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Edited by David Horner, Peter Londey and Jean Bou

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Introduction

David Horner, Peter Londey and Jean Bou

Australian peacekeeping operations occupy a unique and special place in the history of the nation's military experience. By September 2007, the 60th anniversary of Australian peacekeeping, between 30 000 and 40 000 Australian military personnel and police had served overseas in more than 50 peacekeeping missions in at least 27 different conflicts. By any calculation, this is a substantial part of the history of Australia's overseas military engagement.

Yet it is a part of our history that garnered almost no attention until the 1990s, and even then that interest was slow to develop. Australia's first peacekeepers were sent to Indonesia in 1947, but for almost three decades after that, apart from a sizable contingent of police in Cyprus, the nation's peacekeeping deployments were on a small scale and virtually ignored among the larger and more vital military commitments in Korea, Malaysia and Vietnam. After Vietnam, however, larger peacekeeping contingents to apparently dangerous places did seem to find a place in the larger national military tradition. Service personnel sent to places such as Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and the Sinai Peninsula in the 1970s, and then later in the 1990s to Cambodia or Somalia, might be given the sobriquet 'digger' by the media. Newspaper articles were frequently accompanied by photos of tearful farewells at the airport or dockside, just as they might have been in a time of war.¹ There were limits to this, however, and military personnel who went peacekeeping in smaller groups, as individuals on more established missions or to less obviously dangerous places, rarely attracted such colourful coverage. How police, diplomats or government aid officials might be dealt with was altogether less clear.

Media coverage with an Anzac theme was one thing, but full admission to the Anzac pantheon was another. Its traditions had been formed in the

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First World War and reinforced with the Second. Hundreds of thousands of Australians had fought in those wars and the whole nation had been affected by their being in them. Big wars and major commitments in Asia after 1945 were less clearcut but could fit into the tradition without too much difficulty. Peacekeeping was less straightforward. Peacekeepers, regardless of the worth of their cause, were not fighting the nation's wars; they were trying to sort out someone else's. Even if that was in Australia's interest it seemed less compelling. Perhaps implicit, though usually spoken *sotto voce*, was the rather simplistic observation that Australian peacekeepers were not generally being killed for their cause (deaths were few and largely by accident or mines, though no less tragic for that). Such attitudes were best exemplified by the furore that accompanied the decision to award infantry combat badges to the soldiers who served in Somalia, a decision thought by some to overstate the dangers of the deployment and diminish the legacy of returned soldiers who had fought 'real' wars. Military historians may not have shared these views but, focused on Australia's world wars and Cold War and postcolonial conflicts after 1945, many reflected a blinkered view of Australia's military history and certainly overlooked Australia's history of peacekeeping. Even by the end of the 1980s, significant new Australian military histories made no mention at all of peacekeeping.²

Within the Australian Defence Force (ADF) there was considerable interest: since the mid 1970s, after Vietnam, it had been seen that peacekeeping operations might for the foreseeable future provide the only means by which personnel would obtain overseas operational experience. Encouraged by expected deployments in Rhodesia and Namibia planning for peacekeeping operations reached new levels. In 1989 the ADF agreed to a proposal that peacekeeping deaths be commemorated on the roll of honour at the Australian War Memorial.³ When the Memorial set up its first exhibition on peacekeeping, in 1993, it was with considerable financial support from the three services, especially the Army, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Australian artist George Gittoes, who visited the Australians in Somalia in 1993, reflected the growing view and spoke for many Australians when he wrote:

Like all Australians I have heard the legends of the Anzacs since I was a child. It took less than a fortnight in Somalia to realise the people of 1RAR, Colonel Mellor's command administration in Mogadishu and the UNOSOM people at the airport, all deserved to take their place in this respected tradition.⁴

Academics had also become more interested, and for a few years from 1989 a series of conferences focused on the experiences of peacekeepers, analyses

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of peacekeeping and lessons to be heeded for future operations.⁵ The publications provide good primary sources for future historians, but do not attempt to place peacekeeping missions in any broader historical perspective. It was not until 2004 that Peter Londey, who, as an historian at the Memorial had curated the first peacekeeping exhibition there in 1993, published what remains until now the only general narrative history of Australian peacekeeping, *Other People's Wars*.⁶ Indeed, in the period since September 2001 it seems that interest in peacekeeping has substantially diminished, as Australia finds itself, for the first time in a generation,⁷ fighting wars not in our own region but in Afghanistan and Iraq. There are still Australian peacekeepers in Timor-Leste, the Solomon Islands, Egypt, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus and the Sudan, but far less public attention is focused on their activities than was devoted to Australian peacekeepers in the early 1990s or in 1999, when the nation's largest peacekeeping commitment began in East Timor. And that lack of public interest has helped cause, or perhaps been fed by, a failure to distinguish peacekeeping as a separate category of activity.

One of the purposes of this volume is to put peacekeeping back on the agenda; another to stake a claim for the separateness of peacekeeping as a category of action. Our approach is historical. The term 'peacekeeping' was probably first used in the mid 1950s but the activities it describes are older than that.⁸ By devising a clear set of criteria for what should be considered to be peacekeeping, the origins of the activity, if not of the word, in much earlier periods can be ascertained. We have adopted criteria that are elaborated by Peter Londey in the first chapter. In summary, they are that an operation should be

- dealing with the effects of conflict
- include a substantial military and/or police component, provided by contributing governments
- be composed as a multinational force, whether or not under the aegis of the United Nations
- not be a party to the conflict, but be impartial between belligerent parties
- have rules of engagement and practices in the field to ensure the minimum use of force consistent with achievement of the mandate.

These criteria serve to set apart as a group a large number of otherwise disparate operations, ranging from small groups of unarmed military observers, to armed infantry carrying out peace enforcement, to the huge and complex peacekeeping operations we see today. In his chapter, Peter Londey argues that, while these operations differ from each other in many ways, the features that unify them are more important than their differences. Above all,

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their impartiality and their commitment to the minimum use of force set them apart from war-fighting of the kind in which Australia is currently engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁹

The criteria also allow us as historians to draw boundaries between peacekeeping and war-fighting that follow each other in the same theatre. In Korea, the military observers attached to the UN Commission on Korea (UNCOK) in 1950, including Australians Major Peach and Squadron Leader Rankin, were clearly peacekeepers, part of the United Nations' effort to solve the Korean conflict peaceably. But once the North Koreans invaded the south, the Western response – justified by reference to the collective security provisions of the *UN Charter* – was to fight a conventional war. War imposes its own logic, utterly different from that of the most robust form of peacekeeping, and so the US-led 'United Nations' forces soon abandoned any limits implicit in the *Charter* by crossing the 38th parallel.

A similar situation existed in the first Gulf War in 1991. The United Nations responded to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait by imposing economic sanctions, enforced by a multinational flotilla to which Australia contributed several ships. This effort to force a backdown without undue bloodshed may be classed as robust peacekeeping, but once that failed, the US-led air and ground campaigns, while respecting the limits of legitimacy more than General Douglas MacArthur had in Korea in 1950, nevertheless escalated the violence to a level that ultimately led to the carnage on the Basra road. After the war, sanctions were reimposed, enabling peacekeeping to recommence.¹⁰

Peter Londey argues that the distinction between peacekeeping and war-fighting is important in terms of public policy. Both the aims and the moral justification of the two activities are so different, he suggests, that we need governments, the general public and the military themselves to be clear which one they are about at any given time. Too often they are not clear. This seems to be where historians have a role to play. By charting the history of peacekeeping as an activity, by showing how it came into being and developed, and by describing the range of activities that fall under its rubric today, much can be done to sharpen people's perspectives on the subject. It is important also to deinstitutionalise the history of peacekeeping. The United Nations regards its first peacekeeping operation as the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), set up in Palestine in 1948. Whatever the origins of this view, it seems clearly wrong. By applying the criteria elucidated above, the origins of UN peacekeeping get pushed back to 1947, when the UN Consular Commission and the UN Committee of Good Offices (UNGOC) employed military observers in Indonesia. And the origins of peacekeeping as an

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activity lie further back still, at the very least with the League of Nations, the UN's predecessor. The League set up forces to assist international commissions as they administered plebiscites in various disputed territories in 1920 and 1921, as well as a number observation missions and a multinational force to supervise the Saar referendum in 1935. United Nations planners in New York were aware of these precedents, though to a large extent peacekeeping had to be reinvented in the postwar world.¹¹

There is plenty of room for debate in all this, and differences of opinion between the authors represented in this volume will be apparent. Londey, for example, argues that the Cold War was not the critical factor influencing the invention and development of peacekeeping, while Horner puts the case for the end of the Cold War being the decisive factor enabling the increase in size and complexity of peacekeeping operations in the 1990s. While these debates will continue, all the authors here agree that the historical approach is of value. There is today a voluminous literature on peacekeeping, but, understandably, the greater part of it focuses on the immediate lessons which may be drawn from recent operations to inform better practice in the future. That approach tends to neglect the earlier history of peacekeeping and sacrifices deeper historical understanding. An extended examination of one nation's peacekeeping experience will cast valuable light on peacekeeping as a whole.

Writing the history of peacekeeping poses many challenges. For a start, despite the necessary impartiality of peacekeepers, peacekeeping is always a politically highly-charged activity. All peacekeepers intrude into other people's lives and make decisions on the spot about the boundaries that should be placed around such intrusion. Governments treat the decision to commit troops to peacekeeping seriously: there was probably more discussion within the Australian government about the commitment of a single battalion to Somalia in 1993 than the government in 1914 gave to committing Australia to the First World War. Bob Breen, in his chapter on peacekeeping in the South Pacific, describes interventions into three of Australia's near neighbours, Papua New Guinea (with relation to Bougainville), the Solomon Islands and East Timor, where the boundaries between good neighbourliness and regional hegemony can be blurred, at best. John Connor's chapter deals with the deployments of the early 1990s to Cambodia, the former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Rwanda, and demonstrates the intensity of public debate sparked by the size, complexity and media coverage of these missions.

Peacekeeping operations have grown enormously in complexity. Once the preserve of the military and diplomats, today any mission is likely to include civilian police and a wide range of other civilians. The role for the military

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has become equally complex, as they find themselves providing not only observers and infantry, but also logistics, medical support, communications, engineering construction, demining and other ordnance disposal, and so on. Peacekeepers are, increasingly, attempting complex tasks to rebuild (or build *ab initio*) the institutions of a peaceful society. Those within a peacekeeping mission work closely with those outside, including, especially, humanitarian aid organisations (NGOs). This complexity has been addressed in this volume, with contributions that explore the varied roles of the military, civilian police, diplomats and NGOs.

The increased complexity of peacekeeping operations means that it has been extremely difficult to determine who has actually been involved, especially when one is trying to calculate total numbers. It is relatively straightforward to include military and police personnel who have been assigned to be members of a mission, though whether to count those who supported them has proven to be fraught (how, for example, should the air force air-crew who may have flown them or their supplies there be counted – were they on the mission or simply doing a routine job?). It is also appropriate to include civilian government officials such as members of the Australian Electoral Commission and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) who have been deployed as part of a mission. It is more problematic to include members of Australian non-government organisations, even though the Australian government might have helped fund their activities. It does not seem appropriate to include officials who have merely visited missions, or Australians employed directly by the United Nations.¹²

A further level of complexity is the diversity of individual peacekeepers' experiences. More so than in orthodox military operations, individual peacekeepers may find themselves exercising disproportionate influence. The report from the two Australian peacekeeper observers in Korea in 1950 led to the involvement of the United Nations in the Korean War. An Australian captain serving in the UN Iran–Iraq Military Observer Group might well have prevented the re-ignition of hostilities between Iran and Iraq in 1989. Much of the work of a peacekeeping operation is done at the level of interactions between individual peacekeepers and members of the local population. As a consequence, it is possible to argue that it is only by drawing on the recollections of those individual peacekeepers that a worthwhile history of the whole process can be written.

With 30 000 Australian peacekeepers to choose from, it is possible in this volume only to provide the tiniest sample of the vast diversity of their experiences. Those chosen serve to illustrate the range of roles filled by peacekeepers: military observers, mine clearers, weapons inspectors, civilian

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police. Many others could have been added. One specialised role that has been focused on is that of commander. To command any coalition military force is a task that requires political skill, nowhere more so than in peacekeeping, where national governments habitually retain a high level of control over the units they have contributed to an ostensibly multinational force. Australia has provided a number of distinguished commanders of peacekeeping operations, two of whom are represented in this book.

As historians working on recent and contemporary history, we are very aware that the object of our study is not standing still. For Thucydides, ancient Greek historian and author of *History of the Peloponnesian War*, it may have been possible to begin writing the history of a war at the outset, but for the rest of us writing about events that are still unfolding is an activity fraught with danger. Peacekeeping changes and will continue to change, as does the nature of war. In 1991 the military historian Martin van Creveld argued that the era of conventional wars had ended and he suggested that future wars would be ‘waged for the souls of men’.¹³ General Rupert Smith, an officer in the British Army until 2002, has argued that ‘rather than war and peace, there is no predefined sequence, nor is peace necessarily either the starting or the end point: conflicts are resolved, but not necessarily confrontations’.¹⁴ Peacekeepers must enter these messy situations, and though their means are radically different from those of the belligerents, they too must wage their war ‘for the souls of men’. Increasingly, Australia’s peacekeepers are engaged in trying to influence how people think and how societies as a whole work. Historians should avoid trying to predict the future, but we have included in this volume two contributions – by a distinguished practitioner, Major General Tim Ford, and an equally distinguished commentator, Professor Ramesh Thakur – that attempt to place the present in the context of the past and the future.

This book cannot answer all the questions. What we hope the book does demonstrate is the value to the study of peacekeeping generally of writing about the subject from an historical viewpoint. As the subject of a case study of a peacekeeping nation, Australia has much to offer: it was there at the start, it has consistently operated as a middle-level peacekeeper with widespread public support though not always without political controversy and dissent, it has taken increasing responsibility for managing missions in its own region and, under a new government, might become again a consistent contributor in the future. This, then, seems an opportune time to look back on and assess Australia’s first 60 years as a peacekeeping nation.

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PART ONE

The Historical Record

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I

Inventing Peacekeeping

Peter Londey

The peacekeeping missions described in this chapter are those that commenced before the end of the Cold War. Some of them continued for several decades – in some cases are still continuing – but in general the numbers of individual peacekeepers Australia sent remained low. Australian peacekeeping, for its first four decades, consisted of small numbers of officers – often reserve officers – sent to distant observer missions; the larger ones included civilian police in Cyprus since 1964, helicopter contingents in the Sinai in the 1970s and 1980s and a 150-strong army contingent sent to Rhodesia in 1979–80. While these missions were complex, they were clearly on a smaller scale than the missions of the last 20 years.¹

Many would argue that the Cold War was not only the factor that kept these missions small and often unsuccessful, but that it was also the factor that had called them into existence in the first place. As I do not entirely subscribe to this hypothesis, I will argue that a phenomenon that can be summed up by the term ‘peacekeeping’, a phenomenon not even thought of when the *UN Charter* was written, developed gradually from the 1940s onwards for reasons largely unconnected with the Cold War.

DEFINING PEACEKEEPING

There are many definitions of peacekeeping. Here, the word is used to mean an activity by military personnel, later also by police and other civilians, and that meets the following criteria, that

- it be preventing, or ending or dealing with the effects of conflict (that is, not dealing primarily with the results of natural disaster)

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- it would include a substantial military and/or police element, provided by contributing governments (today there will also usually be substantial civilian participation in the operation)
- it be composed as a multinational force (with, in practice, at least four or five nations participating), whether under the aegis of the United Nations or of a regional body or, more rarely, put together by an *ad hoc* group of states
- it not be a party to the conflict, but be impartial between belligerent parties (so long as they adhere equally to norms of peaceable behaviour)
- it has rules of engagement and practices in the field that ensure the minimum use of force consistent with achieving the mandate.

The collection of activities thus defined has different names in different places, such as ‘peace operations’ or ‘peace support operations’. My preference is for the term the general public uses, ‘peacekeeping’.² And while there have been many attempts to construct taxonomies that subdivide peacekeeping into separate categories, these tend to obscure what is most important: that the diverse set of activities that satisfy the above criteria enjoy a unity of underlying purpose, indeed, moral basis, and consequently a unity of approach that outweigh the obvious outward differences of structure, tasking and resources. The Australian Defence Force makes little apparent effort to distinguish between peacekeeping operations and various categories of action, including war-fighting, overseas actions to protect Australian citizens, aid to friendly governments and humanitarian operations. To the practitioner there is simply a continuum of operations with varying rules of engagement. More surprisingly, perhaps, Australia’s largest peacekeeper veterans’ organisation, the Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans’ Association (APPVA), similarly draws no boundaries around peacekeeping.³

Yet the distinction is of enormous importance to the public, who support these operations, and for the government, which authorises them. For the criteria by which one must judge whether to participate in a peacekeeping operation are completely different from those by which one should assess the value and justification of the other types of operations listed. Similarly, the criteria by which one must judge complete or partial success are also quite different. The blurring of the boundaries, which will remain a constant in public life until scholars of peacekeeping better express the uniqueness of the activity they are describing, is a political act that impedes the ability to make clear-sighted judgements about the rightness and effectiveness of our actions. To take the obvious current example, the public is left believing