

AUSTRALIA IN THE WAR OF 1939-1945

SERIES FIVE  
MEDICAL

VOLUME II  
*MIDDLE EAST AND FAR EAST*

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# MIDDLE EAST AND FAR EAST

*by*

ALLAN S. WALKER

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*"I would say that two contrary laws seem to be wrestling with each other nowadays: the one a law of blood and death, ever imagining new means of destruction and forcing nations to be constantly ready for the battlefield—the other a law of peace, work, and health, ever evolving new means of delivering man from the scourges which beset him. Which of these two laws will ultimately prevail God alone knows."*

(Louis Pasteur)

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- A.A.N.S.*—Australian Army Nursing Service.  
*A.A. & Q.M.G.*—Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster-General.  
*A.A.M.C.*—Australian Army Medical Corps.  
*A.A.M.S.*—Australian Army Medical Services.  
*A.A.S.C.*—Australian Army Service Corps.  
*A.B.D.A.*—American British Dutch Australian.  
*A.D.G.M.S.*—Assistant Director-General Medical Services.  
*A.D.M.S.*—Assistant Director Medical Services.  
*A.D.S.*—Advanced Dressing Station.  
*A.G.*—Adjutant-General.  
*A.G.H.*—Australian General Hospital.  
*A.I.F.*—Australian Imperial Force.  
*A.M.D.*—Army Medical Directorate.  
*A.M.F.*—Australian Military Forces.  
*A.R.C.S.*—Australian Red Cross Society.  
*A.W.C.*—Allied Works Council.
- B.M.A.*—British Medical Association.
- C.C.C.*—Civil Constructional Corps.  
*C.C.S.*—Casualty Clearing Station.  
*C.M.C.C.*—Central Medical Coordination Committee.  
*C.R.S.*—Corps Rest Station, Camp Reception Station.
- D.A.D.H.*—Deputy Assistant Director Hygiene.  
*D.A.D.M.S.*—Deputy Assistant Director Medical Services.  
*D.A. & Q.M.G.*—Deputy Adjutant and Quartermaster-General.  
*D.D.S.T.*—Deputy Director Supply and Transport.  
*D.G.A.M.S.*—Director-General Army Medical Services.  
*D.G.M.S.*—Director-General Medical Services.  
*D.R.S.*—Divisional Rest Station.
- E.M.S.*—Emergency Medical Services.  
*E.P.I.P. Tent*—European Privates Indian Pattern Tent.
- Fd. Amb.*—Field Ambulance.
- G.O.C.*—General Officer Commanding.
- H.E.M.S.*—His Egyptian Majesty's Ship.  
*H.M.A.S.*—His Majesty's Australian Ship.  
*H.Q.*—Headquarters.
- I.G.M.S.*—Inspector-General Medical Services.  
*I.M.S.*—Indian Medical Services.

*M.A.C.*—Motor Ambulance Convoy.  
*M.D.S.*—Main Dressing Station.  
*M.E.*—Middle East.  
*M.E.C.C.*—Medical Equipment Control Committee.  
*M.G.*—Machine-gun.  
  
*N.E.I.*—Netherlands East Indies.  
*N.C.O.*—Non-Commissioned Officer.  
*N.Y.D.N.*—Not yet diagnosed Nervous.  
*N.Z.*—New Zealand.  
  
*O.R.*—Other Rank.  
  
*P.O.W.*—Prisoners of War.  
  
*Q Branch*—Quartermaster-General's Branch.  
  
*R.A.A.F.*—Royal Australian Air Force.  
*R.A.M.C.*—Royal Army Medical Corps.  
*R.A.N.*—Royal Australian Navy.  
*R.A.P.*—Regimental Aid Post.  
*R.D. Tent*—Ridge Double Tent.  
*R.M.O.*—Regimental Medical Officer.  
  
*S.B.*—Stretcher Bearer.  
*S.B.A.*—Sick Berth Attendant.  
*S.E.A.C.*—South-East Asia Command.  
*S.M.O.*—Senior Medical Officer.  
  
*T.A.B.*—Vaccine of Typhoid and Paratyphoids A and B.  
  
*V.A.D.*—Voluntary Aid Detachment.  
*V.D.C.*—Volunteer Defence Corps.  
  
*W.E.*—War Establishment.  
*W.W.*—Walking wounded.

## PREFACE

THIS volume is the first of two devoted to the medical story of the Australian Army during the war of 1939-1945. Part I of the volume follows the formation of the 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th Divisions of the A.I.F., and of the I Australian Corps in the Middle East, their training and preparation, medical organisation in Australia and overseas, and the campaigns in the Middle East. The narrative pursues in the main a chronological sequence till the end of 1941, occasionally digressing to describe contemporary events in Australia, but certain other variants in the time pattern have been necessary. Towards the close of 1941 the story has to follow the working out of a threefold destiny; that of the I Australian Corps in its unfulfilled assignment in the Far East, and its eventual return to Australia; that of the 9th Division, left to play Australia's part in the critical battle of El Alamein in 1942, and that of the 8th Division, committed to a bitter campaign in Malaya. El Alamein belongs to the Middle East series, and is therefore included in Part I of this volume. So too is an account of medical work amongst prisoners of war who were captured in the Middle East and held in Europe.

Part II opens with the move of the corps headquarters with the 6th and 7th Divisions, and the events which caused them to return *via* Colombo to Australia. It then deals with the fate of the defence forces sent to Timor, Ambon and New Britain and of the 8th Division in Malaya.

At this point the finger of time is allowed to stretch forward to the end of the war, so as not to interrupt the sequence of the remarkable medical story of these forces in captivity in the Far East, sadly depleted and sorely tried, but never broken. Therefore the history follows them through the actions on Timor, Ambon and New Britain, through the belated efforts to defend Sumatra and Java, through the campaign in Malaya, through the trials of the prison camps, and so to the day of liberation. In Volume III the narrative will return to 1942 and take up Australia's island war in New Guinea and the Solomons, and the concluding phases in Borneo.

Problems of scope and scale arise in the recording of these events; their solution has been aided by discussions between the medical historians of the Commonwealth Nations. A comprehensive history can only be looked for from a nation of great resources and widely disposed forces under arms, while the history of a small nation may be more intimate, and written on a lower military level. Therefore the Australian Medical History is presented with a moderate degree of detail and is projected against a background of regional and world events so as to make clear their strategic and tactical importance and their bearing on medical planning. In these brief accounts full justice cannot be done to individuals, even if it were possible to do so. Biographical footnotes are not included in the medical volumes. By agreement with other medical war historians, and in accordance with the general policy of the Australian War History, references to decorations are omitted.

The various phases of administration are dealt with in separate chapters which follow the chronology of the story in a general way, so as to make clear the building of a medical organisation at home and abroad in support of a fighting force.

All the chapters in this volume have been submitted to critics fitted by knowledge and personal experience to check the accuracy and fairness of the story and the opinions expressed. Many such helpers have given me frank and valued criticism, and have filled gaps in the records. The courage and persistence of prisoners of war who made and preserved valuable records, often at personal risk, deserve special mention.

I am greatly indebted to Mr Gavin Long for his advice and help; and to the members of his staff for assistance, particularly in access to material. My earlier personal assistants, Lieutenant G. Cutler and Corporal D. B. Stinton of the A.A.M.W.S., and Miss G. M. Jones helped me to collect and summarise much of the original material for this volume. Mrs Evelyn East in the research field and Mrs Gladys Pope in the secretarial have given invaluable assistance in assembling, criticising, correcting and checking this volume and obtaining and arranging illustrations. The work of Mr H. W. Groser as cartographer will, I feel sure, often clarify details of military events and plans more than the text.

The successive holders of the post of D.G.M.S. of the Army and their staffs have added to this volume in numbers of ways. Mrs Downes generously allowed me to use and keep over extended periods the diaries of the late Major-General R. M. Downes. Major-Generals F. A. Maguire and S. R. Burston have clarified a number of issues for me, and Major-General F. Kingsley Norris and his staff continue to help in obtaining information and records. I am specially indebted to Lieut-Colonel A. Christie, Lieut-Colonel G. H. Fullbrook and Warrant Officer Colliver. The staff of the Army Records have also been most cooperative in supplying statistical information. In Canberra, Colonel J. L. Treloar, Director of the Australian War Memorial, allowed me to have large quantities of medical records for continuous reference, and Mr W. A. McLaren and various members of his staff in the Department of the Interior have helped us, particularly in accommodation and working conditions, and photographic work on illustrations. My medical colleagues have taken a practical interest in the work, have given me much valuable material and have encouraged me in this slow and laborious task. I am particularly indebted to Dr Mervyn Archdall, Editor of *The Medical Journal of Australia*, for his most helpful reading and criticism of the typescript.

In accordance with the policy of the Australian War History I again point out that I have used as a source of some of the material, my own experiences while acting as the physician-in-charge of the medical division of the 2/1st Australian General Hospital and of the 113th Military Hospital Concord, and as a Consulting Physician to the Army at the Australian medical headquarters and in the field.

A.S.W.

Canberra, 9th October 1951