Naively eager to take their tour of duty, many Australians were confounded by exposure to new cultures in the context of a war. Some were repulsed by the differences they found, some saw it as an invitation to behave badly. Many responses suggest that rather than being broadened by their experiences, some retreated into a debilitating chauvinism and self-advertising, exposing an ugly racism and a pervasive adolescent egotism. At other times, of course, this egotism manifests itself as an endearing independence and can-do manner marked by a generosity of spirit.

As is the way of anthologies such as this, the selections may lead us back to read again or discover the longer works from which these pieces are taken. For this reader, it meant going back to Boyd and to Frederic Manning, who asks us to consider the existential facts of our being; to Monash's detailed and absorbing letters, mostly to his wife; to Louise Mack's compelling and profound reports from the Western Front; to George Johnston's 'vignettes ... incomplete and scattered' that make up My Brother Jack and invited us, in the 'sixties, to look at ourselves; to re-read Barney Roberts and find Ray Parkin's Into the Smother and Don Charlwood's No Moon Tonight; and to hunt out a bit more Hank Nelson. I hope that other readers share this experience; the reading need not stop at the end of this generous selection.

Jim Wieland
Curtin University of Technology


In recent years there has been an upsurge of interest in Australian military history of the second world war, and a corresponding increase in research and publication on this aspect of our past. Desert Sands Jungle Lands falls within the strong tradition of military biographical studies that has seen a range of accounts of the lives of former soldiers such as Vasey, Blarney, Honner and Potts. Readers will now have the opportunity to assess Australian history with this biography of Major General Ken Eather. While for some readers Eather may be a name associated with victory at Kokoda, this book paints a much more complex and fascinating picture. The author (a distant relative of his subject) is a well-established writer of military history who, with this book, has created a well-written and carefully researched account of the life an Australian citizen soldier.

Denied the opportunity to fight in the first world war by his age, Eather combined his civilian work as a dental mechanic with service in the part-time army. He trained hard and was rewarded with promotions that reflected his diligence and tenacity in an era when his lack of experience in battle made him an anomaly in an army dominated by returned servicemen of the 1st AIF. For many who read this book as a study of successful leadership, there might be a wish for more detail on Eather's character at this formative stage. Sparse archival records have contributed, but the link between the leadership in peacetime and in war raises interesting questions.
In 1939 Eather sold his practice at a loss to assume command of the 21st Infantry Battalion. While he later progressed to command of the 25th Brigade and the 11th Division, his place in the development of the new 2nd AIF was an achievement that is perhaps under-recognised in comparison to his later successes. The training and shaping of an army of predominantly civilian volunteers was not an easy task, and Eather's work in giving life to an 800-strong battalion was as important as later campaigns.

In an era of professional armies, we forget that most men and women who served between 1939 and 1945 had little or no prior military experience. This hard training bore fruit in early 1941, when his soldiers played a key role in the Australian victory at Bardia. Success was followed by failure. An infantry battalion is an organic entity, and Eather's troops fought in the disastrous Greek campaign without their pneumonia-stricken leader. In a masterly understatement, the author notes that the fact that only seventy returned played heavily on Eather's mind.

Kokoda has grown increasingly significant to the lay reader of history since Paul Keating's 1992 call to reorient Australian remembrance. Popular works are complemented by Desert Sands, Jungle Lands in that, like Edgar's biography of Potts and Brune's of Honer, the campaign is viewed from the commander's position. It was as a commander at Kokoda that Eather made his greatest mark on Australian history, and enthusiasts will enjoy this section of the book. In September 1942 Eather made the decision to withdraw to Imita Ridge, the last line of defence only forty-two kilometres from Port Moresby, thus precipitating a command crisis between Blarney and MacArthur.

Later campaigns are followed in some detail, while the lengthy recuperation of Eather and his brigade is given little attention. Less eventful than the fighting in New Guinea, the extensive period of retraining was significant, and like many accounts this one does not dwell on more than a year of inaction in 1944-45. Perhaps there is scope for future military historians to undertake work in this area, as while the role of the commander and soldier in combat is usually given attention, periods of quiescence are more typical. There are valuable lessons to be learnt, which would be of interest to both historians of world war two and even to contemporary soldiers, who spend most of their time training for wars that they never fight. The need to retain reader interest naturally dictates that the long period of stagnation on the Atherton Tableland is not described in detail, but Eather's task in maintaining both his own focus and that of his troops was arguably as great as his achievements as a fighting commander.

After the accidental death of Vasey created a series of vacancies in the Australian command structure, Eather's talents were recognised, and he was promoted to major general in the final stages of the war. In civilian life, Eather made further contributions by taking steps to bridge the gap between the Vietnam generation of returned soldiers and those of his own war. A useful glossary and excellent command assessment as an appendix complement this most readable account of Major General Eather's life and career —
Australian history is well served by Steve Eather's book.

Richard Gehrmann
University of Southern Queensland


In Australian Rules football's *annus horribilis*, as it languishes in a crisis of masculinity, player transgressions and tabloid sleaze continue to discredit the game. Something must surely be amiss when even Saints are charged with criminal offences. Yet, viewing the Howard era through the prism of football, *The Game in Time of War* takes footy seriously enough to claim that it intersects with major issues in contemporary Australian society.

As a sportswriter, Martin Flanagan's work is usually superior to the slush served up by many colleagues. His writing describes sport not as vacuous entertainment but as a topic of substance worthy of critical examination. It also stresses Flanagan's belief that football is a bastion of Australian culture. In light of recent events, and considering arts and academia's generally slight regard for sport, both views certainly offer ample opportunity for criticism. *The Game in Time of War* anticipates this by describing football as less monolithic and exclusive than often suggested. By foregrounding moments of communion and solace, it even dares to suggest that sport can offer diversity and inclusiveness. Even so, with the AFL stuck, pardon my pun, like a deer in the headlines, the question remains whether or not Flanagan's optimism is ill-founded.

Flanagan himself notes how football prospers from its astonishing number of female supporters, which is why the current predicament is so troubling. There is little doubt that the pervasive culture of machismo and Mad Mondays promotes misogyny. Accordingly, when adding the non-sexually related criminal charges levelled against players in recent years, present-day football does appear removed from the sense of community outlined in *The Game in Time of War*.

According to Flanagan, the game draws strength from the keen support of Australians, irrespective of ethnic identification, gender or class. More foibles like the ones now in evidence could make that connection tenuous indeed. Yet, despite this, Flanagan's central premise is spot on. Football remains ingrained in Australian culture. Inexpensive to watch, at least compared to the luxury-box-laden sports of Europe and North America, it is a fast game played by athletes whose equal one would be hard-pressed to find elsewhere. A bit violent, yes, but it is becoming less so with changes that emphasise skill over brute force. Fortunately, Flanagan manages to convey the game's significance without resorting to dog-eared cliches, as evidenced by his blank refusal to accept sportswriting's time-honoured dictum that sports and warfare are alike.

Flanagan's writing is the book's great strength. The prose is unadorned almost to fault, so much so that one actually feels relieved when passion intervenes. The book works best away from the intense glare of the floodlights. Flanagan's stories of the ordinary and, in some cases, extraordinary people drawn to the game stand out. Only one player comes to life on the page, and this probably has much to do with Michael Long's irrepressible spirit. Flanagan's interest in character is