
A review by Professor Geoff Till

It’s really quite hard to criticise this book, by one of Australia’s leading naval historians. Formerly a naval officer and a key player in the Royal Australian Navy’s well-known Seapower Centre, David Stevens was seconded for over a year to research this subject further and write the book.

The result is a triumph. At well over 400 pages, *In All Aspects Ready* covers everything the Australian Navy did in the First World War in definitive detail; is profusely illustrated; full of fascinating side-lined personal vignettes of the men involved; makes excellent use of individual testimonies; and is very nicely produced by the publisher at a very reasonable price, bearing in mind what you get for your money these days.

Yet it could not have been an easy subject to write for all the apparently limited compass of the subject, since the Australian Navy was clearly a small one compared to the other naval protagonists of the time.

One problem is the fact that the function and purpose of the Australian Navy was intertwined with that of the Royal Navy, and can only be explained by reference to the policies and actions of the navy of the mother country. Stevens skilfully interweaves Australia’s natural concerns for its own local maritime security with the broader preoccupations of the Royal Navy, which was still seen by virtually everyone as being an ‘Imperial’ one. This posed the dilemma of how best to reconcile Australia’s interests with those of the Empire as a whole. How ‘Australian’ did the Navy need to be? As a case study in the way navies express national identity, this example could hardly be bettered.

It is also a case study in how a country ‘grew’ a navy in the first place. Where do you start with such an aspiration; what has to be done, and how? For this reason, Stevens’ book will be of interest around the world and not just to the narrow band of Australian and British naval historians of the First World War.

Moreover, the general public will enjoy the book too, since it reads so well and the accounts of Australian engagements, both in lesser known encounters out in the Pacific and the familiar grand battles of the European, are uniformly written in a highly accessible style. Highly recommended.