

Australian Peacekeeper Winter 2008 Magazine

“Aussie Soldier up close and personal” Book Review by Gordon Traill Iraq Veteran

“Aussie Soldier up close and personal” was written by Denny Neave with Craig Smith. Neave served as a soldier and is a son of a Vietnam Veteran. Neave writes about what it is really like to be an Aussie Soldier. He draws on his own experiences as a soldier and of others who have worn the baggy green uniform, from the first Anzacs, through to today’s diggers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Neave deliberately wanted the names of all the contributors to ‘appear alongside their words so the style of this book is somewhat different from the traditional works of military history’. Neave takes you on a journey in which he describes the Aussie spirit, compassion, mateship, courage, the larrikin, loyalty and other values which defines the Aussie Soldier.

WO1 Kevin ‘Irish’ O’Halloran a veteran of Rwanda and Timor describes, “The spirit of the Australian soldier is found in our past. From those who have gone before us. From those who cannot be here today”.

“He is in the most serious occupation in the world, yet thrives on irreverent humour”. “In what other organization would the person responsible for toilet hygiene not only accept, but rejoice, in official designation of ‘Battalion Blowfly’. Lt Dave Sabben, 6 RAR, Vietnam

George Gittoes, official war artist and photographer, has covered all the conflicts that Australia been involved with since Vietnam. Gittoes describes the compassion shown by the Aussies in Rwanda. “The campaign in Rwanda left an imprint on many Australian soldiers. When your job is to protect the helpless, the prospect of facing an enemy you cannot engage with in the traditional manner leaves a harrowing mark. Tough soldiers were moved to tears”.

“It’s the old rule of thumb. “While the diggers are whingeing and fooling you know everything is all right. It’s when they become sullen and quiet that you may have a problem” writes Pte Shipway, 2 RAR, Iraq.

“Aussie Soldier up close and personal” is well researched and has brought together a mixture of tales and experiences from Officers, Regimental Sergeant Majors (RSM) and diggers, both in the battlefield and in peacetime. Neave’s book will introduce and wet the appetite of any non Army person. It will open the flood gate of memories for soldiers that have served, to the many things that have shaped them into what they are today.

A final word from WO2 Keith Payne, VC, Vietnam, “You tell them they can’t do something, and you bet they’ll bloody go and do it, just because you said they couldn’t. They’re larrikins, loveable larrikins. They know how to smile, they know how to laugh, and they know how to cry. *Yeah, the Aussie digger, beautiful people*”.

