Charles Edwin (C.E.W.) Woodrow Bean & the ANZAC Legend

He was instrumental in the establishment of the Australian War Memorial and popularisation of the ANZAC legend.

Charles Edwin Woodrow Bean MA, BCL (Oxon), LittD (Melb) (1879 – 1968) was usually known during his career as C.E.W. Bean. He was an Australian journalist, war correspondent and historian renowned as the editor of the 12-volume *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*. Bean wrote Volumes I to VI himself, dealing with the Australian Imperial Force at Gallipoli, France and Belgium. Bean was instrumental in the establishment of the Australian War Memorial, and of the creation and popularisation of the ANZAC legend.

Bean was born in Bathurst, New South Wales. When Charles was born his father had been in Australia six years and was headmaster of All Saints' College, Bathurst. Charles entered its preparatory school in 1886. In 1889 his father was forced by ill health to resign and took the family to England.

For two years the Beans spent summer in Oxford and winter in Brussels, where Charles learned French and drawing. In 1898 Bean won a scholarship to Hertford College,
Oxford (B.A., 1902; B.C.L., 1904; M.A., 1905), where he read classics (preferring history to philosophy) and law, at the same time simplifying his prose style, having “determined never, if possible, to write a sentence which could not be understood by someone of average intelligence.” He returned to Australia in 1904 and worked as a lawyer.

While waiting for clients he was an assistant master at Sydney Grammar School, and wrote some articles for the Evening News, edited by Banjo Paterson. As associate to Sir William Owen and two colleagues he saw much of New South Wales on circuit in 1905-07. He wrote a book, illustrated by his own drawings, about Australia as seen by a returned native. The Impressions of a New Chum could not find a publisher, but the Sydney Morning Herald printed eight articles out of it from 1 June to 20 July 1907, under the general title “Australia, by 'C.W.B.‘”

Bean eventually resolved to live by writing rather than teaching or the law and the Sydney Morning Herald took him on as a junior reporter in January 1908 (after he had spent eight hours a day for four months learning shorthand.) In 1909 he was sent to the far west of the State to do a series of articles on the wool industry. He was initially unenthusiastic, but was to admit later. “... and then it flashed upon me that the most important product of the wool industry is men,” In his articles (published in London in 1910 as On the Wool Track) he created some of the outstanding “national types”, savouring the difference between Englishmen and Australians, and between rural and urban types in Australia. Bean was to cherish a passage which began with an account of comradeship in the back country and ended with a prophecy that if ever England were in trouble, she would discover 'in the younger land, existing in quite unsuspected quarters, a thousand times deeper and more effective than the more showy protestations which sometimes appropriate the title of “imperialism”, the quality of sticking ... to an old mate'. He liked the tough, resourceful boys of the outback.

In September 1914, on the outbreak of World War II, Bean was selected by ballot as the official war correspondent, narrowly defeating Keith Murdoch. He was given the rank of honorary captain in the AIF and followed closely in the tracks of all the Australian infantry's campaigns. He travelled to Egypt with the first contingent of the
Australian Imperial Force as a civilian who was regarded as a captain for such purposes as precedence in the mess. He landed at Anzac Cove at 10am on 25 April 1915, a few hours after the first troops.

Probably no person saw more of the Anzacs in battle on Gallipoli than C.E.W. Bean. After sailing with the first convoy, he landed with them on that fateful first morning of 25 April, and remained on Gallipoli until the evacuation despite being wounded.

He was unique among the war correspondents of his day: no place in the line was too dangerous for him. No other pressman dared to go ashore at the first landings. Throughout the fiercest battles, he would sit in the dust or mud of the frontline trench taking notes or making sketches.

Night after night he sat in his tiny dugout and wrote in his diary all that he had seen and done. Its pages flow with powerful descriptions of battle, touching eulogies to the common soldier, and scathing criticisms of senior officers whose mistakes cost men their lives. He took over 1100 remarkable photographs with the diary they constitute the most graphic personal account we have of the events of Gallipoli.

On 6 August he was hit by a bullet in the right leg. Determined not to be taken off to a hospital ship, he hobbled to his dugout and lay there until 24 August, having the wound dressed each day, until he was well enough to get out and watch the fighting. He was the only correspondent to remain on the peninsula from April to December. The English correspondent during the campaign was Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett. Bean’s accounts
were the more precise, for he had seen more, however those published at the time as the “official” version of events were Ashmead-Bartlett’s. [The English reporter betrayed surprise that “untrained colonials” had done so well.]

On evacuation he carried with him writing and drawing by soldiers which he edited as *The Anzac Book* (London, 1916). Bean contributed photographs, drawings, and two pieces of verse: *Abdul*, in which the Turkish enemy is honoured for having “played the gentleman”, (copy on page and “Non nobis” an affirmation that although we cannot understand why the dead have died and we live, there must be some purpose to it all. He left Gallipoli two days ahead of the evacuation. He would return in 1919 with the Australian Historical Mission..He would return in 1919 with the Australian Historical Mission.

When the Australian infantry moved to France in 1916, Bean followed. Here he worked with two other Australian war correspondents, Frank Hurley and Hubert Wilkins. He continued reporting from close to the front line of all but one of the engagements involving Australian troops, and in that sense saw more action than any other Australian in the First World War. His bravery became legend. He observed first hand the "fog of war"; the problems in maintaining communication between the commanders in the rear and the front line troops, and between isolated units of front line troops, and
problems co-ordinating activities with other arms of the service (such as artillery) and with allied forces on each flank. He reported on the degree to which direct reports given by front line troops (and captured German soldiers) could be misleading given their limited view of the battlefield and the effect shock from exposure to fierce fighting and devastating artillery fire.

Australians resting up in a dug-out are sheltered from shelling 15 feet underground during the Battle of the Somme, July 1916.

It was during this period that Bean began planning for the post-war preservation of the Anzac legacy via the establishment of a permanent museum and memorial. In 1916-18 Bean was in France to observe every engagement of the A.I.F. Some dispatches were published as *Letters from France* (London, 1917). The historian's task grew larger in his mind. At first he thought of one volume, but gradually he conceived a grander work which would be literally a monument to the men of the A.I.F.—“the only memorial which could be worthy of them”, he decided, “was the bare and uncoloured story of their part in the war”.

On 16 May 1917 the Australian War Records Section was established to manage the collection of documents and relics. Attached to the section were members of the Australian Salvage Corps who would select items of interest from the battlefield detritus they recovered for scrap or repair. Bean himself had a 15 pound clothing allowance and
was also equipped with a horse and saddlery. Private Arthur Bazley was assigned as Bean's batman, and the two were to become firm friends.

Bad weather turned much of the battlefield into a quagmire. The vermin-ridden trenches were havens for dirt and disease.

Bean's influence grew as the war progressed and he lobbied (along with Keith Murdoch, father of Rupert Murdoch) unsuccessfully against the appointment of General John Monash to the command of the Australian Corps in 1918. He disliked Monash for not fitting his ideal of Australian manhood (Monash was of Jewish background) and for what Bean viewed as a penchant for self-promotion. Bean wrote in his diary, "We do not want Australia represented by men mainly because of their ability, natural and inborn in Jews, to push themselves." (Embarrassingly anti-semitic though this sentiment is today, it was a commonly-held prejudice at the time) Bean favoured the appointment of the Australian Chief of General Staff, Brudenell White, the meticulous planner behind the successful withdrawal from Gallipoli, or General Birdwood, the British commander of the Australian forces at Gallipoli.
Bean watching the Australian advance to the Hindenburg Line, February 1917

In 1916 the British War Cabinet had agreed to grant Dominion official historians access to the war diaries of all British Army units fighting on either side of a Dominion unit, as well as those of all headquarters that issued orders to Dominion units, including the GHQ of the British Expeditionary Force. However, by the end of the war the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) were less than willing to divulge this information, possibly fearing it would be used to criticise the conduct of the war. It took six years of persistence before Bean was allowed access and a further three years for a clerk to make copies of the enormous quantity of documents. Eventually Bean was given access to the resources.

Bean was unwilling to compromise his values for personal gain or political expediency and was not influenced by suggestions and criticism from British official historian, Sir James Edmonds about the direction of his work. Edmonds reported to the CID that, "The general tone of Bean's narrative is deplorable from the Imperial standpoint." For this maverick stance, it is likely that Bean was denied decorations from King George V, despite being recommended on two occasions during the war. However, Bean was
never motivated by personal glory – when offered a knighthood many years later he declined.

The Lone Pine Memorial to the Missing, Lone Pine, Anzac area, Gallipoli. This memorial stands at the southern end of the Lone Pine Cemetery and commemorates by name more than 4,900 Anzacs - Australians and New Zealanders who died during the Gallipoli campaign and have 'no known grave'.

In 1919 the Australian Historical Mission went back to the Gallipoli peninsula to revisit the battlefield of 1915. The Mission was led by C.E.W. Bean. He was able to walk over ground where some of the famous battles were fought such as Lone Pine and at the Nek, where he found the bones of the light horsemen still lying where they had fallen on the morning of 7 August 1915. He also instructed the Australian Flying Corps, one of the few Australian units involved in the occupation forces in Germany, to collect German aircraft to be returned to Australia. (Tthey obtained a Pfalz D.XII and an Albatros D.Va.

Upon his return to Australia in 1919, Bean commenced work with a team of researchers on the Official History and the first volume, covering the formation of the AIF and the landing at Anzac Cove, was published in 1921. It would be 21 years before the last of the 12 volumes was published. The first six volumes covering the Army involvement were written by Bean himself. [In 1946 he published *Anzac to Amiens*, a condensed
Bean's style of war history was different to anything that had gone before. "Its theme", he wrote, "may be stated as the answer to a question: How did this nation, bred in complete peace, largely undisciplined except for a strongly British tradition and the self-discipline necessary for men who grapple with nature ... react to what still has to be recognized as the supreme test for fitness to exist? The big thing in the war for Australia was the discovery of the character of Australian men. It was character which rushed the hills at Gallipoli and held on there." Bean was fascinated by the Australian character, and used the history to describe, and in some way create, a view of an Australian character (albeit somewhat idealised) as it existed in a society that looked back at its British origins but sought to break free from the limitations of that society.

Bean's approach was to meticulously record and analyse what had happened on the battlefields. His method was generally to describe the wider theatre of war, then the detailed planning behind each battle and then move to the Australian commander's perspectives, contrasting these with the impressions from the troops at the front line (usually gathered by Bean “on the spot”). He went further and quoted extensively from the German (or Turkish) records of the same engagement, and finally summarised what had actually happened. All throughout he noted the individual Australian casualties where there was any evidence of the circumstances of their death. Even with that relatively small contingent of 240,000 (25% of them died) this was a monumental task, particularly as the Australians had been used, much as the Canadians, as shock troops by the British command wherever the line was most threatened, or where there was need to mount an attack.

Bean’s style of writing profoundly influenced subsequent Australian war historians such as Gavin Long, The Second World War series of Official Histories, describing the battles of North Africa, Crete, New Guinea and Malaya, retain Bean’s commitment to telling the story of individuals as well as recording the bigger picture. The tradition has continued through the history of the Australia's involvement in the Korean War and up to the history of Australia's involvement in the Southeast Asian conflicts which are currently
After experiencing the First World War as the official Australian War Historian, he returned to Australia determined to establish a public display of relics and photographs from the conflict. Bean dedicated an enormous portion of his life to the development of the Australian War Memorial, now one of Australia’s major cultural icons.

It was during the time spent with the First Australian Imperial Force in Europe, that Bean started thinking seriously about the need for an Australian war museum. A close friend of his during this time, A.W. Bazley, recalled, “on a number of occasions he talked about what he had in his mind concerning some future Australian war memorial museum”. Bean envisioned a memorial that would not only keep track of and hold records and relics of war, but would also commemorate the Australians who lost their lives fighting for their country.

In 1917, as a result of Bean’s suggestions to the Defence Minister, Senator George Pearce, the Australian War Records Section was established. The AWRS was set up to guarantee that Australia would have its own collection of records and relics of the First World War as it was fought by Australians. This department arranged for the collection of relics from the field, and the appointment of official war photographers and artists. Many of the numerous relics collected, and photographs and paintings produced, can be seen in the Australian War Memorial today.

The basis of the building known today as the Australian War Memorial was completed in 1941. The Memorial's website describes the building plan as “a compromise between desire for an impressive monument to the fallen and a budget of only £250,000”. Bean’s dream of a memorial in recognition of Australian soldiers who fought in the Great War had finally been achieved. However, when it was realised that the Second World War was of a magnitude to match that of first, it was understood that the memorial would have to commemorate servicemen from the latter conflict despite the original intentions.
The Hall of Memory, completed in 1959, could not have fulfilled Bean’s dream of commemoration more completely. It adhered to Bean’s view that war should not be glorified, but that those who died fighting for their country should be remembered and in addition that the enemy should not be referred to in derogatory terms. These principles greatly influenced the philosophical policy that the Australian War Memorial has always observed.

His attitude to warfare changed. Before 1914 he had regarded war as an evil but awesome thing, not to be welcomed, but not to be flinched from. Looking back later, he saw that when politicians and the press asked a young man whether he was prepared to die for his country, that 'splendid question' helped to blind civilized nations to the folly of warfare. Bean became an active member of the League of Nations Union, believing in the league as guardian of peace. Horror of war led him to support Chamberlain's conciliation of Hitler. He went on hoping that Hitler would keep his pledges — would play the game — until the German invasion of Czechoslovakia. On 21 March’ 1939 a letter from Bean appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* under the heading 'Recantation'.

In the “new war” Bean did several jobs. He wrote a pamphlet, *The Old A.I.F and the New* (Sydney, 1940), and was employed in 1940 by the Department of Information to provide liaison between the chiefs of staff and the press. He became chairman in 1942 of the new Commonwealth Archives Committee, and did more than anyone else to create the Commonwealth Archives.

Early in 1964, aged 84, Bean was admitted to the Concord Repatriation General Hospital, and died there on 30 August 1968. He was cremated after a memorial service in St Andrew's Cathedral. He had not been a regular churchgoer, believing (he said in 1948) that "the question whether God existed or not could make no difference to conduct". The congregation sang his verses of 1915, 'Non nobis', and heard of the "devotion, amounting almost to worship" that he won from friends.
Bean’s vision and contributions were vital for the creation of the memorial and historical resource that the War Memorial is today. [Images courtesy of the Australian War Memorial]
Bean had talents in fields other than photography and journalism.
ABDUL
We've drunk the boys who rushed the hills,
The men who stormed the beach,
The sappers and the A.S.C.,
We've had a toast for each;

And the guns and stretcher-bearers
But, before the bowl is cool,
There's one chap I'd like to mention,
He's a fellow called ABDUL.

We haven't seen him much of late
Unless it be his hat,
Bobbing down behind a loophole
And we mostly blaze at that;

But we hear him wheezing there at nights,
Patrolling through the dark,
With his signals-hoots and chirrups
Like an early morning lark.

We've heard the twigs a-crackling,
As we crouched upon our knees,
And his big, black shape went smashing,
Like a rhino, through the trees.

We've seen him flung in, rank on rank,
Across the morning sky;
And we've had some pretty shooting,
And - he knows the way to die.

Yes, we've seen him dying there in front
Our own boys died there, too-
With his poor dark eyes a-rolling,
Staring at the hopeless blue;

With his poor maimed arms a-stretching
To the God we both can name
And it fairly tore our hearts out;
But it's in the beastly game.

So though your name be black as ink
For murder and rapine,
Carried out in happy concert
With your Christians from the Rhine,

We will judge you, Mr. Abdul,
By the test by which we can-
That with all your breath, in life, in death,
You've played the gentleman.  C.E.W.B

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