

REVIEW

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RALLYING THE TROOPS: A World War I Commemoration

Volume I

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Editors: Kathie Reith, Alan Rost, Janet Turner, Jackie van Bergen and Dave Wilkins

Publishers: Ku-Ring-Gai Historical Society (www.khs.org.au)

On turning the cover, this first of four volumes in a series presents the reader with a powerful image. It is a close up of a field of bright poppies, and the reader's eyes are drawn to a solitary poppy in a sea of red. In the prime of its youth, above the others, it stands ready to face the day and what it may bring. And that day, like the humans covered in this marvellous volume, did bring something: unprecedented carnage, now symbolised by the poppies of Belgium and France, among those who answered the call to arms in 1914.

The Ku-Ring-Gai Historical Society is a band of community historians from northern Sydney. They have set out to generate, in this series, a commemoration of their neighbourhood's contribution to World War I. Dedicated to both those who deployed – many never to return – and those who shouldered some of their burdens back home, this first volume examines how prospective soldiers from their area were rallied to enlist in the Australian Imperial Forces.

The success of this work is already evident, with published data attracting further input and research. This volume contains data located at the time of publication about 1,300 troops (including at least 24 female nurses) who went to war feature in this excellent piece of research, an impressive figure when one reads that the total population of Ku-ring-gai was only 12,000 at the time. Of these, over 260 perished in a foreign land; 130 were decorated for their service. Today we believe that virtually everyone who made it home was a casualty in one way or the other.

Rallying the Troops was released to coincide with the centenary of the start of the Great War. It comprises five sections, with six support appendices and a first-rate index. It covers the early years of the war, with biographical entries for those whose family names start with A to F. Follow-on volumes progressively include the remainder.

The first four sections provide concise information on Life in the Pre-War era, Memorials (both in Australia and on the battlefields), the Historian (the vital role played by CEW Bean) and the early Campaigns (German New Guinea, Gallipoli). These sections are written by individuals and are highly illustrated, well-written and suit both the novice reader and serious researcher alike. A Glossary segment allows the lay reader to easily understand the acronyms. Follow-on volumes address subsequent periods of the Great War.

The most remarkable section in this book is the fifth – covering all of those who enlisted from the Ku-Ring-Gai area. Each soldier's story follows a concise pattern. Their military service and next of kin are followed by their life story including location and date of death, and where each is commemorated. The labour of love by those who have painstakingly compiled these data is compellingly obvious, and the result is a record of a community's contribution to war that is probably second to none, especially on this scale and at this level of detail. Where one exists, a photograph of the soldier is included, some records incomplete.

Technically the book is a first class product. Photographs are clear, and the layout, use of white space and general compilation all bear the hallmark of a designer and publisher who know how to communicate visually with the reader to assist the authors convey their intent. Footnotes for each section are perfectly placed to enable the searcher for deeper enquiry to pursue more information. On its own, *Rallying the Troops* is an incisive and deeply personable publication; most Australians even today can relate to the collective hurt and commitment by this community. Collectively, the full set provide a remarkable collection that deserves its place, not only on every household shelf in Ku-Ring-Gai, but in all repositories of first class works of literary art across the nation.

This volume, and others that follow, can be purchased for the Society via their website at varying prices.