

A Review of the Life of Charles Bean

Sources:

Book Title: 'Charles Bean'

Author: Ross Coulthart

Publisher: Harper Collins

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Book Title: 'Bearing Witness'

Author: Peter Rees

Publisher: Allen & Unwin

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Charles Bean

Australians with a keen interest in our nation's military history will be familiar with the name of Charles Bean, the Australian journalist appointed to record the exploits of our Diggers in World War One, first at Gallipoli and then on the Western Front.

I have just finished reading two recently published biographies on Charles Bean, one by Ross Coulthart (Titled: 'Charles Bean') and the other by Peter Rees (Titled: 'Bearing Witness'). Both authors provide comprehensive and insightful narratives about Bean, and I have selected a number of aspects which I consider provide a synopsis of his interesting life.

Charles Bean Pre-War

Born in Bathurst NSW in 1879 to an upper middle class English immigrant family, Charles Bean's early education in this regional community was strongly influenced by his mother Lucy who inculcated in him a strong Anglican morality and a conviction to commit himself to telling the truth without fear or favour.

An additional attribute that Lucy inculcated in the young Charles was that of keeping a *personal diary* to record in considerable detail his thoughts and experiences. As a consequence, over the course of the war years, Bean would write numerous diaries / notebooks outlining the minutia of the numerous things he saw and thought about.

When Charles was 14 years old, the family enjoyed a financial windfall which enabled them to return to England, where, as a devoted Anglophile, they saw themselves as being unquestioningly British, 'thrilled by her imperial might and notions of British racial superiority and purity'.

Edwin Bean, father of Charles, was an enthusiastic student of British feats of arms, and on a number of occasions took his sons on vacations to Belgium, where they explored the landscape around Waterloo and covered the ground where Napoleon was defeated by the Duke of Wellington. These first hand experiences no doubt engendered a keen interest in military matters in the young Bean, which he would retain for life.

In 1904, after completing his schooling in England, Charles Bean returned to Sydney, where, after a brief stint in teaching and a longer one in law, he wrote a number of articles for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and then in 1908 he decided to try his hand at full time journalism as a junior cadet with that paper.

It was in his role that one of the activities that Bean reported on for his paper on was the goings on of the waterside workers at the Sydney wharf. Here he had the good fortune to meet and get to know the then union leader Billy Hughes. William Morris Hughes would later become Prime Minister of Australia for three years of the War, and would provide a valuable point of contact for Australia's official war correspondent.

When, on 4th August 1914, Britain declared war on Germany the Conservative Cook government in Australia quickly responded by promising to send a contingent of 20,000 men to be deployed *as and how it suited the British Army*.¹

Soon after, the Australian government received a cable from the British Army to say that each Commonwealth dominion would be allowed to have just one 'correspondent' accompany its expedition force. In response, a ballot was held by the members of the Australian Journalists Association to select the Australian correspondent, and the then 34 year old Charles Bean narrowly won that contest over Keith Murdoch from the *Melbourne Sun*.

It was in this context at the commencement of World War One that the Australian Federal government of the day appointed our nation's *one and only* 'official journalist' to accompany the AIF and report back to the Australian public on its activities.

This initial restriction, stipulating that just *one journalist* was allowed to accompany the AIF, was dictated by the British Government, on the advice of its army General Head Quarters (GHQ), who were in turn influenced by the French Army Headquarters.

It may surprise many people today to know that during WW1 our Australian Government throughout 1915 knew as little about what was actually happening with our troops at Gallipoli as did the general public!

This was because over the nine months period of this intensive campaign the Australian Government relied for battlefield information on the same British censored reports that journalists forwarded to their newspaper editors for public consumption.

The reason for this arrangement and the accompanying paucity of information was because the British Government and the British GHQ continued to regard our young Australian nation as a colony that largely remained subservient to their administration, whose government therefore had no need to know much at all.

In his official capacity as our official 'correspondent' Charles Bean wrote numerous 'sanitized' and positive reports for the Australian public via the major newspapers of the day about the battles and activities of the AIF. However both authors of his biography provide evidence that Charles Bean actually wrote much more honest, contrary and informative personal diary entries that recorded his real thoughts and views about the events he observed and experienced.

This raises the conundrum as to why Bean wrote positive communiqués about the war to his Australian 'public' audience which virtually amounted to propaganda, while at the same time expressing contrary viewpoints in his personal reflections criticising

¹ This arrangement contrasted with that of the Canadian Government of the time, who stipulated that the troops they would provide for the British Army were to be under the command of a Canadian General, and their divisions would at all times fight together as one army corp. It would take until May 1918 for the AIF to achieve a similar sensible arrangement.

a powerful but often incompetent military elite, and then not publish them? It begs the question as to just what Charles Bean's views were about his role as a journalist and that of the media in our Australian democracy?

Literacy and Critical Thinking

In a relevant back drop to his biography of Charles Bean, Ross Coulthart provides the insight that British education reforms in the 1870s made it possible for virtually every child to learn to read, and in response the number of English newspaper publications doubled between 1880 and 1900. This was an education trend that likewise occurred in the States of our newly federated Australian nation in the decade before the War. In conjunction with that, the then new technology of that time (telegraph) enabled information (news) to be communicated around the world within days, in contrast with previous communications by sea that took weeks and months.

Literacy however is a 'relative' concept. A 'basic' level of community literacy is considered to be a critical key performance indicator for an 'advanced' nation because it enables its people to read, comprehend the information they receive in their media communications and to follow any instructions they are given.

In the era of the Great War a majority of the Australian adult public were only literate to a 'basic' level which meant they could *'read'* and comprehend a simple article in a newspaper. Consequently most Australians during the war received their information from *'tabloid'* style newspapers which tended to *'sensationalize'* some elements of an event while also employing the technique of *'hyperbole'*- whereby aspects of a story were frequently 'exaggerated' in an appeal to audiences with lower level literacy skills.

In 1914 Australia only a small proportion of the population of the day had actually received the 'advanced' education needed for them to be endowed with *'critical thinking'* skills. These are the higher level skills that endow an individual with the ability to be able to critique the difference between a brief / sensational newspaper story based solely on a journalist's personal 'assertions' and 'opinions,' in contrast with a more in-depth balanced and insightful article based on 'facts' backed by 'evidence' that uses reasoning and a 'logical line of argument'.

Consequently 'broadsheet' newspapers tend to be more factual and formally written compared to a 'tabloid', and demographically tend to be more attractive to better educated and older audiences.

It is within the above context that Coulthart states that "it was clear to the editors and proprietors of the popular (tabloid) press that public demand for reports.... about **the war** was immense." This was in a nation where the bulk of the audience was devoted to tabloid style news fare, such as they would receive from Charles Bean.

An example of Bean's style of reporting is provided further on in the section dealing with the Australians fighting at Krithia.

Unfortunately however the public's demand for insightful information about what was happening (with our troops / their loved ones) in the war conflicted with what the British government and Allied military authorities of the day considered it was appropriate for them to know, which they controlled via their application of 'censorship' rules.

Censorship

At this point in my review I felt it necessary to re-visit some additional information that I have learned about the role the Allied censors played in the reporting of the war.

During the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, in their war with the Germans the French government had on occasions provided news reports of successful battles which were shown by astute journalists such as Elizabeth Latimer to be totally false and deceptive.

As a consequence, to avoid such embarrassment in future conflicts, by 1914 the French Army high command had learned how to absolutely control the news from the battlefield by ensuring that no one within the Zone of the (French) Armies would be in a position to contest their claims.

This was effectively achieved via the promulgations of French regulations setting down draconian restrictions for journalists and war correspondents.

These regulations included the following:

'All dispatches must be written in the French language and must be sent by the military post, and only after having been formally approved by the military censor.'

'No dispatches can be sent by wire or by wireless telegraphy'. Effectively this meant the military censors could hold up troublesome news items indefinitely.

'No correspondent can circulate in the zone of operations unless accompanied by an officer especially designated for that purpose.'

'All private as well as professional correspondence must pass through the hands of the censor. War correspondents of whatever nationality will, during their sojourn with the army, be subject to martial law, and if they infringe regulations by trying to communicate news not especially authorised by the official censors, will be dealt with by the laws of espionage in war time.' - that is, they could be shot!

Because the high commands of the French and British armies had been in close liaison before the outbreak of the Great War, this extreme censorship policy of the French military elite was largely mirrored in the attitude of the British army hierarchy. Under the *Defence of the Realm Act* sponsored by Lord Kitchener the British military were given 'draconian' powers to promote the war effort and to suppress dissent: *'No person shall by word of mouth or in writing spread reports likely to cause disaffection or alarm among any of His Majesty's forces or among the civilian population'*.

Furthermore, under the war correspondent's declaration Charles Bean undertook *'not to attempt to correspond by any other means than that officially sanctioned'* and promised not to *'impart to anyone military information of a confidential nature.....unless first submitted to the Chief Field Censor for censorship and passed for publication by him.'*

These were the strict terms under which Charles Bean was employed as Australia's official war correspondent. Despite those stringent conditions, when the AIF landed at Gallipoli Bean was surprisingly given access to all parts of the battlefield where Australian soldiers were fighting and dying. Likewise, when the AIF fought on the Western Front in the period between 1916 and 1918 he was able to visit each of the sites of their major battles. *This unlimited access enjoyed by Charles Bean was probably unsurpassed by any military journalist in any war before or since.* According to General Cyril Brudenell White, Charles Bean possibly witnessed more WW1 battles than any other member of the AIF.

Importantly, this free access undoubtedly allowed Bean to gather the valuable primary and first hand information that enabled him to write the *Official History of Australia in the War 1914-1918* after the war ended.

On the downside, the nearly two million *ordinary* Australians back at home during the War years were given very little factual information via the media about what was really happening to our soldiers on the other side of the world.

Charles Bean – Journalist or Embedded War Correspondent

Coulthart and Rees both assert that the role Charles Bean actually played was that of an 'embedded' journalist. As an 'army friendly' 'embedded journalist', he was given regular personal access to senior AIF officers, including Birdwood, Brudenall-White, McCay, Blamey and Gellibrand. Later, on the Western Front, this extended as high up as Field Marshal Douglas Haig.

The journalistic downside of this, as Coulthart noted from his own experiences as an embedded reporter with the US in Afghanistan, is that: *the military only helps the press tell the story it wants the public to hear'*.

It was within this context that in return for access to these senior officers during World War One, the quid pro quo understanding was that Charles Bean would

sanitise the reports he sent back to Australia, wherein he omitted commentary about his observations of the numerous costly planning errors and operational mistakes made by senior British and Australian military officials.

To illustrate this aspect of Bean's reporting I provide more in-depth details of the **2nd Krithia Battle** to illustrate the difference between the realities Charles Bean observed at first hand, and his actual newspaper reports in Australia that obscured from the public the truth of that costly battle.

My choice for using this particular battle as an illustration of Bean's journalistic style was partly influenced by the fact that my Grandfather Vin Black (1226) participated in this fruitless attack (2nd Brigade – 6th Field Artillery Battery), and my forebears back in Australia at the time would have been among those hoodwinked.

On the 8^h May 1915 the 2nd Brigade of the AIF (from Victoria) was transferred from ANZAC to Cape Helles in support of an attempted second British attack on the Turkish held village of Krithia, an objective which was supposed to be taken on the first day of the invasion.

So it was that late on that Saturday afternoon more than two weeks later, in an irrational and poorly planned daylight attack, the infantry of the 2nd Brigade were ordered to line up and then advance across an open plain for a distance of some *four kilometres* under intense enemy machine gun and artillery fire.

In the ensuing 90 minutes, which Bean observed, and actually bravely participated in, this Victorian Brigade suffered *casualties of 1,056 dead and wounded - all for no purpose.*

During this ineffective advance, Bean accompanied the Brigade's commander, Colonel McKay and his headquarters staff into the battle. Soon after they began to move forward they came across a shallow trench filled with a mix of Victorian and British troops sheltering from the intense Turkish fire.

Records indicate that McCay jumped up onto the parapet to spur his men on to the fight in the face of a hail of bullets.

What Bean Reported

This stirring action was recorded by Bean, and subsequently published a few weeks later in Australian newspapers as follows:

'Then the Brigadier who had so far led the charge himself jumped up on the parapet. "Now then, on Australians" he said waving his periscope..... The men gathered themselves up and shouting "On Australians, Come on Australians" they swept over that parapet like a whirlwind and out across the deadly plateau.

This story by Bean no doubt stirred Australian readers at home and it subsequently became the basis for one of the many erroneous myths of the Gallipoli campaign.

What Actually Happened

Coulthart discovered that Bean's *private diary* recorded a very different version of that event; for it was not just a periscope that McCay was waving to urge his troops on - in his other hand he held a revolver with which he was threatening a reluctant soldier:

'I saw him with the revolver in his hands. He had just been talking to some chap in the trench some ten yards to my left. I heard afterwards it was a Sergeant and McCay threatened to shoot him if he didn't get out damned quick.'

Bean's Use of Hyperbole

In this same Krithia report Bean disingenuously went on to write:

'A perfect storm of bullets met them. They reckoned those bullets no more than if they were a summer shower. One youngster walked steadily into that storm with his entrenching spade held in his left hand and a little in front of his face.....while he looked from under shelter of it exactly as a man looked around his umbrella when walking in the rain down a city street.'

Sometimes when shrapnel burst in front of them, you would seem some youngster defend his forehead with his elbow and come through dust clouds almost blinded but I never noticed one man falter and curiously enough I believe that shrapnel did little actual harm. It must have hit some men of course but I saw none fall.

While this embellished narrative no doubt thrilled and deluded Australian newspaper readers at home (including my great-grandmother), Bean's personal diary and notebooks factually record that he observed numerous casualties in what he considered was clearly a pointless and poorly planned attack.

What Charles Bean Failed to Report On at 2nd Krithia

In his personal diary entries for this battle Charles Bean noted the Allied Command's failure to provide sufficient stretcher bearers and medical assistance at Krithia. As a consequence of this failure many young Victorians who had been lightly wounded subsequently died because their evacuation from the battlefield was unduly delayed. While an issue such as this would obviously have been of interest and concern to the Australian public at home, it was an aspect that Bean chose not to write a report about.

Had he mentioned this relevant aspect of the attack the Australian public would undoubtedly have loudly demanded that our government provide further and adequate medical resources for our troops in subsequent battles.

In my view Charles Bean in his role as a 'journalist' representing our then young democratic nation, allowed himself to be used by the military as a conduit to misinform and deceive the Australian public. From this perspective I believe as a journalist he failed to provide the honest and balanced reports of events that he observed that his profession required.

My viewpoint of course conflicts with the harsh reality of that period where a few powerful men in the governments of each of the major nations on both sides of the conflict shared the view that the citizens of their respective countries could not be informed of the 'truth' of events that occurred on the battlefield.

This fear of the truth is exemplified by British Prime Minister Lloyd George, who in 1917 said:

"If people really knew, the war would be stopped tomorrow. But of course they don't – and can't know."

With respect to acting as Australia's 'official war correspondent' the evidence suggests that Charles Bean the journalist was complicit in helping the Government and the military authorities to deceive a barely literate and gullible Australian public.

In his battlefield reports Charles Bean produced the type of self serving pap that he was required to by both the British and Australian military authorities. In doing so I consider Bean deceived the Australian public by hiding from them the many military blunders he observed involving the AIF in its battles such as those at Lone Pine, the Nek, Fromelles, Pozieres, Bullecourt and Passchendaele. By writing sham reports about each of these conflicts that satisfied the censors, without mentioning the fact that the lives of tens of thousands of our diggers were needlessly lost for no strategic purpose, as a journalist Charles Bean short changed the Australian people who, in our fledgling democracy, I believe, had the right to know.

While Charles Bean's sanitized descriptions about the positive achievements and successes of our diggers were avidly consumed by the Australian public, such reports were to some extent counteracted by an even more powerful factor: this was provided *in the lengthy lists published in Australia's major newspapers giving the names of the thousands of killed, missing and wounded soldiers* that regularly appeared from late 1915 right through to the end of the War.

For the minority of 'thinking' individuals in our communities at the time these staggering casualty lists would surely have caused them to query how our country could have been suffering such enormous human losses when according to the published maps of the Western Front battlefields, the Allied armies at the same time were making no significant gains?

Was there another way for Charles Bean the journalist? - What If – Bean had returned home at the end of 1917 and told ordinary Australians the fuller story?

Charles Bean – Official War Historian

While Charles Bean may not have shone as a journalist, it was in his secondary role that I feel he excelled by playing a unique and invaluable part for Australia in the Great War.

When Bean was appointed as Australia's official war correspondent, in a subsequent conversation with Australian Defence Minister George Pearce the idea was floated that in addition to providing his battle field reports for Australia's newspapers, Bean should, after the War ended, also write *an official history of the war*, thereby giving him a second function.

The evidence from Bean's diaries and letters suggests that he made a decision in 1917 to move away from his correspondent's role to focus on his position as Australia's official post-war historian. In part this was probably because he knew it was impossible to tell his readers the truth under the then censorship constraints, while the jingoism of his editors meant that more candid reports would probably not be published anyway.

Bean's news articles, diaries and notebooks, together with the official records formed the basis of his epic 'Official History of Australia in the War of 1914 – 1918, and in this role he played a uniquely valuable part.

Following the War Charles Bean was the man charged with writing the 'remarkable' and detailed story of the 1st AIF in the First World War, a mammoth task that would take up much of the rest of his life.

The Battle for Fromelles

I have chosen to include Charles Bean's association with the Fromelles battle because it not only illustrates his qualities as a historian but because I think it may have been the watershed event that changed his perceptions about the fallibility of the British command, while bringing home to him the magnitude of the consequences that 'censorship' restrictions would be having on his audience - the Australian public.

Fromelles was the first battle fought by the AIF on the Western Front, following their withdrawal from Gallipoli. For reasons that will be explained, the nation's worst ever military disaster went virtually unmentioned in the Australian media at the time, and very few ordinary people, other than relatives, actually knew that it happened.

British General 'Butcher' Haking 'planned' the attack under the imprimatur of General Haig, with its primary objective being to deceive the Germans into thinking it was a full scale campaign that would discourage them from sending reinforcements to the Somme battlefield further south.²

² AIF General Brudenell White is quoted as saying before the attack: "I hate these unprepared little shows. What do we do? We may deceive the enemy for two days; and after that, he knows perfectly well that it is not a big attack, and that we are not in earnest there."

Planning of the Attack

After the war Bean would write about the planning for the Fromelles attack:

“Suggested first by Haking as a feint-attack; then by General Plumer as part of a victorious advance; Rejected by general Monro in favour of an attack elsewhere; then put forward again by GHQ as a ‘purely artillery’ demonstration; ordered as a demonstration but with an infantry operation added, according to Haking’s plan and through his emphatic advocacy; almost cancelled – through weather and the doubts of GHQ – and finally reinstated by Haig, apparently as an urgent demonstration- such were the changes of form that this ill-fated operation had successively passed.”

As a result of this shambolic planning, on the night of 19th July 1916 the 5th Division of the AIF, together with an inexperienced British division, was ordered to attack the German line near the French village of Fromelles.

On that one night the 5th division suffered 5,533 casualties, which included 1,917 killed – the worst one day military losses ever suffered by Australia.

Charles Bean was not actually present when the Australians attacked that evening, but upon hearing of the event he arrived at the front the next morning, as wounded diggers were still trickling in from the front line.

However, because of British army censorship laws, Bean was unable to report what actually happened at Fromelles, and was shocked to read English press reports that totally distorted the affair by printing a British army communiqué which included the following:

“Yesterday evening, south of Armentiers, we carried out some important trench raids on a front of about two miles in which Australian troops took part. About 14 German prisoners were taken”

Coulthart suggests that Bean’s anger over the lies told about Fromelles was a turning point in his growing disillusionment about not being able to give a truthful account to his Australian readers during the war.

In the aftermath of Fromelles Bean interviewed participating soldiers of all ranks, drew maps and made copious notes. Consequently in the Official History Charles Bean was able to describe in detail the events that happened at Fromelles so that information about the disaster could become known to the people of Australia, in a situation where, without his intervention, the truth about Fromelles would have been buried forever.

Despite his great work however, Bean failed to be fully impartial or to provide a complete account of events of all that had happened. Significantly he failed to provide information of an incident soon after the battle ended when the Germans offered a truce so that both sides could recover their wounded in no-man’s land. This

was subsequently refused by the 5th division's commanding officer General McCay (of Krithia fame). This was despite the fact that under military law a commanding officer was perfectly entitled to authorise a local suspension of arms without superior approval. As a result of McCay's decision hundreds of diggers unnecessarily died excruciating deaths over a number of days on the open battlefield.

This was a significant incident that those Australian survivors who were present felt great bitterness about, but which Charles Bean chose not to mention in his Official History.

The twelve-volume Official History detail Australia's involvement in the Great War – six of which Charles Bean personally wrote – ran to four million words, 10,000 pages, 2,250 maps and 1500 illustrations, and documented the actions and names of around 8,000 men and women.

The Australian War Memorial

By late 1916 Charles Bean's observations on the Western Front lead him to consider the question of how to ensure that when the war was over the Australian public might be given the opportunity to know something of what their diggers had endured.

As a consequence of this line of thought he conceived the idea of a national war memorial that would display physical relics and key documents of the War.

In tandem with his thinking for a national war memorial Bean began the task of actively acquiring some of the AIF's trophies of war, which would be housed in that national museum.³

As a result of Bean's vision, in 1923 a site for the Australian War Memorial was nominated at the foot of Mount Ainslie in Canberra. However it would not be until 11th November 1941 that Charles Bean would finally stand on the dais with the official party for the formal opening for what was to become a highly valued national treasure.

Political Lobbyist

A third interesting element in the life of Charles Bean arose from the fact that during the course of the war he developed personal relationships with many significant personalities in the war, including Prime Ministers and senior Allied generals. However there is evidence to show that Bean attempted to inappropriately use some

³ One memory I have as a twelve year old on our first family visit to Canberra was being photographed beside the monster Amiens Gun, one of the prime trophies of the War.

of these relationships to influence top level decision making, particularly with respect to the selection of the man who would head the AIF in 1918.

During the Gallipoli campaign Bean had a number of discussions with John Monash, and possessing an anti-semitic disposition, he took an early dislike to the man, which he carried through the war years.

Ross Coulthart describes the extent of Bean's vendetta against Monash in some detail. In mid-May 1918 General Birdwood confided to Charles Bean that he would be leaving the ANZAC command to head the British Fifth Army, and that he had recommended General John Monash to head the entire Australian Corps in France and Belgium, rather than Bean's close friend, General Brudenell White.

Given Monash's demonstrated successes in battle this decision should not have come as a shock to Bean, who took it badly in his conviction that White was the best man for the job.

Bean immediately journeyed to London, and in consultation with future newspaper magnate Keith Murdoch (Rupert's father), the two journalists approached the Australian Prime Minister Billy Hughes, in an attempt to have him delay and then reverse the Government's decision, even though the Monash appointment had already been ratified by Cabinet.

In fact during the last few months of the War with Monash in charge of the Australian Corp the force enjoyed an unequalled record of success, to the extent that Roland Perry's biography on John Monash is titled: *Monash- The Outsider who Won a War!*

Coulthart concludes that "*the whole campaign (against Monash) was a seriously deluded misjudgement by both Bean and Murdoch.*"

Charles Bean's Contribution to Australian Democracy

Upon reflecting on both biographies about the life of Charles Bean, the stand-out issues in Bean's story lead me to question the essence of Australian democracy on the one hand, as well as the role we should reasonably expect journalists and the mass media to perform in a *supposedly* democratic society.

While many of us can no doubt recall the '*weapons of mass destruction*' rant that dominated our media just prior to Australia's entry into the second Iraq war in 2003, in fact the first precedent for military mis-information in this country actually occurred via Charles Bean's reporting of the ANZACs at Gallipoli in 1915!

I consider the role of the 'Fourth Estate' involving media and journalists have a critical role to play in representing the interests of the 'ordinary' citizens who make up the bulk of the population, rather than serving the interests of that tiny minority of elite powerbrokers that exist in every society, who are most often un-elected men

from political, business, bureaucratic and the military, *who profess to undertake vital actions in our name and for our benefit.*

The sad reality is that our Australian democracy is and always has been far from perfect in this regard. In over-viewing the role of the media we can find some elements, such as our independent ABC, that adopt a principled and balanced position to – as Australian Democrats senator Don Chipp put it – “keep the bastards honest”. On the other hand, the bulk of our media providers (and Rupert Murdoch’s NewsCorp in particular, exemplified by the Daily Teleraph) take a crass commercial approach to news reporting whereby they unashamedly act as instruments for a minute but powerful elite in our society who use the medium to misinform, distort and keep relevant information from the mass of ordinary people.

In my view the citizens living in a vibrant democracy should have the reasonable expectation that ‘journalists’ and the ‘free media’ would act on their behalf and provide them with relevant, full and accurate information to enable them to assess the extent to which their governments conduct affairs in alignment with their interests.

In this respect, while it could be argued that Charles Bean acted as a ‘tool’ for vested interests seeking to hide the truths of the War from the Australian public, his subsequent initiatives involving the Official Histories and the AWM provided a belated balance which has enabled those with an interest in learning the truth to have access a unique collections the likes of which are not available in the countries of our former Allies.