



THE STRATEGIST

In memoriam: Jeffrey Guy Grey 1959–2016

4 Aug 2016 | [Peter Edwards \(http://www.aspistrategist.org.au/author/peter-edwards/\)](http://www.aspistrategist.org.au/author/peter-edwards/)



The sudden death of Professor Jeffrey Grey of the University of New South Wales, Canberra—the academic component of the Australian Defence Force Academy—at the age of 57 has profoundly shocked not only the relatively small military history community in Australia but also his many international colleagues.

In Australia his stature was indicated by the fact that in a conference on Charles Bean's Legacy held within days of his death, Jeffrey Grey was the only person scheduled to speak on each of the two days—the first on the place of Australian official histories in their international context, and the second on his own contribution to the Australian official history of the Malayan Emergency, the Indonesian Confrontation and the Vietnam War. Jeffrey was the author, co-author, editor or co-editor of 19 books, including one and a half volumes of the nine-volume Official History of Australia's Involvement in South-East Asian Conflicts 1948-1975.

Internationally his reputation was perhaps even higher than in Australia. At the time of his death Jeffrey was the first non-American ever to be elected President of the Society for Military History, the focus for the large and influential military history community in the US. (The Society has set up a tributes page on its website.) He was highly regarded in the US, where he was a frequent visitor and spent two years as the Matthew Horner Professor of Military Theory at the Marine Corps University in Quantico, Virginia. Jeffrey was also well connected in, and a welcome visitor to, the military history communities in the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa. He used those connections to the advantage of his Australian colleagues, for example in helping (with his colleague and friend Peter Dennis) to co-ordinate the Chief of Army's military history conferences.

The breadth and depth of Jeffrey's knowledge of military history was quite extraordinary. His office overflowed with books on shelves, desk and floor. Jeffrey had not only read them all, but could analyse, and give pithy and perceptive comments on, the strengths and weaknesses of each one. In the Australian arena, he had detailed knowledge of all Australia's 20th century wars and the literature surrounding them. But he could also speak with American, British, Canadian, New Zealand, South African and other international colleagues on at least equal terms. His extensive network of colleagues and friends, in Australia and overseas, included many in the military as well as academics.

Jeffrey's knowledge was shared not just through the many books he wrote or edited, but also through his undergraduate students and the post-graduate students he supervised. As several have testified, their experience typically developed from initial terror at his forbidding demeanour to profound gratitude for his encouragement and inspiration. Jeffrey's longstanding and informed interest in the professional education of the military led to productive discussions with the relevant authorities. His knowledge of rugby and of craft beers was also willingly shared.

A presentation by Jeffrey Grey to any academic, military or community audience was always memorable. His detailed knowledge and forthright opinions were always backed by profound scholarship. The thrust of his argument was abundantly clear, as he explained not only what had happened (or not happened), but precisely why (or why not), and the wider implications of the topic.

Jeffrey also shared his encyclopedic knowledge willingly and fruitfully with his colleagues, journalists and others who sought it. I recently emailed him seeking to clarify an obscure point about the airfields from which Japanese aircraft had flown to sink the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* in December 1941. Within hours he had sent me a chart identifying all the relevant squadrons and their bases. As innumerable students, academic colleagues, members of the Australian Defence Force, officials in the Defence Department, journalists and others can testify, this is one small example of an extraordinary willingness to give accurate and relevant information and to suggest useful contacts.

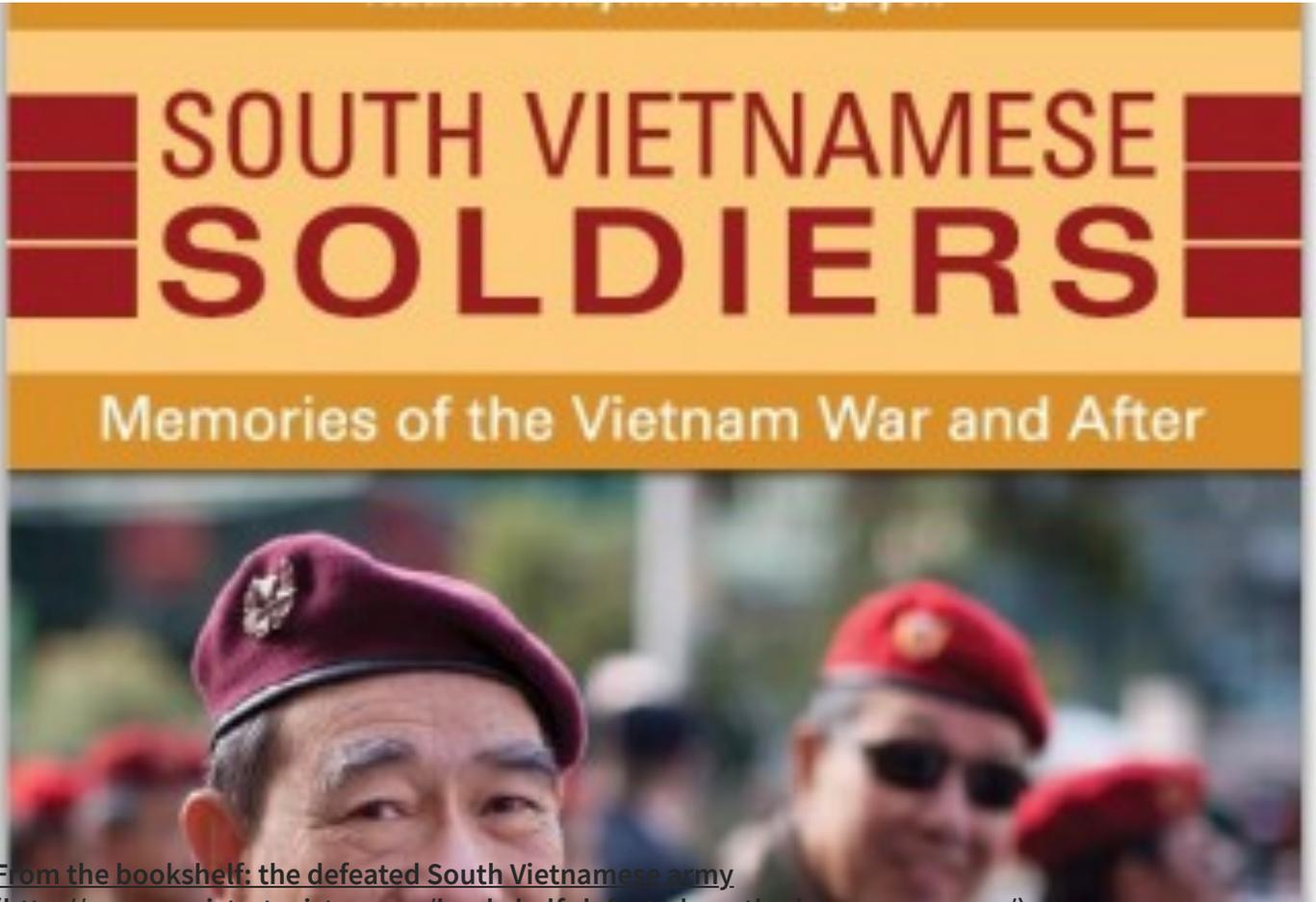
The son of a major-general and nephew of two brigadiers, Jeffrey paid proper respect to those who had served their country. He was attending dawn services long before they became mass events, but was dismissive of the sometimes saccharin sentimentality of some recent acts of commemoration. Military professionalism, courage and skill were greatly to be admired: attempts to seek excessive recognition or fraudulent compensation weren't. His respect for accurate assessments and willingness to puncture false claims were applied universally.

The conveners of the Charles Bean conference in Canberra, professors Tom Frame and Peter Stanley, considered cancelling but, as Jeffrey would certainly have wished, decided to proceed, while including an impromptu session of tributes from colleagues, students and friends. A conference on Bean's legacy thus became the first preliminary sketch of Jeffrey Grey's huge and unique legacy to Australian military history.

AUTHOR

Peter Edwards is the official historian of Australia's involvements in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948-75. He had professional links with Jeffrey Grey from the 1970s.

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