

NUNAWADING MILITARY HISTORY GROUP

MINI NEWSLETTER No. 1

Sir John Robert Kerr, AK, GCMG, GCVO, QC (24 September 1914 – 24 March 1991) was the 18th Governor-General of Australia.

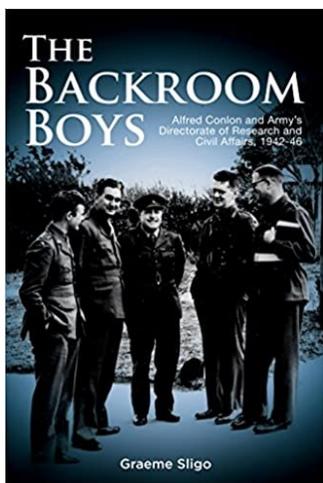
He is remembered mainly because he dismissed the Labor government of Gough Whitlam on 11 November 1975, marking the climax of the most significant constitutional crisis in Australian history. But did you know he served during WW11 and left the army with the rank of colonel and was part of the “WW11 Backroom Boys think tank”.

On 1 April 1942 Kerr began full-time duty in the Citizen Military Forces, at the Base Supply Depot, Parkes. In July he was commissioned as an acting lieutenant and posted to the army's research section in Melbourne. Headed by Alfred Conlon, this organisation evolved into the Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs (DORCA). Kerr's promotion was rapid: two steps to major in 1943 and, following his transfer (November 1943) to the Australian Imperial Force, to lieutenant colonel in 1944. He was effectively Conlon's deputy (formalised in April 1945), putting administrative flesh on the bones of the proposals of his charismatic but idiosyncratic superior and helping to dissuade him from some of his more controversial ideas.

Contrary to many accounts, especially after 1975, DORCA was not an intelligence unit and had no association with American or other intelligence agencies. One of its principal interests was the military government of captured or occupied territories until they could be returned to orthodox civilian administration. Working in this field, Kerr became a quasi-diplomat, liaising with civilian and military officials in London and Washington. During visits to London in 1944 and 1945 he discussed the military control of the British territories in Borneo following their liberation by Australian forces in 1945. He became the Australian link with the British Directorate of Civil Affairs, seeking to alleviate Anglo-Australian tensions over Conlon's heavy-handed management of the joint arrangements.



Colonel Alfred Conlan



The Backroom Boys: Conlon and Army's Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs, 1942-46, by Graeme Sligo, Big Sky Publishing, 2012

In Canberra in 1945 DORCA established the School of Civil Affairs to train administrators for Australia's territories. Subverting Kerr's intention to return to legal practice, Conlon deviously instigated his appointment as the school's chief instructor—succeeding (Sir) Keith Murray—and promotion to temporary colonel in September. Kerr's faith in Conlon's integrity was undermined but he agreed to head the renamed Australian School of Pacific Administration, established as a civil institution in Sydney in 1946. On 4 April he transferred to the Reserve of Officers. While at ASOPA he was also organising secretary of a conference which led to the formation of the South Pacific Commission. He arranged the first session of the commission but declined an offer to become its inaugural secretary-general.

The Australian War Memorial will go ahead with a private, nationally televised Anzac Day commemorative service on 25 April 2020. The traditional Dawn Service, National Ceremony and veterans' march will not take place.



The Australian War Memorial will go ahead with a private, nationally televised Anzac Day commemorative service on 25 April 2020. The traditional Dawn Service, National Ceremony and veterans' march will not take place.

This revised ceremony will be held in the Commemorative Area and Hall of Memory of the Memorial at 5.30 am on Anzac Day.

An assessment was made by the Memorial Executive and Council and the decision taken in conjunction with the RSL (ACT Branch). The event will not be open to the public but will be broadcast live across Australia by the ABC and streamed online.

Acting Memorial Director Anne Bennie said the Memorial is committed to providing an opportunity for Australians to commemorate Anzac Day through the televised ceremony.

"Anzac Day is a symbolic day for Australians and New Zealanders, with the Australian War Memorial being the centre of Australia's national commemoration.

"In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that Anzac Day commemorations adhere to government advice on gatherings of large groups. The Memorial Council has approved a revised commemorative ceremony format, to be held within the heart of the Memorial," Bennie said.

President of the ACT Branch of the Returned and Services League, John King, said we have an obligation to look after the safety of the veteran and wider communities.

"In these exceptional circumstances, the RSL feels the course of action decided by the Australian War Memorial is the most appropriate way to mark Anzac Day, with due consideration for public safety," Mr King said.

It's anticipated the event will be attended by dignitaries representing the Commonwealth of Australia, the people of NZ, and current and former serving veterans.

Full details are being finalised, however the televised ceremony will retain a number of traditional elements. The ceremony will provide an opportunity for Australians to safely pause in their homes.