

BOOKS

TASSIE BESTSELLERS

This week's list supplied by Ellison Hawker bookshop

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1 Minecraft Annual | 7 Kittens for When S--- Happens |
| 2 Grumpy Cat | (Trevor Davies) |
| 3 Tequila Mockingbird (Tim Federle) | 8 Film in Five Seconds (Matteo Civaschi) |
| 4 Raising Steam (Terry Pratchett) | 9 Wit and Wisdom on Tyrion Lannister |
| 5 Minecraft Beginners Annual | (George R.R. Martin) |
| 6 Snuff (Terry Pratchett) | 10 Dangerous Women (George R.R. Martin) |

Listen in to the birdsong of war

FINALLY, a no-punches-pulled, behind-the-scenes account of one of military history's most defiant forces.

When Singapore fell to the Japanese in February 1942, it appeared little could be done to stop their conquest of all of South-east Asia and the Pacific.

One after another, British and Allied outposts were overrun or left behind to starve and capitulate. When Allied morale was at its lowest point in 1942, Darwin received the following message:

"Force intact. Still fighting.

"Badly need boots, quinine, money and Tommy-gun ammunition."

That famous message came from an improvised radio called "Winnie the War Winner" built by Sparrow Force, the Australian and British force that defended Timor in 1942.

Isolated for 60 days, they waged a guerrilla campaign that held off Japan's most successful forces. Winston Churchill acknowledged their grit with the words, "They alone did not surrender".

Grant McLachlan's *Sparrow: A Chronicle of Defiance* documents the history of Sparrow Force. He uses the subtitle: "An epic account of The Sparrows - Battle of Britain gunners who defended Timor as part of Sparrow Force in 1942." In fact, it is much more.

Sparrow is a remarkable book, first for its size, more than 790 pages, second for the extraordinary amount of information and evidence of research and third for its style.

The book is the author's first and it is clearly a labour of love. The author begins with an 18-page description of his own journey of discovery about the research and writing of the book. What set out as family history research into the war service of the author's grandfather grew into a remarkable study of the creation of Sparrow Force, its epic battles in early 1942 and a record of the fate of those who became prisoners of the Japanese.

Previous authors have tackled the subject of the war on Timor in 1942. Few mention the

THE READ

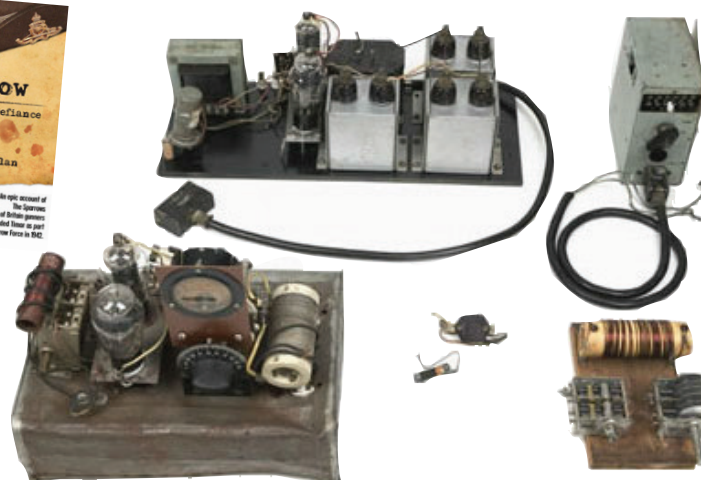
SPARROW: A CHRONICLE OF DEFIANCE
by Grant McLachlan
RRP \$75.50



Battle of Britain hardened anti-aircraft battery that was part of Sparrow Force and even fewer link the suffering of those taken prisoner on Timor with the fighting they did before they were captured. *Sparrow* makes a monumental attempt to cover it all by following the author's grandparents from the outbreak of war through to their reunion upon the grandfather's return, which often finds them in the middle of many landmark events of the war.

The author has chosen to write the bulk of the text as if it is a first-person narrative. It is not a style I am particularly comfortable with. I was always fascinated by how my grandparents formed their sentences and their use of words that had slipped from common use by my generation. I aspired to copy this speech but never quite achieved it. For this reason, I wonder why the author has chosen to recreate the dialogue of the characters in his narrative in such a way.

But for all of my concern about the style, others have found it engaging and treat it as a translation from the mid-20th century to the second decade of the 21st. The author's research is exhaustive and his interviews with veterans extensive, so he is well placed to describe the events in detail and make educated guesses about how those conversations may have played out. That said, the story engages the reader much like a movie script, making it perfect for big screen adaptation.



WAR WINNER: The famous improvised radio built by Sparrow Force that regained contact with Australia after 60 days of isolation.

The narrative is unique in that it tells parallel stories. When other authors have tackled this subject, they have divided the short battle and long captivity of western Timor group and the year-long guerrilla war fought by the largely Western Australian independent company on eastern Timor into two geographically specific narratives and told those stories separately. This author has chosen a strictly chronological approach and so in the space of one paragraph, the reader is transported from the description of a daring ambush by a small band of guerrillas in the mountains of central east Timor to an account of the austere, monotonous, often brutal existence of captured British and Australian soldiers being used as slave labourers near Koepong. The story is especially poignant as it involves the struggles of soldiers' wives helping the war effort on the home front as they ponder their husbands' fate.

In the final section of the book, a 100-page collection of chapters under the heading

"Aftermath", the author shares his perspectives on the historical context of the Pacific War, the atomic bomb, the treatment of Allied prisoners of war by the Japanese and the post-war war crimes trials. He finishes with some fascinating observations on the statistics of the POW experience during World War II.

The book will have very wide appeal as it contains mind-boggling quantities of information, from graphs, tables, maps and nominal roles that any military historian with an interest in the subject will find useful, as well as a narrative of personal and historical discovery to delight the most avid genealogist, family historian or lover of a good story well told.

The website that accompanies the book (www.sparrowbook.com) goes further by mapping the events portrayed and including an extensive archive of unique film footage, interview clips, images and research links. Much of the remarkable dialogue in the story is verbatim to those interviews.

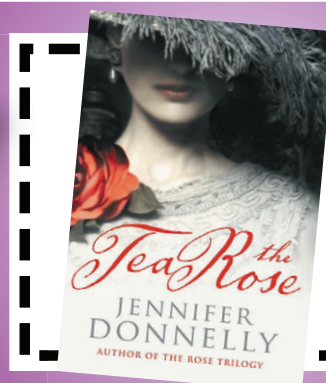
Sparrow is a record of gallant soldiers who did their job to the best of their ability against overwhelming odds and in a hostile environment. For those who were captured it is a story of endurance, ingenuity and mateship. When McLachlan called it a chronicle of defiance he could not have chosen a more apt title. It is a fitting tribute to a past generation of warriors from one of their descendants.

Review by Brad Manera

- Brad is an historian and executive manager of the ANZAC Memorial in Sydney.
- Anyone with relatives who were members of the 2/40 Infantry Battalion who wish to contact the author can email grant@klaut.co.uk

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