

## Australians Must Reclaim Knowledge of Their Military History

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As Australians reflect on the 80th anniversary of Japan's surrender in World War II, new research shows that much of the nation has lost touch with its military history. While Australians rightly honour the sacrifices of those who served, a survey of 1,500 adults highlights concerning gaps in awareness, particularly among younger generations.

The study, conducted by the War Studies Research Group, confirms that while 90% of respondents knew World War II occurred, knowledge of key battles and campaigns was limited. Iconic events like the siege of Tobruk were recognised by only 41% of respondents, while 42% had not heard of any major Mediterranean engagements. Even in the Pacific, awareness of crucial moments was incomplete: although the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (67%) and the bombing of Darwin (59%) were widely recognized, Kokoda, arguably the defining campaign of Australia's wartime courage, ranked lower than expected.

Age remains a strong factor in understanding. Those aged 60 and above demonstrated the highest awareness, with over two-thirds familiar with Tobruk and 90% recognising Pearl Harbor. By contrast, younger Australians, particularly those aged 18–29, showed strikingly low knowledge: only 31% knew of Tobruk, and key campaigns like Kokoda and the prisoner-of-war experiences on the Thai-Burma Railway were largely unknown.

This generational gap presents a serious concern. A nation that forgets its history risks weakening the values of service, courage, and patriotism that underpin national identity. Schools play a vital role in instilling these values, yet the survey found that between 40% and 70% of respondents had never formally studied Australia's military history. While World War II retains a dominant place in public memory, other conflicts, such as the First World War and Vietnam, are less remembered, and the broader narrative of Australia's military contributions is fading.

Australians must act to preserve knowledge of their military heritage. A stronger focus on history in schools, particularly on key campaigns and the experiences of those who served, is critical. Public commemoration should go beyond symbolic ceremonies and ensure that the stories of sacrifice, strategy, and bravery are passed on to younger generations.

A society that honours its military past fosters respect for service, strengthens national identity, and prepares citizens to understand the responsibilities of defending freedom. By reclaiming awareness of Australia's military history, the nation can pay genuine tribute to those who fought and ensure that future generations inherit the courage, resilience, and sense of duty that shaped the country.