

## “Be an Aussie Digger”

by Captain Conway Bown  
Official Army War Artist



*‘Be an Aussie Digger’ – oil on canvas, 2006.  
Official Army Art Collection.*

“This image is reminiscent of the recruiting posters of the First and Second World Wars. Before the widespread advent of visual media such as movies and television, print was the most potent form of communication. Recruiting posters and propaganda were the main form of this type of artwork for use by government. And whilst the term propaganda may have a negative connotation, the actual origin of the word comes from the same latin root for the word ‘propagate’ which means ‘to spread’. So propaganda could be a positive form of communication with positive connotations. Unfortunately, because many untruths were spread via this means, the term has come to take on a negative connotation.”

One of the key aspects of propaganda is that the artist is trying to evoke a specific reaction in the viewer. Unlike the aims of other

artwork, where the artist usually leaves the reactions up to the viewer, this type of communication wants a specific psychological or physical reaction. It could be to encourage the viewer to do – or not do – a certain action... or to change the psychological viewpoint of the person looking at the artwork.”

“An artist has some tricks and tools to do this. For example, when looking at some cartoons today, a character can be made to look ‘cute’ by increasing the size of the eyes. Japanese Manga cartoons use this technique all the time.”

“Another technique used by artists is using what is known as ‘the heroic figure’. This is using a certain combination of pose and proportion. The pose could be a heroic pose, similar to those seen on the two designs on this module. The other is proportion. Proportion describes the relative size of one thing to another. If something is not the right size compared to its surroundings, it’s said to be ‘out of proportion’. Imagine a drawing of a car with one headlight larger than the other. You could say that the headlights were out of proportion. In drawing a human figure, the height of a human

male is 7 to 8 times the height of his head; for a female it is 6 to 7 times. If the artist wishes to make the figure more heroic, what he or she can do is make the size of the figure 8 to 9 times the size of the head. This has the effect of making the chest and torso look larger and stronger, ie more 'heroic'. If you have a look at some of the recruiting posters from the time, you can see this technique used often.

### Points to Note:

**The Flag:** It was also important to me to ensure that I got the flag exactly right. Vexicology is the study of flags and heraldry, and it was vital that I used the appropriate flag protocols as well.

**The Australian national flag (ANF)** is the ensign of the Australian Army and the Army is charged with protecting it. (The Navy and Air Force have their own ensigns). A flag shown vertically has to have the upper canton up and to the left such as that shown. Any other way is technically incorrect.

**The Quote:** The quote is allegedly from George Orwell but evidence suggests that it is a variation on something else that he said (or actually wrote in a book of the '50s). Others attribute it to Churchill and still others cite a Kipling quote of similar intent. I use Orwell as the citation only because his version is close to it.

**The Figure:** The model for the image is a sergeant from 5<sup>th</sup>/ 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, Sergeant Iago Walker. He is seen wearing a combat vest, body armour and is brandishing an F88 AuSteyr Assault Rifle. Strapped to his thigh is a 9mm Browning pistol, his secondary weapon.

He is wearing his Kevlar helmet with ballistic goggles. Above his left breast, attached to his combat vest, is a small two-way radio. Communications are vital on the battlefield and this allows him to remain in contact with his superiors or subordinates even outside visual range.

**The Inspiration:** The image at right is the inspiration for this painting. (Artist and copyright unknown). The Australian figure was posed in the same position as the US Marine as best as possible bearing in mind the differences in the equipment.

