

New Australian Author Book Release

A Soldier's Quartet

COLIN BALDWIN

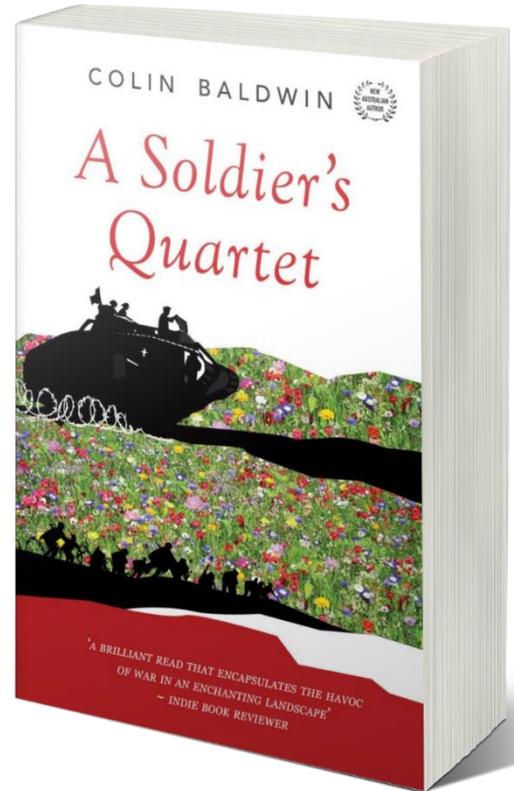
Conrad Bentley enjoys his retirement.

By chance, he comes across a letter from WWI — a German father writes about his grief of losing a son to war — buried by his three comrades near a small French village. The letter resonates with Conrad and he commits to researching its backstory.

Months later, Conrad makes contact with the fallen soldier's family. He falls deeper into their history and other untold stories from this era, including the fate of young Tasmanian soldiers who also fought on the Western Front.

'A Soldier's Quartet' is inspired by true events, a story of perseverance and happenstance that transcends time and reaches across continents. It presents the human faces behind uniforms and battle plans, conveys love and hope set against various landscapes.

Conrad's discovery of the letter brings the past into the present as he reflects on his own life and loss.



Visit shawlinepublishing.com.au for more details on the author, Colin Baldwin.

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A Conversation with Colin

Who inspires you?

Currently, my grandchildren - their creativity and curiosity. Previously, the adventurous spirit of my parents. I am constantly inspired by the ingenious of composers, among others Haydn, Beethoven, and Shostakovich. In the field of literature, I have been inspired by Iris Murdoch, John Fowles and some novels by Thomas Hardy and John Irving.

When did you first realize you wanted to be a writer?

If I look back, the lure of writing a novel has always been there. Discovering the German letter from WWI coincided with retirement. Retirement opened up the opportunity for the right time and mindset to commit to writing about it.

Where did you get information or ideas for your book, 'A Soldier's Quartet'?

The story centres around a character, based on me, who stumbles upon a German letter, written during WW1 about the death of a young German soldier on the Western Front, that found its way back to Tasmania as a war souvenir. The book evolved, considerably, out of this central experience and the results of my research to locate and make contact with the current living relatives of the fallen soldier.

What was one of the most surprising things you learned in creating your books?

The power of sometimes allowing the narrative to write itself and embracing coincidence/fate. For example, when I first started the book, I had solved the identity of the fallen German soldier and made contact with his family. How the letter made its way to Tasmania remained a mystery, therefore I started to invent a storyline of two young Tasmanian soldiers - intending to describe one of them as the one who souvenired the letter from the Western Front.

In the meantime, the German family urged me to utilise my research skills, skills I employed to find them, and similarly solve for the identity of the real Tasmanian soldier. The only clue I had was a short English inscription on the margin of the letter. I solved it by matching the handwriting with online diaries of Tasmanian soldiers who fought in the same battle (the Battle of Amiens, 8.8.1918).

My character was initially named Conrad Brown (now Conrad Bentley). I needed to change it because I discovered the real Tasmanian soldier was a Lieutenant Brown. I also recognised the name of his grandson in a photo I found on the internet - a friend of a friend, which led me to meeting Bessie (daughter of Lt. Brown), now in her 90s.

She was delighted and intrigued that I had, coincidentally, and before knowing her, named the wife of one of the young fictional Tasmanian soldiers Bessie.

Do you have any suggestions to help others become a better writer? If so, what are they?

If you experience a unique event, something that falls into your lap, something that you cannot shake, then consider putting your thoughts and experience down in writing. Get a good grammar mentor. Recognise you are a first-time writer and will need to familiarise yourself with the publishing world but persevere. I'm not a fan of the old adage, nothing ventured, nothing gained, but it certainly applies in my case.

What are your plans for your future books?

I do have ideas for two follow-up books using secondary characters from the first book and developing their storyline but keeping some subtle threads from the first.

Why did you write 'A Soldier's Quartet'? What were your inspirations?

I came into contact with a 100-year-old letter. A sad letter from a father, writing to one of his sons about the death of another. Immediately, the letter spoke to me, urged me to do something. I embarked on a search for the family. After I met them, I felt there was still a loose end - I was compelled to tell the story.

I started with a factual account but became dissatisfied that I couldn't explore the fate of these soldiers who fought and died, particular the young man mentioned in the letter. From information about his regiment, I dabbled with reconstructing his death. This took off like a rocket and I realised I needed to write a novel - half factual, half fictionalised.

How did you decide on the characters for 'A Soldier's Quartet'?

There is a mixture of real and fictionalised characters, real names and pseudonyms. Most are based on people who share interests with the protagonist, based on me. Some of the names have changed throughout the writing process and characters added or deleted when circumstances dictated

