

Zealand. There are, however, some significant New Zealand works missing from Ewer's bibliography. His discussion of 21 Battalion's role in the defence of the Pinios Gorge would, for instance, have been more robust if he had taken note of John McLeod's analysis of this action in *Myth and Reality: The New Zealand Soldier in World War II*.

Forgotten ANZACS is a nicely produced hardback book with a useful range of photographs, including a selection of images taken during the Second World War and recently of veterans of the campaign that the author interviewed as part of his research. There are 15 fairly basic maps, which effectively complement the text. Unfortunately, the book's index, although generally comprehensive, fails to include a number of significant individuals mentioned in the text.

Peter Ewer has a lively and highly readable style, and this combined with the gripping nature of the first-hand accounts included in the book make it easy and enjoyable to read. *Forgotten ANZACS* provides Australians and New Zealanders with a lively and accessible introduction to the part played by their forces in the Greek campaign, and it is not at all surprising that it has sold well on both sides of the Tasman.

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Dark Journey: Three New Zealand Battles of the Western Front. By Glyn Harper. HarperCollins, Auckland, 2007. 544pp. NZ price: \$49.99. ISBN 978-1-86950-579-0.

BOOKS ABOUT FRACTIONS of the British Army should be accompanied by a warning: does this book claim that this corps or that division or those battalions, either won the war, won a major battle, stopped the Germans in their tracks or performed any other feat beyond what their reasonably small numbers might be expected to accomplish?

In this book Glyn Harper, who is rapidly establishing himself as the doyen of New Zealand military historians of the Great War, considers the New Zealand Division's contribution to three episodes — Passchendaele, the German spring offensives of 1918 and the battle of Bapaume in August 1918.

At Passchendaele, the New Zealand Division took part in the best of times (if such a phrase can be used regarding the Western Front) and the worst of times. On 4 October, as part of II Anzac Corps, the New Zealanders helped deliver a smashing blow to the Germans at Broodseinde. This was the last success engineered by General Plumer and mainly relied on his use of massive amounts of artillery. Glyn Harper describes all this with clarity and verve and avoids attributing the entire success of the battle to the New Zealand Division, while bringing out what a considerable role it played in that success. The worst of times soon followed. The New Zealanders were asked to take part in the disasters of Poelcapelle and the first battle of Passchendaele on 9 and 12 October respectively. By this time the weather had turned, the battlefield a sea of mud, the artillery blinded by these conditions and failure inevitable. On 12 October the New Zealanders suffered more casualties than any other day in their military history.

Harper rightly bemoans the fact that these episodes are not better known and understood in New Zealand history. His book, it may be added, will go some way towards correcting that deficit. In his conclusion of these dreadful episodes (again clearly and succinctly described) Harper is perhaps too judicious. He tries to find a reason for battling on in these hopeless conditions in the vulnerable state of the French Army and the Italians. This is to overreach. The French had already recovered from their acts of collective indiscipline earlier in 1917 and had mounted a successful attack of their own. As for the Italians, they too had steadied, but the attrition of the best army in the field (the British) in circumstances where they were not doing much harm to the Germans could hardly help

the cause of any of the allies. There is a time to fight and a time to stop. October 1917 was a time to stop. As it happens the British were not persisting in order to help their allies. They were continuing because of Haig's and Plumer's obsession with capturing the Passchendaele Ridge — which in fact they never did. Nor would it have mattered much if they had.

Harper's next section on the halting of the German offensive in March and April 1918 is a delight to read but its conclusion is also somewhat problematic. He claims that the single New Zealand Division played a 'decisive part in halting the Kaiser's battle'. I think in the choice of the word 'decisive' Harper does not do his story justice. Perhaps 'important' would have been a better word because his narrative shows that many factors combined to halt the Germans — not least of which was Ludendorff's lunatic plan to win the war by infantry alone. As Harper acknowledges, the Australian Corps also played its part, but what goes unacknowledged is the greater part of the offensive was halted by the introduction of countless French divisions into the line. These divisions (which often lacked artillery) frequently did little more than maintain a continuous line during the retreat. But by keeping a line in being they bought time until the German infantry were stopped by their own exhaustion. This is not a New Zealand story but it is essential context if the full reasons for the German failure are to be appreciated.

The section on Bapaume is most satisfactory. Here, in late August 1918, the New Zealand Division could take advantage of a weapons system that had been evolving for at least a year. The system consisted of artillery, which through the application of science to the battlefield could at last hit what it aimed at, providing an accurate creeping barrage to protect the soldiers from machine gun fire and an array of infantry weapons, from rifle grenades to trench mortars, to a plethora of light machine guns. Reliable tanks helped push the offensive further than it might otherwise have progressed. This weapons system allowed the New Zealand and other divisions to exercise their battlefield skills. Without at least a goodly number of these weapons the most skilled soldiers would have found themselves pinned down by the enemy's artillery and machine guns.

Overall, I rate this book very highly. It is important that New Zealanders read it to understand the role their small democracy played in protecting the democracies of Europe from Prussian domination and how their sacrifice (as Harper refreshingly notes) was far from futile. It is also important that Glyn Harper continue on his way with more books of this calibre to enlighten us all about New Zealand's role in the Great War.

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Holiday Seasons: Christmas, New Year and Easter in Nineteenth-Century New Zealand.
By Alison Clarke. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2007. viii + 189pp. NZ price: \$35.00. ISBN: 978-1-86940-382-9.

ON NEW YEAR'S DAY 1906, 21-year-old Mary Cranstoun attended a picnic for 80 people at the bush near her parents' house in Edendale, Southland. Mary 'had a real good time' despite coming home with a bruise on her face after she was hit by a cricket bat during a game. By the early twentieth century, New Year picnics had become firmly established in the cultural life of New Zealanders. Alison Clarke's book provides readers with an account of how these holidays came to be part of our national psyche, arguing that holidays help historians examine another side of nineteenth-century Pakeha life to that conventionally featured in standard histories of the period. With lives often dominated by demanding physical labour, Christmas, New Year and Easter holidays were relaxing highlights which broke up the routine for many people. Family members and the broader community came