

first chapter. He surveys the field and is clear about the directions of First World War studies across time, rejects the tired tags and moves beyond ideology, and has a sensible and clear message to deliver. The First World War was not a disaster without meaning, he tells us; it was about learning to fight a war of trenches and numbers; it took a long time to learn to fight that way but finally the allies twigged. The war was also a matter for empire and a vitally important matter for New Zealand and Australia. 'The war waged by Britain and the empire was tragic, destructive and wasteful, but it was not futile.'

This book would not have made an important contribution if it had examined the New Zealand effort in the war without context. Though tightly focussed on the New Zealand story, almost every writer has read widely in the voluminous British, Canadian and Australian war literature and is alert to differences and commonalities. More might have been made of this. Perhaps the strongest difference between the New Zealand and Australian experience centres on conscription: its acceptance in New Zealand and its rejection across the Tasman. In this regard I expected more on conscientious objectors and the anti-war movement in either one or both of the two fine chapters on the churches. I was disappointed. This leads to a larger criticism. Writers might have more directly explained where the New Zealand experience differs from, or strongly agrees with, the experience in other parts of the empire.

Peter Stanley perhaps comes closest to this in his fine exposition of the Anzacs at Quinn's Post. He shows the overwhelming importance of the Post in the defence of Anzac and shows too that it was left to the New Zealanders to secure and create the Post after the Australians were withdrawn. Stanley notes that Australians had left Quinn's as a shambles and that Malone's New Zealand troops were essential to its defence. Yet Stanley is shy of making bigger claims. Better troops, better-led troops, better national characteristics? Is that why the New Zealanders were better at Quinn's? Stanley's story demands some resolution, some explanation along these or other lines. So do the accounts of action on the Somme, or the final battles of 1918. Andrew McDonald shows that he, too, is aware of the need to say why New Zealand was different, or better. 'If there is such a thing as a distinctive New Zealand style of command', he writes, 'elements of it were on display on the battlefield on 15 September'. And he goes on to analyse this, but shyly. Bigger points might have been made.

Yet this entertaining and useful book is an important beginning. Conference and publication should stimulate others and possibly embolden them. A striking feature of *New Zealand's Great War* is the inclusion of many younger scholars who will take the story further. They have been given a very impressive first opportunity.

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The Face of War: New Zealand's Great War Photography. By Sandy Callister. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2008. 160pp. NZ Price: \$49.99. ISBN 978-1-86940-407-9.

SANDY CALLISTER'S BOOK on New Zealand's Great War photography is a highly stimulating literary essay about an important subject; but it is frustrating and inadequate as a history of that subject. There is no question that there is a need for an in-depth study of photography and New Zealand's Great War. Both are subjects which have recently seen a considerable flowering in New Zealand historiography. The work of Judith Binney, Bronwyn Dalley and Chris Brickell has shown how much historians can learn from a close reading of photographs; while the last decade has seen a flood of local publications on the Great War which have very largely been based either on oral history or on documentary sources, both official and personal. It is opportune to bring these two historiographical

strands together. Sandy Callister is also correct that this was the first war where cameras were used extensively both by official photographers and by ordinary soldiers, despite the theoretical prohibition on their use on the battlefield. So the material is plentiful and cries out for close and thoughtful examination.

On occasion Callister certainly provides this. She is especially good at exploring how photographs were used as a medium of communication and memory between the soldiers at the front and the families, most often the mothers, at home. In the first chapter where she shows the range of uses and meanings of war time photographs, there is excellent discussion of the use of formal studio portraits of soldiers as mantelpiece keepsakes for families, and this is nicely paralleled by her discovery of the Dunedin lantern slide project of the mothers and relatives of soldiers which was intended for use in the YMCAs in Europe. For both mothers and soldiers the photographs became the bearers of memory and longing. Similarly in the third and fourth chapters there are sensitive and intelligent readings of the use of imagery in the *Auckland Weekly News*, both their melodramatic covers of women contemplating the fate of their soldier sons/husbands in France and their serried ranks of mug-shots of the fallen. Chapter six is also valuable in examining the place of war photos in family albums and as the centre-piece for domestic shrines to the dead. There are plenty of good ideas here, informed by a wide reading of the international historiography about war and its cultural meanings.

I was less convinced by the section of the initial chapter dealing with photographs of those who had lost limbs and chapter five which examines before and after photographs of men whose faces had been damaged and were then reconstructed. The story of the rehabilitation of the wounded and of the development by Harold Gillies of plastic surgery is an interesting one and deserves to be told. But the photographs have a completely different function to those discussed elsewhere in the book. They were not primarily either public or private aids to memory. They were not treasured by relatives. They were intended purely for medical reference; and their role in this book appears to be more to drive home the message that war is nasty and brutal and hurts the male body than to inform the larger argument about photographs and memory. Here we get closer to some of the problems in the book. Callister is obsessed with the view that war is about killing and maiming and that photographs fail to illustrate this. She cites repeatedly the casualty figures in the war and bemoans the absence of dead bodies in the photographs. But it is hardly surprising that there were few images of the dead. For a soldier to photograph the dead lying in no-man's land, he would have to rise above the trench lip and be exposed to fire. To 'shoot' photographs was to risk being 'shot'. When, at Gallipoli, there was a temporary cease-fire to bury the dead, quite a number of photographs of the fallen bodies were recorded. Further there was little attempt in either private or official photographs to ignore death since the graves of dead comrades were frequently captured on film and every mother or wife was officially sent a photograph of their son/husband's gravestone. Even today we rarely see photographs of the dead killed in road accidents.

Callister is more interested in giving us a provocative literary essay than in giving us a comprehensive study of an important subject. In one view the essence of good history is to examine the primary evidence and then to report back intelligently and accurately what you discover. But Callister takes a few bits of the story and moves very quickly away from evidence into speculation and imagination. The book is full of such phrases as 'Perhaps ...', 'We may surmise ...' and '... may have been intended'. Such comments cover unproven assumptions. We are given the impression that the soldiers landed in Gallipoli with their Kodak 'cameras at the ready'. But it turns out that the Kodak pocket vest camera, which the author claims was so common, was not actually advertised until October 1915 and not advertised to soldiers until January 1916, after the soldiers had left Gallipoli. Despite this she argues that Gallipoli was much more photographed than the Western Front. But again there is no evidence for this. Certainly when I have

researched collections for Gallipoli images they have been much less plentiful than those from the Western Front. Claims are made on insufficient evidence because, quite frankly, the research has not been done. The bibliography lists seven collections from the Alexander Turnbull Library. Examining TAPUHI I discovered 210 listings including at least 48 substantial collections and albums. There is no evidence that any albums from Christchurch have been explored and only two from the Hocken. This is simply an inadequate basis to make large assertions about the nature of wartime photographs. Further, if you do examine these albums the story that emerges of the meaning of the war is rather different from Callister's. It is true that there are occasional images of graves, even of medics carrying the wounded. But there are far more photographs of soldiers on tourist trips to the pyramids or Westminster Abbey, images of them visiting relatives in Britain, many images from camp or on board ship, images of people playing cards. There are quite a number of albums from other places not mentioned, such as the Middle East and Samoa; and there are quite a number in hospitals, often shot by nurses. These are the more typical 'faces of war'. There is also at least one outstanding example of the use of photographs in memorializing — the Stratford hall of soldier's portraits — which would seem pertinent to Callister's interests but is never mentioned.

At times when she does use the evidence there are sloppy errors — she quotes captions as 'Death's Valley' and 'Man's leg', but the illustrated album does not have apostrophes. We are told that there was not an official photographer 'until late in 1917', but this turns out to be March 1917. We are told that Edward Ruddock died on 7 May 1915 but the image of the grave on that page and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission give the date as 11 May. Sergeant Norton is said to have written 'Merry Xmas' on his parcel to his wife, but the photo shows the words clearly to be 'A Merry Xmas'. Obviously for Callister the evidence is not of the essence because her interest is rather more in the enlightening comments she can make about the photographs. She rushes far too quickly into surmise and commentary.

This book is a good read, and the discussions about the use of photographs as the currency of mourning are insightful and valuable. But the coverage of the subject is so patchy that one simply cannot trust the larger judgements. When a historian gets round to preparing a well-researched and definitive study of photography and New Zealand's Great War *The Face of War* will be a helpful stimulus and fund of ideas. But this is not that book.

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Nordy: Arnold Nordmeyer: A Political Biography. By Mary Logan. Steele Roberts, Wellington, 2008. 486pp. NZ price: \$49.99. ISBN 978-1-877448-33-1.

THERE MUST BE SOMETHING IN THE WATER AT KUROW. Two inhabitants of the manse in this small North Otago town have gone on to long and distinguished careers: Lloyd Geering, and his senior by some years, Arnold Nordmeyer. This is a welcome biography of one of the most capable ministers of finance in the past century.

Nordmeyer was a Christian socialist all his life. His departure from the pulpit for Parliament was entirely consistent with his lifelong religious commitment. He was almost certainly the most influential backbencher of the 1935–1938 Parliament and was impatient for rapid implementation of his party's manifesto and dreams. Until the war broke out, impatient backbenchers coalesced around John A. Lee, who ended by alienating most of them. Here Mary Logan gives a nuanced brief discussion of the antecedents of social security, but by devoting excessive space to Lee and his views she does not give