

Tour of Duty: Midshipman Comber's Journal Aboard HMS Herald on the East Indies Station — Australia, New Zealand & China, 1838–42. Edited by W. David McIntyre and Marcia McIntyre. Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, 1999. xii + 205 pp. NZ price: \$27.95. ISBN 1-877175-24-2.

IN 2001 the government banned the navy from attending Waitangi Day ceremonies. Things had been very different 161 years earlier when a Royal Navy captain stepped ashore from a Royal Navy frigate to annex the country. Watching proceedings at Waitangi in February 1840 was 19-year-old midshipman, Henry Wandsford Comber, whose journal, presented to the University of Canterbury in 1993, forms the basis of this publication from the Macmillan Brown Centre.

Comber had joined HMS *Herald* at Portsmouth in 1838, initially as an unpaid volunteer. Like so many of the architects of empire, he was a child of the vicarage. The ship's four-year cruise under the command of the notoriously ill-tempered Captain Joseph Nias, took it to Madeira, Rio de Janeiro, Cape Town, India and Ceylon, Australasia and South East Asia. Most of the journal records the routine of shipboard life in the Royal Navy of the day: port visits, weather, crossing the line ceremonies and the floggings that sometimes took place on an almost weekly basis. Through all of this Comber comes across as a lively, curious young man, whether he is recoiling from the sight of naked Aborigines or shooting what must have been kiwi on Stewart Island. Perhaps not unexpectedly given his age, he was not given to introspection, but the journal provides the nineteenth-century equivalent of a 'sound bite' of what it was like to be a very young officer in a navy that had a truly global reach.

The elderly frigate HMS *Herald* was not one of the more imposing of Her Majesty's 240 naval vessels, but its duties between 1838 and 1842 took it to several of the empire's hot spots. Even during the long voyage out from the United Kingdom, the ship was on the look-out for pirates. In Australia the *Herald* visited most of the major ports. At Hobart, Comber attended a Wesleyan service 'for the purpose of hearing a sermon preached in the New Zealand language to a number of the Natives'. Before long he had the chance to hear Maori spoken on its own soil, because the *Herald* was assigned to the role of taking Hobson on his historic voyage to the Bay of Islands. This, with Hong Kong, was one of the two annexations during the 'new imperialism' of the time. Comber saw and heard it all, the debate over whether or not to sign and the ill-feeling between Hobson and Nias over the number of gun salutes tendered the new lieutenant governor. Because the *Herald* took the Treaty first signed at Waitangi around New Zealand, he also got to see Coromandel, Akaroa, Cloudy Bay, Stewart Island, Port Nicholson and Kapiti. He was as much interested in the shooting to be had as in who was — or was not — signing.

Comber's journal is a mere footnote in imperial history, but it has interest and has been made more accessible through the thorough editing of the McIntyres. W. David McIntyre contributes a useful introductory essay on the role of the Royal Navy, the background to the annexation of New Zealand and the lead-up to the Opium Wars. Marcia McIntyre's copious footnotes explain every ship, piece of naval jargon, person and event mentioned in the diary. Three appendices sketch out the family tree and family history and finally, a very full index facilitates navigation.

GAVIN McLEAN

*History Group, Ministry of Culture and Heritage
Wellington*