

## Reviews

*The One Day War: The Battle of Omarunui, 1860.* By John Battersby. Reed Books, Auckland, 2000. 144 pp. NZ price: \$24.95. ISBN 0-7900-0731-2.

JOHN BATTERSBY is right: the story of Omarunui is worth telling, and not simply to flesh out the details of a small war scantily covered in previous histories. The two military clashes that took place near Napier on 12 October 1866 between colonial forces and Pai Marire groups were a seminal event in the history of Hawke's Bay and the outcome of the New Zealand wars in the eastern North Island.

On the whole, Battersby does the job competently, with extensive primary sources and a narrative style attuned to his general readership. However, this book underexploits the opportunities offered by a many-faceted conjuncture. One reason is a straining after evidence to pin the label of aggression on the Pai Marire expedition to Hawke's Bay. This hints at an underlying agenda. Battersby would have us believe that this book originated in independent research and a late decision to publish. In fact, the three colleagues he acknowledges are all, like him, part of the Crown's team in the Waitangi Tribunal's Mohaka ki Ahuriri inquiry, which covers Omarunui and the subsequent raupatu and in which Fergus Sinclair, 'superb historian' though he may be, also happens to be Crown counsel. Battersby's Hawke's Bay study, commissioned by the Crown Law Office, supplies most of the research utilized in his book. The study forms a central plank in the Crown's evidence to the inquiry, in which demonstrating military and hence rebellious intent from the Pai Marire side is an important part of its defence. The Mohaka ki Ahuriri Tribunal will itself be reporting its findings on all the evidence, including Battersby's, in the near future, but it is perplexing that he should omit all mention of this context — and of the publisher's grant from Internal Affairs — even excluding his commissioned report from the bibliography.

In this case, context would appear to have influenced the research outcome. One instance is the marginalization of Maori sources. Although Battersby insists that 'a large amount of Maori material' was located and used, he neglects to explain, as he conceded to the Tribunal, that he had not researched Maori language sources at all since the Crown Law research commissions had assigned them to a separate project. Even now, only a handful is cited, and those from Pai Marire sources dismissed with little analysis.

The result is a partisan account of a contested episode. As the author of an opposing interpretation (in two research reports to the Waitangi Tribunal), I readily accept that Battersby has a case to argue. He, however, while ready to point the finger at Belich's historical revisionism, simply ignores — even to refute — most contrary evidence and analysis, including the extensive research on the public record of the Waitangi Tribunal. This is far from the 'complete story' he claims to provide. For all his protestations, Battersby's version veers close to 'goodies and baddies' reductionism — a simple moral world of officials who can do little wrong, legitimated by the support of loyal Maori allies (whoever heard of 'divide and rule'?), and opposed by fanatics beyond the reach of rational engagement. It has much in common with the late nineteenth-century rationalizations of the victors in the New Zealand wars.

On a larger plane, Battersby has a good many axes to grind. He is uneasy about the Crown's apology to Tainui, indeed about the very concept of 'the Crown', and has previously publicly accused academic members of the Waitangi Tribunal of being 'generally on the side of claimants'. He opposes many orthodoxies in the modern historiography of the New Zealand wars, from Paul Clark's 'pacifist' interpretation of Pai Marire to James Belich's accounts of Maori military 'success'. His classically reactionary positions are all arguable, but a single localized conflict is too small a grinding mill without authoritative discussion of historiography and evidence, which here is largely absent. Nor does he help his cause by sometimes misrepresenting his opponents. Revisionist historians have little to fear from this quarter. In the end the book works best as a local battle history of the experience of the militia and volunteers, who clearly engage the author's strongest empathy.

There are also technical failings. An excessive use of emotive language and literary devices, including passages unsupported by evidence or argument and compounded elsewhere by incomplete referencing, erode the book's historical credibility. In places the habit of invention extends directly into hypothesis-building in attempting to explain the 'how and why'. Battersby is also prone to overinterpret fragments that seem to point his way. These failings ill fit his neo-Rankean prescription that 'a historian's task is first to discover, then report the past — whatever it is'. There are also internal inconsistencies of evidence and argument; occasional inaccuracies in the use of primary sources; an incorrect portrait of Tareha; and a desperate need for decent maps.

RICHARD MOORSOM

#### *Waitangi Tribunal*

*The Women's War: New Zealand Women 1939–1945.* By Deborah Montgomerie. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 2001, 203 pp. NZ price: \$39.95. ISBN 1-86940-244-8.

SINCE THE 1980s New Zealand war histories have extended their focus from military tactics overseas to the experiences of civilians at home. *The Women's War* continues this trend, but overthrows one of the major premises of earlier feminist progressive history — that World War II was a turning-point in the emancipation of women. Deborah Montgomerie argues that the combined powers of government, unions and churches worked hard to retain the status quo for men. Despite war-time disruption of the labour force and family lives, traditional gender roles were maintained.

*The Women's War* valuably combines both labour history and family history, appropriate when women's lives are often a complex blend of activities. Chapters 1–5 deal with the workplace: with paid work, voluntary work, and responses to the government's manpowering of women. Chapters 6 and 7 focus on relationships and domestic life, and the final chapter covers attitudes to both home and work in the post-war era.

Montgomerie's analysis of the ways in which women were incorporated into the workplace makes fascinating reading. Statistics and contemporary comment support a strong thesis. There was nothing radical about the short-term practice and long-term effects of women's engagement in the war-time labour force, for the dominating goal of unions, employers and government was to retain women's secondary position in the workplace. Women were needed to replace men in an emergency for an interim period, but there was to be no risk of them displacing men in the peace to come. Montgomerie describes a range of industries and government departments to illustrate the ways in which differences between men and women were consistently upheld throughout the war.