

*The Battles of Monte Cassino: The Campaign and its Controversies.* By Glyn Harper and John Tonkin-Covell. Allen & Unwin, Auckland, 2013. 312pp. NZ price: \$35.99. ISBN: 9781741148794.

The title of this book offers considerable promise, declaring that it examines more than the battles of Monte Cassino, but also ‘the campaign and its controversies’. The critical battles which are the subject of this book occupy a significant place in New Zealand’s military history and are regarded as iconic alongside Ruapekapeka, Chunuk Bair, Passchendaele, Crete, El Alamein and others, and as such, books discussing it are assured of a significant readership. Many adding this to their library will have Fred Majdalany’s *Cassino: Portrait of a Battle* (1957) and possibly Peter Caddick-Adams’s recent *Monte Cassino: Ten Armies in Hell* (2013) on their shelves, and interested New Zealanders will add Tony Williams’s *Cassino: New Zealand Soldiers in the Battle for Italy* (2002) to these other works. This volume fits neatly alongside the earlier volumes, complementing and building on the work of the other historians.

The writers offer a considerable pedigree to their authorship of this military history: Glyn Harper served as an Officer in the New Zealand and Australian armies, became Director of Massey’s Centre for Defence and Security Studies and is now Professor of War Studies at Massey University; John Tonkin-Covell lectures at both the New Zealand Defence Forces’ Commando and Staff College and at Massey’s Centre for Defence and Security Studies. Given the manifest qualification of the two writers to address this already scrutinized battle, this history offers a timely re-examination of the wider Monte Cassino campaign.

*The Battles of Monte Cassino* examines the lives, motivations, strategic plans and politics of each key allied army coalition commander in considerable detail, and this is the greatest strength of this book. The historiography is exhaustive and well constructed, and the examination of Lieutenant-General Mark Clark, which occupies two substantial chapters, is easily the most comprehensive and objective attempted by any military historian. Likewise, the examination of the failings of New Zealand Division commander General Bernard Freyberg is similarly detailed, and in the discussion of his few successes and many failures on this campaign, is entirely fair. The controversy surrounding the bombing of the Cassino monastery is confronted, with a very useful survey of opinions provided in support of, and in opposition to, the bombing, and a comprehensive timeline of strategic decision-making is provided to help the reader understand not only why the bombing happened, but also why it still attracts debate.

The authors’ incisive and illuminating analysis of the failure of the overwhelming allied air superiority to make a significant difference to the battles is one of the sections of this work which departs from the canon of past writers. It answers the question on the lips of many allied soldiers: why their planes were so absent from Cassino’s skies. The discussion of the effectiveness of the bombing of German rear-echelon assets and transportation infrastructure in Operation Strangle forms the second part of this section and is a very useful piece of historical myth-busting.

The examination and elucidation of the historiography of the many books that have been written about the battles for Monte Cassino is the main strength of this book

and essentially constructs the work. It is also its main fault. Military histories that omit the stories of the soldiers on the ground, providing a survey of the commanders and strategic decisions, conform to the pattern of past 'official' war histories, not those written in the twenty-first century. The discussion of the mechanics of the battles themselves is confined to an all-too-brief chapter at the beginning of the book, and suffers from a broad-brush description and narrative brevity that assumes the reader is thoroughly familiar with the work of Majdalany, Williams and Caddick-Adams (and others). I disagree with this assumption; the considerable research, analytical and writing skills of the two authors could have provided a more detailed examination of the battles of Monte Cassino involving the common soldier. This brevity means that readers unfamiliar with the earlier works would find this book poses as many questions as it answers. Curiously, this pattern has one departure, in the form of quotations from the diaries and notebooks of some German paratrooper defenders in the final chapter.

The illustrations are an eclectic mix, including recruiting posters and reconstruction pictures dated from after the battle. Many of the pictures – particularly those showing the terrain – need to be bigger, to provide greater clarity to assist the reader in understanding the complexities of the battle and comprehending why it was such a difficult place for the allied armies to take. Omitting the recruiting images to accommodate this would improve the relevance and usefulness of the illustrations.

When I lived in Rotorua, I met several members of the Māori Battalion who fought at Monte Cassino. These veterans, so quick to talk of Minqar Qaim, Munassib and Tebaga Gap, would either fall silent or mutter quietly to each other if the battles at Monte Cassino were mentioned, clearly regarding it as the worst of their ordeals in the war. I regret that if they read this volume, they would find their story barely mentioned.

As an examination of the historiography of the battle strategies and as an analysis of the commanders involved in the campaign, this is a very useful volume; as a history of the campaign, it is incomplete.

LLOYD CARPENTER

*Lincoln University*

*Unpacking the Kists: The Scots in New Zealand.* By Brad Patterson, Tom Brooking and Jim McAloon, with Rebecca Lenihan and Tanja Bueltmann. McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal and Kingston / Otago University Press, Dunedin, 2013. 412pp. NZ price: \$70.00. ISBN: 9780773541900/9 781877578670.

The outcome of a Royal Society funding grant awarded in 2004, this book has been just under a decade in the making. The product of five authors, it seeks to examine Scottish migration to New Zealand from 1840 to 1936, focusing primarily on issues of origin, settlement and contributions. The chapters range widely to cover demographic overviews of migration and settlement, economic life, contributions