

*A Military History of Australia.* By Jeffrey Grey. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990. xi, 284 pp. Price: \$A39.95.

THIS IS the third book in Cambridge University Press's 'Studies in Australian History' series. The dust jacket promises the reader a 'new and comprehensive' reassessment of Australia's military history in war and peace. It claims to examine Australian involvement with war and with the military since the beginnings of white settlement, and to consider the impact of war 'not only on the military and on the wider community, but also the role of war in the development of Australian society and the Australian ethos'. Finally, the author purportedly maps the development of the Australian armed forces as institutions and the relationship of military policy to civil government. Few of these promises are fulfilled in the text. The book is largely an institutional and campaign history with an occasional brief, superficial glance at the non-military. The perspective is a thoroughly male, military one, the author going to great pains to defend the role of the army, in particular, throughout Australian history. He expresses contempt for 'technically illiterate' social historians, who are apparently ill-equipped to assess the impact of war on society because of their ignorance of military technicalities. Given this attitude, it is not surprising that he ignores or is unaware of much important historiography which would have helped the contents of the book live up to the claims on the cover.

While this partiality pervades the text, several areas stand out as particularly serious omissions. The role of the Returned Servicemen's League and the fate of soldier settlement schemes between the wars, for instance, cry out for comment. The 'secret armies' of the same period, dealt with recently by Andrew Moore and Michael Cathcart, are another glaring omission. And the author is apparently ignorant of the work of Patsy Adam Smith on Australian women at war, as well as the excellent scholarly studies by Lynne Beaton and Carmel Shute in the same field. Women are also neglected within the author's own narrow institutional framework, the women's services receiving only passing mention.

There are problems of analysis as well as omission. The discussion of the effect of World War I on the formation of Australian identity is confused, drifting off into consideration of the existence of an Australian 'way of war'. Grey misses the point that what is important in explaining something like 'national identity' is not so much technical realities as perceptions and myths.

Favourable first impressions of the technical quality of the book itself are not sustained by closer inspection. The index can only be described as appalling as it does not include even a comprehensive listing of proper names (the Returned Soldiers League, for instance, has no entry). The referencing system employed is likewise inadequate for a scholarly publication. Each chapter has a short bibliographic essay. While often interesting and informative in themselves, these essays are no substitute for proper textual notes. There is no way of telling which sources informed which parts of the text, or even the source of direct quotations. The maps and tables are very good, but the photographs limited to one per chapter. In two cases the illustrations chosen are inappropriate, being from a different period from that covered by the chapter.

On the positive side, the book does provide a good overview of the general development of the Australian armed services and of Australia's engagement in military action. And the later chapters do show some original insights which are obviously drawn from the author's primary research.

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