The Cost of War: Australians Return. By Stephen Garton. Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1996. 298 pp. Australian price: $65.00. ISBN 0-19-553967-2.

STEPHEN GARTON'S *The Cost of War* is a finely textured and thoughtful account of the phenomenon of return from war. By juxtaposing the repatriation and rehabilitation experiences of veterans of Vietnam and the two world wars he demonstrates how the figure of the returnee has haunted Australia's twentieth-century political and social landscape. He also illustrates the extent to which the experience of return, though qualitatively different in the case of each of the three conflicts, was structured by a coherent set of ideas about masculinity, national service and the dangers of welfare dependency. The juxtaposition of rehabilitation after World War I and Vietnam also leads him to the interesting conclusion that the relatively smooth transition to civilian society of World War II veterans was the aberration, not the norm.

Garton is at his strongest when dealing with the policies of repatriation. He argues that the repatriation system represented a second welfare state, 'running parallel to, and almost as large as the official one' (p.vii), and convincingly shows how the administration and social status of war pensions was affected by a general ambivalence towards welfare as a form of charity. Throughout, the book is sensitive to the ideological and experiential dimensions of gender, linking shifting constructions of masculinity to not just nationalism and combat, but also to fear of the dependency implied in the provision of ongoing benefits to returned soldiers. Nor are female veterans ignored. The sections on soldier politics, soldier settlement and the recurring tropes of the shirker/draft dodger and the faithless woman are also well crafted and insightful.

Readers on this side of the Tasman may find the early parts of the book tinged with Australian exceptionalism. Apparently, in Australia Anzac Day celebrated the founding of a nation, while in New Zealand it merely served as an occasion for 'remembering the war dead' (p.67). Military historians from many other countries would dispute whether the camaraderie within the Australian forces was as uniquely Australian as Garton suggests.[1] Garton prefers comparing Australia to the United States rather than examining its relationship to other ex-Dominions, but even here many of the comparisons are shaky. James MacPherson's *For Cause and Comrade: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* has shown how, as early as the 1860s, American soldiers were bound together by strong personal ties,[2] and Garton's contention that racial tension was an obstacle to the formation of cohesive units in the twentieth century does not hold water in the case of the two world wars, given the segregated nature of the American military. His other argument for the exceptional qualities of Aussie mateship — the relative absence of class divisions between Australian troops — is somewhat undercut by the later material on the class divisions between veterans in post-war politics.

The chapter on shell-shock, like those on prisoners of war and Vietnam, is a little unfocused, due largely to the difficulties of incorporating case studies of individuals into a vision of the experience of return in which no one experience is typical. Part of what drew Garton to the topic of return from war was an interest in the changing diagnoses and treatment of shell-shock and war-related neuroses, although he is now sceptical about the hypothesis that initially drew him into the work — the suspicion that the treatment of

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1 There is an extensive and long standing literature on the importance of what has been called 'primary group cohesion' — mateship by another name — in creating effective fighting units in World War II. See for example S. Stouffer, et al., *The American Soldier,* 2 vols, Princeton, 1949; Edward Shils and Morris Janowitz, 'Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II', *Public Opinion Quarterly,* XII, (1948), pp.280–315.

2 New York, 1997.

World War I shell-shock victims was instrumental in the shift from asylum-based treatment to psychotherapy. Notwithstanding his early interest in shifting understandings of the nature of combat-related psychiatric illness, his book has little to say on the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder, and he does not engage with Allan Young's work on the way the activism of returned Vietnam veterans and their political allies was crucial in the acceptance of the syndrome, preferring to see the struggle as a replay of the earlier battles over the pension-worthiness of victims of 'shell shock' and 'battle fatigue' after the two world wars.[3] There is also an analytical difficulty, given Garton's exemplary awareness of the way cultural frameworks shape perceptions of mental health, in discerning whether groups culturally constructed as being more prone to dysfunction (such as prisoners of war or Vietnam veterans), were in fact more vulnerable to psychiatric illness. However, despite these difficulties, these chapters make important points about the way in which the image of the veteran has shaped the experience of veterans. *The Cost of War* deepens understanding of the phenomenon of return from war and raises important questions about the nature of antipodean masculinity, nationalism and social welfare.

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3 Allan Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*, Princeton, 1995.

A Nation at War: Australian politics, society and diplomacy during the Vietnam War, 1965–1975. By Peter Edwards. Allen and Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, St Leonards, New South Wales, 1997. 460 pp. Australian price: $59.95. ISBN 1-86448-282-6.

THIS BOOK is the sixth — and most important — volume in an eight-part series on Australia's involvement in Southeast Asian conflicts, from 1948 to 1975. For over a decade, as official historian, its author supervised preparation of the whole series. While other contributors covered the military aspects, Peter Edwards wisely reserved for himself the task of writing the political, diplomatic and social volume on the causes and consequences of Australia's enmeshment in the Vietnam War.

Unlike Edwards' companion volume on the 1948–1965 period, this one focuses more on political debate and socio-cultural changes within Australia than on diplomatic interaction with the United States and other allies. This emphasis is entirely appropriate, for it was through the bitter 'war of words' at home that the Vietnam conflict had its greatest impact on Australia after 1965. Moreover, this Vietnam debate sharpened the divisive effects in Australia of wider social and cultural changes sweeping much of the developed world around this time.

That is not to say *A Nation at War* ignores the diplomacy of Australia's Vietnam involvement; indeed, Edwards summarizes it masterfully. But, once the decision was made to commit combat troops, it was simply a matter of managing the commitment within an alliance framework rather than confronting new diplomatic challenges. Only if Canberra had chosen not to support the United States might the diplomatic story have overshadowed the domestic one.

That possibility was slim. Acutely concerned about regional instability, Australian policy-makers had little compunction in sending troops to Vietnam in 1965 as the