

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

perceived price of ensuring a forward American presence in Southeast Asia. In succeeding years, even as general communist threats to regional stability receded, Australia was thereby implicated in the costly American debacle in Vietnam. Although doubts grew about the commitment, the Australian government loyally supported American policy and expanded its military contribution to over 8000 personnel. Staged withdrawals of those forces only began in late 1970 after the American process of withdrawal was well advanced. Edwards is critical of successive Australian prime ministers for playing the role of dutiful ally for too long and for adjusting slowly to the region's changing geo-political complexion during these years. Clearly, the Australian government displayed little imagination in helping its 'great and powerful friend' extricate itself from the quagmire of Vietnam.

A similar lack of imagination was evident domestically. The government progressively lost the majority support which its position enjoyed in 1965, so that by the early 1970s most Australians viewed the Vietnam commitment as an error. The Labour opposition played a significant part in that process, though its questioning of the commitment was initially beset by internal divisions and did not prevent it losing the 1966 and 1969 elections. Opposition to the war was most colourfully expressed outside traditional party politics through an antiwar movement, whose diverse membership ranged from grizzled veterans of the Old Left and long-haired radicals of the New Left to conservatively clad vicars and respectable mothers in the Save our Sons group. Edwards traces the key events in the movement's evolution to the high point of its success in the moratoriums of the early 1970s. Despite the government's gaffes and the war's unpopularity, however, he concludes that the antiwar movement had little impact on ending Australian involvement in the war, whose course was driven by alliance considerations.

As official historian, Edwards had unrestricted access to Australian government files, and was free to evaluate that material without political censorship. He has used that privilege judiciously to produce a lively and readable narrative account, which synthesizes a vast body of official documentation but which wears its scholarship lightly. His impressive research effort also incorporated newspapers, private papers, records of the antiwar movement and the like, although he has used few oral history interviews and has ignored television and radio recordings.

To a New Zealand reviewer, two significant differences stand out in the two nations' broadly similar experiences of the Vietnam War. One, which Edwards notes explicitly, was that Australia entered the Vietnam conflict more enthusiastically than New Zealand. Another striking difference was the issue of conscription — a focal point of antiwar activism in Australia. But for the use of conscripts in Vietnam, protest against the war might have been more muted in Australia than in New Zealand. (Parenthetically, this country's contemporary insignificance for Australian policy-making is exemplified in a meagre five references to New Zealand in the book's index, fewer than the Philippines receive.)

Although an official history, this work does not defend official policy. Edwards concludes that the Vietnam commitment was justifiable in the context of the times, but questions the methods by which that commitment was prosecuted and prolonged unnecessarily. He indirectly commends New Zealand's more cautious approach and observes ruefully that Canberra's 'robust' support for the United States rendered New Zealand's stance untenable.

In general, this study is eminently balanced, both in the weightings given to domestic and diplomatic considerations and in its conclusions. Those judgements may not please supporters of Australian involvement nor its detractors, but they are the thoughtful reflections of a historian who has thoroughly immersed himself in his subject. One can

quibble about limited analysis of specific issues, but scholars and general readers wishing to consult a single book on the impact on Australia of the Vietnam War during the 1965–1975 period will do no better than to read this fair-minded overview.

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