

Heavy and Continuous Sacrifice: New Zealand, Her Allies, and the Second World War.

Edited by Peter Cooke and John Crawford.

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In 2025, the world marked the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, which continues to dominate the public imagination in many corners of the globe, including Australia and New Zealand. Indeed, recent research has shown that the conflict enjoys the greatest level of interest among the Australian public, who also feel more strongly about this conflict than any other in which Australia has been involved.¹ While similar studies are not available in the New Zealand context, the Second World War nonetheless had a significant effect on the country. The conflict remains the nation's largest mobilisation in history. Around 140,000 New Zealanders served overseas between 1939 and 1945, and nearly 12,000 died. For a country whose population numbered only 1.6 million in 1940, this was a significant loss: one in every 150 New Zealanders died in the conflict.² For many of those who returned from the war, life was forever changed for them and their families, with the 'traumatic effects' of the war rippling into the post-war period.³

The likely toll the war would take was encapsulated in the opening days of the conflict, as New Zealand Prime Minister John Savage, in declaring war on Germany, acknowledged the demand for 'heavy and continuous sacrifice' from New Zealand and its people (p. 15). This theme would become the focus of a 2020 conference organised by the New Zealand Military History Committee, from which this edited collection draws its collection of papers (though not all papers presented are included in the resulting publication).

The theme of the conference is also the title of the book, *Heavy and Continuous Sacrifice*. This is notably broad, expanding to include not only New Zealand, but also its allies in the Second World War. The inclusion of twenty-two substantive chapters from the more than thirty delivered at the originating conference makes for an extensive collection that covers a plethora of topics within the field of military history, ranging from the more 'traditional' battle analyses to examinations of the social, cultural, diplomatic, and biographical aspects of the war. This variety does raise the bugbear of most edited collections that emerge from conferences: the pursuit of thematic cohesion across the volume, or, in other words, the need to ensure the resulting publication is more than the sum of its parts. The book does not necessarily succeed in this regard. Indeed, the broadly chronological approach taken to arranging the breadth of chapters makes for a sometimes-jarring shift from one topic to another, and the titles of certain chapters leave the reader with a lack of clarity around the subject matter. A thematic approach to the compilation and arrangement of the chapters would have likely remedied these structural shortcomings.

Nonetheless, such matters should not deter readers, for the breadth of topics covered is also the book's greatest strength. The introduction, penned by editors and conference organisers, Peter Cooke and John Crawford, provides the reader with the necessary background to New Zealand's involvement in the Second World War, alongside helpful insights into the conference and some of the factors that influenced the book's genesis. This included the onset of the global pandemic in the weeks following the conference. That the editors successfully brought together the international host of authors in this context is commendable. Among them are established and emerging academic and professional historians, as well as children of veterans and both

past and present military personnel. While most (eighteen of twenty-two) chapter authors hail from New Zealand, several are based internationally. This means that much of the volume duly focuses on the New Zealand experience, but numerous chapters focus either partly or fully on international aspects, ranging from the German experience in North Africa to relations with the French in the Pacific. Together, these factors underpin the volume's contribution to the historiography of New Zealand in the war, offering new and various perspectives from a variety of authors.

Given this volume centres on the Second World War, it is unsurprising that many of its chapters can be grouped along more traditional military history lines, examining as they do a variety of campaigns, battles and military-centred aspects. Noting the primary focus on New Zealand many are cast through a national lens. John Tonkin-Covell and Rhys Ball, for instance, examine New Zealand's role in intelligence between 1938 and 1942, highlighting its growth from 'modest and fragmented emergent capability' (p. 26) to the foundation of the nation's post-war signals intelligence development. Ken Ross and Chris Pugsley focus on New Zealand's Lieutenant-General Bernard Freyberg and his relationship with the British, including Eighth Army commander General Claude Auchinleck and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Others focus on specific campaigns or battles: Shaun Mawdsley addresses the involvement of the 2nd New Zealand Division in Operation Crusader, while Robert Engen evaluates the Allied battle against malaria during the fight to hold Crete. Turning to the Pacific, Reg Newell analyses the trials and tribulations the New Zealanders faced in operating with American forces.

Separately, Crawford contributes a chapter on senior officer appointments in the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force (2NZEF), which is complemented by analysis from Jonathan Fennell, who illuminates the social structures and cultures within the expeditionary force. Peter Wood also takes a more military-social approach, examining the will to fight through the lens of a platoon in the 21st New Zealand Battalion, which refused to fight in 1943. Finally, albeit somewhat of an outlier given the New Zealand focus of most chapters, Peter Lieb's chapter on the Panzer Army Africa provides a window into the issue of extra-legal violence from the German perspective.

For the most part, these studies reflect the dominance of 2NZEF, focusing as they do on the land forces' experience. Offering a counterbalance, several chapters investigate the activities of New Zealand sailors and airmen in the war. Peter Dennerly delves into the role of the Royal New Zealand Navy in the fall of Singapore, while Michael Wynd focuses on the Battle of Kolombangara, in which HMNZS *Leander* was crippled by a Japanese torpedo, killing twenty-eight New Zealanders. Simon Moody meanwhile highlights the experiences of New Zealand airmen during the Malaya and Singapore campaigns, which provided much-needed operational experience that would be beneficial in the ensuing Pacific War, but nonetheless remains comparatively less well known against the exploits of the 2nd Division in the Mediterranean.

Foreign policy and relations are also a subject of inquiry, with contributions from Dan Lear and Peter Cook addressing state-based relations (New Zealand–Australia and New Zealand–France, respectively). Two more consider social experiences of connection, with Josh King examining New Zealanders encounters with local populations in the Middle East, and Steven Loveridge looking at racialised views of American and Japanese power from a New Zealand perspective. Together, these four entries offer pertinent and worthwhile insights into lesser-known (but no less important) aspects of New Zealand's involvement in the Second World War.

Owing to its origins in a military history conference, socio-cultural analyses are few within the collection, but they stand out from the crowd of politico-military studies that dominate the volume. These include David Littlewood's chapter on conscientious objection to conscription in New Zealand, but two are worthy of particular attention here. The first is Louisa Hormann's chapter on the histories of German-Jewish refugees in New Zealand. Hormann's chapter is one of few to begin its analysis in the interwar period, providing a detailed case study of Jewish resettlement that is generally missing in broader narratives of the war, but remains important in the modern context. Hormann tactfully handles these difficult histories, highlighting the pressures to assimilate as these refugees, despite being treated with 'relative lenience' compared to their experience in Germany, nonetheless struggled 'to move from a state of exclusion to inclusion' (p. 91) in New Zealand.

The other chapter that merits specific attention is Claire Cookson-Hills' analysis of sexual violence perpetrated by Canadian and New Zealand troops during the immediate post-war period in which they served as armies of occupation. From the outset, Cookson-Hill highlights the 'uncomfortable relationship' (p. 419) that has developed when it comes to the sexual violence committed by Allied personnel in post-war Germany and Japan. Although Cookson-Hill acknowledges that such crimes were infrequent, her chapter interrogates the evident differences in the handling of sexual violence between the Canadian occupation forces in Germany and the New Zealanders deployed to Japan. The rates of prosecution were much higher in the former, and Cookson-Hills shows that, among other factors, the racialised stereotypes of Asian women as both promiscuous and sexually available contributed to less frequent disciplinary action for such crimes. In foregrounding such aspects of the New Zealand experience of the Second World War, Cookson-Hills challenges the patriotic narratives that so often characterise the histories of Allied involvement in the war and adds a new chapter to the long history of sexual violence in conflict generally.

Rounding out the volume are two chapters based on presentations by children of Second World War veterans. Together, the chapters by David Grant and Roger Steele illustrate the challenges that faced returning veterans and their families, for whom the war did not necessarily end in August 1945. As the editors recognise, the lasting impact of the war in this regard remains an underexamined aspect of the history of the conflict, despite growing scholarly attention, and these entries are a particularly welcome inclusion in the volume.

While the volume does struggle to achieve cohesion – a challenge that is, as noted, understandable considering its conference origins – each chapter individually is grounded in solid research and offers insightful analysis and evaluations of its respective subject matter. Taken as a whole, the volume's substantive chapters provide a commendably broad and detailed collection of analyses that manage to bring light to new aspects of the history of New Zealand's involvement in the Second World War, while reframing and challenging established views of this experience. As such, individual chapters will be of interest to a variety of scholars working in the various realms of Second World War history and other related areas of research. As a whole, the volume will be useful for anyone working on or interested in the history of New Zealand's involvement in the Second World War.

¹ Nicole Townsend, "New research shows WWII dominates Australians' knowledge of military history. But big gaps remain", *The Conversation*, 15 August 2015, <https://theconversation.com/new-research-shows-wwii-dominates-australians-knowledge-of-military-history-but-big-gaps-remain-262711>.

² “New Zealand and the Second World War,” *New Zealand History*, last updated 27 January 2026, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/page/new-zealand-and-second-world-war>.

³ Tiffany Jenks and Angela Wanhalla, “Psychological Casualties: War Neurosis, Rehabilitation, and the Family in Post-World War II New Zealand,” *Health and History* 22, no. 2 (2020): 3.