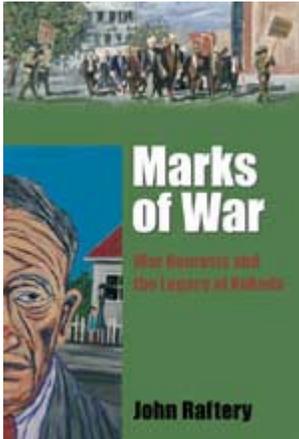


Marks of war: War neurosis and the legacy of Kokoda by John Raftery. Adelaide: Lythrum Press, 2003, pp. XVII + 205, A\$29.95, paperback, ISBN 0 9579960 2 0.



In *Marks of war* John Raftery has encouraged veterans of the Kokoda campaign to discuss their war experiences. These personal testimonies serve as a poignant reminder that there has never been a forum for veterans to talk about their experiences, with little or no recognition of the awful reality of war neurosis. Of his post-war experiences with medical treatment one Kokoda veteran noted:

But they [doctors] are a closed shop... if I ever write a book I'll be opening up. I don't care a bugger what they do to me because they haven't proved anything at all to me that they know what they are doing.' (p. 141).

This book is not easily categorised; it does 'not fit neatly into the academic mould'. An Adelaide psychologist, Raftery has melded science and history, a study of war neurosis supported by oral testimonies. Raftery uses the early pages of the book to place the topic in its historical and scientific context. While this academic basis is necessarily focused, the ensuing text is more inclusive and engaging.

The book is divided into three broad sections. Raftery explores: 'The set of ideas and practices that influenced the way war stress was talked about and managed during and after' the world wars, before examining 'the post-war lives of these veterans' (p. 9). It is in these latter two sections where Raftery is able to give the testimonies of veterans and their families, revealing how the experience of Kokoda continued to affect the men who fought there – and therefore the society to which they returned – for years, even decades. War neurosis, in its various degrees and guises, was an affliction of both veterans and those who shared their civilian lives.

It is disappointing that the book contains a number of typographical errors and the occasional mistake – Papua New Guinean independence was achieved in 1975 and not 1976 as stated – for such a rich and challenging text deserves to be complemented by editorial excellence. Conversely, the illustrations are numerous and pertinent to the text: their inclusion gives the reader regular respite from what can easily be a mentally and emotionally demanding text.

This is not an easy book to read. Some of the science is a little daunting for the lay reader and little of the book is enjoyable reading; the conclusions reached by Raftery are often bleak. It is, however, a sad and powerful book and it will appeal to military historians and those with an interest in psychiatry, psychology and war neurosis. Yet the book deserves an audience wider than this. The

testimonies of the men who returned to their families and attempted to resume 'normal' living provide a vital historical record for all those who seek to understand post-Second World War Australian society.

SEUMAS SPARK
University of Edinburgh
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