

Melinda Tognini, *Many Hearts, One Voice: The Story of the War Widows' Guild in Western Australia*, Fremantle, Fremantle Press, 2015; pp. 252; RRP \$32.99 Paperback.

2016 marks the half way point in the centenary of ANZAC commemorations. Whilst much of this remembering has centred on the soldiers and specific battles, there has been an effort to make visible those voices previously silenced in our national memorialisation of war. The 2014 television series *ANZAC Girls*, for example, tells the stories of Australian nurses in World War I, whilst *Black Diggers* (2014) explores the forgotten stories of the many Indigenous soldiers who fought for their country. However, amidst this concerted effort to uncover these stories one group remains largely unheard – the war widows of Australia. As Quentin Bryce notes in her preface, 'Wars are fought on many fronts' and this book seeks to address the story of those women whose fight continued long after the war ended.

Many Hearts, One Voice continues along the line of *Anzac Girls* and *Black Diggers* as it tells the little known story of the War Widows Guild. Throughout, Melinda Tognini tells of the women who, having lost their husbands at war, fought for the rights of all war widows to be compensated for the sacrifice their husbands made for their country. Tognini introduces these women to us, telling us how their husbands died and how they heard the news. The stories of the men are familiar to us, as they have populated many war books and films over the years, stories of men killed in action, or who died in prisoner of war camps, or who were shot down over foreign lands. Whilst official reports record these campaigns as remarkable achievements for the allied forces, Tognini points out just how costly these achievements were for the women whose husbands never came home. As poignant as these stories are however, they are not the central premise of the book. Rather, Tognini seeks to tell how these women, many of whom experienced isolation and loneliness as they watched others welcome home their loved ones, came together to support each other.

Essentially the book follows a chronological format starting with Jessie Vasey, whose husband died on the 5th March 1945, en route to New Guinea. Jessie had already helped to establish the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) Women's Association in Melbourne in 1941, designed to help support the widows and orphans of war. Now, with her husband's parting words - 'don't forget, look after the war widows because the bloody government won't' - ringing in her ears, she set out to establish a national organisation aimed at bringing war widows together, supporting them to become self-sufficient, and which had the strength of numbers to take on the government over pensions and reparation.

Whilst the book is subtitled 'the story of the War Widows' Guild in Western Australia', Tognini does cross the country frequently to discuss how the Guild worked across the states to achieve its goals for the war widows. That said the book provides a wonderful source of West Australian history. Many people in Perth will know of the old tea rooms located on the Perth Esplanade. This building has been a Chinese

restaurant and has recently been relocated to the island as part of the Elizabeth Quay development project; but how many people know that between 1949 and 1963 the War Widows Guild of WA had the lease on this building and ran a successful tea room and handicraft shop from the premises? The book also details the way in which the primary goals of the Guild have changed over time as the majority of its members grow older. Whilst Tognini mentions the differing requirements of today's war widows from Australia's more recent engagements with war, and how they engage, or not, with the War Widow's Guild, this aspect is only dealt with briefly. For this reader more attention could have been given to the new generations of war widows, but perhaps that requires another book.

This book would be a valuable resource for scholars and non-academics alike. Whilst this book is written for a general audience I can imagine it being used in high schools and tertiary classrooms to supplement classes on local history, gender studies, and studies of Australians at war. Augmented with photographs, letters, newspaper clippings, and telegrams, and with a comprehensive appendices and notes section at the back of the book, it would be a valuable resource for students in any of these areas. Ultimately this book provides an alternative narrative to war by exploring how war has an impact on the women left behind, the war widows, whose stories, as the dedication notes, do matter.

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