Article Type: Book Review

Nic Maclellan. *Grappling with the Bomb: Britain's Pacific H-Bomb Tests*.

Canberra: ANU Press, 2017.

Nic Maclellan's *Grappling with the Bomb* is a thorough examination of British nuclear weapons policy as it played out in the Pacific Ocean. The history of Operation Grapple, the first British hydrogen bomb tests conducted in 1957 and 1958 in several of its Pacific colonial possessions, has been told before. This book, though, brings the residents of these islands, the veterans of the military operations, and others involved in or affected by these tests, into the foreground. In doing so, it highlights a history of victimhood that spans the Pacific region. The research that underpins this book, including British Colonial Office files, oral histories, legal records, and much more, adds an abundance of valuable data to an already rich—and tragic—history of exploitation, resistance, and human and environmental catastrophe that lingers into the present.

The scholarship on British, American, and French nuclear testing in the Pacific is already extensive. There also exists a range of oral testimonies published in various languages that have recorded the tests' impact on the peoples of the Pacific Islands and beyond. Maclellan's contribution to this body of literature is a rich, complex history organised as twenty-two chapters anchored in biography, with each encompassing a wealth of issues, including indigenous struggles, gender politics, anti-colonial sentiment, health and environmental issues, and veterans' rights, along with an exploration of the complex relationship between political, scientific, and military administration of Britain's nuclear weapons program. This history is rooted in British colonial and diplomatic relationships, yet at the heart of these relationships are soldiers, pilots, fishermen, activists, scientists, and others whose stories are positioned alongside those of prime ministers, presidents, and diplomats whose decisions shaped this history. Each chapter uses a biography either to frame a wider history or to investigate its subject and their role in this history in detail. Chapters are uneven in their approach, yet so is the agency afforded to each subject in this complex web of actors.

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Unsurprisingly, U.S. nuclear policy in the Pacific features heavily throughout the book as a means to set up and contextualize Britain's forays into the testing of hydrogen bombs. This backgrounding doesn't gloss over the complex history of scientific and political diplomacy in the early years of the nuclear age, yet this is an extensive story which Maclellan recounts with a heavy reliance on existing scholarship. An early chapter deals with Japanese victims of the American "Bravo" nuclear test of 1954 and the ensuing protest movement that developed in Japan and around the world, spurred by the dangers of atmospheric testing of such magnitude. Chapter 6 extends this protest history, examining British pacifist Harold Steele, who travelled to Japan in 1957 hoping to join a proposed protest voyage into Britain's nuclear testing zone at Christmas Island. Other chapters explore Fijian, Gilbertese, and British military and civilian personnel whose involvement in Operation Grapple was subject to the sorts of official neglect so common with "nuclear veterans" elsewhere in the world. These chapters are rich with oral testimony, yet one is left wanting for a more substantive analysis of the social and cultural lives of these veterans and victims and how their experiences illuminate British colonial policy in the Pacific.

Maclellan's language is grounded in activist sentiment, befitting his own background as an activist and his career as a journalist, most significantly in Fiji. "Nuclear sacrifice zones" is an oft-used term, and the book makes frequent overtures for recognition and compensation for Pacific nuclear testing veterans and affected indigenous peoples. This is no detriment to what is a thorough history based on extensive research in many nations, and a solid grounding in oral histories conducted in several languages. Indeed, *Grappling with the Bomb* complements a wealth of Australian scholarship (most recently Liz Tynan's *Atomic Thunder*) that, in uncovering British negligence during its Australian atomic tests of 1952–63, furthers the case for compensation and recognition of the nuclear veterans who served there. Maclellan's history makes an explicit case for the United Kingdom to admit its responsibility to those veterans, something it is yet to do.

Commensurate with this advocacy, the book's focus on "the lived experience" of nuclear veterans whose stories are often missing from Cold War historiography is an admirable way to "redress the balance." (10) This approach resonates with new work being conducted in this field by Bo Jacobs, Mick Broderick, Becky Alexis-Martin, and others, along with the various accounts of victims of nuclear testing, in

Australia, Japan, the United States, and elsewhere. *Grappling with the Bomb* is a valuable work of research and a testament to the value of oral testimony in Cold War history. It also serves as a reminder to historians of the nuclear testing era that there are many more voices—Russian, Chinese, Indian, Algerian, and others—that deserve to be heard.

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