

Ron Blum, *Doing Their Bit: Australian Women and Children on the Home Front. World War Two*, Ron Blum, Oaklands Park

Many Baby Boomers grew up hearing wartime stories from their mothers: of food and petrol rationing; of women in munitions work; of knitting socks and sending food parcels to men in the war zones; of making frocks from old curtains; of digging ditches as air-raid shelters. It had some fascination (depending on the skill of the teller) but most likely went in one ear and out the other, mainly because of the lack of specific details.

Ron Blum's *Doing Their Bit* certainly packs plenty of detail into an amazingly slim package. In an A4 illustrated history of just 78 pages we learn via 18 well-organised chapters of the roles of the revived Cheer-Up Society, the Schools Patriotic Fund (SPF), the SPF Hostel, the author's own memories of war-time schooldays, the Royal Navy Friendly Union (a strictly South Australian body), the Girl Guides Thrift Campaign, the Fighting Forces Comfort Fund, the Red Cross at Home, various means of war-time fund raising, the Country Women's Association, women munitions workers, the Australian Women's Land Army, the Australian Women's Army Service, the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service, the Women's Air Training Corps, the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force, radar stations and a final article titled 'SA Women's Great War Effort' which appeared in *The Advertiser* on Victory in the Pacific (VP) Day on 15 August 1945. Acronyms abound but a helpful list of abbreviations is listed in the preliminary pages.

The core images are the magnificent photographs of the Krischock Studio owned by Blum. The studio founded by Harry Krischock (who died in 1941) provided photographs to the *Advertiser* and its weekend paper, the *Chronicle*, from 1910 and was carried on by his sons Keith and Bill. As Blum points out in his preface most of the 193 photos in the book were taken by Bill Krischock so that this is predominantly an Adelaide story. However, in order to provide a wider coverage other pictures were sourced from the *Argus* Newspaper Collection held in the State Library of Victoria.

It is easy enough to slap a book of photographs together but what is truly exceptional about *Doing Their Bit* is the utmost care with which Blum as designer (as well as author and publisher) has produced each page, frequently adding pictures of badges, coupons, recruiting posters and cartoons to enrich an enthralling story. The greatest care has also been exercised with picture captions (some of which are mini-essays in themselves) and among the most thorough I have encountered in any book.

Because of the richness of the imagery whether it be the photo of the Legacy boys and SPF lads marching in King William Street in the Victory Parade; the teenagers (male and female) at Pope Industries, Beverley working on artillery shell components; Prime Minister Robert Menzies inspecting a .303 cartridge making machine at the munitions factory at

Hendon; or women of the Land Army operating a grain harvester; it is easy to overlook the high-quality of the text.

To do so would be a mistake because Blum's writing is wonderfully succinct and adds so much to the pictures.

On page 49, for example, is a superb shot of female workers on a train to the Salisbury Munitions complex. Blum tells us that this complex was huge, 'about 20 square kilometres in size' and linked with 66 km of roads.

In 1941 a 6 km branch railway line was run from the existing broad gauge going north to Port Pirie, to the Salisbury plant with three stations within the complex for workers. 25 passenger trains ran to the site daily, 19 from the Adelaide Railway Station, six from Gawler and elsewhere, serving three shifts per day, six days a week. Freight trains also went to the Salisbury plant sidings running to a number of the buildings. A rail loop at the end of the track enabled trains to return without uncoupling the engines. In addition a narrow gauge tramway connected many buildings.

On page 22 there are three photographs of 10 and 11-year-old John Dinning of Mundalla who earned many badges from the Schools Patriotic Fund for collecting bones which were then transported to the city. Of itself this would not explain much but Blum reveals that:

With the fall of the phosphate island of Nauru in August, 1942 fertiliser in Australia became in short supply and threatened food and crop productivity ... Animal bones contain a lot of nitrogen and phosphorus and other mineral substances and after grinding down and mixing with slaughter-house waste can be made into bone meal, a slow release fertiliser rich in phosphorus and protein.

On the previous page there is also a lovely personal touch with the author explaining that he had become an SPFer at the age of seven and earned an SPF badge with six bars (illustrated) which were first issued in 1940. He then adds:

The next step would to aim for a spitfire plane badge ... To do this first collect five celluloid wings ... each worth £1 of scrap. The set could then be redeemed for the fighter plane. The war ended before the author could achieve his spitfire.

War's end sounds disappointing!

Ron Blum is to be congratulated for this absolutely engaging history as are Open Book Howden for the high-quality printing and reproduction of the illustrative material. Only 200 copies have been printed so it is hope that an enterprising publisher might take the opportunity to reprint the work and make it available to the much wider audience it deserves.

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