

1995

Experience of War: An Anthology of Articles from MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History

Harold Winton

Robert Cowley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Winton, Harold and Cowley, Robert (1995) "Experience of War: An Anthology of Articles from MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 48 : No. 2 , Article 31.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol48/iss2/31>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

bomber leaders were sidetracked (in their view) into Operation Pointblank to destroy first the German aircraft industries, then the Luftwaffe, so it could not interfere with the Normandy landings, and the V-weapon sites. In doing so, they destroyed the cream of German fighter pilots, leaving too few to man the new jets and only the flak to defend the factories which finally became the bombers' primary targets.

The author writes of the multi-theater air war in a light, breezy style, marred only by cutesy terms unknown during the war. He also uses no Navy sources, neither for the Doolittle Tokyo raid nor discussions of Admiral Ernest J. King; he gives prewar CNO Admiral William V. Pratt the name of naval writer Fletcher Pratt; and he is mistaken in his assertion that the entire crew of the airship *Shenandoah* perished when it crashed. On the other hand, he does discuss each aircraft, as well as bombs, gas tanks, armor plate, radar, bomb-sights, turrets, and the tactics of aerial gunnery. The China-Burma-India and New Guinea fighting are covered well enough, but not the rest of the Pacific: the Central Pacific's Seventh Air Force is mentioned only once, and the key B-29 aerial mining campaign hardly at all. One of Perret's best chapters covers morale. In Europe the best tonic was Major Glenn Miller's AAF orchestra. Nuggets appear on every page—like the B-17 navigator who fashioned and wore an antiflak armor-plated jock-strap.

Excellent maps, photos, and sixty-seven pages of bibliographic notes complement this excellent book. If they can overlook Perret's ignorance of things

naval, every naval officer should read it for a concise and revealing overview of the Air Force's turbulent but quite glorious roots.

CLARK G. REYNOLDS
University of Charleston
South Carolina

Cowley, Robert, ed. *Experience of War: An Anthology of Articles from MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1992. 574pp. \$35

This book is a fun read. It consists of fifty-one essays by some of the English-speaking world's most capable military historians, including Michael Howard, Geoffrey Parker, Stephen Sears, James McPherson, Stephen Ambrose, and Ronald Spector, as well as such fine writers as Jon Swan, Andrew Ward, and Paul Fussell. The individual essays are arranged chronologically, from Robert O'Connell's investigation of the origins of war to Martin van Creveld's speculations as to its future. The distribution by era is for the most part well balanced, with six treatments of ancient and medieval warfare, five on the American Civil War, and six on the Great War. World War II, however, clearly dominates the collection, with eleven pieces devoted to this watershed event in world history. In "form-critical" terms, there are ten battle or campaign narratives, eight studies of individual leaders, five naval pieces, three assessments each of technological and airpower issues, and two studies focusing on intelligence and deception. Regrettably, there is not a single treatment of that most mundane

but vital aspect of military science, logistics. Despite this gap, the collection covers a broad sweep of the human experience of war, as one would expect from the editors of *MHQ*.

Obviously, a collection of this sort has no central thesis. There are, however, several underlying themes likely to interest those who seek to profit from studying war's variegated past. One of the most striking is its inherently ugly, remorseful, and distasteful seriousness. Paul Fussell, in his essay "From Light to Heavy Duty," notes that "by 1940 the Great War had receded into soft focus, and no one wanted to face the terrible fact that military successes are achieved only at the cost of insensate violence and fear and agony, with no bargains allowed." His description of the evolution of American visions of war, from the well-turned-out Joe Louis of 1942 thrusting a gleaming bayonet captioned "We're going to do our part," to the 1945 poster of a blood-smeared and obviously dead tank crewman above the words "Stay on the Job and Get It Over," graphically portrays the loss of American innocence to the realities of war. Yet if Americans, splendidly secure between two great oceans, went from light to heavy duty, what about the Russians, who began the war with very heavy duty indeed? Here the reflections of Vladimir Lempfort, a Soviet artillery lieutenant in the Great Patriotic War, are particularly instructive. "War," he declares, "is violence and does violence to everything: reason, logic, human dignity, and first of all to such a naturally human feeling as self-preservation. . . . War is a creature broken loose from the pack of human feelings and concepts."

The intrinsic inhumanity of war leads the mere mortals who must partake of it to the psychological escape of ironic humor, frequently manifested as disdain for those who compel them to endure war's indignities—the brass hats. This theme is most evident in David Lamb's splendid essay on World War II's most famous cartoonist, Bill Mauldin. "War humor is very bitter, very sardonic," said Mauldin. "It's not ha-ha humor." His cartoon characters, Willie and Joe, deliver it that way. "Just gimme an aspirin," says Willie to the medic, "I already got a Purple Heart." Thus Mauldin's unshaven, irreverent, but very believable GIs became the prototype for Alan Alda's whimsical surgeon in a Korean War *MASH* and Robin Williams' uproarious Vietnam War disk jockey. A third underlying theme is the impact of individual leaders on war. Arthur Ferrill takes us with Alexander to the far reaches of the Punjab; Thomas Fleming illuminates Washington's sagacity, humility, and determination in the American Revolution; Ira Meistrich places us among the *grognards* (soldiers of Napoleon's original Imperial Guard) retreating from Moscow and raising nary a murmur against the emperor on their disastrous march to the Berezina; and Caleb Carr reminds us of the greatness of German General Helmuth von Moltke's vision, the lightness of his touch, in his practice of strategy as an art of expedients and originality in constantly changing circumstances.

Another fascinating aspect of this work is its succession of well turned phrases. Robert O'Connell describes the crossbow as "a veritable stick in the

spokes of Western military history." Thomas Fleming refers to George Washington's disastrous attempt to conduct a positional defense at White Plains as a "bitter pill [that] purged the last vestige of entrenchment-tool illusions from Washington's mind." Robert Utley quotes George Crook on Philip Sheridan: "The adulations heaped on him by a grateful nation for his supposed genius turned his head [and] caused him to bloat his little carcass with debauchery and dissipation." Robert F. Jones gives us T.E. Lawrence on the remarkable Captain Meinertzhagen: He "took as blithe a pleasure in deceiving his enemy (or friend) by some unscrupulous jest, as in spattering the brains of a cornered mob of Germans one by one with his African knobkerrie." Editor Robert Cowley cogently observes that the absence of shell marks from subsequent wars on the resplendent monuments at Gettysburg "may be the most signal difference between European and American history." Finally, in one of the most revealing utterances ever recorded regarding the Italian conception of military effectiveness, Geoffrey Ward recounts the Italian chief of staff's response to Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1918 observation that perhaps the fleet should leave Taranto occasionally for gunnery practice: "Ah, but my dear Mr. Minister, you must not forget that the Austrian fleet has not had any [practice] either."

Experience of War does not offer its reader a solid meal for intellectual development, but its collection of tasty morsels constitutes a very satisfactory dessert cart; the book provides a

number of illuminating insights. This being the case, the hardbound version should be reserved in the main for library collections. The 1993 paperback edition released by Dell Publishing for \$14.95 is, however, a worthwhile investment for both students and practitioners of the art of war.

HAROLD WINTON
Air University
Maxwell Air Force Base

Pipes, Richard. *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*. New York: Knopf, 1993. 587pp. \$35

This is the third volume of Harvard professor Richard Pipes' trilogy on Russian history, the first two being *Russia under the Old Regime* (1974) and *The Russian Revolution* (1990). This volume limits itself to the period 1918–1924; it begins with the Civil War and ends with the death of Vladimir Ilich Lenin. In Pipes' view, this period constitutes the brutal formative period of Soviet totalitarianism, Stalin's later contributions notwithstanding. Like the earlier studies, this book is filled with highly contentious interpretations and conclusions.

The Civil War (1918–1920) was, in the author's view, the "most devastating event in that country's history since the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century." The devastation, however, was not merely the consequence of military conflict between the Red and White armies but equally the result of the Bolsheviks' use of violence to effect the socialist transformation of backward Russia. Pipes believes that economic