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Britain and the First World War

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Wheeler has woven a skillful tale of McClellan's behavior during the campaign, providing ample evidence of McClellan's inability to understand the political nature of the war. He did not comprehend the problems that faced his commander-in-chief, nor did he appreciate what a military opportunity the campaign was for him. The fears he expressed in his correspondence to his wife and the War Department exemplify this.

McClellan's failure to move quickly and engage the Confederate armies enabled the southern forces to regroup in defense of Richmond, and his defeat at the hands of Robert E. Lee during the Seven Days Battle crushed all hope for a quick end to the rebellion. The author's analysis of how and why McClellan failed to administer a stunning defeat to the Confederate forces is provocative reading.

However, such behavior leaves the reader wondering not why McClellan failed, but rather why he was left to continue in command? Not until the Battle of Antietam did McClellan totally display his ineptitude. President Lincoln was then able to remove him from command.

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Turner, John, ed. *Britain and the First World War* (Collection of essays). London: Unwin Hyman, 1988. 165pp.

This small volume of essays, edited by John Turner of the University of London, will be useful to those with only a surface understanding of the complexities of World War I, as well as to those with a scholarly interest in the war.

The essays are successful in two ways. As an overview, they succeed in synthesizing a huge volume of data, covering virtually every aspect of the war. Secondly, specialists—with very different perspectives concerning the consequences of the war—are called upon to examine the different elements of the war. The book justifies the editor's belief that the Great War was not part of an immutable "march of progress" as some recent historians have claimed.

At first, the organization of the work into separately grouped analyses appears disjointed. However, the arrangement of material is useful for this kind of short textbook, largely composed from recent secondary sources.

Of particular note may be Bryan Ranft's contribution on "The Royal Navy and the War at Sea." It explains convincingly how the British Navy, contrary to popular opinion, succeeded at the task for which it had been preparing for decades.

A.J. Stockwell's work on the Imperial consequences of global struggle in "War and the British Empire" helps make clear why decisions, otherwise inexplicable, were taken by the central government. Any decision involving Imperial resources, and particularly

Indian resources, was necessarily a carefully considered one. As Stockwell shows, there was a continuous attempt to balance carefully what could safely be withdrawn from Imperial funds, men and materiel, against the amount of goodwill needed to maintain the Imperial connexion, which agreement, rather than force of arms, had always sustained. The demand was far too heavy—as for example when Lord Chelmsford noted “Public opinion in India will not tolerate any longer a system under which our [Indian] troops are [used] . . . to suit the fluctuating requirements of His Majesty’s Government.” The goodwill perceptibly deteriorated and the Imperial agreement was clearly on the verge of either collapse or violent renegotiation.

Such a breakdown of authority was not nearly as likely within the army. According to Ian Beckett’s “The British Army 1914-18: The Illusion of Change”—as an institution the army was “not noticeably any different in 1921 from what it had been in 1912 or 1913.” Noel Whiteside’s “The British Population at War” documents that many obvious symptoms of urban poverty, including disease, societal paternalism and institutional ignorance were ameliorated by the growth of trade unionism and the extension of the franchise, directly traceable to wartime labour shortages and imperatives. However, she also concludes that domestic British life was by no means as radically affected as we had been led to believe. Since

the nation was not as debilitated, during or after the war, as either its opponents or allies, Great Britain’s internal societal dislocation was not further exacerbated by popular want or unbearable financial strictures.

Peter Dewey’s “The New Warfare and Economic Mobilization” argues that England had moved off a monetary economy during the war, switching to “command of physical resources” relying on good credit and counting on moving the actual debt to postwar taxpayers, which tends to support Whiteside’s argument that during the war itself, the British were to a degree cushioned financially in ways that other, less financially resourceful nations at war were not.

Perhaps the most striking result of the war was one that previously had been dealt with at some length within the more traditional histories of the period: the collapse of the Liberal party and the consequent shift in political representation. John Turner’s “British Politics and the Great War” makes it very plain how the concessions inherent in maintaining the nation at war led to the collapse, since the Liberals, in coalition with Labour and the Irish Nationalists, were unable to sustain the *quid pro quo* on which they had based their strength since 1906. Particularly notable was the withdrawal of the Irish Nationalists from the coalition, as a direct result of Irish conscription and the secret negotiations concerning the separation of Northern and Southern Ireland.

Although most of its material is not new, the volume remains useful. Because of the abundance of references, recommended reading and citations, *Britain and the First World War* provides a worthwhile introduction to current scholarship regarding a most difficult period, a period of domestic and international conflict with almost too apt a relevance for the present.

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Messimer, Dwight R. *The Merchant U-Boat: Adventures of the Deutschland, 1916-1918*. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1988. 234pp. \$24.95

The *Deutschland*, the world's first and only merchant submarine, was the subject of widespread rumor, hysteria, paranoid secrecy, and exaggerated claims during her brief commercial career during the First World War. Dwight Messimer has done a workmanlike job of tracking down and documenting the facts and providing an interesting account of her real achievements. Originally conceived as a means of breaking Britain's sea blockade, which by 1916 was slowly strangling Germany's war effort as well as her civilian economy, the *Deutschland* was the prototype of a projected class of eight unarmed cargo-carrying submarines designed to transport 750 tons of high-priority materials between Germany and the then-neutral United States. In two trips,

first to Baltimore and then to New London, she evaded British hunters and brought dyestuffs and chemicals to America and returned to her homeland with rubber, nickel and tin. The value of her cargoes is said to have far exceeded the cost of her construction.

Actually, the *Deutschland* never really was a merchant ship. The program was always under naval control, and her crew was made up of naval submarine personnel, poorly disguised as merchant seamen. Strangely, her captain and that of her sister, the *Bremen*, although reserve naval officers, had no previous submarine experience. Their lack of expertise undoubtedly contributed to the accidents suffered by the *Deutschland* and the mysterious loss of the *Bremen*, which disappeared shortly after leaving Helgoland on her maiden voyage. Since no likely Allied attack has ever come to light, an operational casualty was probably her undoing.

Tubby, slow, and unwieldy, both surfaced and submerged, the *Deutschland* was no model for a successful warship, but in the end, she and her surviving sisters were armed and converted into submarine cruisers. Redesignated *U-155*, she made three long war patrols and was credited with sinking 43 Allied ships totaling 121,673 tons—no mean record for any submarine. She ended her career in a British scrapyard, taking final revenge on her captors by blowing up five apprentice workers who inadver-