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Military Strategy and the Origins of the First World War: An International Security Reader

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American edition, to explain the confusing British regimental nomenclature of the day. More attention to these things might have made this a memorable book; as it is, it is well worth reading for incident and atmosphere of what was in any case an incoherent battle.

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Blair, Clay. *Ridgway's Paratroopers: The American Airborne in World War II*. New York: Dial Press, 1985. 588pp. \$19.95

Clay Blair, formerly the Washington correspondent for *Time* magazine and editor in chief of the Curtis Publishing empire, has written extensively on World War II, most recently as a collaborator with Omar Bradley on *A General's Life*. In this latest effort, he traces the parallel development of Matt Ridgway and the American airborne in World War II.

It is a stirring story, filled with legendary heroes (James Gavin, Max Taylor, Tony McAuliffe, among others) and lots of battles (Salerno, Anzio, Normandy, Arnhem, the Bulge, crossing the Rhine). Blair is not only a good writer who brings these men and their actions to life, but one who does not hesitate to assign blame when justified. He is merciless in pointing out the manifold shortcomings of the Army Air Corps in carrying out its mission of dropping paratroopers on target; the drop in

Normandy, as he demonstrates, was a scandal. It was so badly done that there should have been numerous courts-martial, and the truth was that Ridgway's boys were lucky to survive at all. The key problem was that the Army Air Corps simply would not take its mission seriously and refused to properly train its pilots for the job. There was no excuse, because the drop in Sicily, in July 1943, was as bad, but the airmen refused to learn from their mistakes.

Fortunately, Ridgway had done such an outstanding job of preparing the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions for their mission that the paratroopers were able to overcome the problems stemming from the scattered drops and accomplish their objectives. How it was done is Blair's real story, and he tells it well. Highly recommended.

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Miller, Stephen E., ed. *Military Strategy and the Origins of the First World War: An International Security Reader*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985. 186pp. \$25.50 paper \$6.95

This collection presents five interpretive essays on the origins of the First World War and its contemporary significance, originally published as an issue of the journal *International Security*. Two contributions treat general questions; the remaining three concentrate on the cult of the offensive prior to 1914.

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Paul Kennedy offers a thoughtful survey of economic trends during this century, noting that the relative economic strength of the various powers has not altered very much. This finding suggests that the First World War may not have had the catastrophic impact that is normally attributed to it. Kennedy also notes that the relevant economic decline of the United States in recent years may be of considerable significance. Kennedy may somewhat miss the point in that the principal question is the *stability* of the international balance of power across the period in question, most especially from 1914 to 1945, not the relative situation at any given point. But this essay introduces much-needed comment on the relation between economics and politics over a long period of time and its meaning, a concern of the first importance.

Perhaps the wisest essay is that of Richard Ned Lebow who examines the notion of a window of vulnerability and its effect on the calculations of the Great Powers of 1914. He notes the existence of numerous reasons for not going through the window of vulnerability. Associated with this analysis is criticism of the tendency to rely on estimates of comparative military strength alone in deciding international questions. Worst cases based on this approach, when tied to the notion of a window of opportunity, may contribute to arms races.

Michael Howard takes up a venerable subject in his contribution: the proclivity of the Great Powers in

1914 to underestimate the disadvantages of taking the offensive. His competent rehearsal of well-known information provides an up-to-date and accurate summation of the subject. Howard might have gone a step farther. German leaders realized that their nation would benefit from a short struggle. German strength on land, if applied in an all-out offensive, could bring victory before the enemy could mobilize sufficiently to forestall a decision. In other words, the German decision to take the offensive was based not simply on the cult of the offensive but on the belief that it must win quickly. A long war would favor the enemy. More broadly, all parties realized that a war would be violent, but it was also assumed that it would be short: Peoples and armies could not long withstand the destructive impact of the new military technology.

The two remaining articles introduce less traditional perspectives on the cult of the offensive in 1914. Jack Snyder applies organizational theory in an argument that the military adopted the cult of the offensive as a means of strengthening its position in political contests with civil authorities. No one authority is in a position to evaluate this striking hypothesis, but it is worthy of the most careful examination on the part of specialists. Stephen Van Evera offers a parallel argument, insisting that those interested in expansionist policies adopted the cult of the offensive because it strengthened them in contests with less aggressive political elements. Like Snyder's interpretation, special-

ists ought to give this notion the benefit of careful testing. Both writers, incidentally, suggest that comparable circumstances may exist in our own time, enhancing the chance of war rather than peace.

In testing the ingenious hypotheses advanced in this collection scholars must be careful not to let too much generalization rest on too little evidence. Explanations based on single causes almost always fall of their own weight. Moreover, in drawing analogies based on comparison of present processes with past processes, it is well to remember that in almost all cases the differences far outweigh the similarities. These cautionary notices, however, should not deter examination of these most useful essays. For once one does not have to say that the articles in such a format are uneven in quality; each one is well worth the price of the entire volume.

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Robbins, Keith. *The First World War*.

Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1984. 186pp. \$24.95

The profound relevance of the Great War to the defense and strategic policy debates of the contemporary world—coalition warfare, global war planning, the political ends of warfighting, the maritime-continental strategy debate, and ultimate control of war policy—continues unabated. Keith Robbins has provided a substantial, yet eco-

nomical narrative of military events. However, a diffuse organizational scheme coupled with conventional topical division has diminished the effective integration and analysis of the themes of strategic planning, military operations, and the political ends of warfighting. While the various operations plans are surveyed with little critical commentary, fundamental divergences in war policy between the Central Powers as well as the maritime-continentalist debate are diffused throughout the campaign narrative and discussions of civil-military relations.

Additionally, while free of strident biases, Robbins generally is unwilling to articulate judgments or accept the necessary conclusion of a particular line of argument. For example, an impressive discussion of the complexities of the origins of the war ends with the mere truism that the catastrophe was triggered by the intrusion of an unanticipated event into a highly dynamic and imprecise situation. Moreover, no coherent conclusion issues from the disparate and often contradictory observations: the centrality of the Western Front, the secondary significance of direct naval power, the peripheral importance of “external” theaters—yet the importance of Allied successes in those theaters to Luddendorff’s suit for peace in November 1918.

Robbins offers some interesting observations with respect to certain events and issues. For example, he diminishes the traditional significance ascribed to the first Battle of the Marne in favor of the view that