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## The First World War

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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

the overall impact of indecisive campaigns, culminating in the horrendous Battle of Verdun, weakened the effectiveness of the German Army and ensured its eventual defeat. Tactically, the argument is plausible, though Verdun's ultimate significance may well be the part it played in the policy decisions attendant to the ascendancy of Hindenburg and Luddendorff and their challenge to responsible political authority. Robbins plausibly contends that the most devastating application of sea-power consisted of the Allied blockade and the German submarine campaign, though his claim that neither was decisive merely begs the question of the relative weight of the various modes of warfare in the ultimate synthesis of victory.

One of the most informative and pertinent sections embraces an extensive discussion of the higher conduct of war centered upon the vexing and complex issue of civil-military relations. The unprecedented material and manpower requirements of the war established an inherent tension between politically responsible authority and military leadership. Robbins provides an excellent survey of the conventional story of military usurpation of political authority in Germany with its disastrous impact upon German war policy. But rightly he appraises the British case in civil-military relations as more complex in its need to marshal a democratic nation for protracted global war. The author's contention that civilian control was maintained despite the prevalence of the strategic views of

the military is open to question. Admittedly, forms and appearances were maintained, but the inescapable reality was *de facto* military dominance of policy broken only belatedly by Lloyd George.

Finally, Robbins' penchant for ambiguity embraces his final assessment of the war. The principal thrust is that while numerous trends and developments were exacerbated, and that the course of European and world history were irrevocably altered, a rapid return to "normalcy" in reality and perception obviated claims of truly cataclysmic change. Such claims should be received with skepticism, for all periods are ones of transition. But the fact remains that some are more so than others; that Western history has on occasion witnessed periods of fundamental dislocation despite themes of continuity—the fall of the Roman Empire, the Reformation, the democratic revolutions of the late 18th century, and the Industrial Revolution, to note several. In many ways the seminal event of the present century, the Great War, is an obvious addition.

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Musican, Ivan. *U.S. Armored Cruisers: A Design and Operational History*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1985, 240pp. \$26.95

This is the history of 12 ships with 24 names. Only one, the *Brooklyn*, retained her original name through-