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George S. Brown, General US Air Force

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Herwig, Holger, and Heyman, Neil M. *Biographical Dictionary of World War I*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982. 424pp. \$49.95

This dictionary presents a large number of biographical accounts, quite complete and authoritative, describing personages of importance who directed affairs in the most important belligerent nations during the First World War. The nations covered include Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, Japan, Montenegro, Rumania, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, the United States, and the Vatican.

The two authors, both Europeanists, base their biographical sketches on the works of leading authorities or on memoirs, tracing careers in general but concentrating on activities during 1914-1918. Herwig and Heyman make an effort to avoid the dull flatness often associated with biographical dictionaries, including evaluative comments as well as descriptive information and introducing interesting and even amusing anecdotes or quotations.

The coverage is most useful for the European participants, reflecting not only the European specialties of the authors but the realities of the Great War. There are twenty-three entries for the United States by comparison with sixty-nine for Germany and fifty for Great Britain. This apportionment seems just and proper. American users are much more in need of biographical information about our allies and enemies than about the United States, the latter

information being familiar or easily obtained. This work should help American scholars to introduce enemies and allies more effectively into the American treatment of the First World War than is now the case.

Anything that can be done to strengthen the American understanding of the First World War is a contribution of significant import. Much of our mental baggage concerning international relations and national security has its origins in the catastrophe of 1914-1918. Americans all too often ignore this fundamental truth because we were late into the war. In any event the experience of the Second World War effectively aborted a truly comprehensive American appraisal of the earlier conflict, a circumstance that helps to explain certain shortcomings in our understanding of underlying events for the period 1939 to 1945.

The compilers deserve considerable praise for undertaking a taxing labor that should prove helpful to students of the First World War for many years to come.

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Puryear, Edgar F., Jr. *George S. Brown, General US Air Force. Destined for the Stars*. Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1983. 306pp. \$16.95.

George S. Brown was a courageous soldier, a fine officer and perhaps even a splendid human being. Despite these qualities it is not certain that ". . . Brown was destined

to become one of the most brilliant air commanders in history." In another day, he might have become that, but by the time he grasped the levers of power it was beyond his reach. Even were Edgar F. Puryear's judgment on Brown's brilliance as an air commander correct, neither *Destined for the Stars* nor any other book published this early could support that conclusion.

Edgar Puryear was once on the faculty of the Air Force Academy and has written two similar books: *Nineteen Stars* and *Stars in Flight*. He claims a Ph.D. in Political Science and History from Princeton University and a law degree from the University of Virginia.

Notwithstanding impressive academic credentials, Puryear's methodology disqualifies the present work as sound biography or history. By an overwhelming margin, his sources are interviews granted by Brown's superiors, colleagues, and subordinates immediately after Brown's tragic death. The source material, therefore, is much more in the character of a eulogy than a suitable foundation for a worthy biography. Other sources are Brown's Officer Effectiveness Reports, interviews from his mother and brother, and his public speeches when he was Chief of Staff of the US Air Force and Chairman of the JCS. All these materials are handled in an uncritical way. Puryear did not do much archival research for *Stars in Flight*, and of course most of that kind of material on Brown is still classified. Yet he ignores most of the published

material that does relate to Brown's career. Rather, he covers General Brown's tenure as commander of 7th Air Force in Vietnam by stringing together a host of personal anecdotes without ever addressing the great airpower issues involved in the war. Given that Vietnam was a defeat, the worst in American history, Puryear can hardly take that as support for the notion that his subject was one of the ". . . most brilliant air leaders in history." Later, General Brown was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and was in the saddle for one of the saddest days in American military history, the fall of Saigon in 1975. Again, we cannot fault Brown for that humiliation, but neither is it any foundation for the claim of brilliance as an air leader.

Puryear's declared purpose is to tell those who aspire to lead their country the ways in which they might qualify themselves for the task. The method is to use the career of General George Brown as a model. In the final chapter, the characteristics to be cultivated are summarized. There is little doubt in my mind that Brown possessed them. However, the superficiality of the research so undermines the accuracy of the work as to destroy its worth as a credible guide for the younger generation—worse than that, it tends to widen the generation gap in a way detrimental to pride of service—being made up largely of the quotations from senior USAF generals, it is bound to be seen as the voice of the establishment.

Puryear and Presidio Press would

have been well advised to find someone experienced in the military profession to read the final typescript to save them from many of those other elementary mistakes that bring the book's overall worth into question. That would have prevented the Military Air Transport Service from becoming the "Material Air Transport Service," and would also have prevented reporting that in 1967 the USS *Liberty* was sunk, which she was not. There are many other obvious mistakes that careful editing would have prevented. Of these the most important is the failure to recognize in the *Mayaguez* incident that the Cambodian government had decided to release the crew of that captured American freighter before either the Marine landing on Kob Tang Island or the bombing of the Coral Sea had taken place.

This biography of George S. Brown, then, is a last testimonial from his friends—a eulogy and no more. When we do get a history of his stewardship of our national security, we will learn a great deal about crisis leadership, the way that the bureaucracy works, and about survival in Washington in times of political turmoil.

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Macdonald, Lyn. *SOMME*. London: Michael Joseph, 1983. 366pp. \$19.95

The Battle of the Somme opened with an artillery barrage of unprecedented intensity and duration herald-

ing the "Big Push" on 24 June 1916, and ended without achieving its objective over 300,000 casualties later on 21 November 1916. The end was sadly heroic. A forlorn band of ninety men from the Glasgow Boys Brigade Battalion (officially the 16th Highland Light Infantry) reported as "missing" had actually captured a length of battered German trench and held out six days longer. Reduced to fifteen "starving, filthy, frozen, exhausted" men, they were overwhelmed by unrelenting German counterattacks. The German major interrogating them said, "Is this what held the Brigade up for a week? Who are you and where have you come from?"

Lyn Macdonald's book gives the answer to that question. It is an account of *Kitchener's Army*—shipping clerks, errand boys, stevedores, railway porters, grocer's assistants, postmen—men who were transformed from patriotic, high-spirited groups of "pals" on a lark to cannon fodder, corpses and a few surviving soldiers. This is a superb but overwhelmingly sad piece of historical research and writing. The author establishes an objective, and achieves it. "This book does not set out to draw political conclusions and, although it is the story of a battle, it is more concerned with the experience of war than with the war itself."

The story is told in a remarkable series of eyewitness accounts that bring back to life and, death, the men and the times. The author's complete understanding of the battle and mastery of the terrain is the warp