

**Sanders Marble, ed..** *King of Battle: Artillery in World War I*. History of Warfare Series. Leiden: Brill, 2016. 382 pp. \$199.00, cloth, ISBN 978-90-04-30524-3.

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Bringing together some of the most renowned scholars from their respective national specializations, *King of Battle* provides a skillful and important study of World War I artillery. Alongside trenches and machine guns, artillery stands at the core of the most evocative images of the conflict. As the most lethal category of weapons, artillery in many theaters literally dominated the war. In view of the importance of the topic, it perhaps seems surprising that more has not previously been done to encapsulate World War I artillery. The immensity of the topic helps explain the earlier absence. This work goes a long way toward filling a significant gap.

Editor Sanders Marble, cognizant of the complex challenge of coherently examining myriad artillery systems, doctrines, and technologies within a single volume, chose to invite an array of eminent historians to speak to their respective strong suits. As a result, the book is an edited volume that provides an overview and a conclusion, as well as a focused chapter on each of a dozen participants in the war. Bruce Gudmundsson writes a coherent and masterful introduction to the work as a whole.

The first three of the individual chapters deal with the British, the French, and the Germans, the principal antagonists to fight for the entirety of the war. The Hapsburgs, the Ottomans, and the

Bulgarians each receive a chapter to round out the Central powers. Four of the Allied powers (Italy, Romania, Russia, and Serbia), as well as the United States and Britain's India Army, complete the study. Belgium and Japan are the only significant participants that are not granted a chapter in the work. While the list of included countries is not exhaustive, it is certainly extensive.

While each of the chapters tells a discrete story of a respective nation's artillery during the war, readers will appreciate how frequently the accounts of significant battles and campaigns intersect between the narratives of two respective countries. The effect is to enrich the context that lends the work depth and utility. The different countries' fortunes in the war are reflected by the development and fate of their artillery systems, and the diversity of examined nations demonstrates the complex results of the conflict. For example, French and British artillery was transformed under severe pressure, the modest Ottoman artillery system was slowly ground into oblivion, and the systems of the Romanians and the Serbs were rebuilt from the ashes of catastrophe. Standardization (or lack thereof) is a particular interest in several chapters, and the degree of standardization affected doctrine in important ways, as the chapters make clear. Each part of the

book is excellent, and the work as a whole is even more impressive than the sum of its parts.

The array of national studies, and the generally similar size of most of the chapters, means that different perspectives of the war appear. Most chapters, including that of the British and the Germans, are approximately twenty-five pages long. Necessarily, the narratives of the smaller countries become more granular than is possible for the studies of the larger belligerents. Kaushik Roy's chapter on British India's artillery reminds readers that "it would be erroneous to accept the structure of combat in the Western Front as the only paradigm of war" (p. 322). However, readers will find that the thirty-nine-page chapter on French artillery spends ample attention on the western front and on the ways in which that country struggled to derive combat power from antiquated artillery systems that lacked internal recoil mechanisms and that were designed for black powder propellants. The information appears usefully in the early part of the book, because countries such as Italy and Russia (which are described in the book's latter chapters) encountered similar struggles, and the specifics of their efforts enjoy more granular attention.

A notable omission concerns the use of chemical agents. Following the initial release of chlorine canisters in early 1915 by the Germans, artillery was the principal vector by which poison "gas" was used against enemies. Gas was used lavishly during the war and was used by multiple participants on both sides. As an authority on the German artillery innovator Georg Bruchmuller, David Zabecki is well equipped to describe changes in the German use of chemical agents during the latter parts of the war. Aside from his excellent work regarding Germany, chemical warfare appears only at the margins of the other chapters. Marble briefly mentions British use of mustard gas late in the war, and in every other instance the use of gas appears only as a minor mention and only when the examined country

was on the receiving end of a gas attack. Although an unexplained absence, the well-earned reputations of the respective authors suggest that the omission reflects a deliberate decision rather than an accident. However, the result is the implication not only that Germany committed the first use of poison gas but that it was also the sole user on the western front, as every other mention of it appears only in passing and only on the eastern, Italian, or Middle Eastern fronts.

The book does nonetheless offer a wealth of information about the artillery of the leading participants in the war, and shows how it was used and how it changed during the war. The qualitative information is overall superb. In quantitative terms, the book includes a dizzying eighty-five tables. In sum, *King of Battle* packs a formidable punch—in keeping with its subject.

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