



**Emily Mayhew.** *Wounded: A New History of the Western Front in World War I.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Illustrations. 275 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-932245-9.

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**Commissioned by** Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Emily Mayhew's work seeks to shed light on an area of World War I history that is widely discussed but rarely in detail: the medical treatment of the wounded. The conflict, which raged between 1914 and 1918, brought mechanization to every aspect of warfare, inflicting horrible wounds not seen before. Mayhew's focus is on the British effort to master this crisis in terms of medical logistics. Having been through the Boer War a little over a decade earlier, the British felt prepared. They were wrong. In thirteen chapters, she traces the activities of the Royal Army Medical Corps and related organizations from 1915 until the end of the war. She shows how short-term fixes led to a system of treatment, which the British military still uses today. Three chapters address staff at various levels, three are devoted to different types of officers, and a like number focus on aspects of transportation. Interspersed are four chapters that tell the personal narrative of a wounded individual.

What separates her study from other recent works on the Great War is her narrative style, which places the reader in the minds of her subjects. From the start, Mayhew makes it clear that she has chosen to use a writing style more often found in fiction to better bring to life the scraps and loose pieces of history found in the archives of the Imperial War Museum. The result is very

impressive on a literary level. She easily transports the reader to France to experience the horrors of the Great War.

Mayhew must have realized that such a style might cause some concern among academics. She therefore carefully documents her sources. For many scholars, it is the last thirty-three pages that may be most appealing. She not only shows how she built her narrative, and cites up-and-coming literature, but also provides suggestions on art and poetry that tie into the themes of each chapter.

While her references are good, they lack detail. For example, we are told that Mickey Chater's file (ref. 87/56/1) is "rich and well organized" (p. 228), but there is little sense of what it actually holds. The only real perspective a scholar gets is when comparing references for the Chater chapter with that of a man like Joseph Pickard, who left a sound recording (no. 8946). Mayhew utilized eleven references to reconstruct the story of the former soldier, while she appears to have relied exclusively on just the recording for the latter. The ability to draw on the actual words of an individual is an amazing resource, but a good scholar double checks everything.

Mayhew regularly uses multiple sources to help determine where her subject was and what he or she was doing. Sometimes this is very effec-

tive, but other times she reaches too far. On page 29, for example, she discusses the notebook carried by stretcher bearer William Easton. She describes in detail what it contained, leading the reader into believing that she actually used the artifact in constructing the narrative. Then, however, she states “His notebook might also have included....” This phrase immediately moves the discussion from history into supposition.

It is important to point out that Mayhew’s study is an excellent introduction into the care of the wounded during World War I. Through her work, she has helped to resurrect some long-forgotten pieces of British history. The London Ambulance Column was created early in the war as a volunteer organization. If not for the records of Claire Tisdall at the Imperial War Museum, the group would be all but lost to history. The papers of the Dent family, who organized the group, were destroyed in World War II. Additionally, Mayhew’s chapter on Furnes Railway Station is based largely on Sarah MacNaughtan’s autobiography, *My War Experience on Two Continents* (1919). MacNaughtan was one of those iconic take-charge English ladies, who did what she wanted and ordered her supplies from Harrods when the need arose.

When it comes to the British wounded of the Great War, Mayhew has done her research. The text has a map of the western front, images of many of the individuals and subjects from the text, and a time line putting the characters from her work into the larger events of the war. While the narrative style and lack of documentation can be frustrating for academics, *Wounded* is an excellent introduction to an often-forgotten aspect of the horrible war.

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