

Lukasz Kamienski. *Shooting Up: A Short History of Drugs and War.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 416 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-026347-8.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

In an English translation of his Polish book, Polish political scientist Lukasz Kamienski leads readers on a long trip from wars in the Stone Age up to the Great Stoned Age. His subject—the use of drugs in warfare from the unwritten past all the way up to the hyper-recorded present—is inherently exciting. Indeed, studying the history of psychoactive substances has at least two existential benefits. First, it reveals the mundane mechanisms of, for instance, trade relations and religious practice that alter the destiny of socially taboo objects. Second, studying this same history can shine a black light on familiar topics, making interpretations of the Cold War or Islamic insurgency more extraordinary. Unfortunately, I cannot recommend *Shooting Up*, as it accomplishes neither task well. Kamienski's main argument is that soldiers have taken drugs throughout history to move past their own instinctual opposition to killing for a cause; he terms such chemical solutions to evolutionary and psychological roadblocks “smashed rationality” (p. xxiv). But Kamienski attempts to write the history of an ahistorical claim. By overemphasizing the conflicts of instinct versus alchemy, sober versus altered states, he misses more illuminating questions that take us further than another portrait of the addict.

Kamienski's ostensible task is to show the history of drugs in war; however, his larger aim is to suggest the parallel narcoses of drugs *and* war. As Kamienski might contend, war is unnatural to the human condition, and getting fucked up is a precondition for killing in the service of one's tribe, religion, or nation-state. Thus, his main vehicle for describing smashed rationality are the drug takers themselves and their observers. *Shooting Up* tackles smashed rationality and the drug takers who kill, across three parts, bookended with a meaty preface and prologue and an even meatier conclusion and epilogue. Each chapter is dedicated to a specific war or type of warrior. The preface and prologue lay out the method—what he vaguely defines as “social constructivist” and “‘interpretivist’ epistemology” (p. xxv)—and his argument about smashed rationality. Part 1 is an amuse-bouche—tantalizing but unsatisfying. At breakneck speed, he serves up the medieval, mushroom-eating Vikings and Siberian warriors of northern Europe, the opium addicts of the nineteenth-century Chinese imperial forces, and the amphetamine-blasted US airmen of World War II, among other subjects, into a single section. Part 2 is devoted to the Cold War, and in this section Kamienski presents his most compelling, and well-paced, work. He recounts experiments with LSD and other pharmaceuticals in the US Army

Chemical Corps, the Vietnam War-era heroin epidemic, and the Soviet Army's concern over opiate-addicted soldiers in Afghanistan. In part 3, Kamienski surveys recent experiences with drugs in war, including speed-freak Islamic terrorists, the child soldiers in Sierra Leone and Liberia turned onto meth and crack, and the US Air Force's continued drug seeking for a pharmaceutical alternative to sleep. His epilogue and conclusion extend smashed rationality to subjects adjacent to warfare in the recent past, which Kamienski believes are themselves narcotics by another name: industrialization, nationalism, communism, and liberalism. After reading the conclusion and epilogue, one wonders whether his target all along was something vaguely answering to "modernity." He certainly seems to believe so.

Before I expand on my criticisms of *Shooting Up*, I would like to acknowledge its accomplishments. First, Kamienski has undertaken a sprawling subject, one that involves covering much ground in time and space. A history of the world, or rather the world's wars, is a daunting task. Second, his attempt to show us an underbelly of war, that of drugs and drug taking, suggests that drug taking has been much more prevalent than we have supposed. This is all the more convincing when we compare the army's obsession with heroin users in the late 1960s with the past. Put another way, Kamienski shows how getting high was no more unique to heroin-using US soldiers in Vietnam than opium was to nineteenth-century Chinese warriors, or mushrooms were to medieval Viking berserkers. Third, his chapters on the Cold War suggest an imaginative attempt to recount the psychoactive residues of the war on communism and latter-day war communism. His all too brief section on experimentation with LSD at the army's Edgewood Arsenal in Aberdeen, Maryland, after World War II is worth reading, if only to generate more questions on how the US armed forces acquired enlisted and incarcerated research subjects alike, and how university scien-

tists built their careers, and the military-industrial complex, with literal drug money. Far out.

In spite of these accomplishments, *Shooting Up* is a one-trick pony. Rather than dive deeply into one period or place to plumb, for example, the making of research protocols for lab subjects in the Cold War Army Chemical Corps, Kamienski hammers readers with example after example of junked-out soldiers. Troops are either unknowing dupes or drug-addicted PTSD victims of BIG WAR. In his attempt to reify the history of an ahistorical claim—he argues himself and through interlocutors that humans possess an instinctual opposition to warfare—his attention fixates on drug users to the detriment of a more satisfying look at, for instance, the growth of the Chemical Corps through research on psychoactive substances. One could contend that Kamienski's superficial treatment of drugs in war results from the predictable trap of anything called a "short history." I would argue, instead, that Kamienski trapped himself into trying to prove his claim that war is unnatural, using a history of the world's junkies-in-uniform as his evidence. It's no huge surprise that soldiers have used drugs for all manner of reasons, from boredom, to socialization, to trauma, to improved efficiency. However, as Angela Garcia, an anthropologist, has quite convincingly shown in her own work on drug control and rehabilitation in the US Southwest (*The Pastoral Clinic: Addiction and Dispossession along the Rio Grande* ([2010])), our attention to drug takers is important, but the myriad social relationships that foster both drug use and sobriety are equally important. For the history of the military, then, the history of drug taking is best served by looking beyond drug takers, subjects who have already earned their share of often fetishized scholarly interest. Instead, we need to look more closely at people, departments, and agencies adjacent to the battlefield and on the home front.

Kamienski has suggested how the history of drugs in warfare can be an exciting avenue for in-

tersecting research—especially between military historians, medical historians, and sociologists of science and technology studies. Regrettably, *Shooting Up* is a cul-de-sac.

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