

members of the war council who gave their approval are given scant consideration. It is not sufficient, as the author does, merely to state (p. 238) that they 'approved it unanimously'. Such a viewpoint, moreover, is unsupported in light of all the documents now available to historians. Additionally, while the strategic and military justifications for the decision are reviewed, there is little mention and no analysis of the myriad political, economic, diplomatic and social factors weighed by the political executive. (Arguably the latter were far more important.) There is no reference either to the various intelligence assessments available to the war council, nor to the contemporaneous talks with the French government over the desirability of simultaneous landings in Syria. In short, Prior's contextualization of the decision making by the strategic executive is far too narrow. The number of factors in the equation was considerably greater and accordingly the strategic situation confronting the war council exponentially more complex than represented here.

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Before My Helpless Sight: Suffering, Dying and Military Medicine on the Western Front. By Leo van Bergen. Farnham, Surrey, U.K.: Ashgate Publishing, 2009. ISBN 978-0-7546-5853-5. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. ix, 528. \$69.95.

The horror of war is at the heart of van Bergen's study of medicine in the Great War, first published in Dutch in 1999. Indeed the book is not so much about military medicine as about the hardships experienced by troops of all nationalities on the Western Front—hardships that were not altogether alleviated by medicine. Van Bergen examines the experience of troops in battle, the effects of trench warfare on their minds and bodies, the limitations of the medical care that they received, and the problems caused by their deaths at a time when there were more corpses than could be disposed of easily. All is documented in graphic detail from the published accounts of the men involved. Yet perhaps what is sorely missing is some of the trench humour that helped men to survive in such conditions. Van Bergen himself envisages war as representing the 'dissolution of the individual human being' (p. 5). Perhaps it could instead be argued that what is heartening about the First World War is the way in which the individual spirit survived mass warfare and came through it, if not unscathed, at least resilient.

Van Bergen sees the role of doctors and nurses as prolonging the horror of conflict. All that mattered was getting men back into combat whatever the consequences for the individual. The military authorities in this interpretation were only interested in economising on immediate medical care and saving on the future costs of war pensions. Medicine in wartime is indeed geared towards military efficiency, but that involved more than just patching up those fit to fight another day or manufacture the munitions of war without regard to their suffering. Indeed it might alternatively be argued that without medicine the horror of disease and wounds would have been far worse for the individual soldier. The published war diaries of the Harvard neurolo-

gist Harvey Cushing are surprisingly not cited directly in this book, yet show that humanitarian motives and research interests are not antagonistic aims. For van Bergen the use of large magnets to remove metal fragments from the brain by the German surgeon August Bier amounted to wanton experimentation, though his failures led him to advocate the protective use of the steel helmet (p. 343); Cushing was using a similar method as a means of dealing with a new problem more successfully and his own writings show that altruism and the welfare of the injured was what motivated him, not merely an abstract passion for research and innovation at any cost. Indeed many of the new procedures and methods devised in frontline conditions later were to be of value in civilian medicine.

This book is very much a work of synthesis rather than of originality. Van Bergen does not deny this and indeed declares that his work is 'not the result of weeks or months spent in dark bunkers and damp cellars, leafing through old documents page by mildewed page' (p. 1). Not only has he deprived himself of much of the excitement and challenge of such original research, but perhaps it might have been better for this book had he done so, rather than sometimes using secondary sources to quote primary sources with the result that these quotations almost become second hand. His account of the course of the war on the Western Front is very much derived from familiar popular accounts, such as those for the general reader by Martin Gilbert and John Terraine, which often results in a British bias to the story retold in the book, which van Bergen himself freely acknowledges. Yet the great strength of this book lies in its use of less familiar Belgian material that is often more inaccessible to the English-speaking reader because it is written in Dutch. Much of the war was fought in Flanders, yet we hear a great deal more from British, American, French and German voices than from the Dutch-speaking witnesses for whom the battlefields had once represented home. The translation of this book from Dutch into English is to be welcomed for making available a Belgian viewpoint on the Great War. It is an accessible and engrossing, if at times gruesome and grim, read.

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Unknown Soldiers: The American Expeditionary Forces in Memory & Remembrance. Edited by Mark A. Snell. Kent, O.: Kent State University Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-87338-940-2. Illustrations. Notes. Index. Pp. xvi, 274. \$34.95.

There has been a good deal written about unknown soldiers in the past decade or so, among the best accounts of which I would claim to be Jay Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Cambridge University Press, 1995. And there have been other works addressing the French and the American experiences with the memorial process. These, coupled with Professor Snell's Preface, led me to believe this would be the focus of this book but it isn't quite the case. The title and the contents diverge almost immediately and continued to disorient me throughout the reading. Of all the personalities mentioned by the vari-