

Naval War College Review

Volume 52
Number 2 *Spring*

Article 24

1999

The Great War 1914-18

Milan S. Sturgis

Spencer C. Tucker

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Sturgis, Milan S. and Tucker, Spencer C. (1999) "The Great War 1914-18," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 52 : No. 2 , Article 24.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol52/iss2/24>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

170 Naval War College Review

food for further thought and investigation.

JOHN B. HATTENDORF
Naval War College

Tucker, Spencer C. *The Great War 1914-18*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1998. 272pp. \$16.95

Spencer Tucker has taken on the extraordinary task of chronicling the first Great War of this century in one short volume. Tucker is the John Biggs Professor of Military History at Virginia Military Institute and has to his credit the general editorship of *The European Powers in the First World War: An Encyclopedia*. His background is obvious in the structure of this book and the fashion in which he approaches the topic. The chapters are conveniently divided by year, starting with 1914 and progressing to the armistice of 1918. One advantage of addressing the war in this fashion is the linear progression of escalation on all sides, as the initial objectives and estimates became increasingly unattainable.

Tucker begins his study with background on the revolution in military affairs that occurred at the end of the nineteenth century and exploded during the first decade of the twentieth century. These developments in technology demonstrate the impact that technological strides have, not only on the way in which war is conducted, but also on the very decisions that would tempt states into pursuing war as a viable foreign policy option. In the background discussion Tucker focuses on the culpability of the Dual Monarchy and Germany in initiating this conflict.

He makes reference to prominent German historians such as Fritz Fischer, who places the blame on the unyielding attitudes of Austria-Hungary and Germany. Tucker chronicles the ambitious objectives that were designed by both the allied and Central powers. Once again the format that Tucker chooses demonstrates the digression of strategy in the first months of the war, as neither side was accomplishing the objectives of what they had seen as a war that would last only six weeks. In the next chapters Tucker goes to great length to describe the stalemate that ensued after the opening movements by the opposing land forces. What is striking in his account are the numbers of casualties sustained by all forces during the years 1915 and 1916. The account of battle of Verdun in 1916, followed by the battle of the Somme, is especially telling in the current environment of surgical strikes and minimal casualties. In the Somme the British suffered over fifty-seven thousand casualties in one day, with over nineteen thousand of those dying in battle or of their wounds. These facts are well known to all historians of this period, but Tucker has successfully woven these statistics with a readable narrative to give the reader a general overview of the conduct of the war on the battlefield.

The drawback to such a format is the exclusion of the political and societal dynamics that manifested themselves on the battlefield in the form of objectives and campaigns. Battlefield strategy is never developed in a vacuum, and progressing in a yearly format with the focus on developments in the field to the exclusion of concurrent foreign policy gives the reader only one

dynamic in the war's prosecution. To be fair, however, it is nearly impossible to do otherwise in one volume, which leads one to the question of whether it should be attempted at all or left to the books of World War I that already occupy our shelves. Although he does not contribute any new material in this work, Tucker does present a concise, though limited, account of World War I. This work of history is not for the fainthearted, nor should one expect to curl up with it in front of a fire. It serves only as a general overview and reference. All periods of history should be continually revisited; however this work is not for that purpose. Rather, it serves as a reaffirmation of our respect for that which preceded us, and as a warning not to repeat the same mistakes.

MILAN S. STURGIS
Lieutenant Commander
CHIC, U.S. Navy

Bruhn, David D. *Ready to Answer All Bells: A Blueprint for Successful Naval Engineering*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1997. 178pp. \$22.95

In the surface navy, orders to a ship as the engineer officer are often received with apprehension. Many recognize the engineering department head position as the most difficult and challenging tour of a junior officer's career. In order to help the newly arrived engineer officer, David Bruhn, an experienced surface naval officer with several afloat engineering department tours to his credit, has attempted to write an overview of what an engineering officer's job truly

involves. It is highlighted with his personal examples of successful practices, as well as those of several others. Bruhn states that his purpose in writing this book is to provide a philosophy to help one lead and manage an engineering department, to shorten the "learning curve" by exposing the new engineer to fleet experience. Although the material is thoughtful and offers the reader a look into the world of "the hole," it falls short in providing a philosophy for success.

Although advertised as a "blueprint," the book centers only on preparing for inspections rather than providing a coherent strategy for operational success. Someone unfamiliar with the duties of naval engineers may conclude that their lives are nothing more than one examination after the next. Also, the author uses ambiguous terms such as "PEB (Propulsion Examining Board) standards" and "good engineering practices" without providing adequate definitions. He pays little attention to how the new officer should organize the engineering department and how best to use enlisted leadership to set the standards and how to define what those standards are. Most importantly, while Bruhn does provide a framework for preparing the department for the interdeployment evaluation cycle, he does not discuss how to build a leadership team necessary for success.

Bruhn does a good job of familiarizing one with what to expect from the interdeployment schedule, as well as some good ideas on how to succeed during assessments. In this respect the work may serve as a useful primer.

J. TODD BLACK
Lieutenant Commander, U.S. Navy