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Smoke ’Em If You Got ’Em: The Rise and Fall of the Military Cigarette Ration

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“countering violent extremism” efforts often consist of milquetoast declarations that violence and extremism are bad.

Watts could not mess so personally with the Kremlin, but he was among the earliest voices warning of Russian social-media-influence operations. The book details Russian support to pro-Assad trolls and hackers in 2011, then an exponential increase in Russian actions targeting the United States after the occupation of Crimea in 2014. Russia-linked sources promoted all manner of conspiracy theories, extremist ideologies, racial animosity, and negative news stories. Watts’s description of the 2016 Russian efforts to help Trump specifically may be old news in the wake of the Mueller report, but the book places the 2016 election story within the proper context of a much larger Russian campaign predating Trump.

The book’s title promises survival tips for a new world of online adversaries. Watts has some logical policy suggestions, but their implementation is unlikely politically, so one comes away pessimistic. For individuals, Watts encourages readers to think critically, read widely, and vet sources. Someone motivated enough to read the book might follow that advice, but effecting widespread social change will be very difficult. Ideas such as content “trust” ratings on social media sites quickly run into issues with the First Amendment, the power of tech companies, and the ability of seductive bad content to migrate to new platforms. Watts has justifiably harsh words for the federal government’s social media outreach and its cumbersome bureaucracy and contracting rules. How one might scale up the expertise of street-smart iconoclasts such as Mr. Watts is unclear, however. In fairness, Watts does not claim to have easy solutions (however confident he is of his own talents). He recognizes that the fundamental problem is with us, not our adversaries. So long as American society is polarized, distrustful, and weak in critical thinking, enemies will have ample opportunity to mess with us.

DAVID T. BURBACH

Smoke ’Em If You Got ’Em: The Rise and Fall of the Military Cigarette Ration, by Joel R. Bius. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2018. 328 pages. $39.95.

As a child living on Army posts during the Vietnam War, I noticed that most interior spaces had a distinctive, common odor. I later realized that what I thought of as “Army building smell” was actually the odiferous residue of thousands of smoked cigarettes, coupled with gallons of pine-scented cleaning products. The “soldier-cigarette bond” and the historical ubiquity of smoking within the U.S. military—particularly the Army—constitute the subject of Joel R. Bius’s *Smoke ’Em If You Got ’Em: The Rise and Fall of the Military Cigarette Ration*. His book charts the “rise and entrenchment of [the] soldier-cigarette bond from 1918 to 1945” before turning to its “demise and dislodgement . . . from 1973 to 1986” (p. 2).

Bius and the Naval Institute Press should be commended for producing this well-written and -researched work of political and cultural history. Additional credit is due to Matt Simmons for an exceptionally striking and clever cover design.

Smoke ’Em If You Got ’Em explains well the military’s role “in establishing and entrenching” an American

"cigarette-smoking culture" (p. 3). The Great War catalyzed cigarette consumption and production within the United States. Prior to that war, factory-made cigarettes—a still-new product favored primarily by women—accounted for less than 10 percent of tobacco consumption. However, cigarettes proved to be an invaluable adaptogen, valued by soldiers for their ability to soothe nerves and mask the stench of trench warfare. Eventually recognizing these morale-enhancing effects, the U.S. Army began to include free cigarettes as part of a soldier's daily ration in June 1918. Free government-issued cigarettes would continue as an integral part of a soldier's ration until 1973. As a result, cigarette smoking became an American habit, reaching "staggering levels after WWI" (p. 59).

This soldier-cigarette bond legitimized cigarette smoking as a marker of patriotic masculinity. Cigarettes quickly became so popular among all Americans that by the time of the Second World War smoking was "as much a part of American culture as baseball or apple pie" (p. 65). While the Great War's daily ration was four cigarettes, soldiers in the Second World War were "authorized anywhere from twelve to twenty-eight free cigarettes per day" (p. 73). Cigarettes had become such "an essential part of the WWII soldiers' routine" (p. 64) that cigarette production and distribution constituted "a vital warfighting issue of strategic consequence" (p. 62). Bius details the ensuing political wrangling over tobacco crop subsidies, home-front shortages, and hoarding that threatened this now strategically vital resource.

Cigarette smoking—widespread among civilians and the military alike during the Second World War—continued after the war. Bius describes how during this period the "cigarette had essentially become an appendage on men's bodies" (p. 89). In fact, in 1950, 80 percent of American men smoked, tobacco was the nation's fourth-largest cash crop, and 3.5 percent of consumer spending on nondurable goods went toward the purchase of cigarettes (p. 88).

Bius's narrative then fast-forwards to 1973 and the post-Vietnam establishment of the all-volunteer force. That same year, Congress abolished free cigarette rations as a cost-cutting measure. Soldiers continued to smoke. Bius argues that it took growing health concerns about smoking, coupled with rising health-care costs associated with an all-volunteer military, eventually to sever the soldier-cigarette bond. A 1986 Department of Defense report on smoking and health in the military and ensuing antitobacco initiatives sought to curtail smoking dramatically within the military. Bius claims that these efforts were so successful that by "1986 cigarette smoking among the military ranks . . . dwindled" to a rate no higher than that of the larger civilian population (p. 207).

Smoke 'Em If You Got 'Em creates the impression that the soldier-cigarette bond remains severed; I'm not so sure. The antitobacco "Truth Initiative" (www.truthinitiative.org) reports that military personnel continue to smoke at rates notably higher than civilians. Moreover, while *overall* rates of *cigarette* smoking have declined within both populations, use of both smokeless tobacco and e-cigarettes has surged within the military. This is especially true among deployed soldiers and Marines. Even Bius recognizes the persistence of the soldier-cigarette bond—at least in wartime; in a footnote, he observes that

it has been his "personal experience" that "smoking rates among military officers and enlisted personnel deployed to combat zones such as Iraq or Afghanistan increase dramatically" (p. 273).

While *Smoke 'Em If You Got 'Em* excels in telling the story of the rise of cigarettes within the U.S. military, it fizzles out in describing its purported fall. It is true that Uncle Sam no longer issues free cigarettes—the cigarette *ration* has fallen away. However, it would seem that the soldier-*nicotine* bond continues. Indeed, according to Bius himself, "when it comes to the soldier and the cigarette (or pipe, or cigarillo, or cigar)"—to which I would add chewing tobacco or vaped nicotine—"some things never change" (p. 273).

BRAD CARTER

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