

**Sanders Marble, ed. *King of Battle: Artillery in World War I*. Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2016. ISBN 978-90-04-30524-3. Pp. xii, 396. Hardback, €157.00/ \$209.00.**

Artillery was the dominant element on the battlefield during the First World War. It was, for the most part, the attacking soldier's principal obstacle, but also the key in breaking the stalemate on the battlefield. Yet, as Sanders Marble notes, there has been 'little coverage' of the artillery in this war, and 'even less of that is international comparative history' (p.vii). The collection of essays in *King of Battle* succeeds in starting to fill this gap.

The edited volume follows two key trends in recent academic scholarship on the First World War. The first is that there has been a shift in emphasis away from the Western Front and towards other theatres, including the Eastern, Italian, and Turkish Fronts.<sup>1</sup> Marble's own chapter on the British artillery compares the British Expeditionary Force on the Western Front with other British armies in the Middle East. Secondly, and as a consequence of the first trend, English-language works on the First World War are covering other combatants and adopting comparative approaches between different armies, although Marble is right to state that there is still a need for more of the latter. Brill's *History of Warfare* series has produced a number of monographs examining multi-national aspects of the war, and *King of Battle*, complements this well.<sup>2</sup>

The coverage of *King of Battle* is impressive and includes analyses of twelve combatants (if one counts the Indian Army separately). The book starts with a useful introductory chapter from Bruce Gudmundsson outlining artillery types and technicalities. Following this are essays on the principal armies on the Western Front: the British, French, and German armies. The book then branches out to other combatants. These are Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, the Ottoman Empire, Italy, Serbia, Russia, the United States, India, and Romania. Each chapter contains technical information about different guns, artillery doctrine before and during the war, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> This is exemplified in, for example, Jonathan Krause (ed.), *The Greater War: Other Combatants and Other Fronts, 1914-1918* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Joachim Bürgschwentner, Matthias Egger & Gunda Barth-Scalmani (eds.), *Other Fronts, Other Wars? First World War Studies on the Eve of the Centennial* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> For example, Bürgschwentner, Egger & Barth-Scalmani (eds.), *Other Fronts, Other Wars?*

examinations into operational performance and tactical development.

Four key common themes about Great War artillery during the war emerge from the essays. The first is the continual and rapid innovation in guns and tactics. Most combatants during early battles deployed artillery in a supporting role to the infantry attack, emphasised direct fire, and deployed lighter field artillery while neglecting heavy artillery. Most combatants also quickly realised that they needed more heavy guns, began to emphasise indirect fire rather than direct fire, develop new intelligence gathering techniques, and co-ordinate their artillery more effectively. There was some variation in the pace of innovation between nations. James Lyon highlights that Serbia started off as the nation displaying the most foresight as it valued heavy guns and had already discovered many of these lessons during the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913. Nevertheless, the Germans, French, British, and Russians were key innovators during the war, and Gudmundsson's chapter on the French particularly emphasises the 'revolution in the realm of transportation' and the increasing French use of motor transport (p.100). However, while this chapter focused on technical developments, there could have been more in this book on French tactical experimentation and innovation during the early trench battles.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, resources played a key role. Most nations were hampered by a lack of heavy artillery at the start of the war. Despite its tactical knowledge and skills, Lyon shows that Serbia was ultimately constrained by its lack of production capacity and Austro-Hungarian numerical superiority. Some armies could not demonstrate their full potential, as they only mastered new tactics just when artillery and ammunition supplies had seriously deteriorated. This was the case with the Austro-Hungarian army, as John R. Schindler explains. Insufficient resources also reduced the prominence of artillery in specific theatres. For example, limited resources affected artillery support for both the British Imperial and Ottoman sides in the Turkish theatre.

The next theme is the role of terrain. Mountainous terrain, for example the Carpathian and Italian theatres, particularly hindered the artillery, especially in intelligence gathering and communications, as Schindler shows in the latter case. Furthermore, artillery did not play as prominent role in some theatres, and Kaushik Roy is right to remind us that 'it would be erroneous to accept the structure of combat in the

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Jonathan Krause, *Early Trench Tactics in the French Army: The Second Battle of Artois, May - June 1915* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

Western Front as the only paradigm of war' (p. 322). As Roy explains, terrain hampered artillery deployment in East Africa, while logistical problems hindered it in Mesopotamia. Direct fire continued to have utility in these theatres as well. Lastly, the book covers to some extent the interactions and knowledge transfers between the different combatants. For example, the Germans supported and improved Ottoman tactics. Serbia gained inspiration from Russian doctrine. The scope to cover this theme in this book is inevitably limited, but it is an aspect that would benefit from more research and scholarship.

The final chapter by Boyd Dastrup provides a good, succinct summary of the development of guns, artillery tactics, and armies' transition from emphasising direct fire to indirect fire. He also compares the artillery of the French, German, and British armies. The conclusion would have felt more complete had there been more inclusion of some of the other combatants as well. Nevertheless, given that each chapter cover similar themes, it is not difficult for readers to make such comparisons themselves.

*King of Battle* provides an important contribution to our understanding of First World War operational history. Marble does us a great service in assembling these essays together and illuminating this critical component of the early-twentieth century battlefield. Students new to the First World War and established scholars alike will obtain something of value from reading and engaging with this fascinating and wide-ranging book.

**Christopher Newton**  
**Independent Scholar**