

Krüger, Christine G.; Levsen, Sonja (Hrsg.): *War Volunteering in Modern Times. From the French Revolution to the Second World War*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2010. ISBN: 978-0-23022-805-4; 297 S.

Rezensiert von: Niklas Frykman, History Department, Claremont McKenna College

It is peculiar that a volume of this nature should be necessary. After all, photographs of fresh-faced, jubilant volunteers waving rifles, flowers, and flags, marching off into the industrialized mass slaughter of World War I belong to the twentieth-century's most eerily familiar stock images. But as this collection of essays makes clear, the use of such photographs to illustrate the terrifying power and tragedy of belligerent European nationalism in fact has little grounding in empirical research. For as Christine Krüger and Sonja Levsen point out, we know surprisingly little about the men (and even less about the few women) who volunteered for military service in either World War I or any of the other wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In contrast to the attention they have lavished on conscripts, conscientious objectors, and deserters, historians have been „relatively indifferent“ (p. 1) to the quintessentially modern phenomenon of war volunteering. The fifteen essays collected here serve as a useful introduction to some of the key questions that need to be addressed in order to rectify that failure.

The volume opens with an introduction by the editors, in which they briefly summarize a few common themes. They draw attention to three issues in particular. First, and perhaps most pressingly, several authors probe the role patriotism actually played in the decision to volunteer for wartime service. While this discussion does not result in the wholesale demolition of the myth of the deliriously patriotic war volunteer (whose creation and subsequent career Thomas Hippler and Ruth Leiserowitz chronicle in their respective contributions), it usefully complicates and historicizes it nonetheless. Leighton James, for instance, demonstrates that a particular kind of morbid, masculine patriotism indeed played an important role in motivating German volunteers in the wars against Napoleon, but a role

that was often secondary and supplementary to a lust for martial adventure among middle class youth or the need simply to make a living amongst the sons of the peasantry and urban working class. Alexander Watson, in his original contribution combining quantitative and qualitative data to compare German and British volunteering in World War I, confirms James' emphasis on the importance of material incentives, and further adds that to the extent that patriotism had a role it was usually experienced as defensive in nature. Communities on various societal levels – families, neighborhoods, workplaces, cities, regions, and nations – were thought to be under serious threat by an aggressive external force, and it was the duty of fathers, brothers, sons, colleagues, friends, citizens, and subjects to step forward in their defense. Rüdiger Bergien suggests that even German far-right militias of the inter-war years are best understood from that perspective.

That sense of duty to protect the hearth could carry men very far from home indeed. Stephen Miller shows that British men turned out in droves to volunteer for the South African War, and so did hundreds of Frenchmen, Dutch, Germans, Scandinavians, Russians, Italians, Americans, and Irishmen to fight against them on the side of the Boers, according to Fransjohan Pretorius. This phenomenon of men volunteering to serve under a flag that is not their own forms the editors' second area of emphasis. The contributions collected here focus in particular on men who volunteered to serve not just in foreign, but in extremely nationalistic and even racist forces, such as the already mentioned Boer armies, as well as Franco's forces in the Spanish Civil War, and Spain's Blue Division and Germany's Waffen-SS in World War Two (Judith Keene, Jean-Luc Leleu, and Xosé-Manoel Núñez Seixas respectively). It does not come as a surprise that this ultranationalist transnational cooperation was riddled with tension, but the extent to which it even occurred very much does, however. For even when no extreme ideologies were involved, the suspicion of divided loyalties generated extraordinarily high levels of anxiety, as Axel Jansen shows in his chapter on the memorialization of Harvard students who

volunteered for service in World War One before their country had officially joined the conflict.

A peculiar case of foreign volunteering is that of Irishmen fighting in the Union army during the American Civil War, which as Michael Hochgeschwender explains in part served the purpose of placing their demand for civic inclusion in their newly adopted nation beyond question. This use of volunteering for civic advancement is the third common theme the editors wish to highlight. As Hochgeschwender's chapter, as well as Matthias Speidel's on African-American volunteers in the Spanish-American War and Jutta Schwarzkopf's on British female volunteers in World War Two make clear, however, it was a strategy that largely failed, despite a significant blood sacrifice.

Taken together, the essays collected here do not offer ground-breaking or even in most cases very surprising conclusions, but given the paucity of broadly comparative studies of the phenomenon of modern war volunteering they do the important work of mapping out the basic lay of the land. Some opportunities were nonetheless missed. Several authors, for instance, employ so-called „ego-documents“ (letters, diaries, memoirs, and the like) to study the motivations that drove volunteers, yet they rarely succeed in bringing the reader close to their conflicted, complicated subjects. It is all very well – and very interesting – to posit that these men overwhelmingly adhered to a defensive form of patriotism, but without presenting compelling, first-hand evidence (which for the wars of the twentieth-century certainly is abundant) it remains little more than a hypothesis. At the same time, most chapters are relatively short, eleven or twelve pages plus endnotes, and there is of course only so much one can do, especially as most authors make an effort to include a historiographical overview as well as briefly sketch their particular historical context.

In conclusion, *War Volunteering in Modern Times* opens up a curiously understudied subject and introduces the reader to some of its most pressing questions. It is unlikely to find much classroom use – the price alone will disqualify it – but for specialists in related fields it offers a convenient entry point.

The book is edited with care, includes an index, but unfortunately no cumulative bibliography.

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