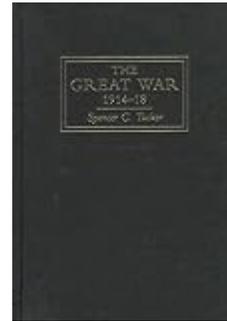




Spencer C. Tucker. *The Great War 1914-1918*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998. xx + 288 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-21171-2; \$44.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-33372-8.



Reviewed by David Imhoof (University of Texas-Austin)

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This packed, encyclopedic military history offers both a clear overview and detailed narrative of military and diplomatic events of the First World War. Tucker is particularly strong when describing the fighting, assessing motivations behind individual tactical decisions, and analyzing the wider impact of specific battles. His analysis of how technology influenced the war and its outcome is also particularly insightful. The book synthesizes a wide range of secondary material and memoirs. Five chapters comprise the bulk of the narrative, each addressing one year of conflict. A background chapter tackles the thorny question of what prompted this international slaughter, and three concluding ones examine non-European theaters of war, home fronts, and the disastrous concluding peace. The beautiful maps and fifteen-page bibliography (organized into general histories, national histories, causes, theaters of battle, types of warfare, diplomacy, and reference works) make this book a valuable guide to small details and large issues. Tucker takes apart the image of never-ending trench warfare and helps the reader understand the fighting by dividing the action into theaters, battles, and even individual movements of less than a day. He likewise outlines the war's immediate and long-term impact on virtually every nation or group of people involved in the European fighting, touching on issues like geopolitics, ideology, and women's role in society.

This book's enormous detail and schematic set-up, however, may make it less than useful for undergraduates and non-military historians. Tucker's overview succinctly describes the volatile mixture of diplomacy, imperialism, technological advancement, nationalism, and social tension that sparked World War I (although it adds nothing new to what John Langdon has recently called this "long debate"). [1] But parts of the book chop the action and analysis up too finely. While small sections describing individual battles make it easy to locate and study specific events, this format makes reading those chapters difficult. Similarly, Tucker's concise assessment of political and diplomatic changes brought on by the war in so many countries comes across as listing. In this regard he misses an opportunity to sum up the war's effects as well as he describes its causes. Nevertheless, this book manages to convey a great deal of military, diplomatic, and high political information in an economic fashion. Anyone interested in the Great War and its aftermath will find plenty here that goes a long way toward explaining what the war was about, why it happened, and what it meant.

NOTES

[1]. John Langdon, *July 1914. The long debate, 1918-1990* (New York: St. Martins, 1991).

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