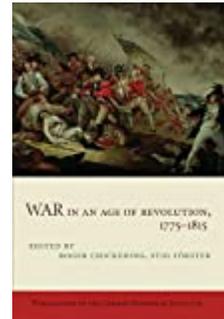




Roger Chickering, Stig Förster. *War in an Age of Revolution, 1775-1815.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 422 S. \$85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-89996-3.



Reviewed by Niklas Frykman

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (July, 2011)

R. Chickering u.a. (Hrsg.): *War in an Age of Revolution, 1775-1815*

It is not uncommon for historians searching for the roots of the total warfare that tore apart Europe in the twentieth century to arrive, sooner or later, at the great conflicts of the revolutionary era. Here, after all, we find the gentlemanly, limited warfare of the eighteenth century abandoned in favor of centrally directed national war efforts, ideologically-fired mass citizen armies using new battlefield tactics that aimed for decisive victories and the destruction of the enemy, single clashes that produced massive, mind-numbing casualty figures, and long-term military occupation of foreign lands, the emergence of guerilla warfare and vicious counter-insurgency operations that evolved into exterminative campaigns against civilian populations. In short, so it seems, the great age of revolution not only ushered in political modernity throughout the north Atlantic world, but also the age of modern, merciless warfare as its pendant.

Or did it? The contributors to the present volume, the sixth in a series of conference proceedings dedicated to the rise and reign of total warfare from the 1860s through to the 1940s, are not so sure. Stig Förster / Jörg Nagler (eds.), *On the Road to Total War.* The American Civil

War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871, Cambridge 1997; Manfred Boemeke / Roger Chickering / Stig Förster (eds.), *Anticipating Total War. The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914,* Cambridge 1999; Roger Chickering / Stig Förster (eds.), *Great War, Total War. Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1918,* Cambridge 2000; Roger Chickering / Stig Förster (eds.), *The Shadows of Total War. Europe, East Asia, and the United States, 1919-1939,* Cambridge 2003; Roger Chickering / Stig Förster / Bernd Greiner (eds.), *The World at Total War. Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1945,* Cambridge 2005. The essays collected in Part I, "Perspectives on a Military History of the Revolutionary Era", all propose that perhaps it is more fruitful to see the period as one of acceleration and expansion rather than innovation. Azar Gat and Stig Förster, the former writing on the "military revolution" debate and the latter on the wars of the revolutionary era as the first world war, both downplay the idea of decisive breaks and instead emphasize long-term developments in state-building, inter-imperial rivalry, and overseas commerce. Beatrice Heuser and Günther Kronenbitter each go on to focus on the writings of key the-

orizers of the new age of warfare, the Comte de Guibert and Friedrich Gentz respectively, while Ute Planert and Dierk Walter discuss the French and Prussian war efforts. Overall, these authors suggest, important changes did take place during the revolutionary decades, notably in the scale of warfare, but these ought not to be exaggerated. Many apparent innovations, such as the idea of citizen armies, had roots in earlier centuries and others were quickly rolled back, such as the French *levée en masse* or the Prussian *Landsturm*.

Opening Part II, "The Growing Dimensions of Battle," Timothy J. Shannon underlines that the exterminative drive central to the modern understanding of total warfare already was evident in the conflicts between Native Americans and European invaders in the seventeenth century, though its intensity grew dramatically during the Sixty Years War for the Ohio Valley. Likewise, Matthew C. Ward shows that American militias during the revolutionary war pioneered the tactics that two decades later would become known as *la petite guerre* or *guerilla*, to which Michael Broers and John Lawrence Tone each devote their respective chapters. The former, in particular, is wonderfully suggestive about the connections between popular resistance to the modernizing drive of the French occupation force and the development of Italian nineteenth-century anti-statism. Alan Forrest, in his chapter on French military logistics, similarly underlines the link between massive resource extraction, popular resistance, and even greater state interference in local economies, first in France and then abroad. This destructive dynamic eventually grew to such monstrous proportions that the problem of keeping the army supplied in itself became the engine for further conquest. In contrast, Jeremy Black shows in his chapter on the Royal Navy, the only one in the entire volume dedicated to the war at sea, that Britain managed to combine the war effort and economic growth into a mutually reinforcing relationship. This in itself, however, echoing the dominant theme of many of the essays collected here, was not a novelty of the late eighteenth century, though its sheer scale certainly was.

Part III finally, "Civil Institutions and the Growing Scope of War," is something of a grab-bag, including essays on the role of the people in general as well as of

slaves in particular during the American revolutionary war (by T.H. Breen and Jörg Nagler, respectively), on French debates over the *levée en masse* (by Wolfgang Kruse), on religion in revolutionary Alsace (by Donatus Dörsterhaus), a fascinating analysis of the diverging patterns of martial masculinity in France and Prussia (by Karen Hagemann), a comparative study of the defense of Baltimore and Washington during the War of 1812 (by Marion Breunig), a survey of the impact of economic warfare on Scandinavia (by Katherine B. Aaslestad), and a critical reading of British war-time poetry (by Mary A. Favret).

It is not immediately apparent how the diverse scholarship represented here contributes to a better understanding of total warfare or, more specifically, of the industrialized warfare of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and a concluding chapter reflecting on that question would have been welcome. But for the historian of the revolutionary era this is a rich and stimulating collection of essays. It is especially gratifying to see historians from five different countries successfully collaborating on a project, as they have done here (Switzerland and Israel are represented by one author each, while the remaining eighteen are fairly evenly divided between the UK, US, and Germany). And yet, peculiarly, the volume's geographical limitations are quite grating. It is, for instance, most surprising that hardly a mention is made of the Latin American Wars for Independence and more surprising still that the Haitian Revolution is completely ignored (never mind its military connections to Africa). After all, there hardly can be a better example of total warfare if by that we mean the complete mobilization of a society's resources in a struggle to the death. Nor is there likely to be a clearer precursor to the genocidal warfare of the twentieth century than France's final doomed attempt to win back the "pearl of the Antilles" by systematically exterminating the rebel population. The failure to include Haiti in the discussion is therefore puzzling.

Even so, readers will find *Warfare in an Age of Revolution, 1775-1815* a useful survey of the state of our knowledge. The volume contains footnotes and an index, but unfortunately no cumulative bibliography. It is riddled with distracting typos, which given its hefty price is a little disappointing.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

Citation: Niklas Frykman. Review of Chickering, Roger; Förster, Stig, *War in an Age of Revolution, 1775-1815*.

H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. July, 2011.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=33804>

Copyright © 2011 by H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved. This work may be copied and redistributed for non-commercial, educational purposes, if permission is granted by the author and usage right holders. For permission please contact H-SOZ-U-KULT@H-NET.MSU.EDU.