



Ian Senior. *Home before the Leaves Fall: A New History of the German Invasion of 1914.* Oxford: Osprey, 2012. 392 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84908-843-5.

**HOME BEFORE
THE LEAVES
FALL**

A New History of the
German Invasion of 1914



Reviewed by Eric H. Haas (SAMS, Command and General Staff College)

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air War College)

Ian Senior, an associate lecturer in the history of art for Open University, offers an interesting examination of the opening campaign of the First World War's western front in his work *Home before the Leaves Fall: A New History of the German Invasion of 1914*. The author presents a focused examination of the Battle of the Marne, specifically highlighting the German and French actions during the start of World War I. Senior uses a chronological examination of the German and French operations as both sides executed their prescribed war plans upon their respective declarations on war. The author concludes the work with a detailed analysis of the opening campaign, as well as a moving postscript that focuses on the role played by individual soldiers in a war traditionally viewed through the lens of the millions killed.

Senior's thesis contends that from its inception, the German war plan, developed by Alfred von Schlieffen but executed by Moltke the Younger, contained insurmountable flaws, due to unsound assumptions and technological capability gaps, which doomed the plan to failure. Senior further states that German reliance on this plan was responsible for the failure of the opening campaign and ensured the Germans' ultimate defeat in 1918. To support this thesis, Senior examines primarily German and French documents, especially journal entries from

participants in the campaign, although more of the author's footnotes trace back to secondary sources than to journals. Senior also specifies that he spends little time examining the British role in the opening campaign due to the British Expeditionary Army's "minor role in the campaign" (p. 14).

Home before the Leaves Fall begins with an examination of the German Schlieffen Plan and the French Plan XVII. Then the work traces the opening of the Marne Campaign and lays out an almost day-by-day account of the German invasion of Belgium and France, which concludes with the German decision to halt the offensive. Senior then conducts a detailed analysis of the campaign and ends the book with an extensive appendix providing the order of battle for all the belligerents. Senior spends the majority of the book focusing on the tactical-level actions of these competing armies, which causes the reader to make a logical jump from the general staff-level conducting of war planning in chapters 1 and 2 to tactical-level maneuver in response to the German invasion of Belgium in chapter 3. Senior would have strengthened his argument with a discussion of the mobilization of all sides and a brief description of the road to war, as this would have resulted in a smoother flow from strategic war planning to operational-level mobilization to tacti-

cal employment of forces.

When the book enters into its day-by-day battle descriptions, Senior does an excellent job using individual accounts to provide the reader with a taste of the soldier's experience. Unfortunately, this does not assist the author in supporting his thesis, as Senior contends it was a flawed strategic plan with deficiencies in the operational-level logistics, technology gaps in mechanization, and damage to the Belgian and French railways that doomed the German maneuver to failure. This raises another issue that the author makes little effort to discuss: the Russian invasion of Prussia from the east and its effect upon the German high command's psyche. Additionally, the examination of the German and French war plans does not offer more than a cursory overview and tends to rely on secondary sources, some questionable, which serves

to undermine Senior's thesis.

Overall, this work provides an interesting study of the day-by-day accounts of French and German soldiers as the First World War progressed. Unfortunately, the author's over-focus on tactical actions results in a disjointed work that attempts to argue that the flaws in the Schlieffen Plan made German defeat inevitable, but pays little attention to the strategic environment (especially in regard to the Russian invasion of German land, which occurred more quickly than the Germans anticipated). Two of the high points of the work are the excellent maps detailing the German and French maneuver and the order of battle appendix in the back of the book. Outside of these features, there is little else that feels new or that expands the body of knowledge currently available on the opening campaign of World War I.

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