

reconnaissance regiment could throw out 60 Staghounds across a two division front — had increased in power and reliability and they were a natural utility and security force to complement any armoured division. Had anti-tank guns been grouped with these units then they might have provided screens that secured (if not exploited) tactical successes and covered preparations for follow-up phases.

10. This version of events is a compelling one in many quarters. Blaming technology for battlefield ineffec-

tiveness eliminates the need for analysis of the human side of events — generalship, leadership, training, morale and so on.

11. Canadians in particular should note that the first-ever work on the Canadian armoured experience is forthcoming in the summer of 1995. John F. Wallace, *Dragons of Steel — Canadian Armour in Two World Wars* (Canada: General Store Publishing, 1995).

Paul Fussell, *Wartime, Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War*

Michael D. Doubler, *Closing With the Enemy, How GIs Fought the War in Europe 1944–1945*

MARTIN KITCHEN

Paul Fussell, *Wartime, Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War*, New York: Oxford University Press), x & 330 pp., illustrations. Paper \$16.50, ISBN 0-19-503797-9.

Michael D. Doubler, *Closing With the Enemy, How GIs Fought the War in Europe 1944–1945*, Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1994, xiv & 354 pp., 11 photographs, 10 maps, 8 figures. U.S. \$40.00, ISBN 0-7006-0675-0.

Paul Fussell, who served as an infantry officer in France where he was seriously wounded, sees the Second World War as a meaningless struggle in which the mindless devotees of “chicken-shit” (or its approximate British equivalent, “bullshit”) sent hundreds of thousands of hapless young men to their deaths. They did not simply get killed, they were blown apart, the battlefield strewn with guts, brains and severed limbs. Soldiers were forced into a dreary uniformity and lost their identities. Their only forms of release were demotic language, cigarettes, drink and frantic masturbation. Life in wartime was mostly numbingly boring but was punctuated by periods of sheer terror in which even seasoned veterans soiled their pants. The military was incompetent, chaotic and wasteful; the normal state of affairs summed up in the acronym SNAFU.

War is indeed ugly and brutal, but the constant repetition of this unpleasant truth soon

becomes tiresome, and for all the lies, cruelty, suffering, hypocrisy, stupidity and vindictiveness, the Allied cause was a just one. The world had to be rid of Nazism, fascism and Japanese imperialism, and the struggle against these evils was far from pointless. In spite of the author's noble sentiments about the horrors of war, his sparkling prose style and his wide-ranging interests, it is not really clear what the book is intended to achieve. Much of what Fussell has to say about the social history of the war has been better said by historians such as John Morton Blum, Angus Calder and Paul Addison. As a study of the literature of the war years, it falls well below the standard set by his earlier study of *The Great War and Modern Memory*. The examination of popular culture is superficial, remarks on Germany in wartime are very wide of the mark, and there is a great deal that is downright false.

Much is made of the contribution by Cyril Connolly's *Horizon* to the war effort, in that it upheld civilized values. Its standards were “breathtaking” and it achieved an “unbelievable excellence.” The awful and indolent Cyril Connolly's “brave uncompromising attitude” sustained him through the “horrors and darkness” of the war. In fact *Horizon* only had a maximum of 5 000 subscribers and much of it was pretentious, snobbish, self-pitying drivel. Connolly's *bon mot*, “perfect fear casteth out love,” said here to be an injunction to a “new

frankness," was uttered when he was forced by a V bomb raid to disengage hastily from a sexual embrace with a lady of quality. This was about as close as he ever came to the "horrors and darkness." Similarly it would be quite wrong to see Osbert Sitwell and Evelyn Waugh as "baroque" stylists reacting to the drabness of "Churchill's War." To English readers, neither have a particularly extravagant style and their chronicles of the eccentric, the dotty and the socially exclusive are a long and honoured tradition. The war was often drab, though the British restaurants were much nicer affairs than is suggested here and were greatly missed when abolished several years after the war, but Churchill's war certainly was not. Both in his public personality and in his private life the prime minister was the antithesis of the drab, and few begrudged him his obvious enjoyment of the good things in life.

Much is made of the pernicious use of rumours, although few details are provided of the activities of the rumour mill, nor is it mentioned that it was run by the Queen Mother's amiable but modestly talented brother. This is a pity, for they produced "rumours" of staggering inanity. For one who takes such a dim view of rumours it is surprising that he spreads a few of his own. Poles launched cavalry charges against tanks. WRENS were inspected to see if they were wearing impenetrable black knickers ("blackouts") before being let near sex-starved sailors. AMGOT meant something very rude in Turkish (it was reputed to mean "shit"). German soldiers spent their time reading *Mein Kampf* and the effusions of Alfred Rosenberg and Hans Frank.

A sensitive American marine, Eugene B. Sledge, discovered on Peleliu that troops were expendable, a fact that was difficult to accept in a nation and a culture that claimed to value human life and individual rights. Paul Fussell agrees, calling the war stupid and sadistic and insisting that only the young and the innocent could possibly think that it was good, justified or even necessary. Michael D. Doubler's brilliant analysis of the performance of the Americans in the European Theatre of Operations, does much to put the ghastliness of war in its proper perspective.

As a professional soldier Doubler knows that war is a very nasty business and that armies make terrible blunders, but he shows how quickly the Americans adapted to unfamiliar conditions in Europe, how ready the military was to accept innovations, how open to suggestions from the lowliest G.I.s. He takes

on the thesis by Russell Weighley and supported by Paul Fussell that it was America's industrial might and technical know-how that won the war. He argues that the United States did not "rumble to victory," but won the war by learning on the job and mastering the art of combined operations.

The Americans had learned a lot in North Africa, but they were initially at a loss to know how to deal with the *bocage* country in Normandy. There was virtually no radio contact between tanks and infantry or between ground troops and aircraft. They quickly learned how to combine infantry and armour, found novel uses for tank destroyers and overcame the difficulties of close air support. They soon came to understand how to launch complicated combined arms operations in which infantry, armour, artillery, anti-aircraft units and engineers, with effective air support were used to great effect.

Once they had learned how to deal with the *bocage*, helped by Sgt Culin's ingenious hedgerow cutter, made of pieces of German beach obstacles, they were confronted with further problems. They had to learn how to fight in towns and villages, how to attack German fortresses and pill boxes, how to cross rivers and how to fight in the forests. They overcame the difficulties of all but the last. The Huertgen Forest campaign was a disaster and they never learned how to fight in the woods. The Germans were amazed that they even tried.

American commanders did their best to destroy the enemy and to end the war as quickly as possible while keeping casualties at a minimum. Losses were very high against a determined and skilful German defence and there was a very high incidence of combat exhaustion. An average infantry squad of 12 men could expect to suffer two killed, five wounded, one missing, two evacuated for trench foot and two incapacitated by combat exhaustion. There were also serious deficiencies in the replacement system. The Americans succeeded not because they had more men and resources but because of their brilliant organizational skills, their ability to learn and to improvise. Their basic doctrine was sound and combined with experience, thorough training and openness to innovation, it led to victory.

Doubler's eagerness to demolish Weighley's thesis sometimes leads him a little astray. American material superiority really did count for something, as he shows in his admirable account of the Battle of the Bulge. The Germans may have had better arms and armour that the

Americans, but they were hopelessly outnumbered and replacements grew increasingly scarce. The point is that Americans learned how to use what they had with great skill. Their campaign was not the mindless carnage

that Paul Fussell condemns, but a brilliant operations for a good cause. Doubler's magnificent book is a fine tribute to the U.S. forces in Europe and a salutary corrective to Paul Fussell's despair at the pointlessness of it all.

Gaynor Kavanagh, *Museums and the First World War: A Social History*

DESMOND MORTON

Gaynor Kavanagh, *Museums and the First World War: A Social History*, New York: Leicester University Press, 1994, 200 pp. £25.

Like other institutions in 1914–18, Britain's museums had to endure the initial challenges and ultimate exhaustion of a society falling into the first total war. How could institutions that symbolized the Victorian faith in progress adjust to the self-evident regression into barbarism. How could they even survive when public and private efforts had to be channelled into a struggle for survival? And how could that struggle best be memorialized when museums themselves were swept to the other edge of public concern and consciousness?

Gaynor Kavanagh, a lecturer in museum studies at the University of Leicester turned to the problem for her M.Phil. dissertation and has transformed it into a readable and surprisingly interesting book, covering provincial museums in England as well as the great national museums in London, Scotland, and other parts of the British Isles are left to their own chroniclers.

Amidst all the questions and problems that afflicted a profoundly civilian society trapped in a war of nightmare magnitude, museums survived on the margins. Their curators worried about risks to their collections, staffing shortages when younger members enlisted and their relevance to the national struggle. Faced with German air raids, the British Museum moved some of its greatest treasures into a new and unused section of London's underground railway. While the Museum suffered little damage apart from fragments of British anti-aircraft shells, deterioration from environmental conditions in the tunnel forced curators to plead for a major post-war investment to control deterioration. Good came out of evil, argues Kavanagh. A laboratory was opened in 1922 to

struggle with oxidation and mould. "The British Museum since this time has been at the forefront of scientific conservation, especially within the field of antiquities" (p. 35).

Bewildered by wartime problems it had never contemplated, Britain's government floundered badly. Faced with a fiscal crisis, in March 1916 it ordered all its national museums closed, not for safety but to save £26 000. *The Times* led the protests as indignant citizens raged that cinematic vulgarity would continue while the educational uplift of museums would be sacrificed — precisely when soldiers on leave, particularly from the colonies, could benefit most. Once closed to the public, many museums were converted to offices for proliferating wartime ministries. A public outcry kept the new Air Ministry from occupying the British Museum; it would have become a legitimate target on the dubious assumption that German bombers knew their targets. Instead, it became a warehouse for the property of interned Germans.

As servants of public institutions, museum staff were expected to do a little more than "their bit" for King and Country. Sir Frederic Kenyon, director of the British Museum, had encouraged his pre-war staff to join the Territorial Army. Once war came, he and many of his staff were soon on their way to France. Between volunteering and conscription, only 18 of the 253 men of military age had not offered themselves, "some of whom were incapable of service." More than half of Kenyon's staff were too old for military service. Women, volunteers, old men and disabled veterans took over the responsibilities as museum workers all over England enlisted. While half the women who entered the British workforce during the war remained after the Armistice, museums were conservative employers. Most kept their promise to