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Review of *A Battle Too Far: Arras 1917* by Donn Farr

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BOOK REVIEWS

status as the 'enemy' (as Gallagher points out, this aspects of the war is 'excluded from virtually every scholarly account of the period'); the role of the international Irish diaspora (many of them politically nationalists) in supporting the war effort; and the ways in which support for the wider Allied war effort was expressed throughout the war. On the latter point, Gallagher makes a persuasive case for distinguishing between hostility towards conscription in 1918 and continued support at the same time for voluntary enlistment to support the war effort – indeed, there was a growth in the latter during the summer of 1918. Two short reflective concluding chapters draw together key themes from the four substantive chapters and then move on to consider commemoration in interwar Ireland (and to the present day) pointing to the breadth and depth of public engagement, and challenging historians who have seen hostility/amenia towards veterans and the cause of the war.

This is a compelling and persuasive study, whose arguments will be central to future scholarship. My plea to the publisher is that they produce a reasonably-priced paperback soon so that it can reach the wider public audience which it deserves.

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Don Farr, *A Battle Too Far; Arras 1917*. Warwick: Helion & Company, 2018., 28 photographs. 36 maps. 368pp. ISBN 978-1912174928 (hardback). Price £25.95.

The Battle of Arras has always sat awkwardly in the historiography of the Great War, chronologically (as well as geographically) between the 1916 Battle of the Somme and the Flanders campaigns of 1917. With a total number of casualties lower than the Somme and Third Ypres campaigns, fewer images of lunar mudscapes and having opened with a day of great success, historians and the wider public have broadly limited their enthusiasm towards the BEF's Spring Offensive to nodding approvingly at the Canadian Corps' achievements on Vimy Ridge. The one book which dealt with the Arras campaign in depth, apart from Cyril Falls' volume of the Official History covering the period, has been Jonathan Nicholls's *Cheerful Sacrifice*. Since the hundredth anniversary of the battle, further works by Jim Smithson and Andrew Rawson join the body of literature which includes considerable interest in the Canadian and Australian actions at Vimy Ridge and Bullecourt respectively. As the Battle of Arras holds the

grim record for the 'most lethal' offensive fought by the BEF in the course of the war, Don Farr's book is a welcome addition to the historiography.

A Battle Too Far is a well-constructed overview of the Battle of Arras, which draws heavily from unit war diaries for its narrative, and has a broad base of secondary literature in its bibliography. The publishing quality is good, and the maps are easy to read and useful. Farr's writing style is clear and methodical, although may be challenging to those without a broad base of reading on the Great War. The value in this work is its breadth; Farr has, ambitiously, addressed not only the Arras campaign, but also elements of the concurrent Nivelle offensive, adding perspective and endeavouring to explain the British efforts from 23 April onwards to jump-start a campaign which had, by the logistical constraints of that point of the war, run its course. Furthermore, Farr carries on the narrative right the way through to late May, including the loss of Fresnoy, and the eventual capture of Rœux and the Chemical Works. There are, in addition, useful appendices with information on the German Army, air operations, artillery, mining, tanks, and Nivelle's instructions to the British and Belgian Armies.

The trade-off in addressing broader themes and actions than anything in the existing literature of the battle of Arras comes in the detail and density. In order to cover the narrative, the language lacks the emotion of Nicholls's *Cheerful Sacrifice*, and casual readers may lament the lack of personal touches and individual testimonies, making this book one for those with a keen, or even professional interest. Indeed, as a reference source, the student or battlefield guide will appreciate the extensive bibliography, including unit war diary WO95 references and the thorough index. Although not as detailed as Smithson's *A Taste of Success* in its description of the lead-up to the battle, the political context and the opening phases of the campaign, *A Battle too Far* is far broader in its scope, a worthy companion to Nicholls's work and a worthwhile research tool and guide to this very much understudied campaign.

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