

# British Journal for Military History

Volume 6, Issue 1, March 2020

---

Review of *Gender and the Great War* by Susan R. Grayzel & Tammy M. Proctor (eds.)

**Ingrid Sharp**

---

**ISSN:** 2057-0422

**Date of Publication:** 19 March 2020

**Citation:** Ingrid Sharp, 'Review of *Gender and the Great War* by Susan R. Grayzel & Tammy M. Proctor (eds.)', *British Journal for Military History*, 6.1 (2020), pp. 84-86.

[www.bjmh.org.uk](http://www.bjmh.org.uk)

---



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.



The BJMH is produced with the support of **Goldsmiths**  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

were too many important findings for all to be identified, that the function of military hierarchies was continued as a response to psychological and physical challenges, how prisoner communities developed and went on to become a lasting legacy of captivity for many former POWs, and how letters and parcels from home became the most important element of captive life in the view of the majority of POWs all have important consequences for our understanding of the soldier and his identity during the war.

Identifying areas for improvement with this work is difficult and is open to accusations of reviewer bias. However, greater levels of comparison with how other nations treated German POWs would have provided a useful context for evaluating the experience of British POWs. Whilst there are occasional references, especially to how Germany treated Russian POWs, it remains inconsistent. Due to the cultural currency of POWs in the Second World War, an element of comparison between experiences in the two wars may have benefited by highlighting certain differences and continuities, though Wilkinson does note he understandably wishes to avoid 'back shadowing'.

In summary an excellent work on an underexplored topic which poses critical questions as to our understanding of gender, society, and the British soldiers experience of war. As such it should appeal to any historian examining the junction of the above subjects and how they interacted.

HARRY SANDERSON  
University of Leeds, UK

DOI 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v6i1.1370

**Susan R. Grayzel & Tammy M. Proctor (ed.), *Gender and the Great War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. Notes. Index. 283pp. ISBN 978-0190271084 (paperback). Price £20.00.**

This beautifully-presented edited volume offers an introduction to the major themes of gender scholarship on the First World War, treading a balance between established and emerging scholarship and pointing forwards to new approaches and areas of enquiry. The contributions are ordered thematically, each chapter drawing together and expanding current thinking on the topic under consideration. Taken together, the 12 chapters show the range of wartime experiences and the ways in which gender intersects with age, class and race as well as cultural and geographic contexts to shape both the war experience itself and the ways in which it is remembered and

## BOOK REVIEWS

commemorated, while a 13<sup>th</sup> chapter offers a brief outline of key works taking a women's or gender history approach to the First World War.

In Karen Hunt's insightful chapter, 'Gender and Everyday Life', we are confronted with the absolute centrality of the everyday to the wartime experience, especially food supply during times of great shortages and uncertain access. She notes that 'everyday life is saturated with gender' (p.154), demonstrating that food queues were predominantly made up of women, whose primary responsibility for providing for the family was never seriously challenged, despite the increasing intervention of the state in domestic choices at all levels. Hunt challenges the claim that the 'home front' was feminised, reminding us that 'men were present and crucially still held power' (p.156).

This is picked up in Susan Grayzel's chapter, 'Gender and Warfare', which reminds us that the First World War challenged the accepted division of a feminised home and a masculine war zone. Grayzel shows that new methods of warfare, such as aerial bombing and the weaponizing of access to food, brought the war into the heart of the home front, while the deployment of poison gas fundamentally changed the experience of war for front soldiers. This chapter includes a consideration of the effects of highly gendered mass propaganda, often foregrounding accounts of violence against women in occupied territories, that drew civilians into the war in unprecedented ways. Grayzel identifies the militarisation of domestic spaces and the full incorporation of women into the war as 'a central legacy of the Great War' (p.183).

In her chapter, 'Gender and Age', Tammy Proctor makes a compelling case for the relevance of age as an often overlooked category that shaped the different experiences of war. Her chapter makes us aware of the range of war experiences that were determined by age, including a study of children's particular vulnerabilities to the effects of undernourishment and to state propaganda, and their conscription into war work at home, school and in youth organisations.

Consistent editorial guidance is obvious in the structure and content of the individual chapters and the extremely helpful ways in which they point forward to new questions and further areas of scholarship, but nonetheless quibbles remain. There is some unevenness between chapters in terms of the focus on men's and women's experience, with a tendency to foreground work on women's history, in the realisation of the aim of embracing more global scholarship, and in the patchy coverage of the post-war period. There is of course overlap between chapters, with issues of violence, race and class appearing in several contexts, and some instances where authors take different views. This might have been an opportunity for chapters and authors to enter into dialogue by cross-referencing, acknowledge the inevitability of overlap, and explicitly address and clarify differences in interpretation.

The volume is distinctive in the field for a number of reasons: first for its thematic approach, which allows it to move beyond the study of particular nation states and the best-known theatres of war and, importantly, to consider the way gender impacted on both men and women; secondly for the range and coherence of the volume due to its origins in linked round table presentations; and thirdly for the consistency of the contributions in terms of clarity of writing and level of scholarship. Taken as a whole, the volume both reflects and shapes the interest in new historical perspectives prompted by the centenary of the First World War and will be of interest to established scholars as well as those new to the field.

INGRID SHARP  
University of Leeds, UK

DOI 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v6i1.1371

**Robb Robinson, *Fishermen, the Fishing Industry and the Great War at Sea: A Forgotten History?* Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2019. 216pp. ISBN 978-1786941756 (hardback). Price £75.00.**

In *Fishermen, the Fishing Industry and the Great War at Sea*, Robb Robinson seeks to rectify a 'traditional' view of the First World War at sea that has tended to focus on the Royal Navy, the U-boat menace, and the vituperative debate over the use of convoys. Over the course of eight chapters, Robinson draws upon a combination of Admiralty records, newspaper reports, and parliamentary papers to present a lively account of the role played by Britain's 100,000-strong fishing industry in the conflict. Readers new to the subject will learn much about the experiences of civilians thrust into the challenging circumstances of a global war, and Robinson's ability to narrate the fates and fortunes of numerous vessels provides much of great value to the historian of the period.

After a very brief introduction, the first chapter concentrates on the fishing industry before the war and stresses the size and complexity of the work undertaken all around the British coast alongside the nascent links between the industry and the Royal Navy in what turned out to be the final years of peace. The book then records the activities of civilian fishermen mobilised to augment Britain's naval strength in three chapters, which concentrate on events around the British coast to the end of 1917. The narrative is then interrupted with two chapters, which cover events further afield and the impact of the war upon the fishing industry, before the final year of the war and