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Civilians in the Path of War (review)

Gian P. Gentile

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Altogether, this is a work which will provoke a lot of thought in anyone interested in the military history of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and which should in particular inspire some serious reconsideration of long-accepted views about British military history in the period.

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*Civilians in the Path of War.* Edited by Mark Grimsley and Clifford J. Rogers. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. ISBN 0-8032-2182-7. Maps. Notes. Index. Pp. xxvi, 280. \$45.00.

One of the authors in this excellent book of essays noted in his own earlier book on American bombing in World War II that he was inspired to think about civilians and war when a student of his at West Point asked “to what extent moral considerations and other limitations on combat can really be effective in a high-stakes, high intensity conflict in a heavily populated area like Western Europe.” That question was undoubtedly fielded in the mid-to late 1980s during the waning years of the Cold War. It does, however, highlight the fundamental point raised in all of the essays in *Civilians in the Path of War*, edited by Clifford J. Rogers and Mark Grimsley, that the sparing of civilians in war has not been an absolute and transcendent idea but relative, contingent, and always contextual.

The editors in their introductory essay identify four essential patterns that emerge from the collection of essays that were originally presented as conference papers at the Fourth Midwest Military History Consortium in 1993. The first pattern drawn from the essays is that refraining from killing civilians in war has been “instrumental rather than absolute.” The second pattern, according to the editors, is derived from the first in that if political leaders over time have instrumentally spared the lives of civilians in war the decisions to attack them have also been instrumental. The third pattern is that regimes and peoples at war have used attacks on civilians as “negotiations” to gain advantage over their adversaries. The final pattern pointed out by the editors as emerging from these essays is that ideological and cultural conditions have profoundly shaped the treatment of civilians in war.

The editors state that the volume’s essays are more concerned with the reasons why attacks on civilians occurred than the morals or ethics involved. Yet a tantalizing dynamic emerges in this collection of essays that the editors did not highlight. On the one hand, the essays dealing with older historical events like Clifford J. Rogers’s piece on the Hundred Years’ War do follow the stated emphasis on why attacks on civilians occurred instead of moral and ethical issues. But on the other hand, the essays concerned with warfare in the twentieth century like Holger H. Herwig’s piece on the German military did tend to show a critical moral tone with respect to the historical actors and events being studied. Perhaps temporal distance affects the scholar’s moral approach to subject matter.

There are nine essays in this volume and they follow a simple chronological pattern beginning with Paul A. Rahe's essay on the Peloponnesian War and ending with Williamson Murray's look at the Gulf War. In between these points Clifford J. Rogers analyzes the Hundred Years' War, focusing on the English *chevauchées*. Rogers's treatment of *chevauchées*—offensive, mounted raids—is important for the volume because many of the other essays use the concept to explain attacks on civilians. John A. Lynn provides a fine discussion of the devastation of the Palatinate, 1688-89, and how the killing of civilians and the threatening of their livelihoods were instruments of war that furthered the objectives of Louis XIV. T. C. W. Blanning brings out in his essay on warfare in revolutionary France that even with the powerful notions of liberty and equality for all people, civilians still suffered in warfare. Mark Grimsley superbly probes by way of comparison the problems with race and American military operations against White Southerners in the Civil War and Native Americans thereafter. Holger H. Herwig explores how the cultural and attitudinal underpinnings of the German military from Ludendorff to Hitler informed the military's treatment of civilians in war. Truman O. Anderson provides a detailed study of partisan fighting and its impact on the civilian population on the Eastern Front in World War II. Using the concept of *chevauchées*, Conrad C. Crane brings out the tension in the American approach to strategic bombing in World War II between technological and practical imperatives and a moral concern over killing civilians. Williamson Murray's piece concludes the volume with a view to the air campaign in the 1990 Gulf War and reinforces the dominant theme in all of the volume's essays that the treatment of civilians in warfare has been contingent and relative. Unfortunately, the editors do not provide a needed afterword that could have brought the essays—all of them written prior to 1993—into a 9/11 perspective. In fact, the absence of any discussion of the three thousand Americans killed in the 9/11 attack and America's subsequent war on terrorism creates an understandable but vacant tone to all of the essays.

Still, these outstanding essays are a must read for scholars and informed citizens interested in understanding the nature of post-modern war and the problem presented by civilians in its path. 9/11 and the looming confrontation with Iraq only reinforce the importance of the themes, patterns, and arguments brought out in this book.

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***Scotland and the Thirty Years' War, 1618–1648.*** Edited by Steve Murdoch. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2001. ISBN 90-04-12086-6. Illustrations. Tables. Figures. Notes. Index. Pp. xvi, 311. \$96.00.

This is a collection of essays concerning Scottish involvement in the Thirty Years' War. The essays focus on Stuart diplomacy and Scottish military involvement in the conflict.