

David A. Bell. *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007. Pp. 420. Paper \$15.95.

Bell, Professor of History at John Hopkins University and contributing editor and writer for various publications, argues that the first total war emerged during the Napoleonic era between 1782 and 1815. He defines total war as war that encompasses all aspects of society. Bell focuses on the transformations in society that changed what he refers to as the "culture of war" in three geographic areas, the Vendée region in France, the Iberian Peninsula and Italy.

Bell argues that the term "total war" came out of Enlightenment thinking. As the French revolutionary Robespierre and his contemporaries had illustrated from their seats on the Committee of Public Safety, terror was necessary to create harmonious societies, an idea shared by leaders throughout Europe. Prior to 1782, wars were a much smaller component of European culture. The revolutionary mentality of the late eighteenth century transformed the idea of what the military and warfare meant. After 1782, membership in the army became a full time occupation. War was no longer a voluntary seasonal occupation. Rather war, and therefore the military, had become central to ensuring the survival of a particular government. Men could be conscripted, as demonstrated in the *Gran Levée* of the French Revolution, and the loss of life came to matter less. Wars came to be fought against nations rather than regions and enormous numbers of civilians could be conscripted to replenish casualties. For example, the National Convention in France called three hundred thousand men in February of 1793 to make up for losses suffered in their engagements with Austria and other neighboring countries. Bell pays particular attention to the conflicts in the Vendee region. It was here that the "revolutionary terror will result in peace" tactic, called for by Robespierre and his contemporaries, was employed. Roughly a quarter of a million people in the region, women and children included, were killed between 1793 and 1794. This "set a new European standard in atrocities" argues Bell and was a pivotal factor in the idea of what constitutes total war. From the Vendee, Bell shifts to the savage street fights of the ruined cities in Spain during Napoleon's reign. Traveling into Italy, the Napoleonic armies' savage treatment of civilians solidifies his argument that these conflicts set new standards for war.

The First Total War relies on an extensive list of secondary sources as well as Napoleon's personal correspondence located at archives all across Europe, primarily in Paris. Bell often includes quotations from revolutionaries like Robespierre, the Girondins and various members of the Assemblies that strengthen the argument regarding the mentality of those in power before and during Napoleon's reign. Maps and paintings of the battles waged by Napoleon and the Spanish military illustrate war tactics and routes.

Written in a style that is easily understandable, Bell's work is appealing to general readers interested in military history as well as scholars of European history and warfare. Bell offers non-specialists sufficient background information to the French Revolution and other European

events, while introducing a unique perspective on why the Napoleonic era represents the birth of total war. The author acknowledges that he is not the first to view the wars of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as total wars. Bell argues that these wars and their atrocities are rooted in the utopian ideals of enlightenment thinking. For European society to maintain the peace they had enjoyed prior to the Napoleonic era, blood would have to be shed. It was not merely European leaders who birthed total war, but rather it was Europe as a whole that allowed it to occur. It is here that scholars will find the originality of Bell's work.

Bell omits thorough comparisons between the conflicts of the eighteenth century and those of the twentieth century, which would demonstrate a much clearer argument to those unfamiliar with the revolution in France and the Napoleonic era. Such an approach might have also explained to that particular audience why the eighteenth century conflicts were the first total wars. The wars of the twentieth century are the conflicts scholars often study when examining the atrocities of war. *The First Total War* shifts that idea persuasively, placing a greater importance on the conflicts of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe.

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