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Review of *When Men Fell from the Sky: Civilians and Downed Airmen in Second World War Europe* by Claire Andrieu

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Claire Andrieu, *When Men Fell from the Sky: Civilians and Downed Airmen in Second World War Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. xv & 355 pp. Appendix. ISBN 978-1009266680 (hardback). Price £29.99.

This is a fascinating piece of historical scholarship in which Claire Andrieu explores the differing reactions to downed airmen in France, Germany and the UK. It is a work set out in four separate parts and consists of an introduction, eleven substantive chapters a conclusion, appendix and bibliography. It sets out the argument that the reaction amongst civilians on a national scale to airmen who had either crashed or parachuted from their aircraft differed between nations. In order to support this argument, Andrieu brings together military, social, transnational and comparative historical approaches. Through these different approaches the argument that is being made is excellently supported through the interrogation of official archival files such as the court proceedings of trials held by Nazi authorities in occupied France, trials conducted by the Allied powers during the occupation of Germany and personal memoirs of the French Resistance, the airmen themselves and domestic German officials. Andrieu does, however, reflect on the general paucity of sources available as well as the inherent reliability of some, particularly the records that emerge from the trials conducted by German military authorities during the occupation of France.

The book begins by exploring the differences between the available documents and the history of the experiences of civilians who interacted with airmen and the cultural and national memories of these events that have developed since 1945. It is here that Andrieu begins to develop one of the most interesting findings that form the basis for later chapters. This is the extent to which the Nazi government directly established the lynching of downed enemy airmen or if these events can be explained more convincingly as a bottom-up reaction from the population at large, particularly in areas that had been subjected to heavy aerial bombardment. The conclusion reached is that whilst senior Nazi officials were perfectly willing to break international law surrounding the treatment of enemy prisoners, and airmen in particular, there was already a groundswell of activity that did not need to be cultivated from above. Strong evidence is provided to demonstrate that the lynching of airmen after aircraft crashes or parachuting was largely confined to Germany with a few instances of airmen being attacked during the German invasion of France in 1940.

The approach of the British government, as well as the wider population, is largely explored by focusing on the humour employed and demonstrates that the public reaction to downed Luftwaffe personnel was largely one of benevolence, although this was not reflected in London during the height of the Blitz, where airmen were subjected to violence, but not lynching. Relying on local newspaper headlines, Andrieu

argues that the British differentiated between Germany as a nation and the political ideology of Nazism, and that acted as a restraint on how the British public reacted in these situations.

The majority of the book looks at the French experience both during and in the aftermath of the invasion and during the bombing raids conducted by the United States and the United Kingdom. Through exploring these two disparate points of both French and Second World War history some interesting trends develop. There was widespread rejoicing amongst much of the French civilian population to the bombing actions conducted against French targets, despite the deaths and damage that was caused throughout a large swathe of metropolitan France. Andrieu suggests that despite the raids, there was little diminution of the support provided to fallen Allied airmen in their attempts to evade capture by German forces, and eventually cross the French border into Spain and to Gibraltar to be repatriated to the UK.

The social character of those who assisted Allied airmen in their escape and evasion from German authorities is explored through two distinct themes. The first is the gender of those who put their lives at risk, often several times, to house, feed and generally support the airmen as they navigated their way through the resistance networks that transported Allied personnel across France. Andrieu highlights that the majority of those who were involved in the initial support were women, often mothers, and that this role fulfilled a maternal or nursing role for those involved. 'The women were there in their traditional role as nurses and mothers. Though their action was politically meaningful, it was ... an extension of their gender role.' The second theme is one of how a society reacts to being under the occupation of either a hostile military and political power or governed by a de facto puppet government. It is argued that despite the harsh penalties in place for aiding Allied personnel, including death or imprisonment in concentration camps, this had little deterrence on the wider population and did little to either stir up animosity against downed enemy airmen, or see a reduction in the activities of the Resistance groups who were supported by British intelligence organisations and personnel on the ground.

Whilst not a traditional military history book, this is an important piece of scholarship that widens our understanding of how societies react or can be made to react through radicalisation, and the agency that individuals or groups have in wartime to conduct hostile actions against enemy personnel who have been unarmed and have surrendered. This work would appeal to those who have an interest in the social aspects of the Second World War, the politicisation of civilians in wartime, and those

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with an interest in the social and gender aspects of the Resistance in France, particularly surrounding the support of Allied personnel.

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Ben Wheatley, *The Panzers of Prokhorovka: The Myth of Hitler's Greatest Armoured Defeat*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing 2023. 229pp + 14 maps + 126 photographs + 67 tables. ISBN: 978-1472859082 (hardback). Price £25.00.

Nowadays, visitors approaching the town of Prokhorovka on the main road from Belgorod cannot miss the fifty-two-metre-high Victory Memorial Tower which dominates the fields to the south of the town. A little further on, lies the extensive Prokhorovka Museum complex which is 'announced' by a particularly dramatic sculpture of two Soviet T34 tanks crushing a couple of German Tigers. The tower, the museum complex and the sculptures were constructed in the 1990s at a time when direct memories of the Battle of Kursk were beginning to fade. The Great Patriotic War was (and is) a source of great pride for the Russian people, and in the post-Soviet era it has served the authorities well to reinforce this through the memorialisation of key sites, and the propagation of associated nationalistic sentiments through school curriculums and state-controlled media.

The Battle of Kursk in the summer of 1943 was, without doubt, an iconic victory for the Red Army - ranking alongside the Battles of Moscow, Stalingrad and the crossing of the Dnieper in terms of scale and importance. Indeed, the distinguished American historian David M. Glantz, suggests that Kursk and the ensuing Soviet Kutuzov counter-offensive constitute the point at which the strategic initiative was irretrievably lost by the German Wehrmacht. However, elements of the established narrative have, in recent years, been subject to vigorous challenge. One such element is the idea that on the 12 July 1943 Hausser's German II SS Panzer Korps suffered a catastrophic loss of armoured fighting vehicles (AFVs) when counter attacked by Rotmistrov's Soviet 5th Guards Tank Army at Prokhorovka.

The 'myth of Prokhorovka' began to unravel with the publication of the II SS Panzer Corps War Diary in 1980. A report from 5th Guards Tank Army issued on 17 July