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Review of *A Long Week in March: The 36th (Ulster) Division in the German Spring Offensive, March 1918* by Michael James Nugent

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the aftermath of the conflict are dealt with. A brief conclusion provides the reader with statistical information that could have been more fruitfully deployed within the main body of the text. There are a number of photographs reproduced in the book, but in many cases the content of the images does not align with the narrative.

The chief frustration with *Fishermen, the Fishing Industry and the Great War at Sea*, however, is that it does not go beyond alluding to some of the more fascinating insights that the subject has to offer. 'The class and cultural gap between working fishermen and many R[oyal] N[avy] officers was enormous', notes the book's abstract. Yet the ways in which these challenges of civil-military relations were navigated remains unexplored. Robinson notes (pp. 53–4) that 'Royal Navy concepts of discipline, service, and smartness were in many ways quite alien to the fishermen', and that 'Fishermen generally cared little for the niceties of uniform and traditional service discipline', but does not provide concrete evidence of how the two groups learned to co-exist as the war developed. Further, there is much potential within the subject for an examination both of the various roles played by civil society in the prosecution of a total war effort and of the manner by which industrial expertise was applied to the challenges of industrial warfare.

In this sense, the absence of introductory and concluding sections to each chapter is a real handicap for the book, as the wider context and significance of the material discussed within it is often buried – if not omitted altogether. As a result, Robinson's contention that the contribution Britain's fishermen 'made to the British maritime war effort was actually much wider and more fundamentally important than has previously been supposed' (p. 3) is not convincingly demonstrated by what follows. Instead, *Fishermen, the Fishing Industry and the Great War at Sea* provides a stable harbour from which further examinations of the topic could be launched.

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Michael James Nugent, *A Long Week in March: The 36th (Ulster) Division in the German Spring Offensive, March 1918*. Warwick: Helion & Company, 2019. xviii + 272pp. ISBN 978-1921390571 (paperback). Price £19.95.

The premise of Michael Nugent's *A Long Week in March* is that there is no comprehensive analysis of the experiences of the 36th (Ulster) Division in the week

leading up to the German spring offensive of March 1918 and the events of the offensive itself. Readers will wonder what it is that Cyril Falls' 1922 divisional history does, and Nugent points out that it is written from a 'strategic military point of view'. That need not have narrowed the scope of Falls' work, but it does suffer from the limitations inherent in many divisional histories written in the 1920s of focusing almost entirely on only the division in question, without offering much wider perspective. Beyond Falls, only Tom Johnstone's *Orange, Green and Khaki: The Story of the Irish Regiments in the Great War, 1914-18* (1992) has offered an overview of the division as a whole, and that is part of a very much wider study. Nugent rightly points out that various regimental or battalion level studies have focused only narrowly on parts of the division. However, he is not correct in his statement that there are no published accounts on either the Entrenching Battalions or the 16th Royal Irish Rifles. My own book, *Belfast Boys: How Unionists and Nationalists Fought and Died in the First World War* (2009) covered the former (if only briefly, making it a forgivable oversight). More substantially, Stuart N. White's *The Terrors: 16th (Pioneer) Battalion Royal Irish Rifles* (1996) includes several pages on the 16th Royal Irish Rifles' experience of the German attack.

However, regardless of these quibbles, Nugent has produced a very substantial and thorough narrative account of the Ulster Division's week facing the German offensive, usefully contextualised with wider politics and matters relating to reorganisation of the British army. The Ulster Division of March 1918 was very different to that which had left Belfast in May 1915, when it had been almost entirely Protestant and reflective of units of the Ulster Volunteer Force. By March 1918, disbandment of volunteer battalions and replenishment with regular ones contributed to the division containing as many as 4,000 Catholics.

As Nugent works through the events of the German offensive, he skilfully reconstructs a series of actions for which records are often far less coherent than those made during advances, simply due to the challenges of writing while on the move and under fire. Nugent has very effectively drawn together unit war diaries with personal recollections to produce a thoroughly comprehensive account of the division's activities, while also drawing out the cases of individuals as illustrative point. This is an account in which the individuality of soldiers is not lost in the broader story.

There might have been room in the book for comparisons between the Ulster Division and other British divisions during the offensive and indeed more widely in 1918, drawing on work by writers such as David Stevenson and general studies of the offensive which are cited by Nugent. He argues that 'the prevailing perception' of the Ulster Division's role during the offensive is of having suffered a defeat. To counteract that, Nugent points to many successes during the German attack, referencing Haig's 'Sixth Despatch' as recognising those. They included, for example, holding a redoubt

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at Fontaine-les-Clercs on 21st March. But how do such successes compare to the record of other divisions? If we are to understand the full extent of the Ulster Division's success or failure in March 1918, then that needs some attention.

Overall though, Nugent has produced a readable and engaging narrative which performs a great service to the division and those interested in its role in a relatively neglected aspect of its history. It will be especially valued by those with some family connection to the men who served. I had two great-uncles serving in the division in March 1918, one of whom, in the 15th Royal Irish Rifles, was taken prisoner. Nugent's highly commendable work will be an essential point of reference in seeking to reconstruct such individual stories.

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Patrick Bishop, *Air Force Blue: The RAF in World War Two*. London: William Collins, 2017. xxi - 410pp. ISBN 978-0007433155 (paperback). Price £9.99.

In his latest volume of a remarkable series of social histories of the Royal Air Force (RAF), Patrick Bishop has tackled the war conducted by the RAF as a whole rather than previous volumes which have concentrated on the exploits of Fighter Command or Bomber Command. As with his previous works, Bishop does not set out to demonstrate an overall argument or thesis, but instead he explores the social history through the eyes of some of those involved. The scope of the book is largely focused on the European theatre of the Second World War with the bomber offensive being one of the major areas to be explored. There are also chapters that look at peripheral theatres such as the campaign in Burma, the fighting of the Western Desert Air Force in North Africa and the oft-forgotten work of Coastal Command in the Battle of the Atlantic. The book further explores an under-researched area of the RAF's pre-war history, the social changes brought about by the expansion caused due to rearmament in the mid- to late-1930s. This was a fundamental sea-change for the RAF that, whilst more meritocratic in its selection of officers and men, still had a relatively rigid social structure that senior officers were keen to preserve.

Overall the scope of the book is a bottom-up approach to the RAF and the Second World War that places the thoughts and feelings of those conducting the strategy into greater focus. The personal and social side of the RAF is neatly interwoven with the