

*The Vest Pocket Kodak & The First World War.* Jon Cooksey. East Sussex: Ammonite Press, 2017, \$12.95, cloth, 96 pp.

Reviewed by Samantha L. Solomon, Washington State University

ETCHED IN GOLD ON THE BACK COVER of Jon Cooksey's recent book *The Vest Pocket Kodak & The First World War* is an outline of the Vest Pocket Kodak (VPK)—a portable camera released to the public by Kodak 1912 (10), and popularized by its use leading up to, and during, the First World War. The camera measured just  $1 \times 2 \frac{3}{8} \times 4 \frac{3}{4}$  inches when closed (10), and, hence its namesake, was designed to fit easily into one's vest pocket. The book, fittingly, is only slightly larger than the VPK would have been, which serves as a reminder of the compactness of the camera as one reads. Appealing to military history buffs and photography buffs alike, Cooksey's informative and easily digestible book traces the VPK's contribution to capturing The Great War, from its early marketing to soldiers to its unauthorized use during some of the war's most infamous battles.

Cooksey's overarching argument is that the VPK played a major role in recording the First World War because of the formerly unprecedented ways in which it allowed amateur photographers to record their experiences. Prior to the First World War, he argues, battlefield photography existed, but it was often staged or relied on "cumbersome" technology; the VPK, introduced to the public two years prior to the start of the war, changed that (8). For the first time, a camera was small, light, and intuitive enough to be used on-the-go by the "'everyman' and 'everywoman'" (9). Cooksey argues that the VPK's ease of use spurred on a "craze" (9, 22) of amateur photography just prior to the beginning of the war so that by the time the war broke out in August of 1914, annual sales of the VPK reached 5,500 (22), and approximately "1 in 5 British officers had packed a VPK in their kit" (27).

Some of the most provocative elements of Cooksey's book detail the ways in which the VPK was advertised, directly or indirectly, to soldiers, and how, as a result, the job of recording the war fell squarely on their shoulders. The 1912 Kodak catalog first advertised the VPK as being "'always ready for action'"—a premonitory statement that took on another meaning during the war. In 1915, the development of the VPK Autographic, which allowed users to write on the film with a metal stylus to label it (24), those using the camera on the battlefield could now record the names, dates, and places depicted in the photographs, thus serving as a more accurate record of events that took place away from the public eye. For this reason, British newspapers were anxious to publish "'real war photographs,'" and offered cash prizes up to £1,000 (27)—more than 166 times the amount that the

camera would have cost at the time. Around this same time, the War Office began restricting the possession of cameras by anyone under military authority (32), even going so far as to order that anyone found with a camera would be arrested (40-41). However, many soldiers disobeyed this order, often with the knowledge of their superior officers (41), and as a result, recorded many of the most well-known events of the war, including the Gallipoli campaign (48) and the sinking of the British ship the *Falaba* (52). Cooksey argues that VPK photographs of these events and others from earlier in the war, such as the Christmas Truce of 1914, gave the general public unprecedented access to imagery of war.

The book is an important contribution to the study of the First World War, especially considering that the war is often studied through written texts instead of visual ones. Cooksey is a military historian and an expert on the two World Wars and the Falklands war. He is currently the editor of *Stand To!*, the former editor of *Battlefields Review*, and is known for leading battlefield tours and for appearing as an expert on radio and television to discuss the World Wars and the Falkland War. He has also published several other books about these subjects including *The Barnsley Pals*, *Flanders 1915*, *Calais: A Fight to the Finish*, and *3 Para Mount Longdon-The Bloodiest Battle*. A somewhat narrower entryway into the study of war than his other books, *The Vest Pocket Kodak & The First World War* utilizes Cooksey's expertise on military history and on the First World War, while also exploring a phenomenon—Europe being bitten by “the photography bug” (9)—that both directly contributed to our understanding of the war, and helped develop the way that we record major historical events long after the war ended.

Cooksey's book is organized into three primary sections: an introductory section, a section about the VPK's development and use during the war, and a final section of photographs taken by the VPK during the war, and their descriptions. Included in the introduction is a list of helpful specifications of the camera, including its dimensions and a detailed diagram of its parts. The introduction also includes a four-page timeline of major events in the First World War and in the development of the VPK. His timeline places the development, and the subsequent rise in popularity, of the VPK into the historical context of the war, thereby helping the reader see how one affected, or was affected by, the other. The next section, titled “The Camera,” begins by describing precursors to the VPK, made by Kodak and other manufacturers, continues by detailing the release of the VPK to the public and its rise to popularity in the years before the war, and ends by highlighting the relationship between the VPK and the war, including how it was advertised, how it was used by Allied and German soldiers in various theatres of war, and how it contributed to creating a record of the

war, despite censorship laws. The final section includes 18 photographs taken with the VPK between 1914 and 1918 (55), accompanied by descriptions and quotes by soldiers, which further exemplifies the ways in which photographs taken by the VPK compliment the written descriptions of war from soldiers' letters, diaries, and memoirs that are so often studied.

Cooksey does several things throughout the text to draw the modern reader into the subject matter. Most importantly, while he uses both photography and military history terminology, he does not rely on the jargon of either to make his argument. On the contrary, he includes several helpful diagrams to help the reader understand the camera's functionality and appeal, at one point even placing an outline of the modern-day 4-inch iPhone overtop of a photograph of the VPK to show that the camera was "not much bigger" (20-21) than what we use to take photos quickly and easily today. Additionally, the text is supported in every section by images of primary source documents such as magazines, newspapers, advertisements, and photographs that help the reader better understand the VPK's relationship to war. Cooksey is also wide-reaching in his consideration of how the VPK was used by different populations. In addition to considerations of how German and British soldiers used the VPK for different purposes, he is careful in several places to remind readers that soldiers were not the only ones who had experiences of the war that were worth capturing with the VPK. He includes nurses, and both male and female civilians in the discussion, which is something that far too many studies of the Great War exclude.

Cooksey's compact and direct approach to the subject matter leaves little to criticize. My minor critiques are: first, that Cooksey's use of words like "adventure" and "journey" to describe soldiers mobilizing in 1914 could have been further explained in the context of the soldiers' expectations, and second, that more information about how soldiers' access to the VPK might have been determined by class would have helped to better understand who was using the VPK. Cooksey's argument that the VPK was brought along with soldiers on "the single greatest adventure of their lives" (8) could benefit from some description about soldiers' expectations for war, and the shift in those expectations once they witnessed war. Certainly, soldiers in the early years of the war were marching off to what they believed would be an adventure, which makes their choice to bring a camera that much more noteworthy in that they may have had different expectations for what they would record, and why. However, it would be interesting to trace the point in which the VPK functioned no longer as a device for capturing adventures, but for recording evidence of a war that nobody but those who saw it for themselves would believe was not a glorious adventure. Additionally, aside from one brief parenthetical that notes that VPKs were carried "more often than not by officers" (32), soldiers' social

class or rank, and therefore, their ability to afford a VPK, is not directly addressed. It would be beneficial to understand how the VPK's popularity, and the images that they captured, might have been related to these designations.

Jon Cooksey's book makes an important contribution to the fields of both military history and photography. Those interested in the recorded history of the First World War or in military photography would benefit from Cooksey's combined analysis of early twentieth-century cameras and the war. Likewise, audiences interested in the development of cameras or photography in general would find this text a useful resource for understanding how the development of new technologies in this time period was catalyzed by the outbreak of war, and by the growing interest in amateur photography. *The Vest Pocket Kodak & The First World War* delivers in its easily accessible and well-researched exploration of the relationship between the VPK and the First World War.

***Points of Honor: Short Stories of the Great War by a US Combat Marine.* Thomas Boyd.**

**Edited by Steven Trout. University of Alabama Press, 2018, \$19.95, paper, 180 pp.**

**Reviewed by David A. Rennie, Aberdeen University**

THOMAS BOYD IS LARGELY REMEMBERED in connection with his much-lauded World War I novel *Through the Wheat*, which was published by Scribner's in 1923 on the recommendation of Boyd's friend F. Scott Fitzgerald, who called it "the best combatant story of the Great War." Boyd is a key, and increasingly important, figure in discussions of American World War I writing, although his name is little known beyond specialists in this area. However, as this timely reissue of Boyd's lesser-known World War I short story collection attests, a growing scholarly interest is bringing Boyd to a more prominent position within discussions of American war writing.

*Points of Honor* sees Boyd progress from the single-protagonist narrative of his debut novel to consider a wider array of the circumstantial and emotional experiences of modern war, which are reflected on in a more nuanced and less condemnatory fashion than in *Through the Wheat*. *Points of Honor* received positive, if limited, praise upon its publication in 1925 and has been out of print, until its reissue this year by Alabama University Press, edited and introduced by Steven Trout. Many researchers and general readers with an interest in World War I literature will be grateful for the opportunity to access Boyd's collection in an affordable, modernized format. The importance of this reissue extends far beyond the valuable service of making Boyd's collection physically obtainable, however. The latest in Trout's long line of contributions to the area of American World War I scholarship at once successfully enhances Boyd's profile as a literary craftsman, and brings this rich and overlooked work to the attention of the increasingly active area of American World War I literary studies.

Over recent years, there has been a growing discussion around Boyd who until 2014 had been the recipient of just a single scholarly essay. In 2006 Brian Bruce published the only biography of Boyd, while in 2009 Rvive Books brought out an edition of Boyd's final novel *In Time of Peace* (1935). Three essays issued through the publications of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature have also brought further attention to *Through the Wheat*. While more can perhaps be said about Boyd's debut novel, which arguably deserves (and seems destined to achieve) a more exalted place in the American World War I canon, the late spike in Boyd scholarship has raised troubling questions for

his advocates: How much more remains to be said about this peripheral figure of twentieth-century fiction? Was Boyd's achievement, after all, really limited to a single standout novel?

The 2018 reprint of *Points of Honor*, attractively repackaged and supported by the prestige of its editor and publisher, makes the convincing claim that Boyd's career amounted to more than beginner's luck with *Through the Wheat*. Instead, as Trout argues, Boyd was the author of not one, but two, notable works of American World War I literature. *Points of Honor*, Trout asserts, is not merely an obscure curiosity of interest to obsessives, but a major work in its own right, and one which represents a significant literary and thematic development from Boyd's first novel.

Boyd enlisted in the Marine Corps in April 1917, serving with the Sixth Marines in the American Expeditionary Force's Second Division. He survived the battles of Belleau Wood, Soissons (in which he won the Croix de Guerre), and Saint Mihiel, before being invalided out during a gas attack at Blanc Mont in October 1918. After the war, Boyd moved to St. Paul, Minnesota, where he managed the Kilmarnock Books store and edited a weekly book page in the Sunday edition of the *St. Paul Daily News*. Inspired by the literary acquaintances his role brought him into contact with, including Sinclair Lewis, Willa Cather, and F. Scott Fitzgerald, whom he befriended while in St. Paul, Boyd quickly wrote *Through the Wheat* in 1922. He submitted the novel to Scribner's, only to be rejected. Fitzgerald, a rising star at the firm on the back of his debut novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), used his cachet and personal enthusiasm to make Scribner's reconsider. His recommendation proved sound, with *Through the Wheat* going through seven printings in a year.

After an unmemorable attempt at historical fiction in *The Dark Cloud* (1924) set in the antebellum Midwest, Boyd returned to the subject of World War I in a series of short stories which appeared in *Scribner's Monthly*, *American Mercury*, and *The Bookman*. As he did with his other Scribner's authors Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway, Maxwell Perkins encouraged Boyd to follow his success as a novelist with a book of stories. With a few newly penned stories to supplement those already featured in periodicals, Boyd had assembled enough material for such a volume by 1925. Although his subject was the same, his treatment of the US Marines' experience of World War I was markedly different in Boyd's second volume of World War I fiction. *Through the Wheat* follows the gradual disintegration of its nondescript protagonist, William Hicks, as the repeated strain of frontline duty reduces him to a dazed and suicidal wreck. The novel possesses virtually no further plot and its other characters appear only as minimal, peripheral figures. Contrastingly, the eleven stories in *Points of Honor* provide a panoramic overview of the experientially variegated war experience of the US Marines in World War I.

In “A Little Gall,” Corporal Lewis elects to go A.W.O.L. from a digging detail to get drunk in a *buvette*, a transgression for which he ultimately earns five years in a Federal prison. In “Responsibility,” Andrus is befriended (to his chagrin) by a weedy and incompetent recruit, Hannan, whom he nevertheless heroically rescues after Hannan is left stranded in no-man’s-land. In “Uninvited,” meanwhile, a United States Registration of Graves Service officer searches in vain for the bodies of group of dead servicemen, only to find their corpses are buried in the garden outside his lodgings. *Points of Honor* engages with the themes of heroism, comradeship, romance, vanity, and even, in “The Long Shot,” the post-war legacy of combat, as the effects of poison gas inhalation tragically frustrate Duncan Milner’s attempts at social reintegration.

Trout provides a helpful biographical overview of Boyd’s career, before making a convincing case for his craftsmanship in *Points of Honor*, pointing to the “succinct precision” of his prose and the structural cohesion of the work generated by its pervasive themes of class warfare, interpersonal relationships, intrapersonal weaknesses, and Boyd’s commitment to showcasing the multifaceted nature of US war service. Trout’s extensive annotated notes, meanwhile, will make the novel more readily accessible to students and general readers.

The reissue of *Points of Honor* makes a significant contribution to the wider revival of hitherto-obscure American World War I authors that has occurred since the millennium, in part facilitated by reprints of works by writers such as Mary Borden, Ellen La Motte, Laurence Stallings, and Hervey Allen. The timing of this publication is apposite not only by virtue of appearing during the World War I centenary, but also for the reason that scholarship in this area is in a phase which increasingly recognizes the complex, multifaceted nature of war service and the heterogeneous social constituents which were affected by it. In short, this reissue redoubles the achievement of Boyd as a war writer and offers a rich and understudied masterwork to the notice of a burgeoning area of literary scholarship.

***Men at War: What Fiction Tells Us About Conflict, from the Iliad to Catch-22.***

**Christopher Coker. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014, 325 pp.**

**Reviewed by Matthew Stewart, Boston University.**

THIS STUDY REPRESENTS SCHOLARLY WRITING at its best. It is learned, creative, clearly organized, lucid, and alive on the page. It crosses disciplines productively. It is judicious and well-reasoned, at times inspired, even provocative. The author is an expert on various aspects of international relations, in which he holds a professorship at the London School of Economics. He has published widely on various aspects of warfare and military affairs. While Coker modestly disclaims any status as a literary critic, the present reviewer, trained in literary studies and all too familiar with contemporary literary scholarship, is eager to assert that this single volume outstrips vast quantities of the arid, abstruse and turgidly written volumes of literary criticism that occupy the lists of academic publishers.

The study organizes twenty-five primary texts into five categories determined according to the status of the text's protagonist: warrior, hero, villain, survivor or victim. In short the book comprises a critical anatomy of war fiction. Each category treats five texts, which typically receive an analysis of ten pages or so. While it is obvious that these categories aren't pure or completely stable, this schema is heuristically productive, and the author's placements are soundly chosen. To name some examples: Achilles is a warrior; Robert Jordan of Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is a hero; General Cummings of Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* is a villain; Falstaff is a survivor; Guy Crouchback of Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honor* trilogy is a victim. The book's sub-title indicates the wide temporal scope admitted. The twenty-five texts under discussion (and many others find their way into the analyses by way of comparison and counterpoint) vary from the canonical and classic to the secondary and out-of-the-mainstream, as for example with Tolstoy, who is represented here not by *War and Peace*, but by *Hadji Murat*, a book ripe for our own times and worthy of the attention it receives. While the word *fiction* in the title is employed expansively to include epic poetry, plays and even one movie (*Dr. Strangelove*), novels are in fact the most frequently discussed genre.

Coker recognizes just how "central to our understanding of war" fiction has become (7). While historians are principally interested in the why's and how's of an era's key events--

the proverbial sweep of history--the novelist wants to bring to life the experience of war both “for the individual soldier and society at large” (2). While some novelists are intensely political creatures, and a small minority do attempt to build historical explanations or political analyses into their narratives, their ultimate endeavor is not to describe what Coker calls “the surface” issues of war, but rather to “capture . . . the essence of war, the *experience*” (7, italics in the original). Could not one learn historically about, for example, the Battle of Caporetto, from reading Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*? Yes, of course, some, even perhaps a good deal of, historical knowledge would be gleaned. (And that particular novel’s action seems to represent the tip of an iceberg in regards to the author’s own historical research, as Michael Reynolds has demonstrated in his monograph.) But what the novelist can do better than the researcher is to plunge the reader into experiencing the chaos of the unimaginably massive retreat, to capture the moments of panic, the split-second decisions that must be made on the basis of . . . what? Intuition? Gut? Mental coin-flip?

As for Coker’s five categories, warriors and heroes still exist in present times. The former word is less used than the latter outside the military, and only occasionally used within the military itself, which is charged with forming this class of being out of the raw stuff of civilian humanity, but which is nonetheless more apt to use branch or function-specific terminology to refer to soldiers, sailors and airmen. The word *Hero* is now used with regularity in the United States. Sometimes it is used in description of actual heroic acts; often it is used in indiscriminate reference to any and all service men and women, as in “our heroes serving overseas.” This latter use seems to have been produced by two factors: (1) widespread regret for the neglect and disrespect dished out too often to Vietnam War veterans, and (2) the all-volunteer military, which elicits effusive displays of gratitude from the 99% who do not have to stand in harm’s way towards the 1% who have said that they are willing to do so. Those genuinely interested in warriors and heroes cannot help but be stimulated by the various and colorful characters examined here. What are the eternal and what are the transitory qualities of these two types? Each age “gets the fictional heroes it thinks it deserves,” the author avers (21). At the same time warriors are by definition consigned to act under pressure, their character development always subject to the crucible of battle. “Every warrior lives a provisional life,” writes Coker, “He is perpetually a ‘work in progress’, like a book that is still being written. He is often unknown to himself” (54).

The anti-hero replaced the hero in fiction and movies from the 1960's onwards. This modern and post-modern cultural questioning of martial values has its deeper roots in the vast literature of disillusionment that emerged in the wake of World War I. Coker is at his most skeptical in his assessment of these particular works, as if calling for the historian to reassert himself against the imaginative litterateur. Of the English Trench Poets "who still haunt English consciousness," the author complains that their partial and subjective truths have come to represent a singular and objective Truth about the war. He goes so far as to say that "the 'poetic' memory of the war is often wilfully [sic.] misleading" (96). In a welcome effort to offset this myth, he examines Frederic Manning's First World War novel *Her Privates We* with intelligence and sensitivity, placing it in the "Heroes" section, and thus providing a counterbalance to the much more widely read *All Quiet on the Western Front*, analyzed in the "Victims" section. Manning's novel will be unfamiliar to many American readers. Those who teach war literature should take interest in this work that provides an alternative to the much more famous and widely investigated English Great War poets of pity and anger such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon.

If the past several decades of war literature have been dominated by an anti-heroic thrust, has our own age reacted in turn against this strain by taking an interest in warriors and heroes? Popular discourse and the aforementioned determined public efforts to acclaim military service seem to indicate that it has taken such an interest, at least superficially. Serious literary texts, though, are bound to continue telling complicated stories. Wars continue to produce villains, survivors and victims. Coker emphasizes that the latter two—survivors and victims—are the most modern of the five character types, the most "in tune with the times" (187). Victims may literally be killed, of course, or they may be counted as victims if they suffer internal or characterological defeats, debilitating. Survivors by definition live through the war, but need something further to be of interest: "survival is more than merely a matter of returning . . . in one piece. . . . It is about a soldier's inner life remaining intact" (187). While positing that "today's survivors tend to be distinctly unheroic," Coker nonetheless describes the survivor as fascinating for the variety of forms that he takes. Resilience, that is, the ability to marshal inner strength and psychic resources, marks the common factor amongst all the types. Currently, terms such as "wounded warriors," "PTSD," "trauma," and "survivor's guilt" have developed as fields of study; they have entered into view of the media and have even

emerged in common public discourse. Given this reality, the social utility of studying survivors and victims seems self-evident.

This work of scholarship can be read for pleasure and profit by expert and relative neophyte alike. It is not only learned, but humane in the grand sense of the old fashioned term humane studies.