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Rachel Duffett. *The Stomach for Fighting: Food and the Soldiers of the Great War.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015. 304 pp. $29.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-7190-9987-8.

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It is said that an army marches on its stomach, with food provisioning a necessary component of a successful military campaign. For the British army in World War I, that meant a reliance on tins of bully beef and hardtack biscuit. Easily transportable, high-calorie tins of beef hash excited military strategists, leading T. E. Lawrence to muse that the creation of bully beef had "modified land-war more profoundly than the invention of gunpowder" (p. 108). *The Stomach for Fighting: Food and the Soldiers of the Great War* addresses the practical challenges of supplying British forces on the western front and soldiers' responses to these efforts. Rachel Duffett explores the origins and impact of the military diet, using food as a lens to better understand the emotional experience of war. The resulting narrative reveals contradictions between the military's practical desire for energy-rich food and the rankers' personal disdain for a system focused on calories over taste.

Food has long been acknowledged as a catalyst for conflict, with recent studies of food and war exploring food shortages and morale, disruptions in food production, changes to soldier and civilian diets, and hunger as a tool of war. *The Stomach for Fighting* pushes the historiography into exciting new territory through exploration of the physical and psychological dimensions of feeding on the western front. Duffett juxtaposes official concerns over supply and caloric content with the visceral response of soldiers disgusted by strange and unappetizing meals. A heavy reliance upon letters, diaries, and memoirs complements the official narrative with the personal. The descriptive information gleaned from these sources is more than anecdotal; it highlights the power of food to shape identity and relationships. Food, Duffett convincingly demonstrates, is a means for appreciating how the war was experienced and understood by the men who fought it, with meals functioning as "emotional litmus paper, a medium through which other feelings, not obviously related to food were gauged and articulated" (p. 150). It was through the deprivations of war that the emotional significance of food was made explicit.

The book is organized thematically, with chapters that examine the physical, social, and emotional impact of food. The first chapter serves as introduction, placing her work in conversation with scholars of the First World War and food studies. Duffett establishes the historical context by reviewing prewar changes in army provisioning and civilian diets. Advances in nutritional science and improved transportation, coupled with a growing population and concerns over the health of the nation paved the way for army meal re-

forms at the turn of the century. The military "felt the impact of increased nutritional understanding and new dietary ideas more quickly than the ordinary family," and it was into this strange world that working- and lower-middle-class soldiers were thrust (p. 58). For many new recruits the army mess hall was a shock. Food preparation was no longer the domain of wives and mothers, and this upending of the domestic, with meals cooked by men and consumed in public, was unsettling and jarring. An unfamiliar menu exacerbated the alien dining experience in the home camps and at the front. The Army Service Corps (ASC) had been ill-prepared for a conflict of such magnitude, and faced numerous challenges maintaining supply lines. Ration complaints were rooted in dissatisfaction over quality as well as quantity. The army's chief concern was delivering the energy values necessary to fuel soldiers; thus calories trumped flavor. The army calculated a minimum of 3,000 calories a day to maintain the effectiveness of a soldier on the front, and provided a diet consisting primarily of protein and carbohydrates. Fats did appear in rations, but as Duffett points out, many recruits were unaccustomed to a rich diet and suffered from a wide array of gastrointestinal issues.

Military ration scales set the issue at 4,193 calories a day for soldiers at the front, but the food received often failed to meet this standard. Official records extolled technological advances, increased training for cooks, and high levels of production, yet personal accounts betrayed disgust, frustration, and unfettered hunger. Duffett identifies the primary reason behind this discrepancy, acknowledging that documenting hunger "would have been tangible and unavoidable evidence" of the army's inability to properly care for its soldiers (p. 9). Throughout the text she carefully identifies the many contradictions apparent in her sources, acknowledging the biases and problems of military and self-censorship. Nevertheless, the overwhelming reaction to military meals was one of disdain, rooted as much in hunger as it was displeasure with military leadership's "disregard for their palates" (p. 152).

Duffett's argument is rooted in her analysis of these complaints, finding that they reveal much more than tensions between soldiers and HQ, with eating "experienced as a social and emotional act, not merely as a nutritional event" (p. 147). Her final two chapters tackle these complex emotional responses to food, discerning important links between food and identity. Duffett explains that she was drawn to this topic by a desire to know more about the rankers' experience of war. The social and cultural history of the Great War has often been explored through the writings of officers like Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, and Wilfred Owen, but food is a class leveler that allows Duffett to explore the emotional impact of war on the working and middle classes. Discussing war through the lens of a daily basic commodity allows for the atypical experience to be typified and normalized. Hunger compounded an already miserable situation, but food also lay at the center of men's relationships. Meals, whether comprised of military-issued rations, looted food stocks, or parcels from home, offered a respite from life in the trenches, recreating "a microcosm of an ordered, civilized world in the ranks" (p. 223). Food procurement, preparation, and sharing fostered a sense of companionship and normalcy that made wartime conditions bearable.

The Stomach for Fighting is a thoughtful reflection on how soldiers on the western front made sense of the chaos around them. Relationships with and created by food were complex, with Duffett's analysis revealing that food was the source of both great misery and great comfort. While the narrative was not organized chronologically, I was surprised by the tidy conclusion. In it Duffett writes that a soldier's relationship with food was a "constant thread, woven throughout this army experience," yet she fails to engage in discussion of food's legacy after the war (p. 229). For many the postwar continued to be a struggle,

which left me curious to know if and how food functioned as an emotional outlet for returning veterans. The connections drawn between food and identity were shaped by war and the traumas endured during the conflict, but what happened when the fighting stopped? Did the experience of food in war change food at home? How did food continue to shape a soldier's identity in civilian life? Regardless, Duffett's observations on the emotional power inherent in food and feeding practices are striking. ***The Stomach for Fighting*** is a rich addition to studies of food and war, and will be useful to food studies scholars and those interested in the social and cultural history of the Great War.