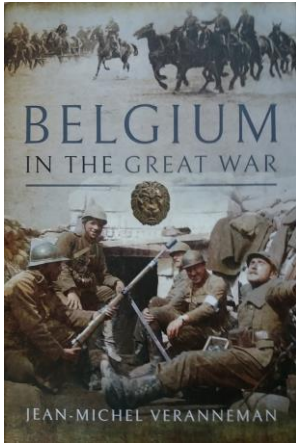


**BOOK REVIEW**  
**BELGIUM IN THE GREAT WAR**  
**Jean-Michel Veranneman**  
*Pen & Sword Military 2018*  
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As is well known neutral Belgium was invaded by Germany in order to outflank the French Army. Germany did not expect the spirited resistance by the Belgian Army, nor the significant defeat inflicted by the Belgian Cavalry Division on the German Cavalry Corps commanded by General von der Marwitz. On 12<sup>th</sup> August 1914 the Belgian Army fighting on its own without help from the British or French defeated a determined German attack at the Battle of Halen, (also known as the Battle of the Silver Helmets because of the many cavalry helmets left behind on the battlefield by the German cuirassiers). This battle also signalled the end of the Napoleonic era massed cavalry charge, such action being utterly defeated by rapid rifle and machine gun fire. Although ultimately pushed back to a sliver of land beyond the Yser the Belgian resistance certainly had a negative effect on German plans as exemplified in the resources need to subdue the forts at

Liege and Antwerp.

Belgian resistance continued under the German occupation, during which Belgium as one of the most developed industrial countries of the world suffered severe destruction, stripped of its industrial infrastructure and subject to civilian deportations and executions. The authors research makes it very clear how the country suffered and the behaviour of the invader was (for a professedly well trained and disciplined force) was fundamentally barbaric in human and cultural terms driven by what was to prove an unfounded fear of the 'francs-tireur'. The Allies made great propaganda out of the atrocities and the summary execution of civilians however 'exaggeration' tended to lessen its impact. However, Belgium whose international standing before the war was somewhat tarnished by its reputation in the Belgian Congo, did benefit overall and German war crimes certainly had a positive effect on international opinion, the country emerging from the war with great prestige as did King Albert 1 and Queen Elisabeth. It is not well known that Belgians colonial army defeated German colonial forces and conquered part of German East Africa.

Sadly, at the time of the treaty negotiations it seems that despite the countries privations it seems fair to say that the British and French treated Belgium and others with an attitude tantamount to contempt. In Belgium's case her claims for reparations and territory were only partially met and as a direct result of the war it abandoned its policy of neutrality, introduced universal suffrage for men and wives and mothers of war dead but the Flanders question remained unresolved.

Jean-Michel Veranneman (whose father fought with distinction in the war) has provided the reader with a deeply researched and highly informative account of Belgium's war and its aftermath. He effectively counters the premise of 'poor little Belgium' with his research and the detailed image of the reality of war as it affected Belgium. I highly commend this book for those with an interest in the Great War for the insights it provides on Belgium's war.

***Martin Willoughby***