



Behind the Front: British Soldiers and French Civilians, 1914-1918 (Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare)

Craig Gibson

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Until now scholars have looked for the source of the indomitable Tommy morale on the Western Front in innate British bloody-mindedness and irony, not to mention material concerns such as leave, food, rum, brothels, regimental pride, and male bonding. However, re-examining previously used sources alongside never-before consulted archives, Craig Gibson shifts the focus away from battle and the trenches to times behind the front, where the British intermingled with a vast population of allied civilians, whom Lord Kitchener had instructed the troops to 'avoid'. Besides providing a comprehensive examination of soldiers' encounters with local French and Belgian inhabitants which were not only unavoidable but also challenging, symbiotic and uplifting in equal measure, Gibson contends that such relationships were crucial to how the war was fought on the Western Front and, ultimately, to British victory in 1918. What emerges is a novel interpretation of the British and Dominion soldier at war.

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