



The Rocky Road to the Great War

Nicholas Murray

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Nicholas Murray's *The Rocky Road to the Great War* examines the evolution of field fortification theory and practice between 1877 and 1914. During this period field fortifications became increasingly important, and their construction evolved from primarily above to below ground. The reasons for these changes are crucial to explaining the landscape of World War I, yet they have remained largely unstudied.

The transformation in field fortifications reflected not only the ongoing technological advances but also the changing priorities in the reasons for constructing them, such as preventing desertion, protecting troops, multiplying forces, reinforcing tactical points, providing a secure base, and dominating an area. Field fortification theory, however, did not evolve solely in response to improving firepower or technology. Rather, a combination of those factors and societal ones—for example, the rise of large conscript armies and the increasing participation of citizens rather than subjects—led directly to technical alterations in the actual construction of the fieldworks. These technical developments arose from the second wave of the Industrial Revolution in the late nineteenth century that provided new technologies that increased the firepower of artillery, which in turn drove the transition from above- to belowground field fortification.

Based largely on primary sources including French, British, Austrian, and American military attache reports—Murray's enlightening study is unique in defining, fully examining, and contextualizing the theories and construction of field fortifications before World War I.

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