

WWI tactics

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 30 Nov 1998

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m.driussi — 30 Nov 1998, 18:32

As my last ditch defense, I'll blame it all on John Crowley's (award winning?) "Great Work of Time":

"She told how in those same years the European powers who confronted each other in Africa were also at work stockpiling arms and building mechanized armies to a size unheard of in the history of the world, to be finally let loose upon one another in August of 1914, unprepared for what was to become of them; armies officered by men who still lived in the previous century, but armed with weapons more dreadful than they could imagine. The machine gun: no one seemed to understand that the machine gun had changed war forever, and though the junior officers and Other Ranks soon learned it, the commanders never did. At the First Battle of the Somme wave after wave of British soldiers were sent against German machine guns, to be mown down like grain. There were a quarter of a million casualties in that battle. And yet the generals went on ordering massed attacks against machine guns for the four long years of the war.

"`But they knew,' Denys could not help saying. `They did know. Machine guns had been used against massed native armies for years, all over the Empire. In Afghanistan. In the Sudan. Africa. They knew.'

"`Yes,' Huntington said. `They knew. And yet, in the Original Situation [i.e., our history], they paid no attention. They went blindly on and made their dreadful mistakes. Why? How could they be so stupid, those generals and statesmen who in the [optimized-by-time-travelers] world you knew behaved so wisely and so well? [For example: WWI only lasted one year in the optimized timeline.] For one reason only: they lacked the help and knowledge of a group of men and women who had seen all those mistakes made [a secret society of time travelers]'" (NOVELTY, p. 96).

Crowley is using this sentiment as a key point for a time travel story (after all, it is nearly impossible to get a time travel adventure going if you posit ala CANDIDE that this is the best of all possible worlds [because it is the only world] and that history [military history, especially] is already optimized by the best people making the best decisions--all of which takes the Wind out of "What if?" scenarios from PAVANE to "Back to the Future"), so we can't say how much he believes it himself . . . OTOH, he does list John Ellis's book THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE MACHINE GUN (1975) as one of the inspiring texts for the story. FWIW.

And no, I didn't/don't learn WWI from Crowley's fiction, but I have been re-reading this fiction and so the example and its sentiment (which has, alas, taken all the attention) were close at hand.

=mantis=