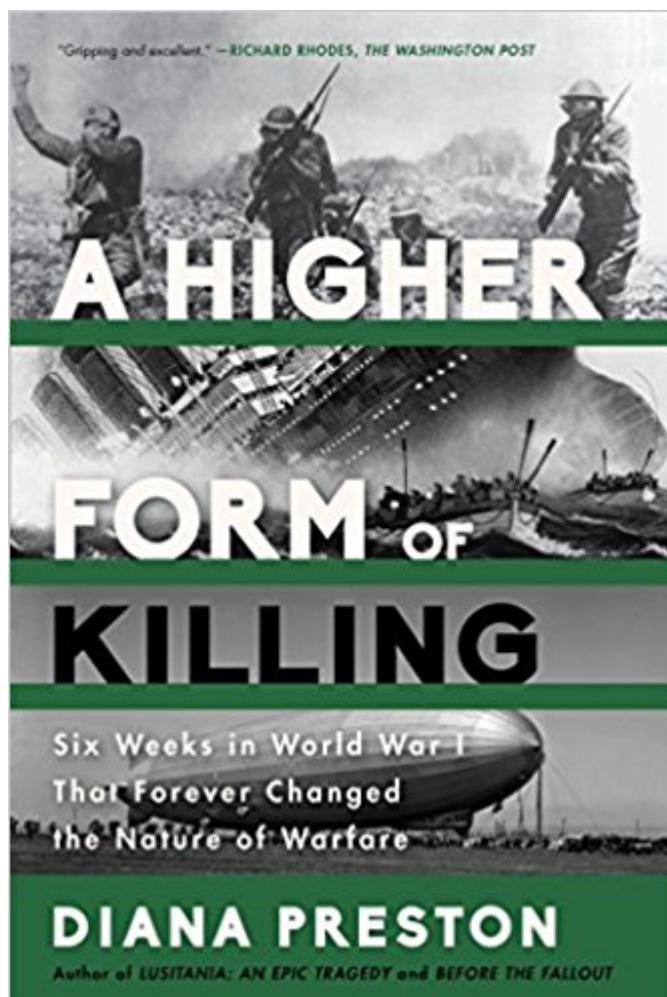


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# A Higher Form Of Killing: Six Weeks In World War I That Forever Changed The Nature Of Warfare



## Synopsis

Between April 22 and May 31, 1915, Western civilization was shocked. World War I was already appalling in its brutality, but until then it had been fought on the battlefield and by rules long agreed by international convention. Suddenly those rules were abandoned. On April 22, at Ypres, German canisters spewed poison gas over French and Canadian soldiers in their trenches; on May 7, the German submarine U-20, without warning, torpedoed the passenger liner Lusitania; and on May 31, a German zeppelin began the first aerial bombardment of London. Each of these actions violated rules of war carefully agreed to at the Hague Conventions of 1898 and 1907 which were deliberately breached by the German authorities in an attempt to spread terror and force the Allies to surrender. While that failed, the psychological damage these attacks caused far outweighed the physical casualties. Celebrated historian Diana Preston links these events for the first time, revealing the dramatic stories behind them through the eyes of those who were there. Placing the attacks in the context of the centuries-old debate over what constitutes "just war" and "civilized warfare," Preston shows how subsequently the other combatants felt the necessity to develop and use similar weapons. Now, when such weapons of mass destruction are once again deployed and threatened, and terrorist atrocities abound in very different kinds of conflicts, the vivid story of their birth is of great relevance.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A British historian of considerable breadth and accomplishment, Preston (The Dark Defile: Britain's Catastrophic Invasion of Afghanistan, 1838-1842, 2012, etc.) focuses on three wartime innovations

that elevated to new heights mankind's ability to slaughter itself: submarines, zeppelins and poison gas . . . In what is often difficult but necessary reading, Preston provides haunting descriptions of the effects of poison gas. A harrowing--and, in this era of drones, absolutely pertinent--look at the rapacious reaches of man's murderous imagination." •starred review, Kirkus" Preston deftly and graphically weaves the complex stories--hitherto kept distinct--of these land, sea and air innovations into a connected narrative. For the first time, readers can grasp the mounting cognitive assault on civilians, soldiers and politicians of the curious clustering of events that spring." •New York Times Book Review" Well-detailed, shattering . . . This is Preston at the top of her analytical form, offering fascinating modern parables on war, mortality and civilization." •starred review, Publishers Weekly" For an illuminating look at the Lusitania in the context of Germany's pioneering use of weapons of mass destruction, see Diana Preston's *A Higher Form of Killing*." •Lev Grossman, TIME Magazine" [A] gripping and excellent book . . . Preston, whose previous books include a history of the sinking of the Lusitania, tells this grim story well. Her extensive archival research fills in the historical chronology with well-selected quotations from personal accounts of participants at every level of civilian and military life and of government." •Richard Rhodes, Washington Post" The author's excellent use of war diaries and newspapers in the sections on Zeppelin warfare are particularly gripping, juxtaposing the terror and awe felt by Londoners and the heroism required of Zeppelin crews . . . A well-documented and argued analysis of the emergence of modern warfare." •starred review, Shelf Awareness" A fascinating and chilling chronicle of weapons of mass destruction . . . Preston's eloquent and objective history of war is immensely exciting." •Library Journal" Vividly narrating the deployment of each of these new technologies, Preston emphasizes the horrors they delivered and the ethical deliberations (or absence thereof) of key decision makers. Viewed together, Preston suggests, these three new ways of killing demonstrated the shortcomings of the laws of war and set the trajectory for even more powerful weapons of mass destruction." •Booklist" [A] fine new book . . . Preston succeeds best in her dramatic renderings of the gas attacks at Ypres, the terror on the decks of the Lusitania as it sank, and the surreal flights of giant airships that seemed like an H.G. Wells fiction come to life." •Boston Globe

Diana Preston is an acclaimed historian and author of the definitive *Lusitania: An Epic Tragedy*, *Before the Fallout: From Marie Curie to Hiroshima* (winner of the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for Science and Technology), *The Boxer Rebellion*, and *The Dark Defile: Britain's Catastrophic Invasion of Afghanistan, 1838–1842*, among other works of narrative history. She and her husband, Michael, live in London.

Early in World War One between April 22nd and May 30th, 1915 only 8 months after the start of the war there were three major events using weapons never used before in the history of warfare.

Dianna Preston's new book is the story of these three told with exceptional detail and interesting research. No doubt the Germans are the villains here but Preston does not hold anyone blameless for how they adopted and further developed even more horrific forms of mass killing. Preston's choosing of these three weapons leaves out many other terrible higher forms of killing introduced in World War One. The use of machine guns and tanks for example. But her choices are interesting, educational and sound. The irony being that these awful weapons were used to fight a war that was totally unnecessary and pointless. A war that devastated European civilization and economic growth. A war that never ended First at Ypres was the use by Germany of poison gas on Canadian and French troops. I found this section of the book the most interesting and horrifying. Just the description of the Germans transporting the gas canisters to the front line trenches and digging the holes to plant them while waiting for the wind to blow in the right direction before mounting their attack is worth the price of the book. Preston also discusses the future use and stockpiling of gas by major powers after the war. Second, was the submarine U-20 sinking the Lusitania on May 7th killing 1,198. This section of the book is well done but Dianna Preston's earlier book about just the Lusitania sinking is a much better read and more detailed. I still consider her Lusitania book her best book (and I have read all of her books). I also just read Erik Larson's book DEAD WAKE which also is about the sinking of the Lusitania. Thirdly, on May 31, 1915 London was bombed by a German Zeppelin. Although the damage done was insignificant compared to the use of gas and submarines the Zeppelin attacks had a great psychological impact on the British civilian population. The stories told here about the development of the Zeppelins and the inability of the British to develop planes that could shoot them down is most interesting. And serves as a prologue to the Second World War's Battle of Britain until the very end of World War II and in the Middle East is still being fought today. The book's publication is obviously timed to coincide with the 100th anniversary of these events.

perhaps misleadingly titled this is a fascinating look at the escalation of industrial terror driven by technology and a refusal on the German side to believe that the war was a mistake and unwinnable. the author avoids blaming and helpfully locates the inclusion of civilians and industrial scale murder of soldiers in the cultural mindset of the age - not so dissimilar to our own. vicious escalation will shorten the war was the belief then heedless of common humanity and inevitable reciprocation. In

this as in so many other ways WWI was the precursor to WWII

Diana Preston is a wonderful popular author of historical subjects! The London born and Oxford educated Preston has written about such subjects as The Boxer Rebellion, The Road to Culloden Moore, Antony and Cleopatra and The Lusitania. In this latest volume from her prolific pen she delves into three horrible innovations in warfare which transformed warfare in the twentieth century. During 1915 battle in the air, on land and under the seas was forever changed by:a. The invention of the Zeppelins led to aerial warfare in France and to bombing in England by the German Air Force. This was a forecast of the Battle of Britain in 1940. The author traces the development of the zeppelins and World War I combat in the skies.b. The use of poison gas by the Germans at Ypres in 1915 led to terrible deaths in the trenches. Poison gas was used by both the Germans and Great Britain during the war.c. The German navy resorted to undersea warfare against shipping in their unrestricted submarine warfare by the U-Boats. The attack on the Lusitania in May 1915 is covered in detail by Preston. This book is a good study of warfare as we remember the one hundred year anniversary of the tragedy of World War I and the beginning of the bloodiest century in human history.

Extremely well written and detailed history of the development of modern warfare and the elimination of the distinction between combatant and civilian during WW I. Diana Preston has provided a very readable and compelling look at industrialization's contribution to the slaughter that was WWI.

Great book pulling together scholarship and first hand accounts of the horrors of war. Diana Preston does a great job of setting the stage for the use of lethal forms of killing in future wars and helps us inside the minds of the British and German leaders who made the decisions to unleash submarine warfare, chemical warfare and aerial bombing targeting civilians.

An excellent book. Well-written, well-organized and compelling. More attention, however, should have been paid to the blockade of Germany during this period of time and the horrible suffering and death caused thereby. This omission is rather strange since it is directly related to the subject matter of this book, mass death during time of war.

I enjoyed this book immensely. It is a bit tough to get started, but very impactful.

Excellent historical rendition. Very informative and of great use to my teaching.

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