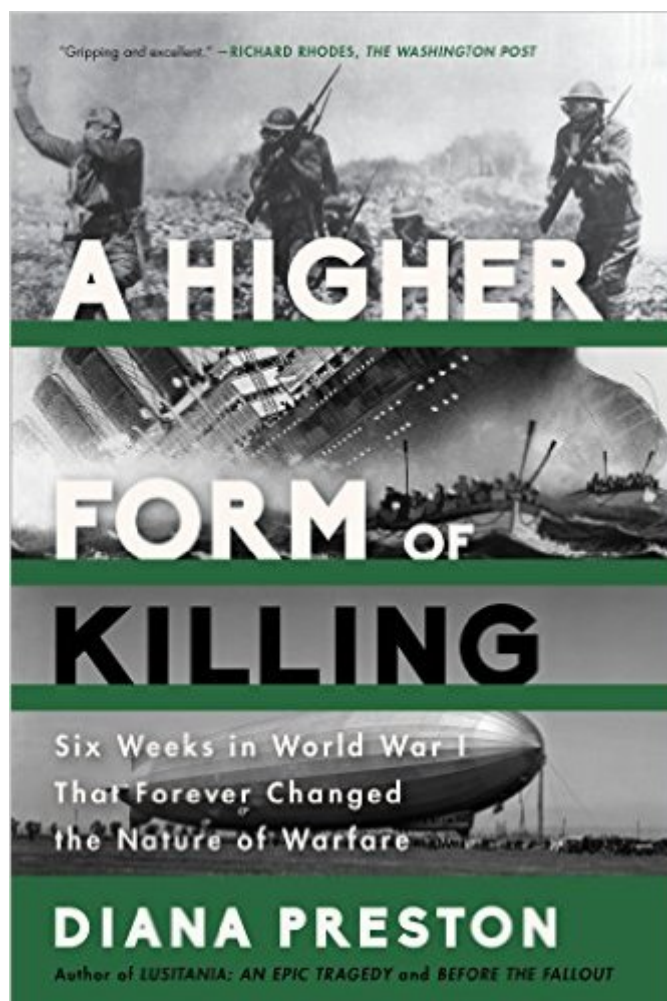


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# A Higher Form Of Killing: Six Weeks In World War I That Forever Changed The Nature Of Warfare



## 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

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. And 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.

A clearly presented and dynamic history full of telling anecdote about the spring of 1915 in which submarines (the U-boat sinking of the "Lusitania"), dirigibles (Zeppelins in the first blitz on London) and poison gas (Second Battle of Ypres) were first employed large-scale by German forces against the Allies' combat and home fronts, and about the radical changes these made in the way all future wars would be fought. The book's theme is best spoken in Churchill's remark in 1940 that, "In the last war the bombing of open cities was regarded as forbidden. Now everybody does it as a matter of course. It is simply a question of fashion changing as she does between long and short skirts for women." (p.273) A cynical and bitter, and too true,

comment on the evolution of war-making, and the reason why this book needs to be read by voters and taxpayers before they agree to make war.

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 takes three seemingly unrelated events of 1915 to weave a tale that is a thrilling, informative, and interesting history. Generally the first use of poison gas, the sinking of the Lusitania, and the bombing of London by Zeppelins are examined as singular events, but Preston demonstrates how these events were catalysts in overturning long-held views on the conduct of war, a flouting of the Hague Conventions rules of war, and an escalation of scientific warfare that continues to resonate today. In *A Higher Form of Killing*, each episode is examined in the context of the war and in relation to the other two episodes. The main characters are introduced, the science behind the weapons is examined and then a recounting of the event using first person perspectives when and where available. Finally, the author looks at the lasting effects each event had on the rest of the war and on future wars and conflicts. Preston manages to balance her look at the three separate events by combining these acts of German aggression into an examination of how the world thinks of weapon systems before, during, and after the First World War. Read *A Higher Form of Killing* and make up your mind regarding her thesis.

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.

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