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John Cerullo, *Minotaur: French Military Justice and the Aernoult-Rousset Affair*. De Kalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011. xi + 298 pp. Appendices, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$40.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-87580-433-0.

Review by Elizabeth Propes, Tennessee Technological University.

In the 1890s, the Dreyfus Affair thrust the issue of civil-military relations and the disconnect between the military and civilian justice systems onto France's national stage. In *Minotaur*, John Cerullo carries the story further into the twentieth century with an in-depth discussion of the military trials of Émile Rousset for his part in the Aernoult-Rousset Affair and for the murder of a fellow soldier in circumstances clearly connected to the Affair itself. A criminal in his earlier life, Rousset's military service had been less than stellar, culminating in the infamous disciplinary camps in Algeria where he witnessed some of the circumstances surrounding the 1909 death of fellow soldier, Albert Aernoult.

These disciplinary camps, infamous among anti-militarists and other critics of the French military, had been part of a larger national discussion over how the military treated its soldiers and the general relationship between the military and the nation as defined by the values of the Third Republic. Rousset asserted that Aernoult had died as a result of excessive cruelty by his officers, a charge that, from the military's perspective, violated the necessary respect for hierarchy and discipline. Rousset further exacerbated the problem, however, by writing to *Le Matin*, which, along with *Paris-Est, L'Humanité*, and other papers, published numerous articles through 1909 and, indeed, helped to maintain a public spotlight on the Affair for more than three years. By contacting the civilian world, Rousset brought internal issues that were solely the purview of the military onto the public, civilian stage. An internal matter of discipline became once again the focus of a national debate. That Aernoult had entered the military primarily as "punishment" for his participation in a ditch diggers' strike and that Rousset faced disciplinary actions for his efforts to achieve justice for Aernoult's death further elevated an otherwise minor incident "in the barracks" into another argument over the relationship between the military and the Third Republic.

Cerullo locates the Aernoult-Rousset Affair as round two of the struggle made most famous through the Dreyfus Affair a decade earlier, but that ultimately had its roots in an on-going effort to determine the appropriate relationship between the military and society that had begun during the French Revolution. Cerullo dedicates several chapters to the historical context in which the military justice system had evolved. These chapters represent his most valuable contribution to the field, and researchers interested in the French Revolution and the Second Empire as a whole will benefit from reading them. In the second chapter, Cerullo rejects claims from critics in the Third Republic that the military's "exceptional justice" was just "some barbaric relic of the *Ancien Régime*" by analyzing the ways that several governments from the French Revolution actually laid the foundation for the justice system still in place a century later (p. 4). Cerullo's discussion also brings the reader to the Second Empire with a solid explanation of the 1857 law that further defined the separation of the military's justice system. This chapter highlights the pragmatic challenges that intersected the Revolutionary governments' ideals with the reality of maintaining a military ready for action. Cerullo's discussion suggests that the

idealism of the Revolution was simply not compatible with the everyday problems of military service, ultimately indicting the military's critics in the Third Republic for falling for the same contradictions.

Cerullo focuses on the Rousset case as an access point to the larger issue of civil-military relations in the Third Republic shortly before the First World War. The primary way in which this debate occurred came through the issue of military justice and the fact that the military system did not adhere to the same principles that the civilian system did, but rather enjoyed "exceptional jurisdiction" that critics contended violated the very principles that brought French citizens into military service in the first place (p. 4). As Cerullo demonstrates, the Aernoult-Rousset Affair revealed the extent to which these issues raised in the Dreyfus Affair had not gone away in the intervening decade, despite efforts by the Third Republic to initiate reform. Civilians and citizens who had completed their term of military service continued to be subject to the military justice system for actions that violated the 1893-1894 "villainous laws" (*lois scélérates*) that attempted to prevent criticism and attacks against the military from civilian society. At stake was the debate over whether the military existed in a subservient position to the Republic and, more importantly for some citizens, the Republic's stated values of liberty and equality, or whether the military stood apart from that Republic in order to uphold loftier values of the "military spirit," which placed a "pact of honor" above "politics," so that the army could fill its "real *raison d'être* [which] was the preservation of a certain moral state" (p. 11). Cerullo explores the meaning and consequences of this "military spirit" through an extensive exploration of the thoughts of General Jules Bourelly and his publications in *Le Correspondant de Paris*.

Critics of the military's justice system argued that it represented a significant way in which the military refused to fall in line with the values of the Third Republic. Bourelly clearly rejected the "penetration of civilian norms and priorities into military settings," which he described as simply "politics" and "politicization" of the military (p. 13). As Cerullo explains, "'politics' was the enemy of discipline and must be kept as far from the daily operations of the jurisdiction as possible" (p. 232). Bourelly considered the democratic aspects of the Third Republic as, in Cerullo's words, "toxins the nation now carried" and "all the diseases to which modern society had fallen prey" (p. 13). The reader sees the military's perspective during the Third Republic through the theoretical discussion of Bourelly, who serves as the cornerstone of Cerullo's discussion of the military's theoretical perspective on civil-military relations and military justice. This reviewer finds that focus both welcome, but also a bit narrow, and this reviewer wonders how the larger discussion of civil-military relations and military justice might have proceeded in *Minotaur* had Cerullo either addressed the nuances within the military regarding the relationship between military and civilian justice (something comparable to his exploration of disagreements among the Left on this issue), or demonstrated to readers that no such nuances existed.

Countering the focus on Bourelly, Cerullo provides a clear discussion of the Left on this issue, although he focuses primarily on the actions of the Committee for Social Defense (Comité de la Défense Sociale, CDS) in its efforts to defend Rousset against military tribunals. The CDS directly challenged the villainous laws in its public criticism of the military's justice system through newspaper articles and posters demanding "Down with Biribi" (the popular name for the disciplinary camps), among other things. These actions resulted in several trials, which Cerullo also considers in his analysis. Here the issue of military justice extended beyond the barracks to the behavior of civilians, as allowed by the "villainous laws." Cerullo's portrayal of the CDS' actions and these trials is that of calculated politics, drawing on Bourelly's own language that interpreted any civilian oversight of military justice as mere politics rather than any legitimate social values or sense of justice. Chapter eight's own title, "Triumph of the Political," reflects this perspective, as well as the CDS' own belief that only through a well-publicized case could true justice be achieved (p. 146). Cerullo's discussion nicely carries the reader to his own conclusion, that by fighting so strongly to keep the military's justice system completely removed from civilian influences, the military laid the foundation for the turbulent, passionate attacks of

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the Aernoult-Rousset Affair (and the Dreyfus Affair a decade earlier) that “were infinitely more damaging to military justice than the politics of parliamentary reform” (p. 233).

The relationship between the nation’s military and the nation’s value system and core beliefs remained an issue beyond these immediate affairs and, for Cerullo, the French military avoided the real consequences of these affairs only because “a change in the nation’s political mood” and the onset of war intervened (p. 233). As a result, Cerullo’s ultimate conclusion lies beyond the immediacy of any of these debates in the French Third Republic as he asks whether the military could achieve justice or defend its own values through the subordination of Rousset’s rights as a citizen, and simultaneously, whether the politicized intervention into Rousset’s case had in fact achieved justice simply because it had interfered with the flaws in the military’s system. Whether Rousset was right, whether he was guilty of murder—these questions remain unanswered. In his overall approach to the issue of military justice, however, Cerullo leaves much greater questions, with enduring significance for twenty-first century nations, for the reader to ponder after finishing Cerullo’s strong exploration into the French experience.

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