



Shooting Up: A Short History of Drugs and War by Łukasz Kamiński.

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In *Shooting Up*, political scientist Łukasz Kamiński (Jagiellonian Univ. in Kraków) has produced an ambitious study of both licit and illicit drug use in modern military conflicts, in the belief that “grasping the scale of the use of intoxicants by states, armies, nonstate armed groups, and combatants is crucial to the study of military history.” He argues that an understanding of the use of drugs to ensure combat readiness, cope with the mental and physical strains of campaigning, and (by their sale) to finance warfare sheds light on important “existential and instrumental dimensions of war” (xxiv).

With a purview extending from antiquity to modern times, the book clarifies the political, social, cultural and wartime contexts of the use of drugs, be they amphetamines in Imperial Japan’s military and home front during World War II, opiates and hashish among Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan, or hallucinogens by Scandinavian “berserkers” in pre-modern times. In so doing, its author highlights the constructed nature of drugs’ (and addictions’) meaning, drawing astutely on the relevant scholarly work in the field of “drug history.” He notes that the physiological effects of a given substance are related to its user’s expectations and the setting in which it is used. This accounts for the sometimes contradictory experiences of users of the same substance. For example, cannabis, a mild analgesic and hallucinogen typically associated with leisure-time relaxation, was employed to fortify nineteenth-century field workers for long hours laboring in Caribbean sugar-cane fields.

Given the range of drug use in time and place, Kamiński avers that “studying soldiers’ memoirs, recollections, and interpretations is absolutely crucial for discovering the meanings they assigned to intoxication.” In a nod to Clausewitz’s dictum about war and politics, he defines war as an “essentially social and cultural phenomenon” where armed forces constitute a “continuation of society and its culture” (xxvi). The central question for Kamiński is “to what extent should the knowledge of the massive consumption of drugs by a given military cause us to reinterpret our understanding of a particular war or campaign?” (xxvii).

Shooting Up contains a preface, a prologue, three main parts, a conclusion, and an epilogue. The preface lays out the author’s interpretive approach, while the prologue outlines the settings and motives for drug use in combat—specifically, “mustering courage, fostering a fighting mood, ... [and] alleviating stress and fear” (3) before and during combat, as well as enhancing combat performance. Drugs may also allay post-combat psychological trauma. While alcohol (officially administered or not) in military contexts has been well documented and studied, Kamiński notes that opiates, cannabis, cocaine, amphetamines, and hallucinogens and their effects still need similarly careful examination.

Part I, “From Premodern Times to the End of the Second World War,” explores cultural and societal norms regarding drug use in the military. The author discusses, for instance, the medicinal and religious use of opium among the ancient Greeks and of coca among precontact Incan societies. He also explains the impact of the “psychoactive revolution” on warfare from the age of discovery through the

nineteenth century, particularly the global spread of drugs as commodities.¹ Veterans of Napoleon's campaigns in Egypt brought hashish and cannabis back home with them. The mid-nineteenth-century Opium Wars ensured that drug use by demoralized Chinese soldiers further weakened the disintegrating Qing dynasty's military preparedness. By contrast, soldiers in the Indian army of the same period ingested opium within a more temperate, stabler cultural setting, where its anesthetic and euphoric properties enhanced soldiers' fighting spirit.

The chapters on the American Civil War and World War I identify similar patterns of drug use by armed forces, not always resulting in runaway addiction. In the absence of more precise and therapeutic treatments and medicaments, the consumption of opium to alleviate common symptoms like bowel irritation caused by digestive illnesses and debilitating coughing among tuberculosis victims often made it a physician's best option. Evidence is lacking as to whether Civil War veterans contributed to an uptick in postwar narcotic addiction, when an unregulated pharmacopeia (including cheap morphine by the 1870s) led to increased addiction nationwide.

Kamieński can be more definitive concerning cocaine use by British troops in World War I. There is documentation for the British army's purchase of cocaine, or medicines containing it, and it continued to be unregulated in Europe until the 1920s. Infantrymen used it to sustain themselves, and—along with morphine—it was commonly employed by medics. Yet, without firm documentation, Kamieński writes that “Unsurprisingly, many patients developed an irresistible appetite for these substances; many became addicted and continued to self-administer drugs long after their recovery” (97); and he exaggerates in claiming that “There are reasons to believe that the conflict left hundreds of thousands of men addicted to cocaine.”²

Kamieński's excellent case studies of (meth)amphetamine use by German and Japanese soldiers in World War II are better sourced. He shows that research by drug and medical historians, along with German studies of the Wehrmacht's methamphetamine consumption, reveal what put the blitz in blitzkrieg early on in the war. In 1939–40, over fifty million three-milligram doses of Pervitin (crystal meth) were distributed, along with meth-infused chocolate bars for pilots and tank crews. Some thirty million doses were distributed on the eastern front though 1942. By then, however, there were reports of severe exhaustion and drug hangovers that could only be remedied with rest. Tighter restrictions ensued: in the Luftwaffe, only elite units received narcotics or stimulants.

Kaminsky cites anecdotal accounts of meth-induced psychoses, but goes too far in suggesting that

the effect of Pervitin was extremely aggressive behavior, which might, to some extent, help explain why Wehrmacht soldiers turned into ruthless murderers, often committing the cruelest massacres of civilians.... If we want to understand the psychological aspects of the Nazi political and military program with its power, dynamics, and appeal, we need to consider—apart from many other factors such as its racist ideology and occultism—the substantial role of methamphetamine. Uppers, which improved soldiers' endurance and fueled their aggression and ruthless determination but simultaneously made them addicts, emerge as a link connecting murderous ideology and war, conquest and genocide. (112, 116)

This claim typifies an unresolved tension in the book. On the one hand, social-constructivists stress that any given drug's effects reflect not only physiological changes, but individual expectations and sociocultural contexts, dispelling the notion of drugs as all-powerful agents that take control of

1. See, further, David T. Courtwright, *Forces of Habit: Drugs and the Making of the Modern World* (Cambridge: Harvard U Pr, 2002).

2. He cites only a novelist who discovered Dutch pharmaceutical records of 20–30,000-kilogram shipments, annually, to Britain during the war.

individual behavior. On the other hand, attribution of wild acts to drug-taking perpetuates old myths about drugs and their users, a flaw in Kamiński's understanding of the history of drug use.

Part II, "The Cold War," examines US attempts—prompted by fears of Communist brain-washing during the Korean War—to create a "truth drug." This research, which centered on psychedelics, dovetailed with efforts to weaponize psychotropics for non-lethal warfare amid fears of nuclear annihilation. Unethical tests of powerful hallucinogens on American military personnel, many conducted by psychiatrist James Ketchum, are well covered here.³

Part II also considers the American war in Vietnam and the USSR's in Afghanistan. While the US military administered amphetamines to infantrymen and antipsychotics like Thorazine in cases of psychological trauma, illicit drug use drew the most public attention. Sensationalized accounts of marijuana use and a 15-percent rate of heroin use among US troops (in 1971) spawned what one historian has termed "the myth of the addicted army."⁴

As for drug use in combat, the author rightly concludes that "contrary to the popular view, [it] did not, overall, seriously interfere with combat performance" (213). Drug use was mostly confined to rear areas and periods of down time. In the case of the Soviet military in Afghanistan, readily available hashish and opiates were widely used during that unpopular counterinsurgency war, especially given the dearth of alcohol in a Muslim country.

Part III, "Toward the Present," considers conflicts funded through drug trafficking, as well as drug use among participants in late twentieth- and twenty-first-century small wars. Conflicts in Somalia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone featured common stimulant use by irregular forces, including child soldiers. Regarding the effects of drugs on fighting performance, Kamiński can only offer speculations based upon press reports and personal accounts. Better documented is the role of drug trafficking in fueling irregular warfare in Africa, as well as South Asia and South America.

Kamiński concludes with a look into the future of drug use in an engaging account of the US military's development of new drugs (e.g. Modafinil) that induce alertness without the amphetamine side effects of exhaustion and disrupted circadian cycles. Thus continues the age-old quest to expand the limits of human capacities in combat.

Despite some shortcomings, *Shooting Up* is a valuable primer for military historians seeking to understand the enduring role of drugs in combat. Łukasz Kamiński has synthesized a great deal of scholarship and helpfully identified topics in need of further exploration.

3. See Raffi Khatchadourian, "Operation Delirium," *New Yorker* (17 Dec 2012). Though truth-drug research was unsuccessful, it intersected with psychological research in the 1950s and 60s that led to "enhanced interrogation" techniques—see Alfred McCoy, *A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation, from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (NY: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

4. Jeremy Kuzmarov, *The Myth of the Addicted Army: Vietnam and the Modern War on Drugs* (Amherst: U Mass Pr, 2009).