

A Strange and Formidable Weapon



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出版者:

出版时间:2008-6

装帧:

isbn:9780803222236

The advent of poison gas in World War I shocked Britons at all levels of society, yet by the end of the conflict their nation was a leader in chemical warfare. Although never used on the home front, poison gas affected almost every segment of British society physically, mentally, or emotionally, proving to be an armament of total war. Through cartoons, military records, novels, treaties, and other sources, Marion Girard examines the varied ways different sectors of British society viewed chemical warfare, from the industrialists who promoted their toxic weapons while maintaining private control of production to the politicians who used gas while balancing the need for victory with the risk of developing a reputation for barbarity. Although most Britons considered gas a vile weapon and a symptom of the enemy's inhumanity, many eventually condoned its use. The public debates about the future of gas extended to the interwar years, revealing that the taboo against poison gas was far from inevitable. "A Strange and Formidable Weapon" uncovers the complicated history of this weapon of total war and illustrates the widening involvement of society in warfare.

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