

Hugely entertaining: Going With The Boys by Judith Mackrell is a book that manages to be both thoughtful and edge-of-your-seat thrilling

By [KATHRYN HUGHES](#)

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Going With The Boys: Six Extraordinary Women Writing From The Front Line

Judith Mackrell

Picador £20

Rating: ★★★★★

Until the 1930s, female journalists were expected to know their place, which was mainly on the fashion or problem pages of the newspapers that employed them. But as the international situation darkened and war became imminent, a handful of remarkable women decided that they could not continue to sit in the office writing about hem lengths while the world went up in flames.

In this hugely entertaining and informative book, Judith Mackrell tells the stories of six intrepid women who demanded the right to risk their lives reporting from the front line.

Two of Mackrell's subjects have been written about many times before. There is Martha Gellhorn, the hard-drinking, fast-talking American who was married to Ernest Hemingway and reporting on the war for Collier's magazine.



Lee Miller, (above, taking a bath in Adolf Hitler's Munich apartment on April 30 1945, the day after the Nazi leader committed suicide) the Hitchcock blonde

Incredibly, Hemingway, who was already famous as the author of *For Whom The Bell Tolls* and *The Sun Also Rises*, signed up to the very same magazine to produce dispatches from the closing months of the conflict.

This, inevitably, made an already rocky marriage positively combustible, with husband and wife competing for the same stories. Things came to a head in June 1944 when Allied troops landed on the beaches of Northern France and began to push back against the occupying German army.

In order to be the first reporter on the scene, Gellhorn stowed away on a hospital ship bound for Normandy and managed to scoop everyone, including her husband, by being the only war reporter to be present at D-Day.

Unsurprisingly, the Gellhorn-Hemingway marriage didn't outlast the war.



In order to be the first reporter on the scene, Martha Gellhorn (above with then husband Ernest Hemingway in Hawaii, 1941) stowed away on a hospital ship bound for Normandy

Equally well-known is Lee Miller, the Hitchcock blonde who made the unlikely transition from stunning Vogue cover girl to tough war photographer. She arrived in Normandy a month after D-Day and from there followed the American troops as they fought their way across Europe.

In early 1945 Miller accompanied Allied forces as they advanced into Germany itself. It was now that the grim discoveries were made of Nazi atrocities at Buchenwald and Dachau.

Miller's photographs of the piles of corpses, bones and shoes remain some of the most iconic ever taken of the concentration camps. When she later took a bath in Hitler's Munich apartment, her boots were still caked in the dust from Dachau.

Less well known is Sigrid Schultz, who worked for the Berlin bureau of the Chicago Tribune. Despite having an American passport, Schultz had spent much of her youth in Germany, which gave her unique access to the mindset and ambitions of the Nazi Party in general, and Hitler in particular.

Indeed, so accurate were her international reports about what Germany might do next that her position started to become dangerous, especially since she was Jewish.

It got to the point where Schultz was obliged to dodge detection by writing her articles under a fictitious byline and nipping over the border to Norway or Denmark to file her pieces.

IT'S A FACT

After the war, Lee Miller was haunted by her experiences. 'I could never get the stench of Dachau out of my nostrils,' she said.

Virginia Cowles, meanwhile, was an uber-glamorous New York socialite who had started her working life writing about fashion before deciding that international politics was what really mattered.

Travelling first to Spain to report on the civil war, Cowles prided herself on her objectivity, refusing to take sides between Franco's nationalist troops and the Republican opposition.

Her tone was so cool and objective that when the British politician David Lloyd George asked to meet the person who had written such excellent anonymous reports, he assumed that he was going to be introduced to a middle-aged military expert rather than a beautiful young woman in furs and lipstick.

Being Lloyd George, he soon managed to overcome his disappointment.

Mackrell rounds out her group biography with Clare Hollingworth, the British journalist who had spotted German troops massing on the Polish border and shortly afterwards broke the news that the Second World War had begun (she died only four years ago, at the age of 105), and Helen Kirkpatrick, an American who managed to report from the Allied war zone, where she was the only woman to have an access-all-areas pass, just like the men.

The author is excellent on the way that being a girl in a man's world had serious dangers – the fear of rape was constant and the possibility of being thrown in jail was always there – but also perks.

It was extraordinary what a slightly drunk army officer would tell a smart female correspondent in a hotel bar that he would never have divulged to a hard-bitten male reporter in a flak jacket.

Female combatants and refugees, too, were more likely to open up to another woman.

This is a book that manages to be both thoughtful and edge-of-your-seat thrilling.

Blood In The Water

Silver Donald Cameron

Swift Press £14.99

Rating: ★★★★★

When not in prison, Phillip Boudreau spent his days tormenting the fishing community of Petit de Grat in Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia.

He was a trickster, a 'rustic Robin Hood', an agent of chaos whose nefarious exploits included poaching lobsters, stealing neighbours' cars for joyrides, and vandalising fishing boats and gear.

Each winter, Boudreau would deliberately get caught by the police during some robbery or other so he could spend the colder nights in a warm bed, with the certainty of three meals a day.

'He didn't fall between the cracks,' it was said of Boudreau, 'he lived in the cracks.'

Hostility towards him continued to spread among the residents of Petit de Grat over years, until he was murdered on a warm June day in 2013 by three 'highly respected local fishermen', who had finally snapped after Boudreau cut their lobster traps that morning.

IT'S A FACT

The killers fired four shots at Boudreau, then rammed their larger boat over his speedboat to finish the job. Boudreau's body was never found.

It is this tension that the Canadian journalist and author Silver Donald Cameron, who died in May 2020, wanted to investigate: 'How the criminal became a victim while the victims became criminals.'

Blood In The Water is the result of his meticulous documentation of the goings-on in the court case against the three fishermen, fleshed out by interviews he conducted with those who knew Boudreau.

Cameron's writing is precise and clearly well-researched. The murder provides him with the opportunity to reflect more widely on the legal system and the manner in which law is reappropriated by particular communities.

He draws upon the Acadian history of Cape Breton Island to show why those in Petit de Grat 'don't like to call the cops', and act out of a shared understanding of what is right, rather than keeping to a moral code enshrined in law.

Acadia was a former colony of New France in north-eastern North America, the majority of whose people were expelled in the 18th Century for failing to submit to British rule.

Though the region no longer exists, the former Acadian communities are still suspicious of the authorities and consider themselves a distinct nation. While the Acadia chapter is illuminating, the level of detail with which Cameron attends to every aspect of the case can be detrimental to the narrative's momentum.

Though marketed as a true crime thriller, *Blood In The Water* is distinctly anti-sensational. There is a moral aspect to the writing, a didactic intention that explains the exhaustive, occasionally tedious, detail.

While the book is unlikely to reach the cult status of *In Cold Blood*, of which its author Truman Capote suggested his method was to treat 'a real event with fictional techniques', Cameron has achieved his intention in producing a comprehensive, thoughtful examination of a case wherein 'the root causes of the tragedy include a systematic failure of the legal system itself'.

Lamorna Ash

The Bomber Mafia

Malcolm Gladwell

Allen Lane £20

Rating: ★★★★★

The bloodbath that was the First World War caused death and destruction on a hitherto unprecedented scale and left some 37 million people dead or wounded. Was there any way that such carnage could have been avoided?

There were plenty of military theorists who thought so, and the most strident of these were the advocates of air power. The First World War was the first conflict in which aeroplanes had played a part, albeit in a supporting role.

Air force leaders around the world were determined that in any future conflict they would take centre stage.



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Malcolm Gladwell's story focuses on two individuals, the idealistic and quixotic Haywood Hansell, and the man who replaced him, the brutal but pragmatic Curtis LeMay (above)

In the United States the doctrine of air power was nurtured with fanatical devotion by a group of talented and ambitious young officers who became known as 'The Bomber Mafia'.

They were convinced not only that strategic bombing alone would suffice to win future wars, but that their methods would result in minimal civilian casualties and would thus be more humane.

What happened when their theories collided with reality is the subject of Malcolm Gladwell's short but fascinating book.

Gladwell's story focuses on two individuals, the idealistic and quixotic Haywood Hansell, who commanded the first B-29 Superfortress raids against Japan, and the man who replaced him, the brutal but pragmatic Curtis LeMay.

When the American USAAF had joined the RAF in the air war against Germany they were dismissive of the British doctrine of area bombing, but despite their much-vaunted technology (in particular the Norden bombsight), USAAF bombing raids were woefully inaccurate.

LeMay came, saw, and changed his mind. Hansell did not, and only after he was sacked did the Americans switch to an area bombing strategy in Japan that for sheer destructiveness put the air war against Germany in the shade.

Gladwell concludes that although LeMay won the battle, Hansell won the war, a reference to the modern computer-guided weapons technology that has finally made the dream of precision targeting a reality.

I'm not convinced, but, as ever, Gladwell's eloquence and flair for lateral thinking make for a compelling read.

Simon Griffith