

REVIEWS

its legacy is surprisingly brief, presumably because, beyond establishing who fought with King Henry in 1415, comparatively little further work had been completed at the time of writing. Given that so much about the battle remains uncertain, it would perhaps have been helpful to examine how exploitation of the documentation that exists for the English army could open up new avenues of investigation. As has been demonstrated by Gary Baker in an article that examines the martial affinity of the duke of York, the highest-ranking English casualty at Agincourt (*Journal of Medieval History*, 2017), identification of the names on the muster rolls through nominal record linkage to other documents, both military records and those generated by domestic affairs, can be the starting point for prosopography and the analysis of social networks. Collective biographical study of the men in Henry's army, exploring depth of military experience and the nature of relationships within retinues, would cast light on military performance, but also provide hard data for an assessment of impact on domestic politics, family fortunes and collective memory. Understanding the men of Agincourt, what brought them to the battle and what happened to them afterwards, should surely be a key thread in the study of legacy.

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Randall Nicol, *Till the Trumpet Sounds Again: The Scots Guards 1914-19 in Their Own Words*. Helion: Solihull, 2016. Two Volumes. Notes, Bibliographies, Indexes, Photographs & Maps. pp. 1105. ISBN: 978-191-109-601 & 978-191-109-607-8. Hardback. Price £24.37 & £23.49.

What is the evidential value of personal testimony when writing military history? On my bookshelves in Aldershot, I still have the first two military history books I ever read: Sir John Keegan's *The Face of Battle*, and Martin Middlebrook's *The First Day on the Somme*. Keegan explicitly warns against over-reliance on the accounts of soldiers, whereas Middlebrook almost completely relies on his interviews with veterans for content. Both are seminal works of British military historiography, but almost three decades of military service has convinced me that the words of the average soldier cannot be accepted uncritically; Tommy Atkins cannot be trusted with the regimental silver, the RSM's daughter, or the history of war.

Keegan's argument focusses on an individual's need to preserve their reputation, producing a version of events which, whilst not wholly inaccurate, may paint the writer in a better light than either other combatants, or impartial observers, might recognise. 'Better' is, of course, a subjective assessment; one man may wish to portray himself as

a saviour, another as a warrior. There is much to be said here about masculinity in war, particularly when examining the audience being addressed by the writer. In *The Great War: Myth and Memory*, Dan Todman examines the role of prevalent cultures in moulding British soldiers' accounts of their First World War experiences. It is particularly striking that, as British society changed over the course of the twentieth century, the authentic Edwardian voices of 1914-18 faded away under the bombardment of the imagination of subsequent generations. This barrage, based on the futility of the First World War, using shells such as sacrifice, innocence, and waste, created a wasteland of memory which few can navigate; for most modern Britons, their ancestors' war was a tale of mud, blood and endless poetry.

Can a narrative of combatant experience, written in the twenty-first century, overcome the foregoing to create an objective history of soldier experience in the First World War? Randall Nichol's two-volume history of the Scots Guards on the Western Front from 1914-19 is, at over a thousand pages, a titanic work of independent scholarship. Nichol combines the Official History with the War Diaries and personal accounts to tell the story of the First and Second Battalions at war; in doing so he has created the best researched and most objective narrative ever written of the Regiment in the First World War. And yet, while *Till the Trumpet Sounds Again* is an immeasurable improvement on F. Loraine Petre and H. Cecil Lowther's 1925 *The Scots Guards in the Great War, 1914-18*, it remains an imbalanced account heavily emphasising the first two years of the War and depending disproportionately on the writings of commissioned officers for its primary content. Nichol has made a valiant attempt to negotiate the shell holes of memory, and the shattered landscape of reputation, but in writing a narrative account, dependant on the subjective accounts of a narrow sample of participants, it is perhaps inevitable that the book lies wounded in No Man's Land. The injuries are made more serious by the tone of the book, exemplified by the sub-titles of the two volumes, *Great Shadows* and *Vast Tragedy*, making it a fine in memoriam piece for the fallen, but a far from objective history. *Till the Trumpet Sounds Again* is a beautifully produced, superbly illustrated, homage to the Scots Guards of the First World War, a fine example of regimental history; whether it represents a fair account of the experiences of the Jocks in that War, is left to the reader.

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