

British Journal for Military History

Volume 8, Issue 1, March 2022

Review of *The Searchers: A Quest for the Lost of the First World War* by Robert Sackville-West

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ISSN: 2057-0422

Date of Publication: 17 March 2022

Citation: Timothy Halstead, 'Review of *The Searchers: A Quest for the Lost of the First World War* by Robert Sackville-West', *British Journal for Military History*, 8.1 (2022), pp. 179-180.

www.bjmh.org.uk



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UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Robert Sackville-West, *The Searchers: A Quest for the Lost of the First World War*. London: Bloomsbury, 2021. xxi + 336 pp. 31 b/w photos. ISBN: 978-152661315-8 (hardback). Price £25.00.

The large number of individuals who visit the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) cemeteries in Belgium and France and attend Remembrance services demonstrate that there continues to be a strong interest in commemorating those who died in both world wars. Robert Sackville-West sets out to demonstrate how the search for and the commemoration of the missing of the First World War has developed. The author has no background in military history, his previous books have addressed the history of his family and its home, Knole in Kent, although at least four family members served in the two world wars. The bibliography does not list his primary sources but it is clear from the footnotes that he has drawn on a wide range of them.

The First World War was the first time the British mobilised a citizen army. This national mobilisation, the ensuing loss of life and the associated trauma made it necessary to find new ways to remember those who had lost their lives. Over the last century, Sackville-West argues, the way this has been done has evolved because every generation's view of commemoration differs because their connection with the 1914 to 1918 conflict has become more distanced. Not only was Britain unprepared to fight the war in 1914 it was also unprepared for the large number of deaths which ensued. The War Office could not cope with the administration this involved and it took Lord Robert Cecil to take this up and create the organisation necessary to account for them. Tracing them in the chaos of war was a difficult task, especially when the nature of the action meant that the missing man's body had been obliterated and there was no trace of it. This required individuals with the right investigative skills to trace missing men. The advantage of keeping an open mind, during these investigations, meant that it was civilians rather than the military who were more likely to have those skills.

For those bereaved relatives where a body could not be found, despite substantial effort in many cases, it was particularly difficult to come to terms with their loss. Sackville-West examines the role of the Cenotaph and the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in helping them to do this. The former he argues provided a place of pilgrimage while the latter gave closure to them as a place where their relative might lie. For many families this was not enough, and they looked to spiritualism as a way to reconnect with the dead. It is a concept that the author deals with through polite scepticism.

The establishment and work of what is now the CWGC is examined. Not only was it responsible for the graves and memorials but it provided practical support to those who wished to make pilgrimages and those who could not afford to. While it did so its work to recover the dead and give them a proper burial continued. Between the Autumn of 1921 and the outbreak of the Second World War it discovered 38,000 bodies. Its work which continues to this day and Sackville-West uses the research behind the discovery of mass graves at Fromelles as a case study to illustrate this.

This is a book which often discusses and draws on the involvement of literary figures such as Arthur Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling and E. M. Forster to explain and illustrate the account. However, there are a few shortcomings. It could have examined more closely the arguments and debates about commemoration. At times this book strays from the main theme, which is not always necessary. Readers may not agree with Sackville-West's analysis of the conduct of the Battle of Fromelles. Despite those caveats, it is worth reading for its value as a primer about the commemoration of those who lost their lives in the First World War.

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DOI: 10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v8i1.1617

Robert Lyman, *A War of Empires: Japan, India, Burma & Britain 1941-45*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2021. 560 pp. including: 11 Maps, 28 Figures, 4 Appendices, Endnotes, Bibliography & Index. ISBN: 978-1472847140 (hardback). Price £25.00.

In recent years the canon of military history has been graced by authors such as Daniel Todman, Alan Allport, and Nick Lloyd. They have not been afraid to take on grand themes such as Britain in the Second World War or the First World War's Western Front. In doing so they delivered sound scholarship, new research, and informed perspectives when the current focus of many academic publications is vanishingly narrow.

Robert Lyman has written extensively on the war in Burma, and in his latest book has taken on the challenge of describing events that lasted from December 1941 to August 1945. Framed as a War of Empires it effortlessly moves from conflicting Grand Strategies amongst the western allies, to the relationships amongst politicians and generals, to the perspective of an Indian army Jawan fighting off a Japanese night attack at Kohima. John Kiszley's *The British Fiasco in Norway* has much in common in terms of