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Brian Bond *Survivors Of A Kind: Memoirs Of The Western Front*, Continuum, 2008, 192 pages, ISBN 978 1 84725 004 9

As President Emeritus of the BCMH and Emeritus Professor of Military History at King's College London, Brian needs no introduction to students of British military history in general and of the Western Front in particular, to both of which he has made an incalculable contribution as teacher, mentor, thinker, researcher, lecturer and writer.

This original book shows that many memoirs of the Western Front are not only literary masterpieces but are also of great value to historians. Brian examines a range of works in this neglected genre which demonstrate the remarkable variety of combat experiences and post-war reflections. His ten essays range from very well known works by poets like Robert Graves ("Goodbye to All That"), Siegfried Sassoon ("Memoirs of an Infantry Officer" and others) and Edmund Blunden ("Undertones of War") striving to overcome traumas; to the rebutter of disenchantment Charles Carrington ("A Subaltern's War" and "Soldier from the Wars Returning"); to warriors like John Reith and Alf Pollard VC ("Fire-Eater") who enjoyed the war; to two exceptionally brave Old Etonians, Anthony Eden and Harold Macmillan, whose military distinction proved to be an asset in their political careers. He goes on to explore the view from the ranks as seen by Frederic Manning and Frank Richards ("Old Soldiers Never Die"); the grandeur and misery of service in the Guards, as recalled by officers like Oliver Lyttelton and other ranks like Stephen Graham and Norman Cliff; the highly irregular career of a senior officer (Frank Crozier); and the sharply contrasting war in the air as seen by two distinguished aviators: Cecil Lewis ("Sagittarius Rising") and the Canadian Billy Bishop ("Winged Warfare").

All these men were survivors of a kind, profoundly affected by their experience of combat; damaged physically or psychologically, and haunted by memories of destruction, suffering and lost fiends. Yet the majority remained enthralled by the spirit of comradeship which could not be replicated in civil life.

The author's stimulation, enthusiasm and enjoyment in re-reading familiar texts after many years and reading others for the first time are clearly communicated to the reader.

Of the many highlights of this superb book, space permits mention of only a few: the discussion of Eden and Macmillan, reminding us that we used to have very brave politicians with first-hand experience of war and that having a "good war" used to be a requirement for a successful political career in certain circles; the discussion of "Wearing Spurs" by John Reith, the badly wounded fire-eater inextricably linked in the popular mind with the BBC (about which today he would be absolutely apoplectic); the discussion of the Australian Frederic Manning's "The Middle Parts of Fortune", the unexpurgated version of "Her Privates We" which is rightly regarded by Brian as one of the truest and most revealing accounts of the trenches; the discussion of "A Passionate Prodigality" and "A Kind of Survivor" (from whence Brian takes his title) by Guy Chapman, who survived the war physically but who was ever after emotionally in thrall to it; the discussion of the contrasting fates of the war protesters Sassoon and the little known Max Plowman ("A Subaltern on the Somme"), who like Sassoon was shell-shocked but who unlike Sassoon thereafter became a conscientious objector; and the discussion of the highly unusual Crozier ("A Brass Hat in No



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Man's Land" and "The Men I Killed"), who went from martinet and militarist to opponent of war.

This reviewer had a few minor quibbles. Unfairly perhaps, I could have done with more and would have welcomed analyses of Aldington, Herbert, Wilson, Vaughan, Barbusse, Junger and Remarque (some of these authors produced fictionalized accounts but no more so than Manning) to name but a few (Volume Two hopefully). I agree that in his second account Crozier exaggerated for effect but I am inclined to accept its essential truth, shocking and unpalatable though that truth is. Hemingway could have been usefully quoted on Manning and Richards (US Edition hopefully). I would have welcomed an assessment of the fact that four well-known accounts of the British experience of the Western Front relate to one Regiment (the Royal Welch Fusiliers), in which Sassoon, Graves, Richards and Dunn all served.

Maps of the Somme and of Ypres helpfully tie in the memoirs to particular places, periods and actions.

Following on from Brian's excellent "The Unquiet Western Front", this wonderful book puts the war in the trenches and those who wrote about it into a fresh perspective and will stimulate readers to explore for themselves these eloquent and deeply moving classics of literature.

Sir Michael Howard has written of this book: *"In this collection of essays Brian Bond brings a lifetime's study of the Western Front to the analysis of some of the best-known memoirs of the campaign. Literary and military historians alike will find the result of great value for their own studies, while for the general reader it should help destroy many long-standing myths. It is a worthy climax to a long and distinguished career"*. For once I beg to disagree with Sir Michael in one respect. I believe that the climax of Brian's career as an historian of the Western Front has not yet been reached and I eagerly await his next book.

Beg, steal or borrow a copy - better still buy one!

John Peaty

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