

BOOK REVIEW BY GROUP CAPTAIN PETER W GRAY D DEF S (RAF)

DOUGLAS HAIG, THE EDUCATED SOLDIER

JOHN TERRAINE

Cassell, London, 2000

ISBN 0 304 35319-; 508 pages; £12.99

John Terraine is no stranger to air power readers in general, and to a whole generation of RAF Staff College graduates in particular. His history of the RAF in the Second World War in Europe – *To the Right of the Line* – remains one of the most comprehensive and readable books on the subject. The provocative edge to Terraine's choice of titles is matched in this appraisal of one of Britain's most controversial military figures. This book was originally published (by Hutchinson) in 1963 and has recently been re-released by Cassell. This reviewer is reluctant to state that any book should be mandatory reading, but Terraine's treatment of Haig is so clear, easy to read and above all balanced that anyone who is proposing to join the increasingly popular sport of 'Haig-bashing' should at least attempt to pick up the salient points. The alternative is to accept, as gospel, the simplistic and damaging treatment that is to be found from GCSE revision guides through many texts, to the TV series, *Blackadder Goes Forth*.

Terraine does not attempt to present the reader with an exhaustive conventional biography on Haig. Rather, he goes to great pains to situate his subject in the context both of his life in the British Army and in the Great War in Europe. By doing so, myths and misconceptions are stripped away. The hostile jibe that Haig was a dyed-in-the-wool Cavalry-man is quickly dealt with and is replaced with the more credible suggestion that his forte was as a professional staff officer. Suggestions that Haig was not receptive to technological

innovation are countered in considerable detail with the additional inclusion of a photographic plate showing a page of his diary complete with diagrams of shell fusing. Perhaps the most important area that Terraine is determined to redress is that Haig was callous to the plight and survival of his troops; he makes it abundantly clear that Haig was sensitive to casualty lists and to the conditions of battle. But Terraine makes it equally clear that Haig was absolutely single minded in his determination that Germany could only be beaten militarily on the Western Front. The options for mobile or manoeuvre warfare were soon lost in 1914 leaving the allies with the uncomfortable realisation that Clausewitz ruled – the enemy centre of gravity was its army in the field and this would have to be defeated.

For the modern reader, a number of areas strike a chord beyond the unwelcome realisation that manoeuvre warfare, in its purest form, may just not be feasible. Haig was a confirmed exponent of centralised command and control with decentralised execution and was evidently frustrated when his aims were thwarted. Haig's experiences of political shenanigans make chilling reading with it being made quite clear that the phenomenon of the 'long screwdriver' is not new. In fact Haig's treatment at the hand of Lloyd George makes appalling reading with Terraine at his most incisive in revealing the depths to which the Prime Minister went during the war and in its aftermath. Lloyd George's revisionist writing after the war – less politely termed elsewhere 'the air-brushing of history' has done the armed forces of the Empire a major disservice in masking the credit that should have been due for the major victories that were won in 1918. (Terraine has produced a separate history of this in *To Win a War: 1918 The Year of Victory*, reprinted in paperback by Cassell, London, 2000).

Terraine does not seek to place Haig on a pedestal; his faults and mistakes are scrupulously presented along with the trials, tribulations

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