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From the author of the bestselling *Forgotten Voices of the Great War* comes a final look at the last 21 living British veterans of the First World War. These interviews, conducted in 2004, will never be repeated, as the youngest was 106 years old, and most are now gone. These first-person accounts follow the young soldiers from their homes throughout Britain to the raging battles while in the service of the Royal Field Artillery, Black Watch, Royal Navy, and others. These combat experiences should never be forgotten.

Last Post: The Final Word from Our First World War Soldiers Details

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Marathon County Public Library says

Being unfamiliar with much about the WWI, the last great war, I was eager to hear of stories from the mouths of those few soldiers still left to tell the tale. This 2005 book is a narrative account of those few British soldiers still alive and able to relay their firsthand accounts and stories of an era that will perish when they do. Approximately 20 men, all over 100 and some 106 and 107 years old tell of a different time and place. They share a brief personal account of their lives from birth, growing up, joining up to fight and living out their later years. If you are interested in gaining an understanding of the historical period of the turning into the 20th century and the war years, this will be an interesting read. It was a bittersweet read, in that the reader can be quite certain, all of these men are now deceased.

Marsha Y. / Marathon County Public Library
Find this book in our library catalog.

Steve Jones says

This was a re-read. As it's the year of the 100th anniversary of the end of WW1, I thought I might revisit some of my books and this was the first of what might be a few of the same theme I read this year. I love this type of book. It is poignant, humorous, heart-breaking and thoughtful as well as inspiring. I have total admiration for the people in this book. These are my heroes.

Venky says

beautiful collection of the experiences in the theatre of destruction and doom that was World War -I as recounted by the last surviving heroes from Great Britain. More than the fatalities, the futility of waging a war shine through the pages.

Aileen says

The author interviewed several WW1 veterans and this is the account of some of them. I listened to this on audiobook and hearing about the early lives, war years and then their later lives was so sad. The men were all over 100 years old when they were interviewed, including the lovely Harry Patch, sadly all of them are no longer with us. What came across to me was how young they all were, how they were looked on as 'cannon fodder' and the long, horrible days of the trenches. It's easy to see why these men never forgot this war, today there would be counselling, medical treatment and assistance, but these brave men just got on with it. There were touches of humour too. I particularly liked the story of the Germans throwing over a pipe bomb with 2

cigarettes attached. Our boys smoked them, then threw the bomb back with a packet of Players attached. A very thought provoking listen, which I have learnt a lot from.

Jessica Powell says

Transcripts from interviews with the last living British veterans of WW1. Very moving, as well as a fascinating record of social history.

Efranken says

British mystery

Jeslyn says

Thank goodness for authors such as Max Arthur (and Lyn MacDonald, among others), who succeeded in obtaining oral histories from WWI veterans, individuals who usually were understandably unwilling to talk about their experiences. In Last Post, Arthur interviews all of his subjects when they are past their century mark - in fact, these were the final 21 British veterans of WWI; all have since passed away, Harry Patch being the last in July 2009, just days after the oldest, Henry Allingham, at 113 years old.

These interviews are conducted as an arc, not simply "what happened in the war?", and the memories of these men are far clearer than one might expect, given their age. They describe their childhoods, family life, and the years before the war as clearly as they do the years after - meeting and marrying spouses, raising children, employment, etc. For me, it made their accounts of wartime experience all the more poignant, as it is clear that they remember those years as vividly, years most would prefer to forget.

The interviews convey grace, dignity, and a remembrance of beloved friends who didn't come back that hasn't dimmed in the near-century of separation. The photographs are wonderful as well, as they are testimony to the care provided by family, careworkers and others - these men do not appear physically neglected, but respectfully cared for.

In particular, several of the veterans commented on the "secret" of how they lived so long, and how they "moved past" the war; it is sound advice for all of us, whatever our difficulties. Alfred Anderson is quoted:

"But I didn't want to go over those old memories. It's over - it's passed. If I dwelled on what happened during those terrible times, I would never have lived to see the age I am now. I've tried to put all those thoughts behind me. I've no wish to revive them. But what I saw and went through still affects me, even to this day...It doesn't do to look back. We lived for each day during the war - and even at my age, now, I do the same thing. I'm still looking forward. I'm more interested in what's happening now."

A wise balance between remembering, but not dwelling on, difficult times.

I specifically chose to read this before this centennial began, and it was good to read about the full arc of their life and see that they indeed had full lives, that the war didn't rob them of happiness for the rest of their

lives.

Dianne says

A very worthy oral history project. Surviving combatants from WW1, all centenarians, tell their individual stories. One combatant had an excellent recollections of pre-1914 childhood, and this particular chapter is really worth reading for its picture of the life at this time. Apart from this I did not find anything of particular interest.

Siobhan Logan says

As part of a writing project, I have been immersed recently in research about the First World War. It's a dark place to go at the best of times. I was especially moved and frankly disturbed by the testimony of survivors of the trenches who in their final years tried to voice the terrible experiences of their youth. 'Last Post', edited by Max Arthur, brought together interviews with 21 of the last British veterans back in 2005. By now, only their words remain. A good third of these veterans were Boy Soldiers, amongst the 250,000 recruited during Kitchener's campaign. This summer I was watching the same generation on TV recounting how they came to be caught up in the 'Pals Regiments' of that war. Raw, heartbreaking accounts of the friends they lost, of the wounded, of the 'wall of bullets whizzing by' as they stumbled over the top.

A hundred years ago our politicians and generals declared war, along with their counterparts in Europe. As summer waned, they marshalled music-hall acts and sportsmen, viscounts and ministers, editors and poster-makers, to bang the war drums. Arthur's elderly Tommies recalled all of those scenes in the early months of war. How recruiting sergeants and well-heeled women handed out white feathers and reeled in the young men. They promised 'see the world' and 'home by Christmas'. They said they'd 'make a man out of you.' They shamed and applauded and corralled a generation of youngsters into the Recruitment Office. 'You're just the Boys we wanted', said the Sargeant as they arrived. They openly signed up children who 'lied' about their age. (The youngest in this country was twelve.) 'I thought I was a big man,' said William Roberts who joined up at 17, 'but I got a shock.'

The Army sent Our Boys to the Front often on cattle trains 'with a little straw on the floor'. They shovelled them into trenches to crouch and sleep where they could; up to their knees in water, under shell-fire, often with little to eat, for days or weeks at a time. The war broke men into pieces but the Army patched them up in military hospitals and sent them back. They didn't only shoot the enemy. They shot men, and children too, at dawn when they fell apart. 'Age no excuse'. 'Shell-shock' something that only happened to officers. Cecil Withers, one of those Boy Soldiers who enlisted at 17, said: 'Our people treated us like dogs. They were cruel bastards compared with the Germans.'

The undoubted bravery of those who enlisted and their comradeship and lifelong friendships were smothered under horror. Men were left crying for help in all languages in No Man's Land. Veterans' descriptions of those scenes will stay with me a long time. And the living too eaten by rats and cockroaches and the inescapable lice. Harry Patch describes how the men clung together and depended on each other:

'I mean, these boys were with you night and day ... we belonged to each other. We were a little team together and those men ... carrying the ammunition got blown to pieces. It was like losing part of my life. It upset me more than anything.'

The Armies of this 'Great War' invented new weapons and these boys and men on both sides were guinea-pigs for a new technology of killing. Green poison gas. Aerial bombardment. Tanks. The modern age speeded-up even as the war trapped combatants in holes in the ground. Another survivor, Albert Finnegan, decided after the war never to have children, 'I was not prepared to produce cannon fodder for the army, not fodder for industry.'

In 2014 David Cameron's Letter to the Unknown Soldier in Paddington Station claimed: '... our world would have been far darker if you had declined the call to act. Without your service, our security, our values, our very way of life would have been lost.' <http://www.1418now.org.uk/letter/new-...>

How could any imagined apocalypse be darker than this? 16 million dead in 4 years. The searingly honest accounts in Max Arthur's collection of interviews belie the attempts of politicians then and now to wrap the slaughter in sanctifying flags. For me the most powerful voice was that of the last man standing, Harry Patch; a veteran who spent his final years nailing what so many of the 'Last Post' Tommies spoke of as the 'idiocy' of the 'Great War':

"We've had ... years to think what war is. To me, it's a licence to go out and murder. Why should the British government call me up and take me out to a battlefield to shoot a man I never knew, whose language I couldn't speak? All those lives lost for a war finished over a table. Now what is the sense in that?"

Geraldine says

A worthwhile read but only up to a point.

An amazing collection of transcripts with a select group of men. Men who had served in the First World War and had lived to be over a hundred, in the 21st century. The premise of the book is the most interesting thing about it.

And it is actually a gobsmacking fact. I don't think any of them would have imagined living to over a hundred years old. Think about it. When the NHS was set up in 1948, when these men were already in their 50s, little thought was given to the over-Eighties, because their numbers were negligible.

Many of these men lost siblings young, through the attrition of child mortality (I watched a programme last night which said that within a year of the NHS being set up, child mortality HALVED. Because it was awful before then, and worse in the 1890s and 1900s). Many of the men lost brothers and friends (neighbours or comrades) in the War, most of them suffered some injury. One of them survived an outbreak of meningitis that pretty much wiped out his brothers in arms before they had completed their training. Others lost family and friends in the Spanish flu. and of course many of their contemporaries who survived the War dropped through the decades in the normal ways - RTCs, heart attacks, cancer, perhaps also the blitz. But these men survived all that and more!

Most of them were on active service - on the Western Front, at sea or in the air - although towards the end of

the book we have slightly younger men who had enlisted before the Armistice but didn't complete their training and weren't sent into War. So this did make me wonder why they were included but no women. Of course a much smaller number of women were active even to the point they were permitted. But they were therefore much likelier statistically to survive the war, and, given the demographic fact that women live longer, it's a pity that the author could not have found one former VAD, ambulance driver or even a munitions worker.

It seems invidious to single out one person but I must mention Harry Patch

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_P... who in his very late years emerged as a passionate advocate for peace, and became a bit of a hero of mine (and many other people too).

The book was very worthwhile to have been produced, and, yes, it was interesting to read, not only about the War but about their lives before and after. But, ultimately, there is a limit to what can be captured in interviews, especially with very old people (although the long term memory is more reliable than the short term memory). I would recommend it to anyone who appreciated first hand accounts of the 20th Century - the People's Century. But I think I might be approaching satiation in World War 1 history for now.

Wwmrsweasleydo says

What this eclectic group of English men have in common is that they lived to a great age across the span of the twentieth century, although Max Arthur picked almost the last minute to gather their memories as most of the twenty one men were dead by the time the book was published.

Apart from the information about the Great War and the last century, what's interesting about this is how different the men's attitudes are to each others: from a conservative nostalgia, to a progressive optimist, to a negative cynic and all shades in between. Yes, there is misogyny, class prejudice, jingoism, but a lot less than I had expected given the times in which they were raised. The most striking fact is that they almost all end their sections by saying that they have had a happy life.

TwoDrinks says

Found this in a holiday home that I'm staying in. Truthfully, I wasn't expecting to enjoy this at all because it's edited transcripts of the still living British WW1 soldiers and I thought it would be a bit pants. Well, it wasn't. It made a really interesting read for several reasons:

1. Some of the blokes had been at the same battles so you heard tales from several different angles
2. The difference in fortune both pre and post-war was fascinating, particularly the difference in fortune and health when it came to different classes
3. It was amazing how resourceful they were in finding work post-war. Loads of them moved about the country to find work, which was quite inspiring.
4. The pictures of the veterans were fascinating. There were only about two per person, but it's always nice to put a face to a name.

There were some wonderful quotations or interesting bits of information as well:

'I've had a unique sort of life. I've scraped the barrel and I've had the cream' - Henry Allingham

'These days if a trigger-happy politician wants to start another war, it's my job to let people know what that means. Politicians today are pitiless humbugs. What do they know? Only those who were there can tell what really happened. Tell of the suffering and misery' - Cecil Withers

'These days I've got no time for governments or politicians - or for any form of religion. None of these emerged from the Great War with flying colours. Lessons have gone unheeded and mankind keeps on repeating its mistakes ... I'd rather cut myself off from what goes on in the world today. The First World War was idiotic. It started out idiotic and it stayed idiotic. It was damned silly, all of it' - Alfred Finnigan

'At some point you showed your emotions. That was why our comradeship was so important, because I was scared more or less all the time I was out there' - Harry Patch

'All those lives lost for a war finished over a table. Now what is the sense in that? It's just an argument between two governments. Neither Charles [a German soldier Harry met in 2003] nor I ever want any other young man ever to go through what we did again, but still we sent our lads to war. In Iraq, our young men are being killed and told to kill.' - Harry Patch

'What would I say to an eighteen-year-old boy? I suppose I'd say, 'At work, make a good job of it and be more polite to people - have better manners.' A lot of them haven't today. I don't think they'll be wanted for a war - but if they were, they haven't got the stamina. They couldn't stand what we went through in the First World War. The youth of today couldn't stand it.' - John Osborne

'I've no idea what the secret is to living so long. I just keep on going - a bit like an infantryman; - John Osborne

'No, I don't volunteer for anything, I'm like a wheelbarrow - I go where I'm pushed' - Bill Stone

I'm not sure if it's the speed of its production, but there are a few typos in this book, possibly a result of not knowing the geography of the area or errors of transcription. So, 'Usher College' should read, 'Ushaw College' (it's still a seminary in Durham), 'Sorby Bridge' should read, 'Sowerby Bridge' (the pronunciation is the former, but it's written the latter way). There was another one relating to the North of England but I can't remember what it was off the top of my head.

Christopher Bashforth says

This is a collection of personal memoirs of the last surviving veterans of World War 1 - Sad that they have now all passed away. As I get older I definitely get the sense of time moving on relentlessly; when WW2 veterans are all passed away I think I will be even more sad that history moves on. When struck me about this book was the different England that these men inhabited compared to today – very much more agricultural and industrial – no one had a customer service job. The other major revelation was that disliked officers would often be shot by their men during an attack – I knew this happened in other armies (particularly Russia) but Britain? Good read.

Mancman says

This was full of warmth, fascination and humanity. The recollections of the last veterans of World War I make for a wonderful read.

The memories vary in their depth and detail, which isn't surprising, given that they're all over a century old. But the tales are mesmerising, and I found myself hooked in immediately, Their take on the events they lived through shouldn't be underestimated.

Christina says

This is a book I do not think many people will read but I feel that it is a book that many people need to read. We glamorize and romanticize war, this book does not do that. This is the story of normal men, who lived and saw things that normal people should not see. Many of the men speak of how they have never really spoken of what happened to them, some speak out to let the world know the truth hoping that it will be used as a warning against more wars.
A book well worth reading.
