

# Captain Robert Graves: A Military Appreciation

*Allan Mallinson*

Dear Mrs Graves,

I very much regret to have to write and tell you your son has died of wounds. He was very gallant, and was doing so well and is a great loss.

He was hit by a shell and very badly wounded, and died on the way down to the base I believe. He was not in bad pain, and our doctor managed to get across and attend to him at once.

We have had a very hard time, and our casualties have been large. Believe me you have all our sympathy in your loss, and we have lost a very gallant soldier.

Please write to me if I can tell you or do anything.

Yours sincerely,  
C. Crawshay, Lt.-Col.<sup>1</sup>

On the face of it, you could be forgiven for thinking that this letter is a shade faint on praise: ‘very gallant’, ‘doing so well’, ‘great loss’ – fine enough words, but, well, a bit anaemic; formulaic, even.

But there again, it was, as Graves writes in *Goodbye to All That*, one of ‘the usual formal letters of condolence to the next-of-kin of the six or seven officers who had been killed’.<sup>2</sup>

It was, of course, *unusual* for its being unnecessary.

Compare it, for example, with another letter written by Colonel ‘Tibs’ Crawshay, the commanding officer of the Second Battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers (the ‘c’ was not authorised until *after* the war): it’s not one of the ‘six or seven’ on the day of the attack, 20 July 1916, in which Graves was wounded, but one of a batch

written a fortnight earlier after the explosion of a huge mine which the Germans had dug under the Royal Welch's trenches. The letter is to the father of Second-Lieutenant Trevor Crossland. Crossland had been at Harrow between 1911 and 1914, and then Sandhurst, and had been commissioned into the Fusiliers in August 1915 – so the same age as Graves, and more thoroughly and conventionally trained, but because of the length of that training, his junior in rank. He had been sent to the Second Battalion in June 1916, just before the Somme offensive.

Colonel Crawshay writes:

[...] he was a splendid boy and one of the sort we can ill spare. On night 21/22 [June] at 2AM the enemy blew an enormous mine. I regret to say that the trench, in which your son was, was blown up. I am sad to say our casualties were heavy for the mine. They then attacked us after an intense barrage, but got badly defeated, leaving a certain number of dead in our trenches. It is really too sad, we all miss him, and everyone was very fond of him. I am afraid you will feel it very much. It will be some satisfaction to you to know he was a real soldier and leader of men. You will remember me – you brought your boy to see me when he joined. Knowing you as I do, and having seen you both together, my sympathy goes out more than I can say. I voice the opinion of my regiment.

Tibs Crawshay.<sup>3</sup>

‘Tibs Crawshay’, mind; not ‘C. Crawshay, Lt.-Col.’

It's a much warmer letter – as perhaps you'd expect when the writer had met the man to whom he was writing – and it's rather more emphatic about the qualities of its subject: ‘a real soldier and leader of men’ – clearly a young subaltern who in the space of just three weeks had impressed himself on the battalion: ‘*I voice the opinion of my regiment.*’ That's quite something.

Well, what to make of this – if anything?

I first read *Goodbye* when I was twenty-one, a subaltern not long commissioned. It impressed me enormously – not as a literary work (who was I to judge?), but as a handbook for the junior officer on the pitfalls he faces, and how to avoid or recover from them. I lapped it up because I largely shared Graves's outlook and interests (except climbing); his military snobberies appealed to me; and his prejudices were exactly mine. The book took deep a root.

I wonder what I would have made of it had I known of Edmund Blunden's poor opinion. 'What Blunden read appalled him,' writes J. S. Roberts in his 1999 biography of Siegfried Sassoon. 'As a reader of war memoirs he wanted accuracy and detail from authors [...] Graves on every count betrayed his calling.'<sup>4</sup>

Since first reading *Goodbye* I've dipped into it over the years, and in greater depth more recently while writing *The Making of the British Army* (Random House, 2009), when I wanted to quote Graves's opinion on the soldierly virtues of men from various parts of Britain. Having thus been reacquainted with that confident – even cocksure – opinion of his, I decided last year to re-read the book with close attention.

Surely one of the compensations of the slow distancing of youth is that it provides the opportunity to re-read things that once had such an impact, and to reassess one's earlier judgement.

Well, this time I found myself rather more sceptical about what Lieutenant and later Captain Graves was saying – not so much the practical stuff of command, but his 'military-worldly wisdom', the accuracy and detail, which as a twenty-one-year-old (Graves's age in 1916) I'd somehow taken for granted, but with which Blunden, with his own considerable first-hand experience, took issue. For what I was hearing this time was not so much the voice of the subaltern and then the rapidly promoted captain, but – of course – that of the thirty-something raconteur with an overdraft, the narrative spiced up even more by Laura Riding, the 'spiritual and intellectual midwife' of the work.<sup>5</sup>

And, of course, since by now I knew rather more about the First

World War, and the Army, than I did when I was twenty-one, the factual mistakes began jumping out at me. For example, the long-cherished image of the First Battalion of the Cameronians at High Wood during the Somme offensive, all their officers dead or *hors de combat*, being led by their padre – recounted by an officer in the dressing station to which Graves had been taken after his wounding in July 1916 (and by his own admission in the 1957 edition a ‘not altogether accurate’ account): ‘Afterwards the chaplain – R.C. of course – Father McCabe, brought the Scotsmen back. Being Glasgow Catholics, they would follow a priest where they wouldn’t follow an officer.’<sup>6</sup> Graves had repeated this story with saloon bar assurance; he really didn’t like C. of E. chaplains.<sup>7</sup>

But actually, the Cameronians *weren’t* Glasgow Catholics: the Cameronians were famously Rangers football supporters in uniform. It was another battalion – an English one, as it happens.<sup>8</sup> If he could pontificate on which parts of the country produced the best soldiers, as he did,<sup>9</sup> he really ought to have known that. And the priest was called McShane, not McCabe, which Graves does in fact correct in his 1957 edition.

Does it matter? Not much perhaps; but it showed me that Graves was not quite so *au fait* with all things military as his breezy style had once suggested. Paul Fussell wrote of *Goodbye*: ‘If it really were a documentary transcription of the actual, it would be worth very little’. Don’t read it as a factual memoir, he advises: read it as a novel of sorts.<sup>10</sup>

But what did come across to me in my latest reading, far stronger than before, was the extent of Graves’s pride in serving with a *regular* infantry battalion. Indeed, at times it’s difficult to remember that immediately before commissioning he’d been at Charterhouse, not Sandhurst.

Let me develop this a little. The time he is describing in that story of the Cameronians, the time of his own wounding, is, of course, the third week of the Somme offensive – July 1916. Siegfried Sassoon was winning his MC, as was Edmund Blunden. Wilfred Owen had just been commissioned, but would remain in

England training for another five months. Charles Sorley had been killed the previous autumn – Graves describes him as ‘one of the three poets of importance killed during the war. (The other two were Isaac Rosenberg and Wilfred Owen.)’<sup>11</sup>

Now, it would be easy to see these men – Sassoon, Blunden, Owen and the rest of the thirteen War Poets commemorated in Westminster Abbey who served in the army on the Western Front<sup>12</sup> – as sharing the same institutional experience. In one sense they did, of course: they all wore the King’s uniform. But the King’s uniform was not *uniform*: men wore the badges of their regiment or corps. And those badges represented very different cultures within that of the army as a whole. Indeed, there were different cultures within a single cap-badge – even the difference between the two regular battalions of a regiment (each of up to a thousand men), could be considerable, depending on where they’d served. Graves himself makes this point: the Second Battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers had previously served many years in India, where they did things very differently from the First Battalion, who had been at home.

I’m not sure this is widely appreciated. Take for example Dr Santanu Das’s essay on the War Poets in the 2007 edition of the *DNB*: ‘Despite the shared experience of combat, the war poets were otherwise separated by class, rank, age, training, and sexuality. Nothing, for example, could be further removed from the experience of the Cambridge-educated fox-hunting country gentleman Siegfried Sassoon, an officer in the Royal Welch Fusiliers, than the world of Isaac Rosenberg, the diminutive and impoverished Jewish private in the “bantam battalion”, [and he quotes Rosenberg]: “this Bantam Battalion (as I was too short for any other) [...] seems to be the most rascally affair in the world”.’

But class, rank, age, training, and sexuality were not all that separated them. Although Das hints at it with the mention of training, to my mind he misses Rosenberg’s clue in that phrase: ‘the most rascally affair in the world’. As Graves wrote of an officer he met in another regiment, who had had to shoot one of

his men to get the others to go forward in an attack: 'I felt sorrier for him than for any other man I met in France. He deserved a better regiment.'<sup>13</sup>

Poor Rosenberg did.

But 'rascally affair' is most certainly *not* how Graves viewed the First and Second Battalions of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, nor service in them. Quite the contrary. Of a pep talk from the commanding officer (though not on this occasion Tibs Crawshay), he writes: 'This is one of those caricature scenes that now seem to sum up the various stages of my life. Myself in faultless khaki with highly polished buttons and belt, revolver at hip, whistle on cord, delicate moustache on upper lip, and stern endeavour a-glint in either eye, pretending to be a Regular Army captain.'<sup>14</sup>

He writes 'pretending to be', but at the time I'm pretty sure he was not so much pretending as trying *hard* to be a Regular Army captain.

How appalled he would have been to see the current Penguin dust jacket, with that scruffy and wholly inappropriate (and of the wrong period) battledress!

However, Graves's pride in being a pretend Regular Army officer is not just about shiny buttons and polished leather: the pride goes with him into the trenches. Whenever either of the Royal Welch regular battalions go into the line, as he makes clear, they at once insist on gaining ascendancy at night in no man's land (that space, in places only a very short distance, between the enemy's trenches and their own) by active sentry work and aggressive patrolling. Graves himself devises a drill for suppressing enemy machine-gun fire at night. Sassoon thinks the same way: while Graves was in England having the operation on his nose so that he could use the new anti-gas respirator, he spent a good deal of the day and night before the start of the Somme battle crawling about in no man's land trying to make wider gaps in the barbed wire with his new wire-cutters, bought on leave at the Army and Navy Stores, so that the non-regular battalion of the Manchester Regiment (one of Kitchener's 'New Army' battalions)

which was to attack from the Royal Welch trench might have a better chance. Sassoon writes: ‘[...] it seemed to me that our prestige as a Regular Battalion had been entrusted to my care on a front of several hundred yards.’<sup>15</sup>

Service throughout with regular battalions is a distinction shared only by Sassoon and Graves – although of course Julian Grenfell had been a true regular officer, commissioned in 1910 straight from Balliol under the direct entry scheme, but in the cavalry, whose experience of the war was rather different.

Now, all my experience and my reading of history tells me that the type of battalion in which a man served in the First World War affected his outlook (as it does today, if rather differently), and that this must therefore be a factor in his writing. For example, the confident and wholly convincing prose of the *Sergeant Lamb* stories surely derives from Graves’s service with regulars? The Army in the Great War was *not* a homogeneous organisation. It isn’t today – although because it’s much smaller the differences today are more contained. The Army in the Great War comprised, in fact, four very distinct and distinctive elements:

1. The regulars – members of the pre-war standing army of about 250,000, half of whom had been fighting since 1914, and more than half of whom were dead or hors de combat by the autumn of 1915. The enlisted men were tough professionals, all long-service volunteers (Britain had never had conscription), and the officers were pretty much the rural and urban gentry.

2. The Territorial Army (strictly, until 1920, *Territorial Force*), whose *raison d’être* was home defence – hence ‘Territorial’ – composed entirely of part-timers. Indeed, before the reforms of the Edwardian period (the Haldane reforms) they were known simply as the Volunteers – strictly, *rifle* volunteers. These were a very different kettle of fish. They were fiercely independent and proud of their patriotic origins half a century earlier during one of the periodic invasion scares; and they were still distinctly middle class

in their officer make-up, their rank and file a notch up from the regular recruit. When they had formed in the 1860s they had disdained red coats, for example, which they saw as synonymous with muskets and rigid lines, preferring instead the more egalitarian and practical ‘rifle green’, or even, after the fashion of American volunteers, grey. In turn, the regulars were all too pleased that these ‘weekend soldiers’ did not wear red and risk being mistaken for ‘proper’ soldiers. Although the Haldane reforms had done much to increase their efficiency, in 1914 they were not generally held in high esteem by the regulars; and in any case, they were not required to serve overseas (it would take an Order in Council after war had been declared to compel this). Only one of the sixteen Great War poets commemorated on the plaque in Westminster Abbey served with a Territorial Army battalion: Ivor Gurney, who enlisted in 1915, having initially been rejected on account of poor eyesight, and who, I suppose, found it easier to get in via the back door of the Territorial Army, which at this time was still recruiting more or less independently. The Yeomanry (the volunteer cavalry) had been formed far earlier, but with the Haldane reforms they were incorporated in the Territorial Force. Socially they were a considerable notch above the volunteer infantry: the Nottinghamshire Yeomanry, for example, had three dukes on their books. Sassoon had joined the Yeomanry before the war – it was the obvious thing for a foxhunting man to do – but had been badly injured in a fall and so could not go abroad with his regiment in 1914, which is why he found his way into the Royal Welch Fusiliers.

3. The third element of the Army, and very soon the largest one, was the Kitchener men – those who had flocked to the recruiting offices in August and September 1914 to answer the new Secretary of State’s famous call for volunteers. Kitchener, appointed on the day that war was declared (he had had to be hauled off the train at Dover, en route back to Cairo, where he was Sirdar, i.e. Commander-in-Chief), did not share the view of the

French and British General Staffs that the war would be a short one, and at once began to expand the army: not, as many supposed would be the case by, as it were, cloning the Territorial Force, but by raising additional battalions of the Regular Army – the so-called ‘New Armies’. His aim was to create five successive replicas of the British Expeditionary Force which was being sent to France – forces of 100,000 men, nicknamed K1, K2 etc. – so that by 1917 the Army would stand at nearly three-quarters of a million men: worthy of taking their place alongside the French and acting decisively. The reality was rather different, of course: with the BEF’s losses so catastrophically high in 1914 and 1915, the Kitchener battalions were dribbled into the fight prematurely rather than introduced fully trained and *en masse*. The problem with raising the New Armies was, naturally, who would command and train them. In the first hundred thousand – K1 – this wasn’t too difficult: there were officers who had not long left the army for civilian life, and who therefore had a reserve liability and were simply recalled to the colours – and on the whole they were pleased to be so, especially since they quickly acquired extra rank. Officers on home leave from battalions based overseas, and from regiments of the Indian army, were likewise offered promotion and posting to the newly raised battalions. And it was the same with the NCOs: on the whole there was no shortage. Indeed, the battalions of K1 were rather fine in terms of the quality of manpower: the first flower of patriotism in the ranks – men of a class whose mothers would never have let them ‘go for a soldier’ in peacetime – and officers in many cases slightly younger than in the regular battalions, because of the immediate promotion, or with considerable and very useful pre-war experience. The problems came with K2, when there were not nearly so many ‘spare’ officers and NCOs to call on; and far worse with K3, when commissioning from the ranks of the BEF became the expedient – an expedient that from time to time proved spectacularly good (there were several cases of former sergeants commanding battalions by the end of the war; and at least one brigadier); but a

pre-war regular NCO was not always the right sort of man to officer a platoon of idealists. By the time it came to K4, the situation could be pretty dire.

Even in K2 there were New Army battalions that formed with only one regular officer. In the case of the Eighth (Service) Battalion East Surrey Regiment a captain drew up his new command and asked those who felt they could control six to eight other men to step forward (a bold move which clearly worked well, since several of these self-selected NCOs went on to win commissions, and the battalion's war record proved second to none). So it's pretty clear that if you joined one of these battalions as an officer you were having to make things up as you went along – which, while perhaps being rather nerve-wracking, must have been rather exhilarating too. While if, like Graves and Sassoon, you joined a regular battalion, even by the time its ranks had been thinned, you were having to conform to a certain way of doing things. Blunden served with the Eleventh Battalion of the Sussex Regiment, a K4 battalion. It doesn't surprise me that he did so well, and won the MC; but the quality of the officers around you, which of course in part determined your own chances of survival, was potluck.

So when Dr Das writes, in that same *DNB* article, 'Like Sassoon and Graves, David Jones served with the Royal Welch Fusiliers', it really doesn't mean much: Jones – who served with the Fifteenth Battalion, a K4 unit – would have had as much in common with them, militarily, as chalk has with the proverbial cheese. Simply the same exploding-grenade cap-badge – although, ironically, Jones would have found more Welshmen with him in the ranks than Graves and Sassoon found in the First and Second (regular) Battalions, for the Fifteenth were raised in London, with the sobriquet 'The London Welsh', whereas by 1916 the majority of men in the First and Second Battalions were from the Midlands.<sup>16</sup>

From 1917 onwards, all this battalion distinction became

increasingly academic, because in 1916 universal conscription was introduced (except in Ireland) and by 1918 you had what I would describe as the fourth element of the British Army: the conscripts. With conscription came some serious reprobates (as an aside, those interested in the ‘Shot at Dawn’ campaign to pardon soldiers executed by military firing squad should note the significant proportion of death sentences for crimes that carried the death sentence in civil life – including murder and rape). The German records of prisoner interrogation by field intelligence officers immediately after capture that were discovered in the East German archives after the fall of the Berlin Wall are fascinating in what they reveal of the quality of the rank and file as the war progressed: of the regulars of the BEF they had nothing but praise: tough, disciplined men, resentful of capture, confident the British would soon win. Of the Territorials: not much, decent enough men but a bit soft. Of the Kitchener volunteers: magnificent, but not soldiers. When, however, from late 1916 they began taking conscript prisoners, they were truly shocked: they were meeting the British underclass for the first time, men who were only too happy to be taken prisoner, slovenly and totally lacking *esprit de corps*. Thank goodness these were nowhere near the majority. The conscripts were not formed into specifically conscript battalions, however: they were spread throughout the army, filling up the ranks of whatever unit – regular, Territorial Force or New Army – needed casualty replacements. Indeed, from 1916, there was no voluntary way into uniform: you were directed. So by 1918 conscripts weren’t so much a fourth element of the army: the army as a whole was largely conscript, with the middle and senior-ranking officers and NCOs the survivors of the 1914 regulars, plus a smattering of Territorial Force, and a large number of Kitchener men who had learned their trade under fire. And at its best it was very good indeed – but that’s another story (cf. ‘The Legion’ (‘Postscript’, below) for Graves’s view of the conscripts – at first horrified, and then reassured).

What I haven’t explained, however, is how Graves came to serve

with the regular battalions in the first place – and in fact he served with three, first being sent to the Second Battalion of the Welsh Regiment, a rather workaday battalion which recruited in mid Wales and the Valleys, as opposed to the First and Second Battalions of the Royal Welch, a much smarter regiment which (theoretically at least) recruited in North Wales.

The answer lies in a short-lived – essentially from 1908 to 1918) – quasi-regular organization called the Special Reserve. From the Middle Ages there had existed the militia, county levies controlled by the lords lieutenant, generally inefficient – except for the London ‘trained bands’. They flourished briefly during the Napoleonic Wars, and in Jane Austen’s novels, when they stood as the anti-invasion belt in case the Royal Naval braces failed. But with the growth of the Volunteer movement, which had been put onto a proper footing as the Territorial Force, the militia would have been irrelevant. So to boost the numbers in the Regular Army’s Reserve, the source of battle-casualty replacements, the militia was transformed into the ‘Special Reserve’: volunteers for all arms and services were given four months’ basic training alongside regular recruits at regular rates of pay before being released to their former civilian occupations, whence they were called up each year for three weeks’ continuation training at regular rates of pay, plus an annual retainer, or ‘bounty’.

Crucially, the terms of service obliged all Special Reservists to serve overseas if called up, which service in the militia had not. It was a particularly effective way of building up the reserve of officers, trained initially in the junior division of the new Officer Training Corps (later the Public Schools Cadet Corps). Militia officers were a notch below regulars in prestige, but considerably higher than those in the Territorial Force and, of course, the ‘temporary officers and gentlemen’ of Kitchener’s New Armies. Graves was commissioned via this route within weeks of the war breaking out, his OTC experience at Charterhouse being considered sufficient preparation. But this of course was in the days when public schools prepared their boys for leadership in

society, rather than, as today, merely for economic advantage. However, replacement officers for the regular battalions had to be truly competent, so Graves was put through proper training at the regimental depot at Wrexham, and it was not until the spring of 1915 that he was deemed fit to send to France. This was, in part, undoubtedly due to the higher standard which replacements for the regular battalions were still expected to meet – ironically, had Graves joined one of the New Army battalions instead he would have been sent to France sooner – but also because it's clear from his own account in *Goodbye* that he didn't quite take to the life as quickly as some of his contemporaries (at one stage his company commander describes him as 'unsoldierlike and a nuisance').<sup>17</sup> When he *was* finally sent to France it was not to a battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers but, as I mentioned earlier, to the Second Welsh, which he himself said he had heard was 'tough and rough'.<sup>18</sup>

He was in fact lucky. He'd just missed the bloody battles known as Second Ypres, and had a relatively quiet introduction to trench life with the Second Welsh, in which he clearly got the measure of being a platoon commander, before joining the Second Battalion Royal Welch Fusiliers a few months later, and then in November 1915 the First Battalion, who had taken a lot of casualties in the ill-starred battle of Loos. It was here that he met Sassoon, who had not yet been in the trenches.

When Graves had first reported to the depot at Wrexham he had been warned (he writes in *Goodbye*) not to expect to be recommended for orders or decorations, that these were for the regular officers, who would find them useful in the promotion stakes after the war.<sup>19</sup> The 'rule' couldn't last, of course, for the casualties among regular officers were simply too great, but it undoubtedly did apply where it could. Although Graves writes that 'I myself never performed any feat for which I might conceivably have been decorated throughout my service in France',<sup>20</sup> I believe that, given his responsibilities, had he not been wounded and sent home he would have been at least mentioned in

despatches by the end of 1916 – if he had not been killed (a big ‘if’).

But he was undoubtedly tricky. Captain J. C. Dunn, Second Royal Welch Fusiliers’ much-decorated medical officer, writes in his wonderful memoir *The War the Infantry Knew* (published in 1939), that Graves had not been very popular in the battalion. I can believe it. Watching the mid-1960s TV interview with that old scoundrel Malcolm Muggeridge, you can just see how that ‘don’t give a damn’, ‘too clever by half’ façade must have irritated some of his seniors and peers. In her blog a Canadian academic, Dr Rohan Maitzen, Associate Professor of English at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, writes:

I finished Robert Graves’s autobiography *Goodbye to All That* tonight. When I wrote about it on the weekend I was wondering if he would shift gears and begin reflecting on the experiences he recounts. The short answer to that is no. There are dribs and drabs of commentary that, if extended, would have added the kind of layered response I was looking for. [...] The thing is, I finished *Goodbye to All That* with no desire to find out or read more. I just came away from the book not liking him very much – and what that should have to do with anything, I don’t altogether know, but even acknowledging that any autobiography involves the creation of a persona that should not be naively identified with the subject etc. etc., still, this is what he wrote to represent himself, and to me, he comes across as a bit of a jerk. Here’s his example of taking ‘a stern line’, for example (from the Epilogue, technically, so written later than the rest of the book, but still...). During WWII, while serving as an Air Raid Warden, he is called for a medical examination,

and the policeman brought me a third-class railway-warrant together with an order to appear before a medical board at Exeter. As an officer on the

pensioned list, I refused to travel except first class, a privilege to which my rank entitled me. He and I might find ourselves in the same compartment, and it would never do for us two to mix socially.

Now, I wonder if he's being ironic at his own expense here [...].<sup>21</sup>

The irony content of *Goodbye* is so high that it should carry some sort of health-warning – especially in Canada!

So, in summary, what sort of a soldier *was* Graves really? Did that rather anaemic letter to his mother sum up the modest regard in which he was held?

There has been recent scholarship, I know, that produces a more favourable picture, but the opinion of his commanding officer – especially one of the calibre of Tibs Crawshay – should really be the one that matters. Crawshay's words to Graves's mother are not his final ones. When he learns that Graves is not in fact dead but in a field hospital, he writes to him at once:

Dear von Runicke,

I cannot tell you how pleased I am you are alive. [...]

We lost heavily. [...] I also wish to thank you for your good work and bravery, and only wish you could have been with them. I have read of bravery but I have never seen such magnificent and wonderful disregard for death as I saw that day. It was almost uncanny – it was so great. I once heard an old officer in the Royal Welch say the men would follow you to Hell; but these chaps would bring you back and put you in a dug-out in Heaven.

Good luck and a quick recovery. I shall drink your health tonight.

‘Tibs.’<sup>22</sup>

This, I suggest, says it all.

## Postscript

Graves's pride in being almost a regular is particularly evident in 'The Legion',<sup>23</sup> from *Fairies and Fusiliers* (1917), while recognising that the new men, the conscripts, the 'sullen pack of ragged ugly swine', will surely come up to the mark:

'Is that the Three-and-Twentieth, Strabo mine,  
Marching below, and we still gulping wine?'  
From the sad magic of his fragrant cup  
The red-faced old centurion started up,  
Cursed, battered on the table. 'No,' he said,  
'Not that! The Three-and-Twentieth Legion's dead,  
Dead in the first year of this damned campaign –  
The Legion's dead, dead, and won't rise again.  
Pity? Rome pities her brave lads that die,  
But we need pity also, you and I,  
Whom Gallic spear and Belgian arrow miss,  
Who live to see the Legion come to this:  
Unsoldierlike, slovenly, bent on loot,  
Grumblers, diseased, unskilled to thrust or shoot.  
O brown cheek, muscled shoulder, sturdy thigh!  
Where are they now? God! watch it straggle by,  
The sullen pack of ragged, ugly swine!  
Is that the Legion, Gracchus? Quick, the wine!'  
'Strabo,' said Gracchus, 'you are strange to-night.  
The Legion is the Legion, it's all right.  
If these new men are slovenly, in your thinking,  
Hell take it! you'll not better them by drinking.  
They all try, Strabo; trust their hearts and hands.  
The Legion is the Legion while Rome stands,

And these same men before the autumn's fall  
Shall bang old Vercingetorix out of Gaul.<sup>24</sup>

**Brigadier (retired) Allan Mallinson** left school at 17 for theological college but abandoned his studies after three years to join the infantry, transferring later to the cavalry and commanding the 13th/18th Royal Hussars. He left the army in 2004 to write full time, including defence comment for the *Daily Telegraph* and then *The Times*. He is the author of *The Making of the British Army* (2009), *1914: Fight the Good Fight – Britain, the Army and the Coming of the First World War* (2013), and of the Matthew Hervey series of novels set in the British cavalry in the early nineteenth century.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That* (London: Cassell, 1957), p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> David Langley, *Duty Done: 2nd Battalion The Royal Welch Fusiliers in the Great War* (Caernarfon: Royal Welch Fusiliers Museum, 2001), p. 73.

<sup>4</sup> John Stuart Roberts, *Siegfried Sassoon* (London: Blake, 1999), p. 234.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Perceval Graves, 'Graves, Robert von Ranke (1895–1985)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> *Goodbye to All That*, p. 196.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, *Goodbye to All That*, pp. 168–69.

<sup>8</sup> Captain J. C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew 1914–1919* (London: King, 1938; repr. London: Abacus, 1994), p. 234.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, *Goodbye to All That*, p. 162, where he puts the Midlands at the top of the list.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 (1975)), p. 207.

<sup>11</sup> *Goodbye to All That*, p. 149.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Aldington, Edmund Blunden, Robert Graves, Julian Grenfell, Ivor Gurney, David Jones, Robert Nichols, Wilfred Owen, Sir Herbert Read, Isaac Rosenberg, Siegfried Sassoon, Charles Sorley, Edward Thomas. The remaining three were Laurence Binyon, Rupert Brooke (served in the Royal Naval Division) and Wilfred Gibson (who enlisted but never saw active service).

<sup>13</sup> *Goodbye to All That*, p. 165.

<sup>14</sup> *Goodbye to All That*, p. 159.

<sup>15</sup> *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston* (Faber, 1972 (1937)), p. 327.

<sup>16</sup> Jones's most recent biographer, Professor Thomas Dilworth, makes the mistake in *David Jones in the Great War* (London: Enitharmon, 2012) of ascribing to 'class' the fact that although they shared the same cap-badge the three never met: 'they [Graves and Sassoon] were officers and did not socialise with privates' (p. 41). They never met because the Fifteenth Battalion was never proximate with the First or Second; there were in fact, at one stage of the war, some *forty* battalions of the Royal Welch – in all perhaps some 30,000 men wearing the same cap-badge.

<sup>17</sup> *Goodbye to All That*, p. 64.

<sup>18</sup> *Goodbye to All That*, p. 80.

<sup>19</sup> *Goodbye to All That*, pp. 77–78.

<sup>20</sup> *Goodbye to All That*, p. 78.

<sup>21</sup> 'Goodbye to Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That*', 10 January 2012 <<http://www.openlettersmonthly.com/novelreadings/goodbye-to-robert-graves-goodbye-to-all-that/>>[accessed 1 June 2014]

<sup>22</sup> *Goodbye to All That*, pp. 197–98.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Graves, *Complete Poems*, vol. 1, ed. by Beryl Graves and Dunstan Ward (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), pp. 35–36.

<sup>24</sup> The Royal Welch Fusiliers were originally the Twenty-third Regiment of Foot; and by November 1918 they did indeed 'bang old Vercingetorix [the Kaiser] out of Gaul [France]'.