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Review of *A War of Empires: Japan, India, Burma & Britain 1941-45* by Robert Lyman

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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. It is 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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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

approach, but he only had to deal with a campaign duration of 62 days. Lyman provides a similar clarity of view in providing the context for and descriptions of the individual parts of a four year-long campaign – a significant challenge in terms of academic stamina. For this reviewer Lyman's description of the reasons for and the mechanics of the retreat from Burma in 1942 and the operations to retake it in 1945 are the best yet seen.

But this book is not a first when others have described the overall Burma campaign, with Louis Allen, Ray Callahan, and Frank McLynn preceeding it, and to which we should of course add Bill Slim, himself a key player in Burma. The Fourteenth Army is often described as the Forgotten Army but that cannot be said of the historiography of the Burma campaign when the Burma Campaign Memorial Library at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies holds over 2,000 documents. Nevertheless, Lyman has, like Todman, Allport and Lloyd given us a new and fresh view in a work that has allowed Lyman to display his deep understanding of the Burma campaign, its strategic context and the principal players involved.

Poverty and empathy are themes consistently rising from the text. Whether it be describing the political and military poverty of the British colonial regime in 1941/2 or the poverty in Japanese decision making in 1944/5 that, 'depended, when things weren't going well, on the lemming-like sacrifice of its soldiers to shore up poor decisions by its commanders. By the end of the campaign, the Imperial Japanese Army had lost 185,149 dead in Burma, the Allies a fraction of that – in what was a nasty, brutal war, a mere by contrast 14,326 dead.' Here we see that empathy extended to the lowly Japanese infantryman, which most post-war history consistently paints as mindlessly cruel, but one we should now see as another victim of Imperial Japan's authoritarian and militaristic society.

At a time of contentious post-colonial debate in the UK, Lyman has not shied away from analysing and providing objective views on the British in India, all 150,000 of them. Sumantra Maita's thoughtful review in The Critic notes Lyman's framing of the concurrent struggle for Indian independence as being fought between elites, while the national response from 300 million Indians was the defence of their home by an all-volunteer army of some 2.5 million, of which 1.3 million were directly involved in the war in Burma.

In terms of the book's grand theme Lyman closes with the Japanese 'believed that their attack on British possessions in South East Asia would lead to the replacement of one empire by another (theirs).' Yet in 1947 it was not Japan but a new, and because of the war a different and more modern India, that took over the Raj as a going concern.

This book is a triumph of scholarship, and better still an engagingly written one. It will, deservedly, become a classic text.

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Raymond A Callahan & Daniel Marston, *The 1945 Burma Campaign and the Transformation of the British Indian Army*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2020. ix+280 pp. including: Preface, Map, Figures, Bibliography & Index. ISBN: 978-0700630417 (hardback). Price £34.50.

In one respect the title is misleading, the authors do cover Burma in 1945 but there is also an excellent chapter on the Indian Army's activities in French Indochina and the Netherlands East Indies following the Japanese surrender.

Before opening the book my first thoughts were how the authors might explain some lines taken from the closing part of John Masters' 'The Road Past Mandalay'. Better known as an author of fiction, Masters was a pre-war Indian Army officer, then a Chindit, and by 1945 a staff officer in Burma with 19 Indian Division. He wrote, not only of the Indian Army's victory in Burma in 1945, but of profound change in that army, and the nation from which it came when he said:

> 'Twenty races, a dozen religions, a score of languages passed in those trucks and tanks.'
>
> 'It was all summed up in the voice of an Indian colonel of artillery. The Indian army had not been allowed to possess any field artillery from the time of the Mutiny (1857) until just before the Second World War. Now the Indian, bending close to an English Colonel over a map, straightened and said with a smile, OK George. Thanks. I've got it. We'll take over all tasks at 1800. What about a beer?'

Could Callahan and Marston explain how Masters' pre-war Indian Army of some 200,000 had become by 1945 an all-volunteer force of 2.5 million? Could they also explain how it had risen above abject defeat in 1942, and a debacle in Arakan in 1943, to successfully defend India in 1944, and by 1945 inflict on the Imperial Japanese Army the worst land defeat in its history?