



Subaltern on the Somme

Max Plowman

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Max Plowman joined the 10th Battalion, the West Yorkshire Regiment shortly after it suffered heavy casualties on the first day of the Battle of the Somme - its casualty rate exceeded that of any other British unit on that day, with seventy per cent killed or wounded. Throughout the rest of 1916, Max Plowman served as a young officer with the Battalion on the Somme.

Subaltern on the Somme is a record of his daily life, and ranges across different aspects of his war in the trenches - including fear, shellfire, drunkenness, mud, frustration and his views about his fellow officers and British army commanders.

Subaltern on the Somme is for anybody who wonders what trench warfare was like for a junior officer.

Subaltern on the Somme Details

Date : Published December 14th 2013 (first published 1927)

ISBN :

Author : Max Plowman

Format : Kindle Edition 139 pages

Genre : War, World War I, Nonfiction, History, Military Fiction, Autobiography, Memoir, Biography

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From Reader Review Subaltern on the Somme for online ebook

Liz says

Just too lyrical and self obsessed for me. Didn't finish.

Ginger says

A true story that shows the folly of war and that it really doesn't solve anything. Should be read by those deciding to send people off to fight.

Leo says

A great book by a junior officer. He does not hold back on criticism of the war machine of the BEF

Paul baker says

Harrowing

An unusual account of a Junior Officer fighting in the mud of WW1 in 1916. You wouldn't joke about mud in the trenches again. He set out as a pacifist and ended up fighting although he doesn't really explain that. The text often feels very immediate and although written in 1928 retains that quality. The extraordinary waste of young lives is constantly confronting him.

David says

The edition I read was published under the pseudonym "Mark VII" in 1927. Very, very graceful and elegiac account of experiences from July 1916 to January 1917, when Plowman was wounded and sent back to England. Plowman was a poet, and it shows! Very hard to find this book (thank you, interlibrary loan)!

Steve Whittaker says

Poignant Autobiography

Well written, poignant autobiography. Not a lot of "action" but good descriptions of the psychological effects of combat. Definitely would recommend.

Linda says

I was prepared to really dislike this book, but read it anyway for my book club. I came away really liking it because it talks about the absurdities of war. Real interesting insights.

Richard says

A self-effacing memoir which speaks frankly about life in the trenches of the Somme once the initial push had failed and after so many were killed in the first few days.

It is clear that the men were poorly equipped at times, the battle got away from the generals and the stalemate was complete.

I liked the human thought that away from the guns pounding positions with impersonal fallout. But if the guns fell silent the troops would lose the inclination to pull their triggers, they lacked the will to kill, being tired and at their physical limit. Yet discipline underpins all the soldiers' life, routine and orders must be followed.

All aspects of daily life, the tedium, the need for morale are touched upon. The desire to punish and a court-martial. The need for foot management, lice, mud, rum ration and awards/ribbons.

The disconnect with home but the desire for leave. The bodies lying around unburied, where they turn up and the troops' superstitions around touching the dead.

The constant drilling of the men, the dangers moving even behind their lines, the courage of the stretcher-bearers and the simple working classes that filled the ranks. This is in stark contrast to the commissioned ranks that were middle class or products of public schools became the officer class with servants and privileges no-one questioned.

It is an honest account told with a degree of pain, few complaints and a honesty that reads well. It brings more pride to my remembrance of these simple acts. Brings clarity and depth to events that still make one angry and how little we have had to overcome as young people.

As a reader I don't feel manipulated or emotionally played. I was moved by a first hand account that sought to explain but not justify events. That educates without any patronising with no real point to convey. It is a realisation some may not want to reflect upon but it is a real honour to gain such insights. In an age where few told of their experiences with understandable reserve, to catch a glimpse through a portal in time is not so much a pleasure as a reality check.

Steve says

Excellent account of the war in the trenches during the battle of the Somme by a British officer during World War I.

Don Blower says

Tedious

To call this tedious is not to denigrate. The tale provides an insight of the experience of the stalemate of trench warfare. For much of the time, "housekeeping," tasks were a vital part of readiness for action and was tedious. Of course the experience viewed through the life of a subaltern was significantly different to that of Nick's English private soldiers.

trevor bell says

Read

Not to bad I would readily read on a train bound for any were as some of this is a drudge

Patrick Carroll says

I think this is a good "view" from the trenches, the original diary is sporadic and quite random but conveys very well the disorganised minutiae of life in the army at that time. Without the wider context and taking one man's "ant's eye" perspective really shows the complete and utter futility of mechanised trench warfare. The internal conflict and thrill combined with helpless fear is well conveyed without any comment from historians "interpreting" battles or circumstance.

Chris Bull says

After a slow start, Plowman gets into the rhythm of it all. Plowman is rather priggish and this halts a more earthy relating of the horrors of the 1916 Battle of the Somme. There are better recounts of the Great Wa

John says

The author tells the story of his 6 month on the Western front when he is a replacement as a junior lieutenant to a unit that was severely mauled in the Battle of the Somme.

He is a very good writer, becoming a poet after WWI. He also becomes a pacifist after he returns to England courtesy of German artillery; refusing to return to military service. Nothing in his six month tour indicates his interest in conscientious objection, he comes across as a officer who would rather be elsewhere but is doing his duty, the best that he can, no different than tens of thousands of other citizen soldiers.

At any rate, his unit doesn't see a major action but spends months in and out of the the trenches enduring extremely adverse environmental conditions as well as German artillery and snipers. He does as good a job as any reflecting on leadership, command relationships, types of troops, quality of officers, why men fight and the dysfunction found in military bureaucracy. He could be writing of almost any modern war waged on an industrial basis, only the tactics and locations give away that it is the western front of WWI.

d ridley says

SUBALTERN ON THE SOMME, Max Plowman

Another reviewer commented that most of the tales in the book concerned the 'details' which they were set to perform in order to keep them active and the amount of front line fighting he experienced was relatively little. It was all a terrible muddle. He didn't write the book until almost ten years later which explains the good quality of the language and the neat proportions of the stories. There are some worthy descriptive passages : waiting at Victoria for the troop train and when he was sat on a horse for the first time since on the sands at Worthing with his nurse.

He became a conscientious objector sometime after his return to England but he does not display more than criticism of the futility of so much wasted effort when he was actually serving.
