

**George Morton-Jack, *The Indian Army on the Western Front: India's Expeditionary Force to France and Belgium in the First World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 346pp. ISBN: 978-1-1070-2746-6. £65.00.**

India provided around 827,000 fighting troops in the First World War and her soldiers saw action in all the major combat theatres in which the British Empire was engaged. Her manpower contribution was more than that of Australia and Canada combined. Yet, whilst readers seeking information about the Dominion contribution to the conflict are spoiled for choice, scholars searching for discussion of the Indian Army in battle are left with a relatively meagre array of sources. This is especially true when studying the Indian Expeditionary Force (IEFA) that deployed on the Western Front in September 1914. George Morton-Jack's book on the subject is therefore both welcome and timely.

The book is a thematically structured reappraisal of the IEFA in battle. The historiography of this force has been decidedly negative, frequently portraying Indian soldiers as ill prepared for the trials of modern warfare. Morton-Jack sets out to challenge this view. It should be noted at the outset that this is a military history, with its focus upon organisation, training, tactics, and combat performance, rather than a study of the Indian Army as a cultural institution. Comparisons can be made to Gordon Corrigan's *Sepoys in the Trenches* (1999) which takes a similar approach. However, the subtle differences in the two works make them complementary rather than contradictory.

After a concise and useful survey of the existing historiography of the topic, the first section of Morton-Jack's book covers the pre-1914 development of the Indian Army. Almost half of the volume is devoted to this period. The discussion covers the organisation and nature of the army; its past experiences in 'small wars', particularly the watershed Tirah Campaign (1897-98) and the reforms that followed; and the development of secret plans to deploy an Indian Expeditionary Force against Germany or the Ottoman Empire in the event of a major war. The centrepiece of this section is a detailed survey of the strengths and weaknesses of the Indian Army on the eve of war. Taken as a whole this is a most valuable contribution to our understanding of pre-war tactical development and imperial defence planning.

The second half of the book covers the IEFA's deployment to Europe and its experience of battle in France and Flanders. It is here that Morton-Jack seeks to challenge accepted wisdom that the IEFA failed in the acid test of combat. The author convincingly debunks the idea that the IEFA suffered disproportionately from inadequate winter preparation and offers a nuanced reappraisal of the issue of self-

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inflicted wounds. The core of this section lies with the chapters 'Old Tactics' and 'New Tactics'. Tactical history has long been a neglected subject amongst military historians and so it is welcome to see it returned to prominence here. In this section the author traces how pre-war principles proved their value, and provided the basis for a considerable degree of tactical innovation in the trench battles of 1915.

Morton-Jack's superb research underpins his argument. Indeed, if a criticism can be made of the book it is that it can sometimes overwhelm the reader with information. The thematic structure offers an opportunity to cover diverse topics, but this occasionally comes at expense of narrative clarity. The absence of maps is notable, and some guidance would have been most useful in the discussion of the Tirah campaign and the tactical actions of 1914 – 15.

The strength of the book lies in its sense of balance. Both the strengths and weaknesses of the Indian Army are discussed and highlighted. The result is a study that places the Indian Army firmly into the context of the modern military historiography of the First World War, illustrating how pre-war experience in the Tirah had informed a peacetime learning process, which was then rapidly refined in the heat of battle on the Western Front.

Overall, this is an excellent volume. It is unfortunate that its inflated price prevents it reaching a wider audience, as this book will be of interest for scholars and students alike.

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**William Philpott, *Attrition: Fighting the First World War*. London: Little, Brown, 2014. 400pp. ISBN 978-1-4087-0355-7. Hardback. Price £25.00.**

Winning the total war of 1914 to 1918 required the total mobilisation of societies. While scholars of the war often treat that statement as axiomatic, William Philpott has given us the best-detailed analysis of that process to date. He identifies attrition as involving five factors: the land battlefield; the maritime battle space; the home front; the diplomatic front; and the alliance front. In order to win the war, the Allies had to defeat the Central Powers on all five. More importantly, they had to do so over time, husbanding resources, reorienting their societies, and suffering casualties at levels equal to or less than those of their enemies.

Attrition has ever since carried a negative connotation, and well it should. As a strategy it counts on winning a war by killing men at "acceptable" ratios rather than seeking territory or some other carefully defined objective that could produce