

## REVIEWS

the start of each chapter. Nevertheless, this monumental work can only enhance Western understanding of the centrality of Sevastopol in the geopolitics and the history of modern Russia.

RT. HON. DR JULIAN LEWIS MP  
Chairman of the Defence Select Committee

**Elizabeth Greenhalgh (ed), *Liaison: General Pierre Des Vallières at British Headquarters, 1916-17*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: The History Press and Army Records Society, 2016. Maps. Notes. Index. Cloth. 282pp. £20.00 (from the Army Records Society).**

About five years ago, the United States Army Heritage and Education Center acquired the papers of Colonel Spencer Cosby, the American attaché to the French Army in 1915 and 1916. Even a cursory glance at the Cosby papers will suffice to demolish a few myths about America's relationship to the war in those years. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the American army, represented by Cosby, was closely observing the western front and doing all it could to distil the proper lessons about the nature of modern war. Cosby's papers are a reminder that attaché and liaison officers, although rarely at the centre of our histories of war, are critical observers and actors in their own right.

Recognising this value, the Army Records Society has done a great service by publishing the diaries of French General Pierre des Vallières, the French liaison to Field Marshal Haig's headquarters throughout 1916 and much of 1917. His diaries reveal the difficult position liaison officers had to fill, trying to coordinate the strategy and operations of two militaries that, although allied, had different languages, cultures, and interests. Des Vallières, partly raised in Dublin after the chaos of the Franco-Prussian War by his Irish mother, might seem an odd choice for such a job. His sentiments were, at least at the start of his service, partly informed by the anti-English environment of his childhood. It is not even clear how well he spoke English.

The editor of the volume, Elizabeth Greenhalgh, is ideally suited to bring this diary out of obscurity and into the hands of readers. She has spent as much time in the relevant archives as any historian and possesses a deep knowledge not just of the personalities involved, but of the historical context around the events she analyses. Her deft editorial hand, clarity of purpose, and insights advanced in the introductory sections, are invaluable.

For better or for worse, in her hands, the diary raises as many questions as it answers. Even basic questions like which language the officers used to communicate with one another or why Joffre selected des Vallières for this important job remain unclear. Des Vallières did replace Victor Huguet, who developed a reputation as having grown far too close to his British hosts, an indication that des Vallières's own supposed anti-English views may have been an asset in Joffre's eyes.

Des Vallières died in the service of France in 1918, shot by a German machine gunner while commanding the 151st Division. He therefore had no opportunity to sanitise his papers, revise them, or clear up unresolved issues with an eye toward publication. The diary is therefore raw and incomplete. Still, there are critical insights here, notably the separation at the senior level between Haig and the French as the British Expeditionary Force grew larger and its commanders more confident in their own judgment. Des Vallières became liaison just as Haig became the new commander of the BEF. Thus the timing allows us to see both men growing into their jobs.

The timing also puts the Somme at the centre of this diary. Haig's discomfort with the Somme operation as originally conceived is evident, as are the daily tensions at the highest levels of inter-allied command. Des Vallières highlights the prosaic but critical problems of logistics that hampered inter-allied efforts and offers some strong criticism of the BEF's tactical approaches.

As Greenhalgh notes, this diary, and other sources like it such as Spencer Cosby's regular reports to Washington, are valuable not just for the new insights they provide. They can also serve to triangulate other sources and balance out their disagreements. Of course, they may themselves be wrong, meaning that the picture can become even more confused. Thus, *Liaison* does little to remove the ambiguity of the war, but perhaps that is just as it should be.

MICHAEL S. NEIBERG  
US Army War College

**Jim Storr, *King Arthur's Wars: The Anglo-Saxon Conquest of England*. Solihull: Helion, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-910777-81-7. 304pp, 96 figures. Hardback. Price £20.29.**

Many books claim to present a ground-breaking development in our understanding of a given historical event or period. These claims rarely withstand closer examination. In the case of *King Arthur's Wars*, however, Jim Storr might be justified in making such