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Review of *The Unknown Warrior: A Personal Journey of Discovery and Remembrance* by John Nichol

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John Nichol, *The Unknown Warrior: A Personal Journey of Discovery and Remembrance*. London: Simon & Schuster, 2024. 400 pp. ISBN: 978-1398509443 (hardback). Price £22.

The First World War was an unparalleled and unprecedented conflict; it left millions of dead and over 300,000 British men missing. Equally tragic was that many British families wondered what had happened to their loved ones and could not bury them, leaving many families without a sense of closure. In *The Unknown Warrior: A Personal Journey of Discovery and Remembrance*, historian John Nichol traces the journey of the Unknown Warrior from the battlefields of France to his final resting place at Westminster Abbey for the 11 November 1920 Armistice Day commemoration. The idea for the Unknown Warrior was conceived by David Railton, a padre who served with the British and witnessed and experienced the suffering of his comrades, and who believed that many families could not say goodbye to their missing loved ones and needed to unburden themselves of emotional pain. Railton advocated that the Unknown Warrior could serve as a symbol for millions of mourning families and bring together a nation to heal.

Nichol explores the symbolic significance of the Unknown Warrior. The mystery behind the identification of the Unknown Warrior was that he could have been a soldier or officer from any branch of the British military, who could have been killed at any point during the war. The Unknown Warrior's class status, ethnicity, and religion would not have mattered to the mourning families. The shrouded mystery of the Unknown Warrior, as Railton anticipated, was that he could give hope to grieving British families that he could be any family's deceased loved one.

Nichol relies on primary sources to tell the narrative of the Unknown Warrior, including newspapers, primary sources within secondary sources, and letters. The author's analysis of Prime Minister David Lloyd George's 29 November 1920, letter to Dean Herbert Ryle of Westminster Abbey reveals that the Unknown Warrior brought Britain together to mourn: 'It was a striking tribute to the memory of those gallant men who were so foully murdered in the performance of their duties and a true expression of grief felt by all classes in the country' (p.185-186). The funeral of the Unknown Warrior united all British people to come together for a single day and collectively mourn for their deceased loved ones. The outpouring of collective grief allowed families to find solace in one another as they were not alone in expressing their personal pain.

As difficult as it was for families to picture the Unknown Warrior as their loved ones, Nichol demonstrates that the Unknown Warrior's funeral allowed families to begin to heal: 'For many thousands of families, the funeral of the Unknown Warrior had, at last,

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brought some of the equilibrium they had so desperately sought' (p.188). The burial of the Unknown Warrior permitted families the opportunity to say goodbye to their loved ones, especially after years of anticipating their unknown fate. While the funeral brought relief to some families, many more remained in mourning for the rest of their lives. Their loved ones were still missing on the Western Front with no known graves, waiting to be found, collected, and buried. In many cases, the bodies of the missing were never found.

Nichol's *The Unknown Warrior* is a heart-wrenching narrative that captures the emotional distress of the First World War. It is a riveting story that depicts the raw violence and destruction of the war, as well as the countless casualties of an entire generation of young British men. Nichol's text is recommended for general historians, including history undergraduates, and does not specialise in a specific area of the history of the First World War. *The Unknown Warrior* is also a reminder that grief is unparalleled. Even in the twentieth century, as Nichol recounts, the families of those military personnel who served in Afghanistan are still impacted by the losses of war and the need to somehow rebuild their lives without the presence of their loved ones. While the nature and technological impact of warfare has changed over the last 100 years, 'the ceremony of death and remembrance goes on' as grief can be a unifying presence across multiple generations (p.148).

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Lavinia Greacen (Ed.), *Military Maverick: Selected Letters and War Diary of 'Chink' Dorman-Smith*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military, 2024. xii + 316 pp., 8 maps & 8 b/w photos. ISBN: 978-1036102272 (hardback). Price £29.95.

Eric Dorman-Smith has been described as his own worst enemy but many of his contemporaries would also have been happy to claim that honour. An intelligent, complex and difficult man it is no surprise that Dorman-Smith has strongly divided opinion amongst historians with Correlli Barnett (no fan of Montgomery, one of many senior officers who Dorman-Smith did not get on with) being his most vociferous supporter. Barnett wrote a typically trenchant foreword defending Dorman-Smith in Lavinia Greacen's *Chink: A Biography* (1989). In it she argued that while Dorman-Smith was his own worst enemy he was also a military genius. Thirty five years later, comes