

# Mud, Blood and Poppycock: Britain and the First World War

**Author: Gordon Corrigan**

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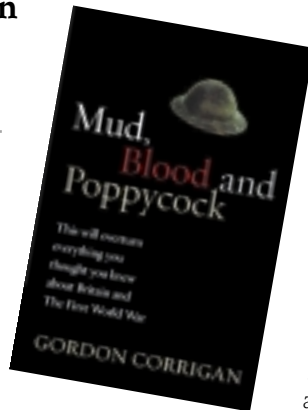
Among the recent crop of publications about World War One, one book deserves a closer examination. The author, Gordon Corrigan, has undertaken to “put right” many of the myths and falsehoods that have persisted about that war. He suggests in the introduction to his work that the popular view of the war is not supported by the empirical evidence at hand. He posits that our view of WWI was shaped by a relatively small number of writers and intellectuals who offered their interpretation of events as truth.

There is more than a whiff of “conspiracy” in this thesis but he is correct in his assessment that many of these critics had “personal issues” which can not be wholly attributed to their service. However, leaving that aside, his contribution to “putting right” the historical record by solid scholarship cannot be denied.

No one has granted absolution to Corrigan and we must accept that, as a professional military man, he has his prejudices and myths also. No doubt, his long service as a professional Army officer has shaped his thinking, but he offers no evidence of being firmly fixed to the Army’s official view of the war. On balance, he is objective and dispassionate about the events he reviews. We should all remember that each of us bears a certain number of prejudices, adherence to pleasing myths and legends. Corrigan has shown himself to be brave enough to take these “sins” on in headlong fashion – his own and others.

To Corrigan, there are no “sacred cows” and no reputations to be saved. In each section of his work, he deftly and quickly destroys much of the “common wisdom” about the Great War that we have come to accept without question.

He consistently illustrates that much of the analysis of the conduct of the Great War has been rationalization to support either a personal or political agenda or to support some other popular cause.



From the popular perception of “mass” casualties to the supposed “shoddy” construction of trenches, harsh field discipline and the effectiveness of the British Officer Corps, Corrigan provides a balanced and well documented counter-argument that calls the various myths and fables that have sprung up over the years into question. His analysis and commentary suggests that we, perhaps, do not know as much about the events of the Great War as we thought.

While much of the information presented has also been included in the works of other authors, Corrigan concentrates it into an understandable text that is well documented and cross-referenced. His contribution to the historiography of the Great War is that he has concentrated this “counter-analysis” into a single easy-to-read volume. Secondly, he shows us that the reasons for going to war in 1914 were often not far removed from the traditional reasons: greed, power and prestige. Technological refinements seem to have just sped up the process.

This is an excellent addition to any library and an excellent text to give to a first or second year History or Political Science course on the Great War or Conflict in the Twentieth Century. Given its rather modest cost as a paperback, it should be on every professional or amateur “Armchair General’s” shopping list. **FL**

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A new association is being formed in Canada that will provide a valuable networking forum for women in the defence and security sectors in Canada while cultivating the advancement of women leaders in government and industry.

WIDS will seek to:

- encourage women to seek careers in the defence and security sector;
- provide a forum for networking to further individual business objectives;
- provide mentorship and access to leadership training; and
- enhance the profile of the defence and security sector as a viable career destination.

Membership in WIDS will be open to men and women alike. Please check your next issue of *FrontLine* for an announcement of the formal launch and a notice of the inaugural luncheon meeting, which is expected to take place in the coming months.

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