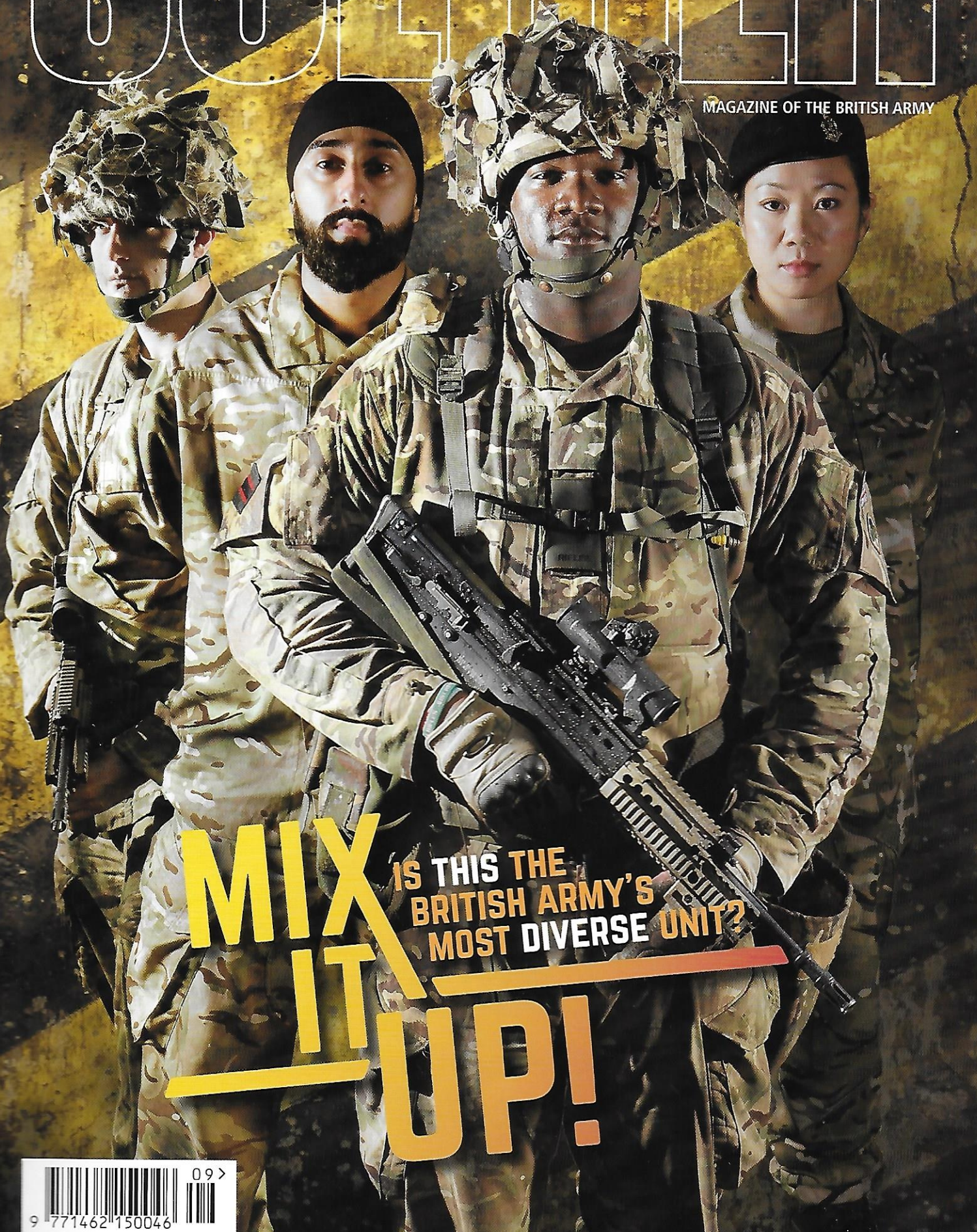


# SOLDIER

MAGAZINE OF THE BRITISH ARMY



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## Interview: Becky Clark

**R**AYNOR Taylor's mother watched three sons go off to fight in the First World War. Over the course of four years she received no less than ten telegrams informing her that he and his brothers, Albert and Jack, had been wounded.

Miraculously, and despite Albert reported as missing, presumed dead in 1918, all returned home.

But the prolonged stress had left Mrs Taylor frail.

She died of cancer three months later – another victim of the conflict, Raynor used to say.

His recollections form part of a new book, *Voices from the Front*, by Imperial War Museum oral historian, Peter Hart.

Based on hundreds of hours of conversations with surviving veterans in the 1980s, the title lays bare the wartime experiences of soldiers, sailors and airmen of all ranks and across every front.

Looking back on the interview process, the author told *Soldier*: "I had been interested in the war since my teens, so it was a great honour to be able to meet these wonderful old men who had witnessed the cataclysmic events that I had only ever read about.

"I always wanted to produce a distillation of the very best interviews – a 'show and tell' if you like.

"The material is just so vivid that it deserves a wider audience and the time seemed right given the heightened interest in the Great War during the 100th anniversary commemorations."

Hart acknowledges that the vagaries of human memory make oral history an imperfect record of events but he believes it is vital to our understanding of the past because of its capacity to convey how complex strategic acts were experienced on an individual level.

"I also think that emotions heightened by war are fully revealed in interviews," he added.

"Given time to consider, men and women open up as to what they were really thinking, untrammelled by pressure to conform to a set perspective.

"Terrible tragedies are often exposed in heart-rending memories of much loved relatives or comrades that were killed, mangled or mentally shattered by war.

"Few had ever written anything down or preserved their contemporary letters, so without these interviews their memories would have been lost."

The ex-Servicemen Hart spoke to were a varied group, ranging from – in his words – "quiet bespectacled types to rough diamonds, stolid Bible-readers, intellectuals and eccentrics".

He recalled: "I met all sorts – brave men who could take all their enemies could throw at them and more; nervous types who had to dig deep.

"Many got through without a scratch, but others were dreadfully injured, their lives changed forever."

It took decades for some to speak of what they had seen during the war and now that none are left to tell their stories firsthand, Hart hopes the book will bring their words to the forefront once more.

"Whatever we think of the rights or wrongs of the Great War, they were generally proud of what they and their comrades had achieved," he continued.

"They were soldiers fighting as best they could in defence of their country in terrible circumstances.

"The things that happened to them, the horrors they endured, are beyond the imagination of people like myself that were lucky enough to have lived their lives without direct experience of war.

"I want their voices to be heard." ■

● To listen to the Imperial War Museum's First World War interviews in full visit [www.iwm.org.uk](http://www.iwm.org.uk)

## The Legacy

by Craig Lawrence

A STUDENT, an ex-Gurkha officer and an assortment of eclectic characters must solve the connection between an assassin, a social media mogul and an aspiring young artist. A series of seemingly unrelated scenarios unfolds in locations as diverse as Nepal, Dartmoor, London and Edinburgh. The result is a hard-to-put-down adventure that contained just the right mix of mystery, romance and intrigue.



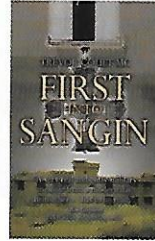
Janet Dornan, ex-R Signals

**VERDICT:** This absorbing yarn should appeal to all tastes ★★★★★

## First into Sangin

by Trevor Coult

THE story of 3rd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment in Helmand in 2006 is well documented. In this book Trevor Coult sets out to show they weren't the only unit there. He was part of an attached platoon from The Royal Irish Regiment and his account is packed full of action and emotion, especially when describing the loss of a close friend. A few spelling mistakes and poor grammar should not detract from a great read.



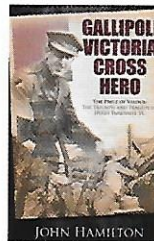
LCpl Scott Roberts, Rifles

**VERDICT:** A lesser-known story of true heroism and brotherhood ★★★★★

## Gallipoli Victoria Cross Hero

by John Hamilton

HUGO Throssell of the Australian Light Horse earned a Victoria Cross at Gallipoli. It is a story of one man's valour and his country's shame. He returned home a hero but suffering from what we now know as PTSD. In 1933 he shot himself after being offered ten shillings for his medal in a pawnshop. The author does an excellent job of capturing the wider conflict as well as the man at the heart of this tragedy.



Douglas Jackson, historical novelist

**VERDICT:** A sobering read with lessons still pertinent today ★★★★★

## KL

by Nikolaus Wachsmann

MORE than just another perspective on the Nazis' "final solution", this book is a comprehensive exploration of the subject from the development of the concentration camps as a concept, through to the manner of their operation. Predictably, the gross excesses of the SS are laid bare but the author also covers less-familiar ground, such as their unsuccessful attempts to exploit the prisoners to boost the German war effort.



George Robey, ex-GH

**VERDICT:** Not an easy read but compelling nonetheless ★★★★★

## After the Flood

by John Nichol

THIS absorbing text brings to life the story of what happened to the surviving "Dambuster" crews after their famous raids. Thanks to the author's intimate understanding of the dynamics of a bomber squadron, the reader is taken inside the history and allowed to view events from a human perspective. I finished the book feeling that the operation was really just the start of an extraordinary tale.



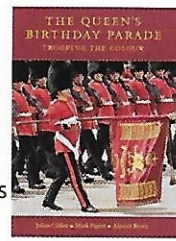
Mike Peters, ex-AAC

**VERDICT:** A gripping, in-the-cockpit perspective of events ★★★★★

## The Queen's Birthday Parade

by Calder, Pigott and Bruce

CELEBRATING the pomp and ceremony that is Trooping the Colour, this lavishly illustrated tome is packed with history and behind-the-scenes details on what it takes to pull this complex event off to perfection. Perhaps predictably, senior officers feature heavily in the narrative and I felt it lacked the junior ranks' perspective but nonetheless, the book is a stunning encyclopaedia of all things ceremonial.



Becky Clark, *Soldier*

**VERDICT:** As glossy as a guardsman's bulled boots ★★★★★