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The Unprofessional Soldier

David G. Alexander

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Are lessons ever really learned? Incredibly detailed and highly emotive, The Unprofessional Soldier gives a first-person account of the Mesopotamian campaign of the Great War. David Alexander has cleverly interwoven his grandfather's original manuscript, diaries and recollections of conversations together, with additional details of the wider context of the campaign. The result is a moving tale of what drives a man to become a soldier and motivates him to fight, to kill and to survive. Insights into military authority, the narrative of wartime decision-making, the ebb and flow of battlefield successes and failures, and the detail of local tactics are balanced by descriptions of day-to-day living and surviving in harsh and dangerous environments where the combination of disease and Arab attacks were as damaging to the British forces as were the Turks themselves. And the images of war are evocative. The bloated bodies of comrades in the desert sun. The anger and rage produced by the instant and violent death of a fellow soldier from a gaping head wound. The cold accounts given by the Battalion's hangman'. The failed attempt at aerial re-supply of the besieged and starving British army at Kut-al-Amara. But Alexander has also included the shades of regret and how a man can justify killing another expressed in his grandfather's own words. A fascinating, well-researched tale which makes one contemplate the futility of war.

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