

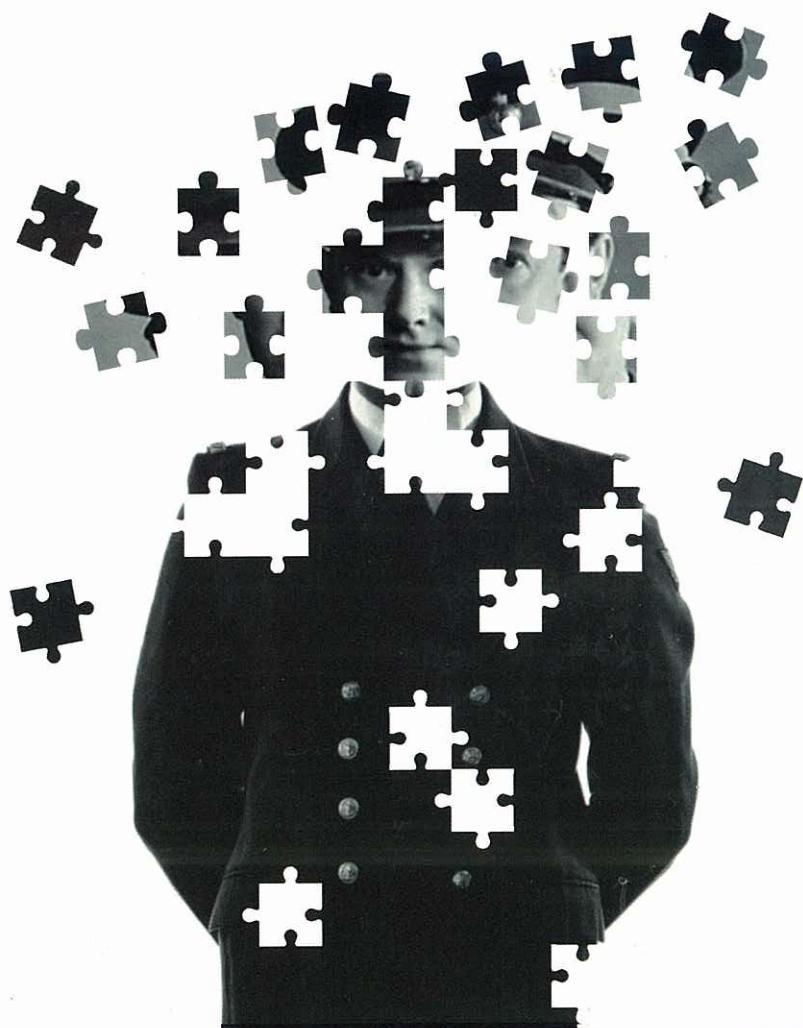
COSTERUS NEW SERIES

207

# *In the Picture*

The Facts behind the Fiction  
in Evelyn Waugh's  
*Sword of Honour*

DONAT GALLAGHER and CARLOS VILLAR FLOR



# **In the Picture**

## **COSTERUS NEW SERIES 207**

Series Editors:  
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and Theo D'haen

**In the Picture**  
**The Facts behind the Fiction in Evelyn**  
**Waugh's *Sword of Honour***

**Donat Gallagher and Carlos Villar Flor**



Amsterdam-New York, NY 2014

Quotations from the works of Evelyn Waugh

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## INTRODUCTION

On 27 August 1939, just five days after Evelyn Waugh had read about the Russo-German alliance and had become convinced that there was no reason “why war should be delayed”, he wrote in his diaries:

My inclinations are all to join the army as a private .... I have to consider thirty years of novel-writing ahead of me. Nothing would be more likely than work in a government office to finish me as a writer; nothing more likely to stimulate me than a complete change of habit. There is a symbolic difference between fighting as a soldier and serving as a civilian, even if the civilian is more valuable.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, after three months of painful search Waugh finally won a commission in the Royal Marines and remained mobilized for the duration of the war. He was right; his “change of habit” stimulated most of his eventual literary output: apart from the unfinished *Work Suspended*, interrupted when he joined up, he wrote one of the first novels dealing with the Second World War, *Put Out More Flags* (1942), in Angus Calder’s words, “the funniest book about the phoney war”.<sup>2</sup> Then came his masterpiece, *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), which according to its preface is “a souvenir of the Second War”;<sup>3</sup> and finally the three novels comprising the war trilogy, *Men at Arms* (1952), *Officers and Gentlemen* (1955) and *Unconditional Surrender* (1961) later revised in a single volume as *Sword of Honour* (1965).

Yet the inspiration the conflict brought about also had a disturbing effect on our writer; it became, so to speak, “a war to end Waugh”. In a letter to Nancy Mitford dated 23 October 1954, while gathering the momentum to get *Officers and Gentlemen* finished, Waugh confessed that he found it “hard to think of novel plots”, and concluded that his

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<sup>1</sup> *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Michael Davie, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976, 438.

<sup>2</sup> Angus Calder, *The People’s War: Britain 1939-1945*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1969, 513-14.

<sup>3</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited: The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder* (1945), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962, 8.

life had “ceased with the war”.<sup>4</sup> Douglas Patey, one of the most recent and perhaps most balanced of Waugh’s biographers, agrees that “the war commenced for Waugh a period of increasing, finally permanent despondence”.<sup>5</sup> The development of the conflict implied a progressive sense of disillusion and of national shame. Although Sykes may be right when he affirms that Waugh never had a love-affair with the army as strongly as does Charles Ryder<sup>6</sup> – or, for that matter, Guy Crouchback – he certainly joined up with an “adventurous spirit”<sup>7</sup> that suffered a process of deterioration as the confrontation went on. Like his character, he conceived the outbreak of war in terms of Civilization versus Totalitarianism and believed in the moral rectitude of going to war to safeguard Poland’s integrity. Consequently, the alliance with the USSR in 1941 and the ensuing British policies of support of Communist regimes – first Russia and then Partisan Yugoslavia – were moral blows Waugh could hardly endure. The final outcome of the conflict, with the subjugation of Poland and other Central and Eastern European nations under Soviet rule, further exacerbated this pervading sense of national shame. Using a remarkably daring turn of phrase for a text written in 1947, Waugh came to affirm that the war had “cast its heroic and chivalrous disguise and became a sweaty tug-of-war between teams of indistinguishable louts”.<sup>8</sup>

The war also “ended” Waugh in another sense, creating his conviction that “the age of Hooper”, with its accompanying barbarism, materialism and philistinism, had taken over throughout the civilized world, and that he no longer had a place there. In the words of Patey:

... it left him prematurely aged and embittered. He would live twenty more years after demobilization and write some of his greatest prose, but in important ways Waugh’s emotional and intellectual

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<sup>4</sup> *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Mark Amory, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982, 432.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas Lane Patey, *The Life of Evelyn Waugh: A Critical Biography*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, 183.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Sykes, *Evelyn Waugh: A Biography*, London: Collins, 1975, 200.

<sup>7</sup> *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, 157.

<sup>8</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Scott-King’s Modern Europe* (1947), in *Work Suspended and Other Stories*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982, 197.

development ... ended in 1945. The war was the crucible in which his mature pessimism was fully formed.<sup>9</sup>

*Sword of Honour* reflects Waugh's military experiences and growing disillusion from 1939 to 1945 set against a background of world-scale catastrophes and political and domestic concerns. This study, which attempts to place the trilogy in history, comprises two mutually reinforcing sections. The first part, "A Place in That Battle", offers a general introduction to the factual dimensions of the trilogy and to the historical and biographical events that inspired them. It concentrates attention on the fictional components closest to history and biography in order to inform discussion of the way in which historical and autobiographical fiction can assist better understanding of the immeasurable complexity of what happened during the Second World War. The sources drawn upon here offer insights, not only into policy (such as regards alliances at the highest level), but also into matters such as the special cadre training of temporary officers in the Royal Marines; the atmosphere surrounding Operation "Menace" in Dakar; the formation, peculiarities and early training of the British Commandos; the last days of the Battle of Crete; the inner working of Combined Operations; and the British mission in support of the Yugoslav Partisans in Topusko and Dubrovnik. They also provide information about the process of mobilization in that strange threshold period, the "Bore War", life in the midst of air-raid precautions, London under the blitz, and the effects of propaganda on public opinion. The discussion intertwines fiction, memory and fact in such a way that the reader at some point may not be certain whether the quoted text is fictional or non-fictional, but this confusion, where it exists, is deliberate and its main purpose is to underline the reality that historical fact may be contained in fiction or autobiography (while autobiography, for many, is one more fictional genre).<sup>10</sup> Thus this first section of the study introduces general readers to the background of the trilogy and provides some basic guidelines to help make sense of a

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<sup>9</sup> Patey, *The Life of Evelyn Waugh*, 183-84.

<sup>10</sup> Not even history, especially contemporary, can escape the personal or ideological angles. Patrick Deer affirms that Churchill "audaciously abolished the distinction between history and memoir" in his twelve-volume series *The Second World War* (Patrick Deer, *Culture in Camouflage. War, Empire, and Modern British Literature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 237).

historical context, knowledge of which should not always be taken for granted.

It is easy to understand why Waugh came to regard the trilogy as his “maximum opus”. As early as October 1946, ever worried about the threat of writer’s block, Waugh developed a premonition concerning his future works:

I have two shots in my locker left. My war novel and my autobiography. I suppose they will see me out.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed he knew he had “bottled and carefully laid in the cellar”<sup>12</sup> a number of decisive experiences that required maturation over the years that followed. It was in June 1951, after reading his war diaries and “capturing the atmosphere of those days” that Waugh set out to write the first volume, provisionally entitled *Honour*. The writing flowed easily, although it went through the predictable ups-and-downs recorded in his letters. Thus, while on 24 August 1951 he wrote “my novel is unreadable & endless. Nothing but tipping in officers’ messes and drilling on barrack squares”, a month later he saw himself “scribbling away hard at my maximum opus. I think it is frightfully funny”,<sup>13</sup> and by early January 1952, once finished, he concluded that it was “slogging, inelegant, the first volume of four or five, which won’t show any shape until the end”.<sup>14</sup>

Even though some of these apprehensions might have been accurate, it is also true that the final product, either in its trilogy form or as the one-volume *Sword of Honour*,<sup>15</sup> has deservedly won widespread critical applause. Andrew Rutherford judged it “probably the greatest work of fiction to emerge from the Second World War”.<sup>16</sup> Cyril Connolly failed to appreciate the first volume (“one raises the silver loving cup expecting champagne and receives a wallop of

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<sup>11</sup> *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, 238.

<sup>12</sup> *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, 547.

<sup>13</sup> *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, 354 and 356.

<sup>14</sup> *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, 363-64.

<sup>15</sup> The title *Sword of Honour* is often used to refer to the three original novels as a whole, though it should most properly be kept for the single volume redaction published in 1965.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Rutherford, *The Literature of War: Five Studies in Heroic Virtue*, New York: Harper, 1978, 113.

ale”<sup>17</sup>) but when he later reviewed *Unconditional Surrender* he recognized it as “unquestionably the finest novel to have come out of the war” and acknowledged the structural unity of the three parts when he declared that “the cumulative effect is most impressive”.<sup>18</sup> Holger Klein agrees that “*Sword of Honour* remains the most substantial exponent of its type so far, and generally among the best books in the field”.<sup>19</sup> More recently the military historian Antony Beevor has replicated this appraisal, choosing the trilogy as one of the five best works of fiction about the Second World War,<sup>20</sup> whilst Jeffrey Archer has listed it as one of the best *roman-fleuves* in English, adding the familiar remark that it is “probably the best thing in English literature to be inspired by the second world war”.<sup>21</sup>

In his chapter on British novels in *The Second World War in Fiction*, Holger Klein also makes the point that war fiction is closely related to documentary and autobiography:

Many war novels incorporate textbook-type summaries, some use procedures recalling the documentary. And quite a few novels are not only based on personal experience (that is frequent) but amount to highly modified autobiographies.<sup>22</sup>

The latter is the case with Waugh’s trilogy and this aspect of the novel is the starting point for discussion in Part I of this book. We have already alluded to Waugh’s “two shots in the locker”. Once he managed to complete his war trilogy, which took over a decade, he produced the first and only volume of what was meant to be his autobiography, *A Little Learning* (1964), ending in July 1925. But he was able to make progress with a second volume only with difficulty,

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<sup>17</sup> Cyril Connolly in *Sunday Times*, 7 September 1952, 5, in *Evelyn Waugh: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Martin Stannard, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984, 337.

<sup>18</sup> *Sunday Times*, 20 October 1961, 31, in *ibid.*, 430.

<sup>19</sup> Holger Klein, “Britain”, in *The Second World War in Fiction*, ed. Holger Klein et al., London: Macmillan, 1984, 37.

<sup>20</sup> Antony Beevor, “Five Best: World War II Fiction”, *Wall Street Journal*, 21 November 2009: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704431804574540113805301456.html> (accessed 12 Jan 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Jeffrey Archer, “Jeffrey Archer’s Top 10 Romans-fleuves”, *The Guardian*, 14 March 2012: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/mar/14/Jeffrey-archer-top-10-romans-fleuves> (accessed 12 Jan 2013).

<sup>22</sup> Klein, “Britain”, 17.

partly for lack of obviously motivating material, since he had “used all [his] more interesting experiences in one form or another in novels”, as he told an interviewer.<sup>23</sup>

As regards the war trilogy there is a mutual enrichment between the sources and the resulting artefact. Not only does the autobiographical material complement the fictional story, but events and characters of the trilogy are in turn contextualized by the author’s biography and autobiographical writings.<sup>24</sup> Both sets of elements, in turn, enrich and clarify knowledge of a crucial period in world history. Given that the Second World War is an unquestionable turning point in the twentieth century, that sixty million people were killed in it and that its consequences are still alive in our own present, it is no wonder that it has inspired so many thousands of volumes and that they will continue to appear. What war fiction, with its peculiar autobiographical angle, can add to the knowledge of this critical period is an irreplaceable first-hand perspective. A writer happened to be there, at the heart of the conflict, and then applied his talent to recreating what he saw. Later authors or historians may be better informed through access to original documents and thus have a better perspective, but their material is ineluctably second-hand. In his study *English Fiction of the Second World War*, Alan Munton agrees that “‘experienced’ or ‘felt’ novels possess a sense of immediacy that brings with it fictional authority”, whereas “the novelists writing in later decades attempt to establish their authority by insisting that their fictions are authentic”; but their “research activities are inevitably conducted according to certain presuppositions about what was significant in wartime, so that the ‘researched’ novel does not so much reproduce the period as construct a post-war view of wartime life”.<sup>25</sup> This sense of first-hand history, and perhaps a dimension of

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<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Patey, *The Life of Evelyn Waugh*, 364.

<sup>24</sup> In his article “‘Not a Man for Whom I Ever Had Esteem’: Evelyn Waugh on Winston Churchill” (in *Waugh Without End: New Trends in Evelyn Waugh’s Studies*, eds Carlos Villar Flor and Robert Murray Davis, Bern: Peter Lang, 2005, 247-57), John Howard Wilson applies this conviction that “publication of Waugh’s diaries and letters has facilitated interpretation of his fiction” (247) to offer new insights into Waugh’s opinion of, and relationship with, Churchill. He concludes that “diaries and letters gloss apparently benign references in the novels” and by doing this “publicly belittled the most famous man in England for years without providing enough grounds for legal action” (257).

<sup>25</sup> Alan Munton, *English Fiction of the Second World War*, London: Faber, 1989, 10.



Unamuno's notion of "intrahistory" (the daily life that serves as permanent background to the visible history), shines light on the entire trilogy.

Part II of this study will closely examine four aspects of Waugh's military service – his conduct as an officer; the truthfulness of the War Diary he kept on Crete; the facts of his forced resignation from the Special Service Brigade, with the fantasies that have grown up around it; and his diligent work as a member of No. 37 Military Mission in Croatia, while opposing British Yugoslavia policy – areas about which knowledge has been fragmentary. At this point it will perhaps be useful to sketch the immediate circumstances that created the need for these studies, why they rely so heavily on primary sources, and the significance of these issues for Waugh's reputation and fiction.

Waugh's military service, while deservedly open to censure, has attracted strangely unremitting criticism, some vituperative, much flat wrong. As a result, each of the four chapters in Part II has its origin in unusually violent attacks made upon Waugh. Those attacks led to controversy, largely because – without seeming to pre-empt later discussions – the evidence put forward to convict Waugh was *prima facie* incomplete and inaccurate. In hindsight the attacks and the controversies proved fortunate, because they stimulated fresh research with enlightening, and often surprising, results.

The fruits of that research, very much expanded and deepened by later investigations, constitute the second part of this volume. The studies prescind from point-by-point disputation with fellow scholars (except over matters of fact), because their aim is not to argue for one opinion against another. Rather they seek to bring to light as much information as possible about Waugh's activities. Equally importantly they attempt to locate the activities within the context in which they occurred. In short, these chapters will not debate secondary or interpretative critiques (although some argument of that kind will be impossible to avoid) but as far as possible will seek to assemble all available evidence from as full a range of sources as can be located and try to understand the facts within their original setting. What emerges will be allowed to speak for itself. In short, the studies in Part II have grown out of past disputes but radically transcend them.

It is fair to say that a fog of misunderstanding has surrounded Waugh's military career. This has been created, it would appear, by

the constant repetition, distortion, and exponential magnification of claims made in studies that deal with primary Waugh material but – with respect for authors who have contributed so much to knowledge – have at times done so inaccurately. Four works deserve particular mention. The first is Christopher Sykes's *Evelyn Waugh: A Biography*. Because Sykes was Waugh's official biographer and known to be his friend and fellow soldier, his work was widely accepted as authoritative. But that impression of reliability is misleading because, as the discussion in Chapter 4 will demonstrate, Sykes channels the damning criticisms of one officer in the headquarters of the Special Service Brigade, a period that, by any standard, was the low point of Waugh's remarkably diverse military experience. Testimony from senior officers in other areas of service mitigates the impression Sykes creates. Nor do Sykes's headline claims – for example that Waugh was so detested by his men that Brigadier Laycock had to set a guard over his sleeping quarters – stand up to scrutiny. Nevertheless, the distinctly unfriendly but dubious anecdotes Sykes passes on, and his own errors, have been repeated and improved upon in the subsequent literature, including the major biographies. Lord Lovat's *March Past: A Memoir*,<sup>26</sup> parallels Sykes in so far as Lovat, for a time Waugh's Commanding Officer, seemed a safe witness. But, as Chapter 6 will demonstrate, Lovat's account of Waugh's being forced to resign from the Special Service Brigade is, apart from the fact of the resignation, almost pure fantasy. Lovat's vitriolic personal abuse of Waugh of course has no place in Sykes, but the gravamen of his attack, unquestioned, has become integral to the Waugh narrative. The third text is Antony Beevor's *Crete*,<sup>27</sup> which attempts to convict Colonel (later Major-General Sir Robert) Laycock of misconduct during the evacuation of Crete, and Waugh of becoming complicit in Laycock's dishonour, allegedly by falsifying the Layforce War Diary to conceal the misconduct. Beevor's thesis seriously inflamed the imagination of Waugh scholars, and since publication in 1991 his charges have been fantasticated beyond recognition. More disturbingly, they have become the basis for readings that diminish *Sword of Honour*. But nothing has brought Waugh's military service into disrepute more spectacularly than his own diaries. The pages relating to the period August 1942 – May

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<sup>26</sup> Lord Lovat, *March Past: A Memoir*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978.

<sup>27</sup> Antony Beevor, *Crete: The Battle and the Resistance*, London: Penguin, 1992.



1943, when Waugh was Intelligence Officer within the Special Service Brigade Headquarters, and to the period August – October 1943, when Waugh moved between Windsor and London after his forced resignation from his Brigade,<sup>28</sup> reveal a pattern of drinking and self-centredness such as to dismay the least judgemental reader. The fuller context provided in Chapters 4 and 6, including the private diary of Waugh's sergeant within the Special Service Brigade Headquarters, mitigate the first impression created by the diaries. But, understandably enough, commentary has highlighted the most glaring instances of bad behaviour, and it is by these that Waugh has been characterized. Detail of the attacks on Waugh, and the distortions to which original criticisms have been subjected, will emerge throughout Part II.

In order to dispel the fog surrounding Waugh's military service, wherever possible Chapters 4 to 7 refer to original documents and other primary sources. This is done in the belief that nothing can be gained by continuing to ring the interpretative changes on the same few passages from Waugh's diaries and letters. What is needed is more information from a wider range of sources, an expansion of real knowledge. Going back to primary sources has the added attraction of enabling actions to be examined in a context in which their adequacy or inadequacy, decency or indecency, prudence or folly, can be most meaningfully evaluated.

A problem facing every biographical investigator is what credence to place on the subject's personal writings. Autobiography is notoriously fallible. But what of private diaries and letters, where there is no apparent motive to lie or to colour the truth? Obviously, in recording controversial situations, or personal disputes, diarists and letter writers can all too easily, albeit unconsciously, report facts selectively and interpret them to fit their own viewpoint. What then of Waugh's diaries and letters? Waugh was highly intelligent but also strongly opinionated; and, though self-deprecating in print, a man with a strong sense of self. Vivid, evocative, pungent, and fatally memorable as they are, do his personal writings clarify or obfuscate serious investigations? This volume puts the diaries and letters to the fullest possible use in every area of discussion. But – in view of past practice in Waugh scholarship some might find the following

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<sup>28</sup> *The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh*, 525-38, 546-52.

reservation paradoxical – it uses them with caution. This is not to say that Waugh skewed his personal writings to give a better impression of himself than was warranted. On the contrary. But those writings, however arresting and valuable, are, like most such writings, idiosyncratic, fragmentary, limited to the viewpoint of the writer, and in many places significantly incomplete.

Thus it would be impossible to guess from the diaries covering 8 April to 9 June 1943,<sup>29</sup> when Waugh was responsible at Brigade level for an important operation, “Coughdrop”, what his responsibility for the operation actually entailed; whereas official records, quoted in Chapter 6, reveal a high-level drama, involving Waugh, to which the diaries give no clue. Again, Chapter 5 will demonstrate that Waugh’s words alone do not supply sufficient information to reconstruct the last night of the evacuation of Crete. Without facts gained from other sources about orders, troop movements, the disposition of the enemy, and the chaos that overtook Sphakia after midnight, Waugh’s recollections, however memorable, are sketchy and not, and were never intended to be, an historical record. Filling in Waugh’s blank spaces by surmising what “must have” happened without concrete information as a guide can lead to a picture of events, such as that in Antony Beevor’s *Crete*, which is ingenious but mistaken in almost every detail relevant to the case against Laycock and Waugh.

The discussions in Part II will not, therefore, present Waugh’s diaries and letters as sufficient explanation of an incident – although their attention-getting quality might explain why so many critics and historians have done so in the past. Wherever possible other information will be sought to complement, contextualize, or correct Waugh’s vision of events, a policy followed with excellent results by Professor Patey in his relatively recent life of Waugh. No historical enquiry can rely on a single source, however authoritative, without stultification. The cryptographer Ralph Bennett, who provided Ultra decrypts to the Allied defenders of Crete, writes appositely that “Intelligence ... however ‘hot’, can only serve to mislead unless firmly fitted into a known context”,<sup>30</sup> a timely warning to anyone wishing to use Waugh’s diaries in a historical argument.

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 534-39.

<sup>30</sup> Ralph Bennett, *Intelligence Investigations: How Ultra Changed History*, London: Cass, 1996, 195-203.

Telling illustrations of the strengths and limitations of the diaries can be found in the accounts they give of Waugh's service in Croatia. On the one hand, no one could divine from them how conspicuously thorough Waugh was in performing his military duties; and yet eye-witnesses as objective as Stephen Clissold and Sir Fitzroy Maclean, cited in Chapter 7, testify to the scrupulous care he took with the work done by the Military Mission for the Partisans. On the other hand, the diaries are valuable eye-witness evidence, albeit from an intelligent, but partial, observer, of the Partisans in the first flush of revolutionary fervour imposing their Marxist-Leninist regime on an unwilling population. Experts, cited in Chapter 7, acknowledged that Waugh had sharper insights into the prevailing situation than they themselves did. But even so, Waugh's entries become much more meaningful when read with the perspective gained through the writings of key participants. The senior Partisan commander and military-Marxist theorist Koca Popovic, quoted at some length, both reinforces Waugh and expands understanding of the place and period far beyond what can be garnered from a British officer confined to two small towns in Dalmatia. The same principle applies to Waugh's analysis of the role of the Catholic Church in the puppet Independent State of Croatia under the Ustase. His account in the diaries and, more particularly, in his report to the Foreign Office, about the Partisans' motives for killing Catholic priests, discussed in some detail in Chapter 7, must be supplemented by the objective scholarship carried on since Croatia declared independence in 1991 and opened up sources not previously accessible.

The topics chosen for intensive investigation are among the most heavily criticized episodes of Waugh's military career and areas where misunderstanding is most likely to distort readings of the major fiction.

The Crete campaign, discussed in Chapter 5, is a major interest because Waugh's experience of the retreat and evacuation, so vividly captured in his "Memorandum on Layforce", feeds directly into the *Sword of Honour* trilogy. Waugh openly, indeed vociferously and imprudently, declared the shame he (and very many other soldiers) felt at the Allied performance on Crete, and there is no doubt that a sense of having needlessly surrendered, and having been involved in a spiritless campaign, contributed to an unease with the war, and perhaps with war itself, that subtly influences the later stages of the

novel. This is not in question. On the other hand, since Antony Beevor published *Crete: The Battle and the Resistance* in 1991, it has become commonplace to declare Waugh complicit with Colonel Laycock, his then commanding officer, in wrongdoing during the evacuation, and to argue that guilt arising from that complicity is the primary inspiration for Guy Crouchback's disillusion with the Second War. Chapter 5 presents abundant evidence showing Laycock acting lawfully, and in some respects very commendably, during the evacuation, and Waugh reporting Laycock's actions truthfully. This creates an opportunity to redirect attention to the turning point of the novel, Guy's moment of disillusion when he learns of Britain's alliance with the Soviet Union.

At the risk of drawing too long a bow, it seems reasonable to suggest a connection between the humiliation of Waugh's forced resignation from his Brigade – dealt with in Chapter 6 – and the “glaring defects” Waugh later found in *Brideshead Revisited*. Waugh's sacking indirectly, and very fortunately, created the space in which he could write the novel, which he then proudly hailed as his “magnum opus”. But fifteen years later, in a major revision involving “substantial cuts”,<sup>31</sup> he revealed that the novel was a “souvenir of the Second War”, written with “a zest that was quite strange”, and infused with “rhetorical and ornamental language” and nostalgia for “the splendours of the recent past” that had now found “distasteful”. Lamely, Waugh explains the “glaring defects” and the “distaste” as a response to “soya beans and Basic English.” It seems altogether more likely that the novel transmutes the misery of the recent forced resignation (together with the “condition of Coventry” which Waugh had suffered in the Special Service Brigade HQ) into compensatory fiction that, in hindsight, looked sadly overwritten.

Waugh's profound dismay at the direction taken by the Second War dominated much of his thought and provoked much of his anger after 1945. His mature response to the imposition of repressive Stalinist regimes from the Baltic to the Black Sea, with the connivance of Britain, is brilliantly personalized in the closing episodes of the war trilogy dealing with Yugoslavia. Chapter 7 therefore closely examines Waugh's service behind the lines in Yugoslavia, including his percipient recognition that, despite widely believed protestations of

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<sup>31</sup> Preface to the revised edition of *Brideshead Revisited* published in 1960 (Waugh, *Brideshead*, 7-8).

democratic intentions, a fully fledged Marxist regime was being put in place where the population was deeply resistant. The chapter also analyses Waugh's report on the perilous condition of the Catholic Church in Croatia, and his protracted dispute with British officialdom over its release. And finally, it documents Waugh's work on behalf of a distressed Jewish group and other displaced and discriminated against persons. The hope is to provide a solidly factual background to the various heart-wrenching elements in the fiction.

Why so many unfounded attacks on Waugh's soldiering were made, and so easily believed by scholars of the highest reputation, will remain a long argument for historians of critical opinion to decide. Suffice to say here that the chemistry of public opinion is mysterious and the British public from time to time demands an ogre to hate and blame. The climate of opinion that prevailed in quality journalism and universities for the last two decades of Waugh's life and for several decades after his death was astonishingly hostile. In such a climate of opinion, it is small wonder that Waugh's military service was depicted as an uninterrupted parade of incompetence and self-indulgence and that serious issues, such as those arising from Crete and Yugoslavia, were prejudged. As Chapter 4 will demonstrate mythology grew so rampantly that military histories in which Waugh played no part quite gratuitously included fulminations, based on fourth-hand sources, to the effect that he "never ought to have been in the Army".<sup>32</sup> An imperative therefore exists for an objective investigation of Waugh's military career, with priority given to uncovering information, viewing it in a full context, and letting the discoveries tell their own story.

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<sup>32</sup> Sir Ronald Swayne, quoted in John Parker, *Commandos: The Inside Story of Britain's Most Elite Fighting Force*, London: Headline, 2001, 60.