

# Dead Men Risen: The Welsh Guards in Afghanistan

Toby Harnden



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WINNER OF THE ORWELL PRIZE 2012. This is the tale of the Welsh Guards in Helmand in 2009. Underequipped and overstretched, guardsmen from the coal mining valleys and slate quarry villages of Wales found themselves in Helmand in some of the most intense fighting by British troops for more than a generation. They were confronted by a Taliban enemy they seldom saw, facing the constant threat of Improvised Explosive Devices and ambush. Leading them into battle was Lieutenant Colonel Rupert Thorneloe, destined for the highest ranks. He was a passionate believer in the war but was dismayed by how it was being conducted. Dead Men Risen will unnerve politicians and generals alike. In chilling detail, Toby Harnden reveals how and why Thorneloe was killed by an IED during Operation Panther's Claw. Harnden, who had known Thorneloe since they met in Northern Ireland in 1996, was on the ground in Helmand with the Welsh Guards. He draws on a trove of military documents, including many by Thorneloe, the first British battalion commander to die in action since the Falklands war of 1982. Major Sean Birchall left behind an unvarnished account of the shortcomings of the Afghan forces that represent Nato's exit strategy. Lieutenant Mark Evison wrote a diary that raises questions from beyond the grave. It was more than half a century since a British battalion had lost officers at these three key levels of leadership. By the time the fighting was over, almost no rank had been spared. A visceral and timeless account of men at war, Dead Men Risen conveys what it is like to be a soldier who has to kill, face paralysing fear and watch comrades perish in agony. Given unprecedented access to the Welsh Guards, Harnden conducted more than 300 interviews in Afghanistan, England and Wales. The searing heat of the poppy fields and mud compounds of Helmand to the dreaded knock on the door back home, the reader is transported there. Harnden weaves the experiences of the guardsmen and their loved ones into an unsparing narrative that sits alongside a piercing analysis of military strategy. No other book about modern conflict succeeds on so many levels. Dead Men Risen is essential for anyone who wants to learn the reality of Britain's war in Afghanistan.

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