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The Kaiser's Reluctant Conscript

David Sutherland

Jan 5 à 8h51 PM

À faffa@wanadoo.fr

Dear Mr Faffa,

Thank you very much for getting in touch with me about Dominik Richert's book. I was really pleased to hear from you, as I know how much effort you put into typing up the original handwritten text. I know too, that we now have something in common – an appreciation of the importance of Dominik's book and a realisation that it should be widely read.

For some reason, your letter did not arrive till the 23rd of December, but that's my birthday, so it seemed appropriate!

You may have noticed that my translation contains the complete text which you typed up, whereas the German edition was abridged. I felt that it was better to include the full text, so Ulrich Richert sent me your original typescript and I worked from that.

I am glad that you appreciate my conscious decision to maintain the Dominik's style in the translation. I felt that that was the best way to be true to the original text. I was just talking to a neighbour who bought a copy recently, and he too was, thanks to the translation, able to appreciate what it meant for Dominik to be involved in the war as he was. Thanks to his book, you get to know him and to like him.

I am not a professional translator. I worked in IT in Germany and Switzerland for about twenty three years before being given early retirement after experiencing a serious heart problem. I then returned to the UK in 2001 and after some further study worked for a software company in London. My brother-in-law who teaches German at Birkbeck, which is a part of the University of London, persuaded me to enrol on the BA degree course. As a part of this course, I decided to write an essay on the First World War as it affected ordinary soldiers – and that is how I discovered Dominik's book. I was surprised to find that it had not been translated into English and thought – "If I have the time when I retire I might try to translate it". The opportunity came earlier than expected as I was made redundant at the end of 2009. I really needed a change from what I had been doing so I started on the translation. It took about six months to complete the initial task, and then it took till the end of 2012 to find a publisher and go through the various stages of preparation for publishing.

I do hope that the English translation will find a wide readership. That's why I translated it. At the time when I started, I was not thinking about the centenary of the First World War – but now it's nearly with us.

I am now officially retired – I am now 67 years old – but I do not like to be idle so I am involved in providing bioinformatics support at University College London, and am also studying for a postgraduate degree in history. My wife is studying too! Life is quite busy – and two of our sons are still living at home, so – apart from the weather – it's never dull here.

We have not been in France for a while. We did visit Bordeaux a few years ago, and drove up to La Rochelle, so we have some idea of where you are. If we are ever in the area again we would welcome the chance to meet you.

With my best regards,

David Sutherland

