

Sahib – The British Soldier in India by Richard Holmes.  
Harper Collins 2005.

Richard Holmes is a military historian whose last book Tommy cemented his position at the very forefront of practitioners of the genre: with Sahib the author moves closer to pre-eminence.

Sahib presents the history of British soldiers in India during the several centuries when British forces first upheld the commercial rights and opportunities of the East India Company and then gradually and inexorably assumed power throughout the Sub-continent, until India became the jewel in Britain's Imperial crown. Richard Holmes details the life and work of soldiers in India, throughout the Raj; the conditions under which they lived, the expeditions in which they took part, and the terrible battles in which they fought. He also describes their interaction with the native population and the varied ways in which they supported and served the military machine.

What makes Sahib so impressive, and so powerful, is that it is suffused with first person testimony from officers and poor bloody infantry alike, bringing an impressive immediacy to the events described; some of the military clashes are so vividly portrayed as to live in the mind long after they have been left behind.

Sahib will be a joy to all who are fascinated by the Raj, or military history, or both.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh