

MY BOY JACK
(British, 2007, 91 Minutes)

It is 1914 and Rudyard Kipling, the British Empire's greatest literary supporter, is facing a dilemma. His only son Jack has been rejected for military service due to very poor eyesight. Yet Kipling firmly believes his son should fight for the unbridled patriotic views that he, Kipling, has espoused so publicly. He secures a commission for his son in the traditional English way - - through influence with Lord Roberts. Jack, barely 18, sees his first action at Loos in 1915 and goes missing. Kipling and his American wife then again use his influence to carry out an increasingly desperate search for their son over the next few years.

The British attack around the slag-heaps of Loos in September 1915 was part of a combined Anglo-French offensive along a 60 mile front in Flanders from Loos to Vimy Ridge. Designed to break through German lines or at least inflict unacceptable casualties on the Germans, it involved 67 Allied divisions and was a disaster which cost 250,000 Allied casualties to 60,000 German. Unknown to the Allies, the Germans had constructed a strong second line beyond the range of French artillery and on a reverse slope out of direct observation. Sir Douglas Haig commanded the British First Army at Loos, and used his influence with King George V to have Sir John French recalled after the campaign and himself installed as commander-in-chief in France. For the British, Loos was the precursor to the disaster on the Somme in the summer of 1916. Today 80,000 British troops are still listed as missing in Flanders.

During the war, Kipling worked as a government propagandist trying to conceal or explain the hideous casualty levels inflicted in trench warfare. Torn between his own jingoistic and imperialist values and his deep love for his only son, Kipling slowly faced the consequences for himself and his family of insisting that Jack go to France.

My Boy Jack was released in the UK on Remembrance Day in 2007. It is based on a play and screenplay by David Haig, who plays Kipling. Jack is played by Daniel Radcliffe (Harry Potter). Some of the filming took place at Bateman, Kipling's home in the south of England.