BOOK REVIEWS

Bloody Buna. The Campaign that Halted the Japanese Invasion of Australia. LIDA MAYO. Newton Abbot.

This is an account of the seven-month campaign of 1942-43 which rescued New Guinea from the Japanese. The Author is to be congratulated on the skill she shews in describing so clearly and vividly the fighting and the terrain.

The Author's sympathy (as will that of the reader) lies with the soldiers and their local Commanders fighting in all but impossible conditions of climate and terrain without adequate weapons or equipment for their tasks. Their constant prodding by General MacArthur from his distant and luxurious Headquarters will add to the reader's sympathy especially as MacArthur was ignorant of local conditions as he did not trouble to visit his men and see for himself but depended on what his staff chose to tell him.

The Author also writes with admirable objectivity free from National bias so that the bravery of all the contestants be they Japanese, American or Australian are paid tribute to. This is indeed fitting for it is the bravery which each Nation displayed which alone brightens this hideous campaign.

Excellent, clear maps uncluttered by too much detail materially assist the narrative so that the reader will thread his way with ease through the Owen Stanley Mountains and finally into the Japanese defended areas and strongpoints.

I recommend this book most strongly. Let's hope we will have more from this Author's pen.

A. MacLENNAN

Marlborough. CORELLI BARNETT. London Eyre Methuen. 1974. P. 288. £5.50. Illustrated.


In a recent review of two biographies of Charles Kingsley published simultaneously it was suggested that steps should be taken to avoid such re-duplication of effort. Nineteen-seventy-four was a good year for Marlborough. In addition to David Green's 'Blenheim' we were offered two biographies, by Corelli Barnett and David Chandler. Corelli Barnett's 'Marlborough' is more lavishly produced: a 'coffee-table book'. Splendid colour plates, important detail from which is repeated in black and white on appropriate pages; fine woodcuts and other illustrations with good maps and sketch-plans all contribute to making this a most tempting addition to the military historian's bookshelf. An unusual feature, the inclusion of photographs of Marlborough's battlefields as they look today, is paralleled in David Chandler's book by the juxtaposition of modern maps and maps of Marlborough's day. This ingenious plan helps to make this a book which would have been an acceptable companion on military service and campaigning in Germany and the Low Countries. How exciting to read, when 15th (Scottish) Division breached the Siegfried Line at Kranenburg, that Marlborough had camped at 'Cranenburg near Cleves'. Such a book, in the Batsford series, by a professional military historian of Mr. Chandler's standing, must appeal most strongly to students of military history. Mr. Barnett's book is more handsome and perhaps more readable. Two unimportant points may be mentioned. The word 'rendezvous' (p 142) may sound all right, but it looks horrid. Edinburgh readers may be surprised to learn (p 44) that theirs is a granite city. Aberdeen readers, who might regard this as a joke in poor taste, may be mollified on finding that Marlborough's much discussed 'mean streak' is dismissed by both authors as a pardonable weakness. Mr. Chandler writes: "if he hoarded his guineas he was equally careful with his men's lives". This noble tribute could never have been paid to Napoleon, but Wellington earned it every bit as much as did Marlborough.

Of our two great captains which was the greater, Marlborough or Wellington? Although the question may be as impossible to answer as it is to say if Joe Louis could have beaten Mohammed Ali, it is one which will always intrigue us. Mr. Chandler can hardly be said to consider it. His mind is clearly made up long before the last sentence in his book which is "England has never produced a better soldier".

Mr. Barnett reveals the extent of Marlborough's dependence on royal favour and the support of Court and Government. Author Wellesley, a born aristocrat, was supremely indifferent to all that; though, alas, his chief rival for military fame, John Moore the son of a Glasgow doctor, was not. Mr. Barnett thinks that Marlborough lacked Wellington's "hardness of fibre". Perhaps so, but a greater military historian, Sir John Fortescue, believed that Wellington had "actually an emotional nature which he kept, owing to early training, under so stern control as to forbid it any vent except upon rare occasions". Both great commanders measure up to Lord Wavell's requirement of being 'good with allies'. It is impossible to weigh Dutch obstructiveness against, for example, the obstinacy of that old survival of the middle ages, General Cuesta. Both would have tried the patience of lesser men unendurably. In terms of temperament Wellington is a clear winner. He never suffered from the psychosomatic headaches, uneasy sleep and other symptoms of the emotional strain of the planning phase, which afflicted Marlborough. Fortunately for his country all these troubles were cured by the elation of the battle itself. Said the better-balanced Wellington: "I put off my cares with my clothes . . . and when I turn over in bed it is time to turn out".

(Perhaps only Montgomery could claim as much and, dare one say, claim it with more justification. Wellington never really trusted his generals to act on their own. "I am obliged to be everywhere" he wrote, and, "if absent from any operation, something goes wrong". Montgomery was the first British general to develop the principle of reliance on a Chief of Staff, trusting de Guingand as Napoleon trusted Berthier.)
In the days of royal commanders and mercenary troops the opinions of corporals and private soldiers could be disregarded in assessing generals. Not so today. Correlli Barnett makes the interesting observation that “as well as commanders inspiring their troops, troops can inspire their commanders”. After that it is surprising that there is not, in his book, a whisper of that “voice from the ranks” of Marlborough’s army, Mathew Bishop, a pioneer of the fascinating territory of soldiers’ memoirs; a field in which Wellington’s men planted so rich a crop. David Chandler is not guilty of that serious omission. He quotes some of the tributes paid by Corporal Bishop to “Corporal John”, which show how well the nickname was deserved: “The Duke of Marlborough’s attention and care was over us all” and “the known world could not produce a man of more humanity”.

Lord Wavell judged Wellington to be “the soundest of all great generals possibly”. But Marlborough he called “the greatest military commander produced by the British race” adding “that he has claims to be considered the most gifted of all time”. Sir Winston Churchill’s massive and noble biography of his great ancestor is as fitting a memorial in words as Blenheim is in stone to so great an Englishman. But Sir Winston’s four volumes, each separately indexed, are not designed for dipping into in search of references etc. Both of the biographies reviewed above can be cordially recommended for present pleasure and subsequent reference.

Frank Richardson


This is a very good, large format paperback which sets forth in simple terms the main scope of Accident Surgery and Orthopaedics and the management of most of the problems encountered therein in modern practice. The chapters are short, easy to assimilate and well and profusely illustrated by line drawings.

Time for formal teaching in these subjects is very limited in many medical schools today and for those students who seek to expand their knowledge and experience by attending in the Accident and Emergency Departments this book will be very helpful. The authors manage to present a great deal of information in a concise and memorable way; and this book is certainly recommended for students of medicine or of nursing or others who wish quickly to review the field before embarking on more detailed reading.

W. C. Moffat


This is an extremely good paperback. The text is clear, concise and packed with information. The illustrations are black and white drawings of commendable clarity. The book is intended for the general surgeon who has to manage head injuries remote from a special centre and for the postgraduate student who wishes to study or revise a large area of accident surgery rather rapidly. Especially to help the latter there is included a set of questions at the end of each chapter together with suggestions for a generous amount of further reading.

This is an unpretentious book which many will find of great value, although for others its condensed, concentrated, almost terse style may lead to a certain amount of mental indigestion.

D. M. Roberts


This book comprises a detailed treatise on every aspect of aldosterone, dealing with its history, chemical and biological properties, biosynthesis and metabolism, mechanism of action, syndromes of excess and deficiency, and with aldosterone antagonists. Professor Ross has classified his subject in a way which leaves no Stone unturned but yet does not confuse the reader with its complexity. This is achieved largely by his exquisite lucidity of style, which has an intrinsic beauty all of its own.

Some 162 of the 500 pages are devoted to the list of references, and this covers all published work on the subject up to mid 1974. The comprehensiveness of the book requires no better testimonial. For many years this will remain the standard source of reference for physiologists, biochemists and clinicians.