BOOK REVIEWS

... and we thought the war was over. D Lee. Thomas Harmsworth Publishing Co, 1991. Pp 225. £15.95. ISBN No: 0 948807 13 X

This excellent little book is an account of a little known piece of British military history written by Air Chief Marshal Sir David Lee GBE CB. It is clearly culled from detailed diaries and an encyclopaedic memory and recounts the experiences of the then Acting Group Captain in command of a RAF Fighter Wing in South East Asia at the time of Japanese capitulation. In common with all other British troops in South East Asia at the time, he and his Command hoped for an early return to the United Kingdom. However, this was not to be, the Wing was moved to Java in support of operations to obtain the release of allied military and civilian prisoners. That it took nearly a year to achieve this indicates the degree of difficulty encountered. As well as describing graphically the day-to-day operations, the difficulties, danger and appalling conditions encountered, the author manages to illustrate the tremendous strategic, logistic and political difficulties under which his troops laboured.

This is a “hands on” account of a campaign which is virtually unknown to anybody but those who took part. It deserves to be read by all students of military history and by anyone, in any of the three Services, who wants to know “what it was like”.

K R YOUNG


This little book is made up of six articles that were first published in 'Thorax'. These chapters are written by thoracic physicians, intensive care specialists and anaesthetists, mainly for general and thoracic physicians rather than anaesthetists. This book provides comprehensive information about assisted ventilation for patients on the intensive care unit.

Chapter 1 describes the techniques of assisted ventilation, explains the various modes of ventilation used and describes the equipment. Chapter 2 describes the indications, benefits and risks of artificial ventilation. Particularly valuable is the discussion on the considerations involved in initiating or withholding ventilation. Chapter 3 discusses the many and varied aspects of the general care of patients who are totally dependent on those caring for them. Chapter 4 seeks to explain the sometimes frustrating process or art of weaning patients off artificial ventilation. This chapter seeks to explain why some patients fail to wean and what can be done to make the process easier. The final two chapters are devoted to hospital based ventilation outside the intensive care unit and to domiciliary ventilation. This latter aspect must be of interest only because I cannot see the Services getting involved in comprehensive respiratory care for patients at home.

This little paperback is well produced and easy to read. I am sure that it will be of value to all physicians who may have patients in the intensive care unit. It would be useful reading for all anaesthetic SHOs who are perplexed by the jargon and techniques of assisted ventilation.

J RESTALL


This is not a rehash of previous accounts of the Battle of El Alamein but is a completely fresh approach to the El Alamein campaign with particular emphasis on the vitally important parts which Ultra, the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force played in making possible the Army’s success.

The author rightly stresses the importance of Malta in the North African campaigns. This is a refreshing view as many have ignored the Island’s role and in fact have regarded it as a liability.

The author writes with clarity and spirit and he is strongly recommended.

Despite the rather high price this book can be most strongly recommended.

One small criticism is that the book is surely worthy of a better dust jacket - once I had removed it I could settle down to read the well balanced and factual account which the author gives!

A MACLENNAN


About the book — a handy sized book packed with short snappy snippets of humorous autobiographical happenings and hilarious anecdotal incidents and recollections from the author’s life, from childhood to retirement. The easy-to-read text is printed on glossy paper and is accompanied by many relevant photographs and numerous Osbert Lancaster cartoons.

About the author — enlisted in the Army in 1942 and 2701193 Recruit Gow, J, Scots Guards; ended a very distinguished military career as General Sir Michael Gow GCB, Commandant RCDs (Royal College of Defence Studies) in 1986, having in the in-between years occupied every imaginable important army post.

Two explanatory specimens extracted at random from the book serve to give a general idea of its contents. The author as Divisional Commander 4 Armoured Division in Germany contributed articles to Sixth Sense (the BAOR’s newspaper) writing under the pseudonym of
Mabel Crump — the woman behind the men behind the guns.’ One of his articles was entitled: ‘Hints on how to treat your Hubby when he gets back from NI for R&R’!

And now for something not completely different and to many of us a deja vu phenomenon: the author as DAT (Director of Army Training) was instructed to ‘cut down the training organisation by 10%. Report back in a fortnight.’ On this occasion the author comments: ‘the deployment of military manpower is a popular subject which afforded ministers an opportunity to show, once again, that by reducing the number of soldiers at duty the Army would emerge leaner and fitter and more cost-effective. And there were some who actually believed this!’

I suggest you should take this book with you on your next holiday, read it when you are on call, pass it around the members of your family and your circle of close friends, and make a note of it as an ideal present for Christmas, anniversaries and such-like occasions.

EE VELLA


Major General Thompson declares his hand when he entitles this book ‘The Life Blood of War’. In doing so, he indicates his understanding of the very essence of successful warfare — good logistics. Such an attitude, from one who is not a logistician by trade, is refreshing. Indeed he makes it quite plain in his opening chapters that ‘G’ snobbery is as much a curse nowadays as ever before and for this he expresses his displeasure.

The bulk of the book is an historical review of the influence of logistic support in the success or otherwise of various campaigns. It is rich in quotations, (useful for any lecture) anecdotes and informed comment from the Assyrians to the present day.

Of particular interest are the consistently recurring themes from ancient to modern times; themes which have plagued logisticians in campaign after campaign. Themes such as; the frequent lack of political will to pay for logistic preparedness; repeated under-calculation of logistic requirements to support any one battle; the influence of geography on resupply and the seeming inability to learn from the past.

Perhaps the most important comment which needs to be remembered is that the logistic plan must precede the tactical plan. Commanders who have appreciated this in the past (Alexander the Great, Richard I) have been the success stories. To this end the book must surely be essential reading for the staff and in particular for the G3 Planners.

This is a thoroughly readable book with an unexpectedly racing narrative. It is usefully referenced and quite inexpensive at £14.95 in paperback.

A M McCULLOUGH


This is a small simple paperback in the Vanity Press tradition. There are some illustrations but the quality of their reproduction is not particularly good. The book essentially is an autobiography of the experiences of a Junior Surgeon conscripted to the RAMC in the days of National Service. It covers his time spent in Malaysia during the terrorist confrontation, initially his deployment in an isolated area with a field surgical team, and later his time in hospitals in the peninsula and Singapore. The latter part of the book is concerned mainly with the trials and tribulations that faced a National Service Officer attempting to get married and then living a married life under these conditions.

The bulk of the book which deals with his experiences in the jungle contain many interesting anecdotes both surgical and otherwise. Unfortunately the style does not flow particularly well and one feels inclined, after a few chapters, to discontinue the book and thus miss some of the more interesting anecdotes.

In nearly every chapter the author emphasises that to him his time spent as a conscript surgeon in the RAMC was a wasteful period of his life and that he developed a profound dislike and contempt for the RAMC for reasons he explains. He also emphasises that the feeling was mutual. However, this cannot be the whole story on either side since he also admits he was awarded a mention in despatches and the title page reveals that he reached the rank of Major, implying service of a voluntary nature protracted beyond that required for National Service.

I R HAYWOOD