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The heroism of men in battle is a matter that has been passed on from one generation to the next in paintings, ballads, songs and odes as well as other writings; the folkloric oral tradition, in particular, has occurred since the earliest mists of civilisation, and was maintained and restocked as the centuries went by and fresh conflicts, associated with the expected ebb and flow of battles, came and went. The principal objective behind such recollections is to ensure that the heroism, bravery and other highly-prized qualities of those fighting for their country are brought to the attention of younger persons, who could then register such virtues as courage and commitments, and hopefully emulate them if and when their nation calls upon them to do so both in peace time and in warfare. World War II was seen by many who participated in it as a crusade that had to be fought, against all possible odds, to vanquish the abhorrent schisms of Nazism and fascism; such ideals brought the beast out of the combatants.

This book recounts for the generations who have come afterwards, both in words and in photographs, the exploits of a very elite and well trained commando unit, the 47 Royal Marine Commando. It was founded on 1 August 1943 at the height of the war and the commencement of the second allied front into Europe. After being trained to a high level of fitness and discipline, this green-bereted company over the next two years saw active service on the continent, at various battlefields, with 112 of its ranks paying with their lives.

This book gives a meticulous first hand, keenly observed account of the travails of these commandos by one of the young medical officers attached to the unit, and as such it has merit both from the medical and the military viewpoints. A full charting of the unit's exploits is provided – from the potential outbreak of measles before embarking to the Normandy coast, to the dire conditions of the troops suffering casualties and requiring emergency

treatment while pinned down under heavy enemy fire, to the elation of victory and the surrender of the enemy, to the memorials held to commemorate the sacrifices endured, to the remembrance services in memory of the deceased held by those who survived and by their relatives and friends.

The account is detailed, but is entirely readable and flowing, a true yarn of days which, with the murkiness of the passage of time and in the light of so-called precision bombing and the mechanised computer-assisted assaults of modern warfare, would be wholly forgotten unless these events are documented in this elegant manner. The last Great War most certainly made of those who fought in it and survived it responsible and upstanding citizens and, more importantly, tried and tested leaders of men. The manner in which the steely resolution of these men was put on trial and tempered by the fire of combat is all there in this book. Accounts such as this may assist in explaining how these same men, on transition of civvies, went on to use and translate the qualities so learnt and the experiences so bitterly achieved into a peace time duty of care to their patients, and into a slick medical career combining service, academic and administrative qualities of a very high standard.

**A. BUSUTTIL**



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'The social history of VD in twentieth-century Scotland is as much a story of moral regulation as it is of public health.' The accuracy of Roger Davidson's statement is illustrated throughout this splendid, well written book. After a short chapter that summarises the salient points for subsequent discussion, there is a clear account of the facilities available for the management of sexually transmitted diseases at the turn of the last century. Some of the measures adopted to control the spread of infection at that time appear quite draconian to modern society. For example, prostitutes could be detained for 'an appropriate period' for medical treatment and *moral rehabilitation*; even ice cream parlours were regulated so that there was no hidden recess in which illicit sexual encounters could occur. The circumstances leading to the establishment of a clinical service for the treatment of venereal diseases, particularly syphilis and gonorrhoea, are described in Chapter 3, and the difficulties faced in some areas in implementing the recommendations of the 1916 Scottish VD regulations are delineated here.

Venereology was regarded during the early and middle years of the twentieth century as the 'Cinderella' service, shunned by both society in general and the medical profession in particular. This theme, introduced in Chapter 4, is continued in Chapter 5, and it is evident that moral considerations often influenced the duration of therapy and periods of abstinence from sexual intercourse; the moralistic stance of some of the venereologists was quite surprising from a twenty-first century perspective.

As described in Chapter 6, rudimentary attempts at health education were undertaken in the inter-war years. These were intended to frighten, and many posters portrayed young women as reservoirs of infection with the male almost being an innocent bystander. The outcome of the measures introduced to control VD is discussed in Chapter 7. The decline in the incidence of syphilis was attributed to the more widespread use of serological

tests and to newer forms of therapy that are discussed in Chapter 4. Measures to permit the compulsory examination and treatment of VD are described in Chapter 8 – it is abundantly clear that they discriminated against women and failed in their objective of controlling the spread of infection. Fortunately, more liberal attitudes prevailed and attempts to reintroduce such compulsory measures later in the twentieth century failed.

Further evidence against a case for compulsion is detailed in Chapter 9 in which policies for the control of infection during the Second World War are described. Chapter 10, describes the epidemiology of sexually transmitted infections during the period 1948–80. In particular, the marked rise in the incidence of gonorrhoea is highlighted and, as in the pre-war era, sexually active young women were considered vectors of infection. The difficulty in the resourcing of the speciality between 1948 and 1980 is considered in Chapter 11. Interviews with venereologists who worked at that time are recorded here, and one almost feels that a researcher interviewing practising physicians in 2001 would elicit the same responses as his or her predecessors. Post-war treatment and control strategies are considered in the penultimate chapter. A critical discussion on health education is included in this chapter, and the difficulties in establishing a system of contact tracing are considered. The last chapter touches on the future, particularly in the era of HIV infection – one wonders if Scottish attitudes have changed significantly since the beginning of the last century.

As a physician in Genitourinary Medicine, I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book and I can wholeheartedly recommend it to my colleagues, both those in training and established consultants. It will also appeal to Public Health and Infectious Diseases physicians, and to anyone with an interest in the history of Scottish medicine.

**A. MCMILLAN**