

gebring het. Die Eerste Vryheidsoorlog het as 't ware in die skadu van die Tweede skuilgegaan.

Benewens die sistematiese indeling van die materiaal is die afbakening metodes, en die skryftrant deurgaans boeiend.

Hierdie boek verdien 'n wye leserskring – nie net onder Geskiedenis studente nie, maar ook by die algemene leser wat in Geskiedenis belangstel.

Dit sou nuttelose haarklowery afgee om net kritiek onthalwe tekortkominge in hierdie puik werk te probeer naspoor. Van binne en buite is dit mooi. Dis stewig gebind en liggrys hardeband met bypassende kleure van swart, rooi en wit, wat naas die Pretoriase universiteitswapen die afbeelding van kmdt-genl Piet Joubert op die voorblad omsoom.

**A.D. Naudé**

**David Lloyd Owen: *Providence Their Guide*. London, Harrap, 1980, 238 p., illustrations and maps, foreword, preface, select bibliography index, R20,70.**

In his preface to this book the author quotes from Milton's *Paradise lost*, from which the title of this book is derived: 'Som natural tears they drop'd, but wip'd them soon; The World was all before them, where to choose Their place of rest, and *Providence thir guide*; They hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow, Through Eden took thir solitarie way.'

This is a personal account of the Longe Range Desert Group who operated between 1940 and 1945 during World War II.

It covers two areas and periods:

1. North Africa: June 1940–April 1943 and
2. The Dodecanese, Italy and the Balkans: May 1943–May 1945.

Useful hints are offered to the desert traveller: the most careful and detailed planning, first-class equipment, a sound and simple communication system and a human element of rare quality.

On p.1 of Chapter 1 the author explains the motive of the LRDG: 'It was raised (and so remained throughout the five years of its existence)

chiefly for the purpose of gathering information about the enemy behind his lines. It was never primarily intended to carry out offensive operations, which so often ruin the change of effecting successful reconnaissance.

Who can blame the hardened soldier for lyricism on the desert?:

In every age there have been explorers or tourists or perhaps, escapists or cranks who have fallen under the spell of the desert. They have succumbed to its lure and sometimes I find it difficult to explain just what is so magnetic about it . . . Somehow one feels fluttered by any of the harsh, resisting influences of human existence as we live in these days. There are no buildings, no roads, no street lights, no artificial or even natural noises, no hustle and bustle, no shout or to have money or to pretend about anything . . . I personally think I know of nothing more restorative than lying on the soft sand – cool now after the retirement of the day's sun and just staring at the miracle of such a sky . . . When the dawn comes, and the stars have all gone away, there is something sharp and exhilarating about the smell in the air. It is fresh and clean and tantalisingly different to the atmosphere which will pervade the day once the sun has come up over the distant horizon.'

The author admits: 'I have a feeling that it was a combination of those two influences – the awareness of danger and the awe-inspiring grandeur of the desert – that always marked the good relationship between those who served in the LRDG.'

He also offers a new approach to discipline: 'I had always disliked intensely the sort of discipline that relied on instant, unquestioning obedience and the fear of summary punishment. I had already discovered that you could get men to do anything you wanted if you let them know the reason, and if you showed them that you were going to do it with them.'

General Owen also learnt a lot about men: 'They had to be more than usually intelligent in order to understand fully the meaning of the task that the Patrol was given, and to contribute effectively towards achieving it. They had to have plenty of initiative to operate independently of supervision and control; they had to have acute powers of observation; they needed a speed of reaction which was faster than most; and I think they also had to have an unusual sense of responsibility

'and balance to be able to make the best of the light rein on which they were led, without taking advantage of it.'

Of David Stirling he says the following: 'What a man! Failure meant nothing more to him than to generate fierce determination to be successful next time. He was convinced that he had only been thwarted by bad luck and certainly not by any lack of preparation or training. This intense enthusiasm of course spread down through him to every single man under his command and they all held him in great awe and admiration.'

How differently 'a change of role' now affects the author, after having been transferred from West to East: 'Then there were those crisp, sharp nights when the silence was so acute and frozen that I seemed to hear it as I stood on the hotel balcony to watch the sparkling snow with casual shadows prancing across it as a high cloud drifted idly past the brilliant Syrian moon. How supremely beautiful those nights could be.'

After a setback (at Heros) he recovered his confidence with thoughts like these: 'I saw clearly what we might do. I began to see how we could do it. I soon started to believe that we could do it. And then I convinced myself that we must do it, and that we would be wanted to do it.'

'There was a fundamental rule which always guided me in the selection of any operation. I would never commit any man behind the lines unless I could see a reasonable chance of getting him back at a later date. Only once did I accept a task which did not fulfil this condition, and I was surprised at the response I had to my call for volunteers.'

Towards the end of the war, 'it was only when it was all over in Europe that a reaction set in and men's thoughts began to turn toward home, their wives and families. For a time they forgot that the war in Japan was still to be won. But only for a time.'

A select bibliography of only seven books accentuates the depth and sincerity of the author's experiences – contrary to many a perhaps more flamboyant and ostentatious chronicle but more superficial.

It is difficult for a hard-boiled critic to view such a genuine extract from real life now recorded as history quite objectively. For the human factor always remains and so does the truth which is stranger than fiction.

**A.D. Naudé**