Slim's achievements surpassed those of Monty who unfairly garnered most of the post war publicity. Although Slim's statue is in Whitehall alongside Monty and Alanbrooke, his story is largely unknown to the public at large.

Roger Green reviews BILL SLIM By Robert Lyman. Published by Osprey Publishing (ISBN: 978 1 84908 528 1)

The author, Robert Lyman, has written many books on aspects of World War II. This small volume on Bill Slim is an abbreviated life story that concentrates principally on Slim's achievements in India and Burma from 1943 to 1945.

Slim was without doubt one of the greatest generals of WWII whose triumphs and generalship have never been as widely recognised as those of his contemporary Montgomery. In Lyman's judgement this is undoubtedly because Slim actively avoided publicity and was a self-effacing man as against the self-publicist Montgomery. Slim always wanted to be a soldier although his relatively humble start in life as a 'pupil-teacher' and then as a clerk belied his future success in rising to the pinnacle of the British Army. Indeed, it was his role as a primary school teacher that he exploited to join the Birmingham University OTC, although not a member of that university, that enabled him to be commissioned as a temporary second lieutenant at the start of WWI. Deployed to Turkey he was at the forefront of fighting in the Dardanelles and at Gallipoli where his battalion suffered extensive casualties. Although wounded twice he found himself commanding his company despite his very junior rank. In the inter-war years he was transferred to the Indian Army, spending time on the North West Frontier with his Gurkha Rifles with whom he established a great bond and won their unsurpassed loyalty. His leadership, character and intellect were recognised with his subsequent appointment to command a battalion of the Gurkha Rifles before being appointed as head of the Senior Officers' School in India with the temporary rank of brigadier in 1939. Lyman identifies these experiences as being the basis of Slim's subsequent approach to command that stood him in such good stead during the Burma campaigns.

The book highlights the difference between Slim and other generals of his time in that he was a born leader with a strong and attractive personality who inspired trust and related to his men as men and not as subordinates. He spent much of his time communicating with his men directly through casual conversation without any attempts at showmanship or exhortation. He believed that the most important attribute of a leader was his effect on morale and he understood the need to be seen and trusted by his men - he was one of them, and he cared deeply for them. Indeed, such was the loyalty of the men who served under him later in India and Burma that

they referred to him as 'Uncle Bill'

Lyman tracks Slim's involvement in WWII starting with his time in Ethiopia and Sudan in 1940 where Slim admits that he performed poorly but fortunately was given the chance to redeem his failure. He then commanded an Indian Infantry Division in Iraq and Syria and it was here he demonstrated the boldness in his planning that was to be a feature of his Burma campaigns. Slim arrived in Burma in 1942 after the Japanese had occupied Rangoon, to take command of two weak divisions of the Burma Corps. The Burma Army was inferior to the Japanese in every respect and Slim accepted the inevitable and led the Burma Corps in a 100 day, 1000 mile fighting withdrawal to India. Under Slim's leadership they remained disciplined and loyal with morale remaining strong. Following this retreat Slim carried out a rigorous analysis of the reasons for the humiliation of the imperial army. Lyman records that it was the lessons drawn from this analysis that Slim put into practice when he was given command of XV Corps. He presented the Corps with clear and simple strategies based on first principles and initiated the very tough training regimes that were to transform their performance. In 1943 Slim was appointed commander of the Fourteenth Army and immediately started planning his campaign to beat the Japanese. Lyman has documented in great detail the strategies and tactics adopted by Slim from the Second Arakan campaign, through the capture of Imphal and Kohima to the campaign to reconquer Burma. As he points out, London did not always support Slim's ideas but fortunately Slim always had the support of Mountbatten as commander of South East Asia Command. However, Slim had to contend with limitations in the resources at his disposal, particularly with air assets being taken away at a critical time to relieve the pressure on the Chinese Nationalists in the north. Lyman puts General Wingate's second Chindit offensive into context. Although Churchill and Roosevelt approved the plan, Slim thought the plan would never achieve the decisive advantage that Wingate sought but would disrupt the Japanese extended lines of communication that would help his Fourteenth Army. Despite initial success the effort faded when Wingate was killed in an air crash leaving the operation without his driving force. It was Slim's bold strategies coupled with the use of armour and innovative all-arms tactics as well as imaginative use of air support to resupply forward troops that eventually defeated the Japanese culminating in the fall of Rangoon. Despite Slim's outstanding achievements General Leese, the commander Allied Land Forces South East Asia, attempted to sack Slim. However, the CIGS and CinC India, neither of whom had been consulted, overruled Leese who was ironically sacked instead. In recognition of his achievements Slim was appointed as CinC ALSEA in place of Leese.

After the war, Slim became deputy chairman of British Rail but Churchill had recognised his unique attributes and brought him back into uniform to succeed Montgomery as CIGS. That was contrary to Montgomery's recommendation for his successor but to the delight of the British Army.

There were two practical strategies that Slim pursued in India and Burma that would be recognised by today's British military. Firstly, Slim's briefing of the commander's intent to subordinate commanders instead of issuing detailed instructions as to what to do. They were then left to decide the best way to achieve their objectives - known today as 'Mission Command'. Secondly, the cooperation between land and air forces acting in concert through air/land operations directed by a collocated land and air HQ, what today would be recognised as

a joint HQ. That legacy alone marks Slim out as an innovative general going against the received wisdom of his day. His other legacy, just as important, was the deeply thought out programme of support and training designed to meet the full range of requirements of the fighting man.

Hopefully this book will bring to wider notice the life and achievements of one of Britain's greatest generals that have been largely overlooked outside military circles since his death in 1970. Probably the most appropriate epitaph for Slim was that 'he had the head of a general and the heart of a soldier'.

Whilst Lyman's text vividly describes Slim and his campaigns, unfortunately the supporting maps do not do the text justice. They often omit key place names that are of importance in following events portrayed in the text and as a result the arrows showing lines of advance and retreat were often difficult to interpret. In similar vein, the historical and small photographs of Slim with other senior officers whilst listing those depicted do not always attempt to identify who was who. However, this is a minor criticism of an otherwise very worthwhile read.