

“Tales from the Special Forces Club” By Sean Rayment. Published by HarperCollins 2013 ISBN 978-0-00-745253-8/749875-8. Price £18.99.

Reviewed by Richard M Bennett (Author-Journalist-Consultant. AFI Research)

This is not a book that seeks to criticize or indeed attempts to illuminate the darkest corners of military history, so an overly critical or lengthy review would seem to be both unnecessary and unwarranted.

However it must be said that this is a book that will add little or nothing to a greater understanding of World War Two or the vital role played by the various British Special Forces involved. It is also highly unlikely to prove of more than limited value to most serious students of the subject.

It is further handicapped by the absence of detailed notes or of even the most cursory attempt at an index, therefore the reviewer wonders whether there was ever any real intention by either

the author or the publishers of producing anything more than just another popular 'War' book.

Most of the information would appear to have been gleaned from the archives or the personal memories of those in the Special Forces Club, which does at least add something to its authenticity. The Special Forces Club was, of course set up largely by Maj Gen Sir Colin Gubbins to preserve something that many of those involved in SO considered to be of great value and that was at risk of being lost in a post-war Britain more concerned with ill-thought out cut-backs and with a growing indifference to the importance of a properly equipped and maintained Defence forcestrangely redolent of today!

The author, Sean Rayment, has more than a passing personal knowledge of Special Forces having served for some years with 3 Para, reaching the rank of Captain and has since become the noted and respected Defence correspondent of a major London daily newspaper.

Within the noted limitations of this book, Rayment has still managed to do a minor service to popular history by recounting a small number of personal stories that should have been told

long ago. Many of the operations and personalities covered have sadly either been ignored by the mass media or been widely misunderstood and misrepresented by popular literature.

Rayment has rightly finally provided an honoured place in history for a group of previously unsung and courageous men and women who undoubtedly played a highly significant role in the Allied victory of 1945. Few will remain unmoved by the dedication of the likes of SOE agent Noreen Riols, Jimmy Patch of the LRDG, Mike Sadler of the SAS, Bill Towill of the Chindits, Fred Bailey in Jedburgh Teams in Europe and the Far East or indeed of Harry Verlander of Force 136.

It is therefore only right and proper that such bravery be recorded and Sean Rayment is to be congratulated for this particular service to popular knowledge.

However, subjects such as the Chindits; the RAF 'Moonlight' Squadrons and the Jedburgh Teams have already been covered in depth in many academic and serious reference works and this book adds nothing of significance to our knowledge of these organizations.

The author, by compiling what is a rather lightweight book, has missed a golden opportunity to inform and educate a wider audience in the true nature of special forces operations and the self-sacrifice of those involved.

The concentration on so few personal histories rather than incorporating them in a wider and more detailed review is a considerable disappointment. Time is fast running out for a substantial and authoritative history of those with living memories of this extraordinary period in time and sadly this limited and ultimately unsatisfying book notably fails to fulfill that particular need.