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## "Wars, Pestilence and the Surgeon's Blade (Book Review)" by Thomas Scotland and Steven Heys

Chris Buckham

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## Book Reviews



*Wars, Pestilence and the Surgeon's Blade.* Thomas Scotland and Steven Heys Eds. Solihull, UK: Helion and Company, 2014. Pp. 416.

There are two things guaranteed when it comes to warfare: death and injury. The authors, following on their extremely informative first book *War Surgery 1914–1918* (2014), have undertaken to shed light upon the development of surgical and medical practices throughout the nineteenth century, focussing particularly upon three capstone events: the Peninsular war (1808–1814), the Crimean War (1853–1856) and the Boer War (1899–1902). Each is studied in detail with a view towards determining where things had improved, stayed the same, or regressed. Concurrent to this the authors highlight the activities of individuals who made significant contributions in a variety of areas that moved both knowledge and yardsticks relating to medicine and the administration thereof.

Scotland and Heys' evaluation falls into five distinct categories: medical surgery, administration and bureaucracy, logistics, lessons learned, and statistical analysis. Each played a significant part in the expansion of knowledge and competency. The approach taken by the authors is to integrate the five together within the narrative in order to facilitate a multi-dimensional picture for the reader of the advancement (and regression) of medical support to the military.

It is both fascinating and disturbing to read about the lack of appreciation by British military (and civilian) leaders of the importance that a sound medical support system had for the successful execution

of campaigns. It was only with the Peninsular campaign and the appointment of Dr. James McGrigor as Wellington's Chief Medical Officer that the first steps in the formalization of medical care were taken. It was McGrigor who introduced the maintenance of patient records, standardized hospital care and recovery of wounded from the battlefield. He also established basic standards of training and education for those wishing to become military medical officers. Through his efforts, the first steps in the universality of care and the professionalization of the medical branch were taken.

McGrigor and his colleagues are also remembered as the individuals who initiated not only the maintenance of statistics relating to illness, injury and a myriad of other information tracking for the British army but also, and just as critical, the interpretation of those statistics as a means of recognizing efficiencies and deficiencies of care. It is estimated that his ability to track and advise Wellington on the health of his army provided him an additional divisions worth of soldiers at a critical time during the war.

Crimea, which occurred almost fifty years after the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars, was, from a medical perspective, a story of forgotten lessons and needless suffering and loss. A failure of effective reconnaissance, not enough time and effort put into preparation, a continued lack of appreciation of the importance of medical administration and provision and a complex and inefficient command structure all contributed to terrible losses resulting from illness and treatment deficiencies.

The Boer War continued to be characterized by the shortcomings of the previous conflicts, despite noteworthy advancements in medical intervention techniques, knowledge of hygiene, administrative practices and doctrinal maturity. Death and personnel shortfalls due to illness continued to outnumber those caused by combat by a significant margin; again much of it preventable. For example, despite the fact that a vaccine for typhoid existed and was known to the army, it was decided not to inoculate the soldiers before departure. The net result was that during the Second Boer War 7,782 died of wounds while 13,139 died of disease.

The authors also look at smaller wars throughout the 1800's and the impact of operational geography upon death and illness rates (providing copious statistics for deaths per thousand in different regions as examples). They provide outstanding analysis of the complex intersection of scientific advances (such as the discovery

of germs, anaesthetic and disinfectant), surgical, statistical and support techniques (of such pioneers as Keough, McGrigor, Ogston, Nightingale and Guthrie) plus the military and political paradigm changes necessary to enact the changes required to see improvements in support to soldiers well-being and health.

The British Army of the nineteenth century was old and steeped in its own traditions and foibles that set it apart from the civilian community it served. These traditions serves as strengths building regimental loyalties and comradeship; however, the also acted as impediments to change and a bulwark against what many perceived as interference from their political (read civilian) masters. Those promoting change within the medical services had to overcome the bias afforded to 'outsiders' in addition to learning and applying the lessons of hygiene, surgery and long term care. Each of these trials would have been formidable in and of themselves; together, as Scotland and Heys point out, they were decades in overcoming.

One of the real strengths of this book lies in the attention that it draws to the plight of the soldier in undertaking his trade. The average reader can pick up any one of thousands of books written that outline tactics, weapons capabilities, weapons production or any one of the many facets of warfare, but very few discuss the grim details of the human toll of fighting; and they are indeed grim. The present day soldier owes an immeasurable debt to those poor souls who served as the means for learning the art of healing and supporting the recovery of those wounded in combat or ill as a result of geographic location. We owe an equal debt to those doctors and practitioners who through their efforts and study advanced the medical trade in a military context.

The production value of this book is superb. The authors have incorporated a commendable series of endnotes for each chapter for further study but no overall bibliography. They have also provided for each of the focus wars, a brief synopsis of what transpired. It is not particularly detailed but enough that it provides context without detracting from the focus of the book. I believe that it would have been very beneficial had the authors provided an organization chart of the command structure of the British military medical services for the periods covered as it was, as previously noted, rather convoluted and difficult to follow. The book is noteworthy however, for how readable and accessible the

authors have made this subject to the reading audience. Scotland and Heys are outstanding medical historians and are to be commended for their work in this book.

MAJ. CHRIS BUCKHAM, *ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE*

*Armed with Expertise: The Militarization of American Social Research During the Cold War.* Joy Rohde. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013. Pp. 213.

The body of historical literature that attempts to define and describe the residual effects of the Cold War on American military thought and national policy is enormous. Within that congested environment, though, Joy Rohde's *Armed with Expertise* is a welcomed contribution as a rigorous study of one of the threads of that period that remains alive today; the application of social science to military problems. Rohde constructs her thesis and analysis around a concept first articulated by President Dwight Eisenhower in his farewell address. Eisenhower observed: "The prospect of domination of the nation's scholars by Federal employment, project allocations, and the power of money is ever present—and is gravely to be regarded."<sup>1</sup> Rohde adopts a quasi-case study approach to examine the history of a narrow slice of that problem, a close study of the relationship between one academic entity, the Special Operations Research Office (SORO), and American University in the 1960s and 1970s.

Rohde frames her discussion with the observation that military use of social science is similar, but not identical, to the other applied sciences in that the output of the social scientists was always intended to support conceptual formation of military and diplomatic programs. The results were not intended to be used as a weapon, but instead to advance the exploration into how to influence and control other nations and cultures without undue force. Her argument begins with a broad discussion of the ongoing relationship between social science and government, the former having evolved as a means to create knowledge to solve problems attendant to industrialization in the early twentieth century.

<sup>1</sup> Dwight Eisenhower, "Eisenhower's Farewell Address to the Nation," <http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/ike.htm>, accessed on 5 May 2015.