

READERS CHOICE

A DOCTOR OF SORTS: IN PEACE AND IN WAR V. J Downie

Leo Cooper (1993), London. pp144

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(Currently out of print but readily available from many booksellers)

Military doctors face danger, excitement and suffering. They often have to operate in circumstances of great adversity. I thoroughly enjoyed V J Downie's book. After briefly dealing with his pre-war career he concentrates on his experiences during the Second World War. Writing in an engaging, lively style, he gives his personal memories and relates the experiences of other surgeons. There is much black humour as he relates events within the operating theatre. He puts us into the chaos and confusion during the landings at Salerno. Here, as acting CO of 185 Field Ambulance, he is landed on the wrong beach, steps on a faulty anti personnel mine, has bullets pass through his pack and rides a motorbike through a German patrol. The pace doesn't falter as we move to Monte Casino for the crossing of the river Rapido. With no boat to reach the wounded he is "towed" across by the padre. The author reflects on what went right or wrong, from a medical perspective, as well as making parallels with more recent conflicts like the Falklands. This is a highly personal account. One salutes Downie and the military surgeons of his generation. This book will be of interest to civilian and military surgeons alike.

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If you would like to submit a literary review for consideration please contact me by e-mail at paulantonyhunt@doctors.org.uk. Submissions should be no more than 500 words and must include the full details of the title, author, publisher and an ISBN number.

