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Review of *Gurkha Odyssey: Campaigning for the Crown* by Peter Duffell

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engaging contribution to the conversations of scholars working across the humanities on British military and domestic masculinities.

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Peter Duffell, *Gurkha Odyssey: Campaigning for the Crown*. Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, 2019. 290pp. ISBN 978-1526730572 (hardback). Price £25.00.

My first encounter with Gurkha soldiers was back in 1979 when I was at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. One of their battalions supplied the Demonstration Company which turned out every so often to show us embryo officers how various tactical drills and skills should be carried out properly. Needless to say, we were hopelessly outperformed by their example when we tried to replicate them.

My second, and last, engagement with Gurkhas came when I was on the Company Commanders' course at Warminster where, once again, they supplied the Demonstration Company. This time, however, I joined them in the field for a few days of practical training to confirm that I was indeed fit to command my own sub-unit. They were bivouacked up a steep slope with their backs to the hill just as it was getting dark, all cammed up and ready to go. I was given my first mug of hot, sweet Gurkha tea and settled in for the night. What a splendid bunch they were.

In contrast to my somewhat fleeting acquaintance with the hillmen from Nepal, the author, Lieutenant General Sir Peter Duffell, joined his Gurkha regiment in 1960 and was with them in one capacity or another for most of his adult life. He led his soldiers in Malaya, Borneo, Indonesia (clandestinely) and Hong Kong – winning an MC along the way – before becoming the British Army's Inspector General, so has a wealth of personal experience to draw on in writing his book.

By the author's own admission his account is a "fractured story" offering "few insights" and "told in a selective and personal way". If you are looking for an in-depth examination of the role of Gurkha soldiers in British service with dissection of the many campaigns in which they fought for the Crown, this is not the book for you. It does provide some historical background and follows some sort of chronological order, but Duffell's caveats do apply.

BOOK REVIEWS

The reader is provided with an entertaining and eminently readable personal account of serving with Gurkhas in various contexts over the period of the author's highly successful military career, with a modicum of historical background thrown in. My interest was drawn to Duffell's account of the covert and ultimately deniable cross border operation into Indonesia during the conflict in the early 1960s. He describes brilliantly the preparations, approach, and eventual controlled chaos of close combat operations in difficult terrain. No plan survives first contact with the enemy, but in the author's case, he had clearly trained his men to perform well in such circumstances.

His chapter on his Gurkhas' ancestor regiment, the Sirmoor Battalion's part in confronting the mutineers of the East India Company's Bengal Army at Delhi – during the 1857 Rebellion – also caught my attention. Here, he notes that the Battalion's stand on the ridge outside the Delhi walls defeated no fewer than 26 separate attacks on their position against severe odds. Delhi seems to have firmly established the Gurkha fighting reputation thereafter.

Peter Duffell writes in an easy, if slightly old-fashioned, style which lends itself well to the task in hand. He appears to be both modest on his own bravery and achievements and somewhat over-effusive in his praise for others. He displays an impressive fondness for his soldiers throughout, although his attitude might be seen as a little avuncular and patronising to younger readers. But this generosity of spirit warmed me to him as I progressed through his book. The book is further enhanced by photographs and watercolours by Ken Howard RA.

I read this book twice, for at first I discovered it was not what I imagined it would be, proof if it is ever needed that one should not judge a book by its cover. But, whilst initially I thought it might be yet another book by an old military duffer reminiscing about times past, I realised gradually that it was much more than that. I also recognised Duffell's deeply felt affection and respect for the soldiers he commanded and can relate directly to that.

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