



Reviews of the New Books



Brilliant and Tragic History of the Parachute Troops

"The Red Beret," by Hilary St. George Saunders. Michael Joseph, London, 17/6.

THIS stirring history of the Parachute Regiment in the second world war is the companion volume to "The Green Beret." Mr. Saunders's equally commendable history of the Commandos.

The Parachute Regiment is not to be confused with other airborne troops, such as glider and transport units. These men also wore the red beret, but their deeds are not the concern of this book: the men of the Parachute Regiment, of course jumped from their planes, while the others landed with theirs.

Mr. Saunders has followed the same method in compiling this narrative as in the first. He has carefully studied the official histories, so that all his statements may be accepted as accurate. Then, to lighten the story and breathe life and humor into it, he has interviewed scores of the actual combatants and got their human and very modest stories of what actually transpired.

The result, in the words of Lord Montgomery's glowing foreword, "is a thrilling story of war and of training for war."

The parachute organisation had its beginnings in June, 1940, and few will be surprised to learn that it sprang to life at the urging of Mr. Winston Churchill: that it had to improvise as it went along and learn by trial and many errors; and lastly (and one wonders whether even yet the lesson has been learnt) it suffered losses and setbacks through deficiencies in equipment, hurriedly improvised in war, but which should have been made ready in peace.

It is a shock to learn that lack of planes, necessitating several "drops" instead of one, largely caused the appalling losses at Arnhem and the defeat of this vital operation. And this was in September, 1944!

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The parachutists were a hand-picked band of volunteers—men who were coldly courageous, resolute and dependable.

The regiment started well with a "drop" in Southern Italy which deeply worried the

Italians, and followed with the brilliant raid on the German radar station at Bruneval, a war cameo of classical daring crowned with complete success.

Forced in North Africa to fight as infantry and without the support of heavy arms, the regiment shocked the Germans and scuttled the Italians, although its own casualties were heavy.

Tragedy loomed over Sicily and it is perhaps out of deference to American susceptibilities that the author seems inclined to draw a veil over these unhappy incidents. It is a picture of ships firing on a friendly glider and parachute air-fleet; of panic and "flap" among pilots, of air-borne troops being cast off to drown.

The Normandy hedgerows saw the red berets on and after D-day, and a remarkable feat of arms was accomplished (one of many) by the capture of the "impregnable" fortified heavy battery at Merville.

With obvious pain Mr. Saunders describes the tragedy of Arnhem. One looks in vain for confirmation of recent stories that a Dutch traitor betrayed the "drop" to the enemy. Be that as it may, the air-borne troops were surprised by the presence in their landing area of the 2nd SS Panzer Corps standing ready and waiting for them. Mr. Saunders praises not only the heroism of the regiment, but also of the pilots of the planes and gliders who flew to almost certain death in a hail of flak, rather than swerve a yard from their ordered route and objective.

The men of the red beret suffered terrific losses through all these actions. The lives of many were lost because of lack of equipment, chiefly planes, so Mr. Saunders's fine history is not only one to stir the blood and arouse one's pride

history is not only one to stir the blood and arouse one's pride, but it serves to point a moral as well.

The book was written with the full co-operation of the corps, and there are many excellent drawings, maps and photographs.



PARACHUTIST

Gilbert Ledward's model for the Combined Services Memorial in Westminster Abbey.