

The Loan Soldier

Adventures of a Military Man Abroad

Bruce Duncan

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This is the memoir of Bruce Duncan, an officer in 3 RTR who, either by luck or design, was largely able to avoid the tedium of the closing decade of the Cold War and the “*eternal triangle*” of postings from BAOR to Catterick to Salisbury Plain, by serving in tropical climates. A succession of postings on secondments and in military training teams successively in 6 nations from Brunei to Sudan and Nigeria, Oman twice, Kuwait and Jordan, interspersed with UK deployments, allowed for a very interesting and varied life both for him and his family until tragedy struck.

This is a book of two parts. The first is a travelogue, a series of well written essays backed by pages of family photos which amply illustrate each national experience and introduce us to a family, intrepid and adventurous, which took every opportunity to explore far and wide. As one reads these fascinating accounts one cannot help but wonder what it is all about. What is the purpose of the book? What is the intended readership?

The second part of the book provides the answer. In 1988 Bruce Duncan, by then a Lt Colonel, is posted to Kuwait to head the British Army Training Team. In 1990 he and his family were caught up in the horrors of the Iraqi invasion. The dust cover reveals that this ended in tragedy with the death of his eldest son. Had this book been a novel the publisher would have given the game away and indeed it is the case that too much is revealed in the blurb. The account of this part of the book is outstanding and whereas in the “travelogue” his insights are clear and incisive here they are also brutally frank: the author takes no prisoners. The treatment that he and his team suffered, not just at the hands of the invader but also in the parsimony and narrow-minded preferences displayed by officialdom in the form of the embassy and the Ministry of Defence is a sad tale. The fact that his team was not included on diplomatic passports of course did not help. Even so the courage and fortitude displayed by the writer and his family, who took their responsibilities as head of the team to heart, is an example to all.

Thereafter, Bruce Duncan, now a full colonel, embarks on his final tour as defence attaché in Jordan. I find this episode interesting in the sense that he was able to undertake this mission with such enthusiasm in a country that, along with Yemen, were the two Arab powers that did not side with Iraq in the 1990-91 conflict. Colonel Duncan must have been aware of this but he makes no reference to the fact that he is appointed to a country which is a pariah amongst the Arab powers.

The Loan Soldier is a thundering good read but other than general interest or historical curiosity I am not quite sure who would be the target in the context of a professional readership. This book is beautifully presented and published and weighing in at 1.1 kilos is a heavy tome to include in hand baggage for a summer read. It is published by Greenfinch Press which is new to me. A quick google tells us that this is an imprint of Petrosport Limited, which produces technical journals and programmes for the oil and bunkering industries. As far as I can make out the Loan Soldier is the only publication of Greenfinch to date. If so they have produced a great read and at £19.99 a bargain to boot.

Eric Morris

Eric Morris lectured at Liverpool University and was seconded to the armed forces as a defence advisor. After Liverpool Eric Morris spent 15 years at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, teaching international relations and war studies. He was deputy head of the department and senior tutor of Old College.

He resigned in 1984 and has since worked in industry as a geostrategic analyst with a particular focus on the Middle East, where he is still gainfully employed.