

An excellent soldier story

GOOD LUCK TO ALL THE LADS

The Wartime Story of Brian Cox 1939 – 43. By **PETER COX**, published by **JJ ANGERSTEIN & ASSOCIATES**, paper back, illustrated, 288Pp including appendices, Roll of Honour, references and bibliography. RRP \$44.99 incl p&p throughout NZ or available through bookshops or from Peter Cox c/- the publisher, J.J. Angerstein & Associates Ltd, pacox@xtra.co.nz PO Box 1263, Christchurch. Reviewed by **Col (Rtd) RAY SEYMOUR**.

Well done Peter Cox for putting together such a well-written account of your father's wartime service in the 27th (Machine Gun) Battalion.

This very readable history is not only about Brian Cox. It's also about 9Platoon of 3Company of 27(MG)Bn. and of those brave warriors who either taught or were educated at Nelson College and served in this Bn.

But it could also be about all the Kiwi soldiers who enlisted in 1939 and went off on their "adventure". It tells the often not told story about training in New Zealand; the long sea voyage to Egypt; the training at Maadi and then hones in on the Greek campaign, Sidi Rezegh, Syria, El Alamein and El Mreir.

Good Luck To All The Lads is an excellent soldier story, ably supported by well over 100 photographs. Well done Peter for sharing these with readers. There are some priceless stories in the pages. Imagine fighting a war with "green" teeth, caused by a lack of water for one's personal hygiene. But the refusal by one of Brian Cox's fellow soldiers (Alf Jago) to load an officer's motorbike onto his truck during the withdrawal through Greece, with the curt statement that he "... didn't have room for the bike and to bugger off", scored high on my Richter Scale. As Cox describes the event, when Jago was asked if he knew who the officer was, he replied, "No, just some bloody Pommy officer". He was then left in no doubt just who it was he had turned down – General Freyberg!

One of the strengths of a book like this is that it tends to tell the "real" story, those which normally wouldn't make it into the pages of an official war history. But it is these stories that, when merged with official records, provide us with a comprehensive record of what really happened.

Our knowledge is greatly enhanced by the two. Perhaps, on occasion, the real story can get diluted in those official histories; but not in *Good Luck To All The Lads*.

Peter Cox has told us just how his Dad saw it. He tells us of the odd incident when, because of the "fog of war", soldiers inadvertently squeezed the trigger on their comrades with tragic results.

Yes, these things do happen in war. But Peter Cox does not fill the action-packed pages with too many examples. Like his father Brian, Peter wanted to relate the day-to-day stories that his father had included in his diary. I particularly enjoyed comparing Gen Freyberg's "Order of the Day" to his troops embarked for Greece, compared to that what was delivered by the Australian Brigadier Vasey. Both said the same thing but Vasey's was so "bloody" different!

By Peter's account, many of the soldiers who served alongside his Dad paid the ultimate sacrifice. This book tells their story. May they rest in peace.

Finally, and without wanting to criticise Peter Cox, but to alert other potential writers of similar accounts, I want to remind them of the comprehensive research material that is available in the Queen Elizabeth II Army Memorial Museum.

I note in Peter Cox's bibliography that he appears not to have made use of these extensive resources. Had he done so, he may well have found many more priceless stories to either add to this excellent book, or to embellish those he has shared with us.

