

Guerilla surgeon in Yugoslavia 1941-1945

By Lindsay Rogers. (Collins 1957)

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Review

The author of this book, a New Zealand surgeon, joined the British Forces in 1940 in London. In 1941 he served in a medical unit during the desert campaign of the Eighth Army in North Africa. After its victory he volunteered to work as a war surgeon in Yugoslavia, where he was parachuted end of the same year. From then till the end of the war 1945, he lived and worked as a medical doctor among the Yugoslav Partisans.

"Guerilla Surgeon" is the story of his experiences during that time. It is the most exciting story of his life in the midst of enemy forces, of brave men and women, and the circumstances in which the work was done - stirred by the odds against which success was achieved. The author had with him two British non-medical soldiers whom he had to train, as he did a number of Yugoslavs, to assist him in his work. The amount of surgical equipment and materials he was able to bring with him was hardly enough to last in a cottage hospital for three months. For months he had to stitch wounds with silk from parachute cords use ordinary four-inch nails to peg certain fractures and petrol to disinfect wounds.

Stealing through enemy-held regions or over mountains and through deep forests in all weathers, he went to attend badly wounded fighters in isolated Partisan groups, setting up surgical posts in caves, byres, log cabins and peasant houses, and leaving one of his assistants to look after them till he could come again. More than once he returned to find all his wounded with their throats cut and the post burnt down.

Except towards the end of the war, the author was carrying on this work in the wildest and most primitive regions of Yugoslavia, where the Partisan forces were enmeshed with those of the Germans, and with enemies of Yugoslav domestic origins.

The nearer to the end of the war the more he was aware of suspicion, lies, deceptions and the changing attitude of the Yugoslav Communists towards the British. When, rarely, he visited the British Mission he found them more wrong in thinking that all the Partisans were Communists, whereas most of them were just patriots, as the author well knew; and the members of the American Mission did not like the British and disliked all the Yugoslavs. He was glad to get back from such visits, and carry on with his work.