

The War. Both of the books reviewed below are accounts of World War II seen through the eyes of single men, but the points of vantage of their authors are as far apart as the glamor-filled VIII Army Headquarters and a cold, muddy hole on the front. In "El Alamein to the River Sangro," Field-Marshal Montgomery continues the straightforward if colorless report on his campaigns which he began in last year's "Normandy to the Baltic." In "To Hell and Back," Sergeant Audie Murphy, "America's most decorated soldier," recounts his own war from Italy to Germany, simply, modestly, and movingly.

Exploits of the British Eighth

EL ALAMEIN TO THE RIVER SANGRO. By Field-Marshal the Viscount Montgomery. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1949. 192 pp. \$6.50.

Reviewed by HARRY C. BUTCHER

A GREAT general and a great actor, Field-Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein writes of the renowned exploits of the British Eighth Army in a stage whisper, but always with a capital "I."

During the war I observed that there appeared to be two kinds of successful generals: the "we" men and the "I" men. Examples of the first are, of course, Generals Eisenhower, Alexander, and Bradley; of the second, Montgomery, MacArthur, and Patton. Modesty and a desire to give credit to subordinates characterized the "we's." Egoism to the nth degree marked the "I's." Yet both types were successful, and certainly Monty is entitled to the credit of never having lost a major battle.

In this book the general whose beret became a fashion style for women at one time during the war describes the strategy and tactics which won his battles, starting with the defense against Rommel's forces at Alam Halfa, which preceded and paved the way for the victory of El Alamein, and ending with the slugging match along the River Sangro in Italy on the long road to Rome, where Monty left his beloved Eighth to return to England for his biggest assignment.

The Field-Marshal's book will be of greatest interest to students of military history, and, of course, to those who were in the battles he describes, but the layman with only a casual interest in how battles are fought will, I am afraid, find it slow going. Monty wrote with inspired words when he prepared a message to be "read out" to the troops on the eve of a battle, but in this treatise he has omitted his dynamic dramatics.



A more readable book covering the same ground was written by the Field-Marshal's Chief of Staff, Major-General Sir Francis ("Freddy") DeGuinand, "Operation Victory." Perhaps the reason I like the Chief of Staff's account so much more is because he so interestingly describes his "master" from intimate association under widely varying circumstances of stress and success as an obstinate yet lovable and colorful personality. Monty has hidden this personality pretty much under his frequent use of the personal pronoun. The comparison illustrates a truism I observed during the war: A general was much more fortunate if the correspondents wrote about him rather than quoted him.

But for the student who likes his facts set forth in straightforward and simple manner, and who wants particularly the reasons behind the commander's decisions in battle, the Field-Marshal has given a splendid lecture. His description of battles is well illustrated with seventeen colored maps, and I can picture him standing at a map in a stifling hot war tent before his staff officers explaining "the intentions of the commander." In this field I thought Monty especially effective. He had the ability

and the patience to communicate to his principal officers what he and they were to accomplish, and the manner in which the battle was to be fought, so that in the turmoil of the fighting the maximum of teamwork was obtained.

When the United States entered the war, we soon found that the British were much more adept in practising deception on the enemy than were the Americans. But we learned from the British. To show the type of effort which was painstakingly undertaken many times to fool the opposition, one deception or "cover plan" is described by Monty. Having decided where Rommel's minefields in front of the British troops at El Alamein would be pierced for the breakout, Montgomery then undertook to convince the enemy that this effort would be made at a different spot, miles away. By means of wireless messages which he knew the enemy was intercepting and decoding, he hoped to aid the deception. In the meantime, and for days before the attack, the flow of motor traffic was kept rolling over the roads behind the principal point of attack at such a volume with the aid of dummy motor transport and armored vehicles that when the actual move came to strengthen that point for the big push, the enemy's aerial photographs showed no change in the rate of build-up. Supplies were stacked in motor parks to resemble vehicles in aerial photographs. These, and no doubt other ruses which he does not go into in detail, helped fool the enemy and therefore contributed to the ultimate victory at Alamein.

Master of the "set battle," and master, too, of infusing fighting spirit into his men, Monty has set down an important contribution to the history of the tedious but triumphant march of the Eighth Army from Alamein to the River Sangro. After the Field-Marshal had said goodbye to his troops in Italy to take his new assignment for the cross-channel operation into France, that classic movement of fighting men was appropriately described by Winston Churchill in Montgomery's autograph book:

The immortal march of the Eighth Army from the gates of Cairo along the African shore, through Sicily, has now carried its ever-victorious soldiers far into Italy towards the gates of Rome. The scene changes and vastly expands. A great task accomplished gives place to a greater, in which the same unfailing spirit will win for all true men a full and glorious reward.

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A Soldier's Business

TO HELL AND BACK. By Audie Murphy. New York: Henry Holt & Co. 1949. 274 pp. \$3.

Reviewed by ARTHUR C. FIELDS

IT can happen on a sunny day or just as night falls. It can happen in a grocery store or on a subway or while reading the newspaper. All at once, there is the feeling that no longer are you alone, that, all at once, the others are there with you, laughing, talking, swearing just as they did before, just the way it was in the war. And you look at yourself in the subway window or as you hoist your bag of groceries, and you indulge yourself for a moment, reliving the experiences, revaluating that part of your life. Thinking back to the war—not the global, worldwide war—but your war, the war made up of a lot of men like you. You see human beings doing a little more than they ever thought they could do, straining past the breaking point, fighting and hating fighting, killing and abhorring their crimes—and then, amazingly, because of them, because of you and others like you, the WAR, that immense, uncontrollable juggernaut is over, kaput, licked, and beaten by men, little insignificant men—like you. And suddenly your suit feels uncomfortable, your topcoat seems strange, the felt hat on your head (that you bought only recently) looks ridiculous. And you walk down the street in a dream, wondering why you are here, what connection there is between the cement sidewalk and yourself—not your name, not your address—but your real self, the real you that was born for a few moments in Europe or in Sicily or in Burma perhaps; the man who surprised everyone (yourself most included) by his native cunning, his clear-headedness in danger, his courage, his heroism. Walking down the street with the bundle in your hand, you wonder just for a moment. You shake your head and pause at the steps to your house. You stop there remembering your strength, your sureness; wondering, puzzling at the change—But then an auto horn, or the crash of a garbage can, or a siren, or a kid on roller skates shakes the thoughts loose and, all at once, it is a fine felt hat that you sport on your head; your suit looks like a million bucks. And with a whistle, you bound up the steps and call out loudly for your wife, as the dreams, the war, the man you once were, are forgotten, gone with the years, finished forever.

Mr. Murphy's "To Hell and Back"

is just such a pause, a single moment of remembering outside the steps of what we call home.

Audie Murphy is best known as the most decorated soldier of World War II. He is also a motion-picture actor and the husband of Wanda Hendrix. But in "To Hell and Back," he is simply the author, a modest, extremely factual narrator who puts down things just as he saw them, whose war autobiography is more than his own—it is the story of Snuffy, of Kerrigan, of Horse-Face Johnson, and of Brandon, whose daughter's request to cut off her pigtails was of more concern to the men than the war. These men were men of action. And theirs is a book of action, steady, fast-paced, quiet yet forceful in its frankness. Audie Murphy first saw action in Sicily, where he immediately began to distinguish himself for bravery and heroism. "I had always wanted to be a soldier," says Audie and before the book is over he has had himself more than a "bellyful" of fighting. Anzio, Italy, Southern France, the Colmar Pocket (where he received the Congressional Medal of Honor), the final mop-up of Germany. On VE-Day, Lieutenant Murphy is en route to the Riviera. Someone wonders at the excitement outside. "It's VE-Day." "Somebody ought to holler," comes the retort. "I haven't got the energy."

That's war from the soldier's viewpoint, a viewpoint which, incidentally, becomes more forgotten as our

recovery from the memory of war becomes more complete. Only a few weeks ago in this magazine [SRL Feb. 12] Norman Mailer's "The Naked and the Dead" was criticized as follows:

It is hard to believe in the too long and over-elaborated description of the agonies suffered by the thirteen men who tried to cross the island. Is it conceivable that as skilled a man as murderous Sergeant Croft, who led it, would have included three sick men in his detail, victims respectively of gonorrhea, a kidney disease, and diarrhea; or that doctors would have refused to examine two of the sickest before they began their gruelling journey?

A more perfect summary of our forgetfulness of what war was can hardly be imagined. Sergeant Murphy returns to Anzio with a hang-over from malaria, accompanied by a man still suffering from gonorrhea. The agonies undergone by GI's on that blood-soaked beach could never be "over-elaborated" even if repeated forever. As for doctors' examinations in the middle of combat and other civilian conceptions of war, Audie Murphy answers them with a grim little story. The Germans, trying to send a tank into the American lines, mounted an American lieutenant and an American sergeant on front. The American shell that disabled the German tank passed through the body of the American lieutenant.

That was war. Our war. American version. If Author Murphy has done anything best, it has been to remind us that the fighting war is a soldier's business. And soldiers are a race apart. They kill impersonally, they wound and cripple at will, they burn, freeze, and drown their enemies, and if they do not, their enemies will oblige by doing the same to them. "Now get this straight in your head," says Audie Murphy. "If a man comes over that hill, he'll be a German. One of you is going to get killed. The man that shoots first will be the one that lives. So don't let civilian conscience get in your way. Draw your bead and pull that trigger fast."

There is no civilian conscience in "To Hell and Back." It is a fighter's story of a fighter's war. Stark, grim, straight from the shoulder, "To Hell and Back" is a terrible, powerful book. We may continue to be guilty of lapses of memory, but books like these will force us to remember. The remembering may be unpleasant, but then, war is unpleasant. We will still go upstairs with the groceries, but it will be with a better sense of values, and a much greater appreciation of the miracle to which we returned—our home.



—From "Art in the Armed Forces."

Self-Portrait by William J. Gunn in full gear for a fifteen-mile hike.