

**Bob Maslen-Jones. Outrageous Fortune. Whittles Publishing, 2006.**

**Major-General (ret'd) Clive Addy, Colonel of The Regiment of The Royal Canadian Dragoons, and President of The Canadian Battlefields Foundation**

A wonderful read! The story of this well-traveled regimental leader in operations over a mere 14 years of his life is the stuff of military legend. It is also the tale of the end of an era in the service of "Queen and Country" and the sunset of the British Empire. Robert Maslen-Jones, who died last July,<sup>1</sup> tells the story of a passionately active and obviously much loved military part of his life. He begins his account with recollections of himself as a young medical student reflecting upon the sadness of Chamberlain's failure, witnessing the arrival home of the defeated British Expeditionary Force, cheering on the brave and wonderful British pilots during the Battle of Britain dog fights, and expressing what certainly was a sincere wish to do his duty. The reader gets a very strong sense of what it was like to be a young British man at the crossroads of choosing a future in May 1940. From the rationing of petrol coupons to his description of his classmate Ian Beddows' father as a "retired Royal Artillery colonel who sported a monocle and was kind" and finally to his "less than impressed" description of his "moral tutor" at New College, Oxford, one senses easily that his destiny in these troubled times is very much elsewhere. He seeks counsel and obtains support for his enrolment in the Brigade of Guards with the Welsh Guards from his father, a well-to-do gynecologist and former medical officer in the Great War. Whilst in training and having been advised to apply to the Indian Army for a commission by his Uncle Eric, a senior officer with the Indian Police in Delhi, he, like many in his "social class," does so and is commissioned into Queen Victoria's Own Corps of Guides. Soon after Sandhurst he began his

---

<sup>1</sup> David R. Maslen-Jones reports that his "father Major Bob Maslen-Jones served 1946 to 1957 in KSLI in Korea and elsewhere. Dad died on 13 July 2005." Available from [www.lightinfantry.org.uk/guestbook/archive/ksli.htm](http://www.lightinfantry.org.uk/guestbook/archive/ksli.htm)

professional military career with a most challenging sea voyage from Scotland, north towards Iceland, then southwest to Sierra Leone, Cape Town, and finally northeast to Bombay aboard the SS *Mulbera*. The cruise lasted over two months, avoiding German U-boats, stopping for the inevitable repairs and provisioning and finally arriving in India in April 1941.

From a purely military perspective, one is caught quickly by the variety and yet familiarity of his experiences on the Indian frontier and beyond. For those who might berate language training in our own military, it is interesting to note its need and application in the context of command in the Indian Army of the day. The training with his new unit was very rugged and they were moved rapidly through Pakistan and Afghanistan to Persia and Kurdish areas south of Turkey and along the Caspian Sea to join with the Russians and keep open the supply routes around the Axis powers. There are some great descriptions of encounters with locals and allies that will bring back memories to any who have served in these areas. He was ill for some time while in Baghdad in 1942 and his stories of the treatment facilities and people interest always, and even then. Following his illness he rejoined the British Army and his King's Shropshire Light Infantry (KSLI) but by October 1943 he was sent back to undergo jungle training with a cadre from 27 Brigade in India. Christmas that year came and went and still he was not in Burma. His kick at operations in Burma finally came in April 1944 when he took command of the A Company Pathans. The fighting on the road to Rangoon, the mopping up of Japanese around Pegu and the tribulations of commanding this multi-tribe company make for a great story. There are some wonderful

leadership lessons here. In addition, his fortuitous encounters with his older brother Ted, a well-decorated observation pilot in this theatre, are the stuff of legend.

His post-war service with the territorials, his Olympic shooting team experience and rugby prowess, as well as his training and staff tours, mark a man destined for higher things. So when the Korean War broke out, he rejoined his beloved KSLI to command its C Company and fight it bravely in defence of the Sami-Ch'On Valley as part of the Commonwealth Division and to replace a Van Doo company location. This is probably the most moving part of the book, wherein he describes so powerfully the life of C Company during its 18-month tour in Korea, its courage and victories and the emotional loss of its soldiers. He and the company are one! From there, he returned to the United Kingdom and during the Cold War, with the unit under a new Commanding Officer with no real operational experience, he prepared his unit for NATO division service in Northern Germany as an Intelligence Officer. While in Europe, he had a serious falling out with his CO that eventually led to his retirement. From this end comes the title Outrageous Fortune, presumably from the numerous "slings and arrows."

Bob proves throughout this book to be a fine storyteller and an able witness to the challenges and values of his time. His maps are clear and simple and no more are needed, for the scope of his story lies within the context of command and people in battle and not of great tactics or strategy. His memory of characters, places, details and events is quite remarkable and his descriptions are charming and clear. It reads like a fine novel and shows great potential as a movie script. It is clear that Major Maslen-Jones is not only a wonderful storyteller, but was also an officer of great emotional depth and competence and one that would have earned the respect of soldiers and

peers in any army. It is what he did and saw, captured so well here, that makes this volume a "must read" for every professional combat arms officer. In this time of "change" and "transformation" and "fourth generation" whatever, the fundamental values of unit leadership and personal selflessness that Major Bob Maslen-Jones practiced are the real lessons of this book. They are worth repeating and always remembering. Those outside the military will enjoy it as well - at just under 240 pages, this book is an inspiring and informative adventure read for anyone!

*Clive Addy joined the army as a reservist in 1959, is a graduate of RMC, an Armoured officer and spent 35 years in the Regular Force. He served a UN tour and 11 years in Europe where he commanded The Royal Canadian Dragoons and later Canada's brigade. On retirement as a Major General, he left command of Western Area and became Executive Secretary of the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires for six years. He is President of the Canadian Battlefields Foundation and former VP of the Conference of Defence Associations. He lives in Perth, Ontario.*