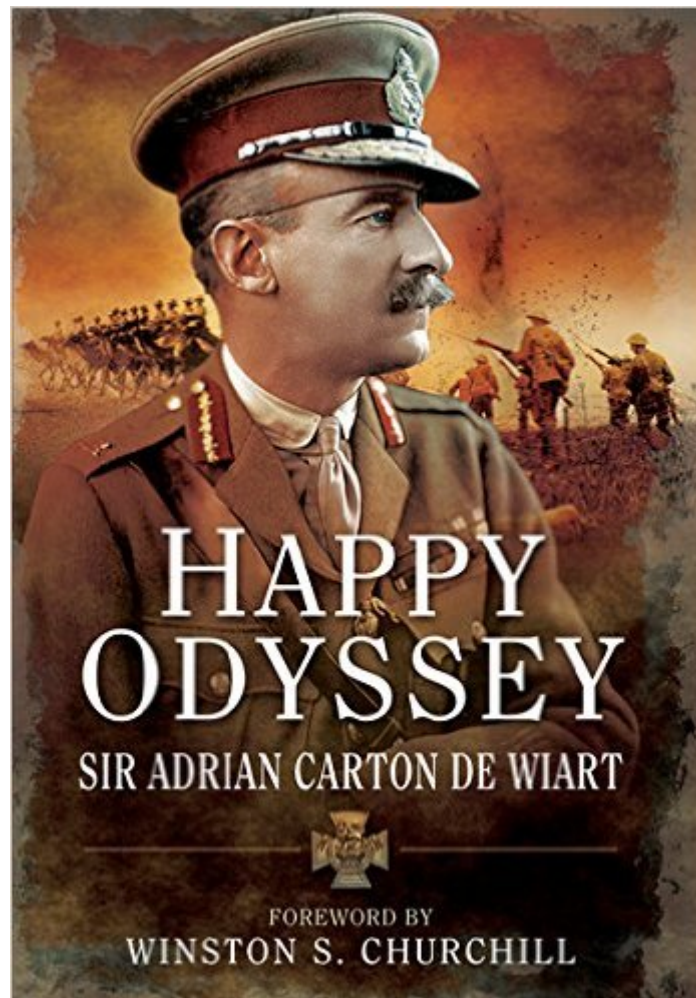


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Happy Odyssey



Synopsis

Adrian Carton de Wiart's autobiography is one of the most remarkable of military memoirs. He was intended for the law, but abandoned his studies at Balliol College, Oxford, in 1899 to serve as a trooper in the South African War. Carton de Wiart's extraordinary military career embraced service with the Somaliland Camel Corps (1914-15), liaison officer with Polish forces (1939), membership of the British Military Mission to Yugoslavia (1941), a period as a prisoner of war (1941-43), and three years as Churchill's representative to Chiang Kai-shek (1943-46). (Churchill was a great admirer.) During the Great War, besides commanding the 8th Glosters, Carton de Wiart was GOC 12 Brigade (1917) and GOC 105 Brigade (April 1918). Both these commands were terminated by wounds. He was wounded eight times during the war (including the loss of an eye and a hand), won the VC during the Battle of the Somme, was mentioned in dispatches six times, and was the model for Brigadier Ben Ritchie Hook in the Sword of Honour trilogy of Evelyn Waugh.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If you are an Anglophile with an appreciation of English lit and wit; a war buff with a romantic side well...you will love this book. de Wiart is simply a classic English soldier in the old mode before political correctness. It's a great read. I hope they make the movie and/or some enterprising young writer turns this fellow's life into historical fiction as highly readable as his own non-fiction. Oh, and Churchill loved this guy. Nuff said.

The earlier reviewers point out that Carton de Wiart served his adopted country long and bravely. He suffered the loss of an eye and a hand in battles before it came to official attention that this Belgian aristocrat was not technically a British subject. No matter, he soldiered on. True, there is little technical information about his campaigns. His straightforward comments about places and people do not "grate" on my ears; they are harmonious and welcome in these days of imbecile political correctness and other contrived sensitivities. His comments on India, for instance, apply still today, only everything is worse. A noteworthy failing is that while he served in China as the official British liaison in the rank of Lieutenant General, he makes no mention of the gross levels theft and corruption that wasted so much of the military supplies brought to China at the cost of many Allied lives and much treasure. The vendor, SuperBoookDeals, waited seven days after the order was placed to dispatch the book, and USPS media mail took five more days to deliver it.

What a story! It's an autobiography, but a surprising humble and reserved book. Sir de Wiart largely relates his life from a macro perspective with some small stories, insights thrown in along the way. There is no analysis of what he was doing or why, no mention of his family which (I imagine) would lead most readers to assume he was a life-long bachelor (which he was not), and no mention of the numerous medals he was awarded throughout his career. Easy read on a fascinating individual, I would like to see a biography on his career to give me a better perspective on how he fit into the events he mentions and how he managed to become involved in the first place.

Most military commanders are not shy, retiring people-calling most of them Type A personalities is an understatement: Think of Napoleon, McArthur, Halsey, Grant, Sherman, etc. Sure, there are a few more reticent ones; Eisenhower and Jackson come to mind. But Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart must surely lead the list. How can I say that: Sir Adrin won the Victoria Cross in WWI, his second war, and NEVER mentioned it in the book. In the Boer war, he was wounded twice, and barely mentions it. In the first World War, he was wounded 8 times: He was shot in the face, head, stomach, ankle, leg, hip, and ear. Barley mentions them. Describing his experiences in World War I, he wrote, "Frankly, I had enjoyed the war." In the second World War, he survived two plane crashes; was captured and made a POW, and after four previous escape attempts, he tunneled out of the POW camp. After finally getting out of the POW camp, he ends up as the UK military representative to China. He ended up as a three-star general, while starting from a private in the cavalry. A life few people could survive, let alone enjoy, but he did, and wrote a very good book about it. Recommended.

Wow, what can you say about this man? Truly the "unkillable soldier" and his autobiography is, to say the least, delightfully British. His humor is direct and brusque, his manner self effacing and his entire career is understated in typical English style. This amazing person was truly a "man's man" and I found myself literally laughing out loud several times when coming across droll and understated phrases throughout the book. I would only imagine that having lunch with this gentleman would have been an amazing experience. Don't read this book for a treatise on warfare. Don't read this book and expect deep analysis of tactics, his place and purpose in campaigns, etc. If you do you'll be disappointed (as evidenced by some previous reviewers). DO, however, read this book for a delightful look at the mind of a man who lived warfare to his very bones, who relished a good fight and minced no words about it. DO read this book for a glimpse at the life of one of the most interesting men I've ever read about.

The author isn't one of the greatest literary geniuses I have come across lately, but his tales are quite extraordinary. There aren't a lot of fictional histories out there with the same amount of adventures packed in one human life. Just to consider the endless amount of plane crashes in this book alone, who were but a 'fait divers' for this man. I would never get on a plane with this dude. Just his presence made them all falling down and crashing to the ground/sea like mad! It got a bit dreary that everyone he ever met was always "the most wonderful, delightful" people, but I guess that's just who he was. A pig sticking sportsman who occasionally stopped pieces of shrapnel.

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