

They couldn't have done better

The Story of the Dorset Regiment in War and Peace 1939-67

by Christopher Jary

Never has it been more important that the histories of our original regiments be readily available for their successors to access and enjoy. This latest contribution to the history of our forebears is not only wonderfully and fully researched but, most importantly, written in a very enjoyable and readable style.

The author, Christopher Jary, is a volunteer researcher in the Keep Museum and, with the help and encouragement of Major Nick Speakman and the curators, has had unprecedented access to all the records available, both official and unofficial. But he has also been able to speak to some of those who are part of that history, which has produced some wonderful insights and tales that would not have otherwise been recorded.

He has brought to life some enormous characters who are very much part of the recent history of our regiment, names that resonate over the years such as Speedy Bredin, Knocker White and Colonel Steve. But this is not just about the officers; there are some wonderful stories about individual acts of extraordinary bravery by people of all ranks. Many of those that are mentioned carry names that are still common in Dorset today and will no doubt have family living throughout the county who may not know of their ancestor's gallantry.

The various battalions of the Dorsets saw action in nearly every significant theatre of the Second World War – France and Belgium, Dunkirk, Malta, Sicily, Italy, Burma and, not least, Normandy and the advance through Europe. Then there was post-war Germany and Austria, Malaya and Japan, Korea, Hong Kong and Minden; all places that produced new challenges and of course many new experiences for those involved.

The book is lavishly illustrated with photos, maps, diagrams and line drawings, all of which add enormously to the tales that are told. Above all else the book brings to life the character of our regiment, the understated excellence that has been our hallmark throughout the generations and the incredible gallantry that is generated by those who are loyal to their mates in a family regiment when faced with incredible challenges. The words of the title, so typical of the way the regiment does its business, came from Major General George Wood, himself a Dorset officer, when he was describing his old regiment's actions during the incredible battle of Kohima.

This is not just a book to be bought out of loyalty and placed with other histories to gather dust in a bookcase; this is a book to be read. Even though we may know the *denouement* of the various battles and campaigns described, the tales are told in such a way that the reader will find it difficult to put them down until all is resolved.