



'Rommel?' 'Gunner Who?': A Confrontation in the Desert

Spike Milligan

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This is the second volume of Mr Milligan's reminiscences of World War II.

'Rommel?' 'Gunner Who?': A Confrontation in the Desert Details

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From Reader Review 'Rommel?' 'Gunner Who?': A Confrontation in the Desert for online ebook

Sourojit Das says

Milligan continues his adventures in the desert, as he prepares for a showdown with the Afrika Corps.

Rob Pearson says

That bloody warsaw concerto.

One day i will look it up on google.
Meantime i remain in suspenders.
When will this bloody submit buton light up?
Ah! There you are.

Donna Edwards says

Read them all they are excellent.

William Paley says

Madcap recap of Milligan's experience as a gunner in the Royal Artillery in Tunisia during WWII.

Rob Kitchin says

'Rommel' 'Gunner Who?' is the second book in a seven book series charting the experiences of Spike Milligan during and immediately after the Second World War. Born in 1919 in India to an Irish father serving in the British Indian Army and English mother, and passing away in 2002, Milligan is widely regarded as one of Britain's most famous and influential comedians in the second half of the twentieth century, known for his surrealist and off-beat sketches and wise-cracks, influencing acts such as Monty Python, Kenny Everett and Eddie Izzard. Prior to the war he performed as an amateur jazz trumpeter in London, a role he continued whilst serving in North Africa and Italy, and after being wounded and hospitalised in Italy he ended the war as a full time entertainer. After being demobbed he shot to fame as one of the co-creators and principal writer of The Goon Show, one of the most popular radio programmes of the 1950s. By the late 1950s he was writing for television and regularly appearing on the small screen. He was also a noted writer, poet and playwright.

I read the first six of the Milligan war diaries when I was a teenager in the 1980s and I still have four of them, this one being the earliest I have. 'Rommel' 'Gunner Who?' focuses on Gunner Milligan's time in Algeria, especially on the battle for Tunis, and draws extensively from his war time diary including sketches

and photographs. It also includes joke pictures and little comedy scripts. It's probably about 25 years since I first read the book so it was interesting to go back and take another look. In many ways it still holds up. The narrative is engaging and witty, blending in pathos in just right measure. Milligan's story is interesting, traversing across North Africa swapping artillery bombardments, being mortared and shot at, witnessing death and destruction, letting off steam in bars, and the camaraderie of young men in engaged in a dangerous endeavour. In other ways, it seems quite dated, especially in relation to the politically incorrect language. Several times, racist jokes are made at the expense of the locals and places are described in racist terms, for example, he calls a couple of settlements 'a wog village'. In this sense it is a product of its time, but Milligan was well aware of such racist sentiments at the time of its writing given criticisms of some of his other works which in trying to address racial stereotyping reproduced what it sought to counter (I'm thinking here of the television programme Curry and Chips). As autobiographies go, it's a largely enjoyable and informative read. As I remember it, the next two books in the series were the best ones – Monty, His Part in My Victory and Mussolini, His Part in My Downfall.

Cathal Kenneally says

Uproariously funny

A comic genius. I read this in less than a day. He keeps you engaged all of the time. A word of warning. Don't have any drinks nearby as you're likely to spill them or choke on them from laughing. He has a rare talent of finding humour in the most trying of circumstances. It was a depressing place. This volume deals with the desert: the heat, the mosquitoes the locals and the enemy. Who would want to be there? He is without doubt a gifted storyteller

Paul E. Morph says

The second volume in Milligan's war memoirs concentrates on his time in North Africa. This volume is more poignant than the first but that was inevitable, really, as his friends started to be killed.

One passage has him describing some typically zany Goon-type humour with one of his mates in his outfit and then he slams it shut with the sentence 'He had eight days left of his young life left to live.' You can't help thinking 'well, fuck'.

Speaking of bad language, Milligan really ramps up the casual use of racist, sexist and homophobic language in this one. While this is undeniably period-accurate, and I wouldn't criticise him for using it for the sake of authenticity, I'd be lying if I said it didn't bother me a little. I guess you can take the guy out of the 21st century but you can't take the 21st century out of the guy.

The laughs are just as abundant, though, and I was still laughing uproariously throughout. At two days per book, I'm going to be done with this series in no time!

Lewis Clark says

This volume suffers from a near constant stream of racism that often manifests itself in the various "Hitlergrams" and off-colour comments from Milligan and his comrades. I appreciate that a bunch of white,

British lads being thrown into foreign territory under constant threat of death by men from a different country is going to breed that sort of attitude, but it can overshadow the fact that Milligan has a great eye for detail and a fantastic sense of humour. One of the things I really like about this volume is the way it's broken up with small passages entitled 'Trauma'. These are often very bleak and read like Milligan having nightmares brought on by post-traumatic stress. I really like the contrast these passages bring, as you'd probably have just been reading about a nonsense conversation between Milligan and co. This is still a very funny and absurdist piece of prose, but sadly it's difficult to make excuses for Milligan's racism.

Jude Wright says

Brilliantly funny!

Kieran McAndrew says

It's surprising that a war could be fought with all the slacking going on in the British Army.

So continues Spike Milligan's anarchic autobiography. This forms a much better narrative, even though it is still a framework for hanging a variety of comic set pieces.

Andrew says

The second volume of Spike's war autobiographies sees him and 19 battery RA engaged in the final battles against the Germans and Italians in North Africa. "Rommel? Gunner Who?" is a book I have read and re-read plenty of times, and it has (like all its companion volumes) that unique Milliganesque mix of surreal humour, bad jokes, an insight into the reality of soldiering, pathos, erudition, anarchy and rehashed Goonery.

Unlike the first volume ('Adolf Hitler, My Part in his Downfall') Spike wrote this follow-up with more free-form humour, especially with the interspersing of miniature sketches ('Hitlergrams') as well as several illustrations adapted as only Milligan would. This means that for all the focus on battles and how Spike first experiences combat this is still at its heart a comedic work.

Yet the scenes of and discussions about battle don't intrude on a comic book; Milligan's experience of war is front and centre in every aspect of the autobiography, and the tension between the dark moments and Spike's comedic response makes 'Rommel? Gunner Who?' better for it. Whilst I've not been in combat I have spent time in the military and so much of what Milligan writes about, the boredom, the inanity of soldiering, the basic pleasures like a good cup of tea or the miseries of stand to at some ungodly hour are experiences I (and millions of ex-soldiers) have experienced.

Another important aspect of this book is that by reading it (and the companion volumes) we see both the experiences and thoughts that shaped Spike, and to some extent a projection of his late adult persona back on his youth. Milligan was always keen to control how his life was presented to the public, and combined with a nostalgia that I think was born from his depression (he always felt happier with the past than the present or future) this means that 'Rommel? Gunner Who?' is perhaps more truthful psychologically than historically.

If I was to boil down the reasons for reading this book from Milligan to the bare essentials, I would

recommend it because it is a funny and at times moving memoir of an old soldier who became probably the greatest British comic writer of the Twentieth Century, and if you love Spike humour then it is a must have.

Mark Sohn says

Following on from Adolf Hitler-my part in his downfall, Spike goes to North Africa to dish it out to ze Afrika Korps... funny, sometimes pant-wettingly, this is a fantastic sequel to the original war diary.

Harry says

Second part of Spike Milligans war memoirs. Hilarious, sad, poignant all at once. However time has moved on and the Goons casual racism grates these days. Not to be read by those easily offended.

Helen says

This is the second book in a series of memoirs Spike Milligan produced about his time during World War II. I did not realise this when I first found it but it can actually quite easily be read as a standalone text so it was not a problem that I had not read the first one or any others in the series. It was certainly a very interesting and entertaining read so I will certainly look out for more of the books in the future.

I liked the black and white photographs included and the sketches done by the author that accompanied the text. I also thought the Hitler-grams were quite funny little additions too, although they did distract me from the rest of the book a little.

It was very poignant in places, given the traumatic events described and friends being suddenly killed right in front of him. There were some bits that may come across as a bit graphic/gory as a result but it was just an honest depiction of some of the horrors he faced during the war. It still however managed to maintain a quick and easy to read style and remain a very funny read. The humour is a bit crude and near the mark in some places so might not sit well with some readers.

"We slept warmly, but had overlooked the need to commune with nature, it took frantic searching through layers of clothing to locate one's willy, some never did and had to sleep with a damp leg".

I should mention that there is also a lot of casual racism and frequent use of bad language which did let the book down a bit for me - the 'f' word and the 'c' word are used several times. I also could not really approve of the way women are treated in the book (I got the impression Milligan was a bit of a womaniser!) and there are some passages that readers these days would no doubt consider quite homophobic.

paul d. says

Hilarious and tragic

Hilarious and tragic. Excellent read even third time round still as fresh, funny and sad as the first time. The series is one of the best memoirs I have read.
