



Lions of the Desert: A True Story of WWII Heroes in North Africa

Samuel Marquis

Mount Sopris Publishing (Feb 26, 2019)

(378pp)

978-1-943593-25-5

Lions of the Desert is a character-driven historical adventure featuring daring actions and an intense rivalry.

In Samuel Marquis's nuanced and insightful historical novel *Lions of the Desert*, new information brings a tense historical operation to light. Recently declassified historical documents provide fertile ground for this fictionalized retelling of the events of Operation Condor.

In the early 1940s, German, Italian, and British forces battled for control of North Africa. In this story, German Field Marshall Erwin Rommel is close to taking Egypt, but Colonel David Stirling concocts a plan to attack German forces and give British forces a toehold on the continent. Six historical figures play a part in this true story of the North African desert and Rommel's defeat.

While Operation Condor and the North African campaign of WWII anchor the story, the varied cast gives Marquis a bit of narrative wiggle room. In addition to Rommel and Stirling, an Egyptian belly dancer, a British spy hunter, a German spy, and an American diplomat share the stage. Each character is rounded out by the new documents, and is dramatized and made individual through displays of personal quirks, but is still kept as close to reality as possible. The dynamics between Rommel and Stirling shine; neither is uplifted or disparaged.

The book's British soldiers adopt a more militaristic tone, using jargon throughout. Spies and diplomats use era-appropriate slang. When Hekmat, the belly dancer, performs, the crowd includes people from a collection of cultures; the book highlights their different ways of reacting to her performance. The dialogue embodies unique voices, revealing supporting information or adding to the color of the characterizations.

Paced consistently—almost to its detriment—the narrative covers a small amount of time. Its events proceed in a linear manner, but shifting perspectives give space to everyone from the book's large pool of leads. Tension adjusts through its transitions, and sometimes perspectives switch mid-scene to offer contrasting viewpoints of the same scene.

Mostly about the characters and their motivations, the book focuses on people more than it does events. Still, historical records and other media have told differing versions of Operation Condor, and *Lions of the Desert* feels fresh as it takes each of its historical figures and examines how their actions and reactions to each other shaped them and the campaign. The ending is true to the historical record but jarring, concluding Rommel and Stirling's combative relationship on a positive note.

Lions of the Desert is a character-driven historical adventure featuring daring actions and an intense rivalry.

JOHN M. MURRAY (April 3, 2019)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.