

Harold E. Raugh Jr., *Wavell in the Middle East, 1939-1941: A Study in Generalship*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013. 364pp. (First published by Brasseys in 1993). ISBN 978-0806143057 (Paperback). Price £20.00.

“Colonel Harold E.] Raugh will most likely be the last word on Wavell’s Middle East Command” concluded G.E. Patrick Murray in a review published shortly after the 1993 release of Raugh’s PhD thesis turned monograph. At the time Raugh received due credit for rehabilitating the somewhat tarnished reputation of this most enigmatic, and consequently misrepresented, man. Twenty years later, The University of Oklahoma Press provides an affordable reprint. The questions this reviewer asks focus on three aspects of Raugh’s study. Firstly, it offers an overview of its content. Secondly, it assesses whether Raugh does indeed still provide the ‘last word on Wavell’s Middle East Command’, given the publication of other Wavell biographies (notably Victoria Schofield, *Wavell: Soldier, Scholar*, (London: John Murray, 2006) and assessments of command and Generalship in the theatres in which he operated. It closes with the subsidiary question as to whether this work merits reprinting right now.

General Sir Archibald Wavell’s appointment as GOC Middle East Command, from his arrival in Egypt on 2 August 1939 until his dismissal in July 1941, made him responsible for enacting British policy across 3,500,000 square miles of Africa, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and South-West Europe. Commanding during the ‘lean years’ of the Second World War, with scant resources and ambitious political demands, Raugh captures the immensity and complexity of this task. Structured in a broadly chronological format, (Chapters 2 and 3 address Wavell’s formative years), seven chapters are then devoted to charting his tenure in this Command (albeit insofar as it is possible to write chronologically about concurrent events in disparate geographic locations). They are followed by an assessment of Wavell’s Generalship. This is a massively researched survey demonstrating a clear mastery of his subject. Raugh observes that his thesis fielded 1,586 endnotes running to 241 pages, albeit condensed in this volume to 930 references over 30 pages.

Broadly speaking, this monograph has weathered two decades well. As a study of Wavell’s Generalship during this timeframe, it has yet to be surpassed. Perhaps the most impressive aspect of this study is Raugh’s ability to reconstruct and communicate Wavell’s transient thinking, as it shifted and fluctuated and crystallised in relation to developing situations and often incomplete intelligence. This is a sympathetic, but by no means a sycophantic study of Wavell’s Generalship. Its conclusions, in the opinion of this reviewer, show a more sensitive appreciation than other works on the same subject, of the nexus between Wavell’s professional life and his character traits, in particular the synergy (or lack thereof) between his

personality and those of others around him, whether political masters or military officers. This issue is at the crux of comprehending this individual, for it contributed to the style of his command, hence to his military successes and reverses, it ultimately influenced his dismissal, and it finally shaped his legacy, for those who did not understand him, such as Winston Churchill, and his place in British military history. Subsequent assessments of the interaction between Wavell's private and professional life may differ from Raugh's, but he has contributed to an alteration of the prevailing scholarly attitude concerning the quality of Wavell's generalship.

Raugh's analysis of Wavell has fared well despite it being conceived in a very different strategic climate as shown by reference to British Special Forces in the First Gulf War [p.32] and some less explicit characterisation of armoured operations in the North African Desert within the lexicon of manoeuvrist warfare. The core message, however, endures.

In 2012, the rights to this work reverted to the author from Brasseys, the original publishers, and it remains the classic work on Wavell. It should appeal to those with an interest in British generalship or the Second World War in the Middle East more broadly. While anyone looking at the balancing of meagre resources to meet a broad portfolio of threats and the judicious use of local irregulars will be well served by this volume. *Wavell in the Middle East* has much to offer and certainly warranted a reprint in its own right.

ALEXANDER WILSON
King's College London