

Books by Steve Heaney MC

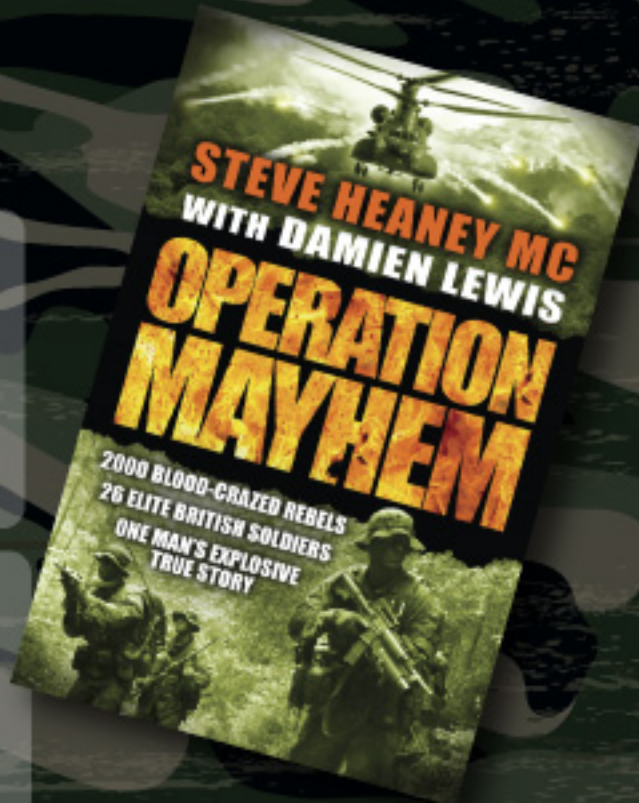
Foreword for Operation Mayhem

In January 1999 I led a small team of officers and marines to Sierra Leone. Our task was to assess whether the once proud little army of that tragic but spirited country had any hope of pushing back the brutal rebels of the Revolutionary United Front. I had to assess whether there was anything we could do to help them and present the case to Tony Blair's government in London.

This invigorating book tells the tale of the hugely professional and courageous group of men who inflicted that vital blow on the RUF on 17 May 2000. Deliberately exposed to lure the RUF onto their positions, the Pathfinders lived up to their unrivalled reputation for toughness and professionalism of the highest order. Without a shadow of doubt, their heroic actions that memorable night was the key tactical event in what has been held up as a model intervention operation. It enabled us not only to complete the evacuation in relative security but, more importantly, allowed us to push the RUF out of Freetown and away from the vital airfield without which no operation was tenable.

Six weeks later, with the RUF essentially defeated and hugely demoralised, we were able to hand over to the UN and wend our way back to the UK. We felt good about ourselves. The generous hearted people of Sierra Leone had been given their country back and could once again hope for a better future. The Pathfinders had written another stirring chapter in their short but illustrious history and Sergeant Steve Heaney was at the very centre of that story. To great acclaim he was rightly awarded the Military Cross; none can have been better earned.

Steve Heaney captures the confusion, black humour, raw courage, jargon and sheer exhilaration of combat brilliantly in this compelling and simply written book. In my judgement it is the best account of low level tactical soldiering since Fred Majdalaney's classic 'Patrol', a World War 2 account of a fighting patrol. But Sergeant Heaney tells a broader tale that has also rarely been captured so well. What makes an elite unit like the Pathfinders so powerful, so special? One that commanders like me loved to have under them. One that their enemies fervently wished was not opposite them. What sort of people join such a unit? What binds them together so closely that they can stay cohesive under the most stressful of conditions? What training do they go through to reach such heights of professionalism? What is the role of humour in keeping morale high when most would succumb to fear and fatigue?



This classic book reveals all this and much more. I commend it to the professional soldier and layman alike.

It was people like Sergeant Heaney MC that I was thinking of when I said at my retirement parade on Horse Guards in London "if I have seen further than most, it was because I stood on the shoulders of giants. "If you don't know what I mean, read this book and you soon will.

General Sir David Richards GCB CBE DSO

Chief of the Defence Staff 2010-2013

Foreword for X Platoon



Sergeant Steve Heaney MC, late of The Parachute Regiment, treats us to his fascinating insights into life inside the Pathfinders - the leading element of our airborne and air assault forces.

The Pathfinders, in their modern guise, started as a 'cinderella' organisation on the Army's 'black economy' in the late 1980s. Their covert role was greatly enhanced by the fact that they didn't officially exist!

Having demonstrated the essentials nature of their function, the Pathfinders are now clearly established in the Army's order of battle as a vital part of 16 Air Assault Brigade.

Still, very little is known about them and this book sheds some light on their evolution, and the way their reputation for excellence in the most exacting of situations has been earned.

It charts the selection procedures, the rigorous and exciting training regime, and their early operational experiences in Belize, Kosovo and Sierra Leone, where they came of age. The importance of their highly skilled contribution was recognized, and they become an essential part of any future deployment of the Brigade.

Ultimately the Army is all about its people. Heaney explains the characters that make the Platoon so special, and its appeal to young soldiers. He reveals the very high degree of personal ambition, self-belief and commitment needs to join their ranks. This is a story of mutual trust and how that is inculcated.

The book also recounts Steve Heaney's personal journey from mischievous, headstrong schoolboy in Middlesbrough to Pathfinder Platoon Sergeant, surely the most demanding platoon sergeant's job in the Army.

The story is told from the vantage point of a consummate professional, who took the fullest advantage of the challenge and opportunity offered by the Army, and in so doing shaped the future of the Pathfinders as we know them today.

It's a great story told by a very special bloke with typical humility. I hope it inspires lots of young soldiers to follow in the Author's footsteps - however daunting that may seem. Go for it! You will surprise yourselves...

General Sir Peter Wall GCB CBE

Chief of the General Staff 2010-2014

