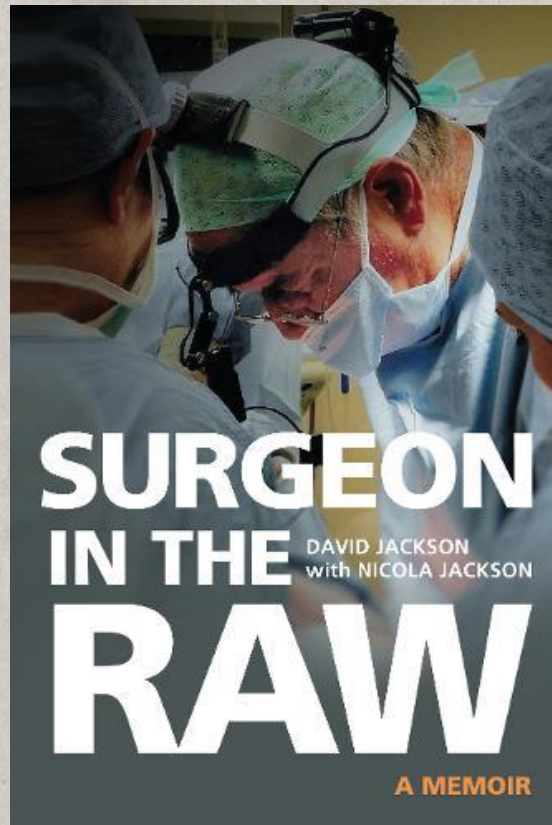




Surgeon in the Raw – A Memoir

David Jackson with Nicola Jackson

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This is an eye-catching, informal and very readable personal account by an experienced and well-respected military and NHS general surgeon, which kept my attention riveted throughout and which should hold yours too. It is aptly named, for it is raw with emotion at times. The protagonist is David Jackson, who made his name serving his country as a military surgeon in the Falklands War.¹ He is also known to me personally from the time when we operated together to save the life of a soldier critically injured by the Provisional IRA (see 'A Shooting, BMH Munster, 1989' in this book).²

Surgeon in the Raw provides a series of privileged glimpses behind the scenes against the different backdrops of his training in the heyday of general surgery and of relatively recent military conflicts, spanning the Northern Ireland Troubles and the Falklands conflict, the British military hospitals in Germany around the end of the Cold War, and the Balkans conflicts of the 1990s.

¹ Jackson DS et al, The Falkland War army field surgical experience. *Ann Roy Coll Surg Engl* 1983;65:281-285

² The author's account elaborates on the case history originally published as "A Terrorist Incident" by Vassallo DJ, Singer B, Yasin T, Jackson DS in the *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps* 1990;136:80-84



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Many people who served at the same time as the author will recognise the scenarios and personalities he mentions – I for one recognised several friends and many familiar names. It is not all about conflict, for there are exciting accounts of postings to distant military hospitals in Hong Kong and Nepal, sadly no more. These are followed by his fulfilling NHS career in Wales at what was affectionately nicknamed ‘BMH Aberystwyth’ until retiring ‘in stylus’ in 2012. I suspect that his NHS colleagues and patients will also remember David fondly through this book.

David Jackson commanded one of the two field surgical teams in the Falklands conflict, the other commanded by Jim Ryan.³ He narrowly escaped with his life when the RFA Sir Galahad was bombed, though three other RAMC colleagues were numbered among the dead. He then helped care for the burned and wounded survivors (see his chapter ‘Aim for the Ocean, The Falklands War, 1982’).

The book is interlaced with the unfolding drama not just of war but of personal anguish as the author’s life and career were torn apart by marital infidelity and then stitched back together with the help of his co-author, who became his friend and later his wife.

The book vividly recounts the life experiences of a compassionate man with a real knack for writing and a wry sense of humour. It is blunt and explicit at times, which may be off-putting to some, but don’t worry about that for the whole is so much greater than a few words. I sense the writing of this book has been cathartic for David and his co-author Nicki, for David lays his heart bare to the reader, being open about the hurt he has suffered, in war or otherwise, and many will empathise. Balancing this, he intersperses his account with many memorable surgical case histories selected for their educational and historical value from carefully recorded contemporaneous diaries (a habit that should be actively encouraged in all military medical trainees). The author has dedicated his book to the victims of war, military and civilian; the reasons are clear within.

Surgeon in the Raw is a worthy and welcome addition to the genre of military surgical memoirs, bringing its own unique contribution to the field, and filling a gap in accounts by RAMC surgeons. It differs from classics such as Edward Churchill’s *Surgeon to soldiers* (Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1972), but it certainly sits well alongside it and more recent publications such as Richard Villar’s *Winged Scalpel* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2012)⁴ and David Nott’s *War Doctor* (London: Picador, 2019).

I have attached a photograph of the Contents pages below to give you a feel for the book and its structure, and to whet your appetite. I unreservedly recommend it for your reading list.

David Vassallo
Chairman, Friends of Millbank
February 2021

³ Jim Ryan is featured in *College Personalities* <https://www.friendsofmillbank.org/college-personalities>

⁴ There is a book review of *Winged Scalpel* on our website <https://www.friendsofmillbank.org/archive>



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They shall grow not old

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