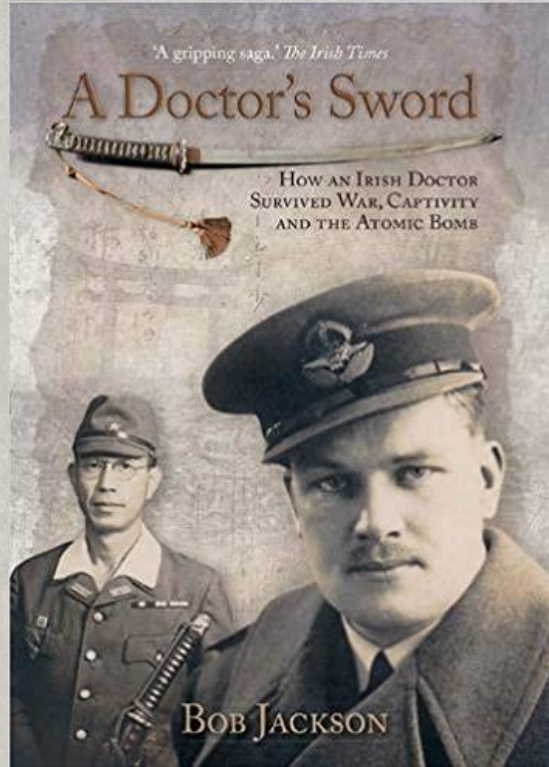




A Doctors Sword

Bob Jackson

Collins Press, 2016. ISBN 1848892861



It is over twelve months since I reviewed the remarkable memoir by Air Commodore Aidan MacCarthy OBE GM, '*A Doctor's War*', recollecting his life as an RAF Medical Officer through the Second World War.¹ This story has resonated with me over the past year as an incredible story of survival against the odds as a Far Eastern Prisoner of War, showcasing both the worst of humanity, and the best of mankind. Bob Jackson, taking a fresh look at MacCarthy's life, agrees with this assessment, describing MacCarthy's account as simply 'the best story I have ever read'.

Jackson approaches the story from a different angle, and as such his book is a worthy companion to MacCarthy's memoir, originally published in 1979. Separated from that by nearly forty years, and written long after MacCarthy's death in 1995, this book adds extra layers of detail and context to what MacCarthy was experiencing through his long time in captivity. This context is provided by regularly zooming out of MacCarthy's personal war and explaining why particular events were occurring at certain times.

¹ Aidan MacCarthy '*A Doctors War*' (First published by Robson Books, 1979; 2nd edition by Grub Books, 2006). See Review by Nathaniel Roocroft, April 2020 <https://www.friendsofmillbank.org/books/>





In doing so it shows how MacCarthy's experience and fate was woven into the stories of many others. Examples of this include the story of the US submarine which sank MacCarthy's ship whilst he was being transported to the Japanese mainland, and the tale of the flight crew of the B29 bomber which dropped the second atomic bomb on the city of Nagasaki. This extra dimension is well researched and offers compelling detail yet does not detract from the underlying story.

Whereas MacCarthy's book '*A Doctor's War*' ends in 1979, Jackson's '*A Doctor's Sword*' continues with the final years of his life, and then also details the author's research into the origins of the sword given to MacCarthy following his release. This works well, covering the story of how Jackson and MacCarthy's family tracked down the relatives of the Japanese officer who gave MacCarthy his sword.

Jackson comments how much of MacCarthy's original writing is often understated, with events that would merit whole chapters or books described in a sentence or two. The entire sequence of events describing the dropping of the second atom bomb for instance is discussed in just a few pages. Whilst this brevity leads to the original story being fast-paced, Jackson's follow-up delves deeper into some of the events to which MacCarthy was witness, and as such is well worth reading after MacCarthy's first-hand account.

Nathaniel Roocroft¹
August 2021

Chairman's Notes

Aidan MacCarthy's sword is displayed at MacCarthy's Bar in Castletownbere, Cork, Ireland, see <https://www.maccarthysbar.com/a-doctor-s-war> for further information, including details about the regular talks held there about the origins of the sword.

Friends of Millbank may be interested in viewing an interview and vivid re-telling of Aidan MacCarthy's war, including footage from Dunkirk and a graphic reconstruction of his experience of the atom bombing of Nagasaki. This can be downloaded as a MP4 file from Vimeo <https://vimeo.com/84950812>

Aidan MacCarthy's extraordinary story was developed into a 70-minute full colour film to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the atomic bomb destruction of Nagasaki. It was screened for the first time on 7 August 2015, by the Irish Film Institute, <https://ifi.ie/film/a-doctors-sword>. It can be viewed at <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4952148/>

A brief account of the life of Air Commodore Joseph Aidan MacCarthy, OBE, GM (1914–1995), who commanded several RAF hospitals after the war, is available on Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aidan_MacCarthy

Nathaniel Roocroft has written previously for Friends of Millbank. See his Personal Tribute to Dr William (Bill) Frankland RAMC at <https://www.friendsofmillbank.org/tributes/> and his review of '*A Doctor's War*' at <https://www.friendsofmillbank.org/books/>

