

Rules of Engagement – A Life in Conflict by Tim Collins.  
Headline Book Publishing 2005.

It has often been remarked that the purpose of military memoirs is to settle old scores and place the subject in the best possible historical light. If this is true, Colonel Tim Collins would have more reasons than most for indulging in the former even as he has no reason for being concerned about the latter.

Few outside the army had heard of Tim Collins until his inspirational speech to his troops before the invasion of Iraq was splashed across the newspapers, earning him the admiration of millions from the Prince of Wales downwards, and the jealousy of lesser men, notably in the military establishment.

Rules of Engagement is an account of Collins' military life which reflects wholly to his credit in a career that has taken him to many nations, involved him in some terrible conflicts and given him stints in various operational and planning roles, including the SAS.

Collins writes extremely well, with commendable modesty, and with a sense of humour that must have enraged some of his superiors as much as it endeared him to his soldiers. His stint in Iraq, together with the First Battalion of the Royal Irish Regiment, brought all of his qualities to the fore – courage, quick thinking, instinctive good reactions in the most difficult of circumstances, and above all a respect for the people he had come to liberate from oppression.

The ending of this period however was mired in a farrago of trumped up allegations that could have buried him were it not for the fact that those who knew his true worth, and believed in him (in the media and elsewhere and to their shame a very few in the Army top brass) even while the Ministry of Defence treated him in a most shameful manner. Once he was exonerated of all the charges against him Tim Collins felt that his future lay outside of the army that he had served with such distinction since the age of 1977.

No one reading this excellent autobiography could do other than admire and respect Tim Collins, applaud his career, and bemoan the pettiness of the military decision makers and bureaucrats whose pusillanimity and pettiness have deprived this country of one of its most outstanding military servants.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh