

Desperate Glory – AT WAR IN HELMAND WITH BRITAIN'S 16 AIR ASSAULT BRIGADE
by Sam Kiley.
Bloomsbury 2009.

Of his own volition, the eminent foreign correspondent and veteran war reporter Sam Kiley decided to join a 6 month tour of duty in Afghanistan with the men of 16 Air Assault Brigade.

Desperate Glory is his mesmerising account of that half year period and of the unutterably brave men and women he shared it with. It is a depiction of the struggle against the Taleban in Helmand that has already cost so many British lives and the purpose of which is still far from understood by many of their fellow citizens in the United Kingdom.

Kiley writes of the privations and heroism of war in Afghanistan, of the self-sacrifice of the men and women serving as warriors but still trying to improve the lot of the civilians in that benighted country, and of the brilliance and determination behind such plans as the transport of huge turbines to the Kajaki Dam. Kiley also portrays the intense camaraderie and mutual loyalty in the ranks as well as the frustrations of their officers in dealing with their US counterparts on the one hand and their political masters on the other.

Desperate Glory now joins the burgeoning stack of books written about the Western powers' engagement with Afghanistan since 9/11 but it takes a deserved place at the top of the pile together with David Loyn's Butcher and Bolt and James Ferguson's A Million Bullets as essential reading for anyone who wants to try and understand what our troops are doing in Helmand and the courage, professionalism and sacrifice they show there.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh