

Major Farran's Hat – Murder, Scandal and Britain's War against Jewish  
Terrorism 1945-1948 by David Cesarani.  
William Heinemann 2009.

Roy Farran was a much decorated special forces officer who was seconded to Palestine during the closing stages of the British Mandate to help the authorities in their increasingly dirty war against the Jewish terrorist groups The Irgun and the Stern Gang. Using tactics closer to the SAS than the police he and his squad kidnapped and then murdered a young Jew, Alexander Rubowitz, whom they found putting up posters for the Irgun. Although Rubowitz' body was never found his abduction and presumed murder became a cause celebre, doing enormous damage to the reputation of the British authorities around the world and ultimately resulting in Farran's court martial.

In this excellent work of popular history, David Cesarani tells the story of the Mandate and its tortuous relationship with the Jews of Palestine, the activities of the various Jewish terror groups and their willingness to transport their attacks to continental Europe and even the British mainland in pursuit of their cause, and especially of British counter-terrorism in Palestine and the longer term impact of patterns created in Palestine for British counter-terrorist activities in other parts of the disintegrating empire.

But at the heart of Major Farran's Hat stands Roy Farran himself, a boy's own hero figure, an active and successful womaniser, a brave soldier with a healthy disregard for authority and ultimately a cold-blooded killer who escaped the consequences of his crime.

David Cesarani elucidates a key and emblematic aspect of the British Mandate in Palestine as well as shedding shocking light on the reach of the Irgun and Stern Gang. This is a major addition to the corpus of material on the Mandate and has some very contemporary resonances for the ill fated 'War on Terror' announced by the hapless George W Bush in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on America.

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