

## *Winged Scalpel* *A Surgeon at the Frontline of Disaster*

Villar, Richard. *Winged Scalpel. A Surgeon at the Frontline of Disaster*. Barnsley, South Yorkshire, United Kingdom: Pen and Sword Book Limited; 2013. Hardcover, 224 pages. ISBN-10: 1781591687 ; ISBN-13: 978-1781591680.

Review by COL (Ret) Warner "Rocky" D. Farr, MD, MPH

In *Winged Scalpel*, Richard Villar, a respected English orthopedic surgeon, describes his second career. Earlier, he was the Special Air Service Regimental Surgeon and wrote a book detailing his SAS adventures, titled "*Knife Edge: Life as a Special Forces Surgeon*," which



I plan to obtain and review soon. This book, his second, considers his life after the SAS as he participates in worldwide natural disaster medicine events and one war. The book is a persuasive read, holds one's attention, and is difficult to put down.

Villar discusses in detail his insights into the problems of administering aid to disaster areas. He spans the process from dealing with difficult local situations on the ground to the emotional toll on people who carry out such work. It has a fast pace without being sensationalistic. The author provides his personal insights into the difficulties, dangers, and risks of providing medical aid to disaster areas and war zones. He shares his considerable experiences obtained in the wake of three natural disasters—major earthquakes: Kashmir (in 2005), Java (in 2006), and Haiti (in 2010). He also was involved in, and writes of, his involvement the Libyan civil war (in 2011).

He presents a very realistic guide to a fast-paced varied life that few understand. The author describes what happens on the ground before a full aid program swings into action. He describes all the necessary actions and plans developed by all those behind the scenes people who support the surgeons and other medical providers. He does an excellent job of being inclusive as he describes and praises the work of those who when arriving in a stricken area with a infrastructure destroyed, take nothing for granted and must deal with lacks of water, power, shelter, and the rule of law. He describes how they must fight shortages of everything while trying to provide care. Villar succeeds well in giving credit where credit is due. His inclusive teamwork study makes the book both instructional and informative.

As the author states, "You can take a man out of the SAS, but you cannot take the SAS out of the man." His SAS time clearly was useful for his follow-on career. I recommend this book as an excellent read for medical personnel, especially those with an interest in international aid work. This story of what goes on behind the scenes when disasters and other crises hit the world is fascinating. You will never take aid workers lightly again. The author draws a wonderful portrait of the organizational complexity, the human toll on all the participants, and the sheer bravery that are part of the race to rush to help humans in severe circumstances.