

## War Reminiscences by the Surgeon of Mosby's Command

Aristides Monteiro. *War Reminiscences by the Surgeon of Mosby's Command*. London, UK: Forgotten Books; 2015. 236 pp.

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Originally published in 1888, 23 years after the end of the American Civil War, Dr Aristides Monteiro's first-person autobiographic recall of his experiences as the surgeon of Mosby's Rangers (43rd Battalion, Virginia Cavalry) hold many truisms and parallels from which battalion surgeons in today's Special Operations Forces can learn. Monteiro writes of not only his "boots on the ground" and "seat in the saddle" experiences as a confederate surgeon in a partisan ranger unit engaged in irregular warfare in northern central Virginia during the Civil War but also relays experiences of Mosby's Rangers that demonstrate many examples of



U.S. Armed Forces Principles of War and Admiral McRaven's Principles of Special Operations that are as relevant today as they were during the Civil War. Throughout the book, the one overarching theme that Monteiro relays is his beliefs that Mosby's Rangers were a devoted and disciplined unit, Yankees are a cruel and inferior military force, and treatment of Confederate prisoners during the war was unnecessarily harsh and murderous.

Other than the subject matter itself (a battalion surgeon of an irregular warfare unit), one of the first aspects of Monteiro's book that caught my attention was the manner in which Monteiro was recruited to Mosby's Rangers. The autobiography begins when Monteiro is assigned to Wise's Brigade (a Confederate regular army infantry brigade) during the First Battle of Petersburg and Monteiro is escorting an ambulance train (horse and wagon) of wounded soldiers from the battlefield to Richmond, VA. Monteiro has a chance meeting with a former college friend, Colonel Mosby, the commander of a Confederate partisan unit. Mosby recruits Monteiro for the Rangers, but Monteiro's infantry commander, Major General Wise, does not want to let Monteiro leave his Brigade and only eventually does so due to Mosby's persistence and presentation of a letter from the chief of staff of the Confederate Army ordering the transfer. The parallels and difficulties that Monteiro had in changing from a conventional force to a Special Operations Force reminded me of stories some modern-day medical officers have in changing from conventional to Special Operations assignments. Sometimes it is only through the interventions of friendships formed early in one's career that the opportunities for a Special Operations assignment can occur.

Monteiro recounts many examples of how through Mosby's leadership, a numerically inferior irregular guerilla force trained and equipped and applying proper applications of mass, economy of force and maneuver can, at a minimum, cause a conventional force to commit a proportionally larger combat power to contain a guerilla force. Strategically, the union had to commit thousands of additional forces to defend Washington, DC, from hundreds of Mosby's men. A traditional advantage of guerilla forces is that they can cause

the opponent to have to commit a large number of forces to keep the guerilla forces in-check, thus eroding a conventional force's combat power from the frontlines. On the tactical level, each one of Mosby's men was a practiced expert horseman and leveraged the superior firepower technology of two six-shot, single action .44 caliber Army Colt revolvers while at a gallop during near ambushes or a surprise hasty attack on Union wagon trains, often taking advantage of "inclement weather." Mosby leveraged tactics and tradecraft such as camouflage to attack numerically superior numbers of Union soldiers. Monteiro tells how honored he felt when a rural farmer gave Monteiro a prized black horse as a gift. Monteiro explains, "The safety and efficiency of the ranger depended much upon the fleetness of his horse."

As a partisan force, Mosby's Rangers worked primarily in an area of northern Virginia known as Mosby's Confederacy (centered near current Loudoun County, VA). The Rangers slept, worked, and lived in local sympathizer safe houses in squads of four to six men, coming together for raids and ambushes when signaled by Mosby. Security at the safe houses was no different then, as it is now. There has to be an early warning plan of approaching Union forces and places to hide and planned alternate escape routes. Monteiro recounts a couple of safe house incidents where escape and evasion planning, intelligence about the enemy gained from local population, and sympathetic Virginians helped Mosby's Rangers to plan best escape routes and how leveraging good will and basic medical care to the local population aided him and other Mosby Rangers to narrowly escape capture or death.

Monteiro describes two trauma cases he managed. The first was the recovery care of Colonel Mosby after he was shot in the abdomen. Interestingly, Monteiro had just been assigned to the Rangers when Colonel Mosby was shot. It was during care of Colonel Mosby that Monteiro learned the history and culture of the Rangers. Later, in another trauma incident, Monteiro helps the reader appreciate the psychological aspects of wound care and healing by describing a wounded Ranger's "soul" as Lieutenant Grogan recovers from an "unpromising" gunshot wound and compound comminuted fracture. Initially, Lieutenant Grogan was captured and treated by Union forces, where Lieutenant Grogan's medical condition declined. Later, Lieutenant Grogan came under the care of Monteiro and a confederate female nurse. Monteiro attributes Lieutenant Grogan's recovery to the strength of Lieutenant Grogan's "soul," being repatriated back to the Rangers under Monteiro's care, and especially the care and compassion given by the nurse. I thought Monteiro did an excellent job acknowledging the attributes of expert nursing care for recovery of the wounded.

Interlaced in the book are paragraphs where Monteiro describes the leadership style of Colonel Mosby. One highlight is discipline in Mosby's Rangers. The only punishment for disobedience in Mosby's command was "expulsion from his

command.” Maybe more legend and lore than fact, but similar parallels are seen in today’s high-performing and disciplined Special Operations units . . . ultimate punishment for violation of discipline is return to conventional units.

A turning point in the book, and indeed the war, as described by Monteiro was when Mosby’s Rangers, who were deep behind Union lines in northern Virginia, received reports that Union forces captured the Confederate capital, Richmond, VA, and that General Lee had surrendered to General Grant at Appomattox, VA. Initially, the Mosby’s Rangers did not believe such reports. Monteiro describes use of psychological and information operations in the Civil War, common Special Operations tactics that are still used by modern Special Operations Forces.

Union forces would use psychological and information operations to lie to, deceive, and persuade Confederate forces that the Confederacy was a lost cause. Union newspaper articles sometimes printed false artist sketches and portrayed Confederate soldiers as barbaric soldiers who mutilated dead Union corpses, including an initial charge that Colonel Mosby assassinated President Lincoln.

Monteiro was part of a delegation from Mosby’s Rangers that attempted to negotiate a surrender to Union forces. He carried a handkerchief tied to a stick as a symbol of truce through Union picket lines. Terms of a surrender could not be reached. Union commanders did not extend the terms of surrender negotiated for Lee’s Army of northern Virginia to Mosby’s guerilla force of partisan Rangers. During the surrender negotiation attempts, Monteiro is introduced to a Union surgeon. Monteiro mistakenly assumes the Union surgeon would be interested in helping relieve the suffering of the sick and wounded; however, the Union surgeon is only interested in finding his horses that were captured in a raid by Colonel Mosby. Surrender terms could not be reached. Mosby decides that instead of surrendering his men to an unknown fate, he disbands, rather

than surrender his Rangers to the Union before the end of the truce.

In the final chapter, almost an afterword for war veterans, Monteiro uses his space and words to highlight the cruelty and unjust treatment of veteran Confederate soldiers captured during the war, especially Mosby’s Rangers. Monteiro appears to write to future readers, 130 years later, emphasizing that the “clear and unbiased lens of history” will make clear the northern cruelty toward southern prisoners. Monteiro narrates accounts of captured Rangers being marched and humiliated by local citizens through the streets of Boston, of being shot for the slightest infraction of prison rules, and systematic starvation. In full disclosure, Monteiro does state that the South was not merciful to Union prisoners either. However, in total the South paid a higher public health price than the North. In the South, Union commanders would slash and burn any ability for citizens of the South to raise and grow crops, and the Confederacy placed a large tax on its citizens to supply the war effort. In the end, the defeated South could not release Union prisoners quick enough, let alone keep them to feed them. In the North, southern prisoners continued to languish as arrangements for parole, pardon, and transportation back home took many months.

*War Reminiscences by the Surgeon of Mosby’s Command*, by Aristides Monteiro, originally written in 1888 and republished 127 years later in London, England, by Forgotten Books, 2015, is the first-person account of the Mosby’s Rangers command surgeon. There are many parallels between Monteiro experiences as a partisan guerilla force surgeon and the medics, medical leaders, and surgeons in today’s Special Operations Forces. Colonel Mosby, a highly talented leader of a Confederate partisan guerilla force in northern Virginia, incorporated all six elements of Admiral McRaven’s elements of Special Operations: purpose, simplicity, speed, security, repetition, and surprise, causing the Union to divert thousands of troops from the front battle-lines to pursue Mosby’s Rangers.



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