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## **BOOK REVIEW**

# ***Red One: a bomb disposal expert on the front line***

by Captain Kevin Ivison, GM

Orion Publishing Group Ltd: London, UK; 2010; 242 pp.; ISBN 978 0 29786 339 7;  
RRP \$32.95 (paperback); Ursula Davidson Library call number 537 IVIS 2010

*Red One* is the gripping autobiography of a young British bomb disposal officer, focusing primarily on his terrifying experiences in Iraq in 2005-06 facing daily rocket attacks and terrorist bombs. When two of his colleagues were killed by a roadside bomb in Al Amarah, Iraq, Captain Kevin Ivison, Ammunition Technical Officer (ATO) commanding the Bomb Disposal Team allotted to the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards Battle Group, was called in to defuse a second, even deadlier bomb just metres from the bodies of his colleagues. Under fire from snipers, and with much of his technical equipment malfunctioning, Ivison left final messages for his loved ones and set off alone towards the improvised bomb that he was sure would be the last thing that he would ever see.

In *Red One*, Kevin Ivison tells the story of his childhood, his training at Sandhurst and explosive demolition courses, his loves, his life as an ATO, his operational deployments to Afghanistan, Germany, Northern Ireland and finally to Iraq where he won the George Medal for bravery. The award was the start of recovery from the effects of post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Kevin Ivison was born in May 1981, the son of a regular infantryman who retired as a Warrant Officer Class Two after 25 years service. At the age of three, Kevin accompanied his family when his father was posted to the Cold War in Germany for 5 years. It was no surprise that Kevin developed a love for the army after a happy childhood clambering over armoured vehicles, firing rifles and running over assault courses. At the age of 15, just 2 years after his father retired, Kevin informed his mother that he was joining the army. His mother's tearful response was: "Me and your dad will support you whatever you decide to do, but for God's sake at least join as an officer".

The route to Sandhurst started with a 2-year spell at an army-funded boarding school for potential career officers. Before attending Sandhurst, he arranged a 3-month attachment to 1st Battalion, The Queen's Lancashire Regiment, in Omagh, Northern Ireland. Here, Ivison became taken in with the responsibility, complexity and challenge of counter-terrorist bomb disposal. This was everything that he had ever wanted and led to a decision to move heaven and earth to become an ATO.

After graduation, Ivison was posted as a troop commander with a movement control unit. Following the events of 11 September 2001, he lobbied hard and wide to be the leader of the movements team deployed with British forces to Afghanistan. On return to England, he was selected to attend the ATO course starting in November 2002 at the Royal Military College of Science at Shrivenham. Despite finishing second, Ivison did not get one of the top jobs as he was considered to be too young. Instead, a posting to Germany was followed by selection on the High Threat Improvised Explosive Device Disposal course. On completion of this course, Ivison was posted to Londonderry, Northern Ireland, for 6 months. This tour was cut short in November 2005 when he was offered the posting to Iraq.

The story relates the boredom and the terror of bomb disposal up to the point when, 3 weeks before he is due to return to England, the incident occurs on 28 February 2006 that is the basis for the title. In minute detail, Ivison relates the torture of the problems faced in disabling a secondary device when confronted with the failure of critical support elements.

The aftermath is post-traumatic shock. Ivison goes on to discuss its effects on his life and the failure of the medical and psychological professionals to help. On 6 September 2006, he is told by the commander-in-chief of Land Forces that he had been awarded the George Medal, one level below the Victoria Cross. This was the turning point that led to his gradual rehabilitation. Captain Kevin Ivison, GM, left the army in April 2009 and began life as a civil servant.

This autobiography is a well written, emotional story that moves with painful reality. It is hard to put down. I recommend it to those who are interested in the psychology of military life, the experiences of a bomb disposal expert in contemporary conflict, the pressures of leadership in command and the emotion of coping with post-traumatic stress syndrome. Overall, this a compelling story that tears at the heart.

**Eric Ralphs**

