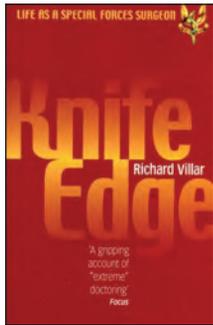


Knife Edge *Life as a Special Forces Surgeon*

Villar, Richard. *Knife Edge. Life as a Special Forces Surgeon*. Windmill Hill, United Kingdom: Vineyard Press; 1997. Paperback, 310 pages, ISBN 0-9542203-0-7.

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

Richard Villar, a frequent guest of the BBC's "Hospital Watch" television series, is a world-famous orthopedic surgeon. He is also a fearless Special Operator. For much of his career, Richard Villar worked with the British Special Air Service, mostly in the developing Third World, and frequently in combat zones, which included Lebanon, Bosnia, the Middle East, Northern Ireland, and Central America. *Knife Edge* is his true and occasionally extraordinary story.



To join the regiment, Dr (actually "Mr" in UK medical terminology)

Villar, an orthopedic surgeon by training, still had to survive and pass the British Special Air Service selection course, which has the reputation of being the toughest Special Operations qualification course anywhere. Much from it has morphed into the US Special Forces qualification course ("The Q course"), which was in the past until the mid-1990s and now, today, is open for attendance by selected US Army medical officers. Villar's qualification and assignment to the SAS Regiment then became his entrée into the world's many trouble

spots, and he cared for his regimental mates, other soldiers, and innocent civilians wherever he deployed. He relates stories of gunfire outside his "consulting room," the dangers of landmines, of how to deal with life-threatening bleeding in the desert, and his fear while on a suicidal operation during the Falklands War. Richard Villar's experiences as a physician are unique; the story he recounts, truly remarkable.

It appears for operational security that he has watered down or, as he says, "fictionalized," some of the particulars of some missions and medical cases, but even with that caveat, they still appear and read as dangerous and real. He seems to have a knack for hitting all the bad spots, Bosnia, Falklands, Iran, India, Sri Lanka, and Lebanon. Some were missions and some were humanitarian missions in a civilian status. He has subsequently written a book of his post military disaster medicine career after leaving the Special Air Service, which I previously reviewed [Villar R. *Winged Scalpel. A Surgeon at the Frontline of Disaster*. South Yorkshire, United Kingdom: Pen and Sword Books; 2012]. Both books are good reads. This current book, *Knife Edge*, will appeal to SOF medical officers and the other, *Winged Scalpel*, to the wider civil affairs and disaster medicine audiences.