

Rainforest Tears

Paul Leslie Smith

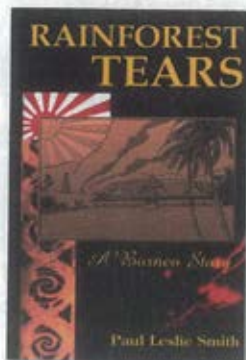
★★★★★

Marshall Cavendish RM85 (hardback)

'Rainforest Tears' is a deceptively gripping tale that rattles along, illustrating how World War II tore Sarawak and its inhabitants apart. Few of us can truly appreciate just how horrifying the Japanese occupation must have been and I can't remember a fiction title so fully capturing, and imparting upon me, the mood and events of the time.

Much of the background story is based on facts and true stories, which is enough to keep the reader on edge as he or she reads of ever more harrowing bombings and executions. This is set into context by intriguing (and disturbing in a quite different way) passages from the corridors of power in Britain and Japan, not to mention the love story, which is perhaps the least convincing part but nonetheless well-used to illustrate the despair and abandonment felt by the lead character, Geoffrey Portas.

Portas, conscripted to the Special Operations Executive, faces the might of an enemy the likes of which none of his countrymen have ever witnessed before. However, it is the changing face of the Malaysian community around him that truly resonates. Seeing themselves no longer as an important part of a noble commonwealth and instead a



downtrodden people of an outdated colony, Malaysia is turning a dark period in its history into the springboard for independence. But before that, they need Portas to fight to save them and the country he has grown to love.

The plot is reasonably strong and certainly does enough for you to care about each character, especially Portas – who has more than a little in common with the author, as both are English expatriates who work in Miri and fall in love with life in East Malaysia. However, the real strength of this book is in the detail and accuracy of the occupation. It took years of research and discussions with locals who witnessed these events first hand to be able to do this tale justice. I have to say, it was worth it. *Bill Pelham*