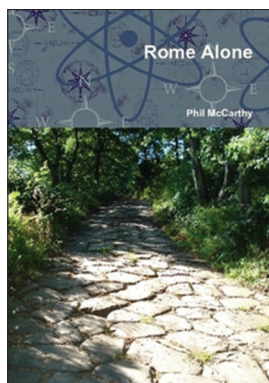


# Out of Hours Books

## ROME ALONE PHIL MCCARTHY

Lulu 2013  
PB, 238pp, £7.50, 9781291337709



In March 2008 Bristol GP, Dr Phil McCarthy, started to walk from Canterbury to Rome along the ancient pilgrims' route the Via Francigena. Phil has been a Bristol GP since 1988. He has had a lifelong interest in politics, was Director of Avon LMC, and is also a GP trainer. This was to be a sabbatical to recharge the batteries. The walk would take 3 months and was in fact, a modern-day pilgrimage.

The structure for the book was built around Phil's weekly diary and each chapter deals with a segment of the journey. Within this pilgrimage are a number of parallel and simultaneous journeys through Phil's spiritual and professional life. Life on the road afforded him time and space to reflect. His comparison between the daily timetable of a monk and a prisoner compared to that of a busy modern professional is fascinating. There is a persuasive argument that the first two are infinitely healthier with emphasis during the day for some exercise, community life, and meals. The life of a modern worker, however, is dominated by eating food on the go and reading e-mails with little time for education, reflection, and silence. What is *your* working day like?

I found the book to be both informative (I knew little about the Catholic Church), but also humorous, (check the joke about Jesus returning as a GP for the day).

The book is simply illustrated with handwritten maps and each chapter is well referenced. I really enjoyed reading this book and would highly recommend it.

We GPs are currently on a journey and the destination is not clear. We all need to keep some perspective in our lives in order to stay on track. Phil succeeded in achieving this with his pilgrimage and has also written a fine book about his experiences.

The proceeds from the sales of this book support Mary's Meals ([www.marysmeals.org](http://www.marysmeals.org)), a very deserving charity.

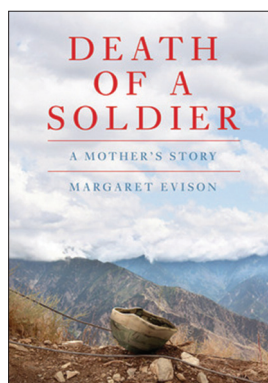
**Mike Cohen,**  
GP and GP endoscopist, Westbury on Trym, Bristol.  
**E-mail: [drmikcohen1@googlemail.com](mailto:drmikcohen1@googlemail.com)**

DOI: 10.3399/bjgp13X671740

\*\*\*\*\*

## DEATH OF A SOLDIER: A MOTHER'S STORY MARGARET EVISON

Biteback Publishing 2012  
HB, 300pp, £16.99, 9781849544498



On 9 May 2009, a small platoon of the 1st Battalion, Welsh Guards, on patrol in the poppy fields of Helmand province, Afghanistan, was ambushed by Taliban fighters. The platoon commander, Lt Mark Evison, had just written in his journal 'There is a definite lack of steer from above as to how to play this one. I am yet to be given a definite mission and clarity as to my role out here'. In the firefight that followed, hampered by inefficient radio communications, Lt Evison broke cover to determine the safest tactics for his men. He was shot in the right shoulder, and died 3 days later in a military hospital in Birmingham, UK.

His mother, Margaret Evison, a clinical psychologist in London, wrote this book to document not only her own experience

of the loss of a son and its personal and public aftermath, but also to lay open the extraordinary obfuscation, delay, and denial that she encountered in many quarters. She, like any bereaved parent, wanted to know exactly what had happened to her boy, but found it extremely difficult to do so. What emerges is a truly gripping, and exceptionally well-written, story of incredible bravery, tragedy, bungling, dishonesty, and magnanimity. The Ministry of Defence and the British Army do not come out of it well, and the Coronial process clearly left a great deal to be desired. The Prince of Wales and the Prime Minister at the time, Gordon Brown, behaved with great kindness and consideration.

This is not a book about the rights and wrongs of the conflict in Afghanistan, although it does try to dispel some of the fog of that war. It is about the age-old relationship between politics and war, between politicians and soldiers, and the gaps between political rhetoric and the realities of conflict. In the case of Afghanistan this has often been expressed in the failure to adequately equip ground troops and to provide sufficient technological, medical air, and artillery support when dangerous situations demand.

Less than a month before he died Lt Mark Evison wrote:

*'It is disgraceful to send a platoon into a very dangerous area with 2 weeks water and food and one team medics pack. Injuries will be sustained which I will not be able to treat and deaths could occur which could have been stopped. We're walking on a tightrope and from what it seems here are likely to fall unless drastic measures are undertaken.'*

This important book is both a reminder of the lessons that need to be learned from tragedies like this, and also a fine and brave memorial by a mother to her remarkable son.

**Roger Jones,**  
BJGP Editor, London.  
**E-mail: [rjones@rcgp.org.uk](mailto:rjones@rcgp.org.uk)**

DOI: 10.3399/bjgp13X671759