

World War II veteran launches autobiography

By Justice Agbenorsi

A BOOK containing the personal accounts of 99-year-old World War II veteran, Joseph Ashitey Hammond, has been launched in Accra.

The 220-page autobiography was authored by the man who, at the age of 16, joined the Gold Coast Regiment, a unit of the Royal West African Frontier Force, and was involved in heavy fighting during the Western Burman War, also known as the Western campaign, featuring series of battles.

The author, now the only surviving member of the February 28 crossroad shooting, winds back the clock in his book and uncovers an ancient window of skilfully woven narratives dating back to the then Gold Coast in 1930, long before the nation Ghana was born.

Experiences

The book, which has five chapters, does not only delve into the personal life of the hero, but goes on to provide a rare picturesque of the harrowing experiences of soldiers on the battlefield, historical testimonies of the untold sacrifices of African troops in the World War, and the harsh realities of conflict.

It further goes on to give readers clarified narratives of historic events that are barely or only available on the shelves of heritage sites and memory institutions.

Recounting his own experiences in his own voice and perspective, Warrant Officer Hammond, also touched on the roles he played in historic events such as the crossroad shooting of 1948, the country's journey to independence, the formation of parties in the Gold Coast, the first election of Gold Coast.

His life as a civilian impacted the construction sector through the construction of iconic landmarks such as the EL-Wak Sports Stadium, the Kotoka International Airport, the Independence Square, as well as his philanthropic endeavour, which saw him embarking on a 14-mile walk to raise funds for

essential COVID-19 workers and provide relief for vulnerable veterans in commonwealth countries, were heavily featured in the autobiography.

The event was held at the Kofi Annan International Training Centre at Teshie, last Saturday, with the Deputy Chief in Charge of Administration at the Ghana Armed Forces, Air Vice Marshal Felix Asante, who represented the Chief of Defence Staff, launching the book.

It was attended by a number of dignitaries, including the Teshie Mankralo, Nii Okang Duamro III and former Attorney-General and Minister of Justice, Nii Ayikoi Otoo, among others.

Also at the event, a documentary, featuring the works of the author was shown, and the Ghana Armed Forces honoured the World War II veteran with a citation in recognition of his exceptional service.

The first two copies of the book were sold for GH¢ 10,000 each.

Mr Otoo described the book as a personal

journey of courage, sacrifice and resilience.

"This memoir is a reminder that history is not a distant concept but lived experiences, each memory etched with triumph and tragedy.

"As we turn the pages of this book, we honour not only the author but also the countless men and women who served with distinction so that future generations will inherit a world of peace," he said.

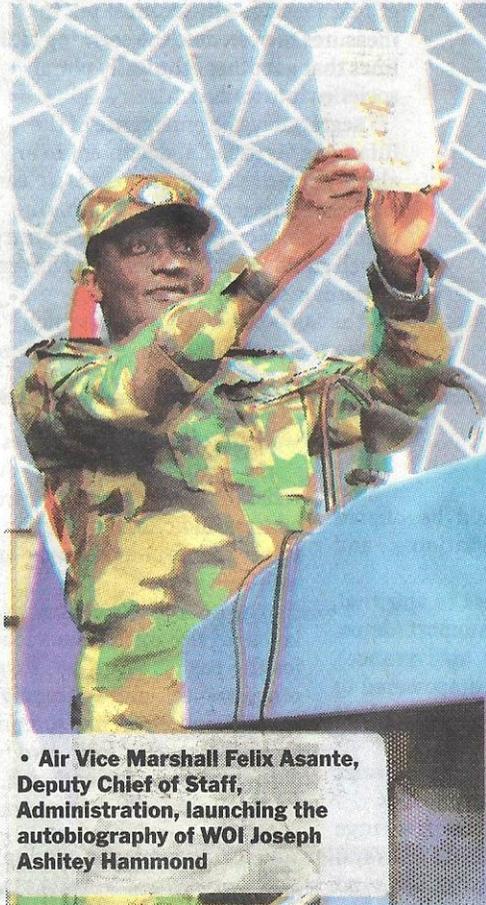
He said the book was a worthy compliment for those yearning to know what happened on the battlefield in order to appreciate the sacrifices of soldiers.

Impact

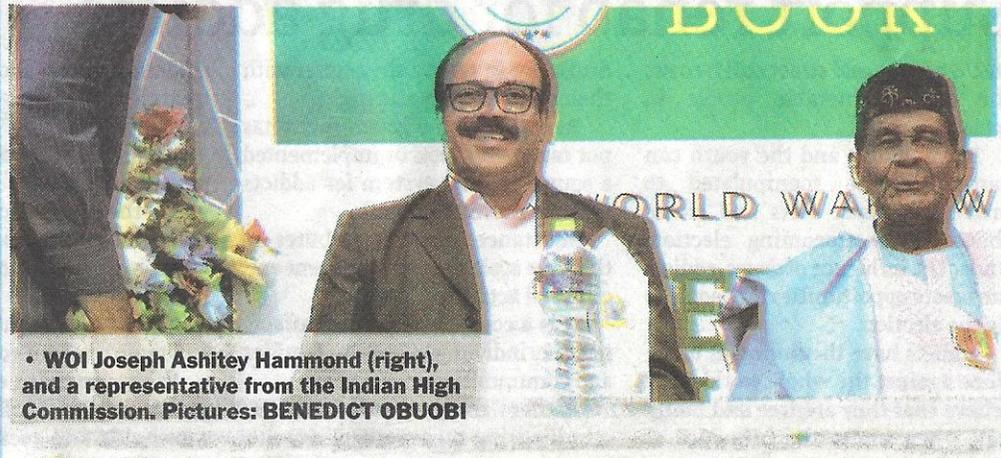
The Chairperson for the launch, Nii Duamro III, lauded the author for the lasting impact he had made on Ghana and Commonwealth countries.

He called on the youth to also show courage for positive impact, advising them to avoid conflict and rather remain united and contribute to the development of the country.

"Let's focus on our families and loved ones. Your lives matter," he said.



• Air Vice Marshall Felix Asante, Deputy Chief of Staff, Administration, launching the autobiography of WOI Joseph Ashitey Hammond



• WOI Joseph Ashitey Hammond (right), and a representative from the Indian High Commission. Pictures: BENEDICT OBUOBI