

# **Pad's Army**

by

Paul Addy

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**Although the chapters in this ‘memory’ are in  
chronological order, the content of each chapter is  
not necessarily so.**

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Dedication

To those who suffered me  
and to those who cared or simply understood.

I'm not sure why but I feel the need to explain the title of the book simply because there's a clever little pun there that will be totally missed by a vast amount of readers in North America. Probably vast is the wrong word, humongous may be more accurate.

The favourite viewing for millions of Brits from 1968 to 1977 was a comedy show about the endeavours of a group of men who formed just a small part of a big WW2 British organisation which was made up of those too young or too old to fight in the regular armed forces together with an element who worked in important industries known as reserved occupations. It was called the Home Guard but it was also mockingly known, by the young and fit of the regular forces, as 'Dad's Army'.

Week by week, we followed the well meaning antics of the Warmington-on-Sea platoon as they tripped and staggered from one near disaster to another. There was a pompous man, the local Bank Manager, who'd decided he should be the Captain in charge but who, every once in a while, displayed courage that made your eyes go all misty. His social and 'class' superior was the under manager at the bank, a well

educated man somewhat lacking ambition and the drive to achieve more who preferred to hand his ration cards and his washing to a woman whose teenage son grew up to call him 'Uncle Arthur'. This young lad was known to us all as 'Private Pike' a generally gormless soul whose neck was permanently attached to a woolly scarf his mother had knitted and insisted he wear, even in full battledress. He had a predilection for American gangster films and was known to the Captain in charge as 'You stupid boy!'

The rest of the main characters were made up of - a local 'spiv', supposedly refused regular service because he had flat feet but if you wanted anything else, from gasoline to silk stockings, he was the 'go to guy' - the funeral director, an over the hill, dour and doom laden Scotsman - the town butcher, an old, old soldier who'd fought in more colonial wars than anyone thought humanly possible and whose battleplan was to ram his bayonet up somewhere dark because '*they* don't like it up 'em, Sir, *they* don't like it up 'em.' - and a very nice but decrepit old bloke who carried the platoon medical bag (consisting of some ointment, a couple of bandages and some plasters,

which you probably know better as ‘band-aids’). Notwithstanding the platoon’s original thoughts on discovering that this man had been a conscientious objector in WW1 the later news that he had won a bravery medal as a stretcher bearer during the conflict earned him their complete respect *and* the coveted First Aid satchel.

But it was the sometimes ridiculous things the Army made its soldiers do or perhaps the stupid things we simply decided to do which, in a way, always reminded me of these well meaning and courageous men who were, despite their ineptitude, willing to confront an invading enemy whilst armed only with a handful of bullets and a ‘sticky’ bomb made from a pair of their old socks. Heck, in the early days, they’d been prepared to do it with a broom handle, carving knife tied to one end and brush still attached to the other. I often felt a kinship.

But there’s another part of my ‘brilliant pun’ which is revealed at the end of the book so I don’t want to spoil the surprise and the moment when you nod to yourself, sagely, feeling the power of this newly acquired special knowledge.

So, these are the reasons why I've clung to the book title.

On the other hand, I could have just changed it to something catchy like, 'My time in the British Army' or 'Please tuck me in, Sergeant Major'. It would have been much simpler than writing this explanation but I fear it could have resulted in the loss of a little intrigue.

## GENESIS

I had a happy childhood. Free, within reason, to gleefully roam all over the place and discover all manner of things: slow worms, lizards, amazing butterflies, smoke canisters, spent ammunition, used parachute flares, training grenades; the every day stuff that young boys would find irresistible. In many ways it had been quite idyllic despite the fact that we lived in a tin hut. But it *was* a big tin hut, previously housing two families in small surroundings, now housing one in somewhat larger style. There was no heating other than the electric fires or paraffin heaters my parents bought and I doubt the space between the tin cladding and the inner board lined wall contained much more than air. If it did it was probably asbestos because in those days 'health and safety' was for scaredy cats. The floors were covered in ancient lino which was split and curled in many places making it adventurous to walk around in bare feet and early morning winter days were spent trying to scrape the thick ice from the inside of the windows just so you could see what the weather outside was like. We had two front doors, two back

ones and two corrugated tin enclosed back yards, one of which doubled as my fort. My big brother and I shared a bed at the far end of the house and slept with our dressing gowns on, sharing the rubber water bottle. The whole ensemble was complimented by our duffle coats and a thick, itchy blanket. Around mid Spring we ditched the itchy blanket.

My father, a soldier, had fought in the Malayan Emergency and the Korean War, which he hotly denied starting. He later took part in the British response to the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya before settling for the more sedate life of being one of the British Army's elite school of weapons experts, the Small Arms School Corps (SASC). These were the people who, as the Military websites stated, 'were responsible for maintaining the proficiency of the Army in the use of small arms, support weapons and range management'. They also taught the Army's weapons instructors how to be weapons instructors.

I'm proud of the fact my dad had been one of the top 100 shots in the British Army seven times in his 12 year career with the SASC and had, one year, been the Army's best shot with the Sterling sub-machine gun



(SMG). My own, meagre, ability with weapons couldn't be compared with his but there was enough in the genes to give me a bit of a career as a police firearms officer and I might have had a somewhat more successful career as a 'shootist' in the Territorial Army (TA) had I remembered what he told me, earlier in the car park at the Army's Northwest District Skill At Arms meeting, one day at Altcar Rifle Range.

I hadn't asked for the advice. He simply came up to me, held a licked forefinger in the air and declared, "At six hundred metres put the left hand edge of your foresight on the right hand edge of the target," and then walked off. Sound advice, as it turned out, but unfortunately I didn't call it into play until I only had four rounds left. But what rounds they were! I then compounded my error by failing to clear the weapon properly and letting one loose down the range.

I'd have got away with it, had it happened just before the whistle went, the one that signified the allotted time for firing had ceased, but I couldn't even get that right.

The Officer from the SASC (my dad's old unit) stood before me and said, "Negligent discharge. What's your name?"

Standing at attention, I answered, "You know my name, Uncle John."

He smiled. "I know I know your name Paul but we have to go through the formalities."

And so I was led back to the Ranges' main office by 'Uncle' John, one of my dad's best friends. Unfortunately, he was unable to resist the urge to tell anyone we met on the way who knew Dad the mortifying truth that Frank Addy's youngest son was a complete idiot. I was marched in and presented to the Range Superintendent who sat alone in his office. Dad looked up from his desk, smiled and said, "Hello, John. What's he bloody done, now?" Oh how we laughed!

Although I can recall one or two snippets of life from when my father had been stationed in Germany; a trip on the NAAFI bus with my mother and playing on the pavement outside our house on a very hot day, it was from Hythe in Kent, where the SASC were based, on England's southern coast overlooking France some 26 miles away (and viewable on a fine day) that I had

most memories of my childhood and for many years it was where I told people I ‘came from’.

It was an ideal place to grow up. The summers were always hot and glorious and full of adventure. With a gang of like minded kids from the married quarters area, which was close to the firing ranges bordering a long strip of the coast, I would rise early and descend upon the range hut at the entrance to the training area to check the notices which were pinned there indicating the dates and times live firing would take place. On the approach, we would check if the red flag was flying for this we knew indicated the ranges were in use and that “No Unauthorised Persons” were to proceed further. We knew we weren’t ‘authorised’ because essentially the sign said for us “No non dads beyond this point”.

If the flag was flying we would revert to plan B which was either play football or cricket on the army football pitch nearby or run madly up and down the small assault course that was even closer.

The extra special attraction at the assault course was Mr Broadbent who worked in the nearby elongated wooden hut which contained not only the apparatus to hold the straw filled sacks used for the soldiers to

practice their bayoneting skills but also the sacks themselves. Not only that but it also held targets, paste containers and the multi coloured patches used to cover the resulting holes in the targets following each shooting practice. The place smelled wondrously of creosote and glue and sometimes there were un-pasted targets which Mr Broadbent would allow the gang to paste up with the patches. A visit to Mr Broadbent's was always followed by a nice cup of tea, specially brewed by himself, and a slice of his wife's very tasty fruit cake. Mrs Broadbent was apparently very keen that Mr Broadbent didn't get hungry mid morning and was under the impression that he was a bigger man than he actually was so there was always more than enough fruit cake to go round. After second helpings Mr Broadbent would unceremoniously announce "Right you've had your lot and I've got work to do so bugger off". He was, despite his brusqueness, a nice man and the kids all loved him.

If the flag wasn't flying, and our check of the notices revealed the availability of the ranges for our sole use, me and the gang, which had no discernible leader, would back track down the approach road and

disappear into the adjacent wood from where we could infiltrate the training area without being seen. The Range Warden who lived in the little wooden house next to the official entrance didn't seem to fully understand the unwritten 'rules' and would, if he saw us entering by the front gate, deny access.

The journey through the woods would almost invariably consist of a jungle patrol, each member on special alert for Japanese snipers. It was well known, through our in depth knowledge of Hollywood and British war films, that Japanese snipers were particularly adept at hiding absolutely anywhere.

Upon safely negotiating this first hazard we would scamper across the open ground in an arrowhead or an extended line formation, as we'd seen our fathers do, before reaching the safety of the gorse bushes from where we knew we could move freely without being detected.

The best time for a range excursion was always following an Army night firing exercise, for that brought a wealth of treasures. Not only would we collect the empty cartridge cases that had been missed during the soldiers end of night clean up and the clips

that connected them into belts of ammunition for the machine guns but also the occasional torch or packets marked Biscuits (Fruit) together with tubes of greengage jam discarded from an army ration pack by some overfull squaddie together with small half drunk bottles of lemonade.

For such finds as a torch, 'finders keepers' ruled but food and drink was always shared out with military precision, as if a besieged garrison, whilst we sat patiently reconnecting the empty cases and belt clips. When complete the resulting bandoliers made us look like Pancho Villa, the Mexican folk hero. I felt sure he would have been proud.

Then there were the parachutes from the parachute flares used to light up the 'battlefield' for the previous night's firers. Finding one of these was like winning the FA Cup. It would be held aloft as the finder danced around taunting the others, for we all knew its worth as barter. One parachute was worth at least three ammo belts, easy! It was not unusual to see the lucky finder staggering home, almost drunkenly, under the weight of bartered bandoliers.

The most dangerous items found were part of the army's pot flares. We knew a spent pot flare when we saw one (and in fact never found one that wasn't, such was the thoroughness of the Army clean up in relation to these items). We would deftly remove them from the metal stakes they sat on for it was the stake that was the prize and usually two prizes because normal practice was that there would be another one a short distance away and it was this stake onto which the almost invisible wire from the pot flare would be attached. Anyone walking between the two stakes would in all probability trip over the wire which would cause the flare to activate and light up the surrounding area. Theory and practice was that defenders would place the flares out, noting the locations, and train their weapons, normally a machine gun, on them and when tripped unleash hell in that direction. When used on night firing it was normal for the flares to be placed so that they would be tripped by the tactically approaching troops in order that they could practise their drills in reaction to an ambush.

The stakes themselves consisted of a main length of thin solid metal sharply pointed at one end. This was

the part that was to be driven into the ground. Welded to it were two L shaped pieces of similar metal, one facing upwards and the lower one facing downwards. The lower L helped to stabilise the stake when it was driven into the ground. The upper held the pot flare.

The overall shape of the stake made it ideal for use as a form of ‘Tommy’ gun as far as us kids were concerned and we would charge through the undergrowth shouting “Brrrrrrrrr, Brrrrrrrrr” in emulation of the sound a machine gun makes totally oblivious to the danger that the sharply pointed ‘weapon’ undoubtedly possessed. It was, I’ve often thought, a miracle that no one had ever been speared during the close quarter combat that followed such death defying frontal assaults.

Often, we would sit and watch the soldiers being given instruction on the field that doubled as a football and hockey pitch and which lay between the married quarters and the entrance to the ranges. Sometimes they would just be throwing the white practice grenades from the pits that were dotted around the periphery of the field whilst on other, more exciting, occasions they would be receiving instruction in the safe handling and



use of the simulated grenades known as 'Thunderflashes'. These were ostensibly tubes of hardened cardboard containing gunpowder and an integral fuse that looked like the chocolate brown head of a match and they were ignited in much the same way except the striker, a solid piece of material that looked like the brown stuff on the side of a box of matches, would be drawn across the fuse. The thunderflash would then start to hiss and would be thrown varying distances depending upon the ability of the thrower. Shortly after there would be a very satisfying 'BANG' and an even more satisfying cloud of smoke.

We were rarely chased away from these demonstrations simply because the Instructor would almost invariably be one of our fathers who would solemnly tell us to sit at the back and far enough away from the soldiers so as not to be a distraction to them. This was serious stuff.

One of the favourite lessons was 'Camouflage and Concealment'. On these occasions the gang would double back to the range road and into the rear of the bushes from where we could infiltrate the hiding soldiers' positions. It was now that the game began. In

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