

Peter Horsfall

A Life Less Ordinary

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Richard Nettleton has kindly sent the GDCoDA the following information about Major Horsfall:



“During my time with the Corps I got to know him quite well, he was a friendly person and supported our Corps at every possible opportunity he could, although in the early days with our bad playing and screechy bum notes I often wondered why. I don’t know if you’re aware, but in 1982 Peter wrote a book called; “Hard to believe, Too old at Sixteen.” Of which I have a copy, and came the time when in 1946 he tried to join the Royal Marines, and they wouldn’t take him, so he turned to the Coldstream Guards and became a Drummer Boy instead. Thirty four years later he retired as a Major Quartermaster having served in several theatres of war from Malaya to Northern Ireland. Upon leaving the Army, he became Staff Supervisor of the House of Lords until his final retirement some time around 2004’ish. Peter received his MBE in the 1972 Queen’s Birthday Honours List. There is also a painting of him as RSM of the Coldstream Guards, but with all the cutbacks that have gone on since his day I’d hate to guess where it now is.”

Our thanks to Richard for sharing the above with us.

Following Richards notes I did no more than search Google and follows a copy of an article, possibly printed in the Yorkshire Post about March 2012. (*Jamie Wallis – GDCoDA Secretary*)

AS CAREER RISES GO, PETER HORSFALL IS PRETTY IMPRESSIVE. From being the son of a Leeds bus driver and joining the Army at 16, the former Sheepscar schoolboy joined the Coldstream Guards as a drummer boy and 34 years later retired as Major Quartermaster.

Living in North London, he was fiercely proud of his Yorkshire roots. and his biography is packed with anecdotes from his travels.

Even the title of the book, ***Hard to Believe - Too Old at Sixteen***, tells a story. "I was turned down for both the West Yorkshire Regiment and the Royal Marines because, having had my 16th birthday, I was too old," he recounts. "Indeed it was the latter who wrote to me suggesting that I apply to the Brigade of Guards, as they accepted Drummer Boys at the grand old age of 16. It is questionable whether the Royal Marines' loss was the Coldstream Guards' gain.

Right from being a youngster, it was clear that Peter Horsfall would make his mark. With his older brother Terry. he was a tearaway child, spending the early 1930s in blissful ignorance of impending war and emulating his cartoon heroes in the The Dandy comic.

"When we lived in Sheepscar, there were a number of derelict houses." he recalls. "We took timber from these, chopped it and tied it into uniform bundles, and went round the houses selling it. It

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seems ridiculous now but the prices charged were one penny for a small bundle and two pennies for a large one",

A regular at Elland Road to watch Leeds United and Headingley for Rugby League and cricket with his father. Peter remembers the warm atmosphere at football matches.

'We never saw Dad during the actual games,' he says. 'In those days children were passed over the top of adult spectators and stood in front of the crowd".

A Drum Major in the West Yorkshire Regiment cadets before he was 15, he had a spell as an apprentice electrician at the Yorkshire Switchgear, then signed up for nine years with the Colour and three years on the Reserve with the Coldstream Guards.

Travelling with the battalion for 35 days at sea in 1948 to reach the Far East was Horsfall's first taste of life abroad. This two-year stint was the start of tours to Germany and Kenya, but after returning to Britain in December 1960, Horsfall and his young family knew exactly where to settle.

"Mary and I bought our first house in Pudsey," he says. "What a shame that Terry and Bob were not born there, they would have qualified to play for Yorkshire at cricket."

By 1976 Horsfall and his family were out in Londonderry with the Coldstream Guards. Amid numerous recountable incidents, there are a few light-hearted moments which he enjoys sharing. His wife Mary had a Smith's alarm clock which broke down, so Peter packed it up and sent it to the Smith's factory in Scotland to be mended. He recalls: "A couple of days later my telephone rang and a voice said captain Horsfall? Stay where you are sire, I'm coming to see you", The corporal in charge of the Postal Depot informed him the clock had started ticking and caused a huge bomb scare. This had closed the whole department while the bomb disposal squad checked the suspect device.

"It goes without saying that I have never felt so stupid in all my life. I felt a right berk," he smiles. "A story for the biter bitten."

At the age of 50, Horsfall made the decision to retire from the regiment, securing a job with a computer company and just working out his notice. "Life takes strange twists and there was about to be a big one." he recalls. Contacted by the Black Rod of the House of Lords, Sir David House, he was invited to apply for - and got - the position of Staff Superintendent.

This led to some intriguing insights into the highest echelons of society.

When Lady Thatcher arrived to take up her office at the Lords, the Iron Lady told her secretary the room would suit her fine.

"Then came a classic moment as she said to me. 'Major Horsfall, if I bring a couple of pictures in. would I be allowed to bang a couple of nails in the wall?' I replied. "No my lady. If you bring some pictures, WE will bang a few nails in the wall!" Horsfall is immensely proud of all the famous people he has met in the course of his career. Golfer Henry Cotton, footballer Ted Drake, and cricketer Denis Compton feature in his memoirs. And in the world of entertainment, names such as Arthur English, Tommy Steele, Mollie Sugden, Bill Moore and Pauline Collins crossed his path.

Regular brushes with Royalty also featured in the diary. "Anyone who has been in the company of the Queen at a 'private' event will know that she has a spontaneous wit and an Infectious laugh,' he confides.

"As a Yorkshireman, I enjoyed being described as a "citizen of London'," he jokes, his final thoughts being with the county of his birth.

"This seems an appropriate moment to mention the ridiculous statement made by the author Beryl Bainbridge in 1999. She seems to think that people with regional dialects are either uneducated or should not be considered for prestigious posts, In recent years I have met with so many 'senior' people with strong regional accents that this makes a mockery of her comments."

As an ex-Coldstream Drummer Boy who has made it to the very top, Yorkshire boy Peter Horsfall is the living proof.

The Biography of Major (Rtd) Peter Horsfall (Coldstream Guards)

