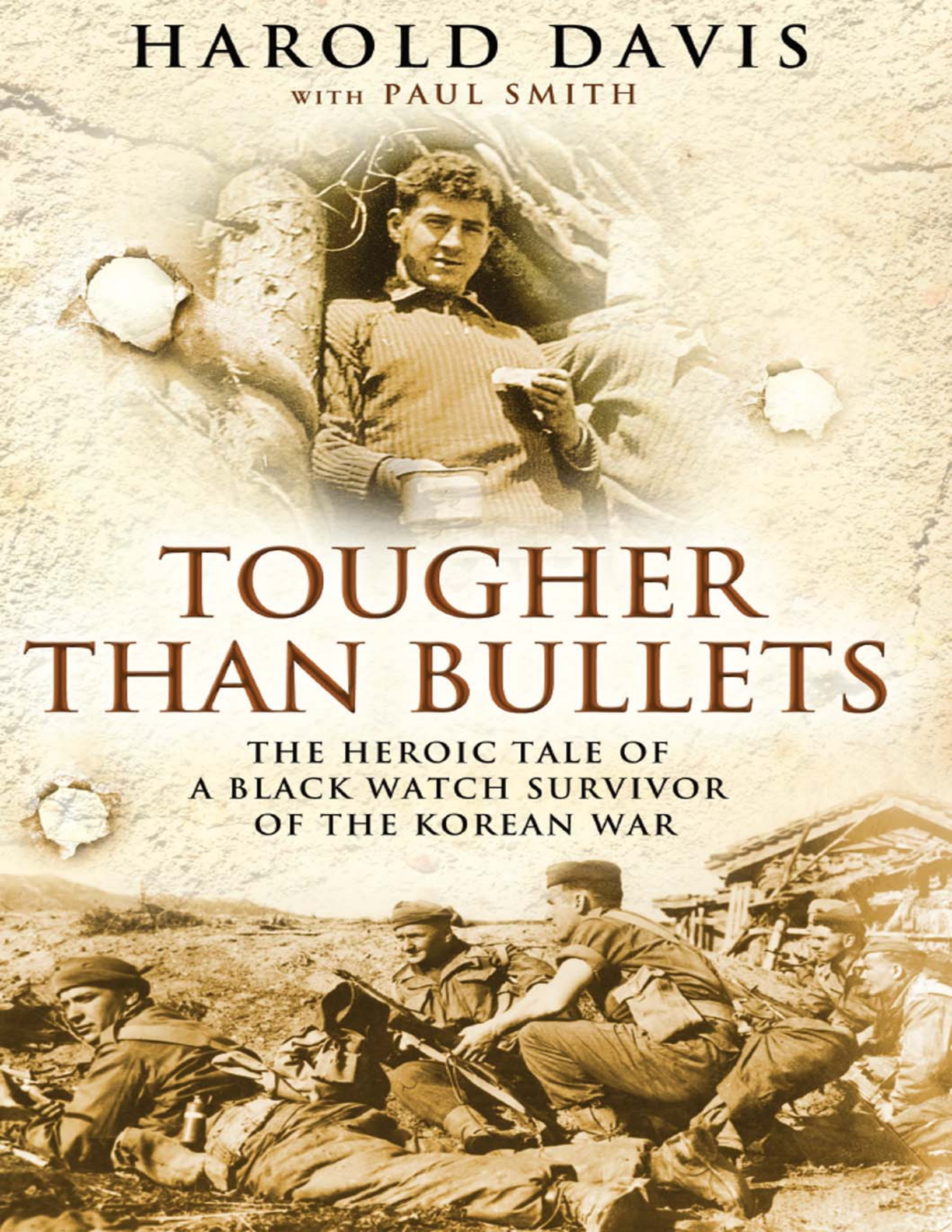


# HAROLD DAVIS

WITH PAUL SMITH

The background of the cover is a composite of two sepia-toned photographs. The upper photograph shows a man, Harold Davis, sitting in a trench or bunker, looking towards the camera. The lower photograph shows a group of soldiers in a field, some sitting and some standing, with a building in the background.

## TOUGHER THAN BULLETS

THE HEROIC TALE OF  
A BLACK WATCH SURVIVOR  
OF THE KOREAN WAR

# TOUGHER THAN BULLETS

The Heroic Tale of a Black Watch Survivor  
of the Korean War

Harold Davis with Paul Smith



MAINSTREAM  
PUBLISHING

EDINBURGH AND LONDON

To Vi and Alan



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In a life not short of incident, I have a great many people to thank as I sit down to put the finishing touches to this book. My deepest gratitude is to those who have been beside me throughout so many of the twists and turns, particularly my wife, Vi, and son, Alan, as well as the wonderful friends who have shared the journey at various points. From my days growing up and finding my way in the world to life in the Army and the events in Korea, the adventures were shared with loyal companions. Without some of those, I would not have lived to tell my story. In football, I was equally fortunate to play alongside some of the greatest men ever to pull on the Rangers jersey – famous names that still trip off the tongue and individuals I feel privileged to be able to call teammates and friends. In more recent times, a different team was involved in bringing this book to life, and my thanks go to Paul Smith and the staff at Mainstream for their enthusiasm and encouragement.

Harold Davis

Relating a life story relies on having a tale to tell – and Harold Davis ticks every box. My thanks go to Harry for giving me the opportunity to work on this project; it was a privilege and an education. My thanks also go to Bill Campbell and the Mainstream team, including Claire Rose and Graeme Blaikie, for their efforts in bringing *Tougher Than Bullets* to fruition, as well as to Colin Macleod for his endeavours. As always, heartfelt appreciation goes to Coral, Finlay, Mia and Zara for their support, love and laughter.

Paul Smith

## **CONTENTS**

- 1** A MESSAGE FROM THE FRONT LINE
- 2** A SOLDIER'S LIFE FOR ME
- 3** ON THE OCEAN WAVE
- 4** WELCOME TO THE FRONT LINE
- 5** THE HORRORS OF WAR
- 6** THE HOOK
- 7** IT'S A RAT'S LIFE
- 8** TOOLS OF THE TRADE
- 9** WORK, REST AND PLAY
- 10** THE LONG ROAD TO RECOVERY
- 11** THE HOMECOMING
- 12** IN THE BEGINNING
- 13** A SPORTING CHANCE
- 14** BECOMING PART OF THE FAMILY
- 15** A NICE START TO IBROX LIFE
- 16** A EUROPEAN MISSION
- 17** THE TASTE OF SUCCESS
- 18** SLIM PICKINGS
- 19** THE IRON MAN
- 20** MOVING ON
- 21** BY ROYAL APPOINTMENT
- 22** FEELING BLUE
- 23** BACK TO WORK
- 24** A HAPPY REUNION
- 25** MACKENZIE COUNTRY
- 26** ON REFLECTION

PICTURE SECTION  
COPYRIGHT

# 1

## A MESSAGE FROM THE FRONT LINE

I REGRET TO INFORM YOU OF REPORT RECEIVED FROM ATTEST KURE THAT YOUR SON (22652203 CORPORAL HAROLD DAVIS, BLACKWATCH) WAS PLACED ON THE DANGEROUSLY ILL LIST ON 22 MAY. THE ARMY COUNCIL DESIRE TO EXPRESS THEIR SYMPATHY IN YOUR ANXIETY. LETTER FOLLOWS SHORTLY.

OIC INFANTRY RECORDS, PERTH.

I CAN ONLY BEGIN TO imagine what was running through my mother's mind when the telegram was delivered to her home in Perth. It took fewer than 50 words to bring the news she must have been dreading since I had been signed up for the Black Watch and we'd set sail from British shores to head for active service in the Korean War.

It was in May 1953 that the worst fears of those I had left behind when I'd embarked on my adventure were realised. A slip of paper with that brief message was all they had to go on at that stage, with no inkling as to the events that had led to my illness.

More than 5,000 miles away, in a military hospital in Japan, I was beginning a very different battle from the one I had been involved in just a few weeks earlier in the barren lands of Korea. This one was not about winning a war; it was about staying alive. I was more determined than ever that I wouldn't be beaten.

By the time the telegram was written, I was preparing for the latest in a catalogue of operations that would save my life and repair the damage inflicted during my final night in



the war zone. It had not ended the way I would have hoped and my exit from the front line was not made, ultimately, under my own steam.

The build-up to that evening had been like any other during the months I had spent in Korea. I was serving with C Company, a fantastic group that embodied all that is good about the famous Black Watch regiment.

It was during one of C Company's stints on the front line that I had come to harm. We had been rounded up and sent up to the most notorious of areas on the battleground, known quite simply as 'the Hook'. Even the name sounds menacing and it is true to say that that was quite fitting.

It was our turn to try to hold back the advances of the vicious and well-drilled Chinese and North Korean forces. It had been a horrible, stagnant war, with neither side giving a yard as the fighting was played out in and around the Hook for months and years on end.

The conflict had been raging for near enough three years by that point and there was a sense that the enemy troops were getting increasingly frustrated, desperate even, at their lack of progress. They had been pegged back, unable to claim the ground they needed to make any inroads at all. Faced with that, the signs were that they would resort to riskier and heavier attacks.

We had been shipped out and sent to a position set slightly back from the front, away on the right side of the Hook. It was a quiet section, we were told, but then we had heard that before and found ourselves sheltering from bombardments. There were no guarantees wherever you were posted, because there was no such thing as a safe place on the line, just different degrees of danger.

As a corporal, I had three gun pits to look after during the course of the night. My job was to dot from pit to pit, patrolling the position and making sure everything was in order and the team was settled and focused on the job in hand.

I took my responsibilities seriously and felt I had to be a figurehead, someone who could keep his head and think things through even when the bullets were flying and shells were dropping. It was made easier by the fact we had good men all around us, people who could be trusted to do their best in the most difficult of circumstances. And we faced plenty of those while we were out there.

This particular night, the boys were nervous, a bit jumpy. I sensed it from the moment we took over and set to work. The mood was far from ideal. I saw it as my job to calm things down and try to keep things on an even keel – but it was difficult.

What would happen was that somebody would come up with information that put the rest of the boys on edge, maybe that there had been a number of attacks in the days before, or word that we were about to prepare to move to a certain position. Anything like that would change the atmosphere and create an air of tension.

I knew all was not well, but tried to carry on as normal. I did my patrol from the top of the trench to the first pit, from where it was maybe a 40-degree angle down to the next two.

From the top to the bottom pit, there was probably a distance of no more than 60 yards. They were always designed to be spaced out enough to provide a decent spread of cover and placed at angles to give a view of all sides of the position, but they were kept close enough to keep in contact with one another and allow communication to flow easily enough. If we were attacked, the last thing you wanted was to be isolated. There would be two or three men in each pit, keeping watch and with their finger on the trigger ready to respond to any sign of danger.

Pointing out of the gaps in the pit walls were Bren guns, strong little machine guns that had been in service since the Second World War. They had a gas cylinder below the barrel that powered the rounds, and generally it was a reliable

weapon. Every magazine held 30 rounds, and the guns gave us a good defence, particularly with the number we had between the three pits.

I had just checked the first pit and was doing my best to keep things upbeat; if they had sensed any sort of worry in my tone, it would only have made things worse. I remember telling the boys in that first pit, 'Look, it's a wee bit jumpy tonight, but there's nothing doing. It's all quiet out here.'

I wasn't telling a word of a lie. Despite the obvious nervousness, I hadn't seen or heard anything that I was overly worried about. As always, you could hear noises in the distance – but it was no more or less than usual. It was just the sounds of a battlefield, the clink of weapons in the darkness and the sort of thing we had all become accustomed to.

I went down to the second gun pit and knew in an instant I had a big problem. There was shouting and bawling coming from down in the darkness, a real panic going on. I could hear it long before I reached it and jumped down into the pit, roaring, 'What the f\*\*k's going on?'

They were screaming back at me, 'We're being attacked, we're being attacked!'

They were hysterical, with real terror in their voices and etched on their faces. They believed what they were saying, there was no doubt about that, but I was desperate to try to manage the situation as best I could. If it was true, they were no use to me in the state they were in and we would all be in jeopardy.

I told them they were talking nonsense, that there was nobody around but our own men. But they were adamant that one of their Bren guns had been pulled out of the pit through its slot.

The enemy had developed a habit of stealing our weaponry whenever they could. They would creep up in the dead of night and target a single gun post, whip away the gun and make off with it. They had it down to a fine art,

rarely being caught in the act and getting back to their lines to turn our own weapons on us. It solved their equipment problems and there was maybe even a sense of perverse satisfaction about killing British and other allied troops with our own bullets.

This night, my guys were convinced that it had happened to them. I kept telling them, 'You're kidding me - you're at it,' but deep down I knew it wasn't a prank. My stomach sank when they told me what had happened. It was very real and very worrying.

We had all heard about it happening elsewhere on the line and we knew the gun hadn't just vanished. For all we knew, the Chinese were still on the other side of the pit looking in at us and ready to fire. From virtually point-blank range, we'd be easy targets, and a horrible sense of dread swept over me. It wasn't panic - I still felt composed enough - but I knew we had to act and had to act fast.

If they weren't outside the pit, they must have made it back to the wire fencing that stretched along our position, adding an extra line of defence. The wire was 40 yards in front of where we were standing. If they could negotiate their way through that, they'd be back to relative safety, under the cover of darkness, and with one of our Brens in their clutches.

Neither of those two scenarios sat comfortably with me. I didn't want it happening on my watch and thought I could sort it out. As I say, a corporal's position in those situations is to patrol his gun pits and keep control of them. Here I had two of the men shouting and screaming at each other, and I'm busy saying to myself, 'It can't be happening to me - what do I do here?'

Dawn wasn't far from breaking and I was thinking to myself, 'Right, the usual time for the Chinese to make these attacks is first thing, before the light gets up. That's why everyone's in such turmoil.'

Generally speaking, you would use two out of three of your pits, but that night all three were manned because the tensions were rising. Maybe you could call it a sense of vulnerability, but whatever it was we'd felt we had to go mob-handed.

Now I was faced with a delicate wee situation. It was getting near to daylight. If they were still around our gun pits, they would have to act soon or go back through the wire before the cover of darkness was blown. There's only so much three gun pits can do if they're ambushed, but we would have to give it a go, and I had to lead from the front.

Without giving it much more than a second's thought, I climbed up over the trench top and slid down the front. All of a sudden, the safety of the pit walls was gone. I ducked down and darted towards the wire to check if it had been cut or if there was any sign of interference. I quickly swept the area in front of our position, finding nothing untoward. Panic over, perhaps.

Then it all happened. Some bastard from a position further down the line called for a flare. He'd obviously seen me moving down by the wire and wondered what was going on. Again, it came down to the stresses of the night.

As so often happened, when one flare went up another one did soon after. Then another, then another . . . and so it went on. In the end, it was like daylight, with these things burning in the sky and casting a bright light over the whole patch.

I was still a good 20 yards from the trench. I started to make my way back, my pace quickening to a sprint as I found myself stuck out in the open without the cover of darkness to fall back on. I was keeping low and trying to get to the trench as fast as I could, my heart in my mouth all the time I was running back.

The next thing I knew, all hell was breaking loose. Bullets splattered all around me. As they drilled into the soft ground, the mud flew up, showering me as it kicked up from

the earth and rained back down. I can remember looking up at the sky, seeing the mud teeming down against the glow being cast out by the flares and just wishing I had a switch that I could turn the lights off with.

The closer I got to our position, the more I thought I'd got away with it – but a searing pain in my foot told me different. I'd been hit. I felt a burning sensation where the bullet had gone through my boot and buried itself in my flesh. It crippled me. I fell to the ground just in front of the safety of the trench.

Then there was another flurry of bullets. It seemed like they were coming from all directions, and the noise was intense, a crackling thunder that just didn't let up. My heart was pounding; the adrenaline from being hit first time round had obviously kicked in, and I was desperate to get myself out of the firing line.

I made a dive for the trench – and got hit while I was in mid-air, so close to making it over the top to shelter. Everything had gone from breakneck pace to slow motion; I was painfully aware of what was going on all around as I launched myself towards the safety of the trench.

But I hadn't made it. That scorching sensation I had experienced just seconds before when I'd been shot in the foot had spread to the rest of my body. I knew I was in big trouble. I could feel where I'd been hit in the stomach and right across my torso. This wasn't the pain of one bullet, like I'd felt before; this was like I'd been ripped open.

I didn't scream when the bullets struck me. Hollywood has a lot to answer for, because it isn't like you see in the movies. Instead, just a single word escaped from my mouth: 'Ffffffffff . . .' You can imagine the rest. That was it, no melodramatics or grand gestures. One word, one sentiment.

I fell over the top of the trench and began to appreciate the position I was in. I could see the blood seeping through my uniform; I could feel the incredible pain from every part of my body. I had a good idea straight away that it was

serious. It wasn't a 'Get me out of here' one, it was more a case of 'Will I get out of here?' But never, at any stage, did I think, 'That's it, it's over.' I was saying over and over, 'Let's get through this.' All that was running through my mind was 'What on earth am I doing here?' What I knew was that if I lay down I wouldn't last five minutes. Between the blood I was losing and the fatigue after a long night on the line, there was no hope of help coming to me in time.

I struggled to my feet, managed to feel my way up the side trench and eventually stumbled towards an encampment housing one of the medical points dotted along the line. I pushed my way through the flap covering the entrance and two guys grabbed me as I fell through the doorway, starting to work on me before I'd hit the ground. I only had to look at them to know I wasn't in good shape. They weren't laughing and joking, that's for sure.

They got on the radio and I could hear them calling for a helicopter to come and get me; they needed to get me away from there and to a field hospital asap. In keeping with the events of the night so far, the evacuation plan didn't run smoothly.

We were tucked away in a position that was set in among the hills; there was nowhere for the chopper to land. They hatched an alternative plan to set down in a clearing nearby. They had to rustle up a jeep to transport me the short distance to the helicopter, with me on a stretcher on the back.

By this time, the helicopter was just about there, and I was transferred into it. It was one of the US bubble choppers, which were relatively new into service. They were put to good use out in Korea, buzzing around here, there and everywhere. For emergencies like this, they were ideal.

I was still conscious, just, at that point but perhaps not entirely lucid. The abdominal wounds were eating away at my mental and physical resistance to my condition. I can remember looking down from my resting place in the little



cabin, seeing the country below me and thinking, 'Isn't that nice?'

We landed a short hop away, but far enough back from the line to be sheltered from the worst of it. I was transferred into a medical bay. That's the last thing I can remember; by that time, the morphine I'd been pumped full of at my first stop must have been working its wonders.

Five days later I came to, bandaged from the neck down to my big toe. The first things I was aware of were the tubes connecting me to machines and the bottles of medicine all around.

The most frightening thing of all wasn't looking at the bandages or wondering what lay beneath them - it was the sound, not too far away, of guns and artillery firing, and the medics muttering, 'That's those bloody Chinese at it again.'

It dawned on me then and there that we weren't that far from the line, and I knew that if they did break through and come for us they wouldn't mess about. There wouldn't be any mercy for the sick or the wounded. Just like the enemy soldier I'd seen shot before my eyes in our trenches, I was a sitting duck.

For the first time during my service in the war, I was totally defenceless, and I didn't like that feeling one bit. Up until then, no matter how futile things might have seemed in certain circumstances, it was always in my mind that I could put up a damn good fight. Even if it was me against a hundred of them, I could give it a go. Now, I had nothing to fall back on. All I could do was lie there and hope against hope that others would look after me, just as the other guys propped up in the beds around me had to do.

Back home, my nearest and dearest were unaware of the drama that was unfolding - unaware until the door went and a telegram was delivered. Then it became real for all of us.

## 2

### A SOLDIER'S LIFE FOR ME

THE TERROR I'D EXPERIENCED ON the line in Korea was far removed from the emotions I'd felt when I'd first pulled on my British Army uniform in the more familiar surroundings of Scotland. Nobody was more proud than me to serve and nothing I experienced in war has changed my attitude towards my time in the Army. I was one of the unlucky ones in a sense, but there were others who did not make it out alive. In that regard, I can count myself fortunate.

I am also fortunate that I can count myself a Black Watch soldier. For anyone with a connection to Perth, the town where I grew up, the regiment is part and parcel of life.

When I was a schoolboy, I quickly became aware of the barracks there in the middle of town, right next to the swimming baths, and you would see the regiment training the new drafts as you went about your life on the 'outside'.

They were there to be seen, if you know what I mean, and there was a real pride in the Black Watch in Perth - indeed there still is, in what has always been an army town. Whether it was seeing the troops marching through the streets or catching a glimpse of the soldiers in the yard, there were reminders all around, and keeping the profile up was very much part of the job for those in charge.

There was a respect for the men of the regiment and for the Army as a whole, not just among us impressionable youngsters but across the board. The Second World War was not long over, and the troops were held in high esteem.

They'd served with distinction and there was a certain amount of awe about what they had been through and what they had achieved.

Today, the Black Watch is still flying the flag and bearing the famous red hackle in all corners of the world. Afghanistan has been the latest port of call, and the skills the regiment is renowned for – discipline, versatility, determination and efficiency – are as relevant now as they were when I signed up in the 1950s.

Those skills may have developed and been adapted as times have changed, but the ethos has always remained the same, and much of that comes from the proud past. Everyone growing up in the area was well aware of the Black Watch and its history, particularly those of us who went to school in the years after the Second World War. Our school even shared its name with the regiment's home at Balhousie Castle. That was one of the reasons that when the call came to join I was enthusiastic about what lay ahead for me. I didn't know where it would take me or what it would lead to, but I was ready to take whatever army life threw at me.

When national service was introduced after the Second World War, opinion was divided. Some were dead against the idea; others could see the sense in making sure our forces were kept up to strength at a time when numbers were severely depleted. I think immediately after the war most felt that anything designed to keep our country safe and secure was worth supporting, but as time wore on there was a shift in some quarters.

In the end, the scheme ran from 1945 through to 1963, with boys seeing service in all corners of the world, from Germany through to Korea and Malaya, and I was among 2.5 million young men enlisted during that period. Admittedly, some were more willing than others. I was certainly among those who were quite happy to be involved and to join the cause, especially when it was my home-town regiment that I

was asked to serve when the instruction eventually came through for me.

The age for being called up was 18 and I had a fair idea I would get the letter soon after my birthday. It all depended on what you were doing at the time, with some people spared national service if they were in a certain line of work or training in a particular profession. The others who missed out were those not in good enough physical shape to get through the medical, perhaps through illness, and I knew I wouldn't be in either of those categories, so my time was coming.

To be honest, I was looking forward to it; it was an exciting prospect and a whole new chapter in my life about to open. Better to go into it with that mindset than dreading what was in store. I can only imagine what it must have been like if you were feeling that way.

Conscripts take to it in different ways. Some people didn't enjoy it all, but I felt I should be there and was quite happy to join. I saw it as an opportunity to see the world and broaden my horizons, and as a chance to do something worthwhile for my country, to do my bit as so many others had done before me.

I still have nothing against the concept of national service – it is the best thing a young man can do. I would thoroughly recommend it and would gladly see it reintroduced today. When people talk about bringing it back, they often sound as if conscription would be some form of punishment, but that shouldn't be the case.

It's about instilling discipline and a sense of duty, something that would be of benefit to anyone taking part. Speaking from my own experiences, taking the rough with the smooth, I can say that being in the Army stands you in good stead for the rest of your life – whatever it may throw at you. It becomes part of who you are, gives you a real sense of identity and purpose.

Of course, you don't know that at the time. You go in with only a vague idea of what army life is all about. I turned up at the gates of the barracks with my wee letter saying the date and time to report, which had dropped through the letter box at home just a short time before. You knew what it was even before you'd opened it, with the official-looking brown envelope giving the game away.

I was pointed in the right direction, and a couple of fearsome-looking sergeants disciplined us from the first step we took inside the grounds. They bullied you about, make no mistake.

How you responded to that was an indication of how you would cope and whether you were cut out for life in the forces. Some blossomed, others wilted. One thing is for certain, it was far from an easy ride, and there was no honeymoon period. Looking back, you can see that it was all part of the test and the training, but when you're at the sharp end there's no time to analyse. All you knew was that if you stepped out of line, even a little bit, there would be hell to pay.

Of course, the strict regime led to a bit of a 'them against us' mentality between the sergeants and us new recruits. We had been thrown together as strangers but quickly developed a bond and the spirit that would see us through. Even though boys were being signed up in their droves, I didn't come across many people I knew. There was only one, a lad called Chalmers, whom I recognised from seeing him around Perth. Unfortunately, he was one of those killed in action in Korea.

At that stage, we weren't looking any further ahead than our training, concentrating on getting through that and making the best of it. We were all in the same boat. It wasn't as though any of us were volunteers, going in with a bit of muscle, thinking we were the boys. We were all young, raw and ready to become men, with a nudge – sometimes a

pretty forceful one – in the right direction from the sergeants who took us under their wing.

In hindsight, it must have been a tough job for them, knocking a motley crew into shape in a short space of time. The training lasted just two and half months or so and there was a lot to pack in, starting with drills on the parade ground and building from there.

I would say that as many as three-quarters of the conscripts on national service didn't want to be there. That put them at a psychological disadvantage, which made the physical part – the marching and the training – all the harder for them. Living with the discipline was also difficult for many of the new recruits, but, having played football at a decent level with East Fife, I was used to taking orders as a sportsman, and that side of things came easily for me.

Early on at Perth, our time was spent marching, getting in step and getting our kit sorted. They were instilling a bit of discipline in all of the recruits – in any way they could. For example, they would give stupid orders that made you think, 'Christ, that's just silly,' to see if anyone would rebel. I can look back and see that was the game now, but when you're on the ground doing the work you don't see it that way. Those who didn't toe the line, who weren't team players, were soon found out, and soon found out it was better to follow orders.

We spent three weeks having the rough edges knocked off, as well as going through all the medical checks and making sure we could go the distance with the physical work.

I took to the drills and the training quickly and painlessly, and by the time we were moved out from the barracks at Perth to continue our work at Fort George, near Inverness, my spirits were high. We were sent north for the advanced part of our training, which included getting to grips with weapons and live ammunition for the first time in army

uniform. It was the next stop on an adventure as far as I was concerned, something new and interesting.

We were at Fort George long enough to settle and call it home. It was an imposing old place, not least when you were just a young boy, but it was inspiring at the same time. There was a real sense of history as you stood in the parade ground.

I will always remember our welcome to Inverness – with the mat rolled out by Sergeant Chalmers (no relation to my acquaintance from Perth) in true army style as our train pulled in at the station. He epitomised the stereotypical cruel character you expect to encounter during training in the forces. Right down to the way the toes of his boots curled up and shone like glass, he was a sight to behold and to strike fear into the heart of every man who filed onto the platform. We thought to ourselves, ‘Look at this! What’s in store for us here?’

There were 20 guys to each sergeant and, of course, I was in the bloody 20 that were assigned to this fearsome figure. In the end, it worked out well for me. Because he liked the way I set about our work, he took me to one side and put me on point and as the corner man for marching.

One of the things they did was an inspection of your quarters and kit. If there was anything that wasn’t just perfect, they would throw it on the floor to be done again. Sometimes it was a case of any excuse to find fault.

One particular day, Sergeant Chalmers grabbed my kit and threw it straight out of the window, watching it fall to the parade ground below. I was absolutely fuming. He barked, ‘Right, Davis, get down there and pick it all up.’ So I did just that, all the time cursing him under my breath, and made sure I got it perfect the next time. There was no way I was going to give him reason to do that to me again, even if I didn’t agree with him in the first place.

Later that day, Chalmers took me to one side and said, ‘Davis, I hope you didn’t take it to heart. I don’t want the

other guys thinking there are favourites, so I had to nail you.'

I'll never forget running out for a game at East End Park, through playing Dunfermline with Rangers, and hearing the familiar shout of 'Davis!' in a voice I'd heard a hundred times and more booming out at Fort George. It was Sergeant Chalmers, standing there in the enclosure and looking just as mean and menacing as he had done all those years earlier. He remembered me, I remembered him, and there was still the same mutual respect that we'd had back in my army days. He was hard, but, in the main, he was a fair man and he treated me well.

Even though the training was hard and unforgiving, my memories of my time in Inverness are good. After our introduction to army life in Perth, it felt as though we were building to something and every day we were growing as men and as soldiers, forming a good strong unit in the time we had together.

There was physical training and weaponry and all of that. We had to do a lot of treks, including overnight exercises. It was quite difficult, particularly for those not used to that type of stamina work. It came easily enough for me because of the football training I'd done week in and week out, and I was thankful for that when I looked around and saw some of the others flagging. It could have been a real slog if I hadn't been ready for it.

It was when you found yourself sitting on the shooting range with a gun in your hand that it began to sink in what you'd really been signed up for. It was no game - the guns were real, the bullets were real and there was the responsibility that went with that. No time for messing around, that's for sure.

I'd handled a 12-bore shotgun a few times in a hunting setting but never a rifle until I went into the army and got down to work on the range there at Fort George, spending



long sessions in rain, hail or shine putting in the hours in preparation for active duty.

I picked up some shooting badges at Fort George, winning the top marksman's medal – the Crossed Rifles – to qualify among the elite. When you get one of those, it's a bit of a double-edged sword, because it means you are on call if they need someone for sniper duties. I didn't particularly fancy that line of work, and fortunately I was only called upon to do it once after I landed in Korea, which was enough as far as I was concerned.

To gain the Crossed Rifles, you had to prove your accuracy in practice, and there was only a slim margin of error. From memory, I think you couldn't miss much more than one in ten targets from distance if you wanted to earn the badge, and I came through with flying colours.

Even today, I still like to keep my eye in. To be fair, my weapon of choice these days is an air rifle rather than army-issue kit, and my targets are Scottish rather than Korean; I use my gun to give the deer a little fright when they stray into our garden and start nibbling the plants and trees. I'd never do them any harm – just a little nip on the rump to send them on their way.

I've also got a little target board set up beneath one of the trees, just to give me something to find my range when I'm leaning out of the front window. Old habits die hard! Just holding a rifle in my hands takes me back to those days at Fort George, where we had the freedom of the wide open spaces around us to go out and find our feet as soldiers.

We weren't alone, though; some of the other regiments came to stay at Fort George at that time. The Cameron Highlanders were in Inverness at the same time as us. Mind you, I always thought the Black Watch had an advantage over every other regiment in the land: we had by far the best kilt in the country.

When you see a squad of men marching in the Black Watch tartan, it is enough to send a shiver down your spine.

The Gordon Highlanders and many others had nice kilts, but none came close to the Black Watch plaid. There's something about it; it looks the part. I still wear mine with immense pride, red hackle and all. Every time I pull it on, I'm reminded what it means to be part of that great regiment and to have served with so many great men. No regrets.

### 3

## ON THE OCEAN WAVE

A BUZZ WENT ROUND THE barracks as word began to break. This was it. We were going out. The order came down that we were to prepare ourselves for active service, and we knew our destiny: the Korean War was to be our introduction to life on the battlefield.

Nerves, excitement, impatience: when you get an instruction like that, you go through every emotion as your mind races with thoughts about what lies ahead. From the moment you pull on the uniform for the first time, when you look in the mirror and realise you are on your way to becoming a soldier, you expect the day to come. When it does, though, there's nothing to prepare you for the feeling of anticipation that washes over you.

Of course, we had to get to Korea first. We began the journey by rail, travelling to England. When we were marching away from the barracks in Perth to get the train, I was ordered to be the point man, out in front of our squad of 40 men and making sure the traffic knew we were coming.

The route took us past my girlfriend's office. Vi would become my wife after the war, and I can remember her looking out of the office and waving. I wasn't able to give a wave back, knowing all too well that every move was being watched by our superiors. We were on show now, flying the flag for the Black Watch.

People would stop what they were doing, cheering us along our way. Most of us had been boys when we'd walked