

Morale under attack?

PULL UP A SANDRAG



Jonathan Smiles

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PULL UP A SANDBAG

*A Comical Compilation of
British Military Humour*

JONATHAN SMILES



Woodfield

It is a good thing for an uneducated man to read books of quotations... The quotations, when engraved upon the memory, give you good thoughts. They also make you anxious to read the authors and look for more.

Winston Churchill

It should be an amusing thing to read Pull Up a Sandbag, but accept it as no more than light entertainment... The stories, if engraved upon the mind, give perverse thoughts and may constitute permanent mental damage. On the other hand, anxiety to read the authors and look for more should be regarded as beneficial.

Jonathan Smiles

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Help for Heroes



“What is H4H all about? It’s about the blokes, our men and women. It’s about Derri, a rugby player who has lost both his legs, it’s about Carl whose jaw is wired up so he has been drinking through a straw. It’s about Richard who was handed a mobile phone as he lay on the stretcher so he could say goodbye to his wife. It is about Ben, it’s about Steven and Andy and Mark, it’s about them all. They are just blokes but they are our blokes; they are our heroes. We want to help our heroes.”

The charity **Help for Heroes** was launched in October 2007 in response to the desire of ordinary people to do something practical to help our wounded servicemen and women. As individuals we are powerless to prevent war and we feel helpless that we are unable to stop our men and women from being killed and wounded. By joining together as Help for Heroes, we are doing something practical to help; we are doing our bit.

Help for Heroes is very simple; we are strictly non political, we recognize that wars happen under any government, and we are non critical, preferring to get on with the job rather than talking about rights and wrongs.

Our first task, given to us by General Sir Richard Dannatt, the Head of the Army, was to raise £6 million to help provide a swimming pool and gym complex at the tri service rehabilitation centre at Headley Court. With the support of Royalty,

The Armed Forces, Celebrities, the Press and thousands of ordinary, decent people, we achieved that target in our first eight months.

Our first task may be complete, but our job is not and, while our young men and women continue to be wounded, we intend to be there to help. We are pushing on with even more determination, buoyed by the extraordinary support of the public in our first few months, to ensure that the wounded get the best help, support and futures that they deserve.

Our Servicemen and women give more, risk more and sacrifice more, so we believe that they should be given more; we believe they deserve the very best. They say they are not Heroes, that they are just blokes doing their job; we say that anyone who volunteers to join the Armed Forces and serve in time of war is a hero and we want to help our heroes.

Bryn Parry

*Appeal Chairman & Co Founder of **Help for Heroes***

Quoted from www.helpforheroes.co.uk



A Wish to Help

The collaborators on this book are former soldiers who have lost friends and known friends injured on operations. They themselves have been fortunate enough to come through their years of military service unscathed.

Many worthwhile charities and organisations continue to help British service personnel and their families affected by conflict. The choice of which to support was difficult, but the final decision was agreed wholeheartedly.

Help for Heroes was singled out for its combination of efficiency and transparency. They ensure that 97% of all donations go towards helping serving and former military personnel wounded on operations. H4H also outline exactly how much has been donated, where and how donations will be used, and include estimated timeframes.

Our heartfelt thanks go to all who are involved with Help for Heroes, whether as members of staff or donors, and we are proud to donate a pound from the sale of every book to support this cause.

Introduction

*For it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' "Chuck him out, the brute!"
But it's "Saviour of 'is country" when the guns begin to shoot;
Rudyard Kipling, 1890*

Soldiers are different. Ask any civilian. Ask any soldier, for that matter, and he will agree, but you will get a different set of reasons. That said, the one characteristic they are both likely to include is the sense of humour. Military humour is usually irreverent, often black, sometimes basic or obscene, and gives little or no thought to being politically correct. At its core is the essential ingredient for any true sense of humour, the ability to laugh at oneself. RSMs, OCs and COs are constitutionally entitled to suppress this last ingredient, but it's still in there, believe me!

This compilation includes examples of all the above. The stories are based on actual events and are as true as any story remains after the embellishments of successive raconteurs, and as accurate as recollection can be after memory survives the passing years and occasional alcohol-based filtration.

The idea behind this book is neither new nor original. The seeds were sown over ten years ago, but lay dormant while its authors got on with the delights of military service and eventual transition to civilian life, in the process living through many of the more recent stories. Life as ex-squaddies brought little change, with subsequent 'tours' taking in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as parts of North Africa and South East Asia. The seeds germinated during the summer of 2008, thanks to the warmth of Sarajevo sunshine and regular Friday 'waterings' at the Zelena Dolina restaurant. We would claim that they reached fruition thanks to the richness of the stories' sources, rather than fertilization with the bullshit that often accompanies military reminiscences.

The final judgment is yours!

Why a book? We asked ourselves the same question, especially after finding the wealth of humorous anecdotes available on various websites, notably ARRSE, the Army Rumour Service. The answer comes from the many that find themselves without Internet access, especially on operational tours, and from a suspicion that material committed to print might reach wider readership than an anecdote quickly relegated to page 4 or 5 of a blog or discussion thread. It also provides an opportunity to contribute to a worthwhile, related cause and **Help for Heroes will receive £1 from the proceeds for every copy sold.**

Thanks are due to the many contributors and sources that have given permission to include their stories here. Thanks, too, to all those characters that enacted these scenes in real life. Should you recognize yourself in any of the anecdotes, either starring or in a supporting role, then accept the appreciation of all those that smile, laugh or cry as they read.

Pull up a Sandbag is dedicated to all servicemen and women on active duty. If it raises a laugh in Afghanistan or Iraq it will have been a worthwhile endeavour. This dedication is also extended to include those who will see active duty, those who have seen active duty and those that still suffer its aftermath

*Yes, it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' spend less on defence,
But who walks the streets of Basra when the air is getting tense?
When the air is getting tense, boys, from Kabul to Kosovo
Who'll say goodbye to wife and kids, and shoulder pack and go?*
Peter Pindar, Sunday Telegraph December 2003

Hasn't changed much, has it?

1. Jonathan Begins to Smile

“Once upon a time” seemed an appropriate way to open, but it didn’t have the ring of truth. “Twice upon a time” would have been a step in the right direction, but I’d lost count of the number of false starts, so that was discarded too. It was only when I stopped raking through the problem of describing the beginnings that the dust settled, clarity returned and realisation dawned. History is defined more by those that record it than by fact. The solution was to just get on and write it ... so here goes!

It started as a night like a hundred others, or maybe a thousand, if I’m honest. Meeting with friends for a drink and a chat had become a well-worn habit that served to punctuate the end of the week, and the general pattern of the evening rarely changed. Greetings and news were exchanged fairly quickly before settling into the core activity of the evening, like brushing crumbs from the table-top to make way for the main course. Here the main course was a kind of conversational comfort food, chewing over topics we had revisited many times, recycling discussions but each time finding a new flavour to the argument or a twist that added zest to an otherwise bland subject.

It should come as no surprise that reminiscences were an unavoidable ingredient in the mix, given the membership of our select little group; ex-military, ex-Police, ex-Customs and Excise, plus a vague and disorganised individual who classified himself simply as ‘ex’. We shared a slightly dark sense of humour, the cynicism common to those professions and a willingness to talk long, hard and late, provided that the accustomed conversational lubricants remained accessible. These could be brown, yellow or black, as long as they boasted alcoholic content and came in large glasses, though occasionally something small and golden did the trick. The vague and disorganised one preferred black, as it seemed a

neutral colour and hence the closest he could get to making no choice at all.

On this particular evening, Bod had arrived first, as usual, but had ordered a complete round for the group. His confidence in the others' imminent arrival may have been based on strength of habit rather than attention to punctuality, but was justified as Plod and Sod¹ stamped into the bar before the last freshly-poured pint hit the counter. The vague and disorganised one arrived last, again as usual, and made the same excuse about the black stuff needing time to settle he had used a dozen times before. The others smiled indulgently, conscious of their own pet repetitions, and our gang of four settled into their customary seats at the corner table.

It wasn't long before we entered the relaxed part of the evening, replaying old conversations. These weren't the sterile, CD-like snippets exchanged at the bar, or the quick one-liner soundbites tossed across the room. Each anecdote was a carefully handled LP, played only by its owner, complete with the hiss and pops and crackles appropriate for its age. We sat back, listened and enjoyed, not noticing the occasional skips, as we knew each note and ornamentation from previous performances. The silences between were comfortable, as we each considered which stories to play next, but never long, due to calls of "Mine's a lager", "My round!" or Sod complaining "It's like a desert in here!"

Eventually, the vague and disorganised one provided an interlude by remarking on the weird and wonderful quirks of memory. He started by mentioning the clichéd distinction between a comic and a comedian (a comic says funny things, but a comedian says things funny). He continued, "I went to a comedy club last night and saw two excellent main acts. The first guy was a true comedian who told one funny story that lasted fifteen minutes. I could tell it to you now almost word for word. The second had me laughing like a drain for twenty

¹ It's not unusual to find the confession "names have been changed, to protect the innocent". No confessions in this case; the names are those we used for each other, and none of us are, were, or will ever again be completely innocent.

minutes with a non-stop barrage of well-timed one-liners, but I can't remember a single one. Doesn't the human mind work in wonderful ways!"

Plod chipped in with, "I heard a professional comedian tell that the only time his mind went completely blank was when a fan of his said, 'Go on then, be funny'. Two minutes later, someone mentioned his mother-in-law and twenty jokes immediately sprang to mind."

"I know what you mean," added Bod. "I can never tell the first story, but the moment one of you starts, it reminds me of one of my own. In fact, it's more of a cascade process than a simple knock-on effect; each one reminds me of three or four others. I guess it's the same for you because we start slowly, but there's never enough time to get them all in before closing time. Couldn't just be the effects of the beer, could it?"

Sod, nodding and looking extremely thoughtful, held our full and undivided attention as we waited for his pronouncement on memory. "Beers all round then?" he asked, and disappeared to the bar.

We'd hardly expected anything truly erudite at that stage of the evening, but it was unlike Sod to have nothing to say. He didn't disappoint. "Reminds me of the prisoner joke," he said on his return. We were hooked. "A prisoner was thrown into a dungeon and chained to the wall. As his eyes became accustomed to the gloom he could see a dozen others chained around the walls. Eventually the man next to him broke the silence, asking 'Know any jokes?' Every joke he told was greeted with howls of laughter from his fellow prisoners, until he finally exhausted his repertoire. After a short pause, one of the others said, 'fifty-three' and everyone laughed. The newcomer was puzzled when subsequent shouts of 'twenty-five', 'sixteen' and 'thirty-three' all had the room in stitches. His neighbour explained that every prisoner had told every joke they knew, and that these had been repeated until everyone knew all the jokes by heart. To save time telling the whole story, the jokes had been numbered. Each time someone mentioned a number, the prisoners remembered that joke and laughed. The newcomer thought he'd try this out but when he loudly proclaimed 'twenty-two!' it was followed by

silence. Several numbers were called out by other prisoners during the next few minutes and all raised a laugh, so the newcomer tried again with 'thirty-one!' Again silence. Several shouts later, someone quietly mentioned 'twenty-two' and the room was filled with hysterical laughter.

'Just a minute!' complained the newcomer, 'I said twenty-two a while ago and nobody laughed.'

His neighbour turned apologetically towards him, 'Ah, it's the way you tell them!' he explained."

The link to memory was there, though not central to the story, but we could see the direction his thoughts had taken when he asked, "We're only prisoners of habit, but how many different stories do you think we've told each other in this room over the years?" None of us had a clue, and estimates varied wildly. "The only reliable way to find out would be to write them down," he continued. There was a brief clamour of voices as every one of us claimed to have had the idea to collect these stories in a written record, each claim pre-dating the previous by at least a year. The Monty Python team would have been proud of us. By this late stage of the evening the effects of our liquid intake were definitely in evidence, and it gradually became very important to write down as many of these tales, anecdotes and observations as we could remember. "For posterity!" declared Plod in the most earnest voice he could muster. "For posterity!" countered Bod, "Same format, but perforate the pages."

Having all claimed the idea, a quick check around the table confirmed that we'd all made similar progress: none. This left us with an open choice for the post of scribe, uncluttered by questions of aptitude, experience or conventional logic. The only unanimous agreement was that the task should fall to just one of our company. Risk of duplication was an excellent excuse as we all back-pedalled to avoid putting any real effort into this "essential" work.

The question was resolved when three of the group realised that the vague and disorganised one, though not the best choice for the job, would offer least resistance of all to the

nomination.² Bod, the most imaginative of the three, quickly came up with the rather arbitrary criterion of “name most suited to author of a work of humour”. Thus, by process of elimination, the vague and disorganised one was saddled with the task.

That’ll be me, then – Jonathan Smiles.

Here it is, finally; the product of a marriage of inebriate minds including, appropriately enough, something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue.

Seats at the corner table are all taken, so pull up a sandbag...

² Those of you who have waded through the purple prose will now know that four old farts got pissed, decided to write down some stories and at this point were about to decide who’d get lumbered with the task. Why it has taken five pages to say so is likely to remain a mystery. Don’t be put off! The going gets easier from here on in.

2. Sprogs, Newbies, Wind-Ups and Wahs

We've all been there; finished our Basic Training and then begun military life at our first unit, running around camp from one location to the next in our desperate search for spirit level bubbles, tartan paint, keys for the indoor mortar range and the outdoor assault course, skirting board ladders, etc, etc. Sprogs and newbies provide easy targets, but squaddies show no mercy. Nor should they; how else will these innocents develop the resistance to survive a military career?

Mister Vice (of the Mess Variety)

There are many, many opportunities during a Service career to fall prey to practical jokes, with particular vulnerability when appearing as 'the new boy' in any situation. Sprogs are easy meat, but new arrivals to a unit who have previous tours under their belts are a harder target. By the time potential victims are promoted to Sergeant, most have developed the kind of awareness that makes them immune to practical jokes. There is a theory that claims this is the very reason Warrant Officers' and Sergeants' messes were invented. Learning the intricacies and traditions of Mess life and an additional, archaic uniform can be an expensive business, usually paid for in a currency of gin and tonic or bottles of port.

Those attending their first Mess dinner provide a target rich environment, but the most junior Sergeant inevitably becomes the main mark. He is appointed 'Mister Vice', a title that carries with it all sorts of additional duties; some seated in tradition, some in practice and necessity, but others down to nothing more than the sense of humour of the assembled company.

At a Squadron top table lunch, the newly promoted Mister Vice was briefed that after the main course the Squadron Sergeant Major (SSM) would bang his gavel to signify that he would like his biscuits to be served. The biscuits were then to be placed on a table to the side of the dining area, and Mister Vice was further briefed that on distribution of the said biscuits he should bow his head to the SSM and report "Sir, your biscuits are not broken, Sir." To lend credibility, it was explained that seventy-five years ago a fight had broken out amongst the Warrant Officers in a Guards mess over the lack of digestive biscuits and the War Office had decreed that biscuits were to be served by the youngest Sergeant in all messes from that day forward.

In due course, the gavel was banged to signify a comfort break and much to the merriment and amusement of all, the biscuits were delivered with much bowing and ceremony – as were five bottles of Port. On comes the light-bulb as Mister Vice thinks, "I am a cnut!

Saw Him Coming?

Young Sapper X on his second day in the Unit after completing his Basic Training and Combat Engineer III Course a few days earlier, was called over to the Troop G10 Store by one of the Troop Corporals who informed him a section was tasked to clear an area of trees out on the edge of the airfield; two other Sappers and one of the Troop Lance Jacks were already clad in Husqvarna (Chainsaw) PPE and were busy checking that each chainsaw had its full inventory of spares prior to heading out on the pending tree cutting task. Sapper X was told to get the full PPE on ASAP. He proceeded to don his PPE (Leather Leggings/Chaps, Protective Gloves, boot and shin guards and Jacket) when the Troop phone rang, which Corporal T answered.

Corporal T wrote out a quick memo, placed it in a brown envelope and handed it to young Sapper X explaining that the memo had to be handed personally to the SSM, who was currently in his office. Sapper X was told to put on his helmet complete with visor and ear defenders; the section would be

leaving their berets in the office to avoid getting them in crap state during the tree cutting, so he would need some kind of head dress at Squadron HQ.

Corporal T instructed Sapper X to make sure he was wearing his helmet correctly in the offices, including keeping the visor down and as he had signed for the chainsaw he would be using, to take it with him and to keep hold of it as it was a starred item. The section would get the rest of the kit loaded and meet him outside Squadron HQ in 10 minutes after he had hand delivered the memo to the SSM; “Make sure you wait for the Sergeant Major’s reply before leaving his office” was Corporal T’s final instruction.

Sapper X, not wanting to let anyone down in his first few days, eagerly rushed off with chainsaw in one hand, memo in the other, wearing full PPE, with helmet on and visor down! Our intrepid young Sapper entered Squadron HQ, marched up to the SSM’s door and knocked. Hearing a bellowed “Enter!” he opened the door, marched up to the SSM’s desk and halted smartly a foot from the desk, then handed the memo to the SSM stating he had to wait for the reply.

Faced with a young Sapper in full PPE, helmet visor down and Chainsaw in hand, the SSM calmly opened the envelope and read the following memo:

Sir,

I completed my Basic Combat Engineer Course on Friday last week and was informed that I had to be at 33 Engineer Regiment (EOD) for first parade Monday morning. This completely messed my plans up as I was looking forward to a long weekend at the minimum after finally completing my Basic Training. I am pissed off to say the least, so I am kindly asking you to fill out a leave pass for me in order to give me a long weekend from this coming Friday. Fail to do so and I will start up this chainsaw and saw your fucking desk in half!

Thank You,

Sapper X

Luckily the SSM had a good sense of humour and even wrote a reply to Corporal X’s Memo. He sent the young Sapper on

his way with no reprisals, but no doubt had a quiet word some time later with Corporal X (if SSM's words are ever quiet!).

A Box of Sparks

Whilst based in Paderborn, Sprogs were often sent to the stores for a 'box of sparks'! The usual thing was to send them back to confirm which colour was required.

Tube Trek

We had a Private Storeman who was sent to the QM Stores by MT section to get 'fallopian tubes' for some 4 Tonne vehicles. The QMS then sent him to the LAD for a 1043/5. The LAD sent him to the URS in the servicing bay, who told him it was a specialist item refurbished by the Medics. Off he wandered to the Med Centre where CMT medic type chap plainly asked "What size?"

Nearly a four-mile walk by the time he got back to his reception committee!

Direct Route

A young Gurkha undergoing driver training at Leaconfield had certainly already learned how to take orders. As he approached a roundabout the instructor said "Straight over" and the Gurkha did just that – went straight over the roundabout.

Report to Sergeant Fletcher

It was while I was at RAF Wattisham that an often used joke was carried out on newbies to the Phantom aircraft.

Most everybody has heard the one about sending a newbie for a left-handed screwdriver or for some elbow grease. This was a twist on that. Phantom aircraft carry external fuel tanks on the wings and they are called Sergeant Fletcher fuel tanks.

Well it's obvious, isn't it; we used to send them around the camp telling them to report to Sgt Fletcher. As most people were in on the joke they used to keep sending the poor sap onto someone else until that is they ended up at the fuel tank repair bay. It sometimes lasted for hours. Wasn't life fun!

The 25m Range Cleaning Kit

We lost count of the times in Northern Ireland where we got a new bloke to go to the CQMS stores for the 25m range cleaning kit. They would come back with 40m of rope and an old mattress. We would just sit back and watch as the idiot crawled the length of the pipe range, one end of the rope around his waist and the other tied to the mattress, then bite back the laughs as he struggled for twenty minutes trying to pull it through the range. Worked a treat every time!

The Temperature Indication Team

One of my personal favourites took place on board a Royal Navy Type 42 Destroyer. Just before a surface to air missile shoot, a list asking for volunteers for a very special duty was doing the rounds. It explained:

“As many of you are probably aware, a rocket propelled surface to air missile such as a Seadart can be a major hazard to marine plant life, especially if the rocket fuel has not combusted at the correct temperature. To that end it is important to assemble a Temperature Indication Team (TIT) in order to record the exact temperature of the flames coming out of the rocket motor on take-off. Obviously, there are some hazards with this task so all members of the TIT must be dressed correctly in full firefighting rig. Due to the blast of the rocket motor it is also mandatory to wear a safety harness to ensure no-one is blown over the side.

Once the team is assembled and briefed on their important task, they must then stand behind the missile launcher with a thermometer (to be signed out from sickbay prior to the launch). It is recommended that the thermometer be attached to a broom handle or similar, however this is at the

discretion of the TIT leader. A few dry runs, under the watchful eyes of the rest of the ship's company, should be carried out so that the whole team is clear on their individual duties. Only once the team is fully conversant with the whole procedure and they are stood to behind the missile launcher can the firing take place."

I once saw a young Wren in tears because she hadn't been selected for the TIT. It was OK, though, because we promised she could be a line buoy lookout when we crossed the equator.

A Right Spanner

In 32 Armoured Engineer Regiment there used to be a crank spanner for the Centurions; jaws about six inches wide, head about a foot across, handle about three feet long and four inches wide. It weighed a ton. This item was kept in the guardroom, which was about a kilometre from the tank park at Monkey lager.

The usual wind-up was that a Cent AVRE would be turned over with the ignition off and the tank commander would tell the troop sprog that the engine needed turning over with the spanner. Off would go the sprog to the guardroom, eventually staggering back to the park with said spanner only to be greeted by the tank starting up just as he arrived back. Oh, the merriment as he realised he had to take spanner back to the guardroom!

Gibloons

Another favourite of mine used to be money-changing for Gibraltar. Money-changing forms would go out to all the messdecks about two days before getting into Gib and all the old hands would fill it in, letting the newbies put their names on it too. Needless to say, the newbies would be the only ones mustering at the ship's office for their 'Gibloons'.

Magnetic Water

The other classic was at RNAS Culdrose. One young green WAFU was sent to the stores for a bucket of magnetic water for the compasses in the Sea Kings. He was told that as it could affect the compasses in other helicopters, if he was overflowed he had to lie over the top of the bucket.

Picture the scene: on the main perimeter road at RNAS Culdrose, which used to be busier than Heathrow for aircraft movements, one young WAFU, carrying a full-to-the-brim bucket (having been told not to spill any, as it was expensive). *Wocka, wocka*, a Sea King flies overhead. WAFU lies on top of bucket as it goes over, with one of the aircrew hanging out of door, taking piccies of this poor sod lying over the bucket.

He finally makes it back to squadron with a big wet circle on his shirt, to be met by all the lads mustered in the hangar and much mirth.

The Wah

Sometimes used to denote any wind-up or sprog-directed prank, the *wah* is more often the verbal response to a bone question asked by a superior (bone questions asked by juniors are dealt with very differently!). Also used within the British Army to signal an unnecessary response to an obvious or rhetorical question. The original question has often been posed by the wah-monger himself, as a set-up. Can become quite frustrating as you become paranoid about answering any question in case it is a wah!

As an example:

Steve: "Is that a can of beer in your hand Bill?"

Bill: "Yeah."

Steve: "Wah!"

Bill: "Bugger. Wah'd again!"

The Wah-Free Zone

A few years ago, on a Squadron range camp, we had some septics over on an exchange thing. The waging got so bad

that folk pretty much stopped talking to each other. A typical conversation might run:

“Alright Codename? How’s things?” answered by,
“Is that a wah? Fuck off.”

At the end of the week, come the Squadron smoker, the bar was deathly quiet with no-one speaking for fear of being wah’d. The seppos just thought we were strange (fair point really). It got so bad that the Badge had to make an announcement:

Badge: Right you fuckers, this is getting out of hand. From now on, the bar is a wah-free zone.

Seppo: What’s a wah-free zone Sergeant Major?

Badge: Well, that’s where you can’t...

Entire Squadron: WAAAH!!!

Egg-Op Wahs

As a young cooky-boy I recall being sent to the Stores to get some tartan breadcrumbs for the scotch eggs... Bastards!

I felt better when one lad was told to ‘put a fork in the bangers’ before they were cooked for breakfast. He succeeded in using up all the forks in the mess hall.

The Chief Cook went ballistic.

Sandpaper Wah

I am currently in the middle of a rather amusing wah. I work at a gun factory with a lot of other ex-Forces types so the ancient art of wahing is not lost on many.

We have started charging a certain apprentice for the amount of sandpaper he uses. It has been going on for nearly three months now and the poor lad is so broke he is making every sheet last as long as possible. A couple of the lads have managed to get him to flash by nicking his sandpaper. He was almost in tears last week when he complained, “Seriously guys it’s not fair. I can’t afford to pay for all of you to use my sandpaper. I am only on an apprentice’s wage.”

He has even started writing his name on the back of his sandpaper and is threatening to put in a formal complaint the next time he catches someone stealing his sandpaper.

There are no signs of any realisation dawning on him, after all this time, and I'm not sure he'd recognize the wah if we spelled it out. If a sequel to 'Sandbag' comes out next year, there's every chance I'll be providing an update and a claim to the longest running wah in living memory!

The Bunk Light Bill

This has just reminded me of another good naval one. Newbie joins the ship, settles in and after his first week is told about the bill for his bunk light. Said newbie then spends the rest of the month either reading by torchlight or just getting into his scratcher and going to sleep. End of the month, there he is standing at the regimental office trying to pay his bill!

Beer Tokens

As a young Sapper just out of training, upon arrival at my new unit in BAOR one of the older lads asked me if I had my beer tokens for the weekend. "Beer tokens?" says I.

"Yep, beer tokens" says he. "You go to the pay office and ask to buy beer tokens. You pay Deutschmarks and collect these tokens that get you cheaper beer down town. Paying with tokens brings the cost down to Squadron Bar prices."

So off I run to the pay office with a handful of Deutschmarks, to get my beer tokens.

The pay clerk was actually quite polite as he explained the situation to me. He didn't laugh at all ... until I walked away.

Target Laser Sight

The trick NIG (Billy, newboy) gunners in our lot used to fall for was the old 'TLS routine' (Target Laser Sight, for you non Chieftain wallopers out there).

The Troop Commander would shout:

“Young’n, grab that TLS and take it across the QM(T)s for an exchange, like kidder.”

As said TLS is passed over to him, the Troop Cpl would generally add, whilst backing rapidly away, “Son, see the radiation hazard sign? Means you gotta suit up, like, in case you drop it on the way and it leaks.” (In fact, the TLS only contained tritium or tritium [like a watch] if memory serves.)

Not five minutes later, said trooper is marching across the tank park in full Noddy order, over-boots, S10 and gloves, the lot, with a boxed-up TLS in outstretched arms. By the time he gets to the Tech store, they are all in on it, suited and booted too, and everyone he passes there and back again runs a mile in terror when they see him coming.

Back to hanger and he is asked (from 100 yards across the park) to blot, bang, rub everything he touches before he hands it back to the fitter waiting in the turret.

Said CFN then pops head out of turret ‘sans NBC gear’ and shouts at terrified NIG.

“WAH!”

The full printed version of the book is available for immediate purchase direct from the publishers, price £9.95.

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