

# From young offender to rsm

Literature



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The sound of the triumphant St. George Band bellows through the corridor. The source is the office at the end. As I walk up to the door and just about to knock,

"Come in H," speaks a warm friendly and familiar voice. Its not the kind of voice you'd expect coming from the Regimental Sergeant Major. This was different I suppose. This time I was a civilian, not a soldier, and plus I was an old friend. I went into his office and took a seat. The walls were covered in regimental paintings and photographs. A cabinet on the back wall was full of awards and trophies. This could be described as a typical R. S. M office but this was different. This was his, with his Newcastle United tablecloth, and his personal name plaque, bronze with white gold lettering W. O. 1 . M. Lawson. We sat and talked about the past, on his and our past experiences together.

Mark was born to a single mother in the West End of Newcastle Upon Tyne; in the year England won the World Cup 1966. He would say that is the reason he's so mad on football and has so much English pride. Others say that's just an excuse for his loutish behaviour every Saturday afternoon. His Mother Shirley Anne Lawson found it difficult looking after Mark and by the time he was 5 years old he was placed in to the care of his Grandparents Betty and George. Mark says that George was his biggest influence.

"An ex squaddie my gramps and you could tell, the smartness and discipline of the man was enormous. You could feel the pride beaming out of him. I just try to be all that for him."

Mark spent most of his childhood and teenage years with his Grandparents. His Mother just kept quietly out of his life. He carries a certain bit of

resentment for this but says she had her reasons. " I mean who wouldn't be a bit angry with your ma for just leaving you like that. People are just people nobody's perfect, I've learned that if nothing else in this job. Yeah its hard being brought up by people from an older generation than your mates. With older rules and ancient values. I mean how would you feel having to take your parents to the pictures not for the film but to supervise your courtship. I didn't have a proper kiss till I joined this mob," he remembers and laughs.

He lived with Betty and George quite happily until he was 15.

Mark was involved in a fight in which a young boy almost lost his life and was sent to a Young Offenders Institution for a year. He recalled the whole incident in minor detail, but his time inside as the most frightening time in his life.

" I remember the day in court; I mean it was just a daft fight over nothing really. It just got out of hand. I expected to get wrong but not go to prison, if you like. I mean that's what it was like, it might have been called a young offenders institute. But believe me it was like going to prison. When I got sentenced I looked over to my Grandparents and saw Nanna Betty just crumble and wail and Gramps just looked down at the floor. You know the way, like when you put your head down and look at your feet on Remembrance Sunday. Well I tried to stay strong but I just broke down in tears, I couldn't stop. I cried all the way to my new home for a year. When I got there it was awful the huge walls, gates, guards and dogs. I felt as though they'd dropped me off at colditz."

He went on to describe his loneliness of not just the first night but also nearly half his time there. In a place where trust didn't exist and friends just wanted something for themselves. He was 7 month into his time there when he got the news that George had died of a heart attack. It shook his world; he felt that, the stupid fight had not only cost him his freedom but also lost him his Gramps.

" It was at his funeral. I decided to make him proud of me, even though he wasn't around physically to see me he still would."

In 1982 he left the institution an open-minded young 16 year old. He'd studied when he was in there but did not gain any academic qualifications. So with out a job now back with Betty it was then he decided to join the Army.

" I wasn't very clever but I passed the entrance test and interview. I only managed to pass good enough for the Infantry. So I joined the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, well it was the local regiment. I remember the whole of training; it was just like the Y. O. Except you had trust there and friends. Plus you wanted to be there it wasn't forced like national service, no, no I volunteered for this. It was new, it was good."

He went on to join the 1st Battalion R. R. F. Where he described himself as a model soldier. Even if he did have a smirk on his face at the time. I spoke to old comrades and asked them what he was like.

" Model soldier don't make me laugh. He was a good lad, but always had an eye for the lady's, and a desire to get caught up in the stupidest situations

ever. I remember the time he showered the C. O.'s daughter with gifts and flowers. Only to be put on show parade for a month for trying to get into her window at night. I mean you don't go into the Colonels house through the front door never mind the window. A model soldier oh aye that was Mark," say's W. O. 2 Stacey, his friend since joining the army. He carried on to serve in various parts of the world and continued to keep an eye on the girls and his foot constantly treading in something. It wasn't until 1991 when I first met him. He was my Section Cmdr in the Gulf.

He struck me as a very professional person but had a terrific sense of humour. In a place like that you needed someone to make you smile and work, well to me he, was both these things. After the Gulf he went on to further his rank and career. Trying to get promoted as fast and as good as possible. In 1995 he met Marie. An attractive estate agent with her own car, as he would describe her and after a whirlwind love affair they were married a year later. She recalls, " He thought he was James Bond or someone. When I asked what he did for a living, I work for the Government he said. I new he was a squaddie, I just thought he was cute. The wedding was like a dream. He held nothing back. The guard of honour and the brass band. I felt like a princess, he's like that on occasions he pulls out all the stops, if you know what I mean. He like's to go the full nine yard's for people he care's for."

After serving in Bosnia and Northern Ireland, Mark became a father to a young boy Mark George.

" I named him after me and Gramps I think he would've liked that. Being a father is mad everything changes. You're views, your attitudes, and your whole life. I wouldn't change it for nothing."

He went on to serve in the second Gulf campaign. After his return he was given his new position, Regimental Sergeant Major of the 1st Btn 1 R. R. F. Where he sits now a proud but very warm kind of person with a job to do and only his way to do it.

" Aye from young offender to R. S. M., who'd of thought of that? Well he might not be here but I bet Gramps really is proud of me know."

So I leave Catterick after a very good day of reminiscing, and leave the barracks and the R. S. M. to his duties and his men.