

THREE DECADES IN BLUE

CH 38 – REMEMBERING JOHN HEDGETHORNE AND HARRY FULLER

It would be easy to write this chapter in a manner, assuming that everybody who will be reading it will know who the two titled people were – considering that within the police they were very well-known individuals from the 1960's & 1970s, though until their respective retirements. However, I have to be mindful that there will also be readers who may NOT have known/know them so well and thus I shall apologise 'up front' (to those who DID), for writing this in a way that they may feel is 'stating of the obvious' – but now you will understand 'why' I have done that. Whichever group you belong to, I hope that you will enjoy reading this chapter, it being interesting, informative and in some places 'AWESOME'!

We all I feel sure will have known/know people in our lives, who for one reason or another were/are 'significant' – I'm referring to those people who we may have 'looked up to' and/or 'looked upon with respect' – whether it be due to 'who they were', 'what they did' or 'how they conducted themselves'. I'm referring to those people who 'influenced us', who 'impacted upon us', left an 'indelible mark upon us' (mentally, Emotionally and in character building), securing a 'special place in our memories' (a 'pencil note in the margin of our minds') causing us to NEVER FORGET THEM!

John Hedgethorne and Harry Fuller were two such people (certainly in my life and I believe in the lives of many others), who I can confidently say I believe made such an impact. Chief Inspector John Hedgethorne was the Commandant of the Essex Police Cadet School, from its opening in autumn 1969, to when the last Course (No 7) 'Passed Out' in the summer of 1977. Inspector Harry Fuller, was John's Deputy at the Cadet School, also from when it opened its doors to young 'police hopefuls' in 1969, to when he left around May/June 1975 – moving to work on a project at Police HQ, then later to Grays and finally to Basildon in the early 1980's, which would be his last station.

John Hedgethorpe (who was said also known as ‘Jon Hedger Torn’ in France – when competing in French Race Walking events and ‘Hog’ around the Cadet School – akin I guess to ‘Hedgehog’) and Harry Fuller (who in his later years tended to refer to himself to friends and work colleagues as ‘Uncle Harry’), were quite different ‘characters’ – it being said by another former member cadet school staff that knew them both, that their ‘ideas/methods’ of handling cadets were ‘quite different’ – yet they never ‘publically’ showed themselves at ‘loggerheads’ with one another¹.

John Hedgethorpe and Harry Fuller BOTH commanded respect and it was easy to read in their ‘manner’, their ‘deportment’, their having some military/service background. Having said that, out of the two of them in many ways, it was John rather than Harry who projected that ‘militaristic manner’, he often behaving like an army Sergeant Major strutting about an army parade ground ‘bellowing’ at his troops! However and interestingly, it now seems that much of that ‘gruffness’ was just a façade – I being told once by a former member of his cadet staff, that behind ‘closed doors’ he was forever asking ‘how his cadets were’, showing constant and genuine concern for their welfare. That said, John Hedgethorpe rarely showed that ‘caring’ side of himself publically (especially not directly to the cadets), I guess he likely thinking that it was NOT the right relationship (between ‘he’ and ‘the cadets’) - NOT in the cadets best interest.

Harry on the other hand being a Yorkshireman and a little older than John, was much more openly ‘kindly and warm’ towards the cadets (and indeed most people he came into contact with I think). I certainly would say that when Harry later became my shift Inspector at Basildon between 1982 and 1985 – when my first son was born - I cannot praise him enough, for his support and kindness. Indeed, so highly thought of was he by my then wife and I, that when my eldest son Matthew was born in October 1983, my then wife and I agreed that we should recognise Harry’s kindness by giving our son a last Christian name (out of five) of ‘Harry’ (his name being; Matthew,

¹ N B (2021), Personal recollection

James, Paul, Albert, Harry).

It was after that ‘bond’ was formed between Harry Fuller and my eldest son, then further enhanced after my youngest son Thomas arrived in March of 1985 and Harry attending their joint Christening, that Harry forever after showed interest in both of my son’s developments AND indeed my own welfare – regularly sending letters and cards – in which he referred to my eldest son Matthew as ‘Little H’ and himself as ‘Uncle Harry!

As mentioned earlier John Hedgethorpe was quite different to Harry, in his NOT showing any ‘softness’ or ‘outward warmth’ towards cadets, his bellowing ‘parade ground’ voice often heard echoing along one of the corridors of the former cadet school complex, calling out ‘Dozy Man’ - at any cadet seen behaving in a way, which he felt dropped below the standard which he required (something similar to John Cleese as the Headmaster Mr Stimpson, in the 1986² British comedy ‘CLOCKWISE’, when he would call out via a loudspeaker system to any misbehaving student(s) in the playground, their name followed by ‘Nine Twenty’, meaning, to report to his office at 9.20am for admonishment!).

However, having said that, there were moments when you could indirectly ‘read’ John Hedgethorpe’s ‘covert’ concern for us cadets – such as when I suffered a nasty head and right elbow injury, through a stupid accident involving the cadet school main lift and as I sat there before him (after a visit to the Hospital for stitches), in a post event ‘discipline interview’ (with head bandaged and right arm in a sling) he commented (still in a reasonably detached, gruff voice), ‘It looks like you’ve been punished enough Mr Watson’ – he being magnanimous enough to recognise, that I had indeed learnt a ‘very painful lesson’ – making my residual punishment, much less than it otherwise could have been.

² UK (2011), Radio Times Guide To Films 2012, London, BBC Worldwide Limited, ISBN 978-0-9567523-1-4, p 238

I learnt of Harry Fuller's military past, upon a visit to his home in May 2007, some years AFTER he had retired from the police. I can honestly say that what happened that day at his home 'shook me' - from the point of view of what he revealed and of which I had no idea about beforehand. I have never and shall never forget how 'blown away I was', at finding out what I did, things (as far as I knew) Harry had kept quiet about, to all of the police officers he had ever worked alongside,

Harry revealed to me that as a seventeen year old lad, he joined the Scots Guards (Army Regiment) and at nineteen, was the youngest serving Sergeant in the Scots Guards, then deployed along with other British soldiers to the jungles of Malaya (for the next three years – no breaks, no leave, no returning home for Christmas), fighting Communist Chinese Terrorists. Furthermore, (if that wasn't enough of a 'past life bombshell'), Harry shared with me that in the early 1950's, still as a member of the Scots Guards but after his time in Malaya, he became a member of the Household Guard at Buckingham Palace, having the honour of being 'Escort to the State Colour' on the occasion of Queen Elizabeth's Coronation in June 1953 - he standing there at the edge of The Mall, in scarlet tunic, black fur bearskin, rifle and other uniform adornments (brushed and polished to perfection), alongside other similarly uniformed members of the Household Guard, as the Queens coach passed by on that historic day.

By this time (during my visit to Harry), I was simply 'gobsmacked into silence' at what he was sharing with me (backed up by photographs and documents). It was almost as if 'I had been chosen' (by him) 'to be the one he would share this past secret life with'. I felt honoured, privileged and was convinced that Harry was sharing things with me about his early life, that had laid (in a 'closed box') probably unspoken of, for many years.

I felt that those revelations were quite significant and something told me that I needed to not only show respect and reverence to them – but at the same time I needed to record

what I was being shown – so that one day, somehow (this chapter being ‘the way’), I would share Harry’s story, of this kindly, Yorkshireman’s amazing early life!

Once I had seen and heard of Harry’s experiences in the Scots Guards and his time as a member of the Household Guard at Buckingham Palace (the Scots Guards being one of five units from where those soldiers are sourced, the others being; the Grenadier Guards, the Coldstream Guards, the Irish Guards and the Welsh Guards), it made absolute sense that he would progress after joining the police in 1954, to being a Drill Sergeant at the regional Police Training Centre at Eynsham Hall in Oxfordshire. How long Harry Fuller was there I do not know, but at some point he ended up as an Essex Police Sergeant stationed at Chelmsford Town police station, which is from where he came on promotion, to being Inspector and Deputy Commandant at the Essex Police Cadet School, when that training facility opened in the autumn of 1969.

It’s interesting to ponder now, whether or not the Cadet School Commandant John Hedgethorpe, knew as much about Harry Fullers’ ex-military past as I found out (or for that matter did ANY of the other cadet school staff know of Harry’s military past?) And if John Hedgethorpe HAD, how did he felt about that? Was he intimidated by it? Was he envious of it? Or did Harry (as I can imagine he may), just keep it to himself?

It is interesting to recall that when I visited Harry at his home in 2007 and he revealed all that he did about his past military experiences in Malaya (31 days away from Britain by boat in those days, so he told me), he also revealed that he had returned there in 1992, with some ex Scots Guards buddies (Eric Lazenby and Don Houlston³) for the purpose of a BBC TV investigative documentary, about an incident during that conflict/campaign, which had attracted controversy. I should say at this point that neither Harry Fuller nor his two fellow former Scots Guards soldier buddies were alleged to have been involved in that incident (known as the ‘Batang Kali Massacre’ – 12th Dec 1948⁴), they alternately

³ BBC TV (2021) Internet search – ‘Inside Story’, documentary broadcast 9th September 1992

⁴ Wikipedia (2021) Internet search

being the first soldiers to come upon the ‘carnage’ days after the incident – never (so it’s said) ever being told exactly what their soldier colleagues had done⁵.

The reason I mention that ‘controversy’, is that I wonder if when Harry came back from his three years in that ‘jungle theatre of war’, having all those nightmarish ‘dangers and deprivations’ still fresh in his mind – whether he just wanted to ‘try and forget about it’ (like so many war veterans understandably would want do) AND that may have been the reason, why Harry never discussed it openly - until he felt ready to with me that day I visited his home? If that be the case, I think most of us can fully understand and respect his reasons for keeping matters to himself, as we would of ANY ex-service man or woman, who has been exposed to such intensity of ‘real and present danger’, for days, weeks, months, years – respecting their need for ‘space and time’, to deal with such mental ‘demons’ and ‘scars’ in their own way.

I said early on in this chapter that John Hedgethorpe and Harry Fuller were quite different people but that they had similarities/things in common too.

John sadly suffered a stroke and died in January 2000, at which time he was 68⁶ years of age. That same year Harry was 70 years of age – so the pair were closely aged. John is said to have joined Essex Constabulary (as the force was called then) in 1955⁷ and Harry in 1954⁸. Prior to John joining the police he was said to have served as a regular N.C.O (Non Commissioned officer) in the Royal Army Educational Corps⁹. So both John Hedgethorpe and Harry Fuller had been ‘twenty something’s’ in the services PRIOR to their joining the police.

Before John attained the rank of Chief Inspector and the role of Commandant at the

⁵ RADIO Times (1992), Feature on the ‘Inside Story’ documentary.

⁶ The Law (2000), The Law Newspaper of Essex Police

⁷ The Law (1969), The Law Newspaper of Essex and Southend on Sea Joint Constabulary – First Edition April 69’

⁸ The Law (2010), Item on the passing of former Inspector Harry Fuller

⁹ J H (1969) The Law Newspaper of The Essex and Southend on Sea Joint Constabulary - First Edition. April 1969, front page.

Cadet School, he served at a number of different stations around Essex including Romford (which later became Metropolitan Police ‘K’ Division¹⁰), from where in 1962 he went to the Regional Training Centre Eynsham Hall as a Sergeant Instructor¹¹ – where Harry also spent time, but as a Drill Sergeant also in the 1960’s. After Eynsham, John was posted in 1965 as a Detective Sergeant to Basildon, but was soon promoted to Inspector and further posted to Grays¹². That interestingly is also where Harry had been before his final move to Basildon in late 1982.

John was posted from Grays to Recruiting and Training and Personnel at HQ in early 1969, as a Chief Inspector – before being selected as the new Commandant for the Cadet School later that same year. Harry was a Sergeant at Chelmsford Town before being offered the job as Deputy Commandant at the cadet school in 1969, being promoted to Inspector into that role.

Both John Hedgethorpe and Harry Fuller enjoyed sports – John’s leanings being towards ‘Race-walking’, Cross Country Running and ‘ultra-events’, such as the Barking to Southend, the 100 mile Road Race (he winning one at Bristol in 1969, securing for himself in the process a place in the Great Britain Team¹³) and the 24hr endurance race – it said John’s best for that was notching up 132 miles!¹⁴ . John was a ‘machine’ when it came to those ‘endurance’ events – he seemed to ‘feed’ on physically demanding challenges – the harder it was, the more he seemed to enjoy it!

Harry on the other hand enjoyed coaching cadet Football and in his own private life, had a liking for ‘Dog Racing’ and his own great passion which was Cricket. I believe for a while after his retirement from the police, he was able to secure a part time role as a Groundsman, at Chelmsford Cricket Ground – which must have seemed like a ‘gift from

¹⁰ J H, The Law Newspaper of The Essex and Southend on Sea Joint Constabulary – First Edition, front page

¹¹ L W (2021) Personal recollection.

¹² WPS Vera Bayliss (1965), Essex Police Magazine Summer 1965, Chelmsford, Essex County Constabulary, p 51Police

¹³ UK (2000), Daily Gazette – Essex County Standard – 26th January 2000

¹⁴ L W (2021), Personal recollection

heaven' for him.

There is another fascinating 'cross-over' link between John Hedgethorne and Harry Fuller, which will likely not be known to many, who did not know of Harry's past army career. It concerns John's daughter Karen who in 1972, flew to Kuala Lumpur in Malaya to marry a chap who was engaged in servicing radar installations for the Royal Malaysian Air Force. It was reported in the Law Newspaper (still then of the Essex and Southend on Sea Joint Constabulary) in June 1972, that the couple planned to live on the outskirts of 'K.L', expecting to return to the UK the following year.

Both John Hedgethorne and Harry Fuller were working together at the cadet school at that time and so it seems quite likely, that HAD John knew of Harry's past military service in Malaya, he would likely have consulted him about Malaya. Of course it also follows, that if John did NOT know of Harry's military past in that country (and/or Harry did not 'give up' knowing of the place to John), then it would have just been an interesting co-incidence, with no consultation between about the place.

I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter how we remember certain people due to the 'impact or influence' they may have upon us and putting to one side ALL the many police officers and civilians that will have known John Hedgethorne (mainly through his involvement in athletics) and Harry Fuller (many through his love of Cricket and even though having been a Drill Instructor at Eynsham) - my calculations (based upon information gleaned from The Law newspaper and other sources) suggests that over the seven courses (nine years) that the Essex Police (Residential) Cadet system was operating, some x 463 cadets (that's boys & girls, plus those who joined directly into the 3rd year attachment phase), WILL have been 'impacted or influenced' upon by one or both of those men.

As PC Laurie Rampling was quoted in the February edition of The Law Newspaper, following the death of John Hedgethorne, he said about him; 'He helped the

development and personality of the hundreds of young men and women who emerged from that establishment into the real world of police work'. I'd like to think there is a little bit of JH in every one of them, as there certainly is in me'.

Pat Campen (former cadet school staff member and cadet herself), was quoted in the July 2009 edition of The Law Newspaper, upon the school's 40th anniversary about John Hedgethorne, as being 'an imposing and charismatic man' and that Harry Fuller was 'firm but always fair' and 'ready for anything and jovial'. Pat further commented about the cadet system (and those two men in general terms); 'I have no doubt that the values, determination, teamwork, confidence, discipline, persistence, loyalty and respect these inspirational men instilled in us, have made us who and what we are today. I and so many other former cadets, will always be grateful to them for that'.

A former member of the cadet staff commented to me about John Hedgethorne; 'John's attitude towards his cadets and staff was always professional and duty bound to turn out the best cadets he could. His attitude towards his staff was that he wanted them to be honest, to work hard, to give their all to be a role model for his cadets and to always be beyond reproach'.

Harry's last posting in his career with Essex Police was to my shift at Basildon and as part of his 'send-off', shift colleague John French (who was a talented watercolour artist of caricature's), did a great one of Harry showing his holding a Guardsman's Bearskin Hat, plus a friendly racing 'greyhound' in the scene'.

One incident that took place when I was a young Bobby at Basildon and Harry was my Inspector, which I shall never forget, took place during the summer of either 1983 or 1984. I had been sent solo crewed to a 'Sudden Death', of some poor elderly lady who had fallen in her kitchen – which did not appear suspicious, she possibly having a heart attack or something similar and fell down. Anyway, I attended and apart from establishing that it was NOT suspicious, I simply had to wait there for the undertakers to

attend, which for some reason that day took a while. At some point Harry turned up to see if I was okay - in those days, it was not uncommon for duty Inspectors to put on their issue 'blue Essex Police blazer' and go out to check on 'their lads'.

So Harry turned up and I recall I had the front door ajar, he called out to announce his arrival and I guess I was initially surprised to see him, but it was kind of nice to think he was bothered enough to want to check up on me. Once he clarified for himself what was going on he rubbed his hands together and said something like; 'Right lad, let's have the Cricket on'! He then went into the lounge, turned on the ladies TV and sat down to watch some Cricket! I guess I must have looked a bit 'stunned' as he then quickly said to me something like; 'Don't worry lad, nobody's going to have to pay this bill', smiling in his own unique charming way, with that cheeky 'glint in his eye', which he had.

Harry stayed with me for some fifteen/twenty minutes or so and subsequently turned off the TV, told me he was leaving and went. I was kind of bemused I guess at his actions – not sure in my mind if what he had done was 'okay' or perhaps a tad 'disrespectful' – the poor lady lying face down dead in the next room!

However some years later, when I was reflecting upon Harry's actions that day it suddenly dawned upon me, that quite possibly what Harry had done that day upon his visit was simply FOR ME – in that he intentionally 'made light' of a difficult situation, he being conscious of my being a young Bobby at that time (with less than 5 years' service) and that by behaving the way he did, it was making that situation less traumatic for me? I could be wrong, but that's now how I now like to reflect upon that situation – as kindly 'Uncle Harry' using some 'old school police psychology', to make a difficult situation 'easier for me to cope with'! That would have been Harry's nature to do that I think.

Harry Fuller retired from Essex Police in 1985, after completing his full service. John

Hedgethorpe's retired in 1986¹⁵, which just prior to he had moved to Public Relations and was involved with Police Vocational Students (aka PVC's)¹⁶ - the replacement scheme to the former residential Police Cadets. It's said by a former member of the cadet school staff that knew Joh, that he knew that the (residential) cadets were finishing well before it was announced¹⁷ and that is likely why the students on the police course at Chelmsford College of Further Education, were 'up and running' by the time the Essex Police Cadet Corps had their Passing Out Parade in the summer of 1977 (he wanting some kind of continuity from 'the old to the new').

John Hedgethorpe's funeral service took place on Friday 11th February 2000 and although I did not attend, I understand there WAS a huge gathering of ex cadets, some ex cadet school staff and various others people - including his surviving spouse Elizabeth Hedgethorpe. There was also a 'guard of honour' provided by a number of students and cadets.

Harry Fullers funeral service took place on Thursday 4th February 2010 and that occasion I did attend. There were many ex cadets and some ex cadet school staff there too, with former top cadet Dick Madden, doing a fine job of reading a Eulogy. A private function then took place after, at the Conservative Club in Chelmsford and it was nice to see John French's watercolour caricature of Harry, on proud display there.

One last thing I want to mention in this 'chapter of reflection', was something of a personal tribute to John Hedgethorpe – but which was 'delivered' to him as a gesture of thanks from ALL the cadets and cadet school staff in the summer of 1977, during the practice weeks ('run up') to the Passing Out Parade of Course No 7.

What happened was as follows;

¹⁵ UK, Daily Gazette – Essex County Standard – 26th January 2000

¹⁶ N B (2021), Personal recollection

¹⁷ N B (2021) Personal recollection

A few months before the 'Passing Out Parade' of the last residential cadet course No 7 (my course), it crossed my mind that the Commandant John Hedgethorpe had over the years that the cadet school had been in operation, presented multiple awards and certificates to cadets for their achievements and so wouldn't it be good, to 'turn the tables' of you like and present HIM with an award as a kind of 'farewell gift', in recognition all of HIS efforts and contributions over the years, in helping to 'mould and shape' all of us cadets.

So I think I consulted with Pat Campen (on the cadet staff), who I recall was supportive of the idea and I then spoke with my father, who was a very capable builder & decorator who then went about designing and making a wooden shield with a metal front plate – upon which I later painted a 'likeness' of John Hedgethorpe. My father also made a smart wooden presentation case for the plaque.

With the shield and presentation case finished, we surprised the Commandant during the Passing Out Parade rehearsals, with an 'impromptu ceremony', in front of all the gathered cadets and staff, in which I said a few words thanking John Hedgethorpe for his efforts over the years that the cadet school had been in operation and presented him with the plaque and case. The Commandant appeared genuinely surprised and taken back by the 'award' – I being told later by Pat Campen, that the Commandant was indeed 'moved' by the gesture.

It would be nice to think that even after John Hedgethorpe's 'passing' in January 2000, his widow Elizabeth and the family, were able to reflect upon that 'plaque' (amongst all his many other athletics and police awards), as a 'symbol' of how highly he was thought of by ALL cadets, whom he had dedicated his time and efforts to between 1969 and 1977, in trying to make 'us' 'THE BEST THAT WE COULD BE'.

RIP to BOTH John Hedgethorpe and Harry Fuller. Two men who gave so much 'to and for the benefit of others' – we thank them – we miss them.

