

Rifleman B will always be a Rifleman.

The stripes, crowns, laurels, stars and swords of rank... black, white, silver, gold or red... embroidered, stitched, printed or stamped... are unlikely to be his. His "Swift and Bold" lumbers along at the Experimental Corps' cadence of hundred and forty paces to the minute. This rate of advance is the unchanged distinction for Sir John Moore's 18th century dark, racing-Rifle-green innovation of the embodiment of the thinking soldier, who continues to serve us all, Wellington, Richards, Fox, my family and yours, so well.

So many prescribed lessons, quality instruction, Explanation, Demonstration, Imitation and Practice go, systematically, plan-fully and (of humane necessity) de-sensitisingly, into the uniquely standard casting of each and every modern Rifleman. That ingraining, into muscle memory, of each element of basic, advanced and continuation training, as skills combine into drills sequenced tactically as part of the operational art designed to achieve strategy, will, randomly, save some of our "happy few" lives, and help our band of Brothers and Amazons, to decide how best to do bad things to "very bad" people; to wit: the Queen's enemies.

And what of Rifleman B? He and I have had but two-range-stew-side conversations where I shared my observation of how he moves his head, and therefore his sight-line, away from observing the plywood targets (for which read: covering the threat in his arc of responsibility, for example, during the intimately vulnerable reorganisation phase of an eight-strong section attack on an enemy held position).

He described how he can't find by touch, the magazine housing, to relocate the fresh magazine charged with 26 tungsten-cored, full metal jacket, high velocity, 5.56mm ball life-taking-life-savers [not forgetting the two tracer rounds at the bottom, nestling snugly atop the spring-loaded carrier-plate - two, first in, last out flaming-red messengers - offering a visual clue to the firer, inevitably forgetting the memorable, yet, hotly, un-remembered, Directing Staff's injunction "count your rounds", to take cover to re-load].

My homoeopathic, mini-personal-shared-story, for him, contained my hard-learned invitation to stay with the individual separate lessons, trusting the process that, with care, attention and practice, one day, like sex, it does come together.

One day arrives. I am leaning against a tree trunk, watching a team progress through a blank firing, fast-moving, contact drill exercise. B takes cover in a slight fold in the ground; cover from fire as well as cover from view - a good, split-second observable, recently drilled-in, decision. His observation into his dynamic arc of responsibility wavers not, as his arms, hands and fingers dance in balletic syncopation to re-charge his contribution to the, simulated, fire-fight.

Preparing to move, he crawls back, shuffles sideways and explodes backwards from cover, weaving and hard-targeting, back no more than 10 metres to his next, slightly more exposed, but none the less effective at his customers' end (as they really do benefit by keeping their heads down) fire position, as he targets his kinetic contribution again..., again..., ag-ag-again and... again, meaningfully, to his team's extraction from the killing ground selected by the "enemy".

I notice, just before his sideways shuffle that he spots my expectantly raised eyebrows and he turns his head to look at what I want to make him see. I raise a smiling, positive, big, emphatic double thumbs-up. He nods, grinning. He knows that I know that he knows that I know. A beautiful, dutiful, shared moment between two of this day's Spartans. An instantly intimate grunt-free connection between Grunts, freely de-code-able by any Amazon passing by.

He'll always be a Rifleman, Rifleman B.

Rifleman B is real; no composite character, he... and this really happened.

Like his Company Commander / Instructor, he's a Territorial.

"...for over a thousand years this country has looked to its reserves for its defence".

It still could ... just !

"Del" Mears* TD VR LLB(Hons) MSc is a retired Parachute Regiment Major. Commissioned in 1984, he describes his 24 years reserve service as "the privilege of a couple of dozen years in the best Regiment in the best small army in the world". He is also a recovering lawyer (admitted as a solicitor in 1987) and has served household name companies at board level as an advisor and trouble-shooter on matters as diverse as performance, talent, change and strategy.

*Del Mears is a nom de plume.