

THE TUXEDO WARRIOR

CLIFF TWEMLOW

FOREWORD AND EPILOGUE BY

GEOFF THOMPSON

SUMMERSDALE

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Front cover photo of Cliff Twemlow taken from the film G.B.H.

Foreword

By Geoff Thompson

When I first wrote *Watch My Back*, an autobiographical book about my own life as a nightclub doorman, I believed that it was the only book of its kind, certainly on these shores. It seemed however that I was wrong. I was informed by my friend Peter (Consterdine) that a man by the name of Cliff Twemlow had previously published a similar book, though it had been out of print for some time. I tried to obtain a copy of Cliff's book but to no avail. It wasn't until some four years later that another friend, Steve Gumbs from Liverpool, managed to get hold of a second hand copy of *Tuxedo Warrior* for me. I read it and loved every page.

Watch My Back had/had been a very successful book for me though I could never quite work out why or what people saw in the book, that was until I read *Tuxedo Warrior*. All the way through I drew comparisons with my own book and saw for the first time what others had seen in *Watch My Back*. I felt an immediate affinity with its author, with his life, his loves and his battles in a city (Manchester) that could quite easily have been my own city. I liked the book so much that I made inquiries about acquiring the copyright. Peter, who knew Cliff when he was alive, put me in touch with some of his old friends and relatives, in particular Cliff's nephew Aaron and his life long friend Steve Powell. Aaron had a chat with the family and they very graciously allowed me the copyright to re-release this great little book.

One very sad thing was that I never got to meet the very charismatic author of this book, who died in 1993. It is my hope that in re-releasing this book many others will be able to share

Cliff's fascinating story and gain inspiration and knowledge from a man who lived such a full and colourful life.

Other than adding the Foreword and Epilogue, I have left the *Tuxedo Warrior* as it was written. The words, expertly crafted, are all by Cliff's own hand.

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Chapter One

THE YOUNG WARRIOR

I was born on October 16th 1936, at Number 14 Lord Street, Hulme, Manchester, the final addition to a family of six - brothers John and William and sister Ethel named after my mother and myself Cliff.

My father Harold was a strong, powerfully built intelligent man, who spent much of his life away from home, his occupation being a Merchant Seaman. Frequently he would return to dominate our home and lives, causing my mother a great deal of unhappiness and distress which would also affect us. Father was also a self-confessed atheist whose home spun philosophies were in later years to hold a certain profoundness and wisdom for me.

He was often heard to quote 'If there is a Holy Spirit or a devil it is drink, for it can bring out the best or the worst in people.'

Drink was the only religion he believed in and one which he frequently practised. Omar Khayyam, the Persian Philosopher, was my father's Prophet, for whenever the opportunity arose he would encourage us all to read his works. You may say we were weaned on bread and jam and Omar Khayyam.

My mother Ethel, once a chorus girl with the George Roby Troop, was kind, loving and gentle. Her love and knowledge of music, which each of us seemed to have inherited, was to be of great significance to me during the course of my destiny.

Looking back now, the environment to which I quickly became accustomed was a constant fight for survival - street fighting and hardship were accepted as normal everyday occurrences. A once upon a time when shoes were considered to be a status symbol, when going bare foot had to be tolerated

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by the majority who, in spite of their existence in squalor and poverty, managed to survive the ever increasing hardships of a country soon destined for war.

Germany, who was ready and restless, began flexing its muscles in a show of power. Soon the whole of Europe were to become engaged in the preliminary bouts of war before Hitler made the final bid for world dominance. Britain accepted the challenge and with little more than courage, khaki and blue, set forth to suppress the might of the Hun to the accompaniment of *We'll Meet Again* and *Roll Out The Barrel*.

My father changed services from Merchant to Royal Navy, where he became an Unarmed Combat Instructor and during the course of his career he led silent raids on strategic positions behind enemy lines, engaging in hand to hand fighting with the opposition.

Meanwhile my mother had managed to acquire a more acceptable dwelling for us in Barton, a small village that bordered Eccles, Salford. So, one Sunday morning with the assistance of a horse and cart, we arrived at 3 Peel Green Road - a rambling old house with a homely appearance downstairs, while the upstairs possessed a haunting, mysterious atmosphere created by large blue painted attics, creaking floorboards and old fashioned fire grates, Three bedrooms that were situated below the attics always held a somewhat gloomy forbidding darkness which was increased by the small narrow windows.

Behind the house a small garden, consisting of a selection of weeds, overlooked the Manchester Ship Canal, where Barton swing-bridge could be observed making its daily routine manoeuvres, allowing ships entrance and exit to and from the Port of Manchester which lay two miles up the river. A variety of trees were seen to flourish along the waters edge. All this was heaven - water, grass, trees, ships - how posh could one become. An outside toilet and white-washed back yard were further luxuries on our Bartonian residence.

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My eldest brother John soon became eligible for the Armed Forces and influenced by my father, he also joined the Royal Navy.

Godfrey Ermen Memorial School, where education was taught and character was moulded, and for those inattentive shirkers backsides were beaten (my own backside having felt more slipper than most peoples feet) was soon to learn of the one thing which I excelled in - my ability as a fighter.

Those unwary young males who unfortunately underestimated my capabilities, were soon to discover that this blond-haired blue eyed refugee from Hulme would not take the funning of his patched up pants and darned socks too lightly and soon I had established myself as cock of the school - *Scrapper Twem*.

The performing of physical exercise had always been encouraged by my parents, and a proven asset which has enabled me to win numerous bare-fisted encounters with a variety of opponents throughout my youth.

Meanwhile, the Americans who were now our allies, had made their own invasion of Britain taking command of selected bases throughout the country in order to strengthen our defences. Burtonwood near Warrington had become one such establishment.

The Yanks were soon to introduce us to various items indigenous to their way of life, such as *Wrigleys Chewing Gum*, *Durex* - common terminology of that era being 'Noddy Bags'.

Almost every G. I. would boast to us naive British of being a kin to John Wayne or some other super-star. The nation's mothers and daughters were easy pickings for these American marauders, those chocolate chewing, Lucky Strike smoking smoothies, with strange sounding names, i. e. Willard, Richmond, Clint, Conroy - 'Any gum chum?'

In between numerous air attacks, exploding bombs and confinements within air-raid shelters, we pretended an almost normal existence.

1945, Germany had been defeated, the war was over. Aided by our allies, we had emerged victorious. The whole of Britain

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erupted into a festival spirit as a carnival of peace spread throughout the land. Brightly coloured Union Jacks were hung and flown across the cities's small towns and villages.

Meanwhile, the nation eagerly awaited the return of its sons and daughters. For some a joyous occasion, while for others grief and seemingly small consolation in the knowledge that their loved ones had died for our country, leaving only a legacy of memories and faded picture to cherish. Their sacrifice was our salvation. 'Lest We Forget.'

For those fortunate enough to have returned home, the fight for survival was to continue and promises of a better existence were soon forgotten as great expectations soon faded with each blundering government.

'To the victors the spoils.'

Despite the controversy following the war, life still prevailed and my youthful activities could be summarised on one hand - football, apple pinching, tree swinging and swimming in the Bridgewater Canal the local pool. A time when summer seemed endless and any kid associating with girls was a cissy, and besides girls wore frocks and knickers and did not possess a thingy like boys.

Winter time you could rely on snow, while Carol singing commenced early around September. Needless to say, my friends and I were repeatedly pissed off by miserable misers for our premature Yuletide recitations.

Sister Ethel had received an inner calling to enrol in the Woman's Royal Army so disguised as a cook she embarked on her new career. If the German forces could have sampled her recipes, the war would have been called off. Now Ethel was to be allowed the practice of her culinary arts on our peace time forces, and if they survived this gastronomical assault, it could be recorded in history as being their finest hour.

My brother William, who was now an Accountant, was also destined to wear khaki while father had resumed his previous career in the Merchant Navy employed by the Manchester Liners Limited, making repeated voyages to Canada and America, and

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returning home via the Manchester ship canal - Eau-de-Cologne North West.

1951. For me school days were over as I entered into the era of Teddy-Boys, Jivers and Creepers.

On leaving school I harboured no immediate plans of becoming a millionaire so I decided to accept employment as an apprentice Projectionist at the princess Cinema, Monton Eccles. Bored and mischievous I would press a certain button which would immediately send the curtains swishing across the screen during a performance, leaving the audience below in utter confusion.

My final exodus from the Princess arrived one Saturday night. I had managed to persuade the head Projectionist to retire for a pint after the first house, upon which I completely re-organised the whole show. In omitting the news and adverts and only presenting the beginning and end reel of the main feature, a bewildered audience found themselves vacating the premises at 9.15 pm - they weren't admitted before 8.15 pm, not even time for their choc ices. Needless to say, my services were no longer required.

Similar incidents were to follow in the numerous varieties of employment which I pursued, until finally Eccles Employment Exchange became seemingly reluctant to assist me any further, stating that I had exhausted their whole supply of suitable vacancies.

Not to be discouraged, I resumed my own search with grim determination. In the evenings I'd meet up with the usual crowd, exchange talk and strengthen my already established reputation as an up and coming hardcase (a phase that a great majority were passing through in this particular era) and fool around with the girls. Childhood opinions of the opposite sex were long forgotten as a new lustful stirring was apparent through my body - a five mile hike with a promise of breast feeling was considered worthwhile, anything more daring and the mind boggles.

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