

SAY GOODBYE TO MUM

A ballad for the 50th Anniversary Reunion of the 13th Intake of Army Apprentices
by Bob Ludlow

"Say goodbye to mum, get on that train, the loco's set to go,
You're heading off to Balcombe Beach, which is only just a throw",
That must be right, 'cause the brochure said, "the beach was just nearby",
Perhaps the stone was not so big, as the Army wouldn't lie.

The DCO, three stripes on show, strides up and down the aisle,
"Where's your bed; is that a joke?", he says with hidden smile,
"It'll only take a day or two, and you're travell'n second class,
Until we're there you'll have no sleep, you'll be sitting on your arse".

"Like hell I will!", I need my sleep, and settled in the racks,
That made more room for my new mates, now sleeping on their backs,
We'll stop a while, or maybe two, there's food but not so much,
I'm a growing lad, just out of school, and want my bloody lunch.

The time arrived, the trip went fast, only three more years to go,
I hope my bedroom's oh so nice, a little bit like home,
"What sleep in that! Its just a hut, of tin and floors so bare,
And what about those other blokes: you mean we have to share?"

The shower's cold, we've got no walls, the Corporal's just a prick,
Sleeping in his donga there, not caring what we think,
"Make up your beds, clean up your boots", he yells at every dawn,
"Get on parade, don't mind the frost, and you'd better be well shorn".

But I know we'll learn a thing or two, a lot more than they think,
To trust our mates, to roll a fag, and how to get a drink,
To learn a trade, to run a mile, and how to shoot a gun,
And how to keep from being sad, turning hardship into fun.

And fun we had, and stuff the rules, our mateship stood us well,
Our drinking on the sly, and more, but no-one there did tell,
It was as if we'd sworn a pledge, unspoken but so strong,
And those were there, they stood as one, no matter right or wrong.

It's late at night, you scale the fence, Lights-Out has come and gone,
I'm in the shit, the Sargeant's there, and he knows I'm in the wrong,
"You're on the mat, now in the cell, you scrawny little brat,
What's in the pockets of your coat, and don't tell me it's your hat".

A quart of plonk, and one of ale, and my baccy tin so dear,
A coin or two, my money's gone, till pay a week from here,
So I'm off to see the Colonel now, but I doubt he understands,
"Twas just a touch of weakness Sir", I plead with shaking hands.

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"See here my lad, I've told you once, and won't tell you any more,
Its fourteen days in barracks now, plus a fine to keep you poor",
So the kitchen is my home 'till then, but its not so bloody bad,
There's lots of bread, and butter too, with sauce and heated snags.

Our mid year passed by quickly, with that odds and evens game,
As we learned to mind our P's and Q's, at the sharp end of a cane,
Our mentors were a toughened mob, but I wonder if they knew,
How we learned to beat the System, and to outwit Mick the screw.

We're seniors now, one year to go, and it's our turn to rule,
Two groups have gone, two more have come, to this our Boys-town school,
From boys to men, in such short time, we've changed in many ways,
We know we will remember all, as we move through future days.

And our history from that distant page, is recounted to this day,
But slightly more embellished, as some small truths fade away,
So stuff all those who worry, if we add a little bit,
As our aging minds assemble, just what put us in the shit.

That bemedalled sarge, 'twas on that train, departed long ago,
But now I understand too late, he was much more than show,
He did his job, he went to war, was not his choice or call,
And with respect, I now do know, he was father to us all.

I'd trust my life to all were there, and to them would also give,
That same regard, and selfless help, as long as I shall live,
For friends that form and share what's hard, together when they're young,
Will stay together through the years; just as we have done.

After all the years since when we left, we've gathered now once more,
To spin some yarns, remember mates, who've passed on well before,
'cause once you wear that badge with pride, a family you become,
To meet as if was yesterday, when we said "goodbye to mum".