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Mylne has created a page-turner here.'*
Randy Mains, columnist Rotorcraft Pro Magazine



Life in a Spin



*the riveting revelations of
an international helicopter pilot*

NICK MYLNE

Illustrated by Peter Loyd

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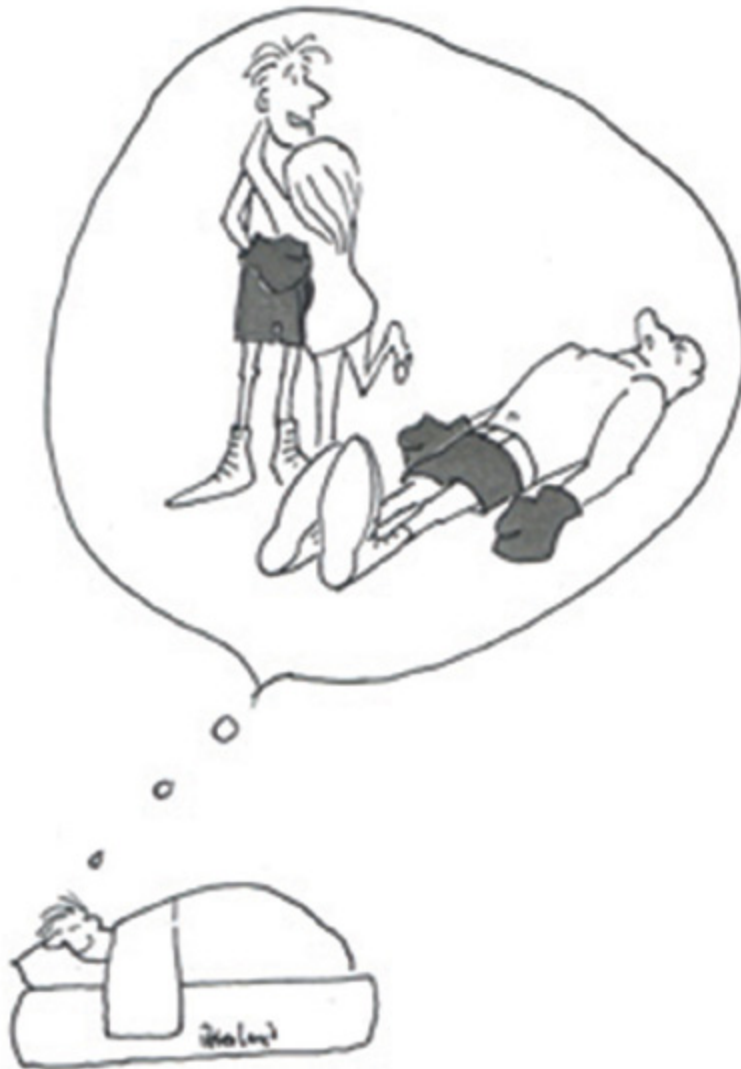
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A Boxing Calamity



Shortly after entering Sandhurst, both I and the Academy realised that it was not a good decision. At the end of my first month I was summoned into my college commander's office to be told I had

absolutely no officer-like qualities and – unless a miracle happened within the next three months – he would be recommending my expulsion.

I knew that my mum would be bitterly disappointed and would feel hugely let down, which was the very last thing I wanted to happen. So I decided to make Herculean efforts to stay and looked around for advice. I knew, through the family, a senior cadet and cornered him on his way out from the breakfast hall one morning.

He could not have been kinder and took me aside into an empty classroom. He listened carefully and then explained that the most important factor in assessing cadets was the almighty ‘Character Grade.’ How it was categorised, he said, was a mystery but it was rumoured that all was well if your character grade was five or above out of the maximum ten. ‘Clearly Nick, you have to somehow up your grade.’

‘How on earth do I begin to do that Jim?’ I asked.

‘Well,’ he replied, ‘It’s a gamble, but I am told that if you represent Sandhurst at boxing, two marks are automatically added to your Character Grade. If that is true, it might be enough to put you in the clear.’ My heart sank, but I had no choice but to follow his advice.

My entrance into the boxing world coincided with the arrival of a new Academy coach – an ex-professional with unbounded ambition and a total disregard for the welfare of his students. One of the very first matches he arranged was with Oxford University.

Not only was it vital that I performed well, but its importance was magnified as University matches in those days were held in public. We arrived early and sat down as a team opposite the main entrance and waited for the arrival of the opposition. My nervousness rocketed as I watched them file into the hall. They were all huge. However, second from last to enter was a friend I immediately recognised. I got up from my chair and intercepted him before he entered his team’s dressing room and asked him to point out to me the person I would be boxing.

‘What weight are you, Nick?’

‘Welterweight’

‘Nick, you are very lucky. The star of our team is our welterweight and he’s gone sick at the very last minute so we had to scramble for a stand-in. Come with me and I’ll point out your opponent.’

He opened the dressing-room door a couple of inches.

‘There – the chap in the red shorts.’

I saw a thin, delicate and narrow-shouldered twenty-year-old.

I was elated.

In my imagination I would smash him in the first round, earn congratulations from my Bluebeard coach and start a stunning career on the way to becoming a general.

I almost danced back to re-join my team. However, on the way I passed two young girls sitting in the front row. One was an angel of a blonde and – to my disbelief – gave me a wink and a thumbs up.

I was in heaven.

I was on the eve of a spectacular career and an association with the most beautiful goddess.

I couldn't wait for my turn to fight.

At last, at last my time came up.

I sprang into the ring and, with a heroic eye contact with my divinity, completed a couple of squats in my corner.

I heard the referee call, 'Come into the centre and shake hands!'

With one final glance at her wonderful, wonderful smile, I swung round to face my doomed opponent.

There in the other corner was the biggest gentleman from Nigeria I had ever seen. His stomach was like an accordion, his triceps were almost as big as his biceps – he shone.

And I fainted.

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