

November 23, 2022

Bulldog Drummond and Britain's Hour of Peril

By: S. Unian Sambar

The (erstwhile) Empire is under threat and the old heroes are recruited once more to vanquish the enemy. Their bravery is not to be questioned but there is a twist in the tale.

How I came to be mixed up in the show is, as Kipling would put it, another story. Suffice to say it had a lot to do with being a pal of Peter Darrell's, who, along with me, turned up occasionally to open the innings for Middlesex. That is how I was introduced to Darrell's remarkable group of friends. In the absence of that cricketing association, I should have remained forever the harmless solicitor I was, a man who had no excitements in life beyond assisting with probating the odd will and dodging his Aunt Gemma's persistent invitations to make a speech to her loathsome tenants at the annual village *fête*. It is thanks to Peter Darrell that I had the privilege of becoming a part of his charmed circle of extraordinary friends and war-time heroes: Algy Longworth, Toby Sinclair, Ted Jerningham—and above all, their vast and universally worshipped leader, Captain Hugh ('Bulldog') Drummond, D.S.O., M.C., late of the Loamshire Guards, and the whitest man I have ever known.

The exploits of these warriors need no fresh retailing by me. They are immortalised in the records of 'Sapper' and the films of Hollywood. Even so, it is regrettable that in the course of Britain's descent into mediocrity after the end of Empire, there has been a tendency to forget these men and all they stood for—their daring and their wit, their unshakeable patriotism, their contempt for dodgy foreigners, their firm way with the lower classes, their love of the Old School Tie, and their hatred of taxes. It is forgetfulness for which England paid, but for which the England under today's Tories has had the sense to atone. For, in their hour of need, they turned again to Bulldog Drummond. It proved, as my brief record will show, to be too late to be of much good, but for all of that, it was a great and moving gesture.

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MI6 calls

I should say that Drummond and his pals in 2022 were still a hale and hearty lot, even if their average age was around one-hundred-and-thirty-three years. No doubt their robustness had much to do with two or three life-times of sturdy indulgence in tobacco, ale, and large indigestible meals at the Conservative Club. It was our custom every Sunday to foregather for ale, banter and luncheon at Drummond's flat in Half-Moon Street in the City of Westminster. It was at one of these gatherings that Drummond received a call out of the blue, a very brief one.

He turned to us, with a grin of pure joy spreading across his homely countenance. With a friendly clap on my shoulder which sent me reeling across the room, he announced: "Laddies, this is it! The game has begun, and the show is on the road once more! We are wanted instanter at the Home Office in Whitehall. National Emergency. That was old Tum-Tum on the phone now." 'Old Tum-Tum' was Drummond's name for Sir Marmaduke Brayton-Neigh, Chief of MI6, for whom Drummond had fagged when the two were at Eton. But I'm getting ahead of my story, and we need to look at the background to the telephone call.

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MI6 had done everything in its power to stop Vladimir Putin. The drone attacks on the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol in October 2022 did not seem to deter him. Neither did the destruction of the Nord Stream gas pipe-lines in September. The only apparent outcome of these events was that Russia had succeeded, by hacking into the British Prime Minister's iPhone, in uncovering Britain's involvement in them. In their customary underhanded way, the Russians had managed to decipher the Prime Minister's heavily coded message sent to the American Secretary of State a minute after the pipe-lines had been destroyed. The cryptic message which the Russians had sneakily decoded read: "It's done". Naturally Britain denied these true and baseless charges, and the Press and the visual media did their best to cover up the issue. England was rightly angry with Russia for having dared to call into question England's reputation for fair play, especially considering that it was (as usual) foul play: but then, as any decent Englishman knows, what better can one expect from the filthy Russian?

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Carl Petersen Putin

When we arrived at Whitehall, the Chief of MI6 addressed Drummond in these words: “England’s in peril, old boy. I’m myself a blunt military man, unfamiliar with the lingo of the finance-and-economics blokes. I have but a dim notion of the balance of trade or of stock-market prices or of the size of the budgetary deficit or allied bilge of that nature. But I’ve been given to understand that we’re in a spot of bother—a ‘crisis’, really, or so the fellers in Finance say. I don’t quite know what it means, nor do I care, but it appears that inflation has hit ten per cent, that large swathes of the unwashed millions are on the brink of poverty, that energy for heating in the winter months can’t be had for love or money, that the old sterling is sliding down a precipitous slope, that the bond market has crashed, that yields are up, that the southern coast is under invasion by thousands of dirty aliens each day, and that three Prime Ministers have headed the Cabinet over the last two months, while one dear old Queen has passed on. What do you make of it, Drummond?”

“You know me, Tum-Tum. I’m no genius. I have less use for the noodle than for my fists, but even one like me who has a distinct preference for brawn over brain has enough common sense to see what we are up against, what England is up against. Discontent and anarchy unleashed by the grubby working classes and their Trades Unions. And all controlled and directed by one organizing force. That ineffable Bolshevik vermin Putin—with help from the slit-eyes, of course. Ah! That’s him on your video screen! Strike me pink, Tum-Tum, he’s trying to conceal his hands underneath the tablecloth, but he can’t hide the agitated drumming of the fingers on his thigh. By all that’s holy, laddies, it appears that the vile Putin is none other than our dear old friend, Carl Petersen, who’s still very much in the land of the living! I could swear that I had strangled the swine in the Zeppelin on that fateful day, but clearly I didn’t quite complete the job. The disease has survived, and continued to plague the world. That encounter in the dirigible wasn’t, after all, the Final Count. I must make this my positively last round with Carl Petersen Putin!”

“What you say of Putin being Petersen is very grave. It is imperative that you should finally and definitively rid the world of this pestilence. For the rest, I knew, Drummond, that I could rely on you to get down swiftly to the crux of the matter. You have hit the nail precisely on the head. It’s all down to that unspeakable villain Putin. He needs to be taken out. Personally eliminated. I want you to head a small British and European team (including your merry men) which I have put together to do the job.”

“Well—er—proud and honoured to serve the old country and all that, Tum-Tum. But I’d prefer to go it alone with my own lads. Not much use for Frogs and Huns, if you can appreciate that. After all, we’ve jolly well Brexited, haven’t we? Can’t trust foreigners, they’re all dodgy. Except for the Cousins, of course. But saving that: no names, no packdrill, mum’s the word, as I see it.”

“Admirably put, Drummond. You and your lads will be parachuted straight into Putin’s residence. Direct action is what I would recommend. The Bolshies have no Intelligence to speak of. Nor much intelligence, if you get my meaning. Take the damned microbe by surprise, that would be my way of thinking. Of course, you’ll need some cover. We have decided it might be best for you to disguise yourselves as a group of Moujiks.”

“From the earliest days at School, old Tum-Tum, you’ve always had a reputation for thinking of everything. In the cause of King and Country, I have no slightest hesitation in taking on the role of a blasted Russian peasant. I could even blacken my face, if that would help. But here’s the sand in the spinach. We don’t know a word of their blamed lingo!”

“That shouldn’t be a difficulty, Drummond. The lot of you will pass off as deaf and dumb.”

“Brilliant, Tum-Tum, brilliant! This is true genius! Are we ready to go, fellas? I’m glad this is a wholly British operation, with no security threats from dubious aliens.”

What we did not know was that there was a mole in the apple. A Cabinet Minister who had no use for the present Prime Minister had planted a damned traitor in Sir Marmaduke’s office and he, as we were soon to discover, had taped the entire conversation and sent it on to the Kremlin. This should explain the following very quick end to this account.

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End of Saga

The mole having done his treacherous work, we were rounded up within minutes of being parachuted into Putin’s back-garden. Within a few further moments, we were trussed up like a flock of chickens. The five of us—Drummond, Darrell, Sinclair, Jerningham and I—were made to sit on chairs in a semi-circle, with our hands tied behind our backs, and the chairs resting on what seemed to be

wooden flooring.

Standing in front of us was an impassive Vladimir Putin.

“So we meet again, dear Carl,” said Drummond. “If you had any decency, you would untie me, and let us have it out one final time. Played to Queensberry rules, with your guard up—“

“The better,” Longworth broke in languidly, “that Drummond may kick you below the belt.”

Putin stood silent and impassive.

“Well, then,” said Drummond, “what do you propose to do with us, you damned virus?”

Putin gestured to a hireling to pull a lever that we had failed to see earlier. We realised we were on a trapdoor, and that it was going to be opened so that we would be sent hurtling down through it. But just before the hireling pulled the lever, Putin issued a command that I should be untied and led away from the trapdoor. Once that was done, he nodded to the hireling again.

I could not but marvel at the cool and nonchalant courage of Drummond and his friends.

“God save the Queen!” roared Drummond.

“It’s the King now, old boy,” drawled Algy Longworth. “I know it’s hard to get accustomed to the notion that she couldn’t go on and on and on forever. So, altogether now, lads: God save the King, such as he is!”

After the plaster from the roof had settled, Drummond uttered his last words: “Dropping us into the Baltic Sea, are you, you indescribable hound?”

For the first time, Putin spoke. “What is it with you Brits and geography? Once and for all: it’s the Black Sea. Baltic: *nyet*; Black: *da* .”

And with that, the lever was pulled, and the saga of Bulldog Drummond and his friends forever buried in the depths of the ocean.

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Betrayal

It remains to say that I was sent back to England with the firm injunction to present a full and accurate account of Bulldog Drummond’s final Final Round. You will ask: why, now that I have my freedom and am back in England, have I obliged Putin? You wouldn’t ask me that if you knew anything about Drummond’s widow Phyllis. No matter how many times it happens to her, she never learns the unwisdom of allowing herself to be kidnapped by the heavies at a crucial juncture in the story. This time was no exception. The preceding account is the price I have had to pay for Phyllis Drummond’s release.

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I have but one more thing to say, just in case I haven’t already said it.

Hugh Drummond was the whitest man I ever knew.

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