

Doc's orders

SoldierSport meets the National Serviceman and would-be-officer who went on to command some of the greatest names in English football

Interview: Richard Lenton

FIRST met Tommy Docherty back in 1999 when, as a young journalist with one too many glasses of complimentary champagne inside me, I was bundled into the back of a taxi with "The Doc" following one of his legendary performances on the after-dinner speaking circuit.

When I leafed through the former Manchester United and Chelsea manager's recently published autobiography, *Hallowed Be Thy Game*, I was somewhat miffed that such a momentous evening in my life had failed to warrant a mention.

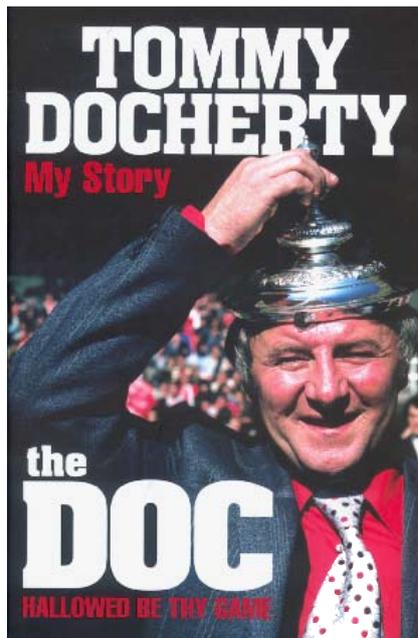
After all, it may have been worthy of a whole chapter in any one of the fluffy tomes published by today's overpaid Premiership stars, who seem to put crayon to paper almost as soon as they've graduated to the first team's subs bench for a League Cup tie at Scunthorpe.

In stark contrast, The Doc, now 78, refreshingly waited until he'd seen it, done it and worn the T-shirt before finally releasing his long-awaited memoirs.

As a player the affable Glaswegian, who was born and bred on the mean streets of the city's Gorbals district, was described by Hungarian legend Ferenc Puskas as "a fabulous defender, one of the most difficult opponents I ever faced". But it was as a manager that Docherty really made his mark.

Although his career took in the less than glamorous surroundings of places like Rotherham – "I promised I'd take them out of the second division and I did, into the third" – the former Scotland boss also occupied the hot-seat at Stamford Bridge and Old Trafford's Theatre of Dreams.

However, Docherty's life could have



WIN: *SoldierSport* has three signed copies of *Hallowed Be Thy Game* (Headline, £18.99) to give away. To have a chance of winning simply tell us the year in which Tommy Docherty led Manchester United to FA Cup glory. Winners will be drawn at random from the correct answers received by February 28. Usual rules apply.

taken a completely different path had he opted to remain in the ranks of the British Army after serving in the long disbanded Highland Light Infantry (with distinction) as a National Serviceman in the late 1940s. It was an experience he remembers with great affection.

"I was 18-years-old, I'd never left Scotland and I was a bit of a scallywag, so it was the making of me," said Docherty, who played alongside record Football League goalscorer Arthur Rowley and David Beckham's grandfather, Gordon West, during his stint in uniform.

"It taught me discipline, tidiness and organisation – it was terrific.

"The single worst thing this country ever did was to get rid of National Service, without a shadow of a doubt. You wouldn't have all these hooligans and thugs running around today if a spell in the Army was still compulsory. I'd love to see it brought back."

Natural leader: The Doc, pictured front right with pals from the Highland Light Infantry, was offered the opportunity to train as an officer after impressing during National Service

After six weeks of basic training in Staffordshire, the teenage Doc found himself on active service in Palestine. With talks under way to form an independent state for the region's Jewish population, it was a volatile environment.

"I was on guard duty on the night the King David Hotel in Jerusalem was bombed, killing 91 people – many of them fellow British soldiers who were mates of mine," he said. "Luckily I was on the right side of the hotel when the bomb went off. I helped to look for survivors – it was an horrific experience."

After two years of unblemished service, Docherty rose to the rank of sergeant and was being groomed for officer training when fate intervened.

Any thoughts of becoming a "Rupert" evaporated when Docherty's boyhood heroes, Celtic, came calling.

And although the young Doc failed to make his mark in Glasgow, he established himself south of the border as an uncompromising defender with Preston and Arsenal.

It was after breaking his leg while playing for the Gunners against his old club Preston in 1959 that Docherty, who represented his country at the 1954 and 1958 World Cups, began looking towards a future in coaching.

After becoming player-coach at Chelsea in 1961, The Doc was swiftly promoted to the top job at the tender age of 34 when manager Ted Drake resigned, but he couldn't prevent the ageing team he had inherited from being relegated in 1962.

It was an inauspicious start to his managerial career, but there then followed five years of success as his youthful Chelsea side established themselves as a major player in the top flight and genuine contenders for European honours.

However, just a few months after Docherty guided the club to the 1967 FA Cup final, and with talent such as Peter Osgood, Bobby Tambling and Ron "Chopper" Harris at his disposal, he surprisingly quit Stamford Bridge.

"The situation at the club changed after Joe Mears died. He was the best chairman I've ever worked for," he said. "If Joe Mears was still alive it would be me, not José Mourinho, in charge at Chelsea. Being at Chelsea was my most enjoyable time as a manager."

After brief cameos at Rotherham,





Picture: Peter Robinson/EMPICS

Crowning glory: Tommy Docherty celebrates with the FA Cup after leading his Manchester United side to a 2-1 victory over Bob Paisley's Liverpool in 1977

QPR, Aston Villa and Scotland, Docherty took over at Manchester United, who were on the slippery slope to the second division just a few short years after Sir Matt Busby's side had been crowned champions of Europe.

Docherty immediately began a rebuilding job, replacing ageing legends such as Denis Law and Bobby Charlton with youthful exuberance. Unfortunately, the new-look Red Devils struggled to gel and, with United languishing at the wrong end of the table, the ghost of one George Best reappeared at the club – a whole year after hanging up his boots.

"We were struggling and Sir Matt persuaded him to come back to help us out. But he'd had a year away, doing things he shouldn't have been doing. He'd lost his acceleration and for the first time I saw fear in his eyes," he added. "He played three games for us but then, just before an FA Cup game, having missed the pre-match meal, he turned up in the dressing room drunk out of his mind with the most gorgeous looking creature on his arm asking to play.

"Soon after that we cancelled his contract. It was very sad because he still had another ten years at the top. He was arguably the greatest player I've seen in my life."

United suffered the ignominy of relegation in 1974, but Docherty's

exciting young team immediately bounced back to the top flight with a side crammed full of entertainers.

In 1976 United reached the FA Cup final, losing 1-0 to Southampton, but a year later The Doc was lifting the trophy after his side overcame Liverpool.

However, just days after Docherty's crowning glory as a manager, it was revealed that he had been enjoying a clandestine affair with the wife of the club's physio, who promptly planted a sweet right hook on the manager's nose. Soon after, Tommy received his marching orders.

"Because I fell in love with Mary, I got the sack for breaking the moral code even though there were people at the club who'd seen more beds than Percy Thrower's trowel," explained The Doc, who, nearly 30 years on, is still married to Mary.

After five years at Old Trafford, in charge of arguably the biggest club in the world, there then followed much less successful stints at Derby, QPR (again), Preston and Wolves.

"After Manchester United, unless you go to Barcelona or Real Madrid, then the only way is down. I'm convinced we'd have won the title within two or three years if I'd stayed."

In the event, it was to be another 16 years before United, under Sir Alex Ferguson, finally regained the cherished crown they'd last worn under Busby.

But while The Doc may have been down as his managerial career came to an abrupt end, he certainly wasn't out and, with his abundant footballing knowledge, charm and wit, immediately became a sought-after pundit.

Although he is now approaching 80, Docherty still works in the media, writing for the *Manchester Evening News* and working the mic on Talksport. And the outspoken Scot is never short of an opinion.

"I get annoyed when I see so much money in the game – it's immoral.

"An average player today can get £25,000 a week and they think

they're doing you a favour by giving you an autograph.

"The other night I was at a dinner and Stan Collymore was there. I said 'it must have been nice to get 40 grand a week and Saturdays off, Stan'.

"These lads should be thankful that they're earning a great living for something they love doing. I've had my successes and failures, ups and downs, but I've got no complaints – I've had a great life." ■

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