

Line of fire

Tony Judge reviews former Metropolitan Police DAC Brian Paddick's controversial autobiography.

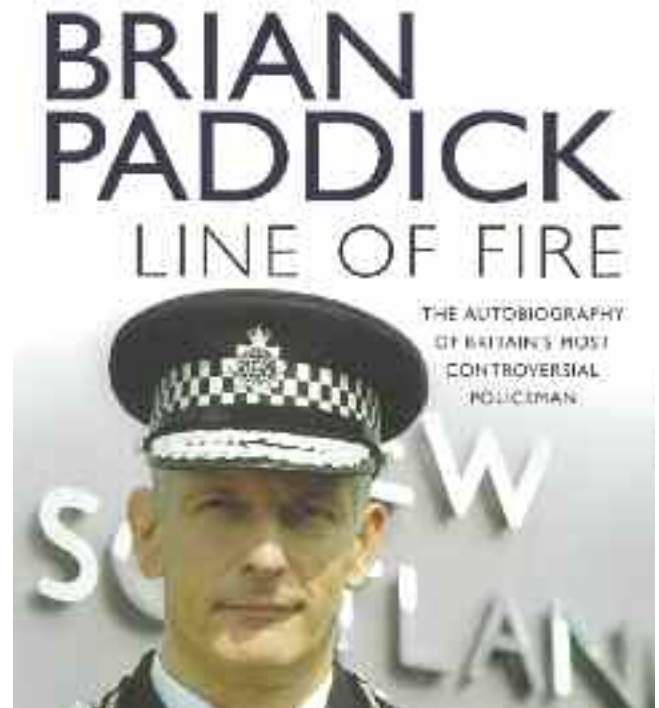
Following a spectacular fall-out with Sir Ian Blair, former DAC Brian Paddick retired in time to stand as the Liberal Democrat candidate in the London Mayoral election. His recent autobiography throws light on the problems of an openly gay senior officer striving for top command, whilst keeping the tabloid bloodhounds at bay.

Brian Paddick's autobiography is titled "Line of Fire". It is an exercise in self-justification in which he puts a number of former colleagues in the sights of his sniper's rifle. He has a photographic memory for total recall of every slight he claims to have suffered.

Paddick was born into a middle class Wimbledon family in 1956. He knew from early childhood that he was different, but managed to conceal his sexuality until he was in his forties. After failing to get the A-level grades needed to study medicine, Paddick joined the Met, aged 18, in 1976. He says his main motivation to become a police officer was his father's fear of unemployment.

Paddick says that the 'desperate rush to recruit anybody with two arms, two legs and a pulse' during the Seventies attracted unsuitable recruits, who in later years, dealt drugs, took bribes and fabricated evidence. He claims that today's Met is again accepting substandard recruits, and he describes Hendon Training School as a hotspot for unacceptable behaviour.

The young PC Paddick soon made himself unpopular with his shift colleagues, due to his insistence on "going by the book". He refused to back a colleague who wanted him to say he had seen an offence committed by a motorist when he had not. However, thanks to doing well in the promotion exam, he soon began to climb the fast-track ladder, starting with a place on the Special Course at Bramshill. There he was inspired by "a handsome (and straight) sergeant from Kent" to become a committed Christian. His career was also boosted by years of academia where he studied at Oxford for a degree, and later at Warwick Business School. By this time, his private conviction that he was destined to reach the very top of the Met had hardened into an expectation of early success. He realised that he was not alone in his ambitions, and his book reveals that he and the late Mike Todd, who was his immediate superior when he was a Superintendent, did not get on together. Both were after the glittering prize –Met Commissioner.



Against the grain: Brian Paddick reveals life as a senior Met officer

Paddick blames Todd for much of his spectacular fall from Ian Blair's favour. He was convinced that Todd fed damaging information about him to the tabloids. He made a formal complaint to Ian Blair, then Deputy Commissioner. After an investigation by Sir Ronnie Flanagan, the Chief HMIC Paddick was told that Todd denied having spoken to the press about him, an assurance that he did not believe.

Paddick's hunger for self-promotion exasperated the Yard. He believed that he had the right, as a senior officer, to hold forth on any subject, without first obtaining permission. Frequently, his remarks ran counter to force practice and policies. This, with increasing regularity, brought him into conflict with the force hierarchy, particularly Ian Blair. In an address to the right-wing McWhirter Foundation, he said that he opposed the Government's proposal for extending the period allowed for detaining terrorist suspects to 90 days. When this appeared in the press, a furious Commissioner forced Paddick to issue a further

statement that amounted to a partial climb-down. Unabashed by reprimands, he continued to court the media, even when sections of the press had turned him into a figure of ridicule. He dismisses the concerns of his superiors almost contemptuously; “The people of Lambeth were right behind me while my colleagues at Scotland Yard were nowhere to be seen.”

When he was removed as borough Commander at Lambeth, after yet more publicity surrounding his sexuality and allegedly soft approach to drugs, he got support from the Community Police Consultative Group, local MPs and Ken Livingstone. He writes: “If someone had told me that 300 people, black, white, old and young, straight and gay, Liberal, Labour and Anarchist, protesters and campaigners, would all be standing together in Lambeth Town Hall demanding their police commander be reinstated, I would have wondered what planet they were from”. In reality, this was a planet on which Brian Paddick’s ego had crash-landed. After the meeting, he marched to Brixton tube station passing posters bearing his photograph and the legend – “He’s not a very naughty boy, he’s the Messiah”.

Planet Lambeth contains many thousands of citizens who have very different priorities from those of the urban activists who, after all, have spent many years complaining about police policies. By his own deliberate choice, Paddick had become an uncontrollable maverick who still believed that he was destined to command the Metropolitan Police.

It was not his fault that Sir Paul Condon chose him to promote the deeply unpopular tenure scheme that destroyed morale amongst detectives and other specialists, but Paddick’s enthusiastic promotion of its alleged benefits did nothing to boost his popularity.

It must have been frustrating for such an ambitious man to see it scrapped by Condon’s successor, John Stevens.

However, it was Stevens who promoted him to Commander.

But Paddick has a sense of humour. In a chance encounter with a Daily Mail reporter who was pursuing Paddick at the time, the journalist told him it was “nothing personal” and added; “I just do what my bosses ask me to do”. To which Paddick, restraining a strong impulse to “knee him between his legs”, responded: “I have the opposite problem.” Paddick did have the satisfaction of collecting substantial libel damages from the Mail on two occasions.

The incident that led eventually to Paddick’s retirement from the force was the shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes in July 2007. Paddick refused to buy Ian Blair’s insistence that he did not know, until the day after the shooting, that the Met had killed a wholly innocent man.

However, a trivial incident brought about the final breach between Paddick and his one-time friend, the Commissioner. Blair had been under fire about the cost of the police operation to remove an anti-Iraq war protestor who had camped in Parliament Square for

many months, to the annoyance of Government ministers. Blair said the cost was £7,000, but someone told the Daily Mirror that the true cost was £27,000. A furious Blair carpeted Paddick accusing him of having leaked the story. When he denied it, Blair is alleged to have called him a liar and said he was moving him from operational command to a desk job in the nether regions of the Yard. Finally, seeing that his career was at an end, he resigned.



Maverick: Paddick frequently clashed with his superiors

Brian Paddick’s book differs from the usual run of police memoirs. It is worth reading because, maverick or not, Paddick is obviously a man of ideas, high principles, and considerable abilities. His Mayoral election campaign may have been a shambolic disaster, suggesting he may be well advised to leave politics alone. Enoch Powell once said all political careers end in failure. To some extent, this applies to anyone who reaches for the top in their chosen calling, and falls from grace in the process. I have always had a soft spot for the occasional mavericks in policing. They are more interesting than the grey men and women who do make it to the top. They all fail in the end, but they remain true to their convictions, no matter how mistaken they may be. Reading this book, I found myself admiring the man at one point, and despising his self-centred motivation at another. Above all, this is an honest if self-serving book, and it contains lessons for many current and aspiring chief officers about the rewards and pitfalls of reaching for the pinnacles of power.