

NATIONAL SERVICE 50 YEARS ON

Berwick Coates

'Bring back National Service.'

How often does one hear that heartfelt plea as a cure for the apparently permanent epidemic of yobs, hoodies, louts, hooligans, delinquents, and general undesirables, yet one wonders whether the pleader really has any idea of what he or she is asking for.

National Service came to an end fifty years ago - the last National Serviceman was demobbed in May 1963 - so you have to be nearly seventy to know what you are talking about - which cuts out the majority of the population.

So what was National Service? How did it start? How long did it last? What did you actually have to do? Who had to do it? Was it really as awful as all that? Or was it in fact worse? Why did it come to an end? What good did it do - if any?

This profusely-illustrated book takes you behind the scenes of the 'system' which created National Service, and analyses the effects it had on two and a half million young men who were given no choice about giving up two years of their lives to the Armed Forces.

This fascinating and richly nostalgic book will provide insights into National Service for those too young to have experienced it and will bring a host of memories for those who went through the apparently endless round of square-bashing and spitting-and- polishing, sometimes with endurance and surprisingly often with enjoyment.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

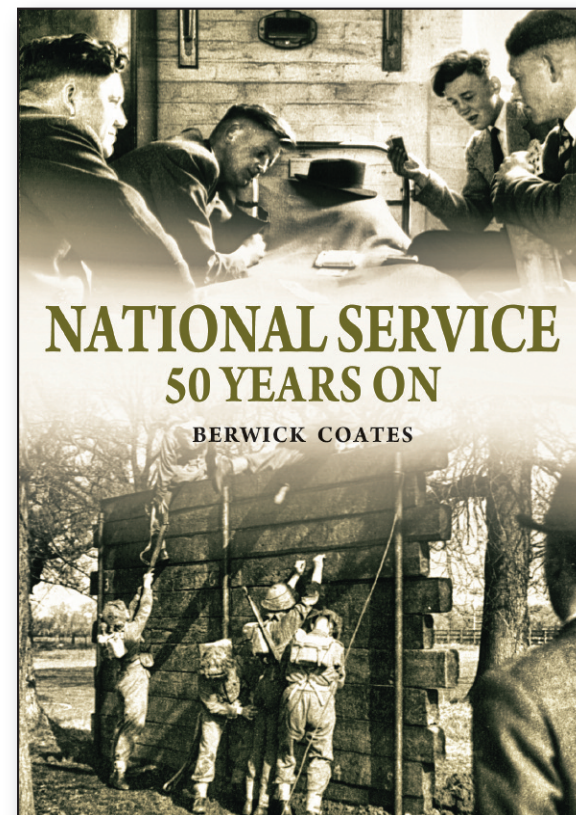
Berwick Coates was educated at Kingston Grammar School, and read History at Christ's College, Cambridge. Since then, he has been at various times an Army officer; writer; artist; lecturer; careers adviser; games coach, and teacher of History, English, Latin, General Studies, and Swahili. He lives in the West Country, where he works as a school archivist. His written work includes biography, text books, general history, local history, memoirs, humour, and light verse. This is his tenth book. His first historical novel will be published next year by Simon and Schuster.

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Learning to wear uniform. Mastering the precise position of the cap badge – one inch over the left eye – and trying the unromantic, square-ended woollen tie.

The Services took its sport very seriously. Games which had been arranged were to be played regardless of the weather – in this case arctic. Competitions, cups, and medals were continual.



No Army training unit was complete without its assault course, and this was part of it – the fearsome ten-foot wall. Note the obligatory trilby hat for the cadet spectator in civilian dress.



Example of a double-page spread.



Postings abroad usually involved some serious soldiering.