Those looking to shatter their last, lingering hopes for the future of Britain should visit Burnley. What used to be a prosperous cotton-mill town is now decimated by the terminal decline of industry, with entire square miles of housing steel-boarded-up, repossessed and marked for demolition by the local council. Unemployment is all-consuming, violence is a popular pastime—as is the rampant theft of expensive copper pipes from condemned houses to sell as scrap to pay for heroin and crack. It’s practically a ghost town these days, but instead of headless cavaliers with chains clanging around their wrists and ankles, there are gaggles of toothless, skeletal smackheads waddling around in skid-mark-stained tracksuit bottoms. Actually, scratch that—it’s more zombie town than ghost town.
Burnley is also one of the focal points of the plan- et’s most terrifying and hilarious forms of dance mu- sic: donk. It’s pretty much the only thing kids live for there. But drive 40 minutes down the motorway, away from the cluster of northwest donk satellites (Bolton, Wigan, Burnley, Blackpool), and barely any- one’s heard of the genre.

There’s a bit of debate about donk’s origins, but generally people attribute early-90s Dutch produc- ers like Ultrabeat for pioneering the sound. It’s a rave-based dance music created around no-budget 150 bpm houncy beats, intrusive fog-horned synth stabs, cartoon-y samples, and unsettlingly saccharine highs. It’s basically happy hardcore on a crip- pling steroid comedown. The word “donk” comes from the relentless, maddening “donk” sound that’s overlaid on the beats. The fact that a whole subcul- ture stems from a noise that originated from an old- school keyboard sound-effect that emulates an em- pty drainpipe being hit by a paddle tells you pretty much all you need to know. The genre has also been called “scouse house”, which refers to its early pro- liferation in Liverpool, and “bouce”, which many locals still use today. Donk has come to represent the sound’s recent influx of MC culture. Inspired by Eminem-copying white-boy rabbiting and early-90s rave MCing, the real donk stars these days are its hype men, whose rhyphing has become the focus for most young fans. To some, this sounds like a hype men, whose rhyphing has become the focus for most young fans.

The hordes grabbed at them, screaming every syl- lable like it was donk scripture. After the show, anx- ious teens scrambled to get close to them and begged for autographs, with one over-excited 12-year-old, who called himself MC Scott, reporting breathlessly that his favourite rappers are “Eminem and MC Dowie”.

All the members of Blackout Crew either live at home with their parents or in council houses. This is what gives them such strong local appeal. The tan- gibility of having their heroes scuff their heels round the same shopping centres seems to have given many kids a refreshing perspective on the concept of celebrity. “I’d love to be a famous MC when I grow up,” said Scott. “At the weekends, mind. I want a proper job too, like selling cars.”

The day after watching Blackout Crew get mobbed like the intro sequence to A Hard Day’s Night, we travelled to nearby Wigan, donk’s Mecca. Wigan houses one record shop, Power Records, that ex- clusively sells one genre: donk. Outside, kids played tracks such as the Red Hot Chili Peppers’ “Other Side”, Katy Perry’s “I Kissed a Girl”, and Chris Isaak’s...
"Wicked Game" getting bouncy makeovers. We were able to evade a pair of gummy thugs from Salford who appeared to have just smoked all of Moss Side’s yearly crack production and caught up with Power Records co-owner, Pam, a girl who’d moved down from Scotland to be closer to the throbbing heart of donk. She explained how they’d tried selling other kinds of music in the shop, stuff you would think may crossover like hardcore or hard house, but to no avail.

"Och, if it doesn’t have a donk on it, Wiganers just don’t want to know," she said. Asking for a description of your archetypal donk fan, she explained:

"The guys are meatheads. They’re all pumped up on steroids, no tops, shaved chests and shaved heads. They wear white trainers and shorts in the winter."

And how about the girls?

"The girls won’t be wearing much," she said. "Either fluorescent bikinis and face paint, or just their underwear. Usually they will wear furry boots and have scraped-back gelled hair.

Later that night we witnessed a crowd of nearly 3,000 of these self-professed “donkeys” welcome Blackout Crew onstage at Wigan Pier nightclub, which, it’s worth pointing out, is the only real club in Wigan, and which these days only plays donk.

Hedonistic weekend escapist culture in Wigan is nothing new. In the 1960s, Wigan Casino became the iconic home to the massive northern soul dances. But when rave culture arrived at the end of the 80s, things changed. As rave evolved, places with African and Caribbean immigrant communities like London and Bristol took to the rolling breakbeats of jungle. Places such as Wigan embraced techno and the deranged euphoria of happy hardcore, and later donk, as their own. Clinging to the bag of pills for dear life and refusing to give up on the weekender dream of 48 hours of chemical heaven, these white working-class areas allowed apocalyptic scenes like those at Wigan Pier to ferment and the careers of people such as Burnley’s MC Grimzie—arguably donk’s most respected MC—to flourish.

"I worked out that the best response I got from crowds was when I say the sickest shit I could think of," Grimzie explained to us during our Burnley excursion. MC Grimzie’s best-known rap is called “Sexy Nun”. It consists of a rhyme chronicling his seduction, rape, and eventual mutilation and murder of a lady of the cloth. He also likes to dip his wick in the political sphere, expressing his views on issues such as the occupation of Iraq and immigration in verses like this one from “Asylum Seeker”: "I am no racist, I’m just sick of this shit/A couple of years illegal, then next they’re raping your kids." Who says politics has no place in music, eh?

Standing at Wigan Pier on our last evening of our northwest pilgrimage, it became apparent that listening to donk for seven hours straight was a bit like being sodomised by a Black & Decker drill in every orifice. But at the same time, the night wasn’t an entirely demoralising experience. The level of frenzied euphoria and commitment on display eclipsed anything we’d ever seen. From the second the doors opened, shaven-headed, topless, gurning young men ran onto the dancefloor to pump their limbs with intimidating ferocity, totally losing their shit. There was no queue for the bar because people were far too preoccupied with pumping their fists and popping endless amounts of pills. The crowd was a mixture of skimpily dressed, emaciated rave bunnies and some of the most gruesome thugs you’d ever come across—blokes whose faces had been permanently disfigured by a lifetime of being pummelled by fists every weekend, who’ve probably washed down massive doses of steroids with gallons of Stella for breakfast every morning since they were 11 years old. You could smell the testosterone and adrenaline oozing from their pores. We spoke to one massive bloke from Liverpool who told us that he’d just got out of prison and his main aim of the night was: “Beak (cocaine), bladdered (drunk) and then I’m gonna go and fill someone’s bum in.”

After a week in the northwest immersed in donk culture, it was impossible to deny that it’s the bottom-feeder of the already bottomed-out dance-music food chain. It’s parochial, drug-centred, racist, sexist and violent, and that’s what makes it so, well, special. For all its flaws, donk perfectly mirrors the generation of kids and the society that created it: totally and hopelessly fucked, in every sense of the word.
The small South Wales city of Swansea is in the grip of a heroin epidemic. How do I know? Well, I’ve been living with a group of young Welsh heroin addicts, on and off, for the last three months. The needle exchange where they flock to every day to change their works recently reported that in the last four years there has been a 178 percent increase in the number of registered heroin users in the city.

This is Amy. At 14, her mother got her hooked on heroin and turned her to the brothels to make money for the family.

A POSTCARD FROM WALES

DEAR MUM AND DAD, I’M LIVING IN A HEROIN EPIDEMIC
WORDS AND PHOTOS BY ADAM PATTERSON
Published November 2009

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Why has this happened? From what I discovered, the supply is driving the demand. Swansea was once a thriving port with a lot of heavy industry, but the Thatcher years and outsourcing to foreign labour has meant that unemployment is high and chances for working-class young people to obtain work is low. It is, however, possible to make upwards of £1,500 a day as a medium-level heroin dealer.

The people I met in my time here told me that heroin has become easier to acquire than cannabis in Swansea, leading to a rise in long-term addiction and the associated spiral of decline.

The result? Lots more heroin dealers selling cheap, cut heroin to an increasingly younger market. If that wasn’t enough, another report recently revealed that in Wales, in 13 years, the number of people contracting hepatitis C through needles is up 1.612 percent.

What else did I find out? Well, lots of other things that statistics can’t record. In an hour you can know more about someone than three months of mindless commuter talk in London. Life is different here.

On a Sunday morning a local man called John Frith, who works for the Swansea Drugs Project (SANDS), walks me around the city. John has seen more than most and has the courage to use this to help out those addicted to heroin. He is well respected here and I am quickly introduced to a number of different faces and opinions that will shape my next four days.

I fall quickly into the lives of people who move very fast. There is Becky, talking aloud to herself with no control of the roaming voices she says are tormenting her thoughts, her fingers badly bent from diabetes. And there is Max, deep vein thrombosis rotting his legs, ridden with hepatitis C, 42 and facing a bleak future. After years on the streets, this couple after years of prolonged drug use, Becky has developed severe headaches and paranoia.
hold down a council house together on the edge of the city.

Walking by the water, I see Simon fishing for mullet, his dog Charlie feeding on scraps from the adjacent pub. He scratches his thick beard and recalls youthful trips to Ireland by boat, surviving only with “eyes on the back of my head”. The boats don’t go to Cork anymore.

Walking up Wind Street, I stop with a girl called Joanne, who is very nervous. The man who assaulted her has been released from prison and is expected back in the city soon. Her story bears a saddening resemblance to many others I spoke with. “I started drinking after my father [committed suicide], but when my mother went [when I was 15], then it got worse and worse,” the story usually goes.

Becky and Neil have been together a short time. They lie back on Becky’s bed and talk of stealing fish-tanks to flog for drug money. Becky is not long out of prison, having been caught attempting to sell drugs to an undercover policeman. As they prepare to shoot up, the routine flows well—all the elements are clean, having been obtained from SANDS—and soon they float away. In most cases, heroin addiction often seems to start young, and more often with the involvement of a family member who has the wrong set of ideas.

I meet some people only once and then they are gone, often in no real direction but with a sense of urgency. Lee and Leanne are hunting for bond money, for example. They need a £200 deposit for a six-month lease. At night they are sofa-surfing with friends—part of the “hidden homeless” the statistics never account for.

John had told me about a young couple who could be too chaotic for me to follow and engage with. Neither Amy nor Cornelius had a phone and so it took a chance encounter and introduction at a breakfast run for the homeless to start the talk. Amy was just out of hospital after impaling herself on a fence; Cornelius helped her through. They have been together almost four years. Over the next few days I would spend a lot of time with them, mostly at night when they would drink big bottles of White Storm cider. They describe trying to come off heroin as being “like the flu, but a thousand times worse”. Living on the streets, their life is like a twisted game of musical chairs. For example, sleeping in the gap behind the solicitors’ wall is no longer an option because they had just been chased from there. Later that day, Cornelius finds an old mattress, and the new plan is to squat a vacant garage they spotted earlier. They talk openly about wanting the life most of us know. Amy would like to study psychology. “You can see people working and doing things with their lives, and I don’t—that’s what depresses me the most,” she says.

These two are not used to a support system of any kind. A family member of Amy’s turned her to heroin and prostitution when she was 14. The last night I saw them, they’d had a row. They’d downed three litres of White Storm in under 40 minutes. Amy, who is only 18, lost a child last year. She and Cornelius are both on methadone and each drinks three three-litre bottles of cider a day. Without the drink, they have morning shakes and wild sweats, distorted logic and a desperate struggle.

Discarded needles are often found in parks and alleys. Many users condemn this lazy practice because disposal kits are available at the Swansea Drugs Project. However, with limited funding, the facility is closed on evenings and weekends.

This homeless person wakes early each morning with the sun. He prefers sleeping at the beach to the town because he can be alone. Here, he is drying his dew-sodden mattress.
In the northeast of Scouserland, aka Croxteth, Liverpool, there lies a delightful old stately home. About 500 acres of it were made into a country park in 1972 and all through the year, families take day trips there to frolic in the fields, eat ice cream, and have a go on the swings. It’s bloody lovely, it is.
But sadly for the holidaymakers, the area directly surrounding the park is run by a multitude of sub-machine-gun-firing gangs, the average age of which is around 15 years old. These kids were all busy getting on with their day-to-day trade of shooting each other and supplying the city’s junkies with regular supplies of crack and heroin, all well underneath the public radar, until one of them mistakenly shot an 11-year-old named Rhys Jones in the back of the head during a gang fight just over a year ago.

Soon after, British true-crime author and undercover reporter par excellence Graham Johnson travelled up to Croxteth with photographer Stuart Griffiths to get in good with the children who run these gangs. This is what they came back with.

**Vice:** Tell us about some of the teenage gang members you met.

**Graham Johnson:** There’s one kid from the Huyton area. He was in a gang called the Moss Edz. He was 14. Let’s call him John. We talked in his mum’s back kitchen while he was doing the dishes and he told me he’d been involved in over 30 firearms incidents, including shooting at rival gang members, being shot at, and “spraying up” houses with rapid-fire machine guns. He told me how he would avoid getting caught through forensic evidences by burning his “Lowies”—the gang’s all-black uniform of Lowe Alpine mountain gear with all-black Reebok classic trainers and black trapper’s hats. Oh, and they wear ski masks too.

I like it. It’s a strong look.

They also wash their hands in gasoline to get rid of gunpowder traces. He told me all this while eating a dinner made up of Haribo sweets, packs of crisps, a chocolate bar, and a bottle of Lucozade.

Sounds delicious—but not very nutritious. Did you meet any of his friends?

Yeah. The leader of John’s gang was a kid called Lee and he was also 14. I met him with a kid called Kevin who received a gunshot wound in his leg when he was 12. They told me that Kevin’s 17-year-old brother Alfie had just got shot in the arse, then took a taxi to hospital. I met Alfie later that day and when I asked him what it was like to be shot he said he “wasn’t arsed” and that it was normal to be shot.

**Why was he shot?**

He insulted a local drug dealer’s mum.

**And what happened after he got out of the hospital?**

They shot a rifle at said local drug dealer’s mum’s house. In response, the drug dealer walked down the street where Alfie, Kevin, and Lee lived and he just shot a semiautomatic into the air and into houses and down the alleyways where the kids sell drugs.

Um, so then the cops came and shot this guy down in the street, right?

Nope. They told me nobody could be bothered to call the police so they left it alone. The drug dealer was connected to a rival gang called the Dovey Edz, from the neighbouring Dovecot area, and stuff like this happens all the time. Maybe ten years ago or so it would have been settled with a fistfight or a knife but now the little kids all have access to powerful firearms. You can see it’s true for yourself by going on YouTube. They make videos of themselves carrying guns and driving stolen cars through council estates and set them to rap music. Often the films have messages to rival gangs in them to the effect of “We are going to come and kill you using all of our guns.”

**What sort of firearms do they have?**

There was one kid I heard about, nicknamed Fuji, who shot himself in his own foot while he was threatening another gang member. When the police eventually raided his house they found an SA-80 army-issue assault rifle—the same used by British soldiers in Afghanistan—underneath his bed next to a load of Xbox games. This gun fires 110 rounds a minute. The police said the weapon had been used to spray up a house in an unrelated incident.

**So is it all shooting houses and accidental foot wounds?**

No. Not at all. As you know, there’s a big trial com-
ing up concerning the death of the 11-year-old boy who was shot by, they say, a 14-year-old, as he was coming back from football practice. And I met a lady called Donna Smith whose son, Liam “Smigger” Smith, was a member of a gang called Noggadogz and had his head blown off with a shotgun by the gates of a prison because he’d had cross words with a rival gang member on a visit to one of his mates. His mother described to me how she’d never seen blood pour out of anyone like that. “It was like running a tap,” she said.

Poor lady. Are you still in touch with her?
No. Sadly, she died shortly afterward of natural causes. That was the only interview she gave.

So we’ve got the Moss Edz, the Dovey Edz, and now the Noggadogz. What kind of environments do they live in?

Well, the Noggadogz live in places like the Boot Estate, which used to be the largest council estate in Europe.

I bet it’s nice there, yeah?
Hmm. It actually looks like a cross between a war-torn Bosnian village and the set of Escape From New York. It’s the perfect environment for gangs to operate in. There are plenty of nooks and crannies to stash weapons and drugs. They need the weapons because there’s currently a war going on between them and their main rivals, the Croxteth Crew. They say that this war is what could have lead to innocent Rhys Jones to getting shot.

Who’s the older guy standing in front of the BMW [above]?
That’s Stephen French. He’s known as “The Devil” in Liverpool.
How come?
He used to kidnap and torture young drug dealers in the Norris Green area of Liverpool and take the money they’d make from selling heroin and crack. He said he needed to feed his family and help pay his friend’s electricity bills.

Ha ha ha.
Yeah, he’s been likened to a black Robin Hood in Liverpool by his allies. He was totally feared by the drug dealers though because nobody knew who this mysterious kidnapper guy was. I wrote a book about his life and when I went up north with Stuart Griffiths to photograph these teenage gangs we bumped into each other and I asked him what he thought about it all.

What did he say?
Well, he blames himself partially for the rise of firearm use by children in the city because when he started operation, some ten to 15 years ago, he created this climate of fear in the younger, small-time dealers who’d previously only really had rival gang stabbings or short custodial sentences to worry about. When they found out they were directly at risk from a guy called “The Devil” who was kidnapping and torturing them and stealing their money they all started to arm themselves for protection.

Makes sense.
Yeah. Anyway, now he’s given up crime and is involved in something called the Andrew John Centre where kids from deprived areas like the one we’re talking about can learn things like wallpapering, motor mechanics, and woodwork. These days “The Devil” is a social campaigner.

Yeah, I still wouldn’t fuck with him though. What does he think about all these gang members now? He said that he’s terrified of them.
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This is Amy. At 14, her mother got her hooked on heroin and turned her to the brothels to make money for the family.

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WORDS AND PHOTOS BY ADAM PATTERSON

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Andy Julien was 18 years old and had been serving in Iraq for two months with the Queen’s Royal Lancers when his Challenger tank came under fire south of Basra. Andy and Lance Corporal Daniel Twiddy had been asleep on top of the tank when they were attacked. An eyewitness later told a Ministry of Defence board of inquiry that after “the boom of a heavy weapon and a bright flash of light” the tank became “an exploding ball of fire”. Andy and Daniel were thrown to the ground, engulfed in flames. Two of their fellow soldiers were killed inside the tank on impact.

Now here’s the really hilarious part: Andy’s tank had come under fire from allied troops. This incident was caused by what was described in the inquiry as a “catalogue of errors”. The laws of combat immunity protect the identities of those responsible for the attack, so nobody will be charged. In fact, Andy has heard rumours that since the incident, crew members of the tank that fired on him have been promoted.

After mistakenly informing his parents of his death, the Ministry of Defence flew Andy back to Broomfield Hospital in Essex. His mother and father did not initially recognise the swollen, bloody heap of flesh that they were told was their son. After 20 operations and six months in a wheelchair, Andy was medically discharged from the army without even the offer of a desk job.
Five days into the war in Iraq in March 2003, Daniel Twiddy was blown off the top of a Challenger tank outside Basra by a round of friendly fire. It was a 120-millimetre high-explosive squash-head shell from another British tank. He remembers bursting into flames as a second round impacted on the turret of the vehicle, killing two of his colleagues. He also remembers being on his hands and knees, on fire, screaming during what he thought would be the last seconds of his life.

He awoke a month later in Broomfield Hospital, Chelmsford. His skin was burned over 80 percent of his body and there was a large hole in his face. He considers himself very lucky.

Daniel told Vice, “I’ve been a gunner myself and when you hit hard targets like tanks, it’s unbelievable. 120-millimetre high-explosive squash-heads are designed to destroy bunkers. They fired two. That’s how lucky I was. ‘When I joined the British Army I respected the Ministry of Defence. I thought that it was their duty to support you through thick and thin. But when you’re at the parade they have for graduation from training and they say, ‘Not only is your son part of our family, you’re all part of our family now,’ it’s hollocks—total shit. As soon as something like what happened to me occurs, they toss you aside like a number. They’re not bothered about you. Physically, I can heal up. What hurts the most is that I’ve been left behind. I’ll always remember what they’ve done to me. Friendly fire is something that should never have happened, so they should be looking after me. But they won’t admit it. That’s what makes me the most angry.”

David McGough was one of the first British soldiers to arrive in Iraq. He was a lance corporal in the Royal Army Medical Corps at the age of 21.

David told us, “We medics did exactly what the other soldiers did—patrols and stuff. The difference with us is we saw the after-effects of war as well. We saw the casualties. We had to deal with the carnage and death and destruction.” David would spend 17 hours a day dressing bodies that had been blown apart by shrapnel and ordnance, sewing the living dead back together, and watching others die. One incident in particular haunts him to this day. “There was a little girl about eight or nine. Her family had died. We were trying to do a nice thing by giving her water and bits of chocolate. One day we spotted a militia hanging her in an alleyway and we had to make the decision whether to go in and save her—which would have led to a riot and many more deaths—or just allow one person to die.” In the end, she was hanged.

“When the militia left, we took her down and buried her. Most 21-year-olds are out getting drunk, but I’ve got that little girl on my conscience and I will until I die.”

David was medically discharged after six months, with a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder a year later. Once back home, his weight plummeted, he couldn’t sleep, and he broke up with his girlfriend. He claims that his former colleagues were told not to speak to him. “I wouldn’t go out of the house. There was no contact and everything was failing around me and I felt like shit. The nightmares would make me go into the bathroom, lock the door, and cry for hours.”

David has since attempted suicide twice—once with a knife and once with a gun that misfired.
During his second tour of Iraq, in 2005, Mark Dryden was on a routine patrol. It was a Sunday. Fridays in Iraq are fairly quiet because everyone goes to mosques. Sunday, for Iraqis, is a fairly normal working day. But on this particular Sunday, it struck Mark that there was no one on the street.

Mark told us, “It was like the Iraqi people knew what was going to happen. The road we drove up is usually one of the busiest ones in Basra but there were no kids, no cars, nothing. Suddenly there were two explosions. The first one was in the engine block, and the second came through my door. It all happened in seconds, but everything slowed down from the point of the second explosion going off. I knew I was badly injured. I was sent back to the medical recovery station in a hotel nearby, where they can stabilise you and get you ready for the helicopter evacuation to the main hospital.

“I don’t think that the British public have slagged the army off—they’ve slagged off the government for sending us. Now it’s like, why are we still out there? Why are we still getting killed and injured? I’d already done fighting in Iraq in 2003. I’ve been to Bosnia, Kosovo, and done two tours of Ireland, but I was more scared to go back to Iraq in 2005 than I ever was in my life. I even changed my life insurance and made sure my will was bang up-to-date before I went out there. When I look back to Northern Ireland in the 1970s, Iraq seems very similar. I think we will be there for another ten or 15 years at least.”
Dave Hart had been with the Territorial Army for years when the call came through that there would be opportunities to serve in Afghanistan. He had already done a tour in South Armagh and really enjoyed it. It reaffirmed why he had joined in the first place. He readily signed up for Afghanistan.

Dave recalls, “The patrol that day was nothing out of the ordinary. There were four vehicles in line and I was in the first one, which was a stripped-down Land Rover. A suicide bomber had tried to get into Bagram US airbase, which was a few miles from us, but came to a vehicle checkpoint and decided to turn around. We had a couple of UN compounds down the road from us and he probably wanted to hit one of those, but he happened upon us instead. We were probably too much of a target to miss. I’ve been told that I was blown out of the vehicle. I don’t remember it. The driver was killed instantly. My mate Dave was in the passenger seat and lost his eye. I was on the ground, on fire. A couple of UN workers came over and doused me. My platoon sergeant flagged down a vehicle at gunpoint and threw us all in the back and got us to the multinational camp in seven minutes. I had already lost eight pints of blood. A couple more minutes and it would have been the end.

“The next time I came round was in Germany. That diamorphine is pretty good stuff. I was off my tits for a while before I fell into a coma for about two and a half weeks. I was there for two months and was then flown back to the UK and taken to Selly Oak in Birmingham. It was a real comedown—really piss-poor to be honest. I went from intensive care in Germany with six nurses to Selly Oak, where you’re dumped in bed for three days, seen by a consultant, then cheers—off you go. And then I got MRSA, a lovely virus you can pick up in hospitals in the UK.”

Growing up in Bolton, Andy Barlow always fancied the military. As soon as he was done at school he joined up. He was 16. He completed relatively safe tours in Afghanistan and Iraq but then, on his second tour of Afghanistan, the shit hit the fan. Andy and his fellow soldiers walked right into a minefield.

Andy told us: “One of our guys’ right legs had been blown off halfway down a mountain trail. The lads went down to give medical support and someone got on the radio asking for a chopper. Our corporal, whose name was Pearson, walked backward and set a mine off that took his leg as well. I began to tour-niquet him when two other soldiers joined me—my friend Mark Wright and a medic I didn’t know. We waited for about an hour for a chopper to come and pull us out. When it finally came in to land, another mine was set off by a rock. That mine hit Mark badly. I was knocked back six feet with shrapnel injuries to my arm, and the medic had also been hit. I took a step toward Mark, and then another mine blew my foot clean off.

“Mark passed away in the Chinook. He was next to me on the helicopter floor in a body bag. I knew that I was going to get my leg amputated—the fact that we had been waiting so long meant that gangrene had set in. I flew back to the UK, straight into Birmingham Airport, where they took me to Selly Oak Hospital. At the time Selly Oak were not prepared for as many casualties as it was getting. One of my main problems there was being on the same ward as civilians. Civvies are the last people you want to see after something like what happened to me.”