

One man's story of emotional enlightenment

# Mastering the Wolf

The background of the cover features a dark, stormy sky with bright blue lightning bolts. In the foreground, the silhouettes of a man standing on a rock and a wolf howling from another rock are visible. A yellow police tape with the text 'POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS' is stretched across the bottom of the image.

**POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS**

Colin Tansley

This book is a must-read if...

- you are interested in gaining insight into public services;
- you are interested in the history of policing and law enforcement over the last 50 years in the UK and beyond;
- you like finding out how people overcome adversity;
- you enjoy reading gritty memoirs;
- you are curious to know what it takes to step outside your comfort zone;
- you enjoy the dynamics of relationships;
- you are a baby boomer and you like reminiscing about your life;
- you are a man who is on an emotional journey;
- you are a man looking for inspiration to voice your story.

# What people are saying about Colin Tansley...

I was delighted to be able to secure an advance copy of this book by the very interesting and insightful Colin Tansley.

Experience can be shared and in business and life a good fact-based book is a way of gaining insights into how others dealt with difficult situations successfully, avoided failures, and made the most of opportunity. It helps if the reference topic is interesting such as the army, the police, and the financial crime private sector. Mastering the Wolf covers the experiences of one man who has covered all three, both as an individual as well as within teams, and leading people.

Colin's memories and storytelling made me wish I'd kept meticulous records of events or had as good a memory. A young soldier, then a good copper, and then working to combat fraud and cyber risks. Iraq, Yorkshire and the Isle of Man are rarely in the same book!

As much as I enjoyed the compelling stories, I found it also helped me find and remember events in my own life that I may have forgotten and that were important learning points. Whether you are a civilian, a veteran, or a former police officer you will enjoy this book. I am sure you will find incidents and problem-solving that will resonate with what you are doing today and what you have ahead of you.

Peter Taylor  
Fraud Consultant  
Peter Taylor Consultants Ltd  
Cheshire, UK

Colin Tansley was an outstanding Police Officer. His quiet and unassuming manner belies a smart, committed and caring individual. *Mastering the Wolf* is a courageously open book on his decades of service to his country, in both the military and the police. It provides more than an eyewitness insight into the challenges of day-to-day policing in modern history; the book reveals some the consequences of commitment to such a profession.

Those consequences are frequently underestimated and subsequently under-reported. Colin's frank self-portrayal illustrates the impact of 'the job,' on family, friends and relationships. As is his way, he never shies away from taking personal responsibility for his actions and is honest about his own weaknesses.

Policing can be addictive, not just for Police Officers performing the special privilege of the office of Constable; our television screens are littered with policing documentaries and factionary adventures every day. Whilst it can be an exciting, adrenaline fuelled experience, officers face some of the worst aspects of humanity and it would be incomprehensible to believe that does not impact upon them and their loved ones.

The caring and compassionate side of policing is well represented by Colin's writing. The calling to help others is a significant motivation for people entering the Service. That and dedication keeps special people turning up for duty whatever the weather!

*Mastering the Wolf* has it all, nothing is left out.

Adam Briggs  
Deputy Chief Constable (Retired)

I've always said that if you want to get to know a person, read their memoirs.

Colin Tansley does not hold back in his book, *Mastering the Wolf*. From sharing his raw and inexperience as a young 16-year-old who joins the army, to stepping into manhood and the rising of his position in the police and beyond his career, to touching on the most intimate details in his private life, this is a book that I found hard to put down.

Kudos to Colin for finding the courage to share such a moving, funny and insightful story.

Mike Roberts  
Managing Director  
Making Digital Real (MDR)  
North Yorkshire, UK



This is undoubtedly one of the truest and most candid accounts of what it means to provide service. If you strip back modern technology and our fast-paced lives, what you get is our innate desire to protect our interests and provide a better future for our families. Colin demonstrates to us, how hard work and goal-setting helps you develop skills and experience that allow you to rise the ranks regardless of your background.

Chris Ashford  
Former Captain, Royal Artillery  
Director, Ashford Fitness Consultancy  
Hampshire, UK

I was asked if I would review Colin Tansley's book. As soon as I saw the cover and read about his background and the context, I could not wait to get started. When I began to read, I could not stop. This is not another story of someone's life – this is Colin's story about Colin's life. From his early years, I was seamlessly led through his life journey, from joining the army as a 16-year-old, through to a full career with the police and beyond.

Those in the services, in particular the Police, will be intrigued to compare the changes or be reminded of their own experiences (or not) after all these years. For the rest of us, it is a reminder of a police officer's lot. Colin found his purpose from a young age; he didn't need the qualifications to get started, but certainly earned many on his journey to fulfil his career dream. Despite the knuckle ride he encountered on his way to the top, his passion never waned.

Balancing personal and family life which had its challenges, yet staying focussed on the job, took tenacity, courage, grit and dedication. I found myself sitting on the edge of my seat as if I was on the set of an action thriller. It reinforced my knowledge about people and the impact they can have on the physical, mental, and emotional health of others and not even be aware of it. That we, like Colin, never know what is around the corner. It was evident how those in our service sector step up and face danger, sometimes on a daily basis; something we may well at times be oblivious to. Gratitude to Colin for his service to the communities in which he served.

Caroline Purvey  
Founder & CEO of TRE UK ®  
Kent, UK

Mastering the Wolf is a searingly honest account of a challenging journey through life whilst charting a career in Public Service, from a youth joining the Armed Forces through to a full and varied career in the Police Service.

Colin shines a light on the safeguarding of children and adults, both in a professional capacity and in his own personal life.

The book will provide the reader with a great insight into a fantastic career, and outlines how Colin achieved his ambitions despite some significant adversity.

Lisa Atkinson  
Retired Detective Chief Superintendent



*Mastering the Wolf* opens the door on the world of law enforcement from training, to probation, to the hierarchy in the force, to undercover policing. It also charts the change in policing and police attitudes towards women, ethnic minorities, domestic violence, child protection issues and generally what is ‘expected’ of a Police Officer.

The narrator is engaging, completely open and honest about his time as a public servant, warts and all. Despite the many traumas and difficulties the narrator has encountered, he remains resilient and unbowed. *Mastering the Wolf* is a thought-provoking and raw, unsettling memoir that leaves us with plenty to savour.

Olivia Eisinger  
Editor  
Surrey, UK

One man's story of emotional enlightenment

# Mastering the Wolf

Colin Tansley





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[www.bookbrilliancepublishing.com](http://www.bookbrilliancepublishing.com)  
[admin@bookbrilliancepublishing.com](mailto:admin@bookbrilliancepublishing.com)

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This book is memoir. It reflects the author's present recollections of experiences over time. Identifying names and places have been changed, some events have been compressed, and some dialogue has been recreated.

For Frankie



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## Foreword

**G**ripping and searing. Words that might be used in a commentary on a novel or crime thriller. It would be rare to find them referring to an autobiography. This is a compelling read and hard to put down. I read it in two sessions.

Colin tells us a story that will gel with many of us. Not just those who have spent time in the military or in policing.

He takes us on the journey of a small boy coming from a poor, single parent family in East London, combining a life in the army and police with a journey through the many trials and tribulations that some of us have with our relatives, spouses or partners.

Colin opens his heart and shares with us his feelings, hopes and fears. The disappointments and the successes. He places us with him at the heart of an abusive relationship; where this big, strong ex-soldier, Northern Ireland veteran and an undercover cop, who worked at senior level in the Iraq War, is the victim.

At times, my heart was in my mouth as I rushed to turn the next page.

His life as a junior soldier and then on operations in Northern Ireland will take you right into the barrack room and then on to South Armagh.

Colin's reflections on life as a police officer in West Yorkshire during and after the miners' strike tells a little known story of community tensions and dealing with trouble as a police officer in areas with a heritage of dislike and distrust of the police. There, the local officers were left to pick up the pieces left by the officers from the Metropolitan Police, Merseyside and Greater Manchester, who had been drafted in to back up the local force.

His life with the CID and as an undercover officer infiltrating animal rights activists will raise some eyebrows, as will his stories of the drinking culture of detectives.

His insights into investigating child abuse are moving as they are disturbing.

All whilst dealing with a torrid personal life and continual domestic assaults upon himself.

Colin takes us to the heart of Baghdad and the Green Zone as a police officer, daily dodging mortars and managing the politics of being junior partners to the Americans.

A fascinating and enthralling read.

Kevin Hurley

Former Senior Police, Army Officer and  
International Policing Consultant to governments  
in conflict zones



## Introduction

The wolf is a much-maligned animal, maybe because of fairy tales, such as Red Riding Hood, where the wolf is portrayed as cunning and conniving. There is no doubt a wolf can be aggressive; as a pack animal, they hunt, fight, and defend each other without question. But there are lesser-known characteristics, including intelligence, a lover of family and friendliness that don't get quite the same attention. I was asked during the preparation of this book by my publisher what animal I would liken myself to. Without any knowledge of the aforementioned information, I instantly said a wolf, mostly because of the connotations with a 'lone wolf', maybe because I don't fear solitude and often work alone.

Looking back at my life, I can see now that all those qualities resonate with me. The difference now is that I have become better equipped to understand and control my emotions. As a man, that is not something that is easy to say or acknowledge. *Mastering the Wolf* is an apt description of my life journey and is by far the most appropriate title for this book.

Since I was a small boy, I have always wanted to write a book. I think my love of books and virtually any reading material came from my parents. They both read avidly; Mum had a lovely habit of writing something on the inside cover of the many books she bought for me. I still have them stored away safely. Growing up, I would immerse myself in books or



comics, often under the bedcovers with a torch. I doubtless picked up a sense of adventure and thirst for information whilst reading stories about ‘Biggles’, scouring through war comics or even trying to understand what *The Wind in the Willows* was all about. I never anticipated writing a book of any kind. The idea was formulated initially only to act as a manuscript to leave for my grandchildren as a permanent memory of me, just in case I lost my marbles as I got older. As I emptied my head onto these pages, I formed the opinion that it may also be of interest to a wider audience. I will let you be the judge of that.

Spending my formative years in the Armed Forces and a large chunk of my adult life in the police service has provided me with self-discipline and a wide array of life skills. Amongst those many competencies are resilience, tenacity, and determination coupled with a not insignificant sprinkling of intolerance, impatience, and stubbornness. It is inevitable in the course of public service that you encounter things that will have a lasting impact on your personality, as well as those close to you. Writing this book has been a difficult task at times. More than once I have had to put it down and come back to it some weeks later. It is a brutally honest account of my own experiences, recalled to the best of my memory, at times aided by search engines and any official records I could lay my hands on. I could not possibly detail or document every single incident. With the passage of time and onset of age, your recall can be clouded. I have doubtless forgotten certain things; some I would prefer not to remember. There are memories buried away in a deep inner consciousness though. Every so often something happens; it could be a smell, a noise, a TV programme, a film, and before you know it, the memories come flooding back. They tap you on your shoulder to remind you they are still lurking in the caverns of

your mind. Sometimes I laugh as I remember the good times: on other occasions, I get sad, and occasionally I shed a tear.

I consider myself extremely lucky to have worked with some very colourful, talented, helpful, and humorous people. They have supported me as I navigated my way through life, some of whom feature in this book, but unfortunately there is not enough room for them all. Thankfully they vastly outweigh the weirdos and small number of individuals who have brought me grief. To protect some of them, I have not identified everyone and have changed certain people's names. I am also not proud of everything I have done. This is a story about a person. My experiences are not unique, for many in a similar position they will have experienced the same, if not worse. I've shared mine in the hope that if you are suffering or questioning yourself, you are not alone. There is hope and a bright future, you just have to find it. For me it took a while, but I now understand that my journey was just as important. It was part of a huge learning experience and so worth it. Perhaps this book will make you sad at times. I truly hope it makes you laugh as well, because my life has also been a lot of fun and it isn't over yet – not by a long chalk.



## 1. Growing up

I don't remember too much about my early childhood. I was born in the late fifties at Hackney Hospital in the East End of London. I qualify as a Cockney by virtue of the hospital being within the sound of Bow Bells. Both my mum and dad came from huge families, with lots of brothers, half-brothers, sisters and half-sisters. They had grown up as neighbours close to the old Arsenal ground in Highbury, both being huge supporters of that very popular North London club. The respective families knew each other well. What I do remember is a closeness amongst my parents with their siblings. We often spent time visiting my aunts', uncles' and cousins' houses in London. Unfortunately, most of that ended abruptly because my parents' ill-fated marriage didn't last. It was much later in life that I learnt what led to the break-up. Dad just didn't love my mum. He disclosed to me many years later that he only married her because she became pregnant. The brother I never met died shortly after he was born. It was quite apparent that from the conversation with my dad that he felt that sad occurrence had made the marriage a complete waste of his life. I couldn't help but conclude that he must have felt the same way about me, my sister and brother.

Mum loved her music and was always singing around the house. We had what was known at the time as a radiogram. It worked with valves and had to be 'warmed up' before you

could use it. That was the first job in the morning before the kettle went on. She was always considerate of others, thoughtful, loving and caring. I like to think some of her traits rubbed off on me. She did tend to worry too much though, at times being a little over-protective. I recall she didn't want me to play rugby just in case I had my ears pulled off; she also worried about cricket in case the ball hit me in the face. My dad's view of boys was a little different; you had to be tough, stick up for yourself and never, **ever** shed tears. It was a case of 'big boys don't cry' as far as he was concerned. Woe betide you if you fell over and cried in front of him.

Dad left us all when I was around eight or nine years old. Mum was devastated but in the spirit of the times, got her head down and raised the three of us virtually single-handedly. Dad had left her for a younger woman he had met in one of the banks he visited as a messenger. With our new stepmother, he moved away to a much nicer place on the other side of town. Her parents were, to us anyway, well off, her father being a picture editor at a prestigious newspaper. I remember visiting their house and marvelling at the furniture and garden.

At home, things for us were much more basic. Dad and Mum had originally purchased the house to renovate. Once he left, it was obvious that some of the work was never going to be completed. We had no running hot water, the toilet was outside, the bath in the kitchen downstairs was out of commission and remained permanently covered with a wooden board. We stood in a bowl of water from a saucepan heated on the cooker in order to get washed. I shared a bed with my brother and we only had carpets on some of the floors. I wouldn't say we were poverty-stricken but it was close. On Sunday afternoons we all huddled around the black and white television in the living room to watch movies, drink

sugary tea and eat biscuits. As children growing up in the mid sixties, Mum always made us feel safe. We didn't have much in the way of possessions, but we were loved and happy.

Like most boys, when I was growing up, I wanted to be like my dad. As the years have gone by, I have come to realise that whilst I love and respect him dearly, it's more important to be yourself. From an early age, I think I always tried to impress him. I think we all like to make our parents proud. I know that I achieved that with Mum. I'm not sure I have ever fully realised that with Dad. At least, I have no recall of him telling me so. It seems to be in his nature to find fault with most things. Nothing was ever quite 'good enough'; it always seemed impossible to please him. There was always that little 'something' that you could have done better. Perhaps that is a good quality to have as it can make you strive to be better. That trait has rubbed off on me somewhat, as I know at times I tend to be overly critical. When bringing up children I'm no longer so sure it is the best approach, in most cases being completely counterproductive. I know now that gentle encouragement and praise gets far better results.

After Dad left home, all three of us got to see him relatively frequently. As I recall, he was certainly present and influential in our upbringing as children. We had some good times at his large flat above a bank in Limehouse. There was a massive empty room, which we inventively called 'The Big Room'. We played football in there together, occasionally broke the windows and bashed the hell out of the keys of a piano in the corner. We had bags of fun at that place; for me and my siblings, this was when Dad was at his best. Despite his negativity, he was quick-witted, good-humoured and he made us laugh a lot. Whilst bitter, I don't think Mum ever really stopped loving him, which reared its head from time to time. I

have a few memories of the arguments that followed when we returned home after spending time with him. The pair of them would frequently end up shouting at each other. We saw and heard it all, including some minor physical stuff, slapping each other around the face and that sort of thing. On one occasion I split my head open during a weekend visit to his flat. When I arrived home after a short visit to the hospital, Mum saw I had stitches on my head and all hell broke loose. In my dad's view it was a scratch, but as far as Mum was concerned, he hadn't taken good enough care of me. They were both quite opinionated and wouldn't give each other an inch.

Both were also very strict: the phrase 'children should be seen and not heard' was used frequently to remind us of our position in life. We were brought up to be respectful to adults, say please and thank you, and had to ask to leave the table after meals. We had jobs to do in the house and were expected to help. Mum didn't stand for any shit either, for when my siblings and I played up at home, a bamboo cane came out and you knew you were for it. This was a standard method of disciplining children at the time and something she was also well-accustomed to whilst growing up. It was tough for her on her own. I recall her going to the doctors with what was probably depression and being told by her GP that I had to behave myself at home to help her.

Shortly after that, I was despatched to a children's home to give her some rest. The little I can recall was horrendous. As a young child, I felt that I was being punished for something, as it was just me that was sent away, not my brother and sister. I don't remember how long I was there for. I certainly didn't enjoy it. I vividly recall getting shouted at and having my legs smacked by a member of staff for mistakenly opening a toilet door when a girl was in there.

I think it is fair to say that in the sixties there was an element of shame heaped upon on any woman who was divorced. They were perceived to be the ones at fault, not able to fulfil the duties of a wife and mother in the way that society expected them to. Nothing could have been further from the truth in Mum's case. I'm biased, of course, but she did a fantastic job in raising all three of us. Growing up where we lived in London and to a single mother, it could have so easily been a different story.

As small children, both my parents were evacuated from London during the war years because of the Blitz. That must have had an impact on them, growing up amongst strangers and apart from their own family. They both seemed to come away with contrasting experiences. Mum talked about it often. She had spent time in Wales and Cornwall, seemingly enjoying the extended holidays. Dad rarely spoke of his time as an evacuee. Only once did he relate a story of his experiences to me. It was the only time I have ever seen him visibly upset and close to tears. He was the last of an evacuated group of children to be taken in by a family in Wales. He told me that no one seemed to want him. A lady had to take him from house to house begging for him to be taken care of. From the little he said, it seemed to be the case that he was physically abused by the people that provided him with what must have been a miserable existence.

In my humble opinion, I think it is those experiences that have made him quite cold and emotionally detached at times. Not once in my life can I ever recall him hugging me, my sister or brother, or even saying he loved us. He went on to have two other children with his second wife. From what I saw, their experience was very different. To this day I have never understood why that was the case. I'm not saying he didn't

love the three of us, he just never really showed it with any overt displays of affection. Maybe he had been conditioned that way. I believe some of that has rubbed off on me and my siblings.

I was introverted as a child with only a small circle of friends. I spent a lot of time with my brother and sister when we were younger. I was quite content in my own company. You could often find me reading books, comics, drawing or doing puzzles. Once I knew people well enough, I tended to open up more, yet you would rarely ever find me starting a conversation. I don't think I ever liked school for that reason. I didn't like being amongst lots of other children. I found it difficult to concentrate unless I found things stimulating. My mind would wander off frequently, reliving comic book adventures or just daydreaming. When selected to answer questions, I had no clue what the teacher was referring to and ended up in trouble. I have vivid memories of being the recipient of free meals at school. Entitlement to them was signified by tickets which were purple in colour. Even now, I can picture them; they resembled raffle tickets, but there were no prizes. I would be summoned out of the class to go and collect them on a Monday morning. This immediately identified me as a recipient of a handout. I was the only kid in my class to get free meals. As a result, I was singled out as being 'poor'. Kids can be cruel and once they found out that my dad had left us, that became yet another stick to beat me with. I think it was those experiences that forged a closeness to my brother and sister as we looked out for one another.

As the eldest, Mum made sure I took care of my siblings. She had to find work to supplement her income, even cutting leather at home for handbags made at a nearby factory. I was invariably the one put in charge of childcare as babysitters



were expensive. One evening my sister and I were playing a game designed with the sole intention of running our younger brother ragged. It involved shining a torch beam on the walls whilst we encouraged him to touch it. We were having a fine old time watching him run around the house, until I shone the torch onto a pane of glass in the bedroom window which he banged with his hand. This resulted in the glass falling to the ground below with an almighty crash. I still remember telephoning Mum desperately trying to explain what had happened. All this was long before anyone really paid attention to age limits for children being left alone. I really don't think it did me, or my siblings, any harm at all. It certainly gave me a sense of responsibility. It's something I think I carry to this day, it maybe even influenced my choice of careers.

*"This is undoubtedly one of the truest and most candid accounts of what it means to provide service."*

Chris Ashford - former Captain, Royal Artillery

*Mastering the Wolf* is a history of policing and law enforcement over the last 40-plus years in the UK and beyond.

In an engaging, gritty, and authentically moving memoir, with a career in public service that spans the Army, Northern Ireland, the effect and fall out of the miners' strike, the Task Force, undercover policing, domestic violence, child abuse and protection, and then Iraq this book is a roller-coaster of a ride.

Fast-paced and packed with action and humour, Colin details the fear, loss, pain, sadness, and disappointment, amidst the pride, gratitude and overwhelming joy of the friendship and camaraderie felt from colleagues and the deep, unconditional love he feels for his children.

These are the words of a very compassionate man who has pursued in what he believes. *Mastering the Wolf* is a highly personal story of public service that will resonate with many.

Colin Tansley is a former soldier and police officer. Now retired from public service, he runs his own cyber security and investigations business. Colin has travelled widely in his professional capacity, imparting his skills and knowledge, even volunteering for a spell in post-war Iraq.

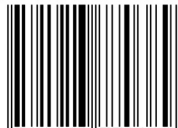


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