

JEFF HOLMES

A man with light-colored hair, wearing a dark suit, a white shirt, and a patterned tie, is shown from the chest up. He is holding a large, ornate silver trophy cup with both hands. The trophy has a wide rim and a handle on the left. A red, white, and blue ribbon is draped across the front of the trophy. The background is a blurred crowd of people, suggesting a large event or stadium. The lighting is dramatic, with a strong blue tint over the entire scene.

THE JOCK WALLACE
STORY

Blue

THUNDER

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Introduction

It was September 1977 and I was the luckiest kid alive. I had just turned 17 and was working as the ‘boy’ in Scottish Television: the ‘do this, do that’ lad who helped keep each department ticking over.

No two days were ever the same and in just one calendar month this young and excited ‘star spotter’ had met movie greats Charlton Heston and Sophia Loren – and secured their signatures. Others would follow – Paul and Linda McCartney, Sylvester Stallone, Cliff Richard, but they would mean very little compared to a number of autographs I got one very ordinary Monday morning.

I was ambling past reception when a security man happened to mention that ‘The Rangers’ were coming in to use one of our conference rooms to view tapes of a forthcoming European opponent. ‘What time?’ I asked excitedly. ‘10am.’ Enough time to nip down to the locker room and get my brand new autograph book, or so I thought.

Off I went down to the general stores and couldn’t believe it when I was packed off to Central Station with one of the drivers to pick up several crates for the film library, off the London train, if I remember right. We were gone for half an hour and on the way back up Hope Street to STV, and with the traffic lights stuck at red for an eternity, I jumped out the van and made straight for the front desk. The look on the security man’s face said it all. ‘You missed them, they’re already in the room.’

Dejectedly, I started to walk off, when he shouted me back. A taxi had drawn up at the front door and out hurried Jock Wallace, manager of Rangers. Obviously late, and wary of setting a bad example to his players, he started bounding towards reception. It was now or never. But was it a good idea to stop this giant of a man in his tracks for a request so futile? Go on, you only live once.

‘Excuse me, Mr Wallace,’ I said with a mixture of nerves and excitement. ‘Can I have your autograph please?’ ‘MY autograph,’ he smiled. ‘Of course son. You a Rangers fan then?’ he asked. ‘Absolutely, and I hope we beat FC Twente next week in Holland.’ ‘So do I son,’ he said. We were having a conversation!

He turned to the security man and asked if all the players were in. ‘They are, Mr Wallace,’ and with that he looked at me, and then at my barren autograph book, and said, ‘It doesn’t look like you’ve got many autographs. Did you not get the players when they came in?’

After I recounted my tale of woe, he said, ‘Come on, we’ll get them now.’ The security man asked me to show Mr Wallace to the conference room. Me! We walked along the corridor and he asked who my favourite player was. ‘John Greig.’ ‘Aye, he’s no’ bad,’ he said, and with that we were inside a room full of heroes.

The manager said, ‘Before we get started today, I want you all to sign, eh, what’s your name son?’ ‘Jeff.’ ‘I want you all to sign Jeff’s autograph book, ’cause the pages are blank,’ and he let out a small chuckle. ‘We’ll fill them up for you son,’ and with that he was off. But I wasn’t.

One by one the players signed my book: Tommy McLean, Colin Jackson, Derek Johnstone, Peter McCloy etc, and the one and only John Greig.

I was speechless. Once I had secured each and every signature, I walked up to the manager and said, ‘Thank you very much Mr Wallace.’ He turned to me and said, ‘You’re welcome son. I would invite you to watch the film with us but you might get the sack,

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so you better get back to your work,' and with that he smiled and I toddled off.

Mr Wallace, you made a young man very happy that day, and it's something I'll never forget. You were one in a million.

**Jeff Holmes,
April 2014**

It's Early Days

JOCK Wallace was as proud and as passionate a Scotsman as anyone born north of Hadrian's Wall. While managing Leicester City and Colchester United, a constant companion was a foot-high statue of legendary Scottish freedom fighter, and namesake, William.

In Alan Ball's excellent biography, *Playing Extra Time*, England's 1966 World Cup winner – Wallace's assistant at Colchester – talks of the time the Us were staying at Stirling University while on a pre-season tour of Scotland. One night, Wallace was perched on the end of Ball's bed and both were enjoying a dram. The curtains were closed and Wallace got up to open them. Moments later Ball drew them shut again, and this continued like a pantomime sketch until Wallace pinned the diminutive Ball to his duvet and bellowed, 'I put you in this room so you would have to look at that statue of William Wallace, and you keep closing the fuckin' curtains!'

Ball admitted to being both frightened and amazed by big Jock's outburst, and obvious passion for his country, but thought better of arguing and, after straightening the lapels on his pyjamas, said, 'Boss, I had no idea that the guy out there meant so much to you – I didn't even know who he was', and with that, the two men continued to drink. As is patently clear from his book, Ball held Wallace in tremendously high regard, as does everyone you speak

to who was acquainted in one way or another with the former Rangers manager.

Wallace was born in September 1935, the son of John and Catherine, and everything pointed to the 'bairn' being a native of Wallyford, a small village just six miles east of Edinburgh city centre.

Wallace senior, a professional goalkeeper, had just been transferred from Raith Rovers to Blackpool, and was playing for the Lancashire side at the time of his son's birth. Several sources, therefore, suggested that Wallace junior was born in Blackpool, although the local registry office had no record of a birth for John Martin Bokas Wallace on 6 September 1935. Can you imagine how Jock would have felt about being English? It was soon confirmed, however, that young Master Wallace was indeed born at 10.40am on Friday 6 September at 146 Forthview, Wallyford, in the Parish of Inveresk.

The middle name of Bokas was a square peg in a round hole, though. While Jock's dad, John Martin Wallace, played for the Seasiders, a team-mate was Frank Bokas, a Bellshill-born half-back who had started out his career at Kirkintilloch Rob Roy. One can only assume that the pair became best buddies during their time at Bloomfield Road, and that the unusual middle name was a nod to Jock senior's team-mate. Bokas died in 1996, the same year as Jock senior.

Wallyford Primary School and Musselburgh Grammar offered the youngster a solid educational grounding, as well as his first taste of organised football, but it wasn't as a goalkeeper that he starred for the latter. Young Wallace turned out at centre-half while the keeper's yellow jersey remained the property of Bert Slater, who would go on to keep goal for Dundee, Liverpool and Scotland. John White, a future Spurs and Scotland star, was also part of a rather talented school team.

One of Jock's teachers, Alex McGillivray, helped run the school team and remembered how the youngster had to be handled with kid gloves. Speaking in 1975, he said, 'I had a soft spot for Jock, but

I was scared to drop him from the team. Most players would accept being left out now and again, but not Jock. If I didn't choose him, it wasn't long before he was hammering at my door and demanding to know why he wasn't playing.

'Jock was our centre-half. He couldn't get a game in goals because of Bert, who was better at the job. We also had another youngster, John White, who was a great player, but at that time, out of the three lads, I would've tipped Wallace to make the top. White was small and slight, while Wallace was tall and well built. He also had character and was both reliable and very determined.'

In the early 1970s, Bert Slater said, 'Both Jock and I had a mining background. Life was hard but we enjoyed our football. When the school bell rang at four o'clock we dashed to the gasworks pitches for a kick-around. In those days Jock didn't like playing in goal. His build helped him to be an ideal centre-half. Before joining the Army, Jock worked as a steel bender and the story went that he used his teeth to bend the steel!'

But it seemed that young Wallace was destined to play between the sticks, although only after an inauspicious beginning. After moving from Wallyford Boys Club to an Edinburgh juvenile side, he turned up for a match only to discover that the regular goalkeeper hadn't showed, and as Jock was the tallest of the outfield players he was shoved in goal. Later that night, he visited his aunt's house and she said to him, 'How did the football go today, son?' He replied, 'We got beat 10-1.' '10-1?' she said. 'For goodness sake, who was in goals?' 'Me', he replied sheepishly.

As a youngster, Jock and his pals played every night on the pitches at the old Musselburgh Gasworks – later to be used as the Loretto rugby grounds. Wallace also regularly watched local favourites Wallyford Bluebell, with whom his dad had played when he was starting out in his career.

And when he was just nine years old, Jock would make the long and arduous fortnightly pilgrimage by train to Ibrox Park which, according to his dad, used to worry the youngster's mother sick.

Jock senior said, 'My son would think nothing of going alone by train from Musselburgh to cheer on Rangers. But his mother was unhappy. She used to worry herself sick when young Jock set off on his own, so he joined a Rangers supporters' club and travelled by bus.' Years later, Jock junior would say, 'I was nine when I started going to games and asked men to lift me over the turnstiles so I could see the Rangers.'

The majority of school leavers in Wallyford, and surrounding villages, found employment at the local pit. Owned for the largest part by the Edinburgh Colliery Company, the Old Pit at Wallyford had witnessed many disasters, with one, in 1901, taking the lives of two local men when a pit wall collapsed. It was a tragedy that cast a giant shadow over the small town and its inhabitants.

Wallace, though, was desperate to follow in his father's footsteps and become a professional footballer. He signed for Blackpool on apprentice terms but was freed shortly after when he became homesick. He headed back to Wallyford, where he took up a job as a delivery boy with a local bakery, while also having a spell as a motor mechanic. But it wasn't long before he was itching to get back into football and he received a break when he signed for Workington. He joined up at Borough Park just after the Cumbrian side had been voted into the Third Division North of the Football League.

Wallace combined playing part-time for Workington with toiling away in a local pit, but sadly his team had also plumbed new depths and finished rock bottom of the league in their debut season. It also turned into a nightmare move for the young goalkeeper and he was released after making just six competitive appearances, including a match against Tranmere Rovers in which he suffered a broken hand.

Wallace moved on but Workington remained one of the league's perennial strugglers and finished second bottom the following season. They received a new lease of life in 1955 when a young manager by the name of Bill Shankly arrived from Grimsby Town. Workington were eventually voted out of the Football League in

1977 and replaced by Wimbledon, and have played non-league football ever since.

Wallace, though, was determined that the early setback wouldn't be the ruin of him and after the broken bone in his hand had healed, he was picked up by Ashton United, who were based just east of Manchester, and plied their trade in the Lancashire Combination. Floodlights were installed at Hurst Cross the year Wallace made his debut for the Robins although his stay in Ashton-under-Lyne was a short one. Six years after Wallace left Ashton, the club signed a young Alan Ball, who would go on to work with Jock in the twilight of his career.

For Wallace, though, the move was anything but a success and although trials were later arranged at both Hibs and St Johnstone, neither came to much and it was a disillusioned young man who opted for a change of career. He decided to fulfil another ambition by joining the Army and moved to Berwick where he signed a 'three-year contract' with the King's Own Scottish Borderers in 1954, a proud regiment which had been based in the Borders town since its inauguration in 1689.

While undergoing rigorous army training with the 'Kosbies', and playing for his army team, he caught the eye of Berwick Rangers, and duly signed a part-time deal with the Wee Gers. He made a solid debut in a 4-0 win over Montrose and a further highlight was a match against English cracks Aston Villa, to mark the official opening of Berwick's Shielfield Park.

Wallace played several games for Berwick before landing his first official posting with the Kosbies. He was off to Ireland for three months, which put the brakes on his career, but his latest football experience had at least been a positive one.

On returning from Ireland, he presumed he would be able to pick up where he left off, but was told that he would soon be on the move again – this time to a posting slightly further afield. He was off to the humid and dangerous jungles of Malaya. Later on, Wallace would say, 'One lasting memory of hearing that news

was that we soon realised it would take us four weeks to get there by boat!’

But far from wrecking his burgeoning football career, the spell in Asia boosted his confidence – and his medal collection. He said, ‘I played for the Borderers, for the Combined Services and, in all, about seven different teams while we were out in Malaya. I also did quite well in the athletics where I specialised in the quarter-mile and the high jump. But we had a very successful football team and ended up winning various cups and trophies during my three years in Malaya and Singapore.’

A guerrilla war, the Malayan Emergency – as it was known – took place between Allied forces and the Malayan National Liberation Army between 1948 and 1960 in an attempt to halt the spread of communism and the defeat of the Commonwealth government.

In the 19th century, Britain claimed Malaya and parts of Borneo as colonies. Many local Malaysians were against their country being colonised by the British but were too weak to remove the colonial power. This continued through to the Second World War when, in 1941, the Japanese invaded and defeated the British. They immediately occupied the area, ‘liberating’ it from colonialism, but imposing their own often brutal form of martial rule instead.

During this period the British trained and equipped many local Malaysians and Malayan Chinese as guerrilla groups to fight the Japanese. The Chinese in particular despised the Japanese because of a previous invasion and brutality in parts of China in the 1930s.

At the end of the Second World War, the British urged non-communist Malaysians to take control, but the Malayan Chinese, many of whom were communists, were hell-bent on ensuring Malaya’s future was as a communist country, and started to fight the British. The King’s Own Scottish Borderers was one of several crack British battalions sent over to fight the communists, who were eventually defeated in 1960, and it was in this conflict that Wallace played his part.

Former Rangers star Derek Johnstone remembered his old gaffer talking about his time in the Malayan bush, and recalled, 'Jock often told the story of being knee-deep in the jungle while wondering how Rangers were doing on a Saturday afternoon. Apparently he got a few of the guys to rig up a radio mast high up in the trees so they could tune in to the BBC World Service, and get the football scores as they came in at 5pm British time.'

Rumour has it that when Wallace signed up for the Kosbies, and was asked his religion, he replied 'football!' And that was big Jock turning his back temporarily on the game to hunt communist bandits in Malaya. The officer in charge of his battalion, Major Richard Hill, once said, 'Jock was a steady, reliable soldier. In those days a good footballer was usually kept at HQ to play for the team, but I don't think Wallace was interested. Anyway, I always said he had two left feet.'

Wallace admitted that his time in south-east Asia had a profound effect on his character, and said, 'Up until I joined the Army I was a bit of a loner. I was never short of friends but tended to keep myself to myself. That all changed in Malaya.'

In the Army you quickly realise that you have to become a team, and that your life depends, quite literally, on the people around you. I was only 20 but I learned more in Malaya than at any other time in my life.'

After three years in the Army, Wallace found himself back on Civvy Street, out of work and with little prospect of finding employment. But while those in a similar position preferred a pint and a visit to the dogs, Wallace decided to keep himself fit until something came along. That something was a job as a labourer, digging drains for a living, which proved easy enough for a man with his build and athleticism, but he yearned for a return to the game he loved.

And it wasn't too long before he was re-introduced into the Berwick Rangers squad. Wallace was soon turning in impressive performances on a regular basis and, having served his

apprenticeship in the game, he was starting to make a real name for himself.

Following his stint with the Kosbies, Wallace started the 1957/58 campaign at Shielfield, but the first few months turned into a bit of a nightmare. The Borders side lost all of their League Cup ties and were shipping goals right, left and centre. The big keeper lost ten in his first two games – and was named man of the match in both!

As he ‘celebrated’ his 21st birthday, Berwick’s dismal form continued but Wallace’s stock was rising, as reports read, ‘Berwick owed a lot to their brilliant keeper Wallace’, ‘Wallace’s ability to cut out the wing crosses kept the score down’. There was a pattern emerging and it was only a matter of time before a bigger side moved in for the talented keeper.