

# THE CLASH

## ON MANOEUVRES

### I. the battle

It was after dark as we crept behind the main body of troops. My combat jacket was soaked with sweat, my brow was streaming; I felt sick - the tension was almost too much to take. "Do you think we'll make it," Mick whispered in my ear. Fortified with more than my fair share of Watney's Red Barrel, I had no hesitation in answering "Yes!"



So this was it, the scene of our last battle, which was fought at the now famous battleground the MAYFAIR. We were the front-line, the thin red line, fighting for the secret army disguised as a fanzine, and Joe Strummer, leader of the Clash, was our target.

Plan A was to hit the rear guard. These were the crack troops, especially trained by the SAS, and were no mean task, easily recognizable in their uniforms of black bow-ties, dinner jackets and bullshit proof vests (which, strangely, made them look like gorillas,) and confronted them.

"Hey, I'm doing an article on violence at Rock Concerts. How do you feel about all the kids fighting and spitting?"

"UH! I'm just here to keep the peace," he defended.

Sneaking past, emptying my magazine at them, we succeeded in passing them. In the heart of the battle, we made a thorough sweep of the area, but our target was nowhere to be found. Had our attack been in vain? Had we wasted our precious ammunition? Would we have to return to HQ empty handed? Just as the pangs of defeat set in, someone shouts "Who are you?"

My God! We were cornered by Joe's second in command, manager Ray, the final hurdle. Pointing my notebook straight at his guts, I informed him we were here to get Joe.

"You've got no chance. People have tried and have left broken men." After interrogating him for what seemed an eternity, he finally broke. He disappeared and returned minutes later, informing us that his leader would speak.



Loading up our notebooks with specially-designed questions manufactured at our secret lab in Gateshead, we were ready. A faint smell of sweat lingered in the air, caused by the anticipation of what was to come. Faces were taut filled with thoughts, palms perspired, nervous tension was released with some small talk.

Our troop was ready - all our training would be tested within the next thirty minutes



## 2. the interrogation

After waiting for over an hour, Joe Strummer finally graced our cigarette-strewn table. He had waited until the last of the fans had made their drunken way home. He seemed to be enjoying every minute, playing the Rock Star up-on-a-pedestal image.

When he sat down and started rapping, I was surprised to find him just the opposite. He spoke in a soft, quiet voice, coming over as an amiable sort of bloke who has an insatiable appetite for what's going on around him. I asked him why it had been so long since The Clash played in Newcastle.

"Well, we're banned from the City Hall," he answered, "and after our last gig at the polytechnic, they banned us as well. And after the violence here tonight, I don't think the Mayfair will let us play here again either."

The violence which seems to follow The Clash around upsets Joe very much; in fact, just TALKING about it seems to upset him very much.

"If trouble starts, we stop playing and ask the bouncers to try and control the offenders. As for the gobbing, I've just got to put up with it even though I don't like it - but who does?"

Had he enjoyed the gig that night though?

"Yeah, it was really good after the crowd had settled down and we could get down to what ourselves and the vast majority of the fans were there for - music!"

I asked Joe about the band's experiences in America and how he compared US and UK audiences.

"We went over to play a few small gigs and the whole thing exploded into something we never expected. The audiences over there are pretty timid, not moving or going wild like the British do, but there wasn't any fighting either. Really though, I don't like America very much."

On asking Joe about 'Bank Robber', and the hassel the band had with getting it released, he aired his dissatisfaction with his record company.

"CBS really piss me off. They said the single wasn't commercial enough, but that hadn't bothered them before. Never mind though, we'll win in the end."

Some time ago, rumour filtered through that Joe was intending to put together an alternative rock programme on TV. So what happened to that idea, Joe?

"Yeah, I seemed to be the only one interested. Everyone I contacted didn't seem to be bothered, so it didn't get off the ground."

At this point, a number of people were indicating that it was time for Joe to think about heading back to London, and time for us to piss off. So we did.





### 3. the aftermath

It seems a shame that it's more than likely we will not see The Clash playing in Newcastle again. I doubt that it will cause mass hysteria, or send people crawling for a bottle of barbituates, but whether it's The Clash or Frank Sinatra, it's a crying shame that so many have to suffer because of so few.

The violence at the Mayfair was nothing short of disgusting. It seems that nowadays the audience wants to BE the band. So what can be done? Knock the stage down and let the mental retards jump around the floor with the band? Or just forget the band and advertise 'Come to

the venue - the best fights in town! - Special reductions for parties!

The violence at their gigs is slowly but surely wearing The Clash down. You can see it in Joe Strummer's face: a look of hopelessness at the very mention of it. And I don't believe the Clash have brought this on themselves.

The band now play a set which runs for close on two hours, pulling samplers from all their albums, their singles, and just enough new material. On stage, the focus is definitely on Strummer as he is totally involved with his performance, belting lyrics out as if possessed and enjoying every sweat-soaked minute of it. Strummer and Mick Jones seem at odds with each other on stage, the latter more at home parading around the stage as a guitar hero and smiling at the young female fans at the front of the stage.

All in all, the Clash have streamlined their set and cut out the ragged parts and are nothing less than a bloody good rock'n'roll outfit.

I finally asked General Strummer to give a parting quote to round the article off, and as message to his fans he told me "Music is my soul, and the only thing that lifts my heart."

Colin Green

