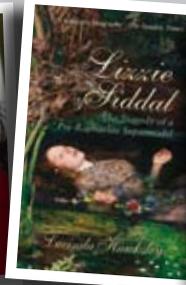


SHELF LIFE

OUR FIVE-PAGE BOOKS SPECIAL WE TALK TO THE BEST LOCAL WRITERS >>



► The 70th anniversary of the Second World War starting means a new book on the Battle of Britain by Brook Green writer Patrick Bishop is perfectly timed, writes **Tom Derbyshire**

WAR today is a messy business. It has always been bloody, confused and unpredictable, but modern conflicts such as Afghanistan and Iraq are especially mired in insurgencies, dubious regimes and shifting alliances.

In comparison, the Battle of Britain in 1940 seems so simple, as best-selling Brook Green author Patrick Bishop explains.

The 70th anniversary of the start of the Second World War has led to a surge in interest in the heroic efforts of the RAF and his new book published this month, *Battle of Britain*, is very timely.

“Now, all conflicts are morally confused,” said the 56-year-old former national newspaper and Channel 4 journalist, who has also written about modern soldiers’ experiences in Helmand, Afghanistan.

“What the Battle of Britain was about is clear and that is refreshing – it is easy to see who the good guys and the bad guys are.”

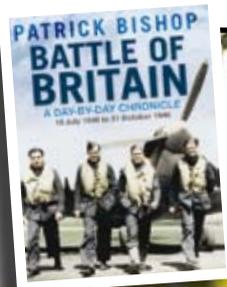
As he outlined in his recent talk at the new Shepherds Bush Library, however, the battle is also surrounded by various myths and it is worth examining the legacy again.

The new book is a day-by-day chronicle of the 1940 events involving many personal accounts and illustrations. It is the latest from a military historian whose books since leaving the *Telegraph* five years ago include *3 Para* (about Afghanistan), and *Bomber Boys* and *Fighter Boys*, concentrating on the Second World War.

Patrick clearly has a passion for the British experience of air war, and he says it goes back to his childhood.

“The Battle of Britain book is connected to the 70th anniversary, which is such a big thing, particularly because most of the few remaining veterans are not going to be around for the 80th anniversary,” he said. “There is still that physical connection to the events.

“My interest in it started with my



HOME: Author Patrick Bishop in Brook Green

PICTURE BY LEIGH QUINNELL

CHURCHILL SPEECHES >>

JUNE 4, 1940
I will pay my tribute to these young airmen. The great French Army was very largely, for the time being, cast back and disturbed by the onrush of a few thousands of armoured vehicles. May it not also be that the cause of civilisation itself will be defended by the skill and devotion of a few thousand airmen? There never has been, I suppose, in all the world, in all the history of war, such an opportunity for youth

JUNE 18, 1940
What General Weygand called the Battle of France is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin... Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will say ‘this was their finest hour’

AUGUST 20, 1940
The gratitude of every home in our island, in our Empire, and indeed throughout the world, except in the abodes of the guilty, goes out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, unwearied in their constant challenge and mortal danger, are turning the tide of the world war by their prowess and by their devotion. Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few

Patrick said: “A lot of the mythology surrounding the battle started at the time itself with Churchill’s rhetoric – it became the Battle of Britain before it even started [‘What General Weygand called the Battle of France is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin,’ said the PM]. I am really trying to disentangle some of these misconceptions.”

For example, the forces were more evenly balanced than people came to believe and there was always in the background the main line of defence against invasion – the navy. But a lot of the material is correct, such as the youth and heroism of the pilots, added Patrick, who clearly has the utmost admiration for their efforts.

That respect is the same for the troops he interviewed fighting in Helmand. Patrick says ‘the same spirit and ethos is there now as there was in 1940’.

His military history books will continue – the story of the sinking of the German battleship Tirpitz is on the way – but he has also written a novel, *A Good War*, set in the Second World War, and another fiction book will be based on Afghanistan.

A move to Queen’s Mansions in Brook Green with his partner Henrietta in May suited him at this time in his life, the area being an ideal ‘family place’ to bring up three-year-old daughter Honor.

His reporting days are certainly behind him.

“I have still have anxiety dreams about deadlines but I do not really miss it,” he said. “I am a bit old for it now.”

When Patrick was in Afghanistan last he reckons he was probably the oldest non-Afghan male in the south of the country.

“Even the army commanders were younger,” he added.

- *Battle of Britain* is published by Quercus. *Bomber Boys*, *Fighter Boys*, *A Good War* and *3 Para* are published by Hammersmith-based HarperCollins.
- Visit: www.patrickbishop.net

Into battle

childhood in Kent. I was born in 1952 so when I was a kid it was still a very real memory for lots of people in the area.

“Like many boys we had the comic books about the Battle of Britain and the pilots were heroic and it was all very real to us, and I think that just

stayed with me. The thing was, as you got older and read grown-up books they were very much of the time and very formulaic.

“I was interested in finding out more about what contemporary people thought. I talked to a lot of veterans and that was very rewarding.

“The Battle of Britain was a short event and not much was written down at the time.

“The stories are well established but it was time to look at the motivation and ethos of the pilots.”

As with a lot of history, the battle has been subject to some revision.

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SHELF LIFE **AMANDA LEES**>>>

Expand your own horizons

► Growing up in Hong Kong, travelling the world – and appearing in *'Allo 'Allo!* – gave kids' author Amanda plenty of inspiration, as **Kate Youde** writes

NO CONFERRING: Is Jeremy Paxman really Amanda Lees' Facebook friend?

The Ravenscourt Park novelist was left pondering this tricky question after failing to pluck up the courage to ask the *University Challenge* quizmaster at the opening of the new Shepherds Bush Library last month whether it really was him on the social networking site. She doubts it.

"I just can't see Jeremy Paxman on Facebook. Can you?" asked Amanda, who has lived in west London for 15 years.

It is hard to know where to begin when interviewing the friendly author, who penned the *Kumari* teen trilogy about a girl goddess, because she has so many interesting tales to tell.

She grew up in Hong Kong after her parents met in the jungle of Borneo and had travelled the world by the age of eight. Following her Gurkha father's death when she was three, Amanda and her mother used to make the most of the latter's long leave as a hospital matron and travel for months at a time.

But the 'total bookworm' always found time to read.

"I was the child reading under the duvet with a torch," confessed Amanda, whose shopping trips down Uxbridge Road, Shepherds Bush, remind her of her time in Hong Kong.

It is no surprise her 'exotic' upbringing inspired her to write children's adventure stories. "It's the fabric of my childhood story," said Amanda, who wrote the first of the trilogy, last year's *Kumari Goddess of Gotham*, as a 'bit of a tribute' to her mother following her death.

"I love the kind of book that expands the horizons. It all went into *Kumari*. It's a celebration of a life but also a celebration of my life."

Before she was creating characters, Amanda was busy playing them and using her drama degree to pursue an acting career. She appeared as a member of the Resistance, with a dachshund under her arm, in the TV sitcom *'Allo 'Allo!* and on stage in various productions, including *Dracula* at

Regent's Park Open Air Theatre. She also turned her hand – she claimed 'very badly' – to stand-up.

However, it was her talent for words that shone through and she landed some work writing for satirical BBC Radio 4 sketch show *Week Ending*. Next came a debut novel for adults and five agents vying for her attention. She picked the one who offered her a drink. And so her career as an author was born.

"It was a case of falling into it and realising I loved it," said Amanda, who now gives talks in schools about her work. She believes it is important to encourage a 'culture of writing' as it has fallen behind in classrooms because of the National Curriculum.

The author, who has a seven-year-old daughter and 15-year-old stepson, is currently working on a 'real thriller' she hopes will appeal to boys, as well as girls, and a gripping book for adults. "I'm going to try and do a Harlan Coben," said Amanda, adding that the bestselling American crime writer whose work she reads really was her Facebook friend.

"It takes me away. You get totally absorbed. I can't see the twists coming."

The novelist still has her own adventures on which to draw. When the family bought a cottage in the 'total cash economy' of Bulgaria two years ago, she travelled with the money to pay for it strapped to her leg.

"It was a hoot because they padded me at Heathrow but didn't find it," said Amanda.



RED ALERT: Children's author Amanda Lees PICTURE BY HARRY RAFIQUE



I was the child reading under the duvet with a torch



PURE POETRY: Perseus Adams PICTURE BY LEIGH QUINNELL

POET PERSEUS AND HIS ARTISTIC VAN GOGH GENES

A POET, a traveller, a school teacher, and a famed artistic connection best sums up Perseus Adams.

Born in South Africa in 1933, Perseus, now of Hadyn Park Road, Shepherds Bush, grew up not quite knowing about his origins. He only found out his true origins when he reached his teenage years.

At the age of 14 Perseus was sent to live with his grandmother for a year, and was to sit his matricular exams during that year. Being told to polish up his Afrikaans in time for his exam, he approached his grandmother for help, upon realising she was tutoring other people with their Afrikaans.

Perseus was under the impression his grandmother was French, but little did he know that she not only spoke perfect Dutch, but she was also Vincent Van Gogh's aunt. His grandmother, who they often referred to as Ella, was indeed Anna Cornelia Carpentus – Van Gogh's sister.

Sharing artistic genes with such an illustrious painter, it is no wonder that Perseus is a poet and a writer. He was also a journalist and a teacher, teaching English in seven different countries, one of which is India where he spent 18 months living and teaching English up in the Himalayas.

He eventually settled in England in 1976, although he

continued to travel to various countries.

"I was very disappointed to find out that the highest mountain wasn't in the Himalayas; instead it is under the sea," he said.

Another celebrity influence on Perseus' personal life is South African writer Athol Fugard, who mentions Perseus in his *Cousins: A Memoir*. Perseus and Athol left home and hitch-hiked to North Africa.

Perseus' poetry is described as lyrical, with a South African theme. He has written some award-winning poems, which have been given awards such as the South African State Poetry Prize in 1963. He has

since gone on to winning several other poetry prizes. He holds the winning title of the Festival of Rhodesia Prize in 1970 and Bridport Arts Festival in 1984.

Perseus had three of his poetry books published, of which the original of *Grass for the Unicorn* recently went up for sale on eBay for an estimated £300.

"I didn't know that these books would sell for this much. Publishing houses don't usually keep poetry books for this long, so hearing this came as a pleasant surprise to me," he said.

Although Perseus is no longer able to travel, he continues to write poetry, entering several competitions a year. **Priya Gulraj**