

Forever a Babe is Tom Clare's account of his early life growing up in post war Manchester alongside the emergence of Manchester United's famous young soccer team, the 'Busby Babes'. It is a tale of their triumphs and ultimate tragedy.

Forever a Babe

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Forever a Babe

Growing Up With Manchester United

Tom Clare

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Munich – 6 February 1958

Although I was just 13 when the tragedy of Munich happened, my memories of that time have never dimmed. The tragedy happened on a Thursday afternoon, and I can remember that day vividly. It was cold and bleak, and some areas of Manchester experienced snow that afternoon. It was dark before four o'clock in the afternoon. After school, I had trudged down Ardwick Green, schoolbag on shoulder, and crossed Downing Street into Rusholme Road. On the corner of that junction was Wyman's pet shop, from where I would start my dog food delivery round. My spirits that day were so high following United's marvellous performance in Belgrade the previous day. Following the 3-3 draw with Red Star, many United supporters were hoping the team would be drawn to play Real Madrid again in the semi-final of the European Cup. Revenge was sought for defeat at the same stage of the previous season's competition.

As I walked my delivery round, the banter with the customers was terrific. They all knew I was United daft, and they pulled my leg as they paid their debts to me from our threepenny bets on United's results! The first time that I had any foreboding, any sense that something was wrong, was when I walked down Store Street, under the long railway arch beneath London Road (now Piccadilly) station, and out onto London Road itself. I used to deliver to a Wilson's pub named The White Hart, on the corner of Whitworth Street, facing the fire station. There was a newspaper man there every night, selling the Evening News and the Evening Chronicle. As I crossed over to his side of the road, he had just finished putting up a poster with the headline *Stop Press – United Plane Crashes at Munich*. The Stop Press was a column on the right hand side of the newspaper's front page which contained a late headline for any breaking news that had not been in the wires before publication time. It looked as though the newspapers had been run through a Gestetner machine to add these headlines after the newspaper had actually been printed. I hurriedly paid my tuppence for the Chron, but all it said was "Manchester United's Plane has crashed at

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Munich Airport – more to follow in later edition.” At first, people assumed it was something minor, and nothing to worry about. As I got further down London Road, and into Downing Street, news had started to filter through about the crash on the wireless. The publican at the Old Gog and Magog was the first to tell me that there had been fatalities, although he couldn't say who they were. It was almost six o'clock in the evening by the time that I got back to Wyman's, but Jean and David knew nothing of the unfolding tragedy. I ran all the way up Rusholme Road, to my home in Royle Street, where I found my father sitting besides the fireplace with tears streaming down his face. He'd arrived home from Henshaw's Blind School, close to Old Trafford, where he was training to be a joiner after losing his sight, and he had heard the news on the wireless.

More news was filtering through, and we sat together for the next few hours as the names of those lost became confirmed: from the team Roger Byrne, Geoff Bent, Eddie Colman, Mark Jones, David Pegg, Tommy Taylor and Billy Whelan; from United's staff Walter Crickmer, Tom Curry and Bert Whalley; the Manchester newspapermen Alf Clarke and Tom Jackson; and from the national press Don Davies, Archie Ledbrooke, Henry Rose, Eric Thompson, George Follows and Frank Swift. Tommy Cable, a steward with British European Airways and a member of the crew; Bela Miklos, a travel agent; Willie Satinoff, listed as a supporter, but who in reality was much more.

News trickled through intermittently. The hours passed. It was as if we were all in a trance, as though time had stood still. Mum was at home, my sister was at home, but there was little or no conversation. We just sat there in the dim firelight, listening, waiting and praying. As the evening grew late news of the injured became clearer. Kenneth Rayment the co-pilot was critical (and would not survive). Matt Busby was critical and was not expected to survive, and it was the same for Frank Taylor, one of the travelling journalists. Duncan Edwards, Jackie Blanchflower and Johnny Berry were also described as critical.

Others were described as survivors – Albert Scanlon, Dennis Viollet, Bobby Charlton, Ray Wood, Harry Gregg and Bill Foulkes; Peter Howard and Ted Ellyard, who were newspaper photographers; Captain Thain, and crew members Rosemary Cheverton, Margaret Bellis and George Rodgers; Mrs Miklos, the wife of the travel agent; Vera Lukic and her baby; and Bato Tomasevic, a member of the Yugoslavian Embassy in London, who had travelled as a liaison officer with United.

There was no mention of Kenny Morgans – he was actually found some four hours after the crash by two German journalists who had returned to the wreckage looking for a canister of film which they had put on board the plane.

A heavy sadness enveloped the whole house. For me, a 13 year old boy, it was unthinkable that I would not be seeing my heroes play Wolves at Old Trafford in a vital league game the following Saturday afternoon. I cried so much that evening, and went to bed hoping it was all a horrible dream, and that I would awake to find that all was well. Unfortunately, when I did awake, I was to find out about the harshness and reality of life. Dad didn't go to work that morning, nor did hardly anybody else in the city. The reality was there before us in the morning editions of the newspapers and in the news bulletins on the wireless. There were pictures, stories and tales of heroism, but the stark actuality was the decimation of a team of wonderful young boys, loyal United backroom staff and the cream of the British sporting press.

The atmosphere in the city during the days that followed was surreal. A great pall of mourning was omnipresent. Adults openly shed tears. Each day I cried so much, and I could not eat. I had no interest in play or doing any of the things that young boys do, so much so that Mum had to keep me off school for some time. In hindsight I know I was suffering from shock, and years later my parents agreed that this was the case. I'd known a number of the United players and, as I have described, I had played with them during the summer months at the swimming pool. They were my idols, my heroes. During the previous three and a half years, I'd hardly missed a match at Old Trafford – in

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effect, I'd been growing up with them. It was beyond my comprehension that I wouldn't be seeing Tommy Taylor, David Pegg or Billy Whelan again – players I had got to know. If there was a light, it was that Duncan had survived, and there was optimism about his recovery.

A few days after the tragedy, the coffins bearing the bodies of those who perished returned home. On a cold, wet, dark evening a long convoy of black hearses brought them from Ringway Airport back to Old Trafford, where they were placed in the gymnasium beneath the Main Stand to remain overnight before being released to their families. Huge crowds lined the routes, and I stood in Warwick Road with my Mum as those vehicles passed by. Not a sound could be heard except the rumble of tyres on the cobbled road, and the quiet sniffles and sobs, as people's emotions got the better of them.

Funerals were held in the week that followed, and still the air mourning was palpable throughout the city. Attention became more focused on those who had survived, and on the daily bulletins about Duncan's recovery. Jimmy Murphy had travelled out to Munich and had returned to Manchester with Harry Gregg and Bill Foulkes. Matt Busby had told Jimmy to keep the flag flying at Old Trafford, and he now had to go about the business of putting a team together to play Sheffield Wednesday in an FA Cup 5th round tie on the evening of 19 February. The FA had allowed the club to postpone the tie the previous Saturday, because of the funerals that had taken place earlier that week. To get the patched up young team away from a grief-stricken Manchester, and away from media interest, Murphy took his players away to the Norbreck Hydro hotel in Blackpool.

That second week after the tragedy, Duncan's condition began to fluctuate. Professor Georg Maurer, who had worked so hard at the Rechts der Isar Hospital in Munich, had said that any lesser mortal than Duncan would never have survived, given the injuries that he had suffered. Oh! How I wanted him to live!

On 19 February I attended the first game after the tragedy with Mum and her friend from Ardwick, Mary Donohue. Although it was a 7.30 evening kick off we got to the ground at four o'clock in the afternoon, as we wanted to be sure of getting in. It was no surprise that there were already long queues outside each turnstile. It was a bitterly cold afternoon, with a very clear sky. The turnstiles opened early, and people flooded into the ground. We stood on the Popular Side, on the half way line, underneath the old shed, with the Glover's Cables factory immediately to the rear of the stand. There was a muted murmur as the ground began to fill – it was eerie, not like a normal match day at all. People spoke softly to each other, and there were still tears of sorrow shed as people contemplated the loss of so many young boys.

As the old steam trains drew into the station on the opposite side of the ground, the clouds of smoke came over the top of the Main Stand, making it look as though a fog had descended inside the ground. The programme was unique, and has since become a collector's item: United's teamsheet bore no names at all, just 11 blank spaces. At a quarter to seven it was announced that the gates were closed – Old Trafford was jammed packed full, a far cry from my previous visit on 25 January, when I had watched my beloved Babes beat Ipswich Town 2-0, in the 4th round of the FA Cup. At seven o'clock came the announcement we had been waiting for - the United team for the match, and even today I can hear that announcer's voice: "In goal, Harry Gregg; number two and captain, Bill Foulkes; number three Ian Greaves; number four Freddie Goodwin; number five Ronnie Cope; number six, and please welcome our new signing from Aston Villa, Stan Crowther (there were gasps when this was announced); number seven Colin Webster; number eight, another new signing, Ernie Taylor; number nine Alex Dawson; number ten Mark Pearson; number eleven Seamus Brennan.

Ernie Taylor had been signed from Blackpool the previous week. It was a great signing because little Ernie was so gifted and experienced, having played a full career with Newcastle United and Blackpool, winning the FA Cup with both clubs. Stan Crowther's signing was the

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surprise, as it had taken place just an hour before the kick off, and had been specially sanctioned by the FA. Stan, who was a member of the Aston Villa side that overcame the Babes in the 1957 final, had played in a previous round of the FA Cup that season for Villa, and would under normal circumstances have been 'cup-tied'. He is still the only man to play for two different teams in the same season in the FA Cup.

The roars of the crowd suddenly erupted like a giant geyser as Bill Foulkes led United out from the players' tunnel. Wednesday's skipper that night was Albert Quixall, who was to join United the following year. Recalling the moment he emerged from the tunnel at the head of the Wednesday team, Albert said the wall of noise that met them was like nothing he had heard before. In effect, poor Wednesday were on a loser whichever way the game went – public opinion was dead against them, and God knows what would have happened that night had they won the game. As it happened, roared on by the crowd, United won 3-0. Towards the end of the first half, United got a corner on the left hand side at the Scoreboard End, and Seamus Brennan whipped in an in-swinger, which Jim Ryalls, the Wednesday keeper, could only help into the net. Shay scored again in the second half, and then big Alex Dawson scored near the end. The atmosphere was electric throughout the game and roars could be heard all over the city. Even the people who were locked out of the ground earlier that evening did not go home, but stayed outside the ground. To win that match 3-0 was beyond people's wildest dreams, and as the crowds filtered out and the ground emptied, there was a kind of eerie silence again on the way home. People had expended so much nervous energy in the preceding five or six hours, they were absolutely drained.

Sadly, the elation and jubilation of the Wednesday evening was to turn to tears once again on the following Friday morning. I can recall my Mum coming upstairs to my bedroom, waking me with gentle shakes, and telling me quietly that Duncan Edwards had died in the early hours of that morning. Once more, my world was shattered. The one player I idolised more than anybody else was now gone. No more would I witness the boyish exuberance of the man, as he emerged from the

tunnel taking those great bounding leaps onto the pitch. No more would any of us hear him shout to his colleagues just before a match started, "Come on lads, we 'aven't come 'ere for nuffink!" The Giant was gone, and the Legend had just begun.

I used to find it difficult to talk about the tragedy, especially as I went from adolescence into manhood. There is no doubt that it left a big scar on me and, to be honest, hundreds of kids like me. I was difficult to control for a while, and both Mum and Dad were so worried that mentally something had happened to me. As I said earlier, in hindsight they both realised that they were having to deal with somebody in deep shock. Even my schoolteachers voiced their concern to my parents, as I became disinterested, difficult, very introverted, and was only happy out on the sports field. I would play 'wag' (truant) from school, and walk all the way to Weaste Cemetery just to stand in front of Eddie Colman's grave, as his was the only one that I knew how to get to. I wrote lots of things about the team, and the players as individuals, and I only wish I still had that material today. It was a macabre pattern of behavior, but I had known a number of those boys, and I was grieving. For a young boy, it was hard to come to terms with, losing heroes that I absolutely adored. At that age, knowing that I would never see them again had a profound effect upon me. I was United 'daft' in the truest sense of the word.

I think the main reason the tragedy affected so many people in the way that it did, was because those players, the staff and the press men were all part of the local community. In those days there was a very close proximity between players and fans, club and local community. It is hard to relate to today, and younger readers may find this unusual, but all those players were just ordinary, everyday guys. There were no prima donnas, there was no pretentiousness. They were 'stars', yes, but in the nicest possible way. They were literally 'the boy next door', just lads who happened to have the gift of football talent, and the good fortune to play for the club they really loved – Manchester United. They were so accessible to everybody. If you waited long enough after a match you could travel home with one of them on the bus; you could

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meet them in the shops, and always at The Locarno in Sale on Saturday evenings after home games. I have a few mates in Sale who are a little older than me, but who have related to me tales of sitting with players in the Locarno: the United lads would have a lemonade on top of the table, but half of mild underneath it! Some of them would walk from Stretford to the city centre just to go to the cinema. They wouldn't travel on the bus because in their own words, "to do that was boring!" Many of them could be found in the local parks during afternoons throughout the week, watching school kids playing football, and there would always be banter and laughter with them. They always had the time of day for ordinary people, for the fans. They never lost sight of where they came from.

They had awakened the imagination of the British sporting public. Until the mid-1950s, football teams had an average age somewhere towards the late 20s. All of a sudden, here was this team winning their first championship with an average age of 22, playing the most outrageous brand of attacking football. Matt Busby's long-term vision had been proved right, and the doubters (and there were many of them) had been proved wrong. Matt, Jimmy Murphy, Bert Whalley and Tom Curry had schooled them in the correct way: the foundations of the club that we know today were laid by those great men in those years immediately after Busby's appointment in 1945. Like the players, the staff were also accessible, and Walter Crickmer would walk around the outside of the ground on a match day, chatting with the fans. For the big 'all ticket' matches, when fans queued for tickets from the early hours of Sunday mornings, Matt and Jimmy would find time to walk down the queue, while Walter would stand on the canal bridge on Warwick Road as if he was counting the fans. After tickets had been purchased at the turnstiles (yes, they were sold through the turnstiles!), it wasn't unusual to see players at the ground because they had been in for treatment to injuries or strains picked up the previous day.

It is also interesting to note that although it this was the era when a maximum wage of twenty pounds was in force, not many of those players, not even Roger Byrne, the captain, were on that amount as a

flat rate. They used to get two quid for a win, and a quid for a draw! But you never heard the slightest moan or groan about money. Those lads just lived to play football, and would have played every day. They were unusual in some ways, because socially they were also a very close knit set of lads, and were all mates together. Byrne was a great captain and leader, and was Matt's mouthpiece in the dressing room. He was also the route to the boss for the players. Roger kept everybody in line. It is my honest opinion that Roger was being groomed by Matt to take over eventually as the next Manchester United manager after himself.

Such was the appeal of the Babes that more people wanted to see them, and attendances started to increase. The BBC had limited coverage of games around this time, showing clips of matches on Sunday afternoons, when those families that had television would invite the less fortunate kids around to watch the programme. This gave the team more exposure, and then came Europe, which really did capture the imagination. There is no doubt that all of England's football fans (apart from City's!) were really behind United in their push for the European Cup. The two epic games against the mighty Real Madrid in early 1957, further enhanced the team's reputation, especially after some dubious methods and tactics were used by the Spaniards in both of those games. The Babes were considered such great ambassadors for their club, their city and their country, and were held in such high esteem everywhere they travelled.

Even today I can get very emotional when talking about those times. And I'm certain that it's the same for most people who were around at that time. But in my opinion, these stories have to be told. The story of the Babes is such an important part of United's history – not so much the actual accident, but the story of those tremendous young men who lost their lives pursuing not only their own dream, and the dream of Matt, but the dream of all of the fans as well. Their memory and legend must never be allowed to die. They were an extraordinary group of young men, blessed with tremendous abilities, who conducted themselves impeccably, and played the game in the right way and in the

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right spirit – what we know today as ‘The Manchester United Way’. It is why our traditions are so strong, why mediocrity is not accepted, and why those traditions have to be passed on from generation to generation. It is why so many clubs are jealous of United now, because we have always been there at the forefront, and they cannot compete with our history. It is why Manchester United is the family that it is, because when you are born into that tradition, it is there for life. When United bleeds, we all bleed. We can disagree with each other, curse each other, fight with each other, but at the end of the day, we all agree on one thing – there’s only one United!

The Aftermath – Murphy Battles On

When I look back at the events surrounding the period from Wednesday 5 February to Wednesday 26 March 1958, a time span of just seven weeks, it brings it home to me just what Jimmy Murphy achieved with his patched up team. Upon reflection, fifty years later, it is simply staggering. That team certainly deserves the accolade of ‘Murphy’s Marvels’ or, even better as far as I am concerned, ‘The Fourth Great Team’.

Without a shadow of a doubt, Murphy’s heroic endeavours in that sad period of time deserve far more recognition than they have been given down the years. United defeated Fulham 5-3 in an FA Cup semi-final replay on that foggy, wet Wednesday afternoon at Highbury. It was hard to take in that for the second year running Manchester United had reached the FA Cup final, in circumstances so different from the optimism of the previous year. And in the trauma of those early weeks after the disaster, people seemed to forget that there was also a European Cup semi-final to negotiate as well. This would not take place until the week after the FA Cup final had been played on 3 May.

The ‘new’ team had acquitted itself so well in the weeks that followed Munich. For the most part they were not seen around Manchester at all, as Jimmy preferred them to be up in Blackpool, away from pall of mourning in the city. The weight on those young players’ shoulders must have been an enormous burden for such inexperienced people to carry. When they trooped off that sodden pitch at Highbury on 26 March, it must have seemed that a little of that weight had been removed. By reaching the FA Cup final they fulfilled a promise that Roger Byrne, the late skipper, had made just a year before as he stood at the bottom of the steps at Wembley, watching the Aston Villa team collect the famous old trophy from the Queen.

In the weeks following the semi-final the pressure started to take its toll. The next two league games were lost, first at Hillsborough by a

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solitary goal, then in front of just over 16,000 spectators at Villa Park on the last day of March they lost 3-2. The first weekend of April was Easter weekend, and on Good Friday United entertained Sunderland at Old Trafford, and on the Saturday welcomed Preston North End. The team fought like tigers to eke out a 2-2 draw against Sunderland, with Bobby Charlton equalising with an absolute thunderbolt of a shot. For the Preston North End game, Kenny Morgans returned to first team duties just eight weeks after the disaster. There was a tremendous ovation for him when he ran out of the tunnel. Making his debut for United that day was a left winger signed from Portadown in Northern Ireland just a few days earlier – a man I was to meet many times in later years, Tommy Heron.

Morgans was just a mere shadow of his old self in that game and it petered out into a tame 0-0 draw. On Easter Monday United travelled up to Roker Park for the return fixture against Sunderland. The Wearsiders turned out in force, and over 50,000 fans saw United win 2-1 through a brace of goals from Colin Webster. This would be United's only league win of the season after the tragedy, out of 14 matches. Considering the circumstances, and the flimsy available resources, a return of four points from six in the three day Easter period was some achievement.

On 12 April 60,000 fans crowded into White Hart Lane to see Spurs beat United by a solitary goal. The United team stayed down south, as the following Wednesday evening they played Portsmouth at Fratton Park. Again there was a good attendance as 40,000 fans turned up to see a real ding-dong affair that resulted in a 3-3 draw. United had to make changes from the game against Spurs, as Harry Gregg had picked up a knock, and 18 year old David Gaskell replaced him in goal. Freddie Goodwin and Bobby Charlton had also picked up knocks, so Crowther was moved to right-half and Wilf McGuinness came in at left half. Up front, Dawson came in at outside right, Morgans switched to outside left and Mark Pearson moved to his favourite inside left position. The changes freshened up the team a little as Alex Dawson, Ernie Taylor and Colin Webster all found the net. Each time United

scored they couldn't hold onto their lead, but when the final whistle blew the fans had enjoyed a thriller, and the result was a fair reflection of the game.

Just three days later, Birmingham City were the visitors to Old Trafford, and they left with a 2-0 win. On Monday evening, 21 April, came the rearranged game against Wolverhampton Wanderers that should have been played on 8 February. It was an emotional night as another of the survivors, Dennis Viollet, made his return to football after recovering from his injuries. It was to be no happy return for Dennis as the league leaders outclassed United, strolling to an easy 4-0 win. I was really angry watching that game, for I hated Wolves with venom. I smile when I think about it now. Wolves had been the pretenders to the United's crown, and their manager Stan Cullis was always of the big opinion that his young Wolves were the better team, and that they never got the credit they deserved. To see United whipped so easily that evening hurt enormously and I could only reflect what might have been but for the tragedy. Incredibly, on the following Wednesday evening, 23 April, United had another home game, this time against the Geordies from Newcastle. This meant that they would play four league games in just seven days, something you could never envisage today. Dennis Viollet had picked up a knock on the Monday, but the good thing from United's point of view was that Bobby Charlton was back to replace him. Just 28,000 saw United take the lead that evening through young Alex Dawson, but once again they could not hold on to it. Newcastle equalized, and that's the way that it was at full-time.

Saturday, 26 April saw the last league game of United's season, at Stamford Bridge. There was a lot of speculation about the team selection for that game – would this be Jimmy Murphy's Cup final team, the final being just one week away? A spirited performance saw them go down 2-1 at the Bridge, with little Ernie Taylor scoring once again for United. The team that afternoon was: Gregg; Foulkes, Greaves; Goodwin, Cope, Crowther; Dawson, Taylor, Charlton, Viollet and Webster.

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United returned to Manchester after the Chelsea game, and in the early part of the week they again went up to Blackpool. On the Thursday they moved down to London to prepare for the FA Cup final against arch rivals Bolton Wanderers. Jimmy had to deliberate and agonise over his team selection. Dennis Viollet had just two league games under his belt, and Kenny Morgans had seven games behind him. Morgans had been coming into some form, but had been left out for the Chelsea game, having played the previous seven games. Jimmy had to make a decision – Viollet’s undoubted experience, even though he had no real match fitness, or Morgan’s potential? In the end, Jimmy went for the line-up that had played at Chelsea, and there was bitter disappointment for the young Welshman.

It was also a bitterly disappointing time for me, as I desperately wanted to go down to Wembley for the final. My grandfather would be there, but going with him was not an option. Tickets as usual were as scarce as rocking horse crap, but I was determined to get one. The problem was that both Mum and Dad would not allow me to travel down even if I had a ticket. They absolutely forbade it, and it broke my heart. I came to understand why years later, but at that time I was inconsolable. Dad was blind and Mum feared that it was a journey too far for me to go alone. Unfortunately our home in Chorlton-upon-Medlock had no electricity, so we had no television. I had to compromise by going to my grandfather’s home and sitting with his wife to watch that final in their old parlour that held so many happy memories for me.

Saturday, 3 May 1958 was a glorious sunny day, and the temperature was well into the seventies as kick off time approached. Just before the teams came out Ted Dalton, the United physio, helped Matt Busby take his place on the United bench. Matt was walking with the aid of crutches, and was greeted with fondness by both sets of fans. As soon as the Cup final hymn ended, both teams emerged from the tunnel. Bolton were led by their manager Bill Ridding and captain Nat Lofthouse, and United by Jimmy Murphy and skipper Bill Foulkes. United’s shirts bore the crest of an eagle which in later years was to become the point of much speculation. Even I always thought that it

was phoenix rising from the ashes, but recent research has established that the crest was definitely an eagle, taken from a small badge on the Manchester coat of arms, which had been redesigned around that time.

The game itself was never a classic by any stretch of the imagination, and as far as United were concerned, it was a non-event. United went behind as early as the third minute when bad defending allowed Lofthouse to steal in behind and score from just a few yards out. The game was a stalemate from then on, and I think the turning point came shortly into the second half when a tremendous shot from Bobby Charlton beat the Trotter's keeper Eddie Hopkinson all ends up – nobody was more surprised than the goalie when the ball rebounded off the foot of a post, and straight back into his hands. With time ebbing away, there came another moment of Cup final controversy. Dennis Stevens, the Bolton inside forward, headed speculatively towards the United goal. Harry Gregg palmed the ball upwards and turned to take the catch. Lofthouse came thundering in, charged Gregg in the middle of the back, and took both keeper and ball into the back of the net. Even back in those days it was an obvious foul, but astoundingly the referee gave a goal. Gregg was out cold for several minutes such was the severity of the impact, and when he did recover he was groggy right up until the final whistle blew. Jack Crompton, the United coach, has recently revealed that he bumped into the referee on holiday a short time afterwards. The referee, Mr. Sherlock, confessed to Jack that he had seen the controversial goal on television after the match, and felt he had made a mistake in allowing it to stand. Crompton, ever the gentleman, put the ref's mind at ease, saying he had no need to apologise for having made an honest decision as he saw it at the time.

That Bolton were the better team is not in dispute, and they deserved their victory, but the Lofthouse-Gregg incident has always left a sour taste in my mouth. Once again I was heartbroken after a game. I remember watching Lofthouse going up to collect the trophy, with tears streaming down my face. Again my memories took me back to just a few short months before when Babes had made mincemeat out of this same Bolton team, trouncing them 7-2. It just seemed so cruel and

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unfair. United's patched up team had given their all, but I think that it is true to say that Wembley that day was a bridge too far for them. The exertions of the previous 12 weeks certainly took their toll. They were not disgraced by any means, but when it came to it they had nothing left in their tanks – they were drained, physically and emotionally.

The following day the team arrived back in Manchester to a heroes' welcome, but it wasn't the same for Bolton. When they returned they embarked on a long open topped bus journey to Bolton, which took them through the United heartland of Salford, where bags of flour were hurled at them by United fans disgruntled about the Lofthouse incident.

Jimmy Murphy had to get down to work immediately after that final to pick the team up for the following week. The first leg of the European Cup semi-final was played on the Thursday against AC Milan. There had been some nastiness between United and Milan, as the Italians wanted the game played on the Wednesday, but the authorities acceded to United's request for another day's recovery from the FA Cup final. Nobody gave United a chance, including some of our own fans, and this was reflected in the attendance, as only 44,000 turned out for the game. United played in a changed strip of all white that evening and Bill Foulkes led them out of the tunnel with Cesare Maldini (Paolo's father) leading out the Italians.

United had to make changes from the team that had appeared at Wembley just five days earlier. Unfortunately for United, Bobby Charlton had been called up to play for England in a friendly match against Portugal at Wembley the evening before this game. Today this would be unthinkable. He would also miss the return leg in Milan the following week as the England team flew to Belgrade to play a friendly against Yugoslavia which took place the following Sunday. For Charlton, it was a harrowing experience to have to fly back to that city, and to return to the stadium where he had played just three months before with his great friends who had been lost in the tragedy.

Mark Pearson replaced Charlton, and Kenny Morgans returned in place of Dawson. The Italians had a star-studded team that apart from Maldini also included Nils Liedholm, who would captain Sweden to the World Cup final just a few weeks later. They boasted Juan Schiaffino, an Argentinian, who was a wonderfully talented inside forward, a flying left winger named Cucchiaroni, and a solid non-sense defence, at the heart of which was a giant sweeper named Bergamaschi. United faced a mammoth task.

The opening exchanges were fairly even, but gradually the Italians began to take charge. It was no surprise when in the 24th minute Schiaffino got behind the United defence to open the scoring. They seemed to settle for it for a while and they allowed United to become more dominant. With the partisan crowd urging them on United took charge, but it looked as though the Italians would cope. That is until a fine piece of opportunism by Dennis Viollet, showing some of his former self, saw United equalise to go in at half-time on level terms.

The second half saw United, prompted by Ernie Taylor, throw the kitchen sink at the Italians. They attacked in waves, and the Italians stooped to all sorts of tricks to slow the game down and waste time. It was even worse than the Real Madrid home tie the year before. United pegged away, and Ernie Taylor's passing was a joy to watch. For me, this was probably his finest performance in his short time at United. Given his age, he stood out like a beacon, and the young players around responded in kind. The game was approaching the final ten minutes, and just as it looked as though it was going to be stalemate, United were awarded a penalty at the Stretford End. The smallest man on the field couldn't get hold of the ball quickly enough. The Italians besieged the referee, but he stood firm. Little Ernie stood with the ball on the spot, waited for the goalkeeper to take his place on the line, calmly placed the ball, turned, took a few paces back, turned again, and waited for the referee to blow the whistle. Then he strode forward and smacked the ball straight down the middle, as the goalkeeper dived to his right. The ball thumped off the underside of the crossbar and into the back of the net. United were ahead and Old Trafford erupted. The

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Italians could not believe it, and though they went chasing an equaliser, it wasn't to be – United had won 2-1.

Whenever I look back on that game it always amazes me what a great achievement it was. It said so much for the character and will of the players, but also of Jimmy Murphy. The return leg was to be played at the San Siro in Milan the following Wednesday, and the win had given not only the players, but the fans and the nation as well, a glimmer of hope. Could this team do the impossible and reach the European Cup final? We all hoped that they could.

Because of the disaster, United obviously opted not to fly to Milan. Instead they travelled over land. The first leg of the journey took them by rail from Manchester to Harwich, where they caught the ferry for the Hook of Holland and then went by rail to Milan. The United party left what was then London Road station early on the Sunday afternoon. I went to see them off, buying my one penny platform ticket so that I could get closer. The players and Jimmy were assembled in the station cafeteria when I arrived, and they were busy signing autographs. We followed them out from the cafeteria and onto the platform where they boarded the train. The players assembled at the various windows and the steam engine whistled loudly as the train slowly inched away from the platform. The players waved, we all waved back and wished them well, and there were a lot of tears amongst the fans. Lots of memories came flooding back of happier times.

The journey to Italy was long and arduous, and the team did not arrive in Milan until late on Monday evening. It wasn't any kind of preparation, but what could United do? The San Siro was teeming with 80,000 vociferous Italians when the teams took to the field on the Wednesday evening. Both sides were unchanged from the previous meeting. For United it was a hard, hard task, especially as Schiaffino wiped out their lead inside three minutes. It was backs to the wall stuff, but they held out until half-time. Seven minutes into the second half the referee awarded a penalty for some unseen offence, and the United defenders were most unhappy about the decision. Nils Liedholm

stepped up and sent Harry Gregg the wrong way as he rolled the ball into the goal. The tie was now over, to all intents and purposes. The Italians took command, and scored again in the 67th minute through centre forward Danova, and Schiaffino got his second goal in the 77th minute to complete a 4-0 rout. United's lads had given their all, but as at Wembley just ten days before, Milan was another bridge too far. They had nothing at all to be ashamed of. They had performed valiantly and had done the club, Manchester and their country proud. It was time for them all to go away and have a rest from the intensity of the spotlight that had been upon them for the previous three months.

And so the European trail had come to its end. It was to be six more years before United took part in European competition again. At that particular time, though, we just wondered whether they would ever get there again.

Those first two European campaigns will always hold such a special place in my heart. There were some marvellous moments and some terrific matches. The memory of seeing the first ever English team to compete in Europe; the memory of seeing the first ever home European tie, ending in a 10-0 win; the battle in Dortmund on an ice bound pitch; the win against Bilbao against the odds at Maine Road; the two memorable ties against Real Madrid; and the games against Red Star. I remember the dreams of a wonderful group of young men who were just so much a part of our lives, and who acquitted themselves so magnificently. I don't forget either the patched up team that took up their mantle, and performed so heroically in the aftermath of the tragedy. Even today, in moments of quiet solitude, I still remember. I still see them so clearly. I still see the happiness and joy which they gave to us all. I'll never forget, and neither will those of my generation who are still around today.

Forever a Babe is Tom Clare's account of his early life growing up in post war Manchester alongside the emergence of Manchester United's famous young soccer team, the 'Busby Babes'. It is a tale of their triumphs and ultimate tragedy.

Forever a Babe

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