

CANUNGRA HOTEL (QLD) BATTLE - 1974



Dedicated to Wayne (Nog) Whitrod for sticking by his mate

Memories: This article and others like it *are based on true events. Readers are warned that some of the material may be inappropriate. Material is somewhat unchanged to reflect the behaviour, expectations attitudes prevalent at the time.*

Pete had just returned from leave and was doing a stint at Canungra. He had returned from Malaya Singapore and this time was trying his hand at being a clerk. The company had been reinforced with a whole new batch of blokes and everyone was getting to know each other.

One night Pete and his mates Jock, Nog, Doug and a few others were drinking down at the Canungra Hotel. The boys were only minding their own business, eyeing off the local talent and drinking beer and whiskey. (Like they always do) The pub was rowdy and comments were thrown thick and fast. You either took exception or you just kept on drinking your "ale".

One bright local spark with too much booze decided to give the Army boys some piece of his mind. He was trying to big note himself in front of his mates. Well, he came around the long way, around the bar, through the bat wing doors and right up to where Pete was quietly drinking his coca cola. With feet spread apart and hands on the table this local bloke looked formidable, sneering he said looking at the Army blokes.

"You cunts are as useless and as weak as piss". I'll taking any body on right now" Apparently our blokes had been involved in a minor scuffle and had come out second best. What this local bloke didn't know is that his strengths and weaknesses had already been analysed and how to tackle him physically should the time arrive. Within two seconds the local bloke was on the floor with his nose broken and blood all over him.

Carefully wiping the blood from his coke bottle, Pete drank the remaining coke and went to the toilet to urinate. Nog and Doug had followed him to see if he was ok. As they were returning to their mates they heard yelling and screaming. Pete and his mates wondered what all the commotion was about. The door suddenly opened and there were a whole pack of locals looking at them.

One of them said where are they. Pete said I don't know mate, realising that they were looking for him. The other bloke behind was holding his nose and blood covered his eyes. He had cleared enough off his eyes to recognise Pete. He then said, "That's him". Well that put the cat among the pigeons. Pete threw a punch at their leader and broke his nose. Pete and his mates turned and ran out of the pub.

They had run about twenty metres when Pete, stuff this, I am not running from these bastards, either I end it here or I get my head belted. He turned and stood facing the last bloke he had belted. A few punches were thrown and they began to wrestle. The bloke said, "ya had better let go, mate because I am a professional wrestler and I could break your neck". Now Pete could see that his neck was in no danger, but also could see that this was getting them nowhere. To cut a long story short, The Army blokes dragged Pete off while the locals dragged their champion off.

As Pete stood up, the local copper, a big six foot two high bloke, who had sided with the locals and was not in uniform decided to throw a punch at Pete. Pete's reflexes were good and saw it coming. He ducked but did not retaliate. The copper jumped back in fear as he thought Pete was going to drop him. (So much for the bravado of the local copper.) After a few insults and threats, Pete and Nog slowly began the long climb back to Battle Wing leap frogging each other and avoiding the vehicle traffic from the Canungra Township.

It appeared that the locals had jumped in about four or five cars and were driving up and down the road looking for Pete and Nog. When Pete got to the top he found that Nog had been punched by one of the locals while standing next to Leishman, the guard at the gate,. What had happened was that Nog made it back to the barracks 5 min earlier and Nog was standing with Leishman who was the guard on the gate at the time. A car load of locals drove past and words were exchanged.

The car came to a screeching stop and this giant squeezed his way out through the front window as obviously the door was bugged. It took the big bloke about 5 minutes to squeeze out the window. Leishman and Nog looked at each other and said "OH FUCK, he's big. The big bloke then strolled up to the gate and more words were exchanged. The big bloke then punched Nog fair in the face and walked off. Once the big bloke had departed Nog said to Leishman "Gee he was a weak cunt he didn't even knock me down"

The next day the Company Sergeant Major, Warrant Officer Bert Franks called for Corporal Barry Fitton to front him. Bazza (Fitton) went past Pete and said "What's the CSM want me for Pete?" "Geeze, I Don't know mate, but he is bloody pissed off about something." Well all hell breaks loose; The CSM tore strips off poor old Bazza. "I have had a report from the local copper that you belted some civvies and they are now in hospital receiving treatment." "Corporal Fitton, If I ever catch you going down to the pub and belting the blood civvies" etc, etc, and the tirade continued.

Poor old Bazza just stood there and took it all in. All he could say was that it wasn't him that belted the civvies. "Fuck off" he said to Corporal Fitton, I would try and smooth things over with the locals. Bazza turned and walked out of the CSM's office. As he passed Pete, he looked as if a brick had hit him. "Don't worry Bazza, I'll fix things" said Pete. But I didn't do it Pete" said Bazza as he marched back to his section.

After Bazza had gone, Pete waited a few moments and sheepishly knocked on the CSM's door. "What do you fuck'n want Pete, can't you see I am busy. I am about to report to the commandant about last night's activities" "Well Sir, before you do that, can I have a word with you, as its not Bazza's fault. Having gained the interest of the CSM, Pete walked into the office and stood in front of the CSM.

Bert Franks was a soldier's man and always looked after his diggers. He was like a father to them. Pete admired him and always wanted to be a Warrant Officer when he grew up. So he trusted the CSM to do the right thing. "Well it's like this Sir, you see the bloke that belted the two civvies was me".

The CSM looked startled and pushed his chair back. Then he started grinning, from ear to ear. "Well private Pete, the story I was told that the Army bloke that belted these two civvies was about 6 foot four inches tall, about four axe handles across and a real ugly bloke. Except for the ugly part, you don't fit that description. The only bloke that it fits is corporal Fitton." Pete grinned that CSM called him, ugly and stored it away for the future, then wiping the grin off his face, he looked at the CSM.

"Well, tell me about it then" said the CSM, "What really did happen". Pete relayed the information, leaving out the bit about leap frogging his way back to the lines and did not mention his mate Nog's involvement. As far as Pete was concerned it was his problem and he was not about to dob his mate in. The CSM looked at him and started laughing. Pete said "Sir it's all true, I know it's my fault, but I wasn't going to take that bullshit from the civvies. Anyway they had belted our blokes earlier and I just thought we should even up the score".

The CSM Bert looked at Pete through his beady eyes and the crooked hawk like nose that he had protruding from his face, and said solemnly, "You know it's a serious offence to be involved in scuffles with the locals. You are giving us a bad name. "Gawd" knows what I am going to tell the Commandant at the briefing, and the OC is really pissed off. However I will think of something.

In the mean time you might as well stay in the lines for the remainder of our stay. Now fuck off while I think of a way out of all this". Pete turned smartly and marched out. "Did we win"? Bert Franks asked as Pete was going through the door? "Too right Sir," said Pete proudly, going through the door.

Well for the remainder of A Company's tour, Pete remained within the camp boundaries. The CSM fixed things up, Bazza stopped worrying about getting into strife, the civvies were told that severe penalties had been inflicted on those responsible and that was the end of the matter.

Postscript. Pete to this day has no regrets regarding the brawl at the Canungra hotel. After all he did not initiate it and sticking up for his mates was something that he prided himself on. Bazza went on to become a Warrant Officer. Bert Franks left the army after 20 years and it is rumoured that he had gone to the big jungle in the Sky. Wayne (Nog) Whitrod went onto becoming a warrant officer and leaving the service after some 20 years and went to work for the Queensland Government.

Doug went onto becoming a captain in the SAS and retired in Queensland. Jock retired from the Army after completing his three year term and now lives in Melbourne. Bruce Leishman remained in the army but Pete lost track of him. It is believed that Bruce Leishman may have moved back to his home state of Tasmania. Nothing is known of the thugs from the Canungra hotel, presumably they went on with their daily lives.



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