

THE PHANTOM BASHER SAGA - 1972

INGLEBURN NSW - 1972



Ugly 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 was in the middle of his Initial Employment Training and thoroughly enjoying himself. He had completed his three months basic training during 1971 and had been allocated to Infantry, his first choice. One day "Pete" and his mate Marshall were discussing over a beer who the Phantom Basher was in the Barracks. Apparently a couple of blokes had been bashed while on guard duty at night.

It had been rumoured that as late as 1971 early 1972 there was a bloke called the Phantom basher bashing the young IET blokes at night. Any way one day "Pete" and his mate "Marshall" were returning from the Chowne Club after an all days session, drinking. They slowly made their way back to their lines they came across another bloke from a different platoon. This bloke was about 6 foot 3 inches. Pete was only about 5 foot 8 inches tall, strong and wiry while Marshall was about 6 foot tall and well built.

Well this bloke was fixing his car and for some stupid reason turned to Pete and Marshall and said, "You blokes are weak as piss, I have already sent two of your blokes to hospital." Pete and Marshall looked at each other and said nothing and walked off. A week later, Pete had gone to bed only to be woken later by Marshall who was pissed to the eye balls. "Pete, I am going to smash that bastard's face in." "Who are you going to smash you stupid Galah: Pete said.

"That big prick who has been bashing our mates at night" said Marshall. "No you're not" said Pete. Marshall just sauntered out and began to walk towards the other blokes hut. Pete hurriedly dressed in his jungle greens and raced outside just in time to catch Marshall going into the other hut. He was concerned about Marshalls

attitude towards the bloke he was after. He had seen that same look many years ago as a young street fighter when he and his mates faced other street fighters in the streets of Melbourne. It was a time when you had to fight to stay alive and in one piece.

Marshall caught up with him and took the large coke bottle off him that Marshall was about to belt the other bloke with. The other bloke was asleep. Pete took the bottle out of Marshalls hand and tapped the bloke on the head to wake him up. Pete was never afraid of big blokes as their balls were always an easy mark and in case Pete had learnt as a street fighter what it's like feel fear and to suppress it.

The bloke woke up and then Pete dragged him out of bed and smashed his head against the metal cupboards and gave him a thrashing of his life. All the rest of the members in the hut were watching this take place. They didn't like the bloke anyway. Still they watched while Pete give this bloke a hiding.

Marshall by this time had sobered up as there was blood everywhere. He grabbed the nearest bayonet and stuck it under Pete's neck and said, "enough Pete, let's go". Marshall took Pete back to his lines while all hell broke loose. The guard was turned out, Pete thrown in the Boob (guard house) located at the front entrance of the Camp. Investigation after investigation, failed.

Pete fronted the OC and charged with punching a soldier and then received confined to Barracks for ten days, but still allowed to go on his final exercise.. During Pete's time in gaol, Marshall had gone AWOL in the meantime and had left a letter behind saying that it was not Pete's fault.

The bloke who had been belted up by Pete, changed Corps as he felt that it best for his health. This was the same bloke who had bragged about bashing others on the camp. Leaving the Corps and the camp was the best decision he ever made as he did not fit in.

Although Pete was still wild and hated authority, the Army suited him and it became his family. He had his ups and downs but eventually went on to being a good digger and only marriage tamed him to a point. In the case of Pete's mate, Marshall, he was never to be seen again, Pete sometimes wonders whether he returned to being a bikie again.

A few years later Pete had to go to Puckapunyal for Infantry/Tank trials and was sitting with his mates having a brew during the breaks. Who should come along with two stripes on his arm but this big bloke (the one with the health problem that Pete had belted ups some years ago). "Howz the grunts going" he said as he sauntered up.

He had not noticed that Pete was amongst the group, as he said "I was a grunt once but I saw the light". A voice in the back ground said, "Yeah and I know who gave you the light". The big bloke turned and went white as a sheet when he saw Pete. The big bloke turned and left without saying anything. Pete's mates said to him, "Did you know him Pete". "Naaah" said Pete, "I never saw the bloke in my life".

Suffice to say, Pete never saw this bloke again and probably it was for the best. Life as an infantryman (grunt) with the Royal Australian Regiment was never easy at any given time, but it was family. For Pete, loyalty to his family was always took priority and it was important that credibility, integrity and being there for mates went hand in hand.

It was a hard life, full of adventures, laughter, grief at times for a lost mate and a sense of belonging. It was certainly not designed for those seeking a cushy job. Thus his regiments motto of Duty First was to sustain him throughout his Army career.

Postscript: (dedicated to Marshall for his sacrifice) Marshall was never to be heard of again, The Army still have as Absent without Leave.



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