

A LESSON IN MARTIAL ARTS 1973

The Voice from the Pavement - Peter Adamis

Dedicated to Terry Styles and an unknown Chinese Elder

In September 1973, Pete was preparing for his visit to Greece. He had planned this for some time. He had approximately six weeks leave up his sleeve and wanted to make the most of it. He had looked at the possibility of travelling throughout Asia, however he decided against it as he had heard that his mother and his sister were going to be in Greece around about the same time. He did not tell them that he would be travelling to Greece, as he wanted to surprise them. Pete had gathered all his clothes that he would need for the journey and was checking them on the bed. He had even purchased one of the latest cassette recorders and a new super 8-film camera.

As he was preparing the items for the next day's journey to Greece, Terry Styles his mate dropped in and watched Pete checking his gear. "Pete, do you want to go to Woodlands for a few beers. I believe that a couple of Yank ships are in port and we may be able to have a few beers with them. Pete looked at his gear and saw that he was ready for the trip. "Yeah sure Mate," said Pete give me a couple moments and I will be with you. Pete stashed his clothing, equipment and other valuables away and ensured that everything was in order.

He combed his hair, threw on some clean clothes, grabbed the last remaining Singaporean dollars that he had. Pete had changed the rest of his money in American dollars in preparation for the trip to Greece. He ran outside, turning off the lights and leaving the overhead fan on so that his mates would not have to come back into the room and find it hotter than usual. He caught up with "Styles", as that is what his mates called him.

Terry and I headed towards the urinals and had a piss as it was important that we had an empty bladder before drinking. The urinals (adjacent to the showers) located near the stairs on every floor, were enough for a company of 100 men. At the bottom of the three story barrack block the feeder roads led out to the main gate. We passed the Battalion guard house and went down towards the main guardhouse which was manned by the Singaporean Police. To get to the guard house and main road where the taxis were, Terry and I had to pass the numerous sports grounds and golf course that lay between them and the main road.

The night as usual was hot, balmy and sticky, but we had become acclimatised to such weather and were at home with the elements, in fact it was a welcome change when it rained as it cooled us down. Suffice to say we were lucky that it did not rain while we waited for a taxi returning with passengers from the main city area.

When we arrived at the main guard house, there were no taxis so we walked the odd 400 meters down towards the main gate. We walked alongside the sporting fields and Support Company lines, waving to the security guards as we walked past them. We did not have to wait very long, as taxis were numerous in the area between Nee Soon and Sembawang. We jumped into the first taxi that came along and asked the driver to go to Woodlands. Woodlands was close to the sea and had numerous bars that catered for the American ships.

This evening the American ships were in port and the sailors had been at sea in the Pacific for some time. Therefore they, the US Navy personnel would be wanting to enjoy themselves. Many would be found near the bars, others would make for the city brothels, Bugis street and all the other delights that Singapore had to offer. The taxi flew past the Happy bar where Kiwis and Australians normally frequented it. Past the local Kampongs and other brothels in the back streets, and passing the odd animal grazing on the side of the road.

The taxi came to screeching halt in front of the Sembawang bars or the "Strip" as it was called. Terry paid the driver and we headed towards the nearest bar. As we entered through the doors we first surveyed the scene and became accustomed to the vibes and behaviour of our new environment. It was always important to obtain a sense of surroundings and to pay heed to our inner self and instinct otherwise we would be fools to go in unawares. The bar in this case was full of Yanks and only a few Australians.

Terry and Pete bought a Tiger ale (which was full of chemicals in those days) and sat at the bar watching the Yanks play darts. After a while of watching we struck up a conversation with the Yanks and were soon playing darts against them. The idea of the game was that whoever lost paid for the next round of beers. Pete had an idea but the Yanks did know that Terry was an excellent darts player. After a number of games it was evident that Terry was an accomplished player and the Yanks were getting a little pissed off at losing all the time.

Pete told Terry that if he wanted them to get out of the bar alive he would have to slip a couple of times at the darts and allow the Yanks to win. With a wink and a nudge Terry understood and allowed the odd slip up now and then to give the Yanks a chance to catch up. After a few hours of playing Terry and Pete were thoroughly pissed, (Pete more than Terry) and decided enough was enough as Pete wanted to get back to the barracks and get a good night's sleep before he boarded the aircraft for Greece the next day.

We said our good byes' to the Yanks, exchanged addresses and promised that we would see them next time round. *(I must admit that we never did catch up, despite our amiable meeting with the Yanks but made up for it when the US Navy visited Brisbane some many years later when stationed in Brisbane Queensland. - But that's another story)*

Upon leaving we found that the taxis were still in abundance, all waiting patiently outside the strip as it was only about 1.00 AM and we grabbed the nearest taxi, asking the driver to head for Kangaw Barracks. We both had money in our socks as was the usual procedure in case we got mugged or were pickpocketed by local thieves. Pete and Terry slumped in the back seat, pissed. We were extremely tired and exhausted, not only from the drinking and darts but also from the day's activities.

Our company had undertaken tests to confirm and test our fitness that day. Runs, and more tests, followed by the Obstacle course, which Pete loved as it, gave him a chance to get onto the "Flying Fox". This was a rope stretching from one end of the obstacle to another part. It gave Pete the exhilarating feeling of being free, pumped full of adrenalin and the risk involved. The confidence Course really tested your agility in nearly everything. It was also timed to see how the individual went. There was always a competition to see who was the fastest.

Mick Hardless nearly always won followed by Tom Crummy; Pete was always near the middle of the pack never last. He hated being at the end of anything. The only thing unusual about today's confidence course was that the Company had a visit by some bloke from Battalion Headquarters called the Ops Officer, Major George Mansford. (That's another story) He thought he heard the CSM, Lance Larcombe say to the Platoon Sergeants that, "Worry George was looking the company over." Pete thought he knew the Operations Officer him in the 1st battalion, but he wasn't game to go and talk to him. Pete was only a digger, what did he now about officers.

The taxi drove past the Kampongs, the Brothels were still open and there were lights amongst the waving palms in the night. The occasional vehicle would speed by overtaking the taxi. As we were approaching the Happy Bar Pete and Terry saw some Kiwis apparently in trouble. Pete and Terry had the same thought. Aussies and Kiwis always stuck together, and the ANZAC spirit was very strong in both Pete and Terry. At the moment the two Kiwi males and the one woman were apparently in trouble. Approximately seven locals that had come out of the bar and approached the Kiwis in a threatening manner surrounded them.

Pete asked the taxi to come to a halt near the Kiwis to see if they need help. Pete gave the driver some money and both Terry and Pete jumped out to assist the Kiwis. "Don't worry coppers; we are here to help you said Pete". The Kiwis said "thanks mate" and promptly jumped in the taxi and sped off leaving Terry and Pete to handle the seven locals. Pete and Terry looked at each other and said **OHHH SHIIIIIT**.

Terry and I did not expect the Kiwis to leave them in the lurch even though they had a woman with them. Oh live and learn the hard way I guess and we both knew that were in for a hell of a punch up. Pete and Terry were in a state of shock for a moment. It was if everything that they had been told and conditioned to believe about the close relationship of the Kiwis and Aussies was about to be shattered.

The yarns and stories of old regarding the ANZAC bonds was quickly going down the gurgler as the rear lights of the taxi disappeared off into the distance. We were alone and only two of us to back each other. Terry knew something about martial arts and he had the build and stature to look after himself in a brawl. Although Pete reckoned that he knew a thing or two about karate. He was of the belief that by watching 'Bruce Lees Martial Arts' movies that he could emulate him.' After all he was a street fighter prior to joining the Army, so he couldn't see a problem.

Terry and Pete stood back to back in true Aussie style and put up a Martial Arts stance. On reflection, I am now laughing my head off at my stupidly and foolishness on my part that we could have taken all of the locals on. this was not the streets of Melbourne, Sydney or Townsville, but a foreign country where our rules just did not apply. Well Pete remembered to put up his arms as a guard against attack as he seen on the Bruce Lee movie. But despite his precautions and in his inebriated state and false bravado, he did not expect what was about to confront them.

The next moment, there was a huge outpour from the Bar; Uncles, Aunties, Cousins, Brothers, Sisters, Grandparents and others came out of the bar facing Pete and Terry. One could hazard a guess that there were about thirty of them against just two Aussies. **OHH MY GAWWD** said Terry and Pete what the fuck have we got into; cursing the Kiwis for fucking off and leaving them in the lurch.

There goes the ANZAC Legend we thought and braced ourselves for what was about to be a hiding of our lives by overwhelming odds. We both looked at each other and felt that we were not going to survive. "Well mate it was nice knowing you cobber" said Terry to Pete. "Likewise mate," said Pete. Both Terry and Pete both thought that this was the end of them.

Fear did not play a part during the brawl as we were both inebriated and full of bravado and in any case we were too busy trying to fend off the blows from the sticks and rattans and other bamboo implements held by the locals. Blow after blow rained on Terry and Pete. The brawl spilled out into the parking area and near the main road with a lot of yelling, screaming, kicking, punching, hitting, and stabbing by the rattans and bamboo poles.

At one point during the brawl, Pete approached one local and gave him a karate chop on his neck. Pete was so pissed that there was no force behind it all. Pete tried again a number of times at the karate chop and then the bloke fell down, probably from laughing too much at Pete's feeble attempt at Karate. Well that was the worst thing that Pete could have done.

This attracted more people to retaliate against him. Pete by now had about twelve people belting the shit out of him and out of the corner of his eye he could see Terry on his own with about 18 to 20 against him. Pete said a little prayer while the blows rained on him from the huge bamboo poles that the locals were using against him and Terry.

This time there were neither local police to look after them nor even the hated Brit Military Police that frequently patrolled the area. Just when we were about to be beaten into submission, an old man came out of the bar and made a motion to the attackers to cease the beatings. The old man (elder) could see that Pete and Terry were in no position to be a threat and that they were about to be beaten to a pulp. The old man took Terry and Pete by the arms as the attackers melted into the night. Furniture that had been outside the bar was now strewn about the road and the lanterns had been knocked down.

A few of the younger locals with the bamboo staves in their hands were standing close by as if watching for signs of a renewal of violence. There was no need, Pete and Terry had been given a thorough beating and both had been hurt internally. Terry was bleeding from a blow to the head by an iron poker and Pete's left side was bruised and fast becoming swollen. Pete could not move his left side at all and his left arm was limp. The old man hailed a passing taxi and said something to the driver, what he said was not known.

Probably something like get these two stupid Australian bastards out of here before they get killed. Pete didn't care what he had said as long as he was a long way away from the bloody place. Pete, slumped in the back with Terry mumbled to the driver to take them to the Woodlands hospital. The taxi driver saw that Terry and Pete were in need of Medical assistance but made no comment. Pete was in no mood for conversation and was thinking that how was he going to bullshit to the hospital staff again. He had already been in scraps before with the locals and had gone to Woodlands for treatment. The last thing he needed was to be kept in for observation.

Pete decided that he would bullshit about the severity of the pain and just get painkillers for his left side. He didn't want anything to spoil his trip to Greece. The taxi driver pulled up near the casualty entrance where Terry and Pete made their way in. A few nights' staff was on and there was senior nurse at the desk. Oh Shiit said Pete, as he knew her from when he was in hospital before. The feelings were mutual, she didn't like him and he didn't like her. The nurse looked up as she had two pips on her shoulders and said *"Private Adams not you again"*.

Terry looked at Pete and said, "Do you know her Pete?" " Yeah" said Pete, "but I am not her favourite person". "Well what's the matter with you now, have you been in another fight". "No Maam" said Pete, "We were just minding our own business at a bar when we were set upon by the locals for no reason at all". She wouldn't understand anyway thought Pete, what do you expect, she's a bloody Pommy nurse.

The two piper looked long and hard at Pete and said "rubbish Private Adams, I have a medical file with your name on it. If there is no way week that doesn't go by without you visiting us." "Gosh maam, you must have the wrong bloke, my name is **Adamis** with an "i" in it" said Pete grimacing from the pain and knowing full well that it was him she was talking about.

Relishing in the thought that Pete was in pain she said "Well, what's the matter with you" looking at Terry. Terry said, "Well Maam, I have some blood trickling down my face and my head hurts." Terry didn't look the best and appeared a little groggy, so the nurse placed him in a cubicle and called a medical orderly to dress his wound. Pete was kept waiting for treatment until Terry was taken care of. When Pete's turn came he could not move his left arm at all.

"I think it's only bruised Corporal" Pete said to the medical orderly, as his left arm remained limp on his side. "Yeah OK" said the Orderly, "but it may be broken or fractured at the most and you may have to stay in for observation." "Crap Corporal, If I stay in overnight, I will miss my flight to Europe and then I will be in deep shit as it is." "Can't you do me a favour, put it in a sling and give me some painkillers." Look Corp" went on Pete, "The head nurse and I just don't see eye to eye."

The medical orderly took a long look at Pete and said, "Ok mate, I will do it, and I don't like the bloody Pommy bitch either." "Now listen carefully I am going to place your arm in a sling and you are not to remove it for at least a week until the bruising goes down." "I will also give you some painkillers to last you for three weeks. After that you are on your own", said the medical orderly. "Thanks Corp" said Pete feeling relieved.

The time now was about 5.00 AM. Terry and Pete fronted the Head nurse again and said that their treatment was finished. "Private Adamis" she said, "I just want you to know that I do not accept your story and that I will be writing a report to your Commanding Officer over this." "I believe that there is more to the story that you have told me." "Yes Maam" said Pete and left the building with Terry. We walked along the gravel road past the administrative buildings and onto the main road to catch a taxi. It was some time before we were able to get a taxi, but one came along eventually and we made our way back to Kangaw barracks.

Pete and Terry asked the Guard Commander to allow the taxi driver to take them to the rear of the barrack lines. The Guard Commander took one look at Terry and Pete, and grinned, "Yeah sure mate, get going." The taxi drove up to the rear of the lines opposite the Other Ranks Mess and deposited the two hapless figures. Terry and Pete painfully made their way up to their lines just as the first cracks of dawn were appearing in the distance. Pete dragged himself up the flight of stairs to A Coy on the first floor followed by Terry

As we were dying for piss, we undid our zippers on our trousers and urinated all over our shoes while trying to make it to the urinals. We didn't make it and at that moment I don't think that cared. We just looked at each other and grinned and in doing so any attempt on our part to laugh only brought more pain because of our injuries. "Have a good holiday in Greece mate" said Terry. "You too" said Pete. "Just watch my back in case that two pippet of a Pommy nurse sends a report back to the CO".

"Just tell old Larcombe (CSM - Company Sergeant Major - deceased) that we tried to do the right thing and we got the worst end of the stick." "She'll be right said Terry, the CSM will understand." Just go and enjoy yourself." Pete went back to his room, got a change of clothes, threw the old ones in the cupboard so that by the time he came back in six weeks they would have been mouldy because of the lack of air and the humidity. Pete didn't give a shit; he just wanted to get on the aircraft and be miles away. Pete had a shower, removing the sling and seeing the multiple bruises on his left side. His body was red raw from the beating.

He washed himself, grimacing at the pain and wondered what he was going to tell his Mum in Greece. I'll tell mum that I fell down a cliff side thought Pete. That's sounds like a good story. Ever since Pete was a young nipper, his mother constantly worried about him. Pete was the black sheep of the family, because he was stubborn and was always in trouble at school or in the streets. It was a tough life.

This however brought him to the attention of his father who was a strict disciplinarian. The discipline meted out by his father was harsh and often very severe. Pete felt somewhat better after the shower and change of clothes. In the distance he heard the Cock crow at the first rays of light and welcomed the sound of another day. His mates were stirring from their sleep and making their way to the urinals and shower block. "Have a good trip Pete," they said as he passed them. He was not wearing his sling in case one of the platoon staff noticed him. "Thanks" said Pete.

Pete then returned to his room gathered his belongings, and made his way down to the guardhouse to get a taxi and make his way to Changi Airport. Pete arrived in Greece with his arm still in a sling and despite his pain took off the sling when he caught up with his mum and sister who were in Greece on a holiday. He did not want them to know about his injuries. I was met at Athens airport by my Auntie Helen Tsihli who was a police officer and she assisted me in finding accommodation and a taxi.

I remained in Athens overnight near tourist hotel and paid the taxi driver in two packets of cigarettes as I had no Greek money to pay him. the next day, I was picked up by my young cousin Helen Vlahogianni who assisted in preparing for my trip to the village of my birth. After a seven hour trip via a mountain route that was fraught with rock slides, slim roads, animals on the roads and dilapidated buses I arrived in the village Pellana (Helen of Troy's alleged palace) and met my Mum and sister Helen.

I must admit that looking back on that Journey, the trip from Athens to Pellana was an experience in itself and today that same trip can be achieved in two and half hours due to the modernisation of infrastructures under the Junta government and subsequent Euro support. The pains in my body would not subside for some time and although I kept it hidden from my Mum and sister, it was evident that I was not 100% fine.

During my four week stay in the village, I ran every day from the village of Pellana to Pardali and back, probably a distance of some six kilometres which was hardly a challenge. During my time in the village, I fell in love with it and made some very long lasting friendships which I have retained to this day.

Post script: I finally caught up with Terry Styles on the September 2012 during the 6 Royal Australian Regiment Association Reunion in Perth. His mind was still sharp and he had spring in his voice as if he was only a youngster. My experience with Terry did not dim or reduce my respect for the ANZAC spirit, but made me aware that not all the things that were we had been taught were true and as a result began to question the paradigms and myths of the ANZACS over the years.

Suffice to say, I came to the conclusion that the ANZAC spirit was the same as the Spartan spirit and that the two military this had much in common. This romanticised version assisted me greatly in reconciling the two cultures that I had within me. On reflection, I must thank the old Chinese gentleman (in absentia) that took it upon himself to extricate Terry and I from a situation that could have had dreadful and deadly consequences.

In 2011 on a return trip from Canada and Europe, my wife and I visited the ANZUK (Australian New Zealand & United Kingdom) military compounds but found it very difficult to recognise old landmarks. Much of our barracks were closed to the public by high walls, security cameras and guarded by the Singaporean armed forces. It appeared that our 6 RAR Battalion barracks (Kangaw) and that of the adjacent "Nee soon" (British barracks - Scottish Highland Infantry) and Kiwi Battalion barracks had also been transformed into a major Singaporean military camp.



The Voice from the Pavement - Peter Adamis is a (not for profit) Journalist/Commentator. He is a retired Australian military serviceman and an Industry organisational & Occupational (OHS) & Training Consultant whose interests are within the parameters of domestic and international political spectrum. He is an avid blogger and contributes to domestic and international community news media outlets as well as to local and Ethnic News. He holds a Bachelor of Adult Learning & Development (Monash), Grad Dip Occupational Health & Safety, (Monash), Dip. Training & Assessment, Dip Public Administration, and Dip Frontline Management. Contact via Email: abalinx@netspace.net.au or via Mobile: 0409965538

Comment by Polly: Terry Styles Sister in law:

“It was a hell of a night”, lol. As Terry is not reading this, I can tell you that he doesn’t get around too well these days, had a stroke several years ago. He lives alone and has retired from being a delivery driver. (written by his sister-in-law, Polly)