

## **VICTORIA BARRACKS GUARD**

12pl were advised that they had been selected for the Victoria Barracks Guard at Paddington in Sydney. Immediately after the advice was given, much to our delight, drill with arms was intensified.

The Guard got off to a bad start when Sgt. Rowley had to withdraw and Sgt. Jock Kane from 11pl was seconded as Sergeant-of-the-Guard. Old Jock was generally disliked by 12pl for no reason other than he was supposedly an ex military policeman. Although prone to flying off the handle, he had done nothing to affect 12pl's well being. However, bad luck for Jock!

We were met at Victoria Barracks by a WO1 and a Sergeant who gave us the low down. The WO1 was an old bloke who was obviously seeing out his Army days on a cushy number. He seemed to be a bit of a dandy. The Sergeant was a big chap with an eye patch. He also had a deep booming voice that gave him great parade ground presence. Unfortunately for him, on the first night of the Guard, he had evidently got a skinful at the local RSL and had wandered onto the main road outside and had been cleaned up by a car. We didn't see him after that first day.

The format of the Guard was basically:

- A change of the Old Guard to the New Guard (with 12pl being the New Guard)
- Guard duties
- The Cenotaph Guard on the Thursday
- More guard duties
- The changing of the Old Guard to the New Guard (with 12pl by then being the Old Guard).

It was very much a touristy thing.

The first Guard change got off to a flying start. From memory I think it involved an exchange of both the Old and New Guard right markers. Big Mick Strong was our right marker and for some reason he made a wrong turn which had him marching passed the front rank of the Old Guard. He realised that he had made an error when he got past the Old Guard and there was no-one there to greet him. Quick as a flash he did an about-turn and marched back passed the Old Guard front rank. Only this time he was glancing at the Old Guard front rank and smiling. To the unwary it looked as though he was inspecting the Old Guard front rank. It was smoothly done but, needless to say, Mick didn't finish up in Jock's good books.

After the changing of the Guard had finished the Platoon split into sections to cover the shifts and the slog of guard duty commenced, as did the baiting of Sgt. Kane.

Jock had three misfortunes to deal with. One was the way he over reacted in certain situations; another was the fact that he, although a character in his own right, was dealing with a Platoon with more than its fair share of characters; and the third was that the Platoon members had very quickly become aware of how and when Jock would react.

I guess that over the entire week that the Guard covered it is fair to say that Jock said "Ar've fookin' well 'ad you Prarvit So-and-So" to all members of the Platoon.

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However my main memories are that of Danny Gray who, for all of his dapper, innocent looks, had turned baiting and brinkmanship into an art.

Attached to the Guardhouse was a tiny prison cell that Jock had affectionately termed "the slot". It seems as though every second threat that he made was "Ar've fookin' well 'ad you Prarvit Grair." By half way through the Guard week this had extended to "Ar've fookin' well 'ad you Prarvit Grair, woon more word oot of you and arl chook you in that fookin' slot." By the end of the week this had extended to "Ar've fookin' well 'ad you Prarvit Grair, woon more word oot of you and arl chook you in that fookin' slot and chook awair the fookin' key." However, to be fair, Jock in an exasperated effort to show that he was a fair and reasonable leader of men would moderate his approach to Danny by saying "Nar Prarvit Grair ..... Prarvit Grair ..... (shaking his head and tut, tut, tutting) ..... 'ar've fookin' well 'ad you."

Danny was on gate duty very early one morning when a senior officer's vehicle approached the gate. The driver had evidently given the warning of an approaching officer but Danny had not heard it and so the Guard was not called out. The driver stopped the vehicle and a half cut Brigadier poked his head out of the car window and asked where the Guard Commander was. Danny, in all innocence, advised the officer that Sergeant Kane was asleep in the guardhouse. (after all it was very early in the morning). The Brigadier's response to this was that the Guard Commander should not be asleep whilst on duty and that he, the Guard Commander, should present himself immediately to the officer. Jock was called out and copped a fair old shellacking from the officer. This immediately affected the Jock - Danny relationship to a point where Jock would have charged Danny with everything from aardvark molestation to zit picking had it not been for Mr Pothof's intervention.

A pastime we had was to watch for when Jock was approaching the Guardhouse. On the signal that Jock was approaching some of the Guard, usually led by Griffio, would fall into a line inside the Guardhouse and start practicing their marching. "By the right, quick march" stuff, whereupon they would break into a perfect and synchronised square gait march. Jock, upon entering the Guardhouse, would see what was happening and produce the inevitable explosion. "What the fook is goin' on 'ere?! You again Prarvit Grair."

Again when Jock was approaching the Guardhouse and upon the given signal two blokes would jump into a bed together and pull the blanket up to their shoulders. (Usually this was Griffio and Danny). Looking around the Guardhouse while barking out his next set of orders Jock would sight the two blokes in bed together. Here, as the colour drained from his face and his eyes bulged in disbelief, Jock, in almost a whisper, coined that immortal phrase, "one man, one ..... fookin' ..... bed".

There were other instances that caused mirth among the Diggers.

The Officer-of-the-Guard (Mr Pothof) decided to wrap the Australian flag around a pile of confetti. One of Jock's morning duties was to raise the bundled flag with one flag rope, and when the flag had reached the top of the staff, open the flag with the other flag rope. Of course, on this particular morning, the confetti went everywhere when it was released. Jock was in a savage mood when he returned to the Guardhouse. He wanted a head on a plate. He settled down only when Mr Pothof ordered him to do so. Indeed Mr Pothof's involvement with the baiting was, to the Platoon members, a green light for Jock to be an open target.

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Another involved my old friend Keith Molyneaux. There were a number of telephone boxes scattered around the barracks ground that a roaming guard could use to contact the Guardhouse. Keith, who was on roaming guard duty at the time, decided to give his friendly Sergeant a call. "Sergeant," he said, "it's the Corporal cook in the OR's Mess here. There's a dog outside of the Mess door and it's bearing its teeth. Can you send a guard around to remove it?". "What are you lad?" Jock roared, "Man or fookin' moose?" With that Jock hung up the telephone and ordered the off duty guard still in the Guardhouse to fix bayonets and hop into the back of the Landrover. Off they went to the Mess. Keith in the meantime was quietly crying with laughter somewhere outside.

In another instance Keith pretended to be a senior officer and phoned the Guardhouse to advise the Sergeant-of-the-Guard that there was a disturbance outside of the Officer's Mess, and requested that the Guard be brought around to take control of things. This was done, there was no disturbance, and Jock had to explain his activities to some officer.

The Cenotaph Guard was also on the agenda. This involved a near noon assembly of the Guard near the junction of Elizabeth Street and Martin Place in Sydney. From here, and accompanied by the Eastern Command Band, the Guard proceeded to march down Martin Place to the Cenotaph in Martin Place near George Street. At the Cenotaph the Guard divided into two with each half lining the sides of the Cenotaph. We then inward turned to face the Cenotaph and then proceeded with the "Rest on your arms reverse" drill. Whoever invented that hideous piece of theatre needs to be wrapped in barbed wire and rolled down Martin Place to watch the parade. We had to perform this act in front most of the population of Sydney and it was a very daunting task.

However we got through that charade and then proceeded with the second part of the Guard. This involved marching with the Band from the Cenotaph back up Martin Place to the War Memorial in Hyde Park. At the War Memorial two buglers detached themselves from the Band and climbed stairs to a balcony high up in the Memorial where they played the Last Post. Truly very effective.

The idea then was for the buglers to return to the Band and upon doing so the Band Leader would give the signal "Band ready". Upon this signal both the Band and the Guard would fall under the drill commands of the Guard Commander (Jock). However, probably due to the multitude of commands that he must remember for the entire Cenotaph Guard, Jock forgot to wait for the buglers to return to the Band. Those of us closest to him could see that Jock was getting fidgety and were like ventriloquists saying "not yet Sarge" in as loud but soft a voice as possible. Unfortunately our good advice fell on deaf ears. Jock started to bawl out the commands "Band by the centre, Guard by the right, by the centre and by the right ....." In the nick of time a voice from the large crowd bellowed "No! Not yet!" It was the dandy WO1 from the barracks.

I suppose this was the final humiliation for Jock in a week that would have been, for him, a nightmare.

The preceding comments may appear to be denigrating of Jock however it certainly wasn't intended to be. It should be said that Jock's performance over the entire week was exceptionally good. Of all the roles of individuals in the Guard, those of the Sergeant-of-the-Guard were, by far, the most onerous. Jock did them well.

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For our own part the humour which had always existed in the Platoon and which was sufficient for us to turn most of our work into a bit of a comedy was hugely supplemented by the arrival of Jock.

After the Victoria Barracks Guard Keith Molyneaux wrote a rather clever poem on the week. I can't remember the full poem but I know that it started:

"The trip to Paddo was quite a thrill,  
Day and night we maintained our drill,  
Lurch was pleased with the job we'd done,  
Just like Korea in '51."

I also remember that the poem contained the classic phrase - "Ar've fookin' well 'ad you".

And for all the furore of the week nobody was charged, nobody was "chooked in that fookin' slot", and they all lived happily ever after.

I hope that my memories can give Jock, now in that great Sergeant's Mess in the sky, cause to smile.