



The Ram and Ewe

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Military Recollections.

Upon completing school, you were automatically drafted to the army for nine months provided you were deemed fit for service. The fitness test comprised of gathering a large number of young men in a gymnasium where they were stripped to their under shorts and made to wait in a queue until it was their turn to be examined by the doctor.

The examination itself was arbitrary, puerile and consisted mainly of colour blind test, touching your toes and the infamous fondling of the crown jewels while coughing to the command of the medical examiner. I could never figure what they were looking for and how it would affect my performance in defeating the enemy. Even more mind boggling was trying to imagine the female counterpart of this test. Let's not go there.

About 4 weeks after the test I was informed by registered mail that I had been drafted to the Natal Field Artillery and furnished with the necessary documents and train ticket.

Thus it was that in my tender youth, barely three weeks out of school, I found myself with about 250 equally bewildered lads on a train station platform. There was a huge crowd of people comprising of the draftees, girlfriends, parents, siblings, relatives and friends. The tears, long faces, hugs, kisses, back-patting and the banal conversations that would have done justice to Hollywood movie depicting soldiers leaving for a hostile front where the mortality was atrociously high.

Oh yes, I was part of the soap-opera. I too had a girl friend and had bought her a little gold charm in the hope that she would treasure it and wear it close to her heart and remain faithful. My Father stood stoically, trying to be the proud stern patriarch and offering sober advice about manly conduct, family values and tradition. My mother was a nervous bag of hysterical chatter and kept trying to get between me and my girlfriend, who was theatrically shedding large crocodile tears and had me convinced that she would soon be shredding her clothing in a display of tortured anguish.

The conductor's whistle heralded the end. There was a last minute clamber onto the train, young lads

leaning out of the windows, holding, hugging, kissing and for the lucky ones, a last intimate little fondle. The moment the train had cleared the station the transformation among the draftees was almost instantaneous. None of us wanted to be associated with our recent performance at the station. We had transmuted into jocks, each trying to out do the other in the display of manly bravado.

We arrived at the little town of Potchefstroom whose main industry was to cater to the large military camp. The first six weeks was devoted to the complete annihilation of your self esteem thereby transforming you into an automated human being so that you reacted to a command without thinking. The usual day started at 5:30 am with a one hour run, followed by breakfast, clean the barracks, drilling and marching, then lunch and more of the same until supper time. After supper it was punishment drill for those who earned a detention for some minor or imaginary infraction.

The military concept was to reshape the way we thought, acted and responded. The slightest spark of defiance or individual expression was enough to send the Bombardiers (instructors usually of the rank of corporal or sergeant) into a frenzy resulting in individual punishment or worse yet, punishing the whole platoon for the alleged infraction of one person. The system worked. Each barrack housed one platoon and the solidarity amongst the men was unquestionably tempered by the pervasive desire to stay unnoticed and out of trouble.

Every Saturday morning the Commanding Officer's inspection of the barracks was the featured event. The panic began after supper on Friday evening. Everything had to be spotless, dead straight, ironed, polished and in it's exact preordained place. The slightest violation resulted in the most draconian punishment for the whole platoon. The barrack split itself up into groups. Whilst some cleaned windows, others wiped down walls, or polished floors. Beds were made so that the sheets were all in an exact line and the edges ironed so that they looked sharp and crisp. There were two irons to a barrack and the most proficient ironers would be tending to shirts, pants, sheets etc.. Sleep was not an option although around three most of the platoon could be found taking a nap on the floor. (Beds

were made and without question out of bounds.)

No one had breakfast Saturday morning. The frenzy reached a feverish pitch. The floors were polished and wiped with wet cloths to make sure that there was absolutely no dust. We even had to dress a "very sensitive" six foot six lad that had suffered terribly from tormented nerves and was reduced to a whimpering mass of uselessness. Now the actual inspection was a true Hollywood spectacular that would make the movie Full Metal Jacket pale in comparison. The sergeant would walk in, call the troops to attention and the CO would walk in with swagger-stick. Each individual would be scrutinized from head to toe. Just when you thought you had passed the test the CO would double back and theatrically rescrutinize thus rendering your bowels to a liquid mass. Finally, the coup de grace. Just before the final judgment he would take the cap off the last man and toss it like a Frisbee under one row of beds to see if it had picked up lint or dust. You have to wonder about the power and the glory if it comes down to a piece of lint stuck to a cap.

Those first three months were very intense and for the first time I blessed my parents for having sent me to boarding school where the basic skills of survival under tyranny were learned at an earlier age. Witnessing the transformation from privileged and comfortable upbringing of most of the draftees, to the Spartan and rough existence of a Boot Camp, was witnessing an awesome leap in social and cultural zones.

Three months intensive training was over. I was trained as an Observation Post Radio Operator and quite happy with this until I learned that your life expectancy in wartime conditions was less three minutes. Crocodile Tears sent me a "Dear John Letter." We were sent off to Bethlehem in the Orange Free state which is the equivalent of remote Saskatchewan.

Not long after arriving in Bethlehem a small contingent of men, including myself, were sent to do guard duty at an open air storage facility in Pretoria. This storage dump was on the side of a steep hill overlooking the Pretoria Central Prison which processed all the executions in South Africa. If that was not macabre enough, the hill was the scene of the worst war time accident in South African history. On the hill was a munitions assembly plant with earth bunkers built around little block houses. Apparently there had been an accident and some three hundred odd munitions employees never knew what hit them. The road from the bottom to the top switchedback several times and there were numerous crosses and memorials in

RESTAURANT NEWS

During the week

Will be open Tuesdays to Saturdays for lunch and afternoon tea.

On Sunday

We will serve our buffet or plate service if there are fewer than 15 reservations.

Fine dining

will commence in April. Check our web site for times and for any new information that will be posted.

PLEASE REMEMBER

That we book up very quickly for
Easter

Mothers Day & Fathers Day

Also

Remember that reservations are essential for all events and recommended during the week.

LADIES NIGHT

Buffet Dinner & Guest Speaker

11th May

With Melanie Harrell

Cocktails 6pm. Buffet Dinner served 7pm
\$25 per person Reservations Essential

Let us do your
PRIVATE FUNCTION
OR
WEDDING

Seafood Evening

April 8th

A gourmet 7 course meal including fresh Oysters, Lobsters and other succulent sea food delights.

\$65 per head

Does not include GST or gratuity

memory of some of the loved ones that had met their Maker on that fatal day. The local military personnel took delight in regaling us with horrific stories, embellishing on the gore of this tragedy and warned us about the ghosts that roamed the hill.

Guard duty was four hours on and eight hours off for twenty four hours a day and seven days a week. There were approximately eight or ten specific locations that were manned with guards in this complex. The most notorious was right at the top of the hill and known as Sadies Dump. It consisted of a huge storage shed with an opening facing the city or the down slope of the hill. The little tarmac road came all the way to this opening and there was a generous enough space in front for a truck to reverse in or do a U-turn. Sadie's was the last drop-off point in the guard duty circuit and a long way from the guard barracks. There was a memorial to Sadie at the last switchback to the dump. Apparently some of her remains had been found there and her troubled spirit was known to roam. Rationally that was absurd. Even more ludicrous was the embellishment to this tale that she was looking for a body to inhabit. On the surface we all laughed and made light of these gory tales but when you are doing the graveyard shift from midnight to four in the morning it's not quite so funny.

There was a particular t that even today as I write this, makes the hairs on my back rise and little shudders run through my body. I had drawn the graveyard shift with a fellow we called Rat. He was slightly built with a long thin nose on an equally long, thin and freckled face with a small mouth and little round dark eyes. Rat was not a great conversationalist, he preferred to read his comics.

It was about an hour and a half into the shift, a proverbial dark night and not a breath of wind in the air. The city below us was asleep and quiet. There were four lights on for the entire complex, two were at the entrance where we were located another two towards the back of the shed. Inside were large crates neatly stacked in long rows. Rat was sitting inside the building on a seat he had fashioned out of pallets reading his comics. I was inside the building, about thirty feet away from Rat, with my back to the entrance smoking a cigarette.

We both heard it at the same time. Rapid footsteps on tarmac gravel coming towards us. There was enough light spilling out of the building to illuminate the area in front and a portion of the road. In a fraction of a second we were both out of

African Feast

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and
Domba

An extravagant selection of wonderful
African Food, followed by Music,
Stories and Dancing.

Saturday April. 22nd 2006

Cocktails at 6 pm Dinner at 7:15 pm

Reservations Essential & Ticket Purchase

Tickets are \$67 per person

Service and GST for meal
included in above price



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Velvet Antler may help to:
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-Boost energy levels
-Strengthen bones, ligaments and joints
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Glucosamine sulfate and
Chondroitin
Alkaline Phosphatase
Pantocrine
Hyaluronic Acid
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Pantothenic Acid
Poly Saccharides
Growth Factors IGF-1and
IGF-2
All eight essential amino acids

**285mg capsules,
60 per Bottle**

This stuff has really helped my arthritis

the building with rifles at the ready prepared to challenge who ever it was. There was no one. We looked at each other for confirmation that we had heard something, shrugged and went back to reading and smoking. Then the lights flickered once and went out at about the same time as there was a loud crash followed by another rush of footsteps then total silence and the pitch black night.

To say that I was terrified would be a gross understatement. Every cliché pertaining to terror was applicable to the situation I found myself in at that moment in time. I am sure that the lights were only out for a few seconds but it felt like ages. Then there was a flicker and the lights were back on and Rat was gone. Terror now had a companion: panic. What had happened to the fellow? My mouth was dry, my heart was still in my throat and any sudden movement would surely result in loss of bowel control. In my best controlled stage whisper I called his name. No answer. I called a little louder. Still no answer. It is amazing how many thoughts both rational and irrational are able to cram your brain in the space of a few micro seconds and Sadie's Curse was definitely the most predominant. I ventured another louder "Rat!" This time a faint voice answered, "Yes." He was atop one of the crates at least eight feet up. How he got there I do not know and neither did he. His rifle was still on the pallet where he had been sitting. The backrest, which was a larger pallet, had fallen off the stack and was on the ground. That was probably the crash I heard as he had leaped off his perch the moment the lights went out, upsetting the pallet and bolting towards the closest stack. I surmised that the sound of that crash had literally galvanized him into a superhuman leap. The most amazing part of this Olympian feat was that it was apparently done effortlessly and in complete darkness.

Whatever had occurred that night could in part be logically explained, with the exception of the first set of footsteps and Rat's superhuman leap. I served several more stints at Sadie Dump, but fortunately none were the graveyard shift. Rat, on the other hand, at the risk of being sent to detention barracks, absolutely refused to do either a day or night shift there.

It was a relief to have completed that duty and be returned to Bethlehem.

Farewell

to dear sentient beings

Tess, the Boarder Collie, passed away from old age this last Fall. Some of you might have recollected her adventures written in an earlier news letter. She was a unique dog in that she was alternate and refused the attention of males when she was in heat preferring to copulate missionary style with other bitches, much to their distress.

She helped Philip with the sheep and patrolled the grounds. In her later life she was spayed putting an end to her amorous escapades with the local bitches and much to their relief.

Tess was loving and loved and we miss her dearly.

Not so well known but a long time resident on the farm was an old black cow called Belva. She was about 25 years old and a common sight as she limped around the field in her old age. She was in full retirement for the last eight years of her life. Happy green pastures Belva.

WOW

Spring has Sprung

And the boutique has new fresh lines to help shop till you drop.

The store is filled with our new Spring Lines. We have looked for the unique and items that will make Spring and Summer fun. Keep a look out for the new cosmetic line and especially the Face Cream.

SHEEP MANURE

Dress your Spring garden with Sheep Manure ready for the spring and have a few bags in the potting shed for a great mix with potting soil. Phone first to make sure that bags are available or that there is a tractor operator if you are buying by the truck load.

Price is \$5 per bag or 6 bags for \$25.

