

B.W. FOSTER

Eastgate gets a welcome to Pint Hutt.

This is a story about an instructor and a class, and his relationship with them. In particular it is about the author's relationship with him, but inevitably, a lot of other people get in the way.

The joining Class of 1968 were greeted at Point Hut by a stocky, ruddy, red haired apparition with a stick under his arm who yelled at them as they poured off the buses, "Welcome to Point Hut." Seldom, it was to seem, had the words been used before with such insincerity. Welcome indeed!

We quickly discovered that the gentleman's name was Warrant Officer Class 2 Brian W Foster. Although everyone else called him "Bluey" for the usual reasons, we could call him Sir. Not Sah. Sir. It seemed that Sir yelled a lot, and he was good at yelling. To those unfamiliar at that stage with the military hierarchy, it soon became obvious that Sir was the senior sidekick to a bloke whose improbable name was Fred Pfitzner, a tall laconic fellow who, although he was a graduate, had not done Fourth Class. It showed. Although it seemed to us at the time a perfectly acceptable option, it apparently was not one he was willing to extend to us. Pfred, although we didn't call him that at that stage, was a Captain soon to be Major, and was the commander of the ad hoc organisation which ran Point Hut in 1968. He was also a Sir, and even though he was obviously more important than Sir Bluey, we didn't see as much of Sir Pfred as we saw of Sir Bluey. Maybe it was because Pfred was more important that we didn't see as much of him. Maybe it was just because it was Pfred.

Bluey was Pfred's Company Sergeant Major. Pfred, whose Teutonic ancestry was obviously a major influence in his life, ran Point Hut along the lines of a German concentration camp. Bluey played Heinrich to Pfred's Adolf. Morning parade and evening meals were a particular trial.

Who could forget the sight of the cadet who would probably wish to remain nameless (2589 AA Dupont) being subjected to the indignity of a public dry shave as he discovered that the Army required that his tender visage, unaccustomed as it was to the regular touch of a razor, would henceforth be required to be shaved every day, whether it needed it or not. No wonder he grew a beard as soon as he left the Army. Or the printable and unprintable Fosterisms that we were constantly subjected to. Foster not only misused the English language, he also abused it. Murdered would be a better word. He had a quaint turn of phrase. Who could forget anyone answering Sah! when his name being called being told, "Don't Sah me boy, you sound like a Swanee River coon!" or "If you keep moving that arm I'll break it off and beat you with the sticky end!" or "I can see the Murrumbidgee through your ears" Essetera essetera. Allrighty!

It was a Point Hut requirement that cadets slow marched to and from the mess tent and their tent lines. Years later I saw a film in which British soldiers returning from a patrol somewhere in the jungle during World War 2 had to make a mad dash across a large open clearing to reach the safety of their base. Japanese snipers played a game with them, waiting until they had almost reached the far side before shooting them. I knew how they must have felt. Pfred and Brian Foster and all the other instructors used to have their mess and creature comforts on a rise which surveyed the

road between the cadet lines and the cadet mess. When the meal was over and we had plucked up sufficient courage to attempt the slow march back to our lines, Foster would wait until we were just about back at the grass verge where normal motion could be resumed, before ordering us back to the mess for some gross infraction of the rules of slow marching.

This verbal sniping at the cadets was a great sport amongst the instructors, and sometimes it would be delegated to one of the ferocious corporal instructors, who were the torturer's apprentices. Most of these delinquents were just back from service with 5 RAR in South Vietnam, and I now realise that they were suffering prematurely from the effects of Agent Orange. I still regularly meet with one of them, Ron Porrier, who went on to be commissioned himself, and whose father was the Chief Clerk at Duntroon at the time. Delegating this enjoyable chore allowed Bluey to sit and have a beer with Pfred and enjoy the sport.

The full story of Point Hut 1968 will be revealed at some future time in an appropriate forum such as a war crimes trial, but suffice it to say that when we left Point Hut, we thought that we really didn't like Pfred and Bluey and all the others very much, and that it would probably be a blessed relief to finally get to the college and meet all the other cadets. Ah, the innocence of youth! Those were the days when Fourth Class got no leave for the first sixteen weeks, or before they passed the screed test, whichever came last. How we yearned for Bluey Foster's tender ministrations, and those languid days of our summer idyll by the Murrumbidgee. (For those who wish to learn more of our Fourth Class adventures in those early weeks, I can but refer you to Mr Justice Fox's splendid report of 1969.)

When we returned to the College, Brian Foster resumed his normal position as a weapons instructor at the Infantry Training Wing. The old wing has gone, swallowed up by ADFA, but in those days it was a remote and quite independent empire. It was housed in an old quonset hut, and its immediate environs were as large in size as the battlefield of Waterloo. When it wasn't actually performing its normal role of teaching cadets how to shoot things, and throw things and see things in the dark, it acted as a refuge for deformed and retarded dogs. This collection of animals, which were the individual pets of the Infantry Wing staff, suffered from a variety of sexual disorders which were the subject of much learned debate, and follow up counselling, by their owners. (For the scientifically and statistically curious, these disorders consisted of nymphomania, two; satyriasm, one; single testicular deficiency with a concurrent fear of darkness, one; bush hat fetish, one; involuntary copulation, one; copulatory incompatibility, one pair.)

The exception was BW Foster. The Fosters had a cat. I know this because some years later there was a cardboard box on our doorstep with a note on it saying "Sir, your cat, Brian" and in it a small black and white kitten. The Foster's cat was apparently no better than the other Infantry Wing animals in the matter of morals, and in settling into a new posting in Sydney had produced yet another litter of kittens which would require a good home. It was the Eastgates' turn. Nigel Montgomery Foster Eastgate, whose father was a Rockdale rubbish tin raider, was part of our family for ten years. Unlike his mother, he would fight his way into a new neighbourhood, until he ran out of luck at Queenscliffe, and I had to take him to the vet before a very important golf game to be put down. I would like to thank my many dear friends and classmates who helped me with compassion and

understanding to handle this very distressing situation. Especially MSB (Mike) Hetherington (68) and DC (Bonnie) Clyde (68). Especially them.

The Infantry instructors, apart from their bestial interests, had a wealth of experience and considerable war service. They were great soldiers and great characters. "Munching" Mick Servos of the voracious appetite and veteran of Kapyong. Ned Larssen whose massive hands seemed capable of carrying a battalion's worth of M60 machine guns. J-J-Jim Edwards, who could sleep (and snore) standing up, but who slept prone with a machete under his head and had to be woken from a distance and with a long stick. Snow Purdon, whose curries were so ferocious that they would make a Ghurka blanch. Merv Kirby, whose ancient and decrepit VW was hand painted military green, and who nearly lost his sanity trying to teach Andy Rankine (68) to navigate. Neil "Lofty" Eiby, whose posting to RMC was only the second in his Army career. He had risen from private soldier to CSM in 3 RAR and demonstrated a singular distaste for drill and ceremonial. He held all drillies beneath contempt. Gary Sutherland. Tony Egan. Don Lord. Payne VC.

Brian Foster had himself served in Korea, Malaya and South Vietnam, where he had been CSM of the relief company at the Battle of Long Tan. It seemed the ambition of all of the instructors to serve on "the Team" (AATV), which they considered the epitome of Infantry service at the time for soldiers of their seniority and experience. Some of them already had. These were the men who taught us the basics of soldiering. Typically on a Saturday morning we would go to The Wing for weapon training, which apart from being a blessed relief from bastardisation, brought a realisation that these old soldiers weren't bad blokes after all, and we enjoyed both the instruction, and their company. A lot of time was spent at The Wing listening enthralled to warries.

Brian Foster's speciality was the anti tank weapons, and he brought his special touch, and vocabulary to this subject. The Karl Gustav was an 88 mm weapon with an open venturi tube at the rear, and a large back blast. At the moment of blast it created a vicious overpressure followed soon after by a reverse pressure which made you feel as though you had been punched all over. It would blow the glass out of your watch, and rip the ear protection out of your ears. The loader and firer were required to huddle closely together before firing to minimise the risks from this effect. Bruce (The Boy) Jones (68) remembers loading for DA (Father) Benge (68) who had somehow missed the initial training for the weapon, and fired before The Boy could adopt the approved firing position. The Boy came to lying on his back, weakly muttering "Not yet, not yet!" "Father" thought that the thing had blown up. Mr Foster put them both to rights in his inimitable way!

The culmination of Camp Training in 1968 was a dawn attack on a fortified position near the village of Ap Monga on the South Coast of New South Wales. This mammoth position in a classic Viet Cong "Y" layout had been put together by a team of soldiers led by WO2 BW Foster, who defended it against the combined might of the First Battalion of the Yarralumla Light Infantry (1 YLI) and supporting troops. It had taken over a week to construct, and was an impressive piece of work, and was still there four years later when we TEWTed the attack in First Class.

Brian's real love was drill and ceremonial. He had first served at the College as a drillie in the early 60's, and he had a custom made pace stick. He had carried it at Point Hut, and seized any opportunity to shove it under his arm and exercise his powerful lungs. In 1970 the College was to receive new colours from the Queen.

With a major ceremonial imminent, the RSM, WO1 Norm Goldspink was required to go to Infantry Centre to do his RSM's course. To the cadets, this made about as much sense as sending God to a seminary for religious instruction, and we were a little saddened to realise that "Uncle" Norm was, after all, a mere mortal. RSM Goldspink's loss at preparing us for the Royal parade was Bluey Foster's gain. Apart from his dicky knees, he was in his element. He polished up his Fosterisms and his pace stick (actually, it was always polished), and he polished us up for the big parade. The 1970 Presentation of Colours is a story in itself, but no account would be complete without mention of the occasion Brian's knees locked up as he was marching up the stairs by the flagpole. It took some time before people realised what had happened, but finally the drillies had to carry him away to the RSM's office to call a farrier to have him attended to.

"Uncle" Norm returned for the actual event, but the preparation was Brian's. We felt a little sorry for Brian, but Norm was the RSM, and a properly trained one rather than just a pretend one by then, and it was his parade. But it had been a bit of nostalgia for the Class of 68 to have our old Point Hut CSM back in harness, and I guess we weren't really surprised when we realised that we had enjoyed the experience.

Brian had also acted as PMC of the Sergeant's Mess during RSM Goldspink's absence. I understand that the period was particularly noted for a dawn attack on the ASCO canteen after a dining in night, when the acting PMC and his troops, all dressed in their patrol blues, successfully captured the building without either destroying it or sustaining significant casualties themselves.

Just after the Presentation of Colours parade, Second Class, as we were by then, had a night navigation exercise near Lake George which had been written, produced, directed and choreographed by BW Foster. This activity was called Exercise Farkawe. This title had passed the rigid scrutiny of the Inspector of Staff Duties and Acronyms. It didn't escape the eagle eye of the Commandant CMI "Sandy" Pearson, who had been a World class rugby player, and could sing a risqué ditty with the best of them. He was singularly unimpressed with Foster's explanation that the name was taken from an American Indian tribe whose traditional greeting was "We're the Farkawe!" But he was a good sport, and the title stood.

I should also make note of some of Brian's more notable personal traits. He wore white socks before they became fashionable, and in the matter of motor cars, he was what could be called a hoon. He drove at the time a white EH Holden. This extensively modified vehicle had a floor shift, and the most gauges ever installed in a vehicle before or since. It had a gauge to tell you how many gauges it had. Nominated for the Guinness Book of records in the category "Most Gauges", it was narrowly defeated by the Boeing 747, which was just then coming into service.

Brian Foster was also a rugby coach, and had been a good player in his younger days, and had the knees to prove it. In 1968 he coached the Under 19 A's. The team played all season without a loss, then lost the grand final. His wife Annette, and children Ashley, Murray and Michelle couldn't help but be involved, and I realised recently while she was chiding my second son for his performance in a "biff" during a school game, that Annette, in her own quiet way, had been almost as much an influence on the team as Brian. After Fourth Class, Brian had followed some of us to the Fourth Fifteen, a notoriously lacklustre team, and even he couldn't goad us into much better results than we achieved. I remember one game when we

returned to the College before the other teams had left with a 55 - nil loss under our belts. I decided that maybe my lack of sporting talents lay elsewhere, and was convinced on the same day to help fill a serious shortage in the Third Eleven hockey caused by the plague or the Black Death or whatever was the Illness of the Week at the RMC hospital at that time. Defeated 11- nil, I took up golf.

I also remember 1970 because it was the year I turned twenty one. There were three of us with birthdays at about the same time, and after cocktails at Captain Michael Barrett's place (Black Velvet out of a balloon glass the size of a goldfish bowl) we went to dinner. Brian and Annette were there, and the occasion was memorable for the fact that when it was time to shut the bar, we were still thirsty, and Brian intimidated the barman into remaining open. As only Brian can intimidate people. When we weren't thirsty anymore, we went home to Brian and Annette's house, where we discovered that in the process of becoming unthirsty, we had become hungry again. Annette cooked all of us steak sandwiches. The food made us thirsty, and all Brian could find was a bottle of Vat 69 whisky, so being discriminating connoisseurs, we drank that. I still don't like whisky. There must have been a crowd, and Annette must have performed a miracle to find enough ingredients. Or maybe she was just used to Brian arriving home with a collection of homesick and hopeless waifs needing comfort and succour.

The start of First Class was significant for me because I met my future wife. It was at a Saturday night party arranged by a classmate's girlfriend. We had been on the range in the morning firing the Carl Gustav. At least one of the weapons had lost the rubber eye cap off the telescopic sight, and this wicked weapon had left those of us who had fired it with a crescent shaped cut over our right eyes, like a mark of initiation into some secret society. Mr Foster had conducted the practice, and we had got little sympathy. We wouldn't have dared to seek any. Anyway, he assured us, the girls always fall for a wounded soldier. Guaranteed to work every time. How prescient!

I seem to remember that at about this time Brian was making some pretty serious attempts to get to "The Team." He actually got to South Vietnam on at least a couple of occasions by my recollection, but his knees and other parts of his disintegrating anatomy kept giving him away, and he would be sent home. We didn't mind of course, because he belonged with us, and if we had to stay there for four years to finish, then he would just have to stay and help us. He finally succeeded, and sometime in 1971 he headed back to South Vietnam, where he got into some pretty amazing adventures. We wouldn't have expected otherwise. But he had promised before he left that he would return to be our class drillie in Grad week.

It is an RMC custom that First class selects the NCO who will drill them for their final parade. Mr Foster started us and we had decided long before graduation that he would finish us. As was also the custom, we selected the music we would march off to, and chose "Teddy Bears' Picnic" in honour of our long term Infantry Instructor Captain Mick (The Bear) Barrett and "The Carnival is Over" which was a hit for the Seekers at the time, and seemed appropriate. As it turned out, Brian Foster couldn't get back from South Vietnam, and it would not understate the situation to say that we were more than a little disappointed.

RSM Goldspink insisted that we choose a replacement drillie, deaf to our entreaties that we were so good by then that we wouldn't need one. As Machiavellian as only cadets can be, we hit upon a perfect compromise. We chose

WO2 "Lofty" Eiby. You may remember that he was not noted for his enthusiasm for drill and ceremonial nor its practitioners. "Uncle" Norm had a fit. "He doesn't know anything about drill" he railed. "We will have no other," we insisted. We even arranged for him to borrow Brian Foster's pace stick.

We created a monster. Lofty had reservations at first. Apart from his general distaste for drill and drillies, he didn't think it quite right that he should yell at "nearly officers." But he could see the point of our little subterfuge, and he decided to play along. We had to help him a bit for the first couple of days, and when he didn't pick even our deliberate mistakes, we had to tell him who to yell at and what to yell. It kept the RSM off our backs if he thought the drillie was doing his job. Through his own not insubstantial contributions to the general noise pollution of graduation rehearsals, "Uncle" Norm was hearing all the right names and the appropriate admonitions, and our ploy succeeded. But Eiby was discovering that he actually enjoyed being a drillie, and had got so out of hand by the Monday before Grad that we had to remind him that we were "nearly officers" and reign him in a bit. In fact, we trained him so well he went on to become RSM of RMC in his own right. A little known Grad Week 1971 success story.

Because Brian Foster was in South Vietnam he also missed one of the most significant events in any class's commissioning process. It is a rite of passage that the new graduates visit the Sergeant's Mess the morning after graduation, when all concerned are in the fullness of health. A welcoming drink from the PTIs, met by the RSM, first drink replaced by a larger one by the drillies, then an even larger one from the Infantry instructors, and so on until it seemed that the drinks were arriving in glasses the size of buckets! Everyone calling you "Sir" and remarking that "Gawd, four years ago who would have thought!" then lunch and a few drinks afterward s. We all got big red badges that had been part of an advertising promotion that said in bold letters "I graduated." "Uncle" Norm wrote "never" on his. More drinks. "Uncle" Norm sang the Lords Prayer (and a mighty fine rendition too) and there wasn't a dry eye in the house but it's alright to get a bit emotional if you've had a few drinks. I think that there were some of them who were sad to see us go. But not all. And there was one person who was conspicuous by his absence. He would have been in his element!

He kept in touch after a fashion with all of us. Not everyone was "lucky" enough to get a kitten, but Brian always seemed to know where we were, and what we were doing. And not just the graduating class of 197. Brian Foster has an unshakeable belief that the "old" Duntroon was the finest training institution in the land, and its graduates, and in particular "his" graduates, are second to none. He will brook no argument, and he will defend the college, and its graduates to the bitter end. In return, he expects graduates to meet the highest standards of duty and service. And honour.

I renewed my haphazard contacts with Brian and Annette when I was posted to Canungra after Staff College in 1985. Brian had left the Army after filling various RSMs positions including 3 RAR and LWC Canungra. He and Annette were living at Southport, and Brian was managing the Southport RSL. He had previously spent two and a half years as manager of the Aviat Club in Port Moresby. At that time the RSM LWC was WO1 Merv Kirby, who had taught me to read a map and to shoot when I was at RMC. His choice of dogs had only marginally improved, but he had sold his VW. We had been at Goldie River Training Depot together straight after

graduation, and he had trained my brother at Portsea. Captain Gerry Berson, whose arrival at RMC coincided with ours, and who was a drillie at Point Hut, was the Adjutant. Because I was on Tac Wing, there was a steady stream of officer students who knew Brian Foster, and a visit to Brian in his domain in the Southport RSL was almost obligatory. His hospitality had not diminished in any way. When I was posted back to PNG in 1988 on secondment to the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary, I was admonished "Keep your powder dry, and keep your head down. Just like I taught you!" It proved good advice.

Our eldest son, Mark, was to remain at boarding school in Southport. Another waif. "Uncle" Brian and "Aunty" Annette naturally volunteered to keep an eye on him, and Mark now regards them as his "second" family. As they had done for me twenty years earlier, they helped him through the rough patches when life away from home became a bit much for a young boy to handle on his own. As I write, Mark is doing his Ready Reserve Infantry training at Singleton. Although WO2 Ashley Foster is monitoring Mark's performance, "Uncle" Brian still receives regular phone calls from the young recruit, reporting on his progress or seeking a ruling on some obscure point of military etiquette.

These days Brian helps run a half way house (called Nui Dat House) for Vietnam Veterans with health and emotional problems. I am concerned for his health if I don't see at least one article each week in the local newspaper either quoting him or reporting him on some issue or other, such as the Monarchy, the flag, the republic or veterans' entitlements. It is also typical of Brian that he has received some criticism for running Nui Dat House "like an RSM." I would not have expected otherwise. He has never been backward in coming forward.

My experience was that I received in the mail an application form to join the Vietnam Veterans Association as an associate member, completed in Brian's hand with a notation "joining fee waived." I protested that I hadn't served in Vietnam. Of no consequence I was informed. You were in the Army then, and you were an officer. And a Duntroon graduate. You were responsible for them then, and you are responsible for them now. You have an obligation to assist. Join. As always, I did as I was told. It is the Foster way.

There is a tale, no doubt true, that LTCOL Colin Townsend, while CO 6 RAR in South Vietnam (and our CO in the Corps in 1968 -1969) received a phone call from the US authorities seeking confirmation that a Warrant Officer Foster, who was attempting to call the White House, was in his employ. Summoning his RSM, he went to the Sergeant's Mess where Foster and some other cronies, in vino veritas and with K phone handset in hand, were caught in the act. Concerned with some elements of LBJ's prosecution of the war, they had decided to call the President to to give him the benefit of their collective wisdom. That they had actually succeeded in getting through the labyrinth of telephone systems to the White House switch was a testimony to their ingenuity if not their perseverance.

Brian and Annette also travel, usually to tidy up the few loose ends left over from the various wars that he has fought. As a Korean War veteran and an ex RSM 3 RAR, he has made several trips to Korea. Last time he went it was for the fortieth anniversary of the Battle of Kapyong. He and Mick Servos found Mick's pit. I bet Brian didn't give Mick an ear full for not filling it in like he once did to me. He also goes to regimental reunions. At one he sat with General Jim Norrie who had been

DMA when we arrived at Clink. Brian and Jim had also played Rugby together and fought in the same war. On the same side.

On the day I was discharged from the Army after twenty four years service, it was all a bit of an anti climax. I went to the same building where I had been processed before I went to Duntroon, and was given a discharge certificate and a gold rail pass. No bands, no dinners, no speeches. The CGS didn't call, and I'd written him a letter! I was feeling a little depressed as I drove back to the Coast. Nearing home, I noticed the green Ford Fairlane with the distinctive BWF 11 plates in the car park of the local tavern. Since it was Friday, I knew exactly who would be there. The Ashmore Tavern Military Anecdote Group, telling the lies that they had forgotten to tell on Anzac Day, as was their Friday afternoon habit.

I was in uniform, but went in anyway. Besides, what could "they" do now, take my regimental number off me? And I needed a bit of cheering up. Mr Foster stood as protocol demanded when an officer in uniform entered and asked "What's happening Taubada?" which in PNG Motu roughly equates to Sir, and was meant to demonstrate to me, and the other members of ATMAG that his considerable language skills had not in anyway diminished.

"Brian," I said "I have just completed my discharge. And since you were the first bastard who yelled at me when I joined, I'm giving you the opportunity to be the last one to yell at me as I leave."

And just then, the smoke in the Lounge Bar must have irritated my eyes a bit, because they went a bit, you know, watery.

It must have been the smoke, because exactly the same thing happened to Brian.

RW EASTGATE

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