

A SECOND-CLASS RIDE BEATS A FIRST-CLASS WALK.

My story, by Peter Ashton,

It all began in 1968. I was working on Alexandria Station on the Barkley Tablelands in the Northern Territory as a Ringer. I was 19 at the time and I could see there was no future in that job. I pulled the pin and travelled back to my home town of Murwillumbah in Northern NSW.

Now the Ashton family have a great history of military service, beginning with one of my heroes, my Grandfather, 552735 Sapper Peter Walter Ashton, who served in The Royal Engineers during WW1. He died of wounds in France on 13th May 1918. Lest we forget.



The Army tradition continued into WW2 when another of my heroes, my father, NX46174 Cpl. Walter William Ashton served in the 2/1st Pioneer Battalion, 9th Division. Australian Military Forces. He enlisted on 1st June 1940. His unit was sent to the Middle East and were part of the defence of Tobruk and earned the nickname of "The Rats Of Tobruk". On return to Australia the unit went to Herberton in North Queensland and carried out jungle training before being sent to New Guinea where they were involved in airfield construction, quarrying and transporting artillery pieces up the Kokoda Track by hand, among other things.



Cpl. Walter William Ashton





2/1 Pioneer Battalion on parade at Greta Army Camp prior to embarkation to the Middle East



Members of 2/1st Pioneers in a defensive position during the siege of Tobruk



Members of 2/1 Pioneers manhandling a 25 pounder gun up the mountains of New Guinea

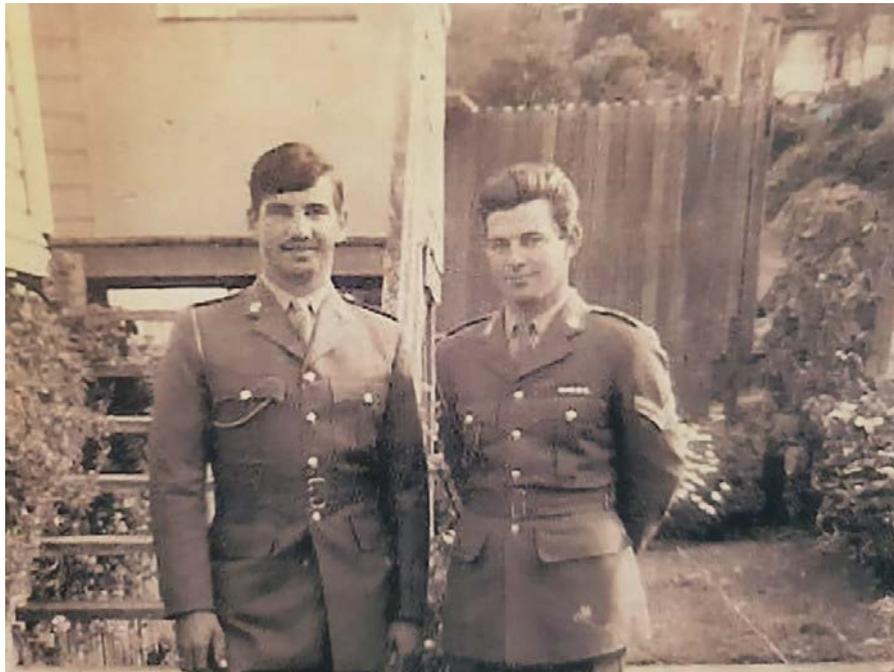
My eldest brother Bob was a National Serviceman during the 1950s



He was followed by my next brother Ron, Ron served in Artillery and was medically discharged after being involved in a truck rollover



To continue the tradition, my next brother Ken joined up and served in RAASC. He did a tour of Vietnam in the 60s with 8 Pet Pl. Ken is on the right of the next photo with yours truly on the left.





Brothers in arms





2791808 Private Peter David Ashton RAASC/RACT.

Australian Regular Army Supplement (NS)

Lance Corporal, Australian Regular Army (O)

Private, Australian Army Reserve

Lieutenant (AAC) Australian Army Cadets

So, back to me, I discovered that I could volunteer for National Service, this meant there were no tests on education, and I must admit I wasn't too good on maths, so I volunteered for the Nashos and off I went to Singleton for the 1st intake 1969. On completion of my rookie training I was posted

to the RAASC driver training centre at Puckapunyal for driver training which I enjoyed very much, even got to have a drive of an APC.

On completion of my driver training I was posted to 9 Coy RAASC at Lavarack Barracks in Townsville. 9 Coy was a general transport unit with 2 platoons of International Trucks Cargo 5 Tonne GS F1 as the Army called them. We just called them F1s.



These trucks were probably the best-off road trucks the Army ever bought. Go anywhere, They would have been even better if they had been fitted with a diesel motor instead of a petrol guzzling 6 cylinder petrol motor with twin carbs and headers. They were hard to bog as we found on training exercises, we would go out to practice vehicle recovery by driving a vehicle into a boggy hole somewhere and then recover the vehicle with winches. The problem was the truck just drove through the bog and out the other side. We compromised and just pretended they were bogged and proceeded to recover them. Great fun.

I had my 21 birthday at the High Range training area north west of Townsville. We had our trucks stripped down to flat tops with a large water bladder on the back. We were engaged in the construction of the air strip with most of our work being watering down the earthworks.



I had many memorable events during my posting to 9 trucks as we called the unit. Some of them included:

Being in an ammunition convoy driving up to the High Range Training Area, my truck was loaded with mortar ammunition, I was about 100m from the top of the steep, single lane road when the clutch started to slip. The driver behind me was able to push my truck to the top of the hill and saved the day. All in a day's work for the galloping green grocers as we were nicknamed

I also Participated in a convoy to the tip of Cape York. The trucks could only go as far as the Jardine river. We overcame that obstacle by swimming across a rope, then using that to pull across a winch rope from one of the trucks. This was chained to a tree, then we built a raft of empty 44-gal drums

around a couple of Landrovers and pushed them to the other side using snap blocks, never gave a thought about the crocs. A heap of us then got on the Rovers and off we went to the tip.

We were accompanied by a Bell helicopter and a Pilatus Porter short take-off and landing aircraft, they were there “to look for new training areas”.



Pilatus PC-6B Turbo-Porter
A14-687 sn 687 173 (General Support Squadron Oakey 1989



The PC 6 is noted for its Short Take-off and Landing (STOL) performance on almost any type of terrain. It can take off within a distance of 200 m and land within a distance of 100 m with a payload of 1200 kg. Thanks to its remarkable STOL performance, the PC 6 holds the world record for highest landing by a Turboprop aircraft at 15,000 feet (4570 m) on the Chomolungma glacier in Nepal. Due to these characteristics, the PC 6 is frequently used in areas with poor infrastructure in the highlands of Papua New Guinea and Papua New Guinea.

A14-687 was delivered 28th January 1989 to the General Support Squadron Oakey Base Australia. It was later with various equipment for the height. The question is whether it was "used" at the time. The cargo was changed from "Honey" to "Honey" plus the installation of the T-10 (Honey) to have a look at some other consideration about the T-10 (Honey) that appeared to be doing 100 km in the ground.

Specifications
 Model: Pilatus Turbo-Porter
 Motor: PC 6-B Turbo-Porter
 Propulsion: Pratt & Whitney PT 6B-23 with 288 SHP
 Height: 3.20 metres
 Length: 13.07 metres
 Wingspan: 13.20 metres

Wing Weight: 2,475 kg
 Empty Weight: 1,400 kg
 Weight: 375 kg, 2 items included
 Max. Speed: 250 km/h
 Cruise Speed: 200 km/h

Pilatus PC 6 Porter A14-687 (sn 687) © 2013 Bernard Williams www.pilatus.org.au/Porter/Porter.htm

Each day we moved a couple of hundred kilometres and cleared a landing area for the aircraft. The route we followed was the old telegraph track, it was certainly a track after 20 trucks. GS a couple of Landrovers and a recovery vehicle had driven up and back. We carried our fuel in 44 gal drums and lived on ration packs. A fun adventure for all concerned.



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One of the highlights for them was the discovery of 2 abandoned Kittyhawk fighters in the middle of a swamp. These aircraft had crash landed after running out of fuel during WW2. They still had their guns and ammo in them, one had belly landed and the other one was on its wheels, although it had sunk in a bit.



Don't know what happened to them but I heard later they were recovered.

Another enjoyable exercise we were involved in was a short posting to the Tropical Trials Establishment at Cowley Beach. During this exercise we were involved with testing the new 105mm Howitzer artillery guns. Basically, all we did was tow the guns through all kinds of terrain with our trucks, I remember a lot of time spent swimming at the beach while the guns were left in the jungle.



During my posting to 9 trucks I decided to re-enlist, so I signed on for another 3 years, I was then promoted to Lance Corporal.

When National Service was stopped by Labor at the end of the Vietnam War there was a dramatic change in the unit. Most Nashos decided to get out and the unit went from 2 Platoons of 22 F1's with 2 drivers per truck down to 1 Platoon of F1's with 1 driver per truck. Also, around this time RAASC was reformed and became Royal Australian Corps of Transport and I was posted to HQ Coy 6th Task Force at Enoggera Brisbane as the Commanding Officers driver. For the next twelve months I got to drive Brigadier John Stevenson around in a new ZD Fairlane. He also had a new FFR Landrover parked in the shed which I got to use once in twelve months when he flew to Shoalwater Bay to watch an exercise. I had to drive the Rover up to meet him and drive him around the training area.





A highlight on this trip was when he got to fly around in an Iroquois, and he invited me along for the ride. Good fun flying over the waters of Shoalwater Bay with the doors open. Loved helicopters ever since.



On his posting as Governor of Tasmania I was given the job as Transport NCO of the unit, didn't like that job much as there was very little driving involved.

I then made the decision to leave the Army at the end of my enlistment, a decision I still regret.

After leaving the Army the Defence Department paid for me to be retrained as a plant operator, A great trade and I have never been out of a job since.

In 1982 I enlisted in the Army Reserve and was posted to Pioneer Pl. 41Btn RNSW Regiment at Murwillumbah. Loved the job particularly learning to blow things up. Met some great mates and

learned a lot. This was a small unit with a high level of camaraderie, we had one of the best mess setups with a bar, pool table and lots of parties. I was able to renew my military licence, so I got to drive the unit vehicles.



During the 90s I attended a Pioneer Pl. reunion, I was approached by my ex OC who asked if I was interested in being part of a new Army Cadet unit, 225 ACU, being formed at Murwillumbah. I jumped at the chance of wearing the uniform again. The unit was formed and paraded at the Army Reserve depot in Murwillumbah. After some advertising at the local high schools we had 120 recruits turn up for the first parade. We were amazed at the response. It took a while for the unit to be issued with uniforms, but we carried on with whatever we could scrounge, and the unit was a great success. This success was due to having 3 ex-army members running the unit, we were all from the Pioneer Pl. which was our cadet foster unit

I became the unit Training Officer, a role I kept for the next 14 years. I acted as an instructor on many Adventure training courses, SNCO and NCO Courses at Holsworthy and Singleton training areas. This role meant I had to learn a lot more than how to drive a truck. I was able to use available learning tools and become proficient in teaching leadership, navigation, fieldcraft, drill, first aid, abseiling and survival and I think that this was the best time in my life.

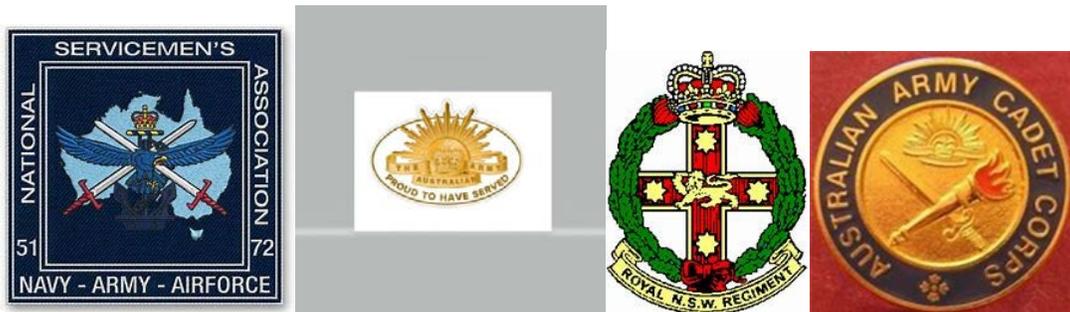


When the National Servicemen's Association was formed, I joined, thinking that I may get to meet up with some of those I served with, but I found that most members were from the 1st National Servicemen's scheme and I didn't really relate to them, so I let my membership lapse. This may have changed now as that first group's numbers are declining with age.

The Australian Defence Force Cadet Scheme would have to be the best recruiting ground and many of the cadets from our unit enlisted in the Army, Air Force and Navy. One of them, Cadet Sgt. Nathan Bewes, was later killed in Afghanistan. Some of these servicemen came to visit the unit afterwards and they were a great source of encouragement to the others.

I am now proud to belong to the Southern Downs Ex Services Association Inc, good mates, good laughs and great camaraderie.

This is my story, hope you enjoy it



Some photos in this article are generic photos sourced from the internet.

