

Warrant Officer Class Two John Henry (Cheetah) Armistead - 24 June 2011

Warrant Officer Class Two Laurie 'Potsie' Ritchie

I personally first met John in 1982 when he marched into 1st Field Regiment at Wacol. We all actually thought he was a school cadet here on work experience due to his boyish appearance but John, Wes Pine, Marty Hunt and myself all hit it off straight away and that friendship has lasted for over 30 years.

John Henry Armistead or as we all knew him 'Cheetah' or 'Cheetah Armistead'. How did this stocky Inala boy acquire this nickname? Quiet simple, Cheetah's first detachment commander Doggie Day nicknamed him Cheetah back in 1982, as you all know Cheetah was Tarzan's loyal friend. So Doggie in his wisdom named him Cheetah, as Doggie referred to all Gunners as 'Trail Apes' and John became the baby trail ape Cheetah and the legend was born. Cheetah however did also possess all the qualities and characteristics of the Cheetah; speed, power, strength and determination all attributes in which the way Cheetah lived his life.

John was a son, a husband, a father, a brother, and a mate to all of us who had the privilege to know and serve with him.

John was a man without prejudice (except if you were in 101 or 107 Field Batteries and wore a NSW jumper then you were exempt from this prejudice). His many friendships crossed the barriers of social position and educational background. He was respected by all ranks he served with and was an asset to any unit he was associated with and left a lasting impression on many young soldiers and junior officers who he had influence over.

He was a professional soldier throughout his entire career and anyone who ever served with John would acknowledge his strengths were his dedication, devotion, professionalism and commitment to soldiering in the Australian Army, in particular in love and passion for the Royal Regiment of Australian Artillery.

John loved the Sergeants Mess and everything it stood for and a majority of us gathered here today have enjoyed John and Carol's friendship over a cold beer or glass of wine in the mess on many an occasion. Whether it being Cheetah dressing up as an Indian, donning the mess kit, having a light hearted discussion on technical gunnery or him busily organizing a function for us all to enjoy.

John was a true team player in every sense. His love of sport in particular rugby, touch football and darts and dislike of grunts on the rugby paddock was testament to this. Although his desire for swimming left a lot to be desired, I remember on one occasion in Townsville during Battery swimming trials in the early 90's when we were trying to find a sergeant to swim in a chain of command relay race and it came to a selection between Cheetah, Wes Pine (another legendary swimmer) and myself. If I remember correctly after the first 15 meters I was gone, Wes had a cramp and poor old Cheetah was the only one who hadn't drowned so he got the nod.

He had a love for many things outside his family as they were always his first priority in particular the Queensland Maroons and XXXX. He also had another love, horse racing, although like his swimming his tips left a lot to be desired and I don't recall him ever tipping me a winner.

He also had a knack for referring to everyone as Jimmy, Blisken, Brutus or his personal favourite's Brahma and Big Arms. He also had a knack of telling jokes which only he found funny.

Dave Appo also told me a funny story in relation to Cheetah, Dave and other members of 101st Field Battery had a Touch Football team in a local competition and were called the Barracudas. Cheetah in his wisdom said to Dave, 'you think you Barracudas are pretty good', Dave replied 'we go alright', Cheetah then said 'well I am forming a team called the Barramundis and we are going to kick some Barracuda arse'. This was just part of John's sense of humour.

I was very fortunate to have had Cheetah as a number 7, one reason in particular was at least he could count up to 10 unlike some of the other number 7's around like the Bashers, Brookes, Dunn's, Roscoe, Booby's and the infamous Boga who all managed to stuff up their records of rounds fired.

John whatever troubles you had in life sadly they are all gone. You will be remembered as a truly amazing family man and friend to many. The legend of Cheetah Armistead will live forever and never be forgotten in this life or the next.

John's death was sudden. I remember when Carol called me and we both shed a tear when she told me. I simply could not believe it. John was too young but as it slowly occurred to me I have realized that John indeed lived his life wonderfully. John was well-loved and he had done so many things on earth and I'm sure he'll do much more in heaven. I will forever be grateful to have known John.

This man, who in big and small ways, while he was alive, never stopped trying to make us feel good, was himself inside a very troubled man. Contained deep within him was something so intensely painful that nothing and no one, it seems, could ease it for very long. And our hearts and understanding go to Carol, Amy, Laura, George and the Armistead family.

His death has stunned, bewildered and agonised those of us who were close to him. I will miss him terribly, we all will. Some things are just too difficult to accept all at once - we try to manage our acceptance of it, to receive it gradually and in smaller parcels of grief and loss.

We wish so much for it to have been otherwise, but sooner or later we need to come to terms with it and accord to him the great measure of dignity he deserves. While Cheetah

gave much to us, I think we need to remember also the happiness our various friendships gave to him.

John is in heaven now and we are here on his funeral. This is not the time for us to grieve his death but it's our time to celebrate his life. Don't ever forget John. He never wanted to see people cry. He wanted to make everyone happy. So at this moment when we are about to lay his body to rest, let's all think back and remember how John touched our lives. How he made us laugh and how good John was as a person.

Cheetah you have been issued with your final posting order and you are now at permanent rest in the Gun Park in heaven.

This is not the moment for us to shed our tears but we should all be thankful that we were given the chance to have known a man named John Henry 'Cheetah' Armistead.

Rest In Peace Old Friend, Ubique.

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