Seven

Seven is nothing special, just a prime number and the number of days in a week. Cheetah, Pete, Mick, Tony, Brad, Dara, and Gordy. Seven names from a roll call of many of the women and men I served with. Those seven are dead now; it was their time to go. No one plays Waltzing Matilda for them anymore. What was it? The alcohol, drugs, hospitalisation, bankruptcy, homelessness, divorce, or separation. It's left families distraught and mates left to question about why it all got too hard. Partners and wives caught up in the mess, victims of the Army's commitment to service.

We trained on seven ranges, Majura, Cultana, Puckapunyal, High Range, Manly, Shoalwater, and Singleton. Servicing the Guns, saluting the Queen's Banner and wearing our white lanyards with pride. At the 10 O'Clock Club we told tall tales in the Blue Room as Brian the Barman dutifully served us. Toasting with awe under the portraits of the legends of Gunners of old. We learnt the hard lessons of crash, creep and ballistic hump with directors, firing tables, slippery sticks and whizz wheels. The courses ROBCs, Regt Sig Offr, GPOs, ROGCs, and the ROAC and did the jobs of, SECO, SIGO, GPO, FO, BK, IG, ADJT, BC, 2IC and CO. The classes in Manly and careers long forgotten. Fond memories of mates and good times fading away.

I served as the words of the Regiment's battle honour and motto insisted. We fought in East Timor, Cambodia, Somalia, Solomon Islands, Fiji, Bougainville, and Rwanda. Forgotten places unlike Iraq and Afghanistan. And I remember Suai, Balibo, Licquica, Santa Cruz, Aidabaleten, Maliana and Dili each night. Sectarian violence and death at the hands of make-believe gods. Christians, Muslims and Jews can't be right. The children of Iran, Lebanon, Gaza and Israel all die in fright because of oil and the Epstein Class. Those of us left survive our wars with our invisible scars.

I'm nearly always startled, disassociated, angry, nightmares, suicidal, despondent, and alienated. Seven symptoms of trauma and crippling terrors controlled by my drugs. Angry, always angry. There's nothing special when it comes to seven. Nothing special - except for my mates.

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