

Anthony Edward Pearce aka 'Pearcie'

True Grit Old Penwithian

'Friendships are often fused in heaven and on Cornish schools playing fields'. Anon.

At Lescudjack Primary School Penzance at lunch time we used to play 'milk tops' against the wall or kick around a tennis ball. I booted the ball across to a dark curly headed cheerful lad nearby who kept picking up the ball and throwing it to me with two hands. I surmised that this fellow had been brought up with the oval ball? I knew him as 'Pearcie' and he knew me as 'Coco'.

It was 1949 the beginning of our first term at Penzance Grammar School (PGS). We filed into the granite stone portals awaiting to be allotted our classrooms as our proud maters watched the maroon blazered clad lads disappeared inside. I made my way to Class 1B which was a wooden motley hutted structure next to the lower football pitch. Pearcie was allocated to crummy hut 1C. The following year both Pearcie and I found ourselves in 2A, form master, Joe 'Tufik' Pascoe. Pearcie was a brighter lad than me and went through the science stream taking maths, chem and physics with one Harry Otto & 'MOT' while I scived along quietly in the arts stream learning little.



We were in the Sixth form and I saw Pearcie's end of term report where Elvet wrote, "As cheerful and lazy as ever." Another Elvet true remark. "Pearce, if personality, cheerfulness and laziness counted for anything, you will be prime Minister: unfortunately hard work and diligence are required in this world, so you will probably be hanged" I have always thought that these remarks were most unjust.

We both started to swim competitively at an early age and swam for the school and play water polo for Penzance 'Tiddlers' and the Junior team. Later we were both selected for Cornwall juniors.



My cheerful chum worked through the house team rugby teams and in 1953 Pearcie was appointed as captain of the PGS First XV (See photo). Pearcie was a forward and a tough hooker while I played centre. There was a good compliment from St. Ives well supported by Tammy Rescorla and Sully Sullivan from Hayle. Most Saturday mornings the School first XV played against other schools. In the afternoons Pearcie played for the Pirates Colts. I played for St. Ives Colts while our hard men rivals Sully and Tammy played for Hayle Colts.

Tony was leaving PGS heading for the Camborne School of Mines (CSM) studies but while playing for the last time for PGS XV against Mounts Bay he got crunched and ended up in

West Cornwall Hospital (WCH). Not long after he had a motor bike accident and ended up in WCH again which shorted out his studies at CSM.

The Malaya emergency and Korean War (1950-1953) led to the December 1948 National Service Amendment Act lengthening conscription for two years. As these small wars dragged on reaching 18 years many of the old PGS school rugby team were called up to serve in the armed forces.

The writer went into the Grenadier Guards on a Thursday and on Saturday was playing rugby for the Guards Depot at Caterham against the Royal Engineers in Chatham. After basic training I was thinking off joining the Guard's Paras or the S.A.S. for a bit of action. However, I managed to fluke my WOSB and was commissioned into the DCLI and seconded to 'White Man's Grave' Nigeria the Western African Frontier Force (WAFF) the One Queen's Own Nigeria Regiment (IQONR). I heard that Pearce joined the Devon & Dorsets. He too received an NS Commission into the DCLI. I wrote to him and urged him to request a secondment to the WAFF. Pearce duly arrived in Nigeria and was posted to the Recce Squadron in Kaduna in north Nigeria. I was stuck in the East. I played in the Port Harcourt Sevens while Pearce played for the Kaduna Club XV. There was no chance to play together or against each other unfortunately. Playing against the Nigerian Police Pearce was crunched again and taken to hospital with eleven stitches in his head. Back in the clubhouse there was a shout from the police superintendent in charge of the police XV, "Where is that bloody Cornishman then?" It was Doffy Behenna's brother!



I wrapped up my military career in Enugu in the east (later the site of the Biafra genocide war) and was on my bike to blighty. After leaving Enugu on a rickety DC 10 I arrived in warm Kaduna to be met by one 2/Lt. Anthony Edward Pearce again where we polished off a few beers before I left for Sokoto to catch my connection to Germany leaving Pearce on the tarmac. I then disappeared for some time among some old German rugby school boys whom I played against in Cornwall and Germany and their girl rugby follower diaspora.

The DCLI was soon amalgamated with the Somersets. Smart Pearce served on and received a Regular commission in March 1961. Unfortunately in Nigeria he went down with malignant tertian malaria and was sent back to Germany for treatment. He soon gave up his regular commission and was working in Grays Essex as a Work Study Engineer. He played rugby there and was President of the Lions Club. During this period he passed the Foreign Office & Excise exams but was unable to take up an appointment with the FCO as he was unable to return his appointment letter on time. Shame! He could have joined me in Hong Kong and played rugby together again.

The next time I was in Penzance on leave from Hong Kong I found Pearce at home suffering a bout of malaria.

At sometime Pearcie became the manager of the Benbow Restaurant and ran the Maritime Museum in Chapel Street Penzance. He then joined a local company maintaining Council property.

Whenever I was on leave from Hong Kong I always used to visit Pearcie and Christine in Penzance and chat about old school times and the gals we used to chase. From 2009 to the end of 2010 we kept in touch on the net. We each used to write short stories to amuse each other.

From 2010 Tony's health began to suffer and despite many uncomfortable medical procedures he remained as cheerful as ever in his correspondence or chatting on the blower. He never complained. He showed true grit and a Cornish rugby player to the end.

Anthony Edward Pearce of Penzance aged 73 finally went 'offline' peacefully on Monday 11 July 2011 at Treliske Hospital. Beloved husband of Christine, loving Papa of the late daughter Clare, family and friends attended the funeral service held at The Kernow Chapel Paramount Crematorium Truro Tuesday 2 August ay 10.30 am.

We miss you Pard!



Brian Coak aka Coco