

# **BUNKS GALORE!!!!**

By Affan Syed, 95142/Latif House

Every boarding public school has its own tales to tell and traditions to preserve. Whether one read Enid Blyton or Harry Potter or any other great novelist who has written stories of school days, tales of rebellion of one sort or the other provide the spice needed to make it interesting.

When one turns to reality, probably the fiction is not far from real stories. And so has been the case with Cadet College Petaro. Over these past 50 years, every single entry has its own chuckles and its own misguided feats of heroism against college order and discipline to tell. The height of these tales is about bunking. While fear would have gripped us when we were actually involved in breaking the law, a reminder of those days lightens up a smile in every Petarian's faces regardless of his age and kit number.

I heard that under Commodore Abid Saleem Sahib's tenure, bunking has come to a grinding halt with beefed up security. But in our times, every junior entry saw their seniors indulging in it. And by the time they reached Second Year, they would be masters in deceit themselves.

Bunking was an art that came in several forms, shapes and intensities. There were mini bunks like going to the "*Army Chhaooni*" for a better haircut and a cup of *doodh puttee* when orders were out for "butcher cut" for all cadets 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade at the barber shop. This type of bunk was normally done during the hot afternoons right after lunch and before evening games.

Saturdays would often be a quick stop at Sheraton\* for "*Anday ka Qeema and Nan*" because lunch at the mess was the same old *Aaloo Gosht* being served for the third consecutive day.

Then there were bunks from classes where teachers didn't pay heed to attendance. This kind of bunk normally ended up in the library or at the cadet's room where he would go for a short siesta. The risk of getting caught here was high but not as high as missing PT/Parade or evening games when the checking against bunking was strict, ending up in a certain "Extra Drill" punishment. Some of us even dared to do that by dodging our house masters and at times even the adjutant and our house petty officer. I personally remember a time hiding myself in the cupboard when the adjutant decided to take a walk in order to catch all the defaulters. The punishment was a loaded package - a week of Extra Drill, a "*tind*" (heads shave), caning and discredits. Thank God I was saved from a disastrous outcome as Eid was close, and the shaved head would not be the best thing to sport around in front of relatives and friends.

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\* "Sheraton" is the name given by Petarians to a very shabby and primitive tea-house located at a short distance from the main gate of Cadet College Petaro.

Ultimately, the mother of all bunks was going to Jamshoro and Hyderabad. The whole experience was an adrenaline rush - Petarian youth at their finest. The whole setup was like a clandestine commando mission. One had to learn the art of dodging, camouflage and be really brisk in their actions - mental and physical. If caught the repercussions were enduring and cruel. If not there was something to boast about at the mess table and in the classroom during break hours.

Normally most Jamshoro bunks took place in the darkness of night. Cadets had different ways of escaping after "lights out". Some scaled the walls and railings from the upper level of the houses; some had duplicate keys for the metal grills at the end of every house. Whatever the case, they managed to sneak out while another cadet kept up surveillance of the grassy field area for any guard on duty. Bunk routes were numerous. Some used the clearing by Shahbaz House which led to the parade ground. Others would circumvent around the riding club and shooting range; while most favored route was to scout around to the Petaro cantonment area where getting trucks became easier. The "Sheraton" route no longer served as a causeway once the Indus Highway was built.

Once in Jamshoro, cadets celebrated their short stint of freedom by consuming freshly cooked *chicken karahi* accompanied by piping hot *naans*. Tea was brought in later with *baakurkhaanis*. Hotels used to blare with songs from local Sindhi musicians instilling the mood for some cadets to dance with their mates. Some went ahead with curious contraband experimentations - puffing their first cigarettes and daring to chew *ghutka* giving them their first nicotine buzz. Others chose to watch the latest James Bond flick or Geet Malas in the near by "*Babu Buledi's Khoka*". In short everybody tried to make most of their short time down in Jamshoro and after a little shopping for their mates in Petaro; it would be time to go back to the dorms.

The trip back got tough too at times. If one couldn't find a truck, it usually went down to hiring a Suzuki pickup. The driver of the pickup was told to turn off his headlights usually near the parade ground so that it could stealthily make its way through the airfield and come close to the openings near Shahbaz house or the riding club. Then the most daring feat of all would take place - the brisk run towards the houses without being caught by the guards or any other member of the staff. I remember once during a Ramadan bunk we outsmarted the naval staff by sending the Suzuki to the riding club while getting off at the Shahbaz house opening that faced the mess. As soon as the staff saw a vehicle approaching the riding club they sent in a van full of guards to check on it. It was Sehri time and the mess was open, so we dashed towards the mess and sat in there, pretending to take Sehri and as if nothing ever happened.

The experiences during my time would definitely be different from those of the other decades. However, what I wrote here might bring back memories for each one of us in his own Petaro experience. Even though things are done changed anyone who has ever bunked can relate to the experience, smiling and thinking about their rebellious nature back during his own days, as they read this.