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Scott Johnson inquest hears soldiers used to bash gay men at Sydney's North Head

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[PHOTO: Scott Johnson's body was found at the base of Manly's North Head in 1988.](#) (NSW Police)

PHOTO: [Scott Johnson's body was found at](#)

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Soldiers training at the Army School of Artillery at North Head in Sydney used to brag about bashing gay men, an inquest has heard.

The coroner is conducting a third inquest into the death of 27-year-old American mathematician Scott Johnson, whose naked body was found at the bottom of a cliff at North Head in 1988.

A witness who cannot be identified told the court it was common knowledge that gay men met for sex in the area.

He said that in 1986 and 1987, he socialised with several groups of soldiers, that trained in the area, at the Hotel Steyne in Manly.

The witness said the group was sitting around and having a laugh when the soldiers mentioned that "they'd gone bashing queers".

"They came in and one of the people in the group said 'oh, where have you been?' and they said 'we were looking for poofers'.

"They were proud of it. They thought it was fun and games.

"They were yahooing and yelling and generally having a great time."

He said that this was at about 8:00pm on a Friday, and the soldiers generally finished their duties at 3:00pm or 4:00pm.

"They were buying two guys a lot of drinks because the three others said, 'oh, they managed to catch their first queer. Their first poofter'," the witness said.

"They found a poofter to bash. And they were buying drinks because they'd been a success."

The witness described how one soldier had bloodied hands where skin had come off his knuckles.

"It happened that day because he had marks on his hands," the witness said.

"We presumed it was North Head. It had obviously not been that long since it happened.

"Friday night was their big night out."



Photo: The inquest has heard anecdotal evidence that gay men were bashed at Manly's North Head. (Flickr: Adam Foster)

'WE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING'

Mr Johnson died on Friday, December 10, 1988.

His brother, internet entrepreneur Steve Johnson, believes he may have met with violence.

"We were hearing these things and to our shame we didn't say anything," the witness said.

"As horrible as it sounds, we were young and I guess we thought it was enough that we weren't taking part.

"To our great shame basically we let it [the bashings] happen."

The witness also described meeting local rugby league players in the period from 1985 to 1990 who openly discussed assaulting homosexual men.

"They were big guys and they were just very aggressive," he said.

"They absolutely weren't ashamed.

"I do recall someone saying 'well, why would you go up there if it's so dangerous?' They were referring to North Head."

MAKING UP FOR 'HORRIBLE SHIT I'VE DONE'

Earlier, the inquest heard from a man who had carried out gay bashings elsewhere.

"My actions caused someone to die," he said.

Counsel assisting the coroner asked if he had any involvement in the death of Mr Johnson.

"No, none at all," he said.

"I was involved in a lot of fighting, a lot of violence.

"That's not something I would have said, to go poofster bashing on the weekend. I didn't see it as a vocation.

"I've gone through a lot of years, a lot of hard work to try to make amends for the horrible shit I've done in my life."

The inquest continues.

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