

Didier and Pascal

There were many ways that you could make money on the docks.

Whichever method you chose, the prerequisite was that you had to be part of a local gang. In St Malo there was no other option because guys who weren't part of a gang got paid less, got shit jobs, and rarely stayed around for very long. It was easier just to be a gang member and was the best way to open doors for bigger money-making opportunities.

Lowest paid were the dock workers, who laboured and drank, and rarely got involved in any gang activities, although they would witness them all. They just had to come into work, do what they were told and keep their mouths shut.

Next were regular gang members who worked under orders to handle stolen goods, carry out security and disciplinary activities, and were essentially the foot soldiers, earning a bonus on a regular basis, passed down from their bosses every time they made a score. Depending on the nature of the job you were involved in, this could prove very lucrative, and a number of the gang members funded villas and hectic love lives this way.

Of course, you could always go out on your own, and steal from the gang set-up and pray that you weren't found out. That was a fool's game, and no one managed to play it for very long because the incestuous nature of gangland meant that someone would rat you out to one of the bosses, and it was impossible to keep anything a secret. Once discovered, you either left the country very quickly or left the world for good, normally being buried at sea.

The best paid were the chosen few who had special skills that earned them the opportunity to carry out specific assignments at the request of the boss, and for whom the rewards were significant. These were typically lawyers, accountants, smugglers and hit men. Jean-Luc Grenoble's preference for violence was well known, and he was one of the two main gang leaders at the turn of the century. His main rival favoured a bullet in the back of the head, which was to be feared, and was a quick exit, clean and painless. Grenoble preferred beatings and thuggery which, he felt, were a far stronger deterrent for his gang members than a quick clean execution. Who wanted to live with permanent injuries, or be repeatedly beaten and hospitalised?

Didier and Pascal had been schoolfriends in St Malo, enjoying a reign of terror in their younger school days, and then progressing to smoking, drinking, rugby and fighting as they got into their teens. They both came from hard family backgrounds; Pascal being the son of a mining family where there was a lot of heavy drinking and hard fists and Didier coming from a long line of bare-knuckle fighters. They left school as soon as they could and took on manual jobs for pocket money.

'We need to get onto the dock gang', said Pascal one evening when they were already several hours into their Friday night drinking at one of the back-street bars.

'How we gonna do that then, Einstein? It's a closed shop. None of our family work there and the fuckers won't let you in unless your connected.'

'I know how we do it,' said Pascal with a grin. 'We just need to get noticed.'

With that Pascal leapt across the bar and ploughed into a group of dock-gang members that had just come into the bar, followed only a few moments later by Didier. It was a short fight, nothing too serious, and ended with everyone slapping each other on the back and Pascal and Didier being assured by the dock foreman that they could use a couple of strong young lads like them.

Once on the docks as part of Grenoble's setup, they took every opportunity to demonstrate their inherited hard-man credentials, but after almost a year they were still just basic gang members,

occasionally called upon to do some heavy lifting, but nothing that would be eye-catching to the bosses, let alone the big boss.

They were working one rainy spring evening moving packing cases full of God only knew what, at Grenoble's warehouse in the commercial district. As they went to leave, Jean-Luc Grenoble himself came out of his office, down the stairs and out into the car park, towards his spotless gold Range Rover. Didier and Pascal had commented on the beautiful car several times, and they watched on forlornly as the famous gang boss walked past them as if they didn't exist. Then, just as Grenoble arrived at his car, two SUVs hurtled into the car park and men from the main rival gang leapt out. As they moved towards Grenoble, he fumbled his keys and had to turn and to face the oncoming threat. Their appointed leader was pointing a gun at Grenoble, and there was a conversation that ensued, but Didier and Pascal couldn't hear what was being said.

'This could be our chance,' said Didier to Pascal.

'Chance for what? To get shot in the head?'

Then, as they watched, Grenoble was standing tall in the face of impossible odds, and waving his hands around, point at the gun in the leader's hand. Unbelievably the man laughed, then put his gun on the floor and the eight gang members started closing in on Grenoble.

'A fist fight!' said Pascal gleefully. 'Looks like it's go time Didier!'

Before they really knew what was happening, Didier and Pascal had fallen on the rival gang members and teeth and blood flew in all directions.

They both tell the story differently.

In Didier's version, he allowed four of them to get close and land a few blows before he started dispatching them with lightning fast fists than landed heavily, laying out five of the assailants within no more than a couple of minutes.

Pascal recalled barrelling into two who fell to the floor and clubbing one other to the ground before dispatching each of them in turn with his steel toe capped boots, and then turning to help his friend Didier. Didier always disputed that he had needed any help, and maintained that he had a much higher headcount than Pascal.

The reality was that Pascal took out two of them, Didier clubbed four of them to the ground in double quick time, Grenoble himself took down the leader, and then as the final one ran off, Grenoble picked up the gun from the carpark floor and shot him in the back. He was very impressed with the speed and brutality of Didier and Pascal, and promised them both plenty of opportunity to use these skills in the future.

That night was the beginning of Grenoble's dominance over the docklands, and he soon had control of all gang activity, ably supported by his two new enforcers, Didier and Pascal, who were handsomely rewarded for their work. Over the next few years, they did more than anyone else to maintain Grenoble's reputation for savage beatings of anyone who tried to stand against Grenoble and earned an almost celebrity status amongst other gang members. No longer did they have to work in the warehouses. Theirs was a life of special assignments, always violent, and always well rewarded by their boss.