

## CCF Recollections from Mike Evans

Whilst I have very little in the way of artefacts, the memory is still in reasonable nick and I may be able to add something about the Combined Cadet Force (CCF), of which I was a member from 1960 to 1963.

Cadet training was sponsored by the then War Office and the Combined Cadet Force was found in public or grammar schools. The Army Cadet Force (ACF) being similar in role but a community based organisation, without a school association. Both CCF and ACF are still in existence, sponsored by the Ministry of Defence.

Turning to our school CCF, recruiting took place in the third year and was memorably announced by my then English master as “those who wish to sell their soul to the devil may meet that gentleman at the CCF hut”. Having joined the CCF, for the first year all cadets belonged to the Army Section undergoing basic training and a one week annual camp at the end of the summer term. The training syllabus was laid down by the War Office, in a publication, of which I still have a “dog eared” copy, entitled “CADET TRAINING”. This was a restricted publication, issued in 1956, and available to school cadet forces on a distribution of one copy for each officer and for 25% of the unit.

The syllabus would be familiar in basic detail to a soldier today, covering such basics as foot drill, drilling as a squad, weapon training (using the old Mark 3 and 4 Lee Enfield rifle, the Bren gun and a monstrosity called the Sten gun), map reading and military topography. At the conclusion of basic training, the cadet achieved proficiency to Certificate A, Part 1 standard, in all the subject areas. Certificate A Part 11 standard followed, which was more of the same but with the emphasis on the role of the junior non-commissioned officer.

The object of basic training was to: “Produce a cadet who can drill with a rifle, stand to attention, at ease, and easy, turn at the halt and on the move, and salute; who can slope, order, port and examine arms smartly and efficiently. To produce a cadet who is capable of teaching and practicing a squad in simple arms and foot drill in the correct sequence; who can detect and correct faults, who can give a word of command in a slow, loud and clear voice and who by his conduct and turnout shows himself a master of his squad”. Note the gender emphasis. In those far off days, there were no girl cadets!

At the end of the first year in the Army section of the CCF, it was possible to transfer to the Naval and Royal Air Force Sections. Training in the Army, Naval and Air Force Sections was what, in modern terms would be described as peculiar to the Service concerned.

The CCF rank structure mimicked that of the 3 services and cadets were appointed to ranks ranging from Cadet to Sergeant Major, with appropriate variations for the Naval and RAF Sections. Promotion was by the time honoured military principle of merit tempered by seniority and occasionally the other way round. And cadets usually attained their “first stripe” during the second or third year. Membership continued until the cadet

left school, and the senior cadets by rank and service were in the sixth form. The contingent officers were drawn from masters. In my day the contingent commander was Lieutenant Commander Hickman, an RNVR officer, who I seem to remember had World War 2 service. He was the school woodwork and metal work master. He was assisted by Mr Spraggs a physics master and by Mr Harrison (Leo) a Latin master. Both ranked as Army Second Lieutenants.

The Cadet Force had a modest military equipment schedule, all kept on site in the school cadet hut, adjacent to the bike sheds. This facility included a .22 target rifle range. Surprisingly all the weaponry, comprising some 60 or 70 full bore rifles and a smaller quantity of automatic weapons and .22 target rifles were kept on site. The weaponry was old but still effective and there were a couple of very ancient radio sets. We even had a couple of collapsible canvas boats that used to convey an assault squad across Langstone Harbour, at the annual inspection and field day. Occasionally, full bore rifle and automatic weapon training and firing took place on proper ranges under supervision by regular military instructors.

Uniform was War Office issue and comprised black leather boots, khaki battle dress trousers and blouse, shirt and tie, a set of denim trousers and a jacket, together with 1937 pattern webbing, including gaiters, which was “blancoed” khaki with polished brass buckles. Badges of rank were appropriate to arm or service and other badges worn signified marksmanship or other skills attained. The ensemble was topped off with a black beret with the school CCF badge in brass. Shoulder flashes worn on the battle dress blouse indicated the Southern Grammar School Combined Cadet Corps. Oddly enough in my day I went to school on my bike in battle dress, carrying my boots and wore uniform all day, until the CCF met after school for a couple of hours. I have a photograph taken by mum of me in full martial fig. Transfer to the Navy or RAF sections generated a change of uniform, to matelot and airman respectively.

The annual camps took place at the end of the summer term and saw the whole Army Section going by train, either to a large cadet training facility shared with other school cadet forces, or to regular military units as a single contingent. During my CCF service, I went to the Intelligence Corps Centre at, Maresfield, Tweseldown Camp near Aldershot, and Saint Martin’s Plain Camp, near Folkestone for annual camps and spent 2 additional weeks at the Royal Naval Air Station, Culdrose, in Cornwall. There was also a weekend entitled “arduous training” spent camping on the Isle of Wight. For many of us the annual camp was the first time we had been away from home. Oddly enough, I don’t remember any bullying or violent misbehaviour, although there were youthful high spirits.

The annual field day took place in the summer term and involved a parade of the whole contingent on the school playground, for inspection by a visiting dignitary, usually a Territorial Army (TA) officer. Following that, various demonstrations were laid on, including the aforementioned amphibious assault. The audience consisted of proud parents, many of whom would have served in the forces themselves. On one occasion the inspecting officer, who commanded a local TA artillery unit, laid on a static demonstration of one of his Unit’s 3.7 inch anti aircraft guns. Unfortunately whilst

manoeuvring the gun and its associated gun tractor into the school, one of the gateposts was demolished, to the great dismay of the caretaker.

As to the purpose of the CCF, then, as now, it was unashamedly a recruiting tool for the Armed Forces. In my time - and I am sure before and after - there was a steady trickle of former CCF members who joined as regular servicemen. Those applying to the officer training academies / colleges, at Sandhurst, Cranwell or Dartmouth went to the appropriate Army Navy or RAF selection board for assessment. If selected and with the necessary "A" levels they went off for 2 years of officer cadet training, leading, if successful, to appointment to a commission in the Land, Sea or Air Forces of the Crown. Others, as in my case, left school at the age of 16 and joined the ranks at 18 years old.

I hope this is of some interest, I eventually retired, as a Lieutenant Colonel, after thirty years Army service, having gone to Sandhurst as an Army entrant, after 5 years service in the ranks of the 10th Royal Hussars tank regiment. Of my immediate contemporaries, Graham White and Ian Watterson both went to Sandhurst at 18 and served for a number of years after commissioning in the Royal Engineers and Royal Military Police, respectively.

On and off over the years I have attended the annual dinner, usually with Chris Wickham and Robin Sutherland, the latter an exact contemporary and both of whom were in the CCF.

Mike Evans