

## **TIME ON OUR HANDS**

### ***In which Eastgate recalls how life unfolded in the early carefree days of Fourth Class.***

The College year of three terms commenced in the last week of January and ended two days after Graduation, which was always held on the second Tuesday in December. There was a short break for First, Second and Third Class only over Easter, plus term breaks, each of one week's duration in May and August.

Each year commenced with three weeks military training which for Fourth Class meant basic training at Point Hut and for the other classes specialised military training either at the College or at one or other of the military corps schools.

Cadets who had failed academic subjects and who had been granted posts were required to return to the College a week early to sit these supplementary examinations.

The academic year paralleled that of the sandstone universities except that rather than extended vacations, we were sent on industrial tours and military visits or engaged in military pursuits.

The college day officially began at 0600 with Reveille, which on most days was signalled in true military tradition by a bugler from the RMC Band at the bottom of the parade ground.

Many cadets were up and about well before reveille, particularly the cadet duty staff whose first responsibility it was to wake cadets in the accommodation blocks as well as those with an appointment on Defaulters' Parade at 0630.

Until 1969 when the practice was ceased as part of the post Fox Inquiry reforms, all cadets were required to stand by their doors at reveille having previously stripped the linen from their beds. This practice was not always observed to the letter, particularly by First Class whose assumed prerogative it was to remain in bed as long as possible. First Class cadets and those members of Second Class with rank were excused from attending Defaulters' Parade, the pay off being that they were awarded SOL or stoppage (stoppage of leave) for any infraction of the rules.

In addition to the myriad other tasks they were required to perform each morning, Fourth Class had the added responsibility for keeping a weather eye out for any College Duty Officer who might decide to check the barracks in the morning to catch cadets who had not bothered to rise. Upon detecting the approaching form of the Duty Officer they would then madly pound the pipes of the central heating system so that the sound reverberated throughout the entire building. This practice, known as pipes, alerted slumbering cadets that there was an officer in the blocks so that they could cease doing whatever it was that they didn't want to be discovered doing.

Canny Duty Officers would attempt to approach the blocks unobserved so that they could catch the Fourth Class lookout unawares before he was able to alert the other cadets to the intrusion. The Quartermaster, Captain Henry MacDermott, was particular adept at entering unseen and, as his own son was in First Class, usually had predetermined targets to catch abed. He collected Sunday night dinner guests in this fashion.

The other person who appeared able to roam the blocks at will and without detection was the Commandant Major General Cedric Maughan Ingram Pearson. Sandy Pearson would appear out of nowhere any time of the day or night for a “chat” which usually indicated that he had more than just a passing knowledge of the progress or problems of those cadets he had chosen to visit. Unlike some of the other visitors, Sandy Pearson was invariably a welcome visitor.

Defaulters Parade, conducted by the cadet Duty Officer and duty sergeant began at 0630 sharp. To be late attracted the immediate award of yet another extra drill. Cadets who had been bumfed put themselves “in the book.” This required the cadet to fill out a CSC Form No 5, Award of an Extra Drill which gave details of the cadet, his company and his offence and who had awarded the extra drill. This needed to be signed by one’s section corporal and by the CSM.

Forms which were considered to be untidy or improperly filled out were resubmitted and the ultimate irony was to be awarded another extra drill for some infraction of the rules of filling out a CSC Form No 5. If someone had ever bothered to retain these forms for posterity, they would make interesting reading.

The Cadet Duty Sergeant had the responsibility of consolidating the defaulters returns submitted by each of the Company Orderlies and for checking the list against those actually on parade. Once all the miscreants had been accounted for, it was the cadet Duty Officer’s turn to inspect the defaulters. As was every other aspect of our lives, so our turnout on defaulters was carefully detailed in CSC Standing Orders.

Dress was dress of the day plus field order and rifle. There was usually a detailed inspection of man, uniform and equipment. Not all cadets kept their field equipment packed in accordance with Standing Orders, inviting further retribution if discovered. Often the contents of water bottles would be emptied, requiring them to be filled yet again before the next inspection.

A favourite trick was to place an alarm clock inside the metal dixies, set to go off about half way during the defaulters’ parade. Rattling about next to the metal it made an awfully obvious racket, even muffled within the other contents of one’s bum pack. We thought this an absolutely hilarious and original piece of bastardisation until we learned from a 1920’s cadet that they had done it as well, after being given the idea by one of the original cadets.

If one actually got to consume one’s breakfast, it always seemed that one had been detained in the Mess until the absolute last minute, and the morning’s pre 0800 parade routine was far from finished. Beds were not allowed to be made until after breakfast so that one’s bedding could air, and Fourth Class were responsible for the immediate cleanliness of the barracks environment, including sweeping the floor.

As any good housewife knows, sweeping is simply a process for rearranging dust, and dust is to spit polished shoes what soup is to a tie. Lest the senior classes splendidly spit polished boots be so attacked, those actually sweeping were required to chant, in a liturgical fashion, the following refrain:

“Down cometh the dust and with it all things of a sundry and abortionate nature, including Fo-o-o-o-ourth Cla-a-a-a-ss!”

This had to be accomplished while simultaneously tidying one’s own room and passing the oils. Now oils ain’t oils, but were actually oral messages which might be announcing forthcoming events or marking the countdown to the 0800 daily parade.

Each Fourth Class was required to stand to attention, usually in the door to his room and announce at the top of his voice:

“Fourth Eleven hockey team meeting in the trophy room after Mess Parade at lunch time ”

This would be repeated by the next Fourth Class in sequence and so on until every Fourth Class cadet had his turn. Multiple repetitions did not guarantee that every senior cadet had either heard or understood the message, and further interrogation frequently followed, often to verify the veracity and to ascertain the origin of the message.

At 0745, a bugler sounded “Quarters” at the Flag station, and all Fourth Class cadets were required to shout at the top of their lungs, “Quarters” to warn the other cadets that the daily parade was but fifteen minutes away, to let Sergeant John Jones know that it really was rather time that he arose from his slumber, abluted and dressed for the day’s activities, and to wake Corporal Sheedy in the warm bath where he had retired to resume his slumbers.

At 0750 Sergeant Jones actually arose and would go into a mad panic, screaming for Fourth Class to bathe, shave and dress him, clean his room, make his bed and have him on parade by 0755. Somewhere in the process he would also consume the fried egg and bacon sandwiched between two pieces of toast which Fourth Class had been required to make for him at breakfast and carry to his room pressed between two bread and butter plates.

The rest of the Corps would begin gathering on the upper terrace from 0750, and at 0755 sharp, the RSM would command, “Bugler, Sound off!” and the parade would begin.

After the Corps had marched on in Company or Class groups, we would be right dressed along the inspection line in time for the national flag to be broken at the top of the main mast of the flag station at exactly 0800. This was a formal moment, with the Corps stood to attention and the main players facing the flag and saluting as the lanyard was yanked by the cadet orderly sergeant and the ensign broke free. Usually.

The RSM had a low tolerance for pranks involving the flag. First thing each morning it was folded, rolled and tied in a special way within its own cords, which were held in place by a match. The Orderly Sergeant would not then let it out of his sight until he had it safely and securely in position at the top of the flag pole. He would then secure the halyards in preparation for the 0800 unfurling.

Wicked souls sometimes arranged for the match, which was supposed to break under little pressure, to be replaced with some hardier material, such as a nail. Anxious cadets, careful that the flag might of itself break prematurely might choose to use something of a hardier nature, occasionally to their embarrassment and ultimate regret.

The worst case scenario in this situation was that not only would the flag not open, stubbornly resisting ever increasing pressure and frantic tugging from below, but the main halyard might also break, leaving the flag tightly encased at its lofty perch. A crane was required to affect repairs and those involved, if discovered, paid a heavy price for their mischief.

Occasionally, some even more wicked cadet would secret within the folds of the flag objects which could flutter free at the moment of release, such as items of female

undergarments, or a pigeon, which would escape noisily from its bonds amidst a cascade of feathers. Every cadet during his week as duty officer breathed a sigh of relief when the flag broke free each morning, free of encumbrances and side-shows.

The rest of morning parade normally consisted of being accounted for plus some foot drill under the direction of the RSM and the BSM. There would also be a uniform inspection and, depending on whether we formed up in class or company groups, this would be carried out by the Adjutant and the RSM, or the BSM and the other Under Officers.

The BSM, SUO Grant Chasling was known by our class as “God,” and on reflection this may have had a touch of irreverence in its origins, although we certainly didn’t think that way at the time. Chasling managed to draw out the sibilants in his speech so that they assumed the menace of a King Cobra about to strike.

The sound we grew to dread were the measured tones of the BSM announcing “I will insssspect Four...” whereupon the whole of Fourth Class would draw its collective breath, “One!” whereupon all members Four One would mentally commit hari kari and Four Two would breathe a collective sigh of relief.

Mr Chasling’s technique was simple. He would march up to the Class orderly, receive the parade state, and commence inspection in the normal military manner. Looking the first cadet directly in the eyes he would announce, “Dusssst in the weltssss of your bootssss. Exssstra drill!” Proceeding directly to the next cadet, he would look down at his boots and say, “Dirty chin sssstrap. Exssstra drill.” He repeated this performance until he had inspected the whole class, bumfing every cadet and sparing only his grandson, as was the accepted custom.

Mr Chasling set high standards yet was prone to hyperbole. He was apt to regard immaculately bogged kit which would have brought a standing ovation from the Brigade of Guards with dismissive contempt. One of our class remembers an inspection by the BSM when the class was wearing his PT kit. He had spit polished his sandshoes in anticipation. His assiduous preparations had been in vain, for God pronounced that his ssssandssshoesssss were filthy. Exssstra Drill!

The accepted response to being bumfed was to shout “Sir!” as loudly as one could and with as much enthusiasm as one could muster under the circumstances. Resignation rather than gratitude was the appropriate emotion, as one cadet discovered to his cost. George Jason-Smith’s attitudes towards discipline had been fashioned under the tutelage of the Christian Brothers in New Zealand. Upon being bumfed for the first time by the BSM, Jason-Smith responded enthusiastically, “Thank you, Sir!” for the Brothers warmly embraced the concept that the gift and receipt of punishment brought pleasure to all concerned. But it made no impression at all on Chasling’s icy heart and he simply returned in kind. “Don’t mention it, Jassson-Ssssmith. Take another one!”

In my case, staring straight ahead made it difficult to look Chasling in the eye, and he would stand in front of me waiting for the moment until I could stare straight ahead no longer and flicking my eyes upwards so that there was a fleeting contact, he would pounce. “Dusssst in your weltsssss, Sssstaff Cadet Easssstgate! Exssstra Drill!” Never failed.

There were eight 40-minute instructional periods in a day, Monday to Friday.

There were also two military instructional periods on Saturday prior to barracks administration and sport.

The first period each week day commenced at 0820 after the morning parade. This ritual was part administrative and part instructional, when we would be accounted for (and occasionally not) and our dress and bearing would be inspected. We would practice various foot drill routines under the direction of the RSM and the drill sergeants. In the lead up to the three main parades of the year, ANZAC Day, Queens Birthday and Grad, 0800 Parade was also used for rehearsal, as were the Saturday morning periods.

The RMC band was an integral part of these parades under the direction of the Bandmaster Captain Jack Silk and the Drum Major WO2 Sheedy, who was no relation to my section commander of the same name, though his daughter married a previous graduate who would return to instruct us in the finer points of field artillery in first class. The band tootled and fluted while Corporal Willey the base drummer did bang and we marched to and fro and drilled.

Captain Silk's music selection was often as not a political statement designed to draw comment from the RSM.

The band had not long before been upgraded to a military band from a brass band, which essentially meant the addition of a woodwind section. This greatly increased the style of music they could play and on one particular morning as the Corps marched on, the band struck up "[\*The Saint Louis Blues\*](#)," a popular southern jazz standard.

**Bold!**

Indeed almost too bold for the RSM who protested volubly to the bandmaster.

Silk, one. Goldspink, nil.

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