

## LIFEBOATS AND LEAPS

### *Eastgate leaps about in refelection.*

OF all the trials in a Fourth Class cadet's day, perhaps the most difficult was evening ablutions. There was one bathroom complex per floor, with the toilet stalls and urinals on one side, and about five or six shower cubicles serving about fifty cadets on the other, the two functions separated by a wall. There was also one bath tub per floor. A row of hand basins and mirrors lined the wall opposite the shower stalls. The bathroom floors were tiled with one inch square ceramic tiles which were not always laid such that a uniformly smooth surface resulted.

There was no escaping the daily evening bathing ritual. Any attempt at an early shower would be thwarted by the dreaded cry for Fourth Class to gather in the showers, towel and soap in hand. "Visiting" Fourth Class from other blocks unfortunate enough to be in the vicinity when bathroom sessions began would often be invited to join in.

Indeed, some senior class cadets were magnanimous enough to extend invitations in advance to Fourth Class cadets to attend from afar. Cosgrove and McDermott particularly, in their far flung and remote empire of Kokoda Company would invite cadets from Alamein , Kapyong and Gallipoli to make the long journey over to experience the magnificent facilities in Anzac Hall before making the weary trudge home. How churlish it would have been to decline the invitation, even if one had discovered an appropriate excuse to do so.

A variety of games for the entertainment of Second Class would invariably ensue. The most common of these was slides, or bum slides. Fourth Class would be required to apply a generous coating of soap to the tiled floor, then slide individually or collectively along the resulting slippery surface. The particular trial in this activity was the occasional protruding sharp edge of the floor tiles which were conveniently placed to snag a bare bum which came into contact with the leading edge of one of these protuberances.

These games were a communal affair, with all available Second Class cadets enthusiastically supervising the occasion. Indeed, such was the strain occasionally placed on the modest resources that it was difficult to find a vacant cubicle. Necessity is the mother of invention and Second Class invention knew no bounds. To ease the strain, Fourth Class would be invited to take a birdie bath so that none went without his daily ablutions.

To take a bird bath, one used one of the hand basins whose main purpose otherwise was for shaving and for cleaning one's Dunlop Volley sandshoes. Placing one's abused bum into the hand basin one then washed in the manner of sparrows frolicking in a comparatively larger, purpose built bird bath. Invariably it was cold water into which one was required to plunge one's bum, which had a bracing, though not necessarily refreshing effect on one's nether regions and dangly bits. Neither was it an efficient way of getting clean.

Of particular annoyance were leaps. This activity required Fourth Class to "bog away" to their rooms and come back dressed in various combinations of uniforms, which would then be worn under the shower, usually cold, before being dumped in a

collective pile in the corner of the bathroom in advance of "bogging away" to don some other weird combination of items which would be similarly soaked. The process would then continue.

For variation we would be required to run a slalom of alternately hot and cold shower cubicles before divesting ourselves of one set of clothing and bogging away for another change. The Second Class minds, which none of us remember either for their originality, generosity or compassion would invent such combinations as "jock strap, poop and helmet outers" or "sandshoes, poly trousers and T-shirt" and we would bog away to return dressed exactly as directed.

These were early days and there were still some cadets who were coming to grips with military terminology. Sometimes the actual intent of the direction was lost in the translation, as Staff Cadet Grubb discovered to his cost when he returned wearing a copy of The Bulletin on his head rather than the rifle magazine he had been sent to collect.

The penalty for being the last back, or for taking longer than Second Class thought necessary or for getting the combination of clothing items wrong was inevitably push ups. Often we spent so long in the showers that when we were finally released to attend the evening parade, the skin on our hands would have assumed the texture of an albino prune.

The cruellest version of leaps took place the evening before "BC Day," the one day per week designated for a formal room inspection by the Commanding Officer of the Corps of Staff Cadets or his delegate. The added burden of having to dry and iron vast quantities of wet uniforms which were then required to be folded just so in accordance with College regulations and back in their place in "piles" in time for the following day's inspection was often heart breaking.

A particular refinement of leaps was either "wet twos" or "wet ones." Fourth Class would be standing in the showers, wet, in some peculiar combinations of uniforms two minutes before the evening mess parade. This meant that they had two minutes to remove the wet items, dry themselves, dress in evening dress and travel the hundred meters or so to the Cadet Mess in time for the evening meal parade. To be late would incur the penalty of an extra drill.

I had a particularly annoying experience. Some wit exchanged my dress blues trousers with those of Mick Lohmeier who, at 6'6" was nearly a foot taller than I. The buffoon had added the particular refinement of tying the trouser legs in knots so that I was hopelessly late when I finally arrived at the parade. A few seconds would normally invite a simple reprimand from one of the senior class cadets, but I was invited to join the BSM upon his lofty perch on the porch at the entrance of the Cadets' Mess.

I was obviously not wearing my own trousers, although at that stage I did not know to whom they belonged. I stood there with acres of blue serge and red stripe flounced around my ankles, bravely attempting to hold the waist band of the trousers in place.

When Mick Lohmeier's elongated frame emerged around the corner even later than I the mystery was solved. He had been unable to fasten my trousers around his waist, and the cuffs were well up his calves. He was an even more pathetic sight than I. I do not remember the BSM, SUO Chasling for a generosity of spirit in such matters and I seem to remember both of us receiving an extra drill for our tardiness. Neither did he allow us the dignity of being able to retire to restore our personal comforts before proceeding to dinner.

But the cruellest diversion was one which was saved for the winter months and which was a particular favourite of my "grandfather" Bob Pothof. This was the infamous Life Boat Drill. Dress for lifeboat drill was usually something like jock strap, "poop," helmet outer and perhaps sandshoes. One's entrenching tool was an essential item as we shall see. We would be commanded to "bog away" and come back "appropriately" dressed, then lifeboat drill would commence.

After the inevitable shower and a brief practice of lifeboat drill on the cold tile floor of the bathrooms, we would be commanded to "bog away" yet again and warn everyone that HMAS Alamein was sinking, and to prepare to abandon ship. This task completed we would return to "the bridge" for further orders. These normally consisted of a command to secure all watertight doors (the fire doors which were located in the middle of each floor of H Block) and to assemble at our "lifeboat stations." These were conveniently located in the external courtyard underneath the bathroom windows.

Once at our "lifeboat stations" we would take our places in our imaginary lifeboats, unsheathe our entrenching tools, "lower the boats" and prepare to row. Once the "boats" were "in the water," a cascade of freezing cold water would descend from above courtesy of bish tin and fire hose, and we would "paddle" away from the "sinking vessel" using our unfolded entrenching tools as oars. The "crews" of the "lifeboats" were of course required to row in perfect unison.

On a cold dark Canberra winter's night, as the perpetrators of this heartless torture languished in a warm shower above while we victims endured the climatic privations below, it was rarely a lot of fun. To this day, I have a lot of empathy with the passengers of the Titanic.

I had been warned before I arrived at Duntroon of such alleged practices as having to warm the toilet seats for senior class cadets. I never personally experienced such an indignity, though there were classmates who claimed that they did. I certainly poured a number of hot baths for the terminally soporific Sergeants John Jones and Mick Carr, and also for the lovelorn Sheedy.

This would either be in the morning when, reluctantly roused from their beds to escape the ire of a prowling Duty Officer, they would retire to the bath to resume their disturbed beauty sleep. In the case of Jones and Carr, they would often collapse into a hot soak after a particularly bruising game of Rugby prior to whatever social pursuits they had planned for the rest of the evening.

But it wasn't just First Class who caused me a trial in the bathroom. My classmate Joff Johnson occupied the room next to mine on the other side of the fire door. He was a reluctant early morning riser, and we (I) had considerable difficulty in waking and rousing him in time for defaulters parade, which commenced 0630 sharp every weekday morning. Fourth Class constituted the majority of attendees on the daily defaulters parade. Johnson was no exception, in fact, at one stage he was so in debt to the early morning grind that the CO declared an amnesty and wiped his slate clean.

My routine was this. Wake at 0600, then wake Johnson. Quietly prepare as much of room as possible in advance of going on defaulters. (Do not make bed. This must be done after breakfast. Bed must be stripped.) Wake Johnson before showering and shaving. Sometimes wake Johnson again after showering and shaving so that he can do mad dash to be on defaulters' parade in time.

Johnson remained in an ill humour until morning TOC on the best of days. Aroused early for Defaulters Parade he could remain in ill humour often until lunchtime. He was a person you normally avoided until at least morning TOC (tea or coffee) on most days. After several months, and in the depths of a Canberra winter, I had had enough.

One particular morning I roused Johnson for the second time on my way to the shower. It growled in response. On a "good" morning by his standards he would be entering the shower as I was leaving. His routine was to run the shower until it was at an acceptable temperature (no easy feat in the depths of winter) then dash next door to relieve himself prior to dashing back to a hot shower.

The Devil made me do what I did that morning. I had finished my shower and had dried myself and was about to leave as Johnson arrived. He snapped a menacing Johnsonian equivalent of a "Good Morning" before selecting a vacant shower stall. He turned on the taps, adjusting them with a practised hand to a comfortable level before dashing to the toilets.

I reached in and turned off the hot water tap and quickly decamped to my room. I locked the door. A roar of rage erupted in the shower as Johnson absorbed the full effect of a freezing cold shower when his barely awake body had been expecting soothingly hot water.

He followed me down the corridor with revenge in his heart, roaring as he went. Naked, dripping wet, rifle and bayonet in hand, he stood before my locked and barred door, promising fearful harm to my person. So loud was the noise that it woke Sergeant Jones. Disturbed well before his normal hour of rising, he gave us both another extra drill.

It was worth it.