

OUR return to the College marked the end of the summer military training period and the start of the academic year.

First Class had commenced the period of intensive military studies which preceded their graduation. Third Class had spent the preceding weeks studying military engineering at the Army's School of Military Engineering at Casula in Sydney's west, and by the banks of the Molonglo River near the College. Second Class had been to Puckapunyal for their armoured training and were being inducted into the mysteries of indirect fire support.

As we were the first class to undertake academic studies at degree level, we were admitted as the first undergraduates of the Faculty of Military Studies of the University of New South Wales. There was some resentment on the part of the cadets above us whose academic studies had been no less rigorous but which would attract lesser recognition.

The new faculty pursued the three main academic disciplines which had been in place for some time; arts, science and engineering. Each discipline placed different pressures on the cadets in its student body so that our lives, which had enjoyed a common purpose for the past month, now headed in several directions.

Third Class, now freed for the first time from the shackles of Fourth Class training, were able to enjoy a number of privileges denied to them in their first year, the most notable of which was the opportunity to use the billiard tables in each of the Company recreation rooms, and to watch television in the Company television rooms. Many promising careers would founder on an ill disciplined preference for these distractions at the expense of academic studies.

Those cadets who had chosen to study engineering spent all day in academic instruction, save for those common periods of military instruction and sport. Those who had chosen to study the Arts divided their time between formal instruction, tutorials and private research and study. The scientists were somewhere in between, with much of their research and study time being required to be spent under the tutelage of the master alchemists in the laboratory, or writing their reports

To ensure that we received a rounded education, the artists were required to complete a unit of science, and the engineers and scientists a unit of English. Physics and Chemistry held few mysteries for those of us who had undertaken such study for matriculation, but proved a revelation for some. Although each of us had been required to matriculate in English for selection to the College, the engineers and scientists pleaded that they were too busy to read books, and sought our assistance. In return they did our sums.

The engineers believed that we artists spent all day lounging about doing nothing, which was far from the truth. Apart from scheduled contact periods, we spent a lot of time avoiding those Second Class cadets whose academic schedule allowed them to spend time in the blocks, where they could divert themselves with a spot of bastardisation of those Fourth Class cadets who were also in the blocks.

The artists in Fourth Class were required to study History plus two elective subjects in addition to the compulsory science unit. I chose English and Geography, subjects with which I had some familiarity and which I hoped would not be too academically taxing given the other pressures we faced. My plan was to drop Geography in Third Class, switching to Economics.

The Academic staff, whom we called accas, generally took a more relaxed approach to instruction than their military counterparts. We observed military protocol at the start and finish of each lecture, when the Class orderly would call the class to attention and give the class state. Some of the accas, particularly those with some military experience, responded appropriately to these minor formalities while some, I think, found them mildly embarrassing.

Such was our emotional state and our constant state of exhaustion that the reaction of some cadets to a droning presentation, was to fall asleep. This was not always appreciated by the lecturers and some were familiar enough with the College's discipline system to award the perpetrators yet another extra drill, without being fully aware that they were simply compounding the problem.

Some had only a passing understanding, which didn't stop them delivering such twee interpretations of the College's argot as, "Give yourself a drill, Staff Cadet Dower!" which, for all the potential grief it caused Dower, gave the rest of us a brief and unaccustomed moment of levity.

Others were more sympathetic. Our Physics lecturer was the late Professor Swan, whose service at the College pre-dated World War 2. He was prone himself to lose the track of his own lectures and it was not unheard of for him to fall asleep at the blackboard. He would jolt back to consciousness, track back to find where he had been before continuing. During one such episode, the incorrigible Dower surreptitiously snuck out the back of the tiered lecture room with Prof Swan totally unaware that his class now numbered one less.

On yet another occasion it was Boris Baker who succumbed rather than the Professor himself. He fell soundly asleep on his folded arms on his desk, failing to stir even when the lecture ended and we began packing our identical College issue briefcases in preparation for leaving the theatre.

Swanny was aware that Baker was asleep, for he was also taking the next lecture, which was for members of Second Class. They took the opportunity for a spot of bastardisation as we left the theatre, but in a rare moment of Second Class - Fourth Class co-operation, we prevailed upon them to let sleeping dogs lie, so to speak, as they took their places for the next lecture.

We were not there, but we were told what happened. Boris awoke, with Swanny still lecturing as he seemed to have been when Boris nodded off. He glanced around the class. Rather than the more familiar members of his own class, he was now surrounded by ...SECOND CLASS! Sitting bolt upright, he hurriedly packed his briefcase before excusing himself and rapidly decamping to the snarls of the Second Class pack.

Although they no doubt enjoyed what occurred, and were willing if not enthusiastic participants in the deception, Second Class afterwards hammered us unmercifully for leaving our classmate in the lurch. We wouldn't have missed it for quids.

The accas had more than their fair share of characters. One ancient mathematician, a bachelor, lived in the back of a kombi van and spent much of his spare time searching for the misplaced manuscript in which he had allegedly disproved Einstein's theory of relativity. Another bachelor who lived in the Officers' Mess was the subject of much rumour and speculation as to his sexual orientation and yet another used his College associations to suggest high military rank when he moved in other circles.