



Queen Mary's Grammar School
Headmaster: R J Langton, M A

CFAV Alumni CCF instructor's journey

Aim

For CCF cadets to learn more about their CCF officers and what they (the Alumni) enjoyed and loved about being a cadet when they were at QMGS.

Rob Smith, Flying Officer, RAF section, QMGS 1995 - 2002

Number of years service in CCF

As a cadet school career Y9 – 6.2
As a CFAV Late 2014 to date

Rank

F/Sgt as a cadet
Fg Off as an Adult after some time as CI

Experience

Lots of shooting or various weapon systems
Taking one cadet for an experience flight in a hawk at RAF Valley which he loved
Lots of helping lead leadership and instructional training the cadets
Planning training for the RAF section
Many great walks in Wales
Lots of 'inside the wire' visits on RAF stations and Army Camps

Places gone with the CCF

RAF Valley to see the Hawks (e.g. the same aircraft as the Red Arrows)
RAF Benson (home of initial chopper training on Pumas and Chinooks)
RAF Honington (home of the RAF Regiment who secure Aircraft abroad)
Various Army Training areas: Swynnerton, Nescliff, Leek, Longmoor
Various Outward Bound activities through Snowdonia



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Fondest moment

Shooting the L98 (the Army's general purpose rifle) on a range at RAF Valley while the sun was shining and hawks (Red Arrows' aircraft) were taking off an landing a few hundred metres away all day. Bliss!

Why should you be a Cadet Force Adult Volunteer (CFAV)?

The simple answer is that you should be a CFAV if you want to help the students develop their skillset in terms of leadership, teamwork, communication and general self-discipline. All the other stuff like shooting, closeness to the RAF, great walks, etc is all very secondary if you don't get fulfilment from watching the students develop and be even better society members.

Kodi Beveridge-Smith, Sergeant Instructor, Army section, QMGS 2011 – 2018

As a quick introduction to me, I was senior cadet (RSM) in my final year at school and it was the final act in my five-year cadet career. I can say with absolute certainty that the skills learned in this role have made me stand out as I left for university in terms of my ability to overcome problems and a determined resilience that almost guarantees success. These sorts of traits are learned quickly in the cadets as you are faced on a weekly basis with new problems such as finding new ways to deliver lessons to cadets or arriving on a field day only to discover your kit has been left at school! Also, the people skills you learn working with a wide variety of people cannot be overestimated and is something I think you truly begin to appreciate after you leave the Marian environment where you work with people you have never met before.

In fact, it isn't until you leave the site at QM that you truly realise how lucky you are to have the CCF available to you. For me, two distinct instances of this come to mind. The first is when I was retelling some of my experiences to some new friends at university, and after struggling to convey the story I was trying to tell due to my inability to hold back laughter, they immediately replied "where do I sign up?". Quickly remembering that not every school had a cadet programme, it was hard for me to not feel slightly sorry for my



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new friends. This was because no other institution comes close to forging close bonds between school peers, forging powerful memories that still make you laugh uncontrollably years later and forging very determined personalities.

The other instance occurred when I was still in the cadets and I went on the Canadian exchange in the summer of 2017. It goes without saying this was the highlight of my career. Six weeks in the absolutely stunning Rocky Mountains, (mostly) all expenses paid, and each week brought with it a new skill to be learned. In this order I tackled: alpine climbing, mountain biking, white water canoeing, horse riding, hiking and finally rock climbing. The stories are endless, and I think friends and family are slightly fed up of hearing them now; well they would be if they didn't see the huge smile retelling each of them puts on my face. If I was going to limit myself to one story it would probably be the watermanship week. We had to complete a white-water swimming test which certainly made me begin to question why I was there. Still, plunging into the rapids I felt a strange sense of achievement until that was, no matter how hard I kicked my legs I couldn't get myself back to the bank. Blind panic took over until I was dragged back to the shore. It was now when I considered just turning in for this cycle. However, I firmly believe that it was only the determination and sense of adventure I learned with the cadets that forced me to give the test another go and this small victory led into my greatest sense of personal triumph in finishing the week. It certainly taught me I could do what I wanted to in life. Canada also introduced me to a passion I have carried with me into university life: mountaineering. Oxford University Mountaineering Society has become a second home for me at university.

This determination still goes further. Before joining the cadets, it would be fair to say I had some confidence issues in terms of controlling my nerves in new situations. Many people would be on the verge of fetching a first aider when they saw how much my body could shiver in a test or in any pressurised situation. What the cadets taught me, and in particular my year 11 SCIC course on Leek training area (where I learned how to be a senior cadet), was that clearly, I needed to believe in myself more. It was the more everyday experiences such as these courses and organising some field days as RSM that gave me the confidence to apply to somewhere like Oxford. I like to think every outcrop of difficult terrain on Leek training area, every thorn in my body as I lay camouflaged in a bush and every warm laugh with a friend as we sat in the pouring rain and howling wind took a very nervous boy and transformed him into something more. I just wouldn't have been able to afford these opportunities were it not for the cadets and if you're not a cadet how can you visit RAF Brize Norton, fly (very briefly) a Tutor aircraft, ride a Hercules plain or shoot on a 300m range.



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One final story. Otherwise, this piece could be thousands of words long. Whilst Canada may have been the most profound experience in my cadet career, my fondest experience was on Sennybridge training area on Infantry Battle Camp. Again, it was a learning experience for the week as we operated on a tactical level many of us had never experienced. That certainly made it exciting. Clearing buildings with mock explosives, stopping and searching vehicles, controlling riot situations and doing two platoon attacks in one day certainly taught us all a lot about what it means to be a soldier and be both tired and exhilarated at the same time. However, somewhat predictably I felt my nerve issues coming back during this week and they threatened to put a negative slant on proceedings. However, this was when my fondest moment occurred as a boy from another cadet unit jumped into his sleeping bag one night and pretended to be a worm. It doesn't seem as funny putting pen to paper but I can assure you to the room of us cadets it was harmless and hilarious and reminded me that above all else I was here to enjoy myself; not be nervous about failure. There was also a caricature of a sergeant present whose quick thinking comments such as "woah there scary Mary" as he bumped into you in the dark of a harbour area and "don't come running to me when you've broken your legs" reminded me of the unique brand of person you can only experience if you are in the military.

This is why I came back as a CFAV. I missed the lifestyle to be sure and didn't want to leave QM behind without giving as much as I could back. However, more than anything else I missed the people and the unique feeling you get when you're surrounded by like-minded people in unique situations and you always find ways to have the best time possible. You can get this joining the UOTC, or another society at university where you feel you belong, but for me there is just something about instructing in the cadets and instructing in a military scenario that allows me to express myself and also learn a lot about myself and learn transferable skills if I do decide the army is the career for me.

To be clear, as an organisation the cadets reminds me of my priorities. That is what I remember joining for, what I remember learning at the time and why I came back.