

Rear-Admiral (Ret'd) William A. Hughes, RCNC 174 1944-46

Rear-Admiral (Ret'd) Hughes attended Royal Roads from 1944-46 when it was the Royal Canadian Naval College, graduating as a midshipman. He finished his naval career in 1982 as Commander Maritime Command Pacific Region.



Remembering Royal Roads 1944-1946

The Beginning

In the early summer of 1944 WW2 still raged around the world. Two Sea Cadets, both Chief Petty Officers, from the Kingston Ontario Sea Cadet Corps, RCCS St. Lawrence, applied for entry to The Royal Canadian Naval College, HMCS Royal Roads. They were myself and Mike Martin (both future Rear Admirals).

The requirement for an applicant was Ontario Grade 12 and it was necessary to go through three hoops to be considered. There was a medical exam (conducted at the nearest Naval Reserve Division), a series of written exams (based on Ontario grade 12), and finally an interview board comprising three Naval Officers (they all looked like God to me). Instructor Commander Ogle was the president of the board I remember. I heard later that about 500 young men applied in 1944 and 61 were accepted.

Then came the anxious waiting to see what kind of letter you would receive from the Naval Board in Ottawa. Finally a letter dated 7th August 1944 informed me that I had been "successful in gaining admission to the Royal Canadian Naval College" and should make arrangements to report on the 30th August 1944.

In 1944 you had to pay to go to Royal Roads so the joining instructions letter included the following: "Parents are reminded that fees in respect of the first year are \$550" and it went on to say that "a cheque for not less than \$50 should be forwarded for your son's deposit account to meet incidental expenses such as pocket money, tooth past, hair cutting etc." (Pocket money was 50 cents paid weekly at pay parade... "Hughes, William, RCNC 0174".... "SIR"). The letter went on, "The annual subscription of \$20, payable to the RCN College Recreational Club should also be paid on or before the day of entrance".

Our Sea Cadet Corps was sponsored by the Kingston Rotary Club and they awarded Mike Martin and myself a \$500 scholarship to the college. My grandmother paid from there on.

With only a few days to make transportation arrangements and buy the clothing required by the college, things were hectic. Travel was by train in 1944 which meant three days and four nights on a train from Ottawa to Vancouver and then by CPR Ferry from the inner harbor at Vancouver to the inner harbor at Victoria. It was fun to meet other Naval Cadet hopefuls on the train, easily identified as being the only young men not in uniform.

The CPR Ferry was met in Victoria by a truck (big) for baggage, a truck (much bigger) for cadets and some intimidating persons in naval uniform. We began the first of many truck trips to the college. Buses were only available for important persons.

The Arrival

Upon arrival at the college we were met by cadet captains and our term lieutenant. The cadet captains had returned early as the rest of the senior term was not due for two more days. We were given our band and locker assignments so we could get all the items from our bags stowed away. There were four dormitories on the top deck (not floor!), each having room for 25-30 cadets, two dorms for seniors and two for juniors. Cadet captains had the luxury of small cabins. We were taught how to make beds naval style with proper hospital corners. The pusser (government issue) bed spreads had to be tight as a drum when the bed was made. To test this, an inspecting officer dropped a coin onto the bed and if the coin did not spring into the air the bed clothes were ripped off and the bed had to be made again.

We were paraded and spoken to by various imposing persons in uniform. We were given a tour of the college and briefed on the go, no-go areas. We were measured for our uniforms (grayish flannels and navy blue blazers for casual wear and navy blue uniforms for formal occasions.) We also obtained sports gear and of course black shoes. (Cadet Dunbar took size 15 and had to have a special purchase!) We were issued boiler suits for engineering practical work, various rain gear for the Victoria climate which we had heard about.

The parade ground work and the discipline did not faze most of us as over 20 cadets had come from private schools and others had sea cadet training. However it was too much for one cadet who left after two days.

On 1st September our senior term returned to the college and we realized how lowly we were. Rumours of an initiation day began to circulate. The gruesome details of this ceremony can be found in the Log for 1945 and 1946.

We were briefed on the weekly pay day procedure when we would parade before the paymaster and get our 50 cents for the week. We were also briefed on the punishments available to those who offended. There were two regular navy punishments called #12 and #16. Each involved extra musters, wearing of khaki web belt and gaiters and an hour or two on the parade ground with a 10 pound Lee-Enfield rifle jogging around with the rifle overhead or doing "bunny-hopping" in the crouch position and the rifle behind the knees. The Chief Gunnery instructor had no mercy!

The final punishment was called "slack party" and it could be awarded by cadet captains for minor infractions such as sloppy dress, unpolished shoes, dust on a locker, and other such dreadful transgressions.

One or two cadets began making up nicknames for nearly all their classmates such as Sails, Zoot, Pusser Jack, Dudley, Blister, Gramps, Dunderflump, Mousey, Juicer, Trasher, Moose, Pudge, Gums, Duke, Buzz, Chesty, Wedge and others.

Daily Routines

The week day began at 0630 with the public address sounding 'wakey wakey' on the bosun's pipe. The call was made by the duty quartermaster (a WRCN) from the QM's lobby at the front entrance to the Grant Block. The call was followed by her lovely voice saying "Wakey Wakey" and sometimes she added

a brief comment. We used to tease her on occasion until she became engaged to our Term Lieutenant, then it was "Yes MA'M".

At 0645 we alternated days between physical training and signals (morse code by light or buzzer and semaphore and some rudimentary radio work). The PT usually meant running (not jogging) up the driveway to the old entrance gatehouse (no married quarters in those days), out the road to the island highway/Sooke Road, along the highway and then in the back way (now the main entrance) and down to the Grant Block. There we had a shower in the locker room but ONLY for two minutes to save water.

Breakfast was at 0730 followed by Divisions, hoisting of colours (the White Ensign) and Prayers. The cadet body was divided into Divisions, each one named after a famous British seafarer such as Frobisher, Drake, Nelson, Hawkins and Rodney. I was in Drake Division.

Then to studies. These included Maths, Mechanics, Physics, Chemistry, English, French and History as general subjects as well as the professional subjects which were Engineering, Pilotage and Navigation, Seamanship, Signals, Gunnery and Torpedo. All the professors had been given commissions in the RCNVR but all the instructors were RCN, officers or men.

I noticed that on passing out in 1946 I received a First Class in all professional subjects and Math, Second Class in most of the general subjects but only a pass in Chemistry and French (I could not distinguish the two!!)

There was a one hour lunch break at 1200. Grace was said at all meals: "For these and all His mercies, Thank God". One member of staff usually shortened this to "Thank God".

After the afternoon classes finished about 1600 it was time for sports. Depending on the season it was rigger, basketball, cross country, soccer, boxing, swimming, boat pulling, shooting, sailing, softball, badminton and track and field. Then of course there was lots of gymnastics (high box, low box, rope climbing etc). Each Division had to produce a team for the team sports and points were awarded toward the final trophy.

The college also fielded rigger teams in various local sports associations. In those days rigger (rugby) was THE big sport around Victoria and was well covered by the local press.

In all sports the officers of the college watched to see how each cadet behaved. Aggressive? Timid? Fair? Unsportsmanlike? and so forth. They were watching us for "Officer Like Qualities" of OLQ's to see if we had "The Right Stuff". The sports were so rigorous that at one time 13 cadets were wearing casts.

After sports and dinner, all who survived went to compulsory studies and finally to stand by beds and lights out at 2130. The Term Lieutenant did stand by beds inspection.

No one had trouble sleeping!

On the weekends we were granted leave from 1400 to 2100. We were taken by truck to the Hudson Bay building and dropped off and then picked up at the same spot. The local girls would drop us and then go off to a party with their civilian boy friends!

Sports was the big thing on Saturday afternoon. Rugby games against local teams who out weighed us but we were in better condition so we won our fair share of games.

Sunday routine was always Divisions and Prayers (“Fall out the Roman Catholics”) before leave at 1400.

Sea Time

Some of the highpoints during our time at Royal Roads occurred when we went to sea in a variety of vessels. The first time was just a day trip aboard HMCS Gatineau, an old ex-RN destroyer, transferred to the RCN in 1943. With the RN she was at Dunkirk and with the RCN at D-Day. Her CO was A/LCDR PD Budge who rose from boy seaman to Rear Admiral. He liked to tease cadets. One of his teasers was to ask a cadet if a potato floated. If the answer was yes he put it in a bucket of fresh water and it sank, Cadet loses...climb the mast. If the answer was no, he put it in a bucket of salt water and it floated, Cadet loses...climb the mast.

Another trip to sea was aboard HMCS Malaspina, an ex-fisheries patrol vessel built in 1912 (sister ship to HMCS Galiano that foundered with all hands in 1918). Malaspina was not built for comfort, with 55 plus cadets on board and only one head, timing was everything. Her captain was nicknamed “Overland” as he had run her aground a few times. At the end of our short cruise we had to Coal Ship as she was a coal burner. That qualifies as a dirty story!

A third ship that we spent time aboard was HMCS Nanaimo K101. She was a short fo’c’s’le Corvette built in 1941 and a veteran of the Battle of the Atlantic. We sailed aboard Nanaimo and proceeded up the inner coast to Quadra Island at a place called Drew Harbour. Here we established a camp ashore. Half the cadets lived ashore doing boatwork, PT, fishing and basic survival and the other half cruised aboard Nanaimo. Then we switched places.

Our cruise of all cruises took place in April 1946 aboard HMCS Crescent built for the RN in 1944 but transferred to the RCN. All 52 cadets were squeezed into the after mess deck and once again we slung our hammocks. There were 18 inches per hammock on the bars to which we attached our hammock and one small foot locker about the size of a bucket. No cafeteria in those days, all meals were at tables in the mess deck and the food was brought along from the galley – sometimes it arrived still hot!

Our first port of call was Ocean Falls, a lumber town which can be seen any day at low tide. The local kids put us to shame with their prowess in the swimming pool. Punctured egos!

The next place we visited was Naden Harbour, a desolate place in the north of the Queen Charlottes. Joe Smith (Pseudonym?) was the single inhabitant, and was the caretaker of an abandoned fish plant. There was a shallow entrance with only a few feet under the keel.

Then to Stewart and Prince Rupert. Here we coped with its terrific tides by moving the gangway up and down every few hours.

Off to sea again. We stood watches in different parts of the ship. Freeze on the bridge, suffocate in the radar shack, roast in the boiler room or get shaken to the bits in the engine room. Great fun!

After a visit to Port Alberni, many miles up the Alberni “Canal”, we refueled in Esquimalt before heading for Portland, Oregon, the best and final port of our cruise. Here the people were very friendly and even dropped flowers on our decks as we passed under bridges as we left. When we returned to Royal Roads we spoke so highly of the young ladies we met in Portland that the Commander had us all report to Sick Bay for a short arm inspection! My goodness but we were flattered.

What did we learn on our sea trips? Do not be seasick to windward. Always carry a chipping hammer or paint brush in order to look busy. When you lash your hammock make it so tight it will keep you afloat when the ship sinks. Being in a ship is like being in jail with a chance of being drowned (not original). And of course lots of things like torpedo firing, pilotage, taking fixes, ship husbandry, and how to live in tight quarters and so on. We loved it.

Special Events

The wonderful VIPs which visited the college, people we would never meet ordinarily: Admiral of the Fleet, Lord Keyes, hero of the raid on Seebrugge in WWI; Admiral Percy Walker Nelles, our wartime CNS; Vice Admiral G C Jones, CNS; Lt. General Sir William Dobbie, Defender of Malta in WWII; and His Excellency The Earl of Athlone, Governor General of Canada (he signed my commission).

Exciting Events

- Watching Joe Louis box in the Victoria Arena
- Celebrating VE Day in downtown Victoria (we were actually given a holiday)
- Singing our hearts out in the castle at Xmas Carol time.
- The Xmas Balls on the Quarterdeck (local paper social page headline.... “Cadets hold gay ball at Royal Roads”) ☹ ☹ ☹
- Graduation ceremonies when all our family and friends looked on, with us wearing our Midshipman’s collar patches (white for Executive, maroon for engineers)
- Hoisting our Term Lieutenant’s small Austin car to the roof of the Grant Block.
- Arriving back at Royal Roads after taking our dates back home to Victoria at the end of the Graduation Ball. Transportation was limited so we piled 17 cadets into one car. At Royal Roads we fell in in three ranks much to the surprise of our Term Lieutenant who was waiting to meet us at 5 am (3 hours late we were!)
- Finding our beds had been apple-pied by the Captain’s daughter and friends.
- Racing 30 foot whalers in the lagoon. “Down sails, our oars and pull”. Big scramble!
- Trying to get our mascot, a donkey called Acting Captain Horatio Hornblower into a truck to get him to a rugby game.
- A pillow fight when two feather pillows broke open and we spent hours trying to corral the feathers.

What I learned at Royal Roads

Values – The value of integrity. The value of honesty. The value of frankness. The value of truth. The value of DUTY. The value of hard work. The value of good leadership.