

Monty McGregor, 5580 Class of 1958-60

Confessions of a Slacker

On September 4, 1958, I boarded an R.C.N. frigate in Vancouver harbour and set sail for Naden, the navy base at Esquimalt. I was sworn into the regular force of the R.C.A.F. with the rank of Flight Cadet while in the Strait of Juan de Fuca. It was a great beginning. From Naden we were bused to Royal Roads and herded into the quarterdeck in the Grant Block. The Commandant, Col. P.S. Cooper, gave a welcoming speech and actually referred to us as unpolished diamonds. He pointed to the array of Cadet Officers sitting behind him and facing the recruits, dressed in their No. 4's, complete with purple and red sashes and bars on their collars, altogether a very impressive looking group. The colonel said that if we attained their very high level we will have had a very successful year indeed. What he in fact had pointed to was the worst flaw of the college, giving teenage boys one year out of high school real military authority over others.



The inspecting officer is Commodore H.V.W. Gross accompanied by the second slate CWC Glen Allen. In the front rank, closest to the camera is Ian Mottershead and next is Monty McGregor.

The very first circle I got was for incorrectly doubling up the stairs in the Nixon Block, my elbows were bent and my arms were not locked against my sides. The circle system at that time had to be one of the worst in the college's history. Seven was the important number, no more than seven could be awarded in a day and up to seven could be run in a day, otherwise there was big trouble. They had to be run at the next scheduled circle parade, not later at a Junior's convenience. Circles were not easy jogs, they were run in our No. 5 uniform, including leather ankle boots, a woolen Battle Dress jacket, and in inclement weather the heavy and sweaty Burberry raincoat. The circle system's value was much more than just being a physical stressor, more importantly, it robbed Juniors of their most valuable commodity, time.

After the Spring final exams, I was given the job of manning the Cadet Office just off the quarterdeck for a day. Because the usual cadet activities were finished for the year the office was a dormant hole-in-a-wall. With nothing to do except watch a phone that never rang, I decided to check out a rumour. I took out the Circle Book, a ledger that recorded every circle run by every Junior for the entire year. Before the finals and when the day approached when the Juniors would no longer get circles, a couple of Juniors were apparently in the running to be the one who had gotten the most. I hadn't kept my circle receipts so I couldn't check it out until that office duty. I added up my and their totals. As I had guessed, I was the winner and by a wide margin. It was generally accepted that slackers got the most circles, and by that objective measure I was my class' worst slacker. Because I had one more year to go at Roads I decided it would be better not to let anyone know about my great achievement.

Sports was a big part of college life and like almost everything else it was compulsory. The annual intramural cross-country race was held in October and because I finished in the top ten I automatically became a member of the cross-country team, whether I wanted to be or not. The team trained by running during every daily sports period, and in each period for the full allotted time. By the end of the year I had moved up in the team rankings. Only a couple of Seniors were faster than me and when I started my Senior year I would be the fastest cadet in the college. Combining the miles I ran on the team with the record number of circles I ran, by the end of the year I was a very high mileage unit.

A few days before the start of the final exams I came down with a case of chills and fever. I worked hard on my studies, and to avoid the risk of missing the finals I toughed it out. After the finals I should have attended sick parade but decided not to because of Operation Northbound. It was a camping trip on a small island for cadets who passed all their exams. The marginal cadets who didn't fail badly enough to be immediately flunked out stayed behind to

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prepare for and write supplementals. I decided to take a break and go on it, it was better to be ill in the outdoors rather than being ill at Roads. Not one of my better decisions.

Accommodation was two cadets to a two-man pup-tent. I was happy with the tentmate I was assigned, and as it turned out it was a good thing he was. We were a good fit, he was a Senior who earlier in the year eliminated me in the first round of a boxing match. The first day went well, an easy time setting up the tent, etc. The second day was disastrous, a good part of the day was spent hiking at a fast pace. By the time we got back to camp, all I could do was crawl into my sleeping bag. On the third day I stayed in the bag all morning, only getting out when I had to go. All the other cadets left for wherever they went for the day with their boxed lunches. I got going at noon when it had warmed up a bit. I visited the field kitchen run by some Army guys, who after some grumbling gave me a lunch. I then went down to the little dock and became acquainted with the sailor in charge of the landing craft on standby for emergency evacuations. He took the boat out and we spent a few hours poking around shallow water. I stayed ambulatory until after supper when, by necessity, I retired to my sleeping bag. All in all, it was a great day. None of the men in camp made it their business to find out what I was doing and oddly, although by the end of day I missed three consecutive head counts, no one noticed they were short one cadet. On the fourth day my tent mate, upon returning from breakfast, asked if I'd be attending sick parade. I said no, it seemed a little too chilly out to do that. He left for a few minutes then reappeared with two cadets. He explained he didn't care whether or not I got out of the sleeping bag and went to the parade, that was entirely up to me. But if I didn't he and his friends would drag the bag, with me in it, to the parade. He was highly skilled in motivating others. I was sent back to Roads that morning and from there to the Naden hospital.



Taken near the beginning of the cross-country race between Royal Roads and the USAF Academy on Nov 29, 1959 at Royal Roads. In the middle of the leading row is John Ellis, in the middle of the second row is Monty McGreor.

At Naden I was diagnosed with a virus. For starters, my doctor ordered total bed rest, no getting up, not even to go down the hallway to the bathroom. My nurse, a stickler for rules, laid down the law. It was important to strictly follow the doctor's orders and never leave the bed, no exceptions. She also said that because she had other patients to look after as well as other duties, it would not be possible to watch me around the clock, and if I sneaked down the hallway when she or the other nurses were out of sight there wasn't much they could do about it. I was in the hospital for six weeks. On discharge my doctor warned me not to participate in any sport for a full year. I then, finally, went back to Roads, got my Air Force uniforms, back pay and travel warrants and headed to Ontario for summer training.

When I returned to Roads in September, I was told, "What do doctors know, you're on the team." I didn't know what my doctor knew but I trusted him and I was very worried about not being allowed to follow his advice. With no choice but to be on the cross-country team, I concluded the only thing I could do was to be careful and never push myself, neither while training nor in races. There was no one in charge of the team, no team captain, and because I was a Senior I was able to just pretend being part of it.

Academics was the only thing I enjoyed at the college, along with the formal dances of course. When I stepped into a classroom I stepped into the Director of Studies' world where the military didn't count. In the first year I earned good marks and in the second year, maybe because a Senior's life was very different from a Junior's, I outdid myself. Two years after leaving Roads I graduated from the Royal Military College with the Queen's Commission and an Honours BEng, and three years and some months after that I left the R.C.A.F. and began my engineering career. And no, the leadership I was subjected to at Roads had no application in civilian society. The college's authoritarian Stockholm syndrome-esque model would not have been effective in the engineering environments where I worked.