



# On Exercise with the CCF

*By Li Kieron Howe*

**T**he Queen Elizabeth's School Combined Cadet Force (CCF) was established in 1992 and its cap badge is that of its associated corps, the Royal Engineers. The current Officer Commanding (OC) is Captain Armon, who otherwise teaches science at QE, supported by myself, Lt Kieron Howe, QE's Director of Music, 2Lt Alex Cavill, Design teacher, and Mr Anderson our resident caretaker. When on exercise, we also have the support of Mr Scally, from PE, and Science teacher Mr Fisher, in addition to an ex-regular soldier Mr Conway, who is seconded to the School through our association with the Deputy Lieutenant of Barnet, Mr Martin Russell.

## Joining Up

Boys join the CCF at the beginning of Year 9. Because the CCF has become so popular, there is not enough space to take on everyone, unfortunately, and there has to be an element of measurable, physical selection.



## CCF Camp

The culmination of the CCF calendar year is annual camp, when between 50 and 70 cadets undertake a week of training somewhere in England or Wales. This year, we will be returning to Wathgill in North Yorkshire.

Military training on camp includes an over-night exercise, live firing on ranges, section attacks, and firing on a computerised range. Personal development activities include climbing, water sports and orienteering.

To prepare for camp, the contingent meets for two and a half hours every Monday evening. Senior boys teach the majority of lessons at these meetings, including drill, weapons handling, first aid, military tactics and physical training.

In addition, we run an overnight field-training exercise, where the younger boys learn how to live and look after themselves in the field. They have to set up a shelter using only a 7-ft square plastic sheet and a handful of bungees and tent pegs, cook their own food using the army's standard 24-hour ration pack, and undertake activities such as map-reading, camouflage, ambushing and firing blank ammunition, usually at a member of staff!

## On Parade

Cadets and staff represent Queen Elizabeth's School at the local borough's Armed Forces Day in June, and also at the annual Remembrance Day Parade and Service in High Barnet, where we march with the regular, reserve and retired members of the armed forces.



## Personal Development

The CCF gives senior boys the chance to stretch themselves, through teaching the younger cadets and, as they rise up through the ranks, to even devise the training plan for the entire contingent.

In the field and on camp, the chain of command is utilised to great effect. Year 9 and 10 cadets are commanded by Year 11 corporals, who in turn are overseen by Year 12 and 13 sergeants, who defer to the sergeant-major. This hierarchy enables many of the boys to experience a management role and to enhance the development of others.

The CCF is an ideal way for the boys to develop their self-reliance and personalities, in a quite different setting to their academic lives. The CCF is not about gaining qualifications. The vast majority of its activities are designed purely for the experience, to enhance personal development, and to give boys a chance to take pride in their achievements, which they thoroughly enjoy.

## Afghanistan

A small number of QE cadets have gone on to join the regular or reserve British Army. In recent years, Charles Russell passed out of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and was commissioned into the Royal Gurkha Rifles, commanding a platoon in Afghanistan. After having been injured by a suicide bomber, Charles has rehabilitated very well and is now a member of staff at Sandhurst, helping to guide and nurture the next generation of officers. Stefan Bridle, who gained a commission into the Queens Own Yeomanry, was also deployed to Afghanistan. Upon his return to the UK, Stefan became a trainee teacher at QE and helped run the CCF. He is now employed at Berkhamsted School.

## Funding

The Ministry of Defence funds much of the activity and equipment for school cadet forces. Many people outside the forces consider this to be a recruitment vehicle. However, this is hardly the case, as the recruitment rate is only in the region of a 1% return. The overwhelming rationale for the cadet force is to enhance the lives of many, giving children across the country the opportunity to enjoy activities that they would not ordinarily have access to, or the facilities to do so. This is something that the boys at Queen Elizabeth's School embrace with enthusiasm.

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