

DG Eng Bugle

A civvy at Staff College - Rodney Garrard

Of many happy years I spent in the MOD, one of the most bizarre was the year 1973 when a random chance presented itself to spend a year at the Army Staff College at Camberley. I had started my engineering career as a Student Apprentice with the Admiralty and considered myself fairly well versed in Naval matters and most of my subsequent career had been with the aircraft industry, so clearly a good time to investigate matters military.

I arrived at the Staff College at the beginning of January for registration to be greeted by the RSM and the realisation that the Army was rather different to other services which more or less dress in the same uniform. The variety of headgear in the reception hall alone was astonishing. Berets of every colour imaginable, some with feathers some without, glengarries, tams, forage caps, bush hats, pill boxes, peaked caps, and the rest of the clobber underneath, just as varied.



**The RSM
Mr Slater - Royal Welch Fusiliers (24th Foot)**

Only the RSM stood out as what to me a soldier should look like, khaki from head to toe with highly polished Sam Brown and boots. That is until he turned round to introduce me to my colonel (Glengarry bonnet, tartan trews, general staff cap badge and red staff tabs) and I saw a long black cloth hanging from his collar and realised there would be no exceptions. The RSM's regiment had apparently been left behind in some long forgotten 18th century war and missed the order to remove pigtails. On returning to Blighty the order was swiftly imposed but omitting reference to removing the now redundant antimacassar, so naturally, they are still wearing it two centuries later.

Most of the students lived in married quarters but I lived in the Staff College together with other officers who were not accompanied by their families. My neighbour was a sapper called Andy Roseveare whose constant companion was a Rhodesian Ridgeback mastiff called Sinbad. This huge hound even accompanied Andy to the dining room until one of the colonels complained on

hygiene grounds. After that Sinbad was chained to a large oak table outside the dining room on which the coffee cups and urns were lined up for after dinner. One evening a good natured Labrador called Scampi popped in with his owner. There was a mighty crash as Sinbad, outraged by the sheer effrontery of this intrusion, took off still attached to the table, taking with it all prospect of a post prandial coffee.

The first evening I wandered into the ante room in search of a much needed pre-dinner drink and met one of the Lieutenant Colonels who form the Directing Staff, a truly charming member of the 17th/21st Lancers who spoke with an aristocratic stammer. I had seen him earlier with a pile of horse equipment in the entrance hall, so we got talking about horses which led me to asking him who looked after them. Apparently the Staff College had stables (of course) and as he put it "I b-brought a ch-chap from the regiment with me, b-bloody awful soldier b-but a damn fine groom". Subsequently the colonel gained a knighthood and is still something big in polo circles.

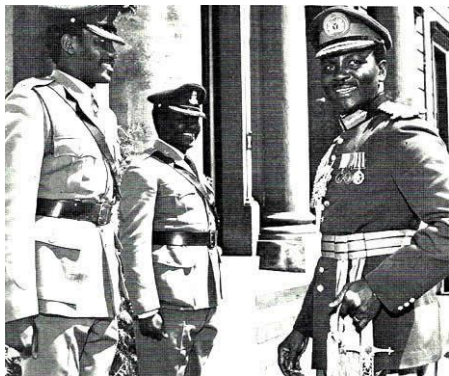
After these early encounters I started to form the thought that the Army was being run mainly for the benefit and entertainment of its members, an opinion which was swiftly revised once term began. These guys were the real deal, very bright, energetic and highly motivated. Many would later achieve fame or notoriety, luck also playing a part. For example Mike Rose who was a Coldstream Guardsman left Staff College for a tour with the SAS. As OC of the Squadron responsible for UK internal ops, it fell to him to take charge of the final stages of the Iranian Embassy siege, allegedly, with ominous orders from she who must be obeyed, that there were to be "no loose ends". A few years later, Lieutenant Colonel Rose, CO of 22 SAS would serve with distinction in the Falklands and as the campaign drew to its conclusion have the responsibility of negotiating the surrender terms. Not bad to have on your CV by mid career.

The Jones brothers, "H" and Tim were also fellow students. Tim was a lieutenant commander in the Royal Navy and "H" a major in the Devon and Dorset's. A fellow student and member of this regiment was Paddy King-Fretts. Paddy was ex SAS so when the vacancy for CO 2 Para came available, Paddy was their natural choice. He had served with the paras in the southern Arabian peninsular as well as Northern Ireland, but the vacancy coincided with that of CO for the Devon and Dorset's. In such a conflict the regiment will always win, so Paddy went to command his regiment and "H" to the Paras and the VC at Goose Green.



Lt Cdr Tim Jones RN with his brother Maj. "H" Jones of the Devon and Dorset Regt

The overseas students were also an interesting bunch. Truth is that professional warriors, even traditional enemies, often have more in common with each other than with most of their own countrymen. Nevertheless it was noticeable when the Yom Kippur war broke out mid year, the Israeli officers vanished home overnight; the Arabs did not. There was a lieutenant colonel in the Nigerian army called Joe Garba, a big man with a laugh to match his size. The military ruler of Nigeria at the time was General Gowon who paid a visit to the Staff College and Joe was detailed to be his host.



Joe Garba meeting General Gowon President of Nigeria at the Staff College,

Afterwards Joe said he had been asked to take charge of presidential security when he returned to Nigeria

About a year after I left the Staff College, I switched on the radio for the evening news to hear a familiar voice announce that "I, Joseph Garba, have assumed control of Nigeria". In fact Joe was the front man but nevertheless became the Nigerian Foreign Minister and shortly afterwards I saw his cheery face in the newspaper alongside Jim Allaghan. At a subsequent College reunion I heard that he had found time to invite some of his old mates from Camberley up to Claridges for a celebration in his hotel suite.

The hosting of visitors was a role everyone had to fill at one time or another and I wondered who they had in store for me. I was probably seen as rather left wing, an easy slot to fall into given the company, an unguarded remark in syndicate implying the British working man was not primarily motivated by patriotism, would do the trick, so it should have come as no surprise when I got the President of the National Union of Students. My visitor did not disappoint looking a bit like Karl Marx on a bad hair day. Fortunately he wore glasses otherwise his face would have been totally obscured. Nevertheless he gave a very good talk and fielded the questions confidently with good humour and certainly needed no help from me beyond the introduction



For everyday wear I was issued with khaki strads and what was then the ubiquitous "woolly pully". For outside wear combat kit and even had my own cap badge (an MoD crown). I was occasionally mistaken for a member of the Royal Army Chaplains Department.

Having put pen to paper, I am surprised how many memories and anecdotes I have of this year out some 40 years ago. My wife chiefly remembers the glittering balls which finished with breakfast in the small hours and where for once the dresses of the ladies were upstaged by those of the men. I left with a great respect for the Army and its unique regimental system which for all its quirks still seems to inspire just the right mix of eccentricity, anarchy and, when it really matters, flashes of pure genius.

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