‘The Adventure of Military Life’

A Century of the Camberwell Grammar Cadets

1888–1988

Dr David S. Bird – School Historian
By the same author:

J.A. Lyons, the 'Tame Tasmanian'. Appeasement and Rearmament in Australia, 1932–39.

Nazi Dreamtime. Australian Enthusiasts for Hitler's Germany.

"Make War Breed Peace": the first half-century of the Camberwell Grammar Cadets, 1888–1939.


‘THE ADVENTURE OF MILITARY LIFE’
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Some would argue that there is an inherent tension in a school such as Camberwell Grammar hosting a cadet unit. Education, they would argue, should be about academic learning, and should not be ‘tainted’ by the ‘militarism’ inevitably associated with such units. The fact that students wear uniforms and practise drill seems to be evidence enough for these critics, who also argue that the time for such institutions is long past. It is a criticism which can be traced back to the very origins of our unit, and this view, and the various responses to it by the unit’s defenders, form one of the central themes of Dr David Bird’s book.

It is certainly true that, for certain periods in its history, military matters have been at the forefront of our cadets’ minds. During each of the wars in which our country has participated, service in the defence forces has been demonstrated by Camberwell Grammar Old Boys, sometimes with tragic outcomes. But while some of the boys who have been members of the school cadet unit have gone on to pursue a career in the Armed Services, or even to have served in combat, it is not militarism which draws students to join the unit, nor is it primarily a military perspective which they take from it. Much more, it is what Davyd Norris identified in 1984 as the opportunities for ‘leadership, comradeship and discipline’ and the opportunities our unit gives students to foster ‘initiative and creativity’. There are few activities in the school which teach and develop leadership more explicitly than cadets—and to see our senior students exercising true leadership in outdoor settings is indeed inspirational. Membership of the cadet unit focuses the minds of students on core values and teaches them practical skills, and both of these things have long appealed to boys.

David Bird’s history of the CGSCU provides us with a window on prevailing attitudes within our school, and indeed in Australia as a whole, for the century from 1888. Behind the routines and rituals of the cadet unit, he discovers passion, commitment and a dedication to service. He also reveals a school community prepared to debate passionately, to express differences of opinion articulately and with creativity, and in the end willing to embrace different views and eccentric characters. There is no doubt, that for some of our students, ‘Cadets’ has been that special activity which has been the highlight of their school years. This book outlines the unit’s first hundred years and reveals the contributions of those who were its champions and which explain its persistence and its success. As with any institution, the people are the key, and Dr Bird introduces us to some of the heroes behind the success of the unit. We should be grateful to them: their legacy has provided the sure foundation for the continued success of cadets at CGS.

Paul Hicks,
Headmaster
PART ONE
'Make War Breed Peace', 1888–1945

CHAPTER ONE
'Are You Ready?': Camberwell Grammar Heeds the Call of 'Kangaroo', 1888

'Are You Ready?' examines the background to the formation of the Camberwell Grammar Cadet Detachment in December 1888. The period was one of considerable anxiety in the Australian colonies about defence and the security of Britain’s most distant possessions. The formation of school cadet units was accordingly seen as one way of countering potential threats. Camberwell Grammar was keen to establish itself as an institution that took such matters seriously, alongside its rival schools.

CHAPTER TWO
Forming a Solid Square: The Camberwell Cadet Detachment, 1888–1914

Although the cadet unit was established within three years of the school’s foundation, it was some time before the corps coalesced and received the recognition that it warranted. Under the able command of the renowned Major Whitehead, the unit nevertheless struggled to survive in the economically depressed 1890s and into the new century, but it was reborn under Commonwealth control when compulsory military training for boys was implemented in 1911. ‘Forming a Solid Square’ examines the difficult early years of the revived unit up to the outbreak of the World War in 1914.

CHAPTER THREE
'Shoot Straight and Tell the Truth': The Camberwell Cadets at War, 1914–19

The resurrection of the Camberwell cadets was in time for the bloody conflict that the Great War would bring from 1914–18. While the boys at home drilled and learned to shoot straight, often with inadequate uniforms and weapons, their attention was focused elsewhere—so too were their hopes, as the ‘war-to-end-all-wars’ finally came to an end. This longed-for conclusion, however, soon brought into question the continued need for the compulsory military training of school cadets.
CHAPTER FOUR

‘An Infinite Capacity for Taking Pains’: The Camberwell Cadets between the Wars, 1919–1939

The Camberwell ‘Cadet Corps’ had survived the Great War only to find the peace as challenging as those difficult earlier years. The 1920s saw a downgrading of the school cadet system and troubled times extended into the ‘Devil’s Decade’ of the 1930s. The voluntary unit survived, however, and displayed an ‘infinite capacity for taking pains’, a capacity that would hold it in good stead after 1939. It had, after all, survived its first half-century.

CHAPTER FIVE

‘As Gold in the Furnace’: The Camberwell Cadets in the Second World War, 1939–45

The second major war in barely a generation forced the cadet unit to endure many of the difficulties of its predecessors, such as personnel shortages and the scarcity of weapons owing to emergency recalls. Senior boys again filled the gaps left by the absent commanding schoolmasters when necessary, and basic drill often replaced weapons training until conditions eased from 1941. The unit was nonetheless noted throughout the period for the finery of its school and public parades. The ever-expanding list of wartime fallen featured many boys whose first military experiences had been in the pre-war cadet corps. Numbers fluctuated throughout the conflict, although both the Army and the school itself were keen to encourage the enlistment of all eligible boys over the age of 14. Reaching almost 100 cadets at one stage, the unit had stabilised at three platoons (about 75 cadets) by war’s end. An unprecedented ‘total war’ had seen the corps survive, prosper and able to demonstrate its worth at a time of unprecedented danger.

PART TWO


CHAPTER ONE

‘Our Fair Share of Metaphorical Honey’: The Camberwell Cadets and the Peace, 1945–54

The immediate post-war era was one in which the newly rebadged ‘Australian Cadet Corps’ searched for meaning at a time when relief at the end of hostilities was matched by anxiety over continuing international instability. As in the 1920s, there were those who questioned the need for the maintenance of such a corps, but the Camberwell cadets soldiered on regardless, replenished with a great deal of surplus Army weaponry from hand grenades to machine guns and mortars. They now sported berets in place of the iconic slouch hat. The selection of a new headmaster, Major Searle, reinvigorated a diminishing unit from 1950 and within three years the corps boasted a record strength of 110 cadets, morale having been boosted further by the formation of a vigorous drum corps. There was now an established series throughout the year of rituals in school life—from ANZAC to Parents’ Day—that prominently featured the cadet unit, a body that consistently attracted praise from external reviewers of a high military calibre. By 1954, the unit was unwillingly caught in an internal power struggle between Headmaster and School Council that would mar the position that it had finally attained in the estimation of the broader school community.

CHAPTER TWO

‘Outward Bound’: Maintaining the Adventure, 1955–65

The assumption of a new headmaster, the Reverend Timpson, in 1955 brought with it concepts of change for the cadet unit, few of which were welcomed by those soon clad in jungle-green rather than khaki. The status of the cadets within the school community was downgraded almost immediately and in 1959 it was announced that there would be a new order in cadet training at the school. All boys other than the medically unfit were to join the ‘Cadet Unit’ when entering the Senior School, with a revised syllabus modelled on that of the Outward Bound movement in the UK. During the three years of compulsory service that would follow, boys were to engage in military drill, but also in community service exercises, orienteering and hobbies of a broader nature. Thus, as in an earlier period, the 1960s unit was intended to resemble a uniformed, peacefully inclined community organisation as much as a military formation. Although never fully implemented, this program led to great dissension within the unit and the school in general until late 1965, when the departure of the Headmaster and the Australian commitment to a new war brought about the opportunity for a reversion to tradition.

CHAPTER THREE

All in a State of Flux, 1966–75

The battle of ideas between tradition and innovation went on in a period of fluctuating fortunes for the unit under a new headmaster from 1966. There were attempts at compromise from on high and at the ground level with mixed success, but adventure training remained the spirit of the times. The Vietnam struggle and the social divisions it effected cast a shadow over the unit and allowed minor divisions within the school community to become guls. These divisions could have spelt the end of the school’s cadet system, but they caused the Headmaster to side with the unit, finally, in the interests of order and authority. The cadet unit had therefore been saved, but abolition on the national level became an issue by the mid-Seventies. Only the recent realignment between the Headmaster and the corps saved it from an extinction that claimed many school units in the last part of 1975.
CHAPTER FOUR

‘If Necessary Alone’: Marching Towards a Century, 1976–88

The cadet unit now faced an uncertain administrative and financial future, but there was a renewed determination to ‘soldier on’. The new focus of the late 1970s was more community based than hitherto, which unsettled some, but the cadets already had great experience of coping with transition. A renewed attempt from 1983 to discourage schools from continuing to host cadet units failed to avert Camberwell Grammar from its duty. Only financial uncertainty continued to threaten the corps, but the school community nevertheless bonded to sustain what had now become a basic unit of the school’s structure. Belatedly, it was acknowledged that the Camberwell School Army Cadet Unit was one hundred years old in 1988.

EPILOGUE
PART ONE

‘Make War Breed Peace’
The Camberwell Grammar Cadets, 1888–1945

‘Make war breed peace, make peace stint war.’
Alcibiades in Timon of Athens, Shakespeare

‘We must be prepared to go to war
if we hope to avoid it.’
Prime Minister J.A. Lyons, National Broadcast,
4 December 1938, after Vegetius, Fourth century AD
CHAPTER ONE

‘Are You Ready?’: Camberwell Grammar Heeds the Call of ‘Kangaroo’, 1888

‘It is indispensable and imperatively necessary that those should possess knowledge who aspire to command others.’

_Napoleon, quoted in the Australasian Naval and Military Gazette, Melbourne, April 1887_

‘The Governor, with the advice of the Executive Council, has been pleased to approve of a detachment of Volunteer Cadets being formed in Camberwell Grammar School. James Lorimer, Minister of Defence.’

_Victorian Government Gazette, 21 December 1888_

The Camberwell School Army Cadet Unit (as it is now known) commemorated its 125th anniversary in 2013, only a short time after the school as a whole was able to observe the same period of existence. Whereas the parent institution has continued uninterrupted, the history of the CGS cadets before 1939 is a fractured one and (like Caesar’s ancient Gaul) can be divided into three parts—the foundation years leading into the early years of Federation, the years of compulsion and war from 1911–19 and, finally, the post-war reformation of the 1920s and 1930s, a time of occasional interruption up to the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939. Despite certain periods in which the unit ceased to function, at least on a formal basis (that is with the imprimatur of either the colonial Victorian Defence Ministry or of the federal Department of Defence), this body of cadets can trace its origins back to 1888, a formidable achievement that few Australian schools can match.

The process of childbirth in colonial Australia was often hazardous, painful and protracted. The foundation of the ‘Volunteer Cadet’ detachment at the fledgling Camberwell Grammar in the anxious 1880s was similarly not without its moments of distress. The detachment did not begin in a vacuum and it was markedly a product of its place and time. Both this place and this time (a prosperous, still-booming, colonial Victoria in the 1880s) exhibited great confidence in itself and in its future prospects, but it was never able to escape an intense, nagging anxiety about security and the pressing state of military preparedness. By 1888, this anxiety had already endured for more than a generation, its genesis being traced back to the Crimean War, 1854–56, but the passing of over three decades since that conflict had done little to ameliorate the sense of vulnerability felt by one of Britain’s most distant and wealthiest colonies. Victoria continued to wallow in the material outpouring of the Gold Rush era, but not without the realisation that the possession of a cornucopia could bring with it the uninvited attention of the envious. None were considered by colonial Victorians to be more envious than the Russians, although the French also continued to attract their ancestral animosity. The ambitions of Imperial Russia may very well have been momentarily thwarted at Alma, Balaclava, Inkerman and Sebastopol (names commemorated throughout the Empire, nowhere more widely than in Victoria), but St Petersburg continued to be drawn ever southwards, as the Imperial Government in London warned after a confrontation between British and Russian forces in early 1885, part of that ‘Great Game’ in northern India and Afghanistan. This war scare had concentrated distant
colonial minds wonderfully. The influential Melbourne journal the Australasian *Naval and Military Gazette* warned in June 1887 that the Russian fleet at Vladivostok would soon feature twelve men-of-war, including the state-of-the-art armed cruiser *Donskoi* and two other vessels of similar strength, whilst the British Pacific squadron could muster only one. Significantly, the same issue carried a reminder to readers of the recent recommendations of Major-General Schaw on the defence of Melbourne, a report that had stressed the need to avoid surprise at the hands of foreign vessels entering Port Phillip Bay before any declaration of war. An earlier issue had also contained a thinly disguised, if fictional, account of a Franco-Russian attack on Port Phillip Bay, with the enemy fleet sheltering off Bass Strait islands before creeping through the heads and capturing the South Channel fort. Further up the bay, at the entrance to the Yarra River, the Victorian armoured flagship Cerberus engaged the *Donskoi* and other Russian vessels, forcing their withdrawal. However, the undeterred Franco-Russian fleet then attacked communication facilities on Wilson’s Promontory, from where they raided Bass Strait shipping until forced to retire to New Caledonia with the Victorian wooden frigate Nelson in pursuit. Fanciful and unduly optimistic though this *Gazette* account was of ‘The Colonies in War Time’, it nevertheless captured the nervous spirit of the age.

Should that journal’s genteel readers be too disturbed by this account of an untoward incursion into their blessed colony, they were also reassured that any invader would be met by the over 3,000 troops of the Victorian Naval and Military Forces (sometimes called the ‘Victorian Defence Corps’), who had been approvingly reviewed by Governor Loch in June 1887 at Albert Park as part of Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee. For the first time, that military review had featured school cadet units, who had ‘acquitted themselves admirably’. Victorian school cadets had already been doing so on a smaller scale for over three years, having been formally established in 1884, although some units such as that of Camberwell’s rival, Scotch College, had predated this formal organisation through the earlier extensive exercise of ‘drill training’. It would be a constant theme of cadet training thereafter, that where a school could not gain formal recognition for a cadet formation, it would nevertheless continue to operate its own system of ‘drill’. The formal inauguration of the cadet movement took place under the guidance and mentoring of Victoria’s first Minister of Defence, the charismatic Frederick Sargood MLC, then a Major in the Victorian militia. He had joined the Volunteer Artillery as a private in 1859, would eventually reach the rank of Lt-Colonel, and was said to be ‘one of the best shots in Victoria’. His estate at ‘Ripponlea’ was accordingly used both as a drilling ground and as rifle range. Sargood had organised a transient, cadet-style school unit of over 100 ‘juvenile soldiers’ as they were called, chiefly from Wesley College, as early as 1867 in order to greet Prince Alfred, the Duke of Edinburgh, on the occasion of the first Royal visit to Victoria, thereby earning his later title of ‘father of cadets’ (a moniker which suited him as the father of ten children). Sargood had also travelled in Europe in the early years of the 1870s. There, he had certainly been impressed by the Swiss system of armed citizenry and probably by the prevailing system of militia training in the newly unified Germany. He was subsequently keen to transport to his home colony the practice of progressive military training for schoolboys and did so through the 1884 Volunteer (Cadet) Act while serving as both Victoria’s Minister of Defence and Minister of Education. The *Naval and Military Gazette*, which considered itself the *quasi*-official journal of Victoria’s forces, reported in early 1887 that thanks to Sargood the colony now boasted over 100 cadet units numbering over 3,500 cadets commanded ably by Major W.H. Snee, late of the Royal Artillery. Each school cadet detachment was required to enrol at least 20 boys (later 40) over the age of 12 and although the government was prepared to equip them with rifles for drill and shooting, on loan, and to grant them
a liberal allowance of blank and live ammunition *per annum* (20 rounds of blanks, 100 of ball cartridges from the Melbourne shot-tower now enclosed by Melbourne Central), the cost of the uniforms was proving a liability for some families—this too would be a constant bug-bear for cadets for generations to come. Sargood, although now out of office, had maintained his ‘deep interest’ in the cadets according to the *Gazette* in August 1887, and accordingly he urged the government to provide an allowance of 5/- per boy to cover the cost of these ‘smart’ navy-blue serge uniforms faced with red and of the accompanying ‘Imperial’ style helmets. The incumbent Defence Minister Bell declined, stating that the measure would cost an exorbitant £900 a year and dismissed Sargood with a reminder that the cadets had already been ‘liberally dealt with’. This would not be the last occasion on which a politician displayed a niggardly attitude towards the Victorian cadet system.

Whatever these boys lacked in the equipment provided by a parsimonious administration, their enthusiasm was undiminished as they practised on the rifle range provided for them at Elwood and as they drilled at their annual camp at Elsternwick in December 1887. By this time their numbers had declined slightly, but this four-day camp was notable for the vigour that the cadet defenders displayed against their mock-rivals, the Victorian Rifles, when these militia-men had launched an ‘attack’ on the high ground occupied by the boys in uniform. The *Gazette* observed that many of the ‘elderly and dignified gentlemen’ were surprised at the vigorous defence offered by these ‘energetic if small defenders’. Unfortunately, one Geelong Grammar cadet was wounded by the firing of a blank cartridge in his face and lost the sight of an eye. The *Gazette* thought this cost a bearable one. So too did the 24 ‘grammar school’ and ‘college’ detachments that constituted one-quarter of the Volunteer Cadet Corps by June 1888, but the newly formed Camberwell Grammar (opened February 1886) was not yet among them. Once the newcomer had established itself, however, the founding headmaster, AB Taylor, ensured that this absence was soon remedied.

AB Taylor was a typical imperial patriot of the late Victorian era and he was also an innovative entrepreneur of considerable foresight. It is unlikely that he would have allowed his new academy to overlook for long the opportunities offered to its reputation by the establishment of a vigorous cadet detachment. The fledgling school had been keen in its inaugural advertising to stress its primary academic focus and promised instruction to ensure a boy ‘successful entrance into the University of Melbourne’. This had enticed an enrolment of 117 by April 1888, including 61 new boys in that year alone—an impressive beginning. Yet, in accordance with the *mores* of the time, physical education had not been ignored and the local *Boorondara Standard* had noted as early as October 1886 that the school offered ‘Drill’ and ‘Gymnastics’ as ‘Extras’. By April 1888, about half of the student body engaged in supposedly ‘voluntary’ drill at the start of the school day on the new Fermanagh Road site under the supervision of ‘Captain’ Lucas. The time was now ripe for Camberwell Grammar as well to formalise these ‘drill exercises’ into the formation of a military unit that suited the spirit of the times, to cross over what cadet commanding officer Bruce Doery would a century later call the ‘very thin line’ between a rigorous, school-based drill and the establishment of a formal cadet unit.1 As so often, a man appeared to suit this particular moment in history. By July 1888, the *Standard* had reported that the Camberwell boys were now being drilled by ‘Lieutenant’ Whitehead, a Cadet Corps officer long serving at Scotch College, where he had functioned as Drill Master since 1877. This acquisition of the mutton-chop whiskered Whitehead, already pushing the age of 60, was something of a coup for Camberwell. Like Sargood, he was a noted sharp-shooter,
although he did not, as yet, devote himself exclusively to the school, simultaneously drilling at Brighton Grammar in preparation for the establishment of their cadet unit. He may also have continued an association with Scotch, although the dates of his movements are somewhat confusing. Whitehead would nevertheless be instrumental in the establishment of Camberwell Grammar’s cadet detachment, the birth of which was tersely announced in the *Victorian Government Gazette* of 21 December 1888: ‘The Governor, with the advice of the Executive Council has been pleased to approve of a detachment of Volunteer Cadets being formed in Camberwell Grammar School.’ And so it began.

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Whilst this Yuletide birth announced by Defence Minister Lorimer was easier than most in that period, perhaps thanks to (now ‘Captain’) Whitehead’s military midwifery, the early years of the detachment and its founder were troubled, as later chapters document. In December 1888, however, Headmaster Taylor was probably quite satisfied that his new school had heeded the call made by the anonymous ‘Kangaroo’ in the ever-vigilant and insistent *Naval and Military Gazette* in April of the previous year, where the anonymous author had provocatively questioned the readiness of the colony’s men and boys to defy a ‘Foreign Foe’ and urged that measures be taken to remedy identified deficiencies—‘Are You Ready?’. Despite its rampant but uncontroversial Franco-phobia, the *Gazette* had also quoted Napoleon to the effect that those who seek to command must be trained to do so, an observation that extended downwards to those ‘energetic if small defenders’ of the Volunteer Cadet Corps. ‘Kangaroo’ had insisted that a state of efficiency must be reached urgently in order for Victorians to reply ’Ready! Aye, ready!’ The boys of Camberwell Grammar, whether volunteering for their bracing morning drill or not, were now steadied to do so. Their immediate future lay in the able hands of the trimly hirsute Captain Whitehead, a man described by a later headmaster, A.S. Hall, who had served with him in the Scotch unit, as one who possessed ‘cheerfulness, manliness, tact and a strong sense of duty’—the infant Camberwell ‘Volunteer Cadet’ detachment would need every one of these virtues in the troubled 1890s and beyond as it struggled through childhood and youth.

Photographs of the early years of the Camberwell cadet detachment have not been unearthed, but this portrait of the Scotch College unit, c.1890, features ‘Captain’ William Whitehead (born c.1830), top, left, with his characteristic mutton-chop whiskers modelled on those of the Austrian Emperor, Franz Joseph. Back row, right, is A.S. Hall, shortly to be the headmaster of Camberwell Grammar.
CHAPTER TWO

Forming a Solid Square: The Camberwell Cadet Detachment, 1888–1914

‘The wearing of the Queen’s uniform causes the cadet to reflect whether his conduct will bring credit or discredit on the corps to which he has the honour to belong.’

Captain A.S. Hall, Headmaster, Annual Report, December 1892

‘Obedience is the first duty of a soldier, young or old.’

Commonwealth Military Cadet Corps standing orders, 1907

By December 1888 Camberwell Grammar had heeded the call of the anonymous ‘Kangaroo’ of the Naval and Military Gazette and picked up the challenge first formulated by the Victorian statesman Frederick Sargood (the ‘father of cadets’) as early as 1884. The school’s response to the defence anxieties of the period was to form its own Volunteer Cadet detachment at the Fermanagh Road campus, a unit that experienced some success and survived many blows of ill fortune in the turbulent decade which the 1890s proved to be. The dawn of the new century (some claimed it as in 1900, others as 1901) and of Australian Federation on 1 January 1901 offered some further hope. The colonial era was now over, both for the cadet formations and for the new nation as a whole, but Camberwell would stand clear of the stillborn Commonwealth Military Cadet Corps (CMCC) once it was established in May 1906 until a new era of compulsion was promulgated on the tenth anniversary of Federation. After 1911, the school’s re-invigorated cadet detachment prepared for the major war that many feared was unavoidable, a war that had been speculated about for decades, and this period of waiting and preparation came to an end in the first week of August 1914.

The fledgling Camberwell Grammar cadet detachment after 1888 was built around the personalities of two men, William Whitehead and Alfred Hall, the one a soldier and the other the new joint headmaster from 1891. The two had become acquainted and friendly whilst working together in the Scotch College cadet unit and their defection to the less prestigious, newer Camberwell Grammar must have raised some eyebrows at that more exalted campus. ‘Captain’ (his rank in the Victorian Volunteer Cadet Corps in 1888) Whitehead, born c.1830, was a British Army veteran who had migrated to Victoria in 1860 and had been the ‘Drill Master’ at Scotch since 1877. Although fittingly white-haired, given his surname, and heading towards the status of a sexagenarian, the captain was still markedly physically fit in 1888; his best years as a renowned sharp-shooter were still before him. He struck a fine military figure in his navy-blue serge Militia uniform, complete with spiked helmet, at a time when complaints about the ‘worn out and shabby uniforms’ of the Victorian forces were commonplace. Whitehead was also difficult to overlook with his finely trimmed mutton-chop whiskers modelled on those of the Austrian emperor Franz Joseph. He was soon drilling (as ‘drill instructor’) the newly recruited Camberwell cadets with skill and precision alongside a
Mr Maloney, as the itinerant ‘Captain’ Lucas had done on an elective basis since the school’s foundation in 1886. This modest drill was prescribed as being of one hour’s duration per week ‘with arms’ (provided by the government). AB Lucas was the commander of the 2nd Battalion of Victoria’s cadet forces, a unit that included several school detachments, and whilst he may have been the de facto commanding officer of Camberwell’s fledgling corps from December 1888, such as it was, an official school title had evaded him. It would be several years before even Whitehead could claim nominal command, as during the unit’s infancy, and later the school’s cadet aspirations remained in a state of flux.

Nevertheless, given Whitehead’s experience and status within the small military society of colonial Victoria, it is highly likely that some of Camberwell’s new cadets participated in the School Cadet Review at Albert Park in February 1889 attended by 640 boys—units were required to parade no fewer than six times annually. The authoritative Naval and Military Gazette was disappointed by this low, mid-week attendance and no Camberwell boy distinguished himself sufficiently to be awarded one of the ‘Sargood’ silver trophies presented, appropriately, by Mrs Sargood. The incumbent Victorian Defence Minister, Lorimer, presided, but the highlight of the day was the presentation of the new cadet ‘colours’ by the first lady of Victoria, Lady Loch, who had personally stitched them. They were described in the Gazette: ‘Union Jack handsomely braided with gold, and the regimental colours, a white ground, with large red cross and crown in the centre, while in one corner is worked a representation of the Southern Cross.’

The Governor’s wife presented these coveted colours to the more experienced Scotch College (even though a Collingwood state school had equalled them in competition results). Although intended to be circulated amongst various units following regular competition, the colours seemed to have remained at Scotch, where they featured in a photographic study, c.1890, alongside none other than Captain Whitehead himself, apparently still a man of divided loyalties—the photograph also features a unit officer, A.S. Hall, soon destined for leadership at Camberwell.2 After Geelong Grammar claimed the colours for 1891, they were returned to headquarters—their present location is unknown.

The local Boroondara Standard soon noted in May 1889 that ‘strenuous efforts’ were still being made at Camberwell Grammar to place the cadet detachment on a more permanent basis, but at least those efforts were sufficient for the ‘Camberwell Grammar School detachment’ to take its place at a further Albert Park inspection in June 1889 alongside its constant rival, Scotch.3 Whatever Whitehead’s ambiguous status as a man who drilled competing bodies of cadets at both schools, the founding headmaster, AB Taylor, was sufficiently impressed to praise the captain in his Speech Night address in December 1889 (at the Hawthorn Town Hall with the Victorian Premier, Duncan Gillies, as the chief guest) even if that praise was arguably faint and accompanied by a qualified commitment to the new cadet detachment. The captain, Taylor noted, had ‘brought his boys on well’ and although the Head praised the ‘cadet movement’ in general, his commitment to the Camberwell unit was only ‘so long as he saw it producing such satisfactory results’. Taylor looked forward to a time when most Camberwell boys (the 1889 enrolment had reached 141) became members in order to produce ‘a respectful tone and bearing to superiors’.4 Unfortunately, many of those assembled cadets who had featured only weeks before at a Melbourne parade to honour the visiting Major-General Edwards (a British officer seconded to report on Australian defences) were regarded as unimpressive and not of suitable bearing, having overenthusiastically pressed too far forward against the dismounted troops preceding them.5
Nevertheless, Whitehead consolidated his position and that of his young charges at Fermanagh Road through 1890. Still referred to as little more than a drill master by the local Standard in April, he had at least gained some public recognition from Headmaster Taylor by the time of the latter’s final ‘Headmaster’s Report’ at Christmas, 1890. Here, an almost grudging Taylor conceded that the school’s cadet detachment was prospering ‘under our much esteemed friend, Captain Whitehead’, following a ‘Drill Exercise’ during the Speech Night at Hawthorn on 16 December, although he failed to muster much enthusiasm about their recent participation in the annual camp (at Langwarrin) other than to observe that the boys had returned ‘none the worse for their outing’. This understatement distilled Taylor’s superficial commitment to the cadet system, even if he had effectively now bestowed on Whitehead the formal status of commander. Lucas continued to assist in drill alongside a Lieutenant Anquetil (not a member of the teaching staff), but without the semi-formal recognition now offered to that ‘esteemed friend’ Whitehead.

However, change was in the air as the school was sold in July 1891 to ‘joint’ owners, A.S. Hall and W.A. Gosman, a peculiar arrangement. As a classicist, Hall ought to have understood Tacitus’s maxim that power can be divided, but not shared, but from the beginning of the rule of these joint ‘Principals’, both former Scotch College masters, Hall was the predominant as ‘Headmaster’ and his predominance proved beneficial for Whitehead and the cadets, if not perhaps as beneficial as might have been expected in 1891. Taylor’s extra-curricular inclinations had been agricultural; those of Hall were militaristic—he took great pride in the ‘Queen’s uniform’ and those who wore it—and this disposition allowed the school’s infant cadet detachment to survive its first, and probably its most difficult, decade, even though that survival was disappointingly disjointed due to circumstances beyond the school’s control. The first report of the Standard, 24 July 1891, only days after the establishment of the new order at Camberwell, noted that the cadet corps was now ‘instructed’ by Captain Whitehead. Things seemed to be looking up and the unit was now sufficiently confident to present a grand, engraved silver ‘Cadet Cup’ to one of its first outstanding veterans, Lt Herbert Rocke (1887–90).

Alfred Hall, native-born at Geelong in 1863, was a generation younger than Whitehead, but he was also a hobby-soldier, having joined the Militia in 1887. At the time of his acquisition of the school, he too was of the rank of captain and had himself commanded the Scotch cadet unit since 1889. For the rest of his professional life Hall (known as ‘the Boss’ and later as ‘the Old Boss’) insisted on the use of his military title at a time when the heads of schools of a similar ilk craved, pursued and/or paraded the title of ‘Doctor’. ‘Captain’ Hall was different and accordingly the first speech night of the reformed school in December 1891 offered the cadet unit a much greater profile through Hall’s annual report, which specifically praised the great progress made by the ‘Cadet Corps under the able instruction of Captain W. Whitehead’, including a ‘considerable increase in its strength’ (the exact figures remain a mystery, but the whole colony now boasted over 4,000 cadets). Yet action spoke louder than magisterial words and this local progress was demonstrated first-hand through the presentation on stage of a noisy, simulated attack on an enemy fortification, all witnessed by over 1,000 parents and friends. Had Taylor been present, he would have been pleased that the boy-cadets had emerged ‘none the worse’ for the outing, but the steady economic base that had sustained them and their flourishing school was, like that mock enemy encampment, under siege—Victoria was passing from its golden era into more uncertain economic times and this uncertainty would impact on both the school as a whole and on its fledging cadet detachment for the remainder of the century. The steady ground that Whitehead had finally been offered for his little corps via ‘the Boss’ was about to be shaken.
The first signs of economic turbulence in Victoria came in late 1889 with the crash of several building societies and within 3 years hundreds of companies reliant on the speculative capital provided by now-ailing financial institutions had also crashed, leaving a great wash of the unemployed in its wake. This was also a period of great industrial turmoil, which affected not only the economic well-being of the colonies but also diminished the sense of difference between themselves and the older, more class-ridden societies from which the colonists had emerged. The era of ‘Marvellous Melbourne’ was passing and while those who had invested in areas other than just the land boom, such as the wily AB Taylor, survived and prospered, many of the suburban middle class were struggling in a state of genteel poverty. Schools such as Camberwell Grammar were amongst the first non-financial institutions to notice the symptoms of decline. The school population dropped alarmingly as the new decade progressed: 1890: 124 (down from the record 141); 1891: 112; 1892: 94; 1893: 78; 1894: 61; 1895: 45; 1896: 34; 1897: 33. The nadir of this year forced the school and its flailing cadets to make a strategic withdrawal back to the more modest, original St John’s campus in the centre of Camberwell. Times were hard and soldiering no longer seemed the priority it had assumed in the security anxious 1880s, even to ‘Captain’ Hall. The fact that recruits were expected to pay for their own expensive uniforms was an obvious disincentive for parents as times hardened—it would remain so for generations to come.

Nevertheless Captain Whitehead soldiered on—he could do little else. Hall’s 1892 ‘Annual Report’ on the ‘progress’ of the school similarly maintained a stiff upper lip:

The Cadet Corps has maintained its high standard of efficiency under the able instruction of the deservedly popular Captain Whitehead, and to him and Lieutenant Hugh Glass [not a member of the teaching staff] is due the very favourable report of the Staff Officer Major Henry, at the annual inspection of the Corps.

Henry, later commander of the Victorian cadet system, was passionate about accurate rifle shooting, an attribute much stressed by Sargood and Whitehead in their own areas of command, and Hall accordingly wished his cadets well in forthcoming sharpshooting competition. Rifle shooting was generally restricted to Saturday afternoons at the distant Elwood range. This was as good as it would get for some years, for it was with considerable regret that Captain Hall, wearing his Headmaster’s mortar board rather than his military cap at the December 1893 speech night, reported his sorrow that the cadet unit ‘has suffered more seriously than it deserved in the retrenchment of the extra subjects’ necessitated by the imprint of decline. Hall could now only console his boy-soldiers with the assurance that ‘Captain Whitehead is still devoted as ever to the Corps and I hope the next year we shall see the boys form a solid square around him again’. The solid, red, British square had saved the day at Waterloo, or so the boys of the Empire had long been taught to believe; now it was the turn of Camberwell’s boy soldiers to act in the same stolid manner. However, Wellington’s squares in 1815 required the deployment of 500 to 1000 men each, but the cadet detachment was struggling to maintain its minimum requirement of 20 recruits as the enrolment of the school plummeted—their minimum height of 4’6” was also somewhat below that of the Iron Duke’s regiments, although some of the senior cadets at 5’4” might have fitted the bill.

The history of the depleting school unit now becomes shadowy and it can be assumed that the period 1894–97 was a barren one with the detachment effectively disbanded, at least formally. The Victorian Ministry of Defence declined to continue paying a cadet officers’ allowance from June 1895, but the ever cash-strapped Education Department grudgingly stepped in with a £5 payment for the benefit of those adhering to the duty of commanding a detachment at a state school. Back at
Camberwell, it was not until 1898 (school population now scarcely 45, but mercifully increasing) that the now Major Whitehead was reported as having 'reformed' the school cadet corps. Headmaster Hall in his turn had saved the school from oblivion in a difficult decade, but the cadets had only survived by the skin of their teeth. Perhaps there could be a new beginning in a new century and even in a new country as Federation approached, not yet inevitable but looking increasingly likely following every scheduled gathering of the colonial premiers throughout the 1890s. Whitehead had been promoted to Major in 1896 and had spent the interregnum years since 1894 as the employed secretary of the Victorian Rifle Association, one of his long-standing interests. He had also spent some time in England in 1898 competing in the VRA's team at the all-Empire shooting competition at Bisley in Surrey, where he secured an impressive fourth place. His passion for boy-soldiering had been undeterred by economic downturn, school retrenchment or by advancing age, as his seventieth birthday approached. Soon, however, his extensive military career was to be interrupted by the outbreak of a distant colonial war.

III

The ‘Transvaal War’ (soon known as the ‘South African War’ given its spread and then popularly as the ‘Boer War’, 1899–1902) called the first of Whitehead’s cadets into combat, not against the French and/or the Russians as an earlier generation had expected, but against the scattered, semi-disciplined farmers of the two Boer republics. At least two of the 16,000 Australians who served in this war had first encountered quasi-military drill under Captain Whitehead during their school days at Camberwell Grammar. One of the invaders of the Boer republics was Percival Creswick Morkham (b.1877), who had enrolled at Camberwell in 1887 at Year Five, staying until 1892. After mining at the Coolgardie goldfields, he enlisted for South Africa in 1899 and served until the following year. Perhaps what he saw of this savage war turned him to God, for Morkham then became a Presbyterian minister before again taking the King’s shilling and serving in Egypt and France, 1915–19, like so many other former Boer War veterans. Another former Grammarian fighting for Empire was Stanley Le Pastrier Symonds (b.1878), who attended the school from 1891 to 1895. He served in the Boer campaign over the two final years, 1901–02, and clearly survived intact as he did not die until 1968, aged 90. A veterinary surgeon serving with the NSW Mounted Rifles, Symonds also subsequently served in the Great War and was mentioned several times in despatches.

How long the ageing Major Whitehead back home continued to serve at the St John’s campus is the subject of some speculation, but in the first decade of the new century he was reported as drilling cadet units at the short-lived Canterbury Grammar and at Caulfield Grammar. His ‘reformed’ Camberwell detachment failed to gain much public recognition, but whatever the connection the peripatetic Major maintained with it, the school’s fortunes were on the up by 1908 with a move to the new Burke Road campus and a strengthening enrolment of 121. The Victorian cadet movement had also risen from the dead as the 1890s Depression faded, boasting over 6,000 cadets by 1904—it had fallen to 2,320 at the most depressed period—and over 1,000 boys had enrolled in 1899 alone. The movement now took on a new life, but not entirely through its own impressive efforts. The new Commonwealth of Australia from 1901 scooped up the parcel of defence anxieties that the old colonies had momentarily set aside during the hungry Nineties, in part motivated (as always) by what was happening in the mother country. Some at the top were seriously considering the prospect of universal military training—‘boy conscription’—around the time that the influential British diplomat the Earl of Meath advocated such a system in 1905. The ‘lads’, he maintained would like it and, through its operation, be prepared for life: ‘The discipline and
healthy exercise would improve their health, strengthen their moral and physical fibre and add to their professional, industrial or labour value when they attained to manhood.’

It was not therefore surprising that amongst the focus points of the new federal Department of Defence, headquartered at Melbourne’s Victoria Barracks, was the development of a national ‘Commonwealth Military Cadet Corps’ (CMCC), formally introduced after several years of political lobbying on 1 May 1906. Detachments were to be formed of boys aged 12–14 (this being the school leaving age) with senior cadet units for those aged 14–19 who were still attending educational institutions. Since most cadets (over 80 per cent) were sourced from the State education systems, where few continued their schooling after the age of 14, these older, school-based detachments were not considered to be the priority of the senior system.

Camberwell Grammar, however, took some time to respond to any new order, either junior or senior, in the absence of its Whitehead mentor. The rigorous morning drill at Burke Road from 1908 was now being taken by Captain Hall himself, at his physical peak in robust middle age, a practice he had most likely also undertaken at St John’s in the absence of the old Major. Yet it does not seem that any Camberwell contribution to the voluntary CMCC was attempted after 1906 or before the Defence Act of 1909 (enforced from 1911) established a new system of compulsory military training for boys aged between 12 and 14 (Junior Cadets) and those aged between 14 and 18 (Senior Cadets), a period of training equivalent in duration to sixteen days annually. The young men were then to pass on to the Citizen Military Forces for compulsory, part-time training up to the age of 25, also equivalent in duration to sixteen days annually, of which eight were to be in camp. The voluntary CMCC system had thus been absorbed from 1 January 1911 into one of universal compulsion as stringent as that which operated in Imperial Germany, against which, in the popular imagination, these measures were now chiefly directed. Others, like Dr Richard Arthur of the Immigration League of Australasia, were already fearing Japan as well and had advocated that ‘no youth in Australia should be allowed to play cricket or football or go sailing until he has qualified as a rifle shot, or learnt to launch a torpedo’. Some extremists in both the short-lived conservative and Labor governments of early Federation had even wanted compulsion to reach down to 10-year-olds—even the disciplined hand of old Prussia had failed to extend the principle that far and this unwelcome innovation was known to its critics contemptuously as ‘boy conscription’. At Camberwell, it is possible that Hall determined to stand aside from the CMCC whilst it was the subject of considerable political horse-trading and manoeuvring in the period 1906–09; perhaps he simply dithered and failed to live up to the promise of engaged militarism that his appointment in 1891 seemed to have offered. He had certainly never given any indication that he supported compulsion and this may perhaps have been something to which he objected as a long-time champion of the voluntary system. The promoted Lt. Colonel Henry of the old Victorian cadet system, who had praised the Camberwell boys in 1892, had expressed his own reservations about ‘conscription’ as recently as 1902, seeing a flourishing voluntary system as a healthy alternative to compulsion, but it was now too late for any such considerations. The voluntary CMCC had passed Camberwell by; its compulsory successor would not.

Compulsion does not recognise reservation, none more so than military compulsion even at the level of cadet service, as the 1907 CMCC standing orders demonstrated: ‘Obedience is the first duty of a soldier, young or old.’ The expanding Camberwell Grammar (school population in 1911 just under 200) was now faced with the need to re-establish a formal, uniformed cadet detachment and to do so without any assistance from a man of the reputation or skill of Whitehead. Accordingly, drill instructors
were now afforded an enhanced rank in the revived cadet detachment and by 1912 the unit’s commander was a member of the teaching staff, ‘Captain’ C. Easton, a significant increase in the status of the position. His appointment appears to have been at the behest of the new centralised cadet headquarters, which insisted that the short, regular morning drill of old be replaced by weekly four-hour parades. Cadet training was now to be a more serious business and intended to be focused on senior cadets from the age of fourteen—for a time the diminished junior cadets were even forbidden to wear a cadet uniform at the cost of a penalty of £10. For the seniors, however, Army-style khaki uniforms provided by the government replaced any remnants of the older colonial blue serge that had marked the volunteer detachments of the old century, a significant change that was recalled as such by those boys who witnessed it. The old collar badges featuring ‘PRO DEO et PATRIA’ (‘For God and Country’) were now discarded for something more Spartan and these senior cadets were issued with rifles, a suitable symbol that a sense of professionalism was in the air at a time, by 1914, when international tensions in Europe were escalating.

Ω

So it was that by the close of the period 1888–1914, Camberwell Grammar had succeeded in its disparate, disjointed efforts to form ‘a solid square’ of cadets in defence of home and Empire. The tragedy of this entire, patriotic exercise was that when a major war finally came—not quite the one that most had feared for generations—nineteenth-century squares were not needed, but (as the Naval and Military Gazette had portended some quarter of a century earlier) twentieth-century trenches. Many former Camberwell cadets were soon to find, like the Mole in the 1908 celebrated classic The Wind in the Willows, a work most of them had relished as either fathers or sons, that the only safety was underground. This would prove a sad ending to a period that was later looked back upon, rightly or wrongly, as a golden age.

It was also sadly fitting that the greatly respected Major William Whitehead, Camberwell’s first formally acknowledged cadet commander, died at Hawthorn in April 1915, aged 85, on the day after the seminal Gallipoli landing. It was only natural that Camberwell cadets provided a guard of honour at his funeral and the Grammarian of August afforded him an extensive obituary, noting his ‘cheerfulness, manliness, tact and strong sense of duty’. The Major’s habitual spiked helmet and mutton-chop whiskers were now associated with the two distant enemy Emperors, so his timely death provided a fitting symbol of an old system passing away in favour of an uncertain future of unwarranted horrors, a future in which many of his former cadets would take their place. Their task now was to follow the advice frequently offered to their colonial cadet predecessors—‘shoot straight and tell the truth’—in imitation of the youths of ancient Parthia.
CHAPTER THREE

‘Shoot Straight and Tell the Truth’: The Camberwell Cadets at War, 1914–19

‘War’s amongst us. Must we take it? Are we forced our share to bear?’
From ‘Our War’, the Prize Poem by Ronald Small, Dux of School, 1915

‘We must fight until the war is over. We must work till it is done.’
From ‘Our Duty’, poem by B. Laurie (aged 9), 1918

‘Shoot straight and tell the truth’ was said to be a traditional maxim used by the Parthians, those inveterate opponents of the ancient Romans in the East. It also serves as a suitable motto for the experiences of Camberwell Grammar’s revived cadet detachment during the Great War, 1914–19 (the date of these hostilities is often rightly extended to include the signing of the peace treaties in that last year). During the grim four-and-a-quarter years of distant armed conflict, the boy cadets at home were prepared for their own likely participation in the ranks of Australia’s overseas volunteer forces, learning in the meantime to shoot straight. They were simultaneously steeled by the examples of heroism provided by the 250 Old Camberwell Grammarians who went into battle, some, if not all, carrying a leather wallet featuring the school badge that had been presented to them by the Headmaster, ‘Captain’ A.S. Hall, now himself a military censor, being too old at 51 in 1914 for active service in the ranks.13 It remains uncertain how many of these volunteers had gained their first military experience in the school’s cadet detachment—the 1936 Jubilee Camberwell Grammian thought it ‘a great number’—but many of them had been unable to serve earlier in the school’s cadet unit owing to the interregnum of the first years of Federation. It is also an unfortunate reality that, as in any war, truth was an early casualty and the boy cadets safely drilling at the school’s Burke Road campus were not always being told the truth about what was happening at Gallipoli in 1915 and in the trenches of Belgium and northern France from 1916. Nevertheless, they drilled to the accompaniment of their new buglers and drummers, obeyed and readied themselves for a conflict that soon surpassed early promises of being over by Christmas 1914, or even ‘before the leaves have fallen’, as Kaiser Wilhelm had promised his eager young recruits in Germany at the beginning. Had this been so, the Australian expeditionary force would still have been at sea, much to the disappointment of Camberwell’s boy cadets and their scarcely more mature commanding officers.

The chapter ‘Forming a Solid Square’ has sketched the early manifestations of the Camberwell cadet detachment and its formal revival from 1911 in accordance with the Commonwealth’s ambitious Defence Act, which outlined compulsory military training for boys—‘boy conscription’—from the age of twelve within the Commonwealth Military Cadet Corps (CMCC). In 1914, ‘Captain’ C. Easton, a member of the teaching staff (1911–14), now commanded a unit that had at its disposal a cohort selected from the bulk of a school population of 251 boys, a population that had increased to 322 by 1919. That figure would not be equalled or surpassed until 1942, in the midst of another war that had been ignited contrary to that earlier promise of the ‘war-to-end-all-wars’. The senior cadets from the age of fourteen...
became the wartime focus, 1914–18, with their new khaki uniforms and, occasionally for a select few, rifles and the flashing bayonets for which the forces of the British Empire were noted. The reality was often less glamorous, with the new school journal, *The Magazine of the Camberwell Grammar School* (soon referred to as the *Camberwell Grammerian*, often simply as the *Grammarian*), formally and according to strict military terminology describing these occasions of armed deployment as ‘musketry courses’, also reminding its readers in the school community that those aged under eighteen were not permitted to possess ‘guns or cartridges’ (penalty a substantial £10). There were very few Camberwell cadets older than eighteen and those beneath that threshold were theoretically only permitted the use of .22 calibre ‘pea rifles’—and then only at an authorised range according to the detailed ‘Pea Rifle and Saloon Guns Act, 1912’.

Yet, even the consistently poorly armed junior cadets, aged twelve and thirteen, were now also dressed in khaki whenever possible, whereas they had been expressly forbidden from wearing any uniform in the years immediately before August 1914—soon, however, the dwindling wartime supply of uniforms would see them and many seniors returned unwillingly to mufti and to the diminished status that such everyday clothing held in these years.

By May 1915 the Camberwell cadet detachment had received the official title of ‘J’ Company of the 48th Battalion and was now under the acting command of a young 2nd Lt. A.E. Burke. It was an important and symbolic period for those in uniform, given the Gallipoli landing on 25 April and the death of the iconic Major Whitehead, the first formal Camberwell cadet commander, on the following day. Camberwell cadets appropriately provided the guard of honour at his funeral under Lt. Burke, who had been the school captain in 1914, having been at Camberwell since 1911. By July 1915 (the beginning of a new training year), 45 junior cadets were expected to graduate into ‘J’ Company and thereby help the detachment to ‘retain its position as the smartest company in the area’.

The status of this company was enhanced at the time through its associated senior cadet Rifle Club gaining fifth place in the Imperial Challenge Shield, a competition open to units throughout the country. The nine cadets, who had formed the Camberwell delegation previously instructed by Headmaster Hall, had scored over 70 per cent and thereby scored prize money of £1, a not inconsiderable sum for these youths, at least until split nine ways. Since the days of Whitehead, Camberwell cadets had taken great pride in their ability to shoot straight and this skill was now more highly regarded than ever as mature officers and even uniforms became scarce owing to the demands of the distant fronts. The detachment was now generally commanded by senior students in their last year at the school such as Lieutenant Ronald Small, who had first enrolled in 1910, and as well as being OC Cadet Corps in 1915 was a prefect and ‘Dux of School’. This position of cadet officer-in-command (OC) was one of considerable status within the school community and outside it, given that its holder was acknowledged as a commissioned officer, rather than as simply a uniformed, senior boy. The revived unit of 1911 had been headed, for the first time, by a promoted senior boy, F. Lyndon James (1910–11), but he was soon replaced by a staff member. Wartime shortages of more mature personnel, however, led to the reinstitution of the system of senior boy commanders and much the same enhanced regard was also held for the other young officers in the cadet units after 1914.Lt. Small had additionally headed the successful team of Imperial Challenge Shield shooters, of whom he had gained the highest individual score. He was not only a sharpshooting officer, described as ‘exercising his authority in the best manner’, but a poet (a combination that marked many during this war), having composed a ‘Prize Poem: Our War’ before April 1915 and the first blooding of the AIF. This poem expressed the patriotic sentiment that permeated the school community as a whole at this time of ANZAC, as well as a broader imperial sentiment that the cadet detachment
in particular sought to stimulate by denying any suggestion that there was a division within the Empire over the present conflict—rather, it was ‘Our War’:

War is with us. Must we take it,  
Are we forced our share to bear?  
This, a cry from many a mother  
This, a trembling sister’s prayer!

War’s amongst us. We must take it,  
Mothers, put your trust in Him  
Who alone can comfort widows –  
Widow’d by one nation’s sin.

It’s a noble thing to battle,  
For a dearly-lovéd land;  
And, if need be, give life gladly –  
Pressing thus the Golden Strand.

Well we know the noble story  
Of our gallant Light Brigade:  
Deeds as noble, yet unheard of;  
Darken sunlight into shade.

Fighting German naval forces.  
In a hail of bursting shells.  
British tars yet save their foemen  
Ah! what sacrifice this tells.

Britain’s unity is doubted,  
Sneers are cast at British pride;  
Britons, wake! Our Honour’s flouted!  
Fight, and die, as those men died.

As we love our land, Australia,  
As we cherish hearth and home;  
Wake, Australians! Join your brothers.  
Far on Egypt’s plains to roam.

Out West cowboys, Eastern town men,  
Canada has gladly given;  
Oh, let us arise united  
And prevent these bonds being riven.

‘God of Battles’, hear the prayer,  
Breathed by every patriot soul;  
Lord, sustain our glorious Empire,  
Keep it integral and whole.

Ronald Small’s poem had distilled the spirit of the age—the call for imperial unity amidst all of the widespread British diaspora; the early attachment of culpability onto Germany; the glory of battle; the call of masculine duty amidst feminine tears of regret and the recognition that the job remained unfinished, even pending. The poetry of war had only just begun and at the time of the poem’s publication so too had the bloodshed at Gallipoli, where old Grammarians such as Alfred Derham (1902–06) would soon distinguish themselves.

The pressure of numbers that is found in any long-term major conflict was now, before the end of 1915, being felt throughout that disparate ‘glorious Empire’, right down even to the CMCC. In mid-1915, the cautious Defence Department determined that any company of senior cadets needed a minimum of 160 members. As Camberwell’s student population was 260 in that year, such enlistment was barely possible, so the unit became a detachment of a larger company on 1 July and was now known as 8 Platoon of ‘B’ Company. It consisted
of 85 boys in the senior unit, generously described in the Gram-
marian of August 1915, according to official military terminology,
as ‘men’, alongside 75 junior boys who were described as being
proud to be part of ‘Australia’s New Army’. Clothing these young
men and boys had now become a problem owing to the un-
avoidable reality of ‘clothing factories kept busy in supplying
our gallant Australians who are enlisting for active service’.17
Cadets aged under fourteen were no longer receiving any of
the coveted khaki uniforms and even many of the older boys
were ‘disappointed’ with their ‘unfit uniforms’ and forced to
 drill in plain clothes. If the gloss of military life was tarnished,
the detachment did not publicly express its reservations and
continued to adhere to its motto ‘Whatever you do, do well.’
This was becoming increasingly difficult as wartime shortages
were now becoming apparent; even ‘sham fights’ were abandoned
owing to a shortage of blank ammunition. Compulsory drill
was suspended by the Defence Department for three months
from November 1915 as the Commonwealth government’s mil-
itary priorities were focused elsewhere, but the Camberwell
detachment soldiered on, some attending the Christmas camp
at Yarra Glen while others were curiously absent, ‘harvesting’.
Yearly training targets had also been slashed from 64 to 48
hours annually.18 While the home front was thus decelerating,
the opposite was happening to those Australians in uniform
overseas. The Old Boy and former cadet Lieutenant OC of 1911,
Lyn James, now a Sergeant in the AIF, had remembered his
old school and unit whilst musing in the trenches at Gallipoli,
presenting a medal to the detachment at home for the benefit
of its ‘champion shot’. The Lyn James Medal continued to be
the subject of school competition until 1922, when the unit was
temporarily disbanded—its present whereabouts are unknown.
The distant Sgt. James was not alone in his reminiscences of the
not-so-distant old days, although by July there was only one Old
Boy still on that Turkish peninsula ‘owing to casualties etc.’, W.
Pender (1901–07), who had also enjoyed the ‘pleasant memories’
of his old school brought to him through the notes and jottings
of ‘Old Grammarians’.19 This ‘ANZAC’ year closed with the
December evacuation of the Dardanelles and, back at home,
the presentation of a new cadet merit board for the drill hall
at Burke Road. Before long, as Australians were blooded on the
Western Front, from the Battle of Fromelles in July 1916 onwards,
such boards would often be rededicated to the growing list of
the distant fallen rather than to those worthy of merit at home.

Lt. Small had continued in command for the first half of
the new year 1916, but it was a year without any sign of im-
pending victory as life became more difficult on the home
front, most notably through the first of the divisive referenda
on conscription in October. Membership of the cadet system
remained compulsory, but this attempt by the ‘Little Digger’,
Prime Minister Billy Hughes, to extend military compulsion
to overseas service failed. The committee of the OCGA had
hoped in July ‘that the time is not too far distant when we shall
be able to tender a welcome home to Old Boys of the AIF’, but
that hope was still premature.20 A new, more intricate ‘platoon
drill’ was introduced and the senior cadet unit reached ‘just
about a hundred’ (it was 102) by mid-year, a record. Lt. J.K.
Goodwin (1910–16, later serving in the Second World War)
became the OC for the last half of the year while still a prefect,
presiding in June over the sharpshooting Imperial Challenge Shield
Competition, if less successfully than that of the previous year,
allegedly due to some of the Camberwell participants having
unwisely taken part in an ill-timed ‘strenuous football match
the previous afternoon’.21 There was now a certain level of
discontent within the detachment over the failure of the Com-
monwealth and/or the school to provide a serviceable ‘mini-
tature rifle range’—perhaps one suited to those ‘pea-rifles’—
despite appeals by the unit ‘year after year’. Further disap-
pointment followed when the hard-pressed Defence Depart-
ment suspended cadet training from 1 October 1916 until 30
January 1917, calling in all equipment, rifles and ammunition. Those senior cadets still able to wear uniforms, the few of rank only, were now left largely defenceless, alongside the lower ranks and the juniors. Nevertheless, the school platoon continued its mock training and continued to treat attendance as compulsory. Some Camberwell Grammarians had also attended the ‘voluntary’ end-of-year camp at Launching Place, where Lt. Goodwin was elected camp adjutant and Sgt. Steele appointed president of the sergeants’ mess. The Headmaster had also attended and was pleased to have received compliments about the ‘conduct and bearing of the CGS boys’ from professional Army personnel.  

These were modest acknowledgements that came at the end of a period of relative decline as the relentless European war was entering its third year.

Once formal training resumed after 30 January 1917, the school senior platoon was still able to muster between 70 and 80 youths (school population: 291), whilst the junior cadets thrived in an atmosphere more akin to the daily drills of the non-militarised pre-war period, utilising new jumping standards, medicine balls, skipping ropes and a tug-of-war rope rather than instruments of war. Their turn at playing soldiers would come in time, as 30 of them ‘graduated to the senior corps’ on 1 July 1917. Meanwhile, those no longer at play or participating in the real game in France and Belgium were commemorated in the Grammarian by the regular In Memoriam column, which continued to grow. The unit was re-organised yet again, now known as ‘Nos. 17 and 18 Platoons, “E” Company, 24 Battalion’, parading on 28 July at Surrey Hills when the 1899 quota of senior cadets graduated into the ‘Citizen Forces’, the national militia. Twenty Camberwell cadets under Lt. Goodwin also participated in the Williamstown Military Competitions in August, coming fourth in the rifle competition, but excelling in the march-past, securing first position. The Grammarian boasted: ‘For this they were awarded a handsome silver cup, which has been added to our trophies.’  

Like the Lyn James Medal, the present whereabouts of this cup are unknown. Entry into the AIF for any former Camberwell cadet seeking the trophy of actual combat remained voluntary following the failure of the second conscription referendum in December 1917, as the nation divided itself with bitterness over aspects of a war that had now entered its fourth year. Some indication of the depth of this division may be gained by noting a resolution by the school’s prefects in the same month, according to which cadet competition results would no longer be counted for the awarding of school ‘colours’, a system that had been introduced in December 1915 at the close of the Gallipoli campaign.  

What would be the final, decisive year of armed conflict saw the cadet detachment under another new OC and another senior student, Lt. S.J. Baird (1907–1918), only recently promoted from sergeant and described as ‘a very popular and efficient officer’. Numbers remained high, mustering between 70 and 80 seniors, fortified in mid-year by the entry into their ranks of 34 juniors. ‘E’ Company now boasted just over 100 cadets from a record school population of 298. Other more sombre numbers were also increasing, however, as the June 1918 In Memoriam of the Grammarian contained 30 names of ‘Old Boys’ who had ‘died on service’; the ‘Old Boys’ Notes’ column was unsurprisingly dominated by news of either those at the front, those returned from the front or those who would never return. The cadets obviously shared the hopes expressed in that same issue in the poem ‘Our Duty’ by the nine-year-old B. Laurie (1915–20), where the poet recognised that ‘We must fight until the war is over / We must work till it is done’, but at the same time looked forward to the ‘boys returning’ in victory—‘And then we’ll all be happy’. Laurie was, of course, too young for the war itself, even for the junior cadets, but he would be of age for the second round from 1939.
These hopes for peace were finally realised on Monday, 11 November 1918. However, now that the ‘foes have fled away’, as the boy-poet inaccurately described it, there seemed nothing left for the sharpshooting cadets to aim for. Amidst the overflowing rhetoric of the ‘war-to-end-all-wars’ some must have wondered if the cadet system was any longer necessary and by 1922 those sceptics had prevailed. Even before the 1918 Armistice, the junior cadet unit had already become a de facto sports organisation, featuring prominently in inter-school football and cricket matches; perhaps it was now time for the seniors to follow suit as a peaceful future beckoned. Symbolically, Lyn James, the presenter of the rifle-shooting medal, was reported in December 1918 in the first peacetime Grammarian as ‘returning home, and is expected to arrive before Christmas’—he did so and became a clerk in the new, burgeoning Repatriation Department. Few of the repatriated former cadets chose to remain in uniform; two notable exceptions were David Mackey (1912–13) and William Crellin (1913–15). Both had trained at the new ‘Duntroon College’ in the new ‘Federal Capital Territory’, been commissioned and then served with the AIF in France as staff officers. Mackey died in the Thirties while serving at Headquarters Staff, Victoria Barracks; the athletic Crellin, the 1914 ‘school champion’, was still serving as an instructor at Duntroon in 1936.27

Yet, despite the coming of peace on that first Armistice Day, the ‘Cadet Notes’ of the Grammarian in June 1919 affected a ‘business as usual’ approach. ‘Drill’ continued to be carried out ‘with great enthusiasm’ under Lt. Baird and ‘a fair number’ of ‘E’ Company cadets continued to pass into the militia. Lyn James—‘home again’—was able to present his eponymous medal in person at Camberwell Grammar to the 1918 winner, the newly commissioned H. Goodwin (1910–18, younger brother of J.K. Goodwin and later a POW in the Second World War). The spokesman for the cadet detachment remained convinced that ‘rifle shooting is one of the most important parts of a thorough military training, and after all is said, the best shooting army, other things being equal, must prove victorious’.28 The Camberwell cadets were accordingly still learning to shoot straight, despite the most testing military contest in the history of the British Empire having degenerated into an unprecedented slugfest that had minimised the role of the individual sharp-shooter. The school’s cadet detachment had survived it all—only ‘unfavourable weather’ seemed able to shorten their continuing parades, an outcome that the author of the December 1919 ‘Cadet Notes’ seemed to find promising, for ‘even bad weather may bring blessings with it in disguise’, although he failed to specify what precisely those blessings were. The new decade of the 1920s would soon indicate whether the outcome of the Great War, 1914–19, was also likely to bring with it its own elusive blessings in disguise. The Camberwell Grammar cadet detachment remained in 1919, regardless, armed (when available) and always ready. Its members, however, along with many others, would be disappointed in their expectation of an enduring peace. War would not, in this instance, breed peace, but lay the foundations of a more extensive conflict for the following generation.
This photograph from 1918 shows the commanding officer (OC) and non-commissioned officers of the Camberwell cadet detachment at the Burke Road campus, some of them wearing the bandage-like puttees of the period. Front and centre is Lt. S.J. Baird, OC, a senior boy of the school. The two sergeants, to his left, had only just been promoted following recent examinations.

The new Grammarian proudly portrayed the cadet unit during wartime in 1917, as the nation divided over the poisonous issue of conscription.
CHAPTER FOUR

‘An Infinite Capacity for Taking Pains’: The Camberwell Cadets Between the Wars, 1919–1939

‘Carlyle defined genius as an infinite capacity for taking pains.
I therefore desire to encourage the taking of pains at the threshold of a boy’s career.’


The Camberwell Grammar cadet detachment had survived the trials and tribulations of the Great War, like the fortunate five-sixths of the 250 Camberwell Old Boys who had volunteered for the wartime services. The ‘war-to-end-all-wars’, however, had everywhere left its scars both physical and psychological. The peace treaties of 1919, most notably that of Versailles, promised much, but there were qualifications for those prepared to look for them—the South African statesman General Smuts detected the potential for future conflict immediately given the ‘prison of inferiority’ that had been forced upon Germany at this time. The wider, immediate response, at least in the British Empire and the US, however, was one of satisfaction accompanied by an understandable repugnance towards the air of militarism that had prevailed during the war and taken the lives of over 1.2 million British Empire servicemen, of whom some 60,000 were Australians. Post-war disarmament followed, naturally enough—an ambitious level of naval disarmament was implemented according to the Washington Naval Conference of 1921–22, limiting the size of the navies of the victorious maritime powers (notably Britain, the US and Japan) and the Commonwealth government in Melbourne, like many other national governments elsewhere, demobilised and decelerated the mass armies of the wartime years. Such attitudes trickled down to the level of the school cadet units at institutions like Camberwell Grammar School, as one side-effect of the seminal Washington discussions was the acknowledgement that the days of compulsory military training for cadets were numbered.29

As a consequence of this official deceleration through the 1920s, the Camberwell cadet system endured another period of flux. Early in 1920, amidst the flush of victory, cadet membership had been restored by the school’s Prefects as an element that counted towards the granting of ‘School Sports Colours’ (it had been removed from such consideration in that grim year, 1917), but only for those dwindling few cadets of commissioned rank, alongside sergeants. The unit continued to be commanded by its wartime leader, Lt. Sam Baird, whose older brother ‘Bert’ (1902–03) was one of those casualties who had died from ‘trench fever’ following his return home from the European battlefields. Albert Baird, unlike his younger sibling, had been deprived of the opportunity to serve in any formal Camberwell cadet detachment, given the recess that the unit had endured in the early years of Federation. The immediate post-war years now also seemed set for some sort of similar interruption; was it perhaps significant that the June 1920 issue of the Grammarian was the first not to feature a lengthy ‘Cadet Notes’ column? Even if an oversight, this omission could nevertheless be taken in retrospect as an augury of the immediate,
punctured future of the unit. That change, adverse change, was on the way was soon made clear in person in October 1920 by the Inspector-General of the Australian Military Forces, Sir Harry Chauvel (to the Grammarian and others 'the famous cavalry commander'), when he inspected both the senior and junior contingents at the school. His primary attention was directed towards the assembled older boys who were already members of the Citizens' Forces. The General's purpose, the Grammarian noted, was to tell them 'of the changes that were going to be made in their training'—a clear admission that the system was under federal government scrutiny. After an official reception by Headmaster Hall, in which Mrs Hall entertained the guests with one of her renowned afternoon teas, Chauvel departed with assurances that he had found the Camberwell unit to be of a pleasing standard and having 'won the hearts of all the boys'.

The establishment of a long lobbied-for rifle range at the rear of the Burke Road campus later in the year (or early in 1921) at least bolstered the morale and heart of those senior cadets competing for the coveted Lyn James Medal, given the continued popularity of rifle shooting—the unit had lobbied for some time for the establishment of such a facility and Headmaster Hall finally designated a suitable site at Burke Road given that 'rifle shooting is an excellent sport in itself, and it not only prepares a boy to use a gun, but gives him confidence'.

In the following month, November 1920, another high ranking military officer, Brigadier-General H.E. 'Pompey' Elliott, visited the school in order to unveil the Honour Board that contained the names of the 40 Old Boys who had fallen, an unknown number of them former cadets. The Board, and the dead, were commemorated in poetry by Prefect Victor Drinkwater (1915–20)—'Lest We Forget'—which called for perpetual reverence for 'the heroes bold, / The glorious dead'.' Pompey' Elliott was a local (he lived in Camberwell) and a decorated hero of both the Boer War and of the recent World War. He had continued post-war as a militia commander, as well as serving in the Senate as a Nationalist. His son, Neil Campbell Elliott (1920–24) was a pupil at the school, most likely a cadet, taking Speech Night prizes in 1921, 1923 and 1924. The Brigadier-General returned the following August, 1921, to present the school in general, and the cadet detachment in particular, with its own 'War Trophy', a 77mm Krupp Field Gun captured by the Victorian 6th Battalion, AIF, in France in the last months of the war, at the iconic village of Villers-Brettoneux (or what was left of it) on 8 August 1918, that 'black day of the German Army' as General Ludendorff called it. This field-piece was placed in the 'playground'—one former student from the late 1920s recalled it as the only piece of equipment there—but remained an untouchable shrine for another next generation both here and at the new Mont Albert campus from 1935, where it stood on a concrete plinth near the Roystead driveway until the 1950s. After that time this war trophy disappeared to a destination unknown even to a former cadet OC. A similar piece captured during the same campaign survives outside Victoria Barracks, Melbourne. The gun was intended, in Elliott's description, as 'an object lesson to the boys upon whose shoulders would rest the future safety of the Empire'. This trophy was also commemorated in schoolboy poetry, 'The Gun' by John Hamilton (1914–24), who had entered the school in Year 1 and would leave in Year 11. To him, it symbolised the humbling of the 'Prussian army's boasted might' and now stood 'in peaceful nook' as a 'token of our great deliverance'.

Around the same time, morning drill of fifteen minutes daily was reinstated for the entire school—this system had been earlier abandoned by the cadets at the insistence of the military authorities in favour of more rigorous 'continuous training'. Its reinstatement was another indication that the difference between those members of the cadet detachment and the main school population was narrowing, a narrowing
that left the author of the cadet notes in the *Grammarian* of June 1921 singularly unimpressed as he expressed his dis-taste for mass exercise on ‘cold mornings’. That gap, such as it was, virtually ceased to exist in 1921–22, when the military authorities determined that the ‘future safety’ of the Empire seemed assured enough to dispense with the system of compul-sory cadet training altogether; as always, the financing of an ever-expensive defence budget played its part in the decision of the Commonwealth government (a Nationalist–Country Party coalition) in November 1921 to reduce the long-standing commitment to universal military service at home. It was fitting that the Camberwell Debating Society’s first topic of 1922 was ‘The Compulsory System of Cadet Training’, a subject that was being discussed well beyond the boundaries of the school.36 The Military Board within the Defence Department determined that from 1 July 1922 (the beginning of a new training year) only sixteen and seventeen year olds would now receive training as ‘Senior Cadets’. Despite their reduced number, training of the Senior Cadets nevertheless continued to consume some 10 per cent of the overall, strained defence and general budget—war debt alone counted for over 75 per cent of the national debt of £416 million. Fourteen-year-old juniors were henceforth to be issued with the appropriate paperwork calling them up only from the February of the year in which they turned sixteen.37 The junior cadet system was thus effectively terminated—it had, in any case, long resembled sports training more than any military drilling. The seniors were disposed of with greater subtlety, becoming the responsibility of the Citizens’ Forces rather than of any school organisation, unless that school could retain a minimum number of four platoons (approximately 180 personnel at this time).

This constituted the effective end of the now often derided system of ‘boy conscription’. ‘Cadet Notes’ disappeared from the *Grammarian*, as did any reference to cadets in the list of ‘School Office-Bearers’. Camberwell Grammar (school population in 1922: 305, but falling thereafter) was unable to sustain a sufficiently large cadet unit to retain formal unit autonomy, as some other schools were able to do. The Camberwell unit, which could trace an interrupted path back to its foundation in 1888, now nominally (if not in actual practice) ceased to exist, an official passing symbolically marked by the retirement of Lt S.J. Baird OC—‘services no longer required’—who had commanded since 1918, his final school year; he later became a Camberwell pharmacist. Baird did not leave his beloved unit without presenting an ongoing school award for ‘champion shooting’—it was still being presented at the end of 1928. Even the surviving, rump school cadet system was further down-graded in 1924, at the recommenda-tion of Lt. General Chauvel, when senior training was reduced to a single year beginning in a cadet’s seventeenth year, after which each youth would be transferred into the Citizens’ Forces. Camberwell Grammar was only one of many educational communities that now continued without the benefit of a uniformed, compulsory cadet detachment, at least one endorsed by the Defence Department. The more relaxed spirit of the 1920s, the era of ‘Australia Unlimited’, was not apparently one conducive to the concept of unquestioned obedience and respect for authority that the cadet system had enshrined. Brigadier-General Elliott had written to Headmaster Hall in 1922 in order to present to the school the bound volume of *The Story of the Fifth Australian Division*, intended as a prize for ‘the boy whom you consider the most industrious and persevering’ in accordance, he insisted, with Carlyle’s definition of genius as ‘an infinite capacity for taking pains’.38 However, any prospective Camberwell Grammarian genius receiving such an award could no longer be one wearing the uniform of the Camberwell cadet detachment, at least not a uniform officially approved at Victoria Barracks; nor could he be a recipient of the Lyn James Medal for rifle shooting, which was presented for the last time in late 1922. Those days now seemed over, even though there seems little doubt that the school cadet
detachment, or parts of it, had continued to drill after 1922 on an informal basis under the eagle eye of former wartime military censor Headmaster ‘Captain’ A.S. Hall, much as it had done in the first decade of the century under this former officer of the old colonial cadet system. The Grammarian no longer featured ‘Cadet Notes’, but instead carefully documented the doings of the ‘Rifle Club’, as directed by a committee under no less than ‘Mr A.S. Hall’.39 Even this informal cadet structure must have been under a shadow, however, once the ‘Old Boss’, who was the personification of the quasi-military atmosphere of the ‘private’ (although often now ‘public’) schools of the period, retired as headmaster at the end of 1926. Soon after, Mr and Mrs Hall left Australia for an extended overseas trip.

II

Hall’s successor, Dr M.A. Buntine, was entirely bereft of any military background at this time—a second world war would allow him to fill that gap, at Tobruk and elsewhere. Victorian-born son of a noted schoolmaster (and long-standing rival of A.S. Hall and his Camberwell Grammar), the newly married Dr Buntine was academic to his bootstraps, with a doctorate from Edinburgh and teaching experience at Scotch, but he did not immediately acknowledge that the cadet system was an integral part of the school he now headed from January 1927 (at the young age of 28, one of the youngest members of staff).40 Under the headship of ‘Bunnie’, the cadet rump that Hall had maintained, either through persuasion or compulsion, continued to drill and to compete in an annual school shooting competition with an award provided by retired OC Sam Baird. The 1927 trophy for second prize awarded to Thomas Bath (1918–28, prefect and cadet) survives—one novice was noted in this year for missing his own target, striking another and for taking out a valuable ‘electric light globe’.41 Nevertheless, the Rifle Club continued and was able to maintain some standard of marksmanship during this lean period.

Elsewhere, however, standards were falling and the overall progress of the unit in this period remained at the mercy of higher authorities. In November 1929, the new federal Labor government of J.H. Scullin, a party and prime minister disposed towards pacifism and concepts of disarmament, abolished the system of compulsory military training, including the cadet branch. Scullin thereby dismantled the structure that had been established under the distant 1909 Defence Act. In some respects, this abolition of a system of compulsion, which aggravated so many in a party still smarting from the divisions of the 1916–17 referenda and from the subsequent defection of Billy Hughes, worked in favour of those schools like Camberwell Grammar which had been able, just, to maintain a semblance of cadet training throughout the 1920s. Within a week of the abolition of the old system, Scullin and Lt. General Chauvel announced the new government’s intention to establish a voluntary replacement system for both the militia and the cadets; soon it was formalised to begin from 1 January 1930. For Camberwell, as for many other schools, this was a step forward, not back, allowing the de facto arrangements of recent years to become de jure, and thereby officially funded. Accordingly, the June 1930 Grammarian made public the school’s already declared intention to establish a formal ‘corps’ complete with a ‘special uniform’ of blue-grey with school colours on lapels and the ANZAC ‘rising-sun’ badge on the cap. It would be one of only six active school units in Victoria in 1930.42

Soon, the Grammarian would boast that following the abolition of compulsory training ‘the Doctor [had] formed a Cadets Corps at the School, the first of its kind in Victoria. The corps does not encourage militarism, but helps boys take an intelligent interest in the defence of the country’.43 Whilst this was a questionable assertion—later chapters will discuss the element of militarism within the school community at this time—there is no reason to doubt the
suggestion of the 1936 Jubilee Grammarian that under ‘the Doctor’ the ‘Cadet Corps reached a very high standard’. Certainly, in his final Speech Night ‘Headmaster’s Report’ in December 1930, Dr Buntine had preferred to stress the importance of the Corps as a means ‘of training in citizenship’, but there was no denying it’s obvious military character. The command structure that had since 1914 allowed senior boys to be the OC (Officer Commanding) was now dispensed with in favour of one that allowed command by a schoolmaster, as had once before been the case. Dr Buntine himself took this position in 1930–31, *ex officio*, and perhaps with some reluctance, or so it appeared in the official cadet portrait of 1930, where the uniformed headmaster appeared rather disconsolate. Following his sudden resignation from the school in mid-1931, Buntine was replaced as OC by Lt. Frank Purvis (1928–32), with boy cadet-lieutenants under him. Camberwell’s reinvigorated cadets were now proud, and protective, of their new status, taking significant prizes at the April 1931 Military Athletic Sports.

The new decade of the 1930s offered a new beginning for those prepared to take up the challenge without the yoke of compulsion and the Grammarian accordingly renewed its ‘Cadet Notes’ in December 1931. The challenge was not accepted by all in the student body and the absence of compulsion allowed the expression of a dissent that had been formerly stifled, as some in the school now openly wondered whether there was even a place for volunteers. The ‘School Notes’ of December 1931 described the visit of Mr Stirling of the League of Nations Union, drily observing that when the speaker referred in detail to his topic of ‘World Peace’, ‘it was noticeable how the Cadet Corps sat up and took notice’. Nevertheless, despite this threat of ongoing peace, the Grammarian followed in July 1932 with the most comprehensive cadet column since the inception of this ‘Official Organ’ in 1915. This enhanced column listed the recent achievements of the revived Corps, including its participation in the ‘School Cadet Corps’ camp at Portsea; it detailed the first parade of the new year in February 1932 which included an exhibition of ‘visual training and stalking’; the success of Camberwell cadets at sports events held recently at their rival Scotch College and elsewhere were celebrated—even attendance at a Battalion Picture Night in March was noted. By ANZAC Day 1932, the Corps was described as ‘marching with the precision of a well-trained body’—the remainder of the school body at this St Mark’s service was curiously, and with a touch of contempt, described as the ‘mufti portion’. ‘The Cadet Corps’, the new notes observed, ‘has done much useful, as well as social, work’, a comment that reflected the evolutionary view of the period that the military could also perform functions that were essentially peaceful in character (an outlook that predominates in the twenty-first century). That ‘useful’ work, however, was not entirely civil and included training with the Lewis machine gun, a heavy weapon that required great physical strength and teamwork to operate effectively—its use was offered only to those cadets who were considered worthy of further instruction. ‘Novices’ were afforded only ‘the feel of it’ in the field at Williamstown in October, as well as the feel of the traditional ‘bayonet drill’, alongside that ever-popular juvenile pastime, ‘shooting with the small rifles’—the cadets had come a long way since their restriction in the Great War to the use of .22 calibre ‘pea-rifles’. Some were also invited to a weekend camp at Eltham by Colonel Disher, commander of the Army Medical Corps, where they were treated to a showing of the film *The Battle of the Somme*, perhaps without gaining a realisation of the full gravity of this mass slaughter, which had taken 16,000 Australian lives alone. As the immediate memories of that terrible conflict were fading in some minds, the words of the popular song of the period perfectly described this reinvigorated body of uniformed boys at Camberwell Grammar and elsewhere—‘Happy Days are Here Again!’
That new beginning for the corps would be under another headmaster, Dr Buntine having decamped to Western Australia in the course of 1931 for, as Mrs Buntine later described it, brighter and more physically comfortable prospects (to the chagrin of the offended School Council which had appointed him for six years); he soon took Lt. Frank Purvis with him, despite the new headmaster persuading the Council to increase his salary, perhaps as a pre-emptive move. The headmaster from 1932 was Mr H.L. Tonkin, formerly head of Mentone Grammar, who declined to head the cadet detachment in the manner of his two immediate predecessors, the command now being briefly passed to Lt. I.L. Smith, Purvis’s assistant, prefect and Captain of School (who would be killed in 1943 as a commando), and then in 1933 to Lt. D.M. Rain, a staff member (1933–35). He commanded a unit of two platoons (about 90 boys; school population 1933: 228). Lt. Rain was able immediately to preside over success at the Military Sports of that year, 1933, for the Aggregate Cup—the School Council sent its congratulations—although Melbourne Grammar narrowly defeated Camberwell for the prestigious shooting award, the Monash Cup. The Camberwell shooters would need to wait another year for competitive success. Despite this, the unit could boast when Corporal ‘Jack’ Lauder (1930–34) became the year’s individual ‘Cadet Champion Shot’. It was at this time too that the old pre-war system of mock battles was successfully revived to the delight of those boys in the victorious team, capturing a targeted bridge, and to the consternation of those ‘defeated’—the most disappointed were those boys on the flanks who had arrived at the scene of ‘battle’ too late to participate. Such demonstrations had been common before 1901, but had been discouraged in more recent years owing to wartime shortages of uniforms and equipment. They had also seemed out of place in the 1920s, when the memory of actual battle was too recent; their revival now was some indication of a changing mentality in the 1930s, some indication of a turn away from the peaceful Twenties and inwardly focused Depression years, returning to a pre-1914 outlook that continued to exalt the military virtues that the Great War had tarnished, at least in the eyes of a few observers. It is difficult to imagine, however, that many of the boys in the cadet corps were especially conscious of such qualifications and little sense of disenchantment is gained from any reading of the ‘Cadet Notes’ of these years, which continued to list and celebrate the unit’s achievements, both military and still occasionally social—the cadets of this period could apparently dance as well as they could shoot.

The only nagging doubt felt by most of the parents was that of the material costs of having a boy in this volunteer unit. Uniform expenses were as vexing to them in 1934 as they had been to those parents of the 1890s. Following the first ceremonial parade of the year, when a ‘depleted’ corps was inspected by Major-General Bruche, it was hoped that a reduction could be made to the cost of these uniforms. In due course, the new conservative UAP federal government of J.A. Lyons (a former wartime pacifist, or close to it, and fierce opponent of conscription) agreed to contribute to the costs of these outfits, which in the case of Camberwell were still the blue-grey throw-back to the uniforms of colonial times. Headmaster Tonkin—now nicknamed ‘Lizard’ owing to his habit of going to sleep in the sun—praised the government for doing so in his December 1934 Speech Night address and hoped that now the voluntary corps could be strengthened, once parents encouraged their sons to join. Tonkin’s focus, however, was on the impending shift from Burke Road to the extensive, but undeveloped new site on Mont Albert Road. The ‘7½ acres of well-laid-out grounds’ stressed by the official school supplement to the Grammarian of August 1934 held out much promise for a corps keen on range shooting and one that had exercised on unforgiving asphalt for decades.
This prospect of a rosier future did not immediately materialise given that the school as a whole was undergoing a population crisis. The 1934 school population had been only 182, the lowest since 1910, and although the move to the Roystead site in the following year had given a noticeable boost to 214, the cadet corps was faltering. 1935 was not a good year for the detachment. Even the resurrected ‘Cadet Notes’ had again disappeared from the Grammarian and a combination of factors had led to another, mercifully brief, interruption to operations. Post-Depression falling student numbers, uniform costs, the absence of compulsion—all would lead to a further shuffling of the pack in early 1936. Such a ‘reorganisation’, as the again revived ‘Cadet Corps’ notes called it, was timely, given that only a month after the opening of the new William Angliss building on the new school campus, military conscription had been reintroduced in Germany (in March 1935), contrary to the provisions of the 1919 Treaty of Versailles. This was a worrying indication that the new Nazi government of the Reich had aspirations beyond those of its immediate predecessors, to say the least, and some of those aspirations would enmesh the Camberwell cadets in later years. Back home, this 1936 ‘reorganisation’ centred on the mundane, perpetual issues of uniforms and weapons, rather than on any indication of future international turmoil. The unit now numbered a respectable four officers (including Lt. H.L. Ackland OC, staff 1936–51; Rain had left teaching to join BHP) and 91 other ranks broken into three platoons (school population: 239 and rising). That the new commander Ackland faced a daunting challenge with the corps, the largest for many years in the headmaster’s estimation, was made clear by the fact that the early parades of the year were occupied with the teaching of the most basic military drill. The issue of uniforms was again to the fore (as it had been to one extent or another since 1888), the old blue-grey issue having failed to meet the demands that these eager boys put upon the garments. Therefore, an attempt was made immediately by Ackland to gain access to a more rigorous (and more historically resonant) khaki outfit. The Defence Department Clothing Factory was asked to provide samples of khaki jackets, cord breeches, puttees and felt hats, the results being considered a ‘decided success’. The cost, however, as so often with military affairs, was damnable and the revived unit was regrettably unable to proceed any further with this sought-after refashioning of its image. As it turned out, they would not need to wait for long, but in the meantime the School Council approached both the Parents’ Association and the Defence Department seeking financial help. Even though the Department offered 10/- per cadet per annum, the Council determined that the costs of uniforms must primarily be borne by individual cadets (at well over £3 each, about the average male weekly wage). The cadet notes of the August 1936 Grammarian give some indication of the depth of regret, almost despair, felt at this time within the unit over the absence, and expense, of a proper uniform for all:

There can be little doubt that the efficiency of the boys on parade is greatly increased when they drill in correct uniform. It adds to the esprit de corps, making every member realise that he must work with his fellows to make the unit worthy of the uniform he wears.

At the end of the 1936, Headmaster Tonkin was still expressing a hope in his Speech Night address that all of the cadets would be in a uniform of some kind, ‘next year’—at times in the history of the corps, promises of future benefits seemed all there was to hope for. Esprit de corps aside, at least the unit could be satisfied with the state of its armaments c.1936, namely rifles and bayonets, the state of which were considered ‘satisfactory’ following an inspection and stocktake of the school’s armoury. That armoury would unfortunately not endure, nor is it clear whether the federal government’s promise of a free greatcoat for each school cadet was ever realised. In the earlier Depression years the government had offered
a free ex-Army greatcoat, dyed blue, to each member of the unemployed (‘Scullin’s Army’), but an improving economy had now diminished the need to do so.

The second term of the ‘next year’, 1937, did see the arrival of a new set of uniforms—the coveted khaki at last, following some unexplained solution of the once ‘vexed question of finance’. The boys were immediately put to the exacting task of learning to bind those wretched colonial-era, bandage-like puttees which had so frustrated their ANZAC forebears and the cadets of the earlier periods. An Argus photographer visited the school in the second term of 1937 and his record shows the senior boys at what was to be the climax of the cadet detachment between the wars. Well-equipped and well-armed, the boys stand vigilant and ready for future combat, unconscious that the following year would bring the British Empire within a hair’s breadth of another European war. The year 1937 had concentrated the minds of the cadets wonderfully, as their documented notes indicated, for it had been decided that the unit ought now to be rigidly restricted to those ‘who were interested in the corps and were anxious to join’. This terse statement of intention probably reflected recent, continuing turmoil within the unit over uniforms and the nature of elementary drill, but it did not support the simultaneous claims of an enhanced esprit de corps. Not surprisingly, there had been of late a consequent ‘unfortunate decrease in our numbers’; despite the obvious pride expressed in the Argus photograph, the image had immediately preceded a certain decline of morale. Ammunition was there aplenty and the Wednesday parades of the seniors were invigorated by the possession of a Vickers machine gun (a Great War icon), but declining volunteer numbers could only be taken as, at the very least, a warning sign of tougher times ahead. Another sign could be detected before the year was half over, when Derham House challenged Robinson in a much-anticipated school debate: ‘That Every Boy Should Join the School Cadet Corps’. Derham’s affirmative case was expected to be prosecuted by boys who were all members of the corps—their House had after all been named after war hero and Old Boy F.P Derham in 1924—and its opponents on the negative side were all expected to be ‘non-cadets’. Camberwell Grammar was thus duplicating the divisive referenda debates of 1916–17, if on a smaller scale. The outcome of the debate is unknown, but Derham did win the cadet Shooting Cup thanks to Cpl. R.G. Jones (1935–37), as well as the ‘Cadet House Competition’ of that year. Shooting was as much of an obsession as it had always been, five boys participating for the Sargood Shield, a colonial era award from 1889 that continued to be the subject of fierce competition in the twentieth century. The results were similar to those of earlier generations, Melbourne Grammar and Scotch College with their greater numbers and experience coming to the fore at the expense of Camberwell, to their apparent delight. The slimmer Camberwell corps was nevertheless congratulated on Armistice Day, 11 November 1937, by the veteran Major Wardell, who spoke about the last war from the ‘soldiers’ point of view’—it was an address that would, within two years, be translated from theory to practice for some of his audience.

The iconic Argus photograph of mid-1937 was titled ‘On Parade’, but again the seeming optimism of that image did not reflect the reality of the corps in another year of difficulty, 1938. In his ‘Annual Report’ of 1938, Headmaster Tonkin apologetically explained what had been yet another interregnum in the history of the detachment, a gap in function caused by the perpetual, nagging issue of uniform costs. The detachment had not operated in this year, he explained, ‘owing partly to the youth of the boys, and owing partly to the cost of the uniform’. Nevertheless, Tonkin promised (yet another) revival in 1939—‘next year’ again—on the condition that parents provided the school with ‘assistance’. ‘It is a great pity,’ he continued, ‘that the Commonwealth will not meet the cost of uniforms’, as Canberra now pleaded an inability
so innocently engaged—the sun may have been shining after a dismally wet week as they separated at Spencer Street station from the Haileybury cadets with whom they had exercised, but there was no escaping the shades of the outside world. Even the most careless boys realised that they had crossed the Rubicon:

The only shadow was that cast by the fact that our return to the city would bring us into closer contact with overseas affairs, which had reached a climax while we were in the country and which had, as yet, seemed strangely unreal to us.

This new war from September 1939 would be real enough and surpass in scale, if not in ferocity, the Great War which had overshadowed the last two decades. The conclusion of the ‘war-to-end-all-wars’ and the general optimism that had followed had proved a false dawn. In December 1927, the Grammarian had published the poem ‘Peace’ by the Year Nine boy Douglas Robinson (1919–28), in which the poet had pondered on the calm of undisturbed bird life amidst the tranquility of nature and the example provided for mankind by sparrows, parrots and magpies (rather than by the eagle):

Oh! If but men could live like this,
And quarrels in our world would cease;
This world would be a world of bliss,
And we should live in perfect peace,
In perfect peace.

As General Smuts had suspected in 1919, the peace had not been a perfect one—those who had indulged in any Shakespearean hope that war would breed peace had been disappointed—and many of the Camberwell cadets would shortly join their fathers and uncles on the school’s Roll of Honour; some would also join those whom the Grammarian had earlier recorded In Memoriam. Many military officials in the
non-compulsory Thirties had seen the cadet movement as an incubator of potential leaders—now was the time to realise their vision. The Camberwell cadet corps, 1919–39, had certainly shown ‘an infinite capacity for taking pains’ and it too was now to be further tested.

The cadet corps survived into 1930 as a voluntary unit following the Scullin government’s abolition of ‘boy conscription’. The boys are wearing the new blue-grey uniform and are seated beside Dr Bunting, who appeared ex officio as commanding officer, not as headmaster. This was the only period in which a headmaster combined the two positions of head of school and head of the cadets.

This shot was taken by an Argus photographer and published as “On Parade” in the winter of 1937. It depicts senior Camberwell Grammar cadets at one of the high points of the detachment between the wars, wearing the newly-issued uniform of khaki jacket and the bandage-like puttees of the period. The school had asked the Defence Department Clothing Factory to provide uniform samples in 1936, but the cost prevented the cadet unit from obtaining any of these outfits until the following year.
CHAPTER FIVE

'As Gold in the Furnace': The Camberwell Cadets in the Second World War, 1939–45

'I believe you have Mr Brown back again. I am sorry I didn’t see him, as it was to a certain extent owing to the cadets and his work with them that I joined the AIF.’

Douglas Roper, AIF (Old Boy 1941), 9 May 1945.

‘vita mortuorum in memoria vivorum est posita.’ (The life of the dead is set in the memory of the living.)

Cicero, quoted in the Camberwell Grammarian following the death of A.S., Hall, July 1940.

Few Australians could have been surprised when Prime Minister Menzies made his self-described ‘melancholy’ radio broadcast on Sunday night, 3 September 1939, during which he announced that Australia too was now at war with Germany. An impending European war had been narrowly avoided barely a year before through the ‘Munich Pact’, as the appeasers preferred to call it, but further tension in March 1939 had resulted in even Prime Minister Lyons—the most strenuous of those seeking international conciliation—admitting in his penultimate radio broadcast that ‘the time for making further concessions in the hope of preserving peace has passed’, although he did add in verbal parentheses ‘for the time being’. The German invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, however, ended any hopes, or illusions, about the prospects of maintaining peace in Europe. Back home, the Camberwell cadets returned home at the end of the first week in September from their annual camp at Seymour to find their nation now at war. Once again, it was the task of the cadet unit to prepare boys for the challenges presented by a world at war.

Some after 1918 seemed to have detected the prospect of another major conflict earlier than others and had already counselled the Camberwell cadets accordingly. When presenting the iconic war trophy of a captured German field piece to the cadet unit in August 1921, Brigadier-General H.E. ‘Pompey’ Elliott, a local hero, reminded his audience that this gift was intended to be ‘an object lesson to the boys upon whose shoulders would rest the future safety of the Empire’. That burden was to be shouldered earlier than perhaps ‘Pompey’ had expected and he did not live to see any of these boys undertake it, but another Victorian of similar disposition and distinction did so; Brigadier-General Thomas Blamey, formerly Monash’s Chief-of-Staff in the Great War, had been the chief guest at St Mark’s Church to commemorate ANZAC Day in April 1930 and had exhorted the boys then to emulate the conduct and spirit of the Gallipoli wounded on that fateful day fifteen years earlier. Blamey would take a significant part in the attempt to recreate this ANZAC spirit after 1939 and the Camberwell cadets of the Second World War would forever be under the shadow of their ANZAC predecessors, for better or worse. They were also under the shadow of their predecessors in the cadet unit, being sorely reminded of that fact in January 1940 following the death of former headmaster A.S. Hall in his seventy-seventh year. Captain Hall had not presided over the establishment of the corps in 1888, but he very soon
brought his own cadet experience to bear on the fledgling unit and was rightly credited by the *Camberwell Grammian* in its July obituary for having maintained the unit in its difficult early years prior to the introduction of compulsory training, fully implemented from 1911.

The wartime unit began under the command of the school’s senior science teacher Lt H. Ackland (soon promoted to Captain), who had held the position since 1936 and was the most highly paid member of staff, at £380 p.a., aside from the Headmaster himself. Ackland was forced immediately to deal with the perennial problems of uniforms and equipment, dilemmas which had already occupied much of his attention during peacetime—just as the 1st AIF had naturally been afforded priority in 1914–18, so too was it now the turn of the 2nd AIF to have first call on military supplies. The military year of 1940 began with the unit’s two officers and four NCOs attending a special course of instruction at Frankston, where they ‘shivered under canvas’ and chiefly enjoyed the breakfast menu, ‘although lectures and manoeuvres did much to increase our military knowledge’.67 The extensive Cadet Notes on this camp were penned with style and humour by Lance-Corporal Norman Tregaskis, a Form VI student who would later have further cause to feature in the history of the unit. This was all in readiness for placing the unit of 52 boys (school population: 308) on a war footing; it was now a modest, but stable, establishment of two ‘stalwart’ platoons and the senior Form rooms were now permeated with the ‘odour of Brasso’. Some students noticed that the cadet obsession with polishing their tunic buttons was at the expense of other school activities and at the expense of their non-military fellows, many of whom began to feel unappreciated.68 In fact, only 23 of these busy cadets had tunic buttons to polish, the rest being initially without uniforms, but before the end of Term One the coveted khaki had arrived in sufficient quantities for the whole unit to parade, polished, in uniform for their first public appearance on ANZAC Day in April 1940. There was eventually some disquiet amongst parents that even uniforms required an allocation from the family’s clothing ration, but such rationing, unpopular though it became, at least avoided the undesirable situation of the previous war during which many cadets had been unable to don a uniform of any kind for long periods. This had come then at the expense of the unit’s morale and would do so again until the rationing of uniforms ceased in August 1942.69 Stores remained a problem, however, because of pressing wartime demands as members of the 2nd AIF were dispatched to North Africa and the Middle East. The Camberwell cadet unit was nevertheless able to present a solid front at the St Mark’s Armistice Day service in November, where they were joined by former members of the Victorian 24th Battalion, 1st AIF, an indication that the past was merging with the future. Only a fortnight later, the past again seemed to anoint the unit when it paraded favourably on 23 November 1940 at the annual school fete, where the salute was taken by Major-General F.P. Derham, a heavily decorated Old Boy (1890–99) and former president of the OGCA. He now commanded the home-based 4th Division, which included many of ‘our Old Boys’, amongst whom were former cadets.70

The unit’s weaponry soon shared the same fate as the stores. History began to repeat itself when the unit was deprived by order of Army Ordnance of its valued Lee-Enfield .303 rifles, ammunition and its treasured Lewis gun from July 1940—each unit had been entitled to a single example of these lethal, signature weapons and its loss now was a psychological blow. It was noted with regret as the year progressed that ‘the enthusiasm of the boys dropped away greatly’ despite (or perhaps because of) the cadets having been kept busy at the early Frankston camp and later with lectures and sand-table exercises at the expense of practical military training.71
The response of the all-powerful Military Board to this and similar problems of drooping wartime morale following the defeat of France in June 1940 was suitably focused and reflective of that renowned quality of military efficiency, with cadet units being instructed to increase their numbers with some urgency. The increase would eventually total 57 per cent nationally and the replenished units, including that at Camberwell, were now drilled with the assistance of Defence Department officers. Camberwell Grammar was allotted the ambitious goal of a corps numbering 90 by 1941, which was only likely to be obtained through the recruitment of close to every boy over the age of fourteen in a total population of just over 300. In his 1939 Speech Night address, Headmaster Tonkin had already expressed his hope that ‘every eligible boy’ would join the unit, a view that the corps itself would soon publicly endorse, so the age of ‘boy conscription’ had returned in all but name.

It was not entirely clear what these expanded wartime numbers were expected to do now that they had been disarmed, although the author of ‘The School and the War’ in the Grammarians of July 1940 was confident that they would nevertheless spend much term and holiday time in ‘further training’. Parents and boys were reminded by the final issue of the Grammarian for the year of their responsibilities and consoled with the thought that ‘equipment is not such an essential part of their training, as every boy is training as a future officer, and it is for him to learn the control and mechanism of the human mind more than that of a machine gun’. Whilst it was true that in due course some 50 per cent of officers in the wartime armed forces of the Empire would have seen earlier cadet service—as defined by no less that A.V. Alexander, First Lord of the Admiralty—and that most of them were products of the private school system, this suggestion by the author of the ‘Cadet Corps’ notes must have seemed to some in the early stages of the war as merely an attempt to excuse a lamentable scarcity of materiel. These shortages were understandable, but vexing, as the Camberwell unit, along with all others, was still required to parade for at least 60 hours a year and to attend an annual camp in suitable numbers. At least the ‘human mind’, even if disarmed, could cope with the concept that many of the boys had models to follow from their own families—for example, Corporal K.C. Harrison (1936–40; Robinson House Captain; Captain of Athletics), a member of the corps since 1936, left the school at the end of 1940 in order to join the Militia, conscious of his father’s record of 1914–18 during which Harrison Senior had won the coveted Military Medal. The son must have been aware that his father’s award was unlikely to have been made without the recipient having had some prior knowledge of the control and mechanism of a machine gun.

The turning of the year, 1941, was not an auspicious one given the continued seriousness of the war situation, even though the cadet numbers had reached 65 and were considered impressive enough—this figure was still well below that of 102 reached in 1916 from a smaller school population in the third year of the previous war (school population 1916: 292; 1941: 307). It was hoped within the corps that the year would see ‘all boys of 14 years and over rallying to the call’. Leading cadets attended small arms and signalling instructional schools at Frankston for a second time and were able in turn to instruct recent recruits, who were still forced to concentrate on field-craft rather than on weapons training. Only later in the war would such ‘field training’ include restored weaponry and have a ‘jungle’ orientation. For now, the final Grammarian of 1941 laconically confessed that this ‘lack of equipment prevented much interesting practical work being done’. Manpower too was a problem and the chief loss of the year was the conscription of Captain Ackland into the RAAF as an instructor in August. He was farewelled with great regret in an Officers’ Mess and
was succeeded by Lt Stan Brown, a staff member since 1939, but he too was called into Army service in September—‘a severe blow’—initially as an Adjutant for the 46th Battalion at Bonegilla. The Parents’ Committee was understandably concerned at this ‘shortage of masters’ and told the School Council so, taking feeble consolation only in the fact that other schools were also feeling the pinch. Brown, who turned 23 in 1941, later acknowledged the fragility of many of the younger staff members other than himself at this time—he had become known to the boys as ‘Machine Gun’—but his departure was not before he took the unit on a successful, but physically taxing, ten day camp at Bonegilla in the second-term holidays. This camp was not especially noted for its military virtues, rather for boys losing their kit-bags on the agonisingly slow train, collapsing on church parade, tossing onions at an unskilled cook and secreting a valued fruit cake from the attentions of an intoxicated sergeant—it was all a valued introduction to life in the ranks. A detailed first-hand account (‘What a Life!’) by the athletic prefect Cadet Herbert Neil (1927–41) demonstrated that these boy-soldiers were already in tune with the mature soldier’s perennial obsession—food. The camp offerings of stew and even sweets were dismissed as ‘slush’ and passed over for sanitary bread-and-jam; the boys arrived home ‘tired . . . but refreshed’ and probably hungry. More sober and sombre public exposure followed in a march through the city in October on behalf of the War Loan Rally and through participation in demonstrations of cadet work at the Caulfield Racecourse in November, experiences often dampened only by rain, ‘as usual’. The final parade of the year took place at Parents’ Day on 6 December, barely a day before the nature of the war was to change forever when the Japanese launched the much-feared southwards strike after 7 December. In the months that followed, the long-held Australian nightmare of a Japanese thrust towards our continent became a reality as Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, Singapore and Australian-held New Guinea crumbled. Peter Lang in Year 8 summarised the attitude to Japan common amongst the school community and others at this time, as the old Anglo-Japanese alliance faded into distant memory:

Japan is one of the most treacherous and fanatical empires in the world, and although she has had many successes in her campaigns, America and Britain will destroy her; for it is written ‘He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword.’

The disarmed cadet unit, however was without swords of any description and although it hoped that 1942 would be a ‘successful year’ once ‘more equipment’ was provided, some now feared that any such equipment may be needed to repel an invasion, and quickly. It was around this time that the school through Headmaster Tonkin formulated a plan—a ‘precautionary measure’—to evacuate all boys up to the age of fourteen to rural Victoria with parental permission. The expanded cadets, however, would remain in situ. Amongst those staying in place was the inaugural winner of the Camberwell Grammar School Cadet Corps ‘Most Efficient Cadet’ trophy, H.A.R. Lamborn (1937–41). This coveted trophy was a gift from Major P.H. Keys, DSO, and Captain Ingram, VC, MM, and it continued to be awarded into the 1960s.

II

Pearl Harbour had changed the nature of the game as the distant European war now became a global conflict. It had also removed any ambiguity about whether cadet units ought to continue with their educational and social activities alongside their military responsibilities. With the threat of invasion, the Melbourne Herald gave voice to the sense of ‘total war’ that firmly included boy cadets when it headlined in December 1941, ‘Cadet Corps Now Junior Schools For Army’, but the boys of Camberwell had long since noticed that the war was intended to be a total one when the Grammarian of the previous December had reproduced a Department of Information essay
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(Making A New World For You'), which argued to that effect. The Army itself agreed on the need for a maximum military effort that would include cadets, although it was somewhat conscious that the training of boys must attempt to maintain some balance and thereby avoid any sense of forbidding 'Prussianism'. The wisdom of Camberwell Grammar in maintaining its voluntary unit throughout the Thirties, when many schools had allowed them to lapse, was manifest to all, especially when the cadets were drafted into the digging of trenches around the school as part of the 'Air-Raid Precautions' that also included the construction of 'blast walls' (by 1948 they were considered an impediment by the School Council). Fortunately, these trenches were never used in anger and served primarily as an out-of-bounds play area for the boarders in the area between the Senior School quadrangle and the 'rifle butts'. There was also the occasional air-raid practice, during which cadets and others skulked therein with liquorice-like pieces of rubber between their teeth. Not surprisingly, Camberwell's list of those Old Boys who had enlisted was increasing at a rapid pace (about 150 by mid-1942; still below the Great War figure). They included Stuart Weir (1933–39), who graduated from Duntroon in mid-1942 and went on to a distinguished military career in this conflict, in which he won the Military Cross, and others. The Roll of Honour of the fallen was also growing—five by July 1942 with five POWs and three missing-in-action. For the third time in a single year the unit lost its OC to the needs of the armed forces as Lt M. Haysom (staff 1939–42) was called into the Victorian Scottish Regiment—he was succeeded by Lt H.M. Reid (staff 1942–45). Lack of equipment continued to drain morale, but an Easter bivouac at Olinda proved a boost to the training process. The cadets slept on the floor of the local hall prior to bush manoeuvres and those who underwent this weekend gained much-needed practical experience, along with blistered feet. A similar bivouac for NCOs and senior cadets at the same site followed in October and the participants could only console themselves with the thought that future recruits would benefit from their experience. They all returned 'tanned a healthy pink'. By the end of the year 1942 the war had also taken a healthier turn as the Axis began gradually to be pushed back in Russia, North Africa and the Pacific—Stalingrad, El Alamein and the Coral Sea became commonplace geographical terms to the boys of Camberwell and elsewhere.

Things began accordingly to look up for the unit very gradually in 1943 with the unit now numbering a healthy 95, beyond the figure set by the Army in 1940. The ANZAC customs were preceded by a significant 'Service of Commemoration and Dedication' at St Mark's on 20 April, the school inviting boys, parents and friends under the inscription: 'The youth of our nation are eager to show what is in them, and with manly determination to endure the heavy sacrifice of a righteous modern war.' This particularly applied to the boys of the cadet unit. The highlight of their year was the July Guard of Honour at a 'beautiful and uplifting' Consecration of St Mark's provided for the Governor of Victoria, Major-General Sir Winston Dugan DSO, who was so impressed with the bearing of the newly rearmed cadets, despite the habitual rain, that he requested (some said 'ordered') Mr Tonkin to grant the whole school a holiday. This was quite a compliment from a vice-regal figure with a distinguished military history in the last war in the British army and the sharp eye that came from his experience of high command on the Western Front. The second half of the year had seen a welcome flow of stores of a calibre and quantity not seen since the outbreak of the conflict nearly four years earlier and the cadets were able to display some of them at the August Parents' Day with a guard drill and a changing of the guard before an audience of 600. Unfortunately, now that equipment such as radios and weapons, even a new Vickers machine gun, were plentiful, there were few at the school with the ability to instruct the boys in their use. Accordingly, the new open-air
‘miniature’ school rifle range (the ‘rifle butt’ at the northern end of the developed campus running alongside the edge of the rear oval) was under utilised, even though the unit was, for once, flush with equipment now that the Army began to release considerable amounts of material that it had formerly husbanded with rigour. Negotiations to establish a proper rifle range on the Mont Albert Road campus were ongoing, but hampered by the anticipated expense of £60; the corps was still waiting at war’s end, a frustrating situation given that the recently mourned ‘Old Boss’, A. S. Hall, had been able to secure a range at the more cramped Burke Road site over 20 years earlier. In the meantime, as the Roll of Honour expanded, many former cadets were now grimly listed amongst the fallen whose photographs often featured in the Grammarian—wartime mores failed to allow the living to express their grief fully over the loss of many servicemen barely out of boyhood. Two examples will stand for many others, one a tiro, the other a more seasoned veteran: Norman ‘Curly’ Tregaskis (1937–41), who was described as ‘a fine Latin scholar’, was also a former prefect and had been a sergeant in the Camberwell corps as recently as 1941. Following commando training in Queensland, he was killed in New Guinea in July 1943 aged only nineteen. The 28-year-old Major Ivan L. Smith (1921–33, former Captain of School) had briefly been OC of the unit in 1933 when he was still a school prefect and had been called to the Victorian Bar just after enlisting in the AIF in early 1940. Having survived and escaped the Japanese invasion of New Britain in January 1942 and having served as a commando in the same war zone, Smith died in an aircraft accident in October 1943. He was remembered by the Camberwell cadets as a ‘great leader’ and for his ‘gentlemanly qualities’. Each issue of the Grammarian now featured essays detailing the backgrounds of those who had made the ultimate sacrifice.

Once a stop-gap commander, Lt Little, resigned from the staff in early 1944, command fell onto a senior cadet, Cadet-Lt John Bland (School Captain 1945) ‘as no other member of the staff was available’, a manpower shortage similar to that of 1914–18. Bland’s predecessors in the first war, like Lt J.K. Goodwin in 1916 (now himself in the 2nd AIF—like his two brothers—as a Major in the Middle East and corresponding with the Grammarian), had acquitted themselves well in an unenviable position and in his ‘Annual Report’ the Headmaster significantly congratulated Lt Bland, recognising that ‘it is not an easy task for a boy of 16 to take charge of 90 cadets’. During that first war, there had been something of a struggle within schools such as Camberwell over the status of cadets in general and of boy-officers such as Goodwin in particular. This was not the case during this second war with the Army placing such cadet-lieutenants on the Reserve of Officers List from 1944, which afforded them enhanced status within their schools and once they joined the regular armed services, as they were expected to do. Given the extended duration of this war, ANZAC Day services at St Mark’s could now be dedicated to the ‘memory of Old Boys who gave their lives for their country in this war and the last’. Such services were also now followed by a march back to the school accompanied by a drum band, a set of drums having been acquired in April of the previous year at the cost of £50—the corps had contributed half of that amount. An additional wreath-laying, memorial service followed before the school’s ‘Roll of Honour’—now referred to as a ‘sacred shrine’—flanked by two chosen cadets in battle-dress and steel helmets, standing at ‘reversed arms’ with the entire unit (again just over 100 in strength) arrayed before them in the Lower Hall of the senior school. The School Council thought the conduct of the corps during these moving ceremonies worthy of congratulation. On two occasions in 1944 the corps had also been able to participate in city parades in aid of Victory Loans, as many now began to sense that the war was drawing to its conclusion.
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III

What would be the final year of the conflict began well for the Camberwell unit as the popular and efficient Stan Brown returned from the services, having been released from an AIF rifle company in which he had served without much enthusiasm—‘I am not occupying the position I had hoped for’—to resume both his teaching career and his position as cadet commander, soon with the confirmed rank of Captain. Before he had left the school, Brown had posted a notice on his desk: ‘Please leave. Back After War.’ He had been able to return in the interim only once, in the course of leave from the officers’ training school in Brisbane in 1942, when the Grammarian thought he ‘looked very fit’. Stan Brown was a charismatic figure and a gifted teacher, possibly the most able of the cadet commanders of the period and one worthy of the Whitehead inheritance from the 1890s. As a veteran, his lectures to the corps on the ‘Battle for New Guinea’ contained an immediacy that had hitherto been lacking and it seems that Douglas Roper’s admission in 1945 (quoted at the start of this chapter) that the quality of Brown’s command had stimulated him, now nineteen years old, to join the AIF was unlikely to have been an unusual experience. Captain Brown was able to preside over the school’s final ANZAC Day service of the Second World War in April 1945, where an honour guard was escorted back to the school from St Mark’s by a guard of nine cadet corporals. The Headmaster’s subsequent biblically inspired and carefully quoted address before the Roll of Honour seemed to summarise the weary sense of sacrifice that the unit must have felt at this juncture, a sense shared by the entire school community and by the entire nation:

All these Old Boys were indeed ‘famous men—men renowned for their love of truth, honour and righteousness and for the great power manifested in them by God . . . God made trial of them, and found them worthy of Himself. As gold in the furnace He proved them, and as a whole burnt offering He accepted them. Their righteous deeds will not be forgotten, and their glory shall not be blotted out.’

Those uniformed boys (uniforms were now issued free of charge) in the listening corps shared this reflected glory; they had not been asked to make the sort of sacrifice to which the Headmaster referred, but they had stood ready to do so. By mid-year the corps had reached Company strength of three platoons (about 75 cadets) and now boasted at war’s end of having ‘a great stock of equipment’, just at a time when such ample stock was no longer needed, at least not with such a sense of urgency. The rifle range at the eastern side of the oval, such as it was, at least was now better utilised and the unit’s sharpshooting ability had been honed for success at the regular Williamstown competitions in which Camberwell boys had been participating since at least 1899.

The unit ‘blossomed forth in all its finery’ on Parents’ Day in July in the description of the 1945 Grammarian, despite heavy rain ‘preventing the large part of the cadet work being carried out’, but, regardless, the salute on this occasion—‘an impressive sight’—was taken appropriately by an Old Boy, Brigadier Wilfred Chapman (1906–07). The Brigadier had attended the school at a time when the cadet unit was enduring one its formal periods of interregnum, but a great many of those now listed on the school’s Roll of Honour had been able to participate in the Twenties and Thirties in the re-established corps. The sacred Roll soon recorded that over 400 Old Boys had enlisted in the armed forces, 1939–45, as opposed to some 250 in the Great War (school population 1918: 299; 1945: 371). Despite the larger number of recruits, the death toll of the longer second war had mercifully been much the same as the 38 (or thereabouts) fallen from the shorter conflict of 1914–18; some 40 Grammarians were counted as fallen or missing in late 1945. It was nevertheless a grim figure, despite the meagre consolations of proportional statistics. But life, and the unit, had gone on with a number of social occasions marking the impending or actual end of the worst conflict in history. The cadet unit was able to hold its
first Officers’ Mess Night since the start of the war around this time in the presence of Headmaster Tonkin and the fathers of the cadet-lieutenants, amongst others, at ‘Roystead’. Soft drinks were served, followed by toasts to the King and a speech by the OC, Captain Brown, on the history of the unit, which he mistakenly traced back to 1908 (the colonial unit’s genesis was in 1888 and the corps had thus already passed its first half-century). The unit had, the OC stated, ‘formed a big link in the character training a boy obtained from his school’. Such a conclusion was beyond doubt, whatever the chronology, and his speech was followed appropriately by ‘drinks, smokes and old soldiers’ stories’. For those of lower rank, a celebratory football match against Haileybury was held in September 1945, now that all could experience a sense of relief following the sudden, atomic-generated outbreak of peace in August that many, including Old Boy C.A. Brough in Tarakan, had thought was unlikely to happen soon given the ‘fanatical beliefs’ of the Japanese. The match was followed by a quasi-Spartan ‘binge’ of ‘sweets and lolly water’ with the necessary canteen funds generously donated by the Headmaster; peace thus promised generosity and prosperity. An impressive parade at the time of Armistice Day, November 1945, put a seal on the sense of final victory—it was combined with the Annual Church Service in a reminder of the gravity of recent, human losses, many of which were now commemorated by a series of memorial prizes often donated by grieving parents and reserved for cadets only; a ‘Most Efficient Cadet Cup’ and ‘Trophy’ (to H.R.H. Downey); a ‘Most Efficient NCO Gift’ (to D. Watt) and a Prize for ‘Champion Shot’ (to S.A. Cant in memory of Norman Tregaskis). This sharpshooting award had been reintroduced in 1944, the like of which had not been seen since the demise of the Lyn James Medal in 1922. ‘Curly’ Tregaskis was also to be commemorated through an annual prize for the student who ‘has made most progress in the study of Latin’. This was appropriate, as in his last letter to the Grammarian, written while he was still in commando training at the front, the young recruit had mentioned that he ‘would like to be back having another go at the Latin’. Now, through the benevolence of his grieving parents, Tregaskis could vicariously refresh his study of the language he clearly loved; as the same journal had said in 1940 quoting Cicero: ‘The life of the dead is set in the memory of the living.’

Watsonia was therefore a memorable post-war celebration that encapsulated the spirit of resilience and initiative that the Camberwell cadets had displayed throughout the war of 1939–45, as gold in the furnace. The task now for their successors was to win the peace—again. Naturally enough, military demands had been the priority for cadet units, 1939–45.
Headmaster Tonkin had referred to such demands early in the war as being in the ‘first place’ of the school’s considerations—but it would not be long before the three pillars of the cadet movement (military, social and educational) were again thought by some, as in the 1920s, to be out of alignment. Now that the war was over, for example, the patient Camera Club (revived in 1941) looked forward to regaining occupation of its darkroom, ‘having been handed over to the Cadet Corps for the duration’—the ‘unfortunate situation’ (as these keen, disgruntled photographers saw it) of the military predominance in student activities was about to end, or so they hoped, as a few in the school community now thought it time to put the husbanded ‘Brasso’ away, forever.

The Officers and NCOs on Roystead steps, 1941. Centre front is OC Captain Ackland. Rear right holding the bugle is Norman Tregaskis, killed in New Guinea in 1943, aged nineteen.

BOTTOM RIGHT: This shot of the wartime cadets was probably taken early in the conflict at a time when the unit had been disarmed owing to the demands of the 2nd AIF for weaponry. As a substitute for weapons training, the cadets received advanced instruction in military theory. Consequently, their morale dropped until late-1943, when they began to receive more equipment, but by then there was a shortage of qualified instructors.

The Governor of Victoria, Sir Winston Dugan, inspected the re-equipped Camberwell cadets (now without the dreaded puttees) at a St. Mark’s parade in July 1943 and was very impressed. The unit took his favourable assessment of them as a considerable compliment, given that His Excellency had the experience of a distinguished brigade-level command in France during the Great War.
The inaugural cadet trophy, awarded to H. Collins in 1888. CGS Archives.

The iconic slouch hat, a design worn by the Unit, with some unpopular interruption, through most of a century. This one is worn by the current OC, Captain Michael Neal.
For many years it was thought that the Unit dated from 1908, as this Presentation Parade booklet indicates. The Unit had, however, been operating in some form since 1888 with some interruptions.

An example of the black webbing belt worn by cadets for many generations. CGS Archives.

These medals were some of those awarded to Francis Plumley Derham (1901), one of the School’s most decorated and venerated military veterans of the Great War. Derham served in the ranks of the early, pre-Federation cadet system. CGS Archives, Derham Collection.
Headmaster A.S. Hall, himself a former cadet officer, current Militia Captain and military censor, presented each Camberwell Old Boy joining the services in the Great War with a leather wallet featuring the School’s crest. Many, probably most, of these boys had earlier served in the various forms of the Cadet Unit. CGS Archives.

The first part of the Unit’s history, dealing with the period up to the outbreak of another world war—many had mistakenly thought that a cadet unit was no longer needed after ‘the war to end all wars’.
The military cap worn by long-standing cadet OC Bruce Doery.
CGS Archives, Doery Collection.

The title “Australian Cadet Corps”, as in this cloth shoulder-badge, was formalised in 1950 and survived until the changing circumstances of 1975–6.
CGS Archives, Doery Collection.

The Unit sported in its own cloth shoulder-badge in later years.
CGS Archives, Doery Collection.

The title “Australian Cadet Corps”, as in this cloth shoulder-badge, was formalised in 1950 and survived until the changing circumstances of 1975–6.
CGS Archives, Doery Collection.
These epaulettes and badges of rank were worn by Bruce Doery as he ascended through the ranks of the Cadet Unit.

CGS Archives, Doery Collection.
Major-General F.P. Derham utilised this swagger stick when on parade, including when inspecting cadet units through the 1920s and 1930s.

CGS Archives, Derham Collection.

An unknown former cadet donated this AMF badge—many former cadets graduated into the ranks of the armed forces.

CGS Archives.
The School Archives contain many framed official portraits of the Unit dating from 1932. This one (1981) features Captain Stafford and other holders of rank. CGS Archives.

This lanyard was presented to Major Bruce Doery by the Cadet Auxiliary in 1997 in recognition of his outstanding service to the Unit. CGS Archives, Doery Collection.
This ceremonial officer’s sword belonged to Major-General F.P. Derham and is one the artefacts on display in the Cadet Cabinet, “Roystead”.

CGS Archives, Derham Collection.
The Roll of Honour Board from the First World War.

Forty of these Old Boys, an unknown number of them former cadets, had fallen in this conflict in the services of Australia and the Empire - the School contributed some 250 volunteers overall. It is likely that the bulk of those named here, both survivors and casualties, had first experienced military life in the School’s cadet ranks in the period 1888-1914. CGS PAC foyer.
The Roll of Honour Board from the Second World War.
Over 400 Old Boys had enlisted during this conflict, approximately 40 of them paying the ultimate penalty of war (about the same number from the smaller cohort of the shorter Great War). An unknown number of them had served in the inter-war cadet units at a time when military service was considered by some to be no longer relevant. CGS PAC foyer.
PART TWO

‘Make Peace Stint War’
The Camberwell Grammar Cadets, 1945–1988

‘Make war breed peace, make peace stint war.’
Alcibiades in Timon of Athens, Shakespeare

‘Only the dead have seen the end of war.’
General Douglas MacArthur, 1962, attributed to Plato, 427–347BC
CHA PTER ONE

‘Our Fair Share of Metaphorical Honey’:
The Camberwell Cadets and the Peace, 1945–54

‘Although we have had plenty of metaphorical rain and snow in the past year, we have also had our fair share of metaphorical honey.’

Major Searle, Headmaster, paraphrasing Winnie the Pooh, Speech Night, December 1951

‘Obedience alone gives the right to command.’

Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted in the Grammarian, December 1949

In the previous century, Mark Twain had referred to the gradation of ‘lies, damned lies, and statistics’ but at least those viewing the Camberwell Grammar School’s Roll of Honour, 1939–45, at the end of the Second World War could take some consolation in comparative statistics when viewing the companion Roll of 1914–19 hanging alongside in the Lower Hall and intended for the ‘Memorial Hall’ of the future, subject to the raising of the appropriate funds. Some 250 Old Boys had served in the armed forces of Australia and the Empire during the Great War, of whom 38 were recorded in December 1918 as having ‘died on service’—the numbers were never exact, as some of the missing would eventually be accounted for one way or another (soon the death toll was listed as 40) and others would die soon after their return and discharge from the injuries received in wartime service. Nevertheless, the statistics of the second war were not quite so grim; over 400 Old Grammarians had enlisted in this conflict with 40 being listed in December 1945 as killed or missing and thereby ‘honoured evermore’. Therefore, the Camberwell death-rate of the first war was some 16 per cent of those who had served (Australian national average = 14 per cent); of the second war Camberwell servicemen, some 10 per cent had fallen (Australian national average = 2.7 per cent)—grim figures indeed. It is worth noting that the 650 or so Camberwell Old Boy veterans of the two world wars constituted over 21 per cent of the just under 3,000 boys who had passed through Camberwell Grammar School, 1886–1945. This was an astonishingly high figure of participation in armed services that had been made up entirely of volunteers (1914–18) and substantially of volunteers for overseas service (1939–45), very few of whom were over the age of 45 (the statistical perimeter). Camberwell Grammar had certainly ‘done its bit’, to use a colloquial wartime expression. Naturally, such statistics were little consolation for grieving parents and other family members of the school community who contemplated the Roll(s) of Honour on regular, ceremonial occasions and at times of private reflection, but these statistics were inescapable, ubiquitous and a nagging reminder of the cost of war, particularly so in the immediate post-war years when it became obvious that this time there would be no abiding sense of any ‘war-to-end-all-wars’ given the international tensions that arose almost immediately between former allies in what was becoming an increasingly divided Europe.

Back home, the Camberwell cadets were proud that many of the veterans had received their first taste of military life in the ranks of their corps, although only a few were conscious that the unit stretched back as far as 1888 to that distant, colonial age of spiked helmets and mutton-chop whiskers
as sported by Major Whitehead, their almost forgotten first commander. The post-war cadet corps was now in an atomic age in which any future major war would again take the lives of millions, but it would be an age in which the late-eighteenth-century concept of a nation-at-arms edged towards redundancy. This transformation was not immediately apparent to all, but in 1946 the Defence Department reminded those responsible for cadet training that the system was a voluntary one, particularly warning the private schools against any de facto revival of compulsion.107 This no longer seemed necessary, at least not yet.

It was a touching coincidence that the beginning of the post-war age overlapped with Camberwell Grammar’s ‘Diamond Jubilee’, at the beginning of 1946. The school population was a healthy 362 (just under the 1945 record of 371) and this provided fertile ground for cadet recruitment which would no longer be quasi-compulsory for the boys of fourteen and over, as had been the wartime practice. The unit, still of Company strength (about 88 boy cadets), began the period with solid leadership; Captain Stan Brown had resumed his old command, retaining his clipped, military moustache. He was seconded by the more youthful Lieut. M.R. Haysom (staff 1941–2, 1946), returning from his war service after having himself briefly commanded the unit in 1942. Both were competent, experienced officers and respected members of staff. Cadet-Lieutenant Bland, who had ably served as the unit’s boy-commander, 1944–45, also left the school for the workforce in 1946. Early post-war recruitment seemed surprisingly promising, which the ‘Cadet Notes’ of the 1946 Grammarian attributed to the ‘standard of efficiency’ of this leadership. The provision of facilities also seemed promising when Major R.N. Lemon, a former commander of the Victorian School Cadet Corps, generously provided the £60 required for the establishment of a proper rifle range on the Mont Albert Road campus on the condition that the School Council purchase a ‘Cup for Shooting’ to the value of £5. His cup was presented for the first time at the end of the year to Cadet Roger Nicholson (1941–47), who had presumably trained on the new rifle range financed by his patron. The School Council had long agonised over expenses, as was its common practice, in this instance over those related to the establishment of a proper range, but had hitherto failed to act and it had now done so following Lemon’s generosity, as long as the Cadet Corps itself paid for the cost of a ‘protective fence’.108 The range was situated at the north-east end of the Keith Anderson Oval, with a rubbish dump and incinerator at one end. The school’s ‘Annual Report’ for 1946, still flushed with a sense of victory, expressed the optimism of this first year of peace: ‘We have never had a better Cadet Corps.’ The first post-war ANZAC service at St Mark’s ranked alongside its wartime predecessors—‘steady rain’ yet again—followed by the now established routine of a Memorial Service held before the Roll of Honour in the Lower Hall of the senior school. A Headmaster’s address and wreath-laying ceremony, a Last Post and prayers from Canon Robinson now constituted the sine qua non of Camberwell cadet parades in the last week of each April.109 An excellent march-past for Parents’ Day in October also recalled former glories. There was even a place for novelty, as the unit held its first ‘Cadet Dance’ in May, perhaps a sign that change was in the air and that the long-neglected social side of cadet life was to be revived.

The annual camp at Watsonia in September demonstrated that the Army had still failed to address many of the material shortages of the wartime period for the cadets by redistributing surplus stock—it would do so in the following year. The three Camberwell cadet-lieutenants (H. Nicholson, R. Downey and J. Waite) were amongst the first campers to realise that there was a shortage even of tents: ‘This added to their previous experience of the Army’s disorganisation.’110 So much for military precision, but their innovative attempt to remedy this deficiency
by confiscating an American tent held by the sergeants was soon abandoned in favour of a smaller Australian model once a ‘large hole’ was detected. As so often, the highlights of the camp were ones engineered by the cadets themselves—‘cane-drill’ with leather swagger canes, perfected by Lt Haysom; telephone-buzzer harassment of the switchboard staff and the rigging of makeshift shelves from abandoned ammunition boxes. A Sunday influx of ‘food and girls’ proved a lively end to what was tagged ‘our best camp ever’. It was the first camp free of the shadow of war for all but the two adult officers, even though some parents were already conscious of the risk of another distant conflict and had complained to the School Council about media ‘eulogy of the Soviet Union’. Canon P.W. Robinson, long-serving chairman of the School Council, shared this parental anxiety and suggested instead that the boys be reminded of the ‘nature and superiority of the British Empire’—nothing, in his mind, demonstrated these qualities better than the ‘School Cadet Detachment’ as it was now known. Soon, C.R. Dickinson of the Old Boys' Association would donate a ‘full-sized Union Jack’ for the use of the school and the detachment in order to remind them of Australia’s place in the Empire, even though the imperial sun was beginning to set.

A third platoon of 40 recruits was formed in 1947 and the climax of the year was the first post-war issue from surplus army stock of ‘AMF pattern uniforms, new School collar and slouch-hat badges, and black and white shoulder flashes’ with the designation ‘Australian Cadet Corps’ (a title formalised in 1950). All the boys thought the new turn-out to be ‘pretty good’ and the parents were doubtless relieved that the uniforms were now issued free of charge. Even better in the estimation of the boys was the fact that the unit had now been rearmed with a Bren gun and an Austen sub-machine gun, while ‘expert instruction’ was offered by officers and NCOs in the use of mortars and grenades. The unit had often suffered during the recent war through shortages of either material or expert manpower—those days now seemed over thanks to surplus wartime stock, with the formation of a specialised machine-gun detachment and the profligate use of dummy rounds on the new rifle range. For the first time the annual September camp was held at the ‘Puckapunyal Military Camp’, a site that would become familiar to succeeding generations of cadets on the irregular occasions when the school was able to access it. This now became the ‘best camp ever held’ in the estimation of some, chiefly owing to the ‘well-stocked canteen and the picture theatre’. The three cadet-lieutenants (‘Tich’, ‘Dub’ and ‘Rog’) chiefly enjoyed access to a radio in their tent, in which ‘life rolled quite sweetly’. The only things missing in this successful year were the annual Cadet Dinner and the only recently introduced Cadet Dance—it is unclear which of the two losses was the more regretted, although given the boys’ constant fixation on food, it was likely to have been the former.

The unit entered 1948 with an ‘overflowing’ armoury and a rifle range in ‘full use’, an unprecedented combination in the previous six decades of the corps. Equipment was increasing in both quantity and quality, including ‘excellent’ brand-new signals material (telephones and walkie-talkies) which was to be exploited by a specialised signals platoon made up of third-year cadets. There was no ANZAC Day march this year as 25 April fell on a Sunday, but the wreath-laying ceremony on the following day was a notable one in the presence of a major benefactor, Old Boy Major-General F.P. Derham (who had taken the salute at the November 1940 parade—he would also later pay the gas bill for the Preparatory School’s heating system). Derham presided over the unveiling of the new 1939–45 Roll of Honour, which included former members of the House that had taken his name, whilst Mr Derek Noble, President of the OCGA, laid a wreath in memory of those who had served in 1914–18. The parade on this occasion featured both cadets and
Old Boys. That the unit was still basking in the aftermath of the recent victories in Europe and the Pacific was demonstrated by the fact that the long-suffering Camera Club (now effectively sponsored by Kodak) had been unable to regain possession of their darkroom as promised, it now being converted into the cadet armoury. The weekly school timetable was generously adjusted to allow an 80-minute cadet parade on Friday mornings from 8.30am and cadets were now entitled to a fortnightly film show, a considerable privilege at this time.

A first term bivouac at Balcombe was enjoyed, given a rare instance of perfect weather, and was followed by the nine-day Puckapunyal camp, where the first-year cadet platoon took the prize for competent foot drill—the Smart Challenge Shield. That night there was ‘great rejoicing in the lines’ and particular thanks were offered to their AMF drill instructor, WO2 Moxey. The winning platoon was pictured with their prize in the December 1948 Grammarian. Camberwell boys were able to participate in the camp’s shooting competitions, having honed their skills on the school’s short rifle range back home near the KAO and its ‘protective’ fence (where they were accused of taking occasional southward .22 pot-shots at neighbouring fences). Irate neighbours aside, Warrant Officer David Shipley (1940–48) won the trophy for aggregate shot following this formal competition. The only casualties of the climatically exposed camp were four boys who returned home owing to illness and those who suffered from the more general affliction of ‘Pucka throat’. The unit was now sufficiently confident of itself to divide the platoons on ‘camp(aign)’ into ‘rookies’ and ‘veterans’. One near casualty was an un-named rookie, who was ‘nearly slain’ by another Camberwell boy (‘Joe’) mastering the art of firing a ‘dud smoke bomb’ from the mortar, a weapon which was also to cause trouble for the unit on a future occasion. Again, this camp was assessed as ‘the best we have had’. Clearly, the boys had enjoyed their war games in the knowledge that the post-war peace seemed to have endured despite those earlier parental concerns about the USSR. 1948 had been a pleasing year overall for the ‘School Cadet Detachment’ and one that the School Council, often indifferent to cadet affairs, thought worthy of a ‘Well done!’.

The final year of the challenging ‘Roaring Forties’ was a year of mixed fortune and a watershed that failed to follow the gentle course of its immediate predecessor. The ANZAC Day parade, reviewed by Colonel R.G. Pollard (Parents’ Association representative on the School Council, 1949–50, and alliterative father of Reginald and Robert, both of whom would hold rank in the corps), was well conducted along with the wreath-laying ceremony according to the ritual that had been established during the last war—that is, a march to the St Mark’s service, followed by a march back to the school, then a parade and, finally, the ceremony in the Lower Hall. However, this was the only settled instance of 1949 and even this event was marred by the absence of a seriously ill stalwart, Canon P.W. Robinson. There were two significant, disturbing elements of this year. The first was the wise cancellation of the Annual Camp at Puckapunyal because of the fearful ‘polio-myelitis epidemic’—the Combined Athletic Sports and Art Exhibition were similarly cancelled—although this sombre interruption to the cadet program did not prevent one anonymous cadet officer offering a fictional ‘Memoir’ of what may have been. His fanciful, amusing account related the polite escorting of those arriving at the camp to comfortable quarters, the provision of beds with hot-water bottles, the equipping of huts with wirelesses, radiators and telephones, the ample supply of appetising food and hot tea—it was, of course, all something that he had dreamt. The realities of Puckapunyal were always much grimmer, but the boys had at least been able earlier to enjoy a successful, polio-free bivouac at Balcombe. The second disturbing element of 1949 was a ‘steady drop in the strength of the Cadet Unit’ with memories of the last war beginning to dim. One factor in this decline...


may have been the fact that cadet parades were now scheduled for 8.30am to 9.50am on Mondays with the school day then extended until 4.15pm, undoubtedly to the discontent of those students outside the corps and possibly with only the grudging acceptance of those within. Nevertheless, the year ended with an essay in the December *Grammarian* that pleaded the case for the continuation of a ‘School Cadet Unit’—‘A Recurring Question’—one that had last been addressed within the school community in the notable 1937 House debate of Derham versus Robinson and one that would endure for decades hereafter. The author admitted that the unit was training with obsolete equipment, some of it from the First World War, but it was equipment used by the Regular Army and therefore their learning was not wasted. ‘Even if we don’t have to put into practice what we have learnt, it is knowledge, and knowledge of any kind is always good.’ The military virtues that a cadet acquired in the unit were then addressed and favourably assessed in turn—shooting skills; map-reading; discipline (with an appropriate quote from Emerson that ‘Obedience alone gives the right to command’); leadership as the product of training, not birth; comradeship; self-respect; self-confidence; physical hardening of the ‘pampered boy’; loyalty; the arts of the gentleman:

The object of the Cadet Corps is to give mental, moral, and physical training to boys, and so form the character of each to enable him to make a good start in life, to develop in him the principles of patriotism and good citizenship, bringing out the qualities of self-confidence, self-respect and ability to face and accept responsibility, with the power to control himself and others; thus a cadet is fitted in the event of national emergency, to take his place in the defence of his home and country.

As well as a formidable piece of syntax, this essay presented a persuasive case from within the ranks for the retention of the system of school cadet training at a time when some thought that the khaki heyday should be either curtailed or terminated, a repeat of the attitudes that had surfaced in that earlier post-war period of the 1920s. The post-war cadet tide had thus begun to ebb by 1949. The Camberwell unit, however, was reinforced at the end of a displeasing year by a timely change at the top and one that promised not just survival, but renascence. As the Iron Duke had said of Waterloo, it had all been a ‘near run thing’, but the corps could now set aside its immediate post-war search for meaning under the guidance of a new, charismatic military patron.

II

The *Grammarian* of December 1949, through the long-standing, influential School Councillor J.G. Robinson—the ‘Great Panjandrum’ in one other Councillor’s estimation—had said ‘Vale’ to Headmaster H.L. Tonkin (‘Lizard’) after eighteen years’ service to the school through Depression, resiting and war. As Robinson noted, the school had noticeably increased its enrolment in that period to now just over 400, perhaps Tonkin’s major achievement: ‘We can only say, “Goodbye Mr Chips. God bless you and Mrs Tonkin with great blessings”’. Mr Robinson had failed to note that the Almighty had not in fact blessed the original Mr Chips with an enduring marriage; nor had he mentioned one of Tonkin’s significant achievements in saving, nurturing and patronising the school’s cadet unit at a time when many similar institutions had allowed their voluntary units to lapse. No section of the school community had more reason to thank Henry Tonkin than did the boys in khaki, but even though he was separately farewelled by name in many of the Form entries in this issue of the *Grammarian*, the pessimistic ‘Cadet Notes’ were silent. It was an unwarranted and ungrateful omission, particularly as the departing Head had repeated in his final ‘Annual Report’ a view that he had stressed for many years since at least his 1934 Speech Night address, that ‘I strongly advise all parents whose sons are eligible to allow them to join the Cadet Corps’. Few seemed now to be listening to yesterday’s man and J.G. Robinson’s chief source of enthusiasm in this year’s journal, and probably that of the cadet unit as well, was directed
elsewhere, to the ‘Salve’ for the new Headmaster, Michael Searle. Unfortunately, these two men would become resolute enemies within a short period with Robinson later confiding that his championing of Searle had been a mistake—the corps would suffer some of the consequences, once Searle’s stewardship came to be regarded as too much along ‘military lines’ in the recall of one Old Boy who had withdrawn his son, James Relph (1949–51), from the school in protest.119

The selection of a new Headmaster in a school such as Camberwell Grammar was, and is, a matter of immense importance for the reputation and day-to-day operation of the institution. When Tonkin signalled his intention to retire in the course of 1949, the School Council shouldered the burden of selecting his successor with alacrity. Their first choice in a field of six finalists was a Mr Thwaites of Oxford University, star-struck as they probably were that a doyen of such an august institution would deign to apply for the headship of a distant, colonial school. However, the Thwaites application did not survive the attainment of ‘further information’ on the candidate by the Council, so it then endorsed the other English candidate at the expense of the final four Australians, Mr Searle of the more modest Maidstone Grammar in Kent.120 By the end of 1949, the school community was in a state of ‘Great Expectations’ (also set in Kent) as Robinson’s editorial profile of the new Head in the Grammarian promised much. Searle’s Oxford MA (awarded in 1943 according to wartime expediency, following his first degree of 1938) and secondary education at Marlborough were considered impressive, as was his parentage of an Imperial calibre—father a retired Indian civil servant, mother the daughter of an Oxford don. The successful candidate was, in fact, a cultured English gentleman. Mrs Searle, a keen gardener, was similarly blessed with a solid, establishment background.121 Yet it was his military status that was the most striking feature of the still youthful Mr Searle (he was on the right side of forty) and it was no coincidence that the Grammarian editorial featured a sketch of the handsome ‘Major’ Searle in his British Army uniform, despite the fact that he had been demobilised four years earlier. He would subsequently sport this redundant uniform as Headmaster on occasions such as ANZAC Day.122 Whatever his achievements at Marlborough and those of his interrupted studies at Oxford (resumed in 1945), Searle’s wartime experiences were striking, as they had included service in the élite Tank Regiment and on the Intelligence Staff of the ‘S.E. Asia Command’ in Ceylon, ‘where he came into contact with many Australians’.123 This had been his only contact with the southern continent to which he was still making his sea-borne way aboard the S.S. Chitral at the time of this flattering editorial. Len Weickhardt, an influential School Council member (1955–79) later believed that Searle ‘knew little or nothing of the school’ beforehand.124 Still, in the recall of one staff member with whom he would clash, Stan Brown OC, he ‘came with ideas’.125 Another former cadet commander, Lionel Ackland thought Searle unduly ‘fairly reserved’ after the more relaxed Tonkin.126 English reservation aside, Major Searle’s appointment did offer immediate promise for the Camberwell cadets, as whilst at Maidstone Grammar he had held a commission in the ‘Combined Cadet Corps’. This and his actual British Army experience, 1939–45, made him the most authentically military headmaster since Camberwell’s inception 63 years earlier—Taylor had little interest in the military despite having presided over the establishment of the cadet corps in 1888; Hall’s experience was at the cadet level only; Buntine’s fine military achievements came after his time at the school; Tonkin was a marked civilian, despite his recent fostering of the corps. Now the cadet unit would have a youthful, yet experienced, and enthusiastic overseer of impeccable quality and background—their future was accordingly very promising, despite polio, ageing weaponry, falling numbers and the bleating of the Camera Club, still waiting for the return of their darkroom and still publicly
expressing their dissatisfaction about its continuing occupation by the cadets; the prospects of its return under the new order seemed minimal. None could have been more enthusiastic at the 1949 Boxing Day reception at Roystead for the Searles than the representatives of the cadet unit. ‘It was a good welcome!’ in the eyes of the Council which had appointed him before he had set foot in Australia. Within a week, the couple were guests at an Army Officers’ Dinner Dance held at Toorak, a further indication of the new headmaster's military status.

The Searle appointment coincided with the formal renaming of the national cadet system as the ‘Australian Cadet Corps’ (ACC) for volunteers under the age of eighteen, whom the Army then expected to graduate to the army reserve, the CMF, if they were interested in so doing. From the following year, all young men of mature age were required to register for ‘National Service’, clearly an end to any remnant of post-war indecision about the future of military training at the school level. Back at the Mont Albert campus, the 1950 ANZAC Day ceremonies were business as usual, although the salute at the school review was not taken by a guest of military distinction, but by Major Searle himself. The Headmaster had already reviewed the unit at the beginning of the year and praised its smartness and expressed his hopes for ‘continual improvement’. It was a full year for the three platoons when compared with its immediate predecessor—a field day at Warrandyte in May in accordance with a directive from Searle (morning field craft, afternoon patrol exercise following which the Headmaster carried out a ‘discussion’ on the day’s mock-battle manoeuvres in which one patrol had been ‘killed’); a very successful Cadet Dance reviving the social side of cadet life (‘the mothers rallied around’, perhaps for a glimpse of the personable new Headmaster); an official Officers’ and NCOs’ Mess at the school with Searle as the guest of honour (Mr Tonkin was unable to attend). The night concluded with a showing of the documentary Australia at War, wartime propaganda material now being touted as ‘educational’. Puckapunyal was again the highlight of the year in September, despite some lingering illnesses, including Cadet J. Wilson’s appendicitis, and this time dreams were set aside for the realities of drill competitions and route marches. The Head was able to spend a day at camp with the boys, the first time since 1916 that a Camberwell headmaster had done so and then at a time when cadet training had been suspended during wartime. It was ‘one of the keenest and most “live” years in the history of the unit’ according to the year’s ‘Cadet Notes’ and it concluded with an inspection and demonstration on the KAO in November (‘Afternoon Tea will be served’) and with the Major repeating Tonkin’s earlier sentiments in his first Speech Night address on 12 December at the Hawthorn Town Hall.

Until February 1958 the school still lacked an assembly hall that was other than the most basic of ‘temporary’ ex-army huts—the ‘green shed’—described by Councillor Weickhardt as ‘an old galvanised-iron army mess shed’. Its maintenance demanded ongoing expenditure, serving to delay the construction of the ‘Memorial Hall’ planned since the latter years of the war. At the Hawthorn Town Hall, the new Headmaster followed the pattern of his predecessors and urged all ‘eligible’ boys to join the Cadet Unit in order to enhance their qualities of ‘leadership, self-confidence and self-discipline’. He meant every word and his sentiments underlined those of Lt General Evetts of the UK Ministry of Supply who had inspected the boys in the previous month on the KAO and expressed his pleasure at their ‘smartness, efficiency and steadiness on parade’. The General had also urged the boys ‘not to disassociate themselves from their responsibility in military matters in view of the critical situation in Korea and the World today’. It was time again for quasi-wartime obedience and the strict observation of duty as the fruits of the victory of 1945 seemed to sour.

Major Searle’s second year and the seventh of Captain Stan Brown as post-war OC began well with the ANZAC Day reviewer
Brigadier C.M.L. Elliott (in charge of Administration, Southern Command, and whom the Head had met at his initial officers’ dinner dance) suggesting that the unit ‘was the best establishment of its kind that I have ever seen—and I have seen a lot’. The Brigadier was invited to return, understandably, in August for the Officers’ and NCOs’ dinner, at which he spoke on diverse topics ‘from spiders to mathematics’.134 1951 was also notable for the school declining to be a small part of Puckapunyal in favour of a joint camp with Camberwell’s frequent cadet companion Haileybury at Point Nepean. Here, in an area still closed to the general public, the cadets were able to view first-hand the architecture of war that stretched back to the colonial era in which their unit had been established, including observation posts, gun-emplacements and tunnels, all of which the boys explored with eagerness—‘spare time was not wasted’.135 The former threats that had stimulated such construction, from French, Russian and Japanese foes both real and imagined, were now being replaced by fears of communist aggression through the foreign ‘domino’ effect in places such as Korea, all a timely reminder that ‘the war’ of 1939–45 was not the end of the matter. Camberwell Grammar would produce a number of servicemen who served in the Korean conflict (1950–53), including Stuart Weir, the 1942 Duntroon graduate, Alan McClure (1937–47), H.R.H. ‘Bob’ Downey (1940–48) and Eric Harrison (1946–50). Weir and Downey were former cadets. One, Craig Kirkpatrick (1936–39), paid the ultimate price.

Back home, Cadet Warrant Officer Bruce Ackland (1939–51, Captain of School and prefect, son of a former OC and staff member) earned the privilege of attending the mid-year Jubilee Opening of Federal Parliament in Canberra as a member of the Victorian Cadet Contingent following which he wrote a prize-winning essay ‘My Impressions of Canberra and Duntroon’. He had camped 200 yards from the War Memorial and this naturally enough proved to be a Mecca (‘like a gigantic Sphinx’)

for this sixteen-year-old cadet: ‘I, and most of the cadets, will never forget the War Memorial.’ This, of course, was its purpose. A Trooping of the Colours rehearsal at Duntroon in July also impressed him—the ultimate in perfection’ and a ‘wonderful spectacle’.136 Overall, 1951 had been ‘one of the most satisfactory [years] in the history of the unit’ according to its longest serving OC, Captain Brown, despite fluctuating numbers and the loss of its erstwhile commander, H.L. Ackland, after seventeen years’ (interrupted) service at Camberwell Grammar, including five at the head of the corps—his relations with the Head had become strained from August and they barely spoke from that time onwards.137 The Headmaster’s Speech Night assessment of the unit on 19 December (still at the Hawthorn Town Hall) was favourable and he complimented its ‘high standard of efficiency’, quoting Brigadier Elliott (although he had first quoted Winnie the Pooh and his little ‘Ho’ song about overcoming the difficulties of life) as well as making his own observation about the ‘resourcefulness and ingenuity’ that the cadets had recently displayed at Point Nepean. In a direct, attributed imitation of Pooh bear’s optimism in the face of adversity, Major Searle suggested that 1951 had brought the school as a whole and the cadets in particular ‘our fair share of metaphorical honey’. It was an eccentric, but accurate, assessment of the year that the boy soldiers had just experienced and could as well have been applied to the fate of the corps throughout the immediate post-war period and beyond.138

The well-trodden ANZAC path was followed again in 1952, with the St Mark’s address (on ‘the real meaning of the ANZAC spirit’) and inspection carried out by Major-General Porter. The ever-fluctuating strength of the unit currently stood at 76, allowing the comfortable formation of three platoons (there had been only two in 1951) and the uniform now featured the ubiquitous service beret rather than the prized slouch-hat. Puckapunyal was again unavailable for the annual camp,
there now being a shortage of army personnel able to supervise such large-scale gatherings, but Colonel Pollard (father of the current Champion Shot, Reginald, who would later serve as an officer in Vietnam) and Captain Brown were able to secure access to Fort Franklin at Portsea in September alongside the unit’s regular companions from Haileybury, as well as a new team from Brighton Grammar. This was not a satisfactory situation and the ‘Cadet Notes’ grumbled: ‘We are now getting used to having our camp site changed from week to week.’139 The camp was judged a success despite the grumblers, even if the ‘location was not riddled with tunnels and dotted with observation posts and gun emplacements as was the site of last year’s camp’ at Point Nepean.140 An old A.24 bomber had provided some sense of past militaria and a lot of ‘hard training’ was done. Unfortunately, the travelling time needed to attend the Portsea camp necessitated the cancellation of a field day for this year. Some cadets had been able nevertheless to attend the Williamstown Open Range day in Term One, where ‘we had a fine day for it instead of the wet one which usually mars the range day allocated to us’.141 Clearly, some cadets were having difficulty maintaining a sense of optimism and adjusting their routines to Melbourne’s notoriously fickle weather. What nature did not provide was again sourced from abundant, if ageing, army stockpiles, including an enlarged, 3-inch mortar and a Vickers machine gun, the latter not having been seen since the war years. Bayonet drill, ever a popular exercise in the armed forces of British origin, also served in 1952 to make ‘life as a cadet . . . more interesting’.142 Rifles, still displayed with fixed bayonets in all public parades, were plentiful enough to lend them on occasion to the more pressed Rifle Club, but it was hoped that 1953 would additionally bring ‘signals and intelligence training’ for those cadets with leadership potential, those more inclined to mental gymnastics and less keen on cold steel and marksmanship. Speech Night, for the first time, was held outdoors on the school campus (between Roystead and the Angliss building) on 15 December ‘on the H.M’s recommendation’, a novel and testing experience given the fluctuations of the Melbourne climate143—few understood this as well as the often rained-upon members of the cadet unit.

III

The hopes that some held at the beginning of 1953 were partially marred by a loss at the end—the resignation from the school by Stan Brown after fourteen years—rumour suggested a personality clash with the Head, which Brown confirmed in an interview 30 years later.144 Summons House’s accurate assessment of Brown’s heritage would strike a particular chord for the members of the cadet corps, which he had commanded for over a decade: ‘He has always been very popular and a very good Master. He has given a great deal to the school and will never be forgotten by the boys who have passed through his hands.’145 However, Captain Brown had not departed before he had been able to secure two platoons of ‘over-keen’ recruits, bringing the numbers up to a record 110; the school population had been boosted in 1953 by 116 new students, a figure just below the entire school population of that distant year in which the cadet unit had been established. The corps was now larger than it had been since the two watershed years of 1916 and 1944, when the atmosphere of war had boosted the numbers for obvious reasons. The unit was now able to secure the services of a staff member, Lt W.B. Dodemaide (1953–55), as second-in-command rather than having to utilise a cadet-lieutenant in this role. At the insistence of the Defence Department, the boys of higher rank were renamed ‘Cadet Under-Officers’, a change of title which ‘caused quite a stir’ as it indicated that they were no longer officially regarded as holding the Queen’s commission, unlike their predecessors. Their new-style caps were also regarded as indicating a loss of status and the only compensation that the Army could offer was that the new ‘CUOs’ would still be regarded as ‘potential officers’ in any subsequent period of adult service.146 One of the veteran
platoons was lucky enough to benefit from the introduction of an intelligence section, allowing its quasi-élite members to gain a better knowledge of maps, air photos and stereoscopes ‘and naturally enough more intelligence’.147 A second veteran platoon had to be satisfied with signals instruction, which ‘kept them tied up’, but these were skills still considered a privilege. The two other recruit platoons received specialised instruction in the use of the mortar and the machine gun, ‘passed on’ skills that were not considered pressing for those more experienced boys now receiving intelligence and signalling instruction, in part from Brown and Dodemaide, described in the ‘Cadet Notes’ as ‘first class signals and intelligence officers’.

The annual ANZAC ceremonies were presided over by Air Vice-Marshall Daley, Director-General of RAAF Medical Services, the Headmaster taking the salute at the subsequent review. Following the ceremony and for the first time, ‘relatives of the fallen’ were invited to meet the Headmaster and his wife in their residence.148 This was the Coronation year of the putative new Elizabethan Age and on 3 May, the unit participated in a parade and church service at St Paul’s Cathedral for ‘Empire Youth Sunday’. The annual camp was at distant Mildura, reached by a taxing rail odyssey, where unsurprisingly ‘oranges were the highlight’.149 Brown’s final Officers’ and NCOs’ dinner in the third term was of the usual high culinary standard, thanks to the inexhaustible Ladies’ Auxiliary, and he was farewelled from the unit with great regret in the Grammarian now that his ‘excellent work’ would be for the benefit of others at rival Scotch College:

He has been unflagging in his interests, and always ready to do his very utmost to help the boys and in the camps . . . I should say that Capt. Brown has given a tremendous service to the School Unit and I am sure the boys will join me in wishing him the very best success in the future.

Camberwell’s loss was Scotch’s gain and perhaps retrospective vengeance by the old rival for the poaching of the then Lieutenant Whitehead in 1888; certainly, Whitehead and Brown had been the most successful, charismatic and popular leaders of the Camberwell unit in its 65 year existence up to December 1953. One had been almost forgotten; the other would be long remembered as a ‘source of inspiration’ in the challenging years that followed—some later saw Brown’s departure as the end of an era. The school community was promised a new cadet commander by the Headmaster in his December Speech Night address, the school’s sixty-eighth and his penultimate, delivered again in the open under ‘the wondrous firmament on high’ as Major Searle described it, amidst the ‘beauties of a summer’s night’.150 Unfortunately, his own midsummer’s night dream was drawing to its conclusion and the cadet unit would soon feel the effects of his decline more than most.

What would unexpectedly prove to be Major Searle’s final year at Camberwell Grammar, 1954, was one in which the expanded corps took a very prominent part in school life, perhaps the most prominent of any year in peacetime, given that a quarter of its formal functioning (since 1911) had been spent during times of war. In retrospect, the year would almost seem a swan-song. The promised new commander was Lieutenant D.A.G. Salter, an Englishman with Australian experience, who taught Commerce, Mathematics and English from 1954 to 1961. The Elizabethan Age began with a bang on 21 February as the new Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh—a title that may have recalled for the studious the origins of the Victorian cadet movement in 1867 at the time of the first royal visit to the colony—landed at Essendon. Fifty Camberwell cadets, including members of the recruit platoon, formed part of the line to greet them there and similarly in March when the Royal Couple attended the Children’s Display at the MCG. One cadet under-officer and prefect, Robert Read (1943–55), had just returned from Canberra after representing the corps at the opening of Federal Parliament in the presence of the monarch, where he too, alongside Prime
Minister Menzies, probably ‘did but see her passing by’. It was all a heady time, with the accustomed ritual of the ANZAC parade, marches and wreath-laying ceremony as two cadet sentries stood by each of the honour boards in the Lower Hall. The march to and from St Mark’s had been augmented by the presence of nine drummers in the recently reformed Cadet Band, three new instruments having been provided by the Tuck Shop Committee and the Ladies’ Auxiliary. Lt Salter, too, proved an enthusiastic drummer. The RAAF was again gracious enough to provide the ANZAC speaker and reviewer, Air Commodore Knox-Knight, the commander of the Point Cook academy. ANZAC ceremonies had clearly taken the commemorative prominence once Shouldered by Remembrance Day on 11 November, an occasion that was receiving diminishing degrees of attention in society as a whole during the 1950s.

It was the mass consumption of oranges at Mildura again for the September camp once the corps reached the site after another gruelling all-night train journey, marked by internal struggles to obtain the luggage racks as sleeping compartments. The boys’ suffering was extended, given the delay caused by a derailment at Ouyen; a week of hard training and hard sleeping on straw-filled palliasses followed. The week’s demands were at least relieved by the presence, behind a fence, of an Army women’s unit (WRAAC) enduring their own camp. The military highlight was success on the range, where ‘our weapon specialists’ were able to deploy the prized Vickers machine gun (under the instruction of a Regular Army officer) and the mortar with suitable effect; the mortar section mercifully landed its bombs closer to the target than did any other school. Cadet M.P.C. Wentzell (1951–56, later a librarian and Director of Music at the school) was accordingly promoted to lance corporal and entitled to wear the wreathed ‘Mortar’ badge. The extra-curricular highlight at Mildura was a successful yabbie hunt by Platoon No.1. This first camp under Lt Salter was judged a success even by the ‘Rookies’ owing to good organisation and the ‘co-operation’ of the ranks with the NCOs. The Cadet Band had also increased its waxing status by attending as a separate unit for the first time, some sporting the ‘Lyre’ badge, and their bass drummer, Cadet Smith, was said to be the best in Melbourne—he alone sported the adornment of a leopard skin (eventually relegated to the cadet ‘Q’ store in leaner times). John Usher (1949–57) ably supervised this percussion section as Drum-Major (he would later be OC of the whole corps soon after leaving school). Major Searle addressed the assembled guests at the Officers’ and NCOs’ dinner a short time later, and for the last time, choosing as his topic the history of the unit now that it was evident to all through formal channels and through rumour that he would not be returning to guide it in the future. He wished it ‘the best of luck’—such felicitations were a sign that the corps would indeed soon be in need of good fortune. Searle’s unseemly and not entirely voluntary departure from the school did not come before the corps was visited and inspected with bayonets fixed by Major-General A.C. Shortt of the UK Service Liaison Staff, who opened the school’s Hobbies Exhibition at the October ‘Hobbies Day’ (something of a short-lived substitute for Parents’ Day). The cadets conducted a Drill Competition for his benefit, with sections divided according to each House. Shortt thought the standard of drill to be high and presented the Drill Cup to Summons. The whole of 1954 had been a ‘good show’ as the greatly expanded cadet notes of the Grammarian described it, but like all shows, the curtain was about to fall.

Ω

Despite the successes of the notable year 1954, it too (like 1953) ended on a sad note for the cadets given the departure of their patron, Major Searle, as Headmaster after five years’ service—the possibility of a non-renewal of contract had been first discussed for two hours by the School Council on 6 April and the Headmaster had expressed his own unhappiness
correspondence with Canon Britten in the previous month. The Council itself had finally resolved not to renew the Searle contract on 1 June 1954—the Head resigned the following day—after which date a cold war, sometimes hot, operated between Headmaster and Council with the cadets caught in the crossfire of No-Man’s Land. By the first week of December there was open conflict with the departing Headmaster complaining at length about ‘the activities of certain members of the School Council during recent weeks’.

The (unsigned) Editorial of the 1954 Grammarian later described his leaving as like the loss of a great friend and quoted in implicit sympathy the composer Arnold Schoenberg that ‘Every great man has had to flee from the present into the future.’

Searle had indeed been a great friend to the cadet corps, which he had husbanded with considerable attention and understanding from 1950–54. Some on the School Council now unfairly thought that he had attempted to run the entire school (now over 500 in strength, and 530 by February 1955) as an army detachment and perhaps the Major had devoted undue attention to the boy-soldiers, but his timing was in order given the inevitable questioning about the worth of such an organisation in the period that immediately follows the (successful) conclusion of a major conflict. The corps had searched for meaning from 1945 to 1949 and had been given it in ample measure thereafter by Major Searle, confident of himself and of the place that the cadet unit occupied in the life of the school and in the broader community, a view that dove-tailed with the then-current orthodoxy of the Defence Department. The Major and ex-Headmaster was deprived of space in the 1955 Grammarian, which uncharacteristically and uncharitably declined to publish the entirety of his final Speech Night address delivered (inside) at the Canterbury Memorial Hall. In its place was a truncated, bowdlerised summary ‘Report of Mr [sic] Searle’s Speech’ which failed to make any mention of the cadet corps, but his conclusion had been a clear reference to the unit that he had nurtured, for here the departing Headmaster had suggested ‘that education should be directed towards leadership, its ability for effective action, and willingness to shoulder responsibility’. These remarks were like those he had made in his Speech Night address four years earlier when referring to the merits of the cadet system and markedly similar to those clarified in the ‘Objects of the Australian Cadet Corps (School Units)’ statement printed in the ‘Record of Service’ book carried by every Camberwell cadet. This was an unrepentant Searle’s ‘Parthian shot’ directed against those critics who had concluded that he was too much of an ex-soldier, particularly those who had five years earlier been so struck by his military credentials but had since reneged.

Even if the clumsy censorship of the Grammarian had succeeded, Michael Searle was the author of his own memorials elsewhere—firstly, he had settled the dispute that had simmered between khaki and Kodak since 1939 with the cadet confiscation of the darkroom by awarding the renamed Photography Club a new, updated facility in 1954; secondly, he had offered a recipe for those dealing with the unexpected difficulties of life in his 1951 Speech Night address by recounting the ‘Ho’ song of Pooh bear: ‘I don’t much mind if it rains or snows / ’Cos I’ve got a lot of honey on my nice new nose.’ Some, no doubt, thought this quotation from A.A. Milne risible and inappropriate, but it was valid enough. The cadet unit would need reminding in the decade to follow of the fact that life can bring its metaphorical rain as well as its metaphorical honey, as the boys of the corps and Lt Salter OC faced the most challenging period of their existence since the daunting 1890s, one that would usher in substantial change.
Anzac Day ceremonies were a marked feature of cadet ceremonies at the school until the 1970s. Here, in 1951, the unit is parading before the ceremony in the assembly hall, a building described as little more than ‘an old galvanised iron army mess-shed’.

‘OUR FAIR SHARE OF METAPHORICAL HONEY’

In December 1943 the School Council resolved to construct a Memorial Hall to commemorate the School’s veterans of the two world wars, the second of which was still raging. This Resolution was coined in the expectation that there would be many more names of the fallen to be added to any commemorative roll.

BOTTOM LEFT: The cadet unit had first acquired an elaborate set of drums in April 1943 at the cost of £50. This photograph dates from April 1952, when the Drum Band was well established. These drummer boys were nicknamed the ‘Drumskins’. 
CHAPTER TWO

‘Outward Bound’: Maintaining the Adventure, 1955–65

‘The traditions of a good unit are present, and are being maintained, yet one receives the impression that many connected with the School, pupils, Old Boys, masters and parents do not think the unit of very much use in education.’

Lt John Usher, OC, ‘Commanding Officer’s Message’, Grammarian, 1958

‘We are not turning out soldiers.’

Captain Moore, OC, ‘Moore About Cadets’, Spectemur, March 1964

The final year of the Searle headship, 1954, had been a difficult one within the inner sanctum of the school community as the School Council and Headmaster battled for supremacy. Once the issue had been resolved and the Council had made a decision on Searle’s successor, the Reverend T.H. Timpson, a certain calm settled again on the campus. However, this serenity did not settle on the shoulders of those Camberwell boys wearing the ‘Australian Cadet Corps’ uniform and the unit was about to experience a period of great change in the course of the coming decade, particularly from 1959. Some had recently seen the cadets as something of a headmaster’s pet during the Searle years, allotted a prominence in school life by the Major
that was, they thought, out of proportion to their importance and relevance. The change of leadership at the top from January 1955 allowed these critics an opportunity to rein in the military aspect of school life and their attitude was soon reinforced by broader changes in society from the early 1960s, ones that also sought to ‘demilitarise’ aspects of the education system. Once Australia became enmeshed in the Vietnam War from April 1965 it was no longer possible for any parent to be indifferent to the existence of school cadet units, but the trend towards the open social polarisation that would follow this military commitment was evident at Camberwell before the revelation by Prime Minister Menzies that South Vietnam had requested the aid of an Australian battalion, an offer implemented from 1966. There had been occasions in the early 1960s when the student body of the school seemed to be fighting its own, civil, war over the existence and purpose of cadet training, for by 1965 the Camberwell cadets had been engaged in their own struggle to maintain their identity for the best part of a decade under the Reverend Timpson.

The new Headmaster was a generally conciliatory, good-natured man and certainly not an enemy of the school’s cadet corps—his ‘joke’ became a welcome feature of the annual cadet dinner in the Buttery building near Roystead—but the vision that he held for Camberwell Grammar had only a limited place for cadet training and then only for a type of ‘adventure’ training unlike any experienced by the unit since its foundation in 1888. The cadets found little humour in that. This decade proved to be a difficult period for them as they waited, in vain, for a clearer picture of what the Headmaster now expected of the unit, but as so often in times of grand ambitions, the finer details of how and when change was to be implemented were overlooked.

After the putative failure of the Searle experiment, a disunited Council came together to make a unanimous choice on his successor and, as so often after a period of traumatic innovation, it resolved to return to a more placid normality. The successful candidate, Thomas Timpson, was British born but one of the school’s own as the first Old Boy (1927–31, prefect 1929–31) headmaster and the first cleric. Whereas Searle, considered by some to be aloof, had probably never heard of the school prior to his distant application for its headship, the 42 year old Timpson knew Camberwell Grammar like the back of his hand. An athletics champion and an accomplished Grammarian essayist by 1928, his first full year at the school, young Tommy had set his future path by taking the ‘Scripture’ prize awarded by the Rev Schofield. He had opened 1929 with a January camp at Anglesea under the ‘Lord Somers’ program, which mixed boys of various classes and backgrounds in an attempt to promote social harmony—in his Grammarian essay recounting this experience, the young man had clearly revelled in the sporting and community ethos of the camp rather than in the compulsory military training which was still required of boys his age (until November 1929, when cadet compulsion was abolished). Timpson also demonstrated his organisational skill during the April 1929 Hobbies Exhibition. He was now an accomplished debater, as demonstrated by a school debate in August where he argued against the notion of ‘International Disarmament’ (a concept that Spectemur was still defending in 1964) Timpson’s Macrow House had prevailed in this debate against Derham, at the end of which the team leader, Thomas Griffiths (1919–30), had summarised their argument by suggesting that ‘there was a possibility of racial degeneration without military training’ and that without weapons there was also a possibility of ‘Orientals overrunning Australia’. A quarter-of-a-century later, a more mature T.H. Timpson was not so sure and he would preside over the foundation within the school in 1956 of a ‘Near-North Society’ that interested itself in Asian
affairs in the short course of its existence under his patronage.

The young Timpson's *Grammarian* contribution of June 1929, 'A Sunset', was prophetic, for the sun seemed about to set on his scholastic career when this second-year prefect was forced at the end of the year following the 1929 'Wall Street crash', like so many others at the time, to terminate his studies at Form V in favour of an unskilled job while the prospect of any employment at all remained open. Before this interruption, the 'Scripture' prize had again been his and he was noted as the football team's 'mudlark', an early indication that 'Mr Timpson' was an all-rounder. Significantly, he had chosen not to enrol in the school's new, voluntary cadet formation following the abolition of compulsion, the threats of racial degeneracy and Oriental invasions aside. Debating remained more to his taste and he was now regularly entrusted with the task of preparing notes for the *Grammarian* on the activities of this lively activity group. The patronage of Dr Buntine, however, through a bolstering scholarship ensured that the interruption to the education of this popular and well-liked boy was brief and he returned to the school at Form VI at the end of Term One 1931, again as a prefect although now in Maxwell House. It was with understandable regret that his debating notes of December 1931, his last, commented with clouded sadness the impending departure of Dr Buntine, 'who has been so much to us not only in debating but in everything else'. No-one had more reason to be grateful to the departing headmaster than Timpson and he would return the favour to other boys under stress once he had himself become the head of Camberwell Grammar, one noted for his compassion.

Following academic success at Trinity College, a combined teaching and clerical career followed—Canberra Grammar, ordainment, RAAF chaplaincy, English teaching experience at Uppingham School, 1948–49, and finally the combined position of Headmaster of Camberwell Grammar School alongside the rank of School Chaplain. Timpson's academic and social credentials were impressive, even if members of the cadet unit might have searched for evidence of military experience during a time when the sporting of the coveted 'RSL' badge was a door-opener. This Old Boy had not been a volunteer cadet whilst a senior student from 1930 (although subject to compulsion in his first two years), nor did he assume the headship following experience as a cadet officer, like Hall and Searle before him—Timpson did not have the direct military *kudos* enjoyed by past headmasters such as Buntine and Searle. Nevertheless, during the recent world war the Reverend Timpson had served as an air force chaplain for five years, including a period of 'overseas service' in New Guinea (without which an ex-serviceman was not entitled to the status of 'returned'). He could hold his head high in educational, clerical and military circles if he chose to do so, but his military chaplaincy, combined with his licensed Christian faith, had offered him a perspective on wartime service that was unprecedented at Camberwell Grammar. Each headmaster had possessed a marked personality that he brought to school affairs in general and to the cadet corps in particular—Taylor the entrepreneur; Hall the 'fix-it' man; Buntine the academic; Tonkin the manager; Searle the cultured soldier—now it was Timpson's turn, from 1955, to add his own perspectives to a somewhat sclerotic institution that was about to celebrate its sixty-ninth birthday and to a cadet unit that had just commemorated its sixty-sixth anniversary.

That change was in the air for the corps was made immediately apparent both to the Council and to a broader audience. The Council was informed verbally on 1 February 1955 in the new Headmaster's first report that 'Cadet Periods' would now be considered 'lesson periods', a demotion of status that no longer offered recognition of the unit as an activity worthy of separate accommodation outside the timetable proper. The office-holders in the 'School Corps' were no longer listed by
the *Grammarian* in the opening section of ‘School Office Bearers’ as they had been in 1954 and in many past years. Future published reports on the doings of the cadet corps were also to be referred to as ‘Cadet Activities’, a subtle change of nomenclature, but one worthy of examination as language is often altered with significance during a time of transition. The notes that followed under this heading for the first time were not reflective of a happy unit. ANZAC Day was marred by wet weather and the Lower Hall service was shortened, but the new Headmaster repeated the practice of his predecessor by inviting relatives of the fallen to meet with him and his wife in their residence; the stunted rifle range beside the KAO, a ‘small oval’ in the Head’s estimation, was closed, forcing the ‘would-be marksmen’ to use a small-bore range at Canterbury as well as the distant Williamstown facilities and to utilise those at Mildura during the May annual camp (although the final day shoot suffered from bad weather too); the Officers’ and NCOs’ dinner was cancelled in favour of a more inclusive ‘Social’. There were still four platoons under the now Captain Salter and Lt Dodemaide and the Band now featured ten drummers, although five were novices, but even the ‘Drumskins’ suffered from gloomy weather and were able only to produce ‘disappointing’ sound. It was a year of gritted teeth and scarce activity. Lt Dodemaide moved on from the Junior School at the end of the year.

Lt W.R. Dickenson, an Old Boy (1939–52) but not, as yet, a staff member, now commanded a unit diminished in status and size (reduced to two platoons, one of which was for ‘rookies’) in 1956, seconded by Cadet Under-Officer Graeme Kinnear (1946–56). The Headmaster no longer participated in parades or reviews and the ANZAC Day ritual therefore fell back onto the stalwart Old Boy F.P. Derham, approaching his seventy-first birthday, having left the school in 1899—he died the following year. The march from St Mark’s back to the school was accompanied by a platoon of Old Boys, perhaps an attempt to bolster a depleted unit—the Head, a prominent member of the OCGA, referred to it as ‘a pleasing innovation’, although it was not unprecedented, but it would be a feature of future ANZAC ceremonies hereafter that they were to be addressed by Old Boys, usually former cadets, whenever possible. May in Mildura proceeded with the usual discomforts of the Victorian rail system, being additionally hampered by an unspecified ‘rash’ for the bone-rattled survivors. The only bright spot for the year was the revival of the Officers’ and NCOs’ dinner in September, where the chief guest was the lamented Captain Brown, now willing with the absence of Searle to return to the school. The current Headmaster did not attend, nor did he make mention of the corps in his Speech Night address at the end of the year. References to the corps in the Headmaster’s frequent reports to Council were now few and then of the briefest nature, the products of an outlook that was in considerable contrast to the attitude of the Minister of the Army, J.O. Cramer, who insisted that boys should be given every opportunity ‘to receive the benefit of cadet training’.

However, obscurity and official indifference did have their virtues, as 1957 would show when the unit attracted attention for the wrong reasons on its Field Day, Monday 19 August, at the beginning of the school’s open ‘Education Week’. The *Grammarian* recalled the day somewhat apologetically:

The Field Day proved more historic than intended, for the ‘over-active’ 3 inch Mortar crew, under its ARA instructor, fired a bomb well beyond the target, hitting a car parked below the Oval. Unfortunately, the Press and radio saw fit to publicise the incident. It should be added that the Unit was cleared of any blame by the Inquiry.

The car, an expensive new American model, belonged to a Camberwell Grammar parent. An outside Army instructor had apparently raised the sights too high in an attempt to prevent mortar-bombs landing on the cricket pitch; the pitch was saved, but at the peril of the residents of Chatfield Avenue,
as one of the sand-filled mortar shells was underweight and travelled 60 yards further than expected, reaching the closed-off zone where visitors’ vehicles were parked. Some thought the incident amusing. Platoon No.3 dryly referred in the same report to having done ‘great things in a certain Mortar Display’, but clearly this accident was no laughing matter and unfit even for puerile humour. It certainly furnished critics of the system with ammunition, including one new staff member, John Hantken, who immediately informed the press in a moment of anti-cadet animosity. Accordingly, the sole remaining Melbourne broadsheet, *The Age*, gave the incident first-page coverage—‘Mortar Shell Hits Car at School’—on the following day, reporting: ‘The opening day of Camberwell Grammar’s Education Week yesterday ended in a big bang.’ After describing the destruction of the car’s roof and upholstery, it highlighted what to the school was the salient fact: ‘The headmaster of the school (Mt T.H. Timpson) said the mortar fire was under the supervision of officers of the Royal Australian Artillery Service.’ Without comment, *The Age* then paraphrased the Headmaster’s further explanation.

Mr Timpson said the owner of the car had been very sympathetic and understanding and had ‘come to an arrangement with the RAA about the damage’. Mr Timpson said the cadets had been trained in mortar fire while attending training camps and bivouacs.

The whole was poor publicity for the school and the unit, despite this probably justifiable attempt to attach the culpability onto the shoulders of the Army. One advocate for a vigorous Australian defence system had suggested in 1908 that boys ought to be taught how to ‘launch a torpedo’—perhaps in the view of this ‘understanding’ parent it was fortunate that Camberwell Grammar did not possess a unit of Sea Scouts in 1957. Platoon No.1, for its part, later noted that the annual camp at Seymour had been enjoyed through ‘exercises with pyrotechnics and the right training’ following this near-disastrous mortar incident, and it was now time to reinforce the latter of these two elements. Mortars were not again employed by the unit on the Mont Albert Road campus. Accidents aside, Lt Glyn France (Junior School staff 1956–64) had now assumed command of a unit of 80 ‘Efficient Cadets’ sporting new shoulder flashes in the school’s colours. These flashes were not worn on battle-dress as in the past, but on the new ‘work uniform’, another indication of changing *mores*.

The penultimate year of the 1950s brought some important changes of personnel including the ongoing recruitment as commander of Lt John Usher (Old Boy 1949–57, Captain of School 1957), who was a former CUO, Sergeant-Major and corps Drum-Major—he would later serve as a staff member, 1960–63. This fresh school leaver was aged only 18 at the beginning of the year and was assisted in an almost joint command by Lt Ron Wootton (staff 1957–90, a talented artist), who would in turn serve as OC briefly in 1960. A forthright man with strong views on the role of the corps in school life, Usher immediately issued an appeal for clemency and understanding in a ‘Commanding Officer’s Message’: ‘The Cadet Unit of Camberwell Grammar School is the tenth [some thought the ninth] oldest in Victoria and as such deserves a place of distinction in school activities. To some extent this has been achieved—one or two years cannot ruin a tradition.’ Usher continued in a candid vein with a not-so-veiled critique of the Headmaster and his reserved outlook on the unit, a blast directed also at that growing portion of the staff sceptical about the unit, some even nursing an unexplained hostility:

The traditions of a good unit are present, and are being maintained, yet one receives the impression that many connected with the School, pupils, Old Boys, masters and parents do not think the unit of very much use in education. If Cadet activities are to be classified ‘a waste of time’ then for the same reasons team sports in which the School participates are a waste of time also, for it is comradeship and self-discipline that the Cadet Unit seeks to, and does, in fact, develop and it cannot be
denied that such senses are valuable in any society. I think it may be
said that it is only some lack of enthusiasm which leaves the unit in this,
its fiftieth [sic] year, not quite worthy of its heritage. With the goodwill
of all concerned it cannot help but overcome this obstacle.

These sentiments could have been those of Michael Searle in
1954, perhaps even of Thomas Timpson the boy debater under
compulsion in 1929, and they were now fighting words when
issued by the current cadet OC in 1958; neither the solidly built
Usher nor Wootton were men to surrender without a fight
and they had the boys of the corps behind them, as well as the
editor of the Grammarian, J.E.B. Currey (not a cadet), who had
just written that ‘free peoples are today facing their greatest
threat’. The previous year’s Seymour camp had contained an
exercise of ‘silent warfare’ in the State Forest near Puckapunyal—
Usher and Wootton had now transferred this method to Mont
Albert Road, there being no annual camp in 1958.

The year had otherwise been notable for the first ANZAC
wreath-laying ceremony in the newly opened, long-awaited
Memorial Hall, even if, as the Old Boy journal Honga noted,
it was ‘not yet paid for’—the school still owed almost £6,000 for
various Hall repayments in this year alone.169 As in the immedi-
ately previous three years, the cadet service was shorter than had
hitherto been the case and accordingly afforded less status than
the unit thought appropriate, although the Headmaster thought
it ‘much more dignified and effective’.170 A Healesville bivouac
with the ‘Royal Melbourne Regiment’ (sic, but actually with
components of 6 Battallion) for selected members of the corps
was the final cadet activity of a fraught year. The Headmaster,
for his part, made some attempt to extend a peace offering by
mentioning the unit for the first time in one of his Speech Night
addresses, 12 December 1958, where he extended a ‘special note
of thanks’ to the ‘Cadet Unit under the leadership of Mr J.C.
Usher’.171 This was only a brief expression of gratitude from a
man generally noted for his conciliatory nature, but better than
nothing, even if the Reverend Timpson’s regular reports to the
School Council continued to make only the briefest, factual
statements about the place, date and nature of cadet activities.
The corps had clearly declined in the estimation of the head of
school for any old enough to recall the old Speech Night ‘mock
battles’ of the colonial era and the extended praise often offered
by earlier headmasters. Any surviving veteran who was displeased
at such a transformation would, however, have been horrified
by what was to come in the following 12 months, a watershed
year for the corps unlike any of the previous 70.

II

It was a year to remember, 1959, as the Camberwell cadet
unit entered its eighth decade. The Grammarian offered a
‘Brief History of the Camberwell Grammar School Cadet Unit’
(by James Minchin, 1948–59) which still, incorrectly, thought
the unit’s foundation date was September 1908 (an error that
overlooked two decades), closing with complaints about recent
changes in personnel having ‘hampered’ its development,
something also marred ‘because the World War has become a
matter of history rather than experience’.172 There was nothing
that could be done about the latter complaint, although the
former offered some hope of rectification given the will to do so.
This brief history remained confident that any future ‘challenge’
could be met and overcome ‘on the basis of the tradition that the
Cadet Unit represents to Camberwell Grammar School’. This was
an arguable point of view at this time and one disputed by many,
including the Headmaster, or so it would seem in September.

Usher remained the commander, although still not a staff
member, and the year began calmly enough with ANZAC Day
noted for the issue of special navy-blue ceremonial jackets
(second-hand from Melbourne Grammar) for the guard and the
band at the ‘considerable’ cost of £100, in part funded by a Term
One Dance. Thirty boys attended a May bivouac at Lerderderg
Gorge near Bacchus Marsh, where the boys were able to put into practice the theory of ‘battle tactics,’ which they had been taught at their weekly Tuesday parades—soon they would be deprived of such opportunities. The September camp at Scrub Hill was poorly attended, but at least the food was good and the unit distinguished itself in battle tactics in something of an unmarked swan song, for when the School Council had assembled on 1 September, Headmaster Timpson had addressed the issue of the Cadet Corp’s future. Here he reported that a recent request from the Headmasters’ Conference to the Army Adjutant-General recommending that the standard of cadet training be raised in some unspecified manner had been rejected. The Head accordingly presented three options for Camberwell:

A: Discontinue with the Cadet Corps.

B: Make cadets efficient under the limitations of training available.

C: Replace Cadets with an Outward Bound School or Group X, as in operation in England.

He also promised the Council a list of extra-curricular activities that would be involved in any transition to Outward Bound and a report on the corps at the next meeting in October. However, no list was ever furnished, an early indication that the Headmaster’s suggestion was more idealistic than practical.

Before the Council was able to consider and adjudicate on these matters, Timpson signalled elsewhere the (Outward Bound) option he preferred when attending the Officers’ and NCOs’ dinner on 21 September, where he ominously explained, even ‘promised’, that ‘plans were being made to develop and extend the activities of the School Cadet Unit and to integrate it much more closely with the life of the senior school than it had previously’. Here, in linking Outward Bound with the cadet system, he was significantly ahead of many other schools and in advance of the national cadet system, which struggled internally over such changes throughout this period. The Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Major General I.T. Murdoch, emphatically stated in 1958 that any move away from basic military training was ‘a retrograde step’. The Reverend Timpson disagreed and may as well have said so directly at this dinner, but despite his shock announcement, the evening closed on a comic note when Staff Sergeant Ian Woodside provided some old Charlie Chaplin films—perhaps Modern Times was amongst them. Soon, the corps would be in greater need of more comic relief than even the ‘Little Tramp’ could provide. The School Council did not, however, address the issue before the Headmaster’s Report of 1959, issued later in the year, where he unilaterally outlined the foreshadowed Outward Bound plans that would operate in the Senior School from the beginning of 1960:

All boys entering Form III must become members of the Cadet Unit unless they are medically unfit. The programme of the Cadet Unit will be very much along the lines of the ‘Outward Bound Movement’ which has been going on for some time in England. There will be a much greater variety of activities which will help the individual boy to learn to accept responsibility for himself and to serve the community to which he belongs.

There was no detail offered of the method of transition, to the eventual frustration of Usher and others who sought a ‘concrete plan’ in vain and who recognised immediately that more time and resources would be necessary overall, for example, to deal with disaffected conscripts. Timpson was a generally accommodating man, but in this area of proposed cadet transformation, there was little connection between theory and practice. The cadet unit would thus survive, if bolstered through compulsion for the first time since 1929, but its essential nature would be changed to a sphere more akin to the Boy Scouts by Timpson’s own description. No more machine guns on campus; no more bayonets except for special parades; no more school rifle range; no more boys carrying home on the tram their (unbolted) .303s (as Bruce Golder, 1958–63, recalled doing, as did John Usher);
no more battle tactics; no more mortars falling over Chatfield Avenue. It was a decade since the Head had first encountered Outward Bound at the prestigious Uppingham School in Rutland, UK, which he often recalled fondly, and the moment had now, he thought, come for its Victorian inauguration. The new activities overlapped to some extent with existing cadet pursuits, but watered-down traditional Tuesday afternoon ‘Quad’ parade and drill. They would include ‘day trips and week-end bivouacs’, given parental co-operation, and school-based activities such as Rescue and Public Service (from first-aid, life-saving, fire service, youth leadership and rescue work to animal welfare); Expedition (from mapping, compass reading, bushcraft, weather study and camping to cooking); and Pursuits and Projects (from physical fitness, art and craft to hobbies). The overall course was to operate for three years in the Senior School, thus guaranteeing cadet enrolments for each triennium, although this element of the proposal was never implemented for unknown reasons and the percentage of cadets within the student body would eventually fall in consequence. The Reverend Timpson closed his Report by admitting that ‘some time and considerable experience’ would be needed before the program was fully operable. The whole would be, without doubt, the most comprehensive revision of the school’s cadet unit for almost three-quarters of a century (a time before even the Boy Scouts had been established). There was no promise of any support to implement such a substantial change.

OC Usher’s immediate, official response to the Headmaster’s bombshell, his ‘Commanding Officer’s Message’, was more moderate than might have been expected given the nature of his message of the previous year. It was one of grudging acceptance, as he was prepared to acknowledge the need for some dilution of the old activities reminiscent of earlier wartime periods, but also one which repeated the argument for cadet tradition.177 The OC was particularly concerned to learn how the newly proposed structure would fit into the Army’s framework, as the unit was not necessarily opposed to change, but understandably wished for more detail (which never came) and was disinclined to accept that change needed to be at the cost of tradition:

A school such as Camberwell Grammar does not exist to produce merely scholars, but citizens. A lad must be able to look after himself once he leaves the shelter of home and school. In a small way, as a school boy, he acquires self-reliance, but that acquired in cadet training is so much more effective. He learns to give and take orders, to pitch his own tent, to cook his own meal; in short, the Cadet Unit provides the adventure of military life which helps the lad acquire self-confidence. This is the function of the Cadet Unit in a school, which must therefore be an integral part of it. It is no coincidence that more and more schools are trying to obtain School Units. And so it seems a pity that boys who need self-discipline so badly do not participate in Cadet life.178

Although this ‘Message’ repeated many of the pro-cadet arguments found in any record of the 1937 Derham versus Robinson House debate and those of ‘A Recurring Question’ in the 1949 Grammarian, it could still have been read by both innovators and traditionalists with a level of satisfaction as it seemed to accept the proposed Outward Bound transformation, placing the unit in ‘a difficult position’ as the OC later described it; or did it?179 This would be the challenge of the unit in the 1960s should the Outward Bound reforms be implemented—to accept the inevitability of change whilst maintaining military integrity, to accept ‘integration’ without losing identity. There was some immediate sadness in the new reality, as while annual prizes for cadet efficiency continued, the post-war Lemon and Tregaskis awards for shooting were now discontinued by a unit facing disarmament, or so it seemed at times. The Lemon award would be revived later, but not that commemorating the fallen Norman Tregaskis, who was now remembered only for his achievements in Latin; soon that token of remembrance would also disappear.
A new decade was set to bring forth the new Outward Bound order, but the Headmaster continued to tarry and cadet tradition was not yet entirely overlooked in 1960. The unit was briefly under the de facto command of Lt Wootton, John Usher having been momentarily side-lined even though now a staff member, perhaps as a reaction to his voiced reservations about the proposed changes—he was absent from the cadet photo of that year. A new flag and holster were presented to the unit by cadet patrons Mr and Mrs Taplin (whose son Gregory, 1949–61, was a CUO and later a staff member) on ANZAC Day and dedicated in the usual April ceremony. This banner and the accompanying presentation ceremony were arguably tangible gestures of survival, even defiance in the face of adversity, although the flag itself was acknowledged as a ‘generous donation’ by the Headmaster—it remains in the possession of the twenty-first century unit and still bears the incorrect ‘1908’ device. The Taplins later donated a stupendous £100 ‘to be invested to maintain the Cadet Flag’; the whereabouts of this sum remains unknown. The generous Taplins also allowed the cadets to use their ‘Sunny Hill’ farm at Buln Buln East in Gippsland for their May bivouac following a wash-out at the Lerderderg Gorge. The iconic Puckapunyal was again the site of the September camp with the hard-pressed cadets mercifully housed in huts rather than tents. Fieldcraft, obstacle courses and above all a ‘30 Yard range’ gave the boys ‘much pleasure as well as a great deal of experience’, things under threat back at Mont Albert Road.

The Headmaster briefly attended one bivouac, at Langwarrin, to conduct a Service (his only visit to an external cadet activity in Usher’s memory), as well as the annual dinner in September where the guest of honour was Major Wren, the cadet Battalion Commander. Life thus went on, despite the domestic Sword of Damocles presented by an unprecedented week-long ‘Staff Conference’ in December, which discussed the ‘place and relative importance of Art, Cadets, Religious Teaching, and Music in the school and how they could best be integrated into school life’. It was left to the Headmaster alone to implement any outcome of this conference.

1961 brought the school’s seventy-fifth birthday and reminiscences from one Old Boy, Cuthbert Dickinson (1907–15), about long-past cadet Thursday afternoons, four-hour parades, ‘sham fights’ with blank cartridges—‘very happy days’. Even though such activities had been modified on the school campus, cadet life continued off-site without any major sign of the feared integration. John Usher was no longer OC, having been replaced by another Old Boy, Captain W.R. Dickinson (1939–52, cadet Lieutenant 1951–52, Captain of School 1952, Rhodes Ideal awardee 1952), son of Cuthbert, who endured in the top job for only a year during which time he did not issue any candid ‘Commanding Officer’s Message’; John Usher was his deputy. The cadet unit had, at least, been returned to the official list of school office bearers in the Grammarian, a small sign of rehabilitation. However, negotiations to purchase an ‘Army hut’ for their use were terminated by a niggardly Council. There still remained (until 1962) little indication that the Outward Bound challenge was anything other than the Headmaster’s theoretical musing—Timpson was planning an absence in mid-year of three months—so the unit continued to tread water (some cadets had now acquired aqua-lung training) and to wait. In some ways, the year was considered ‘unique’ as the corps was able to mount a 24 hour guard on the Memorial Hall from ‘ANZAC Eve’, leaving a guard on the Honour Boards the following day during the service at St Mark’s. The Headmaster inspected the corps, whose remembrance services now also observed those who had served in the Korean War (1950–53) as well as those of the two world wars. Annual camp at Seymour was untoward—foul weather, canvas accommodation, Bren and Owen gun shooting (no longer permitted in the units themselves)—although a
‘live’ tank firing display was notable. An Army Warrant Officer attached to this camp was said to have been impressed by the unit’s dexterity around fox-holes. There were three bivouacs, at the Taplin’s ‘Sunny Hill’ at Buln Buln (now on offer to the school for purchase), at Wonga Park for NCOs and at Fort Pearce on the Mornington Peninsula, which allowed the boys to revisit Fort Nepean, the venue of former cadet activities in more confident years. The Buln Buln bivouac was jocularly referred to as a ‘Lost Weekend’ by the cadet correspondent of Spectemur Agenda and the Fort Pearce visit as ‘a night for accidents’ in this new student journal, which first appeared in March 1961 and gave the cadets their own voice. It also gave a more stentorian voice to the critics of the cadet system, for every subsequent issue that carried a cadet report would contain a greater volume of criticism and jokes at the expense of the unit. The last bivouac of 1961 had featured a river crossing of the Yarra with cadets floating themselves across and back on a groundsheet—the Camberwell unit was thus said to have been the first to have made a river crossing without boats or bridges and similar; dunking events followed in the years to come. The unit closed the year with the optimistic aspiration of ‘more, better, and perhaps ever bigger cadets next year’, the triumph of hope over experience.186

This optimism was forced and the first issue of the increasingly critical Spectemur in 1962 signalled that the intention of the school remained ‘to expand the activities of the Cadet Unit out of the realms of merely practising parade and rifle drill and to make them an active and useful body in school life’.187 The correspondent questioned the value of merely learning to march properly and to use a rifle without the parallel knowledge of first aid and fire drill. Cadet first-aiders, he suggested would soon be in attendance at school sporting events and present in the event of any fire: ‘This extending of the cadet activities to make it a more practicable body in the school is the major change in cadet life for the following year and should, I think, help to create a wider interest and a more tolerant attitude towards the cadet corps as a whole’. This boy correspondent was acting as His-Master’s-Voice, perhaps unwittingly, and the close of his article was immediately above the heading ‘Agree With This?’ The restored commander, Captain John Usher, whom even the Head noted was the stalwart of ‘devoted leadership’, did not agree and was not shy in saying so in his former style, insisting in his annual report that the unit’s commanders had ‘stuck at a job not always easy, pleasant or interesting’. Their only reward, he continued, was a comment from the Cadet Battalion commander that they were the most active unit in the state. There was little praise from their own leader at Mont Albert Road, as the Headmaster’s Report, 1962, now only briefly mentioned the corps and then under the heading of ‘Other School Activities’.188 The School Council, however, extended congratulation through the Headmaster on the unit’s ‘excellent parade’ on ANZAC Day, where the review had been taken by Army Captain Cole.189 The ANZAC Eve Honour Guard again presided, but there had been ‘intruders’ overnight, ‘all of whom were driven off or captured’.190 The ever-active Usher was generally pleased by a year that had seen camp attendance of over 100 boys for the first time and the impressive provision of an Honour Guard for the Lt-Governor of Victoria (Lt-Gen Sir Edmund Herring) at the opening of an extension to the Maranoa Gardens in Balwyn, a testament to the quality of his revived leadership. The extra training that this guard had undergone required a month of additional practice in the boys’ own lunchtimes. Usher, who had also surrendered his own lunch breaks, had been able to reintroduce a school prize for Champion Shot and to maintain a ‘Spartan’ bivouac at Gembrook alongside Puckapunyal camp traditions such as signals, pioneer bridge-building, shelter provision and patrolling in search of ‘guerrillas’, a task which Australian soldiers would soon be undertaking during the ‘Confrontation’ between Malaysia and Indonesia. Former Camberwell cadet, Second World War and Korean veteran Stuart Weir (1933–39, later a Brigadier)
would be amongst them—he would become the only officer to command Australian troops in Korea, Malaya and Vietnam, being awarded the DSO in 1971. Usher was also able to foster his prized Drum Band and to preside over the establishment of a Brass Band. In the meantime, he adjusted himself to the new training program of 1962, expanded according to the outline foreshadowed with varying degrees of vigour and detail over the previous three years. Accordingly, a ‘Medical Section’ was formed with a level of training that allowed most cadets to sit for their St John’s certificate at the end of the year. In the following year, once the school obtained access to the Bambara (‘place of trees’) camp site near Broadford, it was hoped to deploy these trainees in a Regimental Aid Post or sick-bay and thus integrate the old and new systems of training. In the meantime, cadet first-aiders were attached to the games of the First XVIII, the school’s premier sporting team. When sports training or games clashed with cadet activities, the latter were cancelled to the chagrin of the cadet correspondent of *Spectemur*: ‘It shows a complete lack of organisation in the school.’ This arrangement was not, however, owing to a lack of organisation, but to a deficiency of status. The commander had been forced in the course of the year to accept the Outward Bound push and responded with hostility in a *Spectemur* ‘Return Fire’ reply to those critics who thought that the corps was not moving with sufficient speed or ardour towards the new goals.

For reasons of his own, a somewhat disillusioned John Usher decided that 1963 would be his last at Camberwell Grammar. He had been associated with the corps as man and boy for a decade, starting as a humble, thirteen-year-old ‘slushie’ (something between a kitchen-hand and batman) at the Portsea camp in 1952, had been its commander in theory and practice for half a decade and on staff since 1960. He now left ‘to enter the business world’ in his father’s bus firm. In his valedictory ‘The Last Word’, the retiring OC commended the personnel of the unit, without whose efforts 1963 would have been a ‘very ordinary year’, and reminded his readers that boys gained a ‘great deal from belonging to the Cadet Unit of Camberwell Grammar School’ and that he had himself ‘gained more than I can ever repay’—the feeling was mutual. The Headmaster’s Report acknowledged that Usher had made the revised corps ‘a fine avenue of service and training for many boys’.

The year had seen the usual ANZAC ceremonies, dinners and bivouacs—Mt. Bogong; a new school campsite at Kinglake which allowed some .22 calibre shooting; the Puckapunyal camp. A *Spectemur* critic wondered why the ANZAC guard, inspected by Major Dossetor, were not all wearing the expensive (second-hand) blue jackets and berets recently acquired at that ‘considerable cost’ of £100, a deficiency which he thought had ‘marred an otherwise impressive display’ The former OC, Wootton, wondered the same thing, thereby questioning the efficiency of the present command structure: ‘Surely it would not be too hard to keep a check on 30 jackets and berets that are only used once or twice a year.’ It was. The only novelty of the year was the ‘First Annual Passing Out Parade’ on 19 October, frustratingly delayed by lunchtime athletic events now that the unit’s status was below that of sporting activities and now that it was deprived of extensive extra-curricular time allotment. ‘Despite this the Unit put on the best parade yet seen’ as a suitable, ceremonial send-off for Captain Usher, who took the salute. Guard Commander Greg Forbes (1958–63) played a major part in organising this inaugural parade and was awarded the 3 Cadet Brigade Prize in recognition—he had already won the ‘Most Efficient Cadet’ trophy in 1960, an annual award since 1941. The Passing Out Parade endures until the present day and although its format has changed, it remains the important opening event of the annual Open Day. It was fitting, given the tension of recent years, that Usher would choose to leave with a bang, not a whimper when mid-year issues of *Spectemur*
(from March to May) contained articles by the sub-prefect Robert Gayner (1952–64) which slammed the corps and its mores—Gayner claimed to have been at Puckapunyal at some time, but his school records do not provide any evidence of cadet membership. Usher (‘J.U.’) replied at length to his attacks in a following issue. This war of words elegantly distilled the debate about the worth and nature of cadet training that had continued at all levels of the school community since at least 1955, if not since the end of the last world war.

‘E.G.’ versus ‘J.U.’ in the columns of Spectemur, mid-1963, was a battle of ideas in which each combatant represented a broader body of opinion seen as sympathetic to the point-of-view under argument. It was a rerun of a debate that had taken place within the school and in society as a whole for the last four decades, a debate that had exhibited particular vigour since 1955 and been aired by Timpson before the Council in 1959—should the cadet training system be continued unchanged, be modified for relevance or terminated as an anachronism? Abolition was again in the air. ‘E.G.’ had fired the first shot in the debate in a March 1963 Spectemur article, ‘The Salt of the Earth’, where he questioned the purpose of cadets with ‘Boer War rifles’ in the nuclear age and the ‘utter stupidity and foolish tradition’ that maintained a system that was, to him, ‘a breath from the past’. What Gayner had seen of the regular Army impressed him even less and he dismissed the officers who occasionally visited the school unit by quoting an inscription that he had allegedly seen above the door of a Puckapunyal hut: ‘The infantry man is the salt of the earth, and like salt, he is coarse, common and rough.’ Soon after, in ‘E.G. Strikes Again’, this Spectemur gadfly opened his more detailed consideration of cadet matters by suggesting that the five identified aims of the cadet movement, that is those stated in the Army's Standing Orders for Cadet Training, were ‘unjustifiable’ and that the Camberwell unit was, in any case, failing to fulfil them. Their first ‘unfulfilled’ aim was: ‘To give Cadets a foundation of military knowledge and discipline.’ ‘E.G.’ emphatically thought ‘NO’, as, in his estimation, the acceptance of military ideas meant the acceptance of war. Army discipline per se also meant the mindless obligation to ‘obey mass orders from bullying officers’ and he cited as a prime example of this the refined discipline of the Nazi SS in the last world war. This military characteristic was a denial of ‘SELF-discipline’, one of the virtues that OC Usher had touted in his 1958 commander’s message. In a similarly critical vein, ‘E.G.’ then addressed the second unfulfilled aim: ‘To develop the qualities of leadership.’ Although he thought this aim ‘sound enough’, the Camberwell unit ‘does not achieve it’. Even promoted cadets were, to him, merely acting as liaison between HQ and privates—there was no opportunity to demonstrate leadership, only the obligation to ‘accept orders without question’ (the defence that some of the SS officers referred to earlier had offered, unsuccessfully, at Nuremberg). The third aim—‘To develop a sense of citizenship and patriotism’—led to extreme nationalism and ‘reckless patriotic fervour’, encouraging opinionated and intolerant cadets to dismiss the view of others. The fourth aim—‘To develop interest in the Role of the Army’—was something a little different. ‘E.G.’ thought the cadet unit too successful in this aim and that such sentiment ought to be ‘discouraged’, given that the Army was an institution intended to evolve ‘the best methods of killing people’. The author preferred interest in movements that encouraged peace and co-operation between nations, like those unsuccessful, now forgotten, Derham debaters of 1929. The final unfulfilled aim to come under the scrutiny of ‘E.G.’ was ‘To encourage Cadets to continue some form of military service’. This he damned as contrary to all that is taught at the school. Neither the US nor the USSR, he noted, had school cadets, so such a system was not necessary to encourage military service—he seemed unaware that both major powers practised conscription and had school activities that were tantamount to military training. Regardless, ‘E.G.’ closed this assessment with
a solid conclusion: ‘Above all, it is not the duty of the school to encourage such military activity.’ However, he had not quite finished with ‘these corrupt aims’, condemning ‘Tradition’ (another highpoint of Usher’s 1958 message) as wasteful and old-fashioned—so concluded an extensive, acerbic and ferocious critique of the Camberwell cadets and the system that sustained them.

The OC could not let this attack go unchallenged and in the following issue of Spectemur he offered his considered response to an article that he thought of as ‘a lack of courtesy’. It was essentially Captain Usher’s valedictory message. Without addressing the specifics of the five Standing Order aims, he took a broader approach by suggesting that respect for ‘traditional authority’ was as necessary both in daily life (on the tram, on the road, at school) as it was in the military environment, where ‘a common attitude is essential, not just advantageous for the common good’. He favourably contrasted the bearing and order of a cadet parade with that of boys in an assembly in order to make his point. ‘J.U.’ then defended his corps against the suggestion made by ‘E.G.’ that they were ‘an unintelligent mass’ by citing the high level of qualification and application provided by such training, transferred in later years into courses at Duntroon or into apprenticeships. Even in the nuclear age, there was still a place for the ‘infanteer’, even for the ones still using the .303 rifles (bored down to .22) and Bren guns that the unit was able to deploy on occasions. Like ‘E.G.’ he closed on the note of tradition: ‘To my Victorian way of thinking a State, or for that matter, a School without some tradition would rapidly become a cream brick, ferro-concrete and glass walled edifice built on sand.’ This observation was perhaps directed less at ‘E.G.’ and more at the Reverend Timpson, whose extensive building program of recent years was attracting precisely this type of criticism—the 1964 ‘Master Plan’ would soon attract more.199 ‘J.U.’ allowed himself a parting, barbed ad hominem: ‘The Cadet Unit, in addition to all its other advantages gives the “angry young men” traditional to the School an opportunity to follow the tradition of being “agin” cadets. Good Luck. I think you will need it.’

Any contemporaneous reader of these Spectemur articles would have been hard-pressed not to conclude that there was no prospect of compromise between these two positions, no greater prospect anyway in 1963 than had existed since the Outward Bound reforms were mooted in 1959—they were oil and water. However, it is likely that Thomas Timpson, ever the ebullient optimist and man of faith, continued to see his reforms as a compromise that could bring the two extremes together.

IV

There was no John Usher OC in 1964; Robert Gayner was now Spectemur editor and a prefect, for Camberwell was not one of the private schools that tied a prefecture to service as a cadet CUO, although there was always considerable overlap—where the two positions coincided at Camberwell, as they did, for example, with Stewart Taplin (1952–65), the ‘pacifists’ amongst the other prefects objected to their study becoming an ‘armoury’.200 The Headmaster chose not to reappoint a staff member as cadet commander, there being none ‘available’ to do so (as he told the School Council), selecting instead Captain B. Moore, a lecturer at the University of Melbourne, previously the commander at Scotch College, thereby a coincidental throw-back to the era of Whitehead and colonial beginnings.201 Greg Taplin, Old Boy and a university student with the Melbourne University Regiment, remained second-in-command. They were joined later in the year by another outsider as Assistant OC, Captain H. Nicholas, a businessman and friend of Moore. There had now been nine changes of command in twenty years. The positioning of outsiders at the top of the unit and a divided command obviously made the process of change easier to implement without consolidated opposition—there were a number of ‘radical reforms’ in administration and application in this year, as the Outward
Bound measures were accelerated.\textsuperscript{202}

The ANZAC Eve overnight vigil Honour Guard was not repeated ‘as a result of some unfortunate activities last year’, probably a reference to the ‘intruders’, so one of Usher’s traditions would not be entrenched, but the Brass Band was able for the first time to accompany the drummers on the march to and from St Mark’s, which was now feeling the pressure of numbers given that the school population was over 800. The cadets were inspected by Lt Commander Pringle, who in accordance with the broader activity-based perspective of the times then presented certificates to those recently qualified in the increasing number of courses. The unit’s numbers fell to an unspecified ‘compact’ status according to Captain Moore (the Army threatened the culling of any unit under 50) and the bivouacs were limited to one at Bambara in Term One, where the unit was damned with the faint praise of having participated ‘creditably’. A detailed account left by one participant, ‘Operation Walkabout’, recalled the use of blank ammunition, crackers and a race back to the school between trucks and buses—‘the buses won’.\textsuperscript{203} Soon after, uniforms were altered to ‘more comfortable and practical’ jungle-green shirts and black (American-style) webbing, another clear indication of transition given that it required the abandonment of khaki—some cynics believed the change simply due to the Kiwi company having abandoned the manufacturing of the greenish nugget formerly used, but the Army thought it appropriate that the boys be clad in uniforms ‘closer to the present army dress than to the original ANZACs’.\textsuperscript{204} The first parade of 1964 accordingly demonstrated ‘the usual oddities of the new uniform’ including incorrectly laced boots, albeit ones polished with black Kiwi nugget.\textsuperscript{205} The ‘Q’ store and cadet office was evicted from the rear of Roystead in the course of the first half of the year after considerable forewarning and discussion—‘YES, we’re moving AGAIN’\textsuperscript{206}—resited to a smaller but better fortified room beneath the Memorial Hall stage at the cost of £500. This was a suitable piece of symbolism as memories of the most recent major conflict were dimming after more than a generation. None of this prevented the Dramatic Society from complaining about an invasion of its space, putting the cadets in an invidious position. Some may have thought this a delayed but appropriate nemesis for the many years in which the unit had denied the old Camera Club access to its commandeered darkroom—now the (Army) boot was on the other foot. This compressed ‘Q’ store site, windowless, sealed and subject to stage noise, made it difficult to track and to maintain the unit’s equipment in the desired state—at least one .303 disappeared at this time—but Gayner of \textit{Spectemur} welcomed the consequent expansion of cloak-room space and the creation of a sub-prefect’s study in the vacated Roystead area.\textsuperscript{207}

To add insult to this extended injury, the corps experienced a high-profile defection in April, when Drum-Major Andrew Clarke (1961–65 with two years’ cadet service) announced his apostasy in the letter columns of Gayner’s \textit{Spectemur}, denouncing the cadets as ‘a false set-up achieving nothing’ with ‘more chiefs than indians [sic]’. He also suggested the appointment of a committee of inquiry into the corps to establish its purpose and efficiency given his belief that the ‘Cadets are really in a state of collapse. Think about it.’\textsuperscript{208} Readers were assured that Clarke’s departure from the ranks was not a dismissal. Cadet Under-Officer David Bednall (1955–64) was offered the opportunity to reply in the following issue once he had thought about it, but his denials failed to quell an open rebellion in which many in the school community clearly revelled.

Routines were nevertheless maintained within the allegedly collapsing unit under considerable duress. The annual camp of 1964 was at Scrub Hill, Puckapunyal, and considered a success ‘though fraught with minor difficulties’.\textsuperscript{209} The annual
upper-ranks dinner also proceeded in September, undaunted ('Tomato soup. Roast Lamb with gravy and vegetables. Pavlova.')—the other ranks had already enjoyed a Cadet Dance ‘with the Collegian Jazz Band’ in May in the School Hall ('Dress? Casual of course.‘), even though jazz and the military did not normally mix. The cadets made a profit from the Dance, but in another instance of ill-fortune, the new unit flag went missing. A range day at Williamstown again allowed the remaining shooters in the unit to exercise nostalgically in a fashion no longer permitted on the school site, for the resurrected Champion Shot school prize had disappeared again with the departure of Usher—the only ‘good shots’ at Camberwell Grammar were now taken by the Photographic Society and then processed in their restored darkroom. Only one cadet initiative of recent years endured, the Passing Out Parade towards the end of a frustrating year. It was considered ‘an effective spectacle’, even though its training period had been interrupted by the prioritised House sporting activities and by the necessity to disperse from the parade ground for oncoming cars—Spectemur sarcastically wondered who would thus guard ‘The Guards’ from errant motorists. Following this passing out, the Headmaster had addressed and inspected a unit that was now of diminishing morale, stature and size, yet as patron of the Bushwalking Club and of Club Six for the matriculation students, his focus was elsewhere. The year’s official cadet notes in the Grammarian were understandably a strange mixture of under-siege pessimism and implausible optimism:

The School in general has become more aware of the Cadet Unit, if only in opposing it. The Unit has lacked much of the official support it has had in recent years, but an intensified recruiting programme, coupled with improved training methods has set the Unit on a firm foundation for the years to come. Good Luck!

The author ought to have taken a leaf from ‘J.U.’ and concluded with the rejoinder ‘Good Luck. I think you will need it.’

The Reverend Timpson chose to retire at the end of 1965 for broader horizons, to the surprise of the School Council, a loss to the school community as a whole given the quality of his leadership over the previous decade, but not one that some of the die-hard traditionalists in the cadet unit would have wept over, in private. Captain Moore would also depart for the US, having served his purpose through ‘having infected a sense of vitality and adventure into the Unit training’. He was succeeded by Captain Nicholas as OC. It was the year of cadet ‘Adventure Activities’, as the unit continued to struggle to adapt to the new order—Outward Bound was now an unstoppable juggernaut and the new OC conceded that ‘adventure training’ was now an obligation on the school as a whole according to the Timpson model, with the cadet unit designated as its ‘core’. A new staff member with CMF (army reserve) experience, Lt John Stafford, was admitted to the unit and he would endure for three decades, thus providing the stability that the unit so desperately needed—it was the Army’s hope that school units would develop links with their local CMF forces. Numbers were respectable, 105, largely owing to an increasing school population of just over 800—the corps thus enlisted only 12 per cent of the student body, whereas in the ‘good old days’ of 1916 the same number of cadets had represented over 33 per cent of the school’s total enrolment. The Sixties were, however, a world apart from those distant days of the Great War, chronologically, socially and psychologically. ANZAC Day was one surviving element, but attendance was down and the memorial service was short at a time when a few lone voices were beginning to suggest that the days of ANZAC commemoration were numbered—the school’s English Department was already studying an iconoclastic play, The One Day of the Year. Meanwhile, the adventure-oriented cadets were engaged in abseiling down cliff-faces and the nearby railway cutting bridge that had once taken train passengers to and from the ‘Roystead’ station. They were also taking to the air, with light aircraft featuring in the Healesville bivouac as
cadets searched, unsuccessfully, for two enemy parachutists in a ‘Drop Zone’. Camberwell boys were later able to take silk themselves, participating in parachute jumping witnessed by the Head during an activity at Toolangi, this ‘adventure’ exercise being a rare instance of the Camberwell headmaster attending a cadet manoeuvre since the change of leadership in 1955. The Camberwell unit was the only cadet force present at the September annual camp, Scrub Hill, held under the careful eye of the Army, including Lt Taplin’s varsity regiment, and the unharnessed boys were able to engage in a full gamut of military activities including guerrilla patrols in the Vietnamese mode, the use of machine guns, rocket launchers and mortar fire. The cadet correspondent of the Grammarian described all this as the ‘most interesting and successful’ camp for many years. The ‘guerrillas’ were able to force the main force into retreat back to Puckapunyal, a foretaste of what was happening in south-east Asia. For the first time in fifteen years, the boys had been equipped with ammunition—blank, but ammunition. After all, Australians were again at war, even if an undeclared one in Indo-China. It followed quite naturally that when the Passing Out Parade on a hot Saturday afternoon (over 90°F) in October was addressed by Lt Colonel Hatfield, the Brigade Commander, his topic should be the need for boys to continue their interest in the nation’s defences. Spectemur thought his speech ‘morbid’, aggravated by the Colonel’s suggestion that each boy should serve two years in the Army. Soon, as a modified, quasi-lottery, form of conscription was introduced nationally, a shift towards such a model became a reality, a shift that was away from the concept of voluntary service most recently stressed by Captain Moore in his March 1964 ‘Moore About Cadets’ interview in Spectemur, where he had offered an emphatic ‘No!’ to any suggestion of compulsion. The Headmaster’s 1959 half-hearted suggestion of compulsory service in a revised corps (like many other mooted reforms) had never materialised, whereas some Victorian private schools continued to insist on mandatory cadet service. The cadet notes of the Grammarian for 1965 described the year as one of ‘learning and experience’, the corps having survived ‘contrary to what members of the school thought at the end of last year’ in the estimation of their Spectemur columnist. Sometimes the learning experience of cadets was wisdom-after-the-event for some of the survivors, as ‘Ex-Cadet. P.N.’ claimed in Spectemur (now a journal of relentless critique of all things military), where he lamented the trickery and false promises that were made in the Junior School to secure cadet enlistment. The unidentified ‘P.N.’ wanted his civilian lifestyle back. There was, however, a certain irony in the fact that while 1965 was the climactic year of the Outward Bound approach at Camberwell, and therefore to a pacifistically inclined Spectemur ‘the most progressive year of Cadet training’, it was also a year in which Australian troops were preparing a task force for an overseas commitment to a regional conflict that was clearly going to be of considerable duration. Two Old Boys were already serving there as Army officers and military advisers—Reginald Pollard (1948–51) and Ian McFarlane (1945–50), both former cadets. Under these circumstances, it was likely that the Camberwell unit would again be able to return to the honoured, traditional position that they had held in the school community in earlier decades through reinvigorated Army patronage and, indeed, within twelve months the Army would be pressing for expansion of the cadet system. Moore’s onetime ‘new start . . . to the way Cadet training can be carried out’, as the Grammarian had rosiely described it, was stillborn. So too was the approach that he had outlined to Spectemur in 1964 on a ‘troubling subject’, that ‘Cadets is no longer a militant organization’, but rather ‘an aid to character training’—a year later, the regular Army was again looking for militancy and, thanks to Ho Chi Minh, there was light at the end of the tunnel for the traditionalists.
Timpson’s resignation in October 1965 (effective from 31 January 1966) and impending departure for the Victorian Universities and Schools Examination Board took the school community by surprise and was the cause of considerable regret. In the estimation of Len Weickhardt of the School Council, who had come to know him well, he had been ‘a great healer and of warm humanity’, hence the sense of loss. The Grammarian offered its valedictory tribute ‘In Appreciation’ where it reminded the school community of the central, pivotal role played by a headmaster in institutions like Camberwell Grammar, for ‘the School is very much what the Headmaster makes it’. With the regretted departure of the Reverend Timpson, the tribute noted, the school ‘loses not only the man, but also something of its own character’. The disgruntled cadets, frustrated by the lack of precision in some of the mooted changes of the period, were particularly conscious of the accuracy of these observations. They must also have noticed that in the extensive ‘Headmaster’s Report’ of 1965, reproduced in the Grammarian in full, the unit was mentioned in one sentence only of a report of some 2,500 words in length, where the ‘interesting Cadet Bivouacs and Camps’ were listed in a brief mention of ‘other interesting activities’ alongside the Chess Club and the faltering Students’ Representative Council. Headmaster Timpson had earlier addressed the contributions of the Prefects, the Sub-Prefects, the Tuck Shop Committee, and even the Ground Staff with greater prolixity. So, after a decade, the cadet unit warranted barely a mention in the Reverend Timpson’s estimation of the school’s standing at the end of his tenure. He had begun his headship with a level of caution, ‘ambivalence’ not hostility in Usher’s memory, about the system of cadet training and that caution had never left him.

The Headmaster closed his farewell report with a ‘Blessing’, but it is doubtful whether this final extension of conciliation was fully shared by those in the new jungle-green uniforms. The cadets had remained steeped in tradition throughout this period of transition, 1955–65, and however much they may have liked the retiring headmaster on a personal level, they could only have looked forward to the prospect of an enhancement of their status within the school community under his successor and to an improved system of communication between headmaster and cadet unit. The period was summarised by John Usher as having been ‘a hard road to hoe’ and many now looked for relief.

Now, perhaps, the true ‘adventure of military life’ could proceed, perhaps with more focus and less distraction. When Cadet Ian Moyle (1960–65) prepared the ‘Forthcoming Cadet Events’ notes for Spectemur in the month that Timpson’s resignation was announced, October 1965, the page was left blank—a possible reference to past and present censorship— with an image of Father Time in the margin (normally reserved for New Year salutations). The cadet corps was ready for a new beginning.

The use of the 3” mortar on the lower oval was common in the 1950s, although rare following a noticeable accident in August 1957, where a parental car was damaged by a poorly aimed shell during an Education Week display. Headmaster Tonkin blamed the Army instructor.
CHAPTER THREE

All in a State of Flux, 1966–75

‘Everything flows, nothing stands still.’

_Heraclitus of Ephesus, 535475 BC, on universal fluctuation._

‘Several interesting exercises are planned and training will be more realistic and adventurous than before with less stress on the old “right turn”, “left turn” etc.’

_Captain Nicholas OC, on his intentions for 1967, Grammarian, 1966._

‘We need to protect our national interests by ensuring that Defence resources are not used for activities that do not contribute to our defence capabilities.’

_Defence Minister Morrison announcing the disbanding of the cadet system, August 1975._

Any Camberwell cadet hoping that the era of Outward Bound and ‘adventure training’ had departed with the Reverend Timpson in January 1966 was mistaken and the battle of ideas of the previous decade continued under a new headmaster, a battle now exacerbated by Australia’s controversial involvement in the Vietnam war. The national cadet system had undergone an internal struggle over the issue of tradition versus adventure training throughout the late 1950s and into the 1960s, at a time when the Camberwell unit had made its choice in...
favour of the latter or, more accurately, at a time when the choice had been made for them. But the question was still in a state of flux nationally in 1966 and there was a clear split between the two concepts at schools outside of Camberwell Grammar. The traditionalists hoped that the escalating conflict in Vietnam would provide the opportunity for a reinforcement of basics within the cadet system, perhaps even a return to the Army’s 1961 stated aim of cadet weapon training—‘to produce soldiers who can kill an enemy in battle with any platoon weapon’.

There was an increasing stock of enemies in south-east Asia at this time and this would indeed lead to an immediate, reinforced focus on combat-focused field training, but as the Vietnam conflict became less popular at home in the late 60s and early 70s, there was a distancing from tradition in the national cadet system in an attempt to break the nexus between perceived notions of militarism and the day-to-day training of boy cadets within schools such as Camberwell.

The Army, against its immediate instincts, had made some attempt at a compromise between tradition and innovation in this period with the mixed success of a parallel system, but by 1975 the ‘adventure training’ system seemed to have won the battle of ideas nationally (mirroring the outcome of the same struggle at Camberwell Grammar in 1959). This victory was not enough, however, to save the cadet system from threatened extinction at the hands of an unsympathetic government in Canberra. Compromise rarely satisfies the dogmatic; reaction at home against the Vietnam struggle, it seemed, had now brought about impending doom for the cadet system. Nevertheless, throughout this period of flux, 1966–75, the Camberwell corps soldiered on, unsure of its primary focus and often unsure of the stance of the new Headmaster, David Dyer.
Vietnam were already giving rise to street protests in Melbourne, but the ‘Forum’ column of the April Spectemur generously allowed a proponent of Australia’s military involvement to warn of the dangers of allowing communist penetration southwards—this was the iceberg-tip of a debate that would dominate the issue of cadet training for some years to come.

Despite this article, Spectemur continued its relentless program of hostility towards the corps for the first half of the year during the Dr Shann interregnum between Timpson and Dyer, February–July 1966. It permitted one cadet (‘A.R.B.’) to voice his complaints about the inadequate provision by the school of bivouacs and camps and also published a scathing mid-year assessment of the purpose of the corps by ‘K.G.’. The author denied that the cadets, the ‘foot sloggers’, were any better disciplined than other students and questioned the justification of a system allowing some students to shout at others. Rather, he saw it as ‘farcical’ and ‘disgusting’, concluding that the cadets were learning nothing (aside from how to fire 1915-vintage rifles). ‘K.G.’ damningly believed the corps was now ‘the laughing stock of the school’.

Elsewhere, the same issue carried an article by an anonymous ‘Ex Cadet with Experience’ which excoriated the bivouac system and concluded: ‘So, let’s abolish this stupidity, and institute a more efficient form of recreation.’ When ‘J.M.’ of the corps was offered space to reply in the following issue, he repeated many of the arguments familiar to the readers of the early issues of the journal (most recently ‘E.G.’ versus ‘J.U.’ in mid-1963, but also others stretching back to 1937) in which John Usher OC had defended the system—discipline, leadership and responsibility—reminding readers that ‘He must learn to carry out orders before he can give them.’ Thus, the arguments for and against the Camberwell cadets were clearly going around in circles, convincing nobody on either side of the debate of the validity of the opposing point of view. Accordingly, all waited for the arrival of a new headmaster and the promise of adjudication of a dispute that was continuing to split the student and staff bodies.

Once David Dyer assumed office, on Monday 18 July 1966, Spectemur wasted no time in gaining an interview and, unsurprisingly, the first question put to him was ‘Do you think the CADETS are a necessary group in our School community?’

The new Headmaster’s reply was ambiguous. They were so, he suggested, provided that ‘arms drill and marching were not over emphasised at the expense of such things as Bivouacs’. He also saw the role of the Scout as equally important, as it provided the opportunity for city boys to learn ‘to rough it’ occasionally. These comments could have been taken by both sides as evidence in their favour. On the one hand, Cadet OC Nicholas later stated that he intended the corps to place less emphasis on the old “right turn”, “left turn” etc., thereby adjusting himself obediently to the new order.

On the other hand, the enemies of the cadet system could recall the Reverend Timpson’s advocacy of the Scout system as a model in his Headmaster’s Report of 1959. The dilemma thus remained unsolved while the new chief surveyed the ground and considered his options, but the cadets could only have smiled once Dyer immediately purged some of the radical, senior editorial committee of Spectemur, replacing them with a ‘more junior staff’ who were noted to be ‘more liberal’ in their policy towards the Cadet Unit. Enough was enough, but this did not promise an editorial renascence for the cadets, as the first issue under the new committee in September featured an extensive article advocating ‘Outward Bound’.

Nevertheless, the unit was given the space to report in detail on the August camp at Puckapunyal—Bren guns, bivouacs, bushmanship—the whole giving ‘a sense of achievement’, something the unit had not experienced for some time. There were also early signs of the Army’s desire to move cadets towards exercises based around guerrilla tactics, refined skills of infiltration and
interdiction—it was too early yet for mock Viet Cong villages, but they were coming.\textsuperscript{232} For once, the Army's timing was perfect, as this was the month of the Battle of Long Tan in Vietnam. The remainder of the school year included the Cadet Dinner in September, without the former custom of a 'Headmaster's joke' but in the presence of former OCs Brown and Wootton, and the Passing Out Parade in November at which Lt Taplin was farewelled—Cadet Matthews took the parade literally and 'passed out'; he was offered false commiserations by \textit{Spectemur}. Perhaps his unconsciousness was due to the Headmaster's significant warning that the cadets in 1967 would 'concentrate their activities on adventure training next year', as he had apparently now, after four months, made up his mind on the issue of tradition versus innovation.\textsuperscript{233} \textit{QED}—was this the end of a dispute now a decade old? Captain Nicholas thought so and accordingly smiled, looking forward to an excellent year in 1967 now that the Army had given permission for the corps to be increased in strength. Dyer's first 'Headmaster's Report' had not mentioned the cadets, but he had told the final \textit{Spectemur} of the year in November that the cadets would have 'a much improved and imaginative training programme next year'. The proffered alternative was 'Community Service', much of it to be 'physical work'. The cadet unit had no option but to 'Be Prepared' for change.

II

1967 was Dyer's first full year as the Headmaster of Camberwell Grammar and he had already warned boys against 'crass stupidity' in that first Headmaster's Report. It was clearly stupid to think that any cadet unit could now repel the adventure training concept unscathed. Even the Army seemed to accept an 'if-you-can't-beat-'em-join-'em' viewpoint in July and instituted an Adventure Training Award, which soon became a popular component of the national cadet system.\textsuperscript{234} Dyer's commitment of the previous November to this adventure training program was either an example of prescience or of accommodation to the inevitable, perhaps something of an acceptance of the philosophy that 'I am their leader, so I must follow them'. Whatever the origins of the decision, there was no longer any ambiguity for senior boys at the school—it was either the 'adventure' cadet unit or Community Service and its physical work, either the Devil or the deep-blue sea in the estimation of some.

The year began on a sad note with the first Camberwell casualty in Vietnam, Trooper Victor Pomroy (1958–59), killed in action in February. He was a 21-year-old National Serviceman and his death provided the \textit{Grammarian} and others with 'a sharp reminder that Camberwell Grammar is deeply and personally involved in the conflict in Vietnam'. Pomroy joined the school's Honour Board; he would also later be joined by Brian Gill (1957–64) and their deaths would incite the anti-Vietnam War student radicals at the school, momentarily removed from their \textit{Spectemur} pedestal. The new \textit{Spectemur} was still able to publish one anonymous complaint that ANZAC Day represented the 'false glorification' of all our 'glorious defeats'—obviously \textit{The One Day of the Year} was bearing fruit.\textsuperscript{235} The following issue also reproduced an anti-war poem from 1915, pleading for a revised attitude to this special day.

The cadet unit that had once personified the sanctity of 25 April was soon impacted by the Army's commitment being directed towards the distant Asian conflict and away from cadet activity, bivouacs now being difficult to arrange. This was something of a throwback to the two world wars, when the cadets were often at the bottom of the Army's allocation lists and it 'hampered the functioning of the cadet unit' in the view of those in command at the school level.\textsuperscript{236} Bambara offered a home-grown alternative, but fire restrictions and a water supply malfunction impeded cadet activities at that site as well.\textsuperscript{237} At something of a loose end, the unit revived the Cadet Dance in May (10 cents per drink
in the new currency). Sporting commitments also frustratingly remained a greater official priority than weekend cadet activities. August saw the Scrub Hill Puckapunyal camp, briefly attended by the Head, and an exercise where Croydon High School were tracked as an enemy, but they employed ‘undisciplined commando’ tactics to better the Camberwell boys—much the same was happening in Vietnam and the cadet correspondent of the Grammarians thought dropping standards were due to ‘a lack of co-ordination amongst training programmes’. Some attempt was being made to remedy these deficiencies by introducing regular Saturday morning parades, particularly for the benefit of new recruits—Dyer had made it clear that under no circumstances would the weekly 40-period school timetable be interrupted by activities, but these weekend parades with ‘crash courses’ on drill proved counter-productive. The extra-curricular Scrub Hill camp had been chiefly memorable for its ‘psychedelic sausages’ (an appropriate description for the period), said to be the cause of an epidemic.238 The most outstanding cadet of the year was Michael Izzard (1967–68), who won a scholarship to Duntroon and was judged the unit’s ‘Best NCO’. The Headmaster’s Report for 1967 recognised a ‘useful year’s work’, but nothing more. The now ‘more liberal’ Spectemur featured only irregular cadet columns; reports on the Outward Bound movement were gradually becoming more extensive. The year had not lived up to Captain Nicholas’s optimistic predictions of excellence.

Nicholas soon decided to retire under some compulsion from active cadet life early in 1968 owing to age and the Headmaster secured the Council’s thanks on his behalf, reminding them that Nicholas had ‘alone’ kept the unit ‘active’ during a difficult period of transition.239 The 1968 Grammarians also suggested that Nicholas had saved the unit from virtual extinction, a generous assessment that was unfair to his immediate predecessors. This departure after a command of only just over two years’ duration allowed the Head to nominate a successor of his choice and he selected Captain John Stafford (staff since 1965), the second-in-command, as the new OC—Stafford would command until 1984, the longest period in the unit’s modern history, a period rivalled only by the interrupted, sometimes quasi-informal, leadership of the iconic Major Whitehead before the Great War. He found the new Headmaster to be well disposed towards the cadets from the beginning – Dyer would favourably address him in an occasionally hostile Common Room and would, in due course, elevate the OC to the status of a Housemaster. The Headmaster’s insistence that the new OC be a members of staff, as of old, was also a clear signal to the critics of the unit. Stafford was bolstered in his stable position (until 1980) by the mature Quartermaster, Lt W. Brooks, an ex-Army Warrant Officer who had been appointed in the previous year as School Marshal, a vocation that obviously called for a touch of military discipline. A range day at Williamstown was relished by all, aside from CUO Izzard (not yet at Duntroon), who was hit by a piece of rock splintered by a Bren gun.240 The retiring commander had first presided over his final ANZAC day ceremony and as usual the weather was ‘uncooperative’ with gravel being blown into the face of the inspecting Major-General Bell. It was a normal school day and Old Boy ex-servicemen, numbering in their hundreds, participated in the parade back from St Mark’s, as was the custom of recent years.241 A Cadet Dance followed on Friday 26 April. A weekend bivouac at Trentham in the same month allowed the refinement of ‘map-reading and the basic fundamentals of outdoor living’. The visiting Headmaster and his family were ‘attacked’ in their Jeep as an ‘enemy’, but ‘a good time was had by all’.242

The Trentham skills would soon be supplemented on the school property at Blackburn, once acquired for expansion but no longer considered a financially viable option. It was hoped that the unit and the other schools in the 21st Battalion would also utilise this site for an assault course under Army
supervision, but construction of such proved too expensive and was abandoned at the beginning of the following year. The Annual Camp at Puckapunyal in September under Army supervision demonstrated the influence that Vietnam was exercising on the military mind. Two platoons were camped on a hill and were assaulted throughout the night by another; intercepting patrols followed next morning and there was a final assault on enemy positions. There were mock attacks made from bush hide-outs featuring the use of blank ammunition (soon to be phased out), parachute flares and flour bombs. Cadet Bill Pring (1963–68) showed ‘a marked aptitude for shooting’.243 A visit was also made to a depot in order to ‘watch a lesson on boarding and leaving the Iroquois helicopter being taught to some National Servicemen’.244 Soon, the watching Camberwell seniors (and others on Community Service) would themselves be subject to the lottery of conscription, this controversial system having been in operation for four years. Overall, 1968 was judged as ‘one of the best the Unit has had’ by boy correspondents with limited recall of past glories. However, morale was obviously improving. There was even hope that the discarded Cadet Band might be revived in 1969. The Headmaster’s Report promised ‘a more challenging and stimulating training syllabus for the weekly Monday parades next year’.246 Peter Smith (1964–69) and Chris Nailer (1964–69), both cadets, had been given the opportunity by a toned-down Spectemur to provide a cadet perspective, now in competition with the extended Outward Bound column, and they had used their column to stress in May that the number of recruits had fallen by two-thirds primarily due to those weekend parades—the unit’s strength was about 100 (fewer than one in four of the Senior School enrolment) with 46 recruits that year. The Headmaster, not generally noted as much of a listener, did not heed their warning and extra weekend parades would continue, alongside ones on Fridays and Mondays outside of school times.

The Headmaster was absent for much of the first-half of the last year of the ‘swinging Sixties’ on an extended, three-months tour of educational facilities in New Zealand, North America and the UK (no Camberwell headmaster had as yet sought inspiration from continental European or Asian schools). In April he had hiked in the Christchurch, NZ, vicinity of Christ’s College in uncomfortable boots, but he had relished that institution’s ‘excellent Outward Bound type adventure course’.247 Meanwhile, the Blackburn assault course back home had been abandoned. In Dyer’s absence, the Trentham bivouac was repeated with the boys attacking other identified enemies, accompanied by ‘Men of Harlech’ as the nucleus of the reformed Cadet Band played under gum trees.248 They were practising for their debut on ANZAC Day under Sgt Alex Mair (1965–70), which went well, aside from some ‘blemishes’. These bandsmen tended to act as medics and stretcher-bearers during bivouacs. Live ammunition featured at the July Williamstown Rifle Range, as well as at the Scrub Hill Annual Camp—‘Exercise Dustbowl’—where activities again mirrored what was happening in the Vietnam conflict. The Army was most anxious to accommodate adventure training with the demands of Vietnam, now arguing that such methods were appropriate enough given that ‘the characteristics of an infantry fighting patrol provide an ideal basis for the development of this type of training’.249 Soon, military Standing Orders would officially endorse the type of program that the boys were following at Puckapunyal—adventure training in the mode of Vietnam—such as night and day navigation, field hygiene and map-reading alongside camouflage, concealment, ambush and contact drills. Enemy rifle magazines were ‘liberated’ and a four-foot black snake was ‘dispatched’ by Sgt Charles Edmonds (1968–70).250 There was now a system of ‘Elementary Training’ for second-year senior cadets that allowed for testing in order to select a group of ten—the ‘Special Forces’—for advanced commando tactics including cliff climbing and river crossing.251
In the absence of Nicholas, John Usher returned for the 1969 Annual Dinner in September at the Buttery opposite Roystead, where he was joined by other former OCs France and Wootton, no doubt proud that his Band had been resurrected with the assistance of the Music School, where an increasing number of boys were learning brass and woodwind instruments. The Drum Major’s leopard skin had been retrieved from its mothballed sanctuary in the underground Q store. The October Passing Out Parade was reviewed by Lt Colonel Thirlwell, MC, commander of the 3rd Cadet Brigade, who was impressed enough with the standard of the unit that he agreed to be portrayed in its annual Grammian photograph. The School Council too congratulated Captain Stafford on the high standard of the parade. Spectemur had continued its course of subdued representation of cadet activities, aside from the occasional lapse such as that in April, when it carried a ‘Did You Know’ column which suggested that ‘Adolf Hitler’ was the ‘Senior CUO of Cadets’—in the view of this journal, such an appointment was possible as it had concluded (in July 1966) that ‘it is more than likely that he is alive’. This would not be the last time that the name of the late German leader would be associated with the cadet unit, humorously in the eyes of some, inappropriately in the view of others.

The following issue in May 1969 also published a mocking poem, ‘Soldiers of Good Fortune Are We’, which featured this middle verse of three:

I am wearing army booties and a little soldier’s hat,
Captain, are you sure that’s tea you’ve got?
And my gun is at the sloping but I wouldn’t hurt a cat,
Cap., invite me in to share a pot.

The co-editors, Paul Wilson and Paul Speirs, could not but express their contempt for the boys in cadet uniform and were clearly champing at the bit to resume the former campaign that their journal had run against the unit.

III

A new decade saw the unit (two platoons only) in a continuing, accelerating state of flux as cadet traditions came under further re-examination. The most sacred, ANZAC Day, was the most significant and the Headmaster had forewarned the Council in February that he intended to modify the ANZAC program, 25 April 1970 being a Saturday, and that there would be ‘no address or service in the Memorial Hall’ on the following Monday. ANZAC commemorations of some description had been held at Camberwell Grammar since 1921, in peacetime, during war, in periods of depression and amidst economic booms—and following weekends—and Mr Dyer had followed the formula without change in the period 1967–69. This reform was of staggering proportions given the ubiquity of ‘Lest We Forget’ (now hijacked by Spectemur as a reference to Aboriginal welfare), but this was an era in which the ANZAC traditions were under significant duress in the broader community. The ‘Forum’ column of the unimpressed Spectemur had suggested in the previous year, to their disappointment, that only 35 per cent of students thought the ANZAC service should be scrapped, but now the sceptics had their place in the sun—there was no cadet column in the journal at all in 1970, either through a boycott or an exercise in censorship. Before the end of the year, the Headmaster would move to make his ANZAC reform a permanent one, informing the Council in November that in 1971 there would be a service at St Mark’s at which ‘the names of fallen Old Boys should be read’, but no subsequent school ceremony. He suggested that ‘relatives of the Fallen and other special visitors who normally attend the School ANZAC Day service should be informed of the special arrangements’. One can imagine their response, even though the new OC, Stafford, had once told Spectemur that the day was ‘More for the people directly involved. There used to be a Waterloo Day but they don’t have that anymore.’ Times were certainly changing, but at least an ANZAC Day Parade went ahead in 1970, under the newly reformed Drum
Corps under the leadership of Sgt Julian Hogan (1967–71). The larger Cadet Band no longer annoyed fellow cadets with the constant refrain of ‘Men of Harlech’ at the April Trentham bivouac—now it had mastered ‘Anchors Aweigh’. A smaller number of recruits had necessitated amalgamation with Croydon High School—‘our old enemies’—for contact and ambush drill under CUO Peter Marshall (1965–70). The August Annual Camp could no longer be held at Puckapunyal, now devoted entirely to National Servicemen, so the unit was despatched for field training to the Benalla Army Camp under the guidance of Sgt Chambers of the Monash University Regiment and an Army medic. Here they practised the usual field skills during ‘Exercise No Grog’ and ‘ambushed’ the visiting Headmaster and School Captain, Chris Kelly (1966–70, a cadet Regimental Sergeant-Major), although presumably not with the F1A1 self-loading rifles they had just mastered. This camp was the wettest in memory with 250 points of rainfall on each of two successive nights, rendering the camp’s innovation of outside showers redundant.

The annual September Dinner in the Buttery was again attended by three former OCs (France, Wootton and Usher). The Passing Out Parade was combined with a school Open Day in October, an innovation that would endure to the present day, and it featured a revived Colour Band, a reintroduced element that particularly pleased the Parents’ Association. For the first time, the parents of cadets organised financial assistance for the unit, in part through a fete, in order to raise money for new cadet equipment. It was a great success, raising over $200, but another not altogether welcome sign of difficult, more restrained times. This difficult year closed on one happy note when the Board of Works granted permission for the unit to utilise the nearby Outer Circle Railway cutting for an obstacle course (in lieu of Blackburn). The Headmaster’s Report of 1970 devoted more than usual space to the cadets, Dyer reminding parents that the unit was voluntary and should stay as such, but that more boys should be encouraged to join it (an echo of the distant Tonkin years) – he would later raise with Stafford the concept of cadet conscription, but abandoned the proposal after consideration. The experience of the bivouacs and camps he thought ‘extremely worthwhile’, expressing particular pleasure at the innovation of a camp spent entirely in the bush: ‘The way the unit conducted itself in what turned out to be cold and wet conditions reflected credit on all concerned. Nearly everyone of us is better for some hard living away from a fairly pampered life at home.’ It is unlikely that all of the damp cadets or all of their parents agreed with the final part of this grim assessment. A number of them, including Stuart Weir, Reginald Pollard and Ian McFarlane had already, or were currently, enduring the discomforts of Vietnam. Others, Pomroy and Gill, would no longer be remembered at school ANZAC services and were not yet on any school Honour Board. Clearly many in the wider community thought them unworthy of much honour, as 1970 was the year of Melbourne’s two significant Moratorium marches in May and September. ‘Lest we Forget’ was under challenge as never before.

The School Council had become unaccustomed to questioning the resolutions of headmasters since the turbulence of the Searle years, but the question of ANZAC commemoration was raised in this body on 6 April 1971. The minutes of that meeting tersely noted: ‘A decision about future years has yet to be made.’ This was either a back-down by Dyer in the face of opposition or an example of him hedging his bets, but even when he later became more supportive of the unit, there was no restoration of the older-style ANZAC ceremonies at the school—Waterloo had had its day, so too had Gallipoli, or so it seemed. Regardless, OC Stafford remained relaxed about the issue and the unit accordingly got on with the business of adventurous soldiering throughout 1971, confident that the cadets (again three platoons) had ‘come a long way’ since 1967. The March Trentham bivouac was rebadged as ‘Camp Grenada’, but it was still only
a ‘semi-established camp site’ that promised everything other than the softness of home life. There was no ANZAC parade on Sunday 25 April, but the Roll of Honour was read at St Mark’s. The silence at the school on the following day was deafening. Williamstown rifle range in June again provided an alternative to the long-lost school range, the site of which had now disappeared under redevelopment in the vicinity of the Keith Anderson Oval. The August Annual Camp repeated the bush focus of the previous year with the cadets enduring more cold and wet conditions in the State Forest ten miles from Puckapunyal—‘Exercise Sabrina’. The unit was guided in its miscellany of bushcraft by two attached CMF officers, one of whom was a former Camberwell cadet CUO, Lt Ken Stevens (1958–68). The Headmaster arrived for a day in order to inspect the boys, most of whom had come to prefer ‘lollies’ to Army food. Back home, the Q staff reorganised their bunker and vandalism impeded the Assault Pioneers in their task of preparing an obstacle course in the nearby railway cutting, but no vandal could prevent any ‘attempt to broaden the fields of Cadet activity’ through several changes, as the adventure juggernaut rolled on. The first of them was the attachment of ten boys from the advanced section to an ‘Outdoor Pursuits Group’, where they were trained in rock-climbing, archery, canoeing, advanced fieldcraft and navigation. An Adventure Training Course was held at Mt. Cole to test boys on their navigation ability; the CMF arranged a range firing practice and helicopter transport exercise. The Buttery attached to the Tuck Shop hosted the Annual Dinner in September attended by former OCs Brown and Wootton. Open Day, 2 October, was scheduled to repeat last year’s innovation of including the Passing Out Parade, but bad weather led to its cancellation and it was held on the following weekend in temperatures over the nineties, even though this date clashed with the final selections for the Combined Athletics Team. Spectemur thought the parade should have been rescheduled to a desolate after-school time, but it was returned to Open Day in 1972. The journal had been accused earlier in the term of publishing ‘unjust and bias [sic] criticism’ based on their suggestion that rifle-cleaning was a waste of time. In reply, Cadet Adrian Jackson (1967–71, later an Army officer) explained at length the need for such a procedure, concluding ‘DON’T JOIN IF YOU ARE LAZY’. Jackson also reminded his unsympathetic audience that the unit ‘promotes leadership and self-organisation in the cadet’, but no amount of underlining would convince the sceptics of the validity of that assertion.

It seemed that many Camberwell boys preferred laziness to self-organisation in 1972 and the fluctuating cadet tide of fortune was out for much of the time during this year. There was not even an end-of-year group photograph of officers and NCOs. The Annual Camp was held at ‘cold and uninviting countryside’ near Beechworth and concentrated on map-reading and navigation over the six square-mile area allocated to the unit. The boys were instructed in a wider range of topics rather than in a single detailed subject, with mixed success. They also constructed their own mud track (‘Chocko’s Highway’) up the side of a mountain. With the anti-Vietnam backlash in full flight with the third Moratorium march in Melbourne in June, many school units, like that of Dyer’s old Ballarat College, were focusing almost entirely on Outward Bound adventure training. Accordingly, and after thanking himself for his own guidance of the unit, Captain Stafford in the Grammarian of 1972 promised ‘a new emphasis in adventure training’ in 1973 and that ‘Camps and Bivouacs will emphasise individual development of skills in the field more varied than ever before’. This would be in the hope that ‘a greater diversity of activities will attract more boys to join the Unit and share in these highly enjoyable and worthwhile experiences’. However, the most striking feature of the year was the continuing battle of ideas within the student body about whether the corps was worthwhile, a debate that had now come to resemble a dog chasing its own tail, but one
that continued to maintain its own momentum.

*Spectemur* co-editors Andrew Ballard and Karl Kny (both Drama students) were no friends of cadets, but they had remained subdued for the first half of the year, quoting their predecessors and sarcastically denying any intention to turn their journal into ‘an underground paper spreading revolutionary fervour upon the oppressed students of C.G.S.’ They were also conscious that it had fallen ‘under the hammer of much unfair criticism for too long a time’. In the middle of 1972, following a series of contained issues, Dyer allowed them to publish a ‘mid-year special edition’ which he introduced—‘From the Headmaster’—with a complaint about students who ‘had grown uncooperative and irresponsible towards the authorities and towards the rest of the school’. The finished edition, however, was precisely of that character and it directed particular barbs at both the Headmaster and at the cadet unit in a ferocious manner hitherto unseen at the school (and not subsequently surpassed). The article ‘Of Guns and Other Things’ began by sarcastically questioning the value of the $11 million spent by an otherwise parsimonious federal government on the national cadet system at the cost of $110 per ‘cadeteer’: ‘Range days with Boer war relics (by this I mean the guns, not the C.O.) additionally cost 10 cents per round, preparing the boys for an even more expensive “real war”’. The remainder of the article suggested through irony that cadets were a scandalous, immoral waste of money and that marching and drilling were a waste of time. The pictures that accompanied the article were even more critical. One depicted boys shooting at a range and was captioned ‘OUR BOYS PRACTISING ON UNDESIRABLES AT RANGE DAY.’ Another depicted Adolf Hitler in 1933, dressed in evening dress and appearing every inch the bourgeois gentleman that he was not, inspecting the guard in the courtyard of the Berlin Chancellery (which, amusingly, bore a striking resemblance to the more familiar courtyard of the Angliss building). The picture was captioned: ‘THE HEADMASTER INSPECTING THE CHANGING OF THE GUARD AT THE END OF PLAYTIME.’ Nothing, c.1972, could have been more offensive to a man such as David Dyer or to a body such as the Camberwell cadet unit. OC Stafford was appalled. It would prove to be the last hurrah of the radical *Spectemur*.

The response of the Headmaster and the cadets to this assault was immediate. In an ‘Interview with the Headmaster’ in the following, September, issue, Dyer commented that ‘The effect of such publications on this school as on any other seems to be destructive. They are frequently offensive in tone and inaccurate . . . the motives of those responsible for these publications seems [sic] suspect when those involved do so little for their schools.’ The same issue contained an extensive ‘Why Have Cadets at C.G.S.’ by School Captain Gregory Witcombe (1966–72), reprinted in full in that year’s *Grammarian* and thereby afforded full official endorsement. Here, the author recycled many of the points that had been presented at length over recent decades, from the Derham debaters of 1937 to ‘A Recurring Question’ in 1949, on to Usher’s ‘Message’ of 1959, his challenge to ‘E.G.’ in 1963 and found most recently in the appeals of ‘J.M.’ in 1966. The fluctuation of this debate seemed endless, but it was still all about leadership, responsibility, obedience and the development of confidence in unfamiliar surroundings, *et cetera*. In addition, Witcombe added the virtues of the newly expanded system of wider training—medical skills, bushcraft, map work and navigation. Both the tradition and innovative systems shared the aim of training cadets to operate in the ‘give and take of group life’. Whatever the intentions of the radical *Spectemur* issue of mid-year 1972, it had forced both Headmaster and cadet unit further into a single corner; now they forged a *modus vivendi* through the perception of a common foe—undisciplined student radicalism. There was now no immediate prospect of cadet abolition at Camberwell, not, at least, of any proposal coming from
the Headmaster’s office. Within a year, Spectemur was editorially castrated and appeared as little more than a school newsletter under the prior censorship of the Headmaster, as he reassured the concerned Council. The journal was now transmogrified into ‘Volume 2’ (‘Registered for Transmission by Post’), but its old dream of cadet annihilation was not quite dead. The election of a new, not so parsimonious federal government in December would nurse that particular grievance. Overall, 1972 had been ‘a difficult year’ in the description of Dyer’s Headmaster’s Report, owing to some boys being disruptive influences, but because of a piece of misfired student rebellion, he now seemed to subscribe fully to the long-voiced argument that the cadet corps prominently promoted discipline and order at a time of social disintegration. 267 This alignment would be strengthened in coming years, as the Headmaster became further convinced like the Emperor Tiberius, whom he quoted, that ‘society appears to be at sea’ 268—this was all a welcome development for the corps. It was no coincidence that David Dyer now often asked prospective Camberwell students whether they were inclined to join the school’s cadet unit.

IV

The Whitlam years, 1973–75, would prove to be ones of great change and Camberwell Grammar was as subject to the trickle-down effect of change as any other Australian institution. There was an immediate ‘reduction in Commonwealth support’, as Captain Stafford described it, which made the unit ‘rely much more on the initiative of its members’ through fund-raising efforts to purchase a generator, amongst other things. They also had to rely on the ‘sympathetic understanding’ of the new Bursar, Mr Mills, having already secured that of his boss. In the aftermath of the quashed Spectemur revolution of 1972, the OC went on in the Grammarian to thank ‘the Headmaster for his continuing interest and thoughtful attention’. 269 Bambara was now offered to the unit as a cadet facility on demand and was utilised with greater intensity in the absence of alternatives elsewhere in the state. The ‘place of trees’ in 1973 hosted an NCOs camp, a Planning Camp and the weekend bivouac, whilst the Annual Camp near Ballarat was an extended bivouac and bush exercise intended to foil a planned threat to pollute Victoria’s water supply. The Vietnam struggle and Australia’s decelerating military commitment there were now fading beyond the pale and not mentioned in polite cadet company. The October Passing Out Parade was inspected by the new Brigade Commander, Lt Colonel Bladen in his first official appointment, and was well received by a large crowd. An augmented school military Band performed well and the standard of drill was high, considering that ‘drill has been reduced to a minimum this year in the training syllabus’, a complaint now of considerable vintage. 270 The audience of parents and friends, however, still thoroughly enjoyed the pomp of old-fashioned drill and had applauded spontaneously the difficult ‘Advance in Review Order’.

But there were gathering storm clouds coming from the north, from the direction of Canberra, and the Headmaster reminded Council members on 2 October that ‘the future of cadets in schools is at present uncertain’. He thought it likely that federal support would be limited to uniforms, equipment and some help with weekly training periods, but that ‘no further help will be given with bivouacs and the annual camp. Such restrictions would probably mean the end of cadets at this school’:

This, I believe, would be a loss as cadets, particularly since there has been far more emphasis on adventure training, provide for certain boys opportunities for leadership and responsibility not provided by any other activity. At the recent camp, for example, the responsible care of seniors for first year cadets was most impressive. 271

This was the fervour of a recent convert. There had been no such high-level statement of support for the unit for almost 20 years, even if it was delivered in the context of an assessment
that the unit was facing a death threat. Within weeks, Dyer and Stafford attended a meeting arranged by the Brigade Commander to have discussions with the Millar Committee appointed by the federal government in April to review the cost and usefulness of the Australian Cadet Corps. The Headmaster told the Council in November that little new information had come from the meeting, but it was expected that cadets would no longer be funded from the Defence Vote. He also expected that the cadets would lose their military uniforms, that their training program would be ‘less military’ and ‘quite possibly service in cadets would be made available to girls as well as boys’. This would represent the final victory of Outward Bound over the traditional cadet system as it had stood in various forms since the early years of Federation.

Despite this behind-the-scenes manoeuvring, the boys of the Camberwell unit continued to utilise Bambara for planning weekends in 1974 and were able to attend only a single bivouac there, as the Army would provide nothing more than rations and transport. Through the course of the year there were even difficulties with all cadets receiving their full clothing entitlement. The now-sympathetic Headmaster blamed Canberra rather than the Brigade and noted that Camberwell Grammar was better off than most, having access to its own bush property. The Annual Camp was again at Puckapunyal—‘Rain and Mud’—now freed from the demands of National Servicemen. This camp was notable for the fearful engagement of two helicopters (charitably provided by the Navy), also now freed from duties in Vietnam, flying over ‘Hill 289’ where Camberwell’s Senior Platoon was dug in as a stronghold of the ‘Filthy Fascists’—the dismissed editors of Spectemur would surely have nodded at this moniker. However well disciplined, boys were boys and an orange smoke marker-flare was ‘accidentally (?) discharged’ following a welcome meal provided by the unit’s own caterers, Lt Brooks and Lt Bruce Doery (1941–55, later the Cadet OC), the second-in-command and a staff member since 1959—he was a descendant of George Henry Doery, the original owner of ‘Highton’, the eventual nucleus of the Music School. Nine Form II (Year 8) boys, braving the mud, were allowed a day visit in order to gain a taste of military life while there was still an opportunity to do so—this technique was later acknowledged as a primary factor in the unit’s ability to recruit effectively in Year 9. The camp caused the Headmaster to devote more attention to the corps in his public ‘Report’ at the end of the year than they had received since the Searle period 20 years earlier, when he quoted from the OC’s own camp report that this rally had led to the display of ‘unselfishness and unobtrusive caring for others’. The Council had been offered Dyer’s favourable assessment of this ‘most successful’ camp in October, internal confirmation that the unit and the Headmaster were now utterly reconciled, at a minute to midnight. One of the highlights of the year was the award of top Victorian CUO given to Senior CUO Geoff Young (1968–74) by the Brigade Commander Bladen—he was also awarded the General Vasey Memorial Cadet Efficiency Prize for 1974. Adverse weather, the perpetual enemy of the cadets, prevented the Passing Out Parade on Open/Activities/Families Day in October, but the unit arranged a coloured slide show and ‘a very interesting display’, as Dyer generously described it, in the area under the Memorial Hall ‘to give visitors an opportunity to see for themselves aspects of Cadet involvement which are not always self-evident’. There was some symbolism in this, as the cadet system was on the threshold of a period in the catacombs following the presentation of the Millar Report in June 1974.

The Millar Committee had presented findings that were ambiguous. It had not recommended the abolition of the system, recommending its retention on a voluntary basis, although not without questioning certain aspects of it by praising the system whenever it had appeared to be ‘a youth activity with a military
flavour’ rather than vice-versa. The final decision was left to
the Minister of Defence. The School Council examined and
discussed the Millar findings in August 1974, but the Head-
master did not expect ‘any significant changes in the way our
unit is operated, at least not in the near future’. The Army,
of course, could only be expected to support the maintenance
of the ACC—to the surprise of many, it did not. The Army’s official
response to Millar in September 1974 questioned the dragging
cost of the cadet system on the military budget and signed the
death warrant of the present structure by concluding that ‘the
cost and effectiveness of cadet training cannot be justified from
the viewpoint of its contribution to the defence of Australia’. The
Camberwell unit had thus secured the support of its head-
master by 1974 only to have the rug pulled from under its boots
by its father institution, the Regular Army. This was probably
the lowest point for the cadets in the previous half-century,
if not since 1888, and a significant blow to their sense of worth.

1975 was a watershed year in Australian political history;
so too in the history of the Australian Cadet Corps. The Whitlam
government scarcely needed the encouragement provided by the
Army in the previous September to disband an organisation to
which it had long displayed antipathy—any suggestion of replac-
ing it with a youth training scheme also fell on stony ground.
The private school cadet units excited particular hostility within
the Labor caucus and could expect no mercy. The Camber-
well unit had hitherto experienced the Sword of Damocles at
home, but now this cutting instrument dangled at the behest
of Canberra. The rehabilitated unit could do nothing in the
meantime but continue with its normal program at the school
and beyond. Bambara provided the refuge for the Term One
bivouac, transport provided by uncomfortable Army 3-ton trucks.
An adventure course was also held at Bambara in May with
eight cadets qualifying for the demanding Adventure Training
Award badge. The course was completed ‘virtually independently
of Army assistance’ as the ACC was now a virtual orphan.
The Annual Camp was in August at the State Forest near Puck-
apunyal, the only Army facility available to the boys being the
Tank Museum—they were themselves a virtual museum exhibit
according to some. The highlight of what seemed likely to be
a final camp for the Camberwell unit was the provision by Lt.
Brooks of two sheep-on-a-spit (‘I’ve got the receipts to prove
it’). CUO Mark Lang (1965–75) won the General Vasey prize for
topping his course. The visiting Headmaster was impressed with
the lack of selfishness and the ‘spirit of co-operation’ displayed
by the cadets. There were also some Regular Army visitors,
one of whom was Brigade Commander Lt Colonel Wilkinson
who, along with the boys, wished that those in favour of aboli-
tion were present ‘so that they could explain what it is they find
dispensable’, but the abolitionists were not roughing it in the
forest—they were at Parliament House in Canberra.

The Camberwell boys on camp also recognised that there
were ‘clouds over the future of cadets in Australia’ and those
clouds proved to be thunderclouds as Defence Minister Mor-
rison announced on 26 August that the system would no
longer receive federal funding, thus effectively being abolished.
He quoted the support that the Military Board (and the Army)
had recently offered in support of a decision that he knew
would come as a ‘disappointment’ and be one likely to provoke
a backlash. The School Council were accordingly informed
soon after by Dyer with ‘great disappointment’ that there would
be no publicly funded support for any cadet unit after 31 De-
cember 1975, reminding them that this was not the first time
that federal government support for the cadet movement had
been withdrawn. None of the Council members could readily
recall Scullin in 1929, but Dyer’s point was accurate enough for
some measure of optimism given that the unit had survived into
the Thirties beyond the life of the Labor administration that
had then threatened its existence. The Headmaster was also concerned about the ramifications that cadet abolition would have on the school’s Friday afternoon special activities program, an indication that the unit was now offered a greater priority than that experienced over the last two decades, when it had often been at the bottom of the activities pile. The Headmaster hoped that discussions going on between (private) schools would result in ‘some form of Cadet training continuing’.

While these discussions on a stay of execution were proceeding, the Camberwell unit, in limbo, held a ‘magnificent dinner’ in September, reminiscent of the last meal of a condemned man. Guest of honour was Lt Colonel Berry (nicknamed ‘Buster’), OC 6 RVR, who spoke here and at the Passing Out Parade in October about the sadness of losing the unit should the federal government’s intentions be realised. CUO Dean Newlan (1970–75) agreed, but with the optimism of youth could see only ‘an opportunity to take up with enthusiasm a new challenge’ if the worst came to the worst. The Headmaster’s Report of 1975 was not so unforgiving and he gave an address that forcefully condemned the proposal for abolition and praised the unit as an unmatched activity in the cultivation of ‘leadership and man management’. Those in command, he argued, were tempered by the experience and those who disobeyed encountered ‘chaos and tension’. So enthusiastic was Dyer now about the cadet unit that he intended to keep it and the adventure activities going whatever came from Canberra: ‘I have been promised some financial support from parents who believe in the importance of this kind of youth training.’ This would be needed, he noted, were the school to provide itself with the equipment formerly provided by the Army.

The discussions between those schools determined to maintain their cadet establishments allowed Camberwell to participate in a promotion course in December, where boys from other units received training at the hands of Camberwell cadet instructors and there was now some hope for the continuance of the cadet system as the country was convulsed in one of its most dramatic federal election campaigns. The subsequent victory of the Liberal–Country Party coalition on 13 December 1975 could only have been welcomed by enthusiasts of the cadet system, as these parties had announced as early as 1 October that if elected, they would restore the ACC. Some schools (like Ballarat College) had already disbanded in despair, but Camberwell Grammar had held on. All that was needed to save the system and the school unit was for the new Defence Minister, Jim Killen, to reverse the Morrison announcement; then it would be a happy new year for the Camberwell cadets. However, the promises of a federal politician were never to be relied upon without some measure of uncertainty.

Ω

Not since the foundation of the Camberwell cadet unit in December 1888 had there been such a state of flux as that witnessed between 1966 and the cataclysm of 1975. The numbers of recruits had fluctuated wildly from year to year and by the end of the period they had settled at an annual figure of about 10 per cent of the total school population, now just over 1,000. Another obstacle had been that an increasing portion of the other 90 per cent of the student body became hostile rather than indifferent to the cadet system, particularly some of those senior boys approaching the age of the lottery for National Service before 1973. Nevertheless, despite all the difficulties of the period, the support of Headmaster Dyer offered the cadets some security within the limits of the new adventure training concept and this allowed them to face the storm of late 1975 with some confidence and youthful optimism. The unit had faced immense difficulties in the past and had survived as an autonomous body after 1929 until better times beckoned—their task from 1976 was to do the same again. The Army had withdrawn most of the unit’s stores by the end of 1975 with an undue and
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undignified haste. The ‘Q’ store cupboard was now bare, but the affairs ‘Of Guns and Other Things’ went on regardless as the unit’s centenary approached.

CHAPTER FOUR

‘If Necessary Alone’: Marching Towards a Century, 1976–88

‘If necessary for years, if necessary alone.’
Winston Churchill, House of Commons 13 May 1940.

‘I expect that 1984 will be the final year of Cadets.’

‘Whether the “go it alone” approach succeeds depends on the support given by boys and friends of the Cadet Unit.’

The federal political turbulence of 1975 had not passed Camberwell Grammar by and the cadets knew that they were in the sights of those opposed to their practices and mores. The optimists noted that in May 1975 the federal Opposition spokesman on defence matters, Jim Killen, had stated that any likely prospect of cadet abolition by the Whitlam government would be reviewed by a future Coalition government. The pessimists noted that this did not prevent Defence Minister Morrison proceeding with the effective disbandment of the ACC from August, but the ‘Dismissal’ of November 1975 changed the state of play. Once a new federal administration took office in December,
the adherents of the cadet system waited anxiously to learn of the future form of cadet training in Australia. In January 1976, the new Minister accordingly set the ball rolling for a resurrection of the cadet system, but it was not until October that the proposed, rebadged Australian Services Cadet Scheme (ASCS) became operational. This was not, however, a conservative resurrection of the former system, but the birth of a cheaper, community-oriented sibling, the nature of which was further transformed from 1983 by another Labor administration equally determined that the system of cadet training would be more community-based and more financially independent. Many schools abandoned all hope of maintaining a cadet unit in the early 1980s, but the Camberwell Grammar unit was determined to survive, to ‘go it alone’ if necessary. It did so up to and beyond the unit’s centenary in 1988, surviving and thriving contrary to the expectations of friends and foes alike. Its survival was due to the efforts of the school’s parents and staff, but above all to the unmitigated enthusiasm and optimism of the boys who chose to don the jungle-green, those ‘khaki-clad combatants’ as one of their number described them.

Despite these nagging uncertainties, it was a busy and in some respects a dramatic year for the corps. Bambara, in the absence of any site provided by the estranged Army, served for a combined Recruit Training Day and NCO Planning Camp in February. Bambara was again utilised for a ‘field training’ Cadet Bivouac, 9 to 11 April. The Army had now even refused to provide the boys with rations (an interesting interpretation of the ‘survival’ criterion of recent years) until their reluctance was over-ruled by Defence Minister Killen owing to the lobbying of one determined Camberwell mother. Dyer, however, thought this welcome maternal intervention unlikely to be repeated: ‘In future I suspect the Army will have established suitable defences against this formidable lady and the unit will need to have its own radio equipment.’ Nevertheless, this weekend bivouac was considered by the Headmaster to have been a success, thanks largely to this relentless mother but also to John Usher, former cadet, staff member and OC, who continued to assist a corps and school from which he had departed over a decade earlier out of an ongoing affection for the system and what it represented. Now that the Army failed to supply any form of transport for school cadets, Usher generously provided free buses from his family transport firm to allow the boys to reach Bambara. A parent, John Collins, also provided a Land Rover
on loan to the school for such an occasion. Headmaster Dyer thanked both men, something that Usher acknowledged, further lamenting the ‘minimal’ assistance provided by the Army and reminding the School Council that it may need in the near future to endorse the purchase of a school Land Rover, which could also be utilised for ‘Outdoor Activities’, exercises now more in vogue than those of the cadets. This was all conducted, he reminded the Council, ‘under difficult circumstances’. Part of these difficulties was that Camberwell had been forced to rely on Scotch College, the old rival, for the loan of basic cadet equipment—the ghost of Major Whitehead may have been smiling, protectively.

It remains a mystery what the late Major would have thought of the ‘Adventure Training’ course held at the end of the first term for six NCOs, but the participants excelled in what were rightly considered physically demanding exercises. Weekend training continued at the school’s Blackburn site, now euphemistically referred to as ‘Blackburn Lake’, but it remained necessary for Bambara to serve for the Annual Camp in August given that, as the financially stringent Acting Headmaster, Mr C.E. Bartels, explained, ‘the Army is not conducting cadet camps, Bambara was chosen to keep costs to a minimum’. (David Dyer was absent until September 1976 owing to ill-health. John Usher again provided bus transportation gratis and the only cost to the school was the wages for his bus drivers. There was no Land Rover this time, but another parent, John Wood, loaned a 4WD Toyota—beggars could not be choosers. Once the cadets and a number of accompanying Old Boys were delivered to the bush camp, the platoons participated in a demanding eighteen-mile trek over four-and-a-half hours to Flatrock Lookout. An equally demanding, but varied, Assault Pioneer Course was also provided by Year 12 student Robert Blaney (1971–76). Tactical guerrilla exercises resulted in the senior cadets taking the Platoon Prize and CUOs John Dommett (1970–76) and Murray Raff (1971–76) were congratulated for their leadership qualities. The unit was furnished on this camp with .22 target rifles (a far cry from the weighty old .303s, which had now disappeared aside from occasional parade use) and shooting skills were accordingly refined, but the camp medic, Corporal John Upton, was kept busy with an epidemic of the ‘Dreaded Lurgee Glands’, the precise medical nature of which remained unknown. School Marshal Lt Brooks, as was his custom, kept the boys well fed, always a priority on such occasions. Once the recuperated Headmaster returned to his office in September, he provided the Council with an account of a dramatic contribution that members of the unit had made to the recovery of the body of an unfortunate Assumption College boy who had fallen to his death at Murchison Falls. This recovery took place immediately after the return of the cadets from their formidable camp trek, but they executed it immediately with skill and determination at the request of a distressed Assumption teacher, who had been told by the police that nothing could be done until the following day. OC Captain Stafford proudly quoted the thanks subsequently offered to the unit by Assumption’s Brother George Reed: ‘They did much at risk to themselves . . . boys whose manliness and courage I will always remember.’ The whole five-hour operation was widely reported in the newspapers of the time, to the credit of Camberwell Grammar.

The Annual Cadet Dinner in September hosted Lt Colonel R.G. Whitehead, the new administrative commander of the under-staffed 3 Cadet Brigade, and this officer also reviewed the Passing Out Parade in November on ‘Family Day’. In the period between the Dinner and this Open Day, Minister Killen had announced the formation of a new cadet system, the ASCS, but details remained sketchy. Whitehead was impressed with the independent Camberwell unit, like so many guests before him on such days, and promised that once the ‘revised Cadet scheme’ was functioning, the unit would have his unqualified support. Those conscious of the unit’s remote origins might
have remembered the old Major Whitehead of the 1890s—was it merely coincidental that another namesake now offered some hope of resurrection?

At least the unit had survived in 1976, although Stafford insisted that it had been ‘more than just a year of survival’, despite the poor omens of two of the Bambara gatherings beginning on Friday-the-thirteenth. Two former cadets had especially covered themselves in glory—Andrew Makin (1971–76) and Phillip Bridie (1965–76, profiled in the Gallery of Achievement) were awarded scholarships to the Royal Military College, Duntroon, for 1977 and were pictured in the 1976 *Grammarian* discussing their future prospects with an unnamed Regular Army Major. This picture alone offered some evidence of hope for the future; so too did the facing *Grammarian* portrait of the assembled cadets—for the first time in the school’s 90-year history, a headmaster appeared in a cadet portrait in his capacity as head of the school rather than as uniformed OC in the manner of Dr Buntine in 1930. Headmaster Dyer was pictured, smiling, seated between Captain Stafford and Lt Brooks. Even the putatively militarised Searle years had not afforded the unit such visual status. This was a straightforward photographic procedure, but it spoke volumes for Dyer’s determination that whatever happened in Canberra, the cadets at Camberwell Grammar would continue, come Hell or high water.

The new year, 1977, brought to light the promise of (another) new cadet system, but if any expected a return to older military virtues and an over-turning of the ‘adventure’ focuses of recent years, they were to be disappointed. Killen had recently emphasised in parliament the supposedly non-military virtues—leadership, self-reliance, teamwork (all of which were arguably already within the scope of the current cadet system)—that were to form the backbone of the new order and it became clear at a very early stage that the new corps would have few links with what were perceived to be ‘traditional’ military objectives. It also became clear in the longer term that the commitment of the Army to the cadet system would never again match that offered at various times in the past. The old militaristic, Army-nurtured system, long gone in any case, would never return. There was not even any prospect that the uncertainty that had prevailed in 1974–75 would be avoided in the future, as the minister rejected the proposed formation of a school-based ‘Cadet Advisory Committee’. Canberra Grammar head P.J. McKeown had very sensibly suggested the establishment of such a body in order to allow schools to have future input into any cadet restructuring proposals, complaining that the recent changes had come as something of a shock to the school-based units. The wisdom of this rejected proposal would become obvious within six short years.

The initial changes made under the new federal government failed to restore much of the already shaken confidence of cadets nationwide. Jungle-green uniforms were now to be worn whatever the season and the old remnants of battle-dress disappeared, largely consigned (like the .303) to school museums alongside spiked helmets and puttees. Perhaps few regretted that change, although complaints continued about the failure of the system to distribute the new uniforms in sufficient numbers. Camberwell, with its carefully secured Q store, was able to avoid any shortages of clothing and was also able to comply with a new directive that all units maintain a ratio of officers to other ranks at 1:20. Some schools found it difficult to recruit staff members to their units given such a ratio—Camberwell, with its almost unbroken 90-year tradition, did not, although suggestions of compulsion were rumoured from time to time. This nevertheless offered a measure of hope in what was, for cadets, a discouraging period. Headmaster Dyer remained cynical about these developments and confided to the Council in May 1977 that he thought the
re-raising’ of units had been done merely to match an election promise of December 1975. Whatever the motives of Canberra there was at least some measure of ‘renewed government support’, as the 1977 *Grammarian* described it, and this provided a straw for any drowning man to grasp. Accordingly, the unit plunged headlong into renewed training at the beginning of the year at a Training Camp which covered medics, map-reading and radios, all intended to familiarise platoon leaders with ‘living in the field’. This initial training was followed up with sessions at Belmont Park and the nearby railway cutting. Old-fashioned drill, the subject of much controversy in recent years, was decelerated during ‘home training’ and essentially left to be a minor part of the camp experience. The Bivouac hosted some members of the Melbourne University Regiment signals platoon and the optimists thought this heralded a new era of co-operation between the new Cadet Corps and the Army Reserve.

The pessimists, however, including Headmaster Dyer, were more cautious—he soon told the Council that the Brigade Commander was given no support and encouragement from above. He also feared that the weaker technical school units would go under and anticipated that the independent schools (like Camberwell) which continued to foster their units would soon be accused of ‘elitism’, that most dreaded of accusations in the egalitarian age of the 1970s. As if such external divisions were insufficient, there was further dissent within the unit, as Stuart Game (1972–77), Senior CUO, gave voice to a particular complaint about the main Bivouac of the year:

> In addition to Army reserve personnel there were a great many past members of the Unit present, in my opinion too many. The realism of setting up a tactical camp is not enhanced by a procession of cars carrying oddly clad strangers, most of whom the recruits had not seen before, and platoon CUOs and NCOs, while being on a friendly basis with the visitors, often find it difficult to confidently lead a platoon in the presence of their ex-CUOs or platoon sergeants. Thankfully this situation did not recur on Annual Camp.

This was an especially ungrateful response given that Old Boys had played a major part over many years in sustaining a corps under siege. It was also premature to think that the new corps was now stable enough to dispense with such external stimulus, but the diplomatic Captain Stafford OC was nevertheless grateful for any assistance that the unit received from any source.

The 1977 Annual Camp in August at Puckapunyal (again, after the recent interregnum) was preceded by a Sunday Training Day at Blackburn Lake and offered the opportunity for a twelve-hour specialist exercise that tested skills in diverse areas such as medical issues, camouflage and assault courses—’brain and brawn’. The Army sent modern SLR rifles for the Range Day, transporting the cadets to the site in Army trucks and issuing each boy with 32 rounds. It seemed to the September *Specemur* correspondent that ’the drought of 1976 has certainly broken’ and the support offered by the Defence Department had certainly been stepped up. Some were now confident that the camp would be remembered chiefly for ‘sunny days, a successful return to the State Forest, and Regular Army support’. Others chiefly recalled the fun of flour bombs during the assaults and Lt Brooks arriving with a fully prepared hot meal of chicken, vegetables, fruit salad and cream in the company of Andrew, the chef from the generous Tower Hotel, Hawthorn, a regular Camberwell staff watering hole.

The Headmaster expressed particular thanks to Mark Lang (1965–75), a Training Officer and former cadet now in the University Regiment, and again to John Usher for his further assistance in transport.

Lt Colonel Whitehead revisited his most favoured unit for the NCOs’ Dinner and Passing Out Parade at year’s end; for the first time the parade featured ceremonial swords loaned for the occasion and the Colour Party drilled, somewhat archaically but with impressive precision, with .303s. CUO Stuart Game attributed the success of the year as a whole to the unit’s strong
esprit de corps, to the contribution of its past members (contrary to his earlier complaints about unfamiliar Old Boys) and to the capable gifts of the unit’s Officers-of-Cadets (amongst whom he included himself). The most prominent of these CUOs had been John Upton (1973–79), the top cadet at the 3 Brigade CUO course at Portsea in the first week of December. For the first time for several years, the future looked rosy for those inclined towards the sunny side of affairs and any doubters were momentarily brushed aside by the Headmaster’s Report in the Grammarian, where Dyer reminded the sceptics that the 100 senior boys enrolled in the ranks of the corps were involved in ‘an educational activity, not a training for war. While it is an activity that uses military techniques and management skills, it is not a military activity using schoolboys.’ These were fine distinctions that were unlikely to convert the committed sceptics.

II

Senior CUO Upton remained confident that the unit could blossom into new areas of activity in 1978, despite the fact that changes within the Army had prevented a ‘return to the pre-1976 era’. Lt Colonel Whitehead had moved on from Brigade Headquarters, to the dismay of the Headmaster, who bemoaned the renewed difficulty of establishing a permanent relationship with an unsettled HQ. The new commander of 3 Cadet Brigade, Lt Colonel Dawe, visited Camberwell at the beginning of the school year and expressed his (and the Army’s) confidence that the cadet system was worthwhile, offering two Regular Army staff to assist at the first Bivouac. ‘Operation Rosebud’ and ‘Operation Jillander’ were the code names for this exercise that involved the usual specialist and fieldcraft skills, alongside a gruelling, boy-taxing 36-hour ‘orienteering-endurance exercise’ in the bush south-west of Bambara. Mark Lang again assisted at the Annual Camp at ‘Pucka’, a site sentimentally described by one cadet as ‘where we belong’—absence obviously had made the heart grow fonder, although it is uncertain whether Army Liaison Officer WO2 Dunning shared this sentimental outlook. The Camberwell guerrilla force engaged an ant-nest with more vigour than any other identified foe, even the Scotch College unit—‘Ants exterminated’. The recruit platoon then assaulted the Seniors with high spirits on the following day, but the highlights of this Army-assisted camp were rides in Armoured Personnel Carriers, viewing parachute drops from Caribou aircraft and firing the new M16 semi-automatic rifles on the range; the .303 was now as redundant in the field as the Gatling-gun, even if stubbornly reserved purely for ceremonial purposes. Lt Colonel Dawe of HQ was a guest of the unit on one Pucka night, watching with interest a wrestling match between Captain Stafford OC and the anonymous ‘Watchdog’. Lt Brooks, ever the quintessential quartermaster, again furnished welcome roast chickens. The boys in their youthful exuberance could have been forgiven for thinking that the divisive strife of recent years was now resolved and the 1978 annual camp was judged, like so many of its predecessors, to have been the ‘best ever’.

The unit demonstrated that it could also cope when relying on its own resources by hosting a school camp at Bambara in December for promoted cadets. Horsham and Shepparton Technical schools and Ivanhoe Grammar joined 32 Camberwell boys for five days in a variety of exercises including ‘man management and administration’. All who attended received a Qualifying Certificate which entitled them to participate in the induction of the 35 recruits of 1979. In addition, the rebadged ‘3 Cadet Group’ hosted a Promotion Course at Mentone Grammar. Hamish Green (1976–79), later a notable cadet leader and staff member, gained equal first position. Morale was rising as the crisis of 1975 began to fade into memory.

The Camberwell cadet unit had turned 90 in December 1978 but, like at many a nonagenarian’s birthday celebration, the recipient seemed unaware of the significance of the date—
the 1978 Cadet Dinner had mistakenly marked the seventieth anniversary instead. Nevertheless, the final year of the Seventies was regarded as a successful one for the unit in Dyer’s public estimation at the 1979 Leaver’s Service, which he began by quoting Amos 5:24: ‘I want to see a mighty flood of justice—a torrent of doing good’.309 Clearly, Mr Dyer felt that the unit had continued down the path of goodness under his guidance, but the chief flood and torrent that the cadets had faced in this year had been three-and-a-half days of solid, flooding rain at the end of second term at the Puckapunyal Annual Camp, the activities of which were tersely summarised in Spectemur: ‘Rain!’ The boys made the best of it with a ‘wet assault’ course.310 It was another year of transition, one that did not meet with the full enthusiasm of some in the unit, as the Headmaster had conceded at year’s end; the training program was to move even further away from ‘traditional Army training’—déjà vu. Such a move was said to be supported by Lt Colonel Dawe and the unit’s own officers and would focus on bushcraft, watermanship and how to cope in ‘civilian emergencies’.311 It was now an age in which the military had assumed ‘peace-keeping’ duties. The Headmaster signalled that Captain Stafford had indicated a willingness to serve through this period of further transition and that he would then be succeeded by Mr Taplin, a former officer but now in charge of the school’s Outdoor Pursuits group. Headmaster Dyer attended a Headmaster’s Conference in September at St Peter’s College in Adelaide (where he had first taught after arriving in Australia as a £10 migrant from the UK in 1952) structured around the theme of ‘Tradition and Change’. He could well have remained on the Mont Albert campus in order to address just such issues.312

The unit’s entry into this world of ‘civilian emergencies’ in 1979 was noted as a significant change by Senior CUO David Burden (1974–80, Junior Leaders Prize, 1979), who had succeeded Hamish Green. Burden suggested that the cadets could, amongst other things, assist in finding children lost in the bush, thus saving the community thousands of dollars and man-hours each year.313 Accordingly, the unit was now touted as one that cultivated co-operation rather than competition.314 The March bivouac at Bambara, however, did not find any errant young ones wandering off marked tracks, but the attending Headquarters staff were said to have been ‘over fed on sausages’.315 Lost children also eluded a bivouac at the State Forest, Kinglake, nor did the subsequent senior cadet navigation exercise at Mt Hickey discover any. By the time of that rain-drenched Annual Camp, the boys had stopped looking, preferring five-minute helicopter flights. There were two notable resignations in 1979, that of Mark Lang, who had served the unit well for three years whilst a university student, and that of Lt Bill Brooks, the School Marshal and Quartermaster with the ‘firm but friendly’ approach to his duties in the style that distinguished Camberwell Grammar from many other schools. Brooks would linger until the middle of 1980 and assist in a momentary absence of the OC. The Passing Out Parade of 1979 was cancelled owing to another Amos-inspired torrent of rain and the awarding of the year’s prizes proceeded instead in the Memorial Hall in the massed presence of parents and friends.

The first year of the Eighties was judged as an outstanding one by Captain Stafford OC, as he continued his supervision of the period of transition. It was a year, he noted, that was marked by the especial enthusiasm of cadet leaders like CUOs Chris Robinson (1968–80, Junior Leader Award 1980, featured in the Gallery of Achievement and subsequently the most outstanding military graduate of the unit in the post-war era), Simon Crisp (1975–80, Most Efficient NCO, 1979) and Darren Keating (1975–80), alongside Rohan Boyer CSM (1973–80). There were, the commander (now entering his thirteenth year in the position) also noted, ‘changed attitudes to Cadet Training’ amidst a program of ‘virtually full-scale Adventure Training for Senior Cadets’. There was clearly no place in the transformed unit for
any tainted by lingering nostalgia. Stafford’s place was filled for part of the year by Lt Bruce Doery, very ably in the estimation of the OC, Jim Curtis (staff 1980–99), a Regular Army veteran of 21 years who had joined the school in the place of the retiring inaugural School Marshal Brooks in the third term. Marshal Curtis, soon inappropriately rebadged as an ‘Administrative Officer’, had already been involved with the unit as a ‘3 Cadet Group’ RSM and he would prove to be the chief, inimitable acquisition of 1980, a year in which the ‘revamped’ Australian Services Cadet Scheme elsewhere continued in its attempt to set aside the ‘older, military-orientated training’, as Stafford described the old order in the Grammarian.316

The weekend Bivouac at Bambara in March in the first term allowed a dozen senior cadets to hone their qualifications for the ‘Adventure Training Award’, now the most coveted in the system—the wearing of its badge denoted an elite status in the eyes of the boys themselves. Unfortunately, the planned rifle shoot was postponed ‘due to circumstances beyond everyone’s control’.317 Staff member Mark Rogers (1978–81) injured his knee and needed corrective surgery—David Dyer hoped that the Army would pick up the medical insurance.318 Camberwell Grammar proved to be the first Victorian (if not Australian) school to hold an internal ‘Adventure Award’ survival course in May in the State Forest near Bambara. This ‘static survival’ exercise over two days required the boys to construct their own makeshift bush shelters (like a ‘gunyah’), to set traps, to design water stills and to pursue vagrant chickens that, when caught, proved to be ‘very tasty’.319 Ten cadets were recommended subsequently for the appropriate Award despite the absence of Army supervision on the exercise, although one ARA Warrant Officer had attended.320 An external, two-and-a-half day ‘Adventure Training’ course in May at Tallarook State Forest (some 50 miles from Pucka, but in touch through radio communication) featured a ‘Vietnam style’ Iroquois helicopter ‘extraction’ exercise, courtesy of the RAAF, elements of which reminded one of the participants, CUO Chris Robinson, of the movie Apocalypse Now.321 This extraction followed a gruelling survival exercise requiring cadets to live in the field on limited rations (not provided by the Army). August Annual Camp at Puckapunyal similarly featured the latest technology of armoured personnel carriers and ‘stomach lifting, adrenalin lifting’ Iroquois flights.322 Weapons training with M16A1 rifles followed and the boys of the 1980s demonstrated that they were as skilled marksmen as their forebears, taking third position in a school competition of twelve contesting teams. Norman Tregaskis, that long forgotten marksman, was there in spirit.

The Passing Out Parade reviewed by Colonel Plummer on Open Day 1980 was a mixed success. Given that old-fashioned, spit-and-polish drill was no longer a priority, the unit failed to impress as it had so often done in the past. It was left to the Colour Party to leave a lasting mark, as they drilled for the first time since 1977 with .303s rather than with the more modern, considerably lighter rifles that were easier to manipulate. It is unclear whether the unit’s continued use of these obsolete weapons was out of necessity or design. According to CUO Chris Robinson (destined for one of the most notable military careers of any post-1945 Camberwell cadet) the unit continued to be ‘short of time, space and resources’, but it had survived an attempt at the beginning of the year to merge the ‘Vikings’ of the Outdoor Pursuits activity group with cadet activities in some areas. This proposal failed owing to ‘differing outlooks on outdoor activities’ such as kayaking, but it served as a reminder that the unit needed to watch its back.323 It also needed to watch its pocket, as the cost-saving Fraser government encouraged units to seek funding from detachment ‘sponsors’.324 The professed motivation of such measures was to strengthen ‘community involvement’ in cadet activities, but it seemed also to be a method of forced economy. Unlike some schools, Camberwell
was fortunate to have a suitably affluent body of parents, allowing it some measure of financial stability in a new, more stringent decade and, in due course, the school would be able to form an active parental auxiliary. These scenarios allowed the unit to at least contemplate an independent existence, if the worst came to the worst and the present system of limited government support (now being experienced by school-based detachments) collapsed. Camberwell, unlike many others, could then proceed: ‘If necessary alone.’

The Headmaster expressed his pleasure in 1981 that of all the many field of activities in the school, ‘Cadets still caters for the largest number of boys’. Bambara’s bivouac in March had been held on a better-maintained site now that there was a Resident Caretaker and the members of the unit were no longer, in the estimation of Senior CUO David Wehl (1976–81), ‘boy soldiers’ undertaking formal military training, but boys engaged in a much wider range of activities—the ‘rank and file’ could no longer recall any other form of training. An Adventure Training course followed at Bambara in May, prior to which the cadets had formed a flag-bearing party at St Paul’s Cathedral for ANZAC Day. This was the most prominent ANZAC commemoration in which the unit had participated for over a decade, although a sanctuary guard had been provided at North Balwyn the year before for the Catholic War Veterans’ association without much fuss—both instances were further evidence of the unit’s escalating public rehabilitation. The August Annual Camp was again a drenched affair, but more important than deleterious weather was what the Headmaster lamented as ‘very limited Regular Army support’. Colonel Cross, Director of Cadets, had visited, but ‘while he could give little encouraging news about the future level of Army support, he was clearly impressed by the way we insist on the boys planning and executing most activities’. It was the combination of skills—‘navigation, first-aid, water crossing and endurance’—that had most impressed him, all performed with the minimum of adult supervision. ‘This is a main reason’, Dyer concluded at year’s end, ‘why I continue to be a strong advocate for the Cadet Unit in this school’. The Head also gave notice that he intended to introduce the Duke of Edinburgh scheme into the school in the following year and that ‘Cadets may well be very much involved in this activity’. Thus, every cloud had a silver lining. Open Day demonstrated this admirably as well when a television documentary of the Passing Out Parade was shot by the Audio-Visual activity group. It was filmed in colour from the second story of the Resources Centre with wireless microphones being used for the audio recording.

The best laid plans, of course, are no guarantee of success and in 1982 the new structure began to crumble, chiefly owing to a lack of substantial material support from the Defence Department. David Dyer was extremely miffed and shared his thoughts about the unit and its future with the Council at length in May. Camberwell Grammar, he said, ‘has one of the oldest Cadet Units in the State, and I believe it is still serving a very useful role as a voluntary special activity’. Despite its development of the qualities of leadership and caring for others, the future of cadets was by no means assured: ‘Lack of support from the Army, which apparently is the policy of the Defence Department, is making it increasingly difficult for worthwhile activities to take place.’ The Council was informed of a meeting of headmasters that had been held at the school towards the end of 1981 where Dyer ‘was given the task of sending a letter to the Minister [Ian Sinclair from May 1982] expressing our concern at this lack of support’. There had been representatives from Brighton Grammar, Caulfield Grammar, Christian Brothers College, Geelong Grammar, Melbourne Grammar, Mentone Grammar, Peninsula Grammar and Scotch College. The Minister’s office had acknowledged the letter, but no answer had, as yet, been received. Brigade Commander Colonel Teague had replied, but his letter was described as ‘not entirely helpful, indicating
that the situation is likely to deteriorate still further. The Council was reassured that the situation was being monitored by Captain Stafford, Lt Doery and Lt Curtis (now Quartermaster), as well as by the Headmaster himself, ‘but if the level of support decreases, then it may well be in the interests of everyone concerned to disband the Unit’. Dyer hoped that this would not happen, given that the unit had served a useful purpose—‘initiative training’—but clearly he also thought that the writing was on the wall. Much of this was unknown to the other ranks, who conducted themselves without the knowledge that the Sword of Damocles had been rethreaded.

The March Bivouac for 28 cadets took place at the appropriately named Mt Disappointment, with the adventure training activities there now referred to as the ‘mainstream’ of cadet training. Forty-five members of the unit defied this mainstream flow by providing the flag party at St Patrick’s on ANZAC Day at the request of the RSL. In May, a school-related course at Bambara in pursuit of awards honed skills of snaring and trapping at the expense of local yabbies and possums. Second term saw a further innovation when new staff and cadet member Lt Glen Foster taught ‘Natural History’ to the senior platoon as part of the Survival Training Syllabus. The ‘bushman’ skills taught in such classes were utilised in the ‘action-packed’ (i.e. motorised) Annual Camp in August, which featured a striking ‘firepower demonstration’ by the Regular Army. The unit was awarded the trophy for the Most Efficient Unit in camp, the cup being featured in the annual unit photograph at the Headmaster’s feet.

The usually buoyant Cadet Dinner was saddened by the impending resignation of John Stafford as OC after eighteen years’ association with the unit, fourteen of which were at the top, but his final Passing Out Parade on Family Day in October was suitably impressive in the estimation of the reviewing officer, Brigadier Gilmore, who was, like many other visitors, particularly taken by the Colour Party and its dress uniform, as well as by its use of the 303 rifles at their continued ceremonial disposal. Marcus Fielding (1979–82) had been an outstanding Senior CUO in this year and would go on to a distinguished career in the military, as well as becoming a military historian.

Old Boy and long-serving staff member Lt Bruce Doery was earmarked by the Headmaster for the command in 1983. Doery contributed an appropriate panegyric to his retiring commander in the 1982 Grammarian, where he attributed the survival of the unit during the vexed years 1975–77 as due to Stafford’s ‘guidance’—he was unaware that soon he would be guiding the unit through a similar Valley of Death. Stafford had also, Doery noted, guided the unit through a period of ‘anti-military feeling’ during the latter stages of Vietnam and into the early 1970s. The new commander would also soon find that these spirits of Vietnam had not been entirely exorcised. There was no doubting Stafford’s outstanding contribution and personal commitment to a unit now (unknowingly) approaching its centenary. He had often displayed to insiders a marked sense of devotion to a system and to individual cadets that he had not always been able to voice to outsiders in the candid manner of a John Usher. The annual ‘J.L. Stafford Platoon Prize’ was instituted in his memory.

Perhaps Stafford’s departure at this juncture owed something to the sense of foreboding that the Headmaster had shared with the Council in May. There had been yet another official investigation into the cadet system in the middle of 1982, in this instance conducted by Lt General Bennett in an atmosphere of ongoing Army concern about the escalating cost of the ASCS. Bennett wanted to know ‘what we do now and why’ as well as, more ominously, the costs of specific cadet activities. Although the outcome of the pending federal election, due in the following year, was far from certain, once the new Hawke federal Labor government took office in March 1983, the possibility of cadet
abolition again reared its head in Canberra. Dyer’s candid pessimism, which had puzzled some in the Council almost a year earlier, would prove to have been prescient.

III

The storm would break again in 1983 and, as in the past, the ill winds blew in from the direction of the national capital. The Camberwell unit remained uncertain of the future direction that the cadet system would take as the new Hawke government pondered the matter. Whereas the previous Whitlam Labor government had been chiefly driven by ideology in its approach to cadet training, the new Hawke-Keating administration took a more economically stringent outlook in an attempt to differentiate itself from its fraternal predecessor. The tension mounted until Defence Minister Scholes made a clarifying announcement in October. In the meantime, the unit conducted a senior NCOs and Signals Specialist course at Bambara in March with cadets from private and state schools, an indication of the school’s status of cadet leadership in Victoria. The site of these courses was also a testament to the good sense of maintaining an independent training ground, come what may. In this period of the cadet unit’s development, Bambara, rather than Puckapunyal, was really ‘where we belong’. The Headmaster was especially grateful on this occasion to former cadet and Old Boy Lt Mark Scholem (1975–79), who had acted as Training Officer at Bambara (as he would subsequently do over coming years, as well as becoming the OC), warning the Council that the school’s unit was in immediate jeopardy ‘because of lack of officers’.

The boys, as so often, were either unaware of the turbulence around them or dismissive of its importance—successful recruiting in 1983 yielded the largest unit for some years, over 30 in the senior platoon alone. Senior Sergeant Davyd Norris (1979–84) was earmarked as the unit historian in order to prepare a brief history of the unit for the following year’s Spectemur, which he subsequently did with care and precision. It remains unclear whether OC Captain Doery initiated such an account as an act of confidence in the unit’s future survival, or as a valedictory record of what was still thought to be three-quarters of a century and a seventy-sixth year, but the centenary of the school itself was approaching. The April Bivouac at Bambara and a survival course run by 3 Cadet Group in May allowed cadets to hone bush skills, to master Army radios and in some instances to receive the Adventure Training Award following a 60km long navigation exercise. The Bivouac had also allowed seven cadets to complete the ‘expedition section’ of the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme—senior cadets Antony Rogers, Peter Moran, John Mills, Richard White, Andrew Fisher, Nick Somes and Robert Hutton were thus pioneers, but it soon became evident that perhaps they would also be the last Camberwell boys to combine the Duke’s scheme with a cadet gathering.

The unit had been further honoured on ANZAC Day to provide the colour party at St Paul’s, displaying ‘dress and discipline’ of a high standard. Puckapunyal in August was wet, with a storm turning tracks into creeks that defied the penetrative ability of even 4WD vehicles. The Passing Out Parade in October (‘Family Day’) was reviewed by Lt Colonel Castle of 3 Cadet Group, an important occasion given that the public’s image of the unit remained fixated on ‘marching and drill’, to the OCs annoyance. For once, the weather was perfect. Only four or five rehearsals nevertheless produced an excellent march past which pleased the Headmaster with its ‘turn-out and bearing’.

Sgt Brett Fielding (1979–84) accepted the inaugural Stafford Prize on behalf of 2 Platoon. Captain Doery seemed pleased with a successful year, his first as OC, but when the thunder crashed in October, it seemed that 1983 might also have been his last. ‘From the OC’ was soon forced to suggest in the Grammarian that 1983 could have been ‘the last full year of cadets at the School: that is certainly a strong possibility’. Doery was not exaggerating for effect, but simply acknowledging a grim reality.
On 12 October 1983, Defence Minister Scholes announced that from the following year cadets would be restructured along the lines of the existing Navy and Air Force schemes, which were ‘community based’ at the expense of ‘school based’. School-based units would be permitted enough oxygen to survive, just, but without any Army support—the Army had continued to be unhappy about the excessive cost of the cadet system, although it wished not to appear to have abandoned cadet units twice in a single decade. There were still to be regional-based units with Army Reserve help and LSUs (Limited Support Units) based on existing school detachments without any Army support at all. Schools were accordingly asked whether they wished to continue with their cadet units in an atmosphere in which it was considered that few would accept this freedom at a cost. There would be a subsequent drop of 17 per cent in cadet recruitment, 1984–89.338 Doery knew that he still enjoyed Dyer’s ‘strong support’ and thanked him at the year’s end for his ongoing lobbying ‘to ensure the future of school cadets’.339 However, only the School Council was fully aware of the depth of the Headmaster’s feelings on this raw issue of cadet survival and they were offered his insights on 12 October, the very day of the ministerial bombshell. Dyer, a traditionalist to his bootstraps, was repelled by the new ‘far from satisfactory arrangement’, including the concept of ‘open’ community units (which would even include female recruits) at the expense of school units such as the one over which he had presided for nearly 20 years and which he had nurtured for over a decade.340 Camberwell Grammar could, of course, escape the recruitment of girls, but not any arrangement leading to the threatened loss of now even adventure training and bushcraft skills as a result of a ‘less military’ syllabus that seemed reluctant to allow boys to raise a sweat: ‘My clear impression is that this kind of training will be much more jingoistic.’ Dyer had been unable to attend a recent meeting that Minister Scholes held with heads of NSW schools, but he remained steadfast about the situation at his own school, confident that his ‘seventy-five years unit’ (sic) had developed qualities of leadership: ‘I believe it is important that, if possible, it is replaced by a similar activity which presents similar challenges but, of course, we shall have to manage without benefit of support from the government through the Army—stores, equipment and transport in particular.’ Thus the Council was warned of the seriousness of the situation. The wider school community read Dyer’s public complaint about a lack of consultation and lack of prior warning a short time later in the ‘Headmaster’s Report’ of the Grammarian, where he also lamented that the school had so far been unable to contemplate an alternative to such a worthwhile program. Churchill had warned of going it alone after Dunkirk in May 1940—this was now Camberwell’s Dunkirk moment, in October 1983. As in 1940, some thought further resistance pointless and the long dormant anti-cadet animosity of Spectemur briefly raised itself from the grave at this time when the journal critically profiled three cadet leaders, ‘At the Top’, CUOs Cameron George (1978–83), Phillip Sidebottom (1977–83) and CSM Tony Dawe (1980–83). George was designated the ‘brains behind the unit (a position he won due to a lack of competition); Sidebottom was branded ‘a tireless drinker . . . er, thinker who is always looking after his men (?)’; Dawe was noted as a fan of the cult movie Apocalypse Now, which he loved ‘particularly when the Vietnamese get it’.

Clearly, there remained some on the Mont Albert campus who shared the views predominating in Canberra and if the Dunkirk spirit was being revived, so too was the implosive defeatist atmosphere of mid-1972.

Those who anticipated that 1984 would be a difficult year were not disappointed. Headmaster Dyer thought the beginning of the year ‘Gilbertian’ in the absence of a clarifying statement from Minister Scholes and given the lack of information and direction that even 3 Cadet Group Headquarters had received from Canberra. The months up to 1 March 1984 were designated a ‘consultative period’, but there had been precious little
consultation. No new uniforms had been issued for recruits, but the cadet units continued until further notice and modest allowances continued to flow from the Army to cadet officers. This was something, but no Army-sponsored bivouacs or camps were signalled and there were rumours of yet another change to the command of 3 Cadet Brigade. In the meantime, Dyer told the Council, ‘the CGS Unit soldiers on’. It had little option other than surrender. He remained pessimistic throughout March, conscious that the withdrawal of support by 3 Cadet Group had, for example, led to a lack of radios, vital pieces of equipment for forthcoming camps. Dyer hoped to ‘scrounge’ some from the Monash University Regiment with whom the school maintained an informal contact. Nevertheless, his expectations were minimal:

I expect that 1984 will be the final year of Cadets, but our aim is still to continue with the normal program for the rest of this year, including Camp and a Passing Out Parade. To do otherwise would be a break of faith with boys who have chosen to do Cadets as a Special Activity this year. Whether we shall be able to do this depends on whether the authorities decide to ‘de-kit’ the Unit before the end of the year.

The Headmaster retreated from the field from August to October on overseas study leave to the US, Canada and the UK.

Captain Doery was no happier, conscious that being designated ‘LSU’ had placed the emphasis on ‘Limited’ rather than on ‘Support’:

In practice this means very little support is available from the army except for the training of Officers of Cadets and the short term loan, on an indemnity basis of a limited range of equipment. Units must now bear all running costs, including the provision of uniforms, transport and rations.

There was a sole consolation—it could have been worse: ‘Fortunately, the decision was made by the authorities that we could retain, free of charge, existing holdings of clothing and camp equipment. Much of this, however, has a limited life and will need replacement within two or three years.’ Doery was accordingly forced to negotiate with Mentone, Ivanhoe and Peninsula grammar schools in order to organise two joint camps at Bambara. The first was the April Bivouac, which proceeded as normal and the Annual Camp in August, again at the sanctuary of Bambara now that Puckapunyal was, again, off limits. This exercise was planned in conjunction with Mentone Grammar, a collaboration that saved with the bulk purchase of food and in the provision of services such as sanitation and water. John Usher again provided transport, as he had done in previous times of stringency. So as not to replicate the atmosphere of ‘just another Year 7 or Year 8 camp’, the unit HQ was shifted away from Bambara towards the appropriately eponymous Mt Disappointment State Forest. Additionally, the program was expanded to include abseiling and canoeing, the latter conducted by Mr Taplin and two senior members of the Outdoor Pursuits Group. These innovations were a side effect of the changed relationship with the Army and the consequent greater flexibility that was now possible. The weather proved the only impediment with freezing cold, harsh winds and heavy rain. The headquarters were reduced to knee-deep mud reminiscent of that distant war that Camberwell cadet flag bearers had recently again commemorated at Scots Church in the weeks before ANZAC Day.

The 1984 Passing Out Parade on Open/Family Day was a success and in warm weather, but it too marked a watershed, being the last time that a 3 Cadet Group commander (in this instance Lt Colonel Dunlop) reviewed the Camberwell cadets, given that this Army unit was scheduled to cease existence on 31 December 1984; thereafter cadet administration operated from a ‘cell’ (in the Headmaster’s description) housing only a Major. The Cadet Dinner was held later than usual in order for the returned peripatetic headmaster to attend and he did so in the presence of several former OCs—Brown, Wootton, Usher and Stafford. Former cadet stalwart and School Marshal Brooks also
attended. In his end-of-year *Grammarian* report, Captain Doery noted that the year had been marked by some assistance from Army Reserve Units through their involvement in recruiting activities. More importantly, the Monash University Regiment had helped with signals equipment during the Bivouac and the 4/19 Prince of Wales Light Horse had helped with instruction during the various NCO courses of the year. Such assistance to school-based units was not strictly in accordance with the intention of the new system and Doery had been told so at a Cadet OC meeting in June; Victorian school units were all LSUs and the State was without any ‘Open’ units (NSW boasted three) which enjoyed ongoing Army assistance. Nor, of course, was Camberwell eligible for the status of a socio-economically disadvantaged unit. Army assistance was intended to be available in Victoria only for Regional Cadet Units based around Reserve depots at Colac, Ringwood, Dandenong and Wodonga. Although there was some flexibility about Army Reserve affiliation up to 30 June, after this date it was intended that LSUs would function in something of a wilderness—even the coveted Adventure Training Award was under threat for such units, so the Council was warned by the Headmaster. The only hope for 1985, in Dyer’s estimation, was that the Army would continue to provide some administrative assistance for the hiring and loaning of stores, for the purchasing of uniforms and in the continued free training of some cadet officers. This was not a lot to ask for and the school would itself now have to organise an independent system of funding for its own unit were this body of about 100 boys to continue to function. He now wondered how any disbanded cadets could possibly be absorbed into the school’s Friday afternoon Special Activities program; Dyer hoped that there could be some internal school support of the cadet unit in the manner of the ‘Friends of Music’. Accordingly, the *Grammarian* announced that in view of Canberra-imposed stringencies and in order ‘to keep the direct charge on parents of cadets as low as possible’, a ‘Cadet Auxiliary’ would be established as ‘an organisation with the object of raising funds to support the unit’. Two former OCs, Brown and Stafford, agreed to be its patrons and it was hoped ‘to involve a wide range of past cadets and parents’. This would mark the beginning of a happy relationship between the former members of the unit and its present custodians, one that has endured to the present day.

In his public *Grammarian* ‘Headmaster’s Report’ at the end of 1984, David Dyer made it clear that the following year would be a ‘testing’ one for the cadet unit ‘as the Unit will then receive no official government support. A great deal is being done to ensure that there is no drop in the standard or variety of training activities: whether the “go it alone” approach succeeds depends on the support given by boys and friends of the Cadet Unit.’ He went on to commend the cadets to all boys entering Year 9 in 1985 as ‘a very worthwhile youth training activity, which probably more than any other, gives opportunities for the development of leadership skills’. This statement was a long standing one that had been employed over many decades by many earlier headmasters. Cost was obviously going to be a decisive factor in 1985—Dyer had already determined that it would be cheaper for Camberwell to organise its own camps rather than to rely on any grouping of LSUs. It did so—firstly with the March Bivouac at Bambara, then in an Adventure Training and Survival Exercise in May organised without external support and finally during the Annual Camp at the Puckapunyal Forest in August ‘with limited army support’ for a ‘return to Pucka’. The two outstanding events of the year were elsewhere—the first in central Melbourne with Camberwell cadets acting as the flag bearers at the ANZAC Day March, led by senior cadets Michael Chan (1980–85), Steven Moore (1981–85) and Karl Mainka (1983–86) alongside the Australian flag and Escorts at the head of the parade marching towards the Shrine of Remembrance. The second outstanding event of the year was the inaugural Cadet Old Boys’ (‘Gobblers’) Annual Camp in the May holidays.
at Bambara. The Gobblers—the origin of the name remains a private affair—were in fact not so old, being former CUOs and NCOs from 1984, and they provided ‘valuable support to the future of the cadet unit’ in the absence of much support from the Defence Department. The 50 recruits of the year in two platoons were thus not left without some effective mentoring.

The second Passing Out Parade of this ‘going it alone’ period was a trying one in damp conditions, but at year’s end, Senior CUO Steven Moore remained youthfully confident that the challenge of independence ‘certainly is not insurmountable’. Overall, it was a year of treading water, one which Captain Doery OC preferred to remember as a testing period that concentrated on the ‘more mundane aspects of cadet life’ such as weekly Friday parades. The Headmaster made only a passing reference to ‘Cadet Leadership’ in his public report at the end of the year. Unexpectedly, the new Cadet Auxiliary received no official notice from the Grammarian, although Spectemur had warned in May that ‘the future of the Unit will depend heavily on the success of the Cadet Auxiliary’; David Dyer was not the only person at the school who now seemed tired of the constant struggle to keep the unit afloat.

Perhaps the attention of the Headmaster was diverted momentarily in 1986 towards the school centennial commemorations that climaxed on ‘Centenary Family Day’, Saturday 12 April 1986. The cadets were present on the JTO that day at 9.00am in order to welcome and escort Sir Edward Woodward, Chairman of the School Council. The Senior Cadet Platoons then paraded in a restricted space, in inclement weather, to the accompaniment of the School Band sheltering in a ‘Big Top’ marquee that reminded some of the Moscow Circus, all before a gathering of former OCs, Brown, Wootton, Usher and Stafford. The whole was reviewed by Mr Dyer, whose role in lobbying on behalf of cadet causes was acknowledged by the present OC in the Grammarian.

It was fitting that these former commanders then presented the cadet trophies at this Presentation Parade. Finally, if belatedly, some were now beginning to realise that the cadet unit was not far behind in centennial commemoration, as the recent comprehensive publication of the school’s history (1886–1986), By Our Deeds by Ian Hansen, in 1986 had drawn attention to the fact that the unit’s history long preceded the mistaken 1908 date that had been arbitrarily selected some years before and emblazoned on the unit’s flag. Hansen had carefully traced its origins back to the first years of Taylor’s new school in the late 1880s, although he overlooked the birth notice in the Victorian Government Gazette of 21 December 1888. Nevertheless, Dr Hansen finally laid to rest the impression that the unit was established only in the twentieth century and advanced the story of the Camberwell cadets by two decades. Captain Doery could therefore note with pride in the 1986 Grammarian: ‘So it seems that there was a cadet-type activity in the School from the second year.’ At last, the true antiquity of the unit had been revealed to all, at a time when some were still anticipating a death notice.

As Dyer had predicted to the Council two years earlier, by 1986 the Camberwell unit was operating its testing for the Adventure Training Award with virtual autonomy, although ‘HQ 3rd Division’ contributed to a constrained degree. In the first term in May, the school hosted 53 third-year cadets from its own ranks and nine other schools at Bambara in an ATA Camp that tested navigational and survival techniques, as well as initiative and leadership. Assistance was available from Old Boy Greg Goullet (1977–83) and instructors from the ‘Mountaincraft’ organisation. Training Officer Lt Mark Scholem—‘the backbone of the Unit’ according to Senior CUO Tom Davis (1982–86)—had returned to be the Senior Instructor for his sixth year, working in the presence of Captain Doery, who supplied the participants with a welcome headless chicken, once a machete had been used to perform its swift decapitation. Boys were also instructed in this
period on how to wring the neck of a live chicken, but subsequent maternal complaints about overly ‘militaristic’ boys led to this particular, vital survival skill being deleted from any further camp program. Other unarmed, chicken-free Old Boys also acted as ‘directing staff’. Amongst the successful external participants in this CGS-run course was future staff member Michael Daniel, now a Captain in the Camberwell Grammar School Army Cadet Unit, then a school cadet at Mentone Grammar. He and the others received their awards at the final parade from Brigadier Bavington, the honorary colonel of cadets in the 3rd Division.

A weekend bivouac in July at Warrnambool organised by 6 Field Ambulance (Army Reserve) hosted 22 Camberwell cadets as ‘patients’ for various evacuation exercises over land and water. Dyer was pleased that this bivouac demonstrated a level of collaboration between his school-based unit and the Army Reserve, which theoretically was now focused only on assisting units that were not designated LSUs—the connection therefore remained an informal one, but it was useful nonetheless. The Council was duly informed that an Army colonel had assessed this Warrnambool bivouac favourably: ‘The blending of Reservists and cadets on this occasion worked well and I would be happy to have their involvement in some future activity.’ Soon after, Annual Camp at Puckapunyal with its ‘pyrotechnic wonders’ proceeded following an advanced party of Old Boys including Torsten Weller (1978–84), a former Senior CUO. It was now officially acknowledged that the school would be unable to operate full instructional programs, with or without pyrotechnics of its own, and provide adequate catering facilities without such external assistance. Search and Rescue exercises continued in the Puckapunyal State Forest—the ‘dark, khaki forest’—regardless of limited Army support in ‘Operation Casablanca’, with a handful of Year 8s also being exposed to life in the bush. The introduction of these enthusiastic younger boys to cadet activities in this way proved to be an effective tool of recruitment once they graduated into the Senior School. Ninety cadets participated and were grateful for Army transport and the provision of rations for two days of a seven day program, ‘straight from the kitchens of Puckapunyal to the mouths of grubby cadets deep in the heart of the forest’. The other five days were perhaps viewed by the Army as a period necessitating ‘living off the land’. Outside the forest, the display of the Army’s new 42-tonne Leopard Tanks impressed the boys. Senior CUO Davis thanked a cadet ‘triumvirate’ for the good organisation of the camp—Lt Curtis, Lt Scholem and Captain Doery—who helped in the arrangement of ‘EVERYTHING’. The Headmaster visited the camp, which he considered a success ‘in spite of the fact that the Army officially provides virtually no support these days.’ The Camberwell unit had now demonstrated beyond doubt that it was capable of standing alone and relying on its own resources, both material and personal. It could ‘go it alone’ and survive.

As there had been a significant parade on Centenary Family Day six months earlier, the Passing Out Parade in October was a truncated one, but Dyer publicly assessed the year as having been a ‘useful one’ for the cadets ‘in spite of all the difficulties associated with running a unit without the support of government’. Significantly, on his last end-of-year parade, he specifically thanked those ‘who have generously given financial support’. The Cadet Auxiliary had already established a Unit Endowment Fund, but was still short of its $25,000 target and the school community had been reminded in July that ‘the unit needs a secure source of revenue apart from the charge being made on parents of current cadets’. Without these sources and the ongoing flow of donations that had resulted, the cadet unit would already have been consigned to the school’s archives.
IV

In the description of Senior CUO Craig Dillon (1982–87), 1987 was a year of ‘innovation, excitement, enthusiasm and good weather’—some of these qualities had been in short supply in recent years in the absence of much Army support for school-based units, but even Canberra could not control the climate. Dillon was profiled by Spectemur later in the year and acknowledged as having an ‘intelligent persona’ that dispelled the image of ‘the Rambo-like automaton we so often associate with military types’. He himself admitted the gravity of his authority over the 100 or so ‘khaki-clad combatants’: ‘If anything goes wrong, it’s my fault.’ 1987 was also another year of transition as the longest serving post-war headmaster, David Dyer, retired in favour of newcomer Colin Black. As always, the outlook of the incoming headmaster towards the cadet system in general, and to the school unit in particular, was unknown and the cause of considerable anxiety. The unit had had good reason to thank ‘ADPD’ over the previous 21 years. Under his protection, they had found shelter for over a decade from hostile elements both within the school and in the distant national capital. Accordingly, Dyer’s departure was noted with regret by the unit as that of a ‘Sponsor’ without whom the unit ‘would simply not exist’. The very fact of their continued existence in four platoons of about 100 boys in total (1987 school population: 1129) owed much to a complex man described elsewhere in the Grammarian as one of ‘impetus’ and ‘ongoing support’. It was now ‘Vale ADPD 1966–1987’. Like the rest of the school, the cadet unit owed him a great deal.

The Headmaster did not depart until July and the unit maintained a frenetic level of activity under his interim surveillance. The first term saw a weekend Bivouac in March which featured a challenging navigation exercise—‘NAVEX’—including a night exercise that involved the retrieval of stores and equipment from a Bambara transformed into a mock Army base with searchlights, sirens, guards, traps and trip wires. Given the falling level of Army material support for LSUs in recent years, an observer could have been excused for thinking that this was a school-based rehearsal for a raid on the stores of Puckapunyal. The Camberwell Grammar unit also maintained its own Survival Camp in April where boys were abandoned in the bush for four days and forced to construct ‘lean-to’ shelters from which they emerged to track wildlife. The shelters were marginally comfortable enough for Mrs Dyer to express an interest in spending a night therein, perhaps mindful of her husband’s 1970 maxim that ‘nearly every one of us is better for some hard living away from a fairly pampered life at home’. The cadets persuaded her against doing so. The Camberwell unit also participated early in the year in an Army-run ATA Camp for cadets from throughout Victoria and were pleased when CUO David Browne (1982–87) topped the course.

The middle of 1987 saw two new camps organised and run by the unit itself. The first was a ‘Browne-Steer-Sloan’ special (after CUO Browne, WO2 Graeme Steer, 1975–88, and CUO Timothy Sloan, 1984–87), that is, a long-distance hiking camp through the Mt Disappointment State Forest from Bambara to Broadford with the boys carrying all of the required food and equipment on their backs in the style of Roman legionaries, who had long ago styled themselves ‘mules’. The second was a three-day canoeing camp covering 45km of the Goulburn River, an exercise chiefly organised by Lt Curtis. One canoe was destroyed and every one of the 19 participants was subjected to immersion at some stage of this innovative exercise. By now, from July 1987, Dyer had departed, with Dr G.C. Morey-Nase acting in his place during the interregnum. Annual Camp at Puckapunyal in September hosted 93 Camberwell cadets and their 6 officers. It was a ‘Grouped Camp’ that included 30 other LSUs and 31 Regional Cadet Units, a formidable number of boy soldiers gathered on the one site. This massive camp featured more Leopard tanks—something...
which has to be seen to be believed!’—and a perfect shooting score on the range for Corporal Frank Bendeich (1983–88). This earned him the ‘Marksman Award’ of the revived Major Lemon Trophy, a throwback to the traditions of 1946. Another night exercise at Pucka consisted of an assault on a hilltop complex protected by searchlights visible 5km away. This attack on the light-on-the-hill was ‘an incredible success’ and symbolised the survival of the unit against all odds in recent times. It was also termed as a first-ever, ‘super-spectacular, hi-technology night exercise . . . undertaken for the first time in cadet history’.367 None were old enough to recall that mock enemy encampment put under tumultuous siege on stage during the speech night of 1891 under ‘Captain’ Hall, but the historical links were evident for those who cared to search.

In early October 1987, Mr Colin Black was commissioned formally as the school’s eighth headmaster and his extensive British and Australian CV offered hope for any nervous supporters of the beleaguered cadet system, as he had been an ‘Officer of Cadets’ in the course of his long career in education. The new headmaster had served as an officer in the Combined Cadet Force at the Glasgow Academy while he was teaching there in the 1960s and accordingly understood the ethos and the rationale of such organisations. During his seven years at Scotch College up to July 1987 he also had frequent interactions with staff and students regarding their cadet unit and was in no doubt as to its value as a key co-curricular activity.368 The OC, unsettled at the prospect of further transition, was soon set at ease when Black immediately alluded in their first meeting to Doery’s role in the cadet unit. Black recalled: ‘He beamed at me, and seemed genuinely pleased that I was aware of the Unit’s existence and, by the tone of my voice, clearly approved of it. Perhaps relations between the Headmaster and the Cadet Unit had not always been so cordial!’ Soon after, the minds of the boy soldiers were similarly soothed in the Headmaster’s study:

Within a week of my arrival, the Senior CUO [Dillon] and his CSM made an appointment one lunchtime to meet with me. They came to introduce themselves and, so it seemed at the time, convince me that the Cadet Unit was ‘a good thing’ and that I should support it. They need have had no such qualms.369

The Headmaster had already acquainted himself with a sketch of the unit’s long record through the ‘sensitively compiled’ Hansen centenary history By Their Deeds. What particularly pleased him was that the unit consisted of volunteers. Whereas a number of the other member schools of the Associated Grammar Schools of Victoria no longer had a cadet unit, and some only maintained one through making it more or less compulsory for certain age groups, Camberwell’s voluntary unit was thriving. This alone impressed him: ‘In my mind this carried a certain cachet for what was “just” a Grammar School and not one of the grander Associated Public Schools.’ That cachet would be long enduring and would be reinforced once he noted the high level of retention within the ranks.

Although Mr Black’s first public ‘Headmaster’s Report’, in the 1987 Grammian, did not refer to such cadet experience, the Headmaster did signal his view that ‘a good school should not aim to reflect society’ and he eschewed the mores of education in earlier decades, which he judged as having been ‘bedevilled by a preoccupation with relevance’. Instead, he promised, amongst other things, more ‘pomp and ceremony’.370 To those who shared the cadet mindset, this was manna-from-heaven and before the year was over, the new Headmaster had demonstrated publicly and privately his sympathetic support for the unit. At the Passing Out Parade and Cadet Dinner on the same Friday in October, Black had voiced his approval of the ‘good work’ being done by Captain Doery and his fellow officers, following similar comments of approval by Colonel Plummer, who had reviewed the parade.371 His initial impression of the unit on
parade was favourable, but he was also conscious of scope for enhancement, given that ‘it was a modest affair by comparison with the equivalent elaborate and impressive Tattoo at Scotch College’:

I immediately decided that this colourful and well organised event should be seen by a larger audience and, with the full support of Captain [soon to be a Major] Doery and the other officers, the plan was that the Parade in future would be the first item at the school’s annual October Open Day to be held each year from 1988 onwards on the second Saturday of the spring term.372

Brigadier Bavington and John Stafford were the guests of honour at the evening ‘Mess Night’ dinner of 1987 in the old Buttery, along with Mr Black, attending for the first time. Black recalls with pride this special occasion—this makeshift function room (which doubled as the Year 12 Common Room) was transformed, as in past years, into a traditional Mess Dining Room for the occasion:

Flags and banners; a portrait of the Queen; silver candle-sticks; a decanter of port, properly passed at the appropriate time; smartly dressed Year 10 cadets serving as waiters; officers, CUOs, WOs and sergeants in their ‘up to mess’ dress; visiting officers and dignitaries from Regional Cadet HQ and army personnel including that year’s inspecting officer—all these ingredients made for a memorably traditional and formal setting for the speech-making and the toasts. I felt very proud and glad to be a part of it and to be able to show off this very correct side of school life to the Chairman of Council who was always on the guest list.373

Alongside this public acknowledgement, the Headmaster soon confided his private approval of the unit in November to distinguished Old Boy Judge J.E.R. Bland (1935–45) of the Victorian County Court. The judge had recently hosted some Camberwell students at his court and had spoken to them favourably of his time on the Mont Albert Road campus. The Headmaster was pleased and grateful, particularly noting the judge’s comments on his former experience as a school cadet:

Sometimes our pupils forget that they are attending a school with so long a history, and it is good for them to be reminded of its earlier days. I heard with particular interest that you had spoken of your days with the Cadet Unit. You will be happy to know that the Unit, though small, is still thriving, and at the end of my third week here this term I was privileged to join in the proceedings of the annual Passing Out Parade. The standard of the turnout was very high.374

Had these comments been further disseminated, the cadets would have approached their centennial year with a smile on their faces. At the same time, the incumbent OC thanked past unit members who were prepared ‘to put something back’ through their ongoing, irreplaceable assistance throughout the year—in his modest way, Judge Bland had just done so. Finally, Headmaster Black additionally provided evidence to the school community that it was his intention to nurture the cadet unit by appearing in its annual photograph, seated between Captain Doery and Lt Scholem. In doing so, he unwittingly indicated that he was following the path recently blazed by his predecessor. During his time as a young officer at the Glasgow Academy, the Rector had always so appeared pro forma—this was one Caledonian tradition that Black now intended to maintain in the Antipodes.375

So it arrived—the hundredth year of the Camberwell School Army Cadet Unit—1988. The nation was preoccupied with its own Bicentenary celebrations on 26 January, but just as some in the community displayed their cultivated indifference to these events, so too some in the Camberwell school community preferred to overlook this milestone for the boy soldiers in their midst. Their attempt to do so was made easier by the fact that despite the recent Hansen revelations about the unit’s early origins, the precise birth-date (21 December 1888) was not acknowledged with the precision it deserved and would again be passed over unnoticed, like the birthday of an orphan—not until the school’s 125th celebrations in 2011 was December 1888 accepted as marking the beginning of Camberwell’s military
adventure. Nevertheless, there was now a widespread recognition that the unit was of colonial, nineteenth-century origin, not twentieth. That, at least, increased the unit’s standing—it now consisted of 115 boys at the beginning of the year (1988 school population: 1121 of whom about 500 were in the Senior School and thus eligible for the cadets). One small but not insignificant part of this standing was the willingness of the Tuckshop Committee to allocate some funds to the cadet unit, perhaps at the expense of the Parents’ Association. The Ladies’ Auxiliary also earmarked some plum-pudding profit for the same cause. The cadets were again respectable.

The account in the Grammarian of the cadet centenary year offered an impression of ebullience within the unit, an understandable reaction given the sense of relief that must have flowed from the obvious, ongoing sympathy of a new headmaster, a new ‘Sponsor’. Senior CUO Stuart Verrier (1983–88) thought the re-invigorated cadet unit the ‘most exciting extra-curricular activity in the school, if not in the state’, an ambitious claim, but one that indicated an increased level of enthusiasm in the ranks. An early NCOs’ day was followed by a Recruit Day, with the March Bivouac attracting ‘110 or so men in green’ heading for Bambara. The night exercises of recent years were repeated in a mock ‘invasion’ of a mock ‘army camp’ protected by traps, lights and sirens installed by former CUO Dillon. An April four-day Survival Camp for senior cadets saw the cadets showing a preference for their own constructed shelters over ‘their issued hutchies’—it was also alleged that some members of the unit had consumed 100 or so yabbies inside these shelters. This camp notably featured an abseiling exercise over the 100m vertical drop of the Murchison Falls, the site of the 1976 tragedy in which Camberwell cadets had so distinguished themselves. An ATA camp was held at the same time and cadets Verrier, WO2 Steer and Staff Sergeant Paul McCrea (1983–88) were honoured to lead Melbourne’s ANZAC Day march of 15,000 participants.

This, again, was a signal honour and public recognition of the unit’s status as one of the leading cadet groups in Victoria.

A planned second canoeing camp was cancelled owing to bad weather, but a four-day recruit hiking camp proceeded with boys plodding over the Mt Disappointment tracks. The six-day Annual Camp at Pucka again relied on the school’s own resources to a large degree, but ‘the unit benefited greatly from the informal support given by the Army’ according to Headmaster Black. It was fitting in their hundredth year and in the year of the national Bicentenary that the cadets were taken into the town of Puckapunyal to the War Museum with its memorabilia stretching back two centuries. Their own unit had itself undergone the Pucka experience, on-and-off, for over 40 years, no mean feat given the alternating temperament of the Defence Department. Corporal James Fletcher (1985–90) gained the highest score on the range with the ‘most lethal weapons used by the army today’, the SLR rifle, giving him the Major Lemon marksman’s award for the year. Aquatic activities were a prominent feature of this annual camp, with senior cadets utilising zodiac IRBs (‘inflatable rescue boats’ otherwise known to life-savers as ‘rubber duckies’) on Lake Eppalock under the patient supervision of Greg Goullet. Canoeing down the Goulbourn River lasted two days and was followed by a three-day navigational exercise back on land for the seniors curiously involving test tubes of ‘mock’ uranium—a sign of the times—attached to trees throughout the forest. Rumour had it that the Army later removed these tubes under the suspicion that they contained drug-ring cocaine—another sign of the times. Perhaps they should also have removed the bows and arrows that the boys were using in archery practice given their relative inexperience with these equally lethal weapons. Leopard tanks, water, uranium and arrows; owing to the enormous variety that this camp had allowed, the 1988 Annual Camp was assessed by CUO Verrier as ‘most enjoyable and rewarding’.
Although not widely appreciated as such at the time, the 1988 ‘Cadet Presentation Parade’ (as it was rebadged for the October Open Day on a Saturday) was an appropriate recognition of the antiquity of the cadet unit. Brigadier Davies, Commander 3rd Military District, subsequently passed his impressions as reviewing officer to the Headmaster: ‘The parade was an outstanding success, and the turnout and bearing of the cadets was amongst the best that I have ever seen. These lads are a fine example of what young men can achieve in a controlled environment.’

Mr Black understandably informed the Council that this was a ‘very pleasing comment’ as little time was now given over to traditional drilling, the cadet emphasis being more on adventure training, bushcraft and leadership skills. Their morale, he also noted, was ‘clearly very high, and this is a tribute to the fine work being done by Captain Doery and his fellow officers’. This was a pleasing year’s end for a cadet unit now only months away from its hundredth birthday and the Headmaster was owed some credit for having given the unit much wider exposure at the opening of the Saturday Open Day on the more spacious Keith Anderson Oval, thereby avoiding the cramped setting of the Centenary Family Day parade of 1986. The School Concert Band was stationed on the concrete between the William Angliss Building and the KAO, sounding the drum rolls and the trumpet calls and playing a medley during the inspection itself, including the Headmaster’s personal favourite, ‘Edelweiss’ from The Sound of Music, as well as ‘jaunty settings’ of the School Song and the Sports Song. The appreciative audience included commanders old and forthcoming (Brown, Stafford and Scholem), Old Boy ‘Gobblers’ and parents of serving and future cadets.

No-one was more pleased by this greater exposure and enhanced status than Captain Doery, who boasted that the unit’s numbers had increased to 120 before the end of 1988, ‘the highest for over twenty years’. It was additionally pleasing that the unit contained a higher proportion of Year 12 boys than for many years, leading to a high level of ‘student leadership’. One of the new staff recruits in October was John Tuckfield, whom the Headmaster welcomed: ‘As a member of the Army Reserve, he will be invaluable in the school cadet unit.’ Certainly, as an Army Reserve sergeant, Mr Tuckfield proved to be a considerable asset, but he encountered immediate, jarring hostility from those staff members who retained a level of opposition to the cadet system. His appointment was timely, however, as it had often been difficult in recent years to persuade staff members to engage themselves in the demands required of an active cadet unit. Doery summarised these demands on the staff in the Grammarian as involving ‘a considerable sacrifice of personal time on a voluntary basis’ as he also welcomed the appointment of staff member Lt Ian Poyser as OOC—Poyser would become Camberwell’s Sportsmaster and, unlike his predecessors, would extend sympathy to the demands of the unit when and where they clashed with the needs of sports.

There was an air of optimism at the end of 1988 that had not been seen since at least the beginning of the 1980s, if not since the traumas of the mid-1970s. The enthusiastic Cadet Auxiliary amalgamated with the Past Cadets Association to strengthen it in a new role as both a fund-raising and support association. Headmaster Black, as sponsor, summarised in his public Headmaster’s Report where the cadet unit stood, now on the verge of its centenary. The unit, he stated, continued to provide ‘a challenging and interesting programme’: ‘It is one of the few school activities to offer real opportunities for senior boys to take responsibility for younger ones whom they instruct and supervise in a wide variety of outward bound and survival activities.’ Aside from the contemporaneous reference to ‘outward bound’, this could very well have been a reference made in 1888–89 by Headmaster A.B. Taylor to the fledgling Whitehead-led Camberwell unit in that distant period of the school’s origins. It was just as appropriate in 1988 as it would
have been in that previous century, as was the final cadet event of 1988, the five-day promotions course at Bambara. In filtering out ‘the leaders of the future’ (dux Senior NCO Corporal Simon Phillips, 1983–90, and Cadet Fergal Fleming, 1986–89), the unit was continuing to perform a century-old service to Camberwell Grammar and to the wider community.

Ω

The Camberwell cadet unit had survived and thrived through a difficult decade when its demise could have been anticipated by any number of Job’s comforters in the school community. This period had not been the first crisis that the unit endured and is unlikely to have been the last, but there it stood in December 1988, erect, proud and a centenarian, even if one lacking the congratulatory telegram from the monarch. Many of the old disputes that had marked its earlier life were now either settled or subdued and, as Colin Black recalled, relations between the cadet unit and the rest of the school in 1988 were ‘excellent’, even though this assessment was not entirely shared by some in the staff Common Room.

Perhaps the outstanding centenary fly-in-the-ointment was the continuing, nagging concern about finances. The Headmaster immediately took up the burden borne by many of his predecessors, lobbying for the maintenance of government funding for school cadet units. This was a thankless task as those Labor governments at state and federal levels in 1988 did not regard cadet units in schools as a high priority; the Liberals too often failed to match the promises of restitution made in Opposition once they returned to the Treasury benches. The October 1987 stock market crash suggested an even tighter dispensation of public funds, but Headmaster Black was invited around this time to Victoria Barracks one evening to give evidence in support of the school’s need for continuing funding. The Camberwell corps remained a Limited Support Unit, but it was one that had virtually gone it alone since 1976—and had marched through episodes of darkness into light. This was their greatest achievement over the period 1976–88 and the most important of all the survival techniques that the boys had mastered in recent years. From mock sieges to helicopter rides, from decapitated chickens to ‘Edelweiss’, the unit marched on into its second century, prouder and stronger than ever, confident that its place in the school community was a respected and secure one, at least at the top level of school administration, whatever the future may hold.

The Colour Party, 1976, wearing their distinctive ceremonial navy-blue uniforms.
For decades 'Bambara' served as a supplement and alternative to Puckapunyal for cadet bivouacs. Here, in 1984, the cadets are utilising the incinerator for non-military purposes.

The unit was always seeking recruits, but these two boys on parade on the KAO in 1981 had not yet reached Year 9.

The October 1982 Passing Out Parade reviewed by Brigadier Gilmore was not able as the last one presided over by John Stafford OC, commander of the unit for fourteen years. The annual 'J.L. Stafford Platoon Prize' was instituted in his memory.

'Centenary Family Day' April 1986, with the unit being inspected by Sir Edward Woodward, Chairman of the School Council. Headmaster Dyer follows him. The marquee behind them reminded some of the Moscow Circus.
A Cadet Camp in the 1980s, when the Adventure Training syllabus called for the development of water crossing skills.

Survival Camp at Bambara, 1984. The chicken has not survived.

During the 1980s the unit distinguished itself on Anzac Day outside the school. Here, in 1984, the unit prepares to participate in the Melbourne Anzac Parade.

The unit in 1987 on the verge of its centenary. The new headmaster, Colin Black, continues with the recent innovation of the head of school appearing in the cadet portrait of the year, seated here between Captain K. Doery on his right and Lt M. Scholem on his left.
EPILOGUE

The century-long adventure of military life experienced by boys at Camberwell Grammar in the various cadet formations offered by the school and the nation proved to be a mixture of innovative adventure training and traditional military practice. Whereas these two areas were sometimes seen as incompatible, in fact they eventually proved to constitute a convenient partnership, one that has survived into our own century. This broadening of perspective in the cadet outlook caused many to reflect on the nature of the activity that had attracted them. An outstanding analysis was offered by one insider, Senior Sergeant Davyd Norris, as the author of a series of articles on the history of the unit for several issues of *Spectemur* in 1984. The articles were outstanding; so too was his conclusion on the nature of cadet training over the previous nine decades at Camberwell Grammar:

Throughout the years the cadets has been introducing boys to the military life, and has been giving them a taste of a life which for many, would never have been possible. But it is more than that. It builds men by encouraging leadership, comradeship and discipline and fostering initiative and creativity, qualities which are so important in our society today.

These qualities identified by Norris had been as important in 1888 as they were in 1984 and any history of the unit demonstrates the important part played by each for over a century.

The cultivation of ‘leadership’ had been an unspoken part of the cadet program since the beginning, but it was especially stressed as a significantly voiced factor from the time of the Derham versus Robinson debate in 1937, being something that Major Searle also sought to emphasise right up to his final Speech Night address in 1954, where he reminded his audience ‘that education should be directed towards leadership’. The Army’s Standing Orders for Cadet Training, examined here at length during the controversies of 1958, had continued to state throughout this period that the system was designed ‘to develop the qualities of leadership’. John Usher in 1963 had also stressed leadership as one of the outstanding criteria of the corps in 1963, a point reinforced by Cadet Adrian Jackson in *Spectemur* in 1971, when he reminded an unsympathetic readership that the unit ‘promotes leadership and self-organisation in the cadet’. Soon after, in 1973, a besieged David Dyer had professed his view to the School Council that the unit offered ‘opportunities for leadership and responsibility not provided by any other activity’. The Headmaster’s Report of 1975 had termed it similarly, recommending the unit, now itself under siege, as an unmatched activity in the cultivation of ‘leadership and man management’. Later he teamd ‘caring qualities’ alongside these elements of leadership. In 1984, when the system was under renewed assault, Headmaster Dyer had reminded the school community that cadets remained ‘a very worthwhile youth training activity, which probably more than any other, gives opportunities for the development of leadership skills’. Captain Doery OC in the centenary year had commended the unit for providing an unmatched level of ‘student leadership’. Nothing then could have been more misleading than the implication made by Defence Minister Killen in 1977 that ‘leadership’ was a non-military virtue—the Camberwell cadets had demonstrated for the best part of a century (and beyond) that this was not the case. The cadet unit had been the nursery of school leaders throughout the period of its existence.

Norris’s notion of ‘comradeship’ was in the minds and on the tongues of all who fell under the ANZAC shadow after 1915, being one of the marked virtues attributed thereafter to Australian men and boys in uniform. The 1937 House debate had mentioned it...
without the need for particular emphasis, something repeated in 1947 by the seminal ‘A Recurring Question’ in the Grammarian, and John Usher, the unmatched champion of cadet mores in his own time and beyond, gave it prominence in his magisterial ‘Commanding Officer’s Message’ of 1958, in which he stated that ‘it is comradeship and self-discipline that the Cadet Unit seeks to, and does, in fact, develop and it cannot be denied that such senses are valuable in any society’. Any contact with former cadets always brings this notion to the fore—the recognition of a certain bond that exists between those who served in uniform in a particular unit at a particular time. For many, these notions of comradeship remain prominent throughout their lives.

‘Discipline’, of course, is a military characteristic acknowledged as prominent by friends and foes of the cadet system alike. It was a prominent criterion in the arguments put forward by those, like the Earl of Meath, advocating boy conscription in the early years of Federation. ‘A Recurring Question’ had later quoted Emerson to the effect that ‘Obedience alone gives the right to command’. Major Searle preferred to stress ‘self-discipline’, as had Usher, a quality that he thought in 1959 was especially relevant to teenage boys: ‘And so it seems a pity that boys who need self-discipline so badly do not participate in Cadet life.’ The 1963 debates also led him to remind his readers that ‘He must learn to carry out orders before he can give them.’ There was never a contradiction between ‘discipline’ and ‘self-discipline’, as some, notably in Spectemur, argued—they were complementary and two sides of the same coin. By 1972, at a time of social disintegration in the view of Headmaster Dyer and others, it had become widely accepted at the top that the cadets were the key to discipline within the school environment—discipline was one quality that had never been diluted at the level of cadet training at any time from 1988 onwards, whatever innovations had been forced upon the unit in recent decades. It was no coincidence that every external reviewer of the unit over the years, from Colonel Pollard in 1949 to Brigadier Davies in 1988, was impressed by the discipline of the Camberwell cadets. As Davies noted: ‘These lads are a fine example of what young men can achieve in a controlled environment.’ His observation could have been made at any time in the previous century.

The critics were also wrong to think that military discipline killed any concept of ‘initiative and creativity’, the final two qualities identified by Norris. This book contains innumerable examples of cadets displaying both initiative and creativity, both as individuals and collectively. Sometimes they were life-saving initiatives; sometimes they were in spite of the military establishment, such as in the co-option of camp materials that were beyond the system of official distribution. The boys at the Annual Camp of 1945 at Watsonia, for example, had furnished their quarters with acquired camp-stretchers, dressing tables and wardrobes in an unofficial capacity in a display of initiative familiar to soldiers of all ages at all times of stress and discomfort. In addition, Captain Stafford had made it clear in the early 1970s that it was time for the unit ‘to rely much more on the initiative of its members’. Although he was primarily referring to matters of finance, the comment could be interpreted much more widely and his unit met the challenge admirably. In 1982, Headmaster Dyer had referred to the core of the cadet system as ‘initiative training’, an observation that survived a renewed attempt to stifle the system. The unit utilised the Adventure Training camps of the period, in which Camberwell Grammar played a vital part, testing initiative and leadership. The entire history of the Australian cadet system is one that reeks of initiative in the style of the famous Mont St Quentin order issued by General Monash to the AIF in August 1918—‘each man to act on his own, & as many as possible to reach the top’. Any Camberwell cadet who had endured the many bivouacs and camps outlined in this history would have understood this maxim perfectly.
It is appropriate that Colin Black, who presided over the unit’s one hundredth birthday, should have the last word. He was still puzzled many years later how it was that some parents could not understand why their sons had wanted with such passion to become army cadets. As Headmaster, Mr Black would explain to these reluctant elders that the cadet unit provided a window for their sons into what for any nation was its most significant social service institution, the Defence Forces. At the school level, he was pleased to note that the cadets on parade were neatly attired, proud of what they were doing and clearly at ease with the order and discipline of cadet life. They were conventionally groomed and emanated self-respect. As soon as each began his ascent up the promotions ladder, he took his responsibilities for the younger cadets in his charge seriously. The courses offered by the Army for CUOs, he recalled, were very effective in the development of initiative and leadership and so it was no accident that so many of the school leaders also held significant responsibility in the school cadet unit. ‘Ritual and formality’ clearly appealed to these young men, just as these elements had always played a part in the initiation of the young of traditional societies into the norms and expectations of their tribe:

Life in the Cadet Unit was a kind of fall-out shelter from the loose and often directionless lives they were leading outside, focused on the media-created celebrities of sporting and popular youth culture and its transient and superficial fashions and values. 

Some 9684 boys had passed through Camberwell Grammar School by 1988, about half of whom had experienced life in the Senior School and were thus eligible for cadet service as volunteers or sometimes as conscripts. In the non-compulsory periods, a minimum of 10 per cent of these senior boys were serving in the cadets in any given year. The post-war years had managed to maintain about 40 recruits per annum, occasionally surpassing 50, so countless thousands of boys had passed through the navy-blue, khaki and jungle-green ranks over the decades. However, they were not the only beneficiaries, as Dr Hansen noted in *By Their Deeds* when commenting upon Camberwell’s ‘service-orientation’. There was no better way to serve than in the ranks of the cadet unit and in doing so, the boys were also serving the wider school community, helping all to divert their focus from the ephemeral towards tradition. Colin Black recently reminded the author: ‘What was good enough and worked for the Cadet Unit could surely work for the school as a whole.’ It did, from 1888 up to and beyond 1988.

What often remained in the memory of staff and boys involved in the Camberwell cadets, 1888–1988, was people. To John Usher, it was the memory of his charges: ‘They were great kids, great young men’, the best thing he took out of the unit. To others it was the quality of the staff members who formed the backbone of the unit over the decades. There is no specific memorial for these commanding officers from Whitehead to Doery, but in 2014 Camberwell Grammar inaugurated the K.E.B. Doery Courtyard and Garden near the Wheelton Centre. Although this site makes no reference to Doery’s extensive cadet experience, it is an appropriate recognition of his particular contribution to the cadet unit, as well as that of past commanders unnamed from Whitehead onwards. The plaque in the courtyard carries a quote from Chaucer’s *Knight’s Tale* that suitably describes both Doery and the long list of his predecessors as OC Camberwell School Army Cadet Unit in its various manifestations, 1888–1988:
'A verray parfit, gentil knight'.

David Bird, 2014.

With particular thanks to Trevor Hart, Peter Renwick, John Tuckfield and Colin Black.
2. See Chapter One “Are You Ready?": Camberwell Grammar Heeds the Call of “Kangaroo”, 1888.’
3. Argus, 18 May 1889.
5. The Naval and Military Gazette (Melbourne), September 1889.
6. This cup, engraved to Lt H. Roche (aka Rocke), 1891, was donated by Mrs Margaret Wright of Ararat. It is now in the School Heritage Collection.
7. Review of Reviews, June 1905.
10. 10 West Australian, 19 May 1902.
11. Stockings, 43.
13. The experiences of these Old Boys will form the subject of later articles on the general impact of the war on the broader school community. The CGS Heritage Collection holds one of the presentation wallets.
16. Stockings, 64.
17. Grammarian, August 1915.
21. Grammarian, July 1916. Keith Goodwin wrote to the Grammarian, December 1941, while on war service in the Middle East.
27. The Jubilee Grammarian, December 1936, incorrectly lists S.T.W. Goodwin, a highly decorated officer, as a former cadet who won a scholarship to Duntroon, but he attended the school 1905–08 and was thus unable to serve in a cadet unit. Shirley Thomas William Goodwin was the older brother of J.K. and H. Goodwin, who both served in the Camberwell cadet detachment. All three served in the Second World War.
29. 29 Stockings, 85, where he refers to this period as ‘the beginning of the end’ for compulsory cadet training.
33. Marcus Barlow, Brighton, to CGS, 20 April 1976, 30/6/4, CGS Archives.
34. Interview with Stan Brown, 10 June 1982, 30/6/4, CGS Archives.
35. Grammarian, December 1921.
36. Grammarian, June 1922.
37. Stockings, 85–6.
38. Grammarian, December 1922.
40. Mrs Buntine recalled that he was perhaps the youngest members of staff—she was uncertain though of his age at the time of appointment. Interview with Mrs Buntine, CGS Archives.
41. Grammarian, December 1927. The Bath trophy is in the School Heritage Collection.
42. Stockings, 97.
43. Grammarian, June 1931.
44. Ibid.
45. Grammarian, December 1931.
46. Grammarian, July 1932.
47. Grammarian, December 1932.
48. School Council Minutes, 14 October 1926, CGS Archives. H. Tonkin to J. Robinson, School Council, 15 March 1932, CGS Archives. Mrs Buntine recalled that her husband saw little prospect of Camberwell shifting to a better site. Interview with Mrs Buntine, CGS Archives.
49. Grammarian, August 1933.
51. Grammarian, August 1934.
52. Grammarian, December 1934. Interview with Stan Brown, 10 June 1982, CGS Archives.
54. Grammarian, August 1936.
55. School Council minutes, 7 April 1936, CGS Archives.
56. School Council minutes, 5 May 1936, CGS Archives.
57. Grammarian, August 1937.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Grammarian, December 1937.
61. Grammarian, July 1939.
62. School Council minutes, 7 March 1939, CGS Archives.
63. Grammarian, December 1939.
64. Stockings, 92ff.
65. Grammariansian, November 1921.
67. Grammariansian, July 1940.
68. Grammariansian, July 1941.
69. Stockings, 115. Uniforms were issued free of charge after December 1944.
70. Grammariansian, July 1940. December 1940. Derham House is named after this
long-standing member of the School Council, who served in both world wars.
72. Ibid., 128.
73. 3 Grammariansian, December 1949, quoting Alexander.
74. Stockings, 119.
75. 5 Grammariansian, December 1940.
76. 6 Grammariansian, December 1941.
77. H. Symons, Secretary, Parents’ Association, to School Council, 27 September 1941,
C.G.S. Archives.
78. Interview with Stan Brown, 10 June 1982, 30/6/4, C.G.S. Archives.
79. Grammariansian, December 1941.
80. Grammariansian, July 1942.
81. Headmaster’s form for parents on the evacuation of students, n.d., School Council
Minutes, C.G.S. Archives.
82. Stockings, 110.
83. School Council Minutes, 7 April 1942, 3 August 1948, C.G.S. Archives.
84. Kenneth Rogers (1942-50), ‘Some Random Memories of a Junior Boarder from the
War Years.’ C.G.S. Archives.
85. Weir is featured in the school’s Gallery of Achievement.
86. ANZAC and Church Services Scrap Book, 30/6/4, C.G.S. Archives.
87. Grammariansian, December 1943, December 1944.
88. Ibid.
89. School Council Minutes, 1 June 1943, 7 September 1943.
90. Grammariansian, December 1943.
91. Grammariansian, December 1944.
92. Grammariansian, December 1945. Of the three Goodwin brothers serving in the Second
World War, the oldest was killed in action in New Guinea in 1943, the youngest
taken as a POW in Crete in 1941.
93. Stockings, 114. This practice did not long survive the end of the war.
94. School Council Minutes, 6 April 1943, C.G.S. Archives.
95. Ibid. 3 May 1944.
96. Grammariansian, December 1943.
97. Interview with Stan Brown, 10 June 1982, C.G.S. Archives.
99. Ibid.
100. Grammariansian, December 1945.
103. Ibid.
104. Grammariansian, December 1918; December 1945.
105. 1914-18: 58,961 died of 416,809. 1939-45: 27,073 died of 990,000, Australian War
Memorial statistics.
106. By December 1945 there were 2,972 Old Boys according to Peter Renwick’s
outstanding School Population register, C.G.S. Archives.
107. Stockings, 131.
108. School Council Minutes, 4 September 1945, 2 October 1945, 4 June 1946, C.G.S.
Archives.
110. Ibid.
111. School Council Minutes, 3 December 1946, C.G.S. Archives.
113. Ibid.
115. School Council Minutes, 1 February 1949, C.G.S. Archives.
117. Weickhardt, L.W. file, S156/2, C.G.S. Archives.
120. School Council Minutes, 3 May 1949, C.G.S. Archives.
121. Weickhardt, L.W. file, S156/2, C.G.S. Archives.
122. Interview with Stan Brown, 10 June 1982, 30/6/4, C.G.S. Archives.
123. Interview with H.L. Ackland, July 1983, 30/6/4, C.G.S. Archives.
124. Report Welcome to New Headmaster, School Council Minutes, 7 February 1950,
C.G.S. Archives.
125. Argus, 30 December 1949.
126. Stockings 135.
134. Grammarians, July 1951.
135. Ibid.
136. Ibid.
137. Interview with H.I. Ackland, July 1983, 30/6/4, CGS Archives.
139. Ibid.
140. Grammarians, December 1952.
142. Grammarians, December 1952.
143. School Council Minutes, 5 August 1952, CGS Archives.
144. Interview with Stan Brown, 10 June 1982, 30/6/4, CGS Archives.
146. Stockings, 136.
147. Grammarians, December 1953.
148. ‘ANZAC Day Service’ circular, 15 April 1953, 30/6/4, CGS Archives.
149. Grammarians, December 1953.
151. Interview with John Usher, February 2014, CGS Archives.
155. Grammarians, December 1928; June 1929
156. Grammarians, June 1930.
158. Grammarians, December 1930.
159. Ibid.
160. School Council Minutes, 1 February 1955, CGS Archives.
161. ANZAC Day Service’ circular, 31 March 1955, 30/6/4, CGS Archives.
163. Headmaster’s Report No.12, 28 May 1956, CGS Archives.
164. Stockings, 152.
166. John Usher interview, February 2014, CGS Archives.
173. School Council Minutes, 1 September 1959, CGS Archives.
174. Stockings, 171.
177. Ibid.
180. School Council Minutes, 3 May 1960, CGS Archives.
181. School Council Minutes, 5 February 1963, CGS Archives.
184. School Council Minutes, 7 February 1961, CGS Archives.
186. Ibid.
189. School Council Minutes, 1 May 1962, CGS Archives.
190. Spectemur, June 1962.
191. Weir features in the Gallery of Achievement.
196. Ibid.
198. Mr Forbes, who became a Captain in the Defence Signals Directorate, kindly donated the trophy to the CGS Archives.
201. School Council Minutes, 5 November 1963, CGS Archives.
203. Spectemur, April 1964.
207. Ibid.
358. Ibid.
369. Ibid.
373. Ibid.
374. C. Black to J.E.R. Bland, County Court, Melbourne, 16 November 1987, File 30/6/4, CGS Archives.
378. Ibid.
379. Ibid.
380. Ibid.
384. Headmasters Report No.9, 4 October 1988, CGS Archives.
386. John Usher interview, February 2014, CGS Archives.
About the Author

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Dr Bird has written and published extensively on Australian history. He has taught Latin at Camberwell Grammar School since 1997 and has combined this with the role of School Historian and Archivist since 2013. ‘The Adventure of Military Life’ is his fourth book.