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Officer Recruiting in the British Armed Services

Colonel Norman L. Dodd

There are a large number of different ways of obtaining a Commission in Her Majesty's Armed Forces but there are two common denominators: the requirement for high potential leadership and the increasing necessity for either a graduate education or a capability of obtaining that level.

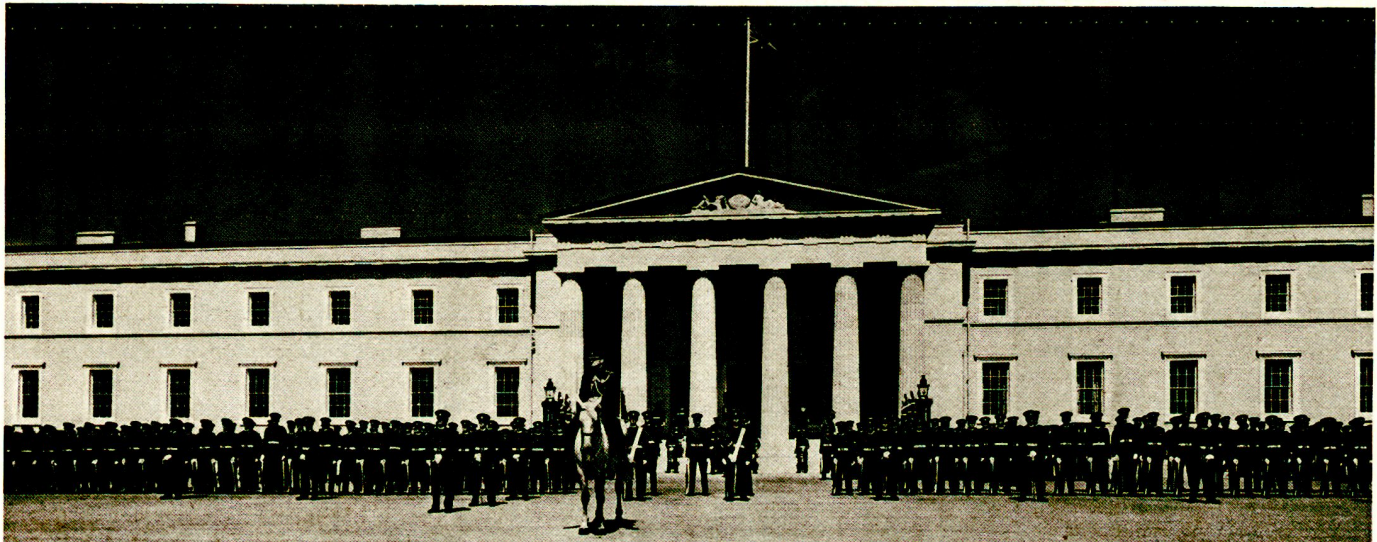
Each Service has somewhat differing methods of obtaining and retaining their officers. The Royal Navy still has its fascination for young people in Britain and the Royal Air Force a certain glamour. The Army's task has always been the hardest and their requirement the largest.

What attracts young men – and women – to a service career as an officer? This has been the subject of many studies but experience seems to prove the main attractions are:

- Travel and adventure. The British Services can still offer service world wide though not to the extent considered normal in the days before the dissolution of the Empire.
- Comradeship. Not obtainable in civilian life.
- Family connections. The British Regimental tradition is still a very real recruiting inducement for the Army.
- Pay and Allowance. These are now good, a Second Lieutenant receives 1500 pounds (about 15,000 Swiss Francs) on commissioning.
- Good educational facilities.

However these attractions do not produce enough youths who wish to obtain commissions in the Army by the orthodox method of attending the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. Even if they did it would not be desirable to have such a restricted system because a stereotyped officer corps would be produced and the Forces would lose the benefit of university trained young men. Further, the promotion pyramid of a long service voluntary force is insufficient to provide a full career for all officers. A system is therefore also required to commission officers for periods of service ranging from 3 to 16 years; obviously it would not be economic for officers on these shorter engagements to attend the two year course at Sandhurst.

Figure 1. The Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, the principle source of officers obtaining a Permanent Regular Commission.



The Army has therefore developed a number of methods of entry to attract boys and men of ages varying from 15 years 3 months to as high as 36 years.

In 1953 Welbeck College was opened by the Army as a boarding school. The object is to provide suitable boys with a two year sixth form education in preparation for entry to the Royal Military Academy and it is run more as a school than a military unit. The age of entry to Welbeck is 15¼ to 17 years 2 months. Candidates who successfully complete Welbeck and the Military Academy are usually, though not always, commissioned into the Service Corps – Royal Army Ordnance Corps, Royal Corps of Signals, and the Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. 75 boys enter each year and the capacity is 150. Parents may be asked to contribute towards the fees but this depends upon their financial means, the amount can be from nothing to a maximum of 255 pounds (2,550 Swiss Francs). The entrants come mainly from Grammar, Military and other State schools, a source not greatly tapped before the opening of Welbeck College.

The age of entry to the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, is between 17¾ and 20 years. Sandhurst, the principal source of long service Regular Army officers, has evolved from a small college founded in 1799.

Its official role is: "To prepare men to shoulder their responsibilities and equip them physically and mentally to take their place among the leaders of to-morrow's army. The officer cadet, therefore, learns his profession by means of a two year course made up of military training and academic studies in almost equal proportions."

The majority of cadets enter the Academy directly from school, including Welbeck College, but a few come from the ranks of the Army. These are young soldiers who appear to have officer potentialities and whose education has been brought up to the high standard necessary for entry by attending a special course at the Army School of Education.

All entrants, less those from Welbeck or on scholarships, must have attended and passed the three day Army Officer Selection procedures at the Regular Commission Board at Westbury. This skilled procedure includes interviews, lectures, essays, outdoor team projects and obstacle negotiation.

There are presently 650 cadets under training in Sandhurst, this includes a proportion of overseas cadets. The cadets come from a far wider range of family backgrounds, than they did before 1940, since 1947 boys have entered from 1300 British Schools.

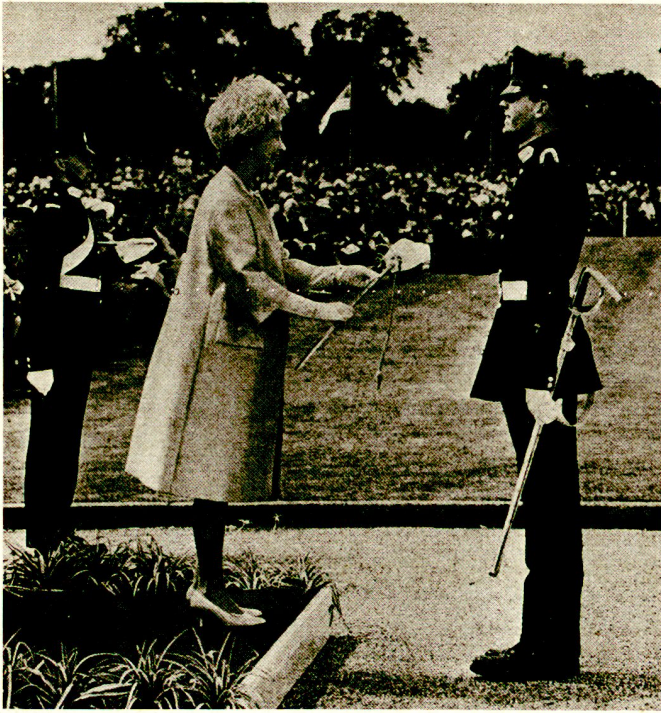


Figure 2. Her Majesty the Queen presents the Sword of Honour to the best Cadet at the Passing Out Parade at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst.

The cadets receive pay and allowances while under training but must be unmarried. On successful completion of the course they are awarded Permanent Regular Commissions normally into the Regiment of their choice. Some, whose educational qualifications are not quite sufficient, may be offered Special Regular Commissions (SRC) which guarantee a career for not less than 16 years and may, under certain circumstances, be converted to Permanent Commissions.

On leaving Sandhurst the Second Lieutenants will complete a Young Officers Course at an Arms School and then obtain experience with troops in the field. After 15 to 18 Months at regimental duty those who successfully studied certain elective subjects at the Academy may be selected to read for degrees at the Royal Military College of Science or at Oxford, Cambridge or other civilian Universities.

This is particularly applicable to officers of the Engineers, Signals and Electrical and Mechanical Engineers who are expected to obtain degrees as Bachelor of Science. In fact about 50% of the Sandhurst Commissioned Officers later go to a University.

In addition to Sandhurst the Army operates Mons Officer Cadet School at Aldershot. This School is geared to train some 250 British Officer Cadets each year. On completion of an intensive 20 week training course cadets are given either a Short Service Commission (SSC), initially for 3 years, or a Special Regular Commission (SRC) for 16 years. In a few cases men entering from the ranks of the Army may be granted Permanent Commissions. Candidates for SSCs must normally be between the ages of 18 and 26 but can be older for certain specific technical appointments; those for SRCs must be over 20, if under 20 they are expected to do the full course at Sandhurst. The age limit for the Women's Royal Army Corps is 35. Lady candidates attend their own training schools as do officers of the Queen Alexandra's Royal Army Nursing Corps.

Candidates for Mons are required to have the General Certificate of Education in a minimum of five subjects. This is a good standard of School education but insufficient to obtain a place in a university. They must also pass the Regular Commission Board.

Cadets are commissioned into all Arms and Services from Mons and it is possible to convert their commissions into Permanent Regular Commissions later on. They receive pay while there and on commissioning their emoluments and conditions of service are identical to regular officers though SSC officers are paid a gratuity but no pension if they only complete a few years' service.

Mons is popular with overseas governments and well over 400 Overseas Cadets have passed through the School.

On the 1st September 1972 Mons will be combined with the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. All cadets will do the same basic military training for 6 months and will then be Commissioned, the Short Service officers will then go to Arms Schools while these wishing to become Regulars will do a further Regular Career Course mainly in academic subjects. Regular officers, as before, can continue to Universities to read for degrees.

In order to widen the field of collection of prospective officers a man may enlist at any Army Careers Information Office (Recruiting Office) on a special "S" Engagement for 3 years as a potential officer. He must satisfy the recruiting officer that he has officer potentialities and sufficient education. He is then entitled to one attempt at the Regular Commissions Board; if he fails he is entitled to a free discharge. If he passes he attends Mons and will be commissioned for a total of 8 years partly on the active list and partly on the reserve.

The "Army Scholarship Scheme" is designed to attract boys by giving financial assistance towards the cost of their last 2 years of their school education to allow them to reach the standard required for entry to Sandhurst or, in some instances, direct to a university. Even though education is supposedly free in Great Britain too many promising boys leave school at the minimum age of 15 in order to start work. There are approximately 40 scholarships awarded each year by open competition, the amount depends upon the need of the parents, the maximum is 385 pounds a year (3850 Swiss Francs). The parents and the boy must give assurances of a true intent to qualify and enter Sandhurst. The parent also promises to refund the scholarship if the boy changes his mind "in a way which constitutes a breach of the understanding".

Another recent innovation is the Joint Short Service Commission and Industrial Career. The Confederation of British Industries in conjunction with the Army have introduced a scheme whereby a man selected for a three year SSC can, at the same time, be considered for employment by firms at the end of their army service. The advantages of the scheme are twofold: the Army attracts able young men leaving school, college or university; industry gains young men whose character, sense of responsibility and powers of leadership have been developed during their service.

This scheme is simple and psychologically important. A man between 18 and 26 applies for a commission and states a wish to take part in the scheme. He is provided with a list of over hundred firms and applies for an interview with the one he wishes to join after leaving the Service. If the firm accepts him opportunities are provided for keeping in touch with them during his service and he can be pretty sure of a good job on his "Demob". It is a great help to those who would like the

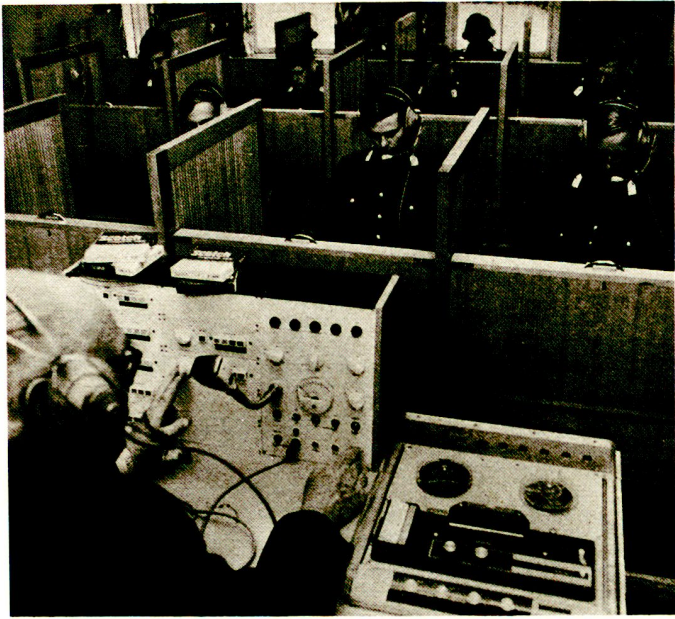


Figure 3. Language instruction at the RMC Sandhurst.

experience of service life but are worried about future prospects. Most of the top ranking firms in Britain are involved for the very good reason that they are impressed by the results of an Army training.

The Army to-day is based upon advanced technology and skilled management therefore a need for a proportion of highly qualified officers is paramount both in the operational and research functions. These officers can only be found in the numbers required amongst University Graduates. For this reason direct entry schemes are operated for graduates from any recognised University or College of Technology. Candidates with degrees can be commissioned directly, without attending an officer cadet school or serving in the ranks though all except those who hold a "Certificate B" gained in the University Officer Training Corps must pass the Regular Commissions Board. The OTCs, active at most universities, are part time units mainly designed to train officers for the Territorial and Volunteer (Reserve) Army.

Commission granted to University entrants can be Permanent, Special Regular or Short Service but are probationary for about 6 months. Further training, after commissioning, is at an All Arms School and then at their Special Arm School.

"Ante dates" can be granted to university entrants, to ensure they will not be permanently junior to those younger than themselves who have entered through Sandhurst and Mons. Certain age limits are enforced but they vary between arms and services, for infantry around 26 but up to 39 for some technical corps.

As well as running Welbeck College for Boys, a Cadet School and the Military Academy, the Army operates its own University. The Royal Military College of Science at Shrivenham near Reading was founded over 100 years ago and has developed into a highly competent and recognised University. It offers degrees of Bachelor of Science in Engineering or Applied Science with honours or Ordinary level and caters for both military and civilian students, the majority commissioned after studying at Sandhurst and joining the College after 2 years with their Regiments. Civilians who are to become officers join straight from school on University Cadetships and hold



Figure 4. Welbeck College where boys obtain an education which fits them for entry to Sandhurst and Commissions in the Service and Logistic Corps.

probationary commissions whilst reading for their degrees, they are granted Regular Commissions on graduation. Other civilians are on Scholarships awarded by the Ministries of Defence and Public Building and Works.

Civilian entrants must have General Certificate of Education (or equivalent) in a minimum of five subjects at least two of which must be at advanced level. This is the normal requirement for entry into any university. The course lasts 3 years and the way of life is similar to that in civilian universities but with perhaps a greater emphasis on physical fitness and excellent facilities are available for most sports. This College has an extremely high reputation and graduates, after leaving the Service, will have no difficulty in obtaining a good appointment in civilian life.

Figure 5. The Royal Military College of Science, Shrivenham where a Degree can be obtained.





Figure 6. Cadets from Mons Officer Cadet School training overseas. This School trains cadets for Short Service Commissions.

To assist suitably qualified young men wishing to take Permanent Regular Commissions and who have obtained places at a University or who are already studying there or who wish to attend the Military College of Science, the Army offers annually a limited number of University Cadetships tenable for a maximum of 4 years. Under this scheme the student receives Army pay and allowances and his fees at the university are met by the Army. The candidates must be over 17½ but must expect to graduate before their 25th birthday, be unmarried, fit, and hold the necessary educational qualifications. They must also pass the Regular Commissions Board. The cadet (Probationary Officer) who attends a civilian university under this scheme must also join the Officers Training Corps, if one exists, and obtain his Certificate "B".

This useful scheme is a considerable help to young men whose parents cannot afford the university fees.

In October 1970 a further scheme was introduced to fill the gap between school leaving and university entrance. Short Service Limited Commissions are granted to selected candidates for periods of 4 to 18 months while waiting the start of their first term. They attend a short course at Mons and then are attached to units for further training. It is hoped that on entry to the university they will take a more permanent commission or at least join the Territorial Army or OTC.

Doctors are in a special category and, due to a shortage within the Services, a particularly attractive scheme has been introduced. Under this Army Medical Cadetships are offered to young men training to be doctors; they are given commissions at the commencement of their studies and are paid 1,197 pounds (11,970 Swiss Francs) a year while at the University and the Army pays their fees. On registration as a doctor at about 24 years old they will have the rank of captain and be earning 3,249 pounds a year. The only obligation undertaken is to serve for at least 5 years after which a tax free gratuity of 2,600 pounds is paid.

The Royal Navy's "Sandhurst" is the Royal Naval Academy at Dartmouth with entry age from 17 to 20¼ years.

The course lasts 3 years and includes sea going experience.

The Navy does not have a "Welbeck" pre entry scheme but does offer scholarships and university cadetships. There are also various types of Short Service Commissions offered - H.R.H. The Prince of Wales, who has his University Degree, is at present doing his sea training to confirm his Short Service Commission.

The RAF is the only service which has gone the whole way; the RAF College at Cranwell is now only open to men with university degrees. The RAF is presently sponsoring over 400 prospective officers on degree courses at some 70 Universities and Colleges; this figure will increase to 1,000. These graduate officers will provide the back bone of RAF officer corps, the long service regulars, though as in the other Services short service commissions are also offered to graduates and non-graduates. These candidates train at the Special Officer Training Unit at Henlow and join certain technical, secretarial and similar branches as well as the RAF Regiment.

Both the Navy and the RAF have Women's Services and full careers are offered to young ladies who are prepared to attend their own training Schools. Wastage due to marriage is high in these, and in the Women's Royal Army Corps!

Certainly the British Services have been go ahead, enterprising and comprehensive in their methods of obtaining officers from all sections of society and ensuring that finance does not inhibit young men from "having a go". The methods have paid dividends and the Officer Corps contains a wide spread of men of varying backgrounds but with high professional and intellectual skills. The highest appointments are no longer the prerogative of the Military Academy outputs or of those with family influence. University entrants reach the highest positions of leadership - General Sir John Hackett, lately CINC Northag, and Air Chief Marshal Sir Augustus Walker, lately Deputy CINC Afcant, two of Britain's most distinguished Commanders, entered the Army from Universities.