



Comrades in arms

To mark 150 years of the Victoria Cross, **Sarah Woodward** joins Cambridge students training alongside the armed forces – and finding leadership skills they never knew they had

Officer Cadets Dickins, Jude, Neighbour and Routledge could have been talking straight from an army advert, such was their enthusiasm. Technically the last three should be referred to as Women Officer Cadets, for despite the fact that the Cambridge University Officer Training Corps (CUOTC) now contains almost as many women as men, there is still a rigid nomenclature. But no matter; in the OTC, as it's known hereabouts, young men and women are having fun as well as getting serious about the army.

The cadets I spoke to all had different reasons for signing up. Ed Dickins and Abbi Routledge, respectively reading geography at Peterhouse and medicine at Emmanuel, are both on army bursaries, which means they have already passed a rigorous inspection from the Regular Commissions Board (RCB – the military are fond of initials). They're obliged to belong to the OTC and committed to serving

for a minimum of three years after they have left university. Ed comes from an army background (his father is a serving officer) and hopes to join the Royal Engineers as a career soldier. 'I'd like to go on active service as soon as possible, before I marry and start a family.'

Abbi's family has no previous connection with the army, but, she says, 'my mother knows it makes sense for me financially'. She was in the cadets for a year at school, an experience she enjoyed, 'and well, when I found I would get paid as well...' It will be ten years from when she passed the RCB at sixteen to the time she finishes her medical training and goes to Sandhurst for the short summer course she must pass before she receives her commission. (With professional qualifications you circumvent the standard 44-week commissioning course Prince William will shortly complete.)

Emma Jude, reading veterinary science at Girton, waited until her second year at Cambridge to sign up for the OTC. 'I'd seen the stand at the Freshers' Fair,' she says, 'but when I first arrived I simply wasn't sure how much time my course would consume. By the beginning of my second year I was pretty confident I could cope'. Now she's thinking of applying to the Royal Army Veterinary Corps when she graduates, though she recognises that 'they only take around four vets a year. There aren't too many animals these days, apart from sniffer dogs and horses for parade duty.'

Katie Neighbour is reading Public Services at Anglia Ruskin

University (ARU), which has a reciprocal arrangement with CUOTC. Despite being in the OTC, her intention is to join the army as a regular soldier, working, she hopes, as a geographical technician in the Royal Engineers. 'I want to be in the ranks. My dad works on a building site and he's so proud about me being in the OTC. He tells everyone!'

While they had different reasons for joining, all are united in singing the OTC's praises. Katie mentions the opportunities for travel: 'as a student, there is no other way I could afford to do so many activities'. Ed chips in that he actually got paid to go sky-diving in Germany. And Emma is about to go off scuba diving in the Red Sea. As we take pictures of the group weapons training and zooming around the lake behind the Cambridge OTC Centre in a landing craft, their broad smiles tell their own story.

Not that they don't emphasise the serious side as well. Emma feels that the OTC has brought some discipline to her life while Abbi finds it has made her more able to appreciate the important things – 'like showers after an exercise', she jokes. 'But the best thing really is the personal development. It gives you a certain strength of character and builds your self-confidence.' 'And you make really good friends,' Ed chimes in.

So what if in your later career you end up getting shot? 'We all learn to look after each other here', he says, suddenly looking much more formidable. 'Of course, there are dangers. But there's nothing like dragging a mate who is supposed to be

All for one. Officer Cadets Katie Neighbour (ARU), Emma Jude (Girton), Ed Dickins (Peterhouse) and Abbi Routledge (Emmanuel) training at the Cambridge TA Centre



MICHAEL DERRINGER



Communicating the army's values. Lieutenant-Colonel Daren Bowyer (Clare 2000) took his MPhil in International Relations at Cambridge

injured through a muddy trench to make you bond.'

By the time I met Lieutenant Colonel Daren Bowyer, who has been the OTC's Commanding Officer since January last year, I didn't really need him to tell me that their mission was 'developing the leadership potential of selected university students through enjoyable and challenging training'. His cadets had done that themselves. A serving officer in the Royal Engineers, he too is a good advert for the army.

Officer Cadet James Bradshaw (Queens' 2004) on HMS Raider



MICHAEL DERRINGER

A few years back he was selected to read an MPhil in International Relations at Clare after a stint at the British Embassy in Washington DC ('though I expect after this posting I shall be sent somewhere hot', he says – and I don't think he was just talking about temperatures).

The point he is keen to make is that the OTC these days is not so much a recruiting organisation as 'a means to communicate the army's values, ethos and career opportunities to a wide variety of students'. It wants to influence future opinion formers, whether they be in politics or the corporate world.

It's a message Lieutenant Mark Headley of the Cambridge University Royal Navy Unit (CURNU) reiterates, though he wants to emphasise that CURNU – which was only formed in 1994 – is 'intrinsically different to the other branches of the military in Cambridge. We have never positioned ourselves as recruiters. Our aim is just to educate talented undergraduates about the Royal Navy.'

CURNU has about fifty student members at any one time, of whom 80 per cent are from the university (it also takes students from ARU and the University of East Anglia). It boasts its own ship, *HMS Raider*, a 65-foot-long turbo-charged patrol boat built specially for CURNU in 1998. Based in Ipswich with a permanent crew of five, it is in use during term-time weekends for sea-training, and in the spring and summer vacations sails with CURNU members aboard for exercises, most recently around the Channel Islands.

Before coming to Cambridge in February, Lt Headley was navigator of the 4,500-ton warship *HMS Somerset* and spent seven months off the coast of Iraq protecting the oil platforms of the northern Gulf from insurgent attack. He had no prior links with Cambridge but, at 31, views his appointment 'as a challenging posting that prepares you well for a more senior command later on'.

Right now he is enjoying getting to know his cadets, who undergo quite a tough selection process. 'We don't deliberately

target people who are mad keen to join the Royal Navy. We're looking for a much broader demographic. In fact, you could argue that your ideal recruit is unaware of the Royal Navy. Later on, when people are business executives or working in government, we want them to understand what we do.'

That long-term aim of winning friends in high places is embraced just as enthusiastically at the University Air Squadron (CUAS), the head of which, Squadron Leader Andy Baker, has been an RAF pilot for twenty-odd years and is also a qualified flying instructor. The chance of being paid to learn to fly means that the 25 places a year he has on offer for undergraduates are heavily oversubscribed, typically by a factor of eight, as he has to field applications from Anglia Ruskin, East Anglia and Essex universities as well as Cambridge.

Founded in 1925, CUAS is the oldest university air squadron anywhere in the world; its first recruit was the explorer Gino Watkins (Trinity 1925), who in 1930–1 won international fame pioneering the arctic air routes across Greenland, from England to Canada.

Originally CUAS only took men eligible to join the RAF, but opportunities are now wholly equal; even glasses or colour-blindness are no bar to joining these days. Nor is subject read important, says Sqn Ldr Baker. 'We have engineers, medics, historians, engineers – you name it, we've got it. All we ask is that our students are fit and healthy, enthusiastic and outgoing. Then, with luck, when they're politicians or captains of industry, they'll look back fondly on their time in the CUAS and thank it for making them better, more rounded people.'

One renowned CUAS alumnus is the NASA astronaut Nick Patrick (Trinity 1983), currently in training in the expectation that he'll be spending Christmas on the International Space Station.

When CUAS hands out leaflets emblazoned 'Learn to fly for free' at the Freshers' Fair, everyone asks 'What's the catch?' says Baker. And, as he describes the adventure training course in

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY ROYAL NAVY UNIT

Corsica he's about to set off on, it does seem hard to find one. Come to that, getting paid to sail round the Channel Islands in this summer's gorgeous weather doesn't sound too bad; and after Christmas there are skiing trips.

Not that it's all fun and games. The four army cadets I talked to were unanimous that 'the summer camp is quite tough physically', and I think they were understating it: the combat fitness test, for example, is a loaded march over four miles.

Daren Bowyer told me a touching tale. 'There was a girl who had found the course difficult and at the end of it told the RSM that she hadn't enjoyed it at all. But later she thought about it and emailed me to say that, on reflection, she was really pleased to have come. And it was all down to the teamwork.' Which, of course, is what it is all about, especially at a time when the British military are under such pressure.

The intention of the army, navy and airforce in Cambridge is not just to recruit heroes, such



CUAS Officer Cadet Vidushi Tekriwal (Peterhouse 2005), training at RAF Leuchars

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY AIR SQUADRON

as those who over the last 150 years have won the Victoria Cross. Certainly they are looking for skilled professionals who can lead and think on their feet. But, above all, they are trying to convey what they do to the rest of us:

in other words, propagating the ethos Churchill so famously summarised in his marathon account of the Second World War: 'In war: resolution. In defeat: defiance. In victory: magnanimity. In peace: goodwill.' ■



Harold Ackroyd VC



Kenneth Campbell VC



Eric Dougall VC



Will Rhodes-Moorhouse VC



Arthur Tisdall VC

ALL PHOTOS: VICTORIA CROSS SOCIETY

Cambridge VCs

The Victoria Cross is 150 years old this autumn. Born in the Crimean War, Britain's highest military award is only given for the 'most conspicuous bravery, or some daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice or extreme devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy'. To date, 1,355 Victoria Crosses have been awarded.

What follows are five accounts of the heroism of Cambridge VCs

Harold Ackroyd (Gonville and Caius 1896). After studying medicine at Caius and Guy's Hospital, Ackroyd returned to Cambridge to undertake research into vitamins. At the outbreak of the First World War he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps and was posted to Flanders with the Royal Berkshire Regiment. He won an MC and later, during the Battle of Passchendaele in 1917, the VC for working ceaselessly amid huge casualties, tending and bandaging scores of men while under heavy fire. 'No wounded man was treated hurriedly or unskillfully,' wrote the regimental historian. 'Ackroyd worked as stoically as if he were in the quiet of an operating theatre. When it was all over and the reports came in, it was found there were 23 separate recommendations of his name for the Victoria Cross.' Eleven days later, moving between shell-holes to tend casualties, he was shot through the head by a sniper. He was 40.

In 2004 Ackroyd's Victoria Cross was sold and the proceeds given by his family to Gonville and Caius College to fund undergraduate medical scholarships and an annual medical lecture.

Kenneth Campbell (Clare 1936). A 24-year-old Scot serving with 22 Squadron Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, Campbell single-handedly attacked the 37,000-ton German battleship *Gneisenau* in Brest harbour on 6 April 1941. At first light French Resistance observers saw him pilot his Bristol Beaufort across the harbour barely above sea level, running the gauntlet of intense anti-aircraft fire from three heavily armed ships protecting the *Gneisenau*, and launching a torpedo at point-blank range. The Bristol vanished into a blizzard of flak and crashed into the harbour, killing the crew, but the great ship was severely damaged below the waterline and put out of action for

nine months. Campbell's was the only VC awarded to an RAF torpedo bomber crew in the Second World War.

Eric Dougall (Pembroke 1905). An athletics blue at Cambridge, Dougall was attached to the 88th Brigade Royal Field Artillery during the Fourth Battle of Ypres. On 10 April 1918, when the British were forced to withdraw, he moved his guns to the top of a ridge to provide cover for the retreating infantry, delaying the German advance for over 12 hours. When his battery finally withdrew, its guns had to be manhandled over half a mile of shell-cratered country under heavy machine-gun fire.

Preserved at Pembroke along with his VC is Dougall's laconic account of the action, neatly noted in his diary. 'Hun attacked. Fought guns all day until 7pm, and then got them all out to behind Wyttschaete. Moved on to Klein Vierstraat.' Four days later he was killed in action, aged 30.

Will Rhodes-Moorhouse (Trinity 1908). Born into a wealthy banking family, Rhodes-Moorhouse found Cambridge 'a waste of time' and was much more interested in fast cars and airplanes. At 19 he knocked down and killed a child while racing motorcycles on Brighton beach but escaped manslaughter charges. Nothing daunted, at university he tore about in a 90hp Grand Prix Fiat called Linda, raced at Brooklands, and after gaining his pilot's licence became the first person to land a plane in Cambridge (on Jesus Green in 1911). To celebrate his marriage he made the first aerial crossing of the English Channel with a pair of passengers – his new wife and a journalist – crashlanding at Ashford and causing his wife to miscarry. Later he mastered the Cresta Run and competed in a Rolls Royce in the Monte Carlo Rally.

During the Second Battle of Ypres, as a Second Lieutenant in the Royal Flying Corps, he was ordered to bomb the German-held rail junction at Courtrai, a near-suicidal mission. On 26 April 1915, flying in at under 300 feet to ensure he could drop his 100lb bomb at precisely the right moment, he plunged into a heavy barrage of rifle and machine-gun fire from the ground. Severely wounded in the thigh and with three fingers on his right hand lost to shrapnel, he managed to release the huge bomb left-handed and survive the blast. Returning to allied lines, he ran into further heavy fire and was wounded twice more before managing to get his aircraft back; he made a perfect landing, though the plane was holed in 95 places. He died from his wounds the next day, aged 27, and a month later became the first airman to be awarded the VC.

Arthur Tisdall (Trinity 1909). At Cambridge Tisdall joined the OTC, rowed in his college first boat and took a Double First in Classics. At the outbreak of the First World War he enlisted as an Able Seaman in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve and was soon promoted to Sub-Lieutenant. On 25 April 1915, the first day of the Gallipoli landings, the former collier *SS River Clyde* was being used as a Trojan horse to land large numbers of troops when it encountered a torrent of machine-gun fire from well-dug-in Turkish forces. Hearing wounded men crying for help, Tisdall jumped into the water and, pushing a boat in front of him, made four or five trips to rescue the wounded, all the time under heavy and accurate fire. On 27 April, he wrote home: 'Have been under fire... all day spent in burying soldiers... Plenty of hard work and enemy shells, and a smell of dead men'. By 6 May he too was dead, shot by a sniper and buried where he fell. ■



VICTORIA CROSS SOCIETY