

RECRUIT TRAINING

From Application to Graduation, 1964–1965



A MEMOIR

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DONALD E. WAITE

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1 **Choosing the Force**

A Calling to Policing



Third Class Constable Waite, D.E. - Regimental Number 23661

When the time came for me to choose a career, it seemed almost natural that I would be drawn to policing. Perhaps the influence began with two of my uncles, both of whom wore the uniform and whose stories had captivated me from an early age. Uncle Tom Wark, married to my father's sister Verlie, was the Chief of Police in Renfrew, while Uncle Tom Menzies, married to my father's sister Vivian, was a sergeant with the Peterborough City Police. Their experiences fascinated me, but it was Uncle Tom Wark who left the strongest impression. A gifted storyteller and public speaker, he could hold an audience with his tales of police work and was always

the natural master of ceremonies at family gatherings. Through their stories, the world of policing seemed exciting, meaningful, and full of adventure—a calling that would eventually shape the course of my own life.

The Application

Being accepted into the Royal Canadian Mounted Police proved to be more challenging than I had anticipated. On 10 August 1964, I drove to the Pembroke Detachment to pick up an application form. I completed it and mailed it back the following day, along with two letters of recommendation addressed to the Force's headquarters in Ottawa. My sponsors were Clair Seeley, the principal of Renfrew Collegiate Institute, and Adam Laird, the general contractor for whom I had worked the previous summer.

Less than a week later, a registered letter arrived informing me that I was to report to the Pembroke Detachment on 17 August to write the entrance examinations and undergo measurements to ensure I met the RCMP's physical requirements, including the minimum chest and height standards.

On the appointed day, dressed in my only brown suit, I took the bus to Pembroke. Here I met Al Nicholson, another applicant, at the front door leading into the office. Because I was 1/16 of an inch short of 5'8", the minimum height required for admission, I had placed pieces of cardboard in each sock. This made me extremely nervous when the constable began taking my height measurements. Luckily, although he made me remove my shoes, he did not ask me to remove my socks.

Just as Al and I began writing the examination, a call came over the intercom reporting that a boat had capsized in the Ottawa River and assistance was needed at the scene. The constable immediately rushed out, leaving Nicholson and me at the detachment to complete the exam without supervision.

When I finished the test, I placed my papers in an envelope and left it in the mail basket for outgoing correspondence. Written on the side of the basket was the saying, “What I do here and what I say here stays here when I leave here.” Instead of taking the bus home, I decided to hitchhike.

A short time later, word came from the Force that I had passed every part of the examination except English and would have to rewrite that section. For my essay, I had written about why I wanted to become a member of the police force. Looking back, I suspect my lack of knowledge and inexperience with policing contributed to my poor mark. On my second attempt, I chose a different topic and managed to earn a much better grade in English.

Swearing the Oaths

On the 3rd of July, 1964, Mom and Dad drove me to a courthouse in downtown Ottawa, where I and three other young men, one of whom was Al, swore the oath of allegiance to Queen and Country.

Oath of Allegiance

I, Donald Ender Waite, do swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, Her heirs and successors according to Law, so help me God.

Oath of Office

I, Donald Ender Waite, do solemnly swear that I will faithfully, diligently, and impartially execute and perform the duties required of me as a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and will well and truly obey and perform all lawful orders and instructions which I will receive as such, without fear, favour, or affection toward any person. So help me God

2 Barracks Life

Arrival at “N” Division

None of us paused to consider the significance of the oaths we were taking. Shortly afterward, we were officially sworn in as members of the Dominion Police Force. Once the paperwork was completed, we were driven in a police cruiser to “N” Division, the RCMP’s recruit training facility at Rockcliffe, Ottawa.

Most of the other recruits had already arrived at the barracks by bus. Upon our arrival, we joined them and marched over to the barracks, where we were informed that we were members of Troop 3 of 1964. The 32 men in our troop would be housed in two dormitories, each measuring 20 feet by 80 feet, located on the third floor of the barracks.

The recruits were assigned numbers alphabetically, which made me number 31. As a result, I was placed in the second dormitory, where recruits with surnames from L to Z were assigned.

The room contained two neat rows of eight beds each. To my left was Peter Von Hausen, who, at 26 years of age, was considered the “old man” of the troop. To my right was Lorne Zimmerman.

We were then escorted downstairs to the recreation room, where a barber gave all 32 of us our first military-style haircuts at 25 cents each, completing the job in less than an hour. By the time I took my turn in the chair, the pile of clipped hair around the barber’s feet was nearly a foot deep. We had officially become “skinheads.”

I was 19 years old.

Initiation and Constable Major

The troop’s second night in the barracks was an experience none of us would ever forget. Exhausted from the day’s events, I was asleep within ten minutes of climbing into bed. Sometime later, a senior troop launched a raid on our two dormitories and tipped our beds upright against the walls—with us still in them. It was a rude awakening to find myself wedged upside down between the mattress springs and the wall.

The initiation hazing continued for much of the night, with members of the raiding party repeatedly warning us to be on the lookout for Constable Major. We had no idea who this mysterious figure was, but the warnings were enough to keep us on edge.

The following morning, at the six o’clock reveille, Constable Major suddenly appeared in our dormitory and announced that Troop 3’s training was not scheduled to begin until 13 July. With a three-foot riding crop tucked under his left arm, he proceeded to bark out insults in every direction and went to considerable lengths to convince our group of raw recruits that he held considerable power throughout the barracks. We were completely intimidated.

He inspected both dormitories, and any recruit whose bed was not properly made was ordered to drop to the floor and perform push-ups. Several recruits were handed mops and instructed to clean every toilet stall in a nearby washroom. After about fifteen minutes of inspection, Constable Major ordered the recruits from dormitories A through K to follow him to the kit room to collect their brown fatigue stable uniforms.

It was several days before we finally discovered the truth: Constable Major was not a senior officer at all. He was simply a regular constable whose surname happened to be Major. For years, he had been playing the same prank on unsuspecting new recruits. We had all been convinced that Constable Major was a high-ranking member of the Force—and he had thoroughly enjoyed letting us believe it.

Discipline and Tragedy

During our very first week, members of Troop 3 learned that senior troops sometimes took discipline into their own hands rather than involving the non-commissioned officers. The senior members had decided to punish a fellow troop member for stealing \$2.00 in loose change that had been left on top of another member’s desk. The recruit had taken the money to use in the communal pay phone so he could continue a conversation with his pregnant girlfriend.

Instead of reporting the petty theft, the troop decided to administer its own punishment by having the offender “run the gauntlet.” The enforcers formed two parallel lines in their dormitory and forced the accused thief to run between them while they struck him with belts as he passed.

The humiliation of the punishment, combined with the stress of his girlfriend’s pregnancy, overwhelmed the young man. A day or two after our arrival at the division, he went behind the horse barns, placed his service revolver to his head, and took his own life.



In the days that followed, the non-commissioned officers conducted a systematic series of interviews with the recruits, attempting to learn more about what had happened during the gauntlet punishment.

The Daily Routine

Together with several other troop mates, I spent much of the first two weeks at “N” Division dressed in brown fatigue attire, swinging an eight-pound sledgehammer to break up an old sidewalk. The remaining recruits loaded the heavy pieces of concrete into wheelbarrows and hauled them away to be used as fill for another project on the division grounds.

A typical day began at 6:00 a.m., when the entire barracks came to life with the sound of reveille, and ended with lights out at 11:00 p.m. During the first thirty minutes after waking, recruits were expected to make their beds, shave, dress, and be standing in formation by 6:30 for the first inspection of the day. Some troops were marched to the horse stables to muck out stalls, while others were sent on a one-mile run or assigned to clean and maintain the buildings.

Cleaning the horse stables was considered the least desirable of the three duties. Several members would grab pitchforks and move the horse manure into the main walkway, while others operated the large wooden scrapers used to remove wet bedding and manure. These contraptions

were built from two-inch-thick planks, approximately eight feet wide and two feet high, with ropes attached on both sides. Three or four members would pull each rope while the team leader guided the scraper using two handholds in the top plank, spaced about thirty inches apart. Together, six or eight recruits would drag the accumulated waste out of the building.

Other members loaded the manure onto wagons for transport to the manure pile. Still others swept the cement walkways clear of fresh straw bedding, while additional recruits fed and watered the horses.

Some troops were assigned to sweep walkways or clean the many buildings throughout the division. Brasso was used to restore the shine to the brass fittings on the doors of the various buildings. Before long, recruits jokingly learned that RCMP could also stand for “Rag–Clean–Mop–Polish.”

These tasks were carefully synchronized so that everyone arrived back at the barracks at approximately 7:00 a.m., although those who completed the one-mile run usually returned a few minutes earlier. It was always a race to change out of fatigue attire, shower, dress in blues, and eat breakfast before the 8:00 a.m. parade.

If the first class of the day happened to be physical training, recruits had to change from their blue uniforms into gym sweats. It was not uncommon to make three changes of clothing in a single morning, and the same routine often occurred again in the afternoon. Recruits attended three one-hour classes before noon and another three in the afternoon, with fifteen-minute breaks between classes. Training ended at 4:30 p.m. and supper was served between 5:00 and 6:00 p.m.

Recruits were assigned additional duties one or two nights a week. Those selected had to report for parade at 7:00 p.m. and march back to the stables for the final muck-out and feeding of the horses. If a recruit misbehaved, he could be placed on “a week’s parade,” which meant reporting every evening at 7:00 p.m. for stable duties.

These members were often caught in a cycle of trouble because once a recruit fell behind with his responsibilities, it was extremely difficult to catch up. Some of the more fortunate members managed to complete the entire nine months of training without ever being placed on parade.

3 Physical Conditioning

Strength, Endurance, and Teamwork

Corporal Roy was our physical training and first aid instructor. I excelled in physical training and, for the first two months, led Troop 3 during our exercises. Much of our training was designed to build strength, endurance, and teamwork. We did a great deal of running on the spot and performed a particularly demanding exercise that required three men of similar build.

One member would get down on his hands and knees, while the second sat sideways across the middle of his back. The third man held onto the seated member's feet. At the instructor's command of "Down" and then "Up," the seated member began performing sit-ups, lowering himself until his head touched the gymnasium floor.

The exercise was brutal for all three men. The member supporting the weight on his hands and knees suffered from the constant rocking motion as his knees were driven into the hardwood floor. The man holding the feet endured the strain on his stomach muscles as he tried to keep the seated member steady. But the greatest punishment was reserved for the man performing the sit-ups, who had to complete about thirty repetitions per minute while bending backward, hands behind his head, and touching the floor nearly twenty inches below his seated position.

We spent many hours training with ropes and enormous beanbags nearly two feet in diameter. After several months, I was able to climb a twenty-foot rope hand over hand while holding my body in a V, or pike, position, with my feet level with my head. To increase the challenge, I sometimes climbed the ropes while gripping one of the twenty-five-pound beanbags between my knees.

It was not unusual to see members place both hands on the floor beside a wall and flip their bodies upward until their feet rested against the wall. From that position, they would perform vertical push-ups. We even experimented with walking up and down stairs on our hands.

The Obstacle-Course Record

Near the end of training, I was one of three recruits selected from my troop to attempt to break the record for the obstacle course. The challenge required us to run the length of the gymnasium and back while completing a series of obstacles. On the way to the far wall, we had to vault over the horse, climb the ropes to touch the twenty-foot ceiling, descend, run to touch the back wall, and then sprint back to the starting point.

I managed to break the previous record.

4 Equitation

The First Bareback Lesson

On July 21, 1964 Troop 3 began equitation training under the instruction of Corporal Ken Strang. Dressed in our fatigue uniforms, we walked beside our assigned mounts from the stables to the riding arena. There were no high boots, spurs, or riding breeches. To our disappointment, we were not even permitted to saddle the horses.

Corporal Strang sat mounted on his saddled horse in the centre of the arena and began explaining the virtues of the four-legged beast of burden. His opening words were, "Welcome to equitation. Remember, the outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man." He then informed us that our first lesson would be conducted riding bareback.

After several minutes, we somehow managed to climb onto our horses. Almost immediately, Strang barked the command, "Walk your horses." Half a minute later came the next order: "Trot your horses." I quickly discovered that riding a horse bareback at a trot was remarkably similar to sitting astride a 2 × 4 plank balanced on its edge.

Before the first lesson was over, Strang gave the command, "Canter your horses." Sitting on a horse at a canter felt much like sitting in a rocking chair—except this rocking chair had a mind of its own and was moving beneath you.

Corporal Strang took particular delight in sending recruits over jumps while riding bareback. We were required to cross our arms while jumping, and it was not unusual for one out of every five riders to end up on the ground. I dreaded the jumping exercises because, by the second or third jump, I often found myself hanging onto the horse's neck in a desperate scissor grip.

Although the jumps were only about eighteen inches high, the motion of the horse caused a rider without a saddle to slide forward toward the animal's withers and neck. Once that happened, a fall was almost inevitable.

Simple Simon and Titan

One of Corporal Strang's favourite exercises was called "Simple Simon." For periods sometimes lasting ten minutes, he would bark out commands such as, "Simple Simon says, quick as the best mount," or, "Simple Simon says, quick as the best dismount."

He would shout the commands repeatedly, keeping us constantly mounting and dismounting, until he deliberately repeated the same order twice: "Simple Simon says, quick as the best mount." Everyone was already mounted, but inevitably one unfortunate rider would make the mistake of dismounting. The instant the rider's feet touched the ground, Strang would yell, "Trot!" leaving the dismounted recruit scrambling to run alongside his horse.

Riders had to remain constantly alert because Strang's motto was, "A doze rider gets a doze horse." My mount happened to be Titan, a seventeen-hand horse who was the tallest horse in "N" Division. Mounting him was a challenge. I could only get aboard by extending my stirrup to its full length. To place my left foot in the stirrup, I had to hop on my right foot while trying to steady the horse and wait for the command to mount. Once I was finally in the saddle, I had to quickly adjust and shorten the stirrup before we began riding at the canter.

I used part of my first paycheck to purchase a 35-mm Petri camera and flash. One day, I smuggled the new camera down to the horse stables with the intention of having another member take photographs of me with Titan. I left the camera in a corner of the tack room while I

completed some chores, but when I returned, I discovered that the film had been rewound back into the canister.

Assuming I had somehow made a mistake while loading the camera, I decided to have the film processed anyway. I was surprised when it came back from the lab containing photographs of every conceivable part of a horse’s anatomy. A member who understood flash photography had exposed my entire role of colour film as a practical joke.

Earning Spurs

The hardest achievement to earn in equitation was the awarding of spurs. Raw recruits quickly learned that without these jingle-jangle ornaments attached to the heels of their high boots, horses often ignored leg pressure commands. The first month of equitation seemed to consist almost entirely of riding bareback at the trot. To avoid being bounced up and down on the horse’s backbone, a recruit had to grip tightly with both knees.

The constant inward pressure of a rider’s knees against a horse’s rib cage often left recruits walking back to the barracks in a bow-legged fashion. The coarse corduroy material of the riding breeches could also chafe the inside of the knees so badly that many recruits wore long underwear beneath their riding pants. On hot days, those rides were much like sitting in a sauna while being shaken from side to side.

An unwary recruit soon learned that some seasoned police horses had developed a clever habit: the moment a saddle touched their backs, they would automatically inhale and inflate themselves. Before mounting, the rider had to tighten the belly strap, or cinch, as much as possible. Those horses that inflated themselves before being cinched would later exhale, leaving the rider to discover too late that the saddle had become loose.

Many inexperienced recruits placed a foot in the stirrup and swung up into the saddle, only to have the saddle “turn turtle” and flip underneath the horse’s belly. The experience was even worse when a saddle shifted to one side or the other while the horse was at a full canter or going over a jump. To overcome this problem, we learned to discreetly drive a knee into the horse’s rib cage, causing the animal to exhale so the belly cinch could be tightened. Of course, this manoeuvre had to be performed when Corporal Strang was not watching.

One of the most dreaded commands was “Stand to your horses.” This required the rider to stand at attention in front of his horse while holding the bridle in such a way that the horse’s nostrils were almost touching the rider’s nose. Horses have incredibly strong neck muscles, and when a horse decided to raise or lower its head, the rider was expected to maintain the position and remain at attention. Arm muscles quickly began to ache, and during inspections, a rider might have to “stand to” for five or even ten minutes.

The command “Prepare to mount” was even worse. Upon hearing it, the recruit had to throw the reins over the horse’s head and place his left foot into the stirrup. Because Titan was so tall, I had to rise onto the toes of my right foot to reach the stirrup, which often startled him and caused him to fidget, making the task even more difficult.

Frequently, the command to mount came before I was ready, and I was too exhausted to pull myself into the saddle. Strang seemed to take great enjoyment in these challenges. When he finally gave the command, “Mount,” it was often followed immediately by, “Trot.”

Pity the poor rider who was not yet in the saddle when that second command came. The unfortunate recruit had to run alongside his horse until Strang finally ordered, “Walk your horses,” followed by the welcome command, “Stop your horses.”



Instructors at “N” Division, 1964-1965.

Back Row: Corporal M. Jack Roy, Corporal John A. Hart, Corporal Ron E. Sparks and Corporal William R.C. Leitch

Front Row: Corporal Eric B. Young, Staff Sergeant H. M. (Mel) Gilbert and Sergeant John W. Maguire.

Unpredictable Horses

Titan had the unique ability to go from a canter to lying down in an instant. His favourite trick was to collapse all four legs at once and roll over. The rider had to remain alert and be quick enough to leap from the saddle to avoid being pinned underneath the horse. He only pulled this trick on me once, and fortunately I managed to jump clear. The only thing injured was my pride, although I did have to clean a very dirty saddle afterward.

Titan may have been the tallest horse, but Sinbad was the meanest. About once a month, he managed to bite an unsuspecting recruit. On one occasion, he sank his teeth into the lower back of my troop mate Larry Hunter and actually lifted him off the pavement. Larry’s screams were blood-curdling and could be heard for at least a mile.

A Musical Ride Misadventure

One fall afternoon, our troop was given the privilege of exercising the horses used by the Musical Ride. It was a beautiful sunny day, and the Depot was crowded with tourists. When they saw us riding in columns of two, they naturally assumed we were the famous Musical Ride.

In the distance, I could hear a hound dog in pursuit of something. Suddenly, a rabbit darted through the formation of riders, startling the horses. Troop mate Hugh Hammond was thrown completely over his horse’s head and landed on the ground while still holding onto the reins.

A moment later, I was thrown in such a way that my horse’s hoof struck me squarely in the seat. I landed among the burdocks and, when I got to my feet, discovered two perfectly formed muddy horseshoe prints on the back of my breeches. Fortunately, I escaped injury.

Larry Hunter was not so fortunate. He was on a runaway horse and was eventually thrown off. When he regained his feet, he found himself standing on the parade square while recruits marched past him. Sergeant Young, the drill instructor, immediately began reprimanding the dazed and confused rider for interfering with his parade ground.

“You don’t see me parading my men in your riding arena,” Young shouted. “Why do you think you can ride all over my parade square?”

Larry was in no condition to understand the meaning of the lecture, but the spectacle provided great amusement for the rest of the drill class. Within minutes, several more riders had been thrown, and the remainder of the afternoon was spent chasing down riderless horses.

The tourists found the whole scene hilarious—until they discovered that the riders they had been watching were not members of the Musical Ride at all, but a group of raw recruits still learning the unpredictable art of horseback riding.

Discipline at the Trough

One particular recruit had a habit of skipping his shower after stable duties and had the audacity to walk into the lunchroom or attend classes still smelling of horse manure. Corporal Strang was well aware of the situation and even hinted that the recruit needed a good washing in a horse trough to improve his personal hygiene.

Naively, we believed we had Strang’s approval to administer our own form of discipline. One winter afternoon, while the horses were being watered, Strang conveniently disappeared from sight, which we interpreted as our signal to carry out the deed. When the unsuspecting offender approached, four of us grabbed him and tipped him headfirst into the water trough.

Unfortunately, at that exact moment, Strang appeared from around the corner and caught us in the act. We were immediately paraded on the spot. I was placed directly behind the victim for the march back from the stables to the barracks. In the dead of winter, his fatigue trousers froze stiff like cardboard against his shivering body.

Sword and Lance Drills

Strang concluded equitation training by introducing the troop to wooden sword and bamboo lance drills. With these toy-like weapons, recruits performed exercises designed to simulate combat, striking at imaginary soldiers. A recruit would swing his sword over his head and thrust toward a foot soldier on his left, then repeat the movement against an opponent on his right.

During one of these exercises, I swung my sword just as Titan unexpectedly threw his head upward. My sword struck him on the right temple. Strang witnessed the accident and

immediately rode over on his own horse, grabbed his riding crop, and began whipping Titan on the rump. Titan responded by charging across the arena, bucking and farting as he went. It was one wild ride, but I managed to stay in the saddle.

Strang roared, “Dumb animal.” He was speaking to me, not the horse.

The Equitation Pass-Out

The graduation exercises for equitation took place several months before the troop’s actual graduation, and my mother and Grandpa McBride attended the ceremony. For the occasion, I was assigned a well-trained Musical Ride horse instead of the unpredictable Titan, and the performance went smoothly—with one exception.

Troop mate Guy Levesque had failed to properly tighten his horse’s bellyband. When Corporal Strang gave the command to mount, the saddle immediately flipped upside down. An embarrassed Guy had to remove the saddle and replace it properly before continuing.

During the parade, the troop stood at attention nose-to-nose with the horses, and several animals began to fidget. After the ceremony ended and the audience had departed, Strang and Superintendent Roy, the officer commanding the training facility, gave us a very clear assessment of our performance. In language that left little doubt about their feelings, they informed us that it had been the worst pass-out parade in recent history.

5 Drill and Discipline

Sergeant Eric Young

Sergeant Eric Young was the troop’s foot drill instructor. One Monday morning, our troop was having considerable difficulty performing the drill movements correctly on the parade square. This frustrated Sergeant Young, and he decided the best way to teach us the importance of paying attention was to run us around the square repeatedly under a cloudless sky.

We were all wearing high boots and breeches, and after about half an hour the entire troop was sweating profusely, with several members close to collapsing. Young finally ordered us to halt, but by then the perspiration had soaked through the tops of our riding boots. Once the boots dried, a white salt residue appeared on the leather, and no amount of polishing could restore their shine.

Young had heard about the equitation pass-out disaster and was determined that our final drill examination would not be remembered for the wrong reasons. He wanted to ensure that our footwork would be precise and our performance flawless.

Inspection-Day Humour

On another occasion, Sergeant Young conducted an inspection of the troop that included his usual brand of humour. As he examined each recruit from head to toe, he made comments designed to test whether he could get anyone to break their composure.

Standing in front of Mike Spurgeon, he remarked, “My God, you look like a dog humped up on a lawn.” He then moved down the line and stopped in front of Pete Jacques.

“And what would that dog be doing, Jacques?” he asked.

Pete’s response was immediate: “Having a crap, Sergeant.”

Young quickly replied, “Don’t be so vulgar. Call it a bowel movement.”

He then moved along the line and stopped in front of me.

“You look like Baby-Face Nelson,” he said. “No, on second thought, you look like Baby-Face Nelson’s son. WAITE - who was Nelson?”

I immediately answered, “An American gangster, Sergeant.”

Until that moment, I had managed not to give him the satisfaction of seeing me smile. Standing rigidly at attention, I began picturing a photograph I carried in my wallet of my childhood sweetheart and her sister dressed in Girl Guide uniforms. In my mind, I could see the badges on their uniforms and even the little black dog standing behind my girlfriend.

Young stared directly into my eyes and said, “WAITE - You look more like a Girl Guide than one of Canada’s finest.”

That was too much. Instead of smiling, I burst out laughing. Young was delighted that he had finally broken my composure and immediately ordered me to drop and complete 25 push-ups.

I have very fond memories of Sergeant Young. Beneath the discipline and the tough exterior was a man who knew how to bring out the best in his recruits while making the experience unforgettable.

6 Self-Defence and Boxing

Three Rounds in the Ring

Corporal Roy was our physical training instructor, and he introduced the troop to the art of self-defence. One day, he asked for two volunteers, but when no one stepped forward, he motioned Dan McKay and me into the centre of the gymnasium. We were each given boxing gloves and told we would go three three-minute rounds.

McKay, nicknamed “Red,” was a featherweight and did not have much experience or confidence when it came to boxing. I landed a few punches early in the round, and during a clinch I quietly told him to back off and just get through the first round. Instead, he planted a fist directly into my eye. Instinctively, I responded with a shot to the chest followed by another to the head. He went down and was in no hurry to get back up.

Since the round had lasted less than twenty seconds, and I was barely winded, Corporal Roy motioned to Alfie MacKeil to put on McKay’s gloves and step into the ring with me.

I quickly discovered that Alfie and I were evenly matched. About halfway through the second round, he caught me with a solid right hand square on the nose. For a moment, everything went black, and I dropped to the canvas. By the time I hit the floor, however, I had regained consciousness, and I sprang back to my feet as if I had bounced off a trampoline.

Anger and pride had replaced common sense. My gloved fists, powered by whatever strength I had left, went searching for Alfie’s head. When the bell rang to signal the end of the second round, Alfie and I continued fighting until Corporal Roy stepped between us and pulled us apart.

During the one-minute rest period, Roy gave me some advice. He explained that Alfie was throwing wide punches and leaving his solar plexus exposed. A well-placed strike there, Roy said, would drop Alfie just as effectively as the punch that had knocked me down.

About ten seconds into the third round, I saw my opportunity. I drove a punch into Alfie’s solar plexus, and just as Roy had predicted, he dropped like a stone onto the canvas.

Unfortunately for me, Alfie also sprang back to his feet and returned to the fight as though nothing had happened. Almost immediately, Corporal Roy jumped between us, blowing his whistle and ordering the fight to stop.

Roy then went on to explain that there were two kinds of fighters. The first type takes a punch, feels the pain, and loses the fight. The second type takes a punch and responds with rage. He classified both MacKeil and me as the second type—the most dangerous kind of fighter.

Lessons for the Street

He explained to the entire troop that a street fighter had to be dealt with quickly and decisively. “Listen up, men,” he said. “If you get into a street fight, you have to make sure your first shot counts. You may not get a second chance, because the most innocent-looking little runt could be a black belt in karate and kick the living daylight out of you in an instant. Never assume anything.”

Roy made one additional point that day. He told us that, under no circumstances, should we ever take our eyes off the eyes of an opponent during a confrontation. “If you cover up after taking a punch and lose eye contact with your opponent,” he warned, “you’ll lose the fight.”

With that, Roy asked a Newfoundlander named Mike Maloney to step forward so he could demonstrate a couple of techniques for quickly taking someone out of a fight. Maloney was one of the least coordinated members of the troop, and he was now understandably nervous. Roy was an imposing physical specimen, and Maloney looked somewhat like a reluctant participant in a demonstration he hoped would end quickly.

Roy reached out to grab him, and Maloney instinctively threw up both hands in an attempt to protect himself. Unfortunately for Roy, two of Maloney’s outstretched fingers caught him directly in both eyes, leaving him temporarily blinded.

Maloney immediately retreated behind several of his troop mates, apologizing profusely while attempting to make himself invisible. Corporal Roy took the mishap in good humour and, with a wry smile, simply remarked, “See what I mean.”

Police Control Techniques

Over the next several months, Corporal Roy taught us a variety of police control techniques.

One involved applying an arm lock from behind, positioning the inside of the forearm against the subject’s chin. Roy explained that only a small amount of pressure on the chin could pinch a nerve and render a person unconscious long enough to be safely handcuffed.

Another street-fighting manoeuvre involved driving your knuckles into the knuckles of an assailant who had come up from behind and placed you in a bear hug. This caused considerable pain to the attacker’s hands, forcing him to loosen his grip and leaving his hands too sore to continue fighting effectively.

When a street fight got down and dirty on the ground, another technique was to gain control of the opponent’s elbow, bend the wrist inward, and apply pressure. The person had two choices: give up or risk ending up with a broken wrist.

Sergeant Leach and the Golden Gloves Champion

While Corporal Roy was our physical training instructor, Sergeant Bill Leach instructed the more senior troops. On several occasions, our troop had the misfortune of having Leach take over one of our gymnasium periods. Roy was tough but fair; Leach, however, had a reputation for being far less forgiving.

One day, after putting us through a gruelling half hour of exercises, Leach gathered us together for a lesson in wrestling. We sat cross-legged in a semicircle in front of him as he delivered his words of wisdom about surviving encounters on the street.

At the end of his lecture, he called upon Benny Rae Fyfe to step forward and pretend he was armed with a knife. Benny Rae made a cautious lunging motion, and Leach immediately grabbed his arm and threw him hard onto the canvas. Benny Rae slowly got back to his feet, only to have Leach call him a wimp.

It was obvious to everyone that Benny Rae had landed badly and was in considerable pain, but Leach showed no sympathy. He instructed him to try again, this time making a more convincing attempt to appear like a knife-wielding attacker.

“A woman could save herself from the likes of you,” Leach remarked.

Benny Rae came at him again, only to be driven into the canvas even harder than before.

A few weeks later, our troop again had Leach for physical training, and once more he singled out Benny Rae. This time, however, he decided to teach him how to box.

As Benny put on the gloves, Leach told him to be aggressive and fight as though his life depended on the outcome. Benny Rae simply replied that he would try.

About fifteen seconds into the first round, Benny Rae landed a left-right combination that sent Leach staggering halfway across the gymnasium. He immediately followed after him, and when he caught up, delivered another dose of “Fyfe medicine” that put Leach on the floor.

When Leach finally got back to his feet, he removed his gloves, looked at Benny Rae, and said, “You sure as hell can’t wrestle, but where did you learn how to box?”

Benny Rae explained that he had won the Golden Gloves Championship for the Province of Alberta shortly before joining the Force.

On that particular day, everyone in the gymnasium was cheering for the underdog.

Pranks and Consequences

Sometimes we would indulge in childish pranks and practical jokes on one another. One evening, Mike Spurgeon, the tallest member of our troop, and I were alone in the lecture hall studying for important examinations. The room was warm, and Mike removed his jacket and hung it over the back of a chair.

I decided to play a prank before we left. I took his jacket, draped it over my left arm, and marched back to the barracks. Later, when Mike attempted to return to the dormitory improperly dressed, he was stopped by an instructor and received a severe reprimand.

Mike did not return to the dormitory until after lights out. I was already asleep when he reached over, pulled me out from under the blankets, and put me in a stranglehold. He was furious. He squeezed with all his strength, and I could feel myself beginning to lose consciousness.

As a last resort, I grabbed him by the nuts. I squeezed with all my might, and after several seconds, Mike released his hold. The next morning, he was unable to get out of bed and was placed on sick parade.

7 Revolver and Rifle Training

Learning the Revolver

Corporal Jack Hart was responsible for small arms training and rifle training. During the first month or two, recruits practised with .22-calibre revolvers before graduating to the larger .38-calibre weapons. Hart taught us to take our time, aim carefully, and gently squeeze off each round.

Using a revolver for the first time, I managed to surprise myself by failing to hit the target even once. Hart scratched his head and asked if I was blind. I explained that I had hunted most of my life and considered myself a good shot with a rifle.

He suggested that I forget everything he had just taught us and simply fire when I was ready. The next time I stepped onto the firing line, I fired all five rounds before most members had even taken their second shot. I hit the target with every round, going from the worst shooter in the troop to one of the better shots in a matter of five minutes.

The Ottawa Range

When we moved on to the .38 Smith & Wesson revolvers and high-powered rifles, the troop was transported to a shooting range in downtown Ottawa. One day, half of the troop was on the firing line while the other half waited in an adjacent room, where they passed the time practising police holds.

I climbed onto a chair and placed my forearm against Mike Spurgeon's chin to demonstrate one of the techniques we had been taught. Mike instinctively grabbed my forearm with both hands. Without thinking, I applied pressure to his chin, and the 6-foot-2 Spurgeon suddenly collapsed backward into the chair, breaking its support and sending the four legs outward.

I jumped clear. Mike regained consciousness within seconds and was understandably furious, but by that time Corporal Hart had returned to the room.

8 Swimming and Lessons Beyond the Barracks

Learning to Swim

The training division did not have a swimming pool, so recruits were bused to an army barracks about two miles away for swimming instruction. No distinction was ever made between swimmers and non-swimmers. Everyone entered the pool, and the non-swimmers quickly learned to swim rather than risk drowning.

One of the most difficult exercises involved treading water while keeping both hands on the hips and using only a circular kicking motion to remain afloat. Any recruit who removed his hands from his hips for any reason was immediately rewarded with a rap on the head from Sergeant Leach's bamboo stick.

The Red Cross Examination

The swimming training culminated with a Red Cross examination that included two particularly difficult exercises. The first required us to jump into the pool fully clothed, remove our boots, and then dive to the bottom to retrieve an iron weight. The second involved using the frog kick to carry a fellow recruit, pretending to be unconscious, the length of the pool.

I drew Mike Spurgeon as my "victim," and he found a way to get his revenge. He allowed his body to become completely limp and then deliberately positioned himself vertically in the water. Despite my best efforts with the frog kick, I could not move the two of us forward. I was simply treading water, and no matter how hard I kicked, we remained in the same place.

Finally, I jabbed him in the back with my knuckles and forced him into a horizontal position on the surface. I resumed the frog kick, using my knee to prompt him whenever he tried to return to a vertical position. Eventually, I managed to get him to the opposite end of the pool and onto the deck. By the time I climbed out of the water, I collapsed onto the deck completely exhausted. Spurgeon had successfully paid me back.

A Demonstration in Renfrew

On November 6, 1964, I was granted permission to return to Renfrew to take part in my Grade 13 graduation exercises. Several of my high school friends were eager to hear about life in the Force, and some were particularly interested in whether I had learned anything about self-defence.

One of them was Brian Wainman. He and I had gone through high school together and had been two of the original founders of Key Club, an organization sponsored by Kiwanis International. He asked me to demonstrate something I had learned about fighting. I agreed and struck him in the solar plexus with the fingers of my right hand. To my surprise, Brian immediately collapsed to the ground.

Trouble After the Dances

One Saturday night, I attended a dance at the Ottawa YMCA and asked a very attractive young woman to dance. During our conversation, she confided that three Italian boys had been bothering her throughout the evening and asked if I would walk her back to her apartment, which was only a short distance from the dance hall.

As we left, I soon realized that we were being followed. I escorted her up three flights of stairs to her suite. Somehow, the three young men managed to enter the apartment building and followed us up. I stood in the doorway and asked her to call a taxi.

When the taxi arrived at the entrance, I realized I had to make a quick exit if I was going to get back to the barracks before curfew. Unfortunately, the three men were waiting for me. I slammed the door on one man's fingers, kicked another in the groin, and, while going down the stairs, tripped the third. At the same time, I placed my hand behind his head and forced it toward the floor.

The taxi carried me safely back to the barracks. I lay awake for much of the night expecting to be called upon to provide a statement about the incident. I was certain that at least one, if not all three, of the men would have ended up in the hospital. However, I never heard another word about it.

Another Saturday night, several members of Troop 3 decided to take two taxis across the river to attend a dance in Hull, Quebec. We were outside our area, and we were clearly outnumbered by the many local men attending the dance.

Around 10:30 p.m., a fight broke out and quickly turned into a full-scale brawl. Before long, our group was fighting its way toward the exit. The Quebecois locals chose chairs as their weapons, and we "skinheads" responded by using tables held over our backs as shields.

Troop mate Al Decker took a fist to the eye, which resulted in some uncomfortable questions from our superiors the following morning when everyone lined up for the parade. Rumours later circulated that, a few weeks afterward, members of the Musical Ride had visited the same dance hall armed with riding crops and had thoroughly dealt with the local troublemakers.

9 Driver Training and Graduation

Rules of the Road

Our troop began driver training on November 28, 1964, under the instruction of Corporal Jim Smith and Senior Constable J. S. D. Saville. Saville, a French Canadian, was an uncompromising stickler for the rules and expected every instruction to be followed to the letter. Even members attempting a simple parallel parking exercise often found themselves on the receiving end of a stern reprimand.

Dog-and-Rabbit Pursuit

After several months of driving through Ottawa on the Queen's Highway, the two instructors decided Troop 3 was ready for the final phase of training. We began practising "dog and rabbit" pursuit manoeuvres on a straight, abandoned stretch of highway about fifteen miles east of Ottawa.

Constable Saville taught us how to overtake a speeding motorist by pulling alongside and, with a very authoritative point of the right hand, directing the driver to pull over onto the shoulder of the highway. I was assigned as the driver of the "dog," or police pursuit vehicle, while Red McKay drove the "rabbit," or suspect vehicle.

The exercise began with the rabbit vehicle taking off at a high rate of speed, with me in pursuit. Within moments, both vehicles had accelerated to speeds exceeding 80 miles per hour. Saville sat in the passenger seat beside me, while three troop mates occupied the back seat.

It was winter, and the road was covered with ice and snow. I hesitated to move into the oncoming lane to pull alongside the suspect vehicle and deliver the authoritative signal for the driver to stop. Saville made a comment about me being out for a leisurely afternoon drive rather than involved in a police pursuit.

When I checked the rear-view mirror, I saw troop mate Alfie MacKeil grinning like a Cheshire cat. I decided it was time to put the pedal to the metal and complete the manoeuvre.

I quickly caught up to McKay and gave him the signal to pull over. Instead of slowing down, he accelerated. I increased my speed and instinctively began forcing the vehicle and its four occupants toward the shoulder of the road. Rather than stop, Red lost control and slid off the highway into a deep, snow-filled ditch.

The cruiser came to an abrupt stop, but fortunately sustained only superficial damage, and none of the occupants of either vehicle were injured. The remainder of the afternoon was spent watching a tow truck pull the vehicle from the ditch and return it to the highway.

The accident was never reported. Once the vehicle was back in the garage, an abrasive car polish was used to remove the scratches before the car was returned to service and driven through the slushy streets of Ottawa to further conceal the evidence.

It was my first introduction to a police cover-up.

A Family Encounter

At the end of January, Pete Jacques and I rented a car and drove to Renfrew so I could give Dad the down payment toward the purchase of a 1965 Rambler Classic 770 two-door hardtop. After our visit, we decided to continue on to Foresters Falls to visit some of my relatives.

We were driving along the Queen’s Line when, suddenly, a Jaguar passed us at a high rate of speed. Pete remarked that he was looking forward to becoming a full-fledged member so he could chase down speeders. No sooner had he said this than the driver of the Jaguar slammed on the brakes, forcing Pete to brake hard to avoid a rear-end collision.

The Jaguar stopped dead in front of us, and the two occupants jumped out and ran back toward our car. I immediately recognized them and shouted, “That’s my Uncle John and Cousin Reid!”

Instead of greeting us warmly, John, my dad’s younger brother, grabbed hold of me, while Reid, Uncle Orin’s only son, grabbed Pete. They hauled us out of the car, but it did not take long before Pete and I had both men pinned to the ground.

John then explained that he had recognized me sitting in the driver seat and had yelled at Reid to stop the car. Once the confusion had settled, I introduced Pete to my relatives.

Loss, a New Car, and Graduation

On February 27, the members of my troop dressed in full ceremonial uniform—boots, breeches, and red serge—for a portrait session mounted on one of the Musical Ride horses. As I was leaving the barracks that morning, I heard a radio broadcast reporting that two young men from Renfrew had been involved in a fatal automobile accident.

My high school friends David Troche and Brian Wainman had driven through an intersection where a stop sign had been knocked down by a snowplow. Their vehicle struck another car broadside, and Brian was killed instantly. Both of their girlfriends also died. David survived.

On March 3, Mom and Dad delivered my new powder-blue-and-teal Rambler 77 Classic hardtop convertible to the barracks. It featured reclining "Pulmonizer" seats that folded flat to form a bed. Dad had loaned me the balance of the purchase price and bought the car on my behalf from Armitage Motors in Renfrew.

Troop 3 graduated on March 15, and I was posted to the New Westminster Sub-Division in British Columbia. It was not the entirely happy occasion one might have expected. The day before graduation, the troop learned that five members had failed to meet the required standards and were to be discharged immediately from the Force. Our troop graduated with only 27 members.

Held Back at Headquarters

Unlike the other members of my troop, I was not immediately posted to a detachment. Instead, I was assigned to the orderly room at Headquarters Division, where I performed clerical duties. I was also required to complete additional driver training with Constable Saville.

The reason for my being held back had less to do with my driving ability than with personality differences. A few days later, Saville charged me with conduct unbecoming a member, giving me the dubious distinction of being the only member of my troop to face a court-martial.

10 The Court-Martial

The Charge

The charge against me read:

“Regimental No. 23661, 3/Cst. Waite, D. E., of ‘N’ Division, having committed an offence in that he, at Ottawa, Ontario, on March 19, 1965, did violate the provisions of Commissioner’s Standing Orders 1156(17) by resorting to the use of improper language while undergoing driving training instructions, contrary to Section 26 of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act.”

The Parallel-Parking Incident

The incident occurred on a steep incline not far from Parliament Hill. I had been instructed to stop and perform a parallel park. The manoeuvre required me to first stop beside a vehicle ahead of the parking space and then back into the vacant spot. I completed the exercise without incident.

Saville then instructed me to leave the parking space. I was having difficulty coordinating my left foot on the brake pedal and my left foot on the clutch while shifting into gear. The challenge was to apply the gas pedal while gradually releasing the brake and moving back into the traffic lane. It was not as simple as it sounds.

Saville began shouting instructions at me to shift into low gear and get moving. Frustrated and under pressure, I blurted out, “Jesus Christ, I can’t get this thing into gear.”

It was those two words—“Jesus Christ”—that landed me in more trouble than I ever imagined possible. For years afterward, I blamed the outburst on subconsciously repeating my father’s familiar “Jesus, Jesus, German-hearted Christ” expressions, which had become part of the colourful language of my childhood.

Before Superintendent Roy

The court proceedings were swift. On March 26, two members of the Musical Ride escorted me before Superintendent J. R. Roy, the commanding officer of the training depot. Sergeant R. G. Moffat, who had volunteered to prosecute the case, formally removed my spurs and Sam Browne belt. I was terrified.

I stood at attention as Saville entered the room and marched directly in front of the desk where Superintendent Roy was seated. Saville was wearing his Stetson. Roy looked up and instructed him to remove his hat.

Saville should have first gone from the position of attention to standing at ease before removing his headgear. Instead, he remained rigidly at attention, removed his Stetson, and attempted to toss it onto a nearby chair. He missed. The hat rolled across the floor, circling the room for what seemed like an eternity before finally coming to rest.

Roy was clearly annoyed. He instructed Saville to retrieve his hat and place it on the desk.

Perspiring heavily, Saville had been giving his testimony for about a minute when one of my escorts suddenly fainted and collapsed onto the floor. Despite the drama surrounding the proceedings, I managed to escape with only a reprimand.

When the hearing concluded, Superintendent Roy asked everyone to leave the room except me. He then gave me a fatherly dressing-down, ending with words I never forgot: no policeman worth his salt ever completed a career without facing at least a couple of court-martials.



Royal Canadian Mounted Police Troop No. 3

“N” Division Ottawa, Ontario - From 13 July 1964 to 15 March 1965.

Back Row: 3/Csts. Norm A. Degirolamo, L. Dan Hickey, Larry R. Ball; Ernie E. Best, Mike K. Spurgeon, F.D.F. “Pete” Von Hausen, Hans R. Burki, S. Mike Showers, Ray P. Haslam, Robert W. Mow.

Middle Row: 3/Csts. Ray A. Forgeron, Al K. Decker, P. Paul Cote, Don G. Fraser, Pete A. Jacques, Dan J.H. McKay, Hugh A. Hammond, Van A. Close, Alfie Mackeil, Bernie F. Cooper.

Front Row: 3/Csts. Don E. Waite, Guy P. Levesque, Wayne N. Tremble, Sergeant Major H.M. Gilbey, Superintendent Josph Romeau Roy, Commanding Officer “N” Division; 3/Csts. Al E. Nicholson, Benny Rae Fyfe, Larry A. Hunter, Grant D. Gulkiwich.