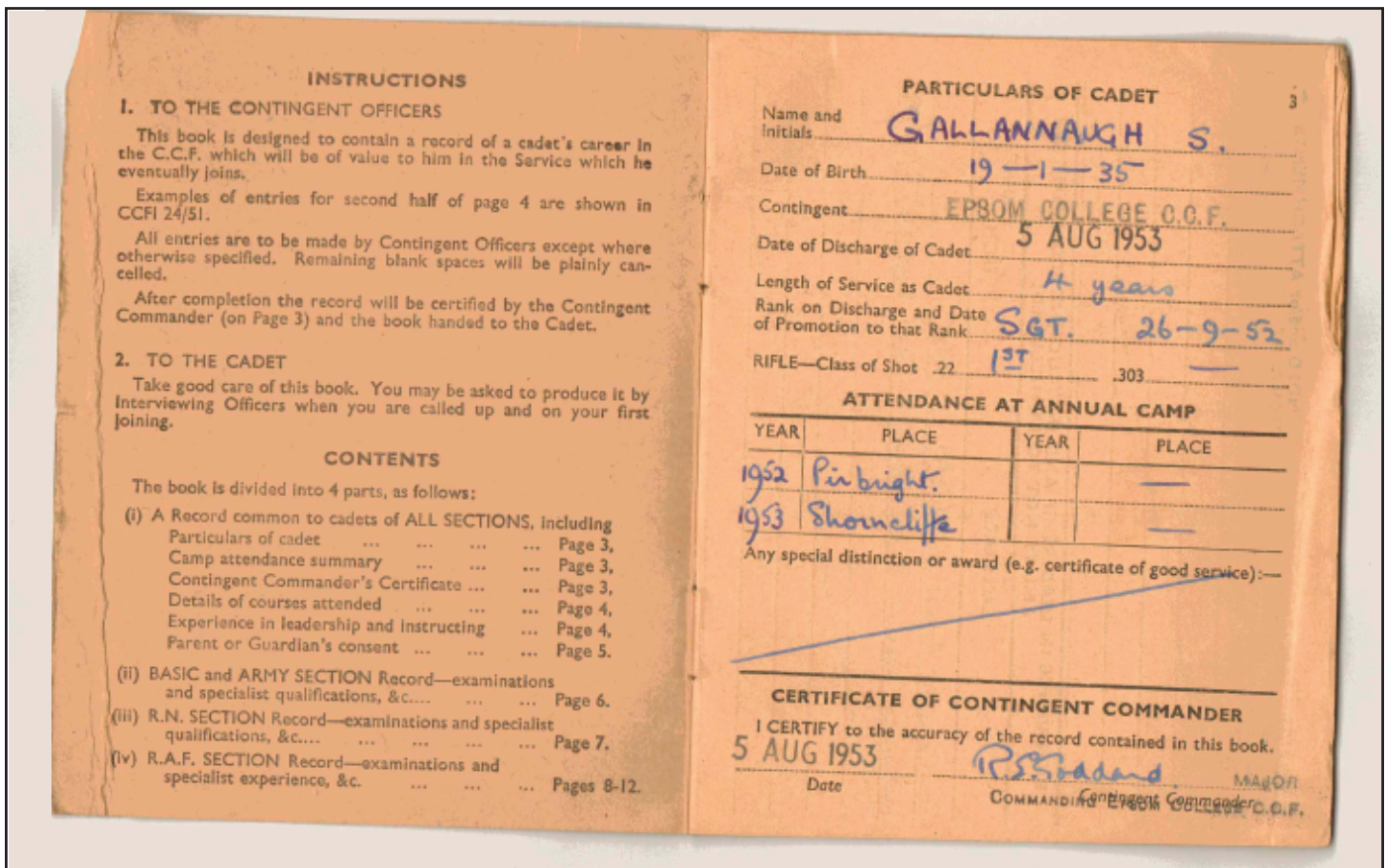
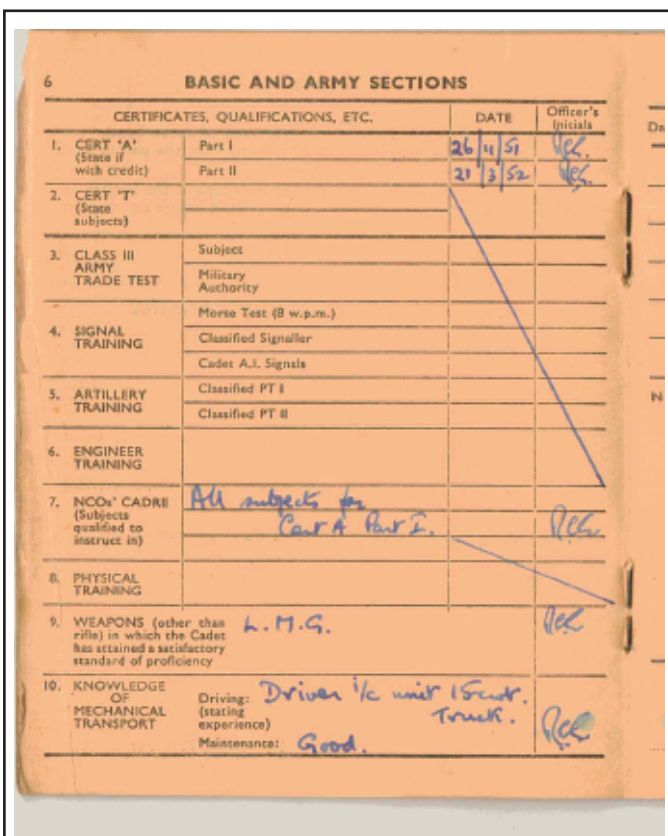


Adventures with the Corps truck

Charles Gallannaugh (Fayrer 1949-53) drives down memory lane



Charles Gallannaugh's 'Attendance at annual camp' card (above) and praise for his vehicle maintenance skills at the bottom of the card (below). The cards were signed by Rex Goddard, the Commanding Officer



I took over as driver of the Corps lorry in 1952, as I recall from Peter Bagnall-Oakeley of Granville when he left the College. He may well have been its first driver.

The lorry was, if my memory still serves me correctly, a Morris GS 15 cwt vehicle known as the CS8 model, although there were a number of different versions used as a general work horse by the British Army in the period during and around the Second World War, some made by Bedford. There were rumours that it had been through the Western Desert and some of its quirks did suggest that the Afrika Corps might have taken a pot shot at it.

It had an Autovac system which sucked petrol from the petrol tank and then

delivered it to the carburettor, rather than a mechanical pump, and the gearbox was a crash box requiring the driver to double de-clutch when moving up or down through the gears. A spectacular noise was created if one misjudged the engine revolutions when changing gear.

One of its more exciting characteristics was for the engine to run backwards when it was switched off, probably because the engine needed a de-coke, finally stopping with a very loud backfire. I always kept the engine running if stopping anywhere near Henry Franklin's study.

One of my first duties was to take it to the annual corps camp at Pirbright in 1952. I was a member of the advance party, the others being Conway Allen and John Townshend from Fayrer and Simon Whitaker from Propert. We reported to RSM [Regimental Sergeant Major] Langridge, 'Stripey' to us, who was then in charge of the Armoury, and loaded up with boxes of ammunition for use on the shooting ranges, rifles, bren guns and thunderflashes, which Alan Parker particularly enjoyed lobbing into trenches to wake up dozy cadets during night ops.

We then set off for Pirbright, the RSM apparently intending to follow us a little later on his motorcycle. The idea that such an arsenal should be entrusted to four young cadets seems quite extraordinary today but those were happier times.

Our route took us through the outskirts of Guildford and, as we approached the town, Simon mentioned that we would be passing very near his home. His mother he felt sure would provide a cup of tea and almost certainly cake and biscuits. Our spirits soared as we arrived at the house and I pulled over and parked on the verge. Someone mentioned something about a

need for security and said he had read about Irish republicans, but it was generally agreed that the Irish were mainly to be found near Liverpool and if we pulled down the canvas cover at the back of the lorry to hide the contents nobody would see what was inside. Tea and cakes were growing increasingly attractive.

Fortified by a splendid tea provided by Mrs Whitaker we returned to our duties and set off once more. On arrival at the camp we drove to the Epsom lines as instructed to find, slightly to our surprise, that 'Stripey' was waiting for us, having passed the parked lorry on his way. His appearance suggested trouble and when we were asked: "Was yer mother in when you got 'ome?" we realised we had been rumbled.

A short lecture followed as we stood in front of him using words common in the Army at that time but very different from those which Bernard Wallis, then Head of English at the College, had done his best to teach us. Nevertheless we got the message that it was clearly a matter of chance that we had not started World War 3 or a new Irish insurrection, but now that we had been good enough to finally arrive we could get stuck into what he called "some hard graft".

Relieved that we were not facing an immediate Court Martial we jumped into the lorry again and drove down to the Quartermaster's Stores, driving merrily in through the large doors ready to start loading what we understood were straw-filled mattresses for transport back to the tents shortly to be occupied by the rest of the Epsom contingent. As I got down from the driving cab I saw that a Quartermaster Sergeant of the Grenadier Guards was approaching and his countenance suggested that he was not at ease. I got

the distinct feeling he was not entirely happy. Indeed his attitude, or what would be described nowadays as body language, did not radiate happiness in any form. Happiness can be a difficult emotion to assess in a Sergeant Major of the Guards, as I discovered a little later at Mons Officer Cadet School during National Service, but even this young school lad could see this one was miffed.

As he glared down at me, and I was over six feet tall, I got the impression that he had assumed a posture which he might have done a few years before had he lifted a stone in the Ardennes and found an unfortunate soldier of the Wehrmacht beneath it. His moustache bristling, he informed me that I “could take that overgrown lawn mower out of my stores and reverse it up to the doors for loading as YOU BLOODY WELL SHOULD HAVE DONE IN THE FIRST PLACE”! The Epsom Corps lorry was then turned round more quickly than it had probably ever been in its history before or since. We spent the next few hours stuffing straw into paliasses, a depressing activity, before transporting them back to the College lines.

I was to renew contact with the Quartermaster again under somewhat different circumstances shortly afterwards. Somewhere around midnight a day or two later the flap of our tent was opened and a figure peered in asking if the driver of the lorry was inside. On identifying myself I was told that ‘Stripey’ required me to take the lorry to the Sergeants Mess as ‘Arry needed a lift. I was to be as quiet as possible, a ludicrous concept in the context of the corps lorry, as the arrangement was not strictly official.

Con Allen and I got dressed and set off with our guide. As we approached the

Mess the strains of ‘I’ll take you home again Kathleen’ rose into the night air, accompanied by a tinny piano sadly in need of a tuner, together with sounds of general merriment. After a short wait two figures emerged through the gloom, one of whom we saw was Stripey supporting ‘Arry, who turned out to be our acquaintance from the stores. Who was supporting who was not entirely clear. When ‘Arry’s bicycle on which he had arrived earlier, and which was clearly an unsuitable form of transport for his return journey, had been loaded into the lorry he was helped onto the tailboard on which he insisted on sitting.

We set off with our guide towards the married quarters with instructions that we should pull up a little way away from the Quartermaster’s house as his wife might not be too happy if disturbed.

When we arrived we jumped down only to find there was no sign of our passenger on the tailboard. “My gawd he’s fallen ‘orf,” said our friendly guide, thus displaying his soldier’s training which enabled him to make a quick assessment of a situation in times of crisis. Assuming he had dropped off on the way, we placed his bicycle against the gate and retraced our route. As there was no sign of ‘Arry, our guide suggested it was best to leave him to sleep it off wherever he was, presumably in a nearby garden, and clearly anxious to avoid a confrontation with his irascible chief, he then faded into the night leaving us to return to the Epsom lines.

Later enquiries from ‘Stripey’ were reassuring and the Quartermaster’s Stores were seen to be open as usual the next day.

Normal duties were somewhat more mundane and as far as military activity was concerned involved transporting tea urns

and items of equipment on Field days and then following the marching cadets home to pick up stragglers. On one such occasion the accelerator pedal fell off and I had to drive using the hand throttle – an interesting experience with a crash gearbox. Fortunately Mr Malett, the splendid technician in the physics laboratory, was able to braze the bits together again when I presented him with the pedal. He helped me on a number of occasions to keep the lorry on the road.

During the Easter holidays in 1953 I took the lorry home to carry out some essential maintenance, such as oiling and greasing, and installing a replacement for the oil gauge which was faulty. Clearly this duty was carried out satisfactorily as the Commanding Officer, Major Rex Goddard, was kind enough to report in the appropriate section of my CCF record that my standard of maintenance of the 15 cwt lorry was good!

I managed to time this activity so that on returning to the College at the beginning of

the summer term I arrived in the Corps lorry with my trunk and tuck box in the back, somewhat to the surprise of some new boys and their parents who were saying their goodbyes at the entrance to Newsom Building as I arrived.

My last trip was again with the advance party to camp at Shorncliffe, near Folkestone, which in 1953 was run by the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. I do not recall any incidents similar to those experienced at Pirbright, although rain seems to have been a more prominent feature at Shorncliffe.

In due course I drove a load of equipment back to the College and then for the last time drove down to the sheds next to the cricket pavilion to park, sheds which I noted recently are still there to this day. There with some sadness I took leave of my faithful steed, hoping that a successor would be found who would continue to look after her in the future and add more history to what, if it still exists, would now be a valuable classic vehicle.
