

## **The Adventurous Cadet: Romanticism and Adventure in the Cadet Corps of the Private Schools of Sydney, 1901-1914 \***

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ABSTRACT: The Federation of Australia in 1901 saw a resurgence in cadet corps activities throughout the private schools of Sydney. The new nation needed to address national defence issues, and so, within these schools, cadet corps began preparing boys for their future as commanders of the armed forces of the nation. The aim was to instil in boys the values of the military: self-sacrifice, discipline and responsibility. Cadets wore military uniforms, carried working rifles, and were subject to strict rules and discipline. But in order to entice boys into the ranks of the cadets (and keep them there), instructors and officers also presented exciting, romantic and adventurous images of war and of military service. Boys enjoyed cadet camps, skirmishes and running around the bush with mates after dark. They could compete in cadet activities, much like other school sports at the time, and win substantial cash prizes.

This paper explores the presence of these adventurous themes in the reporting of the activities of the cadet corps of the private schools of Sydney from 1901 to 1914, and considers how cadets were encouraged by this reporting to believe that the military was fun, and that war was an adventure.

### *Introduction*

The Federation of Australia in 1901 ushered in a new environment of national defence anxiety amongst the new-nation's middle-class citizens.<sup>1</sup> The drive to Federation itself had partly been fuelled by colonial concerns regarding defence,<sup>2</sup> and, in the new century, the newly federated states sought to work together to allay their combined concerns. But government policies were only one of the many ways the middle-class were preparing the nation. Within the education system, middle-class private schools became a key instrument in preparing middle-class children for their future as leaders of the nation in politics,

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<sup>1</sup> R. White, *Inventing Australia* (Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1987), 114.

<sup>2</sup> E.M. Andrews, *The Anzac Illusion* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 16.

business, and, of course, in the military.<sup>3</sup> Within those schools, the cadet corps were utilized to instill middle-class values into boys—discipline, self-sacrifice, and responsibility. At the same time, the militaristic environment of the corps imbued boys with military ideals.

In order to understand this process, this paper will provide a case-study focus on the private schools of Sydney during the 1900s and 1910s, and explore the ways in which the cadet corps of those schools combined romanticism and adventure in the *reporting* of cadet activities in order to attract students to the corps, and imbue them with romantic, adventurous and glorious illusions of warfare. Although cadet corps also existed in public schools during this period, their counterparts in private schools held a more elite status and had higher ambitions for cadets, and, as such, are the primary focus of this paper.

The cadet movement in Australia has a long history of progress and setbacks, and the diversity of various cadet corps throughout different regions of Australia, at different times, has made detailed analysis difficult. Craig Stockings's *The Torch and the Sword* remains a seminal work in the field due to its broad focus on the general cadet movement in Australia.<sup>4</sup> But beyond this, most scholarly works focus either on a specific cadet corps, specific location or region, specific theme, or on a specific period.<sup>5</sup> This paper follows this trend by focusing on the cadet corps of the private schools of Sydney, during the period from Federation in 1901, through to the start of the First World War in 1914. It will build upon previous studies by focusing specifically on those themes of adventure and romanticism in the reporting of cadet activities. Whilst those themes have been touched upon in previous studies, they have not yet been subject to dedicated and focused scrutiny. In the coming years, two key events, the sesquicentenary of the cadet movement in Australia (1866 to 2016), and the centenary of the First World War (1914-1918 to 2014-2018) will encourage Australians to reflect on the links between these spheres.

Thus, this is a timely opportunity to reflect back on the nature of cadet corps activities in the years preceding the First World War in order to understand some of the ways in which cadet activities, and the reporting

<sup>3</sup> D. McCallum, *The Social Production of Merit: Education, Psychology and Politics in Australia 1900-1950* (Hampshire: The Falmer Press, 1990); M. Crotty, *Making The Australian Male: Middle-Class Masculinity 1870-1920* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> C.A.J. Stockings, *The Torch and the Sword: A History of the Army Cadet Movement in Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> For several key examples focusing on this period see Crotty, *Making the Australian Male*; Thomas W. Tanner, *Compulsory Citizen Soldiers* (Sydney: Alternative Publishing Co-Operative, 1980); David Jones, 'The Military Use Of Australian State Schools: 1872-1914'. Ph.D. Thesis, La Trobe University, 1991; John Barrett, *Falling In: Australians and 'Boy Conscription', 1911-1915* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1979).

of those activities, helped shape the outlook of those who went away to war from 1914 to 1918.

### *Background*

The cadet corps had been active in some of the private schools of Sydney since the 1860s, being originally modelled on the cadet systems within the Great Public School system of Great Britain. The economic woes of the 1890s saw a decline in cadet activities in Australia (corresponding with a general decline in enrolments in private schools during this period) and as a result of that decline a number of cadet corps ceased to exist altogether. At St. Joseph's College for example the cadet corps formed in 1890 and originally numbering about 120 cadets had, by the early 1900s, ceased to exist, without any record or mention of their disbandment. Similarly, at Sydney Grammar School economic concerns and a lack of interest in the cadets forced their disbandment in 1893.<sup>6</sup>

However, the Federation of the colonies in 1901 and the subsequent growth in concern over the nation's defence turned that situation around. Issues of national defence were the primary driving force in this renewed interest, and the schools quickly caught on and sought to assist where Australia and the British Empire needed them. As early as 1900 Sydney Grammar School authorities were proposing the resuscitation of their cadet corps following the rise in military spirit due to the Boer War.<sup>7</sup> The subsequent growth in both national and imperial defence-consciousness over the following years resulted in 100 boys forming a petition requesting the formation of a cadet corps in 1907.<sup>8</sup> Within a year, the boys' request was granted. With this type of enthusiasm from boys, the cadet corps increased in strength throughout the private schools of Sydney during the 1900s. Where they had already existed, they now commanded greater prestige, and where a school previously had no cadet corps one was soon formed.

School magazines from this era are a valuable source of information on cadet corps ethos and activities, and they presented the cadet corps as part of the solution to national defence fears. The heavily-edited and school-sanctioned message conveyed within these magazines was that the cadet corps would soon provide strong, disciplined and willing officers in an army if it was needed for the defence of nation and empire. However, historians must be cautious in the conclusions they draw from this material. These magazines were designed to encourage enthusiasm for school activities, including the cadet corps, and they generally reported in glowing terms on cadet activities (and on cadet enthusiasm

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<sup>6</sup> *The Sydneian*, March, 1975, 121.

<sup>7</sup> *The Sydneian*, May, 1900, 1.

<sup>8</sup> *The Sydneian*, August 1907, 12.

for these activities), though there are some notable exceptions.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, these magazines are most valuable in that they help us to understand how the schools and the cadet corps officers wanted to be seen by teachers, students, parents and members of the public.

### *Some Sydney Examples*

Across all of the private schools of Sydney, the same basic message was conveyed through these magazines – cadet corps would prepare boys to be the future defenders of their nation and/or empire. Thus, at St. Ignatius College the school magazine, *Our Alma Mater*, reported in 1909, ‘With enthusiasm on the part of the Corps, and attention to details by the officers, both commissioned and non-commissioned, the College will be in possession of a really fine corps of the future defenders of the Commonwealth’.<sup>10</sup> At Newington College, *The Newingtonian* reported of its cadet corps, ‘the question of national defence should outweigh every other consideration, and that no better work can be done than to train our youth for the defence of Home and empire [*sic*]’.<sup>11</sup> At Sydney Grammar School, *The Sydneian* had asked cadets to ‘consider your Corps first. It is your duty as ‘Soldiers of the King’’.<sup>12</sup> At Sydney Church of England Grammar School, *The Torch-Bearer* reported in April, 1908,

Every boy should remember that by becoming an *efficient* cadet he is carrying out a duty which he owes

(1) to his country by rendering himself more capable of fighting in her defence.

(2) to his school by helping to send out a corps that will do her as much credit as cricket and football teams and crews have done in the past.

(3) to himself, by undergoing a training which will benefit him body and soul.<sup>13</sup>

And at the King’s School, the *King’s School Magazine* of March, 1908, reported on the long-term advantages offered by service in the cadet

<sup>9</sup> See for example descriptions of cadet camps in *The Sydneian*, March 1909, 5 and *The Torch-Bearer*, April 1909, 121, as noted below.

<sup>10</sup> *Our Alma Mater*, *Midwinter 1909*, 118.

<sup>11</sup> *The Newingtonian*, December 1907, 375.

<sup>12</sup> *The Sydneian*, December 1909, 19.

<sup>13</sup> *The Torch-Bearer*, April, 1908, 90. *The Torch-Bearer* uses the double synonym that the cadet corps were both like a sporting team, and a military unit. This supports the argument of Dale Blair that sport, particularly team sports such as football, and war presented and promoted in similar ways. Sport assisted in the creation of the ideal man, and one best suited for military training, as it enhanced values of ‘loyalty, courage, self-discipline, and teamwork’ that would be required in war. See D. Blair, ‘Beyond the Metaphor: Football and War, 1914-1918’, *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, 28 (April, 1996).

corps, and the possibilities thus made available to former cadets of their school's corps:

...[they] may now rise to the rank of an officer; and already two of The King's School boys are holding Government Commissions. On leaving school these boys may pass straight into one of the infantry regiments, without having to go through all the preliminary training a second time; and this should have a very stimulating and beneficial effect on the military work in the schools.<sup>14</sup>

There were subtle differences in the representation of these duties, based upon the religious affiliation of the school. As seen in the above quotes, among the Protestant schools, like The King's School or the Sydney Church of England Grammar School (SCOEGS), the empire came first. In those schools the boys were taught about the great victories of the British Empire and were inculcated with a sense of duty to both Australia and the British Empire, and they publicly expressed their imperial patriotism each year through Empire Day celebrations<sup>15</sup>. On the other hand, the Catholic schools, such as St. Joseph's College and St. Ignatius College, put Australia first. Catholic schoolboys expressed their patriotism publicly through Australia Day,<sup>16</sup> and their magazines proudly promoted duty to nation.

### *The Making of the Middle-Class*

A common theme in the reporting of cadet corps activities within school magazines was the moulding of these boys into proud specimens of middle-class manhood. The cadet corps would not only make good soldiers, they would also make decent middle-class men of the boys, curing them, it was claimed, of the slothful habits of modern youth. The school magazine from Newington College, *The Newingtonian*, thus reported in 1911:

In a year's time we shall see a great improvement in the appearance and physique of those who have never hitherto had any instruction in the art of bodily discipline and culture. The slouch and roll so much in vogue amongst a certain class of boys will have disappeared, we hope, and a manlier, firmer walk have taken their place.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Kings School Magazine*, March, 1908, 394.

<sup>15</sup> J. Hollingworth, 'The Call of Empire', PhD Thesis, La Trobe University, 1993, 81; M. McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War* (Melbourne, Thomas Nelson, 1980), 44.

<sup>16</sup> McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War*, 44.

<sup>17</sup> *The Newingtonian*, December, 1911, 171.

Indeed, private school boys were being taught to be the future officers of the army and they were expected to behave as such, whilst, elsewhere, public school boys were being taught to fill the lower ranks as the future soldiers within this army.<sup>18</sup>

In line with this, one of the primary ambitions of the cadet corps instructors was to instill students with a sense of duty and discipline. By teaching boys how to be soldiers, it was believed that they would be both obedient students and more prepared for their future in the defence of Australia and the British Empire. *King's School Magazine* thus asked in December 1913:

‘Why do we commence with the boys?’ The reason is this. A soldier takes some making, and we want to use as little time as possible for the making when he becomes of most use to the community.<sup>19</sup>

This attitude was indeed reflected throughout the private schools of Sydney; boys were seen as objects or ‘instruments’, valuable instruments no doubt, that needed to be trained in order to fight and if necessary die to defend the greater national and imperial interest.

### *Selflessness and Sacrifice*

Given this need to mould boys into soldiers, personal sacrifice was also presented as a key theme in the reporting of cadet activities. From the time a boy put on his cadet uniform to the time he took it off he was treated as part of Australia’s defence force, and no longer simply a student at school. The cadet corps instructors expected the boys to act like soldiers, and, in many regards, staff treated cadets like soldiers. The very structure of the cadet corps itself imitated that of a military unit. Each school cadet corps was organized into a company, attached to a battalion consisting of the collegiate schools of Sydney, and usually led by a military officer, preferably one with some experience of war. Sydney Church of England Grammar School was proud to have a veteran of the Boer War as an instructor in 1908; *The Torch-Bearer* reported,

Sergeant-Major Cooke-Russell is an ex-guardsman and served for several years under Lord Kitchener in Egypt and South Africa, and his thorough knowledge of all things military is of great service to the

<sup>18</sup> Jones, *The Military Use Of Australian State Schools: 1872-1914*, 95.

<sup>19</sup> *Kings School Magazine*, December, 1913, 150. For a scholarly analysis of the targeting of children and youth for the adoption of ideas see J. Väänänen and K. Kiljunen, *Youth and Conscriptio* (Geneva: International Peace Bureau, 1987), 60-62.

officers, while his soldierly bearing is an example which all will do well to emulate.<sup>20</sup>

The Catholic schools showed a similar sense of militaristic enthusiasm. The St. Joseph's College Magazine of March, 1911, reported that their instructor, Sergeant-Major Ross,

has served in India, in Egypt, and 'sought the bubble reputation at the cannon's mouth' in South Africa. The Sergeant by his tales of 'flood (sic) and field' should ignite our military ardour.<sup>21</sup>

### *Presentation: Uniforms, Ceremonial Duties, and Style*

Boys generally wore dark green uniforms with a slouch hat, and at times carried rifles with either blank or live ammunition, depending on their purpose. Some schools used ethnic and cultural traditions and social links in the formation of their cadet corps. The cadets at Scots College, for example, were sponsored by the New South Wales Scottish Rifles (later the 30th Battalion, New South Wales Scottish) and Scots based its uniform on the Rifles. It consisted of a slouch hat with a red hackle and blue and gold puggaree, a serge jacket in the Scottish tradition, and kilts from the early 1900s until all uniforms became regulated under Compulsory Military Training in 1911. As much as was possible, the environment of the cadet corps was designed to reflect that of a military unit, including military cultures and traditions, in the view that this would encourage boys to take their cadet work seriously.

Beyond these appearances, the promotion of the belief that cadets were to be regarded as part of the nation's defence forces can also be seen in their activities and their expected duties. At St. Ignatius College, cadet corps served as a funeral cortège for the funeral of a master, Fr. Patrick Keating, in 1913.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the Newington cadet corps formed a Guard of Honour for the State Governor, Sir Harry Rawson, in 1905.<sup>23</sup> As the Guard of Honour, the Newington College cadet corps' duties were extended when they were required to fix bayonets in order to keep back the crowd from the main door of Sydney Town Hall whilst the Governor was inside.<sup>24</sup>

Whilst it may seem remarkable to have young boys keeping crowds back from the door with rifles with fixed bayonets, in the cadet corps of the 1900s this was expected when the circumstances required; the cadets

<sup>20</sup> *The Torch-Bearer*, October, 1908, 51.

<sup>21</sup> *St. Joseph's College Magazine*, March, 1911, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Photo 'Fr. Patrick Keating's funeral leaving St. Mary's, North Sydney, for Gore Hill Cemetery, 1913', St. Ignatius College Archives.

<sup>23</sup> *The Newingtonian*, March, 1905, 188.

<sup>24</sup> *The Newingtonian*, March, 1905, 188.

were not looked upon as immature boys, but rather as responsible and disciplined soldiers, and they were thus treated accordingly. Great crowds lined Sydney's streets to watch the Sydney private school cadet corps parade on special occasions, and for many youth being seen in uniform was an exciting and memorable experience. The experience of being one of the estimated eighteen thousand cadets who marched past the Governor-General, Lord Denman, on 30 March, 1912, in Centennial Park, Sydney, with parents, teachers, and government and military officials watching attentively, would have been one of great pride.<sup>25</sup>

Militarism was evident in other ways. J. McElhone of St. Joseph's College wrote in the school magazine in March, 1911, 'When we don our uniforms, and are armed with rifles, we shall then commence to take a soldierly pride in ourselves'.<sup>26</sup> In formation on parade, the cadets were required to be in perfect order, buttons polished and shoes shining, as government and military officials inspected them. Boys without complete uniforms were not allowed to attend, as they would reduce the appearance of the company. Orders were given sharply by officers to fix and unfix bayonets, march in precise line, and perform specific manoeuvres, each carried out by the cadets, it was hoped, in perfect unison. Cadet corps throughout the private schools were addressed at various times by, for example, the Inspector-General of the army, the Governor-General of Australia, or by their headmaster, each reminding them of the responsibility they had to their cadet corps, to their school, and to their king and country. They were told that the many hours of drill required of them was teaching them the 'very valuable and necessary lessons of life'.<sup>27</sup> They were told that, to be effective soldiers, they needed to be disciplined, do as they were told by their officers, and respond to orders swiftly. Thus, these cadets were learning not only the attributes of an officer, but of middle-class society in general: respect, presentation, and the acceptance of the rules of society.

Occasionally boys took part in what was believed to be a simulation of actual warfare—a 'skirmish'. Skirmishes usually involved two companies from different schools. The boys would march with rifles and blank ammunition to a specified area where they were then instructed to attack, or defend against, an enemy whose position and numbers were unknown. *Kings School Magazine* gives an effective summary of a skirmish that took place on a combined cadet corps camp in 1909,

Two companies took up a position on a hill near the penitentiary [*sic*], while the remaining six endeavoured to dislodge them. Steadily, and under a pitiless sun, the valiant six threaded their way through scrub,

<sup>25</sup> Naughtin, *A Century of Striving*, p. 142.

<sup>26</sup> *St. Joseph's College Magazine*, March, 1911, 2.

<sup>27</sup> *The Newingtonian*, December, 1911, 171.



and over rocks, until they were sighted by the enemy, who immediately opened fire. Undeterred, they continued to advance, and having reached the base of the hill, prepared for the final rush. Amidst the rattle of musketry, the storming party carried the height, and forced the enemy to retire.<sup>28</sup>

Throughout these skirmishes cadets were issued with orders by their officers and were judged according to how promptly they carried out these orders, by how well they took cover, used ammunition, and attacked or defended the designated position.<sup>29</sup> In the aftermath, instructors and judges taught boys what they were doing wrong, how to correctly manoeuvre, or take cover effectively, as if skirmishes were teaching boys how to handle themselves if war were to come.

Cadet uniforms, activities, instructors and officers, and particularly their school magazines, reinforced the belief that the boys in the cadets were undergoing a form of military training, a training that would be relevant to any future war. *The Sydneian*, for example, reported in August, 1907, that,

Military service demands constant sacrifice from both boys, and parents – sacrifice of playtime, sacrifice of money, sacrifice of anything and everything, apart from school work, in the interest of the corps. The vain puppy who wishes to be a cadet, that he may wear a uniform and paralyze his sisters, must grasp this fact – that *the beginning and end of military service is self-sacrifice* – from the patient preparation in time of peace, to the stray bullet on the battlefield.<sup>30</sup>

The cadet corps were presented as military units undertaking military service, and this reinforced the belief that boys were preparing for the nation's defence. Themes of discipline, self-sacrifice, and responsibility throughout boys' training further reinforced the image of the ideal cadet, and of the ideal soldier. Indeed, cadets were often referred to directly as 'soldiers', and they were described as undertaking the training of soldiers. *The Torch-Bearer* thus reported in 1911 that boys would be 'toughened by a soldier's hard training and learn to bear the pinch of sacrifice and bear it cheerfully'.<sup>31</sup> These references were designed to provide a contrast to their peers who had not joined the cadets, and who were regarded derisively as 'civilians'.<sup>32</sup> The boys who had volunteered as cadets were praised, whilst those who had not were shamed.

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<sup>28</sup> *Kings School Magazine*, March, 1909, 16.

<sup>29</sup> *The Torch-Bearer*, April, 1914, 442.

<sup>30</sup> *The Sydneian*, August, 1907, 12.

<sup>31</sup> *The Torch-Bearer*, April, 1911, 251.

<sup>32</sup> *The Torch-Bearer*, October, 1908, 50.

*Always the Competitive*

To further encourage dedication to and pride in cadet activities, schools used competition as a cornerstone of the cadet corps ethos. Cadet corps competitions were held regularly between schools, and by the 1910s the results were being reported regularly in school magazines directly alongside those of the school rugby and cricket teams. For example, *The Torch-Bearer* March, 1915 edition, published cadet corps news between that of athletics and cricket. Indeed, such was the ethos associated with the cadet during this era that in school magazines their activities were typically reported above those of sporting groups.

In considering the re-establishment of their cadet corps in August, 1907, the Sydney Grammar School magazine, *The Sydneian*, reported,

Any New Cadet Corps must maintain the fine traditions of the old one. It must be the pride of the School – our chief object of out-door interest. All sports must give way to it, rather than that the corps, once formed, should fail.<sup>33</sup>

Battalion ‘sports days’ were held regularly and presented an ideal opportunity for cadets to demonstrate their pride in their corps, and their school. During such ‘sports days’, cadets formed their companies at venues such as the Sydney Cricket Ground and competed in a range of cadet-related events, ranging from simple activities such as tent pitching and tug-of-war up to the more serious and highly competitive events such as shooting, skirmishing and drill.<sup>34</sup> The boys enjoyed these activities as they had the chance to defend the honour of the school and display the results of their training throughout the year.

The next step up from this was defending the honour of their nation through the military – seen as the ‘peak of personal achievement and the epitome of manliness’ at the time.<sup>35</sup> This competitiveness drove cadets to try harder, practice longer, and give more attention to their officers. In addition, victorious cadets were given medals and prizes to reward their military enthusiasm. An Old Boy of Newington College in 1902, for example, ‘offered to present a Winchester repeating rifle to the Newington boy who obtains the highest score in the coming Schools’ Competition match for the Shield’.<sup>36</sup> At one stage in 1909 Sydney Grammar School were even offering prizes of ten shillings, five shillings, and two shillings six pence [a half crown] (10/-, 5/-, and 2/6) for the boys who had the best general turn out on parade.<sup>37</sup> For cadets, being a soldier

<sup>33</sup> *The Sydneian*, August, 1907, 13.

<sup>34</sup> *The Newingtonian*, March, 1913, 292.

<sup>35</sup> Crotty, *Making the Australian Male*, 9.

<sup>36</sup> *The Newingtonian*, December, 1902, 7.

<sup>37</sup> *The Sydneian*, June, 1909, 3.

was fun and exciting. Rifle practice, parades and competition all combined that sense of militarism and adventurous fun, but it was the cadet camps that best combined those themes.

### *Going into Camp*

Cadet camps took on a number of different forms. Some were designed for only a single school corps, generally comprising one or two companies, over two or three days, whilst the more publicized larger battalion camps brought together the cadet corps from a number of private schools around Sydney and lasted up to a full week. Instructors told cadets that camps were the absolute closest a boy could get to experiencing the environment of war, a sentiment echoed in the school magazines. For example, *Kings School Magazine* summarized the goal of cadet camps in March, 1909,

the real practical work that gives a cadet [an idea] of what life is like in actual warfare, can only be had in camps, where everything is done methodically, and with discipline.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, *The Sydneian* reported,

Boys who did not go to camp can have no idea of what a cadet learns in his short four days. The work may be hard, but it is full of interest, and each feels that he is no longer 'playing at soldiers,' but going in for it in real earnest.<sup>39</sup>

Whilst *The Torch-Bearer* likewise reported that camp,

was the real thing, not much to eat or time to eat it. Those who grumbled at the hard fare may get comfort from the fact that it did them good, and that, with a little forethought and experience, they can mitigate the severity of it on the next occasion.<sup>40</sup>

As these entries indicate, reports on cadet activities did not always focus on fun and excitement. School magazines did occasionally report on the uncomfortable and difficult aspects of cadet work. Nonetheless, even these sombre descriptions and the language used to describe these camps reinforced the belief that this was preparation for war. *The Torch-Bearer* thus referred to evenings at camp as 'Peace amid War',<sup>41</sup> whilst the

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<sup>38</sup> *Kings School Magazine*, March, 1909, 16.

<sup>39</sup> *The Sydneian*, March, 1909, 5.

<sup>40</sup> *The Torch-Bearer*, April, 1909, 121.

<sup>41</sup> *The Torch-Bearer*, April, 1914, 444.

above quotes focus upon the ‘real practical work’, ‘real earnest’, and ‘the real thing’.

The notions of heroism, courage and sacrifice were actively practiced during cadet activities. However, whilst the cadet corps had been formed to reproduce the tough and stern environment of the military, and to produce the ideal citizen and soldier, its activities were simultaneously accompanied by a sense of light-hearted adventure and romanticism. Thus, whilst camps were presented as serious military training and ‘the real thing’, they simultaneously presented the military as an adventure. Whilst daytime almost always meant long, tiring and ‘serious’ cadet work, evenings generally meant free-time, campfire concerts, and groups of boys running through the bushes after lights-out. In one report a SCOEGS cadet reported that,

Fistic encounters took place when it grew dark, between chosen men from rival companies, and weird shadows darted to and fro as lighted candles were held up for the benefit of followers of Burns and Johnson.<sup>42</sup>

Colour-Sergeant Parkinson of the Sydney Grammar School cadet corps reported on another cadet camp in a similar vein,

Written in cold black and white there will not appear much fun in unloading blankets and pitching tents, but the good humour and language of the officers supervising—language more forcible than polite—gave a glow of good fellowship and enjoyment; and though the steak was tough and the blankets hadn’t been washed since 1900, we would gladly go back again to-morrow (sic) and shall long preserve the pleasantest recollections of our first camp.<sup>43</sup>

Reports from school magazines suggest that boys generally enjoyed cadet camps, skirmishes, and running around the bush with mates after dark. There was a risk they could be caught by the guards and punished, but this added to the sense of excitement and adventure. As evidenced by their personal reports in school magazines, this, cadets believed, was what war was like, and as Michael McKernan has argued, ‘Naturally war will always excite and stimulate youth’s minds romantically attuned to notions of heroism, courage and sacrifice’.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *The Torch-Bearer*, April, 1909, 124. Tommy Burns and Jack Johnson were two heavyweight boxers from the period.

<sup>43</sup> *The Sydneian*, March, 1909, 8.

<sup>44</sup> McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War*, p. 45.

### *Conclusion*

Throughout the 1900s and 1910s, the resurgent cadet corps of the private schools of Sydney refocused their efforts towards preparing boys to be the future defenders of their new nation. During this period, school magazines sought to attract boys to the cadets by reporting on the sense of duty boys had to defend their new-nation and empire. These militaristic elements, coupled with the tough and stern rhetoric of school magazines, further supported the belief that these boys were preparing for war. Through this reporting, cadet corps openly presented themselves as preparing boys for actual military service, and their activities were, at times, described as close to real warfare. The other attraction for prospective recruits was the sense of romanticism, adventure and competition surrounding cadet corps activities; in short, the cadet corps were presented through school magazines as a fun place to be. Boys competed in militaristic activities such as drill, skirmishing and rifle practice for public pride, and for personal prizes; victory could bring broader public prestige to their corps and their school. The sum of these messages was that military service and warfare was tough and dangerous, but it was also romantic, glorious, adventurous, exciting, and fun. The cadet corps of the private schools of Sydney thus helped foster certain beliefs amongst those middle-class boys.

This paper has focused on a small number of schools in Sydney in the years prior to the First World War. Given this limited focus, we must be cautious in the broader conclusions drawn from this analysis. The private school cadet movement made up only a small part of the larger state-based cadet movements that operated throughout Australia during much of this period. The introduction of Compulsory Military Training in Australia from 1911 to 1915 also subtly changed the nature of cadet activities in Sydney's private schools. There are other factors that need to be explored in more detail, but space has limited their attention within this paper. These include the role of staff and teachers in determining cadet activities; the differences between junior and senior cadet activities; and regional and state differences in cadet corps activities. Clearly, this is still an area that requires greater scholarly attention. Cadets were one part of that broader culture in Australia during the 1900s and 1910s that fostered an adventurous and exiting view of military service, and of war. These were views and beliefs that these children would carry with them out of school, as Old Boys, and into the Australian Imperial Force during the First World War.

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*Cadets at Glen Innes, NSW, Public School, 1911-1912. Courtesy of Australian War Memorial.*

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