

[1907]  
well. He gives you parameters to work with in the task.

Mr. Specht: How would he know himself exactly what the task is, though?

Dr. Ranta: I think this is part of the administrative responsibility of knowing at least what the task ought to achieve. If the administrator isn't able to break down the task to a point where he can define the jobs that need to be done, well then he isn't a very good administrator!

Mr. Specht: With the C.O.T.C. expanding vastly during the war and all kinds of new problems and tasks coming up....how did he manage to keep it all in hand?

Dr. Ranta: I think that certainly he was, as we all were, much assisted by the professional people that we had with us whose job is mainly to split up the whole of the military operation according to the jobs that need to be done. The good officer and the poor officer is distinguished by his ability to split up the tasks.....so that you can get the work done by the least trained people. It's the best user of people's resources I believe, of any human endeavour. The only thing that's close to it is perhaps a hospital organization that tries to use the minimum kind of force in order to accomplish the task that needs to be done.....except there there isn't the same command over people as there is with a military unit.

Mr. Specht: You think Dr. Shrum's command was very effective then in administrating?

Dr. Ranta: He was an extremely effective commanding officer.

Mr. Specht: How did the other officers in the corps view him? Was he a dominating presence?

Dr. Ranta: He was a dominating presence He was a commanding

officer. People recognized him as such. He kept separated from the rest of the unit as a commanding officer ought to do. Things begin to change a good deal in the course of the post war period but I think that's the chief difference between then and the unit was it was under Gordon Shrum and Bob Bonner. They were both highly military oriented people and they had a separateness from the entire unit. Things begin to change with Johnny McLean who was a little closer to everybody. But at the same time, the unit was melding into a more uniform kind of unit because everybody was in an officer group by that time. But there was a separation as far as Gordon Shrum was concerned and as far as Bob Bonner was concerned. They were pretty close to their officers but not as close to the people being trained as officers.

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Mr. Specht: During the war there was an obvious need for the C.O.T.C. and the regular forces to work very closely together. After the war I suppose the pressure wasn't the same. I wonder how you did maintain close liason with local units after the war.

Dr. Ranta: There was always a very close relationship between the C.O.T.C. and the reserve units. Of course many of the people in the reserve units served as replacements in the regular armed forces even after the war. We tried to maintain a close relationship with the units. In the course of the years after the war, this became easier rather than more difficult because many of the officers of the unit were in fact ex-C.O.T.C. people.

In fact at one time the Commanding Officer of the various militia units were almost without exception ex- C.O.T.C. people. Certainly somewhere along the line in the course of the years, each one of the local militia units was commanded by a C.O.T.C. person. I think that this is without exception, those on the North Shore as well as those in town. I know it was true of the Irish and the SEaforths and the 15th Field Artillery Unit here in town. This helped to maintain the liason because we had no difficulty at the smoker which was held in the fall at the time that we were recruiting on the campus. Shortly after the new recruits had indicated their intentions to join and may not yet have joined, we'd hold a smoker and invite representatives from each one of the local militia units and from headquarters as well, to come and meet the prospective recruits. It helped us in this way. It allowed us to become acquainted with the potential recruits in a different kind of social setting. We could see how they responded to the new people that they had to meet on that particular occasion. It would give them a chance to look over the armed forces people and they may decide that it wasn't for them, or that may strengthen their desire to join up. It was purely a voluntary kind of effort and both parties had to be satisfied in these instances. It was after that that the real selection process was gone though. If they succeeded in getting through selection, then they would join up.

Mr. Specht: Was the smoker tradition kept up?

Dr. Ranta: Oh, pretty well, yes. I can't recall any year in

which we didn't have the smoker. It was really a bang up party, you know. It was a long party and one in which a lot of the parlour games of the regiments were performed and that sort of thing which became quite a tradition with some of the people.

Mr. Specht: Where were they held?

Dr. Ranta: They were held mainly in the ballroom....the west side room of the Mess. There would be quite a crowd of people you know, 150 or 200 people. The place was packed with people.

Mr. Specht: How does it get the name 'smoker'?

Dr. Ranta: Oh, I don't know. I suppose other people had been calling them smokers. In clubs and this sort of thing, a smoker was an all male event and this is really what it was...an all male event. Except then the Air Force started to recruit women. Then the occasional sprinkling of women would appear at these when they were joint affairs.

Mr. Specht: You were the P.M.C.

Dr. Ranta: Yes.

Mr. Specht: When were you selected for that?

Dr. Ranta: Well, I can't remember exactly when it was but I would guess about 1945. Certainly within a year of the time I was formerly attached to the C.O.T.C.

Mr. Specht: Who asked you to become...?

Dr. Ranta: Well the commanding officer asked some officer in his command to serve in this capacity and he then becomes responsible for the management of the Mess. It's a fairly frequent thing that the medical officer is roped in on that particular task. I'm not sure why that is. Although when I was C.O.

one of my officers was selected and he was selected largely because he was interested in it and did a darn good job. It's a sort of semithankless job. You've got all the arranging to do and it's a matter of keeping track of all the details associated with the social life of the unit.

Mr. Specht: How long were you in charge of the mess?

Dr. Ranta: Until I became C.O.

Mr. Specht: What does P.M.C. mean?

Dr. Ranta: President of the Mess Committee. That means that you preside over the Mess Committee. Mess Committee is a regular kind of organizational establishment that you set up. You have a secretary, an<sup>d</sup> elected people that serve on two or three committees. You have an entertainment committee, a special events ecommittee and this sort of thing. You may have a catering committee. You have a wine selector. People that have a special interest in those particular areas. They have then the responsibility for the operation of the unit and the President of the Mess Committee presides over that committee and takes the total responsibility for the operation of the mess and is responsible to the Commanding Officer for its operation. This includes finances and everything.

Mr. Specht: Can you outline some then, of the major routine events of the mess.

Dr. Ranta: Well, I've mentioned the smoker. There would be a spring dance. Another thing that was routine was that every Friday night there was some sort of an event that went on in the course of the academic year. They were sort of informal kinds of get togethers. Then on Saturday nights there would

be some kind of an informal dance, a record dance or something like this. The more or less formal arrangements were for the smoker, a fall dance, the Christmas reception which was really for the friends of the unit rather than for the unit itself, the Mess Dinner which was normally in February or March, the main annual dance of the units....

Mr. Specht: This would be the one following inspection.

Dr. Ranta: Yes. Those were the main events. The Mess was fairly active in terms of people that wanted to use the Mess. Any member who wanted to use the facilities for his own gathering of people, so long as the gathering were acceptable which was decided by the mess committee, then they could use it. It was their own private club.

Mr. Specht: What was the purpose of the meetings in February of all the Commanding Officers?

Dr. Ranta: This was the regular mess dinner of the Unit. The main purpose of that was to entertain the graduates who were going to be graduating that year. What happened was that they were the special guest<sup>s</sup> and we also had a lot of Army and civilian dignitaries there. It was really their event. It was put on by the unit for the graduating class. This was the first kind of real formal mess dinner that some of the people would have attended. It was run in the style of a formal regimental dinner. The most senior dignitary of the province that we could get which was usually the Lieutenant-Governor would come. Everything was laid on including the Mess orchestra was piped in to the dignitaries at the head table. It was black tie for the civilian people that were there and

formal military clothing for everybody else. It was part of the education really, that's the way we looked on it. It was part of the education of an officer cadet. If he went on into the regular armed forces or into a militia unit, he would have to attend these kinds of events. There's a certain kind of decorum and conduct that's expected of people at a formal mess dinner. This was part of their education to learn how to conduct themselves at a mess dinner.

Mr. Specht: Do you recall any special events while you were president of the mess committee?

Dr. Ranta: One special event was in 1945. At the time we were selecting the pictures to decorate the mess. We had the assistance of Charles Scott who was the head of the Vancouver Art School and we had pulled together as many as 30 paintings from various artist<sup>s</sup> around in British Columbia. We had hung them in the Mess. One of the things that we didn't have was an abstract. Every one was more or less traditional art. Two or three or four years before that, I had painted an abstract that I had in my lab, stuck on the side of my refridgerator . Bob Osburne and Bob Bonner and I were talking about how we should get an abstract and I said, "Well, I'll get you one." I went over to my lab. I had glued it with cellophane tape to the side of my refridgerator. I took it down and put a frame around it and we presented this at this showing as the work of Paul Durand, a refugee French artist in Montreal...who was one of the first abstractors of art. This was long, long ago when abstract wasn't all that popular, you see. It was really funny. That was the first

time that many of the people who were at the dance had been there including Larry and Margaret McKenzie, the new President of the University. Well, it just so happened that that painting caused the most controversy among all the paintings that were there. Once we got into telling the fib about the thing, we couldn't very well back out of it. So we returned alot of the paintings and kept some of them....but this one was kept. Sheri Walmsley was in on the hoax. He was the regimental staff officer at that time. Of course Bob Osburne and Bob Bonner too. But we were the only 4 who knew that it was a hoax. The picture continued to hang around in the mess and finally Sheri Walmsley couldn't hold it any longer from the Commanding Officer. The Commanding Officer had made a few remarks about this and he didn't want to get in too deep, it was Gordon Shrum, you see. So one day he told Gordon about this. Gordon thought that it was such a huge joke that so many people had been taken in by this thing that he decreed that it should be hung forever in the mess. He used to bring around his arty friends and present this painting....this interesting and valuable painting that they were able to get. He used to take great delight in this, especially if it were some person who was known to know a great deal about art. Often they would contribute more biographical material about the artist....who was a purely imaginary person. (laughing) He used to find it a source of great delight, to be able to trip somebody up on that.

Mr. Specht: Would you describe how you acquired the Emily Carr paintings.

Dr. Ranta: Well I had got acquainted with Ira Dillworth not long



after I went out to the university. He was at that time the person who was in charge of the CBC with his headquarters in the Hotel Vancouver. It was at the time that we were looking for these paintings and he was a long time friend of Emily Carr and subsequently became her biographer. He was sort of taking care of her. She had become quite invalided because of a couple of strokes that she had had. What he was doing was keeping her goin by selling off her paintings a few at a time. I went down to see him to find out if we could have the opportunity of seeing some of these pictures. I couldn't commit us to buy them right to begin with and when I dropped into his office in the Hotel Vancouver he said, "Well, I just happen to have a couple of paintings here." They were turned to the wall and he turned them around and they were very attractive paintings, really. I had seen a number of Emily Carr's by this time and thought that she was really a most dynamic painter. We had those on display at the time we had this showing. They were controversial pictures too.....the second most controversial pictures that we had in the display. There were a lot of people who didn't know Emily Carr in those days and a lot of people who didn't appreciate her as an artist. However, we decided that we should acquire these two paintings and I went down to see Dillworth. We had a conversation then about price. He gave them to me for \$125 a piece and this was a lower than usual cost. I think he was charging \$150 or \$200 for them at that time. But his argument was that they were going to be seen by young people. They were going to be at the university. He knew that they were going to be hung in the officer's mess where the officer cadets would

be and it was his interest to see that British Columbians appreciated the works of British Columbia's best artist. For this reason we got them for \$125 apiece. Now I am aware and Doris Shadbolt who has done a study of all of her paintings is aware that one of those paintings is painted on a linen canvas and I think it's the only one. She used to always paint on all kinds of things, paper, ordinary wrapping paper and stuff that artists normally wouldn't use. But this is on a perfectly good piece of linen canvas. It's just one of those things you don't expect to see Emily Carr's painting on. The other one is done on a regular cotton canvas and is in good shape.

End of Track I

Dr. L. E. Ranta  
August 8, 1973

Interview \_\_\_\_, Tape 2, Track 2.

Dr. Ranta: One of those paintings was selected for her retrospective show that was assembled by Doris Shadbolt and the Vancouver Art Gallery. It had a tour of Canada and when it was in Montreal I received a letter from Readers Digest asking that they be allowed to reproduce it in the Digest as one of the five best paintings in the Retrospective Show. The Combined Services Trust Fund that is responsible for it, gave them permission to reproduce it. So it was reproduced in the Canadian edition and subsequently it was reproduced in the International edition of Readers Digest. All this is publicity for the picture. At the same time it's publicity for British Columbia and C.O.T.C. We really were the original owners of the painting.

Mr. Specht: How many paintings did you acquire?

Dr. Ranta: We got nine paintings and of the \$1,000 that Gordon Shrum had given me to spend on paintings, we spent \$950.

Mr. Specht: How many Emily Carrs did you collect?

Dr. Ranta: There were two Emily Carrs.

Mr. Specht: What would you estimate their value to be today?

Dr. Ranta: Oh, one of them I guess would be somewhere around \$35,000 and the other one would be about \$45,000.

Mr. Specht: Where are they now?

Dr. Ranta: They're in the social suite in the Faculty Club. There are various other paintings. There's MacDonalld, two Laytons, Peter Ustinoff, that's in the president's office at the present time, is another painting that we have. Mrs. Bell's painting of Hollyburn Ridge. They're

really very nice decorative paintings. We didn't buy them as investments or anything like that. It's just that this is what's happened to the art market.

Mr. Specht: These aren't in any way the property of the army, then?

Dr. Ranta: No, they were bought with non-public C.O.T.C. monies.

Mr. Specht: I noticed from one of the photographs of the Officer's Mess that there was some excellent furniture. I wondered how you acquired that.

Dr. Ranta: Yes, Gordon Shrum bought those at auctions from the estate of Senator McRae from Hycroft. Those pieces of furniture were used in the entrance of the Mess as well as in the ballroom of the Mess. I think he got them for a song. I don't know exactly how much he paid for them but certainly the prices in those days weren't going very high. There is one piece particularly that is a Tudor double 'Y', stretched table that is really a museum piece. I think it's in the foyer of the Gordon Shrum Building at the university at the present time. There are some smaller pieces of furniture, I guess four chairs, that are now back in Hycroft. They are on loan to the university Womens Club which is preserving Hycroft as a historical site. They have been attempting to recollect a number of the pieces of furniture that were originally obtained for Hycroft by Senator McRae. These are pieces that the university felt that they couldn't use. In 1968 when they were turned over to the university it was the intention that they be used by the

university for 10 years but the possession of them was actually retained by the C.O.T.C. unit Trust Fund. Those Trustees are really the owners of the furniture for a 10 year period at which time armed forces units aren't re-established on the campus, they will become the property of the university. But if a unit were to be established on the campus then they could call back from the C.O.T.C. Trust Fund the furniture and also call back the paintings from the Combined Services Trust Fund.

Mr. Specht: You had some very elaborate and very formal dinners. I wonder how these were arranged.

Dr. Ranta: We'd have a formal dinner once each year. I mentioned that the purpose of them was really to honour the graduating class. They were the responsibility of the Mess Committee to arrange. The dinners that were put on were put on by Miss Davis during most of the time that I was P.M.C. They were set up in the traditional manner with place cards, with a programme, with the invited guests who had been warned that they would be called upon to say a few words.

Mr. Specht: Judging by the menu, the dishes that were served were very specialized. Did Miss Davis cook these?

Dr. Ranta: oh yes. She would really put herself out to put on a very special type of dinner with a great deal of preparation. She was a very fine cook.

Mr. Specht: What was her background?

Dr. Ranta: She was a little English lady, remarkably loyal to the Crown. She had, I think been raised in a military family, possibly a Navy family. She had served in a Navy officer's Mess for a long period of time and when war broke out she returned

to this by falsifying her age by about 20 years. She was a very spare kind of person and she did look a lot younger than she was. When I learned what her age was, many years after I'd known her, I was flabbergasted. She was in her 70's by then but looked like about 50. She was fairly deaf but she could hear more with the little hearing than she had than almost anybody else could.

Mr. Specht: How long was she with C.O.P.C.?

Dr. Ranta: I would say for...from 1947 until 1954 or maybe '55 even. I left the university in 1952 and she was another 2 or 3 years there after I left the university. She was a very, very loyal armed forces supporter. She would really put herself out to no end to make everything right. She used to train her own staff. She was Queen of her own kitchen. She was the most efficient cook that I've ever run into. The marked change that occurred in the cost of our Messing as soon as she took over, was just remarkable. It dropped to about a third of what it had been previously. She took pride in a fact that a mouse couldn't live on what he could find in her garbage pail. The only thing that went out in the garbage were paper cartons or something like that. She would go down and do personal shopping at Woodwards and inspect everything before it was ever sent out. She would pick out this and that. It had to be exactly what she wanted. Because of the size of the unit I'm sure it wasn't as if she were ordering for the hotel Vancouver but I'm quite sure that she gave as much trouble to places like Woodwards as did the hotel Vancouver! Everything had to be just right or it wasn't going to be satisfactory to

her!

Mr. Specht: At first the Mess would be exclusive to the Officers.

Dr. Ranta: Yes. When the unit was very large, it was in fact an Officer's Mess. This was right up into the early fifties that it was an Officer's Mess. Then at that time there was a formal change of the recognition of the members of the unit. Up to that point they all had been on a sort of a basic training programme preparatory to entering officers training programmes. Then along in the early fifties, everybody became officers. In other words, the officer cadets, as soon as they were enrolled were entitled to put up their one pip on their shoulder that covered a white flash that indicated that they were officer cadets. At that point they became members of the Mess. At that time their numbers were sufficiently small that the Mess could accommodate them. Prior to that it wouldn't have been possible to have a Mess there with 1,000 people as members of the Mess. But when it was two or three hundred, it was a very active Mess. At any of our social events there would be a hundred and fifty or two hundred couples, something like that. Sometimes we had to hold events down on the main floor of the Armouries because the area for dinner wasn't large enough up in the regular part of the Mess.

Mr. Specht: You had a military library.

Dr. Ranta: Yes.

Mr. Specht: Do you know when that started?

Dr. Ranta: That started a long time before I became associated with the unit. I don't know when it would be started but it was already a very substantial library at the time the Armouries

were built. I remember when we were doing medical examinations in the basement of the Arts building that the walls of the rooms were covered with cases....books behind glass doors as it were, that were available to the unit. From my earliest memories of the unit there was always a small amount of money made available to the unit by headquarters for use as a Library Fund. Books were obtained and they were put into the library. When the unit was disbanded those books and the military library that we had were turned over to the university library.

Mr. Specht: Where was the library...in the Armoury?

Dr. Ranta: It was in two areas. One part of it was in the ballroom area of the Mess. We had a series of cupboards at the west side of the main ballroom under the windows. It extended from wall to wall of this very large room...pretty well filled with books. Then there were three cases of books in the orderly room that were available to people as well.

Mr. Specht: Did you also subscribe to magazines?

Dr. Ranta: Yes, this was a responsibility of one part of the Mess Committee. They subscribed to various journals, not only military journals but popular journals as well for leisure reading.

Mr. Specht: R.O.T.C. was introduced in 1952 or 1953, somewhere in there.

Dr. Ranta: Yes.

Mr. Specht: How did it connect up with C.O.T.C.?

Dr. Ranta: Well, they were really a part of the C.O.T.C. At first they were individuals that were C.O.T.C. people who applied



for subsidization. Then those individuals who were accepted for subsidization by the armed forces were then classified<sup>d</sup> as R.O.T.P. people. There were three different classifications of this. One had to do with regular officers. This would include those in the various specialty courses of infantry, artillery, the armoured engineering. Then there was a medical subsidization group and the dental subsidization group. Those were the three categories that were established. Subsequently that changed so that people who were selected by the regular recruiting system of the armed forces and who were going to be associated with the Army, were then sent out to us if they were going to be university students. Some of these individuals were persons who might already be in the armed forces. We had a number of them who came to us. They weren't yet officers but they had been selected for officer training and they were being sent to the university for their degrees. They were then assigned to us in the C.O.T.C. for training purposes. They would go back to their particular unit in the course of the summer for the continuation of their C.O.T.C. training. But the training was all the same. There wasn't really any difference in the training.

Mr. Specht: All the basic training and the classes?

Dr. Ranta: The basic training, the classes, their responsibilities. They were our responsibility for all purposes although they may have been in the armed forces before and were now getting their university degrees and were being trained as officers.

Mr. Specht: R.O.T.P. cadets had a longer summer camp than the C.O.T.C. didn't they?

Dr. Ranta: I don't think I recall that. There might have been

differences in there but certainly it never came to my awareness that there was any appreciable difference. I thought that they were the same.

Mr. Specht: Well C.O.T.C. had always been two or three weeks in the summer whereas the R.O.T.P. was...

Dr. Ranta: Oh, oh no. We're comparing different kinds of years. Originally before there was an R.O.T.P. and only a C.O.T.C. our summer camps were short...three weeks. But then when C.O.T.C. was established on the post war basis, then our summer camps became longer. They became virtually the entire summer free period of a student. The purpose of this was to give the C.O.T.C. individual sufficient support in the summer that would help to finance his university education. The R.O.T.P people were people who received a stipend of support throughout the whole of their academic year. They had their fees paid for them. But their summer employment activity as far as I can recall, was exactly the same.

Mr. Specht: For C.O.T.C. cadets was the three month summer camp compulsory was it....or optional?

Dr. Ranta: It was compulsory....from our point of view. But if the educational future of an individual depended on him doing a particular kind of job for part of his summer, like a survey school or something along these lines, then an arrangement would be made. They were allowed leave of absence for this period. But it was part of the commitment for the individual to attend summer camp.

Mr. Specht: Would the introduction of R.O.T.P. have influenced the quotas that you were allowed?

Dr. Ranta: Originally it didn't. The quotas were for C.O.T.C. people only. The R.O.T.P. were over and above the quota. Even when we were cut to a quota of 25 in a year which would provide us with about 75 people in the C.O.T.C. there would still be a fair number of R.O.T.P. people over and above that. Then later on I believe there was an effort by headquarters to reduce the total number of officers being trained, then the quota became conjoint...R.O.T.P. and C.O.T.C. The numbers in the entire unit dropped quite substantially when this occurred.

Mr. Specht: Was it in the favour of R.O.T.P.?

Dr. Ranta: Well, yes, I would say so. I think that headquarters at that time were concerned about the number of people they were training and they had to support in their training through C.O.T.C. and they did not continue their military careers. One of the things that Ray Herbert who was in charge of the Air Force and Morris Young who was in charge of the Navy unit and myself argued was that we were not only training people to be officers but we were training people to be good citizens. We felt that there was value in military training for anybody who is going to be a good citizen of this country. We argued it on the grounds that if the armed forces were going to survive, they were going to survive by virtue of some people who were civilians believing in the armed forces. We felt that if the young man who is receiving university training, who was going to be taking a position of responsibility in his community has a knowledge of what the purposes of the armed forces were, if he had some training in it...he was going to be a better supporter for the armed forces. He was going to

able to assist in the use of armed forces in the way armed forces ought to be used. I think that it's even more important in times of peace that there be a substantial portion of the civilian community who understand what the armed forces can do. Otherwise how can a man who goes into parliament, for example, be guiding the armed forces as to what they might do in a peace keeping role? It's really the democratic kind of politics that have to understand what the purpose of the armed forces is and what they can and what they ought not to do. If they have to establish the policy for the armed forces, what better way to start off than by understanding a bit about the armed forces? This was our argument all the way for having armed forces units on the campus. These are the people that a few years from now are going to be guiding the destinies of the country...guiding international relationships of the country. We felt that there should be an opportunity on campus for those who were not going to be career oriented to understand about the armed forces. There are many citizens of our community who have taken important positions in the community that have an understanding of the armed forces in a way that they would not have understood them...because they belonged to the C.O.T.C. or the Navy Unit or the Air Force Unit.

Mr. Specht: I guess it would prevent the armed forces from becoming isolated from the rest of the community.

Dr. Ranta: That's right. We were strong supporters of the idea that the armed forces were an agency within the community that is civilian controlled...and that to keep the civilian control, it's got to be understood by civilians. That's why we thought

it was a dreadful mistake of the Government of Canada, not to understand this. To base the future of their officers training on military schools only...no matter how good they are.... increases the isolation. It makes it very difficult for the armed forces. I notice this now...that the armed forces are trying to maintain their relationship with the civilian side of the community and they're having a hard time doing it. I don't know. I think we were getting some simply wonderful young people joining the armed forces from the device of the units on the campus. It was good for them. Many, many youngsters I know, friends of mine today, I know that they're better for having had the opportunity of being in the armed forces.

Mr. Specht: In the fifties you were starting to feel the squeeze on quotas...

Dr. Ranta: Yes.

Mr. Specht: I wonder if Lt. Col. Mclean would have fought ... about these quotas?

Dr. Ranta: Yes he was one of the staunchest fighters for them because it was during that period of time that the first squeezes were felt by the unit. He was the instigator of a lot of effort on the part of the Commanding Officers of C.O.T.C.s trying to recruit civilian support. He involved President McKenzie in communicating with Ottawa. He involved the.....

End of Track II