

## MSc Studies at RMC Shrivenham

By Lt Cdr Mike Rose RN

Initially, I joined the Royal Navy as a schoolie on a short, five-year commission. Well into my commission, I thought that five years was too little, so I applied to extend it to eight, and was accepted.

It was while I was at HMS *Sultan* in 1989, teaching digital electronics, that I was given the opportunity to do a full-time Masters course at the Royal Military College of Science (RMCS) in Shrivenham, Oxfordshire. However, I had to commit to a further eight years of service, thus extending my commission to 16 years (then known as a "Medium Commission"). At first I had to think long and hard as to whether to prolong my naval career, since I had some concerns about entering the civilian IT world "too old". What helped me to make up my mind was a conversation that I had with a fellow schoolie, who was already serving on a medium commission. Unfortunately I cannot recall his name, but the essence of his advice was that a 16-year commission would provide me with a larger lump sum and a steady, reasonable pension, from the day I leave the service, not to mention the possibility of being promoted to Lt Cdr during the extra eight years. So, considering the obvious opportunities of studying full-time on full-time pay for a year, gaining an MSc qualification at the navy's expense, gaining a chance of promotion and getting a steady pension when I finally left the navy, all contributed to my affirmative decision.

I started the course in January 1990. The title of the course was "Design of Information Systems," which suited me very well, since I had a profound interest in computers. It turned out, however, to be a little more "soft" than I imagined. There were several philosophical subjects to study, such as "Management of Information" and "Soft Systems Methodology". In spite of this, I didn't let my reservations deter me from getting the most out of the course.



Royal Military College Shrivenham, 1970, by kind permission of Cranfield University

My colleagues on the course came from all of her majesty's services plus one from the Canadian Army, one from the Dutch Navy as well as one civilian who worked for the MoD. I commuted at the weekends together with Lt Cdr Peter Ross, who also lived in Fareham at the time. He is somewhat older and more experienced than me, and his confidence and personal support gave me great strength when it was tough going on the course. For example, I would have liked to have spent more time socialising in the mess in the evenings during the course, but there was always so much to read, study, learn and write about, that little time was left for relaxing. However, to make up for the intense term-times, the holiday periods were extensive, similar to those of civilian universities.

I would like to share a particular memory that I have of one of my course colleagues, who was an army major at the time. He was an interesting man, not least because of his highly extroverted personality. He had so many fascinating tales to tell class members about his life, which involved women, cars, overseas trips, money and many more besides. His

method of driving reflected his personality – fast, uncontrolled and dangerous! Every time I was a passenger in his car, I feared for my life, and often thought that he'd have an accident one day. Well, one day, he didn't turn up for any lectures, and we later found out that he was in hospital following a car crash. He recovered after a few weeks, and he had had his car towed to RMCS. When I saw the remains of his car, I was surprised that he had survived, as it was a mangled mess of steel and rubber, completely unrecognizable as a Ford Escort. He seemed a little more subdued after that event.

A fascinating aspect of my time at RMCS was spending time with members of other services, particularly those of other countries. There are clearly cultural differences between nations, as well as between services, and it was truly an education to witness those differences in person. For example, the Canadian officer seemed to have an extremely “laid back” attitude to almost everything, and rarely seemed worried about his educational commitments at the college. His attitude seemed to follow the maxim “every problem has a solution, so why worry?”

The environs of RMCS were reminiscent of a redbrick university, and I was very proud to be a part of it. Walking between the classrooms, offices, library and the mess hall was great – it was like being back at university. The food was excellent, as good as that of the officers' mess in any naval establishment.

The village of Shrivenham was (and probably still is) a quaint little place with wonderful pubs. Consequently a few “runs ashore” were obligatory! The Canadian guy, of course, thought that the pubs were great – as do most visitors from abroad. Living abroad now, as I do, British pubs are one of the few things that I miss about living in the UK.



Design of Information Systems course #14, RMCS Shrivenham 1990  
Lt Michael Rose RN front right (personal photo of Michael Rose)

My end of course thesis was titled “*A Study to Determine the Most Effective Method of Automating the Pay of Small Populations within the Army*”. In order to gather all the information I needed for the study, I travelled to several army pay offices in Worthy Down, York and Glasgow. It was nice to visit York again, since I had studied there for my first degree in the late 1970s. It was also enjoyable to visit Glasgow as I had rarely visited Scotland. The course finished in December 1990.

At the end of my 16-year commission, I was glad to have decided to extend my time in the service. Apart from the financial benefits, I got to work in many new interesting places and meet some fascinating people. Working for her majesty's services is never boring, and the comradery is second to none. All in all, I was very pleased to have studied at RMCS, and very happy to have gained an MSc. Today, in my office, the MSc certificate hangs proudly on the wall next to my BSc one.