

Hi, I'm Cadet Alec Coles a drummer from the 1249 Dereham, Air Cadet Squadron. I've been a cadet here since July this year and have had a fantastic time so far. The highlight for me has been the ACO National Marching Band camp that I attended in April this year. This was a tri-service camp, meaning there would be Air, Sea and Army cadet forces there, each with their own band. The three bands would come together at the end of the week for massed Tattoo. Our aim for the week was to prepare for this tattoo, as there would be some very important people watching it.

The camp was held in, of all places, Scotland. Don't get me wrong, I like Scotland. It's just such a long way to go from Norfolk! While I waited at the coach collection point, I spoke to some cadets who were also attending and got to know them a bit. Little did I know that one of the guys I spoke to then (Ed) would turn out to be my best mate on the camp. Anyway, after a long journey up North, we finally arrived in bonny Scotland, at the Barry Budden Training Camp in the middle of nowhere just outside Dundee. We arrived in darkness so the camp seemed huge when we unloaded our baggage. We had a mass meeting outside before we were divided into our dormitories. There were eight to a dorm and those eight were put together by age, so I was with all 14 and 13 years old guys in my dorm, who I got on very well with.

Each day we had to be up, dressed and ready for muster parade on the parade square at 07:30, and then breakfast in the mess at 08:10. We always had breakfast at 08:10, lunch at 13:30 and dinner at 18:30. In between meals, the day usually consisted of sectional rehearsals, (I was with all the other snare drummers practicing our bits for the tattoo); parade practice, (working out what formations and marches we would perform in the tattoo); room inspections, and also a bit of free time before lights out at 23:30.

You were always very busy on the camp; always practicing and getting to know so many new people. The camp was organised in a very military fashion as you can probably imagine, you couldn't be late and you had to be up on time. Also, if you were in the central area of the camp, you had to march if there was more than two of you.

At the end of the week, when the tattoo was about to start I felt a little bit nervous, as we all did. And it was very cold. The tattoo went on for about an hour or so and it was very thrilling to be a part of it. The end result was very good and the families of some of the cadets that were there were very impressed.

The only thing that was bad about the camp was finding out on the first day that I had conjunctivitis. It made me feel terrible. I had to go to the medical centre four times a day, but I didn't mind because the nurses there were very friendly and took care of me perfectly.

In all, the whole camp was an absolutely brilliant experience for me. I've made new friends that I've stayed in contact with and will continue to do so. I've learnt many new skills on the snare drum that I can incorporate in to my kit drumming outside of cadets. I would recommend it to anyone in the cadets. No matter what your skill, beginner or expert, they accept and support anyone. I would definitely do it again and again!

You can view the Air Cadet Part of the tattoo on Youtube at 'ACONMB Camp Barry Buddon Tattoo march on Aces High Pathfinders March'.