



SANDHURST

Series Synopsis

The 200 year old Royal Military Academy's image as a bastion of old school tie and privilege comes under the spotlight as the unrelenting pace of the Sandhurst course tests each individual's abilities, physical, mental and emotional - against the standards of becoming a British Officer in the Regiments and Corps of the British Army.

Young officers are still known as 'Ruperts' amongst regular soldiers (for dressing like Rupert the Bear!) and one cadet, Harbord, who true to form has never owned a pair of jeans, has generations of esteemed relatives who've served in the armed forces. Officers like Major Max Lytle, himself the son of a General, speak about the tradition where sons of 'the great military families' still continue to come to Sandhurst to serve and lead, even with the likely endgame being deployment to Afghanistan. Yes the caricature still rings true for some but in other ways we find Sandhurst has moved on. An establishment unsurprisingly steeped in history for newcomers like electrician Iain Thompson it's a different planet - 'I mean there's a great, great grandson of a prime minister and you can go beagling if you want to'.

In the final term the pressure and tension mount amongst the officer cadets. With the end in sight but the prospect of being "back termed" ever present, the stakes go up each week. Sandhurst may still have the polo, fox hounds and nineteenth century traditions but to make it as an officer in the British Army you've got to be able to withstand the pain and demonstrate you have the necessary controlled aggression, moral integrity and mental agility under gruelling conditions.

Learning to be leaders is brought sharply into focus on **exercises** like First Encounter and Druids' Ridge. Cadets' competitive or self-survival instincts can get the better of them. These exercises are designed to test them after depriving them of sleep and pushing them to their physical and mental limits; they make mistakes and compromise themselves - i.e. they buckle under the weight of expectation and their rucksack, 'jack' on their mates to get some extra sleep, tell a lie or are economical with the truth. The exercises are designed to teach the Cadets about what sort of person they really are. In these tough conditions will they still be the team player they like to believe they are or will they crack?

The Regimental Selection Boards also loom - the Officer Cadets have to choose which regiment they want to join, and the choices they make say a lot about each Cadet. With some already accepted to the elitist Household Cavalry because of family ties, others compete to lead and fight with the British Army's esteemed Infantry Regiments such as the Paras.

Some Cadets compete for the few places in the front line Infantry Regiments. Why are these men attracted to the most arduous and dangerous job in the world that will take them to Afghanistan in less than a year? Thompson says it's 'the ultimate man test'.

Sandhurst accepts that inevitably some will fail. Doubts, weaknesses, 'head injuries' and lack of fortitude in the face of war need to be exposed in order to get the best leaders in the British Army. For some keeping up proves impossible - but for others the Sandhurst dream is about to become a reality.

For those who make it the metamorphosis/ transition from outsider to 'one of us' is complete. The film culminates with their final Sovereign's Parade and the Commandant, General Marriott telling them 'to go out and love your soldiers'. In all their finery it is worth remembering that within months many of these young officers will find themselves deployed to Afghanistan to lead soldiers.

Programme 1: First Encounter

This fly-on-the wall series with remarkable access to Sandhurst gets under the skin of the potential young

officers over their year-long course as they battle to reach the extraordinarily high standards required to become a future leader in the modern British Army. Within the first 24 hours of arriving at the Royal Military Academy, new recruit Batty wants his freedom back, another, Darrock has a best friend killed on active service in Afghanistan. In Sandhurst's 200 year old corridors and classrooms the great great grandson of former Prime Minister Lloyd George rubs shoulders with Thompson, an electrician from the London Underground. As the Officer Cadets struggle with 18 hour days, the September 2010 intake are all pushed to their limits. While Miss Eldridge struggles to find a military bone in her body, cocksure cadet Stewart is punished for lacking integrity after exposing his genitals mid room inspection. Navigating 50 miles across the Black Mountains in under 24 hours, Mr Chapman leaves the platoon after letting himself and his team down by 'refusing to soldier' on exercise.

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As referred to by Prince Harry, the "infamous first five weeks" at the prestigious Military academy are renowned for being one of the toughest experiences most people will ever go through. They are stripped of their physical and psychological comforts and put through a strict regimen of water parades, sleep deprivation, strenuous exercise, bulling boots, ironing, room inspections, drill and whole lot of shouting: from now on nothing but perfection will be tolerated. It's a process that reduces most of them to private tears before 'cracking on'.

This programme joins the new summer intake, 2010, at the start of the British Army's world famous Sandhurst leadership course and looks at the key characteristics it demands of its young officer cadets as it sets about its task of developing the skills to lead men into the war in Afghanistan and future wars that Britain will fight. It begins with the pre course build up in June as the number of British soldiers killed in Afghanistan reaches 300. Having already passed the Army Officer Selection Board the film begins with medicals, boot fittings, and staff arriving back from active service in Afghanistan for 'Ironing board day', September 12th, the iconic first day at the Military Academy for every Sandhurst Officer Cadet.

From Etonians to electricians, recruits join up from diverse backgrounds. Some have never even camped out let alone held a gun. In the first few days Sandhurst sizes up the new intake, their personalities and their limitations; their suitability for leadership and the determination they will need to exercise that leadership in conditions of extreme fatigue and fear.

Over the first five weeks the potential young officers are taught basic military skills, discipline, obedience, loyalty, an uncompromising attention to detail and when standards fall short treatment is severe. The Academy's aim is to establish the fortitude and morale necessary to overcome the primitive emotional responses of fear and pain in the battlefield and also give them an understanding of basic soldiering.

Cadets used to the comforts of modern life question the point of the relentless focus on inspection, 5.00am starts, drill and punishments for minor infringements. For the independent minded university graduates who have been taught to question the world around them it can feel petty, difficult to understand and demoralising. Surviving on under five hours sleep a night, cadets suffer 'the shock of capture' and the majority contemplate 'jacking it in'.

Physically tested to the limits on a 50 mile endurance march which the cadets aim to complete in under twenty four hours, they learn about who are team players, who is top dog and who is the weakest.

In these early weeks the Academy is transforming civilians into soldiers, self into team. It is a huge step-change within these young people's lives that provides a rich source of material. This is the time when they struggle with obeying and rebelling against the seemingly pointless orders no matter what, and question the Army's way of doing things. 'It's Hogwarts with guns' says Officer Cadet Thompson, who's given up his day job on the London Underground to see if, like Princes William and Harry, he can make it in Her Majesty's elite Officer Corps.

The Royal Military Academy has trained the leaders of the British Army for 200 years. In war and peace.

Sandhurst's bi-centenary is in 2012.

Programme 2: A Matter of Life and Death

Sandhurst's core aim is to win at war. War costs lives. The second film in the Sandhurst series is about the psychology and impact of killing, launching the Officer Cadets into the harsh realities of war and what will be expected of them as leaders of men and young platoon commanders.

Written in gold glittering letters and arching high in the Sandhurst Chapel, the spiritual home of British Army Officers is 'Dulce et Decorum Est Pro Patria Mori' - made famous by the British Army Officer and war poet Wilfred Owen in his poem 'The Old Lie'. Can it ever be sweet and proper to die for one's country?

The Sandhurst staff teach the cadets about their role as young Lieutenants in Afghanistan and the leadership skills they will need to draw upon when making life and death decisions. This film shows the cadets contemplating the high expectations of the British Army on young officers. It is like no other job, with its principles of service, selfless commitment, putting individual wants and needs last, team work, cohesion and sacrifice. Some of them will literally give their lives for these principles. All this is rare in the civilian world.

From a sombre day trip to Brookwood Military Cemetery to case studies of a young Lieutenant killed in action to the dehumanising bayonet training - it is a far cry from anything the graduates and ex-professionals have come up against in their lives before Sandhurst and it's met with a range of responses. Issues of heroism, death, cowardice and a just war are brought up to leave the Cadets in no doubt as to what becoming an officer in the British Army means in 2011. Are they willing to kill for Queen and Country? Are they willing to die for it? Sandhurst requires them to contemplate not only how they will cope, manage and continue to lead while confronting the death of one of their soldiers but also their own mortality.

The film will challenge more squeamish viewers as it examines the cadets' motives for wanting to lead soldiers and fight in tough wars where lives will be lost. Sandhurst understands that the loss of their officers' lives is a necessary evil but believes it would be immoral not to show the cadets the reality of war. It's why you become a soldier and Remembrance Sunday reaffirms this.

Alongside being taught how to close with and kill the enemy on the bayonet range, the Sandhurst cadets are taught the guiding principle of Officer-ship 'Selfless Commitment' using the written diary and footage of a young Welsh Guards Officer Mark Evison, killed in Action in Afghanistan. Cadets watch soldiers being shot by Jihadists snipers on the Internet.

On the final exercise of the term there is worse to come as Cadets have to camp in the snow in Wales as temperatures plummet to minus 16. For some the realities of a pending tour to Afghanistan turn out to be too much. One young Cadet, the son of a vicar, struggles with whether or not he will be able to take another person's life and if it is ever right to do so. Over months he searches his conscience and realises he cannot stay at Sandhurst not only can he not take life but he realizes he is not prepared to die for a war 3,500 miles from home. He decides to leave the Academy on grounds of conscience and fear of his own mortality.

Naivety versus courage. Few of the cadets have ever experienced war let alone battle stress or shell shock. Can the cadets really understand how the stresses of war, killing and dying, will affect them, their men and their judgment when making decisions?

Programme 3: Officer Class

The final episode sees tensions mount amongst the officer cadets. With the end in sight but the prospect of being "back termed" ever present, the stakes go up each week. The 200 year old Royal Military Academy's image as a bastion of old school tie and privilege comes under the spotlight as the unrelenting pace tests each individual's abilities, physical, mental and emotional - against the standards of becoming a British Officer in the Regiments and Corps they have applied to join. For some keeping up proves impossible - but for others the Sandhurst ambition is about to become a reality.