

Through action and adventure, fun and friendship, the Army Cadets help young people to become more independent, confident and able to step up to any challenge. Anthony Jacques gives an insight into what it is like to volunteer with them in this contribution to our series “Everyday Neighbours”, in which we share and celebrate some of the daily acts of quiet, unobtrusive service that our parishioners undertake during the week, putting our faith into practice for the benefit of our neighbour.

The Army Cadet Force



I came pretty late to cadet work. In 2012, when I first got involved as a ‘Civilian Assistant’, I had just turned 63. I’d happily thought when I investigated it that I’d just put in a few words at the occasional committee meeting. Not so – they instantly had me appointed as Public Relations Officer despite my lamentable camera skills. Having attended a PR course and discovered I was the only non-uniformed person doing the job and that no one listened to a civvy anyway, I asked to resume my commission. This caused a bit of a problem with the authorities on age grounds until the Colonel pointed out that the doctor and the catering officer were both even older, so shortly after my 64th birthday, I became Captain Jacques again. Thus began in earnest five very happy years as a member of Surrey Army Cadet Force, which is headquartered in Godalming with 25 detachments covering the whole county.

The Army Cadet Force is run on a county structure under a County Commandant, usually a full colonel. This is a part-time role and he or she is assisted by a permanent staff at County HQ, and probably about 150 volunteers out on the ground. These people at the coal face will give two evenings a week to running training sessions as well as many weekends to driving minibuses taking young people to specialist training; most will also attend the fortnight-long summer camp. Attendance at courses for adults (tactics, range management, adventurous training, command and staff work, music and many more) also takes up the spare time of these volunteers. It is not one for the faint-hearted, and many probationers drop out during training.

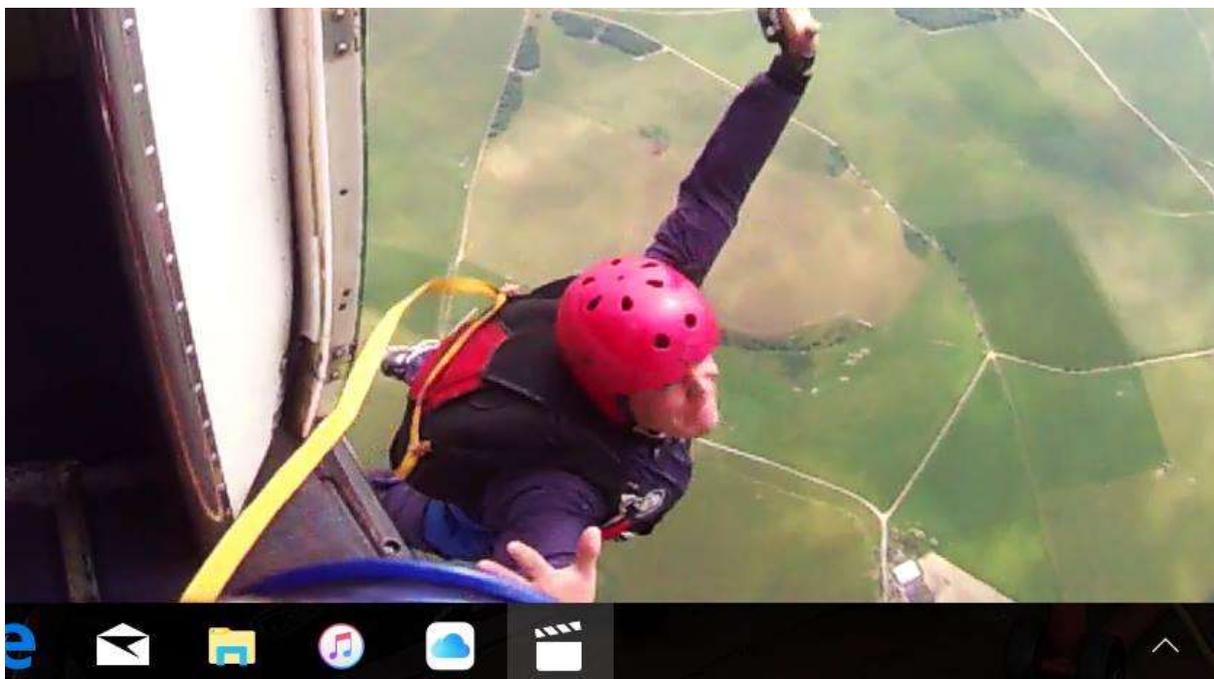
So what is the aim of this organisation? The ACF is a national voluntary youth organisation. It is sponsored by the Army and provides challenging military, adventurous and community activities. Its aim is to inspire young people to achieve success in life with a spirit of service to the Queen, their country and their local community, and to develop in them the qualities of a good citizen.

This is achieved by providing progressive cadet training, often of a challenging and exciting nature, to foster confidence, self reliance, initiative, loyalty and a sense of service to other people. It encourages the development of personal powers of practical leadership and the ability to work successfully as a member of a team. It also advises those considering a career in the Services or with the Reserve Forces, though recruitment *per se* is not part of the mix. It must be stated too that none of our cadet forces in Britain are part of the Armed Forces, and the aim is not the production of ‘child soldiers’.

I am still loosely involved, mainly on civic and community involvement and a bit of PR, but during my five years' commissioned service I did these tasks and also commanded the Band and Corps of Drums – bit of a mixed blessing that, musicians are right little prima donnas – and I had a lot of fun for free. Volunteers do get paid for a certain number of duty days at Regular Army rates and can claim expenses. Costs for parents when a young person joins are very small compared with many youth organisations.

Anyone who would like to know more about this work, either as a cadet (age 12–18) or as an adult volunteer (under 60), do please talk to me or look at their website (<https://armycadets.com/about-us/>). I can also point people in the direction of Sea or Air Cadets if that is their preference.

Anthony Jacques
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Parachuting at the Army Parachute School on Salisbury Plain