

The Boys Brigade Knowledge Badge Project

“Crew”

A Story Of The 33rd Vic Boronia Drill
Squad From 2018-2019



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THE BOYS'
BRIGADE
33RD VIC BORONIA

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
SECTION 1 - Unenthusiastic Drill	3
Attitude	3
Drill program	4
Competition Results	4
SECTION 2 - A new commander	4
Changes with a new commander	5
Extra Practices	5
How did teaching drill change	5
Drill Camp	6
SECTION 3 - Refining Ideas	7
Team Spirit	7
Practice Increased	8
Improving little details	8
Practice Focus	9
Relaxation day before competition	9
SECTION 4 - Formula for Success	9
Regular Practices	10
Team bonding	11
Precise Measurements	12
CONCLUSION	13
REFERENCES	14

INTRODUCTION

This project is about the journey 33rd Vic Boronia's A-Grade Drill Squad undertook to improve and grow our drill practices and methods which resulted in winning The Boys Brigade Victoria State Drill Competition in 2019 (hereafter referred to as State Drill Competition).

I have structured this project in the form of a retelling of events/from different perspectives and interviews. I have included relevant references that support certain methods which could benefit others when planning their drill program. This is not a tutorial or guide.

This story is about a group of Boys, who were lead by Sergeant Daniel Hugo, and the journey they undertook, where they overcame their differences, and built strong relationships that allowed them to form into a tight knit crew, who were willing to sacrifice themselves for the benefit of the squad as a whole, and have complete faith and trust that the other members will do the same.

My hope is that this will inspire other companies that drill can be used for team bonding and not just team building which can lead to great results.

"It has often been proved that a Company which is good at drill is good at most other things. The result can be felt in all Company activities, the general atmosphere and spirit of the Company, and the overall discipline. The result can also be seen in the Bible Class, and attendances at Bible Class often go up with the drill attendance and Standard." - [BBA Drill Manual]

SECTION 1 - Unenthusiastic Drill

Attitude

When I recall the days I started to drill, in my mind's eye, I see a grey monochrome landscape that's overcast and cold. In this landscape there is a squad of Boys marching up and down, seemingly without purpose, while another Boy calls commands from a sheet of paper. To the side there is a pair of officers observing the marching and correcting the caller. Contrast this to the year when we won the State Drill Competition. I fondly recall bright and colorful days, as a bunch of Boys who are eager to train together, looking forward to hearing from our commander, a fellow Boy, and what interesting technique he was going to show us.

The State Drill Competition is an annual event held in term 3. Companies across the state of Victoria will send squads of Senior Section Boys to participate in one of two divisions. The competition takes place inside of a hall, where squads of 8 Boys will be instructed to march around by their drill commander. The commander is given a paper, which has a predetermined set of movements on it, that is used to guide the squad around the hall. The squad and commander are judged by Officers from each company. The points each squad scores is based on how well each movement was done and how close to the drill manual they were.

Drill program

When I started drill, it was taught by officers and called by a Boy. The caller would call from a drill paper and the officers primarily focused on correcting the caller. At Boronia, there wasn't a hall to train in, leading to a parking lot being used, the problem with this is that the Boys didn't have any preparation for the size of the competition floor. Extra practices were added closer to the State Drill Competition, and if I had to sum up the vibe of our practices I'd say, it felt like we were going through the motions; we were just there. There didn't seem to be a clear goal or motivation to attend the practices. It felt instructible, without leading, and probably worst, uninspiring.

Competition Results

When it came down to forming a squad for the State Drill Competition there wasn't an even spread of Boys to form a coherent squad. With an inconsistent number of Boys attending the practices, the commander had to scrape together enough experienced Boys to perform in the A grade section of the Competition. All of this meant that the squad performed some casual and sloppy drill, resulting in low rankings on the leaderboard, and not winning the Drill competition.

“When it is presented and carried out well, drill can be attractive to the Boy. He can find it interesting, but even when he grows older and this interest may wane a little, he will be prepared to do something he may not really want to, for the sake of the Company. However, it must be realised that the Boy comes to drill to be drilled, and these results will never be obtained by just marching round the hall, or by casual and sloppy drill.” - [BBA Drill Manual]

SECTION 2 - A new commander

Changes with a new commander

At 33rd Vic Borinia, the Captain's view is to empower Boys in leadership, and for Boys to gain experience in leading as part of the development of NCO's.^[5.a] In 2018, 16 year old Corporal Daniel Hugo was recommended by officers as a potential drill commander. He was a Boy who was able and willing, to lead a drill squad, but more importantly had the capacity in terms of time. This allowed him time to prepare, develop and plan for drill, around studies. On top of this he was flexible and willing to learn from others and take on advice. Usually other able Boys would progress to officers by the time they had the capacity to lead and teach drill. ^[5.a]

It may have appeared that Daniel was running things by himself, but behind the scenes he had help, from officers to the Captain. However much of the program, techniques and teachings were done by Daniel himself.^[5.a]

Extra Practices

He also increased our practices, by starting our 6 pm (before parade) practices in term 1, to help retain the information that was taught. The way we did this is by practicing often and with breaks in the longer practices. Another challenge we faced was to get Boys to attend practices. The approach was by giving best Boy points to everyone who attends a drill practice.

How did teaching drill change

Daniel has been mentoring me about commanding drill, and these are three points he advises me on:

1. Don't overload the Boys with too much information. Keep the lessons simple and down to earth, teach about 3 points worth of information, this is to make sure that whatever you do teach gets retained and not lost
2. Make sure to have a goal when going to drill practice. Having a goal means that you are following a path to your end goal, instead of just winging it and hoping for the best
3. Conclude your practice with prayer. This is because you are doing drill for God and not for personal gain. It also gives you another opportunity for team building, by gathering around each other and praying/learning about each other and their goals

Drill Camp

During 2018 one of the Boys in the drill squad created a Drill camp. The focus of the camp was to have uninterrupted time to practice, as well as an enjoyable environment for the Boys to bond together in. The following year Daniel ran the camp and made sure that there was a balance between training and rest. The way he did this was by focusing the first day on drill practices, and the second was focused on team bonding activities.



SECTION 3 - Refining Ideas

After seeing the progress of the previous year, Daniel knew he was on the right track, however he also knew that more improvement could be made, however there was now a clear and reachable goal that could be used as inspiration, winning the State Drill Competition.

Team Spirit

We had become a committed crew, to quote the Australian Army Cadets Drill Manual section 1-1.2b: *“Drill forms a common bond and a unity of spirit and purpose within a team”* I believe that we had achieved this. The commander's attitude is the forerunner to the drill team's attitude. For example, when the commander arrives early for practices, in full uniform and enthusiastic to start, the team members will also start arriving sooner, in uniform, ready and enthusiastic to start.

Daniel was always offering advice and congratulating the members of the squad.^[2]

SECTION 1-1.10 At the end of the session he would also gather the squad around and get each member to give their own feedback on what was done well during the session and what could be improved on in future sessions. This led to different perspectives being shared, as well as letting the squad have some control and influence over how they wanted practices to go .

Practice Increased

Our Saturday practices came sooner in the year as well as practicing during a parade night. The amount of time that we practiced increased, for Saturday practices 4 hours became 6 hours, for parade night practices 30 minutes became 40 minutes. These increases may seem small however they made a huge difference. When Daniel arranged an extra practice session outside of BB we would get a 100% turnout. The boys would also be eager to do drill and learn the techniques. This was a good sign which showed that the Boys were interested in drill and that the sessions weren't boring or confusing.

Improving little details

Music was also used to help with timing, this may not seem as effective as a metronome, however instead of having to brute force memorize the timing, the timing would instead get stuck inside our heads via a catchy song. When choosing a song to march to the more catchy it is the better. In this case the song Daniel chose was Gimme Gimme Gimme by Abba^[10], the main reason was because it was unorthodox, and a bit cringey, it also had simple lyrics that allowed it to stick fast. ^[5.b]



Practice Focus

Another tool employed was video analysis. By recording the marching and then, as a group, watching the recording each member is able to see what they are doing, as well as to offer more detailed advice to other members. This gives another view of the performance.^[5.b] This allows the process of finding and fixing mistakes to become quicker, as there are more eyes analysing the data.^[8]

After so much refining from last year, all that was left to refine was small details and technique. Focusing on smaller more general details, such as pace size and timing. This was a more efficient use of time than trying to fix specific movement, like a wheel or turn.

Relaxation day before competition

On the day of the competition the drill team had a final drill practice, and then went to one of the Boys' houses to relax and chill. The practice was less intense than the normal practices, however this was because the purpose of the practice was to remind us about what had been practiced. The reason the squad went to one of the Boys houses was to help calm them before the Drill Competition, thus allowing them to focus more on performing the movements.

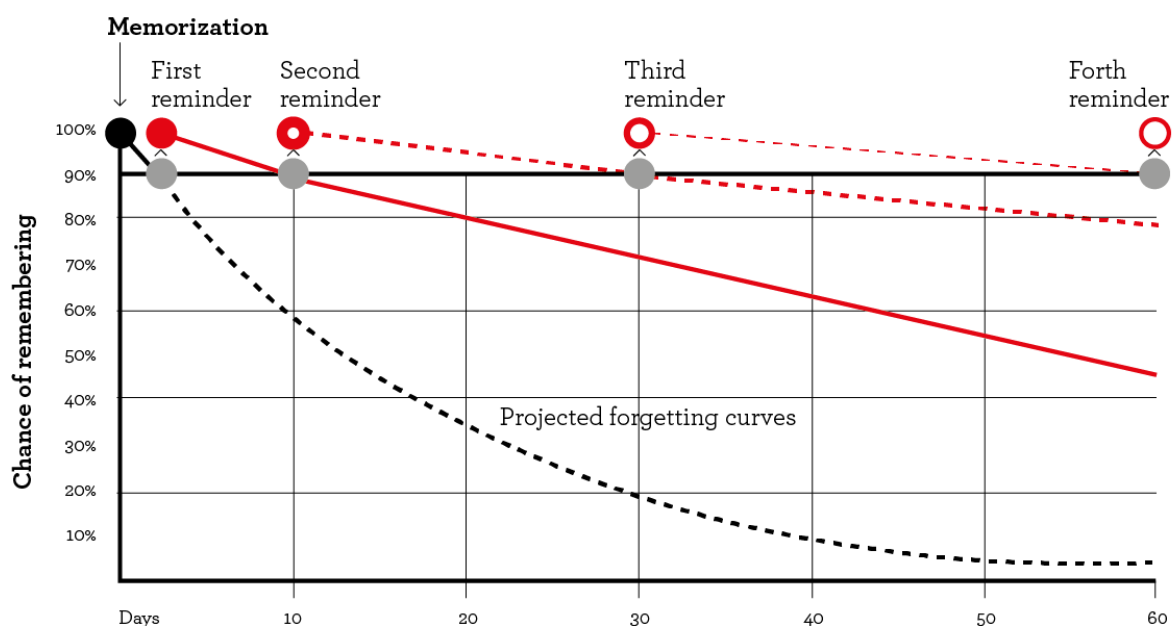
1 Corinthians 12:25 "This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. 26 If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad." - New Living Translation

SECTION 4 - Formula for Success

With uniforms ironed, shoes polished, and many hours of practice, the drill team marched onto the drill floor, ready to be judged. Their hopes and nerves solidified in the reality of our preparations. After a deep breath the drill commander called the first command, "Squad, Attention".

Regular Practices

In his book *"Outliers"* Malcolm Gladwell suggests that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to become an expert at something. We may not have 10,000 hours, but perhaps more realistically, author Josh Kufmen writes, that to go from "knowing nothing to pretty good" actually takes about 20 hours of practice. Daniel would often refer to the "forgetting curve", discovered by Hermann Ebbinghaus.^[7]



This shows how quickly we forget, but through regular repetition we are able to retain what we have learnt. To apply this concept to BB drill, it would be wise for a company to do regular half hour practices throughout the year.

We started practicing drill in term 1, and increased our practices in terms 2 and 3 to twice as many half hour practices per parade night. To further our practices, we added 4 hour blitz training sessions on some Saturdays in term 3 and a drill camp.

Team bonding

As articulated in the Australian Army Cadets Drill Manual *“Drill forms a common bond and a unity of spirit and purpose within a team.”*^[2] SECTION 1-1.2 A high focus on team bonding is arguably better than a high focus on raw skill. This is a team effort, and as such it is easier to teach Boys that are a team. They will work with the drill commander and listen to him. This is one of the many benefits of forming a team.

In a post from former Navy SEAL, Curt Cronin, co-founder and CEO of Ridgeline Partners, he writes that for a team to achieve the same end; a cohesive, peak-performance team, the leader must *“Paint a picture that inspires unity”*^[9]

Daniel was that kind of a leader. He inspired. He had a vision. He shared the journey with us. We all knew what our goal was, and we knew we were going to achieve it together.

It was through many hours spent together, practicing, socializing, towards the same goal, that built a strong team. But it did not end at drill. This bond was shared throughout all company activities, devotions, parade, squad times. As the BBA drill manual stated *“It has often been proved that a Company which is good at drill is good at most other things. The result can be felt in all Company activities, the general atmosphere and spirit of the Company, and the overall discipline. The result can also be seen in the Bible Class, and attendances at Bible Class often go up with the drill attendance and standard.”*

Precise Measurements



This famous quote emphasizes the importance of focused practice and a high level of proficiency. Although we are not practicing one drill movement 10,000 times, we rather want to be diligent and master the technical proficiency of our movements.

One of the tools we used to help us improve our accuracy and precision of our moves was through the aid of visual feedback. By videoing our practices and then observing and reviewing our practices and how we looked, helped us gain proprioception. This visual feedback loop helped us to connect and improve our performance. A research study that backs up why and how visual feedback helps improve accuracy is published in Hindawi, "*Effects of motor training on Accuracy and Precision of Jaw and Finger movements*" [8], concluded that visual feedback significantly influences the accuracy and precision on physical movements when used as a training aid along with practice.

In BB we can use everyday tools around us to master our drill movements. We need to remember to be kind to ourselves, to train at the level we are at, and master each move one at a time.

CONCLUSION

In this story we covered how 33rd Vic Boronia's Senior section trained and prepared for the State Drill Competition, and how their efforts paid off to take the winning trophy. What made this journey



unique is how a Boy was able to build and teach a drill program that resulted in 33rd Vic Boronia winning the State Drill Competition for the first time since the competition has been in place.

First and foremost we acknowledge that Daniel Hugo was not only willing and able, but also capable of putting in the time and effort. We also acknowledge the Captain of 33rd, Captain Chee Ngui, who empowered Daniel Hugo, by giving him the opportunity, resources and respect to carry out this endeavor of being the Drill Commander.

One of the things that Daniel told me during our interview was that Tough and Hard experiences bring people together, which helps to bond them. The drill camp was designed around this and, run to create bonding and to teach drill at the same time.

Another very powerful technique that I would recommend is review. Using resources like video analyses not only makes the commander aware of the small details, but also allows the members to see themselves

Along with the quality of drill teaching, the enthusiasm of the instructor is equally, if not more important. I can speak from my experience that whenever our drill

commander would show up with enthusiasm, it would rub off on me, making me more willing to put in the effort to learn.

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