



## ▶ SPRING BREAK THRILL:

Royal Canadian Sea Cadets get a once-in-a-lifetime experience during Coast Guard Boot Camp

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**THIS SPRING BREAK**, three Royal Canadian Sea Cadets (RCSC) embarked on the journey of a lifetime. They spent their British Columbia high school work experience as youth search and rescue technicians (SAR Techs) on the Pacific Ocean with the Canadian Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard Youth Boot Camp program is the brainchild of Assistant Commissioner Roger Girouard who says, "It's a win-win; the Sea Cadets learn hands-on about real life maritime careers, and the Canadian Coast Guard has a recruiting tool to introduce Canada's finest youth to our Western Region Search and Rescue."

While the three youths were spending their spring break gaining high school credits for learning the technical choreography of real-life man overboard drills, their high school colleagues were participating in land-based activities. In British Columbia, students choose from a suite of options of high school work experiences including various retail, fast food, hospitality and service opportunities.

"My friends are bagging groceries for their work experience," says 16-year-old Brian Qi, from RCSCC Captain Vancouver, "and we're out on the ocean practicing parbuckling drills on each other."

Although the Coast Guard Youth Boot Camp Program is not a Sea Cadet activity under the control and supervision of the Department of National Defence, only Royal Canadian Sea Cadets are selected to participate because of their seamanship, leadership, teamwork, first aid training and demonstrated interest in a maritime industry.



"The Sea Cadets come with huge skills and abilities," says Nic Frith, Coast Guard Search and Rescue Specialist, who acted as mentor and supervisor to the youth for the week of boot camp. "They already know how to do heaving lines, nautical terminology and they're focused and mature. They were able to operate the boats already. These Cadets could get hired in the Coast Guard right out of high school as far as I'm concerned."

ABOVE: Brian Qi learns lessons about teamwork and leadership on the sea that would be impossible in a typical entry-level job. In the background, *The Grace* under full sail. As part of a different program, 30 Sea Cadets acted as pirates during a five-day tall ship deployment.

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The boot camp curriculum was created by senior Search and Rescue Specialist Tyler Brand, who included in the week's syllabus such activities as the donning of personal protective equipment (PPE), swimming, self-rescue, fast rescue craft operations, driving, navigating, towing, communications, seamanship, line-handling and a mock search and rescue mission.

To the young participants, those activities translated into polishing existing skills, learning new skills and heading out to sea travelling at 50 knots in a bright orange Coast Guard Zodiac in full rescue gear.

"I'm way better at manoeuvring the vessel now," says Caitlin Jarvis, 17, from Gibsons, British Columbia, as she deftly reversed the Zodiac and began heading out to sea for their 'afternoon rip'.

For 17-year-old Ricardo Fabris of Victoria, the Coast Guard Youth Boot Camp changed the course of his planned career. "I was going to be an engineer with the Coast Guard, but now I realize I'm much more interested in the hands-on of rescuing people. I wouldn't have known that unless I spent this week doing search and rescue." Fabris will be entering the four-year Coast Guard College program after Grade 12 graduation.

The highlight of the boot camp program was a mock mission to board a pirate ship approaching in the Strait of Juan de Fuca off the coast of British Columbia. With dry suits, helmets and gear on, the three youth listened to the advice of Tyler Brand to

ABOVE: After getting hands-on experience learning search and rescue techniques as part of the Coast Guard Youth Boot Camp, like the chance to drive a Zodiac in full rescue gear, Ricardo Fabris is reconsidering his career choice of becoming an engineer.

RIGHT: Four Sea Cadets pose for a picture while floating aboard a Coast Guard Zodiac in front of the Parliament Buildings in Victoria, BC.

"stay inside the boat, lean your body weight in and forward into your feet."

With that they headed out at top speed in the Zodiac, heading towards an approaching pirate ship in the distance to save the West Coast.

Unknown to the three young Coast Guard SAR techs, they were about to experience a moment that would prove history making. Their rapid approach soon brought into breathtaking view the pirate threat: the tall ship *The Grace* under full sail, lyrical in its beauty against the clear blue West Coast sky.

On the deck of *The Grace* were her captain and 30 Royal Canadian Sea Cadet 'pirates' who were on a five-day tall ship deployment. It was a joyful moment for the Coast Guard youth who pulled alongside *The Grace* and waved hello to their fellow Sea Cadets.

For the Navy League of Canada, this crossover of programs represented a rare convergence when two vastly different Sea Cadet opportunities meet at sea. For Nic Frith, who was keeping vigil over his three participants and enriching them with the seeds of Coast Guard service, seeing his work through the lens of the youth in his charge was fulfilling. "They're amazing kids," Frith says. "I'm really glad to have done this."

Having saved the West Coast from pirate advances, the Coast Guard crew headed back to base for a final debriefing before the program's end, their souls nourished by their time at sea. The three youths were emotional at the injustice of having to say goodbye to the members of the Coast Guard who had taught them so much throughout their memorable week.

"I know what the Coast Guard does and how they do it," says Caitlin Jarvis. "I have so much respect for the Canadian Coast Guard. The experience in the Coast Guard is a part of me now, and a part of who I will become." ♦

