

## [A Commentary on RSM JJT McManus, CD, CDN GDS \(The Rock\)](#)

G. W. Stephen Brodsky, CD, DPhil

Sidney, BC

March 23, 2010

When in the Guards Depot's early days I arrived as a callow young sergeant instructor, I knew I'd have a challenge joining my betters – Sergeants Nick Puddicombe, Pete Stone, John Doucet – in trying to match the expectations of the living legend Regimental Sergeant Major McManus. We were training the recruits who would be the lifeblood of the elite new Regiment of Canadian Guards, and Jim was determined that they'd be the best. Only the best.

The Army's choice of Jim as the first Regimental Sergeant Major of the new-minted Canadian Guards Depot was already very nearly a postscript to a distinguished military career. In the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa in World War 2 he'd already been the Canadian Army's youngest Regimental Sergeant Major; and for the Special Force newly formed for the Korean War he'd been selected as the RSM of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment. In the Canadian Guards his earlier nickname "Rocky" changed to become a title – The Rock. A biblical parallel is apt: On him was founded a regiment. Any soldier who wouldn't or couldn't measure up to his unyielding standard of leadership was broken on that rock. He demanded the impossible, and he got it.

Jim had no patience with weakness of will and he brooked no excuse. He lived – and demanded that others live – by an ethic of total command responsibility – for oneself and for the soldiers in one's care. After each day's training his platoon sergeants would assemble for a session called Evening Parade, when he would reveal an uncanny knowledge of both the sins and graces of his charges. On one occasion a recruit somehow had been found wanting.

"Who has Recruit Clark?" the RSM asked.

"I have, sir," two of us answered.

"Which one of you has Clark RJ?"

As the other sergeant replied, I paused to thumb through my roll book.

The RSM's stare was incredulous and withering. "Sergeant, you've had this platoon for a WEEK? And you don't know your men's INITIALS? Get aboard of yourself!"

By the time I had atoned with twenty-four hours' extra duty as Picquet Sergeant, I had memorized the initials, boot and cap sizes, next of kin, religion, and home town for all thirty of my men. Jim's lessons were

deservedly harsh but instructive. He never put his subordinates *down*. Rather, he made us measure *up*. (But I never quite figured out how to follow his oft-repeated acrobatic order to "get aboard of myself.")

Jim was utterly intolerant of error. Hard yet scrupulously fair, he wouldn't tolerate the slightest neglect or abuse of subordinates, or even foul language.

Jim had a great sense of humour and it wasn't of the muted sort. He appreciated a humorous situation and his laughter was as huge as his stamping steel-shod boots. Everything about Jim was huge. He was a huge presence among us.

And that in turn was matched by his compassion. When, some years after our Depot days, I'd arrived at a crisis of decision about the future, I turned to him again when he was College Sergeant Major at the Royal Military College, Kingston. He proved unfailingly loyal with the understanding and sage counsel I sought. I left a few hours later, with renewed sense of purpose and direction. Since then, as his beneficiary in leadership I have cherished his example of a soldierly kind of love, which has served me well over the years.

Through a mysterious chemistry he inspired me and generations of others to give a "best" we hadn't known was in us. In later years and up through the ranks, I've often heard inwardly that imposing voice intoning the mantra of command he taught me to live by: "Sergeant, you're RESPONSIBLE."

In short, he taught us by his example how to lead. I once told him I owe him more than I can ever repay, and I know I'm not alone in that. His was a precious gift for us to pass on – a legacy that endures today both with his family and in our soldiers in other far fields where poppies grow.

In my exchanges with his twin sons this week, it became clear to me that the values and principles that Jim taught to us soldiers, he also instilled in his children. I am sure you, his family, saw this same great quality of spirit, and were touched by him as greatly as we were. However, I knew him only as a soldier; and while I saw his humanity, I never saw flaws. To me he has always been an ideal, an inspiration, and a comrade, and I've counted it an honour to call him friend and mentor.

The proof of all I've said here is the bond we've had for well over half a century, and my lasting love and respect. Jim will always remain for me a truly Great Man - a Soldier. I share his family's loss.