

# Tragedy on Lake George

On a Sunday in July in the year of 56,  
On a lake that's known for beauty and for danger  
There came a group of men with some sailing craft to fix –  
For some that evening death would be no stranger

When the College sought to broaden the horizon of her men,  
To become less insular and more diverse  
They could not then foresee that most tragic moment when,  
The blessing of their sailing turned to curse

Staff Cadet Noble made request for a visit to the lake,  
To help maintain the College Sailing craft  
To carry out this mission seven others he did take,  
While on the truck they probably joked and laughed

There was Pritchard, Gosling, Ford, Colquhoun and Jorgensen,  
Also Reilly and Alizzie shared the ride  
They were in the prime of youth, they were strong and healthy men  
As sailors though just Noble qualified.

Though the water was quite cold there was little wind about  
The surface of the lake was fairly calm  
Colquhoun and Jorgensen rigged a VJ and sailed out  
There was no sense this task could end in harm

They were sailing close to shore, just a little distance out  
And as they turned the craft the boat capsized  
From their icy water plunge they were seen to get about  
The future peril not yet realized

These two continued sailing while the others worked their chores  
And then work stopped for lunch at 2pm  
They called them in from sailing and were seen to turn for shore  
By meal's end though they had not joined with them.

For these two had come to trouble, now a greater distance out,  
Both clinging to the hull their boat upturned  
Their returning to the clubhouse had never come about  
To sail against the wind they'd never learned.

On shore their friends proceeded to sail out to make a rescue  
In an engineer assault craft from the fleet  
But on reaching these two fellows their attempt could not continue  
As their boat collapsed when fate dislodged a seat.

Now five were in the water and some tried to swim for shore,  
On land they searched for motor boats in vain  
They grabbed an older VJ and with wood to use as oars  
A rescue mission set out once again

They paddled through the icy waves and came across a swimmer,  
Near exhausted and affected by the cold  
They slung him 'cross the cockpit and with daylight growing dimmer  
They found two others clinging to a hull

With these two dragged aboard there were now five on the boat  
And only three were conscious furthermore  
With the overloaded VJ trying hard to stay afloat  
They turned around to paddle back to shore

There was no sign of the others and the going very slow,  
To make it worse a head wind came with night  
Alone Alizzi waited there was no way he could know  
That tragedy was just beyond his sight

Alizzi started paddling just as the truck returned  
To take the party back home to their quarters  
His paddling back to shore was the way the drivers learned  
That seven men were stranded on these waters

He sent the drivers searching for a phone at nearby farms  
And said that he would wait till help arrived  
They still were unaware of the gravity of harm  
That faced their colleagues struggling for their lives

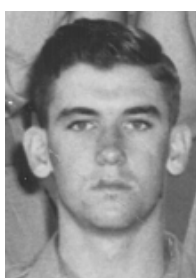
## THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES



**I.D. Colquhoun**



**B.W. Jorgensen**



**D.F. Noble**



**R.R. Pritchard**



**J.L. Reilly**

The driver was not able to locate a telephone  
And returned to RMC in failing light  
The army DUKW was readied but the headwind now had grown  
And the tiny boat was blown into the night

On board they saw the truck driving off o'er Geary's Gap  
As the offshore wind now blew them further out  
To add to their despair Colquhoun was in a flap,  
Deliriously he tried to thrash about

On shore Alizzi waited but when no one had returned,  
He thought it best to start back on his own  
He caught a lift which took him back to college where he learned  
The DUKWs had left but all else was unknown

On the lake the dark descended and they huddled on the boat,  
They tried to keep her pointed to the waves  
The VJ took on water and was barely now afloat,  
Each minute stole their hope of being saved.

Their hopes of rescue raised when at last they saw the lights  
As the army DUKW patrolled along the beach  
The 50 metre range of their lights searched through the night  
But the drowning men were well beyond their reach

It seemed that all the elements conspired against their task,  
A moonless night, a strong wind, driving spray  
They knew not where to search – there was no one there to ask,  
Concern was quickly turning to dismay.

Just then a large wave crashed against the boat and it capsized,  
Colquhoun and Jorgensen were seen no more  
Just three men now were clinging to the VJ on its side,  
And death still had not finished with its score

Another wave crashed down and these three were swept asunder,  
It seemed that fate had finished its attack  
Lake George would keep poor Reilly's body hidden deep down under,  
Two months would pass before it gave him back

But somehow in the wash Ford and Gosling found the strength  
To grasp as drowning men their little boat  
And that is where they stayed till the Army Dukw at length  
Chanced to find them - close to death but still afloat.

After four cold freezing hours these two men had now been saved,  
Their task of rescue tragically unfilled  
For five cadets this lake was this evening now their grave,  
Five future leaders accidentally killed

When the college finally learned of this elemental slaughter  
They joined the searching party to a man  
Till 3am they toiled on the shore and chest deep water,  
And started back as soon as day began

They toiled all through the morn but it wasn't till 3 when  
A chopper brought a little bit of closure  
Still wearing a life jacket they'd located Jorgensen,  
Autopsy found he died from cold exposure.

They dragged the lake with hooks, and planes flew searching low,  
They waded through the shoreline and the marsh  
No matter how they tried Lake George would not let go,  
The waiting and not knowing cruelly harsh

When Reilly was discovered on the thirteenth of September,  
Colquhoun and Noble's bodies were nearby  
The next day they retrieved Pritchard, the last remaining member  
Of this fateful group all much too young to die.

Hindsight is a precious gift, if only they had known  
The wind would push them to the other shore  
An even greater irony – the winds of time have blown,  
In Lake George there's no water any more.

CHAP Jim Cosgrove 2008

**Photo:** Funeral of Cadets who  
drowned in Lake George,  
RMC Parade Ground,  
15 September 1956  
(RMC Archives)



This poem acknowledges  
"Duntroon, The Royal Military  
College of Australia, 1911-2001"  
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