



Pacific Region Cadets

ROYAL CANADIAN SEA CADETS
ROYAL CANADIAN ARMY CADETS
ROYAL CANADIAN AIR CADETS

THE CANADIAN CADET ORGANIZATION IS A NATIONAL YOUTH PROGRAM SPONSORED BY THE CANADIAN FORCES IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CIVILIAN ARMY CADET, AIR CADET, AND NAVY LEAGUES OF CANADA

BACKGROUNDER DOCUMENTATION

"FREEDOM OF THE CITY"

The tradition of granting Freedom of the City to a military unit goes back more than three centuries. Throughout history there has been a strong aversion against the war-like appearance of large bodies of troops in city streets disturbing the peace and appearing to be a threat to the ancient civic rights of the city fathers. The custom first took hold after the restoration of King Charles II of England in 1660.

During the winter months, military troops camped outside the walls of the city. While the soldiers might visit the city's taverns during the day, they would return to their camp at sunset. Over the winter, the soldiers would gain the trust of their city neighbours. As the citizens became more familiar with them, they might then be conferred with "Freedom of the City" particularly if they had defended the city from an attacking enemy or performed some other worthy deed.

The Freedom of the City means, in the physical sense, the granting of the privilege for all time for a specific military unit to march through the city with "drums beating, colours flying, and bayonets fixed." It is a most prized honour, for it recognizes the honourable record of the military unit, and demonstrates the affection and esteem with which it is held by the community and the trust the citizenry has in the military to protect its democratic institution.

The granting of "The Freedom of the City" is therefore a private matter between civic officials and the specific unit. The decision to grant this symbolic freedom rests with the municipal authorities. While it is not unprecedented, it is rare for a city to grant the honour to a foreign military unit. "Freedom of the City" may also be bestowed on a unit of the Royal Canadian Sea, Army and Air Cadets, often to mark a long history of service in a community.

The ceremony starts as the unit to be granted the Freedom of the City marches towards city hall, colour cased and rifles carried without bayonets fixed. When the unit nears city hall, they are stopped by the chief constable standing in front of a barrier in the centre of the road. The unit halts at the barrier. The chief constable challenges the unit on its identity, and the commanding officer responds with the unit's title. The chief constable then calls for the unit to "advance one and be recognized". The commanding officer only, moves closer to the barrier.

The commanding officer, accompanied by the chief constable, then marches to the door of city hall. The commanding officer knocks on the door three times with the pommel of his or her sword. The mayor opens the door and the commanding officer declares his name and that of the unit. With the city councillors line up at the entrance to city hall the mayor reads a proclamation proclaiming that Freedom of the City is bestowed on the specific unit. The commanding officer accepts the freedom and returns to the unit and the chief constable orders that the barrier be removed. The unit fixes bayonets, and the colour is unfurled. The unit marches past, with the mayor taking the salute.

Once a unit has been granted Freedom of the City it may exercise its freedom on occasions arranged with the civic authority. The ceremony to exercise Freedom of the City is similar, except the unit may march directly to city hall with drums beating, colours flying and bayonets fixed. After the unit is challenged and identified by the chief constable, the mayor proclaims the unit welcome, inspects the troops, and invites the unit to exercise its freedom.