

## Fire at Will

### A Tale from the Vic High Rifle Range

There have been hundreds of teams and clubs at Vic High over the years, but if there was one that might strike us as a bit unusual considering the contemporary suspicion of firearms, it might be the shooting range competitions that took place in the attic of Vic High. And here it was you thought all that happened up there was a bit of flirting and snuggling. Well, one's notion of carrying on in the attic could immediately be put to rest when the potential snugglers were packing around .22 rifles.

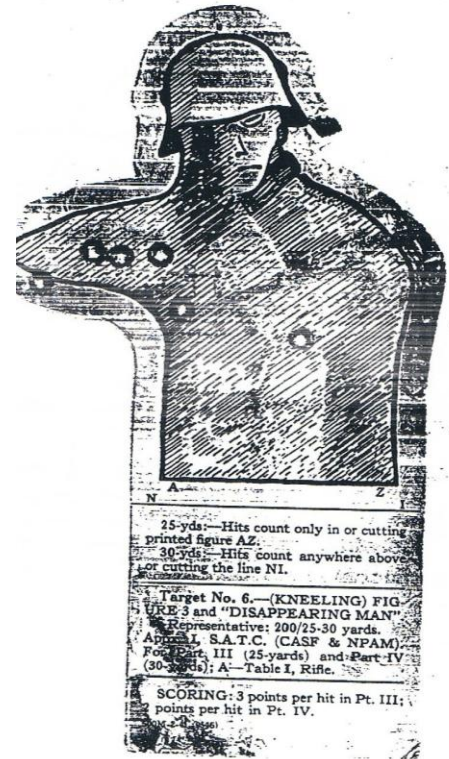
As the opening of the building on Grant Street corresponded closely with the beginning of the Great War in 1914, a target range was created in the attic and stayed in use until the end of World War II. The student cadets between 1914 and 1918 practiced shooting vigorously in the attic and at the West Point Barracks range.

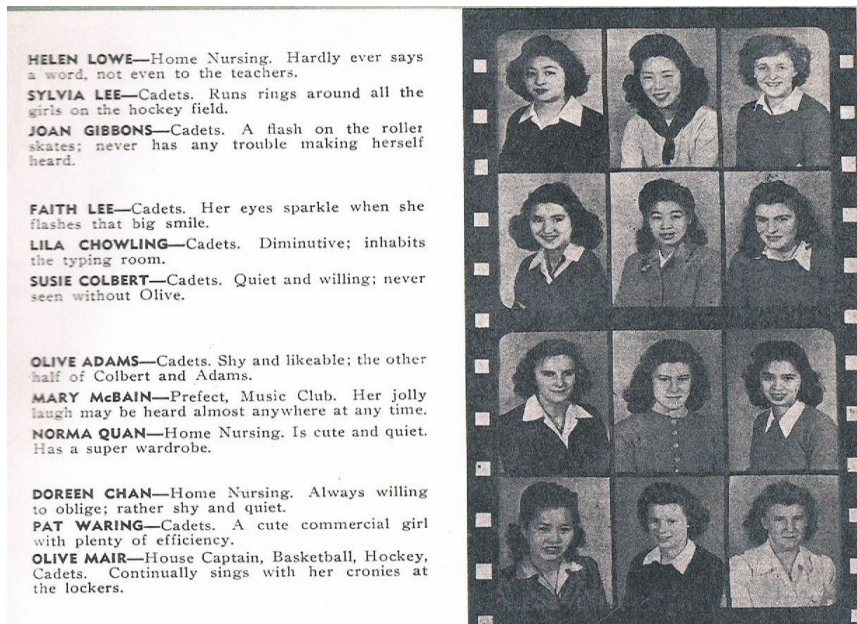
During those early years at the school, shooting competitions were held, for both boys and girls, and records of those shooting trials still exist. I found no evidence you could win a Block V for your marksman proficiency, but trophies existed so some personal acclaim must have been involved.

We know that Cadet Captain Yuill won a Ross Rifle, courtesy of the Daughters of the Empire, for his total of 70 points accumulated during gallery matches for the month of March in 1914. Noted was that a further competition would be held at the Clover Point Range on April 5, where another Ross Rifle could be won, as well as many cash prizes.

During World War II, a number of girls were taught to shoot in the attic of Vic High, as we learned from this letter from Mrs. Suzie (Colbert) Griffin:

"To whom it may concern: During the Second World War, we used to practice shooting in the attic of Victoria High School under the directions of Mr. Clarke. We enjoyed it very much. One time, I suddenly turned my head to the left and I heard a whistling sound in my right ear. Sylvia Lee, who was next to me, had inadvertently pulled the trigger of her rifle, and a shot went right past my head. She gave up shooting after that. I still remember the whistle of that stray bullet. Otherwise I wouldn't still be here. I graduated in 1944, I had just turned 18. I have good memories of going to good old Vic High."





Mrs. Griffin didn't explain where she was standing when the gun went off or if Mr. Clarke allowed the girls to fire at will. She did point out that her father graduated from Vic High when it was located at Central School. Her oldest brother Jim graduated from Vic High as well, and went on to UBC, received a scholarship from Columbia University and eventually earned a doctorate in International Affairs. Her younger sister graduated from Vic High and then did her nurses' training at St. Joseph's Hospital. Their cousins from Bamberton boarded in Victoria and attended Vic High because it was the closest high school.

Mrs. Griffin had *nine* children: Mary Anne, Paul, Monica, Mark, Cecilia, and Joan who graduated from Vic High, Janet from St. Ann's Academy, and "horrors," Theresa and Michelle from Oak Bay. One grandchild, Sean Janzer, graduated from Vic High as well.

As you have read, Mrs. Griffin has led a very full and active life, and we sincerely appreciate her taking the time out to share some of her story with us.

As for Sylvia Lee, we'll assume as she promised to stay away from the gun range, she's lived a long and fulfilling life as well.

Comparatively speaking, the old attic is rather quiet these days. I am pretty sure, but can't be totally positive; one can visit there without putting one's life at risk.

If you have a story you think would make interesting reading in "Tales from the Attic," please pass it on. We'll consider just about anything except for licentious tales about any "snogging" up in the attic. Some things are best kept a secret.

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Barrie Moen ('69)