

Petty Office Cadet Alex Cameron – My Sea Cadets Journey

Good afternoon Sirs, Ma'ams, Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Alex Cameron. Until last week, when I aged out, I was a Petty Officer Cadet at Musselburgh Unit. I'm delighted to be here at Trinity House to share what Sea Cadets has meant to me.

The real turning point in my journey came when my Unit Training Officer suggested I go to Port Edgar Boat Station for a Stage 1 sailing course.

I couldn't think of anything worse than going away with people I didn't know. Naturally, I said I didn't want to go. And naturally, my mum made me go anyway.

It didn't go particularly well, mostly because of a difficult experience with other cadets. But the chief instructor, Rhys Gorman, persuaded me to come back for Stage 2.

That second visit changed everything. I loved it. And I've been going back to Port Edgar ever since.

Without Port Edgar, I don't know whether I'd have carried on sailing. I needed somewhere to return to, skilled people to teach me and the chance to practise again and again.

Port Edgar wasn't just somewhere to go for one course. It became the place where my confidence grew. There were proper boats and facilities, skilled instructors and a pathway from being a complete beginner to taking on much bigger challenges.

Sailing would have been beyond my reach in that way without Sea Cadets. Having that specialist facility available to me made all the difference.

Once I'd discovered sailing, I wanted to race. I started doing Sunday keelboat racing with Sea Cadets at a local yacht club, then Wednesday evening racing at Port Edgar with friends. I loved the adrenaline and the teamwork.

Eventually, we developed enough to be selected for the RS21 National Championships in Lymington in 2023. Sailing with new people and being interviewed on camera tested my confidence. But it grew, and we finished as the top Sea Cadets team in a fleet of fifteen boats.

For the past three years, I've also competed at the National Sailing Regatta. The unpredictable wind at Southport has taught me how to deal with disappointment, and possibly how to be a bit more mature when it comes to protests!

Last month, all that practice paid off when I won bronze as part of the Northern Area Windsurfing Team. I also had the chance to speak to The Princess Royal, our Admiral. That was an amazing way to finish my cadet career.

Having made the life-changing discovery that I loved sailing, I realised I wanted to test myself in competition. I started off by doing Sunday keelboat racing with Sea Cadets at a local yacht club – and became addicted to the adrenalin rush of the racing!

Me and a few friends started taking part in Port Edgar's Wednesday night racing. We developed our skills to the point we were selected to attend the RS21 National Championships in 2023.

But down at Lymington, I struggled in a team of new people. And being interviewed on camera for a news story pushed me out of my comfort zone. My confidence slowly grew, and once I had the chance to sail with friends, everything clicked. We ended up as the top Sea Cadets team out of 15 boats!

But some of my proudest achievements are not medals. They're my instructor qualifications in dinghies, keelboats and windsurfing, because those mean I can now help somebody else enjoy the same experiences.

Port Edgar's manager, Adam Ranklin, and Rhys have both played a huge part in that. They didn't just teach me to sail. They gave me the encouragement and support to become an instructor myself.

One of the best things about Sea Cadets is that someone who starts off shy and uncertain can end up teaching the next group of young people. And that cycle depends on having places like Port Edgar, where cadets can come back, build their skills and get to know experienced staff who believe in them.

In summer 2025, I was asked if I'd like to help with a programme called On The Water, which was running at Port Edgar for the first time.

It's different from an ordinary cadet course. On The Water is an outreach programme that offers free watersports taster sessions to young people who might otherwise have very little opportunity to get on the water, including children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

I spent a month teaching sailing and paddlesports, five days a week. That was where I really developed as an instructor. But it was also something more important to me: I was helping young people have the kind of first experience that changed my life.

I knew what it felt like to be nervous and unsure. I'd been the ten-year-old who didn't want to come back after a difficult first course. So being able to welcome other young people onto the water, help them feel comfortable and give them a chance to try something new meant a great deal.

The thing that I didn't appreciate when I was younger is how much has to happen for a programme like that to work. You need the boats and the boat station. You need trained people who can teach safely. You need all the planning that goes on behind the scenes. And, because these sessions are free for the children taking part, you need the funding that makes that possible.

On The Water is funded entirely through external support raised for the programme. That generosity means the opportunity doesn't depend on whether a family can afford to pay for a course. It means Sea Cadets can reach beyond its own units and introduce more young people to activities they might never otherwise try.

I think that's something special. I was given a chance through the boat station, and then I was able to use what I'd learnt to give other people a chance too.

I've even given our Chief Executive, Guy, a windsurfing lesson! He showed real promise, although I was quite relieved we were on dry land. I'm still looking forward to giving him a proper lesson at Port Edgar.

Offshore sailing aboard Royalist challenged me in different ways. I achieved Watch Leader this year, despite being terribly seasick during the Tall Ships Races leg towards Stavanger. It taught me a lot about resilience.

I'm now studying on a three-year maritime and STEM cadetship at City of Glasgow College, and one day I'd love to work on superyachts around the world. I also want to volunteer, because I know what the right instructor can do for a young person who doesn't yet believe in themselves.

I'm grateful to the volunteers at Grangemouth and Musselburgh, and especially to Adam, Rhys and all the teams at Port Edgar. And to everyone who helps support our boat stations and raise funds for programmes like On The Water... thank you!

For me, the boat station didn't just open the door to sailing. It gave me the skills and the confidence to hold that door open for somebody else.

Sea Cadets just wouldn't be possible without all the amazing staff and volunteers who dedicate their time to helping kids achieve and succeed. Their hard work does not go unnoticed, and I will always be grateful to them. Especially to my first CO at Grangemouth Unit, Captain Cuningham, who built me up from a shy kid to a confident leader. And to Adam and Rhys at Port Edgar Boat Station – who constantly helped me develop confidence and resilience on the water.

Before I discovered Port Edgar, I had tried kayaking and windsurfing taster sessions at Edinburgh Water Sports Centre ... and hated it. The fact that I now work there as an instructor tells you how much Adam and Rhys helped me.

I also need to thank the staff at Musselburgh Unit, who were so welcoming when I transferred in December. And the countless volunteers across Northern Area – some I won't even have met – who have made massive contributions to my Sea Cadets journey.

So I'd like to finish by saying a huge thank you to everyone who gave up their time – to give me the time of my life. It is greatly appreciated.

Thank you very much for listening.