

MANPOWER PLANNING

The Navy's total strength has continued to reduce and, at 63,200, is some 1,800 fewer than a year ago. With the current Fleet remaining at much the same size, the reductions have had to fall mainly in the Support and Training areas; concomitant efficiency improvements have not always materialised in time, and extra tasks such as guarding have appeared. The result is the well known phenomenon - stretch. In the timescale of Options for Change the size of the task, and the number of people to meet it, will be brought back into balance.

MANNING

The current strains in manning result from upward trends in wastage rates, which are now at their highest level for ten years. Male non-artificer ratings are our main cause for concern, although there also remain some worrying areas amongst officers and artificers. The decision to employ the WRNS at sea will allow fuller utilisation of our trained people and improve some sea shore ratios for men. Royal Marines manning remains generally in balance although again subject to increasing voluntary wastage rates mainly due to dissatisfaction with pay.

RETENTION

Some successes have been achieved in measures to improve retention. There have been substantial increases in the real value of some bonuses and allowances, most notably the Open Engagement bonuses and the Long Service Advance of Pay for House Purchase, which, in addition, has now been extended to unmarried personnel. Putting some of the cleaning and painting of ships out to civilian contract has helped to reduce the drudgery factor.

The main reasons given by those who apply for Premature Voluntary Release are lack of job satisfaction, inability to make personal plans, excessive separation and slow promotion or advancement. These factors reflect the demands on personnel caused by gapped billets, commitments in excess of resources and inadequate facilities and support. The recently instituted Continuous Attitude Survey has revealed that pay and allowances are also now a matter for major concern.

RECRUITMENT

There has been wide publicity about the extent to which demographics (the birth dearth!), the economy and changing attitudes amongst the young are combining to create an increasingly difficult recruiting market. In common with most other large employers, the RN is putting considerable effort into new ways of attracting people from the available pool in order to keep up both the numbers and the quality which we need to sustain the Fleet.

Officer Recruiting. Effective advertising led to a 40% increase in the officer enquiry rate in 1989/90 and, by the end of the year, 652 had entered - an increase of 34 on the previous year but still a shortfall of 7.6%. The main shortage categories were Engineers, Observers and Doctors.

Rating Recruiting. 6,033 ratings and other ranks were recruited into Naval Service in 1989/90. This was the highest intake since 1981/82 but still 841 (12.2%) below the recruiting target, which has been steadily increasing to compensate for high wastage rates. The main shortage categories are Seaman Operators, Radio Operators, Marine and Weapons Engineering Mechanics, all Supply and Secretariat branches and trained Nurses. Recruiting for the Royal Marines and WRNS has remained buoyant.

In anticipation of likely recruiting difficulties in the 90's caused by the demographic trough, a study was commissioned into the wider employment of women to meet the manning requirements of the Fleet and to improve career opportunities and prospects for female personnel. The Study team made its recommendations in the Spring of 1989.

Following considerable staffing and debate, the Navy Board and Ministers decided to go ahead and in February 1990 the Minister of State for the Armed Forces made the following announcement:

"I am very pleased to be able to announce that we intend to extend the employment of members of the WRNS to include service at sea in surface ships of the Royal Navy

Our decision has been taken against a background of

concern about the Royal Navy's future manning position, but we have also been mindful that the current restrictions on WRNS employment were in any case ripe for review in the light of developments in other navies and of domestic social trends. It follows decisions already reached and announced to widen the employment opportunities for members of the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) and the Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF)."

There is one important distinction between these earlier announcements and that for the Royal Navy. It stems from the nature of naval operations and it is that officers and ratings of the WRNS serving at sea are liable to serve there in combat. This represents a change in the long-standing policy that women should not undertake Service duties that may include direct combat. We have concluded that to attempt to categorise ships as "combat" and "non-combat" would be artificial and misleading in the context of modern maritime warfare, when all ships will be liable to serve in potentially dangerous waters.

We plan for women to serve in a wide range of ships, including the carriers and amphibious ships. A team has been appointed to plan the early selection and modification of vessels so that members of the WRNS may be drafted to sea, and our aim is for the first of them to be embarked by the end of the year. Present plans do not include extending mixed manning to the submarine flotilla, but early studies will be conducted into the employment of women as Naval aircrew and in the Royal Marines. Separate work is in hand to determine how women can serve at sea in ships of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary."

BRILLIANT, INVINCIBLE, JUNO, ARGUS and BATTLEAXE were nominated as the first ships to be converted for mixed manning. The first volunteers go to sea in October after appropriate professional and general training. They are filling complement billets and being paid the same basic pay as their male counterparts. WRNS personnel serving before 1 September 1990 have the option whether or not to volunteer for sea service but after that date all new entrant officers and ratings will be liable for sea service and it is planned to convert all the most recent surface ships for mixed manning at the first opportunity.

Whilst much work has still to be done to align Conditions of Service and career structures, new branches have already been opened to women (Seaman Officer, WEM, Ops(Sonar), Artificer etc). Royal assent will need to be sought to give WRNS officers their male equivalent rank titles.

Progress in all respects has so far been most encouraging.

WARFARE BRANCH DEVELOPMENTS

It has for some time been recognised that rapidly changing technology and inherent structural weaknesses in many of the Operations and Weapon Engineering sub-branches would require remedial action by the mid-90s. It has also been accepted that the philosophy of future ship manning should move towards the user-maintainer principle. The Warfare Branch Development Team was formed to recommend the way forward with the broad objective of finding a solution which would best:

- Solve structural problems in the present branches and sub-branches.
- Satisfy the need for operator technical awareness.
- Make more efficient use of the available manpower.
- Provide a more rewarding career for those involved.

Many options were looked at and it became apparent that full merger of the Operations and Weapon Engineering sub-branches held out the best prospect of meeting the 4 objectives on an evolutionary basis. In addition it was also the only option to offer manpower savings possibilities and rewarding career prospects for Junior Ratings. The full merger option has now been the subject of two years' detailed study.

Proposals have been made to the Navy Board recommending the amalgamation of the Operations and Weapon Engineering sub-branches to enable the creation of an operator-mechanic, capable of both operating and carrying out semi-skilled maintenance; the title of the new branch which this would create has yet to be finalised. It is proposed that the present Operations and Weapon Engineering streams will gradually be phased out to be replaced at all levels by operator-mechanics. The ratings would be trained and employed in a single area of warfare and have career opportunities to Warrant Officer in their specialist fields. Officer employment and career patterns would be as for the present Seaman specialisation. The WE Officer and the WE Artificer would remain as a WE sub-branch.

There are areas which still require a further eighteen months or so to resolve, for example the long-term requirement for Senior Rate mechanics, our ability to recruit men and women of the required calibre and their capacity to cope with the breadth of training. In order to assess these important factors it will be necessary to study the details of training such as course design and scheduling, establishment capacities and training equipment requirements. This work, called the Planning Phase, is now being undertaken by Warfare Branch Development Training Design teams working to the Commander-in-Chief Naval Home Command. No decision on whether to proceed with the Warfare Branch will be taken until all this work is complete, towards the end of 1991. A lengthy transition period would then be required and would need to be most carefully managed so as to minimise disruption, maintain operational effectiveness and safeguard engineering standards.

If the proposals go ahead they will affect approximately 16,000 personnel and represent the largest manpower reorganisation since the Engineering Branch Development. But change is unavoidable if we are to take full advantage of the progress of technology.

FROM THE CHAPLAIN OF THE FLEET

At around 80, numbers in the Naval Chaplaincy Service (NCS) are a little down on last year but recruiting is now at its best for ten years and we are attracting younger candidates, which is particularly encouraging in view of our aim to put more Chaplains through the Royal Marines Commando course.

For the Church of England the year has seen steady progress towards the establishment of Synodical structures in the Royal Navy. The Archdeaconry Synod which represents all our chaplaincies has met twice and is tackling two areas of particular importance to the Church of England at present. The first, the Decade of Evangelism, is concerned with the spread of the Gospel in the approach to the third millennium of Christian history. The second, Stewardship, sets out to increase involvement in our church by drawing out the best of our talents and resources. In October the Forces' Synodical Council will meet for the first time at Lambeth Palace under the presidency of our bishop, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and representatives of all three Services will gather to consider the work of the church in the Armed Forces.

The magazine "Church Pennant" has made quite an impact in its first year. Its inception was part of the process of Synodical government which seeks above all to inform and involve all members of the Church. The magazine will be produced every quarter and its editor is always happy to receive copy.

A major ecumenical project will begin this Autumn with the first Naval Chaplaincy Consultation at Amport House. 18 Chaplains representing all denominations within the Service will spend four days considering the way ahead for the NCS in relation not only to the constraints of their own churches, but also to the requirements of the New Management Strategy.

This year marks a first for the Church of Scotland and Free Church branch with the Baptist Church providing a woman minister for the first time in the Royal Navy: the Reverend Caroline Pullman joined in September.