

PLEASE

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*May 15,
1931.*

The Finance Unit
NOT
to the Admiralty.

The Admiralty
ATTEMPT

I have
arranged with **TO** *the* *Secretary*
to raise the care
of Edward **COPY** *(late of*
Harwich Training School), on
the adjournment **THIS** *for Wednesday*
next, May 20th.

PAGE

*Yours,
Fred Roughton.*

THANK YOU

PLEASE
IMMEDIATE.

No. 368

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PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION.

NOT

To be dealt with **IMMEDIATELY** and not placed
with other papers.

ATTENTION IS DRAWN TO THE MEMORANDUM
No. 556 DATED 14th NOVEMBER, 1929.

ATTEMPT

To be answered on 3rd day June 1931.

TO

*Case of Edward Bennett -
late Boy 3rd class -
Reason of discharge*

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Motion on Government

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(See within)

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THANK YOU

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Lord.

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EXTRACT FROM HANDBOOK

3rd June

1931, COLUMNS 313-324

DO NOT

ROYAL NAVY (INVALIDED RATING).

made, and Question proposed, this House do now adjourn."—
P. Kennedy.]

LONGDEN: I deeply regret to detain the House at this hour and that there is no other way of doing what I consider to be justification at the treatment of a boy by the Admiralty during the last few years. This boy is Edward Bennett, and he is in my Division. He volunteered 12 years in the Navy. He joined in October, 1925, and was invalided in May, 1926. The boy immediately had paralysis all at one side of the body affecting the leg, arm and tongue. There is nothing which would lead me to suppose that this infiction has in any way due to any weakness or injury on his part. The Admiralty have no responsibility for this boy or any obligation towards him and his family and the boy attributes the malady to which he says he suffered while at a naval school at Harwich. The fact is that we cannot get the report made under the last Administration—the Tory Administration—on the medical point of view, and all the reports for over three years have not given any help at all being given to a very poor boy. The case of the boy has been very clearly stated in which have been written to me in which I propose to quote in my report. I received a letter in April, 1929, as follows:

commanded by my Lords. Committee of the Admiralty to acquaint you that Edward Bennett was invalided out of the Royal Navy on 2nd June, 1926, on account of a deficiency, certified by the Medical Survey to be attributable to the following:

August, 1929, that statement was found in a letter on 28th October, 1929, and this written to me from the following:

Complete medical evidence available at the time that the boy was treated for nervous disability, primarily a nervous growth of the brain, neurasthenia. The Royal Naval Medical Officer reported on him when he was in the Navy that he was under treatment both in hospital and on the sick list, practically the whole of his time there."

I am told: that in the case that the boy received home leave and a crippled condition of the body, it suggests that these disabilities are of a chronic origin as suggested by his medical officer leaving the Navy."

On the other hand argues his case effectively and he has sent me a letter in which he says that he was in hospital mainly through maladministration. To quote from the boy's

"I cannot get a record of my health before I joined the Navy as I was always in good health. I have witnesses to prove that I was fit before joining up. I am now disabled in my arm, leg and speech. In the boxing I was described by the medical officer as 'a little tiger.'"

He claims, to the best of his knowledge, that his condition is due to "ill-treatment" by the petty officer and his orders. When he was again, he received a letter from the Admiralty for having four fagging marks and 13 cuts for disobedience caused by the ill-treatment of the petty officer."

He was smacked across the face, he says, and he did not know what it was about. He received punishment in the "gym" by "indescribable jumping, climbing, bending and straining" and, finally, he says that the reason for entering the hospital was the result of birching and other ill-usage. Probably there was a type of officer there of the kind who would like to see men "on the knee" in the interests of discipline in the old savage fashion that we know so well. An Admiralty letter dated 6th September, 1929, tells me this:

"It is open of course to the boy's friends to produce any reliable medical evidence tending to show that his present illness is attributable to his naval service."

The local doctor, who knows the family well, Dr. Moscow, a very competent man indeed, has made a certain inquiry into the family history and precedents, physiologically and mentally, and he found no traceable hereditary weaknesses of a nervous order nor any traceable functional weaknesses, either in the family or in the boy. He says himself of the boy:

"His left hand is much wasted. The upper and lower arm movements are good, but the left hand is spastic and kept in a position of palmar flexion. I find hysterical aphonia. He can shout loudly, but can talk only in a whisper."

There are in addition many opinions of his neighbours. Here is one from a Mr. Carter, a very reliable neighbour, who says:

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"This is to certify that I have known Edward Bennett for about 10 years, and before he joined the Royal Navy, before he entered the Service, he was a fine lad, being bright, strong, intelligent, and of splendid physique; in fact, when he had his first leave from Shotley he was a picture to look at. When he came home discharged from the Royal Navy it was a shock to me, for I met him, and not only had he lost his voice, but he was a cripple, and is now. I am prepared to swear on oath, if required, that the boy was fit in every conceivable way when he joined the Royal Navy, but when he came out he was a complete wreck, so I think that proves that his illness must have been caused through his service."

I have other letters that I might quote, including one from Mr. Vincent, one from Mr. Gray, one from Mr. Crutchley, O.B.E., and quite a number of others. It seems to me that the letters from the Admiralty partly admit the boy's case. In the letter of 19th April, 1929, from my Lords Commissioners, one reads this:

"As he was discharged prior to attaining the age of 18, he is ineligible for the award of any compensation under the Disability Pensions Regulations."

Secondly, in the Civil Lord's letter of 6th September, 1929, it says:

"An illness which has developed since his naval service is not necessarily attributable to service."

Those words "not necessarily" bring in a considerable element of doubt, and if there be any doubt in a tragic case like this, the benefit ought to be given on the lad's side and not on the State's side. It is very strange that this boy entered the Navy fit as a fiddle and that actually during the time he was in the Service, some eight or nine months, he rapidly declined in mind and body in this way and became paralysed. No effort of mine for these three years can get a penny for that lad—not even recognition for him. That is not good enough. There must be plenty of parents wondering where their children are going to. The fault may have been under the old administra-

cult than at present, but none the less the public ought to realise what might happen to their children if they get into the hands of people like this brutal petty officer. **NOT** trust that there is still hope that the Financial Secretary will do his best to see that the State plays the game with the boy that apparently it has crippled.

The PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY to the ADMIRALTY (Mr. Addison):

Everybody who heard the case put by my hon. Friend would naturally feel a good deal of sympathy with the person on whose behalf he spoke, and one might say that he is happy in his advocate, for the case could not have been put with greater feeling and sympathy. But, in the first place, it is fair for me to remind the House that this case dates back to 1925, when the lad joined the Service at a little more than 15 years of age. He went to Shotley in October, 1925; and he was invalided out in May 1926. Nothing was heard of the case until 1927, when it was first raised, and it was again raised, as my hon. Friend has said, in 1929. There is one mistake that at once intrudes itself in the statement of my hon. Friend, when he said that the lad complains of having been birched. The birch is not used in the Navy for boys, but only caning, and that under exceptional circumstances, so that that in itself is an exaggeration. It is difficult at this distance of time to trace any accusation of ill-treatment by individual petty officers. This is the only case that has come to our notice.

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We have certainly never heard of any case of ill-treatment, and if one visits these ships and knows anything of the life in them, one gathers that these lads are treated with a very great deal of consideration, probably very much more than they get in the normal public school.

Naturally, when this case was raised—and my hon. Friend not only wrote but spoke to me about it—I called for the whole of the papers and went through them myself very carefully, and I am bound to say that, with the greatest will in the world to find some loophole, there does not seem to be any at all in this case. It is true that the boy was admitted, and the House will readily see that even if we admit the very worst, it would have to have been tremendously rapid for it to happen within six months of service. If my hon. Friend states that he was in A.1 condition when he joined, that even makes it more unlikely. The whole conditions in the Navy and in naval training are not such as would be conducive to a rapid deterioration of health in such circumstances.

I called for reports with regard to the time during which this boy was in the Service, and the reports almost immediately after he joined were to the effect that he was a wholly unsatisfactory recruit. He was continually attending the hospital for imaginary or minor complaints, almost daily. He showed signs of subnormal development, and in the examinations, which were merely elementary, he scored only 28 per cent. of the marks. Then the report says that while he was in hospital the observation was that his expression was dull and heavy, that he was slow and contradictory in answering questions, and below the average intelligence. I went into

whole matter carefully, and the practice of the Admiralty is—I can say this with every confidence, having handled a great many cases, and within the knowledge of hon. Members on both sides of the House—that if there is an element of work on which we can work, the benefit may be given to the man or the lad, and it is wholly because there is no shadow of doubt, so far as the papers in this case, that one has had to come to the decision that has already been communicated to the House by my hon. Friend.

During the time he was in the Service he has been given the opportunity to state his case, as is usually the practice, and he made no claim that his condition was the sequel to any injury or treatment that he received while in the Navy. The only remark which he made in reference to his health was that his toe hurt when walking, and that he was born with a medical reports on the whole of the lad was of a hysterical nature, and subsequent certificates from medical sources that we have had since he has been out of the Navy seem to confirm that out. Part of that certificate has already been communicated to the House by my hon. Friend. If it be true that he has shown signs that he was nervous after he left, all I can say is that he was shamming very effectively during the time he was in the Navy to bring about his discharge.

LONGDEN: That is hardly fair.
HAMMON: That is the only conclusion that can form.

MORGAN: May I ask the hon. Member whether he is arguing that a person who is passed fit into the Army cannot in the course of nine or six months, because of certain ill-treatment which he has received, show symptoms which are regarded as of a functional nature?

HAMMON: A lot hinges on the word "fit," and there is no proof whatever of any proof can be brought forward that he suffered ill-treatment, that is the case, but here is a very peculiar case. It would be peculiar if the lad, out of the whole who had been trained in the Navy, should have received this very exceptional treatment, where there is no evidence whatever in support of it. It is very difficult to trace the distance of time, and it has to be remembered that a very long while before any complaint was brought to the attention of the Admiralty. That is more difficult to prove, and very more difficult to find out whether there is any truth in it or not. What I am going to point out is that there are to be very exceptional circumstances for the lad to develop at such a short time. Those exceptional circumstances are not proved. Therefore, we would be only too glad to do the case, and give the benefit of the doubt to the lad himself.

I can assure my hon. Friend that the Admiralty and I have given great attention to this case, and we have done everything we can to get to the bottom of the matter. There are there the slightest shadow of anything would have given it to the boy willingly, but the whole facts seem to prove that there is no whatever in the treatment he received while he was in the Navy which would account for this condition. Soon after

he joined he showed signs of being physically and mentally below the normal standard, and he was in hospital for the greater part of the time for minor complaints, and it was necessary to pay him out at the end of that time. If it were possible to meet my hon. Friend I would gladly do it, but I can assure him that it is the practice of the Admiralty, at any rate during the time I have been there, always to give the benefit of the doubt to those who are concerned. I am sorry that it is not possible for us to do that in the present case.

Mr. KELLY: Something seems to be wanting in the reply of the Parliamentary Secretary. I know nothing of this case except what I have heard in this Debate, but I would ask, in view of the allegations, whether any questions were put to the particular petty officer who had charge of this boy, why a boy who so soon after joining the Navy was found to be sub-normal should have been accepted for the Navy, why his want of capacity was not found out when he was enlisted, how soon after he joined the Navy was he admitted to hospital, and what was the complaint from which he was suffering? Who was responsible for taking into the Navy a boy whom the Admiralty now claim to have been sub-normal; and why, as he had to go into a hospital within a few days, were no steps taken to release him from the Navy?

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I hope the case will not rest where it is at the moment. Investigations of some kind are required. The statement has been made that there is a complaint from only one boy. I hope the Admiralty will never rely upon that situation. I have known cases in other Services where one boy has not received the same treatment—I will put it no higher than that—as other boys who were being trained, and had excellent reason for complaining. I cannot say that that happened in this case. I do not want to suggest that the petty officer did not like this particular boy, or anything of that kind, but the case cannot be left where it is. Here is a boy whom we are now told is a cripple, but who was a sound boy when he entered the Navy. His neighbours speak of him as being an extremely bright boy physically and mentally. After a few months' service in the Navy he is in a crippled condition. Things cannot be left there, and I hope the Admiralty will investigate the case and get right down to the bottom of it, so that nobody in this country shall believe that a boy entering the Navy is not going to be properly treated.

Dr. MORGAN: I was a little disappointed with the reply of the Parliamentary Secretary. I asked a question of him really to try to ascertain whether he had any medical substantiation for the view which was expressed at the time, and only from the point of view of eliciting the outlook of the Admiralty in reference to the medical document read out. He may have some document in his possession counteracting that. There seems to be two points in this case, first, the medical fitness of the boy, and secondly, his mental stability. This boy was accepted for service in the Navy at a most impressionable age. Presumably he came up to the physical and mental standards required on recruitment. Whatever happened, whether physical ill-treatment or his mental reaction to his

surroundings—suppose all the suggestions of physical ill-treatment were untrue—yet here is a boy who has been mentally affected by the conditions existing in the Navy. As a result of that service, the boy developed a mental state which resulted in his having to go to the hospital for complaints which he regards as being real, and which the hospital authorities regard as imaginary. May I point out that they must have been real symptoms, because, in the end, the boy was taken to the hospital to have those symptoms treated. The boy has been dismissed from the Navy under conditions which deny him any opportunity of working in the ordinary industrial market. In the first instance, the Admiralty were of the opinion that the boy was fit for recruitment, and now he is sent from the Navy with a ruined constitution, and he is refused compensation for a state which is due to the conditions under which he has been serving.

It has been stated that the boy developed a dull mentality in the Service, but when did he develop it? There is a certain disease known as sleepy sickness. In its acute form it is easy to diagnose, but in its chronic form every disease has extreme forms, from the most trivial to the extreme—it is one of the most difficult diseases to diagnose, and yet it leaves mental after-effects. The boy may have had that form of sleepy sickness after his service, and this may have caused his mental reaction. I beg the Parliamentary Secretary to reconsider the case, because his reply has not been at all convincing. I am only considering the statement and the counter-statement, and, if the Parliamentary Secretary has strong medical facts showing that the boy is not entitled to compensation, he should tell us what they are, and he has not so far told us. May I be that the condition of the boy is attributable to his service in the Navy, and for these reasons I hope the hon. Gentleman will give the boy's case further consideration.

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Mr. STEPHEN: I hope that the Minister is going to agree to consider this case further. I would suggest that he should get from the boy's schoolmaster some record of his conduct and condition when at school. This boy is passed into the Service, and afterwards begins to show evidence of a dull mental condition and a bad physical condition. It was not there when he passed in, or, at least, the Minister has to take responsibility for the fact that he was passed into the Service. I suggest that the Minister might quite well go back to the boy's earlier period of life at school, and find whether he was a healthy boy and what was his schoolmaster's opinion of him. If that is satisfactory, you come to the second stage. The boy is passed into the Service, and he is not very long in the Service before this hysterical condition, this mental and physical condition and his desire to go into hospital, becomes apparent. The history of the boy after he left the Navy, and his present condition, show that the boy's desire to go into the hospital was due to a defective physical and mental condition.

When I heard the Minister's statement to-night, I wondered that his medical

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EXTRACT FROM HANBARD 3rd June 1931, COLUMNS 313-324

... did not seem to see this connection between the boy's condition while he was in the Service and his anxiety to get into hospital, and his present condition. An ordinary lay mind like my own, would appear to be an obvious connection there, and I believe that every member of this House would feel greater sympathy if the Minister would tell us after hearing his fellow Members' case, he is prepared to have regard to the former history of the boy during his school life. If that school life was a satisfactory physical and mental condition, it is obvious that it was during that period when he was in the Service that the symptoms began to develop which have resulted ultimately in his present condition.

It may be said that it was latent, and only began to become manifest during his period in the Service. The reason for intervening is that I think that, in the handling of such cases by the Ministry of Pensions, the medical authorities ever give sufficient regard to their own responsibility, or the responsibility of their fellow medical officers who passed those people into the Service. I believe that one of the weaknesses of our whole administration in dealing with such cases is that it is said, possibly he should never have been passed in; a mistake has been made; and, because a mistake has been made, responsibility is accepted for it. I believe the Minister if he will not give the assurance that, in view of the serious feeling in the House that consideration should be given to the boy along these lines, he will take into consideration all these additional points which have been appealed to the rest of us, with a view to something being done for this boy.

MR. KEDWARD: Allegations of the nature have been made on the floor of the House, and I do not think that we can leave this matter to the Admiralty. Statements have been made which go out to the public, and what effect will they have on the minds of boys who are thinking of joining the Royal Navy? For the honour of the Admiralty and of the Service, and the satisfaction of this boy, there should be the most careful and searching inquiry into the whole of these facts.

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Any reluctance to grant such an inquiry will be taken by the British public to mean that there is more in this than appears on the surface, and I think it would be a good thing if the Parliamentary Secretary would give the House an assurance that the Admiralty will make a most searching investigation and call before the tribunal those who are able to give evidence, and thus clear up this matter to the satisfaction of the Service and of the boy himself.

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MR. AMMON: In the event of the House, I would say, in answer to the last two speakers, that, if anyone can bring any fresh evidence upon which we can go, we shall be only too glad to reopen the case and go into it to the fullest possible extent. I shall be only too glad if any ground can be advanced for going into it. This lad was recruited in the ordinary way at an ordinary recruiting station. He was accepted but was found later not to be quite up to standard. From the very beginning he was seen to be not up to standard. He was in the naval school. He was reported upon by the officer in charge as below standard and was sent to the medical observation. The medical officers had no purpose in acting against him. Two or three medical officers gave independent reports, and on that he was passed out, not on any physical ground, but as mentally unfit for service. Nearly 12 months elapsed before any complaint came to the Admiralty. This was years before the present Government came in. A lot may have happened during that time that we know nothing about. He was simply passed out as one who would not make a proper naval rating.

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MR. STEPHEN: But he was passed in first, and we hold that you have taken responsibility for the passing in. If he should not have been passed in, that is unfortunate, but some of us feel that the Ministry must accept responsibility for that action. We have to assume that, when he was passed in, he was in a fit condition.

MR. AMMON: That sort of thing is happening again and again in all the Services. A recruit may be accepted by the recruiting officer and be found on subsequent examination not to be quite up to standard. With lads of this age, there is every possibility that, with proper training and nourishment, they may be improved. Everything shows that this boy was given every consideration. It is hardly fair that the Navy should be charged with ill-treatment or any responsibility in a case like this. I repeat publicly what I have said in writing to my hon. Friend, that, if there is any evidence, however slight, that can be brought forward which will give us any room to review the case, I shall be only too glad to see that it is reviewed fully.

MR. KEDWARD: Has any investigation taken place in regard to the charges of cruelty? That is the point that is in my mind. Has the boy been given an opportunity of being brought face to face with those against whom he makes the accusation? It seems to me that that needs to be done.

MR. AMMON: The first thing I insisted upon was that inquiry should be made as to the alleged cases of ill-treatment. A searching investigation was made, but the same petty officers are not there now. That is one of the difficulties. Everything was done to trace any record or to find anyone who knew anything about ill-treatment. There is no ground whatever for the assertion. The very fact that the suggestion was made that he was birched is an indication of the inconsistency of the position. There was no birching at all. The birch is only used in cases of unnatural sexual offences. Only a cane such as that in use in ordinary schools is used and there are records of ordinary caning in the punishment book. There has been no evidence on which one can proceed to bear out any charges of any ill-treatment in regard to the contemporaries of the boy; in regard to none of these can we find any cases of ill-treatment by petty officers.

Question put, and agreed to.
Adjourned accordingly at Nine-
teen Minutes before Eleven
O'Clock.

THANK YOU