

TRAINING NAVAL OFFICERS

II—EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL FIT CANDIDATES

WIDENING THE FIELD OF ENTRY

By Our Naval Correspondent

Cadets entered through the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth are intended to provide about half the officers of the Navy, half the rest being supplied by promotion to commissioned rank of men serving on the lower deck and the other half, one quarter of the whole, by what is known as the "special entry." Space does not permit discussion here of the large subject of promotion from the lower deck; it provides opportunity for advancement for the young man who does not develop intellectually early enough in life to achieve a cadetship—an intellectual standard above the general average is an indispensable qualification for the naval officer of to-day; most of those promoted in this way have received no more than elementary schooling. The special entry, on the other hand, was intended, while drawing its entrants from the same sources as Dartmouth, to enable the Navy to take advantage of the general educational system of the country, which caters for boys up to the age at which they enter a university or its equivalent.

Special entry was instituted just before the 1914-18 war, cadetships being offered for open competition by boys in their seventeenth year. It was hoped to attract boys from the public schools, but in order that midshipmen from that source should not be too different in age from their Dartmouth contemporaries their age of entry was put too low for that project to be entirely successful. Holding that the last year at a public school is the most valuable in the formation of character, head masters and house masters were reluctant to encourage their best boys to enter the Navy under a scheme which deprived them of that most valuable period.

DANGERS OF CRAMMING

The age of special entry was raised to remove this handicap, but even then the scheme fell short of the success it might have had, for in the meantime the entrance examination had somehow evolved into a form which demanded cramming if a candidate were to have an adequate chance of success. The published lists of successful candidates for "special entry" announced the schools from which they came, but to an unduly large number of names was frequently appended the note "studied with a tutor after leaving school." In effect, it would seem that many of them were still losing the chief advantage of a public school education through premature removal.

This disability ought not, however, to be inevitable. From no point of view is any advantage to be gained by the encouragement, or even toleration, of cramming. It is to be hoped that, in prescribing the examination for special entry in the future precautions—well known to experienced examiners—will be taken to avoid any continuance of the premium hitherto put upon special instruction.

For many years the parents of Britannia and Dartmouth cadets were charged fees, comparable to those of the more expensive preparatory schools, which confined the ranks of naval officers to the sons of well-to-do parents. As long ago as the beginning of this century the view was often urged—occasionally from inside the Navy, as well as outside it—that the Navy ought to be able to draw its officers from the best and the ablest in the land, even though they might happen to be the sons of poor parents. The institution of the special entry by open competition did something to permit the entry of the able youth of humble origin, but that entry, as described above, had its limitations.

In order to throw the net wider, a scholarship system of entry to Dartmouth was therefore instituted in 1940, age of entry and other Dartmouth conditions remaining unchanged. Scholarships, numbering about half the vacancies at each entry, are now offered for competition by would-be cadets, and of these scholarships about half are reserved for candidates who come from grant-aided secondary schools. The scholarships vary in value according to a means test applied to the boys' parents, but if necessary they amount to a waiver of all fees with a maintenance grant—to cover holidays in addition.

Scholarship boys are therefore not precluded from success by lack of means in their parents, but it remains true that to the extent of more than half the Dartmouth-trained and special entry officers the Navy still draws its officers chiefly from the sons of well-to-do parents.

QUALITY OF OFFICERS

Though the tradition that formerly prescribed that limitation is out of date, the system which still in part embodies it is not thereby necessarily to be condemned. The view of the Navy has always been that the test of a system must be first and foremost the quality of the officers produced. Experience of two wars has confirmed that, throughout all the changes and experiments with the conditions and age of entry and the system of training, the quality of the finished product has been of the highest. There has been, inside the Navy, some opposition to changes which have had the effect of casting the net wider. That has been due not to a desire to maintain class privilege but to a fear of lowering the standard, which is set not by intellectual ability alone but even more by the extent to which personality and character have been fostered.

Naval officers as a whole are reluctant to throw open their ranks to all aspirants, regardless of their origins, though only a few opposed the start with that process, which the scholarship system represented, experimentally on a small scale. Most of them contend that the Navy, if it catches the able boy young enough, can make of him the officer it needs. That theory is held to have been borne out by experience, for it has been stated that, after a few terms at Dartmouth it becomes impossible to distinguish the scholarship boy from his well-to-do fellow.

The general raising of the school-leaving age to 16, however, profoundly affects the whole situation. General education up to school certificate standard will be available, when the future educational structure is complete, to every boy in the country who is capable of achieving that standard. The Admiralty have therefore decided to enter cadets at the age of 16, charging no fees to any entrant, and to make their training at Dartmouth after entry largely professional up to the time that they pass out from the college and seagoing training ship and join the fleet as young officers.

TWO SYSTEMS

It is not intended that this system shall at once replace the present Dartmouth system, for so sudden and complete a change would not be administratively practicable. Moreover, it would clearly be risky to discard a well-proved system altogether in favour of one entirely different and untried. For a time the two systems will exist side by side, and it seems probable that experience will suggest some modifications in each. It would be a fairly safe prophecy, however, to predict that the system which eventually emerges will approximate much more to the new, which is clearly more in harmony with the spirit of the age, than the old. The "special entry" at 18 is also to continue in operation, cadets entering by that channel devoting also the whole of their time to technical and professional training.

The Royal Naval College at Dartmouth thus seems destined to develop into the counterpart of what the Army, in barbarous jargon, knows as an "Octu," rather than the "public school" into which it has been transformed of late years. Its chief function will be character training and the development of the brand of leadership and the realization of responsibility which have come to be known as "officer-like qualities." Naval cadets, whatever their age of entry, will undergo a period of intensive sea-going training after Dartmouth in a cruiser allocated for that duty (at present H.M.S. Devonshire) where they will do the duties of seamen. This period is strictly analogous to the period served "in the ranks" by the young officers of the Army and Air Force. One thing which is clearly unacceptable, in any quarter, is any derogation from the standard of efficiency which the country has always expected in the Navy, and the Navy has required of its officers.

ROYAL NAVAL COLLEGE, DARTMOUTH

PASSING-OUT LIST

The Secretary of the Admiralty announces the following results of the passing-out examination of Naval Cadets held at the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, at Easter. The names are in order of merit:—

CLASS I.—P. D. A. SCHOFIELD (Robert Roxburgh prize and King's Medal), French (Div. II), Mechanics (Alpha), and Eardley-Howard-Crockett Memorial prize), P. LUCAS, J. BOWER (Russian), B. C. FOYNTON (Science, Alpha), R. RICHARDS (Harold Tennyson Memorial Prize, and Mathematics, Div. II), J. L. VARLEY (History, Alpha, and Science, Div. II), T. WELLS (Mathematics, Alpha), I. F. BLAKE (English, Div. II), W. A. T. AVES (Navigation), J. G. D. SWINLEY (Mathematics, Div. II), D. C. SMITH (Seamanship), A. N. H. WEEKES (Mechanics, Div. II), J. M. LEE, A. G. C. REWCASTLE, G. E. NEW, and G. H. WALKER.

CLASS II.—M. T. HARLAND, R. S. ADAM, G. R. LEMON, W. F. LINTON, J. W. HARGREAVES, W. R. SHELLEY (Eardley-Howard-Crockett Memorial prize), R. P. MACKENZIE-EDWARDS (English, Alpha), R. DATHAN (Engineering), R. J. PRESTON, W. B. DEWING, W. A. C. LONGSTAFF, A. R. GARWOOD, J. A. HEATH-CALDWELL, J. R. D. EDWARDS, R. J. GREEN, P. T. BURRELL, P. A. C. HARLAND (Whitworth Memorial prize for Music), P. G. M. GILLETT, R. K. PIGOT, J. F. CAPELL, P. C. D. GIBAUT (Millington Drake prize for Spanish), and J. M. C. Graham.

CLASS III.—J. M. HOWARD, S. W. PAKENHAM, C. K. K. BROWN, R. J. SALE, W. M. STRANGWAYS, J. K. HALL, HALL, I. R. T. ROBERTSON, C. J. SCOTT, T. P. BOURNE, P. L. Clough, and J. A. B. THOMAS.

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