

NAVAL LIBERTY MEN.

SCHEME FOR RECREATION AND WELFARE.

VALUE OF CRUISING CLUBS.

(FROM A CORRESPONDENT.)

Arrangements are now being made in the fleets and squadrons in home waters to reinstitute a system for the advancement of the welfare of the men of the Navy while on short leave which had already given good results when tried on a limited scale before the war. The idea of the system is to organize accommodation for the liberty men of the Navy and Marines whenever ships visit places other than the naval ports. A moment's thought will convince anyone of the need for such organization, for the capacity of regular lodging-houses in all towns is governed by ordinary civilian requirements, and cannot therefore even approximately meet the demands of the hundreds, or may be thousands, of liberty men who land. Even if accommodation is plentiful, it means are not taken to guide the liberty men they are unable, during the limited time in a strange port, to utilize it to the fullest advantage.

The idea of the R.N. Accommodation Registers and Cruising Clubs seems to have taken root at the time of the Coronation Review at Spithead, when, owing to the large numbers of people at Portsmouth, it was essential to make special arrangements in this direction. So successful did these prove that, although the average number of naval men on shore during the time that leave was given was 18,500, the average number of apprehensions by the naval and civil police was three. At other times and places equally good results were attained.

THE SCHEME DESCRIBED.

In restarting the scheme for the post-war fleet, the Board have appointed an officer at the Admiralty to form a central office to which proposals for increasing the utility of the registers and clubs can be sent. They have also outlined in orders certain arrangements which are to be brought into force subject to the discretion of the respective Commanders-in-Chief and flag officers in command. In each fleet or squadron, there will be formed a permanent "Accommodation Unit," consisting of one selected petty or non-commissioned officer and one seaman or other rating in each ship, with an officer, termed "accommodation officer," in general charge. As soon as possible after coming to anchor, an accommodation party, consisting of the units from each ship present, is to be landed for duty in connexion with the registration of householders and the guidance of liberty men. In most of the places visited, an accommodation register will already have been provided with the assistance of the coastguard, the police, and the civil authorities, and, if possible, before the cruise begins the accommodation officer in the senior officer's ship will forward to the coastguard officer an "information schedule" with a request for its completion and for a copy of the register. On landing, the accommodation officer in charge will ascertain the streets in which houses have been registered, and those in which there is the best chance of adding to their number. He will detail one of the party to act as clerk, and will divide the district into areas, allotting two men at least to each area, for the purposes of a house-to-house canvas.

The Admiralty have provided all the necessary books and papers to facilitate the working of this part of the scheme. The parties will leave at each house a form known as a naval accommodation leaflet, which contains full instructions in regard to the conditions under which men can be taken. After the owners have had time to understand the necessity for accommodation, the men of the party, each of whom will wear a distinctive armlet marked "R.N.A.," will revisit the houses, and will issue as necessary window cards or renewal slips. The regulations require that before a house is registered the rooms must be personally inspected by both members of a "pair" of the accommodation party, who will be held individually responsible that each room complies with the R.N. accommodation conditions. A standard fee of one shilling per night per guest has been laid down, each man to have a separate bed. This is the rate which prevailed at the best clubs and institutions. At a prearranged time and place, the accommodation party reassembles to report progress. Every guest-house they have registered increases the sleeping accommodation for men, and correspondingly the number of men to whom night leave can be given. This is a most important matter for consideration when a large number of ships are in port, and its bearing upon the contentment and therefore the efficiency of the personnel as a whole is obvious.

In forming the register, differentiation is made between (1) temperance hotels, boarding-houses, and lodging-houses, which are particularly useful for men seeking accommodation for their families; (2) clubs, homes, and similar institutions; (3) individual householders, as described above, who do not make a practice of receiving lodgers, but who, for the good of the Navy, will consent to give sleeping accommodation, either at any time or in an emergency; and (4) halls, large rooms, &c., which could in an emergency be fitted as dormitories. The official instructions state that it is undesirable to register public-houses or non-temperance hotels. They vary in suitability, the authorities point out, but it is not possible to differentiate between them. As the Admiralty realize, the public spirit of private householders is the basis upon which the new organization is built. The response so far has been gratifying, for, apart from the willingness of the people in the coast towns to help the Navy, they realize that their own relations, if they have any in the Service, will profit at other ports as the naval accommodation system extends to them.

THE CRUISING CLUB.

Another important development of the accommodation scheme is the cruising club. A central organization is necessary for the successful working of the accommodation registers, and this is provided by such a club, with its standing committee and secretary. A hall or other suitable building, as near the landing-place or railway station as possible, is opened as a club-house, and its uses are many. It caters for the men by day as the accommodation register does by night. It is invaluable as a resting-place, especially in wet weather. It provides toilet facilities, and, as the Admiralty have pointed out, an untidy appearance, which in default of cleaning materials it is hard to avoid, produces an unfavourable impression upon residents, besides affecting the men themselves, drawing them to a companionship and neighbourhood in which they would not otherwise be found. The club-house is useful as a depot for parcels, oilskins, and the like, and as a dressing-room for football teams. For these purposes it is the only alternative to places of public entertainment, which can seldom be used free from expense, whereas the club-house costs nothing to individuals, very little to the ships' companies as a whole, and enables the men to feel that the club is their own.

The new scheme is as simple as possible, and is very flexible in working, so that it can be adopted with equal smoothness by a large or a small force when visiting any place. The management of the club-house rests with a committee, which in the case of one ship consists of the members of the canteen committee of the ship, or, in the case of a squadron, of representatives of the canteen committees, with the accommodation officer of the flagship as *ex officio* chairman. On arriving, the committee select and prepare a building for use as a club-house. Sub-committees may be appointed to arrange for furnishing, papers, amusements, outings, concerts, and the like. A cruising club "property box" has been designed, and it is hoped that in time every ship will possess one. Applications for these boxes are made to the Physical Training and Sports Branch of the Admiralty, at present housed at 21, Carlton House-terrace, S.W.1. Each box contains a signboard, direction and notice boards, writing paper and materials, toilet utensils, looking glasses, a hall porter's book, and an assortment of games. The canteen manager of one of the ships will act as caterer, and provide non-intoxicating refreshments at the standard tariff. This is an important part of the arrangements, and in practice has been very successful. During a visit of one vessel to Portsmouth for about 10 days, upwards of 300 meals were sometimes served in a day, and practically every man in the ship used the club.