

# THE ARTIFICER APPRENTICE LEADERSHIP TRAINING

BY

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Criticism is sometimes heard from the Fleet of the lack of petty officer-like qualities in the products of the Artificer Training Establishments. The following is an account of what is done in H.M.S. *Caledonia* as an attempt to rectify such deficiencies.

The four years' technical training of apprentices has been dealt with in previous articles in this *Journal*. Summarizing, all apprentices joining H.M.S. *Fisgard* do  $1\frac{1}{3}$  years' basic and partially common training before joining their specialist training establishments for  $2\frac{2}{3}$  years. H.M.S. *Caledonia* absorbs the majority, covering E.R.A., O.A. and Shipwright Apprentices; there will shortly be nearly 1,000 apprentices under training in the proportion of 550 E.R.A.s, 350 O.A.s and 100 Shipwright Artificers, their ages ranging from about 17 to 21.

## The Difficulties

One of the fundamental difficulties we are up against is the 'nature of the job'. During his period under training—four long and potentially tedious years—the apprentice's day is apt to be so regulated that from 0600 until 1930 he rarely has to think for himself except how best he can dodge some of the more uninteresting pieces of training. During his factory time he is taught

to subdue the natural impatience he may feel when working with an inanimate piece of metal which just won't respond to his efforts, and he must learn to bend his will to the overcoming of a boredom which attacks any fitter when he finds that, although the job seems all right, it just won't do and he has to spend many more hours perfecting it. The majority of *good* fitters are of the slow speaking, steady type who press on and produce a good job no matter what the circumstances, whereas the more mercurial type with a bit of dash and verve often makes a good job here and a bad job there.

The natural leaders come from each type of lad but the vast majority, by the very nature of the training, should be steady, reliable men whose abilities have been directed into one channel—to be a good tradesman with some technical knowledge.

The O.A. starts with an early advantage. He leaves the establishment and goes to sea, and to Gunnery and Torpedo Schools where he rubs shoulders with all classes and conditions of Service life. He is victualled in a petty officers' mess where he quickly learns to defend himself against all-comers and is eventually elevated to the chief petty officers' mess from where he surveys the rest of the ship's company, not just as an O.A., but as a chief petty officer. The same applies broadly to the Shipwright Artificer. But this, unfortunately, is not the case with the E.R.A., who is victualled in his own mess, is rarely seen by the members of the ship's company and tends to become prouder of being an E.R.A. than a C.P.O., with a feeling that as long as the engine room is all right he has nothing to do with the firm next door. There is a tendency sometimes for the E.R.A. to be detailed and supervised by an engineer officer to a degree which leaves him little personal responsibility as opposed to his brother O.A. who is given a turret or a fire control system and told that it is his responsibility to ensure its maintenance is well done and that it should always be ready for inspection by his officer.

Another fundamental difficulty is to what extent should the artificer either be expected to assume, or be trained for the role of a chief petty officer? By virtue of his skill and knowledge he is undoubtedly more than qualified to rate with the best of the C.P.O.s of other branches, but the opportunity of exercising the authority may not come often. The majority of the Service expects a C.P.O. to be capable of taking charge of a large number of men, whereas an E.R.A. in particular may sometimes be in charge of nobody but himself—but at the same time in charge of several thousand pounds' worth of complicated but inanimate machinery. Part of the problem is therefore to convince the young that resource, initiative and self-reliance are qualities which pay, whether looking after men or machinery. (*A sine qua non* is that the skilled artificer possessing such qualities is *treated* as a chief petty officer.)

### **The Apprentice's Background**

In a recent challenging and stimulating article in this *Journal*, 'Training the Whole Man', its author outlined clearly the problem as it applies to the young man of today, and discussed at length the type of youngster coming into the Service as a stoker rating. What sort of young man is the junior artificer, and what attempt is being made to mould his life?

The material generally received from *Fisgard* is excellent. Those who fall by the way are almost invariably those with an indifferent or unhappy family background. (This fact alone should be sufficient stimulus to training officers to form the mould correctly.) There are others who, often through the over-indulgence of their parents or some other cause, do not take kindly to the inevitable mild forms of ragging by the senior apprentices. There is no harm in ragging provided it does not degenerate into bullying. The antidote is to

encourage a divisional spirit to the utmost, the seniors leading the juniors by example.

The young artificer is more usually however of a sound family background, often with long Service connections. By the standard required for entry he is educationally suited to absorb example quickly, good or bad. He is loyal, particularly to his own friends, and to his division, but often no further than that. The article, 'Training the Whole Man', quoted the young stoker rating as suffering from the evils of the age—'little religion, easy morality, little sense of service or duty, no roots, few hobbies or outdoor interests, under-exercised bodies, "spectatoritis" and a confident expectation that someone else will provide'. But what a challenge this lamentable catalogue of qualities provides! Happily the young apprentice, with a better early background, can certainly not be described as possessing all these shortcomings, though many possess some. Looking back, however, how many officers can claim that they were free at that age of all these ills? The writers' opinion is that 'spectatoritis' and 'a confident expectation that someone else will provide' are the most common failings of the apprentice (the latter often the result of the necessarily organized life in a training establishment.)

To this must be added that, as a result of an unfortunate inter-service agreement, he is too highly paid while under training. In consequence the pursuit of pleasure ashore is all too prevalent, leading in a few cases to very early marriage, sometimes at the age of 18. It is particularly unfortunate also that the law of Scotland allows such marriage without parents' consent; the granting of marriage allowances to these young men acts as a direct inducement. Without any enforceable scheme of compulsory savings or control of expenditure the problem resolves into one of control of their thinking and inculcating a sense of right or wrong, of prudence or improvidence. But in general these apprentices are quickly and easily led, and their main collective faults are those that it should be possible to eradicate by good leadership at the start, and in turn producing in them the qualities of leadership so essential later on.

### **Leadership Training**

It has been suggested that all artificers should go through H.M.S. *Royal Arthur*, the Royal Naval Petty Officers' School, as soon as they leave their specialist establishment. This, however, is not practicable for many reasons (nor is it desirable until they become petty officers), and steps have been taken therefore in *Caledonia* to insert a modified version of this six weeks course into the training syllabus, but spreading it over the whole 2½ years.

To the few who are selected as chief and petty officer apprentices opportunities for exercising leadership are great, both on the parade ground and in running the daily routine. The increasing trust placed in them is very rarely misplaced, and the incidental privileges obtained as a result, greatly prized. The problem is to give the remainder (the great majority) adequate opportunity.

The aim must be firstly to induce the maximum indoor and outdoor recreational activities, and secondly and more important to make these young men try to run these activities *themselves* to the utmost, the officers playing only a guiding role. Simple jobs, such as Duty Librarian, Duty Swimming Bath Apprentice, are examples. The latter are selected from fully qualified life-savers, and are placed in entire charge with disciplinary powers during swimming periods. Qualified coxswains take away whalers and cutters for week-end camping, and Mountain Club summer camping parties are left to the entire charge of an Apprentices' Committee. Winter climbs by the Mountain Club are organized completely by the apprentices, but an officer normally accompanies the party. Though not aspiring to the same feats as performed by the

Aircraft Artificers of the Mountain Rescue Unit at the sister establishment of H.M.S. *Condor*, about 35 apprentices at alternate week-ends have scaled all the peaks over 3,000 feet within week-end reach, including Ben Nevis, Ben Lomond and Ben Lawers, often under arduous conditions of ice and snow. Camping under canvas has continued in December.

A beer bar has recently been opened in the establishment, and run entirely by the apprentices (seniors only), with gratifying results. Fortnightly smoking concerts organized by the apprentices have proved remarkably popular, and a Christmas pantomime was produced largely by their unaided efforts.

The Band, of some 50 performers, trained by the Band Sergeant, is the only naval band on which Flag Officer Scotland can call for ceremonial and civic functions, and is consequently much in demand in the area. Its morale value is considerable.

There is also a dance band, run entirely by the apprentices, while a string orchestra and a pipe band are in the making.

Considerable emphasis is placed on parade ground training, a senior apprentices' Guard being mounted on all ceremonial occasions. On Prize Day the Guard consists of the leaving class who normally parade the White Ensign. On two occasions last summer the Apprentices' Guard and Band beat retreat for official functions—their performance being most favourably commented on. Although normal drill is regarded by them as one might expect, it is a healthy sign that there is considerable pride taken in being in the Guard for special functions.\* It is now the aim to give every apprentice periods of taking charge during squad drill. With the recent formation of the local defence organization, it has been found that many of the apprentices with school cadet unit experience have proved most capable instructors, and have been able to assist considerably in training their own companies. Interest in the rifle received a considerable stimulus by the sweeping successes of the apprentices' shooting teams in the last two Nore Command annual shoots.

As mentioned above, an attempt has been made to sandwich an abbreviated Royal Naval Petty Officers' School Course into the existing training syllabus. As well as weekly lectures on History and Current Affairs by the Instructor Officers and periods of Religious Instruction, weekly 50-minute 'Practical Leadership' periods alternate with P.T. periods. These cover simple seamanship, parade training, an assault course, first-aid, self-defence, artificial respiration, passive defence, and various lectures and films. Importance is attached to lectures, both prepared and impromptu, by the apprentices themselves—an astonishing variety of subjects sometimes being produced.

A very practical limitation to all such training is the acute shortage of staff, and the consequent large classes. Teaching how to rig a sheerlegs to a crowd of 75 is apt to tax even the most patient. The best that can be hoped for, and it is admitted to be most inadequate, is the knowledge that the majority will at least have had the opportunity to absorb much that will be of value in later life.

### **Continuation of Training at Sea**

It is continually rammed home to leaving classes that the most important year of their training, as 5th Class Artificers, lies before them. But it is natural that, after the sudden release from a training establishment to a first ship, slack habits, so easily learned by imitation (such as the deplorable 'tiffies cap') can creep in unless rapidly checked. Pride in work and pride in games are apt to be regarded as things of the past. It is just at this period therefore that the guidance (and chasing) by sea-going divisional and departmental officers is most important.

## Conclusion

The old-timer trained in the pre-war years might well exclaim ' Why waste all this time when they should be learning their trade ? I never had all this nonsense, and what harm has it done me ? ' To the first question the reply is that only about 5% of their working time is absorbed in such non-technical instruction. (Whether still much more time should be appropriated from technical instruction is a matter of considerable argument.) And to the second, that the march of civilization and hence naval technical progress now demands a much higher degree of mental adaptation to changing conditions, a broader outlook on life, greater self-reliance and a greater capacity to lead and influence aright one's fellows than ever before. As a result of the change in the composition of the modern Fleet with the relatively greater number of small vessels, artificers of all branches are likely to be in responsible billets, without the guidance of more experienced ratings, at a very early age.

It is to the chief petty officers of the future that we look in time of war ; what little one can do in the formative years is now of vital importance, keeping in mind the stirring words of Her Majesty's Christmas broadcast : ' Above all, we must keep alive that courageous spirit of adventure that is the finest quality of youth, and by youth I do not just mean those who are young in years : I mean, too, all those who are young in heart, no matter how old they may be.'

\* *Note—800 apprentices and the Band were trained for street lining duties for Her Majesty's State Visit to Edinburgh.*