

EARLY TRAINING OF NAVAL OFFICERS

The First Lord of the Admiralty has stated that the early training of officers is to be entirely reorganized in the light of the decision that in future all cadets will enter the Royal Navy at about 18.

Under the present system, cadets leave Dartmouth between 18 and 19, and their subsequent professional instruction until they join the Fleet as sub-lieutenants some $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 years later is given first in a training ship, then in ships of the Fleet as midshipmen and finally in a sequence of courses at different shore establishments as acting sub-lieutenants.

It is intended that cadets of the new entry, who join the Navy from May, 1955 onwards, should receive a course of training centred at Dartmouth, partly on shore, and partly afloat in a small squadron of H.M. ships. The whole of their early training, lasting about two years, will thus be conducted by a single authority at Dartmouth, and the full capacity of the Britannia Royal Naval College will be used for this purpose.

At first, candidates will, as now, be entered as executive, engineer or supply and secretariat cadets and the Dartmouth curriculum will provide training for officers of all three branches, although, during the later stages of the course, some may spend a short period away from Dartmouth for specialist instruction. Cadets for the electrical branch will participate in the preliminary stage of the Dartmouth training and then, as at present, undertake a university course and works training. The question whether there should be one single entry of cadets with appointment to branches at a later stage will be considered in the light of the review of the officer structure of the Navy which is now being made.

Cadets will, as now, be promoted midshipmen after one year of service, and on finally passing out of the College, will go to sea with the Fleet as acting sub-lieutenants to complete their training. The total length of their training before becoming fully effective junior officers will be shorter than that of present Special Entry cadets. This is one of the advantages which will result from concentrating and consolidating early training.

The decision to enter all cadets at about 18 provides an opportunity for a fresh approach to the early training of officers. Although the Navy has for many years entered a proportion of its cadets at about 18, their training has had to be kept in line with what was considered appropriate for cadets passing out of Dartmouth after four years' (latterly two years') education and training in the college. The desirability of this fresh approach was underlined by the First Lord in his Estimates speech in the following terms :—

‘The rapid development in the weapons at our disposal now and in the future . . . makes it very necessary that we should consider entirely afresh the principles on which the present careers and training of naval officers are based.’

The Admiralty have decided, therefore, to reorganize the early training of permanent officers to ensure that when they first go to sea with the Fleet they possess not only a thorough grounding in the customs and traditions of the Navy and in what is expected of an officer, but also a large measure of professional knowledge, so that they can obtain the fullest advantage from their practical experience at sea. It is intended that their professional and technical knowledge on leaving Dartmouth should make them capable of efficient and intelligent understudy. This new policy means that the basic professional and technical instruction which at present is, for the most part, given *after* a young officer's first period of service at sea with the Fleet will in future be given *before* it. At the same time, care will be taken to familiarize him at an early stage with life at sea by interspersing instruction ashore with training cruises in a squadron attached to the College. Special provision will also be made to ensure that the young officer obtains an understanding of the relationship of aviation to naval tactics and strategy.

Outline of the new Dartmouth Course

This is intended to fall into three phases :—

Phase I. Two terms. Initial instruction in academic subjects, naval history and customs, divisional duties, elementary pilotage, boatwork, etc.

Phase II. One term. At sea in the local training squadron as part of the rating complement. Cadets will receive no formal instruction during this phase, which is conceived as one to introduce them to life in seagoing ships.

Phase III. Three to four terms. Instruction on shore and in the local training squadron in all the principal professional subjects, with provision for experience at a naval air station.

The local training squadron will consist of frigates and minesweepers or similar vessels based on the river Dart.

Great importance is attached to making the new course a coherent whole. Subjects will be taught concurrently and progressively over the whole period and not in a succession of self-contained courses. There will be two examinations : a preliminary one at the end of the first phase and a final passing-out examination which will carry seniority benefits for those who do well.

Subsequent Training

For executive officers the period at sea with the Fleet as acting sub-lieutenants will be eighteen months. During this time they will carry out duties as understudies and will obtain their watchkeeping certificates and certificates of competence. Promotion to sub-lieutenant will be earlier than at present by a few months. Moreover, the sub-lieutenant of the future should be able to undertake the full duties of his rank immediately, whereas under the present system some six months or more elapse before he possesses his watchkeeping and other certificates. The length of time at sea may be shorter for acting sub-lieutenants of the other branches, in order not to delay too long their full specialist training.

Gunrooms will not be required, because midshipmen will no longer serve with the Fleet. Gunroom space in H.M. ships will probably be needed to assist in accommodating the increased numbers of wardroom officers.

When the flow of young officers through the present system of training has ceased, the existing sequence of courses for R.N. acting sub-lieutenants at Greenwich and the specialist schools will stop. There will also be no further need for a seagoing training cruiser or carrier.

Changes at Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth

Since the abolition of the entry at 13 the cadet population at Dartmouth has fallen to approximately half its former size. Under the new scheme of training numbers will rise again to the full capacity of the college. Some modifications will be necessary to adapt the college to its new purpose (e.g. dormitories will be divided into cubicles so that the cadets and midshipmen will have places for private study). Certain additional equipment will also be required for the professional instruction to be given in the third phase.

Both the college and the training squadron will come under the command of a single senior officer.
