

PART I

**NOBODY READS THE
'JOURNAL'?**

BY

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If you have read the 'Distribution of Duties' on page 497 of the October, 1954, issue of the *Journal*, you will have seen my name under the grandiloquent title of 'Deputy Engineer-in-Chief (Administration)'.

My duties in this post are many, varied, and not always well defined, but among them is responsibility for the *Journal*. I confess that this section of my responsibilities does not usually cause me many sleepless nights, thanks to the efficiency of the Editor, but the daily 'tea party' of the Directing Staff at Bath offers excellent opportunities for provocative discussion on any subject that happens to be in the limelight, including even the *Journal of Naval Engineering*.

On one such occasion, the statement which forms the title of this article was made, followed by a good many others of varying shades of opinion, none of them supported by facts. I decided therefore that it would be interesting and instructive to collect some opinions on what engineer officers actually read and what they would like to read in the *Journal*.

A questionnaire was accordingly concocted, based on the more serious of the criticisms levelled against the *Journal*, and inviting opinions on certain changes which had been suggested. These questionnaires were issued to a number of Commanders (E) and Lieutenant-Commanders (E) at Bath, and were also sent to the Rear-Admirals (E) at the Home Ports and to the Fleet Engineer Officer, Home Fleet, with a request from me to organize replies from representative officers within their reach. I asked particularly that there should be a large proportion of replies from junior officers. For obvious reasons it was not possible to issue the questionnaire to officers further afield.

The results have been rather remarkable: to the Editor, encouraging; to the more violent critics, confounding—and to readers an interesting source of discussion, I hope.

The replies from inside and outside the Engineer-in-Chief's Department at Bath have been analyzed separately and give remarkably similar results. This in itself surprised some people! The combination of the two is therefore fair and is given below.

In all, 189 replies were received—145 from Home Ports and the Home Fleet, and 44 from the Engineer-in-Chief's Department at Bath. These are the details of the questions and answers:—

Question 1

Are you reasonably satisfied with the *Journal* as it is ?

	<i>Per Cent.</i>
Unqualified YES	83·2
Qualified YES	13·1
Unqualified NO	3·7
Condensing still further, we have :—	
Generally satisfied	96·3
Completely unsatisfied	3·7

Thus, over 96 per cent are generally satisfied with the Journal as it is.

Question 2

What percentage of the *Journal* do you read as a rule ?

	<i>Per Cent.</i>
100 per cent of the <i>Journal</i> is read by ..	7·4
90 per cent and above	22·7
70 per cent	61·5
50 per cent	92·1
Below 50 per cent	7·9
Below 20 per cent	1·5
Below 10 per cent	Nil

Thus over 92 per cent read more than half the Journal, over 22 per cent read 90 per cent and more, while over 7 per cent read all the Journal.

Question 3

Do you think that the *Journal* is too theoretical, technical and serious ?

	<i>Per Cent.</i>
Unqualified NO	71
Qualified NO	19
Unqualified YES	10

Thus, 71 per cent DO NOT consider the 'Journal' to be too theoretical, technical or serious. About 19 per cent are generally favourable to its tone with certain reservations. 10 per cent DO consider it to be too theoretical, technical and serious.

Question 4

Are you in favour of deleting any of the regular features :

	<i>Delete</i>	<i>Leave in</i>
Notes from Sea	1·6	98·4
Technical Abstracts	18·0	82·0
Distribution of Duties	11·5	88·5
Book Review	39·6	60·4

Thus, Notes from Sea, Technical Abstracts, and Distribution of Duties are appreciated by 82 per cent or over, Book Review qualifies for retention.

Question 5

Which of the following suggested improvements do you favour, if any ?

		<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>
Personal News Section	..	59·4	40·6
Branch Sporting News	..	14·8	85·2
Regular News from Training Establishments	37·6	62·4
Comic Drawings	28·0	72·0

Thus, the majority is overwhelmingly against Branch Sporting News and Comic Drawings, and a good majority against Regular News from Training Establishments. There is a majority of 9 per cent in favour of a Personal News Section.

Question 6

Have you any further suggestions for improvement ?

Answers to this question were many and varied, and do not lend themselves to numerical analysis. I wish I could quote some of the suggestions in full, but this is obviously impossible ; nevertheless I must record my gratitude to the officer who thought that ' It is right that most people should know where senior officers go to (including Heaven) '. He might so easily have consigned them elsewhere !

Space does not permit reproduction of many of the answers, but from abstracts which have been made it is clear that readers want, not popularization, but more information on the following topics :—

- (a) Notes from Sea. (By far the most popular item in the *Journal*).
- (b) Articles from sea about sea-going experiences, troubles, trials, tests, cruises, and exercises.
- (c) Information on present and future policy in machinery and equipment.
- (d) Engineering descriptions of Dominion and foreign warships and Merchant Navy practice.

There were also many answers containing suggestions and advice on editorial standards. The gist of these was that the articles should be brief, interesting, not too abstruse, and written in a personal style. A brighter correspondence column and a separate comprehensive index were among many other suggestions.

The result of this very interesting and valuable exercise is that the *Journal* will continue in its present form and style, with the addition of a Personal News section which will cover important appointments, special awards and decorations, and any other interesting personal news.

We shall also endeavour to incorporate the most strongly supported suggestions which I have recorded above. There are however two provisos which must be made.

Firstly, many of the replies to the questionnaire seem to assume that there is a plethora of articles showered upon the Editor and that he is therefore in a position to pick, choose, and abridge ruthlessly. In fact, in the first eight months of this year only three articles have been submitted voluntarily by naval officers to the Editor. It may be worth noting that two of these were by Captains (E) and one by a Commander (E), and contributions by more junior officers were notable for their absence. Again, two of these articles were by M/E officers and one by an A/E officer. (The latter was not on A/E matters). It is therefore very difficult for the Editor to publish a balanced number of M/E, A/E and O/E articles.

The same assumption is frequently applied to correspondence. The Editor is urged to expand the correspondence column ; in fact, he would be only too pleased to print every reasonable letter sent in and is only prevented from writing letters to himself from bogus correspondents by the existence of the Navy List !

Generally speaking, the much desired ' Letters from Sea ' about practical running difficulties cannot be obtained by request. Obviously, the Editor cannot pick in advance on any particular ship which is about to have an eventful cruise and interesting machinery defects. He must depend on sea-going engineer officers to contribute voluntarily.

Secondly, I must emphasize the difficulty of printing almost anything on future trends, for obvious reasons. One short article on this subject commissioned by the Editor has recently been turned down, and although we will try to give you information which will be interesting and informative, we may not always be successful. Articles on personnel and manning policy are liable to similar suppression.

Finally, however hard we try we cannot meet the demand for articles or comment from sea unless we get the material. We do appeal, therefore, to readers at sea, to contribute their interesting experiences.