

THE SPECIALIST

BY

ONE

The writer is aware of a more famous article with the same title but, except to admit that the specialist is a 'one-holer', the more obvious parallels in the two trades will be avoided.

It is possible that some of our more thoughtful colleagues might have wondered what is a specialist? Who is he? What does he do and how is he evolved? Or perhaps, how do I become one? The last question is the easiest to answer—you don't become one—it just happens.

In the following remarks, the term 'specialist' refers to that comparatively rare bird at Bath. There are undoubtedly more exotic birds in the dockyards and in the Fleet but, being outside my knowledge, these are not included.

What is a specialist? There is one thing that he is not and that is 'an expert'. To understand this, one must appreciate the stages in his evolution. Firstly he appears on a doorstep at Bath to take up a job in a 'specialist' section. Now such a section deals with specialist subjects—no, that's too obvious. It does *not* deal with ships—more accurate but hardly flattering. It deals with specialist bits of machinery in ships—a little vague but that will have to do. If he is a naval officer he will meet his opposite number whom he is to relieve. This man will be an expert. The new man will not be an expert—not yet. The turn-over will take three weeks and at the end of this time he will be an expert. It does not matter if either or both of them happened to be on leave and there was no interchange of information, if at the end of three weeks one of them goes, the one left is an expert. He will attend meetings—all by himself—and he will represent his department as an expert—not as a specialist. In fact he is a worker in a specialist field. Now comes the evolution to a specialist. If he stays long enough, say, four years, he learns more and more about less and less until he becomes the true specialist. Because the normal tour of duty is about four years, a naval officer can only just qualify. The civilian officer, of course, stays on and he continues this 'more and more of less and less' evolution until he remembers only the names of things and processes and completely forgets the 'why'. He is then a 'deep' specialist, and is anchored.

Who is a specialist? By definition then, he is a civilian who has never been invited to move to another job. The reason for this might be self-evident in conversation with one.

What does a specialist do? Briefly he pontificates and if he has the build to fit a purple cummerbund he is never questioned. In particular he advises, he answers questions—but the questions must be posed in such a simple fashion that the interrogator can usually answer them himself, and far more quickly. He is best at delaying the answer by clouding the whole issue with technical jargon until the questioner leaves in despair. The specialist can then get a quick telephone call to an expert and get the real answer.

Is the specialist necessary? The answer must be in the affirmative. To every question there can be only two answers: yes or no. The specialist has, therefore, an even chance of being right and he is secure in the knowledge that if he guesses wrongly the common sense of his non-specialist questioner can usually be relied upon to reject his advice. There is mutual satisfaction in this interplay. Who else can the non-specialist blame when things go wrong, and how smug can a specialist be when he says: 'I told you so'? This is the peak of satisfaction.