

FLEET BOARDS

BY

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For the purposes of this article, the Author shows the trend of results of examinations held in one particular place, endeavours to determine the reasons for an increasing failure rate and offers a few suggestions which might enable candidates to have a better chance of success.

Shortage of Senior Ratings

A glance at the Advancement Rosters (A.F.O. 927/63) for engine room ratings shows that four of the five rosters are either 'dry' or 'intermediate' each of these headings indicating a serious shortage of ratings qualified for advancement.

These shortages, apart from creating manning difficulties, reflect a general failure of training and/or a lack of stimulus to advancement.

Fleet Board Examination

The Chief Staff Officer (Technical) on the staff of the Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth, convenes about seventy-five Fleet Boards annually and thus deals with sufficiently large numbers of ratings, to enable fair conclusions to be drawn.

One of these conclusions is that, if a reasonable percentage of passes could be obtained, the shortages referred to in the first paragraph would be very much diminished.

TABLE I.

Examination for	1958		1959		1960		1961		1962	
	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
C.E.R.A.	13	69	25	56	23	48	20	30	18	11
CH. MECH.	3	66	18	44	8	50	10	40	2	50
UNIT CERT.	77	62	67	68	77	60	45	58	70	40
P.O.M.(E)	79	67	65	75	89	53	97	63	82	51
L.M.(E)	61	61	52	56	104	54	112	43	76	56
ALL RATES	233	63	227	65	301	55	284	51	248	47

TABLE I shows numbers of candidates (column A) and percentages of passes (column B).

From this it will be seen that, whereas the total numbers applying for examination do not differ substantially, the percentage of passes shows a steady decline. At Fleet Boards held at the Portsmouth Headquarters alone, 530 ratings have failed during the last five years.

It is understood from conversation with various officers that similar trends are being experienced elsewhere.

Causes of Low Passing Rate

What are the reasons behind this unhealthy picture? The answer is in most cases, a lack of preparation on the part of the candidates. Many ratings appear before Boards without having seen the syllabus for examination. The Admiralty is not without blame in this matter since B.R.3000 is not readily available to all ratings.

In a small-ship Navy, many ships have but one engineer officer and he is fully extended grappling with day to day problems and just cannot spare as much time as he would wish in the training of his men. There are also of course a large number of ships with no engineer officer at all. It is noticeable that many candidates from small ships are keen and knowledgeable about their particular vessels but lack the broader knowledge required by the syllabus. The absence of a guiding hand in these cases is obvious.

Among the causes of failure are:

- (a) Inexperience (frequently due to the comparative youth of the candidate)
- (b) Lack of formal training in the subjects embraced by the appropriate syllabus.

Key Questions

Although the composition of the Board differs each time and questions sometimes reflect the past experience of the questioner, nevertheless common patterns emerge. Certain key questions in the examination for each rate must be answered well. Failure to answer these key questions usually involves failure even if the candidate is reasonably knowledgeable in other aspects. The questions are listed below.

For C.E.R.A. and Ch. Mech.

What do you know about Defect List and 'A' and 'A' procedure and where do you find the rules for each.

Make out a programme for post refit machinery trials.
How do you work out consumption curves and endurance.

For Unit Certificate

Questions requiring a detailed knowledge of B.R.3000, Chapter 13.
What action would you take if turbine lubricating oil pressure gauge showed Zero.
What are the causes of loss of condenser vacuum.

For P.O.M.(E)

How do you flash up a boiler from cold and prepare boiler room for steaming
What is the Boiler Gauge Glass drill
What is the Boiler Leaky Tube drill
How do you deal with boiler room fires
What action would you take if no water level could be seen in the boiler gauge glass.

For L.M.(E)

How would you deal with:
(a) A technical offence
(b) A disciplinary offence
(c) A fight on the mess deck.
How would you start:
(a) A turbo generator
(b) A distilling plant.

General

All candidates should know the revised rules for 'A.B.C.D. States and Conditions of Readiness' as laid down by A.F.O. 1416/62. Very few do.

Response to Questions

Candidates should learn to answer questions which concern emergencies such as a low level of boiler feed water, loss of lubricating oil pressure, etc. in a ready and confident manner. A man who gives the right answer only after a long deliberation does not give the examining board members sufficient confidence to say 'I would like that man, in the Rate for which he is sitting, in my ship'.

Reports on Candidates

At Boards convened by the Chief Staff Officer (Technical) on Commander-in-Chief's Staff, Portsmouth, a detailed account of the candidate's examination is sent to the rating's ship or establishment whether or not he is successful in the examination. Weaknesses are shown and where necessary the book reference are given to help the candidate prepare himself for another attempt. There are signs that the extra work involved is worth the effort.
