

H.M.S. 'SULTAN'

BY

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Recently A.F.O.150/56 gave information about the transfer of the Mechanical Training Establishment at Portsmouth to new quarters, and it may be of interest to give readers some idea of the facilities that will be available in the new establishment.

As H.M.S. *Sultan*, it will take over the major part of the buildings now occupied by H.M.S. *Siskin*. This Air Station at Gosport has always been a training establishment since its inception, in 1912, by the Royal Flying Corps as one of the first five airfields in the country. Lord Trenchard, the father of the Royal Air Force, was trained as a pilot at Gosport. One of the Gosport team introduced the dual control training plane, and training by this method started there in 1917. Its first connection with the Royal Navy was in October, 1914, when the first Royal Naval Air Squadron, commanded by Commander Longmore (later Air Chief Marshal) was formed and trained. In 1921, Gosport became a permanent Royal Air Force station, mainly engaged in training Fleet Air Arm personnel and the present buildings date from 1928-30. In August, 1945, the station was transferred to the Navy.

Accommodation

The accommodation both for officers and ratings was fortunately up to the high standard prevailing at that time. Ratings are accommodated in blocks. Those for the chief petty officers are different in design from the remainder and form comfortable, self-contained units. Cabins only are provided and public rooms include a billiard room, reading room, dining room, galley and bar. The blocks for the petty officers contain cabins and dormitories, with a billiard room and lounge on the ground floor, and a bar. It is hoped that it will be possible to equip all these blocks up to the most recent approved standard before the move takes place. Because of the unusual proportion of higher ratings under training, some re-allocation of the blocks themselves will be necessary.

Training Facilities

Training facilities will be available in a spacious hangar and other smaller buildings, and the layout gives far more space for both vice-benches and machines than was available at Flathouse Road. There are adequate classrooms, some being new buildings and some conversions of existing buildings. A small laboratory is being fitted out for work in practical physics and mechanics. Considerable mechanical equipment will be available for demonstrations and, to this end, some modern machinery, Weapon Class, Y.100 cruising turbine, etc., is being installed. It is not proposed at present to have steaming facilities. Allowance in both accommodation and training facilities has been made for the probable requirement to take the Petty Officer Engineering Mechanics Course and the Mechanical Training Courses for all the Home Ports.

Maintenance training will be continued in ships of the Reserve Fleet as at present, but it is hoped, in due course, to obtain a ship in a state of unmaintained reserve, attached to H.M.S. *Sultan*, which can be used for operational boiler, auxiliary machinery, and maintenance training.

Arrangements have been made for the miscellaneous courses (Domestic Automatic Refrigerator, Welding, Shipwrights Familiarization Course, New Machinery, etc.) to be available as before.

Recreational Facilities

The playing fields are excellent. There are 4 soccer, 2 hockey, 1 rugger and 2 cricket (1 with concrete wicket) pitches and a 'Kick-about'. It is hoped to run a 0.22 rifle range and to share the gymnasium with the Admiralty Interview Boards, which also function within the establishment. Two whalers and two 14-ft dinghies are approved and will be supplied, and these will offer opportunities for sailing. The N.A.A.F.I. has an excellent canteen and a shop for families. There are a library, quiet rooms for study, billiard tables and other facilities, and a well-equipped theatre which is available for social functions.

Position

The whole establishment is sited in reasonably open country, though new married quarters are being built close at hand. These should prove of value however, to those ratings of H.M.S. *Sultan* who are fortunate enough to secure one. The Solent, with its beaches at Stokes Bay, is within 15 minutes' walk and bathing is pleasant from a shingle beach.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive account of the new establishment, but it will be seen that it is a vast improvement on the old Mechanical Training and Repair Establishment, which has served the Engineering Branch so well for so many years.