

CADER IDRIS

OUTWARD BOUND

BY

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To Serve, to Strive, and not to Yield.

Several articles on the training of engineering personnel have appeared in the *Journal* recently. Suggestions have been made, and views set forth, on how one should tackle the problem of producing a 'whole man'. The immediate problem that confronts authority, is how to prepare the youths in their charge for the life ahead of them. It resolves itself into the natural division of technical training and what can be called 'manhood training'. There seems little trouble with the former, it is the latter that causes so many headaches and requires much profound thought. This article describes a scheme that does overcome these problems. Most people have heard of the Outward Bound Schools, but how many realize what actually goes on? I certainly did not when I was appointed to one of them at Aberdovey in north-west Wales. It is upon my experiences there as a temporary instructor, that this article is based.

School History

'To serve, to strive, and not to yield'. This is the motto of the Outward Bound School, and how well they live up to it. It was Lawrence Holt of the Blue Funnel shipping line who first had the idea of setting up a school where boys could discover their own physical capabilities. Many of the young deck boys in his ships were not surviving the hazards of days spent in open boats after being torpedoed. He felt that by previous experience of hardship and deeds of endurance, they would be better able to face, with confidence in their own ability, the greater dangers in a war at sea. He collaborated with Kurt



ON THE RIVER

Hahn, the headmaster of Gordonstoun, evacuated for the war to north-west Wales. Hahn was already well known for his advanced views on this type of education, and the two set up the first Outward Bound Sea School at Aberdovey. Their dedication is inscribed on a brass plaque at the school :—

' This school, named the Outward Bound Sea School, was founded in 1941 by Lawrence Durning Holt and Kurt Hahn, as a challenge to Youth on the threshold of manhood, by God's help, to seek through the Sea and the Hills, the Joy of Striving, of Achievement, of Selfless Duty and Service.'

The schools are not now confined to this country alone. In addition to Aberdovey, Moray and Eskdale, there are schools in Commonwealth countries, in places as far apart as Malaya, Kenya and the Cameroons. It is significant from a naval point of view, that there also exists a Mediterranean Fleet Outward Bound Association which encourages and helps to organize outward bound activities whenever possible. At the R.N.A.S., Arbroath, the air apprentices have the benefit of a camp situated on the slopes of Glen Esk, where activities are conducted on similar lines to those of the Outward Bound Schools. A movement is now afoot at Manadon whereby young officers in their third term are given a week or more of Outward Bounding.

The Boys and how They are Organized

On the average course, there are about one hundred boys. They come from every social sphere, youth clubs, public schools, industry, dockyards. Their ages vary between 16 and 20, which is the same age group we are primarily interested in, from a naval view-point. They are interviewed on joining, and are then divided into watches of about fourteen boys. Certain boys are selected as watch captains, and an instructor is placed in charge of each watch. The duties of the instructor are similar in many respects to that of the divisional officer in the Service. There is one great difference, however. It is the boys under their watch captain, who are expected to organize and run everything connected with the watch.

The watch instructor is there as an interested spectator, occasionally offering advice and constantly observing and noting boys' characters. Extensive reports

are written at the end of each course by the watch instructor on all the boys in his watch.

The Staff

In overall charge of the school, the captain and headmaster combined, is the Warden. A captain in the Merchant Navy, he retired specially to take up this challenging job. The chain of command is rather like that of a ship, with a Chief Instructor, and heads of departments. All are experts in their particular sphere ; mountaineering, seamanship and athletics. The temporary staff, provided mainly by the Services and universities, are each allotted to one of the departments. There is a certain amount of overlapping of duties, however, and the sailors, for example, are expected to be able to take watches on expeditions into the mountains. A doctor attends the school on the first and last day of each course, when all boys have a thorough physical check. Most boys find they have increased their chest expansion during the course ! The school matron keeps a motherly eye on blisters, cuts, and the like during the twenty-six days of the course.

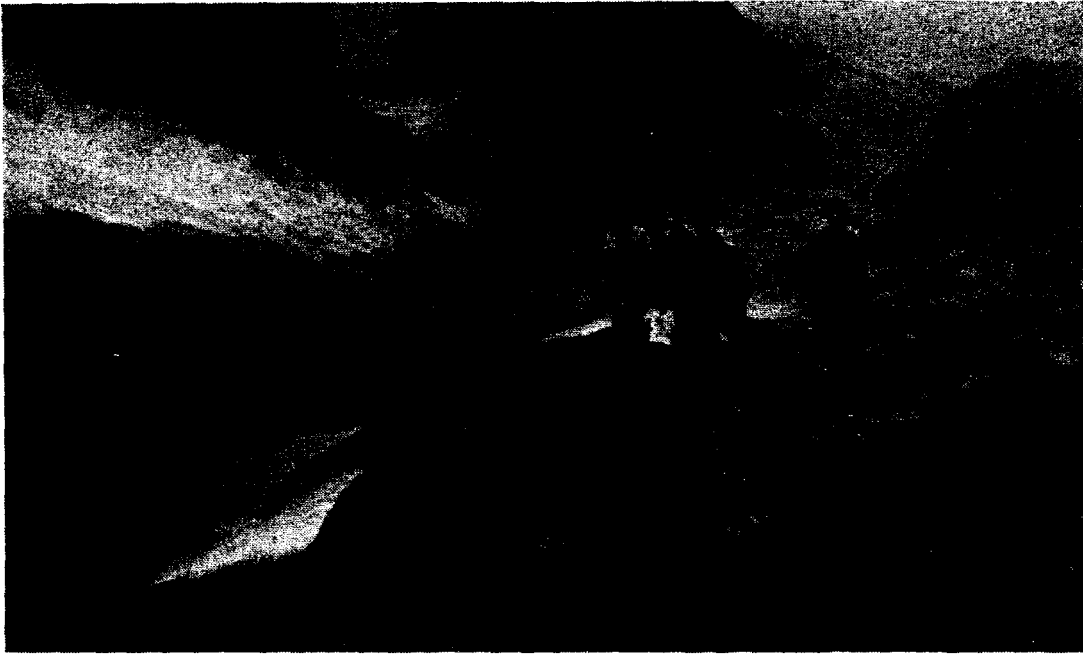
General Arrangement of the Course

When agreeing to become a candidate for an Outward Bound badge, each boy personally takes the oath to keep his training conditions at a simple, but now traditional ceremony, on the evening before the course starts. These conditions are, no smoking, no drinking, and a cold shower every morning for the duration of the course. Great importance is attached to keeping these conditions. If any boy breaks them he is not given his badge at the end of the course. He can, however, be sent the badge, if he thereafter keeps the condition he has broken for a continuous twenty-six days.

The first week is mainly concerned with getting the boys fit. Five-mile walks in the hills, boat-pulling in cutters on the Dovey estuary, athletic events, all are mixed to provide interesting days. In athletics, boys have to reach certain standards to gain awards towards their final badge. A modified Commando course provides a relaxation !

In the evenings, lectures are given either by visitors on a wide variety of subjects, or by members of the staff on activities and projects. Activities at present carried out at the school include a fire brigade, a mountain rescue unit, a beach rescue unit, and seamanship. These arouse great interest, especially as all are operational. The fire brigade, for instance, goes to all local fires, either with its own pump and gear, or, if the fire is further afield, then on the local fire engine. It is highly esteemed by the county fire chief for the good work it does. In the mountain rescue unit, boys are shown the elements of climbing on the rocks just below the school. They then graduate to quite thrilling climbs in the mountains. The long stretch of sand at Aberdovey lends itself well to ' Australian type ' life-saving units, especially in summer.

During the second week the boys begin sailing on the river, in the school cutters. The swift tides and currents in the estuary make it most exciting. The purist, however, will find no joy here. When going about, the oars have always to be kept ready, for one false move, especially when the ebb is in progress, and you find yourself stuck on the numerous sandbanks until the next tide. These early adventures on the water, which take place in any weather, serve to harden the muscles, to make eyes and ears more alert, to build up stamina and proof the body against cold and damp. Three-day expeditions into the mountains, and two-day cruises in the ketch *Golden Valley* are also enjoyed. These are the real testing grounds, for although the boys have been toughened and tempered by



ON THE BIG EXPEDITION

the previous activities, it is in these journeys by sea and land, that events requiring initiative, courage, and leadership occur.

Why should we try to give these young lads an idea of leadership ? why do we in the Service try to inculcate qualities of leadership into our stokers, and our artificers ? John Buchan sets out the reasons thus—Where there is leadership, ‘ First, there will be fortitude, the power of enduring when hope is gone, the power of taking upon oneself a desperate responsibility and daring all. There must be self-forgetfulness, a willingness to let worldly interests and even reputation and honour perish if only the task is accomplished. The man who is concerned with his own repute will never move mountains. There must be patience, supreme patience, under misunderstandings and set-backs and the muddles and the interferences of others. There must be resilience in defeat, a manly optimism which looks at all the facts in all their bleakness and yet dares to hope. There must be a sense of the eternal continuity of a great cause so that failure will not seem the end, and a man sees himself as only part of a predestined purpose—Leadership then, depends primarily upon moral endowments.’

The boys are very keen to learn and show lots of enthusiasm. During the whole course one’s aim is to make the boy realize his own potentialities.

Given the opportunity to take charge of a cutter under sail, or run two miles against the clock, many boys surprise themselves. Their confidence grows and during the course one sees the improvement in effort and attitude. Each day’s activities begin with divisions and prayers, and twice a week the local padre gives a short talk. These services always start the day off so well. The boys take a genuine interest in the remarks addressed to them. The evening activities also begin with a service at which boys read the lessons and the Warden or the duty instructor takes prayers. This religious background to the school life is a most sure foundation on which to build the characters of the boys on course. It provides a stabilizing influence, so often missing in Service life today.

The final weeks are crowded with activity. Canoes appear on the river, the dinghies are taken out by the boys themselves, and generally they begin to take charge of all their activities. Everything is building up to the climax of

the course, the ' Big Expedition '. The boys in small groups of five or six, are dropped about 35 miles from the school, and make their own way back via given routes. All the routes include the ascent of Cader Idris (2,900 ft) and many check points along the way, including the summit of Cader, are manned by the instructors. Great exertions are required by all concerned, and the routes are designed to encourage all those qualities of duty, service, leadership, and endurance that the school tries to develop. The course usually takes about eleven hours, but weather conditions are the criterion of slow or fast trips. Groups occasionally lose themselves and have to sleep out, but none has ever failed to return.

The evening before the boys receive their badges, a concert is held in the dining hall. It follows a true Royal Naval pattern. Unrehearsed efforts by each watch are mixed up to provide a real *pot-pourri*. Great fun is had by all.

Conclusions

Two features of the school life are of special interest to the Service ; the type of discipline employed and the religious background to each day's activities. A very special kind of discipline is required to control adolescent youths. It is achieved through a very personal officer/boy relationship, much more personal than one could ever achieve in a Service training establishment. Yet even at the end of twenty-six days the faults of over-familiarity begin to appear. The instructor gets a very clear idea of a boy's character within this time, however, and as a means to this end the familiar discipline is effective. It would, however, be quite out of place in the Service.

The regular morning and evening prayers, although very plain and simple, were a great moral force. Being non-denominational all the boys attended. I am in no doubt that this is one of the school's real strengths. Its application of Christian principles and standards of conduct to the routine of the boy's life while at the school, is something we could do well to study.

The fact that so many places are now engaging in Outward Bound activities, is proof enough of the schools' success. In the Navy all training establishments should have at least one officer who has visited a school in England or Scotland. The staff of the schools always welcomes visitors. To see the scheme actually in progress is to realize that all the talk of ' manhood training ' is not mere intellectual speculation, but a splendid reality.
