

# MORE FORMS

BY

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*'The task of filling up the blanks  
I'd rather leave to you'*

(W. S. Gilbert ; *The Mikado*)

A letter I received recently started 'I am returning your card which I have completed in the same ingenuous spirit with which my son writes to Father Christmas'. This accompanied a form, or card, which was recently circulated to commanders M/E, and below, in order to fill a gap in the information held in the office known as E.A.P. To explain the object of producing yet another form to fill in, I will first reproduce the covering letter which was circulated with it.

## 'I KNOW WHERE I'M GOING'

'The system of appointing officers in the Engineering Branch has always been on a very personal basis and most officers, I believe, prefer it that way. There are a few, however, who would prefer a mammoth mechanical brain which could work out exactly when and where an officer should go next in order to provide them with a possible yet perfect career. These are the officers who are reluctant to state any preference, even when invited to do so, and go where, and when, they are appointed, without a murmur. At the other end of the scale is the officer who, after a very long spell in his home town, and six months notice of his new appointment, complains furiously because it takes him away from home just before his wedding anniversary.

'Neither of these is of as much assistance to the appointing authority as the officer who states briefly, once only, when asked, his preferences in order.

'There may often be two officers equivalent in suitability and seniority to go to similar jobs in different places. On consulting the address cards, it is discovered that Lieutenant-Commander X's last address was a boarding house in Barrow-in-Furness in 1948, and Lieutenant-Commander Y is still down as at

NAME :—		DATE
PRESENT APPOINTMENT :—		RANK
DATE APPOINTED :—		G.L. OR S.D.L.
DECORATIONS :—		SENIORITY
SOCIETIES, INSTITUTES, ETC. :—		AGE
SPORTING QUALIFICATIONS :—		
SPECIALIST QUALIFICATIONS :— (A/E ; O/E ; S/M ; / ETC.) :—		
SPECIAL JOBS HELD (F.D.E.O's ; ATTACHES, DOCKYARDS, GAS TURBINES, ETC.) :—		
MEDICAL CATEGORY :—		
LANGUAGES :—		
MARRIED/SINGLE :—	WIFE'S NAMES :—	
AGES AND SEX OF CHILDREN :—		
PERMANENT ADDRESS (IF ANY)	PRESENT ADDRESS (IF DIFFERENT)	

FRONT

STATE PREFERENCES—THERE IS **NO** GUARANTEE THAT ANY WILL BE AVAILABLE

CHOICES :	SHORE JOB				SEA JOB	
	HOME		ABROAD		AREA	TYPE OF SHIP
	AREA	TYPE OF JOB	AREA	TYPE OF JOB		
1st.						
2nd.						
3rd.						
4th.						

BACK

R.N.E.C., Keyham, 1943. Then it is a question either of tossing a coin or starting off a correspondence. The former method, while having the advantage of speed, may mean the disturbance of two families, schools and everything. Hence a great deal of time is spent on the latter method.

‘ Another example is an officer being appointed to sea in a frigate. He can go to one on the East Indies Station, or one on the West Indies Station. If he is appointed to the West Indies, you can bet your bottom dollar he has relations in Ceylon and Kenya, and so it will be changed at the last moment.

‘ There are quite a number of things about an officer which do not go on record—for example, the number of children he has.

‘ The Deputy E. in C. (E.A.P.) has agreed to the trial of cards for M/E commanders, and below, which are filled in yearly, showing all that an appointing authority could wish to know about an officer. Some of the information asked for, naturally, is known already but is included on the card for completeness. It must be emphasized that the choices of jobs are a guide only, and it may be impossible to give an officer any of his choices.

‘ These cards will be circulated soon and, if filled in intelligently, will be of great help both to the officer concerned and to the Appointing Authority. In spite of A.F.O. 1/56, it is recommended that cross-appointing is forgotten for the moment. Ambitions to become the R.C. padre or P.M.O. must be restrained.

‘ By this method everyone’s choice will at least be known, instead of the choice of a limited section only, and it should cut down a great deal of private correspondence, which varies from eight-page diatribes on the unfairness of life to a picture by Mabel Lucy Atwell inscribed “ With a heart that’s true I’ll wait for you ” ; (this latter missive, received unstamped, caused the greatest trouble, a long search having to be made to find a suitable card in reply—a nude woman, long black hair, a serpent, and an apple saying “ What can I possibly give you ?”)

‘ The card itself is self-explanatory and should be simple to fill in after Income Tax Returns, and I should be grateful if they could be typed or printed in ink—not Biro—and returned to me.’

Filling in the front of the card is simple, but most officers, so far, have found the back rather a problem. Nearly everyone knows where they don’t want to go, but you cannot run the world on hates and negatives, and it is only when an officer has to decide where he would like to serve next that he realizes the difficulties. A native of the north of England may agree with Hortensio that there’s small choice in rotten apples, but, unless you are one of the rare people who genuinely does not mind whether you work in Devonport or Rosyth, it seems folly not to put something down. Nearly everyone filled the back in somehow, but there will have to be some modifications to ensure that they indicate whether the first preference is Home or Abroad, for the shore job. One extremist element filled in every single square, while another only filled in the squares where they were able to write ‘ Plymouth ’.

Although it may be a good idea to include a line for ‘ hates ’, the backs were fairly explicit without it, appropriate remarks being written across the bottom, such as ‘ If not promoted very soon, then my choice is a lucrative civilian job in industry ’. Another officer wants ‘ 1 year’s leave in 8 years’ time for a world cruise with daughters 16, 18 and 20 ’. I need hardly point out that putting down ‘ Loan Service ’ as a choice does not obviate the need to apply for it officially. Incidentally, officers can volunteer for loan service with the Canadians, New Zealanders, Pakistanis, Malaysians, Australians or Indians at any time, and need not wait for an A.F.O. calling for volunteers. A.F.O.s are only published when the list of applicants is empty.

Filling in these forms is a tremendous help to the appointing authority, but it is in no way meant to replace, or diminish, the personal contact between officers and the D.E.-in-C. (E.A.P.) or his assistant.

Some officers are reluctant to fill in the back of the form on the grounds that, if they are sent where they have asked to go, it might not be the best thing for their career. Let it be clearly understood that this is not the case ; the back is an indication of the area an officer likes and the type of job in which he is interested, but the expression of preferences will not stop an officer getting a good job if he deserves it, nor get him a plum job if he doesn't.

The front of the returned cards show how widely diverse are the qualifications of our engineer officers ; sporting qualifications include spelaeology, gliding, motor racing and watching cricket : linguistic ability varies from knowledge of working Malay, Turkish and ancient Greek to cocktail French. It is apparent that few officers know their medical category, and those who are P2 describe themselves as ' healthy ', ' fit for anything ', ' not classed ', ' A.1 ', or even ' firing on all cylinders ', except one honest man who says he is reasonably fit but a poor sailor.

Knowing Yorkshire to be an unpopular part of the world, I was surprised to find an officer whose present appointment read ' Cheerful at Hull '. However, I soon realized it was H.M.S. *Cheerful*, and that he was probably anything but happy at Hull.

The next issue of the cards will be in March, 1957, with the backs altered to ensure clarity and to include dislikes. Spare cards will be sent to the Secretaries of Rear-Admirals for Engineering Duties on the Staffs of C.s-in-C., Home Ports, or their equivalent in other Commands, for collection by officers who are inadvertently omitted from the initial distribution.

As a serious contribution to the agency for getting the right man in the right job with the minimum family disturbance, these cards are already proving invaluable.

I hasten to add, in conclusion, that it would be more than fortuitous if everyone could possibly be just where they want ; but I hope the percentage of round pegs in at least oval holes may go down.

*' Still raise for good, the supplicating voice*

*But leave to Heaven the measure and the choice '*

(Johnson ; *Vanity of Human Wishes*).

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