

# 'OFFICER' TRAINING AT THE ROYAL NAVAL ENGINEERING COLLEGE

## INTRODUCTION

In September, 1956, the last term of midshipmen, other than constructor midshipmen, entered the Royal Naval Engineering College. This moment, therefore, may be said to be a very definite milestone in the history of the whole naval training given in H.M.S. *Thunderer*. The average age of officers at entry will henceforth rise from nineteen to twenty-two or three and at leaving from twenty-three to twenty-six or more. The routines and practices in force for the present age-group may well seem out of place for the older and more mature officers who will join in the future. Though a considerable amount of time and thought is now being devoted to the problems of the future, the thinking is not yet finished.

This article is concerned only with one aspect of the present course, an aspect which in the future will largely devolve on Dartmouth, namely the early teaching of leadership. Discussion of this type of training, about which all know so little but many think they know a lot, is apt to cause controversy. This article purports only to be factual in its description of the training given, but in describing the reasons behind certain facets of the training, opinions which inevitably are controversial have had to be expressed. No new doctrine is propounded. The leadership training which has evolved since the war is the product of the experience and views of many staff officers, many other officers who have conveyed their ideas and suggestions, some helpful, by letter or in person and lastly by the most important element of all, the officers under instruction themselves ; for leadership is not like algebra ; unless the fire is already smouldering, no amount of teaching will ever kindle the flame.

The quest for leadership in the world today and the best way of teaching it are problems to which all seek the answers.



THE EMMETT-LIKE STRUCTURE WHICH CONSTITUTES A MESS

In the case of the modern Navy, recruited from the youth of a war-time and post-war generation and officered in the junior ranks by some who lack a tradition of service and dedication and who come from the same social environment as the led, the need for the formal teaching of leadership, something quite alien to the generally satisfactory but haphazard methods in which a pre-war generation was nurtured seems, regrettably, to be true.

This article does not seek to lay down any rigid doctrine. Indeed, as the Author's meagre experience of training increases so does his doubt that there is, in fact, any doctrine to cover the teaching of what is really a Divine gift.

With Gibbon, he has little faith in our power to mould others ; mostly, the only people we can teach are those who do not need it. Necessarily, however, he has certain beliefs which colour his views and it is fair to the reader that these beliefs should be stated so that the worth of the rest can be measured.

The teaching of leadership (if such is possible) to young officers of considerable academic standing, who already have been taught to reason, to doubt, and to question, has little relationship to the possibility of teaching leadership to ratings.

All young officers were selected because, on the evidence adduced, they were thought to possess character and moral endowments above the average ; they also necessarily possess considerable intellectual ability. To help such officers to develop their talents and, still more, to help them to dedicate themselves to the never-ending quest of experience and to the life-long study of how such talents can be improved and used for the good of the naval community, is ' leadership ' or ' officer ' training, as the author understands it. Of all subjects, the teaching of leadership needs the most careful handling ; yet, of any subject, it is the one which almost everyone feels themselves qualified to teach. No subject is more beloved by the stupid and sanctimonious who believe they have a ' mission ' : no subject gives a greater scope for doing harm, when the humourless and pompous try to handle it.

A formal organization can be established only for clearly foreseen ends. In this case, there are an infinite variety of ends in the shape of potential (and always different) embryo leaders requiring to be taught and so no formal organization is possible.

When the Author has tried as so many must have done, in peace and war, to define the particular qualities which give to a few dominion over others, he, at least, has found only the simplest virtues.

' Always in times of stress,' wrote that great American Ambassador, John Winant, ' it is the simple virtues that really count. In the welter and tragedy of the American Civil War, courage and kindness, common sense and a sense of humour, and an abiding faith in the purpose of life gave strength and unity.'

There seems no facile road to leadership and an even more difficult one leads to the proper teaching of it. All that can be done is first to select a boy of character (itself a moral endowment) and then, through his training, give him the chance of developing his character, the habit of choosing, daily, between right and wrong, and by so doing encourage constantly a certain attitude of mind, a strength of purpose, and a growth, at last, to balanced maturity.

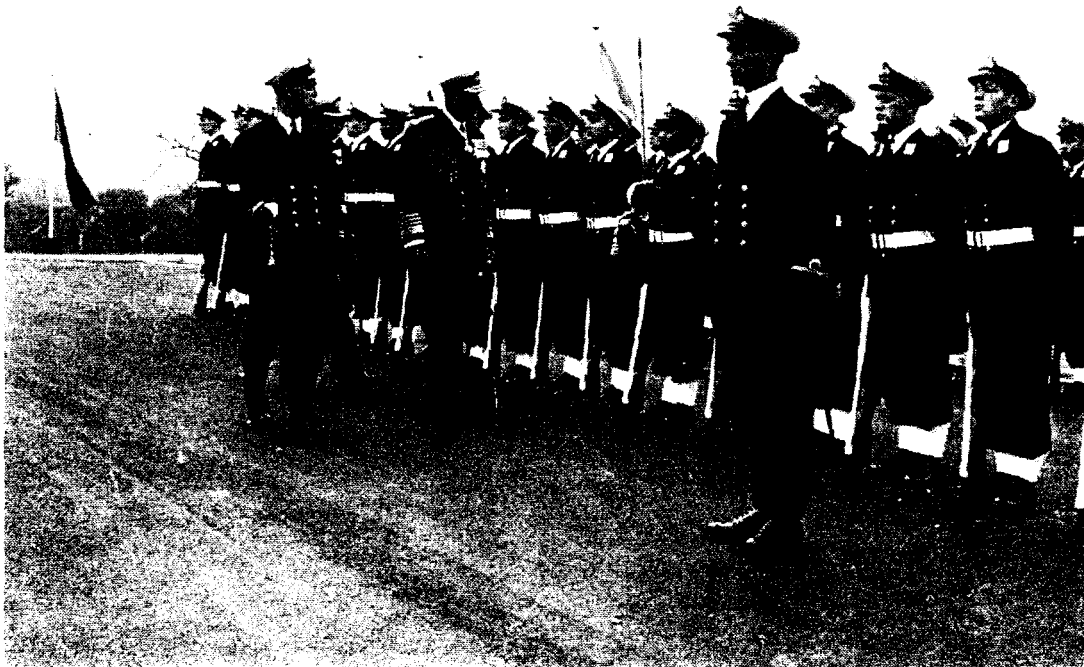
If these general principles are found acceptable, the problem then resolves itself into how they can be put into practice, in the environment of the Royal Naval Engineering College.

As this is so very different today from its previous state, some description is perhaps necessary.

## THE COLLEGE

### Numbers

There are at present at the College some 360 officers under instruction. Their ages range from nineteen to twenty-nine and besides General List officers, there are Branch List and National Service officers and Commonwealth and Foreign officers ; in all, officers from ten different nations and all five continents. Their ranks comprise in the main midshipmen, acting sub-lieutenants, sub-lieutenants, lieutenants and there are also about a dozen constructor officers from India, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.



VARIOUS PARADES ARE HELD

The officers under instruction enter and remain in terms for purposes of sport and administration. The alternative which might be preferable, would be to adopt a 'House' system, but in view of their ages, it has been felt that a University rather than a Public School system was more suitable. In any case they now live in four different ante-rooms, which are disposed :—

North ante-room, Keyham : Xth term and National Service officers.

South ante-room, Keyham : IIIrd and IVth terms.

Wardroom, Manadon : IXth, XIth, XIIth terms and Branch officers.

Gunroom, Manadon : Ist, IInd, Vth, VIth terms and Constructor officers.

The division into the different ante-rooms is made for various, almost unavoidable reasons, despite the resultant 'general post' term by term.

Most of these officers are housed in cabins in single brick thickness huts, eight to a hut (midshipmen in dormitories). The huts are situated up to a quarter of a mile from the ante-rooms and nearly another furlong from the 'Emmett'-like structure which is not waterproof and which is said to constitute a 'mess'. The living quarters are half a mile or more from the instructional block.

The cabins are inadequately heated by electric heaters and the main cable is so overloaded that complete 'blackouts' are no novelty. All sanitary arrangements freeze up in any hard frost. Attempts have been made to modernize the furniture but modern cabin furniture, designed presumably for the 175 square foot inter-Service scale cabin, is so large that when inserted into Manadon cabins (70-80 sq ft) it leaves little room for the occupant or his belongings.

### Working Hours

Working hours, including stand-easies and time for lunch, are from 0815-1615 on four days a week and 0815-1300 on two days a week, a total of about forty hours fairly intensive lecturing.

A recent Director of Studies calculated that the average officer should put in at least 8 hours a week dog-watch work to keep up with the syllabus and many officers, in fact, do more. Every other term an officer has a progress examination, a first failure (less than 50 per cent) entailing an Admiralty Warning and a second failure removal from the Service. One or two officers are so removed each term. The average working-week totals, therefore, about fifty hours and if to this is added the period occupied between waking, dressing, breakfasting and getting to divisions probably sixty hours is a more accurate total or seventy if the necessary time for eating supper or dinner and tea is taken into account.

This suggests that the average officer, if he takes nine hours between starting to go to bed and starting to turn out, has thirty-five hours a week remaining for private recreation.

Some eighty periods over the whole course, known as Divisional Periods, are devoted to the development of 'Power of Command', and many more to the 'mechanics' of being a divisional officer. One or two weeks practical leadership training in the hills and one week's training as an assistant divisional officer at H.M.S. *Raleigh* are also worked in during the seven terms.

With these exceptions, it is into the thirty-five leisure hours that remain for private recreation and against the background described that the officers on the staff endeavour to inject officer training.

This would be an appropriate moment to mention the staff officers. There are twenty-nine officers who are engineering specialists and twenty-six instructor officers. Apart from the Executive Officer (responsible for leadership lectures to the specialist officers and for a fair number of similar lectures to other terms) there are only three officers, the First Lieutenant, the Sports Officer and the Captain's Secretary, who are not full-time lecturers. These three in fact represent the administrative staff, responsible for 420 officers and forty 'ships company', while a Maintenance Officer is responsible to the Executive Officer for the 300 civilian employees. The two establishments for which they are responsible are three and a half miles apart. The engineering specialist officers are primarily lecturers and are striving constantly to improve and renew the lectures and syllabus, as of course are instructor officers.

It is only in the hours left to them, after this task has been accomplished, that a 'Term Officer' finds opportunity to devote to the leadership training of his term. That they do find opportunities and that they and their wives do get to know so many of the officers for whom they are responsible, is a constant source of admiration to those who only have to watch.

It is worthwhile comparing the Royal Navy's out-dated attitude to leadership training with the facilities at the Royal Air Force Technical College at Henlow where they are certainly investing in the future. Besides a full administrative staff the R.A.F. believe that their present complement of one non-lecturing staff officer for twenty-five officer cadets is too low and are pressing for about one for twenty officer cadets. At a conservative estimate and discounting any comparison in administrative staffs this would mean, on present numbers, eighteen extra officers, for Term Officer duties only in *Thunderer*.

#### ' OFFICER ' TRAINING

The various parts which go to make up ' officer ' training are, very briefly :—

##### **Power of Command and Parade Training**

This is a comparatively simple and mechanical function, and is carried out progressively throughout the officer's time at the College. Various parades are



LARGE AMOUNT OF SAILING

held every day, some larger than others, guards are paraded and, in addition, about six or seven hours a year per officer are devoted to this matter. All officers get many chances of taking charge of their messmates, both at drills and at physical training. At such functions, senior officers are present to criticize the efforts of the officer under instruction. Any officer who by his fourth or fifth term is seen not to be reaching an acceptable standard, is given special coaching and brought up to the required standard before he leaves.

### **Responsibility Training**

This is a difficult function in what should be a well-regulated shore establishment. Nevertheless, the out-of-working hours organization and discipline of 350 very live young officers calls for some considerable degree of responsibility and, almost completely, this responsibility is handed over to the officers under instruction. During their early terms as midshipmen they are given certain fairly mundane duties to perform, and later, as acting sub-lieutenants and sub-lieutenants, they are put in charge of the midshipmen, of the security and fire-fighting organizations and of the out-of-working hours functioning of the very considerable amount of workshop machinery. Finally, as 'Specialist Course' officers they are placed in full charge of nearly everything that happens in the College outside working hours. Because almost one-third of the officers are from other navies, and in order not to draw an invidious distinction between the responsibilities delegated to the foreign and British officers, there is always a Duty Staff Officer on board who deals with any major ship's company or civilian employee problems.

There is also a considerable field for the exercise of responsibility in the extra-mural activities of the College. The principle behind extra-mural activities is roughly that any officer who wishes to start any activity is encouraged to do so and, if he can gather around him a reasonable number of other officers also interested in it, the Mess will consider supporting it.

Because of the 'General Post' already referred to between Manadon and Keyham and because of the large number of external courses which take the 'Specialist Officers' (who might be expected to be the moving spirits) out of the College for two or three weeks at a time, inevitably there is a staff officer associated with each activity which needs one; his role today is strictly one of continuity only. Some of the more reputable sports and activities at present in vogue are rugger, soccer, hockey, basket ball, badminton, swimming, water polo, inshore and deep sea sailing, tennis, squash, golf, riding (modern pentathlon), rowing, cross-country running, motoring and motor racing and motor cycling of all sorts, singing, orchestra, dance band, bridge, billiards, Highland dancing, conjuring, photography, bird watching, parish working party, gramophone concerts, chess, library, mountaineering and ski-ing, pot-holing and underwater exploration, pantomime and drama festival and archery. In addition, there is an active mess committee.

### **Practical Leadership Training**

This type of training is perhaps among the most controversial that exist today. For those who are not familiar with the term as it is used at the College, a detailed description will follow later—but it is known broadly in the Navy as 'Expedition Training', or more colloquially 'Outward Bounding'. Probably more nonsense has been written and talked about it than almost any single aspect of naval training in recent years. It is even possible that over-ardent advocacy has militated against its introduction (until lately) at the College and this is not altogether to be wondered at. The Navy, speaking non-politically, is very conservative and those (and there are many, the writer included), who believe that this type of training, have in some cases perhaps lost their sense of proportion in the presentation of a new training aid whose virile and vocal exponents tend to assert that it is the only answer to all the Navy's troubles, both in the fields of material and personnel problems. Wherever the fault may lie, there is no doubt that some extremely sane officers, quite unwittingly, have been led, when reading or learning of this type of training, to speak darkly of the 'Führer Prinzip' or 'Hitler Youth' and to dwell on some of the evils that emanated from that particular organization; others, more charitable, conceive 'Expedition Training' to be something to do with that otherwise doubtless estimable evangelical array, ubiquitous in the country today, the 'Crusaders'. In either case, of course, they are (at least in the College) equally wide of the mark. In *Thunderer*, the case for 'Practical Leadership Training' rests on the wisdom of someone perhaps wiser even than any of its present exponents. It rests on the words of Abraham Lincoln—'Trees,' he said, 'are deceptive in their likeness to one another as are certain classes of men amongst whom none but a physiognomist's eye can detect dissimilar moral features until events have developed them. It would be a good thing . . . if we could have a school of events. . . . I mean one in which, before entering real life, students might pass through the various vicissitudes and situations that are necessary to bring out their powers and mark the calibre to which they are assigned. Thus one could select from the graduates an invincible soldier, a politician too cunning to be outwitted and so on. These things have all to be tried and their sometime failure creates confusion as well as disappointment. There is no more dangerous or expensive analysis than that which consists of trying a man.'

In *Thunderer* it is believed that, among other types of training, what in the College is called 'Practical Leadership' is only one of many means to an end, the end being the presentation to young officers of as many differing opportunities as possible of acquiring a variety of experience.

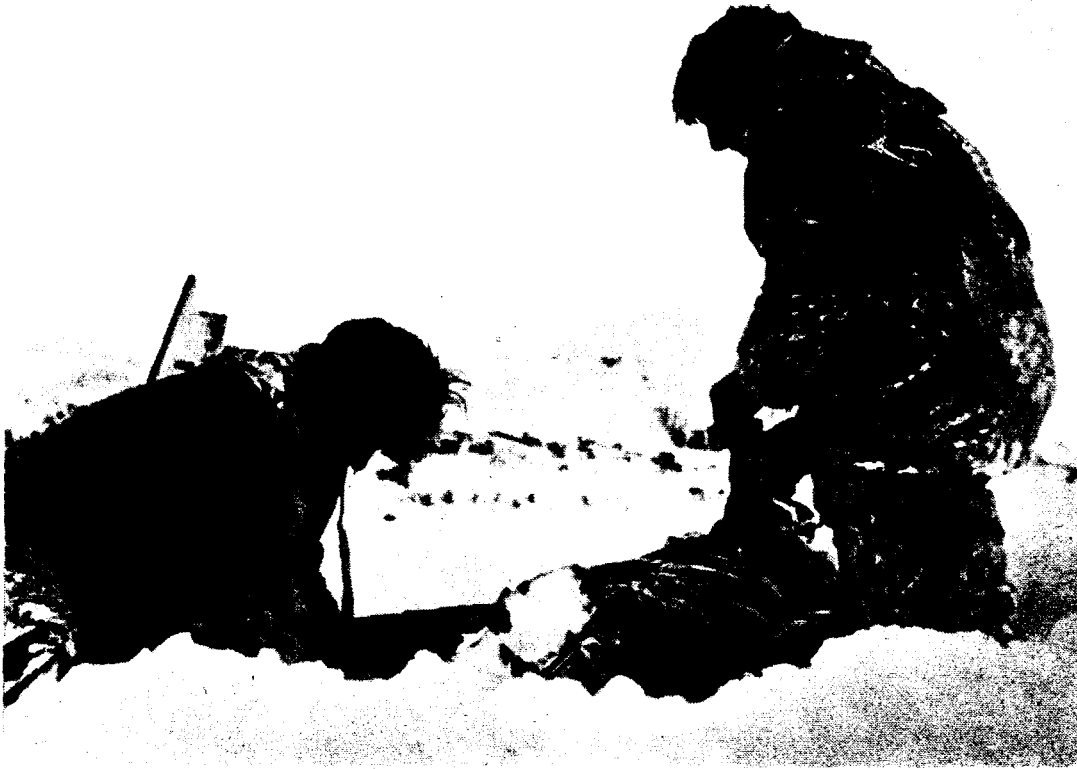


THE STAFF OFFICER CAN GET TO KNOW HIS TERM

The details of Practical Leadership Training at the Royal Naval Engineering College are :—

- Term I : Officers spend one fairly arduous day on Dartmoor.
  - Term II : Officers spend two fairly arduous days and a night, in the open, on Dartmoor.
  - Term III : Officers themselves carry out the whole organization for transporting a group of thirty or so with all food and equipment to Scotland. On arrival they are divided into groups of three or four and are sent on expeditions lasting from 48 to 72 hours.
  - Term V : Officers themselves organize and conduct parties of up to twelve engineering mechanics or artificer apprentices on the moors, usually for about 36 to 48 hours.
  - Term VI : Officers spend one more week in Scotland under considerably more difficult conditions than they have met to date.
- Subsequent Terms : As for Term V.





CAPACITY TO FACE HAZARDS, HARDSHIPS AND DIFFICULTIES

These expeditions serve several purposes. Initially they are tremendously useful in that the staff officer in charge of each division is able, in a short time, to get to know his 'Term' really well. Secondly, they forge each 'Term' into a purposeful and cohesive community and generally enhance the spirit of each group. Thirdly, they provide the officers under instruction with opportunities of developing foresight and the ability to plan ahead, because all orders and all the organization has to be carried out by the officers themselves. Fourthly, they increase each officer's self-confidence and stimulate their will to endure by presenting them with the opportunities of developing their capacity to face hazards, hardships and difficulties.

In this connection it should be said that such expeditions are only complementary to the large amount of deep sea and inshore sailing which is undertaken by most officers in the College, at one time or another and which achieves almost the same objectives. It is no coincidence that recently two officers from *Thunderer* have each sailed to New Zealand, one alone in the smallest craft ever to cross the Pacific.

Lastly, expeditions on Dartmoor give officers and ratings a chance to meet each other under conditions where the Naval Discipline Act is right in the background and an officer must lead by the exercise of his own personality.

### **Divisional Work**

The training in the pure mechanics of being a divisional officer is given by lectures on every practical aspect of this subject likely to be of use while, in addition, every officer under instruction spends one week as an assistant divisional officer in H.M.S. *Raleigh*.



THE OFFICERS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THE ORGANIZATION

### **Interest Training**

Attempts are also made to broaden officers' interest not only by outside lectures on world subjects but, also, by lectures adapted from the quarterly publication of the Royal United Services Institution on purely professional military matters. Apart from these, a most encouraging feature is the large increase in numbers of officers who spend their leaves wandering about the Continent, bicycling to Vienna, or other similar exploits.

### **Spiritual Training**

'There was never a time (wrote Sir Winston Churchill) when the inherent virtues of human beings required more strong and confident expression in daily life, there was never a time when the hope of immortality and the disdain of earthly power and achievement was more necessary for the safety of the children of men.'

Amid the feverish preoccupation with the transitory and the material which threatens the human soul in the modern west, it is well to reflect on the things which abide, and which redeem all man's endeavours from futility. But to get a young officer in the fullness and bloom and enthusiasm of youth to reflect on such things is a gift which only a very few possess, but for which all must pray. To quote Sir Winston once again in his writings of thirty years ago, 'Russia, self-outcast, sharpens her bayonets in her arctic night and relentlessly proclaims through self-starved lips her philosophy of hatred and death.'

The problem of how to mobilize officers to fight spiritually against the onset of Communism is not one which, as some assert, can be solved by getting them round camp fires on the moor at night. They are too clever and often, outwardly at least, too cynical for that approach.

The most that can be done is, by a close acquaintanceship and knowledge of the officers concerned (in many, so difficult really to achieve, and to the over-burdened lecturers a constant source of concern), to awake some search for faith. It is natural, with the character that the majority already possess, that they should be fumbling for another way of living, less material and less sterile than is common today. If, eventually, they can be helped to discern this road and if young officers can be convinced that it is not a soft and priggish one, but the hard and right road, down which, in the normal course, their natural loyalties should lead them, then to some at least, a faith and strength of purpose may come.

The lines on which the culminating lectures to the more mature officers are gradually developing are :—

The danger : Militant Atheism : Modern Russia.

The temporary physical shield : The North Atlantic Treaty Organization. War in the future.

The professional role of the engineering specialist in forging the naval weapon.

The rating before he joins the Navy.

The leader : Types of leadership : The mechanics and theory of leadership.

The role of the leader/engineer—the officer.

This approach is found to lead more logically to the need for leadership, than the ‘plugging’ of it in the abstract. There is, in fact, a physical and spiritual danger facing us. An engineer by his professional skill is here to help forge the physical defence—an officer, by his leadership, can help to build up the spiritual defences.

### CONCLUSION

The First Sea Lord on a recent visit reiterated the classic definition of an expert—‘X’ : the unknown quantity and ‘Spurt’ : a drip working under pressure. He advised the young officers to turn the ‘X’ into leadership and never become a ‘Spurt.’

Once more there is no easy road to leadership. It depends primarily on moral endowments and it is on their always slow development, in the school, in the workshop, in the ship or in a church, on the moor, on the hillside, on the sea or in the snow, in the boiler room or on the bridge and in all the fields of normal human endeavour, that the quality of leadership achieved ultimately depends.

Leadership is not something that can be ladled out of a bottle—a teaspoonful for ‘A’ because he will only need a little ; two desertspoonsful twice a day to ‘B’ because he’ll need a lot. A true leader is perhaps a fighting optimist, with a philosophy of constructive altruism, happy in living life for twenty-four crowded hours a day and content always to do his best, just for the satisfaction of doing it.

Such a philosophy cannot be generated by innumerable lectures or by harping continually on the subject ; but only by (it is to be hoped unconscious) example, precept, inspiration, infinite patience and prayer on the part of those who try to teach and, above all, the presence of the spark itself in the young officers concerned.

It is to be doubted that Nelson gave lectures on the art of leadership, yet as Arthur Bryant writes : ‘The years in which Nelson won his first laurels were

years of naval mutiny, of bitter feeling between officer and man, of sectional grievance and party controversy. Nelson's plan was not to unite men through agreement as to the justice of what they were entitled to receive—an ideal little likely to be achieved in this world—but on the high platform of what they offered. In this, from admiral to powder monkey, he made them all feel equal—a band of brothers—under his inspiration they gladly offered their all.'

The first and last essential of a true leader, therefore, seems to be character.

The most that can be hoped for from the *Thunderer* training is to show the crying need for leaders in today's world and to present the widest possible variety of opportunities for the development of the character with which each officer under instruction, when he was selected for the Royal Navy, was believed to have been endowed.

Whether the inadequate time and great effort devoted today to this aspect of a naval engineer officer's training will bear fruit, only the troublous and distant future will show. The author of this article at least, who, because he has used the ideas and words of so many others hides his identity from all but a few, believes that it is in the lines indicated here, leavened always with a sense of proportion and humour, and expanded greatly by the liberal provision of the right staff officers without other preoccupations, that 'Officer' training must be perpetuated when Dartmouth comes to carry the full burden of the first and most important period of our adult and life-long training for the responsibilities and privilege of service in the Navy.