

VIII.—DURATION OF COURSE OF TRAINING OF BOYS.

131. Although the terms of reference do not specifically invite us to express any opinion as to the practicability of reducing the courses of Harbour training for Boys and Youths, we have examined this question in its bearing on the accommodation in the Harbour Establishments. As pointed out in the Interim Report, a definite curtailment of the period of Harbour training would afford some relief to the pressure on the accommodation in these Establishments, and it therefore seemed to us desirable that the effect of such a measure should be carefully examined.

132. In 1903-4, Boys on joining the Harbour Training Establishments underwent a course of seven months' instruction in seamanship, school subjects and physical training, at the expiration of which they were rated, Boy, 1st Class.

The subsequent training of Ordinary Boys comprised :—

5 weeks—Mechanical training.

12 weeks—Gunnery (including stripping gun-mountings).

4 weeks—Work of ship and kitting up.

A period of seven weeks' leave was allowed during the course, and the total Harbour course covered a nominal period of 12 months.

133. In 1903 a revised scheme of training involving a reduction of about four months in the time spent in the Harbour Establishments was introduced experimentally on the recommendation of the local Committee appointed at Portsmouth in 1902 to enquire into the system of instruction followed in Boys' Training Ships. The scheme was applied at first to the "St. Vincent" only, to which H.M.S. "Isis" was attached as sea-going Training Ship for the purpose of embarking Boys to complete their course of training.

134. In 1905 the Harbour course of all Boys was reduced to its present length, viz., eight months for Ordinary Boys, the time being allocated as follows :—

12 weeks—Seamanship and School.

4 weeks—Mechanical Training.

12 weeks—Gunnery.

2 weeks—Work of ship and kitting up.

2 weeks leave at Christmas ; 3 weeks at Midsummer.

The curtailment of the Harbour course enabled a reduction to be made in the number of Harbour Training Ships with a consequent saving in expense, the reduction in the rate of entry facilitating this economy.

135. In the meantime, it had been arranged that Boys on completing their Harbour course should undergo about four months' sea training in ships of the Particular Service Squadron (now the Fourth Cruiser Squadron), drafts of Boys being embarked for the purpose periodically. It was designed that instruction in many of the subjects omitted from the revised course in the Harbour Ships should be given afloat in the sea-going cruisers. This course has not since been subjected to any substantial modification.

136. The recent pressure on accommodation in the Harbour Training Establishments caused by :--

- (a) the increased rate of entry of Boys ;
- (b) the limitation for hygienic reasons of the numbers to be accommodated at Shotley and in the "Impregnable" Establishment,

has, however, necessitated a more rapid output from those Establishments, pending the provision of additional accommodation. As a temporary expedient drafts of Boys have been embarked specially in Home Fleet Ships for sea-training, in addition to the ordinary drafts sent to the Fourth Cruiser Squadron, the Harbour course being curtailed as necessary, in order to provide room in the Harbour Establishment for the new entries. It is understood that this expedient has not proved altogether satisfactory, owing to the difficulty of providing suitable and adequate accommodation in sea-going ships. The actual effects of this tentative arrangement as regards training can only be gauged after some experience afloat as Service Boys and Seamen of the Boys thus dealt with.

137. In normal circumstances, when there is such a margin of accommodation in the Harbour Establishments that the rapid accumulation of Boys in periods of prolific recruiting causes no undue pressure, the nominal period spent by Ordinary Boys in those Establishments is, as indicated above, about eight months. At such times, however, the arrangement by which drafts of Boys are embarked in the Fourth Cruiser Squadron for sea-training three times a year necessitates the retention of Boys who have completed Harbour training beyond eight months for periods varying from two or three weeks up to nearly four months awaiting embarkation. The average period spent by Ordinary Boys in the Harbour Establishments, allowing also for delays due to sickness, is therefore taken to be about 10 months.

138. At the present time, however, owing to the rapidity with which drafts have been embarked for sea-training, the average period of detention has been reduced to under six months in all. In these cases, owing to the uncertainty as to the duration of these tentative arrangements, it has been impracticable to recast the curriculum of training so as to spread it over the whole period of training. The Boys who have been longest in the Harbour Establishment have been selected for embarkation, and when required to embark their instruction has been stopped at the point reached under the syllabus now laid down, (*i.e.*, usually in the Gunnery Course), and the Boys kitted up for sea-draft.

139. If it is found to be necessary to continue to embark boys for sea-training before they have completed the full course of training now prescribed, we would recommend that some indication of the probable duration of the arrangement should be given to the Inspecting Captain of Boys' Training Ships with directions to rearrange the syllabus of instruction so as to secure that some instruction is given during the period available in the subjects considered absolutely necessary. / cap

140. The evidence before us convinces us that it is inadvisable, having in view the high standard required in the Seaman personnel of the Fleet, to effect any permanent reduction in the total period now prescribed for training Boys to fit them for draft to sea as Service Boys (*viz.* about eight months in the Harbour Establishment and four months in a Seagoing Cruiser). / 2

141. We recommend therefore that when the accommodation available in the Harbour Establishments admits, the normal periods of training as now prescribed should be reverted to, and that no curtailment of the Harbour course should be made as an expedient for reducing the accommodation to be provided in those Establishments.

142. The chief considerations which lead us to this conclusion are as follows :—

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- (a) The period of training in the Harbour Establishments is considered to be the minimum required to set up the physique of the Boys sufficiently to counteract the disabilities of their earlier life where necessary, to qualify them in swimming, to teach them habits of discipline and self-control, and to give them sufficient stimulus in educational subjects to encourage them to prepare themselves subsequently for advancement to higher ratings.
 - (b) A permanent curtailment of the Harbour Course would necessarily involve an extension of the facilities for embarking Boys for sea-training in order to avoid a larger accumulation of Boys awaiting embarkation.
 - (c) Unless accompanied by an increase in the age of entry, which is considered inadvisable in view of the possible effect on recruiting, a reduction of the course of Harbour training would involve a still longer period afloat as Service Boy, and consequently a larger proportion of Boys in the Fleet.
 - (d) It is advisable that all Boys should be in the Training Establishments long enough to qualify them for one of the periods of long leave at Midsummer or Christmas. It is undoubted that the increase in the rate of entry of Boys after the Midsummer and Christmas leave periods is largely due to the influence of Boys on leave in uniform.
 - (e) The process of weeding out undesirable Boys, which is effected at a minimum of expense to the Crown during the period of training would, in the event of a shorter course of training being adopted, necessarily be continued afloat at considerably increased cost.
 - (f) If the teeth of all Boys are to be attended to, as at present, before they are drafted to sea, additional assistance would be required by the Dental Surgeons attached to the Harbour Training Establishments to deal with the work in a shorter period.

143. We are further of opinion that no curtailment should be effected in the course of training for Boy Telegraphists and Signal Boys. These boys are selected to qualify in special subjects at the conclusion of the 12 weeks' course of Seamanship and School common to all entries. The subsequent course of specialised training is not considered too long to test the capacity of the Boys selected and to equip for their special service those finally chosen.

144. As regards Boys selected for Advanced Class training, we would suggest the expediency of a close scrutiny of the curriculum of training and a careful review of the numbers selected. It has been stated that, in the Fourth Cruiser Squadron, no steps are taken to continue the Advanced Class training on the lines followed in the Harbour Establishments. There is no regular school during working hours, although Boys are given the opportunity of attending voluntary schools.

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145. The need for a more systematic and continuous training of Advanced Class Boys is emphasised by the policy recently outlined of selecting young Petty Officers for advancement to Warrant and Commissioned rank.

146. The regulations provide for Advanced Class Boys and Youths being selected up to 20·0 per cent. and 5·0 per cent. respectively of the total entries. In actual practice, however, not more than 12·0 per cent. of the entries of Boys are selected for Advanced Class training.

147. In this connection some interesting particulars are given in Appendix No. 14, showing the system in Foreign Navies of training the Seamen Class personnel and the method of providing for the advanced training of recruits intended to supply the higher ratings.