

Officer Training

NOEL SMITH

HAVING RECENTLY completed a course of training at Leyhill, and whilst it is fresh in my mind, I feel that some comment ought to be made.

Let me first go back a few months to the moment when the decision had been made to apply for the job. If one is to be truthful I am sure it must be agreed that the majority of us did not apply because we wished to be social workers or reformers of sinful characters; no, the choice was far more selfish. The younger man being attracted by the career offered, (I might add that this line of approach in advertising could possibly improve the recruitment), the older man probably with a secure job in mind, whilst another fellow might see in it just another form of work with a reasonable weekly wage.

Like a good number of the general public, I had no idea of the structure of the prison service, what it stands for, or how the penal system of today works. My original views on the subject of treatment of the law breaker, I now realise to be completely wrong: they might almost be described as criminal in comparison with today's outlook. This appears even more absurd when I say that my imagination led me to believe that the

population in prisons would consist of "hard-cases" and vicious looking roughs, living in really uncivilized conditions.

However, my application having been accepted I found myself at the gates of my local establishment where I was to undergo four weeks preliminary training. There were some conflicting opinions amongst the officers as to the importance of this basic period. Some agreed with it, whilst others thought it only confused.

Its true importance is only noticeable when one gets to the proper training school. I found that auxiliaries from borstal institutions were at a distinct disadvantage, as they had not had the opportunity to study the routine or structure of a prison. (That is where, in my opinion, the basic training period falls down). Thanks to my training principal officer and his excellent classroom tuition, I found that my knowledge of prison duties was quite a bit in advance of many other students.

There is a need to establish a more uniform system of basic training. A reasonable period of time should be spent daily in the training office (possibly a longer period in the case of borstal auxiliaries) where any differences

between local procedure and standing order procedure can be clarified. This would eliminate confusion during later training. It would be an advantage if some of the more difficult precis, such as those dealing with privileges, bail, etc., were studied and explained, thus easing the study at the training college.

The only problem which arose during the four weeks was the mixed feelings which developed as regards to my approach to the job. Many different ideas resulted from talking to the officers. Some were rather harsh in their outlook, others seemed very lenient. My former opinions which had been influenced by imagination were shattered. I found an easy going system, I was shocked by the time wasted and the way that many idle periods were daily passed over. Instead of ogres I found on the one hand intelligent human beings, and on the other end of the scale some rather pathetic individuals; in between are characters of varying intellect.

Whilst a wonderful sense of companionship existed amongst the officers, the "Could-not-care-less" and "Bang-them-up" attitude was noticeable in some cases. Unfortunately these few individuals are not really happy with the work and they deem it their duty to warn off any new entries. Consequently a little apprehension crept in and it was with this confused state of mind that I proceeded to the Training School at Leyhill.

As I approached the School a completely new outlook began to develop. The majestic looking

mansion standing in its vast well-cared-for grounds, the few words of welcome on the blackboard in the hall and the friendly reception from the staff, removed any anxiety and a relaxed feeling fast took its place. I felt that I was coming into a really worthwhile service and this air continued throughout the course and, in fact, still does exist.

The main reason for the success of this class was without a doubt the situation of the School. I am certain the atmosphere of the place encouraged the students far more than the nissen huts at Wakefield. There were no entertainments near at hand, except for the Officers' Club, thus we had more time to spend and devote to our studies. The next class will be even more fortunate in that they will be able to relax in the sun on the lawns whilst doing revision. There was nothing depressing about this out-in-the-wilds establishment and the desire to do well became an obsession.

Of the course itself there is very little to criticise but much to praise. It is often referred to as an endurance test; whether this was in the mind of the designer, I do not know. If a man, selected for training, is of the right calibre then he should be able to cope quite easily, although I must admit, a little mental weariness did creep in towards the end. For this, and a few other minor reasons I would like to see the course lengthened by a couple of weeks.

Visits to the various establishments seemed to come at the wrong end of the course. It is really essential that auxiliaries from

borstals should see a closed prison and not quite so important that auxiliaries from closed prisons should be able to have a look at the borstal system. These visits should, in my opinion, take place at the beginning of the eight weeks then *all* students would understand the contents of the precis. Just to illustrate this point a little more, some auxiliaries were completely baffled when mention was made of the "Inner Wicket gate" or "the inner safe", etc. They had no idea what it looked like, let alone what it was.

The last two days were spent almost entirely in the main lecture hall, listening to various officials pointing out how our co-operation was required to produce an efficient service. Regardless of the fact that most of the speakers were very interesting, I feel sure that they would have received better attention if the lectures were incorporated in the body of the course.

Apart from this the periods were extremely well conducted and although there was much complaint of the difficulty in grasping the knowledge of Civil Defence and First Aid together with the discipline duties, and comments of how unnecessary it was, I am certain that everyone did quite well and now realise how these lessons relieved the monotony of the classroom.

Quite a lot of criticism and the attitude "Why must we know about John Howard" arose amongst the students. Obviously no job can be really well done if taken up at a half-way stage, neither can

appreciation of the development and reasons for today's system be accepted unless some mention is made of its back-ground. A great deal was learnt during these lessons and, together with the many films, the object of today's penal system became quite clear. Here lies, in my opinion, the most important part of our training, and personally I would like to see more emphasis placed upon it for two reasons.

Firstly, human nature being what it is, some people require far more convincing than others, and, secondly, if a uniform system for treatment of prisoners is required, then all must be agreed upon the same outlook.

I was very surprised that more periods were not spent on inter-section quizzes. This appears to be by far the best method of revision. It creates an alive and an alert atmosphere and is more constructive than reading the rather overcrowded note books. This brings me to another point regarding the precis; the true meaning of the word precis is lost; they contain quite a bit of unnecessary repetition, they read almost like complicated statutory laws and they are inconsistent in as much as some contain certain nouns with capital letters whilst others think only a small letter is required. There are even a few technical errors which I believe have been pointed out by the training principal officers.

Additional "lecturette" periods would be useful from the point of view that they instil confidence in the students. P.T. and Judo lessons were a great boon in this respect

but I feel that more time should be devoted to the latter, as without a terrific amount of practice the art is completely useless, and time was wasted here.

From these few points it can be appreciated that an extension to the course could be quite an asset. More time could be spent in practical work in relation to the duties of a discipline officer and, instead of cramming the knowledge, we could learn it soundly.

Taking into consideration the amount of ground covered by the course it can be seen that my

criticisms are negligible. An enormous amount of study and thought certainly must have gone into its construction and it was administered in an excellent manner by all the staff concerned. Praise must also go to the Cook and Bakers who provided us with an abundance of excellent meals. Thank you all.

Finally I would like to say that the last two months have been a thoroughly enjoyable experience which I would not have missed, and it has provided me with a sound foundation to my future career.

Address manuscripts to :

**THE EDITOR,
PRISON SERVICE JOURNAL,
STAFF COLLEGE,
LOVE LANE,
WAKEFIELD.**

Biannual publication : January and July