

**Hansard (House of Commons), 9 May 1902**

**Questions and Answers Circulated with the Votes.**

## **Birching in the Army.**

MR. LLOYD MORGAN (Carmarthenshire, W.)

To ask the Secretary of State for War whether his attention has been called to the fact that Joseph Kibby, of the Grenadier Guards, was in or about the month of March flogged; and whether he will state the offence this man had committed, and also the offences for which punishment by birching is allowable in the Army.

(Answer.) The boy was birched by order of the commanding officer. The offence was disobedience of a regimental order, which forbade boys smoking, and absence without leave; for the latter offence he was liable to trial by general court-martial. Birching is not allowed in the Army, except in Army Schools under restrictions. The Commander in Chief disapproved of the commanding officer's action, and has taken the necessary disciplinary action.

(War Office.)

HC Deb 09 May 1902 vol 107 c1231

**Daily News, London, 10 August 1903**

## **The Naval Manoeuvres.**

**By A.G. Hales.**

**(extracts)**

[...]

**The Life of the Sailor.**

**Work, Play, and Punishment.**

H.M.S. JUPITER, AT SEA, Later.

A British ship of war is capable of supplying a journalist with more pen and ink studies than any place of its size I have ever lived in. The life is clean, wholesome, and hard. It is a nursery for men, and it makes men. Seldom have I had such an opportunity of understanding the term "English gentleman" as this trip has afforded me. Here, within these iron walls, one is brought into hourly contact

with the naval officers, and a page is added to life which is worth the keeping. I watch them at their work. In truth, they know the meaning of the word, for they work unceasingly in working hours, and play like merry boys in playtime. Early and late these men and boys attend to their duties with a conscientious exactness which is a credit to the service. No wonder the British Navy is the pride of the nation, for the men who run the Navy work for their prestige.

[...]

The work is hard and the hours long, the food and liquors plain, the life pleasant and healthy, and the discipline taut as steel. The cardinal sin is "slackness."

### **Boy Life Aboard.**

The boys on board have a healthy time. Nine out of every ten of them will get a better up-bringing than they would have received in their own homes. They have to do as they are told, and do it as promptly as a bird flies from the spring of a cat.

[...]

No boy may smoke until after he is eighteen years of age. If he does, and is caught, he will most certainly be flogged across the buttocks with a stout cane. If he lies and is found out the same punishment awaits him. If he is impudent to his superior officer he is soon taught that a civil tongue is a jewel beyond price in the Navy. All offenders are tried publicly, no matter what their offence.

I have seen several of these trials, during which some twenty men and boys came up in custody, and I defy anyone to find fault either with the system or the conduct of such trials. When first tried the prisoners in a batch are marched aft to the quarterdeck in the custody of the ship's police. The commander hears the charge read out, the prisoner stands forward, cap in hand, and listens.

"What have you to say for yourself? Are you guilty or not guilty?" asks the commander.

"Not guilty, sir."

"Very well. Call the witnesses."

The witnesses are called, and the commander delivers his verdict. The first one charged is a lad of sixteen, who has been caught smoking. The second was charged with neglect of duty, and insolence. He, too, was about sixteen or a little over. The charges

were proved up to the hilt. For smoking the lad was sentenced to receive three strokes with a cane. The other fellow was to get six.

[...]

### **Boys' Punishment.**

I went to see the boys punished. In the waist of the ship stands a dummy gun; beside the gun a ship's corporal and a file of men. The ship's corporal is a ship policeman, a big, powerful fellow, who fingers a stout cane, such as schoolmasters in my school days used to use.

The prisoner who has been smoking comes forward, hitches his pants, and throws himself across the gun upon his stomach; his head hangs down one side, his feet on the other. A couple of men kneel by his head and take a wrist and an ankle each and draw them together so that the trousers fit very taut in the most prominent place.

The corporal throws himself into a striking attitude. Evidently this is to be no child's play. Swish! That boy would give every cigarette in his possession to be able to rub the spot where the cane has fallen, but he can't rub, he can only writhe and wait for the next.

The corporal is in no hurry. The first stroke had been a sort of overhead and downward cut. This second one -- whew! -- swish! It comes underhand and upwards. Offer the boy a plug of tobacco now and he will gnash his teeth and curse the very memory of Sir Walter Raleigh. He wriggles on the gun, and every wriggle wakes a memory of my school days. He has my sympathy, but I know it is for his soul's good. He will be a man some day, not an asthmatic weed.

Whizz! -- slosh! A straight forearm cut fair across the other two lines. The men let his hands and feet go, he springs erect with flushed face and suspiciously brilliant eyes, and trots off to his duties. He may smoke again. Probably he will; but he won't sit down to do it for a day or two.

The other lad gets his half-dozen, and the next time he feels like neglecting his work or "cheeking" his officers he will pause and consider the matter; but it is safe to wager that if he gets his portrait taken shortly he won't send one to the ship's corporal. That much you can read in his eye as he glances at the policeman in passing. I fancy I read a little more than that, but I may be mistaken.

I hope that no sentimental person reading this account of ship's punishment will cry out about it. The boys were not damaged; they

got just what they deserved; they learnt, and it is well that they should learn in youth, that the way of the transgressor is hard, mighty hard.

## **A MUST READ ARTICLE. ONCE READ IT WILL SET THE SCENE FOR ALL THAT FOLLOWS**

**The Times, London, 13 June 1904**

# **Corporal Punishment In The Navy.**

**To The Editor Of The Times.**

Sir, -- Certain doubtless well-intentioned but mischievous persons have of late devoted themselves to raising an agitation against corporal punishment in the Royal Navy. I propose to set forth exactly what are the King's Regulations on the subject.

**Section 729.** -- "It being requisite for the maintenance of the efficiency, discipline, and even safety of his Majesty's ships of war, that the power of inflicting corporal punishment, when absolutely necessary, should be continued; such punishment, under the following conditions, may be inflicted under the responsibility and authority of the captain, who is, however, to exercise the power vested in him with the greatest discretion and forbearance compatible with the discipline of the Service.

"Note. -- The power of commanding officers to award corporal punishment for any offences tried summarily under section 54, Naval Discipline Act, is suspended till further orders."

The Regulations then proceed to lay down --

- (a) A maximum of 25 lashes.
- (b) Necessity of a warrant properly completed 12 hours before punishment (except for mutiny).
- (c) Exemption of petty and non-commissioned officers and first-class conduct men from summary sentence (except for mutiny).
- (d) Exemption of second-class conduct men from summary sentence, except for (1) mutiny or (2) violence to a superior officer.
- (e) That in case of (2) violence, summary corporal punishment is not to be carried out on board if the prisoner can be sent to a prison; and that, if reasonably possible, a Court-martial is to be held.

(f) That in peace time the approval of a flag officer present is necessary.

**Section 730.** -- "When the captain ... is of opinion that no punishment (other than corporal) would be applicable or expedient under the circumstances, then (except in open mutiny) he is to appoint one or more officers to inquire ... and after the report ... and after full investigation on his own part, he is to act as may seem right in his judgment."

**Section 732.** -- "Exceptional power is hereby given to the captain or to the commanding officer in the case of open mutiny. When an immediate example is necessary ... any person under the grade of subordinate officer ... may be summarily punished corporally ..."

**Section 734.** -- "By corporal punishment is to be understood the usual punishment at the gangway ... according to the custom of the Service, in the presence of the captain, the officers, and the ship's company."

**Section 659.** -- "Should a Court-martial award corporal punishment, it is not to be carried out without the previous approval of the Admiralty."

**Section 759.** -- "Birching is to be confined solely to boys rated as such, and is to be inflicted with the birch as supplied from the dockyard; the birching is to be given over the bare breech, and is never to exceed 24 cuts; it is to be inflicted by the ship's police in the presence of the executive officer, a medical officer, two or more petty officers, and all the boys."

"(The punishment is to be awarded by warrant, with (in flagships) the approval of the flag officer.)"

2. "Caning on the breech with clothes on is limited to boys, and is to be inflicted with a light and ordinary cane,. The number of cuts is not to exceed 12."

3. "Drummers under the age of 18 may be caned, but not birched."

The extracts given above show exactly what naval law lays down. I proceed to state how it works in practice.