

SPECIALIZATION AND PROMOTION.

THE question which every young naval officer has to answer at some stage of his career is, " Shall I specialize? " And closely associated with that question he asks himself, " What are the prospects of promotion? " Captains, commanders and the specialists themselves are all called upon to give advice. Specialization and promotion, then, is the concern of the majority of executive naval officers, and warrants some analysis.

It so happens that my year of lieutenants, of 1931 vintage, has just passed over the top of the promotion zone to commander. This " year " has thus obtained all the promotions to the rank of commander which it will obtain, and the time is appropriate to investigate how the officers concerned set about climbing the naval ladder and what success they achieved.

In 1939, when the 1931 lieutenants got their half-stripes, there were on the list 163 lieutenant-commanders. This figure of 163 may be said to be the number who were seriously making the Navy their career, a few half-hearted and unsuccessful ones having been shed from the 1931 list. In addition, the 1939 list of lieutenant-commanders contained the names of seven officers ex-warrant rank. Apart from their different entry, these officers were specialists before reaching lieutenant's rank. They do not therefore come within the scope of this analysis and they have been omitted. Of the 163, 99 specialized as follows :—

Gunnery	...	...	14
Torpedo	...	...	10
Navigation	...	...	11
Anti-submarine	...	...	10
Communications	...	...	12
P. & R.T.	...	...	1
Submarines	...	...	19
Pilots	...	...	12
Observers	...	...	10

Before relating what befell these officers, it might be of interest to decide why they made the choices enumerated above. At the risk of causing apoplexy and savage counter-attack I will give *my opinion* on the subject.

GUNNERY is fairly easy. It is generally acknowledged to be the best promotion bet in the Navy. There are plenty of volunteers, and those selected are always "above average." They are good types and would get promoted from any branch. I have deliberately avoided stating that gunnery as a study lures all the best young lieutenants. Gunnery as such attracts some, but the greater attraction is to specialize in that branch which is known to offer the best prospects in the Service. Gunnery appeals more to the ambitious man than to the technician.

The TORPEDO branch, as it was, had the reputation of offering a quiet life. It did not necessitate too much "moving at the rush." Indeed, much of this complicated and highly technical subject seems to require study in comfort. This, and the "swing it till Tuesday" tag, and "cabins in the *Vernon* with h. and c. laid on," were freely credited to the torpedo branch. Be that as it may, the branch undoubtedly attracted most of the bright young officers with an inventive kink to their brains.

Next NAVIGATION. My guess is that most of the officers who specialize in "N" do so because the subject really interests them, and not, as in some other branches, for what they hope to get out of it. The strongest field of recruitment is amongst sub-lieutenants who, detailed for navigating duties in destroyers, are fascinated by the work and decide to make it their career. The same to a lesser extent may have applied to A/S specialization. In addition, in the early thirties A/S was still an up and coming branch, and this always offers a good prospect to the man first in the field.

COMMUNICATIONS.—Signals, as it was, attracts two distinct types of officer, though they do not remain distinguishable for long, since they all acquire the well-known communicator's stamp and, let's be frank, "hair-do"! The first of these two types are those who are attracted by the absorbingly interesting subject of naval communications; the second tend to be attracted by the environment of the communications officer rather than the subject of communications.

P. AND R.T. is the most baffling of all the forms of specialization, particularly because the numbers are small and analysis therefore misleading. The Navy encourages all kinds of sport, and many young officers find this much to their liking. One would expect, then, to find P. and R.T. courses heavily oversubscribed, and only the most brilliant and promising officers selected for the few vacancies offered for long P. and R.T. courses. On the contrary, it does not seem to attract officers of the very top attainments either in mental capacity or athletic achievement. Possibly the line of thought is that every officer should be able to organize games (below Fleet standard), so why specialize? I do not think that that is a good answer, but I cannot think of a better one.

Unlike all other branches, where specialization takes place in the middle years as a lieutenant, SUBMARINERS and PILOTS are both recruited as sub-lieutenants. These two widely differing branches have common attractions for the young man. They offer high adventure, high pay and a relaxed curriculum. The last-named allows some escape from frock coats and watchkeeping under the peppery observation of senior officers. This consideration carries real weight in the decision of many young officers to specialize whatever the branch. The commonest remark to be heard amongst sub-lieutenants when discussing the advantages of specialization is, "Yes, and you get off watchkeeping."

Finally, OBSERVERS. I cannot pretend to understand why officers used to volunteer as observers. The promise of some hundreds of hours in the back seat of a *Swordfish* would surely daunt the most ardent spirit. Yet many promising officers did volunteer, and, so far as I know, there was never any need to conscript observers until just before the war when the Naval Air Arm expanded. How one gets a calling to "observe" must be answered by the observers themselves.

Should one include service in DESTROYERS in this list? These unpaid "specialists" are certainly a branch all to themselves. A major difference is that sub-lieutenants usually find themselves in destroyers at the whim of the appointing authority and not through any particular choice of their own. Once there they soon find that they have far more responsible duties than their contemporaries in larger ships, and, although some elect to specialize, the majority stay on through the ranks of "Number Two" and "Jimmy"