

# NAVAL WARRANT OFFICERS' JOURNAL.

REGISTERED OFFICE—2, COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS, LAKE ROAD JUNCTION, PORTSMOUTH.

VOL. XV.

AUGUST, 1902.

No. 8.



## PROMOTION FROM THE RANKS.

(Specially written for this Journal by Sir William Laird Clowes.)

**T**HE Editor of the *Naval Warrant Officers' Journal* has been so kind as to express a wish that I should send him for publication some historical notes bearing upon the subject of promotion from the ranks in the Royal Navy, together with an expression of my opinion as to the policy which the Admiralty is now following in the matter.

I am afraid that the investigation of cases of alleged genuine rankers who in former times attained to commissions on the active list is a business upon which at present I am too occupied to be able fully to enter. In the eighteenth century undoubtedly there were genuine cases, though they were never numerous; and it is often exceedingly difficult to decide whether, for example, a given man who was rated A.B. was a genuine A.B. who had "come in at the hawse-holes," or was merely some Captain's friend or protégé whose rating as A.B. was entirely nominal, and who was destined from the first for the quarterdeck. The late Admiral of the Fleet Sir Provo W. P. Wallis was thus nominally rated in 1795; and Admiral the Earl of Dundonald (Lord Cockrane) first went to sea with only a boy's rating, in spite of the fact that at the time, or just before, he held a commission as a Captain in the 79th foot. As for Nelson he actually served before the mast in a merchant-man, although previously, while still a child, he had been nominally a midshipman in a King's ship. It would be ridiculous to attempt to base any arguments or theories upon instances such as these; or upon other instances where the family position of the man, the intention of his parents regarding him, and the duties which he really performed cannot now be ascertained. Still, we may

take it that, at almost all periods, genuine rankers in small numbers, were to be found among the lieutenants and superior executive officers of the service.

Historically the enquiry is interesting and attractive; and I am sorry that I have not now leisure to undertake it. From the practical point of view I do not know that the historical interest is very important, even in so conservative a service as the Navy; for in the past fifteen years it has been four times officially recognised that promotion from the ranks is admissible.

This being so, the practical points for consideration are (1) whether promotion from the ranks should take place more often than it does at present; and (2) whether such promotion should be a recognition of merit displayed in time of peace, or solely a reward for exceptional services in time of war.

Speaking only for myself, I would do all in my power to encourage the Warrant Officers, whom I have always regarded as the backbone of an efficient Navy, and for whom, as a body in our own Navy, no one who has been much at sea with them, as I have, can fail to have the highest admiration. If the Warrant Officers desire that such encouragement should take the form of promotion to the rank of Lieutenant, I would say: "Let us have more rankers." But it must be borne in mind that every man who has served on the lower deck is not so constituted as to be able to feel happy and comfortable at a wardroom mess-table. I know more than one most capable and deserving Warrant Officer who would refuse promotion for that reason, and who has told me so frankly. So that, while I would open, and open wider the quarterdeck to the distinguished Warrant Officer, I would also desire to devise some other method of rewarding him adequately, should he prefer the alternative.

As regards the other question, I am of opinion that promotion from the lower deck should, occasionally at least, be made for good work done in peace as well as for war services. Nothing would so much encourage good gunnery and good social life progress in other directions as the bait of a commission held out to such as desire it. I do not underrate the importance of having naval officers who are gentlemen in the best sense of that much-abused term: I am not wholly without sympathy for those officers who demand that their wardroom associates shall be gentlemen in the narrower and more artificial sense. But the first thing to be thought of now-a-days is efficiency. The Navy exists for the country; and the service is not to be regarded as a social career, but as a fighting one.

# Naval Warrant Officers' Journal.

Registered Office—82, KINGSTON CRESCENT, NORTH END, PORTSMOUTH.

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APRIL, 1946.

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## THE D.B.A. IS OPEN TO ALL BRANCHES OF AND FROM THE WARRANT RANK.

### OFFICERS' PENSIONS SOCIETY

**T**HE times in which we are living are so hard, and the question of meeting all our obligations satisfactorily while at the same time living in that social status applicable to our rank is such a difficult one that by the very pressure of circumstances an organisation has been called into being, with the title of "Officers' Pensions Society," embracing all three services and all ranks of officers. The anomalies and inequalities that abound amid the rates of retired pay are legion; and it is felt that it is high time that something should be done to iron out these inequalities and strive for a fair and honest deal common to all the fighting forces.

In the Portsmouth Evening News of March 15th appeared the following advertisement:—

A Society has been formed to promote the interests of retired Officers of the Services and Officers' widows.

Open to Retired Officers of all three services, wives and relatives of Serving Officers, and widows of Officers. Subscription £1; Widows 10/-.

Apply Officers' Pensions Society, c/o Gale & Polden, Ideal House, Argyll Street, London W.1.

This advertisement and the general objects of the Society were amplified by a letter in the Portsmouth Evening News over the signature of Albert E. Way, Lieut.-Commander, R.N., retired, who wrote as follows:

#### "UNITY IS STRENGTH"

Sir.—The reference to the "Officers' Pensions Society" in your columns of March 7th means that "in one season" something important in the financial affairs of a large body of the citizens of this country has "happened."

In future any of those little worlds in which we each move and have our being, that are not organised, cannot hope to exist.

The Committee is representative of all regular retired officers, and consists of Lieut. Col. R. M. Raynsford, Capt. Russell Grenfell, R.N., Air Commodore Lachlan Maclean and myself. I have been asked to join the committee as a representative of the considerable body of officers known in the Royal Navy as "officers of and from the Warrant Rank."

At the committee in February it was decided to press:

- (1) For an increase in officers' widows' pensions as the committee's first concern;
- (2) For equality in retired pay according to rank and seniority irrespective of the gateway by which an officer received his commission or warrant as an officer;
- (3) For equality of retired pay and widows' pensions to that obtaining in the Civil Service;
- (4) To enlist the support of Members of Parliament in the furtherance of retired officers and widows' interests;
- (5) For a representative or representatives in the House of Commons.

The Society is in the making, and to attain its objects needs the practical sympathy and financial support of all those entitled to become members (e.g., regular retired officers, active service officers' wives and dependents, and officers' widows. Information as to joining is given in the advertising columns of the Evening News.—Yours, etc.,

ALBERT E. WAY,

Lieut.-Comdr., R.N.

It will be seen from the foregoing that a most important Society has been formed, with various lines of effort that will appeal to us all, because they touch us all, or will do so in the process of years.

Nowadays if one keeps quiet it is taken for granted that he is satisfied, and with wages swelling all around us and the prices of commodities still maintained at war-



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## OFFICERS' PENSIONS SOCIETY

**O**UR article relative to the above newly-formed Society created so much interest and aroused such a good measure of enthusiasm that we make no apology for making the subject the basis of this second leading article.

The matter is one of such pressing need and such vital importance that it is our desire to keep our readers informed of the progress of this long overdue organisation; whilst the disabilities under which retired officers labour are such that, given adequate publicity and proper representation, the very logic of their case presumes a good measure of success, provided the Society receives the backing it deserves.

To succeed it simply *must* have a good representative membership, and funds sufficient to run the Society on business lines. There are no fat salaries to be paid, but such indispensable items as postage, advertising, printing, travelling to and fro, a room from which to "run the show," etc., must be provided for; and we have little doubt that those who have conceived and set in motion this forward movement often find themselves out of pocket in the work they have undertaken.

The following clear statement of the Officers' Pensions Society is published herein for the information of our readers. Kindly broadcast the information far and wide.

### OFFICERS' PENSIONS SOCIETY.

Officers of all three Services have become gravely concerned at the steady decline in the value of their retired pay and the pensions of officers' widows. The proportion of retired pay to full pay has decreased considerably since before the last war, with the result that retired pay is now quite inadequate to enable the lower and middle grades of retired officers to maintain their officer status in retirement, as they could prior to 1914. This is all the more serious, since the nature of

their profession and their ages of retirement deprive them of any civilian market value worth mentioning.

As for officers' widows, their pensions have hardly altered since the early years of the nineteenth century and are now quite ludicrously small.

Civil Servants have not suffered in this way, since their pensions are a fixed proportion of their pay and therefore automatically go up as pay is increased. As a result, the maximum pensions of the Permanent Secretaries of the Service Ministries are now about half as large again as can be obtained by any First Sea Lord, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, or Chief of the Air Staff, no matter how high his rank or how great his services to the nation. Civil Service widows are also much better provided for than those of fighting officers.

The impression has been spreading among retired officers that this very unsatisfactory state of affairs will not be remedied except by their own efforts. The undersigned are therefore sponsoring the formation of an inter-Service Officers' Pensions Society, with a view to taking appropriate action. They have previously invited opinions from officers and are convinced from the number and tone of the replies received, including many from senior officers, that there is a considerable body of support for such a Society.

The Society will not be in any sense a charity, but will be a militant organisation designed to promote retired officers' and widows' interests through Parliament and public opinion and in any other suitable way. The primary necessity for the success of such an undertaking is the accumulation of adequate resources. The sponsors believe that it would be bad policy to initiate energetic action without the means of backing it up, and they consider that every effort should initially be devoted to reaching a substantial target as quickly as possible. Any donations for this purpose will be welcome.

Membership is open (subject to the approval of the Council of the Society) to retired officers of all three Services, the wives and relatives of serving or retired

August, 1902.]

NAVAL WARRANT OFFICERS' JOURNAL

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ALL the other ranks of the Chiefs and Warrant Officers throughout the Navy will congratulate Mr. Collins on his promotion to Chief Boatswain. Not only Mr. Collins, but the other signal boatswains who have been promoted to the rank of Chief, as well as the signal boatswains generally upon the fact that they have obtained in their own case a concession which all classes of W.O.'s have long been seeking. viz, promotion to the rank of Chief at a fairly early age. Mr. Collins, for instance, has about 16 years yet to serve; and so he will long be in receipt of the maximum amount of pay before he retires. Thus promotion at his age will be of the greatest pecuniary advantage to him, and is practically a large grant of money. It is not more than he deserves, and not one of us will envy him what, after all, we are all seeking for in our "Earnest Appeal." True we ask there that all deserving W.O.'s should receive such promotion at 18 years seniority; but we do mean that it should not be given before that seniority is obtained. We notice, also, that the principle of selection is being adopted in the promotion of the signal boatswains. This method will not bear so hard on those passed over, when the senior men on the list are of less than 13 years seniority, as they will still have a chance of obtaining their Chiefship long before even the youngest of the men in the older ranks of gunner, boatswain and carpenter; as some of these latter are going over 20 years before they are promoted. However, these early promotions will help us in our general arguments; and no one will, probably, be held back on the boatswains' list because these boatswains (S) have been advanced to the Chiefs' list. It would, of course, be pure cant and hypocrisy to pretend we did not understand why the boatswains (S) are getting along so fast. They are the right hand men of their Captains and flag officers on the bridge, when squadrons are being handled at ticklish evolutions; at which the slightest mistake may cost the country a million of pounds and a Admiral his reputation. Naturally flag officers do not forget those who serve them so well, and whose intellectual capacity has to be second to none among the Chiefs and Warrant Officers. This will now be generously recognised and allowed by all classes, where, unhappily, only a few years ago all sorts of recriminations would have ensued had any such promotions taken place. The "I'm a better man than you," spirit remains only among the least and not the most progressive men of our rank. The boatswains will not envy the boatswains (S) neither will the carpenters; and the gunners will congratulate and not set up odious comparisons about duties with the signal boatswains as a class; and this spirit will do all ranks infinite credit, and shows how rapidly we are really advancing. To be sincere and consistent is in itself a claim to consideration. But we should be insincere and inconsistent if we did not recognise that the concession of a principle is to be warmly welcomed, even though it does not affect us, if it affects our messmates; for we are fighting for all classes and all seniorities of Chiefs and W.O.'s, and not for any one class or any one seniority. So long as the authorities do not injure by delay the other class of boatswains, by promoting signal boatswains, at an age we would like to see all classes promoted, we shall not complain at seeing our messmates go over our heads, for we may be sure the wedge is in and will presently be driven home, and our particular rank, too, will eventually reap a like advantage. Therefore we say good luck to the signal boatswains!

Yes,  
Certainly  
Again!

“ In some recent notes, writes the *Globe's* Naval correspondent, I mentioned the case of Mr. Buddy, who had originally passed into the Royal Navy as a temporary service assistant engineer, then resigned and entered as an engine-room artificer, and subsequently, by political pressure, became allowed to re-qualify and re-enter as a temporary service assistant engineer. I now hear that another engine-room artificer has applied for permission to be examined for the rank of assistant engineer, but do not know whether the request will be granted: if it is, there appears to be no reason why commissioned rank should not be thrown open to chief stokers and stoker mechanics, and following the same line

of procedure, petty officers in other branches may be allowed to qualify as commissioned officers, and boatswains' mates commanders or captains ; but whether such a change in any branch will add to the general efficiency or improvement of the Naval Service is quite another matter.' Is it? Well, we can all hold and enjoy our own opinion on this matter. Our present brothers and cousins, the engineers, seem to be doing very well in the wardroom anyhow. It is scarcely good form for the correspondent of the *Globe*, himself a man from the poorer classes, probably, to write with any scepticism on this matter, since nearly all of present Engineers come from the so-called "ranks" of the people of this country.

IN the article, entitled "Considerations Governing the Disposition of Navies," which Captain Mahan contributes to the new number of the *National Review*, he dwells, not for the first time, on the maxim that a bold offensive may be the true and best defensive. English Naval officers have seldom doubted that principle since the time of Rodney, or even Blake; and theoretically, at any rate, it is fully recognised by modern strategists, who are always telling us that the proper way to protect the shores of Britain from invasion is to steam straight for the enemy's coasts and pen up his battle fleet or annihilate it. They would certainly agree with Captain Mahan that in war time it would not be advisable to keep an overwhelming force of ships of the line permanently hovering about the Channel. The campaign would probably be fought to seize or maintain a great market and trade route; and the likeliest area for such operations, according to the American writer, is the Far East, where alone there are great unappropriated areas, and populations still open to be 'exploited' by the energetic peoples of the West.

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*It*                    "Would it not greatly strengthen the House of  
*Certainly*        Commons, and consequently benefit the country, if  
*Would.*            one or two level headed naval officers of experience  
                      could be chosen by the electoral Lord Charles  
                      Beresford is the only officer in the House who has the  
ear of the country respecting the Navy, and apparently there is  
no expert in the House who can carry sufficient weight either to  
give him substantial support when he is right, which he generally  
is, or to criticise him if he is inclined to overstate his case, which  
is a temptation occasionally. I should say Lord Charles would  
welcome such expert opinion." This question is asked by a  
Retired General and we very heartily agree with him that it most  
certainly would be a good thing to draw a few Naval officers into  
Parliament, even if they were only allowed to speak on Naval  
questions and not to vote at all. But some of these officers should  
be drawn from among the most able and eloquent of those who  
have sprung from the ranks. It is the naval men as well as  
naval material about which the House of Commons needs information.  
Men drawn from the ranks who could find fitting expression  
for the thoughts and aspirations of the men and give opinions  
founded on practical experience on naval matters generally in the  
House of Commons would be worth a good deal to the nation, in  
Parliament.

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WRITING to the *Times* on the subject of nautical terms, Rear-Admiral Marcus Lowther says:—I joined the Royal Navy early in 1831. Port and starboard were in use for steering, and no mistakes were ever made by the helmsman; besides, they had been in the "custom of the sea" beyond the memory of man. Some suppose the two to be confounded, but sailors always put a strong accent on star and none on board. These words have a fulness wholly wanting in "right and left," both weak words, especially left, difficult to be heard in a breeze. I never heard before that "larboard" was ever used in steering. This word "larboard" was abolished about 1844, and "port" ordered to be used in its place. I do not think sailors would care for right and left.