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Fishermen's Union
Trading Co., Limited.

FLASHLIGHTS ON THE BRITISH FLEET

3. THE MAN BEHIND THE GUN.

HOWEVER perfect the mechanism of the battleship may be, however powerful her armament, there lies behind all these vast masses of gleaming steel the greatest element of all—the crew.

For many years—in fact, right up to the Russo-Japanese war—the advanced school of naval experts asserted that the time had passed when the crew of a fighting ship was everything, and that the day had arrived when the fearful offensive and defensive powers of the ship would, in the hour of stress, take the first place. But the conflict between the fleets of our Eastern allies and the Russians proved in a very conclusive way that the training and valour of the crews made all the difference between victory and defeat.

The present agitation for a largely increased personnel for our fleet should, therefore, receive careful attention from every man in the British Isles, for that it is urgent we should continue to provide ourselves with more bluejackets is an undeniable fact. With the increase in the size of our fighting ships, the number of men employed to man them efficiently continues to increase, and shortly every one of the monsters now building will be a steel-clad town with a population of a thousand men.

Men Badly Wanted

It is openly admitted now by the Admiralty itself that at the end of last year there was a shortage of about 2,000 men, and at the present moment the powers at Whitehall have the matter serious in hand. Mr. Churchill, in the House of Commons, has pledged himself to raise the personnel from 133,850 (the figure at which it stood at the end of March last) to 141,150 on March 31 of next year, and to add another 5,000 men during the following year, and to go on adding to the personnel resources on this scale, besides raising the immediate reserve from its present strength of 2,000 men, to an aggregate of 5,000. This latter move is excellent, for it will enable us to "man" efficiently one of the older squadrons of battleships without calling out the Naval Reserves. The men of this body are now in the prime of life, with a lengthy service in the active fleets, and will be far and away superior to any reserves possessed by a Continental Power.

The Demands of the Future

In the new circumstances that have arisen since the passing of the new German Navy Act, "the Admiralty must not for one moment abandon their well tried methods of manning our fleet; but notwithstanding the promised additions to the strength of the personnel, at the very least another thousand men over and above this number should join the fleet annually to bring it up to considerably over 160,000 in five years' time.

Let us look at the example Germany and Japan have set us since 1904. German sailors have increased by 23,000; in that time our increase works out at approximately 5,000 men; by 1920 an additional 15,000 Germans will be sailors of the Kaiser, in addition to the automatic increase provided for. Japan is in the exactly opposite position to ourselves, and, according to the naval articles in the Japanese Press by Paymaster-Inspector General Katagari, the fleet of our Eastern allies is vastly over-manned, the number of the personnel being from two to three times that of the British navy when the total tonnage is compared. This writer believes that 15,250,000 men could be saved by the provision of a reservist and nucleus crew system that has from time to time been so emphatically commended in England.

Germany's System of Manning

Let us examine the system of manning the German fleet. There the conscript is brought straight from the

plough, for the number of men obtained from the maritime states is exceedingly small. These are drafted in their hundreds into the great naval ports, and there possibly look upon the sea for the first time. In three short and fearfully busy years these fellows have to learn all the complex and manifold duties of a modern "man-o'-warship." Thus every year from autumn until the late spring months, the German battle fleet is practically demobilized by the departure of the trained men to their homes and the arrival of these huge masses of absolutely raw greenhorns; for it has been discovered that not 25 per cent. volunteer for longer service.

But it is not to be forgotten that these men must remain another four years in the first reserve, and then pass through the Seewehr, or second Reserve, and remain in the Landsturms, or third Reserve, as long as they are physically fit for service. This leaves Germany with vast reserves of men who would be called upon to fill the gaps of war, though many would be rather poor stuff, and thus, therefore, the autumn would be chosen suddenly at the strength of the Fatherland. As for us, there is nothing of this weakness, and, furthermore, with our longer service system, we have always with our fleets a vast number of highly trained men, no matter at what time we should be involved in war.

Another question that has just received attention, by the granting of extra pay to certain of our fleetmen, is the state of unrest in the fleet due to various reasons, chiefly pay, cost of uniform and its upkeep, mess expenses, railway fares, and punishment. In regard to pay, it seems a scandalous thing that a highly trained able seaman, a man with eight years' service behind him, and a highly skilled workman, get on an average but £1 per week; less, in fact, than a corporation road sweeper obtains.

The Truth About "Unrest"

In regard to uniform, men are employed in all sorts of very dirty jobs in our fighting ships, but all are expected and made to keep up a smart appearance, and this means a continual drain on the meagre pay of the men. Mess expenses often cost an average man at the very least 5s. a month. Certain food in certain climates, as provided by the Admiralty regulations, is impossible.

One "growl" pertains to keeping the potatoes peeled overnight and left in water under the mess tables, where the men sleep packed as tight as sardines. In the morning, chunks of meat are placed upon these almost black potatoes, which are placed in hot water in a gigantic dish, and the whole mass is put in a very hot oven, and presently emerges as that famous naval dish known as "baking-boiling-cooksum-try," known all the world over, and warranted to try the best digestion to its utmost.

Overcrowded Sleeping Places

Owing to the huge number of men carried in our latest fighting ships, and the hundreds of complex machines that go to make up the whole structure, the fighting man is unduly cramped. At night the sleeping world of a battleship is a weird sight indeed. Down in the "rats," surrounded on every hand by naked steel, and filling every space, are the bulging hammocks, rows upon rows of them, each containing its sleeping sailor-man. The air is warm, filled with strange smells, and throbs with the continuous roar of the fans and the hundred and one other machines that are never still. Thus the great grey mass that squats as solid as a rock upon the water, with her anchors in the mud, seeming silent and menacing in the black stillness of the night, is within her hull never still, never silent, and never asleep.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that Jack is always ready and anxious to board the liberty boat to take him ashore. But here we come to yet another grievance, for to avoid putting extra work on the men remaining on duty, steamers and private boats are constantly asked to take the liberty men ashore, and for this the liberty man is asked to pay. At the end he is given leave long distances from his home, and though the railway companies carry him for a return journey at a single fare, it will not be hard to understand that railway journeys make a big hole in his pocket.

Babyish Punishments

Finally, whilst we are on the subject of these grievances that cause talk ashore when the men get among their relatives and friends, and accordingly spreads a feeling that does not help the recruiting officers in their work, is the question of punishment. "Leave breaking" is generally the most frequent offence, and though on the surface of things this appears a wilful offence, in hundreds of cases it is simply the result of a lost train or boat, and a man's character lost causes him the greatest difficulty to regain. For other offences he may be made to take his meals apart, or, most ludicrous punishment of all, he is made to stand facing the paintwork from 8 p.m. to 10 p.m., like a naughty small boy. Often this humiliating and absurd punishment has the very opposite effect from that intended.

But let us not run away with the idea that even if a married man with a family has to do the ridiculous "stand-in-the-corner" sort of punishment, the same as his wife metes out to his smallest son, and grinds his teeth and growls as he watches the files on the paintwork, that he is for an instant disloyal. He is ready and willing to do all in his power to serve his king and country, and help to bring honor to the huge steel citadel upon which he is called to serve.

How Pay Has Declined

Though the pay, as we have previously mentioned in this article, has been increased in certain quarters, Dr. Macnamara has officially admitted that pay and allowances to the seaman branch has been reduced by 24s. per head since 1909. The average rate has declined from £37 17s. 7d to £37 13s. 3d., and these parsimonious reductions have been effected in the navy during a period conspicuous for the unrest of the manual workers ashore. Is this the way to make the fleet popular and help us to gain readily the right sort of man that we require?

That a substantive rise will have to be given all round is generally foreseen, but even if it is not at present forthcoming, the naval service, with its splendid traditions, and the "fit" look of the British fighting seaman (who does not outwardly show what he oft-times has to go through afloat) causes thousands to be attracted to the sea life. If only those in power will provide the money, the British Isles will easily produce the men, so that in the day of need we shall not see Portsmouth Dockyard choked with "crewless" cruisers.

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WAR FACTS IN FIGURES.

In war strength the number of men in the armies of the great European powers, in proportion to their population according to latest figures, is as follows:

Germany, 1 man in 12.48 of population; Austria, 1 in 25.67; Italy, 1 in 29.36; United Kingdom, 1 in 62.15; France, 1 in 9.09; Russia, 1 in 31.10.

Figures of their comparative resources in men and money are:—

	TRIPLE ALLIANCE.			
	Population	War Strength	Debt	Total Debt
GERMANY	54,925,993	5,200,000	\$1,177,418,000	\$60,500,000,000
AUSTRIA	51,540,378	2,000,000	1,433,511,000	25,000,000,000
ITALY	35,238,097	1,200,000	2,706,609,000	20,000,000,000
Total	151,504,468	8,400,000	\$5,377,538,000	\$105,500,000,000
	TRIPLE ENTENTE.			
	Population	War Strength	Debt	Total Debt
GRAND BRITAIN	45,370,530	730,000	\$3,485,818,000	\$80,000,000,000
FRANCE	39,601,509	4,000,000	6,283,675,000	65,000,000,000
RUSSIA	171,059,900	5,500,000	4,553,488,000	40,000,000,000
Total	256,031,939	10,230,000	\$14,322,981,000	\$185,000,000,000

For Sale! Motor Boat F.P.U.

Built for R. H. Silver, Esq., at their premises, Greenspond, in 1912. Used by President Coaker the last two summers during his cruises North. Boat is fitted with a 27 h.p. Fraser Engine, which has given splendid satisfaction. The boat is 40 feet long and 9 feet wide, and would make an ideal mission boat.

She contains sleeping accommodation for four, and tanks for 250 gallons of fuel. Nine-tenths of the fuel consumed by the engine is Kero oil.

The reason for selling is, the boat is not large enough for the purpose she is now used for. The boat cost about \$1800, and is well fitted in every respect. She is provided with sails. She would make a fine boat for collecting bait or for fishery uses.

Apply to

W. F. Coaker.

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