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THE PRINCETON NAVAL UNIT

By REAR ADMIRAL CASPAR F. GOODRICH, U. S. Navy

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This brief article is not designed to give all the details of the work of the Princeton Naval Unit, but only a few of them, thought to differ from those in other naval units, all of which latter were conducted on general lines laid down by the Bureau of Navigation. The members prosecuted the studies prescribed by the University faculty for the gaining of the degree aimed at individually, while the naval instruction and discipline were the care of the commandant. In my case, there was no commissioned officer to assist me. I was, however, allowed one chief yeoman. Fortunately for me, he was competent to conduct military drills, having previously had a long experience in these matters. Also, he was helpful in the routine of the office within the limits of his capacity and knowledge.

The theory of navigation, seamanship, ordnance and gunnery were taught by college professors of exceptional ability. Practical work in gun exercises and demonstration in ordnance fell to the lot of a keen chief gunner's mate after the somewhat belated receipt of the necessary material, including some machine guns and a 4-inch loading rifle. This man had the happy knack of enthusing my lads almost as much as if he had a 14-inch gun at his command. I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to Chief Yeoman J. G. N. Mitchell and Chief Gunner's Mate W. F. Buckley for loyal support.

Professor A. G. Mayor, a nephew of the late Rear Admiral Louis M. Goldsborough, U. S. N., assisted by Professor R. S. Dugan, the astronomer, kindly assumed charge of navigation, for which task they are eminently qualified. As the former has for years cruised about the world in a sailing vessel, he was able also, to teach seamanship. Here he was helped by Professor

Ulric Dahlgren, grandson of the late Rear Admiral John A. Dahlgren, U. S. N. In Professor Dahlgren's veins runs hereditary salt water. Later, when some cutters and whale boats arrived, he greatly aided me in boat drills conducted, perforce, by myself.

Professor L. P. Eisenhart, the mathematician, handled the subject of theoretical ordnance and gunnery in masterly fashion, acting, moreover, as liaison officer between the university authorities and me. I may here remark that my relations with these authorities continued to the end absolutely flawless. These gentlemen did all in their power to facilitate my work, freely acceding to my every request. If they entertain towards me the same feelings of regard as I do towards them I shall have good reason to be proud.

My unit was comfortably quartered in dormitories hard by an office assigned me in the gymnasium. Thus they were accessible at all times for inspection and were close to the place of formation.

So much in the way of preamble.

Possibly, nay probably, my disciplinary methods will be regarded by the majority of my readers as execrable. I should welcome universal applause, naturally, but really I would not alter those methods by a hair's breadth to win it. I was trying an experiment. As the experiment succeeded perfectly, at least to my satisfaction, I am well content.

At practically the first gathering together of the unit, I addressed the members substantially in these words:

You are training to become officers in the United States Navy. Absolute truthfulness and honesty in all your dealings is obligatory as well as diligence in your work, respect to your seniors, devotion to the service and an upholding of its traditions. I propose, with your permission, to treat you as officers. If, however, you compel me to treat you as school boys I am quite ready to do so; it all depends upon yourselves.

Therefore, when reports for some minor infractions of discipline were made to me, I adopted the rule of asking the man involved whether the report was true. If he replied that it was in error, I accepted his statement without question and dismissed his case at once. I knew instinctively that, if he lied, his colleagues would make his life very unpleasant. Should the report imply moral turpitude, I allowed him to select one judge, the battalion commander appointed a second and the two chose

a third. The court thus formed investigated the case and handed in to me its finding and recommendation. In one case, I was led to dismiss the man from the unit and transfer him to the nearest receiving ship. In another, although the lad was guilty, clemency and a chance to rehabilitate himself were urged. This plea was accepted with happy results.

Demerits I rejected as appropriate to primary schools, not to a class of officers. In lieu thereof, I sought a "punishment to fit the crime." For example, one lad, whose shoes were not polished, was directed to write me a report on the shoe blacking establishments of Princeton. This report was so well done, in such good spirit and with so delightful a touch of humor (he discussed the relative merits of Greeks and Negroes in this employment) that I sent it to the boy's father who enjoyed it as much as I. I may add that cases of unpolished shoes were conspicuously absent thereafter. If the average youth dislikes any one thing in particular, it is writing a report. The instance referred to had a widespread and salutary effect.

One member, given to repeated talking in ranks, heard this pronouncement: "Since you are so fond of hearing your own voice, you shall stand in front of your company and recite aloud the Star Spangled Banner." Needless to say there were no more complaints of this nature. Incidentally I may remark, that the National Anthem was memorized by all. Every now and then it was the password to liberty.

At the very first lecture, I spoke to the unit in somewhat this fashion: "I observe with great displeasure that some of you young gentlemen have failed to obey my order always to bring notebooks and pencils to every recitation. You will each therefore write me a letter explaining your neglect and you will include in your letter a résumé of the sermon preached yesterday in the College Chapel by President Hibben." The neglect mentioned was not repeated.

One lad had not made up his bed by the hour appointed. To him I remarked, "Is not this afternoon a half holiday?" "Yes, sir," was the reply. "Very well, then, you will have your bed made up and your room in perfect order by 2 p. m. You will report the fact to the officer of the day, who will inspect. If all is in good shape, he will immediately pull your bed clothes apart and turn your room topsy-turvy. You and he will repeat

your several operations three times." This remedy proved most effective. These specimens of disciplinary methods are taken at random from a number—fortunately not large.

At the outset, I warned my youngsters that I should ask them many questions which might at first seem childish and should make them do many things which they would think foolish, my object being to cultivate their powers of observation, adding that when any one of the unit, later, on joining his ship, should be noted as mentally alert to a marked degree, seeing at once what others only looked at and taking in everything in sight, he would at once be recognized as a "Princeton man." To this end I sent out four observation parties, one to each compass quadrant, nearly every afternoon to make a hike covering about five or six miles. On their return they would be quizzed somewhat after this manner: "What kinds of road did you go over? What kind of fences did you see? What trees along the road? How many cows, sheep, pigs did you see? What sort of teams did you meet? How was the wind blowing? What proportion of blue sky in tenths?" etc. Each man was marked on the Naval Academy scale according to his answers. Meeting a group, I would fire at them such puzzles as these: "How high is that tree? How wide this road? How long is the gymnasium? How far is it from this building to that? What kind of trees line such and such a path? How many haberdasher shops in the two blocks on Nassau Street facing the University? The lads never knew what was coming next and they were distinctly on their toes whenever I hove in sight. One instance is so amusing as to be worth the telling. A company was at rest on the drill ground beside the railway. Calling out of ranks some half dozen or so men, I told them that railway metal was graded by the number of pounds per running yard, that, the last time I had occasion to inquire into the subject, the heaviest rail rolled was 110 pounds but that doubtless the weight had increased since then. "Go over to the railway, look at the rails, return and give me your estimates of weight." This they did. I may say that their guesses were quite close to the real figure. Then said I to them, "If you had looked carefully you would have seen that the weight of each rail is stamped upon it." A more crestfallen lot it would be hard to imagine.

It is notorious that competent messengers are rare. Inattention or indifference is the cause. I instituted a training in this respect. For example, while the battalion was at rest, the captain of Company A would write a message, call up one of his men and read it aloud twice, slowly and distinctly. "Take this message to the captain of Company B." The latter would write the message *as verbally delivered*, and send the paper to the captain of Company A. This procedure was repeated all down the line. It was astonishing to note the errors at first made in this transaction, but these errors diminished rapidly with practice, even when the messages, at the beginning short and simple, grew longer and more complex. The lads developed closer attention as time went on. Of course they were marked for accuracy in this work.

Now what was the result of this unusual form of instruction? Several members of the Princeton faculty have told me that never has there been in this University so keen and mentally wide-awake a set of men as those of the Naval Unit. Again, the Professor of Architecture informs me that he has, perforce, to teach largely by means of photographs. Since he cannot bring St. Peter's in Rome or Canterbury Cathedral into his lecture room he must resort to pictures of them. Usually it takes his class a whole year to learn "how to read a photograph," yet the men of the Naval Unit acquired the trick in two weeks. It seems incredible—yet that is what he said. As there can be no substantial difference between the men of my unit and the rest of the student body it follows that the former merely learned the use of their eyes.

I have always been of the opinion that cadet officers at the Naval Academy should not be permanent. The practice gives all the experience in command to a select few. At Princeton I had an opportunity to try out my own ideas under this head. The unit was formed into a battalion of four companies. The cadet officers, upon organization of the battalion, were chosen for their qualities in leadership as gathered by me from the information available. I hasten to say that they justified their selection. But I at once spoke to the unit in somewhat these words: "The most essential thing in an officer is the faculty of command. This can only be developed through practice. If it were possible, each one of you belonging to the First Division (designed to graduate at Christmas) should have a trick as

battalion commander, but as you know, you are too many and the time is too short. In a couple of weeks I shall appoint a new set of cadet officers, but as I am determined that none of you shall ever be able to accuse me of favoritism, of giving this inestimable opportunity of learning how to command to men I hold in special esteem, I shall put into a hat the names of those of the division now serving in the ranks. These names will be drawn by a disinterested person and a roster made absolutely by lot. There are fourteen cadet offices. The man whose name leads the roster will be the battalion commander for two weeks, the second the battalion adjutant, etc. At the end of a fortnight numbers 15 to 28 will succeed them, and so on to the end of the term. If any one of you fails to get a high place, do not blame me. I shall have given every man the same chance. Luck shall decide, for or against you." I have every reason to be satisfied with this innovation. Each man knew in advance the place he was to fill and sought to prepare himself for his duties. There existed a hearty sense of co-operation all round and there was no lack of snap in drills, for each endeavored to do even better than his predecessor.

One case is worth citing as illustrating my own attitude towards my men. A certain member, a thoroughly nice, manly chap who had drawn the lot of company captain, came to me and begged to be excused from that duty on the score of his lack of sufficient military training. This request I flatly refused, saying "Blank—you have an opportunity of showing to yourself and others of what you are capable, an opportunity which may never again come to you in all your life. Your friends in the first detail will tell you what to do. Put on a bold face and pretend you know the whole game. Never mind mistakes, we all are guilty of them. If I should relieve you now, in days to come you would never forgive me." Of course he made good and when later a chance occurred to prove his gratitude he seized upon it eagerly—but that's another story. Disappointment was doubtless experienced by some who drew the smaller prizes in the lottery, but all recognized the justice of the scheme.