

The Army Outward Bound School

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THE Army Outward Bound School is having an increasing influence on the Corps. Royal Signals apprentices from Harrogate, junior leaders from the Royal Signals Junior Leaders Regiment at Denbury and from the All Arms Junior Leaders Regiment at Tonfanau, and junior tradesmen from Rhyl attend courses at Towyn. A number of future officers in the Corps come to the School as candidates for the Regular Commissions Board, as officer cadets at Sandhurst, as students at Welbeck and as Army Scholars. Add to these the serving Signals officers and N.C.O.s who attend as adult students, instructors and potential instructors and the number is appreciable. None the less the majority in the Corps have at worst never heard of the place and at best have but a vague idea of what the Army Outward Bound School is all about.

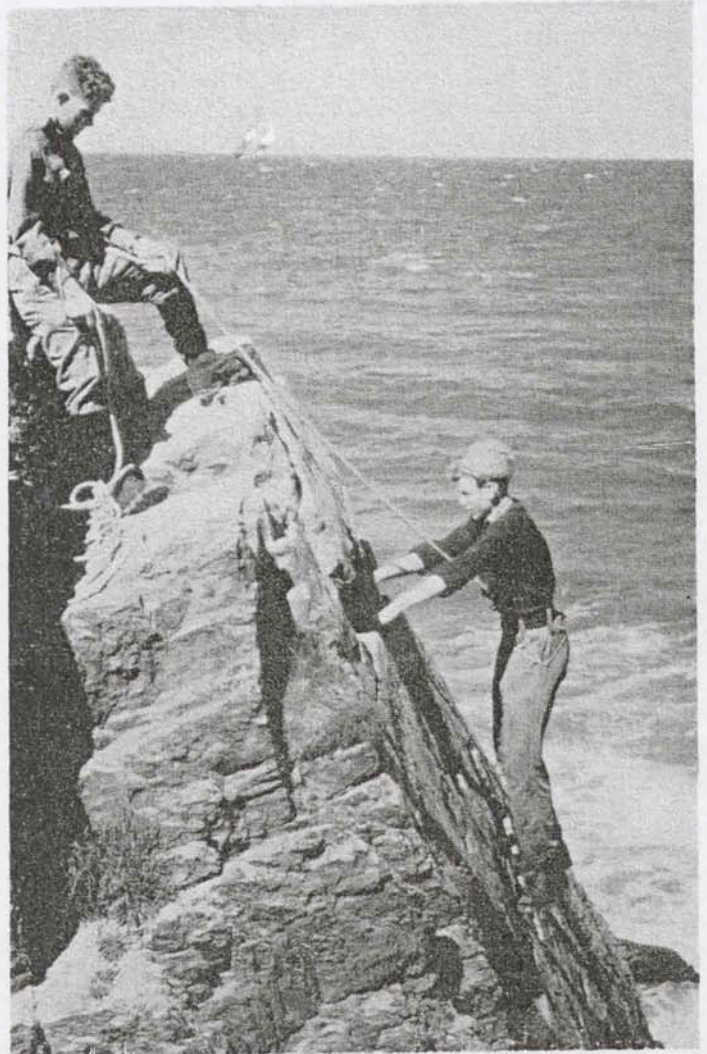
In late 1956, when Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer ordered the Army Outward Bound School to be inaugurated and appointed Lieutenant-Colonel J. F. Churchill, the Seaforth Highlanders, as chief architect.

The first site chosen for the School was at the Trawsfynydd Practical Training Area and the School was 'attached' to that establishment. A team of instructors was collected and, with a small number of administrative personnel necessary for Outward Bound Training, the School opened on 11th March, 1957 with Course No. 1. A number of trial courses had been held previously.

The first sixteen courses were in a way experimental and during these it was found highly undesirable to run a School on true Outward Bound lines while attached to another unit. The School moved to Morfa Camp, Towyn, in early 1958, where it had remained ever since.

During the experimental period at Trawsfynydd Lieutenant-Colonel Churchill had devised a standard course and very few changes, apart from detail, have been made in that course to this day.

The students who attend courses at the School are army apprentices, junior leaders, junior tradesmen, junior bandsmen, candidates for the Regular Commissions Board, Sandhurst cadets, Army Cadet Force and Combined Cadet Force cadets and Army Scholars. The bulk are from the first two categories who form the future skilled tradesmen and N.C.O.s of the British Army. There are about 12,500 boys in the Army and they are spread all over the country in regiments and schools from Taunton to Troon and



from Rhyl to Dover as well as the All Arms Junior Leaders Regiment at Tonfanau, two miles up the coast. Eighty of them come to the School for each three week course which means that over a thousand pass through our hands every year. The majority are aged between 16½ and 17½ when they do the course.

The aim of the School is to develop character through adventure at a crucial period in a young man's life when, at the age of about seventeen, he is outward bound from adolescence into manhood. This aim can be divided into a number of separate but complementary ones.

The first is to help the individual boy to discover himself and his capabilities. This is done by putting him up against a number of physical and moral challenges. The overcoming of these gives him self-confidence, strengthens his determination and encourages his self-reliance. He competes against no one else but himself and all that is asked of him is

that he should do his own individual best. He learns to meet ordinary crises squarely, and gains self-respect and even desirable self-assertion.

The second aim of Outward Bound training is to show the value of self-discipline, integrity, unselfishness and service to others. This is achieved by giving the lad the opportunity of experiencing team-work and responsibility under conditions of physical hardship and some risk.

Having discovered himself and learnt the importance of self-control he is then in a position to learn to control others. This is the third aim and he is encouraged in the art of leadership by example and enthusiasm.

There are two other subsidiary aims which might almost be considered as coincidental. The first is the provision of training in mountain craft and canoeing, the passing on of sound traditions of safety and the introduction of young men to the kinds of experience which the mountains, moors and sea can provide. The second is the cultivation of an awareness of the beauties of nature and an appreciation of the life of the countryside. At its lowest level this means the collection of litter and respect for the country code; at its highest it means the strength and spiritual uplift that men throughout history have gained from the grandeur of their natural surroundings.

The Outward Bound process of character development may be likened to the transformation of the chrysalis into the butterfly. One of the essentials is that this should take place in a unique atmosphere quite separate from everyday life. This can only be provided at an Outward Bound School. Weapons and tactics could not be included without turning it into a Commando or Special Air Service type course where skill at arms and fieldcraft would take precedence over challenge and self-discovery. It would also favour the naturally strong and resourceful leader. In Outward Bound each lad is asked to make the best use of his own capabilities. The big strong chap is expected to do just that much more than his

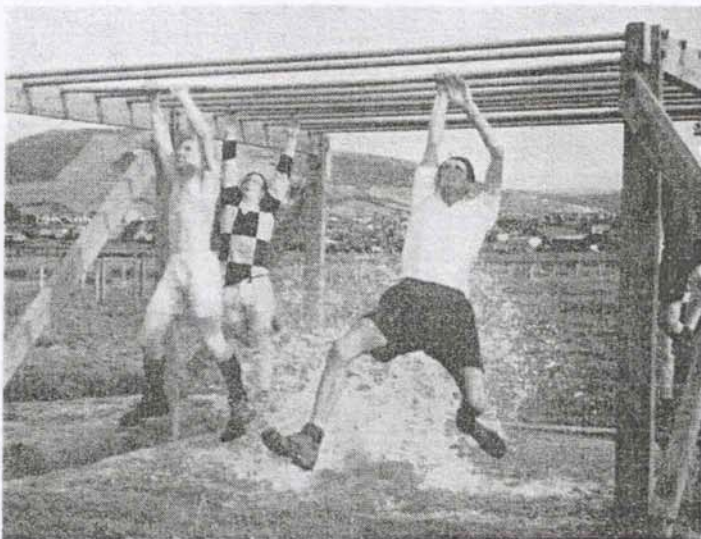


weaker companion and each is assessed on his own individual effort rather than on his results. Everyone, not least themselves, is most surprised at just how much each boy can in fact do.

The young man is placed in a patrol of ten boys none of whom he has met before. He can discard any preconceived role such as that of buffoon which in the past he may have enacted, and can start afresh. This he does and invariably he tries to do his best. Many boys, inhibited by lack of progress in their normal life, grasp the opportunity to test themselves and prove their worth in the fresh environment offered them by an Outward Bound Course.

The Army course lasts for three weeks as compared with four weeks at the civil schools. This disadvantage is compensated for by the facts that the Army boy is basically fitter than his civil counterpart, he has a sound grasp of basic map reading, and he is used to the discipline inherent in community living. In fact, he finds it easy to adapt himself to the relaxed atmosphere at Towyn where there are no parades, he does not wear uniform, and where he is asked rather than ordered to do things. He responds to this with true self-discipline and it is extremely rare for anyone to take advantage of this freedom.

The course is divided into three parts; a week of preparation, a week of challenge, and a final week of achievement. During the first week the boys, who have been split into patrols of ten each under a patrol instructor, do their preliminary training. This is to give them the necessary physical and mental ability to carry out the rest of the course. It includes instruction in mountain map-reading, accident drill and first aid, and the knots and rope handling techniques required in rock climbing and mountain rescue. This indoor instruction is interspersed with physical training which includes an obstacle course to foster team work, co-ordination and agility. They do circuit training in the gymnasium to build up the muscles that they will be using in the walking, climbing and canoeing with particular stress on arm, leg,





stomach and shoulder muscles. Their breathing is improved with half-mile runs which also demonstrate their physical improvement during the course. Overlapping this training they start to learn particular skills. These include rock climbing, hill walking, stretcher drill, camping and canoeing.

They go out into the hills to practice mountain navigation and the art of bivouacing. This 36-hour expedition is most valuable for the instructor. It is then that it is possible to get to know each lad and to see exactly what he is made of. His physical fitness, self-reliance, endurance, unselfishness and leadership will all be revealed. This personal contact and the sharing of experiences by small groups of boys with a mature and level-headed instructor is an important factor in their training.

During the second week they go up to Snowdonia on a four day expedition. This includes two days rock climbing with about four climbs of very difficult standard up two-hundred-foot rock faces. They carry out an unaccompanied hill walk across either the Moelwyns or the Carneddys with all their food and camping equipment. On one day they do the traverse of the Snowdon Horseshoe, one of the finest ridge walks in the country. They also carry out a mountain rescue and lower a patient in a stretcher over a cliff.

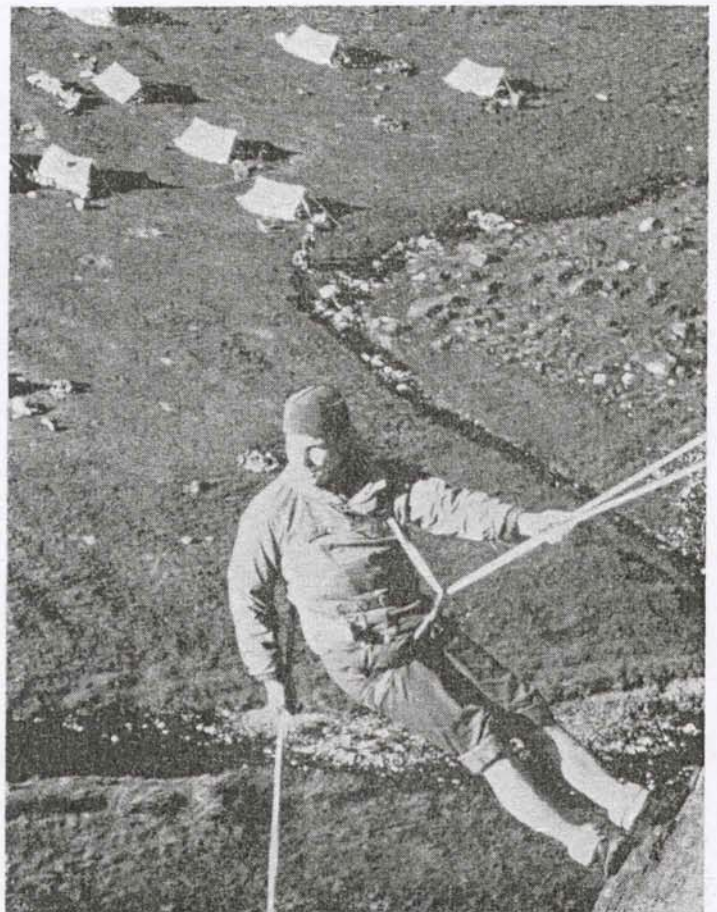
The day after they get back from this strenuous expedition they compete in a three-and-a-half mile cross-country run and prepare their route cards for the final expedition. This takes place during the last week. It consists of a 40 to 45 mile journey over some of the wildest possible mountain country including the Arans and Cader Idris and involves

over 17,000 feet of uphill walking. It is done in small parties of three or four boys who are completely on their own and self supporting for the three days it takes them. They carry food, stove, tent, sleeping bag, spare clothing and everything else needed for survival in the hills in whatever weather they could conceivably experience.

This final expedition is a real test of endurance, determination, team spirit and all the skills that they have been taught with the exceptions of canoeing or climbing, though even this may be required by those who mistake their way.

Throughout this and all their training they are being taught to appreciate nature and the countryside. Any litter seen lying about is picked up by the boys as they walk over the hills. The School has taken part in several mountain searches, sheep rescues and a vain winter attempt to rescue a trapped dog.

At the end of the course all students are graded as to the effort they have put into the course and a full report is written on each. This describes the progress and personality of the individual as revealed by the course. The people interested are the regiment or school from which they may have come or the Regular Commissions Board to which they may be going. They all set great store by these reports which they find most valuable. Instructors throughout the course have been closely observing each boy, his reactions to hazards and difficulties, his perseverance,





thoughtfulness and consideration for others, ability to work without supervision, his initiative and powers of organization, his powers of leadership, loyalty, integrity, fortitude and general attitude to the course.

The report and grading provide a record of the young man's performance and of the insight gained by the instructor into his character, but it is the course itself which benefits the individual student by developing his character through self discovery, self discipline and leadership.

Any young officer or sergeant looking for an interesting and rewarding posting for a year or two in the open air should look at A.C.I. 254/61. Officer and sergeant patrol instructors have identical jobs and responsibilities and teach their own patrol everything they do. They need to be tough, extremely fit and natural rock climbers with a love for the hills and the out of doors. On top of this they must be enthusiastic, have a real interest in, and ability to get on with and understand boys and be able to assess character. Most of these attributes will come to anyone who is basically keen and athletic and possessing the necessary qualities of leadership.

A potential instructor does a course as a senior student and does everything that the boys do. If he passes this successfully he does a second course as an assistant instructor and gets a more objective view of the course. If he still likes what he sees and the School likes what they see of him, he becomes a patrol instructor with all the challenge of developing character through adventure that that involves. Not only will he develop the character of his students, but he will find that his own has been most profoundly affected. The Corps will have benefited considerably from his absence.