

The Training of Boys in Royal Signals

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A large number of Officers must have served in units of the Corps where the post-war product of the Junior Leaders Regiment has been in evidence, but only a very limited number of those Officers have any real knowledge of the training system and problems confronting the modern type of Boys training unit. It is the aim of this article to give a picture of the training system at present in use in the Junior Leaders Regiment, Royal Signals and to discuss the requirements of a Regiment of this nature.

History

Since the 1939-45 war our own Junior Leaders Regiment has developed from a Squadron, which was formed with a nucleus of Boys from the Army Apprentice School at Harrogate. This Squadron was attached to No 1 Independent Selection Squadron and stationed in Richmond. By April 1950, both Squadrons had outgrown their accommodation and were moved to Beverley. The unit continued to grow and in order to provide more accommodation No 1 Independent Selection Squadron was moved to Catterick where it became No 5 Squadron of 7 Selection Regiment, on 25th August 1950 6th (Boys) Training Regiment was formed.

After much experiment and as a result of many complications and difficulties which were largely caused by Boys Troops, which only three years ago were each 90 strong, a new establishment was written and implemented in 1955. This establishment provided for five Boys Troops in each of the two training Squadrons and a Recruit Troop. Troops were to consist of not more than forty boys each with an Officer and two Sergeants, and the Recruit Troop was designed to cope with a maximum of fifty boys. A few months later the Regiment moved to Newton Abbot and settled into Rawlinson Barracks, its present ideal home.

Towards the end of 1954 a new recruiting policy was adopted which was designed to produce quality rather than quantity in that the PSO interviewed each boy at the Recruiting Office before he had been attested and a higher standard of intelligence and ability was required. Hitherto the boy had virtually completed his initial basic training in the Recruit Troop at Selby, Yorkshire before seeing a PSO.

Early in 1955 a Committee consisting of General Sir Euan Miller and two well known civilian educational experts was set up to review the system of training in boys units. The report of this Committee was published as a White Paper in April 1955, and many of its recommendations have now been put into effect.

The quality of boys at intake has improved and the Miller Report undoubtedly put boys units very much "on the map" Its recommendations had much to do with the rapid move of our own Regiment in August 1955. Naturally enough the poor recruiting rate of the past two years has led to small outputs to the Royal Signals Training Regiments in recent terms. At Christmas 1956, the output dropped to 31 Boys but as recruiting is now improving slightly the total strength of the Regiment is slowly increasing and the quality of the intake is being maintained. During the Summer Term of 1956 the intake balanced the output and an intake of over 50 during the Christmas Term of the same year showed a net gain of some 25 boys.

Aim of the Regiment

The primary aim of the Regiment is to produce the future Warrant Officers and Senior NCOs of the Corps. In order to achieve this aim, two essentials of paramount importance immediately stand out on their own: –

1. A good standard of education is required, since a soldier cannot achieve the rank of Warrant Officer or Sergeant without the necessary educational certificates.
2. Such qualities as leadership, courage, initiative, self-reliance, self-discipline, etc., are an essential part of the make-up of a Warrant Officer and Senior NCO.

Herein lie two of the main problems confronting the Commanding Officer of the Regiment and his staff. A percentage of the boys come from broken homes and a few have no parents. Some have suffered from lack of proper parental control at an early age as a result of the late war when one or both parents were more often than not away from their homes doing essential war work, and their children (the Boys of the Regiment today) were all too often left to their own devices and desires. In order to ensure that a Boy has a reasonable chance of obtaining the necessary qualifications to fit him for promotion and for training in one or other of the Corps trades, no boy is accepted for training unless his intelligence grading is SSG3 minus or above.

It can therefore be seen that the boy at intake must be properly cared for and shown that the Army is a fine career and holds an excellent future for him, that the Boys Regiment is a good home and that every opportunity is afforded him to improve his education and so qualify him for the study of a technical trade and future promotion. The Regiment in fact, can be looked upon as a boarding school with a military bias – as its Headmaster the Commanding Officer, the Housemasters being represented by the Squadron Commanders.

The greater percentage of boys at intake however come from good, happy homes and possess a higher SSG rating than the required minimum. Some have already received a Grammar School education, some are the sons of past and present members of the Corps or other arms of the Service, but all have decided at an early age that civilian life could not provide them with the security and adventure they required and they decided to make the Army their career.

It is most gratifying for members of the permanent staff to look upon the Senior Boy NCOs and Warrant Officers at the end of their last term in the Regiment and say to themselves with assurance, "There is a future NCO for the Corps"

Training System

One member of the Miller Committee was a well known Headmaster of a Public School. It was not unnatural therefore that many of its recommendations should savour of public school life. The allocation of training time during the week recommended by the Committee and approved by the War Office Standing Committee on Boys Regiments is as follows: -

EDUCATION – 50%, of which 30% is pure academic study.
MILITARY TRAINING – 25%.
PT AND GAMES – 15%.
AT THE DISPOSAL OF THE CO – 10%
ONE PADRE'S HOUR PER WEEK.

The hours of training are 0830-1300 hrs. 1400-1700 hrs. 1745-1900 hrs.

On Saturdays training finishes at 1200 hrs and on Sunday, apart from a short Church service a Boy is free. He is not allowed to remain in his barrack room all Sunday. If he elects to stay in camp there is always some form of organised recreational training or amusement for him on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon.

Because intakes are irregular in date and quality the following training system has been evolved in the Royal Signals Junior Leaders Regiment.

The Recruit Troop is used as a buffer Troop which aims at bringing all boys up to a similar standard in drill and basic military training, irrespective of the date on which they join the Regiment. Some boys suffer from home sickness during their first few weeks but in this troop, which is kept entirely separate from the remainder of the Regiment, except for messing; the boys are made to feel at home amongst other new boys and gradually shown the way of life in the Army.

Ages at intake vary from 15 to 16 and a half, and on occasions a few months older, although the upper age limit has now been fixed at 16 and a half. The Regiment does however, recruit several boys from the Channel Islands and Northern Ireland where the school leaving age is 14 and a half, so that boys of under 15 on entry are not uncommon. At this stage of his training no account is taken of his age. Boys are formed into squads and taught the basic movements of foot and arms drill. They are conducted around the Regiment and generally instructed in the elementary details of such things as Pay, Clothing, PRI, Rank, etc. After four weeks training they are allowed out of Camp at weekends for the first time, as by then they are considered to be capable of appearing in public in uniform and carrying themselves with a proper Military bearing. After six weeks a Pass Off Parade is held and the first milestone in their career is passed. During the first six weeks 25% of the boys training time is spent on education and his standard in this respect is assessed, so that he can be placed in the correct educational class according to ability on posting to a Boys' Training Squadron. He also performs three periods of PT and plays two or three games each week.

The intake is posted to one of the two Boys' Training Squadrons six times in the year at the beginning of each term and at half term, so that if a boy enters the Recruit Troop six weeks before the end of a term, after completing his Pass Off Parade he proceeds on block leave with the rest of the Regiment and is posted to a troop at the beginning of the following term.

The full course of training covers a minimum of four terms in the Training Squadrons, but a boy must leave the Regiment for Trade Training in the Training Brigade, Royal Signals, at the end of the term in which he reaches the age of 17 and a half. It is therefore most desirable that he should not be more than 16 years 3 months when he arrives in the Regiment, although special arrangements can be made for the boy who is two or three months older.

The younger boys carry out an additional term in a Junior Troop and in some cases after completing this term plus the full four-term course, as senior boys, will still not be old enough to leave for trade training in the S.T.B. In such cases it is intended that boys will undergo a postgraduate course of one or two terms, consisting almost entirely of trade training in a trade of their choice compatible with their educational qualifications. Should any of these boys hold a First Class Certificate of Education it is intended that they will receive a course similar to the basic pre-course held at Catterick for X Tradesmen, thereby saving training time after attaining the age of 17.

The weekly block training programme is as follows: –

1. MORNINGS (Except Saturday) – Education plus three periods of PT and one Padre's hour.
2. AFTERNOONS – Games on three afternoons and Military Training on two afternoons.
3. EVENINGS – On two evenings Squadron and Troop administration including Kit exchanges, cleaning and Make and Mend parades. Interior economy, etc.

On Wednesdays training ceases at 1700 hrs. after which voluntary hobbies are available. On the remaining two evenings all boys are engaged on one of the following as far as possible in accordance with their own selection: –

Games Instruction; Band Practice; Confirmation Classes; Choir Practice; Aero-Modelling; Art Classes; Canoe Club; Fencing; Gymnastics; Modern Language Classes; Modern Railway Club; Photography; Printing; Radio Club; .22 Shooting; Philately; Woodwork and Basketry.

One recommendation of the Miller Committee which has been found impractical concerns meal times and evening study or training. The recommendation here was that boys should play games in the afternoons, followed by a light tea and then return to training in the evening on four days a week.

This procedure was tried out in the Regiment, but it was found that the boy was not attentive and quite unreceptive to classroom instruction at this time. Furthermore, having been used to a substantial meal in the early evening he did not thrive on a light tea at 1630 hrs and supper at 7 p.m. In any case, on leaving the Regiment he would immediately revert to the age-old Army custom of consuming a good square meal at 5 p.m. before departing for the local township. It was for these reasons that the Regiment reverted to the normal meal times and evening instruction of a practical and interesting nature was introduced.

Military Training afternoons are occupied with a series of courses designed to cover the four terms in a Training Squadron. A boy attends two of these courses each term and a written report on each boy at the conclusion of each course is filed with his documents.

The obligatory courses during the boy's training are as follows: –

1. Drill and Elementary Weapon Training.
2. .22 Shooting and Field-craft.
3. Advanced Weapon Training (Rifle, LMG and SMC). All three are fired.
4. Drill and Duties.
5. Lines course.
6. Wireless course.
7. MT course (including motor cycle riding instruction).
8. Advanced Wireless and Line course.

The younger boy who has an additional term in a Junior Troop does his Drill and Elementary Weapon Training as a Junior and then a Junior Training course consisting of Camp Craft, Knot Tying, Map Reading and other Boy Scouting activities, together with some elementary practical Electricity and Magnetism and a little switchboard operating. In his second term he does an Advanced Junior Training course, in lieu of the Drill and Elementary Weapon Training, consisting of: First Aid, Morse, Switchboard Operating and the duties of a Signal Centre Clerk.

Nowadays a boy can earn Proficiency Pay by passing his educational examinations and by achieving certain standards of proficiency in P.T., Shooting and Trade Training. It is important, therefore, that he should be given every opportunity to attain the necessary military training standards as soon as possible. With this in view each boy has his future in the Regiment carefully planned in both education and military training.

Trade Training

Trade Training forms an important part of the curriculum; approximately 12% of the total training time is allocated for this purpose.

The aims of the Trade Training are fourfold: –

1. To assist the boy to choose the Trade which will give him the most satisfaction on life
2. To teach the boy the rudiments of several trades as required by an NCO in a Divisional Signal Regiment who has to command men of various trades.
3. To satisfy (to some extent) the demand by boys who join Royal Signals to learn a trade.
4. To add interest to the training curriculum.

Because the time available is limited, the syllabus for each trade course is very elementary and covers as wide a range as possible without going into detail. In order to maintain interest and satisfy the normal demands of a young boy, the training consists very largely of practical instruction and demonstration.

In order to achieve aim No. 3 above, and very possibly to stimulate recruiting, it is intended in future to increase the time allotted for trade training for all boys who have obtained their Intermediate Certificate of Education. At this stage in his training the boy will be provisionally selected for his future trade and will undergo a course in that trade in accordance with the Trade Test Summary. It is not anticipated that he will pass out from the Regiment as a tradesman, but he should require a shortened course of training in his trade at the STB and will, therefore be posted to a Unit a little earlier than hitherto.

In selecting and recommending boys for trade training, much thought must be given to the boys' potentialities and capabilities. It is desirable that as many boys as possible should be allotted to the "X" trades to help meet the present shortages in this group, but at the same time the primary aim of the Regiment and the boys own future must be carefully considered. If the boy is unlikely to achieve anything more than a Class III rating in an "X" trade, or even a Class II with some difficulty, he cannot qualify for promotion to Warrant Rank unless at some later stage he qualifies for an additional trade of a lower group and with a Class 1 rating.

Education

As stated earlier, 50 per cent of the boys' training time is allocated to education, the aims of which are: —

To send out from the Regiment boys qualified by having passed minimum of Intermediate (2nd Class) Test.
To provide training in academic subjects and in character and mental discipline to fit boys to become Sergeants and Warrant Officers of the Corps at a later stage.

Only those boys whose intelligence and ability is such to give a reasonable chance of their reaching the required standards are accepted. Boys are tested on entry by PSOs and those whose summed selection gradings are of SSG4 or below are not accepted except in special circumstances, A boy who is unlikely to pass the Junior Certificate within six months of joining the Regiment or who in fact does not do so is discharged.

Examinations for the Junior and Intermediate tests are prepared and held in the Regiment at the end of every term. An examination for the Senior Test is held in the Regiment also at the end of each term, but this is prepared by the Institute of Army Education for all Boys Units.

Classes are held during the term in preparation for all these examinations. The length of study for an average boy at each stage is: —

Junior Test	One term.
Intermediate Test	Three terms.
Senior Test	Two to three terms.

Arrangements are made to accelerate the progress of more intelligent and better educated boys.

Recruits begin educational training on arrival in the Recruit Troop and many pass the Junior Test after only a few weeks' instruction. Classes consist of 15 to 22 boys. Parallel streams are organised at each level where numbers make this desirable.

Boys who have completed their Senior Certificates continue to study for the GCE. There are only a few who reached this level and are grouped in one additional class.

Six academic subjects are studied at each level and the syllabus in each makes a continuous progression throughout the subjects are English, Mathematics, Map Reading, History, Geography and General Physics. In the Senior Test only five subjects are required for the completion of the Certificate so that some boys are allowed to drop History.

About 80% of the boys leaving the Regiment are qualified educationally for promotion to the rank of Sergeant, by having passed their Intermediate Test. Of these approximately half obtain further qualifications such as part or all of the Senior Test or G.C.E. No boy leaves the Regiment without, at least, a Junior Certificate of Education.

Initiative and Leadership Training

This type of training forms a most important part of the curriculum. In addition to day-to-day opportunities for such training, largely afforded to Boy NCOs and Senior Boys, time is allowed each term for the Outward Bound type of training. All types of training under this heading are designed to develop character, self-reliance, and a sense of responsibility, to promote team spirit and knowledge through experience and to develop the qualities of leadership and courage.

Here in Denbury, the Regiment is fortunate in having Dartmoor within a few miles of the camp. Boys can be sent off in small parties over planned routes in all weathers, with rations for two or three days and a ground sheet and sleeping bag. Instructors are invariably at hand to assist *in* the event of accidents or to advise inaccurate map-readers when they find themselves too far off the route.

In addition, a few specially selected boys have attended courses at the Outward Bound Trust Schools. All acquitted themselves well and obtained excellent reports. The Army's own Outward Bound School opened at Trawsfydd in March, 1957, which will offer additional opportunities for a greater number of boys to undergo this valuable training.

This Regiment has not yet taken part in the Pilot scheme of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, but from all accounts it appears that the conditions of the award will not present great difficulty to the Boys of the Regiment.

Ceremonial Parades

Surprisingly enough, Ceremonial Parades are popular. The showpiece parade performed by the Regiment is an almost exact replica of the Ceremony of "Trooping the Colour." The Boys' version, known as "Trooping the Regimental Standard," is performed entirely by the Boys themselves, the Parade Commander being the Boy RSM. Although this parade is only held on important occasions, rehearsals are carried out each term, as it is a complicated parade and everyone must be kept well practiced in its procedure. At the end of each term a Presentation Parade is held, again performed by the Boys, and the various trophies and awards won during the term are presented by the Inspecting Officer to the winners.

Games

In order to provide three games per week for each boy, a large number of playing grounds are required and great quantities of sports kit and equipment. The latter is a big drain on P.R.I. funds, but the per capita grant of £2 per boy per annum goes a long way to make up for the small NAAFI rebate obtained in a Boys Regiment where the spending power is a good deal less than in a normal unit.

The following games and sports are played in the Regiment and instruction in the skills of each game is provided for: —

Summer Term: Athletics, Cricket, Soft Ball, Swimming, Sailing, Rowing, Canoeing and Tennis.

Christmas Term: Soccer, Basketball, Rugby and Hockey.

Easter Term: Boxing, Cross-country and Badminton.

Swimming, sailing, rowing and canoeing are at present non-competitive. Soccer takes priority during the Christmas Term and Rugby during the Easter Term

Each sport is run by an Officer who is responsible to the General Sports Officer and the Sports Committee for the successful and efficient organisation of every detail of his sport. All fixtures are planned by the Sports Committee and great care is necessary to avoid a clashing of dates of Inter-Troop and Regimental fixtures.

Pay

The rates of Pay for Boys were considerably increased early in 1956 at the time of the general increases for all ranks of the three Services. A Boys' minimum rate of pay is now 31/6d per week. He can earn a Service increment of 7/- per week for each year's Service, up to 8/9 a week as Junior/ RSM and Proficiency Pay in four different gradings up to a maximum of 21/- per week. This means that a Junior/RSM with more than two years' Boys Service and Grade I proficiency will receive 75/3 per week. On reaching the age of 17 and a half a boy is posted to the Rank of Signalmán on paper but remains in the Regiment until the end of the term. On being posted to the ranks he receives the basic rate of pay as a Signalmán on a six-years' regular engagement. The latter is the period to which each boy is committed from the age of 18. Many boys appreciate the financial advantages to be obtained under the new pay code, by signing on for an additional period of nine years or more, and often apply to do so before leaving the Regiment.

In order that each Boy may have a reasonable sum of money with which to enjoy his leave, and to teach the value of thrift, boys are not paid their full entitlement each week. All boys are encouraged to save and the majority have a Post Office Savings Account. The average sum, including ration allowance and advance of pay for a three weeks' leave period, available to a boy at the end of term, is £20-£25. Collecting boxes placed in a prominent position at Pay Parade and labelled "Royal Signals Association Benevolent Fund" are never ignored.

Crime and Punishment

The incidence of serious offences in the Regiment is now very low, but it would be most unusual in an establishment of this sort if the Minor Offence Report was a blank sheet each week. A misguided but often most laudable spirit of adventure will inevitably lead the occasional boy into trouble, but the real problem lies in the correct permissible form of punishment to be administered.

Until about 18 months ago caning was permissible and administered by the R.S.M. or S.S.M. after an award by the Commanding Officer or a Squadron Commander. This was probably the most suitable form of punishment and the ideal deterrent particularly for the bully, but, unhappily, it is no longer permitted. A period of detention invariably means a loss of instructional time in the Educational and Military training classrooms and confinement to barracks is no hardship as the weekly training programme permits time out at Camp at week-ends only and occasionally on a Wednesday evening. The introduction of Proficiency Pay has however, provided an alternative and unpopular form of punishment to the Boy, in that he can readily be deprived of this additional sum if necessary.

Unlike the normal boarding school boys of 16 years and over are permitted to smoke with their parents' or guardians' permission, but such orders as "Break off for a smoke" during training are frowned upon and every effort is made to explain the folly of smoking at an early age.

Permanent Staff and Instructors

As mentioned earlier the Regiment can be compared with a boarding school, so that it is not difficult to realise that the instructional staff of Officers, Warrant Officers and Sergeants need to have many of the attributes of a schoolmaster in order to succeed in their job, none the least of which is endless patience.

Officers and NCOs directly connected with Boys Troops and their training should be specially selected and recommended for service in the Regiment. They must have an interest in the training of Boys, a good personality, and be prepared to put up with long and unusual hours of duty. Prowess in a sport is of great value to an Officer and the Regiment and a NCO who has attended a Guards Drill course or Weapon Training course at Hythe can be a great asset. Both Officers and NCOs must be good instructors and should have some military background and experience. The Miller Committee stressed the importance of maturity and experience of Officers and NCOs of a Boys Regiment and recommended that all appointments should be for not less than three years. Whilst such tenures of appointment are most desirable and for longer periods if possible, the career of the individual has also to be considered. Continuity of Officers, Warrant Officers and Sergeants of the RAEC, staff is often easier to achieve. RAEC officers are now receiving specialised training in the instruction of boys and all the RAEC staff play a big part in the various activities of the Regiment. They do not merely confine themselves to the job of schoolmaster each morning in the classroom.

A most valuable addition to the staff has been the appointment of a full time member of the Women's Voluntary Service. This lady provides the right feminine influence in the life of the Boys and does excellent work in connection with the Boys and Boy NCOs Club.

The Junior Leaders Regiment is an important and thriving unit of the Corps, the job of training boys is a very worthwhile task and a most satisfying one. The reward will be seen in later years when the boys of yesterday, today and tomorrow, take their places amongst the Warrant Officers and Senior NCOs of the Corps, which many of them will undoubtedly do.