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SUBJECT, AND OFFICE OF ORIGIN

EDUCATION IN THE ARMY
by
W. E. WILLIAMS

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Education in the Army.

by.

W. E. Williams.

1. The Inheritance of Army Education.

1. It is sometimes more hazardous and expensive to adapt or reconstruct a building than to pull the whole thing down and start again from the foundations. If the second course had been chosen when the war broke out we might have had by now a more solid and workable system of Army Education than the improvisation with which we seemed destined to make do until demobilisation. We might have had it designed by a Grotius instead of contrived by a Heath Robinson. By the end of the last war the army had equipped itself with many varieties of non-military training in the best patterns of adult education. In the flush of reconstruction fervour H. A L. Fisher described Army Education as "the best invention since gunpowder"; many of the best young officers, sharing Fisher's conviction, decided to make it their life work and enrolled in the A.E.C. When the post-war years of dis-illusion so quickly came this corps of specialists suffered heavy blows. That its numbers had to be reduced in a shrinking army was inevitable. What was neither wise nor inevitable was that it's prestige should be deliberately undermined. It was deprived of its role of training men for citizenship and set to the task of peeling the educational potatoes. It reverted in many respects to the old humdrum business of the obsolete corps of Army School-masters, that body of blue-coated ushers in which Barbett and James Thompson served their dreary time. Army Education relapsed into a mere curriculum for Army Certificates, 1st, 2nd & 3rd Class. Many of the best men left the A.E.C to employ their skill and ardour elsewhere; others stayed on rather like the poor relations in a Chekhov play, to

suffer as patiently as they could the denial of opportunity, recognition and reward. It says much for the faith and stamina of these men that, after twenty years of frustration, and more than their share of raw dealing, they have been able to put so much resource-fulness and "intestinal fortitude into the present army Education projects. It is not their fault that the prestige of education was so low when this war began, so low that they were sometimes received by C.O's as curtly as a harassed suburban housewife would treat the vacuum-cleaner salesman. Educationalists in the professional army had come to be considered as one of the lesser castes, a handicap which is still, despite their recent success, far more than a vestigal one, and which, of course, is only too familiar in many other parts of our educational system.

This matter of prestige has nothing to do with the size of the army. The point is that, however large or small the army, its educationalists should enjoy the same recognition and standing as, let us say, the padres and the doctors. This error of values has been the bane of Army education, and it explains many of the imperfections of the present schemes. It is time that these schemes give the A.E.C. the chance of its life time, but the AEC has much to forget and much to live down. From being under-rated moreover, the AEC is now over-worked. Where chaplains abound by the hundred, educationalists are to be found in their tens; while the padre is at least a captain, the educationalist is usually a subaltern or a sergeant. These matters are note-worthy, not from the standard of professional rivalries, but, once more, as pointers to the crucial issue of prestige. The A.E.C today is the most harassed and under-manned section of the

British army, yet its fate is to operate educational schemes of unparalleled magnitude for its size in arms. What, then, are the projects which are being administered by this long suffering body?

II. The Training Scheme.

Briefly two main systems of education are now operating in the army; the war-time Education Scheme and the army Bureau of Current Affairs — whose trade mark "A.B.C.A", has become as familiar as "E.N.S.A". The first owes its existence primarily to the Voluntary Bodies of adult education whose powerful and repeated representations finally led, over a year after the war began, to the project which is briefly outlined in the war office leaflet "Education in the War-time Army". This scheme was intended to provide, quite apart from military instruction, three varieties of education, all on a voluntary basis, and all (therefore) to be conducted in the men's spare time. The three varieties were to be:

(a) The humanities
(b) The utilities
(c) The arts and crafts.

The first category was to cover the familiar curriculum of adult education, e.g. history, geography, international affairs, economics, either in single lectures or in short courses. The second was designed to enable soldiers to begin or to continue some training in the vocations they hoped to take up when the war is over. The third was intended to give men constructive hobby interests. In considering the short comings which this triple scheme has since revealed

it must be remembered that, in the shop-keepers metaphor, this was a bigger order" than the massed resources of adult education could cope with. The potential customers were many times the number of the entire popn of pre-war adult education.; the machinery to supply them was not the well-established and well greased civilian system, but an improvised collaboration between the A.E.C. and civilian resources.

III The Machinery of the Scheme

The machinery for operating the A.E. Scheme is complicated. First, there is the Wellis-work of the AEC, which follows the pattern of the military hierarchy. That is to say, a C.E.O. at each Command H.Q. and, branching from him AEC administrative officers at Corps HQ., area HQ., District HQ and Div. HQ. To many observers this procedure of matching educational organisation to military organisation seems wasteful, and the cross-cross of boundaries between Corps, area, District, Div etc. sometimes leads to over-elaboration and duplicated effort. It has been suggested that a simpler procedure would be to by-pass the military hierarchy, and organise army education on a county basis, but this modification is certainly not in sight yet.

The A.E.C. officers in this hierarchy are, so to speak, the supply officers of Army Education. They go shopping. Largely, with the Regional Committees of Adult Education in H.M. Forces. These Committees are the representative bodies

of civilian adult education - such as W.E.A's, the University Extra Mural Departments, the Y.M.C.A. the W.E.A - and each Committee has a panel of lecturers who are available to give single talks or short courses to the troops.

The immediate agent and spokesman for the "customers" is the U.E.O., a regimental officer detailed by his C.O. On top of many other duties to take care of education. It is his business to discover and evoke the educational needs of his unit, and to meet them either from Unit resources - which are sometimes varied and considerable, sometimes negligible - or from the resources provided by the Regional Committees. The U.E.O. is the local lynch pin. If he is keen, resourceful, and not too bogged in other duties, he gets a creditable show going. If he is unwilling, apathetic, overworked, he gets little or nothing done, even though the indefatigable ABC hierarchy is constantly encouraging and aiding him. In the better units there is an Education Committee of officers and men, who re-inforce the effort of the U.E.O.

It must be admitted that this lynch pin is a frail and uncertain device. It must equally be conceded that the notion of a full time education officer in every unit is an Utopian vision which cannot be realised in our man-power situation. There is nothing for it but to teach the best of these U.E.O's, partly by training them at the Army School of Education or at week-end schools, partly by extending the practice of

forming unit Education Committees. Both these palliatives are being applied; and, moreover, Young Soldiers Battalions (where education is even more vital than elsewhere in the Army) have a full time A.E.C. officer and several A.E.C. Sergeants all to themselves.

IV Problems of Supply and Demand.

The best facilities for every kind of Adult Education, whether cultural or vocational, are usually concentrated in larger towns, whereas the biggest camps are usually located on some windy heath remote from inhabited places. Moreover, the very idea of further education in their own spare-time was not one wh. a majority of soldiers were liable to welcome with open arms. They had neither more nor less interest in it than they had in peace-time. The W.E.A. had a peace time enrolment of about 50,000 men and women, and that figure had only been attained only after 40 yrs of propaganda and powerful official encouragement. It is a figure worth remembering when a soldier tells you he never heard of education during his first year in the Army. He is neither more nor less likely to have heard of it than the average Trade Unionist is likely to have heard of the W.E.A. Such were and are the major difficulties involved in an attempt to gear the civilian system of adult education to the needs of a war-time interest. The Army does not provide the suitable frame work for education, and the man in battle dress is no more disposed to be voluntarily educated than the man in dungarees.

As the Army Education Scheme developed

- and its progress has been unexpectedly good - other defects were observed in this effort to utilise the civilian resources of peace-time. There is not a sufficient supply of the right sort of but or for the "humanities". of the 3,000 odd names on the panels of the civilian Regional Committees not more than 10% are really up to the game of arousing the average soldier's mental interests. If any Gideon cares to take the 3,000 of them down to the water's edge he will find that not one in ten can dap the right way, the simple way. Many of them are experts of high calibre, but they lack the essential attributes of simplifying and popularising their "subjects" among men to whom the very alphabet of those subjects is alien. In a sense, this state of things is a well deserved retribution on those bodies of adult education which have been pre-occupied all these years with the upper intellectual standard of their university betters and have so notoriously neglected the effort to enlighten the common of common men. The fact is that the massed bodies of adult education cannot produce enough suitable dispositions to supply a Div., let alone an Army. In the other two species of B. Education, the "utilities" and the "handicrafts" the supply of instructors has not been so short, largely because they have been supplied by those Marthas of Adult education, the L.E.A's and not voluntary bodies.

V. Home Produced Education.

The Training Committee was realistic enough to declare, in "Education in the War-time Army", that civilian provision would not meet the Army's educational needs. It urged that the Army should not rely on imports from civilian suppliers, but should get busy on the home produced facilities. This advice has been adopted on a surprising scale. There are many units that are educationally self-sufficient, and which remain so when they go overseas. Gibraltar and Tobruk have accomplished what many areas have failed to achieve in England. Such provision, inevitably, is patchy. There are battalions which can produce 25 instructors - some professional, some amateurs - and battalions which can produce none. And the educational fare of units which rely on their home produced material often shows a lack of balance due entirely to the fact that there are six language instructors but no historians. The A.E. Scheme is lopsided, it cannot be else.

VI. Some Figures.

In the face of these difficulties and improvisations let a few figures speak for the progress of Army Education. This spring the no. of lectures given to troops in this country reaches an average of 12,000 a month, and many of the lectures are followed by some variety of question and discussion. Of the organised classes, i.e. series of meetings continuing week after week mainly in utilities but also to some extent in humanities, the

average per month is well over 8,000. and besides these formal activities there are unnumbered legions of music circles, play readings, educational visits to historic places and industrial centres, choral societies, art groups and brains trusts.

VII The Crucial Factors.

Much of the criticism of the A.E. Scheme betrays an inability to appreciate 2 decisive factors.

(a) The Shortage of Teachers.

Even if the full complement of peace time instructors and tutors were available, it would not be able to take on this vast new audience. But, in any case, the complement is not available, for large numbers of trained educators have gone off to other tasks - tasks more over, which, in the various Ministries for example, they often prefer their old profession. Faced with this problem of "short supply" the AE Scheme cannot achieve the wide scope which some people expected from it. The dream of "continuous courses" in a multitude of subjects has proved a pipe dream. Single lectures must inevitably be the main stay of Army Education.

(b) The Physical Factors.

The army cannot stay put; the Army must give priority to military training and military ~~exercises~~, the Army lacks the premises and apparatus for systematic education. Thus, once more, the hope of continuous and diverse educational facilities proves a mirage. And if these conditions are so decisive while the Army is on its own ground

they must be even more so when it begins to play its long awaited away matches. Even during the "phoney" war period that unrealistic expectation was defeated.; and for an army on the move it is abundantly plain that the only kind of education it can set must be what it can carry.

The recognition of these factors led directly to the second Army Education project viz. the Army Bureau of Current Affairs.

VIII The Second Plan. A.B.C.A.

The biggest educational venture of the war has produced is the A.B.C.A. Its conception was due in part to the inevitable limitations of the A.E. Scheme. The argument behind A.B.C.A runs thus.

(1) The army must learn educational self-sufficiency and equip itself with a rough and ready, portable kind of education.

(2) The predominant interest disclosed by the AE Scheme has proved to be an interest in Current Affairs

(3) If these first two propositions are sound, then this minimum educational provision must not be regarded as an optional extra in the soldier's daily life. It must be supplied in training time or, as the old-fashioned commander prefers to say, in "the King's time".

On this basis ABCA was built and let it be recorded to the credit of the regular soldiers

who determine the group destiny that they were willing to play with this dynamite. For ABCA is dynamite. It ordains that, at least once a week, platoon in the middle of working hours, platoons shall sit down and discuss Current Affairs. Once a week a soldier shall not only be entitled to ask, but encouraged to ask "Why Black Markets are allowed" or "Why isn't America in Top Gear" or "Why Women are being called up". No one pretends that they always get an answer or that they get the proper answer. The significant point is that they can ask. They can talk. They can unbosom themselves of doubt ~~and~~ ignorance, and anger. It is a long way from Balaclava to ABCA - yet the jump has been made.

IX. Officers as Group Leaders.

The leaders of these group discussions are usually the platoon commanders; that is to say, the younger regimental officers, the amateur soldiers, not the recalled regulars or territorials. Most of them lack any experience of discussion-group leading, but they are fortified in their task in many ways, of which the two chief are:-

(a) The issue of weekly bulletins, each of which provides the "brief" and talking-points for a discussion on some topic such as "Russia's Resources" or "Economic Warfare".

(b) The provision, largely by civilian experts from University Extra-Mural Departments, of week end courses at which officers are taught - with clinical demonstrations - the tricks

of the trade of group leading.

Now it must be conceded that to most subalterns this task is strange and often disconcerting. Yet if the troops are to get, at least, a regular ration of education in citizenship, ABCA is the only way. From the standpoint of the professional teacher these ABCA sessions are often lamentably unskilful. But the fact remains that these ABCA sessions have already struck a deep root into military life. Not, necessarily or mainly, because the troops wish to be informed about current affairs, but because they want a chance to speak their feelings and opinions. Many a thoughtful subaltern has declared that even when he can't find the answer to a soldier's conundrum he is conscious that, once he has put his case or question, the soldier, does'nt feel thwarted. ABCA gives him a chance to open his mouth.

Through its directives to officers the War office re-iterates the following advice:-

① The platoon is the only possible basis for a two-way traffic of discussion. A bigger gathering becomes a public meeting - which few officers are competent to address.

② The officer is a group leader, not a lecturer. His role is to take the chair and not the floor.

③ No-one can determine the "dosage" of controversy for any unit. It depends on the experience and good-sense of the leader no less than on the knowledge and stability

of the men. But the object of an ABCA discussion is to secure a balanced controversy on the topic under consideration.

These injunctions are, of course, variously adopted or accepted. In conducting ABCA, there are as many errors of judgement, blunders in the scales and sheer baboooneries as you would expect. There are officers who monopolise the meeting; officers who read bits aloud from ABCA bulletins; officers who shy from any clash of opinion; officers who hastily shut down when the temperature rises, instead of persisting until reasonable ventilation has been secured. Yet there are others who make this plethora discussion the most vital and sincere item in the week's entire time-table. In short, ABCA provides an exacting test of leadership for officers; the percentage of officers who respond to the test is no less than that of any other role of military leadership.

X. The Need for Training Courses.

The imperative need of the moment is to give the regimental officer a fuller training in discussion-group leadership. The week-end course is something; at least it takes the edge off his ignorance of the job. But officers must be given at least as much time to train themselves for ABCA as they do for their many other roles of leadership. So far there is not a single full time ABCA school in the country, although many educational

establishments have been commandeered for other military purposes. Meanwhile, valiantly improvising as usual, the universities and the voluntary bodies, lend their buildings and their experts for peptonised week-end courses in method for zealous but inexperienced amateurs.

XI The Significance of A.B.C.A.

ABCA is less than a year old. It is still sketchy and inadequate; ill-staffed and ill provided according to Russian, German or american standards. Yet it has laid the foundation for a development for which we may thank God when peace arrives. ABCA is not only a safety valve for the citizen soldiers ignorance, bewilderment or resignation; it is becoming the one and only place where he can hammer out his notions of the post war world and where he can learn the rudiments of his obligations as a citizen. These may seem ambitious claims, yet they are already taking shape in many units. For ABCA represents - sometimes, and according to the vision of the officers - not merely a weekly discussion, but a series of other aids to knowledge. It is developing for instance into wall-newspapers, visual aids, reading circles; and it may yet play a part in transforming the escapism of the BBC Forces programme into a constructive preparation for battle.

The soldier has taken to ABCA, and the reasons are easy to detect. For many

soldiers the keenest privation to be endured is the curtailment of civic privileges. This is a citizen army ~~of peace-time~~, not the monastic-professional army of peace-time; and its members are often men (and women) accustomed to their regular ration of discussion. Others again, are young soldiers who would normally be cultivating some concern about the world they live in. If that concern gets no encouragement in the army it will become a withered root - or possibly the poisoned cactus plant of fascism. The soldier, then, has the citizen's right to discuss current affairs and the army is the only place, for the time being, which can preserve that right for him. Preserve it, moreover - and thus is significant - not as an exotic, often a boring daily work, but slap in the middle of "office hours" in a way and at a time which may persuade him to take it more seriously than he otherwise would.

There is another aspect of the ABCA experiment which deserves mention: the effect upon the officer of having to give these weekly talks. For many it is, no doubt, one more irksome of drudgery in the dog's life of a subaltern leads. But for many others - on the evidence of their testimony - it is an opportunity for self education in citizenship. An officer who is taking ABCA duties conscientiously is becoming a more systematic student of current affairs than he was before. It is notable, for example

that the circulation within the army of such valuable aids to study as the Oxford pamphlet and the British Survey has increased since ABCA began; and on a lower but not less significant level is the declaration of many platoon officers that they in nowadays read their papers and magazines with an eye for discovering talking points to their men.

Now that ABCA is a lusty adolescent, something may be said of the opposing attitudes which threatened its cradle. First, there was the clamorous Left-wing declaring that ABCA didn't go far enough, and bellowing for commissars who would enforce in every unit a ruthless analysis of Munich and the rudiments of political education. Then there were the middle-roaders, the garden-city idealists, abetted by some educational sects of the covenanting type, who feared that ABCA would pump propaganda into the troops. The third side of this triangle of forces was manned by Brigadier Blueface and his myrmidons convinced to the last ditch that the soldier is a good-natured clod who is best left in his ignorance. ABCA has confounded all three. It turns out to be the typical British compromise; improvised, often incompetent, always capable of adaptation. It is an item in the army time table which can be used to get the barb out of a grievance, the poison out of a rumour, or bees out of a bonnet. If that seems an elementary and minimum function, let it be borne in mind that hitherto there has

been working in mass-education which provided even such a previlege as that.

ABCA has proved, moreover, a confidence trick in the best sense. Many hard-bitten Lt-Cols. feared the worst when ABCA came in - and often did what they could to sabotage the innovation. Nowadays their testimonies often heaps on three strongs

(1) The ABCA discussion does not appear to undermine the subaltern's authority.

(2) It often seems to create a new and useful kind of association between the platoon commander and his men; an off-the-record relaxation of the tension of military life.

(3) If men are to speak their minds, they had better do it in open daylight than in the canteen or the privy. Perplexities and grievances are better spoken out loud than whispered - no matter whether they are soluble or not.

Because ABCA has dissolved such nightmares of foreboding it is now in a position to tackle themes which would have been untimely six months ago - Town Planning, the Future of the Land, Public Health - and it is reasonable to suppose that when a British army of occupation begins to speak its mind about the world it wants to live in, it will find ABCA a forum whose rules and methods it understands and respects.

XII ABCA as a Pattern.

If war-time conditions can produce even a crude and approximate education in citizenship, then ABCA is the pattern which might also be

attempted in factory and dockyard as well. The fact deserves to be recorded that nowhere else but in the army (and lately, on a small scale by the N.F.S.) is an attempt being made to teach men and women the ABC of citizenship. The consequences of the fact may yet prove unexpected and decisive.

XIII Bolt-Holes in Army Education.

The army, in many ways, doesn't make sense. In its bolder moods it tackles such a job as ABCA, yet in other ways it takes freight and makes for the nearest educational bolt-hole. One such bolt-hole is Handicrafts. In recent years Handicrafts has found its way into Adult Education, and it thrives always and everywhere, as readily and dangerously as rabbits in the Antipodes. Even since some well-meaning and easy going educationalist coined the phrase about those who think through their finger-tips" Handicrafts has become the soft option of educational development. Thus it was palmed off on the frustrated unemployed coal-miners of S. Wales and Tyneside; and beguiled by one kind of cats-cradle after the other, the hands without work were kept occupied so that their minds may be kept off their bitter-fate.

Handicrafts are a pleasant hobby. They may with profit occupy a segment of any good citizen's leisure. But Handicrafts schemes get out of hand faster than anything

in the adult education time-table. ; they become escapist and trivial more quickly than any subject under the sun. and this is truer in the Army than in other places. as a device for occupying a portion of the long day in a Con. Depot or on a remote A.A site, Handicraft has an obvious place. But Handicraft has a fatal attraction for one kind of military mind; it looks nice and bright in the shop-window. What can be easier when a staff Wotability asks the C.O. about education than to say "Step this way Sir." and to flick open the door of a room in which their upon tier, nice models of aeroplanes, prettily covered Benquines, blotters, footstools, lamp shades and what have you? In some regions Handicraft is sweeping the board of Army Education. It is the easiest business to organise, it placates the reactionary C.O., it produces visible results and it looks big on the records. In its right place and proportion, Handicraft is a valuable and necessary part of the Army's education programme, but it wants close watching.

XIV An Imaginative Venture.

On the other hand, although this diverse Army sometimes falls for soft options, it also tackles unexpected propositions. One such is

the Army Study centre, of which several score now exist.

A little over a year ago the British Institute of Adult Education began to foster an experiment which met with a warm response from the army. It was evident that a considerable minority of soldiers felt the need of a time and place where, alone in very small groups, they could pursue those "serious pleasures" which had meant so much to them in peace-time.

Although most units have some kind of common-room, it is, as a rule, a general purpose place. Very often it is the mess-room which, in between meals, is utilised for recreation of all kinds. When you go into such you may hear the radio putting up its evening barrage of variety or dance music; you may hear the monotonous plonk of half a dozen dart boards, or the sounds which accompany the playing, at half a dozen different tables, of various games of skill and chance. No-one complains of that. The army is a public life in a public place, and the will of the majority, in terms of voice and games, must prevail. Yet it is equally true that some soldiers want some thing else as well. And it is almost certainly true that all soldiers, if vaguely and subconsciously, sometimes need more private occasions for a little peace and quiet - either to do something or simply to sit and reflect. These were the sentiments and convictions which led to the creation of a few specimen army study centres.

The Army Study Centre, as a rule, is a house (rented by the army) in which the rooms are each ear-marked for some minority cultural purpose - a room with a radio-gram for organised listening to good music, a reference library, an art room, and so on.

In one sense the notion is not a novel one. The Y.M.C.A. whose record of imaginative service to the forces has still not received its due recognition, has for some time provided many camps with Quiet Rooms. These sanctuaries have a realistic and un-assuming purpose - to provide the soldier with an oasis where he can sit and write a letter home, or sit and read without interruption. The historians of to-morrow may, indeed, give as many marks to the Y.M.C.A as their predecessors gave Florence Nightingale.

The British Institute of Adult Education approached the question from rather a different angle. Its purpose - revealed also in several other contributions it has been able to make to Army Education - was to encourage in the army the notion of self-help. If such a body as the Y.M.C.A. will provide Quiet Rooms well and good. But if the army can be persuaded, as part of its regular provision, to supply such places - better still. This was the purpose which animated this experiment.

The Pilgrim Trust, godfather of so many projects which have made good, donated funds to the experiment. The rules of the game were that if the army would provide the bricks

and mortar the British Institute would
install the cultural "plant". First off the mark
was the Northern Command, where the C.E.O.,
abetted by a broad-minded G officer, seized
premises which were in use as a store
room in York. The place was, in fact,
an abandoned tavern. The example of York
has been improved upon elsewhere. The most
impressive army Study Centre is to be found,
appropriately in ~~Glasgow~~ Scotland. The Glasgow centre
is ~~the~~ an imposing old house, comfortably
furnished, including settees and saddleback
chairs - with open fires. On the walls are
famous pictures - originals lent by the
Glasgow Art Gallery. And there is a woman
resident Director, who has managed to give
the place not only the atmosphere of culture,
but the flavour of home as well. Glasgow
has proved that, once someone has the act
of faith to start such a place, support is
readily forthcoming - in cash and in kind.
In other Scottish centres, for instance, such
bodies as the W.V.S. and the Girl Guides
have knitted and donated furniture, sewn
curtains and loose covers and even browbeaten
their husbands into making book-cases.

XV Bricks and Mortar.

The success of this handful of Army Study
centres points us once more to the fundamental
weakness of every variety of education in the
Army - the lamentable lack not only of time
but of suitable premises and equipment.

Education, always and everywhere, boils down to bricks and mortar. Find the right place with the right atmosphere and the rest is comparatively easy. It is all very well for the gills to swell in the Senior Combination Room about the pathetic amateurism of Army Education. Army Education has to make do with barrack-room standards, while all over the country more suitable premises are allowed to remain in the occupation of evacuated insurance companies and the like. There is nothing on earth - except the will - to prevent the army being equipped with premises where its education might proceed in the best environment. Even in the University towns the right premises are there - except that they are occupied by war-interlopers who have no right to be there: such as Oxford College now being used as a lodging-house for Civil Service clerks.

XVI Back to the A.E.C.

In the face of every disadvantage - from its lack of expert personnel - the army has contrived a versatile range of educational facilities. Some of its schemes have gone awry; others, such as correspondence courses, have been deliberately supplied for the minority interests. But the army has had the zeal and the sense to persist in its trial and error until in A.B.C.A. it has

devised a rough but effective minimum
educational provision for its men and women.
A.B.C.A., heaven knows, is a botch in many
ways, but it is the beginning of something
which, when the war is over, may shape
a new pattern in popular education.

The considerable volume and diversity of
educational schemes sketched in the preceding
pages is administered largely by the A.E.C.
Their function is to dovetail civilian resources
into the Army's needs; to evangelise among
wayward and indifferent units; to locate and
utilise the corps's own teaching talent; to
organise training facilities for the army's amateur
teachers and group leaders; to develop the
growth of handicrafts, music, art and every
kind of informal educational activity; to give
concentrated attention to the special needs of
the Young Soldiers' Battalions, Con. Depots and
the like. And in the words of the orderly
Room Sergeant "the rest of the day's their own".
Most of the AEC officers spend their days and
nights organising and administering at high
pressure. In number they are ludicrously
inadequate for the heavy and incessant
duties imposed upon them. In the same
spirit as we permit the crowded classroom
in the elementary school, so we countenance
a similar imposition on Army Education.
We skimp it - and then we blame it
because the result of its efforts is often

so inadequate. It brings us to the question of priorities. Is the education of the army as important as the health and spiritual welfare of the troops? If the answer is yes - and dare it be otherwise - one immediate and practical step should be to put the administration of Army Education into as numerous hands as these which bless the troops on Sunday mornings or prod their towels on Tuesdays. Call them what you like - but let them be numerous as the men who control the educational destinies of the soldiers of the Reich and the U.S.S.R. Their motives and their traditions will do the rest.

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AREA ROUTINE

- ORDERS -