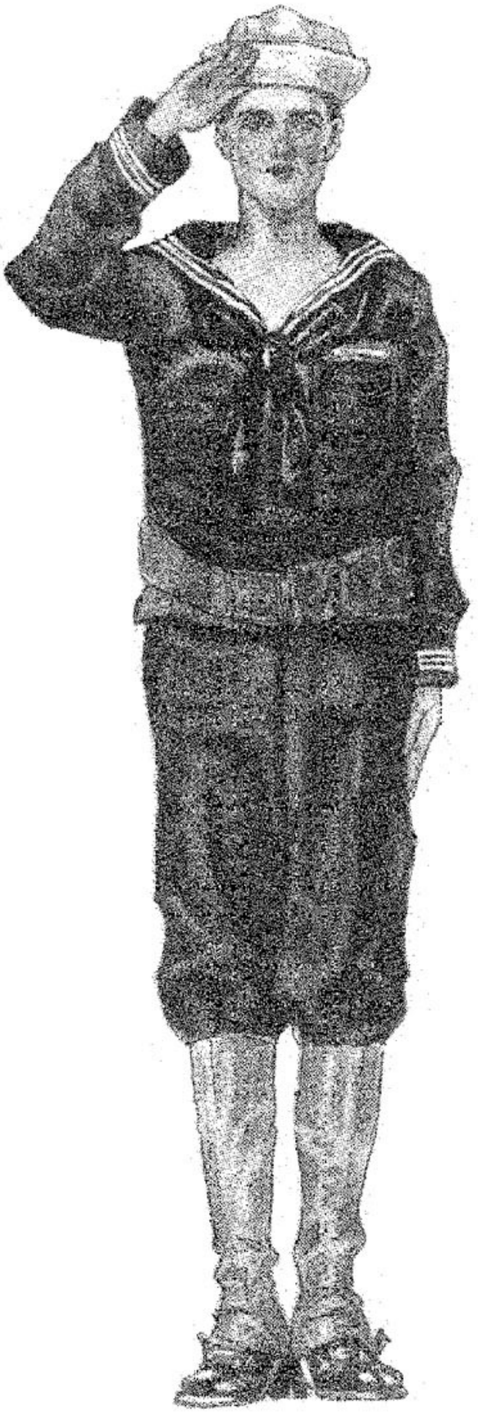
JACK'S UNIFORM

THROUGH the New York papers there has been recently raging a lively discussion on the origin and meaning of the uniforms of the American sailors. One acute correspondent started it by declaring that the costume was merely a slavish imitation of the British tar's outfit, and that it had no special application to our own country or traditions. Another immediately answered him, denying all his allegations, and further adding the astounding statement that the black-silk tie worn about the neck had been instituted during the Spanish War, and meant "Remember the *Maine*."

However true that may have seemed to the individual who contributed it, it was immediately exploded by a marine who attested that the scarf had been worn for years. Its origin and the reason for other details of the marine costume are given in a recent letter to the New York *Sun*, as follows:

May I be permitted to say a few words regarding the origin of the three rows of white braid on the collar of the sailor's jumper, his black-silk neckerchief, and the lanyard around his neck?



Long, long ago, before the days of Lord Nelson, the English bluejackets wore the queue or pigtail. This was drest in thick grease and then the powder was put on. In the course of time this dressing got the men's jumpers filthy, and to protect the blue flannel of the jumper the Admiralty of that day ordered Jack to wear a plain, light blue linen collar hanging from the shoulders to the middle of the back.

This plain linen collar was worn till after Lord Nelson's death, when the Admiralty decreed that it should be adorned with three rows of white braid (not worn on the cuffs in the English Navy), and that is how the collar came to be adorned as it is to-day, most other nations having copied this collar for their lower-deck uniforms.

The black-silk neckerchief dates from the days when English sailors went into action stript to the waist; in the olden days the sailors were served out with a cotton cloth which was tied round the neck and used as a sort of sweat-cloth or as a bandage for first-aid purposes. This has since been changed to silk, and it is only worn by the men when ashore nowadays.

The lanyard worn round the sailor's neck is attached to a jack-knife which has one large blade and a small marlin-spike with which to splice quickly small-sized ropes; but it is used for many other purposes besides. No sailor on the lower deck ever has a whistle attached to his lanyard. Only the "bosun" and his mate have any need for whistles.

And then another reader, who has apparently made an exhaustive study of the manners and methods of the Navy regarding uniforms, tells us in detail just what the meanings are of the various markings on the sleeves of the uniform. We are informed by him:

The rating-badge consists, first of all, of a spread eagle, commonly called by the bluejackets a "crow," which is placed above a specialty mark or chevron. The eagle is always of white silk when used on blue suits, and of blue silk when used on white suits.

The chevrons are made of stripes of scarlet cloth, sewed flat, in the shape of an angle, with the points upward. When permanent petty officers hold three consecutive good-conduct badges these chevrons are made of gold lace instead of scarlet cloth. Chief petty officers wear three stripes, with an arch of one stripe forming the arc of a circle between the ends of the upper stripe of the chevron, with the eagle resting on top of the arch, while the specialty mark is placed in the center of the field under the arch. Officers of the first class wear three stripes, those of the second class wear two stripes, while those of the third class wear only one stripe.

For blue clothing the specialty mark is embroidered in white silk, and for the white clothes blue is used, except hospital stewards and their apprentices, who wear red Geneva crosses as their marks, both for the blue and white clothing.

The rating-badge is worn by all petty officers of the starboard watch on the right sleeve, while those of the port watch wear their badges on the left sleeve.

The man who has never been at sea and

OldMagazineArticles.com

knows nothing about it is rated on the ship's book as a "landsman" or, in naval parlance, a "landlubber." After he has gained a good knowledge of the art of knotting, splicing, handling of boats and oars, gunnery, and other duties, he is promoted to the next higher rating, that of ordinary seaman, and from this to the one entitling him to use the letters A.B. after his name, signifying that he is an able seaman. By this time, however, he has become so proficient in ship knowledge that he is eligible to receive a petty officer's rating, and, after years of service and devotion to the duties to which he is best suited, he may receive a warrant commission, which will entitle him to mess with the junior officers in the ward-room and have additional liberties which the ordinary seaman does not have.

It is not generally known that every man-of-war carries a policeman on board, but the master-at-arms, or "Jimmy Legs," as he is usually called, acts in that capacity. He is really the chief of police and has general charge of the order and cleanliness of the decks and lockers. The boatswains, who have charge of the deck watches, and the coxswains, who are in charge of the boats and launches, each wear crossed anchors as their specialty marks. The quartermaster, who steers the ship, wears a representation of his steering-wheel. The blacksmiths and ship's fitters wear crossed hammers, while the carpenters, painters, and plumbers each wear crossed axes. Turret-captains have insignia showing a gun-turret and gun; the gunner's mate has crossed cannon. Chief yeomen who have risen from the lower grades wear crossed keys, indicating positions of trust. The yeomen of the first, second, and third classes all wear crossed quills.

Electricians have as the mark of their profession a globe. Machinists' mates, boiler-makers, water-tenders, coppersmiths, and oilers all wear a three-bladed propeller-wheel on the sleeve. Band-masters and musicians are distinguished by a harp, while the commissary steward, who has charge of the supplies, wears two linked keys with a quill laid underneath.

In the class of distinguishing marks, of which there are only a few in use, that for the seaman-gunner always attracts attention. It is a bursting shell, worn below the rating-badge if he is a petty officer; or, if not holding any rank, in place of the rating-badge. Gun-captains, detailed by the commanding officer for the position, except at a secondary battery-gun, wear on the other arm than that on which the watch-mark or rating-badge is worn a gun with its axis horizontal and muzzle pointing forward.

Our gun-pointers, men who direct and adjust the aim of the great guns in action wear, if of the second class, a circle with crossed lines and a small square in the center; while those of the first class use the same insignia, but with the addition of a star, one inch above, with one ray pointing up.

The apprentice boys, who go into the service at an early age and study until they are graduated as seamen, wear the figure-eight knot. This is worn on the overshirt and on all coats except the heavy winter overcoat.

The watch-mark, denoting to which watch a man is assigned, is a strip of braid placed on the shoulder-seam of the overshirt and extends all around the arm. White braid is used for the blue shirts and blue braid for the white shirts. This is for all of the seamen branch; firemen and coal-passers use red braid for both blue and white clothes.

Men who have several enlistments to their credit are entitled to wear a scarlet stripe for each enlistment. These stripes are worn on the left forearm and at an angle of 45 degrees, running from the cuff end of the shirt diagonally across the arm. Petty officers who have received good-conduct badges wear these stripes made of gold lace instead of scarlet cloth.

The enlisted man also wears on the cuff of each sleeve a distinguishing mark, but unless you are a sailor you will be at a loss to know whether he is a first-class seaman or a landsman. All petty officers, seamen, and first-class firemen wear three stripes of narrow white braid on the cuffs and also on the collars of their overshirts. Ordinary seamen and second-class firemen wear two stripes; while coal-passers, landsmen, and apprentices have one row of braid on collars and cuffs. All men other than chief petty officers wear the stars on their collars, and all of them wear the black neckerchief.

OldMagazineArticles.com