

Fort on a Crusoe Isle Is 'Home' for Delinquents in Bermuda

BY EDAN WRIGHT

PAGET ISLAND, Bermuda--An old English fort built in the shape of a ship on a Robinson Crusoe island is Bermuda's 'home' for delinquent boys.

Probably the most unusual in all the world, it has a name as appropriate as the monicker of a Dickens' character--Nonsuch Training School.

The school was originally on Nonsuch Island, named for the favorite palace of Queen Elizabeth. The boys cultivated Nonsuch so well that they were almost running out of projects when they moved over to larger Paget Island and the old fort that commands the channel from the Atlantic Ocean into St. George's harbor.

Wonderland of Cedar

If the setup would suggest a Junior Alcatraz it is a notion dispelled on sight. The island is a boy's wonderland of cedar, wild lemon and orange trees, with woodland trails that would make any kid feel like an explorer. Or coves where a boy can swim and fish, dangling his line over a chunk of coral.

The fort where the boys sleep, eat and learn seamanship is surrounded by a moat with a drawbridge. But the moat is filled in on one side.

There are no locks or bolts to prevent an escape. It is only three-quarters of a mile across the harbor to the market wharf of St. George and the superintendent's boat, the Sea Horse is handy.

Few Escapes

Yet there have been only a few escapes in the close-to-a-score years of the school.

It is run by Arthur Tucker, a quiet-spoken seaman who knows if one of his boys has so much as a stomachache. Tucker has put his whole heart into the school, which he started with his own ideas. It comes under the Board of Education and is operated by the Bermuda government.

One of Tucker's ancestors was a governor of Bermuda in the 17th century, but Tucker himself was born in Canada. He served in the British navy during World War I and later in the Merchant Marine. He finally 'swallowed anchor' as he describes getting married, and brought his wife, Elsie, as a bride to Nonsuch when he started the school.

Dress Like Tars

Tucker's lads dress like British tars complete to a cap ribbon, with the insignia T.S. Nonsuch. 'Uniforms are good for them,' he said. 'Gives them something to be proud of.'

They sleep in hammocks slung on hooks in their dormitory. Every morning at 6:30 hammocks and bedding are lashed up British style with seven turns of the rope and stowed in a hammock bin.

'That does away with any loafing in bed,' Tucker remarked.

The fort is a huge 'ship' fashioned of stone and bricks from England. It cost so much that Parlia-

ment complained every brick must have been gold. Around the sides are cabins topped with 12-inch steel armor plating made as a protection against shells.

Gun Room Chapel

An old gun room with an arched ceiling was converted into a chapel. 'A good use for it,' Tucker commented.

Everything is so neatly shipshape it seemed incredible that this is home for 46 boys under 16. The only boy sign was a pile of toy sailboats hastily stacked in a corner and a dogeared picture of a ship askew on the wall.

Besides learning how to be expert boatmen, the kids are taught cooking and farming. 'Some of them become bakers or farmers but a lot go to sea,' said Tucker. 'We had some in the Normandy invasion,' he added proudly.

The boys take turns as cooks and bakers under the supervision of Mrs. Tucker. She trains them, mothers

them and nurses them when they are sick.

Two Assistants

Tucker's official assistants are a schoolmaster-minister and a former soldier in the Royal medical Corps.

In the handicraft shop the boys make boat fenders, ash trays, candlesticks and lamps. Some of the things they sell to add to their bank accounts.

Tucker gives them responsibility 'without overload-

ing them.' The Tuckers and their teen-age son live a quarter-mile away from the fort. So do the assistants. Boy quartermasters stand watch at the fort, reporting by phone.

Awarded Metal

Tucker has a medal conferred by King George for his work with the kids. But the success of the school seemed summed up in

a remark between Tucker and his wife.

They were talking about a lad who had nearly drowned.

'He belongs to me,' said Tucker.

'No, he's mine. I nursed him!' his wife retorted.

SPARE THAT BEAR

FLAGSTAFF, Me.--(UP)--Woodcutter Lester Viles heard a growl while working in a clump of trees and looked around to see a bear. Viles swung his ax, killing the bear.



SHIP'S LANTERNS BURN AT GATE--A boy quartermaster stands watch at the entrance to the old fort on Paget Island, the home for Bermuda's delinquent boys.