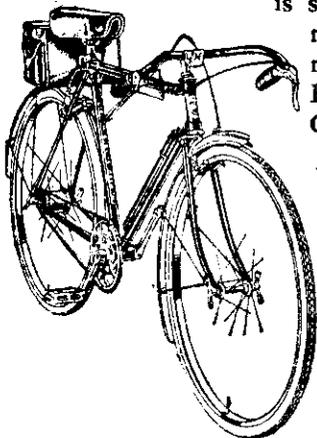


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HUMBER

HUMBER LIMITED (CYCLE DEPT.),
NOTTINGHAM, ENGLAND.

RATS LIKE BEER

(continued from previous page)

he. He says: "Here, come on, old girl, out of this." Of course he's the first to leave.

Another thing people say is: "Aren't you afraid of the rats attacking you?" No, there's no danger of that. The rat's a gallant fighter. But if he isn't interfered with or actually touched, he'll not attack under any conditions whatever. If you want to know my opinion of those stories of babies being eaten by rats in their cradles—it's all hokey. It's Fleet Street wanting to cause a sensation—that's all it is. If anyone tells us rat-catchers a thing like that we have a jolly good laugh. If the King of England told me I just wouldn't believe it. And don't you go on thinking that a rat-catcher wouldn't have much chance of speaking to the King of England. My brother Tom and I worked on the floor above the King and Queen when they were Duke and Duchess of York, and Princess Elizabeth sent a special message saying: "Please tell the rat-catcher not to touch my rabbits."

Essential War Job

Rat-catching is an essential war job. Rat-catchers are reserved from military service at 25. You can understand why that is. If rats get into a factory canteen, production is held up at once. In one place the manager wired us: "Come quickly. Every time a rat appears, 60 girls leave their machines." And, mind you, the fear of rats isn't confined to the female section. I remember one time a delayed-action bomb had been dropped in the city and a party of men came to remove it. They dug a pit round the bomb, but it got dark, and they had to leave it. Next morning when the chap in charge thought about going down, there was a rat in the pit. "Here," he said, "I'm not going down there with that rat." The bomb, which was a very large one, might have gone off at any moment. That didn't worry him, it was the rat that got on his nerves.

We did plenty of rat-catching in the city during the blitz. And working as we do at night, we had all the bad times. The worst of it was that every time a bomb dropped anywhere near us, off went all our traps, sometimes 60 or 70 at a time. Then we had to re-set the lot again. You can imagine what we thought of old Hitler and his mob then! As for the rats, they soon got used to the gunfire and the bombs. Several times we lost everything—traps, rats and all the gear. And many's the time we were working by the light of flames from a neighbouring building, but we never lost a rat-catcher.

One of the essential war jobs we do is on the aerodromes. I remember one in particular we did, where the rats got inside the bombers. There was risk of them gnawing the communicating cables, and the planes had to be examined every morning to make sure the rats hadn't done any damage during the night. We were seven nights there, and we caught a thousand-odd rats. It was so intensely cold, I remember, that the rats in our cages were frozen. I used to knock off about four in the morning and walk across the landing ground covered with snow like a snowman, carrying my cages of rats all frozen stiff in different shapes. And when I looked up, there was the Dawn Patrol going out, dim up there in the half light. There are proud moments in every profession, and that was one of them for me.

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