

WHERE ALL IS NOT QUIET ON THE WATERFRONT

German Dive-Bombers on The Shores of the Waitemata

AUCKLANDERS had a retrospective shiver of excitement when wartime security was relaxed and they learned that Japanese planes had actually been over their harbour. But what the majority of them don't know—such is the power of censorship—is that German planes have been dive-bombing and strafing ships on the Auckland waterfront for years now, and in Wellington too, for that matter. What's more, you can still see them do it if you know where to look—and if you are lucky enough to get the necessary invitation.

Until now these planes have been a very closely guarded secret, but a *Listener* representative had a look at them the other day and got dive-bombed and strafed in the process. It wasn't such a bad experience—unnerving perhaps in peaceful surroundings—but at least he was able to fire a pan of Lewis gun ammunition back at them and 30 or 40 rounds of cannon-shell of the "Chicago piano" variety.

It may come as an anti-climax to learn that all this rowdy and warlike activity occurs at the press of a switch in an unprepossessing little shanty on the waterfront, but for anyone who has been through it, the Navy's Dome Trainer is no anti-climax. Few training devices thought up during the war can compare with it, either in the complication of its equipment or in the verisimilitude with which it reproduces the sights and sounds of battle.

The Dome Trainer is in reality only half a dome—or, more exactly, the quarter of a sphere, with a radius of about 15 feet. It is lit by strip lighting on the rear, semi-circular wall which is lined with perforated fibre-board to absorb any confusing echo from the sound-system—the acoustics of the dome are excellent. In the centre of the floor, enclosed by a stout steel rail, is a variety of equipment all ruggedly constructed, while the curved section of the dome is smoothly finished in off-white, with the exception of a band of shore-sea green coming up about three feet from floor level.



A class watches while two gunnery ratings receive instruction in the Dome Trainer

As we came in the door, the officer escorting us pressed a switch and the dome was suffused with that peculiar luminous colour which hack-writers (like ourselves) refer to as the "violet dusk of the Northern (or Southern) latitudes," depending on whether we are writing for Southern. (or Northern) readers.

The effect was rather like that obtained in the "atmospheric" picture-theatres which were such a sensation when they first appeared here in the late 'twenties and early 'thirties, except that there were no tinsel stars to distract the attention and the zenith of the dome was lost in the dim light.

Before the show began the twilight was switched off and replaced by something more like the cold light of common day, so that we could inspect the various pieces of apparatus used. First of all, we noticed a heavy, steel-plated gadget down on the floor level which looked remarkably like a film projector with, about 18 inches or two feet in front of

it, a plate-glass mirror a foot square mounted at an eccentric angle on a steel rod. It turned out to be a projector after all, which cast its images on the mirror, the latter reflecting them on the plaster surface of the dome. As the film turned, the mirror swung slowly, carrying the reflected image across the soaring curve of the dome.

Just in front of the rear wall and in the centre—about where the pips would be if the dome were the quarter of an apple—there are two gun-mountings. One of these is a power operated turret, the other simply a monopod light

machine-gun mounting, rather like the Motley mounting the Army used to have on L.A.F.V.'s. There were no guns mounted on either, but grips were provided for the trainees and the equipment was handled precisely as if there were guns being used.

On the light mounting, for example, there was a cross-bar at the top of the monopod, with a hand-grip on either

WREN SUE KETTLE, operating the movie projector which is part of the trainer

An officer operates a gun in the miniature tracer range which follows the course in the Dome Trainer

side and, on top, a peep-hole and a centred ring-sight similar to those which can be seen offset on either side of a Bofors anti-aircraft gun. Mounted like a radio microphone on a steel rod about six feet high was a glass-fronted metal box the size of a small bully-beef tin. This gadget—it turned out to be a range-indicator—is just out of the line of vision of a trainee working either of the gun mountings.

There were a number of other recon-dite-looking objects (possibly switch-boxes, amplifiers, electric motors and their accompanying cables) arranged with unobtrusive precision on the floor, and hanging from hooks on the rail running round the enclosure were numerous reels of film, each in a solid-looking metal container. Everything, in fact, was so solidly constructed that one might have imagined that it was designed to resist the shock of actual bombardment rather than reproduce the simulacrum of it.

Under Fire

"Let us have one of the dive-bombing reels, Crawshaw," said our Lieutenant to a rating who accompanied us (his name wasn't Crawshaw, but we like to respect the Navy's penchant for anonymity). Crawshaw selected a reel of film—it was blue in colour and, we were told, was a special type for the job—threaded it through the spools and guides of the projector with competent fingers and switched on the lamp inside. "We'll have to let it warm up a bit," he said and proceeded to check over the various points and plugs in the mechanism, set the angle of the reflecting mirror and do a number of other mysterious things. Throughout our brief acquaintance with him, we felt we should address him as Mr. Crawshaw. He was so obviously one accustomed to instruct and correct in a highly scientific subject; at the moment he might have been a research worker preparing to bombard some unfortunate atom in the rarefied atmosphere of a higher physics laboratory.

"Should be about ready now, Sir," murmured Crawshaw. The light switch clicked, at one stride came the dark and

