

Things Are Happening In The Home Guard



National Film Unit photo

"They collect and put together their own bridging material"

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They began with scrapped telephones, which they reconditioned; with scrapped motor-cycle and motor-car headlights, which they turned into signalling lamps; with bits of wood and scraps of cloth, from which they made their own flags; with scrap metals and used wire, from which they made Morse buzzers. Some of their bigger home-made lamps will signal over 30 miles. One has, in fact, been seen over 50 miles. They can cover their whole province, and keep their commander in touch with units comprising a huge number of men.

Lessons With Explosives

We saw the explosives expert getting the men used to noise and blast. He carried with him sticks of gelignite, made into what he called "Blast Offensive Grenades." A detonator and short fuse are thrust into the gelignite. The fuse is capped with their locally-made mixture for ignition. They strike it as a match is struck on a wooden match box, and it always strikes because it is waterproofed with shellac. The blast does not kill, except with a direct hit, but within a close range it shocks, and in the confusion that follows the Home Guard knows what to do.

The expert was teaching the men who did not know already, how to make the famous "jam-tin" bomb. Actually, they used baking-powder tins. Into these they place a plug of gelignite fused and capped as for the blast offensive grenade. Packed in with the gelignite is "shrapnel," which consists of any scraps of metal on which they can lay hands. They have found that the metal-punchings from fencing standards, etc., make excellent shrapnel. Old nails don't come amiss, tacks, staples, and fragments. These weapons are really dangerous, but safe enough to use for a man who knows what he's doing and keeps his head. The thrower, however, must be careful not to kill himself. He takes cover from his own weapon, for its killing power is very great.

To throw these bombs as mortar-bombs, the Home Guard is now ex-

perimenting with its own mortars. The most successful so far has been made from a metal tube large enough to take the jam-tin bomb on a rifle-grenade cup. At the base of the mortar tube is the locking piece of a discarded shot-gun. The trigger and firing-pin of the shot-gun piece fire a blank shot-gun cartridge, which throws the bomb up to 300 yards. Elevation controls range. A method of traversing is not yet perfected. There is no doubt that it soon will be perfected, some week-end, in somebody's tool-shed, in somebody's backyard.

Similar originality goes into the design of anti-tank weapons. They know all the tricks, and are expert from long practice in the use of the Molotov Cocktail. Some tar, or heavy oil, some petrol, kerosene, and a quart bottle. A cork and a piece of rag. Light it, throw it at the tank, follow it with half a dozen others. So! Experiments are being made with a better system of lighting the cocktail. A match-head mixture, a piece of tape with a striking paper on it, shellac for waterproofing, a tug, and there you have it.

Their Own Bridges

They collect and put together their own bridging material. One small unit bridged a 20-foot stream for us in almost 15 minutes. They had a few oil drums, soldered to be watertight, and a collection of boards and timber for bracing. When the bridge was built 200 men staged a rush across it, to fan out and attack on the other side. While they crossed, the water around them was pelted with blast offensive grenades. One at least landed directly beneath the running men. They ran on without faltering. They are used to it.

Wearing home-made camouflage suits, some of them made themselves invisible in grass, ambushed a sentry, disposed of him, called up a raiding party, and successfully attacked an "enemy" detachment and destroyed their "ammunition dump." Similarly dressed, others ambushed a "tank." They stopped it with a charge of gelignite under its nose, and attacked it with Molotov Cocktails. In less than five seconds it was furiously

burning, and they put the imaginary-crew out of their misery with Tommy Guns.

Wherever they made these mock attacks, they left behind them ingenious booby traps. Trip wires and various lures set off hidden charges of explosives. A favourite method was to set a rat trap so that when released, it came back and hit a rim-fire .22 cartridge. The powder from this set off a fuse, which ignited the charge.

They blew up a road for us, and threw smoke bombs made on the spot. They supplied food and drink from their own canteen, made by themselves, on a truck chassis mobile under its own power. They rescued imaginary casualties on home-made stretchers and carried them off in their own ambulance, also home-made, also mobile under its own power.

In one bivouac, they were looked after by the W.W.S.A., who were in many cases their own wives, or the wives of soldiers in the Middle East.

We saw, for ourselves, that there was a weapon for every man, and that each day makes those weapons better and the men better able to use them. We saw for ourselves that women are working with the men. Women become camp cooks, nurses, despatch runners, or manufacturers of munitions in kitchen-factories.

Napier Was Ready

When we came to Napier, late one night, we could not see where it stood,

or where the houses lay on the bluff above the town. Not a light showed. The blackout was perfectly organised. The town was invisible a mile away. From the sea, Napier has become an empty coastline. And this without great inconvenience. The street lights still show the way, efficiently dimmed. In Napier, too, we found that ample provision had been made for air-raid shelters. We did not have time to see that the shelters were really effective, but we were told that most of the new buildings in the town had strong basements or cellars, and that these had been adapted for use during raids. All over the town we saw the notices: "Air Raid Shelter, No. 13, 270 Persons." Yes, one was numbered "13." Napier faces the facts.

Perhaps we were over enthusiastic, because we saw them at their best. But we agreed we were right in believing that Hawke's Bay had an army that could hit hard. We had seen what people could do for themselves if they made the effort. We saw people working as free people. When they wanted something, or saw something that needed doing, it was not their custom to say "They ought to do something about it," or "It's time the Government did something." We had an impression that in Hawke's Bay they had taken life and living firmly in their own hands, and would look, if aid were needed, first to themselves.

Westland As It Was

AIR, rail travel and the service car have made the West Coast of the South Island of New Zealand easily accessible to tourist and business man, but something of the Coast's tradition of isolation still remains from the roaring, busy days of gold-seeking, when small cities sprang up and disappeared in the course of a few years, when money was easy come, easy go, and a man was judged by what he was and not by what he claimed he was.

The Coast never was and never will be like any other part of New Zealand, and something of the secret of this distinction is revealed in a series of six talks on early Westland, the first of which will be heard from 3YA on Monday, February 2, given by A. P. Harper, the veteran New Zealand explorer and mountaineer. Mr. Harper knows the Coast, as it is to-day and as it was 50 years ago, as few other New Zealanders do. His father was Leonard Harper, who made the first crossing of the Southern Alps in 1857 and with James Mackay was responsible for the earliest exploration of South Westland; he is a nephew of Archdeacon Harper, one of the most celebrated figures in the early history of the coast; and he himself has explored the wildest and most distant corners of Westland and has met and talked with some of the many picturesque figures on the old diggings.

Up to the beginning of this century the Coast had produced 300 tons weight

of gold, and even with gold at its former value of just under four pounds an ounce, that represents a considerable reward. In his talks Mr. Harper discusses the value of some of the finds, and after discounting the digger's inevitable tendency to exaggerate his success, comes to the conclusion that the richest patch of fine sea gold was at the Okarito, Five Mile Beach. The best pocket on the beach was said to have yielded one man £1,600 for two months' work.

Another rich claim was at Ross, not far south of Hokitika, and a legend has sprung up around the name of Cassius, a digger who is reputed to have won 20,000 ounces of gold in two years. Many stories of fantastic successes, however, must be treated with more than a little caution, says Mr. Harper. An old West Coast friend of his once warned him that if a digger had worked ground worth, say, £2 a day, the £2 would in the course of time grow into two ounces, or about three times the actual value.

Of Archdeacon Harper, Mr. Harper has many revealing stories to tell. With the Coast's the man came first and the clergyman second. Inquiring once from some diggers as to the secret of the Archdeacon's popularity, Mr. Harper received the reply, "Well, you see, he could box better than any of us, he could ride any horse, and if a flooded river had to be crossed, he pulled as good an oar as any of us."