



# SINGAPORE AND SINCE:

*Are You Anxious? Have You Made Plans? What About Your Children?*

**- WE ASK SOME QUESTIONS: HERE ARE THE ANSWERS -**



**M**OST of us, when Singapore fell, accepted the blow calmly. Did we accept it too calmly?

To find out whether there has been any noticeable reaction since—any relapse into despondency or new flurry of preparation for the future—members of "The Listener" staff have made a large number of inquiries among a large variety of people.

To narrow the investigation down a little, and get as many people as possible to talk about the same things, each person interviewed was asked these questions:

1. *Is there alarm (a) in your home; (b) in your factory or office since the fall of Singapore?*
2. *Do you discuss your own safety?*
3. *Are you or your friends uncertain about what to do if a raid comes?*
4. *Are you making personal plans?*
5. *Have you or your friends given up your games or your hobbies or private interests to concentrate on emergency preparedness?*
6. *Are your children aware of the danger or do you hide it from them?*

**T**HE men we approached denied anything like alarm, though some expressed strong dissatisfaction with present arrangements.

## Warm Clothes and "The Doings"

After administering the customary caution that anything he said would be taken down in writing, we questioned one factory worker at his machine.

"No," he said emphatically, "There's no alarm in my home, nor here, either. There has been plenty of talk, plenty 'What the hell?' so to speak, but nothing more than that. I don't discuss my own safety, and I haven't heard others doing so. Some of the women, I think, would rather stay indoors than get into a slit-trench—they like a roof over their heads—but I don't know anyone who is preoccupied with his own skin."

In the same way, he had made no personal plans, and apart from the time he gave up to fire-watching, he was living a more or less normal existence, and still enjoyed recreation. He had no children, but those at the school opposite his home seemed to be well aware of possible dangers, and well trained to meet them.

"And do you know what to do if trouble comes?" we asked.

He scratched his chin. "Well, I'm a fire-watcher, and I suppose I'd have to report first to the team-leader. If I wasn't wanted, then I'd go to the shelter in the basement. If the alarm went while I was at home, I'd get into the shelter in the garden."

"Would you take anything with you?"

"Well, if the night were cold, I suppose I'd take some warm clothing and a drop of the doings. Once there I'd sit tight till the 'all clear' went."

## Fatalist

**W**E struck one confirmed fatalist—or perhaps it was just the Anglo-Saxon phlegm carried to the nth degree. He gave emphatic negatives to the first four questions. To number 5, he replied that since he was getting on in years, it did not affect him much. He had not yet given up his favourite sport—he still had a bottle of it every evening—and since his only hobbies were going to the pictures occasionally and reading his Bible, he felt that he could still indulge them in moderation.

"What would you do in an emergency?" he was asked.

"I'd just sit here," he replied, gripping his desk with both hands. "No, perhaps I shouldn't say that. I'd obey all the regulations, but beyond that, I wouldn't exert myself to save my own skin. If you're going to get it, you'll get it. I've known men go through several campaigns and then kill themselves falling off a bicycle, so what's the good of worrying?"

## Hotel-Keeper

"I'VE told the customers we'll leave the bar open and they can take charge if the Japs come. We won't wait for 'em," said a jovial publican from a provincial town near a military camp, when we asked him if he discussed personal

safety across the counter. This publican sounded as if he had no worries—the bar was always full of soldiers, and business was on the up and up.

"Alarm? No, no alarm, but plenty of criticism," he told us, in answer to Question 1. "The customers get going, and there are some regular arguments, you know, and you daren't take sides. Churchill's going out and Stafford Cripps is going in, all that sort of stuff. All the more since Singapore, too. They're all disgusted."

"Uncertain about what to do? Well, no, it's all arranged, everyone's got his job to do in our town, and as far as that goes, there isn't going to be any panic or anything. The only personal plans we've made is digging trenches for the guests and the staff. You've got to do that."

The suggestion that anyone had given up his games, hobbies, or private interests was almost too much for our licensed victualler, whose own private interests showed ever more interest as the war went on; of course, he said, the petrol restrictions knocked games back a bit.

## On a Ferry-Boat

**N**EXT we asked three men who live out of the city and travel in and out by ferry boat.

The first, a public servant, had not noticed any difference in his home or among his friends. He was a member of the Home Guard, and with each succeeding week, all members were becoming busier and doing more urgent and more practical work. But there was no alarm in their ranks, though they indulged in a certain amount of alarmist talk jocularly. All of them, he thought, had given up sports, hobbies, and private interests to do their duty in the Home Guard.

The second man, a city messenger, said he had not watched his associates very closely, but he thought that most of them were worried—he himself was—about plans in an emergency. He met liftmen, carriers, and storemen a good deal, and they were all inclined to complain that we seemed to be drifting along without direction. He admitted that there had been a change for the better during the last week or 10 days, but would like to see the authorities do what they were now doing in Australia—"stop appealing and begin ordering." He had two children at school, and they spoke a good deal when they came home about "what they were going to do at school if the Japs came," but he did not think they were afraid. He certainly said nothing in front of them that might make them more afraid.

The third man worked for a stock and station firm, and began by saying that he "belonged to the old school." He did not mean the school that wore special ties, but the school that believed

in hard work and discipline. He had been far more alarmed before Singapore than since, because we then seemed to be unaware of the fact that danger even threatened us. Now, he thought, we were waking up. He was too old to serve in the forces or in the Home Guard, and too slow to be of much use on a roof or a fire escape, and had not, therefore, changed his way of life much during the war, and had not changed it at all since Singapore fell. But he was for spreading alarm—not panic, he insisted, but good healthy alarm—by all reasonable means. The situation, he thought, was very alarming, and those who shut their eyes and ears were the real menace.

Asked whether he would alarm school-children, he said, "No, I would not alarm them. But I would tell them plainly that wicked men were trying to take New Zealand, and that their fathers and even their mothers might have to help in driving these men away."

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**Q**UESTIONS were then put to different types of women. Among their answers we quote these:

## Librarian (Aged 22)

"When I heard of the fall of Singapore, my first reaction was disgust. And then I realised that after all I'd known for some time that it would happen. I certainly think it increases the likelihood of an invasion or a bombing attack."

"We're not greatly worried at home, because we're well out in the suburbs. But every time I'm waiting for the tram I can't help reading a notice asking whether you've dug a trench in your back yard and whether you've got a stirrup pump. I've got to the stage of seriously considering buying a bucket to keep clean water in. I haven't started getting together a little stock of tinned stuff yet, but I *did* preserve some beans."

"My friends and I don't discuss the question of raids or invasion. I don't think I worry about it at all. But last night I did dream about an attack in which all the bridges were blown up, so maybe it's all subconscious."

"I think there is a certain amount of apprehension among the girls in the library. We all go round asking each other things like 'Can you speak Japanese?' and 'Do you know that this (nod), means no in Japanese?' But underneath all the flippancy there's an undercurrent of seriousness."

## Housewife and Social Worker

"I WAS depressed, but not panic-stricken by the fall of Singapore. After all, we had all been expecting it for some time. I don't think that it brings a possible invasion of New Zealand."

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