

GUERRILLA TACTICS FOR NEW ZEALAND

Tom Wintringham's Advice On What To Do If The Japanese Come Here

THIS war we are fighting is the most mechanised, industrialised, mass production sort of war there ever has been. Yet at the same time, it gives bigger opportunities than ever before to irregular forces that can penetrate or hold on behind the enemy's line—Home Guards or guerillas or commandos. Fighting in Spain five years ago, we found that course useful even when we were very poorly armed. The Russian guerillas have helped to throw back the Germans, and if New Zealand is invaded, similar forces can do a great deal to destroy the Japanese.

In the last great war, there was no military value in guerilla fighting except in the Arabian Desert. In this war, things are very different. Fronts then were continuous. Now they are not. An army such as that of the Germans or the Japanese consists usually of a very strong spearhead thrusting forward, with very vulnerable supply services coming up the roads or tracks behind it. In the last war, if any guerilla bands started attacking reinforcements, those reinforcements would probably consist of men marching on their feet without any baggage but their rifles. In this war, reinforcements are often men on bicycles or men crowded together in trucks who cannot use their weapons properly until they are out of their trucks. If a single well-aimed shot hits the driver of a truck, it can mean a nasty crash with all the trucks behind jammed up as a good target for the guerillas.

Hitting the Soft Spots

All the latest developments in tactics are aimed at getting men and weapons to the rear of the enemy, to the soft spots behind his armoured unit of fit

fighting men. This is the main aim of the parachutist, the troops landed from planes and from tanks used for deep drives into enemy territory. And I myself think the guerilla fighter has advantages over all these people. He doesn't have to get to the rear of the enemy. He just hides in the ground he knows and lets the enemy's forces go by him. Then he starts playing all sorts of tricks against dispatch riders, against enemy commanders and staff in their cars, and against any sort of transport.

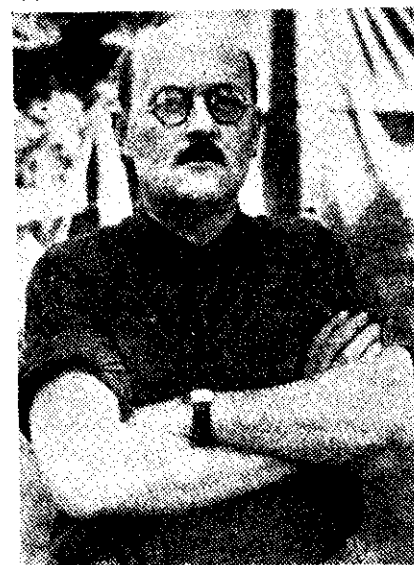
Wherever the enemy has stores or air-fields or command centres or transports, there must be enemy sentries, and an enemy sentry is something to be stalked. He is in strange country, and the guerilla is in country he knows. The sentry, therefore, is at a disadvantage. If you can approach quietly (almost any weapon will put a sentry out; the quieter the weapon the better), and if you can put him out in complete silence, you can go on to deal with the men sleeping somewhere behind him, and with the stores or planes or headquarters that they are supposed to be guarding. Lack of sleep can destroy an army faster than bullets can. It takes weeks of hard fighting to kill off the whole of a military unit. Four nights without sleep will make a unit absolutely useless, and if the enemy knows that his sentries are likely to get knocked out soon after darkness comes, few of those enemy soldiers are going to sleep well. The guerilla force is an invisible army, its shot coming always from an unexpected place, its men always having a get-away so that the enemy never has a fixed target. It can be like a swarm of mosquitoes or wasps and just as difficult to swot. Quite a few men can keep a large enemy force continually awake and continually worried.

Sometimes guerillas work in complete silence. It is slow work moving silently at night—no time to walk on tip-toe. You have to lift your feet rather higher than usual and put them down carefully, testing the ground for twigs that may snap or leaves that may rustle. If the enemy lights a flare, you don't fling yourself down; you stand like a tree. Or you may have to crawl, testing the ground with your hands, then moving each knee to the spot where you put your hands. Of course moving quietly is such a slow job it is better sometimes to make a distracting noise. The Moors played that trick on us in Spain during the Civil War. One Moor would be coming towards our sentry, another would drag a blanket along the ground 50 yards away, using a length of rope to pull it. While the sentry was listening to the rustling which this blanket made on his left side, the first man would crawl silently up to him on the right.

What 20 Men Could Do

The modern army has a strong armoured head and shoulders, and weak unarmoured legs and feet. Home Guard units that know the right moment to take to the woods and the hills can do a lot to trip up such an army by striking at its weakest points—its communications. But they can also do a certain amount before that against even the strongest forces the enemy can bring along. I was listening recently to a Home Guard sergeant in the south of England. He was giving a lesson on tactics to a village unit of 20 men. He said: "If two German Army Corps come up the road from Brighton one morning, you 20 men are going to get pushed around a bit. Then when you have pulled yourself together, the first thing you have to do is counter-attack." That may sound a little absurd—the odds I've stated are slightly heavy. But it's not as absurd as it sounds—it's good tactics, the right idea. If the Germans ever cross the 70 miles or so that separate them from this country, our friend's idea of two Germany Army Corps coming up his road may be no exaggeration. The Germans, and as far as I can see, the Japanese also, usually concentrate very heavy striking forces at the points they choose for attack. What could these 20 men of the Home Guard do against such a force? You could first of all check the light troops that the enemy sends ahead of his columns—motor-cyclists and scouting vehicles. These light troops move very fast if there is no opposition, but they can be ambushed by a few well-hidden rifle-runners. You can stop a cyclist with a wire strung across the road about the height of a rider's shoulders. Don't swing it straight across at right angles to the road, put it slanting at 45 degrees, so that his own speed takes the rider to the roadside where you are waiting. Then go straight for his weapon, which may be a tommy-gun,

"Here is the formula for our victory" says—



TOM WINTRINGHAM

whose talk to New Zealand from the BBC last week is printed on this page. He led the British troops in the International Brigade in Spain, where he learnt many of the tricks described here. As a writer (notably in the Penguin "New Ways of War") he has probably done more than any other writer to modernise the British Army. He founded a training school for the Home Guard in England, has lately been lecturing to the War Office on guerilla warfare

and see what you can do with it. At short ranges you can do quite a lot. A tommy-gun will probably cut a man in halves at 50 yards. There's no need to try this out until you have accumulated a lot of ammunition, but you can take it from me that any odd weapons you may pick up from the enemy can often be very valuable.

How to Deal With Tanks

To come back to those 20 men of the Home Guard. After they have checked the enemy scouts, they will quite likely have to deal with armoured cars or tanks. You can't expect to stop large forces of enemy tanks, but you can worry them and stop some of them. Any tank, however it's made, has some weak spots. It must take in air not only for the men inside to breathe, but also for the engine. It needs a good deal of air to burn its fuel, and wherever air can go into the tank, flames can go in. When we were up against German and Italian tanks in Spain, the people who were hunting tanks sometimes scored with a bottle of petrol, sometimes with rags or blankets well soaked in petrol. Whenever you can surprise the tank, you are likely to find that the hatch is open or that there are openings in front of the gunner or driver through which they are looking out. Tanks are very vulnerable to high explosives in any form. Miners and others who are accustomed to handling this stuff in their ordinary occupations can fairly easily improvise anti-tank grenades.

All this, of course, is straight fighting
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"ANY TANK . . . has some weak spots": British Home Guards deal with an immobilised tank during exercises