

MECHANICS GO BACK TO SCHOOL

Learning How To Keep The Wheels of War Moving

SHOULD New Zealand ever be invaded, one of the Army's first worries will be to keep road communications flowing smoothly. That will depend on the motor transport section operating without dislocation or breakdown, which, in its turn, will depend on both men and material—the quality and readiness of the material, the training of the men (from colonels down to grease-grimed mechanics), and their grip of the job they have to do.

At an Army School located at a large motor company's plant I watched twenty men, divided into teams of five, disembowelling four big Army trucks; I listened to experts from the factory initiating them into the mysteries of steering geometry and engine torque and brake horsepower; and finally I sat with them in a small theatre and watched documentary films.

From all over New Zealand these men come, and although they have all been connected with the motor trade in civil life and some of them are master mechanics, they are back at school for

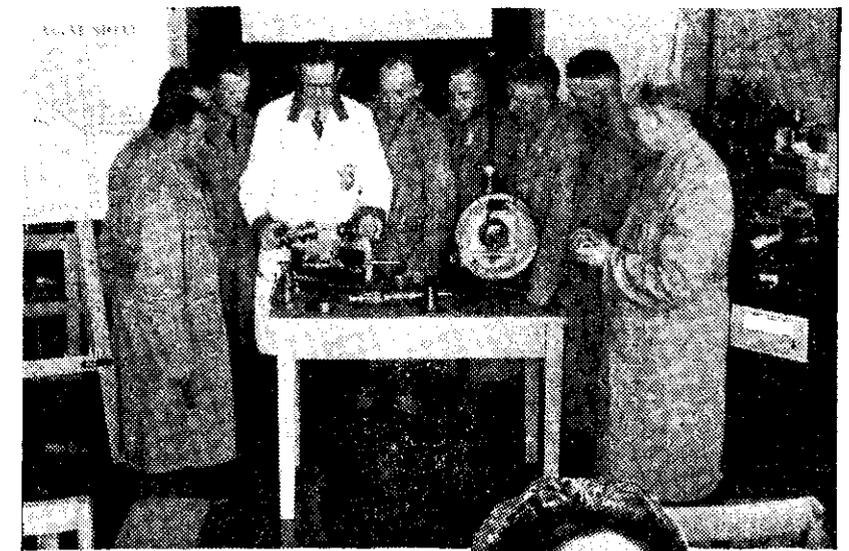
eight weeks to learn the complete alphabet of motor trucks and Bren gun carriers. "That's one advantage of belonging to this outfit," a sergeant who in peace time owned a garage in a Wairarapa town told me. "When I get back to civil life after the war I'll know a hundred per cent. more than when I left."

That is important. The class were young men, I noted, keen to make their way in life, and determined not to be sidetracked after the war. Most of them had ambitions to settle down in businesses of their own, and any extra knowledge and experience they got out of the army would help them to that end.

Intensive Theory

Though the course is a new one, and the class I saw was the first to take it, this company has been operating an army school nearly a year now, a fourteen-day refresher course for mechanics.

They do theory only; there's no time for practical work. The course is short, sharp, and intensive, and it is aimed, briefly, to help mechanics to diagnose



ARMY SCHOOL trainees learn the theory of truck engines, gear boxes, back axles and other equipment in classrooms which are complete with working models, cut-away parts and a motion picture projector



TROOPER RICHARD CLARK is a young Maori from Wairoa, Hawke's Bay. He is one of the keenest members of a motor company's Army School; has ambitions to be a fitter and turner after the war

trouble, find the source and make a repair as snappily as possible. Another motor company conducts another school for the Army, this one taking a raw recruit from scratch and making a mechanic out of him in four months: just how good a mechanic depending, of course, on the quality of the raw recruit.

The eight weeks' course at the school, while it does not demand expert knowledge of motor mechanics to start with, does require at least a rudimentary knowledge. The trainee may not be expected to draw a graph of a brake horsepower test, but he will be expected to have a general idea of what is implied by brake horsepower.

He arrives at the school, then, as a mechanic; he is drafted to his five-man section, introduced to his instructor, and then given an army truck to start pulling to pieces. The trucks—one to each section, and a Bren carrier for a whole class—are army trucks in urgent need of overhaul, their condition mute testimony of the hard work they are put to.

Putting It Into Practice

He starts on the engine. First he attends a lecture from his instructor on the fine points of pulling an engine down—reboring, valve grinding, adjusting for wear and tear. Also pitfalls and short-cuts. Then he is let loose on the truck, to put into practice all he has learned at his lectures. The instructor is standing over him, of course.

Batteries, tyres, fuel (both Diesel and petrol), are special departments, and are dealt with by experts from battery, tyre, and fuel companies. Also a special department is the highly-scientific business of tuning up, which takes several days. And while the power unit of the Bren gun carrier is a standard one, there are special problems here, too, especially in the track and the steering.

Naturally the men look forward to the documentary films as a relief from the intense instruction of the rest of the day. The films serve a purpose, however. They are mostly instructional, though for relief there's often a news-reel or a comedy short. The programme I saw included the Quentin Reynolds film *London Can Take It*, a sports thrill, and an escorted tour of a great automobile plant in Canada.

The eight weeks' course over, the men return to their Army units with a little more grease imbedded in the pores of their skin and a great deal more knowledge of the inner workings of trucks and Bren gun carriers in their skulls. For most of them the course brings promotion and added responsibility, as they pass on to jobs as Sergeant Instructors and Sergeants in charge of repair depots, in New Zealand and overseas.

Their attitude to the course is best summarised, I think, in the words of a grimy young corporal who was having trouble with the inward parts of a back axle, and who looked up and swore gently and said, "I never realised before how little I knew about these damned things."

—J.G.M.

A Blitz in the Garden!

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