



THE BATTLE OF THE TELEPHONES



"THE enemy has landed at — and is advancing rapidly! What would you do?"

"The forward troops have run out of ammunition. The ammunition dump has been blown up! The ammunition supply company has been wiped out! The roads are blocked! The bridges are down! What would you do?"

"The enemy is reported in Otaki! The enemy is reported to be evacuating Otaki. Farmer Brown, of Otaki, complains that the enemy has shot his pedigree bull! What would you do?"

"Our left flank is hard-pressed! What would you do? At the same time, supply a return of all troops in your unit not of British parentage, and state whether married or single, giving age, parentage, number of children, and whether previously convicted."

"What would you do?"

THE "battle" is on. The embryo intelligence officers are getting the third degree—a test of wits and staying power that goes on for tense, gruelling hours.

They are completing a course from which some will graduate as intelligence officers to army units in New Zealand. They have been roundly lectured in the importance of their work. On their ability to pick the eyes out of any situation, maintain a quick flow of information between command and fighting unit, depends the efficiency of attack or defence.

"That's why we lost Singapore and Burma and Malaya. That's why we were hopelessly beaten." The instructing officer makes it quite clear at this New Zealand army school. "Here were the best troops in the world—and I really mean the world. British regulars—some of the finest regiments—beaten, thrashed, and kicked out of one stronghold after another, because why? Because many of them had the ideas with which many of you came to this school. They thought intelligence officers were men who could read maps and move across country at night with a compass. They forgot the fundamentals; a close and continued study of your enemy, a never-ending searching of his methods, his arms, his training, his morale, his dispositions, his supplies, his aspirations, and as a result of an experienced study of these factors, an intimation of his probable plans and intentions."

To approximate fighting conditions in a country at peace within its own borders, the intelligence school makes war by telephone. The utmost ingenuity gives the idea extraordinary training value. Students are divided into syndi-

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cates, each with a headquarters, complete with 'phones, maps, battleboards, typewriters. The fighting comes to them by telephone from a control room in which the chief instructor directs operations from a full script of the operations.

Not for a second once the "battle" starts is the student given any let-up. Demands, reports, commands, everything conflicting, bewildering, flow continuously in to him by telephone.

Harassed, nerve-wracked, he fights for time to think against the incessant ringing of the 'phones. But he gets no time. He must think while he acts. Every mistake would mean a skirmish lost, an opportunity given away, if the battle were real. To make it more difficult, apart from having a battle on his hands, he is plagued also with irrelevancies. Requests for statistics from headquarters, visits by "local dignitaries," complaints from civilians.

If he survives, then he's good.

THE battle begins. The 'phone rings: "Hello, hello. Is that the Army? This is the Mayor of —. They're all around here. . ."

"Wait a minute. Who are?"

"The Japs. They're passing through the town on armoured vehicles, and there are lorries of infantry. . . I can't talk any longer. . ."

The headquarters begins to buzz. Maps are marked.

"Call up the forward units," says the officer who answered the 'phone, "and tell them that Japs A.F.V.'s and lorried infantry are just passing north through — and let them know. . ."

"How many A.F.V.'s?" asks the instructor. "What size lorries, and how

many men on each? Are they their own lorries or have they captured some of ours?"

The intelligence officer realises, too late, his mistake.

"I didn't ask him. I'll ring him back . . . he'll probably be at the Town Hall."

"Yes, of course he will," smiles in instructor. "The streets are full of Japanese tanks and soldiers, and the Mayor will be in the Town Hall probably writing his speech for the next borough elections. . . No, you slipped. Never mind, answer the 'phone."

"This is A Battalion. Our forward patrols report that a large body of enemy troops passed our front forward position 685795 in an easterly direction. About 20 minutes ago. About two platoons."

Map references are studied. It is obvious that the enemy will strike the right flank of B Battalion. Some of the students fail to pass on the information.

The instructor reminds them, and is still talking when the door opens and a civilian staggers in. His head is swathed in a blood-stained bandage, and as he starts to speak, he collapses. Painfully, he raises his head and points to the door, gasping, "Guns . . . guns landing off ships . . . big guns . . . warships."

The staff all start asking questions. He faints. They bring him round, but in the excitement they rush him again and again he faints. Only when they question him slowly and reasonably does he tell the number, types and sizes of the guns and ships. Again the instructor points out the errors. The class is learning fast. Even while the instructor is talking, the 'phone rings. It is a further report from the right forward battalion that they have captured two enemy soldiers identified as belonging to the Second Japanese Marines.

Flood of Reports

For the next hour the 'phone never stops ringing. Reports from forward units giving positions of enemy patrols and their own movements; inquiries from division for intelligence summaries; fire plans from units; reconnaissance reports from the Army Co-operation Squadrons. All the time the situation map is being altered under the watchful eye of the instructor, and seemingly irrelevant scraps of information are being juggled by the intelligence officer and his staff as they try to piece together the strength and composition of the enemy, while forward and flanking units are kept informed of the situation.

Again the door flies open. In bursts a civilian who demands to see the head man immediately.

"What sort of a ruddy army do you call this?" he screams, knocking the battleboard flying. "A man spends his money on Liberty Bonds and patriotic associations and what does he get? Japs

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"... Threw the evidence through the door"