

and sunk, with a heavy loss of life, spread like leaking gas, and smelled about as sweet. The story was repeated all over New Zealand, and all over New Zealand relatives and friends of the men who left on the transport heard the report. The anxiety can be imagined. So serious and general was the reaction that the Government had to broadcast an official denial of the sinking, and of any attack. The people were reassured, the lie had been killed; but implicit in the denial was the valuable information to the enemy that a troop transport had left New Zealand and was still on the high, and dangerous, seas. The aim of that rumour had been accomplished.

Then there are the rumours either originating from or circulated by people who apparently are not very bright. Security officers in New Zealand have tracked down false reports that undoubtedly have been started by enemy agents and sympathizers. However, the greatest number of rumours which may help the enemy are not started by them. They are started by New-Zealanders whose loyalty to country and war effort is 100 per cent.—it cannot be doubted. They are just not very bright. There is no other conclusion. People's conscious and unconscious Reasons for Rumours are suggested later in this article. But the damage they cause is no less harmful because it is unwitting.



Recently in Wellington a number of the ship's company of an American vessel spent a night ashore; they attended a dance. A representative of a photographic firm was present, many photographs were taken; the next day a large order (of £70) was made with the firm. Some of the photographs were to be collected by the partners of the soldiers and sailors, the rest to be forwarded to the ship by mail. Later in the week the order was completed, and when a sailor from another ship came into the shop some of the photographs were displayed on the counter. The sailor recognized some of the men, and mentioned that their ship had been lost with all hands. The manager was dismayed, there was nothing to do but cancel the order. Girls (some of whom were wives and sweethearts of the men concerned) were told the "sad" news, and, further, that instructions had been received from the authorities to cancel the order. The story was entirely false. Security officers were quick to act, but in other and similar cases they are often too late to save grief and anxiety.

In a New Zealand coastal town the E.P.S., after inactivity for several months, was called out to ensure that the organization was capable still of working quickly and smoothly. Here are a few examples of the clutch of rumours that were quickly clucked round and far beyond the town: (1) enemy submarines were off the coast; (2) enemy subs. and an aircraft carrier were off Cape X; (3) enemy warships had been seen off the coast; (4) an enemy sub. or an aeroplane from a carrier had sunk two New Zealand destroyers; (5) a minesweeper had been sunk; (6) of five bombers sent from an Air Force station to bomb the sub. only three had returned—two had been lost to enemy gunfire. All these stories because one Thursday night the E.P.S. had made sure it could save the pub. if there was a fire.

The interest in rumour is perfectly natural and healthy, and rises from normal human curiosity. In peacetime it is, generally, more or less harmless, but in time of war there arise special circumstances which make the dissemination of rumour much more widespread and much