

TALK FOR FIRE GUARDS

The following is the text of the first of a series of five minute talks for fire guards by Col. Guy Symonds D.S.O., Fire Adviser to the Home Office, to be given in the B.B.C. Home Service tonight at 7.5:-

I think you know that a little while ago I was sent specially to have a look at the A.R.P. work in Russia and I was telling you the other night about my experiences in Moscow, and I had something to tell you about their fire watching methods. I want however to draw no comparisons - to each country the method that suits them best. Abundant man power they have, and remember this includes women, for little difference is made between the sexes. Rigid and cast iron discipline is their lot, yet you, yes, I suppose I may say the great majority of you, are old hands at the business, and we, most of us, have been through our ordeal by fire.

I have the utmost confidence in the issue if and when we have to face that ordeal again because I do not believe for one moment that your spirit of self sacrifice, your determination and your courage, are one whit less than those of our allies.

I am indeed privileged to be chosen to start this series of talks, and when I ask you, as I do most deeply and most earnestly to listen in to the next evenings' talks, every single one of them please remember that I am not here to lecture you. I claim no greater degree of courage, no measure of common sense above that of the average man or woman, but I am a very old hand at the business of handling incendiary bombs. I and one other, Colonel Thomas, have been at it now for close on six years.

As long ago as January, 1937, we put untrained women into actual furnished houses where bombs had been burning for two minutes or longer, women who, mark you, had never seen an incendiary bomb before, and had only had half an hour's instruction in the appliances they would have to use. The remarks of many highly qualified observers are on record. The leading Chief Fire Brigade Officer of the day was very concerned at anyone being allowed to go into the room where he was acting as observer. The Head Master of our most famous public school observing at another window, said that, unless he had seen such a fire tackled with a small jet, he would have never believed it possible. Yet the four fires were all dealt with, and the parties came through unscathed, though through a slip of mine it was a very near thing for some of them.

I have little to add. Your courage will never fail us. Suitable appliances are now available in enormous numbers. A little organisation and a little training is all that is required of you, and that you will hear more about in the forthcoming talks.

When our time of trial is over and victory is ours, as it shall most surely be, I want you to remember a certain signal made by one of our old time admirals to those under his command, after a successful fleet action, a signal, the words of which were far too little known to this generation until perhaps tonight. Memorise it if you can. It may not be flown in strings of coloured bunting but if you and I can repeat it in all good faith as referring to our households, our workmates and our friends and neighbours generally, it will do fitting honour to those good folk and to the courage of our race. That signal read: "God send to see such a company together again when need is."