

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE

55, WHITEHALL,
LONDON, S.W.1

PRESS NOTICE

13th August, 1945.
M.A.F. 1456

FARM FIRES

The Ministry of Agriculture again appeals to everyone living or working in the country to take all possible precautions to prevent the destruction by fire of farm property and produce, which are of vital importance to the nation in the present food shortage.

Smoking near ricks, carelessness with bonfires, dropped cigarette ends, pipe ashes and lighted matches have been responsible for heavy losses.

At this time of year there are many visitors to the countryside. Volunteers working at agricultural camps, boys and girls at school agricultural camps, and holiday makers are all asked to be particularly careful. Every scrap of food is needed this year.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION, BROADCAST, OR USE ON CLUB TAPES BEFORE
0830 B.S.T. (i.e. FOR EVENING PAPERS) ON

MONDAY, AUGUST 13.

THIS EMBARGO SHOULD BE RESPECTED OVERSEAS BY PREFACING ANY
MESSAGES FILED WITH THE EMBARGO

HE SAVED HUNGERFORD BRIDGE

In the London Gazette of June 9, 1942, was announced the award of the George Cross to Lieut. Commander Ernest Oliver Gidden, G.C., O.B.E., G.M., R.N.V.R., of Neath, South Wales, for "great gallantry and undaunted devotion to duty".

Now, for the first time can be told the full story which lay behind that brief seven-word citation.

During the height of the London blitz an unexploded parachute mine dropped on Hungerford railway bridge, Charing Cross. At the time the mine fell, some trains and many sleepers were on fire and the Charing Cross ^{Hotel} was burning in the background. Underground trains had to be stopped and many buildings, including the War Office were evacuated.

Lieut. Commander (then Lieutenant) Gidden arrived on the bridge shortly after dawn and found the mine lying across the live electric wire at the foot of the main signal gantry with the bomb fuse and primer release mechanism facing downwards. The electric current from the rail had melted some of the metal around the bomb fuse and primer release mechanism to such an extent that if the fuse was to be removed at all, it could only be done by drilling. But, before any attempt could be made to arrest the operation of the fuse by the insertion of a "gag", a lump of molten metal had to be prised from the surface of the fuse itself.

Before operations of any kind could be begun, the mine had to be turned to get at the bomb fuse. Turning the mine was in itself likely to detonate it with disastrous results to railway communications and important buildings. In order to be in a position to control this operation with accuracy, Lieut. Commander Gidden stood at a distance of only 50 yards from the mine while the necessary pull was being exerted from a distance. To appreciate the danger it should be understood that the fuses in this mine are clockwork and liable to be actuated by the slightest vibration.

Lieut. Commander Gidden had to stop firemen from playing water on the sleepers and trains while he got to work. The burning wood, however, kept giving off loud cracks during the whole of this delicate operation, thus making it difficult to listen for the clockwork in the fuse running which is essential to safety.

/At length

At length, the surface of the fuse was successfully cleared and a "gag" inserted, but the molting had damaged the part in question and the gag would not fit securely, a fact of which Lieut. Commander Gidden was aware. He then attempted to remove the remains of the ring which holds the fuse in place with a hammer and chisel. At the first blow, the clockwork in the fuse started to run. Lieut. Cdr. Gidden, who had kept his head close to the fuse, heard the ticking and made off as best he could but, as it was necessary to jump from sleeper to sleeper with a 10-foot drop below, there was little chance of escape.

By sheer good luck, the "gag" held. Lieut.Cdr. Gidden returned with a drill and succeeded in removing the ring, but even then he found it necessary to prise the fuse out with a chisel. Normally these are removed from a distance for fear of some anti-handling device.

This exhibition of cold-blooded courage continued for six hours until Lt.Cdr. Gidden had completed successfully the operation of rendering the mine harmless.

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NAVAL AFFAIRS

13.8.45. No.2.

POST OFFICE STAFF REWARDED FOR DETECTIVE WORK

Counter clerks who stop Savings Bank
frauds

Although the Post Office has its own special section for dealing with attempts by the public to defraud the G.P.O. staffed by detectives and investigating experts, many of the offenders who are caught owe their arrest to the ordinary men and women behind the Post Office counters and to the telephonists at their switchboards.

This year nearly 180 of the staff have been commended by the Postmaster General and rewarded by gifts of money. Included in the number are 125 women.

Frauds against the Savings Bank and attempts to cash forged savings stamps have been among the cases detected by the counter staff recently.

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GENERAL POST OFFICE

13.8.45. No.3.

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BRITISH PACIFIC FLEET FORMS DRAMATIC SOCIETY

Shore-based personnel of the British Pacific Fleet are forming their own Royal Naval Dramatic Society at their Sydney Headquarters.

One of the most enthusiastic supporters of the scheme is Lieut. Robert Quentin R.N.V.R., of Tunbridge Wells, formerly a leading member of the Oxford University Dramatic Society and now attached to the Commander-in-Chief's staff in the Pacific.

He has taken over a Sydney theatre where he plans to produce a succession of shows by naval actors and actresses.

The idea is for the Navy personnel to entertain civilian audiences and for the present only "straight" plays will be given. The venture will be self-supporting.

Although it will naturally not be possible for the men of the B.P.F. to take part in the productions, Lieut. Quentin plans to make recordings of the plays for distribution to the ships to be reproduced over the internal broadcasting system.

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NAVAL AFFAIRS

13/8/45 No. 17.

S.E. ASIA COMMUNIQUE NO. 588.

H.Q., S.E.A.C.

August 13, 1945.

LAND:

Burma: Japanese resistance continued in the Lower Sittang sector North-east of Pegu.

Enemy snipers were active against our patrols in the area of Myitkyo and astride the Pegu-Martaban railway East of Abya.

North-East of Penwagon on the banks of the Sittang river our troops encountered machine gun fire and sniping. Aggressive patrolling and ambushes inflicted a number of casualties on the enemy in this area.

On the Toungoo-Mawchi road the advance continued.

AIR:

In direct support of our ground forces, Thunderbolts and Spitfires of Air Command on August 11th attacked Japanese troops East of the Sittang river, between Kyaukkyi and Boyagyi. Other Spitfires hit a gun observation post and started a large fire when bombing and strafing troop concentrations at Paingkyon, North-East of Moulmein.

Mosquitos bombed troop concentrations East of Mudon (South of Moulmein), and North of Peinnegyaung, on the Bilin-Papun road.

A Sunderland on armed reconnaissance between Koh Samoi and Bandon Bay, in the Gulf of Siam, scored two direct hits on a coaster and damaged a junk and many small craft. Another Sunderland set fire to an eighty-foot powered barge in the Puket area, West of the Kra Isthmus, and damaged a junk and a beached coaster,

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13/8/45. No. 18.

CHIEF DECORATES INDIAN TANK BRIGADE HEROES

By An Army Observer

H.Q., A.L.F.S.E.A.

During his recent visit to Indian troops in Burma General Sir Claude Auckinleck, Commander-in-Chief in India, presented awards for bravery to members of an Indian Tank Brigade. The ceremony took place at a special parade when the M.C. was given to Capt. Riazul Karim Khan, a Punjabi Mussulman of Khandwa village, Central Provinces, and Risaldar Siri Singh, a Dogra Rajput of Kot village, Tehsil Nurput, Kagra District.

Capt. Riazul Karim Khan in an action at Meiktila had his tank hit twice but carried out his reconnaissance which led to an enemy position being captured.

Risaldar Siri Singh led his troops into an enemy position killing 70 of the enemy and destroying a gun. The M.M. was given to Lance/Driver Baboo Singh, a Jat Sikh, of Hakim Singh Wala village, Tehsil Nabha, Nabha State District. He worked under fire for 50 minutes at Meiktila to repair his tank and helped to capture a position.

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13.8.45 - No.19.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION APPOINTMENTS

The Rt. Hon. Ellen Wilkinson, Minister of Education, has appointed Mr. A.A. Part, M.B.E., to be her private secretary and Miss F.R. Wheeldon to be her assistant private secretary.

Mr. Arthur Jenkins, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Education, has appointed Mr. J.F. Larcombe to be his private secretary.

Lt. H.D. Hughes, M.P., has been appointed Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister and Parliamentary Secretary.

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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

13.8.45 - No.25

APPOINTMENT

Mr. Lewis Silkin, Minister of Town and Country Planning,
has appointed Mr. A.R. Wagner to be his private secretary and
Mrs. L.H. Horner to be his assistant private secretary.

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MINISTRY OF TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING

13/8/45 - No. 26

APPOINTMENTS
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The Minister of Works, Mr. George Tomlinson,
has appointed Mr. A.F. Ewing to be his private
secretary.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of
Works, Mr. Harold Wilson, has appointed
Mr. I.O. Fletcher to be his private secretary.

MINISTRY OF WORKS

FIVE U.S. SUBMARINES TAKE ON TWO CONVOYS
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In what Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, USN, described as "one of the most sensational stories of the war", five U.S. submarines on war patrol deep in Japanese waters attacked two Jap convoys sinking ten sizable enemy ships, one of them a prison ship, rescued 159 British and Australian prisoners of war from the debris of the troopship, and brought the survivors to Saipan in the teeth of a fierce typhoon.

The submarines are: the USS SEALION, USS BARB, USS QUEENFISH, USS PAMPANITO and the USS GROWLER. The prison ship was the RAKUYO MARU, which carried 1300 prisoners taken after the fall of Singapore. She was bound for the Japanese mainland and was sunk by the USS SEALION.

The first engagement was between the GROWLER and an enemy destroyer, which action has been described by Rear Admiral Ralph Waldo Christie, USN, Commandant, Puget Sound Navy Yard, as "one of the most daring attacks on record".

The GROWLER, while surfaced and preparing to close on an enemy convoy, was attacked by a destroyer heading on a collision course. When the destroyer and the submarine were less than half a mile apart the GROWLER, still surfaced, fired her torpedoes. "The destroyer exploded violently but beautifully amidships" recorded Commander Thomas B. Oakley, USN, Commanding Officer of the submarine.

The RAKUYO MARU was sunk shortly after this engagement. Three days later the USS PAMPANITO sighted considerable debris, floating wreckage and what appeared to be men on a raft. The men were so covered with oil and filth that only the black curly hair of one identified them as not being Japs. The men pleaded "pick us up please", after which the survivors were taken aboard.

All were exhausted and showed signs of pellagra, beri-beri, ringworm, malaria and malnutrition. The PAMPANITO eventually rescued 73 men which completely overcrowded the sub which has a complement of 90 men. She sent word to the SEALION requesting help.

The SEALION took up the rescue and brought 54 survivors aboard.

The BARB also called to the scene, rescued 14 men, sinking a 22,500-ton Jap Aircraft Carrier on the way.

The QUEENFISH later picked up 18 more men.

The fate of the remaining men was sealed by a tropical typhoon which made the rescues increasingly difficult for the submarines and at times submarine crewmen were forced to jump into the high seas to rescue weakened survivors. All were taken to Saipan.

IN BURMA THE QUARTERMASTERS PREPARE FOR THOUSANDS OF
JAP PRISONERS

Pegu, South-East Burma,
Monday.

The great Allied military machine in South-East Asia is poised, while its forward troops in Burma along the Sittang River and the Taungoo-Mawchi Road are in contact with Japanese who may or may not know of the negotiations for peace by their government. Private soldiers and generals await the Japanese reply to the Allied surrender terms in the hope that they can capture about 60,000 Japanese troops. This is the most exciting time the Burma front has known, though all ranks contain their excitement and are prepared for anything. A senior Army officer said in an interview today that he thinks "if, as is generally believed, the Emperor of Japan is regarded by the Japanese as an infallible and semi-divine being, then probably the whole mass of the Japanese army in Burma will obey his command to surrender, save for isolated groups who may be 'uninformed'". He said that it was not possible to predict the behaviour of the Japanese but he is prepared for anything.

While poised before what may be an historic moment, the troops carry out their normal task, and the administrative branch prepares to receive many thousands of prisoners, which will mean camps, food, barbed wire and the collection of arms, vehicles, armour and stores from the Japanese army in Burma. This task is being handled by men who have been used to administering a great army in one of the world's worst battlefields, which stretched from India to the Sittang River in south-east Burma. As the curtain goes down on the Empire of a fanatic mediaevalism, the private soldier eats his bully beef and biscuits in rain-filled foxholes. He can have reason to feel satisfied with his efforts, having engaged and smashed an army of 200,000 emperor worshippers who had made war a Japanese export for years. In the last year the Japanese have been kicked from one end of Burma to the other, and all ranks wonder what the last act will be. If the Japanese Emperor orders his troops to surrender it will be sweet music in the ears of every soldier. For the Japanese opposite us it will be a denial of everything they were taught and believed sincerely, especially of the creed that Japanese soldiers must die rather than surrender. While the Emperor who lived as a God now tries to reach a human decision, the confident army awaits the surrender of his ragged troops. It will be hard for the Japanese officer to give the order for surrender to these troops, for out of his own mouth he will deny what he has always taught them.

The war continues in Burma, but may stop at any time. Meanwhile the quartermasters cope with the preparations for the Japanese surrender, which task is possibly the most pleasant they have performed in the army.

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13/8/45 - No. 30

MAJOR WAR CRIMINALS: THE U.K. CHIEF PROSECUTOR

The Attorney, General has been appointed Chief Prosecutor on behalf of the United Kingdom for the investigation of the charges against and the prosecution of the Major War Criminals under Article 14 of the Charter of the International Military Tribunal annexed to the Agreement made between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Government of the United States of America, the Provisional Government of the French Republic and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, for the prosecution and punishment of the Major War Criminals of the European Axis and signed in London on August 8, 1945.

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10, DOWNING STREET.

13.8.45 - No.31

FRENCH AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY DELEGATION.

Twenty-two members of the French Aircraft industry reached Croydon this afternoon on a 10 days' visit to this country.

They came from well-known aircraft factories in the Paris region, Bourges, Issy-le-Molineaux, Bordeaux and elsewhere and represented, among others, Chautre Chateau Roux, Syndicat des Metaux, Sigma, Salmson, Marignane, Gnome-Rhone, Morane Saulnier, Briguet and Latecoere.

After a short stay in London the Delegation, divided in three parties, will visit aircraft and equipment factories in Bristol, Oxford, Gloucester, Brough, Leeds, Birmingham, Leicester, Banbury, Cheltenham, Reading, Luton, Weybridge and a number of works in the London area.

They will attend a reception at which Mr. John Wilmot, M.P., Minister of Supply and Aircraft Production, will receive them, and before the visit ends the Delegation will meet Sir Walter Citrine at Transport House.

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MINISTRY OF INFORMATION