

CHRISTCHURCH H. G. TELEPHONE ORDERLIES

HAPPY COMRADESHIP AT FAREWELL

Christchurch Times Dec. 16, 1944

THE men behind Christchurch 1187—which was one of the Borough's most important and (from the public's point of view) “hush-hush” telephone numbers, met together for a farewell dinner party on Tuesday evening at the Drill Hall.

They were the Telephone Orderlies of “E” Company Home Guard, Christchurch, and on the tables in the Canteen—almost unrecognisable with its coloured lights and decorations—were cut-out models of the telephone (Christchurch 1187) which these men had manned at the Home Guard Headquarters for every hour of the 24 for 4½ years.

Such a record of devoted duty would be sufficiently worthy of any group of young and able-bodied men; but when Eden made his famous wireless appeal in 1940 there were others besides the young and the able-bodied whose first thought was to serve their country in its hours—and years—of need.

It was these men, up to the age of 80, unable to enter the active fighting services and unable to become part of the fighting Home Guard, who so faithfully carried on the job of " keeping open the lines of communication " right the way through. Boer war veterans, last war officers and men, men who had lost limbs, the shell-shocked, men who suffer from asthma and other ills and those who would have done more if their age had permitted them to do so—these were the ones who met to say farewell to each other as Telephone Orderlies last Tuesday night.

It was an intensely happy gathering. The work these “boys " undertook had been done well. They deserve all the praise the public can give them; but what pleased them more than anything was that they enjoyed, last Tuesday, the chance of reminiscing, laughing, joking, and smoking, pulling each other's legs about incidents in their lives as telephone orderlies, bandying nicknames about, singing, yarning about the past during and after a jolly good spread. It was a wonderful end to a darned good job of work.

The Chairman of the function was Mr. L. Idle; selected for the honour by his fellow telephone orderlies. Amongst the guests were the Company's Commanding Officer, Major G. T. Thomas, the Second Command, Capt. A. Hornby; Capt. H. R. Saywell, of the Bournemouth and Poole Electricity Co.; the Platoon Commanders of Nos. 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 Platoons; Lieut. Lockyear, of the Army Cadet Force; Lieut. Dodge, of Coastal Defence, and Private Holroyd. ,

Private Holroyd (80 plus) and father-in-law of the Rev. Canon Gay, was perhaps the most remarkable figure there. Unfortunately the other Boer War veteran, Keith Ball, was unable to be present; but Pte. Holroyd was wearing his Boer War uniform with the buttons of the Imperial Yeomanry. He wore one medal ribbon—the Boer War. He was with the first New Zealand contingent, mounted rifles.

The most interesting story of how Mr. Holroyd joined the L.D.V. the very morning after Anthony Eden's broadcast in May, 1940, was told during the evening by Major T. Woombell, M.B.E.

“When Mr. Holroyd arrived at the Drill Hall during the morning," related the Major, “I asked him how old he was. He looked me straight in the face and said 64. The first question he had to fill in on the form was the date of his birth. After thinking for a bit he put 1864, and I told him he couldn't be 64.

Mr. Holroyd answered, “I can't do arithmetic, Sir, but that was when I was born — and I'm 64 ! “--- so we enrolled him!”

There's a story one could tell about almost every one of those telephone orderlies of the Christchurch Home Guard. There was L/Cpl. Clack who, now 56, had gained his St. John's Ambulance and Marksman's badges, during his Home Guard service. The Marksman's badge is only given for those who pass all the tests at full Army standard. There was Pte. Vincent, mentioned in despatches in the last war, Major A. Harris, ex-Bandmaster of the Brigade of Guards, Mr. C. B. Hudson, who had put in more hours of duty than anyone could tell— especially in the early days, 67-year-old retired Police Inspector Ratcliffe of " L " Division of the Metropolitan Police, Mr. Andrews and Mr. Payne, both with only one leg, but of whom the Commanding Officer said that they would certainly have found a window seat and shot Huns had the Huns arrived.

We wish we could tell the stories of them all; but here are their names. The names by which they were proudly known as telephone orderlies: Andrews, Anker, Ball, Barnes, Baxter, Chaplin, Clack, Dashfield, Davis, Double, Esterling, Gamlin, Green, Harris, *Ho?an*, Holroyd, Idle, James, Lay, Newnham, Pardy, Payne, Place, Ratcliffe, Rogers, Searl, Sheppard, Stephens, Tizard, Varney, Vincent and Wilson. The meal itself was a most fitting tribute to the men: soup, chicken, ham, sausages, potato and salad, followed by jellies and custard, most tastefully decorated, cheese and celery, biscuits, and coffee. Messrs. Hailey Bros, most admirably carried out the catering, and as much credit was earned by Mr. Jack Dashfield, who organised the function. After dinner there were toasts and speeches interspaced by entertainment assisted by Mr. Baxter, Sergt. Price, and Mr. Jack (Amami) Dashfield. There was even a "Loving Cup," filled with the best Home Guard punch, in which a toast to the Home Guard was drunk. Menus were passed around for autographing and songs were sung: such grand old songs as "Tipperary," "There's a long long trail," "Who's your lady friend," "If you were the only girl in the world," "The Bells of St. Mary's," "Take me back to dear old Blighty," "Mademoiselle of Armentiers," and lots of others. As the pressure of space in this weeks' issue would prevent us from doing sufficient justice to the interest of the speeches which were made, a full report of these is being held over until next week. But the whole evening was packed with interest. It was beyond midnight when the party broke up.

When, owing to his age, Mr. Holroyd was asked if he would like a lift home, his reply was "Good gracious, no, I'm quite capable of going home under my own steam!"

Perhaps the whole spirit of these men who served their country so well is best represented by a remark which this old Boer War veteran made in the course of a short speech replying to his toast.

"I cannot say that I hope there will be another Home Guard, because wars are awful things; but if there is another, and I'm still kicking —I'll be there!"

During the evening Miss Manuel, daughter of Sergt. Manuel, of the Post Office Home Guard, recited "Stand down," a poem written by her father. In its opening words:---

"Home Guards---Farewell,

Your tour of Duty's done;

Christchurch acclaims you with historic pride."

Speeches at H.G. Telephone Orderlies' Farewell Dinner.

As reported in last week's Christchurch Times, the Telephone Orderlies of the Christchurch Home Guard held their farewell dinner at the Drill Hall on Tuesday, 12th December. The following speeches were made:

Proposing the toast to the Home Guard orderlies, Major G.T. Thomas, Officer Commanding "E" Company, said it was difficult to express his gratitude for what the men had done during four and a half years of very monotonous duty day and night waiting for the phone to ring,

The majority or all of the men were either ex-service men or were incapacitated for active service. A great measure of thanks was due to them for the way they had done their duty so faithfully and well.

Major Thomas referred to the assortment of men who had performed this service. They included representatives of the scholastic profession, butchers, bakers, a bandmaster of the Brigade of Guards, publicans, fish caterers, government officials, etc.

He mentioned some by name.

"There's dear old friend Holroyd." went on Major Thomas, "who has been a sheep farmer in New Zealand and a cowboy in Texas---a real two-gun man and still an excellent shot. He is 81 years old next birthday and I can assure you it hurt us more than we can say when we had to retire him." Major Thomas recalled the regularity with which, prior to his retirement, Mr. Holroyd "clocked in" at mid-day every Wednesday---with his own particular brand of cigarettes.

Keith Ball was another veteran of the Boer War and the last war whom the Major described as one of the straightest men he had ever met. He too had served the Home Guard most faithfully.

Both Mr. Andrews and Mr. Payne were sadly incapacitated; but were never absent or late for their duty.

"When I had youngsters of 17, 18 and 19 coming to me and saying they couldn't do this, that or the other," said Major Thomas, "I thought of what these two men were doing."

Mr. Wilson also had been badly knocked about, but had done his duty faithfully and well. Also Mr. Double, who had always been on their track for their savings.

Major Thomas also mentioned Major Woombell, Sgt. Price, Mr. C. B. Hudson, Mr. Nelson Pardy, Capt. Saywell, Lieut. Lockyear, Mr. Dashfield (who was accorded musical honours), Sgt. Manuel. C.Q.M.S. Kermode, Lieut. Dodge. S.M. Cocks, Sgt. Barnes, and Mr. Hailey and his staff.

Presentations of an outsize medal were made to Mr. Jack Dashfield and of a fountain pen or cigars to Mr. Holroyd, Mr. Andrews and Mr. Payne, with thanks for their loyal service.

Responding to the toast, Major A. Harris expressed thanks for the appreciation of their "little efforts." After relating some amusing stories of his experiences as Director of Music, Brigade of Guards, he said he had been to many gatherings in all parts of the world; but had never been to a happier one than this.

The toast to the Visitors was proposed by Mr. Sam Place, who referred to the wonderful spade work that had been put in by so many they were pleased to honour as their guests. Their work had been appreciated by all. Major T. Woombell, M.B.E., responded.

He recalled the extraordinary way the L.D.V. had started on the 10th May, 1940, when Mr. Hudson, Mr. Hornby, Mr. Martin and himself had set about the task of enrolling. He mentioned how in the early days the men, in their civilian clothes, with L.D.V. on their arm and a big stick in their hand, had guarded the road blocks.

Later he had been able to secure six suits of denim uniforms which had to do for everybody all the week. Nevertheless, right from the commencement the telephone orderlies had kept the lines of communications open and on more than one occasion had been congratulated by the Garrison Commander.

The Major endorsed all that had been said about Mr. Hudson, who had been a wonderful help putting in night after night of work. He also referred to the excellent assistance that had been given in the early days by the Girl Guides.

He concluded: "I am glad to have had this opportunity of meeting and saying thank you to all my old comrades who were the backbone of the present company which is 100 per cent, proficient. I am very proud of the way you have improved and shall always remember the very happy, days I served with you.

HOME GUARD FAREWELL PARADE at CHRISTCHURCH

LAST Sunday the people of Christchurch had an opportunity of witnessing a full parade of the local Home Guard which, headed by the Company's band, marched from the Drill Hall in Portfield Road, through Bargates, to the Priory Church. Indeed this was probably the last parade of the Home Guard Christchurch would ever see.

The previous Sunday, December 10th, the Christchurch Company had to attend the "stand" down parade in Bournemouth. It was felt however that Christchurch should not be deprived of the chance to offer its thanks to its citizen army personally, by holding an independent parade here in Christchurch.

The salute was taken at the surface shelter in the High Street by Lieut.-Col. Ford, and accompanied on the platform by the Mayor of Christchurch (Alderman D. Galton), Major Bishopp and Captain Andrews. The pavements opposite each side of the shelter were crowded by eager onlookers. These pavements were also lined by members of the Army Cadet Force and the Air Training Corps.

The Priory Church was well filled by Home Guardsmen and civilians, who heard Major Thomas read the very appropriate lesson. The flags of the United Nations were draped over the altar, reminding the congregation of the fine work the Home Guard had done for this country.

In the Bible, said Canon Gay, there were extracts referring to a body of men who "held a sword in one hand and a trowel in the other." They were a natural guard, formed to resist invasion, and behind them the civil work carried on. That was over 2,000 years ago, and unhappily nations had been at strife with one another ever since. One hundred and forty years ago the Christchurch volunteers were formed to await invasion by Napoleon. And now another body of men, working with the sword and the trowel, had prepared to defend

our island against invasion. The Government had ordered them to stand down, but their memory would be ever alive in the minds of those they prepared to defend.

“The democratic unpaid part-time army, this sword and trowel band of patriots, which had now reached the number of two million in this country, has inserted a glorious page in our English history.”

No order could affect or obliterate the memories of the past four years. He was glad that the Christchurch Company had their own farewell parade. It was right that the Borough should see and express their admiration for all the hours of leisure that they had sacrificed for the national cause.

Referring to civil strife in a country, the Canon said that the successes of the week had been over-shadowed by the melancholy conflict in Greece. Here was a quarrel between rival parties.

“Having spent a few days in jollification and liberation, a new strife begins, and they use the weapons supplied by England to fall upon each other. That is the result of ideology. At present in this country England and what it stands for is greater than ideology. We, too, have differing parties, but they are in complete harmony when faced with a national crisis. “We must be on our guard lest some hotheads are encouraged to create distrust in the Government.”

Concluding, Canon Gay said that the Nazi had a great respect for the Home Guard. They realised that it included men, veterans from the 14-18 war, and although the enemy actually never arrived, it may be said with some truth that the Home Guard preserved us from invasion. He spoke of the fine work done by the Home Guard for charity.

“We cannot say farewell to a body of men with such fine spirit. We realise that you are a team, ready because of orders to stand down, but ready if the occasion should arise to stand by.”