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Camp News

As this is not an official publication of Army Headquarters of the New Zealand Military Forces, all matters intended for publication should be addressed to The Editor and reach this office not later than 2 p.m. Mondays. Correspondence is invited on topical items of interest. Only business communications should be addressed to the Manager. Extra copies of "Camp News" may be obtained on application to the Manager, "Camp News," 3rd Floor, Whitaker's Buildings, 11 Manners Street, Wellington.

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Wellington, Friday, July 10, 1942.

When big guns are tested, each shot costs £150

By E. W. REED in the "Daily Mirror"

Somewhere in England, but miles away from anywhere, even a village, men are testing the new weapons of the Allies' Armies, and they are going at it great guns. . . .

Before it is possible to get within miles of the ranges, guards are already covering visitors with their weapons, and a guide escorts every stranger for safety.

A car is necessary over the mountain roads, which lead way up into the hills, and with each few hundred yards the whole air vibrates with the sound of terrific explosions.

Echoes run round and round the hills, running on until the whole sky is thundering in one tremendous roar.

Down the hills in a valley is the headquarters of the testing ranges. The building stands on wooden piles, lapped at their feet by a mountain stream.

Railway wagons go shunting by, carrying field guns, anti-aircraft guns and other weapons, on their way to the proofing range from which every few minutes detonations can be heard.

Some of the biggest guns in the world are tested here, and each one is subjected to complete examination in every testing schedule.

This is what happens at the proofing of a 14in. naval gun.

Mounted on a huge concrete block is the "Baby" in question, and 400 yards away, built in the bottom of the hillside, is a huge cavern filled with sand. Looking along the gun-sight is a frame, half-way between the muzzle and the sand butt, through which the testing shell passes, giving a reading of velocity, and line error, if any.

Connected to the breech, which is opened by three men, are scores of wires for the electrical energy to fire the first test.

The reason for this is plain when the huge flat-nosed "test" shell is lowered by crane into the breech, and a large gathering of men, armed with a ram nearly seven yards long, charge forward to get the shell home.

Following this, more than 400lb. of cordite in leather-cased cylinders is carried to the gun on sedan-type

trays, rammed in, and the breech closed.

This amount of charge is twice the normal amount of explosive, enough to prove the gun will stand great strain.

Each shot costs about £150. . . .

For the first proof test, everybody on the site is "warned off" and ear plugs of cotton wool are handed out as the men move into a deep shelter dug into the hillside, about 100 yards away and lined with steel.

Away in the distance a bell starts to ring, then complete silence.

Three minutes later another bell, and all is ready for the final warning.

Automatically fingers are plugged to the ears waiting for the concussion, when the third bells rings out.

One minute later an explosion rents the air, shaking buildings, trees, metal chains, and even shaking the foundations of the shelter.

Birds in the bush take the air screaming.

A few seconds later all is quiet and peaceful, the sound of water rippling over the stones in the stream breaking the tense silence.

Then some of the technicians and gun experts run towards the gun mounting to inspect the action of the first proof test, while others begin to take notes at the frame through which the shell has hurtled.

In the sand butt men begin digging frantically to reach the "shell" which has dug itself over forty feet into the sand. It takes a long while.

When this has been completed, and if the gun has stood its test well, another charge is inserted into the breech and a second shot made.

But this time the men and the experts stay above ground to watch the effects, because the charge is one of normal capacity.

Each time it means a large gathering of men digging into the sand.

But it's vitally important if the men of the British Navy are to rely on their weapons to fire straight and absolutely accurate at fifteen miles.

Many of the "range" men are deaf, caused by the constant strain on their

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ears, but they have a great delight in watching their "charges" in both senses of the word, go off to schedule.