

OPERATION ROAST BEEF

By . . .

DOROTHY BRUCE

Tuesday night I went out on manoeuvres with an official party from the Herald. Our self-imposed duty was to inspect and garner news from the various emergency canteens and rest centres that have been set up in the Elmwood and East Kildonan district.

I was especially eager to learn more of the particularly useful service these canteens offered in that they gave hot meals to the dike workers instead of sandwiches, acceptable as they are, but a monotonous diet at times.

And what I learned of this really splendid effort made me look upon the volunteers and donors to "Operation Roast Beef" with tremendous respect and admiration.

Our first stop was at the Prince Edward Legion Hall in East Kildonan. This canteen was started originally in the basement of John Black Church. It was soon evacuated of course, although the church proper is still in use as an inoculation centre.

In this hall we found a group of half a dozen workers sitting around a canteen table—a board on trestles—getting a well earned rest during a lull in activities.

Here we found clothing spilling over from the large cartons in which they were delivered by the Red Cross and from individual donors. Men's clothing to be used when workers' garments got wet. Changing sox was an especially busy job around this centre, the wet socks being hung on a line outside and from there collected by a laundry. An ironic touch was a shipment of rubber boots which arrived after the most of the dike workers had moved on to another area.

This canteen had been in receipt of donations of food, candy and clothing rather than cash, as they specialized in soups and coffee. However, in case of a really bad emergency involving the sudden housing of evacuees, plans had been carefully laid whereby the evacuees would be placed in the nearby Prince Edward School and fed three full meals a day at the Prince Edward Legion.

The supervisor on duty at the time we made our call spoke enthusiastically of a very active depot set up at Knowles Boys' Home in North Kildonan. Unfortunately, with flood waters cutting off that school, we didn't call there.

It was not so quiet at the Chalmers ave. clubhouse as there were more dike workers, hereinafter to be termed dikers for the sake of brevity. There were more dikers having meals and recreation all

hot on plates teeming with potatoes and gravy and a second vegetable.

From then on the movement snowballed until 2,000 to 3,000 meals a day were served. The cooking was done in the homes of local women and brought in piping hot. Two women saw to it that hot boiled potatoes were renewed every half hour during the rush.

At first the workers covered the distance between their homes, the canteen and the dikes on foot, but it was not long until local men with cars volunteered their services as transport drivers.

After a few desperate days of prideful achievement the Red Cross took over, emphasizing the supply angle of this depot, though hot meals were still served. The workers who had been serving dikers, soldiers and sailors indiscriminately, were not a little chagrined to find that they were now limited to dikers. One of the canteens more or less defied this order and went on serving all three alike, and to date no one's head had fallen.

Like the Prince Edward depot Chalmers has dry socks and clothing for the men. In fact, during one night at the peak of the battle four men who had fallen in the river were completely re clothed.

Chalmers ave. clubhouse is the newest of the Elmwood and East Kildonan recreation centres, having just opened last March. In fact, its chairs are not yet paid for and they look as though they'll be worn out before that is accomplished, so thoroughly have they been used.

At the Kelvin st. clubhouse, our third port of call, we were met by the familiar C.V.B. arm band. A sign prominently displayed over the canteen read "Please be quiet, some people are sleeping upstairs," toned our voices down from the enthusiastic pitch to which it had been gradually mounting all evening.

That and the ever present sign "Wash Your Hands" almost sent me in reverse to my childhood days with all its involved guilt complexes. However, I was assured it was a necessary order where dikers were concerned, for the flood waters had to be fought on both a sanitary and physical front if the fight was to be won with as few casualties as possible.

The story here was the same the first day, sandwiches, and after that, hot meals. Sunday, the 14th, was the peak day here as everywhere and 500 hot meals were served Sunday noon, which seemed incredible as there were only two tables along each wall. The overflow was sent along to Gordon