



# Parish News

## Oaksey

### Bomb Made Safe Despite Rising Water Threat



Sitting astride a 750 lbs German bomb, which fell in 1941 at the foot of the embankment of the main London-Cheltenham Railway near Oaksey Halt (near Cirencester), Lt J C Harper, of a Bristol Bomb Disposal squad on Wednesday afternoon, performed the tricky and dangerous task of removing the corroded fuse from the bomb.

The climax to a long and difficult operation was reached just after the officer and his men had scrambled out of the 22 feet deep shaft, which began to fill with water at a rate faster than could be handled by the pumps.

When the bomb was dragged from its resting place, water flooded into the nine feet wide excavation at a rate of hundreds of gallons a minute. The men at the bottom had to scramble up the ladders to the surface until the pumps regained control of the water.

In a few minutes, the depth of water was over 10 feet, at the bottom of which was the bomb.

Fortunately, Lt Harper had had the foresight to attach some wire hawsers to the bomb and with the aid of a crane, it was hauled up.

The fuse having been identified, work began on its removal, the most hazardous task in bomb-disposal work.

First of all, Lt Harper drilled a hole in the fuse and after pumping a special fluid into the bomb, the delicate piece of mechanism was removed with special tools.

Water was poured into the aperture left by the fuse, and with the aid of a steel spike and a hammer Lt Harper churned up the lethal contents of the bomb. The water minimised the effects of the picric acid, which the Germans used to assist the detonation of the main charge.

The bomb, now comparatively safe, was hauled to the surface to await disposal.

Lt Harper told an "Echo" reporter that his task had been unusually difficult because of the constant flow of water from the nearby Swill Brook into the deep shaft.

There had, he said, been at least two previous unsuccessful attempts to locate the bomb during the past seven years, and because of its close proximity to the railway the operation was classed as Number One Priority.

The equipment in use at the site was valued at about £5,000.

Twenty-five years of age, Lt Harper, whose home is at Bexley, Kent, has had considerable experience during his 13 months in the Royal Engineers, in bomb disposal and minefield clearing.

His squad, commanded by Major I Powell, MBE, RE, is responsible for both bomb disposal and minefield clearing in Cornwall, Devon, Somerset, and Gloucestershire.

A former member of the squad is Captain Davis, GC, who removed the famous bomb from St Paul's Cathedral.

Prisoners of war, who are helping in the work of bomb disposal, are volunteers, and one of those who helped at Oaksey was a former German ace night-fighter pilot. All have worked well with the British Sappers, Lt Harper stated.

German POW's who volunteer for this work receive extra pay, but the British Sapper receives nothing extra.

**Gloucester Echo Thursday 22 April 1948**