

# DIG ON FOR VICTORY



The National Archives Education Service

## The Home Front

How did people prepare for  
the war at home?

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INF3/96

# Introduction

## Lesson at a Glance

**Suitable For:** KS3

### **Time Period:**

Second World War  
1939-1945

### **Curriculum Link:**

Challenges for Britain,  
Europe and the wider  
world 1901 to the  
present day

- The Second World War and the wartime leadership of Winston Churchill

### **Learning Objective:**

To investigate the British reaction to the Second World War at home

### **Resources needed:**

Printed sources and questions

## The Home Front

Britain started to prepare for the Second World War at least a year before it actually started.

In 1938, the government began to build new warships and increase its armaments. However, this war would not just involve soldiers. The government expected the war to disrupt and threaten the lives of civilians left at home. This happened in a variety of different ways, from cutting down railings to be melted down and used in munitions factories, to rationing and evacuation plans.

Between 1938 and 1939, the government thought of all the possible dangers and difficulties the Home Front would face during war, and started to take precautions. People were needed on the home front to help with all sorts of things. They were encouraged to plant vegetables on any spare land they had to supplement the rationing, but people were also recruited into a variety of essential positions such as Air Raid Wardens and the Home Guard. People were also encouraged to think about their safety, and the government spent a great deal of time educating people on what to do in situations such as an air raid, or a gas attack, as well as providing information on how to make rations stretch further and how to keep yourself healthy.

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# Background

## Evacuation

Evacuation plans had been in preparation well before the outbreak of war. Small-scale evacuation of women and children were carried out in September 1938 but the real evacuation began in September 1939. The government had planned to evacuate about three million people but in the end only one million left home. A few hours after the war was declared on 3 September 1939, almost all of them had been evacuated from the danger areas to the reception areas.

## Air raids

The biggest danger came from air raids. Air raids meant both danger and disruption. 60,595 civilians died as a result of enemy action in the UK. Homes, workplaces and public buildings were destroyed. Streets were subject to the 'blackout' – lighting restrictions – and the ban on street lighting caused a huge rise in car accidents. Volunteers were needed to be trained in civil defence duties. These included fire-fighting, first aid and ambulance driving.

Civilians were instructed in how to protect themselves against poison gas attacks and issued with gas masks, which they were encouraged to carry on all journeys. Fortunately, poison gas was never used as a weapon in Britain. They were also given materials to build air raid shelters in the backyards. Strong buildings were also prepared for use as air raid shelters.

## Workers

The working lives of most of the adult population changed with the outbreak of war. To fight the war, men aged between 18 and 41 were needed in the navy and army. This would take them away from their jobs in factories and farms. To fill the shortage, women were recruited for jobs previously done by men. Women worked in the factories, constructing weapons and many others joined the Land Army to work on farms.

## Rationing

Much of the food, clothes and fuel which Britain needed came from abroad. The war disrupted and prevented these supplies from arriving. This meant shortages of the essentials to keep life going. In 1940, rationing was introduced in Britain. The ration book became indispensable for every man, woman and child, ensuring a fair distribution of what meagre essentials were available. The government also tried to encourage people to grow food on every available piece of land.

## Invasion

Another danger was from invasion. When in 1940 the Channel Isles fell into German hands and it looked as though the RAF was losing the Battle of Britain, the government called on volunteers to join the Home Guard – Dad's Army – to help defend Britain from attack.

## Teacher's notes

This lesson asks pupils to develop their understanding of the war on the Home Front from their basic understanding. Through primary source analysis it examines how those involved on the Home Front were encouraged to deal with the war and the problems that shortages and uncertainty created.

Pupils investigate the organisation and bureaucracy behind the ARP system, before looking at details of how individuals were advised to take precautions. This lesson helps pupils understand the attitude to the war on the Home Front, as well as developing their ability to use source evidence to question and challenge existing beliefs.

This lesson can form part of studies for Key stage 1 and Key stage 3 studies of the Second World War. In addition, it offers coverage of National Curriculum requirements for History in England, relating to general requirements of knowledge and understanding of events, people and changes in the past, together with breadth of study requirements to study significant events and developments from across the 20th century. Similarly there are clear links to citizenship and PSHE issues that can be explored further with teacher development.

### Sources

Illustration : INF 3/96 – Dig on for Victory Poster

Source 1 : INF 3/98 – Dig for Plenty Poster

Source 2 : INF 13/171 – Don't Do It Mother Poster

Source 3 A, B & C : HO 186/2247 – Gas Raid Quiz and Gas Mask Leaflets

Source 4 : INF 3/400 – Just a Good Afternoons Work poster

Source 5 A : HO 186/2247 – ARP Notice

Source 5 B : ZPER 34 – Air Raid house picture from the Illustrated London News, 1938

Source 6 : WO 199/94 – Conversation between Mr Celave & Capt. Denaro regarding beach mines

Source 7 : INF 3/232 – Be Careful what you say poster

### Tasks

Look at Source 1

1. This is one of a series of posters designed to encourage people to grow their own food:
  - a) Why did the government want the Home Front to 'Dig for Plenty'?
    1. If the Home Front had not organised growing more of its own food, what would have happened?
    2. Would a poster showing what would happen if people did not start to 'dig' have been more or less effective? Explain your answer.

Look at Source 2

2. This is a government poster about evacuation:

- a) Who is the ghostly figure whispering 'Take them back!'?
- b) Where is he pointing?
- c) What does he want the mother to do and why?
- d) Why might this mother be tempted to 'Take them back'?
- e) Why were civilians evacuated during the Second World War?

Look at Source 3 a, b and c

3. These were leaflets produced during the war:

- a) Who produced these leaflets?
- b) What dangers are these leaflets about?
- c) How many different types of gas masks would the government have to provide?
- d) How useful do you think the advice offered in these leaflets is?
- e) The government had to be careful not to scare people, but at the same time it wanted people to take notice and be prepared.
- f) How do these leaflets:
  - get people to take notice?
  - educate people?
  - reassure people?

Look at Source 4

4. This poster shows a woman slapping Hitler in the face.

- a) What type of war work does this poster advertise?
- b) What is happening in this poster?
- c) Can you explain the double meaning behind the caption?
- d) Why was the work of part-time women workers an essential part of defeating Hitler?
- e) How might this poster encourage women to contribute to the war effort?

Look at Source 5 a and b

5. These are wartime warning posters.

- a) What dangers do these sources warn the public about?
- b) Who was the local air raid warden for Drypool Green?
- c) What was the air raid signal for 'all clear'?
- d) In the months leading up to September 1939 many towns practised their air raid signals and taking shelter. Why do you think this was necessary?
- e) Read the section in Source 5a called 'Fire Precautions'. Which parts are the public...
  - likely to follow?
  - likely to ignore?
- f) Look at Source 5b. Read all the labels. How would each precaution help save lives if there was an air raid?

Look at Source 6

6. This is a telephone conversation between Mr. Cleave and Captain Denaro a mine laying specialist in 1940

- a) Why were mines placed on the beaches?
- b) What is Mr. Cleave complaining about?
- c) According to Mr. Cleave, was placing mines on the beach an effective way of protecting Britain?
- d) Do you think Mr. Cleave was being unreasonable?
- e) What does this source tell us about the power the government had over people's lives during the Second World War?

Look at Source 7

7. This picture shows Hitler balancing on a telephone line.

- a) What other precautions were taken to protect Britain?



Source 1 – Dig for Plenty poster – Artist : Le Bon (INF 3/98)





Source 2 - Don't do it, Mother – Leave your children in the safer areas poster (INF 13/171)



***DON'T do it,  
Mother—***

**LEAVE YOUR CHILDREN  
IN THE SAFER AREAS**

ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH



Source 3 a - Gas Raid Quiz Leaflet (HO 186/2247)

**No. 17**

**Gas Raid Quiz**  
ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF HOME SECURITY

**WILL YOU BE IN GREAT DANGER IF A GAS RAID COMES WHEN YOU ARE IN A TRAIN?**

**ANSWER:—**  
NOT IF YOU HAVE YOUR GAS MASK WITH YOU AND PUT IT ON IMMEDIATELY. THE GUARD OF THE TRAIN WOULD TAKE CHARGE AND DECIDE WHAT WAS BEST FOR THE PASSENGERS.  
**NEVER SET OUT ON A JOURNEY WITHOUT YOUR GAS MASK.**

(THIS SPACE IS PRESENTED BY WHITBREAD & CO. LTD.)




## Source 3b - War Gas Leaflet (HO 186/2247)

# WAR GAS

OFFICIAL INSTRUCTIONS ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF HOME SECURITY

## IF THE GAS RATTLES SOUND



Put on mask, holding your breath until mask is in position. Turn up collar. Put on gloves or keep hands in pockets. Take cover in nearest building quickly. Put up umbrella if you have one.

### IF YOU GET GASSED

*by Vapour Gases*

1. Keep your mask on even if you feel discomfort.
2. If discomfort continues, go to First Aid Post.

*by Liquid or Blister Gas*


1. Dab, but *don't rub* the splash with your handkerchief. Then destroy the handkerchief.
2. Rub No. 2 Ointment well into place (buy a 6d. jar now from any chemist). In an emergency, chemists will supply Bleach Cream free.
3. If you can't get the Ointment or Cream within 5 minutes, wash the affected place with soap and warm water.
4. Take off *at once* any garment splashed with gas.

### HOW TO PUT ON YOUR MASK

1. Hold your breath. 2. Hold mask in front of face, thumbs inside straps. 3. Thrust chin well forward into mask. Pull straps as far over head as they will go. 4. Run finger round face-piece taking care head-straps are not twisted.

### MAKE SURE IT FITS

See that the rubber fits snugly at sides of jaw and under chin. The head straps should be adjusted to hold the mask firmly. To test for fit, hold a piece of paper to end of mask and breathe in. The paper should stick.



Arrows indicate points needing particular attention.

**ALWAYS HAVE  
YOUR GAS MASK  
WITH YOU - DAY AND NIGHT.  
LEARN TO PUT IT ON QUICKLY**



## Source 3c - War Gas Leaflet (HO 186/2247)

OFFICIAL INSTRUCTIONS ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF HOME SECURITY

# What to do about GAS



*In a gas attack, first put on your own mask, then you will be better able to help baby.*

## HINTS TO MOTHERS

★ Learn to put on baby's gas helmet quickly, while wearing your own mask. Your Health Visitor will show you how. If you don't know her address ask at Town Hall or at the Child Welfare Centre.

★ With more than one baby you need help. Arrange with a neighbour, or find out if your local W.V.S. has a Housewives' Service.

★ Toddlers soon learn to put on their own masks. Let them make a game of it and they will wear their gas masks happily.

**MAKE SURE YOUR FAMILY  
HAVE THEIR GAS MASKS  
WITH THEM NIGHT & DAY**



Source 4 - Just A Good Afternoon's Work Poster (INF 3/400)



Source 5 a- Air Raid Precautions Card (HO 186/2247)

# AIR RAID PRECAUTIONS

\* The A.R.P. Warden's Post for your Sector is:

.....  
 .....

\* The nearest First Aid Post is:

.....  
 .....

\* THESE TWO POSTS WILL ALWAYS BE MANNED DURING AIR RAIDS

Help or advice upon A.R.P. matters will be given by the local wardens.

The nearest SENIOR WARDEN is:

.....  
 .....

Ask him for the name and address of your nearest local Warden and make a note of it here:

MR GREENBURY  
10 GRAHAM PLACE, CLARENCE SQ.

Get to know him now and note any changes in the names and addresses given here.

## IN CASE OF INJURY

Wounded and gas contaminated casualties who can walk should go direct to the nearest First Aid Post. If you suspect that your clothing has been contaminated by liquid gas, remove the affected garment immediately and place it outside the house, then wash yourself thoroughly. Stretcher cases will be taken to hospitals.

## GAS MASKS

**TAKE CARE OF YOUR GAS MASK.** Learn how to put it on and take it off and how to store it properly. Keep it ready for immediate use. If you have no gas mask or if your mask does not fit or seems out of repair, speak to your Warden about it at once.

## LIGHTING RESTRICTIONS

All windows, doors, skylights or openings which would show a light, must be screened so that no light can be seen from outside. Do not use a light in a room unless the blind or curtain is drawn, and remember that a light at the back of the house is just as visible from the air as one at the front.

## AIR RAID WARNING SIGNALS

• **WARNING SIGNAL.** Whistling or intermittent siren on siren. Whistle blown by police and marines. • **GAS WARNING.** Bells sounded. • **RAIDERS PASSED.** Continuous sound on siren. • **ALL CLEAR.** Hornblows ring. When you hear the WARNING Signal TAKE COVER AT ONCE and stay there until you hear the continuous sound on the siren.

or the ringing of a handbell. Have your Gas Mask with you. If RATTLES have been used warning you of gas, do not come out until you hear HANDBELLS.

## FIRE PRECAUTIONS

Be ready to deal with an incendiary bomb. Clear all lumber from your attic NOW, and see that you have easy access to the attic or roof space. Provide two buckets filled with water and, if possible, a stirrup hand pump with two-purpose nozzle, either producing spray for dealing with the bomb itself, or producing a jet for tackling the resulting fire.

Have a reserve supply of water in buckets or tubs. Leave used water in bath.

If you have no stirrup hand pump, have two buckets of sand or dry earth near the top of the house, and a shovel with a long handle for putting sand on the bomb. After covering the bomb with sand place it in a bucket which has a few inches of sand in the bottom, and remove it from the house. Scrape up every particle of burning metal. The resulting fire will then have to be extinguished. Buckets of water or a folded blanket kept wet from a bucket of water might be used.

On no account throw water on the bomb or an explosion may result.

If you cannot put out the fire send for help to

.....  
 .....

★ HANG THIS CARD IN A PERMANENT AND PROMINENT POSITION



## Transcript of Air Raid Precautions Card (HO 186/2247)

### AIR RAID PRECAUTIONS

\* The A.R.P. Warden's Post for your Sector is:

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\*The nearest First Aid Post is :

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\*These two posts will always be manned during air raids

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10 Granham Place, Clarence Street

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### AIR RAID WARNING SIGNALS

\*WARNING SIGNAL Warbling or intermitent sound on siren. Whistles blown by police and wardens. GAS WARNING Rattles sounded. \*RAIDERS PASSED Continuous sound on siren. \*ALL CLEAR Handbells ring. When you hear the WARNING Signal TAKE COVER AT ONCE and stay there until

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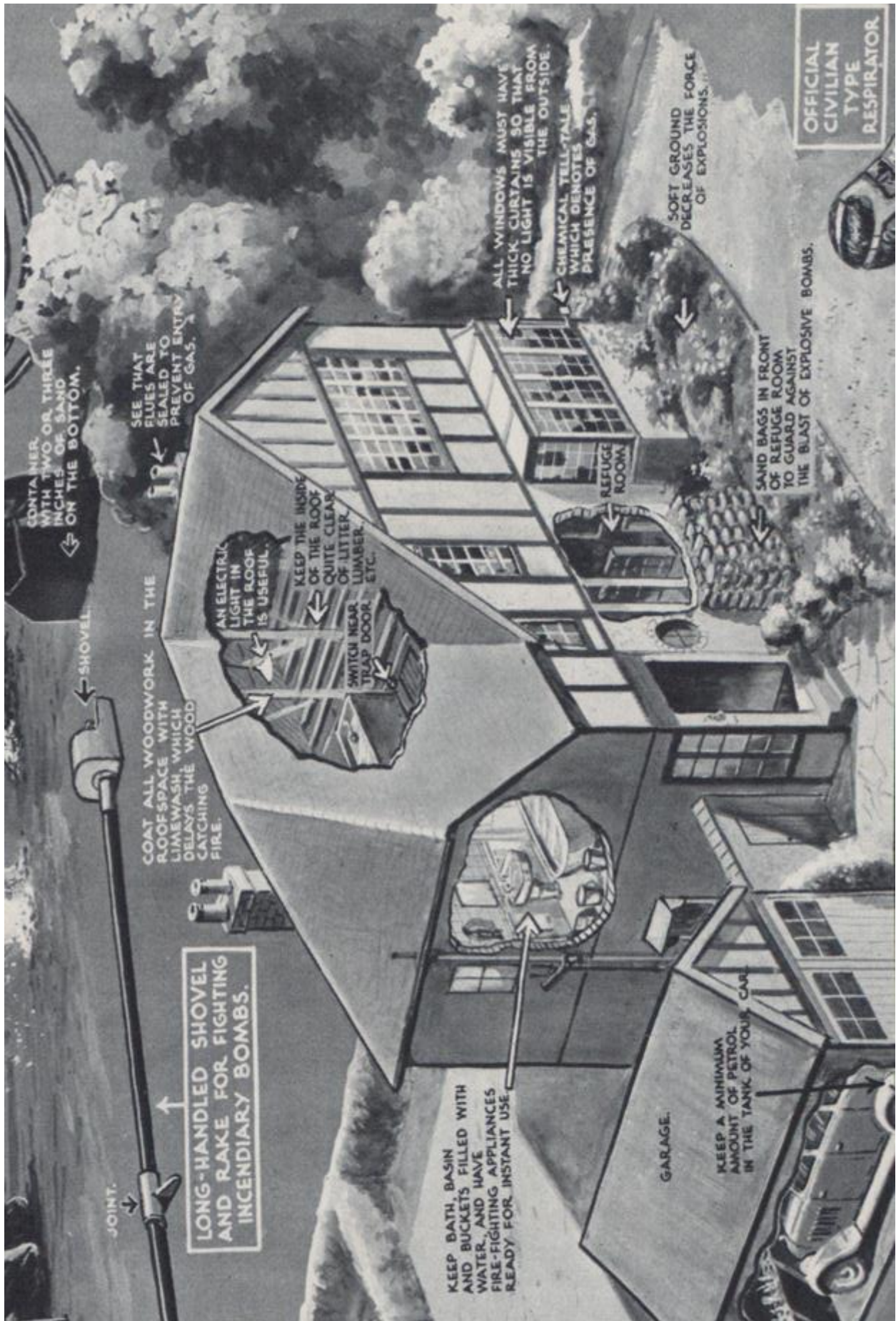
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\* HANG THIS CARD IN A PERMANENT AND PROMINENT POSITION

Source 5b - Detail from The Householder's part in ARP: Meeting Bomb and Gas Dangers: Illustrated London News July 16 1938 (ZPER 34/193)





## Source 6 - Telephone conversation between Mr Cleave and Captain Denaro (WO-199-94)

Digest of conversation that took place over the 'phone when Captain Denaro rang me up on Sunday the 22nd of September 1940 at 9.45 a.m.

Hullo. Is that Mr Cleave. Yes, who is that speaking? I am Captain Denaro of the Royal Engineers. Oh yes. About your letter. He said he would not remove the mines. I replied, surely they could be removed to a safer position? He said, he would have the position surveyed. I told him the matter was most urgent, and had counted 13 strewn over the foreshore immediately opposite my house, laying loose and washed about by the tide, and further said, when his men were laying the mines, I pointed out the position in which they were being set would prove a menace, as the battering they would receive from a high tide, and a strong wind, coupled with the further risk of any flotsam and jetsam striking them, would explode them. He said I did not understand the position, and he intended to guard the whole coast. I replied I quite agreed and understood about taking every precaution against an enemy, but he surely did not seriously anticipate, out of the hundreds of miles surrounding the British Isles, the enemy would pick on my 200 feet of foreshore for his invasion plan, and even if he did, the mines would be no deterrent, as they would have already exploded and have done their damage, not to Jerry, but to me. He laughed, and said, they may land anywhere. I replied, yes, but surely the end you are endeavouring to attain, could be so attained without having my property periodically damaged. He asked if I was nervous. I said no, and had yet to learn that objecting to one's house and home being blown up was a symptom of nervousness, but was apprehensive of having my home blown to blazes. I told him, on two separate occasions mines had exploded, and it was not altogether enjoyable expecting at every high tide for more to go off, and I did most strongly object to being blown up by my own people. He suggested I should let the matter drop, and say no more about it, to which I replied, I most certainly did not intend to let the matter drop. He said my letter had threatened him, and although he did not like turning people out of their homes, if I persisted, he would ask for a compulsory evacuation. I replied we had been asked to stick it, and we were going to stick it, and the leaving of the premises would in no way

prevent more damage as the matter was at present. I again urged that the mines be removed from the immediate vicinity, and failing this, could they not be properly secured to prevent accidental explosion, but because I lodged a legitimate complaint, to threaten me with expulsion, was only burking the question, and to adopt such an attitude was quite untenable. He again said he would have the position surveyed.

## Transcript of telephone conversation between Mr Cleave and Captain Denaro (WO-199-94)

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Source 7 - Be careful what you say poster (INF 3/232)

