

Commercial and Financial	83
News in the News	18
SPORT	64-70
Empire Game Review	70
Baseball	71
Ottawa	71
Boxing	72
Wrestling	73
Tennis	73
THE	64-68
WOMEN'S PAGES	22-38
Abol. Daily's Page	24
Age and Crisis	29
Medical Chronicle	25-28
Fashion	28-38



Garden and Orchard	86-87
Kennel	85
Leading Articles	69
MAGAZINE FEATURES—	
Are You Sure?	38
Blow! There Blow!	86-87
Books	61
Broadcasting	63
Children's Page	62
Contract Bridge	88
Crossword Puzzles	89
Film	92-93
Homes	60
Leisure Hour	60
Medical	89
Short Story	84-85

AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND, FEBRUARY 23, 1938

# TWENTY-ONE DROWNED IN FLOOD

## Torrent Overwhelms East Coast Railway Camp

TWENTY-ONE lives were lost when, following a cloudburst, a mountain stream became a raging torrent and overwhelmed a Public Works camp on the East Coast railway construction scheme at Kopuwhara, about 35 miles north of Wairoa, before dawn on Saturday. Eighteen of the bodies, including that of the only woman victim, had been recovered by Sunday night.

The camp, which nestles at the foot of steep, wooded hills, consisted of three sections. All were located in an elbow of the Kopuwhara Stream, the married men occupying high ground on either side of a depression in which the single men's quarters were located. The camp for single men, directly in the path of the wall of water that poured without warning from above while the occupants were sleeping, was demolished and 20 of the men, together with a waitress, were swept to their death. The married men's homes were beyond the reach of the flood.

So sudden was the onslaught that those trapped on the lower ground had no warning of impending disaster. They went to bed on Friday night with the stream at its normal level and had a tragic awakening at 3.30 next morning when the flood engulfed them. A roaring cataraict of yellow water, charged with huge boulders, which were tossed like pebbles, tree trunks and debris, jumped the banks of the stream and poured over the doomed camp. Barely awake, the occupants fought for their lives in pitch darkness and bitter cold.

Rushing at fully 35 miles an hour, according to an eye-witness the stream rose at the rate of feet per minute until hundreds of acres of level flow were inundated. In the camp itself, rocky hills kept the torrent within narrow bounds but only served to necessitate its tremendous velocity.

A stoutly-built bridge was swept away, and its timbers and foundations were hurled upon the 57 tents and huts ranged in neat rows over a length of about 100 yards. Battered by giant logs, great pieces of the bridge and rocks that were rolled unceasingly beneath the surface and swept by the ever-increasing force of the current, the buildings collapsed like matchwood.

Taken completely by surprise and chest-deep in the swirling water, men and youths rose above mere thoughts of self-preservation in the crisis, and proved themselves heroes. Many gave their lives for others, sacrificing their chances of escape to save their friends. Stories of the heroic deeds of many of those lost were faithfully told by men for whom the sacrifices had been made. The district rang with praise for spontaneous and often successful attempts at rescue by men counted among the dead. The bonds between those who worked together were never more severely tested and never more completely proved.



## ROLL OF THOSE WHO DIED

Most of the Bodies Recovered

- The victims of the disaster are:—
- Miss Martha Quinn, aged 22, single, a waitress at the cookhouse, whose parents reside in Gisborne.
  - Mr. William Auld, aged 55, single, of Napier.
  - Mr. George Barbarich, aged 32, single. He has a brother at Marton.
  - Mr. David Barclay, aged 56, single, of Auckland.
  - Mr. Frederick I. C. Clark, aged 31, single. His father lives at Gisborne.
  - Mr. George H. Davis, aged 49, married.
  - Mr. R. Douglas, aged 28, single, of Gisborne.
  - Mr. William Dunn, aged 64, married, of Christchurch. He was the camp sergeant.
  - Mr. Frank W. Fry, aged 51, married, of Gisborne.
  - Mr. F. C. Fountain, aged 25, single. His uncle lives at Te Puke.
  - Mr. Thomas Hall, aged 35, single, of Gisborne.
  - Mr. Ron E. Halford, aged 22, single. His family lives at Woodville.
  - Mr. Robert Johnston, aged 40, single, of Wairoa.
  - Mr. John Kelliker, aged 51, single, of Wellington.
  - Mr. Ivan Martinac, aged 31, single. He has an uncle at Palmerston North.
  - Mr. Edward McGiven, aged 28, single, of Gisborne.
  - Mr. J. Pender, aged 40, married. His wife lives at 22a Halsey Drive, Mount Roskill, Auckland.
  - Mr. Hugh Sloan, single, who recently arrived from Ireland.
  - Mr. Ted E. Smith, aged 37, single, a son of Mr. J. H. Smith, Patutahi, Gisborne.
  - Mr. Tom Tracey, aged 44, married with a wife and children in Wairoa.
  - Mr. W. Waaka, aged 25, single, a Maori, of Mohaka.
- The bodies of Messrs. Halford, Martinac and Davis have not yet been recovered.

## WARNING GIVEN

TASK ENDED BY DEATH

"THOUGHT OF EVERYONE"

A hero who saved many lives only to lose his own was Mr. Tom Tracey. Regardless of the risk he ran and deliberately ignoring a tempting chance of escape by way of a bridge, which withstood the first onslaught of the flood, he beat the gong to rouse the sleeping men and women. Finally he made a round of the camp, knocking at each door and shouting a warning. He disappeared, while those who had awoken were given a chance to reach safety.

Glowing references to Mr. Tracey's unselfish action, which, they said, had undoubtedly saved many lives, were made by survivors. Mr. R. Blair summed up the unanimous opinion when he said, "He gave his life for the men."

"He seemed to think of everyone but himself," Mr. Blair said. "He got hold of the gong from the front of the cookhouse, with George McLean and 'Burr' Hampden, and kept beating it to wake everyone."

"The bridge spanning the stream was still standing at this time and Tom and the others could have got away, but Tracey was lost. He made a round of the camp, and after finishing with the gong, which one of us took for a practical joke, he beat on the door of every hut."

"At the hut occupied by the foreman, Mr. F. Yeo, who is hard of hearing, he wasted no time in knocking. He went straight in and pulled him out of bed. Mr. Yeo was seen later, but does not know, astride a wood and iron chimney, and we grabbed him and pulled him up on the roof, from where we were all eventually rescued."

"Tom Tracey continued his rounds," Mr. Blair added. "He was chest deep in the water, which was rapidly rising, and was last seen struggling with the last standing huts. His body was later recovered over three miles downstream."



First survivors of the disaster to reach Waikopu: Messrs. R. Blair (left) and H. Trainor resting on Saturday night after their terrible ordeal.

## RESCUE OF A CHILD

Situated two and a-half miles above the settlement that was overwhelmed, the No. 5 camp escaped relatively lightly. However, water came over a low-lying portion of the site and several of the huts in the married men's quarters were threatened. One occupant was carrying two children to safety when he fell, losing one of his charges. The child was washed away, but was speedily rescued.

## SECURITY WITHIN GRASP

After being carried for about six miles in the raging torrent from the hills, one of the victims of the Kopuwhara disaster apparently died when security was in his very grasp. He was discovered dead, clinging tenaciously to a fence on the property of Mr. Alan Johnson, with a knoll of dry ground only several feet away.



# HEROISM THE INSTINCT OF MEN IN PERIL

## Searching for Bodies In Path of Cataract FACING TREMENDOUS DIFFICULTIES

With all communications severed by the torrential rain and high flood, news of the disaster in the No. 4 camp was slow to reach the four other settlements in the district. However, when rescue parties were formed, every available man volunteered for service and a search was immediately commenced for the bodies of the victims.

One of the first to realize the magnitude of the disaster was Mr. Alan Johnson, a farmer, whose property lies on either side of the stream about six miles from the site of the doomed camp. The piteous bleating of lambs awakened him shortly after dawn and he discovered that the house was completely surrounded by water. As he surveyed the scene, he noticed a man float by clinging to a mattress. Plunging into the chilly water, he secured the man, but found him to be dead.

### Severe Injuries

Forcing his horse through water that was at times so deep that the animal was obliged to swim, Mr. Johnson rode to the house of a neighbour and from there telephoned Constable Houston, of Nuhaka. A search on the property was subsequently instituted and further

Work had to be done, moreover, in that was practically land mud.

### Swift Reason

Reaction among survivors and helpless witnesses of the tragedy was prompt. Some spoke sense of the scenes in the early-morning disaster, others presented a bold and controlled, and a few, prostrated with grief and shock, could bear no spoken reference to it in their presence, and their residence in the wrecked camp below were sufficient.

Prominent among the organizers of help for those trapped in the single men's camp, Mr. P. Stapp, representative of the Y.M.C.A. in the settlement, told how he and Mrs. Stapp were awakened at three o'clock in the morning by a cry from an unknown man.

### Cry of Horror

"All the men are drowning," shouted in tones of horror outside his window was Mr. Stapp's first inkling of the tragedy. His house commands a view of the site, but darkness was relieved by a single gleam. The water had interrupted the power supply, and from the lower level came only confused calls, the roaring of water, and the endless grinding of boulder upon boulder.

"I remembered my car, as a possible source of light," Mr. Stapp said. "I drove her up the bank and turned on the headlights, which probably were a help."

"The water was rising by at 50 to 75 miles an hour. It was the better part of 6 ft. deep, and was filled with stones and timber. It rose at the rate of feet a minute instead of inches an hour, and after wrecking the camp it subsided almost equally suddenly."

### Theories About Cause

Opinions regarding the possible cause of the sudden onrush of water varied. Some members of the community at the camp believed that slips higher up the stream had made a dam, which had burst, releasing the pent-up waters in a mighty flood. Others, and these included engineers, thought that there had been a cloudburst higher up the valley, and that a great mass of water had suddenly been poured into the stream, transforming it into a torrent in an instant.

Severely shaken by the loss of so many friends and acquaintances, Mrs. H. Cameron, the only woman in the wrecked camp to escape, was profoundly grateful for the fact that her husband and two children, as well as herself, had been spared. She could not bring herself to speak much of the tragedy. With her family close beside her, she spent the day with friends.

"Darkness was the horror of the whole thing," Mrs. Cameron said. "Had they been able to see, some of them might have saved themselves."

Mr. A. Johnson.

Three bodies were recovered on Saturday. All the victims bore evidence of having been severely injured, apparently as the result of being struck by heavy timber and other debris.

Shortly after Mr. Johnson's original discovery, advice of the disaster filtered through to the No. 1 camp at Waikopu where several men were selected to accompany the foreman, Mr. G. Foster, on a tour of inspection. The heavy flood presented a barrier, and thorough examination being made, but the mass of equipment being carried to the sea in the turbid, swollen stream suggested that at least one camp further in the hills had been washed out.

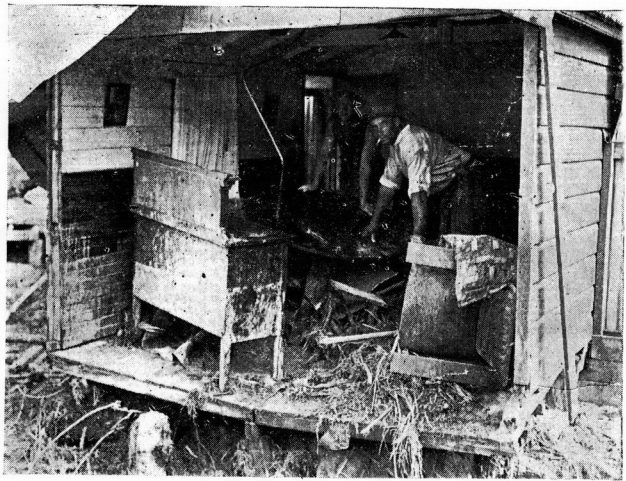
### Clothing Torn Away

Some 35 men, clad in bathing costumes, shorts or storm clothing, manned motor-cars and a lorry and set out for the No. 3 camp. Forcing their way through a layer of silt that was often 3 ft. or 4 ft. deep, they recovered the bodies of nine men who were known to belong to the ill-fated No. 4 camp. Their clothing torn from them, the victims were in many cases shockingly injured.

At the No. 2 camp, where some damage occurred, principally from sitting, there was little thought that the No. 4 settlement might have suffered more severely, and the real tragedy of the flood was brought to the notice of these men only later in the day. Men from No. 3 camp discovered a severe water mark on the road leading further upstream, and it was while they were discussing this situation that one of the married men from the No. 4 camp who was seeking assistance called to them from across the river.

### Formidable Task

The search was continued on Sunday. A large party, containing 60 men and a police party, left Waikopu at 7.30 a.m., and their efforts were concentrated on the wide mouth of the valley for a distance of two miles to the sea. However, settlers had several hours earlier discovered the body of Miss Martha Quinn near the site. Subsequently the body of Mr. Ted Smith was found by searchers from the Nos. 2 and 3 camps further upstream. The party from Waikopu was confronted with a tremendous task. Paddles were used to clear the



After the flood waters had subsided: Salvaging belongings from one of the wrecked huts.

## ESCAPE OF CAMP TWO Forty-Seven Sleeping People Roused

Tragedy was nearly repeated in the case of the No. 2 camp. Rising about 20 ft. with almost incredible swiftness, the Kopuwhara Stream threatened the lives of the 47 sleeping residents and, in the hurried evacuation to higher ground, few personal possessions were saved.

Although situated about three miles below the No. 4 camp, the settlement suffered severely. In low-lying sections the huts were covered with water. The swift currents, charged with huge boulders, logs and other debris, caused havoc. A heavy motor-truck was lifted bodily and carried downstream for about one and a-half miles before being deposited, extensively damaged, on a farm.

The plight of the occupants was vividly described by Mr. R. Gilberd. He said he and his room-mate had gone to sleep without switching off the light. He was awakened at about 3.30 a.m. when a power failure occurred.

### Shrieking a Warning

"I was surprised but not altogether alarmed to discover that water was

trickling into the tent," Mr. Gilberd said. "When my companion talked about a flood, I told him not to be silly and to get back into bed. Then I noticed water coming under the door and decided to put on my gumboots and investigate. Less than a yard from the entrance to the hut I stepped into water above my knees."

"Then, suddenly, the alarm was sounded. One man rushed from the hut but shrieking a warning. My mate grabbed some belongings and made to follow me but a huge log, tossing madly in the current, threw him off his feet. He regained his balance but lost his belongings."

"Everyone was making his way to a garage on higher ground, which seemed secure from the flood. Here the shivering people huddled, wet through and disconsolate. Two women clad in night attire were included in the group, but a third, Miss Marston Nugent, a waitress at the camp, was missing."

### Stayed Behind to Dress

"It was discovered that Miss Nugent had stayed behind to dress," Mr. Gilberd continued. "Realizing her plight, a close friend, Mervyn Hoggard, after seeing some other chaps to safety, plunged back into the flood to her assistance. It was no easy task. Finally, he lashed an emergency fire hose between a power pole and the coach, and this enabled them to get safely to higher ground."

"Another man, Mr. Tom Castles, had been told when the warning was sounded. That was for his violin. Holding it aloft above the water he reached the garage in safety but almost immediately returned to the flooded camp to aid another waitress, Miss Florence Wilson, who was calling for assistance."

### MINISTER SHOCKED

### NO SIGN OF DANGER

### CAMP 100 PER CENT SAFE

The Minister of Public Works, the Hon. R. Semple, showed great concern over the news of the Kopuwhara disaster. He stated that nobody would have dreamed that such a thing was possible on that camp-site. The locality had been used for camps since the work was originally started. It was not like putting a camp in a valley near a watercourse with a liability to floods. It seemed 100 per cent safe, for there never seemed any sign of danger.

"It is just one of those terrible happenings which can only be described as an act of God, for which no human being is to blame," said Mr. Semple. "I know this camp-site, and the news has come as a terrible shock to me. I cannot adequately express my feelings of regret at the loss of those useful boys, who were rendering such a great service to the department and the country. It is an immeasurable loss, and my deepest sympathy goes out to their relatives and friends."

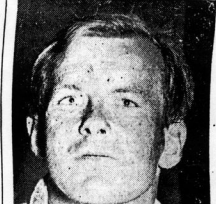
### FINE TYPE

### MEN IN THE CAMP

### MR. SAVAGE'S REGRET

### SYMPATHY FOR RELATIVES

"I deeply regret to learn of the disaster which has overwhelmed a camp of single men at Kopuwhara, near Waikopu, on the East Coast railway construction works," said the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. M. J. C. "It can only be described as a realisation of a disaster."



Mr. R. Gilberd, one of the survivors.

"The official information is sufficient to show the extent and sadness of this terrible happening," said Mr. Savage. "It is not easy to express one's feelings in the face of such a calamity. The causes were entirely beyond the control of man, and no human wisdom or foresight could have averted the disaster. The men were a fine type, and had been rendering very useful service to their country."

"I feel that I am not only expressing the feelings of the Government, but also those of all the people, when I say that heartfelt sympathy will go out to the relatives of the victims."

"Immediately he received news of the Kopuwhara disaster, the Minister of Public Works, the Hon. R. Semple, conferred with Mr. J. Woods, engineering engineer of the Public Works Department left Wellington for the scene of the disaster."

### SHEEP LOSSES 1500

### SEVERAL HUNDRED CATTLE

Although subsequent tallies have not justified the earlier estimates that stock losses amounted to many thousands of head, it is expected that the flooding of the Kopuwhara Stream resulted in at least 1500 sheep and several hundred cattle being carried out to sea.



## FUNERALS AT GISBORNE

Burial of Camp Victims  
SEVEN INTERRED AT WAIROA

Four of the victims of the Kopuwhara tragedy were buried in the Tararua Cemetery, Gisborne, on Monday afternoon, by their friends, relatives, two friends, Mr. Hugh Sloan and Mr. Edward McGivern, were interred in adjoining graves, and Mr. George Henry Davis, a returned soldier, was buried with military honours.

There was a large concourse of mourners at the funeral of Miss Martha Quinn, the 21-year-old waitress at the camp, who had been a universal favourite, many of the survivors marked the journey to Gisborne to attend her funeral. Miss Quinn was to have come home to Gisborne last Friday night for her father's birthday on Saturday, but she decided to stay at the camp overnight and return on Saturday morning.

The wife and two children of one of the victims, Mr. G. Barbarich, are at present on their way from Dalmanita to New Zealand, where they are expected to arrive in two or three weeks.

## Funeral Delayed

Arrangements were made for the funeral of at least seven victims of the disaster to take place at Gisborne on Monday, but advice was received

from the Commissioner of Police at Wellington, giving instructions to hold the funeral until Tuesday at 11 o'clock. The change in the time of the funeral is believed to have been made at the instigation of members of the Cabinet, some of whom arrived at Wairoa from Wellington for the purpose of attending.

The majority of the bodies have been claimed by relatives. One has been forwarded to Auckland, one to Te Pahi, one to Wellington, one to Opotiki, one to Waipukuruan, and five to Gisborne. The remainder, with exception of possibly two, will be buried in a communal grave at Wairoa.

## Plight of Women

The plight of two women in the camp above No. 4 is causing some concern. They are expectant mothers, and the camp is completely isolated by the frigid efforts are being made to restore road communication to enable a district nurse to get through.

## VICE-REGAL SYMPATHY

## MESSAGE TO RELATIVES

A message of sympathy has been sent by the Governor-General, Viscount Galway, and Lady Galway to the relatives of those who lost their lives in the floods in the Kopuwhara Valley on Saturday.

## VICEREGAL SYMPATHY

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## VICEREGAL SYMPATHY

## MESSAGE TO RELATIVES

An appeal is being made in Gisborne for clothes and food for the occupants of Boyd's camp, in the Wairoa Range, who lost all their worldly possessions when their homes were smashed to pieces in Saturday's flood in the Marateta Stream.

The camp is a small one between Bartlett's and Maruia, about 24 miles from Gisborne, and the inmates were employed on construction work on the Waikopu-Gisborne railway. When the stream rose in the early hours of the morning the occupants of the camp, seven married couples with 16 children, fled in their night attire to higher ground, one husband, Mr. William Robinson, being lost. The site of the camp, which comprised pine huts, is now merely an open paddock covered with heavy silt.

Regarding the death of Mr. Robinson whose body had not yet been found, eye-witnesses state that when the flood came he was wearing a waterproof and gum boots, and was the last to attempt to get to higher ground. His wife, who was a few yards in front, turned round to call to her husband when she saw a wall of water descend on him.

## KILLED BY A TRAIN

## RAILWAY EMPLOYEE

## FATHER OF SIX CHILDREN

While cycling beside the main line at the southern end of the Timaru railway yards shortly before two o'clock on Monday afternoon a stoneman in New Zealand was killed and was struck by the north-bound express and killed instantly. The victim was:

Mr. James McKewen, married, with children.

Mr. McKewen, who was transferred to Timaru from Invercargill only last week, was riding on the main line and in the same direction as the train. He was carrying a hydrant over his shoulder, and as he tried to stop the act of stopping his bicycle when it was struck by the train.

Although the express pulled up quickly Mr. McKewen was carried some distance before being thrown to the side of the track.

## BID FOR LIBERTY

## TWO MEN AT WAIKARIA

Two prisoners have escaped from the Waikari prison camp near Feilding, one just before 8 o'clock on Monday night and the other on Monday afternoon. Both men had been at the camp for just over a week and were sentenced to three months in the Supreme Court session at Auckland. The district is being scoured by a large number of warden and police, but neither man had been recaptured at a late hour on Monday night.

The men are Richard Jackson Ruff Myle, aged 27, height 6ft., with black hair and a ruddy complexion, and William Myle, a Maori labourer, aged 29, height 5ft. 11in.

A particularly daring escape, right in view of the warden and the remainder of a gang engaged in cleaning drains on the farm at the time, during the night of the superintendent, was made by Tito. He asked permission to secure a hole in the wall, and a few seconds later was seen by the warden to dive into an old disused tunnel, almost obscured by overgrowing weeds. The warden immediately sounded an alarm, but he had to line up the other prisoners and make certain of their safe custody before he could make an attempt to follow.

A search party quickly began operations in the vicinity of the tunnel, but the prisoners had long since made their break into the dense bush beyond, and no trace of his movements could be found.

## CARS IN SWAMP

## ONE DROWN ACCIDENTS

The Para Swamp, on the Pictou-Blenheim highway, was the scene of no fewer than six motor mishaps during Saturday afternoon and night. Two were of a fairly serious nature, the occupants of the vehicles having narrow escapes both from drowning and serious injury. The others were few or less minor mishaps in which cars left the road but were not wrecked without any major damage being done.

## AVIATOR'S FATE

## SEARCH BY FRIEND

## KINGSFORD SMITH MYSTERY

First-hand information about the search for the bodies of the late Sir Charles Kingsford Smith and his companion, Mr. T. Polthbridge, who were lost in a Lockheed aeroplane when flying from England to Australia in November, 1935, has been received in Auckland by Mr. J. S. W. Stannage from Mr. J. D. Holdor, an Australian aviator who led an expedition along the coast of Burma to find traces of the missing men.

Mr. Holdor is now employed as a pilot by a firm-mining company in Burma. In a letter to Mr. Stannage he says he went to the island of Ayey, which is only a mile long and half a mile wide, situated about 10 miles off the Burmese coast, and made a thorough search. At the topmost point, 800ft. above sea-level, was a large tree with the top cut off, and from there Mr. Holdor had difficulty in dragging the bodies of Sir Charles and his companion were numerous broken trees.

It appeared possible, said the writer, that the Lockheed struck the topmost tree, tore its way through the trees on the slope and plunged into the water. The finding of a wheel on the slope strengthened the theory. He eventually located the natives who found the wheel, and they took him to the spot where they made their discovery.

A further search was made, and after three days they found in a small bay two pieces of duralumin and a piece of steel nickel-plated moulding, which probably came from around the cockpit. The sea is dangerous thereabouts, and Mr. Holdor had difficulty in dragging the portion of the bay opposite the broken trees, where he believes the bodies of Sir Charles and his companion will be found.

"I have a feeling that it is where he was," he wrote, "and I am going to try to make another trip as soon as possible. This time I shall take a small boat and use it for dragging."

## NEW AIR SERVICE

## LINK ACROSS TASMAN

## START WITHIN YEAR

A statement that there will be a regular air service across the Tasman within the next 12 months was made yesterday by Mr. J. Stubbs, engineering engineer of Australian National Airways, Limited, when he arrived at Auckland by the Niagara from Sydney on his way to the United States and Europe to study aircraft developments. Mr. Stubbs said he had been informed on very good authority that Qantas Empire Airways, Limited, would have charge of the Tasman service.

## DAMAGE ON EAST COAST

## Camp Saved by Dogs' Alarm

## WAIMA COTTAGE WASHED OUT TO SEA

Although a complete survey was not yet possible owing to the blockage of roads and dislocation of telephone services, inquiries from Gisborne on Monday indicated that unprecedented damage was done by the storm and floods which invaded the whole district from as far south as Morere to Te Araroa in the north.

The main north road has been reopened for traffic, and the inland route to Wairoa, via Hangarua, gives reasonable access to the south, but it is unlikely that the East Coast road will be open before Thursday, while at least a week will be required to repair the damage on the main road to Napier.

Near Miruiri, the scene of desolation is almost indescribable. Around every tree or stump is piled a hopeless tangle of logs, branches and debris, all covered with silt. Entangled in these or lying in the stream or deep silt are sheep and cattle and hundreds of geese.

Six men camped at Mangatuna might have been drowned while they slept if they had not been awakened at 2 a.m. on Saturday by the cries of a dog and cats in their camp.

## Five Hours in Trees

The Ilkwaiki River was in high flood, and the men climbed some sturdy manuka trees near by, taking with them the dog and cats. For five hours they remained up the trees. Most

## PURSUIT BY POLICE

## LONG RIDE IN STORM

## SEARCH FOR MISSING CAR

Battling on horseback through sodden bush and over roads deep in mud, two constables from Whakanele rode into the heart of the forest country at the height of the storm on Friday in search of a missing motor-car. The car was found abandoned on the edge of a high cliff and an arrest was made later.

On Friday morning the police heard that the car, which had been missing from Edgecumbe since Tuesday evening, had been seen in the Waimana district, and they left to search for it. The Waimana George was in a very bad state and the road was blocked by slugs, but the constables obtained horses and rode on. Fourteen miles from the Waimana township the car was discovered unrecognised, but poised on the edge of a 200ft. cliff.

The police pushed on further up the Waimana River to Matahi, the burial place of the Maori prophet, Rua, and made an arrest in the bush near this lonely settlement.

The sequel to the chase was the appearance of Herbert Maxfield, a labourer, before justice at Tangata this morning. He was charged with the conversion of the car and remanded to appear in Whakanele.

of the residents in a near by Maori settlement climbed to the roofs of their houses for safety. Three feet of water surged through their houses.

In the property of King Brothers at Mangatuna the water rose to fill inside the house, and the owners took refuge on the roof of the verandah. In the morning they found that a large proportion of their stock was drowned, including 29 dairy cows.

Phenomenal Rainfall  
At Tokomaru Bay the flood was the worst known. The river through the township, at the height of the storm at 2 a.m. on Saturday, rose 20ft. above the normal level.

Water entered the school and houses in the centre, leaving a deposit of silt a foot thick. Waima township suffered extensively. A stream washed through the freezing works outcrops, leaving silt piled up to a depth of 4ft. at the back doors of five houses. One cottage owned by an elderly Maori, Mr. W. Hulihui, was washed bodily into the sea.

At Waimaitani a creek at the back of the residence of Sir Apirana Ngata changed its course, flowing right through the house. The outer buildings were almost completely buried in silt and gravel deposited by the turbulent stream, and much damage was done to the interior of the house, while the grounds surrounding it were ruined.

## DEATH OF INFANT

## YOUNG MOTHER CHARGED

## VERDICT OF MANSLAUGHTER

Charged at New Plymouth on Monday with the murder of her newly-born child on a farm at Ngareo in December, an unmarried woman, Stella Elizabeth Solomon, aged 21, was found guilty of manslaughter. The jury recommended that the highest degree of mercy should be extended to the girl. Sentence was deferred until Thursday.

The child was found in a deep hole in an outshouse on the farm where the girl was employed, and died in hospital soon afterwards.

Mr. J. O'Dea, for the defence, contended that the girl was in such a condition that she was not aware of the gravity of her act in placing the child in the hole. She did not know whether it was dead or alive, and only desired to put it out of sight.

The Chief Justice, Sir Michael Myers, said he would take the responsibility of directing the jury, if it found the main facts proved, to take a more merciful view and find a verdict of manslaughter.

The jury retired for 12 minutes.





# RUGGED KOPUWA WHARA VALLEY

## Mute Evidence of Havoc

### Wrought by Past Floods

#### ROUTE OF EAST COAST RAILWAY

By a Special Correspondent

THE Kopuwhara Valley, scene of Saturday morning's disaster, is a cleft, about 13 miles long, in the mass of hills which separate the Poverty Bay flats from Hawke's Bay. From the sea at Opoutama, right at the neck of the flat, sandy isthmus which unites the Mahia Peninsula to the mainland, it tapers back into the hills. For the first four or five miles from the sea it is comparatively wide, and the valley floor consists of grassy flats, strewn with large stones, which speak eloquently of the havoc wrought by floods in the past.

The impression given by the Minister of Public Works that the valley is not generally liable to floods can hardly be strictly accurate. It used to be the route of the old coach road and one of the reasons why the road was abandoned long ago, and not restored until the railway engineers reconstructed it, was the difficulty of maintaining it owing to frequent flooding.

#### Danger Recognised

THAT railway engineers, in locating the course of the East Coast line at this point, recognised the danger of floods, is evident from the fact that the railway line, instead of traversing the valley floor, is built high above it. At sea level at Waikopu, the line crosses an arm of the harbour there on an embankment, then swings north into the Kopuwhara Valley and traverses the hillsides along the eastern edge of the valley, climbing steadily all the time.

The Kopuwhara valley lent itself admirably to the purposes of those who plotted out the route, in that it affords a gradual approach to the largest tunnel on the whole line, the Tikiwhata

had to push a line through. The valleys are deep and wild, the hills impressively high and steep, and the tunnels very long. The danger of washouts and landslides had to be recognised, and special precautions taken along practically every yard of the route. For this reason, where ordinary fillings are pierced by culverts, these water-drives through solid rock are substituted. Some of them are 80 or 100 yards long, built like railway tunnels, and heavily concreted, with tremendous concrete approaches to guide the water into the tunnels and away from the vulnerable base of the fillings.

#### Famous "Battle"

OVER this particular section of the East Coast line, between Wairoa and Gisborne, was fought the famous "battle of the routes." The inland route by way of Timoroti, which would have traversed easier country, was rejected in favour of the coast route, partly because the latter took the line through Waikopu, a tiny port which has a big wharf and very little else. Comparatively few ships go there, and with the development of Napier's deep-water harbour, there will probably be fewer still.

In the old coaching days the main road to Gisborne followed the shores of Hawke's Bay from Wairoa along through Nuhaka to Waikopu, then went up the Kopuwhara and climbed crazily among the hills until it rejoined the present line of road on the summit of the well-known Wharecara Hill. Today, of course, the main road turns north at Nuhaka, passes the Moreore hot springs, and climbs first the Moreore Hill, then Tarawa, then Wharecara. Even to-day it is a road of countless curves and corners which has reduced many a novice-car passenger to a complete misery of car-sickness. In the old



follow the "coach road" if I wanted to see the railway workings properly. From the coach road subsidiary roads go twisting and spiralling and diving among the spurs and gullies to give access to various camps and supply points, established in connection with the big tunnels and the intermediate formation work. The top end of this formation occurs at the head of the Kopuwhara, between tragic No. 4 camp and the southern portal of the Tikiwhata tunnel, and in the Tikiwhata valley, where the railway line next sees daylight.

#### A Mountain Gorge

WE had been down in the deep Wharekakahe valley, where the Waikoura tunnel is being pierced, and had peered over the cliff at the main Tikiwhata camp, looking down the coastal slopes where the line is to emerge from the coast tunnel, 500 feet above the sea. Then we went back to the old coach road, heading for the Kopuwhara, and held our breath more than once in passing tracks on that



Clearing debris from a battered motor-car which was caught in the torrent.

tunnel, two miles long. The highest point on the line, 600 feet above sea level, is reached in the middle of the Tikiwhata tunnel, which is barely ten miles from Waikopu. Practically all this climbing is done in the Kopuwhara valley.

The stricken camp, No. 4, was located just beyond the last of the arable flats and was completely hemmed in by hills. Its situation on a grassy shelf between the hillsides and the stream made it the prettiest camp on the whole line. The railway, having crossed to the

days it was worse, but it could never hold a candle, in this respect, to the old coach road up the Kopuwhara valley.

The road up the Kopuwhara was virtually abandoned after the other was completely the main highway, and until 18 months ago was pretty well impassable. Then the railway engineers turned their attention to it, because it shortened the distance between Bartlett's and the Kopuwhara by about 20 miles. They widened it and reticulated it, and Public Works trucks and coaches

narrow road where there was but an inch or two between our wheel tracks and disaster.

The upper end of the Kopuwhara is so narrow, and its sides are so precipitous, that the valley is indistinguishable until the descent into it is actually begun. It is closed in by a watershed of a height and steepness which gives it all the characteristics of a mountain gorge.

Down in the valley, after three or four miles of twisting and turning, we

The Kopuwhara Stream after the torrent had subsided. Confined to a narrow groove the stream scooped out banks on either side, washing away a large section of the roadway on the right.

## Escape from War Camp

### Visiting Priest's Experience in France

Specially Written for THE WEEKLY NEWS

DARING and fortitude marked an adventure of an officer of the German Imperial Guards Regiment, who planned an escape from a British prison camp shortly after the termination of the Great War, only to be recaptured when within reach of absolute freedom. A Catholic missionary in Fiji, this former prisoner of war, the Rev. Father Bernard Wobken, is now visiting Auckland for the New Zealand Catholic centennial celebrations.

Father Wobken, as a comparative youth participated in the famous engagements at Passchendaele and Ypres against Australian troops. It was during the Battle of Langemarck, on July 31, 1917, that he was taken prisoner by Canadian troops.

One of the major British prison camps at Boulogne was destined to be the "home" of this soldier for 26 months, his particular occupation being that of foreman of the circular-saw bench, where timber was prepared for supply to the hospital at Etaples. After the Armistice he revolted against further enforced confinement.

"We were told that since Germany could pay none of her war debts, we would be held prisoners for several years to work and assist in rebuilding France," said Father Wobken, in relating his story. "My only thought was to escape. I did so with the assistance of my fellow-prisoners, to whom I shall always be indebted."

For two long months, preparations were made. In a corner of the workshop in which the prisoners were engaged, a slab of the wooden floor was lifted. Little by little a hole large enough to receive the escape was dug out, the spoil being secretly disposed of. Food, too, had to be put aside by each prisoner as the time neared for the escape.

The day arrived, and the full scheme was put into train. Father Wobken hid himself in the hole under the shed, while his countrymen replaced the flooring, piled old iron in the corner, scattered dust about, and sprang the entire shed with keystone to thwart the possibility of dogs being set loose to locate the escaped prisoner.

For 36 hours Father Wobken lay in hiding. Many of his countrymen were spent in utter misery and almost overpowering excitement. The camp was a cage. "I heard the British were put among the pile of iron in the shed above me and two of them actually sat on a form right over my head for what seemed to me to be an age," said Father Wobken. "I was afraid to breathe, lest I should make my whereabouts known."

In the dead of the next night, the prisoner stole from his hiding place. The guards had been withdrawn from their posts surrounding the camp. With the aid of a pair of scissors, he cut his way through the outer barred wire fence.

During the day he lay concealed in small forests or scrub-covered country

was offering, as there was a price of £500 on his head at this stage. He evaded a small party of beans, about three feet to four feet high. And I day was made doubly agonising by 41 undesired attentions of impostor fowls, which he was afraid would lead to his discovery.

Night after night he trudged, taking his bearings from the Pol Star. As a youth he had studied a little astronomy. Sometimes he would happen across other prison camps, but would give them a wide berth as soon as he saw their lights. But it was the absence of lights in a Chinese working camp lying directly in his path that led to his being recaptured on the ninth night—only one night from liberty.

"The camp was served by acetylene lighting, and they had run out of candle, which was just my misfortune," the narrator continued. "At three o'clock in the morning I walked right into the arms of an armed sentry. Soon I was surrounded by guard pointing fixed bayonets at me. Misty that I was a Belgian on my way

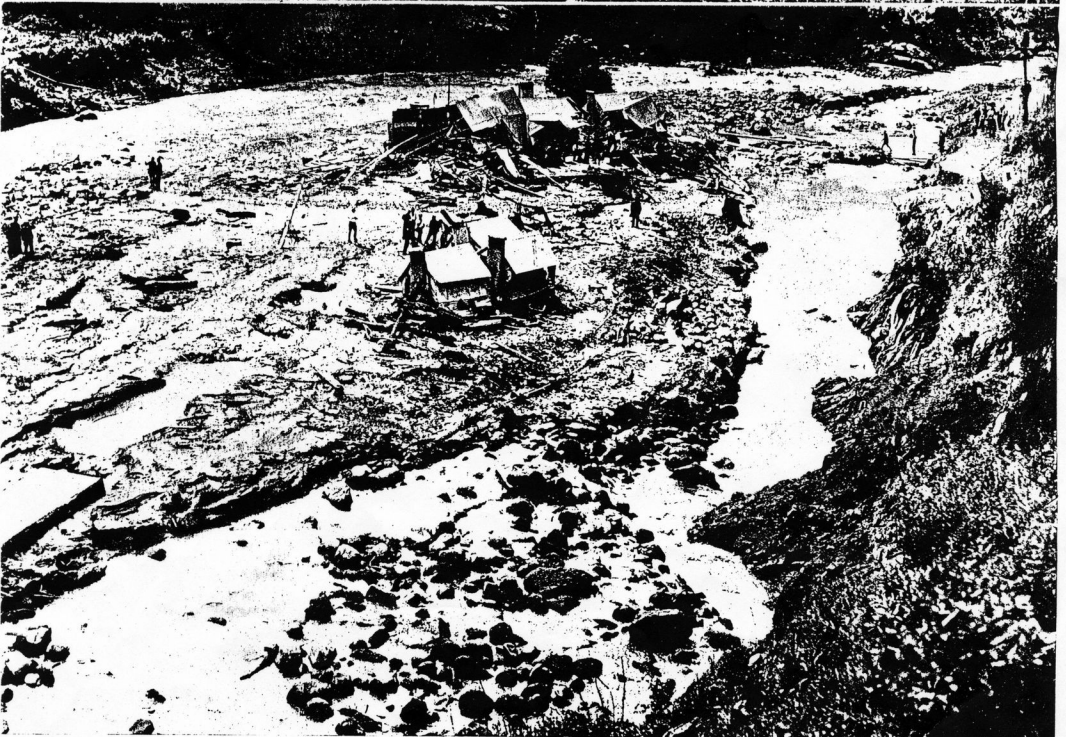
#### REV. FATHER BERNARD WOBKEN

to the coast in search of work was discovered. My identity was soon established."

Had an additional night's freedom been granted the prisoner, he could have swum the treacherous River Scheldt into Holland's neutral territory. Once there he could have discarded his prison clothes, which he had cut and patched to remove the prison brands and his fears for safety would have been over.

Another 15 days ended Father Wobken's prison life. It was a year to the day since the war had ended, and he was granted his freedom. He returned to Mappan, in the province of Hanover, which was his birthplace. In the succeeding years he studied for the priesthood, and after being ordained in 1922 volunteered for mission work and was appointed to Fiji, where he has been ever since.

Before going to his appointment in Fiji, where he has been in charge of



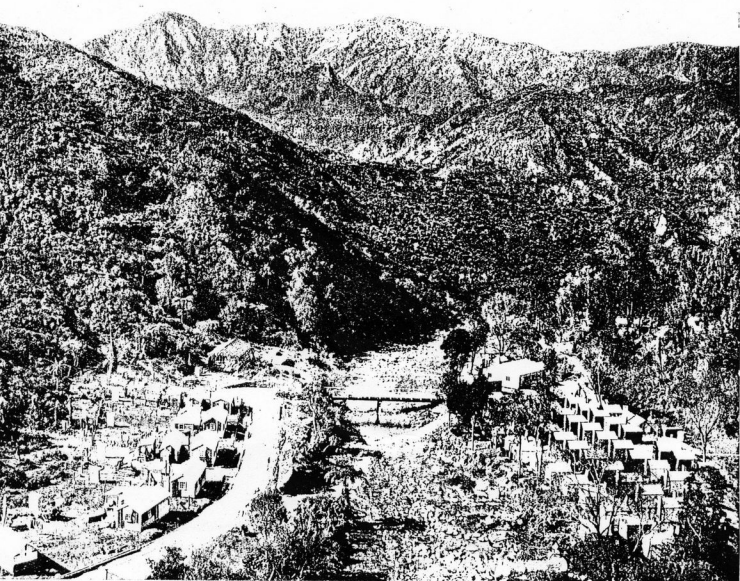
RIVER TORRENT OVERWHELMS RAILWAY CAMP: HEAVY LOSS OF LIFE IN NORTH ISLAND EAST COAST FLOOD DISASTER

These two pictures tell the tragic story of the disaster which overtook the No. 4 railway construction camp at Kopuwhara, about 35 miles north of Wairoa, early last Saturday morning. UPPER: The block of 47 workers' huts before the coming of the raging wall of water which overwhelmed them. LOWER: A view of the same place after the torrent had passed. The mountain stream on the left, swollen by fierce flood waters, jumped its banks and poured over the doomed camp. Men struggled for their lives in the darkness as their homes were swept away. Twenty-one perished. Scattered wreckage and desolation remained.

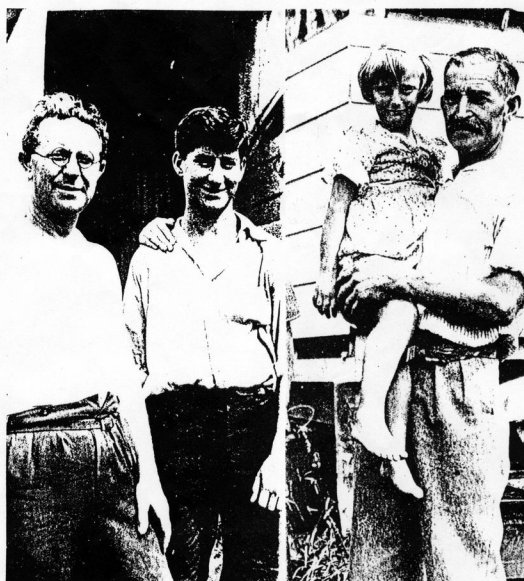




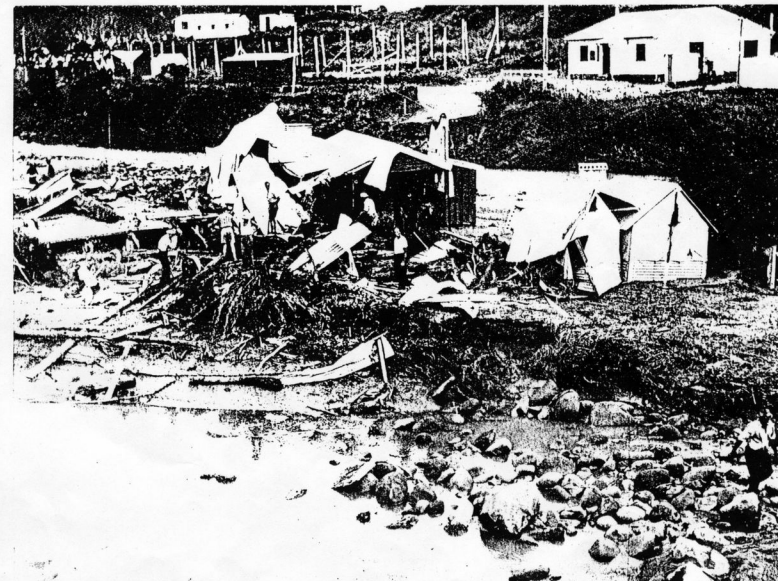
Scene of tragic desolation after the disaster: a general view of the No. 4 railway construction camp at Kopuawhara taken early on Sunday morning. Debris and where formerly the camp for single men was located, on the right of the stream which engulfed the men's homes. Compare with lower left picture.



In tragic contrast with the picture above is this view of the camp and surroundings before the flood. The ill-fated single men's section of the camp is on the right of the Kopuawhara Stream. TWENTY-ONE PEOPLE PERISHED WHEN RAGING FLOOD WATERS SWEEP AWAY RAILWAY WORKERS' HOMES IN THE DARKNESS OF EARLY MORNING; GRAPHIC PICTURES FROM THE SCENE OF THE TERRIBLE DISASTER WHICH OVERTOOK THE KOPUAWHARA CONSTRUCTION CAMP



Survivors of the tragedy. From left: Mr. Harold Cameron, Mr. H. McCorquodale, Harold Cameron, Jr., Mrs. Cameron, Joan Cameron dragging a heavily-built man to safety.



All that remained of the stricken camp: a closer view of wreckage of some of the buildings after the flood had passed.