

British But Not Basic

(Written for "The Listener" by L. R. HOBBS)

EVERY war and every Army develops its own slang. So the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force, in its Middle East stay, had made some contributions to a more picturesque speech.

Many of the new expressions are self-explanatory. "Get mobile," for instance, needs no interpreter to explain that the Sergeant means by it that he would like a speedy move. It sounds better, too, than the older expression "Get a move on." Meaning the same but with more emphasis, and more commonly used, is the phrase "get cracking." When the Major rings up and wants something done in a hurry, as like as not he will finish with an explicit "Get cracking now."

Then there is the most common phrase of all; expressing a kind of inverted irony. It is "You've had it." It means that you haven't had it. You go

down to the Y.M.C.A. late for free supper on a Sunday night. You rush in anxiously and say "What about supper?"

You're told "You've had it." It means emphatically that supper is finished, and that not only have you not had it, but that you're not going to get it. Such a phrase lends itself to all sorts of variations. You are, let us suppose, for financial or other reasons, finished for the time being with going into Cairo. To explain your attitude, you tell your friends "I've had Cairo." Everyone in the Middle East knows what you mean.

There are, of course, the eternal variations on the old theme which nearly wrecked New Zealand's slang two or three years ago. "That'll be the day," "That'll be the sunny afternoon," and so on.

Talking to each other, the Kiwis use the terms "Soldier" or "Dig" mostly. First, Second and Third Echelon men are naturally known as the "Old Digs"—men who were there almost before the Pyramids. Occasionally, but not very

often, you hear the word "sport." English troops are not referred to as "Tommies" at all, but as "Pongos." They call us "Chum."

The Australian troops in the Middle East adapted from the Cockney the very puzzling rhyming slang. "Apples and Pears" for "upstairs," and so on, interminably.

An adaptation to Kiwi needs of the Arabic language is also a variant of slang. Many a wife at breakfast after the war will be surprised when her husband replies, absent-mindedly, "Aiwa" to some question. It means "Yes." The fatalism of Eastern people is reflected in the use of the phrase "Maleesh," which can mean anything from "It doesn't matter" to "Don't bother about it," or "What difference does it make, anyway."

For the best use of Arabic in everyday speech, those readers of *The Listener* who are fortunate enough to have someone send them occasional copies of the *N.Z.E.F. Times* should read the Johnny Enzed column, in which there are some classic examples of the soldier's idiom, caught exactly.

For instance this article is finished now. In Arabic it is "koloss." In soldier's slang it is also "wiped," another phrase for something ended.

SMART ONES PLAY

A WAITING GAME

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