

WORD came to "The Listener" the other day that some men were returning from overseas, with them Sergeant John Denvir, D.C.M., the New Zealander who escaped from Germany into Yugoslavia and joined Marshal Tito's partisan forces, was officially reported dead for a year, rose to the command of a partisan battalion, and became a famous figure throughout Yugoslavia before a wound made it necessary to send him to Cairo for treatment. Sergeant Denvir has received the D.C.M. for his services in Yugoslavia but the award for valour which has been bestowed on him by the Soviet Union has not reached him yet. He is a shy and modest man, and he evaded journalists who wanted to see him on his first day back in New Zealand, except reporters from "The Listener" and another weekly. Our representative spent about four hours with him, and here is his account of the interview.

I WAS told to be at a reception at 4 p.m., and that Sergeant Denvir would be there. So near the appointed time I entered a Y.M.C.A. hut where soldiers and next-of-kin were milling round in what was more like a roar than a buzz of conversation. I found a photographer who was bound to have seen Sergeant Denvir already, so I asked him to direct me to him. The direction I was given will serve as a description of the man: "Yes, he's over there somewhere. Big tall joker with ginger hair and a blackberry hat." Actually he is lean, not big, tall but not abnormally. His hair is deep red, and he wears the black beret of the tank corps.

I found Sergeant Denvir being interviewed by another journalist, and there was another waiting her turn to talk to him. We waited together. Since his home was in Christchurch, and there appeared to be no friends or relatives preparing to carry him off, it might be possible, we thought, to do the carrying off ourselves, and get him away from

"ONE OF TITO'S LITTLE BAND"



Sgt. John Denvir, of Christchurch, is a Hard Man to Interview

all the hurly-burly of tea and cakes and other people's conversation.

Our opportunity came and we got him outside. My colleague was joined by another representative of her paper and between the three of us we agreed on a plan for spiriting away one of Marshal Tito's former battalion commanders to a place of comfort and quiet. But there was a hold-up while Sergeant Denvir made inquiries about his obligations for the next few hours, and it was a fortunate hold-up because it gave time for a

friend of Mrs. Denvir's to seek him out and present herself as the next best thing to a next-of-kin. Finally the party consisted of Sergeant Denvir, his wife's friend, two journalists whom I shall call Miss X and Mr. Y, and myself. And being all assembled we made for a hotel of Mr. Y's choosing, where a photographer would in due course join us. We threw ourselves on the hospitality of the proprietor, a friend of Mr. Y, and shortly we were gathered by the fire in his private sitting-room and drinks were handed round.

Reticent But Patient

Well, Sergeant John Denvir is a hard man to interview. He is patient, friendly, and agreeable. But if you make the mistake of inviting him to open out and tell you in his own words what he has done he will correct you: "Well, a chap doesn't want to talk about his own deeds, you know." Feeling as if you had wronged him by expecting him to do anything so immodest, you wait for one of the others to put a more specific question. A question is put, and Sergeant Denvir answers it with the minimum of necessary words, with one syllable only, if possible. He looks at the carpet and rubs the side of his head with one long forefinger, ready to answer the next question when it comes, but neither impatient to hear nor anxious to escape it. Finally we get muddled with the confusion of unco-ordinated questions:

"Well, perhaps I'd better start from the beginning" . . . (eager replies of "Yes, do," general relief and expectation, pencils at the ready).

"I was a prisoner of war in Maribor, in Austria, and I escaped to Zagreb . . ." We would not have known our jobs if we had asked how. The obvious questions about that went unasked.

"Then I was recaptured by the Ustachi, Yugoslavian Fascists. It was hard luck. I saw a couple of chaps in the street in Yugoslav uniforms and went up like a fool and introduced myself."

A wry little smile suggested far more than any explanation could have done.



If these two photographs lack something in clarity, it is because they have had some adventures. They are from a film brought home by Sgt. Denvir. On the left he is seen with Major-General Stane, commander of the Slovenian forces, after receiving a citation for bravery. On the right is a Partisan family—mother, two sons, and 13-year-old daughter, all active fighters, photographed by Sgt. Denvir.