

New Zealander's Adventurous Year

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On this occasion I found myself in a new dilemma. I had to convince the Germans that I really was a New Zealand "Hauptmann" and not an English spy. After a lot of grueling cross-questioning, I produced photos of my wife and child sent to me in Campo 47, and these, to my great relief, seemed to turn the scales in my favour, but even so, I was remanded for further questioning at Rieti. It was while en route that I was lucky enough to make my third escape.

Escape Under Water

I was seated between the driver and spare driver of the second truck of a long convoy which departed from the front at about 8 p.m. Some five hours later the column was stopped by a road blockage caused by the R.A.F. At this point the River Salto,

as easy as that—my ducking had serious consequences in the form of pneumonia, which became so serious that the generous family nursing me through this illness even called the priest in to administer the last rites. Luckily, however, these were not necessary, and I recovered, thanks to the kindly ministrations of Quintino and Tomasine of Tornimparte.

Hardly was I up and about than Alexander started his big push. Cassino fell, Frosinone fell, Rome was evacuated, and the German was well on the run. My freedom seemed certain, and the day for which I had waited for nine long weary months was approaching hourly. The Germans were pouring north, and then came the never-to-be-forgotten night when bridges, culverts and roads were destroyed, "ammo"



"Radio Post"

J. B. PRIESTLEY, with Fred Emney, London comedian, in the BBC's variety programme, "Radio Post," for listeners overseas. The first four editions of this radio magazine were introduced and edited by Priestley. Having successfully launched the programme, he then handed it over to a serving soldier, Corporal Jack Hancock who, like Priestley, is a Yorkshire man. An edition of "Radio Post" will be heard from IYA at 9.30 p.m. on Wednesday, October 25.

greatly swollen by the thawing of the mountain snows, flowed very close to the road in the same direction as we were taking. Thinking this river might offer possibilities, I found occasion to be excused, and modestly climbed the bank. The water was only 20 yards away, and no German had his gun out. It was worth the risk. I took to my heels, cleared the bank and plunged into the icy water. I swam as far as I could under water, and reluctantly came up for breath. Not a sound could I hear. Down again and more frenzied strokes. Unwillingly to the surface again. This time there were plenty of sounds—the duck shooting season was open, and I was the poor bird. Under yet again and for a longer spell, till my lungs nearly burst. Head out again for another gulp of air, and still plenty of lead round. But most of it was behind me, and the shooting seemed wild. Even so, I played safe, and swam until I couldn't see a single flash from the bank. Then, and only then, did I pull myself out, collecting my hat that was floating behind me, and probably had acted as decoy. I clambered up the opposite bank and ran till I found a farmstead where some kindly peasants took me in and let me dry my clothes.

Pneumonia Next

Well, I had had three escapes from the Germans, and I did not want to "flog my luck," so I decided to wait for the Allies to come to me. But it was not

dumps went up while the sky was lurid with explosions and fires. And in the morning—peace, the Germans were gone: I was safe.

"The Greatest Thrill"

What I have written is only the bare bones of my story. I could tell of partisan activity, British bombing, encounters with other escaped prisoners—Russian, Slav, French, American, etc.—my feud with a Nazi lieutenant from Stuttgart, who swore to get me; and more than these, of my loyal friends among the simple Italians, and of the lives they lead under what seem to us to be primitive conditions.

But my greatest thrill was yet to come. I was privileged to observe a crowd of jubilant Italians joyously welcoming their liberators. I stood with weeping and excited citizens in the town square of Aquila on June 17, 1944, and watched with deep emotion a column of typical Tommy troops passing under the triumphal archway specially erected in their honour. I made myself known to a British officer, who insisted that, grubby and lousy as I was, I should ride with him. During our conversation I told him I had not had a cup of tea for more than nine months. His response was typical. Leaning forward, he tapped his driver on the shoulder and said "Stop, Gibson, brew up." And with that mug of hot, sweet, strong tea in my hand I knew that at last I had arrived.

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