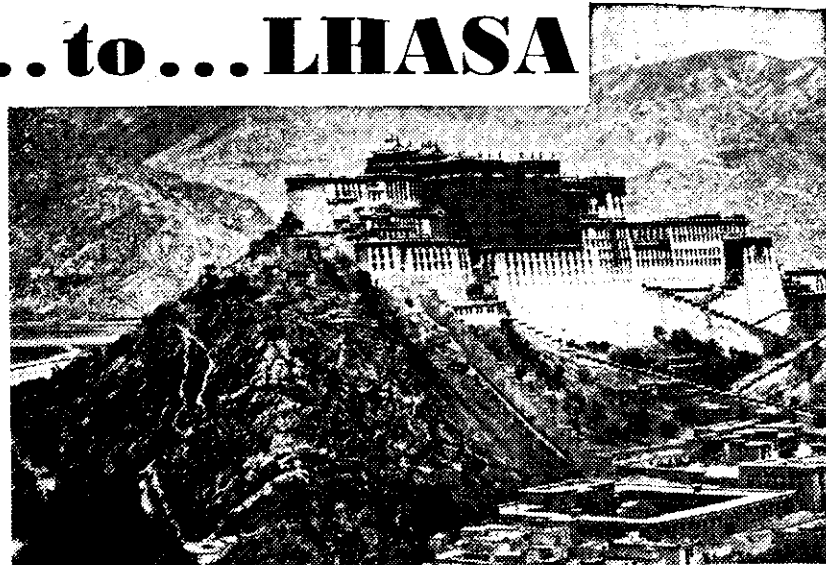
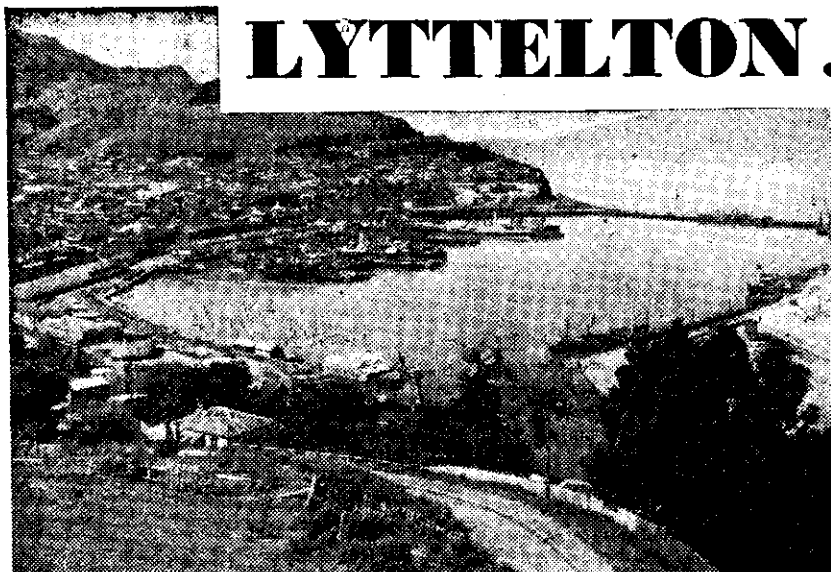


LYTTELTON...to...LHASA



IT began, as most events do, in the brain of a dreamer—the New Zealander Rewi Alley, then as now “somewhere in China.” The day before Christmas, 1940, he sent to a brother in Wellington (G. T. Alley, Director of the Country Library Service) what would have been a fantastic proposal from anyone else, and from almost any other place, but which from Rewi Alley in Chungking was almost routine:

*The Ministry of Koloshan,
CHUNGKING.*

The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry wish to buy some stud sheep from New Zealand for our great North West. China is fighting our battle for democracy against Fascism in Asia, and needs all the help she can get. Our industry needs better raw materials. The Ministry is doing its best to improve stock so as to provide these . . . Before the war China was doing much experimental breeding from imported American stock. But the stock farms are now all in occupied territory, and work has to be begun anew in Free China . . . What is needed are 100 hoggets—half rams and half ewes, say 50 Corriedales, 20 Merinos, 20 Romneys, and 10 Lincolns. The country on which they would be run varies from the west highlands of Chinghai to the drier part of Kansu . . . We need to know whether these sheep can be bought and exported from New Zealand to China. What is the state of shipping—that is, is there any available? What would be the route from New Zealand to Rangoon, the port of disembarkation? What would be the cost of passage approximately? Would it be possible to get a New Zealand Chinese who was used to sheep to go with them? . . . Can you make out an outline budget for us? Include the cost of 200 pairs of shears with oilstones.

The brother went to Wright Stephenson & Co., and by the middle of February, 1941, was able to send to Chungking a “draft budget to cover the cost of buying 100 sheep and sending them insured as far as Rangoon.” Curiously enough, he could not quote for 200 pairs of shears and oilstones which had been asked for: these were unobtainable then in New Zealand, and Chungking was referred to Sydney for that portion of its order.

Wanted: A Shepherd

One of the problems was the care of the sheep on the way, and there is this interesting paragraph in the letter written by G. T. Alley to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Chungking:

The Story Of A Mob Of Sheep

THIS may or may not be the story of the most remarkable journey by a mob of sheep in the history of the world. The world is large, history is long, and superlatives are always dangerous. It may or may not be the most remarkable story of New Zealand sheep—here again caution is necessary. Our sheep have gone to Patagonia, to Siberia, to Manchuria, to Bechuanaland, and other places equally remote. What is certain is that it is the amazing story of an almost incredible journey which may or may not now be ended; which began in Lyttelton and continued to Lhasa; which involved sea-risks, air-risks and land-risks; and which may already have been resumed across the very top of the world.



THESE WERE SOME OF THE SHEEP THAT WENT

WELLINGTON.

The cost of care of the sheep has been included in the estimate of freight, but it would be very desirable to have a Chinese shepherd who knew New Zealand conditions and who would travel with the sheep to Rangoon and thence into China. My brother has two adopted sons (Chinese) whose whereabouts could perhaps be got from him. One of them has been to New Zealand and would, I think, be very suitable for a job of this kind. Would it be possible for him to come to New Zealand, spend a month here, and return with the sheep? If this is not possible, I may be able to arrange with the Chinese Association here for a New Zealand Chinese to go. If your Government decides to buy these sheep, I can assure you that there is no better place in the world from which to get them.

By April 10, 1941, C. C. Ku was able to write from Lanchow:

LANCHOW, CHINA.

Your brother, Mr. Rewi Alley, has sent me copies of letters in regard to purchasing purebred sheep from New Zealand. Allow me to thank you first, for these sheep are for my enterprise, as it is now my duty to improve wool in China's North West, which is mostly a region inhabited by Mongols and Tibetans. We have over 10,000,000 sheep here waiting for improvement, so you can readily see that what we buy is only a drop of water in comparison. But it will be a start. In case the Chinese in New Zealand

are interested in this project, it will be a real contribution to my country if they can contribute 60 purebred ewes, and send them with the stock we are going to buy. We ourselves have decided to buy 130 sheep.

New Life for Many

On the same day, Rewi Alley wrote again from Chungking asking if a New Zealand Chinese could be trained as a shepherd and sent with the sheep, and adding:

In China it often depends on the courage and energy of one man to get a project over that will mean new life to a great many people indeed. C. C. Ku is one such . . . It seems impossible in view of the present situation for either Mike or Alan (adopted sons) to leave their present places. A good shepherd would be a very great help to us in training shepherds, though the going would not be easy . . . Our Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is a new one, and so has a good deal to do setting up its various departments. But no one department has so great a responsibility for improving the wool of the North West. On this one factor depends the morale and the better livelihood of many millions.

Those two letters reached Wellington on May 1, and by May 3 G. T. Alley sent off these replies:

G. T. ALLEY TO C. C. KU.
WELLINGTON,
NEW ZEALAND.

All here are anxious to help. We think no time should be lost, and I am replying to you at once to give you the names you have asked for . . . In making your final budget, allow for the fact that guineas are not pounds. A guinea is £1/1/-, 1000 guineas equals £1050. It is a silly custom here to sell some things for guineas . . . Let us know what type of purebred ewes you would like if the extra number can be sent. Perhaps we can advise about this, but we should know what type of country (amount of rainfall, feed, etc.) these sheep will go to, and what you will want to use them for. It will have to be remembered that the number of sheep that can be sent will depend on shipping space and that there is a limit to the number one man can look after. But 150 to 200 should not be impossible for one man, although feeding and cleaning the pens on board ship is a long job . . . Although you have so many sheep to improve, I should advise you to try to get the best that can be got here for a reasonable price. New Zealand breeding is of the very highest, except for Merinos, which are, however, quite good. Corriedales are sent from here all over the world.

G. T. ALLEY TO REWI ALLEY.
WELLINGTON,
NEW ZEALAND.

About the shepherd, this is a hard nut to crack, though enquiries are now being made. To teach an intelligent Chinese to shear would not be hard, but this is not the season. Much could be learned on general lines in a few months at a good place by a good man, but the result would still be an incompletely trained person. It looks as though you will have to take time off your main jobs and start a shearing Co-op. Perhaps we could send films of a good blade shearer doing a few sheep.

Quantity Before Quality at First

By June 10, 1941, those letters had been delivered in China and brought this reply to G. T. Alley from Mr. Ku at Lanchow:

LANCHOW, CHINA.

Things can hardly be hastened as we wish, but a sum of £3,000 has been granted and £2,000 will be sent to you direct within a month or two. Perhaps 180 animals would be the maximum. Ewe lambs are certainly the best; the question of a shepherd will be entirely at your free decision . . . the type of country here is dry, altitude about 2,000 to 3,000 metres. Grass good in summer, but not enough good hay in winter. Winter very severe. A few places swampy. Parasites in plenty. Local shepherders all unscientific. Our first purpose is more wool and not much attention to quality. We are thinking of buying a bunch of sheep every year from New Zealand, and each year better stock.

(continued on next page)