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Off at Last

Then on August 8, 1941, a cable came which enabled G. T. Alley to send a letter to Wright Stephenson asking that firm to proceed with its negotiations for the purchase of 100-150 sheep and "to indicate at the earliest possible moment whether there was a chance of getting them to Rangoon by October."

Business is business, of course, and we are not permitted to report either the negotiations between buyer and sellers or the discussions between banks, Governments, embassies and shipping companies. There were, of course, hitches and delays, but by December 12 G. T. Alley was able to write to the manager of Wright Stephenson's stud stock department "thanking him very much for his work in getting the sheep away," and hoping that the effort would be successful "in spite of recent happenings in the Pacific."

A Japanese Complication

The effort was successful, though it was a long time before there was proof of that. In the meantime, Japan had entered the war on December 7. An urgent cable had come from Lanchow on December 24 asking that the sheep, if they could be located, should be detained. Sydney cabled on January 9, 1942, that the sheep would be unloaded at Calcutta, and on January 15 an urgent cable was sent to Rewi Alley, Chungking, asking him to "contact Rangoon" and "ensure that somebody reliable" go to Calcutta to "attend further transport."

Two men had, in fact, started from Kansu for Rangoon on November 22, but the letter from C. C. Ku to G. T. Alley announcing this did not reach Wellington till January 19. It contained this interesting passage:

KANSU, CHINA.

Allow me to report to you briefly what we have been doing here. We have half of our buildings done, which include a clinic and serum-making plant for sheep. About 4,000 native young and selected ewes are gathered ready for use in hybrid matings when the purebreds arrive. Extension works

are under way on a large scale, but we cannot do actual pushing until we have the purebreds in hand, as Tibetans and Mongols believe nothing in empty talk. We are extremely short in scientific equipment, medicine, and books. My bunch of young men need rigid training to acquaint them with severe conditions of the grasslands, which are by no means peaceable. What friends both in New Zealand and in China do in helping this project out will not only be long remembered but will be a real contribution to scientific sheep husbandry and to the sheep-raising people of China, not to mention the economic help in resisting foreign aggression.

As it happened, the sheep were not met when they arrived, the men sent from Chungking having been held up at Lashio. But 149 sheep — a Corriedale ewe died a few days after leaving New Zealand — did eventually start for Darjeeling, and the rest is mystery for months.

News at Last

Once or twice the little flock was reported somewhere "off the map." Once or twice rumours came through that it had perished. For nearly two years there was no authentic news of it at all, and then the other day this letter arrived from Lanchow. It was written by Rewi Alley to G. T. Alley under date November 15, 1944 — nearly four years after the "translation of the dream into words and plans":

LANCHOW.

You will remember the efforts you made to get those stud sheep out of New Zealand, to buy them in the best places, to get them by various shipping lines to the East only to find Rangoon lost. Then the trouble there was to get them to the highlands in India, and finally the trek across Tibet towards Kansu. From that time to this present, there have been two new Ministers of Lands, the man who was to receive them has been moved from Minchow elsewhere, and the sheep are given up as too difficult to move further, at a point this side of Lhasa. One report said that they had died of eating Tibetan poisoned grass. However, following that, two American men, Tolstoy and Dolan, reported that they had seen them, and that Tibetans were crossing their sheep

with them, and that they were exciting a great interest amongst Tibetan shepherds. So it seems that they have come to the end of their trail, and they will have their effect on the sheep of Central Tibet, but not on those of the province of Kansu, for which they were intended.

Yet Kansu is the province we must do something to help with better sheep. Those here clip about 3lb. of poor wool a year. Add one or two pounds to this fleece and better livelihood comes to a great number of people. We are trying to bring in small unit textile machinery from abroad, but we must have more wool to use here. This is the thing of paramount importance. . . . The last time the sheep were sent, the Ministry of Lands sent the money for purchase. My proposal now is that we do the same thing again, but entirely as a social thing apart from Government aid. To do this, money for purchase and sending would have to be raised abroad. New Zealand Chinese might help, though I expect they send a great deal already. It would do the average New Zealand farmer good, and make for an interest in this country, if he put a bet on Kansu sheep and their betterment, at the same time as he puts his bets on the tote in Riccarton. A sporting chance. Would the sheep get through, would they be cared for, would they stand this climate, would they help a lot of farmers such as they themselves are, to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps?

Sure, the whole thing is a gamble. But it is a gamble that would be good for us here and for people in New Zealand to play, for the sake of the good of their own souls. Here, we should never cease trying to abolish this poverty which, if it stays, will be the breeding ground of so many new wars, so much human distress. There you have to realise that there are other countries in the world besides New Zealand and its Commonwealth neighbour.



REWI ALLEY — it was his dream



G. T. ALLEY — he helped to translate the dream.



From New Zealand pasture . . . to high Tibetan grasslands



Shearing, Tibetan style. The blades are blunt, so the women hand-pluck some of the wool first.



Shearing, New Zealand backblocks style. The blades are sharp.