

THE LIBRARY GOES TO THEM

Supplying The Services With Books

"**S**HUSH, moider! M' . . . yes, I think I'll go in for a drop of moider this week."

So said a young private at a military post last week when the A.E.W.S. travelling library van made its call with 300 books for exchange. He got what he wanted. Had he inquired for Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* he would probably have been equally successful.

"**I** LIKE to visit my friends now and then just so that I can look over my library," a cynic once said. But sailors, soldiers, airmen, Waacs, Waafs, and Wrens do not have to adopt the subterfuge of borrowing without returning to keep themselves supplied with literature. They have a choice of 20,000 books in the Central Military District library to call on—books on subjects ranging from tailoring to diesel engineering, beekeeping to conjuring, and from the latest thriller to an ancient classic. And what's more, they do not have to visit the library: the library goes to them.

To gain an impression of how the scheme (started in March, 1943, and described in *The Listener* soon afterwards) has progressed in the meantime, we accompanied a travelling library van on one of its issue trips and found that the system of book exchange is practically the same as that in any city library. After all, the men and women of the fighting services are merely civilians in khaki or blue for the time being.

The A.E.W.S., assisted in the purchase of books by the Country Library Service, and by book donations from the public, has built up a very fine collection with headquarters at Buckle Street. Every week two Waac librarians make a round of service posts, taking about 300 books to each. Between 2,000 and 3,000 exchanges are made in the three services monthly. The trays of books, carried in the van, are never empty, for this is a game of put and take in a literary sense. And there are 28 units to be served.

A Photostat Copy

Personnel may have books on almost any subject. If the trays in the travelling van do not contain what a man wants, he may put in a request and out comes the book next trip. The service endeavours to supply all demands, and frequently writes to far-away libraries for request volumes. Recently a soldier required material contained in a rare volume in the Turnbull Library. It could not be loaned out, but the difficulty was solved by obtaining photostat copies of the sections the soldier was anxious to study.

The issue and return system is quite simple. The trays of books are arranged in the post messroom or, if it is a fine day, outside. The Waacs have the cards ready and as soon as a man has made his choice of two books or three or four periodicals, has handed back his old books and had his card marked, the transaction is complete. Books returned by the personnel of one post are taken to the next and overdue volumes are checked weekly.

In the first instance 90 per cent of the stock was donated, since the purchased material was quite inadequate to meet the needs of the men and women. Then purchases were made, so that now about half the stock consists of gifts and the other half has been bought.

Maoris Like "Westerns"

The assistants had not been on the job long before they gained a very fair idea of the average taste of the readers. "Westerns" are particularly popular among Maoris, who read with avidity. Often they pick one author and ask for everything he has written. But the range is vast. We noted one or two titles at random. They were *U.S. Foreign Policy* (Walter Lippman), *The Fleet of To-day* (Banning), *The Russian Enigma* (Chamberlin), and, by way of contrast, *The Rat Began to Gnaw a Rope* (Grafton).

The average rate of reading in the forces is three to five books a month. This is considered small, but is accounted for by the numbers of men and women on leave, on transfer, and marching out. The majority of the men go in for light reading, but there is also a good inquiry for what is loosely called "good, solid stuff."

In the larger Army, Navy, and Air Force camps, big stocks of books are held and are circulated by full-time staffs of librarians. And if a sudden expansion came in the three services, the central depot could meet the book demand. Depreciation of stock is considerable and, as much of the donated book stock was well worn before being handed over, a repair desk is always busy. Books quite beyond repair are put aside to be repulped. Disposal of the library after the war will be carried out through the Country Library Service.

The library staff is proud of its set-up and keenly interested in the work. One of them spent some years in the Parliamentary Library and so knows the book business thoroughly. He considers that the C.M.D. library is equal in quality to any in the other centres.

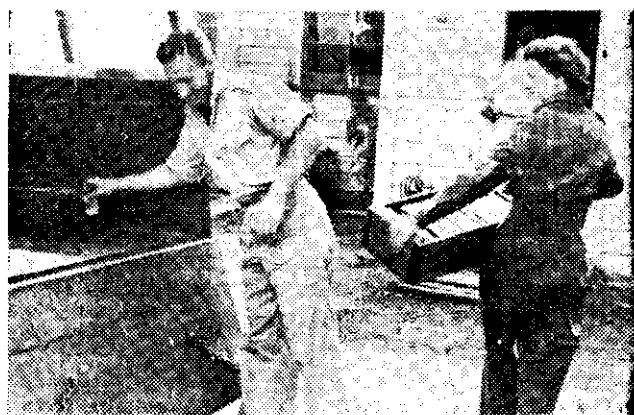
Civilian Comparison

It is impossible to give an adequate idea of the range of subjects beyond saying that the C.M.D. library can be compared with its civilian contemporary. Whole sections are given up to music, the theatre, biography, travel, trades and sciences, economics, business and hobbies, while fiction is well up to date. Incidentally, the New Zealand section is excellent.

One of the posts *The Listener* visited was a naval barracks where rating and Wrens flocked to change their books. Quite by accident we noticed two books standing out in the trays. They were *The Naval Officer's Guide* and *My Island of Dreams*. Whether the personnel had seen enough of the sea or had been disillusioned about waving palms, ukuleles, and South Sea beauties we do not know. The books were still there when we left.



(Above) Inside the depot at the Central Military District, where the books start on their travels. There are 20,000 to choose from.



(Right) Carrying trays of books from the van into the mess-room, where the men will choose their reading-matter for the week.



(Right) If it is fine they make their choice outside. Interest is keen.

(Below) At a naval barracks, WRENS are keen to see what the library van has brought this week.

