

NEW ZEALAND WILL BE THERE

Volunteers For Free China

NEW ZEALAND will be represented in yet another theatre of war, when seven volunteers for the "China Convoy" who are now on their way arrive. *The Listener* was able to interview five of the party the day before they left.

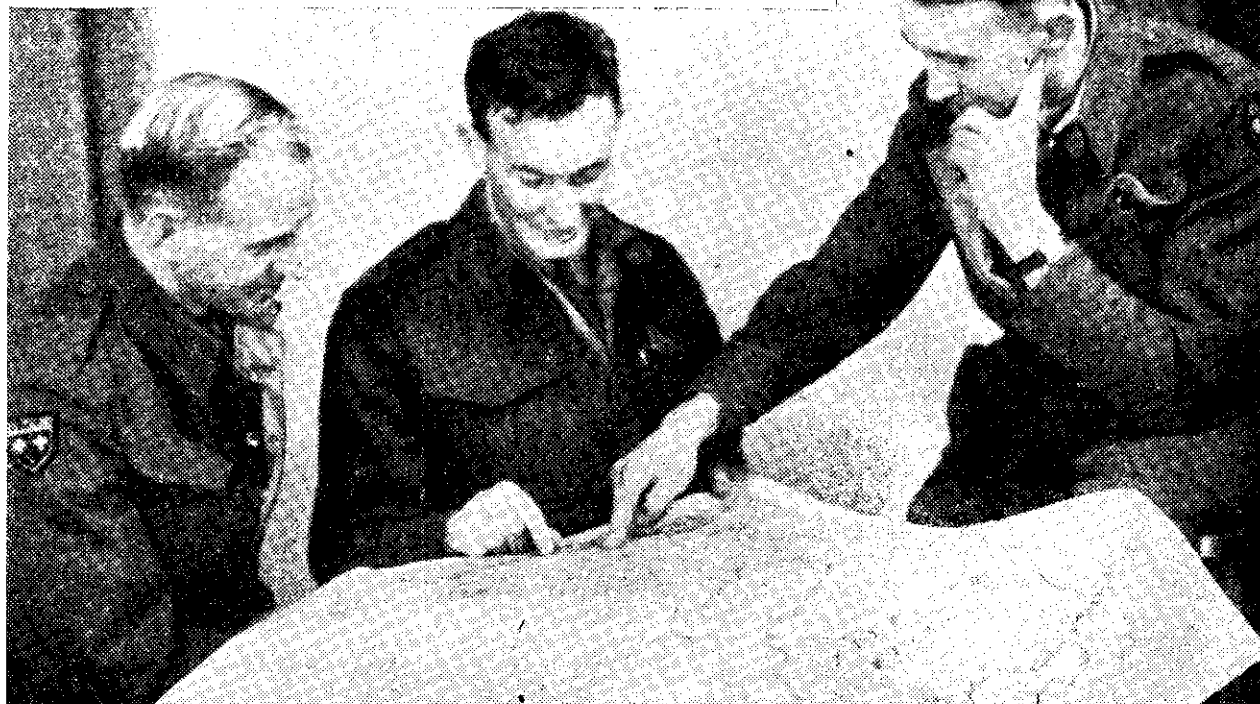
"Seven men is more like an Embassy than an Army Corps," someone commented. "What will you be doing when you reach China?"

"Lying on my back in the mud under lorries that won't go," suggested Wilfred Jackson, who until recently trucked timber from the bush in North Auckland. "Those Chinese trucks haven't had spare parts, let alone replacements, since 1941. That's why they picked John Johnston here. A man who has been at sea never is. We are relying on John, who has also been engineering and woodworking, to help rebuild the Convoy as it moves along. You see we are going neither as consuls nor as soldiers, but as Jacks-of-all-trades."

John grinned in turn. "Judging by what we hear of Chinese roads its Owen Jackson, another of our party, whom both of us may need. He's a boat builder. But seriously," he added, "we three are wanted mainly as drivers and mechanics. Apparently the Chinese haven't had enough mechanical experience, on the whole, to keep them sensitive to an old crate's creaks and wheezes. They let them deteriorate too far. We may work on the Burma road now that it is being remade. Or, more likely, we'll be sneaking medical supplies across the new corridor to the coast that the Chinese have opened up."

The Medical Side

"The other three of us may need their brains on our job as well as everything we can supply, commented Courtney Archer, journalist from Greymouth, introducing Neil Johnson, Master of



CHINA'S A BIG PLACE: Three of the New Zealand volunteers—Wilfred Jackson (left), Neil Johnson, and Lindsay Crozier—study a map

Science, but later working on a North Canterbury station, and Lindsay Crozier, a pre-war cine and still photographer, whose more recent jobs have been in Southland bacon factories. "We are the medical people," Archer explained. "We've had, to prepare us, a little—but not nearly enough—training in simple work with microscopes and X-ray equipment—and of course First Aid. But I was reading of one F.A.U. de-lousing station that had been made with oil drums for heaters and bamboo for water pipes. Improvisation seems to be the first qualification for medical work in way-back China."

"You said a 'F.A.U. Station.' You'd better explain what F.A.U. means," I suggested.

They thumbed their arm badges. "Friends' Ambulance Unit," one expounded. "That's what we belong to — the Chinese Section of it." I learned that the Unit was altogether about a thousand strong and had operated on all fronts, including Finland and Ethiopia.

"Then you fellows are all Quakers?"

"No, not all of us," Neil Johnson explained. "But it is a Quaker unit and does not admit anyone out of sympathy with its general attitude." There had been over a hundred applications in New Zealand from free men able to go. Some, I was told, had offered their whole savings as well. It was mainly the expense of getting to China that made the team so small. More money would enable more to follow.

Seven Pence a Day

"And are not expenses in China itself very heavy?" I asked, thinking of current inflation.

"Not nearly so heavy to the F.A.U. as to foreigners in general," they replied. Unit Members drew no pay, only 18/- a month pocket money—that is, 7d a day. They lived on Chinese food wherever they happened to be.

"Does that not expose you to special risks?" I asked. "What about disease for instance? If you travel Chinese-fashion, how are you to protect yourselves against vermin and filth?"

They had been warned, they said. The Unit's casualties were as heavy as the Army's. But if men had to tackle such things single-handed, it was obvious that more were needed.

"Candidly, it's the language scares me," laughed one. They had not been able to study it here, he went on, since practically all the Chinese in New Zealand spoke Cantonese. However, the present members of the Unit apparently went everywhere without interpreters

and somehow got complicated instructions across. What British, Canadians, Americans and Indians were able to do New Zealanders would manage somehow.

That led to a discussion about the khaki uniform with a red cross on the arm and "New Zealand" prominent across the shoulder. Crozier thought they might be very nearly the first civilians to leave New Zealand for any war zone. At that some produced their passports which, I saw, were Red Cross Identity Cards. From there I began asking about the seventh man, the doctor in the party.

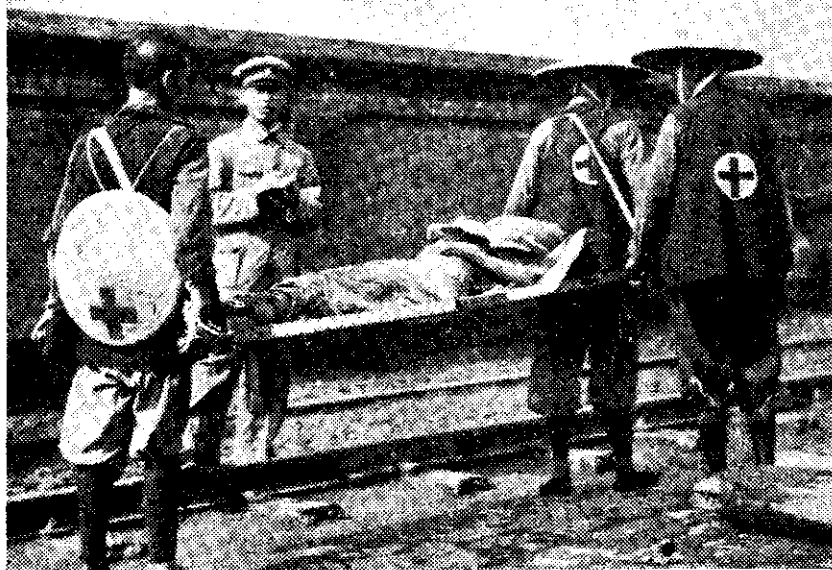
After the War?

Dr. Graham Milne, a young Otago graduate, was already in Burma, they replied—"practising improvisation." He was not actually a member of the Unit, but would work with it for two years at least until he could get through to the New Zealand Presbyterian Hospital near Canton, which was his final destination. He had left wife and child in New Zealand. Another young doctor would join them as soon as he could be spared from his present post. "You see, he thinks 7d a day is better than Social Security," smiled Archer.

Another member of *The Listener* staff had a last question. What would happen, he asked, if the war against Japan ended before the volunteers' minimum term of two years was up. The party professed to be missionaries of a sort, but not prophets. However, they understood that the Chinese Relief and Rehabilitation Administration was to administer UNRRA in China, and it was a possibility that it would want to incorporate the F.A.U.'s experience into its staff.

If so, I thought, looking around, New Zealand will be well represented.

—A.M.R.



CHINESE MEMBERS of the Friends' Ambulance Unit