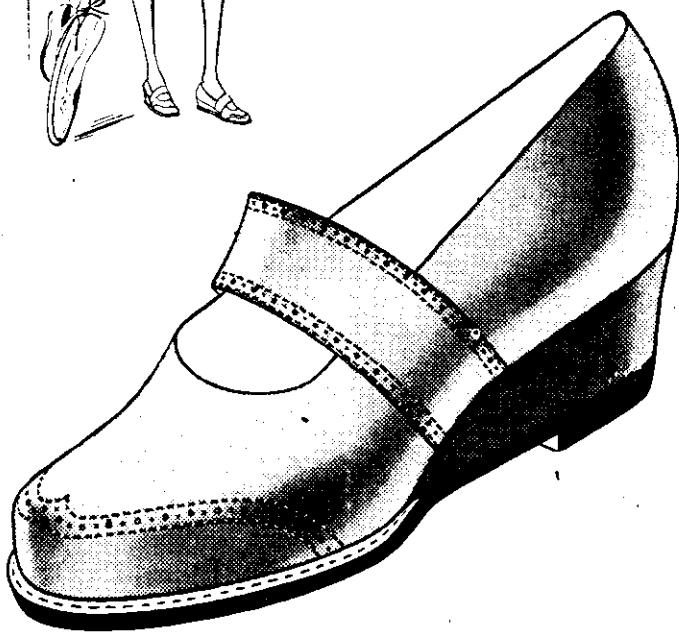


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PROCESSION DOWN THE GANGWAY

Men Who Were Guests of the Japs

SHOWING my Army pass at the gangway and joining with the officials whose business takes them on ships as soon as they berth, I went on board the mercy vessel, Maunganui, a few days ago, seeking material for an article. The welcoming band played. From the deck-rails the troops cheered a little. The excitement and hustle surrounding an ordinary troopship coming home was not there. Men had died on the way—one of them just about the time the ship tied up at the wharf, and another a little later.

Alongside, on the wharf, was a Red Cross train, with bunks made up ready to receive stretcher cases—and there were lots of them—bound for hospitals in Palmerston North, the Hutt, and Trentham. The ship left that night for Lyttelton, taking cases to hospitals at Cashmere and Burnham.

When a troopship comes home, the noise on board is deafening. Welcomes and farewells are roared and there are scenes of intense emotion. The Maunganui scene was different. In the long wards men were lying on their bunks, some so covered with bandages as to be almost unrecognisable. Some gave a smile to passing visitors; some just gazed at the ceiling out of hollow eyes. They looked like ghosts. Some hobbled about; others wandered round the decks aimlessly.

"Take a Look at That"

Male and female nurses were attending to one young fellow's leg. His arm was bandaged and his face white with pain and covered with sweat. The leg was being hauled up with a cord on a pulley. He forced a grin as I passed.

A civilian in a near-by bunk—a man well over 60—said: "Take a look at that. That's what those — little Japanese skunks did to that chap in Formosa, and thought it great fun. Those yellow little swine. But, for God's sake, let's talk about something else. You're after a story, I suppose? See the O.C. troops and ask for a copy of the ship's magazine. You'll get the lot there. It's tough reading."

I heard tales of bestiality and sadism in the atmosphere of the floating hospital with all its smells of medicine and drugs. They were shocking.

A youngster lay still, not reading, not even smoking, but he had a passing word with the Governor-General who made a tour of the wards, and then relapsed into staring at nothing. On various parts of his face and hands was a pink-coloured paint. That covered up bruises received from the polite and happily grinning Japanese.

Pain and Misery

"God," said another youngster in the next bed, "never let those —s into this country. There's talk about giving them trials. What's wrong with the machine-gun?"

And then the stretcher cases formed into long lines. Gently, easily, experts at their job, the medical orderlies carried



M. BARROW
His Horses Died

these starved and smashed-up men off the ship. The band was still playing, and in the streets, factories, shops, and business houses of Wellington, people went about their affairs. They did not know that within easy walking distance was pain and misery.

A civilian visitor to the ship remarked: "There should be a procession of stretcher cases through the streets, just to let people know what sort of a person a Jap is."

Possibly I had seen some of the worst cases. There were plenty of apparently able men about, anxious to get ashore, some to see New Zealand for the first time. A tall, gaunt man in civilian clothes sat on his bunk, toying with his dinner—fish and diced carrots. He was a big business man in Hongkong. He gave some of his experiences.

"We have been wonderfully treated on the ship," he said. "But don't worry about my dinner getting cold. I'm on the light diet and I'm pretty tired of it."

Horses in Hongkong

Wearing a slouch hat and an odd assortment of clothes, a civilian stood at the rail, looking over towards Eastbourne. Like the others, he was lean and looked as if he had seen and been through some frightful things. He was M. Barrow, of Hongkong, a member of the Hongkong Jockey Club and formerly of Western Australia. Before the war he had owned five racehorses. The club, he said, was a big one, with 420 horses in the stables. The Japanese took the horses over in 1942 and one of his horses, Canberra, won five races for them.

"Did you get any compensation," I asked.

"What do you think?" he said. "Some of the horses were kept racing and others were used for remounts. But it was funny in 1944, that is, funny in a way. When the horses died through lack of feed, the Japanese substituted wooden horses at their race meetings, hauling them round the course with wires. This did not suit the public and the sport

(continued on next page)