

# BACK FROM BATAVIA

## New Zealand Cameraman's Final War Assignment

THE first plane to reach Batavia after the Japanese surrender was sent from New Zealand, and New Zealanders were the first prisoners evacuated. But evacuation was not the only aim achieved. The National Film Unit had a representative on the first plane to land—its cameraman Stan Wemyss, who, although he worked as one of the crew, before landing and afterwards, brought away a photographic record of everything that happened.

When Wemyss came the other day into *The Listener* office he had finished his last war assignment. But the Unit's assignment book shows that he had been on every front but one on which New Zealand troops had operated. One mission took him to the Middle East to cover the fighting of the N.Z.E.F. as far as Tripoli. Three others took him to the Pacific, from Fiji to Bougainville, and finally to Singapore. In four years the war in Europe was almost the only front he didn't touch. Five years ago he was a commercial artist in the art department of the Government Film Studios. Then he changed over to camera work and soon became an expert. His personality he had to begin with.

### It Looked and Felt Queer

When he arrived in Batavia, he told us, the Japanese were still armed and still in control of the city. A small British naval detachment—merely a token force—had arrived about three hours before the New Zealand plane landed, but it was Japanese and not British troops who met them and looked them over.

"Were they friendly or hostile?"

"Outwardly friendly, but it looked queer, and felt queer too, to have Japs with rifles examining our plane and generally giving us the 'once over.'"

"You were to see a good deal of them before you came home. What general impression did you get of their state of mind?"

"None at all. It is impossible to read them. You order one of them to do something for you. If he is going to do



STAN WEMYSS: he has been places and seen things

it he bows, smiles, says 'Yes, yes.' But if he is not going to do it he bows and smiles and says 'Yes, yes.' So you never know where you are with them."

"Did you yourself carry arms?"

"Yes—after Bougainville. Whether it was a protection or not I don't know, but it made me feel protected. It is not pleasant to know that you are being shot at and can't shoot back."

"You have had that experience?"

"Yes, on my first visit to Bougainville, and once was enough."

"What standing did the cameramen have? Were you war correspondents?"

"Yes, but there are two types of correspondents—those recruited from the forces and those sent away as civilians. Both get the same treatment in the field, but the first are equipped and directed by the Army and the second by the paper or organisation for which they are working—in my case the National Film Unit."

"Were you welcomed by the Army?"

"Well, not very warmly at first perhaps. The Army began by regarding us as a nuisance. But that period passed, and in the end our standing was very good. While the fighting was on we were third priority people, the fighting men coming first of course, and supply personnel second. When the fighting ended we moved up to first priority."

### Nationalist Movement in Java

"Did you get any opportunity to study the nationalist movements in Java, Burma, and Indo-China?"

"Not to study them, but we of course saw and heard things—banners and placards in the streets, for example, and processions of people shouting out for freedom. In Bandoeng students all wore armbands, and buildings and transport vehicles carried quotations from speeches by Churchill and MacArthur."

"Was there any hostility to you?"

"None at all. On the contrary, they were always telling us that we were 'good people.' All the Dominions were 'good.'"

"They made a difference then between the Dominions and Britain?"

"Well that's a little awkward. Perhaps I had better say that they went out of their way to praise the 'independent' British—those who had (they imagined) made themselves free."

"Could you wander at large without interference?"

"By day, yes. But we were careful. By night we were more careful still. Once we were going to a cafe when a friendly Indonesian told us that he had 'seen a dead body there last night.' We stayed in our hotel."

"Did you see any Dutch people in the streets or had they all been gathered in by the Japanese?"

"I think most of them had been in Java. All the same, there were very few signs of war in Batavia—the trains were running, beautiful cars slipped past in the streets, the shops were well stocked. It was quite unlike Singapore, where the railways had been almost brought to a stop by neglect of the rolling stock,

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R.N.Z.A.F. prisoners-of-war arrive at Kallang Airport, Singapore, on the first leg of their journey home



Two Japanese terrorists from the camp staff of Siam Road Internment Camp, Singapore