

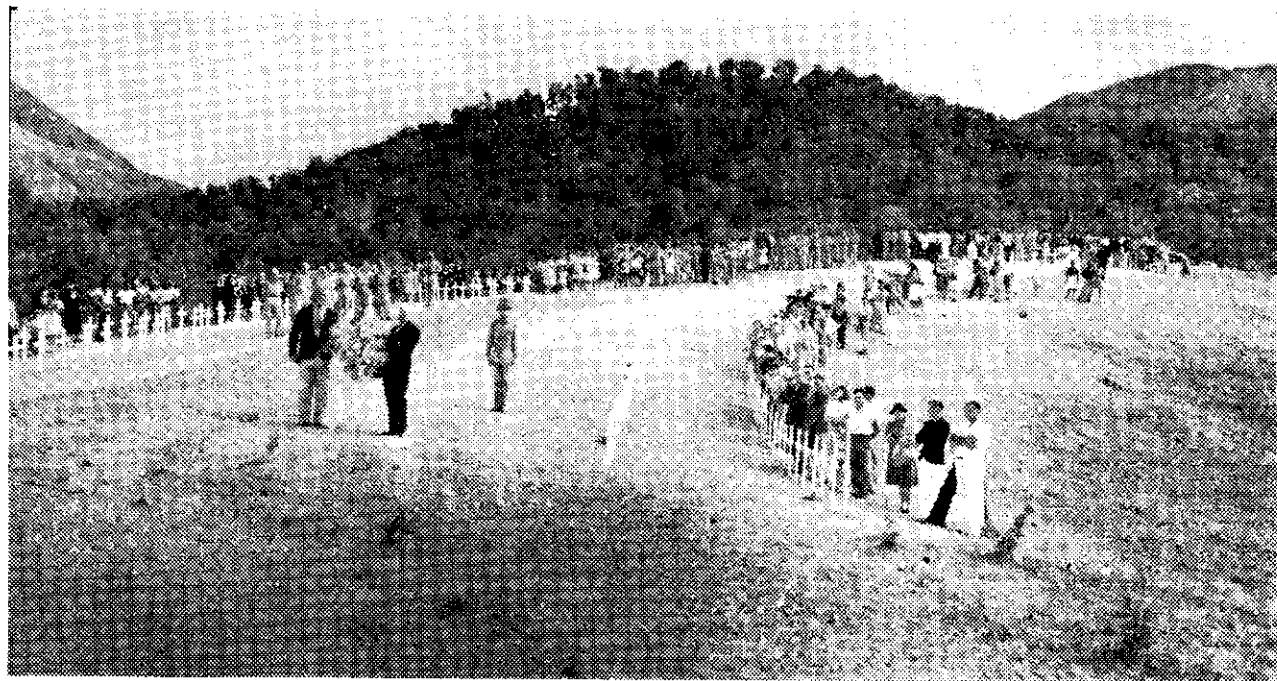
FOR EVER NEW ZEALAND

A Corner of a South Pacific Island



Above: Major A. G. Lowry speaking at the Dedication ceremony at the cemetery

Right: A general view during the ceremony. Dr. Drayton and M. Lemaître are holding the official French wreath



WHEN Shakespeare laid a curse on the man who moved his bones he meant the man who moved them irreverently. From time immemorial men have moved their dead to more honoured or more secure positions, as New Zealand has just done with her fallen in the South Pacific. What has happened there everybody now knows. The bodies of 212 men and one woman have been moved from temporary graves in 12 widely separated island groups and reverently reburied at Bourail, New Caledonia—sailors in one section, soldiers in another, airmen in another. New Zealanders took them up, and New Zealanders laid them down again, and now New Zealanders may visit the last resting place knowing that everybody was identified, that every grave has been accurately marked, and that the jungle will not again engulf them.

THE decision to move the bodies was made by the War Cabinet, acting on behalf of the Government and people of the Dominion, but the actual work was carried out by the Graves Registration Unit: Major A. G. Lowry (Auckland), W.O.I. E. A. Preston (Gisborne), W.O.I. S. G. H. Kay (Te Hoe), S/Sgt. L. R. Varnham (Palmerston North), Sgt. A. Nizich (Auckland), and Sgt. R. M. Underwood (Auckland). The whole party, Major Lowry assured *The Listener* in a brief interview, carried out this painful duty with delicacy and sympathy, and "it should be a source of comfort to relatives to know that not one body was lost of those who died on land."

"The original graves were marked individually?"

"Yes, and we were pleased to discover that in every case the cross remained and was in good order."

"What records were taken at the final burial?"

"First we have a complete plan of the whole cemetery, with the row, the plot,

and the number of each grave. New crosses were erected, and every grave was photographed."

"Are the photographs available to relatives?"

"Yes. Two enlarged photographs are being sent free to the next-of-kin, and more can be obtained if relatives want them, at a nominal cost."

"So there will be no difficulty in locating any grave if the relatives ever visit New Caledonia?"

Green the Year Round

"None at all. And in the meantime they may rest assured that no grave will be neglected. The French authorities not only gave New Zealand the land for the new cemetery, but gave an undertaking to visit the graves officially three times every year—on Anzac Day, Armistice Day, and the nearest Sunday to October 7 (Dedication Day)—and deck them with flowers. In addition a private citizen of New Caledonia, M. Prinnet, a farmer who had formed many friendships with New Zealanders when Bourail was their base, has undertaken to do all the work that is necessary in laying the cemetery down in paspalum grass which will remain green all the year round."

"A fine gesture."

"Yes, but the spirit of M. and Mme. Prinnet is the spirit of the whole French population. Our troops made real friends of the French, and the French do not forget. Wherever we went we had their most sympathetic co-operation."

"Is there any British representation there?"

"Only a Consul, Mr. W. Johnson, O.B.E., and he of course was most co-opera-

tive too. He was one of the official representatives at the final ceremony of dedication."

"That would be a religious ceremony."

"Religious in spirit, but official in routine. As soon as the French people learned that the task of concentrating the Graves was complete, they asked if they might hold a dedication ceremony at the cemetery and to this we readily agreed. A Guard of Honour of 30 men was drawn from the few N.Z. Army and R.N.Z.A.F. personnel still remaining on the island, and at 3 p.m. on Sunday, October 7, they marched down the road through those white crosses, and took up their positions around the Flag Staff. French girls and boys from the Convent

—about 100 in all—had arrived under the care of the Rev. Father Bussy, and lined the side of the cemetery behind the graves. In addition about 250 French people and natives were assembled, and M. Michel, a representative of the people, opened the proceedings with a typically eloquent speech. When I had replied, thanking the French people on behalf of the people of New Zealand, the local French doctor called on a French lieutenant to lay a wreath at the foot of the Flag Staff on behalf of the French Government.

"As he placed the wreath in position this officer said:

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THE GRAVES REGISTRATION UNIT: (front row from left), W.O.I. E. A. Preston (Gisborne), Major A. G. Lowry (Auckland), W.O.I. S. G. H. Kay (Te Hoe). (Standing from left), Sgt. A. Nizich (Auckland), S/Sgt. L. R. Varnham (Palmerston North), Sgt. R. M. Underwood (Auckland)