

NEWSREEL ANGLES ON JAPAN

LOOKING through camera finders in Japan in recent months I have had a colour preview of the scenes New Zealand audiences would be glimpsing in black-and-white a few months later in the National Film Unit's Weekly Reel. Even when not looking through finders impressions were still being gathered, and a few thoughts and experiences may be worth passing along both to those

Written for "The Listener" by James Harris

was not plain sailing. The shots which reached the screen of the Divisional Cavalry crossing the water from Eta Jima to the Honshu mainland look simple enough, but getting them was quite a worry, the processing being roughly as follows:



FRUSTRATED FIREMAN: He got to the fire, but the pumps failed to deliver the water!

who saw the pictures and to those who had to stay at home and mind the children, or arrived too late to see the shorts.

ONE of the first things learnt by experience in Japan was that there was no "unchanging East" about it; the scene changed rapidly, and when a subject was seen that was worth a few shots it was best to grab it at once before it disappeared, without waiting for a brightening of the light or other improvement of circumstance. A case in point is the little Jap in Kyoto who was happily pulling a broken and hanging piece of live overhead wire aside with a yard of old rope each time a tram came along, so that it could pass the spot without fireworks. Though he looked as though he had been doing it all his life I knew enough to take shots of him at once, and sure enough the repair tower arrived a few minutes later and Japs in tramway uniform and mitten-like shoes (with the big toe in a separate compartment) busily monkeyed up the tower and repaired the damage. That subject went on record, but others as amusing were missed; thus the dockyard practice of making little wood fires to warm the hands on bits of iron on ships' decks and on the ground in front of NO SMOKING notices was out of season by the time I had film to spare for matters of such slight importance.

Somewhat at Sea

The main job in Japan was to report on the Kiwis in the local setting rather than on the local oddities, but even that

- (1) Collect a rumour that Div. Cav. are shortly to take over an Occupation Area on the mainland, and decide that the water crossing from Eta Jima to Kure is the best place to get a brief newsreel item of them.
- (2) Call on the Public Relations Officer for fuller information and transport.
- (3) Find out that landing-barges are leaving Kure at 8.00 a.m. next morning to fetch the troops, and do some necessary darkroom preparations in the darkness of night.
- (4) Get the gear down to the boat-harbour in the morning, only to find that the barges are leaving at the time stated, but from moorings out in the bay and that there is no way to get to them.
- (5) Ignoring profane advice to "walk the water" I trek round to the starting-place of the 9.00 a.m. ferry, scheduled to arrive at Koyo on the island too late to get pictures of the departing troops.
- (6) Arrive at the island and find that a couple of fast Jap landing-craft are not in any hurry to come unstuck from the island, as they have been run well onto the beach and then loaded with N.Z. vehicles during a falling tide.
- (7) Get the shots amidst requests to "Take my picture, Pakeha." (The weather stays fine and from the camera's point of view delay has saved the day.)

In Chofu a shot I had had my eye on for some time was spoilt by too much co-operation. Every time the Pipe Band

passed the crossroads in front of the 2NZEF Headquarters a crowd of Jap kids would sweep in behind them and follow the band up the road as though leaving Hamelin for good. This was a shot I meant to get and one afternoon everything was right, the band there, a good crowd of kids, the light bright but not harsh, and the camera set up in the predetermined spot. As the band came round the corner the precious film started running through. The band crossed the finder and the kids started pouring off the pavement as they always did. Everything was going perfectly when a helpful Kiwi stepped into the road and pushed the kids back onto the pavement again so that they would not spoil my picture of the band! "Go and see what the Japs are doing and tell them not to," seemed to be his motto. Similar trouble comes from people looking nice and natural in the foreground of a scene who suddenly start pointing in a theatrical manner, each of them at a different imaginary object of interest in the landscape before them.

Who Goes Home?

Apart from the arrival of the Main Body on the Strathmore (bringing the special treat of being able to go on board and drink a large glass of clear, safe, and unchlorinated water) the biggest sitter for camera shots was Repatriation work. At two Repatriation Centres the supervising troops were New Zealanders, who were thus taking part in the job of getting home and demobilising the five million Japs overseas at the end of hostilities, and in returning Koreans to their impoverished homeland across the famous Tsushima Straits. The endless queues of families of both nations carrying all their babies and other worldly possessions I viewed with

misgiving, foreseeing more vividly than usual the logical conclusion of the present world-wide mania for repatriation and universal Zionism, including the rounding up and shipping off to the place where the tweeds come from of all the people of my surname, along with the Harrisons and the Harries tribe from Wales. That will be the final victory of the ideas of the late Adolf Hitler, and will make a certain peninsula in the outer Hebrides more overcrowded than a Japanese tram in the rush hour.

At Otake thousand after thousand of Japanese soldiers were stripped of their badge of rank, and after customs and medical treatment went out into their homeland as civilians in old uniforms. At Sensaki a New Zealand soldier watched an oriental family going through the medical part of it. He saw them all sprayed with DDT dust and injected against various ills, the needle not missing even the smallest crying baby: "Nice to see them taking it for a change," he said, not realising that this lot were Koreans and more or less our allies. The discomforts and anxieties seemed little worry to the cheerful Koreans though, for this was the being-pushed-around to end being pushed around, the long Japanese domination of their country being over.

Kobe Kiwi

A search for a vital camera part brought me to Kobe in the American area. One night a lone small sailor carrying a large bottle asked me sailing directions in the ruined city, addressing me in the darkness as "Marine." In surprise he said, "Are you Kiwi?" and then rolled on alone up the centre of the street between eight-story burnt-out buildings. "So-long, Kiwi," he called back proudly, "WE'RE . . . AUSTRALIANS!"

As the only wearer of Kiwi uniform seen in Kobe I was thought by some to be the Advance Guard of British forces. "Are you going to take this place from us too?" asked an American regretfully.



KOREAN CHILDREN on their way home from Japan. A shot taken at Sensaki

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