

# WE WANT ALL THE FACTS

## An Interview with General Kippenberger

THE Editor-in-Chief of the New Zealand War Histories, Major-General H. K. Kippenberger, broadcast a talk on Sunday evening (August 18) about the job that is to be done by him and his staff over the next ten years or so. His talk has already appeared in the daily papers, and the appeal now being made for diaries, letters, and other papers likely to be useful has therefore been publicised. In the interview we print below, General Kippenberger has told us something of the background to his plans, and talked in closer detail about some of the points which were only briefly mentioned in his broadcast.

One of several reasons General Kippenberger gave for the production of a War History was this: "It is right that an intelligent democracy should understand the part it played in the war."

We asked if he thought it possible that people can grasp the details of a war—if the majority of people, once the struggle is over, are interested in anything but the fact that they were safe again and victorious.

"What I mean is that a democracy should understand what it has done in war just as much as it understands what it does in peace," he answered. "In our ordinary affairs, every single thing that is done is subject to criticism at the time. In a war, things have to be done arbitrarily; in secret. As soon as the emergency is past, those things should then be opened to examination and criticism. It's the only way you can expect people to face future crises—with their eyes open. And before it can be studied, it has to be fully recorded."

### "The Real Factual Basis"

"Where will you get your material—how much will depend on official records, and how much on personal records?"

"Our technique will be to build up basic narratives, working first of all on the war diaries kept by headquarters of all formations and units in all the Services. These are usually fairly bald, short accounts, but they form the real factual basis that we start on."

"Such documents exist? Commanding officers diarise their activities even when battles are going on?"

"Yes, whenever possible. Some of course do it more successfully than others. But we shall supplement their diaries with copies of orders—showing not what was done, but what was ordered to be done. We shall get messages; reports put in by formations or units after operations—some on an almost minute-to-minute basis. But we must not forget that messages in this war were often given over the air, and not put on paper, and many important decisions were made in conversations by radio telephone, without necessarily being recorded."

"There will be gaps, then, that can't be filled in?"

"Yes, that must be the case to some extent, but we hope to fill most of them in. There are personal diaries, which are important in proportion to the time at which they were written. There are personal reminiscences, varying according to the quality of a man's memory. There are enemy reports, and intelligence reports on the enemy; the diaries of troops from other Dominions who were with our men; war correspondents' notes, and of course maps and photographs."

### The Heavier the Lighter

"Have the correspondents anything to tell that has not been told already?"

"Oh yes. A correspondent often takes notes that at the time he is unable to use. I am expecting a good deal from that source."

"The official diaries that you start on, General, were they kept specifically for

war history? Or were they taken for practical military purposes?"

"Specifically for war history. Men were assigned to the job, and their diaries were sent back to base at intervals. One big defect about those official diaries is this: the heavier the fighting was, the more scanty the diary was. Unit diaries on Crete, for instance, were very bare. In my own Battalion, the 20th, I tried to have the diaries kept well, but when the Battalion was annihilated at Bel Hammed, in Libya, and practically every officer was a casualty, the diary dismissed the whole thing in a couple of sentences. I have seen two consecutive entries reading like this: July 14, Action at Ruweisat Ridge. July 15, ditto."

### Now it Can be Told

"If personal diaries are sent in that are highly critical of the conduct of operations—what happens? Is there any way in which the viewpoint of the ordinary soldier or airman or sailor will be conveyed?"

"Yes, but it must be remembered that criticism from junior officers and the ranks is usually insufficiently informed. You had to be very high up before you knew what was really happening—and then you didn't know. But anything in letters or diaries that broke regulations at the time might be all the more valuable to us now. Things that should have been censored are just the things we want."

"What about the other Dominions—are you watching their work too?"

"Yes. Britain and the other Dominions have similar plans under way. Australia's is more elaborate than ours and the Americans are starting a tremendous project."

"Isn't there a problem in that? Have histories not dragged on in the past until events made them useless?"

"I would not say that. Facts, when you get them, are never useless. But it is true that the last war overtook the British and Australian official histories. I was watching Australia's with interest between the wars. They finished it in 1943. The British official history of the 1914-18 war was just finished a few months ago—70 volumes—and the last of it is in the printer's hands now."

### Much Bigger Than Last Time

"You are planning something altogether more comprehensive than came out of last war."

"Yes. New Zealand produced four volumes on the 1914-18 war, which weren't either a popular history or an official history. The original plan was to have an official record and a popular one. But the interest died out. It's my job to see that that doesn't happen again."

"But I seem to have been telling you about the Army all the time," he said as our talk ended. "That is because I naturally illustrate things from my own experience. But it's my hope that I won't allow my personal interest to make me biased as Editor-in-Chief. I mean to see that the three Services are on an equal footing all the way."



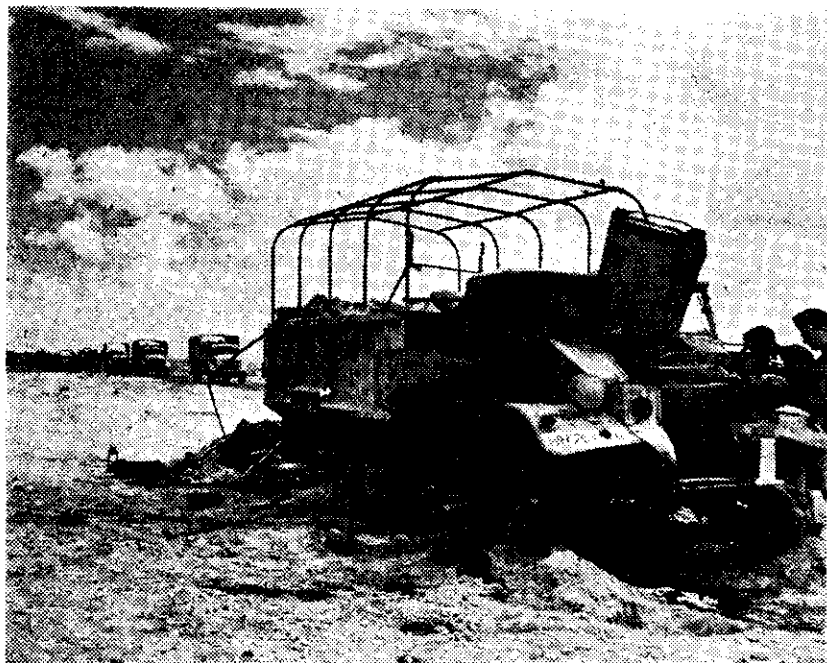
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