

HANDYMEN NEEDED IN CHINA

Work of Friends' Ambulance Unit

TEN New Zealanders working with the Friends' Ambulance Unit in China sent messages home to their families recently with an English member of the unit, V. M. Stone, who spent five weeks in the Dominion on his way home to England via Australia and the United States. While he was in Auckland waiting for a ship—he was planning to work his passage—Mr. Stone recorded a talk (heard from 1YA recently) and called at *The Listener* office to tell us about the ten New Zealanders (nine men and one woman) now working in Honan, north-central China, with headquarters on the borderline of the National and Communist governments' territories.

In the first place, he said, those New Zealanders are all in the best health; and they are all doing the varied work of the unit. Two are doctors, one is a hospital business manager, three more work in the hospital (doing the work of dispensers, medical mechanics, maintenance experts), two are transport

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much theory: it's primarily more money they want, though they did get behind the Democrats before last election, pushing Wallace. But there's a long way from that to a Socialist party."

"Then did Wallace's resignation from the Cabinet have perhaps as much internal as external significance?"

"I'm holding judgment till I see the text of his speech, since what the newspapers reported didn't altogether make sense to me. Wallace is a man of very great ability, who stands high in the esteem of liberal Americans. If things get tough economically he may yet head a really left-wing split among the Democrats."

"I want more information, too," concluded the Professor, "about this wave of lynchings. In the last 30 years the relations between whites and negroes have improved out of sight. Religious groups mainly have led the way, and the C.I.O. unions—which are the radical ones—now admit negroes to full membership. Besides, so many have moved north during the war that some southern districts were made to realise how dependent on them they were. One town was said to be unable to throw dinner parties for lack of cooks and maids. I suspect it is this advance that has made the old bunch in the deep South go really violent. I'm not suggesting that discrimination is ending. For example, the Fair Employment Commission may be hamstrung. And signing house-owners up at half-a-dollar a signature not to sell or let to coloured tenants has become a racket with some real estate agents. Which reminds me, too, that renting to negro families is very profitable—you pack three families into a house that one white family occupied before and don't charge any of them much less than the previous rent; for all this, conditions are certainly improving."

drivers and one a transport depot manager, and one is organising a school of technology where Chinese students can be trained in skilled mechanical work.

The Scholar and the Peasant

"This we find one of the greatest drawbacks," Mr. Stone said, "that there is such a huge gap between the scholar and the peasant in China. You can take in mechanical gear, medical equipment and so on but you won't find anyone able to work it."

In 1940 the unit was set up with 40 British members but now there are 130 members, British, Canadians, American, Chinese and New Zealand. Some have always been at work on the transport of medical supplies (which were trucked through on the Burma Road for some time) and others with actual medical work among the people. Since the end of the war the convoy has been concentrated in reoccupied Honan province where its particular work is in reorganising and restocking damaged hospitals, and in combating disease such as the lice and flea-borne fevers, and the virus disease, kala-azar, believed to be carried by the sandfly. By restoring sanitation and instituting systems of cleanliness the unit hopes to reduce the 80-90 per cent mortality rate claimed by this disease, especially in children.

Health by Stealth

"And how do you set about this work?" we asked.

"With soldiers it is fairly simple because they are used to discipline and take treatment regularly. But with the peasants we found it necessary to invent all sorts of devices. One useful thing was to introduce them to hot showers which they liked very much. While they were under the hot shower we'd put their clothes through the steam delousing plant. Of course you realise that our delousing stations were sometimes makeshift affairs—oil drums were sometimes all we had to build a steam pressure plant from."

Mr. Stone told us of other difficulties faced by the unit in its attempts to combat disease: the constant fight against vermin in bedding and clothing worn for perhaps five months without change; the attempt to rid rice of rat fleas which spread plague from place to place; and on top of what might be termed natural difficulties the unnatural or accidental ones—connected chiefly with ammunition left unexploded as the war moved on.

"If a group of children, or even adults, found a mortar shell," Mr. Stone said, "there seemed to be an irresistible urge to throw things at it until something happened. And so, of course, we have to supply artificial limbs—which we have to make ourselves."

"Is that included in the work of a medical mechanic?"

"You could just about say that everything is included. It's the same thing again, the handyman is the person most needed. The expert is not nearly as useful as the man who can turn his hand to mending gadgets or devising and improvising gear of all kinds. And of course what the technology school is aiming at is to produce Chinese who are handymen themselves."

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