

# NOLA LUXFORD AND THE ANZAC CLUB



NOLA LUXFORD

AS guest of the New Zealand Government, Nola Luxford arrived by flying-boat from Sydney in Auckland on November 11 to begin a tour of New Zealand lasting until December 21. Miss Luxford, in case any readers do not know, is a New Zealander who has spent most of her adult life in America working in radio, drama and journalism: her particular interest for New Zealanders is that she founded and directed for the five years of its existence the Anzac Club in New York and organised the shortwave programme which brought the voices of servicemen visiting the Club to their homes in Australia and New Zealand. Miss Luxford is visiting New Zealand on her way back to New York from Australia at the end of a mission of mercy—she volunteered to bring home a sick Australian serviceman who was too ill to travel without a nurse.

The morning after her arrival Miss Luxford was at IYA dictating the radio talk that she recorded later in the day; as I was there to interview her I listened in to the dictation. Surely a stenographer could not wish for a better dictation that Miss Luxford gave; she spoke in reasonable phrases with good pauses; she did not say um or er or ah, and she did not make any false starts. In fact she only once asked for a rub-out—and that was really our fault: she wanted to refer to a certain New Zealand serviceman in the rank he held in 1940 and she appealed to the stenographer and to me but we couldn't tell her. So she began the sentence again, avoiding the explicit reference.

I did not hear Miss Luxford's first broadcast over the air, but only across a desk at IYA while I watched her speak so slowly and thoughtfully, occasionally with a forefinger pressed to a temple or with one knuckle stroking down her upper lip—was this, I wondered, because that upper lip tended to

tremble sometimes? I think it well may have been so. For Miss Luxford spoke to her well-known New Zealand audience from much closer at hand than ever before: she spoke of things and memories that brought certain pictures and certain young men with bright faces most vividly before her eyes and, I am sure, before the eyes of mothers and fathers and wives and sisters and brothers listening to her. And as she spoke of messages sent homewards from that warm Anzac Club in New York and of the air of gaiety that sometimes very nearly broke down—as when a young man would send a message to a baby he had never seen or to a mother he would never see again—I myself, who should be hardened by ten years of reporting, found it necessary to lower my head and blink.

## Ambassador of Goodwill

And quite apart from Miss Luxford's most moving manner of talking to her audience—a manner that is illuminated by a burning but not feverish sincerity — she has a story to tell that must be fascinating to every New Zealander who took part in this world war at first hand or at second hand. She met our New Zealand servicemen, probably every one who visited New York, and through her own enthusiasm and effort she made it possible for many of those young men to speak to their families from the Anzac Club, and, for their more immediate needs, to meet American families in their own homes.

"They call me New Zealand's unofficial ambassador of goodwill," she said; "and it's true I do talk New Zealand just everywhere I go—I never stop talking New Zealand, I must confess."

"So you count yourself a New Zealander rather than an American citizen after all these years in the States?"

"I suppose I do, though I think of myself as someone who does not think in terms of nationality much at all. When you live in different places and move about a good deal you tend to lose that very national outlook I think."

"And you have moved about a good deal, apart from your different travels within America?"

"I should say I have indeed," Miss Luxford said with a wave of her hand. "Look! In the last year I've been in 14 different countries, including Germany. With this trip down here on top of it all I've just about been on the move since before the end of the war in Europe. I was in Germany before the war ended and, in England. You know, people themselves do not want war, no single country wants war; the terrible things I have seen—and in every devastated town I could only think of the boys up there who flew in the bombers. If only we could do away with these scare headlines and really get down to the hearts of the people we'd surely not hear any more about wars."

Going back again to the beginning of the Anzac Club, Miss Luxford explained

that the first gatherings were held in her own apartments and that the Club could be said to be like Topsy—it just grew.

"Take the vice-president. She was a friend of mine and one day she said to me, 'I'll give you a hand with those letters for the afternoon.' This was when we were still working in my rooms and I wanted to write out to interest people in the idea. So, all right, she gave me a hand with the letters that afternoon, and the next day, and all that week, and then she said she'd stick around for another week—and the end of it was she stayed right on for five years! That was how it was all the way and all the time. People would ask a boy for the week-end and a week-end would grow into a week or, as in one case, six weeks; our boys were adopted into the American families and as you can easily imagine there are some strong links between our two countries. Those links worked both ways of course, because New Zealanders entertained American servicemen in the same way and young New Zealand brides are now adding to the good reputation of our servicemen as good ambassadors for New Zealand."

At this moment another reporter arrived and introductions were begun. But—

"Remember me?" he said to Miss Luxford.

She did remember him, and also the circumstance that together they had one day drafted an article about the Anzac Club to send back to his newspaper in Auckland—and here he took out a clipping of the very article to show her. It was a reunion and a very cheerful one. Miss Luxford is bound to have many such as she travels through New Zealand as the guest of the Government.

## Guest of the Government

The only other guest of the Government I have interviewed was Jean Batten when she made her flight from

## A "Listener" Interview

England to New Zealand in 1936. I was young then—or so it seems to me now—and I found her readiness to offer me unasked advice on the spelling of Damascus extremely irking.

Remembering this—and more, which will still keep—I asked Miss Luxford how she became a guest of the Government—that is, how the machinery of the invitation worked.

"Well, it all began when I left New York at four days' notice to bring that sick boy home to Australia," she said. "It was a completely unexpected trip for me. But as I was coming, some magazines asked me to do a series of articles on all sorts of subjects of interest down here—oh, education, health services, Karitane, plunket and so on. So when I got to Australia I asked the Department of Information to let me have what material they could and they responded by saying 'Just you mention what you want to see and we'll see that you get to it and see it.' And they certainly did. And then I had a letter from Mr. Chifley inviting me to stay at Canberra as the guest of the Government

as a recognition of the work I had done during the war for Australian servicemen. And after that I had a similar invitation from the Prime Minister's Department here—and here I am. When I arrived last night, Mr. Heenan met me and gave me THIS." She held up several pages of foolscap with her itinerary—visits and talks and entertainments throughout New Zealand. "It began this morning with a visit to Mr. Savage's memorial and it goes right through to December 21.

"Tired? Right now I am tired—but that's because I didn't go to bed at all the night before I flew over here. So many things to do, say goodbyes, do my packing and cleaning up and then write letters—thirty-three of them! I was just finishing typing at a quarter past four in the morning and it didn't seem worth while going to bed then—so I didn't."

"Do you do your own typing and so on as you travel round like this?"

"Not always. Sometimes I am lucky enough to get a stenographer."

## Three Jobs at Once

Miss Luxford will go back to New York to do a series of articles and talks, both public addresses and broadcast talks, on the various matters she has studied in Australia and New Zealand. She has had her turn at acting, both on stage and in films, at reporting in daily journalism and in periodicals, and at radio in various branches; but she will go back to work in radio most of the time. She has had a wide experience in all these things—there was one time when she was doing three strenuous jobs at once—playing a part on the stage, playing in a film in which Basil Rathbone was starred, and reporting for radio. She was the first woman to do sports broadcasts in the United States—she did commentaries at the Olympic Games at Los Angeles and has covered all sorts of sports from horse-racing to yacht racing (this last she covered from above, in an aircraft). She contends that it is not so much energy that is required to make a success of this type of reporting but the trick of picking out amusing or striking details that will bring the colour and movement and noise of a scene vividly before absent listeners. When she talks about describing a horse race, for instance, she sounds as if she is like some superior type of television in operation.

"I go from the rails to the stands and back to the horse boxes and among the people and I just pick out all the bits that will make it come alive for people who are not there. I'm just lucky enough to feel the colour and movement strongly myself and be able to pass it on. Perhaps it's something to do with looking at the game or whatever it is from various angles—I mean from the onlooker's point of view and at the same time from the point of view of the player himself."

Listeners in the United States are assured of some lively pictures of New Zealand life when Miss Luxford returns to New York early next year.

—J.