

Department, himself also a man with much experience of out-of-the-way spots. The diarist had written: "December 25. Christmas Day. Had several spots before dinner. Very hot. Opened the medical brandy." This man had put in nine months in one of the most desolate pieces of coral in the whole Pacific. The short extract may mean little to the stay-at-home, but a lot to the man who knows loneliness.

Men in remote localities are instinctively on their guard against these passing mental phases. Their precautions take the form of an almost ritualistic observance of the courtesies and decencies associated with Christmas. Dinner is an important affair. The menu invariably includes green peas, tinned of course, and a pudding which may be canned or the real thing. It all depends on the skill and confidence of the cook.

All the Trimmings

After dinner comes the exchange of gifts. One man will produce a bottle of wine, stored up against the day; another a cake for which his wife has collected butter coupons from friends and relatives. The most phlegmatic man Mr. Clifton has ever met was stationed on Campbell Island. Completely unemotional, he smoked an old pipe continuously. Comments on its aroma left him cold. But on Christmas Day he nonchalantly presented the party with a box of fine cigars.

There were a good many lonely Christmas seasons during the war, on the secret radar installations, listening-posts and coast-watching stations at home and abroad. One of the loneliest came the way of a highly-placed civil servant connected with coast-watching. His Christmas Day was spent not on a Pacific island but in the Government buildings on Lambton Quay, Wellington. This is how it happened.

On Christmas morning the Director of Naval Intelligence telephoned him at his home, and referring to Suvarov, a tiny island near the Equator, asked: "Didn't we change the Suvarov code word last week?"

The civil servant remembered something about it; he had intended to fix it up after the holidays. The codes were in the office safe.

The rest of the conversation went something like this:

Director of Naval Intelligence: It's very awkward; there's a signal from Suvarov this morning.

Civil Servant: I suppose it couldn't wait till to-morrow; there's nobody in the office to-day.

D.N.I.: But a signal wouldn't come unless it was most important.

C.S.: Well, to-morrow. . . .

D.N.I.: But it might be something about a raider or a pocket battleship.

The civil servant (highly-placed) closed his nostrils to the cooking smells, his eyes to the Christmas toys being unpacked by the children and to the concerned expression of his wife as she watched him at the telephone, and said: All right; I'll go down and decode it myself.

A taxi shortage meant a long time in getting to the office. It took him a while to find the key of the safe. By dinner-time he had found the code. He felt peckish. An efficient typist had locked away the tea and biscuits. He had a glass of water. By late afternoon he had the puzzle out, although until he had studied the directions that very morning, he had never drawn up a Playfair code.

And while he waited for a taxi to return to his home, his eye kept straying to the message, decoded, on the table. It read: "Compliments of the season to all the staff . . . Jim."

—Staff Reporter



"WHAT are the names of the Ministers Plenipotentiary in New Zealand for Russia and France?" Faced with this question from the quiz-master, John Melville, of Dunedin, aged 14 years (above right), replied, "Ziabkin and Gazel," and spelt their names. Thus he became "Quiz Kid of New Zealand," winning a junior quiz contest conducted recently by the ZB stations. He is a student at the Otago Boys' High School and intends to study for the law. The runner-up was James Sampey (left), a 13-year-old pupil at the Northcote High School, Auckland, whose sister, Betty, stayed with him through some of the elimination heats. Melville and Sampey were South Island and North Island champions respectively when they met in the final test for the New Zealand title. The Junior Quiz general session is on the air from the ZB stations every Monday and Wednesday at 5.0 p.m.

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