

TWELVE MONTHS IN JAPAN

New Zealand's Part in the Occupation

(Special to "The Listener" from the Official Correspondent with the "J" Force)

IN heavy rain and the bitter temperatures of midwinter, late in March, 1946, the 4,000 officers and men of 2nd N.Z.E.F. (Japan) passed by train through the outskirts of the ruin of Hiroshima and through the dreariness of a devastated countryside to establish their units in the Yamaguchi prefecture. Within two days of arrival the force had taken over the duties of occupation from American and Australian units. Many Japanese were reported to have taken to the hills and back-country when they heard the new troops to be stationed in the area were New Zealanders.

Twelve months have now passed. In that year more than 2,000 square miles of country have been patrolled and the activities of the 1,400,000 inhabitants closely directed and controlled. More than 400,000 Japanese and Koreans have passed through the two repatriation centres at Otake and Senzaki. But by no means all the energy and initiative of the force have been given to the supervision of a civilian population; equally onerous has been the work, often against difficulty, of making conditions at first habitable and then comfortable, of increasing that comfort in every way.

Initial Difficulties

When the troops from Italy landed at Kure, in still another foreign land, there was in New Zealand a vigorous campaign for recruits to replace them. The relief force entered camp in March; in late May the first draft, and a few weeks later the second, sailed from New Zealand. Neither the tasks of occupation nor of settling the troops in comfort was helped by the inevitable confusion

and disorganisation caused by the replacement of all other ranks and nearly all officers. Moreover, in September and October and again in January and February, about 500 officers and men were attached to the Composite New Zealand Guard Battalions which carried out training at Mizuba and duties in Tokio.

Japanese who had taken to the hills because of the reputation attributed to New Zealanders by wartime propaganda



AT TOP: The 27th Battalion got their first view of Japan as they marched from the wharf at Kure to the railway station. LEFT: The Kiwis soon fraternised with the children. BELOW, LEFT: A Korean coolie, charged with black-marketing, is heard through an interpreter in the British Military Court at Shimonoseki



Although such epidemic diseases as cholera had been rife, there was not one case among New Zealand troops—a tribute to the high standard of discipline and medical control.

Because of the vigilance of a strong naval task force and the bitter winter conditions, the illegal smuggling of Koreans into Japan along the north-west coast of the New Zealand area has ceased. Earlier, this smuggling was a major problem; the average number of Koreans entering the area each week was about 1,500 and at one time 4,300 illegal immigrants were impounded in the centre at Senzaki. To ensure the safety of the ships' Japanese crews it was necessary for two large drafts of Koreans to be accompanied to Korea by heavily-armed New Zealand guards. Widespread disease increased the problem.

Justice with Dignity

Essential to an efficient and orderly running of the prefecture is the Military Provost Court, the commission responsible for the hearing of offences (against the occupation forces) such as black-marketing, theft, and disobedience of military directives. This provost court, headed by a permanent president, is the only legal check readily available to the force, and everything is done to ensure the greatest justice and dignity. In the nine months of the court's operations—it sits alternately in the two larger cities, Shimonoseki and Yamaguchi—about 330 charges have been heard; sentences have varied from four years' imprisonment and heavy fines for disobedience of directives, to deferred sentences and probation for young people convicted of less serious offences. However trivial the charge, an officer is always available to defend all accused or,

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were not long in returning. The Kiwis, the civilian population quickly realised, were good soldiers: they were interested in the country and friendly towards its people; their treatment was fair and their discipline high. One of the first duties of the force was the demilitarisation of the area. Infantry and motor patrols, covering thousands of square miles, have been made in the collection of war equipment and supplies. To-day it is unlikely that anything of importance is undiscovered.

Repatriation of Japanese troops and civilians from overseas and of Koreans returning to their homeland has now ended, and the supervising of the process by New Zealand troops has ended with it. In all, more than 400,000 Japanese and Koreans have passed through the repatriation centres, giving full-time duty to two companies and to hundreds of men who were needed as train guards.

