

BOOKS

The Brigadier is Human

INFANTRY BRIGADIER, by Major-General Sir Howard Kippenberger, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O. and Bar, E.D. Geoffrey Cumberlege: Oxford University Press. (Also through the British Council.) N.Z. price, 26/3.

(Reviewed by Jim Henderson)

THE primus put out, the blackened, dented billy slanted over the enamel pannikins, the sweet scalding tea to our lips, we would loll about in the sand, another day done. Not often, we would wonder, curiously and critically, sometimes resentfully, about "the big shots" over us. Remote, they seemed to us, in 1941. A copy of *Infantry Brigadier* would have done our hearts and minds good. The brigadier is human, after all.

Within the book are maps, battle-plans, troops' dispositions and situations, all carefully and cleanly presented, which the soldier, the conscript, the civilian, and the politician can study to his gain. An old soldier feels his fingers curling round the smooth handle of the shovel in that almost memory-photograph of Sidi Rezegh, one of 18 illustrations. The intense vitality of a healthy field headquarters charges the book; no trace is found of jingoism, religion and atrocities, and above all, is the love and respect for the rifleman. And mature humour, too, thank God, in the scholarly writing. Should we have a 3NZEF, *Infantry Brigadier* will be part of its mind.

DISHEVELLED, frowzy from long trips, many drunk, the civilian-clad volunteers for the First Echelon trudge into Burnham Camp. Kippenberger, in command of 20 Battalion, remarks: "This is going to be the best infantry in the world," and writes, "Every second New Zealander will make at least an n.c.o." In February, 1940, they reach Maadi. Reluctant to punish transgressors at the Citadel, British-run detention centre, Kippenberger finally sentences two privates, who "came out so unrecognisably smart that I was tempted to send the whole battalion in by instalments." Few so benefited, he adds.

In March, 1941, leaving for Greece, Kippenberger notes in a letter: "We have not wasted our time. We are ready. My men will do their whole duty."

"The whole operation in Greece had rather the nature of an exercise"; a story of brief stands in the north, demolitions, incessant air attack, retreat, with isolated echoes from the dark hillside: "New Zealand here, wait for us." A forgotten sentry reappears in Crete "with

no deficiencies of kit." A sweating infantryman tells farewelling Greeks: "We'll bloody well come back again!"

On May 20 the gliders, "in their silence inexpressibly menacing and frightening," and low-flying troop carriers invade Crete. The island's varied units are woefully under-equipped to meet air invasion. Nineteen Battalion reports 155 parachutists killed and "rather apologetically" nine prisoners. Detailed fighting at Galatos and at the key point of Maleme results in withdrawal, and a heroic 18-hour trek leads to embarkation on May 30. Cut from 815 to 300, the Twentieth receives two V.C.'s—and 400 reinforcements.

THE enormous, exalting sweep to the Libyan frontier opens in November, 1941. Kippenberger feels this campaign "was fought with [a] total disregard of what one had understood to be the principles of war—with two exceptions," economy of force and "obstinate maintenance of the objective." The Twentieth goes to its annihilation at Belhamed, Kippenberger is wounded, captured and escapes, refrains from lashing those con-

fused, bitter and deadly days, and in January, 1942, takes command of Fifth Brigade. "Smart in my new red badge and tabs," he visits a hospital sister, who is told, "a military policeman with grey hair" called.

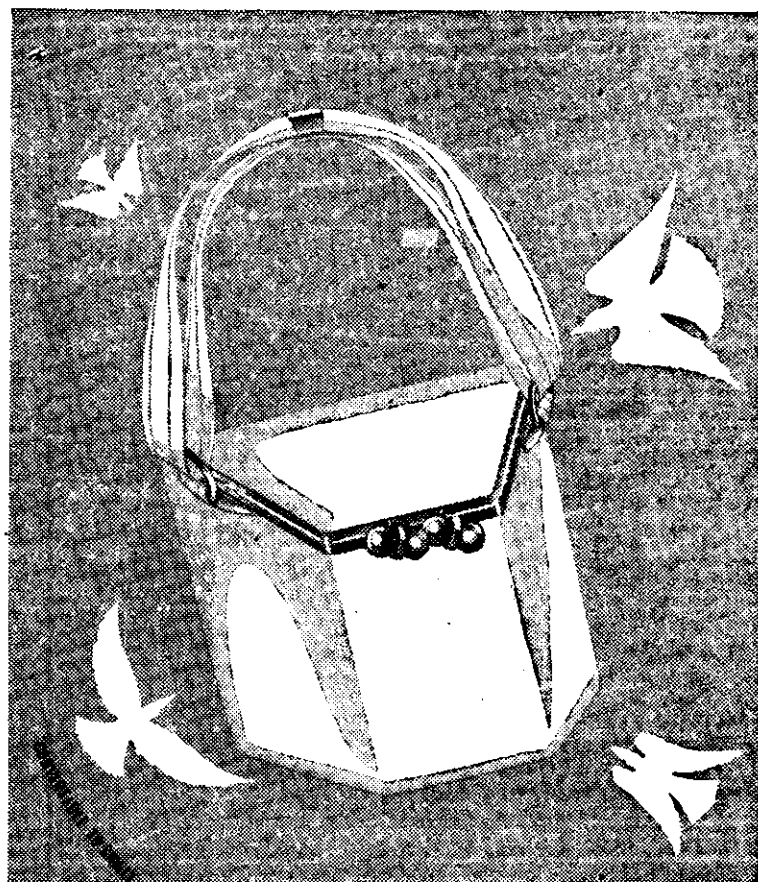
In May Rommel resumes the offensive, and the stubborn and exasperating days from Minqar Qaim to Ruweisat and the New Zealand Box repeat the bloody lessons of infantry and armour not co-ordinated. Flies, heat and rock, plans for evacuation of Egypt, and "a most intense distrust, almost hatred, of our armour" infuriate and embitter all ranks.

Montgomery, sharp, curt and stimulating, arrives; by October 23, General Freyberg and the author, fascinated and awed, watch the beginning of the breakthrough at Alamein, superbly underwritten. "If ever there was a just cause," he [Freyberg] said to himself, touched my shoulder, and departed.

General Freyberg . . . whose "idea of safety was purely relative," and who had remarked "with only broad accuracy 'shelling doesn't hurt anybody'"—took "the war seriously and disapproved highly of the Italian army." Teamwork, understanding and good fellowship sprang from his regular divisional conferences and their "Soviet-like methods" . . . "Occasionally he would have to fight the Brigadiers' Union. . . ."

Christmas finds the Division 1,200 miles west of Cairo. A psychiatrist from the War Office sees "an immense difference" (what was it?) "between the 21st

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