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FREE FRANCE AND OCEANIA

Visit Of Military Commander

FRENCHMEN overseas have every bit as much faith in the ability of their brothers in metropolitan France to withstand Nazism as Britons overseas have in the power of their Mother Country to meet the blitz and fight back successfully. That, at least, is the opinion of the present commander-in-chief of the military forces of Free France in Oceania, Commandant Edmond Mansard.

Commandant Mansard, who has been visiting Australia in connection with the organisation of the Free French forces in the Pacific, got into the news on quite a different count last week. While walking near Sydney's Botanic Gardens he was savagely assaulted by a stranger who apparently mistook the Cross of Lorraine (symbol of Free France) for the swastika (which means something quite different). From the scuffle, Commandant Mansard emerged with a broken arm and an outsize in black eyes.

Both these injuries were still much in evidence when he arrived in Auckland by flying-boat for conversations with the authorities here. Of the matters which he would discuss with the New Zealand authorities he could, of course, say nothing, but when interviewed by a representative of *The Listener* he was ready enough to talk—in French, for he does not speak English fluently—of the attitude of the French people to the war.

Papeete Plebiscite

Under the last free French Government, that of M. Reynaud, he was C-in-C. of the French colonial forces in Oceania and his term of office in that position ended in June, 1940. He left Noumea, where he had been stationed, the day before the Franco-German armistice and when the ship arrived at Papeete the settlement was in a political ferment. He at once cancelled his plans to proceed straight home to France and remained in Tahiti. During the succeeding weeks De Gaulle's party easily gained the ascendancy in the colony and when a plebiscite was held on August 30 to determine the attitude of the islands 5564 votes were cast for Free France and 18 for Petain and the Vichy administration.

In the provisional Government set up at Papeete after the plebiscite, Commandant Mansard was appointed Governor of the islands, this appointment being confirmed as from September 11 last by General De Gaulle himself. He remained in this office until November 26 when he resigned in order to take up once more his command of the military forces.

Men of Vichy

Asked for his opinion of some of the more prominent members of the Vichy

Government, Commandant Mansard said he was sure that both Petain and Weygand were true patriots and that they were doing what they could under circumstances of extreme difficulty to save France. "Though they cannot say so, in their inmost hearts," he said, "they approve of what De Gaulle and the French Free Forces are doing."

On the recent activity of Admiral Darlan, "Je ne le comprends pas" was his only comment. Darlan up to the time of the armistice had distinguished himself both as a sailor and as a patriotic Frenchman. Where he stood now was for the time being a mystery. There was, however, no doubt in the Commandant's mind about Flandin — "I have no confidence in him at all," he snapped. "He wrote a letter of congratulation to Hitler after the Munich agreement. He is as bad as Laval."

Like all Frenchmen overseas, however, he is out of touch with the contemporary history of his own country. He has had no direct news from his homeland, not even a letter from any of his relatives, since April last. What are the day to day reactions of the French people against the German army of occupation he can only surmise. Whether Weygand would be willing to effect a junction with De Gaulle's Central African forces if the latter, along with the Army of the Nile, were able to take Libya in the rear, he could not say, and when asked for his views on the situation in Indo-China, he could only shrug his shoulders with Gallie expressiveness.

"Après la Guerre"

On the other hand, he has very definite ideas about what should happen once Hitler and Nazism are finally defeated. "Il faut en finir"—this business must be finished once and for all, is his attitude and the attitude of every Frenchman. For his own part, and he thinks the majority of Frenchmen feel likewise, there will be no guarantee of peace in Europe unless Germany is dismembered. Not that he suggests that the Reich should be carved up and taken over by the conquerors. He does not suggest that France should seize the Rhine provinces as Germany has seized Lorraine. Frenchmen, he thinks, will only sleep quietly at nights when this war is over if present-day Germany is split up into its original components—not merely should Austria be made independent, but Bavaria and Wurtemberg and so on.

"It would have been done the last time," he said, "had it not been for President Wilson and Lloyd George."

That, he added, was the attitude of the average Frenchman toward Germany. And since France and Germany have been next-door neighbours for a long time, it is perhaps understandable.