

FIRST CASUALTIES

Two New Zealand Privates Who Shared An Italian Bomb At Mersa Matruh Arrive Home

ON October 3, 1939, just one month after the declaration of war, two young New Zealanders enlisted for service overseas with the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force. One of them, Reg. Buckingham, a carpenter in civil life, enlisted in Cambridge; the other, Jim Roiall, an optician, enlisted in Auckland.

But although they both did their training at Hopu Hopu, Papakura, and finally in Egypt, they did not make each other's acquaintance until early one morning near Mersa Matruh, nearly a year later, when Private Buckingham, now driving one of his battalion's trucks, was ordered to pick up Private Roiall, now looking after army instruments and, as a sideline, spare parts for trucks, and take him into Mersa Matruh on his next trip.

Two or three hours later they were caught in an air raid, wounded by splinters from the same bomb, operated on in the same underground operating theatre, and eventually they arrived back in New Zealand in the same hospital ship. Disembarked, they spent a cheerful week together in the same ward of the Wellington Hospital.

Life at the Base Camp

The earlier part of their story must be identical with that of thousands of other young New Zealanders who enlisted with the N.Z.E.F.

Life at the base camp in Egypt was a round of hard training, and heat, sand, and flies, varied by sightseeing in Cairo, and by some brief trips as far afield as Palestine. Reg. Buckingham's most vivid memories of those months in Egypt are of his first route march after leaving the troopship (most of the men were dismayed at the way they had softened up during the voyage, and there was hardly a heel which wasn't blistered at the end of the march), and the night of Italy's entry into the war. He was at the pictures, in a camp recreational hall, when the news was flashed on the screen, and the troops dispersed to their tents, prepared for immediate action.

The next few weeks would have been an anti-climax but for their shift up to the vicinity of Mersa Matruh, where they were given the job of guarding a section of the coast. Mersa Matruh was the big base for the front line, held then by Indian troops, and the first thing the New Zealanders had to do when they arrived was to dig tank traps. Night and day they dug, stripped to the waist; one tank trap after the other. "It's no wonder they call us diggers," said Jim Roiall.

The Italians Come Over

Though the surrounding country was arid and devoid of shape, the strip of beach where Buckingham's company was camped reminded some New Zealanders of beaches of the Bay of Plenty. The water, however, was more salt, and during the summer months, much warmer.

Air raids on Mersa Matruh and the important roads leading to the base were frequent, and each tent had a slip trench

just outside into which the men would tumble when the alarm sounded. In daytime the Italian planes would come over at high altitudes, mere specks away up in a burning blue sky, but at night they were more daring, gliding in from out at sea with their engines off, at times seeming to skim the tent tops.

Up to then Buckingham had been an ordinary footslogging infantryman, but one day he received word of his transfer to the transport section of his battalion, and was ordered back to pick up a brand new truck. His first trip was to a dump where he loaded up petrol and Jim Roiall, whom he met for the first time.

Something Told Him

"A new truck and a new driver on his first trip—something tells me we're going to be hit," observed Roiall jokingly as they introduced themselves. It was only too true a prophecy.

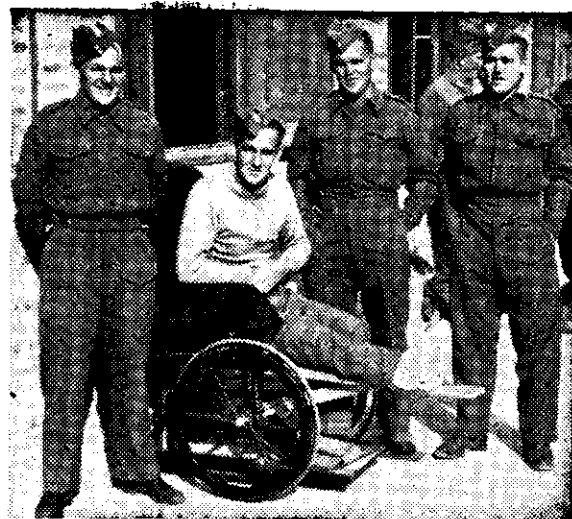
As they moved out of the dump, a sergeant warned them that the Italians were on their way. Approaching Mersa Matruh, they noticed that the air raid warning sign was showing. The planes came over high up, and they barely had time to get out of the truck and drop flat in the road when the stick of bombs landed.

A 250-pounder exploded some 20 yards away. Another landed even closer, but did not explode.

When they had recovered momentarily from the blast and shock, Buckingham said, "I feel funny in the legs." Then he saw that he had collected a splinter in the arm and one in the left leg. He felt no pain, and was able to walk round to where Roiall was still

FOUR BROTHERS:

Private Reg. Buckingham, at a hospital in Egypt, is visited by his three brothers, all on active service with the N.Z.E.F.



lying under the truck. Roiall had been hit more seriously in the calf of the leg, and was deluged with petrol from the pierced tank of the truck.

Somehow they managed to get to a shelter from where they were soon taken to an operating theatre thirty feet underground. The raid was still going on, and even as they were carried in to the operating theatre a bomb landed close to the entrance.

They Became Famous

And that was how Privates Reg. Buckingham and James Roiall came to feature in the first New Zealand casualty list from the Middle East. Their recovery was sure but slow, Roiall being on the dangerously ill list for two weeks. In hospital, they had the distinction of becoming the most photographed and publicised patients there. They were photographed with Anthony Eden, General Freyberg, and Mr. Menzies, and interviewed by the official Australian newsreel photographer. Buckingham received further publicity when he was

visited by his three brothers, all on active service overseas with the New Zealand forces.

When they had recovered sufficiently, they embarked on hospital ships for the long voyage home to New Zealand, Buckingham by an Australian ship, Roiall by the Somersetshire. The New Zealanders on the Australian ship had a ten days' stay in Sydney waiting for the Somersetshire, a time spent very pleasantly sightseeing and enjoying an overwhelming amount of Australian hospitality. Highlight of the visit was Sydney's welcome to the sick and wounded, hundreds of thousands of people cheering the men as they circled round the Sydney showgrounds in motor-cars.

So back to New Zealand and a short stay in the Wellington hospital before returning to their homes. Jim Buckingham still has his leg in plaster, and he will have a slightly stiff leg for the rest of his days. Jim Roiall's leg is healing slowly, and has to be dressed regularly.

Both of them, however, are feeling fine.

Advice On Health (No.3)

MILK - OUR BEST SINGLE FOOD

(Written for "The Listener" by DR. MURIEL BELL, Nutritionist to the Department of Health)



BY including an adequate quantity of milk among our daily foods, we safeguard our diet in a way that can be done by no other single food. For children, milk has been found to be necessary in making bones and teeth. For straight, strong bones, for a well-built frame, the things required are Vitamin D (in fish liver oils), or else sunlight directly on the skin, together with salts of lime and phosphorus in the food. In cold climates it is impossible to get enough sunlight on the skin to make up for deficiencies of lime and Vitamin D in the food, particularly as the hours of sunlight are the times when children are sitting in a school-room. There are those who may think that a pint of milk per day is all that is necessary to make a child grow, but it has been demonstrated by several American doctors in numerous studies on children that for most ages the best

growth is secured when 1 3/4 (Imperial) pints are included in the food each day. On the strength of observations such as these, the Committee of Nutrition experts appointed by the League of Nations Health Organisation advised that 1 3/4 pints (1 litre) of milk should be the standard daily intake for children and adolescents, and indeed up to the age of 21; also for the expectant and the nursing mother.

Richest in Lime

Milk is the food that is richest in lime. The farmer of to-day knows this, for he is nowadays aware that "milk fever" in a cow is due to the sudden drain of lime salts from her blood into the milk. This sudden drain is caused by the rapid secretion of milk into the udder before her body has had time to adjust itself to supply the large amount of lime required. The farmer has witnessed the rapid cure that results from

injection of suitable lime salts into her blood, and has pronounced it better than the older methods of treatment.

Milk is indeed the only protein food which at the same time contains an adequate quantity of lime. Meat, though a good protein food, is deficient with respect to lime. Moreover, the lime in milk is utilised 50% better than that in vegetable foods.

Milk is our best single food.

Skim milk, which costs less, is a good food for children too, for it still contains the protein and the lime and phosphorus present in whole milk. Costs may also be reduced by using skim milk powder for cooking—some children even prefer their milk drink, or their cocoa, made with it.

That children in England grew better with extra milk was demonstrated by the experiments of Dr. Corry Mann. That children similarly grew better in New Zealand when given extra milk was shown by the experiments of Dr. Turbott and Mr. Rowland, upon the evidence of whose work the valuable Milk in Schools Scheme was instituted. A similar demonstration of the value of milk for children was conducted by H. D. Somerset, whose report on his experience with children at a school in North Canterbury has just been published.

(Next week: "No More Diphtheria," by Dr. H. B. Turbott)