

WAR DIARY

It Happened To Him

ONE MAN'S TALE OF GREECE AND CRETE

THIS is the story of Horace Edward Beale, private in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, and lately returned from Greece, Crete and Egypt with an explosive bullet through his hand. "High Explosive" he has been nicknamed, and that is partly because of his initials, partly because he is known to have had his fair share of that lethal substance during the past few months.

He arrived in Wellington the other week on a grey, cold day with wind and rain driving along the streets and great pools of water in the roadway in front of the clearing hospital. Inside the hospital was a great deal of bustle and activity, with white-jacketed orderlies coming and going and cheerful soldiers limping from ward to ward and greeting friends and relatives and sweethearts.

There was no one to meet Private Beale. His family lives in Auckland, and he was leaving by train the next day, so he spent most of the afternoon lying on his bed or strolling around talking to other soldiers. He carried his arm in a sling and most of it was in plaster, as the small bones in his hand had been cruelly shattered. He was what is technically described as "walking wounded," but he was still shaky and sick, and the nurse who introduced him said "He's not too well yet."

"Part of the Day's Work"

Horace Edward Beale, who was a bush worker in the King Country before he enlisted, is not the sort of man who would wish to make a song about his experiences in Greece and Crete. What happened to him happened to thousands of other New Zealanders and Australians. It was nothing to make a song about, nothing in the least bit heroic, just part of a tough day's work. So he said.

How, then, to set about telling what happened to him during those hectic days of burning sun and bitter rain and snow, of forced marches and hurried evacuations, of sleepless nights and hard fighting, and incessant danger, of food eaten carelessly when and where he could, with too often the deadly shapes of Stukas diving at the marching columns of men?

Like most of the troops who have returned, "H.E." brought back, for the most part, just a series of jumbled memories of those nerve-taut days in Greece and Crete.

But here are some of the things he remembers of the campaign:

He was up past Olympus when the Germans came, but he saw no fighting as his unit was withdrawn over the Serbian Pass. The weather was

capricious, with brilliant sunshine alternating with snow and rain. For men just up from the heat of Egypt it was a real test of endurance, but though they slept some nights in mud inches deep, their hard training and fitness brought them through.

"Endless Bombing"

The only contact "H.E." had with the Germans was through their endless bombing of the roads and towns in the



HORACE EDWARD BEALE
... bomb-happy

New Zealanders' line of retreat. South of Larissa, which was pounded off the map, they really got to work, coming over in groups of 40 and 50 bombers. The bombing itself did little damage, and the results obtained for such an expenditure of high explosive must have been extremely disappointing to the Germans. But the crash of bombs, the continuous roar of motors and the scream of the sirens fitted to the bombers had its effects on the Anzacs' nerves.

A day or two before he was taken off from a beach south of Athens, "H.E." was blasted from his feet by a heavy bomb which landed a few chains away. Not a fragment touched him, but the effects of the blast lingered for weeks. "I was what we called bomb-happy. Lord, how bomb-happy I was," he says, and leaves it at that. But he was ill and shaken, and needed every day of the three weeks' respite and recuperation in Crete.

Calm Before Storm

In Crete, the New Zealanders rested, drank the island's strong, resinous wine, and, because they knew that the German drive to the East would not rest at Greece, prepared themselves for whatever form an assault might take. "Those weeks on Crete were just what I wanted," said "H.E." "It would have done me for the duration."

But in the dark, early hours of the morning of Tuesday, May 20, the Luftwaffe

came in concentration to Malemi Aerodrome, near where "H.E." was camped, and bombed and machine-gunned the area with relentless fury, and they all knew then that zero hour had arrived. With daylight came the gliders, huge, slow-moving machines that crash-landed and poured out their quotas of infantry. Then troop-carrying planes, and simultaneously the parachutists, suddenly filled the sky and floated down to death. "It was like the first of May," said "H.E." "Not many of them landed alive."

His Nastiest Moment

From then on, life resolved itself into days and nights of fighting, bitter and bloody, with sleep and food taking a back place. "H.E." was attached to a mortar unit. No sooner would a cloud of parachute troops land and set up their machine guns than the unit would be called up to deal with them. While he was "spotting" for the mortar he had his nastiest moment of the whole fighting. He was on the top of a small hillock, well screened by a tree. He knew that there was a whole company of Anzacs between him and the Germans, and he was relaxing, with his rifle slung in the tree above him to keep it out of the dust.

Through the undergrowth of a sudden came a shouting, and a few seconds later two Germans crashed through, not more than 15 yards away. Frenziedly, "H.E." grabbed for his rifle. "I didn't know what I was doing, but somehow I managed to get one of them, then started shooting wildly at the other. I was so excited I was shooting all over the place. He got away."

The evening of the first day saw further desperate fighting, wild bayonet charges, hand-to-hand fighting in the darkness. It was during hard in-fighting near Galatos that "H.E." received a bullet through his hand. He had it attended to at a field dressing station, but not until five days later was he taken off from the island. He spent those days struggling across to the bay from which, early one morning, he embarked on a transport. They were five days of pain and physical exhaustion, and he was getting weaker every day. He started off with a whole collection of German souvenirs, but they were discarded one by one. There were only two things to do—press on as fast as possible to the coast or lag behind and get cut off.

Respect for the Red Cross

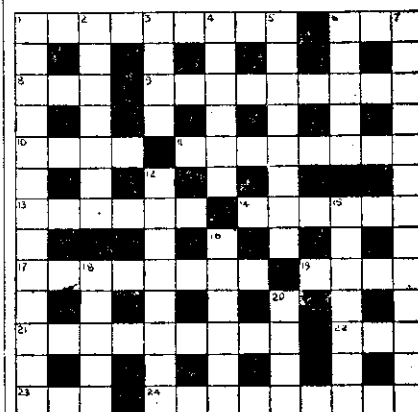
One thing "H.E." does give the Germans credit for is the respect with which the Luftwaffe generally treated the Red Cross. Once he saw a crowd of over a thousand Anzacs, their "tin hats" and rifles thrown away, standing around a dressing station, but though German planes were roaring low overhead, the men were not machine-gunned.

As those will remember who followed the cable news during those anxious days, the New Zealanders' ordeal did not end with their departure from the shores of Crete. The transport and their escorts of cruisers and destroyers were dive-bombed until they were within the

THE LISTENER CROSSWORD

(No. 62)

(Constructed by R.W.C.)



Clues Across

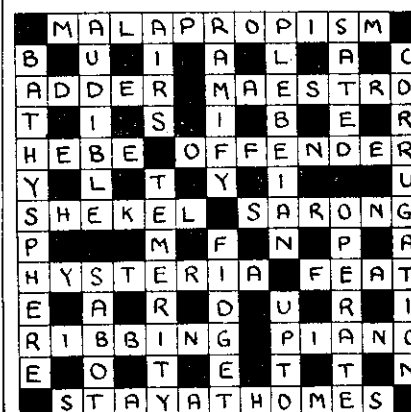
- These have recently been responsible for a reduction in the speed of Steamer Express.
- The necessary.
- A sign of the Zodiac.
- A comedy type concealed among our betters.
- A sane organisation for entertaining war-workers.
- Guardian of the entrance to Hades.
- This is mad, Sir!
- Oblige aliens to pine within prescribed limits.
- Ron's coat (anag.).
- Stigma.
- The garlic makes you apathetic.
- Often found at the foot of a page.
- A shrub found in 1 down.
- Moves over.

Clues Down

- April prudence (anag.).
- Egyptian king who has gone to sea.
- Receptacle found in 1 across.
- Sea-sickness.
- An Arab in the sand gives a dance.
- Alert, but not so early.
- Gordon's remiss in disarranging these rooms.
- A rat in the organ—this is presumptuous.
- Sell pie on the Oval?
- These variations may well be a puzzle.
- Blooming early from the earth.
- A famous radio family

THE LISTENER CROSSWORD

(Answer to No 61)



range of protecting British fighters operating from North African bases.

And so, for Horace Edward Beale, ended a campaign which can truly be called an epic, though he would probably be amused and puzzled by the term. "It was tough enough, too tough maybe," he says, "but there were lots worse off than me."