

NEW ZEALAND
LISTENER

Incorporating N.Z. RADIO RECORD

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Fallen Soldiers

WE print a pathetic letter to-day from the mother of a fallen soldier. It is not very accurate, not very logical, not very fair, but it is very sincere, and we cannot doubt the assertion made in the closing sentence—that it expresses what many ordinary people are thinking.

It is not accurate or fair to suggest that decorations go first to those who are first back at the base. Decorations are very rarely bestowed on base personnel, decorations for gallantry almost never; nor are all or nearly all of those in base depots there by choice. Further, if an officer is back at the base before his men he is a high ranking officer who went through severe fighting before promotion came to him. General Freyberg, for example, was wounded nine times between 1914 and 1918, and although there are one or two senior officers in the New Zealand Division who had not seen active service before the present war, that is because they are professional soldiers who were too young for active service twenty-five years ago. In all these matters therefore our correspondent, without meaning to be unjust, is most inaccurate and unfair. She is, however, entitled to express an opinion—who could be better entitled than a woman who has lost her son?—and it is certainly not true that there is no substance at all in her complaints. Men in bases have been decorated in the past, and if we except the Victoria Cross, distinctions are still made between officers and men in the grade of honour bestowed for valour—a survival of the days of privilege that can no longer be justified.

And just as she is unfair, but not without excuse, in her references to decorations, our correspondent is unreasonable, but very human, in her demand for news. There can be few mothers of fallen soldiers who have not had a personal message from one of that soldier's officers, and it is not therefore just or reasonable to ask what would be thought of a captain who was the first away from a sinking ship and "could not tell the world what happened to the crew." Army officers are not the first to withdraw from a battle, but battles are spread over miles of country and it is usually quite impossible to follow the fortunes of individual soldiers. On the other hand, the fact that so much information is communicated privately to relatives means that a good deal is sooner or later known at the base, and our correspondent is right when she says that the battle story of this or that company or platoon could occasionally displace the sports chronicle of this or that football side or cricket team.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

Letters sent to "The Listener" for publication should be as brief as possible, and should deal with topics covered in "The Listener" itself. Correspondents must send in their names and addresses even when it is their wish that these should not be published. We cannot undertake to give reasons why all or any portion of a letter is rejected.

HOW DID THEY DIE?

Sir,—We hear quite often over the radio about soldiers being decorated. Can you tell me what they are decorated for? Is it the first to reach the home base who has the prize? I see that quite a few are the head men—men who accepted the responsibility of watching and caring for our boys who went all trustingly to do their duty.

With all due respect and honour to those leaders, I think we hear too much about them. It is about time they were able to tell the waiting parents and wives of the Private Soldiers something of the battle in which they fought. Surely with so many at H.Q. safe and well, some one is able to tell us. When and where did our boys die? Up to the present time all we have is just the "Killed in action" notice. And many are the weeks which have passed while we patiently wait for some account of the battles. I sometimes wonder what we should think if a Captain of a ship and his officers were the first to leave when it was sinking and could not tell the world what happened to the crew.

How nice it would be if we could hear over the air an account of the battles our boys fought in. How is it their commanders do not tell us what happened to the boys they left in the battlefields? It is our boys who will never be able to tell us themselves what we want to hear about. If an account of each platoon in its turn could be broadcast, how much satisfaction it would give to the ever waiting, watching, listening relatives. If on Sunday mornings we could hear more about them and less about sports it would be appreciated. We don't want to hear about the fellow who calls himself a soldier and hangs around a base camp to tell his story.

I am sending you this just to give you some idea of what the Man in the Street is thinking in this quarter.

MOTHER (Nelson South).

(This letter was received the day before General Freyberg's official account of the Greece and Crete fighting was published, and a week before the V.C. awards were announced. We discuss it in our leading article.—Ed.)

WORTH ITS SALT?

Sir,—Had it not been for the harm which J. Harris's misinformed outburst over 4YA might do to the industrial development of New Zealand, we should have been grateful for the publicity which his talk, and *The Listener* report which followed it, gave to the book, *The Industrial Future of New Zealand*, written by Edmund F. Hubbard, and recently published by ourselves.

The book came through with flying colours. Mr. Harris, displaying a boundless ignorance of the production of salt, declared that contrary to the opinion of Mr. Hubbard, that commodity could not be economically produced in New Zealand. He spoke as follows: "If new discoveries have been made to alter this, Mr. Hubbard should say so. As it is his statement appears to be one more of the vague and unsubstantiated assertions which appear on every page of the book."

Must the compiler of a dictionary substantiate within the dictionary each statement—and to the satisfaction of Mr. Harris? Can anyone in his senses really have mistaken this brief survey for an industrial encyclopædia? Mr. Hubbard was asked precisely how NEW the principle of salt production is and he states that it "Goes back anyway to the time of Lot's wife." So there have been no new discoveries. And for Mr. Harris's further information, the Department of Industries and Commerce considers the production of salt to be definitely an economic possi-

bility in New Zealand. It is apparent from information to hand that salt can be evaporated from water in New Zealand at a cost of approximately £1 per ton.

One half, therefore, of Mr. Harris's inexplicable attack can be dismissed for ever. The time he spent on the air in making his attack and the space which the report occupied in *The Listener* were consequently a dead loss to the listeners in the Dominion. Perhaps it was because the book contained not one superfluous word that Mr. Harris was most disconcerted. Such a book is almost a curiosity in a day of literary verbosity. Had Mr. Hubbard reported Mr. Harris's talk for *The Listener* it would have been reduced to a sentence: "I assert that contrary to Mr. Hubbard's opinion salt cannot be manufactured economically in New Zealand." Mr. Hubbard is one of our busiest men, a research scientist who has put in many years of original work proving some of the principles upon which he constructed his handbook. Some of Mr. Hubbard's investigations are already bearing fruit of industrial importance and will become of enormous national importance in the future. That a layman should take the opportunity to launch a broadcast attack on the professional ability of another—and in so doing make serious errors!—has seemed to many people to be gravely out of place.

That this particular book criticism should have been chosen from among three criticisms which Mr. Harris delivered at the same time to be the one reported in *The Listener* appears to be even more inexplicable. Why was Mr. Hubbard not given an opportunity to reply first? Surely the attack was the most violent ever delivered over the air in New Zealand?

Obviously, *The Industrial Future of New Zealand* was published to make the people of the country industrially conscious—not to provide Mr. Harris with a course in popular science! Mr. Harris in his outburst attempted to erase some of the good already achieved by this publication. Revealed in his attitude are the same old negativeness and unprogressiveness which have laid a dead hand for so long on our national development. Mr. Harris even complains that much of the information was derived from official sources! He was acquainted with that fact in the Bibliography at the end of the book. Can Mr. Harris suggest a more accurate source?

Fortunately the sale of the book and the economic expansion of New Zealand proceed despite the talk and the lengthy report in *The Listener*. If Mr. Harris reads the book thoroughly he will find that it is constructive, realistic, and clear-cut in conception, and that it was particularly well written.

If Mr. Harris comes to Wellington at any time, Mr. Hubbard would, I am sure, be pleased to allow Mr. Harris to watch him achieving in his laboratory things which Mr. Harris would consider impossible, and to see Mr. Hubbard's staff doing the things which Mr. Harris talks about. — W. STUART WILSON AND ASSOCIATES (Wellington).

(Our correspondents find it "inexplicable" that we should have printed, out of all Mr. Harris said during that talk, one mild paragraph about salt. So do we. We could so easily have printed this passage:

"The first thing you notice about the book is its appearance. It is got up exactly like a Penguin Book. But there the likeness ends. The cost is seven times as great, the length only about one-eighth of the average Penguin."

Or this:

"He (the author) then proceeds to survey our resources under various chapter headings, such as "Pastoral Industry, Agriculture, Forestry, Ceramics, Mineral Resources. To call them chapters is perhaps misleading. Some of them contain only a few paragraphs. All are extremely superficial, consisting of little more than a few broad facts culled from the official Year Book, followed by rather vague generalisations."

Or this:

"The publisher, in the blurb appearing on the cover, speaks of Mr. Hubbard's 'intimate knowledge of the resources and potentialities of the country.' Such a claim is even on the face of it quite absurd."

Or this:

"For the same price you can get the New Zealand Official Year Book. . . . It contains all the information presented by Mr. Hubbard and infinitely more besides. It is factually reliable."

—Ed.)