

# LISTENER

Incorporating N.Z. RADIO RECORD

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EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICES:  
115 Lambton Quay, Wellington, C.I.  
Post Office Box 5004,  
Lambton Quay, Wellington, C.I.  
Telephone 46-520.  
Telegraphic Address: "Listener," Wellington.

## The Army We Deserve

WE print on another page three letters commenting on our review of *Bless 'Em Ali*, a recent book about the British Army; good letters, well written and well argued, and presenting a point of view that should never be forgotten. We regret that we have not the space (in this issue) to print more than three, since the subject is of front-rank importance. Although the Army has never been Britain's first line of defence, and is not yet the last line, it depends very largely on its efficiency whether the war lasts for two more years or for ten. So far it has not been efficient, if efficiency means winning battles. We agree with our correspondent A.M. that for this it is not wholly to blame. We civilians are to blame, we voters and taxpayers who in peace-time starved it and laughed at it, and now in war-time expect miracles from it. It is the army it is because it has not had time to grow into the army it ought to be. At the best it is three years old, much of it younger. The army that went to France returned disarmed and disorganised. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the whole process of training and equipping the armies on which we depend to-day began after Dunkirk. On all these points we agree with our correspondents and could even feel amazed at their moderation. But the question is not whether there is something to be said in the Army's defence. It is whether the Army is equal to its terrible responsibilities, and if it is not, whether it is taking the best steps to reach that point. The author of *Bless 'Em Ali* exaggerates its weaknesses, deliberately, and occasionally perhaps with some lack of responsibility. But when everything possible has been allowed for his irreverence his strictures remain. There is still too much caste in the Army, too much ignorance, and too much stupidity. Too much time is wasted on things of negligible importance. It is far too readily assumed that every soldier knows what he is fighting for and that all soldiers have the same long-distance aims. If it makes "painful reading" to emphasise such things it would be shameful cowardice to gloss them over. An army is good when it stops and overwhelms its adversary. To apologise for it when it does the opposite of this is a dangerous pastime for a nation at war.

## 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.

### GANDHI DEFENDS INDIA

Sir,—The cartoon entitled "Gandhi Defends India," which you published last week, showing Gandhi drawing a thread from a spinning-wheel across the path of a Japanese tank, was striking and superficially clever. I imagine your source was the American magazine *Time*, but to put this picture in truer perspective you should also have published some of the text which appeared with the cartoon on *Time's* page. May I be allowed to quote now from this source?

"Wildly exaggerated as Gandhi's faith in his own defence technique may be, it is not at all beyond possibility that the British-Indian Army's fighting may be aided to a degree by Gandhi's non-violent non-co-operation."

"It is fanciful, at least, to urge Indians in general to fight the Japanese invader. Britain has long forbidden weapons to India's citizens—probably no more than 2,000,000 out of India's 350,000,000 have ever seen a rifle—and now Britain has no weapons to give them, except wooden batons. Armies of villagers equipped only with sticks and fists would be small hindrance to Japan."

"But armies of non-violent non-co-operators might be a considerable obstacle. Gandhi's policy is anything but pacifism. It is organised mass resistance, whose nearest U.S. equivalent is the sit-down strike. Gandhi's followers would obstruct Japan by refusing the invader their labour; they would not work in factories, run trains, operate telephones or telegraphs, draw water or grow crops for Japan. If Japan killed them for their resistance, it would not help Japan. And followers of Gandhi have sometimes proved their willingness to die—in front of street-cars or police, or in hunger strikes—for their cause."

—PERSPECTIVE (Wellington).

### NOTHING WRONG WITH OUR TYPE

Sir,—You are in error when you state that I "deplored the increasing use of smaller type." Possibly my reference to "failing eyesight" gave you the idea. The point that I wished to make was that owing to failing eyesight a number of people are not able to read and thus are compelled to depend on the radio programmes for their entertainment. Your type is all right and much clearer than the newspapers.

"SERIAL" (Riccarton).

(We regret having misunderstood our correspondent's earlier letter.—Ed.)

### TOBRUK AND THE SOOTHSAYERS

Sir,—May I congratulate you on your article "Tobruk and the Soothsayers?" For a long time I have wondered when somebody would at last write something of that kind. So far we have been winning the war splendidly, with our mouths, and on the battlefield retreating, retreating, retreating; or rather, as our propagandists portray it, winning glorious defeats and allowing the enemy to suffer ignominious victories. We have not yet realised that the only foes who have not hopelessly outclassed us are the despised Italians, and we have yet to prove whether we are very much better at the game of war than they are.

We cracked many a joke over the Italian retreat in the first Libyan campaign, but for a complete fiasco I don't think even the Italians could compete with our performance in Malaya, and the impregnable fortress of Singapore must surely be the greatest joke in history.

I certainly agree with you that it is high time we did away with these soothsayers, and woke up, and faced facts.

PHANTOM DRUMMER (Wanganui).

Sir,—A note of congratulation and thanks for Editorial on Tobruk. I think we are all getting sick of being led up the garden path. Your words are timely and mild to what they doubtless could be.

DAVID K. BOYD (Queenstown).

### 49TH PARALLEL

Sir,—I am amazed at the criticism of 49th Parallel by "G.M." The whole theme was moral not materialistic.

The war is not being fought on the battlefields only but in your and my small circle. Does "G.M." allow a snake to escape because it is only one? By what process of imagination did he feel sympathy for the hunted in this film? It roused none in me. Only a desire to eradicate.

A WOMAN (Taihape).

### WOMEN ON EDUCATION BOARDS

Sir,—On page 13 of the issue of your paper of July 24, you publish an article headed "A refining influence? Women on Education Boards," which purports to give the matter of an address recently given by me at a meeting of the Federation of University Women. What I actually said on that occasion has been completely misrepresented by the writer of this article, and both the Senate of the University and the Federation of University Women have been placed in a singularly undignified and unwarranted aspect. I wish emphatically to dissociate myself from the subject matter of the article, and shall be greatly obliged if you will give publicity to my protest. May I also respectfully suggest that articles purporting to report the works of a speaker be submitted to the person concerned before publication.

SYLVIA G. CHAPMAN (Wellington).

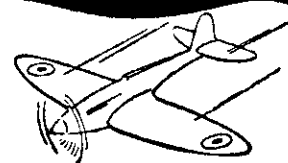
(The writer of our article attended the meeting at which Dr. Chapman's remarks were made, took notes of them, and can think of no important respect in which our correspondent was misrepresented. Dr. Chapman must know that her final suggestion is neither practicable nor generally desirable.—Ed.)

### POINTS FROM LETTERS

H. ALEXANDER (Auckland), wants to know if "anything can be done to protect listeners . . . from the gross carelessness and indifference . . . of announcers who quite distinctly yawn into the mike, the voice fading away to allow of the full yawn."

PTE. E. de LACEY writes from a military camp asking that Schubert's "Death and the Maiden," which was broadcast recently from 2YN, Nelson, should be broadcast again from a YA station for the pleasure it would give to many eager listeners in uniform.

A.C.2 (whose name and address we are at liberty to reveal to "an interested party who has a genuine desire to have new methods used to assist in winning this war") writes: "A partner and I have designed and patented an entirely new means whereby we can stop a tank, or any other vehicle. While it is comparatively inexpensive, it is absolutely practical, and has a variety of uses."



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