

U.S. MARINE, BOXER, AND RADIO COMPERE

We Interview The "Voice" of The "American Hour"

WE threaded our way in sunshine in and out of beeps, jeeps and other military impedimenta as we made our way to the office of the camp. "Sergeant Fishel? Sure. Here he is." And we faced round to see a big, tough-looking Marine emerge from a group. He greeted us with the voice which has become familiar to the many listeners who have heard the *American Hour* programme from ZB stations on Sunday nights, for Sergeant Fishel has arranged and compered these ZB sessions.

"Have you been connected with broadcasting in the States?" we asked.

"No," came the reply. "I had never done anything of the sort before. My friend Jim Hurlbut, who was in radio work in Washington and was War Correspondent here, had the first two *American Hour* broadcasts, and when he moved on to Guadalcanal, he took me along to the radio authorities and suggested I take his place. I wasn't too sure of myself, either, but it's been a good recreation from the job of being a Marine, and it's given me a lot of fun."

"And do the men here listen-in to you?"

"Sure they listen, and they kid me about it, too. The boys in hospital like it, and send in requests for special items. When I went up to the hospital last, there was a youngster there who called me over to him and hauled me over the coals. He had a leg off, but he had been practising jitterbugging on crutches all the week, and then I didn't put on any jitterbug music on Sunday night. It was just too bad."

Fighter in Private Life, Too

In private life Sergeant Fishel was a trainer of professional fighters, boxing, ju-jitsu, night fighting and bayonet fighting. In the Marines he continues as boxing instructor, and as we looked again at the burly figure, we realised that our first appraisal of him as tough was not wrong. He joined the Marines because they get the tough fighting and the dirty jobs, and have the tradition that makes a fighting job worth while. "We get on fine with your boys," said Sergeant Fishel. "The Marine Corps gets the

dirty jobs, and your boys have had some, too. We know how it feels, so we can appreciate what they have done."

Drivel or Heart Throbs?

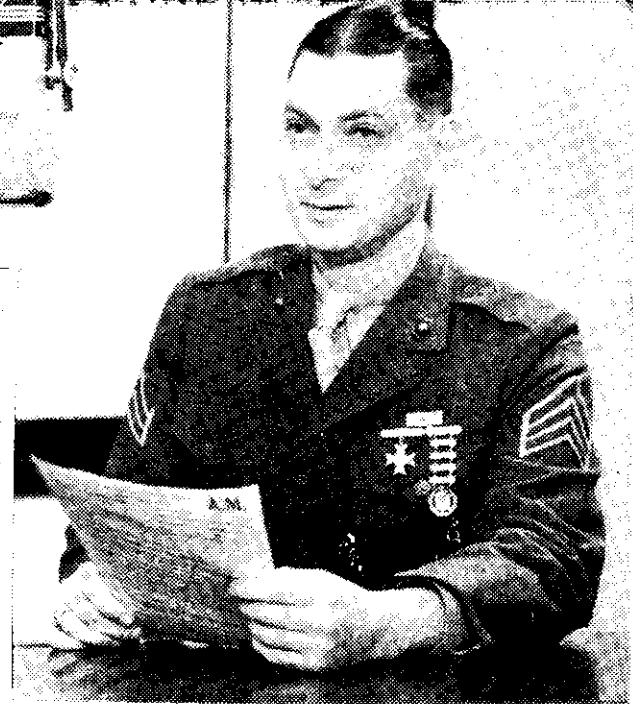
We asked whether he had had much fan-mail.

Sergeant Fishel re-emerged after a little search with quite a formidable bundle. "Do I think this a lot of work? No. I like answering these letters. It tickles my vanity to feel anyone would listen to me compering a programme, and this shows that they do. Not that they are always flattering," he chuckled. "Look at this—'putting on drivel . . . colourless, insipid stuff . . . we thought Yanks were lacking in musical taste . . . but now we know they're crazy.'" He laughed. "You see, it's not all complimentary!"

"Most of the letters, however, are very warmly appreciative, and it's very pleasant to get them. Here's one that I think the boys must have cooked up." He passed over a letter beginning "Dear Heart-Throb." "My wife will get plenty of laughs out of some of these. Then there are a whole bunch that came from one evening when we put on 'Starry Night,' which is taken from the theme of Tchaikovsky's Symphony. I said that the only pathetic thing about it was that there were no starry nights

"Command Performance"

Here are the film star comperes for the ZB programme on Sunday, January 3: 1ZB, Betty Grable; 2ZB, Bing Crosby; 3ZB, Linda Darnell; 4ZB, Frances Langford; 2ZA, Bob Hope.



Above: Sergt. S. J. Fishel, comperé of the ZB's "American Hour," at the microphone

Left: Betty Grable, who comperes the "Command Performance, U.S.A." session from 1ZB on Sunday, January 3

here and no one to spend them with. Did I have some letters after that! Gee!

"But I like to think that even for one or two this may be, as one correspondent puts it, 'The brightest spot in Sunday's radio.' A number of people write asking what sort of an hour it is that lasts only 30 minutes. I liked the appreciative letters that I've had from Maoris. They like the fact that I begin with the Maori greeting 'Kia Ora, Katoa Katoa.' I've been acquiring quite a bit of Maori in between times." And to prove it, he rattled off several Maori sentences with breath-taking speed and impeccable accent.

"And you like being here?" we asked.

"In New Zealand? Sure. I like it very much, and so do all the boys. Both sides may have been shy at first, but we soon got over that. This is the friendliest place we have been in, and I'll say we appreciate it."

FOR THE HOMESICK

ONE very popular feature which has been incorporated in the *American Hour* will be continued from all Commercial stations. This is *Command Performance, U.S.A.* This, as some will remember, is a 29-minute entertainment built around the requests of the fighting men. The army handles the requests; Hollywood assembles the talent. The men get America's choicest entertainers. Nobody has yet declined to entertain.

A gob in Pearl Harbour sends in a pencilled scrawl: "I wish Carole Landis would step up to the microphone and just sigh—that's all." A few days later, Miss Landis leaves her work on a Hollywood lot, hurries over to the radio—and broadcasts precisely one sigh for this lonely bluejacket in Hawaii. A Marine writes that he is homesick for the voice of his pet cocker spaniel. The dog's bark is duly broadcast halfway across the world.

Each performance is compered by a different film star, and this fact will continue to do for the session what one of Sergeant Fishel's correspondents claimed was done by the *American Hour*: "It will help to make American forces more at home here, and it will help us to build up an understanding of America."