

THE DESERT WAS NOT DULL

THE New Zealand Division has left the Desert—this time finally. Unless something happens that no one at present can foresee, there will be no more battles in the sand during the present war. But it is not as easy to forget North Africa as to turn away from it. We are not likely to forget it. On the other hand we must not suppose that life in the Eighth Army was one long test of endurance. Our soldiers were well fed, well equipped, and when opportunity presented itself, well entertained. Here are some notes by a former member of "The Listener" staff which show the kind of life the Division led during its last three months of African campaigning. We have added nothing and deleted nothing.

OUR existence is as tolerable as a desert rat can expect it to be. We eat well, considering the difficulties of provisioning an army with lines of communication as long as ours are. Our breakfast: porridge (oatmeal, army biscuit porridge or a gluey mass prepared from Atta flour, which contains a proportion of corn and occasional "livestock"); sausages or bacon or beans and bacon; bread, margarine (occasionally butter) and tea. Lunch: bread supplemented by army biscuits (which are really an excellent article of food), the inevitable bully beef, margarine, jam, cheese, tea, dates or peanuts—both products of North Africa. Dinner: bully beef hash or meat and vegetable ration (M. and V.) cooked as interestingly as our cook knows how, canned potatoes, a vegetable, plus a sweet which may be dried or tinned

lifted by rumours of the arrival of a consignment of Canadian beer. In Egypt there were plentiful supplies of American whisky. Residents of Cairo are missing their French wines and are now drinking Cyprus wine which once they used only for cooking. In Tripolitania we were able to buy quantities of a locally made *vin ordinaire* universally known to the troops as "plonk." It is drinkable stuff, but not intended to be consumed like beer, as some Kiwis found to their cost.

Military supplies naturally having the first claim on transport, it isn't surprising that what canteens are accessible have meagre stocks. We receive a weekly ration of 50 cigarettes (Woodbine, "V"—commonly known as Mark Five—occasionally Ardath) and two boxes of matches. These are precious, and the scrounger of matches is unpopular. From the canteens—NAAFI/EFI or our unit canteens—we can buy small quantities of chocolate, tea, biscuits, condensed milk, tinned fruit. Our suppers, cunningly cooked up by primus, are enough to make the self-respecting stomach blanch.

Plenty of Eggs!

In addition, and this is a feature by which many New Zealanders will remember the Middle East most vividly, there is always an Arab to sell you small hen's eggs. "Ekkis" is his cry; sometimes "Ekkis a-bread." The "ekkis" are safe, the bread always doubtful. Much has been written about the

tenacity and quiet courage of the London shopkeeper, who persisted in business with the ceiling falling about his ears. The Arab "ekkis" man is not far behind. I have yet to hear of him following up a creeping barrage to do business, but he is never far behind. Air raids leave him unshaken, his ability to drive an outrageous bargain unimpaired.

Few of us have seen a movie since leaving base camp in Egypt. A night or two ago a mobile cinema unit opened up not far from us and promptly had the show spoiled by flares dropped from enemy aircraft. Later in the evening a further attempt was made, but more flares were dropped, and by this time everybody was getting browned off.

In Tripoli on leave I saw for the first time the Kiwi Concert Party in action. They arrived in Tripoli hard on the heels of the New Zealand Division, and played to packed and uproarious houses.



NO EGG SHORTAGE THERE: "A feature by which many New Zealanders will remember the Middle East most vividly"

fruit or a duff or some sort of pastry.

It is noteworthy that the jam supplied to the Army is made in the Middle East from the surplus of fruit which accumulated as European markets disappeared. The manufacturers, foolish fellows, haven't yet learned that plum and apple jam can be made from an infinitesimal quantity of plum and apple and the rest turnip. Or perhaps the Middle East doesn't grow the quantity of turnips New Zealand does.

The Cook Was Popular

Despite the many poor jokes about Army cooks, ours (who was a motor body trimmer in private life) is popular and seldom abused. Sadly missed deficiencies in our diet are fresh fruit, milk and vegetables. An indefinite period of this desert life, would, I am sure, leave us unhappy examples of vitamin deficiency.

At the moment liquor cannot be procured, though the other day we were up-

The theatre at which I saw them was a typical Italian opera house, and once the pride of the city. Gigli had sung from the stage, and many top flight Italian opera stars. Latterly it had been a movie house and there remained stills and stickers announcing Shirley Temple, Randolph Scott and Gloria Stuart in "Rondine Senza Nido."

We all read a lot. Newspapers (particularly New Zealand ones), magazines, Penguins, books of all sorts. In the past two months I have read H. G. Wells's *Short History of the World* (an Egyptian Penguin edition, full of misprints); James Joyce's *Ulysses* (the edition printed in Paris, picked up in Jerusalem by a member of my unit); R. H. Mottram's *Spanish Farm*; Aldous Huxley's *Jesting Pilate*; Steinbeck's new novel

The Moon is Down; Wintringham's *English Captain*; Hasek's *Good Soldier Schweik*; several Penguin "New Writings." Most of these I had read before, but they gave renewed pleasure in a new life under new skies.

—J.G.M.

A Military Choir

On Friday, August 27, 3YA will broadcast some songs by a male choir from one of our main military camps. For nearly a year this choir, which is linked with the A.E.W.S., has entertained the men of its own and neighbouring camps with its repertoire of classical and traditional music. The conductor is Cpl. C. L. Martin, Mus.Bac., M.R.S.T.

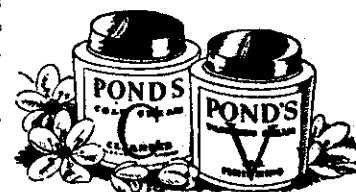
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