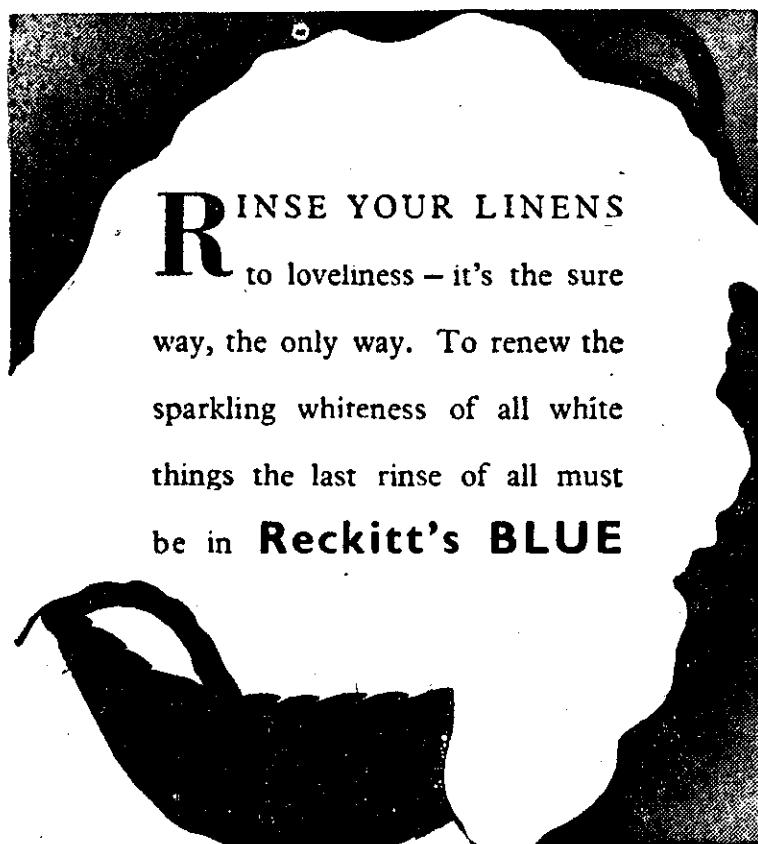


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WHY CORSICA IS IMPORTANT

*Former French Soldier Describes A Romantic
Island Of Great Strategic Value*

ONE of the clauses in the Armistice agreement with Italy is that Corsica is to be surrendered to the United Nations. Of what assistance will this be in the general conduct of the war?

Though little attention has been paid to Corsica from the military point of view for more than a century and a-half, it none the less occupies a position of enormous strategic importance. The increasing range of air warfare makes it possible for aircraft based on Corsica to dominate all northern Italy and southern France. Allied command of Corsica will constitute a grave threat to the flank of Axis forces fighting a rearguard action up through central Italy. It will be invaluable for blasting the suggested Po line of resistance. Lines of communication or retreat through the Alpine passes will be seriously menaced. From Corsican bases, southern Germany and Austria will be immensely more vulnerable, and help can at last be given to the partisan forces in Yugoslavia which have been such a thorn in the side of the Axis.

Seven months spent in the French Army in Corsica before the war have given me a fairly intimate knowledge of the island, its inhabitants and the possibilities of its defence.

A Fist and a Finger

Close your right fist; then extend your first finger. You will have an almost exact outline of the map of Corsica, which suggests, symbolically, an admonitory forefinger shaken warningly towards the heart of Europe. In area it is a trifle larger than Crete, just over 3,000 square miles. Some 350,000 thrifty, hard-working people get a frugal living from its soil. They are deeply, passionately attached to their mountainous island. But its resources are quite inadequate for the maintenance of a race in which families of 12 and 15 children are still not unusual. A large number, therefore, are obliged to seek a livelihood elsewhere. They go to France. (The Corsican colony in Marseilles is said to exceed in numbers the population of the whole island.) Their love of authority and of wearing a uniform has given them a sphere of activity which they can almost call their own. As non-commissioned officers, as customs officials, and members of the lower grades of the civil service, they are to be found throughout the French empire. In the army the Corsican drill-sergeant is a byword. Part of their small earnings is sent home to help parents or brothers to bring up their innumerable children. These remittances eke out the family income from the sweet-chestnut grove, the cork oak, the vineyard, and the herd of goats. Best of all, after a long period of service there is a small pension that allows the exile to return from Madagascar or Tonkin to his beautiful homeland and to spend, in retirement the evening of life in his native village.

For family ties, in Corsica, are very strong. This is what lies behind the "blood feuds" which have given the



★ *R. GOODMAN, who wrote this article for "The Listener," is seen above in the uniform of the 173rd Regiment of Alpine Infantry at Corte, Corsica. He was born in France of mixed parentage, and served as a conscript in the French Army. After some years of newspaper work in Paris and London he came to New Zealand 12 years ago to take up dairy farming in Auckland Province.*

island a sinister reputation. An injury committed against one person is resented by all his kindred and they will none of them rest until it is avenged. These quarrels sometimes persist for generations. On lonely roads one not infrequently notices a cross commemorating the tragic outcome of some vendetta.

No More Brigands

French law, however, long ago ceased to sanction this personal exaction of vengeance. And, since tradition did not allow honour to be satisfied by any other means, many men became outlaws for "crimes" which the national code demanded that they commit. Taking to the *maquis* — Corsica's characteristic "bush" — they lived thenceforth by preying on travellers. The nature of the country afforded at once admirable cover to these brigands and ideal opportunities for plying their trade. Occasionally they banded together for protection and to enlarge the scope of their operations. When their hauls were profitable the whole village would benefit, for they practised a chivalry of their own, taking from the rich and giving it to the needy. It was only quite recently that the French Government succeeded in putting an end to this state of affairs. A large-scale campaign in which regular troops were used, was required to round up the brigands. The last and

(Continued on next page)