

INTO BATTLE

With the New-Zealanders in Greece

The writer of this article was a medical orderly with the New Zealand Forces

WHEREVER WE camped in Greece we seemed always to be surrounded with a wealth of great natural beauty. Our first headquarters was sited in the midst of a wood where the first touches of spring gave promise of the loveliness soon to be. Close by was a mountain stream of ice-cold clear water flowing through wide stretches of white sand. Nature seemed to have become the leader of a conspiracy to make the war appear to us the mere shadow of a distant threat. There were flowers among the green of the undergrowth, and birds in the trees. Sometimes a clumsy slow-moving tortoise would waddle unconcernedly across the winding bush tracks almost between our feet. In the distance the mountains, snow-capped, coldly watched us.

There was work to be done—that everlasting digging which is the bane of the soldier's life, but often his salvation when the guns begin to fire. But in the evenings we were still free to visit nearby villages, and once or twice there were trips to a more distant town. In contrast with the small rural villages which boasted only small wineshops, this town had banks, public buildings, two fine churches, and quite a number of shops with a fairly wide range of goods.

Many of the shopkeepers could speak a little English, and boasted of the happy days they had spent in America "many years ago." To deal with the heavy demands made by the soldiers on the town's resources some enterprising former American Greeks opened restaurants, which, after all, supplied the main need, for there were none when first we arrived.

It was a busy place, transformed overnight from placid normality to bustling excitement by the arrival of the New-Zealanders. Scores of tiny wine-shops, where once the locals used to sit for hours, chatting, singing, laughing, or

sleepily musing over a single glass of "krassi," became in an instant crowded with noisy throngs of soldiers.

Greeks and New-Zealanders formed countless little international groups, the members of which vied with each other in extending expressions of friendship. Mutual salutations were exchanged. Many a soldier called to his aid all the scanty knowledge of schoolboy French at his command combined with a smattering of Greek learnt from booklets sold in the streets of Athens and generously helped out by smile, shrug, and gesture in order to explain the beauties of his home country to admiring groups of listeners.



Others made the acquaintance of strange little places where rich, sweet cakes and pastries soaked in honey were sold, to be eaten with a glass of hot goat's milk, or else ambled leisurely among the countless little stalls of the town markets where they would critically examine the stock put up for sale, commenting with the air of experts on the qualities or otherwise of anything from sheep and pigs to watercress and pickling onions.

In our camp among the trees we were settled in greater comfort than we had known for some time. There was soft white sand with which to floor our tents. Close at hand the clear stream provided a luxury unknown in Egypt. Somehow, in spite of wounded Greeks back on sick-