



(From facts known to Ivan Tong, Kiwi prisoner of war in Germany)

By JIM HENDERSON

This story won the first prize in *Korero's* recent competition.

THE FOUR had been hiding out in Greece a long time, now. The days, the weeks, the months, and the years had slipped by, but in spite of the misery and hardship and vileness of a vagabond life, they had stuck it out; together, four cobbers, four refugees.

They had lived in caves: damp, dismal dripping caves.

They had lived in deserted huts: lousy, swarming with parasites from goats and sheep.

They had lived in isolated little villages: then on again, out and away, as rumour whispered of approaching danger.

They had lived in the open: in bivouacs built between boulders, under trees, in hollows gouged from shingle-beds when fierce torrents had sprung to short, angry life in the season of melting snows.

The wilder and rougher the region, the safer the four refugee soldiers felt. For the strutting Italians still smarted from the humiliating defeats the Greeks had inflicted upon their lumbering armies in the Pindus mountains. That was why the Italians took their job of Army of Occupation in Greece so very seriously. Now and again Jerry patrols would be out, but generally the Germans didn't worry very much about enemy soldiers up in the hills. So long as they didn't show themselves or give trouble, the Jerries preferred to forget about them,

for, when all is said and done, they were pretty harmless, and a prisoner has to be fed, and clothed, and housed, and guarded.

Food. And smokes. That was the problem. That was the great need which time and again had driven them, in desperation, to the point of discussing surrender. But whenever they got round to talking about chucking the whole thing in, two of the four refugee soldiers always had pleaded so fearfully, undeniable terror in their voices, that the other two relented and decided to stick it out, for their sake.

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The four had met up in strange circumstances. Two New Zealand soldiers found themselves cut off from their section during a rearguard action near Thebes late in April, 1941. Lost, determined to evade capture, failing, by some strange stroke of ill-fortune, to link up with other New-Zealanders still at large, these two Kiwis were on the point of death through exhaustion and exposure when they stumbled into a cave occupied by two other refugee-soldiers.

It was a strange meeting; it never should have taken place; everything was against these four men living together in friendship and harmony. But there are odd happenings in wartime, and men still can love one another, even though the whole world is steeped in hatred.