



HOW THEY GOT THERE

A KORERO Report

THE ROOMS are empty, now. The trestle tables have been stacked away. The crates, the piles of timber, the cans of food have gone. The women who worked there—skillfully, voluntarily, gladly—have gone back to their homes. Their work is over.

For the war in Europe is ended. The Kiwi captives have left their cages. They can come home, now. So there is a silence over the gaunt, brick building, 96 Tory Street, Wellington, parcel-packing centre for the Joint Council of the Red Cross and St. John.

"Parcel-packin' mommas, send those parcels on," sang fifty women, working shift after shift, assembling food-parcels at the rate of 7 a minute, so that our countrymen in *stalags* and *campos* would not starve. They sang that song for the last time on Friday, May 18. The last food-parcel number 1,139,624, was assembled. Then packing ceased.

Whether repatriated or liberated, every prisoner had said, "We owe our lives to the Red Cross and St. John food-parcels."

How was it possible to send New Zealand food into the heart of enemy lands with frontiers closed, with men and machines in bitter combat upon the land, on and under the sea, and in the air?

The story goes back to June 24, 1859, when Jean Henry Ducant, Swiss banker, chanced upon the battlefield of Solferino. French, Sardinian, and Austrian ambulances and medical stores, with no common distinguishing-marks, had been shelled to splinters. Sickened by the appalling condition of the neglected wounded (two doctors helpless amongst 6,000 casualties)

Ducant organized indiscriminate aid to the stricken soldiers, and returned to Switzerland, pledging himself to obtain internationally recognized medical services for all future wars.

Passionately demanding respect and protection for all war-wounded in his book "Recollections of Solferino," Ducant organized a lawyer, a veteran general, and two doctors into a Swiss committee of action, which sponsored "An International Conference in Geneva of International and Permanent Relief Societies for Wounded Military Personnel in time of War." So strong was their resolve to work for humanity, so great was their enthusiasm, that on October 26, 1863, delegates representing sixteen Governments assembled in Geneva.

They agreed:

1. Every nation should possess a voluntary society, with highest Government patronage and encouragement, for the relief of suffering in war.

2. Those caring for the sick and wounded should be considered neutral.

As a distinguishing-mark, a red cross on a white background (the reverse colours of the Swiss flag) was chosen for all medical services. On religious grounds, however, the red cross is replaced by the red crescent in Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, and part of the U.S.S.R., and by the red lion and sun in Iran. The Red Cross emblem was first used and respected in the Austro-Prussian war against Denmark, in the beginning of 1846.

But no binding convention yet had been prepared. So in Geneva, on August 22, a diplomatic conference of sixteen Govern-