

EXCURSION

ALTHOUGH mention of a tropic isle to readers of romantic fiction conjures up visions of glamorous nights and gluttonous days, we Enzedders in Nocal are less likely to be so misled. We were many months here before we saw "les vallees luxuriantes" or "les fruits delicieux" of which the French maps boasted. Such exaggeration seemed merely to confirm our impression of the French as a romantic race.

Eight o'clock one sunny Saturday two of us set out on a mission to secure a supply of mandarins. We were perhaps a little sceptical of any success, for we had staggered around for months and miles without seeing anything more than spider's webs hanging from the trees - ninouli trees...



But orders were orders, the day was fine, we missed a parade and we wore our own bossos for a few hours. It mattered little to us if mandarins proved to be as plentiful as pork in Jerusalem.

On the outskirts of a straggling village we left the corrugated road and sought out the house of the French farmer whose fruit we were going to buy. We were greeted by a young man in his twenties, who, in the absence of the owner, offered to take us down to the plantation. We went with him through a grove of slender dark-leaved trees that thwarted the sun.

The smell of dank earth and rotting foliage assailed our nostrils. Mingled with the tall trees were sturdy red-barked coffee trees - and then, through a gap in the undergrowth, we caught a glimpse of paradise.

Hundreds of golden fruit were lying on the brown soil ahead of us. We flung caution to the wind.



I do not know how mandarins Bill ate, but mine had disappeared to my account before I realised that a grizzled, bare-footed, toothless French labourer was awaiting an explanation. Mistily I gulped and broke into my rusty French.

Matters were speedily clarified and we resumed our attack, deterred neither by the 16 yelping hounds that surrounded us, nor by the herds of mosquitoes that kept the Frenchman perpetually fanning his face with his hand, and exclaiming all the while "Pest! Les moustiques sent mauvais - toujours les moustiques..."

DAYS OF YORE

Sometime someone is going to write our story - and in preparation for this day the paper committee is working on material concerning the days of the life of the 29th Bn. which have gone in all but memory.

We would be obliged for any material you can supply from your end. Photographs would be particularly welcome, and if they will not pass the censor to-day, we would be grateful for advice that you have some you would make available in the future.

We arranged to collect our fruit at three o'clock and somewhat reluctantly set out for the village. Our guide, by this time our friend, accompanied us, and we dined at the restaurant (that served also, he informed us, as maternity home) on grilled steak, beans and lettuce, accompanied by plenty of bread and butter.

After lunch Robert insisted that we should go to his home. A grooving New Caledonian native climbed up a tree and lopped off several bunches of coconuts for us. Again we ate and drank, while cats, dogs and fowls rushed around us to share in the feast.

Time passed all too quickly as we compared rifles, chatted about the war and explained the virtues of our Ford truck to an interested audience of four. Trophies of the chase were brought out and an invitation given to us to return for a hunting and fishing trip.



We collected the oranges and met the owner back at his house. Again hospitality was extended to us, this time in the form of a lamen drink enjoyed as we talked on a breeze swept verandah.

Our host, a typical French colonial, ruddy featured, white-headed portly man of sixty or so, spoke well of the "Kiwis" and expressed the wish that friendly trade relations might be established between New Zealand and New Caledonia. His daughter sought our help on the problems of English grammar.

But the sun was sinking; we had far to go. With mutual expressions of good will we took our leave. The back of the truck was overflowing with mandarins and for "our own private needs" we were given a kerosine case full of them, with a sugar bag full of limes.

We were still tossing mandarin peelings away as our truck swung into camp.