

GENERAL INTEREST

In general considerable interest was displayed by members of the Forces, but, as reported by cable, there was some apathy to the election, engendered doubtless by lack of knowledge of the candidates and loss of touch with New Zealand affairs.

In addition, the Division was moving out from base with consequent packing, and later during the voting period, was preparing for the move to Italy. This meant that a number of personnel did not bother to attend the unit booth to vote.

In view of the circumstances existing it is felt that the achievement of recording 28,191 votes was very satisfactory.

The 2 N.Z.E.F. had a strength of 31,532, and it was estimated that there were approximately 500 other New-Zealanders within reach of the Middle East, so that 88 per cent. voted.

INFORMAL VOTING

The total number of informal votes cast was 951, and it is considered that this is not excessive. Many persons cast blank ballot-papers and many Polling Officers issued ballot-papers for the two electorates for which there were no contests. The remaining cases were caused by voters inserting the name of a candidate for one electorate in the ballot-paper for another.

CONCLUSION

The experience in conducting the election in the Middle East was very valuable, and I am satisfied that everything possible was done in the very limited time available to ensure a successful poll. Every member of 2 N.Z.E.F. was given the opportunity to vote, and, in addition, all votes possible were obtained from the Navy and Air Force over a tremendous area. It was unfortunate, but inevitable, that some of these isolated personnel should be missed.

I strongly recommend, however, that in the event of it becoming necessary to conduct another election in wartime, in any sphere as large as the Middle East, that the Special Returning Officer should be on the spot two months before the date of the election, as this would allow six weeks before the commencement of the voting period in which to build an organization, train a staff, and make detailed planning. From personal experience I can state that it is almost impossible to assess in New Zealand the difficulties involved by distances, the lack of communications, the effect of operations, the very enervating climate, the limitations imposed by operating in a foreign country, and the extreme necessity for security.

I further recommend that the Special Returning Officer should be supplied with an assistant who has worked with and had an opportunity of studying the voting scheme and the arrangements made before leaving New Zealand.

The time available to me—*i.e.*, three weeks before the voting period—was much too short, and I consider it extremely fortunate in that I can report a successful poll.

It is pleasing to report that the scheme for recording votes worked very well, and after putting it into operation I can suggest no improvement. Polling Officers in particular were pleased with the simplicity of the arrangements, and it can be claimed that practically no dislocation was caused to service duties.

W. A. BRYAN, Major.

[*Enclosure: Appendix "E" referred to in above report.*]

Electoral Office, H.Q., 2 N.Z.E.F., Middle East Forces,

15th October, 1943.

THE SPECIAL RETURNING OFFICER.

Re POSTAL VOTING MAIL: INDIA

On 11th September, in accordance with your instructions, I took a number of parcels of letters containing postal voting-papers to the R.A.F. Post Office, Cairo. These letters were addressed to various R.A.F. stations throughout the Middle East, and amongst them was a bundle of between 200 and 300 letters addressed to individual New Zealand personnel attached to R.A.F. stations in India. These were all marked "Certified Official" and also "Fast Air."

I handed them all to Captain Reilly, R.A.F. Post Office, and drew his attention specially to the bundle of letters for India, and to the fact that it was desired that they should go "Fast Air."

Inquiries from Major Barnes, British Base Post Office, on 9th October, showed that planes left for India on 11th, 13th, and 14th September.

As no replies have been received from New Zealand personnel in India, I interviewed Captain Reilly on 13th October, and was informed that the mail in question had been sent immediately by his office in a bag addressed "Sorting Officer, British Base Post Office," and that the label had borne a note to the effect that it contained New Zealand electoral papers and was to go "Fast Air."

I saw Lieutenant Thompson, Officer in Charge, Sorting Office, British Base Post Office, on 13th October, but he stated that owing to the vast volume of mail passing through he could not clearly recall having received the bag in question. At the same time he seemed to have a vague recollection of receiving electoral papers, and said that if the mail reached him on 11th September it would certainly have gone "Fast Air," and would have connected with the planes leaving either on 11th, 13th, or 14th September. He would have no record of the contents of any particular bag. He could only suggest that the mail had gone straight through by fast air to R.A.F. Post Office, Bombay, where it would be sorted for despatch to the individuals concerned.

I also inquired from Major Barnes whether any air mails between Cairo and India had been lost, and he stated that no planes had been lost for some months.

British Base Post Office could give me no indication of the arrival of surface mails from India, as they have no information until the mail actually arrives.

Air mails from India are frequent, probably two or three per week.

The latest surface mail I have seen from India is a letter from Mr. Gardiner, Supply Liaison Officer, Bombay. This bears Bombay P.O. postmark of 15th September, and the Cairo P.O. date-stamp of 14th October.

K. M. SLEIGHT, Staff Sergeant.