

HE WAS AN INSTITUTION

A KORERO Report

THERE WAS a person unlisted by name on any one establishment or daily state within the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force; unknown in the ranks of any one platoon; unable to respond to a greeting, "Hey, there, Johnny!"; never seen around a Naafi table on beer issue night, nor sipping free tea from a cracked cup after Sunday evening services in the Y.M.C.A.; never seen tickling lizards on a Syrian roadside, nor brewing over a petrol fire in the rocky waste of the Western Desert. Yet he must have answered the roll in some platoon, swapped reminiscences in some Naafi, and brewed inevitable shai over many a desert fire, because week after week for years his thoughts and experiences were chronicled in *N.Z.E.F. Times*. These columns identified him beyond a doubt as a soldier among soldiers. His experiences were theirs, his language their own. His was the pen, inked with pungent humour, which expressed their discomforts, their impressions, their suspicions, their intolerances, their contentment, their biting, bickering, unshakeable camaraderie.

The illustrations for this article are by Neville Colvin. He knew Johnny Enzed very well from the time when he supplied the original drawing for the "Face Which Launched a Thousand Quips."

For some time Colvin was a regular contributor to *N.Z.E.F. Times* and achieved popularity with that sketch well known to all members of 2 N.Z.E.F., "That's not a Wog, son. That's a Thirty-Niner!" He joined the staff of the paper as illustrator, and such sketches as "Interval at the Opera" and his "Clueless" series were very popular. He illustrated "Johnny Enzed in the Middle East," from which these drawings are taken.

But if he could have been located, a greeting, "Hey, there Johnny!" would have brought response, because Johnny was his name—Johnny Enzed. He was an institution.

Johnny Enzed was a soldier, a soldier-observer, and an observer of soldiers with an omniscience for the deeds, thoughts, and words of all New Zealand soldiers. He saw humour in the commonplace, and with humour reduced to the commonplace those institutions and events which appeared exaggerated in the eyes of Dominion servicemen. He burnished everyday events with the outlook of a sardonic adventurer. Take, for example, these extracts from his description of that section of the Cairo-Maadi road along the Nile known to all as the "Mad Mile":

"The Mad Mile is bounded on one flank by what are known in M.E. as 'usines,' and what would be known anywhere else as something much less complimentary. Behind them runs the river Nile, which marks time at this point to provide an anchorage for the Royal Felucca Club of Egypt. Here the corn, the cotton, the bricks, the camel dung, the flower-pots, and the watermelons of Egypt are unloaded in all their rich luxuriance, loaded on to mule and donkey carts, wheel carts, camels, barrows, and heads of women to be carried out into the Mad Mile as course hazards.

"On the other flank the course is bounded by a length of Egyptian railway in all its pristine freshness, and here, sleeping in the noon-day sun and making no attempt whatever to get their day's work done, can be seen serried ranks of policemen, dogs, fellahin, wallads, donks, and heaps of rags camouflaged as human beings. From time to time, when aroused by the imperious toe of authority, these debouch on to the roadway from the rough, where they bounce lightly from bumper to bumper . . .