

XMAS IN KOREA

On Friday, December the 19th, Bill Jordan left London in a BOAC Argonaut en route for one of the most exciting jobs he has yet been given as a newreel cameraman. He was going to the battle front in Korea to spend Christmas with the troops out there. He took a few shots on the way; that's near Bangkok. He was there by Monday morning, not bad going. Only a couple of days later and he was over Seoul, the capital of South Korea. The Korean war seemed (perhaps) remote when he was at home. But the British Overseas Airways Corporation had shown him just how near it was - less than five days away. He soon had his camera out (yes, that's him - back in uniform again) and he took a few shots of the countryside, bleak and very miserable - and cold.

The front-line wasn't far off, but now it was Christmas Day and the boys of the Royal Fusiliers were determined to forget the war for a day or two if the enemy would let them. They were in great spirit, these chaps - like Ernie Costin whose home is in Stepney or his pal from Sunbury in Middlesex, Pat Saunders. They couldn't get home - but they were darned sure they were going to enjoy themselves just the same.

Even as breakfast was going on, Jordan found Bill Ballantyne of Belfast and Jim Batt who comes from Croyden hard at the old routine. Londoner Reg Lord (he's from West Ham) looked pretty pleased with life, so did Tony Dallingers - and no wonder, that grub was really good. Then came the cards from home. Company Sergeant Major Robin Hawkinson considered them more welcome than the grub. Neighbours in New Cross will recognise this chap - Roy Steward.

Lunch preparations were soon under way. Thanks to an extra-special effort from the cooks and the Naafi caterers, they were to have turkey with all the trimmings. It may not have looked like the Ritz, but Larry Townley, the cook, would have held his own against any chef anywhere for patience and skill.

That same Christmas morning Bill Jordan attended a service for men of the Durham Light Infantry. It was cold on that barren hillside, but they forgot that as they joined in the carols that, back at home, families were singing in their own churches. Guns were quiet; no sound came from the enemy lines and for those few moments war seemed very distant. The message of Christmas is the same in war-torn Korea as throughout the world, that this is the time for peace on earth and good-will to all men. The service ended and it was back to the cookhouse to begin eating all over again.

Dick Deller, the cook, said it would be just like dinner at home - well, it was and wasn't. They didn't go in for any luxuries like plates, mess-tins had to do, but you have to hand it to those chaps - it tasted just fine. There was plenty of it too. Turkey, sausages, pork, roast potatoes, peas and cabbage. And then to follow, Christmas pudding with rum sauce, mince pies, sweets and fruit - in fact the lot.

As Christmas Day guests they had some South Koreans. They couldn't understand Bill and Bill couldn't understand them but they got along fine just the same. Besides their mouths were too full most of the time for talking.

Dinner went on for many hours and everyone agreed that the Army had really excelled itself. Somebody said it was the first time in history that the duty officer hadn't got a reply when he asked if there were any complaints. Corporal Jim McCabe from Newcastle and O.S.M. Hawksworth of Hull really enjoyed themselves. There was plenty to drink, too. Beer or fruit squash was on the menu, though Private Ron Pattison of Sunderland stuck to beer.

Off came berets and tin-hats, and on went paper-hats as things warmed up. Here's someone Durham folk may recognise, Lance Corporal Len Gowans of Coxhoe.

Another Durham lad, is Bill Stableforth, and here's a chap from Cornwall, Private John Gardens whose home is in Sanfast. From Borden comes Sergeant Whelan. But, even while they were celebrating Christmas, men like Jeff Wharton and his pal Tuck Collins were keeping guard. Christmas was nearly over - but the war still went on.