

Australia

Under the title "A Library Without Books", the Australian Red Cross publication "Action" (No. 8, 1965) is devoted to the "talking book library" which was founded by the National Society and operates under its auspices with the aid of its members. In view of the originality and usefulness of this scheme, we quote below extracts from the article in question.

According to the Directory of the Library Association of Australia there are, scattered throughout Australia, over 500 Public Reference and Lending Libraries, apart of course from the many Private Libraries which still exist in many places.

These libraries cater for the needs of hundreds of thousands of readers, all of whom have at least one thing in common, a pair of eyes that enable them to read any books they may care to borrow.

There is, however, one library in this country with members in every State of the Commonwealth, not one of whom can see.

Why these blind people are able to read, how they read, and what they read—these things are told in this short article—which is a warm, human-interest story, not known by many.

Formation of the Talking Book Library.—The Australian Red Cross Society conducts a great many Community Services in this country. One of the more unusual of these is the National Red Cross Talking Book Library. This is a lending library service of books, recorded on long-playing records, for Blinded ex-Servicemen and Women in all States of Australia.

Whilst it is true that each State has Talking Book societies, apart from the service provided by Australian Red Cross, it is nevertheless a fact that Red Cross is the only organization that caters exclusively for the reading requirements of blinded ex-Service personnel. Further, it is believed, that of the 106 different countries that belong to the world-wide organization of Red Cross, our Australian Red Cross Society is the only one which provides this service.

Shortly after the Second World War, the Blinded Soldiers' Association of Victoria sent a request to the Headquarters of the Australian Red Cross Society asking that a Talking Book Library be established for blinded ex-Servicemen.

The Repatriation Department agreed to co-operate by supplying the necessary Talking Book machines, or record players, especially designed for independent operation by the blind.

The Postmaster-General's Department also agreed to assist by undertaking to deliver the "books" free of charge throughout Australia, a service which it has rendered for the past 15 years. For those "readers" who live in the vast outback of Australia, the arrival of the postman with his precious parcel of records is always a highlight.

"Books" for all Tastes.—Although the range of "books" available from the Red Cross Talking Book Library is not as wide as one may expect to find in most Lending Libraries, there is nevertheless a large number of classifications from which the "readers" may choose. At present there are 1,270 different titles in the Library, with new "books" being added nearly every week . . .

"Readers" may select from the Library Catalogue, which includes Mysteries, Fiction, Historical, Westerns, Biographies and Autobiographies, Travel, Short Stories. The Library covers the range of both fiction and non-fiction.

Over a period of years it has become evident that the "books" with the most popular appeal are good Adventure stories and Travel "books". Good Mysteries and Westerns are also popular.

It doesn't take long for a new "reader" to learn how to use the machine, and for his convenience all titles on the recordings are in Braille.

Production.—Of interest to the technically minded is the fact that the records are played at either 24 or 33 revolutions per minute. Not many have been actually produced in Australia; the main sources of supply are the Nuffield Library for the Blind in England, the American Printing House for the Blind in Louisville, Kentucky, and the American Foundation for the Blind in New York, U.S.A.

IN THE RED CROSS WORLD

In England many well known B.B.C. announcers give their time willingly, in an honorary capacity, to record these "books".

Although at present the "books" are recorded on 12 inch discs, the general trend in other similar Talking Book Libraries is towards using tape recordings for this purpose, and it is anticipated that ultimately all "Talking Book" equipment will be converted to tapes and play-back machines.

In the meantime, however, the Australian Red Cross Society will continue to use discs, and the task of sorting, cleaning, filing and despatching is one of extreme importance. The Australian Red Cross Society has always been fortunate in the vast army of dedicated women who voluntarily give their services to assist the Society in its many functions, and the Talking Book Library is no exception. A team of voluntary workers comes into the National Headquarters in Melbourne each day of the week to clean and sort the "books". Each "book" is numbered, and stamped with the Red Cross symbol on the cover, and the staff at Headquarters select and pack the "books", which are despatched in special containers which take up to 13 records.

Readers have their say.—It is always a source of encouragement, and often amusement, to the voluntary helpers and the staff in the Library, to read the warm and personal little notes that the "readers" frequently enclose with the "books" when they are returned.

Despite their disability, many of the 187 blinded ex-Servicemen, who borrow these "books", have learnt to type! In fact "Touch Typing in Ten Lessons" is one of the books in this library which is frequently requested. Those "readers" who haven't learnt to type, get their wife or a friend to write to the Director of the Talking Book Library, who has, because of this correspondence over a period of many years, come to know a great deal about each of her 187 borrowers.

Many of these "boys", as the Director calls them, are now over 60 or 70 years of age; in fact, quite a few are in their eighties and nineties.

One such is 92 years of age and living now in the Victorian country town of Casterton. He found much to interest him in

T. E. Lawrence's "book" "Revolt in the Desert", which he borrowed last month from the Talking Book Library, for he served with Lawrence in the Secret Service in Arabia during the First World War.

Another member of the Library with an interesting background served for 20 years as a mounted police officer in the Northern Territory.

As a result of his action in rescuing wounded civilians during the first air raid on Darwin, he lost his sight, and subsequently turned to writing as a career.

His long experience in the Northern Territory has made him an acknowledged authority on the Australian aborigines.

He now lives in Birkalla, South Australia, and, although he will be 70 this year, he is still "reading" and writing. Two more of his books dealing with life in the inland of Australia are to be published later this year.

It could well be that one of his books will at some time in the future be recorded for inclusion in the Talking Book Library.

The longest "book" in the Library is the well-known novel "Gone With the Wind". It consists of no less than 72 separate recordings. A "reader" who was a veteran of the First World War requested this book last Christmas to "read" over the holiday period. A few days later a reply-paid telegram was received at Red Cross Headquarters asking permission to keep the 72 records. This reader had enjoyed it so much he wanted to commence again immediately and replay the 72 records.

Still another "reader", this time from Western Australia, was so pleased with the first parcel of "books" sent to him that he re-read every one three times before returning them to the Library.

This Library is unique.—Time is catching up with some of the veterans of the First World War, and many of them are only now losing their sight and therefore being accepted as readers in this unique Library, so that although some members pass away each year, the actual number of "readers" enrolled remains fairly constant.

Unlike other normal libraries, this is one Library that seldom loses a book. True it is that occasional breakages are inevitable, but "readers" treat their books with as much care as the voluntary

helpers and Library staff at Red Cross Headquarters. In fact, during the 15 years this Library has been in existence, very few "books" have been mislaid.

The Australian Red Cross Society is proud of this achievement, just as it is honoured and privileged to provide this invaluable amenity to so many blinded ex-Servicemen.

Luxemburg

It is known that the Luxemburg Red Cross is particularly active in its work for children. The French Red Cross review Vie et Bonté (No. 165) which describes how six different countries are working under the same emblem has published the following account of this activity.

Since the end of the First World War, the Luxemburg Red Cross devoted part of its work to health and welfare problems of children. On the initiative of the Red Cross the first modern maternity home in the country was built in 1932 near the capital. It has since been taken over by the State whilst the Red Cross has extended its activity on behalf of children especially in the medico-social sphere.

Assistance to infants. — Thanks to courses in puericulture given by the Luxemburg Red Cross, future mothers are made familiar, before the birth of their children, with problems raised by the hygiene and health of infants. These courses which are organized in the remotest districts arouse considerable interest and render valuable service in filling a gap in the education of the young women of Luxemburg.

Whilst giving theoretical preparation to future mothers, the Red Cross also gives help to infants. For the latter it maintains no less than 37 dispensaries, a high figure considering the smallness of the country. About half the new-born babies in Luxemburg are registered in these dispensaries where the mothers, who regularly submit their infants to medical inspection, receive advice in feeding them and generally in all problems raised in rearing them. It should