

PRISONER-OF-WAR CORRESPONDENCE

Outward.—Mails for prisoners of war in Europe continue to be forwarded from New Zealand at every opportunity. Unfortunately, owing to the refusal of the enemy authorities to provide transport across Southern France, the Post Office has been reluctantly compelled to refuse the acceptance of next-of-kin parcels for New Zealand prisoners who escaped from Italy to Switzerland.

Letters for prisoners of war in Japanese hands take a long time in transit. This is brought about partly by the fact that there is no direct exchange of mails with Japan or Japanese-occupied territory, and partly by the fact that the Japanese experience difficulties in regard to censorship of prisoners' mail. The latter is the reason for the requirement that letters for prisoners in Japanese hands be limited to twenty-five words.

Inward.—Letters from prisoners in Europe continue to arrive fairly regularly, mainly via the United States of America. Letters from prisoners in Japanese hands, however, show heavy delay in transit. Some letters which arrived recently from Japan were received via London.

POSTAGE-STAMPS

The 1½d. stamps of the Centennial issue were withdrawn from sale on the 31st January, 1944, and replaced on the 1st February by 1½d. (red) stamps of the King George VI series.

Health stamps of two denominations—3d. and 1½d.—bearing portraits of Her Royal Highness Princess Elizabeth and Her Royal Highness Princess Margaret, respectively, were placed on sale on the 1st October, 1943, and withdrawn on the 29th February, 1944. They were the first triangular stamps issued by the New Zealand Post Office. The value of the health stamps sold was £52,049. One-third of this amount, representing the health value, together with donations amounting to £10,044 collected by the Post Office, was paid to the Federation of Health Camps.

MONEY-ORDERS, POSTAL NOTES, AND BRITISH POSTAL ORDERS

Money-orders issued, postal notes sold, and British postal orders sold and paid during the year were as follows:—

	Number.	Value. £
Money-orders	786,511	5,500,687
Postal notes	2,215,572	945,293
British postal orders sold	23,371	8,075
British postal orders paid	9,979	5,659

SAVINGS-BANK

Deposits lodged in the Post Office Savings-bank during the year amounted to £47,648,754 and withdrawals to £35,580,165, an excess of deposits over withdrawals of £12,068,589. The amount at the credit of depositors at the close of the year was £98,614,198, the interest accruing to depositors being £2,075,676.

WORK PERFORMED FOR OTHER DEPARTMENTS

The total sum handled by the Post Office during the year on behalf of other Departments was approximately £158,000,000, an increase of £8,000,000 on the previous year's figures.

The amount of Social Security Charge and National Security Tax collected by the Department totalled £20,006,385.

MILITARY ALLOTMENT WARRANTS

During the year 2,659,896 military allotments and dependants' allowance warrants were paid by the Department.

TELEGRAPH SERVICES

TELEGRAPH TRAFFIC

Telegraph traffic has continued to increase. Compared with the previous twelve months, the number of telegrams increased by 709,547 (10·66 per cent.) and the revenue by £57,315 (12·21 per cent.).

TELEPHONE-EXCHANGE SERVICES

TELEPHONE DEVELOPMENT

At the close of the year the number of telephone subscribers was 181,717 as compared with 177,030 at the end of the previous year.

The number of new telephones connected was again limited owing to the shortage of telephones and switching equipment. In order to provide service for the maximum number of applicants, steps were taken to recondition obsolete telephones and equipment capable of rendering further service. The number of telephones so provided, plus the limited stocks which have been coming to hand from overseas, has enabled the position to be materially eased at those exchanges at which switching and line accommodation are available. However, there are still approximately 8,000 applications awaiting satisfaction throughout the Dominion, most of which are for service at the four main centres.

Although the position is constantly under review, there is little prospect of any major improvement in the present position at the main centres and other places where switching and line accommodation