

NARROW ESCAPE FROM DEATH

Pte. Doultree Relates His Experiences

Mr. John Hetherington, the Herald war correspondent with the A.I.F. in Syria says stories of narrow escapes from death were told to me by wounded Australians who were captured by Vichy troops in the Syrian campaign when I visited them in the French military hospital, the windows of which overlook the street along which Australian and English tanks, Bren-gun carriers and trucks roll to enter Beirut.

"Were we glad to see the Aussie hats marching by below us yesterday?" one man said: "I'll say we were!"

Officers and men in this hospital made no complaint about their treatment in Vichy hands. Indeed, they speak in the highest terms of the attention they have had from doctors, nurses and hospital orderlies.

They say the food has been good and plentiful. I lunched with four wounded officers—two Australian and two English—in the hospital, off soup, fresh salad, mutton, potatoes, carrots, fruit and bread and butter, washed down with red wine. The men are given substantially a similar diet, and

the only real deprivation they have offered has been Virginia cigarettes.

Private George Doultree, of Sale, and Private Albert Leahy, of South Melbourne, were among 15 or 20 men from a Victorian Pioneer Battalion who were wounded 100 yards from the walls of Merjyun Fort. Pte. Doultree was wounded in an ankle by a machine-gun bullet, and Pte. Leahy in a side. Both are now convalescing.

Pte. Doultree said: "I was lying out in the sun for three or four hours. It was damned uncomfortable; especially

when the French tanks came out and our artillery opened up on them. You did not know which side you were going to get it from, and the only thing to do was to keep your head down.

"I was luckier than some of my coppers. I was wounded about 5.30 a.m. soon after our attack began, and about 9 a.m. I grabbed my chance while there was a lull and hobbled into the fort.

"They treated me well there, dressed my wound, and gave me a drink."

Answering representations made by the last conference of the U.C.P., the Federal Treasurer (Mr. Padden) says that the heavy demands of war finance make it impossible for the time being to contemplate the raising of capital for a mortgage bank.