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Sir John White:

Witness to History

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ABSTRACT

Many contributions have been made to New Zealand's literary record of the Second World War, from the comprehensive War History Series that recorded each action and every unit of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force through to the memoirs of lowly contributors down the ranks. Everyone saw the war through different eyes. While much has been written, so there is much still to be understood about New Zealand's contribution to the defeat of the forces of fascism and Nazism between 1939-1945. By far the majority of those who served the nation declined to talk, even to their families, about their experiences, preferring to keep them bottled up, possibly as a result of what they saw, memories of lost comrades or believing non-participants would not understand. Debate, controversy and study have gone into many of the writings from the war and into the actions in which New Zealanders were involved.

Typical of many of those who largely decided to retain their own counsel, a not inappropriate description given his later status, was John White. He started the war as a second-lieutenant and ended as a Major. He began his working life as a solicitor and ended as a Supreme Court Judge, having also served as Solicitor-General. This thesis largely relates to his unique role, as personal assistant to the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the 2nd New Zealand Division, General Bernard Freyberg, a figure of immense stature in New Zealand history.

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