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THE RISE OF NEW ZEALAND'S MILITARY TRADITION :
THE WELLINGTON WEST COAST AND TARANAKI REGIMENT
(5 BATTALION RNZIR) 1855-1964

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA Journal	Arthur Atkinson's Journal
A.C.	Armed Constabulary
ANZAC	Australian New Zealand Army Corps
AWOL	Absent without leave
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
Bde	Brigade
Bn	Battalion
CO	Commanding Officer
Col	Colonel
C in C	Commander in Chief
DGMS	Director-General of Medical Services
INZEF	First New Zealand Expeditionary Force
G.O.C.	General Officer Commanding
G.H.Q.	General Headquarters
Gov.	Governor
Lt	Lieutenant
Maj. Gen.	Major-General
MP	Member of Parliament
NAAFI	Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes
NCO	Non Commissioned Officer
NZJH	New Zealand Journal History
OCTU	Officer Cadet Training Unit
POWs	Prisoners of War
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAP	Richmond-Atkinson Papers
Rev	Reverend
RNZIR	Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment
ROs	Routine Orders
RQMS	Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant
RSA	Returned Servicemen's Association
SAAF	South African Air Force
2NZEF	Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force
UK	United Kingdom
VC	Victoria Cross
VD	Venereal Disease
WAACs	Women's Army Auxiliary Corps
WWC & T	Wellington West Coast and Taranaki

ABSTRACT

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE THESIS

A more detailed general account of this thesis appears in the Introduction, where the themes to be developed are more fully explained. The first three chapters are concerned with developing themes derived from the Maori Land Wars : the colonial soldier's assertiveness, his organisation, and tactics. Thus it should be clear this thesis is more a study of military behaviour than a description of wars and battles. It is further argued that the three themes developed are inter-linked. That is because the early settlers successfully resisted conscription into military organisations, in which they had no say. They learned to impose their own views on the military establishment, and this gave rise to the novel system of electing officers. Further the resulting new military organisations proved fairly successful in the field, and challenged military orthodoxy.

However, these new volunteer formations lacked any overall unity and in peace time were inclined to become rival social clubs with a fetish for bright uniforms, colourful parades, and garrison balls. The long period of peace in the latter half of the nineteenth century also saw the gradual growth of a regular force established on more orthodox lines by career officers, mostly seconded from the British Army. For a while, therefore, two rival military organisations existed in uneasy alliance and the New Zealand defence force was composed of two disparate wings. Eventually, as a result of several 'scares' and the South African War, the colonial government came to

accept the suggestions of the career soldiers, and to reorganise the old volunteer force into a territorial part-time branch of the regular army.

The first World War saw the new system working well but the old colonial assertiveness remained and some allowance for this had to be made. For a time most officers were created via the ranks again. But many of the supporters of the old system were swept away at Gallipoli and the links with the past were lost. However out of this holocaust the new Anzac tradition arose, emphasising a certain military style and fighting reputation.

The nineteen-thirties saw a decline in the territorial system and the country was little prepared for World War II. Nevertheless the overseas battalions were quickly mobilised and once again some of the old colonial attributes became apparent. The Germans for example noted the New Zealanders seemed to favour particular tactics. World War II also saw New Zealanders overseas becoming more insular and conformist, perhaps to present a more definite national image in an international arena of conflict.

Throughout this thesis the Wellington West Coast and Taranaki Regiment has been used as a basis for research, as it fed men into the three major conflicts of New Zealand history. Finally the change in the Regiment's title to 5 Battalion RNZIR, has served to exemplify the trend to centralisation and integration of the whole army at the expense of local affiliations.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a long time resident of Wanganui and ex-national serviceman the military history of the district has always aroused my curiouosity. However it was not simply an account of the various battles, advances, and retreats which held interest but how the early settlers behaved and thought. It is this social and organisational background to past events which I feel has been chiefly neglected. The local libraries are full of detailed battle descriptions but little has been written of the behaviour and organisation of volunteer soldiers or what traditions developed.

Thus it is hoped that this thesis adds something to the grass roots of military history and provides an insight into the social concerns of the early settlers. Perhaps more importantly my researches have led me to believe and argue that the early settlers, placed in a new and threatening environment, evolved new methods of approach to military affairs which were original and laid the foundation to a New Zealand military tradition. In any case these somewhat motley bands of part-time soldiers represented the various origins of the present 5 Battalion (Wellington West Coast and Taranaki) Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment. This thesis follows the progress of that Regiment as it developed and notes the significance of the various changes which time and events imposed.

It is hoped that in studying the circumstances which brought about a local military tradition and in following the local regiment through two world wars, sufficient evidence may be cited to add something to the present store of national history. Though starting from a separate base

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it is argued that much of the subsequent history of the regiment applies typically to other New Zealand infantry regiments. In this way it is hoped the local history can be adapted to throw more light on national developments.

To advance this cause the gathering of primary source material is the first task of the local historian. Fortunately, the late Major C.L. Lovegrove, archivist to the defunct Wanganui Military Historical Association, collected a diverse assortment of letters, documents, reports, diaries, press clippings, etc., relating to the military history of the region. This collection fills fifty-seven boxes at present lodged in the Wanganui Public Library : the archives also contain much other primary uncatalogued material. The district therefore has cause to be grateful to Lovegrove for preserving so much of the past, and this miscellaneous collection of data has provided primary source material for this thesis, especially in the period prior to 1939.

Another major source of national and local primary material was the Army Department files held in the National Archives, Wellington, and these provided a range of information covering the whole period, 1855 to 1964. Lodged also at National Archives are the 'Freyberg Papers,' the 'Kippenberger Papers,' and the 25 Battalion War Diary; all these documents served to emphasise various themes in the chapters concerned with World War II.

The curator of the Queen Elizabeth II Army Memorial Museum, J.R. McLeod, has conducted a questionnaire on fighting in World War II among ex-servicemen, and some of the findings have been used and quoted. In addition

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Major C. Pugsley, formerly of the staff training unit at Waipoua, has contributed some conclusions from seminars held at the centre. Other primary sources used include the Diary of Samuel Austin, recording early events in Wanganui, the Diary of George Jupp, a Taranaki pioneer, and some insights of trench warfare in World War I are gained from the Diary of Basil Handley, a local soldier killed in 1916.

Primary published sources include articles and editorial comment from the early Colonial press, a full list of the newspapers concerned appears in the bibliography. Another major source of information on how the early colonists fought, thought, and behaved is contained in the two volume collection of the Richmond-Atkinson papers. This influential, letter-writing family have contributed much to the early social history of the region and their comments on events are frequently drawn upon. Later on in the 1890s the Fox report is used to shed light on the state of the army, national and local; it also contained important suggestions for the future.

Among the secondary unpublished sources are a brief but factual pamphlet on the organisational history of the New Zealand Army by Major-General W.G. Gentry, and an incomplete five volume miscellany on the Wellington West Coast and Taranaki Regiment, by Major Lovegrove. Several theses have been read to provide additional background to the main themes developed, and a full list appears in the bibliography.

Some useful journal articles have been referred to in the course of the text, including Professor O'Connor's analysis of some of the social problems among the troops in World War I, and Dr L.H. Barber's discussion of the

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unrest among senior officers caused by the defence cuts of the 1930s. Finally the secondary sources contain some twenty-eight published memoirs, from three separate wars. The memoirs are listed separately and those from the two former wars nearly all concern the affairs of the Regiment directly. The remaining secondary publications are chiefly war histories generally in some way connected with the associated overseas battalions of the Regiment.

I would like to acknowledge a debt to Dr M.C. Pugh of the History Department at Massey University, for his thoughtful comments and ability to rescue me from a fascination with the trees, when I should have been looking at the wood. Thanks and acknowledgements are also due to Mr Tony Richardson and Mrs Hilary Wooding of the Wanganui Public Library, Mr Tony Byers of the Wanganui Regional Museum, Lieutenant J.R. McLeod, Curator of the Queen Elizabeth II Army Memorial Museum, Captain S. Gray, Adjutant of 5 (WWC and T) RNZIR, and Mrs Neva Sinclair of Wanganui Newspapers for her helpful comments. Lastly a special thanks to Mrs Mary Beavan for her steadfast typing of a difficult manuscript enabling me to produce in time a final typed draft.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is twofold. Firstly to provide an historical account of one of New Zealand's oldest voluntary organisations, the Territorial Regiment now known as the 5 Battalion (Wellington, West Coast and Taranaki) Royal NZ Infantry Regiment. The Regiment's origins are traced back to the earliest period when this unit was the first British volunteer unit to take the field against the enemy. The early background of the Regiment evolved in the local Wanganui and Taranaki Military districts. Later on the scene moves overseas when the Regiment became a training unit feeding its men into the associated Wellington Regiment battalions. For most of this time provincial links remained clear, solid and identifiable but during World War II the ties weakened. After the war the two units were amalgamated and in 1964 in keeping with the changes in tradition the new title of the Regiment became 5 Battalion (WWC and T) Royal NZ Infantry Regiment.

The second function of this thesis is to use the history of the Regiment as a microcosm reflecting the larger colonial and national military tradition as it developed. However, it is not a descriptive military history which is presented but rather an examination of the social, tactical and organisational aspects of New Zealand's military history.

New Zealand military traditions began in a colonial society operating in an environment which provided a relative abundance of land, loosely occupied by an energetic and threatening indigenous people. Thus the early settler was in an environment which was both a physical challenge and a threat. He had come from a rigid settled society where expectations were very much determined from birth. The New Zealand environment offered no such set of determined expectations, a man could become his own master, and there was a premium on labour. Perhaps above all, plunged into a wilderness of such uncertainty, people needed people. New settlers were welcome additions for they strengthened small communities, psychologically, economically, socially and physically.

At the same time there was no local squire to defer to or a clearly established class hierarchy. Many men had now realised their independence and found a voice in community affairs. Thus in colonial days meetings were well attended, noisy affairs. Gentlemen could still lead but their leadership was no longer automatic or guaranteed a following. Nevertheless, the early colonials thought themselves British to the point of idealisation, yet close proximity to the Imperial army invariably revealed tension and irritation on both sides. The Imperial army should have been welcome, as a protecting shield, but the colonial press gave it a bad time. Nearly every aspect of its behaviour was criticised particularly the arrogance and haughtiness of the officers, which reminded most settlers of their former status. Thus when the racial tension forced the settlers to form their own defence forces they were determined they should not be modelled on the British pattern. However, the Colonial government felt obliged to appoint trained military men to oversee and command each district and ex-Imperial officers were the most appropriate. There then began the long struggle between the permanent staff who thought in British terms, and criticised local improvisations, and the volunteer-settlers who strove to build a popular army (in a democratic sense) with a high degree of individual independence. This battle was largely won by the permanent staff Corps of ex-British officers in the 19th Century, who advised the government, wrote the reports, and kept the records. The main opposition was provided by the provincial press which fostered the local traditions.

Yet the New Zealand army had been born out of a unique environment and a different type of battlefield. The early volunteers thought their small units to be much more successful than the larger and slow moving British formations, and so their own more specialised forms of organisation, tactics and methods were, to them, justified. Thus, it is argued, certain traditions worthy and unworthy became part of the New Zealand military scene. They remain today the characteristics of the New Zealand army and surface more obviously in war time, when the rush of

new volunteers seem to bring along with them the old ideas.

In the early chapters concerning the Maori Land Wars the emphasis is very much on describing military events which bring out the new forms of military organisation, colonial assertiveness, and colonial tactics. To some extent all three themes are linked together. The colonials noisily protested against the compulsory forms of military organisation that were prescribed for them. It became clear that the only way to establish a reliable local defence force was to allow a degree of local autonomy and in particular grant the settlers the right to elect their own officers. There was an element of colonial assertiveness in their methods of fighting. Tactically, the settlers went for more mobile decentralised formations which utilised the bushranging skills, which many of them as small farmers had. They adopted the tactics of the mobile patrol, continually harassing the enemy, destroying his crops, and communications. To do this they were prepared to operate in the bush for long periods day and night. By contrast the Imperial regiments did not like night operations or following the enemy through the bush. Their troops were less specialised, trained for large set piece battles, on open plains. They moved slowly in large regimented columns, where the emphasis was on obedience to a central voice of command. Thus for engagements in the bush they were completely unsuited, and had to hope the enemy would remain in the open. Though many of these points appear obvious they were never really at the time conceded. Both forms of military organisation thought they had won the war.

The first three chapters therefore bring out the formation and early development of the Regiment as a necessity of war. Later in the long period of peace until World War I, the local units tended to either disintegrate or become semi-social clubs, in an era devoted to bright uniforms, town parades, and garrison balls. The governments

of the day were not particularly happy with this state of affairs, nor were the permanent staff who acted as defence advisers. The latter in particular disliked this cheap defence system with its large degree of local autonomy conferred on the various units, lack of an overall command structure, and system of electing officers. Pressure for change built up, through the agency of various invasion scares, culminating in a flurry of military activity connected with the South African War. In 1910, therefore, a new compulsory territorial system was established and the old volunteer corps were merged into a battalion system with a traditional hierarchical command structure.

The new system enabled New Zealand to mobilise quickly in 1914, and perhaps do more than political wisdom dictated. Still the men were eager to go, at first, and displayed a greater enthusiasm for war than their colonial forbears.

Thus, New Zealand soldiers went overseas in great numbers for the first time into a major area of conflict. It is interesting to trace their development from the swaggering almost romantic days at Anzac through to the bitter slog of trench warfare in France. Yet the Anzac tradition became a significant force among the troops who through the bitter days of 1917 and 1918 kept going because of the reputation they had earned. The rallying cry of Empire, King and Country faded for a time, the Anzac soldier was contemptuous of his allies and bitter towards his foe, yet kept on attacking to uphold the newly established New Zealand reputation and prestige. As in the earlier Maori Land Wars his opinion of the commanders and their strategy was dangerously low, but he took some comfort from the slightly different social traditions operating within the New Zealand division. These social factors, a legacy of the past, now took on a different meaning for they emphasised the distinctive New Zealand style of soldiering. Also, the men were still assertive enough, when 50,000 Anzacs rioted in Cairo, 1915, General Godley whilst deprecating the incident to the Defence Minister, could only add that with Antipodeans

unused to restraining themselves he was surprised it had not happened before. Tactically, the fighting experiences of the Regiment can offer very little reminiscent of colonial days, with perhaps the exceptions of, excessive worry about its vulnerable flanks, a desire to keep constant contact with the enemy and some preference for night attacks. Generally, World War I with its fixed lines lacked the mobility for the Regiment's associated battalions to make more of their colonial tradition.

The 1920's saw the problem of officer creation in the New Zealand Army finally settled in favour of something resembling the British rather than the Colonial tradition; perhaps this reflected wider social changes. A period of neglect in the thirties found the system wanting in 1939, and the local territorial regiments suffered accordingly. Some of the early setbacks of World War II can be traced to this period which ended in the sudden mobilisation of hundreds of partially trained officers and men who had to learn their job as they went. In particular the premature withdrawal by the 22 battalion from its key sector in the Crete campaign is noted as an error, by the battalion and brigade commanders, who sited their HQ's too far back to keep in touch with forward companies, a departure from the distinctively colonial tradition of commanders and men all moving up close to the enemy.

The eventual withdrawal of this whole brigade defending the vital Maleme sector was to have a calamitous effect on the campaign. In part it was due to the inexperience of the officers, but there was also considerable hostility among the battalion commanders which made liaison and control difficult. These matters have in the light of the subsequent heroic retreat tended to be officially glossed over, and earlier army references to this brigade have explained away the difficulties between the battalions as an unfortunate aspect of provincial rivalry. This does not seem to have been the case. This 'odd hostility' stems from inexperienced battle commanders of differing social

backgrounds who could not get on together. In fact shades of the old rivalry between Imperial and Colonial officers. However, by the Italian campaign a significant change had come over the army. It was developing a sensitive insularity. This did not take the form of any strident nationalism rather it was a quiet conservative emphasis on the 'Kiwi' type. Differences within the army were, it is argued, minimised to create an ideal model of the New Zealander to which all personnel could conform and aspire. In this way some of the problems encountered in Crete were solved, and provincialism, the designated scapegoat, suffered accordingly. Nevertheless, the social differences between personnel had been noticed and so the promotion of an ideal Kiwi type common to all provided the best solution. Some of the old colonial assertiveness was still there and reference is made to traditional tactics for which New Zealanders were noted, but it ^{was} the concept of the 'One Army' which emerged as the newest and strongest development.

The regiment during World War II had remained in New Zealand training and feeding men into its associated battalions, but some of the old provincial links had perceptibly perished between them. After the war it was the 'One Army' concept which held sway in official thinking. There was to be a greater integration of territorials and regulars, more centralisation, and less local autonomy, and some of this is reflected in the new title adopted by the Regiment; 5 Battalion (WWC and T) Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment.