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Memory, History, Nation, War

The Official Histories of New Zealand in the
Second World War 1939-45

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Abstract

The Official Histories of the Second World War are the largest historiographical project in New Zealand's history. They are still used as core reference texts for individual battles and for the war as a whole.

The War Histories were intended to fill a wide range of roles. They were to be 'at once a memorial, a souvenir, an interpretation of events and a record of experience in certain specialised fields'. The conflicting nature of these roles created a double dichotomy within the War History project, between an affirmative national memory and an empirically accurate history on the one hand and between the critical evaluation of campaigns and the recognition of service and sacrifice on the other. This thesis examines this dichotomy through a framework of memory, history, nation and war. It uses four case studies from the War History series, *Journey towards Christmas*, by S.P. Llewellyn, *23 Battalion*, by Angus Ross, *Crete*, by Dan Davin and *Battle for Egypt, the Summer of 1942*, by J.L. Scoullar, to consider the extent to which the tensions between the roles of the Histories influenced their production and their place as contemporary histories in post-war New Zealand.

While the War Histories represent the largest repository of information on New Zealand in World War Two, the thesis contends that to use the series now as reference works only is to miss a significant opportunity. The War Histories were Official, but they were also contemporary and collective in their production. Each volume in the series is a valuable historical text in its own right, and can be read and deconstructed as representative of both the individual and society that produced it.

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Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Abbreviations	vi
Introduction	1
1: ‘High Traditions and Good Practices’	22
2: ‘A Crazy Delightful Contraption’	58
3: ‘The Finest Thing in Our Lives’	103
4: ‘This is Now Our Story’	143
5: ‘The Hard Path of Truth’	184
6 ‘We Should Not Refuse to Try’	213
7 Bibliography	255

Abbreviations

1NZEF	First New Zealand Expeditionary Force
2NZEF	Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
AR	Auckland Museum & Institute
ASC	Army Service Corps
ATL	Alexander Turnbull Library
Bde	Brigade
BGS	Brigadier General Staff
Bn	Battalion
CB	Companion of the Order of the Bath
CBE	Companion of the Order of the British Empire
CGS	Chief of General Staff
CO	Commanding Officer
Col	Colonel
CRA	Commander Royal Artillery
DCGS	Deputy Chief of General Staff
DCM	Distinguished Conduct Medal
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
ED	Efficiency Decoration
GOC	General Officer Commanding
Gen	General
GSO1	General Staff Officer Class 1
HQ	Headquarters
KBE	Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire
KCB	Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath
Lt	Lieutenant
MA	Master of Arts Degree
Maj	Major
MBE	Member of the Order of the British Empire
MC	Military Cross

NA	Archives New Zealand
NAAFI	Navy, Army, Air Force Institutes
NA, UK	National Archives, United Kingdom
NCO	Non Commissioned Officer
NZ Div	New Zealand Division
OBE	Order of the British Empire
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
POW	Prisoner of War
RAF	Royal Air Force
RMT	Reserve Mechanical Transport
RNZA	Royal New Zealand Artillery
RSA	Returned Services Association
R/T	Radio Telephone
Sgt	Sergeant
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNE	University of New England
VC	Victoria Cross
VD	Volunteer Officers Decoration
W/T	Wireless Telephone
WWI	World War One
WWII	World War Two

Introduction

In their scale and complexity the 48 histories produced by the government War History Branch following the Second World War were a major historiographical event in New Zealand. In volume, these works has been surpassed only in recent years by those produced for the Waitangi Tribunal. Yet while the role of history in the Tribunal process has attracted sustained analysis and debate,¹ historiographical interest in the War Histories has been slight and critical assessment of their aims and methodology lacking. The New Zealand War History Branch was part of a broader initiative across the Commonwealth and it attracted the admiration of others in the network for the level of detail in its volumes and the rigour of its analysis.² It is ironic that while in countries such as Canada and Australia war historiography has blossomed in recent decades in New Zealand, despite renewed political interest in the role of war in forging national identity, the War Histories continue to be thought of as something historiographically apart.

Yet the War Histories were viewed at the time of their initiation as being of ‘overwhelming importance’.³ With hundreds of thousands of documents at the Branch’s disposal, the Histories were expected to become the definitive account and a ‘fitting

¹ See for example: W.H. Oliver, ‘The Future Behind Us: the Treaty of Waitangi’s Retrospective Utopia’, in Andrew Sharp & Paul McHugh, (eds.), *Histories, Power and Loss, Uses of the Past: A New Zealand Commentary*, Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2001, pp. 9-29; Giselle Byrnes, *The Treaty of Waitangi and New Zealand History, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2003*; Michael Belgrave, Merata Kawharu & David Williams, (eds.), *Waitangi Revisited: Perspectives on the Treaty of Waitangi*, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2004; Michael Belgrave, *Historical Frictions: Maori Claims and Reinvented Histories*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2005; Mathew Palmer, *The Treaty of Waitangi in New Zealand Law and Constitution*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2009.

² Letter, Canadian Official Historian Col C.P. Stacey to Kippenberger, 19 January 1956, IA1 181/3/2, NA; Letter, British Official War Historian Brig. Harry Latham to Kippenberger, 19 August 1955, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

³ Memo, Walter Nash, Acting Prime Minister, to W.E. Perry, Minister of Internal Affairs, 26 April 1945, IA1 181/5, NA; see also Letter, Maj Gen Sir Howard Kippenberger to Prime Minister Peter Fraser, 9 January 1947, IA1 181/5, NA.

record'⁴ of New Zealand's participation in the Second World War. The topics selected for the volumes – campaigns, service and unit histories, logistics, political context, civilian participation, three volumes of primary documents and a further 24 short booklets covering specific services or events – were aimed at attaining the most comprehensive coverage possible. The amassing and evaluating of such a wealth of primary material led to a number of historiographical challenges and positioned the Histories as a significant test of empirical historical method as it was emerging in New Zealand at that time.

Against this empirical mandate, however, were the clear social imperatives of recognition and honour. For a nation rebuilding after the disruption of war there was the need for a degree of historical cohesion, a collective understanding of effort expended by both those who went to war and those who contributed from home, and a means of rationalising the events which had defined a generation. Gathering material and planning for the Histories had begun as early as 1942 and the Branch itself commenced work in 1946. Its Histories drew heavily on the testimonies of those who had participated in the campaigns and, in the unit histories particularly, undertook to provide an explanation of the events and conditions surrounding the deaths of many comrades and family members to those still coming to terms with their loss. In this way, as well as being definitive factual accounts for readers in the future, the Histories upheld a responsibility to those in the present. They functioned as receptacles of collective and national memory. While the treatment of large numbers of military documents may have taxed workers at the Branch, these special problems of contemporary history, of balancing empirical rigour and critical assessment against the need to honour men who 'risked and sometimes gave their lives',⁵ defined the national narrative. Where judgment was applied it was expected to be done 'sparingly, mercifully and if there is doubt, not at all'.⁶

⁴ 'War History of Dominion Position of Editor Filled', *Dominion*, 13 February 1946.

⁵ Kippenberger, 'Address to the Wellington Historical Association', 21 October 1952, Private Collection.

⁶ Kippenberger, 'Historical Association', 21 October 1952, Private Collection.

It is this double dichotomy within the role of the War Histories, between an empirical national history and affirmative national memory on the one hand, and the critical evaluation of campaigns against the recognition of service and sacrifice on the other that forms the focus of this thesis. In an undertaking that was expected to be ‘at once a memorial, a souvenir, an interpretation of events and a record of experience in certain specialised fields’,⁷ how did the interplay between empirical method and social imperatives effect the interpretation and production of the Official Histories of the Second World War in New Zealand?

In reflection of these dichotomies, the thesis is structured around four themes: memory, history, nation and war. It considers the extent to which empirical history may have influenced the development of individual and national memories of the war and, conversely, the contribution of memory in forming official records of this contemporary event. It also examines the extent to which the critical analysis of campaigns and commanders was tempered by or operated in conflict with the construction of a cohesive, affirming national record of a just and worthwhile war. As a first attempt at the analysis of the War Histories, the range and style of the volumes the series contains is so diverse that any of them could have conceivably made adequate case studies and would have provided valuable examples of empirical history in action. Four, however, have been chosen, two from the campaign volumes and two from the unit history series, for the particular historiographical issues or tensions they illustrate. Although all four themes are examined throughout, each case study reflects one predominant focus.

Journey towards Christmas, the unit history of the First Ammunition Company written by S. Peter Llewellyn, was the first of the War History volumes to be published. Llewellyn was a journalist and the volume was written in a particularly literary style, filled with rich description and humour. It was widely praised on publication for its ability to capture the essence of the New Zealand soldier’s experience and an atmosphere so inclusive that even the general reader was made feel to ‘home amongst a band of men

⁷ Memo, E.H. McCormick, ‘Paper Submitted by Archivist, 2NZEF’, November 1943, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

that he himself knows and understands'.⁸ Analysis of the volume, however, suggests that many of Llewellyn's descriptive and literary techniques were intended to maintain a shield of privacy around the experiences of Company members, and the Division generally, and to provide a public front behind which soldiers might structure their own reminiscences of the war. It is examined here from the perspective of memory: individual, collective and national.

23 Battalion was written by Angus Ross, a Brigade Major during the war and an empirically trained historian in civilian life. As Associate Professor of History at Otago University, Ross brought to his volume an empirically based research question and a particular view of the role of history, not least as justifying the participation of the Battalion through assumed connections to earlier battalions in earlier conflicts. Ross was immensely proud of his Battalion and continued his involvement in the territorial army to the level of Commander of the Otago and Southland Regiment. His approach to his volume suggests a certain level of contradiction between methodological consciousness and a relatively acritical belief in the valour of war. In his positioning of the Battalion within the framework of heroic quest, the closeness of his working relationship with its members, determination to provide a 'bottom up' view of their experience, and in his treatment of the narrative material he obtained from them, his volume contains many examples of war history at the interface of community and personal experience. It is considered here primarily from the perspective of history.

Crete, written by novelist and Rhodes Scholar Dan Davin, was one of the first campaign volumes to be published and covered the Battle for Crete in May 1941, one of the 'most baffling and controversial'⁹ of the war. At over 520 pages for a 12 day battle, it was clearly intended to provide the background to and detailed explanation of the fighting in which over 3,800 New Zealanders were either killed, wounded or taken prisoner.¹⁰ The

⁸ D.L. Wood, Radio Review, 4YA, 19 December 1949, IA1 181/7/29B.

⁹ Dan Davin, *Crete*, Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1953, p. vii.

¹⁰ Davin, *Crete*, p. 489.

approach in the volume positioned New Zealand as central to the battle and, in doing so, offered heavy criticism of the performance of some New Zealand commanders there. Part of this was to discuss alternatives open to commanders and, by way of a counterfactual, suggest that a different course of action by the New Zealanders could have achieved a victory on the island for the Allies. Tracing the volume through its production suggests the extent to which criticism of commanders for the benefit of military training rubbed uncomfortably against the War Histories' role of national recognition and tribute. Close analysis of reviews provides insight into the reception and public interpretation of this volume. *Crete* is examined predominantly from the perspective of nation.

The final case study, *Battle for Egypt, the Summer of 1942* by newspaper editor and military commentator, J.L. Scoullar, covered the first battles on the El Alamein line. As the start of the campaign that eventually drove Rommel back across North Africa, these were part of an important turning point in the war. In the period covered in the volume, however, there were repeated and ignominious defeats for the Allied forces and several occasions in which the New Zealand troops were badly let down by British armoured support. Again, over 4,000 New Zealand troops were killed, wounded or imprisoned.¹¹ Lessons learnt concerning the training and co-ordination of troops during these battles were considered to be among the most important lessons for New Zealanders of the war, yet the manner in which Scoullar presented them seemed to some to be 'carping'¹² and hyper-critical. The volume caused Freyberg considerable embarrassment in Britain on its publication. Tension existed between the need to make the military lessons explicit and the War Histories' role nationally and within the Commonwealth community. The focus here is on the conduct of war and the place of lessons and criticisms of strategy and commanders in national history.

¹¹ J.L. Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt: the Summer of 1942*, Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1955, p. 387.

¹² Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 28 October 1953, IA 1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

The choice of volumes spans the timeframe of this study: from the inception of the War History Branch in 1946 through to the death of Sir Howard Kippenberger, its first Editor-in-Chief, in 1957. Although these years represent the ‘high noon’ of the War History project, with such attention as it has received diminishing even further after this point,¹³ it also represents the most historiographically productive and challenging time for the Branch. It was the time in which its form and function were established, practices laid down and its relationship with the national history developed. It is also, with the exception perhaps of Professor Neville Phillips’ volume on the Italian campaign up to Cassino, the point at which the public interest in the project was highest and reviews of its publications the most numerous. Although Ross’ volume, *23 Battalion*, was published outside of this timeframe, in 1959, the draft was completed in 1957, the delay being a result of Kippenberger’s death. All four case studies sit easily within the framework established for the War Histories as it was during that period and are strong reflections of the culture, aims and methodologies of the Branch under Kippenberger.

The New Zealand War Histories were numerous and detailed by international standards. Of the 48 volumes, there were 23 campaign and service volumes, including three of primary documents, 21 unit histories and four civilian volumes under the title *The New Zealand People at War*. There were also 24 further booklets termed Episodes and Studies. A volume on the Boer war also completed under the campaign series, finishing a project started in 1905.¹⁴ From the first of the Episodes and Studies in 1948¹⁵ and Llewellyn’s unit history in 1949 through to the last publications, Nan Taylor’s volumes on *The Home Front* in 1986,¹⁶ the project spanned four decades. Taylor’s volumes were

¹³ Along with the historiographical essays discussed below see also biographies of Kippenberger, Glyn Harper, *Kippenberger: An Inspired Military Commander*, Auckland: HarperCollins, 1997; Denis McLean, *Howard Kippenberger, Dauntless Spirit: A Life of an Outstanding New Zealander*, Auckland: Random House, 2008, see especially pp. 294-318.

¹⁴ Ian McGibbon, “‘Something of Them is Here Recorded’: Official History in New Zealand”, in Jeffery Grey, (ed.), *The Last Word? Essays on Official History in the United States and British Commonwealth*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003, pp. 53 – 68, p. 53.

¹⁵ S.D. Waters, *Achilles at the River Plate*, Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1948.

¹⁶ Nancy M. Taylor, *The New Zealand People at War: The Home Front, Vols. I & II*, Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1986.

anomalies in terms of their publication, however, and all other titles were completed by 1967. After Kippenberger's death the editorial post was filled by the Branch's Assistant Editor, M.C. (Monty) Fairbrother, overseen by an Editorial Advisory Panel of History Professors, Neville Phillips, Fred Wood and F.W. Holmes. In 1966 the War History Branch was superseded by the Historical Publications Branch¹⁷ and the last six publications of the series were completed under that title.

The War Histories have occupied an ambivalent place in New Zealand historiography. In as much as they have been considered by the academy at all, it has been in association with war history in general, a field often perceived as 'theoretically improvised'¹⁸ and, as Roberto Rabel has wryly noted, 'more intellectually challenged than challenging'.¹⁹ A number of essays appeared on the War Histories at the end of last decade, reflecting in part a growing interest in the field of public history and discussions in this area. Ian McGibbon (1999)²⁰ Roberto Rabel (2001), and Deborah Montgomerie (2003) each considered the War History project within the broader rubric of New Zealand Official and military history. McGibbon and Rabel, both of whom have produced Official War Histories themselves,²¹ traced the development of the War Histories from their roots in the Official Histories of World War I (WWI) and noted the professionalisation introduced to the World War II (WWII) project by its administration under the Department of Internal Affairs. Both also noted the extent to which military history has remained distinct from developments in other fields of history in New Zealand. This has been

¹⁷ McGibbon, 'Something of Them is Here Recorded', p. 62.

¹⁸ Roberto Rabel, 'War History as Public History: Past and Future', in Bronwyn Dalley & Jock Phillips (eds.), *Going Public: The Changing Face of New Zealand History*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001, p. 64.

¹⁹ Roberto Rabel, 'War History in the Future', *People's History: Newsletter of the Historical Branch, Te Puna Koreo Tuku Iho*, No. 23, (November, 1996), p. 2.

²⁰ Although McGibbon's essay was not published in Grey's volume until 2003, it was posted alongside the texts of the Official Histories prior to publication: URL: <http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-McGsome.html>.

²¹ Ian McGibbon, *New Zealand and the Korean War*, Auckland, Wellington: Oxford University Press in Association with the Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1992-1996; *New Zealand and the Korean War, Vol. II: Combat Operations*, Auckland: Oxford University Press in Association with the Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1996; *New Zealand's Vietnam War: a History of Combat, Commitment and Controversy*, Auckland: Exisle, 2010; Roberto Rabel, *New Zealand and the Vietnam War: Politics and Diplomacy*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2005.

partly due, McGibbon suggests, to the ‘vice-like grip’²² of social history within an academy which has failed to recognise the social aspects of the military experience.

In response to their essays, Montgomerie addressed these issues more closely and considered some of the reasons why military histories, including the Official War Histories, have sat outside of New Zealand’s academic writing and teaching. These include especially the lack of theoretical engagement in the field of military history and a tendency to minimise ‘historical debate in favour of the production of a streamlined and authoritative narrative of events’.²³ A continued emphasis on facts within military histories, rather than on issues of interpretation, has tended, she suggests, to render such debates as do occur within their production ‘invisible or irrelevant’.²⁴ All three authors recognise the potential for a closer and more constructive relationship between military history and the broader concerns of social history in the future.

It is on this matter of historical production that this thesis differs in its approach to the War Histories. While the War History series is commonly read for its factual base or, less charitably, ‘mined’ by historians as an alternative to primary research, as a Branch worker W.E. Murphy wrote once in frustration,²⁵ it is those issues Montgomerie identifies, of interpretation and debate behind the volumes, that are the focus here. The aim is to construct a critical base from which the War Histories might be considered as texts in their own right, over and above the factual material they contain. The War Histories reflected both the values of government and the aspirations of the nation. They were a conscious attempt to position the war in post-war society. In their collection and treatment of testimonies from those who had participated in the war, in the contestation and debate they generated within the Branch and in their reception by the general public the War Histories can indeed be viewed as social history; one step on the bridge, as

²² McGibbon, ‘Something of Them is Here Recorded’, p. 65.

²³ Deborah Montgomerie, ‘Reconnaissance: Twentieth-Century New Zealand War History at Century’s Turn’, *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol. 37, No. 1, (April, 2003), p. 68.

²⁴ Montgomerie, p. 68.

²⁵ W.E. Murphy, ‘Crete – New Zealand Command Failures’, *Comment*, Vol. 9, No. 1, (December, 1967), p. 28.

Montgomerie suggests, between war as a ‘sequence of distinct actions’²⁶ and its interpretation in broader society.

My own path to the War Histories has been through work on other government funded histories, those of the Centennial Branch and School Publications particularly. In 2005 I completed an MA thesis on the historian Ruth Ross and her seminal article, ‘The Treaty of Waitangi: Texts and Translations’.²⁷ In that thesis I traced the provenance of the article from Ross’ work on the Old Land Claims as a researcher at the Centennial Branch through to its publication in 1972. Although it was not published until the 1970s, the greater part of Ross’ argument was developed during the 1940s and 1950s. It was the product of her close reading of the Treaty texts and the meticulous tracing of their terms and meanings through empirical method. Her findings, including a recommended emphasis on the Maori text, helped revolutionise Pakeha and institutional understandings of the Treaty and continue to underpin its interpretation to this day. In addition to ‘Texts and Translations’, which was published in one of the early volumes of the *New Zealand Journal of History*, I also traced her Treaty work through other, more popular, forms of historical media, including School Publications bulletins and stories for the *School Journal* and local magazines. The aim was to explore empirical method as it was applied in New Zealand in the middle decades of last century and its impact on the broader national historical tradition.

Ross was well known for the rigour of both her method and her criticism, to the extent that Keith Sinclair had once called her ‘the sternest perfectionist in New Zealand’.²⁸ Outside of her Treaty work, from 1954 to 1956, she became involved in a very public and acrimonious debate with Kippenberger over the paraphrasing of material in the War

²⁶ Montgomerie, p. 73.

²⁷ Ruth Ross, ‘The Treaty of Waitangi: Texts and Translations’, *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (October, 1972), p. 129-154; Rachael Bell, ‘Ruth Ross: New Zealand Scholar / Treaty Scholar’, MA Thesis in History, Massey University, 2005; see also, Rachael Bell, “‘Texts and Translations’: Ruth Ross and the Treaty of Waitangi”, *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol. 43, No. 1, (April, 2009), p. 39-55.

²⁸ Keith Sinclair to Ruth Ross, 17 August 1956, MS 1442, Box 91, Folder 1, AR.

Histories' *Documents* series.²⁹ Ross maintained that 'in the absence of any discernable indication [as to] where, and how often, ... paraphrasing occurs', no document in the volumes could be 'accepted as a true copy of the original'.³⁰ In response, Kippenberger cited national security, stating that without paraphrasing cipher codes could be 'compromised with possibly serious results'. 'It would be very helpful,' he maintained, 'to some people whom we are not anxious to help' if the degree of paraphrasing was made as explicit as Ross requested.³¹ It was this obvious tension between purity of method and perceived national interests that triggered my interests in the War Histories.

Although my MA thesis gave me a thorough grounding in empiricism and its relationship to national history, it did not prepare me for the war. I have no background, let alone the 'specialised skills' in the 'study of war'³² that Rabel suggests are required of military historians in New Zealand. Those looking in this thesis for insights and controversies over the conduct of campaigns and commanders will be disappointed. The thesis is not primarily about the war. It is, rather, a history about the history of war, something which, within the context of New Zealand's Official Histories of WWII, is, I believe, long overdue. Given the path above, my initial interest in the War Histories was an almost entirely methodological one: how did the rise of empirical technique as it was becoming established in interwar and post-war New Zealand affect the treatment and interpretation of the War History material? That focus was soon expanded by contact with the Histories themselves. Although I had read the essays of McGibbon, Montgomerie, Rabel and others it was not until I enrolled in the thesis that I began reading the War History volumes themselves. Coming back from the library with the first ten or so in my arms, I flicked open a page of the top volume at random to read as I walked. The volume was

²⁹ Ruth Ross, 'Review: Documents Relating to New Zealand's Participation in the Second World War, Vols. I & II', *Landfall*, Vol. 8, No. 4, (December, 1954), pp. 310-313; Kippenberger & Ross, 'Letters to the Editor', *Landfall*, Vol. 9, No. 1, (March, 1955), pp. 93-4; Vol. 9, No. 2, (June, 1955), pp. 177-9; Vol. 9, No. 3, (September, 1955), pp. 260-3; Vol. 9, No. 4, (December, 1955), p. 360-1; Vol. 10, No. 1, (March, 1956), pp. 82-4.

³⁰ Ruth Ross, 'Review: Documents Relating...' p.313.

³¹ Kippenberger, 'Letter to the Editor', *Landfall*, Vol. 9, No. 1, (March, 1955), p. 94.

³² Rabel, 'War History as Public History', p. 59.

Crete and the page contained an extract from a letter by Lt Col John Gray, the commander of 18 Battalion (Bn), on the landing of the German paratroopers:

‘I shot another hiding behind a tree, and wounded him. He was very frightened but I told him to lie still and he would be looked after. Took his pistol away and gave it to Dick Phillips who was just on my right. No sooner had I handed it to him than he was shot through the knee. Two Huns about 30 yards away hiding behind a tree were shooting at the two of us. Two careful ones immediately dispatched them both. There were plenty of bullets flying round but one had no time to bother about them. I saw George Andrews sitting on the ground taking careful aim at some cactus bushes behind us. “Steady on, George,” I said, “You will be shooting one of our own chaps.” “No bloody fear, it’s a Hun,” he said, and fired, “Got him.”’³³

I was very surprised, quite shocked, in fact. This was not at all what I had expected. Along with the essays, early reading of military historians such as John Keegan had suggested the War Histories would be of a very different nature, based on a genre with rules and procedures for dehumanising warfare and making ‘orderly and rational what [was] essentially chaotic and instinctive.’³⁴ Far from standardised elements, however, or, the distant and ‘unremitting’ empiricism suggested by Rabel,³⁵ here was war as high adventure: lively, personal, colloquial and immediate. Rather than the mechanical recording of facts, the volume clearly cared very much about its audience of general readers. It had used this extract to engage them and draw them into the story of the battle and, written more like *Biggles* than the gloomy stereotypes I had expected, it called on a familiar and popular schema to do so.

While up until this point my thinking on the War Histories had focused on the heuristic and hermeneutic that had so occupied empirical historians of that period, this first dip into the volumes brought me again to the issues of representation that had been at the

³³ Davin, *Crete*, p. 147.

³⁴ John Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, London: Jonathon Cape, 1976, p. 20.

³⁵ Rabel, ‘War History as Public History’, p. 64.

core of my MA. For all their fact and detail, the War Histories were as much literary exercises as empirical ones, concerned with presenting the war in a way that could be understood, on some level, and accepted, at some level, by all New Zealanders. It took more than facts to engage a nation.

In the way of things, although *Crete* was selected as one of the case studies, the emphasis in that chapter fell elsewhere and the extract did not make it into the body of the thesis. War as represented through a sense of adventure and heroic quest was explored in the chapter on Angus Ross' volume on the 23 Bn. The impact of that first encounter, however, remains throughout, with the War Histories being considered not only in terms of the collecting and selecting factual material but also in matters of their presentation and, as far as could be ascertained, their acceptance by the national readership. Each case study is examined in terms of both the method and approach of the author and as a reflection of the values and the national and historiographical aspirations of its time. While it is true that the War Histories should not be seen as sitting apart from New Zealand's 'social history', they need not be viewed only as sitting within it either. They are something richer still – the conscious attempt to *create* a social history in itself, the efforts by some who had participated in the war to record not only the events there but the lived experience of the nation.

On this premise, a wider range of reading has influenced this thesis than would inform a 'war history' approach. Although it is based largely on primary sources from the Branch documents and files, these have been supplemented by not only historiographical discussion and theory but works on literary criticism, humour, linguistics, psychology and trauma studies as well as the more obvious areas of memory studies, oral history and the contemporary writing of the time. The principle material has been the Branch's production files in the IA 181 series housed at Archives New Zealand. These include the initial material on the planning and establishment of the Branch through to author and publication files for each volume. Having been produced by archivists and historians, the series is thorough, meticulously filed and frequently cross referenced. It has been a

pleasure to work through. This has been supplemented by the correspondence files of Kippenberger, Branch workers W.E. Murphy, Ron Walker and others in the WAI series, also at Archives New Zealand, and the personal papers of volume authors, including Dan Davin and Angus Ross, at the Alexander Turnbull and Hocken Libraries. The preliminary booklets prepared for the authors from which the volumes were written, termed Narratives, were stored at the Kippenberger Research Library at the National Army Museum, with the exception of those for *Crete*, which were missing. Alternative copies were available, however, at the National Archives, UK, which were photographed during a research trip to Britain and form the basis to much of the discussion on that volume. In addition I was fortunate to have access to a series of taped interviews with workers from the Branch conducted by historian Glyn Harper in the early 1990s as part of his own PhD research on Kippenberger.³⁶ These brought valuable perspectives and insights into many ‘in house’ aspects of the project that sat below the official memos and records of the Branch.

Of secondary sources, beyond the essays of McGibbon, Montgomerie and Rabel, my point of entry to this material was Pierre Nora’s seminal essay, ‘Between Memory and History: les Lieux de Memoire’.³⁷ Written in 1989 as the flagship to an ambitious seven volume study of French historical and cultural practice, ‘Between History and Memory’ caused something of a historiographical sensation on publication. With over 3,000 subsequent citations, it has been credited with initiating the ‘memory boom’ in historical studies.³⁸ The antithetical positioning of history and memory that Nora suggested, with the former working to override and eventually to annihilate the later, has achieved a hegemony within memory studies which, as Kerwin Lee Klein has observed, even the most diligent scholars have struggled to overcome.³⁹

³⁶ Glyn Harper, ‘“Kip”, Major-General Sir Howard Kippenberger: A Study in Command’, PhD Thesis, UNE, Armidale, Australia, 1996.

³⁷ Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History; les Lieux de Memoire’, (trans. Marc Roudebush), *Representations*, (Spring, 1989), pp. 7-24.

³⁸ Kerwin Lee Klein, ‘On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse’, *Representations*, Vol. 69, (Winter, 2000), p. 127.

³⁹ Klein, p. 128.

Nora's study is concerned primarily with 'sites of memory', fragments of memorial practices retained against what he perceives to be a tide of historical manipulation. Nora's essay is of interest to this thesis for four reasons: his claim of history as antithetical to memory; his allegation that history seeks to control memory; the notion of hyper-realisation; and his view of history as the democratisation of knowledge.

Although he believes they were once aligned in their archaic forms, Nora argues that modernisation has caused history and memory to develop essentially opposing characteristics. While memory retains its organic, fluid, 'unselfconscious' and all powerful nature, history, particularly with the ascent of 'scientific' or empirical method, has become reconstructed, problematic and, through its reliance on remains as evidence, inherently incomplete. This form of history has come to replace, but not fulfil, the 'ancient bond of identity' within society that Nora believes was once provided by memory. In its new form, history has become, he believes, 'perpetually suspicious of memory'. At worst it aims to 'suppress' or 'destroy' it. At best it seeks at least to create a "true" past, uniform and without the fluctuations, 'lacunae and faults' of memory. Significantly for this study, it is through history books and memorial events, particularly, that he maintains history best imposes its 'neat borders' around memory.⁴⁰

Symptomatic of the discontinuity between history and memory, Nora argues, is the elevation of the "fact" – and consequently of the repository of its material remains, the archive – to the level of 'superstitious esteem'.⁴¹ Even the 'most modest vestige' of the past takes on the 'potential dignity of the memorable' and so the archive grows.⁴² Every scrap is saved, every fact recorded. The result becomes the 'artificial hyper-realisation' of history with more facts than it would be humanly possible to remember or, were this to be applied to the history of war, a constructed panorama more complex than any one

⁴⁰ Nora, 'Between Memory and History', p. 21.

⁴¹ Nora, 'Between Memory and History', p. 13.

⁴² Nora, 'Between History and Memory', p. 13. For further discussion see Pierre Nora, 'Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory', *Transit*, Vol. 22, (April, 2002), pp. 437 – 446.

person could possibly have conceived of at the time. Coupled with this elevation of the fact, comes the democratisation of knowledge and an understanding of the past that has become ‘tremendously dilated, multiplied’ and ‘decentralised’.⁴³

Nora’s essay attracted considerable criticism and debate.⁴⁴ While, when work commenced on this thesis in 2005, history journals seemed awash with articles working through his assertions and the place of memory in historical discourse, much of this interest has subsided in the intervening years. This may be the result of memory studies becoming more secure in its foundations and its parameters more clearly established. The principles of Nora’s argument, however, bear a particular relevance to this thesis. They represent one angle of a broader disenchantment with historical discourse and, as Klein has described it, ‘post-modern reckonings’ on the ‘marching black boot’ of history.⁴⁵

Nora’s argument is perhaps the end product of the ‘empiricisation’ of history as it occurred across the middle decades of last century. The War Histories, however, represent the other end of this process in New Zealand, as in other countries across the Commonwealth. They come at the beginning of the drive to apply empiricism on a broad scale across New Zealand’s history and from a time when empiricism’s scientific methods, reliance on documentary sources and critical rigour were a source of pride and validation to those who used it. Far from being ‘theoretically impoverished’, the War Histories were at the cutting edge of historical theory as it was at that time. Bringing Nora’s allegations against history to this process provides another lens and set of criteria through which to consider the impact and implications of empiricism in the War History project.

⁴³ Nora, ‘Between Memory and History’, p. 14.

⁴⁴ See for example, Klein; Jay Winter & Emmanuel Sivan, (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; Ho Tai Hue-Tam, ‘Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and French National Identity’, *American Historical Review*, Vol. 106, No. 3, (2001), pp. 906-922.

⁴⁵ Klein, p. 145.

The foremost advocate of empirical method in New Zealand at the time of the War Histories was Victoria University College historian J.C. Beaglehole, a mentor of Ruth Ross and an articulate and prolific champion of empirical history at the service of the community. Beaglehole published widely on the relationship between history and national identity and, significantly, set up a similar polemic to Nora between history and that unconscious, subconscious sense of continuity of time, memory and place that he termed 'tradition'. Where Nora was in opposition to this relationship, however, to Beaglehole a well informed tradition was a necessary foundation for citizenship, national cohesion and growth. In the interwar and post-war periods he saw New Zealand at a cross roads, cut free from the ties of colonialism but as yet unsure of its place as an independent nation in the world. A critically informed tradition, grounded in verifiable evidence and which accepted both the creditable and less creditable aspects of its past was seen as essential for a nation to know itself. 'Unavoidably, inevitably, deliberately or unconsciously,'⁴⁶ he argued, the past formed the basis to national identity. While left unguided, tradition might wax and wane,⁴⁷ tend toward the vainglorious or settle upon the inappropriate in its search for symbols of essential national character,⁴⁸ empiricism provided a solid foundation so that the tradition might be a sound one and set a correct course for the future. It was the role of the historian, as 'man thinking,' to mediate this relationship and to integrate the findings of critical analysis and the 'stringently trained power of unbroken logical thought'⁴⁹ into the fabric of everyday life.

Beaglehole is best known, historiographically, for his essay 'The New Zealand Scholar,' first published in 1954, in which he linked this model explicitly to his work in the government's Centennial Branch. His thinking in this area, however, went back much

⁴⁶ Beaglehole, 'History and the New Zealander', in Ernest Beaglehole, (ed.), *The University and the Community: Essays in Honour of Thomas Alexander Hunter*, Wellington: Victoria University College, 1946, p. 107.

⁴⁷ Beaglehole, 'New Zealand Scholar': (Margaret Condliffe Memorial Lecture, 21 April 1954), in Peter Munz, (ed.), *The Feel of Truth: Essays Presented to F.L.W. Wood and J.C. Beaglehole on the Occasion of their Retirement*, Wellington: A.H. & A.W Reed for the Victoria University College of Wellington, 1969, pp. 237-52, p. 250.

⁴⁸ Beaglehole, 'History and the New Zealander', p.118.

⁴⁹ Beaglehole, 'History and the New Zealander', p. 106.

further, to the 1940s and a series of essays in which he explored and developed these ideas.⁵⁰ Beaglehole was on the founding committee of the New Zealand 1940 Centennial project, a forerunner to the War Histories, and saw the initiation of the relationship between the government and historical production along this conscious theme. He was in many ways the spokesperson for this early generation of empirical historians who worked and published largely outside of the university. After the completion of the Centennial, Beaglehole remained as Director of its successor, the Historical Branch.⁵¹ Although he was less directly involved with the War Histories, the themes of his essays can be seen mirrored in the Branch material, especially in the writings of Eric McCormick and D.O.W. Hall, both of whom worked on the Centennial and went on to work for the War History Branch.⁵²

Through the work of Beaglehole and others, the Centennial publications evidenced a clear link between government sponsored empirical history and the development of national tradition. In the War History project, with the higher possibility of contention and greater level of national involvement in what had been a ‘total war’, greater emphasis was given to the role of creating a centralised, standardised and well informed basis for national understanding. In planning the project, a vision of the War Histories as an ‘authoritative’, ‘scholarly’ and ‘comprehensive’ base was set against the possibility of how an unguided national tradition might come, in time, to deal with the war: as a ‘scrappy, unscholarly collection of books, dealing principally with the “highlights”,’ or,

⁵⁰ Along with ‘History and the New Zealander’ and ‘The New Zealand Scholar’ see also J.C. Beaglehole, ‘The New Zealand Mind’, *Australian Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 4, (December, 1940), pp. 40 -50; ‘Some Philosophies of History’, *Historical Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 6, (November, 1942), pp. 95-113; *How History is Written*, Post Primary School Bulletin, Wellington: Department of Education School Publications Branch, 1947; ‘A Small Bouquet for the Education Department’, *Arts Year Book*, Vol. 7, Wellington: Wingfield Press, 1951, pp. 122-9; ‘Victorian Heritage: Thoughts on New Zealand Social History’, *Political Science*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (March, 1952), pp. 29-37; ‘Why Archives’, *New Zealand Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 15, No. 1, (September, 1952), pp. 9 – 15; ‘The Development of New Zealand Nationality’, *Cahiers d’Histoire Mondiale: Journal of World History*, Vol. 2, No. 1, (August, 1954), pp. 106-23.

⁵¹ Rachel Barrowman, ‘Heenan, Joseph William Allen’, from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Te Ara – the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 1-Sep-10, URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biography/4h24>.

⁵² McCormick’s memos will be covered in detail in Chapter One, see also D.O.W. Hall, ‘New Zealand Centennial History’, *Historical Studies Australia and New Zealand*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (March, 1940), pp. 21-30.

alternatively, as an undertaking ‘drifting’ into the ‘hands of sentimentalists’ or falling prey to ‘literary jackals’.⁵³ This relationship between history and tradition was not universally welcomed, however, and there were those for whom the notion of the government seeking to actively influence the tradition aroused suspicion. Some equated government involvement with censorship and distortion or believed the timeframe required for empirical research would rob the Histories of any degree of meaningful impact.⁵⁴

At the crux of the War Histories was their role as contemporary history and the ability of historians to accurately and fairly record events on behalf of those who had participated in and were affected by them. Much of the historical work on which Beaglehole had based his model involved history of a somewhat more distant past. Empirical method had first arisen as a means of authenticating and analysing ancient and medieval documents. Beaglehole himself was to become best known for his biographies of Cook and the multivolumed edition of his journals. Much of the Centennial project, too, had been concerned with material from a hundred years earlier. The War Histories, however, were contemporary and brought empiricism and the notion of history as it had been demonstrated in the Centennial publications together in a new way. Workers at the Branch were faced with the challenge of linking the positivist aspirations of the War History project with the evolving and often conflicting memories of participants that made up much of their material. In many ways the newness of their endeavour denied them an established set of theoretical guidelines or terminology around which to frame the difficulties they encountered. Subsequent work, by oral historians in particular in defining and defending their field, has now given us a pool of self-reflective and methodologically conscious literature with which to consider the challenges, problems and opportunities of contemporary history. This is especially so with regard to the influence of the historian on the collection and interpretation of material and on the

⁵³ Memo: McCormick to Joseph Heenan, Undersecretary to the Department of Internal Affairs, ‘Provisional War History Scheme’. 2 February 1945, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

⁵⁴ ‘Editorial’, *Otago Daily Times*, January 24 1947.

nature of memory, which has become ‘the subject as well as the source’⁵⁵ of much oral history.

Within this field, the work of Alistair Thomson has been particularly useful to this thesis, firstly for his contribution to the discussion of methodology over the course of three decades⁵⁶ and secondly, and more specifically, for his early work with Australian WWI veterans, exploring the relationship between their war experiences and the Anzac legend as it evolved over their lifetime. Thomson’s ‘working model’ of popular memory theory⁵⁷ and the dual meanings behind his notion of the ‘composure’ of memories has been used in the chapter on *Journey towards Christmas*. His work on the evaluation and use of contemporary testimony in war history informs the discussion of *23 Battalion* and *Crete* also.

There remains one further group whose work has brought cultural expression and remembrance together specifically on the history and memory of war. Lead by the early work of Paul Fussell, this group includes American cultural historians Samuel Hynes and Jay Winter, George Mosse and British historian Graham Dawson. Fussell and Hynes were both participants in WWII, Fussell as an infantry officer and Hynes as a bomber pilot in the Pacific. Although their early work centred on WWI both have since moved their focus forward to the Second World War, including their own parts in it.⁵⁸ Winter too

⁵⁵ Alistair Thomson, ‘Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History’, *Oral History Review*, Vol. 34, No. 1, (2006), p. 55.

⁵⁶ Alistair Thomson, ‘The Anzac Legend: Exploring National Myth and Memory in Australia’, in Raphael Samuel & Paul Thompson, (eds.), *The Myths We Live By*, London and New York: Routledge, 1990, pp. 73 - 82; *ANZAC Memories: Living with the Legend*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994; ‘Memory as a Battlefield: Personal and Political Investments in the National Military Past’, *Oral History Review*, Vol. 22, No. 2, (1995), pp. 55 – 73; ‘Anzac Stories: Using Personal Testimony in War History’, *War & Society*, Vol. 25, No. 2, (2006), pp. 1 – 21; with Robert Perks, (eds.), *The Oral History Reader*, (2nd Edition), Oxon UK / New York: Routledge, 2006; ‘Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History’, *Oral History Review*, Vol. 34, No. 1, (2007), pp. 49 – 70.

⁵⁷ Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, p. 8

⁵⁸ See for example Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975; *The Boys Crusade: The American Infantry in North Western Europe, 1944 – 1945*, New York: Modern Library (Random House), 2003; Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: the First World War and English Culture*, New York: Atheneum, 1991; *The Soldiers’ Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War*, New

began by concentrating on the Great War and has expanded his focus across the entire twentieth century.⁵⁹ Mosse's seminal article 'Two World Wars and the Myth of the War Experience'⁶⁰ specifically compared the integration of experiences and understanding of war in post-war societies. These moves toward the study of war in more general terms reflect perhaps the centrality of war to the emerging field of memory studies, a body of scholarship which has taken the significance and remembrance of war 'out of the battlefield and into every corner of civilian life'.⁶¹

Graham Dawson, a cultural historian now at the University of Brighton, also links a background in literary criticism with the popular memory movement to examine the role of the soldier hero and adventure quest within the 'master narrative of Britishness'.⁶² Hynes' work on narratives and on the nature of collective memory is central to the discussion of memory in *Journey toward Christmas*. Mosse and Winter's inform the consideration of national memory generally and while Dawson's work is used to Ross' positioning of the 23 Bn experience under the framework of heroism and quest.

This thesis consists of six further chapters. Chapter One, 'High Traditions and Good Practices,' examines the roots of the War History project in the Centennial Branch and develops the notion of an empirically informed national tradition suggested in the writings of Beaglehole. It considers the extent to which the War Histories consolidated

York: Penguin Group, 1997; *Flights of Passage: Recollections of a WWII Aviator*, New York: Routledge, 2003.

⁵⁹ See for example: Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, London: Macmillan, 1985; *The Experience of World War One*, London: Macmillan, 1988; *Visions and Violence: Imagining the Twentieth Century*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004; *Remembering War: the Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006; Jay Winter & Emmanuel Sivan, (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

⁶⁰ George Mosse, 'Two World Wars and the Myth of the War Experience', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 21, No. 4, (April, 1986), pp. 491 – 513.

⁶¹ Jay Winter, *Remembering War*, p. 6.

⁶² Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imaginings of Masculinities*, London, New York: Routledge, 1994.

but also extended the role of empiricism within government sponsored and official histories. The chapter also discusses the specific contribution of Kippenberger to the War Histories and his influence as the exemplar of the citizen soldier that the series was to represent. Chapters Two through to Five explore the four case studies of *Journey toward Christmas*, *23 Battalion*, *Crete* and *Battle for Egypt* respectively from the perspectives of memory, history, nation and war. Although all four themes are considered within each volume, one predominates in each and is examined in relation to the double dichotomy and the tensions it represents within the War History project. Chapter Six, 'We Should not Refuse to Try', forms a more general discussion and draws these four threads together across the War Histories as a whole. It considers the extent to which the War History project achieved its goal of creating a meaningful military record and representative account of New Zealand's WWII experience both for the current generation and in the minds of the next.

Chapter 1: 'High Traditions and Good Practices'¹

Foundations and Methodologies of the War History Branch 1943 – 1946

By 1946 Britain, the United States and the Dominions of Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand had all begun work on their war histories. In Britain preparations had started within the first few weeks of the war when civil and military departments were invited to 'put aside' diaries and documents in anticipation of histories being written.² Australia, too had shown itself anxious to take early advantage of an excellent structure and precedent laid down by Dr. C.E. Bean, the Official WWI Historian.³ In New Zealand, however, arrangements had lagged behind. Despite concerns for an early start, it was not until 1941 that the first army archivist position was secured for New Zealand Expeditionary Forces (2NZEF) headquarters Middle East.⁴ This resulted in the appointment of Eric McCormick, as first Assistant, then Official, Archivist at Maadi, then as Chief Archivist back in New Zealand in 1943.⁵ McCormick's appointment was an important one because, as a founding member and later editor of the government's 1940 Centennial Branch, and author of 'admittedly the most outstanding'⁶ of its historical publications,⁷ he forged a strong continuity between these two government projects, both of which were groundbreaking in their scope and method. It also hinted at the high literary aspirations held for the military histories when they were eventually written.

¹ Letter, Kippenberger to Lt-Col J. L. Scoullar, 11 July 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

² Sir J.R.M. Butler, 'British Official Military Histories: World War II', in Robin Higham, (ed.), *Official Histories: Essays and Bibliographies from around the World*, Kansas, Kansas State University Library, 1970, accessed 20 May 2006, URL: http://warchronicle.com/britain/offials_wwii.htm.

³ Memo, 'For Cabinet: Official History of Australia in the War', August 1942, copy: IA1 181/3 part I, NA.

⁴ Ian McGibbon, "'Something of Them is Here Recorded': Official History in New Zealand", in Jeffery Grey, (ed.), *The Last Word? Essays in Official History in the United States and British Commonwealth*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003, p. 58.

⁵ Eric McCormick, 'The Jumpers', in Dennis McEldowney, (ed.), *An Absurd Ambition: Autobiographical Writings, Eric McCormick*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1996, pp. 152 – 184, see particularly pp. 169 – 184.

⁶ Memo, Heenan to Minister of Internal Affairs, 7 March 1941, IA1, 181/1, NA.

⁷ Eric McCormick, *Letters and Art in New Zealand*, Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1940.

From his position as Archivist, McCormick laid solid foundations for the War History project. He campaigned for the establishment of an Inter-Service War History Committee, visited Australia to study its impressive WWI archive and plans for its WWII histories and wrote copious reports and memoranda outlining the possible purpose and structure for New Zealand's own War History Branch. Being articulate and well versed in the Beaglehole-styled model of informed citizenship and national tradition that had underwritten the 1940 Centennial, McCormick was able to link the War Histories to concepts of service and nationhood in a way that was difficult for the government to refuse. Thus by the arrival of Kippenberger to the Branch as Editor-in-Chief in July 1946 these connections were already firmly in place. This chapter examines the intellectual context and methodological precedents on which the War Histories project was built. The influence of the Centennial Branch in terms of its empirical methodology and the conflation of history and citizenship forms the first focus of this chapter, the structure and methodology of the War History Branch as it arose from these precedents, the second.

The citizenship-based publications of the Centennial Branch represented only one model of history, however. The Official Histories produced by the War History Branch were very much military histories also. The recording of not only the successes but also lessons from the failures of WWII was regarded as crucial from a military perspective. The government's poor treatment of the WWI history was considered to have contributed to the 'waste of blood and treasure'⁸ that had accompanied the low success rate of New Zealand troops early in WWII. There was a real concern lest such hard-won experience be lost again.⁹ However laudable, this combining of military and civic goals made for a difficult historical mix and the project potentially laboured under a mass of conflicting expectations. As national histories the War Histories were to capture in broad terms the country's participation and martial spirit yet they needed also to provide sufficient detail,

⁸ Kippenberger, Radio Address: "The History of New Zealand at War 1939 – 1945", 19 August 1946, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

⁹ See for example: Memo, W. Nash, Acting Prime Minister to W.E. Parry, 22 March 1945, IA1 181/5, NA.

military analysis and criticism to take a meaningful place in the Army staff colleges of the future.

In steering through these muddy waters, the appointment of Major-General (Maj-Gen) Sir Howard Kippenberger was, as Glyn Harper has suggested, an ‘inspired choice’.¹⁰ A solicitor by occupation and the owner of an extensive library of military history, he was equipped with an ‘almost incomparable knowledge’¹¹ among New Zealanders of historical campaigns. Kippenberger was also considered ‘the most experienced infantry brigade commander of the Second World War and ... certainly one of the most skilful’.¹² He had the breadth of experience to span the conflicting roles of the War History project and the respect within military and governmental circles to ensure it was kept in motion. His election as President of the Returned Servicemen’s Association in 1948 confirmed his standing among the fighting men of the war.¹³ Even so, leadership of the project proved a heavy burden. Prime Minister, Peter Fraser, foresaw that Kippenberger would have many ‘painful things to do’ and would need ‘character and determination’¹⁴ to see them through. Kippenberger’s influence and leadership of the War History project form the third focus of this chapter, his approach to and handling of censorship and criticism the fourth.

Writing to the government on return from his trip to the Australian War Memorial in 1942, Eric McCormick noted that the ‘virtual non-existence’¹⁵ of an equivalent New Zealand war history tradition had constituted a ‘serious weakness in our national life’.¹⁶

¹⁰ Glyn Harper, ‘Kippenberger, Howard Karl – Biography’, from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 1-Sep-10. URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/5k11/1>.

¹¹ Murphy, ‘Appreciation Written for Army Board’ 8 May 1957, WAI, 11, No. 4, NA.

¹² Murphy, ‘Appreciation’, WAI, 11, No. 4, NA.

¹³ Glyn Harper, ‘Kippenberger, Major-General Sir Howard Karl’, in Ian McGibbon, (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 265.

¹⁴ Letter, Kippenberger to Freyberg, 11 August 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

¹⁵ Memo, McCormick to War Cabinet, ‘Australia’s War History Organisation’, 4 August 1942, p.3, IA1 181/3 part I, NA.

¹⁶ Memo, McCormick to War Cabinet, ‘Australia’s War History Organisation’, 4 August 1942, p.3, IA1 181/3 part I, NA.

As Australia's official WWI correspondent Bean had spawned a massive War History project that had served as 'a Rosetta Stone'¹⁷ for the Australians' role in that conflict. In New Zealand, however, Bean's journalistic counterpart, Malcolm Ross, had met with restrictions and a political atmosphere so 'virulent'¹⁸ that he was not only prevented from reporting effectively from the front but excluded from New Zealand's War Histories altogether. The New Zealand Official Histories of WWI, as they eventuated, were restricted to just four popular, journalistically styled volumes, designed for the 'intelligent general reader'¹⁹ but in which it was admitted that 'acts of gallantry'²⁰ received 'an amount of notice which in a work addressed to the serious student would be disproportionate'.²¹ These four volumes were intended as the start to a larger project but the more factually based, military volumes they were intended to supplement never eventuated. An extremely 'narrow conception'²² of the purpose and material appropriate for an official military history and the influence of the Chief of the General Staff, Colonel (Col) A. W. Robin, who had both argued for the histories being the sole preserve of the military authorities and then failed to do anything about them, appeared to be the principal reasons.²³ Therefore, despite their unscholarly nature, these four popular volumes, which had been produced, at their authors' own admission, without 'overmuch reliance on ... rigorously scientific methods',²⁴ dominated New Zealand's literature on WWI for almost 80 years,²⁵ if only for the want of more authoritative texts with which to replace them. The resultant feeling that, left to the Army, New Zealand's fighting forces had been significantly short-changed by the government's handling of the WWI histories played very much to the advantage of the WWII history advocates and formed an

¹⁷ Ron Palenski, 'Malcolm Ross: A New Zealand Failure in the Great War', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 1, (March 2008), p.20.

¹⁸ Palenski, p. 20.

¹⁹ Col H. Stewart, *The New Zealand Division 1916–1919: A Popular History based on Official Records*, Wellington: Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd., 1921, p. iii.

²⁰ Col H. Stewart, p. iii

²¹ Col H. Stewart, p. iii.

²² McGibbon, "Something of Them is Here Recorded", p. 54.

²³ McGibbon, "Something of Them is Here Recorded", p. 54

²⁴ Col H. Stewart, p. v.

²⁵ McGibbon, "Something of Them is Here Recorded", p. 56.

effective leverage point from which to justify the infinitely more ambitious Second World War project.

The years between the publication of the WWI histories and the start of WWII had seen significant developments in New Zealand historiography. Foremost had been the rise of empirical or ‘scientific’ method and the efforts of certain academics and government personnel to see this supersede amateur, journalistic histories as the historical canon within New Zealand. While empiricism was well established in university circles before the WWI, it required the vision of a younger generation of academics and the sympathetic ear of government to move it out into the broader community and the fabric of national life. In the interwar years, this move was led from Victoria University College in Wellington where the fresh energy of Beaglehole and the newly appointed Professor, F.L.W. Wood, combined with the ‘imaginative and administrative power’²⁶ of Joe Heenan, Undersecretary at the Department of Internal Affairs. Together they re-visioned the place of history in New Zealand society along the lines of Beaglehole’s model for an empirically informed tradition. In the spirit of the progressive Left and the bureaucratic expansion of the interwar and early war years, there was a new willingness to see the government as central to this process and through institutions such as the School Publications Branch and other forms of government sponsored histories, New Zealand was promoted as a country with ‘a tradition and contemporary ways of living of its own’.²⁷

The approach of the 1940 New Zealand Centennial had proved a perfect opportunity to put some of these ideas into practice. Beaglehole, Wood and historians from other universities such as James Hight, James Rutherford and W.T. Airey, were invited onto the National Historical Committee, along with a number of journalists and civil servants, to advise government on matters in connection with the celebrations and on suitable

²⁶ Rachael Barrowman, “‘Culture-organising’: Joe Heenan and the Beginning of State Patronage of the Arts”, *New Zealand Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (July, 1996), p. 3.

²⁷ J.C. Beaglehole, ‘A Small Bouquet for the Education Department’, in Eric Lee Johnson, (ed.), *Arts Year Book No 7*, Wellington, Wingfield Press, 1951, p. 124.

publications.²⁸ The Centennial marked the one hundred years since, ostensibly, the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi, but more specifically in the minds of many New Zealanders, the arrival of the British settlers. Activities organised to recognise the Centennial were a lively mix of enthusiastic, if uncritical, local celebrations of ‘founding families’ and the pioneering spirit and a more formal government programme. This included an exhibition, a film, and a ‘varied programme of historical publications’²⁹ by the newly formed Centennial Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs. Centennial publications were centred around a series of fortnightly *Pictorial Survey* magazines illustrating New Zealand’s history and development, a *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, a proposed historical atlas, and 11 historical ‘surveys’, substantial volumes of around 30,000 words, ‘authoritative yet designed to appeal to the general reader’,³⁰ in which key aspects of New Zealand’s social and political development were to be discussed.

While the Atlas proved ambitious beyond the scope of the Department and was eventually abandoned in the early 1950s,³¹ the pictorial and historical surveys were considered a great success and, as Branch writer, D.O.W. Hall, suggested, helped to ‘destroy old fallacies’ in favour of a new, ‘well proportioned view’ of New Zealand history.³² Written on topics such as early exploration, government, farming, education and ‘Women in New Zealand’, they were designed to foster fresh national perspectives in the lives of everyday New Zealanders. The high quality of the publications and their inexpensive price reflected the government’s expectation of an interested and discerning

²⁸ Eric McCormick, ‘Centennial’, in Dennis McEldowney, (ed.), *An Absurd Ambition: Autobiographical Writings, Eric McCormick*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1996, p. 138.

²⁹ D.O.W. Hall, ‘New Zealand Centennial History’, *Historical Studies Australia and New Zealand*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (March, 1940), p. 21.

³⁰ McCormick, ‘Centennial’, p. 139.

³¹ To chart the ill-fated course of the Atlas see Malcolm McKinnon, ‘The Uncompleted Centennial Atlas’, in William Renwick, (ed.), *Creating a National Spirit: Celebrating New Zealand’s Centennial*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004, pp. 149 – 160; for its specific contribution to empiricism see Chris Hilliard, ‘A Prehistory of Public History: Monuments, Explanations and Promotions, 1900 – 1970’, in Bronwyn Dalley & Jock Phillips, (eds.), *Going Public: The Changing Face of New Zealand History*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001, pp. 30-54; Rachael Bell, ‘Ruth Ross, New Zealand Scholar / Treaty Scholar’ MA Thesis in History, Massey University, 2005.

³² Hall, p. 21.

reading public and also the belief in lifelong learning of the many self-made, self-educated politicians of the time.

The Centennial Branch set important precedents for the War History project. Over and above the obvious matters of funding and a bureaucratic framework through which the War History Branch could be established, there were important historiographical precedents. Firstly, the Centennial project was recognised as a ‘remarkable landmark in state cultural enterprises’³³ and evidenced work across many departments and between political parties in a spirit of ‘co-operation and goodwill’.³⁴ In its many forms it set, firmly and irrevocably, a role for government in the cultural and intellectual life of the nation. Where, as Chris Hilliard points out, government support for historical and literary projects had been ‘considerable though inconsistent’³⁵ until the Centennial, the notion that ‘being educated, informed, and (in varying senses of the word) “cultured” had a place in Labour’s expanded definition of citizenship’³⁶ found full voice in the government’s commitment to this project. Through its emphasis on citizenship, the Centennial presented New Zealanders as not only the product of 100 years of pioneer spirit and a healthy environment but also of ‘the boldest social legislation during the latter half of its brief existence as a British possession’.³⁷ The scope and scale of the Centennial publications were a proud reflection of this.

With the outbreak of war in 1939, the war and the Centennial were easily conflated as tests of national character. Centennial celebrations were often ‘mingled with the farewells of servicemen leaving for overseas’³⁸ while the war was seen as ‘the greatest and most exacting test of this country at the point of time when it had reached a degree of

³³ Hall, p. 30.

³⁴ William Renwick, ‘Introduction’, in William Renwick, (ed.), *Creating a National Spirit: Celebrating New Zealand’s Centennial*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004, p. 17.

³⁵ Hilliard, p. 33.

³⁶ Hilliard, p. 33.

³⁷ Hall, p. 25.

³⁸ Memo, McCormick, ‘Official History of New Zealand in the War 1939 – Provisional Scheme’, October 1944, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

maturity'.³⁹ These were links repeatedly emphasised by McCormick when setting up the War History Branch. In 1942, for example, he campaigned for a set of volumes comprehensive enough for 'the historians of the future to see this war in perspective – not as an isolated phenomenon but as an expression and a test of the qualities developed in the course of a century's separate existence'.⁴⁰ In 1943, in a memo for cabinet, his vision for the War Histories again channelled Centennial values and was an almost entirely citizen-based one:

New Zealand was a hundred years old when the war began. How did this country ... come through the test imposed on it by the conditions of war? Were its men found to be adaptable as mechanics, airmen, sailors? How did they act when thrown amongst foreign people, far removed from the restraints of their own environment? How did the machinery of government adapt itself to the conditions of war? Etc.⁴¹

In 1944 he again emphasised the war as a test of national distinctiveness and 'an assessment of the character and the qualities that have been formed in these surroundings over the past one hundred years'.⁴²

McCormick was a writer and an intellectual. He had, by his own admission, few heroic pretensions.⁴³ Despite training in the infantry and a brief period as a hospital orderly in Maadi, he was soon recalled by government as one who, as Heenan maintained, was 'of infinitely more value in connection with our war effort'⁴⁴ well away from the battlefields of North Africa and Italy. In his capacity as Archivist he did much to focus the War Histories as citizen-based nationalist histories rather than military ones, confined not to

³⁹ Memo, McCormick, 'Official History of New Zealand in the War 1939 – Provisional Scheme', October 1944, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

⁴⁰ Memo, McCormick, 'Memo for War Cabinet: Australia's War History Organisation', August 1942, IA1, 181/3/ part I, NA.

⁴¹ Memo, McCormick to Secretary to War Cabinet, "Official War History", 1943, IA1 181/5/1.

⁴² Memo, McCormick, 'Official History of New Zealand in the War of 1939 – Provisional Scheme', October 1944, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

⁴³ McCormick, 'The Jumpers', p. 152.

⁴⁴ Memo, Heenan to Minister Internal Affairs, 7 March 1941, IA1 181/1, NA.

‘the army or to the expeditionary force or even to the three services’ but ‘widened to cover the work of civilians and the social and economic changes in New Zealand’⁴⁵ as a whole. While it is not recorded if this view was seriously contested or, as is common to Official Histories,⁴⁶ what ministerial expectations on the nature or content of the War Histories were, it is clear that by time Kippenberger arrived home to take over the project in 1946, it was already firmly established as a Centennial-styled undertaking to be produced within a civilian branch of government. Significantly, the Army felt itself in ‘no position to give any authoritative criticism’⁴⁷ on McCormick’s general proposal. Its only concern was for the ambitious scope of the project, feeling that a ‘reduced scheme [that] finished in a reasonable time’ would be of more use. Army archive staff were transferred to the Branch in 1946⁴⁸ and although all writers of the volumes were ex-servicemen to some degree, they wrote, in the main, as public servants or within a civilian capacity. There was no serious consideration of the Histories being written solely by the Army as they had been in the WWI and the military contribution was principally an archival one.

Methodologically, the Centennial had provided the opportunity to work through many of the challenges posed by the Beaglehole-styled model of popular yet scholarly histories. Central to the idea of citizenship-based histories was the manner in which they were conveyed to the public and worked into the national tradition. The historian was required to not only ‘write about aspects of our culture in ways that were true to what had to be said’⁴⁹ but to convey it across many different levels of society. The Centennial publications aimed to reach the widest possible readership, from the *Pictorial Surveys* for school children and beyond through to Dr Guy Scholefield’s *Dictionary of Biography*, for

⁴⁵ Memo, McCormick, ‘Official History of New Zealand in the War of 1939 – Provisional Scheme’, October 1944, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

⁴⁶ S.F. Wise, ‘Canadian Official Military History: the End of an Era?’, in Jeffrey Grey, (ed.), *The Last Word? Essays on Official History in the United States and British Commonwealth*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Memo, Brigadier W.G. Stevens, ‘Reply to Proposal (Provisional Scheme): Q12/16’, 23 January 1945, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

⁴⁸ Memo, Kippenberger to Adjutant-General, ‘Archives Personnel – Army HQ’, 3 October 1946, IA1, 181/5/3, NA.

⁴⁹ W.L. Renwick, ‘“Show Us These Islands and Ourselves ... Give Us a Home in Thought”: Beaglehole Memorial Lecture, 1987’, *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol. 21, No. 2, (October, 1987), p. 203.

researchers and tertiary students, ‘especially those who elect to present a thesis for the Master of Arts Degree’.⁵⁰

While a clear expression of the egalitarian principles of the Labour Government in the late 1930s, the scope of the Centennial publications also reflected a desire by the Branch, and of the government, to control the historical perspective of the public and to attain a certain unanimity of understanding and standardization of fact. Part of wresting New Zealand history away from journalists and amateur historians, and the justification for government spending to do so, was the ‘critical inquiry and conscious exploration’⁵¹ that empirical method afforded. The acceptance of both the strengths and weaknesses in national life exposed by this technique equated a critical and enlightened historical outlook with a modern nation. ‘Not only is the modern interest in social conditions of the past being served,’ Hall wrote enthusiastically of the Centennial programme, ‘but the whole of New Zealand’s past is by implication being completely re-written’.⁵²

In seeking to overwrite existing or potential viewpoints, the Centennial publications were thus in implicit competition with other popular histories. While the historical surveys were clearly expected to become the ‘established authorities on their subjects’, *Making New Zealand* was also ‘not ashamed to compete with popular picture-papers on their own ground’.⁵³ As the nexus between developments in empirical history and the expanding role of state, the Centennial publications confirmed the sense, continued over into the War Histories and many subsequent publications, that history could not and should not be left to the vagaries of the public. True to Nora’s interpretation, perhaps, the Centennial model confirmed national history as something to be both directed and corrected along

⁵⁰ Hall, p. 23.

⁵¹ J.C. Beaglehole, ‘New Zealand Scholar’: (Margaret Condliffe Memorial Lecture, 21 April 1954), in Peter Munz, (ed.), *The Feel of Truth: Essays Presented to F.L.W. Wood and J.C. Beaglehole on the Occasion of their Retirement*, Wellington: A.H. & A.W Reed for the Victoria University College of Wellington, 1969, p. 250.

⁵² Hall, p. 30.

⁵³ Hall, p. 21.

with the notion that, as Hilliard observes, ‘the state was the only body with the resources required to get New Zealand historiography running properly’.⁵⁴

With respect to the War Histories, concern lest the recording of the war be sentimentalised or exploited⁵⁵ gave extra impetus to the project. The New Zealand War Histories were seen as a marked departure from the previous focus of Official Histories and, like the Centennial, were expected to meet the needs of a young, modern nation with a wide and well educated readership. ‘The popular conception of an official war history – a series of formidable volumes written for the services and a small public beyond that – grew up in countries with a strong military tradition,’ explained McCormick presenting his provisional scheme to Cabinet:

and in an age when the efforts of war were limited. The all-embracing scope of modern warfare, involving as it does entire literate populations, has altered this conception, and it seems probable that a history of the present war will be of interest not only to professional sailors, soldiers and airmen but also to a public ranging from the students of war-time economics to the casual reader and perhaps the schoolchild.⁵⁶

The scope of publications mirrored those of the Centennial. The 24 ‘simply written’ and fully illustrated booklets in the Episodes and Studies filled the role of the *Pictorial Surveys*⁵⁷ and were intended to alert schoolchildren and general readers to the sacrifice and initiative of the New Zealand troops. The ‘Official Histories proper,’⁵⁸ as Kippenberger termed them, the 13 campaign and service volumes, offered overviews and insights into campaigns or particular battles in the way that the Centennial surveys had done for aspects of New Zealand public life. By undertaking the unit histories also,

⁵⁴ Hilliard, p. 48.

⁵⁵ Memo, McCormick to Heenan, ‘Provisional War History Scheme’, 2 February 1945, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

⁵⁶ Memo, McCormick, ‘Official History of New Zealand in the War of 1939 -, Provisional Scheme’, October 1944, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

⁵⁷ Memo, McCormick to Shannahan, Permanent Head of Prime Minister’s Department, 27 January 1947, IA1 181/25, NA.

⁵⁸ Kippenberger, Radio Address, ‘The History of New Zealand at War 1939-1945’, 19 August 1946, IA1 181/5/1, NA

however, the War History project significantly expanded the range attempted by the Centennial Branch and reflected the new levels of state involvement brought on by the war in the private lives of New Zealanders.

Under this plan, New Zealand's was an Official History in the widest sense: a memorial to the dead, a souvenir for the living, an explanation to the public, a definitive national record to 'meet the legitimate needs of specialists and students' and an institutional archive to 'preserve any experience that has been gained during the course of the war'.⁵⁹ Like the Centennial histories, the success of the War Histories, as national histories, rested on the ability of the historians to convey this wealth of material in an engaging manner. Again, an authoritative but accessible style formed the fundamental link between the historical record and pride in the national tradition. 'Now many will say,' said Kippenberger in his radio address,

when you have produced all this who will read it? I hope and expect that a great many people will. We have a great story to tell. There is no need for an Official History to be dull We are not going to produce a dull history, the subject matter makes that almost impossible.⁶⁰

Calls to the public for personal material such as diaries and photographs to include in the Histories emphasised it standing as a 'complete and faithful record'⁶¹ of the life of the nation.

While eager to attract information and sources, however, the Branch could prove considerably more chary about reciprocating with its own material. As the institution with a 'legal monopoly of violence',⁶² the state retained a monopoly on the official

⁵⁹ Memo, McCormick, 'Official War History', 1943, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

⁶⁰ Kippenberger, 'Radio Address', IA1 181/5/1, NA.

⁶¹ Kippenberger, 'Radio Address', IA1 181/5/1, NA.

⁶² Roberto Rabel, 'War History as Public History: Past and Future', in Bronwyn Dalley & Jock Phillips, (eds.), *Going Public: the Changing Face of New Zealand History*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003, p. 60.

records of the war also, a matter justified, as has been seen in the introduction, on grounds of state security. Like the Centennial Branch, there was a level of gate keeping associated with the War Histories' attempt to prevent competition for the authority of its record. By co-ordinating all levels of publications under one organisation and systematically checking and cross-referencing information between volumes, including the unit histories, the War Histories intended to produce a single, unified and authoritative version of the war. Information was strategically guarded by the Branch to this effect so 'the merit of the official histories' would be 'increased by its inclusion'.⁶³ The Branch declined to 'dissipate ... [its] scattered historical resources'⁶⁴ by making them available to the interested public during the writing or lengthy publication periods of the Histories. As this extended to university students and other researchers it effectively blocked other forms of contemporary research into the war from the official records while the histories were underway.

Although there was generally a very positive and constructive working relationship within the Commonwealth network, there was also potential for competing perspectives in the Histories of others in the group. The short popular-styled histories produced as stopgaps until the more comprehensive volumes appeared, challenged at times the New Zealand interpretation of the war, perhaps even more so as the Official label could belie the hastiness and lack of research and accuracy in their production.⁶⁵ One example was a 'slick'⁶⁶ British publication on the Battle for Crete, put together by journalist Christopher Buckley under contract to the British War Office. A draft was sent to New Zealand for review and incurred such wrath from Kippenberger and Murphy that New Zealand Prime Minister, Peter Fraser, was called on to halt its publication until its many errors and offences could be addressed. Over a hundred foolscap pages of scathing criticism were

⁶³ Memo, M.B. McGlynn to Monty Fairbrother, 19 February, 1950, IA1 181/35, NA.

⁶⁴ Memo, McCormick, 'Memo for War Cabinet, "Official History of Australia in the War"', 4 August 1942, IA1 181/3 part I, NA.

⁶⁵ Letter, Kippenberger to Stacey, 10 October 1949, IA1 181/3/2, NA.

⁶⁶ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 26 January 1950, IA1 181/3/3, NA.

sent back by the Branch outlining its ‘inexcusable’⁶⁷ inaccuracies and injustices⁶⁸ to the New Zealand troops. It was duly rewritten to reflect these views. Unfortunately Buckley’s work on the Greece campaign fared no better, arousing comment from Freyberg also,⁶⁹ while the comments and feedback given to a ‘thoroughly slap-dash’ publication by the Australian war historians were, in Kippenberger’s words, so ‘ruthless’ that he ‘rather hesitated to send them at all.’⁷⁰

The perceived need for popular histories had put several Commonwealth War History Branches in a difficult position. While they were intended to cater quickly to that portion of the public interest that would have ‘evaporated’⁷¹ by the time the full volumes appeared, the speed at which they were produced was predictably at odds with the empiricism on which they were to be based. In some cases, such as Buckley’s booklet, they were produced under different departments altogether to the Official Histories and were agreed to only on the rather unworkable proviso that ‘their facts should agree with those appearing later in the Official Histories’.⁷² As their very purpose was to be published well ahead of the full histories, it was not yet known what those facts would be. It was understandable that their authors, being ‘military correspondent types’ contracted at a cheaper rate than the professional historians employed by the Branches, would resort to the ‘colour and sensation’⁷³ of their trade. This tendency for speed over accuracy led in some countries, such as Britain and Canada, to the market being ‘saturated’ with ‘distorted views based on insufficient evidence’,⁷⁴ which British Official Historian

⁶⁷ Letter, Kippenberger to McClymont, 29 September 1948, WAIL, 3, Box 16b, NA.

⁶⁸ Murphy to Kippenberger, ‘Sir Howard Kippenberger, Notes and Comments on Christopher Buckley’s Crete Narrative’, MS-Papers-5079-234, ATL.

⁶⁹ Letters, Kippenberger to Latham, 26 January 1950, IA1 181/3/3, NA; General Freyberg to Director of Public Relations, War Office, London, 27 August 1948, CAB 106 / 701, NA UK; General Freyberg to Secretary of State for War, 20 September 1948, CAB 106 / 701, NA UK.

⁷⁰ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 26 January 1950, IA1 191/3/3, NA.

⁷¹ Letter, Latham to Kippenberger, 25 June 1952, IA1 181/3 part III, NA.

⁷² Letter, Latham to Kippenberger, April / May 1950, IA1 181/3 part III, NA.

⁷³ Letter, Latham to Kippenberger, April / May 1950, IA1 181/3 part III, NA.

⁷⁴ Letter, Latham to Kippenberger, 25 June 1952, IA1 181/3 part III, NA.

Brigadier H.B. (Harry) Latham and his Canadian counterpart, Col C.P. Stacey, then had to go to considerable lengths to refute.⁷⁵

Although the Army Board had put out a series of brief publications during the war,⁷⁶ the New Zealand Branch managed to circumvent these problems in their own publications by forgoing popular histories of whole campaigns in favour of the Episodes and Studies, brief booklets which targeted only specific incidents or case studies as their facts were fully established by the Branch. As with the unit histories, maintaining control over these popular styled booklets along with all other publications in the series ensured that all the New Zealand histories fed consistently into the historical framework as the Branch attempted to establish it. In planning the booklets, however, the Branch misjudged the demand for the Episodes and Studies. Despite the high quality of their publication and the predictions of naysayers such as the Editor of the *Otago Daily Times*, who believed that their popularity would render the campaign volumes ‘sacred white elephants’,⁷⁷ it appeared that most readers preferred to wait for the more detailed and analytical works. By 1956 Kippenberger admitted to having been ‘over-optimistic’ with the booklets.⁷⁸ While many of the campaign volumes had sold out or were well on their way to full sales, most of the Episodes and Studies had sold barely half their print run and it looked like they would be ‘left with a good many’.⁷⁹

The willingness of the New Zealand Branch to intervene in the publications of other Commonwealth War Histories, and the fact that they called on the Prime Minister to do so, points to a third aim of the War History project and the last respect in which it could be considered as an extension of the purpose and focus of the Centennial publications. Along with commemorating and explaining the war to New Zealanders, New Zealand’s War History project was intended to record within the Commonwealth and for the world

⁷⁵ Letter, Latham to Kippenberger, 25 June 1952, IA1 181/3 part III, NA; Tim Cook, *Clio’s Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006, p. 158.

⁷⁶ Army Board, *Battle for Crete: the New Zealand Division in Action*, Wellington: Army Board, 1943.

⁷⁷ ‘Editorial’, *Otago Daily Times*, January 24 1947.

⁷⁸ Letter, Kippenberger to Freyberg, 13 January 1956, IA1 181/3/3 part IV, NA.

⁷⁹ Letter, Kippenberger to Freyberg, 13 January 1956, IA1, 181/3/3 part IV, NA.

the place and contribution of New Zealand in the conflict. 'It will not be appreciated or understood,' Kippenberger maintained, 'unless we do'.⁸⁰

Co-operation within the Commonwealth War History network was strong, forged initially by a conference hosted by the American Historical Division in February 1948 and attended by Kippenberger and Fairbrother. There Kippenberger met the four Commonwealth Historians with whom he would work the most closely, Latham from the UK Branch, Long from Australia, Stacey from Canada and Agar-Hamilton from South Africa. Of the four, the most constructive relationship was with Latham, who as an officer in the British Artillery had witnessed the tragic overrunning of Kippenberger's 20th Battalion at Belhamed, Libya, in November 1941. The two corresponded with increasing warmth for nearly a decade, with Kippenberger sending food parcels, as he did for several other families in the UK, to ease the post-war restrictions for Latham's wife and children.

The New Zealanders' relationship with the Australian war historians was slightly more ambivalent. Charles Bean, as the driving force behind Australia's WWI series, was greatly admired. Following McCormick's visit, the structure and function of the War Memorial Bean had established was touted as a model for the New Zealand Branch and his article 'Technique of a Contemporary War Historian'⁸¹ was compulsory reading for its staff. Over Gavin Long, Australia's WWII historian, however, feelings were more mixed. The strength of Long's views on campaigns or individuals were seen by others in the network as apt to 'colour his judgment'.⁸² If not expressed 'actually offensively,' they could be given at times, Stacey felt, 'rather unpleasantly'.⁸³ Although points were often

⁸⁰ Kippenberger, 'Radio Address', IA1 181/5/1, NA.

⁸¹ C.E.W Bean, 'The Technique of a Contemporary War Historian', *Historical Studies in Australian and New Zealand*, Vol. 2, No. 6, (1946), pp. 65 – 79.

⁸² Letter, Latham to Kippenberger, 4 February 1954, IA1 181/3/3, part III, NA.

⁸³ Letter, Stacey to Kippenberger, 22 February 1954, IA1 181/3/2, NA.

strongly contested between the New Zealand and Australian Branches,⁸⁴ it remained a respectful and productive relationship.

The relationship with Stacey got off to an acrimonious start at the conference when the Canadian openly laughed at the 48 volumes the New Zealanders planned to record the experiences of their one Division (to which Latham had replied “But what a Division!” and others had apparently applauded).⁸⁵ Kippenberger soon warmed to Stacey, however. He visited him in Canada in 1949 and campaigned on his behalf with the Canadian Minister of Defence for an expansion of what he considered to be Canada’s own very ‘skimp’y’ War History programme.⁸⁶ Stacey, for his part, readily exchanged publications and wrote perceptive reviews of the New Zealand volumes in which he acknowledged he had initially underestimated both the scope of the New Zealand project and the calibre of its readers.⁸⁷ As historian Tim Cook has remarked, although the ‘shooting war’ had stopped in 1945, the ‘paper war’ for Canada’s Official Histories continued for many years.⁸⁸ Of the three armed services involved, the history programme was progressively stripped until only the Army histories, under Stacey, were completed.

While they worked closely with one another, each Commonwealth War History project developed its own tone and style. This was very much so with the South African histories by Col John Agar-Hamilton and a team of historians including L.F.C. Toner with whom the New Zealanders dealt most frequently.⁸⁹ Where the New Zealand volumes were considered by others to be heavily detailed and the British reserved in their criticism of military affairs, the drafts of the South African series were regarded as racy - even shocking - by comparison. This was so much so that Latham had found one South

⁸⁴ Letter, Kippenberger to Davin, 9 February 1950, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

⁸⁵ Letter, Kippenberger to McClymont, 9 March 1948, WAII 3, 16b, NA.

⁸⁶ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 5 October 1949, IA1 181/3/3 part II, NA.

⁸⁷ C.P. Stacey, ‘New Zealanders in Action: Book review on *Crete*, and *The Pacific*’, copy: IA1 181/3/2, NA.

⁸⁸ Cook, p. 131.

⁸⁹ Ian van der Wag, ‘Contested Histories: Official History and the South Africa Military in the Twentieth Century’, in Jeffery Grey, (ed.) *The Last Word? Essays on Official History in the United States and British Commonwealth*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003, p. 36.

African draft of the fighting against Rommel ‘so violent in tone’ he had been ‘quite unable to circulate it for comment’.⁹⁰ Although this turned out to be a deliberate tactic, Agar-Hamilton having put out an inflammatory version in the hope of eliciting a stronger response from participants – an ‘expedient’ the New Zealand Branch was not past using itself⁹¹ – the South African style was still considered the more forthright and highly coloured of the group. It was for this reason, perhaps, that the South African historians had been especially pleased with Scoullar’s outspoken volume, *Battle for Egypt*, after wanting the New Zealanders to ‘put more spice’ into their accounts.⁹²

Along with the more obvious purpose of sharing records and eliminating discrepancies, the exchange of material and drafts among the Commonwealth historians was aimed at ensuring each nation’s viewpoint was recognised within the Histories of others. This was achieved, as the Chief Historian of the British Histories, Professor J.R.M. Butler, euphemistically termed it, through the ‘understanding of motives’.⁹³ Debate was common among the Commonwealth groups, according to the campaigns they had shared, as each sought to ensure their nominated perspective shone through. Although relations with other Branches remained cordial throughout, the example of Christopher Buckley’s history on Crete suggests the lengths to which the New Zealand Branch was prepared to go to achieve this goal.

In their role as national, citizenship-based histories, therefore, and in their government funding, the control of the historical record and stipulation of New Zealand’s role internationally, New Zealand’s Official Histories of the Second World War can be seen as direct extensions of the Centennial Histories. There were two significant areas, however, in which the War Histories departed from the Centennial model. The first was in methodology, with their use of Narratives and an ‘author /narrator split’ between the various steps of empirical enquiry; the second in their content, with the requirement that

⁹⁰ Letter, Latham to Kippenberger, 11 June 1949, IA1 181/3/3 part II, NA.

⁹¹ Kippenberger, ‘Address to the Wellington Historical Association’, 21 October 1952, Private Collection.

⁹² Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 4 October 1955, IA1 181/3/3 part IV, NA.

⁹³ Professor J.R.M. Butler, ‘Writing of the History of World War II’, copy, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

the Branch engage, willingly or otherwise, in criticism of individuals and policies carried out during the war.

As discussed, the manner in which historical material was conveyed to the reader formed an important part of the Centennial publication programme. A historian in the Centennial Branch was required not only to obtain and critically analyse his materials but also to write the volume in an erudite yet accessible manner.⁹⁴ Thus an historian skilled in the national tradition under the Centennial Branch was responsible for all steps in the empirical process, from heuristic and hermeneutic through to synthesis and, in the cases of Beaglehole, McCormick, Hall and others on the editorial staff, even to the layout and publication of the volumes themselves.

In the War Histories, however, in anticipation of the bulk of material to be dealt with, the steps of the empirical process were divided. Heuristic, the gathering, verification and collation of historical documents, was performed by researchers at the Branch, termed ‘narrators’, who used them to write up Narratives – chronologically ordered, ‘preliminary factual accounts’⁹⁵ of battles or campaigns. The actual writing of the volumes, as synthesised history, was contracted out to experienced, and preferably high profile, authors such as scholars, military commentators or commanders. These then used the Narratives to write thorough, accurate and engaging volumes on the various battles or campaigns. While the narrators worked full time at the Branch, many of the authors completed their volumes part time, fitting them around their main employment and sometimes at distances well away from the Branch. Several, such as Dan Davin and Geoffrey Cox, were in England.

This author / narrator split, as it was termed, was based on a model provided by the British War Histories, a project that was dealing with, literally, millions of documents

⁹⁴ Renwick, ‘“Show Us These Islands and Ourselves’ p. 203.

⁹⁵ Memo, McCormick, ‘Official History of New Zealand in the war of 1939 – : War Archives Memorandum No. 4 the Preparation of War Narratives’, IA 77, 1, NA.

and presenting a very broad view of the war. It was neither popular nor perhaps necessary with the close working environment of the New Zealand Branch. It was frustrating for the narrators, mainly young university graduates, who put in many hours of painstaking work yet could not control the outcome of their labours. It was also somewhat uncomplimentary, with its implication that as historians they could not be trusted to write attractively. For the authors, it left them at a distance from the original documents on which they were expected to base their interpretations and descriptions. The lack of war experience or officer training of some of the narrators meant that they did not always grasp the significance of the material they were reading, diminishing the value of the Narratives for the authors.⁹⁶ There was a constant need for authors to write back to the Branch for clarification on issues or for the original documents to be sent for closer reading. Overall it was considered cumbersome and suggested a simplistic view of the historical process – that the facts having been recorded, the history would speak largely ‘for itself’. ‘I was totally hostile to the whole system of narrative,’ Murphy recalled later of his time as a narrator at the Branch:

I didn’t think that any self-respecting historian would ever be content to let other people do all the basic research for him ... and he would then take up their work without ever having seen the original documents. Never the less it was the British system of doing it and in those days we had to rely on the co-operation of the British to a very large extent.⁹⁷

On the other hand, the split system had significant advantages which seem often to have been overlooked by its critics. The Narratives enhanced the flow of information among participants, both in New Zealand and across the Commonwealth. This could lead to a broader perspective across the War Histories in general. Multiple copies of a Narrative could be made, allowing up to four or five to be in use at any one time. These could be circulated as source material or for question and comment, even while the master copy was being used by an author to write up his volume. In the case of Christopher Buckley’s

⁹⁶ Letter, Ross to Fairbrother, 4 November 1946, MS-2702/005, Hocken.

⁹⁷ Interview, W.E. Murphy with Glyn Harper, 27 January 1993, Harper Archive.

booklet and the Australian and British volumes on both Crete and the Desert War, exposure to the New Zealand narratives lead to the New Zealand perspective being more strongly represented than would otherwise have been the case.⁹⁸

For the New Zealand Branch, the Narratives also allowed recruitment of higher quality authors than if they had been limited to those living in Wellington or close enough to the Branch to work directly off the primary documents. The appointment of authors such as Rhodes scholars Dan Davin and Geoffrey Cox and university professors, Neville Phillips and F.L.W. Wood, lent credibility to the project and, along with the appointment of Kippenberger as Editor,⁹⁹ helped focus a sense of ‘status and prestige’¹⁰⁰ on the Histories.

Historiographically, however, the author / narrator split was simplistic, primarily because it overlooked hermeneutic, the crucial step of internal criticism that allowed a nuanced reading of primary sources. While heuristic sought to identify documents and to authenticate, date, order and sort them, hermeneutic asked after issues of interpretation. These could be both functional, such as the context in which a document was produced, and psychological, such as the mental state and motivation of the individual who produced it. While hermeneutic may have been considered at first too academic or ‘highbrow’¹⁰¹ to be of concern to the War Histories, understanding the context, relationship and intention between the sender and recipient of a document soon proved central to the level of detail and critical analysis characteristic of the Branch’s work. Hermeneutic was central, for example, to both *Battle for Egypt* and *Crete*, but especially to *Crete* where Davin’s ability to justify his criticism of the New Zealand commanders relied on his interpretation of records and the assumed psychological state of the officers who sent or received them.

⁹⁸ See for example, letter, Latham to Kippenberger, 19 August 1955, IA1 181/3/3/part III; Playfair to Kippenberger, 22 January 1953, IA1, 181/3/3a, NA.

⁹⁹ ‘Personalities – Sir Howard Kippenberger: Quiet Man Tells the War Story of New Zealand’, *Dominion*, 7 August 1954.

¹⁰⁰ Interview, Robin Kay with Glyn Harper, 11 January 1995, Harper Archive.

¹⁰¹ ‘Humours in History: Kippenberger talks of “the Big Book”’, *Evening Star*, 15 August 1947.

Under the author / narrator split, hermeneutic fell potentially outside the brief of both authors and narrators. It was not a direct concern of the narrators, who collated documents and constructed Narratives but were not expected to engage in analysis or interpretation. Nor, however, was this necessarily possible for authors, who were expected to work largely off the Narratives and given only those documents deemed relevant or for which they specifically asked. While it is true that some of the narrators, as ‘MA with honours in history types’,¹⁰² did not have the officer training to appreciate the significance of Operational Orders, for example, and merely ‘consolidated’¹⁰³ information or gave only ‘disappointingly short extracts’,¹⁰⁴ very few of the authors were trained historians. While they were much more likely to grasp the military significance of a point, they did not necessarily have the critical technique to consider hermeneutic themselves.

In the event, hermeneutic was most often a collective undertaking, conducted by the Branch as a whole and by the group of commanders and interested others to whom Kippenberger circulated drafts and documents for comment. While the unit histories each had designated committees made up of representatives from the unit to oversee the drafts and general writing of the volumes, chapter drafts for the campaign volumes were circulated on an ad hoc basis. Regular participants included the surviving battalion commanders and Brigadiers of the Division such as Bill Gentry,¹⁰⁵ Keith Stewart,¹⁰⁶ Steve Weir,¹⁰⁷ Jim Burrows,¹⁰⁸ Ian Bonifant,¹⁰⁹ R.C. Queree,¹¹⁰ L.M. Inglis,¹¹¹ Edward

¹⁰² ‘Humours in History: Kippenberger talks of “the Big Book”’, *Evening Star*, 15 August 1947.

¹⁰³ Ronald Walker, ‘The New Zealand Second World War History Project’, *Military Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (February, 1969), p. 179.

¹⁰⁴ Letter, Ross to Fairbrother, 4 November 1946, MS-2702/005, Hocken.

¹⁰⁵ Maj. Gen W.G. Gentry, CB, CBE, DSO and bar, m.i.d., MC (Greek), Bronze Star (U.S.), at times Deputy Chief of General Staff (DCGS), Commander NZ troops in Egypt, 9 Bde Italy. (These and following biographical footnotes contain appointments held during the war only)

¹⁰⁶ Maj. Gen R.L. Stewart, CB, CBE, DSO, m.i.d., MC (Greek), Legion of Merit (U.S.), at times DCGS, Commander 5 Bde, 4 Armoured Bde, 9 Bde (2NZEF Japan).

¹⁰⁷ Maj. Gen. Sir S. Weir, KBE, CB, CBE, DSO and bar, m.i.d., at times Commander Royal Artillery 2 NZ Div, Commander 2 NZ Div.

¹⁰⁸ Brig. J.T. Burrows, DSO and bar, ED, m.i.d., Order of Valour (Greek), at times Commanding Officer 20 Bn, 20 Bn and Armoured Regiment, 4 Bde, 5 Bde, 6 Bde.

Puttick,¹¹² and General Freyberg himself, but material was also sent to Non Commissioned Officers (NCOs) and Other Ranks contacted for a specific event or on the recommendation of another reader. This could also include, through the links with other Commonwealth Branches, commanders of other Allied forces who had fought alongside New Zealanders in the campaigns. Through the circulation of both Narratives and drafts, the context and circumstances behind a document could be gradually pieced together and the subjective element, such as the intention of actors now dead, could be interpreted and brought to significance. This collective approach to the Histories, while remarkably time-consuming, gave authenticity and allowed a degree of critical examination that was the envy of other Branches.¹¹³

Either way, the author / narrator split became increasingly specious as the project continued. The full range of Narratives was difficult to complete. After the first flush from 1947 to 1949 that enabled the campaign authors to begin writing, momentum gradually slowed as staff left and typists proved scarce¹¹⁴ until ‘there were soon too few narrators for even one to be allocated to each major campaign’.¹¹⁵ It became difficult to keep production going. By 1953 the Narratives had bogged completely¹¹⁶ as narrators were needed to pick up work on the volumes themselves. The last Narrative was not completed until 1956. By this time 23 of the 48 volumes had been either published or fully drafted. Of the unit histories, for example, the great majority were written without

¹⁰⁹ Brig I.L. Bonifant, DSO and bar, ED, m.i.d., at times Commander 25 Bn, Divisional Cavalry, 6 Bde, 5 Bde.

¹¹⁰ Brig R.C. Queree, CBE, DSO, m.i.d., at times GSO1 2 NZ Div, Brigadier General Staff NZ Corps, Commander 5 Field Regiment, CRA 2 NZ Div.

¹¹¹ Maj. Gen. L.M. Inglis, CB, CBE, DSO and bar, MC, VD, ED, m.i.d., MC (Greek), at times Commander 27 (Machine Gun) Bn, 4 Infantry Bde, 4 Armoured Bde, GOC 2 NZ Div.

¹¹² Lt Gen. Sir Edward Puttick, KCB, DSO and bar, m.i.d., MC (Greek), Legion of Merit (U.S.), at times Commander 4 Bde, 2 NZ Div, Chief of General Staff (CGS) and GOC NZ Military Forces.

¹¹³ Letters, Stacey to Kippenberger, 19 January 1956, IA1 181/3/2, NA; Latham to Kippenberger, 14 September 1955, WAIL, 11, No. 6, NA; Memo, Kippenberger to Cabinet, 25 November 1955, IA1 181/5/1, NA; Letter, Playfair to Kippenberger, 22 January 1953, IA1 181/3/3a, NA.

¹¹⁴ Letter, Kippenberger to Ross, 22 April 1955, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

¹¹⁵ Walker, p. 177.

¹¹⁶ Letter, Kippenberger to Ross, 22 April 1955, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

Narratives to the Italian campaign, authors being left to rely on unit diaries and personal communications instead.

In some respects this was mitigated as the division between narrators and authors blurred as the project went on. Many of the young narrators at the Branch were already writing for the Episodes and Studies at the time that the main volumes were being written, working their Narratives on particular events into short publications to maintain public interest while the larger volumes were got underway. The most popular booklet,¹¹⁷ *The Other Side of the Hill*,¹¹⁸ for example, contained chapters by Ian Wards, Murphy, Ron Walker and Robin Kay, all narrators, each chapter taken from the Narratives they were working on at the time. Because of distance and time, narrators often became far more closely involved in the material for the volumes than did the authors themselves. They also spent considerable time correcting errors and rewriting sections of drafts¹¹⁹ and were prepared to defend their positions at some length.¹²⁰ The debates between Murphy as narrator of the Crete campaign and Davin as author will be discussed in Chapter 4, while a wrangle over the origins of New Zealand's involvement in the Greek campaign saw the young Ian Wards take on not only the British historians Maj Gen Ian Playfair and Professor J.R.M. Butler, who along with his duties at the Official Histories was also the Regius Professor of History at Cambridge, but also criticise Lord Wilson and Winston Churchill himself for being 'duplicitous' for their part in organizing the campaign.¹²¹ Although Wards was eventually 'firmly and satisfactorily'¹²² dismissed by Butler, it was typical, perhaps, of him to have engaged in over a year's worth of heated exchange in pursuit of what he believed to have been the truth,¹²³ and typical of Kippenberger also, as Editor, to have let him.

¹¹⁷ Letter, Kippenberger to Freyberg, 13 January 1956, IA1 181/3/3 part IV, NA.

¹¹⁸ *The Other Side of the Hill*, Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1952.

¹¹⁹ Walker, pp 177-8.

¹²⁰ Interview, Robin Kay with Glyn Harper, 30 December 1992, Harper Archive.

¹²¹ See correspondence, Wards, Kippenberger, Playfair and Butler, 5 October 1954 – 25 October 1955, IA1 181/3/3a, NA.

¹²² Letter, Kippenberger to Butler, 18 October 1955, IA1 181/3/3a, NA.

¹²³ Letter, Wards to Kippenberger, 25 October 1955, IA1 181/3/3a, NA.

Several of those originally employed as narrators stayed to become stalwarts of the Branch. Maintaining author numbers over such an extended period was a constant frustration for Kippenberger. ‘There is nothing to hold up the authors now,’ he wrote a little unkindly in 1955,

except their own lack of diligence, muddle-headedness, and their other numerous failings. And of course some are always going off on holidays ... or dying (three have died), or getting tired of the job (two), or getting sick (three), or just plain being sacked by me (about half a dozen). I am all the time hounding them on.¹²⁴

As the War Histories progressed and the original authors left the Branch for other projects, narrators increasingly took over uncompleted volumes or began works from scratch in an effort to see the series completed. With their close proximity to and deep knowledge of the sources, the narrators were the obvious choice for these jobs. But it was also, Ron Walker suggests, a commitment to the project as a whole that saw them accept ‘unsuitable working accommodation and low salaries through a sort of dedication to see the [War Histories] completed.’¹²⁵ Having written the Narratives of Crete, Murphy took over from Geoffrey Cox to complete the campaign volume *The Relief of Tobruk*, published in 1961. He also wrote the history of his own unit, the New Zealand Divisional Artillery in 1966, after he left the Branch. Walker, who had been narrator for *Battle for Egypt*, took over after Scoullar’s death to complete the second of the Alamein volumes, *Alam Halfa to Alamein*, published in 1967. Wards, having compiled the Greece narrative for author Monty McClymont, went on to write his own volume, *Takrouna*, in 1951. Robin Kay, who had joined as an editorial assistant under Bill Glue and had also prepared narratives for Alamein, Tripoli and the Italian campaign, was asked to write the unit history of the 27 (Machine Gun) Bn, published in 1958 and the second volume on the Italian campaign, *Cassino to Trieste*, 1967. The history of the Machine Gun Battalion had presented ‘special problems’ due to the dispersed nature of the unit, spread across all

¹²⁴ Letter, Kippenberger to Freyberg, 13 January 1956, IA1 181/3/3 part IV, NA, (Parentheses in the original).

¹²⁵ Walker, p. 179.

other Battalions and across all campaigns. It was Kay's wide experience as a narrator and his close readings of other volumes while on the editorial team that made it possible for him to complete such a complicated task.¹²⁶ Even Bill Glue, as the long-standing sub-editor at the Branch, was called on to write, completing the 20 Bn and Armoured Regiment history for D.J.C. Pringle in 1957.¹²⁷

In this way the distinction between author and narrator dissolved as the project continued. Although it is possible that the lack of writing experience among the young university graduates may have hindered them completing the first volumes themselves, it was their lack of experience in another area, military leadership, that was considered the more important. The preferred authors for the New Zealand War Histories were high profile individuals who had first hand experience of battle, if not in this war in the previous one. It was expected that their accounts and analyses would not be accepted by the New Zealand public unless they did. This was in direct contrast to the British model which adopted the principle that 'no-one should be employed to write the history of operations in which he had himself played a major and responsible part'¹²⁸ on the grounds that they were 'likely to have already formed strong opinions on controversial matters which it was desirable that a historian should discuss with an open mind'.¹²⁹ In the close social and military circles of New Zealand, however, participation was seen as favourable, if not essential for, as Monty McClymont maintained, 'to get facts out of ex-officers one must have a good war record and military knowledge or know them as friends personally'.¹³⁰ This was borne out by the early, unsuccessful, attempts at interviews by narrators - they were later left largely to the authors - and also by comments by Ian Bonifant, Commander of the 6 Brigade (Bde) at Cassino who, on hearing from Kippenberger that he had been "given the works" by a young civilian author for his part in the battle, replied that he

¹²⁶ Interview, Robin Kay with Glyn Harper, 11 January 1995, Harper Archive.

¹²⁷ See also Interview, Bill Glue with Glyn Harper, 19 January 1995, Harper Archive.

¹²⁸ Butler, 'British Official Military Histories'.

¹²⁹ Butler, 'British Official Military Histories'.

¹³⁰ Letter, McClymont to Ross, 7 February 1947, MS-2702/005, Hocken. (Underlining in the original.)

‘wouldn’t bother’ to respond as ‘the guy wasn’t there so [he, Bonifant] wasn’t going to worry’.¹³¹

Participation in a campaign was also seen as providing compassion and a genuine understanding of the realities of warfare that made the criticisms in the volumes the more valid, and the more poignant. As Murphy expressed it in *The Relief of Tobruk*:

Except for Hitler and Goering in the prologue, there are no villains – only men perhaps misguided or mistaken at some junctures. All do their best and most do it under conditions of danger and urgency, merely suggested [in the volume], which are fully understood only by those who knew the real thing.¹³²

It was ‘the real thing’ that enabled Davin to write with compassion of Brigadier James Hargest, Commander of 5 Bde, and his apparent incompetence during the Battle of Crete and Scoullar to balance his criticism of the reluctance of the British Armour during the fighting at El Alamein with a description of the horror of being ‘cooked up’ in a tank under attack.¹³³ It enabled Llewellyn to stir his ‘unit and ex servicemen generally’ to ‘live again the many varied and rich experiences of the army life’¹³⁴ and Angus Ross to write of the elation of participating in a charge, rising above fear and frustration in a sense of joint endeavour. These were collective experiences, shared between authors and others who had participated in war and, through the Histories, increasingly relatable to soldiers’ families and members of the general public. The participation of authors in the campaigns helped to move what they wrote from military history of now distant battles into a national history of a war in which everyone had been involved to a certain extent whether, as Kippenberger maintained, they realised it or not.¹³⁵ The ability to harness this

¹³¹ Interview, Ian Bonifant with Glyn Harper, 15 August 1992, Harper Archive.

¹³² W.E. Murphy, *The Relief of Tobruk*, Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1961, p. v.

¹³³ J.L. Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt, the Summer of 1942*, Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1955, p. 300.

¹³⁴ D.L. Wood, ‘Radio Review: *Journey towards Christmas*’ 4YA, 19 December 1949, IA1 181/7/29B, NA.

¹³⁵ Kippenberger, ‘Radio Address’, IA1, 181/5/1, NA.

experience balanced against the empirical skills of the narrators is perhaps the most enduring legacy of the author / narrator split in the War History project and the one which gives the volumes most authenticity as national stories of war.

There was none at the War History Branch for whom participation was more relevant than Kippenberger, whose own military experience had won him not only the respect of seemingly all who fought or worked with him¹³⁶ but also the right of his team to critically evaluate the decisions and contribution of others. Kippenberger's life and successes have made him the subject of a number of biographies and studies, as a soldier, a leader and scholar.¹³⁷ All write of his abilities in military leadership, his intellect, popular support and the quiet authority that contributed to his appointment as Editor-in-Chief of the War Histories. 'Quiet, intense and seriously maimed,' Glyn Harper suggests, 'Kippenberger to many symbolised the triumphs and tragedies of New Zealand's wars'.¹³⁸ While Harper believes the appointment to Editor-in-Chief would have been Kippenberger's 'dream job',¹³⁹ a more recent biographer, Denis McLean, perceives the extent to which it may also have been a step down from the 'wide stage' of military and Commonwealth affairs he had been a part of in England to a life increasingly defined by pain, the grind of historical production and 'the small world of [New Zealand] bureaucracy'.¹⁴⁰

Studies of Kippenberger have emphasised the importance of his extensive military library and the influence of this on his understanding of military strategy and command on the battlefield. Admiration for this knowledge has led some biographers and his contemporaries to label Kippenberger as a skilled military historian as well as a military leader. It is important to note, however, that during both his time on the battlefield and up

¹³⁶ Denis McLean, *Howard Kippenberger: Dauntless Spirit, a Life of an Outstanding New Zealand Leader*, Auckland: Random House, 2008.

¹³⁷ Glyn Harper, *Kippenberger An Inspired New Zealand Commander*, Auckland: HarperCollins, 2005; Emmet McElhatton, 'The Strategic Thinking of Major-General Sir Howard Kippenberger', Discussion Paper 06/08, Centre for Strategic Studies New Zealand, Victoria University of Wellington, 2008; Denis McLean, *Howard Kippenberger: Dauntless Spirit, a Life of an Outstanding New Zealand Leader*, Auckland: Random House, 2008.

¹³⁸ Harper, 'Kippenberger, Oxford Companion', p. 263.

¹³⁹ Harper, *Kippenberger, An Inspired New Zealand Commander*, p. 271.

¹⁴⁰ McLean, p. 295.

to his appointment to the Branch, Kippenberger was not a historian. He was an erudite and extremely well read 'student of history' but he had neither the historical training nor the skills in evaluating and writing from primary sources of a working historian. His knowledge in this respect was far less, for example, than that of Eric McCormick, whom he replaced, or of Ruth Ross to whom he had to confess 'I am just not scholar enough to give the scholarly definition of my views and policy on the function, limitations and editing of official documents, the absence of which Mrs Ross rightfully regrets'.¹⁴¹

Although he had drafted his memoir, *Infantry Brigadier*, by the time he began work at the Branch, this was still three years away from publication and while his was a 'universally acknowledged classic'¹⁴² of its kind, a memoir is not a history. A comparison of its chapters with the Official Histories covering the same campaigns will testify to this fact.

What is very apparent from biographies of Kippenberger, however, is the loyalty that he evoked in those who fought and worked with him. This was also evident in the interviews carried out by Glyn Harper with retired members of the War History Branch. McLean relates that when he asked two-times Victoria Cross (VC) winner, Charles Upham and Kippenberger's fellow 20 Bn Commander Brigadier, Jim Burrows, 'what they would say in criticism of Howard Kippenberger', they seemed 'not only nonplussed but shocked at the very idea'.¹⁴³ Kippenberger's lack of experience as a historian was more than compensated for by the many other attributes he brought to the editorial position: respect, prestige and, not least, a firm but constructive handling of his staff. As Bill Glue reflected:

You could say what you liked to Kip. You were very respectful – always called him Sir - but I enjoyed working with him ... If Kip wanted something, you talked it over. You had to have a good reason to disagree with what he wanted, but if you produced a good

¹⁴¹ Kippenberger, 'Letters to the Editor', *Landfall*, Vol. 9, No. 1, March 1955, p. 93.

¹⁴² Maj Gen Piers Reid, 'Foreword', Harper, *Kippenberger, An Inspired New Zealand Commander*, p. 7.

¹⁴³ McLean, p. 13.

enough reason he was reasonable and would listen ... He was easy to work with, very good to work with.¹⁴⁴

Ian Wards, also, remembered the challenges and rewards:

He did have some fairly strong views. In some of these he made you think very very carefully about what you yourself were producing in certain elements of the story. I'm not aware of any stage where, if you disagreed with him and produced evidence to support your disagreement, he ever made it difficult for that different view to be published. He would accept it on good evidence. ... He knew his soldiers, he knew his military scene, tactically, he was learning about government, he was very judicious in an unassuming manner ... these attributes are not easy to describe. They are either present in a person or not present.¹⁴⁵

Ian Wards own exchange with the British historians, in which Kippenberger 'let Wards have his say'¹⁴⁶ even though he did not agree with him, supports this idea of a management style that fostered debate and recognition of talent, regardless of rank. In this respect, Kippenberger's leadership both reflected and encouraged the egalitarian ideals behind the project as a national history and in which mention – irrespective of rank – was very much a 'literary medal'.¹⁴⁷

One of Kippenberger's greatest contributions to the Branch was his insistence on an absence of censorship of the War History volumes. This was something he established very early on. Having conferred directly with Fraser, he had secured within six weeks of his appointment an assurance of no censorship along with what was effectively its opposite: indemnity for liability over material included at the government's insistence but against his own wishes as Editor-in-Chief.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Interview, Bill Glue with Glyn Harper, 19 January 1995, Harper Archive.

¹⁴⁵ Interview, Ian Wards with Glyn Harper, 30 December 1992, Harper Archive.

¹⁴⁶ Letter, Kippenberger to Butler, 18 October 1955, IA1 181/3/3a, NA.

¹⁴⁷ 'Literary medal' the term is Jock Phillips', cited Rabel, p. 61.

¹⁴⁸ Memo, Kippenberger to Fraser, 19 August 1946, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

The issue of censorship called into focus the very purpose of the War Histories and is the final point at which they differed significantly from the Centennial project. As a first official sweep across the field of New Zealand history, the Centennial series could take license to avoid inflammatory or contentious topics. It is now well recognised that Native Affairs and religion, for example, were both considered too ‘delicate’ to be topics of investigation,¹⁴⁹ and that material on the 1860s wars was removed from James Cowan’s *Settlers and Pioneers* volume. The volume on Social Security by W.B. Sutch was also considered too inflammatory and was withdrawn from publication due in part to its critical tone and unwillingness, according to Heenan, to “show the bright side of our national progress”.¹⁵⁰ The much awaited volume by Sir Apirana Ngata on the lives and roles of Maori over the previous one hundred years also never came to fruition. While McCormick attributed this to Ngata being ‘perpetually busy and a procrastinator’¹⁵¹ it seems likely that the gap between a simplistic institutional view of Maori society and the complex iwi histories and intertribal politics of the time also contributed.

The War Histories did not have the luxury of omission. Required to deal with the complete record, their role was to provide, Kippenberger maintained, an account of the war ‘without fear or favour, without malice or concealment’.¹⁵² The scope of the series and the detail in which each battle was covered also meant that omissions would not be easily achieved in the face of an astute and critical readership. The publication of the three *Documents* volumes in print runs of 1,500, indicated the extent to which it was

¹⁴⁹ Hilliard, p. 37; Rachel Barrowman, ‘History and Romance: the Making of the Centennial Surveys’ in William Renwick, (ed.), *Creating a National Spirit: Celebrating New Zealand’s Centennial*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004, p. 167.

¹⁵⁰ Draft memo, Heenan to Nash, 4 March 1941, MS-papers 1132-296, ATL, cited Barrowman, ‘History and Romance’, p.170.

¹⁵¹ McCormick, ‘Centennial’, p. 142; McCormick attributes the chapter by Ngata that did appear in I.L.G. Sutherland’s *Maori People of Today* in the Centennial year to Sutherland following Ngata ‘around with a notebook and a pencil’, something McCormick was ‘not prepared to do’. I.L.G. Sutherland, (ed.), *Maori People of Today: A General Survey*, New Zealand: Whitcombe & Tombs for the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs and the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1940.

¹⁵² Kippenberger, ‘Radio Address’, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

assumed New Zealanders would want to analyse and verify such matters for themselves.¹⁵³

The publication of wartime records and documents in the tense post-war environment presented both potential embarrassment to commanders and a security risk to the governments involved. Although some degree of pressure or ministerial veto was standard within the Commonwealth War History projects,¹⁵⁴ Kippenberger's contract accepted the input of the Chiefs of Staff for 'technical military secrets'¹⁵⁵ only. '[B]ut I am not,' he wrote as he negotiated the finer points of its application with Shannahan, Acting Permanent Head of the Prime Minister's Office, 'going to accept the Services as the final authority in any other respect and I am glad that this has been made clear'.¹⁵⁶ 'I will not be exposed to unjustified censorship by the Services concerned on ... matters which are now for history, but on which the Services may be sensitive – and are.'¹⁵⁷

The limited role of the Chiefs of Staff in New Zealand, and lack of government censorship of the Branch in general, was very much a reflection of Kippenberger's personal standing and was guaranteed only for the length of his appointment. '[S]o long as you are Editor-in-Chief,' Shannahan wrote of the agreement,

the Chiefs of Staff are happy to repose a large degree of confidence in your discretion on the understanding that you will refer any doubtful cases for their discretion. But should your appointment ever be filled by a person with less than your military experience a stricter scheme will have to be evolved.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵³ See again, for example, debate between Ruth Ross and Kippenberger, 'Letters to the Editor', *Landfall*, Vols. 8 - 10, 1954-6.

¹⁵⁴ Letter, Latham to Kippenberger, 14 September 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA; see also for example, Cook, p. 136-7.

¹⁵⁵ Memo, Kippenberger to Shannahan, 11 February 1949, IA1 181/35, NA.

¹⁵⁶ Memo, Kippenberger to Shannahan, 22 April 1949, IA1 181/35, NA.

¹⁵⁷ Memo, Kippenberger to Shannahan, 11 February 1949, IA1, 181/35, NA.

¹⁵⁸ Memo, Shannahan to Kippenberger, 2 March 1950, IA1, 181/35, NA.

While an absence of censorship, however, did not automatically imply the right to criticise, they did come together over ‘lessons’ to be learned from the War Histories. That the historical record should be an instructive guide was held dear by Kippenberger, who, as has been noted, was extensively read in military history and seemed able to draw an historical precedent for almost any combat situation he was in.¹⁵⁹ The absence of an accurate account of WWI as a firm guide was something he had felt acutely as a Territorial commander in the bleak interwar period, ‘twelve years’ as Murphy later described it, ‘of military makeshift and heartbreak – even of ridicule’.¹⁶⁰ The lack of histories and ensuing lack of awareness was emphasised in his first radio address as Editor-in-Chief:

[I]t would be wrong if generations grew up ignorant of our part in the catastrophe that we have survived and unaware of the sacrifices made for them. The generations of children who grew up after 1918 were told next to nothing in the schools and perhaps the ignorance of those generations ... and the warped views that consequently gained credence, were partly responsible for our blindness and unreadiness before 1939...¹⁶¹

While political figures and public servants might reasonably expect to come under scrutiny, criticism of military personnel and leaders in contemporary Official History was more problematic. As analytical works rather than ‘barren chronicles’ it was important that in War Histories ‘something must be said about these things’.¹⁶² As public records and reference texts, however, the matter was all the more delicate. Explaining the situation to the Wellington Historical Association in 1952, Kippenberger painted a somewhat optimistic picture:

the policy is to give the fullest information while exercising the greatest of caution in the matter of judgements. It may now appear from the incidents of war as recorded that some

¹⁵⁹ Murphy, ‘Appreciation’, WAI, 11, Box 4, NA, and cited in a number of newspapers recording Kippenberger’s passing.

¹⁶⁰ Murphy, ‘Appreciation’, WAI, 11, Box 4, NA.

¹⁶¹ Kippenberger, ‘Radio Address’, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

¹⁶² Letter, Kippenberger to Freyberg, 11 August 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

errors were made by one or another of our commanders. These men risked and sometimes gave their lives for us; it is sufficient and proper if the published history permits the reader to draw the inference that here, or there, an error lies. There is no call for the book to say so bluntly. Such things may be said in staff colleges and history classrooms in future, and on the authority of the War History; but it is not the function of the Official Historian.¹⁶³

In reality, Davin's volume on Crete, soon to be so closely scrutinised by readers for its critical evaluations, was in its last drafts at the time of this speech, while Scoullar's shrill and hard-hitting assessment of the failings of British command and British armour was also well underway. Both were strident in their own manner. Certainly neither seemed to rely on 'inference' to bring home their principal analyses. However, Glyn Harper's close reading of *Infantry Brigadier* and both these and other Official Histories against the war records has identified a number of points at which Kippenberger intercepted criticism to spare the reputation of the commander or individual involved, taking the blame upon himself at times in preference.¹⁶⁴

Balanced criticism in contemporary Official History was difficult to achieve. It was another area where Kippenberger's military experience and personal influence as Editor-in-Chief held sway. Under the model of 'objective distance' used by the British, Butler, who knew 'little or nothing of the stories the historians have to tell'¹⁶⁵ was 'adverse' to cutting or advising on the text unless it was proved by the military panel to be factually incorrect.¹⁶⁶ As an academic who did not 'pretend to be a strategist',¹⁶⁷ a military expert or 'still less a general',¹⁶⁸ he was not prepared to comment on the decisions of commanders and preferred where necessary to 'leave it to the narrative to show how

¹⁶³ Kippenberger, 'Address to the Wellington Historical Association', 21 October 1952, Private Collection.
¹⁶⁴ Harper, *Kippenberger, an Inspired New Zealand Commander*, pp. 136-37, 152-54, 163-64, 218, 264-65.
¹⁶⁵ Letter, Latham to Kippenberger, 14 September 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.
¹⁶⁶ Letter, Latham to Kippenberger, 14 September 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.
¹⁶⁷ Letter, Butler to Kippenberger, 7 April 1955, IA1, 181/3/3a, NA.
¹⁶⁸ Letter, Butler to Kippenberger, 7 April 1955, IA1, 181/3/3a, NA.

completely we failed'.¹⁶⁹ Kippenberger, on the other hand, was more engaged. 'Without setting myself up as a military expert,' he wrote to Butler,

and admitting that I belong to the lowest class of generals I do feel that even an official historian is entitled, in fact that it is his business, to point out that a plan was ill-considered, that vital factors were disregarded and that the results were what should have been expected if he is satisfied that the case is clear. The high ranks of those responsible should not protect their decisions from examination and comment. Surely it can be done without offence and without any pretensions to infallibility and I feel rather strongly that it should be done We will do a little more than leave it to the narrative to show how completely we failed, but we will not be offensive or impertinent.¹⁷⁰

In this way the New Zealand Branch proved itself willing to engage directly with criticism of strategies and commanders and to present these to the national readership as a means by which they might assess the conflict in which they had taken part. It was the combination of empirical historical method and the participation of the authors and others at the Branch in the war, and Kippenberger in particular, that conferred this right to criticise. It was the participation of the nation in the war that had given them the right to receive it.

Thus the War History project can be seen as intrinsically linked to contemporary notions of nationhood and citizenship as they were manifest in New Zealand in the interwar and post-war periods. Precedents set by the Centennial project confirmed a role for empirical history in providing a balanced assessment of national identity and as grounds for cultural advancement. The expanded view of citizenship emphasised a well informed engagement with contemporary issues and as well as recognition of the abilities and contributions of everyday New Zealanders.

¹⁶⁹ Letter, Butler to Kippenberger, 7 April 1955, IA1, 181/3/3a, NA.

¹⁷⁰ Letter, Kippenberger to Butler, 18 April 1955, IA1 181/3/3a, NA.

The view that empirically based history could and should guide and define the national tradition lead to the unit history volumes of the battalion and service units of the Division being formally incorporated into the War History project¹⁷¹ and thus for the Branch to engage with not just the empirical record with but personal and collective memories of the war. The individual approaches of the authors to their subject lead to a wide variety of styles within the unit histories, reflected in the techniques used to position the war in post-war society and the relationship between the war, citizenship and participation. The case studies selected for the next two chapters show very different approaches and interpretations of the unit history role. Both, however, provide clear examples of the interplay between history, memory, nation and war within the War History project.

¹⁷¹ This was with the exception of the 3rd Division units who fought in the Pacific where arrangements had been made prior to the establishment of the Branch to produce unit histories through an independent committee.

Chapter 2: 'A Crazy Delightful Contraption'¹

Journey Towards Christmas; Memory

Journey towards Christmas, the history of the 1st Ammunition Company, was written by unit driver S.P. Llewellyn and published in 1949. It was the first of the unit histories, or indeed of any of the major volumes, to be published by the Branch. Appearing less than four years after the return of the New Zealand troops from the European theatre, it attracted much public attention and was seen as an important indicator for the rest of the series.

Fortunately for the Branch it was a remarkable book. While light hearted and engaging, it was also sensitive and full of descriptive detail. This, along with its novel-like prose, encouraged empathy and identification with the unit and their experiences to an unusual degree. Far from being representative of the series, however, *Journey towards Christmas* was acknowledged as a lucky exception and of a style and quality the Branch would be unlikely to produce again.² Because he recognised that it conveyed the subjective experience of war far beyond the ability of most soldiers to express it for themselves, Kippenberger promoted the book vigorously. He endorsed it as 'the best book on the New Zealand soldier that has been published' and as being representative of not only the company drivers, or even the Army Service Corps (ASC) to which they belonged, but of the Division as a whole.³

Journey towards Christmas sat at the very edge of what was anticipated for the unit history series. While it carried the label Official, it was less formal and, having been

¹ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas: Official History of the 1st Ammunition Company, Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force 1939-45*, Wellington: War History Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs, 1949, p. 118.

² Letter Kippenberger to General Freyberg, 30 July 1948, IA1 181/7/29A, NA

³ Letter, Kippenberger to all reviewing newspapers, 29 October 1949, IA1 181/7/29A, NA.

written largely off Llewellyn's diaries, less empirically based than the volumes that were to follow. As a memoir and unit souvenir, it roamed loosely over the historical landscape, recording some events at the expense of others and blurring the lines at times between fair historical representation and tactful omission. Carrying the reader along on a wave of descriptive detail, it read somewhat like an extended letter home. And like a letter home, full of 'euphemism and good cheer'⁴, it represented the view perhaps of the war that men of the 2NZEF would have preferred to have shared with their relatives, if they had had the time and abilities. *Journey towards Christmas* was also replete with the popular themes of the war and of war experience. Four in particular will be examined: the war as the attainment of personal and national maturity; the war as a step from naivety into worldliness; the assumed national characteristics of camaraderie, egalitarianism and rugged resourcefulness; and the anti-heroic ironic tone often associated with the war. As well as being affirming, these themes helped to position the memory of the war in post-war society and form the first focus of this chapter.

Although *Journey towards Christmas* was written for members of the 1st Ammunition Company, it was, like all unit histories, available to the general public. Protecting the privacy of individuals' more intense experiences from the gaze of the wider readership resulted in a dual narrative and subtle layers of inference and silence that ran beneath the chatter and bonhomie of the text. Such was the quality of Llewellyn's writing that this seemed to have gone largely unnoticed by the general public. Indeed, many of the literary devices employed in *Journey towards Christmas* are now recognised by critics as tools of 'non-representation': 'signal ways' that prompt or convey a sense of events to those who recognise their significance while in the 'very act of avoiding the telling' in the text itself.⁵ The second focus of this chapter is to examine three of these devices, landscape description, unanimist rhetoric and humour, to explore the relationship between historical and literary modes in historical writing, and in Official Histories in particular.

⁴ 'Euphemism and good cheer': Alistair Thomson, 'Anzac Stories: Using Personal Testimony in War History', *War & Society*, Vol. 25, No. 2, (October, 2006), p. 6.

⁵ Lea Wernick Fridman, *Words and Witness: Narrative and Aesthetic Strategies in the Representation of the Holocaust*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2000, p. 3.

In its combination of style, themes and literary devices, *Journey towards Christmas* aligned the nationally favoured view of the New Zealand soldier with unit members' own experiences and provided a framework for individual, collective and, as will be argued, national memory. The third focus of this chapter is the role of narrative and memoir in the War Histories in contributing to a tolerable national memory of the war. Using frameworks provided by Alistair Thomson and Samuel Hynes, the chapter will explore the composure and containment of memory and suggest, in the manner of George Mosse, the idea that a 'myth of war experience'⁶ could still prevail in the New Zealand context after WWII, despite the highly industrialised and mobile nature of that war.

Peter Llewellyn was an English journalist of adventurous disposition resident in New Zealand at the outbreak of the war. He signed up immediately and departed with the first echelon, serving as a driver with the Ammunition Company through to its disbandment at Trieste in 1945. Having volunteered as the unit historian while in Italy he worked on his return to New Zealand first at the Army Archive and then at the Branch on the Episodes and Studies before beginning his unit history.

Although he had received an English public school education, Llewellyn clearly revelled in the 'cheery, beery' and easygoing lifestyle of the unencumbered New Zealand male.⁷ Described by one of his colleagues as having 'a genius for extracting enjoyment from life', his needs were apparently few: some 'friends, a pint, or if you will, a gallon of beer and a longish piece of string from which, when time allowed, he might suspend his washing'.⁸ It was this light hearted and good natured persona that Llewellyn projected onto his volume and used to characterise the unit as a whole. His life appears to have continued a relatively transitory course after leaving the Branch. Along with a series of

⁶ George Mosse, 'Two World Wars and the Myth of the War Experience', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 21, No. 4, (April, 1986), pp. 491-513,

⁷ Ian McGibbon, 'Llewellyn, Stephen Peter 1913 - 1960'. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, Volume Five (1941-1960), 2000; 'Cheery, beery', the term is Chris Hilliard's: *The Bookmen's Dominion: Cultural Life in New Zealand, 1920 - 1950*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2006.

⁸ L.S. Hart, Review: *Journey Towards Christmas*, undated, IA1 181/7/29B, NA.

moves between England and New Zealand, he worked for a time as a forestry cook, received an MBE for public relations services during the Korean War, and published a number of novels. Llewellyn died in Waikanae in 1960.⁹

Llewellyn was a sensitive and gifted writer, a point which surprised at least one of his officers who had seen him as a ‘problem child’ within the unit.¹⁰ The diary Llewellyn kept throughout the war appears to have been a remarkably full one and suggests that he spent much of his time between engagements honing his descriptive skills on characters and locations. The incorporation of these studies into the history added greatly to its atmosphere and, by tempering its harshness, lent an acceptability, or innocent charm even, to the earthier aspects of army life. A description of an Italian dawn, selected as an extract by several newspaper reviewers in praise of the book, is a good example of both Llewellyn’s writing style and the balance he achieved between delicate detail and the roughhouse nature of an army camp:

They started, those golden days, with a kind of imagined click and a little whisper of wind, as though somewhere in the sky – above Carpinone perhaps – a small door had opened, not wide but just a crack. At once, with a drowsy throatiness that told of sleep-ruffled feathers and tiny yawning beaks, the first bird calls sounded, coinciding, often, with the final despairing echoes of ‘Lili Marlene’ sung positively for the last time by the last returning revellers. Then the door opened wider, silently inch by inch, and the stars paled and went out and all the birds tried over their morning songs. There was a grey moment and a green moment, and golden fingers of light rested on top of cherry trees, and then, with a great unrolling of yellow carpets down all the western hillsides, the sun came. The birds went mad and swept through the drenched branches in clouds, and the cooks woke. They came out of their musty tents, the ones whose turn it was for early duty, and lurched into the sunshine, scratching their tousled heads and glancing grumpily

⁹ McGibbon, ‘Llewellyn, Peter Stephen’.

¹⁰ Letter, A.R. Delley to Kippenberger, 11 December 1949, IA1 181/7/29B, NA.

at the burners. As soon as the burners were alight their hissing roar drowned everything – the bird songs and the strangled snores of the revellers.¹¹

Llewellyn's narrative was built with layer upon layer of such detail. From the 'blue and gold'¹² days early on Crete and the little English tavern rigged up by the unit at Fuka, Egypt - 'it had rafters, yes, and settles carved into the sand'¹³ - to the 'foul and dismaying oneness' of the Alamein flies,¹⁴ attention ranged from the smallest of details to the almost dreamlike quality brought on by the enormity of war. In capturing 'billowing waves of exhaustion',¹⁵ for example, or the strange detachment of a Greek village burning efficiently to the ground 'without any unnecessary fuss or noise',¹⁶ Llewellyn evoked the tangle of emotions and experiences, both bizarre and banal, which in the war had been so 'mixed and mixed'.¹⁷

This gift of descriptive writing drew readers, general and military, into the life of the unit and, as will be discussed, gave authenticity to the four principal themes as Llewellyn presented them. The first of these, war as a journey from innocence to maturity, was dominant throughout the book and traced the working of roguish kiwi lads through the discipline of army life into an effective, if not entirely 'unroguish', military unit. Lines from the opening paragraphs introduced this theme and the humour which characterised the book:

We came from every walk of life – every walk, crawl, shuffle and stampede. Most of us had our homes in Auckland or in the Auckland district, and after breakfast we assembled sixty-five strong at the Drill Hall, Rutland Street ...

¹¹ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 344.

¹² Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 106.

¹³ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 118.

¹⁴ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 247.

¹⁵ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 168.

¹⁶ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 76.

¹⁷ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 23.

Soon we were marching down Queen Street in a blur of rain Not everyone was quite sober and our civilian clothes hung damply about us. Most of us had sugar sacks on our backs and bottles in our pockets, and as we marched, heading for the railway station, we linked arms with girls, called out to friends, and took other steps to demonstrate our amateur status.¹⁸

Descriptions of training, first actions and the hard slog of continued fighting reflected this theme of gradual maturation and the idea of a unit ‘growing up and ... growing together.’¹⁹ Thus one of the principal themes of the War History project – war as an attainment of national maturity - was reflected overtly in this first volume, no matter how light hearted its approach.

Parallel with the theme of maturation in *Journey towards Christmas* was that of worldliness, affirming popular notions of war as a gateway to travel and to seeing the world.²⁰ This was emphasised through Llewellyn’s descriptions of travel scenes and by the unfolding of first time experiences. There was, for example, the wonder of the unit’s first foreign stopover in Colombo - ‘It bewildered and astonished us ... [we] stared and stared’²¹ - and the sighting of their first air raid over Egypt:

The sky above Alexandria was lit up like a Christmas tree. Tinsel and gold baubles and coloured chains scintillated in the darkness ... It was a spectacle that our drivers were to see many times before the war ended but never again would they see it with the same shock of surprise at its beauty, its savagery, its marvellous patterns.²²

¹⁸ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 1.

¹⁹ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 37.

²⁰ Bart Ziino, ‘A Kind of Round Trip: Australian Soldiers and the Tourist Analogy, 1914-1918’, *War & Society*, Vol. 25, No. 2, (October, 2006) pp. 39 – 52. See also for examples, Elanor Fraser, in Megan Hutching, (ed.), *The Desert Road: New Zealanders Remember the North Africa Campaign*, Auckland: HarperCollins / Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2005, pp. 94, 107; Jacob Bacos, in Megan Hutching, (ed.), *A Fair Sort of Battering: New Zealanders Remember the Italian Campaign*, Auckland: HarperCollins / Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2004, p. 79.

²¹ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 12.

²² Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 24.

This theme continued through storybook deserts, biblical lands and Syria and to the ancient civilisations of Italy. Coming from a land that ‘measures time by the extinction of the moa’,²³ this was travel and history indeed.

But there was also travel weariness as the war moved on. A longing permeated the second half of the book as the excitement of travel, and of war, became increasingly replaced with nostalgic and popular images of New Zealand. The emotions of those detailed to return home on the first furlough, not ‘the happiness straight away, only the shock and the ache under the heart and the nearness of tears’,²⁴ or the news of the father who was putting aside a bottle of beer each Saturday night for his son - ‘130 bottles’²⁵ - touched on a softer and more vulnerable side of the unit. Reminiscences of V8s, woolsheds, and the spraying gravel of country roads²⁶ hinted at rural home life which, while a comforting national stereotype, may never have been a reality for many of that Auckland based unit. Even so, as Bart Ziino has noted, a sense of home and faith in the return home often framed soldiers’ war experiences and, as the conclusion to a round journey, provided a familiar trope through which they could be represented to the public.

27

The mixed emphasis on novelty and nostalgia promoted the war as a positive experience and New Zealand as a land worth fighting for. This was affirmed by Llewellyn in his presentation of the New Zealand soldier and was a point seized upon by reviewers for demonstrating, as one enthusiast put it,

all the New Zealand essentials – unfailing initiative and ingenuity, sheer common sense in trouble and danger, and practical but deep-rooted comradeship. Miracles were performed hourly without fuss, a typical grim cheerfulness pervading the show.²⁸

²³ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 316.

²⁴ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 309.

²⁵ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 213.

²⁶ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 446.

²⁷ Ziino, p. 52.

²⁸ Review, *New Zealand Free Lance*, November 1949, copy: IA1 181/7/29B, NA.

Llewellyn's soldiers were youthful, largely uncomplaining, and described almost exclusively in the collective: 'We were young, too, most of us – many were only boys. Hell, it was a great adventure!'²⁹ Much emphasis was given to camaraderie: to bunk raids and bed rolling in the recruitment camp, 'hand-shaking, back-slapping, and all-in wrestling' on the reuniting of the unit after being split up for service, to parties and drinking and singing and, always, to talking, 'on and on and on and round and round and round, mostly about nothing or about private matters But it didn't matter. Nobody was compelled to listen: we knew each other so well'.³⁰

Little attention was given, however, to dissension, violence, or to the consequences of unruly behaviour. References to negative behaviour in *Journey towards Christmas* were often extremely brief. The riots in Cairo at the end of the desert campaign received less than three lines: 'not bad trouble ... foolish trouble'.³¹ While Llewellyn was at pains to record many of the good times of the war, much of what was negative was left to the individual memories of unit members after the war.

Beneath these three themes and underwriting the volume as a whole ran a fourth thread, that of the anti-hero and Llewellyn's refusal to buy in to the values of the war. Llewellyn's drivers were fun-loving and boyish, and to be a boy, as Elizabeth Mathias has since observed, is 'to be energetic, mischievous, and not entirely responsible for one's actions'.³² Llewellyn's drivers retained an innocence that was conspicuously absent from, for example, the infantry soldiers of Angus Ross' *23 Battalion* to which they will be compared in the next chapter. This was picked up by one reviewer for an Australian Returned Services magazine he when wrote:

²⁹ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 67.

³⁰ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, pp. 196, 193 respectively.

³¹ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 311.

³² Elizabeth Mathias, 'A Memorial to Forgetting: Libbie Custer's Re-Visioning of General Custer's Legacy', *War, Literature and the Arts*, Vol. 21, No. 1-2, (January, 2009), p. 29.

Llewellyn, moved by the simplicity of the soldiers and a way of life he has shared for six long years, writes freely of the children [of Italy] and between them and his rough comrades draws a strange analogy – truer perhaps of the Dominion soldiers than of any other.³³

This innocence was outlined early in the volume. Llewellyn's drivers had, on signing up for the army, he maintained, entered into 'a pact with the Devil'. If they had surrendered 'not quite [their] immortal soul', they had given up at least their 'immediate hopes and ambitions', their independence and 'the kindly and familiar ways of home'.³⁴ But what they had gained in return was also a type of freedom, not only from 'the trouble of earning a living' but also, and more significantly in terms of this thesis, from the 'responsibility' of thinking for themselves.³⁵ While they worked hard and played hard, Llewellyn's Ammunition Company lead a curiously passive existence, controlled by the needs, or whims, of the Army. They were frequently uninformed, perennially misinformed, often confused, and always, 'like an extra person in the cab, mouthing and chattering,' accompanied by rumour.³⁶ The very title, *Journey towards Christmas*, as the only volume in the series to have a title beyond the purely functional, alluded to the hopeful but misguided expectation by unit drivers of an early homecoming.

Along with this freedom and lack of responsibility came Llewellyn's consistent refusal to buy into army values. The drunken march down Queen Street and light hearted approach to enlisting was mirrored in his description of the unit's arrival in Egypt. At a time when most units began their desert training in earnest, Llewellyn's drivers were already convinced they had been 'trained to a frazzle':

³³ A.S., 'Review: Journey Towards Christmas', *Stand-To*, (May-June, 1950), p. 17.

³⁴ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 2.

³⁵ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 2.

³⁶ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 212.

We began to count up the hours we had spent in route-marching and on the parade ground and to regret that we had not been able to spend them in learning, say, to play the saxophone or class wool. A sense of waste was heavy upon us.³⁷

Of the victorious march into Tripoli at the conclusion of the desert campaign he was also at pains to separate his unit from the satisfactions and, by association, the values of the conquering heroes:

For others – and we grudged them nothing, for theirs had been the greater danger – the supreme moment of marching into the fallen city to the skirl of pipes. Our own unit began to wiggle towards it with the extreme diffidence of a very young puppy approaching a dead rat.³⁸

Talks by medical officers that left the unit ‘squirming uncomfortably for twenty minutes’ and ‘dedicated to continence’,³⁹ descriptions of the troops sent to Lebanon following the abortive Crusader campaign who harboured an ‘exhilarating sense of grievance’ that enabled them to ‘keep happy’,⁴⁰ and of others who, on arriving in Italy many months later, proudly took ‘possession of several acres of the best mud’,⁴¹ all reflected a similar lack of serious conviction.

While adding significantly to the humour of the volume, this emphasis on dependence coupled with a refusal to take army life seriously can also be seen as Llewellyn’s way of distancing himself and his unit from the responsibility for their behaviour during the war, and thus also from judgement over the individual decisions and actions of the men. The ironic tone adopted was in itself part of the ‘syntax and grammar’ of war,⁴² while the anti-authoritarian element of the unit persona may also have claimed a jester-like role,

³⁷ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 17.

³⁸ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 284.

³⁹ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 13.

⁴⁰ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 203.

⁴¹ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 323.

⁴² Jay Winter, *Remembering War: the Great War Between Memory and History*, New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2006, pp. 118, 119.

with ‘license to gibe’⁴³ at institutional values or leaders in a way that those who authored the volumes of units closer to the fighting, and to the sacrifice and dying, were not able to do. As such, Llewellyn captured for his unit some of the ‘folk hero’ appeal of the anti-hero.⁴⁴ This element of the book held an appeal across not only all services and ranks of the New Zealand army but across New Zealand society in general.⁴⁵

These four themes of maturation, experiencing the world, national characteristics and the anti-hero provided the framework for Llewellyn’s book. In writing in such a popular style, however, he faced a particular conundrum: how to produce a history that was honest and meaningful to his small and close-knit unit without exposing the full range of their experiences to the curiosity of the general public. A skilful balance was required and for Llewellyn this was achieved through his literary style.

‘[I]f the historian’s aim is to familiarise us with the unfamiliar,’ wrote Hayden White, ‘he must use figurative rather than technical language’:

No given set of casually recorded historical events can in itself constitute a story; the most that it might offer the historian are story *elements*. The events are *made* into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motif repetition, variation of tone and point of view, alternative description strategies and the like – in short, all of the techniques that we would normally expect to find in a novel or a play.⁴⁶

⁴³ Brad West, ‘Crime, Suicide and the Anti-Hero: “Waltzing Matilda” in Australia’, *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 35, No. 1, (2001), p. 136.

⁴⁴ West, p. 136.

⁴⁵ See for example reviews: L.S. Hart, ‘Review: “Journey Towards Christmas”’, IA1 181/7/29B, NA. Penguin, ‘Gamblers, Mud and Brave Men’, *Weekly News*, 7 December 1949; ‘New Zealand Solider at War’, *Southland Times*, 21 November 1949; ‘Review of “Journey Towards Christmas” by S.P. Llewellyn’, undated, IA1 181/7/29B, NA.

⁴⁶ Hayden White ‘The Historical Text as a Literary Artefact’ in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, Baltimore & London,: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, p. 84. (First published *Clio*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1974). Italics in the original.

Llewellyn's literary style did much to convey an interpretation of the war recognisable to both unit members and the general public. Because of the quality and gentle conviction of his writing, the detail and the way in which it engaged the reader, and not least because of the book's title as an Official History, *Journey towards Christmas* was widely accepted as being a true and verified account, even as 'the most faithful unadorned picture of the New Zealand soldier it would be possible to present either to the general public or to the soldier himself'.⁴⁷

And nor was it 'untrue'. But Llewellyn's interpretation of the unit experience was a carefully selected and, in its own way, highly sanitised version of the war. A layer of silence accompanied the dominant narrative that served to retain a cover over the more distressing and unsavoury aspects of the soldiers' experiences. Llewellyn's decision to do so may have reflected the wish of the returned servicemen themselves. As Alistair Thomson found for WWI veterans, the vast difference between 'civilian ideas about war' and soldiers' actual experiences meant conversations and reminiscences between the two tended to gravitate towards "what good times we had when we was on leave or something" in order to avoid stories that were 'hard to tell and equally hard to listen to'.⁴⁸

Journey towards Christmas was no exposé, yet there was sufficient leeway within its narrative to ensure that it spoke with conviction to both the general public, for whom it was an informative and gratifying tale, and to soldiers, who recognised it as offering sufficiently truthful expression without exposing them to the questioning or prurient curiosity of non-participants. As one Returned Servicemen's publication observed, the soldiers' 'natural reticence' had been 'expanded by the understanding and discernment of Llewellyn'.⁴⁹ The volume employed a number of devices which made this achievement possible, and which have since been identified as central to the literary techniques of

⁴⁷ H.L. Heatley, 'Brilliantly Written Work Sets High Standard in NZ War Histories', *Freedom*, 4 January 1950. See also for example: Alan Mulgan, 'Review', 18 January 1950, copy: IA1 181/7/29B, NA; F.M. Dawson, 'Radio Review', 2YA, 22 December 1949, IA1 181/7/29B, NA.

⁴⁸ Alistair Thomson, *ANZAC Memories; Living with the Legend*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 110.

⁴⁹ A.S., 'Journey Towards Christmas', Review, *Stand-To*, (May-June, 1950), p. 14.

distance and non-representation. The chapter turns now to examine three key devices in more detail: the use of landscape and description, unanimitist rhetoric and humour.

Much was made by reviewers of Llewellyn's use of landscape and description within his volume. In the literary sense, landscape and description were central to the construction of his dual narrative and hence to maintaining distance between the public and private roles of the history. Work in the field of Holocaust Studies by American literary critic, Lea Wernick Fridman, has identified new ways of considering the representation of historical trauma or extreme events.⁵⁰ Historical trauma, Fridman maintains, can create a narrative schism between the knowable and 'representable' world of familiar objects and experiences, and the type of extreme and 'unrepresentable' events that may be encountered in war. In narratives of the familiar public world, concrete objects and the real or temporal sense prevails. Extreme experiences, however, fall outside this framework and the capacity it offers for representation. They require a very different form of knowing and expression, one that is disengaged from a 'sense of the real [or] plausible'.⁵¹ As a result, experiences of extreme trauma remain essentially private, in that they are only 'knowable' to those who have experienced them.

As such, the narration of extreme or traumatic events holds a very real risk. Because of their private nature and because they defy the comprehension of those who have not experienced them, it is possible that, on hearing of them for the first time, the feelings of horror and disgust they generate may become attached in the mind of the listener to the narrator rather than the events themselves. Thus, by being the bearer, or barer, of such narratives, narrators risk becoming in themselves a 'repository for the negative emotions that the narrative evokes'.⁵² It is understandable that explicitly describing the more

⁵⁰ Fridman's work has been criticised within Jewish studies for its tendency to be 'more interested in theory and aesthetics than in Jews', however it is her broader literary criticism that is of interest to this thesis; see David Patterson, 'Holocaust Studies without the Holocaust: Review Essay', *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 4, (2003), p. 115.

⁵¹ Fridman, p. 19.

⁵² Mark Klemperer, 'Navigating Life Review Interviews with Survivors of Trauma', *The Oral History Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2, (Summer, 2000), p. 79.

horrifying or extreme events of the war within the unit histories would run the risk of imposing such an association upon unit members themselves. As the first of the War Histories and in describing the experiences of one of the smallest units to receive a volume in the programme, it is understandable that Llewellyn would not wish to expose unit members to this form of scrutiny and negative association. The tension that existed, then, between providing an accurate and meaningful history for participating members and maintaining the privacy of their experiences from public gaze called for particular care when describing the war.

According to Fridman, one solution to this difficulty is for references to traumatic, horrific or extreme events in narratives to be presented obliquely: approached not directly but brought to within an ‘existential or felt proximity’ that enables readers to obtain a sense of events without being directly confronted by them. In this way a screen is maintained, both morally and aesthetically, over the values at their core.⁵³

This was the pattern within *Journey towards Christmas*. By foregrounding the concrete world, in its wonder, variety and detail, and by structuring descriptions of travel and scenery around the narrative of a journey, Llewellyn ensured that it was the sense of objects and the temporal dimension that prevailed. The focus was on that which was cheerful, familiar, bloodless and nonconfrontational; there were few passages that allowed the general reader a glimpse into the trauma of war. Although there were descriptions of weary times, hard work, and individual encounters with Germans, the particulars of combat were often kept, literally, physically distant from the principal narrative. Key battles and engagements that would have been central to an infantryman’s war such as El Alamein or Cassino were often reduced to distant glimpses within Llewellyn’s narrative, a background or framework against which a foreground of landscape and the natural world might be described.

⁵³Fridman, p. 20.

During the opening of the battle at Meteiriya Ridge at Alamein, for example, the drivers watched the obliterating effects of a 1,000 gun barrage⁵⁴ beneath an ‘unbelievably large and yellow’ moon:

You could have read a newspaper by it easily The horizon was on fire and it threw back a continuous hollow roar. Giants were striking matches, matches as big as pine trees, on the rough desert, and a roaring wind was blowing them out at once. The roar and the dancing flashes went on and on, and we lay in our sandy beds or stood huddled in blankets in the backs of our lorries, which were dark mouths in the silver desert, and watched and wondered.⁵⁵

At Cassino, too, although the fighting there was ‘as bitter as any in the whole war’⁵⁶ it was reduced to ‘white puffs’ and the ‘hazy’ smoke of battle, far distant from the ‘warm golden sunshine’ and ‘clothes-lines strung between stacks of ammunition’ of Llewellyn’s drivers camp.⁵⁷ ‘Remote from blazing dumps’ he wrote of the later withdrawal, ‘shut out from the sound of guns, and with plenty of time for play, we enjoyed ourselves in our leafy valley.’⁵⁸

This distance was, perhaps, partly circumstantial, due to the different emphasis of a service unit’s war. Units such as ammunition companies and transport were often more heavily engaged in the preparations for a battle than in the battle itself. Periods of intense combat, Llewellyn explained, were ‘hell for the fighting units ... but for us (and we said it with all the apology in the world) a kind of holiday’.⁵⁹ The narrative mode of ‘witnessing’ he employed provided another method of oblique reference to events and could be regarded as an important literary device when the realities of combat had

⁵⁴ Llewellyn lists this in his volume at 800, it is more commonly listed at 1,000, see for example: Laurie Barber, *War Memorial: A Chronology of New Zealand and World War II*, Auckland: Heinemann Reed, 1989, p.147

⁵⁵ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 262.

⁵⁶ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 334.

⁵⁷ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 335.

⁵⁸ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p.344.

⁵⁹ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 358.

‘outstripped the imagination and the laws of credibility’⁶⁰ and thus the understanding of non-combatants.

There were occasions, however, so momentous and so well established in the national story as to require direct description, even for general readers. One of the greatest of these for New Zealanders in WWII was the breakout from Minqar Qaim, a night manoeuvre in which the Division burst through a laager of German forces in a desperate and brutal surprise attack. It was an engagement in which the Ammunition Company, as drivers, held a key role and could not be omitted from the narrative. Having been central to its success and proud of their contribution, it is also likely the unit would have expected it to have been given thorough recognition. Llewellyn’s treatment of Minqar Qaim was particularly interesting in that he chose a second method of oblique reference, that of a dream, to deliver a sense of the intensity of this event while still maintaining the screen of privacy over its grisly reality:

And so it went on – not for a long time according to the clock but for ages as dreams go, and this was a kind of dream and therefore not really frightening: less frightening, our drivers were to find, than lying in a slit-trench with the lorry ten yards away and a dixie of stew cooling on the flat, ugly mudguard and the Stukas coming. There was no background of normality, no touch of everydayness, to make a nightmare out of a dream. It was Cowboy-and-Indian stuff: a picture, a story, a play – almost, in its rush and wonder, a poem.⁶¹

Although rich and evocative, Llewellyn’s description of the breakout gave little away. Much was hinted at or implied: a ‘glimpse of a bayonet dark and bright with blood’,⁶² or the effects of a grenade thrown in to the back of a truck.⁶³ There was the feeling of proximity in the ‘rush and wonder’ of the moment; a ‘glimpse’ of the butchery and

⁶⁰ Fridman, p. 134.

⁶¹ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 232.

⁶² Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p.232.

⁶³ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p.232.

carnage. But, compared, for example, to the technical and descriptive treatment by Scoullar in his campaign volume, or the accounts chosen by Ross in *23 Battalion*, which described a ‘lid ... lifted off Hades’,⁶⁴ and ‘men’s bodies ... thrown twenty feet in the air’,⁶⁵ the opacity in Llewellyn’s account remained intact. By ‘being captured by the incredible’,⁶⁶ Llewellyn provided a sense of the experience with little of the detail. The general reader could be drawn in and feel intimately involved, and yet the distance, and privacy, of this remarkable event were preserved.

Landscape and description allowed Llewellyn to establish a point of common access to the unit’s story for soldiers and general readers alike while maintaining a tactful distance from the brutality of the war: either as a ‘witness’ standing in the concrete world looking in, or, alternatively, as in the case of Minqar Qaim, by appealing to the surreal. The result was a paradoxical volume. Uncommonly warm and inclusive on the surface, it remained a closed and largely bloodless account of the war. While it provided a mass of detailed description it also foregrounded some events to the occlusion of others and gave the sense of a seemingly complete story while much remained untold.

The second notable literary feature of Llewellyn’s narrative was his use of unanimist rhetoric, that is to say the attribution of uniform emotion, action or reaction across the unit as a whole. The tendency for bulk action and the ‘trafficking of collective images’⁶⁷ has usually been perceived as a negative characteristic of Official Histories. It became, for example, a target of criticism by the ‘new’ military historians of the ‘70s and ‘80s for the strong tactical and strategic focus it represented and for legitimising and encouraging the dehumanising of war. Broad collective description was seen as insensitive, overriding the particularity of experience and indicative, as John Keegan maintained, of ‘desiccated and didactic military academy style’.⁶⁸ Such changes in focus, however, may not have

⁶⁴ Angus Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 148.

⁶⁵ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 148.

⁶⁶ Fridman, p. 28.

⁶⁷ John Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, London: Jonathon Cape, 1976, p. 39.

⁶⁸ Keegan, p. 22.

been solely a response to military history, but also a reflection of the movement from the general to the particular and a greater recognition of the diversity and multiplicity of experience evident in the broad historical trends of those two decades.

Rather than dehumanising, however, this uniformity of experience could be seen as serving a more positive purpose within the War Histories, particularly those produced in the immediate post-war period. For Llewellyn the collective life of his unit members was a source of great pride, something that had both defined and greatly enriched their time at war. At a national level collective experience contributed to a generalised understanding that may have helped in positioning the war in post-war society. Certainly from reviews of the volume it seemed that Llewellyn's ability to represent the experiences of not only his own drivers but 'the private's, the gunner's and the trooper's war', and those of the Division as a whole, was one of the most admired aspects of his book.⁶⁹

The first person plural dominated Llewellyn's narrative. A move out from camp to the desert at the start of a new campaign, for example, was presented as universally welcomed: 'Well, that suited us. We had enjoyed our leave and we had spent our money. Now was the moment ... for us to look forward'.⁷⁰ More humorously, a description of Llewellyn's well lubricated unit on Christmas Day 1944 in Forli, Italy, suggests the potential for collective description to convey a sense of esprit de corps:

By now Forli was making considerable noise ... Everyone was talking at the top of his voice, and talking, for the most part, confidentially But speech is inadequate to express deep feeling – song's the thing. Fortunately everyone was in perfect voice, and that being so everyone who could secure an audience – one was enough, fifty was perfect – burst out singing ...⁷¹

⁶⁹ L.S. Hart, 'Review', no date, IA1 181/7/29B, NA; see also, for example, F.M. Mason, 'Broadcast Review of "Journey Toward Christmas"', 2YA, 22 December 1949, IA1 181/7/28B, NA; 'New War Book is One of the Finest Yet', *Christchurch Star-Sun*, 12 January 1950; 'Reading for a Variety of Tastes: "Journey Towards Christmas"', *New Zealand Herald*, 19 November 1949.

⁷⁰ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 115

⁷¹ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 396.

While the contribution of such descriptions to the aligning of collective and national memory will be considered in the next section, it is used here to continue the discussion of distance and of the public / private divide that made up the dual role of the unit histories.

American literary critic, Susan Rubin Suleiman, has examined unanimist rhetoric as a tool for rebuilding post-war societies. The use of the term 'we' in the fashion illustrated above, she suggests, is based, she suggests, on a presupposition. Rhetorically, it is a means of persuading an audience that such a state existed or exists without the requirement of 'empirical verification'.⁷² Unanimist rhetoric is accepted, and tacitly acknowledged, as 'expressing a wish', rather than describing 'an actual state of affairs.'⁷³ Llewellyn's rhetoric was accepted not only because of the beguiling nature of his narrative and the easy flow of prose which the unanimity contributed to, but also because of his presupposition. Llewellyn was easy to read and easy to accept because the wish that he expressed was one that the New Zealand public also wished to believe: that of a happy, unified and enriching war experience. His version of unanimity was recognisable to New Zealanders because the images he 'trafficked' were positive national stereotypes of New Zealanders at war: camaraderie and resourcefulness, willingness and hard work when called for, and a confident, fun loving, easy going nature when at rest. As suppositions they were easy to accept without evidence because, to New Zealanders, they could be regarded as self evident.

While nationally affirming, such rhetoric claimed considerable licence. Without the need for evidence, or to question, the lines between the narrative 'wish' and the empirical 'state of affairs' were easily blurred. In the War Histories the relationship between the two required negotiation. For unit histories at least, it was recognised that empirical

⁷² Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Crises of Memory and the Second World War*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006, p. 17

⁷³ Suleiman, p. 17.

rigour might sometimes be sacrificed to atmosphere so that the ‘moods and views’⁷⁴ of the Division might show through. Kippenberger, particularly, acknowledged the potential looseness of Llewellyn’s narrative. While he took care to let it be known that ‘all the formal essentials of a unit history’⁷⁵ were present in volume and ‘every statement of fact’⁷⁶ had been checked, to colleagues such as Harry Latham he admitted that from the point of view of the Branch the ‘principal value’ of *Journey towards Christmas* was that it gave ‘a really good picture of the New Zealand soldier and of the scenes in which he served’.⁷⁷

This licence was also acknowledged by the public. The reviewer for the *Otago Daily Times*, for example, recognised that empirical basis of Llewellyn’s volume may have been compromised but, on weighing the bargain, came out, like Kippenberger, in favour of its subjectivity and collective representation. ‘Perhaps an official history ought to be more factual,’ he wrote of the volume, ‘but even if that stricture is allowed the critic must [also] allow that what has been given is more valuable than any compilation of facts and figures. What we have here is the New Zealander at war.’⁷⁸

Unanimist rhetoric offered Llewellyn a number of advantages. Firstly, and relatively unproblematically, ‘bulk’ description and collective experiences could provide the basic narrative facts while diffusing intensity and maintaining the easygoing nature of the volume. Within the narrative, Llewellyn deflected the focus from individual experience and again, as in his use of landscape, retained privacy while recording an authentic unit atmosphere. Focusing on the collective enabled him to give considerable detail of experience without pinpointing any one individual. This could be applied to harrowing or

⁷⁴ War History Branch, ‘Publicity Flier for *Journey towards Christmas*’, 21 November 1949, IA1 181/7/29A, NA.

⁷⁵ Letter, Kippenberger to Freyberg, 30 July 1948, IA1 181/7/29A, NA.

⁷⁶ Letter Kippenberger to Denis Wood, 9 December 1949, IA1 181/7/29A, NA.

⁷⁷ Letter Kippenberger to Latham, 1 February 1950, IA1 181/3/3 part 2, NA.

⁷⁸ D.G.B., ‘Kiwis at War: First Unit History Vivid and Intimate Record’, *Otago Daily Times*, 23 November 1949.

traumatic events as much as happy ones, or to particularly revolting ones such as the unwelcome and unrelenting attention of the “Alamein flies”:

The foul and dismaying thing about the Alamein flies was their oneness. None was separate from its fellows any more than the wave is separate from the ocean ... As one fly, one dark and horrible force guided by one mind, ubiquitous and immensely powerful, they addressed themselves to the one task, which was to destroy us body and soul. It was useless to kill them, for they despised death and made no attempt to avoid it ... None the less we killed them unceasingly. We killed them singly and in detachments with fly swats, and the dead lay so thick on our lorries that we had to sweep them out several times a day. We set ingenious traps for them and they filled the traps, the living feasting ghoulishly on the dead. We slew them in mounds with our bare hands until the crunch of minute frames and the squish of microscopic viscera, felt rather than heard, became a nightmare. But what was the use? Their ranks closed at once and they went on with the all-important task of driving us out of our minds.⁷⁹

Unanimity was also a form of stipulation in that it highlighted some experiences while allowing the thoughts and experiences of individual soldiers to remain in the background. This helped to continue and reinforce the dual narrative between the public and private experiences of the war: those experiences that Llewellyn chose to make explicit and, again, those he chose to leave opaque. In *Journey towards Christmas* this was most clearly illustrated in four of the most intense experiences of war: fear, pain, grief and death.

While fear was openly acknowledged in Llewellyn’s narrative, it was diffused through the collective and remained relatively sanitised in its account:

Everyone owned that he was afraid and everyone either had a charm against fear (which sometimes worked and sometimes didn’t) or was trying to find one. It helped to count the planes and watch the bombs falling. It helped to dig your slit-trench to a specification: so

⁷⁹ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 247.

many yards from the lorry, so many feet deep, so many feet wide. It helped, when the planes were coming, to have a pet jingle you could let loose in your head – nonsense Or something charming from childhood ...

It helped, perhaps, to pray: to pray that nothing irrevocable would happen ... or to ask, with a diminution of self-respect, for the RMT [Reserve Military Transport] to be sent [instead].⁸⁰

Pain, on the other hand, was simply passed over, with a rapid change in subject:

As they were pulling off the road into the Tyrnavos area they were machine-gunned by a single aircraft, and Stan Fisher was wounded in the back while returning fire from B Section's ack-ack truck.

The lorries that had reached home earlier in the day were already back on the road ...⁸¹

Death, of course, was recognised and each one briefly recorded at the point at which it occurred in a manner which, while not perfunctory, did cause the minimum of disruption to the general themes of the narrative. Grief, on the other hand, like pain, was largely absent. In a narrative that emphasised over and over again the camaraderie of unit life, a single memorial to Driver Lenny Hay, lost at Ruweisat, served for all 27 men killed in the unit during the war. Simple, innocent and anti-heroic, he was the embodiment of Llewellyn's characterisation of his unit:

He had wanted to know if any of the others were hurt. Then he had said he was hot and would like his jersey taken off. We heard afterwards from a New Zealand doctor that if courage could have saved him he would have lived.

⁸⁰ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 239.

⁸¹ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 66

Possessing no unusual gifts, unless a genius for friendship is a gift, possessing no unusual virtues, unless happiness and high spirits are virtues, consciously contributing nothing to the sum of the world's treasure, he was the one we could spare least. He was like Stevenson's man – an extra candle in the room. When they heard that he was dead, his friends knew then, as so many had known before them, and so many others would know later, that the war had lasted one day too long, had killed one boy too many.⁸²

By the time of the publication of *Journey towards Christmas* in 1949 the immediate presence of fear and death through war for New Zealanders had passed, but grief, pain and mourning continued into civilian life. They remained the inevitable losses of even a winner's war: too private to share with the general readership, too personal to assume on a unit-wide basis, and still too tender for historical generalisation. As souvenirs for the living, the unit histories hardly needed to serve as their reminders. As memorial to the dead it is understandable that they would want to stress, as do most funereal practices, the positive aspects of service and lives well lived. It is partly the shock of this swing from the broad and collective to the disarmingly candid and individual that makes Llewellyn's memorial for Lenny the more powerful. Of all the death and dying in the unit histories to come, these few paragraphs with their glimpse into the grief of mates losing a mate remain some of the most memorable.

Unanimist rhetoric, then, was easily accepted within *Journey towards Christmas*, due, on the one hand, to the skill of Llewellyn's writing and again, on the other, because it confirmed popular national stereotypes of New Zealanders at war. By 'trafficking' in the collective it was possible to give detailed and evocative descriptions without specifying or attracting attention to any one member. As a form of stipulation it was able to foreground certain experiences at the expense of others and protect the privacy of those aspects of the war experience likely to have continued over into civilian life. The general use of collective description also served as a foil, a background against which those

⁸² Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, pp. 242-243.

incidents in which Llewellyn did allow a glimpse into the private or emotional lives of individuals appeared all the more poignant.

The third notable literary feature of *Journey towards Christmas* was its humour. Unexpected in an Official History, perhaps, it did much to enhance the accessibility of the volume and, as will be discussed in a later section, to set its particular version of the war within the national memory. Decades after its publication, New Zealand's Chief Historian, Ian Wards, who had been an original member of the Branch and was an exacting critic, still regarded *Journey towards Christmas* as the most successful of the unit histories because 'even now' he knew he could 'read it with pleasure.'⁸³

Humour has always played an intriguing, if seemingly incongruous, role in war. Historical attention to date has focused particularly on its expression during the First World War where the darkness and brutality of that conflict has highlighted the resilience of the human spirit that humour in wartime seems to illustrate. Recent studies have emphasised a double dichotomy in the role of wartime humour between, firstly, subversive humour, directed against war itself, and supportive humour, 'mobilised' by the authorities with the aim of dissipating fear and raising morale, and then again between this form of condoned humour and humour of all forms, denounced as an act of disrespect toward suffering, mourning and loss.⁸⁴ While often dark and sardonic, humour in war has been recognised as an important defence mechanism in times of stress: not an act of 'actually forgetting' so much as a 'temporary effort to forget'.⁸⁵

The humour in *Journey towards Christmas*, however, was war humour of a different kind, directed not toward coping with or forgetting immediate danger, but toward remembrance itself. Again, with the double task of positioning the war as national

⁸³ Interview, Ian Wards with Glyn Harper, Tape 2, 10 January 1993, Harper Collection.

⁸⁴ See for example: Jean-Yves Le Naour, 'Laughter and Tears in the Great War: the Need for Laughter / the Guilt of Humour', *Journal of European Studies*, Vol. 31, (2001), pp. 265- 275; Jan Rüger, 'Laughter and War in Berlin', *History Workshop Journal*, (2009), Vol. 67, pp. 23-43.

⁸⁵ Le Naour, p. 272.

history and retaining the privacy of the unit participants, Llewellyn's humour was neither dark nor derogatory. It was, rather, light, inclusive, gently self-effacing and conciliatory. Although its content was directed backward at the war, its purpose and values were forward facing.

Llewellyn's humorous approach reinforced several of his principal themes, and, again, created the particular blend of inclusive narrative and subtle distance that characterised the volume. Of these themes, that of the anti-hero lent itself most obviously to both the parodying of army life and the collision between the structured and the chaotic and the formal and informal, that is the basis of humour across all cultures and societies.⁸⁶ Thus when Llewellyn recorded unit driver 'Snake Gully' coming across Freyberg in the compound, asking him for a cigarette and commenting "You work here, don't yer?",⁸⁷ or the despair of an internationally famed violinist who, on being accompanied by the local NAAFI orchestra, 'thought nostalgically of the concert halls and conservatoires of Europe, where ... the rule was one tune at a time',⁸⁸ the humour lay in the lampooning of, and hence also the distancing from, army values and the hierarchy and standards that supposedly accompanied them.

Humour was used to create distance from not only values but also, by diffusing tension, from descriptions of distressing events. Having been chased the length of Greece by the German Luftwaffe in 1941, the unit was required to destroy their trucks before evacuating to Crete. Llewellyn chose to make light of this tense and humiliating episode by joking over their enthusiasm for an otherwise dispiriting task, noting dryly that '[I]ater it was felt that a smaller amount of explosive would have done the job'.⁸⁹ Similarly, after an alarming close encounter with German desert armour brought on by a unit member rashly lighting a pile of captured flares, in which they were caught in anti-tank crossfire and could have been taken prisoner or killed, Llewellyn wrote 'our drivers mopped their

⁸⁶ For literary overview of this concept see Rüger, p. 26.

⁸⁷ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 5.

⁸⁸ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 205.

⁸⁹ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 90.

brows and implored Clarry not to do any more signalling'.⁹⁰ Not only did humour mask the anger and danger the drivers experienced, it allowed general readers to appreciate the joke without necessarily recognising the intensity or fear behind the events described. Indeed, this form of wry understatement picked up on by Llewellyn is still characteristic of many descriptions of WWII and forms the epigrams used to title popular publications on the war. *A Unique Sort of a Battle*, edited by Megan Hutchings of the Ministry of Culture and Heritage and *A Near-Run Thing*, by Mathew Wright, both of which deal with the Battle of Crete, are two examples.⁹¹

The third area in which Llewellyn's humour created distance from or masked the values and trauma of war was in his description of the enemy, where it formed framework for reconciliation. Where war humour has often been identified as mocking or disparaging the enemy, Llewellyn, writing from a post-war perspective, achieved the opposite effect. There were many points where he gently challenged received stereotypes of the enemy, including those promulgated by the Branch, and even the of concept of 'the enemy' itself. There was little bitterness toward the Germans and, indeed, passages of considerable compassion.⁹² Army slang standardised for the unit histories by the Branch⁹³ such as Hun and Jerry was restricted to the narrative inserts and reminiscences of other drivers, rather than passages by Llewellyn himself. Missing also was the tendency, common in other volumes, to personalise battles or engagements by referring to the enemy, especially the Germans, in the third person singular.

By emphasising shared qualities instead, Llewellyn's humour painted a more humane picture of the opposing forces and mocked not the enemy, but rather the racial stereotypes and the spurious divisions between sides that had been generated by the war.

⁹⁰ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 145

⁹¹ Megan Hutching with Ian McGibbon, Jock Phillips and David Filer, *A Unique Sort of a Battle: New Zealanders Remember Crete*, Auckland, HarperCollins NZ in association with the History Group, Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2001; Mathew Wright, *A Near-Run Affair: New Zealanders in the Battle for Crete, 1941*, Auckland: Reed Books, 2000.

⁹² Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, pp. 167, 402, 403.

⁹³ Memo, 10 September 1947, WAI, 11, Box 6, NA.

German soldiers, for example, with their unlikely pots of face cream and letters from home left scattered after a hasty departure in the desert, were recognised as being

subtly different from the blind automaton of legend, just as we were different, by the grace of God, from the flattering conception of the Kiwi warrior ... presented by friendly journalists for the delectation of our admirers.⁹⁴

The easygoing Italians, also, with their ‘enviable knack of disassociating themselves from the springs of their own disaster’⁹⁵ were appreciated for their humour, uncomplicated natures and lusty opera singing while being transported back from the lines as prisoners of war.⁹⁶

Nowhere was this tendency more evident than in Llewellyn’s description of a group of captured prisoners in an Italian village toward the end of the war, in which he emphasised differences pushed aside in anticipation of a post-war reconciliation:

They were Austrian mechanics – in fact fellow tradesmen – practically workmates. Photographs of girl friends and chubby babies began to circulate and cigarettes were exchanged. Soon victors and vanquished were showing the bewildered villagers how little five years and eight months of bitter warfare weigh in the balance against a shared trade, an impulse of curiosity, and the common man’s feeling that after a fight it is proper to shake hands. It was as well that no wine was available. A few litres of ‘Purple Death’ and they would have been hanging around each other’s necks and harmonizing.⁹⁷

Under Llewellyn’s humorous approach all, in their own way, were innocent, victims as much as each other of their times and circumstances. There was a refusal to buy into it all: ‘Wit and humour and zest for life’ as Alan Mulgan noted in review, ‘bubble up amid

⁹⁴ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 167.

⁹⁵ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 317.

⁹⁶ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 32.

⁹⁷ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 430 -31.

the tragedy and boredom of war'.⁹⁸ Humour was one way of brushing over passions inflamed during the war, poking fun at oneself, empathising with those once considered the enemy and smoothing the path for post-war co-operation to face the new conditions of the Cold War. If slightly subversive, in its parodying of army life Llewellyn's humour was also 'mobilised', condoned by the Branch for its uniting and universal appeal that straddled the divide between participants and the nation at home. Alongside landscape and description, it allowed general readership to feel included. Combined with unanimist rhetoric, it protected individual experience under the cloak of collective endeavour.

Landscape and description, unanimist rhetoric and humour worked together to create a publicly engaging but essentially very private account of the war. The scope and leeway they created within the volume enabled Llewellyn to contribute to memory on a range of levels. The chapter now concludes with a consideration of the possible role of a unit history in the placement of war within individual, collective and 'national' memory.

The ways in which individuals and nations remember war has been of absorbing interest to historians over the past three decades and has encouraged reflection, not only on the process of remembering but on the role of history itself. With its roots in the oral history movement and in the work of sociologists, anthropologists, linguists, cognitive psychologists and others, memory studies has experienced a 'great swell' in popular and academic interest.⁹⁹ As the source of 'much discussion but very little agreement',¹⁰⁰ however, this upsurge in the study of memory has not lead to the standardisation of even its most basic terms. While the phenomenon of individual memory may be readily accepted, a shared understanding of past, in the manner of a 'collective', or even 'national', memory is still much disputed. For the purpose of this discussion three distinctions in the levels of memory will be made: individual, 'collective', in the limited

⁹⁸ Alan Mulgan, Radio Review, no date, copy: IA1 181/7/29B, NA.

⁹⁹ Kerwin Lee Klein, 'On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse', *Representations*, Vol. 69, 2000, p. 127, 129.

¹⁰⁰ Jay Winter & Emmanuel Sivan, 'Introduction', in Jay Winter & Emmanuel Sivan, (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 1.

sense of common memories held by those who shared participation in a particular event, and ‘national’.

Although unit histories were incorporated into the War History project as a national enterprise, the assumption behind them was one of individual memory and, as the Branch flier described it, the ‘basic desire of the soldier to keep alive his rich experience as a member of a military organisation that has shared in a great cause’.¹⁰¹ At their very least, the unit histories were intended to provide a chronological framework and basic narration around which a soldier might structure and maintain his own memories of the war. In this respect unit histories aimed to keep memories accessible and contribute to the ‘shaping and organising of temporal experience’¹⁰² that, on a cognitive level, forms the foundation of remembering and life narrative.

The role of memory is widely acknowledged, however, as more than the simple (or not so simple) chronological ordering of events. The work of groups such as the History Workshop and the Popular Memory Group in Birmingham has drawn attention to the ways in which memories are managed to create coherence between an individual’s past, their current identity, and present and future life goals. Memories are seen to be in a ‘dialectical relationship’ with individual identity and are, Alistair Thomson suggests, constantly renegotiated to make ‘more comfortable sense of our life over time’.¹⁰³ The term ‘composure’ captures the dual sense of both constructing, or setting together, a framework and repertoire of memories to be called on, and, on the other hand, of selecting of memories that bring comfort or peace to the rememberer. Under this framework, memory is seen as a continual process of ‘selection, ordering and highlighting’ and one in which ‘troubling, disturbing aspects may be “managed”, worked through, contained [or] repressed’.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ War History Branch, ‘Publicity Flier for *Journey towards Christmas*’, 21 November 1949, IA1 181/7/29B, NA.

¹⁰² Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*, London, New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 22.

¹⁰³ Alistair Thomson, *ANZAC Memories*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁰⁴ Dawson, p. 22.

Memories of events such as war, with their highly dissonant values between combat situations and peacetime lives, make such processes particularly problematic. Willingly or not, in the course of a lifetime, interpretations and attitudes toward the conflict change, both in the view of the participant and within the public sphere. As a leading researcher in this field, Thomson's study of Australian WWI veterans linked individual composure of war memories to both the official histories of that conflict and the popular view of the 'Anzac Legend' as portrayed in the media, film, commemorations and public events.¹⁰⁵

Thomson has noted the role of popular styled official histories, such as those inaugurated by Bean in Australia after WWI in giving recognition to the experiences and achievements of frontline soldiers, providing 'positive ways' for a veteran to 'make sense of his experience.'¹⁰⁶ On the other hand, official histories can also be seen as participating in 'hegemonic processes' whereby a uniform view of the war is created, not so much by 'excluding the varieties and contradictions of [veteran] experience, but by using selection, simplification and generalisation to represent that complexity'.¹⁰⁷ The more popular and accessible the history, presumably, the more effective this process becomes. Thomson gives examples of men interviewed in his study who, having read Bean's histories of the war, 'quoted anecdotes' from them to him during interviews 'as if they came from their own experiences'.¹⁰⁸ Recent research among veterans by cultural psychologists has also suggested a tendency to return to early war experiences in later life and to examine these at a level and in ways that they had not done earlier. The role of

¹⁰⁵ See also, Alistair Thomson, 'The Anzac Legend: Exploring National Myth and Memory in Australia', in Raphael Samuel & Paul Thompson, (eds.), *The Myths We Live By*, London and New York: Routledge, 1990 pp. 73 – 82; 'Memory as a Battlefield: Personal and Political Investments in the National Military Past', *Oral History Review*, Vol. 22, No. 2, (1995), pp. 55 – 73.

¹⁰⁶ Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, p. 156.

¹⁰⁷ Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, p. 47.

¹⁰⁸ Thomson, 'History as a Battlefield', p. 60; *Anzac Memories*, p. 161.

history texts and other forms of historical media in triggering and facilitating this process was noted.¹⁰⁹

Official history, therefore, offers a potentially powerful influence on individual memory, not only by maintaining the accessibility of veterans' memories of war, but also by influencing the process of selection and interpretation through which the composure of their memories in later life might occur. While this notion of composure is seen as a fairly recent interpretative tool in history or memory studies – Thomson describes it as a 'new theoretical framework' in his work from the 1980s¹¹⁰ - its necessity and function were clearly recognised during the period of adjustment back into civilian life in the 1940s and 1950s. When asked by reporters for his view on the unit histories, Brigadier Lesley Andrew, who as will be seen later had some very unhappy war memories of his own to deal with, stressed the active, conscious nature of this process and saw its facilitation as an unashamed duty of the War History Branch:

During actual battle the best that is in the make up of each man is called on – his unselfishness, his team spirit, courage, physical fitness and his loyalty to his pals and his unit. All these must be included in the unit history so that members of the unit may each have a written record, to read and re-read the story of their lives together so that they will be able to say to themselves in years afterward: "it was worthwhile knowing, living and fighting with those chaps."¹¹¹

This was an area in which *Journey towards Christmas*, as one of the earliest, most appealing, and even jolliest, of the unit histories, excelled. Its emphasis on camaraderie and travel provided an inclusive framework around which to structure war memories. Its rich description of landscape tied recollection to the familiar and concrete world, while its humour and theme of the antihero minimised responsibility, sparing members the need to

¹⁰⁹ Stephen Gibson & Nathalie Noret, 'Historical Experiences, Collective Memory and Willingness to Fight for One's Country: Comments on Paez et al (2008)', *Journal of Cross Cultural Psychology*, Vol. 41, No. 3, (2010), pp. 445 – 450.

¹¹⁰ Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, p. 11.

¹¹¹ *Southern Cross*, 15 January 1947.

take any more accountability for their part in the less savoury aspects of the war experience than they felt inclined.

Journey towards Christmas was also openly dedicated to nostalgia. This was not for a distant past, for the war was no more than four years away, but for circumstances that could not be recreated¹¹² and a life of structure, purpose and, as suggested, a certain freedom from domestic ties and responsibilities. That Llewellyn sought to emphasise the more positive aspects of war was acknowledged early on in his text:

Time softens everything – buildings, bad liquor, memories. The bright enchanted islands – the excitements, the good times we had ... these alone seem to stand out, whereas the dreary and bitter tasting sea in which they were pin-points only ... seemed misted over for the most part¹¹³

In his most evocative passages, nostalgia and pride in the unit dominated. The almost shameless emphasis given at times to these aspects can be illustrated in a passage describing a unit base early in the campaigns of the Western Desert:

The time at Fuka belonged to the Workshops' drivers. It was, you might say, their coming out. We realised all of a sudden their tremendous capacity for squeezing the last drop of enjoyment out of Army life. When there was work to be done they worked hard and to the business of enjoying themselves they brought the same keenness. Theirs were the merriest parties, the happiest homes, the liveliest adventures. At Fuka, for instance, they built themselves a raft – a crazy, delightful contraption with an old canvas bivouac for a sail – and from this they fished and bathed morning, noon, and night.¹¹⁴

While the course of war itself was given in only in the broadest of strokes, passages such as these, and descriptions of sensations, places or moments, were often presented in much

¹¹² Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male: A History*, Auckland: Penguin, 1989, p. 207.

¹¹³ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 26.

¹¹⁴ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, p. 118.

greater detail than the military context in which they occurred. This provided unit members with an evocative, and yet deceptively open, canvas with which to compose their own memories. Similarly, where the techniques of nonrepresentation took care to retain a layer of privacy between unit members and general readers, they also ensured that there was little to impinge upon the process of managing distressing memories for the unit's men in their post-war lives.

Containment, that aspect of composure that seeks to control, repress or eliminate painful memories, can be regarded as an important part of managing and integrating war experiences. Many of the 'strategies of containment' identified by oral historians such as Thomson as methods of dealing with the memory of trauma, failure, pain and loss in war had parallels within the literary devices operating in Llewellyn's text. Avoidance, silence, subject changes, oblique references and even, it might not be too much to say, the transference of distressing material, as in the case of Minqar Qaim, into the surreal or dream state in *Journey toward Christmas* are all now acknowledged as means of deflecting traumatic or uncomfortable memories in individual lives.¹¹⁵ The very brief treatment of the Cairo riots at the end of the Desert Campaign in 1943 mentioned earlier or the portrayal of the Ruapehu Furlough Draft, in which a fortnight was spent in a 'daze of joy and alcohol' bidding farewell to the 190 men returning home on leave, but in which only 17 Other Ranks were later acknowledged as returning to the front,¹¹⁶ reflected Llewellyn's willingness to deflect from behaviours which, while they held a certain logic during the war, transcribed less easily into peacetime values. These, along with the more obviously traumatic or brutal memories were left for individuals to deal with on a private basis, shielded from the judgement of either the author, his unit or the general readership.

In as much as *Journey towards Christmas* operated as an invitation to remember the war in a certain way, it also offered, through its stipulations and omissions, a framework for

¹¹⁵ For discussion on the strategies of containment encountered in oral history, see Thomson, 'Memory as a Battlefield' p. 69; *Anzac Memories*, Chapter 6.

¹¹⁶ Llewellyn, *Journey towards Christmas*, pp. 311, 340.

forgetting. Where the transition from wartime to peacetime roles required a degree of adjustment, the ‘desire to forget’ in the process of forming a new identity could create ‘living space’ for the present, or even, as anthropologist Paul Connerton suggests, be an ‘essential ingredient in [the] process of survival’.¹¹⁷ And while it was acknowledged that this would occur for each member at an individual level, by emphasising the ‘pinpoints’, those moments of collective excitement and ‘good times’, Llewellyn also formed a basis for group recognition and reminiscence which, for veterans, could constitute an important part of composure.

Although *Journey towards Christmas* was available to both unit members and the general public, and was aimed at facilitating memory on an individual level, it could also be seen as written for a very ‘specific public’ – the unit as a whole. Specific publics, as Graham Dawson explains, refer to the small or select groupings for whom, through shared experiences, recognition or cultural values, narratives hold particular meaning and who exercise, in return, a ‘determining influence’ on the way in which those narratives are told.¹¹⁸

Although composure is an individual activity, it depends ultimately upon the ‘power to confirm that the versions of self and world ... correspond to those of other people.’ Memories must ‘resonate with the experience of others, as shared, collective identities and realities’.¹¹⁹ The ‘repertoire’ of a specific public can serve as a ‘currency of recognisable social identities’ among its members.¹²⁰ Composure is partly, then, a comparative process, sustained by the recognition of others and subject to the hegemonic forces this entails.¹²¹ ‘Our memories are risky and painful,’ Thomson maintains, ‘if they

¹¹⁷ Paul Connerton, ‘Seven Types of Forgetting’, *Memory Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (2008), pp. 63, 68.

¹¹⁸ Dawson, p. 23.

¹¹⁹ Dawson, p. 23.

¹²⁰ Dawson, p. 23.

¹²¹ Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, p. 11.

do not fit the public myths, so we try to compose our memories to ensure they will fit with what is publicly acceptable.’¹²²

For veterans, much of the structure for this public recognition can come from identification with one’s unit through personal contacts, reunions and public institutions such as the Reserved Services Association (RSA) and Anzac Day. Unit histories could also contribute and, with their specific focus, reinforce the tendency to remember the war as a collective or battalion endeavour.¹²³ As the nuclei of collective reminiscence they could, through their attribution of prominence or silence, smooth the vagaries of individual memory and refine stories within the collective memory of the group. Thomson noted that acts of collective commemoration tended to ‘play down distinctions’ remembered by veterans while divisions that had been ‘previously troubling’ to their own identities, such as those between members who did not drink and the hard living larrikins in the unit, could become progressively ‘eclipsed by the pleasure of reunion and common, remembered experiences and identities of the battalion and the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]’.¹²⁴

Journey towards Christmas was directed toward a relatively small specific public by infantry battalion standards. Aspects of identity and experience could still have proven problematic. Here, too, a popular view of the New Zealand soldier as a light hearted, heavy drinking lad attributed to the unit would have by no means resonated with all members. Similarly, when divided up for service, not all accounts or experiences presented in the volume were applicable to all unit sections. In considering the smooth, inclusive dialogue and sense of belonging achieved by Llewellyn, the discussion returns to the literary devices of unanimist rhetoric and humour to examine the ways in which Llewellyn created a cohesive account of the war that would speak meaningfully to the collective afterlife of the unit.

¹²² Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, p. 11.

¹²³ Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, p. 161.

¹²⁴ Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, pp. 161, 160.

It has been shown that unanimist rhetoric allowed Llewellyn to provide considerable detail while maintaining the privacy of individual experience. It was acceptable to its readership because it accorded with their desire for a happy, unified and enriching memory of the war. Carried over into peacetime, these same premises could help to contribute to the successful resolution of war time memories. In his use of this device Llewellyn employed what Suleiman has termed the ‘waving we’, a rhetorical strategy in which the membership of the group covered by the pronoun fluctuated and the lines of inclusiveness were blurred.¹²⁵ As with many texts creating a cohesive view of the past, the inclusion of this ‘slippage’ between groups and sets of individuals became ‘not a weakness but a strength’,¹²⁶ and offered a fluid degree of identification with any one event or cause.

Within *Journey towards Christmas* ‘we’ could at various times relate to a few drivers, a section, the unit as a whole or, in the case of Christmas Day at Forli, be so non-specific as to convey nothing more than a general sense of inclusion and bonhomie. It could be used to assume complicity and defer blame, as in when Clarry’s signalling attracted the German tanks. If the record of these events became integrated within the composed memories of individuals and the repertoire of the unit as a whole, this lack of specification could work to members’ advantage. The ‘waving we’ allowed incidents to be selected for composure and, for those who subscribed to Llewellyn’s version of events, there was considerable scope as to where they could place themselves in relation to the text. Thomson found that veterans who had undergone a relatively positive war experience and who found themselves well aligned to the Anzac legend as it evolved in the post-war years tended to expand their memory of their participation to include popular events, described in their battalion histories but in which they had not actually taken part. Others, whose route to composure had been more problematic, sought to withdraw from both their own memories and from group commemorations due to

¹²⁵ Suleiman, pp. 18, 19.

¹²⁶ Suleiman, p. 19.

lingering feelings of bitterness and alienation, confusion and distress.¹²⁷ The fluidity of Llewellyn's text allowed for both these possibilities. It offered sufficient vagueness and flexibility to contribute to the unit's post-war culture by encouraging and expanding identification and recollection among its members but also, in the majority of cases, was so non-specific as to avoid imposing recognition where it was not wanted. Alternatively, members could have assumed the positive and affirming war experience offered by the volume as a public front, for family or for reunions, and used this to deflect attention from the more personal and distressing memories they harboured within.

The other strategy through which collective identity and memory were encouraged was humour. Humour is recognised as performing an important role in creating the idioculture of groups, that particular understanding that can bind a group through sets of shared, historicised experiences which are referred to and best understood within the collective context.¹²⁸ Being party to such references and to the jokes they entail is strong confirmation of group membership. The familiarity of the humour ensures that the jibes, jokes and pranks are carried out as 'tokens of attention [and] affection' within the group rather than mockery.¹²⁹ It is the confirmed membership of the group that gives the joker the '*right to joke*' and, conversely, for other members to receive and understand the joke among themselves.¹³⁰ A repertoire of jokes, like a repertoire of memories, reflects the historicised and referential nature of the interaction, identifying group members as sharing knowledge and commonalities. Humour is also functional and can be used to 'smooth interaction, to build cohesion, create norms and set boundaries' within the group, and to soften what 'might otherwise be harsh and divisive relations'.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, pp. 169, 161 & 169, 170 respectively.

¹²⁸ Gary Alan Fine & Michaela De Soucey, 'Joking Cultures: Humor Themes as Social Regulation in Group Life', *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, Vol. 18, No. 1, (February, 2005), pp. 1-2.

¹²⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984, p. 183, cited, Fine & de Soucey, p. 2.

¹³⁰ Fine & De Soucey, pp. 2, 3, (Italics in the original).

¹³¹ Fine & De Soucey, p. 6; Mark Klempner, 'Navigating Life Review Interviews with Survivors of Trauma', *Oral History Review*, Vol. 27, No. 2, (Summer – Autumn, 2000), p. 17.

The humour in *Journey towards Christmas* was a greatly admired by reviewers and was seen as something that later volumes would struggle to equal.¹³² It was a way of inviting unit members to remember even unpleasant or distressing events positively and was a mode of memory particularly acceptable for recounting at reunions. Like unanimist rhetoric, it presented an opportunity for expanding and confirming recognition within the unit and was intended to foster commonalities and facilitate unit members in aligning their memories. As with individual composure, it could encourage the unit to remember the war in a certain way and offered a collective screen behind which less attractive memories could be dealt with on a private basis.¹³³ And, although in *Journey towards Christmas* these techniques were primarily directed at instilling pride in individuals and the unit as a whole, the particular quality of Llewellyn's writing, the appeal of his themes and techniques, and the willingness of the nation to believe his tale meant that the volume was able to resonate at a much broader level.

The concept of 'national memory' has been a particularly problematic one for historians. The fact that memory, as a neurological event, is reliant on the chemical and cognitive processes of each individual restricts it to what Samuel Hynes has described as 'essentially private transactions between a man who was there and the things that happened where he was'.¹³⁴ Cognitive memory is not transferable, and although it may be composed, contained, expanded or aligned to the memories of others, it technically expires with each individual. For memories to gain broader purchase, in the sense of 'national memory', and to resonate with members of the public for whom, although they perceive an identification with those involved, there has been no direct experience, two processes are required. Firstly, a national memory must be generated, in the sense of constructing a notion or set of sensations with regard to an event in individual minds where there had been none. Secondly, to prevail, it must be accepted or integrated into a

¹³² D.L. Wood, 'Review: "Journey Towards Christmas"', Radio 4YA, 19 December 1949, IA1 181/7/29B, NA; 'Review of "Journey Towards Christmas" by S.P. Llewellyn', IA1 181/7/29B;

¹³³ See for example, Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, p. 164.

¹³⁴ Samuel Hynes, 'Personal Narratives and Commemoration' in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 205.

‘myth’: a ‘simplified, dramatised story’ that evolves within society to, in the case of war, ‘contain the meanings ... that we can tolerate, and so make sense of its incoherences and contradictions.’¹³⁵

National memory, Hynes would argue, requires ‘vicarism’. That which is considered ‘national’ memory is, in fact, better termed ‘vicarious’ memory, in the sense of having been generated through the ‘imagined participation in the experiences of others’.¹³⁶ For meaning to be generated through historical texts, readers must be able to relate material back to the experiences of their own lives. While in literary fiction this ‘truth effect’ can be achieved by reference to sets of common scenarios that allow readers to ‘fill in the gaps’ and make meaningful in ‘relation to their own experience in the world’, in historical writing the circumstances being discussed are generally far less familiar.¹³⁷

Through his use of literary devices and evocative style, Llewellyn was particularly skilled at evoking vicarious experience. This drew public attention to the volume and was the feature Kippenberger wished to exploit at a national level. *Journey toward Christmas* received extended coverage in newspapers over November and December 1949 in preparation for the Christmas market. It was praised by reviewers specifically for its ability to induce a sense of identification with the unit and with the New Zealand Division as a whole. Llewellyn had created, one reviewer maintained:

an imaginative atmosphere so powerful that ...[t]housands of people who have never seen a tank or an army truck will, through this book, live with the 1st Ammunition Company their experiences of war, will learn just what war means to individual soldiers,

¹³⁵ Hynes, p. 207.

¹³⁶ Hynes, p. 207 / definition: Dictionary.com, May 2009, URL: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/vicarious>

¹³⁷ Kuisma Korhonen, ‘General Introduction: the History / Literature Debate’, in Kuisma Korhonen (ed.), *Tropes for the Past: Hayden White and the History / Literature Debate*. Amsterdam, New York, Rodopi, 2006, p. 16.

will learn a good deal about their fellow New Zealanders and a good deal about themselves.¹³⁸

It was his rich description that enabled Llewellyn to convey these experiences to the general reader and to link travel and landscape to identification with the unit. ‘You as readers will be guided through many countries,’ another reviewer enthused:

You will travel through Palestine and Syria, you will march and fight through Greece and Crete and far across the North African Desert, sometimes resting awhile, sometimes enjoying leave, sometimes fighting desperate battles, sometimes enduring the harsh burning sun, the dust storms and the flies of El Alamein.¹³⁹

The unit’s experiences were seen as becoming those of the reader, the ‘outstanding impression’ made by the volume being that ‘he, the reader, is at home amongst a band of men that he himself knows and understands’.¹⁴⁰ The familiarity of the tropes, stereotypes and personae in the volume confirmed this sense of identification on a national level and linked it with perceived national characteristics and the New Zealand landscape. ‘At work and play,’ Alan Mulgan wrote in his review of the book, ‘these New Zealanders stand out like the outline of their own clear hills.’¹⁴¹

Like individual composure, vicarious memory is reliant on recognition and confirmation and, in order to move it toward some form of universal understanding and integration into ‘myth’, sufficient alignment is required between the experiences of those who participated and the vicarious understandings of those who have not. Again in *Journey towards Christmas*, Llewellyn was seen, through his choice of descriptions and writing style, as having formed an important link between soldiers’ experience and the ‘home

¹³⁸ Review, undated, unsourced, copy: IA 1 181/7/29B, NA.

¹³⁹ F.M. Mason, ‘Broadcast Review of *Journey towards Christmas*’, 2YA, 22 December 1949, IA1 181/7/29B, NA.

¹⁴⁰ D.L. Wood, Radio Review, 4YA, 19 December 1949, IA1 181/7/29B

¹⁴¹ Alan Mulgan, ‘Radio Book Review: *Journey Towards Christmas* 1st Ammunition Company, 2NZEF’, 18 January 1950, IA1 181/7/29B, NA.

front' in establishing a degree of unanimity about the war. The book was, as reviewer D.L. Wood said, a 'notable achievement' in this respect:

Through its pages members of the unit and ex-servicemen generally will live again the many varied and rich experiences of their army life. Their friends and relatives will find in it an answer to their oft made complaints that letters from overseas never told them anything. Everyone will find it a readable and fascinating odyssey...¹⁴²

The fluidity of Llewellyn's unanimist rhetoric was also readily expanded to this end, and picked up by reviewers themselves to emphasise the inclusive nature of the volume for the general readership: 'We see and smell the deserts, we cock an ear for the bombers, our mouths are dry with fear, we box on, we, too, share the joy as the tide rolls back'.¹⁴³ This broad appeal and identification was due in part to the sensitive balance Llewellyn achieved in creating an authentic atmosphere for soldiers without distressing the public. His mix of inclusive humour and description, while capturing the 'racy and picturesque qualities' of soldiers language, was achieved in such a way as to 'delight those who know or want to know but with just the right amount of delicacy ... to avoid offending the primmest of readers'.¹⁴⁴

Paradoxically, those subjective and vicarious elements which were seen as making the volume applicable to everyone were also seen to add validity to its representation of soldiers' actual experience and as Official History. As with the choice of topics it offered for discussion at reunions and with individual composure, there was a willingness by reviewers and readers to overlook omissions, to accept the presupposition of the 'expressed wish' and to maintain the public front of the WWII war experience. Bypassing the section on the workshops' raft at Fuka, presumably, for example, one reviewer praised the book's 'absence of emotionalism or overstatement', and maintained that it rung with 'truth and realism'. H.L. Heatley's review for *Freedom* endorsed its validity as

¹⁴² D.L. Wood, 'Radio Review', 19 December 1949, IA1 181/7/29B, NA

¹⁴³ 'Journey towards Christmas Review', no date, copy: IA1 181/7/29B, NA.

¹⁴⁴ D.L. Wood, 'Radio Review', 19 December 1949, IA1 181/7/29B, NA.

‘the most faithful, unadorned picture of the New Zealand soldier it would be possible to present to either to the general public or to the soldier himself’.¹⁴⁵ As suggested by the *Otago Daily Times*, the cultural work of the subjective representation in *Journey toward Christmas* appeared to be more important to these reviewers than the strictly factual nature of the volume itself.

This willingness to accept *Journey towards Christmas*, and to accept as a faithful picture what was clearly a sanitised and selective view of the war, deserves consideration. No reviewer was critical of the assumptions Llewellyn brought to the volume or challenged its representation of army life. This may be because, as the first of the unit histories, they were unsure of what to expect from this form of official representation, but another possibility also presents itself. In 1986, George Mosse’s seminal article, ‘Two World Wars and the Myth of the War Experience’, suggested that the ‘domestication’ of the war experience in the UK and Europe had differed following the two World Wars according to the nature of the warfare and the extent of the demarcation between the ‘battle line and the home front.’¹⁴⁶ In WWI the development of a war myth based around the ‘Spirit of 1914’ had enabled soldiers to reconcile their ‘contradictory attitudes’ to war and to transcend the horror while retaining the purposefulness and ‘meaning which the war had given to individual lives’.¹⁴⁷ This was, Mosse argued, missing from WWII. The industrialised and mobilised nature of that war and the memories of the still recent WWI had broken both the illusion of war as a ‘call to adventure and manliness’ in which participants could see themselves as ‘a class apart’ and, significantly also, reduced the physical and psychological distance between participants and non-participants that had enabled the myth, always more rhetorical than supported by experience, to prevail. The main themes of the ‘Spirit’ - manliness, camaraderie and the cult of the fallen soldier - which had effectively submerged the actual ‘boredom, numbness, cynicism and ... unrest’ that had prevailed during WWI - seemed to be missing, as was the political vigour that

¹⁴⁵ H.L. Heatley, ‘Journey towards Christmas: Brilliantly Written Work Sets High Standard in N.Z. War Histories’, *Freedom*, January 4 1950.

¹⁴⁶ Mosse, pp. 492, 497.

¹⁴⁷ Mosse, p. 494.

they had brought to the interwar period. In the mobilised, scrutinised and, more particularly, atomised world following WWII, which saw ‘little distinction’ between soldiers and civilians under the ‘menace of universal death’, war was stripped of ‘its remaining glory’,¹⁴⁸ and the myth, based as it was on a certain public naivety, could not remain.¹⁴⁹

Mosse, however, was writing of Europe and Britain, and of Germany in particular. With *Journey towards Christmas*, might it be argued that there was still some willingness to engage with that myth again here in New Zealand; that here, far from the bombed cities, the theatres of battle and the actual experiences of soldiers, the ‘expressed wish’ of Llewellyn’s presupposition - that camaraderie, unanimity, travel and humour made up the core of the war experience, that Cassino was about playing football in a leafy valley, that the war was about drinking and singing and parties - was something New Zealanders could still choose to believe? Writing in 1944, Major (Maj) Sandy Thomas recorded a particularly revolting day mopping up after the German army in Italy and recognised the extent to which this gulf in experiences between war participants and the Home Front still existed in New Zealand:

I shall never forget the sight which met our eyes on crossing the Pisciatello and where the Hun had withdrawn – a whole village demolished flat on the ground with the weeping mothers and children picking over the wreckage for whatever they might find. They were allowed to take nothing out – the Hun just walked in and filled their houses with explosives quite indifferent as to whether the owners were inside or not, and blew them up. It is horribly cruel to see an old lady of eighty hardly able to walk clambering over the rubble crying silently as she pulls a picture from under the beam ... particularly with the sky gathering black for a snow-storm. Where will she go? ... Oh! It makes me sick at times – the same day to see the stream of refugees on the road with children of all ages, seeing swollen German bodies in grotesque positions, the stench of their bodies mingling with that from the horses and cattle which litter the road. What a nightmare! Thank God

¹⁴⁸ Mosse, p. 505.

¹⁴⁹ Mosse, p. 497.

our people at home are spared that, do not and could never understand what war really is.¹⁵⁰

Certainly it was a side of the war not presented in *Journey toward Christmas*. ‘The story that is actually told,’ Dawson maintains, ‘is always the one preferred amongst other possible versions, and involves a striving, not only for a version of events but also for a version of the self that can be lived with in relative psychic comfort.’¹⁵¹ As a War History, *Journey towards Christmas* was an indulgence, a playful record and a brief opportunity, of which the Branch took full advantage and which the public happily received, to promote a particular view of the war. In the balance between the objective and subjective attempted in the unit histories, Llewellyn appeared to negotiate the dual role of the series with ease, providing a rich and evocative history for unit participants and others of the Division and a sanitised yet engaging account for the general readership. By stipulating some events and aspects of army life while approaching others only obliquely or excluding them altogether, he provided a framework for both remembering and forgetting. ‘Signal ways’ were provided around which participants could structure war memories. An emphasis on descriptions of landscape and the natural world, humour and the fluid levels of identification achieved through unanimist rhetoric enabled participants to position, and reposition, themselves, individually or collectively, in the very private exercise of ordering of their war experience. Paradoxically, these same literary devices created a strong identity with the unit among general readers also and, through a vicarious sense of participation, may have helped a move toward an acceptable account of the war at a national level. Although, through the characterisation of the antihero, Llewellyn distanced the unit from many of the values and much of the violence of war, the emphasis of the more positive stereotypes, such as war as a means of experiencing the world or of gaining personal and national maturity, for example, or as a display of positive national characteristics, positioned the war as a worthwhile, even

¹⁵⁰ Cited, Angus Ross, *23 Battalion*, Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1959, p. 404.

¹⁵¹ Dawson, p. 23.

enriching, experience. Its enthusiastic reception through reviews suggests this was a sought after interpretation and a welcomed result.

Chapter 3: “The Finest Things in our Lives”¹

23 Battalion; History

Following the publication of *Journey toward Christmas* other unit histories began to appear, slowly at first with *Chaplains* in 1950 and *26 Battalion* in 1952, then in greater concentration from 1953 to 1958. These were written with varying degrees of success, and increasingly by authors not directly associated with the units in question. It was not until 1959, perhaps, that another volume appeared to match Llewellyn’s in historiographical interest. With its analytical approach and heroic tone, Angus Ross’ volume on 23 Infantry Battalion was the opposite in almost every sense to *Journey toward Christmas*. As serious as Llewellyn’s was light-hearted and as measured as the latter was emotive, this volume, with its ability to generate pride in the Battalion and to engage the reader in a sense of its achievements, was, in its own way, an equally successful example of the unit history programme. Ross served as an Intelligence Officer and company commander in the 23rd and had risen to the rank of Brigade Major by the end of the war. He was also an empirically trained historian. Along with managing a heavy workload as a Lecturer at the History Department of Otago University, he left for Cambridge in the course of writing the Battalion history to complete a PhD. Over a decade in the making, his volume captured the balance, but also the tension, between empirical analysis and soldierly sentiment that underwrote the War History project. It can tell us much about the condition of history and its relationship to memory in New Zealand post-war society.

Following the guidelines of the unit history project as they were eventually worked out, Ross’ volume was highly collaborative. Where Llewellyn had worked from his own diaries, incorporating testimony and outside sources only to compensate for gaps in his

¹ Angus Ross, *23 Battalion*, Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1959, p. 192.

own record or to describe engagements that his company was not involved in, Ross had the strong support of his battalion's history committee and a personal commitment, in the manner of Charles Bean, to incorporating as much material as possible from 'individual New Zealanders' and those who 'would not otherwise have been mentioned'.² Thus nationally, regionally (23 Bn drew its forces from the South Island only) and individually, Ross celebrated the 'achievements of New Zealand citizens turned soldiers'.³ In doing so he preceded in his method and writing some of the 'shared authority' and collaborative methodology that came later to characterise the community history projects of the History Workshop in the 1970s and '80s. Ross' collaborative approach is one of the four main foci of this chapter.

Ross deliberately highlighted and fostered regimental traditions, through pride in the Battalion as a unit that had always got its objective⁴, and the 'solemn responsibility'⁵ associated with such traditions. As a '23rd man', and one who went on to command the Otago and Southland Regiment of the Territorial Army after the war, Ross was open about his intention to use his history not only to record members' achievements for the 'second and third generations' of their descendents, but also to 'help to inspire infantry soldiers of the future'.⁶ This notion of history put to the service of war, both in lessons for the future, as in the campaign volumes, and here in the sense of 'inventing' tradition to inculcate the values of service and sacrifice, forms the second focus of this chapter.

Service and sacrifice however, require a narrative structure to integrate them into a broader national understanding. For Ross this structure was the heroic quest, the classic genre for war and adventure stories. While Llewellyn's anti-heroes had joked, sung and drunk their way through six years of conflict, Ross' infantrymen strode forward to their individual and collective destinies and into the 'test of war' – 'the greatest test,' as Ross

² Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. viii.

³ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. vii.

⁴ Ross, *23 Battalion*, see pp. 271, 473, for examples.

⁵ Letter, Lt-Col 'Acky' Falconer to Ross, 11 November 1946, MS-2699, Hocken.

⁶ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. vii.

concluded, ‘to which the comradeship of men can be put’.⁷ Narrative forms are always the product of both ‘prior generic traditions’⁸ and the intellectual modes of their time. Their use within empirical history, and Official History in particular, is worthy of close examination. The works of Graham Dawson and Joseph Campbell are drawn on to explore this third aspect of Ross’ volume.

Fourthly, Ross’ history was notable for its use of testimony, both oral and written in the form of diaries and letters from unit participants, to add colour and atmosphere and to compensate, perhaps, for his own slightly lacklustre descriptive prose.⁹ However, Ross’ use of these sources was also grounded, however, in a belief in the purity of the primary record. While not going as far as Ruskin’s allegation that history was of value only from “the mouths of the men who did and saw it”, he did maintain when ‘dealing with the emotional side of military history’ that he, as author, ‘should intervene as little as possible between the reader and the fighting men who have spoken for themselves’.¹⁰ While justified in terms of historical objectivity, the selected testimonies also served to legitimise Ross’ own perspective on the war. Examining his choice of extracts through the lens of narrative analysis encourages a more careful consideration of their use as a historical medium and forms the final focus of this chapter.

Underwriting all four aspects of the history was Ross’ position as an academic historian and the material circumstances of the volume’s production. Ross’ historical training not only put him in an obvious position to write the history, and indeed put him under considerable pressure to do so,¹¹ but also led him to give the volume a unique character in the form of a research question. This was entirely Ross’ initiative but reflected both the Branch’s preoccupation with providing something more than ‘a mere chronicle of events,’ and Ross’ own wish to employ a historical medium with which he felt

⁷ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 476.

⁸ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities*, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 57.

⁹ Letter, Ross to A. Monaghan, 29 November 1949, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

¹⁰ Ross, *23 Battalion*, pp. viii – ix.

¹¹ Letter, Ross to Fairbrother, 1 September 1946, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

comfortable.¹² By choosing to examine the relationship between a unit's morale and its rate of success, Ross could also draw attention to and legitimise one of the principal assertions of his volume: that the 23 Bn had an *esprit de corps* or *élan* greater than any other unit, including that of its first echelon equivalent the 20 Bn, for which it was 'justly famous'. He then used this premise to confirm a second assertion, that 23 Bn was disproportionately successful in its engagements compared to other units. While the unit history guidelines had been clear that volumes were not to overly promote their particular units or to claim success at the expense of others, the research question generated a degree of licence in this respect.¹³ Under the guise of objective analysis, it enabled Ross to promote this aspect of his Battalion 'wherever' he felt he could 'get a chance'.¹⁴

The research question was not entirely to the benefit of the Battalion, however, as it also required close examination of its failures in order to match them with corresponding fluctuations in morale. In doing so it removed some of the protective layer of privacy afforded in less rigorous unit histories. Thus criticisms of the overrunning by the Battalion of their objective at Miteiriya Ridge in October 1942,¹⁵ the refusal of some men in A Company to go forwards as ordered at Sant' Andrea, Italy,¹⁶ and the unpopular appointment of Monty Fairbrother as Commanding Officer (CO) in May 1943¹⁷ all caused concern during the circulation of the drafts for the amount of attention they received. This was much greater than they would have done in other unit histories, and certainly greater than in *Journey toward Christmas*.

Ross' position as an academic historian also influenced more mundane aspects of the volume's production, including the length of time taken in its writing and publication. Despite his historical training, Ross' estimation of the time required for his project was, like that of seemingly everybody at the Branch, almost incredibly naïve. When appointed

¹² Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 24 March 1954, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

¹³ See for example letter, Ross to Fairbrother, 21 December 1946, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

¹⁴ Letter, Ross to Taun Emery, 28 April 1955, MS27-2/004, Hocken.

¹⁵ Ross, *23 Battalion*, pp. 200 – 206,

¹⁶ Letter, Ross to W.B. (Sandy) Thomas, 18 February 1956, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

¹⁷ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p.275, Letter, Ross to Fairbrother, 30 July 1957, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

in September 1946 he wrote to Fairbrother that he expected to be largely finished by the following July,¹⁸ and that any additional work could be completed during his ‘vacation times’ at Cambridge.¹⁹ These comments along with others in his correspondence, such as ‘the odd spot of adding and subtracting after circulating the first drafts’,²⁰ confirm the impression that, taken as a whole, no amount of either reading of military history, in the case of Kippenberger, historical production, in the case of McCormick and others who had transferred from the Centennial Branch, or empirical training, as here with Ross, had prepared members for the scale of undertaking of the War History project.

In the event, it was to be thirteen years before Ross’ volume was completed. During this time he had completed not only his PhD but also, over and above his existing workload, served as Acting Head of the Otago History Department,²¹ been on one trip through the university as an official observer to China²² and another in his military capacity to Gallipoli, served as Historical Secretary to an International Science Congress held in Dunedin²³ and on the Board of Governors of the Otago High Schools,²⁴ spent three years as Brigade Major of a large and scattered territorial unit and a further three years as its CO,²⁵ marked up to 800 papers a year for University Entrance examinations²⁶ and written numerous articles for newspapers and historical journals, including reviews of the War History volumes.²⁷ Ross’ experience was a fair, if somewhat concentrated, representation of what employing skilled but part-time writers had meant to the Branch. Those considered competent to write the histories were in high demand from other organisations as well.

¹⁸ Letter, Ross to Fairbrother, 4 December 1946, MS-2702/005, Hocken.

¹⁹ Letter, Ross to McClymont, 16 October 1946, MS-2702/005, Hocken.

²⁰ Letter, Ross to McClymont, 16 October 1946, MS-2702/005, Hocken.

²¹ Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 4 September 1953, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

²² Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 26 March 1956, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

²³ Ross, Circular Letter on Return of Members’ Diaries, March 1958, MS-2699/027, Hocken.

²⁴ Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 4 September 1953, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

²⁵ Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 4 September 1953, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

²⁶ Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 12 October 1953, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

²⁷ See for example, Letter, Ross to Fairbrother, 1 September 1946, IA1 181/7/23, NA; Maj Angus Ross, ‘Middle East Memories: Famous South Island Battalion was in Thick of Second Division Campaigns’, *Otago Daily Times*, undated; Ross, Review ‘Crete’, *Historical Studies Australia and New Zealand*, Vol. 6, No. 3, (November, 1954), pp. 348-350.

Kippenberger's frustration at the time taken to complete the volume boiled over into an angry sacking of Ross in 1953. Sparked by some comments passed on to him from a 23 Bn reunion at Gore,²⁸ he wrote a letter to Ross that swung between his own exasperation at dealing with an increasingly parsimonious and indifferent government and compassion for his authors, some of whom he now felt he had burdened with an impossible task. From claiming at the start of his letter that the 23rd history was a 'sore spot' and that he saw not the 'slightest use' in Ross carrying on, his tone softened toward the end of the letter, won over by his respect for a hard worker and fellow soldier. 'I am a friend of yours too,' he concluded to Ross, 'an old friend. And I say that I hope you will accept the position and in fairness to the 23rd give up a hopeless task – and feel a great relief. We haven't heard from you for 3½ years, Angus, it is no use deceiving yourself that you can properly continue.'²⁹

Ross was not to be so easily dismissed. In his 'refusal to be sacked', as Kippenberger described the letter Ross wrote in return,³⁰ he challenged many of his editor's allegations, corrected several errors, including the 3½ years, and amply demonstrated his commitment to the history and to the Battalion.³¹ Writing again after Kippenberger had relented, which he readily did, Ross described himself as 'both delighted and relieved' to be given the chance of completing the history, knowing that he would have 'despised' himself if he had done as suggested, "heaved a sigh of relief" and given up.³² Kippenberger, for his own part, when reading through Ross' later drafts was moved to find the 'old splendid pride in the 23rd welling up'³³ among the pages and was contrite. Compared with the fluctuating fortunes of other unit histories, some of which were up to

²⁸ '23 Bn War History', *Kiwi Courier*, August 1953, p. 11: 'Where is our history? This question, which has been asked month by month by many former members of the 23 Battalion who saw other unit histories appear in print, was answered by Professor (Lt Col) Angus Ross at a battalion reunion held at Gore recently ...'

²⁹ Letter, Kippenberger to Ross, 29 September 1953, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

³⁰ Letter, Kippenberger to Freyberg, 13 January 1956, IA1 181/3/3 part IV; Letter, Kippenberger to Ross, 8 October 1953, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

³¹ Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 4 September 1953, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

³² Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 12 October 1953, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

³³ Letter, Kippenberger to Ross, 22 April 1955, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

their third or fourth authors, Ross' progress had been straightforward after all. 'You haven't done so badly,' Kippenberger admitted in 1955, 'and I'm glad my attempt to sack you failed!'³⁴

While 'all's well that ends well' perhaps, the sacking was a sobering episode for both parties and demonstrated the stress the War History project was under to maintain standards and production over such an extended period. The death of Kippenberger not long after this correspondence led, in Ross' case, to further delays. More than three years were to pass between the completion of the full draft in 1956 and its final publication. 'Be patient just a little longer', he had begged those members of the Battalion whose diaries and letters he had used, 'and then I hope you will be able to take pleasure in having made a distinctly useful contribution to the writing of the history of the 23rd.'³⁵

It was to these men, the contributors of letters and diaries, and to those among the Other Ranks particularly, that Ross felt the strongest obligation. While in principle the unit history committees were intended to contain a cross section of the Battalion and produce a work representative of the experiences of all men, in practice it was often the officer ranks that predominated. Monty McClymont, who had been first a narrator at the Branch, but was later the author of the campaign volume, *To Greece*, was especially sceptical. Writing to Ross in 1946, just as the narratives were getting underway, he fumed:

I have dealt with many senior officers who knew all about history. They were a bloody pest and when I see the names in [the] Battalion Committees I realise they shall continue to be so. ... There's too much of the old CO touch of "I'll leave it to you, George", without the final responsibility. No one will blame the CO for a poor history. They will blame the historian.³⁶

'This suggests that I am soured', he added. 'Well I am.'

³⁴ Letter, Kippenberger to Ross, 22 December 1955, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

³⁵ Ross, 'Circular Letter', MS-2699/027, Hocken.

³⁶ Letter, McClymont to Ross, 30 September 1946, IA1 181/7/23, NA, (Underlining in the original).

With his own unit committee comprising the Battalion's original CO, Brigadier Falconer, one colonel, three lieutenant colonels, five majors and one lieutenant, Ross could see McClymont's point. By following his own practice during the war, however, of trying to consider the 'real and essential interests of those under me rather than above', he felt confident of giving a balanced representation.³⁷ The biographical footnotes on two pages taken randomly from the text suggest that he achieved his goal. Along with introducing one of the Battalion's favourite sons, Lt Col 'Sandy' Thomas, these footnotes include one sergeant, two corporals, one captain, a lance corporal and three privates. Along with Thomas, who was a bank officer on enlisting, the occupations of these men were a yardman, butcher, seaman, surfaceman, labourer, stock agent and builder: a good representation of Other Ranks and a fair slice of New Zealand society.³⁸

McClymont's comments and Ross' own endeavours reflect one of the most high minded but also one of the most challenging of the War History's goals and one which strongly reflected New Zealand's view of itself as an egalitarian nation. The New Zealand War Histories were intensely collaborative and while this was on a 'needs must' basis for many of the campaign volumes, it was a matter of principle and a point of considerable honour for the unit histories. The very concept of bringing the unit volumes under the auspices of the Branch was an attempt to ensure that for each man within the unit, and also between the units themselves, this recognition should be spread as equally as possible. The provision of the unit history for free was intended to convey to each man 'the thanks of the government in recognition of his services ... or the services of his son in the case of volumes given to parents of a deceased soldier'. It was, Kippenberger felt, 'a handsome gesture'.³⁹

³⁷ Letter, Ross to McClymont, 16 October 1946, MS-2702/005, Hocken.

³⁸ Ross, *23 Battalion*, pp. 40 - 41.

³⁹ Memo, Kippenberger to Peter Fraser, 9 January 1947, IA 1, 181/5, NA.

In as much as the war was fought by citizen soldiers, the unit histories were intended to be very much ‘community histories.’ Within the files of the unit history volumes and the working papers of Ross particularly, there is ample evidence to suggest a conscious attempt to create a voice for those marginalised by the formality and functionality of war records: the common soldier and especially, in Ross’ case, the many who ‘did a good job and yet never got a gong [medal] or a mention in dispatches’.⁴⁰ The unit histories were based, both methodologically and ethically, on the equal dissemination of knowledge and the decentering of power as it was represented through the established hierarchies of the army. Although, as McClymont’s comments suggest, this may not have come easily in the early stages of the project when, during demobilisation and rehabilitation, the retention of army formality and structure was at its strongest, the persistence of informal networks among those with a long-term interest in the Histories addressed this imbalance as the authority of the army in everyday lives gradually slipped away. The names and contacts in Ross’ files, the diaries offered up and letters gathered, sometimes from the families of members killed in action, and reminiscences sent in, either spontaneously or in response to requests for information on specific events, came largely from Other Ranks and the ‘small local colonies’⁴¹ of the 23 Bn that had remained in contact with each other in various districts.⁴²

With such a wealth of material at hand Ross was often critical of army records as representations of events and favoured instead the direct testimony or reminiscences of unit participants. As with other historians at the Branch, it was his practice to send official accounts of events out to participants, giving them the opportunity to confirm or correct the record, and to offer subjective accounts of their experiences.⁴³ These accounts, and even whole chapters, were freely circulated among the Battalion members themselves, posted on the initiative of one to others from a platoon or patrol if their

⁴⁰ Letter, Ross to Emery, 28 April 1955, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

⁴¹ Letter, R.A. Somerville to Ross, 18 May 1955, MS-2702/004, Hocken

⁴² See for example Ross file MS-2702/004, Hocken.

⁴³ See for example letter, Keith Burt to Ross, 24 October 1955, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

addresses were known.⁴⁴ They eventually made their way back to Ross appended with ‘constructive criticisms’,⁴⁵ descriptions and quotations, many of which were incorporated into the text. While, as later historians attempting these methods were to discover, this form of ‘open and democratic scholarship’ required ‘more work from the historian not less’ and a ‘great effort to achieve clarity of presentation’,⁴⁶ they were essential to Ross and to the story of ‘individual New Zealanders and not simply the “personnel” of certain Army orders and memoranda,’⁴⁷ that he wanted to tell.

In concluding the volume, Ross credited the war and battalion life with having consolidated the egalitarian leanings of New Zealanders. Like the ‘bonds of blood and kinship’, they had provided the framework for a ‘comradeship between men of different walks of life’, and, writing himself a little clumsily into the text, cited ‘businessman and miner ... high country shepherd and tradesman, and ... wharf labourer and university lecturer’ as his examples.⁴⁸ This comradeship, he believed, was ‘not restricted to one level’ but united men ‘irrespective of rank’.⁴⁹ It was founded on loyalty to fellow members and, significantly, on the determination to place the ‘honour’ of their Battalion ‘above personal interests’.⁵⁰ In doing so, he linked egalitarianism to the themes of heroism, service and sacrifice that dominated his narrative. Before examining these themes further, however, it is timely to consider the ‘invention’ and use of battalion tradition that Ross employed to validate his argument in this respect.

The term ‘invented tradition’ was first mooted by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in 1983.⁵¹ It was a critique of the methods by which history could be used to legitimise political or nationalistic agenda and to ‘inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour’

⁴⁴ Letter, Burt to Ross, 24 October 1955, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

⁴⁵ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. viii.

⁴⁶ Sally Alexander et al., ‘Editorial’, *History Workshop Journal*, No. 1, (Spring, 1976), p. 2.

⁴⁷ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. viii.

⁴⁸ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 477.

⁴⁹ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 475.

⁵⁰ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 475.

⁵¹ Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger, (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

through an implied ‘continuity with the past’.⁵² Invented traditions were seen by Hobsbawm as serving three purposes, especially in times of rapid social transformation: to achieve social cohesion within ‘real or artificial communities’; to legitimise ‘institutions, status or relations of authority’; and as a means of socialisation through the aligning of beliefs, values and conventions.⁵³ If the nature of the values which the traditions carried were often ill-defined, described in loose terms such as ‘duty’, ‘patriotism’, service, ‘and the like’,⁵⁴ the practices through which they were manifest were often very clear and the focus of strong social pressure. In the expression of nationalism, particularly, they were often ‘virtually compulsory’.⁵⁵

For Ross, tradition was both the glue that held his Battalion together and the mould by which its values had been established. From his first chapter, “What’s in a Name?”, he was at pains to emphasise the historical links of 23 Bn to previous South Island battalions and gave ‘full marks’⁵⁶ to Brigadier Falconer for instilling this sense of connectedness from the outset. In what was, indeed, an ‘artificial community’ established in the rapid social adjustment required for war, tradition provided the leverage by which submission to the army hierarchy and a degree of unity and commitment was achieved in a disparate group of men with nothing more than a loose geographical proximity to bind them. References to tradition occurred frequently in the early pages of Ross’ volume, primarily in relation to the WWI forces and coupled with the notion of a ‘solemn’⁵⁷ or ‘genuine’⁵⁸ responsibility to maintain their record. Hence for this newly formed unit, the presupposition was, with no more empirical evidence required than for the unanimist rhetoric of Llewellyn’s volume, not only that there would exist for the 23 Bn a link to ‘historic regiments with long lists of battle honours’⁵⁹ but also that the ‘fine record

⁵² Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction’, in Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger, (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 1.

⁵³ Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction’, pp. 4,9.

⁵⁴ Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction’ p. 10.

⁵⁵ Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction’, p. 10.

⁵⁶ Letter, Ross to Fairbrother, 21 December 1946, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

⁵⁷ Letter, Falconer to Ross, 11 December 1946, MS-2699, Hocken.

⁵⁸ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 4.

⁵⁹ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 3

established by New Zealand soldiers in the past must be maintained and that the traditions of 1NZEF [First New Zealand Expeditionary Force] and of the Territorial regiments must be upheld'.⁶⁰

This conviction and the uncritical acceptance of a seamless connection in the minds of both the Battalion commanders and Ross himself is evidenced by the proud inclusion of comments such as that of Maj Leckie at Burnham, when the unit was only a few weeks into its initial training, that 'all problems in training that arose were met and overcome with the usual 23 Bn resource and initiative'.⁶¹ Another stated that, after two pages recording the frustrating lack of action experienced by the Battalion during its first deployment, as ground troops during the Battle of Britain, the Battalion had developed a 'spirit of exclusiveness' as a result of 'pride in the 23rd and its record'.⁶² While both examples came from so early on in the life of the Battalion that it effectively had no 'record', the legitimizing of its identity and the affirmation of cohesiveness among its members suggest that this invention of a proud tradition, and the values to which it aspired, outweighed the empirical dubiety of its facts. "Our minds," one officer was quoted in the volume, "were 23rd right from the start".⁶³

If, after Burnham, the Battalion had been left with a 'deep consciousness of [its] responsibility' to the 'high traditions established in 1914',⁶⁴ the linking of these old traditions to the new ones consciously developed within the unit and to service and sacrifice became clear as the volume progressed.⁶⁵ Tradition was shown to have been used by commanders to extol troops to higher levels of performance⁶⁶ and to inculcate a sense of duty and commitment among groups of new reinforcements, each of whom were 'given to understand that the 23rd had a very special record which they must aspire to

⁶⁰ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 4.

⁶¹ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 7.

⁶² Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 19.

⁶³ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 4.

⁶⁴ Letter, Falconer to Ross, 11 December 1946, MS-2699, Hocken.

⁶⁵ Ross, 'Slogans and Mottos, The Twenty-Third Battalion: Reunion of Notable 2nd N.Z. Div Unit', MS-2699/028, Hocken.

⁶⁶ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 286.

maintain or develop'.⁶⁷ It was also used by Ross to legitimise losses in action and the human cost of war. Not one to capture the sparkle or humour of the men's close relationships in the way that Llewellyn had done, Ross used tradition and the call to higher duty as compensations for the pain of men losing their comrades. After two days of hard but successful fighting at Takrouna, for example, the battalion was recorded as having 13 dead and 107 wounded. 'Depressing though these casualties were,' wrote Ross, employing his own attempt at unanimist rhetoric to support a potentially dubious assumption, 'everyone had much satisfaction in knowing that a grand effort had been made to live up to a unit tradition, "the 23rd always takes its objective"'.⁶⁸ Although for many involved in Takrouna and other engagements, maintaining unit traditions may have been scant compensation for a wound or the loss of a comrade, this did not appear out of place in Ross' volume. Tradition, along with a raft of similar ideals such as duty, service and sacrifice, formed the narrative backbone of his text. Although more analytical than most unit histories and with a level of strategic and tactical detail that reflected Ross' continuing role as an army commander, the 23 Bn history was structured, essentially, around the notion of the heroic quest.

Writing on the emplotment and encoding of historical material, Hayden White observed that historical narratives 'succeeded' best when they endowed 'sets of past events with meaning over and above ... causal laws by exploiting metaphorical similarities between sets of real events and the conventional structures of our fiction'.⁶⁹ Familiarity with and understanding of such structures constituted part of an individual's 'cultural endowment'.⁷⁰ Graham Dawson has linked these structures to notions of masculinity in the 'continued willingness' to see military heroes as 'expressions of a national essence',⁷¹

⁶⁷ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 476.

⁶⁸ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 271.

⁶⁹ Hayden White, 'The Historical Text as a Literary Artifact', in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, (first published *Clio*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1974), p. 91.

⁷⁰ White, p. 86.

⁷¹ Dawson, p. 15.

a tendency adopted in New Zealand's military past also.⁷² Adventure quests particularly, offer a 'powerful metaphor for the human capacity to endeavour, risk and win through'.⁷³ With their assurance of a positive outcome against the 'vicissitudes' of an uncertain world, they provide a rewarding schema for narrations of war – in preference to irony demonstrated in *Journey towards Christmas* for example - through the 'powerful, superior and triumphant'⁷⁴ attributes they ascribe to their protagonists and the potency and pleasure of the identification that these engender in their readers.⁷⁵ More than merely giving 'textual embodiment to the real heroic impulses and qualities' of soldiers, Dawson argues, the 'heroism and virtue of the patriotic soldier is secured, not by his actions, but by their narration in terms of the quest structure'.⁷⁶ Rather than simply accepting quest as the most natural or appropriate mode for recording the heroic endeavours of citizen-soldiers in a victorious war, therefore, as perhaps Ross may have seen his choice of narrative, consideration needs to be given to the extent to which the positioning of the 23 Bn volume within the quest genre contributed to the historical interpretation of the Battalion experience.

Although he recognised the attractiveness of the genre, Dawson was critical of analyses of quest that rendered it 'ahistorical', as the product of essentialist concepts located 'exclusively within the psyche'⁷⁷ rather than of cumulative cultural images and experiences. The notion of quest has become deeply familiar through its 'endless repetition'.⁷⁸ Even so, it is constantly developing as its 'inherited forms are activated within new social conditions and draw on the imaginaries currently investing them'.⁷⁹ It is the hybridisation, Dawson maintains, between 'the conserving familiarity of well established generic conventions' with their 'comfort of a known reading experience' and

⁷² Jock Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male: a History*, Auckland: Penguin, 1987, pp. 198 – 207.

⁷³ Dawson, p. 55.

⁷⁴ Dawson, p. 53.

⁷⁵ Dawson, p. 55

⁷⁶ Dawson, p. 56.

⁷⁷ Dawson, p. 57.

⁷⁸ Dawson, p. 54.

⁷⁹ Dawson, p. 57.

the ‘stimulating and unsettling material’ of new settings or plot variations that make the quest narrative so attractive.⁸⁰ In Ross’ volume, quest combined for readers the pleasure of the successful, and known, outcome of the war with the drama and developments of a near-fought and very modern conflict. It also positioned the Battalion, and rightfully so perhaps, as returning heroes deserving of the bright promise of the post-war nation. The incorporation of this genre into the new modes of empirical investigation employed by the Branch gave additional validity to a rewarding and at times gripping tale and conveyed the historical details in an engaging way within the national tradition.

Although he was often reliant on the testimony of others to convey the particularities of the Battalion’s experiences, Ross’ respect for willing service and his determination to honour the Battalion’s memory, made quest an attractive choice for his volume. It was a path that could align for him, personally, the roles of historian, narrator and soldier. With its familiar elements and popular appeal it was also a way of bringing the brutal and extraordinary experiences of war, some of which he treated in considerable detail, into the broader understanding of soldiers’ families and the general public.

Joseph Campbell, whose early studies of mythic quest have remained central to the literature, identifies four narrative elements central to quest: journey, suffering, sacrifice and heroism. Closely aligned with these are the concepts of maturation and passage, again two of the overarching themes of the War History project. Journey, clearly, was an essential element for most Commonwealth troops participating in the war, and in quest is representative of a ‘threshold’: leaving the familiar realm, over which participants have a degree of control, and moving into the unknown. Here, in a series of ‘crucial struggles’,⁸¹ they must pitch themselves against both the enemy and fate. In each encounter they must wrest back control or perish.⁸² For Ross, the ambivalence of leaving for this ‘great adventure overseas’⁸³ saw the Battalion drinking ‘toasts of good luck and celebration

⁸⁰ Dawson, p. 54.

⁸¹ Dawson, p. 54.

⁸² Campbell, *The Power of Myth*, New York: Anchor House / Random House, 1991, p.180.

⁸³ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 3.

with the one hand and drowning sorrows with the other', while the significance of the threshold was marked in a 'curiously dramatic way' by the burning of the straw palliasses and the tidying up of the camp that represented 'the end of a chapter'⁸⁴ in Battalion life. Passage by troopships and the initially frustrating time in England bore little of Llewellyn's humorous or descriptive approach but rather concentrated on training and patriotism as men entered into their part in the war with a spirit 'that could not have been more serious or more willing'.⁸⁵

Aside from their literary styles, it is in this aspect of agency that the fundamental difference in the volumes of Ross and Llewellyn lies: between Llewellyn's light-hearted lads and Ross' depiction of men of destiny, responsible for not just their own fate but that of their nation. Where Llewellyn's drivers would have preferred learning the saxophone to training, Ross' soldiers continued to practice independently on their Bren guns, mortars and rifles 'long after parade and training hours were completed for the day'.⁸⁶ This sense of agency is characteristic, Hynes suggests, of soldiers on the frontline, along with pride in 'hardships shared and endured'.⁸⁷ 'No man,' he writes, 'with a weapon in his hand can be entirely a victim, and the narratives [of war memoirs] show that men did not think of themselves as such.'⁸⁸

Suffering is also central to narratives of quest. Campbell maintains that the structures within mythic quest tells us 'how to confront and bear and interpret suffering, but they do not say that in life there can or should be no suffering.'⁸⁹ For Dawson, also, it is suffering, in the struggle for ultimate victory, that makes 'possible the recognition of the protagonist as a hero'.⁹⁰ The positioning of events in quest as a series of 'obstacles to be

⁸⁴ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 9.

⁸⁵ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 13.

⁸⁶ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 7.

⁸⁷ Samuel Hynes, 'Personal Narratives and Commemoration', in Jay Winter & Emmanuel Sivan (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 219.

⁸⁸ Hynes, p. 219.

⁸⁹ Campbell, p. 200.

⁹⁰ Dawson, p. 54.

overcome in pursuit of [the] desired ends'⁹¹ emphasises the notion of earned reward and gives poignancy to the final victory and return. Ross' use of the quest structure, as with his use of Battalion traditions, gave legitimacy to suffering in war as a necessary and integral step in the passage to victory. Although in his own capacity as historian he seldom mentioned suffering directly, and then most generally as part of measured summary of events, outside of the official record, in the testimonies of the men, he allowed it to be given full voice. There, the extracts chosen by Ross were often disarmingly frank, as in this summing up by Dave Jenkin's of the Ruweisat offensive in the first battle of El Alamein:

It's been a nerve wracking six months, bitter memories most of it, but a man is proud to have been part of such a game outfit. It was mighty hard on the central sector at Ruweisat Ridge, week after week of blazing heat and those terrible night patrols, continual shelling, when we were pinned to the ground from morning till night, and things got so bad in the forward position which No. 10 platoon held that we had to be relieved or we would have cracked up. That terrible day when Gordon Bone and Butch Conner were killed in their trenches! I mind Harry and I nearly got shot up burying them after dark. And always there was the flies and the sickly smell out front where the dead of both sides lay unburied. And the long hours of darkness when we laid minefields and did miles of wiring, all half sick with dysentery and desert sores. A wonder how we stood it! My God what a pack of scarecrows we were!⁹²

More formal though Ross may have been in his own writing, he had many men at hand who were prepared to speak from the heart.

Journey, suffering and sacrifice, however, were essentially foundations. They allowed for the central platform of Ross' narrative: the recognition of heroism and the consciousness among Battalion members, 'of belonging to and being possessed by,' as he described it in the conclusion to his volume, 'a force much bigger and much more important than

⁹¹ Dawson, p. 55.

⁹² Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 191.

themselves'.⁹³ This sense of the heroic and the giving over of one's self gave meaning to participation, loss and sacrifice. It could also frame the memory of the war in men's lives.

Dave Jenkin's diary entry concluded:

Well, its behind us now, thank Christ. Here's hoping the Div never sees such times again To us it has been a memorable period and though things were often terribly hard and often hopeless, the comradeship and sheer guts of the boys concerned have been among the finest things in our lives.⁹⁴

Heroes are the essential protagonists of quests. 'Prodigies of courage and endurance',⁹⁵ as Dawson describes them, they stride through the narrative landscape, unhindered by fear, doubt, or ambivalence. There were times when Ross' narrative displayed these elements in the style of an action adventure story. At Celle in Italy, for example, caught in the power of the moment, fear, doubt and even, the significance of the Battalion's own dead, fell away:

The shells of the barrage were still hitting the top storey when [Lt Bill] Williams and his men arrived in the yard and fired a few burst of Bren or Thompson sub-machine gun fire through the windows. Once the barrage had rolled on, Williams strode up to the nearest door, opened it and gave it a vigorous kick. It opened only a few inches but sufficiently far for a German inside to fire a volley through the open crack. Standing with his back to the wall a yard away from the door, Williams drew the tape from a phosphorus smoke bomb, kicked the door open again and pushed the bomb inside Thus, from house to house, the troops moved, losing a few good men but rejoicing in the number of prisoners taken and in such a sight of dead Germans as few of them had ever seen before.⁹⁶

The pinnacle of heroic quest was transcendence, the touching of the "mysterium tremendum et fascinans", to quote Campbell again, 'something higher and more

⁹³ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 476.

⁹⁴ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 192.

⁹⁵ Dawson, p. 55.

⁹⁶ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 418.

terrible⁹⁷ than themselves. For 23 Bn this transcendence occurred at Galatas on Crete when a surprise and hurriedly organised attack on German troops resulted in the ‘most stunning and dramatic blow on the battlefield’⁹⁸ Kippenberger claimed ever to have seen. Consideration of the treatment of this engagement offers not only an example of the use of heroic quest in historical writing but also shows its use to claim and position war experiences in the national tradition.

Galatas was a small village within the New Zealand sector during the Battle for Crete in 1941. Due to the loss of other vital ground it had become a key point in the New Zealand line. On May 25, after six days of close and bloody fighting, the Germans managed to outflank the New Zealanders and occupy Galatas and thus break the line and force a retreat to the east. As those pockets of the Division defending the surrounding hills were told to withdraw, troops streamed down past the village. As confused and exhausted as they were, a degree of panic began to set in among the New Zealanders while it was also obvious that some units had been cut off behind the German lines. Quick action was called for and, among the tension and confusion, Kippenberger organised an attack. Calling ‘Stand for New Zealand!’ he gathered the men. From troops in retreat, with a mighty yell they turned to become the aggressors and using mainly hand-to-hand combat and small arms fire drove the surprised Germans from the village. In seemingly only a few minutes Galatas had been regained, time had been bought for those troops cut off to complete their withdrawal and the New Zealand line could once again be stabilised. Although casualties were high, both order and honour had been saved and, for New Zealanders, Galatas became one of the most recognised and heroic engagements of the war.

Yet the attack on Galatas could as easily have been seen as an ultimately futile exercise. Major Russell and members of the Divisional Calvary, the relief of whom was one of the key objectives of the attack, had already removed themselves prior to the start of the

⁹⁷ Campbell, p. 45.

⁹⁸ Letter, Kippenberger to Ross, 2 April 1948, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

fighting and had come around to join the 19 Bn outside the village, less than half a mile away.⁹⁹ A decision to withdraw from Galatas only hours after having taken it, disgusted the men who had cleared it¹⁰⁰ and was taken in conditions far more amenable to collective consideration than those, for example, of Lt Col Lesley Andrew and Brigadier James Hargest at Maleme airfield, to be discussed in the following chapter. Yet the decision to withdraw was an error which Kippenberger later admitted amounted to the loss of the Crete ‘for the chance of an orderly retreat’.¹⁰¹ Certainly it was seen so in the minds of the men who believed that, like so many of decisions taken during the battle, if they had been allowed to ‘[hold] on for one more day the Germans would have pulled out’.¹⁰²

Furthermore, Galatas was, at its inception, essentially an exercise in staying a breaking line of panicking and exhausted men.¹⁰³ Rather than an heroic rallying, Kippenberger’s famous call, “Stand for New Zealand,” could equally be interpreted as a reaction to one of the lowest and least heroic moments on Crete. Kippenberger maintained privately that there were officers from that incident whose conduct had been so poor that he had found himself still ‘unable to speak’ to them more than four years later.¹⁰⁴ Alternatively, it may have been, as veteran Peter Winter wrote many years later in a bitter vitriol against the management of Crete as a whole, that Galatas was no more than ‘a desperate act born of frustration caused by trying to fit World War I tactics and the bayonet mentality into World War II situations’ and ‘another manifestation of unimaginative and incompetent command’.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Letter, Kippenberger to Ross, 30 July 1946, quoted Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 85; Davin, *Crete*, p. 307.

¹⁰⁰ Peter Winter, *Expendable: The Crete Campaign, a Front Line View*, Tauranga, Moana Press, 1989, p. 51; Lynn McConnell, *Galatas: Courage in Vain*, Auckland: Reed, 2006, pp. 185–187.

¹⁰¹ Letter, Kippenberger to Ross, 2 April 1948, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

¹⁰² Crete veteran Jim Lydiate, in McConnell, p. 185; Lydiate is also mentioned in the attack on p. 81 of Ross’ volume.

¹⁰³ ‘Comments by General H.K. Kippenberger on Work of 10th & 4th Brigades on Crete’, no date, CAB 106/711, NA, UK.

¹⁰⁴ Kippenberger, comments in ‘Draft history of the Crete Campaign – Comments by W.E. Murphy’, Davin, Daniel Marcus 1913 – 1900, Literary Papers, Tapuhi IRN: 169582.

¹⁰⁵ Winter, p. 52.

A careful consideration of any one of these perspectives within the 23 Bn volume would have enabled Ross to have presented the fighting at Galatas in a markedly different light, had he so wished. Yet, other than one reference to a line that ‘appeared to be cracking’ and then was rapidly ‘stabilised’,¹⁰⁶ only the contention over the withdrawal was mentioned in his volume and this, at six brief lines, occurred at a level only just sufficient to prevent the account from becoming inaccurate.¹⁰⁷ The inclusion of an extract, on the other hand, of a letter from Kippenberger claiming the attack succeeded in relieving Russell¹⁰⁸ appears a deliberate inaccuracy. It ran contrary to both Kippenberger’s own report written during the battle as Commander of 10th Brigade, in which he acknowledged that Russell ‘had in fact skilfully extricated his troops just before the counter-attack was launched’¹⁰⁹ and also to the details given in the Branch’s own history *Crete*, published in 1953, six years earlier than Ross’ volume.¹¹⁰ Apart from possible loyalty to his previous commanders, and to Kippenberger in particular, the reasons for the interpretation of Galatas Ross gave in the 23 Bn history appear twofold. Firstly the fighting at Galatas represented the point in which the commitment and soldierly qualities of the men surpassed the merely heroic and, transcending all ordinary calls to duty, touched upon the elemental and sublime. Secondly, Ross intended to claim Galatas for the 23rd.

The trigger for the heroic transcendence at Galatas was the spontaneous ‘roar’ from the men as they began their charge into the village. A full page of description and the six separate testimonies included by Ross attest to the significance he placed on this event. Lt Col Sandy Thomas, whom Ross later described as having a genuine ‘love’ of

¹⁰⁶ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 76.

¹⁰⁷ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 85.

¹⁰⁸ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 83.

¹⁰⁹ Kippenberger, ‘Report on the Operations of the 10th Inf. Bde at Galatas, 20 – 25th May 41’, CAB 106/711, NA, UK.

¹¹⁰ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 83; Davin, *Crete*, p. 316, see also I.McD.G. Stewart, *Struggle for Crete, 20 May – 1 June 1941: a Story of Lost Opportunity*, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 391.

soldiering,¹¹¹ and who also had a genuine literary flair, provided the longest description and best captured the sense of transcendence:

‘[S]uddenly I found myself shouting to my men and we were away And then it happened. I don’t know who started it, but, as the tanks disappeared in a cloud of dust and smoke into the first buildings of the village, the whole line seemed to break spontaneously into the most blood curdling of shouts and battle cries the effect was terrific – one felt one’s blood rising swiftly above fear and uncertainty until only an inexplicable exhilaration quite beyond description surpassed all else, and we moved as one man into the outskirts By the time we entered the narrow streets, every man was firing his weapon to the front or in the air and every man, you could feel it, was flushed with confidence. Nothing could stop us.’¹¹²

Another witness described a ‘deep throated wild beast noise’,¹¹³ while E.H. Ferry, a private from the HQ company who had volunteered to drive one of the tanks, recalled a ‘howling and shouting’ that sounded like ‘the baying of dogs’. In its otherworld quality, rising and falling, it had made his ‘flesh creep’.¹¹⁴

Descriptions of extreme heroism followed. Waves of men marched forward routing the unprepared Germans from their positions and sending them, as Thomas described it, in “full flight swarm[ing] wildly, falling over one another to clear our relentless line”.¹¹⁵ Individuals preformed outstanding deeds: a single man cleared one enemy strongpoint, two men cleared another.¹¹⁶ One of the most extraordinary acts was that of Private David Seaton, a tractor driver in civilian life who, on finding his Company held up in a narrow street by machine gun fire, ‘broke the spell by striding forward firing his Bren gun from the hip’. Seaton was killed, ‘but the attack surged on again’.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 404.

¹¹² Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 78.

¹¹³ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 78.

¹¹⁴ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 78.

¹¹⁵ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 80.

¹¹⁶ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 80.

¹¹⁷ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 80.

Fighting left Galatas ‘like a butcher’s shop’.¹¹⁸ Privates had slashed and shot their way across the village, killing up to four Germans at a time, while officers had ‘despatched’ their enemy equivalents with their pistols. ‘Bayonets, rifle butts ... and bare hands’¹¹⁹ had all been used in what Ross maintained was the closest fighting by the Battalion in the war. In four pages of description no fewer than 26 individual soldiers were named, but ‘those not mentioned,’ Ross felt, would not ‘grudge the honour done to a few as representatives of them all’. All, he maintained, were ‘heroes of the fight to retake Galatas’.¹²⁰ German reports selected by Ross at the end of the passage confirm this heroic view, citing crowds of ‘Tommys’ with lowered bayonets, and ‘thunder and lightning in every corner and cranny’ as groups of brave German comrades ‘defend themselves with pistols and hand grenades in this fearful hand-to-hand struggle’.¹²¹ Although the levels of casualties in the Battalion were acknowledged as having been ‘serious’, all officers killed and all senior NCOs wounded in one company alone for example,¹²² no mention was made of the civilians, those ‘Greek women and children’¹²³ who were occupying the houses at the time and who would have been left to cope the best they could in a village that had been reduced to a blood bath. ‘Powerful, superior and triumphant’,¹²⁴ perhaps, to return to Dawson’s description of the classic soldier hero, Ross’ Battalion, victors just once in this otherwise dispiriting battle, could go striding on.

The 23rd was not alone in recognising the heroic significance of Galatas, however. Other battalions and units, whom Ross considered to have played notably lesser roles, were also anxious to stake a claim in the victory. 18 Bn and his own fellow South Islanders, the 20 Bn, had both written the incident into their histories, at times, he felt, unfairly. In a fine

¹¹⁸ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 80.

¹¹⁹ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 81.

¹²⁰ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 81.

¹²¹ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 82.

¹²² Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 83.

¹²³ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 79.

¹²⁴ Dawson, p. 55.

example of history as stipulation, Ross had written to Kippenberger after reading the 18 Bn's version saying:

you may be interested to read what the 18th Bn narrative says – namely “some reinforcements had been brought up from the 5th Brig. and along with 2 coys of the 23rd, the 18th made an assault on Galatas.” It rather suggests that the 23rd had a secondary role, but the detail I have given compared with the brief account given by Stewart will indicate which unit was the more fully engaged.¹²⁵

Along with employing this detail and ‘a bit of colour’¹²⁶ to highlight the significance of his Battalion's participation, Ross included a series of otherwise seemingly magnanimous acknowledgements, purportedly recognising the contribution of others but intended, primarily, to clarify the record and keep competing battalions at bay. Thus, in the explanation of the lead-up to the attack, he noted that ‘[r]ealising the smallness of their numbers, the men of the 23rd were glad to be joined by small parties from the 18th and 20th’.¹²⁷ Five pages later, he was even more explicit: ‘While the recapture of Galatas was principally a 23rd achievement, credit must be given to the representatives of other units who joined in this fierce fighting’.¹²⁸ He then listed specific officers from adjoining battalions, some of whom had ‘joined in destroying some of the German posts’¹²⁹ and others ‘in the bayonet charges’.¹³⁰

Competition for participation in Galatas also arose from within the Battalion, however, in an incident that illustrated both the individual and collective composure of memories and some of the difficulties of relying on personal testimony in contemporary histories. When Kippenberger had written up his own account of Galatas in *Infantry Brigadier* in 1949 he had inadvertently offended Maj H.H. Thomason, the temporary CO of 23 Bn at the time

¹²⁵ Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 17 April 1947, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

¹²⁶ Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 17 April 1947, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

¹²⁷ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 77.

¹²⁸ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 82

¹²⁹ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 82

¹³⁰ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 82

of the attack by describing events in a way that Thomason felt was ‘likely to create an entirely wrong impression’¹³¹ over his level of contribution. Thomason had only been given command of the 23rd on his way up to the village after the wounding of its regular CO, Col Leckie. Kippenberger had described him as arriving with the last company of the Battalion, after the attack had already been launched. Thomason, however, maintained that he had been there from the start of its organisation and had not only ‘repeated the call for volunteers to man the tank’, after hearing somebody, ‘presumably’ Kippenberger, begin the rally, but had also followed the Battalion into the village before returning to Kippenberger and the other commanders at the side of the road.¹³² Sensing an implied criticism in Kippenberger’s account, he wrote to him, stating that ‘throughout the attack and afterward’ he had had ‘the Bn completely in hand’ and that ‘there was no suggestion of disorganisation’. It was a slight he had felt ‘very acutely, as one does not relish the idea of being mis-represented by one’s friends’.¹³³

While Kippenberger was surprised at the extent of Thomason’s sense of injury, he handled the matter in a style typical of both his leadership qualities and management as editor. He was respectful and self deprecating in his response, while at the same time relinquishing little of his position. Writing to Thomason, he assured him that ‘there are few things that I would be more reluctant to do than to be unjust to the 23rd ... or to so brave and devoted soldier as yourself’.¹³⁴ He then went on to remind him of the way in which he, Thomason, had coolly restrained Kippenberger, pulling him back off the road from where, on hearing the rise of the battle cry at Galatas, he had been foolishly ‘dancing about’ in ‘extreme excitement’.¹³⁵ Having set the ground for conciliation there was only so far Kippenberger was prepared to go in conceding leadership of the attack. Although he acknowledging that he had got his ‘recollections confused’ in his own

¹³¹ Letter, H.H. Thomason to Kippenberger, undated (February 1949), copy, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

¹³² Letter, Thomason to Kippenberger, undated (February 1949), copy, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

¹³³ Letter, Thomason to Kippenberger, undated (February 1949), copy, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

¹³⁴ Letter, Kippenberger to Thomason, 28 February 1949, copy, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

¹³⁵ Letter, Kippenberger to Thomason, 28 February 1949, copy, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

memory and that Thomason ‘certainly had been there from a little time before the assault was ordered’, he kept credit firmly in his own hands:

‘You will agree, I’m sure, that the actual orders for the counter-attack were given by me to the Companies and not through you. The Battalion was put into action or position by me and after the fighting died down I thought that you re-established your grip in extremely good fashion’¹³⁶

Although *Infantry Brigadier* had already been printed, Kippenberger posted a letter explaining the error over Thomason’s arrival to the editor for printing in the *R.S.A. Review* where the book had been serialised, and the matter appeared resolved.¹³⁷

It was to return, however, with the draft of *23 Battalion*. Writing to Ross after the circulation of the Crete chapter in 1957, Thomason recounted a further version of his participation at Galatas that suggested that, rather than accepting Kippenberger’s attempt to contain his role, it had if anything amplified in his memory in the intervening decade. Thomason now saw himself as having gone further into the village behind the tanks than in his original account,¹³⁸ but more significantly, he also no longer acknowledged that his call for volunteers had been merely an echo of Kippenberger’s but was rather of his own initiative. Thus he had come to place himself in a far more central role in organising the attack than others felt warranted. ‘This letter of Thomason’s is rather distressing,’ Kippenberger wrote unhappily to Ross after receiving a copy. ‘I am afraid that the insufficient recognition I unwittingly gave to him in *Infantry Brigadier* has rankled and now he rather suggests that he laid on the whole affair.’¹³⁹

For Ross, it was a difficult situation. Without the corroboration of other accounts, Thomason’s version muddled rather than clarified an understanding of what had

¹³⁶ Letter, Kippenberger to Thomason, 28 February 1949, copy, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

¹³⁷ Letter, Kippenberger to Editor, *RSA Review*, 23 November 1949, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

¹³⁸ Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 16 February, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

¹³⁹ Letter, Kippenberger to Ross, 30 January 1957, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

happened yet, although it ran counter to most testimonies and made the others ‘difficult to follow, he did not feel he could leave it out. While Thomason was ‘easily the most peppery’¹⁴⁰ of his correspondents concerning Crete, there was little doubting his sincerity, and after the slight incurred over *Infantry Brigadier* he seemed to Ross deserving of particular care. The result was a compromise. While generally most reluctant, Ross conceded under some circumstances ‘how necessary’ these could be. He tried to ‘find a way out’ of the dilemma by writing Thomason clearly, but in a firmly limited capacity, into the text.¹⁴¹ During the build up to the attack, therefore, while Kippenberger was sending tanks into the village for reconnaissance and giving orders to Company commanders, it was explained that Maj Thomason had been ‘sent by Brigadier Hargest to attempt to stabilise the line’ elsewhere and that ‘[d]uring the minutes that elapsed before he could rejoin the 23rd, the attack on Galatas was organised’.¹⁴² This was emphasised again in the following paragraph where it was stated that C and D Company commanders ‘received their orders from Colonel Kippenberger’ and that ‘[on] arrival, Major Thomason agreed with the arrangements already made’.¹⁴³ This was followed by the concession that both ‘Colonel Kippenberger and Major Thomason’ had then ‘called for volunteers’.¹⁴⁴

There was no acknowledgement in the passage that Thomason had followed the Battalion troops into the village at the start of the attack, even though this was an action confirmed by others, including the Battalion’s VC winner, Sergeant Clive Hulme, and also by Kippenberger in his letter to *Review*, where he had acknowledged that Thomason had gone ‘a lot further’ into the village than he himself had done.¹⁴⁵ There was also no mention of Thomason bringing Kippenberger in off the road, possibly saving his life. Other than mentioning that he had turned down one volunteer who would be needed in a more skilled capacity, nothing more was read of Thomason at Galatas until he was

¹⁴⁰ Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 26 January 1957, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

¹⁴¹ Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 26 January 1957, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

¹⁴² Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 76.

¹⁴³ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 76.

¹⁴⁴ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 77.

¹⁴⁵ Letter, Kippenberger to Thomason, 28 February 1949, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

handed over command by Kippenberger at the end of the attack and began to evacuate the wounded. In his final recognition of Thomason as commander, when he had handed over his own command during the gruelling retreat of the Division across the island to the south coast, Ross took the opportunity to reinforce the volume's position over Galatas, noting that 'Thomason had been a tower of strength to the battalion *from Galatas onwards*'.¹⁴⁶ As an active and competent leader over a very difficult period, he had continued to command the Battalion 'with a bomb splinter in his knee until he could no longer walk' and had, Ross acknowledged, 'served the 23rd well'.¹⁴⁷ It was not that Thomason had not been a hero, just not at Galatas.

Viewed collectively, these aspects of the treatment of Galatas demonstrate a very conscious and specific effort by both Ross and Kippenberger to set the hegemonic view of this engagement as, firstly, a Kippenberger initiative, secondly, a 23 Bn endeavour and thirdly, and ultimately, the embodiment of heroism. Transcending the limits of empirical history in much the same way that the men themselves had transcended the normal levels of soldierly contribution and service, Galatas seemed to represent for these two veterans much that was good and possible in war. Although it was not recorded in the volume, at the time that the battle cry had gone out at the start of the attack and Thomason had pulled him in off the road, Kippenberger had been shouting "Isn't it beautiful, isn't it beautiful!"¹⁴⁸ and he seemed seldom to have missed the opportunity of emphasising the significance of Galatas to other historians dealing with the period. While he was not always successful - the historian E.E. Rich, for example, working for the British War Office, could see no reason to give it extra emphasis in the British Narrative¹⁴⁹ - in Ross he had found a kindred spirit. While it is fair to say that Ross' account of Galatas may have been skewed in places in terms of its emphasis, and even on one occasion in its interpretation of fact, its place in *23 Battalion* did not seem to be primarily about fact. It was, rather, a section of the volume given over to capturing that beauty: of men rising to

¹⁴⁶ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 92, (My italics).

¹⁴⁷ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 92.

¹⁴⁸ Letter, Kippenberger to Ross, 30 January 1957, MS-2702/004, Hocken.

¹⁴⁹ See Memos, Latham, 20 December 1945 & 14 January 1946, CAB 106/711, NA, UK.

the occasion, of touching the sublime and, to return to Ross' description in his conclusion, 'of belonging to and being possessed by a force much bigger and much more important than themselves'.¹⁵⁰

Emphasising the heroism of Galatas, however, left one last quandary to be resolved: the treatment of the Battalion's own nominated hero, Sgt. Clive Hulme, who was awarded the VC for his actions on Crete. Hulme was an undoubtedly brave yet, at times, unpopular and controversial figure. As the Battalion provost sergeant on Crete Hulme already had his detractors before the battle, but the citation outlining his exploits during the fighting, which was inaccurate, even contradictory, in places, fuelled criticism of Hulme and also a certain bitterness within the Battalion that one man should have been singled out for such an award when so much gallantry by others had gone 'unrecorded and unrewarded'.¹⁵¹ He, himself, believed that it had been a series of sensationalised news articles that had appeared about him when he was invalided home after Crete that had caused the problem, having presented him as exploiting his award to get preferential treatment.¹⁵² Either way, Hulme, who had been in a psychologically fragile state on his return to New Zealand, had seemed out of his depth over the VC, a blowhard courting attention on the one hand, but deeply sensitive to negative publicity and criticism on the other. Fifteen years later he remained defensive, unwilling to co-operate with either Ross or his previous commander and the man who helped put him forward for the award,¹⁵³ Maj Gordon Cunningham. In the end it was only the intervention by the Battalion's original CO, 'Acky' Falconer, that secured Ross an interview with Hulme, and then not until 1956 when the volume was near ready for publication.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 476.

¹⁵¹ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 94.

¹⁵² Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 16 February 1957, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

¹⁵³ Memo, prepared by Ross and signed by Gordon Cunningham, December 1946, MS-2702/005, Hocken.

¹⁵⁴ Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 16 February 1957, IA1 181/7/23, NA; For transcript of this interview see 'The Story of Sgt Clive Hulme VC, as told by Hulme', 'Correspondence Relating to 23rd Battalion Unit History', Ross, Angus, Professor, Papers, MS-2702/005, Hocken.

Although Ross greatly admired Hulme's bravery, he found him an 'odd' and difficult character.¹⁵⁵ Hulme was still deeply upset by the controversy surrounding the award and had arrived at the interview in a 'dreadful state of nerves', even leaving to be physically sick at one point from the stress that it caused him.¹⁵⁶ Recalling the newspaper articles was particularly distressing, based as they were, Hulme believed, on a mishmash of second-hand sources and yet being the start in his mind of much of the criticism he had endured. It was particularly galling to Hulme that the most sensationalised and distorted of these, published in the *Weekly News*, was found later to have been cobbled together by an itinerant journalist, J.C. Goodwin, who had stayed only a few weeks with the newspaper before travelling on to Sydney. While a throwaway article to Goodwin, the damage felt by Hulme had been lasting and severe.¹⁵⁷

The unit history appeared to offer an important opportunity to set the record straight and, as the definitive account, to remove 'once and for all the rumours and criticisms'¹⁵⁸ that had circulated around Hulme's award. For Ross, this presented a series of difficulties. His first attempt to contact Hulme in 1947 had failed, and a second approach, that of sending the VC citation to him, a little tactlessly perhaps, via his friends, had failed also. After this Ross had felt justified in his first draft at leaving the awarding of the VC unemphasised. Having taken care to get the details in the citation as correct as possible, he planned to mention Hulme only in passing, listing, as he later explained to Kippenberger, 'one or two points without in any way highlighting him'.¹⁵⁹ Sandy Thomas, however, took exception to this treatment, believing it inadequate in an Official History and, 'with a view to inspiring those who may read the book when soldiering in the future',¹⁶⁰ insisted that Hulme get a specific write-up.

¹⁵⁵ Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 16 February 1957, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

¹⁵⁶ Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 16 February 1957, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

¹⁵⁷ Appendix to Interview, Clive Hulme interviewed by Angus Ross, 1956, MS-2699/010, Hocken.

¹⁵⁸ Memo, Prepared by Ross, Signed by Gordon Cunningham, December 1946, MS-2702/005, Hocken.

¹⁵⁹ Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 16 February 1957, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

¹⁶⁰ Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 16 February 1957, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

While a laudable goal, accurately highlighting Hulme required not only his co-operation but also tact. Over and above the confusion in the citation and the apparent misrepresentation of the newspapers, Hulme himself told stories of his exploits to Ross in the interview that appeared garbled and fantastic in places,¹⁶¹ and which, coming so late in the drafting of the book, would have been difficult both to confirm and work into an already long and complicated chapter. Despite these contradictions and exaggerations, Ross believed Hulme to be fundamentally honest and deserving of his award and, having gained his belated co-operation, he wanted to do him justice. This was true of many of the Battalion officers also who had either seen Hulme in action or had worked with him.

The solution was to append a separate section to the Crete chapter to ‘record, even if briefly, some of [Hulme’s] exploits’¹⁶² and to recognise his contribution without clouding the main narrative of the battle. Even at 2¼ pages, however, the longest tribute given to any one individual in the volume, Ross’ ambivalence still came through. In choosing extracts that described Hulme as ‘reckless’¹⁶³ and ‘wandering’ his territory, and in describing him as seeking ‘so frequently to fight a one-man war’,¹⁶⁴ Ross evoked the image of a loose and individualistic personality which was markedly at odds with the tight camaraderie and soldierliness he attributed to the Battalion in general. A further passage ascribed to him the ‘prescience of a mystic and the assured self-confidence of a man who trusted his intuition or “sixth sense” in the special kind of fighting in which he engaged’.¹⁶⁵ This was something that Ross was considerably sceptical of in his private correspondence¹⁶⁶ and, again, having emphasised the impression of eccentricity, would have done little to dispel the criticisms of Hulme’s detractors.

The passage on Hulme demonstrates some of the difficulties in the unit histories of recording dissent within the Battalions and in aligning their role as contemporary

¹⁶¹ Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 16 February 1957, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

¹⁶² Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 94.

¹⁶³ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 96

¹⁶⁴ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 94.

¹⁶⁵ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 96.

¹⁶⁶ Letter, Ross to Kippenberger, 16 February 1957, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

histories with their mandate as official records of the war. Although he helped to legitimise the awarding of Hulme's VC through quotations from higher officers, including Brigadier Hargest and Sandy Thomas, Ross appeared unable to detach himself sufficiently from his own exasperation in dealing with this difficult and 'egotistical' character to prevent his personal bias coming through. While outwardly supportive of Hulme, the additional section remained something of a backhanded compliment, with sufficient guarded praise and ambiguity to confirm also the scepticism of those who doubted Hulme's personality and make up, or who may have been critical of his behaviour on returning to New Zealand. Furthermore, as the history could deal only with events in the theatre of war, it did clarify the official record in terms of the citation but could not address the newspaper articles or publicity Hulme had received at home. As such there may have been little satisfaction for Hulme to be gained from his special treatment in the volume. Nor may it have relieved the paradoxical burden that, as the designated hero in this most heroic of battalions, the awarding of the VC seemed to have placed on him. Controversy continues over Hulme's award to this day as his tactics come under the scrutiny of current, peacetime, values.¹⁶⁷ His unwillingness to co-operate with the history may have been, to a certain extent, well justified.

The selection of extracts by Ross concerning Hulme and the quotations chosen to support his claims on Galatas highlight the use of testimony as a historical tool. Testimony was used in *23 Battalion* to support an argument or to capture and represent the experiences of the men. It could be taken from either soldiers' personal diaries and letters or gathered as later recollections in response to a request for information. It was a particular feature of Ross' work and set the overarching theme and tenor of the volume. It was an important means of building a sense of collective experience and provided a point of subjective entry into the empirical detail of the volume. Hundreds of letters, diaries, reports and oral

¹⁶⁷ See for example: *Sunday Star Times*, 'Kiwi heroes accused of War Crimes' 9 April 2006; *Daily Telegraph*, 'VC Hero Branded War Criminal', 10 April 2006; *Otago Daily Times*, 'Behind the Myth of New Zealand's VC Heroes', 21 April 2006.

testimonies were available to Ross. His choice of these and the manner in which they were worked into the Battalion story forms the concluding section of this chapter.

The ‘proclivity to organise experience in terms of plots’¹⁶⁸ and to narrate them is central to social life. ‘We all need,’ as John Campbell maintains, ‘to tell out story and to understand our story. We all need to understand death and to cope with death... We need for life to signify [and ...] to find out who we are.’¹⁶⁹ With war, Hynes suggests, constructing narratives not only gives order and meaning to its processes but also, by bringing voice to those experiences, asserts the narrator’s individuality and ‘impose[s] private feelings and responses upon events’.¹⁷⁰ By offering these to a public readership, narratives and testimonies share in both the ‘creation’ and ‘preservation’ of a collective understanding of war. Through the interplay of selection and tone they help not only to ‘make sense of the muddle of images’ that soldiers bring home with them but also to construct a consolidated and cohesive national story. Although numerous accounts of a war may be published, many languish largely unread. Those popularly selected, Hynes suggests, tend to ‘confirm each other’¹⁷¹ and contribute to a unified version of the war that the nation wants to hear.

Sitting between the official campaign volumes and popular narratives, the unit histories were intended to present factual accounts of their battalions’ war, but to do so in a way that would engage not only the members specifically but also their families and communities and to generate interest and respect at a national level. Generating an identification with personal experience, therefore, was of far greater significance to unit histories than it was to campaign volumes. For Ross this was difficult to achieve alone. While intensely loyal to his Battalion, and taking no less pride in unit life than Llewellyn, his empirical training and measured academic style seemed to drain the spontaneity from

¹⁶⁸ Elinor Ochs & Lisa Capps, *Living Narrative: Creating Lives in Everyday Storytelling*, Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 26.

¹⁶⁹ Campbell, p. 4.

¹⁷⁰ Hynes, p. 206.

¹⁷¹ Hynes, p. 207.

his prose. Many of his descriptions of stirring events fell very flat. There was a sorry lack of the travel descriptions that had brightened Llewellyn's volume, for example, while attempts to emulate the joyful and light-hearted accounts of parties and sing-alongs could be almost painful to read, as this description of the conclusion of the European fighting suggests:

On 7 May 1945 the battalion celebrated the end of the war in Europe by firing off many coloured flares and with some convivial gatherings enlivened by song and story.¹⁷²

Fortunately help was at hand with the testimonies of Battalion members. Used sometimes singly, and other times in sets to either verify or contradict the official record, their placement and depth of perspective were indicative of Ross' skills in another area. His ability to bind the voices of many into a rich yet cohesive account became one of the principal strengths of the volume.

Hynes argues that narratives of war can be divided into two principal groups. The first are published volumes of diaries and letters, which offer immediacy through their spontaneity, 'lack of judgement and retrospection'.¹⁷³ The second are memoirs, produced at some distance from the events and hence marked by the 'role of time and memory in their making'.¹⁷⁴ Although some exception may be taken to Hynes' observation that while 'the letter writer speaks to someone else, elsewhere', the diarist speaks to himself alone – judging from the letters and file notes accompanying those used by Ross, many New Zealand soldiers' diaries were consciously written for folks at home and future generations¹⁷⁵ – the distinction in production is an important one. Historiographically, the two forms reflect the tension inherent in both the act of narration and the War Histories

¹⁷² Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 469.

¹⁷³ Hynes, p. 208.

¹⁷⁴ Hynes, p. 208.

¹⁷⁵ Can also be evidenced also in the extract from Pvt. Somerville's diary describing a horrendous night march down Sfasciata Ridge in the Italian winter when he wrote 'It would be useless to try and make people understand about that march. 3 miles odd took 4 hours and was over knees in mud practically all the way.' Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 315.

themselves: the conflict, as sociolinguists Elanor Ochs and Lisa Capps describe it, between the need to construct a coherent storyline on the one hand, with rational causative links and a ‘seamless explanatory framework’, and the conflicting desire to ‘capture the complexities’ of events as they unfold in all their detail, contradiction and ‘uncertainty’¹⁷⁶ on the other. Published memoirs may be seen as manifestations of the first desire, unmediated letters and diaries of war, in their immediacy and detail, the product of the second.

As a War History with a personal tale to tell, *23 Battalion* drew on both narrative forms. Published memoirs such as Sandy Thomas’ *Dare to be Free* and Kippenberger’s own *Infantry Brigadier*, which were products of the same distance and construction as the War Histories themselves, were often used as cross references to confirm factual and technical details and to give veracity to accounts.¹⁷⁷ Diaries and letters, on the other hand, were valued precisely for their immediacy, atmosphere and chaos that illustrated the human face of war. Used to “display” rather than inform, they highlighted ‘highly tellable’¹⁷⁸ events and served to demonstrate, as Ross described it, ‘something of the colour and tension’¹⁷⁹ of the Battalion’s engagements. Through their sense of vulnerability and rawness they could also evoke a vicarious identification with the unit in the same way that landscape, humour and the more abstract literary techniques had done in Llewellyn’s volume. Using the diaries of the same individuals throughout the volume helped to emphasise this aspect. The diaries of R.A. Sommerville and Private Blampied, for example, as new soldiers, or Dave Jenkins, as a ‘grand’¹⁸⁰ fighter whose experience and skill gave authenticity to accounts and offered points of human contact in the story of a large and constantly changing battalion. The passage in which the honour of ‘the last word on the battle for Celle’, considered to be the Battalion’s most successful

¹⁷⁶ Ochs and Capps, p. 4.

¹⁷⁷ Sandy Thomas’ account of the roar at Galatas was taken from his own memoir *Dare to be Free*, London: Allan Wingate, 1951, p. 24; for frequent referencing to *Infantry Brigadier* see for example Davin, *Crete*, pp. 304, 311 & 318.

¹⁷⁸ Ochs and Capps, p. 33.

¹⁷⁹ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 148.

¹⁸⁰ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 197.

engagement in Italy, was given to Private, now Lance Corporal, Sommerville, to mark the earning of ‘his first stripe’¹⁸¹ encouraged this kind of identification and was a touching gesture by Ross.

Diary extracts could also be used anonymously, and, like the unanimist rhetoric and oblique description in *Journey towards Christmas*, enabled Ross to relate experiences of trauma or psychological damage without specifying individuals. A collection of entries taken from the diaries of a number of unnamed men describing the repulsive corpse-fed flies of Alamein encouraged empathy with this experience while sparing the burden of personal identification:

These flies are terrible. There’s millions of them as I lie here writing this, there are hundreds of flies walking all over me, on my mouth, in my nose, eyes, ears, everywhere.¹⁸²

Conversely, a highly personal but anonymous extract showed the despair of one man as he realised he had lost his nerve at Cassino and become battle-shy. Ross believed he spoke for many and he used the extracts to demonstrate for readers the harrying effects of long and desperate fighting. It was also, he maintained, a salutary reminder to future war historians of the inability of official records to convey the human cost of war when ‘what should be asked of [soldiers] had been reached’.¹⁸³

As the men themselves seem to have experimented with a range of writing styles, so too could Ross vary his selection from the diaries and letters, moving from the ‘stream of consciousness’ entries of Sommerville as he sought to capture the heat and frustration of a day’s battle,¹⁸⁴ through to the more considered reflections of Lt Jenkins cited earlier in this chapter. Some extracts, such as those by Ray Street, a schoolteacher, gave smooth

¹⁸¹ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 424.

¹⁸² Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 182.

¹⁸³ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 372.

¹⁸⁴ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 363.

articulate accounts and were valued for their accurate impressions of unit personalities¹⁸⁵ and ‘high action’ style.¹⁸⁶ Others, such as a poorly spelt tribute to Col Falconer, left uncorrected and whose spelling Ross maintained in no way detracted from the ‘sincerity’ of its message,¹⁸⁷ suggested the breadth of unit membership and the extent of consensus on certain points.

The use of extracts was also indicative of Ross’ historiographical approach. A combination of an empirical respect for the primary record and a soldierly admiration for the men themselves left him unwilling to intervene in their accounts when not absolutely necessary. Aware that this lack of mediation ran contrary to the scientific trends of academic history and segued toward the journalistic practices the Branch was anxious to avoid, Ross anticipated his critics with a description and defence of his methods in his Preface. Rather than ‘scissors and paste’¹⁸⁸ history, as he thought it might be judged, he believed it was the method most appropriate to the ‘emotional side of military history’ and the unique role that the unit histories played. When focusing at the level of the fighting men and, in his case, on ‘contemporary evidence of the state of morale’¹⁸⁹ he saw the extended use of narratives as both desirable and necessary. On the veracity of the extracts, however, Ross had no recourse but to the subjective. Anticipating questions on the ‘trustworthiness’ of his witnesses and diarists as representatives of the Battalion, he could only reply: ‘that I have known personally most of the men whose diaries I have used. In the main they were reliable soldiers, men of steady eye and no lack of courage, men I would and do trust’.¹⁹⁰ Mirroring the later observations of Hynes, he also believed the spontaneous and unmediated nature of diaries added to their veracity and concluded that ‘it should [also] be remembered that their diaries were not written for publication but as a record for the writers and their more intimate relations’.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁵ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 364.

¹⁸⁶ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 366.

¹⁸⁷ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 62.

¹⁸⁸ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. viii.

¹⁸⁹ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. viii.

¹⁹⁰ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. ix

¹⁹¹ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. ix

Although the diarists may not have been writing with a view to publication, Ross himself selected his narrative material with the cohesiveness of his volume in mind. Accepting that all narrations are effectively ‘selections’ rather than true reflections of reality,¹⁹² and that, in the manner discussed in *Journey towards Christmas*, may be structured to give a tolerable view of events, Ross can be seen, through his own selection of extracts, to have constructed a similarly rewarding, and yet, ultimately, artificially cohesive view of the war. While they were frequently presented in opposition to the official record, the extracts in the 23 Bn volume did not argue against themselves. Rather they corroborated each other and, when used in groups, as the selection on Galatas suggests, used repetition and confirmation of narrative versions to effect a common framework of understanding.¹⁹³ Extracts used individually also contributed to this process. Justified as giving an ‘authentic ring of 23rd sentiment’,¹⁹⁴ or a ‘picture of events as 23rd men saw them that day’,¹⁹⁵ they too suggested a uniformity of experience. Together in their net effect, these uses of testimony performed a role similar to that of unanimist rhetoric in Llewellyn’s volume. Where Llewellyn used lively description and the appeal to an attractive, but unsubstantiated, presupposition, Ross used subjective representations as empirical evidence. In both histories unanimity through the recognition and acceptance of common and collective experience was the goal.

Part of the acceptance and appeal of this unanimity in Ross’ volume lay in the narrative extracts themselves. Ochs and Capps have identified a ‘cluster of characteristics’ shared by successful narratives which give them ‘inherent appeal’. These include having a highly tellable account or event to relate; lineal, temporal and causal organisation, and a certain, constant moral stance.¹⁹⁶ Collectively these help to construct a clear storyline and, especially, an identifiable psychological or moral position from which listeners can

¹⁹² Ochs & Capps, p. 45.

¹⁹³ Ochs & Capps, p. 2.

¹⁹⁴ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 197.

¹⁹⁵ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p. 253.

¹⁹⁶ Ochs & Capps, p.20.

interpret the story. Examination of the extracts in Ross' volume shows they shared many of these key characteristics, suggesting perhaps the reason for their success in working the volume into a cohesive whole. While both Ross and Llewellyn created strong personae for their units and used the chronology of the war to construct a temporal and organisational framework, for Ross the details of the fighting and the immediacy of the soldiers' testimonies in combination with the quest genre created a clear moral position for interpreting the actions of Battalion members, that of having made a specific and heroic contribution to a worthy cause. Narrative selection gave emphasis to this effect and, when extrapolated to the unit experience as a whole, gave cohesion to the Battalion story. The relationship with the reader built up by the ongoing accounts by Sommerville, Blampied and others, the different testimonial styles used to represent different aspects of army life and the linking of these together as a quest may all have helped to make these experiences accessible to family members, and brought the concepts of history, sacrifice and suffering together as a national story.

While *23 Battalion* was a skilled and thorough piece of historical research it also demonstrated how empirical aspirations met with the more subjective personal and national interests of its author under the War History project. Structured and informed by Ross' training as an empirical historian, it equally reflected his pride in his Battalion and his ongoing interest as a Territorial commander in the psychology and strategy of warfare. While the research question sought to critically evaluate the relationship between morale and success on the battlefield, it also gave grounds for promoting the Battalion experience as being exceptional and a source of great pride to its members. Empirical methodology was coupled with the affirming and familiar schema of the heroic quest to frame the war experience for the Battalion's soldiers and to carry its story out to their families and the national readership. The meticulous ordering and detailed analysis of engagements was set against an invented tradition with the intention of inspiring not only pride in the memory of participants but also the call to service among generations in the future.

The length and detail of *23 Battalion* provided a comprehensive framework for the structuring of memories but could equally be used, as this chapter has shown, to curb and contain the memory of participants by stipulating a specific version of events against competing interpretations and competing battalions. Such contestation was also a feature of the campaign volumes, especially when poor record-keeping during battle had left the construction of a factual base reliant on the memory of participants. This was particularly so in the case of Crete where the battle had hung in the balance and the decisions of individual commanders were seen as having had determined its outcome. As the battle closest, perhaps, to the nation's heart, Crete is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 4: 'This is Now Our Story'¹

Crete; Nation

Crete was one of most difficult, and in many ways the most contentious of the War Histories. As only the second of the campaign volumes published, it was an initiation by fire. The nearness of the battle to those working at the Branch tested the role and duties of an official historian and it would be fair to say that no other volume in the series attracted such rigorous debate in its preparation or as much interest on publication. Despite its extraordinary detail - 550 pages covering only 12 days of the war - the fine balance achieved in the book between description, military analysis and the lived experiences of all ranks on Crete attracted praise² and it was soon hailed as a 'classic' of its kind.³

Like the battle itself, *Crete* was a project full of paradox and tension. Fundamental differences in opinion between its author, Davin, and Murphy, as its equally talented and probably more historically rigorous narrator, resulted in a volume which ultimately, this chapter suggests, argued against itself. Within the Branch, anxiety and unease over the attribution of blame and criticism of commanders set memory against evidence, fact against reputation, and, in the course of analysis, colleagues and friends potentially against each other. The length and detail of New Zealand's treatment of Crete claimed an authority which secured not only the centrality of the battle in the national consciousness but the centrality of the nation to the battle. While claiming credit for New Zealand for some of the greatest acts of valour during the battle, Davin's volume also, through the force of its criticism, claimed full responsibility for its loss. This chapter traces the path

¹ Letter, Kippenberger to Inglis, 25 January 1952, IA1 181/32/2, NA: 'I have decided that this is now our story ... any further enquiry is a vain search for unattainable perfection'.

² C.P. Stacey, 'New Zealanders in Action', Review of *Crete* and *The Pacific*, copy: IA1 181/53/part II, NA.

³ Letter, Inglis to Kippenberger, 25 January 1952, IA1, 181/32/2, NA; Letter, Latham to Kippenberger, 8 September 1952, IA1 181/53/3/ part I, NA.

of *Crete*, from the assembly of its Narrative and criticism of its drafts through to the publication and reception of this painful yet, ultimately, highly successful volume.

The publication of *Crete* was the culmination of an enormous effort by Davin. Although he already held a demanding job as Secretary of the Clarendon Press at Oxford and had writing of his own in progress, he worked on the volume doggedly in his evenings for over four years. While it inevitably became something of an ‘albatross’⁴ around his neck, completing *Crete* was an act of dedication, a sign of respect for those who had fought there and a touchstone for Davin of his New Zealand roots while in England.

Despite being located 12,000 miles from the Branch, Davin was a fine example of the authors originally envisaged for the Histories. A New Zealander by birth, a Rhodes Scholar and an established novelist, Davin’s appointment gave a certain cachet to the series, combining international standing with, as one newspaper commented, ‘a New Zealander’s understanding of the New Zealand character’.⁵ Davin had served on Crete as an Intelligence Officer to the 23 Bn. Although he was wounded early, his participation was important in lending legitimacy to his volume and was frequently noted as a point in his favour in reviews.⁶ His background in publishing also proved an unexpected bonus and brought a level of professionalism to the project that the Branch soon came to miss in their other less experienced authors. ‘I am very gratified with the way you have driven ahead with this hard volume,’ Kippenberger wrote to him on completion. ‘I suppose its possible you will have earned 6d an hour given the time you have spent in earning your fee.’⁷

⁴ ‘Albatross’: Letter, Davin to Kippenberger, 16 May 1952, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

⁵ ‘Crete: Official History of Campaign’, *Christchurch Press*, copy, IA1 181/53/3 part II, NA.

⁶ Of the 12 reviews discussed later in this chapter, seven specifically mention Davin’s participation, see for example ‘Vivid Narrative and Critical Judgment on Crete’, *Southland Times*, 2 November 1953; E.T. Williams, ‘Vivid Chapter in History of Crete’, *Oxford Mail*, 18 January 1954; ‘Crete: Official History of Campaign’, *Christchurch Press*, copy IA1, 181/53/3/part II.

⁷ Letter, Kippenberger to Davin, 3 October 1951, IA1 181/32/2, NA; Keith Ovenden, *A Fighting Withdrawal: the Life of Dan Davin, Writer, Soldier, Publisher*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 246.

At first, while faith in the author / narrator split was strong, it was not anticipated that Davin's distance from the Branch would be an issue. Where difficulties had arisen in providing material, for reasons as prosaic as the shortage of typists at the Branch rather than security or political restrictions, these were often compensated for by his closeness to the British sources. As the project wore on, however, Kippenberger began to doubt the wisdom of appointing overseas authors.⁸ This was mitigated to a certain extent in Davin's case by a research trip to New Zealand in 1948; but more generally material, 2,700 pages in the first packages and many thousands more to follow, chugged its way laboriously by surface mail between hemispheres. It was a mark of Davin's commitment and the quality of his work that the book was completed in the time that it was.

Taking distance into account, the estimated completion date for the volume was, again, optimistic to the point of naivety. When Davin first discussed the project in 1946, Kippenberger expected it would take 'about a year' to complete writing up from the Narratives, and even when he began writing in 1948 Davin thought that he would be 'surprised and annoyed' if he were not finished by 1949.⁹ In the end he was to be both. The final draft was finished in November 1951 and the volume was not published until 1953. Comparatively, however, *Crete* was still a quick and efficient piece of work. It was over six years before its chronological predecessor, *To Greece*, was published and of all the campaign volumes, only Oliver Gillespie's *The Pacific* was completed sooner.¹⁰

After his work as a novelist, the demands of empirical method came as a shock to Davin, especially the elusiveness of seemingly plain fact and truth. 'How wise you are to read war history and not write it,' he joked to Kippenberger as he began his work. 'Every fact begins to shimmer when you come up close to it, like the air in the Western Desert at

⁸ Memo, Kippenberger to Shannahan (Permanent Head, PM Department), 24 May 1948, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

⁹ Letters, Kippenberger to Davin, 3 September 1946; Davin to Kippenberger, 20 May 1948, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

¹⁰ W.G. McClymont, *To Greece*, Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1959; O.A. Gillespie, *The Pacific*, Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1952.

midday'.¹¹ Stylistically, however, he was quick to recognise the parameters of the discipline. The outline of his work he sent to Kippenberger would have provided a sound description of empirical history writing of the time:

This can never be a “popular” book in the stylistic sense and I don’t think it should be. The methods I am following are roughly those that we at the Press would expect of a sound history: emphasis on clarity and narration; presentation of evidence for all quotations and for disputable points; as much brevity as is consistent with full detail; avoidance of purple patches and rhetoric; and a generally objective tone lightened by occasional adjective ... I could have made it more readable by keeping Force or Div. HQ as my chief focus. But I approved and wanted to follow your own wish that tactical action should be gone into as much as possible. This means intricacy, which can be made lucid by brevity and arrangement. It means little room for readable spread, but I think there has been too much “purple” written about Crete anyway.¹²

Against current practice, Davin chose to make the structure of his narrative explicit, or to leave, as one Oxford professor wrote acidly, ‘his scaffolding all over the place’.¹³ While not making for tidy or sophisticated writing, its purpose was to guide his readers clearly through the complexities of the battle and enable them to follow events in several arenas at one time. This explicit structure also reflected the egalitarian principles of the War Histories and their role as national histories. The candidness and simplicity of Davin’s writing was intended to break down the barrier between the historian and reader, in much the same way that Angus Ross argued that the war had done among soldiers themselves. Davin encouraged the reader to approach the material as his equal – to gain an explanation of events but also to analyse, interpret and conclude directly from the facts. He did not wish his writing to interfere with this process. ‘The battle is such a powerful

¹¹ Letter Davin to Kippenberger, 4 January 1949, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

¹² Letter, Davin to Kippenberger, 24 October 1950, IA1 181/32/2, NA. (Underlining in the original.)

¹³ Cyril Falls, ‘A Window on the World: the New Zealanders in Crete’, Review, *Illustrated London News*, 27 March 1954.

story,’ he wrote to Kippenberger ‘that one ought to let the facts speak as much as possible for themselves – but, of course, I mustn’t gag them or make them mumble.’¹⁴

The simplicity and clarity of Davin’s style was also necessary to carry the weight of detail in the volume. After the introductory chapters, *Crete* traced the engagement of the New Zealand troops, unit by unit, day by day, frequently down to platoon level. The complexity of the battle caused the narrative to move back and forward between engagements. If the logical introduction of individuals and events sometimes suffered in order to maintain the fluidity of the text, it was a sacrifice appreciated by critics and readers alike. ‘It may not be military history at its best,’ wrote Ross in his own review of the volume, ‘but it is military history at its most readable.’¹⁵ *Crete* is still considered one of the most readable of the Official Histories today.¹⁶

This detail also helped to position the battle as national history and moved it towards some unified understanding of events. While soldiers who were in Crete could place themselves in the larger picture, the detail also enhanced the understanding of those who had had a son or family member in the battle. One reviewer described *Crete* as ‘emphatically a book for those who were there, and for all whose sons and husbands were there’.¹⁷ For another it was ‘recommended reading for the wives and families of men who were on Crete’.¹⁸ The novelist’s ability to engage his readers extended the reach of Davin’s volume to the general public. Ross maintained he knew of ‘both men and women with no background of interest in war who have found *Crete* a fascinating study and most interesting reading’.¹⁹ Indeed, on finding the recitation of facts in his first draft too ‘dry’, Davin had gone back and, despite his earlier comments on ‘purple’, inserted

¹⁴ Letter, Davin to Kippenberger, 24 October 1950, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

¹⁵ Angus Ross, ‘Review: “Crete” by D.M. Davin’ *Historical Studies Australia & New Zealand*, Vol. 6, (November, 1954), pp. 348-350.

¹⁶ See for example Matthew Wright, ‘Official History Sets Record Straight on Baby Eaters and War Victims’, *Sunday Star Times*, 19 September 2010.

¹⁷ J.W. Robertson, ‘Vivid Narrative and Critical Judgement on Crete’, *Southland Times*, 2 November 1953.

¹⁸ ‘Official History of Campaign’, *Christchurch Press*, copy, IA1 181/53/3 part II, NA; J.W. Robertson, ‘Vivid Narrative and Critical Judgement on Crete’, *Southland Times*, 2 November 1953.

¹⁹ Angus Ross, ‘Review: “Crete”’, p. 349.

many additional quotes and descriptions into his final copy, specifically to ‘jolly the thing up’²⁰ and increase its appeal to the general reader.

The length and detail of Davin’s volume claimed the Crete campaign for New Zealand. The level of analysis possible in New Zealand’s 550 page volume compared with the 124 pages allocated in the Australian History,²¹ or the 26 pages in the British²² established New Zealand as the authority on the battle. So strong was this claim that as one English reviewer remarked, ‘[i]t would seem almost intrusive for any but a New Zealander to attempt to tell the story of Crete’.²³ Certainly, as Buckley had found, the New Zealand Branch did not tolerate other historians’ light treatment of Crete or its handling in a way that did not give full credit to the efforts of the men. For his own part, Davin’s comprehensive treatment of the battle positioned him as expert, possibly to the extent that, as his biographer Ovenden has suggested, ‘no subsequent historian of either the Crete campaign specifically or the Mediterranean Theatre ... in general could proceed without consulting him’.²⁴ These included Liddell Hart and Dr Ian Stewart, whose work carried many of the comments that Davin, as Official Historian, had felt constrained to withhold.²⁵

The detailed treatment of the New Zealanders’ efforts in *Crete* and the authority it claimed also served to marginalised the activities of other Allied troops on the island. The efforts of the Australians at Retimo and the British at Heraklion were kept consciously ‘to

²⁰ Letter, Davin to Kippenberger, 18 September 1951, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

²¹ Gavin Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria, Australia in the War of 1939–1945*, Series One, Army, Vol. II, Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1953.

²² I.S.O. Playfair et al, *The Mediterranean and Middle East, Vol. II: The Germans Come to the Help of their Ally, 1941*, London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1956, pp. 121 – 147.

²³ E.T. Williams, ‘Vivid Chapter in History of Crete’, *Oxford Mail*, 18 January 1954.

²⁴ Ovenden, p. 249.

²⁵ I. McD. G. Stewart, *The Struggle for Crete 20 May – 1 June 1941: A Story of Lost Opportunity*, London: Oxford University Press, 1966; W.E. Murphy, ‘Crete – New Zealand Command Failures: I.McD.G. Stewart, The Struggle for Crete, 20 May – 1 June 1941: A Story of Lost Opportunity’, *Comment*, Vol. 9, No. 1, December 1967, p.28.

a minimum',²⁶ included, as Davin wrote to Kippenberger, only for 'the large picture' and 'because Freyberg, as General Officer Commanding (GOC), was involved'.²⁷

While this may have been acceptable in what was a designated 'national' history, it had important implications in the controversy surrounding the battle and the question of whether or not the island could have been, and therefore should have been, held. From the very end of the battle in June 1941, two interpretations of events on Crete have been contested: one that has seen the poor preparation in the months leading up to the fighting as making the loss of the island inevitable, and another that has argued that the ineptness of the New Zealand commanders and the loss of the Maleme airfield gave the Germans a foothold on the island and thereby a victory that would otherwise have been denied them. While in its overall structure Davin's volume argued for the inevitable loss of the island, its tight focus on the New Zealand sector and candid discussion of the alternatives open to the commanders charged with defending it, amplified the significance of events there.²⁸ This left an ambiguity which not only rekindled the controversy at the time of its publication but continues to underwrite the debate to this day. While this thesis in no way presumes to analyse the events on Crete themselves, an outline on which to base the discussion of its historiographical interpretation has been provided.

The island of Crete lies 160 kilometres south-east of the Greek mainland. In WWII it was recognised as an important base for air control of the Eastern Mediterranean and as a gateway to the Middle Eastern and Romanian oilfields. Despite its obvious advantages, by 1941 the Middle East Command had not been able to spare sufficient resources to prepare defences on the island. The three main towns of Suda, Retimo and Heraklion all faced toward the Greek mainland and were linked by a single road. All three had airfields of interest to an invading enemy. When German forces swept down the Greek peninsular in April of that year, a Marine Naval Defence Base Organisation (MNDBO) was still

²⁶ Letter, Davin to Kippenberger, 9 March 1948, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

²⁷ Letter, Davin to Kippenberger, 9 March 1948, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

²⁸ Current historical treatment of the Crete campaign as it works its way into the tradition is discussed in Chapter Six.

being established at Suda. Its Commander, Maj. Gen E.C. Weston, was the seventh commander the garrison on Crete had had in six months.²⁹

Allied forces were evacuated to Crete from the 25 April, after the defeat on the Greek mainland. While their time there was at first a welcome chance to recuperate and await transfer on to Egypt, the belated decision by British High Command to defend the island and the appointment of Freyberg as GOC changed matters dramatically. The New Zealanders were assigned to protect the area behind Suda, including the Maleme airfield. This became the most strongly contested sector of the battle and their time on Crete turned from an idyllic interlude to the 'hardest and most savage campaign' of their war.³⁰

Although some troops, such as the New Zealand 6 Bde and certain of the Army Service Corps, had already been transported back to Egypt by the time the decision to defend Crete was made, insufficient shipping was available to bring back the manpower and equipment necessary to defend the island or to rationalise the units available. Those troops that were still on Crete when the build-up to the German invasion began were required to stay and fight. For the New Zealanders this was an accidental mix, consisting mainly of 21, 22 and 23 Battalions of 5 Bde – 4 Bde being held by Freyberg as Force Reserve - and a scattering of others from auxiliary and artillery units. These included drivers without trucks, gunners without guns and even the Kiwi Concert Party. All were required to reform as infantry. When evacuating Greece, however, these troops had been ordered to abandon all heavy equipment and most of their personal weapons, leaving them very poorly equipped. While many of the infantry had defied these orders and had smuggled their rifles on board under their coats, other equipment was extremely scarce: seven picks and seven shovels for the whole of 18 Bn in its first allocation of tools,³¹ for example, and sites for guns reportedly fashioned from twigs and chewing gum.

²⁹ Davin, *Crete*, pp. 11 – 16.

³⁰ Freyberg, 'Speech on Return to Crete', 30 September 1945, cited Davin, *Crete* p. 523.

³¹ Lynn McConnell, *Galatas 1941: Courage in Vain*, Auckland: Reed Publishing, 2006, p. 68.

Extreme pressures in other areas of the Mediterranean theatre left only minimal air support for Crete. When, having fought virtually to the last, the remaining Hurricanes were called home to Egypt on the eve of the invasion, the Luftwaffe were left to harass the ground troops uncontested. Their daily rounds of bombing and strafing increased in intensity as the invasion approached. Now with only the Navy to defend them, the troops waited while the British High Command, despite their extraordinary accurate predictions over the nature and timing of the German attack, could offer little further help, save last minute exhortations that 'Crete must be held'.

Under these conditions, the loss of Crete could be argued as inevitable and its reasons self evident. Freyberg, when he recalled the campaign soon after the war, could see no way that 'men armed only with rifles and machineguns could succeed in such an impossible task'.³² Put a little more bluntly by Davin, 'Britain deserved to lose it'.³³ These views form what will be referred to here as the 'inevitability thesis': that Crete represented a heroic, but ultimately futile, struggle against insurmountable odds. It is an argument that rests on a number of key points: that the seeds of the defeat of Crete lay in the many months of inadequate preparation and were sown long before the arrival of the fighting troops; that once the decision to defend the island was made, everything that could be done was done; such equipment that could be spared by Wavell for Crete was provided and such belated preparations that were feasible under the circumstances were made; and that the defeat was no shame to New Zealand. As Davin stated in his conclusion '[s]oldiers never fought better than they fought on Crete,' nor under conditions of command 'more inimical to success'.³⁴ It was a view also fuelled by the popular view of the German army as an enemy at the peak of its power, made up of fanatical leaders, slavishly devoted soldiers and seemingly endless resources.

³² Freyberg, Letter to Director of Public Relations, War Office, 27 August 1948, [response to Christopher Buckley] CAB 106 / 701 NA UK:

³³ Davin, *Crete*, pg, 462.

³⁴ Davin, *Crete*, p. 463-4.

The conduct of the men themselves, the New Zealand rank and file, also supported this 'heroic but futile' interpretation of the battle. Although they were compromised in seemingly every aspect except morale, their stand against the German paratroopers was extraordinary. In the intensity of the German air attack, the closeness and fierceness of the fighting, and the deprivations the defeated Allied soldiers endured in their retreat across the island, the battle of Crete had few parallels. Nor did the failure to hold the island negate the perceived heroism of these men. Futility is not inimical to heroism. In the case of Crete, as with Gallipoli and other acts of faithful sacrifice and perseverance, it seemed to amplify it. 'Although they failed,' Stacey wrote in his review of Davin's volume, 'they failed gloriously'.³⁵

It was this inevitable loss of Crete that Davin had hoped to, and would have preferred to, have written. It did form the basic framework of his text. Beneath this broad narrative, however, within the details of the fighting, lay another story, far less flattering to the New Zealanders but no less integral to the course of the battle and which, in the interests of the integrity of both the volume and the series as a whole, needed to be told. It centred around the loss of the Maleme airfield and is termed here the 'Maleme hypothesis'.

Of the many thousands of Allied troops evacuated to Crete, those who remained to fight were divided across the three main townships – the British to Heraklion to the east, the Australians to Retimo in the central coastal sector, and the New Zealanders to Maleme, at the western end of the island. MNDBO troops continued to oversee the port of Suda itself. Such Greek troops as had arrived on Crete, who were even more poorly equipped and largely untried, were divided among these forces and also given charge of Kisamos Kastelli, at the island's western tip. Between Kastelli and Maleme lay a large area of unprotected land for which no troops could be spared. The shortage of equipment, and particularly of signals and transport, meant that once the battle started communications between sectors and even between the battalions themselves was extremely difficult, often impossible.

³⁵ Stacey, 'New Zealanders in Action', IA1 181/53/3, part II, NA.

The principal points within the New Zealand sector were Maleme airfield with Point 107, the high ground that overlooked it, the local prison and a number of small villages including Galatas. Because it was known that the German invasion was to be, initially, an airborne one of paratroopers and glider troops, high priority was given to the defence of the airfield. Aggressive attack and counterattack were to be called for if necessary. Intelligence sources, however, had also predicted a seaborne invasion and the division of troops and equipment at Maleme between these two contingencies severely compromised the already stretched resources of the New Zealand Division. The battalion charged with defending the airfield was the 22nd under Col L.W. Andrew. Andrew located his HQ on Point 107 and divided his companies between that feature and the southern and western flanks of the airstrip.

The invasion began on 20 May 1941 with particularly heavy strafing and bombing by the German air cover. This was quickly followed by gliders and hundreds of Junkers aircraft that discharged parachutists and equipment. Despite the scale of the invasion, the poverty of German intelligence sources was immediately apparent. In the Maleme sector many of the paratroopers fell on or around the well camouflaged sites of the New Zealand battalions and experienced heavy losses. Sufficient were dropped in the unprotected land to the west and south of the airfield, however, to prepare their equipment and as other surviving troops worked their way around to join them, a heavy German attack was launched on the airfield. Although this was repelled throughout the day by the forward companies of 22 Bn, the failure of communications and the dreadful losses experienced by those companies closest to Andrew's headquarters led him to believe that his Battalion had been over-run. Following a number of calls for assistance and a failed counterattack by his few tanks, he became convinced of the need to withdraw. This he did on the first night of the fighting, initially to a point to the rear of his own sector and then back further to join the line of his neighbouring battalions.

The Maleme hypothesis identifies the withdrawal of 22 Bn and the events that immediately followed it as a turning point, not just of the fighting at Maleme but, as events transpired, for the battle for Crete as a whole. As a failure of command, and even more of nerve, it was a decision from which neither the fortunes of the troops, nor the reputations of Andrew and his immediate superior, Brigadier James Hargest, ever recovered. Once the Germans had gained a foothold on the airfield, the battle became one of incremental and ignominious retreat for the Allied forces. Despite moments of military brilliance, seen as ‘too little, much to late’,³⁶ discreditable incident seemed as often to follow discreditable incident, especially in issues of command. These culminated in the ragged retreat of the Allied troops over the White Mountains to be collected by the Navy from the southern side of the island. Over 12,000 troops who could not be evacuated were abandoned to become German Prisoners of War (POWs), including 2,180 New Zealanders.³⁷

Although the events at Maleme airfield were presented in *Crete* as only one of many factors contributing to the loss of the island, they have come to hold a particular place in New Zealand history. They represent, from Lt Col Andrew through his chain of command of Hargest, Puttick, as Acting CO of the New Zealand Division, to Freyberg, something of a nadir in New Zealand military leadership. Davin’s detailed analysis of Maleme on the first night of battle and the events that followed suggested not only a frank, and very public, admission of New Zealand’s culpability for the loss of the island but also the potential for an alternative, successful, outcome. Despite the apparent intention of the introductory and concluding chapters of Davin’s book to argue that the loss of Crete was inevitable, the inclusion of the Maleme hypothesis and the counterfactual it implied fuelled heated debate. Certainly, as this chapter will show, it was the interpretation most likely to capture the attention of the New Zealand public and continues to dominate interpretations of the battle today.

³⁶ W.E. Murphy, ‘Crete - New Zealand Command Failure’, p. 28.

³⁷ Davin, *Crete*, p. 486.

The significance given to Maleme in Davin's volume, and its rapid uptake by reviewers, made the idea of New Zealand responsibility for the loss of Crete explicit in the national consciousness. Refined since over the years, through scholarly works on the one hand, and simplification and reiteration in popular histories on the other, the rise of the Maleme hypothesis has seen the alternative interpretation of an inevitable loss slip largely from view in New Zealand. This is, perhaps, because for participants and readers alike, of all the complexities and futilities of the twelve day battle, the loss of Maleme most captures the frustration of Crete as a whole: the over-cautiousness and lethargy of command that dogged the otherwise extraordinary efforts of the men.

There were very few documentary records covering Andrew's withdrawal from Maleme. In the conflicting recollections of surviving participants, at least two alternative interpretations of the withdrawal were available. Close analysis of the methods used to obtain and interpret this and other information for the volume suggests that flaws in the Narrative system and the difficulties arising from the author / narrator split were particularly apparent in *Crete*. It therefore offers the opportunity to examine the working of the Branch methodology in some detail. In doing so, however, this chapter does not seek to elevate either of the two interpretations of the battle above the other. Nor does it criticise the validity of any historian's treatment of these events since then. It is merely to suggest that close and critical reading of historical *processes*, as much as evidence, can make salutary contributions to the understanding of our national pasts.

The Narrative for the Crete Campaign was prepared initially by Monty McClymont. When he returned to teach at Otago Boys High School the role passed over to Murphy. Murphy brought sharpness and rigour to the project in equal measure. The Narrative eventually amounted to five volumes and over 1800 paragraphs. With his nearness to the sources and his remarkable attention to detail, Murphy built up an understanding of Crete that easily rivalled Davin's. Although he had not been present during the fighting, his passion in the Narrative and drafts for the battle, for the accuracy of its record and recognition of its men, is almost palpable. In his formidable knowledge and rigorous

criticism, Murphy's influence over the structure and argument of the volume could be seen in places as almost co-authorship.³⁸ The gracious acknowledgement Davin gave to Murphy in his Preface points perhaps to the intensity of the working relationship and the arguments involved:

That [errors] are not as numerous as they might have been is largely due to the invaluable help of Mr W.E. Murphy. In acting as a filter to me of information from New Zealand he very soon made himself an authority on the battle, saved me from countless errors of detail, and many times, by adducing considerations overlooked or insufficiently weighed, compelled me to modify a conclusion.³⁹

As the first piece of work done on a volume, the primary function of a Narrative was heuristic: to collect, collate and co-ordinate the primary documents and raw material for the author. War records such as operation reports, unit diaries, maps and intelligence communications were used to build up a skeleton chronology of events. This was supplemented by interviews, parliamentary records, Narratives from the other Commonwealth histories, and enemy records as they became available, to provide a comprehensive and detailed account. This was then refined by circulation in draft among commanders and other key participants, and supplemented where appropriate from private letters and diaries, and by questionnaires published in the *RSA Review* or circulated at reunions.⁴⁰ Cross referencing to files and reports outside of the Narrative, particularly to Allied and enemy records, and to other Narratives being prepared by the Branch, turned each Narrative into a well integrated data base that linked not only events on the various fronts of the battle, but recurrent issues and personalities across the War Histories as a whole.

³⁸ For one example of this see his approximately 120 pages of comment on 57 pages of Davin's text: 'Comments by W.E. Murphy on Dan Davin's Draft History of the Crete Campaign, pages 136 – 193 included', MS-Papers-5079-665, Draft History of the Crete Campaign – Comments by W.E. Murphy: Davin, Daniel Marcus 1913 – 1990: Literary Papers, Tapuhi IRN: 169582, ATL. For an example of Maleme, see particularly pp. 7–9.

³⁹ Davin, *Crete*, p. viii.

⁴⁰ Letters, Kippenberger to Davin, 9 March 1948, IA1 181/32/2; Davin to Kippenberger, 1 April 1948, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

Up to five copies of the Crete Narrative were in circulation at any one time and comments and alterations noted on a master copy as they returned. This was periodically retyped and copied, enabling the process to begin again. The Narrative, as it was understood at the time of typing, was restricted to the right-hand pages, while comments and additional material were inserted on the left. In these copies it is possible to see, quite literally, the layering up of understanding of the battle as the latest of these comments and additions were typed, handwritten or glued onto the pages. Much of the Crete Narrative was mundane and unspectacular, the minute working through and standardising of the many facts and figures that appeared so readily in both the Official and subsequent histories. In matters of strategy and tactics, however, debate could become heated. Even on the pages of its final copy, the contest of opinion in the Narrative remained spirited.⁴¹

One function of the Narratives was to integrate enemy documents into the Allied understanding of the battle. For Crete these were prepared by the Branch's own translator, W.D. Dawson.⁴² Particularly important was the testimony of General Kurt Student, GOC XI Air Corps, whose revelations concerning the tenuous hold on Maleme airfield by German troops on the night of May 20 heavily influenced the development of the Maleme hypothesis. The German records and perspectives were presented in the introduction to each volume of Narrative. Part II of the Crete Narrative, for example, as the section that dealt with the day of the invasion and the loss of Maleme through to the night of the 22 May, began with a 16-page appraisal of German operations during this period including their intentions, appreciations, and battle plans and a summary of landings and outcomes for each of the units involved.

Thus the Narrative began immediately with an example of Nora's hyper-realisation of the historical, whereby, as Davin acknowledged, any reader of the Narrative and later the

⁴¹ Spirited debate: see for example pages adjoining paragraphs 953 – 954, Copy 3, Crete Campaign Narrative, Volume V, Part II Operations 20 -22 May 1941 (paras 421 – 1026), AL 771/2, NA, UK.

⁴² See Narrative, plus Murphy, 'Crete - New Zealand Command Failures', p. 28.

volume knew ‘far more about the campaign than any commander on either side could have known at the time,’ and was put ‘temporarily ... into the position of God’⁴³ While the integration of New Zealand and German records was essential for an understanding of events, it needs to be remembered that, as readers and contributors, the recollections and opinions of commanders and all others participating in the Narrative process also became filtered through this knowledge. In a battle in which the judgement of individual officers weighed so significantly on the outcome and yet, in the production of its history was so reliant on personal recollection, this relationship must be kept particularly in mind.

Although, as has been discussed, the Branch’s author / narrator split was frequently criticised, this was largely for the naïve trust in empiricism and the deliberate distancing of the historical researcher from the finished volume. While this thesis has acknowledged there were a number of advantages in such a system, it can also be argued that the use of the Narratives as means of obtaining and evaluating evidence was theoretically unsound and fundamentally flawed. In Crete, particularly, the poor communication, scattered fighting and often desperate nature of the battle meant that very few written records were produced. As a result much of the Crete Narrative was constructed from the recollection of commanders as it was circulated. In this way it became not only a collation of existing documents but a primary source in itself as the first point at which various of the experiences or events of battle were recorded. It is understandable that the circulation of the Narrative for confirmation of existing information would impact upon its role as the collector of new information. Having read the Narrative, any response, comment or recollection that a participant offered would have been effectively, although unwittingly, distorted by contact with the Narrative itself. Where hindsight may have already existed, it was brought further into effect, especially by exposure to German sources and intentions. There could be no true relinquishing of this knowledge, ‘temporarily’ as Davin suggested or otherwise. The ongoing layering up and recirculation of information and opinion could only exacerbate this tendency as each participant read and based their recollection on information made available by others.

⁴³ Letter Davin to Kippenberger, 19 March 1948, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

This does not imply that there was always unanimity. There was frequently dispute and disagreement. Rather, it acknowledges the difficulty of trying to recreate and understand the conditions in which decisions were made against the artificial conditions created in the history which described them, and the difficulties, also, of extracting the lessons afforded by hindsight from these decisions without unduly criticising those in the difficult position of having had to have made them. While retrospectively analysing the events of the battle already seemed unfair to some, especially when ‘the real atmosphere’ of battle was so far from ‘the classical and sedate confines of Oxford’⁴⁴ from which they were being made, it was an unfairness exacerbated by the Narrative system. This was something that *Crete* could never get past and which Davin, as its author, found harrowing. His explanation of this dilemma, as included in the Preface, is worth quoting at length:

Far more trying, however, was the fact that I, a very junior and ignorant subaltern in that battle, was forced by the nature of the historian’s role not merely to try and discover what happened and present it in a lucid and logical way, but also, by considering the decisions taken and the alternatives possible, to imply or express judgment on the actions of men immeasurably my betters in courage, military capacity and experience: among them men under whose command I had served and whose personal friendliness to me in times past reinforced the loyalty a junior officer owes to his commanders long after the temporary ties of discipline have been severed; among them also men of whom death during or since the war has deprived us and whose testimony, if we had it, might make plain a great deal that is obscure.

... The historian’s is also a duty and men who died generously for theirs would be the last to reproach another for trying to do his. I hope therefore that this history will be read as one written in the earnest belief that nothing should be set down in malice; and I hope also that the reader will keep it in his mind, as I have tried to keep it in mine, that the commanders whose actions are being subjected to such close consideration took their

⁴⁴ Lt-Col C.N. Armstrong, ‘The Defence and Fall of Crete’, *Freedom*, 9 September 1953, p. 2.

decisions in grim conditions of urgency; that they were pitifully lacking in equipment which later in the war would have been considered essential; that much now clear was then hidden; that the time to ponder the facts which is the privilege of the historian and his readers was not theirs; and that consequences which seem to us inevitable because we know they took place were, even for those who then predicted them correctly, uncertainties of an inscrutable future.⁴⁵

To study the Narrative process in more detail a case study has been made of the communications between Andrew and Hargest over the withdrawal from Maleme airfield.

As the Narrative was pieced together and the significance of the withdrawal became apparent, the need to determine responsibility for the withdrawal mounted accordingly, particularly between Andrew, located at his Bn HQ on Point 107 and Hargest at his Bde HQ, some 5 kilometres further back.⁴⁶ Accountability hinged on the timings and content of the communications between the two Headquarters and on how much Brigadier Hargest knew of Andrew's intention to withdraw. It became particularly important, therefore to discover when 22 Bn was last in touch with 5 Bde HQ. The sources relating to Andrew's withdrawal from Maleme airfield on the night of 20 May were among the most sketchy collected for the Narrative. For documentary evidence there was only one written footnote added by Andrew to the 22 Bn War Diary, after the event, most likely in Egypt, which was singularly inconclusive.⁴⁷ Attention therefore turned to oral testimonies. As Hargest had been killed while serving as a New Zealand observer at the Normandy landings in 1944, the Branch had to rely on the recollections of four remaining participants: Captain Dawson, the Brigade Major; Lt Hawthorn, the Intelligence Officer for 22 Bn; Maj Leggat, Second in Charge, 22 Bn; and Lt Col Andrew himself. These testimonies were taken midway through 1948, some seven years after the event.

⁴⁵ Davin, *Crete*, pp vii – viii.

⁴⁶ Glyn Harper, 'Crete', in Ian McGibbon, (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 126.

⁴⁷ Murphy, Note to page adjoining paragraph 861, Crete Campaign Narrative, AL 771/2, NA, UK.

Given the significance later attached to it, recollection of the withdrawal was both vague and conflicting. Dawson, located at Bde HQ, could recall a message from Andrew direct to Hargest by Wireless Telephone (W/T) at 19:25 on the evening of the 20th. Hawthorn, at 22 Bn HQ, also maintained Andrew had spoken directly with Hargest, and had stated that he would have to withdraw. In his first account Hawthorn had believed that this permission was 'not granted'. In the fluid manner of recollection, however, a note attached to this statement in the Narrative records this information as 'opinion only' and states it was 'later rejected by Lt Hawthorn after discussions with Major Leggat'.⁴⁸ It is not clear from the note what aspect of the statement was rejected.

Leggat, himself, did not believe Andrew could have spoken by W/T, as contact had been lost earlier in the day, a point confirmed by the Signals War Diary. He was, however, the officer sent to the Bde HQ by Andrew following the full withdrawal of 22 Bn to 21 and 23 Bn defence lines. He maintained that he had to wake Hargest, who was 'in pyjamas and sleepy' to tell him the news. Leggat was certain that '5 Bde HQ knew nothing of the 22 Bn withdrawal until then'.⁴⁹

Andrew's own commentary also appeared confused and conflicting. On the matter of the first contact he was in agreement with the timing of the Bde HQ officers, in that he maintained he 'spoke again [to Hargest] after the 'I' tank counter-attack 17:15 had failed'.⁵⁰ After informing Hargest of his need to withdraw, he maintained that Hargest had 'agreed to withdraw "if I must"',⁵¹ this being the point, presumably, at which Lt Hawthorn first believed that permission had not been granted. After this, however, his statements appeared more contradictory. At first he maintained that he 'contacted Brig Hargest again about 0100 [on the morning of the 21st] and though the messages were

⁴⁸ Murphy, Note to page adjoining paragraph 601, Crete Campaign Narrative, AL 771/2, NA, UK.

⁴⁹ Murphy, Note to page adjoining paragraph 600 - 601, Crete Campaign Narrative, AL 771/2, NA, UK., see notes to paragraph 861 also.

⁵⁰ Andrew, Note to page adjoining paragraph 601, Crete Campaign Narrative, AL 771/2, NA, UK.

⁵¹ Andrew, Note to page adjoining paragraph 601, Crete Campaign Narrative, AL 771/2, NA, UK.

weak, told him I would have to withdraw to “B” coy [company]. Ridge’.⁵² He then immediately contradicted this statement by maintaining that his ‘last message to Bde would be about 2100 hours’, which in itself was a confirmation of a comment to the same effect earlier in the narrative in which he stated the last time he spoke with Hargest was ‘approx. 2100 / 2115 hrs.’⁵³ These points were not followed up in the Narrative.

Therefore, at the time that the Narrative was completed in 1948, there was neither firm documentary evidence nor compatible oral testimony and consensus over Hargest’s knowledge of Andrew’s withdrawal. Evidence, based on recollections seven years after the event, was conflicting. Andrew maintained permission was granted for his withdrawal following the failure of his I tanks around 19.25 on the evening of the 20 May, Lt Hawthorn believed, at first at least, that it was not. Andrew maintained he had informed Hargest of his partial withdrawal at 1.00 am the following morning, Leggat was certain that he had not. Given the perceived significance of the withdrawal within the volume, the weighting and interpretation of the evidence now became of considerable significance in itself.

In empirical method, the collation of evidence was followed by its critical evaluation by the historian. In the case of the War Histories this was achieved by the circulation of the Narrative and drafts of the chapters among those connected with the Branch. Because of the lack of firm documentary evidence over the withdrawal the emphasis fell on internal rather than external criticism: that is, factors relating to the psychological state and intention of the individual who produced the historical evidence, rather than the evidence itself. In the case of Crete this was given particular weighting by the contemporary nature of the history and the fact that, with Andrew and Hargest, one participant was living and the other dead. Ideally, hermeneutic included many steps to maintain both logic and an objective distance between an historian and his or her material. It was this assumed objectivity that justified the ‘scientific’ label frequently attached to empirical history in

⁵² Andrew, Note to page adjoining paragraph 601, Crete Campaign Narrative, AL 771/2, NA, UK.

⁵³ Andrew, Note adjoining paragraph 576, Crete Campaign Narrative, AL 771/2, NA, UK.

the interwar and post-war period. In *Crete*, however, this was not possible and understandings of Hargest's decisions and behaviours were reliant on a no more objective method than of guessing, from what participants knew of Hargest personally, why he would have acted the way he did, or what those at the Branch believed he may have been thinking at the time. Interpretation therefore occurred at a level that was unavoidably personal. The opinions and comments given by those participating in the Narrative provide some interesting insights into this process.

Commenting on the Narrative by those commanders directly involved in the battle, was, as Kippenberger admitted, a relatively unbuttoned, almost cathartic process. Criticisms were given at times 'coldly and bitterly' but certainly with no expectation that they would make it into the final text.⁵⁴ While, very largely, they did not, in the historiographical traces of this process the division of sympathies between Andrew and Hargest are evident.

In the Narratives, sympathy for Andrew and for the ordeal he had undergone on the day of the invasion was very evident. A note was included by Murphy, for example, that contained an extract by Maj W.D. Philp, an artillery commander present at the conference following the withdrawal from Maleme, describing Andrew's worn-out appearance on the first day of battle: 'he looked like a man at the end of his tether'.⁵⁵ Philp had been very impressed, Murphy noted, as it had 'made him realise that 22 Bn had had a "rough passage" and that "he just could not stand up to any more"'.⁵⁶ Although the source was anecdotal, Murphy stated that he had included it to show that the 'ordeal 22 Bn had endured on and around the airfield was so terrible as to be not easily forgotten'. To this Kippenberger had added the endorsement, 'Andrew a very good soldier and an honest man'.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Kippenberger to Davin, 'Memorandum of Criticism', 23 January 1951, IA1 181/32/2; Letter Kippenberger to Davin, 1 February 1951, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

⁵⁵ Murphy, Notes to page adjoining paragraphs 788 - 789, Crete Campaign Narrative, AL 771/2, NA, UK.

⁵⁶ Murphy, Notes to page adjoining paragraphs 788 - 789, Crete Campaign Narrative, AL 771/2, NA, UK.

⁵⁷ Kippenberger, Notes to page adjoining paragraph 788, Crete Campaign Narrative, AL 771/2, NA, UK.

In the comments on Hargest, however, admiration and understanding seem to have been replaced with frustration, and even disdain. For Kippenberger, particularly, who had taken over Hargest's ill disciplined and divided brigade in January 1942,⁵⁸ the Narrative was an opportunity to vent his anger. Against a section from the 5 Bde war diary where Hargest had written 'I sent the 23rd to their [22 Bn] assistance', Kippenberger underlined the comment and had written 'one company'.⁵⁹ Against a comment by another participant on the need to counterattack he wrote 'Yes, yes, yes'. In the section concerning an abortive counterattack to regain the airfield on May 22, he dismissed Hargest's concern over the late arrival of his troops as 'a typical Hargest remark'⁶⁰ and criticised him for his lack of initiative in arranging an alternative. Later in the same passage, after two other commanders had offered support for Hargest's decision not to change his battle plans, Kippenberger wrote again "Why Change? Why not be filled with determination to get every man into this obviously vital counterattack ... A vigorous commander would have got over these difficulties".⁶¹ Against a section of Davin's draft on Hargest, he later wrote 'not soldiering'.⁶² Hargest, with his apparent lassitude during the battle and discreditable behaviour afterward - as MP for Southland he had used his parliamentary connections to voice concerns over Freyberg to Peter Fraser after Crete - did not appear to have either the respect nor sympathy of those who had worked with him and who were now participating in the Narrative at the Branch, and certainly not Kippenberger's.

An alternative interpretation of the evidence over the withdrawal was always available, however, and was stated explicitly by Murphy in both the Narrative⁶³ and in his

⁵⁸ This is relatively mildly stated in *Infantry Brigadier*, London: Oxford University Press, 1949, p 113, however very explicitly stated in the letter, Kippenberger to McClymont, 6 March 1953, WAIL, 11, No. 7, NA.

⁵⁹ Kippenberger, Notes to page adjoining paragraph 596, Crete Campaign Narrative, AL 771/2, NA, UK.

⁶⁰ Kippenberger, Notes to page adjoining paragraph 952, Crete Campaign Narrative, AL 771/2, NA, UK.

⁶¹ Kippenberger, Notes to page adjoining paragraphs 953 – 954, Crete Campaign Narrative, AL 771/2, NA, UK.

⁶² Kippenberger, margin note in Murphy, 'Comments on Davin's Draft', p. 14.

⁶³ Murphy, Notes to page adjoining paragraphs 861, Crete Campaign Narrative, AL 771/2, NA, UK.

comments on Davin's first draft of the volume in December 1951.⁶⁴ While Murphy was by no means an outright supporter of Hargest and often wished that elsewhere in the text the criticisms against him could be made more forcibly still,⁶⁵ he harboured an unrelenting scepticism toward Andrew and his account of the withdrawal from Maleme on the night of 20 May. More than any other, Murphy saw Andrew as fully culpable for the loss of the airfield, and for a dereliction of duty that no circumstances, 'no matter how terrible',⁶⁶ could excuse. By disregarding Andrew's account, for which there seemed little in the way of evidence but much in the way of reputation to be regained, and relying instead on Hawthorn and Leggat, he believed that Andrew had not only failed to convey to Bde HQ how bad things were with 22 Bn, but the fact that he was planning to withdraw at all. 'Hargest did not, I am certain, know that 22 Bn had withdrawn from the airfield' he wrote in his comments, 'and I find it hard to believe that he even so much as authorised Andrew to make a limited withdrawal'.⁶⁷ Although, according to Andrew he had 'told Hargest that he might have to withdraw ... and says that Hargest replied "If you must, you must,"' there was, Murphy believed, 'almost cast iron evidence' to the contrary.⁶⁸

Had Murphy's interpretation been accepted, some of Hargest's behaviour following the withdrawal which, in the light of Andrew's account, seemed so inexplicable may have made greater sense. While there remained many episodes in the days that followed in which Hargest's leadership could still be found wanting, for this one occasion, where there was benefit to be gained from a greater doubting by the Branch of Andrew's evidence, insufficient doubt appears to have been given. To do so would have been to contradict the testimony of a living soldier, a VC winner and one for whom loyalties remained high.

⁶⁴ Murphy, 'Comments on Davin's Draft', pp. 8 – 9.

⁶⁵ Murphy, 'Comments on Davin's Draft', p. 25.

⁶⁶ Murphy, 'Comments on Davin's Draft', pp. 8 – 9.

⁶⁷ Murphy, 'Comments on Davin's Draft', pp. 14–15.

⁶⁸ Murphy 'Comments on Davin's Draft', pp. 8-9.

As with many other aspects of the Crete campaign, Davin clearly had a choice to make: a ‘most delicate and difficult job’ as Kippenberger described it.⁶⁹ While Davin had great respect for Murphy’s scholarship he could not always agree with the ‘avenging righteous anger’ of his allegations.⁷⁰ Were the Maleme hypothesis to be accepted, and while others in the Narrative process supported it to a greater or lesser degree Murphy was its main proponent, the entire blame for the loss of the island could lie with one man, Andrew. Given the complexities of the battle and the management of the build up to the campaign this hardly seemed fair to Davin and, given his preference for the inevitable loss of the island in the first place, hardly fair at all. The result, therefore, was an implicit compromise. While Davin recognised the possibility of misunderstanding between Andrew and Hargest,⁷¹ he stopped short of suggesting either that Hargest had not approved the withdrawal, and therefore that Andrew had contravened his orders to maintain his post, or the implied culpability that, as Murphy so bluntly put it in his comments on Davin’s draft, ‘if anybody won Crete for the Germans it was Andrew’.⁷²

In the final manuscript Davin presented the evidence with as much consideration of the alternatives as he felt the construction of a coherent argument would allow. Even then there were some readers who complained that with so many pros and cons presented they could not make a decision one way or other.⁷³ And this, perhaps, was the point. The evasiveness of Andrew in the Narrative was reflected in the final text. It was, as Davin had confessed to Kippenberger, ‘difficult to explain away some things’⁷⁴ and crucial matters remained veiled in uncertainty. While there were clear accounts from Andrew, for example, of his side of the conversations, Hargest’s replies were simply listed as ‘not recorded’. Andrew’s plans for using the two companies sent to assist him were also presented as conjectural, even though Andrew would have been in a position to confirm

⁶⁹ Letter, Kippenberger to Davin, 16 December 1947, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

⁷⁰ Letter, Davin to Kippenberger, 29 January 1957, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

⁷¹ Davin, *Crete*, p. 136.

⁷² Murphy, ‘Comments on Davin’s Draft’, p. 19.

⁷³ Cyril Falls, ‘A Window on the World: The New Zealanders in Crete’, *Illustrated London News*, 27 March 1954; L.R.H., ‘Crete: Official History of Campaign’, *Christchurch Press*, copy, IA1 181/53/3 Part II, NA.

⁷⁴ Letter, Davin to Kippenberger, 29 June 1949, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

them with Davin for himself.⁷⁵ Although Andrew was alive and available for further comment, his evasiveness, coupled with the poverty of alternative records, meant that Davin was required to reach a balance between fact and conjecture and, out of loyalty, this amounted at times to a sympathetic clouding in Andrew's favour.

Davin's explanations of Hargest's decisions were, however, entirely conjectural: 'his confidence would have been encouraged'; 'a similar report ... may have made him hope ...'; 'the Brigadier had evidently felt...'; 'it is a reasonable assumption that the orders given...'; '[t]he optimism implicit in this inaction...' and so on,⁷⁶ as, arguing against what anecdotal evidence was available, Davin worked hard to construct a fair and convincing assessment out of almost nothing. The need to rely on internal criticism, based largely on extrapolations of Hargest's temperament and personality, was evident: 'that communications with companies had gone must have been disturbing, but the Brigadier no doubt interpreted it as cheerfully as was natural to one of his sanguine temper...'⁷⁷ Hardly, one might think, an ironclad basis for definitive history. Furthermore, when an explanation did hang in the balance between empirical evidence and an interpretation based on subjective projection, it was not necessarily the documentary evidence that won through:

Yet the tenor of [Hargest's] message sent to 23 Bn at 2:25 pm to the effect that it would not be needed for the counter-attack ... does not suggest any great perturbation; though it is just possible that captured maps brought in about two o'clock and indicating a projected enemy thrust eastwards towards Canea may have made Hargest anxious to hold on to his reserve as long as possible, the more so if he believed, as he may well have done, that there were more waves of paratroops to follow. Confidence [as in misinformed overconfidence] in the general situation, however, seems the more likely and simpler explanation.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ See Davin, *Crete*, p. 112

⁷⁶ Selected from Davin, *Crete*, pp. 131-138.

⁷⁷ Davin, *Crete*, p. 132.

⁷⁸ Davin, *Crete*, pp. 132 - 133.

The account of Andrew's withdrawal, then, was presented within this framework. The structure of the volume, in which the experiences of the three battalions of 5 Bde were dealt with before those of the Bde HQ, meant that Andrew's account of his conversation with Hargest in which he maintained Hargest had agreed to the withdrawal - "if you must, you must"- came a full 25 pages before the disclaimer that acknowledged Andrew as the sole source of this information.⁷⁹ Davin's disclaimer, and the passages that follow it require inspection:

Hargest's next news of the Maleme front was Andrew's report that the counter-attack with tanks had failed. In the same conversation - about six o'clock - he also learnt that Andrew, his reserve gone and no counterattack having come, might have to consider withdrawal. He replied by agreeing to that withdrawal if it had to be.

These conversations seem crucial to the interpretation of Hargest's attitude. But no record of them survives and Hargest did not discuss them with his staff. We are dependent for information about them on the recollection of Lieutenant-Colonel Andrew, and he can throw no light upon the conclusions Hargest drew from them. Moreover, with weak signals, the forward troops under heavy attack, and a confusing situation, full allowance must be made for the possibilities of misunderstanding, never so rich as in time of battle

....

Again, at half past eight [pm] or somewhat later, Andrew got in touch with Hargest by the last effort of the No. 18 set and, though the messages were weak, 'told him I would have to withdraw to B Coy ridge'. A glance at the map should have told Hargest that such a course was tantamount to giving up the position. Then, if ever, was the time for some such course of action as that already suggested.

Instead, he sent the message to Division that has already been recounted - a message which gives no indication that Andrew was contemplating even a local withdrawal, though this news would surely have been thought of the greatest importance.

⁷⁹ Davin, *Crete*, pp. 110 & 136 respectively.

This fact – that his message does not mention withdrawal – and the fact that his staff also had no inkling of what might be in the wind suggest that either Hargest had not understood Andrew’s intentions or that he believed the arrival of the two companies would be enough to restore Andrew’s confidence and prevent him from withdrawing And finally, he had missed the most important fact of all, that now was the time to strike with all the force he had.⁸⁰

Implicit in this explanation are many of the elements of Murphy’s alternative interpretation of events: the one-sided nature of the evidence, the lack of material traces, the acknowledgement that Hargest would have recognised the significance of Andrew’s withdrawal had he known of it or authorised it, and yet gave no indications of it to either his staff or his superiors that it was going to happen. These factors along with the absence of Hargest’s response to Andrew’s request may have acknowledged, to those who discerned a veiled counter-narrative, the possibility that he had not in fact authorised it at all. Against this, however, the layers of inferences and emphases within the book as a whole continued to lay culpability at Hargest’s feet.

This slanting, along with the blatant omission later in the text of the one piece of solid testimony in support of Hargest, the fact that Leggat, when waking Hargest at his HQ later that night to confirm the withdrawal, was certain that he was totally unaware that it was going to occur,⁸¹ served to deflect responsibility for the decision to withdraw from Andrew onto Hargest. In the event of its publication, however, it was the next passage in *Crete* that more surely sealed the fate of Hargest’s reputation in the battle. As he did in other sections of the book, Davin closed his discussion of Andrew’s account with a summary of Hargest’s performance at Maleme. While ostensibly offering a number of factors in his defence - ‘an apology’, as Murphy put it, being ‘... in effect more damning

⁸⁰ Davin, *Crete*, pp. 136 – 137.

⁸¹ Davin, *Crete*, p. 136.

than outright criticism⁸² - it was more readily interpreted as confirmation of his accountability.

In short, Brigadier Hargest misread the situation. That he did so can be blamed partly on the fact that he was still tired from the campaign in Greece; on his being over-impressed with the success of 23 Battalion and too ready to believe that 22 Battalion would have equal success in weathering the storm; on the circumstance that this was a kind of battle new to him and one where hours counted, not days; and on the fact that communications were peculiarly bad and advice from a trained Intelligence staff quite absent. But the conclusion is inevitable that he began with a battle plan which gave his battalion commanders too much choice of role with too little guidance on which roles were prior, that in the battle itself he failed to give his commanders firm directions, that he would have been better able to deal with the breakdown of communications had he taken up beforehand an advanced HQ much closer to Maleme, the vital point, and once things had begun to go wrong his wisest course would have been to go forward as far as possible to see for himself what the situation was.⁸³

There were many participants in the battle of Crete whose contribution had paled under close examination. Although Davin acknowledged that mistakes had been made, they were, he believed, no 'more numerous or more culpable than the mistakes made, say, at Alamein. Only the odds were greater and mistakes correspondingly more dangerous'.⁸⁴ Who was the most culpable depended on where on the spectrum between inevitable loss and the Maleme hypothesis readers chose to position themselves. In such a lengthy and complex book, and one in which the interpretations seemed to cross so readily among themselves as they did in *Crete*, succinct summaries of the type Davin provided for Hargest greatly assisted its acceptance by the public. In the strange mismatch of arguments contained in *Crete*, the emphasis at the beginning and end of the book on the inevitable loss of the island was undermined by the events at Maleme, spelt out in such

⁸² Murphy, 'Comments on Davin's Draft', p. 13.

⁸³ Davin, *Crete*, p. 138.

⁸⁴ Davin, *Crete*, p. 463.

detail in between, which seemed to concentrate blame, in the public eye at least, directly on Hargest.

This perspective was emphasised by the inclusion in the volume of the counterfactual. As stated earlier, the near run nature of the fighting on Crete was an important factor in the public interest in the battle, and never more so than when the German records worked into Davin's volume confirmed how 'tantalizingly close'⁸⁵ troops had been to inflicting their first ground based defeat of the war. The temptation to speculate on alternative outcomes was not only exploited by reviewers but, along with the addition of knowledge in later decades of the ULTRA intelligence, has contributed to the fascination with the battle to this day. Certainly, the pivotal role played by the New Zealand troops and commanders in the Maleme hypothesis has maintained its profile here in New Zealand more so than, for example, in Australia where the inevitability thesis appears to have prevailed.⁸⁶ Like criticism, although speculation on possible outcomes had decisions been different held valuable lessons for warfare and command, it sat uneasily in a national history. The inclusion of the counterfactual in *Crete* was never a foregone conclusion. It was another point of contention between Davin, who believed in the inevitable loss of the island, and Murphy who was one of the strongest contenders that it could have been saved. Murphy believed he eventually convinced Freyberg of this point also.⁸⁷ The inclusion of the counterfactual in *Crete* pushed the role of Official Histories, and the official historian, to its limits. It is well to consider the idea in more depth.

The analysis as well as the description of events was regarded as one of the defining characteristics of the War Histories produced by the Branch. It differentiated them from war chronicles, on the one hand and, through the use of an informed and sceptical restraint, from sensationalist accounts on the other. What place, then, was there within the

⁸⁵ Glyn Harper, 'Crete', p. 128.

⁸⁶ Albert Palazzo, *Battle for Crete*, (2nd ed.) Australian Army Campaign Series – 1, Canberra, Australian Army History Unit, 2007.

⁸⁷ W.E. Murphy, 'Crete - New Zealand Command Failure', p. 29; W.E. Murphy, Interview with Glyn Harper, 27 January 1993, Harper Archive.

Histories for speculation on events that had not actually occurred and which might stir up sensation and controversy in their wake?

First it must be said that counterfactual arguments are inherent in causative analysis. To argue a causative link between an antecedent and consequent is to imply that without it an alternative set of events would have occurred. This is the principal broadly accepted, among other things, at the core of our legal system,⁸⁸ and something with which Kippenberger would have been particularly familiar.

Counterfactuals lie at the foundation of military history also. Military history as a genre originated as a teaching tool for young officers. Its purpose was to extract lessons from past campaigns that could be applied in future battles.⁸⁹ This was a mandate of the War History Branch also. To recreate a situation ‘going forward’, that is to ‘see those problems coming upon us’⁹⁰ as the commanders may have seen them in the heat of the battle is to extract lessons from the study of possibilities. This was the atmosphere which, in the absence of evidence, Davin tried to recreate in his interpretation of the first night of battle on Crete: to balance the hyper-realisation afforded by the integration of many different sources against the uncertainty and reality of events experienced by Andrew and Hargest as they weighed the options available against the likely outcomes. The lessons in Maleme lay in understanding not only how it “actually was” but also, as Niall Ferguson has suggested, ‘*how it actually wasn’t* - but how to contemporaries it might have been’.⁹¹

Richard Ned Lebow has argued that counterfactuals can be used by historians in two ways: either, as entertainment and sensationalism: that is to ‘offer a different and more compelling theory or interpretation’, or alternatively, what could be termed here diagnostically, that is to test a hypothesis or refute another potential counterfactual by

⁸⁸ Niall Ferguson, ‘Introduction’, in Niall Ferguson, (ed.), *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals*, London: Papermac, 1998, p. 82.

⁸⁹ John Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, London: Jonathon Cape, 1976, pp. 20 - 22.

⁹⁰ Ferguson, p. 86.

⁹¹ Ferguson, p. 86, (*Italics in the original*).

showing that ‘the outcome in question would have happened in the absence of the hypothesised cause’.⁹² The goal for the Branch was to suggest the latter without indulging in the former. Davin, reluctantly perhaps, justified the counterfactual so:

The absence of an explanation for what was done, however, hardly absolves the historian from the necessity to consider the action taken in the light not only of its results but also of what might have been the results of a different course. And as the events of this twenty-four hours [at Maleme] were largely to determine the developments of the whole battle for Crete, it is particularly necessary to pause and recapitulate the main points of the day’s action with an eye to suggesting the courses open to Brigadier Hargest and scrutinizing the course that he did take in the light of the defence he would probably have advanced for it.⁹³

Because the significance of Maleme was so evident ‘in the upshot’, as Davin was fond of wording it in his volume, the tendency was to suggest the alternative outcome as the direct converse: because Maleme could be so readily identified as the point at which the battle was lost, it could easily be assumed that a success at Maleme would have amounted to success of the battle as a whole. The validity of this argument depended on which hypothesis the reader subscribed to. For those who believed in the inevitable loss of the island, the loss of the airfield was, after all, no more central to the outcome of Crete than any other event following the fateful disorganization in the months before the invasion. It also depended on the breadth of view of the battle. Freyberg, as GOC, believed that success at Maleme would have ‘delayed the end at Crete and no more’, citing the airborne and seaborne forces building up at Heraklion and the ‘gaps in our defences over a distance of 100 miles’ as factors that would otherwise have assured loss of the island.⁹⁴

⁹² Richard Ned Lebow, ‘What’s so Different about a Counterfactual?’, *World Politics*, Vol. 52, No 3, (July, 2000), pp. 550-85, p. 585.

⁹³ Davin, *Crete*, p.134.

⁹⁴ Freyberg, ‘Comments on W.O. Popular History – Mr C. Buckley’, 27 August 1048, CAB 106 / 701, NA, UK.

Puttick, too, took the broader view. 'I cannot agree', he wrote in the Narrative, in response to Murphy's insistence that the fate of Crete 'hinged' on the aerodrome,

with the above opinion. The attempted seaborne attack at CANEA ... could NOT be ignored. A NZ success at MALEME, which at the least was highly problematical in view of the weak forces available for it and the rapid enemy reinforcement in the area, would have been largely nullified by a German success at CANEA, with all its implications.⁹⁵

The Maleme hypothesis, on the other hand, and the argument that the abandonment of the airfield 'turned the fate of the entire British force on Crete',⁹⁶ was based as much on an historian's view as a commander's. While the inevitability thesis focused primarily on the shortcomings in preparation that had reduced the island to a logistical nightmare, it also fed on the assumption of an endlessly resourced and indefatigable German Army. This view was understandable among those who had witnessed the wave upon wave of German aircraft on the day of the invasion and the intensity of air attack in the weeks leading up to it. If the enemy were denied access to one airfield, it was assumed they could simply be directed to another and, as suggested by Davin, it seemed unlikely that Hitler, with 'no practice in acknowledging failure',⁹⁷ would have given up so easily. In the Maleme hypothesis, however, documentary evidence and the testimony of German commanders cut through this rhetoric to show how vulnerable the Germans had believed their positions around Maleme to have been and the limitations placed on the operation as a whole by preparations for the invasion of Russia. Thus historical analysis gave heightened significance to what may or may not have been apparent to commanders at the time.

Once such knowledge had come together, Murphy could confidently state, as he maintained in the many years that followed, that if Andrew had 'not withdrawn his

⁹⁵ Puttick, Notes to page adjoining paragraphs 952 – 953, Crete Campaign Narrative, AL 771/2, NA, UK.

⁹⁶ Palazzo, p. 50.

⁹⁷ Davin, *Crete*, p 462.

Battalion the whole course of the battle would have been utterly different'.⁹⁸ The Germans, he argued, required only one airfield to ensure success, but having 'squandered' their airborne resources by attempting to capture all three, they had no further troops left in reserve. Believing themselves outfought, they 'signalled back that they had lost the battle and were utterly amazed when they ... found the troops that had been holding them up all day had gone'.⁹⁹ In the light of such evidence the decisions of Andrew, or more apparently in the volume, of Hargest, took on a far greater significance than if the inevitable loss of the island had been accepted.

For Davin, dealing with these contradictory interpretations within the volume presented a number of problems. While he was prepared to meet Murphy 'whenever possible'¹⁰⁰ he did not support the Maleme hypothesis himself and was reluctant to detract from his preferred argument to sustain it. In the course of the drafts, however, he had increased emphasis given to both the events at the airfield and the failure to regain it. This was due in no small part to Murphy's insistence that 'the history revolves around the loss of the airfield and [that] our explanation of this must carry conviction'¹⁰¹ and the substantial alterations he suggested to the way these points should be presented. But having supported the Maleme hypothesis with forthright criticisms in the volume, Davin then attempted to reconcile them with his original argument by back peddling somewhat in the conclusion.

As an exercise in simplification and stipulation, Davin's conclusion was a skilful piece of work. While he recapitulated some 'important points which, though implicit or explicit in the narrative, have perhaps been obscured by the length of the narrative or its detail',¹⁰² it was also, as he noted privately to Kippenberger, a 'judicious attempt at allotting praise

⁹⁸ Interview, W.E. Murphy with Glyn Harper, 27 January 1993, Harper Archive; Murphy, 'Crete - New Zealand Command Failures', pp. 28-30.

⁹⁹ Interview, W.E. Murphy with Glyn Harper, 27 January 1993, Harper Archive; see also. Murphy, 'Crete - New Zealand Command Failures', pp. 28-30.

¹⁰⁰ Letter, Davin to Kippenberger, 25 October 1951, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

¹⁰¹ See for example, Murphy, 'Comments on Davin's Draft', pp. 2-9, 20-21.

¹⁰² Davin, *Crete*, p. 456.

and blame'.¹⁰³ In five brief sections, none more than three pages long, he outlined the principal arguments concerning Crete and effectively weighed up the two hypotheses. In the first two sections covering the long term and immediate preparations for defence of the island and which outlined the mixture of geography, circumstances, and the misguided 'optimism which existed in quarters remote from the scene',¹⁰⁴ he confidently argued for the inevitable loss of the island. The third section containing the German plan, and particularly the fourth, summarising the counterfactual, together supported the Maleme hypothesis. Here, Davin admitted, the conclusions were altogether more doubtful. After having dealt with Maleme in such depth in the volume and explored events there from all possible angles, he refused to use the conclusion to commit himself further. While, from historical duty, perhaps, he acknowledged both the potential for British success, and, as argued by Freyberg and by Puttick above, the potential for German success either way via the capture of one of the other two airfields, he refused to be drawn further:

They might have succeeded and it cannot be proved that they would have failed; but, on the other hand, it cannot be proved that they would have succeeded either. And in fact it is probable that things took the course they had to take.¹⁰⁵

Should, then, the counterfactual have been taken seriously within an Official War History, especially as, statistically speaking, the chances that any counterfactual would have come out as predicted are highly remote?¹⁰⁶ From a military viewpoint, as a record of learned experiences, the study of alternative outcomes seems to have justified its inclusion. Many of the decisions faced on Crete, such as the locating of headquarters, were ones which commanders would have faced with much greater confidence later in the war.¹⁰⁷ Murphy also maintained as much when, in a series of exhaustive interviews, he believed he was able to convince Freyberg that the island could have been saved, thus

¹⁰³ Letter, Davin to Kippenberger, 29 January 1957, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

¹⁰⁴ Davin, *Crete*, p. 460.

¹⁰⁵ Davin. *Crete*, p. 463.

¹⁰⁶ Lebow, pp. 574-575.

¹⁰⁷ Stewart, Notes to page adjoining paragraph 831, Crete Campaign Narrative, AL 771/2, NA, UK.

showing that it was ‘not quite correct’ that, as another historian had asserted, Freyberg ‘had never learnt this lesson’.¹⁰⁸ Used diagnostically, the purpose of the counterfactuals was to analyse and educate. The profiling of poor decisions and apportioning of blame among certain individuals within the War Histories may have been regarded as an unfortunate side effect, but one in which the lesson justified the means. Outside of military circles, however, these same counterfactuals, while carrying the official endorsement, could fall into the alternative category of entertaining speculation and sensationalism, where the cost to an individual’s reputation, or to their family’s could be high. The conflicting notions of war as a rational science and war as a national endeavour were never so strong within New Zealand’s Official War Histories as they were in *Crete*.

In the broad social context, counterfactuals are, crassly put, the preserve of the losers. This is to the extent that those who succeed in their goal may rarely bother to investigate alternative historical possibilities.¹⁰⁹ The notion that Crete could have been, should have been, and nearly was, won gave a sense of a purposefulness to a battle which might otherwise have been seen as reactive and hopelessly disorganised. The paradox of counterfactuals, however, is that while they are intended to enrich understanding, they can also, and probably more commonly do, tend to simplify events by privileging a ‘few key variables to account for the forces allegedly responsible for the outcomes in question’.¹¹⁰ They thus assume a certain chain of connection when no certainty was there. The attempt to accommodate the Maleme hypothesis into his volume against his own conviction was something Davin was unable to reconcile in his conclusion. The emphasis given to Hargest’s responsibility in the body of the text, in combination with the certainty assumed by the counterfactual suggested in the Maleme hypothesis, brought matters together in the public mind to identify Hargest as the man who, to use sports analogy (a field in which counterfactuals often find their ripest expression) had let down the side. While it was not the outcome preferred by Davin, reviews suggest that the combined

¹⁰⁸ Murphy, ‘Crete - New Zealand Command Failures’, p. 29.

¹⁰⁹ For general discussions of the role of counterfactuals in history, see Ferguson, pp. 2 – 20.

¹¹⁰ Lebow, p. 558

focus on Hargest as an individual and on the paradigm of alternative success created by the counterfactual, encouraged the nation to do so.

Crete was widely reviewed on publication. All metropolitan and many regional New Zealand newspapers reviewed it, along with a number in the UK, several literary and foreign military journals, and the magazines of the Soldiers' Associations. Viewed collectively these reviews suggest a number of important patterns in the reception of the volume within the wider community.

The twelve New Zealand newspapers that reviewed the volume recognised, almost without exception, the criticisms and counterfactual of the Maleme hypothesis implied in the volume. More than three-quarters of them chose headlines or headers to this effect, even if some then argued explicitly against the counterfactual in the article.¹¹¹ The latent controversy surrounding Crete drew readers to the volume, although those expecting definitive conclusions from Davin were to be disappointed. As for Davin himself, the fact that he had served in the battle appeared more important than his actual rank or early wounding. While more than two thirds of the reviewers mentioned his participation as a form of endorsement of the volume, - 'no false glamour', as the *Southland Times* termed it – only one gave details of his position as intelligence officer and his later role within Divisional Intelligence.¹¹² The tight New Zealand focus of the book was also evident. Only one newspaper mentioned events at Heraklion and Retimo directly¹¹³ and one other indirectly. This may have contributed to the significance given to events at Maleme and the validity of the counterfactual.

While the division of opinion appeared relatively evenly split between the two competing hypotheses, it was not uncommon for the reviewers, following the manner of the book, to

¹¹¹ For example: 'Maleme Counter-Attack Came too Late to Save Crete', *New Zealand Truth*, 12 August 1953; 'Crete Lost before Battle Began: Historian tells Hitherto Unknown Facts of Campaign', *New Zealand Herald*, 30 July 1953.

¹¹² 'Maleme Counter-Attack Came too Late to Save Crete', *New Zealand Truth*, 12 August 1953.

¹¹³ 'The Crete Saga Retold: New War History Volume', *Christchurch Star-Sun*, 17 August 1953.

argue the two in tandem. Under the headline ‘Crete Lost Before Battle Began’, for example, the *New Zealand Herald* went on to state, without apparent contradiction, that ‘The Battle of Crete was lost on the first night of the fighting on May 20, 1941, when the New Zealand Fifth Brigade did not make an immediate counter-attack on the vital Maleme airfield ... But the Crete campaign was lost long before the battle started, for the ultimate decision to fight was dictated by events rather than planning ...’¹¹⁴

For those who were more decided in their views, attention in the reviews was not on Andrew but divided largely between Freyberg and Hargest. The emphases and tone applied to them were often very different, however. There were many commanders in the battle who must have wondered, and worried, how their conduct would measure up against the accumulated evidence. According to Kippenberger, Freyberg was very worried about how he would be presented.¹¹⁵ Because reviewers who saw the loss of the island as inevitable were generally looking at the broad sweep of events, their discussion did tend to focus on Freyberg but their criticisms were directed upward, toward the unduly high expectations of his superiors: Wavell, the Middle East Command, and, more anonymously, the Joint Planning Staff in Britain. Freyberg’s portrayal in the reviews, therefore, was as the stoic recipient of an impossible task. Although Davin also believed that this was the level at which responsibility lay, the necessity to follow the New Zealanders’ experiences, battalion by battalion and unit by unit, could not help but detract from the force of his own preferred argument. ‘I hope,’ he wrote to Kippenberger, ‘that I will be able to do this without muffling the main point: that we fought in circumstances none of our own choosing and that the roots of our failure must be sought in defensive negligence and political errors back in 1940.’¹¹⁶ What was a frustrating for Davin, however, may have ultimately worked in his GOC’s advantage.

¹¹⁴ ‘Crete Lost before Battle Began: Historian tells Hitherto Unknown Facts of Campaign’, *New Zealand Herald*, 30 July 1953.

¹¹⁵ Letter, Kippenberger to Scoullar, 3 August 1955, 11, No. 6, NA.

¹¹⁶ Letter, Davin to Kippenberger, 6 October 1949, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

While Freyberg's possible inadequacies as a Corps commander are debated to this day, the close Divisional and local focus of Davin's book seemed to have minimised them in the public eye at the time, and they formed little part of the contemporary understanding of the volume. This was so much so, in fact, that in one reviewer's précis of what he regarded as the seven most 'critical stages' in the loss of Crete, Freyberg's name is not mentioned once.¹¹⁷ No reviewer pursued the enquiry by the Inter-services Committee, hinted at rather than explained in Davin's conclusion, nor the doubts about his leadership held temporarily by the New Zealand government. Rather, if these reviews were an indication, the result was an ironic reversal of Hargest's artless attempt to besmirch Freyberg's reputation. *Crete* did not, as the General had feared, connect his name in the public mind with failure. That was the lot of Hargest himself.

The attention given to Hargest in the reviews in comparison to both Freyberg and Andrew is revealing. Although he was named as frequently as Freyberg, he attracted far more scrutiny than his commander. In several reviews his performance was analyzed at length while Freyberg was not mentioned at all.¹¹⁸ He was also mentioned twice as often and in considerably more detail than Andrew. As Hargest was a Member of Parliament for Ararua in Southland, it is indicative, perhaps, of his portrayal in the volume that the only three papers not to mention him were South Island ones.¹¹⁹ It also appears that he deflected attention almost entirely from the performance of other New Zealand commanders. Puttick, for example, had his name mentioned only twice and attracted almost no comment at all. The material chosen by reviewers in their judgement of Hargest's is also interesting. While sympathy for Andrew was evident among reviewers, the material most used to support criticism of Hargest was the summary and evaluation Davin provided at the end of his discussion on Hargest and Andrew over the withdrawal

¹¹⁷ 'Vivid Narrative and Critical Judgement on Crete', *Southland Times*, 2 November 1953.

¹¹⁸ 'Counter-Blow Might Have Saved Crete: New Zealand Brigade Lacked Firm Direction', *New Zealand Herald*, 31 July 1953; see also 'Vivid Narrative and Critical Judgment on Crete', *Southland Times*, 2 November 1953.

¹¹⁹ See: 'The Battle of Crete: New Zealanders Proved their Fighting Qualities', *Timaru Herald*, 29 August 1953; 'The Crete Saga Retold: New War History Volume', *Christchurch Sun-Star*, 11 August 1953; 'Crete was Costly Victory for Germany', *Dunedin Evening Star*, 12 August 1953.

from the airfield itself. This was an analysis which, as we have seen, was always open to alternative interpretation and in which, it seems possible, Hargest's reputation was compromised in favour of Andrew's.

Davin's summary, quoted earlier, was given in full in two of the twelve newspapers and supplied précised material for two others.¹²⁰ The *New Zealand Herald*, for example quoted all 31 lines in its article headed 'Counter-Blow Might Have Saved Crete: New Zealand Brigade Lacked Firm Direction'.¹²¹ The *Christchurch Press* ran a similar full length quotation under the observation 'hard words',¹²² and *New Zealand Truth*, while only précising the summary, ran a portrait photo of the Brigadier with the caption 'History Apportions Blame'.¹²³

This summary – reflecting, it may be argued, the conscious choice on the part of Davin to convey that Hargest had 'misread the situation' over Andrew's withdrawal –formed a convenient explanation for so much else that seemed inexplicable in relation to Maleme: the miscommunications between the battalion commanders in the initial day's fighting; Andrew's untimely withdrawal; the failures to launch sufficient counterattacks and all that lead, ultimately, for those who subscribed to the Maleme hypothesis, to the loss of the island. The decisions and confusions of many came, through Davin's profiling of Hargest, to be accumulated under this one man.

Hargest became an individual on whom the public could focus, while those responsible under the inevitability thesis, the collective groupings of the Joint Planning Staff and Middle East Command, remained clouded in anonymity. It could also be argued that Hargest, as presented in the volume, had a number of what might be termed mythogenic qualities. A politician in civilian life, he was already a public figure. More than any other

¹²¹ 'Counter-Blow Might have Saved Crete: New Zealand Brigade Lacked Firm Direction', *New Zealand Herald*, July 31 1953

¹²² 'Official History Of Campaign', *Christchurch Press*, copy, IA1, 181/23/3 part II, NA.

¹²³ 'Maleme Counter-Attack Came too Late to Save Crete', *New Zealand Truth*, 12 August 1953. Précised also: *Christchurch Star-Sun*, 17 August 1953

in the volume, and for the want of alternative information, his decisions had been described in terms of his personal failings. He was presented as not only naively optimistic but older, more tired and more trapped, perhaps, in the past than his peers, none of which were likely to elicit sympathy but all of which may have contributed to the carriage of this interpretation of the battle of Crete into the national tradition. He became a figure around whom a simplified version of the battle could coalesce. This concentrated attention did not extend, unfortunately for Hargest, to the one undertaking in Crete at which he did seem to excel, maintaining the discipline and morale of his troops during the retreat over the White Mountains and for which there was a wealth of documentary evidence.

As an example of the tensions between history and memory, nation and war within the War History series, the writing of *Crete* offers rich insight into the complexity of contemporary official military history as a national undertaking. Although grounded in empirical method, the lack of documentary sources and the commitment to a collective approach to the Narratives exacerbated the difficulties of relying on memory as a historical tool. Understandings that were already limited by an individual's ability to remember events were further complicated by hindsight, the hyper-realisation afforded by the inclusion of enemy documents and perspectives and by the personal biases evident within the Narratives themselves. The death of Hargest, as a key participant in the battle, made the personal views of others at the Branch the more influential while the presence of conflicting hypotheses over possible outcomes of the battle brought the interpretation of his intentions during the attack into even sharper relief.

As national history, the analysis and detail of *Crete* and the focus on Maleme served to marginalise the contribution of other Allied forces and positioned New Zealand as central to the battle. Although, this held New Zealand accountable for the loss of the island, it also mitigated, by the alleged nearness of victory, what would otherwise have been seen as the wastage of troops on an inevitable defeat. The Maleme hypothesis proved a popular interpretation among reviewers. In the balance of accountability between the two

commanders implicated in the hypothesis, Andrew and Hargest, the interpretation offered in the volume seemed to shift the weight of blame toward Hargest. While the attribution of blame among commanders caused considerable discomfort to Davin as author, the role of recording military lessons within the Histories seemed to demand it. The place of criticism within the War Histories is the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 5: 'The Hard Path of Truth'¹

The Battle for Egypt: the Summer of 1942; War

The War Histories were intended to ensure an adequate national record and to give recognition to participants and tribute to the fallen. They were also charged with recording the lessons of war, those failures of strategy, tactics, communication and command that might provide examples to guard against unnecessary loss of life in future conflicts. The run down state of the military between the wars and the inadequate record made of WWI were seen as having contributed to poor command decisions early in WWII, before 'the light of our experience in later campaigns and battles,' as Brigadier Steve Weir noted, left 'no question [as to] which was the right procedure'.² Anxious that this experience should not be lost again, honest yet critical evaluation was seen as a duty of the Branch. The Histories were intended 'to draw from the campaign[s], for civilians and soldiers alike, such lessons in the art of war as may have permanent value'.³ This was especially so with *Battle for Egypt, the Summer of 1942*, the volume that covered New Zealand's early fighting in the Western Desert and included a series of disastrous encounters in the early battles on the Alamein Line.

Battle for Egypt was a difficult volume covering a difficult period that was, from a New Zealand perspective, a particularly low point in British command. In June and July 1942, Auchinleck's Eighth Army was 'consistently beaten' by a force 'greatly inferior in tanks, guns and men and, as to its Italian component, in fighting spirit'.⁴ Over and above the lack of success on the battlefield, there were also disputes between New Zealand and British commanders over the formations to be used by troops in desert warfare and

¹ Letter, Scoullar to Kippenberger, 30 July 1955, WAIL, 11, No. 6, NA.

² Steve Weir, Notes to page adjoining paragraph 830-32, Copy 3, Crete Campaign Narrative, Volume V, Part II Operations 20-22 May 1941 (paras 421 – 1026), AL 771/2, NA UK.

³ J.L. Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt: the Summer of 1942*, Wellington: War History Branch of Department of Internal Affairs, 1955, p. vii.

⁴ Letter, Kippenberger to Freyberg, 11 August 1955, WAIL, 11, No. 6, NA.

particularly high feeling when New Zealand battalions were overrun after British armour failed to support them. As adjustments in strategy following these battles were largely in New Zealand's favour⁵ there were some who felt their criticisms of this period particularly vindicated.⁶

Battle for Egypt covered three distinct phases: the move of the Division to Syria in February 1942 and the training which occurred there; the return to Egypt in June and the initial fighting around Matruh, including the break-out at Minqar Qaim; and the retreat to El Alamein and the fighting at Ruweisat Ridge, 14 July 1942, and El Mreir Depression on July 21. Each phase came in for severe criticism in the volume: the first for Auchinleck's command in the aftermath of the Crusader campaign; the second for the strategies employed in desert warfare; the third for the inadequacies of the armoured command and the poor support the Division had received. At Ruweisat New Zealand infantry had been left unprotected for the entire day while, as Scoullar alleged, British commanders had seemed 'almost paralysed with indecision'.⁷ The 5 Bde had been attacked at dawn, 4 Bde at dusk. 1,400 New Zealanders were killed, wounded or captured. It was a battle in which, Kippenberger claimed, the New Zealand Division had 'performed one of its finest feats of arms and gained a magnificent success, yet which ended in disaster and bitter disappointment'.⁸ This pattern was repeated only one week later at El Mreir when, 'despite pleas from the New Zealand commanders for armoured support',⁹ 6 Bde suffered the same fate, with the loss of a further 900 men.

Battle for Egypt was, in its style and content, an altogether different book from *Crete*. Where Davin's argument had been seen as scholarly, finely crafted and even 'urbane',¹⁰ newspaper editor Jerry Scoullar had attacked his subject with a far coarser brush. Scoullar

⁵ For outline see Glyn Harper, 'North African Campaign', in Ian McGibbon, (ed.), *Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 388 - 395.

⁶ See for example, Scoullar's comments in the text itself, *Battle for Egypt*, pp. 39, 41, 368.

⁷ Harper, 'North African Campaign', p. 391.

⁸ Kippenberger, *Infantry Brigadier*, London; Oxford University Press, 1949, p. 161.

⁹ Harper, 'North African Campaign', p. 392.

¹⁰ Letter, Stacey to Kippenberger, 22 February 1954, IA1 181/3/2, NA.

had fought with the Otago Regiment in WWI and had served as a Home Guard instructor and Zone Commander of the Auckland Fortress during WWII. He had written for the *Auckland Star* during this time as its military commentator but, shortly after being contracted by the Branch, he left the *Star* for Tauranga to become editor of the *Bay of Plenty Times*. With his pressman's ear for a story and his background in military instruction, he was quick to seize on the disputes within the period his volume covered and wrote them up in terms of national characteristics, swathed in bitter criticism. As a veteran, he heard echoes of the misuse of colonial troops from WWI.¹¹ Although Kippenberger considered him a difficult and slightly conceited character,¹² he developed a good rapport with Scoullar. He wrote to him frequently to keep him abreast of affairs or simply to clear his own mind.¹³ Their voluminous correspondence forms, as Kippenberger anticipated, a 'useful record of progress and expectations'¹⁴ at the Branch and has provided much of the material for this chapter. Scoullar had originally been contracted to write both volumes covering the El Alamein battles. His death from cancer in 1956, soon after the publication of *Battle for Egypt*, however, meant that Ron Walker, his narrator, completed the second volume, *Alam Halfa and Alamein*, in 1967.¹⁵

Battle for Egypt presented Kippenberger with both personal and editorial challenges. As Brigadier of 5 Bde at the time of the fighting, it had been his battalions overrun at Ruweisat. On going back to find General Lumsden, the commander of the British Armour, he had come across the British tanks four miles away watching the fighting through binoculars.¹⁶ He had been furious at the time, and the bitterness had remained, by his own admission, 'for years thereafter'.¹⁷ Kippenberger recognised this and had to work hard when editing the volume to keep his own feelings in check. Although he 'cut whole

¹¹ Letter, Scoullar to Kippenberger, 30 July 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

¹² Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 28 October 1953, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

¹³ Letter, Kippenberger to Scoullar, 11 July 1955, WAI, 11, Box 6, NA.

¹⁴ Letter, Kippenberger to Scoullar, 11 July 1955, WAI, 11, Box 6, NA.

¹⁵ Ronald Walker, *Alam Halfa and Alamein*, Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1967.

¹⁶ Kippenberger, *Infantry Brigadier*, pp. 169. For alternative view of this encounter, see letter, Brigadier Raymond Briggs to Latham, 13 November 1953, copy: IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

¹⁷ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 24 May 1955, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

chunks of ferocious criticism' from Scoullar's draft, by up to two-thirds in places, he still failed, by his own admission, to sufficiently reduce its critical tone.¹⁸ The rationale behind the criticism of strategy and command within the War Histories forms the first focus of this chapter, its handling in this volume and the international liaison involved, the second. The effect of the criticism in *Battle for Egypt* on Freyberg, who had by this time returned to the UK and was circulating among the 'Generals' Union,' makes an important study in contemporary history in itself and forms the third.

Kippenberger, from his long experience reading war histories, believed that honest criticism of military commanders was essential for an historical understanding of warfare. He held that undue sensitivity to reputations had severely compromised many historical accounts in this respect¹⁹ and that New Zealand's own histories would be 'valueless if we are not fairly candid about these unfortunate incidents'.²⁰ This aligned also with the broader historiographical context within New Zealand which saw critical evaluation as central to establishing a realistic national self image.²¹

Frank criticism of military conduct beyond a military readership, however, risked misinterpretation by the general public, very few of whom, as Kippenberger knew, would be capable of understanding the 'heavy burden of command' or the difficult conditions under which commanders had operated.²² This had been well evidenced in the discussion on *Crete* and the apportioning of blame between Andrew and Hargest. Like the counterfactual in that volume, tensions existed between the need to record valuable lessons and the recognition that many points of military value would also be of great 'delicacy' within the public sphere.²³ Criticism was, then, another area in which the

¹⁸ Letter, Kippenberger to Stacey, 13 December 1956, IA1 181/3/2, NA.

¹⁹ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 21 January 1954, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

²⁰ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 21 January 1954, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

²¹ J.C. Beaglehole, 'History and the New Zealander', in Ernest Beaglehole, (ed.), *The University and the Community: Essays in Honour of Thomas Alexander Hunter*, Wellington: Victoria University College, 1946, p. 124.

²² Letter, Kippenberger to Davin, 7 December 1951, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

²³ Letter, Kippenberger to Shannahan [Permanent Head, PM Department], 24 May 1948, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

military functions of the War Histories butted uncomfortably against their role as national histories. To criticise command decisions at all required finding a responsible balance. The burden of this fell on Kippenberger and was one he took very seriously.

Kippenberger had begun his editorial duties on *Crete* full of resolve and at first felt that Davin was being 'too tender' with the commanders there. 'If we tell the truth as we see it,' he wrote to an army colleague in London, 'it is going to be a rather tragic story, and of course I propose to do just that'.²⁴ By the end of the volume, however, the implications of criticising one's contemporaries were taking their toll as he struggled to balance the need for lessons against the personal cost to those being scrutinised. 'A little while ago you said that for the second time Crete was likely to be the death of you,' he wrote to Davin as the volume went out for publication, 'at the present time I rather feel this applies to me also.'²⁵ He concluded work on the volume with six weeks of what he described as 'almost prayerful examination' of Davin's text.²⁶ Having cut out most of the "“shoulds” and “oughts” and “would haves”, he finally allowed himself to feel satisfied. 'I have decided that this is now our story', he wrote in January 1952, '... any further enquiry is a vain search for unattainable perfection'.²⁷

The results of the criticisms in *Crete*, however, no matter how carefully placed, were sobering. Despite the good reviews of the volume, the alacrity with which the press had seized upon Davin's more critical passages left Kippenberger wary in the future. 'I am getting more chary, or charitable, or squeamish about criticism as we go on,' he wrote to Angus Ross as *Battle for Egypt* was underway, 'It causes such terrible distress and the stigma sticks, like being blackballed at a club'.²⁸ Yet against this discomfort, he allowed in *Battle for Egypt* a tone and level of criticism that was far more strident than *Crete*.

²⁴ Letter, Kippenberger to G.H. Clifton, London, 1 December 1950, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

²⁵ Letter, Kippenberger to Davin, 17 January 1952, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

²⁶ Letter, Kippenberger to Inglis, 25 January 1952, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

²⁷ Letter, Kippenberger to Inglis, 25 January 1952, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

²⁸ Letter, Kippenberger to Ross, 2 June 1954, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

As the source of much concern and some distress, why then include such searching and vigorous criticisms of commanders and their decisions in the War Histories? Clearly criticism was seen by the Branch as part of the analysis required to write well balanced national histories. Just as the Centennial Branch had sought to distance itself from the ‘wickedly episodic’²⁹ and overly laudatory pioneer histories produced by amateur or journalistic historians, so too did the War Histories aim to provide a balanced and authoritative bulwark against journalistic flourish and sensationalist reporting. While they were accepted to some degree within the unit histories, where journalistic traits leaked out in the works of authors commissioned to write the campaign volumes they were seen as having ‘lowered the value’ of the criticisms contained.³⁰ Criticism that was authoritative yet restrained, and backed by firm documentary evidence was seen as one of the principal tools of definitive histories.

Against this, however, the confidence to criticise military actions and decisions was also partly a reflection of the military background of most of the workers at the Branch and the prerogative of historians who had themselves participated in battle. As Kippenberger recognised that ‘only the very careful and intelligent reader will even see the various points open to comment if [a] narrative is entirely factual,’³¹ criticism formed part of a well-considered analysis that would give New Zealanders a balanced view of the war.

On a broad social level, criticism also provided lessons that could be seen as giving purpose to the war, its wastage and expense. This call to the future as a means of validating the nation’s loss thereby justified the close and critical examination of the participants in these events. At the end of his inaugural radio address on the War Histories in 1946, Kippenberger had been at pains to connect the military and the broader memorial aspects of the project:

²⁹ Chris Hilliard, ‘A Prehistory of Public History: Monuments, Explanations and Promotions, 1900-1970’, in Bronwyn Dalley & Jock Phillips, (eds.), *Going Public: the Changing Face of New Zealand History*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001, p. 36.

³⁰ Letter, Latham to Kippenberger, 14 September 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

³¹ Letter, Kippenberger to Davin, 3 October 1951, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

Finally, it is surely a right thing that the services of those who died, of those who fought and laboured and suffered, of those who sustained grave and heavy responsibilities should be recorded, as an example or a warning to later generations, and as their only real memorial.³²

With the grounds for criticism established, the question then became one of identifying the ‘proper measure’ to be used within the War Histories.³³ Kippenberger seemed to swing on the matter according to his audience. In his correspondence with those involved in War History programmes, such as Butler, Latham and Long, he advocated presenting the issues clearly. In public addresses, such as the radio broadcast noted above, and the address to the Wellington Historical Association in 1955, he had advised inference and caution, saying that if it became apparent that ‘here, or there, an error lies’ there would be ‘no call for the book to say so bluntly’.³⁴ His ambivalence over criticising commanders might be gauged from a letter sent to Davin in 1951 on the loss of Maleme Airfield in which he admitted ‘a certain tenderness, perhaps not entirely a necessary part of an historian’s equipment, toward these brave and devoted soldiers who I think were so tragically mistaken’.³⁵ The letter contained a correction, however, rare in any of Kippenberger’s letters. The wording had been adjusted. The term was originally ‘an unnecessary part of an historian’s equipment’, but the ‘un’ had been blacked out.

Necessary or unnecessary, the key to managing the discomfort associated with the criticism of commanders was to establish a Branch-wide standard for its application. As one of the first campaign volumes, *Crete* had been instrumental in establishing these guidelines as Kippenberger attempted to set the parameters for critical evaluation. Writing to Davin at the conclusion of the first draft, it was with ‘no great confidence’ that he suggested the following:

³² Kippenberger, ‘Radio Address: The History of New Zealand at War’, 18 August 1946, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

³³ Letter, Kippenberger to Davin, 23 January 1951, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

³⁴ Kippenberger, ‘Address to the Wellington Historical Association’, October 1952’, Private Collection.

³⁵ Letter, Kippenberger to Davin, 7 December 1951, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

That phases of the story, events, decisions, events immediately consequent on such decisions, be related without interruptions for discussion of alternative courses of action or for criticism. The reasons advanced by commanders for such decisions should at the same time be given without comment, but not any speculations as to their reasons.

The account of a phase being completed the action taken can be critically examined, the validity of the commander's argument considered, and the relevant factors mentioned and an opinion expressed.

Commanders are not expected to be "great captains". They are justly expected to act after consideration of all relevant factors known to them with commonsense and courage, with a clear view of the object and their instructions, and with a vigorous combative spirit. If they fail to do so the failure should be pointed out.

All such comment and criticism should be temperately expressed. Words such as "unfortunate", "regrettable", "surprising" are sometimes convenient. It will often be sufficient to criticise by implication, I do not mean by insinuation. The mere relation of the circumstances at Maleme when Andrew decided to retire, those known to him, or surmised being clearly distinguished from the actual facts, will I am afraid be quite sufficient. Emphasis, when everyone is doing his best, should be equally laid on showing the difficulties and on criticising.³⁶

Despite Kippenberger's original misgivings, this memorandum remained the benchmark for subsequent volumes and was circulated to all campaign volume authors along with Freyberg, Inglis and others commenting on the drafts. It explained several aspects of *Crete* which, as discussed in the previous chapter, had amplified the criticisms and assisted their passage into the wider community. Most particularly, Kippenberger's recommendations for separating the description of events from their criticism and analysis resulted in the separation of the section on the withdrawal from Maleme airfield

³⁶ Letter, Kippenberger to Davin, 23 January 1951, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

from the qualifying paragraph that explained it was based solely on the later recollections of Lt Col Andrew rather than from documents prepared at the time. It also accounted for Davin's periodic blocks of summary and evaluation, so appreciated by the reviewers and which had provided much of their quoted material.

In *Battle for Egypt* criticisms that had remained relatively 'in house' in *Crete* took on an international perspective. The combination of the material to be covered and Scoullar's journalistic background pushed the notion of criticism in the War Histories to fresh limits within the series and severely challenged the framework that had been laid down so far. Although Kippenberger had been pleased to get Scoullar, in light of his high public profile and military experience, he sat at the very edge of empirical / journalistic nexus. One of several journalists employed by the Branch, he was the first to work on a campaign volume, the others having been employed on the unit histories and Episodes and Studies. Within the more formal and empirically rigorous standards required of the campaign volumes his approach to his material, and particularly to criticism, proved something of a double-edged sword.

While Kippenberger welcomed the fluent writing styles of journalists, he was wary of the assumption that they could be turned into historians by simply asking them to write history. In the case of Scoullar, whom he regarded as considerably 'more journalist than historian',³⁷ he was concerned by his partisan approach, whereby as many favourable comments on the New Zealanders were 'dragged in' as possible, and his 'journalist's assumption of easy judgement',³⁸ both of which brought him close to that subjective and sensationalist historical style the Branch had been so anxious to avoid. On the other hand, as a journalist, Scoullar was articulate, could see and present issues clearly and responded readily to critique of his text. Contrary to the misgivings of those at the Branch, he was proud of his journalist's craft.³⁹

³⁷ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 28 October 1953, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

³⁸ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 30 June 1954, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

³⁹ Letter, Scoullar to Kippenberger, 30 July 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

The stamp of the newsman was very evident in Scoullar's volume. That which in *Crete* had been simply made explicit became in *Battle for Egypt* both laboured and repetitive. With Scoullar's background in military instruction, discussion and judgement on strategy and tactics predominated and was driven home in the manner of a staff lecture. 'He is not a schoolmaster ...,' Kippenberger had felt obliged to remind those reading the more laboured and outspoken sections of Scoullar's draft. 'It is not his job to draw every moral, teach every lesson, point out every "mistake".'⁴⁰ Phrases such as 'sabotaged', 'deliberately forfeited', and 'spiritless command' peppered his text with regard to the British.⁴¹ Despite heavy editing, chapter titles like 'Preparations for Decisive Battle' and 'Enemy Prepares Counterattack' read very much like 'leading article headlines'⁴² and, as Kippenberger confessed, the mark of Scoullar's journalism remained on the volume. It was a feature regarded later as something of 'a mistake.'⁴³

Each section of *Battle for Egypt* was written up in terms of national characteristics in which Scoullar juxtaposed a view of the institutional incompetence of the British High Command and the British Army system against the prescience, innovation and at times naïve trust of the New Zealand Division. Under the British Generals, Auchinleck and Gott especially, 'faulty appreciation[s]' of conditions on the battlefield were suggested as matters 'of habit rather than of judgement'.⁴⁴ Gott's promotion to Army Commander was seen as particularly 'astonishing,' the 'enviable confidence with which he ignored facts as well as difficulties,' Scoullar concluded, had evidently 'impressed his superiors, his staff and subordinates and seems to have communicated itself to the Prime Minister'.⁴⁵ 'Orders and counter-orders,' on the other hand, 'marches and counter-marches, works

⁴⁰ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 28 October 1953, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

⁴¹ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, pp. 41, 45, 68, respectively.

⁴² Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 28 October 1953, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

⁴³ Interview, W.E. Murphy with Glyn Harper, 23 January 1993, Harper Archive.

⁴⁴ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 92.

⁴⁵ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 380.

started and stopped’ were all taken as evidence of the ‘inability of higher formations to make up their minds’⁴⁶ and of their ‘remoteness from [the] realities’ of battle.⁴⁷

Freyberg’s dislike and mistrust of Auchinleck was made explicit in the first pages with the removal of the New Zealand Division to Syria after the ‘bitter’ victory of the Crusader campaign, 1941.⁴⁸ Referenced directly to an interview with Scoullar in May, 1948, Freyberg was quoted:

“I had seen what had happened in Greece and Crete and in the desert at Sidi Barrani and Battleaxe. I had seen the Desert Command under Auchinleck. I knew their ideas and how faulty they were. I became firmly convinced that the only way to safeguard the interests of New Zealand and of the Division was to get the Division away from the Desert Command.”⁴⁹

This attitude to Auchinleck was echoed by Scoullar throughout the text, with the General being apparently unable to appreciate that the ‘real causes of the failure of his successive blows’ lay in ‘[f]aulty command and staff work’ rather than the ‘Eighth Army’s lack of material strength’ and where the ‘weakness and misconceptions [of his] general plan’ were openly and repeatedly ‘pointed out’.⁵⁰

The New Zealanders, on the other hand, were presented as having ‘that peculiar quality of good troops – a grim pride in their ability to take hard knocks’.⁵¹ Scoullar believed that the Division had paid a ‘heavy price’ for the ‘lack of co-ordination’⁵² among British commanders during Crusader and had developed a particularly independent spirit as a result. The opposition of the New Zealand commanders to the splitting up of the Division to fight in separate brigade groups was repeatedly emphasised, in a manner, again,

⁴⁶ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 62.

⁴⁷ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 325.

⁴⁸ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 5.

⁵⁰ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 366.

⁵¹ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 2.

⁵² Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 223.

approaching a staff lecture. While Scoullar acknowledged that the New Zealanders were not alone in opposing the system, which was later abandoned under Montgomery, they were presented as ‘most active pioneer[s] in the opposition’⁵³ with Brigadier Steve Weir, Commander of the Royal New Zealand Artillery, a particularly ‘wrathful opponent of the dissipation of the fire power’ it entailed.⁵⁴ The Division’s decision to ‘persistently ignore’ commands to continue with this unsound and outmoded practice were, Scoullar maintained, overlooked by the Desert Command for fear of bringing embarrassment upon themselves with the British Government.⁵⁵ Inglis was given special credit by Scoullar for anticipating, and trying to forestall, the difficulties between the New Zealand infantry and British armour that arose at Ruweisat and for his ‘clear perception of Eighth Army’s conditions and needs when these were obscure not only to the enemy but in Eighth Army itself.’⁵⁶

While emphasising these innovations and developments by the New Zealand commanders, Scoullar was also at pains to distance them from the repeated failures of the period. In dealing with accusations that the New Zealand Division had, as part of a larger operation, deserted 10 Corps at Matruh for example, he concluded that the misunderstanding was ‘not due to any fault of the Division’.⁵⁷ Of an earlier action also fought at Ruweisat, the Division ‘did not consider itself responsible in any particular [sic]’ for the difficulties encountered there and indeed after considerable analysis, was cleared as ‘blameless’ for its defeat in this engagement.⁵⁸ On the matter of Minqar Qaim, Scoullar struck back at German accusations that the New Zealanders had used excessive brutality during the breakout and at the ‘somewhat whimsical’ notion that they had ‘not played the game fairly’.⁵⁹

⁵³ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 39.

⁵⁴ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 42.

⁵⁵ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 41.

⁵⁶ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 212.

⁵⁷ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 134.

⁵⁸ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 300.

⁵⁹ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 125.

There is no need to defend let alone apologise for the actions of 4 Brigade in the breakout. Let it be repeated, it was a glorious feat of arms. But a false charge incorporated in the enemy archives cannot be passed over by anyone having access to all the facts ... [to] leave a stain on the proud record of a hard-fighting yet chivalrous division.⁶⁰

It was in the sections dealing with the overrunning of the New Zealanders at Ruweisat and El Mreir in July 1942, however, that the journalistic qualities, staff lecture and nationalistic leanings of Scoullar's volume came together most strongly. In the repeated foreshadowing of these engagements he not only heightened the tragedy of their outcome but attributed an innocent trust among the Other Ranks in British support which served to make the failure of the armour the more bitter. Scoullar began to frame the fighting at Ruweisat in this way almost 60 pages before the engagement was dealt with directly in the text:

So opened the third phase at Alamein, the Battle of Tell el Eisa. This in turn led to 13 Corps' disastrous engagements on Ruweisat in which the New Zealand Division suffered severely.⁶¹

This was repeated 16 pages later with 'the first hint of the Ruweisat operations which were to prove disastrous to the Division'⁶² and soon again as he described the difficulties and failures of preliminary engagements that were presented as the 'key to understanding why disaster fell upon the Division [at Ruwesiat] four days later'.⁶³ As events on Ruweisat began to unfold Scoullar slipped into the future tense to give emphasis and pathos to the narrative:

⁶⁰ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 127.

⁶¹ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 194.

⁶² Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 210.

⁶³ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 218.

Within another quarter of an hour, New Zealand Division will receive a tragic blow, the first of a series. Ere it falls, there is time for a quick survey ...⁶⁴

As the fighting began, emphasis moved to the perspective of the infantry battalions to draw readers, in the manner of Ross' use of testimony, into the atmosphere of the battle and the misplaced trust of the troops:

This attitude reflected the spirit of all ranks. They were confident that their part of the operation had been successful and that they had only to hold their positions and endure the hostile fire and discomfort for the short period needed to move up the artillery and British tanks.⁶⁵

This was particularly so of the wounded, whom he described as 'hanging on waiting for the tanks and support weapons and equipment to arrive'⁶⁶ in an operation that, due to poor communication and an unwillingness by the British to seize the initiative, was about to turn into a 'ghastly failure'.⁶⁷

Although in its final text *Battle for Egypt* appeared partisan and unmeasured, the draft had been far more so. Scoullar maintained that when he started on the volume he had no idea he would be dealing with such a catalogue of errors by the British Command. It was, he claimed, a 'startling and disconcerting discovery'.⁶⁸ As he wrote he grew more and more angry.⁶⁹ Ignoring the guidelines for criticism provided by the Branch, his first draft as presented in late 1953, was a bitter diatribe, critical in the extreme.

⁶⁴ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 249.

⁶⁵ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 264.

⁶⁶ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 270.

⁶⁷ Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 300.

⁶⁸ Letter, Scoullar to Kippenberger, 30 July 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

⁶⁹ Letter, Kippenberger to Stacey, 13 December 1956, IA1 181/3/2, NA.

Because of Kippenberger's own anger over the conduct of these battles, perhaps, or as a means of eliciting a response, he had allowed Scoullar to 'speak pretty bluntly',⁷⁰ in his draft and had let it go out unmodified for circulation among British and New Zealand commanders and historians. Of note here was the work of Harry Latham, who was the key liaison between the British commanders and the historians of the Commonwealth network. Latham was, by his own admission, 'a staunch admirer'⁷¹ of the New Zealand Division, and with his personal friendship with Kippenberger, who was still sending food parcels to Latham's family eight years after the war, his tactful intervention on behalf of the Branch was indispensable. Latham arranged for Scoullar's account of the Ruweisat and El Mreir operations to be read by all four surviving British commanders and staff officers of the armoured brigades involved: Raymond Briggs, Roger Peake, Alec Gatehouse, and A.F. Fisher. He co-ordinated their replies and sent them on to Kippenberger.

A notable feature of the commanders' replies to the draft was the lack of dispute over its facts. All four agreed that Scoullar's account was a 'fair summary of the position' during the battle and 'generally correct'.⁷² The point of contention was rather the tone of the writing. Some, such as Raymond Briggs, who had commanded 2 Armoured Bde at Ruweisat Ridge, believed the criticisms were not 'completely fair' and, as has been seen also with Maleme in *Crete*, that much depended on the emphasis given to the circumstances surrounding their failure to support the New Zealanders. Of the two armoured brigades involved at Ruweisat, 23 Bde was a composite group, formed just before the Ruweisat attack. It had been severely compromised by its newness, lack of training, unfamiliar signals and so on. For his own brigade, the 2 Armoured, Briggs maintained the problem had been the opposite, battle weariness and exhaustion.⁷³ This

⁷⁰ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 10 November 1953, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

⁷¹ Letter Latham to Kippenberger, 13 August 1953, IA1 181/53/3 part III, NA.

⁷² Letters, Briggs to Latham, 13 November 1953; Latham to Kippenberger, 17 June 1954, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

⁷³ Letter, Briggs to Latham, 13 November 1953, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

brigade had fought unrested for many weeks prior to Ruweisat and had experienced shattering losses.

The other commanders were also upset by Scoullar's tone and his attribution of blame when they themselves had been trapped by the decisions of their High Command. Maj Gen Alec Gatehouse, who had stepped in to head the 1 Armoured Division at El Mreir, was so concerned by the draft that he had gone to see Latham personally. Along with the general tone of the volume he was affronted by the personal level of Scoullar's criticism, especially the "the easy manner" Scoullar maintained that Gatehouse had "thrown in the raw 23rd Armoured Brigade" into the battle at El Mreir. Gatehouse's distress over this statement, itself so easily made and, from Gatehouse's perspective, so "far from being true," was a salutary reminder to the Branch of the human cost of their criticism and of their righteousness.⁷⁴

The most vigorous response, however, came in a very full letter by Roger Peake, General Staff Officer 1 (GSO1) to first General Lumsden, who had since died, and then to Gatehouse at El Mreir.⁷⁵ Again, taking exception to the constant criticism that the Armour at Ruweisat had 'lacked dash and were battle weary', Peake took the opportunity of addressing Scoullar's allegations from a British perspective. He wrote of how anxious the armoured brigades had been to not let the New Zealander Division down a second time, of their frustration at not being able to find the clear way the New Zealanders had supposedly provided through the minefields surrounding the depression, the 'awfulness' of a morning spent 'blundering about' and, in direct contrast to Scoullar's accusations of lackadaisical indifference, of the pressure the brigade felt throughout the day in their efforts to reach the New Zealanders. He wrote of the 'horror' of losing, as he remembered it, 76 out their original 92 tanks, and provided a terse but moving account from a driver's perspective, to remind the Branch of what it might have meant to be in a tank as it 'brewed up, either quickly or slowly' - 'If it was a quick one you'd had it.' - and

⁷⁴ Letter, Gatehouse to Latham, June 1954, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

⁷⁵ Letter, Roger Peake to Latham, 1 April 1954, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

the psychological effect of having to bale out of one's tank under fire 'for the fifth or sixth time' in a month.⁷⁶

Peake's account was not, as he made clear, an apology. He was 'still not convinced'⁷⁷ that one was necessary. Alec Gatehouse, too, while he acknowledged that the New Zealanders had every reason to feel aggrieved by the events at Ruweisat and El Mreir, emphasised that there were 'two sides to every question or more' and that little was to be gained by 'putting such bitterness into an official history'.⁷⁸ The letters, as they accumulated, had a considerable effect at the Branch, and on Kippenberger particularly. Again, the question revolved around what was to be the purpose and the tone of criticism in the War Histories.

Because they considered themselves as having been on the receiving end of a series of very poor command decisions, those at the New Zealand Branch were adamant that the lessons from the Ruweisat and El Mreir engagements should be made explicit. After being so searching of their own commanders in *Crete*, they were unwilling to let matters slide when addressing the British.⁷⁹ As the commanders' replies came in, Kippenberger refused at first to be moved. He wrote to Latham:

I have very carefully considered Roger Peake's letter on El Mreir and have re-read Scoullar's text Really, I don't feel that I should alter or tone down Scoullar's criticisms. It was a sad affair No. Scoullar's text will have to stand.⁸⁰

But as the letters mounted, with their explanations and points of view, the distant figures of command increasingly revealed themselves as individuals, vulnerable, regretful and having been themselves operating under extreme pressure. Much that had been black and white in Scoullar's draft began, for Kippenberger at least, to be tinged with grey. Worse

⁷⁶ Letter, Roger Peake to Latham, 1 April 1954, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

⁷⁷ Letter, Roger Peake to Latham, 1 April 1954, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

⁷⁸ Letter, Gatehouse to Latham, June 1954, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

⁷⁹ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 9 September 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

⁸⁰ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 4 May 1954, IA1 181/3/3 part II, NA.

still, as with *Crete*, culpability seemed to be gravitating towards those least able to defend themselves. Kippenberger began to relent. ‘We will go most carefully into the matter again’, he wrote to Latham after the replies from Fisher, and particularly, Gatehouse:

but as in most of these things it becomes clearer and clearer that the people to blame are the poor chaps who are dead. Everyone else has good explanations and usually they are good. All lead to the conclusion that criticism must be very restrained, if made at all I shall try to alter the tone.⁸¹

The letters and comments were referred on to Scoullar and, even though the volume was in already in galley stage, he began to rewrite large segments of the text.⁸² Working closely with Kippenberger, comments such as Gatehouse’s “easy manner” were removed along with the more ‘ferocious’⁸³ aspects of his criticism. Care was taken that the ordeals the British commanders and tank crews had undergone before the Ruweisat and El Mreir engagements were given due recognition.

Scoullar and Kippenberger reached ‘complete agreement’ over the text in March 1954⁸⁴ and the volume went to print. Even so, *Battle for Egypt*, as it was published remained remarkably frank. This was especially so on matters of high strategy. Freyberg, who had, in his early enthusiasm for the Histories, been naively unbuttoned in his comments to the Branch, was most distressed. There was a heated exchange of cables and Kippenberger prepared to defend his position once more.

The catalyst for Freyberg’s concern was an article that had apparently been published in the London *Evening News*.⁸⁵ Written before Scoullar’s volume had even reached Britain,

⁸¹ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 30 June 1954, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

⁸² Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 30 June 1954, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

⁸³ Letter, Kippenberger to Stacey, 13 December 1956, IA1 181/3/2, NA.

⁸⁴ Letters, Kippenberger to Scoullar, 24 March 1954; Scoullar to Kippenberger, 30 March 1954, WAI1, 11, No. 6, NA.

⁸⁵ This article remains something of a mystery, there is no copy or further mention of it in the Branch files. During a research trip to the UK, I searched copies of the *Evening News* extensively around 6 July 1955,

it was believed to have been lifted from a New Zealand review and much sensationalised.⁸⁶ Rather than the ordeals experienced by the New Zealanders at Ruweisat and El Mreir, the article had focussed on the initial chapters of the book covering the aftermath of the Crusader campaign and concerns over the quality of the Middle East Command where, such as in the example given on the move to Syria, Scoullar had openly attributed much of his material to Freyberg.

Freyberg was in a difficult position. Early in the War History project he had been eager to participate and had brought materials back to New Zealand with him for the Branch. He had also made himself available for interviews, including those with Scoullar in 1948, and had checked and vetted the material taken from them. Like others involved at the start of the project, a certain enthusiasm coloured his perceptions. “All we are concerned with is the truth”, he had purportedly told Scoullar, “even if it does hurt some people”.⁸⁷ But like most at the Branch he had little experience at that stage with which to gauge what the ‘hurt’ associated with the truth might mean, or the indelible nature of the printed word.

Although Freyberg had been very concerned during the writing up to *Crete*, Davin’s treatment of the volume and the relative anonymity afforded to the British High Command and Joint Planning Staff had provided them all a degree of protection. In *Battle for Egypt*, however, British commanders were dealt with more individually and more directly. The determination of the Branch to ensure that the lessons of the campaign were made explicit, in combination with Scoullar’s somewhat aggressive treatment of them, had allowed some of the sensitivities evident in *Crete* to be pushed aside. Freyberg had perhaps sensed this and held early concerns about Scoullar. He had written to Kippenberger in 1948 with fears for how his material might be used. Kippenberger, however, had assured him that he would be able to maintain ‘sufficient control over what

the dates of the cables and those of the previous correspondence, along with all other major London papers of the time. The article was not found.

⁸⁶ Letter, Latham to Kippenberger, 19 August 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

⁸⁷ Letter, Scoullar to Kippenberger, 30 July 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

is published to meet the situation'.⁸⁸ To have found, then, the inclusion of such pointed and forthright criticisms in the finished volume must have appeared to Freyberg a double betrayal. Between Scoullar's brashness, Kippenberger's own anger over the campaign and its treatment in the British press, the delicate balance between national tribute and military analysis in the War Histories had, from his perspective, been well and truly broken.

Freyberg's reaction at first was one of reasonable concern. 'I am sad,' he wrote to Kippenberger July in 1955, when the British review had first come out, 'about the bitter tone of Scoullar's book ... [his] remarks are not liked here by New Zealanders, and his personal attacks on higher commanders are causing unhappiness...'.⁸⁹ In a classic move of presuming his subordinate's support, he concluded: 'I have not seen the book, but I am unhappy, as you are, with the severe criticism, especially of Commanders who have since been killed in action'.⁹⁰

Kippenberger was, in fact, not unhappy at all. He had sent Freyberg's letter on to Scoullar and received a full and 'spirited' reply, which he prepared to forward to the General. Before he could do so, however, fallout from the review in Britain reached parliamentary level. Freyberg, who sat in the House of Lords, had been tackled in the House over the criticism and appeared on the verge of making a statement. Now that he was back in England and Deputy Constable and Lieutenant-Governor of Windsor Castle, the 'chickens' from his earlier frankness had, in the words of Harry Latham, well and truly 'come home to roost'.⁹¹

Freyberg was furious. His cable to Kippenberger on August 4 1955 was stinging:

⁸⁸ Letter, Kippenberger to Freyberg, 15 July 1949, IA1 181/3/3 part II, NA.

⁸⁹ Letter, Freyberg to Kippenberger, 19 July 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

⁹⁰ Letter, Freyberg to Kippenberger, 19 July 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

⁹¹ Letter, Latham to Kippenberger, 19 August 1955, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

I know you cannot read all the work you are producing it is a pity because Scoullar's book is in the worst possible taste and contains inaccuracies further Scoullar had no right to quote me without my permission and I must point this out here where his remarks have given great offence I hope I have not written a foreword to this volume ...⁹²

Kippenberger, in a characteristic manner, cabled back immediately. He expressed concern for Freyberg and accepted full responsibility for the volume, but also pointed out, as tactfully as a cable would allow, that as the book had not yet reached England, 'with deepest respect and affection ask you to withhold judgment until you have read book and following letter stop'.⁹³ His handling of the situation in the ensuing correspondence shows as much about Kippenberger as a manager as it does of his views of criticism in the War History.

On the one side Kippenberger was off-hand, almost disparaging to Scoullar of Freyberg's concern, possibly to keep the affront to his author to a minimum and ensure he continued work on the second volume. 'He has panicked properly and disgracefully',⁹⁴ he wrote to Scoullar after the cable, and again of the earlier letter, 'I am thoroughly annoyed with him and shall tell him so plainly I don't really know what Lord Freyberg's conception of history is, but your volume satisfies mine very well'.⁹⁵ But he did not tell him so plainly, of course. Freyberg was a dear friend of Kippenberger's and one with whom he understood, and to a certain extent shared, the heavy duties of public office.⁹⁶ It had been his policy not to consult Freyberg too closely during the work on the campaign Narratives to keep the delineation of responsibility as clear as possible and avoid any 'impression that he was responsible for the history'.⁹⁷ But, despite these concerns, it was Freyberg

⁹² Cable, Freyberg to Kippenberger, 4 August 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

⁹³ Cable, Kippenberger to Freyberg, 4 August 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

⁹⁴ Letter, Kippenberger to Scoullar, 4 August 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

⁹⁵ Letter, Kippenberger to Scoullar, 3 August 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

⁹⁶ For description of their friendship see the biography of Freyberg by his son, Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg, V.C.: Soldier of Two Nations*, Sevenoaks, Kent: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991, p. 566; Glyn Harper, *Kippenberger: An Inspired New Zealand Commander*, Auckland: HarperCollins, 1997, p. 284; Denis McLean, *Howard Kippenberger, Dauntless Spirit*, Auckland: Random House, 2008, pp. 272 - 273.

⁹⁷ Letter, Kippenberger to Scoullar, 4 August 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6; Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 4 October 1955, IA1 181/3/3 part IV, NA.

who was now bearing the brunt of Kippenberger's editorial decisions. He regretted the cost to the General and felt it deeply. It was likely no exaggeration when he wrote: 'Nothing has ever hurt me more than that you have been pained by what I approved. I have thought of nothing else and hardly slept for a week'.⁹⁸

Kippenberger, too, had a public duty to perform, however. In the carefully crafted letter that he sent to Freyberg accompanying Scoullar's reply, he guided him through his concerns.⁹⁹ His first appeal was for a degree of objective calm. 'As Latham said,' he reminded Freyberg, it was a volume that 'must be studied'. 'Before I pass on [Scoullar's] remarks,' he continued, 'there are some things I want to say.' Kippenberger then returned to the memorandum of criticisms he had prepared for *Crete* and the lessons the battle had contained, reminding Freyberg as he did so of the 'well-deserved tribute' he himself had paid to earlier British War Histories in helping form the 'excellence of the New Zealand Division' during the war. On the problems between Freyberg and the Desert Command, he referred to the General's speech in the House of Lords the previous year on the role of Commonwealth commanders¹⁰⁰ and took care to link this to the Division's move to Syria as it was described in the volume:

They were reasons that should be known, it was our duty to make them known and now they are known. It is an historical fact of high importance for the proper understanding of Commonwealth relations and the whole episode, culminating in the unhesitating readiness to go back to the Desert when danger menaced there does you the greatest credit. You carried these burdens in solitude, magnificently, and must not now be concerned that a few people are offended, some of them long aware of and contributing to your difficulties, others utterly ignorant.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Letter, Kippenberger to Freyberg, 11 August 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

⁹⁹ Letter, Kippenberger to Freyberg, 11 August 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

¹⁰⁰ Hansard HL, 15 April 1953: 'Dominion / British Relations between Commanders'; Hansard HL, 17 March 1954, 'Military Relationships'.

¹⁰¹ Letter, Kippenberger to Freyberg, 11 August 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

He then suggested Freyberg reread his speeches before moving on to Scoullar's letter. Citing Peter Fraser's comments that he would need 'character and determination' to carry out his duties, Kippenberger claimed he had examined his conscience and decisions as closely as he could over *Battle for Egypt*, 'with humility'. 'I believe,' he concluded to Freyberg, 'it was right to say what was said and that nothing but good would come of it as a result, after a while'.¹⁰² He stood firm.

Freyberg did receive a copy of the volume soon after and, having read up to page 120 'at which point he got wounded',¹⁰³ seemed happy enough. He apologised, as Kippenberger related to Latham, 'for distressing Scoullar and me'.¹⁰⁴ Auchinleck, too, read the text and was unconcerned. He dined with Kippenberger the following year and said the book had 'contained many revelations for him'. His only criticism was that 'not enough consideration had been given to his difficulties',¹⁰⁵ a point since brought out by his own biographers.¹⁰⁶

The fracas over the British review, then, could be regarded as a storm in a teacup were it not for the broader principles involved. As Kippenberger said of Ruweisat and El Mreir themselves, 'by numbers engaged they were minor operations ... but the issues were serious'.¹⁰⁷ *Battle for Egypt* had shown that cost of contemporary history to those involved was potentially very high. However, the priority of extracting lessons for future generations was regarded as higher still. The strength of the reaction to the volume on all sides reveals the concern people harboured for their reputations and for the way in which their decisions and behaviours might be understood outside of the context of war. While Davin's measured assessments in *Crete* had generated much considered debate,

¹⁰² Letter, Kippenberger to Freyberg, 11 August 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

¹⁰³ Letter Kippenberger to Latham, 9 September 1955, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

¹⁰⁴ Letter Kippenberger to Latham, 9 September 1955, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

¹⁰⁵ Letter, Kippenberger to Stacey, 13 December 1956, IA1 181/3/2, NA.

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, Correlli Barnett, *The Desert Generals*, (2nd ed.), London: Cassell, 1983, pp. 179 – 148, (First ed., London: Allen & Unwin, 1960).

¹⁰⁷ Letter, Kippenberger to Stacey, 5 January 1956, IA1 181/3/2, NA.

Scoullar's coarser approach had exacerbated a delicate situation and had lent itself to sensationalism, especially when taken outside of the New Zealand context.

Back in 1949, Freyberg had written to Kippenberger, 'I feel very very sorry for those early Generals, ... I hope, however, that they will take the big view and not ventilate their bitterness in their histories – it will do great harm'.¹⁰⁸ Throughout his early correspondence he had expressed his wish that the Histories not become a 'smearing campaign'.¹⁰⁹ Now, in only the third of the New Zealand campaign volumes, it appeared his own material had been used in precisely this way. Clearly, he had felt betrayed. Despite his apology to Kippenberger and Scoullar, he was not so trusting of the Branch in the future. Writing to Kippenberger in September 1955 he broached Scoullar's aggressive stance in the volumes and tried to clarify his position on the material he had provided:

My dear Kip,

I hate bothering you again about the War Histories. I feel nervous of what might be produced from the mass of material that is available for the second volume ... the general tone of our criticism in Volume I was in my opinion too aggressive

Personally I would be glad if you could avoid vexatious references to British Generals, and especially using my opinions to back them up.

I do not want to be mixed up in another newspaper controversy with men who look upon us as their friends

Of course, the author has every right to state his own opinions, and I hope he will. But he has no right, if I object, to use my name to support an argument, except where it is covered by official documents ...¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Letter, Freyberg to Kippenberger, 14 May 1949, IA1 181/3/3 part II, NA.

¹⁰⁹ Letter, Freyberg to Col E.E. Rich, 17 October 1949, copy: IA1 181/32/5, NA.

¹¹⁰ Letter, Freyberg to Kippenberger, 20 September 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

The use of material such as Freyberg's had placed the Branch in an awkward position. Interviews, particularly, contained a mix of 'background information, direct evidence and private comment and opinion,' and imposed conditions, tacit or otherwise, on their use which, as Kippenberger acknowledged, were 'very difficult to observe accurately'.¹¹¹ In *Battle for Egypt* these conditions had been misunderstood and Freyberg had felt betrayed. On the other hand, by participating in the historical process Freyberg had created a record of his opinions. To have then overlooked them, as Scoullar pointed out in defence of his own actions, would have been not only to have 'falsified history' but also to have compromised the integrity of the War Histories at the hands of some future, and more thorough, historian or biographer.¹¹²

Battle for Egypt contained broader lessons for the Branch also. Although Kippenberger maintained it had been well received in New Zealand, with a correspondingly 'good effect' on Cabinet and the assurance of continued funding,¹¹³ reviews of the volume had been mixed. Column space in the newspapers was markedly less than for *Crete* and praise was comparatively muted. While most reviewers recognised it as being well written, instructive and successful in explaining the frustrating losses to those who had participated in the campaign, of the 14 reviews identified almost half (excluding syndicated columns) were critical of its tone and the amount of criticism it contained. Although, with headlines such as 'Confused Thinking Blamed for Disasters to New Zealand Division',¹¹⁴ and 'Eighth Army Heads Slated in Official N.Z. Alamein History',¹¹⁵ it was clear that the Branch's viewpoint had got through, some were uncomfortable with 'page after page' of harsh criticism especially when, as with *Crete*, this had been written from the 'comparative calm' of the War History Branch, with 'full knowledge' of the battle and 'access to all available papers'.¹¹⁶ Others felt objectivity was

¹¹¹ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 15 July 1949, IA1 181/3/3 part II, NA.

¹¹² Letter, Scoullar to Kippenberger, 30 July 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

¹¹³ Letter, Kippenberger to Scoullar, 11 July 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

¹¹⁴ 'Confused Thinking Blamed for Disasters to N.Z. Division', *Auckland Star*, 22 July 1955.

¹¹⁵ 'Eighth Army Heads Slated in Official N.Z. Alamein History', *Dunedin Evening Star*, 24 July 1955.

¹¹⁶ J.W. Robertson, 'New Zealanders in Desert Battles, Disasters of 1942', *Book News*, undated, copy IA1 181/53/8, NA.

lacking and, as a British reviewer commented, Scoullar had painted the New Zealand commanders as being the “only men in step”.¹¹⁷

More concerning still was that several of the more perceptive and rigorous reviewers of the volume had found it methodologically lacking. Barton Maughan, reviewing for *Historical Studies Australia and New Zealand*, for example, considered it partisan and unsubstantiated in places.¹¹⁸ Insufficient evidence had been offered, he believed, to support one of its principal assertions, that Freyberg had moved the Division to Syria to protect it from Auchinleck. Maughan was able to point to evidence himself, including a message in the Branch’s own *Documents* series, that gave indications to the contrary. The standards that Freyberg claimed to have used when deciding whether to commit the Division to an engagement were also called into question. Although they appeared ‘chivalrous,’ they were again ‘specious’ according to Maughan, who challenged them with a counter-example from the same campaign.¹¹⁹ The uncritical acceptance of Freyberg’s accounts that this suggested, without the evidence to substantiate them, had made the Branch appear naïve, swayed by hindsight, and somewhat overeager.

Christchurch Press reviewer L.R.H. made similar observations on the partisan nature of *Battle for Egypt* and the limitations of its sources, including Freyberg’s interview as the sole source on the move to Syria. In a comment likely to wrangle with the Branch, the reviewer suggested that Scoullar had produced a ‘more convincing piece of good journalism than a methodical history’ by making the ‘known facts fit a pattern’ and yielding to the ‘temptation to over-emphasis’.¹²⁰ Kippenberger took the *Press* review surprisingly personally, possibly because it circulated in his home province, and replied with a letter to the Editor. This was primarily concerned, however, with doubts L.R.H. had expressed on the ability of a Brigadier to judge the morale of his troops and, although

¹¹⁷ ‘Books of the Day: New Zealanders at Bay’, *Glasgow Herald*, 5 January 1956.

¹¹⁸ Barton Maughan, ‘Review: Battle for Egypt, the Summer of 1942,’ *Historical Studies Australia and New Zealand*, Vol. 7, No. 26, (May, 1956), pp. 243-245.

¹¹⁹ Maughan, p. 243.

¹²⁰ L.R.H., ‘A Controversial NZ War History Volume’, *Christchurch Press*, July 1955.

Kippenberger hinted darkly at the ‘other points’ on which he could engage the review ‘with pleasure,’ he left the matter of methodology and sources unaddressed.¹²¹ Both reviews served to highlight the lack of historical training within the editorial team at the Branch in cases where their determination as soldiers to make these issues known could be seen as having overridden the empirical rigour required to make the level of criticism in the volume justified.

A third review, by Kippenberger’s colleague, Brigadier George Clifton, Commander of 6 Bde during the battle, was also sobering.¹²² Drawing again on a prerogative for criticism that came only from direct participation, Clifton emphasised Scoullar’s ‘lack of battle experience in the Western Desert’ when assessing the impact that the breakout from Minqar Qaim had on slowing the German advance. He also took offence at the ‘unfair and uncalled for’ accusations of “rank cowardice” that Scoullar suggested the New Zealand troops had levelled at the British tank drivers. ‘No man,’ Clifton warned, ‘who fought in a British tank in the summer of 1942 was a rank coward.’¹²³ In publicly labeling the inclusion of these two points as misguided, Clifton’s criticisms were as much a reflection of Kippenberger as Editor as of Scoullar.

While Kippenberger defended the volume broadly, *Battle for Egypt* did perhaps knock his confidence after the success of *Crete*. Although the lessons that arose from the battle had indeed been made explicit, it was not in a way that reflected favourably on New Zealand as a nation. ‘I am sorry I didn’t tone it down a little more,’ he wrote to Latham. ‘It would have been more dignified to have taken our lickings without complaining quite so sourly’.¹²⁴ Where the volumes of the British or Canadians swept along over ‘great affairs and the affairs of the great’,¹²⁵ he recognised that the scale and close analysis of the New Zealand series could foster introspection, self importance and, unfortunately,

¹²¹ Letter, Kippenberger to Editor, *Christchurch Press*, 12 July 1955, copy: IA1 181/53/8, NA.

¹²² G.H. Clifton, ‘Review: Battle for Egypt by J.L. Scoullar’, *Bookshop*, undated, copy, IA1 181/53/8, NA.

¹²³ Clifton, ‘Review’.

¹²⁴ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 9 September 1955, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

¹²⁵ Letter, Kippenberger to Playfair, 12 June 1956, IA1 181/3/3a, NA.

arrogance. As a record of participation for the rest of the world, Kippenberger wondered if Scoullar's volume was, after all, an accurate reflection of the nature of the New Zealand contribution: 'I don't know who we'll have a crack at next,' he wrote again to Latham:

Freyberg used to say we were a critical folk We didn't like the way Crusader was run and got off to Syria, didn't like the Ras el Ali project or the plan for Turkey or the brigade group theories, preferred that someone else should be shut in Matruh, had previously reacted violently to the suggestion that we should relieve the Australians, equally troublesome, in Tobruk, in fact nearly always had some objection or counter-suggestion. Only British commanders could have put up with us and I hope we were worth the trouble.¹²⁶

And what of the lessons themselves? Although the issues of command of Commonwealth troops may have had continued application, such as in the then current conflict in Korea,¹²⁷ those of strategy and tactics were already, Kippenberger conceded, 'as much outmoded ... as those of Hannibal.'¹²⁸ In *Crete*, while the lessons had been explicit, the reliance on testimony and the complexity of the battle had made critical argument hard to sustain. In *Battle for Egypt*, the difficulties associated with testimony and criticism had been exacerbated by the tone of its expression. Clearly, if harsh criticisms were to be made, their bases were expected to be irrefutable. In *Battle for Egypt* this had not been perceived to be so. The inability of the volume to rise above the emotion invested in its production served to limit its legitimacy as a definitive national history.

Battle for Egypt, as a War History, seemed, again, to work essentially at cross purposes. On the matter of personal sensitivities, Kippenberger had justified the criticisms in the volume to Freyberg in terms of their value to future generations.¹²⁹ Scoullar too,

¹²⁶ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 9 September 1955, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

¹²⁷ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 9 September 1955, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

¹²⁸ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 3 March 1955, IA1 181/3/3 part IV, NA.

¹²⁹ Letter, Kippenberger to Freyberg, 11 August 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

described the volume, ‘as in all histories worthy of the name ... a guide to those who follow’.¹³⁰ Yet, the heightened tone of *Battle for Egypt* does not survive its immediate context. While, as contemporary history in 1955, it may well have avenged the anger of some New Zealanders over the handling of the early battles of Alamein, those aspects which may have affirmed it to its initial readership now strongly detract from its qualities as a definitive text. To readers in the current day it is indeed bitter, partisan and as Kippenberger admitted at the time, ‘carping’.¹³¹ It has since been regarded by those who continued on at the Branch as one of the poorest of the campaign volumes.¹³² Latham, on reading it in draft, had predicted that its execution and tone would lower the value of the criticism and lessons it contained, and this has proved to be the case. Scoullar, as a journalist, wrote for his contemporary audience. Kippenberger, as an aggrieved commander, let him. Both detracted from the History in the long term.

¹³⁰ Letter, Scoullar to Kippenberger, 30 July 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

¹³¹ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 28 October 1953, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

¹³² Interview, Robin Kay with Glyn Harper, 11 January 1995, Harper Archive.

Chapter 6: 'We Should Not Refuse to Try'¹

Memory, History, Nation, War

In the introduction to this thesis a double dichotomy was identified in the War History project. This was between a definitive empirical record and affirmation of memory on the one hand and the critical examination of lessons and failures against the recognition of contribution and a cohesive national history on the other. Underwriting this dichotomy were the four elements of memory, history, nation and war. While Chapter One considered the ways in which the War Histories were an extension of the nationalistic project begun with the Centennial Histories, Chapters Two through to Five examined four volumes from the War History series as case studies. These case studies considered ways in which these four elements and the tensions they represented were manifest in the War Histories and how they were dealt with by their respective authors. While all four elements were found to have been of influence in all the case studies, one was considered to have predominated in each volume. Memory was foremost in *Journey towards Christmas*, history in *23 Battalion*, nation in *Crete*, and war in *Battle for Egypt*. In each instance tensions were also identified between the official nature of the Histories and their execution within a contemporary framework. As contemporary history, the War Histories relied heavily on the memory of individual participants. Conversely, the record, once constructed, held the potential to influence the way that the war was remembered by participants, both in individual memory and in national life. The thesis now concludes by bringing these findings together to make a number of observations on the War History project and the relationship between the history and memory of the war in New Zealand post-war society.

¹ 'Our histories will be valueless if we are not fairly candid about these things. "What is the truth?" said jesting Pilate. It is very hard to tell but we should not refuse to try.' Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 21 January 1954, IA1 181 3/3 part III, NA.

Through the precedents set by the Centennial project, history as a government enterprise in New Zealand was openly engaged in setting the national record and bringing the light of analysis to the national tradition. In this new historical environment one of New Zealand's principal needs was seen as 'a fine and disinterested critical integrity'² through which to assess and better understand its past. In this sense both the Centennial and War History Branches might be seen to be in opposition, as Pierre Nora suggested, to memory, or tradition, as represented by the episodic tales and local chronicles to which, Hall maintained, New Zealanders had been 'excessively attached'.³ Under the model of history articulated by Beaglehole, which underwrote both government projects, an ill-founded tradition was seen as creating a fundamental weaknesses in society and was a risk. In times of social stress or unrest, when the appeal to the past was strongest, twisted interpretations could appear and the notion of history be misused:

... not as the dispassionate search for truth, not as the sifter and preserver of tradition, not as the discipline of men who would know themselves, but history as the tenacious recorder of rights and wrongs, of hates and betrayals, history as the fantastic justification of fantastic crime.⁴

In the light of Stalinist Russia and the rise of Nazi Germany during the years in which this form of government sponsored history was being established in New Zealand, these claims may not have appeared unfounded. In this way history was seen in post-war New Zealand as a rational antidote to the potential excesses of a subjective and ill-grounded tradition. As an analysis of national strengths and weaknesses, it could encourage self-reflection and give 'individuality and self-reliance to a very small nation in a very

² J.C. Beaglehole, 'History and the New Zealander', in Ernest Beaglehole, (ed.), *The University and the Community: Essays in Honour of Thomas Alexander Hunter*, Wellington: Victoria University College, 1946, p. 124.

³ D.O.W. Hall, 'New Zealand Centennial History', *Historical Studies Australia and New Zealand*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (April, 1940), p. 22.

⁴ Beaglehole, 'History and the New Zealander', p. 109.

complicated age'.⁵ The potential for tensions in the years of readjustment following WWII gave extra impetus to the War History project.

While the War History project did not aim to crush or obliterate the national tradition, as Nora suggests history has done to memory, it certainly aimed to foster it along particular lines and create a common understanding. As such, the Branch was also answerable to the second of Nora's allegations against history, that of seeking to 'control' memory. This is seen as having occurred on three levels: through hyper-realisation, stipulation and the unit histories.

Hyper-realisation, in the sense of using the retrospective analysis of accumulated evidence to create a more comprehensive view of the past than it would have been possible for any one person to have known at the time, was a principal goal of the War Histories and central to integrating the war into national understanding. 'It is right that an intelligent democracy should understand the part it played in the war,' Kippenberger wrote in 1946. 'While it was on we fought and worked largely in the dark, now the story can be told and the part this country took seen in its proper perspective'.⁶

Hyper-realisation was a goal of 'definitive' histories in the sense of achieving a past 'without lacunae or faults'.⁷ In the War Histories, this was primarily the function of the Narratives where there was a layering up and integration of information from a wide range of sources, including the enemy. The circulation of Narratives and drafts among key participants and the exchange of material within the Commonwealth network contributed to a multifaceted and richly detailed account of any one day or engagement. This resulted in a comprehensive but ultimately, from the perspective of those who had participated in the fighting, highly artificial view of the war. Once integrated into the

⁵ Beaglehole, 'History and the New Zealander', p. 111.

⁶ Kippenberger, Radio Address: 'The History of New Zealand at War 1939-1945', 18 August 1945, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

⁷ Pierre Nora, (trans. Marc Roudebush), 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Memoire', *Representations*, Vol. 26, (1989), p. 9.

volumes, this hyper-realised view reached participants of all levels and the general public also and was available to reframe individual understandings of the war.⁸

Providing a detailed and authoritative analysis of engagements was intended to create a standardised version of events in which, as Kippenberger explained, ‘each individual reader is able to identify his own part or that of anyone or any unit in whom or which he is interested’. Without such detail it was considered ‘very difficult, if not impossible to get the general picture’.⁹ Such a bombardment of information, however, may indeed have been as Nora states ‘antithetical to spontaneous memory’,¹⁰ with recorded fact and sequences of events restructuring or overwriting previous understandings. Yet this thesis has shown that, rather than being in authoritative opposition to memory, much of the historical record in the War Histories, and the campaign volumes particularly, was either the product of, or mediated, by memory itself.

As definitive histories, the War Histories were informed by strongly positivist beliefs, based on the ascertainment of ‘truths’ - about engagements, campaigns and, ultimately, about the war. The project was the recipient of major government funding to this effect. Facts about the war, however, proved seldom to be straightforward. As has been clear from the case studies, they appeared at times almost unattainable. ‘Was there ever so controversial a campaign?’ Kippenberger asked Inglis of Crete. ‘Except for Greece, Libya ’41, Egypt ’42, the Mareth Line and Cassino, Waterloo and 1870 and the Marne, there wasn’t!’¹¹

In its purest form, empirical technique privileged the use of documentary sources as a means of obtaining historical information and provided an elaborate system of analytical operations for their assessment. For the War Histories, however, beyond the level of government and high command, there were not always sufficient documents available to

⁸ See for example letter, Keith Stewart to Kippenberger re Crete, 10 December 1951, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

⁹ Letter, Kippenberger to Stacey, 23 February 1953, IA1 181/3/2, NA.

¹⁰ Nora, ‘Between History and Memory’, p. 9.

¹¹ Letter, Kippenberger to Inglis, 25 January 1952, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

support an analysis of New Zealand fighting in WWII. This was especially so at the brigade, battalion and company level at which the Histories were most concerned. Despite the empirical mandate and definitive aspirations of the War Histories, therefore, documentary sources were not necessarily given primacy by the Branch. For soldiers turned historians, such as Kippenberger and Fairbrother, the maxim that had long underwritten empirical method, “no documents, no history”,¹² was less revered than it may have been in more conventional academic circles. Their own experience in warfare made obvious the shortcomings of war records as representations of actual fighting and little of Nora’s ‘superstitious esteem’¹³ was attached to them as sources. With ‘such a mass of information coming to hand,’ as Kippenberger said, with ‘memories of that interesting affair being good,’¹⁴ the Branch turned to alternative methods of data collection. In doing so they became heavily reliant on the memory of participants and thus ran into issues more commonly associated with oral and other forms of contemporary history.

While oral history was becoming established in the post-war period, it still operated for the most part outside the historical academy and was typically viewed with suspicion.¹⁵ In New Zealand it was more closely associated with the retrieval of memories of pioneers or veterans from the Land Wars in the work of James Cowan and other journalists or popular historians – the style of work that the new forms of empirically based histories were aiming to supersede.¹⁶ As contemporary history, however, the War History Branch was required to bring these two styles together in a way that was new. While interviews, testimonies and comments on the circulation of drafts greatly enriched the Branch’s understanding, reliance on memory also presented a number of problems.

¹² For the origins of this phrase see Ch.V. Langlois and Ch. Seignobos, *Introduction to the Study of History*, (Trans. G.G. Berry), London: Duckworth & Co., 1898, p. 17; for Beaglehole’s interpretation see J.C. Beaglehole, *How History is Written*, Post-Primary School Bulletin, 1:8, 1947.

¹³ Nora, ‘Between History and Memory’, p.13.

¹⁴ Letter, Kippenberger to Ross, 2 April 1948, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

¹⁵ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, (3rd Edition), Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 65, 55-60.

¹⁶ Chris Hilliard, ‘A Prehistory to Public History: Monuments, Explanations and Promotions, 1900- 1970’, in Bronwyn Dalley and Jock Phillips, (eds.), *Going Public: the Changing Face of New Zealand History*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001, p. 36.

The first was the physical act of remembering and the ability of participants to accurately recall details two, seven or even ten years after the event. Some participants found themselves unable to remember clearly, which led to concern over being ‘wise after the event’¹⁷ or the idea of criticising or judging others. Other participants, however, appeared over confident, as suggested by Brigadier Alec Gatehouse who, in contradicting another commander’s recollection of a conference at Ruweisat, claimed to have ‘an excellent photographic memory’¹⁸ in support of his version. The vagaries of memory were open to a degree of exploitation within the project, as has been demonstrated in the Narrative for *Crete* when Andrew claimed he was able to remember certain parts of conversations clearly but not others, which contributed to the way in which his behaviour was explained in the text.

Secondly, with the plurality of accounts available, testimonies were at times conflicting. In some instances these could be accommodated into the volume, either in the text or, if arising after the final circulation of drafts, as footnotes. At others participants were prepared to have their versions realigned to provide a more linear account. Keith Stewart, for example was prepared for his version of a Brigade conference on Crete to be ‘modified somewhat to fit in with Inglis’ account,’ which, although it was ‘not unreasonable’ was ‘not strictly accurate’ according to his own memory.¹⁹ At times, however, conflicting versions of events were simply overridden. A significant example of this occurred in *Battle for Egypt* in the explanation of Kippenberger’s exchange with Lumsden, the Brigadier of the British Armour at Ruweisat. As commander of 2 Bde, Briggs had been present when Kippenberger had challenged Lumsden over the failure of the armour to support the New Zealand infantry as planned. Briggs maintained he could ‘well remember the meeting between Kippenberger and Lumsden. Kippenberger was angry and excited and the exchange of views was stormy’.²⁰ Briggs recalled he had taken

¹⁷ Letter, Freyberg to Kippenberger, 14 May 1949, IA1 181/3/3 part II, NA.

¹⁸ Letter, Gatehouse to Latham, June 1954, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

¹⁹ See for example, Letter Keith Stewart to Kippenberger, 10 December 1951, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

²⁰ Letter, Briggs to Latham, 13 November 1953, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

himself off a 'discreet distance' to avoid this embarrassing scene. Kippenberger, not surprisingly, took exception to this unsoldierly view of himself, so at odds with the quiet authority with which he believed he generally conducted himself and which others more commonly attributed to him. 'I didn't think I would have appeared excited at the Lumsden conversation,' he remonstrated to Latham. 'I was coldly angry and would have bearded the devil himself but I didn't feel excited.'²¹ He too claimed to have an 'indelible memory' of the event. Scoullar's account in the volume not only overrode Briggs entirely, but quoted directly from Kippenberger's own passage in *Infantry Brigadier* where he had described the encounter and his part in it.²² Cool and soldierly it was.

A third difficulty was integrating the recollections and testimonies of individuals when, in composing their memories, their view of their own participation had evolved over time, such as Maj Thomason and Sgt Clive Hulme in *23 Battalion*. In both cases participants had reworked the memory of events they had participated in and had enlarged their personal role beyond a level which the Branch felt it could support. Ross needed to take care to show respect for the participants' viewpoints while imposing limits in the official account to prevent compromising events as they were understood from other sources. In the case of Thomason these restrictions were again tied to the memory and reputation of Kippenberger, while for Hulme they were reduced to subtle cues or qualifiers in the text that pointed to the ambivalence with which Ross and others regarded his material.

The sense of obligation the historians felt to those providing material for the volumes reflected the subjective element to the oral history process.²³ Here the relationship established between the historian and contributors created pressure to present a particular viewpoint or, alternatively, potentially blinded the historian to discrepancies in their

²¹ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 11 December 1953, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

²² Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt: the Summer of 1942*, Wellington: War History Branch of Department of Internal Affairs, 1955, p. 258; Kippenberger, *Infantry Brigadier*, London: Oxford University Press, 1949, pp. 169–170.

²³ Valerie Yow, "'Do I Like Them too Much?'" The Effect of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice – Versa', *Oral History Review*, Vol. 24, No. 1, (1997), pp. 55–79.

material. This was especially evident in Davin's volume where, following his interview with Andrew, evidence from this was favoured to the detriment of the reputation of Hargest. In this case the interpretation was also influenced by the collective memories and viewpoints of those working at the Branch and, it has been suggested, again, of Kippenberger in particular. The ability of Andrew to present his perspective and explain his actions in terms of the criteria outlined for the criticism of commanders limited the effect against him, while the alternative perspective, that of Hargest, had to be interpreted from knowledge of his character alone.

Loyalty and obligation toward participants was also evident in *Battle for Egypt* when contact with the British commanders led to a softening of the criticisms Scoullar had come to when working off the documentary sources alone. In each case, the participation of the subject in the historical process not only gave access to a perspective which had been marginalised or unrecognised in the documentary sources, but also engendered a sense of loyalty in the historian, or within the Branch, that resulted in the text being expanded or modified in their favour.

Under the positivist paradigms that informed the Branch at the time, therefore, oral and empirical methodologies resulted in the first of several paradoxes in the relationship between history and memory in the War Histories. Interview material, testimony and comment on Narratives were gathered by the Branch to confirm or expand documentary sources in an attempt to make the record more definitive. The effect, however, was to introduce a greater degree of plurality, contingency and compromise into the volumes. The wider the Branch cast its net in pursuit of truth, the less definitive the account became. Today the pursuit of the definitive has increasingly been replaced by the recognition of, and celebration of, the variety of experience. In the historiographical climate of the War Histories, however, the plurality and contingency arising from oral and other contemporary sources resulted in something of a double life for the project. The rhetoric that presented the Histories to the public and justified them in terms of government funding aligned the project to the historical aspirations of the day: for a

single, 'exhaustive and completely authoritative account of New Zealand's part in the war'.²⁴ This was intended not just for those who had participated but for subsequent generations so that they might recognise the sacrifices made on their behalf. But within the Branch, the limitations of their method were well recognised, as were the shortcomings and compromise to which the volumes were contingent. 'Sometimes I am pleased with what we have done and sometimes can see the defects only too plainly,' Kippenberger wrote to Stacey with regard to *Battle for Egypt*. 'But on the whole it [the series] will be worth finishing.'²⁵

The second method by which history could influence or seek to control memory through the tradition was stipulation: the emphasis given within the Histories to particular events or versions of events to the exclusion of others. This was achieved firstly across the series as a whole through the allocation of volumes to battles, then also, as has been shown through the case studies, within the volumes themselves by emphasising specific events. While the number of New Zealand volumes was large by international standards, their allocation within the series was also telling. Of the campaign volumes, one covered from the outbreak of war to the end of the campaign in Greece, in May 1941; one covered the 12 day Battle of Crete; five covered the two and a quarter years to the end of the desert fighting in October 1943, with two of these being on the battles at El Alamein; two covered the two years of fighting in Italy to the end of the war in 1945; one covered the Pacific. There was no volume on J-Force, the troops deployed to Japan at the end of the European fighting.

For many, New Zealand's war was the desert war, helped, perhaps, by the high number of First Echelon soldiers who returned to New Zealand on furlough with these campaigns fresh in their minds. Tactically, the desert was considered an ideal place for battle. The Left Hooks the New Zealanders conducted there, a series of specialty outflanking manoeuvres at which they were considered to have excelled, also fostered a particularly

²⁴ 'War History of Dominion Position of Editor Filled', *Dominion*, 13 February 1946.

²⁵ Letter, Kippenberger to Stacey, 5 January 1956, IA1 181/3/2, NA.

satisfying view of national prowess and initiative. Freyberg, too, supported this view, writing in 1961: 'I feel that our greatest contribution to New Zealand's war effort was made in the North African campaigns, a class of warfare for which New Zealanders were ideally suited'.²⁶ As demonstrated in Scoullar's volume, it was a time in which many of the lessons in command and tactics occurred that those participating in the project, and especially Kippenberger, wished to make explicit. The allocations of the volumes reflected these interests.

Within the individual volumes stipulation has also been clearly illustrated. Most obviously this occurred in *Crete* where the length of the volume dedicated to twelve day's fighting and the marginalization of other Allied forces clearly claimed the battle for New Zealand. This view was reinforced by the rigour with which the Branch approached the work of other Commonwealth historians on this subject. An important part of New Zealand's stipulated version was the inclusion of the counterfactual through which it was suggested that, were it not for the withdrawal of New Zealand forces from Maleme, the battle could have been won.

Stipulation within the volumes occurred both indirectly and directly. It was achieved indirectly by Llewellyn, for example, through his use of literary techniques to foreground landscape and through rich description that positioned the war as a rewarding adventure and a means to travel and companionship. In *Battle for Egypt*, also, the style of chapter headings and the foreshadowing of the overrunning of troops at Ruweisat and El Mreir emphasised the significance of these two disasters and juxtaposed New Zealand initiative and endeavour against British incompetence. More directly, stipulation could be achieved through the treatment of specific events. The attention given by Ross to the attack on Galatas was intended to claim the engagement for 23 Bn against perceived competition from other units. Through his firm positioning of Thomason in this same account Ross also ensured recognition of Kippenberger's leadership of the attack.

²⁶ Freyberg, 'Preface', in A.L. Kidson, *Petrol Company*, Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1961, p. vi.

The emphasis given to these events provided the structure and framework around which readers of the volumes could either assess and compose their own memories or, in the case of the general readership, formulate their own vicarious understanding of the war. The use of stipulation within the Histories could also influence memory in another way. By dictating what should be remembered, or integrated into the tradition, stipulation also implicitly indicated what should be forgotten or, for a time at least, overlooked. This was again evident in the case studies with the marginalizing of pain and grief in *Journey towards Christmas*, or, more specifically, in *Crete*, with the omission of details on the conduct of Inglis and Brigadier John Gray. In both these cases the commanders did not perform to orders given, derelictions of duty that could have amounted to court martial charges, but intervention by Kippenberger prevented the details being included in the volume.²⁷

Ross was also challenged by Sandy Thomas on the inclusion of less than complimentary details within his unit history. The reference is to Ross' son:

I do wonder, in the interests of the youth of a world where moral values are lax enough, whether you should not carefully delete all reference to loot (LOOT) and LOOTING. It existed - I well know - but so did other evils - fornication, drunkenness, buggery - do consider this, Angus. You want this book to be a guide to Bruce and those lads to come. If they have war, they will not be helped by the ideas that it was clever to loot. It was only a late development, a bad one in retrospect. To a [general?] reader it is damning, it has so much stronger meaning to them, a master ring.²⁸

²⁷ See for example letters, Kippenberger to Inglis, 25 January 1952, IA1 181/32/2; Kippenberger to Latham reply to letter, 13 August 1952, IA1 181/32/3 part III, NA; W.E. Murphy 'Crete - New Zealand Command Failures: I. McD. G. Stewart, The Struggle for Crete, 20 May - 1 June 1941: A Story of Lost Opportunity,' *Comment*, Vol. 9, No. 1, December 1967, p. 28.

²⁸ Letter, Sandy Thomas to Ross, undated, 1957, MS-2710/003, Hocken, (Capitalization and underlining in the original).

These types of omissions highlighted a second paradox within the War History project, and another tension between its roles as definitive but also contemporary history.

Although the War Histories occupied a public role as definitive works, it was recognised within the Branch that in significant respects theirs was a selective interpretation. It was also recognised that subsequent historians, in reworking and reinterpreting the material, would be better able to make certain points, and especially criticisms, than the Branch was itself. While Kippenberger promoted the Histories publicly as definitive and unassailable he wrote openly in his correspondence, as he had to Davin, of the ‘reticences proper to an Official Historian’,²⁹ and of the restrictions he was placing on the way incidents were dealt with in the texts. While the implications of criticism will be discussed in the section on nation and war to follow, the point to be acknowledged here is that the Branch recognised the War Histories as first attempts at material that they knew would be revisited. While, because of their unprecedented access to sources and their detail, Official Histories are popularly regarded as ‘the last word’ on their subject, they are, as Australian historian Jeff Grey points out, ‘best understood as the first word, not the final one’.³⁰ They are, for want of a better word, protohistories, both in the sense of being the original interpretation of official war documents and also being the generic base from which other derivatives will occur. Recognising them as such provided those at the Branch, and Kippenberger in particular, with what little leeway was available within an outwardly definitive project to apply discretion and spare, in a very human way, friends and colleagues from public exposure. ‘Those poor chaps who have failed have to live with themselves in that knowledge,’ Kippenberger wrote to Ross, ‘We can show them the charity of silence’.³¹

The second paradox therefore lay in that, having obtained the assurance of its absence, such censorship as did occur within the Branch came about not because of government

²⁹ Letter, Kippenberger to Davin, 16 December 1947, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

³⁰ Jeffrey Grey, ‘Introduction’, in Jeffrey Grey (ed.) *The Last Word? Essays on Official History in the United States and British Commonwealth*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003, p. xi.

³¹ Letter, Kippenberger to Ross, 2 June 1954, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

intervention but rather at a domestic level, imposed from within the Branch itself. It was a result of not the official, but the contemporary nature of the histories. While the appointment of military personnel to the editorial roles did achieve greater insight into the battles it also exposed them to greater pressure within the close military circles, particularly in terms of criticising the dead or those commanders that were participating in the Narrative process. These omissions could be rationalised by the Branch within their own Histories, perhaps, by the recognition that they would be picked up by later historians, as had been the case with Stewart and the omission from *Crete*.

Even so, the application of this charity was uneven. While it was considered imperative that the British armour in *Battle for Egypt*, for example, and Hargest and Andrew in *Crete*, came under scrutiny for the lessons to be learned from their conduct, Kippenberger showed an unwillingness to ‘deal harshly’ with not only Grey and Inglis on Crete but also, as Murphy noted, with himself.³² Murphy maintained that ‘Kippenberger thought he did his best soldiering in Crete and the official history written under his editorship could not fail to be affected by this belief’.³³ Various assessments of that battle and others have suggested points of dissonance between the record of events and Kippenberger’s positioning of his own part in them.³⁴ As this thesis has also shown, in the writing up of both Galatas and Ruwesiat Kippenberger took moves, however slight, to keep a certain image of himself to the fore. With a wealth of war records and subsequent scholarship available, along with Kippenberger’s own diaries and voluminous personal correspondence and a published memoir - a book of which he was inordinately proud - material exists for an in-depth study of Kippenberger’s construction of his own historical image as a New Zealand citizen and soldier – an image he was able to promulgate not only in his own writing but also, through his position as Editor, in the work of others. This is not suggested in the spirit of deprecation or malice. It is rather an opportunity to

³² W.E. Murphy, ‘Crete - New Zealand Command Failures’, p. 28.

³³ W.E. Murphy, ‘Crete - New Zealand Command Failures’, p. 28; this impression is strongly back up by Kippenberger’s personal correspondence, see Denis McLean, *Howard Kippenberger, Dauntless Spirit: a Life of an Outstanding New Zealand Leader*, Auckland: Random House, 2008, p. 186-189.

³⁴ See for example, I.McD.G. Stewart, *The Struggle for Crete, 20 May – 1 June: a Story of Lost Opportunity*, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, pp. 189-90.

further explore the interface between history, memory, nation and war through the study of a perceptive and self reflective individual who also had enough of a public role to bring the significance of his work to a national level.

As a further form of stipulation, the unit histories occupied a particular role in the War History project. As souvenirs and tributes, and with the intention of assisting soldiers to order their own memories, they were explicitly positioned between history and individual and collective memory. In them, the information gathered for the campaign volumes was mediated through the experiences of the author, the members of the unit committees and the contributions of interested others to represent the subjective experience of the unit as a whole. They were, in that respect, the most conscious working through by the Branch of Beaglehole's model of history as a means to influence tradition. As Robin Kay, author of the 27 (Machine Gun) Bn History, related, they were often the most meaningful volumes for the servicemen themselves and, at their best, could be a particularly rewarding form of history to write:

...all survivors were entitled to a copy of their unit history. This was their war, where as they probably wouldn't be interested in the campaign histories, except in a few cases. ... I know when I was doing the Machine Gunners history I got quite a lot of help from people who were in the Battalion. Inglis for example used to come in himself and see me quite often, but I also went to Machine Gunners reunions in Wanganui and Nelson, Timaru and so on. They sort of accepted me as an honorary machine gunner, they were very helpful and took a great deal of interest in what I was doing. I had a great number of diaries and they were quite prepared to give me their time. ... I think it was quite well received, I enjoyed doing it immensely, one of the most enjoyable things I've ever done.³⁵

The unit histories examined in this thesis took very opposite approaches to providing a framework for memory. The first of these was the character they attributed to the unit to

³⁵ Interview, Robin Kay with Glyn Harper, 11 January 1995, Harper Archive.

provide its public face to members' families and the wider reading public. The strong contrast between Llewellyn and Ross reflected the differing approach of the authors to the war. Llewellyn's volume was a celebration of army life, Ross' an affirmation of the things he valued in war and service. Both were affirming, in their own way, of popular views of national character. Both would have formed acceptable public facades for personal experience and memory.

The two volumes also differed in their historical approach. Llewellyn, through the characterisation of the antihero and an easy charm, presented a view of the war so flippant it could conceivably have been insulting to some. Yet it was promoted as representative of the Division as a whole and, it would appear from reviews, was welcomed and willingly accepted as such. The unanimist rhetoric in Llewellyn's text was extended by reviewers themselves to incorporate not only the unit and Division but general readers and the nation. This willingness to take the volume in the manner in which it was intended would indicate that it presented a framework for the war that people were willing, or even anxious, to accept at that time; a 'mantle of consolation', as Jay Winter termed this style of writing that appears soon after a war, that made the war 'thinkable, even in the aftermath of terrible carnage'.³⁶ War, in the sense of violence and fighting, was certainly secondary in Llewellyn's volume. Many of the less savory aspects were approached obliquely, or witnessed at a distance, making it a non-threatening account for the general reader. Along with a preferred³⁷ view it was, as has been argued, essentially a very private one.

Ross produced a very different unit history. The inclusion of a research question problematised the war experience and made it a subject for analysis. This removed not only some of the sensitivity but also the privacy afforded in Llewellyn's volume. Ross assumed the right as historian to do so. The volume reflected his own ongoing interest in

³⁶ Jay Winter, *Remembering War: the Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, p. 238.

³⁷ Deborah Montgomerie, 'Reconnaissance: Twentieth Century New Zealand War History at Century's Turn', *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol. 37, No. 1, (April, 2003), p. 68.

the practice of warfare and, in terms of its emphasis on lessons and analysis, took on more of the nature of the campaign volumes. It is evident from the file notes that its criticisms would have been more probing still, were it not for the intervention of Kippenberger.³⁸ On the other hand, Ross' engagement of the heroic quest motif rationalised the violence and suffering of the war within a popular and readily accepted framework that helped to integrate it into post-war values and understandings. Where Llewellyn used one voice to speak for all, Ross incorporated the voices of many to represent individual experience. The aligning of extracts from diaries and letters within the quest narrative gave cohesion and purpose to the unit story and reflected the 'fierce pride' in the Battalion he attributed to its members.³⁹ With its emphasis on the agency and initiative of the soldiers and claims of higher than usual élan and success in battle, the volume could provide satisfaction and an acceptable public front, even if it did not align with the individual experiences and memories of the men themselves.

Written for both specific and general publics, the unit histories were intended to address memory on a number of levels. They were certainly intended to assist the individual serviceman to 'keep alive his rich experience'⁴⁰ and provided a framework through which this could come about. Alistair Thomson's work with veterans from WWI suggests that Official Histories and unit histories could promote positive memories of the war for those veterans who were willing to or enjoyed engaging in the literature and other forms of popular commemoration. To this extent, the unit histories and campaign volumes could form part of a positive cycle of composure of memories. For other veterans, however, the process of composure had been less positive. Thomson also provided examples of veterans who shunned all forms of commemoration so as not to revive bitter or distressing memories.⁴¹

³⁸ Letter, Kippenberger to Ross, 2 June 1954, IA1 181/7/23, NA.

³⁹ 'Specialists with the Bayonet', *New Zealand Herald*, 3 April 1959.

⁴⁰ *Journey towards Christmas*, War History Branch Publicity Flier, 21 November 1949, IA1 181/7/29B, NA.

⁴¹ Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 169, 161 & 169, 170 respectively.

Correspondence in the files of both *Journey Towards Christmas* and *23 Battalion* suggests a positive reception of the volumes by unit members and a willingness to engage in the kind of nostalgia they promoted. N.E. Hale, for example, wrote to Llewellyn and the Branch:

to say how much I have enjoyed reading [*Journey towards Christmas*]. The book has far exceeded my expectations and is a credit to all concerned and it has brought back to me very vivid recollections of happy times spent in the Middle East and Italy and of enduring friendships made during the campaigns. Again I thank you for this treasured memento of the “Good Old Days”.⁴²

As with Thomson’s findings, however, this correspondence would reflect only those members who chose to engage with or responded positively to the unit history concept. This would apply to gauging their impact as collective histories also. The scholarship discussed in relation to *Journey Towards Christmas* particularly, suggests that the techniques used in the unit history volumes have the potential to contribute to the affirmation of membership and cohesion within groups. At the very least, the chronological ordering and stipulation of events did provide clear frameworks around which group reminiscences at reunions could occur. In contrast, Jeff Grey notes that in Australia following the Vietnam war, where Official Histories were not produced until the 1990s,⁴³ an ‘entire network of myths’ arose out of veterans discontent, ‘much of it fed by misconception about the Australian experience and confusion in the popular mind between Australian and American images of the war’.⁴⁴

A claim, however, that the unit history programme necessarily set the record and could allay discontent in a unit’s collective memory would be a difficult to sustain. Among New Zealand WWII veterans there is at least one recent example of group discontent that

⁴² Letter, N.E. Hale to Kippenberger, 26 November 1049, IA1 181/7/29A, NA.

⁴³ <http://www.awm.gov.au/histories/seasia/seasia.asp>, accessed 6 October 2011.

⁴⁴ Jeffrey Grey, ‘Memory and Public Myth’, in Jeffrey Grey & Jeff Doyle, (eds.), *Vietnam: War, Myth and Memory, Comparative Perspectives on Australia’s War In Vietnam*, St. Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1992, pp. 143, 144.

seems to have arisen over a lack of recognition, despite official publications to the contrary. Among the veterans of the Divisional Petrol Company, a Service Corps unit that had been required to fight as infantry in the defense of Pink Hill at Galatas, there appears to be the feeling that they have been overlooked, by Kippenberger particularly.

At least two revisionist publications have appeared concerning the Petrol Company at Galatas. The first was in 1989 by Peter Winter, a driver with the company who later worked as a journalist. The second, *The Gatekeepers of Galatas: the Untold Story*, appeared in 2007. This was by Brian Taaffe, the son of a Petrol Company Sgt. wounded on the first day of the fighting. Winter's book, *Expendable: The Crete Campaign – a Front-Line View*, was a firsthand account that refuted much of the order and purpose attributed to the fighting in Davin's official version. Winter was later involved in peace groups. There was less emphasis in his account on heroism than on the stupidity and waste of the campaign from the point of view of Other Ranks. Disgust at Kippenberger's leadership in the Galatas area and his perceived lack of empathy with the troops under his command was particularly evident. Winter described Kippenberger as 'despising'⁴⁵ the ASC personnel and Greek soldiers of 10 Bde, a makeshift group of untrained infantry under his charge. The famous 'roar' and fighting at Galatas, of which Kippenberger was so proud, was to Winter's mind far from heroic:

From our position some hundreds of metres away [Winter had been detailed to carry out some wounded] we heard the yells of the infantry as they sought to demoralise, but also alerted the enemy. This was followed by a pandemonium of small arms firing interlaced with the screams of the wounded and dying. No one who heard that encounter could forget.⁴⁶

Winter's aim in *Expendable* was not only to get recognition of the Petrol Company's stand at Galatas but also to emphasise the 'unimaginative and incompetent' leadership by

⁴⁵ Peter Winter, *Expendable: The Crete Campaign – a Front-Line View*, Tauranga: Mona Press, 1989, p. 50.

⁴⁶ Winter, *Expendable*, p. 51.

the New Zealand command, when the ‘young men who had volunteered for a cause they believed in were deserving of better’.⁴⁷

In *Gatekeepers of Galatas*, this disenchantment has been taken one step further. Taaffe’s account starts:

“*We were never given credit.*” This was the refrain of many men of the New Zealand Divisional Petrol Company – referring to their stand outside the village of Galatas ... against the German elite 3rd Paratrooper regiment.⁴⁸

The theme of the book, which traces Taaffe’s personal journey to Crete, the Western Desert and Greece, is grievance: a sense that recognition has been withheld from the Petrol Company for their efforts on Crete. This is despite at least four of the six Military Medals awarded to the Company in the war coming from the fighting at Galatas;⁴⁹ considerable recognition in Davin’s volume; their own Unit History, in the Forward of which Freyberg specifically mentions the drivers’ stand at Galatas; and specific mention and praise in Stewart’s volume⁵⁰ and those of several subsequent authors.⁵¹ This may be partly due, perhaps, to unrealistically high expectations of the individual recognition possible within Official Histories and other forms of historical overview,⁵² but, largely, it appears by the end of Taaffe’s book that his anger, like that of Winter, springs from resentment toward Kippenberger. Taaffe comes to the ‘unpalatable’ but ‘inescapable’ conclusion ‘that *Kippenberger deliberately muted his praise* of Petrol Company and the Greeks’.⁵³

⁴⁷ Winter, *Expendable*, p. 52.

⁴⁸ Brian Taaffe, *The Gatekeepers of Galatas: the Untold Story*, St Kilda, Australia: Sabicas, 2007, p. xiii.

⁴⁹ Kidson, pp. 122, 127, 129.

⁵⁰ Stewart, pp. 185 – 188, 356, 389.

⁵¹ http://podcast.radionz.co.nz/sat/sat-20080621-0835-Brian_Taaffe_Crete_and_NZ-in_WW2-048.mp3, accessed 5 October 2011

⁵² Taaffe, p. 505.

⁵³ Taaffe, p. 518, (*Italics in the original*).

Part of Taaffe's argument is based on Kippenberger's own writing in *Infantry Brigadier*, where he feels Kippenberger was dismissive of the efforts of the Petrol Company, seeing them as nothing out of the ordinary. Later however, he maintains that Kippenberger, as Editor of the War Histories, remained determined to withhold information on the successes of the Petrol Company at Galatas. This was firstly, he believes, through a lack of knowledge but then, once this knowledge was available to the Branch, out of spite:

... he [Kippenberger] found it *utterly unpalatable* to concede that these individuals, virtually operating independently, *had challenged and negated the very precepts of infantry training and discipline so dear to him* beaten the elite German 3rd Parachute Regiment to a standstill and at the same time outperforming much of his infantry. An awful revelation, indeed!⁵⁴

In an extension of this argument, Taaffe suggests, reasonably perhaps, that Davin was 'hamstrung' in his volume by Kippenberger's lack of recall of the Petrol Company and his editorship of the Histories.⁵⁵ He then goes on, less reasonably, to a broader analysis of Kippenberger's faults. His experiences in WWI, for example, are seen as having led to the '[lack of] any genuine show of remorse' when the lives of his own soldiers were 'snuffed out' and an attitude that seemed 'to portray the unspoken statement "*See how noble I am*".'⁵⁶ A similar implication is that Kippenberger's leadership personally contributed to the difficulties experienced in the Furlough scheme: 'Later on, the outrage of his men would be brought home with a vengeance. The feelings of these troops while on furlough back in New Zealand... would explode into mutiny!'⁵⁷

Taaffe's is not a scholarly work. It is a long and rambling volume in which italics, exclamation marks and armchair psychology abound. Its research is faulty in places. He is forced to conclude, for example, that Davin had no 'significant conversation with

⁵⁴ Taaffe, p. 526, (Italics in the original).

⁵⁵ Taaffe, p. 505.

⁵⁶ Taaffe, p. 511.

⁵⁷ Taaffe, pp. 512-3.

Kippenberger [about Crete], apparently relying more upon his published book, *Infantry Brigadier*, for his views',⁵⁸ when the most cursory glance at the five folders of author correspondence in the *Crete* file would have shown him otherwise. The significance of Taaffe's work, however, may not lie in the quality of his scholarship. What Taaffe may better represent is the working of empirical history into the national tradition. As the son of a sergeant in the unit he is a member of the '1.5 generation'⁵⁹ – the offspring of the actors involved, taking up the story and investing it with series of values and interpretations of their own.⁶⁰ Taaffe claims to speak for the men of the Petrol Company. Certainly, he made personal contact with many of the surviving veterans and with veterans' families.⁶¹ Historiographically, perhaps, we should be less interested in the accuracy of his facts and assertions and more in the permutations of the story as it has evolved, collectively and familiarly, among Petrol Company members and their families. Despite what appears, from the outside, to be considerable recognition, both within the War History series and in the medals awarded to company members for their part in the fighting at Galatas, in the memories of these men and their families, a sense of having been omitted remains. The 'pervading sense of injustice regarding Crete,' Taaffe maintains, has been 'a major source of grievance to the drivers throughout their lives'.⁶² For both Winter and Taaffe this injustice appears to have been focused on Kippenberger and frustration that his star has continued to rise while this discreditable aspect of his leadership and conduct has been overlooked. No amount of recognition elsewhere seems to have compensated in this respect.

In terms of the War Histories, therefore, the unit history of the Petrol Company, by A.L. Kidson, in which he acknowledges that the unit fought largely without officers and yet took 'the brunt of the enemy's first onslaught' in the Galatas area,⁶³ seems to have had

⁵⁸ Taaffe, p. 519.

⁵⁹ Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Crisis of Memory and the Second World War*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006, p. 179.

⁶⁰ Taaffe, podcast.

⁶¹ Taaffe, p. 597; Taaffe, podcast.

⁶² Taaffe, p. 504.

⁶³ Kidson, p. 117.

little effect. Winter believed himself unaffected by Davin's volume also. Suggestive of history's 'neat borders',⁶⁴ he saw Davin's account as being 'all very military and orderly, but it did not happen like that'.⁶⁵ While Kidson offered a 'slightly more personalised version' it too 'failed to agree'⁶⁶ with his recollections. Taaffe maintains his own father 'rarely got around to reading any of the historical accounts that had been sent to him after the war by the New Zealand Government',⁶⁷ although he did apparently return to Kidson's volume late in his life. Certainly there is a mythic quality to the Petrol Company's tale outside of the Official account: 'There was something unique and appealing,' Taaffe concludes, 'about the way that the drivers, Greeks and locals had combined to exceed everyone's expectations, even their own, excepting perhaps those of Howard Kippenberger'.⁶⁸ It is, as he has said, 'a great story'.⁶⁹ Approaching Taaffe with a view to his own papers, perhaps, and careful use of other oral history sources involving Petrol Company men may enable a future researcher to test this attitude within the unit more fully. Sources such as the Ministry for Culture and Heritage material at the Alexander Turnbull Library or those of Graham Power on the defence of Pink Hill,⁷⁰ could be combined with Kidson's volume file and interviews with members' families to trace the evolution of this story as it passes across generations and into the tradition. It could be a fascinating and valuable study.

The War History project not only sought to write the war into the history and tradition of New Zealanders but did so on the assumption that it had been of 'the deepest importance to every one of them'.⁷¹ The scale of the project reflected the place the experience was expected to take in New Zealand life. The cost was justified as being only an 'infinitesimal part'⁷² of the cost of the war itself. The goal of the Branch was to construct

⁶⁴ Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History', p. 21.

⁶⁵ Winter, *Expendable*, p. 46.

⁶⁶ Winter, *Expendable*, p. 46.

⁶⁷ Taaffe, p. 529.

⁶⁸ Taaffe, p. 503.

⁶⁹ Taaffe, podcast.

⁷⁰ Graham Power, *The Battle of Pink Hill: Crete 1941*, Auckland, Power Publishing, 2009.

⁷¹ Kippenberger, 'Radio Address' 18 August 1946, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

⁷² Memo, Heenan to Mackintosh, Prime Minister's Department, 13 February 1945, IA1 181/5, NA.

a central, standardised, lineal and cohesive framework around which the war could be understood in its many facets and manifestations. This positioned the war as a legitimate and ultimately rewarding undertaking and its outcome as conclusive.

The first section of this chapter has considered history as a rationalizing agent over memory and tradition. This second section will consider the War History project as a rationalizing agent over the war itself. Through the hyper-realisation afforded by the integration of many sources, much that was impenetrable or seemed irrational during the war was fitted into a rational framework. Explanations could thus be provided retrospectively for actions or decisions taken at the time of battle. In his provisional scheme, McCormick wrote:

Amongst New Zealanders themselves one of the main functions of the official history will be its explanation of facts that, in the nature of things, cannot be revealed in a time of war. Men are kept for long periods on lonely garrison duty, they are on the point of embarkation when the arrangements are suddenly cancelled, they are sent on hazardous and apparently useless missions – these are commonplace experiences during a war and they were borne, for the most part, with fortitude. But, as educated members of a democracy, New Zealanders have the right ultimately to learn the underlying reasons, and they should be able to find them in the pages of the official history.⁷³

‘Military and orderly’ as Winter suggested, this rational base sifted order and purpose from chaos and promoted war as a rational science. The inability of confusion to survive narration within such a framework was something noted by a number of reviewers, and those of *Crete* particularly: ‘Thirty maps looking far too flat, with the places on them appearing too easily accessible,’ wrote R.H. Thomson for the Broadcasting Service, ‘....

⁷³ Memo: McCormick, ‘Official History of New Zealand in the War of 1939 - , Provisional Scheme’, October 1944, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

The noise and the tension of the German air coverage is almost completely missing – and that was so fundamentally Crete.’⁷⁴

Along with retrospective explanation came the retrospective evaluation of commanders. Again, the inability for the tense and desperate conditions in which decisions were sometimes made to be transposed effectively onto the Histories was hard on those who had not done well under the circumstances. It has been suggested that this could be exacerbated in some cases by the Branch’s method of obtaining information via the Narratives. Here, each individual’s recollection or evaluation was built incrementally upon the recollection or opinion of others before him as material was passed around the pool of commanders and others for comment. Many participating in this process were uncomfortable with the prospect of criticising their peers. Freyberg, particularly, hoped for ‘fairness’ in dealing with men who had failed, and especially the dead: ‘We should “look upon them as the good comrades who fall,” he wrote to Kippenberger, “...[but who] pave the way for ultimate success”’.⁷⁵ The need to extract and record lessons, however, overrode these considerations: “It is of so much more consequence that the truth should be told,” Kippenberger replied to Freyberg, quoting Samuel Johnson, “than that individuals should be made uneasy, that it is much better that the law does not restrain writing freely concerning the characters of the dead”’.⁷⁶ ‘We are trying to write a history,’ Kippenberger reminded him, ‘to be read long after all participants in these actions are dead’.⁷⁷

The justification for public criticism in the volumes was that lessons needed to be made explicit for the benefit of generations to follow. ‘How,’ asked Scoullar in exasperation after Freyberg’s angry reaction to his volume, ‘... are the lessons to be learned and

⁷⁴ R.H. Thomson, ‘Book Review: *Crete* by D.M. Davin’ Radio Broadcast, January 1954, IA1 181/53/3 part II, NA.

⁷⁵ Letter, Freyberg to Kippenberger, 14 May 1949, copy: IA1 181/3/3 part II, NA.

⁷⁶ Letter, Kippenberger to Freyberg, 11 August 1955, WAI, 11, Box 6, NA.

⁷⁷ Letter, Freyberg to Kippenberger, 14 May 1949, copy: IA1 181/3/3 part II, NA.

applied if they are passed by or glossed over in official studies of the campaign?’⁷⁸

Kippenberger, too, felt that a failing of even the most respected war histories in the past was that they had so often left it ‘impossible to discover the reasons for success or failure’.⁷⁹

There was no specific volume commissioned in the series for the army or its staff colleges. Despite Kippenberger’s comment that such material may be more appropriately discussed there than in the Histories themselves,⁸⁰ no provision was made to explicitly record or evaluate these lessons outside of the general campaign volumes. There is no evidence in the files to suggest the Army wished to be working alongside the Branch in this respect. Even so, the programme had a strong mandate to record and analyse errors and lessons from the war. With no separate volume in which to do this, material considered as necessary for training future officers was included in the Histories themselves. As such it became available to all readers, general and military.

In this way the series could be seen as indicative of the democratisation of knowledge that Nora saw as symptomatic of the growing divide between history and memory. It was also strongly indicative of the egalitarian principles and characteristics that informed both the Centennial and War History projects. As can be seen from the extract from McCormick’s Provisional Scheme above, access to this knowledge was equated with citizenship and the workings of a democratic society. In the same way that participation had legitimised the right of authors to include opinions and criticisms in the Histories, participation and sacrifice as part of the war effort was seen as having given New Zealand citizens the right to know. It was indicative of the Histories as Official Histories that this information was not to be withheld from the participating public. It is indicative of the Histories as contemporary histories, however, that in practice, and in various respects, it was.

⁷⁸ Letter, Scoullar to Kippenberger 30 July 1955, WAI, 11, No. 6, NA.

⁷⁹ Letter, Kippenberger to Latham, 21 January 1954, IA1 181/3/3 part III, NA.

⁸⁰ Kippenberger, ‘Address to the Wellington Historical Association’, October 1952’, Private Collection.

The ultimate confidence in the Branch's ability to deduce rationality from the chaos of war was the inclusion of the counterfactual in *Crete*. Here the assumption that an alternative outcome could be rationally predicted through a series of causes and effects was such that individuals were severely criticised and held accountable as a result. Davin's own analysis inclined toward the inevitable loss of the island while Murphy was the strongest proponent of what has been termed the Maleme hypothesis. While the author / narrator split was criticised within the Branch for distancing the researchers from the product of their labours, its use in conjunction with the circulations of drafts might equally be seen as distancing the author from his. In *Crete* Davin was unable to argue the battle solely from the perspective he believed to be the most appropriate but was pressured instead into including the perspectives of others, much to the detriment of his own argument. The counterfactual was entirely the product of hyper-realisation. This was especially so with later knowledge on the weakness of what had appeared at the time to have been unlimited German resources. This included insights from enemy records into the many points at which the Germans had considered themselves beaten and the impact of the diversion of equipment and resources to the Russian front. The task of integrating this artificial view and the retrospective criticism that accompanied it into the History was that of the author, not the narrator. Davin was appalled by it, Scoullar revelled in the opportunities it afforded.

Another area in which egalitarianism and citizenship were manifest in the War Histories as national histories was in the scope and inclusiveness of the series. The inclusion of the unit histories particularly reflected both the value placed on recognition and the domestic politics of the time. One example was in their funding and standardisation, whereby an additional £60,000 of government money was allocated to ensure a comparable history for each unit and to avoid the unevenness in quality that would have resulted if unit canteen funds had been used instead.⁸¹ The funding was partly justified by the additional

⁸¹ McCormack, 'Official War History of New Zealand in the war of 1939 - , Provisional Scheme, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

information and insight that those participating in the unit histories would bring to the War History project as a whole. The second example was in the allocation of volumes. Along with the Chaplains, the Dentists got a separate volume in the series, after being adamant that they would not be included under the medical services.⁸² The ASC also got four separate volumes, one of which was Llewellyn's. This was partly a reflection, perhaps, of the logistical nature of modern mobile warfare, but was also at the insistence of Brigadier Stanley Crump, the ASC CO, who had kept additional funds aside to supplement the government allocation and ensure the individual recognition of his units.

Allocation as a means of recognition was most evident, however, in the publications on POWs. New Zealand POWs were the subject of three separate Episodes and Studies booklets - on those captured by the Germans, Italians and Japanese respectively - and a substantial volume by Wynne Mason within the main series.⁸³ There was also an appendix added to *Crete* to cover some of the daring escapes off the island and to end the volume on 'a stout hearted note'.⁸⁴ While Hall's fluid and descriptive style was evident as the author of the three Episodes and Studies, Mason's volume was a model of objective prose, as the following passage suggests:

Clearly a man's physical condition on release depended on the length of his captivity and on his own personal experiences as a captive. If he had worked in the Silesian coal mines or on the Burma-Thailand railway at its worst, if he had been in one of the less fortunate columns that marched across Europe or subjected to severe exposure and privation while attempting to escape, if he had served a spell in a German military prison or been beaten and tortured by the Kempetai, he would probably be in a worse state than if he had not had one or more of these experiences.⁸⁵

⁸² Letter, Kippenberger to Freyberg, 13 January 1956, IA1 181/3/3 part IV, NA.

⁸³ Wynne Mason, *Prisoners of War*, Wellington: War History Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs, 1954.

⁸⁴ Letter, Kippenberger to Freyberg, 19 December 1951, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

⁸⁵ Mason, p. 525.

New Zealand's was the only Commonwealth War History series to have a volume on POWs, who were more generally regarded as being of 'secondary military significance'⁸⁶ to the war. New Zealand had experienced very high numbers go 'into the bag' early in its fighting, with over 8,000 prisoners being captured in the 18 months from Greece to El Alamein.⁸⁷ These included many from Kippenberger's own battalions and brigades. Many spent upwards of four years in captivity. As Kippenberger was also in charge of receiving POWs in England at end of the war he would have been particularly aware of the resentment and frustrations these men could harbour. Mason's POW volume was an important means of bringing recognition to their contribution and sacrifice. Suggestive of Grey's observations on the Vietnam War, however, the measured tone of Mason's volume also seemed an attempt to curb sensationalism in this respect. It is significant that the cloth for the POW volume was green, denoting it as part of the civilian series, rather than red for the Division. The contribution of these men taken out of battle was to the nation rather than to the war.

The unit history of the 28 (Maori) Bn was also important for its emphasis on a contribution of national significance. Written by J.F. Cody, a Pakeha, it was seen as a culturally and politically sensitive but important volume. Freyberg's Foreword emphasised its role in introducing Maori to Pakeha New Zealanders and the rest of the world. He was clearly not writing for the Battalion themselves:

... glorious as these battles were, and as gallant and brave as was the Maori part, it is not only of their bravery that we wish to write. We want to record what fine fighting comrades they are.

... In this book you will discover that the Maoris are fine men and fine soldiers. They are a great joy to be associated with. They are ideal comrades in arms – high-spirited, happy

⁸⁶ Cyril Falls, 'A Window on the World: the New Zealanders in Crete': Review, *Illustrated London News*, 27 March 1954.

⁸⁷ Mason, chart adjacent p. 41.

and brave. They had a further great military virtue – their sense of humour never failed, they always saw humour even in the most difficult situation.⁸⁸

Although not a case study in this thesis, the writing, and particularly the editing, of the 28 (Maori) Bn volume is worthy of a study in itself. Investigation into this volume would offer valuable insights into the significance and consequences of Maori participation in WWII and in New Zealand post-war society.

Along with recognition and tribute, the resources allocated to the unit history programme reflected the same emphasis on citizenship that had underwritten the planning and initiation of the programme as a whole. As has been demonstrated, McCormick repeatedly positioned the war as a test of national character, the strengths and weaknesses of which were to be examined in the course of the Histories. Certainly, like all conflicts, the war gave New Zealanders the opportunity to define themselves against what they were not – German, Italian or Japanese. In Scoullar's volume this sense of 'opposition to the other' was extended to include the British. In Llewellyn's it was minimised to suggest that participants from both sides were little more than victims of the political circumstances that had, for the period of the war, set them against one another.

Yet, for all it loomed large in the justification and scope of the War History project, the assessment of national character was not dealt with explicitly within any one volume in the series. Although behaviours were often described in terms of national characteristics, as in Scoullar's assertion of a 'hard-fighting yet chivalrous division',⁸⁹ these were assumed, or simply attributed, rather than consciously evaluated. As Llewellyn's volume has again shown, trafficking in affirming stereotypes may have provided a valuable means for extending the Division's war experience, vicariously, to the nation as a whole. Only Ross' volume looked at the characteristics and behaviours of New Zealand soldiers systematically, with his question on the effect of morale taking the form of a conscious

⁸⁸ J.F. Cody, *28 (Maori) Battalion*, Wellington: War History Branch of the Department of Internal Affairs, 1956, p. vi.

⁸⁹ Scoullar, p. 127.

assessment. The very specific focus of his work, however, and his claims that the 23 Bn experience was over and above that of other units, effectively negated his findings as representative at a national level. Again, as with an army volume, the lack of a single volume overview of the war and its place in national life made such an evaluation difficult.

While the 48 volumes of the War History provided exhaustive detail and a comprehensive view of the war, it was unlikely that anyone with less than a professional interest would read the entire series. Despite the successful models provided by the Australian and Canadian War Histories, a single volume overview was never factored into the New Zealand series. Kippenberger had thought to write one himself⁹⁰ but he had not started at the time of his death in 1957. While a summary of each campaign could be provided at the end of the last volume that dealt with it, that hardly constituted an assessment of the war. *Italy, Vol. II*, as the last volume of the last campaign in the European Theatre, and also the last campaign volume to be published, contained an excellent Foreword by Monty Fairbrother as Editor-in-Chief. Here he identified characteristics of the Division that he believed had contributed to its success. These included New Zealanders' outdoor lifestyle, the meritocracy system of officer promotion and the regional nature of the battalions. He also linked the fortunes of those at war with the anxieties of those at home. Like Ross he concluded that war had brought New Zealanders closer together and that 'the crises of war display[ed] more sharply than the dilemmas of peacetime the essence of national character'.⁹¹ The quality of Fairbrother's writing suggests it is a great pity he did not contribute a volume himself, and especially not to have picked up on the idea of a single volume after Kippenberger. At three and a half pages, however, his Foreword as it stood was a disappointingly short treatment of what was intended to have been one of the major foci of the War History project.

⁹⁰ Memo, Kippenberger to Harper, 'Summary', 25 November 1955, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

⁹¹ M.C. Fairbrother, 'Foreword' in Robin Kay, *Italy, Vol. II, From Cassino to Trieste*, Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1967, p. viii.

Because the series was intended to operate as a whole, it might be assumed that a national appraisal would have been dealt with in the civil volumes. It was not treated explicitly in Wood's *New Zealand People at War: Political and External Affairs*. Without a conclusion as such, Wood ended his discussion with New Zealand's representation at the establishment of the United Nations (UN). There was no assessment of the national impact of the war nor of national character save two paragraphs in which he linked New Zealand's part in the debates at the UN to the 'idealistic and humanitarian aspirations which were reflected, to an exceptional degree, in New Zealand pronouncements on foreign policy'.⁹²

A more obvious conclusion was evident in Nancy Taylor's *The Home Front, Vol. II*. Here the effect of the war on the nation was summed up in a 10 page epilogue to her 1,295 pages of text. Although its opening question asked 'What, then, had this war now concluded meant to a small country that in two successive generations had so fervently espoused causes arising from the political and territorial ambitions of European powers?'⁹³ the epilogue commenced by providing yet more facts, with statistical summaries of participation and the financial cost of the war overall. Some broad appraisals were provided: New Zealanders were seen as having come closer 'to seeing themselves as just that, New Zealanders'⁹⁴ and the opportunities the war had afforded for refugees, women and Maori were seen as having 'set trends which the post-war boom would firmly establish'.⁹⁵ Again, although the concept of some nationally distinct experience was there, as the conclusion to a 48 volume series, it was disappointingly short.

As national history then, the War History project suffered from a lack of succinctness and the absence of one overarching volume or easily accessible summary on the place of the

⁹² F.L.W. Wood, *The New Zealand People at War: Political and External Affairs*, Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1958, p. 384.

⁹³ Nancy M. Taylor, *The New Zealand People at War: the Home Front, Vol. II*, Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1986, p. 1285.

⁹⁴ Taylor, p. 1288.

⁹⁵ Taylor, p. 1294.

war in New Zealand national life. As indicated in Taylor's volume, where the solution to coming to a conclusion was to provide yet more information, truth in the War History project was seen to rest in the accumulation of factual detail rather than in an overall analysis of what it had meant. In its search for accuracy and representation, the Branch incorporated a wide range of sources and went into battles to a level of detail and complexity that was the admiration of other Commonwealth history teams. Detail and complexity, however, are not necessarily what people are looking for in a national history. As Jock Phillips has pointed out, historical projects aimed at 'searching out the evidence, questioning the received wisdom and appreciating complexity' do not always result in the 'simple myths which help define national identity'.⁹⁶

In this way, the ambitious scale of the New Zealand War Histories has resulted in a final pair of paradoxes. The first of these is that while the Branch strove to include as many different volumes and perspectives as they believed would be necessary to make the project truly representative of national experience, the length and complexity that resulted served to move the series, as a whole, beyond the reach of many readers. By their own measure, success to the Branch was equated with attaining and preserving all, as Kippenberger described it, that 'we did and suffered, escaped and endured and accomplished'.⁹⁷ As national histories then the War Histories were perhaps victims of their own success. This seems particularly so for the readers from subsequent generations. For all the effort that went in to capturing the experiences of everyday New Zealanders and Other Ranks, the concept of the War Histories as national histories seems now to elude New Zealanders. Historiographically, they are perceived as something apart, an appendix to but not a part of our national story. As the then Prime Minister Helen Clark wrote in the first of a series of oral history volumes on WWII by the Ministry of Culture and Heritage in 2001:

⁹⁶ Jock Phillips, 'Our History, Our Selves: the Historian and National Identity, J.C. Beaglehole lecture at the Conference of the New Zealand Historical Association, 1996', *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol. 30, No. 2, (October, 1996), p. 112.

⁹⁷ Kippenberger, 'Radio Address', 18 August 1946, IA1 181/5/1, NA.

The official histories necessarily give a high-level perspective on the various campaigns. They discuss the movements of battalions and the decisions of generals. But war is also about the fears and the excitements and the pain of ordinary soldiers. I was keen that the memories of individual soldiers be recorded for all time while many of the veterans were still amongst us. In twenty years it will be too late.⁹⁸

Despite much of the material, in the unit histories particularly, being recorded and collected during or soon after the war by those who actually participated in it, the War Histories are still seen as inadequate in capturing or creating the national story – of showing what the war ‘was really like’. Although there is a wealth of firsthand material in the Histories, it is enmeshed in such a web of detail that, for a general reader, perhaps, it is overwhelming. While the series has come to be viewed as an excellent set of reference texts, the story of the war continues, like that of Taaffe’s Petrol Company, to work its way into the tradition through simplification and retelling. This, then, has led to the final paradox of the War History project. While information in the War Histories was very detailed, it was often contingent on an understanding of other factors accompanying it. In its consolidation and retelling within the national tradition, however, much of this nuance and context has been progressively stripped away. This chapter concludes by tracing one small aspect of the War History material examined in this thesis through to the present day as it works its way into the national story and the tradition.

At the time that the Branch was formed, Beaglehole noted that in the working of history into the national tradition extraneous detail is often sloughed away, ‘as indeed tradition has a habit of doing without deliberate moulding’,⁹⁹ in pursuit of a simplified coherent account, easily understood within the national story. Peter Burke and Samuel Hynes, too, have considered this tendency toward myth, not as an untruth but rather the ‘simplified, dramatised story that has evolved in our society’ to give, in Hynes’ case, not only meaning to war but also clarity and coherence to ‘the incoherence of war-in-all-its-

⁹⁸ Helen Clark, ‘Foreword’ in Megan Hutching, (ed.), *A Unique Sort of Battle: New Zealanders Remember Crete*, Wellington: Harper Collins / History Groups, Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2001,

⁹⁹ J.C. Beaglehole, ‘History and the New Zealander’, p. 118.

details'.¹⁰⁰ As the need for a simplified account and general appraisal was not addressed in the War History series, this aspect has occurred, needs must, outside of the official programme. As Beaglehole predicted, however, the War Histories have clearly served as reference texts from which these new permutations of the war story have been formed. Tracing this process through, from the Narrative material to publications in the present day illustrates this role in the use of the War Histories in New Zealand today.

The example is again taken from *Crete*. By returning to the exchange between Andrew and Hargest over the withdrawal from Maleme, it is possible to trace the way in which this incident has been simplified and accepted within the tradition through successive publications on the battle. With its controversial nature, Crete has attracted a steady stream of analysis from both military and general historians. Ten publications by New Zealanders on the battle have been identified, from Davin's in 1953 through to 2011. To begin again at the Narrative, it will be remembered that the material on Andrew's withdrawal available to the Branch was both scant and contradictory. Andrew first recorded in the Narrative that Hargest had given him permission to withdraw 'if I must'.¹⁰¹ Following Davin's interview with Andrew this became "if you must, you must", the wording used in the volume.

The suggestion that Hargest had given permission to Andrew to withdraw had always been contested by Murphy who considered the testimony of Leggat and, at first at least, Hawthorn, to be 'almost cast iron evidence to the contrary'.¹⁰² Although it was Andrew's version of events that made it into the volume, to the considerable detriment of Hargest's reputation, this was conditional on the understanding, albeit given 25 pages later, that the Branch had been entirely 'dependent for information [on permission for the

¹⁰⁰ Samuel Hynes, 'Personal Narratives and Commemoration', in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, (eds.), *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp. 207, 220.

¹⁰¹ Andrew, Notes to page adjoining paragraph 101, Copy 3, Crete Campaign Narrative, Volume V, Part II Operations 20 -22 May 1941 (paras 421 – 1026), AL 771/2, NA, UK.

¹⁰² Murphy, 'Comments by W.E. Murphy on Dan Davin's Draft History of the Crete Campaign, pages 136 – 193 included', MS-Papers-5079-665, Draft History of the Crete Campaign – Comments by W.E. Murphy: Davin, Daniel Marcus 1913 – 1990: Literary Papers, Tapuhi IRN: 169582, ATL., pp. 14–15, 8-9.

withdrawal]... on the recollection of Lieutenant-Colonel Andrew'.¹⁰³ This statement was accompanied by two somewhat pointed observations. The first was that Hargest's message to Divisional HQ on the fighting at the airfield gave 'no indication that Andrew was contemplating even a local withdrawal, though this news would surely have been thought of the greatest importance'.¹⁰⁴ The second was that Hargest's own headquarters staff had 'no inkling of what might be in the wind'.¹⁰⁵ Together these statements may be read as an intimation, or recognition, even, that an alternative interpretation was available.

This alternative does not appear to have been pursued, however. In fact the opposite has occurred. Hargest's permission for Andrew's withdrawal has become one of the most reiterated episodes of the battle for Crete but qualification as to its source has slipped away. Tracing the treatment of the account through the subsequent historical publications on the battle shows that the further the histories have come from the original sources, the more this has been the case. Of the nine further publications considered, the first three were worked off the primary sources, the last six off the Histories themselves.

The first publication after Davin to discuss the conversation between Andrew and Hargest in detail was another of the War Histories, Jim Henderson's unit history on the 22 Bn, published in 1958. Working from the same Narrative material as Davin but having also been in close contact with Andrew personally, Henderson concurred with the Branch's interpretation. As an employee of the War History Branch and working on the same series, it would have been almost impossible for him not to. He did not include Davin's discussion on sources, however. Instead he added a qualifier to his account of the conversation, stating:

¹⁰³ Dan Davin, *Crete*, Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1953, p. 136.

¹⁰⁴ Davin, p. 137.

¹⁰⁵ Davin, p. 137.

Colonel Andrew therefore told Brigadier Hargest that he might have to withdraw, and he *understood* the Brigadier to reply: “Well, if you must, you must”.¹⁰⁶

Henderson also gave considerably greater emphasis to the evidence that Hargest later seemed to have no prior knowledge of the withdrawal, stating clearly that when Maj. Leggat visited the Brigadier that night to confirm the withdrawal had taken place he found that ‘Hargest, asleep and in pyjamas, “was absolutely surprised and unprepared”’ by the news.’¹⁰⁷ This information had been available to Davin in the Narrative but he had excluded it from the campaign volume.¹⁰⁸

The next publication was again by Davin, written from Oxford in 1966. It was a magazine length contribution to the popular Purcell series on the Second World War, edited by Liddell Hart. Wary, perhaps, of the alacrity with which the press had picked up on Hargest the first time, he took advantage of the simplified version required in this account to avoid implicating Hargest in Andrew’s decision to withdraw, merely stating that: ‘Shortly after 2100 – the wireless now so weak that this was the last message – Andrew told Hargest that he would have to withdraw to B Company ridge.’¹⁰⁹ No response was given. Although Hargest was described as ‘always inclined to look on the happy side’ and seemingly unable to ‘realise how desperate Andrew believed his situation to be’,¹¹⁰ there was no suggestion that he had authorised Andrew’s withdrawal at all.

Here we must also consider a major publication on the battle that appeared that same year and which was also worked off the New Zealand sources. *The Struggle for Crete, 20 May – 1 June 1941: a Story of Lost Opportunity* by I. McD. G. Stewart. Stewart was a doctor

¹⁰⁶ Jim Henderson, *22 Battalion*, Wellington: War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1958, p. 70, (My italics).

¹⁰⁷ Henderson, p. 71.

¹⁰⁸ Davin, *Crete*, p. 185.

¹⁰⁹ Dan Davin, ‘How Crete was Lost: the Allied View, the German View’ in Liddell Hart, (ed.), *History of the Second World War*, UK: Purnell & Sons, p. 514.

¹¹⁰ Davin, ‘How Crete was Lost’, p. 514.

who had been with the Welch Regiment on the island during the fighting. When writing his book he had been given full access by Davin to all official papers and Narratives used for the New Zealand War History. Although Davin received a severe reprimand from the Branch for this breach of confidentiality,¹¹¹ Stewart's volume was considered to be an excellent piece of work. In its ability to be more critical of New Zealand leadership than Davin had been, it was described by Murphy in a very favourable review as 'Davin Through the Looking Glass'.¹¹² Although Stewart was highly critical of New Zealand commanders in many aspects of the battle, he, too, was careful to avoid implicating Hargest in Andrew's decision to withdraw and made no suggestion that permission was granted:

Andrew felt no lessening of his anxieties. He now told Hargest directly over the radio speaker that he "would have to withdraw to B Company ridge". There is no record of this critical conversation. It is recalled by Andrew, the surviving participant. What is clear is that it provoked no reaction.¹¹³

Viewed collectively, these first four publications on Crete are significant in that, worked off the Narratives and primary sources, they all acknowledge a degree of ambiguity in Andrew's story and the notion of Hargest's approval. While in the campaign volume Davin had allowed the benefit of the doubt over the withdrawal to fall Andrew's way, and had gone to considerable lengths to try to justify Hargest's behaviour in the light of this, the subsequent authors, and Davin himself in his second publication, took care, in varying degrees, not to repeat this implication. Henderson, particularly, included material omitted from Davin's official volume that suggested that Hargest had been totally unaware of Andrew's decision. From the 1980s, however, a renewed interest in the battle has seen a steady stream of New Zealand publications on Crete, all of which have foregone the primary material in preference to using the War Histories as sources in

¹¹¹ Memo, Ian Wards (as Acting Executive Officer, Historical Publications Branch) to C.E.O. (Cultural), Department of Internal Affairs, 4 September 1968; Letter, Davin to Wards, 29 October 1968, IA1 181/32/2, NA.

¹¹² Murphy, 'Crete – New Zealand Command Failures', p. 28.

¹¹³ I. McD. G. Stewart, p. 177.

themselves and in each of which the original ambiguity surrounding the exchange has slipped away.

The first of these publications was Tony Simpson's *Operation Mercury*, in 1981. With all surrounding references to Davin's Official History, Simpson acknowledged that the conversation between Andrew and Hargest on withdrawal from the airfield had been a 'curious exchange', after which Hargest appeared to have behaved irrationally. He did not acknowledge, however, that the source of the information on this exchange had come only from Andrew himself. Instead he used Andrew's account to lay the blame squarely with Hargest:

In such a circumstance Hargest's reaction might have been expected to have been that Andrew must not contemplate withdrawal. Instead he replied, "If you must, you must". Rarely since the issue of the infamous "Charge the guns!" order at Balaclava can a commander in a crisis have given such a vague direction.¹¹⁴

John McLeod, writing in 1986, used many primary sources in his discussion of Maleme in *Myth and Reality: the New Zealand Soldier in World War II*.¹¹⁵ It appears, however, that although his account of Hargest's response to Andrew's request to withdraw is unreferenced, it also came from Davin's War History. In what McLeod, an army officer, described as an 'amateurish' handling of the defence at the aerodrome, he too laid accountability with Hargest: 'Although a glance at a map would have warned Hargest of the dire implications of this decision, he made no effort to stop Andrew, saying "If you must you must"'.¹¹⁶ Again, although Hargest is judged as incompetent, the conditional information that the account of Hargest's reply came only from Andrew, is not given.

¹¹⁴ Tony Simpson, *Operation Mercury: the Battle for Crete 1941*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1981, p. 191.

¹¹⁵ John McLeod, *Myth and Reality: the New Zealand Soldier in World War II*, Auckland: Reed Methuen, 1986.

¹¹⁶ McLeod, p. 37.

In a highly scholarly text written from the MA thesis of John Tonkin-Covell, Barber and Tonkin-Covell also repeated Davin's official version in *Freyberg: Churchill's Salamander*.¹¹⁷ Again, while the withdrawal received a wealth of close analysis, the qualifier that the source of the Branch's information came only from Andrew and the possibility that there may have been an alternative interpretation was not acknowledged.

118

This pattern has continued into the last decade, with five further publications, several of them at reference level, all treating the War Histories as definitive sources on the permission for Andrew's withdrawal. As might be expected, a number have added their own embellishments as material from the War Histories works its way into the national tradition. Harper in his section on Crete in the *Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History* (2000) maintains, for example, that Hargest 'at first concurred, "If you must, you must"', but then notes that he, rather incongruously, sent two companies forward in support.¹¹⁹ Matthew Wright, in 2003, again referenced his source to Davin's War History but added his own subjective element: 'Hargest seemed despondent. "If you must," he told Andrew, "you must"'.¹²⁰ Writing in 2010, and referencing to Henderson's unit history, David Filer, in *Crete, Death from the Skies* gives the most explicit linking of Hargest's culpability into the counterfactual, stating: 'Hargest made the fateful reply, which would ultimately ensure the loss of Crete, "well if you must, you must"'.¹²¹ (This pattern was also mirrored in an Australian publication that same year, also referenced to Henderson, which added its own layer of atmosphere and conviction: 'Over the crackling airwaves, Hargest replied, "Well, if you must you must", adding '[w]ith those six words,

¹¹⁷ Laurie Barber & John Tonkin-Covell, *Freyberg: Churchill's Salamander*, Auckland: Century Hutchinson, 1989.

¹¹⁸ Barber & Tonkin-Covell, p. 63, the footnote is to Davin, p.110; Stewart, p. 174.

¹¹⁹ Glyn Harper, 'Crete', in Ian McGibbon, (ed.), *Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 126. Harper's section is referenced to Davin, *Crete*, and Barber & Tonkin-Covell.

¹²⁰ Matthew Wright, *Battle for Crete: New Zealand's Near-Run Affair, 1941*, Auckland: Reed Publishing, 2003, p. 57.

¹²¹ David Filer, *Crete, Death from the Skies: New Zealand's Role in the Loss of Crete*, Auckland: David Bateman, 2010, p. 72

he virtually signed Crete's death warrant'.¹²²) And finally, the Ministry of Culture and Heritage website, nzhistory.net, updated in 2011, has included the exchange in its section on Crete, stating, understandably perhaps given the previous accounts, that 'Hargest agreed to the withdrawal famously replying "if you must, you must" before ordering two companies forward'.¹²³ This same information is repeated later in the site under the label 'Controversies' > 'Mistakes at Maleme'.

An overall analysis of these publications, then, shows that material from the War Histories that was once contingent on the recognition of contributing factors has become stripped of the context in which it was provided and integrated in a simplified form into the broader national record. From 1953 to 1966, while authors worked directly from the Narratives and primary sources, the limitations of the sources on the exchange between Andrew and Hargest were recognised and qualified accordingly. From the 1980s onward, however, the tendency to use Davin's War History, and to a lesser degree Henderson's, as a source in itself has led to this contingency slipping away. Hargest's permission for Andrew's withdrawal has now become accepted as fact while "if you must you must" has been included uncritically as evidence in every version. Through this and the ready acceptance of the counterfactual, Hargest has been singled out, as Filer shows and Latham predicted, as 'the man who lost Crete.' In this pattern subjective elements have also been added as each author has sought to add interest or colour to the account with their individual interpretation.

As well as illustrating the integration of empirical history into the national tradition, these observations on the use of the War Histories by subsequent generations also point to the oddly ambivalent position they occupy in the historical environment today. While they are used authoritatively, if somewhat uncritically, by military and popular historians on the one hand, they still sit uncomfortably within the field of New Zealand social history

¹²² Peter Thompson, *ANZAC Fury: The Bloody Battle for Crete 1941*, North Sydney NSW: William Hienemann, 2010, p. 284.

¹²³ 'The battle: days 1 – 3 –The Battle for Crete', Ministry for Culture and Heritage, URL: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/the-battle-for-crete/the-battle-days-1-3>, updated 20-May-2011.

on the other. The dichotomy between the empirical and the memorial, and between criticism and the national pride has robbed them of a clear place in New Zealand historiography. As neither popular histories nor conventional academic works, they are open to cynicism from those suspicious of their official status and government sponsorship, yet their subject matter has set them outside the interests of those best placed to recognise the quality of the research and professionalism that went into them. Ruth Ross recorded that during her protracted debate over the paraphrasing in the *Documents* series she met with considerable distain from academic historians. This was not for having challenged Kippenberger over the War Histories, but for having read them in the first place.¹²⁴

Much of the rationale behind the War History series was to provide a factual base on which to found a national tradition of the war so that it might be a source of cohesion and strength rather than division and discontent to the nation. While they do represent by far the largest repository of information on WWII in New Zealand, to use the War History series now as reference works only is to miss significant opportunity. The War Histories were indeed official, but they were also contemporary, social and collective. As the case studies in this thesis have shown, each volume was a historical text in its own right, to be read and deconstructed as representative of both the individuals and social climate that produced it.

Writing contemporaneously with the War History project, R.G. Collingwood described the Ancient Greek perception of the historian as ‘the autobiographer of his generation’.¹²⁵ This was in the sense that he would be called on to write only when ‘memorable things have happened which call for a chronicler among the contemporaries of the people who have seen them’.¹²⁶ While the terms, as Collingwood defined them, would be wrong for history at an empirical level, a chronicle not being a history and autobiography not being

¹²⁴ Letter, Ruth Ross to Pat Kenny, 15 April 1956, MS 1442, Box 91:1, AR.

¹²⁵ R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, London: Oxford University Press, 1946, (Oxford Paperbacks, 1963), p. 27.

¹²⁶ Collingwood, p. 27.

a profession, he captures the essence of the War Histories as a national project: an historiographical undertaking of extraordinary proportions arising from the extraordinary events of the war and one in which authors were called on to write, not because they were historians, but because they were seen as the contemporary witnesses best able to speak of the events for the 'people who had seen them'. That was, at its most fundamental, the national mandate of the War History project. It was for empiricism, as a new form of history, regarded at that time to be most appropriate for conducting the task, to adapt to the task at hand. That it did so, across 48 separate publications, 37 different authors, 2 editors and, at the extreme end of its completion, four decades, was a mark of the commitment of that generation to its undertaking.

To identify the tensions between memory and history, nation and war that underwrote the War History project is to juxtapose the rational and objective against the felt elements of national life. Although empiricism, evaluation and criticism provided the analytical framework around which the recording and assessment of the war took place, they do not seem to be, as Helen Clark's comments suggested, what people are looking for in the war now. The popularity of *Journey toward Christmas* and indeed all of the unit histories when they come available at auction, the constant rewriting and reworking of battles such as Crete, and Taaffe's interpretation of Petrol Company all reflect a call to history, not as the wish to collect empirical facts but as the need to simplify and understand; nor to provide a set record as the War Histories perhaps anticipated, but rather to see the past, as Collingwood termed it, autobiographically. That is to understand not only the facts but the place of the war, in the generation of those who participated but also in the personal stories of the next.

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