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**Freyberg's High-Command
Relationships, 1939-1941**

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the
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Abstract

This thesis analyses General Bernard Freyberg's high-command relationships from November 1939 to June 1941. The civil-military relationship was inadequately formed and therefore incapable of functioning effectively. Coalition relations with Middle East Command became disharmonious in September 1940 because the British refused to accept Dominions as independent allies. Unable to unite his force until February 1941, Freyberg's officers formed an independent subculture that challenged his command. The 1941 campaign in Greece brought these relationship shortcomings to the surface. The turning point in all three relationships took place in Cairo in June 1941 where, in meetings with Freyberg, Prime Minister Peter Fraser implemented remedies to the relationship failures and also initiated changes in the New Zealand Government's alliance relationship with Whitehall. Personalities and interpersonal relations are shown to be central to effective high-command relationships.

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Introduction

This thesis is a departure from the concerns of most New Zealand military historians of the Second World War. It is an analysis of Major-General Bernard Freyberg's high-command relationships: his civil-military relations with the New Zealand Government, his command relations with the officers of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force (2NZEF), and his relations with coalition partners. The alliance relationship between the New Zealand and British governments is also examined, but to a lesser degree. The scope is akin to the 360-degree assessment process because it provides a "full circle" perspective on Freyberg's interaction with his immediate subordinates (senior officers), peers (coalition partners) and superiors (the Government and theatre commanders-in-chief).¹ The period covered is from Freyberg's appointment in November 1939 until June 1941 when, after New Zealand's high-command relationships had all malfunctioned, Prime Minister Peter Fraser and Freyberg met in Cairo to change or correct the relationships.

¹ Also known as multi-source assessment. The term *full circle* is from "360-Degree Assessment: An Overview", US Office of Personnel Management, Performance Management and Incentive Awards Division, September 1997, 1.

The historiography of New Zealand's participation in the Second World War has been dominated by the official histories, which set out to provide a record for the state, to satisfy public demand for an account of the conflict, and to serve as a memorial to those who did not return.² The official histories also aimed to construct a consensus view that would influence tradition.³ It is likely that one (probably unintentional) influence was to focus New Zealand military history on operations and the experiences of those who took part. The postwar "new military history", which broadened the scope of military historiography and reduced the preoccupation with generalship, has also contributed to the operational and participant focus.⁴ One result is that New Zealand military history has been accused of being more concerned with narrative than analysis.⁵ The field of high command has, it is true, been little analysed. Nor has it been narrated. As historian John Crawford observed, New Zealand military history is "notable for the comparative dearth of scholarly articles and books on ... matters of high policy".⁶ Ian McGibbon recorded that there is still no

² Ian McGibbon, "Something of Them is Recorded Here': Official History in New Zealand", in Jeffrey Grey (ed.), *The Last Word?: Essays on Official History in the United States and British Commonwealth*, Westport, Ct: Praeger, 2003, p. 53.

³ Rachael Elizabeth Bell, "Memory, History, Nation, War: The Official Histories of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939-45", PhD Thesis, Massey University, 2012, p. 2, and p. 253.

⁴ See Robert M. Citino, "Military Histories Old and New: A Reintroduction", *The American Historical Review*, 112:4, October 2007, 1070-1090.

⁵ Deborah Montgomerie, "Reconnaissance: Twentieth-Century New Zealand War History at Century's Turn", *New Zealand Journal of History*, 37:1, 2003, 62-63.

⁶ John Crawford, Introduction, in John Crawford (ed.), *Kia Kaha: New Zealand in the Second World War*, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 7.

“authoritative critique” of New Zealand’s role in the war.⁷ Many recent histories (not all of them scholarly) are dominated by oral accounts, often by other-rank participants, that frequently ignore command and strategic issues.⁸ A New Zealand equivalent to David Horner’s *High Command* (which examined Australia’s Second World War strategic relationships) has yet to be produced.⁹ High command is largely uncharted territory in New Zealand military historiography.

Not only has high command been a neglected area of study, it has not been well served by archives, libraries and museums in New Zealand. Only one New Zealand general (Major-General Howard Kippenberger) published an autobiography, and there are few worthwhile biographies of senior military and political figures.¹⁰ Of the communications between Freyberg and the Government, only a portion has survived in archives, and there are significant omissions from other records.¹¹ The lack of high command source material is not a uniquely New Zealand or military phenomenon. A difficulty

⁷ Ian McGibbon, “New Zealand’s Strategical Approach”, *Kia Kaha*, p. 10.

⁸ David Filer, *Crete: Death from the Skies, New Zealand’s Role in the Loss of Crete*, Auckland: David Bateman Ltd, 2010, p. 9.

⁹ D. M. Horner, *High Command: Australia and its Allied Strategy 1939-1945*, Canberra, ACT: Australian War Memorial, 1982.

¹⁰ Bassett and King’s *Tomorrow Comes the Song* is the only scholarly biography of Fraser, and Paul Freyberg’s *Bernard Freyberg VC* is the best biography of Freyberg. Kippenberger had two biographers. There is one journal article about William Jordan. An edited version of Carl Berendsen’s autobiography and his letters have been published. Jones (the Minister of Defence), the two CGSs (Generals Puttick and Duigan), and all New Zealanders who held general rank in World War II (except Kippenberger) have no article- or book-length biographies.

¹¹ Omissions of relevance to this thesis include Freyberg’s personal papers (in private ownership in the UK), Ministry of Defence communications with Freyberg, Prime Minister’s Department records, and communications between Freyberg and Middle East Command.

with any investigation of the performance of high-level office-holders is that most important decisions are made in private and are scantily documented.¹²

The five chapters in the body of this thesis examine: (1) Freyberg's charter and the foundations of the civil-military relationship; (2) coalition relations with Middle East Command; (3) Freyberg-senior officer relations; (4) the lead up to Greece, which precipitated a breakdown in high-command relations; and (5) the meetings Fraser had with Freyberg in Cairo in June 1941, where remedies to the relationship breakdowns were made.

It is contended that the reason Freyberg volunteered his services to New Zealand was because he rightly or wrongly believed that his forced retirement from the British Army in 1937 meant he would not be able to achieve the level of autonomy he desired after he returned to the British Army in 1939. New Zealand offered a better opportunity to exercise the self-determination that Freyberg, a self-made man, sought.

The development of Freyberg's charter has not been fully examined in New Zealand military history. It is usually held that Freyberg wrote his charter himself and that the Government changed not a word of it. It is here established that the draft charter Freyberg brought to New Zealand was re-written by the Attorney-

¹² J. Kahl, cited in Andrew Kakabadse, Nada K. Kakabadse and Ruth Barratt, "Chairman and Chief Executive Officer (CEO): That Sacred and Secret Relationship", *Journal of Management Development*, 25:2, 2006, 135.

General, and was possibly re-written again. Freyberg was not the author of the approved version of his charter. It is also posited that it was during this hitherto unreported re-writing that a clause prohibiting the piecemeal use of the force (which was almost certainly in the draft charter) was lost, and that Freyberg's right to direct communication with the Government on any matter was restricted to specific topics.

The final matter chapter 1 examines is Deputy Prime Minister Peter Fraser's failure to explain to Freyberg the kind of reporting and counsel expected from him, the reasons the Labour Government formed 2NZEF, and how it wanted it to participate in the war. In January 1940 Freyberg was allowed to go into battle without knowing the Government's priorities, its expectations of him, or the Government's strategic concerns. The civil-military relationship is found to have been inadequately established.

Freyberg's coalition relations with the British Army officers of Middle East Command is the subject of chapter 2. The historiography of coalition relations in the Middle East has not identified the two distinct phases in the relationship. Until September 1940 Freyberg could not form a division and with Wavell's 90,000 troops facing over half a million Italians, Freyberg and the Government agreed to detach units to assist the hard-pressed Middle East Command. Freyberg and the Government were disturbed by General Sir Archibald Wavell's plan to dismember

2NZEF in August 1940, but it was the arrival of the third echelon in Egypt in September 1940 that ignited the acrimony that marked the second phase of coalition relations in the Middle East.

The arrival of the third echelon made forming a division possible. But when Freyberg requested the return of detached units (to consolidate with the third echelon and thereby form a division) he encountered resistance from Middle East Command. The British reluctance to return units Freyberg had lent out made it apparent that they did not regard 2NZEF as an independent allied force but as a resource pool within the British Army. The cause of the animosity was not, as is often contended, detaching units, but obtaining their return so that the New Zealand Division could be formed.

Chapter 2 also examines Australia's Lieutenant-General Thomas Blamey's reactions to detachment requests, the contention that Freyberg suffered a conflict of loyalties in 1940-41, and shortcomings in inter-governmental agreements. The base cause of the coalition friction is found to have been disagreement over Dominion status. Freyberg essentially fought a political battle for Dominion rights with his military commander-in-chief.

Chapter 3 analyses the relationship between Freyberg and his officers. Organisational culture theory is used as the analysis methodology. The theory exposes the flaws in previous historical scrutiny of Freyberg-officer relations and reveals the hidden cause of the discontent. Unable to consolidate the division because its

echelons were dispersed geographically and over time, Freyberg was unable to impose his *culture* (command) and 2NZEF's officers developed a subculture of their own which, by early 1941, challenged Freyberg's command. In May 1941 the officers took their complaints to Fraser. Fraser was so alarmed by what he heard that he considered dismissing Freyberg. The contention that Freyberg's British nationality was responsible for the officers' disaffection with Freyberg is challenged, and the four remedial processes Freyberg used to restore harmony are identified.

The lead up to and battle in Greece caused breakdowns in all New Zealand's high-command relationships. Influenced by Wavell's duplicity, Freyberg chose not to inform the Government of his misgivings about Greece. Officer discontent boiled over. The Government made hasty and knowingly ill-informed decisions concerning Greece, and allowed itself to be manipulated by the British War Cabinet. In addition to exposing the high command failures in civil-military, Freyberg-senior officer, coalition, and inter-governmental relations around the time of Greece, chapter 4 also exposes failures in Britain's civil-military relations and examines how the campaign's high-command issues have been treated differently in Australian and New Zealand military historiography.

The little-documented, often-overlooked meetings Fraser had with Freyberg in Cairo in June 1941 marked a watershed in New Zealand's high-command relationships and are the topic of chapter 5.

Many historians acknowledge that the meetings took place, but few recognise that the meetings constituted a turning point in all New Zealand's high-command relationships.

Angered at learning that Freyberg had withheld from the Government his reservations about Greece, Fraser made it plain that Freyberg was henceforward to keep the Government informed. Fraser and Freyberg came to a long-overdue understanding about reporting and counsel that served efficaciously for the rest of the war. Fraser learnt how Freyberg was treated by Middle East Command and that intelligence led to Fraser helping Freyberg in two ways. He set conditions on the use of New Zealand troops, and he altered the Government's relationship with Whitehall.

Three months after the meetings Freyberg repeated his pre-Greece behaviour and did not inform Fraser of his doubts about a forthcoming operation. Shortly afterwards, though, he began to refuse operations that did not meet Fraser's conditions and, in early 1942, when Middle East Command persisted in treating him as a subordinate and wanted to split up the Division, Freyberg withdrew 2NZEF to another command.

Fraser almost certainly raised the officers' criticisms of Freyberg in the meetings and he probably influenced the shape of the resolution of them. The meetings properly aligned 2NZEF's use with the Government's strategic concerns, as Freyberg's decision-making in battle in 1943-44 showed. In order to better support

Freyberg with Whitehall (and in response to pressure within New Zealand to be less submissive) the Government's relations with Britain changed from acquiescence to something more equitable. Much-needed processes were put in place in Wellington to handle British requests to use 2NZEF and, after spending time in London and developing a measure of personal rapport with Churchill, Fraser became more adept in getting New Zealand's way.

In examining New Zealand's Second World War high-command relations several themes emerge: the importance of interpersonal relations; Freyberg's nationality; Dominion rights; and the strategic purpose of 2NZEF.

That personalities affect high-command relationships may seem an incongruous assertion when the training and professionalism needed in modern warfare and the harsh nature of war generally are considered. But most conflict between politicians and soldiers in British history was, Michael Howard observed, "embittered—as such struggles usually are—by personalities."¹³ Alex Danchev determined that Churchill's direction of the war was "supremely personal."¹⁴ The major issue in modern civil-military relations is not armed revolt by the military but the maintenance of an effective working relationship between the soldier and the

¹³ Michael Howard, "Introduction: The Armed Forces as a Political Problem", in Michael Howard (ed.), *Soldiers and Governments: Nine Studies in Civil-Military Relations*, Westport, Ct: Greenwood Press, 1957, 1978, p. 21.

¹⁴ Alex Danchev, "Great Britain: The Indirect Strategy", in David Renyolds, Warren F. Kimball and A.O. Chubarian (eds.), *Allies at War: The Society, American and British Experience, 1939-1945*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1994, p. 7.

politician.¹⁵ Australian historian David Horner found that “the relationship between [General Douglas] MacArthur, [Australian Prime Minister John] Curtin and [General] Blamey cannot be understood without examining their personalities.” Indeed, “the problem of personalities” extends to “the command relationships between generals and politicians, and between the different national generals in allied forces.”¹⁶ The importance of interpersonal relations has also been identified in New Zealand’s high-command relationships. Professor Frederick Wood wrote that “the personal links ... between Peter Fraser and both Churchill and Freyberg were of untold importance to wartime New Zealand.”¹⁷ Had New Zealand’s senior officers (most of them Territorials with limited command experience) been less parochial, better trained and more experienced, they would likely have appreciated Freyberg’s position in 1940-41 and been less petulant. Wavell’s intransigence soured coalition relations in the Middle East. Personalities profoundly affected all New Zealand’s high-command relationships.

Freyberg’s nationality influenced the civil-military relationship. Because Freyberg was not a New Zealander, he and the New Zealand Government did not know each other well enough to have the rapport that was proven necessary. Freyberg’s

¹⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory of Politics and Civil-Military Relations*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1957, p. 20.

¹⁶ D. M. Horner, *High Command: Australia and its Allied Strategy 1939-1945*, Canberra, ACT: Australian War Memorial, 1982, pp. xx-xxi.

¹⁷ F.L.W. Wood, *Political and External Affairs*, Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, 1958, p. 100.

nationality complicated coalition relations because his being British made it easier for the British officers of Middle East Command to consider him a British Army subordinate. Many of 2NZEF's officers regarded Freyberg as too British and that perception contributed to the difficulties in Freyberg-officer relations until mid 1941.

Dominion rights were fundamental to the differences of opinion Freyberg had with Middle East Command. The Government wanted 2NZEF to be an independent force but did not make that sufficiently plain to either Freyberg or Whitehall and consequently both the civil-military relationship and the Government's alliance relations with Britain needed correcting by June 1941.

The Government's strategic intent in forming 2NZEF and their views on how it should be used were not explained to Freyberg in 1939. Freyberg was therefore unable to align his actions with the Government's objectives. This fundamental shortcoming in the civil-military relationship influenced Freyberg's behaviour with his coalition partners and had an effect on his relations with his officers because he was unable to show how his decisions reflected Government policy.

If New Zealand's Second World War high-command relationships display one common failing it was lack of rapport. There are three interconnected constituents of rapport: dialogue (mutual two-way information exchange), empathy, and acceptance. It was not until after the Fraser-Freyberg meetings in Cairo in June

1941 that rapport was established in the civil-military and Freyberg-officer relationships. Rapport was not evident in coalition relations until mid 1942, when commanders who accepted Dominion rights were appointed to the Middle East. The dispersal of New Zealand echelons in 1940 prevented Freyberg from establishing rapport with his senior officers.

Laurie Barber, John Tonkin-Covell and other historians have assessed Freyberg's performance as a divisional commander but almost no analysis of Freyberg's conduct as General Officer Commanding (GOC) 2NZEF has taken place. (Put briefly, as commanding officer of the New Zealand Division, Freyberg was responsible for the fighting force; as GOC 2NZEF, Freyberg gained responsibility for non-divisional formations such as hospitals, education, payroll and discipline, and also for liaison with the Government and coalition partners.) Stevens' volume of the official history, *Problems of 2NZEF*, is the only work that concentrates on expeditionary force rather than divisional matters. The high-command relationships that are analysed here (civil-military, coalition, command) largely relate to Freyberg's role as GOC of 2NZEF rather than his other responsibility as Commanding Officer of the New Zealand Division. In some respects this thesis incidentally provides a partial assessment of Freyberg's performance as GOC. The focus, however, is on examining New Zealand's high-command relationships in 1939-41. Consequently, the performance

of the New Zealand Government, the British Army and the senior officers of 2NZEF are as important as Freyberg's conduct. The figure who emerges as the saviour of the relationships is Prime Minister Fraser. The initiatives and changes Fraser implemented at, or as a result of, his June 1941 meetings with Freyberg corrected New Zealand's high-command relationships. This thesis establishes why the relationships broke down and made Fraser's intervention necessary, and it demonstrates that his solutions were effective because they recognised the importance of personalities and interpersonal relations in high command.

1. *Civil-military relations*

In 1935, Major-General Bernard Freyberg, VC, CB, CMG, DSO was a well-known hero of the First World War with a successful and promising career as a British Army officer. In January of that year he was selected as the next GOC of the Presidency and Assam District in India, a prestigious appointment. When a pre-appointment medical examination discovered that he had a heart murmur, Freyberg's posting was cancelled.¹⁸ Freyberg argued about the medical finding but to no avail and was retired in 1937. The British Army had been embarrassed by the deaths of a number of high-ranking officers and was wary of retaining senior officers with medical conditions.¹⁹ The War Office was also concerned that with another war likely older officers needed to be replaced with younger ones.²⁰ On the outbreak of war Freyberg returned to the British Army as GOC Salisbury Plain Area, a "sedentary", "home only" position from which his medical status did not disqualify him. He

¹⁸ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC: Soldier of Two Nations*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991, p. 181.

¹⁹ Interview with Major-General W.G. Stevens, June 1969, ATL 2000-094-5.

²⁰ John Moremon, "The Professional Soldier Left High and Dry: Military Pensions of the Australian Staff Corps and its Antecedents, 1903-1948", *War and Society*, 26:2, October 2007, p. 44.

quickly became dissatisfied with it,²¹ and in early September 1939 Freyberg wrote to William Jordan, New Zealand's High Commissioner in London, offering his services to the New Zealand Government.²² Although born in Britain, Freyberg spent his formative years in New Zealand, and his mother and brothers lived in Wellington. Freyberg could claim a connection with New Zealand.

This chapter examines the reasons Freyberg wanted to command 2NZEF and why the New Zealand Government appointed him. The reasons Deputy Prime Minister Peter Fraser supported New Zealand's participation in the war are discussed to expose his concerns and intentions regarding 2NZEF. Freyberg's 385-word charter is shown to be an inadequate document. The contention that Freyberg wrote his own charter and that the Government changed nothing in his draft is shown to be erroneous. Freyberg's draft gave him the right to direct communication with the Government on any matter. That right was restricted to three topics in the approved version of his charter. A clause prohibiting the piecemeal use of 2NZEF was removed. The Attorney-General is identified as the author of the approved charter, not Freyberg. The changes to and omissions from Freyberg's charter complicated coalition relations in the Middle East and probably contributed to his silence regarding his misgivings about Greece in 1941. In addition to these documentary

²¹ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, pp. 196-7.

²² Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 197; and NZ High Commissioner to Prime Minister New Zealand 16 September 1939, *Documents Relating to New Zealand's Participation in the Second World War 1939 - 45*, Vol. I, Wellington: War History Branch, 1949, #27, p. 23.

shortcomings, Freyberg was sent off to the Middle East insufficiently briefed on Fraser's and the Government's expectations of both him and the use of the force. New Zealand's civil-military relationship is, therefore, found to have been poorly established.

Freyberg's offer of his services was probably received in Wellington with interest. Freyberg was a high-profile figure and the Government was searching for a GOC. Even though many Labour members of parliament had been pacifists in World War I, the Labour Government, which was elected in 1935 and recognised that a major conflict was likely, increased defence spending. The lion's share went to the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) and the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy.²³ The Army, the service many Labour politicians feared might be used against them, remained the poor relation.²⁴ In 1938 four Territorial Army (reserve) colonels went public with their concerns about the Army's state of neglect.²⁵ In 1939 the Army had a permanent *strength* of just 556 officers and men, augmented by 10,364 Territorials.²⁶ The Army's officers were ageing, its equipment was out of date and training

²³ Gerald Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield: New Zealand and its Allies 1939 - 45*, Auckland: Viking Penguin, 2009, p. 30. The Royal New Zealand Navy was not formed until 1941.

²⁴ F. L. W. Wood, *The New Zealand People at War: Political and External Affairs*, Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1958, 1971, p. 23 and p. 63. The New Zealand Army was not officially instituted until 1950. "Army" is universally used in histories of the Second World War—and here.

²⁵ Laurie Barber, "The History of New Zealand's Army: From the Veldt to Italy", seven radio talks of March-April 1984, p.7 of 10 April broadcast transcript, NAM.

²⁶ Fort Dorset Conference papers, 1980, ATL MS-Papers-9030-35. Other sources give slightly different numbers for permanent staff in 1939 but all find it to be under or around 600.

levels were basic.²⁷ Major-General John Duigan, the Chief of the General Staff (CGS), was thought unfit for the role of GOC and there was no suitable candidate identified in New Zealand.²⁸

A month after Freyberg wrote to Jordan, a routine medical inspection reclassified Freyberg as “forward everywhere”. The change made him eligible for active service. Freyberg promptly sent a copy of his new medical status and a request for a “training and fighting job in France” to General Sir Edmund Ironside, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS).²⁹

That Freyberg’s September offer to New Zealand preceded his October medical clearance raises a question about why Freyberg chose to volunteer his services to New Zealand. If he did so when in despair at being denied an active role in the British Army, the offer could be seen as an expediency, a fit of pique even, and in no way flattering to New Zealand. But in the first week of November, three weeks after his eligibility for a British fighting command had been restored, Freyberg accepted an invitation to meet with Fraser, who was in London for meetings, representing Prime Minister Michael Savage, who was terminally ill. Fraser and Freyberg, along with Carl Berendsen (head of the Prime Minister’s Department) and

²⁷ Ian McGibbon, “New Zealand’s Strategic Approach” in John Crawford (ed.), *Kia Kaha: New Zealand in the Second World War*, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 200, p. 11; Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, p. 51; and Freyberg to Dewing, 8 January 1940, in Miscellaneous Personal Private Correspondence, ANZ R16 700 607.

²⁸ Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, p. 64.

²⁹ Letter from “Other Freyberg papers” quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 198.

Lieutenant-Colonel W. G. “Bill” Stevens (Fraser’s military advisor), met for dinner at the Savoy Hotel.

Fraser is unlikely to have cut much of a dash in the opulent Savoy. His trousers were often so crumpled that they looked as if he had slept in them.³⁰ Seldom smiling and in constant discomfort from haemorrhoids, Fraser had such poor eyesight that the only way he could read a document was to hold it in his enormous hands a few inches from the tip of his bespectacled nose.³¹ Whatever his outward appearances, Fraser was a pivotal and respected figure in the Labour Party. He served as the Minister of Education, Health and Police and was one of the principal architects of Labour’s cradle-to-grave welfare system.³² In 1939 Fraser was the *de facto* Prime Minister.³³ (After Savage died in March 1940, Fraser became Prime Minister.)

Born in the village of Fearn, Scotland, Fraser’s upbringing could be described as frugal, Spartan and Presbyterian.³⁴ Fraser remained true to his roots and throughout his life was humourless, abstemious and prudish.³⁵ He received the free elementary schooling that was available in Scotland and as much secondary education as the family’s limited means allowed. Fraser trained as a carpenter

³⁰ Michael Bassett with Michael King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song: A Life of Peter Fraser*, Auckland: Penguin Books, 2000, p. 75.

³¹ Interview with Sir Carl Berendsen, Wellington, 8 January 1971, ATL 2012-028-150; Interview with Doris McIntosh, ATL 2000-094-2; and Alister McIntosh, “Working with Peter Fraser in Wartime”, *New Zealand Journal of History*, 10:1, 1976, 3 - 20.

³² James Thorn, *Peter Fraser: New Zealand’s Wartime Prime Minister*, London: Odhams Press Ltd, 1952, p. 124.

³³ Thorn, *Fraser*, p. 162.

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 14.

³⁵ McIntosh’s “Working with Fraser” is probably the best single description of Fraser’s wartime manner and conduct.

and for a few years worked in London, where he became a socialist.³⁶ In late 1910 he emigrated to New Zealand and promptly became involved in trade-union and socialist-party activities.³⁷ Fraser was a firebrand. “I am a revolutionary Socialist. I am an Industrial Unionist. Socialism is my goal” he announced in 1912.³⁸ As left-wing political factions overcame their differences, moderated and coalesced into the New Zealand Labour Party (1916), Fraser mitigated his radicalism and sought to achieve his political objectives through parliamentary processes rather than revolutionary upheaval.³⁹

On one point, however, Fraser remained an incendiary. He held that the conduct of conscription in the First World War was iniquitous. Fraser was neither a pacifist nor an antimilitarist and volunteered for military service in both wars.⁴⁰ His objection to conscription in the First World War was specific. It offended Fraser’s socialist principles that men were being compelled to risk their lives fighting while capital and commerce were unaffected or making money from the conflict.⁴¹ As he saw it, the working class was being unfairly burdened. Fraser spent 1917 in gaol after making

³⁶ Thorn, *Fraser*, p. 14.

³⁷ Bassett with King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, pp. 39-43.

³⁸ Quoted in Thorn, *Fraser*, p. 40. [Original capitals.]

³⁹ Thorn, *Fraser*, p. 49.

⁴⁰ David Grant, “Anti-Conscription, Conscription and the Referendum” in Margaret Clark (ed.), *Peter Fraser: Master Politician*, Palmerston North: The Dunmore Press, 1998, p. 132; Bassett with King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 120; and “King’s Fraser Notes”, ATL 2000-094-2.

⁴¹ Bassett with King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 69.

comments critical of conscription.⁴² Politically unaffected by his internment, fewer than twelve months after his release Fraser was elected to the House of Representatives.⁴³

Fraser was one of the triumvirate that effectively ran the Labour Government in the pre-war years. Finance Minister Walter Nash and, until he became ill, Prime Minister Savage were the other two.⁴⁴ Fraser was respected by senior public servants for his dedication, integrity and political acumen. These same mandarins also reviled Fraser for being chronically unpunctual, inconsiderate to staff, an incompetent chairman, and disorganised.⁴⁵ In 1937 Fraser instituted the Council of Defence and its associated body, the Organisation for National Security.⁴⁶ These linked entities, and the effort Fraser expended on them, prepared the country for the coming conflict and have been credited with making New Zealand's transition to a war footing in 1939 smooth and orderly.⁴⁷ One of Fraser's duties in London was to identify a suitable GOC for 2NZEF.

Freyberg met with Fraser when Freyberg knew he was eligible for a command in the British Army. It has been contended that Freyberg wanted to "serve with his compatriots",⁴⁸ but New Zealanders were not Freyberg's compatriots. Freyberg's family had

⁴² Thorn, *Fraser*, pp. 46-47.

⁴³ Bassett with King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, pp. 84.

⁴⁴ Interview with Sir Carl Berendsen, 8 January 1971, ATL 2012-028-150.

⁴⁵ Ibid; and McIntosh, "Working with Fraser", 3-20.

⁴⁶ Bassett with King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 168.

⁴⁷ McIntosh, "Working with Fraser", 10; and Carl Berendsen, quoted in Bassett with King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 170.

⁴⁸ Wood, *Political and External*, p. 100; and W. G. McClymont, *To Greece*, Wellington: War History Branch, 1959, p. 11.

migrated to New Zealand when he was two years old and he left when he was 24. In the 25 years between leaving New Zealand and the outbreak of the Second World War, Freyberg visited only once: a British Army-funded convalescent trip in 1921.⁴⁹ He undoubtedly retained some affection for New Zealand but Freyberg was born in Britain, was married to a Briton, and had a career in the British Army. During the Second World War (and afterwards, when Governor-General of New Zealand) Freyberg sometimes claimed to be a New Zealander.⁵⁰ There were valid public relations reasons for his doing so, but Freyberg was not a New Zealander and was not a member of the New Zealand Army. He remained on the British Army list and payroll, on secondment to the New Zealand Government during the war.⁵¹

While it is true that during Freyberg's 22 years in New Zealand he represented New Zealand in swimming and went on sailing expeditions with his brothers, the idyll that is sometimes manufactured from these recreations was made by those unaware of the domestic realities of Freyberg's upbringing. In a private letter Freyberg's son and biographer, Paul, stated that Freyberg's father, James, was a "Victorian martinet" and:

a very nasty bit of work—a man of violence who used to beat up his wife, until his sons were old enough and big enough to

⁴⁹ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 148-149.

⁵⁰ Robert Halsey, "The Greek Campaign: Freyberg's Circus Enters a Balkan Imbroglia", MPhil thesis, Massey University, 2005, p. 11.

⁵¹ Correspondence, ANZ R16 700 677.

stop him. His mismanagement of his life and his finances made him and his family badly off, and his poverty made him mean and vindictive.⁵²

Paul Freyberg chose not to include mention of James Freyberg's wife-bashing in his 1991 biography of his father, but did include a description of the insensitive and penny-pinching way in which, in December 1904, James Freyberg plucked his 15-year-old son out of school before the end of the year and, as James had done with his other sons, forced him into a career that he (James) had selected. Freyberg was apprenticed to a dentist, the training method then in use. It was a financial expediency on James's part. After the New Year, the apprenticeship would have cost James more.⁵³ Although Freyberg acceded to his father's wishes, he loathed being a dentist.⁵⁴ Domestic violence blighted Freyberg's youth and adolescence. He spent the first half of his twenties living and working in provincial New Zealand towns—not the most stimulating environments for a young man with ambition—disinterestedly “peering into yawning mouths” and filling his leisure hours with sporting and Territorial Army activities.⁵⁵ Accounts of Freyberg's early-adult life paint a picture of a restless young man who longed for adventure but, stuck

⁵² Paul Freyberg to Brigadier Fuller, 19 November 1988, ATL MS-Papers-1619-145.

⁵³ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC: Soldier of Two Nations*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991, pp. 19-20.

⁵⁴ Paul Freyberg to Brigadier Fuller, 19 November 1988, ATL MS-Papers-1619-145.

⁵⁵ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War: The Man, the Legend and Reality*, Auckland: Penguin Books, 2005, p. 16.

in a career he disliked, was fretting that life was passing him by.⁵⁶ Sensing Freyberg's frustration, an older friend who had travelled abroad advised Freyberg to leave New Zealand:

He was so obviously chafing at the limitations of his job and of the small town environment, that I strongly urged him to do as I had done—to cut adrift and find his feet in a wider world. He did not take much urging.⁵⁷

Freyberg left New Zealand in March 1914. In his youth he had witnessed, and later had to physically intervene to mitigate, the physical violence his father inflicted on his mother. Freyberg's father forced him into a career that Freyberg hated and, even after he left the family home, he found life less than satisfying. It would be going too far to say that Freyberg regarded New Zealand with animosity, but any affection Freyberg felt for New Zealand was surely mitigated by the unhappiness he experienced there. Freyberg's desire to lead 2NZEF was not from fondness for New Zealand.

The most likely reason for Freyberg accepting Fraser's invitation is found in his unfinished, unpublished autobiography. Recounting training exercises with the second echelon of 2NZEF in Britain in September 1940, Freyberg remarked:

I have always wanted to train an Army for war but it seldom falls to your lot in the regular army to have an entirely free hand in what you do. Either there is not any money in the

⁵⁶ Singleton Gates, *Freyberg*, pp. 20-25; and Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 24.

⁵⁷ J.O.C. Neill, quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 25.

training grant or the Commander in Chief wants quite naturally, a plan of his own carried out. Anyway this was the first time in my twenty-six years service in which I have been responsible to nobody except my own Minister for the training and efficiency of a Force.⁵⁸

Freyberg's desire for military self-determination is entirely in keeping with the narrative of his adult life. From the moment he left New Zealand in 1914, Freyberg set about remaking himself. He secured a commission in the Royal Naval Division (a Royal Navy infantry formation) and helped by the connections he made there—the turning point of his life, according to his son—made the most of the opportunities that came his way.⁵⁹ By the end of the First World War Freyberg had succeeded. He held the Victoria Cross and had been awarded the Distinguished Service Order and two bars. He was the youngest general in the British Army, a friend of politicians and nobles, was well-placed financially, and had met Barbara McLaren (née Jekyll), who became his wife in 1922.⁶⁰ Through his own efforts, Freyberg had made it. The only discordant note in Freyberg's life in 1939 was his medical status.

Had Freyberg not had the heart condition that prevented him from taking up the posting in India, Freyberg would have been well placed for a role at the pinnacle of the British Army. In 1935, when the heart murmur was detected, Freyberg was senior to Gort,

⁵⁸ Freyberg, "The World War" (MS), ATL MS-Papers-9030-36, p. 69. [Errors as in source.]

⁵⁹ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 37.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 102 and p. 145; and Singleton Gates, *Freyberg*, p. 62 and p. 85.

Auchinleck, Alan Brooke, Alexander, O'Connor and Wilson, and his "fighting record and his ability to get on with Churchill ... would probably have ensured that he was considered for the top appointments."⁶¹ In 1939, however, Freyberg apparently felt that he had missed out, and would never achieve in the British Army the level of control and autonomy he sought. For the self-made man to have an "entirely free hand", Freyberg would need to look beyond the United Kingdom. The New Zealand Army was the non-British service with which he could claim some connection.

Independence of command was also a concern for the New Zealand Government. The Labour Government was not entirely comfortable with needing to appoint a non-New Zealander as GOC 2NZEF. There was a concern that in the First World War, when New Zealand had handed over complete control of its force to Imperial command, New Zealand troops had, Bassett and King reported, "been sacrificed at the whim of decision-makers from northern-hemisphere countries".⁶² In 1939 the Government wanted to ensure that they, not the theatre commander-in-chief or the British War Office, would decide how and where 2NZEF was used. Freyberg's desire for independence and to report only to a Minister fitted with New Zealand Government objectives.

⁶¹ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 188.

⁶² Christopher Pugsley, "New Zealand: 'From the Uttermost Ends of the Earth'" in Dr Peter Liddle, Dr John Bourne, Dr Ian Whitehead (eds.), *The Great World War 1914 - 45*, Vol. II, The Peoples' Experience, London: Harper Collins, 2000, p. 218; and Bassett with King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 177.

Fraser was also concerned to find a GOC who would not squander the lives of New Zealanders and, he reported:

was at once struck not only by his [Freyberg's] personality and by his obvious experience, but particularly by the supreme importance which he clearly attached to the proper treatment of the troops ... to ensure their welfare and their safety.⁶³

Fraser's concern for the care and welfare of the men of 2NZEF is central to the relationships discussed in this thesis. The high casualty rates of the First World War, to some extent magnified in Fraser's mind by his suspicions over the purpose of the conflict, offended Fraser.⁶⁴ 2NZEF eventually constituted over half of New Zealand's able-bodied male workforce, and most of them were from Labour-voting households. It was not in the political interests of the Labour Party or the New Zealand economy to neglect the welfare of New Zealand troops.⁶⁵ The care of others, whether soldiers, workers or the needy, was also fundamental to Fraser's system of beliefs. A soft touch for anyone in need, Fraser gave away most of his money and died leaving a very modest estate.⁶⁶ For ethical, political and personal reasons, Fraser was determined that while New Zealand would do its bit in the war, it would not allow its troops to be used recklessly.

⁶³ Fraser, Report on Visit to England, *Documents* I, # 29, pp. 29 - 30.

⁶⁴ Thorn, *Fraser*, p. 44.

⁶⁵ Bassett with King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 177.

⁶⁶ Interview with Alister McIntosh, 21 March 1978, ATL 2000-094-2.

In the days after the dinner, Fraser sought opinions on Freyberg from British military and political leaders.⁶⁷ Winston Churchill, again First Lord of the Admiralty, championed his friend Freyberg with Fraser.⁶⁸ General Ironside also endorsed Freyberg and his approval may have sealed the matter for Fraser.⁶⁹ Ironside also set the New Zealand Government a deadline by explaining that while the Army list was open to Fraser, Freyberg would be given a division the following week if New Zealand did not take him.⁷⁰ Fraser wired his recommendation to Wellington, the Cabinet approved and Freyberg was invited back to the Savoy and offered the command.⁷¹ Stevens recorded that on leaving Fraser's room Freyberg "took me by the shoulders and well-nigh danced me round in his delight".⁷²

One of the first tasks Freyberg accepted was to develop a charter that would describe how 2NZEF was to be commanded and how 2NZEF would operate with coalition forces. Providing a charter to a force commander who will fight under the command of an allied commander-in-chief has been common since at least the American War of Independence. In the First World War charters were used by the United States and Britain when formations fought under allied

⁶⁷ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 210.

⁶⁸ Singleton-Gates, *Freyberg*, p. 102.

⁶⁹ Hugh Templeton (ed.), *Mr Ambassador: Memoirs of Sir Carl Berendsen*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2009, p. 132.

⁷⁰ Interview with Major-General W.G. Stevens, June 1969, ATL 2000-094-5.

⁷¹ Nash to Fraser, *Documents I*, # 33p. 27.

⁷² Major-General W.G. Stevens, *Freyberg, VC: The Man 1939 - 1945*, Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1965, p. 17.

superiors.⁷³ A charter serves two purposes: it defines the rights and responsibilities of the commander in relation to his government; and it describes the coalition warfare arrangements that will exist between the commander and the allied military superior. All the Dominions qualified how their troops could be used in the Second World War. Canada, Australia and New Zealand did so through charters, and South Africa placed restrictions on how and where its forces could operate.⁷⁴ In London in November 1939, Freyberg claimed that there was no template charter available from the War Office to guide him.⁷⁵ Freyberg's assertion is curious given the British use of charters and that Freyberg was sufficiently familiar with the War Office to know where to look and whom to ask.

Irritated at having to "start from bedrock", as he put it, Freyberg went to see Major-General Richard Dewing, the Director of Military Operations.⁷⁶ In the First World War Dewing had served in the Middle East, a theatre where British commanders were often given charters, and had attended the Camberley Staff College with Freyberg in 1919.⁷⁷ Freyberg recalled that Dewing warned him:

⁷³ McClymont, *To Greece*, pp. 18-19.

⁷⁴ W.E. Murphy, "Blamey's and Freyberg's 'Charters': A Study in Civil-Military and Commonwealth Relations", *Political Science*, 16:2, 1964, 31 and 41 - 45.

⁷⁵ Lord Freyberg, House of Lords 17 March 1952, hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1954/mar/17/the-statement-on-defence, accessed 17 May 2014.

⁷⁶ Freyberg, "The World War" (MS), ATL MS-Papers-9030-36, p. 13.

⁷⁷ John McLeod, *Myth & Reality: The New Zealand Soldier in World War II*, Auckland: Reed Methuen, 1986, p. 172; and biography in Dewing's records at kingscollections.org/catalogues/lhcma/collection/d/de80-001, accessed 21 September 2014.

You are in for a very difficult time. The history of the integration of these forces has not been a happy one. You will have friction. You will have hard words. What is more, I must warn you that you should reserve for yourself certain powers, and your Government should also reserve certain powers for themselves. You should decide the channels of communication between yourself and the New Zealand Government.⁷⁸

Freyberg and Dewing together constructed a draft charter. Unfortunately no copy of that draft is known to exist but Freyberg later recollected it as:

The New Zealand Government should at all times have access to my opinion direct.

The administration, discipline, promotion and pay of officers and men should be completely under the NZ Govt.

The NZ Forces should not be committed to any active operations until they were adequately equipped.

And finally, that the New Zealand Expeditionary Force should be employed as a complete formation and should not be split up and used piecemeal.⁷⁹

In the charter the Government approved on 5 January 1940, there were some changes: Freyberg's direct access to the Government was limited to training, administration and policy matters only; and the necessity to equip the force before deployment and the prohibition on piecemeal use were both omitted. (See approved charter at end of chapter.) These changes were important. Australia's Lieutenant-General Sydney Rowell wrote in his memoirs that the unauthorised dismembering of formations was "the most critical problem facing a force operating in an overseas theatre of

⁷⁸ Lord Freyberg, House of Lords 17 March 1952.

⁷⁹ Freyberg, "The World War" (MS), ATL MS-Papers-9030-36, pp. 13-14.

war under the command of a superior Allied commander".⁸⁰ In 1940-41 Freyberg would have sometimes momentous rows with Middle East Command about consolidating the New Zealand Division and, in 1941-42, about maintaining the Division's integrity. Restricting Freyberg's direct access to the Government was also an ill-considered amendment that, as later discussion shows, contributed to coalition partner difficulties in 1941.⁸¹

In November 1939 Freyberg also sought advice on his charter from Lord Birdwood, who had commanded the Australia and New Zealand Army Corps (Anzac) at Gallipoli in 1915, and General Sir Alexander Godley, the Anglo-Irish GOC of 1NZEF in the First World War. Both men recommended that Freyberg meet with General Sir Cyril Brudenell White, who, they maintained, was an authority on charters. White had been Chief of Staff to Major-General William Bridges in 1st Australian Imperial Force in 1914.⁸² Freyberg would see White, who lived in Melbourne, while on his way to New Zealand later in the year.

On 4 December 1939 Freyberg began the first stage of his journey to New Zealand by flying to Cairo to select sites for and to arrange the construction of 2NZEF's bases. In Egypt he linked up with Fraser's group from London and an Australian Government party headed by Richard Casey, the Minister for Supply. They all

⁸⁰ S.F. Rowell, *Full Circle*, Clayton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1974, pp. 48-49.

⁸¹ These matters are discussed in later chapters.

⁸² Lord Freyberg, House of Lords 17 March 1952.

shared the multi-leg flying-boat journey to Sydney, Australia.⁸³ It has frequently been stated that Freyberg wrote his charter during the flights from Cairo to Australia, but Freyberg maintained that he had written the first draft in London with Dewing.⁸⁴ Freyberg had intended to see only White in Melbourne. But when Casey recommended that Freyberg also speak with Lieutenant-General E. K. Squires, Australia's CGS, and Lieutenant-General Thomas Blamey, the recently appointed GOC 2AIF (2nd Australian Imperial Force), Freyberg arranged meetings with both men.⁸⁵ It is likely that Squires and Blamey told Freyberg of some of their experiences in the First World War, probably including the advantages of Dominion forces fighting as integrated formations and a warning that British officers tended to regard Dominion formations as colonial units they could use however they saw fit.⁸⁶

Freyberg and White met at the Menzies Hotel in Melbourne on the evening of 20 December 1939.⁸⁷ White was the first Australian Military Force officer to attend the Camberley Staff College, and had served in the First World War.⁸⁸ In 1914 White and General Bridges had urged the Australian Government to make it clear to Britain

⁸³ Wright, *Freyberg's War*, p. 32.

⁸⁴ Interview with General W.G. Stevens, June 1969, ATL 2000-094-5; Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, p. 68; and Wright, *Freyberg's War*, p. 32.

⁸⁵ Freyberg to Dewing, 8 January 1940, ANZ R 16 700 607.

⁸⁶ David Horner, *High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy 1939 - 1945*, Canberra, ACT: Australian War Memorial, 1982, p. 43.

⁸⁷ Brudenell White diary 1939, Papers of Sir Brudenell White, Folder 17, Box 17, NLA 1096442.

⁸⁸ Jeffrey Grey, "White, Sir Cyril Brudenell (1876-1940)", Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/white-sir-cyril-brudenell-1032/text15983, accessed 22 September 2014

that Australia would not contribute forces to backfill British units. Rather, it would provide a national army that would serve as a discrete unit under an Australian-appointed commander who would have the right of direct communication with the Australian Government.⁸⁹ Freyberg asked White to review the charter he had drafted with Dewing and recalled that White thought the draft not strong enough and re-wrote it.⁹⁰ Given White's First World War experiences and that White had, just a week earlier, also advised on Blamey's charter (which had a force-integrity clause), it is almost inconceivable that White deleted the piecemeal use ban.⁹¹ Adding further weight to the likelihood that White retained the clause is his post-meeting letter to Freyberg advising that Freyberg's charter should include "the avoidance, as far as the exigencies of the service allow, of splitting up formations and units".⁹²

Freyberg arrived in Wellington on Christmas morning 1939 with a draft of his charter "in his back pocket."⁹³ The preceding discussion has established that that draft almost certainly contained a clause prohibiting the piecemeal use of 2NZEF. Dewing and White had both recommended it. No such clause appeared in the approved

⁸⁹ John Bentley, "Champion of Anzac: General Sir Brudenell White, the First Australian Imperial Force and the Emergence of the Australian Military Culture 1914-18", PhD Thesis, University of Wollongong, 2003, p. 147 and p. 170.

⁹⁰ Lord Freyberg, House of Lords 8 November 1955, hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1954/mar/17/the-statement-on-defence, accessed 17 May 2014.

⁹¹ David Horner, *Blamey: The Commander-in-Chief*, St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1998, p. 135.

⁹² Brudenell White to Freyberg, 21 December 1939, quoted in Bentley, "Champion of Anzac", p. 327.

⁹³ Alister McIntosh, interview, 20 March 1978, ATL 2000-094-2.

charter. Few historians have noticed the omission. Only Murphy recognised that Freyberg's charter lacked a reference to piecemeal use.⁹⁴ A requirement that 2NZEF not be broken up and used piecemeal would have been in sympathy with Government wishes. By 1939 "the Dominion had come of age"⁹⁵ and the disappearance of 2NZEF personnel "into the general mass of British troops would be an offence to New Zealand's sense of nationhood".⁹⁶ There was, therefore, no reason for the Government to reject a piecemeal use prohibition. There is no record of any objection to clauses in Freyberg's draft. The only change that has been identified previously was Lieutenant-Colonel Stevens' addition of the last sentence limiting the rank of new officers.⁹⁷

The 12 days Freyberg spent in New Zealand (25 December-6 January) were crowded with visits to camps, public occasions, interviews, meetings, and getting the charter approved. Had the sailing date for the first echelon not been brought forward by a need to join a convoy of ships carrying Australian troops, Freyberg would have had a month or more in New Zealand.⁹⁸ In the rush that eventuated, errors and oversights were to be expected, especially so considering that the Government was not well-suited to making

⁹⁴ Murphy, "Charters", 11.

⁹⁵ McClymont, *To Greece*, p. 18.

⁹⁶ Wood, *Political and External*, p. 102.

⁹⁷ Interview with Major-General W.G. Stevens, June 1969, ATL 2000-094-5.

⁹⁸ Savage to Fraser, 20 November 1939, #50, pp. 42-41 establishes that the first echelon's training was not due to conclude until 20 January 1940; Fraser to Savage, 29 November 1939; #60, p. 49; and Fraser to Savage, 5 December 1939, #63, p. 52, *Documents I*, describe the circumstances that resulted in the 6 January 1940 departure date.

important military decisions. The Labour Government of 1939, Keith Sinclair found, “could scarcely be in worse shape to lead the nation in war”. No Cabinet member had military experience, and most public servants and Ministers were quite poorly educated and lacked executive management experience.⁹⁹

The Minister of Defence, with whom Freyberg would have considerable dealings throughout the war, was Frederick Jones. Jones trained as a boot clicker (cutter of the uppers for shoes), became involved in trade union affairs and in 1916 joined the Labour party. He was popular because “he was just working class—one of us.”¹⁰⁰ As Minister of Defence, Jones was as an “absolute washout”.¹⁰¹ Often regarded as a nobody, Carl Berendsen, Fraser’s head of department, noted that Jones “disliked anything military and this did hamper him in his work as Minister of Defence ... But he was a good man and a likeable fellow.”¹⁰² Freyberg’s opinion was that Jones:

is a quiet sensible man with whom I was on cordial terms. He has no reputation, however, in New Zealand, and he is popularly supposed to be nothing more than a cypher, an opinion in which I do not concur. My opinion, however, may be

⁹⁹ Keith Sinclair, *Walter Nash*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1976, p. 190 and p. 154.

¹⁰⁰ Unattributed quotation cited in Erik Olssen, “Jones, Frederick”, from *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, Te Ara - the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, updated 29-Oct-2013, te.ara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4j8/jones-frederick, accessed 25 July 2014.

¹⁰¹ Alister McIntosh interview, 6 April 1978, ATL 2000-094-2.

¹⁰² Carl Berendsen interview, January 1970, ATL 2000-094-5

influenced by the fact that so far I have managed to get everything I wanted from Mr Jones.¹⁰³

Jones's intellectual and managerial shortcomings were compensated to a significant degree by the concentration of power in the hands of just two men. Peter Fraser (the de facto, and shortly to become actual, Prime Minister) and Walter Nash (the Minister of Finance, soon to be Deputy Prime Minister) made all major decisions.¹⁰⁴ Jones took care of day-to-day matters only.¹⁰⁵ Alister McIntosh stated that "the real Minister of Defence was Peter Fraser".¹⁰⁶

It is known that Freyberg discussed the draft of his charter with Jones, Duigan (CGS), Stevens, and Henry "Rex" Mason, the Attorney-General.¹⁰⁷ Stevens said that Freyberg's charter was "almost entirely Freyberg's own work" and that the Government "did not alter a word" of Freyberg's draft.¹⁰⁸ On another occasion, however, Stevens recorded that Freyberg's charter was approved "with slight alterations."¹⁰⁹ Gerald Hensley found that Freyberg reviewed his charter with Fred Jones, had it "looked over" by the Attorney-General, and that the charter was approved "without any

¹⁰³ Freyberg to Major-General Dewing, 8 January 1940, Miscellaneous Private Correspondence, ANZ R16 700 607.

¹⁰⁴ Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, p. 153.

¹⁰⁵ Arnold Nordmeyer interview, 14 August 1978, ATL 2000-094-2.

¹⁰⁶ Alister McIntosh interview, 12 August 1978, ATL MS-Papers-0212-31.

¹⁰⁷ Freyberg, "The World War" (MS), ATL MS-Papers-9030-36, p. 30 and p. 31A; and Stevens, *Freyberg*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Major-General W.G. Stevens, June 1969, ATL 2000-094-5.

¹⁰⁹ Major-General W.G. Stevens, *Problems of 2NZEF*, Wellington: War History Branch, 1958, p. 93.

change.”¹¹⁰ Paul Freyberg told a similar story.¹¹¹ Stevens, Hensley and Paul Freyberg did not recognise that a prohibition on piecemeal use was absent from the approved charter or that Freyberg’s right to direct communication with Wellington had been restricted to just three topics.

In his last days in Wellington in January 1940, Freyberg appointed as his personal assistant (PA) a young lawyer, John White, who had been a judge’s associate in the Supreme Court in Wellington.¹¹² In the mid 1980s White stated that the first task Freyberg gave him to do was:

to look at some documents which he [Freyberg] said he had received from the Government setting out his powers and ... he commented that they had been drawn up by the Solicitor-General, a lawyer, and he would be glad if I would look through them and make a summary of them for him... I duly read the legal powers as set out in the documents, which of course are now able to be read, and put them in short form.¹¹³

White’s comments raise the existence of a previously unknown version of Freyberg’s charter that casts doubt on the historical orthodoxies that Freyberg wrote the approved version of his charter himself and that the Government changed nothing in his draft. His remarks also imply that hitherto unknown rewriting processes took place, potentially providing the circumstances for the loss of a clause

¹¹⁰ Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, pp. 68-9.

¹¹¹ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 209.

¹¹² Lieutenant-Commander Chris Griggs, RNZN, “The Honourable Sir John White, MBE [*sic*], QC”, *New Zealand Armed Forces Law Review*, October 2001, 25.

¹¹³ Interview with Sir John White, David Filer, “Interviews for the ‘Freyberg, VC’ Television Series” (MS), n.d., NZ Defence Force Library, pp. 2-3.

relating to piecemeal use and to a limit on Freyberg's right to direct communication with the Government. As Freyberg remembered it, the draft he developed with Dewing gave him unfettered, direct access to the Government.¹¹⁴ The approved charter limits that right to only training and administration matters, and "details leading up to and arising from policy decisions".¹¹⁵ The reason for the change has never been explained, but the restriction may have contributed to Freyberg's decision to keep his reservations about Greece from the Government in 1941.¹¹⁶

It is unlikely that White was asked to précis and simplify the approved version of Freyberg's charter, the text of which is neither long nor abstruse. The only Cabinet member with legal skills who is known to have reviewed the draft charter was Attorney-General Rex Mason.¹¹⁷ Mason was very intelligent. The dux of his school, he received an honours MA in Mathematics before completing his LLB, and served as President of the Labour Party.¹¹⁸ Freyberg's recollection of his meeting with Mason is confused: "[I] discussed with him the powers that I sought, and I asked him to examine them so that he would be able to put any questions to me later on."¹¹⁹ Freyberg implied that Mason had no questions about the draft, but

¹¹⁴ Freyberg, "The World War" (MS), pp. 13-14.

¹¹⁵ Clauses 1 and 2, see charter at end of chapter.

¹¹⁶ See chapter 4.

¹¹⁷ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 210; Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, p. 68; Wright, *Freyberg's War*, p. 34; and Freyberg, "The World War" (MS), ATL MS-Papers-9030-36, p. 31A.

¹¹⁸ Jonathan Hunt, Mason biography, teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/4m45/mason-henry-greathead-rex, accessed 30 September 2014.

¹¹⁹ Freyberg, "The World War" (MS), ATL MS-Papers-9030-36, p. 31A.

Mason nevertheless rewrote it. In a letter forwarding copies of his charter to Dewing, Freyberg advised that his draft differed:

slightly from the documents [the charter and an accompanying letter outlining financial arrangements] which are the product of the New Zealand law offices. I put forward a very much shorter and clearer document which they have been pleased to put into legal form. I do not defend their form of words.¹²⁰

Contrary to the assertions by Stevens, Hensley and Paul Freyberg that the approved charter was Freyberg's own work and that the Government made no changes, Rex Mason rewrote Freyberg's draft. That finding, though, has not quite resolved the authorship of the approved version, and does not explain how a piecemeal use prohibition was lost or why the GOC's right to direct communication with the Government was limited.

At Freyberg's request, White shortened and simplified the charter document Freyberg had received from Mason. The approved charter is short and simple. The approved charter is, therefore, unlikely to be the "legally drafted" document Freyberg gave White. The approved charter might, however, be White's condensed, simple-language rendering of the Attorney-General's version. At no time, however, did White claim to have written Freyberg's charter. David Filer, the interviewer to whom White spoke in the 1980s, said that he gained no impression that White was admitting that he had written the charter. Filer also made the sensible comment that

¹²⁰ Freyberg to Dewing, 8 January 1940, ANZ R16 700 607.

White would have been reluctant to rewrite such an important document, and that in January 1940 White had no experience of the military or military law.¹²¹ What is certain is that the approved charter was not written by Freyberg.

Mason (and, if he were involved, the same would apply to White) was a trained lawyer and aware of the need for accuracy and checking. He is unlikely to have accidentally lost or summarily deleted a clause. The inevitable conclusion, though, is that hitherto unacknowledged re-writing of Freyberg's draft created the circumstances whereby changes were made. Freyberg was apparently unaware that the approved charter differed from his draft. While at sea on 8 January 1940 he wrote to his brother-in-law:

The New Zealand Government, whom I liked, and who in spite of their red tendency showed me every consideration ... [gave] every help that was necessary. I have come back with the most complete powers, financial and military, which I shall use broadmindedly when the time arrives.¹²²

In the 12 days between Christmas morning 1939 and 6 January 1940, Freyberg was in "perpetual motion".¹²³ Fraser had been out of the country for three months and was busy catching up. Savage was hospitalised and there had been strife in the Labour party.¹²⁴ No time was found for Fraser and Freyberg to meet and discuss what each of them expected from their civil-military

¹²¹ Telephone conversation with David Filer, 26 August 2014.

¹²² Freyberg to McKenna, 8 January 1940, ANZ R16 700 677.

¹²³ Bassett with King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 179.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 179-181.

relationship. Such a discussion was, however, needed. Freyberg had no experience of commanding a Dominion force or of being subordinate to an Allied commander-in-chief, and had very little knowledge of New Zealand's expectations of the force or Labour Government thinking on its use. Fraser had developed some conception of how 2NZEF would be controlled and should be used, but did not share his thoughts with Freyberg.

What Fraser did not discuss with Freyberg were the reasons for and limitations on New Zealand's participation in the war. New Zealand backed Britain in 1939 because public sentiment demanded it and because of Imperial Defence commitments. Fraser supported the fight against Nazi Germany because fascism was undemocratic, anti-trade unions and anti-socialist.¹²⁵ He saw victory in the war as an opportunity to institute a new and fairer world order with a "stronger form of collective security" than the League of Nations offered.¹²⁶ Historian Ian Wards described Fraser's attitude as being:

the purpose of the war, the consequence of victory, was not to maintain the status quo—it was to make possible an advance in the social condition of people. Fraser implicitly held to this view in all he did throughout and immediately after the war.¹²⁷

If New Zealand were going to have a say in shaping the postwar world order, it would have to make a military contribution

¹²⁵ Thorn, *Peter Fraser*, pp. 162-163.

¹²⁶ Bassett with King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 174, and p. 187.

¹²⁷ Ian Wards, "Peter Fraser—Warrior Prime Minister", in Margaret Clark (ed.), *Peter Fraser: Master Politician*, Palmerston North: The Dunmore Press, 1998, p. 146.

to the conflict. The commander of New Zealand's primary contribution to the conflict needed an appreciation of the Government's justifications in order to align the military effort with the political intentions, but Fraser did not share his "implicitly held" rationale with Freyberg. Freyberg probably intuited the sentimental and Imperial justifications and New Zealand's abhorrence of fascism. What Fraser most needed to explain to his GOC was that 2NZEF had not been formed to win battles so much as to win New Zealand a seat at the peace-conference table. New Zealand needed to be seen as doing its bit. In some ways Fraser saw to it that New Zealand did more than its share. He introduced conscription, and two-thirds of New Zealand men of qualifying age served in the forces.¹²⁸ But with such a sizeable portion of the workforce in uniform, New Zealand could not risk its service personnel unnecessarily. It was not until mid 1941, in the conditions Fraser imposed on the use of 2NZEF, that Freyberg learnt that there were limitations on New Zealand's participation the war.

In addition to leaving the nature of New Zealand's contribution to the war unexplained, Fraser did not describe the type of communications he expected from Freyberg. The "dour and solemn" Fraser lacked charm.¹²⁹ He had little warmth and few friends, and never called Walter Nash, a colleague for over 20 years, anything but

¹²⁸ Nan Taylor, "Human Rights in World War II in New Zealand", *New Zealand Journal of History*, 23:2, 1989, 109.

¹²⁹ Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, p. 75.

“Mr Nash”.¹³⁰ It should, therefore, be no surprise that Fraser established little personal rapport with Freyberg. The lack of understanding in their relationship mattered. As the chairman of the Allied Expeditionary Air Force Bombing Committee contended, the political direction and high command of a war are “concerned so essentially with personalities and those antinomies of human nature ... that all other considerations are secondary”.¹³¹

Fraser sent the commander of what would eventually constitute close to half New Zealand’s able-bodied male workforce off to fight on the other side of the world (where their only means of secure communication was enciphered telegrams) without describing how he expected his GOC to behave, what his priorities were, and without attempting to establish a degree of intimacy in their relationship—the sort of affinity that would enable a subordinate (Freyberg) to raise issues and doubts with a superior. As later discussion establishes, Fraser’s failure to institute rapport and to lay down operating procedures were serious oversights.

Effective civil-military relationships, Horner and others have established, are built upon personal understanding. November 1939 until early January 1940 was the window available to Fraser and Freyberg to establish their relationship. Despite having compatible desires regarding an independent expeditionary force and mutual

¹³⁰ Alister McIntosh interview, 16 March 1978, ATL 2000-094-2.

¹³¹ Air Vice-Marshal E. J. Kingston-McCloughry, quoted in Horner, *High Command*, p. xx.

agreement on the care and welfare of the troops, Freyberg and Fraser made little progress in deepening their understanding of each other.

Freyberg, who knew next to nothing of the New Zealand Labour Government and who had no experience of commanding a Dominion force in coalition warfare, drafted his own charter. Freyberg's draft was re-written and in the process important provisions that would have bearing on his conduct as GOC were omitted or changes. Other matters that could have been stipulated in the charter, such as whether Wellington or the theatre commander-in-chief had priority, were left unresolved. The reporting and advice that the Government expected from Freyberg was not explained to Freyberg in the limited opportunities for discussion that a crowded schedule in New Zealand allowed.

The shortcomings of the approved charter, and the lack of explanation and discussion, meant that the civil-military relationship was only partly constructed. Although Fraser and Freyberg had travelled together and had met several times, little rapport was established. The relationship between Fraser and Freyberg remained formal and impersonal, and therefore ill-suited to the kind of information exchange Fraser tacitly expected and that Freyberg would have benefited from.

The diversion of the second echelon to Britain meant that the consequences of an only partly established civil-military relationship

did not surface until nine months after Fraser and Freyberg parted company in January 1940. When things did come to a head, the use of 2NZEF, the priority of Wellington over the commander-in-chief, and communication with the Government—matters that were omitted from or restricted in Freyberg’s charter—were the issues involved.

The GOC’s Charter

5 January 1940

The General Officer for the time being commanding the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force Overseas

The General Officer Commanding will act in accordance with the instructions he receives from the Commander-in-Chief under whose command he is serving, subject only to the requirements of His Majesty’s Government in New Zealand. He will, in addition to powers appearing in any relevant Statute or Regulations, be vested with the following powers:

In the case of sufficiently grave emergency or in special circumstances, of which he must be the sole judge, to make decisions as to the employment of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force, and to communicate such decisions to the New Zealand Government, notwithstanding that in the absence of that extraordinary cause such communication would not be in accordance with the normal channels of communication indicated in the following paragraphs and which for greater clearness are also indicated in an attached diagram. [Not included here or in source.]

1. To communicate directly with the New Zealand Government and the Army Department concerning any matter connected with the training and administration of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force.
2. To communicate directly with the New Zealand Government or with the Commander-in-Chief under whose command he is serving, in respect of all details leading up to and arising from policy decisions.
3. In all matters pertaining to equipment, to communicate with the War Office through normal channels, and through the liaison officer of the High Commissioner's office in London, the former to be the official channel.
4. In matters of command, to adhere to the normal military channels between the War Office and the General Officer Commanding 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force overseas.
5. To establish such administrative headquarters and base and line of communication units as are necessary for the functions of command, organisation and administration with which he has been vested.
6. To organise, change, vary or group units and formations in such a manner as he considers expedient from time to time.
7. To fix and alter the establishment and composition of units and formations as exigencies of service may in his opinion require from time to time.

After the Third Echelon has left New Zealand no officer above the substantive rank of captain will be sent overseas without the concurrence of the General Officer Commanding.

M. J. Savage
Prime Minister

Source: *Documents Relating to New Zealand's Participation in the Second World War*, Vol. I, Wellington: War History Branch, 1949, #39, pp. 31-32. (The text above is the charter as was approved on 5 November 1940 and excludes later amendments that were included in square brackets in *Documents*.)

2. *Coalition relations*

When Freyberg left New Zealand on 6 January 1940 he was confident that all the powers he needed were in his charter.¹³² Aboard ship he wrote to Fraser that he doubted he would need to use his charter “because I know the British Military Authorities will treat us with the greatest possible consideration.”¹³³ Freyberg was wrong on both counts. His charter proved inadequate, and the manner in which he was treated by the British Army was not considerate but peremptory.

There were two distinct phases in the coalition relationship in 1940-41: agreement in the first nine months of 1940; and from September 1940 onwards conflict over the return of detachments and about British treatment of Dominion commanders. The disharmony that surfaced was sparked by military issues but was fuelled by differences of opinion on Dominion rights. The importance of Dominion status has been insufficiently emphasised in New Zealand military historiography, but the one dedicated analysis of Middle East coalition relations identifies Dominion status as the base cause

¹³² Freyberg to McKenna, 8 January 1940, ANZ R16 700 677.

¹³³ Freyberg, quoted in McLeod, *Myth & Reality*, p. 173.

of the rancour.¹³⁴ In seeking to establish the type of coalition relations the Government wanted, Freyberg wound up fighting a political battle to have Dominion rights recognised.

For the first nine months of 1940 Freyberg had only one brigade (the first echelon) in the Middle East, plus portions of non-divisional 2NZEF units (medical, railway, entertainment, education, etc.). The second echelon, which had been expected to arrive in Egypt in late May, was diverted to Britain. Freyberg was therefore unable to form a division and, with Middle East Command facing serious troop shortages and gravely outnumbered by Italian forces, Freyberg agreed to lend units to other formations. The Signals Corps was sent to the Western Desert, machine gun battalions and ambulance units joined other forces, some personnel served in the Long Range Desert Patrol, and troops unloaded ships, dug anti-tank ditches and were given security duties.¹³⁵ The Government agreed to these detachments.¹³⁶

In the same period, Blamey, Australia's GOC 2nd Australian Imperial Force (2AIF), was having difficulties with Middle East Command about maintaining the integrity of his forces.¹³⁷ Just two weeks after his arrival in the Middle East, Blamey received notice to

¹³⁴ Lance McMillan, "The British Middle East Force, 1939-1942: Multi-Front Warfare with Coalition Forces", Naval War College, RI, 1994.

¹³⁵ Christopher Pugsley, *A Bloody Road Home: World War Two and New Zealand's Heroic Second Division*, Auckland: Penguin, 2014, p. 53.

¹³⁶ See, for example, Freyberg to Jones, 14 June 1940, and Jones to Freyberg, 18 June 1940, *Documents I*, #s 240 and 241, pp. 183-184.

¹³⁷ David Horner, *Blamey: The Commander-in-Chief*, St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1998, p. 144.

detach an infantry brigade and a cavalry regiment from 2AIF. Blamey objected but “sheer strategic necessity” meant he shortly afterwards acquiesced.¹³⁸ It frustrated 2AIF’s senior officers that when units were detached, the British Army became uncommunicative about them. Eventually a staff officer had to be sent with each detachment, and direct radio contact with that officer put in place, in order that Blamey and the Australian Government might be kept informed.¹³⁹ Unlike Freyberg, Blamey had experienced British Army treatment of Dominion commanders in the First World War and knew to expect differences of opinion with the British.¹⁴⁰ Blamey frequently complained about his exclusion from the “club of British generals” in the Middle East that, he believed, sought to limit the influence of Dominion commanders.¹⁴¹ Fortunately, Blamey’s charter contained a clause that forbade the piecemeal use of 2AIF and that probably gave him confidence.¹⁴² He certainly knew how to use such documents to effect. When Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police (1925-1936), Blamey “knew his statutory powers to the last comma, and more than once a state ministry ... capitulated when he sailed into the attack with a copy of

¹³⁸ Norman D. Carlyon, *I Remember Blamey*, South Melbourne, Vic: Sun Books, 1980, 1981, pp. 12-13.

¹³⁹ S.F. Rowell, *Full Circle*, Clayton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1974, p. 56.

¹⁴⁰ Horner, *Blamey*, p. 135; and Gavin Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, Sydney, NSW: William Collins, 1953 1986, p. 21.

¹⁴¹ Carlyon, *Blamey*, p. ix.

¹⁴² Clause (a) of Blamey’s charter states “No part of the Force to be detached or employed apart from the Force without his [2AIF’s commander’s] consent.” Quoted in Horner, *High Command*, p. 45.

the Police Regulations in his hand.”¹⁴³ Blamey’s experience, his assertive nature and his charter contributed to his tendency to refuse detachment requests, but the principal reason he declined them was that he had consolidated formations (whole divisions) and did not want to break them up. The New Zealand Division was not formed until February 1941.¹⁴⁴ For most of 1940 Freyberg had no division and therefore few reasons to decline detachment requests.

2NZEF was quite different to New Zealand’s air and naval contributions to the war. There was no Royal New Zealand Navy until September 1941. Prior to that time, New Zealand’s two cruisers, *Achilles* and *Leander*, formed the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy. The ships were crewed by New Zealanders, the officers were supplied by the Royal Navy, and Wellington had little say in how or where the naval division was used—though it did request that one warship be kept in or close to New Zealand waters. The Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) was established in 1937 and, on the outbreak of war, the bombers New Zealand was about to receive from Britain, along with the crews to operate them, were handed over to the Royal Air Force (RAF). Additionally, over 7,000 New Zealand air crew were to pass through the Empire Air Training Scheme. Some of these served in the seven New Zealand squadrons

¹⁴³ John Hetherington, *Thomas Blamey*, Melbourne, Vic: Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 15.

¹⁴⁴ Freyberg to Jones, 23 February 1941, *Documents I*, #274, pp. 207-207.

of the RAF, the bulk were dispersed through RAF units.¹⁴⁵ Like the sailors in the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy, RNZAF personnel served under British commanders and the Government did not determine their use—though it did take steps to ensure that the welfare and care of the men met New Zealand standards.¹⁴⁶

Not only was 2NZEF unlike New Zealand's naval and air contributions in being an independent force under New Zealand command, it was also the first time that a New Zealand military force would remain under the control of the New Zealand Government.¹⁴⁷ In the First World War, New Zealand passed control of its army to the British.¹⁴⁸ Wellington had informed Whitehall of the terms of Freyberg's charter, but the charter's terms were apparently not communicated to British Army commanders. Even if senior British commanders had been informed of Freyberg's charter, the opening paragraph's statement that the GOC is subordinate to the commander-in-chief "subject only to the requirements of His Majesty's Government in New Zealand" fails to make Wellington's primacy plain. There were, therefore, reasons for senior British officers to expect that, like New Zealand's air and naval contributions, in keeping with past practice, and in the absence of

¹⁴⁵ Ian McGibbon (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 8-9, pp. 459-461 and pp. 465-466.

¹⁴⁶ Andrew Stewart, "At War with Bill Jordan: The New Zealand High Commission in Wartime London", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 40:1, March 2012, 77.

¹⁴⁷ Bassett with King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 177.

¹⁴⁸ Christopher Pugsley, "New Zealand: 'From the Uttermost Ends of the Earth'", in Dr Peter Liddle, Dr John Bourne and Dr Ian Whitehead, *The Great War 1914-45, Vol 2: The People's Experience*, London: HarperCollins, 2001, p. 218.

advice to the contrary, command of 2NZEF would pass to the British Army.

In the period until September 1940 there were, though, occasions on which New Zealand control of 2NZEF was made apparent. In February 1940 the War Office asked that 2NZEF's officers be allowed to serve in British formations and British officers be permitted to serve in 2NZEF. The New Zealand Government refused.¹⁴⁹ When Italy entered the war in May 1940, Wellington agreed that, so long as they were sufficiently trained and equipped and, it was stipulated, under New Zealand command, 2NZEF troops could be used in the defence of Egypt.¹⁵⁰ In June Freyberg obtained the Government's help to stop the second echelon in the United Kingdom being dispersed through British formations.¹⁵¹ Also in June, Middle East Command acknowledged "the desire of Australian and New Zealand forces to operate as formations".¹⁵² Freyberg responded by explaining that this was not merely a desire, and that the use of 2NZEF was determined by New Zealand Government-imposed conditions.¹⁵³ By mid 1940 the British Army had a clear understanding of the arrangements relating to the use of 2NZEF. General Sir Archibald Wavell, Commander-in-Chief Middle East, had also learnt of the limitations on the use of other Dominion forces. In February 1940 Blamey informed Wavell that the Australian

¹⁴⁹ Communications, #s 73, 74 and 76, *Documents I*, pp. 62-63.

¹⁵⁰ Fraser to Freyberg, 26 May 1940, *Documents I*, #78, pp. 64-65.

¹⁵¹ Communications, *Documents I*, #s 157-162, pp. 115-120.

¹⁵² GHQ Middle East to HQ 2NZEF, 8 June 1940, *Documents I*, #238, p. 182.

¹⁵³ Freyberg to GHQ Middle East, 11 June 1940, *Documents I*, #239, p. 183.

Government had prohibited the dispersal of 2AIF into British formations, and by August 1940 (at the latest) Wavell was aware of the restrictions on the use of South African forces.¹⁵⁴ Accord marked the pre-September 1940 phase of 2NZEF-British Army relations. Freyberg and the Government empathised with Wavell's plight and allowed units to be detached to aid him. Relations between GHQ Middle East and 2NZEF's headquarters were "good from first to last."¹⁵⁵ Middle East Command was informed of the rules New Zealand had imposed on the use of 2NZEF.

Ideally, strategic and high-command policy should be created from agreements between allied nations.¹⁵⁶ Political-level agreement is necessary because coalitions, although usually seen as mechanisms for coordinated military action, are essentially political arrangements.¹⁵⁷ In the Second World War, true high-command cooperation and mutual development of strategy did not exist amongst Allied or Axis governments except in the "Grand Alliance" between Britain and the United States.¹⁵⁸ In late 1939 Fraser asked the British Government for a set of war aims. The request failed to secure a response and, when the other Dominions declined to support

¹⁵⁴ Carlyon, *Blamey*, p. 12; and McMillan, "The British Middle East Force", p. 16.

¹⁵⁵ Major-General W.G. Stevens, *Problems of 2NZEF*, Wellington: War History Branch, 1958, p. 167.

¹⁵⁶ Kjeld Hald Galster, "Introduction" in Neils Bo Poulson, Kjeld Hald Galster, and Søren Nørby (eds.), *Coalition Warfare: An Anthology of Scholarly Presentations at the Conference on Coalition Warfare at the Royal Danish Defence College, 2011*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2013, p. 5.

¹⁵⁷ Andrew Pierre, quoted in Thomas Stow Wilkins, "Analysing Coalition Warfare from an Intra-Alliance Politics Perspective: The Normandy Campaign 1944", *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 29:6, December 2006, 1123.

¹⁵⁸ Mark A. Stoler, *Allies in War: Britain and America against the Axis Powers*, London: Hodder Arnold, 2005, p. xx, p. 37 and p. 43.

his later attempt to obtain them, Fraser dropped the matter.¹⁵⁹ The New Zealand Government entered into agreements with the British Government concerning equipment, costs and provisioning, but not about coalition cooperation or war strategy.¹⁶⁰ Freyberg's charter was forwarded to Britain and signed by Neville Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, in January 1940.¹⁶¹ There was, however, no alliance-partner agreement and Freyberg had to improvise. The "irretrievably complex" problem of coalition coordination was left to military commanders to work out between themselves.¹⁶²

Wellington apparently assumed that New Zealand's Dominion status was sufficiently understood to make its control of 2NZEF, and Freyberg's independence as a national commander, accepted facts. It was not. As Wood noted, Dominion status "was by no means easy to translate into terms of military cooperation."¹⁶³ Britain saw little need to cooperate with the Dominions. When asked to institute an Imperial war cabinet (at which Dominion representatives would have had a say in the direction of the war) Churchill responded "You can easily turn the War Cabinet into a museum of Imperial celebrities,

¹⁵⁹ Bassett with King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, pp. 174-175.

¹⁶⁰ The details of how 2NZEF was to be funded were not worked out until April 1940. Stevens, *Problems*, p. 62.

¹⁶¹ Wood, *Political and External*, p. 102. The date Wood gives (5 January 1940) is same as the date the charter was approved by the Cabinet in Wellington. It is possible that the charter was immediately cabled to Whitehall where Chamberlain might have been able to sign it when it was still 5 January in Britain. Wood gives no source for the date.

¹⁶² Wood, *Political and External*, pp. 102-103.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 2.

but then you have to have another body to manage the war.”¹⁶⁴ British Government attitudes to the Dominions were evident in the invitation list for a 1941 meeting of allies. Representatives from nine countries, including Luxembourg and Ethiopia, were invited.¹⁶⁵ No Dominion was invited to send a representative. Churchill was opposed to Dominions having a say in Imperial policy and New Zealand’s voice was “only rarely raised and even more rarely heard”.¹⁶⁶ One reason for New Zealand’s failure to influence Whitehall was the ineffectiveness of its representative in London, William Jordan. Jordan was a cockney and former London policeman who had emigrated to New Zealand, been elected a Labour Member of Parliament and, in 1935, returned to Britain as New Zealand’s High Commissioner.¹⁶⁷ Although liked personally, Jordan’s lack of education and sophistication, together with a tiny entertainment budget, made him incapable of earning any serious regard for New Zealand in Whitehall.¹⁶⁸ In September 1940 Churchill terminated the Dominions Secretary’s automatic attendance at War Cabinet meetings.¹⁶⁹ Without notifying, let alone obtaining the permission of, the Dominion government concerned, in September 1940 Churchill had Australia’s flagship, HMAS *Australia*,

¹⁶⁴ Churchill quoted in John Colville, *The Fringes of Power: Downing Street Diaries 1939-1945*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985 2004, p. 351.

¹⁶⁵ Colville, *The Fringes of Power*, p. 345.

¹⁶⁶ Andrew Stewart, *Empire Lost: Britain, the Dominions and the Second World War*, London: Continuum, 2008, p. 73.

¹⁶⁷ Stewart, “Bill Jordan”, 69.

¹⁶⁸ Stewart, *Empire Lost*, p. 39, p. 73 and p. 33; Budget information from Carl Berendsen’s memoirs MS, p. 180, ATL MS-Papers-6759-463.

¹⁶⁹ Stewart, *Empire Lost*, p. 46.

take part in the ill-fated Dakar expedition, and in May 1941 made Freyberg, who was on secondment to New Zealand, commander on Crete.¹⁷⁰ Australia's Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, told his War Cabinet "Mr Churchill has no conception of the British Dominions as separate entities."¹⁷¹

Blamey recognised much the same attitude amongst British Army officers:

There was a curious element in the British make-up which led them to look upon the Dominions as appendages of Great Britain. They had difficulty in recognising the independent status of the Dominions and their responsibility for the control of their own Forces.¹⁷²

Blamey's opinion was endorsed by Freyberg. Commenting after the war on the friction between the Dominions and Middle East Command, Freyberg stated: "It is the old story of the father not realising, and I believe not wanting to realise, that his sons have grown up and want full partnership in the family business."¹⁷³ Senior British officers frequently resented the charters that Dominion governments gave their GOCs. In 1941, General Sir Alan Brooke recorded that the Canadian charter "renders the use of

¹⁷⁰ David Horner, *Defence Supremo, Sir Frederick Sheddon and the Making of Australian Defence Policy*, St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2000, p. 88; and Tuvia Ben-Moshe, *Churchill: Strategy and History*, Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner, 1992, p. 265.

¹⁷¹ Prime Minister's Visit Abroad, Australian War Cabinet minutes, 28 May 1941, AWM 67 5/17.

¹⁷² Menzies' recollection of Blamey's statement in Discussions with General Officer Commanding AIF, Australian War Cabinet minutes, 28 May 1941, AWM 67 5/17.

¹⁷³ Lord Freyberg, House of Lords, 15 April 1953, hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1953/apr/15/defence#S5LV0181PO_19530415_HOL_43, accessed 17 May 2014.

Dominion troops even more difficult than that of allies!”¹⁷⁴ (Alan Brooke’s comment is further evidence that, to British eyes, Dominions and allies were separate beings.) Middle East Command was condescending towards Dominion officers and “an undercurrent of resentment” developed that caused “major difficulties in British-Dominion relations.”¹⁷⁵ While the British officers cannot be commended for the attitude they adopted towards Dominion commanders, they should not be held entirely responsible for it either. Their attitude mirrored that of their government.

In June 1940 Freyberg left Egypt for Britain to oversee the second echelon’s training and deployment there.¹⁷⁶ In August, and while still in the United Kingdom, Freyberg learnt that Wavell intended breaking up 2NZEF and distributing the portions throughout British, Indian and Australian formations. Had the plan been carried out, Freyberg would have been left with just his headquarters staff in Cairo.¹⁷⁷ The Government feared that if broken up and used in a piecemeal fashion, New Zealand’s largest contribution to the war might disappear. The public, Wellington knew, would be outraged and doing so would “would make impossible the maintenance of the high standards of welfare on which New

¹⁷⁴ Field-Marshal Lord Alanbrooke, *War Diaries 1939–1945*, Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman (eds.), London: Phoenix Press, 1957 2002, p. 137. [Exclamation mark original.]

¹⁷⁵ Lance McMillan, “The British Middle East Force”, p. 19 and p. 22.

¹⁷⁶ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, pp. 220-223.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 233.

Zealand opinion insisted.”¹⁷⁸ Sufficiently aware of Government thinking on the matter to know how to react, Freyberg said he “naturally refused to obey this improper order” and raised the matter with General Sir John Dill, Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS).¹⁷⁹ Dill told Freyberg “Archie [Wavell] cannot do this—leave it to me”.¹⁸⁰ Freyberg expected that Wavell’s plan would be abandoned or countermanded. Instead, when he returned to Egypt in September 1940 Freyberg found that significant numbers of 2NZEF personnel had been distributed to other formations.¹⁸¹

Initially, and incorrectly, Freyberg blamed Brigadier Edward Puttick (who had acted as temporary commanding officer during Freyberg’s absence) for not preventing the detachments. Freyberg’s return to Egypt coincided with the arrival of the third echelon. The third echelon enabled Freyberg to commence forming a (two-brigade) division. But in order to form that division, Freyberg needed to get the detached units back. When he asked for units to be returned, Middle East Command resisted. September 1940 marks the beginning of the second phase in 2NZEF-Middle East Command relations. Freyberg summed up the change as: “There was an angry exchange of letters, and from that moment our relationship deteriorated”.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Wood, *Political and External*, p. 102.

¹⁷⁹ Lord Freyberg, House of Lords 15 April 1953.

¹⁸⁰ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 232.

¹⁸¹ Wood, *Political and External*, p. 176.

¹⁸² Lord Freyberg, House of Lords 15 April 1953.

In late September Freyberg sent a letter to Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, GOC British Troops in Egypt and often known as “Jumbo”, pointing out that he was “within measurable distance of having a complete Division concentrated”. Freyberg explained that while detachments had previously been agreed to, “the time has come when we can no longer comply” and requested the return of nine units.¹⁸³ Headquarters British Troops in Egypt (HQ BTE) replied that four of the nominated units could be returned and gave reasons for the retention of the other five.¹⁸⁴ HQ BTE were not being unnecessarily obstructive. There were desperate personnel shortages in the Middle East, they expressed their gratitude for the service that New Zealand units had provided, and (somewhat hollowly) assured Freyberg that “every effort is being made to return them ... as quickly as possible.”¹⁸⁵ Meanwhile, 2AIF had also experienced British Army reluctance to return detached units. Getting detachments back was “like prising open the jaws of an alligator”, Blamey told Menzies.¹⁸⁶ Freyberg sought the Government’s opinion and learnt that the Cabinet was “most dissatisfied with the present dispersal” of forces and would “support you fully in any steps you consider it necessary to take to facilitate the consolidation of the New Zealand Division.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Freyberg to HQ BTE, 29 September 1940, *Documents I*, #242, pp. 184-185.

¹⁸⁴ HQ BTE to Freyberg, 4 October 1940, *Documents I*, #243, pp. 185-186.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Blamey, quoted in Horner, *Blamey*, p. 237.

¹⁸⁷ Jones to Freyberg, 15 October 1940, *Documents I*, #246, pp. 188-189.

At the same time that Freyberg was arguing with HQ BTE, Maitland Wilson (acting as temporary commander-in-chief while Wavell was in London) ordered the 16th Australian Brigade into battle. Blamey refused to detach it from his 6th Division. The objection “really set the cat among the pigeons” and the next day 2AIF received the message “Our Archie [Wavell] in London has seen our Winston [Churchill] who has directed that Tubby [Brigadier Arthur Allen, commander of the brigade] should move as directed.”¹⁸⁸ Middle East Command, Horner observed, “had still not understood the realities of Australia’s status as an independent nation, albeit within the Empire.”¹⁸⁹ Blamey and his chief of staff, Rowell, decided that a stand needed to be made and replied “This cuts no ice with us. The decision will rest with our Thomas Albert [Blamey] in Gaza and our Robert Gordon [Menzies] in Canberra.”¹⁹⁰ September 1940 was, therefore, a turning point in coalition relations for both New Zealand and Australia. Freyberg and Blamey both became insistent about the right of Dominion governments to decide how and where their forces were used, and both made stands about maintaining the integrity of consolidated (or consolidating) formations.

On 16 October Freyberg wrote to Puttick to apologise for wrongly holding him responsible for the August detachments. In the letter he complained that his friends Wavell, Maitland Wilson and

¹⁸⁸ Rowell, *Full Circle*, p. 49; and cable from Middle East command quoted pp. 49-50.

¹⁸⁹ Horner, *Blamey*, p. 156.

¹⁹⁰ Rowell, *Full Circle*, p. 50.

Lieutenant-General Arthur Smith (Wavell's chief of staff) were being uncooperative about returning units, and said that he was disillusioned by the "passive resistance" he was encountering at Middle East Command. "Our duty is to train the Force and like Blamey we have most reluctantly to avoid any commitments that interfere".¹⁹¹ Freyberg's reference to Blamey is important. It was only when Freyberg had the opportunity to form a division that he had a reason to behave like Blamey. Furthermore, Blamey and Rowell had taken their stand against Middle East Command at the same time that Freyberg informed Maitland Wilson that, now being able to form a division, he could no longer accede to detachment requests. McLeod's contention that "Freyberg, being a British officer had, unlike Blamey, taken time to fully realise what Dominion status meant" is a misinterpretation.¹⁹² It was the diversion of the second echelon to Britain, not Freyberg's nationality, that prevented him from forming the Division earlier in 1940. Until Freyberg had sufficient troops to form a division (September 1940) there was no reason to decline detachment requests. Freyberg being a British officer had nothing to do with it.

On 19 October Brigadier Alexander Galloway (Maitland Wilson's Brigadier General Staff at HQ BTE) sent Freyberg a memorandum advising that because of impending battle commitments it was "out of the question for the time being" for New

¹⁹¹ Freyberg to Puttick, 16 October 1940, ANZ R21 124 596.

¹⁹² McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, p. 174.

Zealand units in the Western Desert to be returned. Galloway claimed that efforts were being made to return some other units and that Freyberg should be satisfied that detached personnel were receiving “very good training”.¹⁹³ Freyberg was outraged and telephoned Galloway:

If you have discussed the employment of NZEF without reference to me I think it is very wrong. You can't get together, the three of you [presumably Galloway, Maitland Wilson and Wavell] and decide what to do ... You cannot break up the New Zealand Division. That is impossible.¹⁹⁴

Freyberg followed up the telephone call with a letter that reminded Galloway that 2NZEF was “not an integral part of the British Army ... [and] cannot be split up and used piecemeal, except with the consent of the New Zealand Government.”¹⁹⁵ The letter is frequently quoted in New Zealand military histories, often as evidence that Freyberg was (at last) supporting 2NZEF over his British friends and British Army background.¹⁹⁶ That contention overlooks both Freyberg's September letter to Maitland Wilson and the arrival of the third echelon, and is a misstatement of Freyberg's motives and conduct.

After his outburst to Galloway, Freyberg evidently took up the matter with the Commander-in-Chief because ten days later he

¹⁹³ HQ BTE to HQ NZ Division, 19 October 1940, *Documents I*, #247, pp. 189-190.

¹⁹⁴ Transcript of Freyberg's telephone call to Galloway, quoted in McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, p. 175.

¹⁹⁵ Freyberg to HQ BTE, 19 October 1940, *Documents I*, #248, p.190.

¹⁹⁶ Excerpts from the letter are cited in McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, p. 173, Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 235, Singleton-Gates, *Freyberg*, p. 116, Pugsley *Bloody Road Home*, p. 54; and Wright *Freyberg's War* p. 40.

wrote to Minister of Defence Jones that the matter of detachments had been settled with Wavell. “It cannot be carried out at once but arrangements will be made to do so as soon as the operational position here ... allow[s]”.¹⁹⁷

Even though Freyberg had told Puttick in mid October that he must henceforward avoid commitments that would interfere with consolidating the Division, in early November Freyberg advised the Government that Wavell was “having to fight with inadequate resources” and that New Zealand “should be willing to compromise” and allow troops to be sent to Crete.¹⁹⁸ This Wellington agreed to.¹⁹⁹ The British Government, however, declined the offer. They had recognised from other, unrelated communications that New Zealand was keen to see the second echelon (in Britain) united with the rest of the Division (in Egypt). Rather than adding to Wellington’s frustrations by further breaking up 2NZEF, Whitehall decided that other troops could be sent to Crete.²⁰⁰

In late November Wellington became alarmed when press reports indicated that there were New Zealand troops in Athens.²⁰¹ Neither the Government nor Freyberg had agreed to or had knowledge of the deployment. The presence of New Zealand troops in Greece was initially denied by Whitehall and Middle East

¹⁹⁷ Freyberg to Jones, 28 October 1940, *Documents I*, #249, p. 191.

¹⁹⁸ Freyberg to Fraser, 8 November 1940, *Documents I*, #253, p. 194.

¹⁹⁹ NZ Governor-General to Dominions Secretary, 9 November 1940, *Documents I*, #254, p. 195.

²⁰⁰ Batterbee to Fraser, 10 November 1940, *Documents I*, #255, pp. 195-196.

²⁰¹ NZ Governor-General to Dominions Secretary, 23 November 1940, *Documents I*, #257, p. 198.

Command.²⁰² Enquiries persisted and two weeks after the matter had first been raised (and after Wellington, Freyberg, the War Office and the Dominions Secretary had all become involved), Middle East Command admitted that two officers and 54 men of the 9th New Zealand Railway Survey Company were indeed in Greece.²⁰³ There were few other unauthorised deployments of New Zealand personnel and, in the case of the railway troops, there was some uncertainty over whether or not they were under Freyberg's command.²⁰⁴ While it could be argued that even a small number of unauthorised detachments was too many, and that unapproved use of Dominion resources reflected British arrogance, it is easy to exaggerate the significance of the rare instances of unsanctioned use of what were only ever small-sized units.

In October 1940 Freyberg had reported to Jones that Wavell would release detached New Zealand units as soon as the operational position allowed. Three months later, in January 1941, Freyberg still awaited the return of some units.²⁰⁵ The Signals Corps, for example, that had been lent out in June 1940 for three weeks, was kept for 30 weeks and was not returned until January 1941.²⁰⁶ So far as the few communications concerning the return of units that are available in New Zealand show, Freyberg was persistent but no

²⁰² See #s 258, 259, 261, 262, and 264-266 *Documents I*, pp. 198-202.

²⁰³ GHQ Middle East to CGS Wellington, 6 December 1940, *Documents I*, #267, p. 202.

²⁰⁴ Freyberg to Fraser, 3 December 1940, *Documents I*, #267, p. 202.

²⁰⁵ Freyberg to Duigan, 13 January 1941; and Arthur Smith to Freyberg 14 January 1941, *Documents I*, #271 and #272, pp. 204-206.

²⁰⁶ Pugsley, *Bloody Road Home*, p. 53.

more.²⁰⁷ It is likely that Freyberg's attitude was the result of directions from Wellington. In February 1941 Jones advised Freyberg that although the Government held it "most desirable" that the Division be concentrated, the exigencies of Middle East Command had also to be considered.²⁰⁸ Wellington and Freyberg were more sensitive to and accommodating of Middle East Command's needs than Middle East Command was of New Zealand's.

In February 1941 Wavell told Freyberg—he was not, as the commander of an independent national force might expect, asked—that the New Zealand Division would serve in a forthcoming operation in Greece. Wavell refused to entertain Freyberg's questions and concerns about the operation, and when Freyberg said that the Government would have to approve the deployment, Wavell lied and said that Fraser had already sanctioned it. Blamey received similar treatment from Wavell and was also lied to about government approval.²⁰⁹ Although two-thirds of the fighting force that was sent to Greece were Australians and New Zealanders, a British general (Maitland Wilson) was appointed as commander, much to Blamey's chagrin. The appointment of a British rather than a Dominion general was typical of Middle East Command which,

²⁰⁷ Commenting on the exchanges Freyberg had with Middle East Command to secure the return of detached units, Fred Wood remarked "there is little information about them in official records[s]." Wood, *Political and External*, p. 176. Wood was correct.

²⁰⁸ Jones to Freyberg, 5 February 1941, *Documents I*, #273, p. 206.

²⁰⁹ See chapter 4 for a full discussion of the lead up to Greece.

rather than sharing command opportunities with Dominion generals, intentionally excluded them.²¹⁰ Official historian W. G. McClymont held that the campaign in Greece “made it clear to the Dominions that the problems of Commonwealth relations were not always understood by the British Government or by the Higher Command in the Middle East.”²¹¹

It is now accepted that good interpersonal relations between national commanders are a “precondition for smooth cooperation and seamless interoperability within a coalition.”²¹² A number of senior officers during the Second World War also understood the importance of harmonious personal relations with coalition partners. General Dwight Eisenhower advised Admiral Louis Mountbatten that the true basis for allied unity of command “lies in the earnest cooperation of the senior officers assigned to an allied theatre ... depends directly upon the individuals in the field ... [and requires] patience, tolerance, frankness [and] absolute honesty in all dealings.”²¹³ Freyberg expected to be treated in such a manner, as his January 1940 letter to Fraser anticipating courteous treatment from the British Army showed.²¹⁴ Freyberg’s expectation was not

²¹⁰ McMillan, “The British Middle East Force”, p. 23. Whether Freyberg, a British Army general on secondment to New Zealand was “non-British” is, perhaps, debatable. The point McMillan seeks to make is nonetheless important. Brackets in original.

²¹¹ W. G. McClymont, *To Greece*, Wellington: War History Branch, 1959, p. 477.

²¹² Kjeld Hald Galster, “Introduction” in Poulson, Galster, and Nørby (eds.), *Coalition Warfare*, p. 10.

²¹³ General Dwight D. Eisenhower, quoted in Anthony J. Rice, “Command and Control in Coalition Warfare: Does History Provide us with Practicable Solutions for Today?”, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pa, 1996, p. 11.

²¹⁴ See beginning of chapter.

unrealistic because Britain had over 200 years' experience of fighting in alliance with the armies of other nations. Coalition warfare has been described as Britain's "historical tradition" for terrestrial combat.²¹⁵ The British should, therefore, have been able to institute better relations with Dominion GOCs.

It was also reasonable for Freyberg to expect considerate treatment from a commander-in-chief who was a friend. Freyberg and Wavell had been friends since 1934 when they were sent as observers to *Cycle d'Information des Généraux et des Colonels* (School of Field-Marshals) in Versailles, France.²¹⁶ Wavell was intellectually gifted, fluent in several languages, deeply interested in poetry, renown for his taciturnity, and unusually broadminded.²¹⁷ In the interwar years he had been a supporter of the military reformists Basil Liddell Hart and John Fuller, and his article on generalship, "War and the Prophets", was often regarded as visionary.²¹⁸ In a 1936 lecture Wavell advised that a leader "must have a genuine interest in and knowledge of humanity—the raw material of his trade."²¹⁹ He also recommended that because a senior commander has to deal with the statesmen and soldiers of other nations, "the

²¹⁵ Graham Goodlad, "Alliances and Warfare, 1792-1945", *History Review*, March 2012, 47.

²¹⁶ Schofield, *Wavell*, p. 104 and p. 138.

²¹⁷ Victoria Schofield, *Wavell: Soldier and Statesman*, London: John Murray, 2006, p. 33 *et passim*. In 1940 Wavell arranged for his ADC, Peter Coats, to travel in Palestine with Henry "Chips" Channon, a visiting British Member of Parliament and Coats's lover. Peter Coats, *Of Generals and Gardens*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976, p. 80.

²¹⁸ Max Hastings, *Winston's War: Churchill 1940-1945*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010, p. 104; and Schofield, *Wavell*, p. 93.

²¹⁹ Major-General A. P. Wavell, "The Higher Commander", *Royal United Services Institution Journal*, 81:521, 1936, 19.

more general knowledge he has of their characteristics and point of view, the better.”²²⁰ The Freyberg and Wavell families mixed socially and the two men even shared an interest in literature.²²¹ Wavell knew Freyberg’s “characteristics” and his “point of view”. But their very different relationships with Churchill may have soured their friendship.

Churchill had known and admired Freyberg for 25 years and the two were friends. In June 1940, Wavell upset Churchill by refusing to release troops from the Middle East to bolster the defence of the United Kingdom.²²² When Wavell and Churchill had their first meeting, in London in August 1940, Churchill was frustrated by Wavell’s silences and disappointed at Wavell’s apparent lack of bellicosity. Wavell meanwhile despaired at Churchill’s failure to understand that modern warfare required equipment and training, and not just “a few men with a few rifles and horses”.²²³ Their unsuccessful meeting in 1940 led Churchill to consider replacing Wavell—with Freyberg. Wavell’s 2006 biographer held that Churchill’s regard for Freyberg increased the tension between Wavell and Freyberg.²²⁴ Paul Freyberg saw it only as adding another stress to a friendship already strained by Wavell’s

²²⁰ Wavell, “The Higher Commander”, 20.

²²¹ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 234. Paul Freyberg implies that Mrs Barbara Freyberg and Lady Eugenie Wavell were also friends. Through his friendship with J.M. Barrie, Freyberg had developed an interest in literature (chapters 6-10).

²²² Schofield, *Wavell*, p. 143.

²²³ *Ibid*, p. 150.

²²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 155.

scholarliness, his brooding silences and his unwillingness to discuss coalition relations.²²⁵ Even though Wavell and Freyberg were friends, and notwithstanding Wavell's lecture that espoused the need for sensitivity towards allied commanders, Wavell instituted a command regime more appropriate to the First World War than the Second. In Wavell's view Dominion troops were part of the British Army and New Zealand's instructions that the Division be consolidated and fight as a national force could be disregarded.²²⁶

It was not merely metropolitan arrogance that shaped Wavell's dismissive attitude to Dominion rights; his responsibilities overwhelmed his resources. Wavell's command covered East and North Africa, the Mediterranean, the Balkans, the Levant, Persia, and Arabia. To administer this vast and diverse theatre Wavell had on his headquarters staff just five staff officers and one aide-de-camp (ADC), but no commander-in-chief's aeroplane.²²⁷ His 90,000 troops faced a total Italian force of over half a million.²²⁸ Wavell was conducting multi-front operations with British, Empire and Allied forces from an under-staffed headquarters in an ostensibly neutral country, Egypt, which offered little in the way of industrial support.²²⁹ Basic infrastructure such as railways, roads and even

²²⁵ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 234.

²²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 233.

²²⁷ Beckett, "Wavell", p. 75.

²²⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 74-75.

²²⁹ Lance McMillan, "The British Middle East Force", pp. 6-7.

water were frequently lacking throughout his command.²³⁰ Wavell also suffered from a paucity of resources. There were serious troop shortages, the limited armour that was available was mostly obsolete, and artillery resources were inadequate.²³¹ Somewhat inevitably, Wavell's command became known as "the Muddle East".²³²

Troop shortages obliged Middle East Command to adopt a policy of exploiting to the full the scarce resources they possessed. Stevens reported that "from the British standpoint, there was no objection at all to detaching part of a division ... From our standpoint there was every objection".²³³ A Middle East staff officer partly concurred. Freyberg's insistence on forming a division and guarding its integrity was:

no doubt right from a New Zealand point of view but it nearly drove poor Archie Wavell ... round the bend. Blamey was taking the same line as Freyberg, and the Indian Government was trying to exert control over the Indian formation. The very few pats of butter Wavell had to spread over a vast amount of bread he was forbidden to use ... It was intolerable for him, and put some little strain on a friendship of long standing.²³⁴

Other Middle East Command officers felt similarly. Maitland Wilson told a British officer that he looked upon Freyberg as "an ally, a

²³⁰ Lieutenant-General Arthur Smith, "The War in the Middle East: June 1940-March 1942", *Royal United Services Institution Journal*, 88:549, February 1943, 2.

²³¹ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 227.

²³² Stewart, *Crete*, p. 54.

²³³ Stevens, *Problems*, p. 170.

²³⁴ Bernard Fergusson, quoted in McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, p. 175.

friendly ally, but not too friendly”.²³⁵ Galloway wrote to an associate “Freyberg is a complete menace, and possibly things may come to a head which will result in proper control of formations ... irrespective of whose government they come from.”²³⁶

While Wavell’s need to make use of all available resources is understandable, the methods that Middle East Command adopted to address their shortages, and the attitudes those methods reflected, engendered not cooperation, but resentment.²³⁷ Coalition warfare requires “deriving full benefit from the partnership through the integration and coordination of individual contributions into a joint effort.”²³⁸ The lead nations in coalitions “cannot entirely disregard the interests of their weaker partners ... because even the strongest power is *dependent* to some extent on the support of its smaller allies.”²³⁹ In order to fully exploit Dominion resources:

minimising problems with coalition partners should have been a high-priority task, but the British decided to essentially ignore it ... The failure to work harmoniously with the[ir] allies and be sensitive to their concerns needlessly complicated Middle East Force’s efforts.²⁴⁰

The reticent and scholarly Wavell had an intellectual appreciation of the need to respect coalition partners, but failed to

²³⁵ Field-Marshal Lord Harding, Filer Interviews, Department of Defence.

²³⁶ Galloway, October 1940, quoted in Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, p. 90.

²³⁷ McMillan, “The British Middle East Force”, p. 22.

²³⁸ Allan R. Millet, Williamson Murray and Kenneth H. Watson, “The effectiveness of Military Organisations”, *International Security*, 11:1, Summer 1986, 48.

²³⁹ Thomas Stow Wilkins, “Analysing Coalition Warfare from an Intra-Alliance Politics Perspective: The Normandy Campaign 1944”, *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 29:6, December 2006, 1129. [Italics original.]

²⁴⁰ McMillan, “The British Middle East Force”, p. 22.

exploit the sensitivity he displayed in other elements of his life when dealing with Dominion GOCs. Freyberg considered that serving under Wavell constituted the unhappiest years of his career, said he was “deeply wounded” by Wavell’s conduct, and described Wavell’s behaviour as “intolerable”.²⁴¹ Wavell allowed the “old Colonial attitude of the British officer” to influence relations with Dominion commanders.²⁴² Middle East Command patronised Freyberg and Blamey and refused to accept that the two GOCs commanded the national forces of independent nations.²⁴³ As Commander-in-Chief, Wavell was responsible for his command’s relationship with its coalition partners. He had been made aware of Dominion conditions and concerns. Wavell either condoned or ignored the manner in which his Middle East Command mistreated Dominion GOCs.

It has often been contended that in 1940-41 Freyberg suffered a conflict of loyalty, that he was initially loyal to the British Army and his British friends. Singleton-Gates asserted that Freyberg’s “divided loyalties” meant he showed “great forbearance” in the use of his charter while Blamey, who was loyal to Australia only, felt no need for restraint when dealing with the British Army.²⁴⁴ Stevens wrote that Freyberg was, at first, only “gently insistent” that the Division be consolidated and didn’t show real commitment to New

²⁴¹ Quoted in Dan Davin, *Memoir of Bernard Freyberg*, ATL MS-Papers-5079-353, p.25; and Dan Davin, *Filer Interviews*.

²⁴² Horner, *Blamey*, p. 239.

²⁴³ Murphy, “Charters”, 47; and McClymont, *To Greece*, p. 475.

²⁴⁴ Singleton-Gates, *Freyberg*, pp. 219-220.

Zealand until the last part of 1940.²⁴⁵ McLeod determined that Freyberg's position had been invidious because championing New Zealand would "inevitably bring him into conflict with men who had been his superiors and/or friends."²⁴⁶ These contentions have overlooked a matter that is self-apparent. Until September 1940 and the arrival of the third echelon, Freyberg had insufficient troops to form a division. The needs of Middle East Command were dire and there was no occupation for many of 2NZEF's men. Detaching under-utilised units was sensible and had the support of the Government. Comparing Freyberg's response to detachment requests with Blamey's in the first nine months of 1940 is, as has already been noted, inappropriate because Blamey had consolidated divisions while Freyberg did not.

The commentators who alleged that Freyberg had divided loyalties, or that his friendships with British officers complicated coalition relations, usually contradicted themselves by also reporting that Freyberg argued with his British Army friends in order to achieve New Zealand's intentions. Wood held that "Freyberg acted firmly."²⁴⁷ McLeod described Freyberg's concern to consolidate a division as "zealous" and his fight for the recognition of New Zealand's independent status as a "persistent struggle".²⁴⁸ Singleton-Gates recognised that Freyberg's forbearance and

²⁴⁵ Stevens, *Freyberg*, p. 29 and p. 31.

²⁴⁶ McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, p. 173.

²⁴⁷ Wood, *Political and External*, p. 176.

²⁴⁸ McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, p. 170.

intransigence brought results.²⁴⁹ The contradiction inherent in these commentators' remarks about Freyberg's acquiescence on the one hand, and their recognition of his pugnacity on the other, suggests their failure to distinguish between the pre-September 1940 phase and the post-September one caused the misinterpretation.

The absence of a no-piecemeal-use clause in Freyberg's charter had little effect. Blamey's charter included a prohibition against breaking up 2AIF but its existence made no difference to the British Army and made the return of detachments no easier. Other differences in their charters had more effect. Blamey's charter began by stating:

The Force to be recognised as an Australian Force under its own Commander who will have direct responsibility to the Commonwealth Government with the right to communicate direct[ly] with that Government.²⁵⁰

Freyberg's charter was weaker:

The General Officer Commanding will act in accordance with the instructions he receives from the Commander-in-Chief under whose command he is serving, subject only to the requirements of His Majesty's Government in New Zealand.²⁵¹

The charter Wellington in November 1942 provided Major-General Harold Barrowclough, GOC the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in the Pacific, was an improvement on Freyberg's charter.

²⁴⁹ Singleton-Gates, *Freyberg*, p. 220. Brackets original.

²⁵⁰ Quoted in Horner, *High Command*, p. 45.

²⁵¹ Charter, *Documents I*, #39, p. 31.

Barrowclough was “expressly authorised” to communicate with the Government when troops would be placed at risk, and except for operational matters, was deemed responsible to the Government.²⁵²

Four myths concerning 2NZEF’s coalition relations in 1940-41 have been created and perpetuated in New Zealand military historiography: that Freyberg had conflicting loyalties; that it took until late 1940 for him to commit to New Zealand; that Freyberg let friendships get in the way of securing Government objectives; and that detaching units caused the disharmony. Those myths have been exposed as fallacies and miss-appreciations brought about by historians failing to recognise that September 1940 was a turning point in Middle East coalition relations. It was not making detachments that sparked the conflict with Middle East Command, they were agreed to by Freyberg and the Government, it was getting detached units back.

The New Zealand Government was unable to gain formal agreement with the British Government over how their alliance relationship would work. Whitehall declined to enter into partnership agreements with Dominions or to recognise the Dominions as sovereign states and allies. Freyberg’s charter had been signed by the British Prime Minister but was not regarded by the British Army as binding on them. In the absence of an alliance agreement, the British Army’s previous experiences of working with

²⁵² Barrowclough’s Charter, Appendix V, *Documents III*, pp. 553-554.

New Zealand forces and their national-cultural attitudes determined the form of the coalition relationship. The result was that 2NZEF was treated in the same manner as 1NZEF had been treated during the First World War. The Government and Freyberg found such treatment inappropriate and anachronistic. Freyberg had to engage in a political battle for the recognition of Dominion rights.

Freyberg had an established friendship with the theatre commander-in-chief that should have aided obtaining agreement on 2NZEF's use, but the friendship had no effect. Wavell stubbornly insisted that his out-dated, Imperial and insensitive notions of how Dominion forces were to be used would apply. He paid no heed to his own recommendations on understanding the desires and needs of coalition partners, and allowed Dominion GOCs to be treated high-handedly.

Freyberg's and the Government's empathy with Wavell's predicament in 1940, showed that they tried to establish rapport. Middle East Command and Whitehall made little attempt to be accommodating or flexible. The coalition strife that surfaced in September 1940 was almost wholly the result of British attitudes and British conduct.

3. *GOC-officer relations*

In late May 1941, Fraser heard from a 2NZEF officer that Freyberg had made poor command decisions in Greece and Crete, and did not communicate with his officers or listen to their opinions. Fraser then spoke to other 2NZEF officers, a number of whom also had criticisms of Freyberg. The officers' complaints so worried Fraser that he referred their allegations to the inquiry on Greece and Crete. He also considered sacking Freyberg.²⁵³ The officers' grievances were, in fact, not new. There had been rumblings of disaffection with Freyberg from the time of his appointment.

The treatment of the 1940-41 officer discontent in historiography—when it has been mentioned at all—has largely consisted of repeating the officers' complaints, and also their statements about the cause and resolution of them, usually with little analysis. The topic has been more thoroughly discussed in accounts by some of the officers, Stevens and White particularly. Those accounts located the source of the unhappiness with Freyberg's "British Army" (as the officers saw it) ways, and

²⁵³ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, pp. 322-325.

contended that the dissatisfaction was resolved when Freyberg transformed from being British into a New Zealander.

This examination of Freyberg-officer relations uses organisational culture theory as an analytical framework and reveals the difference between the officers' perceptions of what caused the discontent and the real source of the disharmony. It is also made apparent that Freyberg's nationality and his British Army background were, contrary to what the officers believed, of little consequence. The officers' own cultural baggage is shown to be the foundation of most of the disharmony. The resolution of the officers' dissatisfaction with their GOC was a matter of acceptance. The officers changed and accepted Freyberg's command, but they stated that he changed and accepted them.

The application of organisational culture theory to the military is established practice. Leadership, high-command organisation, combat operations, and the development of the national armies, to name but a few topics, have all been subject to organisational culture analysis.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ Major Remi Hajjar, "Leveraging Culture to Lead Effectively", *Leadership Breakthroughs from Westpoint*, "Special Supplement", 67-73; Lieutenant-Colonel Christian Freuding, "Organising for War: Strategic Culture and the Organisation of High Command in Britain and Germany 1850-1945: A Comparative Perspective", *Defence Studies*, 10:3, September 2010, 431-460; Major R.A. Applegate and J.R. Moore, "The Nature of Military Culture", *Defence Analysis*, 6:1, 1990, 302-305; and John Bentley, "Champion of Anzac: General Sir Brudenell White, the First Australian Imperial Force and the Emergence of the Australian Military Culture 1914-1918", PhD Thesis, University of Wollongong, NSW, 2003.

Organisational culture theory holds that a leader's principal responsibility is to manage the culture of the organisation.²⁵⁵ Edgar Schein identified the fundamental constituents of organisational culture as being artefacts, values and assumptions.²⁵⁶ *Artefacts* are the visible attributes of an organisation's culture (attire, forms of address, the layout of work premises) but are, Schein warned, difficult to decipher with accuracy. Saluting is an example of an artefact. 2NZEF troops tended to wave, or to acknowledge an officer in some other way, rather than salute.²⁵⁷ *Values* are the stated beliefs of an organisation. Values may or may not fit the artefacts, and may not accurately describe an organisation's true culture. Values are central to the analysis in this chapter and it is therefore worth remarking that the officers' statements concerning their complaints and about the resolution of their grievances were values and therefore not, as Schein warned, reliable expressions of the truth.²⁵⁸ The soul of an organisation, the potent thoughts and feelings that actually determine behaviour, are its *assumptions*. Assumptions are seldom articulated; they are tacitly understood, deeply rooted and are the most powerful aspect of organisational culture.²⁵⁹ As will be described, the underlying cause of the disharmony between Freyberg and his officers was disagreement

²⁵⁵ Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman Jr, *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*, New York: Harper Collins, 1982, 2004, p. 24.

²⁵⁶ Edgar H. Schein, *Organisational Culture and Leadership*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1985, 4th ed. 2010, p. 32.

²⁵⁷ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 364.

²⁵⁸ Schein, *Organisational Culture*, p. 32.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 23-25.

over whether the officers' or Freyberg's assumptions should prevail in 2NZEF.

Those who establish organisations (“founders” in Schein’s lexicon) create the cultural assumptions of the entity.²⁶⁰ Leadership is an exercise in influencing the organisation’s culture by “creating the conditions for new culture formation.”²⁶¹ When a leader attempts to change an organisation’s assumptions, the response is resistance, often so strong that can seem excessive.²⁶² Schein determined that a leader has three main culture-management tasks:

to understand the deeper levels of a culture, to assess the functionality of the assumptions made at that level, and to deal with the anxiety that is unleashed when those assumptions are challenged.²⁶³

In 1940-41, Freyberg was both founding a culture for 2NZEF (it was a new entity) and modifying the cultures that existed in its three constituent parts (permanent New Zealand Army, Territorial Army and civilian volunteers). The complaints Fraser heard about Freyberg were to be expected, Schein would argue, because Freyberg was founding cultural assumptions and challenging existing ones—activities that create anxiety and generate hostility. That the discontent boiled over during operations in Greece and Crete was also to be expected. Those operations were the first time that the

²⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 32.

²⁶¹ Ibid, p. 3.

²⁶² Ibid, p. 8, and p. 29.

²⁶³ Ibid, p. 33.

New Zealand Division was consolidated and engaged in battle. Initial experiences, Schein held, are where cultural assumptions quickly form.²⁶⁴

There appears to have been no disaffection with Freyberg among the rank and file members of 2NZEF. Although Stevens wrote that in 1940-41 the soldiers were only indifferently respectful of Freyberg,²⁶⁵ Fraser spent a good deal of his time in the Middle East in 1941 visiting New Zealand bases and was satisfied with the mood of the troops.²⁶⁶ The discontent was confined to the senior officers, some of whom resented the appointment of a British officer as GOC.²⁶⁷ Brigadier Harold Barrowclough, for example, said he was initially “opposed to the choice of Freyberg as commander of the New Zealand Division. Along with some other Territorial officers I thought a New Zealander should be given the position.”²⁶⁸ In their first year in theatre Freyberg and his officers were “wary of each other”.²⁶⁹ Freyberg’s manner was thought too formal,²⁷⁰ and he endured “a prolonged period of variance and dissension between himself and his divisional staff”.²⁷¹

In mid 1940, when Freyberg and the second echelon were in the United Kingdom, Brigadier James Hargest wrote to Fraser to

²⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 54.

²⁶⁵ Stevens, *Freyberg*, p. 31.

²⁶⁶ Fraser to Freyberg, 22 May 1941, ANZ R16 700 550.

²⁶⁷ Interview with General W. G. Stevens, June 1969, p. 11, ATL 2000-094-5.

²⁶⁸ Interview with Sir Harold Barrowclough, November 1969, p. 19, ATL 2000-094-5.

²⁶⁹ McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, p. 173

²⁷⁰ Stevens, *Freyberg*, pp. 22-24 and pp. 30-31.

²⁷¹ Singleton-Gates, *Freyberg*, pp. 108-9.

complain about Freyberg's command.²⁷² Hargest was a farmer and long-serving Territorial officer who had fought in the First World War, where he had been awarded the Military Cross and the Distinguished Service Order. In 1931 he was elected to the House of Representatives. Although a National Party member, when a 1939 medical board found Hargest unfit for service overseas, Fraser intervened and Hargest was given command of the 5th Infantry Brigade.²⁷³ Hargest's performance in Greece was satisfactory but his command on Crete has been widely criticised.²⁷⁴ It is often held that Hargest was responsible for the loss of Maleme airfield that "gave the Germans a foothold on the island and thereby a victory".²⁷⁵

When Hargest was evacuated from Crete to Egypt in May 1941, he immediately (without shaving or washing, and still in the clothes he had been wearing for nearly a fortnight)²⁷⁶ complained to Fraser that Freyberg had caused the loss of the reinforcement battalion at Kalamata, had lost control of the withdrawal from Mt Olympus to Thermopylae, and that Freyberg was responsible for the loss of Maleme airfield. He also criticised Freyberg for poor communication with his officers.²⁷⁷ Barber and Tonkin-Covell

²⁷² Laurie Barber and John Tonkin-Covell, *Freyberg: Churchill's Salamander*, Auckland: Century Hutchinson, 1989, p. 110.

²⁷³ Ian McGibbon (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*, Auckland: OUP, 2000, p. 215.

²⁷⁴ Barber and Tonkin-Covell, *Salamander*, p. 80 and pp. 106-6; and "Comments by Lieut-General Sir Edward Puttick on Dan Davin's Draft History of the Greek Campaign pp. 135-629", ANZ R21 124 604.

²⁷⁵ Bell, "Memory, History, Nation, War", p. 149.

²⁷⁶ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War: The Man, the Legend and Reality*, Auckland: Penguin, 2005, p. 78.

²⁷⁷ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 323.

regarded Hargest's outpourings to the Prime Minister as an abuse of parliamentary privilege, and contended that in criticising Freyberg, Hargest was attempting to deflect attention from his own performance at Maleme.²⁷⁸ But Fraser would have paid heed to Hargest's opinions because Hargest was a member of parliament and politicians, Hensley contended, have a special regard for the opinions of other politicians.²⁷⁹ Although investigations and inquiries subsequently exonerated Freyberg, and Hargest's "artless attempt to besmirch Freyberg's reputation" was found to be groundless,²⁸⁰ the damage was done. Hargest's allegations caused Fraser to ask other officers about Freyberg. The identity of the officers to whom Fraser spoke cannot be established with certainty (McLeod excludes Brigadiers Miles, Barrowclough and Puttick.)²⁸¹ It is likely that several of the officers Fraser interviewed were members of parliament. Berendsen was reportedly astounded by the "freemasonry" of the officer-MPs who relished getting together with Fraser.²⁸² It is known that Fraser hosted a dinner for five officer-MPs while in Cairo.²⁸³

In organisational culture theory terms, Hargest displayed the anxiety that surfaces when existing cultural assumptions are threatened by new ones. That Hargest had complained about

²⁷⁸ Barber and Tonkin-Covell, *Salamander*, p. 111.

²⁷⁹ Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, p. 124.

²⁸⁰ Bell, "Memory, History, Nation, War", p. 180.

²⁸¹ McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, p. 175.

²⁸² Alister McIntosh, interviewed by Michael King, 22 July 1978, ATL 2000-094-2, p. 6.

²⁸³ McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, p. 176.

Freyberg in 1940 and again in 1941 also suggests he was not willing to subordinate himself to Freyberg's command, as does Hargest's malicious diary entry on his session with Fraser: "I hope it will bear fruit".²⁸⁴ Hargest's resistance took the form of an attack on Freyberg's military competence.

From his interviews of officers, Fraser learnt that they were dissatisfied with Freyberg's communications, thought Freyberg insufficiently available to them, and that they wanted to be consulted by Freyberg before major decisions were made.²⁸⁵ It is an assumption in New Zealand command culture that commanders listen to their subordinates and this, Glyn Harper observed, "was the rather painful lesson that ... Freyberg had to learn".²⁸⁶ Some of 2NZEF's officers came from the (tiny) permanent Army, but the majority were Territorial officers. Both groups included a number of men who had held commissions in the First World War. The officers were members of the educated middle class.²⁸⁷ Several Territorial officers were lawyers (e.g., Kippenberger, Inglis and Barrowclough) and most were used to having their opinions listened to in their professional/civilian lives. Given their backgrounds and their limited military experience, the officers' desire to be heard is understandable. At the same time, their expectations suggest that

²⁸⁴ Hargest diary, 2 June 1941, quoted in McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, p. 175.

²⁸⁵ Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, p. 124; and McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, p. 176.

²⁸⁶ Glyn Harper, "A New Zealand Way of War and a New Zealand Style of Command?" in Glyn Harper and Joel Hayward (eds.), *Born to Lead?: Portraits of New Zealand Commanders*, Auckland: Exisle Publishing, 2003, p. 35.

²⁸⁷ Harper, "A New Zealand Way", p. 35.

they regarded being officers as akin to being members of a school board or a golf club committee.

In the small world of the interwar New Zealand Army, the officers knew, or knew of, each other. In their separate echelons, the officers had the opportunity to deepen bonds and to develop common views. Because the echelons were dispersed by time and geographically, and because Freyberg could not be in several places at once, the officers had few chances to get to know their GOC. The officer subculture probably crystallised during operations in Greece, the first time the officers were all together and sharing the experience of battle. As Schein noted, “cultural assumptions have their roots in early group experience”.²⁸⁸ The development of an officer subculture was a threat to Freyberg’s command and, in fact, a rival to it. According to Schein, “the bottom line for leaders is if they do not become conscious of the cultures in which they are embedded, those cultures will manage them.”²⁸⁹

Central to the officers’ criticisms of Freyberg was their perception that Freyberg’s methods were too regimental and too British Army. The perspective of Stevens, and probably others, was that “the GOC was still thinking of the British regular army, and despite the time that he had spent in New Zealand, did not truly understand the New Zealand way of looking at things.”²⁹⁰ The

²⁸⁸ Schein, *Organisational Culture*, p. 54.

²⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 22.

²⁹⁰ Stevens, *Problems*, p. 18.

officers were aware of Freyberg's book, *A Study of Unit Administration*, and thought its recommendations "quite unsuitable and indeed inapplicable to a [D]ominion volunteer force in a temporary camp in a foreign country in wartime."²⁹¹

Stevens' comments are surprising. The New Zealand Army had been modelled on the British Army since Godley's reforms prior to the First World War.²⁹² Those reforms were part of the Imperial Defence initiatives Kitchener had championed with Dominion governments so that Dominion armies could be effortlessly "integrated", as it was then termed, with the British Army. It was the intent of the Labour Government that 2ZNEF would operate within the British Army in the Second World War, albeit as a distinct force.²⁹³ 2NZEF used British Army doctrine, methods, equipment and provisioning in order to achieve tactical interoperability with its lead coalition partner. 2NZEF's officers apparently did not understand the reasons for Freyberg's imposition of British Army procedures. They saw them as British Army methods (with the emphasis on *British*) not the methods of the dominant coalition partner.

One reason for 2NZEF's officers not appreciating the justifications for British Army procedure was their lack of training and experience. Freyberg reported that the New Zealand Army of

²⁹¹ Stevens, *Freyberg*, p. 24.

²⁹² General Sir Alexander Godley, *Life of an Irish Soldier*, London: John Murray, 1939, p. 141.

²⁹³ Agreed Conclusions of Discussions Between Official, Held at the War Office on 2 November 1939, *Documents I*, Appendix I, pp. 333-334.

1939 was under-staffed, under-trained and poorly equipped.²⁹⁴ 2NZEF's officers knew that compared to the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy and the RNZAF, the Army had been neglected and under-funded for years.²⁹⁵ There appears to have been no acknowledgement by 2NZEF's officers that while 76 Staff officers were (just) sufficient to support a defence headquarters in peacetime, they were inadequate for training and leading a division in war.²⁹⁶ The officers "made every mistake possible", Freyberg wrote.²⁹⁷ When first sent overseas, New Zealand Royal Army Service Corps (NZRASC) officers did not know how to draw supplies when in the field.²⁹⁸ Freyberg explained in a cable to Fraser that "none of the senior officers of the second echelon [is] fit to start unit or collective training without first being trained themselves".²⁹⁹

The contention that Freyberg's policies were too regimental and inappropriate for wartime can be regarded in two ways. First, it is common practice for a newly appointed commander to insist on drill, sharpness and doing things by the book as a means of imposing his or her authority. The officers should have recognised that, if such actually took place. It is unlikely, however, that Freyberg acted as a martinet because the second perspective is that there is good

²⁹⁴ See chapter 1.

²⁹⁵ Interview with Lieutenant-General W.G. Stevens, June 1969, ATL 2000-094-5, p. 2

²⁹⁶ Peter William Wood, "A Battle to Win: An Analysis of Combat Effectiveness through the Second World War Experience of the 21st (Auckland) Battalion", PhD Thesis, Massey University, 2012, p. 54. (Errors as in original.)

²⁹⁷ Freyberg, quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 224.

²⁹⁸ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 224.

²⁹⁹ Freyberg to Fraser, 26 May 1940, *Documents I*, # 79, p. 66.

evidence that Freyberg was not concerned that 2NZEF was “less smart” than British Army regulars in Cairo, and that he tolerated New Zealand informality.³⁰⁰ That perspective suggests that Freyberg was not regimental. The officers’ true objection is more likely to have been their reluctance to accept that their skills were wanting and that procedures mirroring those of the lead coalition partner were necessary.

Prior to operations in Greece and Crete the officers had complained that Freyberg interfered and was inclined to do too much himself.³⁰¹ Given the officers’ inexperience and lack of training, Freyberg probably needed to intervene and to coach them. Either ignorant of or complacent about their shortcomings, 2NZEF’s officers chose to resist the procedures and standards Freyberg sought to implement. Freyberg’s vision of 2NZEF’s command operations clashed with the officers’ perceptions of their capabilities and of what was needed.

In the process of implementing procedures that would aid interoperability, Freyberg confronted two linked national (Schein uses “macrocultural”) assumptions: the Gallipoli legend and the myth of the natural soldier. The two are connected. The Gallipoli legend holds that training and leadership are unnecessary, and the myth of the natural soldier maintains that New Zealanders are

³⁰⁰ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 218; and Singleton-Gates, *Freyberg*, p.110-111.

³⁰¹ Stevens, *Freyberg*, pp. 22-24 and pp. 30-31.

inherently gifted fighters. The two work together and combine to argue that training and regimentation are not needed because New Zealanders are born soldiers. These notions had surfaced by the start of the First World War. “The young New Zealander who lives in the country is half a soldier before he is enrolled,” the *New Zealand Herald* ebulliently announced in August 1914.³⁰² Even 40 years after the end of the Second World War, the notion still had resonance. John McLeod reported in 1986 that “there remains an abiding belief among New Zealanders that their soldiers are second to none” and naturally talented fighters.³⁰³ The truth of the matter was quite different. Gallipoli:

showed that no matter how much potential the citizen recruits may display, it is only of value if they are well trained and equally well led. Anzac demonstrated how little the Australian[s] and New Zealanders knew about the business of war.³⁰⁴

In the First World War 1NZEF took until late 1917 to develop battle skills to match its popular reputation.³⁰⁵ It is unlikely that all the lessons learnt during that war had survived 20-something years of budget and staff cuts in the New Zealand Army. It didn’t have to be a British officer’s proposal that training and leadership were needed to offend New Zealand officers. Any officer of any nation

³⁰² Quoted in Christopher Pugsley, “Stories of Anzac”, in Jenny Macleod (ed.), *Gallipoli: Making History*, London: Frank Cass, 2004, p. 46.

³⁰³ McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, p. 6 and p. 186.

³⁰⁴ Pugsley, “Stories of Anzac”, p. 58.

³⁰⁵ Christopher Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience: New Zealand, Australia and the Empire in the First World War*, Auckland: Reed Books, 2004, p. 304.

with the temerity to argue that New Zealander soldiers needed development and direction would have been seen as challenging the Gallipoli legend and the myth of the natural soldier. The officers' reaction to Freyberg's imposition of standard military routine was to protest that it was the procedure of another nation's army and therefore alien to and unsuitable for New Zealanders. While they stated that Freyberg was imposing British ways and that he did not understand New Zealanders, their real objection came from their macrocultural assumptions about their intrinsic martial talents.

Freyberg's command also challenged some other New Zealand social attitudes. John Keegan determined that "an army is an expression of the society from which it issues,"³⁰⁶ and throughout the twentieth century, structure, processes and formal methods were an affront to New Zealand respect for improvisation. Terms such as "Kiwi ingenuity" and "No.8 fencing wire" work-arounds continue to evoke national pride. Although the form the officers' resistance took was to claim that Freyberg's methods were unsuitable because they were peacetime British Army methods, their real objection was that professionalism and procedure were incompatible with their national cultural assumptions that honoured amateurism and inventiveness.

1940 was New Zealand's centenary. In the lead up to the anniversary, New Zealanders were presented with images of New

³⁰⁶ John Keegan, *The Mask of Command: A Study of Generalship*, London: Pimlico, 2nd ed., 2004, p. 2.

Zealand that inspired national pride. Those images were less self-conscious and more confident than before.³⁰⁷ The writers of the 1930s had championed New Zealand nationalism.³⁰⁸ Frank Sargeson's "The Making of a New Zealander", in which a Dalmatian migrant wondered whether he were a New Zealander or not, shared the short story prize in the Centennial Literary Competition.³⁰⁹ Monte Holcroft and Frederick Wood both published popular analyses of New Zealand society in 1940 that helped make the New Zealand character part of the national discourse of the time.³¹⁰ 2NZEF's officers had also witnessed the social and attitudinal changes brought about by the Great Depression (which poet Robin Hyde thought had a stimulating effect on New Zealand),³¹¹ the election of the first Labour Government, and the inception of the welfare state. A nascent sense of self-esteem, the notion of a fair go for all, and a newly articulated national identity separated the New Zealanders Freyberg had grown up amongst (he left the country in 1914) from the New Zealanders he led in 1940. Had an Australian, Canadian or other nation's officer been appointed GOC 2NZEF, the officers would have felt the same hurt pride that no New Zealander was deemed fit for the role.

³⁰⁷ Wood, *Political and External*, p. 25.

³⁰⁸ Keith Sinclair, *A Destiny Apart: New Zealand's Search for National Identity*, Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1986, p. 246.

³⁰⁹ Bibliography in Frank Sargeson, *The Stories of Frank Sargeson*, Auckland: Longman Paul, 1964, 1973, p. 344.

³¹⁰ H. M. Holcroft, *The Deepening Stream*; and Frederick L. W. Wood, *Understanding New Zealand*.

³¹¹ Sinclair, *A Destiny Apart*, p. 247.

What needs to be understood about almost all previous commentary on the officer discontent of 1940-41 is that the officers' complaints about Freyberg's British Army methods and formal ways were *values* and therefore unreliable descriptions of cultural truth. There were sound reasons for Freyberg employing British Army methods. The officers should have recognised the need to employ the lead coalition partner's procedures—as should those commentators who uncritically recorded and repeated the officers' complaints. For 30 years the New Zealand Army had modelled itself on the British Army. The officers' real objection to Freyberg was not that he and his ways were British, but that methods and structure were not needed. The officers' cultural assumptions were that they were competent military commanders, that training was unnecessary because New Zealanders are naturally gifted soldiers, and that regimentation and procedure were antithetical to New Zealand mores. In repeating the officers' values and accepting them as statements of fact, previous commentators have made Freyberg's British nationality the point of focus in their deliberations on 2NZEF officer discontent. Organisational cultural theory exposes that it was not Freyberg's nationality that was the issue, but the cultural assumptions of 2NZEF's officers.

Although Freyberg's nationality has been erroneously deemed to be the cause of the officer discontent of 1940-41, some aspects of his background disconcerted the officers. There was a “gulf between

New Zealand thinking and the idiosyncratic British world of rank, discipline and officer eccentricity” from which Freyberg came.³¹² 2NZEF’s officers regarded Freyberg as not merely British but “a real pukka English officer ... moustache and all”.³¹³ Another officer recalled him as “an aloof dignified figure, essentially an Englishman”.³¹⁴ The way Freyberg spoke identified him as a member of Britain’s social élite, and some likened him to Colonel Blimp, a London *Evening Standard* cartoon character (created, ironically, by New Zealander David Low).³¹⁵ Freyberg:

moved in a strata of English society enhanced by distinction, and political power, and endowed with tradition and wealth; a society far removed from the dwellers in the townships of Levin, Hamilton, Morrinsville, or even the capital city of New Zealand itself.³¹⁶

Freyberg’s class and status were at odds with the egalitarianism of New Zealand’s civil and military cultures.³¹⁷ As the comments from 2NZEF’s officers (cited above) show, the perception of Freyberg’s British-ness was more concerned with his social position than his nationality. Had Freyberg been a middle-class Briton, it is likely that 2NZEF’s officers would have felt more comfortable with their GOC. Freyberg’s social status did distance him from his officers.

³¹² Wright, *Freyberg’s War*, p. 36.

³¹³ Interview with Sir Charles Bennett, Filer Interviews, NZ Defence Force Library.

³¹⁴ Interview with Brigadier Fuller, Filer Interviews, NZ Defence Force Library.

³¹⁵ Interview with Sandy Thomas, Filer Interviews, NZ Defence Force Library.

³¹⁶ Singleton-Gates, *Freyberg*, p. 109.

³¹⁷ Harper, “A New Zealand Way”, pp. 33 - 34.

Many of 2NZEF officers had served in the First World War and remembered the last time that a “pukka” British general commanded New Zealand troops. They did not recall that experience with unbridled fondness. General Sir Alexander Godley, the British Army officer appointed GOC 1NZEF, had not been a popular commander.³¹⁸ Despite Godley’s assertion that he “always gave the most sympathetic consideration to any possible ideas for the alleviation of their [the soldiers’] lot,”³¹⁹ he was regarded as indifferent to the welfare of the men, aloof, and was often held responsible for the losses that 1NZEF incurred.³²⁰ New Zealand’s senior officers may have feared that the appointment of a British officer as GOC would lead to a repetition of First World War experiences. Prior to operations in Greece, Freyberg had few opportunities to prove to his officers that he was not Godley Mark II.

When examined from the perspective of organisational culture theory, it becomes apparent that the officers resented Freyberg’s challenge to their macrocultural (national) assumptions and openly opposed him. Given time and a consolidated Division, Freyberg may have been able to manage the officers’ anxiety. Freyberg was given neither time nor a consolidated division. The first echelon arrived in the Middle East in February 1940 and shortly afterwards elements

³¹⁸ McGibbon (ed.), *Companion*, p. 202.

³¹⁹ General Sir Alexander Godley, *Life of an Irish Soldier*, London: John Murray, 1939, p. 225.

³²⁰ Pugsley, “Stories of Anzac”, p. 56; and Ray Grover, “Godley, Alexander John,” from *The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, Te Ara - the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, te.ara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3812/godley-alexander-john, accessed 23 August 2014.

were detached. In the twelve months prior to Greece, Freyberg seldom had a united first echelon and had few opportunities to impose his assumptions. The second echelon was diverted to Britain and arrived there on 16 June 1940. In the nine months between the second echelon's arrival in Britain (June 1940) and its embarkation for Greece (March 1941) the echelon's officers spent little more than a month or two (at most) with Freyberg. The third echelon disembarked in Egypt on 29 September 1940. They needed equipping and further training and those activities took some time. The officers in the third echelon, like the officers of the other echelons, saw very little of their GOC before going into battle. Freyberg wrote "It is a severe criticism of Middle East Staff and Commanders that ... our first full-scale divisional exercise was ... not a training exercise or a battle rehearsal, but a bitter battle."³²¹ Circumstances over which Freyberg had no control denied him the opportunity to impose his culture on 2NZEF and a cultural vacuum (as it might be termed) came to exist. In that vacuum 2NZEF's senior officers developed a subculture with its own assumptions. The officers' subcultural and macrocultural assumptions rivalled Freyberg's command. When Freyberg tried to impose his assumptions on the officers' subculture, the officers became anxious and displayed the resistance to change that Schein identified.

³²¹ Freyberg, quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 248.

The complaints about Freyberg's command style included a desire for better communication and for officer participation in decision-making. Freyberg accommodated the officers' wishes by allowing them to speak freely at Orders Conferences. That rather trivial concession, together with social events, training and a lack of recriminations, won the officers over. In the space of just months, 2NZEF became an efficient and harmonious force. The latter part of 1941 was widely regarded as the acme of 2NZEF morale.³²² "I don't think we ever reached that same peak again as we did in 1941" Brigadier William Gentry said.³²³ The remediation of officer dissatisfaction was perceived by the officers as a victory of New Zealand attitudes over (as they saw them) British ones. Freyberg, they said, "rediscovered himself as a New Zealander".³²⁴ In the 1980s John White claimed that "after a year or so he [Freyberg] became nearly a Kiwi, and the second year he was a dyed-in-the-wool, one-eyed biased Kiwi if ever there was one."³²⁵ Cox held that in 1941 2NZEF developed a "powerful sense of identity, of our being men of a particular tribe with its own attitudes, its own skills, its own independence, and above all its own pride."³²⁶ Cox

³²² Geoffrey Cox, *A Tale of Two Battles: A Personal Memoir of Crete and the Western Desert 1941*, London: William Kimber, 1987, pp. 150-1; and Major-General Sir Howard Kippenberger, *Infantry Brigadier*, London: Oxford University Press, 1949, p. 81.

³²³ Gentry interview, Filer Interviews, p. 9, NZ Defence Force Library.

³²⁴ John White quoted in Stevens, *Freyberg*, p. 34.

³²⁵ White, Fort Dorset Conference transcript, p. 31, White Papers, Kippenberger Archive.

³²⁶ Cox, *Two Battles*, p. 150.

acknowledged that the achievement was largely Freyberg's doing.³²⁷ When, as a result of Freyberg's initiatives, 2NZEF developed an identity and a pride, how else were its men and officers to regard their GOC except as one of their own? The chief of a tribe is quintessentially a member of the tribe. To the officers (and men) of 2NZEF, full of pride in themselves and their commander, Freyberg had become a New Zealander.

So far, organisational culture theory has been used to analyse the officers' conduct. Freyberg's behaviour has been reported but not assessed. It was earlier stated that Schein identified three key tasks for a leader: (1) understand the deeper levels of a culture; (2) assess the functionality of the assumptions made at that level; and (3) deal with the anxiety that is unleashed when those assumptions are challenged.³²⁸ It is now time to determine how well Freyberg performed his culture-management duties.

Freyberg understood the state of training and the experience level of his officers. That he went to Britain to oversee the training and deployment of the second echelon, and the comments he made on the echelon's officers to Wellington, reflect his realistic appreciation of the officers' competence. The extent to which he understood his officers' cultural assumptions is harder to determine. Freyberg had not commanded Dominion forces previously and, while he had kept in touch with his family and some friends in New Zealand, there is

³²⁷ Ibid, p. 150.

³²⁸ Schein, *Organisational Culture*, p. 33.

no evidence that he understood the “deeper levels” of his officers’ culture. He certainly did not understand that the officers expected to be able to voice their opinions and that the GOC would listen to them. In terms of understanding his subordinates, Freyberg does not score highly.

There is good evidence that Freyberg saw the need to train his officers and recognised that procedures and what might be called systems needed to be established. At that level, Freyberg understood the functionality of the culture of his officers. There were two important matters Freyberg did not recognise. He did not appreciate that the officers were already a club, and he was not prepared for the officers to close ranks against him and protest in the manner they did. Freyberg did not assess, or did not correctly assess, the functionality of officers’ assumptions. He was not prepared for the anxiety that was unleashed.

When the anxiety surfaced, however, Freyberg rose to the occasion. It had taken 18 months for the officer discontent to develop. Freyberg resolved it in four months.

Organisational culture theory has shown that the officers failed to recognise the advantages that would accrue from using the methods of the lead coalition partner. Their hubris meant they regarded themselves as competent and formal procedures as unnecessary, and their macrocultural assumptions encouraged them to think that systems and routine were culturally inappropriate for

New Zealanders. When the officers spoke about these matters (iterated values) they described standard procedures as British Army practices and declared that Freyberg was too British.

The officers were displaying behaviour that has been termed *confirmation bias*. Psychologist Raymond Nickerson defined confirmation bias as “the seeking or interpreting of evidence in ways that are partial to existing beliefs, expectations or a hypothesis in hand.”³²⁹ Norman Dixon essentially identified confirmation bias in the military incompetency he described as “a tendency to reject or ignore information which is unpalatable or which conflicts with preconceptions”.³³⁰ It was possible for the confirmation bias to develop because in the first 18 months of the war, with the echelons dispersed, Freyberg had few opportunities to impose his assumptions and win the officers over. In their separate echelons, and then united in battle, the officers banded together and developed an independent subculture. The fracturing and dispersal of 2NZEF meant that Freyberg was insufficiently aware his officers’ cultural assumptions, and was ill-prepared for their response to his command. But when the officers’ anxiety surfaced, he handled it well. With only trivial concessions to the officers, he quickly won them over.

³²⁹ Raymond S. Nickerson, “Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises”, *Review of General Psychology*, 2:2 1998, 175. Confirmation bias is also known as “myside bias”.

³³⁰ Norman Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, London: Pimlico, 1976 1994, p. 152.

This analysis of GOC-officer relations has established that three factors were responsible for the officers' discontent. Freyberg was not sufficiently sensitive to the officers' cultural assumptions. The dispersal of the echelons made it impossible for Freyberg to impose his command/assumptions on his officers in the period prior to June 1941. The officers themselves were the third responsible party. Their hubris and macrocultural assumptions made them resistant to Freyberg's command and confirmation bias meant they misinterpreted Freyberg's actions. Contrary to officer assertions, Freyberg's nationality had little bearing on the relationship difficulties. The GOC-officer relationship was repaired quickly and relatively easily when the three factors that caused the breakdown were addressed: Freyberg became sensitive to the officers' cultural assumptions; the New Zealand Division was united in one location (making management of cultural assumptions possible); and through training and some token concessions to the officers, the officers changed and accepted Freyberg command/ assumptions.

4. Participation in Greece

The process by which Freyberg and the New Zealand Government agreed to participate in the ill-fated 1941 operation in Greece precipitated breakdowns in New Zealand's high-command relationships. Those failures were augmented by malfunctions in the British war administration's key relationships. This chapter describes the relationship malfunctions and shows how they were instrumental in New Zealand deciding to commit troops to an operation that neither Freyberg nor Wellington thought likely to succeed. By the end of the Greek (and Cretan) operation, it was apparent to Fraser that Freyberg's command was imperilled by officer discontent, that coalition relations had become a cause for concern, that the civil-military relationship needed to be re-engineered, and that the alliance relationship between New Zealand and Britain required realignment. Participation in Greece resulted in a high-command relationship crisis.

After a brief summary of the military campaign in Greece, the high-command relationship failings are examined and analysed. A comparison of Australian and New Zealand historiography

concerning Greece reveals the quite different attributions of responsibility, and an analysis of the means used to persuade Wellington to re-approve participation in Greece addresses whether the New Zealand Government was duped by the British Government.

The decision to strip scarce resources from North Africa to mount what was little more than a token defence of Greece in 1941 is usually regarded as a mistake. Strategically and militarily the campaign was lost before it began.³³¹ As one British historian observed, “never for a moment had there existed the slightest prospect of ‘halting a German advance’.”³³² Greece was one of Churchill’s worst wartime decisions,³³³ and even Churchill admitted that it was a mistake.³³⁴ Movement of New Zealand troops to Greece began on 6 March, with the New Zealand Division forming part of what was largely an Australian-New Zealand force. When the German invasion commenced on 6 April, Dominion and British forces responded by retreating. Craig Stockings and Eleanor Hancock determined that no Commonwealth soldier “ever engaged a German without already having orders to withdraw”.³³⁵ Evacuation of New Zealand troops began on 24 April. Three days later the Germans

³³¹ Tuvia Ben-Moshe, *Churchill: Strategy and History*, Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner, 1992, p. 160.

³³² I. McD. G. Stewart, *The Struggle for Crete: 20 May-1 June 1941, a Story of Lost Opportunity*, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 22.

³³³ Michael Burleigh, *Moral Combat: A History of World War II*, London: Harper Press, 2010, p. 188.

³³⁴ John Colville, *The Fringes of Power: Downing Street Diaries 1939-1955*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1985, revised ed. 2004, p. 386.

³³⁵ Craig Stockings and Eleanor Hancock, *Swastika Over the Acropolis: Re-interpreting the Nazi Invasion of Greece in World War II*, Leiden: Brill, 2013, p. 297.

entered Athens. Fifteen per cent of the 16,720 New Zealand troops sent to Greece became casualties (291 killed, 599 wounded, 1,614 prisoners).³³⁶

The first high-command relationship to malfunction was the coalition relationship between the British Army and 2NZEF. Military planning for the defence of Greece began in early January 1941. Freyberg was excluded from the planning, as was perhaps appropriate for a divisional commander. Whether it was appropriate to exclude the GOC of a national force that would contribute a quarter of the troops is another matter.³³⁷ It was not until 17 February that Wavell informed Freyberg that the New Zealand Division would be sent to Greece.³³⁸ Freyberg was told of the Division's involvement, he was not asked. When Freyberg posed questions and raised objections, Wavell informed Freyberg that the New Zealand Government had approved the deployment.³³⁹ Wavell's assertion that Wellington had agreed to the Division's involvement in Greece was a lie.³⁴⁰ Presented with what he regarded as a *fait accompli*, Freyberg put aside his reservations and accepted that the Division would fight in Greece. Freyberg knew that Middle East Command strongly disapproved of national commanders mentioning

³³⁶ W. G. McClymont, *To Greece*, Wellington: War History Branch, 1959, Appendix I.

³³⁷ Stockings and Hancock held that Blamey's exclusion from planning was inappropriate. *Swastika*, p. 563.

³³⁸ Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Vol. VI, The Finest Hour 1939-1941*, London: Heinemann, 1983, p. 979; and Schofield, *Wavell*, p.174.

³³⁹ McClymont, *To Greece*, p. 99; and Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 238.

³⁴⁰ Stockings and Hancock, *Swastika*, p. 564; and Wright, *Freyberg's War*, p. 43.

forthcoming operations to their governments,³⁴¹ and was warned not to discuss the campaign with anyone save Blamey.³⁴² Security concerns, the impression that Wavell was in communication with Fraser, and being told that Wellington had already approved the campaign—all matters originated by Wavell—led to Freyberg deciding to not inform the Government of his misgivings.

The next day (18 February) Wavell told Blamey that two Australian divisions would be sent to Greece. When Blamey responded that the proposal would have to be referred to Canberra, Wavell claimed that Menzies (who had recently visited the Middle East) had already given his consent.³⁴³ Most historians hold that Menzies had not agreed to the deployment and that Wavell was again lying.³⁴⁴

Blamey and Freyberg met late on 18 February to discuss the operation in Greece. Neither was happy with what they knew of the operation and neither was pleased that, despite being the commanders of national forces, they had been instructed by Wavell rather than consulted.³⁴⁵ Wavell, on the other hand, thought that he had made a significant concession to the Dominion GOCs in

³⁴¹ Horner, *Blamey*, p. 166; Freyberg to McClymont, 15 November 1949, quoted in Gordon Robert Halsey, “The Greek Campaign: Freyberg’s Circus Enters a Balkan Imbroglio”, MPhil thesis, Massey University, 2005; and Horner, *High Command*, p.68.

³⁴² Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, pp. 238-9.

³⁴³ A. W. Martin assisted by Patsy Hardy, *Robert Menzies: A Life Vol. I, 1984-1943*, Carlton South, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1993, p. 324; and Stockings and Hancock, *Swastika*, p. 561.

³⁴⁴ Martin and Hardy, *Menzies*, p. 323 and pp. 324-5; McClymont, *To Greece*, p. 99; Stockings and Hancock, *Swastika*, p. 561; and Gavin Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, Sydney, NSW: William Collins, 1953 1986, p. 194.

³⁴⁵ Horner, *High Command*, p. 67; and McClymont, *To Greece*, pp. 475-476.

informing them ahead of time of where they were to be sent.³⁴⁶ Blamey was sceptical of the size, even the existence, of the forces Wavell had said would be available in Greece and, like Freyberg, had no great opinion of Maitland Wilson, the force commander.³⁴⁷ Blamey also felt that since Australian troops constituted most of the fighting force (and British troops but a small fraction), that he rather than the British Army's Maitland Wilson should command.³⁴⁸

Although Freyberg and Blamey had misgivings about the campaign, neither was prepared to raise their concerns with their governments.³⁴⁹ Horner has explained that “intentionally or otherwise, Wavell had, by mentioning that he had the approval of the respective governments, stifled any discussion by the Dominion representatives.”³⁵⁰ Freyberg did not mention his concerns to Fraser until after the Greek (and Cretan) campaigns.³⁵¹ Blamey contacted his government sooner, but in a curiously slow manner. On 5 March Blamey sent a letter—not a cable—to Menzies expressing his disquiet about the operation in Greece. The letter did not reach Menzies until 18 April, the day that planning for the evacuation of troops from Greece commenced.³⁵²

The second high-command relationship failure was the civil-military relationship. For reasons already stated, Freyberg did not

³⁴⁶ Horner, *High Command*, p. 67.

³⁴⁷ Carlyon, *Blamey*, p. 30; and Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 247.

³⁴⁸ Carlyon, *Blamey*, p. 31 and p. 36.

³⁴⁹ Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, p. 113.

³⁵⁰ Horner, *High Command*, p. 67.

³⁵¹ Stockings and Hancock, *Swastika*, pp. 564-565.

³⁵² Horner, *Blamey*, p. 173; Laurie Barber, *Chronology*, p. 90.

disclose his concerns about Greece to Wellington, and the Government neither asked for his opinion nor acted with prudence. Blamey's failure to warn the Australian Government in a timely manner raised, Horner noted, "important questions about his performance as GOC".³⁵³ The same could be said of Freyberg, who after the war admitted that he should have cabled Wellington.³⁵⁴ Although Freyberg's charter stipulated that he communicate with the Government on matters of policy, whether a new operation constituted policy is debatable. As was earlier noted, Barrowclough's 1942 charter "expressly authorised" direct communication with the Government on forthcoming deployments.³⁵⁵ Fraser, who "was interested in the operational side of the war ... [and] followed the progress of the war closely", would have wanted to know of Freyberg's doubts about Greece,³⁵⁶ but in early 1941 the Fraser-Freyberg relationship was not as close as it later became. Freyberg might have understood that in failing to warn Wellington about Greece he was ignoring his formal responsibilities but, because he was insufficiently familiar with Fraser, it is unlikely he realised that he was also failing Fraser's personal expectations of him.

Although modern civil-military relations theory was not properly defined until after the Second World War,³⁵⁷ by the 1930s it

³⁵³ Horner, *Blamey*, p. 178.

³⁵⁴ Freyberg quoted in McClymont, *To Greece*, p. 99

³⁵⁵ Barrowclough's charter, clause 5, Appendix V, *Documents III*, p. 553.

³⁵⁶ Sir George Laking interview, 14 August 1986, ATL 2012-028-141.

³⁵⁷ Suzanne C. Nielsen, "American Civil-Military Relations Today: The Continuing Relevance of Samuel P. Huntington's *The Soldier and the State*", *International*

was understood that senior military officers should consult with their governments. The *Field Service Regulations* in use during the Second World War instructed senior officers to advise their governments on “the policy for the conduct of the war, the resources to be employed and the distribution of the available man-power and material.”³⁵⁸ In not communicating with Wellington Freyberg was neglecting in his duty to maintain sound civil-military relations and was potentially in breach of the regulations under which he served.

Freyberg had in fact plenty of channels through which he could have shared his misgivings with Wellington. He had been diligent about keeping New Zealand informed of routine matters. Unique telegraphic codenames for Fraser (PREMIER) and Freyberg (FERNLEAF) had been created in early 1940 to facilitate direct communication.³⁵⁹ Freyberg had also initiated direct communications with Duigan (CGS), Berendsen (Fraser’s head of department), Major-General Sir Andrew Russell (who acted as temporary CGS in 1940), Jones (Minister of Defence), and Gordon Coates (the leader of the Opposition).³⁶⁰ From the very start the Cabinet had followed Freyberg’s advice, and Freyberg should have been encouraged that his opinions were listened to and that his

Affairs 88:2, 2012, 369-376; and Robert D. Kaplan, “Looking the World in the Eye”, *The Atlantic Monthly*, December 2001, 68-82.

³⁵⁸ British Army, *Field Service Regulations Vol. III: Operations-Higher Formations*, London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1935, p. 2.

³⁵⁹ Berendsen to Freyberg, 14 March 1940, ANZ R16 700 607

³⁶⁰ Freyberg to Duigan, 18 April 1940, ANZ R16 700 600; Freyberg to Berendsen, 18 April 1940, ANZ R16 700 607; Russell to Freyberg, 29 July 1941 and 5 January 1940, ANZ R16 700 600; Jones to Freyberg, 27 December 1941, ANZ R16 700 607; and Freyberg to Coates, 8 January 1940, ANZ R16 700 607.

advice was acted upon.³⁶¹ With so many connections in place and with Wellington so responsive to his recommendations, it appears that, even if Freyberg felt uncomfortable about raising his concerns with Fraser, there were several other avenues available to him that he could have used.

It has sometimes been asserted that Freyberg was so keen to get the Division into battle that he intentionally withheld his reservations from the Government. Historian Ian Wards remarked in private correspondence:

General Freyberg was told on 17/2 he was going to Greece[;] he had not told his Gov't. Freyberg wanted to go into action with the Division—took upon himself responsibility of agreeing that the Division would go in without first informing the New Zealand Government.³⁶²

It is unlikely that Freyberg was especially eager to take the Division into battle in February 1941. The second echelon arrived from the United Kingdom on 16 February, just three weeks before embarkation for Greece, and no three-brigade divisional training had taken place. Freyberg's reservations about Greece were considerable. It is improbable that his doubts about the plan, the force commander, the matériel available, the intelligence work and air support were all overcome by impatience to blood a barely consolidated, partially trained division.

³⁶¹ Wood, *Political and External*, p. 109.

³⁶² Wards to McClymont, 20 March 1953, quoted in Halsey, "The Greek Campaign", p. 68. [Text as in source.]

In his biography of his father, Paul Freyberg claimed that Freyberg had been insufficiently informed about Greece to be able to give the Government a worthwhile appreciation.³⁶³ But Freyberg knew enough about the campaign to raise objections with Wavell and to share his concerns with Blamey, who agreed with and added to them. Dan Davin recorded that Freyberg “had misgivings from the first”.³⁶⁴ Stevens reported that Freyberg had serious doubts about the deployment.³⁶⁵ Barrowclough recalled that “we all knew the weakness of the plan, and knew that we wouldn’t be in Greece for long.”³⁶⁶ Paul Freyberg’s contention that Freyberg did not have enough knowledge of the campaign is, therefore, unlikely.

Freyberg made some (rather limp) excuses for not communicating with the Government. In June 1941 he told Fraser that it was difficult for a subordinate officer to disagree with his commander-in-chief.³⁶⁷ Freyberg later stated that senior British officers intensely disliked “backseat driving” by subordinates.³⁶⁸ In the 1960s he told Kippenberger (then general editor of the official war histories) that the decision to go to Greece had been made at a level he “could not touch”.³⁶⁹ None of these excuses holds water. Freyberg had had “heated arguments” with Wavell on a number of

³⁶³ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 239.

³⁶⁴ Dan Davin, MS of “The General”, ATL MS-Papers-5079-353.

³⁶⁵ W.G. Stevens interview, ATL 2000-094-5, p. 12 of transcript.

³⁶⁶ General Barrowclough interview, ATL 2000-094-5, p. 12 of transcript.

³⁶⁷ Lord Freyberg, House of Lords, 15 April 1953.

³⁶⁸ Lord Freyberg, House of Lords, 5 March 1958.

³⁶⁹ Freyberg, quoted in McClymont, *To Greece*, p. 99

occasions in 1940.³⁷⁰ Since Freyberg had previously overcome the difficulty of challenging his commander-in-chief, there was no reason for him not to do so regarding Greece. Freyberg understood that his charter effectively gave him the right to refuse an order from a coalition superior.³⁷¹ He had done so in August 1940 when he defied Wavell's order that 2NZEF be broken up and dispersed to other units. Freyberg could have exercised that right again. Since Freyberg was sufficiently familiar with his charter to know that he had a right to refuse allied commanders-in-chief, it is improbable that he did not also know that his charter obliged him to communicate with the Government on matters of policy. Freyberg's comment that the decision to participate in Greece was made at a level he could not touch is disingenuous. Freyberg had good relations with New Zealand's political and military leaders. He and his wife, Barbara, were personal friends of the Churchills, he had connections in the British military hierarchy and he was a member of a social network that included senior political figures.³⁷² New Zealand and British decision-makers were not at a level Freyberg could not touch, rather, they were at a level with which he was in touch. Freyberg's justifications for his silence ring hollow. Freyberg failed to meet his civil-military relationship obligations and breached—if not the exact terms, then the spirit—of his charter

³⁷⁰ Schofield, *Wavell*, p. 138.

³⁷¹ Lord Freyberg, House of Lords, 15 April 1953.

³⁷² Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, chapters 4 and 13.

when he decided to keep from the Government his misgivings about Greece.

The New Zealand Government also failed to meet its high-command relationship obligations. Contrary to what Wavell had told Freyberg a week earlier, it was not until 25 February that the New Zealand Government first learnt of the initiative in Greece. On that date the Government received a cable from Whitehall stating that Menzies had approved the use of Australian troops in Greece and requesting the urgent approval of the use of the New Zealand Division as well.³⁷³ Wellington's approval was, in fact, neither urgent nor needed. The previous day (24 February) Churchill had cabled Eden: "Presume you have settled with New Zealand Government about their troops. No need to anticipate difficulties ... we send you the order 'Full Steam Ahead'."³⁷⁴

The British Government's after-the-fact request for New Zealand approval happened to arrive in Wellington at almost the same time as a delayed cable from Freyberg (of 23 February) informing the Government that the New Zealand Division was ready for deployment in two-brigade form. The final paragraph of Freyberg's cable read "I therefore feel that should British Government approach NZ Government to release [2]NZEF for full operational role they can now do so with confidence."³⁷⁵ On their

³⁷³ Cranborne to Fraser, 25 February 1941, *Documents I*, #336, p. 241.

³⁷⁴ Churchill to Eden, 24 February 1941, quoted in Horner, *High Command*, pp. 80-81.

³⁷⁵ Freyberg to Jones, 23 February 1941, ANZ R16 700 543.

own initiative, Alister McIntosh said, the Cabinet decided that Freyberg's cable, which made no mention of Greece, gave them the "green light" to approve participation in Greece:

We assumed that General Freyberg ... had been consulted about the Greek venture and that the message of 23 February from the General was letting us know, in guarded terms, that he could do what was going to be requested in the message we received from the British dated 25 February.³⁷⁶

Confident that they had discovered a hidden message in Freyberg's cable, the Cabinet rushed to respond to Whitehall. Wellington's impetuosity was compounded by the lack of process in the Labour administration. The Cabinet made no attempt to seek Freyberg's opinion and approval was immediately given. McIntosh's contention that had Fraser "not been under the impression that the operation had General Freyberg's endorsement, he would have certainly sought his views" does not satisfy.³⁷⁷ The Cabinet was committing its major military contribution to the Second World War to its first battle based only on conjecture. Furthermore, the opening sentence of the cable that had been received from Whitehall referred to an earlier cable about Greece that had not, at that point, arrived in Wellington. The Cabinet therefore knew that they were only partially informed but, without waiting for the delayed cable and without consulting their GOC, went ahead and approved. When, the next day, the Cabinet received the delayed cable about Greece, its contents created

³⁷⁶ McIntosh to Kippenberger, 16 August 1955, ATL MS-Papers-6759-179.

³⁷⁷ McIntosh to Kippenberger, 16 August 1955, ATL MS-Papers-6759-179.

such anxiety that they immediately sought Whitehall's assurance that the forces to be dispatched to Greece were sufficient for the task and that support and supply arrangements were adequate.³⁷⁸

The Cabinet failed its civil-military relationship duty to get input from its senior military advisor, and failed to demonstrate the prudence expected when governments make major decisions. In these shortcomings New Zealand was not alone. Australia also committed its forces to Greece in an irregular manner. Australia's Defence Secretary Frederick Shedden recommended Menzies cable Blamey before committing 2AIF to Greece, but Menzies summarily approved Australia's participation in Greece at a British War Cabinet meeting on 24 February without consulting his GOC or his Cabinet.³⁷⁹ The Australian and New Zealand governments failed to maintain the consultation and processes of orderly civil-military relations.

Britain's civil-military relationship and its alliance partnership with New Zealand also malfunctioned. The cause in both cases was the dominance of the British Prime Minister. "In all the writings on the time, one factor is never disputed: that Winston Churchill was at the controls in London".³⁸⁰ When Churchill became Prime Minister of Britain in May 1940 he "knew very well that the machinery he inherited for the central direction of the war was

³⁷⁸ Fraser to Cranborne, 26 February 1941, *Documents I*, #339, pp. 242-3.

³⁷⁹ David Horner, *Defence Supremo: Sir Frederick Shedden and the Making of Australian Defence Policy*, St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2000, pp. 102 - 103; and Martin and Hardy, *Menzies*, p. 325.

³⁸⁰ Anne Henderson, *Menzies at War*, Sydney, NSW: New South, 2014, p. 112.

totally inadequate to the task.”³⁸¹ Churchill created new committees, circumvented the War Cabinet, replaced senior military leaders, and created a new portfolio, Minister of Defence, to which he appointed himself.³⁸² As Churchill’s official biographer noted, “this structure enabled Churchill to put forward his suggestions directly, and with the utmost directness”.³⁸³ One result of Churchill’s new decision-making arrangements was that he and Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden were able to secure intervention in Greece with little input from politicians and without challenge from military leaders.³⁸⁴ Churchill’s supremacy in Whitehall was also aided by the War Cabinet members who reneged on their responsibility to participate. War Cabinet member Ernest Bevan told Churchill to get on with winning the war and to “not come asking the Cabinet for its opinion”.³⁸⁵ Menzies was in London at the time and reported that the British War Cabinet was dominated by Churchill and that there was a “great reluctance on the part of the UK Ministers to offer any views” contrary to those held by the Prime Minister.³⁸⁶

Churchill had also intimidated British military leaders, to the extent that when they gave (what should have been) their

³⁸¹ Alex Danchev, “Waltzing with Winston: Civil-Military Relations in Britain in the Second World War”, *War in History*, 2:202, 1995, 209.

³⁸² Danchev, “Waltzing with Winston”, 209-210.

³⁸³ Martin Gilbert, *Winston Churchill’s War Leadership*, New York: Vintage Books, 2004, p. 5.

³⁸⁴ Danchev, “Waltzing with Winston”, 210-211.

³⁸⁵ Quoted in Alex Danchev, “Great Britain: The Indirect Strategy”, in David Reynolds, Warren F. Kimball and A. O. Chubarian (eds.), *Allies at War: The Soviet, American and British Experience, 1939-1945*, New York: St Martin’s Press, 1994, p. 6.

³⁸⁶ Prime Minister’s Visit Abroad, Australian War Cabinet, 28 May 1941, AWM67 5/17.

professional opinions about Greece, they tended instead to repeat the political rationales for the venture.³⁸⁷ By February Wavell, his biographer contended, “believed the political reasons to be inseparable from the military ones”.³⁸⁸ (In 1949 Wavell remembered it differently and claimed that “there were good military reasons, quite apart from the political considerations”).³⁸⁹ Wavell’s ADC, however, held that politics “had been allowed to overrule military, and especially RAF, capabilities.”³⁹⁰ To be effective, strategic decision-making in wartime requires input from both the state and the military so that a balance of, not power but perspective is achieved. No such balance existed in Britain in early 1941. Cabinet influence had declined and senior military advisors regurgitated political justifications rather than presenting military evaluations. Churchill wound up making military decisions on political grounds.³⁹¹

The dysfunction in Whitehall was exacerbated at the personal level by Churchill’s methods and attitudes. Although Churchill “regarded any disagreement with his views as a *personal* affront”, he also used debate as a decision-making method.³⁹² “Disputation was

³⁸⁷ Ben-Moshe, *Churchill*, p. 136.

³⁸⁸ Schofield, *Wavell*, p. 175.

³⁸⁹ Transcript of Wavell interview by Chester Wilmont, 11 March 1949, AWM67 5/17.

³⁹⁰ Coats, *Of Generals*, p. 87.

³⁹¹ Geoffrey Regan, *Someone Had Blundered: A Historical Survey of Military Incompetence*, London: B.T. Batsford, 1987, p. 134.

³⁹² Ismay quoted in Alex Danchev, “Waltzing with Winston”, 214. [Italics in original.]

Churchill's essential method of work",³⁹³ but was anathema to military culture where obedience was the norm.³⁹⁴ Churchill had little time for his CIGS, General Sir John Dill, whom he nick-named "Dilly-dally" and thought an ineffectual pessimist.³⁹⁵ Threatened by Churchill's behaviour, Dill kept his concerns about Greece to himself.³⁹⁶ Wavell's taciturn and donnish manner made his chances of influencing Churchill unlikely and when the two met they did not get on.³⁹⁷ Admiral Andrew Cunningham (the Royal Navy's Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean Fleet) thought the initiative in Greece was bound to fail.³⁹⁸ David Margesson, the Secretary of State for War, "disliked the whole venture."³⁹⁹ But Churchill's ability to intimidate, his brilliant rhetoric and his tendency to disregard the opinions of those he did not personally admire,⁴⁰⁰ meant that military advice had a diminished voice in the deliberations about Greece. Menzies came to the opinion that "the Chiefs of Staff are without exception yes-men."⁴⁰¹ Ian Stewart determined that military leaders had failed to sufficiently inform their Prime Minister of the

³⁹³ Alex Danchev, "Dill: Field-Marshal Sir John Dill" in John Keegan (ed.), *Churchill's Generals*, London: Warner, 1991 1992, p. 58.

³⁹⁴ Huntington, *Soldier and State*, p. 73.

³⁹⁵ Danchev, "Dill", p. 50 and p. 51; and I. C. B. Dear and M. R. D. Foot (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995 2005, p. 233.

³⁹⁶ Ben-Moshe, *Churchill*, p. 137.

³⁹⁷ Schofield, *Wavell*, p. 150; and Stewart, *Crete*, p. 13.

³⁹⁸ Viscount Cunningham of Hyndhope, *A Sailor's Odyssey*, London: Hutchinson, 1951, p. 315 and p. 340.

³⁹⁹ Margesson to Colville, quoted in Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, p. 1024.

⁴⁰⁰ Accordingly to Churchill's private secretary "nothing influenced him more in a man's favour than an act of gallantry on the field of battle". Colville, *Fringes*, p. 101.

⁴⁰¹ Menzies' diary, 14 April 1941, quoted in Martin and Hardy, *Menzies*, p. 345.

facts and, in consequence, “Churchill was given no professional warning that the [Greek] project was beyond the strength of forces in the Middle East.”⁴⁰²

Churchill’s attitudes also shaped British relations with the Dominions. Throughout his political career Churchill took a reactionary stance on Empire and Dominion matters. During the First World War Churchill had regarded the Empire as merely a source of troops, he had mishandled the Dominions over Turkey in 1922, and in 1930 had opposed Dominion status for India.⁴⁰³ Churchill’s treatment of Commonwealth nations during the Second World War was “high-handed”, and he regarded the Dominions as little more than subject colonies.⁴⁰⁴ He excluded the Dominions Secretary from most War Cabinet meetings and was “reluctant to communicate to the Dominions even basic war information such as U-boat sinkings.”⁴⁰⁵ When the Dominions Secretary recommended that Dominion governments be consulted on military decisions, Churchill’s response was that it was not possible, even when Dominion troops were likely to be used.⁴⁰⁶ At the same time, Churchill apparently understood that the Dominion governments would expect to be asked to approve the use of their troops and consequently went through the motions.

⁴⁰² Stewart, *Crete*, p. 13.

⁴⁰³ Roy Jenkins, *Churchill*, Pan Books, 2001 2002, p. 311, p. 368 and p. 423.

⁴⁰⁴ Max Hastings, *Winston’s War: Churchill 1940-1945* (a.k.a. *Finest Years*), New York: Random House, 2009, p. 69 and p. 199.

⁴⁰⁵ Stewart, *Empire Lost*, p. 3; p. 39; p. 46 and p. 54.

⁴⁰⁶ Henderson, *Menzies*, p. 106.

In their initial (25 February) approach to Wellington, the British Government had claimed that three divisions, one armoured brigade and the air resources potentially available would have a “reasonable prospect” of halting a German advance into Greece. (An assertion far removed from reality.)⁴⁰⁷ The operation was also recommended in strategic terms: a Balkan front; encouraging the participation of Turkey and Yugoslavia in the war; sure to earn the United States’ approbation.⁴⁰⁸ A week later, however, Turkish and Yugoslav support had been proven unobtainable and the military prognosis was bleak.⁴⁰⁹ The changes were so dramatic that Australia and New Zealand were asked to re-approve the involvement of their troops. Whitehall sent a number of telegrams to New Zealand to persuade the Government to agree to “dangerous and glorious duty” in Greece.⁴¹⁰ The first telegrams were received in Wellington on 7 March—the day after the movement of New Zealand troops to Greece had commenced, and after Greece had accepted Britain’s offer of Dominion troops. As Stockings and Hancock remarked:

This sequence of events was a grave indictment of the idea of any truly cooperative conception of Imperial defence in 1941. The attitude seems to have been that Dominion troops were there to be used and Dominion governments could be replied upon to do what they were asked.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁷ The three infantry divisions faced three infantry corps, the armoured brigade had to contend with a panzer corps and a panzer group, and the RAF’s meagre resources were overwhelmed by the much larger Luftwaffe which quickly gained control of the skies.

⁴⁰⁸ Cranborne to Fraser, 25 February 1941, *Documents I*, #335, pp. 239-241.

⁴⁰⁹ Cranborne to Fraser, 7 March 1941 *Documents I*, #346, pp. 247-249.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 246.

⁴¹¹ Stockings and Hancock, *Swastika*, p. 565.

The New Zealand War Cabinet took no offence at the timing of the request and made no remark about an 8 March cable informing them that the Greek campaign—and *ipso facto* the deployment of New Zealand troops—had already been approved by the British War Cabinet.⁴¹² Even though the telegrams advised Wellington that the military situation had deteriorated, the Cabinet again neglected to solicit Freyberg's opinion. Despite the absence of Freyberg's input, New Zealand's response to Britain on 9 March included a "more hard-headed and realistic assessment than any it had received."⁴¹³ The response also made New Zealand's involvement in Greece subject to three conditions: the "strongest possible" protection for transports; the planning for a withdrawal be immediately considered; and assurance that unless the full contemplated force could be deployed the operation would not be undertaken.⁴¹⁴ Churchill was "deeply moved" and promised to "make good" on the provisos.⁴¹⁵ He succeeded with only one of them; transports were adequately protected but the evacuation from Greece was a last-minute affair and the full, promised force never materialised.

One of the reasons New Zealand assumed a subservient role in its relations with Britain in 1941 was because, like Australia, it had no source of intelligence other than Britain. The High

⁴¹² Cranborne to Fraser, 8 March 1941, *Documents I*, #352 p. 256.

⁴¹³ Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, p. 115.

⁴¹⁴ Fraser to Cranborne, 9 March 1941, *Documents I*, #353, pp. 257-8.

⁴¹⁵ Churchill to Fraser, 12 March 1941, *Documents I*, #354, p. 259.

Commissioners in London were New Zealand's and Australia's only diplomatic representatives overseas and neither country had a national intelligence organisation.⁴¹⁶ Despite Fraser's desire to have a say in strategic decision-making, throughout the lead up to Greece he did not once request information from London and was content to make decisions based on the abridged versions of the selected documents he was sent.⁴¹⁷ It is usual for the largest nation in a coalition to dominate, but "all coalitions are entered into for motives of self-interest" and it is through agreements between participating nations that the necessary synergy is achieved.⁴¹⁸ New Zealand provided about a quarter of the fighting force in Greece, that force was its single largest military contribution to the war. But at the very time that its voice stood the best chance of being heard, Wellington made little effort to be an active coalition partner and was content sit back and let Britain determine policy and decide what information it would share.

There is a considerable difference between the way that Australian and New Zealand historians have commented on the lead up to Greece. Australian historian D. F. Woodward thought there were "clear signs of a diplomatic sleight of hand on Britain's part" and that Australian troops were committed to Greece without proper consultation with the "consistently ill-informed, misinformed and

⁴¹⁶ Horner, *High Command*, p. 76 and p. 75.

⁴¹⁷ Stockings and Hancock, *Swastika*, p. 567 and p. 566.

⁴¹⁸ Galster, "Introduction" in Poulsen, Galster and Nørby (eds.), *Coalition Warfare*, pp. 3-12.

ignored” Australian Government.⁴¹⁹ Jeffrey Grey maintained that Menzies “was lied to” and that “Churchill was not inclined to consult with the [Australian] government which would provide the bulk of the forces” in Greece. He further held that Blamey’s and Menzies’ failures to communicate with each other meant that neither could escape censure.⁴²⁰ Gavin Long acknowledged that in 1940-41 Dominion governments were not sufficiently informed on military matters but, when it came to Greece, pointed the finger at Blamey and Freyberg for not informing their governments. Long also held Australian and New Zealand Cabinet Ministers responsible for, first, failing in their “duty to ensure that they were adequately informed” by their GOCs and, second, for not demanding effective consultation from London.⁴²¹ In *High Command* David Horner attributed the responsibility for Australian participation in Greece to a number of matters and parties: Wavell; Blamey; the process used to appoint Maitland Wilson; and the very limited access to Ultra information at that time.⁴²² In his biography of Blamey, Horner put more emphasis on Wavell telling Blamey that involvement in Greece had been discussed with Menzies.⁴²³ But in a 2002 article, Horner stated that the reason Blamey did not advise Canberra of his concerns about

⁴¹⁹ D. F. Woodward, “Australian Diplomacy with Regard to the Greek Campaign, February-March 1941”, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 24:2 June 1978, 219 and 223.

⁴²⁰ Jeffrey Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Revised edition 1999, p. 156.

⁴²¹ Gavin Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, Sydney, NSW: William Collins, 1953, 1986, p. 194 and p. 19.

⁴²² Horner, *High Command*, pp. 74-5.

⁴²³ Horner, *Blamey*, p. 169.

Greece was because, at that point in the war, Blamey had little appreciation of the importance of strategy.⁴²⁴ Stockings and Hancock held that Churchill's communications about Greece with the two Dominion governments included information selection and some disinformation, but mostly blamed Blamey for not communicating with the Australian Government, and, in regard to New Zealand, found Freyberg and Fraser equally culpable for not maintaining a dialogue.⁴²⁵

New Zealand historians tend to blame circumstances rather than participants. Hensley was suspicious of the 7-8 March sequence of cables from Britain but did not so much as imply that New Zealand was being manipulated. Hensley is unique, however, in reporting that Freyberg "notably failed" to inform his Government of his misgivings about Greece.⁴²⁶ Wood found that the responsibility for New Zealand's participation in the Greek venture was happenstance: the nearly simultaneous arrival of Freyberg's cable and the cable from Whitehall. New Zealand's official historian for the battle in Greece, W. G. McClymont, also blamed the Cabinet's misreading of Freyberg's cable.⁴²⁷ Bassett and King attributed no

⁴²⁴ David Horner, "The Evolution of Australian Higher Command Arrangements", 2002, p. 11, defence.gov.au/2Fadc%2Fcdclms%2FCommand%2520evolution.doc&ei=JNU5VLj2B4WE8gWIn4G4Dw&usg=AFQjCNFMkAdaCqLWboYY23TFOdhDQhnTDw&bvm=bv.77161500,d.dGc, accessed 12 October 2014.

⁴²⁵ Stockings and Hancock, *Swastika*, pp. 558-9 and p. 563-4.

⁴²⁶ Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, p. 114 and p. 133.

⁴²⁷ McClymont, *To Greece*, p. 104.

blame and instead proffered a possible explanation for the lack of consultation between Freyberg and Fraser:

Freyberg was in touch both with British general headquarters and with Churchill and his War Cabinet, while Fraser was receiving regular briefings by cable directly from Whitehall. While Fraser and Freyberg often completed the triangle with coded messages, neither could be sure that all the information one had was known to the other.⁴²⁸

Keith Sinclair, however, was unambiguous in allotting responsibility: “The British Government had not told the New Zealanders of the full military difficulties of the operation, and, in particular, of the probable lack of air support”.⁴²⁹ Ian Wards determined that the Cabinet had been gullible, observing that: “it is extremely unlikely that Fraser or McIntosh or Berendsen would have anticipated that Churchill or the immaculate and prestigious Eden might misrepresent vital information.”⁴³⁰ Content to only imply manipulation on Britain’s part, Wards found the Government’s submissive attitude to Britain responsible for New Zealand agreeing to participate in the ill-fated defence of Greece.⁴³¹ Sinclair and, to a lesser degree, Wards were the only New Zealand historians critical of Britain’s treatment of New Zealand.

That Freyberg escaped censure in New Zealand’s official histories is perhaps understandable. Many of the histories were

⁴²⁸ Bassett with King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 208.

⁴²⁹ Keith Sinclair, *Walter Nash*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1976, p. 203.

⁴³⁰ Ian Wards, “The Balkan Dilemma” in John Crawford (ed.), *Kia Kaha: New Zealand in the Second World War*, Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 21.

⁴³¹ Wards, “The Balkan Dilemma”, pp. 20-21 and p. 29.

written while Freyberg was Governor-General, frequently by former 2NZEF officers who had served under Freyberg. Additionally, Freyberg was consulted on drafts of histories and was unhesitant in giving his opinions.⁴³² Few recent histories criticise Freyberg. The difference between Australian and New Zealand perceptions of Freyberg's conduct suggests that the way that Freyberg has been treated in New Zealand military history warrants review.

On 7 and 8 March the British Government sent nine cables concerning Greece to the New Zealand Government. Just prior to the dispatch of the cables Churchill had lost confidence in the Greek venture and feared that the "ignominious ejection" of a military force from Greece would harm Britain's reputation more than would allowing the Balkan nations to negotiate submission to the Nazis.⁴³³ But Churchill's and the British War Cabinet's opinions were altered on 6 March by a cable from Sir Michael Palairet, the British Minister to Greece. Palairet adamantly insisted that it was morally indefensible for Britain to go back on the promises it had made to Greece, and that the Greek Government supported British intervention.⁴³⁴ South Africa's Prime Minister, General Jan Smuts, whose opinions Churchill regarded highly, endorsed Palairet's views.⁴³⁵

⁴³² See Bell, "Memory, History, Nation, War".

⁴³³ Churchill to Eden, 6 March 1941, quoted in Winston S. Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, London: The Reprint Society, 1950 1956, p. 92.

⁴³⁴ Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, p. 1027.

⁴³⁵ Hastings, *Winston's War*, p. 165 and p. 199.

The British War Cabinet understood that most of the force in Greece would be Australians and New Zealanders and therefore wanted to tell Canberra and Wellington that:

the campaign was undertaken, not because of any commitment entered into by a British Cabinet Minister in Athens, but because the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and the Commanders-in-Chief in the Middle East were convinced that there was a reasonable fighting chance... [But] few facts or reasons had been supplied which could be represented to these Dominions as justifying the operation on any grounds but *noblesse oblige*.”⁴³⁶

The nine cables Britain sent to New Zealand on 7 and 8 March largely consisted of excerpts from selected British Government communications. Wellington learnt that circumstances in Greece had changed for the worse, and that Yugoslav and Turkish support was now “most improbable”. There were no reasons to expect success and, although the hazards had increased significantly, the situation was “not by any means hopeless.”⁴³⁷ (On its own, the preceding précis may seem odd, but it fairly accurately conveys the mix of information selection, disclosure and self-contradiction in the cables from Whitehall.)

Despite the bleak military forecasts in the cables, the New Zealand Cabinet again neglected to obtain Freyberg’s opinion. Instead, Carl Berendsen, the head of the Prime Minister’s Department, was asked to prepare a military analysis. That

⁴³⁶ British War Cabinet minutes, quoted in Gilbert, *Finest Hour*, p. 1029.

⁴³⁷ Various, *Documents I*, #s 345-352, pp. 246-256.

Berendsen, an intelligent and able bureaucrat, but nonetheless a civilian, was the person Fraser and the Cabinet chose to prepare a military assessment on Greece, is an indictment of Labour Government methods. Freyberg, Duigan (the GGS) and Jones's Ministry of Defence were not approached. Yet again, a small cohort of insiders was relied on for input to decision-making.⁴³⁸ Berendsen's report was, however, insightful and accurate. It concluded that another Dunkirk was inevitable. "Fraser crossed this part of my paper out ... but he was fully aware of the dangers and risks of the campaign", Berendsen told an interviewer after the war.⁴³⁹ If Berendsen's recollection is accurate, Fraser withheld critical information from the War Cabinet. Moreover, it suggests that he was trying to engineer a positive decision. If that were the case, Fraser had apparently put aside his concerns about the care and welfare of the men and to not expose the New Zealand Division to unnecessary risk in order to satisfy a moral obligation. Just over a week earlier, on 25 February, the Government had approved New Zealand's participation in Greece on the grounds that the campaign was militarily viable. But on 9 March, when the chance of military success had been exposed as improbable, Fraser and the Cabinet adopted a non-military justification to approve involvement.

⁴³⁸ Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, p. 11 notes that such was normal Labour Government procedure: "Policy and its execution were decided by a startlingly small group of people, barely more than half a dozen, with virtually no participation by the public and very few others in the government."

⁴³⁹ Carl Berendsen interview, January 1970, ATL 2000-094-5, p. 11 of transcript.

Excerpts from three communications written by Palairet comprised one of the cables received on 8 March. In an indignant and somewhat impassioned manner in one excerpt (from the 6 March cable that had so influenced Whitehall), Palairet cautioned that renegeing on the assurances that had been made to the Greek Government and King was “unthinkable” and would cause Britain to be “pilloried by the Greeks and the world in general”.⁴⁴⁰ Palairet’s comments struck home with Cabinet members in Wellington. They chose to overlook what they had been told of the campaign’s military weaknesses, its already failed strategic rationale, the heightened risks to which New Zealand troops would be exposed, and (eight months before a general election was due) the consequences for the Labour Government if those risks materialised. The Cabinet re-approved the venture. Attorney-General Rex Mason described the decision as one “taken with knowledge of the military arguments against it, and even with the realisation that the whole Division might be lost.” The Government, he held, feared moral failure.⁴⁴¹ Mason’s explanation of the Cabinet’s attitude is supported by Berendsen’s comment that “we felt that our honour was at stake”⁴⁴² and suggests that the Cabinet latched onto Palairet’s warning that disgrace would ensue if commitments to Greece were not honoured.

⁴⁴⁰ Various, *Documents I*, #s 345-352, pp. 246-256.

⁴⁴¹ Mason quoted in Wood, *Political and External*, pp. 185-6.

⁴⁴² Sir Carl Berendsen interview, January 1970, ATL 2000-094-5, p. 10 of transcript.

Palairret's single paragraph on the principles at stake—the only reference to ethical obligations in the cables—constitutes about one-third of one of the nine cables Britain sent. Palairret's comments were, however, likely to resonate with Fraser. Fraser's integrity was legend. As Alister McIntosh noted, “the motives of honour and duty never failed to influence” Fraser.⁴⁴³ He supported participation in the Second World War for largely moral reasons.⁴⁴⁴ The weight Fraser placed on Palairret's views serves as an example of how personal values shape political and military decisions. This was the case in more than New Zealand Labour Party circles. The “dual themes of honour and duty” were used to justify intervention in Greece in Britain and “found fertile ground” in Australia also.⁴⁴⁵ New Zealand's reply to London summarised the campaign's military shortcomings and reported that New Zealand was nonetheless not prepared to abandon the Greeks to their fate because it would “destroy the moral basis of our cause and invite results greater in their potential damage to us than any failure in the contemplated operation.”⁴⁴⁶ This decision, and the ethical rationale for it, received the unanimous approval of the War Cabinet and the full Cabinet, and was endorsed by the Leader of the Opposition.⁴⁴⁷ New Zealand

⁴⁴³ McIntosh to Kippenberger, 16 August 1955, ATL MS-Papers-6759-179

⁴⁴⁴ Ian Wards, “Peter Fraser—Warrior Prime Minister”, in Margaret Clark (ed.), *Peter Fraser: Master Politician*, Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1998, p. 146.

⁴⁴⁵ Stockings and Hancock, *Swastika*, p. 567.

⁴⁴⁶ Fraser to Cranborne, 9 March 1941, *Documents I*, # 353 pp. 257-258.

⁴⁴⁷ Peter Fraser, quoted in McClymont, *To Greece*, p. 113.

regarded its re-approval of the use of the New Zealand Division in Greece as a matter of honour.

Stockings and Hancock have noted that New Zealand's (and Australia's) decision to re-approve involvement in Greece has often been interpreted as showing that they "were somehow tricked into agreeing" and have argued the British "cannot be held singularly responsible". The Dominion governments at that time, they contended, deferred to British opinion.⁴⁴⁸ It is true that the New Zealand Government was not deceived about the military risks. In another sense, though, New Zealand had been manipulated into believing that it would be ignoble to repudiate the promises that had been made to Greece. That they were British, not New Zealand, promises seems to have made no difference to Wellington. The only discernible reason for the Cabinet discovering a moral imperative in the Greek campaign was Whitehall's inclusion of Palairot's views in the cables they sent to New Zealand. As a result of ideas implanted by the British Government, Wellington came to believe that a higher purpose existed, and that the higher purpose outweighed the military risks. In that sense the Government was tricked. Rather than asking whether the British Government tricked the Australian and New Zealand governments, Stockings and Hancock should perhaps have asked whether Churchill tricked the Australian, New Zealand and British governments.

⁴⁴⁸ Stockings and Hancock, *Swastika*, p. 4 and p. 566.

This analysis of New Zealand's participation in operations in Greece has shown that New Zealand's involvement resulted from or brought about failures in high-command relationships. The coalition relationship malfunctioned when Wavell's dishonesty encouraged Freyberg to overlook his chartered and civil-military obligations to keep Wellington informed. The Government failed its role in the civil-military relationship by not seeking Freyberg's opinion. Wellington's misreading of Freyberg's cable, its lack of proper procedures and the haste with which it approved British requests also compromised the standards of good governance. The Government's mismanagement of its relationship with Britain meant Wellington made decisions while knowing that it was only partially informed, and went without the say in strategic decision-making that it wanted, and which a coalition partner is entitled to receive when its forces constitute a major component of an operation.

These New Zealand failures were exacerbated by British failures. Britain had not created a balanced civil-military relationship to support strategic decision-making. Churchill was allowed to dominate. As a result, the voices of those opposed to the campaign in Greece were muffled and the operation went ahead. The British Government failed to behave equitably in its relationship with New Zealand and instead treated New Zealand as little more than a vassal state that could be manipulated and that would not challenge British decisions. The consequence of these relationship

failures was that despite knowing that intervention in Greece was strategically a lost cause and likely to fail militarily, the New Zealand Government, abetted by its own high-command malfunctions, kowtowed to Whitehall and approved New Zealand's participation on the moral grounds that cables from Britain had led it to believe existed.

New Zealand's agreement to be involved in Greece in 1941 is probably the best example in the Second World War of the mistakes that result when high-command relationships do not function properly. Every major relationship (civil-military, coalition, allied) failed to function correctly. No participant in the relationships should escape blame. Freyberg, Fraser, Wavell, Churchill, Dill, the British and New Zealand War Cabinets, and senior bureaucrats in Wellington and Whitehall were all culpable. The one overriding reason for these experienced office-holders' conduct was the poor state of their interpersonal relations with each other. Fraser and Freyberg did not know each other well enough to be candid. New Zealand's high-command infrastructure and Cabinet processes were shown to be inadequate. Fraser and Churchill had yet to meet as Prime Ministers and develop a personal understanding—though Churchill showed a keen understanding of what would work with Fraser. Wavell had developed no understanding of the coalition relations New Zealand expected or of Freyberg's status as the commander of an allied national force. Senior British officers and

British War Cabinet members were too easily intimidated by Churchill and, as a result, junior alliance partners were callously manipulated, and political and ethical rhetoric displaced military advice in military decision-making.

5. *The Cairo meetings and their consequences*

Prime Minister Fraser arrived in Egypt in early May 1941. He had been worried by the losses in Greece and, having learnt from some members of parliament serving as officers in 2NZEF that the troops were unenthusiastic about the Labour government, wanted to spend time with the men.⁴⁴⁹ In Egypt he met the ships that brought defeated and tired New Zealand soldiers back from Crete, which added to his anxiety. In the last weeks of May Fraser had also become distressed by New Zealand officer criticisms of Freyberg and was considering dismissing him.⁴⁵⁰ At 3:30am on 31 May, Fraser was at the Royal Air Force base on Aboukir Bay, Egypt, to meet Freyberg who had been evacuated from Crete by flying-boat.⁴⁵¹ Fraser had been up all night negotiating for HMS *Phoebe* to make a final troop-evacuation run to Crete and had become “anguished”, his

⁴⁴⁹ Bassett with King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, pp. 213-214

⁴⁵⁰ Ron Palenski, *Men of Valour: New Zealand and the Battle for Crete*, Auckland: Hodder Moea, 2013, p. 71; Singleton-Gates, *Freyberg*, p. 183; and Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 325.

⁴⁵¹ Personal Diary of B.C.F. 1941, p. 9, ANZ R16 700 543.; and royalnavyresearcharchive.org.uk/FAA-Bases/Aboukir.htm#.VJjvwEC2AH, accessed 23 December 2014.

biographers said, by the losses on Crete.⁴⁵² An exhausted Freyberg arrived with only the clothes he stood up in and apprehensive about the criticism he expected for the loss of Crete.⁴⁵³ Berendsen, who was with Fraser, remembered it as a “tense and emotional” reunion.⁴⁵⁴ Pressure of other duties meant that two days elapsed before Freyberg and Fraser met for the first of what were the most important meetings in New Zealand’s Second World War high-command relationships.⁴⁵⁵

The lack of records concerning the Fraser-Freyberg meetings in Cairo in June 1941 is a probable reason—but not an excuse—for the way in which historians have tended to overlook their turning-point aspect. Some historians have recognised that the meetings cemented “the successful partnership between statesman and soldier that lasted until the end of the war”.⁴⁵⁶ It has been noted that the meetings were a “very significant development both to the relationship between Freyberg and Fraser and ... in the constitutional development of New Zealand”. It has also been remarked that “not enough attention has been given to analysing what actually went on” at them.⁴⁵⁷ But many commentators have

⁴⁵² Bassett with King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 216.

⁴⁵³ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 313.

⁴⁵⁴ Berendsen, MS of memoirs, p. 13, ATL 2000-094-5.

⁴⁵⁵ “War Diary, N.Z. Div. General Staff, Vol. 4, 1 June - 31 Dec. 1941”, p. 1, ANZ R23 517 360.

⁴⁵⁶ McClymont, quoted in Bassett and King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 217.

⁴⁵⁷ Fort Dorset Conference transcript, John White papers, box 2, pp. 95-95, Kippenberger Archive. The speaker, unnamed in the transcript, was one of the four panellists: Major-General Sir William Gentry (a 2NZEF brigadier in 1941), Brigadier J. T. Burrows (also a brigadier in 2NZEF), Justice John White (Freyberg’s PA) and George Laking (Secretary of the New Zealand War Cabinet)

failed to appreciate that the meetings transformed New Zealand's high-command relationships. The relationship changes have often been attributed to other matters. Stevens, for example, asserted that the improvement in Freyberg's relations with 2NZEF was the result of Freyberg rediscovering himself as a New Zealander during battle in Greece.⁴⁵⁸ Tonkin-Covell implied that the fighting on Crete was responsible for Freyberg's new confidence in dealing with the British Army.⁴⁵⁹ While Wood's recognition of the importance of the personal relationships between Fraser, Freyberg and Churchill was perceptive, Wood missed noticing that the relationships developed from or became effective only after the meetings.⁴⁶⁰

This chapter recounts the little that has survived about the meetings and seeks to identify the matters discussed. The chapter traces the impact the meetings had on coalition-partner relations, the senior officer discontent, Freyberg's conduct in battle, and Wellington's relationship with Whitehall.

It is likely that the first meeting principally consisted of airing and discussing issues, and that Fraser announced his determinations in the second. Such would be a natural pattern. Although two meetings took place, there is no evidence that the need for a second meeting was anticipated initially. The first meeting on 2 June appears to have taken place at the British embassy in Cairo, and the

⁴⁵⁸ Stevens, *Freyberg The Man*, p. 33.

⁴⁵⁹ John Tonkin-Covell, "Lieutenant General Bernard Freyberg: A Necessary Commander?", in Glyn Harper and Joel Hayward (eds.), *Born to Lead?: Portraits of New Zealand Commanders*, Auckland, Exisle Publishing, 2003, p. 110.

⁴⁶⁰ Wood, *Political and External*, p. 101.

second on 7 June was at Shepherd's Hotel, where Fraser's party was by then staying.⁴⁶¹ No minutes have survived, if minutes were ever taken. Carl Berendsen, who was the most likely person to have sat in on the meetings, never claimed to have been present. In 1986 John White (Freyberg's PA) implied that he had been present during at least part of the first meeting and recalled post-mortems on Greece and Crete. White remembered nothing else of the meetings and in subsequent discussion admitted that there were events "going on behind the scenes" and that Freyberg's meetings with senior figures were usually private.⁴⁶² Fraser and Freyberg probably met alone. A little of the tone of the meetings is known. Freyberg reported the sessions as being "frank".⁴⁶³ They have also been described as explosive, a "stern talk", a reprimand, a rebuke.⁴⁶⁴

Fraser wanted to discuss the Greek campaign and what had gone on in Crete.⁴⁶⁵ In the process was "surprised to learn" that Freyberg had "never considered the operation a feasible one."⁴⁶⁶ Worse, Freyberg had chosen to keep his reservations to himself. In

⁴⁶¹ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 326 and Bassett and King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 516 discuss only one meeting and locates it at the British embassy. "Personal Diary of 'B.C.F.' 1941" p. 10, ANZ R16 700 543 suggests that the first meeting took place at the embassy and implies that the second was at Shepherd's. Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, p. 125, notes that Fraser's party was moved from the British embassy to Shepherd's when the embassy's guest accommodation was needed for refugee Balkan monarchs.

⁴⁶² John White interview, 13 August 1980, ATL 2000-094-2, p. 5, p. 9 and p. 10. The transcript suggests that White was somewhat confused and evasive in the interview. He may have been present at the beginning of the first meeting. That White could recall so little of what was discussed implies that, if present at all, he was not an observer for long.

⁴⁶³ Freyberg, quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 334.

⁴⁶⁴ Wood, *Political and External*, pp. 188-9; McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, p. 176; Stockings and Hancock, *Swastika*, p. 565; Long, *Greece, Crete and Syria*, p. 20.

⁴⁶⁵ Bassett with King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 215.

⁴⁶⁶ Fraser to Nash, 7 June 1941, *Documents I*, #447, p. 323.

no uncertain terms, Fraser told Freyberg that he had failed the Government.⁴⁶⁷ Fraser has been described by those who worked with him as “rude”, “something of a bully” and, in the words of two associates, “quick-tempered”.⁴⁶⁸ Freyberg’s confession of his silence over Greece probably triggered Fraser’s rage.⁴⁶⁹ When, in defence of his behaviour, Freyberg pleaded that it was “very difficult” to disagree with a commander-in-chief and that “backseat driving” was intensely disliked, Fraser would have none of it. Freyberg later recalled that Fraser made it “perfectly clear” that “no matter who your C-in-C or what his rank may be, it is your duty to keep us in touch”.⁴⁷⁰

The meetings in Cairo are likely to have been the first time that the precedence of Freyberg’s political master over his military one was spelt out. The appointment interviews in November 1939 were inappropriate settings for discussing the topic and to do so then would have been premature. A great deal of the structural framework for 2NZEF operations had been established in 12 hectic days in New Zealand in December 1939 and January 1940 but, as was earlier established, Fraser had not explained the Government’s expectations for coalition cooperation, the dialogue expected from Freyberg, or the GOC’s priorities. By June 1941, the clarification

⁴⁶⁷ Lord Freyberg, House of Lords, 15 April 1953.

⁴⁶⁸ Interviews with Carl Berendsen, p.25; Brigadier Conway, p. 14; and Sir Leonard Isitt, p.12, in ATL 2000-094-5.

⁴⁶⁹ Fraser “proceeded to blast the General for not advising the New Zealand Government of his dissenting view” over Greece. McIntosh to Kippenberger, 16 August 1955, ATL MS-Papers-6759-179.

⁴⁷⁰ Lord Freyberg’s recollection of Fraser’s words, House of Lords, 15 April 1953.

was overdue and for this the Government was responsible. Fraser and his senior public servants had been remiss in not recognising the need to articulate Government expectations prior to Freyberg's departure from New Zealand, especially given the fact that Freyberg was not a New Zealander and was a stranger to Labour Government thinking.

In the week prior to the meetings, Brigadier James Hargest, the member of parliament Fraser had helped get a commission despite an unsatisfactory medical report and commanding officer of the 5th New Zealand Brigade in Greece, had complained to Fraser about Freyberg's command in Greece and on Crete.⁴⁷¹ Brigadier Lindsay Inglis also blamed Freyberg for the loss of Crete, and Fraser had questioned other New Zealand officers, several of them the members of parliament with whom Fraser had been corresponding.⁴⁷² Fraser asked the Inter-Services Committee of Inquiry, which was investigating the Greek and Cretan campaigns, to look into the officers' complaints. The inquiry exonerated Freyberg but Fraser's doubts lingered until he had obtained (mostly positive) opinions on Freyberg's fitness to command from Generals Dill, Wavell, John Kennedy (the British Army's Director of Military

⁴⁷¹ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, pp. 322-323.

⁴⁷² McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, pp. 175-176; and Bassett with King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 213.

Operations) and Sir Claude Auchinleck (Wavell's successor in the Middle East).⁴⁷³

Fraser was dismayed when he learnt that Freyberg had chosen not to tell the Government of his reservations about Greece.⁴⁷⁴ Not only had important information been withheld, Freyberg's silence implied that a vital communication channel had failed. Fraser needed to rely on communications with Freyberg because they were his only reliable and direct conduit to 2NZEF. Fred Jones, the Minister of Defence, was poorly educated and unable to operate at an executive level, which made the Department of Defence channel of limited value to Fraser. The CGS, Major-General John Duigan, was not respected in Labour Party circles and was not considered a trustworthy go-between by Fraser.⁴⁷⁵ Fraser was a micromanager who liked to keep abreast of the details.⁴⁷⁶ He consequently needed to make direct communications with his GOC functional and that left him with two courses of action, either change the GOC or change Freyberg's conduct. Ever since their first meetings in London in 1939 the two men had seemed to communicate well and had established what appeared to be a

⁴⁷³ McGibbon (ed.), *Oxford Companion*, p. 243; Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, pp. 323-325; and Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, p. 135.

⁴⁷⁴ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 325.

⁴⁷⁵ Interview with Brigadier A. E. Conway, 11 November 1969, ATL 2000-094-5, p. 11.

⁴⁷⁶ McIntosh, "Working with Peter Fraser", pp. 11-12; and Sir George Laking interview, 14 August 1986, ATL 2012-028-141, p. 4.

satisfactory working relationship.⁴⁷⁷ There was, however, little rapport; their communications were transactional and functional, but no real dialogue took place. Fraser thought Freyberg was “shirking”, not doing what was requested or not in the manner desired.⁴⁷⁸ Fraser’s decision to meet with Freyberg rather than take summary action, indicates that Fraser recognised that Freyberg had earned the right to explain himself and that some degree of collegial respect had developed.⁴⁷⁹

In the first meeting on 2 June, Freyberg’s revelation that he had chosen to keep to himself his misgivings about the campaign in Greece shocked Fraser. The focus of the meeting changed from a post-mortem of operations to examining Freyberg’s conduct as GOC. Fraser learnt something of how the British Army was treating Freyberg and that Freyberg tended to defer to Wavell rather than Wellington.⁴⁸⁰ The senior officers’ complaints about Freyberg were almost certainly discussed. The officers’ disgruntlement was known to senior officers in Middle East Command and had been raised in the inquiry.⁴⁸¹ Fraser, who was known for his bluntness and disregard of others’ feelings,⁴⁸² would not have soft-pedalled the issue

⁴⁷⁷ Wood, *Political and External*, p. 190; and Bassett and King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 208.

⁴⁷⁸ Peter D. Feaver, “Crisis as Shirking: An Agency Theory Explanation of the Souring of American Civil-Military Relations”, *Armed Forces and Society*, 24:3, Spring 1998, 410.

⁴⁷⁹ Freyberg later wrote of this time in Cairo that Fraser was “a remarkable man” of whom he had a high opinion. Quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 325.

⁴⁸⁰ McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, p. 176.

⁴⁸¹ Wavell, quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 328; and p. 324.

⁴⁸² Sir George Laking interview, 14 August 1986, ATL 2012-028-141, pp. 6-7.

with Freyberg. Each man was given disturbing news by the other. Fraser's confidence in Freyberg was diminished but not destroyed. That a second meeting took place implies that Fraser thought it worthwhile to try to repair his relationship with Freyberg. He also hedged his bets and, as has been noted, delayed deciding Freyberg's future until he had obtained references from senior British officers.

The second meeting on 7 June is where Fraser told Freyberg the policy determinations he had decided upon, proffered advice about the officers' discontent, and established the priority of the New Zealand Government over Middle East Command.

In the first meeting Fraser had been dismayed that in the operations in Greece and Crete New Zealand troops had been exposed to unnecessary danger. He had told Freyberg that it was the GOC's job to ensure New Zealand troops were properly supported and equipped. In the second meeting Fraser set two requirements that had in future to be met. Fraser had clearly spent some time preparing for the second meeting and phrasing his policy on the use of 2NZEF which, on the same day as the second meeting, Fraser described in a cable to Wellington:

Unless the necessary adequate air protection is available, we must voluntarily embark on, or acquiesce in, no further adventures, and in no case must we again allow our New Zealand troops to be exposed to a situation requiring them to meet a highly-developed mechanised attack armed solely with their rifles and their courage.⁴⁸³

⁴⁸³ Fraser to Nash, 7 June 1941, *Documents I*, #447, p. 324.

Freyberg was pessimistic about the practical application of the conditions and warned Fraser that “a great deal of trouble” and “stormy times” should be expected.⁴⁸⁴ He accepted that it was his duty to keep the Government informed and won two concessions from Fraser. Fraser agreed that Wellington would not deal with commanders-in-chief without informing Freyberg, and that the Government would henceforward obtain Freyberg’s opinion on major operations before approving involvement.⁴⁸⁵ Clearly Freyberg was seeking to avoid a repetition of two events: Wavell claiming the Government had, behind Freyberg’s back, approved the operation in Greece; and Wellington’s precipitate approval of the Greek operation, which was made without Freyberg’s input. Over 18 months after the start of the war, basic procedural matters were at last being settled.

Fraser also saw that he would need to raise in London operational matters such as air-land coordination and the need to increase air resources in the Middle East.⁴⁸⁶ As a result of his discussions with Freyberg, Fraser was beginning to see that his role as Prime Minister required him to act as Freyberg’s advocate with Whitehall.

Fraser’s appreciation of a new role in the alliance relationship with Britain was not the only relationship transformation sparked by the meetings. As a result of the inquiry and his meetings with

⁴⁸⁴ Lord Freyberg, House of Lords, 15 April 1953.

⁴⁸⁵ Freyberg, quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 327.

⁴⁸⁶ Fraser to Nash, 7 June 1941, *Documents I*, #447, pp. 322-325.

Fraser, Freyberg saw the need to address the officer disaffection with his command. Four initiatives were used. Both Hargest and Inglis, Freyberg's two most prominent critics, had denounced his command conduct. The training established that Freyberg was a capable commander, restored the officers' confidence in their commander and also raised the morale of the New Zealand Division. Freyberg refused to have his officers blamed for the loss of Crete and ensured there were no recriminations for those who had spoken to Fraser. Hargest and Inglis remained officers in 2NZEF. Thus no bitterness surfaced to further contaminate GOC-officer relations. Freyberg's wife, Barbara, arrived in Suez on 14 June 1941. Mrs Freyberg's relocation to Cairo had been arranged well before the officer discontent surfaced (Freyberg had wanted her to oversee the New Zealand Club) but Freyberg used her presence, and the flat they had set up in Cairo, to entertain a range of 2NZEF personnel and thereby establish harmonious relations with them.⁴⁸⁷ The format of Orders Conferences was changed to allow more and freer commentary from officers. The initiative was probably suggested by Fraser.

Officer discussion at Orders Conferences was initiated shortly after the Fraser-Freyberg meetings.⁴⁸⁸ The *soviets*, as they were nicknamed, gave the officers the chance they sought to contribute to decision-making, suited New Zealand's national character, and

⁴⁸⁷ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, pp. 337-338. The first record of entertaining in the flat is on 16 August 1941, Personal Diary of "B.C.F." 1941, p. 12, ANZ R16 700 543.

⁴⁸⁸ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 410.

reflected the officers' preference for an informal style of command.⁴⁸⁹ Barber and Tonkin-Covell's assertion that the new conference format proved that the brigadiers had increased their power and that, should push come to shove, Fraser would back them over Freyberg, is an exaggeration.⁴⁹⁰ Freyberg was merely accommodating his subordinates' preferences. Even the extent of that accommodation is debatable. There is little agreement as to how democratic the *soviets* actually were. There were complaints that descriptions of the conferences made them sound like Cabinet meetings when "it wasn't like that at all".⁴⁹¹ Several remembered the conferences in an ambiguous manner, that Freyberg encouraged discussion but remained "very much the boss" and for comments such as "Well, gentlemen, we'll compromise and we'll do it my way".⁴⁹² Likening the *soviets* to Cabinet meetings was not inappropriate. Fraser's Cabinet meetings were "chaotic" and "most un-business-like" talk-fests that Fraser concluded by making the decisions unilaterally.⁴⁹³ Contemporary commentary on Orders Conferences suggests a similar process was instituted. Whatever their model, the *soviets* succeeded. Hargest wrote to Fraser in October 1941 that "we now meet in conference and the whole details are placed before us—we on

⁴⁸⁹ McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, p. 176; Stevens, *Freyberg the Man*, p. 86; and Glyn Harper, "A New Zealand Way of War and a New Zealand Style of Command?", in Glyn Harper and Joel Hayward (eds.), *Born to Lead?: Portraits of New Zealand Commanders*, Auckland, Exisle Publishing, 2003, p. 33.

⁴⁹⁰ Barber and Tonkin-Covell, *Salamander*, p. 120.

⁴⁹¹ Burrows interview, Filer Interviews, p. 23.

⁴⁹² Brigadier Gentry, Filer Interviews, p. 23; and Sir William Gilbert, Filer Interviews, p. 1.

⁴⁹³ Carl Berendsen interview, January 1970, pp. 9-10, ATL 2000-094-5.

the other hand are free to express ourselves... Thanks to you, we have developed a new method.”⁴⁹⁴ Other officers felt similarly. “There could have been no better means of ensuring teamwork and understanding, combined with good fellowship”, Kippenberger wrote.⁴⁹⁵ Stevens delighted in the reactions of foreign officers. The *soviets* were, he claimed, “so relaxed as to scandalise the British Army purist and leave the Americans dumbfounded.”⁴⁹⁶

Rather than challenge the officer subculture, and its dissatisfaction with his command, by making a frontal attack on it, Freyberg compromised on the trivial matter of Orders Conference procedure and through training, avoiding recriminations and socialising won the officers’ acceptance. Freyberg knew that he had to succeed in imposing his cultural assumptions on 2NZEF’s officers because he was a conscientious officer who understood the need for harmonious command relations, and because he knew (or at the least suspected) that his job depended upon repairing the relationship.⁴⁹⁷

These initiatives to remedy the officers’ discontent commenced while Fraser was in London. The losses in Greece and Crete, and learning of the manner in which Freyberg was being treated by the British Army, convinced Fraser that the Government needed to develop a less deferential attitude towards Britain. It is possible that Fraser was already developing a measure of scepticism about

⁴⁹⁴ Hargest to Fraser, 30 October 1941, ANZ R17 370 106. [Underscore original.]

⁴⁹⁵ Howard Kippenberger, *Infantry Brigadier*, London: Oxford University Press, 1949, p. 332.

⁴⁹⁶ Stevens, *Freyberg*, p. 86.

⁴⁹⁷ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, pp. 322-325.

the British. He had been offended by Wavell's peremptory assumption in May that the New Zealand Government would accept the termination of the evacuations from Crete.⁴⁹⁸ In urging that further ships be sent to save troops, Fraser explained to Admiral Andrew Cunningham, the Royal Navy's Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean Fleet, that while Britain, a large country, might be able to sustain heavy losses, they would be a disaster for a small country like New Zealand.⁴⁹⁹ It has also been alleged that Fraser told Cunningham, "This is not our war; it's your war and we're not going to have these blokes left to be sacrificed on the altar of your concerns."⁵⁰⁰ Fraser was beginning to discern that Britain's objectives were not always identical to New Zealand's.

While in London in June-August 1941 Fraser busied himself with press engagements and public speeches, attended 13 meetings of the British War Cabinet and, through spending time with Churchill, developed an understanding of the British Prime Minister.⁵⁰¹ Fraser's increased public profile in the United Kingdom and his personal relations with Churchill provided him with new leverage to increase New Zealand's influence in Whitehall. A

⁴⁹⁸ Thorn, *Fraser*, p. 195; and Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, p. 123.

⁴⁹⁹ Bassett with King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 215.

⁵⁰⁰ Sir George Laking's version of what Eric Halstead "reputedly" heard Fraser say to Cunningham, ATL 2012-028-141, p. 15. A similar account of Fraser's conversation with Cunningham is alluded to on pp. 93-94 of the transcript of the 1980 Fort Dorset Historical Study, John White Papers, Kippenberger Archive.

⁵⁰¹ Bassett and King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 218.

sufficiently close relationship was established for Churchill to have personal, your-eyes-only telegraphic addresses set up.⁵⁰²

As Freyberg was training the New Zealand Division and as Fraser was increasing New Zealand's influence in London, General Sir Claude Auchinleck replaced Wavell as Commander-in-Chief Middle East. In April 1941, when British and Commonwealth resources had been diverted to Greece, Rommel's *Deutsches Afrika Korps* had made considerable advances in North Africa. Australia's 9th Division wound up besieged at Tobruk and Wavell's counter-offensives had failed. One of Auchinleck's first objectives was to push the German-Italian forces back.

"The Auk", as he was known, had spent most of his career in India, and during the First World War had led Indian Army units against Ottoman forces in the Middle East and Africa. His only experience of fighting Germans with British/Commonwealth troops was the brief operation in Norway in 1940. Freyberg found Auchinleck intolerant and difficult to work with.⁵⁰³ There were two principal areas of disagreement. Auchinleck favoured brigade-sized "jock column" units fighting from static defence "boxes", while Freyberg advocated mobile division-strength formations. Secondly, Auchinleck refused to accept 2NZEF, or any other Dominion formation, as an independent national force and treated Freyberg as

⁵⁰² Alister McIntosh interview 18 April 1978, p. 16, ATL 2000-094-2; and Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, p. 136.

⁵⁰³ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 345

a British Army subordinate.⁵⁰⁴ The trouble and stormy times Freyberg had predicted materialised but, unlike Freyberg's conflicts with Wavell, there was no existing friendship between the two.

In September 1941, the training of the New Zealand Division was coming to an end. When shown the plans for the forthcoming operation Crusader (a two-pronged attack on Rommel's forces in Libya), Freyberg was horrified by the operation's shortcomings, including the control of armour and the inadequacy of air support.⁵⁰⁵ Armour and air support were the very matters that, just three months earlier, Fraser had ruled must be sufficiently available before New Zealand forces could contemplate participation in a campaign. But instead of raising his concerns with Fraser, and despite having it made clear to him that it was his duty to keep the Government informed, Freyberg again kept quiet. Fraser, who was in London, had got wind of Crusader and cabled Freyberg what has been described as a "check-list of pertinent but embarrassing questions" that specified new and expanded Government requirements for the use of 2NZEF.⁵⁰⁶ Fraser's cable is a mix of polite explanation and firm questioning:

I gather from your telegram of 13 September that it is contemplated the Division should be employed in early operations. In view of the experience in Greece and particularly in Crete, I should be grateful if you would send me

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid, pp. 342-345.

⁵⁰⁵ Barber and Tonkin-Covell, *Salamander*, p. 123.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid, pp. 123-124.

at once, if necessary after consultation with the Commander-in-Chief Middle East, the following information:

1. In what operations is the Division to be engaged?
2. What is its role?
3. Is it completely equipped up to War Establishment in all respects?
4. If not, what are the deficiencies?
5. Are you satisfied that the Division is ready for action both in respect of training and equipment?
6. Is adequate AFV [armoured fighting vehicle] support available for the operations contemplated?
7. Is adequate air support available for these operations, and have appropriate arrangements been made for its use in conjunction with land forces?

This information is required by the Government to satisfy themselves and, should it be necessary to do so, to assure the people of New Zealand that our troops have not been committed to battle without every possible precaution and preparation to meet every calculable emergency being taken.⁵⁰⁷

The next day Fraser added an eighth question: Would the Division “be associated in a Corps with any other division or divisions and, if so, under whose command and with which division or divisions?”⁵⁰⁸ On 19 and 20 September Freyberg responded, but only in the vague terms that Auchinleck insisted he use.⁵⁰⁹ All Freyberg was permitted to say about the Division’s role, for example, was that it “has not yet been disclosed”.⁵¹⁰

Freyberg was derelict in not proactively informing Fraser of his concerns about Crusader. His behaviour was a repeat of his silence about Greece and breached the undertaking he had given

⁵⁰⁷ *Documents II*, #96, pp. 70-71.

⁵⁰⁸ Fraser to Freyberg, 17 September 1941, *Documents II*, #97, p. 71.

⁵⁰⁹ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 345; and Barber and Tonkin-Covell, *Salamander*, p. 124.

⁵¹⁰ Freyberg to Fraser, 19 September 1941, *Documents II*, #98, p. 71.

Fraser just three months earlier. But Freyberg's lapse resulted in him acquiring a set of clear guidelines to use when assessing forthcoming operations. Why, when his charter gave him the right to direct communication with the Government, and when he had committed to keeping the Government fully informed, Freyberg allowed Auchinleck to censor his cable to Fraser has never been explained.

Freyberg was initially reluctant to use the guidelines Fraser sent because he felt it would be morally wrong to cherry pick operations and that doing so would be resented by other forces.⁵¹¹ But when the performance of the New Zealand Division in the battles of late 1941 earned it a reputation in the 8th Army, that regard helped Freyberg to overcome his fear of envy and he started applying the checklist to Auchinleck's operations.⁵¹² He "argued vehemently" against a planned amphibious landing at Ras el Ali, "flatly refused" to be bottled up at Matruh or to allow the breakup of Division into battle groups, and "reacted violently" to the suggestion that the New Zealand Division relieve the Australians at Tobruk.⁵¹³ In December 1941, however, Freyberg oddly acquiesced to an unreasonable demand from Auchinleck. Freyberg had decided to produce a report on operation Battleaxe for 2NZEF's officers. Auchinleck got wind of the report's development and insisted upon

⁵¹¹ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 366.

⁵¹² Barber and Tonkin-Covell, *Salamander*, p. 125.

⁵¹³ McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, pp.178 - 9; and Kippenberger, quoted in McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, p. 179

reviewing and vetting it before it was published.⁵¹⁴ Although Freyberg recognised Auchinleck's diktat was inappropriate interference, he allowed the report to be censored.⁵¹⁵ Freyberg's submission to Auchinleck's demand can be seen as an example of his ambivalent behaviour in late 1941. It can also be seen as Freyberg picking his battles, the report was a relatively minor matter. Freyberg's frustrations with Auchinleck's tactics and coalition attitudes were the big issues and when Auchinleck refused to budge on them, Freyberg relocated 2NZEF to Maitland Wilson's command in the Levant in February 1942.⁵¹⁶ Rommel's attacks in North Africa resulted in 2NZEF returning to Egypt (and to Auchinleck's command), but Auchinleck was shortly afterwards replaced. General Sir Harold Alexander was made Commander-in-Chief Middle East and Lieutenant-General Bernard Montgomery was given command of 8th Army.

Freyberg was the first field commander Montgomery met and in their initial interview Freyberg explained that 2NZEF operated as an independent national force and that Wellington's approval was needed for operations.⁵¹⁷ Montgomery had had some run-ins with Canadian commanders earlier in the war and had come to accept Dominion control of Dominion forces. He agreed to the

⁵¹⁴ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 365.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 365.

⁵¹⁶ Lieutenant-Colonel J.L. Scoular, *Battle for Egypt*, p. 2, nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-WH2Egyp-c1.html, accessed 29 December 2014.

⁵¹⁷ Nigel Hamilton, *The Full Monty*, Volume I, *Montgomery of Alamein 1887-1942*, London: Allen Lane, 2001, pp. 521-523.

arrangements Freyberg outlined.⁵¹⁸ Improved, but not perfect, coalition relations with Middle East Command resulted, and Freyberg's nerve with his military superiors increased. A British staff officer recalled:

Freyberg wasn't slow in throwing his weight about. If he didn't like an order from somebody or other, he'd say, "Well, I'll just have to let my government know about that one"—which generally put the stopper on a Corps Commander.⁵¹⁹

It was not until nearly a year after the Fraser-Freyberg meetings in Cairo that Freyberg developed true confidence with his senior coalition partner. During a 1942 staff conference, whenever it was stated that British tanks would then attack, Freyberg (who had been repeatedly let down by British armour) called out "They won't!" When Australia's Major-General Leslie Morshead joined Freyberg in the heckling, the conference had to be adjourned.⁵²⁰ Freyberg was displaying the same assurance and flippancy that Blamey and Rowell had shown two years earlier with their "This cuts no ice with us..." telegram when Middle East Command sought to detach an Australian brigade without Australian approval.⁵²¹ Later, in Italy, Freyberg became almost impudent and took to declaiming "No

⁵¹⁸ Nigel Hamilton, *The Full Monty*, Volume I, *Montgomery of Alamein 1887-1942*, London: Allen Lane, 2001, pp. 396-403 and pp. 523-525.

⁵¹⁹ M. St. J. Oswald quoted in John Tonkin-Covell, "Lieutenant General Bernard Freyberg: A Necessary Commander?", in Glyn Harper and Joel Hayward (eds.), *Born to Lead?: Portraits of New Zealand Commanders*, Auckland, Exisle Publishing, 2003, p. 110.

⁵²⁰ Montgomery, quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 397.

⁵²¹ See chapter 2.

ammunition, no fight!” to get matériel from XIII Corps.⁵²² While this cheeky behaviour may seem trivial, it speaks volumes about the change in Freyberg’s attitude to coalition partners. As a consequence of his meetings with Fraser, Freyberg displayed sangfroid when dealing with theatre headquarters. He knew his rights and he knew that “my Government” would support him.

New Zealand’s coalition relations with its senior partners improved as a result of the Fraser-Freyberg meetings, but only gradually. Three months after the meetings, when plans for Crusader put Freyberg in much the same position as he had been in prior to Greece, he again failed to inform Fraser of his concerns and to insist upon his right to direct communication with the Fraser. But when the New Zealand Division had proved itself in battle, and as Freyberg’s frustrations with Auchinleck’s command increased, he became less tractable. Six months after the meetings, Freyberg began to exercise his right to veto proposed operations. It was, however, the appointment of new commanders-in-chief, who accepted Dominion rights, that brought about the real improvements in coalition relations. That finding is no slight on Freyberg, in coalition as in other relations *mutual* agreement on the terms of the relationship is needed.

By early 1942 Freyberg was demonstrating that he would not compromise New Zealand requirements to appease a commander-in-

⁵²² Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 475.

chief. Fraser was behaving similarly. The improvement in communication between Prime Minister and GOC that the Cairo meetings brought about resulted in the creation of rapport. Freyberg and Fraser were developing mutual understanding of each other and a common resistance to unnecessary submission to British requests. Fraser's new resolve with Churchill was supported by trade union and Labour Party calls for him to be firmer with Britain.⁵²³ A relatively routine incident, eight months after the Cairo meetings, illustrates the assurance Fraser was displaying in relations with the British government.

In early February 1942 Freyberg informed Fraser that the Division, which had barely recovered from the heavy losses of late 1941, was again required in battle. Fraser advised Freyberg that he thought the request premature and immediately, without prompting from Freyberg, conveyed his disappointment to Churchill. Fraser's reaction showed new levels of comprehension and sensitivity. He saw that Freyberg's message was also something of a query about how to respond to the request, and he instinctively knew the action he needed to take. Fraser also had the wit (and the personal knowledge of Churchill) to include in his cable a reference to "ill-informed comments emanating recently from America" that British troops were languishing, unemployed in the United Kingdom while

⁵²³ Wood, *Political and External*, pp. 210-211.

Dominion forces were doing the fighting in the Middle East.⁵²⁴ Fraser's ploy worked and two days later Freyberg reported that plans had been altered and another division would be used. (The Japanese capture of Manila and Kuala Lumpur, and that Singapore was then under siege, undoubtedly also influenced Churchill's response to a Dominion under heightened threat.) The changes the incident expose are that Fraser and Freyberg were working cooperatively and with new sensitivity, and that Fraser had learnt how to handle Churchill. Both developments had their genesis in the Cairo meetings.

As the war continued and as Fraser-Freyberg communication improved, Freyberg became aware of Government strategy and Government concerns. For the first 18 months of the war Freyberg and Fraser did not discuss Government policy regarding 2NZEF or New Zealand strategy. After the meetings their dialogue improved and they began sharing more information.⁵²⁵ Freyberg used his knowledge of New Zealand's strategic issues to align his battle conduct with Government priorities. The two clearest examples of the new alignment are Tebaga Gap (Tunisia, 1943) and Monte Cassino (Italy, 1944). During both operations Freyberg knew that New Zealand was facing severe labour shortages. That knowledge—

⁵²⁴ Fraser to Churchill, 7 February 1941, *Documents II*, #123, pp. 92-93.

⁵²⁵ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 335; and Interview with Major-General W. G. Stevens, June 1969, ATL 2000-094-5, p. 12.

a direct outcome of the rapport the meetings had brought about—
influenced Freyberg.

Tebaga Gap was another “left hook” operation designed to split Axis forces in Tunisia. The New Zealand Division had developed a reputation for effective turning operations and Montgomery sought a repeat performance. Rommel’s forces were on the Tunisian coast, successfully defending the Mareth Line from attack by the 8th Army. Rommel was alive to the risk of a push through the Matmata Hills on his inland flank and sent part of his armour there. Freyberg’s initial attack, Pugilist, on 21 March met more resistance than he had anticipated from German armour and Freyberg halted it. Lieutenant-General Brian Horrocks’ larger, better-equipped and better-supported attempt to break through succeeded on 26 March.⁵²⁶ Freyberg’s decision to halt Pugilist was controversial but most commentators acknowledge that Government concerns over manpower influenced Freyberg.

At the time of Tebaga Gap New Zealand had two divisions in two different theatres, had garrisoned some Pacific islands and was trying to cope with labour shortages in essential industries and primary production.⁵²⁷ Freyberg had known since Cairo in June 1941 that Fraser would not tolerate under-equipped New Zealand troops being exposed to superior forces without very good reasons. Freyberg’s PA remarked:

⁵²⁶ Pugsley, *Bloody Road Home*, pp. 373-379.

⁵²⁷ Wood, *Political and External*, p. 243.

It may have been the result of Peter Fraser's own discussions with General Freyberg, but the General was always very conscious of the fact that his Division [was] New Zealand's great manpower contribution and you've got to be a bit careful about this...⁵²⁸

Fred Jones, the Minister of Defence, visited the Middle East at the time of Tebaga Gap.⁵²⁹ It is reasonable to expect that Jones reminded Freyberg that a need for reinforcements would overtax New Zealand's already strained labour resources. Most historians accept that Freyberg's decision-making at Tebaga Gap was modified by Government concerns about manpower shortages.

McLeod recognised that Freyberg's lack of aggression at Tebaga Gap was brought about by a Government request to limit the need for reinforcements but concluded that Freyberg had been overly cautious.⁵³⁰ Kippenberger acknowledged that Freyberg "had this business of his charter in his mind" and knew that the lives of New Zealand troops must not be risked unnecessarily.⁵³¹ Others have argued that success at Tebaga Gap was defined in both military objectives and in preserving troops' lives "for reasons essentially imposed by the New Zealand Government."⁵³²

New intimacy with Government thinking also influenced Freyberg's conduct in the attempts to break through the Gustav line

⁵²⁸ John White, Fort Dorset conference transcript, p. 33, John White papers, Kippenberger Archive.

⁵²⁹ Barber, *Chronology*, p. 167.

⁵³⁰ McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, p. 182.

⁵³¹ Kippenberger, quoted in McLeod, *Myth and Reality*, p. 180.

⁵³² Wright, *Freyberg's War*, p. 152.

at Monte Cassino, Italy, in March-April 1944. Four Allied attempts to take Cassino were made. New Zealand-led forces conducted the second and third. Freyberg was pessimistic about his chances and thought the Division unsuited for the operation.⁵³³ He was pressured by his immediate superior, Lieutenant General Mark Clark (Commanding General, United States' 5th Army) and by General Alexander (Commander-in-Chief Middle East) to attack quickly to divert German forces from the Allied landing at Anzio.⁵³⁴

Freyberg's first assault began on the night of 16-17 February 1944. It was, like the previous American attempt, a frontal assault against well-defended German positions and ground to a halt on 21 February.⁵³⁵ On 15 March—without the close fighter-bomber support and infantry reserves Freyberg had requested, and without Kippenberger (who had been seriously wounded) to command the New Zealand Division—Freyberg made another attempt.⁵³⁶ Five days later New Zealand casualties reached 998, “which was Freyberg's signal for calling off the battle.”⁵³⁷

Freyberg had informed Clark's Chief of Staff of the 1,000-casualty limit prior to the assaults.⁵³⁸ Freyberg's cap on losses was consistent with Government policy that the Division should offer

⁵³³ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 455.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 456-458.

⁵³⁵ B. H. Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War*, London: Papermac, 1970 1992, p. 553.

⁵³⁶ Barber and Tonkin-Covell, *Salamander*, pp. 229-232.

⁵³⁷ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 467.

⁵³⁸ Freyberg, quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 462.

maximum usefulness with minimum casualties.⁵³⁹ And, as at Tebaga Gap a year earlier, Freyberg was aware of the desperate manpower shortages then prevailing in New Zealand. A scarcity of able-bodied workers was impeding attainment of food production targets, many 2NZEF troops sent on furlough to New Zealand had refused to return and, just two months prior to Cassino, New Zealand women aged 18-40 were required to register for war work.⁵⁴⁰ As New Zealand troops fought at Cassino, the Government was forced to admit that, in order to obtain workers for essential production and to provide reinforcements for 2NZEF, the 3rd New Zealand Division (in the Pacific) would have to be disbanded.⁵⁴¹

Whereas Greece and Crete typified Freyberg's pre-meetings ignorance of Wellington's concerns, Tebaga Gap and Cassino reflected his post-meetings cognisance of New Zealand's strategic issues. Barber and Tonkin-Covell's contention that the meetings resulted in Freyberg becoming "more subject to the fickle will of his political masters" is mistaken in two ways.⁵⁴² First, the military should always be subordinate to the state.⁵⁴³ Second, Fraser was not fickle, he was unwaveringly consistent in requiring that New Zealand lives not be risked needlessly and that New Zealand's

⁵³⁹ Barber and Tonkin-Covell, *Salamander*, p. 260.

⁵⁴⁰ Barber (ed.), *Chronology*, p. 197 and p. 199; and Gwen Parsons, "The New Zealand Home Front During World War One and World War Two", *History Compass*, 11:6, 2013, 423.

⁵⁴¹ Barber (ed.), *Chronology*, pp. 206-207.

⁵⁴² Barber and Tonkin-Covell, *Salamander*, p. 111.

⁵⁴³ Huntington, *Soldier and State*, p. 73; and Mungo Melvin, "Soldiers, Statesmen and Strategy", *The RUSI Journal*, 157:1, February 2012, 25.

strategic concerns would determine how 2NZEF was used. The improved rapport between Fraser-Freyberg that the Cairo meetings generated led to the alignment of New Zealand's civil and military efforts.

The Cairo meetings enabled the synchronisation of New Zealand's military conduct with the Government's strategic concerns, and also motivated Fraser to be more assertive in relations with Britain. On 14 April 1943 Churchill sought Fraser's approval to use the New Zealand Division in a planned amphibious invasion of Sicily. (The operation did not eventuate.) Alister McIntosh had succeeded Berendsen as Fraser's head of department and recalled that Fraser:

having fallen in over Greece and Crete was very careful to cable Freyberg and ask him what he thought and Freyberg said "It isn't on" ... Fraser played for time and told Churchill that he didn't want to call parliament together at a moment's notice—he'd only give the show away that something big was happening.⁵⁴⁴

The difference between Fraser's response to Greece in 1941 versus Sicily in 1943, is not so much that one was positive and the other negative, it is that by 1943 there were procedures in place in Wellington and Fraser handled the request with assurance. Fraser obtained Freyberg's opinion, as he had agreed to do in Cairo. Having made a commitment to members of parliament that the House of

⁵⁴⁴ Alister McIntosh, interview with Michael King, 18 April 1978, p. 18, ATL 2000-094-2.

Representatives (which was not due to meet until mid May) would approve operational deployments, Fraser refused to be pressured by Churchill's urgency into making a spontaneous decision that would have dishonoured his undertaking to parliamentarians.⁵⁴⁵ Fraser's reasons for not recalling Parliament included more than the risk of tipping off the enemy. He also wanted to avoid speculation by the public and questions at the Labour Party's imminent conference.⁵⁴⁶ Two years on from Greece, Fraser fulfilled his civil-military obligations and his Cairo undertaking to seek Freyberg's opinion on major operations. Fraser had made sufficient progress with Whitehall by 1943 that, unlike 1941, Churchill asked for approval before New Zealand forces were dispatched.

Later in 1943, Italy's 8 September capitulation revived British interest in Greece's Italian-garrisoned Dodecanese islands. Operation Accolade, commanded by Maitland Wilson, was intended to capture the islands' airbases and harbours so that they might be used to launch attacks on German forces in the Balkans. Ill-conceived, poorly executed, under-resourced, with the United States so sceptical it refused to participate, and yet again without adequate air support, the operation failed.⁵⁴⁷ The New Zealand Squadron of Long Range Desert Group played a small part—but without

⁵⁴⁵ Bassett and King, *Tomorrow Comes the Song*, p. 242; and Wards, "Warrior Prime Minister", p. 154.

⁵⁴⁶ Wood, *Political and External*, p. 255.

⁵⁴⁷ David Bews and Steven Cashmore, "Caithness Commandos: LRDG: The Dodecanese Operation and the Camps", 1999, iprom.co.uk/archives/caithness/Dodecanese.html accessed 3 January 2015.

Freyberg's or Wellington's knowledge, which raised Fraser's hackles.⁵⁴⁸

Getting information about the fate of the squadron and resolving its involvement was complicated by Freyberg being both GOC of 2NZEF and commanding officer of the Division, which was then in battle in Italy. Freyberg cabled Jones, "I am 1,800 miles away and out of contact with Middle East."⁵⁴⁹ Maitland Wilson refused to release the New Zealand Squadron from British command or from Leros, where they suffered over one-third losses.⁵⁵⁰ On 2 November, Fraser requested High Commissioner Jordan get the matter the urgent attention of Whitehall.⁵⁵¹ There was no satisfactory response from Britain. Fraser became so irate that, even though in hospital at the time, he personally wrote a "very tart long telegram" to the Dominions Secretary.⁵⁵² Six months later, in May 1944, Fraser's anger at the arrogance Britain had displayed over Accolade had not abated. When Fraser recognised Maitland Wilson at a Prime Ministers' function in London, he publicly "tore strips off him", even though doing so threatened his relationship with

⁵⁴⁸ This was the second, and only other notable unauthorized detachment from 2NZEF during the Second World War, the first being members of the railway company in 1940. Again, only small numbers of personnel were involved.

⁵⁴⁹ Freyberg to Minister of Defence, 7 November 1943, *Documents II*, #346, p. 311.

⁵⁵⁰ Hensley, p. 259.

⁵⁵¹ Fraser to Jordan, 2 November 1943, *Documents II*, #345, p. 310.

⁵⁵² Alister McIntosh interview, n.d., ATL 2000-094-2. Fraser's telegram to Cranborne was published in *Documents II*, #350, p. 313.

Churchill, who was fond of Maitland Wilson. “It was something very close to Fraser’s heart”, McIntosh explained.⁵⁵³

Fraser’s anxiety about the losses in Greece and Crete, together with the understanding he gained in Cairo about how Middle East Command treated 2NZEF, encouraged Fraser to adopt a less compliant attitude towards the British Government. In London Fraser developed a personal relationship with Churchill. Fraser’s handling of the British request to use the New Zealand Division in Sicily in April 1943 displayed new assurance, new procedures and a refusal to compromise standing commitments. Fraser was incensed by the British presumption evident in the unauthorised use of New Zealand forces in the Dodecanese Islands in November 1943 and was unhesitant in making his feelings known. Fraser’s determination that Britain treat New Zealand as an independent ally strengthened as a result of his experiences in Cairo and his meetings with Freyberg.

The effect of the Cairo meetings on GOC-officer relations, decision-making in battle, coalition relations and alliance relations with Britain establishes that the often-overlooked meetings altered the shape of New Zealand’s high-command relationships.

Fraser informed Freyberg that his relationship with his officers had to be repaired and probably told Freyberg that the officers deserved a say in decision-making. Relations with the

⁵⁵³ Alister McIntosh interview 18 April 1978, p. 3, ATL 2000-094-2.

officers were improved by training, socialising, avoiding recriminations, and changes to the format of Orders Conferences.

The meetings affected how the New Zealand Division was used in battle for the rest of the war and established that the Government's strategic concerns took precedence over the military objectives of Allied commanders-in-chief. Decisions Freyberg made to safeguard New Zealand lives at Tebaga Gap and at Cassino—operations that took place during manpower crises in New Zealand—reflected the new alignment of the military and the state that the meetings initiated.

The meetings helped to strengthen Freyberg's resolve with Allied commanders-in-chief. An eight-point check-list of conditions that had to be met before the Government would approve an intended operation was put together as a result of Freyberg's tardiness in honouring the undertaking he had given Fraser in the meetings. Freyberg successfully objected to some of Auchinleck's intended operations. When Auchinleck refused to recognise other New Zealand Government determinations and insisted that the Division fight from "boxes" and in sub-divisional units, Freyberg removed 2NZEF to another command. Freyberg's confidence with Allied commanders-in-chief continued to develop throughout the war. Freyberg promptly informed Montgomery of how 2NZEF would operate within Middle East Command and became unabashedly insistent that "my Government's" wishes be met.

The meetings informed Fraser of how his GOC was being treated by British commanders-in-chief and produced new spirit in the support he gave Freyberg. Over time the Government developed processes for responding to alliance-partner requests and, even when pressed (as over Sicily), would not budge from them. Fraser's confidence and efficacy in dealing with Whitehall improved after he had developed a personal relationship with Churchill. When Britain ignored New Zealand's stipulations and made unauthorised use of the New Zealand Long Range Desert Squadron in operation Accolade, Fraser made his outrage plain.

The greatest overall consequence of the meetings was the enhancement of the Prime Minister-GOC relationship. Civil-military communication improved, trust was established and priorities were articulated. Beneath these observable ameliorations, the personal relationship between the two men deepened. As Horner recognised, personalities shape high command relationships.⁵⁵⁴ The everyday example of Fraser and Freyberg instinctively working in tandem to avert the Division's precipitate battle deployment in February 1942 is not only an example of mutual support, it reflects the trust and sensitivity their relationship developed as a result of the meetings. An organisational culture term used in chapter 3 can be employed to describe the nature of the concord that was reached. In Cairo in June 1941, Fraser and Freyberg began to develop shared

⁵⁵⁴ Horner, *High Command*, p. xx.

assumptions (the thoughts, feelings and opinions that determine behaviour). Freyberg's description of the meetings—"a frank discussion which cleared the air and laid the foundations for a most harmonious and satisfactory association"—⁵⁵⁵ aptly sums up the improvement in Fraser's and Freyberg's interpersonal relations. That improvement constituted the most far-reaching and beneficial consequence of their meetings in Cairo in June 1941. The meetings have no rival for being the most important single event in New Zealand's Second World War high-command relationships.

⁵⁵⁵ Freyberg, quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg VC*, p. 334.

Conclusion

After being appointed as GOC 2NZEF, Freyberg set about developing a charter. He sought advice from appropriate people and, so far as available sources show, drafted a competently constructed charter document which restricted the breaking up and piecemeal use of the force, and gave him the right to communicate directly with the Government. The Government had Freyberg's draft rewritten and in the process—unnecessarily and in contradiction to Government desires—important provisions were removed or qualified.

The civil-military relationship was further hampered by Fraser, the pivotal figure in the Government when it came to defence matters, who was unable to establish rapport with Freyberg, failed to explain how 2NZEF should be used and neglected to specify the kinds of communications he expected from Freyberg. The principal reasons for Fraser's failures were his reserved personality, his lack of experience, and insufficient or poor advice. Freyberg too was inexperienced. He had not previously commanded a Dominion force in coalition operations, and he was a stranger to contemporary New Zealand culture and the Labour Government. The responsibility for

the inadequate establishment of the civil-military relationship was, however, Fraser's. He was the superior and was obliged to ensure that his subordinate (Freyberg) understood what would be required of him, and that Freyberg would feel free to raise with him, as Fraser desired, any concerns or doubts.

For the first nine months of active service, until September 1940, Freyberg was unable to form a division. The time it took to gather and train the personnel needed, and the diversion of the second echelon to Britain, were the causes of the delay. In this period of waiting, Middle East Command suffered troop shortages and a threat from far larger Italian forces. Freyberg and the Government recognised that they could assist Middle East Command by detaching units to serve with other formations and by allowing the 2NZEF troops in the Middle East to take on support duties. Freyberg and the Government approved detachments and lent out troops willingly.

In September 1940 the third echelon's arrival in the Middle East made it possible for Freyberg to form a two-brigade division. To achieve that objective, Freyberg requested the return of the units he had detached. Middle East Command was reluctant to give back the units and disagreement, sometimes acrimony, resulted. In some cases Middle East Command had no replacements for the 2NZEF units. The British Army officers of the command also displayed an out-dated, insensitive and imperious attitude towards Freyberg.

Their attitude was out-dated because, unlike the First World War, New Zealand had retained control of 2NZEF and, by the Second World War, regarded itself as an independent nation, and its expeditionary force as an independent allied formation. The officers of Middle East Command refused to acknowledge the change in the status of New Zealand and 2NZEF and continued to regard Dominion forces as subordinate units of the British Army. Middle East Command behaved in a peremptory manner that offended Dominion GOCs.

The coalition arrangement between 2NZEF and the British Army was mostly undocumented. Although the British Prime Minister had signed Freyberg's charter, there is no evidence that the British Army regarded the charter as binding on them. The lack of formal agreements between the New Zealand and British Governments on procedural matters enabled difficulties to arise in both the coalition (military) and allied (political) relationships.

The Government and Freyberg showed understanding and cooperation in assisting Middle East Command by releasing units. Middle East Command showed no similar sensitivity or willingness to collaborate. Nor did the British Government, which refused to inform Fraser of its war aims, dismissed the idea of forming an Imperial War Cabinet (at which Dominions would have had a voice), and declined to treat Dominions as allies. Coalition relations in

1940-41 were a one-way street, New Zealand showed sensitivity and teamwork while the British Army and British Government did not.

Because it took over a year for all three echelons to be consolidated into a division, the officers were able to develop a subculture which rivalled Freyberg's command. The development of an officer subculture was facilitated by the officers' macrocultural assumptions, their hubris and confirmation bias. Previous historical commentary on the officers' dissatisfaction with Freyberg has tended to hold Freyberg's nationality responsible, but analysis using organisational culture theory has exposed that attribution of blame as misplaced. Discontent with Freyberg boiled over during operations in Greece and Crete.

The lead up to and operations in Greece exposed shortcomings or caused malfunctions in all New Zealand's high-command relationships. In addition to the disharmony that surfaced in Freyberg's relationship with his officers, the basis of the civil-military relationship was shown to be inadequate because insufficient rapport had been established, and processes were either lacking or not observed. Wavell's mendacity and ambiguities in Freyberg's charter brought about coalition dysfunction. Additionally, communications between the British and New Zealand Governments exposed the imbalance in the alliance relationship between Wellington and Whitehall.

Fraser was in the Middle East shortly after operations in Greece concluded and was able to meet with Freyberg. The meetings the two held in Cairo in June 1941 constituted a turning point for all New Zealand's high command relationships. Agreement was reached on the kind of information and reporting Freyberg should provide Fraser. From learning how Middle East Command treated Freyberg, Fraser set conditions on the use of 2NZEF, and also saw the need to support Freyberg by adopting a firmer line with Whitehall. As a result of the meetings Freyberg's attitude to Middle East Command gradually stiffened. Fraser no doubt raised the officers' complaints about Freyberg and likely had a hand in the remediation of them. Fraser subsequently met Churchill and developed a personal understanding of him. That understanding helped Fraser to establish more equitable relations with Britain.

Good interpersonal relations has been shown to be central to the success of high command relationships. It was only when Fraser and Freyberg communicated more (more intimately, more often and on more matters), and developed mutual trust and respect, that the civil-military relationship was able to function effectively. Personalities were central to the post-September 1940 disagreements between Freyberg and Middle East Command. Wavell displayed sensitivity when it came to biography and literature but was stubborn and insensitive in his refusal to recognise 2NZEF as the national force of an independent Dominion. For reasons beyond his

control, Freyberg was not able to form a relationship with his senior officers until mid 1941. The short-sightedness, lack of military experience and macrocultural assumptions of some of New Zealand's senior officers prevented them from understanding their GOC's purposes and from establishing harmonious relations with him.

The role of Freyberg's (British) nationality has been wrongly interpreted in many previous histories. While it is true that Freyberg had not lived in New Zealand for 25 years and was unfamiliar with Labour Government thinking, the reason the civil-military relationship was improperly established had more to do with Fraser's personality, lack of experience and inadequate guidance than Freyberg's nationality. Freyberg's nationality had little effect on the breakdown in the coalition relationship in September 1940. The historians who have asserted that Freyberg was loyal to his British Army roots until late 1940 have done so because they failed to appreciate that, with the Government's blessing, Freyberg cooperated with Middle East Command and agreed to detached units to assist a threatened command. The change of attitude that took place in in September 1940 was not the result of Freyberg changing loyalties but the arrival of the third echelon and the possibility of forming a division. Historians have also misinterpreted the role of Freyberg's nationality in the officer discontent of 1940-41. The officers certainly complained that Freyberg was "too British Army", but the application of

organisational culture theory shows that those complaints were values that should not have been taken literally by historians, and that the real cause of the disaffection was based in the officers' cultural assumptions and inexperience.

New Zealand's Dominion status has been another frequently raised issue in the analysis of high-command relationships. The civil-military relationship was handicapped from the start by two failures by the Government. Wellington did not make it clear to Whitehall and the British War Office that 2NZEF would be an independent, allied formation controlled the government of the independent Dominion of New Zealand, and it did not make it sufficiently clear to Freyberg that that was the case. As a result of those two failures, Wavell and Middle East Command treated Freyberg and 2NZEF in a manner that was inappropriate to New Zealand's perception of Dominion status. 2NZEF's officers in 1940 and early 1941, serving at the time of the nation's centenary and a newly articulated national identity, were not entirely happy to be commanded by a non-New Zealander, perceived Freyberg's actions as being those of a British Army officer, and allowed national pride to inhibit forming a harmonious relationship with their GOC.

The performance of Freyberg as GOC of 2NZEF, rather than as commanding officer of the New Zealand Division, has been little analysed in New Zealand historiography. Freyberg developed a charter that met the standards of the time. As his decision to

correspond with a range of New Zealand leaders showed, he made an effort to establish good communications with the Government and the New Zealand Army. That Freyberg was unable to establish personal relations with Fraser had more to do with Fraser than with Freyberg. Freyberg had been warned by Dewing and several Australian generals of what to expect from the British Army when commanding a Dominion force but nonetheless expected to receive courteous treatment from his friends in Middle East Command. Freyberg and the Government were considerate and cooperative from the start and, consequently, coalition relations seemed amicable. But when Freyberg requested the return of detached units to form a division, and the intransigence, arrogance and stubbornness of Freyberg's fellow British Army officers became apparent, Freyberg did not hesitate to confront them. Freyberg's conduct in relation to operations in Greece and Crete was probably too compliant to British Army direction. Freyberg's decision to withhold from Wellington his misgivings about Greece was a mistake, as was Freyberg's repeat of the same behaviour in relation to operation Crusader in September 1941. After that, Freyberg developed confidence in coalition relations. By mid 1942 he was assertive, and at Tebaga Gap and Monte Cassino he demonstrated that he had aligned military decision-making with New Zealand's strategic concerns.

Peter Fraser emerges as both a cause of and the cure for the high-command relationship difficulties of 1939-1941. Wellington's

failure to obtain formal agreement with Whitehall on the status of 2NZEF impaired the force's use and made Freyberg's role as GOC more difficult. Fraser was also at fault for not explaining to Freyberg the Government's rationale for participation in the war and for not developing the necessary rapport with Freyberg that would have ensured the level and nature of communications Fraser desired. Fraser's background and personality made it difficult for him to be intimate with associates, a finding that confirms David Horner's (and others') contention that personalities shape high-command relations. That Fraser kept Government strategy and its focus on influencing the postwar world order from Freyberg in 1939 was inexcusable. Like basic operational matters such as the conditions that had to exist before involvement in a campaign could be approved, Freyberg was not informed of what was required from him and therefore found it hard to meet expectations and to align military effort with Government intentions. It is ironic that in 1939-40 New Zealand twice pressed the British Government for a statement of war aims while, at the very same time, it neglected to inform its GOC of its own war aims.

But when, in May 1941, Fraser became aware of the dysfunction in the civil-military, coalition and command relationships, he responded with initiatives, policies, guidance and a readiness to alter even his own behaviour that was remarkable. Fraser initiated the remediation of New Zealand's faltering high-

command relationships. By making the primacy of the Government over the theatre commander-in-chief explicit and laying down approval criteria for New Zealand involvement in operations, Fraser resolved the central issue in 2NZEF's coalition relations. The extent to which Fraser shaped the resolution of the senior officer discontent cannot be definitively established. Of the four remedies used, divisional training, social events and avoidance of recriminations can largely be attributed to Freyberg. Officer participation at Orders Conferences was likely to have been suggested by Fraser and was perceived by the officers as more welcome and more transformational than the small concession actually was. Fraser was also motivated to change the New Zealand Government's relationship with the British Government and this he achieved.

The most profound and important change that Fraser implemented was to the civil-military relationship. More than 18 months after the start of the war, Fraser became aware of the need for rapport with (at least one of his) senior associates. It must have been an uncomfortable realisation for Fraser, the dour and nearly friendless micromanager, that he would have to become more communicative and trusting. But he did. As a result of their meetings in Cairo in June 1941, Fraser and Freyberg developed a civil-military relationship that paralleled, supported and contributed to the correction of the other high-command relationships. The two men became friends. Whether their friendship was a product of the

rapprochement that was introduced to the civil-military relationship, or whether amicability made the rapprochement possible cannot be known for sure. What this analysis of Freyberg's high-command relationships in 1939-1941 has established, though, is that, as David Horner, Frederick Wood and Air Vice-Marshal Kingston-McCloughry contended, personalities and interpersonal relations shape high command in war.

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