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THE NEW ZEALAND SOLDIER IN WORLD WAR II:

MYTH AND REALITY

A thesis presented in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

The New Zealand soldier has gained a reputation for being an outstanding soldier. The prolific New Zealand involvement in the numerous wars of this century have allowed him to develop and consolidate this reputation. World War II was to add further lustre to this reputation. The question that this poses is whether the reputation is justified - how much is myth and how much is reality?

In the early stages of World War II the New Zealander failed to live up to his mythical reputation. The battles of Greece and Crete, in particular, showed the totally unprofessional nature of the New Zealand Army. Much of the weaknesses shown in these battles were caused by inadequate preparation. The Army had been one of the principal victims of the retrenchment policies of successive governments between the wars. In 1939 the New Zealand Army was in no state to fight a war. The Regular Force numbered no more than 500 and of the 10,000 Territorials only twenty percent could have been considered active. The Army was deficient not only in trained manpower but also in modern equipment. It was therefore a race against time to prepare the New Zealand Division for combat.

Though the early years of the war demonstrated just how inadequate the preparations had been, the quality of the New Zealand soldier and the New Zealand Division increased. This was due to experience, improved logistics, and more competent leadership. Leadership was perhaps the major problem for the New Zealand Division in its early years. The failure of leadership is clearly illustrated by the loss of Maleme aerodrome and consequently Crete. The skills required for peacetime promotion as usual differed from those needed for leadership in war. As the war progressed promotion became based on ability and officers lacking in leadership skills were gradually replaced.

The New Zealand Division had achieved a high standard by the end of the North African campaign but its standard was not at variance with

other Divisions with similar experiences. Battles such as Minqar Qaim, El Alamein, Tebaga Gap and Takrouna were examples of the Division profiting from its experiences. However, there were still problems. At Takrouna the New Zealanders were able to bring all their experience to bear, but the need for new tactics in this unusual attack found the New Zealanders a little lacking, and another lesson was learnt.

The New Zealand soldier is not physically or mentally superior to any other soldier. The Division did have advantages such as Freyberg's Charter and the national nature of the Division and this helped the soldiers and the Division in their battles. What counts though, for fighting ability is training, experience, leadership and logistics. In all armies and all Divisions these fluctuate and correspondingly so does the fighting ability of that Division.

The myth of the New Zealand soldier has developed as New Zealanders search for a national identity. The myth has grown with New Zealand nationalism to a stage where New Zealanders are unable to distinguish myth from reality.

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ABBREVIATIONS

A. Text Abbreviations

The abbreviations used in this thesis are primarily those used by the War History Branch. I have used as a guide the glossary in W.G. McClymont, To Greece, pp.515-17 though the use of the abbreviations varied throughout the Official Histories. The specifically military abbreviations have only been used in case studies, excepting, of course, those in common usage. Unit titles such as platoon, company, battalion, and brigade, have been abbreviated in the case studies except when referred to in general terms. They have been abbreviated if it is obvious they refer to a specific unit or units even though it is not prefixed by a letter or number. One modification has been adopted. When referring to a specific company of battalion in a battle in which more than one battalion is involved, I have referred to it as company/battalion to avoid any confusion, e.g. D/24 refers to D Company of 24 Battalion.

AA	Anti-aircraft
AA & QMG	Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster-General
AGRA	Army Group Royal Artillery
ASC	Army Service Corps
AWOL	Absent Without Leave
bde	brigade
bn	battalion
bty	battery
CGS	Chief of General Staff
cm	centimetre
CMS	Company Sergeant-Major
CO	Commanding Officer
comd	commander
coy	company
CRA	Commander Royal Artillery
CRE	Commander Royal Engineers
cwt	hundredweight
Div	Division
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GSO	General Staff Officer
FOO	Forward Observation Officer
HQ	Headquarters

2 i/c	second-in-command
ID	Intelligence Officer
I tank	Infantry tank
LOB	Left Out of Battle
L/Sgt	Lance Sergeant
Lt.	Lieutenant
Lt.Col.	Lieutenant Colonel
Lt.Gen.	Lieutenant General
mph	miles per hour
NCO	Non-commissioned officer
NZ	New Zealand
NZEF	New Zealand Expeditionary Force
OC	Officer Commanding
OCTU	Officer Cadet Training Unit
pl	platoon
Pt.	Point
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAP	Regimental Aid Post
Regt	Regiment
RQMS	Regimental Quartermaster-Sergeant
RSM	Regimental Sergeant-Major
VC	Victoria Cross

B. Footnote Abbreviations

The footnote reference beginning DA refers to War Archives II, Series 1 at National Archives. The series is referred to at National Archives as the DA series and this has been continued in the thesis.

ATL	Alexander Turnbull Library
DA	War Archives II, Series 1
FP	Freyberg Papers
IP	Inglis Papers
KP	Kippenberger Papers
KQ	Kippenberger Questionnaire
MQ	McLeod Questionnaire
n.d.	no date
No.	number
p.	page
pp.	pages
QEIIAMM	Queen Elizabeth II Army Memorial Museum
Vol.	Volume
WATT	War Archives II National Archives

PREFACE

A 'Strategy and Warfare' class at Massey University in 1977 was my first introduction to military history, and was the stimulus that created my interest in this subject. I have never doubted, somewhat naively, the myth of the New Zealand soldier and it was a lecture by Major Chris Pugsley on the North African campaign that first led me to think about the topic objectively. As a result I chose to investigate the subject further in a thesis. It is a topic that strikes a reactive chord in most New Zealanders, both positively and negatively, and most people have an opinion or are prepared to discuss it. This has been of great assistance in the writing of the thesis. I have tried to remain objective throughout the writing of this work, but I believe it is impossible for the historian, and unjust to expect him, to show no bias or emotion.

Apart from the Official Histories there has been little study of the New Zealand soldier at war. The resources are voluminous and there is much room for academic study, as there should be, in a subject that has preoccupied the minds of New Zealanders over the last century and a half. The War History Archives, at National Archives, are vast. The collection, gathered over twenty-five years include official reports and documents, War Diaries, eye-witness accounts, narratives, narrators' and authors' correspondence, authors' drafts and comments on drafts. Also at National Archives are the papers of such prominent figures as Freyberg (in War History Archives), Fraser, Kippenberger and Puttick. The Alexander Turnbull Library, besides holding the Inglis papers, has started a War Documentation Centre to collect the memorabilia of war. The Queen Elizabeth II Army Memorial Museum has an accumulation of pamphlets, manuals, diaries, photographs, personal papers, and documents that will be immensely valuable to the historian when catalogued.

My other source of primary material was a questionnaire distributed to ex-members of 2NZEF. The questions are included in Appendix A. It was based on a questionnaire which the Official Historian, Major General Sir Howard Kippenberger, distributed to fifty-six senior New Zealand

World War II officers in 1948. The questions were derived from S.L.A. Marshall's book Men Against Fire (1947), which examined American soldiers' aptitude for and attitude to combat. The fifty-six Kippenberger questionnaires and the thirty-nine who responded to mine are obviously not a significant sample nor cross-section but they do provide an insight to the attitudes of the New Zealand soldier to combat, which provided ideas for me to explore further. I am grateful to those who responded to my questionnaire.

In preparing this work I am indebted to a large number of people and organisations. Two people have played a significant part in the evolution of this thesis: Mike Pugh, my supervisor, whose keenness and enthusiasm has been greatly valued; and Chris Pugsley, who has provided technical advice and who was always willing to listen to my ideas and never reticent to suggest his own. There are many others to whom I am grateful: my classmates and colleagues at Massey University; the staffs of the Massey Library, National Archives and the Alexander Turnbull Library; Major Bob Withers at the Queen Elizabeth II Army Memorial Museum; Major General Sir William Gentry, Brigadier J.T. Burrows, Professor W.E. Murphy, and Mr W. Gibbons for interviews; and to those who corresponded with me, particularly Mr G. Weenink. Others have supported me in a non-academic manner by way of providing friendship and accommodation on my many trips to Wellington; in particular Monica and Terry Robinson. I would also like to thank my typist, Mrs Jill Cheer. I am exceedingly grateful to Charlotte Macdonald who encouraged and enthused me in an enduring manner throughout the two years it has taken to write this thesis.

ROUX: We demand that everyone should do all they can
to put an end to war
This damned war
which is run for the benefit of profiteers
and leads only to more wars

We demand
that the people who started the war
should pay the cost of it

Once and for all
the idea of glorious victories
won by the glorious army
must be wiped out
Neither side is glorious
On either side they're just frightened men
messaging their pants
and they all want the same thing
Not to lie under the earth
but to walk upon it
without crutches

'The persecution and assassination of Marat as performed by the inmates
of the asylum of Charenton under the direction of the Marquis de Sade'
by Peter Weiss.

ACT ONE : 19