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**Forgotten Aviators: The journey, experiences
and contributions of Māori Airmen to 75 (NZ)
Squadron during the Second World War**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts (History)**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the journeys, experiences and contributions of a group of 29 Māori airmen who flew in various capacities with 75 (NZ) Squadron. It first explores Māori enlistment in the military prior to the Second World War. It looks at the early Māori pioneers in aviation and how they paved the way for Māori airmen joining at the beginning of the Second World War. It argues that the Māori War Effort Organisation played a critical role in Māori recruitment at the dawn of the Second World War, but much of the focus lay in recruiting men into the 28th (Māori) Battalion. While the ranks of the battalion began to fill, a small group of Māori men chose to begin the long journey towards joining the Royal New Zealand Air Force. This thesis follows their experiences at various training schools in Canada and New Zealand, where they became skilled in their respective trades.

After training, the airmen moved to the United Kingdom to begin preparations for joining an operational squadron. These men would join 75 (NZ) Squadron at various times throughout the Second World War. This thesis details their operational sorties with the squadron and their experiences while on base. It explores the broader picture of the European theatre. It will also examine their post-war lives and reintegration into civilian life and argues that policies concerning returned servicemen were applied unevenly and did not honour the contributions of these Māori airmen.

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The staff at various archives around New Zealand have been gracious in trawling their respective repositories for any material used in this work. On numerous occasions, Simon Moody at the Air Force Museum of New Zealand invited me into their archives and took great time and care to work through the material with me. His interest extended beyond my time in the archives, and he continued to look for and provide source material by

correspondence. Thank you, Simon. Chris Brooks from the NZDF Personnel Archives provided all of the Air Force Record Cards for these airmen, which have formed a big part of telling their stories. The staff at Archives New Zealand, Museum of Transport and Technology and Auckland War Memorial Museum were all incredibly helpful, and their source material and guidance have also helped bring this thesis together. Emma Liley at the Rotorua Museum was also generous with her time and provided interesting material concerning the airmen's time at the Initial Training Wing in Rotorua.

Most importantly, thanks must also go to the descendants of these airmen who have shared so many stories of their fathers, grandfathers and uncles. There are too many to name here, but they are listed in the interviews at the end of this thesis. I am incredibly honoured to have been entrusted by all of you with these deep and personal stories. Your contributions have made this thesis much richer, and I hope this brings more context to the stories of your airmen. Their bravery and determination to volunteer to serve on the other side of the world is remarkable. You can all be eternally proud of their efforts and contributions to bringing the Māori war effort to light. Thank you to all of you.

This thesis is dedicated to the Māori airmen and their descendants who have so generously shared their stories.

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Introduction

Eighty years ago, at 24,000 feet over Occupied Europe, Te Reo Māori was ringing out in the cockpits of Royal Air Force bombers. One of those speaking Te Reo Māori was Kiwi Amohanga of Ngāti Maniapoto. Amohanga was a pilot flying Avro Lancaster bombers with 75 (NZ) Squadron (75 Sqn). While on operations, he could be heard conversing at various times in Te Reo to aircrew, which included his Māori wireless operator, Max Spooner, and other pilots, including Pākehā Eric Meharry, who had acquired his proficiency in the language from his pre-war friendship with Amohanga in Te Kuiti. The tale of these Te Reo Māori radio conversations reveals a broader story of Māori in 75 Sqn. Amohanga was just one of 29 Māori airmen who flew with the squadron during the Second World War. Their story is one of fortitude, tragedy, dedication and mana.

New Zealand's wide-ranging contribution to the Second World War has been extensively documented through numerous historical publications. An exploration of this secondary literature shows a strong and sustained exploration of the New Zealand Army's feats during the Second World War, especially that of the 2nd New Zealand Division in the Mediterranean theatre. Lesser-known are the parts played by New Zealanders in the Allied air forces and navies. This is especially true of New Zealand's contribution of airmen to Bomber Command. Within Bomber Command, 75 Sqn had the largest concentration of New Zealand airmen in the Royal Air Force (RAF). The squadron saw significant action throughout the air war over Europe. Various publications detail the actions of 75 Sqn throughout the Second World War. Serving as general histories of the squadron's wartime exploits, these publications delve into the day-to-day lives of New Zealanders in the squadron and in Bomber Command. Nonetheless, the contributions of Māori airmen within the squadron are largely absent. This

literature review will explore the works dealing with 75 Sqn, New Zealanders who served with the squadron, the Māori war effort, and how all three strands of literature interrelate.

The New Zealand contribution to the air war in Europe appears throughout the literature on the history of Bomber Command in the Second World War. The official history of New Zealanders with the RAF¹ explores the areas where New Zealand airmen participated in the air war over Europe. Across his three volumes, H. L. Thompson examines the men, their squadrons and their exploits, beginning with early New Zealand representation in the RAF. The number of New Zealanders in the RAF was substantial. Thompson notes that just under 11,000 New Zealand airmen saw service with the RAF throughout the Second World War.² The volumes are extensive and account for the New Zealand experience throughout the war and across the European and Eastern theatres. However, the volumes are light on detail in terms of the individual experiences of men in the RAF. Max Lambert's *Night After Night*³ seeks to rectify this by examining the New Zealanders' experience of life within Bomber Command. Lambert's extensive work breaks into every aspect of aircrew life in Bomber Command. Lambert paints a picture of Bomber Command as 'relaxed, with a minimum of spit-and-polish discipline.'⁴ Life in Bomber Command vastly differed from New Zealanders' lives in the army. Lambert notes that men in Bomber Command ate well, could socialise freely in pubs, slept in clean beds and had seven days of leave every six weeks.⁵ Such a portrayal of Bomber Command would suggest an easy life away from the horrors of war many New Zealanders experienced on land. However, as Lambert notes, this perception is untrue. Life as a member of a bomber crew was perilous. The centrifugal force of a bomber in

¹ H. L. Thompson, *New Zealanders with the Royal Air Force*, vol. 1 (Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, 1953).

² Ibid, 22.

³ Max Lambert, *Night After Night: New Zealanders in Bomber Command* (Auckland, New Zealand: HarperCollins, 2005), 25.

⁴ Ibid, 25.

⁵ Ibid.

trouble spinning wildly towards Earth often prevented aircrew from reaching parachutes and making a hasty escape. Few aircrews, Lambert notes, were pulled alive from bomber wreckages.⁶ Tony Redding's *Life and Death in Bomber Command*⁷ has an extensive chapter on the odds of survival within Bomber Command. Though Redding's book speaks very little of New Zealanders in Bomber Command, it does provide a general picture of life and death in Bomber Command. Redding notes that around 125,000 aircrew served with Bomber Command throughout the war, of which 32,000 were Commonwealth or Allied airmen, including New Zealanders.⁸ Lambert places the New Zealanders who served with Bomber Command at approximately 6,000.⁹ Redding argues that Bomber Command's loss rate averaged five per cent for most of the war.¹⁰ He further argues that the chance of an airman completing 30 operations was as low as one in five. Redding notes Bomber Command Commander-in-Chief Sir Arthur Harris' argument that the odds of surviving a tour was 'scarcely one in three.'¹¹ When Harris' figures are applied to the New Zealand losses within Bomber Command, they are nearly accurate. Lambert's *Night after Night* suggests that 1850 New Zealanders were killed in service with Bomber Command.¹² That figure translates to a 31 per cent casualty rate among New Zealanders with Bomber Command. The general literature concerning Bomber Command explains the high casualty rate experienced throughout the war.

In his extensive history of the Second World War, R. A. C. Parker provides an insightful view of Bomber Command's operations.¹³ Parker argues that Allied military

⁶ Ibid, 27.

⁷ Tony Redding, *Life and Death in Bomber Command* (Gloucestershire, United Kingdom: Fonthill Media, 2013).

⁸ Redding, *Life and Death in Bomber Command*, 131.

⁹ Lambert, *Night after Night*, 35.

¹⁰ Redding, *Life and Death in Bomber Command*, 131.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Lambert, *Night after Night*.

¹³ R. A. C. Parker, *The Second World War: A Short History* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1989).

leaders believed it was possible to defeat Germany by bombing alone.¹⁴ Richard Overy supports this argument in his book *Bomber Command 1939-1945*.¹⁵ He argues that Winston Churchill's private view was that bombing Germany would be the only way to get the United Kingdom out of the precarious situation of 'Britain alone' in 1940.¹⁶ Thus, New Zealanders found themselves embroiled in a struggle to knock Germany out of the war by striking at the very heart of the Reich at every given opportunity. Alex M. Spencer notes that the petition for more New Zealanders to contribute to the burgeoning air war over Europe came directly from the top of the British Government.¹⁷ In *British Imperial Air Power*, Spencer argues that British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden informed the New Zealand Government that the greatest need was to reduce the disparity between British and German air strength.¹⁸ Notably, New Zealand could contribute complete units or supply aircraft, materiel and personnel to prop up the RAF.¹⁹ Ultimately, the New Zealand Government opted for both options, and 75 (NZ) Squadron was born.

The general history of 75 Sqn is well documented. This is especially true in the Official History of New Zealanders with the Royal Air Force.²⁰ The squadron is afforded an entire chapter detailing the part of the squadron from its formation as a New Zealand squadron of the RAF in March 1940. The first volume argues that by October 1940, the squadron already had considerable operational experience and quickly became one of No. 3 Bomber Group's foremost squadrons.²¹ In his book on the history of 75 Sqn²², Norman Franks also details the wartime exploits of the squadron. He notes that while the squadron

¹⁴ Ibid, 151.

¹⁵ Richard Overy, *Bomber Command 1939-1945* (London, United Kingdom: HarperCollins, 1997).

¹⁶ Ibid, 51.

¹⁷ Alex M. Spencer, *British Imperial Air Power* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2020).

¹⁸ Ibid, 243.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Thompson, *New Zealanders with the Royal Air Force*, 1, 183.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Norman Franks, *Forever Strong: The Story of 75 Squadron RNZAF 1916-1990* (Auckland: Random Century New Zealand, 1991).

flew its first operational sorties on March 27, 1940, it was not until additional personnel arrived in May 1940 that it began to come up to full squadron strength.²³ While 75 Sqn was a New Zealand squadron, it contained other nationalities, in line with Anthony Eden's push for Commonwealth and Dominion governments to contribute men to the RAF. Recruitment of New Zealand men into the air force was rigorous. Max Lambert details the requirements in *Night after Night*. Candidates had to be between 17.5 years and 28 years old, unmarried and educated up to the standard of school certificate or university entrance.²⁴ As the war progressed and more men were required, these requirements would be relaxed. Lambert argues that the Great Depression had denied many men of age the chance to attain the academic standards required to join the air force.²⁵ Thompson explains that the squadron was filled with men from New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, giving it a truly 'Empire character.'²⁶

Character is a crucial undertone throughout the literature concerning 75 Sqn. In *Kiwis Do Fly*,²⁷ Peter J. Wheeler argues that the squadron was the RNZAF 'glamour' bomber squadron.²⁸ Wheeler's book includes the memoirs of those who served with the squadron during the Second World War. One memoir describes the squadron as having a 'press-on' attitude, while another describes the squadron as a 'gung-ho group full of press-on types.'²⁹ At the other end, another airman describes the squadron as having very high standards and little tolerance for DNCD (Did Not Complete Duty).³⁰ The culture within 75 Sqn was not unlike that of the rest of Bomber Command. Martin Francis explores the representation of the

²³ Ibid, 16.

²⁴ Lambert, *Night after Night*, 35.

²⁵ Ibid, 36.

²⁶ Thompson, *New Zealanders with the Royal Air Force*, 183.

²⁷ Peter J. Wheeler, *Kiwis Do Fly: New Zealanders in RAF Bomber Command* (Auckland: New Zealand Bomber Command Association, 2012).

²⁸ Ibid, 42.

²⁹ Wheeler, *Kiwis Do Fly*.

³⁰ Ibid, 220.

wartime RAF in his book, *The Flyer*.³¹ Francis explains that the wartime RAF featured ‘relatively lax discipline, rampant individualism and ostensible cosmopolitanism.’³² Francis also notes the effect of a high casualty rate on the men of the RAF. Aidan Kimberley’s essay, “You Wouldn’t Know There Was a War On,”³³ also deals with the culture of Bomber Command from a New Zealand viewpoint. Kimberley details some of the recreational sporting rivalries that imbued a fighting spirit, courage and aggressiveness in the airmen of Bomber Command.³⁴ As the war progressed and more men were needed in the air war, Francis notes the Air Ministry relaxed its requirements to ‘the desire of the candidates to fight and fly in the air.’³⁵ As seen, the way of life in 75 Sqn exuded the desired culture of Bomber Command. Nevertheless, 75 Sqn still required a class of men able to adapt to new bombers with increasingly complex technology in them.

The bombers and the airmen that flew on them with 75 Sqn feature prominently in the literature about the squadron. In their book on the squadron,³⁶ Chris Ward and Chris Newey produce a detailed picture of the squadron’s operations month-by-month as the war progressed. The book notes maiden flights of crews, nightly operations and losses of crews. It also includes a roll of honour that suggests just over 1,100 New Zealanders were killed while serving with 75 Sqn.³⁷ *RAF Bomber Command Profiles: 75 (NZ) Squadron* is a somewhat focused version of Martin Middlebrook and Chris Everitt’s *The Bomber Command War Diaries*.³⁸ This operational reference book details the nightly operations of Bomber

³¹ Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force 1939-1945* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³² Ibid, 13.

³³ Aidan Kimberley, "You Wouldn't Know There Was a War On: A Cultural History of New Zealanders Serving in Bomber Command during the Second World War" (Bachelor of Arts (Hons) University of Canterbury, 2013).

³⁴ Kimberley, “You Wouldn’t Know There Was a War On.” 8.

³⁵ Francis, *The Flyer*, 49.

³⁶ Chris Ward and Chris Newey, *RAF Bomber Command Profiles: 75 (NZ) Squadron* (Merthyr Tydfil, United Kingdom: Aviation Books, 2023).

³⁷ Ibid, 530.

³⁸ Martin Middlebrook and Chris Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries: An Operational Reference Book, 1939-1945* (Middlesex, United Kingdom: Viking, 1985).

Command in general. Thus, 75 Sqn does not play a leading role. It is, however, possible to glean a picture of the squadron's place in Bomber Command by exploring the general historical literature on Bomber Command. Andrew R. B. Simpson writes in his book, *'Ops' Victory at All Costs*,³⁹ that New Zealanders served among English, Scots, Welsh, Irish, Australians, Canadians, South Africans, Free French, Poles, Dutch, Norwegians, Lithuanians and Americans.⁴⁰ The size of Bomber Command and the contributions of men from many countries often render New Zealanders and 75 Sqn only a mention in most general histories. In Simpson's work, New Zealanders barely make a mention. It is a similar case in Max Hastings's *Bomber Command*,⁴¹ which gives a broad general history of Bomber Command but fails to recount the role of 75 Sqn. However, Max Lambert's *Victory*⁴² gives significant airtime to the squadron. He particularly notes the introduction of the Avro Lancaster to 75 Sqn in 1943.⁴³ It was the Lancaster in particular that Martin Francis notes as possessing more complex technology.⁴⁴ Lambert's book includes the stories of individual airmen and crews with the squadron. He references Errol Martyn's volumes, *For Your Tomorrow*,⁴⁵ which records every New Zealand death in the RNZAF or Allied air forces.

Lambert uses Martyn's work to recount the individual stories he tells in his book.⁴⁶ Through these individual stories scattered throughout the general histories, the reader gains an understanding of the contributions of New Zealanders to 75 Sqn. As Kimberley argues, much of the historiography of New Zealanders in the RAF is told through personal narratives or general histories, sometimes a combination of both.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the picture of 75 Sqn

³⁹ Andrew R. B. Simpson, *'Ops' Victory at all Costs* (West Sussex, United Kingdom: Tattered Flag Press, 2012).

⁴⁰ Simpson, *'Ops' Victory at all Costs*, X.

⁴¹ Max Hastings, *Bomber Command: The Myths and Reality of the Strategic Bombing Offensive 1939-45* (New York, NY: The Dial Press, 1979).

⁴² Max Lambert, *Victory: New Zealand Airmen and the Fall of Germany* (Auckland: HarperCollins, 2014).

⁴³ Ibid, 70.

⁴⁴ Francis, *The Flyer*, 49.

⁴⁵ Errol W. Martyn, *For Your Tomorrow*, vol. 1 (Christchurch: Volplane Press, 1998).

⁴⁶ Lambert, *Victory*, 71.

⁴⁷ Kimberley, "You Wouldn't Know There Was a War On," 4.

remains incomplete. Mixed within the personal narratives and tales of crew exploits are very few Māori airmen. Few make passing mention in the literature on 75 Sqn, and the difficulties they faced in joining the squadron are overlooked. A broader overview of the Māori war effort is required to understand their contribution to the squadron.

The Māori contribution to the Second World War was a critical period in the history of Crown-Māori relations. As the literature shows, the role of Māori in the war effort changed and developed as the war progressed. Adam Rankin writes extensively in his thesis, “The Price of Citizenship?”⁴⁸ about Māori, Fijian and Tongan soldiers under New Zealand command during the Second World War. He argues that the historiography of Māori in the Second World War focuses primarily on the 28th (Māori) Battalion and the Māori War Effort Organisation.⁴⁹ The Māori War Effort Organisation that Rankin describes is explored extensively by Claudia Orange in her article “An Exercise in Maori Autonomy.”⁵⁰ Orange argues that the impetus for the formation of the organisation came from within the ranks of Māori MPs. Orange notes that Apirana Ngata, MP for Eastern Māori and Ratana-Labour MPs Eruera Tirakatene and Paraire Paikea, put forward petitions for the formation of a Māori military unit.⁵¹ By mid-1940, the situation in Europe was growing dire as the United Kingdom faced the Nazi threat alone. By this time, the 28th (Māori) Battalion had already departed New Zealand for Egypt in May 1940.⁵² The worsening situation overseas spurred the New Zealand Government to introduce military conscription and redirect civilian manpower. Despite this, Prime Minister Peter Fraser and the War Cabinet had been convinced by Māori MPs not to introduce conscription for Māori. As Orange argues, Māori MPs were

⁴⁸ Adam Rankin, “The Price of Citizenship? Maori, Fijian and Tongan soldiers under New Zealand command in the Second World War” (Doctor of Philosophy University of Western Australia, 2020).

⁴⁹ Ibid, 41.

⁵⁰ Claudia Orange, “An Exercise in Maori Autonomy: The Rise and Demise of the Maori War Effort Organization,” *New Zealand Journal of History* 21, no. 1 (1987).

⁵¹ Orange, “An Exercise in Maori Autonomy,” 157.

⁵² Ibid.

worried it could cause new grievances, particularly with Taranaki and Waikato iwi, who had suffered heavy land confiscations during the New Zealand Wars.⁵³ As such, Māori continued to enlist voluntarily throughout the Second World War.

In order to build and encourage the voluntary Māori war effort, the government saw the need to engage and interact with Māori directly. In May 1941, Paraire Pakea was given responsibility for building the Māori war effort. He travelled throughout the country, embarking on an extensive publicity campaign to encourage Māori to contribute to the war effort.⁵⁴ In their book *Indigenous Peoples and the Second World War*,⁵⁵ R. Scott Sheffield and Noah Riseman establish a critical conversation about the role of Indigenous peoples worldwide in the historiography of the Second World War. Sheffield and Riseman note that New Zealand had an approximate population of 115,000 Māori at the time, of which approximately 16,000 enlisted.⁵⁶ This amounts to approximately 14 per cent of the overall Māori population. It is known that approximately 3,600 of those Māori enlisted with the 28th (Māori) Battalion.⁵⁷ Their story is detailed extensively in Wira Gardiner's *Ake Ake Kia Kaha E! Forever Brave*⁵⁸ and Monty Soutar's *Nga Tama Toa: The Price of Citizenship*.⁵⁹ These newer publications provide essential insight into the battalion's B and C Companies, respectively. J. F. Cody's official history *28 (Māori) Battalion*,⁶⁰ and Wira Gardiner's *Te Mura o Te Ahi: The Story of the Māori Battalion*⁶¹ both explore the battalion more broadly.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 158.

⁵⁵ R. Scott Sheffield and Noah Riseman, *Indigenous Peoples and the Second World War* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁵⁶ Ibid, 63.

⁵⁷ "About the 28th," 28th Maori Battalion, accessed October 22, 2024, <https://www.28maoribattalion.org.nz/story-of-the-28th/about-the-28th#:~:text=In%20total%2C%20almost%203600%20men,the%20Middle%20East%20and%20Europe.>

⁵⁸ Wira Gardiner, *Ake Ake Kia Kaha E! B Company Maori Battalion* (Auckland: David Bateman, 2019).

⁵⁹ Monty Soutar, *Nga Tama Toa: The Price of Citizenship* (Auckland: David Bateman, 2008).

⁶⁰ J. F. Cody, *28 (Māori) Battalion* (Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, 1956).

⁶¹ Wira Gardiner, *Te Mura o Te Ahi: The Story of the Māori Battalion* (Dunedin: Reed, 1992).

Despite the resounding impact that the 28th (Māori) Battalion had on the historiography, a significant group of Māori still served in other units and other ways during the war.

Many of those Māori who enlisted served with other units in the 2nd and 3rd NZ Divisions. Others served in the home guard, navy, air force, and merchant navy, while some Māori women served as nurses or in the women's auxiliary forces.⁶² It was clear that Paraire Paikea's tour around the country was successful in recruiting a large group of Māori to the war effort. However, this was not without struggle. As Orange argues, problems in identifying Māori for war service emerged as the government had no complete list of the adult Māori population.⁶³ A lack of engagement with many Māori in the pre-war period had almost left Māori out of the government's focus. Nevertheless, this did not stop many Māori from identifying their war service with their own aspirations and the aspirations for Māori as a people. Rankin argues that many Māori enlisted for financial reasons or the desire to travel but later realised aspirations for Māori to prove themselves.⁶⁴ Ngata, Tirakatene and Paikea shared these ambitions and saw the war as a chance for Māori to build their social standing in New Zealand. Sheffield and Riseman explore these ideas further and argue that Māori notions of mana pushed some Māori to enlist, especially those in iwi with positive relations with Pākehā.⁶⁵ They note the explanation of one Māori volunteer who saw that 'to die in the pursuit of the war god Tūmataunga was a sacred duty and a manly death.'⁶⁶ For many Māori, the Second World War was to mark a significant shift in relations with Pākehā. The spread of Māori across all services throughout the war should see their contributions strongly represented in the New Zealand historiography, but this is not so.

⁶² "About the 28th."

⁶³ Orange, "An Exercise in Maori Autonomy," 158.

⁶⁴ Rankin, "The Price of Citizenship," 113.

⁶⁵ Sheffield and Riseman, *Indigenous Peoples and the Second World War*, 83.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Rankin explores Māori in the Home Guard in his thesis⁶⁷ but argues that Māori service across the air force, navy, home guard and territorial forces is minimally represented in the historiography. This is particularly evident with regards to Bomber Command and 75 Sqn, where Māori make even less of an appearance, if at all. Martin Francis argues that non-white aircrew, in particular, have been largely erased from the cultural memory of the wartime RAF and, thus, the historiography.⁶⁸ Māori feature fleetingly in the literature on New Zealanders in the air force. Sheffield and Riseman explore Māori enlistment in the RNZAF, noting that at the beginning of the war, ‘good types of Māori’ were accepted into the air force.⁶⁹ However, by 1943, Māori participation in India and the Middle East became a problem, and so, in June 1943, the RNZAF removed the ability for Māori to enlist.⁷⁰ Rankin touches on this policy, outlining that Māori airmen were encouraged to transfer to the 28th (Māori) Battalion, with 45 eventually doing so.⁷¹ Elsewhere, this did not stop Māori with mixed ancestry from joining the air force, with their skin colour still listed on their files.⁷² Despite policy seeking to remove the colour ‘problem’ in the subcontinent and the Middle East from the air force, Sheffield and Riseman argue that Indigenous servicemen, including Māori, gained an unprecedented sense of respect and acceptance from their comrades and superiors during the war.⁷³ This is especially true of the Māori contribution, as seen through the well-documented feats of the 28th (Māori) Battalion. For Māori who served with distinction in the air service, their contributions are briefly documented in C. M. Hanson’s *By Such Deeds*,⁷⁴ an extensive volume detailing the honours and awards of airmen in the RNZAF. In particular, the service records, award citations and biographies of four Māori

⁶⁷ Rankin, “The Price of Citizenship,” 226.

⁶⁸ Francis, *The Flyer*, 58.

⁶⁹ Sheffield and Riseman, *Indigenous Peoples and the Second World War*, 68.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 69.

⁷¹ Rankin, “The Price of Citizenship,” 45.

⁷² Sheffield and Riseman, *Indigenous Peoples and the Second World War*, 69.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 119.

⁷⁴ C. M. Hanson, “By Such Deeds,” (Christchurch, New Zealand: Volplane Press, 2001).

airmen who served with 75 Sqn are listed in the book. The collection of Distinguished Flying Medals (DFM), Distinguished Flying Crosses (DFC) and Croix de Guerre (CdeG) recognise the courage and devotion to duty that these Māori airmen displayed in their time with 75 Sqn.

However, beyond these award citations, the lives, stories and contributions of other Māori airmen in the air force, particularly those who served in 75 Sqn, are not detailed in any literature. The literature concerning the Māori war effort identifies the gaps in the historiography, particularly around the home guard, navy and air force. Māori airmen have effectively been rendered forever to the past. Martin Francis argues that it is possible to recover their contributions, but many sources are incomplete and piecemeal.⁷⁵ Francis' theory could account for the absence of Māori in Bomber Command literature and, even more importantly, in 75 Sqn literature. To add Māori to the historiography of Bomber Command and 75 Sqn would bring a more complete overview of the operations and experiences of the squadron and a broader picture of the Māori contribution to the Second World War.

This thesis seeks to fill this gap in the literature around the Māori contribution to the air war over Europe throughout the Second World War by way of three research questions:

1. Who were the Māori airmen of 75 Sqn?
2. In what ways did Māori airmen contribute to the broader war effort by serving with 75 Sqn, and how were their contributions recognised?
3. What effects did the wartime experiences have on Māori airmen's subsequent careers and post-war social mobility?

This thesis will utilise qualitative research to examine a variety of primary and secondary sources related to the contributions of these Māori airmen. The sources used in this thesis will include archival material, letters, diaries, logbooks, photos and stories from a

⁷⁵ Francis, *The Flyer*, 59.

range of sources. Archival material will be gathered from relevant archives, including the Air Force Museum of New Zealand, Archives New Zealand, Museum of Transport and Technology, Auckland War Memorial Museum, Papers Past and other local museums and archives. The research will include finding descendants of the 29 Māori airmen to discover stories, logbooks, letters, photos and diaries that can be added to the narrative. At the same time, historians and researchers in the relevant fields will be consulted to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the narrative being constructed. Combined, this will produce a strong qualitative and fresh understanding of 75 Sqn during the Second World War. It will also utilise interviews with descendants of the airmen to gain an understanding of the airmen and their lives before, during and after the war. Letters, diaries, logbooks and other ephemera from descendants will also feature in the thesis. The sources noted above will provide direct insight into the lived experiences, thoughts and views of the airmen and those around them.

The analysis of these sources will also raise broader themes concerning Māori and New Zealand participation in the Second World War. This will include an exploration of their origins and prewar life to build a narrative around the types of Māori who participated in the air war over Europe. This may include themes of education, iwi and hapū affiliation and prewar careers. This is necessary to build a complete picture of the airmen and their time with the squadron. Ultimately, these sources will lead to the construction of an in-depth narrative of the contributions of Māori airmen to 75 Sqn. For the first time, a history of the squadron focusing on Māori participation in the broader life of the squadron will be created.

Structurally, this thesis will first explore Māori enlistment in the military at the outbreak of the Second World War and how policies and the social make-up of New Zealand affected this. It will then look at the training that Māori airmen undertook in New Zealand and Canada before joining the squadron in the United Kingdom. An in-depth analysis of the airmen's time with 75 Sqn throughout the war will follow. Finally, this thesis will look at the

post-war readjustment to civilian life of the Māori airmen and how policies affected their reintegration into New Zealand after the war.

Chapter One: Māori Recruitment at the Dawn of the Second World War

To have finally reached your squadron was a remarkable feat during the Second World War. For Flight Sergeant Colin McPherson, this was especially true. McPherson, a pilot by trade, was the first Māori airman to arrive at 75 Sqn on June 2, 1942. Beginning his squadron career as Second 'Dickie' on the Wilson crew, McPherson quickly progressed to captain his own crew of five men flying Wellington bombers on night raids over Germany and the Third Reich. The crew continued valiantly flying operations throughout June and into July 1942. On July 26, 1942, McPherson and his crew were detailed with 14 other aircraft to carry out an attack against targets in Hamburg, Germany. At the end of the operation, McPherson and his crew failed to return. The circumstances leading to the loss of the McPherson crew are unknown, and they were recorded as 'lost without trace.' The loss of Flight Sergeant Colin McPherson, just 21 years old, and his crew, was a blow to 75 Sqn. Aircrews took several years to train, and the loss of the McPherson crew after less than two months of operations represented a loss of talent, fortitude and manpower that would continue throughout the war. Tragically, McPherson was the first Māori airman to join the squadron, but also its first Māori airman killed on operations.

McPherson was not the first Māori airman in the Second World War, nor would he be the last. Instead, he joined a growing group of Māori aviators who first saw service in the First World War. Ernest Taniwha Sutherland was the first Māori to qualify as a pilot.⁷⁶ A farmer of Ngāti Apa and Ngā Wairiki, Sutherland had always looked skywards. He qualified on September 15, 1917 at the Canterbury Aviation Company in Sockburn, Christchurch.⁷⁷ His impressive routine wowed both of the examiners. The sun had come out strongly for

⁷⁶ Errol W. Martyn, *Swift to the Sky* (Auckland: Penguin Group, 2010), 52.

⁷⁷ "Two More Pilots: Young Aviators Take Certificates," *Star (Christchurch)*, September 15, 1917, 10.

Sutherland's test, and a rising wind helped him take flight in his locally built Caudron-type biplane.⁷⁸ He climbed to 900 feet before making a controlled dive back towards the earth. The *Star* reported it was a 'very unexpected and clever variant of the actual programme.'⁷⁹

Present at the qualifying flight was Henry Wigram, the prominent Christchurch businessman who had long supported the advent of military aviation. Sutherland's qualifying flight was an important milestone in his life and for Māori—he was to become the first Māori to enter the Royal Flying Corps. However, his ethnicity briefly caused a hindrance to his recruitment into the First World War. The Imperial Government had stipulated that all men entering the Royal Flying Corps must be of pure European descent.⁸⁰ A compromise was reached with the Imperial Government, and they agreed to accept Māori airmen, provided they were not full-blooded Māori. Sutherland, therefore, qualified for the Royal Flying Corps. It was not long before he was on a ship to England, arriving on December 8, 1917. From there, Sutherland served as an Air Observer until October 4, 1918, when he was commissioned as an officer and flew anti-submarine patrols for the rest of the war.⁸¹ In a letter home, Sutherland succinctly expressed his feelings about his role in the war. 'I am quite proud of myself as an airman, especially being the first representative of the race.'⁸²

Another Māori farmer from Ngahape was hot on the heels of Sutherland for pilot training. Charles Barton became the second Māori to qualify as a pilot. Like Sutherland, he also went to England for further flight training, but the Armistice ended his military flying career. The contribution of Māori to the new and revolutionary aspect of air warfare during the First World War was small but successful. It had even seen the first airman of Māori descent be awarded a Victoria Cross. In fact, William Rhodes-Moorhouse was the first airman

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Martyn, *Swift to the Sky*, 52.

⁸² Adam Claasen, *Fearless: The extraordinary untold story of New Zealand's Great War airmen* (Auckland: Massey University Press, 2017), 141.

to receive a Victoria Cross. Though English, Rhodes-Moorhouse's link to Māori ancestry came from his maternal grandmother, who hailed from Ngāti Ruanui. His military flying career came to a tragic end on April 26, 1915, when he went on a solo bombing mission carrying a single 100-pound bomb. Targeting a railway junction at a low altitude, Rhodes-Moorhouse's aircraft flew so low that it was damaged by the explosion of the bomb he dropped. His low-altitude mission rendered him vulnerable to machine-gun fire from the ground. He managed to return to base and file his report despite being gravely injured. Rhodes-Moorhouse succumbed to his injuries the following day, and he was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.⁸³ All three men's courage, perseverance and bravery should have revealed a great sense of aptitude and duty to the Imperial Government. Instead, for some little-known reason, the Imperial Government advised in October 1918 that the educational standards of Māori candidates should be higher than that of their European counterparts.⁸⁴ While this policy change did not affect any existing airman in the Royal Flying Corps/Royal Air Force, it would affect any post-war applicant.

For Rhodes-Moorhouse, Sutherland and Barton, the dream of bringing Māori into aircraft cockpits was to extend beyond the First World War. Sutherland was a strong advocate for this. Writing to his uncle, Tuiti Macdonald, at the war's end, Sutherland spoke of the path to becoming an airman.

I think it's up to you and I to teach our race something about flying. Practically, of course, one must be efficient in education, wireless, navigation by stars and compass, topography, and physically fit—sound nerves, normal blood pressure. There's nothing

⁸³ "William Rhodes-Moorhouse," updated July 24, 2024, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/people/william-rhodes-moorhouse>.

⁸⁴ Martyn, *Swift to the Sky*, 52.

like making a name and then dying. We don't live long at this game, but we don't seem to worry about about [sic]. Kia ora, nato teina tamaiti.⁸⁵

Sutherland's letter reveals a strong sense of duty and a staunch willingness to encourage Māori to fly. Unfortunately, the Imperial Government's change of policy and the end of the war would dampen Sutherland's dreams for Māori.

The inter-war period was to be a difficult period for the air force and for Māori. Immediately after the war, New Zealand's military forces experienced a rapid manpower reduction. The permanent and territorial forces were reduced, and compulsory military training (CMT) was suspended until 1921.⁸⁶ The reintroduction of CMT was to become the main point of contention for Māori military service in the inter-war years. Another impact on Māori military service was the Great Depression. With New Zealand export prices falling by 40 per cent between 1928 and 1931, government revenue shrank substantially.⁸⁷ Among the sharp reduction in public works expenditure and public service wage cuts were also cuts to old age and war pensions. Where wages and government expenditure decreased significantly, unemployment increased sharply. It is not possible to pinpoint the number of unemployed Māori during this period as government records did not include them. However, Michael King argues that the actual unemployment rate may have been around 100,000, or 40 per cent of the male workforce.⁸⁸ It is possible, however, to determine that Māori were negatively impacted by the Great Depression. Many of those listed in the unemployment statistics came from labouring, farming or building jobs, in which many Māori men were employed.⁸⁹ By the Great Depression, CMT had again been paused. Prior to the Depression, CMT had been

⁸⁵ "First Maori Airman," *Fielding Star*, July 17, 1918, 4.

⁸⁶ Ross Webb, *Equality and Autonomy: An Overview of Māori Military Service for the Crown, c.1899-1945 (Wai 2500)*, Waitangi Tribunal (1 May, 2018), 167.

⁸⁷ Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2003), 345.

⁸⁸ King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, 346.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

compulsory for Māori men. There appeared to be confusion over this policy during the 1920s, but this was cleared up by Lieutenant-Colonel R. B. Smythe who stated that,

although Maori are not exempted by the Defence Act from the obligation to register or to render personal service it has been the policy of the [Defence] Department since the commencement of the scheme of compulsory military training to refrain from prosecuting those who do not register, but to enrol and train those who do register.⁹⁰

CMT did not present itself as an option for unemployed Māori during the Great Depression, with the scheme being stopped in 1930. Despite the desperate economic times, the decision was not popular with all quarters. The *Otago Daily Times* reported on the debate with the aptly-named succinct subtitle, 'Conflicting Views.'⁹¹ The article referred mainly to the views of Colonel Henry Avery, a First World War veteran and president of the Wellington branch of the Returned Soldiers' Association. In Avery's view, CMT should have been remodelled to a voluntary system with a permanent staff of officers and non-commissioned officers to keep the scheme running.⁹² Regardless, the scheme was stopped, and it is unlikely Māori would have enjoyed any leadership roles in Avery's proposed scheme. There had been no Māori employed in the Defence Department in the preceding years, and many Māori who would go on to serve in the Second World War had had no inter-war military experience.⁹³

However, Colonel Avery's protest against the complete reduction of CMT did raise an important point about the air force.

I do not think that anybody will challenge the proposal to spend more money on the Air Force. I think it is generally admitted that the Air Force must be extended and

⁹⁰ Webb, *Equality and Autonomy*, 169.

⁹¹ "The Defence System," *Otago Daily Times*, April 2, 1930, 4.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Webb, *Equality and Autonomy*, 171.

made a thoroughly efficient unit, but no one who has had any experience of war will say that the Air Force, no matter how efficient, is going to replace the infantry entirely. The Air Force is simply an auxiliary arm, a scouting force and so on, taking much the same place in modern warfare that the cavalry used to in the old days.⁹⁴

The New Zealand Permanent Air Force (NZPAF) had existed since it was gazetted in 1923 and had been initially incorporated into the army. Almost in tune with Avery's view of the air force as a small and inconsequential unit, the NZPAF continued flying under the radar through the 1920s and into the 1930s. However, Avery made an important note that the air force should be expanded, even during the tough economic times of the early 1930s. Just as New Zealand was beginning to climb out of the pits of the Great Depression, the King conferred a new title on the NZPAF. On March 6, 1934, Minister of Defence John Cobbe announced that it would soon become the 'Royal New Zealand Air Force' (RNZAF).⁹⁵ The new title for New Zealand's air force paid homage to the growing importance of its aerial capabilities in defence of the Dominion. Cobbe argued that the new name brought New Zealand's air arm into line with the air forces of other dominions, notably the Royal Canadian Air Force and the Royal Australian Air Force.⁹⁶ Curiously, the *Dominion* article also reveals that the name change coincided with the recent Government decision to increase spending on the air force. In his 1934 Annual Report to the House of Representatives, the General Officer Commanding New Zealand Military Forces, Major-General Sir William Sinclair-Burgess, outlined the state of the country's inter-war air force. Sinclair-Burgess notes that the Government approved expenditure relating to the acquisition of aircraft suitable for coastal defence and seaward reconnaissance.⁹⁷ As such, the RNZAF ordered two flights of Vickers

⁹⁴ "The Defence System," 4.

⁹⁵ "Increased Status," *Dominion*, March 7, 1934, 8.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ W. L. H. Sinclair-Burgess, *Defence Forces of New Zealand: Annual Report of the General Officer Commanding New Zealand Military Forces*, New Zealand House of Representatives (1934), 3.

Vildebeest bombers for the task. The report also detailed the maximum strength of personnel but also noted a shortfall of adequate funding to ensure equipment could be maintained.⁹⁸

New Zealand's aerial warfare capabilities were beginning to build in the latter half of the 1930s, just as conflict loomed on the horizon.

Newspaper readers throughout New Zealand in 1938 were beginning to see titles noting that the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union were on a 'war footing' in their respective spheres of influence. Various articles detailed military buildups in the easternmost regions of the Soviet Union against Japan and British consternation at Hitler's military buildup and sabre-rattling. The previous decade had not been standard, politically, economically or militarily around the world. This was especially true in New Zealand. As New Zealand was building up its military again, Māori expressed a desire to contribute. As early as 1935, the Te Arawa Welfare League resolved that the people of Te Arawa were ready to serve should it be necessary.⁹⁹ Despite Te Arawa's petition to the Government, the Minister of Defence thanked Te Arawa for its offer but replied, 'should a national emergency arise, the recommendation of your league will be given every consideration.'¹⁰⁰ As the world edged closer to conflict, Te Arawa's offer returned. In a speech to the nation in May 1939, Prime Minister Michael Joseph Savage spoke of the looming conflict.

This country may have to be defended, and soon ... Therefore, I say again to our manhood, Maori and Pakeha alike, in factory, farm, shop, office and everywhere, enrol and be ready.¹⁰¹

Before the war, Māori expressed an interest in joining the RNZAF as war loomed. In a letter addressed to the Air Secretary on July 23, 1939, the headmaster of the Native School

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Webb, *Equality and Autonomy*, 183.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 184.

at Mohaka wrote, 'in regard to your advertisements in the daily papers for vacancies in the N.Z? [sic] Air Force, will you accept the services of Maoris, provided they comply with conditions of entry?' The reply from the Air Secretary came a week and a half later. 'I have to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the 23rd ultimo and in reply have to advise that Maoris may apply for enlistment in the Royal New Zealand Air Force.' The Secretary further noted 'that enlistment is competitive i.e. those applicants with greater experience for the trades required in the Air Force will be accepted and it is under these conditions that all candidates should apply.' Enclosed with the Air Secretary's reply were several application forms, conditions of service and rates of pay for the RNZAF. The advertisements in question appeared in newspapers throughout the country, detailing what type of candidate the air force was seeking. 'All candidates must have attained the age of 17½ but not of 28 years, be unmarried, able to pass the prescribed medical examination, and educated up to the standard of the School Certificate or the University Entrance Examination. IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT APPLICANTS SHALL HAVE ATTAINED THE STANDARD OF EDUCATION REQUIRED [emphasis in original].'¹⁰² For would-be Māori applicants, trade experience and education were significant factors in the trades they were chosen for in the air force.

At the outbreak of the war, Māori enlistment in the military more broadly became a crucial issue in the halls of Parliament. The issue itself and the solutions to come from it were championed by Māori Members of Parliament. In October 1939, an infantry battalion comprising Māori recruits was formed. The formation of the battalion came on the back of petitions by Apirana Ngata, Eruera Tirakatene and Paraire Paikea, a group of Māori MPs whose early petitions would spur a greater contribution of Māori to the war effort.¹⁰³ The infantry battalion initially saw 900 Māori men enlist. The formation became the 28th (Māori)

¹⁰² "Short Service Commissions in the Royal Air Force," *Evening Star*, July 1, 1939, 16.

¹⁰³ Orange, "An Exercise in Maori Autonomy: The Rise and Demise of the Maori War Effort Organization," 157.

Battalion and departed overseas in May 1940 with its Māori ranks and Pākehā officers.¹⁰⁴

Prior to their departure, on February 19, 1940, Major-General J. E. Duigan had inspected the battalion during its training in Palmerston North.¹⁰⁵ Noting the significant amount of training and the great contribution of Māori, Duigan lauded, 'I have no hesitation in saying that you will be a credit to your officers, a credit to New Zealand, and a credit to the Maori race which you represent. I feel that you will make history for the Maori people.'¹⁰⁶ Duigan congratulated the battalion's Pākehā officers and non-commissioned officers for bringing the battalion up to its high standard. Ngata and those who supported the creation of the battalion initially objected to the appointment of Pākehā officers in a Māori unit. To Ngata and his fellow MPs, the battalion was intended to comprise only Māori members. Nevertheless, the Government sent the battalion overseas as a mixed unit. Though the battalion's men had all volunteered, the mounting pressures on Britain and her allies in Europe caused the Government to look at stronger measures to build manpower in the New Zealand forces.

In June 1940, conscription was introduced for the military and civilian manufacturing and production. Ngata, Tirakatene and Paikea urged the Government not to force conscription on Māori. The issue had its roots in the wars of the 1860s and risked another flare-up as it had done in the First World War. Conscription was especially resented by Taranaki and Waikato Māori, who experienced significant land confiscations in the 1860s at the hands of the Crown. Despite the passage of time, the confiscations remained a critical grievance between Māori and the Government, and conscription would not help the situation. The Māori MPs sought to avoid a repeat of the First World War and pushed for Māori enlistment to remain voluntary. Ultimately, the MPs were successful in their request, and a new effort to encourage Māori enlistment began. Paraire Paikea became the front for a travelling campaign

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ "Will Make History For the Maori People," *Manawatu Times*, February 20, 1940, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

encouraging Māori to contribute to the war effort.¹⁰⁷ Paikea's tour took him throughout the country, looking to build up Māori contributions, particularly in areas where sympathies with the Crown were low. The scheme experienced particular success in Northland. In September 1941, Paikea toured the Kensington Park Camp at Maungatapere, where he witnessed a successful training programme with content Māori recruits. Paikea noted that the men looked fit and well and had an enthusiasm for military training.¹⁰⁸

While Māori were exempt from conscription, military service largely remained compulsory for everyone else. However, there was one military branch where enlistment remained voluntary for everyone—the air force. The year 1940 had been noteworthy for the RNZAF's sister force in the United Kingdom. Hitler's regime had swept across Western Europe and now stood on the doorstep of the United Kingdom. Fighter Command's defensive victory in the Battle of Britain, in part due to the astute leadership of fellow New Zealander, Air Vice-Marshal Keith Park, spurred interest in joining the air service. Thousands of aspiring young airmen joined in the defence of the country against an aggressive Nazi Germany. Back in New Zealand, the call to build the country's own air force was growing. It was noted that voluntary enlistment was required to train efficient airmen.¹⁰⁹ To build a well-trained air force comprising only volunteers meant that the British Empire would hold an advantage over Nazi Germany. The RAF was operating with distinction across theatres and, by the end of 1940, was contributing significantly to the Greek Allied land campaign. The *Taranaki Daily News* reported on the 'triumph of the Royal Air Force.'¹¹⁰ To defend Britain from air attacks was important, but to aid in the Allied offensive in Greece was crucial.

¹⁰⁷ Orange, "An Exercise in Maori Autonomy: The Rise and Demise of the Maori War Effort Organization," 158.

¹⁰⁸ "Positive Results From Maori Recruit Scheme," *Northern Advocate*, October 6, 1941, 2.

¹⁰⁹ "Air Force Recruits," *Bay of Plenty Times*, September 6, 1940, 4.

¹¹⁰ "Real Help," *Taranaki Daily News*, January 28 1941, 7.

Closer to home, the Japanese threat was causing consternation at the highest levels in New Zealand. In early 1941, Singapore became the focal point of a major Allied defensive operation to ward off any threat of an attack and further expansion by Japan. The *Wanganui Chronicle* reported on the military buildup in February 1941. The arrival of New Zealand air units with modern bombers, fighter aircraft, and well-trained airmen was lauded as a powerful reinforcement to protect British interests in the area.¹¹¹ However, a significant flow of new airmen was needed to sustain the Allied presence in Singapore and RAF strength worldwide. So began the recruitment and training of thousands of young New Zealand men, including a contingent of Māori willing to undergo arduous air force training.

¹¹¹ "Singapore Base," *Wanganui Chronicle*, February 21 1941, 5.

Chapter Two: Training Māori Airmen for War

Training for the air force was notoriously rigorous during the Second World War, and it had to be. The time between enlisting in the air force and joining a squadron was often lengthy and required many airmen to traverse the oceans for training in their respective trades. This lengthy journey was the result of the introduction of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP). Established in 1939, the BCATP played a crucial role in building the wartime strength of the air forces of the United Kingdom and the dominions. At the outbreak of war in September 1939, New Zealand had the smallest of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth air forces, numbering just 1,160 men to the RAF's 173,958 men.¹¹² The closest air force strength to New Zealand was the South African Air Force, at 1,837 men.¹¹³ While the RAF looked big on paper, Germany's mobilisation of men into its Luftwaffe threatened the United Kingdom from the air. This required the RAF to mobilise men from the dominions.

The BCATP was the brainchild of the British Government. Accounting for the reality that the United Kingdom would be on the frontline of the war, training aircrews elsewhere would speed up their training and lessen the risk of serious accidents. The preferred dominion to host the scheme was Canada. The vast clear airspace over Canada meant crews could train in the safety of the Canadian skies in preparation for the battles in the skies over the United Kingdom. The Canadian Prime Minister warmed to the idea of hosting the fledgling airmen of the British Commonwealth. Like many other countries, Canada was coming out of the Great Depression, and the scheme presented an opportunity to grow the Canadian economy

¹¹² Iain E. Johnston, "The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan and the Shaping of National Identities in the Second World War," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 43, no. 5 (2015): 905.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

and provide employment for its people.¹¹⁴ Other countries such as New Zealand and Australia were looked at as hosts of the scheme, but their distance from the European theatre was too great to move men and materiel to Great Britain with efficiency. Negotiations between the United Kingdom and Canada began in earnest on October 16, 1939. Lord Riverdale, leading the team negotiating on behalf of the United Kingdom, was given the simple brief to secure an agreement with 'the Dominion Governments concerned as speedily as possible to the establishment of the proposed Dominion Air Training Scheme for pilots and air crews.'¹¹⁵ Negotiations concluded in December 1939, and the Empire looked forward to building a rigid training scheme for aircrew. As such, airmen from New Zealand joining the scheme would be bound for training in Canada.

The Canadians waited enthusiastically for the arrival of the British, Australian and New Zealand airmen in the New Year. The Canadian Chief of the Air Staff, Air Vice-Marshal George Croil, urged,

All ranks in the Royal Canadian Air Force to take a lively interest in the welfare of these young men coming to Canada for training as pilots, air observers and air gunners.¹¹⁶

Before making the long trip to Canada, New Zealand airmen completed their initial training at various RNZAF Stations around the country. These men responded to advertising campaigns launched nationwide at universities, secondary schools, aero clubs, newspapers and the Air Training Corps. For many of them, the journey to initial training was prefaced by a long wait for acceptance into the air force. Māori men, too, were responding to these air

¹¹⁴ Ivan Lindsay and Lorna Lindsay, *In the Heavens Above: British Commonwealth Air Training Plan* (Christchurch: Willsonscott, 2012).

¹¹⁵ Johnston, "The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan and the Shaping of National Identities in the Second World War," 906.

¹¹⁶ "Spirit of Unity," *Otago Daily Times*, February 17, 1940, 12.

force recruitment campaigns. As early as 1939, the RNZAF had identified Māori men wishing to join the service. In a memo to the New Zealand Liaison Officer at the Air Ministry in London, Air Headquarters, Wellington, asked if the RAF was willing to accept 'good types of Maoris for service in aircrew section.'¹¹⁷ The reply from London came on December 15, 1939. 'RAF will gladly accept good types of Maoris for aircraft crews if up to educational standard. Air Ministry rely on you to select applicant carefully.'¹¹⁸ The education standards for Māori required by the RAF were not dissimilar to what was required by the RNZAF.

A series of assignments awaited enlisted airmen before they reached their initial training wing. These matriculation exams would become a common experience for every airman wishing to join the air force. One such Māori airman, Wi Rangiauaia, who joined towards the war's end, had studied for his matriculation exams via correspondence.¹¹⁹ Poring over his assignments by candlelight in Waipiro Bay, Rangiauaia joined the throngs of hopeful airmen. Like thousands of others, Rangiauaia passed his matriculation exams and received his travel warrant to the initial training wing in Rotorua. These initial training wings (ITWs) had existed since the beginning of the war and were receiving thousands of men. The ITWs served as an introduction for these men into the military. Based at various RNZAF stations around New Zealand, the men were introduced to drill, shooting, military law, and basic aeronautical principles, including flight, radio, and navigation.¹²⁰ From there, the airmen moved to their respective specialist schools before travelling overseas. By November 1940, the training programme was growing exponentially. Approximately 5,700 New Zealand men were in training for the RAF, with a further 1,000 already serving across the United

¹¹⁷ Memo to New Zealand Liaison Officer, Air Ministry. *Maoris in RNZAF, General Instructions R21077377*, Archives New Zealand Wellington.

¹¹⁸ Memo to Air Headquarters, Wellington. *Maoris in RNZAF, General Instructions R21077377*, Archives New Zealand Wellington.

¹¹⁹ Jim Cooper, interview with author, August 7, 2024.

¹²⁰ "ITW, Rotorua," accessed October 17, 2024, <https://www.jn-dogboys.com/the-crew/gerry-newey/itw-rotorua/>.

Kingdom. Already, 45 of the New Zealand airmen serving in the United Kingdom had been decorated by the King.¹²¹ The Minister of Defence expected a further 10,000 men to enter training for the air force in 1941. New Zealand was beginning to make a substantial contribution to the Allied air war efforts over the United Kingdom.

The call for airmen was being answered nationwide, with men joining from all walks of life. Among the first to enlist was Marama Parata, an 18-year-old toolmaker from Wellington.¹²² He enlisted on October 27, 1939. Parata completed his initial training between RNZAF Stations Ohakea, Hobsonville and Levin. Parata remained in New Zealand until May 26, 1941, when he embarked for Canada. He arrived at No. 3 Wireless School, RCAF Station Winnipeg, on June 16, 1941. He remained there until October 27, when he transferred to No. 4 Bombing and Gunnery School at RCAF Station Fingal. Just as Parata was leaving Winnipeg, the first snowfall of the year arrived. It proved a novelty for the Australian and New Zealand airmen at the station, with several snowball fights ensuing.¹²³ Parata remained at No. 4 B & G until November 28, when he transferred to No. 1 "Y" Depot to prepare for departure to the United Kingdom.

On December 1, 1940, the 19-year-old Auckland salesman Colin McPherson answered the call to service and enlisted in the air force. Coming from a background selling paper hangings, oils and colours, the air force was a significant change of direction for the prospective Māori airman. McPherson began his initial training at RNZAF Station Weraroa before transferring to RNZAF Station Whenuapai. He then arrived in Canada and transferred to No. 32 Service Flying Training School (SFTS) at Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, in May 1941. McPherson would spend the next four months at Moose Jaw training to fly bombers.¹²⁴ The

¹²¹ "Rapid Expansion," *Evening Star*, November 9, 1940, 12.

¹²² Marama Tahu Te Whaiti Parata, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

¹²³ Royal Canadian Air Force operations record books, October 27, 1940, *Canadiana Héritage* C-12359.

¹²⁴ Colin Valentine McPherson, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

quiet skies over Canada allowed the airmen at No. 32 SFTS full reign of the skies.

McPherson's time at No. 32 SFTS consisted of eight weeks on an intermediate training squadron, a further six weeks on an advanced training squadron, and the final two weeks at a bombing and gunnery school.¹²⁵ McPherson likely completed his training in an Airspeed Oxford in preparation for joining a bomber squadron in the United Kingdom. He departed Canada from Halifax, Nova Scotia, in August 1941, with his next stop being Bournemouth, United Kingdom.

While McPherson was in the midst of his flying training in Canada, another young Māori airman was enlisting into the air force back in New Zealand. Roy Raharuhi, an electrical engineer from Wellington, answered the call to service on May 4, 1941. Raharuhi, too, was on the path to becoming a pilot, following in the footsteps of McPherson. Pilot training was the longest and most challenging of all air force trades. Raharuhi completed his initial training at RNZAF Station Weraroa before transferring to RNZAF Station Harewood to attend Elementary Flying Training School (EFTS). The training undertaken at EFTS was, like the rest of pilot training, extensive. Before Raharuhi could even step into the cockpit of a Tiger Moth, he went through a long period of ground instruction. This prepared pilots for the air component of their training. Aircraft training was governed by the maxim, 'there are old pilots and bold pilots; there are no old, bold pilots.'¹²⁶ Safety was of the utmost importance at EFTS. Training pilots to be bold in their wartime flying was critical. Raharuhi completed his EFTS training and left Harewood for Blenheim in August 1941. He remained there until November 1941, when he embarked for the United Kingdom. There, he would complete his pilot training and await a posting to a squadron.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ "32 SFTS - Service Flying Training School (RAF) (39)," 2024, accessed October 22, 2024, https://caspir.warplane.com/perunitget/unitmiltype/RAF_SFTS/qd/32/.

¹²⁶ "The British Commonwealth Air Training Plan," 2024, accessed October 31, 2024, <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/en/remembrance/classroom/fact-sheets/britcom>.

¹²⁷ Roy William Raharuhi, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

It was not only pilots the RNZAF was in search of. On May 11, 1941, another two young Māori airmen signed up for service in the air force. Mikaere Manawaiti of Taumarunui and Edward Gray of Ōtaki were both directed towards becoming wireless operator/air gunners (WO/AG) after initial training. Like those who had already joined, Gray's new role in the air force vastly differed from his prewar civilian occupation. The assistant greenkeeper at the Railway Bowling Club in Ōtaki, Gray was converting from green to blue, grass to sky as he worked through his WO/AG training. Both Manawaiti and Gray completed their initial training at RNZAF Station Weraroa before embarking together for Canada. They arrived at No. 3 Wireless School, RCAF Station Winnipeg, on July 5, 1941, along with 139 other new trainees from Australia and New Zealand. At Wireless School, WO/AGs learned their craft. They would be responsible for communications on bombers, within the aircraft, with the airbase and with other aircraft. They would also be responsible for assisting the gunners and with navigation if the navigator was wounded.¹²⁸ The role of the WO/AG was extensive, requiring the person to be a jack-of-all-trades and, at times, a master of them all.

Manawaiti and Gray joined the 21st entry at RCAF Station Winnipeg. They remained at No. 3 W/S until their graduation on November 21. The significance of the day for the airmen was hampered by the severe weather that rolled in over the station. Beginning at 4:45 pm, the graduation parade took little more than half an hour before the newly graduated men retreated for the drill hall.¹²⁹ Manawaiti and Gray both enjoyed the graduation dance that evening, which was likely a nice end to their four months of wireless operator training. The next day, they both received their examination results, joining 132 others from the 21st entry who passed their examinations. Both men had done well to pass their examinations. Seventy-four of their counterparts had failed the examinations, the greatest number of failures to

¹²⁸ Lindsay and Lindsay, *In the Heavens Above*, 74.

¹²⁹ Royal Canadian Air Force operations record books, November 21, 1941, *Canadiana Héritage* C-12359.

date.¹³⁰ Manawaiti and Gray departed RCAF Station Winnipeg for No. 7 Bombing and Gunnery School at RCAF Station Paulson on November 24, 1941.

As both men were leaving for bombing and gunnery school, another young Māori airman was preparing to leave New Zealand for further training. Frederic Cumpsty, a 22-year-old schoolteacher from Auckland, enlisted on June 15, 1941, and completed his initial training at RNZAF Station Weraroa. He spent the rest of 1941 moving between Weraroa and Whenuapai before eventually travelling to No. 9 Air Observer School at RCAF Station St. Jean near Quebec, Canada. Destined to become an air bomber, Cumpsty underwent basic navigation training at No. 9 AOS. He was joined by 22 other New Zealanders who arrived at St. Jean on February 4, 1942. Their uneventful voyage from New Zealand to Canada saw a fresh batch of New Zealand airmen arrive at St. Jean eager to begin their air observer training, Cumpsty included. Life at No. 9 AOS was reasonably relaxed for the New Zealand airmen. The next day, the men enjoyed a moving picture shown in the airmen's mess, and on February 6, the men enjoyed a concert by the Evans Sisters' Concert Party.¹³¹ Despite the morale-boosting concerts and moving pictures, the men were there to train. Cumpsty and his fellow airmen in Course 43 remained at No. 9 AOS until June 1942. From there, Cumpsty moved to No. 4 Bombing and Gunnery School at RCAF Station Fingal, Ontario. Cumpsty edged closer to joining a bomber squadron.

Just over a month after Cumpsty enlisted, another young Māori airman enlisted. Raymond Going, a farmhand on his father's farm in Maromaku, Bay of Islands, answered the call to service. Going was one of many young Māori Mormons joining the military. *Te Karere*, a Mormon magazine, listed the many young Mormon men training and departing for

¹³⁰ Royal Canadian Air Force operations record books, November 21, 1941, *Canadiana Héritage* C-12359.

¹³¹ Royal Canadian Air Force operations record books, February 5, 1942, *Canadiana Héritage* C-12331.

service overseas.¹³² ‘Bro. Raymond Going of the Maromaku Branch is now in the Air Force, stationed at Hobsonville, training for overseas service,’ the November 1941 edition read.¹³³ His overseas service began when he went to RCAF Station Dunnville, Ontario, to No. 6 Service Flying Training School in December 1941. Going joined 33 other trainees from the RNZAF at No. 6 SFTS.¹³⁴ He remained at Dunnville until early 1942, when he went to the United Kingdom via Halifax, Canada. After spending some time at No. 3 Personnel Reception Centre in Bournemouth, Going transferred to RAF Spitalgate to join No. 12 (Pilot) Advanced Flying Unit. The advanced flying unit was the final step in his long journey to earning his pilot’s wings. Until now, Going had passed his exams and successfully conducted many hours of flying across his various training units. After receiving his wings, Going moved to No. 11 Operational Training Unit at RAF Bassingbourn for final conversion training to join a night bomber squadron. No. 11 OTU was a hotbed for New Zealand airmen during the war, with Going arriving on August 18, 1942, to learn to fly night bombers. Like Cumpsty, Going was edging closer to finding a home in an RAF bomber squadron.

As Raymond Going was transferring to No. 11 OTU, 20-year-old Galatea farmer Stanley Higgins was undergoing initial training in New Plymouth. Destined to become an air bomber, bombing and gunnery school was to be an important part of Higgins’ training. As Manawaiti and Gray had done in 1941, Higgins went to No. 7 Bombing and Gunnery School at RCAF Station Paulson on June 12, 1943.¹³⁵ Paulson was an ideal location for bombing and gunnery training. The station’s proximity to Lake Dauphin allowed the airmen at No. 7 B & G free room over the lake for training. Bomb aimers’ training consisted of map reading, air photography, communications, radar, and, naturally, bomb-aiming.¹³⁶ The role of a bomb

¹³² Te Karere, “News from the Field,” November 1941.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Royal Canadian Air Force operations record books, Image 1386, December 7, 1942, *Canadiana Héritage* C-12346.

¹³⁵ Stanley John Higgins, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

¹³⁶ Lindsay and Lindsay, *In the Heavens Above*, 74.

aimer had initially existed as an observer, but as the war progressed, aircrew roles were evolving, and tasks were fanned out across changing crew sizes. Bomb aimers were characterised by the flying badge on their left lapel with a single wing and the letter 'B'. Nevertheless, Higgins' training encompassed all aspects of what observer training had been. It was crucial for navigators and bomb aimers to have a basic understanding of each other's roles onboard the aircraft. Should either airman become incapacitated, it would be the other's responsibility to take up the additional responsibilities. As such, navigators and bomb aimers also received basic flying instruction should the pilot become incapacitated.¹³⁷ A good bomb aimer was essential, while a great bomb aimer would prove pivotal to any bomber crew's success.

The wireless operator/air gunner was another crucial, multi-talented member of an aircrew. Where required, the WO/AG would assist in bomb aiming and with navigation if the navigator was incapacitated. This presented an intense but exciting opportunity for Glen Marshall, a fireman turned WO/AG-in-training from Kopuawhara.¹³⁸ Marshall enlisted on November 1, 1941, completing his initial training at RNZAF Station Weraroa before embarking for Canada to No. 2 Wireless School at RCAF Station Calgary. Like those who had trained before him, Marshall's next stop was bombing and gunnery school. He arrived at No. 8 Bombing and Gunnery School with 12 other New Zealand airmen on December 6, 1942.¹³⁹ Hot on the heels of Marshall was Charles Pinker, who enlisted just eight days after he had done so. The 19-year-old farmhand from Matatā was being streamed to become an air observer, completing his training at No. 7 Air Observer School, Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, in April 1942.¹⁴⁰ As Pinker was training, the role of the air observer was undergoing

¹³⁷ Lindsay and Lindsay, *In the Heavens Above*, 74.

¹³⁸ Glen Osmond Marshall, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

¹³⁹ Royal Canadian Air Force operations record books, *Canadiana Héritage* C-12335.

¹⁴⁰ Charles Mita Hikairo Pinker, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

significant changes. The trade had been a carryover from the First World War, during which the observer observed enemy plane movements, trench and artillery positions, enemy troop movements, and the placement of headquarters. This information would be fed back to field headquarters. The observer played a crucial role in keeping an eye on the First World War battlefield. By the Second World War, air warfare technology had developed substantially, and the air observer outgrew his trade. With the introduction of advanced aircraft navigation technology, the air observer found his new place as a navigator. The Second World War navigator was trained in the use of GEE, a radio-navigation system, and OBOE, a bomb-aiming system.¹⁴¹ Pinker's trade had thus advanced significantly from the First World War and continued to develop throughout the Second World War as Allied navigation systems increased in accuracy. Pinker's training in Canada set him up to become a highly skilled and crucial bomber crew member.

As 1941 was coming to a close, young Māori airmen continued enlisting in the air force. Just two days before Christmas 1941, 21-year-old farmhand Phillip Baker left his home and career in Waipawa to enlist in the air force. Baker completed his initial training at RNZAF Station Bell Block in New Plymouth. Baker's time in New Zealand after enlisting was lengthy and marred by an incident on January 14, 1942, in which the fledgling airman went absent without leave for 13 hours and 25 minutes. The punishment saw Baker forfeit a day's pay.¹⁴² For reasons unclear, Baker did not finally arrive in Canada until April 27, 1943. Baker's first stop in his Canadian training itinerary was No. 2 Wireless School at RCAF Station Calgary, Alberta. His next stop was to No. 3 Bombing and Gunnery School at RCAF Station MacDonald, Manitoba. Here, Baker learned the air bomber's trade in the bombing ranges close to the station. Having successfully completed his training and his time in

¹⁴¹ Lindsay and Lindsay, *In the Heavens Above*, 99.

¹⁴² Phillip Baden Baker, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

Canada, Baker embarked from No. 1 "Y" Depot at Halifax, Nova Scotia, arriving in England on April 8, 1944. Baker's training had taken nearly two and a half years, but he was now ready to join a bomber squadron on the frontlines of the European theatre.

The year 1942 saw a fresh batch of enlistments into the air force. After enlisting straight from Te Aute College in Hawke's Bay, Guy Tomlins completed his initial training in Levin and Rotorua.¹⁴³ Tomlins embarked for Canada, arriving at No. 1 Manning Depot, Toronto, in August 1942. He moved to No. 4 Bombing and Gunnery School at RCAF Station Fingal, Ontario, on August 30, 1942. He remained at RCAF Station Fingal until October 25, when he moved to No. 10 Air Observers School near Chatham, New Brunswick. Tomlins finished his year by embarking for England from Halifax, Nova Scotia, bound for a squadron in the United Kingdom. Another young Māori airman was progressing through his training in Canada and had already departed for England by the time of Tomlins' departure. Tame Waerea, of Nuhaka, had finished his training at No. 3 Bombing and Gunnery School at RCAF Station MacDonald on March 29 and, less than a month later, was awaiting a posting at No. 11 Personnel Reception Centre in Bournemouth, England.¹⁴⁴

By March 1942, Paraire Paikea continued to appeal for Māori volunteers to enlist for home defence or overseas service. The formation of the 28th (Māori) Battalion had seen a keen uptake of enlistments across Māoridom. However, keeping the battalion up to full strength, numbering some 700-750 men at any one time, required a continual stream of willing young Māori men to answer the call to service. Paikea made an address on March 4 calling for Māori to continue to join the war effort. Their contributions, he argued, 'would foster extra keenness in the Maori war effort.'¹⁴⁵ The job of keeping the Māori Battalion up to

¹⁴³ Guy Perenara Tomlins, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

¹⁴⁴ Tame Hawaikirangi Waerea, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

¹⁴⁵ "Paikea Appeals For Maori Volunteers," *Northern Advocate*, March 5, 1942.

full strength and Māori participation in other branches of the military was the responsibility of elders, every able-bodied man and their mothers. Despite the emphasis on recruitment into the 28th (Māori) Battalion, young Māori men continued to express a strong desire to undergo the extensive and intensive air force training required for service in the air.

Just three days after Paikea's appeal, Inia Maaka of Rotorua enlisted in the air force. He completed his initial training at RNZAF Station Taieri before embarking for Canada. Maaka arrived at No. 3 Service Flying Training School, RCAF Station Calgary, in November 1942.¹⁴⁶ By going to service flying training school, Maaka had been training to become a pilot but soon re-mustered to the air bomber trade. Maaka returned to No. 3 Manning Depot to learn of his new trade before departing for No. 2 Bombing and Gunnery School at RCAF Station Mossbank, Saskatchewan, in April 1943. He remained at Mossbank until he departed for No. 7 Air Observers School at Portage La Prairie in July. Maaka completed his training in Canada in August, departing Canada from No. 1 "Y" Depot. Graduation from training and preparation for embarkation to England was an important time for Maaka and his fellow airmen. With bags packed and farewells to those they were leaving behind in Canada, the airmen took a two or three-day train journey to a departure depot, often at Halifax. Leave was offered to some men during this time, but this was dependent on shipping availability. For those airmen lucky enough, 10 days of leave could be afforded after months of intensive training and before joining a frontline squadron in England.¹⁴⁷

Five months after his cousin Charles Pinker had enlisted, Hoani Paraone enlisted in the air force on April 1, 1943.¹⁴⁸ The 23-year-old teacher from Wellington followed Pinker's footsteps in joining the air force. Paraone completed his initial training at RNZAF Station

¹⁴⁶ Inia Whangataua Maaka, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

¹⁴⁷ Lindsay and Lindsay, *In the Heavens Above*, 107.

¹⁴⁸ Hoani Paraone, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

Weraroa and RNZAF Station Rotorua. Embarking for Canada, he arrived at No. 1 Manning Depot, RCAF Station Toronto. On the path to becoming an air bomber, Paraone quickly moved to No. 4 Bombing and Gunnery School at RCAF Station Fingal. Having completed his time at No. 4 B & G, Paraone then moved to No. 10 Air Observers School at RCAF Station Chatham, New Brunswick. Like his cousin, Paraone departed Canada from No. 1 “Y” Depot at Halifax, arriving in England on January 4, 1943. Like his predecessors and his cousin, Paraone waited patiently at No. 3 Personnel Reception Centre, Bournemouth, for his next posting.

In quick succession behind Paraone was another group of Māori airmen, all joining within a two-day period. The first of this group was Canterbury farmer Iwikau Te Aika. He enlisted on May 29, 1942, completing his initial training at RNZAF Station Ohakea and RNZAF Station Rotorua. While in Rotorua, many of the airmen-in-training were billeted in many of the town’s hotels. Te Aika spent his time in Rotorua at the Chirm’s Hotel, conveniently situated just a few blocks from the station. Writing in the hotel’s visitor book, he described his lodgings simply as ‘prime.’¹⁴⁹ Te Aika arrived in Canada on October 19, 1942. He moved to No. 3 Wireless School at RCAF Station Winnipeg. He then completed his bombing and gunnery training at RCAF Station MacDonald before moving to No. 1 “Y” Depot to prepare for embarkation to England in May 1943. Hot on the heels of Te Aika was another cohort of Māori airmen. May 30, 1942, proved to be a successful day for enlisting Māori into the air force.

A group of six Māori men joined from across New Zealand. Kiwi Amohanga, Phillip Falkiner, Tapua Heperi, Bill Kereama, Richard Ulrich and Vernon Zinzan all answered the call to service on May 30. Amohanga, destined to become a pilot, completed his flying

¹⁴⁹ Chirm’s Hotel Visitors’ Book, 2019.13.167, *Rotorua Museum*.

training in New Zealand at RNZAF Stations Harewood and Wigram. Despite enlisting in May 1942, he spent a period of time on reserve from September 1942 until January 1943.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, by November 1943, Amohanga had completed his elementary flying training, and he embarked for advanced flying training in England at Little Rissington, Gloucestershire. Ulrich followed a similar path to Amohanga, completing his initial flying training at Harewood and Wigram between April and November 1943. He embarked for England, arriving at No. 12 Personnel Reception Centre, Brighton, on December 23, 1943.¹⁵¹ Ulrich's advanced flying training was completed in Oxfordshire. By October 1944, Ulrich was ready to take flight with a squadron.

Zinzan's pilot training differed slightly from Amohanga and Ulrich's. After completing his initial flying training at Harewood, Zinzan embarked for Canada, arriving at No. 15 Service Flying Training School, RCAF Station Claresholm, on June 14, 1943. He remained in training at No. 15 SFTS until November 1943, when he embarked for the United Kingdom. His advanced flying training was completed at Church Lawford, Warwickshire.¹⁵² Zinzan was ready to fly by mid-1944. Wireless operator/air gunners were also among the May 30 cohort. Kereama and Heperi mustered as WO/AGs. After completing their initial training in New Zealand, both embarked separately for Canada to No. 3 Wireless School at RCAF Station Winnipeg. Kereama was the first to leave No. 3 Wireless School, arriving at No. 7 Bombing and Gunnery School, RCAF Station Paulson, in March 1943.¹⁵³ Heperi departed for No. 7 Bombing and Gunnery School, RCAF Station Lethbridge, Alberta in October 1943.¹⁵⁴ By this time, Kereama had already passed through No. 7 Air Observers School at Portage La Prairie and was training at No. 32 Operational Training Unit, RCAF

¹⁵⁰ Kiwi Ernest Amohanga, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

¹⁵¹ Richard John Ulrich, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

¹⁵² Vernon John Zinzan, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

¹⁵³ William Lawrence Kereama, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

¹⁵⁴ Tapua Heperi, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

Station Patricia Bay, British Columbia. He departed Canada for England, arriving in December 1943. Heperi completed his air observer training at No. 8 Air Observers School at L'Ancienne-Lorette, Quebec and departed for England in April 1944.

The last of the May 30 cohort was Falkiner, who trained as an air gunner. He, too, attended No. 3 Wireless School at RCAF Station Winnipeg.¹⁵⁵ After his wireless training, Falkiner returned to a manning depot before being posted to No. 1 Aircrew Graduate Training School. Falkiner's posting to an AGTS is the first to appear in record cards among the previous Māori airmen. Aircrew Graduate Training School was a crucial three-week course where aircrew learned survival and evasion techniques if they were shot down behind enemy lines.¹⁵⁶ The skills learnt in this course would prove to be incredibly useful for some of the airmen on their future postings to operational squadrons. Self-defence and ground navigation numbered among the critical skills learnt in Falkiner's crash course at Maitland, Nova Scotia. On July 11, 1943, he moved to RCAF Station Mont-Joli, Quebec, to complete his bombing and gunnery training at No. 9 B & G. After completing his training, Falkiner moved to No. 1 "Y" Depot to prepare for embarkation to England. He disembarked at Brighton on September 19, 1943, and awaited an operational squadron posting. Falkiner and his May 30 cohort had all travelled vast distances, completed various intense stages of training, and passed and embarked for postings with the RAF in the United Kingdom. On June 1, 1942, 22-year-old Ta Tio Tuaine Nicholas enlisted in the air force.¹⁵⁷ Nicholas had been a freezing worker in Hastings and initially hailed from the Cook Islands. He completed his wireless training at No. 3 Wireless School at RCAF Station Winnipeg before transferring to No. 8 Bombing & Gunnery School at RCAF Station Lethbridge, Alberta. His time in Canada ended in October

¹⁵⁵ Phillip Falkiner, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

¹⁵⁶ "4 AGTS- Airman Graduate Training School (RCAF) (0)," 2024, accessed December 10, 2024, https://caspir.warplane.com/perunitget/unitmiltype/RCAF_AGTS/qd/4/.

¹⁵⁷ Ta Tio Tuaine Nicholas, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

when he prepared to embark for the United Kingdom. This cohort presented a broad cross-section of talented and dedicated Māori airmen about to take on various roles within a bomber aircraft.

Another cohort of various roles followed on July 11, 1942. Wi Rangiuiaia, Edward Snowden, and Max Spooner all enlisted on July 11 from various parts of New Zealand. 23-year-old Rangiuiaia had left his job as a farm labourer, his wife, Matekino, and his daughter, Carol, in Waipiro to pursue a calling in the air force.¹⁵⁸ He completed his initial training in Rotorua before transferring to Harewood and Wigram in Christchurch to complete flying training. Unlike many of his predecessors, Rangiuiaia completed most of his training in New Zealand. He set sail for California in November 1943 before making the trek across the United States to New York to prepare for departure to England. He was billeted at No. 12 Personnel Reception Centre in Bournemouth until April 25, 1944, when he transferred to No. 15 (Pilots) Advanced Flying Unit. At the advanced flying units, pilots would become accustomed to the busy skies over England, something not seen when they had trained in New Zealand or Canada. Rangiuiaia then moved to No. 30 Operational Training Unit at RAF Hixon, Staffordshire, on July 10, 1944, to begin night training using the Vickers Wellington bomber. On October 14, he moved to No. 11 Base at RAF Lindholme, Yorkshire. His stay at Lindholme lasted a month. Rangiuiaia's next posting was to No. 1668 Heavy Conversion Unit at RAF Balderton, Nottinghamshire, to convert to flying the Avro Lancaster. Rangiuiaia was now fully qualified to join a squadron as a pilot.

Snowden and Spooner, a bomb aimer and a wireless operator/air gunner, respectively, completed the July 11 cohort. Snowden, a self-employed farmer from Ahipara, Northland, left his wife, Dolly, and young daughter, Jane, behind to join the air force.¹⁵⁹ 19-year-old Max

¹⁵⁸ Wi Rangiuiaia, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

¹⁵⁹ Edward Simon Snowden, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

Spooner had been working on his father's farm before he joined the air force.¹⁶⁰ Spooner completed his initial training between New Plymouth and Rotorua. He forfeited two days' pay in early August 1942 when he went absent without leave. While Snowden's air force Record Card does not record where his initial training was completed, it too records a rocky start to his air force career. Snowden went absent without leave at the stroke of midnight on November 12, 1942, for 20 hours and 29 minutes. As a punishment, he was confined to camp for three days and forfeited a day's pay. Nevertheless, both men would go on to complete all of their training in Canada successfully. Snowden arrived in the United Kingdom on September 1, 1943. He completed his time at No. 4 (Observers) Advanced Flying Unit at RAF West Freugh, Scotland, on December 14 and transferred to No. 11 Operational Training Unit at RAF Westcott to begin preparations to join a squadron as a bomb aimer. Spooner, meanwhile, was behind Snowden, arriving in the United Kingdom in April 1944. He completed his advanced flying training in August, passed through No. 11 Operational Training Unit, and was ready to join a squadron in early 1945.

Two more prospective Māori pilots joined in October 1942. 18-year-old Roy Iles enlisted on October 24 in Auckland. 19-year-old Tom Wehi enlisted a week later in Hastings. Like Rangiuiaia, both men completed their elementary flying training in New Zealand before embarking for the United Kingdom. Iles arrived in the United Kingdom in early January 1944, with Wehi arriving five months later. Iles completed his advanced flying training in Warwickshire in the latter half of 1944.¹⁶¹ Wehi, meanwhile, was ready to join a squadron at the beginning of 1945.¹⁶² Both pilots had completed various stages of rigorous and intense pilot training in New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The progression from the de Havilland DH.82 Tiger Moth flown at elementary flying training school to the Airspeed

¹⁶⁰ Edward Maxwell Spooner, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

¹⁶¹ Roy George Tawa Iles, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

¹⁶² Tamaterangi Wehi, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

AS.10 Oxford at service flying training school streamed prospective pilots like Iles and Wehi towards flying bomber aircraft. The Airspeed Oxfords also formed a major part of advanced flying training in the United Kingdom. For the pilots to proceed to the next stage of training, they needed to be proficient at flying any or all of the aircraft types on their training stations.¹⁶³ The skills learned became more advanced as their training progressed to more complex aircraft types, like the Airspeed Oxford. Crucial operational skills like day and night flying, communications, survival techniques, air combat and navigation were central aspects of training for bomber pilots.¹⁶⁴ While pilots became proficient in all aspects of the aircraft's operation, it would still take a full complement of airmen to operate the mission.

The final Māori airman of the cohort of 29 who had enlisted throughout the war was Calvin Mataira, an 18-year-old mechanic from Auckland.¹⁶⁵ After completing his initial training in New Zealand, Mataira embarked for further training in Canada in the latter half of 1943. His Canadian training began at No. 3 Bombing and Gunnery School, RCAF Station MacDonald, Manitoba. He then transferred to No. 3 Wireless School at RCAF Station Winnipeg on October 30, 1943. He remained at No. 3 WS until June 1944, when he transferred to No. 5 Bombing and Gunnery School at RCAF Station Dafoe, Saskatchewan. Mataira completed his time in Canada in July 1944 and embarked for the United Kingdom to prepare to join a squadron. The role of an air gunner was crucially important to the safety and defence of the aircraft. As such, a competent and alert gunner would prove to be a critical asset to any aircrew.¹⁶⁶ Mataira's training leading up to joining an operational squadron schooled him intensely in the art of accurate shooting to achieve the most amount of damage possible to hostile aircraft. The air gunner learned about the various gun types used, the

¹⁶³ Lindsay and Lindsay, *In the Heavens Above*, 97.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Te Rahu Calvin Mataira, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

¹⁶⁶ Lindsay and Lindsay, *In the Heavens Above*, 101.

correct ammunition to load into each, and how to handle any issues arising from jams or blockages. The air gunner would also prove invaluable in warning the pilot of any enemy aircraft approaching from any direction. Mataira would be the last of the cohort of 29 Māori airmen to complete his training before joining 75 (NZ) Squadron. Just a few months after enlisting, the RNZAF had its sights on the recruitment of Māori into its ranks.

The issue of recruiting Māori into the air force ranks was raised in early 1943. Correspondence between the Secretary of the Tuhoe Manpower Committee and the Air Department shows that the RNZAF was willing to continue to take Māori men. In response to the Secretary's initial letter detailing the four Tuhoe men intending to enlist, the acting Air Secretary only drew attention to Tahae Kawana. 'As Tahae Kawana is only 17 years of age, he is not eligible for the Aircrew section of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, but is eligible for the Air Training Corps.'¹⁶⁷ All appeared to be ok, and recruitment of Māori airmen continued into 1943. However, in March 1943, the issue arose again in a message to the Air Department from the RNZAF HQ.¹⁶⁸

Colour question has become acute problem with Maoris posted India and Middle East. No distinction between races in U.K. but difficult to ensure that they are retained in this country particularly in cases where they have European names. Suggest position be discussed with A/Cdr Isitt... with view to retention [sic] all Maoris or those with Maori blood for service Pacific area.¹⁶⁹

Air Commodore Ronald Bannerman, Air Member for Personnel, led the charge in drawing up lists of Māori aircrew under training in New Zealand to 'see how great the problem is.'¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Letter to the Tuhoe Man Power Committee Secretary, Ruatoki. *Maoris in RNZAF, General Instructions R21077377*, Archives New Zealand Wellington.

¹⁶⁸ Message to Air Department from RNZAF HQ, March 27, 1943. *Maoris in RNZAF, General Instructions R21077377*, Archives New Zealand Wellington.

¹⁶⁹ Message to Air Department from RNZAF HQ, March 27, 1943.

¹⁷⁰ Bannerman response to RNZAF HQ, April 3, 1943. *Maoris in RNZAF, General Instructions R21077377*, Archives New Zealand Wellington.

This required every RNZAF station around New Zealand to submit lists of the Māori airmen currently under training. The returns from each station contained some of the cohort of 29 Māori airmen, including Roy Raharuhi, Marama Parata, Roy Iles, Max Spooner, Calvin Mataira and Tom Wehi.

The issue continued to be debated into August 1943, with Bannerman noting that the initial aircrew selection should be tightened significantly concerning Māori ‘as they are a problem once they qualify.’¹⁷¹ It is not entirely clear what the issues were that were identified around the recruitment and retention of Māori airmen, as much of the correspondence dealing with the issue does not note the cause of the discussions between the Air Department and RNZAF Headquarters. However, combined with the India and Middle East issue, it appears that Bannerman was concerned with the education and aptitude of Māori airmen, noting, ‘where however a man is obviously a maori and frequently not so hot as a pilot it creates a difficulty.’¹⁷² Particular attention was paid to Richard Ulrich and Wi Rangiuiaia, who finished 35th out of 43 and last place, respectively, in their service flying training.¹⁷³ A note at the bottom of the minute sheet stated that the academic qualifications of both men meant their chances of becoming operational bomber pilots were very slim. Nevertheless, the RNZAF Director of Operations recommended that both men be allowed to proceed to England to continue their flying training.

By October 15, 1943, the RNZAF appeared to have made its decision regarding the enlistment of Māori airmen. It viewed that Māori aircrew were not suitable as they lacked aptitude. Those in ground trades were of limited value as a decision had been made restricting

¹⁷¹ Minute No. 181, August 25, 1943. *Maoris in RNZAF, General Instructions R21077377, Archives New Zealand Wellington.*

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Minute Sheet, 433/24/4, September 20, 1943. *Maoris in RNZAF, General Instructions R21077377, Archives New Zealand Wellington.*

overseas service of Māori in the air force.¹⁷⁴ The RNZAF had all but restricted enlistment of Māori airmen, instead encouraging them to join the 28th (Māori) Battalion. Nevertheless, a strong cohort of dedicated airmen had already passed through the various intense stages of training in their respective trades. Regardless of their perceived lack of aptitude, many would go on to serve valiantly with squadrons throughout the RAF and RNZAF. The squadron that brought these 29 Māori airmen together was 75 (NZ) Squadron.

¹⁷⁴ Minute No. 119, 433/24/4, October 15, 1943. *Maoris in RNZAF, General Instructions R21077377, Archives New Zealand Wellington.*

Chapter Three: Service in 75 (NZ) Squadron

It took some time for Māori airmen to start appearing in the official unit history of 75 (NZ) Squadron (75 Sqn). During the first couple of years of the war, Paraire Paikea was at work recruiting young Māori men into New Zealand's armed forces. While the 28th (Māori) Battalion quickly filled its ranks with trained soldiers, training for those joining the air force took much longer. By the time the first Māori airman arrived at 75 Sqn, the New Zealand squadron was in full flight. The period between his arrival and the end of 1943 saw the squadron undergo significant changes, tragic accidents and the loss of multiple Māori airmen on operational sorties. During this time, the squadron got its first taste of the contributions of Māori to a war far from home.

New Zealand's glamour bomber squadron was contributing significantly to the Allied effort at striking the heart of Nazi Germany. Though the squadron was filled with many New Zealand airmen and carried the 'NZ' abbreviation, its origins lay with the RAF prior to the Second World War. The squadron itself had existed since 1916, at the height of the First World War, under the Royal Flying Corps.¹⁷⁵ As the contributions of aircraft to the Entente war effort grew, so too did the contributions of 75 Squadron RAF. The squadron continued operations until June 1919, when it was finally disbanded.¹⁷⁶ As war loomed a second time towards the end of the 1930s, the RAF's 1937 expansion plan saw 75 Squadron RAF reform as a heavy bomber squadron.¹⁷⁷

Meanwhile, back in New Zealand, the RNZAF was also undergoing an expansion. The New Zealand Government had curiously abandoned the operations of its cruisers, HMS

¹⁷⁵ Franks, *Forever Strong*, 1.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 2.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 5.

Achilles and *Leander*, citing that they could not defend New Zealand against any invading force.¹⁷⁸ Much of the government's perspective was influenced by Wing Commander Ralph Cochrane, who had overseen the creation of the RNZAF and subsequently became Chief of the Air Staff. To Cochrane, aircraft 'would be a better protection against such raids than would cruisers.'¹⁷⁹ In the end, after extensive negotiations, the British convinced the New Zealand Government to retain *Achilles* and *Leander* and substantially increase the country's defence budget, which included a significant increase in funding to the RNZAF. Cochrane strongly believed air power would be the key component in defending New Zealand and a major contributor to the Commonwealth's defence.¹⁸⁰ The New Zealand Government saw that the key aircraft to achieve its aims was the new Vickers Wellington bomber. The Government elected to buy 30 Wellingtons for service in New Zealand.¹⁸¹

The Vickers Wellington was to become a vital member of the RNZAF fleet. With a range of 1200 miles, the Wellington would provide a critical defence circumference around New Zealand, stretching to the edge of the Pacific Islands and nearly to Australia. The RNZAF sent a group of men to the United Kingdom to spend months familiarising themselves with the Wellington before flying them back to New Zealand.¹⁸² The Government took delivery of the Wellingtons in May 1939. Numbers of RNZAF airmen soon began to swell at RAF Marham in Norfolk. These men formed the New Zealand Flight under the command of Squadron Leader Maurice Buckley.¹⁸³ As war on the European continent loomed closer, the New Zealand Government cancelled its 30 Wellingtons from returning to New Zealand and placed the aircraft and men at the disposal of the RAF.¹⁸⁴ The RAF decided to

¹⁷⁸ Spencer, *British Imperial Air Power*, 221.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Franks, *Forever Strong*, 6.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ward and Newey, *RAF Bomber Command Profiles: 75 (NZ) Squadron*, 13.

¹⁸⁴ Franks, *Forever Strong*, 9.

keep the New Zealand airmen together and raise the New Zealand Flight to full squadron strength. On April 4, 1940, the existing 75 Squadron RAF was absorbed into No. 15 Operational Training Unit, and the squadron numberplate was passed on to the New Zealand Flight to become 75 (NZ) Squadron. The squadron was the first of its kind in the RAF and marked the beginning of an important relationship between the RNZAF and RAF. New Zealand prepared to send more willing airmen to join the squadron.

The squadron continued to build in strength over the following months, with its ranks readily filled by men trained in the RAF. It would not be until October 1940 that the first New Zealand-trained pilots would arrive at 75 Sqn.¹⁸⁵ The lengthy training periods for pilots and all aircrew trades resulted in the delay of New Zealand and Canada-trained crews. As such, the squadron would not see its first Māori airman arrive for at least another couple of years. Nevertheless, as the squadron grew and its ranks were filled with more and more New Zealand airmen, its operations within Bomber Command became more substantial. The role of Bomber Command in the Allied war effort would evolve as the land war in Europe did. Throughout the war, the Air Ministry would direct Bomber Command against targets throughout the European continent based on need. Overall, Bomber Command operations would be crucial in degrading German industry, destroying infrastructure and attracting valuable war resources in the air defence of the Third Reich. In January 1941, the Air Ministry directed Bomber Command against oil-related targets. For example, some of the top targets in Bomber Command's sights accounted for 80 per cent of German synthetic oil production.¹⁸⁶ However, Bomber Command's strategy gradually evolved as the war progressed. Winston Churchill refused to place his faith solely in Bomber Command, citing 'he is an unwise man who thinks there is any certain method of winning the war.'¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Ward and Newey, *RAF Bomber Command Profiles: 75 (NZ) Squadron*, 49.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 85.

¹⁸⁷ Parker, *The Second World War: A Short History*, 152.

Particularly in the early years of the war, the RAF had a tendency to overstate its actual abilities, creating a gap between its declaratory policies and its ability to carry them out.¹⁸⁸

Figures suggest that in the early years of the war, only 22 per cent of bomb tonnage was dropped on German industrial cities, while 43 per cent was dropped on military targets, including airfields, ports and military stores.¹⁸⁹ Bomber Command would need to focus its efforts if it was going to blunt the German takeover of Europe.

1941 was to become an important year in developing Bomber Command's strategy. The RAF was clawing back its air superiority, having defeated the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain the previous year. The Luftwaffe had targeted British airfields, radar stations, major industrial hubs and other military installations in the months-long attack against the heart of the United Kingdom. British air leaders saw the strategy's merits and elected also to target strategic German economic and military targets.¹⁹⁰ However, despite the concentration of Bomber Command resources, including those of 75 Sqn, against German industry, the bombing raids proved inaccurate. The Butt Report, authored by David Bensusan-Butt in August 1941, analysed thousands of target photos against reports given by crews over their targeting accuracy.¹⁹¹ The report was damning, finding that 'of those aircraft recorded as attacking their target, only one in three got within five miles.'¹⁹² It further noted that of the total sorties conducted, only one in five got within five miles of the target.¹⁹³ Target location features, such as moonlight, haze, cloud, and anti-aircraft flak, presented serious challenges to aircrews, targeting highly specific yet vitally important targets. The release of the report severely damaged Bomber Command's reputation as an accurate and strong contributor to

¹⁸⁸ Antony Beevor, *The Second World War* (London, United Kingdom: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2012), 531.

¹⁸⁹ Overy, *Bomber Command 1939-1945*, 51.

¹⁹⁰ Keegan, *Collins Atlas of World War II*, 39.

¹⁹¹ Ward and Newey, *RAF Bomber Command Profiles: 75 (NZ) Squadron*, 113.

¹⁹² David Bensusan-Butt, *Butt Report*, The National Archives Kew AIR 14/1218 (August 18, 1941), <https://etherwave.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/butt-report-transcription-tna-pro-air-14-12182.pdf>.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

crippling the Nazi war machine. The Command was dogged by leaders consumed by an overconfidence in the abilities of the RAF to deliver decisive blows against German industry. Sir Arthur Peirse, Bomber Command's Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, was relieved of his post in early 1942 in favour of a leader able to recover the Command's credibility.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris arrived in February 1942 with a new focus on 'area-bombing' instead of 'pin-prick attacks.'¹⁹⁴ As Harris developed and refined his new strategy, 75 Sqn continued sorties designed to hamper German naval abilities against ports and other smaller targets. Another important contribution that the squadron was making, and would continue to make, was 'gardening.' Bomber Command designated various sectors or 'gardens' held by the enemy and would conduct sea mine 'sowing' operations in these gardens.¹⁹⁵ The gardening operations were an important task undertaken by the crews and aircraft of 75 Sqn. As crews switched between regular night-time bombing operations over Germany and gardening operations in several gardens around the European continent, the danger of their missions was evident. Despite not being as dangerous as regular bombing operations, gardening operations still presented a high risk of death, and many crews would be lost on these missions.¹⁹⁶ There were many ways in which bomber aircrews could be killed, not least having their aircraft targeted by enemy night fighters. In other instances, aircrew could safely parachute to the ground only to be captured by the enemy or drown if their aircraft had ditched in the ocean.¹⁹⁷ For many airmen in Bomber Command, fear remained the dominant emotion experienced. Fear of not returning to base, or fear of their squadron mates not returning, was a constant in the minds of those at 75 Sqn.

¹⁹⁴ Ward and Newey, *RAF Bomber Command Profiles: 75 (NZ) Squadron*, 162.

¹⁹⁵ "Gardening," accessed January 17, 2025, <https://bombercommandmuseumarchives.ca/gardening.html#:~:text=Gardening&text=The%20placing%20of%20air,much%20of%20the%20Baltic%20Sea.>

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Francis, *The Flyer*, 108.

In June 1942, 75 Sqn received the first of its Māori airmen. Colin McPherson debuted with his crew on June 22, 1942. McPherson had been flying as second pilot with Peter Wilson's crew since the beginning of June but was now in command of his own crew. McPherson's Wellington was the first to leave RAF Feltwell that night. Leaving at 23:20, McPherson's crew were joined by 12 other 75 Sqn aircraft for the raid.¹⁹⁸ The raid targeted Emden, a city in Lower Saxony, northwest Germany. The conditions that night were suitable for flying with no cloud cover over the target. Together, the 75 Sqn contingent dropped bomb loads of 4000 lbs., 500 lbs., 250 lbs. and 4 lbs. of incendiary bombs in the target area.¹⁹⁹ The total Bomber Command effort that night numbered 227 aircraft.²⁰⁰ The raid destroyed 50 houses and damaged a further 100, killing six people.²⁰¹ Flak fire against the bombers was scarce, and only one Junkers Ju 88 and a Messerschmitt Bf 109 were spotted, and no attack was made. McPherson and his crew safely touched down back at Feltwell at 03:55 on June 23, after a flight time of 4 hours 35 minutes.²⁰²

McPherson and his crew next flew on the night of June 25/26. Over 1,000 aircraft were assembled from across Bomber Command and Coastal Command at the request of Prime Minister Winston Churchill.²⁰³ The raid was known as a 'thousand-bomber raid' and was intended to portray an overwhelming sense of the RAF's air power to the Germans. McPherson's crew was one of 472 Wellingtons.²⁰⁴ McPherson left RAF Feltwell at 23:26 and set a course for the European continent. The target was the German city of Bremen, and while other elements of the thousand-bomber force attacked the Focke-Wulf factory, McPherson and his crew were tasked with area bombing the town and docks. Cloud covered much of the

¹⁹⁸ 75 Squadron, Royal New Zealand Air Force Ohakea, War Diary, June 22, 1942, *Air Force Museum of New Zealand*, Christchurch.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 279.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² 75 Squadron War Diary, June 22, 1942.

²⁰³ Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 280.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

city, preventing the bomber crews from sighting their target. A strengthening wind in Bremen fanned fires, leaving 572 houses destroyed and a further 6,108 damaged. McPherson and his crew of five returned safely to Feltwell, landing at 04:30 on the morning of June 26.²⁰⁵

McPherson rounded out operations in June with attacks against Bremen on June 27/28 and St. Nazaire on June 28/29. This was followed by another attack against Bremen on the night of July 2/3.²⁰⁶

A temporary change to the McPherson crew's regular operations came on the night of July 7/8 when they were ordered to undertake 'gardening' off the coast of the Frisian Islands. The nine Wellingtons from 75 Sqn joined 93 other aircraft from across 1 and 3 Groups, Bomber Command for the operation.²⁰⁷ The operation was largely uneventful, with no anti-aircraft fire, searchlights or enemy aircraft to hamper the sortie. Apart from the poor visibility over the targets, the McPherson crew successfully completed their mission with a flight time of three hours.²⁰⁸ McPherson flew again the next night on an attack against Wilhelmshaven. He then had a respite from bombing operations until July 21, when 13 aircraft from 75 Sqn were detailed to attack Duisburg in Western Germany. McPherson took off from Feltwell at 00:25, fully laden with bombs and incendiaries.²⁰⁹ The weather over Duisburg made for good bomb aiming, and anti-aircraft fire remained light. Most of the damage was done to housing areas in the city, and good hits were made against some of the city's important war industries.²¹⁰ McPherson landed back at Feltwell at 04:25 on July 22, after a total flight time of four hours.

²⁰⁵ 75 Squadron War Diary, June 26, 1942.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 284.

²⁰⁸ 75 Squadron War Diary, July 7, 1942.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 288.

On the night of July 26/27, 75 Sqn detailed 15 aircraft to join a Bomber Command operation against the city of Hamburg. At the end of the sortie, McPherson and his crew failed to return to RAF Feltwell. The circumstances leading to the loss of McPherson and his crew are unknown, and they were recorded as 'lost without trace.' Throughout his time with 75 Sqn, McPherson had flown 17 operational missions as a second pilot and captain of his own aircraft.²¹¹ The loss of the all-New Zealand crew became another tragic statistic in the mounting Bomber Command losses. The loss of a comrade for those left behind at RAF Feltwell was always keenly felt yet rarely displayed. The RAF popularised the expression 'gone for a burton' to refer to those airmen who had lost their lives on operations.²¹² The use of light-hearted expressions such as this was an attempt to lessen the terror of death that airmen faced leaving Feltwell every night. News of his death quickly travelled back to New Zealand, and by August 7, he was appearing in newspapers as a casualty.²¹³ For 22-year-old McPherson, the culmination of years of training was tragically cut short in one night. His death would not be the last of the Māori airmen serving with 75 Sqn.

While 75 Sqn awaited its next group of Māori airmen, the squadron was now located at RAF Station Mildenhall, just a 16-kilometre drive from Feltwell. The move was completed on August 15, 1942.²¹⁴ The next Māori airman to join the squadron was Mikaere Manawaiti, a trained wireless operator. He transferred to 75 Sqn on August 12, 1942. Manawaiti flew on an all-New Zealand aircrew captained by Leo Trott. The Trott crew undertook their first operational sortie on the night of August 20/21. The crew and four others from 75 Sqn were detailed on a gardening mission off the coast of Saint-Nazaire, France.²¹⁵ The Trott crew's introduction to operations was reasonably uneventful, with the moon shining bright over

²¹¹ RNZAF Biographies of Deceased Personnel 1939-1945 – Ma – McW, File 845, R17845613, *Archives New Zealand Wellington*.

²¹² Francis, *The Flyer*, 120.

²¹³ "N.Z. Air Casualties," *Grey River Argus*, August 8, 1942, 6.

²¹⁴ 75 Squadron War Diary, August 15, 1942.

²¹⁵ 75 Squadron War Diary, August 20, 1942.

Saint-Nazaire to illuminate the target. Despite considerable anti-aircraft fire around the coast, no enemy aircraft were encountered. The crew returned safely to Mildenhall after a flight time of 6 hours and 5 minutes.²¹⁶ Joining the Trott crew on a raid on August 28/29 was another Māori debutant, Roy Raharuhi. Raharuhi began his time at 75 Sqn as a second pilot on Jack Wright's all-New Zealand crew. The attack on the night of August 28/29 was detailed for Nuremberg.²¹⁷ The Wright crew departed Mildenhall first at 20:40, with the Trott crew taking off eight minutes later.

Guiding the crews to their targets in Nuremberg was the new Pathfinder Force. Having come into being that month, the Pathfinder Force was designed to guide the bombers towards their targets. Increasing anti-aircraft fire forced bombers to fly at higher altitudes, and the growing effectiveness of German night fighters forced Bomber Command to retreat to flying on moonless nights.²¹⁸ This presented a problem for bomb aimers who struggled to see their targets below. Early Pathfinder missions simply illuminated the target with flares, but for the first time on the night of August 28/29, the Pathfinders used target indicators adapted from 250-lb bomb casings.²¹⁹ For Manawaiti and the Trott crew, this sortie was particularly dangerous. Their Wellington was attacked by a Messerschmitt Bf 110. The rear gunner opened fire and exchanged shots with the German aircraft before it peeled away.²²⁰ The raid destroyed historic houses, and in the south of the city, incendiary bombs destroyed areas where some of the major pre-war Nazi rallies were held.²²¹ Having dropped their loads over Nuremberg, both crews turned back towards Mildenhall. The Trott crew touched down at 04:20 the next morning, with the Wright crew touching down 20 minutes later.²²²

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 304.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 299.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 304.

²²⁰ 75 Squadron War Diary, August 28, 1942.

²²¹ Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 304.

²²² 75 Squadron War Diary, August 28, 1942.

Raharuhi had selected another Māori airman to serve on his crew. Marama Parata served with Raharuhi as his wireless operator. The nature of the work that 75 Sqn was undertaking required crews to work well with each other in the confines of a bomber aircraft. Therefore, every step was taken to ensure that crews formed naturally. Raharuhi and Parata passed through No. 11 OTU at RAF Bassingbourn, Cambridgeshire. Raharuhi, as the pilot, was in charge of selecting his crew, which included a navigator, wireless operator and front and rear gunners to fly the Wellington. Raharuhi's navigator, H. D. Reid, was the only non-New Zealand aircrew member.²²³ On the night of September 1, 1942, Raharuhi and Parata took off from Mildenhall at 23:50 on a bombing mission against the German city of Saarbrücken. 11 aircraft from 75 Sqn were detailed for the mission. As usual, large bomb loads and incendiaries were dropped over the target, which the Pathfinders had illuminated and believed was Saarbrücken. However, the aircraft attacked the town of Saarlouis, 21 kilometres northwest of Saarbrücken.²²⁴ The mission for Raharuhi and his crew was fairly uneventful. Anti-aircraft fire was not intense, and the crews faced no threat from enemy aircraft.²²⁵ Raharuhi touched his Wellington back down at Mildenhall the next morning at 01:20 after a flight time of 1 hour and 30 minutes.

On the night of September 4/5, Raharuhi flew as second pilot on a Wellington captained by Wing Commander Trevor Freeman, a fighter pilot-turned-bomber pilot. Manawaiti also flew again that night with the Trott crew. Trott left Mildenhall at 00:05 on September 5, with the Freeman crew departing 20 minutes later.²²⁶ The target for the night was the German city of Bremen. 75 Sqn detailed 12 aircraft against the target. The weather over Bremen made for good navigation and bomb aiming, bringing good results. The Weser

²²³ 75 Squadron War Diary, September 1, 1942.

²²⁴ Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 305.

²²⁵ 75 Squadron War Diary, September 1, 1942.

²²⁶ 75 Squadron War Diary, September 4, 1942.

aircraft works and the Atlas shipyard were severely damaged. Four dockside warehouses were destroyed. A local report noted the effect of the bombing raids against Bremen and the ineffectiveness of the city's flak defences. 'It was no comfort for the hard-pressed population that one bomber was shot down by flak. The people knew that the flak could not protect the town effectively.'²²⁷ Both crews touched back down at Mildenhall after a flight time of 5 hours and 10 minutes.

The Raharuhi and Trott crews flew again on the night of September 6/7 in a bombing operation against Duisburg. Flak fire in Duisburg was much heavier than in Bremen a few nights earlier. The intense gaze of searchlights trained high in the sky drew attention to the invading bombers.²²⁸ For Duisburg itself, this was the heaviest raid to date, with 430 buildings either damaged or destroyed.²²⁹ Both crews arrived back at Mildenhall just before dawn on September 7. Raharuhi, Parata and the rest of their crew joined three other Wellingtons from 75 Sqn the following night for a sortie to conduct gardening operations off the Frisian Islands. The four aircraft planted 1500 lbs. of vegetables and returned to Mildenhall.²³⁰ Raharuhi and his crew were given respite from operations on the night of September 8/9, while the Trott crew, with Manawaiti at the wireless operator's desk, was on a sortie against Frankfurt. The Pathfinders failed to locate Frankfurt accurately, so many of the bombs were dropped to the southwest of the city. Having been joined by 248 other aircraft from various squadrons, it is unclear whether the Trott crew dropped their bomb load over the target or where some loads were accidentally dropped 24 kilometres away over Rüsselsheim. Nevertheless, Manawaiti returned safely to Mildenhall in the early hours of September 9.

²²⁷ Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 306.

²²⁸ 75 Squadron War Diary, September 6, 1942.

²²⁹ Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 307.

²³⁰ 75 Squadron War Diary, September 7, 1942.

The rest of September saw both crews conduct various gardening and bombing operations. These included operations that returned to familiar places such as Bremen, St. Nazaire and Saarbrücken. October saw the introduction of the Short Stirling bomber to replace 75 Sqn's fleet of Wellington bombers. The squadron completed its conversion training to the Stirling at RAF Oakington.²³¹ The Wellington had served 75 Sqn well, having been the platform for many successful sorties since the New Zealand squadron came together in April 1940. However, the Air Ministry had long set its sights on introducing a four-engined heavy bomber. The aircrews were required to take on two extra crewmembers, bringing each crew size to seven airmen.²³² Until now, the navigator had been in charge of bomb aiming, but responsibility for that on the Stirling fell to the dedicated role of bomb aimer. The flight engineer joined the bomb aimer as a new crew member. Despite the exciting prospects of a new bomber for 75 Sqn, the Stirling was flawed in its design. With a range of 3750 kilometres, a top speed of 410 km/h and a ceiling of 16,500 feet, the Stirling did not debut as a revolutionary addition to the RAF fleet. The low ceiling made the Stirling susceptible to German gunners and night fighters.²³³ Much of the Stirling's woes came down to its wing design. With thick wings, which gave the Stirling impressive maneuverability, the engineers at Short were also forced to design the aircraft with a shorter wingspan to ensure it would fit in the RAF hangars of the day. This reduced the potential operational capability of the Short Stirling, accounting for its subpar high-altitude performance. 75 Sqn became the sixth RAF squadron to operate the Stirling.²³⁴

While parts of the squadron were at Oakington converting to the Stirlings, Parata, Manawaiti, and Raharuhi continued to operate from Mildenhall. The first sortie of October

²³¹ Franks, *Forever Strong*, 67.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Hastings, *Bomber Command*, 174.

²³⁴ Franks, *Forever Strong*, 67.

1942 for both crews was on the night of October 2/3. Both crews continued to operate Wellingtons. The Trott crew was the first to depart Mildenhall at 18:45, followed closely by Raharuhi's crew.²³⁵ The target was Krefeld, a city in Western Germany. The ground haze in Krefeld was considerably thick on the night of the operation, making it difficult for the Pathfinders to mark the target. As a result, the bombing run was not entirely accurate, and most of the incendiaries dropped appear to have fallen in open country.²³⁶ Both crews touched down safely back at Mildenhall, with the Raharuhi crew arriving back at midnight. The next sortie for both crews came on the night of October 5/6. Bomber Command detailed 257 aircraft against Aachen, another city in Western Germany. The weather was particularly bad, with thunderstorms stretching from England to Germany. The Pathfinders had trouble finding Aachen, so they accidentally illuminated the small Dutch town of Lutterade instead. With minor damage to Aachen, most of the damage was done to Lutterade instead.²³⁷ Both crews returned safely to Mildenhall after midnight.

As dawn broke on October 6, 75 Sqn was preparing for the arrival of its next Māori airman. Ted Gray had been selected by New Zealand pilot Raymond Broady to fly with his crew as its wireless operator. While he settled into life at 75 Sqn, Broady briefly found his feet as a second pilot with the Trott crew. Broady joined the Trott and Raharuhi crews on a sortie on the night of October 13/14. The target was set for Kiel, a major German port and shipbuilding city.²³⁸ 75 Sqn detailed thirteen crews for the sortie, with all leaving Mildenhall between 18:00-19:00. The weather was good for navigation and bomb aiming. The crews from 75 Sqn noted the light, medium and heavy anti-aircraft fire encountered over a larger area. The absence of enemy aircraft made their attack on Kiel easier. The Germans had been

²³⁵ 75 Squadron War Diary, October 2, 1942.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 314.

²³⁸ 75 Squadron War Diary, October 13, 1942.

learning from Bomber Command's tactics and had begun developing strategies to counter the effectiveness of the raids. German defences set up decoy fire sites to draw bombers away from Kiel and withheld anti-aircraft fire to prevent them from identifying the target.²³⁹ After what was considered a successful raid, the Trott and Raharuhi crews returned to Mildenhall after a flight time of six hours.

The next night, Gray went out on his first sortie with 75 Sqn. The Raharuhi and Broady crews set out with five other crews from 75 Sqn for a total Bomber Command strength of 289 aircraft in a raid against Cologne.²⁴⁰ Gray's first sortie proceeded uneventfully, and both crews returned to Mildenhall in the early hours of October 16. While Gray was beginning his time with 75 Sqn, two of the squadron's Māori airmen were preparing to finish their tour. The final sortie for the Raharuhi crew came on the night of October 23/24 in a raid against Genoa, an Italian port city. Raharuhi flew his final sortie as a second pilot with Squadron Leader Robert Crawford. The raid proceeded uneventfully, with Raharuhi and Parata returning early on October 24 to complete their operational flying time with 75 Sqn. At the end of the month, A Flight, under the command of Squadron Leader Crawford, moved to RAF Oakington to begin its conversion training to Stirlings. Parata and Raharuhi were posted out of 75 Sqn on November 10 to continue their flying careers elsewhere across the RAF and RNZAF.

That left Manawaiti and Gray as the only Māori airmen with 75 Sqn going into November 1942. On November 1, the squadron moved again to RAF Newmarket. A and B Flights of the squadron continued to be split across Oakington and Newmarket as the various squadron crews continued to train on the new Stirling aircraft. Manawaiti and Gray spent the first half of November at Oakington with their crews training to fly the Stirling. In the

²³⁹ Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 315.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 316.

meantime, the operational part of the squadron continued flying sorties against Germany and Italy.²⁴¹ The Trott crew was not operational until November 20/21, when it joined a Bomber Command sortie against Turin in northern Italy. The Trott crew was carrying incendiaries to drop over Turin. The crew successfully dropped their bomb load, observing large fires in the centre of Turin.²⁴² As the fires grew and consumed more of the town centre, a large smoke screen began to envelop Turin, preventing the crews from further observing the effects of their bombing. As such, the Trott turned for home and touched down at 02:05 on November 21 after a flight time of 7 hours and 45 minutes.

The Trott crew was again detailed to attack Turin on the night of November 28/29, joining three other aircraft from 75 Sqn. The raid proved successful, with the Trott crew dropping their bomb load in the target area. Turin was ablaze again, appearing on fire from end to end.²⁴³ Importantly, the 75 Sqn crews believed that both the Lancia and Fiat factories in Turin had been hit. Lancia and Fiat were major contributors of machinery to the Italian war effort. The attacks against Turin and the attacks that had preceded them across Germany and Italy were working towards a major Allied plan to cripple the Axis Powers' ability to wage war on the European Continent. On November 3, Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal, presented a memorandum to the British Chiefs of Staff, laying out the combined Anglo-American plan to defeat Germany from the air. Portal saw the need to target German industrial towns on a large scale, rendering their inhabitants homeless. In turn, this would render German industry useless without the manpower to keep it functioning. He concluded that the loss of one-third of German industry would sacrifice the entire war potential of Germany or collapse the entire German economy.²⁴⁴ This required the RAF and

²⁴¹ 75 Squadron War Diary, November 1, 1942.

²⁴² 75 Squadron War Diary, November 20, 1942.

²⁴³ 75 Squadron War Diary, November 28, 1942.

²⁴⁴ Overy, *Bomber Command 1939-1945*, 111.

the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) to work towards a strengthened air force with more manpower and aircraft. In the meantime, targeted attacks would continue across the Axis Powers.

As the Trott crew were navigating towards Turin on the night of November 28/29, the Broady crew were conducting a night flying test on a Stirling from RAF Oakington. Trying to avoid a head-on collision with another Stirling, Broady's aircraft stalled, crashing just shy of the airfield at 22:29 on November 28. The rear gunner was the sole survivor but succumbed to his injuries two days later.²⁴⁵ Gray, the crew's wireless operator, was not on the flight that night. Luckily, the young Māori airman had been replaced by operational training unit personnel, and Gray remained grounded that night. It was a similar story for the crew's navigator, and both men had been orphaned from their now-deceased crew. Raymond Bennett's crew absorbed Gray in February 1943. Until then, he did not appear in any of the squadron's operations logs. It appeared that Gray remained grounded for the rest of 1942.²⁴⁶

Manawaiti operated in December 1942 as the squadron's sole operational Māori airman. The Trott crew began its December operations in the early hours of December 3. Five of 75 Sqn's aircraft were detailed for an attack against Frankfurt. Trott's Stirling was the only 75 Sqn success story of the night. One aircraft failed to return, and the rest suffered various problems preventing successful sorties.²⁴⁷ Trott approached Frankfurt at 10,000 feet, and the bomb aimer prepared to release the bomb load. The ever-vigilant gunners remained alert throughout the bombing run but without the need to fire a single shot at approaching enemy aircraft. While the Pathfinders had struggled to identify Frankfurt ahead of the main bombing force, the Trott crew were able to identify the target by the bend in the river, immediately to

²⁴⁵ Ward and Newey, *RAF Bomber Command Profiles: 75 (NZ) Squadron*, 211.

²⁴⁶ 75 Squadron War Diary, November–December 1942.

²⁴⁷ 75 Squadron War Diary, December 3, 1942.

the south of the city centre. They released their load of incendiaries, observing fires starting below as they turned away from Frankfurt and back towards Newmarket. Sunrise chased the crew back to the United Kingdom, and Trott touched his Stirling safely at Newmarket at 07:50 after a flight time of nearly six hours.²⁴⁸

To close out 1942, the Trott crew completed sorties to Duisburg on the night of December 20/21 and a final sortie on December 23/24 against Lorient, France. Much like previous sorties, the Lorient raid proceeded without issue. The crew returned to Newmarket just before the stroke of midnight. Christmas was celebrated by the squadron with a Christmas dinner served in the mess. However, Christmas was not without a streak of sadness. The squadron had lost many promising airmen throughout the year, including its first Māori airman and pilot, Colin McPherson. The transition into the new year would have been especially sombre for Ted Grey. Nevertheless, his experience was not uncommon. 1942 was a year of major transformation for Bomber Command, especially 75 Sqn. Moving bases, replacing aircraft, and the constant flow of new airmen in and out of the squadron provided a lively environment for airmen to live and work in. The early years of the war up until 1942 had seen Bomber Command build its strategy for the defeat of Germany. 1943 would be the year to enact the strategy. For those airmen who died in 1942, including McPherson, their operations were never in vain and paved the way for future Bomber Command successes. 1943 would see a fresh batch of Māori airmen join the squadron.

For the month of January 1943, Manawaiti was the only operational Māori airman in the squadron. The Trott crew carried out various sorties throughout the month, including attacks against Lorient, Hamburg and Frankfurt.²⁴⁹ Gardening operations off the coast of the Frisian Islands remained on the agenda for 75 Sqn. Change was afoot in Bomber Command

²⁴⁸ 75 Squadron War Diary, December 3, 1942.

²⁴⁹ 75 Squadron War Diary, January 1943.

with the release of the Casablanca Directive by the Combined Chiefs of Staff on January 21, 1943.

Your primary object will be the progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic system, and the undermining of the morale of the German people to a point where their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened.²⁵⁰

The directive identified German submarine construction yards, the German aircraft industry, transportation, oil plants and other crucial German war industry targets as the primary objectives for Bomber Command and the USAAF. In the current arrangement, attacks against the Germans would happen day and night, with the USAAF bombing Germany by day and Bomber Command by night.²⁵¹ For 75 Sqn, little was to change except a new focus on crippling Germany from the air in every way possible. For the squadron, January was a quieter month, with the dispatch of just 28 sorties.²⁵² February would open with the reintroduction of Ted Gray back into an operational crew.

Gray first flew again in an operation against Lorient on the night of February 7/8. He joined the Bennett crew as its new Wireless Operator. 75 Sqn detailed nine aircraft for the sortie that night, which also included the Trott crew with the squadron's other Māori Wireless Operator, Manawaiti.²⁵³ Gray's sortie was cut short, with Bennett forced to turn their Stirling back to Newmarket due to an unserviceable intercom on the aircraft. They arrived back at Newmarket at 21:40 after a flight time of 2 hours and 20 minutes. The other eight aircraft from the squadron proceed towards Lorient, dropping loads of bombs and incendiaries over

²⁵⁰ *Memorandum by the Combined Chiefs of Staff: The Bomber Offensive From the United Kingdom*, C.C.S. 166/1/D (1943).

²⁵¹ Overy, *Bomber Command 1939-1945*, 111.

²⁵² Ward and Newey, *RAF Bomber Command Profiles: 75 (NZ) Squadron*, 251.

²⁵³ 75 Squadron War Diary, February 7, 1943.

the target. The official Bomber Command and 75 Sqn logs describe the attack's success, with large fires being lit and smoke seen rising high into the sky. Both crews flew again on the night of February 13/14 in another raid against Lorient. For Manawaiti, this raid was especially dangerous. Flying over Lorient, his aircraft was damaged by flak, causing a fuel leak in the number two tank on the port side. Trott turned the Stirling back towards the United Kingdom and successfully landed at RAF Middle Wallop at 22:50, a considerable distance from Newmarket, in Hampshire. The Bennett crew, meanwhile, touched back down at 75 Sqn's airfield at 23:50 after the Bomber Command mission to batter Lorient further.²⁵⁴

The Lorient raid was Manawaiti and Grey's final time to fly a sortie together. Manawaiti had been with 75 Sqn since August 1942, and it would soon be time for him to be posted out of the squadron. The Trott crew flew a gardening operation in the Bordeaux area on the night of February 16/17, an attack against Wilhelmshaven on February 19/20, and a final sortie against Nuremberg on the night of February 25/26. The final sortie for the Trott crew was another eventful affair for Manawaiti. Their Stirling was hit by flak in the Rhine area, so Trott had to jettison his bomb load. He elected to continue to Nuremberg, however, and the crew observed the effect of the bombing. Like in many other raids, the incendiary bombs caused significant fires across the city. The Trott crew touched back down at 03:15, bringing its time with 75 Sqn to a close.²⁵⁵

Just as Manawaiti was preparing to leave, another young Māori airman was joining the squadron. 21-year-old pilot Raymond Going had selected his crew with a mix of men from the RNZAF and RAF. For their debut operation, the Going crew was tasked with gardening operations off the coast of the Frisian Islands.²⁵⁶ However, the crew failed to return

²⁵⁴ 75 Squadron War Diary, February 13, 1943.

²⁵⁵ 75 Squadron War Diary, February 25, 1943.

²⁵⁶ 75 Squadron War Diary, March 3, 1943.

and was classified as missing. The circumstances of the crash of the Going crew's Stirling are unclear, but it was believed they crashed somewhere in the ocean.²⁵⁷ It is likely the crew encountered a Junkers Ju 88 while laying mines in the area, leading to their death. Ju 88s were operational in the area against Bomber Command aircraft at the time.²⁵⁸ It was a sad end to Going's potential flying career. He had already amassed 422 hours as a pilot throughout the various stages of his training but ultimately lost his life on his first sortie with 75 Sqn. For his parents back in Maromaku, Bay of Islands, the news of their son's death was not the fate they wanted to hear of their son. Going had eagerly pursued a calling in the RNZAF after success in his academics at Whangarei High School. He had further succeeded in tennis, football and cricket.²⁵⁹ The dangers of flying with Bomber Command were evident, and after Going's brief introduction to the squadron, Gray was now the only Māori airman with 75 Sqn.

The next few months saw Gray floating between bases and crews. Gray remained with the Bennett crew until mid-February, conducting his final sortie with the crew on the night of February 14/15. In early March, he was posted out of 75 Sqn to No. 1651 Heavy Conversion unit with James Way's crew. By May, Gray was back with the squadron and was now flying in Squadron Leader Jack Joll's crew as its wireless operator. Joll had already completed a tour with 75 Sqn in 1941 but had returned for his second tour in 1943 with a new and refreshed crew. Gray had finally found his feet in an aircrew comprising a mix of New Zealanders, Canadians and British members. The Joll crew debuted in a gardening operation on the night of May 21/22 in the Gironde Estuary in the southwest of France.²⁶⁰ For their first operation, the Joll crew proceeded successfully and encountered little anti-aircraft fire. Joll

²⁵⁷ RNZAF Biographies of Deceased Personnel 1939-1945 – Ea – Gw, File 536, R17845610, *Archives New Zealand Wellington*.

²⁵⁸ Ward and Newey, *RAF Bomber Command Profiles: 75 (NZ) Squadron*, 260.

²⁵⁹ RNZAF Biographies of Deceased Personnel 1939-1945 – Ea – Gw, File 536.

²⁶⁰ 75 Squadron War Diary, May 21, 1943.

and his crew continued to operate successfully over the next few months as Bomber Command chipped away at the Nazi war machine.

In early August, three more Māori airmen arrived at 75 Sqn. Charles Pinker, Tame Waerea and Hoani Paraone arrived at the squadron's new home at RAF Mepal. Pinker arrived as the navigator and Paraone as the air bomber on Francis Lundon's crew. Waerea debuted as the rear gunner on Richard Whitmore's crew.²⁶¹ Pinker and Paraone, cousins and crewmates, were detailed on a gardening operation off the Frisian Islands for their first sortie on the night of August 22/23. The following night, 23 aircraft from 75 Sqn were detailed against Berlin. Joining Pinker on the raid was Ted Gray with the Joll crew. Curiously, Pinker had subbed in as a navigator with another crew for the raid that night. The night was cut short for Pinker's crew when their Stirling suffered a failure. Pinker and Paraone's usual crew captain, Francis Lundon, was operating as second pilot with another crew that night, which failed to return to Mepal.²⁶² Meanwhile, the Joll crew successfully completed the raid and returned to Mepal after eight hours of flight. Pinker and Paraone were orphaned from their crew and would spend some time away from operations. Gray and Waerea would continue to operate with their crews throughout the month of September.

In late September, two new Māori airmen joined 75 Sqn. Iwikau Te Aika joined Des Horgan's crew as the rear gunner, while Glen Marshall joined Eric Witting's crew as its wireless operator. Marshall flew his first sortie on the night of September 18/19 in a gardening operation in the Gironde Estuary, southwest France. The largest concentration of Māori airmen in 75 Sqn to date would be seen eight days later in a sortie against Hannover. Waerea, Pinker, Paraone, Te Aika and Marshall all flew out with the squadron's contribution

²⁶¹ 75 Squadron War Diary, August 27, 1943.

²⁶² 75 Squadron War Diary, August 23, 1943.

of 16 aircraft to the attack on Hannover.²⁶³ However, the critical milestone turned to tragedy when the Whitmore crew, with Waerea onboard, failed to return to Mepal at the end of the sortie. The Hannover raid had been the eighth with the squadron and his second over Hannover.²⁶⁴ The circumstances of the deaths of the Whitmore crew are unclear. They were recorded as missing at the time, but after further information was received through the International Red Cross, the crew was reclassified as ‘missing, believed killed.’²⁶⁵ Waerea’s death was the third death of a Māori airman with 75 Sqn, after Colin McPherson and Raymond Going. That left Pinker, Paraone, Te Aika and Marshall as the squadron’s current operational group of Māori airmen. Ted Gray had completed his final sortie in September and was preparing to be posted out of the squadron in October 1943.

Much of the rest of 1943 proceeded as usual for 75 Sqn and its cohort of Māori airmen. The tempo of operations kept up with Bomber Command’s efforts to cripple the German war industry. However, the constant stream of USAAF sorties by day and Bomber Command sorties by night allowed the Germans to effectively develop a strategy to counter the attacks on some of their most crucial industrial cities. The Luftwaffe built a defensive line of anti-aircraft and searchlight batteries across Germany, France, Belgium and Holland.²⁶⁶ Supported by German radar stations to detect incoming bomber formations, an increased number of German fighter stations also aided in the defence of the cities. Berlin remained a prime target throughout the Autumn of 1943, but the Allied air forces were starting to see increasing numbers of bombers failing to return to base. Bombing missions remained dangerous for Bomber Command, relying on gunners like Iwikau Te Aika to protect the aircraft from approaching German night fighters. The proximity of Germany to the United

²⁶³ 75 Squadron War Diary, September 27, 1943.

²⁶⁴ RNZAF Biographies of Deceased Personnel 1939-1945 – Ue – Z, File 83, R17845617, *Archives New Zealand Wellington*.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Keegan, *Collins Atlas of World War II*, 93.

Kingdom prevented the Royal Air Force's own fighters from escorting bombers to the targets. Nevertheless, Bomber Command had dropped over 157,000 tonnes of bombs on Germany throughout 1943 but had struggled to yield tangible results.²⁶⁷ Without serious damage being inflicted on the Luftwaffe defences, Bomber Command would not see the success it had anticipated. 1944 would require new aircrews, new aircraft, and a new focus for Bomber Command. 75 Sqn would again be in the thick of the changing tide of the war.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

Chapter Four: From 1944 to the End of the War

The year 1944 began at a reasonable pace for the four Māori airmen on 75 Sqn. Nineteen forty-four was to finally see Bomber Command's bombing offensive come into its own. By 1944, Bomber Command was finally producing enough bombers to inflict substantial damage on German industry. As the bombing offensive began to hit further and further into the heart of the German economy, the Luftwaffe gradually lost its power as an effective fighting force. The Combined Bombing Offensive by Bomber Command and USAAF diverted vast amounts of critical resources and manpower away from other areas of the German war effort. By 1944, over two million Germans were working in anti-aircraft defence.²⁶⁸ A third of German artillery shell production was going towards anti-aircraft defence, and enough aluminium had been diverted to anti-aircraft batteries to have produced an estimated 10-15,000 more fighter aircraft.²⁶⁹

The odds were beginning to stack against the Luftwaffe and Germany more broadly. The constant barrage of Bomber Command sorties night after night began to have an effect some four years after the offensive had been launched. For 75 Sqn, the beginning of 1944 was somewhat anticlimactic, with other squadrons of Bomber Command departing on long-range sorties to target important targets like Berlin. By now, the Stirling had proved a liability for Bomber Command and 75 Sqn especially. Increasingly, aircrews were returning from sorties, facing a myriad of problems with their aircraft. The unreliable Stirling was restricted to gardening and special bombing operations in Northern France.²⁷⁰ This meant that for a large chunk of the first half of the year, the squadron's crews were mining around the coast of Europe with the odd sortie over France.

²⁶⁸ Keegan, *Collins Atlas of World War II*, 121.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ward and Newey, *RAF Bomber Command Profiles: 75 (NZ) Squadron*, 357.

Pinker, Paraone, Te Aika and Marshall participated in the 75 Sqn gardening operations during January and February. Little changed in their rotation of gardening sorties until March, when a series of new missions emerged. On the night of March 2, ten crews from 75 Sqn joined a top-secret special operation. Bomber Command had been supporting operations for the Special Intelligence Service (SIS) and Special Operations Executive (SOE) since 1942.²⁷¹ SOE existed as an organisation to conduct espionage and sabotage to support local resistance movements behind enemy lines in Nazi-occupied Europe. The Bomber Command aircraft had conducted various operations, dropping agents and equipment over Europe. With Pinker and Paraone onboard, the Buckley crew joined the operation on the night of March 2/3 in what was known as Operation WHEELWRIGHT 71. The crew, unable to find the final pinpoint to drop the container of equipment, aborted the mission and headed home.²⁷² Marshall conducted a similar sortie, Operation TRAINER 121, on the night of March 4/5. The mission was aborted as well, owing to thick cloud at the target location.²⁷³ SOE operations were notoriously tricky. Adverse weather conditions and the absence of reception committees at drop locations often led to aborted missions.²⁷⁴ For 75 Sqn, the early March SOE operations did not yield good results.

The Buckley crew, however, were at the helm of a successful sortie on the night of March 5/6. Operation AUTHOR 18 took off at 20:20. Pinker navigated the Stirling to the target, reaching it at 23:50. On this occasion, the weather was clear, and the SOE reception committee was present at the drop location. The marker to indicate the drop location was three white lights and a letter flashing correctly. The entire operation took nine minutes, with the crew dropping 16 containers from a height of 400 feet. Pinker set a course back to base

²⁷¹ Ibid, 365.

²⁷² 75 Squadron War Diary, March 2, 1944.

²⁷³ 75 Squadron War Diary, March 4, 1944.

²⁷⁴ Ward and Newey, *RAF Bomber Command Profiles: 75 (NZ) Squadron*, 365.

via Brive-la-Gaillarde, where the crew dropped leaflets.²⁷⁵ The Witting crew had no such luck with its SOE operations, but the Horgan crew, with Te Aika in the rear gunner's seat, experienced success on the night of March 10/11 with Operation MONGREL 11. As with the Buckley crew's success, the weather was clear, and the SOE operatives were present at the drop location. The operation took only seven minutes, and the crew proceeded to base via Culoz, where the crew dropped leaflets. The rest of March saw the Māori airmen conduct a mix of gardening sorties, SOE operations and conversion training. In April, 75 Sqn underwent a new and exciting change.

On the night of April 9/10, the Buckley and Witting crews departed on a sortie against Villeneuve-Saint-Georges near Paris. This sortie was particularly notable for both crews as they had converted to the Avro Lancaster. The crews briefly returned to the old 75 Sqn base at RAF Feltwell to No. 3 Lancaster Finishing School to begin converting to the Lancaster.²⁷⁶ The introduction of the Lancaster meant 75 Sqn could move on from the unreliable and restrictive Stirlings. The Lancaster had evolved from the Avro Manchester, a twin-engined bomber withdrawn from service in 1942 due to its underpowered engines. Avro redesigned the airframe, resulting in the Lancaster, which had larger wings and four Rolls-Royce Merlin engines. The Lancaster outshone the Stirling in all measures. With a maximum bomb load of 14,000 lbs., the Lancaster could traverse some 2700 kilometres.²⁷⁷ With a top speed of over 440 km/h and a service ceiling of 25,000 feet, the Lancaster was to become a crucial asset in the arsenal of 75 Sqn. The sizeable unobstructed bomb bay provided room for 14,000 lbs. of bombs, and with defensive armaments of two .303 machine guns in the front, dorsal and rear

²⁷⁵ 75 Squadron War Diary, March 5, 1944.

²⁷⁶ Franks, *Forever Strong*, 114.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

turrets, the Lancaster was well-defended. Pinker and Paraone had the privilege of being the first Kiwi Lancaster crew to depart on a sortie.²⁷⁸

Te Aika and the Horgan crew debuted on their first Lancaster sortie on the night of April 10/11 in a raid against Laon, France. Railway yards were an important target for Bomber Command, and the sorties against railway yards in early April correlated with a major Bomber Command effort to isolate German forces away from the coast. The efforts by Bomber Command were part of the prelude to the upcoming D-Day invasion in June 1944.²⁷⁹ Allied military leaders identified the railways as an important conduit for the Germans to reinforce their positions across France and Belgium when the Allied invasion finally went ahead. Pinker, Paraone and Te Aika departed for another railway raid on the night of April 18/19, this time against Rouen, France. The raid proceeded as planned, with a concentrated attack dealing significant damage to the railway yards.²⁸⁰ Marshall spent most of his April sorties targeting various cities across France and Germany as part of the push to weaken the German war machine further.

As D-Day drew closer, 75 Sqn targets for the month of May continued to focus primarily on railway yards, airfields, ammunition and fuel storage dumps.²⁸¹ The airmen were also unwittingly part of a major Allied deception plan to fool the Germans into thinking an invasion would occur in the Pas-de-Calais area, some 300 kilometres north of where the Allies were planning to invade around Normandy. The Buckley and Witting crews conducted one such sortie on the night of May 9/10 in a coordinated Bomber Command attack against coastal gun batteries in the Pas-de-Calais area. 75 Sqn was detailed to attack batteries at Cap Gris-Nez.²⁸² For all four Māori airmen, May saw their final sorties with 75 Sqn. Te Aika

²⁷⁸ 75 Squadron War Diary, April 9, 1944.

²⁷⁹ Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 489.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 495.

²⁸¹ Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 489.

²⁸² 75 Squadron War Diary, May 9, 1944.

completed his final sortie on the night of May 19/20 in a raid against the railway yards at Le Mans. Pinker and Paraone completed their final sorties on the night of May 24/25 in a raid against Aachen. Their crew briefly encountered a Focke-Wulf Fw 190 but managed to proceed with the sortie.²⁸³ All three airmen prepared to be posted out of the squadron.

As Marshall was also preparing to leave the squadron, a Merlin Film Company film crew arrived at RAF Mepal to make a documentary about 75 Sqn on May 25. With opening shots of the squadron's Lancasters sitting on the airfield, the narrator describes it as a piece of New Zealand, 'but it's in England, 11,000 miles away.'²⁸⁴ The crew were preparing for a raid against Mannheim, but a late cancellation came through.²⁸⁵ Marshall was introduced by the narrator, William Anderson, who served as the crew's navigator. 'Glen's another New Zealander. A Māori from the North Island. He's our W/Op—short for wireless operator.'²⁸⁶ Marshall is seen climbing into the Lancaster, making his way forward to the Wireless Operator's desk. A brief segment details what each crew member thought about as they proceeded towards the target: 'I'll bet Glen's got a tune running in his head. One of the songs his people sing.' The film then cuts to a waiata being sung with various clips of Māori back in New Zealand.²⁸⁷ The film was one of the final contributions Marshall made to 75 Sqn. The four airmen slowly disappeared from the squadron's war diary throughout June and early July, awaiting postings to other squadrons or back to New Zealand.

All of Bomber Command's preparations paved the way for the Allied invasion of the European continent on the morning of June 6, 1944. Only one Māori airman was on active operations with 75 Sqn during the D-Day invasions. Phillip Falkiner, a rear gunner with Colin

²⁸³ 75 Squadron War Diary, May 24, 1944.

²⁸⁴ Michael Hankinson, "Maximum Effort," (United Kingdom, June 1944).
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgli_JwTOd0.

²⁸⁵ Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 515.

²⁸⁶ Hankinson, "Maximum Effort."

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

Nairne's crew, had arrived at 75 Sqn at the end of May and was quickly thrown into sorties. On the night of June 6/7, as the Allied ground forces attempted to gain a foothold around Normandy, 24 aircraft departed Mepal in a sortie to support the Allied forces on the European continent. The target for the night was Lisieux, a French town some 30 kilometres from the Normandy coast.²⁸⁸ Seventy-five Sqn's bombing run at Lisieux damaged the railways and much of the town. The night following the D-Day landings saw 75 Sqn's 24 aircraft contribute to a combined Bomber Command offensive of 1,065 aircraft.²⁸⁹ The thousand bomber raid focused on destroying communications, railways and roads leading to the coast. The raids on the night of June 6/7 were largely successful, but the focus of 75 Sqn was to now support the Allied advance across Western Europe.

Just a few days later, another Māori airman arrived at 75 Sqn. Edward Haimona Snowden served on Hoturoa Meyer's crew as the air bomber. Snowden's first sortie was on the night of June 15/16 against Valenciennes, France. Joining them on the raid that night was the Nairne crew, with Falkiner in the rear gunner's turret.²⁹⁰ The raid proceeded uneventfully, and Snowden dropped 9,000 lbs. of bombs on the railway marshalling yards in the town.²⁹¹ 75 Sqn's contributions to disrupting German reinforcements from reaching the frontlines of the Allied advances placed a critical strain on the German ability to defend against the advancing Allied forces. One crucial sortie came on the evening of June 30, in which the Meyer and Nairne crews participated. In order to curb the Allied advance, Hitler ordered the transfer of Panzer divisions and troops from the Eastern Front. That evening, the 2nd and 9th Panzer Divisions, having transferred from the Eastern Front, were preparing to attack the British and American front lines in Normandy.²⁹² The sortie was set for Villers-Bocage,

²⁸⁸ 75 Squadron War Diary, June 6, 1944.

²⁸⁹ Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 523.

²⁹⁰ 75 Squadron War Diary, June 15, 1944.

²⁹¹ J. D. Mercier Scrapbook, 2010/059, *Air Force Museum of New Zealand Archives*.

²⁹² Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 536.

where the Panzer divisions had been observed lying in wait. From his Lancaster, Snowden dropped 12,500 lbs. of bombs for a combined Bomber Command load of 1,100 tonnes.²⁹³

Having been severely damaged, the Panzer divisions could not proceed with their attack that night.

Falkiner and Snowden continued to operate sorties against German targets throughout July 1944. However, it was not just operations that the men experienced at RAF Mepal. On the evening of July 29, the Commanding Officer and officers of RAF Mepal hosted an evening of cocktails and dancing for the men based at the station. Those attending were treated to a sumptuous buffet of lobster, salmon, trifles, jellies and fruits.²⁹⁴ The evening finished at 21:30 for the aircrews of 75 Sqn, who were detailed on an early morning raid against Amayé-sur-Seulles on another attack against concentrations of German troops and tanks. Snowden released a bomb load of 9,000 lbs. directly onto German positions, and the crew turned back towards Mepal.²⁹⁵ Falkiner and the Nairne crew were posted on this sortie but failed to return. The circumstances of the Nairne crew's deaths are unclear, but the recovery of the air bomber's body by a Naval patrol suggests the crew crashed in the English Channel.²⁹⁶ Falkiner became the fourth death of a Māori airman with 75 Sqn. The body of the 21-year-old airman, along with the bodies of the rest of the crew, were never found.

At the end of July, two more Māori airmen arrived at RAF Mepal with their crews. Mac Maaka and Tai Nicholas, an Air Bomber and a Wireless Operator, respectively, joined in time to begin Bomber Command's August raids against oil storage and supply depots. Nicholas' first sortie came on the afternoon of August 4 in a raid against the oil refinery and

²⁹³ J. D. Mercier Scrapbook, *Air Force Museum of New Zealand Archives*.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ J. D. Mercier Scrapbook, *Air Force Museum of New Zealand Archives*.

²⁹⁶ RNZAF Biographies of Deceased Personnel 1939-1945 – Ea – Gw, File 156, R17845610, *Archives New Zealand Wellington*.

storage at Bec d'Ambès in southwest France.²⁹⁷ Maaka's first sortie came on the night of August 9/10 in an attack against the fuel depot at Fort D'Anglos. Targets for the three crews throughout the month of August continued to support the Allied advance towards Germany. The Allied armies were making significant gains, and by August 24, Paris had been liberated from the Germans.²⁹⁸ The pace of the land invasion meant Bomber Command could return to focusing on striking at the heart of Germany itself. Towards the end of August, crews at 75 Sqn were conducting much longer sorties. Some sorties were even flying over Germany and striking into Poland. The sorties often reached 10 hours in the freezing cold and darkness of a Lancaster flying high above Europe. For the likes of the gunners, the conditions were made even more uncomfortable by the cramped conditions in their turrets. For the rear gunner especially, the job was made even more lonely by the isolation of the rear turret from the rest of the crew who operated further up the front of the Lancaster. Flying with Bomber Command was never easy, and this was especially true as the war reached a critical point.

One of these lengthy sorties came on the night of August 29/30 in a raid against Stettin in western Poland. The raid caused significant damage to houses, industry and ships.²⁹⁹ The entire sortie took the Layton crew, with Nicholas as its wireless operator, nearly 10 hours.³⁰⁰ The same night, Snowden's crew were detailed to the north of Poland to conduct mining off the coast of Gdynia. It took the Meyer crew 4 hours and 30 minutes to reach the target. Approaching from the north, Meyer flew his Lancaster down through the gulf to the east of Gdynia. Approaching Danzig and having dropped its load of mines, the Lancaster made a left turn and circled back around to the north and towards Sweden. The crew described the raid as 'the big trip.' On the way back to base, Meyer asked, 'how long till base,

²⁹⁷ 75 Squadron War Diary, August 4, 1944.

²⁹⁸ Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 565.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 575.

³⁰⁰ 75 Squadron War Diary, August 29, 1944.

navigator?’ ‘Another 4 ½ hours yet skip.’³⁰¹ The navigator observed that the entire crew, bar himself, fell asleep on the flight back to Mepal. The crew touched back down at Mepal the following day at 06:15.

As the Meyer crew rested from their big sortie the night before, another Māori airman arrived at RAF Mepal, bolstering the numbers of Māori airmen with the squadron. Stan Higgins, the air bomber with Alan Baxter’s crew, flew on his first sortie on the evening of September 5.³⁰² Joining him that night in their own crews were Snowden and Maaka. The raid was much closer to Mepal, with it detailed for Le Havre, France. Despite the Allies having advanced well beyond Paris, some German positions held out around the area, having been bypassed by the Allied advance. The aircraft of 75 Sqn led the raid that night, successfully bombing the German positions. While the raid was the first sortie for Higgins, Le Havre would be the last for Snowden five nights later. During the party celebrating the end of the Meyer crew’s tour, the navigator told a story of their final raid.

They’ll have to watch this daylight formation bombing. Today there was a squadron above us on the bombing run. One kite’s bombs fell in a stack between our main plane and tailplane. I was in the astrodome and as they went past, I could read the printing on the cases, in fact I noticed one spelling mistake.³⁰³

The Meyer crew worked well together, and Snowden was a valued crew member. The crew prepared to be posted out of the squadron together.

The Baxter crew was not complete without the addition of Bill Kereama, the crew’s wireless operator. Kereama was a valued crew member and a keen sportsman. 75 Sqn did not participate in the raids against the German cities of Gelsenkirchen and Osnabrück on

³⁰¹ J. D. Mercier Scrapbook, *Air Force Museum of New Zealand Archives*.

³⁰² 75 Squadron War Diary, September 5, 1944.

³⁰³ J. D. Mercier Scrapbook, *Air Force Museum of New Zealand Archives*.

September 13 but instead held its inaugural sports day. The sports day raised money for the Prisoner of War Fund, an apt recipient given that some of 75 Sqn's own crews had been shot down and captured by the Germans.³⁰⁴ Kereama featured in the day's lineup, participating in the long jump, with an impressive jump of nearly six metres. Kereama's athletic feat was among the most outstanding performed by the squadron's airmen that day.³⁰⁵ Regular sorties resumed again the next day. Nicholas and the Layton crew were posted out of 75 Sqn on September 15 to complete a tour with 7 Sqn. The crew would return to 75 Sqn in early 1945. Maaka, meanwhile, had a respite from operations until the end of October. In the intervening period, Higgins and Kereama joined 75 Sqn's sorties against various industrial targets across Germany in support of the advancing Allied armies.

New technology developed and evolved throughout the war, with Bomber Command at the forefront of some of the most important advances. As aircraft developed and the conditions of the air war changed, Bomber Command constantly adapted its equipment to provide better bomb-aiming accuracy and navigation. During October, Maaka and Higgins, both bomb aimers in their respective crews, were working with the new Gee-H blind bombing device and were using it to great effect over Germany.³⁰⁶ The bomb-aiming device was based on the GEE radio navigation device in which the time delay between two radio signals would be measured to produce a navigation fix. Gee-H succeeded the Oboe bomb-aiming system.³⁰⁷ The bomber would navigate across an arc in the sky aided by a radio beam. Ground stations could measure precisely where the bomber was along the arc, relay targeting information, and the bomber could drop bombs without seeing the target.³⁰⁸ With Gee-H, the

³⁰⁴ Ward and Newey, *RAF Bomber Command Profiles: 75 (NZ) Squadron*, 408.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid, 413.

³⁰⁷ Louis Brown, *A Radar History of World War II: Technical and Military Imperatives* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 1999).

J. D. Haigh, *The Services Textbook of Radio: Radiolocation Techniques*, vol. VII (London, United Kingdom: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1960), 250–52.

³⁰⁸ Overy, *Bomber Command 1939-1945*, 106.

system now had greater range and could be used by a hundred aircraft simultaneously.³⁰⁹

While Gee-H provided for greater bombing accuracy, particularly in low visibility, the weather continued to present a significant problem for Bomber Command operations towards the end of 1944 and into 1945. Aided by their intensive training back in Canada, Maaka and Higgins contributed positively to the 75 Sqn sorties over Germany.

Through the remainder of 1944, Higgins, Maaka and Kereama kept up operations with 75 Sqn. October had seen the arrival of another Māori airman, Phillip Baker, a gunner with Donald Leadley's crew. Further, in November, Tapua Heperi, a wireless operator with Douglas St. Clair Clement's crew, arrived at 75 Sqn and debuted on a sortie in early December. The Leadley and Clement crews were detailed on a raid against Oberhausen on the afternoon of December 4. Thick cloud prevented the results of the bombing from being observed. Gee-H played a pivotal role in the raid, and heavy damage was reported in Oberhausen.³¹⁰ As 1944 was closing, the end of the war was creeping closer. By mid-December, the Allied frontline was closing in on the Rhine. The weather also improved towards the end of the month, allowing for more accurate Bomber Command operations. Both crews went out again in a pre-Christmas raid against Trier, southwestern Germany. The raid was reported as one of the town's worst of the war.³¹¹ The German war effort was crumbling at the end of 1944, and the Bomber Command raids were playing a part in ensuring that would remain the case leading into 1945.

The Leadley crew rang in the New Year with a daylight sortie against Vohwinkel, Germany. Baker and Heperi were the only operational Māori airmen with 75 Sqn at the beginning of 1945. Higgins, Kereama and Maaka had completed their final sorties across

³⁰⁹ Hastings, *Bomber Command*, 336.

³¹⁰ Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 626.

³¹¹ *Ibid*, 636.

November and December 1944. The final logged sortie for Maaka came on December 31 in a daylight sortie against Vohwinkel. After the war, Maaka's crew captain, Harry Yates, wrote a book about his time during the war and spoke highly of Maaka.

As he talked, my impressions of him became ever more favourable. No Englishman I'd met was so sincere and guileless about himself. Mac was simply a stranger to the inner tensions and vanities that make liars of the rest of us. He was mightily proud of his people who, I thought, must be formidable opponents in war if they were all like this chap.³¹²

The closing months of the war would see 75 Sqn with its greatest concentration of Māori airmen throughout the entire war. Airmen like Mac Maaka were valued members of their crews, and Yates further observed that 'he was just the sort of chap one imagines walking steadfastly into the enemy's fire for the sake of his comrades.' The Yates crew prepared to depart 75 Sqn but would remain at RAF Mepal until they were posted out of the squadron in February 1945.

The next Māori airman to join 75 Sqn was Wi Rangiuiaia. A trained pilot, ready to fly with his own crew, Rangiuiaia first served as a second pilot with Ernest Abraham and Cyril Baigent. Rangiuiaia selected a crew mostly made up of airmen from the RAF. The exception was his wireless operator, John Mossman, who also hailed from New Zealand. Rangiuiaia was one of 75 Sqn's few Māori airmen known to be fluent in Te Reo Māori, another being Heperi, who was serving with the squadron simultaneously. Rangiuiaia grew close with his crew as they operated on sorties with 75 Sqn. The crew's closeness was displayed one evening when they walked back to Mepal from a nearby pub. A man jumped down from a tree and, attempting to stab Rangiuiaia, cut through his pilot's brevet on his left lapel. It is unclear what

³¹² "Maori aircrew who served with 75 (NZ) Squadron 39-45," accessed February 19, 2024, <https://75nzsquadron.wordpress.com/maori-aircrew-who-served-with-75nz-squadron-39-45/>.

led to the incident, but Rangiuiaia's crew quickly dealt with the assailant.³¹³ Rangiuiaia spoke little of his experiences and time at 75 Sqn, with this story serving as one of the very few he relayed after the war.

Between February and March, the number of Māori airmen at 75 Sqn grew. By now, Nicholas had returned to 75 Sqn after a secondment with his crew to No. 7 Pathfinder Force at RAF Oakington between November 1944 and February 1945. Nicholas' contribution to 75 Sqn is of particular note, being the only Cook Islands Māori airman with the squadron. His family remained in Rarotonga while he had gone to work in New Zealand before the war.³¹⁴ Nicholas and Rangiuiaia participated in the February 13/14 overnight raid against Dresden. The bombing of Dresden became a sore point for Bomber Command.³¹⁵ An Associated Press correspondent argued that Bomber Command had embarked on a 'deliberate terror bombing of German population centres as a ruthless expedient to hasten doom.'³¹⁶ The resulting firestorm, which 75 Sqn's crews had observed on their way back to Mepal,³¹⁷ raised the ethical dilemma of the raid that night. The discussion over the necessity of the raid and area-bombing late in the war lies with figures like Churchill and the Chief of the Air Staff.³¹⁸ Nicholas and Rangiuiaia were conducting a raid as they had previously done. The raid on Dresden was completed, and 75 Sqn returned to its regular schedule of raids over what parts remained a threat to the Allied advance towards Nazi Germany. Baker left 75 Sqn on

³¹³ Jim Cooper, interview with author, September 17, 2024.

³¹⁴ Ta Tio Tuaine Nicholas, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

³¹⁵ Beevor, *The Second World War*, 867.

³¹⁶ Hastings, *Bomber Command: The Myths and Reality of the Strategic Bombing Offensive 1939-45*, 400.

³¹⁷ 75 Squadron War Diary, February 13, 1945.

³¹⁸ John Keegan, "Necessary or not, Dresden remains a topic of anguish," *The Telegraph*, October 31, 2005, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3620700/Necessary-or-not-Dresden-remains-a-topic-of-anguish.html>.

Tami Davis Biddle, "Dresden 1945: Reality, History, and Memory," *The Journal of Military History* 72, no. 2 (April 2008).

Alan J. Levine, *The Strategic Bombing of Germany, 1940-1945* (New York, NY: Praegar, 1992).

Richard Overy, *The Bombing War: Europe 1939-1945* (London, United Kingdom: Allen Lane, 2013).

February 20 and transferred to No. 30 OTU at RAF Hixon. Seventy-five Sqn was to be the first and only squadron he would serve with during the war.³¹⁹

In early March, Kiwi Amohanga arrived at 75 Sqn with his crew, which included another Māori wireless operator, Max Spooner. In their debut sortie against Essen, the Amohanga crew were also joined by Heperi, Nicholas and Rangiuaia with their respective crews.³²⁰ A successful sortie was reported in the 75 Sqn Unit History for that day. The Essen raid on March 11 was the final Bomber Command raid against the city. Like many German cities, Essen had been laid to waste by Bomber Command sorties. The population of Essen had dropped drastically from a pre-war population of 648,000 to 310,000 in the closing months of the war.³²¹ As populations decreased and cities lay in ruins, the Germans found it increasingly difficult to defend against the daily Bomber Command raids. The Luftwaffe struggled to produce aircraft, fuel its existing aircraft and could not effectively operate anti-aircraft batteries. For those Māori airmen who departed on raids later in the war, they often came up against slight to moderate German anti-aircraft, allowing a greater degree of bombing accuracy.

On March 18, Nicholas completed his final sortie with 75 Sqn against Bruchstrasse. He would later transfer out of the squadron in early April. On March 20, Richard 'Dickie' Ulrich and Calvin Mataira arrived at 75 Sqn. Ulrich was captain of his own crew, and Mataira joined with Charles Wagstaff's crew as the rear gunner. The Ulrich crew flew their first raid on March 27 against Hamm. The Wagstaff crew flew their first sortie two days later against Salzgitter.³²² By now, the newspapers back in New Zealand were reporting the tide turning in favour of Bomber Command. A March 23 article in the *Evening Star* described 75 Sqn's

³¹⁹ Phillip Baden Baker, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

³²⁰ 75 Squadron War Diary, March 11, 1945.

³²¹ Middlebrook and Everitt, *The Bomber Command War Diaries*, 678.

³²² 75 Squadron War Diary, March 22, 1945.

daylight sorties. ‘The losses in aircraft on operations is not high these days; in fact, in Bomber Command, they are the lowest they have ever been.’³²³ The end of the war was truly in sight when the Allies began their operation to cross the Rhine on the same day. By early April, the *Evening Post* was reporting the major contributions of 75 Sqn. In the preceding three weeks, the squadron had flown more than 400 sorties, dropping 2000 tonnes of bombs on Germany.³²⁴ The period was particularly good for the squadron, with all aircraft returning safely. ‘All the pilots have returned without personal injury and in formation.’³²⁵ Of the many New Zealand airmen involved in the efforts across various squadrons, six were the current cohort of Māori airmen with 75 Sqn.

During some sorties across March and April, Te Reo Māori could be heard over the airwaves. The likely participants included Amohanga, Heperi, Rangiuiaia, Spooner and Ulrich. Another participant in the conversations was Eric Meharry. Although a Pākehā airman, Meharry had been friends with Amohanga and his family before the war. Meharry spent time with Amohanga’s father, Rehi, and other kaumatua in Te Kuiti. Meharry became fluent in Te Reo Māori because of these interactions. The relationship between Meharry and the Amohanga whanau was mutual, with Meharry teaching the whanau English. In the pre-war years, Amohanga and Meharry spent time canoeing and fishing together.³²⁶ During the war, the two airmen flew alongside each other, using the language of a people whose homeland was 18,000 kilometres away.

Operations throughout April were sparse for 75 Sqn’s Māori airmen. Valuable targets were becoming more challenging to find. The Rangiuiaia crew began the month with a raid against Kiel on the night of April 9/10. This was followed by a raid against Potsdam on the

³²³ "Daylight Operations," *Evening Star*, March 23, 1945, 8.

³²⁴ "75 Squadron," *Evening Post*, April 9, 1945, 3.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ James Meharry, interview with author, August 1, 2024.

night of April 14/15.³²⁷ The Clement and Wagstaff crews joined the raid that night. For Heperi, this was his final logged sortie with the Clement crew. He prepared to be posted out of 75 Sqn over the coming weeks. The Wagstaff completed a sortie against Bad Oldesloe, northern Germany, on April 24. Each of the sorties in April had been successful for the crews, and Germany was falling further and further towards defeat. Six days later, Adolf Hitler committed suicide, with Nazi Germany finally surrendering on May 7. The April 24 raid against Bad Oldesloe was the last for 75 Sqn. Mataira was, therefore, the final Māori airman to serve with 75 Sqn on a sortie against Nazi Germany. However, a new task was given to the squadron as the war in Europe ended.

As April closed, 75 Sqn switched from offensive sorties to humanitarian aid. Rangiuiaia flew one of the squadron's first supply missions to Delft, near Rotterdam, on April 29. The bomb bays of the Lancasters swapped bombs and incendiaries for bags of meat, chocolate, flour and salt.³²⁸ Rangiuiaia dropped his Lancaster to 500 feet and released his load of supplies for the jubilant Dutch crowds below.³²⁹ The Wagstaff crew flew another supply drop sortie over Rotterdam the next day, and the entire trip remained uneventful for Mataira, who was in the rear gunner's turret. When VE Day arrived on May 8, RAF Mepal held a station parade to celebrate the war's end. Ulrich and Rangiuiaia likely participated since they did not fly sorties that day.³³⁰ The entire operation was dubbed Operation Manna. Rangiuiaia flew two such sorties over Delft and would go on to also fly several POW repatriation flights from Juvincourt in northern France. The Ulrich and Wagstaff crews joined Rangiuiaia on these missions, spanning several days between May 10 and May 14. The 75 Sqn efforts repatriated over 300 Australian and New Zealand prisoners of war during that time.³³¹ Some of the

³²⁷ 75 Squadron War Diary, April 14, 1945.

³²⁸ Franks, *Forever Strong*, 159.

³²⁹ 75 Squadron War Diary, April 29, 1945.

³³⁰ 75 Squadron War Diary, May 8, 1945.

³³¹ 75 Squadron War Diary, May 10–14, 1945.

airmen's final sorties throughout May and early June included refugee repatriations and flights to observe the effects of the bombing offensive throughout Europe. During June, Heperi, Rangiuiaia, Ulrich and Amohanga were posted out of 75 Sqn, having contributed to one of the most important parts of the war for the squadron. However, the squadron was still to see two more Māori airmen arrive.

Guy Tomlins joined 75 Sqn on June 8 as an air bomber with Laurence McKenna's crew. Tom Wehi would join in July as a pilot/flight engineer with the McKenna crew. The squadron's role in Europe concluded in June, but the war raged in the East. For those Māori airmen still with the squadron, new preparations were underway to move the squadron to begin sorties against the Japanese mainland. Bomber Command dubbed it 'Tiger Force,' and its contributions of Lancaster and Lincoln squadrons would add to the British effort to end the war against Japan.³³² The Avro Lincoln was the successor to the Lancaster. The Lincoln looked almost identical to the Lancaster but featured newer Merlin 85 or Packard Merlin 68 engines.³³³ 75 Sqn took delivery of the Lincoln in preparation for its transfer to the East. In July, the squadron moved to RAF Spilsby in Lincolnshire to begin its conversion to Lincolns. However, while Spooner, Mataira, Iles, Tomlins, and Wehi were all completing their conversion training, the Empire of Japan surrendered to the Allies on September 2. Tiger Force was no longer required, and the squadron remained at RAF Spilsby to begin disbanding.

The final group of Māori airmen began preparations to depart for New Zealand. Spooner, Mataira, Tomlins and Wehi finished their tours with the squadron at the end of September and awaited embarkation on a troopship in Southampton. Iles departed 75 Sqn on

³³² Franks, *Forever Strong*, 162.

³³³ BAE Systems, "Avro 694 Lincoln," <https://www.baesystems.com/en/heritage/avro-694-lincoln>.

October 9. Six days later, on October 15, 75 Sqn was formally disbanded.³³⁴ The 29 Māori airmen had contributed to a total of 8017 raids carried out by 75 Sqn throughout the war.³³⁵ The squadron lost 193 aircraft for a loss percentage of 2.4 per cent. It dropped over 21,000 tonnes of bombs and laid over 2300 sea mines, making it one of the most effective squadrons in all of Bomber Command.³³⁶ Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris duly noted the contributions of the squadron.

Please convey to all the New Zealand personnel who have served or are serving in Bomber Command my great appreciation of their loyal cooperation and gallant and determined contribution to the defeat of Germany and the freedom of mankind. To all New Zealand aircrews and to all ground staff personnel, their British cousins give heartfelt thanks. We in Bomber Command are proud indeed of the great record of service of the New Zealand crews, who were second to none in courage and efficiency.³³⁷

Despite an acknowledgement of their bravery and contributions, the squadron's Māori airmen returned to New Zealand to find their service almost forgotten.

³³⁴ Franks, *Forever Strong*, 164.

³³⁵ *Ibid*, 161.

³³⁶ *Ibid*.

³³⁷ *Ibid*, 162.

Chapter Five: Repatriation and Post-war Civilian Life

For some of the Māori airmen, their post-war lives began as early as 1943. Subject to the requirements of the RAF at the time, airmen either found themselves on a troopship back to New Zealand or being posted to other squadrons after their time with 75 Sqn. For those who finished the war with 75 Sqn, the journey home did not come immediately after the end of hostilities and the disbanding of the squadron. When all the airmen eventually returned to New Zealand, they encountered inadequate recognition of their efforts, inequitable policies concerning returned servicemen, and a struggle to reintegrate into civilian life. Despite several of the airmen receiving decorations for their wartime gallantry, this did little to raise the profile of Māori airmen. In such a way, the contributions of the 29 Māori airmen of 75 Sqn faded into obscurity.

Five of the 29 airmen with the squadron received various types of gallantry decorations for their contributions to the RAF. The first was Mikaere Manawaiti. He was awarded a Distinguished Flying Medal in May 1943 while waiting to return to New Zealand. After his time in Europe, Manawaiti was reposted into the Pacific theatre with the RNZAF for the rest of the war.³³⁸ Iwikau Te Aika and Charles Pinker were awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross, which was gazetted on October 19, 1944.³³⁹ The citation for both read, 'this officer has completed numerous operations against the enemy, in the course of which he has invariably displayed the utmost fortitude, courage and devotion to duty.' Te Aika's decoration came as he awaited repatriation to New Zealand in Brighton. He finally left the United Kingdom on November 1, 1944.³⁴⁰ Pinker's decoration also came while he was waiting in Brighton. Both men were repatriated to New Zealand on the same ship, arriving on New

³³⁸ Mikaere Tutahunga Tomika Manawaiti, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

³³⁹ "The New Zealand Gazette," (Wellington, October 19, 1944), 1260.

³⁴⁰ Iwikau Te Aika, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

Year's Day 1945.³⁴¹ The next gallantry decoration was not presented until March 1945, when Edward Snowden received a Distinguished Flying Cross. Snowden was awarded his DFC with No. 7 Squadron RAF, a Pathfinder Force squadron. This was his final squadron posting before the end of the war.³⁴²

The final gallantry decoration was awarded to Guy Tomlins in 1947. Tomlins was awarded the *Croix de Guerre avec Palme*, a military decoration of France. His citation read:

*Warrant Officer Tomlins has made several sorties against a wide variety of enemy targets, including some of the most heavily defended deep in Germany. After the landing of the Allied Forces on the Continent he worked closely with the British Army by taking part in sorties against enemy communications, which operations assisted in the liberation of Belgium. Warrant Officer Tomlins has displayed keenness and efficiency together with determination and a devotion to duty that gained him the confidence of his crew, and set an example of the highest order in the squadron.*³⁴³

Tomlins joined 75 Sqn at the war's end but had a previous posting with No. 466 Squadron, a Royal Australian Air Force bomber squadron. When he returned to New Zealand, Tomlins worked in the railways. Although an intelligent and experienced worker, he watched as non-Māori employees received promotions before he did. He left the railways and joined the freezing works while he raised his family. Tomlins did not discuss the war often, citing that 'you don't talk about those things.'³⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the war had an effect on him, and he often reflected on the death tolls caused by the Bomber Command offensives over Germany.

³⁴¹ Charles Mita Hikairo Pinker, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

³⁴² Edward Simon Snowden, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

³⁴³ "Maori aircrew who served with 75 (NZ) Squadron 39-45."

³⁴⁴ Huia Jahnke, interview with author, December 13, 2024.

This weighed heavily on Tomlins, who maintained a gentlemanly demeanour and a strong love of his family after the war. To the experienced airman, the war was not worth it.

For those airmen who finished their time with 75 Sqn well before Tomlins, their post-war lives looked different. After finishing his time with the squadron, Roy Raharuhi joined No. 115 Squadron RAF, another bomber squadron, before he was repatriated to New Zealand in late 1942.³⁴⁵ He took up a posting as a flying instructor at No. 1 Service Flying Training School, Wigram. In 1945, he embarked again with Jayforce. Marama Parata also returned to New Zealand in early 1943 and was preparing to embark for the Pacific theatre by the end of the year. He finished his time in the Pacific in December 1944.³⁴⁶ Meanwhile, Ted Grey finished his time with 75 Sqn and returned to No. 11 OTU before being repatriated to New Zealand. Arriving back in early 1944, he remained in the aircrew selection pool. He was finally discharged in February 1945.³⁴⁷

Hoani Paraone followed his cousin, Charles Pinker, out of 75 Sqn to No. 3 Lancaster Finishing School in June 1944 before they were both repatriated back to New Zealand later that year. Paraone saw the end of the war in New Zealand.³⁴⁸ Tai Nicholas finished the war at No. 17 OTU at RAF Upwood in Cambridgeshire, having left 75 Sqn in September 1944. Edward Snowden was also at No. 17 OTU when the war ended in Europe. When Snowden returned to New Zealand, he began a career in Christian ministry. Initially trained as an Anglican minister, he became disillusioned with the Anglican Church and moved to the Open Brethren Church. Snowden returned to Ahipara after the war and preached all around Northland. Snowden experienced loss of his own, with five of his best friends not returning

³⁴⁵ Roy William Raharuhi, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

³⁴⁶ Marama Tahu Te Whaiti Parata, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

³⁴⁷ Edward Henry Gray, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

³⁴⁸ Hoani Paraone, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

from sorties throughout the war. He often noted he was lucky to be alive but preferred not to talk about the war.³⁴⁹

Loss was keenly felt in the squadron during the war. Many fine New Zealand airmen had been lost on sorties with 75 Sqn, including four Māori airmen. Colin McPherson, Raymond Going, Tame Waerea and Phillip Falkiner all failed to return from sorties. McPherson is remembered at the Runnymede Memorial in Englefield Green, England. Going and Falkiner are also commemorated there. Waerea is buried in the Hanover War Cemetery. Commemoration was a critical part of the post-war experience for those airmen who returned to New Zealand. Flying with Bomber Command had been a dangerous undertaking. These four airmen were among the 70,000 RAF personnel who lost their lives throughout the war.³⁵⁰ An overwhelming majority of these deaths were from Bomber Command. Estimates place Bomber Command deaths around 55,000, which was nearly half of all airmen who served with the Command.³⁵¹ For the 26 other Māori airmen who returned, the dangers of their wartime undertakings remained present in their minds. The nostalgia of the smell of aircraft fuel, cordite, the sound of the Lancaster's engines and the memory of the freezing cold darkness on sorties was also tinged with a sense of sadness for the comrades that failed to return to New Zealand. For families back at home with lost loved ones, recognition would form a part of the grieving process.

However, recognition of Māori service in the Second World War was limited in the immediate post-war period. The greatest concentration of Māori participation had been with the 28th (Māori) Battalion, which had served with distinction across North Africa and Europe. Regularly, Māori were told by the Government that their wartime contributions

³⁴⁹ Robbie Fleming, interview with author, October 14, 2024.

³⁵⁰ Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force 1939-1945*, 194.

³⁵¹ "History of Bomber Command," International Bomber Command Centre, accessed March 26, 2025, <https://internationalbcc.co.uk/history/the-history-of-bomber-command/>.

would be recognised after the war.³⁵² Paraire Paikea, who encouraged Māori all around the country to contribute to the war effort, had seen the war as an opportunity to raise the profile of Māori and to settle grievances stretching back to the 1840s. Te Puea Hērangi also observed that Waikato Māori contributing to the war effort could be a chance to settle old grievances throughout the King Country.³⁵³ During this time, the Government sought to ensure the reintegration of returned servicemen was as seamless as possible. In 1941, it passed the Rehabilitation Act.³⁵⁴ It provided low-interest business and home loans for returned servicemen and preferential allocation of state homes. The Act alone should have provided equal opportunities for Māori returned servicemen, but this was not the case.

Much like the Soldier-Settler Scheme introduced at the end of the First World War, a land settlement programme was introduced at the end of the Second World War. The scheme had been introduced in 1915 to allow returned servicemen to be given farmland and cheap finance to develop it. A ballot system allocated farmland to Pākehā returned servicemen only. It was assumed that Māori returned servicemen had access to tribal lands.³⁵⁵ For the Second World War Land Settlement Board, there was much to learn from the First World War scheme. The land for settlement at the end of the First World War had been given out regardless of a serviceman's farming experience, which often resulted in those on remote farms failing to provide a sufficient return from their farms. The programme was adjusted for Second World War servicemen, and economically viable land was only given to those with farming experience. The rural backgrounds of many Māori servicemen should have seen many receive land; however, this was not the case. Frederick Baker, a former commanding

³⁵² Webb, *Equality and Autonomy: An Overview of Māori Military Service for the Crown, c.1899-1945* (Wai 2500), 295.

³⁵³ Ibid, 296.

³⁵⁴ "Veterans' assistance - Economic rehabilitation," Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, accessed February 25, 2025, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/veterans-assistance/page-2#:~:text=The%20Rehabilitation%20Act%20was%20passed,preferential%20allocation%20of%20state%20houses.>

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

officer of the 28th (Māori) Battalion, was the government-appointed Director of Rehabilitation. Although Māori himself, Baker did not identify strongly with his Māori heritage.³⁵⁶ Baker conducted a tour of the North Island in August 1945 to find Māori land that could be used for resettlement of returned servicemen. 'I feel confident that the Maori people will co-operate in the job of finding land for the settlement of those Maori ex-servicemen who wish to rehabilitate themselves on farms of their own.'³⁵⁷ However, Baker also noted that Māori servicemen would have to compete with Pākehā servicemen if Māori land was not readily available. He further stated that 'Maori people in making land available for soldier settlement must be prepared to transfer their interests in that land by way of sale or otherwise.'³⁵⁸ Crucially, the Land Settlement Board failed to account for collective Māori land ownership³⁵⁹, just as the Government had failed to do so in the previous scheme. Collective ownership prevented Māori land from being bought by the Government for the settlement of Māori returned servicemen. This made it difficult for Māori returned servicemen to apply for land for farming. As a result, the post-war period saw a significant increase in Māori urban migration to seek employment.³⁶⁰ However, one of 75 Sqn's Māori airmen found a way around the inequitable policy.

Wi Rangiuaia returned from England after the war with a wish to farm the land. He had been offered a job with the British Overseas Airways Corporation, but his wife did not want to move the family to England. When Rangiuaia returned to New Zealand, and realising how difficult it was for Māori returned servicemen to receive land from the scheme, he

³⁵⁶ "Baker, Frederick," Te Ara - The Encyclopedia of New Zealand, 2000, accessed March 21, 2025, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/5b3/baker-frederick>.

³⁵⁷ "Land for Maoris," *Waikato Times*, September 1, 1945, 7.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ "History of Māori land," Te Puni Kōkiri, accessed March 22, 2025, <https://www.tupu.nz/en/tuhono/about-maori-land-in-new-zealand/history-of-maori-land/>.

³⁶⁰ "Māori–Pākehā relations - Māori urban migration," Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, 2011, accessed March 22, 2025, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/maori-pakeha-relations/page-5>.

changed his name to William James Cooper.³⁶¹ The name change worked, and he soon received land to farm. His pre-war experience as a farm labourer in Waipiro Bay also made the process easier. By 1964, the Government had settled 14,000 Second World War returned servicemen. Those servicemen who farmed the land after the war aided in the economic recovery of New Zealand in the post-war period. By the 1960s, New Zealand was diversifying its export markets, and buoyant export prices aided them in developing their land further. Rangiuaia continued to farm the land and obtained his private pilot's license to maintain his flying ambitions.³⁶²

In January 1945, both Stanley Higgins and Bill Kereama left 75 Sqn. Higgins remained in the aircrew allocation centre until April. He remained in the non-effective pool, awaiting a posting when the war ended.³⁶³ Kereama, meanwhile, was posted to No. 46 Squadron RAF until June. He finally embarked for New Zealand in October.³⁶⁴ While in the United Kingdom, Kereama met a young Scottish woman, and they fell in love. When Kereama returned home to his wife and family at the end of the war, the young woman, Genie Stewart, discovered she was pregnant. Stewart gave the baby up for adoption. It took her daughter, Jennifer, many years to reconnect with her family in New Zealand.³⁶⁵ Amidst the uncertainty of war, Kereama had discovered love, which was not uncommon. Stewart was a Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) member, so their romance likely developed on base. WAAs worked in various roles on base as cooks, waitresses, radiographers, meteorologists and mechanics.³⁶⁶ While the RAF hierarchy actively disapproved of such relationships,

³⁶¹ Jim Cooper, interview with author, December 31, 2024.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Stanley John Higgins, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

³⁶⁴ William Lawrence Kereama, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

³⁶⁵ Dick Meadows, "Homeground." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lv11MiNnuQs>.

³⁶⁶ Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force 1939-1945*, 74.

Kereama's story shows that some airfield romances flew under the radar of station commanders.

Phillip Baker and Mac Maaka both left 75 Sqn in February 1945. Baker saw the end of the war while at No. 30 OTU at RAF Hixon, Staffordshire. On December 28, 1945, he was finally discharged from the air force and returned to civilian life.³⁶⁷ Maaka remained in the non-effective pool when the war ended and soon embarked for New Zealand.³⁶⁸ Kiwi Amohanga finished the war with No. 9 Squadron RAF, another bomber squadron. Throughout 1946, he completed a tour with No. 511 Squadron RAF, a transport squadron. He completed his tour in April 1947 and returned to civilian life.³⁶⁹ Tapua Heperi and Richard Ulrich finished their tours with 75 Sqn alongside Amohanga. Heperi departed the United Kingdom in late 1945 and returned to New Zealand. The war had been particularly hard for Heperi. He joined the air force with a strong sense of adventure but came back to New Zealand with post-traumatic stress disorder. The memories of war led Heperi to drink heavily, but by 40 years of age, he was able to put much of the war behind him. Heperi died at the age of 50.³⁷⁰ Ulrich completed a tour with No. 246 Squadron RAF throughout 1946 before returning to civilian life in New Zealand. He wanted to stay in England after the war to continue flying, but his wife asked him to return home. When he eventually returned in August 1946, he left his air force career behind and would speak very little of the war for the rest of his life.³⁷¹

Max Spooner, Roy Iles, Tom Wehi and Calvin Mataira were among the last Māori airmen to leave 75 Sqn. Spooner remained in the United Kingdom until the end of 1945 after

³⁶⁷ Phillip Baden Baker, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

³⁶⁸ Inia Whangataua Maaka, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

³⁶⁹ Kiwi Ernest Amohanga, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

³⁷⁰ Tapua Gudgeon, interview with author, August 1, 2024.

³⁷¹ Rhonda Lelo, interview with author, August 9, 2024.

completing his time with the squadron. He arrived back in New Zealand in May 1946.³⁷²

Upon his return, Iles transferred to the reserve force. In 1951, he returned to the RNZAF, working across No. 41 and No. 6 Squadrons. Iles finally retired from the air force in April

1959.³⁷³ Tom Wehi arrived in New Zealand in February 1946 and returned to civilian life.³⁷⁴

Mataira also returned to New Zealand in early 1946. During the 1950s, he remained on active reserve and completed annual training with the air force. He was finally discharged from the air force in 1957.³⁷⁵ For some airmen, returning to New Zealand meant putting military service behind them, while for others, it meant the start of a new career in the reserve force or returning to the regular force.

Whether or not the service of these airmen was recognised adequately after the war, their contributions and sacrifices remained great. To have volunteered for military service in a distant land at a young age was a significant feat for many young Māori men who only dreamed of embarking on an overseas adventure. The return of these airmen was never guaranteed, and for four of the airmen, death cut short their promising careers and lives. Nevertheless, Māori had contributed significantly to the New Zealand war effort. The war gave Māori a new place in society, presented new opportunities and opened new avenues for healing old grievances. The path to joining the air force was long and arduous; many never reached the cockpits, turrets and navigator's aircraft tables. Nevertheless, a small group of Māori airmen did reach an operational squadron, and their contributions were significant. They won the respect of other airmen, all while carrying the mana of their people back home. Apirana Ngata, a fierce supporter of Māori wartime service, stated:

³⁷² Edward Maxwell Spooner, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

³⁷³ Roy George Tawa Iles, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

³⁷⁴ Tamaterangi Wehi, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

³⁷⁵ Te Rahu Calvin Mataira, Air Force Record Card, NZDF Personnel Archives and Medals.

We are of one house, and if our Pākehā brothers fall, we fall with them. How can we ever hold up our heads, when the struggle is over, to the question, “Where were you when New Zealand was at war?”³⁷⁶

³⁷⁶ "Ngā pakanga ki tāwāhi – Māori and overseas wars - Second World War: the Māori war effort," Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, accessed February 25, 2025, <https://teara.govt.nz/en/nga-pakanga-ki-tawahi-maori-and-overseas-wars/page-4#2>.

Conclusion

For 75 Sqn's cohort of Māori airmen, the journey to an operational squadron was lengthy. The training lasted longer than their counterparts who had joined the 28th (Māori) Battalion. This is suggestive of an immense determination and academic ability amongst the Māori airmen. At every stage, their service was voluntary. Paraire Paikea and Sir Apirana Ngata spearheaded a campaign encouraging Māori to contribute to the war effort. For many, this resulted in service on the home front or service with the 28th (Māori) Battalion. While Paikea and Ngata focused on filling the battalion ranks, a smaller group of Māori chose to serve with the air force. The air force was a new branch of the military that enticed many young men at the outbreak of the Second World War. Tales and lore from the air service in the First World War remained etched in the minds of many. The attraction of flight and new technology, combined with positive recruitment strategies by the Air Department, saw the RNZAF ranks quickly swell with young men, including Māori.

The Māori airmen who flew with 75 Sqn came from throughout the North Island, with the exception of Iwikau Te Aika, who was from Tuahiwi, Canterbury. They hailed from various iwi, particularly in Northland, the Bay of Plenty and Hawke's Bay. Their prewar occupations varied and included farmers and farmhands, teachers, greenkeepers, civil servants, freezing workers, salesmen, students, and labourers. To have joined the air force ranks required a standard of education with success in subjects like mathematics. Amongst the ranks of airmen were graduates of Te Aute College, a Māori school in Hawke's Bay. The airmen dedicated many hours to the matriculation exams required to join the RNZAF, and their discipline and aptitude followed them through their air force training.

Their training began as soon as they enlisted. Departing for any of the initial training wings around New Zealand, they developed elementary survival skills, weapons use and

physical fitness. For those who mustered as pilots, much of their flying training occurred in Christchurch. For all other trades, the lengthy journey to Canada began almost as soon as initial training in New Zealand finished. The proximity of Canada to frontline squadrons in the United Kingdom allowed the airmen to train in friendly skies with the ability to quickly transfer to a squadron at the end of their training. For many Māori airmen, Canada was an exciting opportunity to see the world, train and contribute to the war effort. Training took the airmen to various parts of Canada before they headed east to prepare for departure to the European theatre. In the United Kingdom, the wait was often not over, and some airmen spent several months in reception centres waiting for a posting to an operational training unit.

The operational training units were where aircrews were born. The New Zealand airmen, 18,000 kilometres from home, either formed crews comprising men from home or searched the units for airmen from Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom. Some crews contained up to two Māori airmen. Wherever a Māori airman found himself, he was a valued aircrew member. They carried a strong sense of duty, mana and pride in being Māori with them. This often earned them the respect of their squadron comrades and crew captains. Squadron aircrews were required to work closely with each other, and strong bonds formed amongst crews. Flying with Bomber Command was dangerous, and a crew was never guaranteed to return to base from their sortie. Four of the squadron's Māori airmen became statistics in Bomber Command's high crew losses throughout the war. Some 1,100 airmen died while serving with 75 Sqn. Despite the extensive training giving the airmen the best chance of operational success and survival, flying over hostile territory night after night increased their chances of not returning from sorties.

Those who completed tours with 75 Sqn were quickly replaced with more Māori airmen. The squadron had Māori present from June 1942 to the war's end. Flying was often a daily task for the crews, either laying sea mines or bombing German cities, industry and other

strategic targets. Though Bomber Command did not win the war on its own, it played a vitally important role in dampening the German war effort, particularly in the dying months of the war. Māori airmen were present with 75 Sqn at some of the war's most critical stages, including D-Day and during the Allied advance through Europe. When the war ended, some airmen remained with the squadron to complete humanitarian aid and sorties to return prisoners of war and refugees. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly how many New Zealanders served with the squadron throughout the war. While 75 Sqn was a New Zealand squadron, it did contain airmen of various other nationalities. Seventy-five Sqn's airmen were among the 6,000 New Zealanders who served with squadrons throughout Bomber Command. When the squadron was disbanded in 1945, many airmen had already returned to New Zealand or were awaiting repatriation.

The return to New Zealand for a number of the Māori airmen was not easy. Some wished to stay in the United Kingdom to continue flying, while others returned home scarred by the brutality of war. Most chose not to speak about the war, while some told small stories of their time in the United Kingdom to their children and grandchildren long after the war had concluded. Repatriation and reintegration policies did not favour Māori returned servicemen. These unevenly-applied schemes often left Māori out of post-war Government contributions to aid their reintegration into civilian life. In such a way, this devalued the recognition of the Māori contribution to the Second World War. Paikea and Ngata had seen the war as a way to raise the profile of Māori and bring them closer to Pākehā. While the airmen had become close in aircrews overseas, it would take some time before the dreams of the two politicians were finally realised. Recognition of Second World War Māori service remains an important issue to address.

There is now an opportunity to further explore the role of Māori airmen in the Second World War. This has been an ill-explored area of New Zealand's Second World War History.

Māori served with distinction across various other RAF and RNZAF squadrons and in the European and Pacific theatres. There remains a significant body of work to be done to explore their journeys, contributions and experiences to other squadrons during the Second World War. It is difficult to attribute Māori ancestry to airmen based on name, but a proper exploration of logbooks, memoirs, engagement with descendants and other methods used in this work can be used to determine the Māori airmen who served with any given squadron. Further work around these airmen's contributions to the Second World War will broaden the general historical understanding of New Zealand's role between 1939 and 1945. This will also aid in bringing these men to light and adequately recognising their distinguished service throughout the Second World War and beyond.

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