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THE NEW ZEALAND SOLDIER IN WORLD WAR II:

MYTH AND REALITY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>	
ABSTRACT	ii	
ABBREVIATIONS	vii	
PREFACE	ix	
CHAPTER 1	INTRODUCTION	1
	The Myth of the New Zealand Soldier	3
	The Literature	12
	Military History	16
CHAPTER 2	PRELUDE TO BATTLE	18
	Enlistment	24
	Composition of 2NZEF	28
	Training	38
CHAPTER 3	THE FIRST ACTION: PLATAMON AND PINIOS GORGE	51
CHAPTER 4	LEADERSHIP: MALEME	68
	The Maleme Sector	74
	The Attack	77
CHAPTER 5	THE BAYONET: GALATAS	91
CHAPTER 6	THE QUICK ATTACK: PT. 175	104
CHAPTER 7	THE KILLING INSTINCT: MINQAR QAIM	124
CHAPTER 8	TAKROUNA	142
CHAPTER 9	CONCLUSION	160
APPENDICES		170
BIBLIOGRAPHY		177

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

	<u>Page</u>
<u>Figures</u>	
1.	Syllabus of Training for 20 Battalion 42
2.	Greece 52
3.	21 Battalion's Positions Platamon 11-16 April 1941 55
4.	Pinios Gorge - Dispositions 17-18 April 1941 61
5.	Crete 69
6.	5 Brigade Dispositions 19 May 1941 69
7.	German Landings at Maleme 20 May 1941 75
8.	Maleme: 0130 hours 21 May 75
9.	Maleme Counterattack 21-22 May 87
10.	Galatas - Noon 25 May 1941 93
11.	Counterattack at Galatas 25 May 93 a
12.	The Bayonet Technique 100
13.	Sidi Rezegh 23 November 1941 108
14.	D Coy 25 Bn Attack on Pt.175 23 November 1941 113
15.	B Coy 25 Bn Attack on Pt.175 113
16.	A Coy 25 Bn: Operations 1100-1300 hours 113
17.	C & D Coys 25 Bn Overrun by Tanks: Afternoon 23 November 1941 117
18.	24 & 25 Bns: Late Afternoon 23 November 1941 117
19.	21 Panzer Div.'s Encirclement of NZ Div. at Minqar Qaim 27 June 1942 127
20.	Withdrawal of NZ Div. from Minqar Qaim on the Night 27/28 June 127
21.	The Withdrawal of 4 N.Z. Infantry Brigade at Minqar Qaim, June 27/28, 1942 132
22.	Plan Vulcan Issued 12 April 1943 144
23.	Takrouna 147
24.	NZ Div. Attack on Takrouna 153
<u>Tables</u>	
I.	Regular Officers, NCOs, and Other Ranks in the First Three Echelons 29
II.	Rank Distribution of Staff Corps Officers in 2NZEF 30
III.	Occupational Status Ranking for Officers of First Three Echelons of 2NZEF 32.

Tables (Contd.)

Page

IV.	Occupational Status Ranking for Officers of First Three Echelons of 2NZEAF (totals)	33
V.	Rank Structure of Selected Occupations of Personnel from the First Three Echelons	34
VI.	Occupational Groupings for Commissions 2 Division 1941-5	37

## ABBREVIATIONS

### A. Text Abbreviations

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

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

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

#### B. Footnote Abbreviations

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

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

PREFACE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ACT ONE : 19

O thou, that sendest out the man  
To rule by land and sea,  
Strong mother of a Lion-line,  
Be proud of those strong sons of thine  
Who wrenched their rights from thee,

Lord Tennyson 'England and America  
in 1782'

The 1920s is the only decade this century that New Zealand troops have not been involved in a military conflict. New Zealanders have always been quick to respond to any potential military situation and there has rarely been a shortage of men willing to serve overseas. Jim Henderson<sup>1</sup> aptly describes this New Zealand trait:

My poor little Enzed, exporting frozen  
meat in peace, live meat in war,

But New Zealand attitudes to war, as Mike Pugh<sup>2</sup> points out, have not been muted by exposure to atrocities as have many nations. New Zealand has not had its towns 'reduced to rubble, its earth scorched, its women and children turned into refugees'. Allied to this partial image of war is a belief in the outstanding quality of the New Zealander as a soldier. This reputation has developed and grown throughout the wars of this century - in South Africa, World War I, World War II, Korea, Malaya and Malaysia, and Vietnam. It is not surprising, therefore, that New Zealanders have the reputation for 'being not only good at war but half in love with it'.<sup>3</sup>

The New Zealand people are fiercely proud of the accomplishments of their soldiers. The New Zealand heart glows with an insular pride when laudatory comments are made about the deeds of the New Zealand soldier. Propaganda and public opinion during the wars, fuelled by the return home

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Henderson, letter to Sir Stephen Weir, 27 April 1968, J. Henderson Papers, MS 1240, ATL.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Pugh, Introduction to 'Rebuff and Recovery', unpublished manuscript, 1978, p.1.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

of the troops and the romanticism that the passing of years inevitably brings, has created much of the reputation. The reputation is fostered by many groups in society, including the Returned Servicemen's Association, and perhaps by society as a whole. Every society likes to hear praise of its members and is reluctant to accept criticism. Adverse comments on the New Zealand soldier's reputation are howled down with a vociferous anger.<sup>4</sup>

This thesis will examine the validity of the reputation of the New Zealand soldier in World War II. It will discuss whether the personnel of 2NZEF were able to live up to the reputation of 1NZEF, and deserving of their own reputation gained throughout the war and after it. It is impossible for any individual, within the time allowed for this thesis, to be fully cognisant with all campaigns fought by the Division. It is for this reason that this work will not move beyond the end of the North African campaign in May 1943, and will be restricted to six case studies within that period. Clearly this limits discussion to selected aspects of the New Zealanders' activity. Perhaps the only writers capable of writing in depth on this subject and able to draw from the whole sphere of the New Zealanders' experience are the surviving Official Historians. Their knowledge was accumulated over a period exceeding ten years.

There is another reason for not including the Italian campaign in this study. Until the end of the North African campaign the New Zealand Division retained much of the identity of the Division that went to war in March 1941. At the end of the North African conflict this identity was diluted by casualties, furloughs, and the replacement of long service troops. This approach does make it possible to see the New Zealanders evolve from their first conflict in Greece to a peak in the Enfidaville battle. This will suffice for the purpose of this study but a larger work could not ignore the Italian campaign and its very different type of warfare.

It will be argued that in at least one respect the New Zealand soldiers' reputation was a myth. In the early years of the War the New Zealanders laboured to live up to their reputation. This was principally the result of inexperience and inadequate preparations. As experience increased and the lessons of war were absorbed, the competence

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<sup>4</sup> A typical example of this response can be found in the newspapers of February 1978. An overseas journalist disclosed information from a previously secret document which was critical of the behaviour of New Zealand troops in Aden during World War II.

of the soldier and the Division as a whole, grew. The New Zealanders were only gradually to fulfill the promise of the country's fighting tradition.

It has proved impossible to write of the New Zealand soldier at the lowest level. It is possible to discuss combat motivation and attitudes to war of the individual but in the tactical sense the soldier rarely controls his own destiny. The reputation gained by soldiers is often, in reality, in direct relation to the experience and ability of the battle leaders at various levels. Therefore this work must inevitably revolve around the actions of the leaders. These men made the decisions and gave the orders that allowed the private soldier only a limited control over his fate.

As mentioned above six case studies will be used taking the soldier through his first action on Greece, through Crete, and thence to the desert battles. The underlying theme that connects the case studies is the demonstration of the evolution of the New Zealand soldier. The case studies allow us to examine the soldier's attitude to war, his attitude to death and killing, his proficiency with the bayonet, and the reputation of the New Zealander commanders on Crete.

#### The Myth of the New Zealand Soldier

The New Zealand soldier venturing forth to battle in 1941 in defence of his country and the Empire had a dazzling military tradition behind him. It was this tradition or 'myth' that he was expected to live up to. 'Myth' in this context does not mean 'lie' or 'distorted exaggeration as to be almost totally untrue'. An 'historical myth' is an idea or belief about the past which, whether based on fact or not, has become part of a tradition and because of its legendary qualities serves the development of a people's self-awareness.

The South African Wars of 1899-1902 revived and continued a New Zealand military tradition that had been established in the New Zealand Wars. Over six and a half thousand New Zealanders, seething with a patriotism that was 'inflammable as gunpowder' volunteered for service in South Africa. The New Zealand Mounted Rifles won high praise for their 'excellent conduct and bearing', and their 'exceptional bravery'.

The Times History of the War in South Africa considered that the New Zealanders 'after they had a little experience...were, by general consent, regarded on average the best mounted troops in South Africa.' The War Record of the 1st Battalion of the Derbyshire Regiment described the 5th Contingent as 'a finer looking and as useful a body of men as any in the field.' Yet, as was to happen many times in later years, the most eloquent and laudable praise was to come from New Zealanders themselves. As Hall remarked, 'Their motive was not to glorify themselves, but by doing their duty that is what they have done.'<sup>5</sup>

Historians may be mystified by the omission of mutiny, gross insubordination, and desertion prevalent in the 6th and later contingents. In the enthusiasm to acclaim the deeds of the troops in South Africa the potential significance of the comments of Colonel R.H. Davies, CO of the 7th Contingent and later New Zealand Column Commander, were overlooked. He considered the troops had done well, but there was still a lesson to be learnt from South Africa. Against well armed, well disciplined, and well trained troops, the New Zealanders would not have been able to acquit themselves with distinction.<sup>6</sup>

The legend of the New Zealand soldier reached a new level on the Gallipoli battlefield. W.P. Morrell considered it a watershed in New Zealand's history - an awakening of a new nationalism: 'They fought for the Empire, but also for New Zealand.' The Australian World War I Official Historian, Dr C.E.W. Bean, also believed in the mysticism of that first ANZAC Day. On 25 April 1915, 'the consciousness of Australian nationhood was born.'<sup>7</sup> The following passage illustrates the Australasian attitude to Gallipoli. It provided the

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<sup>5</sup> See Keith Sinclair, A History of New Zealand, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1969, p.219; Glen St.J. Barclay, The Empire is Marching, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1976, p.39; D.O.W. Hall, The New Zealanders in South Africa, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1949, pp.88, 90.

<sup>6</sup> Colonel R.H. Davies, Lecture on Discipline, delivered to the Auckland Garrison Officers Club, 1 September 1903, Government Printer, Wellington, 1904, Overton Papers, QEIIAMM.

<sup>7</sup> See W.P. Morrell, New Zealand, Benn, London, 1935, p.112; Geoffrey Serle, 'The Digger Tradition and Australian Nationalism', Meanjin Quarterly, Vol.24, No.2, 1965, p.149.

occasion and the opportunity for our New Zealand soldiers, together with their gallant comrades, the Australians, to perform those feats of daring, resolution, and endurance that gained them the unforgettable joint title of the 'Anzacs' and caused them to be enrolled...as 'the bravest of the brave.' The world rang with the name of those southern soldiers and their brilliant deeds in the fierce warfare on Gallipoli...There was no need for Australians and New Zealanders to extol the deeds of their countrymen; the whole of Europe - nay the whole world...was acclaiming their brilliant deeds.<sup>8</sup>

Stirring words indeed! But is it an accurate picture of the significance of Gallipoli? Freyberg was to say later that the New Zealanders went into battle on the Gallipoli beaches fervently praying that 'they would measure up in battle and be a credit to their country.'<sup>9</sup> There can be no denying the importance of Gallipoli in New Zealand's history, and there is little that can detract from the soldierly valour of the New Zealanders. However Gallipoli was a strategic fiasco and a tactical disaster, and a lack of tactical appreciation by New Zealand Commanders may have been the vital factor in the failure of the attack on Chunuk Bair.<sup>10</sup> Gallipoli is considered an ANZAC foray, yet the Dominions did not provide the largest component of the expedition nor suffered the heaviest casualties. ANZAC casualties were 32,000, French 47,000 and British 184,000.<sup>11</sup>

After Gallipoli the New Zealand force was reorganised as a Mounted Brigade for Palestine and a Division for France. The actions of the New Zealanders from mid-1916 to March 1918 do not figure greatly in the reputation of the New Zealand soldier. We know of the deeds on the Somme and at Passchendaele but it seems almost as if the New Zealanders were swallowed up in the vast morass that was Flanders. Possibly the initial excitement of having troops involved in a major battle could not easily be repeated, or perhaps it was hard to distinguish New Zealand troops on the

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<sup>8</sup> Review, March 1942, p.8.

<sup>9</sup> Lord Freyberg, Foreword to J.F. Cody, 21 Battalion, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1953.

<sup>10</sup> It seems likely that an error of judgement by Lt.Col. Malone - Wellington Regiment - when he dug in on the wrong side of the ridge at Chunuk Bair caused that Regiment to suffer excessive casualties and eliminate any chance of success. C.J. Pugsley, Interview with author, 3 July 1979.

<sup>11</sup> Barclay, The Empire..., p.66.

Western front. One commentator writing of this period considered that many of the New Zealanders' 'gallant deeds went unrecorded or were attributed to their great neighbours', the Australians.<sup>12</sup>

By contrast, in the heady days of March 1918 to the end of the War, the New Zealand Division figured prominently in the war credits, culminating in the capture of Le Quesnoy in October. Sir G.M. Harper, GOC IV Corps, told the New Zealanders that their record in this period was unsurpassed. The Adjutant-General to the French Cabinet echoed Harper's words: 'Its exploits have not been equalled and its reputation was such that, on the arrival of the Division during the most critical days of March, 1918, the flight of the inhabitants immediately ceased.'<sup>13</sup> The reputation the New Zealanders had acquired in World War I is typified by a German appreciation of the New Zealand Division:

A particularly good assault Division. Its characteristic is a very strongly developed individual self-confidence typical of the Colonial Englishman, and a specifically pronounced hatred of Germans. The Division prides itself on taking few prisoners.<sup>14</sup>

The British were quick to offer all her Imperial allies similar praise, and this was received with the same modesty displayed by the New Zealanders. The Canadians and the Australians had earlier vied to suppress the Boers, and one British general remarked on the Canadians' 'steadiness under fire, gallantry in the field, and their uniform good conduct in camp.' It was this last feature that was much appreciated by the British who were, however, appalled by the Australians' attitude to discipline - one Brigadier described the Victorian Mounted Infantry as 'white-livered curs' and a 'fat dammed lot of wasters'.<sup>15</sup> Again in World War I the Canadians were to merit the reputation as the most formidable Imperial troops. This praise was primarily from British generals for whom it seemed apology enough for using them as 'cannonfodder'. On the first day of the Somme the Newfoundland Battalion suffered 684

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<sup>12</sup> John Vader, Anzac, New English Library, London, 1971, p.33.

<sup>13</sup> Lecture by F.H. Blakewell, 'The Value of Tradition', reported in The Dominion, 5 July 1922, Puttick Papers, Series 8, No.3.

<sup>14</sup> Puttick Papers, Series 2, No.11.

<sup>15</sup> Barclay, The Empire..., pp.39-40.

casualties out of 800 men.<sup>16</sup> The Australians were also praised for their high fighting qualities, but the discipline problems of the South African War seemed to persist. The Australian desertion rate was four times as high as any other unit and convictions for AWOL were twelve times as high. The Australian Government refused to allow any of their troops to be executed, despite Haig's pleas to be able to shoot a few.<sup>17</sup> Yet Sir Arthur Conan Doyle considered 'these Australians to be great soldiers who stood on a place of their own in the Imperial forces'. But this praise must be placed alongside his reference to the New Zealanders as the 'equal of any Division in France'.<sup>18</sup> Comparisons with the Australians were numerous, but none so quaint as that proffered by Sir Philip Gibbs (the journalist) who suggested the Australians reminded him of 'gipsy fellows' whereas the New Zealanders had 'rosy cheeks like the English boys of Kent'.<sup>19</sup>

The tradition of the New Zealand soldier was firmly established by the outbreak of World War II. He was an amateur, a part-time soldier, who in time of war would serve with the ability of a well-trained professional soldier. He was a natural warrior who would meet the challenge of combat with a courage and resourcefulness that characterised his every challenge in life. New Zealanders were proud of their military reputation which had been earned with the 'blood of their countrymen'. It made little difference to public opinion that the other Dominions considered themselves the best, and that 'mother' Britain sat aloof from the squabbles, though encouraging each to believe that she was superior to the others.

Rightly or wrongly the New Zealand soldier entered World War II with this reputation. Freyberg made sure that every man knew of the deeds of 1NZEF:

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<sup>16</sup> Martin Middlebrook, The First Day on the Somme, Penguin Press, London, 1971, p.330.

<sup>17</sup> In March 1918, 9 Australians per 1000 troops were AWOL compared with the British rate of 1/1000, and the New Zealanders and Canadians 2/1000. Barclay, The Empire..., p.68.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> John Laffin, Anzac at War, Abelard-Schumer, London, 1965, p.19.

You should remember that your fathers of the First New Zealand Expeditionary Force defeated the Germans during the last war with the reputation of being one of, if not the best fighting formations in our Empire. It excelled in war craft.<sup>20</sup>

New Zealanders then, and today, consider the initial combat experiences of 2NZEF in Greece and Crete simply confirmed what an outstanding soldier he was. At the time, Churchill, ever one to gauge the right tone in order to strike a resonant chord, cabled Freyberg on the eve of the battle for Crete:

Everyone in Britain has watched with gratitude and admiration the grand fighting deeds of the New Zealand Division upon the ever famous battle fields of Greece,...Throughout the whole Empire and English speaking world the name of New Zealand is saluted.<sup>21</sup>

Although Crete was lost, the experience was to make the island immortal in the legend of the New Zealand soldier. At home in New Zealand, propaganda created an impression of a great triumph in the face of adversity, and this opinion was fostered among the troops by senior officers. These effects, together with the passing of time, has allowed Crete to rank with Gallipoli as a battle honour. Brigadier J. Hargest told his men after the battle that once again they had shown that confronted on the ground the enemy was not a 'patch on the New Zealander as a fighting animal'.<sup>22</sup> The attitude to Crete is epitomised in a review of the Official History. Major General Keith Stewart said that Crete was a 'magnificent story of the spirit and endurance of the New Zealand soldier', which 'exploded the myth of the invincible German Army.' 'Very few New Zealanders,' wrote Stewart, 'left Crete with any other feeling than that given equal equipment they were more than a match for any Germans.'<sup>23</sup>

But confidence probably reached its peak in North Africa. One respondent to my questionnaire, when asked his opinion of other Allied

<sup>20</sup> Major General R.C. Freyberg, 'GOC Report to the New Zealand Government on Greece', FP, No.8.

<sup>21</sup> Glen St. Barclay, Their Finest Hour, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1977, p.123.

<sup>22</sup> Brigadier J. Hargest, Lecture, Maadi, 23 July 1941, IP, Folder 45.

<sup>23</sup> Review, September 1953, pp.8-9.

troops there, simply replied, 'We men of 2NZEF were prone to think we were the best.'<sup>24</sup> John Mulgan writing of the New Zealanders in the desert remarked that they were 'quiet and aloof and self-contained. They had confidence in themselves, such as New Zealanders rarely have in themselves, knowing themselves as good as the best the world could bring against them'.<sup>25</sup> This self confidence is demonstrated by Brigadier H.K. Kippenberger's Brigade Instruction issued after the Ruweisat battles in July 1942. He criticised the 'unseemly boasting' and the disparaging comments of the South Africans, Indians, British and the Armoured formations. He instructed the troops to 'LEAVE IT TO OTHERS TO PRAISE US. Everyone in Egypt is willing to give us full credit and we have no need to boast.'<sup>26</sup>

The reputation of the New Zealander in World War II has been strengthened by praise from prominent commanders associated with the Division, both during the war and after it. Lieutenant General Horrocks, GOC 10 Corps, considered that the 'New Zealand Division was unquestionably the most experienced and formidable fighting machine in the 8th Army.' General Oliver Leese, GOC 8th Army in Italy, referred to the New Zealand Division as 'Freyberg's incredibly efficient Division.' Yet it was Churchill who was able to say what most New Zealanders wanted to hear: 'Far away in your homes at the other side of the world all hearts are swelling with pride in the deeds of the New Zealand Division.'<sup>27</sup>

Much of the reputation of the New Zealand soldier has stemmed from the prestige of its commander. He epitomised the ideal of the New Zealand soldier and was, himself, a legendary figure. One author has described him as being 'one of a select band of men who are incapable of fear', Who's Who in World War II (1978) called him a soldier of 'phenomenal personal bravery', and maintained that he instilled his own fearlessness

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24 MQ, Question 17.

25 John Mulgan, Report on Experience, Oxford University Press, London, 1947, pp.14-15.

26 H.K. Kippenberger, Infantry Brigadier, Oxford University Press, London, 1949, pp.196-7.

27 See Brian Horrocks, A Full Life, Leo Cooper, London, 1974, p.162; Review, January 1948, p.3; Churchill, February 1943, DA 404.

into his men,<sup>28</sup> Lieutenant General Lord Freyberg was intensely proud of his troops and was lavish in his praise of them. He told his men in July 1942 that they would have 'an honoured place in the history of our country for the next one hundred years'. As he began his term as Governor-General he told the nation that it was the early days of the war when 'we were fighting without equipment and with our backs to the wall of which we are most proud...which showed the New Zealand fighting soldier at his best and demonstrated...that the sons were worthy successors to their fathers'. He concluded by saying that 'although brilliant and great are the New Zealanders' fighting qualities of courage in battle, it is the qualities of the mind, moral qualities, that I most admire in them'.<sup>29</sup>

The abilities of the Maori fighting man rank with any unit in the war. New Zealanders have always been proud of the Maori warrior. The Maori reputation, for Pakehas at least, had its infancy in the New Zealand Wars where the British soldier found the Maori 'the grandest native enemy that ever had been encountered'.<sup>30</sup> The Maori was prevented from fighting in the racially pure South African War and it was only in the latter stages of World War I that he was allowed to participate in combat. The legend of the Maori warrior reached its peak in World War II. References to 42nd St., Minqar Qaim, Tebaga Gap, Takrouna, Ngarimu, and Manahi, are synonymous with the deeds of the Maori Battalion. Their virtues are extolled in popular history such as H.G. Dyer's Ma te Reinga The Way of the Meinga: The Way of the Maori Soldier (n.d.). There are a number of diverse views on the Maori soldier, and the following illustrates one popular image of their role in the war:

Then the last Maoris came along with the Germans hard on their heels. Not a shadow of fear showed on their smiling copper faces. As they passed my tank they winked and put up their thumbs. Some fifty yards behind the rest came two Maoris carrying a pot of stew across a rifle.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See John Hetherington, Airborne Invasion, Oswald-Sealy, Auckland, 1944, p.23; David Mason, Who's Who in World War II, as reported in the Manawatu Evening Standard, 10 August 1978, p.2.

<sup>29</sup> Freyberg, Lecture 12 July 1942, DA 404; The Dominion, 30 March 1946, p.7, DA 404.

<sup>30</sup> Keith Sinclair, 'Why are Race Relations in New Zealand better than those in South Africa, South Australia, or South Dakota.' The New Zealand Journal of History, Vol.5, No.2, p.124.

<sup>31</sup> Roy Farran, Winged Dagger, quoted by Review, August 1948, p.10.

The Maori myth will not be considered separately in this thesis but will be considered as part of the general myth of the New Zealand soldier in World War II.

Romanticism is one of the main factors that perpetuates the myth. Participants look back with fond memories when the times seem to be better and the deeds greater. Only a short time after the war respondents to Kippenberger's questionnaire already demonstrated this inclination:

Undoubtedly war is the greatest experience that falls to the lot of the average man.

I think the most exhilarating day of my life was 20 May, 1941 - the day the parachutists first landed on Crete,

Some of the fullest examples of friendship, devotion to duty and acts of sacrifice are seen on the battlefield and those who have come through a war are in most cases richer for the experience.<sup>32</sup>

Thirty years later respondents to my questionnaire expressed similar sentiments, though with one exception::

If I could be assured they would return safe and sound I would love my sons to enjoy the same experience as I was privileged to enjoy.

The great legacy from the years of battle experience is the spirit of comradeship which endures for many years.

Some types would tell you that war gave them the best years of our lives. Quite frequently many in this latter category have not adapted back to civvy st.<sup>33</sup>

Was the 'son' able to live up to the mantle of his 'father'? The myth would have us believe so. From the moment of his first combat the New Zealand soldier is reputed to have taken over from those fine New Zealand soldiers of previous generations. Yet the inexperienced New Zealander did flounder initially, possibly when his reputation was at its highest, but as he learnt from his mistakes, and gained in experience, so he gained in battle stature.

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<sup>32</sup> KQ, KP, NO. 38.

<sup>33</sup> MQ.

### The Literature

Much of the myth is an oral one, passed over a few beers or at a reunion. As they are repeated, the tales and the reputation seem to become larger. Written sources have also played a significant role and there is a wide range of literature on the New Zealand soldier at war and on war itself. Some of it has created and perpetuated the myth, though there have been occasional attempts to place the New Zealanders' contribution and reputation in a more realistic perspective.

The Official Histories provide the most comprehensive details of New Zealand in World War II. They will number seventy-two when complete, including twenty-one Campaign and Service volumes, three volumes in the 'People at War' series, twenty-one Unit Histories, twenty-four 'Episodes and Studies', and three miscellaneous volumes published by the Historical Publications Branch.<sup>34</sup>

In an attempt to avoid the chaotic situation at the end of World War I an early effort was made to preserve the archives of war with the appointment of an archivist in early 1941, and the creation of an Archives Section in 1942. The War History Branch was set up in April 1945 under E.H. McCormick who had been the Chief Archivist for 2NZEF. McCormick was sent to Australia to study Dr Bean's revolutionary World War I Official History project. Bean's histories were subject to no editorial interference and were detailed, though very readable, and were remarkably frank. In June 1946, Major General Sir Howard Kippenberger was appointed Editor-in-Chief to coordinate the whole project. He retained this position until his death in 1957, when his deputy Brigadier M.C. Fairbrother replaced him.<sup>35</sup> For its modest contribution in manpower the country's number of Official Histories is large and was greeted with some surprise by other nations. Kippenberger wrote of the first meeting of the Allied Editors-in-Chief:

The Canadian said he was amused at the idea of a volume being devoted to one Division for one campaign whereupon Latham interjected 'But what a Division!'<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> There remains one volume to be published; Nan Taylor, 'A Social History of New Zealand 1939-45', in the 'People at War' series. It will be published in 1979-80, and is the only volume to be written by a woman though Judith Hornabrook wrote much of the Narrative for Italy. Wanganui Chronicle, 21 April 1979, p.6.

<sup>35</sup> Ronald Walker, 'The New Zealand Second World War History Project', Military Affairs, Vol.33, No.3, December 1969, pp.173-81.

<sup>36</sup> H.K. Kippenberger, letter to W.G. McClymont, 9 March 1948, WAI, Series 3, No.16b

The War History Branch prepared exceptionally detailed campaign narratives which were then passed on to key senior figures to make commentaries. These were passed on to contract authors who wrote the published work. Dan Davin, for example, wrote most of Crete in the United Kingdom though he did make one visit to New Zealand.

In general the histories are readable and accurate, but it must be remembered that they were written by New Zealanders about other New Zealanders. They have avoided the remarkable feat of the compilers of the British Official History of the First World War who managed to write 'an exhaustive account of one of the world's greatest tragedies without the display of any emotion at all.'<sup>37</sup> Indeed New Zealand campaign histories of World War II are most professional. They were not aimed at a select audience as was the case with the Unit histories.

The Unit histories, understandably, have a distinctly partisan flavour and vary markedly in quality. Ronald Walker, a member of Kippenberger's staff, said that too many of the Unit Historians' drafts 'contained gaps in the sequence of events and unsupported assumptions and showed far too much reliance on the picture of war that has been built up out of censorship, propaganda, and war correspondents' highly coloured stories.' The authors of these more personalised accounts encountered a special difficulty for the 'persons around whom the stories would be built, from privates to generals, departmental officers to politicians, were fellow countrymen of a small intimate country and no one wanted them criticised, even indirectly.'<sup>38</sup> Although this problem arose more acutely in the unit histories it was also a problem for the historian preparing a narrative for a campaign. After Major General L.M. Inglis had written to W.E. Murphy on 'a little bit of murder' by 19 Battalion at Ed Duda in November 1941, the latter replied:

In preparing a history for publication discretion naturally plays some part and it is unlikely we should want to print such details; but I think it is important for the historian to know.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> John Keegan, The Face of Battle, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1978, p.29.

<sup>38</sup> Walker, p.177.

<sup>39</sup> W.E. Murphy, letter to L.M. Inglis, 3 February 1955, WAI, Series 11, No.4.

Thus the major problem facing the war historians was in writing soon after the War of people and events they were closely acquainted with,

There can be little doubt that the whole project was coloured by the Editor-in-Chief's controlling concern to assess the events in light of New Zealand's contribution to the war effort.<sup>40</sup> Kippenberger set the pattern and theme for the Official Histories and this inevitably brought him into conflict with some of his authors. R.M. Burdon refused at one stage to allow 24 Battalion to be published under his name because of Kippenberger's editorial interference and suggested it not be published at all or anonymously.<sup>41</sup> The Official Histories did succeed in their task of describing the New Zealand war effort and they provide a valuable launching pad for further research.

The personal memoirs derived from World War II are extensive and diverse. They can be useful as 'source material and individual perspectives, but tend to display an anxiety on the part of the authors to establish, occasionally to destroy, favourable reputations'.<sup>42</sup> The most useful is H.K. Kippenberger's Infantry Brigadier (1949) which is a frank and realistic account of his role with 20 Battalion and 5 Brigade. Others such as Keith Elliot's From Cowshed to Dogcollar (1967) are valuable but a large number, such as Kiwi Saga (1943) by Martyn Uren, provide nothing but a romantic, inaccurate, and illusory view of the New Zealand soldier. One memoir, though only indirectly related to the New Zealanders, is Report on Experience (1947) by John Mulgan. Mulgan combined his rich literary skills with an honesty which makes the book an important contribution to military literature.

Biographies are in the main a poor source. Charles Upham is eulogised by Sandford in The Mark of the Lion (1964) to such an extent he surely must have been embarrassed by it. The other two main World War II biographies are of the GOC, Freyberg.<sup>43</sup> Both are very sympathetic

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40 Pugh, p.3.

41 H.K. Kippenberger, letter to J.L. Scoullar. 21 January 1954, WAI, Series 11, No. 7.

42 Pugh, p.3.

43 Peter Singleton-Gates, General Lord Freyberg, Michael Joseph, London, 1963; W.G. Stevens, Freyberg VC The Man 1939-1945, A.H. & A.W. Reed, Wellington, 1965.

to the Commander, particularly that by Singleton-Gates. Stevens does provide some interesting comments on Freyberg's initial problems with his subordinates, but neither book provides what the literature of New Zealand in World War II needs - a critical appraisal of Freyberg, the Divisional Commander,

Novels such as For the Rest of Our Lives (1947) by Dan Davin, or M.K. Joseph's A Soldier's Tale (1976) provide a valuable contrast to the non-fiction and take the reader closer to the battlefield than is otherwise usually possible. Fiction allows us to get close to the soldier's thoughts and actions. The other type of fiction, though many would argue that they are actually non-fiction, are the anecdotal books such as Jim Henderson's Soldier Country (1978). They are a welcome relief in the study of military history, but typify the stories that evolve from war which in time have become part of the myth.

Despite the involvement of New Zealanders in war the academic literature on the subject is minute. The study of military history has been regarded with suspicion in New Zealand, and this is only slowly being rectified. Waikato and Massey Universities have shown an interest in military history, and the work of P.S. O'Connor, Ian MacGibbon, Charlotte Carr-Gregg, and Laurie Barber is winning wider acceptance. The primary material is certainly available for historians to use.

The quantity of overseas published material on military history is voluminous. The most outstanding recent work is The Face of Battle (1978) by John Keegan. His 'analysis of the physical realities of war'<sup>44</sup> in studies of Agincourt, Waterloo, and the Somme, and, in particular, his introduction to, and discussion on, the future of battle, must surely rate as one of the most intellectually stimulating approaches to military history. The use of case studies in this thesis is largely modelled on Keegan's work.

The subject of combat motivation and stress has attracted a number of researchers. Military authorities have encouraged psychologists in these studies as they seek ways to make the soldier more efficient in

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<sup>44</sup> Pugh, p.3.

battle. One early study, published soon after the war, has been especially useful. S.L.A. Marshall's Men Against Fire (1947) examined a number of psychological problems associated with combat encountered by American troops in the Pacific and European theatres. It discussed initial combat, fear of killing, willingness to fight and associated topics. Marshall's book provided the basis for Kippenberger's Questionnaire which has been valuable to this thesis. Peter Watson's War on the Mind (1978) relates mainly to psychological warfare post-World War II, but gives an excellent general coverage of psychological warfare.

There are a number of general works on actions involving the New Zealand Division. Among the many books that proliferate on the North African battles is W.G. Jackson's The North African Campaign 1940-43 (1975) which is clear and displays a realistic analytical approach. There are few books specifically relating to the New Zealanders, and those that do are on Crete. The Struggle for Crete (1966) by Ian Stewart<sup>45</sup> is an extremely accurate and well-written account of that particular battle. Stewart had the advantage of being able to use much of the material collected by Davin for the Official History.

Although the literature relating to New Zealand's involvement in World War II appears vast, it soon becomes obvious that little of the published material is of any significant value to the historian. The result is that one is dependent on primary sources, the continued preservation of which is crucial to historians of our military past. In this respect Kippenberger and his staff have made an enormous start with the collection of material relating to New Zealand's involvement in World War II. But there is still much to be done. A large number of the soldiers of past wars are now past middle-age and there must be a danger of their military effects falling into the hands of a generation who might not appreciate their value to the nation's history.

### Military History

The writing of military history is not an easy task. Hindsight

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<sup>45</sup> Ronald Lewin, the author of a number of books on military history, in a letter to the author, 4 September 1978, considered that Stewart's was 'the most satisfactory account so far written'.

is probably the greatest pitfall. General Inglis warned the Official Historian of this very danger when commenting on the 'Crusader' battle:

I think history should be written to make evident the knowledge of the commanders when they did their planning, the circumstances in which the plans were made and the reasons that influenced the makers.<sup>46</sup>

The writer of military history must be careful to allow for the human factors in war and must not be too ready to criticise illogical actions, for war is not a logical process. He must not be concerned to fight battles over again, 'still less to fight them differently. His duty is to explain.'<sup>47</sup>

The academic military historian is always at risk of being criticised because he/she was not there or had not taken part in combat. But one can argue that it is harder for a participant to write of war. He has experienced the actual sensation of combat, but it is often that experience which limits his ability to write objectively and successfully on war. He/she is biased by friendship, comradeship, and a localised experience of action.

Over thirty years after the action that forms the subject of this thesis the time is ripe to try for a new perspective on the New Zealand soldier. The myths and war experience been handed down from the soldiers to their families and their friends. The myth is very much still intact. One can only admire these men who went to war and suffered horrors and degradation, and of those who were killed. But we must not allow this to distort the truth. War has played a part in the development of the New Zealand character and, if we are to fully understand ourselves, we must know the truth of our past.

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46 Major General L.M. Inglis, Comments on the Narrative of the Second Libyan Campaign, n.d., WAI, Series 11, No.4.

47 A.J.P. Taylor, New Statesman, 5 October 1961. Quoted by I. McD.G. Stewart, The Struggle for Crete, Oxford University Press, London, 1966, p.257.

CHAPTER 2 PRELUDE TO BATTLE

No other country expects to defend its territories with the veterans of the last war,

Major General P.J. Macksey<sup>1</sup>

The preparation of the New Zealand soldier for combat in April 1941 was, at the most optimistic, barely sufficient. This is evident from the weaknesses that surfaced in their early battles and the principal reason for this was the neglect of the military between the wars. The Army was virtually faced with recruiting a civilian army and training it to match professionals. From the day of mobilization it was a race against time to prepare the men of 2NZEF for combat. Major General K.L. Stewart,<sup>2</sup> in his introduction to the confidential booklet, 'Infantry in Battle', made this point succinctly:

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the Territorial Force was neither organised nor trained to fight as a Division. Fortunately the 2nd New Zealand Division did not go into action until April, 1941 - some nineteen months after the declaration of war. The period was barely sufficient to build up and train the 2NZEF.

Training only succeeded in introducing the soldier to army life, giving him the rudimentary needs of his trade, and let him learn by experience.

2NZEF was not as prepared as its predecessor, 1NZEF, to meet the challenge of war. It may only be conjecture but it appears that if 2NZEF had undergone an experience such as Gallipoli within seven months of mobilisation it would have disintegrated under the stress. The main

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<sup>1</sup> Major General P.J. Macksey, 'Report on the Military Forces of New Zealand', 22 May 1939, quoted by C.J. Pugsley, 'The Division - North Africa', 'Rebuff and Recovery', M.C. Pugh (ed.), unpublished manuscript, 1978, p.3.

<sup>2</sup> 'Infantry in Battle', Army General Staff, Army Headquarters, 1950, p.3. This manual was prepared from the Kippenberger Questionnaire.

difference between New Zealand's readiness for war in 1914, as opposed to 1939, was that the Staff Corps and Permanent Staff, who had played a significant role in preparing the Territorial Force for the Great War, was allowed to decline to a low ebb between the wars, in line with the retrenchment of the Territorial system,

The Staff Corps had been formed in 1910 to meet the administrative and training needs of the Territorial Force created under the Compulsory Military Training scheme. Prior to this there had only been twenty-six Regular officers in the New Zealand Army. The Staff Corps was about 100 strong, with sixty to seventy percent of its members having had South African experience. Most of the remainder had had experience in the British Army.<sup>3</sup> A number of senior NCOs were commissioned and they complemented the force with their training expertise. It was a group of experienced officers mostly in their mid-thirties. A Permanent Staff, consisting mainly of senior NCOs and having a strength of 205, was established to work with the Staff Corps. The result was that the sixteen Territorial Battalions were each provided with a Staff Corps adjutant, and a Permanent Staff RSM and RMQS,<sup>4</sup> as were the twelve Mounted Rifle Battalions.<sup>5</sup> The command of the Territorial units was left in the hands of Territorial soldiers, many of whom, like Major General Sir Andrew Russell, had had South African experience. The professionals had the responsibility of organizing the Battalions and supervising training

By the outbreak of war in 1914 the Territorial system had been functioning satisfactorily with a strength not far short of its ceiling of 30,000. The Volunteer system had provided a sound base, there having been 13,000 Volunteers in 1906.<sup>6</sup> Each of the four military districts - Auckland, Wellington, Canterbury and Otago - was asked to raise an infantry battalion of about 1000 strong, and a Mounted Rifle regiment about 550 strong. Each of the four infantry battalions within each district was told to provide a double company about 250 strong.

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<sup>3</sup> Much of this section relating to the Staff Corps and Permanent Staff is, unless otherwise stated, drawn from interviews with Major C.J. Pugsley on 22 April and 3 July 1979. Major Pugsley is preparing a history of the Staff Corps.

<sup>4</sup> Regimental Sergeant Major, and Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant,

<sup>5</sup> Gill, 'New Zealand Army Military History' unpublished, n.d. QEIIAMM, pp.76-77.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p.57.

Accordingly each Territorial Battalion commander was able to pick the best half of his men. There was a similar procedure with the Mounted Rifle Regiments. The key position in each battalion was filled by Staff Corps' officers and the Permanent Staff. Thirty-five members of the Staff Corps went overseas with the Expeditionary Force and the remaining eighty-five remained at home to fill the key training positions. Experienced Imperial officers filled both vital Expeditionary Force Headquarters and Brigade Headquarters' positions.

Even with this solid base the seven months before Gallipoli was only just adequate. The men fought well enough and the legend of the brilliant amateur New Zealand soldier was firmly cemented into history. But fighting ability is immaterial if men are not well administered, and it was in this latter area where the New Zealanders' weakpoints became evident, though they were no worse than the British. There was little concern for the troops' welfare and it was demonstrated how little had been learnt from the South African War. Hygiene standards and sanitation were appalling. The Division was only held together as a fighting force in the face of these problems because they had at their head, and in key positions, professional soldiers with a large amount of experience.

In 1939 the situation was very different. The Territorial system had declined to such an extent that in 1938 there were only 1500 to 2000 Territorials considered effective.<sup>7</sup> The Staff Corps was very much into its 'Second Eleven', numbering no more than seventy or eighty for much of the interwar period. The vital personnel who could have filled appointments with the outbreak of war were not there. They had become disillusioned with war and left soon after, or had been retired in the cutbacks of the early 1920s. The officers who could have provided 'new blood' to the Staff Corps throughout the interwar period - the officers graduating from Duntroon - were cut out between 1922 and 1930.

The officers who made up the Staff Corps were ones who, in a manner similar to Major General J. Duigan, CGS on the outbreak of war, had been forced through the system to reach high rank. The distinguished

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<sup>7</sup> Auckland Star, 23 March 1938; Scrapbook kept by Point Resolution, Home Command, QEIIAMM.

soldiers of World War I - the Victoria Cross winners - were kept on, L. Andrew and R. Judson had both been commissioned for their gallantry and retained positions in the Staff Corps because of the mana associated with this award. The other group in the Staff Corps comprised the competent young officers who thought the Army would continue along pre-World War I lines and who, when it did not, decided to stay because they liked the life. Consequently the group was largely over the age of forty. The Artillery fared better and from 1924 two gunners a year had been sent to either Woolwich or Sandhurst. Most of the crucial positions in 2 Divisional Artillery were thus filled by Regular officers.

It is unfair to be too critical of the quality of the Staff Corps' officers but there was simply not enough officers of sufficient calibre to take the positions in 2NZEF, and to stay behind to supervise the training of reinforcements. Many were too old for combat, and therefore comparatively junior officers were promoted to fill these positions.

The Territorial Force had declined to such an extent that in 1939 any hopes of it providing the nucleus of trained soldiers for the Expeditionary Force were farcical. The compulsory military training scheme continued in existence until 1930. During the severe depression of 1921-22 the Territorial Force was reorganised into one Division and three Mounted Rifle Brigades. Training was reduced from seven to four years, there was no pay for those attending annual camp, and a large number of officers and NCOs were discharged. In 1925-26 pay was restored and 17,335 Territorials of a strength of 20,000 attended camp. Compulsory Military Training was abolished in 1930 on the grounds of economy and because 'we cannot ignore the strong feeling in favour of world peace and opposition to militarism which has grown up not only in New Zealand but in most civilised countries.'<sup>8</sup> In 1931 voluntary Territorial training was introduced with a ceiling of 10,000. Only a small number of the 7,500 Territorials attended camp and there was a very high turnover.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Major General Sir William Gentry, 'The Army between the Two World Wars', Draft script prepared for QEIIAMM, unpublished, 1979, p.1.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, Gill, p.116.

The training consisted of hour and a half night parades at drill halls once a fortnight, daylight parades on Saturday afternoons once a month, and six days in camp a year. There were courses of instruction and tactical exercises held for officers and NCOs. Kippenberger, one of the few enthusiasts for the interwar Territorial system described it in the following manner:

The period 1930-38 was probably one of the most discouraging the New Zealand Army has survived. Those who soldiered on, Regular or Territorial, knew they had no support or sympathy from Government or the great majority of the public. Gradually camps and training courses were reintroduced. A few recruits, mostly those not very interested in sport or very fit for them, were obtained but only about 40 per cent ever attended camps or regularly attended parades. Few firms found it possible to spare the services of the most junior office boy to do any training, unless he would, of course, forego his pay. Most officers used their annual leaves in attending camps....Equipment was never replaced however worn or useless.<sup>10</sup>

With the deterioration of the international situation there was some alarm at New Zealand's military preparedness. The GOC's Report for 1937 records that the Territorial strength was about 7,900 and this had lead to 'unreal situations and had been discouraging to the officers and NCOs with so few men to lead'. The Cadet Force was better off with 15,000 cadets and 376 schoolmasters holding commissions.<sup>11</sup> Duigan, who had become CGS in 1937 attempted, with the Minister of Defence, Fred Jones, a rationalisation of the defence forces in 1937 and 1938. It involved the institution of a Defence Council, plans to mechanise the infantry, full pay for up to twelve days for public servants who enlisted in the Territorial Force, new Territorial uniforms, and promotion for Regular Force officers who had suffered salary cuts and deferred promotion during the depression.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Puttick Papers, Series 8, No.8.

<sup>11</sup> Gill, p.117.

<sup>12</sup> L.H. Barber, 'The New Zealand Colonels' "Revolt", 1938', The New Zealand Law Journal, 6 December 1977, p.497.

It did little for the Territorial Force apart from increase training commitments. There were no pay increases and a number of junior officers were made redundant by the reorganisation of units. Territorial morale reached an all time low. Four prominent Colonels in the Territorial Force were moved to issue a manifesto detailing their conviction of the 'complete inadequacy of the system of land defence' and complaining that the voluntary system had failed due to the lack of support for the Army by successive Governments.<sup>13</sup> One of the officers, Colonel R.F. Gambrill, wrote to Jones<sup>14</sup> telling him he had no wish to repeat:

the sight - witnessed by me on Gallipoli in 1915 - of half-trained troops (from the English Midlands) of undoubted bravery, being slaughtered in an endeavour to do what untrained troops would have found unnecessary.

This dissent by the four colonels resulted in their being posted to the retirement list. The weakness of the Territorial system was further illustrated at this time when the then Mayor of Wellington, T.C.A. Hislop, told a public meeting that only 200 Territorials from a strength of 1000 had attended a recent Battalion display at Fort Dorset.<sup>15</sup>

A recruiting drive in the last few months before the war lifted the Territorial strength to over 10,000, but the majority of these had only three or four weekends training. The contrast between 1NZEF's readiness for war in August 1914 and 2NZEF's readiness in September 1939, is callipygic. 1NZEF had been able to call upon the best half of nearly 30,000 reasonably well trained Territorials with enough Regular Force officers to man the key positions and to provide trained and experienced personnel to train the reinforcements. 2NZEF could draw on 10,000 Territorials, of which less than a quarter were satisfactory, and then had to find another 6,000 totally untrained men to man a Division. The Staff Corps and Permanent Staff were unable to provide the numbers of experienced and competent personnel that had been provided for 1NZEF. 2NZEF was nowhere near as prepared as its predecessor and it was to become a race against time to repair the damage. The experiences in Greece and

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<sup>13</sup> Gentry, p.2.

<sup>14</sup> R.F. Gambrill to F. Jones, 22 October 1937, Barber, p.498.

<sup>15</sup> Auckland Star, 23 March 1938, Scrapbook kept by Point Resolution, Home Command, QEIIAMM.

Crete were to show that it was not long enough. 2NZEF suffered one further disadvantage in comparison with 1NZEF. The latter was able, because of a surplus of semi-trained men, to send reinforcement drafts at more frequent intervals. This was done by blending recruits with non-military experience with those of military experience. This mutual learning system was not possible with 2NZEF and training of reinforcements took longer in World War II.<sup>16</sup>

The situation that had arisen can be attributed in some ways to the reputation earned by the New Zealanders in 1NZEF. Obviously the economic and political climate did not favour more emphasis on the 'luxury' of defence. There was also an undercurrent of opinion which probably still exists that in time of war the New Zealand male will be able to over night transform himself into a soldier ready for combat. J.L. Scoullar an officer in World War I and author of an Official History of World War II believed this was so:

Our politicians and the people generally believe the New Zealand soldier is a natural soldier fit to take a place in battle as soon as weapons are placed in his hands. I had an hour and a half with the Minister of Defence and...with Mr Savage the next morning in January, 1940, trying to convince him that sending untrained men into battle was murder. The New Zealander is only the raw material of a good soldier. Train him and he is the equal of any...We must destroy the illusion that every New Zealander is naturally a good shot, a belief that has its origins in the idea of life in the wide open spaces where meals are hunted.<sup>17</sup>

### Enlistment

Initially, as in previous wars, there was no shortage of men willing to serve in an Expeditionary Force. What prompted men to enlist in 2NZEF? Many had their decision made for them when the Territorial Force was mobilised on 6 September. Many more were to have the choice of

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<sup>16</sup> Gill, p.79.

<sup>17</sup> J.L. Scoullar, letter to H.K. Kippenberger, 7 December 1948, KP, No.38.

enlisting before the National Service Regulations<sup>18</sup> came into force, on 18 June 1940, and removed the voluntary option.

Although W.B. Sutch asserted that New Zealanders were brought up on a 'background of war and imperialism',<sup>19</sup> it appears that the patriotic fervour which had accompanied enlistment in the South African War and World War I (and had reasserted itself in the Chanak crisis of 1922),<sup>20</sup> had diminished by the outbreak of World War II. Once the initial enthusiasm had declined in 1939 the number of recruits also declined markedly. The New Zealand Government was forced to put pressure on the British Government to get the First Echelon overseas as the 'retention of our voluntary system of recruiting is to some extent dependent on the knowledge and the fact that the men will serve overseas'.<sup>21</sup> This would suggest that patriotism was not the only reason for men wishing to join 2NZEF. One contemporary correspondent saw patriotism as a minimal factor:

How many volunteered out of pure patriotism, to how many was patriotism and faith as it was to Bradshaw. Very very few I think. They volunteered out of a spirit of adventure or dissatisfaction with their civil lot. They did it unthinkingly, for to my mind no man who thinks about war will rush into a recruiting office.<sup>22</sup>

The replies to my questionnaire seem to confirm this conclusion. The responses abound with 'a love of adventure', 'excitement of a trip overseas', and 'I was unattached and carefree at the time with a strong

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18 The Regulations split a general reserve of men between the ages of 16 and 46 into three divisions. The Minister had the power to divide the divisions in any manner he wished. All men called up were required to serve for the duration of the war or until discharged. Statutory Regulations, Vol.I, 1940.

19 W.B. Sutch, Poverty and Progress in New Zealand, A.H. & A.W. Reed, Wellington, 1940, p.250.

20 Though there was no call for volunteers to serve in Chanak if the crisis developed into a military conflict, over 12,000 New Zealanders volunteered for service. Angus Ross, 'Reluctant Dominion or Dutiful Daughter? New Zealand and the Commonwealth in the Inter-war Years', Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, Vol.10, No.1, 1972, p.32.

21 Barclay, The Empire..., p.147.

22 O.E. Hughan to H.R.C. Wild, 6 February 1944, p.3, O.E. Hughan Papers, MS 1288, Folder 17, ATL.

leaning to adventure'. For many men war would be their only opportunity to go overseas. War and death were not yet close realities, and the lure of foreign lands far outweighed any notion of them. When men became familiar with death and war the sense of adventure often wanes and survival becomes a prime motivating factor. One writer has seen the furlough problems in 1943 and 1944 as one of the consequences of having large numbers of men going overseas simply for adventure:

Now they are home tired, disillusioned, and have had a guts full of adventure. They do not want to go back and they are rationalising their position on patriotic grounds. Unavoidably feeling guilty at not wanting to return they are designating the stay at home as shirkers.<sup>23</sup>

For many men the prime motivating factor must have been patriotism. Many New Zealanders still had what they considered were the salient features of good citizenship - a regard for the nation's welfare and also for the Empire's welfare:

I had been educated at a good secondary school which had plenty of tradition....We were taught what was regarded 'as the thing to do'. If and when it became obvious that something had to be faced up to we had fortunately been inculcated with sufficient responsibility to do something about it.

...a respect for King and country and a dislike for Hitler and his cohorts and a belief in freedom of people to choose their own way of life. I had to sell a shop, a fruit run, and a milk run all at a loss...<sup>24</sup>

Society, itself, pressurises men to go to war. Most New Zealanders had been brought up with the legend of the New Zealand fighting man, and the pressures from all groups in society for him to enlist and try to emulate his 'father's' deeds must have been immense. The reputation worked not only as a social pressure but as a spur to experience warfare and military life as recounted by an older generation:

...because of the example of my elder brothers who were killed in Flanders.

To experience the challenges as told by my uncles and cousins in the First World War.

<sup>23</sup> D.E. Hughan to H.R.C. Wild, 6 February 1944, p.3, D.E. Hughan Papers, MS 1288, Folder 17, ATL.

<sup>24</sup> MQ, Question 21.

The Maori soldier was under even more social pressure than the Pakeha, The tribal and communal nature of Maori society left a Maori little alternative if his elders asked him to go to war:

In 28 (New Zealand) Maori Battalion the enlisting was a family tie,,,I left NZ for these reasons

1. It was a tribal turn and I was chosen
2. My two brothers were there
3. The Maori people

Many of my relatives and friends were enlisting in the Maori Battalion and I wanted to be with them.<sup>25</sup>

The prospect of the security offered by Army life and a dissatisfaction with civilian life is a further factor in enlistment. Some men may have had reasons for leaving their civilian situation and there may be some foundation in the nicknaming of the First Echelon as 'the wife beaters and the debt evaders'.<sup>26</sup> It seems likely that many of those unemployed or engaged in relief work would have joined the Army. There were still 32,000 unemployed or on relief work in March 1939,<sup>27</sup> though few men on the 2NZEF Embarkation Rolls list their occupation as unemployed.<sup>28</sup> It seems likely that recruiting officers would have listed anything the recruit said as his occupation. On many occasions this simply meant classing him in that undefined occupation 'labourer'.

All these suppositions are summed up by an ex-member of 22 Battalion whose reply to my questionnaire was:

I'm buggard if I really know! Maybe just crazy youth, adventure and doing what was the "Going thing".<sup>29</sup>

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25 MQ, Question 21.

26 Major J.C. White, letter to O.E. Hughan, 22 May 1944, O.E. Hughan Papers, MS 1288, Folder 16, ATL.

27 New Zealand Official Yearbook, Wellington, 1934-40. The number of unemployed at the height of the depression was well over 65,000.

28 The economist, G.R. Hawke, in a letter to the author, 4 September 1978, considered that those on relief or Government assisted schemes returned themselves as employed in the occupation appropriate to their relief occupation and cannot see any reason why this should not apply to recruitment.

29 MQ.

### Composition of 2NZEF

The officers originally selected for the senior positions in the Expeditionary Force were mostly on the 'old side'. Freyberg himself was fifty; his Brigade Commanders averaged forty-seven years; the Battalion Commanding Officers also forty-seven years, with the oldest, Varnham, at fifty-one; the CRA, Miles, was forty-seven; and the three senior Staff Officers averaged forty-three. Freyberg was worried by this situation and W.G. Stevens describes Freyberg's first meeting with his senior commanders and his subsequent actions:

I knew he thought we were rather on the old side, Stewart at forty-three being the youngest. And this question of age led a few days later to his insistence on having one or two young Battalion commanders, and so promoting two junior regular officers to the position. We were all shaken by this action which seemed to us to be going too far and too fast in the solution of a problem.<sup>30</sup>

Those promoted were Page (33) and Shuttleworth (32) who were to command 26 and 24 Battalions respectively. The other officer promoted, and this was perhaps one of Freyberg's soundest decisions in the war, was C.E. Weir to command 6 Field Regiment. Weir was to be one of the outstanding successes of the war and certainly one of the most outstanding gunners to serve with New Zealand forces. Freyberg's fear, and it was not without foundation, was that there would be no comparatively young officers experienced enough to replace senior personnel. The advanced age of a number of his senior subordinates would mean that they would not be able to fill field positions for more than a short time. Obviously there would also be casualties amongst the senior personnel. The men desperately needed at this stage were those sacked from Dunroon between 1922 and 1930. Their careers would have developed far enough to allow them now to be holding middle rank positions.

Obviously every army needs experience; it must have senior personnel who know about war conditions, who know about operational staff work, and who have held command positions. But without their being complimented by younger officers their value is negated. Initially 2 Division was not able to find a satisfactory blend.

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<sup>30</sup> W.G. Stevens, Freyberg V.C. The Man, A.H. & A.W. Reed, Wellington, 1963, p.20.

The four eldest Commanding Officers - Varnham, Wilder, Macky, and Falconer were no longer in command by the beginning of the Crete battle and only Wilder was to command troops in combat again. These older officers and also senior NCOs were to fulfill a useful function for 2NZEF. They were invaluable in showing the new soldiers how an army lives and looks after itself. Brigadier J.T. Burrows considers that these experienced officers and NCOs who knew about Army organisation and Army administration were invaluable to 20 Battalion in its infancy and in its training.<sup>31</sup> But the officers themselves were buying leadership experience. Those that did not measure up were purged after Crete and after this apprenticeship the leadership of the Division was to climb to a high quality.

Only 125 Regular soldiers embarked with the first three Echelons. Table I shows the distribution and numbers of Regular officers, NCOs, and Other Ranks in the three Echelons:

TABLE I

Regular Officers, NCOs, and Other Ranks in the first Three Echelons

	1st Echelon	2nd Echelon	3rd Echelon	Total
Officers	13	11	11	35
NCOs	26	32	18	76
Other Ranks	3	4	7	14
Total	42	47	36	125

These figures clearly demonstrate the non-professional nature of the New Zealand Army. It was as one writer has described an Army of amateurs who would be taking on 'German professionals...operating at the end of two centuries of dedicated militarism...'<sup>32</sup> To utilise the professionals in the most efficient manner possible they were often posted to the Headquarters of the various units. Twenty-five of the thirty-five officers and thirty-one of the seventy-six NCOs were posted to unit

<sup>31</sup> Brigadier J.T. Burrows, interviewed by C.J. Pugsley, September 1979.

<sup>32</sup> John Hall Spencer, The Battle for Crete, Heineman, London, 1962, p.159.

Headquarters. The remainder, particularly in the case of senior NCOs filled unit and Company positions such as RSM and CSM which were important in training and discipline. The regular officers either filled the position of senior commanders or the staff and adjutant positions - for example Lt.Col. Dittmer, CO 28 Battalion; Brigadier Puttick, 4 Brigade Commander; Lt.Col. Stewart, GSO 1; Lt.Col. Stevens, AA & QMG; and Lt.Col. Crump, CO ASC. The rank distribution of the regular officers of 2NZEF is worth noting as it illustrates this feature:

TABLE II  
Rank Distribution of Staff Corps Officers in 2NZEF

	1st Echelon	2nd Echelon	3rd Echelon	Total
Lt,Col, & Above	7	1	5	13
Major	3	4	1	8
Captain	3	5	3	11
2Lt, & Lt,	-	1	2	3
Total	13	11	11	35

This clearly demonstrates that most of the Staff Corps officers were reasonably senior and at the junior levels of command - platoon level particularly - professionalism was lacking. The nature of the Army between the wars had meant that only a few positions could be manned by Staff Corps officers. It was therefore vital to have in other leadership positions experienced, competent, and trained Territorial officers. The weakness of the Territorial system between the wars meant that this was simply not possible.

The background and selection of officers for 2NZEF requires de-mythologising. It has been popularly considered that the selection of officers for 2NZEF, and therefore 2NZEF itself, was 'egalitarian':

...the New Zealand Division did achieve a kind of democracy of its own in that considerations of wealth, job, social prestige or status did not matter the slightest in the final analysis...There were exceptions, of course, to the rule that civilian qualifications did not count. Doctors and dentists found they counted very much.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Leslie Hobbs, Kiwi Down the Strada, Whitcombe and Tombs, Christchurch, 1963, pp.65-7.

It has always been one of the more popular myths that New Zealand 'is, was, and should be an egalitarian society',<sup>34</sup> Professor Sinclair claims that New Zealand 'must be relatively more classless than any other society in the world',<sup>35</sup> Admittedly the word 'class' is often misunderstood and misused. But for the purposes of this work it is sufficient to say that in so far as occupation divided people into 'status groups', or 'classes', it can be suggested that 2NZEF was neither a classless nor a homogenous body. Initially 2NZEF was stratified by occupational status and this only broke down as the war progressed.

The methodology used in the occupational analysis is outlined in Appendix B together with the criticism that can be levelled against it. Using Thermstrom's categories for Boston, applied to New Zealand society by Claire Toynbee, I have divided New Zealand society into four broad groups as follows:

- I. High White Collar
- II. Middle White Collar
- III. Low White Collar-Blue Collar
- IV. Working Class

Occupational status is highest in Group I and lowest in Group IV. Any suggestion as to the percentage of society in each group could only be a guess, but it is safe to assume that Group I would not exceed five to ten percent. It would appear that the other three groups would split the remainder of the population evenly, though Group IV may be slightly larger than Groups II and III.

Tables III and IV clearly show that officers were initially drawn from the higher levels of society and out of proportion to the numbers in their groups in society at large.<sup>36</sup> The two largest groups in society, III and IV, accounted for less than half of those commissioned. As can be seen the subaltern ranks were much more 'egalitarian' than the senior officers who were almost exclusively drawn from the higher status groups

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<sup>34</sup> David Pitt, Social Class in New Zealand, Longman Paul, Auckland, 1977, p.5.

<sup>35</sup> Sinclair, p.276.

<sup>36</sup> There were approximately eighteen to twenty other ranks for every officer in 2NZEF.

TABLE III  
Occupational Status Ranking for Officers<sup>1</sup> of First Three Echelons<sup>2</sup> of 2NZE

GROUP	Lt.Col. +		Major		Captain		Lieutenant		2nd Lieutenant		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	<u>1st Echelon</u>											
I	3	(75,00)	5	(21,74)	3	(10,71)	5	(7,94)	4	(4,60)	20	(9,76)
II	1	(25,00)	15	(65,22)	11	(39,29)	29	(46,03)	33	(37,93)	89	(43,41)
III	0		3	(13,66)	13	(46,43)	24	(38,10)	37	(42,53)	77	(37,56)
IV	0		0		1	(3,57)	5	(7,94)	13	(14,94)	19	(9,27)
	4		23		28		63		87		205	
	<u>2nd Echelon</u>											
I	3	(60,00)	2	(11,76)	4	(12,90)	4	(5,71)	3	(2,88)	16	(6,75)
II	2	(40,00)	15	(88,24)	17	(54,84)	37	(41,11)	44	(42,31)	125	(52,74)
III	0		0		8	(25,80)	19	(27,14)	45	(43,27)	72	(30,38)
IV	0		0		2	(6,45)	10	(14,29)	12	(11,54)	24	(10,13)
	5		17		31		70		104		237	
	<u>3rd Echelon</u>											
I	2	(28,57)	6	(25,00)	6	(12,00)	21	(17,21)	24	(8,60)	59	(12,24)
II	5	(71,23)	12	(50,00)	34	(68,00)	61	(50,00)	115	(41,22)	227	(47,10)
III	0		5	(20,83)	9	(18,00)	27	(22,13)	113	(40,50)	154	(31,95)
IV	0		1	(4,17)	1	(2,00)	13	(10,66)	27	(9,68)	42	(8,71)
	7		24		50		122		279		482	

Notes:

1

This table does not include dental, medical, and clergy officers whose rank was dependent on their professional qualifications and who were unlikely to be involved in a combat role.

2

The figures for the Third Echelon includes reinforcements who arrived before the embarkation for Greece but who were not specifically included in the first three echelons.

TABLE IV

Occupational Status Ranking for Officers of First Three Echelons of 2NZEF (totals)

<u>GROUP</u>	<u>Lt. Col. +</u>		<u>Major</u>		<u>Captain</u>		<u>Lieutenant</u>		<u>2nd Lieutenant</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
I	8	(50.00)	13	(20.31)	13	(11.93)	30	(11.76)	31	(6.60)	95	(10.39)
II	8	(50.00)	42	(65.30)	62	(56.88)	127	(49.98)	192	(40.83)	431	(47.16)
III	0		8	(12.50)	30	(27.52)	70	(27.45)	195	(41.49)	303	(33.15)
IV	0		1	(1.89)	4	(3.37)	28	(10.89)	52	(11.07)	85	(9.30)
	16		64		109		255		470		914	

in society. Table V shows selected occupational derivations within the Army. Occupations were chosen which were clearly representative of the four occupational status groups. The numbers and the ranks were arrived at by analysing every fifth page of the first three Embarkation Rolls. The table is self-explanatory.

TABLE V

Rank Structure of Selected Occupations of Personnel from the first Three Echelons

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Officers</u>	<u>NCOs</u>	<u>OR's</u>	<u>Total</u>
I. Lawyer	13	2	3	18
II. Teacher	33	15	21	69
III. Shop Assistant	5	18	84	107
IV. Labourer	1	65	1014	1080

The reason for this preponderance of 'middle class' officers is quite simple. Control within the Army is based on 'middle class' thought patterns and skills; in order to participate at the higher levels one needs middle class skills - the ability to articulate orally and literally, construct programmes, write reports, and understand more complicated orders and translate them for use at the lower levels. It would be incongruous if the leaders in civilian life were not given equivalent status, particularly in the interwar Territorials. Also the higher one goes in social status, the more one's leisure time increases, allowing time to be spent on the demanding task of being a Territorial officer. He is rarely likely to lose pay or suffer financial hardship for fulfilling his Territorial commitments. It would also be somewhat incongruous if the leaders in civilian life were not the leaders in Army life. There may be a large number of dissimilarities between being a civilian leader and a leader of men in battle but until the latter situation occurs there must be some manner of picking out potential officers. With no recognised officer selection procedure it seems natural for Commanding Officers to recommend those who were civilian leaders.

The following passage from Kenneth Sanford's biography of Charles Upham gives us an indication of how officers were selected and this example for 20 Battalion is probably typical for the other Battalions:

Kippenberger paused, card in hand. 'Upham', he mused, 'Christ College boy. Farm Valuer.' He turned to Davis. 'Here's one we could try. Have a look at him anyway. I know his father - Johnny Upham, a lawyer in Christchurch - well known good family. And I've had a note about this chap from Eric Hudson at Lincoln College.'<sup>37</sup>

This method of selecting officers was not unique to New Zealand. It was in the manner that officers for most armies had traditionally been selected. In the nineteenth century it involved handing over a sum of money. In New Zealand the system of electing officers had ended with the demise of the Volunteers. In this period well-known and prominent local figures had been elected as officers.<sup>38</sup> The First Australian Imperial Force's officers were mainly from the professional classes and perhaps a study of 1NZEF may reveal a similar trait, given that patterns in Australian and New Zealand society have not been widely different.<sup>39</sup> British officers before World War II and during the initial stages of it had been recruited from the middle and upper classes and almost exclusively from those with a public school education. Entry into an officer training establishment was dependent on family connections, schooling, private means, accent, dress, and social standing.<sup>40</sup>

There was little time in New Zealand to gauge the abilities of officers before the Expeditionary Force departed. This was to cause problems overseas, for once an officer had embarked the Expeditionary Force Headquarters was loathe to rescind his commission. This became a major headache for the Headquarters. Major General W.G. Stevens, then a Lt.Col. in charge of administration, considered that by May 1940 certain weaknesses in officers, in some cases comparatively senior ones, had become apparent.<sup>41</sup> The trials of Greece and Crete were to expose the limitations of a number of

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<sup>37</sup> Kenneth Sanford, Mark of the Lion, Arrow, London, 1964, p.24.

<sup>38</sup> 'Report on the New Zealand Permanent and Volunteer Forces', by Lt.Col. F.J. Fox, AJHR, 1893, H9, p.42.

<sup>39</sup> L.L. Robson, 'The Origin and Character of the First A.I.F., 1914-1918: Some Statistical Evidence', Historical Studies, Vol.15, No.61, 1973, pp.746-9.

<sup>40</sup> Shelford Bidwell, Modern Warfare, Allen Lane, London, 1973, p.113.

<sup>41</sup> W.G. Stevens, Problems of 2NZEF, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1958, p.26.

officers. A policy had been laid down that if officers were found to be inefficient in the field they were to be adversely reported on.<sup>42</sup> The need to send men home to supervise training and also to provide officers for 3 Division in the Pacific allowed 2 Division to dispose of a number of unwanted officers between August 1941 and February 1942. One senior officer commented that some of the best were sent home in this period, but the majority were those who had failed to cope.<sup>43</sup>

With combat 'wastage' 2 Division was forced to commission a number of promising NCOs. They were recommended by their Commanding Officers to go to OCTU. 2 Division did not have its own OCTU until 1944 and until that date candidates were sent to British OCTUs in Egypt and Palestine.<sup>44</sup> If the percentages in Table VI are correct it seems that there was some move towards more selection on military merit than occupational status. Though the sample is small, Groups I and II decline in significance and more officers were selected from Groups III and IV. There could be a number of reasons for this. First the numbers of eligible candidates from the top two groups may have diminished markedly. This would be as a result of their being previously commissioned or becoming casualties. The other reason could be selection on merit. Now that the soldier was fully integrated into the military system the prime prerequisite for commissioning could only be military service and leadership potential. This latter reason seems the most plausible for after a man has experienced combat there can be no other criteria.

Officers commissioned in New Zealand and then posted overseas with the Reinforcement drafts lost their rank and reverted to Temporary Sergeants. This allowed them to be tested for suitability to hold a field commission. After one month they were either granted immediate commissions in the field, commissioned through a normal OCTU course, or confirmed as Sergeants or reduced to any rank below that which was considered suitable. For example, in the 12th Reinforcements there were forty-two Temporary Sergeants who had held commissions in New Zealand. They consisted of one Major, five Captains,

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<sup>42</sup> Stevens, p.184.

<sup>43</sup> Major General Sir William Gentry, interview with the author, 12 September 1979.

<sup>44</sup> Stevens, p.200.



eighteen Lieutenants, and eighteen Second-Lieutenants. It has not proved possible to ascertain how many were subsequently able to re-earn their commissions.<sup>45</sup>

The selection of officers for 2NZEF was an extremely important factor in the combat fortunes of the Division. The early selection of officers illustrates the confused and unprepared state of the New Zealand Army in the first year of the war. It was important to have the right men in the right positions. Some men with experience will make good officers; others will never have the right criteria for success. It became important to develop the skills of the officers with promise, and dispose of and replace those who were inadequate. As this was done the fighting ability of the Division was raised.

#### Training

The lack of preparations before the war and the inexperience of the men made it very important for an intensive training programme to commence as soon as possible. Initially the situation was chaotic. When the soldiers, or what were to be the soldiers, of the First Echelon entered camp in November 1939, they found little ready for them. One of the officers of 20 Battalion, Major, later Brigadier, J.T. Burrows describes those first few days in camp:

Within two days civilian clothes were a thing of the past. Every man had been issued with a uniform from World War I, a suit of denims, web equipment (1908 pattern) and a rifle and bayonet. Training equipment - what there was of it - was also World War I vintage, including the obsolete Lewis gun.<sup>46</sup>

This shortage of modern equipment was to be a problem for each of the three echelons. However the Second and Third Echelon, who entered camp in January and May respectively, found conditions more pleasant. There was more parade space, the rifle ranges had been extended and more huts erected for recreation and accommodation.<sup>47</sup>

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45 Brigadier W.G. Stevens, Memo to GOC, 10 August 1944, DA 21.1/9/G32.

46 J.T. Burrows, Pathway Among Men, Whitcombe and Tombs, Christchurch, 1974, pp.77-8.

47 W.G. McClymont, To Greece, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1959, p.28.

The three months that each echelon spent training in New Zealand could provide little more than the 'elementary grammar of military training'.<sup>48</sup> The aim was to introduce the recruit to the various facets of Army life, and to create the first feelings of comradeship that would eventually become the team spirit. The Second and Third Echelons did work to a programme that had been prepared by Freyberg. The syllabus was based on the eight weeks training undertaken by the militia in Britain. It emphasised training for war as the keynote for all instruction. It has proved impossible to find out the exact details of the programme.<sup>49</sup>

The arrival of the First Echelon in Egypt in February saw the beginning of other problems, not the least of which were to be administrative:

The first few months in Maadi can only be described as frenzied, certainly from the administrative standpoint. A group of partially trained units was under the care of an inexperienced staff.

For the staff officer the nature of his work was a very new experience because peacetime training had not included 'divisional staff work by an integrated staff. The staff...had to learn their duties like anyone else, and yet at the same time as the troops they were supposed to train.'<sup>50</sup>

Throughout the whole training period shortage of modern equipment was to be a major problem. Gentry, then GSO II, had the task of obtaining equipment from the British. He considered they were as helpful as possible, but were unable to supply what they did not have.<sup>51</sup> The main supply difficulties were for specialised units - anti tank weapons, light tanks, and field artillery pieces.<sup>52</sup> The Second Echelon, which had been diverted to England, was probably the worst off. There was a great shortage of equipment in England and the GOC wrote to the Minister of Defence, the Hon. Fred Jones, on 27 June 1940, that for 'some time we shall be short of many of our weapons as there is a desperate shortage of equipment.'<sup>53</sup>

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48 McClymont, p.27.

49 *ibid.*

50 Stevens, p.18.

51 Gentry, interview.

52 Freyberg considered the old 18-pounder was adequate for training needs; '...the force...lacks new 25-pounders, but it has 18-pounders - a good gun'. War History Branch, Documents, Vol.1, p.75.

53 *ibid.*, p.131.

By the early stages of 1941, in the desert at least, there were fewer shortages of clothing and equipment. The Official Historian, W.G. McClymont, remarked that:

By February it was fashionable for the well-dressed soldier to be wearing khaki drill by day and the new battledress uniform at night. Motor vehicles were being issued to replace those ruined in the desert; 25-pounder guns replaced the old 18-pounders and the 4.5 howitzers; the Divisional Cavalry Regiment received Marmon-Harrington armoured cars and the Signal Corps was issued with many tons of equipment.<sup>54</sup>

The training of a soldier for combat was more complex in World War II than in World War I. World War I training requirements were little more than proficiency with a rifle, physical fitness, and a few elementary minor tactics. This was all that was required when attacks consisted basically of frontal advances and defence of firing from static points. Major General Gentry believes that the Second World War soldier was required to be proficient with a larger number of weapons - rifle, sub-machine gun, Bren gun, mortar, grenade - which all took longer to master. Minor tactics were a little more advanced and the private soldier was expected to show some initiative.<sup>55</sup>

The training of 2NZEF was divided into two phases - individual and collective. The former involved the basic skills required in combat. These included weapon training, shooting, living in the field, navigation, minor tactics, and physical training. The soldier's task is to kill and he must have the basic skills to enable him to do that.<sup>56</sup> It is not much use placing the soldier in a position to kill if his marksmanship is so inadequate that he is unable to hit the enemy. Therefore a large amount of time was spent on the rifle range which was built with indigenous labour. The troops also had to accustom themselves to snap firing and firing at moving targets.<sup>57</sup> Much time was devoted to physical fitness and one goal set was that the men must be able to move forty miles in twenty-four hours.<sup>58</sup>

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54 McClymont, p.81.

55 Gentry, interview.

56 'Infantry in Battle', p.6.

57 Fraser D. Norton, 26 Battalion, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1952, p.11.

58 McClymont, p.82.

The aim of collective training was to ensure that every soldier would operate as part of a team whether at section, platoon, company, or battalion level. Individual skills were best able to be utilised in these collective groups. The men had to learn how each group utilised its numbers to the best advantage; how to deploy in an attack; how to use ground; how to attack over a rise, mutual support in defence, and how to react to various types of enemy fire. This collective training was particularly important to the officers and NCOs. The lack of experience among officers and NCOs meant they were learning at the same time as the men. It gave them valuable experience in handling men and knowing the capabilities of each sub-unit. 25 Battalion, for example, practised companies in attack and defence both by day and night, defence against aircraft by use of infantry weapons and dispersal, patrolling and protection on the rest and on the march.<sup>59</sup> 20 Battalion was to practise for anti-parachute deployment just after the entry of Italy into the war in June 1940. This in itself was a fluke in light of later events but it illustrates the training that a commanding officer with a knowledge of modern war and initiative could provide.<sup>60</sup>

The soldier, once he has completed his initial training, must be given realistic exercise on the battle range, with ample ammunition and life-like targets and situations, before he can be considered fit for battle. 'Infantry in Battle' considered that he:

must develop confidence in his weapon from the knowledge that he can use it effectively as an individual. Both as an individual and as a member of the section and platoon he must be taught to "shoot to kill" whenever a target offers. He must also be taught that there will be occasions when he must use fire to suppress an invisible enemy, and that such fire will be more effective if controlled by section and platoon commanders. The latter must be taught to control it.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Sir Edward Puttick, 25 Battalion, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1960, p.21.

<sup>60</sup> Burrows, p.94; Gentry, Interview.

<sup>61</sup> 'Infantry in Battle', p.14.

## FIGURE I

20 BNSyllabus of Training May 20 - 25.

All companies will work on circuit system. Platoons or details going to instructors provided by Companies. Classes in all subjects set out will proceed simultaneously throughout training hours.

First period each day will be used by Bn Parade and a demonstration of "wrong and right" done by a platoon from each Company in turn.

All Coys will do 2 hours night work, patrols and reliefs. Inspection. Picquet Coy will be inspected each day. Range. Details will be sent on days range available.

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Each Day 0615 - 0715 ALL COYS. Bn Parade and Demonstration by Platoon from each Coy in turn.

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Monday  
May 20

0815 to 1115 HQ COY. C.O.'s inspection 0815 - 0915.

1630 to 1730 Signals Pl : Cable repairing & knotting. Buzzer & Lamp reading, procedure.

A.A. Pl. A/A trg with tpt. Semaphore, Rifle.

Mortar Pl. Pl Drill. Lecture - Gas : Rifle.

Carrier Pl. Carrier Maint. Semaphore.

Pioneer Pl. Duties and sand bag constructions.

Transport. Revision and Maintenance.

A COY Rifle : Bren : AA Defce : Bayonet : Semaphore.

B COY Rifle : Bren : Mortar : A/T Rifle : Message & Reports. Lecture - Theory of S.A. Fire.

C COY Bayonet : Individual Stalk : Section Leading. Semaphore : AA Defce.

D COY Coy for Duty. Revision for details not employed.

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Tuesday  
May 21

0815 to 1115 HQ COY

Signals Pl : Gas Training. Procedure. Buzzer & Lamp reading & sending.

1630 to 1730 A.A. Pl. Action positions : Bren Gun : A/T Rifle : Semaphore.

Mortar Pl E.M.D. Mortar : Sight Setting : Field Signals : Control of Fire.

Carrier Pl Bren : Carrier Maintenance : Anti Gas.

Figure I (Contd).

		<u>Transport</u>	Maintenance & inspection of vehicles, A/T Rifle.
		<u>A COY</u>	A/T Rifle : Section Stalk.
		<u>B COY</u>	Bren : Rifle : Mortar.
		<u>C COY</u>	Bren : A/T Rifle : Mortar : Anti Gas.
		<u>D COY</u>	Bren : Rifle : Sec Leading : Standing Patrols.
Wednesday May 22	0815 to 1115	<u>HQ COY.</u>	
		<u>Signals Pl</u>	: Reading & sending : Signal Clerks, Station discipline.
		<u>A.A. Pl.</u>	Gas trg : Bren Gun : Field Sigs Semaphore.
		<u>Mortar Pl</u>	Packing vehicle : Det. Drill : Lecture -
		<u>Carrier Pl</u>	Carrier Tactics.
		<u>Transport</u>	Desert Driving. Breakdown procedure.
		<u>A COY</u>	Coy for duty. Revision for details unemployed.
		<u>B COY</u>	Bren : Rifle : A/Gas : A/T Rifle : Messages : Theory of S.A. Fire.
		<u>C COY</u>	Individual stalking. Section leading.
		<u>D COY</u>	A/T Rifle : AA Defce & procedure against A.F.Vs.
Thursday May 23	0815 to 1115	<u>HQ COY</u>	
		<u>Signals Pl.</u>	: Helio operating & aligning. Procedure, Telescope & morse flag. Lamp & Buzzer sending.
	1630 to 1730	<u>A.A. Pl.</u>	Route March : AA Action positions : Bren.
		<u>Mortar Pl</u>	Occupation & digging of position. Prep. range cards.
		<u>Carrier Pl</u>	Judging distance. Field Craft : Map reading : Gas Trg : Semaphore.
		<u>Transport</u>	Desert driving & with gas masks : Guards & Sentries : Signal.
		<u>A COY</u>	Bren : Mortar : Rifle : Guards & Sentries : Signal.
		<u>B COY</u>	Coy for duty. Revision for details.
		<u>C COY</u>	Bren : A/T Rifle : Mortar : A/Gas. Guards : Field Craft.
		<u>D COY</u>	Bren : Rifle : Field Signals : Semaphore : Bayonet.

Figure I (Contd).


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Friday	0815	<u>HQ COY</u>	
May 24	to		
	1115	<u>Signals Pl</u>	: Procedure : Reading & sending : Re-transmitting.
	1630		
	to	<u>A.A. Pl.</u>	Bren Gun : AA Trg : Semaphore : Squad Drill & Rifle.
	1730		
		<u>Mortar Pl</u>	Decontamination of Mortar : Recce of Positions : E.M.D.
		<u>Carriers</u>	Driving in Gas Masks : Maintenance : Map & Compass Reading.
		<u>Transport</u>	Mechanical Movement in Convoy. Lecture & Exercise.
		<u>A COY</u>	AA Defce : Bren : Mortar : Sec leading. Bayonet : Guards.
		<u>B COY</u>	Bren : Rifle : Mortar : A/Gas.
		<u>C COY</u>	Duty Coy. Details on revision.
		<u>D COY</u>	Bren : A/Gas. Appln of fire : 2" Mortar Bayonet : Semaphore.

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Saturday	0715 - 0815		Adjutants Parade - Interior Economy.
May 25	Afternoon		Leave yp to 50%

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Source: DA 21.1/9/G2

The hardest problem to overcome in training is battle simulation. The soldier must find it hard to visualise the noises and mental strains of battle. The Prussian military theorist, Karl von Clausewitz, argued that in battle the 'novice is only met by pitch black darkness'.<sup>62</sup> This 'darkness' and the psychological attitudes to killing prove the biggest hurdles in first combat. The problems associated with killing in war will be elaborated on in the chapter on Minqar Qaim. Perhaps Major General Stewart is correct when he suggests that the:

...approach of the individual to the sensation of actual combat and the training of the leaders in the technique of command consequently required under fire present a much more complex problem. It has often been said that experience of battle is the only effective teacher in these respects.<sup>63</sup>

It may be easy to agree with Stewart's last sentence but there are a number of ways that battle can be simulated. 20 Battalion carried out an exercise in advancing under a live ammunition barrage in January 1941. One diarist recorded that it 'was a realistic show - plenty of noise, dust, and smoke, and the shriek of shells overhead'.<sup>64</sup> None of the other unit histories record such activities but it seems likely that the other units followed 20 Battalion's example.

The training of the Second Echelon was somewhat different from the First and Third Echelons. Their training had to fit in with their role in preparing for a seaborne or airborne attack. This should have been perfect training for their later role at Maleme on Crete. The main difference between the training of the two groups seems to have been in individual training and small sub-unit training. The Official Historian records that:

Instead of regular stages of section, platoon, company, battalion, brigade, and finally divisional exercises, the order was reversed. The syllabus began with divisional training on the assumption the troops were already trained soldiers.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> S.L.A. Marshall, Men Against Fire, William Morrow, New York, 1947, pp.49, 78.

<sup>63</sup> 'Infantry in Battle', p.4.

<sup>64</sup> D.J.C. Pringle and W.A. Glue, 20 Battalion and Armoured Regiment, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1957, p.33.

<sup>65</sup> McClymont, p.36.

The type of training is clearly illustrated in their first exercise on 18-22 July. In the area west of Tunbridge Wells the New Zealanders repelled hypothetical assaults on the beaches and overwhelmed imaginary parachutists.<sup>66</sup> Freyberg considered that this led to a 'rapid and successful training' of the New Zealanders and that in two months they had become a 'fully trained fighting force, capable of taking their place in any offensive'.<sup>67</sup> Whether this was true was still to be seen.

In the desert, after individual and collective training had progressed to a satisfactory initial level, the First Echelon underwent Brigade and Division training. In March the first major exercise took place. This was a Brigade exercise some 20 miles from Maadi and lasted four days. The troops marched to the exercise area and Kippenberger remarked on the many stragglers.<sup>68</sup> But as the 18 Battalion Official History points out there were a number of advantages for the soldiers in this exercise:

They learnt how hard it is, on a hot dusty day, not to drink too deeply from your water bottle, and how fatal it is to succumb to the temptation. They learnt how tiring it is to march over soft sand, and how at night small wadis and bumps in the ground become traps for the unwary....They learnt how to travel light, with food, toilet gear, rifle and ammunition, and as little else as possible. The truck drivers learnt...that driving across country at night without lights is difficult. The quartermaster's staff learnt something of the technique of getting supplies to a battalion out in the 'blue'...<sup>69</sup>

In April the first Divisional exercise was held with the forces of the First Echelon. The two forces were commanded by Brigadiers Puttick, 4 Brigade Commander, and Miles, the CRA. This exercise clearly showed the New Zealand commanders' inexperience and illustrated how much they had to learn. Kippenberger relates how Lt.Col. John Gray, CO, 18 Battalion refused to go to a Brigadier's conference because the Brigadier and the other

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<sup>66</sup> McClymont, p.36.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, p.27.

<sup>68</sup> Kippenberger, p.11.

<sup>69</sup> W.D. Dawson, 18 Battalion and Armoured Regiment, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1961, p.36.

Commanding Officers were on the wrong hill and he was on the right one and was not shifting. Consequently the next morning Puttick was forced to launch his attack a battalion short. 'It was a fiasco and we were all properly hauled over the coals for it by the General.'<sup>70</sup> Not surprisingly the 18 Battalion history makes no mention of this incident. The exercise was not helped by the fact that there was no signal equipment and one side was using imaginary tanks and the other side did not even have imaginary anti-tank guns.<sup>71</sup>

The New Zealanders were sent on numerous courses to familiarise themselves with tactics and equipment. These courses were invaluable as teaching aids and were able to improve New Zealand standards. However officers found it hard going on some of the tactical courses. Burrows was sent to one such course for senior officers at Abbassia shortly after arrival in the desert. All the others on the course were British regulars and 'I had to get down to a furious programme of work just to keep my head above water.'<sup>72</sup>

The standard of the New Zealanders gradually increased and efficiency was improved at all levels. The morale was high and the 'mess was now a very happy one, we had been more than a year together with few changes and fewer disputes, the companies had become tight little entities, and the platoons groups of firm friends.'<sup>73</sup> 4 and 6 Brigades were upset that they were not used in the First Libyan campaign in December 1940, but the support units received invaluable experience.

However a refresher course for the riflemen of 4 and 6 Brigades in January 1941 was disquieting. The GOC was upset that 147 men of 1772 from 24, 25, and 26 Battalions had failed to qualify with the rifle and only 274 of 1751 had qualified with the Bren gun. He considered that 'the standard of weapon training is very low.'<sup>74</sup> The CO of 26 Battalion,

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70 Kippenberger, p.12.

71 *ibid.*

72 Burrows, pp.84-5.

73 Kippenberger, pp.14-15.

74 Colonel K.L. Stewart, Memo to Brigadier H.E. Barrowclough, 13 February 1941, DA 21.1/9/G14/12/1.

Lt.Col. J.L. Page, wrote to Barrowclough that most of the forty-seven men who failed to qualify in his battalion 'appeared hopeless cases' but he would arrange 'further instruction and more ammunition',<sup>75</sup> The 4 Brigade shoot had similar results with ten percent failure on the rifle and a ten percent qualification on the Bren. The former does not appear excessive, particularly by modern day standards, and Freyberg was possibly hoping for too much. Kippenberger considered the 'poor results from the Bren are due to bad holding which cannot be corrected without further actual shooting'.<sup>76</sup> Puttick wrote to Divisional Headquarters that there was simply not enough ammunition to accustom the men to the Bren.<sup>77</sup>

The shortage of ammunition seems likely to have affected the zeroing of rifles. It only took a small knock to upset the sights of the rifle, causing a discrepancy between the aiming point and the hitting point. One participant has even suggested that it was uncommon to zero rifles before battle. It is little wonder that men never knew whether they had killed an opponent. This clearly demonstrates the amateur nature of the New Zealand Army. It also leads the writer to wonder whether or not any consideration was given to firing when a bayonet was attached to the rifle. The bayonet caused the rifle to fire considerably lower and the zeroing of sights should have taken this into account. At the very least the men should have been taught to allow for this low firing and consequently adjust their aiming point.<sup>78</sup>

How prepared was the New Zealand Division for combat in April 1941? The men were eager for action and it was important for their morale and that of the people at home for them to be blooded. The New Zealanders could never have hoped to be a well-trained professional army, if one allows for the inadequate pre-war preparation and the immense problems associated with equipping and training 16,000 men virtually from scratch.

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<sup>75</sup> Lt.Col. J.L. Page, Report to Brigadier H.E. Barrowclough, 16 January 1941, DA 21.1/9/G14/12/1.

<sup>76</sup> Lt.Col. H.K. Kippenberger, Report to 4 Brigade Headquarters, 12 February 1941, DA 21.1/9/G14/12/1.

<sup>77</sup> Brigadier E. Puttick, Memo to Divisional Headquarters, 14 February 1941, DA 21.1/9/G14/12/1.

<sup>78</sup> Keith Elliot, VC, Interview with author, 18 January 1980.

Obviously officers and men are very inexperienced, regardless of training until they come under the stress of battle. The Division did not concentrate as a single force until 3 March 1941, and it was only three days later that the force deployed for Greece.<sup>79</sup> The officers and men of the Second Echelon had had virtually no contact with the other two Echelons. The working relationship between the commanders must have been a problem. Freyberg had had some time with the Second Echelon, but they were now becoming involved with him as a Divisional Commander for the first time.

The training of the Second Echelon varied from that of the First and Third Echelon. Ironically neither group had trained for the type of combat in which it was to be deployed. The First and Third Echelons had trained for desert warfare. They had trained in flat open spaces in a climate that was in the main hot and dry, though the desert could be bitterly cold, and torrential rainfall was not uncommon. The Second Echelon had trained for airborne and seaborne landings in England. Nowhere had the New Zealanders encountered the rugged mountain terrain nor the snow that they were to find in Greece. The fighting withdrawal they were to be involved in was foreign to most. Those that had had World War I experience had never encountered combat which moved more than several miles. It is somewhat ironical given the defensive nature of the New Zealanders' role that only a week previously the First and Third Echelons had practised river crossings and assaults from landing craft.

It is in command experience that 2 Division were deficient when they embarked for Greece. The officers did not have enough command experience nor were the Divisional Staff fully conversant with their role. The training had given them valuable experience. At all levels officers and NCOs commanded units they had never handled in combat before. The forthcoming battles of Greece and Crete were to show this lack of experience and in some cases lack of ability. Commanders were to act time and time again in a manner which clearly demonstrated this.

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<sup>79</sup> Pugsley, p.3.

The New Zealanders were in a buoyant and excited mood as they prepared to sail for Greece. Everyone was anxious for battle. They had trained hard for war and it was soon to be a reality. Kippenberger wrote to a friend on the eve of leaving for Greece:

We have not wasted our time. We are ready.  
My men will do their whole duty.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Kippenberger, p.15.

CHAPTER 3      THE FIRST ACTION: PLATAMON AND PINIOS GORGE

The Anzacs - their ranks are but scanty all told -  
 Have a separate record illumined in gold,  
 Their blood on Gallipoli's ridges they poured,  
 Their souls with the scars of that struggle are scored;  
 Not many are left, and not many are sound,  
 And thousands lie buried in Turkish ground,  
 These are the Anzacs; the others may claim  
 Their zeal and their spirit, but never their name.

'The Real Anzacs'<sup>1</sup>

In late February 1941 it was obvious to all ranks of the New Zealand Division in Egypt that the Division was about to move to a 'theatre of war'. Freyberg had informed his Brigadiers on 24 February that deployment to Greece was imminent, but among other ranks speculation as to the theatre was rife. The Base Ordnance Depot was a scene of intense activity as final arrangements were made in bringing the Division up to its war establishment and preparations were made for the movement of equipment and supplies. The Division was well up to strength in war equipment when it embarked for Greece. Some of the equipment was not of high quality, in particular the anti-tank gun, but it was to be October 1942 before the Division was to be so well supplied again.<sup>2</sup>

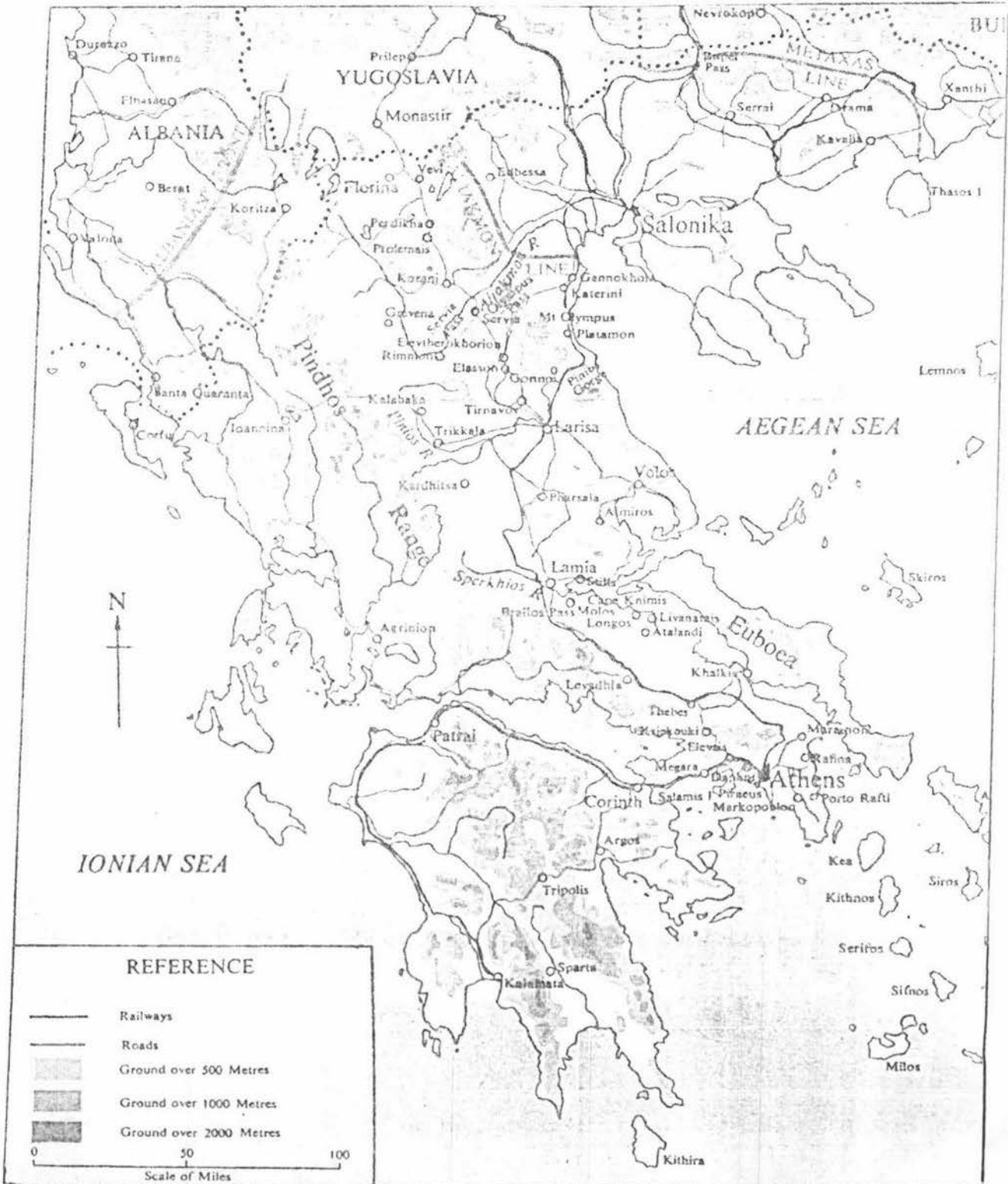
The Division was moved in instalments to Greece between 6 March and 3 April. Initially the Division was to be utilised on the plains north of Katerini. The New Zealanders were to be deployed behind a massive anti-tank ditch some 15 miles south of the Aliakmon River. Freyberg was concerned that the Allied forces would not be strong enough to hold the Germans on the plains and suggested to General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, GOC Allied troops in Greece, that the defences would be more effective at the foot of the mountain passes adjoining Mt. Olympus. Wilson was not entirely convinced but allowed the New Zealanders to prepare demolitions

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Real Anzacs' appeared in Punch on 1 November 1916. The poem was contained in a letter from Alan J. Agnew, Managing Director of Punch, to Colonel C.F. Seaward, 11 May 1954, Seaward Papers, QEIIAMM.

<sup>2</sup> Gentry, Interview.

Greece



Source: W.G. McClymont, To Greece, facing p.85.

and garrison the passes on either side of Mt. Olympus, though insisting they also hold their positions behind the Aliakmon Line.<sup>3</sup>

There was one serious deficiency in the Aliakmon Line. It could be outflanked by a force which attacked through south-western Yugoslavia and forced its way through western Greece. It was hoped that the Germans would respect the neutrality of Yugoslavia or that country could stop the Germans by force of arms.<sup>4</sup> Any such hopes were immediately dashed with the Germans attacking simultaneously on two fronts on 6 April. The main Greek defensive position in north-eastern Greece, the Metaxas Line, was smashed. With the surrender of the Yugoslavs on 9 April the way was now clear for the Allied positions in northern Greece to be outflanked. Wilson had reacted to the failure of the Greeks to delay the Germans by ordering the New Zealanders to form a front around the mountain passes. 21 Battalion was moved up from near Athens on 8/9 April to strengthen the eastern flank of the line. It is the actions of this Battalion that we will follow for the next eleven days.

On 13/14 April Wilson decided to withdraw his forces to a new line at Thermopylae through the Allied line from Platamon through Mt. Olympus to Servia Pass. It was obvious to Wilson that if he did not withdraw he would be encircled and cut off. He could not rely on the Greeks delaying the Germans to the west. However if the Allied forces were to be extracted there was a need for a skilful delaying action. The ANZAC Corps<sup>5</sup> was to delay the Germans and then withdraw on the nights of 17/18 and 18/19 April.

The Platamon position was at the eastern end of a chain of mountainous country which divided the flat rolling country to the north from that around Larisa to the south. The value of the position was that it guarded the entrance to Pinios Gorge which opened out on to the plains around Larisa. This town was the bottleneck through which the retiring

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<sup>3</sup> McClymont, pp.118-121, 136-8.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p.148.

<sup>5</sup> Initially the New Zealanders were under the command of 1 Australian Corps but on 12 April the name was changed to ANZAC Corps. This led to General Blamey, GOC ANZAC Corps, making his famous comment to the officer taking the message to New Zealand Divisional Headquarters: 'There you are, sonny, you only have got to live till 6 o'clock tonight to be a ----- Anzac.' *ibid.*, pp.222-3.

Allied troops must withdraw. The loss of Larisa would jeopardize the opportunity for all but a few of the Allied troops to escape.

The defences around Platamon had been held since 27 March by D Coy of 26 Bn. They were told to prepare positions for a battalion. The principal feature of the position was a ridge dominated by a sixth century Frank Castle. To the west, separated by a saddle was another ridge, Pt.266, which was slightly lower and a further mile and a half west of that ridge was the village of Pandeileimon. A railway line ran through a tunnel through castle ridge. Beyond the tunnel to the south was a small railway station. Defensive positions were prepared around the castle, on the southern slopes of castle hill, and through to Pt.266. Demolitions were prepared in the tunnel and on the saddle.<sup>6</sup>

21 Bn arrived in the early evening of 9 April brimming with a keenness brought about by the inactivity of garrison duties near Athens. Lt.Col. N.L. Macky, the CO, based his dispositions on the defences that had been prepared by D/26. A Coy was placed near the castle, B Coy on Pt.266, C Coy was to hold Pandeileimon, and D Coy dug in on the reverse slope of the castle. The Bn had in support A Troop of 27 Bty, 5 Field Regiment, and a section from 19 Army Troop Coy, NZ Engineers. The obvious weakness of 21 Bn's positions was the village of Pandeileimon. The maze of tracks leading from the village to the railway station at the rear of the New Zealanders' defences meant that if any significant pressure was brought to bear the left flank could not hold and encirclement would be a real danger. Macky was in some doubt as to the Bn's role but on the afternoon of the 14th he was visited by Freyberg. The situation was outlined to him and he was told to expect an attack by infantry only as the terrain was impossible for tanks particularly with the recent heavy rain.<sup>7</sup>

The men of 21 Bn spent an uncomfortable time preparing for the German attack. The nights until 12/13 April were cold and wet but the days of the 13th and 14th were fine and warm. Though this was welcome to the New Zealanders it was to be a significant factor in the battle. It

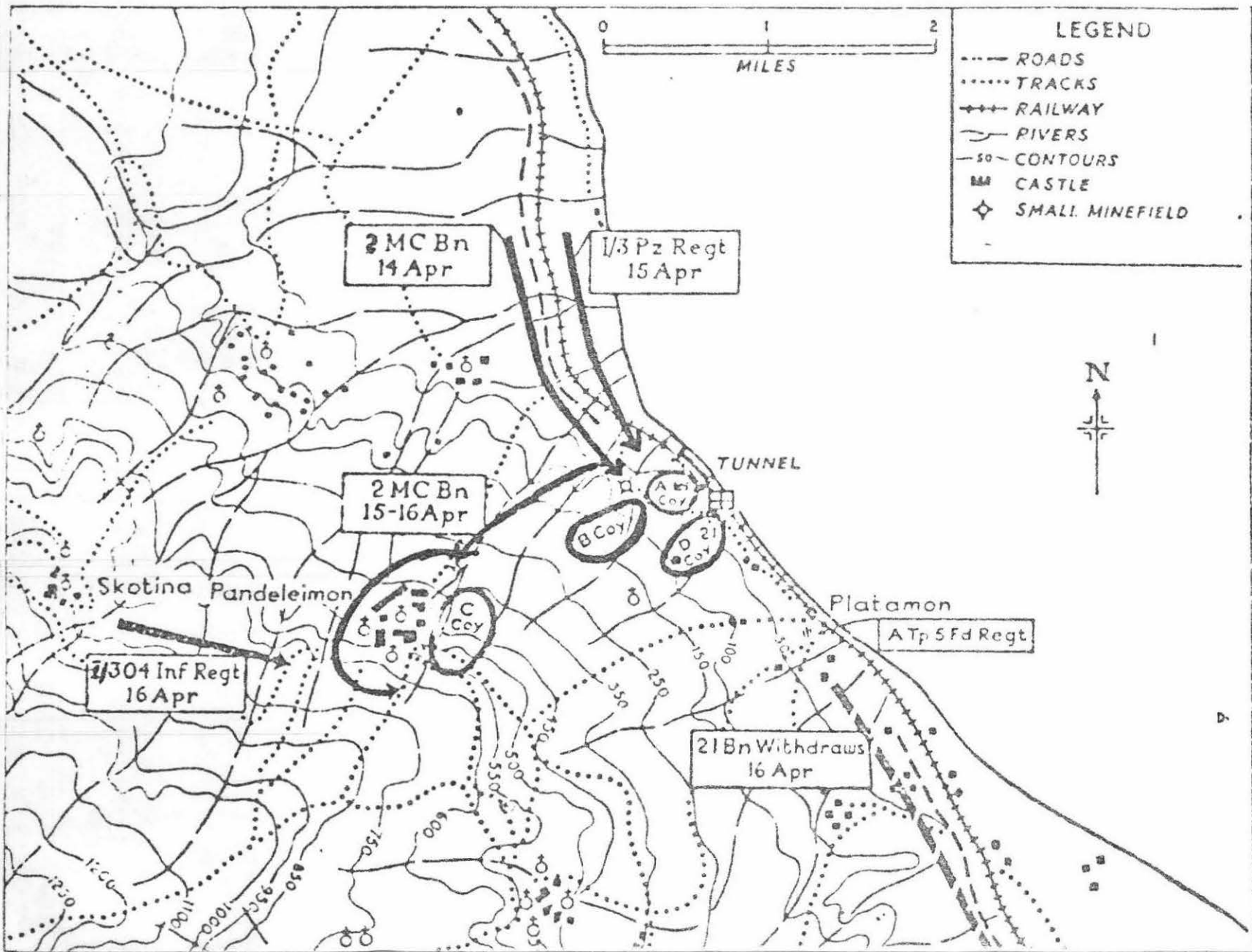
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<sup>6</sup> McClymont, pp.146-7; J.F. Cody, 21 Battalion, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1953, p.42.

<sup>7</sup> Cody, pp.43-49; I.McL. Wards, 'Greece Narrative', DA 401.21/1, pp.295-7.

Figure 3

21 Battalion's Positions Platamon 11-16 April 1941



Source: J.F. Cody, 21 Battalion, p.41.

had been expected that the few mountain tracks over which tanks might have been able to move under favourable conditions would be too bogged to allow any movement. But the clearing weather and the sandy nature of the soil combined to make the tracks barely usable.<sup>8</sup>

The arrival of reconnaissance elements on 2 Motor Cycle Battalion of 2 Panzer Division in the early evening of 14 April caused a flurry of excitement in the positions of the New Zealanders. The four 25-pounders of A Troop opened fire at 5,000 yards and the Battalion Historian remarked that 'an optimistic Bren-gunner let go a burst'. The demolitions were blown in the tunnel and along the saddle track leading towards the castle.<sup>9</sup> The rest of 2 Motor Cycle Battalion arrived on the plain below and C Coy, presumably mistaking armoured troop carriers for tanks, reported 100 tanks massing on the plain. Macky cut this down to fifty when reporting to ANZAC Corps, but there were in fact no German tanks in the vicinity until noon of the following day.<sup>10</sup>

The night of 14/15 April must have been a tense one for the New Zealanders huddled in their positions around Platamon. Throughout the night the guns kept up a constant bombardment of the German positions. Those who had been in combat before such as Macky and his senior officers Harding, Trousdale, and Le Lievre must have wondered on their reaction to combat again after twenty-three years. Macky had a further cloud hanging over him. He had been one of the four colonels to 'revolt' in 1938. Any failure here would further decrease his reputation. But for most of the men the experience they were about to undergo was to be a novel one. Jim Henderson's description of the night before 22 Bn's first combat must equally apply to 21 Bn. The men 'licked their lips and felt the sweat on the palms of their hands and while every man wondered how he would show up in his first action, many a man was probably thinking - "I mustn't let my cobbles down, I mustn't let my cobbles down".'<sup>11</sup> Cody, the 21 Bn Historian, considers that 'never was a rifle checked more thoroughly, never a bayonet point thumbed so thoroughly.'<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Lt.Col. N.L. Macky, 'Report on 21 Battalion in Greece', DA 54/10/19.

<sup>9</sup> Cody, p.50.

<sup>10</sup> McClymont, p.246; Cody, p.51n; Macky, 'Report...'.  
<sup>11</sup> Jim Henderson, 'Narrative of 22 Battalion, Greece', WAI, Series 3, No.28, p.7.

<sup>12</sup> Cody, p.52.

One can only wonder as to the thoughts of men preparing for their first combat. Though nearly forty years later, the memories of those answering my questionnaire are worth considering. Many men were anxious to get to grips with the enemy though General Gentry considers this anticipation is tempered by the first action and men are not so eager to fight next time,<sup>13</sup>

Anticipation that you could have a go,  
satisfaction that you were part of the  
real thing, and a thankfulness that the  
waiting was to end.

Full of youthful adventure, keen to  
prove I was ready and that I was better  
than the antagonist.

One of great curiosity and expectancy.

Yet there were others who met their first combat with reverse feelings:

A sick feeling in the stomach and a wish  
to be excluded.

I'm afraid I had plenty of imagination!

Terrible...I wondered what would happen  
and whether I would be killed or wounded.

I was extremely scared.

In all probability most men entered battle with mixed feelings - anticipation and fear:

It was one of expecting the unknown  
dangers with the feelings of anticipation  
mixed with trepidation.

Apprehensive and mixed with a fervent  
hope that I would acquit myself creditably.

Nervous, in the sense that one did not  
know what may happen, would you fight? or  
run? Yet we all did not want to let our  
friends and comrades down.

Yet as my respondents point out, the initial fears in combat are not of being killed. Most men assume they will come out of it. 'I never thought for a moment I wouldn't come out of it'. But the 'fear comes when you see the wounded and the dead.' It is interesting to note in the Spanish Civil War three quarters of men questioned found the experience of first

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<sup>13</sup> General Sir William Gentry, Interview. All quotations relating to first combat are from the MQ, Question 7.

action as expected,<sup>14</sup> which is surprising given the unique experience first combat is,

It was undoubtedly a relief after the tense and nervous night, when the initial assault by 2 Motor Cycle Battalion commenced after a short bombardment. The Germans found that the New Zealanders were firmly entrenched and made little progress. The arrival of I/3 Regiment with its tanks in the early afternoon led to a change in the direction of the assault. Five Mark II tanks of I/3 Panzer Regiment attempted to climb the ridge just to the west of Castle Hill. One almost reached the forward platoon of B Coy before it shed its tracks on a boulder. Simultaneously, 2 Motor Cycle Battalion attacked C Coy at Pandeileimon. One company attempted to outflank C Coy by climbing behind it, over 'terribly difficult, mountainous and pathless' country with 'slopes of 700 metres to surmount.'<sup>15</sup> Before it was in position the other two companies attacked suffering heavy casualties, though by nightfall sections of 2 Motor Cycle Battalion had infiltrated C Coy's positions and continued this throughout the night.

I/304 Infantry Regiment arrived during the night and when the attack recommenced next morning the Germans had 100 tanks, over 2,000 infantry, and sixteen heavy guns against 21 Battalion's 700 men and four 25-pounders. I/3 Panzer continued its tank attack and learning from its experiences of the previous afternoon made some progress. The emphasis of the attack, now, however, was outflanking C Coy. With I/304 Regiment's support, 2 Motor Cycle Battalion was able to threaten C Coy with encirclement. 15 pl was overrun and by 0930 hours the Coy began a gradual withdrawal, towards the Railway Station. Macky was faced with encirclement through Pandeileimon, a tank attack that was threatening B Coy, and a shortage of ammunition for the guns. 1800 rounds had been promised but only 1200 arrived and by mid morning the guns could only be used sparingly.<sup>16</sup> Macky decided to withdraw towards Pinios Gorge soon after 1000 hours. There was no pursuit as the Germans sought to regroup. The tanks found it impossible to follow the New Zealanders and in the end they had to be towed over

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Watson, War on the Mind, Hutchinson, London, 1978, p.213.

<sup>15</sup> I.McL. Wards, 'Panzer Attack in Greece', The Other Side of the Hill, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1952, p.11.

<sup>16</sup> Macky, 'Report...'.

castle ridge and only twenty-five-thirty were across by 1100 hours the next day. The demolitions were successful and even by the 20th the Germans had effected only the most rudimentary of repairs.<sup>17</sup> The New Zealanders had coped well with their first combat. The position was lost but the enemy had more than the three to one advantage which later in the war was to be accepted as the criterion for a successful attack against a well entrenched enemy. The lessons for the New Zealanders must surely have been not to under-estimate the ability of the Germans to use their tanks in places that were barely possible and the determination that they pressed their attacks home with.

21 Bn withdrew along the coast to Pinios Gorge where it was planned to form another defensive position with the two battalions of 16 Australian Bde. The importance of the Gorge was easily apparent. It was only fifteen miles from Tempe, at the western end of the Gorge, to Larisa. The Gorge itself was a natural defensive position. From the sea to the start of the Gorge the land was heavily forested and impassable. The Gorge itself extended for three miles with 1000 foot cliffs on either side. However if an enemy climbed over the mountainous country to the north of the Gorge the position could be outflanked by a river crossing near the village of Gonnos. Many centuries before the Persian Xerxes had used those very tactics to outflank the Greeks.<sup>18</sup>

The section from 19 Army Troop Coy was responsible for demolitions in the railway tunnel on the northern side of the Gorge and on the road on the southern side. The latter was particularly important for should tanks succeed in crossing to the southern side of the river which flowed through the Gorge they could be stopped from progressing past the demolition. Half a ton of gelignite was used in the demolition and the whole of the road surface to a depth of six feet was blown out. However the sloping strata was not touched and this left an effective foundation for crossing the gap. This was due to a lack of satisfactory boring tools.<sup>19</sup> 10 pl, B Coy, was left to cover the demolition.

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<sup>17</sup> Wards, 'Panzer Attack...', p.6.

<sup>18</sup> Cody, p.59; Wards, 'Greece Narrative', pp.462-3.

<sup>19</sup> 'Report on Demolitions at Pinios Gorge', 19 Army Troop Company, Hanson Papers, QEIIAMM.

Macky disposed his Coys to cover the mouth of the Gorge and the Gorge itself. One platoon from B Coy was used to patrol the heights above Ambelakia to prevent movement along the mountain tracks, while the other B Coy platoon was on a ridge about 800 feet above the river halfway between the road demolition and Tempe. C Coy was positioned at the mouth of the Gorge near Tempe. One platoon was on the road as it left the Gorge while the other two were in the rocky ridges above the road. A Coy was beyond C Coy with a dual role; to stop further exploitation should the enemy push beyond C Coy, and to stop any river crossing near Tempe. The only communication was by runner as most communications equipment had been left behind at Platamon. Four anti-tank guns were placed between C and A Coys in what Kippenberger described as the 'counter-penetration role beloved of anti-tank gunners then, and so neither infantry nor anti-tank guns could help one another.'<sup>20</sup> The 25-pounders of 26 Bty, 4 Field Regiment, were sited three miles to the south of Tempe.<sup>21</sup>

21 Bn's positions aimed at denying the enemy any opportunity to leave the mouth of the Gorge. Should the enemy reach Tempe and beyond there would be no opportunity to regroup and form another defensive position. If infantry crossed the river west of Tempe the New Zealanders' positions would be useless. They could be simply bypassed. Macky sited his companies low on the ridges to enable them to prevent infantry moving through the Gorge but this was to make them vulnerable to fire from the heights across the river. This problem was to be more intense as the battle developed with the enemy increasingly able to bring more firepower to bear.<sup>22</sup>

The Australians of 2/2 Bn occupied a position at the mouth of the Gorge and extended westwards to prevent a river crossing. C Coy occupied a position at the mouth of the Gorge; A Coy protected the approaches to Evangelismos, while B Coy and Battalion Headquarters were situated just south of that village. One platoon from each of A and B Coys were detached to be 'spectators' at Hill 1005. D Coy was sent to

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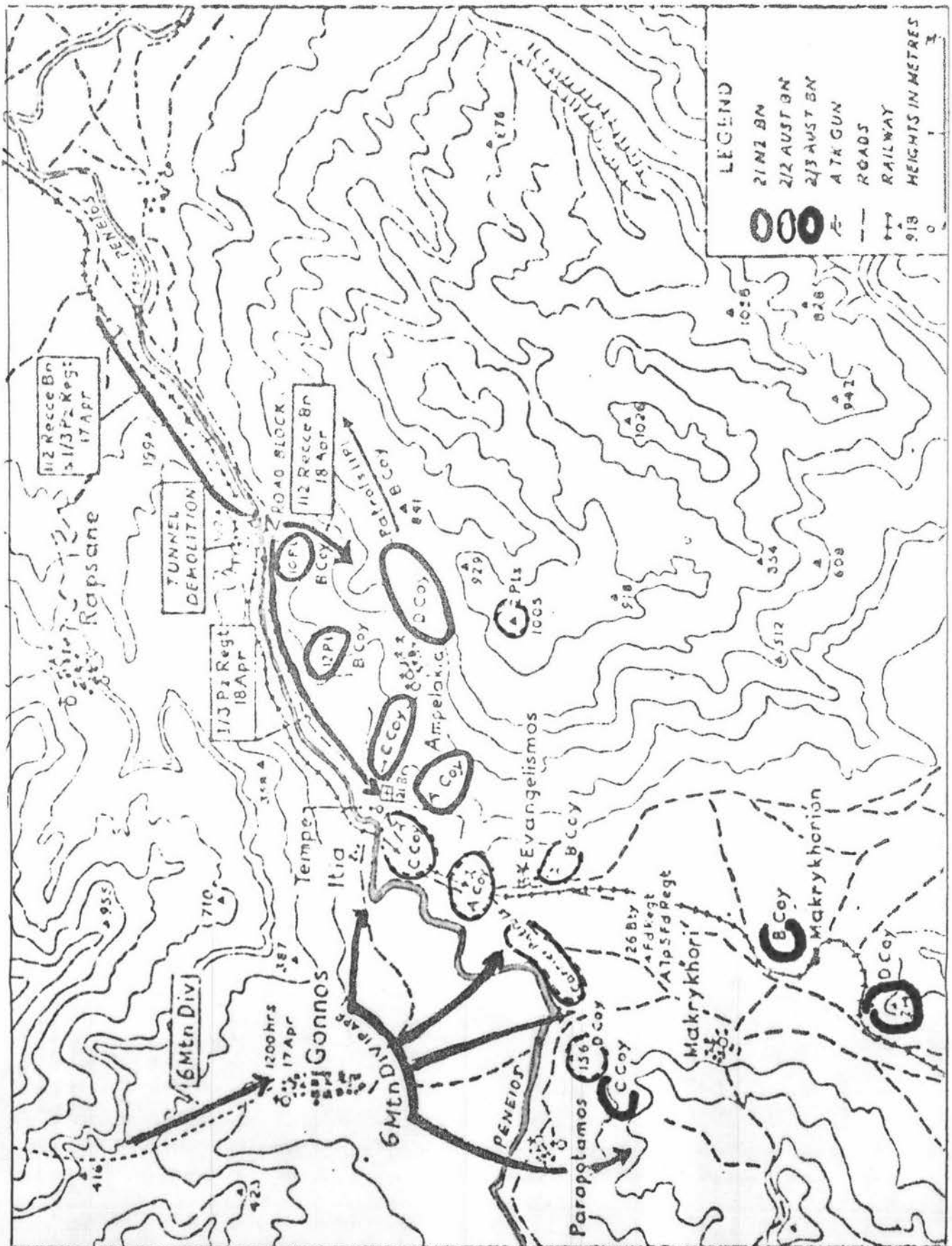
<sup>20</sup> H.K. Kippenberger, letter to J.L. Scoullar, 21 January 1954, WAI, Series 11, No.7.

<sup>21</sup> McClymont, p.325; W.E. Murphy, 2nd New Zealand Divisional Artillery, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1966, p.58; Cody, p.53.

<sup>22</sup> Wards, 'Greece Narrative', p.468.

Figure 4

Pinios Gorge - Dispositions 17-18 April 1941



Source: J.F. Cody, 21 Battalion, p.59.

Hill 156 overlooking the river between Makrykhorion and Parapotamos. 2/3 Bn and Brigadier A.S. Allen arrived on 17 April. C Coy was sent to a position overlooking D Coy 2/2 Bn, while B and D Coys were placed in reserve to the north and south of Makrykhorion. A Coy was to patrol mountain tracks to the west. Allen assumed overall command but made no effort to alter either 2/2 or 21 Bn's positions. The Narrator for the Greek campaign made three criticisms of the Australian dispositions:

- (i) No force was available for a counterattack should the German infantry cross the river.
- (ii) The 3,000 yard gap between A and D Coy of 2/2 Bn could not be held with a handful of carriers and a patrol of platoon. They could have been replaced by C Coy 2/2 Bn or the two platoons on Hill 1005.
- (iii) Allen had B and D Coys of 2/2 Bn four miles in reserve where they could be of little use.<sup>23</sup>

A reconnaissance patrol from 6 Mountain Division approached the eastern edge of the Gorge on the evening of 17 April. They moved along the northern bank and were fired upon by 10 pl. The arrival of the first tank from I/3 Panzer Regiment forced 10 pl to climb higher on its ridge. The platoon was unable to call on accurate artillery support because the rugged terrain severely restricted radio communication between the guns and its FOO. After dark 10 pl withdrew leaving the roadblock unguarded. No attempt was made to re-establish a position protecting the roadblock. During the evening the tanks managed to find a ford in the Pinios River and by dusk four were safely across. Throughout the night 6 Mountain Division assembled near Gonnos after its feat of crossing the mountainous country to the rear of that village. So by morning the Allied forces faced two threats - one from the tanks to the east of Tempe and the other a river crossing to the west of Tempe on the Australians' positions. If either attack was successful it was inevitable that the other position would be severely jeopardized.

Next morning German infantry crossed the river on kapok floats and cleared the roadblock in two hours without opposition. At 0900 hours

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<sup>23</sup> Wards, 'Greece Narrative', p.468n.

I/143 Mountain Regiment made a feint attack between Tempe and Parapotamos. To the west a dawn patrol from III/143 Regiment crossed the river without any opposition. Throughout the morning the Germans concentrated on completing and consolidating this crossing though drawing some small arms and artillery fire. At noon the tanks reached the mouth of the Gorge. The platoon from B Coy overlooking the Gorge could do nothing as the tanks moved below. They then reached C Coy's positions to the great consternation of that Coy. The platoon on the road was cut off; the other two attempted to climb the ridges. The anti-tank guns were still not within range. Here the tanks delayed for two hours in a 'swelter of dust and explosions'. C Coy reported that seventeen tanks had come through the mouth of the Gorge.<sup>24</sup>

With great caution the tanks then moved towards A Coy and were engaged by the anti-tank guns. Of the anti-tank gun troops L1 had been silenced by machine gun fire from across the river, L4 destroyed two tanks, damaged another before being put out of action by the infantry, L3 was apparently destroyed by infantry, and L2 escaped - though the Australians claimed the crew removed the breachblock and withdrew before coming into action.<sup>25</sup>

By mid-afternoon I/143 Mountain Regiment had begun a full scale crossing. Another attack was launched across the river near Tempe, and Macky, considering the Australian position lost, ordered his Battalion to withdraw. This only affected A Coy as the other Coys had already withdrawn towards the hills. Earlier in the day Macky had told his Coys that if they were cut off to make for Volos over the mountains.<sup>26</sup>

The Australian position which had been steadily worsening throughout the afternoon was rapidly becoming desperate. The river crossings had stretched the Australian defences close to their limit. With the collapse of 21 Bn's positions the Australians were faced with attacks on two fronts and began to withdraw. Initially Allen Force had been expected to

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<sup>24</sup> McClymont, p.329; Macky, 'Report...', There were six tanks.

<sup>25</sup> Wards, 'Greece Narrative', p.480.

<sup>26</sup> Macky, 'Report...'.

hold its positions until 0300 hours on 19 April,<sup>27</sup> Savige Force<sup>28</sup> and 6 New Zealand Brigade would not clear the vicinity of Larisa until 0100 hours on 19 April. After a visit to Allen Force Headquarters in the early afternoon Freyberg considered that Allen Force would be unable to hold its positions until the required hour. He decided that a fighting withdrawal must take place to prevent the Germans reaching Larisa too soon. To help facilitate this fighting withdrawal the New Zealand Divisional Cavalry Regiment was placed under the command of Allen Force. The withdrawal was a success and the Germans did not reach Larisa until noon of the 19th. This was mainly due to a skilful rearguard by the Bren carriers and the artillery.

Pinios Gorge is in many ways a confused battle. It did serve its purpose in that the German forces were prevented in cutting off a proportion of the Allied Army in Greece. Several histories, prepared for popular consumption have grossly distorted the fighting at Pinios Gorge. Martyn Uren, a gunner in the battle, wrote:

They must have been doped...for they marched towards the river ten abreast, singing and doing the goosetstep some of the time...many of them were sick of the slaughter, physically sick of killing Germans.<sup>29</sup>

Another said the men became 'sick of killing' while The London Illustrated News described it as the 'river of blood'.<sup>30</sup> These are obvious distortions of the truth. It appears that the maximum casualties at Pinios Gorge were Allied 200 (130 prisoners of war) and German fifteen.<sup>31</sup>

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27 A NZ Divisional Order issued on the 16th said that units in Pinios Gorge would withdraw on the night of 18/19 April. On Macky's copy the dates for withdrawal were listed as 17/18 April, but one can assume that Macky was aware of the correct date; he was in touch with Australians who presumably knew the correct date and also because he made no attempt to withdraw his force on the night 17/18 April. McClymont, p.332n.

28 Savige Force was composed of mainly 17 Australian Brigade with several attached artillery batteries. *ibid.*, p.221.

29 Martyn Uren, Kiwi Saga, Collins, Auckland, 1943, p.101.

30 Draft of Buckley's History of the Greek Campaign, IA 181/42/3, NA, and Lord Freyberg's comments on the draft, undated, IA 181/42/3, NA.

31 The German casualties are those estimated by Lord Freyberg in his comments on Buckley's draft; the Australian casualties from Wards, 'Greece Narrative', p.492; those of 21 Battalion from a letter from H.K. Kippenberger, letter to J.L. Scoullar, 21 January 1954, WAI, Series 11, No.7; and those of the New Zealand gunners from McClymont, p.497.

Neither the New Zealanders nor the Australians were happy with each other's conduct of the battle. Brigadier Allen stated that he found it necessary to remind Lt.Col. Parkinson, CO 4 Field Regiment, that his guns were withdrawing without orders and he was expected to stand and fight. Lt.Col. Lamb, CO 2/3 Bn, said he twice had to draw his revolver to force New Zealand gunners into position. Lt.Col. Chilton, CO 2/2 Bn, in his report said that the New Zealand anti-tank crew in C/2/2's area removed the breech-block from their gun and departed. He also stated that the guns firing across the river were not effective and at one stage ceased altogether. He was told by Parkinson that he had sent a senior officer 'to give the gunners ten minutes drill to pull them together'. Parkinson reported exactly the opposite. He said the Australian infantry ran away and left the guns. An Australian 2-pounder that was with a section of 25-pounders pulled out and left. Both Parkinson and Major G. Stewart, OC 26 Bty, 4 Field Regiment, said that Chilton and his Headquarters left without any warning. Parkinson felt there was no excuse for the Australians' abrupt departure. This difference in opinion seems unlikely ever to be solved. It seems likely that most of these differences in opinion are a result of misunderstandings. The Official Historians have simply concluded that Parkinson considered his guns fought a copybook action and that German records bear this out.<sup>32</sup>

The performance of 21 Bn cannot escape some criticism. Macky was prepared to admit an error in the siting of the roadblock and the use of one platoon to cover.<sup>33</sup> But others were more critical of the handling of the battle. Freyberg was intensely annoyed with 21 Bn's performance and made it known. His foreword to the Official History is very much an apology for his comments. The Editor-in-Chief was also quite clear in his thoughts on the Bn's performance:

21 Battalion was tipped out of its position and dispersed by 1½ platoons of German infantry and six Mark II tanks (of which two were disabled and none were able to get at the infantry), supported by the fire at a thousand yards and more of a cyclist squadron from across the river and two or three mortars, but only a few mountain guns and no aircraft. The Battalion had four casualties and gave up its vitally important position and scattered in

<sup>32</sup> Wards, 'Greece Narrative', p.492; Reports by Lt.Cols. Chilton and Lamb, with comments by Brig. Parkinson, DA 401.21/2.

<sup>33</sup> McClymont, p.324n; Macky suffered from dysentery after his escape from Greece and after 17 May 1941 was not to command troops on active service.

a few hours....Allen rung out two battalions on a seven mile front, put his Headquarters miles back and generally was so disposed that when beaten in only a little his troops were thrown off the line it was their business to hold. Poor Polly was pushed head first into the Gorge and he left the demolitions, which in the position he was in had become vital, guarded by one platoon which was withdrawn.

Kippenberger considered it a classic example of bad dispositions and suggested the obvious position for Allen's force to take up was across the line Makrykhorion-Parapotamos where 'it stood across the road to Larisa on a reasonably compact line and in a position that looks...difficult to attack without lengthy preparation and in country where there must have been a lot of tank proof country'.<sup>34</sup> Kippenberger's comments are hindsight and though they are valid in many areas take little account of the situation of Allen Force. All three Battalions had had little sleep over the previous five days. The conditions over much of their time in Greece were wet and miserable, and they were meeting experienced successful troops while they themselves were inexperienced and were yet to taste success in battle.

Macky's decision to withdraw his men independently into the hills is hard to justify. His dispositions meant that there was no opportunity for any Coys bypassed by the Germans to take any further part in the battle. Once his men withdrew into the hills they ceased to be a cohesive fighting force and were little more than rabble and of no more than nuisance value against the enemy. The men themselves fought well. But they could only fight as well as their positions and leaders allowed them. It is for this reason that they were defeated and dispersed so easily.

It may seem unfair to study Platamon and Pinios Gorge when other rearguard actions were more successful. 5 Bde's defence of Olympus Pass has not met with any criticism, and there has only been mild criticism of 4 Bde's defence of Servia Pass. This mainly centres around the CO of 18 Bn, Lt.Col. J.R. Gray.<sup>35</sup> Platamon and Pinios Gorge are interesting

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<sup>34</sup> H.K. Kippenberger, letter to J.L. Scoullar, 21 January 1954, WAI, Series 11, No.7.

<sup>35</sup> Gray was a controversial figure until his death in the middle of 1942, and his unorthodox approach led to some criticism. At Servia Pass his withdrawal route led to problems with dispersal of his Battalion.

for their controversial nature, and this has had the dual result of attracting attention and resource material,

These two actions fought by 21 Bn illustrated clearly the problems of the New Zealanders in this early stage of the war. Their leadership was deficient in experience and in a few cases ability, and the men had little experience in combat. There was little opportunity for the leaders or the men to change the course of the battle. All that could be hoped was to delay the outcome. The enemy was superior in men and weapons and logistic support. Defeat was inevitable at Platamon and Pinios Gorge. The battles were valuable teaching experiences. There was a learning experience from simply being in a combat zone. They now knew what war was about. They had met death and mutilation. But leaders at all levels had had a valuable experience in man management and leadership under battle conditions. From the outset the Greek expedition was doomed to be a learning experience.

Expectation would not allow Greece to be anything other than a success. Greece may have been a defeat for the Allies but battles such as Olympus Pass, Platamon and Pinios Gorge, and Veve, enhanced further, in the eyes of the New Zealand people, the tradition that had grown to adulthood on the beaches and heights of Gallipoli.

## CHAPTER 4

LEADERSHIP: MALEME

Not for the first time in British Commonwealth experience, a battle was to be lost through kindness

Maurice Tugwell, Airborne to Battle<sup>1</sup>

After the evacuation from Greece, 4 and 5 Brigades were transported to Crete and 6 Brigade continued on to Egypt. Crete was to win fame for the New Zealanders in a manner similar to Gallipoli. New Zealanders are fiercely proud of their countrymen's exploits on Crete and the mere mention of 'their gallant deeds will always bring a thrill of pride to the people of New Zealand.'<sup>2</sup> But the battle was a fiasco as was Gallipoli. New Zealanders seem to have a propensity to see the disastrous episodes in our military history as great triumphs. Yet Crete was to fully expose the limitations of the New Zealanders at this stage of the war. All the heroism and bravery in the world is no substitute for inadequate and inexperienced leadership against well-trained troops, and, as Brigadier Burrows points out, the enemy on Crete was the best, 'the very best'.<sup>3</sup> This chapter will reassess the battle of Maleme emphasising the leadership. There were valuable lessons to be learnt from the problems on Crete; and the Division did indeed absorb them.

With only one exception, the senior New Zealand commanders on Crete all had had World War I experience.<sup>4</sup> The experience and rank was varied, from brigade commander to the most lowly of privates. Two of these commanders, Freyberg and Lt.Col. L.W. Andrew, had won the supreme award for gallantry - the Victoria Cross. But it was this very experience that was to be a liability in this, the most novel of attacks. No-one could have had any experience in dealing with an airborne invasion, yet when flair and initiative were most required the commanders were clouded by their

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<sup>1</sup> Maurice Tugwell, Airborne to Battle, William Kimber, London, 1971, p.109.

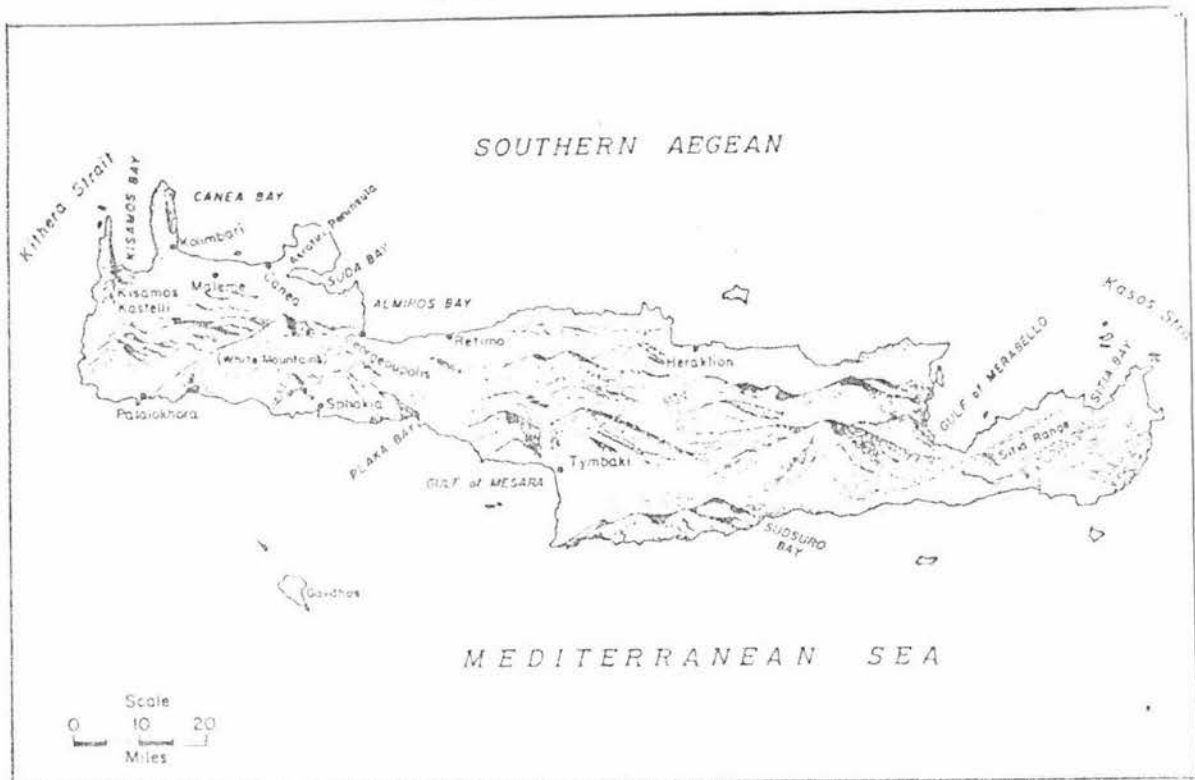
<sup>2</sup> Army Board, Battle for Crete, Wellington, 1943, p.3.

<sup>3</sup> Brigadier J.T. Burrows, Lecture on 'Leadership' to the New Zealand Commissioning Course, September 1977; Tape held by OCTC, ATG, Waiouru.

<sup>4</sup> Lt.Col. J.M. Allen, CO 21 Battalion.

Figure 5

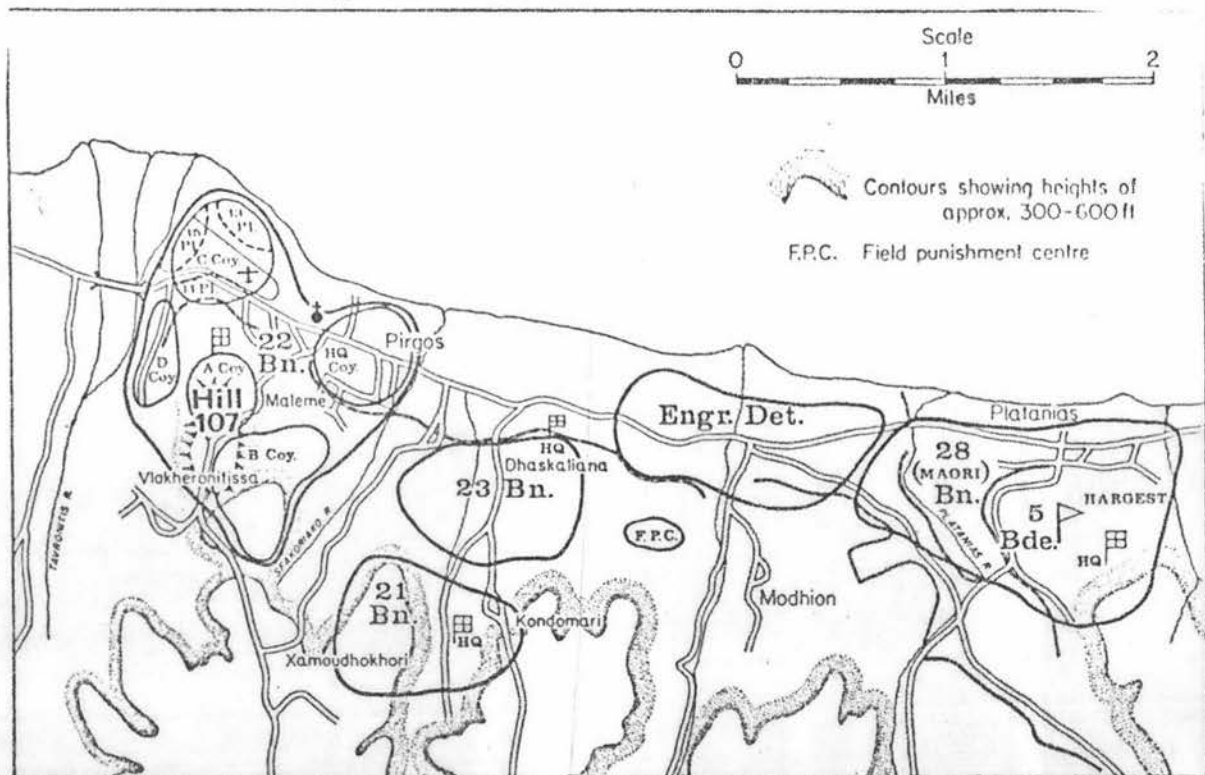
Crete



Source: I. McD. Stewart, The Struggle for Crete, p.33.

Figure 6

5 Brigade dispositions Maleme 19 May 1941



Source: I. McD. Stewart, The Struggle for Crete, p.122.

World War I experience and an adherence to the 'Blue Water' school,

A battle is often won or lost in the preparations and on Crete the British leadership was given the opportunity to diminish the chances of the invasion succeeding, even before the transport planes left Greece. Creforce was in possession of the 'most detailed plans of the enemy's proposed operations that were ever likely to be available to any commander.'<sup>5</sup> German signals, mechanically enciphered, were being regularly deciphered by the British from the summer of 1940 onwards. It was this source that provided the British with the complete German invasion plans a 'substantial' time, possibly up to three weeks, before the invasion.<sup>6</sup>

It seems apparent that the information was passed on to Freyberg. F.W. Winterbotham, a senior British Officer who dealt with the Ultra information as it was called, is emphatic that the information reached Freyberg. Freyberg himself was later to praise the 'wonderful intelligence reports', and Gentry has also commented on the marvellous information brought by 'the Air Force chap up on the hill'. Brigadier R. Miles, CRA, commented that the method of attack was 'exactly as foretold by the "I" branch.'<sup>7</sup>

Apparently Freyberg was not told of the source of the information and for this reason may have doubted its authenticity. It has been suggested that he knew of the source but could not use it fully for fear of giving away the Ultra Secret.<sup>8</sup> However, it seems likely the intercepts 'were camouflaged as coming from a well-placed agent.'<sup>9</sup> One of the conditions of being an Ultra recipient was that he could not place himself in a position where he could be captured by the enemy.

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<sup>5</sup> F.W. Winterbotham, letter to the author, December 1978.

<sup>6</sup> R.V. Jones, Most Secret War, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1978, p.208, and letter to the author, 29 May 1978.

<sup>7</sup> Winterbotham, December 1978; Professor M. Howard, letter to the author 25 July 1978; Gentry, 12 September 1979; I.McD. Stewart, pp.103-4; Ronald Lewin, Ultra Goes to War, Hutchinson, London, 1978, p.158; Brigadier R. Miles, 29 May 1941, FP, No.17.

<sup>8</sup> Jones, p.208 and 29 May 1978. The present Lord Freyberg, in a letter to the author, 30 July 1978, refused to comment.

<sup>9</sup> Freyberg is reputed to have asked Montgomery's IO what had happened to that Foreign Office chap we had working for us in Berlin. Lewin, p.158; see also Howard, 25 July 1978.

A Joint Intelligence Committee summary gave Creforce an early indication of the scale of attack. It predicted a bombing attack, prior to the airborne landings, followed by three to four thousand parachutists. There would be a simultaneous seaborne invasion which would reinforce the airborne invasion. It was estimated there were ample troops and shipping, including lighters for tank transport, and the scale of the seaborne invasion was only dependent on the extent it could avoid British naval forces.<sup>10</sup>

A further appreciation was issued by Creforce on 12 May accurately predicting the attack and its scale. The first objectives were the three aerodromes of Heraklion, Retime and Maleme, 'the possession of which is an essential preliminary for the landing of troop carrying aircraft.' The secondary objectives were the ports of Suda Bay and Heraklion. In the days preceding the invasion there would be heavy air attacks and on D-Day fighters and bombers would attack the aerodrome perimeters to neutralise the defences, and then they would immediately be followed by the parachutists. The 'entire plan is based on the capture of the aerodromes. If the aerodromes hold out...the entire plan will fail.' Significantly it concluded:

Although this appreciation has not mentioned sea landings on the beaches, the possibility of these attacks must not be overlooked, but they will be of secondary importance to those from the air.<sup>11</sup>

It seems likely Ultra also gave Creforce the exact invasion date. Davin, the Official Historian, wrote that the attack was expected any time after 14 May, this being revised on the 16th to any time between the 17th and 19th. W.E. Murphy, who prepared much of the Narrative for the Official History, told the author that the attack was expected on the 19th and they were partly caught unawares on the 20th. Freyberg's Report makes it quite clear he knew the invasion time:

We had now been warned that the attack was due to start on the 20th. On the 19th, however, some doubt was thrown on this but the certainty of the attack coming on the 20th was confirmed at midnight on the 19th.

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<sup>10</sup> 'JIC Intelligence summary No. 54141, 29 April 1941', FP, No.16.

<sup>11</sup> Creforce HQ, 'Appreciation of the German Plan for attack on Crete', 12 May 1941, FP, No.17.

General Gentry has suggested that the previous alerts were in fact correct but the Germans had each time postponed their attack. He confirms that New Zealand Divisional HQ knew on the 19th that the attack would come on the 20th.<sup>12</sup>

Intelligence itself does not win a battle; it makes a contribution. One has to consider 'objectively the capacity of British and German commanders, the amount and efficiency of their guns, tanks and aircraft.'<sup>13</sup> However, in light of this information it seems hard to understand why Freyberg was far 'more nervous of a seaborne approach.'<sup>14</sup> This was to manifest itself both in preparations for the invasion and throughout the landings. He was later to tell Churchill that 'We for our part were mostly preoccupied by sealandings, not the threat of airlandings.'<sup>15</sup> Like the other commanders he had had no experience with the aeroplane in modern warfare, and consciously or unconsciously concentrated on the threat he was more familiar with. Though the Appreciation of 12 May downplayed the danger of a seaborne invasion there were specific grounds for worry in that direction. The JIC summary indicated there were plenty of craft available for an invasion and would only have to make six knots to reach Crete by day when they would have protection from the Luftwaffe. He could not possibly have known that the Battle of Matapan would dissuade the Italian fleet from offering protection to a seaborne invasion.

Cunningham, Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean, had told Freyberg quite flatly that he would be unable to intervene in daylight hours. Freyberg was extremely worried about the threat of tanks being landed from the sea. He wrote to Wavell that they 'would be able to stop him on the aerodromes, but not beach landings with tanks.'<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to note that the British Official History of the War at Sea considered that

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<sup>12</sup> D.M. Davin, Crete, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1953, pp. 62, 77; Freyberg, 'Report on Crete', p.33, FP, No.11; Gentry, Interview; W.E. Murphy, Interview with author, 4 March 1971.

<sup>13</sup> Lewin, p.155.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p.156.

<sup>15</sup> Stewart, p.71.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p.97.

before the battle it seemed 'most unlikely that an airborne invasion could succeed without seaborne support',<sup>17</sup>

This obsession is hard to understand. One explanation is that he assumed that the Junkers 52 could crashland on any flat area, though where he gained this impression is difficult to know. One can only suggest his ignorance of aviation. The worry of an armoured landing illustrates clearly the prevailing beliefs about armour held by the British at this time. The factor which should have allayed the senior commanders' worry was the coastline. It seems that there were very few places along the coast where transports could get close enough to make a landing successful. Kippenberger went down to inspect his section of coast and decided that there were few places where a vessel drawing three feet could land. Murphy pointed out that a visit to the beach showed at a glance that sealandings would be impossible.<sup>18</sup>

But Freyberg's thinking is clearly illustrated by his decision not to destroy Maleme aerodrome. The CRE, F. Hanson, used 'all the persuasive powers at his command' to have the aerodrome demolished. He considered the results could have been obtained by ploughing, and cutting down and hauling olive trees over the aerodrome; 'Less than a couple of days would have sufficed for the task and an effective job.' There were local type ploughs available and 7 Field Company had been trained in the United Kingdom to make airstrips and flat areas unusable by aircraft. Yet Hanson was unsuccessful simply because of a failure to realise the danger from airborne landings:

The 5 Bde Comd was not very enthusiastic about the need to destroy the aerodrome and he did not think it could be captured anyhow. The Div Comd was rather more impressed with the possible advantage of putting the aerodrome out of action.<sup>19</sup>

Creforce took no action to have the aerodromes destroyed and Freyberg was to maintain later that he had received specific orders not to destroy the aerodrome. There was some expectation of air support and Gentry confirms this expectation. Stewart believes that it was a misguided optimism on

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<sup>17</sup> Stewart, p.22.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p.74, and Murphy, Interview.

<sup>19</sup> F.M.H. Hanson, letter to J.F. Cody, March 27 1957, and Hanson to D. Stockton, March 12 1966, Hanson Papers, QEIIAMM.

Freyberg's part to expect effective air reinforcement from Egypt, and this combined with an obsession with the threat from the sea, and a misguided conviction that the Junkers 52 could crashland on any flat ground, encouraged him to leave Maleme aerodrome intact.<sup>20</sup>

#### The Maleme Sector

5 Bde was given the task of defending Maleme aerodrome and the coast between the Travronitis River and Platanias, a distance of about ten miles. The brigade was commanded by Brig J. Hargest, a farmer-politician. Hargest was highly ranked in the Opposition and had certainly been closely considered for GOC of 2 Div. His Operation Instructions were very simple, the essence of it being:

In the event of the enemy making an airborne or seaborne attack on any part of the area, to counterattack and destroy him immediately.<sup>21</sup>

The units of 5 Bde were given the following tasks:

- (1) 22 Bn static on the aerodrome;
- (2) 23 Bn was the nearest to 22 Bn and was to hold its positions and to be ready to counterattack towards the beach, aerodrome, or area held by the engineers.
- (3) 21 Bn (less one pl protecting the southern flank of 22 Bn) was to either protect the left flank of 22 Bn or replace 23 Bn if it counter-attacked;
- (4) 28 Bn was protecting the coast around Platanias;
- (5) The Engineers (thirty strong) covered the coast between Pírgos and Platanias.<sup>22</sup>

Theoretically the Brigade dispositions were sound and the plan valid and simple. But there were some major defects. They indicate a belief in the importance of the aerodrome that was held not only by the GOC but his senior commanders. Although Hargest's Operation Instructions contained 'special regard to the defence of MALEME aerodrome',<sup>23</sup> he saw fit to site 5 Bde HQ at Platanias in the Maori Bn sector, which was five miles from

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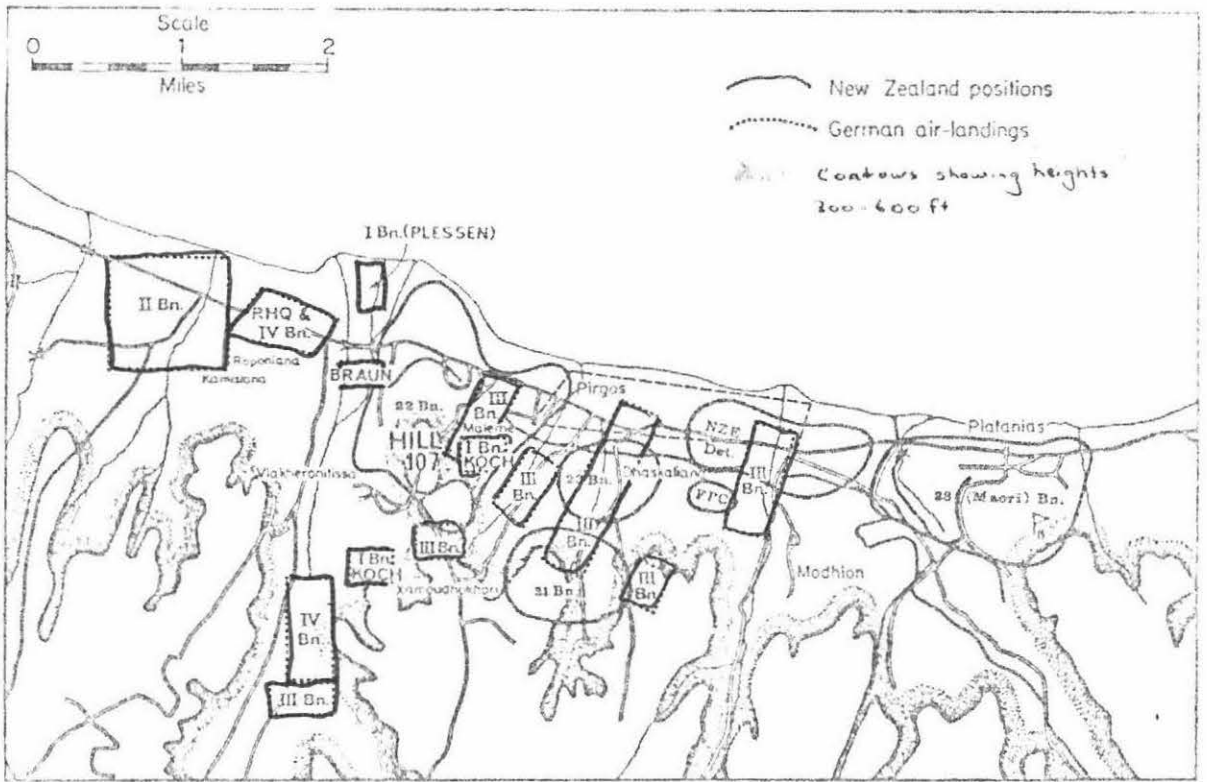
<sup>20</sup> Stewart, p.136; Gentry, interview.

<sup>21</sup> Stewart, p.124.

<sup>22</sup> Davin, p.64.

<sup>23</sup> Stewart, p.124.

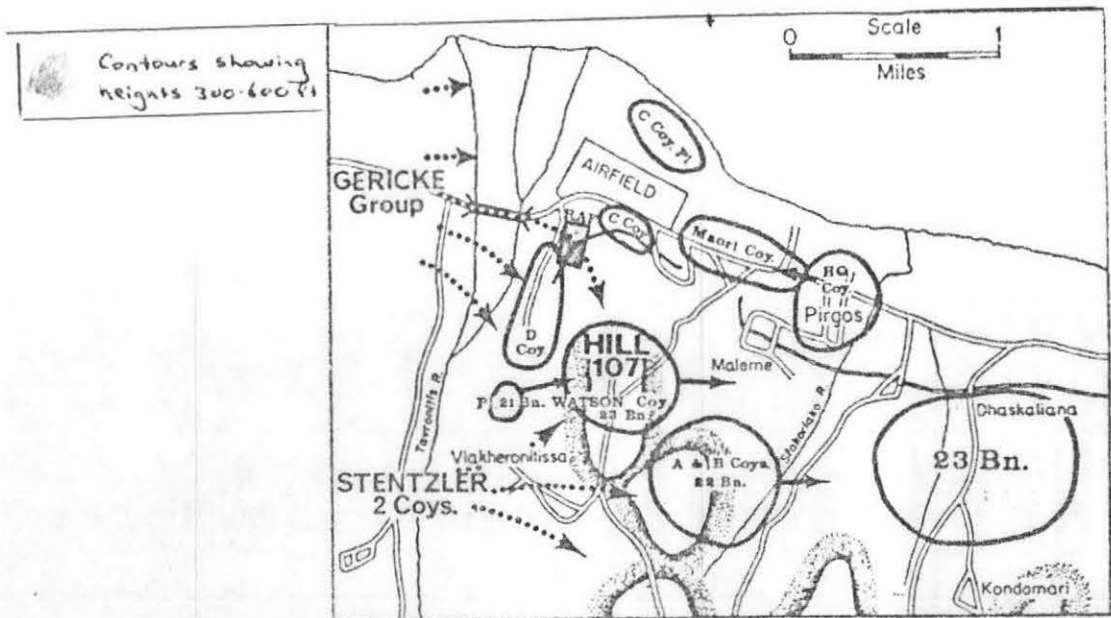
German Landings at Maleme 20 May 1941



Source: I.McD. Stewart, The Struggle for Crete, p.163.

Figure 8

Maleme: 0130 hours 21 May



Source: I.McD. Stewart, The Struggle for Crete, p.242.

Maleme. The Official Historian remarked that if the seaborne invasion had gained a footing, 5 Bde HQ would have been in an advantageous position.<sup>24</sup>

There was no defence immediately to the west of 22 Bn. If the enemy was to land in the area to the west of the Travronitis River they could form up unseen and without opposition. Puttick was worried about this and suggested to Freyberg that a Greek Battalion, fifteen miles to the west protecting the small port of Kastelli, move to already prepared positions to the west of the Travronitis. It was not done. Davin claims it was not feasible because the Greek Government's permission had to be obtained for the move and this was not received until 13 May. With the attack initially expected from the 14th there was not time to bring them into new positions. This reasoning is hard to follow, when all Greek troops, at the Greek Government's request, had been placed under Freyberg's command on 4 May. Hanson in correspondence with the Engineers' Official Historian considered that there was a fear that the enemy would land and rebuild the demolished aerodrome at Kastelli and slowly build up their forces. Ultra may have had a negative effect in this decision; it would have provided information on the small German landings at Kastelli. However it seems strange given their information about landings on the airfield perimeters that nothing was done. With the Brigade commander confident that the aerodrome would not fall Freyberg may have felt it was simply not worth the trouble to shift the Battalion.<sup>25</sup>

The defence of the aerodrome had been entrusted to 22 Bn commanded by Lt.Col. L. Andrew. Andrew's personal bravery could not be doubted. He had won the VC as a Corporal and been commissioned towards the end of the war. He had remained on in the Staff Corps and through good luck and perseverance had been given the command of a Battalion. The transition from section commander to battalion CO must have been immense. Like most officers of 2NZEF he had only peacetime soldiering to take with him in this major step.

The Battalion was about 600 strong and consisted of five rifle companies

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<sup>24</sup> Davin, p.60.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p.60; Hanson, letter to Cody, 27 March 1957, Hanson Papers, QEIIAMM; Stewart, p.128.

two I tanks and a carrier platoon,<sup>26</sup> The central feature of the defence was Hill 107, a feature about 300 feet high which dominated the aerodrome and the surrounds. Also in the Battalion's sector were miscellaneous Air Force personnel, mostly in the vicinity of the airfield buildings. Very few were armed.

Group West of the German 11th Air Corp was given the task of taking Maleme. It consisted of the Assault Regt. (less half a battalion) and a coy of the Parachute AA Machine Gun Bn. It was an elite force specially trained for glider and parachute operations, and its main objective was to seize Maleme aerodrome and keep it open for airborne landings. The glider and parachute phases of the attack would be launched simultaneously. The glider detachment (fifty gliders) had three tasks:

- (1) Land to the south of the Travronitis Bridge and take it;
- (2) Land in the Travronitis River mouth, destroy the Anti-aircraft guns on the edge of the aerodrome and ease the way for the landing of troop carrying aircraft.
- (3) To land on the southern slopes of Hill 107 and take it.

The remainder of the force would parachute in, land well clear of the defence, form up and converge on the aerodrome. The plan was based on the reasoning that the defence would concentrate on the aerodrome and that landings to the east and west would be unopposed.<sup>27</sup>

A reception was awaiting them, yet the New Zealanders had not fully grasped the fundamental that was the key to the battle - the aerodromes. They were aware of their significance, but a lack of total commitment to their importance, originating with the GOC, was to result in them faltering in the heat of battle.

### The Attack

The morning of May 20 was a calm beautiful one; 'a dome of cloudless blue, gently encompassing us...not even the wind intruded...'<sup>28</sup> The bombing

<sup>26</sup> Jim Henderson, 22 Battalion, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1958, p.35.

<sup>27</sup> Davin, pp.89-94; Simon Blair, 'The Leader - Crete'; 'Rebuff and Recovery', M.C. Pugh (ed.), unpublished manuscript, 1978, pp.3-5.

<sup>28</sup> Keith Elliot, From Cowshed to Dogcollar, A.H. & A.W. Reed, Wellington, 1967, p.73.

and strafing began at daybreak as usual. 22 Bn's positions came under heavy attack although the enemy was careful to avoid the runway. The attack left men 'bleeding at the ears and mouth from concussion,'<sup>29</sup> Then shortly after 0800 hours the gliders and transports filled the sky. The immediate threat was from the gliders. The groups landing near the Travronitis River were immediately successful, taking the bridge, overrunning several machine gun posts on the east bank as well as overwhelming several AA crews, but were unable to make further progress. The glider troops landing on the southeast and southwest slopes of Hill 107 lost heavily to the defenders above them and were to make no impact on the defence. II and IV Bns landed west of the Travronitis River, unopposed and unobserved, and were able to form up and move towards the river. Of the other parachutists III Bn landed to the east of the aerodrome, south of the Maleme-Platanias road, on the positions of 21 and 23 Bns. Two-thirds were killed, including all officers, and was only to be of nuisance value.<sup>30</sup>

Most telephone lines between Bn HQ and the Companies were cut by the bombing, and those remaining intact were soon cut by the parachutists and glider troops. The difficult nature of the country and the shortage of digging tools had made it impossible to dig the lines to a depth sufficiently invulnerable to the enemy. C/22 laid a new line about 0900 hours but it was almost immediately cut. This meant that the only communication between Bn HQ and the companies was by runner - a precarious occupation in these conditions to say the least. Battalion's HQ only contact with Brigade was one radio which failed shortly after the attack began; it did not function efficiently again until about 1000 hours and periodically failed throughout the day. The lack of adequate communications was to be a major factor in the battalion's failure to hold the aerodrome.<sup>31</sup>

Throughout the day the battalion's companies' experiences were varied.

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29 Diary, L. Sutton, D/22, WAI, Series 3, No.8.

30 Davin, pp.94-6.

31 It has been suggested there were plenty of radios on the island. Lt. Beaven, 22 Bn's Signals Officer, is reputed to have seen a number in bulk store in Canea. Apparently the British looked on the 'NZers as birds of passage' and did not wish to give away their hard earned supplies. This has not been substantiated. T.R. Hawthorn, IO/22 Bn, Comments on 22 Bn War Diary, 18 May 1943, DA 55/10/2.

HQ Coy/22, the least experienced coy in infantry tactics, was never seriously threatened from the few survivors of III Bn in their area, coming under only 'intermittent fire most of the day,' though communications with battalion HQ's were lost.<sup>32</sup> A/22, B/22 and Bn HQ after dealing with the gliders met with little opposition until later in the day.

D/22 was strongly attacked at the bridge and 18pl was forced to fall back thus allowing the enemy to begin forming a wedge between D and C Coys. 18pl's position was unsatisfactory (too far forward) but were unable to move to the most satisfactory position without using the Air Force Administration buildings. These were not part of the battalion's area and is one example of the lack of cooperation between the services that stifled the defence. D/22's positions were under constant fire all day without the situation being precarious. This was to cause some personal problems. One diarist noted: 'Things getting tough had to use empty bull or M and V tins when nature called.'<sup>33</sup>

The pl of 21 Bn, in the riverbed was attacked by glider troops and paratroopers but acquitted themselves well. They were a nuisance to the enemy and delayed their encircling attack on the battalion.

C/22 was the hardest pressed and was only just holding its positions by dusk. 15pl took the initial pressure from glider troops who had overrun the AA positions. By 1000 hours, Johnson, the OC, felt that the enemy infiltration of the northern flank of 15pl was dangerous and asked Andrew for a counterattack with the two I Tanks. These were Andrew's only trump cards and he was not prepared to play them yet. He was probably correct but it may have taken some of the initiative away from the Germans at this stage. Infiltration of the positions continued throughout the day; the pls were forced to cover too much ground and could do little. They simply 'hung on and hoped.'<sup>34</sup>

Throughout the day 22 Bn was harrassed by leaderless and demoralised Air Force personnel. These were mainly administrative staff and ground crew whose function was limited with the departure of the last planes. They

<sup>32</sup> DA 55/10/20; Henderson, pp.45-6; Davin, pp.105-6.

<sup>33</sup> L. Sutton, Diary, WAI, Series 3, No.8.

<sup>34</sup> R. Sinclair, letter to H.K. Kippenberger, 30 March 1948, DA 55/10/11.

were not placed under the command of 22 Bn but acted as an independent group. Their presence was such to make the New Zealanders 'bewildered and unsure of their position and was inclined to make them distrustful as to the stability of troops on their flanks and rear,'<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile the Germans had been attempting to exploit their successes. Meindl, GOC Group West, jumped soon after the first troops. He would have been initially unaware of III Bn's fate and may have assumed they had had the same success as the troops landing to the west of the Travronitis. He attempted to exploit the road bridge, and it was through this that the pressure was brought on C and D Coys. Two coys of II Bn crossed the river south of Hill 107 and attacked to the northeast putting pressure on B/22 near the end of the day.<sup>36</sup>

It was 1000 hours before Andrew could contact Brigade. He told them that 400 parachutists had landed on 22 Bn's positions, and asked for the area west of Travronitis to be swept by artillery fire shortly afterwards. This was done though it was hampered by the lack of observation posts. Andrew was very concerned with lack of contact with his companies and sent runners to establish contact.

At 1550 hours Andrew told Hargest that his left flank (D/22) had given way as he was under heavy fire (Mortar) from the RAF administrative buildings, but the situation was in hand. He also asked for 23 Bn to be asked to make further attempts to contact HQ Coy/22.<sup>37</sup> The Bn was surprised that 23 Bn had not yet come to their aid. The pre-arranged signal (white-green-white flares) had been fired. The non-appearance of the counterattack had 'increased the feeling of bewilderment and isolation that was apparent among all the troops and officers.'<sup>38</sup> One soldier was indignant at the absence of the expected counterattack, especially as he had accompanied Lt.Col. Leckie 'over the area and its environs for the purpose of giving him complete freedom of movement in his counterattacking role.'<sup>39</sup> Angus Ross,

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<sup>35</sup> F.N. Twigg, letter to W.E. Murphy, 14 November 1948, DA 55/10/19.

<sup>36</sup> Davin, p.96.

<sup>37</sup> Angus Ross, 23 Battalion, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1959, p.67, says this was attempted by HQ Coy/22 thought they were Germans and fired on them.

<sup>38</sup> Twigg, letter.

<sup>39</sup> H.T. Fraser, 11 February 1948, DA 55/10/21.

23 Bn Historian defended the battalion by saying that clouds of smoke and dust over the aerodrome precluded 23 Bn from seeing the signals. The Bn considered it was not needed and its Observation Post was manned all day. Observers from 23 Bn looking through binoculars concluded the enemy could not move and 22 Bn still held the environs of the aerodrome and the runway. Brigade gave them no reason for doubting that this was the situation. Hargest told Leckie at 1425 hours: 'Will not call on you for counter-attacking unless position is very serious.'<sup>40</sup> This seems to vindicate 23 Bn's actions though Thomas has said, 'We knew the 22nd was in grave peril...'<sup>41</sup>

At 1700 hours Andrew finally asked Hargest for the counter-attack from 23 Bn, but he was told that this could not be done as 23 Bn was engaged against paratroopers in its own area. This action is extremely hard to fathom. Both 23 Bn and 21 Bn had reported by 1345 hours that the area was under control. He may have thought that Andrew was exaggerating - 450 paratroopers should not be causing 600 men any problems - but surely should have been somewhat discouraged by Andrew's reports. He also may have feared that if he took 23 Bn away from the coast and 21 Bn took over its positions, he would leave his defence against the expected seaborne invasion too thin. Hargest undoubtedly knew that Andrew had not committed his reserves and felt the situation could not be too serious.

Andrew was now faced with committing that reserve, and with 14pl the two I tanks moved towards the bridge. One tank found its two pounder ammunition would not fit the breech-block and its turret was not traversing properly and was forced to withdraw from the battle. The other tank reached the bridge, passed under it and then its turret jammed. Without tank support 14pl was decimated and only eight or nine men made it back. Yet the counter-attack had been very close to success, and caused a degree of panic in the German troops. A German was later to write that the 'few British tanks that were there shook us badly at the start.'<sup>42</sup> The failure of the counter-attack left C/22 in a precarious position. 14pl had been destroyed, 15pl and the rest of 13pl had been overrun. The positions were only held

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40 Ross, pp.66-7.

41 W.B. Thomas, Dare to Be Free, Allan Wingate, London, 1951, p.13.

42 Stewart, p.173.

by miscellaneous C/22 HQ personnel, Johnson told Andrew he would only just be able to hold on until dusk, and was told to 'hang on at all costs',<sup>43</sup> a surprising statement in light of his later actions. Hargest had promised him two relieving coys, A/23 and B/28, which he expected would arrive shortly after dark. Yet Hargest had stressed no urgency to the Bn comds and they did not move until dark (1930 hours).

As the evening wore on and there was no sign of the relieving coys Andrew was fast approaching the moment of crisis. A and B Coys were intact but he feared for his other three coys. C/22 was almost destroyed and he had not heard from the other two coys. Large numbers of parachutists had been seen to fall in HQ Coy/22 and he feared the worst. A soldier had come in from D/22 and said he was the only survivor; the rest had been wiped out. On other occasions the situation would have been treated differently and he would have been ignored, but now it simply seemed to confirm Andrew's fears.<sup>44</sup> To Andrew, there must have been a real danger of being encircled - his west flank had gone, the pressure against B/22 suggested an enveloping movement from the south,<sup>45</sup> and the loss of contact with HQ Coy/22 and the heavy fighting in 23 Bn's sector suggested that the enemy were in strength to the east. If no support was forthcoming, daybreak would bring a further deterioration in the Bn's position and with the enemy's overwhelming air superiority, there would be no escape and the Bn would face annihilation.

When, at 2100 hours the relieving coys had not arrived, Andrew told Hargest that his position was untenable and he was moving to B Coy ridge. The Bde Comd's reply is not recorded though at 1700 when Andrew first intimated the move he said, 'If you must, you must.'<sup>46</sup> Soon after the move had begun, A/23 arrived. Watson, OC A/23, had been fully briefed by Leckie before they left 23 Bn's positions and he was able to outline the situation to Andrew. Andrew may have been puzzled at Hargest's actions but surely here was the knowledge that if he held on a little longer help would be

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<sup>43</sup> Stewart, p.174.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p.231.

<sup>45</sup> Firing to the south and then silence suggested that the pl from 21 Bn had either been forced from their positions or overwhelmed. Henderson draft, p.17, WAI, Series 3, No.8.

<sup>46</sup> Davin, p.110.

forthcoming. Yet another dilemma now faced Andrew. B Coy ridge offered little natural cover and no tools to improve the defences. His choice was now to go back to A Coy ridge or withdraw to 21 and 23 Bns. He sent A/23 to occupy A/22's positions. He now had 300 fully armed men, with the prospect of 100 Maoris and survivors of his lost coys to come. With the arrival of darkness and the associated increase in the ease of movement, there was a prospect of his coys contacting him. Yet he chose to leave his coys to their fate - if they were intact - and shortly after midnight 22 Bn began to withdraw.<sup>47</sup>

It is easy to look at Andrew's decision with hindsight and criticise it, but the decision is one that leaves itself open to considerable criticism. Stewart attributes the decision partly to 'some inflexibility of attitude persisting from...memories of the First World War', and 'the doubt and uncertainty that had been induced in them by the overwhelming German strength in the air, the power that had disrupted communication, and which carried the constant reminder that enemy reinforcement might be delivered at any moment.'<sup>48</sup> Andrew, similar to most leaders, had a very high regard for the safety and lives of his men. This consideration seems to have been foremost in his mind. At this stage of the war there was not yet a conditioning to death and Andrew's greatest fear was the loss of his Bn. He too had seen the slaughter and unnecessary death in World War I and had no wish to see it repeated. He had been under immense pressure throughout the day, was isolated and worried about the welfare of his men. The attitude of his superiors towards the airfields surely led him to believe that there was no need to risk the annihilation and hang on 'at all costs.'

A number of Andrew's problems throughout the day were caused by the actions of the 5 Bde Comd. Hargest's actions were full of inconsistencies. Why, when asked by Andrew for a 23 Bn counter-attack, tell him that 23 Bn were fully occupied in their area, or tell Leckie that he would not be called upon for a counter-attack unless the situation was 'serious'? A 5 Bde Staff Officer commenting on the Bde War Diary for the evening said the situation did not appear to be serious and the 'Brig did not seem to think

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47 Stewart, pp.232-5.

48 *ibid.*, p.235.

the situation was terribly serious and he appeared very confident'.<sup>49</sup> When Leggatt, 22 Bn 2 i/c reached 5 Bde HQ in the early hours of the morning he found only one officer awake and the 'Brig himself was in pyjamas, asleep'.<sup>50</sup> Though he probably thought Andrew was exaggerating surely 'personal contact between the two was an essential element at some time during the day.'<sup>51</sup> Yet the siting of his HQ virtually precluded this. Undoubtedly the fear of a seaborne invasion was very much to the forefront of his mind, Hargest seemed to lose contact with the reality of the situation in his sector. Whereas Andrew was to repeat his error at Menastair in December 1941, Hargest's efforts at Sidi Rezegh in November 1941, led to his capture. He sited his HQ too close to the action and stayed on too long.

Even with Andrew's withdrawal there remained another chance for the New Zealanders to re-establish themselves on Hill 107. At about 0300 hours the CO's of 21, 22 and 23 Bns met and considered the situation. An observer noted that Leckie blamed Andrew, 'his old rival'. They looked to Andrew, the senior officer, to make a decision. Yet it could hardly be expected that he would decide to go back, when only a short time earlier he had told the OC of the relieving Maori Coy that they had been lucky to escape with their lives. So once again on that day inertia and indecision prevailed. Puttick was to later say:

I had expected in the circumstances the whole Bde (less detachments up to a coy/Bn to police their areas) would have made an all in counterattack on Maleme, and had this resulted in any difficulty in the areas vacated by the Bns, the Div Reserve would have been used.<sup>52</sup>

Activity in the 5 Bde area was characterised by a lack of flair and initiative. The Germans had been allowed to dictate the tempo through the day. The 22 Bn counter-attack had been delayed until the last moment. Hargest believed that the aerodrome could not be taken and nothing could shake him out of his belief. Yet at Retimo Campbell, 'unprejudiced by

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49 W.W. Mason, Comments on 5 Bde War Diary, 20 May 1941, DA 55/10/11.

50 J. Leggatt, Statement, 17 June 1948, DA 55/10/3.

51 K.L. Stewart, Comments on W.G. McClymont, 'Crete Narrative', para.692.

52 Puttick's Comments on Davin's draft of 'Crete', Puttick Papers, Series 4, No.7.

memories of the First World War' launched a counter-attack within the hour committing his tanks to regain the hill overlooking the aerodrome and within the next twenty-four hours made five attempts, the last successful, to recapture the hill. He realised the supreme importance of the aerodrome to the defence.<sup>53</sup>

Some of the problems may have been caused by the Brigade comd and the relationship between the senior officers in the Brigade. Kippenberger later wrote of 5 Bde and Hargest:

I don't think he ever gripped his Brigade. It was partly because of the circumstances but also characteristic, that 5Bde never fought as a Brigade in Greece, Crete or Libya '41. Battalions never helped one another, in or out of battle - and there were opportunities. They bellyached or evaded when asked to do so. The units quarrelled with one another, or rather their commanders did and the units conformed with mutual dislike....Watching his work at Divisional and other exercises I used to think he had learned little since 1918....I am still certain, as I was in June, 1941, that neither of the other Brigades would have lost Maleme.<sup>54</sup>

Though it may appear that Kippenberger made Hargest and Andrew scapegoats for the loss of Maleme<sup>55</sup> the actions of the Brigade and Battalion comds bear out Kippenberger's words. A soldier of 23 Bn recalls that provincialism was particularly rife in 23 Bn and North Islanders were looked on as 'second rate New Zealanders' and that 'the rivalry between Leckie and Andrew was filtered down to the lowest levels.'<sup>56</sup> Whatever the reason for the lack of cooperation and the loss of Maleme:

without any doubt, the initiative up to that time was ours for the asking. From that moment the tide of the battle began to swing in favour of the side with enterprise.<sup>57</sup>

Creforce and Divisional HQ became aware of the situation in the Maleme sector shortly after dawn and immediately thought in terms of a

53 Stewart, pp.216-7.

54 H.K. Kippenberger, letter to W.G. McClymont, 6 March 1953, WAI, Series 11, No.7.

55 Andrew told Kippenberger and Davin what happened but it made no difference to them. He said 'I am prepared to let the men who were there with me and know what happened to be the judges.' 'Spencer', p.152.

56 W. Gibbons, Interview with author, 12 August 1978.

57 Thomas, p.13.

counter-attack to recover the aerodrome. At approximately 1115 hours Hargest discussed a counter-attack with the Div. Comd and convinced him that the attack could not be carried out in daylight. He told Puttick that he would only require 28 Bn and one other battalion for the counter-attack. Puttick accepted his assessment of the situation and did not question the adequacy of two battalions or stress to him the vital importance of the counter-attack. He found no reason to go forward to assess the situation preferring to remain at his HQ to maintain contact with Creforce and his other brigades.<sup>58</sup>

The certainty of a seaborne invasion that night was confirmed late in the afternoon and this was to strongly influence thinking and actions throughout the night. A meeting of NZ and Australian Brigadiers (Hargest was not present) in the late afternoon decided on a two battalion counter-attack at night. Puttick returned to his HQ just after dark and sent his GSO I to 5 Bde HQ to discuss the plan for the counter-attack and clear up any obscure problems. The stress and strain was taking a heavy toll on Hargest and Gentry found him so tired as to be 'unable to think coherently.' Burrows found Hargest several hours later 'so exhausted that he could not complete one sentence at a time.'<sup>59</sup> The plan evolved was straightforward. A troop of three light tanks would lead moving along the road, with 20 Bn on the right carrying through as far as the airfield and 28 Bn thrusting as far as the Travronitis River. Zero hour depended on the time 20 Bn arrived but 'it would be safe to count on 20 Bn being able to advance by 0100 hours.'<sup>60</sup> 20 Bn was on the outskirts of Canea some four miles from Platanias. They would be relieved from their role by 2/7 Australian Bn<sup>61</sup> and would use the Australian trucks to reach the advance line. They would start their attack from Pirgos about 0400 hours. Once they reached their objectives the Maoris would return to their positions at Platanias; Hargest seemingly content to re-establish one battalion on the aerodrome. One point

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<sup>58</sup> Davin, pp.192-3.

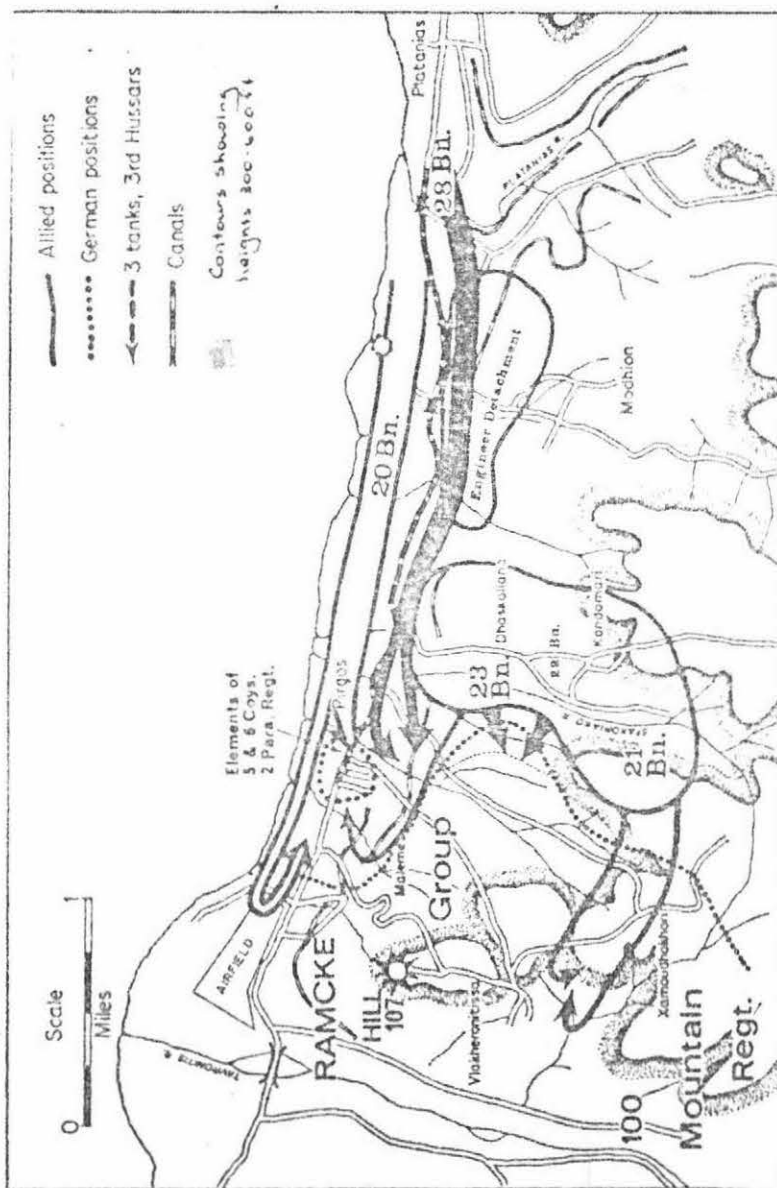
<sup>59</sup> Stewart, pp.290, 293.

<sup>60</sup> Davin, p.197. Gentry recalls the Brigade Major, Mason, trying to write the orders for the attack with the orders writing manual in one hand. He had never before written, or even practised writing an operational order. Gentry, Interview.

<sup>61</sup> It is hard to understand why the battle-hardened 2/7 Bn was not used in the counter-attack. It had taken part in the first Wavell offensive and had been heavily engaged in Crete.

Figure 9

Maleme Counterattack 21-22 May



Source: I. McD. Stewart, The Struggle for Crete, p.294.

that was neglected by Hargest was that there were likely to be strong enemy pockets between Platanias and Pirgas which would cause losses and dispersion even before the attack had commenced. The result was that the strength of the counter-attacking force was further reduced.<sup>62</sup>

The Maoris were ready by midnight but there was no sign of 20 Bn. Freyberg had ordered Puttick to keep 20 Bn in its positions until 2/7 Bn arrived. With the beginning of the cannonade at sea Puttick was adamant in his refusal to let 20 Bn go forward. Two requests were made to Puttick but both were refused. The Australians had been delayed and dispersed. Burrows asked permission to go forward and receive his orders from Hargest and this was granted and he arrived at 5 Bde HQ at 0215 hours. Thirty minutes later two of his coys arrived and the attack commenced. Hargest had his doubts as to the success without the other three coys of 20 Bn and asked Div. HQ whether the attack must continue. He was told it must.<sup>63</sup>

The attack commenced at 0330 hours and almost immediately met delays from small pockets of Germans, the opposition intensifying as they approached Pirgos. It was already daylight when Pirgos was reached and the Luftwaffe had begun to play a part in proceedings. Yet while the New Zealanders were in close proximity to the enemy the Luftwaffe could only play a passive role. D/20 reached the edge of the aerodrome, but with the cover of darkness gone their positions were exposed and they came under intense fire and were forced to fall back some 200 yards into the cover of bamboo. Burrows decided that no further progress could be made and decided to move the Bn around behind the Maoris who were moving to higher ground. The Maoris had fared no better; A and D Coys were held up on the outskirts of Pirgos, and B and C Coys were only half a mile beyond. 21 Bn acting on Allen's initiative (a rare commodity in 5 Bde on Crete) made some progress to the south but were halted for the same reasons as 20 and 28 Bns. The men fought particularly well in this counter-attack with a number of men performing deeds that deserved high honours - some were recognised, others were not.

The importance of the counter-attack was not acknowledged by the

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<sup>62</sup> Davin, p.199.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p.215.

New Zealand commanders, Stewart considered that Hargest was only 'dimly aware what was happening on the rest of the island, and neither Puttick nor Freyberg had impressed upon him that this action might be of supreme importance.' It seems surprising that there was no attempt to use 23 Bn for other than mopping up operations and the attacks made by 21 Bn were not as a result of orders from 5 Bde. By using 23 Bn and issuing a directive to 21 Bn he would not have had to wait for 20 Bn and the attack may have had some chance of success,

Yet the opportunity for success had still been there. It was the Divisional Commander's responsibility to ensure the counter-attack was launched in time, but he was too preoccupied with invasion from the sea. After the war he was to write:

A NZ success at Maleme, which at least was highly problematical in view of the weak forces available for it and the rapid enemy reinforcement in that area, would have been largely nullified by a German success at Canea, with all its implications.

He never asked for more troops from Freyberg or suggested that the two battalions were inadequate for the attack. The impression can be gained that he was not very closely concerned with Maleme. Stewart suggests that he, like Freyberg, was under the impression that the Germans were landing in open country and because of this it was not vitally important to recapture the aerodrome.<sup>64</sup>

Puttick said that there were three considerations that were predominant:

- (1) The unemployed enemy airborne formations, an extremely mobile reserve;
- (2) The impending seaborne attack on Canea;
- (3) The ability of the enemy force in the prison area to move north against the coast road, east against the head of Suda Bay and north-east to Galatas.

He considers they were factors that should be considered because the effect of enemy action in any of these ways with the area 'denuded by the absence of 20 Bn needs no emphasising.' However severe the result of any of these

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<sup>64</sup> Stewart, pp.302-6.

actions may have been they would certainly not have been as catastrophic as the failure to recapture the aerodrome. He also points out that the cannonade at sea was the only information regarding the seaborne attack and this recurred at regular intervals throughout the night. There was no report as to the result of the naval action until 0840 hours. This concept is reinforced by Burrows<sup>65</sup> who said they had no idea as to whether the intervention had been successful. But Gentry has said the sky was lit up and it was obvious what was happening at sea.<sup>66</sup> Puttick felt justified in delaying the departure of 20 Bn as he did not know that the battalion would debus at Platanias, two and a half hours march from Maleme.<sup>67</sup> This gives a clearer indication to Puttick's thinking but fully illustrates his preoccupation with the sea.

Freyberg stayed detached from the counter-attack and was not prepared to interfere with the counter-attack. He allowed his subordinate commanders a large amount of latitude, and perhaps he can be criticised for that. But he was a commander trying to establish himself amongst the New Zealanders and to interfere with his subordinates' running of the battle was not a way to win their respect or confidence. Gentry considers that Freyberg was never again to allow his subordinates so much latitude. He was always present but never interfered unless absolutely necessary.<sup>68</sup>

Crete did show the weaknesses of the New Zealand leadership at all levels. It has been said that British generalship reached an all-time low in the first battle of Alamein. It could equally be said that New Zealand leadership reached an all-time low on Crete. Never again were such errors of judgement to be made on such a scale. Maleme and Crete are battle honours for 22 Bn and the New Zealand Division. Are these appropriate?

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65 Burrows, p.117.

66 Gentry, Interview.

67 'Comments on Counterattack at Maleme', Puttick Papers, Series 4, No.7.

68 Gentry, Interview.

## CHAPTER 5

THE BAYONET: GALATAS

All scramble towards Galatas,  
 Immune to pain, terror or grief,  
 Charging over the fallen,  
 While King and Thomas roar mad execrations,  
 Dutton, Gallagher and Joyce screech  
 Demoniacally as they kill;  
 Seaton runs berserk, firing from the hip,  
 Kennedy bashes in a man's brains  
 With one classic swing of the rifle butt;  
 All howl and rage at the paratroopers,  
 At the invader invaded,  
 Trapped forming up,  
 Trapped in Galatas square  
 By a fury stabbing bayonets  
 Into throats and chests  
 As frail as straw,

Les Cleveland, 'Galatas'<sup>1</sup>

With the loss of the Maleme sector 5 Bde were placed in reserve behind 4 (NZ) Bde and 10 Composite Bde. These latter Bdes formed a new line near the small village of Galatas which was only six miles from Canea and was a 'sort of no mans land between the Suda Bay Naval Base and Maleme aerodrome'.<sup>2</sup> It was in this village in the evening of 25 May 1941 that further renown was added to the reputation the New Zealand soldier had gained for proficiency with the bayonet.

This notoriety had had its infancy in the South African War. At Slingersfontein on 15 January 1900 the 1st Contingent were observed to fix bayonets and charge down the hill, 'upon which the leading Boers immediately turned and ran down the hill'.<sup>3</sup> The fierce close fighting of the Gallipoli campaign aided the development of the reputation. One officer wrote home:

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<sup>1</sup> Les Cleveland, 'Galatas', The Iron Hand New Zealand Soldiers' Poems from World War Two, Wai-Te-Ata Press, Wellington, 1979, p.33.

<sup>2</sup> T. Akrita (pseudonym), 'The Germans in Crete', DA 448,22/4.

<sup>3</sup> Hall, pp.21-22.

...Turkish trenches which pour a hail of lead over us day and night. Redoubled it is when darkness settles in the one hope of deterring the dreaded bayonets of our men from giving them another taste...steel has an unearthly terror for them.<sup>4</sup>

It is hard to gauge the extent of use or efficacy of the New Zealanders' use of the bayonet in World War II and to assess the Maoris' deeds with the bayonet in Greece. The Official War Correspondent's report of the fighting, in the Evening Post of 8 May, and The Dominion of 9 May 1941 contained a reference to a Maori bayonet charge before 'which none, even the German shock troops could stand their ground. They turned and ran.' A popular publication by the Army Board, Campaign in Greece: The New Zealand Division in Action also eulogised the actions of the Maoris with the bayonet:

...the order was given to fix bayonets and then...began an extraordinary deadly game of stalk and kill...brown faces working with fury; and the savage shout of tribal war cries upon their lips, these Maori warriors must have seemed to the enemy like horrible beings from another world...

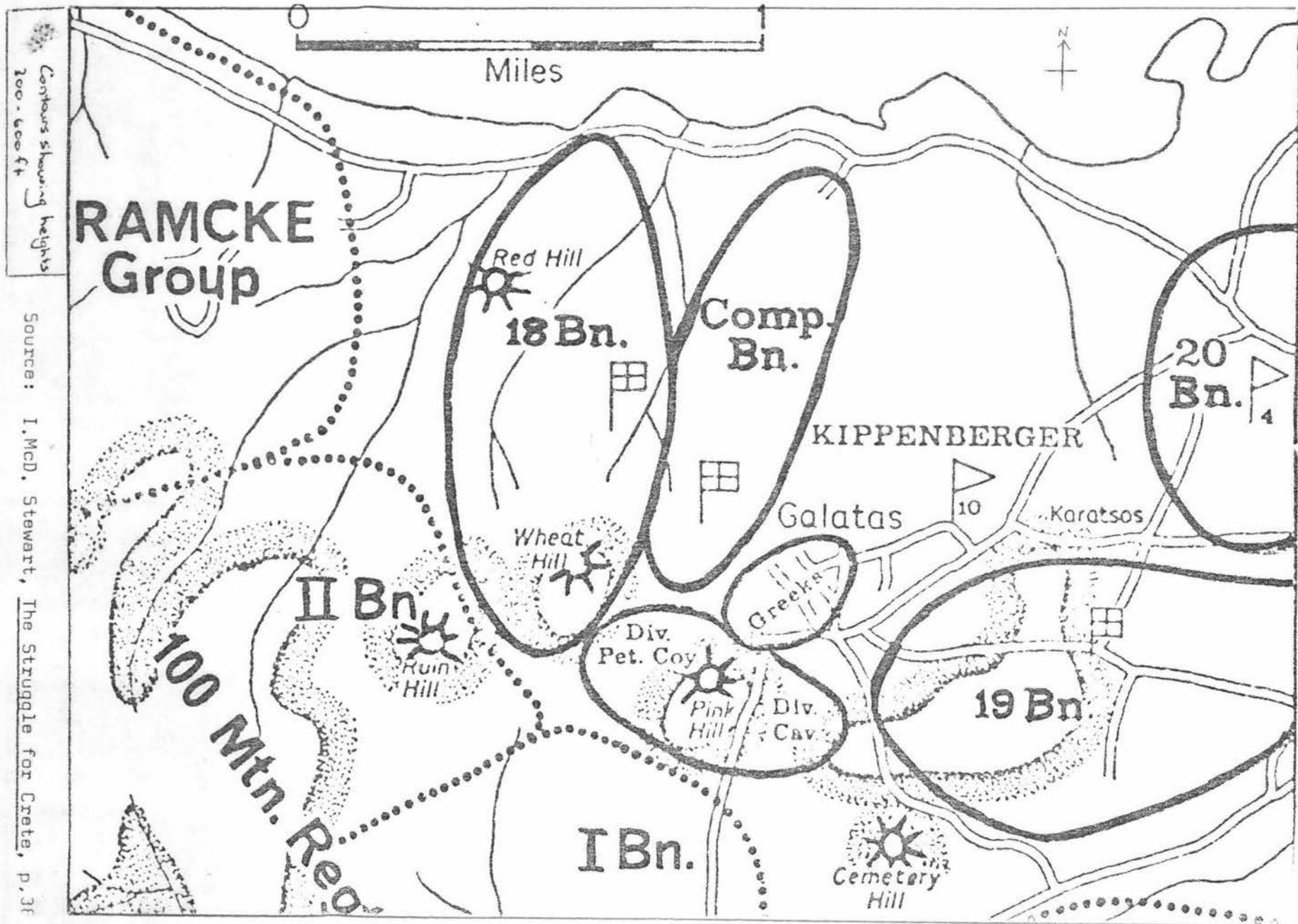
The Army Archives section investigated these reports in June 1943 and considered they were unfounded. 28 Battalion's War Diary had no entry of bayonet fighting in Greece and two of the Battalion's COs, G. Dittmer and F. Baker confirmed there was no bayonet work in Greece apart from the odd isolated incident. Baker wrote that there were a number of untrue stories about the Maoris in Greece and he had read of a full battalion bayonet charge after a haka led by the CO.<sup>5</sup> These stories became public knowledge and served to reinforce some commonly held notion of the Maori soldier as a fierce and outstanding warrior.

The bayonet attack on Galatas came at the end of a day which had further eroded the New Zealanders' position on Crete. The Germans had spent the day of the 24th preparing for their attack on the Galatas line. From early morning of the 25th the positions of the defending troops came under continuous and heavy air attacks and then heavy machine gun and

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<sup>4</sup> Barbara Harper (Ed.), Letters from Gunner 7/516 and Gunner 7/517, Anchor Communications, Wellington, 1978, p.21.

<sup>5</sup> DA 420.21/3



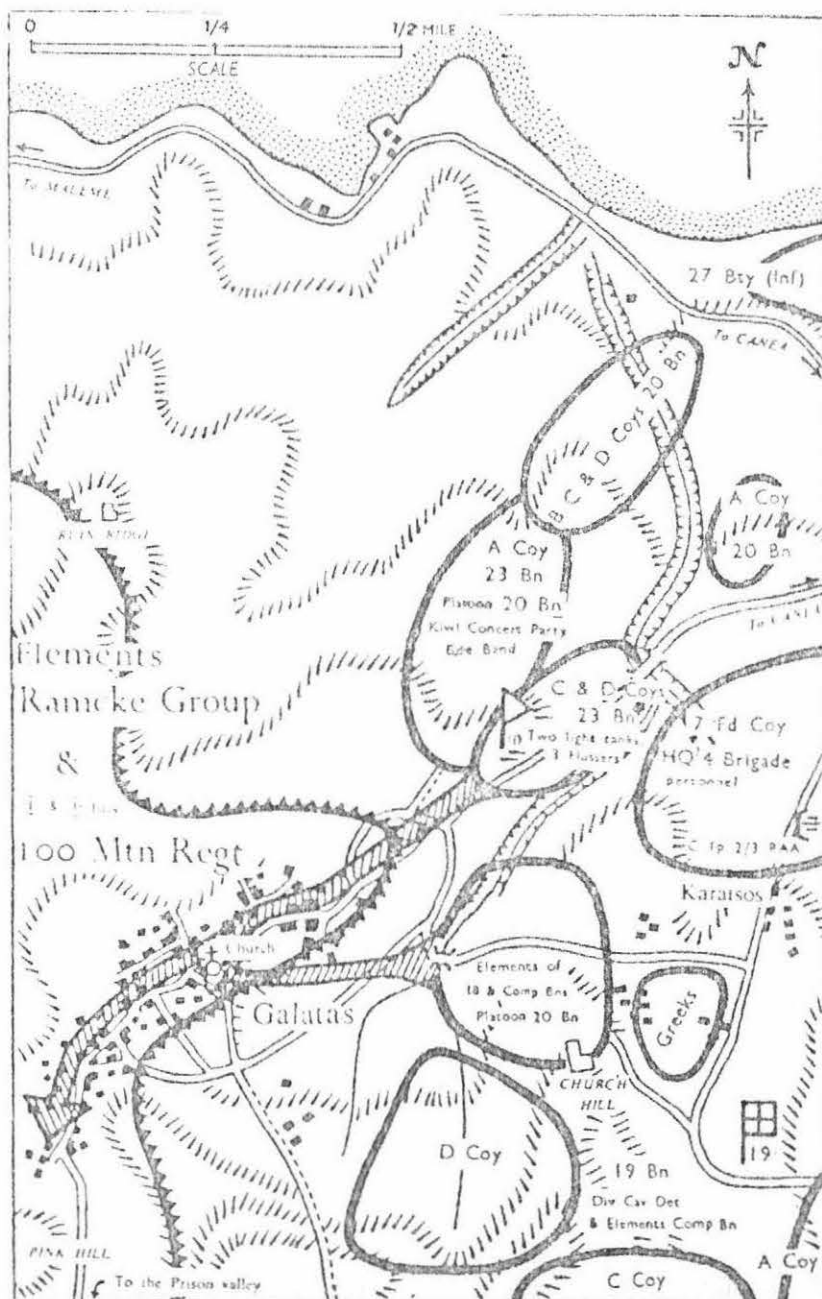
Galatas - Noon 25 May 1941

Figure 10

Source: I. McD. Stewart, The Struggle for Crete, p. 37

Figure 11

## Counterattack at Galatas 25 May



Source: D.M. Davin, Crete, p. 310.

mortar fire. The main infantry assault began in the middle of the afternoon. After two hours one Coy of 18 Bn had been overwhelmed and a counter-attack with anyone who could hold a rifle - 'padre, clerks, batmen' - had failed. This meant that one of the hills in the sector of 18 Bn was abandoned. The loss of Wheat Hill exposed the centre of the Bn which was forced to fall back. The Germans were now infiltrating 18 Bn's positions and seriously threatening the Composite Bn. In a short time the situation had become critical and a rout threatened. All around Kippenberger the 'trickle of stragglers had turned to a stream many of them on the verge of panic. I walked in among them shouting "Stand for New Zealand" and anything else I could think of.'<sup>6</sup> 23 Bn had been called forward to stabilize the line and as they approached the turnoff to Galatas it was obvious to them that a serious collapse threatened:

Wildeyed men, unarmed, came running frantically back through the trees shouting with fear. "Back, back", they screamed, "they're coming in their thousands. Back for your lives. It's every man for himself.'<sup>7</sup>

Kippenberger desperately sought to secure his right flank. The 4th Brigade Band, the Pioneer platoon of 20 Bn, and Kiwi Concert Party were initially thrown in to stabilize the line and three coys of 20 Bn carried it further towards the sea. The position was still desperate. Russell's force had still not withdrawn, the enemy were in Galatas, and the whole left flank was in danger. The enemy could debouch from the village, drive through the disorganized 18 Bn and then north to the coast road and cut off the restored right flank.<sup>8</sup>

Shortly before twilight tanks from 3 Hussars appeared under the command of Lt. Farran. They had been sent to block the eastern exit of Galatas. Kippenberger sent Farran forward to make a reconnaissance of Galatas. He found the village was 'stiff with Jerries'. They were 'in all the cottage windows, in the orchard, behind chimney stacks, and in the school yard.'<sup>9</sup>

For Kippenberger the time had come when 'it was no use trying to

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<sup>6</sup> Kippenberger, p.65.

<sup>7</sup> W.B. Thomas, p.21.

<sup>8</sup> Davin, pp.309-10.

<sup>9</sup> Stewart, p.388.

patch the line anymore; obviously we must hit or everything would crumble away.'<sup>10</sup> What was needed was a strong blow to give Russell's force the opportunity to withdraw, and delay the enemy for the hour or so until dusk. Kippenberger decided to use C and D Coys of 23 Bn to retake Galatas with the aid of the tanks. There would be no time for reconnaissance; they must move straight up the road, one company on either side in a single file behind the tanks and take everything with them.<sup>11</sup> On their left the few survivors of the 18th who had not withdrawn would also give them support.

Men began appearing silently to join the attack. For many of the men this was the first opportunity to strike back. They had been hounded and pounded from the air and had spent the last six days on the receiving end. They had lost friends and relatives. Two of the volunteers had lost brothers. They wanted to have a 'crack at the Hun.'<sup>12</sup> Thomas thought everyone looked 'tense and grim', and 'wondered whether they were feeling, as afraid as I, whether their throats were dry, their stomachs feeling now frozen, now fluid.'<sup>13</sup>

Two of the tank crew were wounded and replaced by a pair of sapper volunteers. After a ten minute course of instruction for the crew the tanks moved off followed by 200 men. It was 2010 hours, not quite dark, though the stars were already bright.<sup>14</sup>

The tanks rumbled down the road in a cloud of dust. As they reached the first building:

The whole line seemed to break spontaneously into the most blood curdling of shouts and battle cries...the effect was terrific - one felt ones blood rising swiftly above the fear and uncertainty until only an unspeakable exhilaration quite beyond description surpassed all else...<sup>15</sup>

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10 Kippenberger, p.66.

11 ibid.

12 Davin, p.312; Stewart, p.389.

13 Thomas, p.23.

14 Stewart, p.389.

15 W.B. Thomas, 'Report on Galatas', DA 417.22/39.

The noise made a lasting impression on Lt.Col. Gray: 'I shall never forget the deep throated wild beast noise as the 23rd swept up the road.'<sup>16</sup> In the close confines of the tanks the noise was particularly frightening: 'the howling and the shouting of the infantry sounded like the baying of the dogs from inside the tank. As it rose and fell it made my flesh creep.'<sup>17</sup> As they entered the narrow streets, even before the first enemy was sighted, every man was firing his weapon to the front or in the air. The infantry charged down the road. They were fired on from the front and from the houses to the side. Initially men stopped to clear houses from which fire was coming but found they were losing momentum and charged on ignoring the small arms fire. They came under mortar fire but such was the speed of the advance that it fell harmlessly in the wake.<sup>18</sup>

As the tanks approached the village square the leading one commanded by Lt. Farran was halted by grenades though its machine gun continued to sweep the square. The second tank halted and turned back and an altercation followed with Lt. Thomas before it continued towards the enemy. The New Zealand sapper in the tank said a 'New Zealand soldier came at us shouting and waving his pistol - threatened to shoot us. (He undoubtedly thought us poor silly Tommies for whom the battle was too much).'<sup>19</sup>

The New Zealanders reached the square and charged across it at the enemy who were forming up:

Three forms rose up from the shelter of some corpses on the left and we fell on them. They stood their ground and bayonet clashed against bayonet. One collapsed clutching (Templeton's) bayonet in his throat, one died from a burst from Diamond's Tommy gun and I think perhaps the third fell to my revolver.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> J.R. Gray, letter to J.G. Mclean, 24 July 1941, DA 442,2/4, p.10.

<sup>17</sup> B. Ferry, letter to H.K. Kippenberger, 5 April 1948, DA 46/10/5.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas, 'Report...'

<sup>19</sup> Thomas said the British driver ran from his tank screaming and threatened the success of the whole attack. He was shot by a private soldier. No other accounts mention this and Murphy considers it most unlikely to have happened in the manner described by Thomas. Davin, p.314; Thomas, 'Report...'; Ferry, letter, 5 April 1948; Murphy, Interview.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas, 'Report...'

Thomas struggled with a German, 'then I must have struck his temple for the barrel suddenly crashed through something like strong paper'.<sup>21</sup> A savage and bitter fight took place in the dark. Occasionally a pistol or rifle flash lightened the scene. It was hard to distinguish between friend and foe. 'In the town itself things go mad, everywhere bitter individual combat takes place.'<sup>22</sup>

By now we were stepping over groaning forms and those which rose against us fell to our bayonets, and bayonets with their eighteen inches of steel entering the throats and chests with the same horrible sound...<sup>23</sup>

Death was not restricted to one side:

One of the boys just behind me lurched heavily against me and fell at my feet clutching his stomach. His scream bubbled in his throat for half a second as he fought against it, but stomach wounds are painful beyond human power of control and his screams rose above all others.<sup>24</sup>

A group of Germans came charging at the New Zealanders:

They were right on us. A bayonet glinted not three yards from my pointing pistol. As I pulled the trigger...as the helmetless figure plunged down towards my groin...My pistol jarred in my hand. On the instant I noted the shudder that shook his frame, something like a sledgehammer hit me on the thigh, lifted me up and back.<sup>25</sup>

As Thomas fell, his platoon was taken over by a private who exhorted his comrades to 'get stuck into the bastards and be done with'.<sup>26</sup> The Germans retreated from the village. They had been caught unprepared and were thoroughly demoralised by the bayonet attack:

we grasp our wounded comrades under the arms... and carefully withdraw them between the ruins of smashed houses...Dripping with sweat, beaten and tired to death, we arrive...at the battalion outposts.<sup>27</sup>

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21 Thomas, 'Report...'

22 W.E. Murphy, 'Galatas', The Other Side of the Hill, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1952, p.12.

23 Thomas, 'Report...'

24 Stewart, p.390.

25 Thomas, 'Report...'

26 Davin, p.315.

27 Murphy, p.12.

The remaining New Zealand officers now struggled to control their men as they sought to prepare for the inevitable German counter-attack. But there would be no counter-attack. The Germans were prepared to wait for daylight when once again the Luftwaffe would dictate the tempo of the battle. For the Germans of 3 Parachute Regiment the counter-attack took on a forbidding light:

We were firmly convinced that this was much more than a local counter-attack, it was a general counter-offensive along the whole line which we have been expecting for some days....The appearance of tanks confirmed us in this view and we were quite sure the battle was turning against us. The men had reached the limit of their endurance. They had been fighting for six days in heavy paratrooper equipment, casualties had been heavy....Our morale at this time was very low and we were sure the battle for Crete had been lost. We could not hold on for much longer.<sup>28</sup>

The attack was a success. A breathing space was provided which stabilised the line. Galatas could not be held in isolation and the New Zealanders in the village were withdrawn the very evening of their success. Ian Stewart<sup>29</sup> sees a paradox in this success at Galatas. After six days of hard fighting those two hundred men erupted with a 'passionate verve and spirit' against fresh troops more than double their number. He considers the German position at Maleme much more precarious than that at Galatas, and had the 21st, 23rd and Maoris attacked together on the evening of 21/22 May they could have broken through.

The men certainly reacted well to positive leadership and the frustrations of the previous days. The positive and ferocious nature of the attack was brought about by a combination of these factors. It was also natural that this express itself as a bayonet attack. It is certainly a fearsome weapon. But its use or threatened use is mainly psychological. Opportunities are restricted by the nature of modern battle which precludes more than a small number of hand-to-hand skirmishes. They are also restricted as the enemy will rarely stay to fight in the face of a bayonet attack. 'Infantry in Battle', at the end of World War II, describes the bayonet as follows:

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<sup>28</sup> Murphy, p.12.

<sup>29</sup> Stewart, p.392.

The bayonet is a weapon of great moral value. Even a resolute enemy will rarely fight to the last when faced by a determined bayonet assault. The long bayonet is a more obvious (and therefore more effective) weapon than the short. Even though the opportunities for its use will remain infrequent, and at best fleeting, its threatened use in battle remains a moral weapon of the first order.<sup>30</sup>

As recently as 1969 a United States weapon survey found that the main advantage of the bayonet was its 'psychological advantage'.<sup>31</sup> The respondents to both Kippenberger's and my questionnaire have a similar opinion:

Both at Galatas and Ruweisat the opportunity to use the bayonet was short as the enemy cleared off quickly.

...the opportunity to use the bayonet was limited because they surrendered smartly or shot through before you could get close.

...the bayonet, in most cases, has its effect before use.<sup>32</sup>

A large number of men were never put into a position where there was an opportunity to use the bayonet:

In the Western Desert and Italy I never saw the bayonet used....Mostly used as a canopener and not a very good one at that.

I have had my bayonet fixed plenty of times but never got near enough to use it - nor have I seen it used very much.<sup>33</sup>

It seems likely that most soldiers taking part in an attack where there was an opportunity to use the bayonet chose not to. They did this because it was quicker to kill with the bullet, because it was easier, or simply because they found it was a revolting way to kill and found other means more acceptable:

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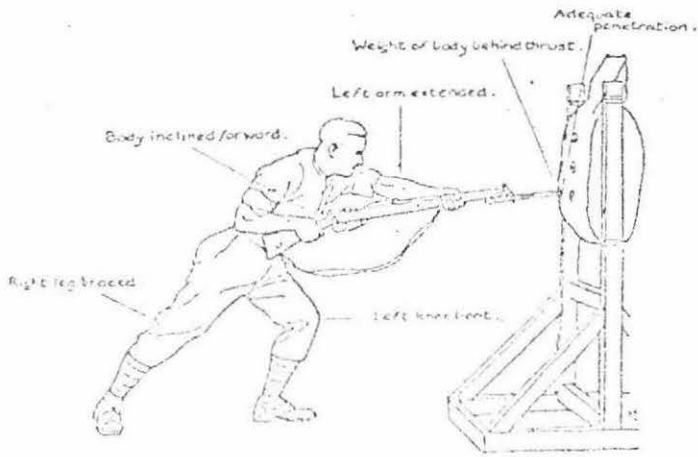
30 'Infantry in Battle', p.16.

31 Watson, p.64.

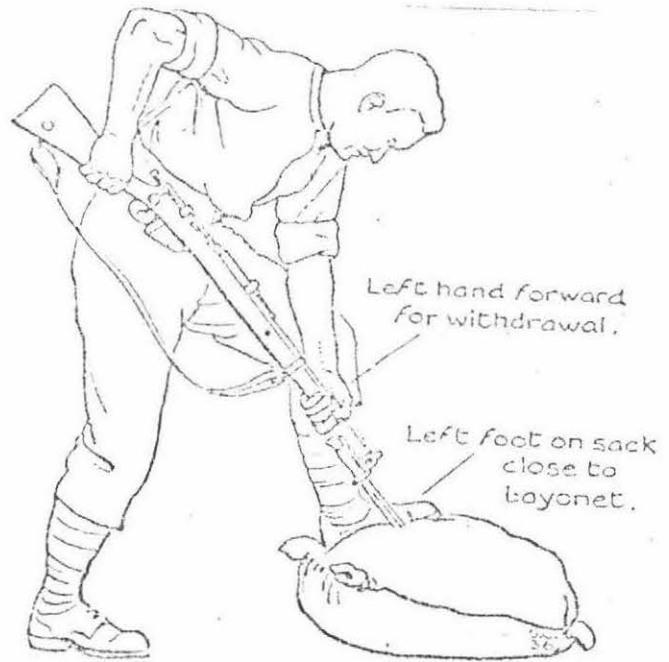
32 MQ, Question 4; KQ.

33 ibid.

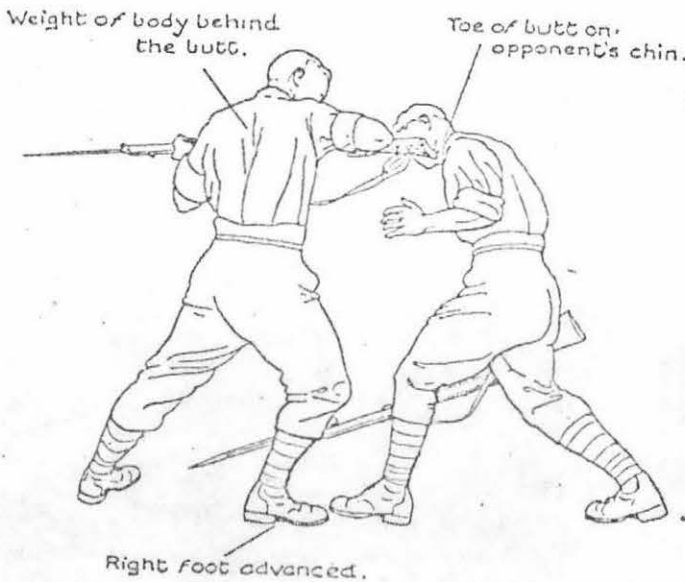
### The Bayonet Technique



-The Point.



-The Withdrawal (using Foot).



-The Butt Stroke.

Source: Tommy Gun Rifle and Bayonet, Figures 3, 5 and 9.

Bayonet charge is a figure of speech - troops charge with fixed bayonets but rifle, bullet, Tommy gun and Brens and grenades do the damage.

The use of the bayonet actually to kill a man was not pleasant...while the bullet, being somehow more remote as an instrument of death did not give nearly the same effect.<sup>34</sup>

At Galatas it seems unlikely that more than a small number of men used the bayonet. Thomas considers that:

In a company of sixty men, at least fifty took part, and of these, I should say ten made real use of their bayonet or rifle butts. The rest got their men with a bullet, took a prisoner, or got a bullet themselves.<sup>35</sup>

Any suggestion as to the number of Germans killed by bayonet wounds can only be a guess. At 42nd St., later in the battle of Crete one observer counted over a hundred bodies with bayonet wounds.<sup>36</sup> The Official Historian estimates that the enemy 'can hardly have lost fewer than 300 men.'<sup>37</sup> This seems a high proportion even if we assume that a number of the bodies would have had multiple wounds. Over the wider battle scene it is hard to assess what proportion of wounds were caused by the bayonet. The closest estimate that can be obtained is given by Keegan who considers that edge-weapon wounds consisted of a fraction of one percent of all wounds.<sup>38</sup>

Obviously killing with the bayonet is not a pleasurable experience and the sensation of killing at a very close proximity is even less so. Killing at close quarters will be discussed further in Chapter 7 on Minqar Qaim, but the experience must have been a lasting one:

As we reached the well the German crouched down and feigned death. I said to the Maori "Bayonet him." The Maori thrust his bayonet through the German but turned his head away as he did it - apparently unable to bear the sight.<sup>39</sup>

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34 MQ, Question 4; KQ.

35 W.B. Thomas, KQ.

36 Bertrand, KQ.

37 Davin, p.378.

38 Keegan, pp.268-9.

39 KQ.

I charged this Hun - his bayonet was diverted from my chest by my web equipment. I bayoneted him in the guts and fetched up the butt of my rifle and split his skull - as I had been trained - I have been ashamed for the rest of my life.<sup>40</sup>

...and his gang were the best killers we had - after one experience they never used the bayonet...never forget the look in the poor devil's eyes as the bayonet went in nor the feel of the bayonet as it came to them through the rifle when it grazed bone and the flesh puckered on withdrawal.<sup>41</sup>

But men were prepared to use the bayonet in battle. In a kill or be killed situation as close quarters fighting usually is and when the blood is 'up' men will do anything. Training is obviously a key factor in conditioning men to use the bayonet in combat. Adequate training will make the reaction automatic;

Any sane person involved in war combat would prefer to execute his mission at a distance and close combat is a most undesirable situation. However the rather outdated bayonet is a great comfort particularly when ammunition is limited.

The use of a bayonet or bullet was dictated by the conditions and I knew of no soldier who liked either. It was something that had to be done and done regardless.

...survival was the name of the game. I saw no reluctance by any man to use the bayonet.<sup>42</sup>

The Maoris had a reputation for enjoying bayonet fighting and being very proficient - some would say too proficient. Certainly the sight of the Maori bayonets and the accompanying sound of the haka must have made many men's blood chill. Lt.Col. H. Dyer<sup>43</sup> suggests that once the Maoris' blood was up they became almost uncontrollable. One eye witness considered that at Minqar Qaim the Maoris took 'a savage delight in the slaughter they were able to inflict, and they used their bayonets with deadly effect'.<sup>44</sup>

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40 MQ.

41 KQ.

42 MQ.

43 KQ.

44 DA 447.23/29.

This typifies the popular concept of the Maori soldier in action, but it is hard to concur or disagree without any concrete evidence.

Other nationalities had a similar reputation to the New Zealanders. These include the Australians, Canadians and some of the Highland Regiments. But there are numerous examples of many different units from many different countries being involved in bayonet fighting; the Maoris buried soldiers of the Warwickshire Regiment at Acroma where they lay 'within a few yards of the line of enemy guns - head and bayonets towards the enemy'. In the same campaign Poles were seen to 'charge the enemy on Bren carriers, jumped off and cleared the enemy trenches with the bayonet.'<sup>45</sup>

It is hard to assess the New Zealand soldier's proficiency with the bayonet. But then it is not very important to assess his proficiency. The important factor of the bayonet is its psychological value. As long as men had the confidence to go into battle with the bayonet they had a tremendous advantage. Most never had to use it and most never wanted to. But while a few were, and the attacks were successful, the reputation was enhanced and a further psychological advantage was gained for the next attack with the bayonet. A large number of bayonet attacks were made when, as at Galatas, the men were 'out for blood'. In a sense they almost became successful. Frustration and desperation were almost enough to carry the attackers through. The other type of attack with fixed bayonets was also often a success. But they were planned attacks, almost cold blooded, and they were often in a period when the Allies held the advantage. The men simply attacked with fixed bayonets and walked towards the objective. Almost invariably the enemy quickly surrendered.

The battle for Galatas clearly showed the place of the bayonet in modern warfare. But for the New Zealanders it was too late. Crete was lost and it was only a matter of time before evacuation would be necessary. There would be other bayonet charges on Crete and in World War II. But Galatas was the first time in that war that a bayonet attack took place by New Zealanders. A small number of determined and frustrated men, well led, had at least achieved some success on Crete.

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<sup>45</sup> Dyer, KQ.

I've never heard or seen such a muck-up of a war. All our mob, NZers, South Africans and Indians are fighting private battles all over Libya. We are cut off, the Germans are cut off, everything is ruddy well cut off. Damn and Blast!!

J.W. Bell, Diary.<sup>1</sup>

The 'Crusader' battles of November and December of 1941 were vitally important to the New Zealand Division. They had been involved in two costly defeats, suffering heavy casualties and losing much of their arms and equipment. Freyberg felt the forthcoming campaign would give them an opportunity to justify themselves in the eyes of the New Zealand people; 'What we wanted most was a success, but it was important we were not employed on another costly failure.'<sup>2</sup> Freyberg himself needed a victory. He had not yet established a rapport with his subordinates, and had been strongly criticised by Brigadier Hargest. It may seem ironical that Hargest of all people should be criticising his General. He was able to use his position as a front bencher in the National Party to unburden himself to the Prime Minister, Peter Fraser, on Freyberg's method of command. Fraser was worried by Hargest's allegations and consulted Freyberg's superiors for advice. They endorsed him completely. However Freyberg must have been aware that his reputation in the eyes of the New Zealand people was still hanging in the balance.<sup>3</sup>

General Claude Auchinleck had succeeded Wavell to command the Middle East forces after the failure of the Battleaxe offensive in June 1941. Auchinleck withstood pressure from Churchill and decided to launch another offensive in November. For this the Western Desert Force was reorganised

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<sup>1</sup> Private J.W. Bell, Diary, WAI, Series 11, No.4.

<sup>2</sup> Freyberg's Comments on W.E. Murphy, 'Narrative of the Second Libyan Campaign', undated, WAI, Series 11, No.4.

<sup>3</sup> W.E. Murphy, The Relief of Tobruk, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1961, p.1.

into the 8th Army. There were two Corps in the Army; 30 Corps which was an armoured Corps under the command of Lt.General Norrie, and 13 Corps which was an infantry Corps under the command of Lt.General Godwin-Austen. The New Zealand Division was in the latter Corps. It was a powerful force strong in armour (two-to-one superiority) but lacked the techniques that had been evident in General O'Connor's professional Western Desert Force in the Compass battles at the end of the previous year. Defeats had diluted its professional strength. The newly formed Corps had no opportunity to practice command of control procedures before the battle.

Auchinleck appointed Cunningham as GOC 8th Army. He planned to use his armoured Corps to seek Rommel's armour and destroy it. He believed the only method for success in North Africa was this destruction of the German armour. His Corps would seek a decisive battle at Gabr El Saleh where the enemy would be hemmed in and not escape. Any other objectives, including the relief of Tobruk would be secondary. The infantry Corps would isolate the Axis frontier garrisons. Once the German armour had been destroyed the Tobruk garrison would break out and link up with the force advancing from the frontier.<sup>4</sup>

The New Zealand Division's role was similar to that of the rest of 13 Corps in that they would drive behind the frontier strongpoints and isolate them. 4 Bde was to advance on to the escarpment west of Bardia and block movement on the Bardia-Tobruk road; 5 Bde was to advance to the Trigh Capuzzo and sever that line of communication with the west, and also cut the Bardia-Capuzzo water pipeline; 6 Bde was a reserve ready to move to Gambut and to later come under 30 Corps if needed. Freyberg was worried about the vulnerability of his infantry to the German armour and asked for armoured support to be placed under the command of his infantry. This was declined. There was absolute confidence in the ability of the British armour to gain a decisive victory.<sup>5</sup> The New Zealanders faced battle with confidence. Gentry considers that morale was higher at this stage of the war than at any previous or subsequent stage. The men believed that in spite of all adversities they have proved they were capable and were

<sup>4</sup> W.G. Jackson, The North African Campaign 1940-43, B.T. Batsford, London, 1975, pp.146-7.

<sup>5</sup> 'The New Zealand Division in Cyrenaica and Lessons of the Campaign', Part I, 4 January 1942, unpublished, QEIIAMM, pp.3-4.

as good if not better than the enemy. They had had time to recuperate from Greece and Crete, absorb reinforcement drafts and train.<sup>6</sup>

The New Zealanders had spent a large amount of time training for desert warfare but as yet had not taken part in any major desert conflict. So in many ways this was to be a novel experience. The terrain was vast stretches of gravelly desert. In November the days were still stifling and the nights unpleasantly cold. Dust storms were frequent and severely reduced visibility while they lasted, and yet heavy rain could suddenly turn the desert into a quagmire. There were three major problems associated with desert warfare: firstly, a difficulty in establishing the identity of friend and foe at a distance; secondly, radio communication was unreliable and this was compounded by poor equipment; and thirdly, the obvious hazards of desert navigation.<sup>7</sup>

The battle opened on 18 November and initially was an anti-climax. Rommel refused to react and this dashed British hopes for an immediate and decisive battle. The British were forced to seek out the enemy. 7 Armoured Div. probed north and overran Sidi Rezegh airfield. Rommel suddenly saw the danger and ordered 15 and 21 Panzer Divs. to Sidi Rezegh to meet the threat. As soon as 15 and 21 Panzer turned to face the threat at Sidi Rezegh, Cunningham released his infantry Corps to move across the frontier. This was on the night of 21/22 November. At Sidi Rezegh on the afternoon of the 22nd a decisive tank battle took place. 7 Armoured Div. and 22 Armoured Bde suffered heavy losses and were forced to withdraw several miles. Elsewhere the battle had gone well for the British. The New Zealanders took Fort Capuzzo, cut the via Balbia behind Bardia and severed that town's water supply as well as its links to the west. 6 Bde had been detached to the west and 4 Bde was ordered to follow later in the day. Amazingly both commanders thought victory was in their grasp. Rommel felt he could complete the destruction of the British armoured forces on the 23rd while Cunningham had ordered 13 Corps to join in the 'pursuit'.<sup>8</sup>

23 November 1941 was the Lutheran Sunday of the Dead, a very apt

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<sup>6</sup> Gentry, Interview.

<sup>7</sup> Jackson, pp.153-54.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, pp.160-5.

description for the bloodiest day in the war for any New Zealand battalion. The attack by 25 Bn on Pt. 175 was to cost the lives of over 100 New Zealanders. To complete the day, 15 and 21 Panzer to the south were to destroy most of 5 South African Bde. It is the former battle which will be the focus of this study.

6 Bde had been detached from the NZ Division on the evening of 21/22 November and proceeded west to join 30 Corps. The Bde spent the night of 22/23 November near Bir El Chelta. Early next morning as the Bde was having breakfast, HQ Afrika Korps came across the New Zealanders' position. A short sharp skirmish followed and the New Zealanders took 200 prisoners for about a dozen casualties. The loss of its HQ was not to be an immediate problem for the Afrika Korps but later in the battle it was to be a severe handicap. After the skirmish the Bde recommenced its journey reaching Wadi esc-Sciomar, three and a half miles from Pt. 175, at about 1030 hours. Brigadier H. Barrowclough, Comd 6 Bde, had been ordered to secure an 'allround defensive locality about Pt. 175'.<sup>9</sup>

The objective was a trig point marked by a cairn of stones. It was surrounded by an egg-shaped contour of equal height 1400 yards long and 6-800 yards wide. 500 yards to the north of the trig was the edge of the escarpment which runs west from Bir El Chelta to three miles beyond Sidi Rezegh, a distance of twenty miles. A further two miles to the west of the trig (or cairn as it was called during the battle) was a blockhouse.<sup>10</sup>

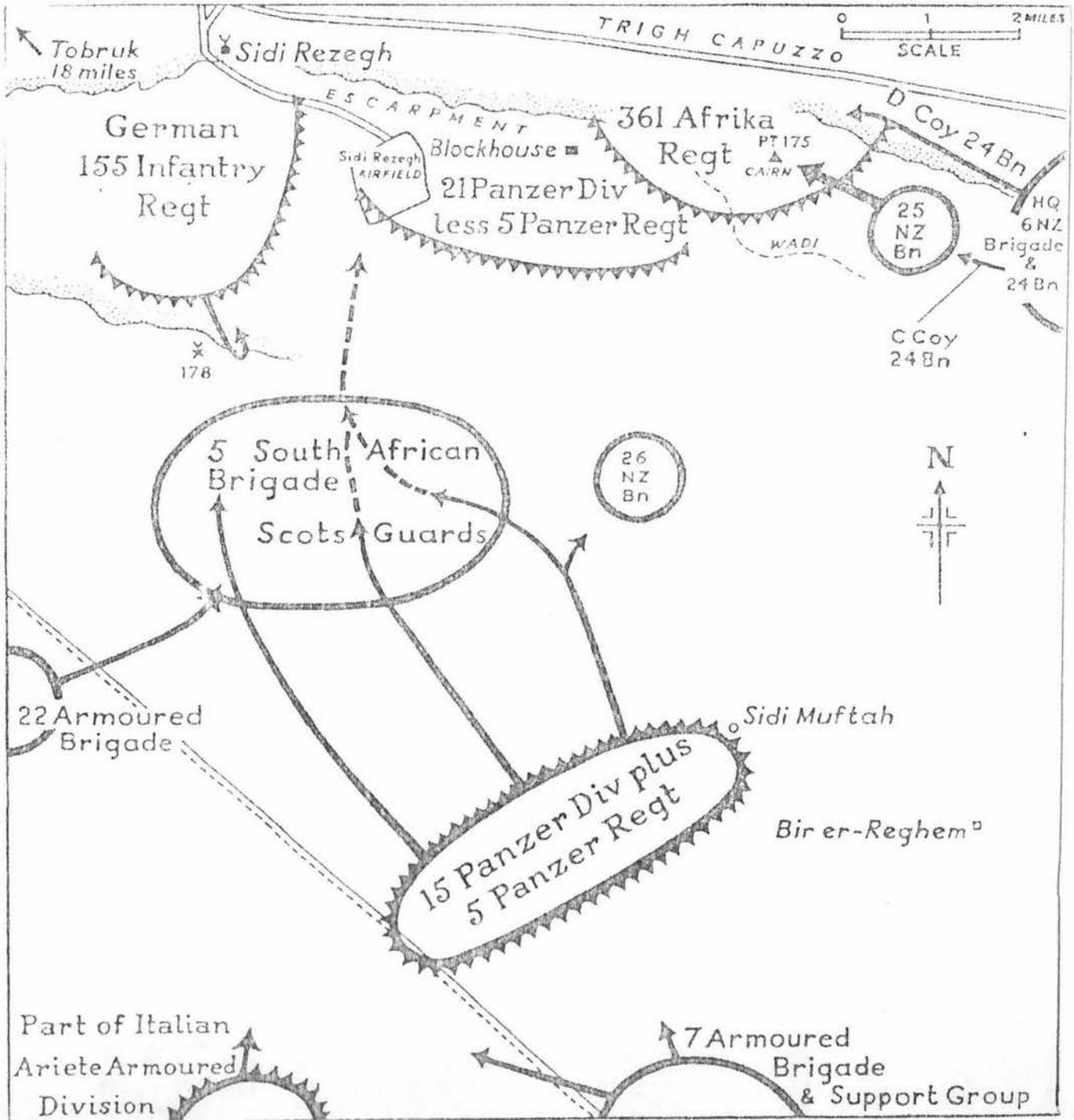
Barrowclough and Lt.Col. C.E. Weir, CO 6 Field Regiment, went forward to a vantage point to study Pt. 175. They could see very little; 'there wasn't a thing to be seen and I could have sworn there were no Huns holding that hill.' There was no further reconnaissance of the position. Barrowclough was insistent that the attack begin as soon as possible and allocated 25 Bn, supported by eight 25-pounders from 29 Bty and an anti-tank troop, the task of capturing the feature. 25 Bn was commanded by Lt.Col. G.J. McNaught. He had only taken over the Battalion in September

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<sup>9</sup> W.E. Murphy, The Relief, p.138.

<sup>10</sup> Major H.G. Burton, '25 Battalion in the Crusader Campaign, November - December 1941', DA 61/10/10, p.9.

Sidi Rezegh 23 November 1941



Source: W.E. Murphy, Point 175, frontpiece.

and had not yet had an opportunity to get to know his officers and men. The Battalion had seen action at Elasson and Molos in Greece where they were embroiled in the rearguard action. They had missed the fighting on Crete as had the rest of 6 Bde.<sup>11</sup>

The men were very eager to get to grips with the enemy. Some had lost friends in the skirmish with Afrika Korps HQ earlier that morning; 'To me this attack could not come quick enough,' One diarist wrote:

My trigger finger felt very itchy indeed and my sharpened bayonet was gleamy and cold awaiting any opportunity to present itself. I was wild by this time because I had heard that...my cobber, had died of wounds....I was gradually becoming frenzied with a thirst for German blood; repayment for several debts.<sup>12</sup>

McNaught outlined his plan at a Battalion conference at 1100 hours. The startline was about 2000 yards from the cairn on a north-western axis.' The width of the advance was 800 yards on a two coy front, D on the left, B on the right. C Coy would follow the advance as the reserve Coy while A Coy would deal with the enemy which was firing at the Battalion's right rear. The advance would begin at 1130 hours. This left Coy OCs just 15 minutes to do any reconnaissance, form their own plan of attack, issue orders to platoon commanders, and have the men on the start line. This meant the men were to be largely unaware of what was to be required of them in the forthcoming attack. Men of one section said that they had no idea where they were going as no one had been told a thing.<sup>13</sup>

The attack commenced on time, but little progress had been made when the order came to halt. A medical officer of the 6th Hussars who had been released by 26 Bn, told Barrowclough that there was a formidable line of anti-tank guns and Tommy guns centred on the blockhouse. There were also 100 Armoured Fighting Vehicles and three or four heavy guns drawn by tractors in the vicinity of Pt. 175. Barrowclough was not entirely

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<sup>11</sup> Murphy, The Relief, pp.152-3; Murphy, 'Narrative...', p.540; C.J. McNaught, 'The Attack of 25 NZ Bn on Point 175 on 23 Nov 41', DA 61/10/7.

<sup>12</sup> W.E. Murphy, Point 175 The Battle of the Sunday of the Dead, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1954, p.4; Private Diary, DA 441.24/10.

<sup>13</sup> Murphy, The Relief, p.153; Murphy, 'Narrative...', p.540; McNaught, 'The Attack...'; Burton, '25 Battalion...'; J. Heslop, letter to W.E. Murphy, 30 September 1950, WAI, Series 3, No.19.

convinced that the information was accurate, particularly as it was against his own judgement. However he ordered McNaught to halt the attack and told him the position 'was strongly held and tanks were present'. The supporting squadron of 'I' tanks - C Squadron 8 Royal Tanks - which had been diverted to deal with some Italian tanks fifteen miles to the southwest, was recalled. It seemed that this would be more than adequate as the commonly held opinion of the day was that 'I' tanks were almost invulnerable to anti-tank fire. The attack was still urgent and was to recommence at noon.<sup>14</sup>

McNaught was now faced with coming up with a plan not only to overcome machine guns, but possibly heavy opposition including tanks. Time was very limited. 'I could almost hear myself saying to myself, "make it simple, make it simple".' The plan was for the tanks to advance in two waves; the first at 15mph to capture the objective, and the second wave with 25 Bn Bren Carriers and C Coy at infantry pace some 800 yards behind the attacking companies. Some of the infantry were already far beyond the start line but the Official Historian considers McNaught was aware of this and had planned the timing so that the tanks caught the foremost infantry somewhere near the objective. Most of the troops were unaware that the objective was a 'nest of Huns in pockets'. They were still under the impression that they were going in to clear up 'a bit of light opposition'.<sup>15</sup>

The German unit around Pt. 175 was the 361 Africa Regiment which had been quite recently formed. I Bn was made up of German members of the French Foreign Legion and Murphy feels that II Bn may have also suffered from this 'unpatriotic association.' This was their chance to regain the 'name of good Germans'. They were experienced and seasoned fighters, adept at holding ground and certainly no strangers to desert conditions. It was also reasonably well equipped with an above average allotment of machine guns and mortars.<sup>16</sup>

A Coy continued in its attempts to locate the enemy along the

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<sup>14</sup> Murphy, The Relief, p.154; Murphy, 'Narrative...', pp.541-3.

<sup>15</sup> Murphy, 'Narrative...', pp.544-5; McNaught, 'The Attack...'; Burton, '25 Battalion...'; It seems likely that several platoons in B Coy might not have received the order to stop, and continued on towards their objective.

<sup>16</sup> Murphy, The Relief, pp.173-4.

escarpment. 9 pl climbed down the escarpment and found some enemy positions that 'had obviously been hurriedly evacuated'. They had just begun to ascend the escarpment again when they were fired on by a squadron of tanks passing below. The correct recognition signals were given but the tanks still fired killing two men. They may have been captured British tanks still with their markings, though it seems unlikely that the Germans had a squadron of tanks close to Pt. 175 at this time of the morning. C Squadron did pass close to 9 pl on its route to join the attack and it seems likely it was they who fired on the platoon.<sup>17</sup>

C Squadron reached the startline and the advance recommenced. 'At first it seemed like just another manoeuvre....Nothing happened we just plodded....There was no sign of life.' The ground was 'very flat, with clumps of salt brush here and there.' This was the only cover available and it was no more than nine inches high. D Coy found the pace steadily increasing to such an extent the 'muscles ached.' Some 500 yards from the cairn, Hastie, OC D Coy, noticing his men were veering to the left away from B Coy, and ordered a half right wheel which caused the sections furthest left to run 'with lungs bursting to keep abreast'. The Coy had not progressed much further when the enemy opened up 'with mortars, machine guns and God knows what else.' D Coy began to bunch, and went to ground under this heavy fire. The tanks, which had moved well forward of the supporting infantry, had crossed this ground but the enemy had lain low until they had passed. The resistance brought about by this return to life was soon overcome by a series of short dashes. About 200 prisoners were taken and 'as usual there was a scramble for the usual loot, and the prisoners seemed rather to be neglected.'<sup>18</sup>

The reinforcements in B Coy had caused the biggest initial problem. In this, their first battle, they were 'very keen, some too much so', and they had to be held back. 10 pl came under fire after half a mile, but several bayonet charges brought about fifty prisoners. 'It was rather hectic

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<sup>17</sup> Murphy, The Relief, pp.174-5; Murphy, Narrative..., pp.547-8.

<sup>18</sup> Murphy, The Relief, pp.175-6; Murphy, 'Narrative...', pp.553-555; Hastie, 'Report on Pt. 175', DA 61/10/8; Participant letter to W.E. Murphy, 23 July 1951, WAI, Series 3, No.19; Participant letter to W.E. Murphy, n.d., WAI, Series 3, No.20.

for about half an hour, and we had to dig in under fire, but our blood was up now, after seeing those good chaps of ours knocked out.' 11 pl on the left of 10 pl came under such heavy fire that one soldier said he was never to experience anything similar again. The pl was approaching the HQ of II Bn which was strongly defended. 12 pl was the only pl in B Coy which had been told the revised estimate of the enemy strength. They met little opposition and continued on past the cairn. 500 yards past the cairn they came under heavy fire from the rear and were forced to ground. The pl comd was killed and the survivors withdrew. Both 11 and 12 pls withdrew towards McNaught. Advanced HQ was now only a few hundred yards southeast of the cairn.<sup>19</sup>

The artillery was having problems at this stage supporting the two leading Coys. Their only success was to put out of action several machine gun and mortar positions. The biggest problem was to find targets in the featureless desert. There were also problems keeping contact with the FOO's and much of the usefulness of artillery was negated when both sides came into contact with each other. Weir considered his 'guns assisted to the best of their ability but observation was poor and difficult into the setting sun.'<sup>20</sup>

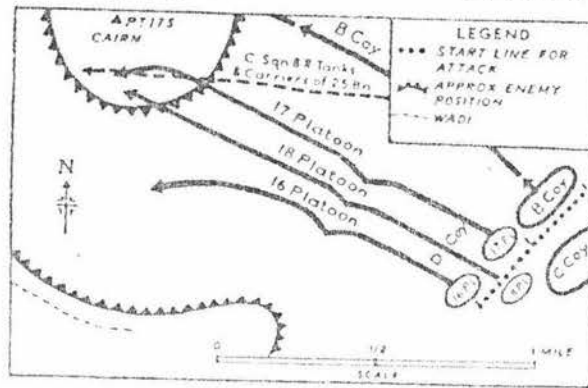
C Coy followed on behind D Coy and again met some resistance from dormant enemy positions and disabled tanks which were manned by Germans. Most of the resistance was quickly overcome and the Coy moved on towards D Coy's positions. 13 pl however stayed behind, on the initiative of its comd to meet the counter-attack that he expected would come from the area of the Rugbet. 15 pl, C Coy was detached, on McNaught's orders, to fill the wide gap that had opened up between B and D Coys. They were given the support of 3 Valentines and moved forward to their positions without any opposition. German anti-tank guns quickly knocked out the tanks and the pl came under heavy fire. They had passed in front of a strong enemy position

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<sup>19</sup> Murphy, The Relief, pp.177-78; Murphy, 'Narrative...', pp.549-53; Letters home OC 10 pl, B. Coy, DA 442.24/7; participant letter to W.E. Murphy, 12 April 1951, WAI, Series 3, No.20; Heslop, letter 20 September 1950, WAI, Series 3, No. 19.

<sup>20</sup> C.E. Weir, Letter to unknown, 12 December 1941, p.3., DA 442.24/5.

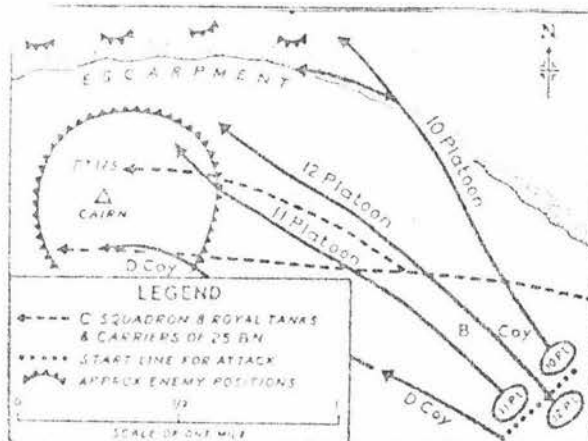
D Coy 25 Bn Attack on Pt. 175 23 November 1941



Source: W.E. Murphy, Point 175, p.8.

Figure 15

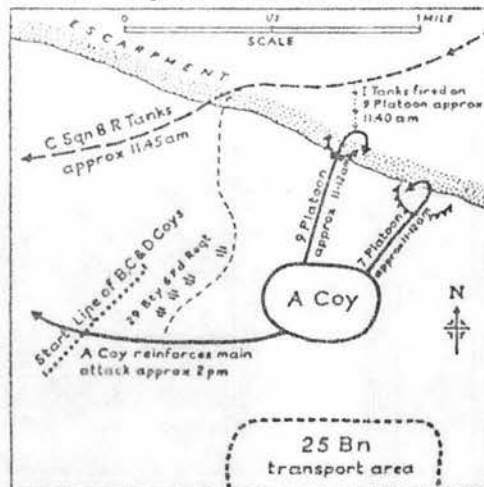
B Coy 25 Bn Attack on Pt. 175



Source: W.E. Murphy, Point 175, p.6.

Figure 16

A Coy 25 Bn: Operations 1100-1300 hours



Source: W.E. Murphy, Point 175, p.12.

now from which heavy fire came. 'No doubt the enemy kept their heads down while the tanks were with us.' The pl was surrounded and felt very isolated. The sound of a tank could be heard below the crest of the escarpment strengthening this feeling. The decision was made to withdraw. It proved disastrous. As soon as the men rose to their feet they drew a terrible fire. Most quickly became casualties. The pl was decimated. This situation illustrates the terrible responsibility that accrues to the command of men in battle. Murphy considers the decision to withdraw was reasonable and justifiable despite the tragic consequences.<sup>21</sup>

C Coy, minus two of its three pls, reached D Coy who were forming a defensive position. They had no cover and no tools to dig in. There were the holes vacated by the Germans, but these were no more than six inches deep. The two Coy comds conferred and Heslop decided to move on through D Coy's positions. He felt D Coy's positions were 'so darned exposed that...anything was better than just staying there, and it would be better to get down and clear the waddy beyond.'

As C Coy moved forward 18 pl D Coy followed unaware of what was happening. They had moved forward less than 100 yards when 'mortar fire thickened considerably, forcing us to ground' and sent them looking for any cover they could find. The fire was intense and to fire back drew a flurry of intense fire. 88mm shells bursting six feet above the ground caused a number of casualties. The air was 'black with gun smoke and the fumes of explosives were suffocating'. A bayonet charge was cut to pieces before any impetus could be gained.

It was not long before the Germans counter-attacked from the Rugbet. 'Germans...visible to our immediate front and could be seen advancing in short bursts to our left front, left side and left rear.' Detachments of infantry followed behind each of the three tanks. The anti-tank troop was unaware of the two Coy's predicament and was busy dealing with a derelict tank that had sprung to life. There was little option but to surrender.

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<sup>21</sup> Murphy, The Relief, pp.179-80; Murphy, 'Narrative...', pp.558-9; participant letter to W.E. Murphy, 13 September 1950, WAI, Series 3, No. 20. Of the 34 men in the pl, 14 were killed, nine were wounded and safe, and six became Prisoners of War. Some of the wounded lay in the open for two days.

'We soon became aware that it was a case of fight on and all perish, or make the best of a bad job and surrender,...,Never at any time before or during the fight did we think we might be taken prisoner.' They were surprised with the treatment they received from their captors as there was no looting.<sup>22</sup>

McNaught now used his only reserve, A Coy, to try and arrest the dangerous situation on the left. 7 and 9 pls came forward and debussed near the Advanced HQ which 'was in the process of being shot to pieces'. The two pls advanced to within 150 yards of the enemy positions before fire density made it impossible to continue. 8 pl had no transport and was forced to move up on foot losing several men. The Coy was split into little groups who were bewildered and out of touch with each other. 'It was impossible to gain a coherent appraisal of the situation, a continual stream of wounded was passing to the rear, enemy fire was intense, and our own 6th Field was putting down a spot barrage that was suicidal in its closeness.'<sup>23</sup>

By the middle of the afternoon - 1430-45 hours - the situation around Pt. 175 was grim for the New Zealanders. The survivors of A and B Coys were disorganised and heavily engaged to the north of the cairn. The southern flank lay open to the enemy with the almost total loss of C and D Coys. But the enemy had suffered heavily and were not yet in a position to take advantage of the situation. All but four of the tanks had been knocked out but McNaught had been very impressed with their conduct; 'the johnnies in the tanks...were a game lot and deserved great credit for their work.'<sup>24</sup> McNaught himself had been wounded twice and the Advanced HQ was a shambles with trucks and ammunition carriers blazing. McNaught had been an inspiring example to his men 'with his Balaclava on his head and pipe in the mouth.'<sup>25</sup> McNaught said that he felt exhilarated during the fighting 'thinking more rapidly and clearly than I had ever done in my

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<sup>22</sup> Murphy, 'Narrative...', pp.560-5; Heslop, letter to W.E. Murphy, 20 September 1950, WAI, Series 3, No.19; Account by E.A. Eagen, WAI, Series 3, No.18; Hastie, 'Report...', participant letter to W.E. Murphy, 12 September 1950, WAI, Series 3, No.20; participant letter to W.E. Murphy, 22 July 1950, WAI, Series 3, No.20; participant letter to W.E. Murphy, August 1950, WAI, Series 3, No.20.

<sup>23</sup> Murphy, 'Narrative...', pp.565-6; Murphy, The Relief, pp.184-5; participant letter to W.E. Murphy, 18 March 1953, WAI, Series 3, No.20.

<sup>24</sup> McNaught, letters to W.E. Murphy, 29 June 1950, 12 July 1950, WAI, Series 3, No.20.

<sup>25</sup> Kippenberger had forbidden the wearing of Balaclavas in 20 Bn considering it 'unhealthy, unsightly and unsoldierly headgear'. Routine Order No. 59/41, 18 October, 1941, WAI, Series 11, No.4.

life before.' Burton, the 2 i/c had managed to collect some stragglers and form them in a line behind B Coy to protect its rear which was now coming under threat.<sup>26</sup>

McNaught was now forced to ask Barrowclough for assistance. 24 Bn, the reserve Battalion had been on edge throughout the afternoon as it became increasingly obvious that 25 Bn was in serious trouble. D Coy was sent forward about 1530 hours to reinforce B/25. The latter Coy had not been warned of D/24's arrival and fired on them. This was the second time in the afternoon that New Zealanders had fired on each other with C and D Coys being the previous participants. D/24 then pushed forward and found the scene 'strewn with the dead and wounded of both sides'. The OC D/24 was killed and with his death the Coy ceased to show any initiative. A counter-attack with the few remaining tanks drove the enemy back some distance but failed to consolidate because of the lack of infantry support. There was no movement in support from D/24.<sup>27</sup>

McNaught was wounded for the third time and Lt.Col. Shuttleworth, CO 24 Bn, was brought forward to take over the 25 Bn. C/24 was then released to join the battle and the OC, Tomlinson, found a confusing scene at Battalion HQ:

On arrival it was found that their HQ no longer existed. Their Battalion Commander had been wounded and evacuated and there was no sign of the Adjutant or any other HQ officers; all that remained were a few signallers packing up and getting out - it was impossible to obtain any coherent information; the Battalion was badly demoralised and their men were streaming off Point 175 hotly pursued by the enemy.

Tomlinson's arrival coincided with another counter-attack attempt by the enemy at about 1630 hours and his impressions were undoubtedly coloured by this. He decided to attack towards the cairn to help the Battalion to reorganise itself. He told his pl comds not to 'persist in

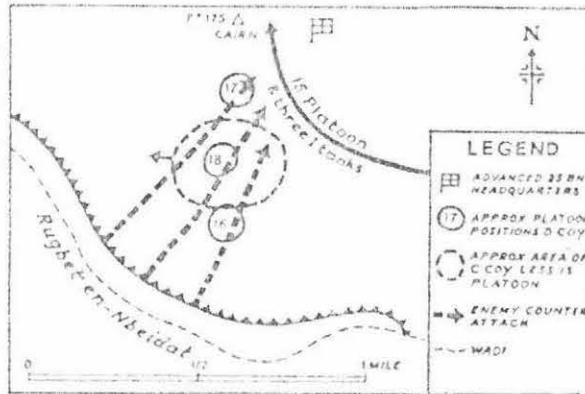
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<sup>26</sup> Murphy, 'Narrative...', p.567; participant letter to W.E. Murphy, 31 July 1951, WAI, Series 3, No.20.

<sup>27</sup> Murphy, The Relief, pp.187-88; Murphy, 'Narrative...', pp.569-72.

Figure 17

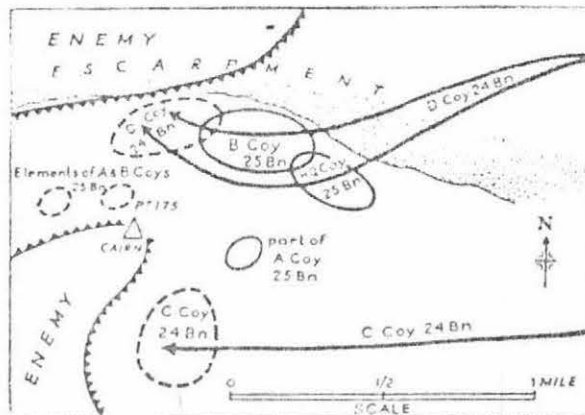
C & D Coys 25 Bn Overrun by tanks:  
afternoon 23 November 1941



Source: W.E. Murphy, Point 175, p.13.

Figure 18

24 & 25 Bns: late afternoon 23 November 1941



Source: W.E. Murphy, Point 175, p.26.

the face of fire if it caused heavy casualties.' The attack came to a stop 300 yards short of the cairn when Tomlinson thought the casualties warranted caution. But C/24's attack stopped the German counter-attack and stabilised the left front. C and D Coys of 24 Bn now formed a line with the remainder of 25 Bn. Digging implements were brought forward and Shuttleworth brought his two remaining Coys forward as a reserve. C/24 spent much of the night bringing in the wounded and distributing great-coats and blankets to 25 Bn who had gone into battle without them.<sup>28</sup>

Both I and II Bns had lost heavily and at nightfall regrouped around the blockhouse, their positions on Pt. 175 being taken by Afrika Korps infantry who had been brought up from the south during the day. Casualties were about equal. 25 Bn suffered 350 casualties, its 100 dead being more than any other New Zealand Battalion lost on any day in the war. Officer casualties had been 16 out of the 27 who had entered the battle. C and D/24 Bns had suffered about 35 casualties, the tanks about 25 casualties, and 6 Bde 420 in all.<sup>29</sup> Less than half of Pt. 175 remained in the New Zealanders' hands by nightfall. It appears likely that Rommel himself became embroiled in the fighting in the afternoon, perhaps to the detriment of the wider battle.<sup>30</sup>

Many of the problems encountered by 25 Bn and 6 Bde throughout the day can be attributed to faulty planning. The haste of the launching of the attack was the major problem. Barrowclough insisted that the attack be launched quickly and did not allow McNaught enough time to prepare his attack. As reconnaissance by Bren carriers would have only taken a short time, would have indicated that the position was held in strength and may have pinpointed the enemy's strongpoints. With this information Barrowclough and McNaught would have been able to plan their attack. However, as Murphy points out, it was a characteristic of 6 Bde operations in this campaign that the Units were expected to make all the elaborate preparations required for a major attack in a remarkably short time - far shorter than was considered necessary by other formations at this or any other stage of the war. He gives 25 November, as an example, when four battalions were expected to launch a most complicated attack at only one hour's notice, extended reluctantly to two, and found in the event that they could not

<sup>28</sup> Murphy, *The Relief*, pp.190-1; Murphy, 'Narrative...', pp.573-5; Tomlinson, letter to W.E. Murphy, 13 May 1951, WAI, Series 3, No.20.

<sup>29</sup> Murphy, 'Narrative...', p.576.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p.622; Jackson, p.169.

start within four hours,<sup>31</sup>

A preparation could have consisted of an artillery programme of high explosive and smoke. Weir suggests that smoke would have been very useful for the tanks but there were neither sufficient guns nor ammunition to set these in motion. He was also unsure whether the atmosphere was suitable for smoke. There had been no detailed techniques worked out for co-operation between artillery and 'I' tanks. Artillery, infantry and armour were to act independently throughout the day. The gunners pointed out targets to Bde Comd before the start of the attack and engaged these. There was however, no request for support of the guns by the infantry throughout the day and all fire put down was on the initiative of the Bty Comd.<sup>32</sup>

The lack of co-ordination exhibited in the attack on Pt. 175 by infantry and armour was typical of the relationship between the two arms at this time. Neither the infantry nor the tanks had worked together and did not know how to help each other. New Zealand infantry had practised infantry-tank co-operation at Baggush before the battle but had only been able to use lorries representing 'I' tanks. The commonly held assumption at the time was that since the tank was the main assaulting arm the 'tank comd must have free choice of approach and entry.'<sup>33</sup>

Veale, C Squadron comd, chose to approach from the right, and as luck would have it, it was the most heavily defended side. But neither he nor McNaught had any idea of the defences and Veale chose the approach that seemed the most tactically acceptable with the naked eye. The tanks went forward at 15 miles per hour in two waves, rapidly overhauling and then racing ahead of the infantry whose advance rate was 100 yards per minute. The result was that neither arm was able to mutually support one another. The tanks were vulnerable to the anti-tank gun and without infantry support to neutralise that weapon they suffered heavy casualties.

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31 Murphy, 'Narrative...', p.545n.

32 C.E. Weir, Letter to unknown, 12 December 1941, DA 442.24/5.

33 'Operations of Armoured Forces, Western Desert-Libya-Cyrenaica October 1940-June 1941', unpublished, QEIIAMM, p.77.

Many of the enemy infantry were bypassed by the tanks and the infantry was forced to engage them without tank support.<sup>34</sup>

The Official Historian, W.E. Murphy, considers this lack of co-operation extended further to artillery and armour. FOO's inside the 'I' tanks may have aided the tanks' struggle with the anti-tank guns. They could have directed the guns' fire on the anti-tank guns and also pinpointed the enemy strongpoints for further concentrations. 8 Field Regiment had practised this technique with 1 (Army) Tank Bde but that Regiment had not accompanied C Squadron 8 Royal Tanks on its deployment to 6 Bde.<sup>35</sup>

Barrowclough was not slow to absorb the lessons of infantry-armour attacks and prepared a paper detailing the requirements for such attacks. He pointed out that infantry were necessary to clean up defended localities, to take prisoners and to occupy the localities. Tanks were vulnerable to artillery and anti-tank fire and were dependent on the infantry to neutralise these weapons. He recommended that either the second or third tank wave move forward with the infantry.<sup>36</sup>

The problems that plagued the operations involving infantry and armour continued until after the Ruweisat battles in July 1942. The arrival of Lt. General Montgomery as GOC 8th Army in August 1942 marked a turning point in infantry-armour co-operation. Infantry were repeatedly frustrated by the non-arrival of armoured units or their unwillingness to assist. Relationships between the two arms became increasingly antagonistic and bordered on outright violence during the Ruweisat battles. However, co-operation between the two arms, when it did occur, had spectacular results. After a disastrous daylight attack at Ed Duda, Freyberg and Inglis cajoled the 1st Army Tank Bde into a night attack with 19 Bn on the same objective on the night of 27/28 November. The attack was an outstanding

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34 Murphy, 'Narrative...', p.548.

35 *ibid.*, p.548n.

36 H. Barrowclough, 'Attacks by "I" Tanks with Infantry', n.d., QEIIAMM.

success with the force opening a corridor through Ed Duda to the Tobruk garrison; with only one casualty.<sup>37</sup>

It was not until armour was put under the command of infantry that the problem of co-operation between the two was solved. The armour preferred to stay independent and make their own decisions. They were, in a way, attempting to preserve the cavalry notion that they were socially superior to the remainder of the British Army and were the 'most aristocratic and the most magnificent.'<sup>38</sup>

The haste in launching the attack meant that many men did not know what was required of them in the forthcoming attack. They did not know their objective and what opposition they were most likely to meet. A soldier, if he is to perform adequately, must know what is to be required of him. He needs to know the general plan, know what others are required to do and how his efforts fit into the general plan. Lt.Col. C. Bennet, a CO of 28 (Maori) Bn considered that a 'soldier going into battle must be put completely in the picture. The 1941 Libyan campaign - a fairly uncertain one throughout - revealed the grave influence of obscurity on the morale of the troops.'<sup>39</sup> At Pt. 175 the men were bemused and mystified by the heavy opposition they encountered. Because of this lack of knowledge the Battalion was split up into bewildered and often leaderless groups without any common goal except survival.

The haste in starting the attack caused a number of seemingly small items to lack adequate attention. When the attacking troops reached their objective they had no digging tools to prepare positions for the inevitable counter-attack. This may be only conjecture as the gravelly nature of the ground may have precluded the defenders from digging in to a sufficient depth to give some protection against the counter-attack. But without tools the men were exposed and vulnerable.

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<sup>37</sup> see H.B.C. Watkins, 'Night Fighting', Army Quarterly, October 1953, pp.52-67.

<sup>38</sup> Extract from Cecil Woodham-Smith, The Reason Why, Constable, nd, p.139, WAI, Series 11, No.4.

<sup>39</sup> KQ.

The occupation of Pt. 175 was urgent as it was necessary to relieve some of the pressure on the British armoured forces. Criticisms of the lack of preparation may seem hindsight but the Bde comd and Bn CO owed it to their men to ensure these preparations were made. If the position had not been strongly held the preparations would have been unimportant. By launching the attack in undue haste Barrowclough ensured that if the position was strongly held the attackers would be severely handicapped. With prior reconnaissance, an adequate artillery preparation, and infantry-armour-artillery co-ordination throughout the battle, Pt. 175 may still not have been a complete success but it certainly would have been more successful than it eventually was.

Pt. 175 was a rarity in that it was one of the few attacks made by New Zealanders in the Middle East that took place in daylight. It was only in World War II that night fighting became commonplace. Before then it had only consisted of skirmishing. The Prussian military theorist, Clausewitz, had considered that large scale night fighting was impossible as 'the attacker, seldom, or ever, knows enough about the defence to make up for his lack of visual observation.'<sup>40</sup> The development of the machine gun and the associated increasing killing power in the hands of the defence led to the evolution of night fighting. It was found that attacks without overwhelming air and armour superiority suffered unacceptable casualties. The night provided the protection of darkness and for infantry it also meant there was only a limited threat from their nemesis; tanks. The desert was unsuitable for daylight attacks. It offered good visibility, flat ground and sparse cover; all in favour of the defence. Night attacks won acceptance in World War II as the only practicable way to take objectives with an acceptable level of casualties. No one wanted, nor could afford, a repeat of the World War I bloodbaths. But there were to be many attacks which had to be launched in daylight. Necessity decreed that the attack, as at Pt. 175, could not wait until night.

The Libyan campaign was a costly one for the New Zealand Division and on 1 December Freyberg was forced to withdraw the Division from the battle. But the New Zealanders had had their victory. Logistics won

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<sup>40</sup> Karl von Clausewitz, On War, Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Eds.), Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1976, Book IV, p.273.

'Crusader' for the British and Tobruk was finally relieved. But in set piece battles and in quick attacks such as Pt. 175 it had been clearly illustrated that the British and New Zealanders had a way to progress before they were a totally competent military force. But they were learning rapidly.

In their insular way they (the British) were convinced that they possessed an inbred tactical flair; that their marksmanship and the speed of their tanks would enable them to outmanoeuvre the Germans in spite of the apparently lower performance of their tank guns; and that they had the stamina to outfight the Germans. They did not realise that their tactics were inadequate; that their marksmanship only passable; and that their higher commanders had not yet found the secret of bringing superior force to bear with decisive effect. They were to buy battle experience from the Germans during 'Crusader' in the hardest possible way - by coming very near to defeat.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Jackson, pp.150-1.

## CHAPTER 7

THE KILLING INSTINCT: MINQAR QAIM

Knowing their names gave them identity, establishing them as fellow men with mothers and wives and the whole demoralising arsenal of emotion with which they could assault your pity. Enemies should be kept nameless if the men who fought them were to survive themselves.

Richard Beilby, Gunner<sup>1</sup>

No matter with what grandiose ideas politicians and theorists describe war, war for the common soldier is simply survival. To survive he must kill. Killing is one of the essential ingredients of war. The military machine to be effective in a time of war must encourage men to kill others. It is impossible, I believe, to write of any war without discussing killing. Minqar Qaim, besides demonstrating the continued evolution of the New Zealand Division, clearly illustrates this aspect of war. Killing did run riot at Minqar Qaim but can it be justified? Or do we have the right to judge or assess any man's action in war?

After the 'Crusader' battles the New Zealand Division moved to Syria to act as a garrison force. Once again the Division had a chance to recuperate from its hammering in a battle. On 27 May 1942 Rommel launched an offensive which in 25 days was to cause Tobruk to fall. On 14 June the New Zealand Division was ordered to the Western Desert and by 24 June the whole Division was concentrated in the Western Desert. The New Zealanders were thrust into the Matruh 'box' where they were instructed to 'prepare to fight a defensive action around Matruh and delay the enemy as far west as possible'. Freyberg objected to his 'highly trained mobile New Zealand Division' being confined to a fortress and pressured Ritchie, GOC 8th Army for a more mobile role.<sup>2</sup> On 25/26 June the New Zealand Division was moved to the escarpment south of Matruh in the vicinity of Minqar Qaim.

<sup>1</sup> Richard Beilby, Gunner, Angus and Robertson, London, 1977, p.29.

<sup>2</sup> J.L. Scoullar, The Battle for Egypt, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1955, pp.53-6.

With the battle reaching its crisis and threatening the very existence of the British in North Africa Auchinleck removed Ritchie from his command of the 8th Army and took personal control. He decided to reverse the decision to fight a decisive battle around Matruh and instead decided to fall back to El Alamein. The retiring troops were obliged to 'inflict the heaviest possible losses' on the enemy. There is no record that the New Zealand Division received this instruction.<sup>3</sup>

From about 1030 hours on the 27th the New Zealand Division came into contact with the enemy. Initially it was only fringe contact, as the main Axis thrusts were to the north near Charing Cross. The thrusts by 15 and 21 Panzer and XX Italian Corps brought steadily increasing pressure on the New Zealand Division and 1 Armoured Division throughout the day. There was no major conflict but the New Zealanders were involved in several sharp clashes as the enemy probed for weak spots. By late afternoon 1 Armoured Division had been led to believe by 13 Corps that the New Zealand Division had ceased to exist, and made plans to withdraw.<sup>4</sup> By 1800 21 Panzer had called a halt to operations for the night and moved into defensive positions to prevent the enemy breaking out. The Division was encircled and they were prepared to wait until morning to 'destroy the enemy'.<sup>5</sup>

Freyberg had, in the late afternoon, issued precautionary orders for a withdrawal in which 4 Bde and the Divisional Cavalry would act as a

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<sup>3</sup> Scoullar, pp.69-70.

<sup>4</sup> 13 Corps sent a message to 1 Armoured Division at 1655 hours advising them that the 'New Zealand Division had fallen out of Bedstead' and ordering them to 'Iodine'. Decoded the message meant that the New Zealand Division had either been pushed out of Minqar Qaim or had withdrawn, and 1 Armoured Division should withdraw as soon as possible. 1 Armoured Division interpreted the message as 'the battle was over and the New Zealand Division did not exist.' However any doubts should have been dispelled when the New Zealand Division signalled 13 Corps at 1830 asking for fresh orders. 1 Armoured Division's GOC also had personal contact with the New Zealand Division at 2115 hours. The misunderstandings were typical of the British situation at the time. Scoullar, pp.99-100.

<sup>5</sup> The New Zealanders were surrounded. To the north the Division had been engaged by the enemy and had watched enemy columns moving there throughout the day; to the northeast reconnaissance had shown that the Germans had moved close to the main road south of Garawaka; the enemy had attacked from the east and southeast; to the south 21 Bn had encountered enemy positions; and the west was the direction the enemy were coming from. R. Walker, 'Minqar Qaim Narrative', DA 401.2/3, p.58.

rearguard. This first plan did not envisage the Division having to fight its way out. Brigadier L. Inglis, who had taken command of the Division when Freyberg was wounded soon after 1700 hours, was forced to find an alternative plan. It had become obvious that the proposed easterly withdrawal route was now blocked by the enemy. Unit commanders and senior staff officers attending a conference called by Inglis were faced with two alternatives: they could either attempt to bypass the enemy to the south and then move eastwards, or they could attempt to fight their way through the enemy to the east. The former course would take the Division, in the dark, with unreliable maps, on a 'tortuous route over unknown country.' It was decided that the Division would attempt to fight its way out using tracks it was familiar with and where the going was known to be good.<sup>6</sup>

For the first time Freyberg was not guiding the Division's fortunes. Though Inglis was the most senior commander he was certainly the 'first among equals'. Inglis was not a professional soldier, but a lawyer-Territorial. He was a very competent commander as the next few weeks was to illustrate but he lacked those 'professional qualities' which made Freyberg stand aloof from his subordinates. When Lumsden, GOC 1 Armoured Division visited the New Zealand Division that night he considered command had passed to a 'committee'.<sup>7</sup> There may be some substance in this but it is hard to substantiate. It is certain that Inglis would have sought assistance from his colleagues in this his first Divisional command.

The plan was simple. 4 Bde was to attack with the bayonet and attempt to force a hole in the German defences on a neck of ground between Bir Abu Batta and Mahatt Abu Batta. The rest of the Division would follow through this hole. There would be no artillery preparation because of a shortage of ammunition and because it would advertise the Division's intentions. The col was about a quarter of a mile wide and 4 Bde would attack in an arrow formation. 19 Bn<sup>8</sup> would lead in the centre, and

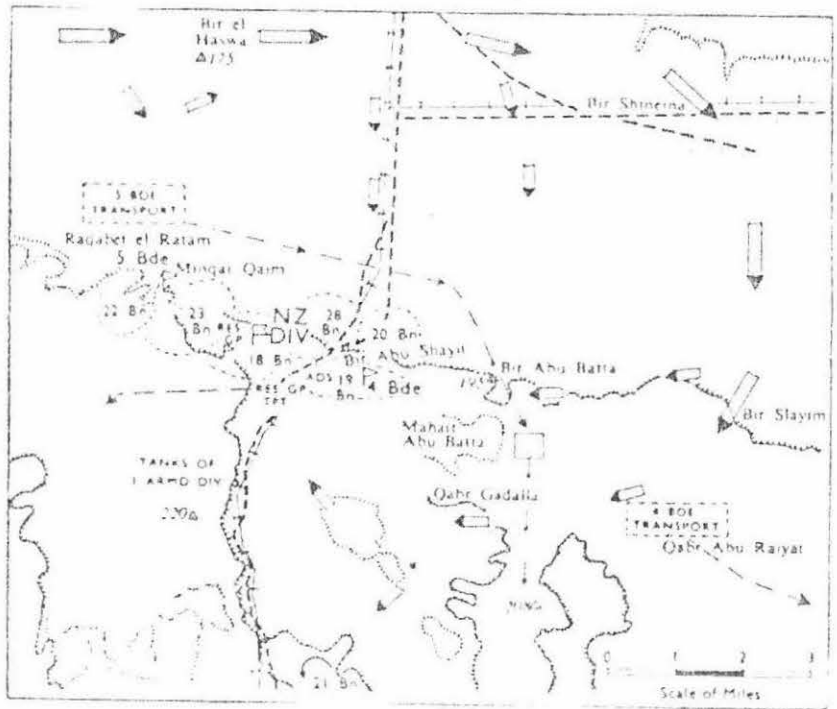
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<sup>6</sup> Scoullar, p.103; Walker, 'Minqar Qaim...', p.67.

<sup>7</sup> H. Latham, letter to H.K. Kippenberger, 3 September 1948, WAI, Series 11, No.7.

<sup>8</sup> With 19 Bn was a company from the Essex Regiment which had lost contact with the Regiment. 20 Bn's War Diary recorded that earlier in the day one platoon from the Essex Coy 'panicked and ran'. Burrows was able to stop them and an Essex Officer brought them under control. This was denied by survivors of the Essex Coy after the war and upset them very much. (The Regiment had been in disgrace in the Sudan campaign for a similar action). It stimulated some argument between the British and

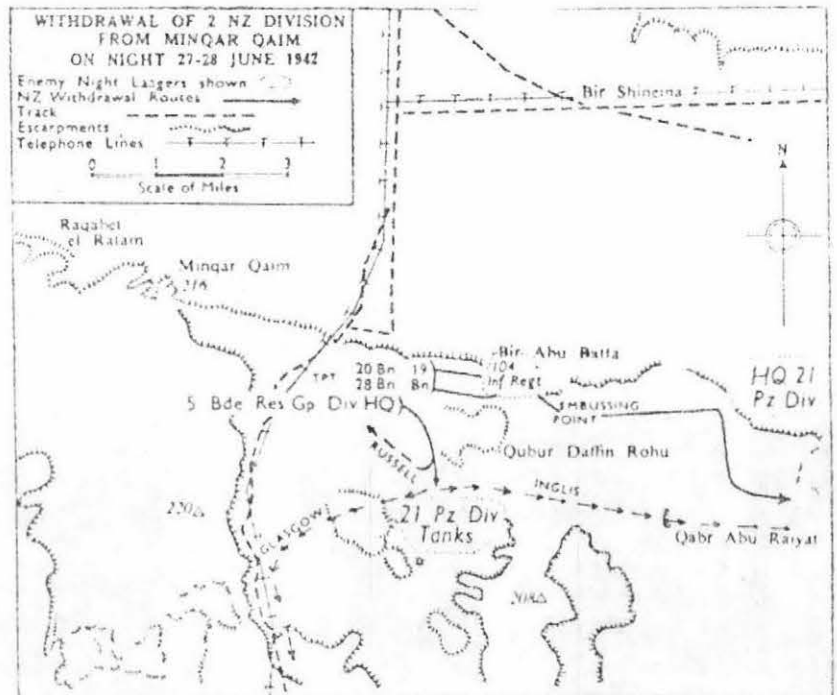
21 Panzer Div.'s Encirclement of NZ Div. at Minqar Qaim 27 June 1942



Source: J.L. Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p.84.

Figure 20

Withdrawal of NZ Div. from Minqar Qaim on the night 27/28 June



Source: J.L. Scoullar, *Battle for Egypt*, p.106.

20 and 28 (Maori) Bns were on the left and right flanks respectively. 5 Bde was not tactically employable. Contact with some of its transport had been lost and part of the Bde was forced to use the Divisional Reserve Group's transport. Once embussed the Bde would not be able to be deployed for action.<sup>9</sup>

19 Bn was the first to form up and its front covered 3-400 yards and was 200 yards in depth. Zero hour (0030 hours) approached and passed without any sign of the other two battalions. 20 Bn arrived soon after that but there was still no sign of the Maoris. Burrows, the 4 Bde comd, was faced with a crisis similar to the one that had faced him at Maleme. Should he attack with the forces he had and risk failure, or wait and risk being caught by the Germans in daylight? He decided to wait. The Maoris were the battalion furthest from the start line and it had taken time for a battalion conference and to recall patrols. One commentator suggested that some of the delay was caused by the wait for the return of men 'investigating' what the enemy had left behind.<sup>10</sup> At 0145 hours the Maoris arrived and the advance began immediately.

The moon was out and visibility was about 100 yards,<sup>11</sup> as 4 Bde moved off, with bayonets fixed. The silence was eerie. The breathing of a neighbour, the 'rhythmic crunch, crunch of army boots', the sharp ring of a boot on stone and the occasional rattle of equipment all seemed dangerously loud. It was just under 2000 yards to the escarpment and a further 1000 yards before the embussing point for the transport was reached. As the waves of men moved forward the tension must have been unbearable. How much further could they go before they were seen?

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8 (contd.)

New Zealand historians. The Essex swore that the accusation was not true and Burrows was quite adamant it was true. If they were guilty of this indiscretion they certainly redeemed themselves with their conduct in the breakout, receiving a letter from the CO of 19 Bn commending them on their efforts. J.T. Burrows, Comments on Walker, 'Minqar Qaim...', p.69n; H. Latham, letter to H.K. Kippenberger, 3 September 1948, WAI, Series 11, No. 7; R. Walker, letter to H.K. Kippenberger, 28 October 1948, WAI, Series 11, No.7; R. Walker to H.K. Kippenberger, 1 December 1948, WAI, Series 11, No.7; J.T. Burrows, letter to D.J.C. Pringle (20 Bn Historian), 3 May 1951, WAI, Series 11, No.7.

<sup>9</sup> Scoullar, pp.104-5.

<sup>10</sup> Walker, 'Minqar Qaim...', p.70n.

<sup>11</sup> Only one participant account suggests other than the visibility was good. He considered 'it was the darkest night imaginable'. DA 50/10/40.

200 yards from the escarpment three flares split the moonlight on the left flank and the 'whole world seemed to go mad.' Fire, rapidly increasing in density, crossed and recrossed the whole area. Lines of tracer lit up the night. Burrows felt 'it was obvious fire had been deliberately held in the forward posts until we were very close.'<sup>12</sup> There seemed to be no way through the fire. The feeling of every man must have been to go to earth as quickly as possible. However, the tensions<sup>13</sup> of the last few days were released in one great gush: 'There was a roar from our chaps and we all broke into a run...we all knew instinctively that our only chance lay in keeping going.' Burrows was thrilled with the response from the men: 'To a man the whole Brigade charged. No orders were given, no urging forward by officers and NCOs. With shouting, cheering and war cries every man broke into a run as if he knew exactly what was expected of him.'<sup>14</sup> According to some sources the Maoris reacted in a characteristic way as they charged forward; a 'blood curdling haka...burst spontaneously from left to right throughout the entire battalion.' One man was apparently out in front of B Coy 'prancing, leaping and yelling as he led that famous haka, Ka Mate! Ka Mate!'<sup>15</sup> The Maori haka seemed not only to inspire the Maoris: 'I could hear the rhythm of a Maori haka over to our right. Almost everyone was yelling his own particular battlecry.' The men

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- <sup>12</sup> The Germans hadn't held their fire; they had simply been unprepared. It seems that the Germans when laagering for the night did not follow the British practice of Forward Defensive Lines, but merely a light screen of guards, mostly armed with automatic weapons close around the transport. R. Walker, letter to Scoullar, 4 May 1948, WAI, Series 11, No.7.
- <sup>13</sup> Not only were the New Zealanders in a critical situation; most had had little rest since the return from Syria. Hanson, CRE, estimated on June 26 that he and his men had only had an average of two hours sleeping the last four days. F. Hanson, letter to unknown, 1 August 1942, Hanson Papers, QEIIAMM.
- <sup>14</sup> One participant suggests that for 'one, brief, terrible moment there was a sort of half recoil', while another suggested there was an 'involuntary wavering in the front as the old instinct to go to ground exerted itself.' There is obviously some truth in this but the truth will probably never be known. DA 447.23/43, participant letter to H.K. Kippenberger, 5 July 1948, WAI Series 11, No.7.
- <sup>15</sup> It seems likely the haka was only a figure of speech and more as 'a call in very loud voice taken up by the rest of those around the caller finishing up in a full-throated roar'. The man referred to above as in front of B Coy was in fact in charge of B Coy headquarters and caused so much excitement with his haka which resulted in coy headquarters firing their rifles indiscriminately with the bullets going through a platoon up front, endangering them. K. Waaka, letter to the author, 26 February 1979.

charged forward; 'there was no stopping, no crouching, no going to earth.'<sup>16</sup>

19 Bn found its area devoid of any strong opposition and moved to assist 20 Bn who had penetrated the middle of the enemy laager. It was here that opposition was most fiercest. The Maoris swung out to the right and as they saw their first German 'everyone let fly with Tommy guns, Brens, and rifles. The enemy were completely surprised, many still being asleep';<sup>17</sup> 'Little groups of Germans, still half asleep, bewildered, could be seen leaping from the backs of trucks...still in their blanket rolls...'

The defensive fire though heavy was erratic and ill-directed. One German machine gun was seen to be firing into the air at an angle of forty-five degrees while there were 'other Germans lying in slit trenches just pulling the trigger without looking where they were firing.' The machine guns were firing tracer on fixed lines. This negated their value as the lines were clearly visible and easily avoided. It also pinpointed the location of the guns making them easier to deal with. Accurate and well-controlled fire might have had a devastating effect on the New Zealanders' attack and brought it to an abrupt halt.

The laager was a blazing inferno of burning trucks and explosions. Grenades were thrown in trucks with sleepy, bemused Germans still inside. A Maori threw a Mills bomb into a tank and slammed the hatch. Germans were shot and bayoneted before they could climb from their slit trenches. Drivers desperately tried to manoeuvre their trucks away from the scene of death and destruction; some succeeded, most received a grenade. No chances were taken. The second and succeeding waves put a few shots in or bayoneted any nearby bodies 'just to make sure'. One New Zealander lying wounded on the ground struggled in desperation to his feet because bayonets were being 'stuck in everyone, dead or alive, and it was hard to distinguish between friend and foe.' It was of little consequence whether

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<sup>16</sup> Scoullar, pp.108-9; J.T. Burrows, 'Report on the withdrawal of 4 NZ Infantry Brigade from the Bir Abu Shayit area on the night of 27/28 June 1942; Walker, 'Minqar Qaim...', p.71, Appendix 6; DA 50/10/40; DA 68/15/16; DA 68/15/18; DA 447.23/29; DA 447.23/30; DA 447.23/43; DA 447.23/49; DA 447.23/59.

<sup>17</sup> One participant said he was surprised how many Germans slept in pyjamas in the desert. J. Sanders, letter to H.K. Kippenberger, 23 July 1948, WAI, Series 11, No.7.

the enemy were resisting, surrendering or fleeing. One member of 19 Bn saw two surrendering Germans shot. The savage ferocity of the attackers was evident when a Maori struck a German hiding behind an anti-tank gun with such force that the 'bayonet went right through him, struck the gun behind him and broke off the nosecap of the rifle.'

The gap was made and the troops moved to the embussing point 'excited and intensely exhilarated.' Most troops quickly climbed into the trucks but it seems the Maoris might have been an exception. Indeed one participant said that the Maoris 'after tasting blood, were eager to be up and at them...Even telephone orderlies went out with the bayonet. Their officers tried to call them back.' Again it is hard to verify this report and indeed it may be that some observers have read too much into the troops' behaviour in this desperate situation.<sup>18</sup>

The remainder of the Division waited in the transport for the success signal.<sup>19</sup> A 'mutter of conversation from a truck would sound unnaturally loud in the stillness.' Then suddenly the night was full of the sounds of battle and the sky was alight with explosions and tracer. Inglis now found himself in a dilemma. He feared 4 Bde might take too long to break through and the Division would either be caught with fire from the flanks, or would not be clear of the area by daylight. However if he chose not to follow 4 Bde he would risk a contact with the enemy when he was unable to deploy his infantry and guns. Inglis decided to use 4 Bde's attack as a diversion and the Division itself would move south for two miles and then turn due east on a line parallel to their proposed route. The Divisional column consisted of 900 vehicles and guns, nine abreast on an eighty-yard front.

The column had moved only a mile and a half when a series of green flares lit the sky. The night was once again full of the clatter of

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<sup>18</sup> Scoullar, pp.109-10; Walker, 'Minqar Qaim...', pp.71-73; J.F. Cody, 28 (Maori) Battalion, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1956, pp.193-5; DA 68/15/16; DA 420.23/1; DA 447.23/30; DA 447.23/59; participant interview, 16 June 1948, WAI, Series 11, No.7; participant, letter to H.K. Kippenberger 5 July 1948, WAI, Series 11, No.7; participant, letter to H.K. Kippenberger, 23 July 1948, WAI, Series 11, No.7.

<sup>19</sup> When Major B. Bassett, the 4 Bde Brigade Major, fired the success signal he and Burrows were nearly shot by Maoris who thought they were Germans signalling. Burrows, 'Report...'

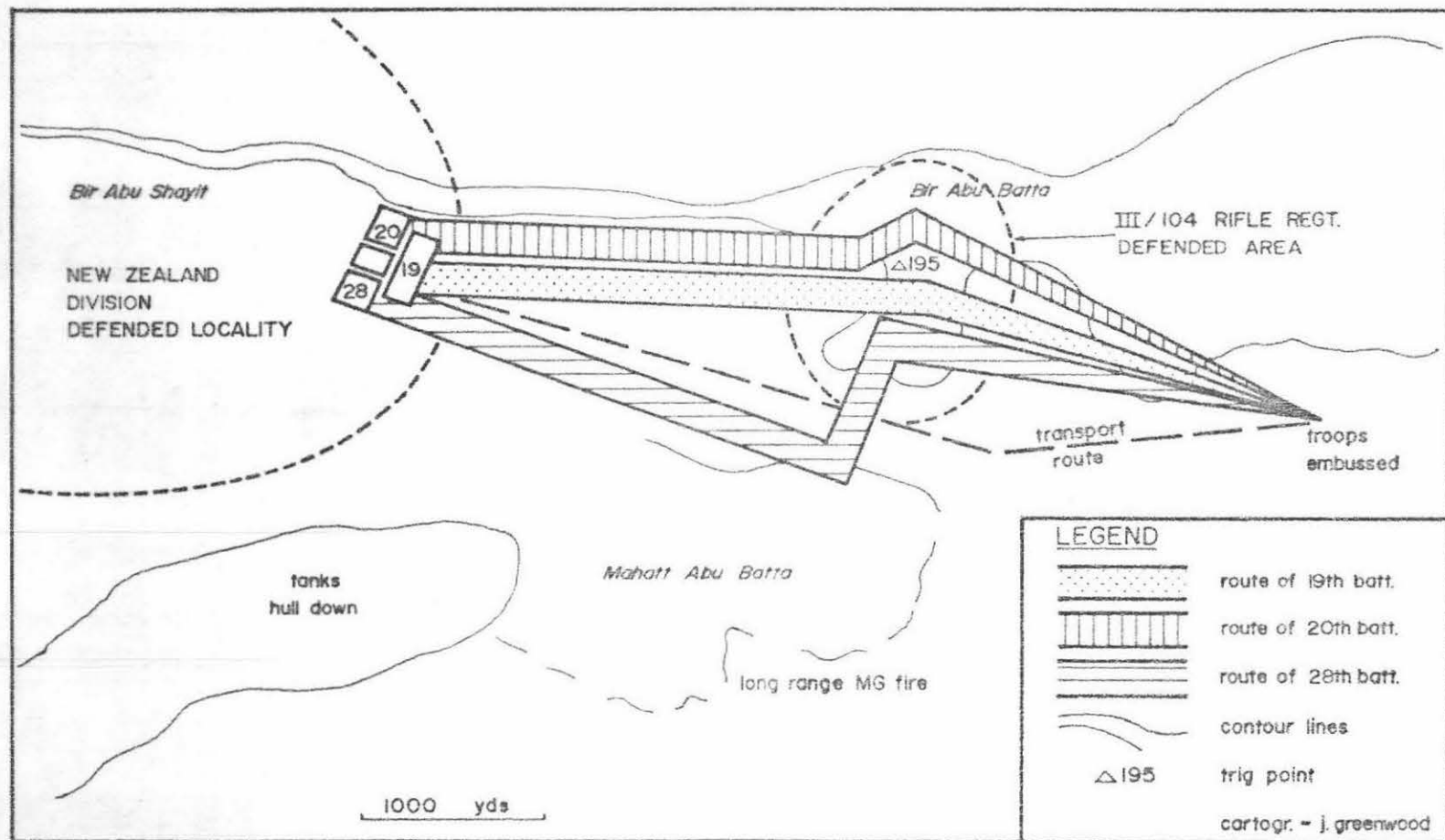


Figure 21

The Withdrawal of 4 N.Z. Infantry Brigades at Minqar Qaim, June 27/28, 1942

Source: R. Walker, Minqar Qaim Narrative, Appendix 6 (J.T. Burrows Report).

weapons and lit by tracer and explosions. It seemed as if the Germans had opened up with everything they had. As with 4 Bde's attack, much of the fire was machine guns firing tracer on fixed lines. The Division had bumped into a German tank laager, but the Germans were as startled and unprepared as the New Zealanders. There was no possibility of the Division debussing and fighting it out. The front of the column turned left across the face of the enemy and raced away at high speed over rough ground. The remainder of the column split into two groups as it sought to avoid the enemy.<sup>20</sup> The whole area was one of absolute confusion:

...the noise of the firing and fast moving vehicles, the lightening burst of tracer shells and bullets, with here and there a bursting sheet of flame lighting the night as a vehicle was hit, made a hectic scene.<sup>21</sup>

Every man sought to do his 'bit'. Even those on the inside of the column who could not fire directly at the enemy tried to add to this hectic scene:

One man was sitting in the back of a 15cwt truck with a bren gun between his knees. He was holding the muzzle of his gun straight up in the air. Every few seconds he fired a burst, the bullets streaking up like little rockets. He was on an "inside" truck', and thus could not fire at any opposition. He was certainly doing his best to add to the din.<sup>22</sup>

The three groups all escaped. The routes need not concern us. A little under 10,000 New Zealanders escaped from Minqar Qaim. Casualties, as one would expect in such a desperate situation, were high. Total casualties for the thirty-six hours at Minqar Qaim were approximately 650, with 100 of these being deaths.<sup>23</sup> The Official Historian has considered that 4 Bde had 'added unfading lustre to the story of New Zealand arms. Proof was given, if proof was needed, that the New Zealand citizen soldier,

<sup>20</sup> Scoullar, pp.110-20; Walker, 'Minqar Qaim...', pp.76-79; L.M. Inglis, Interview by War History Branch Staff, 26 June 1951; WAI, Series 11, No.7; DA 420.23/1; DA 447.23/49.

<sup>21</sup> War Diary, New Zealand Division General Staff, Vol.5, DA 21.1/130.

<sup>22</sup> H. Murray Reid, The Turning Point, Collins, Auckland, 1954, pp.46-7.

<sup>23</sup> Walker, 'Minqar Qaim...', Appendix 25; H.K. Kippenberger, letter to J.A.I. Agar-Hamilton (South African War History Branch), 11 December 1950, WAI, Series 11, No.7.

adequately trained and equipped, was equal to any situation.'<sup>24</sup> This eulogy contains some element of truth. The impression one gains from the breakout is competence. The plan was simple, but effective, and worked well. Burrows did not panic or make a premature attack when many of his instincts must have told him otherwise. The attack itself was successful because of the desperation of the men to make it a success. The attack, for all the confusion and bedlam, was efficiently and competently carried out by men who had confidence in themselves and their weapons. The Divisional column itself may have been lucky to escape, but in many respects it made its own luck. Inglis' decision to use 4 Bde's attack as a diversion and to change the direction of the Divisional column's breakout was effective and justified. Though opposition was encountered and the column became fragmented there was no panic and the groups were able to organise themselves and were able to meet at the arranged rendezvous. These factors were showing the evolution of the Division as it increased in efficiency and became one of the most competent Allied units in North Africa. The performance of the New Zealand Division at Minqar Qaim, in what were the darkest days of the war for the Allies in North Africa, certainly gives credence to this suggestion.

The Germans were very bitter with their failure to keep the New Zealand Division encircled and with the tactics employed in the breakout. They considered 4 Bde had violated the rules of war. The DAK War Diary was very harsh:

Elements of 21 Panzer Division repelling attempts to breakthrough are involved in bitter defensive fighting during the evening. III/104 Rifle Regt, which is being attacked by the New Zealanders suffers particularly heavy losses. During these actions, violations of International Law, such as the slaughter of wounded, etc. occur.

The Germans were upset at finding multiple wounds in their dead, that an Advanced Dressing Station had been overrun, and that wounded lying in slit trenches had been killed.<sup>25</sup> New Zealanders taken prisoner received

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<sup>24</sup> Scoullar, p.110.

<sup>25</sup> Walker, 'Minqar Qaim...', Appendix 20.

a hostile reception at the HQ of 21 Panzer the next day. They received a 'long dissertation' on their 'disgraceful behaviour'. They were told that as a retaliation they were not to be treated as prisoners of war and would be shot. They were separated from other Allied prisoners and without any distinction between ranks were stripped of all their personal belongings and made to stand in the sun for several hours. The Germans relented on their threat and they were not shot, but however the incident was to resurface during the Ruweisat battles. A New Zealand officer taken prisoner on 15 July was abused at HQ of 21 Panzer. He was told that New Zealanders no longer fought like 'gentlemen' and that they filled themselves up with cognac and 'fight like Bolsheviks'. From Minqar Qaim onwards, Lord Haw Haw, the German propaganda radio broadcaster, referred to the New Zealanders as 'Freyberg's butchers'.<sup>26</sup>

This incident leads us to a wider discussion of killing in war. As pointed out at the beginning of this chapter killing is one of the essential factors of war. There are a number of questions on killing which can be asked and can, in particular, be related to Minqar Qaim; what instincts make men kill and how are they activated, and when does killing in war become murder?

The Army is faced with either dredging up or creating a latent destructive instinct in its recruits and then aiming this instinct at the enemy. There seems no conclusive answer as to whether man is inherently violent or not. If he is correct, the processes of socialisation force these tendencies into the individual's subconscious, although they may be expressed in outlets such as sport. Zoologist Hans Kruuk suggests that animals often kill for no reason other than pleasure and this may, in humans, be a manifestation of inherent violence.<sup>27</sup> The other argument however, is that humans are not inherently violent and any violent tendencies are a product of their environment. Some psychologists, in opposition to Kruuk,

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<sup>26</sup> Reid, p.44; Walker, 'Minqar Qaim...', Appendix 20; DA 541.23/1; J.A.I. Agar-Hamilton, letter to H.K. Kippenberger, 12 July 1949, WAI, Series 11, No.7; participant letter to H.K. Kippenberger, 1 July 1948, WAI, Series 11, No.7; participant letter to H.K. Kippenberger, 6 August 1948, WAI, Series 11, No.7; participant letter to H.K. Kippenberger, 13 September 1948, WAI, Series 11, No.7; participant statement, 23 November 1949, WAI, Series 11, No.7.

<sup>27</sup> Hans Kruuk, 'The Urge to Kill', New Scientist, 20 June 1972, pp.735-7.

argue that animals only kill when hungry or cornered.<sup>28</sup> Any participation by an historian in this debate can only be superfluous and confusing, but it is important to realise the biological and mental problems that the Army must overcome to produce killers.

The killing instinct is aroused and directed at the enemy by instilling a hatred of him so that killing will become automatic. However much an individual believes that his hatred of the enemy is a result of logical and coherent thought on his own part he is largely a victim of subtle brainwashing propaganda. The press is one medium which conditions the soldier's mind both before and after enlisting. It reported pre-war abuses in Germany; editorials deplored the lack of individual freedom and the territorial ambitions of the Nazis. Once the war started reports of 'atrocities' and other acts upset New Zealand public opinion. In its own publications for the troops the Army emphasised the evil of the enemy and the need to hate him. 'The Nazi enemy has descended to depths lower than the jungle animal.' 'Luftwaffe airmen machine-gun women and children and chuck their bombs about indiscriminately with the sole object of terrorising. These airmen are the brothers of the ruthless soldiers you will meet.'<sup>29</sup> This propaganda is necessary in a country such as New Zealand which has only once seen conflict on its own soil. Soldiers who have seen their country invaded and devastated need no further motivation for a 'will to war' and a 'will to kill'. It is this first hand experience of invasion that enabled the Poles to earn their reputation as fierce and often merciless fighters.

Paralleled with this attempt to dehumanise the enemy, the military tried to dehumanise the soldier so that he would react automatically in a combat situation. He is trained to respond automatically in a given situation and conditioned to shoot at a grey uniform when ordered to do so. Some New Zealanders were able to adapt easily to act as shooters and hunters. It would be reasonable to say that soldiers with a rural background had more contact with death and killing. One CO of 25 Bn said that while he commanded

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<sup>28</sup> e.g. Anthony Starr, Human Aggression (Penguin, 1968), extract in The Study of War and Society, Block I, Units 1-4, Open University Press, 1973, pp.107-11.

<sup>29</sup> 'Tommy Gun Rifle and Bayonet', Military Manual No.12, Whitcombe and Tombs, Christchurch, n.d., p.4.

the battalion, B Coy was a weak fighting Coy and first to show unease in a static position such as forward of Takrouna. He attributed it to the fact that B Coy was from Wellington and few had seen even animals killed.<sup>30</sup> This is one individual's observation and does not take into account many other factors, but it is a suggestion.

The battles in Greece and on Crete gave many New Zealanders their first opportunity to kill. Many men may not have had the opportunity to fire in Greece but on Crete there were many opportunities; either in the air or on the ground:

...I saw something dark green, a German steel helmet almost hidden by a thick olive tree, and a revolver raised from the ground next to it pointed right at me. I pulled the trigger of my rifle, the parachutist's shoulder jumped, and with a sudden thrill I realised that I had fired instinctively from the hip and killed him...had involuntarily killed my first German....There was no time for any exultation or repugnance.<sup>31</sup>

These first experiences in killing and death soon changed men's attitudes. Any man who was wounded or had seen friends killed and wounded, had suffered the severities of action and the extremes of privation - lots of marching, water and food shortages, and lack of rest - would be less tolerant towards the enemy:

The varnish of civilisation made them a fraction too slow in killing and once a man had been blooded he was much better at killing again.<sup>32</sup>

A loyalty to friends and unit was the predominant motivation that saw men through war. They felt themselves obligated not to let their 'cobbers' down. No man wanted to lose the self respect of his mates. It would be hard to live with your peers and your own conscience knowing your hesitation had cost the life of a 'mate'. Men probably found killing easier

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<sup>30</sup> KQ. All references to KQ in this chapter are from Question 21.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas, p.10.

<sup>32</sup> KQ

in a group situation. A study at West Point found that people in groups are more likely to be more aggressive and cruel than those alone. Mobs and riots offer further evidence of this.<sup>33</sup>

The tensions of combat work men up into a 'hot blood' state. When this is released in combat men are capable of anything:

in reaction to the strain and excitement of the attack he can do anything...I remember reducing one of my chaps to tears by admonishing him for shooting a Hun attempting to surrender during a bayonet charge at Fort Cappuzzo. He was not a 'tough' man but had worked up to a high state of tension.<sup>34</sup>

It would be reasonable to expect that all men will kill when their life is in imminent peril. This particularly applies to close quarters fighting. After all, survival is probably the strongest instinct in mankind and he will do anything to survive:

'Stand to' was at dawn and my cobber and I were in a 'Slittie', when we heard an obviously German voice above us. I had my rifle leaning on my left shoulder, pointing upwards, with one up the 'spout' and safety on. I just pulled the trigger and shot the chap under the jaw killing him instantly. Just as well, as he was about to drop a 'potato masher' (grenade) on us. We pushed him back from the edge with the casual comments, 'Poor bastard! Dead fluke I got him or he'd had us!'<sup>35</sup>

There are a number of men who will not kill unless it is absolutely necessary. 'Infantry in Battle' considers there will always be a small proportion of men who are reluctant to use their weapons, 'either through fright or the fear of drawing enemy attention to themselves, or through mistaken feelings of humanity.' It cites an example from the Senio:

a forward platoon phoned battalion headquarters to say that a German was lying out in front of their position, and they wanted a mortar concentration on the poor unfortunate. No-one seemed anxious to fire a bren, rifle or S.M.C. An order from the CO put this right - and the 'German' was found to be nothing more than a steel helmet.<sup>36</sup>

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33 Watson, p.118.

34 KQ

35 MQ

36 'Infantry in Battle', pp.14-15.

An American officer, S.L.A. Marshall, estimated that no more than twenty-five percent of troops who had the opportunity to fire at the enemy did so. Marshall estimated this after studying American troops in the Pacific and in Europe.<sup>37</sup> In World War II only one man in four was directly involved in combat operations, which suggests only five to eight percent of an Army took steps to kill the enemy. The respondents to Kippenberger's questionnaire felt these figures did not apply to New Zealanders. One considered it was 'rubbish' while another said it was ludicrous to suggest the great proportion of an army 'were only there to eat rations and were of absolutely no use whatsoever.' However, Burrows thought that with the exception of those who fought on Crete an 'astonishingly high proportion of fighting men never fired a shot.' Another respondent estimated that in September 1942 out of Coy strengths in his battalion of 65, 70 and 80, there were six, ten and eight willing fighters. These figures seem astonishing and might have given politicians food for thought had they realised it.<sup>38</sup>

Men found it harder or easier to kill depending on their individual circumstances - their background, whether their friends have been killed or wounded, and their combat motivation. It too depended on their enemy. The Germans were fellow Westerners and Allied countries could relate to their style of war. It was considered civilised and there was not an intense hatred. There was no attempt to understand the Japanese style of warfare. Deeds which the Japanese considered normal were interpreted as uncivilised and abhorrent, evoking a reaction of intense personal hatred. One respondent to the Kippenberger Questionnaire who had fought against both the Germans and Japanese considered men might have a resistance to killing Germans. It did not, however, apply to killing Japanese; 'it is probably stretching one's imagination to regard a Jap as a fellow man...The approach to killing Japs was in a wave of hate, such as one would kill rats, and killing Germans in my experience was very impersonal.'<sup>39</sup>

We need to assess the killing at Minqar Qaim in light of the previous discussion on killing. The mood of the attacking troops and the prevailing

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37 Marshall, p.127.

38 KQ.

39 KQ.

conditions. Should they fail to break out the men had nothing to look forward to except death or becoming a prisoner of war. The situation was analogous to a cornered animal which when left with no alternative but to fight for its freedom and life, will do so with a savage fury. There were simply no facilities for holding prisoners. It was impossible to stop and round up dazed and sleepy men, let alone to find anywhere to put them. The whole momentum of the attack would have been lost. Wounded men can still fire, and fire from the rear is extremely disconcerting. It was presumably very hard to see whether the figure in the slit trench was dead, wounded or only shamming. The safest course was to make sure it was dead. 19 Bn was told that under no circumstances were they to stop and pick up their wounded, the Maoris would do that. The role of 4 Bde, to punch a hole for the rest of the Division, dictated the circumstances of the attack. To allow themselves and the rest of the Division to escape had to be the prime consideration.

No quarter was given and the only prisoner was a German taken by the Maoris.<sup>40</sup> It seems that this was simply a spontaneous decision by individuals who considered the situation made it impossible to take prisoners. Freyberg did record in his diary at 0930 hours on 27 June, that if a breakout was needed he favoured a night attack with the bayonet; 'No quarter was to be given.' Two participants also wrote to Kippenberger that orders had been given to the effect that no prisoners were to be taken; 'we were told it was to be fairly desperate...and we were to take no prisoners; there was to be no quarter.' Others, however, said they had received no such orders but realised that if the attack was to be successful no prisoners could be taken. It appears that no orders on quarter were given by unit commanders but that a few sections or platoons may have been given instructions on order, however the majority of men made their own decision.<sup>41</sup>

In the history of warfare there have been countless instances when one side has been unable or unwilling to offer quarter. In modern times Official Historians have been reluctant to acknowledge that their troops

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<sup>40</sup> The Divisional Column included the German prisoners who had been captured earlier in the day.

<sup>41</sup> Participant, letter to H.K. Kippenberger, 26 June 1948, WAI, Series 11, No.7; Participant, letter to H.K. Kippenberger, 1 July 1948, WAI, Series 11, No.7; Participant, letter to H.K. Kippenberger, 5 July 1948, WAI, Series 11, No.7.

have been involved in such actions. There is, however, a big difference between killing on occasions when it is impractical to take prisoners, as at Minqar Qaim; when troops attempt to surrender at the last possible moment after inflicting casualties on the attackers; when prisoners are treacherous, and when killing takes place for the sake of killing. It is a fact that many things happen in war that a detached observer can question at a later date. Dr Bean considers that such actions are inevitable in the heat of battle (he was describing the slaughter of surrendering Germans in the Passchendaele battle), and any blame 'for them lies with those who make wars, not with those who fight them.'<sup>42</sup>

Minqar Qaim and the succeeding battles at Ruweisat were important battles for the New Zealand Division. The battles of the previous year had proved a good grounding for the Division. The spectre of the 'failures' of these was beginning to fade. Minqar Qaim demonstrated the competence of the New Zealand Division. It also showed clearly that to survive in war men must be ruthless. As Burrows said, 'we left good evidence of no hesitation to kill on the field at the Minqar Qaim breakout.'<sup>43</sup> The killing at Minqar Qaim may be a blot on the New Zealand moral code of war but there must be a sense of reality about observing the rules of war. When a man's life is in danger his prime consideration is survival and he will often do anything:

Men who have killed in battle still feel this resistance to killing and yet in the madness and frenzy of those battles it became so easy as to be frightening when the battle was concluded. Many nights I lay awake, wondering what sort of citizen I would be if I did ever get home.<sup>44</sup>

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42 Keegan, p.47.

43 KQ.

44 MQ.

## CHAPTER 8

TAKROUNA

The man is the first weapon of battle.

Aron Du Picq

The attack on Takrouna by the New Zealand Division in April 1943 was the culmination of two years' hard fighting. It was to be the last major battle fought by the New Zealanders on North African soil. The Division was at the peak of its efficiency as a fighting machine. Morale and spirit may have been higher in earlier campaigns, but the Division had not reached such a degree of competence before the Tunisian campaign, and perhaps did not reach the same level again. The experience gained by the Division was utilised to fullest advantage in the attack on Takrouna. This was illustrated in the preparations for the attack and in the attack itself. During the battle men at all levels of command, in particular those at the senior NCO level, showed their experience to take the initiative and carry the attack through when it was in danger of faltering under the severe casualties.

After the bitter battles of Minqar Qaim and Ruweisat the New Zealand Division had been withdrawn from the line to prepare for the El Alamein offensive. The New Zealanders had suffered heavily and, understandably, the respite was welcomed with a 'binge' in Cairo.<sup>1</sup> The men were extremely antagonistic towards the British, in particular the armour, resulting in some nasty scenes in Cairo. The battles and successes of the following six months - El Alamein, Agheila, Medinine, Mareth and Tebaga - had restored confidence in the British leadership and tactics while further tuning the Division's proficiency. For example, the battle at Tebaga on the 26th March had been one of 'first-class planning, careful timing, co-ordination between ground and air and between arms and excellent preparation of every kind.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See FP, File U, for further information on these incidents.

<sup>2</sup> W.G. Stevens, Bardia to Enfidaville, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1962, p.341.

By the middle of April 1943 the 8th Army's offensive had ground to a halt before the rugged mountainous country to the north of Enfidaville. It was obvious a setpiece attack would be required to advance beyond this natural defensive barrier. To the north-west of the 8th Army the remainder of 18 Army Group lay poised for the final assault that would conclude the North African conflict. General Alexander, comd 18 Army Group, decided to use the British 1st Army, 2 United States Corps and 9 French Corps, in his main thrust towards Tunis, Bizerta, and Cap Bon. The operation, codenamed 'Vulcan', gave Montgomery's 8th Army no positive role which would allow them to be in at the 'kill'. They were simply to deceive the enemy as to the whereabouts of the main thrust and consequently to draw his reserves towards their front.

The rivalry between the British and Americans, and between the two British Armies was intense. Montgomery, and his Army, were very disappointed that they would not be the spearhead of the offensive, and consequently not partake in the glory of entering Tunis first. They considered it was their right as they had borne the brunt of the fighting in North Africa. Montgomery decided to launch an attack before the 1st Army was ready to launch 'Vulcan'. He believed there were only eight German battalions 'corsetting' the Italians and an incisive and vigorous attack might cause the whole front to crumble. Horrocks, GOC 10 Corps, gave the New Zealand Division the task of taking the dominant feature of Takrouna, while on the New Zealanders' left flank, 4 Indian Division would attack Djebel Garcia and then advance through the hills in a right hand sweep behind the Axis Forces. 50 Division and 7 Armoured Division would have static roles on the eastern and western flanks respectively.<sup>3</sup>

The New Zealand Divisional plan called for an attack on a two brigade front.<sup>4</sup> On the right flank 6 Bde would attack with two battalions, the objectives being the feature of Djebel Ogla and a long ridge called Hamaid en Nakrla. The 5 Bde attack would be by three battalions, 21, 22 and 28 (Maori), and would be on the left flank of 6 Bde. Its objectives were Djebel Bir, a horseshoe-shaped feature, and 700 yards to the left across a narrow valley, Takrouna. To the north of the two features, running east-west,

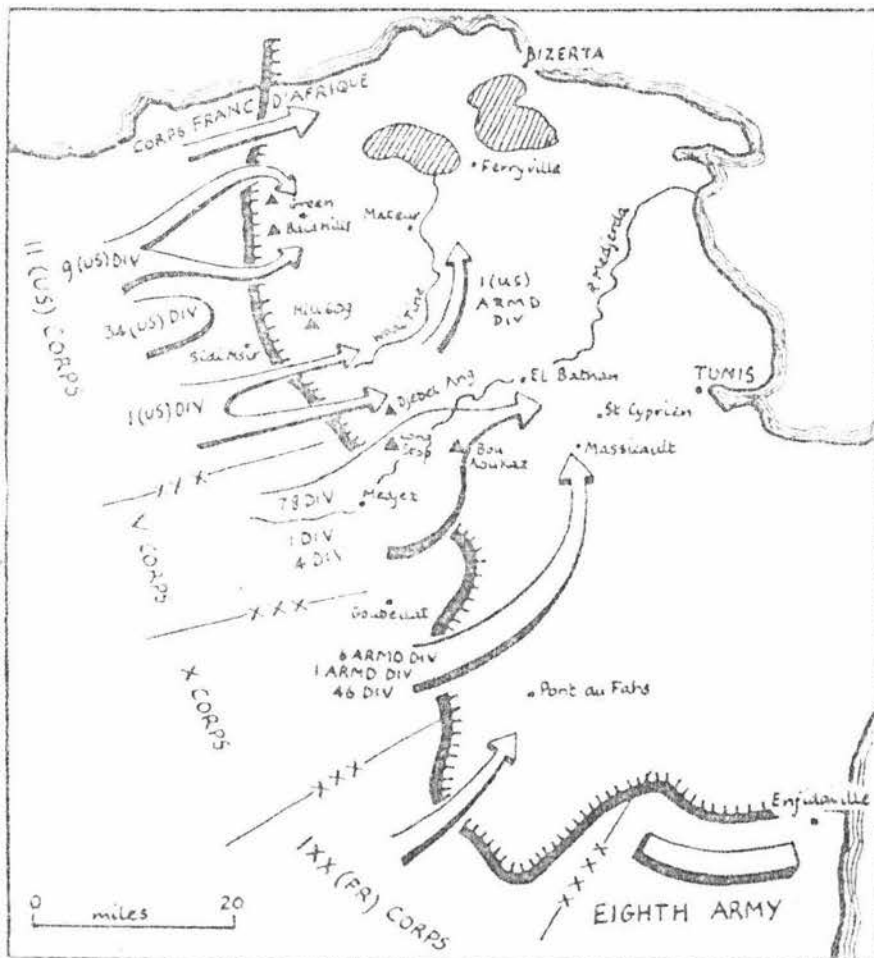
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<sup>3</sup> Jackson, pp.380-2.

<sup>4</sup> 4 Bde was refitting as an Armoured Bde.

Figure 22

Plan Vulcan issued 12 April 1943



Source: W.G. Jackson, The North African Campaign 1940-43, p. 379.

was the Zaghouan-Enfidaville road. Beyond the road were two further features, Djebel Cherachir and Djebel Froukr. The axis of advance was almost south to north and it was hoped the troops would be able to use the Pole Star to keep direction.<sup>5</sup>

5 Bde was the most experienced of the two brigades, but was drained in manpower after six months of continuous fighting. 21 Bn had an assaulting strength of 360 allranks, 23 Bn 383, and 28 Bn 319.<sup>6</sup> The Bde comd, Kippenberger, and his COs, Lt.Cols. R. Harding (21 Bn), R. Romans (23 Bn) and C. Bennett (28 Bn), had been together for over six months and had achieved a good understanding. Kippenberger allotted the Maoris the task of capturing Takrouna. 21 Bn assaulting on its left would seek opportunities to assist. The two battalions would cover a front of 2,500 yards. 23 Bn would follow 28 Bn in a second wave and push through beyond the road to capture Djebel Froukr.<sup>7</sup>

The attack would be supported by seven field and two medium regiments. They were to fire a barrage that would lift 100 yards every two minutes. This rate was based on the one used at El Alamein (100 yards every three minutes) which in the flat open country was too slow. However, this quicker rate did not take into consideration the rugged nature of the terrain. The guns on the perimeter of the Divisional boundary were to fire smoke to indicate that boundary for the assaulting forces.

The use of artillery in the Takrouna battle was to demonstrate the evolution of 2 Division Artillery during the War. Initially there was no centralised control of the artillery and in the Libyan campaign the three Field Regiments of the Divisional Artillery had been dispersed to each support an infantry brigade. It was not until Brigadier R. Miles, then CRA, asked Lt.Col. C.E. Weir to fire 4 and 6 Field Regiments in support of an attack on Belhamed that there was any centralisation of artillery. It was

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<sup>5</sup> I. McL. Wards, Takrouna, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1951, p.3.

<sup>6</sup> 'Report on Operation "Oration"', 19-23 April 1943, 5 NZ Inf Bde, DA 52/10/6, p.6.

<sup>7</sup> Kippenberger, p.304; Stevens, p.303; Wards, Takrouna, p.6.

at Minqar Qaim that the Divisional Artillery was fired by the CRA for the first time. They were fired by Weir who had become CRA after Miles was captured in late November 1941. The development of centralised artillery was enhanced with the arrival of Montgomery to command the 8th Army. Montgomery was opposed to using smaller battle formations than divisions. This development was continued with the provision of artillery regiments from units not directly involved in operations, and the creation of an artillery pool known as AGRAs (Army Group Royal Artillery). At Takrouna Weir had under his command the New Zealand Divisional Artillery, three field regiments from 50 Division and two from 5 AGRA.<sup>8</sup>

Takrouna, the objective of the Maoris, was a bald outcrop of limestone, nearly 600 feet high. The southern slopes of the feature were very precipitous. Takrouna commanded the whole plain to the south and offered excellent observation. Should the attack fail, the guns, which had been moved forward under the cover of darkness and then camouflaged, would be exposed to counter-battery fire. Takrouna was surmounted by a domed mosque and the remains of a Berber fortress (referred to as the pinnacle). On a slightly lower level, to the south, there was a series of buildings on a ridge (referred to as the ledge), and directly behind the pinnacle, at a lower level was the village of Takrouna. To the south of the feature there were olive orchards surrounded by ditches and cactus hedges. The cactus was a thick variety that grew to about six feet high and sprouted hard sharp needles.<sup>9</sup>

The Maoris' task was a severe assignment. The precipitous nature of the southern slopes made any frontal assault difficult and hazardous. The most accessible line of approach was along the northern slopes and consequently Bennett decided to attack from that direction. D Coy was given the responsibility for taking Takrouna. A platoon from B Coy was detailed

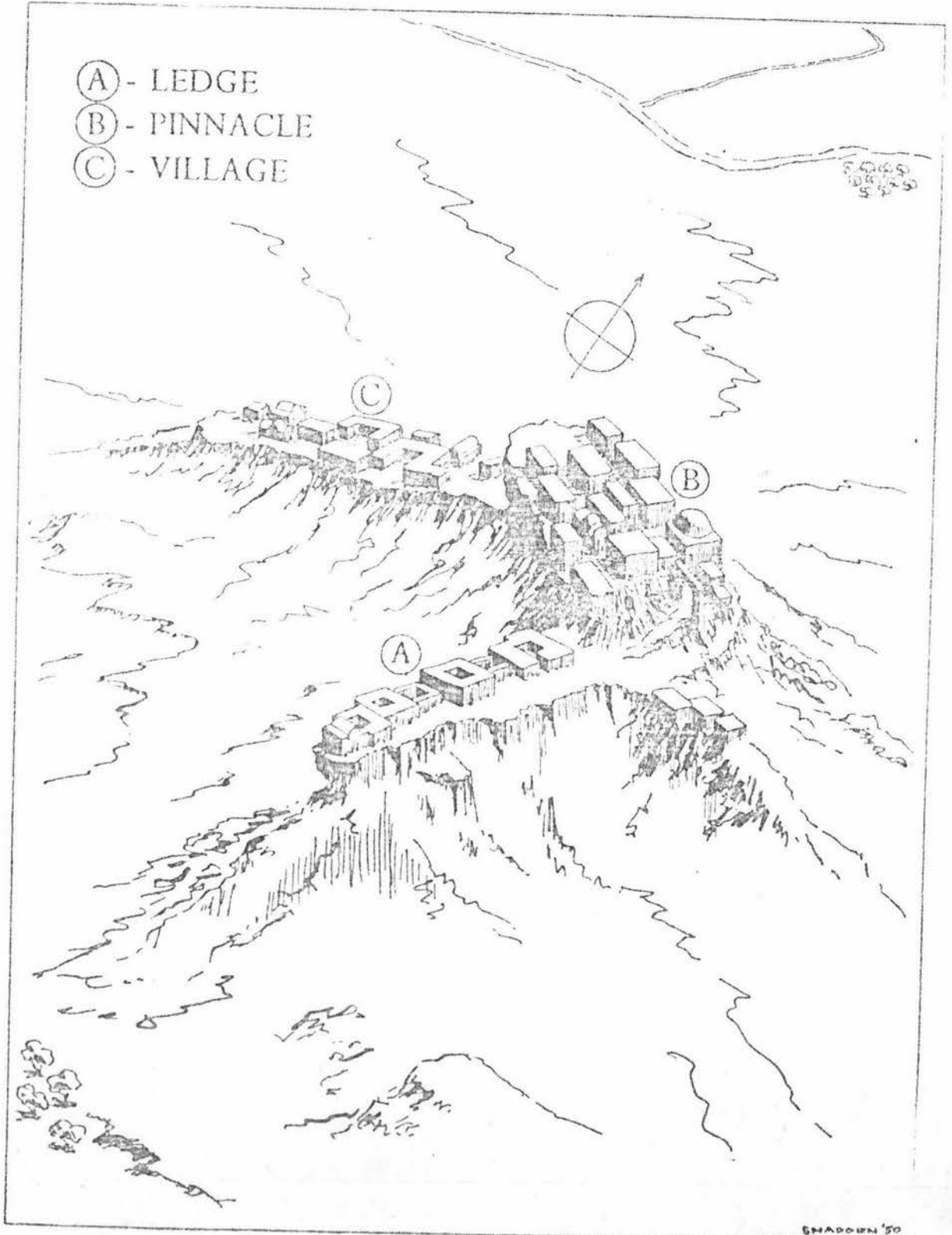
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<sup>8</sup> The creeping barrage used in this attack was also partly attributable to Weir. Initially the British considered that the creeping barrages would never be used in World War II. The practices of the New Zealanders involving this type of barrage so impressed the British that it was reintroduced for El Alamein and later battles. Letter, C.E. Weir to unknown, 9 June 1948, DA 491.2/18.

<sup>9</sup> Wards, Takrouna, pp.4-5.

Figure 23

## Takrouna



Source: I. McL. Wards, Takrouna, p.4.

to detach and create a diversion by attacking the southern face of Takrouna. A Coy's responsibility was the feature of Djebel Bir which was known to be well defended. C Coy was to advance through the valley between Djebel Bir and Takrouna, and exploit to 200 yards beyond the Zaghouan road. The remainder of B Coy and C Coy were to skirt Takrouna and push through to the road. D Coy would follow these two Coys and then put in its attack. A troop of Crusader tanks was allocated to the Maoris and one was attached to each forward Coy. Their role was to smash gaps in the cactus hedges for the Maoris to follow. All available machetes were distributed to facilitate this movement through the hedges.<sup>10</sup>

The preparations made by the Maoris as they readied themselves for their attack indicate how they had absorbed the lessons of their previous battles and found solutions to their problems. A number of these may seem insignificant, but to the soldier in the field these were vital to his continued comfort and survival. The provision of hot food and 'steaming tea' for the men during the battle was important in maintaining stamina and morale. Hard rations were provided for two days but hot food and liquid provided a stimulus to the mental and physical well-being of the soldier that the ration pack could not. Less than a month before at Pt. 209 the Maoris had been able to provide the men on HIKURANGI (where Ngarimu won his VC) with warm food even though the enemy was less than fifty yards away. The Quartermaster was tasked with ensuring hot food and liquid were brought forward during the battle.

The Maoris realised that a fair percentage of deaths were caused by the delay between a soldier's wounding and his evacuation to an RAP (Regimental Aid Post) for proper medical care. A 15 cwt truck was allocated to each Coy to speed up this transfer. The battalion transport officer co-ordinated the arrangements and it worked satisfactorily during the battle.

In any night attack there was always a possibility of the attacking troops losing direction, companies losing contact with each other and moving far forward or hanging back, and companies being unable to communicate with battalion HQ. The Maoris used the innovation of laying telephone lines as

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<sup>10</sup> Cody, 28 Maori Battalion, p.292.

the battalion went into attack. This ensured quick communications and marked the battalion's axis of advance for subsequent traffic. The problem of companies maintaining contact with each other was solved by detailing responsible NCOs to move on the flanks of the companies and liaise between them.

The usual procedure of putting the men completely 'in the picture' was followed by sub-unit OCs. The men were assembled and the operation was outlined to them, thus enabling them to have an intelligent appreciation of the attack and their part in it. Just prior to the attack commencing the troops were gathered for a battalion prayer. Lt.Col. Bennett spoke briefly to the men. He told them the honour and good name of the battalion was in their hands. They were expected to do their duty, whatever the cost, for the battalion and the Maori race they had left behind.<sup>11</sup>

Precisely at 2300 hours on 19 April the guns commenced firing and the attack began. Behind the attacking troops the 'whole horizon seemed to be lit up and the ceaseless flashing of the guns in the rear caught all intervening objects in a blanket of light and kept them in constant silhouette.'<sup>12</sup> The enemy's response was quick and the area just forward of the startline was bombarded. Part of the bombardment was conducted by the nebelwerfer, a six-barrelled mortar, which was being used against the New Zealanders for the first time.<sup>13</sup> In the 5 Bde sector heavy casualties were caused by mortar and artillery fire originating from Takrouna and Djebel Bir. Many of the cactus fences were booby-trapped with 'S' mines and wooden box mines on the western side of the olive groves. The introduction of wooden box mines and non-magnetic mines had made obsolete previous methods of mine detection. Kippenberger was worried when he knew the infantry would have to go through mines as no better technique had been

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11 The information on Maori preparations is derived from Cody, 28 Maori Battalion, p.293; and Bennett, pp.94-6.

12 Bennett, p.97.

13 The nebelwerfer was a six-barrelled mortar firing 15 or 21cm rockets. They had been used earlier in North Africa but this was the first time they had been specifically used against the New Zealanders. The nebelwerfer was nicknamed 'The Andrews Sisters' because of the whining of the bombs through the air. It achieved a frightening reputation and several respondents to my questionnaire remarked that it was the most frightening sound on a battlefield.

evolved other than 'simply walking through on a broad front and accepting the heavy casualties that there were.'<sup>14</sup>

When the attack had commenced the Maoris were hardly deployed. The IO, Lt. Wikiriwhi, had taken longer than anticipated to lay the tape indicating the startline. Further delays were caused after the attack had commenced by problems in chopping through the cactus hedges. A Coy came under heavy fire as it approached the southern face of Djebel Bir. All officers quickly became casualties and the Coy could not progress beyond the lower slopes and remained there throughout the night. C Coy was halted in the valley between Djebel Bir and Takrouna. The defensive fire and mines had caused heavy casualties and only one officer remained unwounded. B Coy, facing similar conditions as the other coys, was halted at the south-eastern corner of Takrouna. D Coy had started ten minutes behind the other coys as planned but it too was stopped by heavy fire in the vicinity of B Coy.<sup>15</sup>

21 Bn's attack had made no more progress than 28 Bn. All coys came under heavy fire though A and B Coys initially only suffered a small number of casualties, but C and D Coys and battalion HQ suffered badly. The CO, Harding, was wounded but not evacuated. In spite of several determined attacks the south-western and southern slopes of Takrouna still remained in German hands. Harding had no success signal from the Maoris and deciding his position would be untenable in daylight asked Kippenberger if he could withdraw. Kippenberger agreed and decided to use 21 Bn as a reserve on the eastern side where he believed some progress had been made. Wards considers this step almost unique in the history of the Division. Kippenberger was prepared to abandon A and B Coys of 21 Bn who had reached

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<sup>14</sup> H.K. Kippenberger, letter to F.M.H. Hanson, 22 July 1949, Hanson Papers, QEIIAMM. Hanson who was then CRE, considers that the Tunisian campaign saw the mine change from being an obstacle to becoming a new defensive weapon 'which is necessitating marked changes in battle drill'. Hanson had played a significant role in the development of the three methods of mine detection - bayonet prodding, radio-magnetic detection, and the flaying tail of the 'Scorpion'. The wooden box mine and the anti-magnetic mine made them obsolete. The former could only be detected by ground disturbances which ruled out night clearances. The anti-magnetic mine made bayonet prodding impracticable, left the detector useless, and another simple method defeated the 'Scorpion'. Hanson, 'Report on Operations', 11 June 1943, Hanson Papers, QEIIAMM.

<sup>15</sup> Cody, 28 Maori Battalion, pp.293-8; Wards, Takrouna, pp.6-8; Stevens, Bardia..., pp.315-8; Bennett, pp.97-99.

the road and then been cut off. At dawn they would be exposed to the fire of the enemy above them.<sup>16</sup>

23 Bn had commenced its advance behind the Maoris and soon<sup>16</sup> suffered the same fate as the Maoris. Their startline was the Zaghouan road and it was obvious they would have to fight for it. The CO, Romans, was wounded and Captain W.B. Thomas took command of the battalion. Thomas exhorted his men to move forward and C and D Coys responded to his urgings, standing up and advancing in short dashes. One participant said Thomas' voice rang out as that of a leader and the men followed.<sup>17</sup> When the two Coys reached the road only thirty-seven men remained. B Coy attacked the eastern slopes of Cherachir and D Coy the western side of the same feature. B Coy encountered little opposition and dug in just below the crest of the ridge. D Coy attracted most of the enemy's attention but they too were successful in reaching the crest of the ridge. The men huddled into whatever cover they could and for the remainder of the night the enemy brought mortar fire down upon them. The hold on Cherachir was tenuous and the enemy still retained possession of the northern slopes.<sup>18</sup>

Bennett had set about trying to accelerate the advance of the Maoris. B and C Coys pressed forward towards the road under the cover of tank and Bren-gun fire concentrated on the southern slopes of Takrouna. The two platoons of B Coy are reputed to have literally driven 'themselves forward through a hail of fire.'<sup>19</sup> They reached the road despite the casualties, but once there they were isolated and surrounded. By 0200 hours all control in 28 Bn had been lost. The CO, Adjutant, RSM, and most officers had become casualties. A Coy, B Coy and C Coy had only two officers left between them. The IO, Lt. Wikiriwhi, now fulfilled the functions of CO, IO and Adjutant. The Bde cmd had asked for LOB<sup>20</sup> personnel to come forward to take over the key battalion positions.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Wards, Takrouna, pp.8-10.

<sup>17</sup> KQ.

<sup>18</sup> Wards, Takrouna, pp.11-12.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p.7.

<sup>20</sup> Each time the New Zealand Division went into action a number of personnel were Left Out of Battle (LOB). Should the unit be decimated in action these personnel would facilitate the rebuilding of the unit.

<sup>21</sup> Cody, p.299; Bennett, pp.99-100.

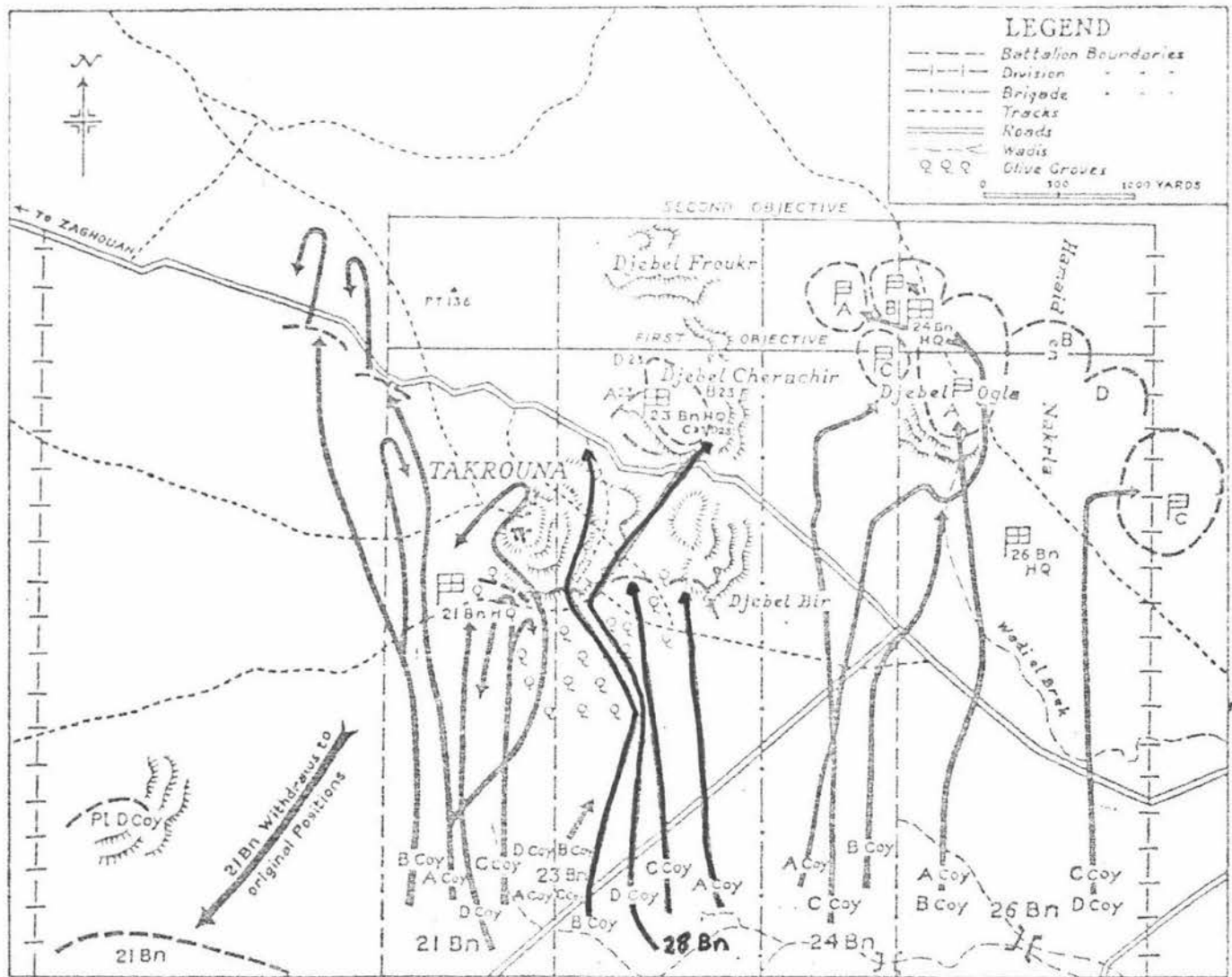
By first light the position seemed grim for 5 Bde. 21 Bn, suffering heavy casualties had been withdrawn, and most of 23 Bn and B and D Coys, 28 Bn, were virtually surrounded and waiting for the inevitable counter-attack. 6 Bde, in contrast, had secured its objectives with little loss and was now firmly entrenched to the right of 5 Bde. Although the position appeared much less than satisfactory, a small number of determined men with experience and initiative were involved in a struggle that would decide the outcome of the battle.

10 pl B Coy had been detailed to make a diversionary attack on the southern side of Takrouna. The pl comd had been wounded and evacuated leaving Sgt. J. Rogers in command. He had with him L/Sgt. H. Manahi and ten other personnel. Rogers decided to attack just before first light. He decided they would split into two groups: he would take one group up the south-eastern face of Takrouna and Manahi the other, up the south-western approach. If this was successful they would devise further tactics on top of the feature. Just before the attack commenced Sgt. W. Smith, a stray from 23 Bn, arrived and attached himself to Rogers' party. A FOO from 5 Field Regiment, Captain S.F. Catchpole also came upon the small group. He encouraged them to continue and set about establishing communications with his HQ.

When the assault began just before dawn the movement attracted a flurry of enemy fire. The New Zealanders ran forward and were soon amongst the Italian weapon pits. A furious mini-battle took place and some men broke through these positions. First light found a number of men from both parties halfway up the slopes of Takrouna. Below them the enemy defences cycled the feature in three distinct rows. They were able to fire downwards straight into the enemy pits and white flags soon appeared. Between sixty and seventy Italian prisoners were taken and a private was detailed to take them down to the New Zealand positions.

Manahi and three men then continued up the ridge until they reached a twenty-foot sheer rock face topped by the ledge. Sgt. Smith and Private Aranui scaled the rock face with the aid of overhanging telephone wires. The solitary inhabitant of the ledge was a German wireless operator who was captured. Rough steps hewed out of the rock led the way up to the pinnacle. There was no interference and the enemy had obviously relied on the defences at the foot of Takrouna. Below the pinnacle in the village

Source: I. McL. Wards, Takrouna, frontpiece,



NZ Div. Attack on Takrouna

Figure 24

Italian soldiers wandered about oblivious to the New Zealanders' presence. Their presence had been noted by an Italian who had eluded pursuit and made off in the direction of the village. Rogers and Manahi prepared for the inevitable counter-attack. A boulder was jammed in the mouth of a tunnel bored through the rock and leading to the village. With this access from the village covered Manahi placed himself in a position where he could prevent access to the pinnacle via the steps from the ledge. The rest of the men covered the south-eastern side of the pinnacle. A handful of men from 28 Bn and 23 Bn seen below were hailed and made their way to the summit to reinforce 10 pl.

Almost as soon as the New Zealanders positioned themselves the enemy bombarded the pinnacle with artillery and mortar fire. In the restricted area - the pinnacle was about thirty yards square<sup>22</sup> - the men were very vulnerable to enemy fire and Rogers was killed with five others becoming casualties. Manahi feared that there would soon not be enough men to prevent a counter-attack being successful and sent down for reinforcements. He later went down himself, probably mid-morning, and secured a section of riflemen, stretcher-bearers, hot food and ammunition. On his way back up to the summit he met a FOO from one of the British Medium Regiments supporting the attack. He told him to withdraw his men as the feature was untenable and was to be pounded with artillery fire. Manahi was unsure of what course of action he should take fearing that a withdrawal would give the enemy time to occupy the pinnacle. He found Captain Catchpole who told him to hold on at all costs.<sup>23</sup>

At 1300 hours a platoon from 21 Bn was despatched to relieve the Maoris on Takrouna. The platoon arrived and began the relief at about 1530 hours. While the relief was taking place the enemy launched the expected counter-attack. The attack was made from the village and from the ledge. The Italians secured a foothold on the ledge and the outcome of the fierce battle hung in the balance. The Maoris became incensed when an Italian, probably unknowingly, threw a grenade into a stone hut

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<sup>22</sup> Kippenberger, p.309.

<sup>23</sup> 10 Corps and Divisional HQ debated the wisdom of withdrawing the troops off Takrouna, pounding the feature with artillery and launching a new assault. It was decided not to do this. The Bde Comd knew nothing of this discussion. Wards, Takrouna, pp.23-24.

sheltering their wounded. The Maoris reacted fiercely and savagely to this 'flagrant violation of accepted battle behaviour,'<sup>24</sup> Italians were shot, bayoneted and pushed over the cliffs 'during one of those grim moments when all control is lost.'<sup>25</sup> One Maori diarist wrote:

he was standing close to the edge of the ledge 600 feet drop when his right hand went for his inside Pocket When I rush a bayonet through his guts he yell for merci same time. While my bayonet was in his guts I push him over the side 600 feet to the bottom of Takrouna....The rest of the Barstards well I pick one up and throw him over the side We kill them all because they kill our wounded,<sup>26</sup>

Sgt. Smith noticed a pair of binoculars slung around the neck of a surrendering Italian officer and moved forward to remove them. He had just unslung them when the officer went sprawling down the hill having been propelled in that direction by a 'hefty Maori boot'.<sup>27</sup> The turning point in this furious and desperate struggle came with a charge by Captain J. Muirhead, a FOO from 5 Field Regiment, and three Maoris with blazing Tommy guns. By nightfall on the 20th the pinnacle and the ledge were once again in the hands of the New Zealanders.

Another platoon from 21 Bn arrived about 2100 hours to relieve the small garrison. They had only been positioned for a short time when they were caught unawares by an attack through the tunnel. In the various changes of personnel the tunnel had been overlooked and the platoon now on Takrouna did not know of it. The pinnacle was captured and the New Zealanders were almost driven off the ledge. This was avoided and a stalemate developed with the Italians on the pinnacle and the New Zealanders on the ledge.

Brigade ordered 28 Bn to provide reinforcements preferably those who knew the layout of the pinnacle and ledge, and once more Manahi

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24 Bennett, p.107.

25 Wards, Takrouna, p.25.

26 DA 447.27/12. Two eyewitness accounts, both DA 447.27/2, confirm this account.

27 DA 447.27/2.

returned to the summit this time with twelve men. From first light the Italians on the pinnacle were able to make the New Zealanders on the ledge very uncomfortable. Captain A.F. Harding, another FOO from 5 Field Regiment, tried to solve the problem by bringing artillery fire down on to the pinnacle. He used a solitary 25-pounder at 8000 yards and worked it up the hill despite the risks to the New Zealanders on the ledge. Fifty rounds were fired before the buildings on the pinnacle were hit and then there were three hits in ten rounds. Two parties took advantage of this fire and raced up to the pinnacle and found it deserted. The New Zealanders re-established themselves on the pinnacle and set about arranging communications with 5 Bde HQ and 5 Field Regiment.

Immediately the New Zealanders re-occupied the pinnacle the mortar and artillery fire recommenced. Harding was able to take advantage of the communications with 5 Field Regiment to bring fire down on the enemy positions. This eliminated some positions but while the enemy held the village the New Zealanders' hold on Takrouna could not be secure. The 5 Brigade Major, Major M. Fairbrother, decided to use the still secret 17-pounder anti-tank gun on Takrouna village. The stone huts gave little protection against this bombardment and the enemy was soon reduced to panic. Manahi and several other Maoris were stalking enemy posts on the north-eastern slopes and seeing the damage being done in the village decided to take advantage of the confusion in the village. At the same time Lt. Hirst on Takrouna decided to lead a party to attack the village. Hirst's party attacked from the north and Manahi's party the other way and all resistance collapsed completely. By 1830 hours on 21 April the whole Takrouna feature was in the hands of the New Zealanders.<sup>28</sup>

On the morning of the 20th, Djebel Bir, the objective of A/28, had been captured. A Private T. Heka from A Coy, with support fire from the Crusader tanks, attacked and put out of action an anti-tank gun and three machine-gun posts on Djebel Bir. He took fourteen prisoners which resulted in a collapse of resistance on that feature.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> The following sources have been used to describe the fighting on Takrouna itself: Wards, Takrouna, pp.21-22, 25-27; Cody, 28 Maori Battalion, pp.299-302, 304-308; Stevens, Bardia..., pp.332-38; Bennett, pp.105-108; Wards, 'Narrative of the Tunisian Campaign', DA 401.27/1, pp.505-6.

<sup>29</sup> Cody, 28 Maori Battalion, p.303.

The expected counter-attack on 23 Bn's positions never eventuated at first light on 20 April. Their positions were incessantly shelled and after 0900 hours there were indications that the enemy was massing to the north-west for a counter-attack. The IO made his way to 5 Bde HQ and asked for the area to be 'stonked'.<sup>30</sup> This was done at 0950 hours and repeated at 1115 hours. In the middle of the afternoon enemy efforts to prepare a counter-attack were again interrupted by 'stonks'. During the evening 23 Bn was replaced by 25 Bn. Enfidaville had been captured and the New Zealanders were in complete control of the right flank as far as 25 Bn's positions. The days of 21 and 22 April saw heavy shelling of 25 Bn. Kippenberger went forward on the evening of the 22nd to see 25 Bn and had an unpleasant trip while the 'sickly sweet smell of death lay heavily over the valley and there were still many unburied dead'. There was also constant shelling.<sup>31</sup> On the night of 23/24 April 152 Bde from 50 Division replaced 5 Bde and the rest of the Division was also withdrawn.

Takrouna had cost the New Zealanders heavily. Casualties were 403 in the three Bn's from an assaulting strength of 1062.<sup>32</sup> Both the Indians and the New Zealanders had failed to achieve their objective. Both Divisions' objectives were impractical with only two brigades per Division. The commanders severely underestimated the difficulties of fighting in the Tunisian hills. The advantages the Allies had in armour, artillery, and air were negated by this fighting in the hills. All the work was placed on the infantry who could only move at foot pace. The desire of Montgomery to smash his way through to Tunis resulted in his spreading his resources too widely. If his aim had been a genuine 'holding attack' as envisaged by Alexander he may have concentrated on one of the many peaks. This may have resulted in less distress for his units and more distress for the enemy.

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<sup>30</sup> The 'Stonk' was devised by Weir to neutralise a considerable target area in a short time. He devised a rectangle 1200 feet by 600 feet deep, whereby declaring the co-ordinates of the centre point and a grid bearing of the perpendicular axis of the Divisional Artillery, by firing seven rounds a gun put 504 evenly spaced rounds into the rectangle in about three minutes. Weir also had a variation called 'Murder' where his guns could put 360 rounds on a pinpointed target in two minutes. Weir, letter to unknown, 9 June 1948, DA 491.2/18.

<sup>31</sup> Kippenberger, p.313.

<sup>32</sup> 'Report on Operation "Oration"', p.6.

There were mistakes in planning at the New Zealand Divisional level. Cherachir was ignored in the planning and the attack was directed at the re-entrants without control of the peaks. Kippenberger wrote to Stevens after the war of the battle; 'When we lined up at Enfidaville I don't think we adjusted our thinking to the closer country there.'<sup>33</sup> The excessive speed of artillery barrage typifies this.

Takrouna was very different to the battles that the New Zealand Division had fought over the previous few months. The terrain and nature of the defensive position negated the Allied strength in armour and in the air. There was little hope of the perfect co-ordination between arms that had characterised the Tebaga battle. Takrouna was an infantryman's battle. Horrocks, the Corps Comd, wrote of the battle:

Of all the magnificent achievements of 2NZ Div I have always felt that the capture of Takrouna must surely have been the finest. I went up there myself during the battle, just after the 51st Highland Division had taken over, and I cannot, to this day, imagine how it was captured in the face of tenacious enemy resistance.<sup>34</sup>

The fierce resistance of the Italians was out of character with their actions in previous campaigns and was greeted with a degree of admiration by the New Zealanders.

Takrouna demonstrated the experience of the New Zealanders. The preparations, particularly those of the Maoris, illustrate this. When things began to go wrong in the battle there were enough men with experience and initiative to take command and carry the attack through. Rogers and Manahi continued the attack when inexperienced leaders may not have persevered. The efforts both on the feature and on the ground around it over the next few days were further examples of this.

However, because Takrouna was very different from the other battles the Division had fought, the leadership had problems adapting to the new battle conditions. Mistakes were made but they were error caused by unfamiliarity. As the leadership further experienced these conditions they were able to adapt to them and absorb the lessons.

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<sup>33</sup> Stevens, Bardia..., p.340.

<sup>34</sup> Comments by Sir Brian Horrocks on the Tunisian Narrative of Ian McL. Wards, DA 401,27/1.

In terms of military experience the New Zealanders had progressed a long way since Greece and Crete, but weaknesses were still evident. No matter how professional an Army becomes, there is one weakness that can never be eradicated - the fallibility of man.

It is now impossible to remember very clearly the shocking things one saw and smelt. I think one shut those things out of the mind, so long ago, that it seems vague now. But the comradeship and the many wonderful memories of the happier times over there will never be forgotten.

McLeod Questionnaire

The six case studies have demonstrated the evolution of the New Zealanders and their Division in World War II. As the war progressed the gap between the myth and reality of their reputation diminished. But it was only on a few occasions that their deeds matched their mythical qualities. Reputations are made in a few moments of undoubted valour. However the other ninety-nine percent of the soldier's time is boredom, and ordinary actions interspersed with a few failures.

It seems highly probable that the experience of other Allied nations was similar to that of the New Zealanders. No Allied nation was prepared for war in 1939, with few officers and men having any combat experience. As the war progressed they, too, obviously benefited from the learning process. The question that inevitably arises though, is whether the New Zealanders were better soldiers than those of any other nationality? There is a widespread belief that the 'pioneering instinct' with its accompanying initiative and robustness gave the Dominions an advantage over other nationalities in a war situation:

they were the best physical specimens of countries that possessed extremely high standards of living, but at the same time had substantial proportions of their populations engaged in outdoor work in climates that could generally be termed challenging.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barclay, The Empire..., p.75.

Another writer has considered the emphasis New Zealanders placed on winning at sport, particularly rugby, was reflected in their attitude to war:

I found in war-time that there was considerable virtue in men who had played games like professionals to win, and not, like public-schoolboys and amateurs for exercise. So that perhaps it would be more correct to say that the virtues and values of the New Zealanders were not so much wrong as primitive, and to this extent useful in the current collapse of civilization.<sup>2</sup>

Obviously the environment conditions and creates human attributes that are useful for soldiering but to suggest it makes one nationality better at soldiering than another is to make a genetic conclusion that is impossible to substantiate. An Army is drawn from such a wide spectrum of society that it is impossible to generalise about character traits. Any Army, as any society, covers a diverse group of people who vary greatly.

The quality of the New Zealand soldier's reputation was dependent on the success, or otherwise, of 2 (NZ) Division. The Division had a number of advantages that played a significant part in its success. Perhaps the most important of these was the Charter given to Freyberg by the New Zealand Government.<sup>3</sup> It was a powerful weapon for him in his dual role of commander and protector of 2 Division, and 2NZEF which was the cream of New Zealand's manhood. Subparagraph (a) of his Charter read:

In case of sufficiently grave emergency or in special circumstances of which he must be the sole judge, to make decisions as to the employment of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force, and to communicate such decisions directly to the NZ Government, notwithstanding that in the absence of that extraordinary cause such communication would not be in accordance with normal channels of communication...<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mulgan, p.7.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix C, p.174.

<sup>4</sup> Documents, Vol.I, p.31.

This paragraph in particular gave him control over the deployment of the New Zealand Division and allowed him to preserve his Division through a period in which British generalship showed inadequacies equal to the worst periods of World War I. Freyberg was so eager to find a theatre of war for the Division that he raised few objections to the Greek and subsequent Cretan campaign. Peter Fraser, the Prime Minister, was upset that Freyberg had not transmitted any reservations about the campaigns to his Government and told him: 'You will communicate with us and tell us you are satisfied.'<sup>5</sup>

He was still, however, a loyal subordinate and though questioning the planning of 'Crusader' made no firm objections to the use of his force in the campaign. It was a disaster. Armour was committed and destroyed piecemeal and the infantry was left unsupported. From this point onwards Freyberg's relations with Middle East British commanders became severely strained. He invoked his Charter to avoid being bottled up in Mersa Matruh and persuaded Auchinleck to allow him to meet the thrust full on at Minqar Qaim. After the Ruweisat and El Mrier battles that followed in July 1942, Inglis, who was temporarily commanding the Division, told Freyberg that he had informed the British that he flatly refused to fight 'another operation of the same kind'.<sup>6</sup> The arrival of Montgomery improved relations a little, and tactically he improved things to such a level that the problem was virtually eradicated.

The use of the Charter did not allow the New Zealanders to avoid fighting costly actions but it did prevent the New Zealanders from being involved in too many strategically and tactically unsound operations. Generals Tucker (India) and Blamey (Australia) were able to bring similar pressure on the British but did not have anything as concrete as Freyberg's Charter. Divisional commanders in both the British and American armies had little option but to undertake an operation even if they considered it unsound and that heavy casualties would eventuate. The New Zealand soldier and that of other Empire nations had the advantage of entering a battle which, particularly later in the war, was

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<sup>5</sup> Pugsley, p.4. Much of this section on Freyberg's Charter is derived from the Pugsley article.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p.6.

at least to some degree tactically sound.

Obviously the various theatre and Army commanders were not very happy with this situation. Wavell declined to use a New Zealand brigade in O'Connor's offensive in December 1940/January 1941 because he could use the 16th Infantry Brigade 'without reference to anyone'.<sup>7</sup> Mark Clark, Commander 5th Army in Italy, probably aptly described the feelings of his fellow commanders:

I noted in my diary that I now had five corps under my command, only two of which were American...and I was about ready to agree with Napoleon's conclusion that it is better to fight Allies than to be one of them.<sup>8</sup>

The second advantage the New Zealand Division had was that it was an homogeneous body. Despite some provincial differences it was essentially New Zealanders fighting with New Zealanders. The New Zealanders were a close-knit community surrounded by foreigners. This must have inevitably drawn them closer together. 2 Division was the New Zealand Army and everyone in the Division had a clearcut identity as a New Zealander. The vastness of the British Army resulted in diverse groups being thrown together to make up a Divisional unit. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that there were vast differences between a Highlander, a London Cockney, and a Welsh miner. They might not be fighting alongside each other in a unit but their own units may have been combined in one Divisional unit. The experience of these British units co-operating may have been similar to the relationship that existed between co-operating national armies on the battlefield.

As 2 Division was the New Zealand Army in the Middle East promotion prospects were limited. Officers had to wait for positions to become vacant within the Division and only one senior officer was to accept a command outside the Division. Weir left in late 1944 to command 46 (British) Division. Officers had senior positions within the Division for a comparatively long time given the usual rapid 'wastage' in a war situation. Kippenberger commanded 5 Brigade from December 1941 to March 1944 and Inglis commanded 4 Brigade from Crete until 1944. Kippenberger

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<sup>7</sup> Documents, Vol.I, p.81.

<sup>8</sup> Pugsley, p.10.

had in 1942/43 the same three Battalion Commanding Officers for six months. Obviously there were still examples of rapid promotion. W.B. Thomas was a 2nd Lieutenant at the beginning of 1941 and a Lt.Col. at the end of 1943. The stability in the command levels of 2 Division allowed the officers to gain more experience in their position and therefore become more competent. It would be reasonable to argue that the increased level of efficiency that was to be obtained as the war progressed can in some ways be attributed to this command longevity. In the larger armies, particularly the British, there was a much wider scope for promotion and a reasonably competent officer was likely to find himself quickly elevated through the ranks.

The national nature of 2 Division and its stable leadership enabled reinforcements to be absorbed relatively easily. With experienced leaders and peers combat training could be achieved more rapidly. They were being absorbed into an increasingly experienced and combat hardened Division. A number of British Divisions used in the latter stages of the North African campaign and in the landings in Italy and France had not seen combat since their evacuation from Dunkirk. Their reinforcements often had had little practical experience and were not able to be fitted into experienced and stable units. They suffered in comparison to the experienced units in these theatres, but only because of inexperience.

It is unfair to compare the competency and soldierly attributes of one nationality against another. Every nation has its days of glory and days of disaster. The glorious days are remembered and those of a lesser quality are either glorified or conveniently forgotten. No-one, for example, wishes to recall that a number of NCOs and men from 21 Battalion refused to go into action north of the Sangro in Italy around Christmas 1943 and were subsequently courtmartialled.<sup>9</sup> It is forgotten because it serves no purpose to remember it and because it tarnishes the reputation. But if New Zealanders are to extol the virtues of their soldiers of 21 Battalion they must be prepared to accept that there are deeds and actions that are embarrassing to recall. What counts in the end for soldierly ability is training, experience, planning, leadership and logistics. Given these at optimum levels there are few nationalities that

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<sup>9</sup> Freyberg, letter to F. Jones, 25 January 1944, FP, File GGG.

would not be considered outstanding soldiers. One respondent to my questionnaire sums up the relative merits of soldiers of all countries:

I think all humans have the same virtues and limitations regardless of their ethnic origins or colour. Italians are often quoted as being cowards. But they were ill-educated, poorly paid, badly equipped, officered by upper and middleclass types regardless of ability. How would the Kiwis have performed under these conditions? I had experience of frontline Germans who took me prisoner,... they were good fellows. We were let down at one stage by British tanks and at another stage they were tops. One can't generalise...<sup>10</sup>

If the New Zealander was any better than the soldier of other armies it was not because of any physical and environmental advantages but because of the advantages previously outlined. But who is qualified to judge the qualities of soldiers? New Zealanders certainly cannot objectively evaluate the performance of their soldiers. New Zealanders have always considered that the comments of the Germans on the ability of the New Zealand Division has justified their own assessment. Yet such comments are not always unanimous. A German intelligence report at the beginning of 1944 considered that the 'combat value of the Australian and New Zealand troops is not all so good; the inner discipline is considerably inferior to that of the English.'<sup>11</sup> The relative merits must in the end continue to be conjecture; certainly this writer is not qualified to make an definitive statement.

The myth of the fighting qualities of the New Zealand soldier stems from both themselves and the people at home. Every army needs morale, a confidence in itself. To do this it must be successful or at least in failure to believe it had fought outstandingly well. Soldiers convince themselves of their own quality because they need confidence to sustain them in battle. Propaganda by the media and superiors is aimed at further enhancing this confidence. The building of unit pride is one aspect of the development of this confidence. Soldiers believe their unit is best and defend it against any disparaging comments. They glorify the deeds of their unit and these circulate throughout the combat

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<sup>10</sup> MQ, Question 13.

<sup>11</sup> David Kahn, Hitler's Spies, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1978, p.413.

zone and to the people at home. In moments that bring defeat and a consequent weakening of confidence the leadership must move to rekindle that confidence. It was inevitable that Greece and Crete would bring Victorian Crosses to New Zealanders, both to sustain and enthuse the New Zealand war effort, and to indicate to the New Zealanders they had been gallant and their deeds had been recognised. Without disparaging the deeds of the Victoria Cross winners, their award is very much a political award. Of the Crosses awarded to 2 Division only one was awarded at a time of British success and that was to Ngarimu, the first Maori to win a Victoria Cross. None were awarded to New Zealanders for the advance through Italy.

On the domestic scene New Zealanders believed the information coming back from the war zone because it told them what they wanted to believe. Virtually every person in New Zealand had a relative or friend serving with 2 Division. When the Division saw action all New Zealanders had a very direct interest in the outcome. 2 Division was their Army. The nation's morale could not accept defeat, or rather defeats without glory. When a British Division went into action only a limited number of people had a very direct interest in the outcome, and it was not as vitally important to the nation's morale that it was successful. The media gave New Zealanders highly colourful accounts of the deeds of their soldiers. Politicians too played a part in strengthening the myth. The following motion passed by the General Assembly is typical of those passed during the war:

That the General Assembly of New Zealand in Parliament assembled records its enduring admiration of the courage, tenacity, and determination displayed by the Officers and men of the New Zealand Division Maori and Pakeha alike in the fight for the liberty on the battlefields of Greece and Crete...<sup>12</sup>

These served to convince the people at home their soldiers' deeds were magnificent and to inform the soldiers that their deeds had been recognised. It is only in recent years that New Zealanders have come to doubt the accuracy of all statements in Parliament. New Zealand public opinion is easily manipulated particularly when New Zealanders are told what they want to know. There has been a widespread acceptance that

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<sup>12</sup> New Zealand Parliamentary Debates, 1941, Vol.259, p.290.

whatever is written in the newspapers or is on the radio is true. This perhaps explains the ease with which the myth has permeated through New Zealand society.

Why has the myth developed and why have New Zealanders sought to perpetuate it? This writer believes the myth is an extension of nationalism and a search for an identity in the international community. The deeds of our soldiers have been reassuring to this young country. War and sport are the only times New Zealand can stand alongside other nations as an equal. Politically and economically New Zealand is insignificant in the world community. For this reason it was important to New Zealanders that they were able to fly their own flag in World War I and continue to do so in World War II. It was important to them also so that these tiny pieces of New Zealand in the Dardenelles, in France and in Sinai and Palestine did well. They had to prove, mainly to themselves, that they could stand alone and be the equals of any. This was continued in World War II.

A group of Australian historians<sup>13</sup> believe the Australian Digger tradition is an extension of Australian nationalism. One, Noel McLachlan, considers that 'all nations like to think of their warriors as brave, resourceful, loyal and so on. It is probably a necessary fiction for vigorous nationalism.'<sup>14</sup> K.S. Inglis sees this nationalism reflected in both the World War I and World War II Australian Official Histories and quotes Gavin Long, the World War II Official History as saying that 'one objective of the Australian war histories is frankly a nationalistic one - to contribute to the statement of a national tradition...'.<sup>15</sup>

The Australian experience is a similar one to New Zealand and I believe the nationalistic pattern of the Digger tradition is a mirror-image of the tradition of the New Zealand soldier. Nationalism is a strong force and has led a desire for status in the international community.

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<sup>13</sup> K.S. Inglis, 'The Anzac Tradition', Meanjin Quarterly, Vol.24, No.1, 1965, pp.25-44; Noel McLachlan, 'Nationalism and the Divisive Digger', Meanjin Quarterly, Vol.27, No.3, 1968, pp.302-308; Geoffrey Serle, 'The Digger Tradition and Australian Nationalism', Meanjin Quarterly, Vol.24, No.2, 1965, pp.149-58.

<sup>14</sup> McLachlan, p.303.

<sup>15</sup> Inglis, p.32.

We must do well and to meet this aim we grasp anything that will show New Zealanders in a favourable light and discard those that do not.

The lessons of World War II have not, or cannot be absorbed. A conventional war in 1984 would find New Zealand only marginally better prepared for war than in 1939. Defence has continued to be an unimportant consideration in the national budget. Large votes on defence are politically unacceptable. The Army continues to be hampered by lack of finance resulting in manpower and equipment shortages. The principal armoured weapon is the M41, a tank used in the early 1950s and declared obsolete by the Americans in the early 1960s. The New Zealand Army's role is not that of an army fully equipped for war. The Regular Force provides the basis for rapid expansion in time of war. The main force will be the Territorials but they too, as between the two World Wars, have suffered from the lack of defence spending.

However, the Army today has a number of advantages that it did not have in 1939. There is a nucleus of officers and senior NCOs who have seen combat in Vietnam. By 1984 the Vietnam war will have been over for twelve years. Those that saw combat there as officers and as other ranks will still be able to fill key positions in a Divisional force. The officers will blend with the younger officers that have graduated from the Officer Training Establishments in Australia and New Zealand. A battalion of the New Zealand Infantry Regiment is permanently stationed in Singapore and trains in a similar environment that is likely to prevail for New Zealand's next conflict. The Army spends a large amount of money on overseas courses for its personnel. They gain a working knowledge of the equipment and tactics they would use in an operational theatre. Lack of equipment will be the main problem facing a New Zealand Division in 1984. Much will depend on how quickly and with what equipment the Americans can supply New Zealand.

However, little has changed since 1939. Politics still dictate the state of readiness of the New Zealand Army. It is simply politically unacceptable to keep the Army in a constant state of readiness in a time of peace and retrenchment. The Army has come to terms with this and has attempted to build as professional an Army as possible using what finance is available. In this they have succeeded. The New Zealand Army is probably as professional now as it has ever been in a time of peace.

However, a war in 1984 would still provide many similar difficulties as experienced in 1939.

New Zealanders have 'fashioned and perpetuated' a myth of 'valiant duty, faithfully done'.<sup>16</sup> It is a myth most New Zealanders accept without thought. Certainly this myth, as with most myths, has a foundation in truth, though this is hard to gauge. Battles such as Takrouna and Minqar Qaim do justify, to a degree, the extolling of the New Zealanders' deeds. These were the deeds of experienced combat-hardened troops who had learnt from the harsh reality of war. There were still errors and omissions but not as many as in the early battles. These early battles in Greece, Crete and North Africa, are revered as battle honours but were disasters. This was due in part to inexperience, incompetence and the strategically and tactically unsound nature of the campaigns. Experience at all levels was the key to the evolution of the New Zealand soldier and consequently the Division as a fighting unit.

As J.L. Scoullar pointed out the New Zealander is not a natural soldier. While New Zealanders refuse to accept this, the New Zealand soldier must always enter battle with an initial disadvantage. It is important for the future of the military and probably for the lives of those New Zealanders entering future combat that it is accepted that the New Zealander can only perform well if he is adequately trained and equipped and that his performance will improve with experience.

There is little hope that the myth can be deflated. A large number of the World War II generation are now dead but the myth they have fashioned is further being perpetuated by post-World War II generations who lack the knowledge and probably the inclination to question the reputation. Nationalism is their prime consideration. Every year new books are published which perpetuate in print the myth. The latest, A Fighting Quality (1979) by Cedric Mentiplay has further added to the reputation. This thesis will hopefully add to the literature on New Zealand in World War II but there can be little hope it will even dent the myth. It is simply too firmly entrenched in the New Zealand national character.

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<sup>16</sup> Audio-visual, QEIIAMM.

## APPENDIX A

McLEOD QUESTIONNAIRE

1. The great majority of infantrymen held a low opinion of the importance of infantry. Do you agree?
2. How important is the presence or presumed presence of a comrade in helping an infantry soldier keep going in battle?
3. What percentage of troops who had the opportunity to use their weapons in combat did so? One estimate suggests no more than 25% did so. The others are prepared to risk wounds and death but will not fight.
4. Opportunities to use the bayonet were restricted as the enemy often surrendered before it could be put into use. Most troops in any case disliked the bayonet and if at all possible preferred to use the bullet. Do you agree?
5. A small number of men did most of the fighting. Time and time again they lead the fight, volunteered for patrols, etc. until killed or wounded. Do you agree?
6. "In action half the men are in terror and the other half nervous". How true is this before battle and in battle itself?
7. What were your feelings when preparing for your first action?
8. Fear of killing, rather than fear of being killed or badly wounded, was the most common cause of battle failure. Fear of failure was the next most important reason for failure in battle. Is this true?
9. Most men have an inner and underlying resistance to killing, and if possible will turn away from it. How does this change after several actions?
10. Talking and humour are essential elements to keep up morale in combat. Do you agree?

11. Do you believe a soldier will fight better and endure more provided he is given information on the forthcoming operation and is satisfied with its need and tactical soundness?
12. No man wants to die - so what induces him to risk his life? Belief in a cause, friendship, loyalty, responsibility, knowledge others have faith and confidence in you?
13. The discipline of the N.Z. soldiers in the line was good, but lapsed once out of the line, e.g. troops calling officers by their Christian names, rarely shaved, dressed poorly. Did this have any effect on the fighting ability of the N.Z. Division?
14. One reads of the horror and filth of war, but also that it was among the finest and fullest days of one's lives. How true is this?
15. What were the major differences between volunteer and conscript N.Z. troops?
16. "Sometimes it is more important to kill than take prisoners" e.g. Minqar Qaim. Is this true?
17. What opinions did you hold of other Allied troops and Germans?
18. Why did N.Z. soldiers prefer night fighting?
19. What is the most frightening sound on a battlefield?
20. What was your reaction to the various types of leadership of junior officers, i.e. NCOs to Captains?
21. What reasons made you enlist in 2 NZEF?

## APPENDIX B

OCCUPATIONAL GROUPING METHODOLOGY

The occupations that form each of the four occupational status groups used in Chapter 2 are listed at the end of this Appendix. The ranking framework is derived from that used by Claire Toynbee,<sup>1</sup> Her system, which is based on that used by Thernstrom for Boston, divided late nineteenth-century New Zealand society into five main groups. They are listed at the end of this Appendix. I have virtually combined her lowest two grouping, Semi-skilled and Service workers, and Unskilled Labourers and Menial Service workers, into one group broadly defined as working class. As Dr Erik Olssen<sup>2</sup> has pointed out to me it does leave the lower end too undifferentiated. However, for the purpose of this thesis it is only necessary to have broad groups. The discussion on the social stratification of 2NZEF is only a minor part of this work and the conclusions meant to be little more than tentative. I have used a modern socio-economic index<sup>3</sup> to update Toynbee's work. This does not allow for major changes in New Zealand occupational stratification but does allow us to generalise into broad groups for 1939.

There must be doubts about Thernstrom's terminology and its applicability to New Zealand. Boston was a highly industrialised urban society whereas New Zealand was still largely rural. The social stratification of 2NZEF is a subject well worthy of study. An acceptable methodology and an indepth study would be an extremely useful asset and provide a valuable insight into the composition of 2NZEF.

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<sup>1</sup> The ranking structure has been made available from the drafts of Claire Toynbee's thesis which is still in progress at Victoria University.

<sup>2</sup> Dr Erik Olssen, letter to the author, 15 March 1979.

<sup>3</sup> W.B. Elley and J.C. Irving, 'Revised Socio-Economic Index for New Zealand', New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, Vol.11, No.1, pp.25-26.

ADAPTED OCCUPATIONAL RANKING FOR NZ 1939I HIGH WHITE COLLAR

solicitor	civil engineer	sheep farmer
MP	surveyor	architect
broker	company director	hotel proprietor
district engineer	company manager	business manager

II MIDDLE WHITE COLLAR

stock agent	grain and seed merchant
teacher	assistant university lecturer
advertising rep	public servant
insurance inspector	radio announcer
stock auctioneer	interpreter
land agent	branch manager draughtsman
station manager	assistant manager
farm appraiser	horsetrainer
detective	auditor
hostel manager	student
builder	private secretary
accountant	meteorologist
farmer	orchardist
bank officer	artist
journalist	insurance agent

III BLUE COLLAR - LOW WHITE COLLAR

clerk	electrician	plumber
tanners rep	hairdresser	shop assistant
telegraphist	herdtester	motor mechanic
constable	bank teller	butcher
tobacconist	traffic officer	postal official
draughting cadet	car salesman	bookkeeper
grocer	farm cadet	salesman
foreman	canvasser	pastrycook
explosives inspector	draper	newspaper agent
consulting auto engineer	telephone exchange clerk	
taxi driver	garage manager	traveller
contractor	cashier	fitter
warehouse manager	leatherworker	signwriter
stockbuyer	mechanic	farm manager
petrol cadet	carpenter	carrier
		printer

IV WORKING CLASS

slaughterman	bricklayer	grocers assistant
labourer	metal sprayer	plasterer
joiner	rabbitter	state forestry worker
motorcar painter	plumbers apprentice	drover
P & T employee	painter & paperhanger	service station empl.
warehouseman	photoengraver	engine driver
linesman	vulcanizer	power board employee
sheetmetal worker	bush worker	P.W.D. employee
storeman	timber worker	truck driver
panelbeater	hospital attendant	bus driver
acting driver	factory hand	farmhand
rotary machinist	surfaceman	bootmaker
orchard worker	enamel sprayer	shepherd
motorman	painter	meter reader
kauri gum producer	cellarman	boilermaker

AN OCCUPATIONAL RANKING FOR N.Z. (AFTER THERMSTROM)

Claire Toynee

- CODE I. HIGH WHITE COLLAR
1. Professionals  
 architect professional engineer  
 solicitor pharmacist  
 clergyman physician  
 editor scientist
2. Major Proprietors, Managers and Officials  
 merchant hotelkeeper, publican  
 sheriff banker  
 manufacturer, brewer broker
3. II. LOW WHITE COLLAR  
Clerks and Salesmen  
 auctioneer advertising man credit man  
 accountant agent dispatcher  
 clerk auditor insurance adjustor  
 collector baggageman
4. Semiprofessionals  
 photographer, optician actor musician  
 surveyor airplane pilot  
 journalist artist  
 teacher librarian
5. Petty Proprietors, Managers & Officials  
 cabprop, coachprop  
 dealer  
 mastermariner, harbourmaster,  
 minemanager, police inspector,  
 postmaster, manager
6. III. SKILLED (Apprentices in IV, Self-Employed in II)  
 shoemaker, stonemason, coachpainter,  
 maltster, bricklayer, bookbinder,  
 miller, coachbuilder, pipemaker,  
 sailmaker, bootmaker, pilot,  
 printer, patternmaker, compositor,  
 imagemaker, boatbuilder
7. IV. SEMISKILLED AND SERVICE WORKERS  
 platelayer, cook, storeman,  
 flaxdresser, watchman, sawyer,  
 puntman, boatman, milkman,  
 storeman, coachman, warder,  
 laundryman, clicker
8. V. UNSKILLED LABOURERS AND MENIAL SERVICE WORKERS  
 groom, porter, ganger, bushman,  
 charwoman, quarryman

NOTE: Occupations listed in each grouping are only examples.

## APPENDIX C

FREYBERG'S CHARTERMemorandum from the Prime Minister to General Freyberg

5 January 1940

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

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

- (a) In the case of sufficiently grave emergency or in special circumstances, of which he must be the sole judge, to make decisions as to the employment of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force, and to communicate such decisions directly to the New Zealand Government, notwithstanding that in the absence of that extraordinary cause such communication would not be in accordance with the normal channels of communication indicated in the following paragraphs and which for greater clearness are also indicated in an attached diagram.
- (b) To communicate directly with the New Zealand Government and with the Army Department concerning any matter connected with the training and administration of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force.
- (c) To communicate directly either with the New Zealand Government or with the Commander-in-Chief under whose command he is serving, in respect of all details leading up to and arising from policy decisions.
- (d) In all matters pertaining to equipment, to communicate with the War Office through normal channels, and through the liaison officer of the High Commissioner's office in London, the former to be the official channel.
- (e) In matters of command, to adhere to the normal military channels between the War Office and the General Officer Commanding the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force overseas.
- (f) To establish such administrative headquarters and base and line of communication units as are necessary for the functions of command, organisation (including training) and administration with which he has been invested.

- (g) To organise, (train), change, vary, or group units and formations in such manner as he considers expedient from time to time.
- (h) To fix and alter the establishment and composition of units and formations as the exigencies of service may in his opinion require from time to time.

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

M. J. SAVAGE,

Prime Minister

Source: C. J. Pugsley, 'The Division - North Africa', Appendix.

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  - (iv) Eye-witness accounts,
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