

*MILITARY HISTORY FOR
WILLIAM EDWARD (BILL) MOLD*

PART ONE...



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INTRODUCTION...

Dear People,

My intention is to record this war record for those members of my family and others who are interested now and for those who may be interested in the future.

I am but one who is interested, I hope there will be others...

Through the following pages of this war story, I hope to capture and cover some of the events and experiences of one of our Kiwi soldiers during World War Two (1939-1945) also the history of his Battalion and the huge commitment and sacrifice "**The Twentieth**" made for its country and the Mother-Land.

With other members of my family, including Grandparents, great Grandparents and great-great Grandparents, Uncles and great Uncles, Nurses, including all of their individual Comrades of Arms, who fought, were killed, wounded, became Prisoners of War and Mentally affected during many wars down through those troubled times of history. Because of their courage and commitment, Kiwi's of today can live their lives with freedom and in peace.

Our Soldiers letters to his Mum and family and condensed information taken from "*Official New Zealand Military History Books*", and personal stories from his comrades in arms, will give some account of the hardship, terror, humour and comradeship "**our soldier**" experienced while helping to defend, Greece, Crete, Palestine, Syria, North Africa and Italy from Germany's Adolf Hitler, the Nazis and their Allies.

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The contributions the many military members of our families and other Kiwi families made during the Wars of the World, have made it possible for me to sit here to-day and write this account without fear of prejudice and with the freedom to write the words of my choice. I thank them all for giving me this opportunity.

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Dear Dad,

I dedicate this small part of history to you.

During this journey I have learnt to understand and know you better.

I am sorry you were unable to discuss in full this life changing time in your life. I now know why.

Your son,

Roger Mold.

LEFT BELOW: ON FINAL LEAVE WITH HIS MUM, BEFORE DEPARTING OUR SHORES FOR NEARLY FOUR YEARS

RIGHT BELOW: SAYING FAREWELL TO HIS DOG MAC



LEFT: WITH HIS DOG MAC AND SISTER RUTH.

Note: His dog Mac waited patiently at the front of the house for the return of his master. Day after day he looked up the drive-way in anticipation. Approximately four years later he heard a familiar whistle from the back of the house. Towing his kennel around the side of the house and down the new track to the road at the bottom of the hill this dog and our soldier were finally re-united.

My Grandmother told me that when our soldier was wounded in battle in North Egypt his dog howled for nearly 24 hours. She said to my Grandfather *"something has happened to Willy"*. A few days later our soldier's parents received a telegram from the Government to say that he had been wounded.



**LEFT: OUR SOLDIER.
ON FINAL LEAVE AT HIS PARENTS' HOME IN DARGAVILLE**

FOLLOWING IS A COPY OF OUR SOLDIER'S SERVICE RECORDS

I obtained these from the Army archives which are kept at Army headquarters Trentham, Wellington.

From these I was able to match dates and events to his letters and establish where he was and when at any specific time.

SERVICE RECORD

W. E. MOLD

SERVICE NUMBER 14756

Description of soldier on enlistment...

Date of birth... 1.7.1919

Place... New Zealand

Age... 21

Height... 5 foot 8 inches

Complexion... fair

Eyes... blue

Hair... brown

Religion... Methodist

Single married or widower... Single

Occupation... Coal Carbonization factory worker

Place of enlistment... Area 4 Huntly

Last employer... Waikato Carbonization, Rotowaro, Huntly

Last New Zealand address... C/o R. Dowd, Huntly

Unit: 20 NZ Armed Regiment	Rank. Trooper	Christian Name: William Edward	Surname: Mold
Outward; Attested. 31.7.1940. Entered camp. 3.10.1940. Embarked. 19.12.1940 Disembarked. Egypt. 31.1.1941	Inward; Arrived NZ 31.10.1944 Discharged. 1.2.1945 Wellington	Service; N.Z.... Days 24.9.1940 to 18.12.40 = 86 1.11.1944 to 1.2.1945 = 93 Overseas 19.12.1940. To 31.10.1944 = 3 years 318 days. Total: 4 years and 132 days.	
Next of kin; Herbert John Mold	Relationship; Father	Address; Haimona St Dargaville.	
Address of soldier on return to New Zealand. Haimona St, Dargaville. 11.7.1946			
Casualties.			
Cable No. 7391/1. 4.12.1941. 1961/1. 10.1.1942	Date of Casualty. 24.11.1941. 2.1.1942.	Nature of Casualty. Battle Casualty. Wounded 24.11.1941 Discharged from Hospital.	
Action after return to New Zealand or discharge abroad.			
Nature of document issued. No. 2.828 certificate of discharge No 15,480	Date. 29.4.1947	By R. 8	Address sent to. See Schedule No. 312.

ACTIVE SERVICE RECORD

Unit	Particulars of Report	Place	Date
D. Company. Southern Infantry	Burnham Camp	Burnham	3.10.1940
	Final Leave 18. Nov – 1. Dec	Burnham	18.11.1940
	Marched out. Foreign Service Commenced	Burnham	19.12.1940
33 Battalion	Marched in Egypt	Egypt	31.1. 1941

20 th Battalion	Marched in and posted to 20 th Battalion	Egypt	28.2.1941
	Embarked to join Lustre Force in Greece	Middle East	?3.1941
Nominal Roll 20th	Reported safe in Crete	Middle East	18.5.1941
With 20 + 34 Batt	Advanced to 64 General Hospital	Middle East	30.5.1941
With 20 + 34 Batt	Advanced to 3 N.Z. General Hospital	Middle East	6.6.1941
With 20 + 34 Batt	Advanced to 1 N.Z. Convalescent Depot	Middle East	13.6.1941.
1 Con dept	Was On Active Service. Contravening BTE standing orders. AA11 (2) Absent Without Leave, 1 hr 10 minutes AA (5 (1) Punishment 72 hrs detention plus automatic forfeiture of 2 days' pay under RW	Middle East	9.7.1941
Base RD	Depart 1 N.Z. Convalescent Depot too Base	Middle East	17.7.1941
Base RD	Marched out too 33 Battalion	Middle East	19.7.1941
	Marched in Reported from S. Inf Tng Depot	Middle East	24.7.1941
20 th Battalion	Marched out reposted to 20 Battalion.	Middle East	24.7.1941
20 th Battalion	Battle Casualty. Wounded in action.	Middle East	24.11.41
	Battle Casualty. Advanced 6 Field Ambulance	Middle East	24.11.41
FSACCS	Adm F SA CC S	Middle East	27.11.41
F SACCS	Dchg'd to 15 BBS	Middle East	30.11.41
	Evacuated by Ambulance Train	Middle East	4.12.41
200 Field Hospital	Transferred to Base Hospital	Middle East	7.12.41
	Transferred to 3 New Zealand General	Middle East	21.12.41

	Hospital		
N.Z.RD	Discharged 1 N.Z. General Hospital att N.Z.RD	Middle East	2.1.1942.
N.Z.RD	Marched out to Sthn TDF Irng Depot	Middle East	6.1.42
S. Inf	Marched out. Posted 20 NZ Battalion	Middle East	13.1.42
20 Battalion	Marched in Posted from S.NZ.Inf.Tng. Depot	Middle East	13.1.42
20 th Armoured	Marched out 20 Battalion att NZ Tg depot	Middle East	27.6.42
20 Armoured Regiment	Marched in CTBA 33 NZ Battalion	Middle East	18.7.42
20 Armoured Regiment	Safe	Middle East	19.7.42
	Safe	Middle East	7.9.42
20 Armoured Regiment	Marched out 20 Armed Regiment att 178 Pal Coy RASC	Middle East	25.10.42
	Marched in Ct BA 178 Pal Coy	Middle East	27.10.42
20 Armoured Regiment	Adm 23 NZ Fwd Amb and Frd to x (ii) hish	Middle East	30.11.42
NZ Reception Depot	Dschd 1 NZ Gen Hosp and attchd NZ Reception Depot	Middle East	4.12.42
NZ Reception Depot	Marched out to 20 NZ Armed Regiment's/ox(ii)List	Middle East	7.12.42
20 armoured regiment	Marched in posted from NZ Reception Depot and s/o x (ii) List	Middle East	7.12.42
20 armoured regiment	Adm 23 NZ Fwd Amb and Frd to x (ii) hish	Middle East	19.1. 43
NZ Reception Depot	Dschd 1 NZ Gen Hosp and attchd NZ Reception Depot	Middle East	19.1.43
NZ Reception Depot	Marched out to 20 NZ Armed Regiment's/ox(ii)List	Middle East	20.1.43

20 armoured regiment	Marched in posted from NZ Reception Depot and s/o x (ii) List	Middle East	20.1.43
	Qualified for award of Africa Star 20 NZ Armed Regiment	Middle East	
20 armoured regiment	Embarked Alexandria	Middle East	17.10.43
20 armoured regiment	Awarded Africa Star	Middle East	6.12.43
20 armoured regiment	Adm 4 NZ Fd Amb ADS and ifd to x (11) list		2.2.44
NZAC x List	Discharged. 1 NZ Conv Dep and att 2 NZ Reception Depot and remains on X (II) list	Italy	30.3.44
NZAC x List	Marched out Adv Base 2 NZEF and tfd from x (11) to x (IV) list NZAC	Italy	1.4.44
NZAC Adv Base	Marched in from 2 NZ Reception Dep TFD from x (11) L X (IV) List	Italy	1.4.44
	Marched out to Follout as Reinforcement and remains on x (IV) list	Italy	13.4.44
NZ Fwd Delivery Sqd	Mrch in Att FAP from Adv Base 2NZEf	Italy	15.4.44
20 armoured regiment	Marched in posted CTBA Fwd delivery Sqd and 5/0 x (IV) list	Italy	19.4.44
20 armoured regiment	Eligible for E.D. Pay of 1/- a day as Dvr - Mech	Italy	24.4.44
20 armoured regiment	Marched out to 2 NZ Reception Dep and trd NZ Roll special	Italy	20.7.44
NZ Roll Special	C+B eligible for E/D pay 1/- per day Dvr _ mech	Italy	20.7.44
2NZEf Detail	Disembarked Alexandria	Middle East	15.8.44
	Embarked Tewfik for NZ	Middle East	27.9.44
Per 684 Decision of 2.11.44	Boarded Whangarei 2.11.44. Grade 1. Granted 91 days overseas leave expiring	Whangarei	2.11.44

	1.2.45. Then placed in Area 3 Pool on LLWOP. To report to DMPO regarding future employment. Form NZ. 450 No. 2018 issued. File to Area 3.		
	Discharged 2 NZEF 1.2.45	Area 3	1.2.45

MEDALS AWARDED

Note: Our soldier refused to have his medals so I applied for them and received them in 1990.

1939 - 45 STAR

AFRICA STAR

ITALY STAR

DEFENCE MEDAL

WAR MEDAL

NEW ZEALAND WAR SERVICE MEDAL

Deceased: 15th February 1990. Dargaville

Buried: Kaihu Cemetery (St Agnes Church)



A GENERAL OVERVIEW

At dawn on the 1 September 1939, the German Luftwaffe (Air force) attacked Polish airfields and the Wehrmacht (Army) crossed into Poland. The British Government warned Germany that her aggressive action should be suspended, but was ignored and so started a war which would continue through until 1945 and span all of Europe, the Mediterranean and North Africa.

All the Dominion Countries, (Commonwealth) were asked by Britain to co-operate and to take precautionary measures.

By the 5 October 1939, an initial 14,983 New Zealanders had enlisted in the armed forces, and were sent into training camps at Ngaruawahia, Trentham, and Burnham.

The NZ First and Second Divisions were born. The first Division was made up of one, two and three infantry Brigades and were to be used for home defence: The second Division, made up of the 4th, 5th and 6th Brigades would be sent overseas.

In each of these Brigades were the Battalions. For example, in the 4th Brigade were the 18th Battalion (Auckland), the 19th (Wellington) and the 20th (Southland). From all Brigades came the 28th (Maori Battalion).

The acting General Officer appointed was **Major-General BC Freyberg**, who in his early days had been a natural athlete, swimmer and leader. After his schooling in Wellington he ventured overseas to obtain experience in the military, progressing very quickly through the ranks to Commander.

During the First World War he had commanded a Brigade or a Battalion in nearly all of the great battles on the Western Front: At the Somme, Arras, Bullecourt Third Ypres, Passchendaele and Flanders. He won the Distinguished Service Order at Gallipoli for an individual exploit of swimming ashore in the Gulf of Xeros and lighting oil flares to divert the Turks from landings made elsewhere. He won the Victoria Cross at Beaucourt, was awarded two bars to his DSO, and in all was mentioned in dispatches six times and wounded nine times. Indeed a man most suited to organise New Zealand's military operation.

After his appointment he agreed with the N.Z. Government that any major decisions such as the employment of the forces would be made by the N.Z. War Cabinet. The forces would be under the command of an Allied Commander in Chief for operational purposes only, but not for training, organisation, administration or discipline.

These decisions were to be debated with some aggressive concern to the N.Z. Prime Minister by Freyberg during the Greece and Crete campaigns. The Allied command would put the NZ Division into some very difficult situations.

After a short visit to France to see conditions for himself, General Freyberg stopped in Egypt to select camp sites in which the Echelons were to assemble, be equipped and trained as a complete Division. He chose Maadi and Helwan because they were comparatively free from mosquitoes, had suitable training space and was close to Cairo.

On 6 January 1940, the 'First Echelon' departed from Wellington and Lyttelton arriving at Port Tewfik in Egypt on the 12 February on the ships *Empress of Canada*, *Dunera*, *Sobieski*, *Orion* and the *Rangitata*. The troops were officially welcomed by Mr Anthony Eden on behalf of the King and the British Parliament. General Freyberg made the reply.

By 15 February, disembarkment was complete and the troops made their way to the Maadi camp, some 90 miles away. From the troop trains the men could study the already monotonous desert, the dusty sun soaked villages and the feluccas coming down the Nile with their cargoes of vegetables and livestock.

On arrival, the troops marched in column behind the pipe band of the 'Cameron Highlanders', past General Freyberg and into Maadi camp. The camp site was only eight miles from Cairo and within sight of the Pyramids across the Nile. It was situated on a sandy plateau, over looked by a rock strewn hillock on which was the tents and huts of Divisional Headquarters.

Around this hill and spreading outwards, the advance party, consisting of British and Indian Engineers were supervising Egyptian labour, and had laid out a camp that in time was to have hundreds of huts, miles of tarmac roads, drains and water pipes. The cookhouses, mess room, canteens, and shower houses of the great encampment were still to be constructed.

Over the next twelve months in this mushroom town, the First Echelon, followed by the Second and Third Echelons and reinforcements from New Zealand, would be equipped and trained for the battle's to come.

The Second Echelon of nearly 7,000 men made up from a mixture of civilians, railway and building and forestry experts, left for Egypt on the 2 May 1940. During the crossing between Fremantle and Colombia, a decision was made between the New Zealand and British Governments to divert the convoy south to Cape Town and then to Britain.

Germany was widening her front in Europe and it was evident that Britain required extra troops to maintain her defence.

The convoy arrived on the 16 June and after a grand tour to Scotland the railway and forestry companies of the Echelon went to Woolmer, and the balance to Aldershot.

It was not until the 3 March 1941 before the Second Echelon re-joined the N.Z. Division in Egypt.

During May to July 1940 while the Second were still at sea, the Third Echelon was assembling in N.Z. By this time there had been 59,644 voluntary enlistments in the 2. NZEF (Second New Zealand Expeditionary Forces), and the Government was considering a compulsory system because of the threat from Japan to the Pacific Nations. So consequently, only 600 out of the 2,900 of the Third Echelon were sent to Egypt, arriving towards the end of September, with the balance being sent to Fiji.

Finally by the end of March 1941, all the Echelons and some of the reinforcements were assembled in Egypt.

They were re-organised into their separate Battalions, and then prepared for the route to Alexandria and then Greece.

THE NZ DIVISION

Letter from the Chief of the General Staff (Wellington) to General Freyberg...

2 January 1942

The complete mobilization of the New Zealand Forces has been ordered for 10 January, providing twenty-three Battalions and eighteen being formed, nine mounted rifle regiments, four field regiments, and miscellaneous and ancillary troops.

Medium guns and howitzers are being utilized to cover various anchorages, leaving only one troop of 6-inch howitzers for the field forces. Field artillery includes thirty-six 25-pounders and fifty 18-pounders.

The total strength will be approximately 50,000 by 10 January, rising to 62,000 about one month later, and 68,000 ultimately, all exclusive of the Home Guard. We had already advanced the annual training date for part of the force from January to 15 December, on which date approximately 30,000 troops of all categories, including New Zealand Expeditionary Force reinforcements, were in camp.

Fiji is of the first importance as an essential link in the United States air reinforcing chain and for other reasons, and we reinforced it in December with eighteen field guns and howitzers, four 3-inch anti-aircraft guns, six anti-aircraft searchlights, and 700 men to complete the third Battalion. Further reinforcements comprising approximately 4000 troops, four 25-pounders, four Bofors, two 60-pounders, and two 6-inch howitzers are being sent in two flights to raise the force to two brigade groups and two reserve Battalions organized as a division.

The first flight has sailed and the remainder goes in a few days. Arms and equipment have been found from New Zealand, resulting in shortages here, but the United States is dispatching the equivalent, plus other equipment, urgently to Fiji and New Zealand, when adjustments will be made if the situation permits.

THE MAORI BATTALION

Like the other infantry Battalions, the Maori Battalion was divided into five companies: four rifle companies of about 125 men each and a headquarters (HQ) company of around 200 men. Each company was commanded by a major or captain. The Battalion's four rifle companies (named A, B, C and D) were organized along tribal lines, while HQ Company drew its personnel from all over Maoridom.

Each rifle company was divided into three platoons led by a lieutenant. Each platoon was in turn made up of three sections of about 10 men led by a non-commissioned officer (NCO). HQ Company was made up of six specialist platoons: signals, anti-aircraft, mortars, Bren Gun Carriers, pioneers and transport.



REINFORCEMENTS

The main body of the Maori Battalion left New Zealand as part of 2 NZEF 2nd Echelon in May 1940. To maintain its strength throughout the war, especially when heavy losses were suffered, groups of new recruits were regularly sent from New Zealand. 2 NZEF 3rd Echelon sailed for the Middle East in August 1940, followed by the 4th Reinforcements in November and the 5th, 6th and 7th Reinforcements in 1941. The last Maori recruits to see action, part of 2 NZEF 14th Reinforcements, arrived in Italy in April 1945.

Note: 4th Reinforcements: Our soldier's initial section from New Zealand later transferred to 20th Battalion. The 15th Reinforcements did not reach Egypt until May 1945, after the war in Europe ended.

NEW ZEALAND MEDICAL SERVICES IN MIDDLE EAST AND ITALY

3 GENERAL HOSPITAL (4TH REINFORCEMENTS)

After tentative plans made earlier in 1940 for the mobilization of a third general hospital had been cancelled, representations from General Freyberg in September 1940 led to the calling-up of 3 General Hospital in October. The Commanding Officer, Colonel Gower, entered Trentham Camp on 27 October and the rest of the unit arrived in the next three days.

The 4th Reinforcements then in camp embarked in three separate sections and according to the usual practice a medical officer and a few orderlies were sent with each departing transport. No. 3 General Hospital embarked on the *Nieuw Amsterdam* with the third section of the 4th Reinforcements on 1 February 1941, the number embarking being 14 officers (including a dental officer and a chaplain), 48 sisters, and 143 other ranks.

After the departure of 3 General Hospital no further medical units were formed in New Zealand to extend the medical services of 2 NZEF in the Middle East. Other units, notably the Casualty Clearing Station, were established in the Middle East. This enabled full use to be made of the capable officers and men who already had considerable experience of overseas conditions.

ASSEMBLY AND TRAINING OF THE NEW ZEALAND DIVISION

IN December 1940, when it was clear that the Italian Army was withdrawing along the North African coast, permission was granted for the New Zealand units to assemble in Maadi and Helwan camps and there prepare for the spring campaign. The Division was to be in General Headquarters Reserve ready to move at short notice to any theatre of war. There was no certainty just where this would be. The Battalions could be sent to Libya, to Abyssinia, or to any other country in the Middle East in which the German High Command chose to play its next card.

In November General Freyberg had informed the New Zealand Government that Germany, having failed to invade Britain, might attack either Russia or Turkey; in December he thought that the Italian disasters in Greece would affect 'German plans for next spring' and that Greece as well as Turkey was a possible theatre of war.

The immediate problem, however, was the assembly of the scattered Division. There were even doubts about the arrival of reinforcements, though they were essential if the Division was ever to go into action.

In August the reinforcements who were to have sailed with the Third Echelon were retained for service in Fiji. Since then the position in the Pacific had deteriorated, and in October the Government warned General Freyberg that the growing tension in the Far East made it necessary for it to revise its plans for reinforcements to the Middle East and to consider whether a proportion of those available should not be sent to Fiji at the earliest possible moment.

The Government eventually decided that only a section of the 4th Reinforcements should leave in November. Later on, to the consternation of the General, a shortage of shipping made it necessary to send the remainder in two sections. In the end, however, he was able to act on the assumption that the original total of reinforcements would be adhered to 'without any deficiency'. From December onwards a succession of convoys was to come in from Britain and New Zealand.

To make way for these reinforcements, 6 Brigade and those units of the Division already in Maadi Camp moved out during 9–14 December to Helwan, the desert camp near which 2 General Hospital was already established and from which 6 Australian Division had just moved to the Western Desert. Henceforward Maadi was left as the Base Camp for HQ 2 NZEF base units and the training units of the Reinforcement Depot.

The first to enter Maadi Camp under this new system was the first section of the 4th Reinforcements, 1487 all ranks, who left Wellington on 8 November in *HMT Story* and *Maunganui* and after an uneventful voyage arrived at Port Tewfik on 16 December. They were joined by a small detachment from Divisional Headquarters and Headquarters Divisional Artillery which arrived from England on 29 December.

Note: Our soldiers second section of the 4th Reinforcements, a total of 2301 soldiers of all ranks, left Wellington on 20 December on HMT ships *Dominion Monarch*, *Empress of Russia* and *Awatea*, arriving at Port Tewfik, Egypt on 28–30 January.

FORMATION AND BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NEW ZEALAND TWENTIETH BATTALION DURING WWII

With the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the 20th Battalion was formed at Burnham Military Camp in early October under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Howard Kippenberger. After a period of training, it departed for the Middle East on 5 January 1940. The Battalion arrived at its base in Maadi, Egypt, on 14 February, and would be involved in training and garrison duty at Baggush for most of the next 12 months.

JOURNEY FROM NEW ZEALAND TO EGYPT JANUARY 1940

The Battalion soon reached Lyttelton where, in spite of precautions taken to keep the move secret, a large crowd had gathered at the wharf gates. The two trains drew up near the transporters *Dunera* and *Sobieski*.

The 'Twentieth Battalion' and some 4 Field Ambulance personnel would embark on the *Dunera*, which already had on board the Divisional Signals: they had embarked at Wellington. The men were marshaled in alphabetical order on the wharf and their names checked as they went up the gangway in single file. The Battalion left with exactly its establishment, 801 men: the last man, absent without leave was dragged from his home and hurried to the wharf.

Once on board the men were shown to their quarters in the mess decks. The *Dunera* was a regular troop transport which before the war had carried troops and their families to and from India.

About 4.30 p.m. To the strains of '*Now is the Hour*' and '*He Careth for me*', accompanied by a local band, His Majesty's Troopship *Dunera* pulled out to sea.

It was the first transport to leave New Zealand in the Second World War and was followed, after a short interval, by the *Sobieski*. Some disappointment was felt that the public had not been allowed on to the wharf in time for final farewells. Out from port the naval escort, HMS *Leander*, was picked up. The troops paraded for boat drill, had a meal—a good one too—and then drew their hammocks. Many men took their hammocks up on deck and slung them in all kinds of unauthorized places: from pipes, rails, knobs—anything that would hold a knot. The boson is reported to have commented: "*I've seen soldiers, I've seen sailors, I've seen Boy Scouts, but I have never seen b—s like these!*"

The ship steamed slowly north that night and out of the haze next morning appeared the squat bulk of the battleship HMS *Ramillies*, leading the rest of the ships—*Orion*, *Rangitata*, *Strathaird*, and *Empress of Canada*—from Wellington. With HMAS *Canberra* guarding the rear, the convoy passed through Cook Strait and up the west coast of the North Island before turning west for Australia. Patrol planes, flying low over the ships, dipped their wings in salute as the first echelon of troops to leave the Dominion in the Second World War began the long voyage to its 'overseas destination'. All eyes were turned to the receding coastline and to snow-capped Egmont, never more beautiful than when viewed from the sea.



The Dunera leaving Wellington, January 1940, en route to Lyttelton to embark First Echelon troops, including 4 Field Ambulance

The trip across the Tasman was uneventful, the weather remarkably good, and the troops in excellent spirits. Everyone gradually settled down to life aboard a troopship. For some it was their first experience of being at sea. Unlike the luxury liners that comprised the rest of the convoy, the *Dunera* was adapted to carry the greatest number of people in the smallest possible space. After the manner of a transport long used to carrying regular troops, her passage-ways and decks were liberally plastered with 'Out-of-Bounds' notices and other signs strongly emphasizing the distinctions in rank between officers, NCOs, and men. It took some time for Dominion troops to appreciate their full significance. Deck space for other ranks was deplorably small, this being one of the worst features of the ship's organization. The other was the stowing of hammocks before a quarter past six each morning in the hammock room some six decks below.

Physical training, games, concerts, and lectures helped to pass the time during the crossing of the Tasman, and on 9 January the *Empress of Canada* left the convoy to allow the GOC to catch a plane in Sydney for Egypt. Next day the ship, accompanied by six transports carrying Australian troops and their escort, HMAS *Australia* and HMAS *Canberra*, rejoined the convoy.

Convoy maneuver's, which had begun in the Tasman Sea, were continued on 16 January when a mock attack by the two cruisers, *Australia* and *Canberra*, was repulsed by the *Ramillies*. Warning of the attack was given by the *Dunera* with two blasts of her siren. The convoy closed in and increased speed, but at another long blast the ships scattered in star formation. Under cover of a thick blanket of mist which hung low over the sea and a smoke screen laid by the protecting battleship, the other transports in the convoy quickly disappeared from view. The troops crowded to all vantage points to watch the battle. The only 'loss' was the *Dunera*, the slowest of the convoy.

Issues of New Zealand hat and collar badges, field dressings, 'housewives', puttees, and unit sleeve patches (the last in short supply) were completed before arrival at Fremantle, which, after a slow trip across the Australian Bight, was reached on the afternoon of 18 January. The ships anchored in the roadstead, pulling into the port as berths became available.

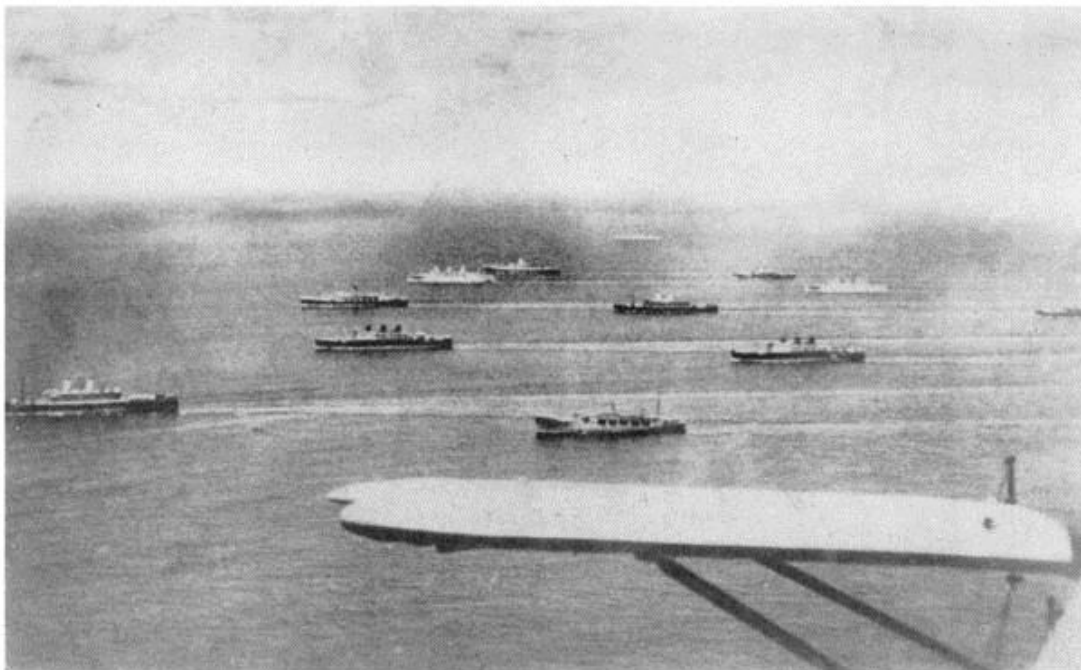
The *Dunera* was one of the last to tie up, but the period of waiting next morning was enlivened when the master of the ship allowed the troops to use the lifeboats for a row round the anchorage. The men enjoyed the exercise and, at the same time, took the opportunity to row across to other ships in the convoy.

After being paid £1 Australian money, debited in pay books as sixteen shillings sterling, the men were granted leave to visit Perth and enjoyed both there and in Fremantle the unlimited and unforgettable

hospitality of Western Australia. There were the usual pranks that must be expected from high-spirited men who have been cooped up for some time in a troopship. As the result of one of these the stuffed, full-sized kangaroo from the 'First and Last Shop in Australia' found itself on board the *Dunera* and sailed all the way to Tewfik, where it was left with the ship's crew with the hope that it would one day be returned to its rightful owners. Three men from the Battalion had not returned to the ship by the time it sailed.

At 12.30 p.m. on 20 January the convoy left Fremantle and began the long voyage across the Indian Ocean. The naval escort consisted of the battleship *Ramillies*, the cruiser *Kent*, and the French cruiser *Suffren*.

Three days out from Fremantle the OC of Troops, Lieutenant-Colonel Kippenberger, addressed all ranks and told them that they were going to Egypt, where they would undergo about two months' training with new equipment and modern weapons before being considered ready to go into action. He stressed the value of discipline and the necessity for co-operation between officers and men.



First Echelon and AIF convoy in the Indian Ocean, January 1940. The ships are: Nearest line (from left), *Otranto*, *Sobieski*; second line, *Strathnaver*, *Strathaird*; third line, *Orion*, *Orford*, *Dunera*; fourth line, *Empress of Canada*, *Empress of Japan*; fifth line, *Orcades*, *Rangitata*; at rear, an escorting cruiser

In its turn as duty unit in the *Dunera* the Battalion was required to provide men for guards, pickets, and fatigues, the last including duties in the ship's galley and butcher's shop and as deck-scrubbers. There were twenty-four sentry posts, requiring seventy-two men to man them. It was difficult for men who had been on duty during the night to get sleep in the daytime as they had to sling their hammocks up on deck over a hatch. Military training was largely restricted through lack of space, but physical training, signaling instruction, and lectures on a wide variety of subjects relieved the monotony of crossing the Indian Ocean. Recreational training was also hampered by cramped quarters but boxing and wrestling tournaments attracted large entries and created interest. Four footballs were popular for a time until they all went the same way—over the side.

A less strenuous diversion was playing 'Housie' on the open decks, the caller perching on a hatch cover in the center. Crown-and-Anchor had its usual followers until a few boards were confiscated. After this boards were chalked on the deck where they could be rubbed out quickly at the approach of authority.

Because of blackout restrictions all portholes were closed after dark, and to help reduce the consequent discomfort in the tropics men were allowed in turn to sleep on deck at night. Canvas awnings were erected

on the upper decks for protection against the fierce heat of the sun. Wind sails with canvas chute's leading through the holds to the decks below were hoisted to catch every breeze.

Messing arrangements called for much organization. Officers, warrant officers, and sergeants messed in dining-rooms in peacetime comfort, attended by Indian waiters clad in a picturesque uniform of flowing blue coat over a spotless white gown, complete with a broad waist-sash and corded blue-and-white turban. The men were allotted set tables for the voyage, two men from each table acting as mess orderlies. The food, generally, was good, although inadequate cool-storage accommodation early in the voyage caused an epidemic of diarrhea and vomiting among a section of the troops. As the result of an investigation which substantiated complaints that the butter was tainted by refrigeration, New Zealand butter was issued for the rest of the voyage.

In the ship's canteen, prices were cheap, especially for cigarettes, tobacco, and chocolate. So brisk was the trade in these items, as well as in tinned fruit and stationery, that it was necessary to replenish stocks at each port of call. The method of serving, however, from a single window with only one customer at a time, meant protracted waits in long queues that discouraged many from returning after the first visit.

On 30 January the convoy reached Colombo, where the transports entered a Harbour thickly congested with shipping of every conceivable size and nationality. In contrast with the grey camouflage of the troopships, neutral ships in the Harbour bore in conspicuous paint their distinctive colours and the names of their countries of origin.

A Japanese luxury liner, the *Brazil Maru*, with all her lights on made a brilliant sight amid the blacked-out convoy at night. While the ships lay in Harbour they were surrounded by Arab dhows and bumboats from which native vendors sold their wares—fruit, nuts, cheroots, and ebony elephants—and clamoring boys dived for coins.

Next day shore leave was granted. The men paraded at 8 a.m. and waited on the ship for three hours before going ashore in lighters and marching to the Galle Face hotel, where they were dismissed. During this brief visit the men made their first acquaintance with eastern shopkeepers, rickshaw men, jugglers, fortune-tellers, and beggars. They went sightseeing in taxis and explored the bazaars.

After returning from leave one man fell overboard but was fished out safely. A number of men, some sixty-odd, had been absent from the parade at the 'Galle Face' before the return to the ship, and for this offence were either reprimanded or given two or three days' CB. Others absent without leave received from two to seven days' CB, with some forfeiture of pay by the worst offenders.

On 1 February the convoy began the last lap of the voyage and was joined by a French ship, *Athos II*, carrying French colonial troops. The naval escort now included the *Ramillies*, the aircraft-carrier *Eagle*, and the cruisers *Sussex*, *Hobart*, and *Westcott*. Some excitement was caused four days later when one of the *Eagle's* aircraft crashed into the sea, the pilot being rescued by one of the escort vessels.

The troops manned ship on 3 February as a salute to HMS *Eagle* as she steamed down the line of transports, and again two days later for the *Ramillies* when she left the convoy in the Gulf of Aden. With the approach of their destination the men were given lectures on tropical diseases and other pitfalls of Egypt.

Web equipment was fitted and checked, identification discs completed, boots stamped with regimental numbers, and water bottles disinfected. On 8 February some of the convoy called at Aden to refuel, but the *Dunera* carried on up the Red Sea. She berthed at Port Tewfik at 10.30 a.m. on 12 February after a voyage of thirty-eight days. During the morning the ship was visited by General Freyberg, who introduced to the troops gathered on the decks the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, the Rt. Hon. Anthony Eden, General Sir Archibald Wavell, Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East Forces, Lieutenant-General H. M. Wilson, GOC-in-C British Troops in Egypt, Sir Miles Lampson, British Ambassador to Egypt, and the Governor of the Canal Zone, representing the Egyptian Government.

Mr. Eden read to the troops a message from the King...

I know well that the splendid tradition established by the armed forces of New Zealand will be worthily upheld by you, who have left your homes to fight for the cause that the whole Empire has made its own.

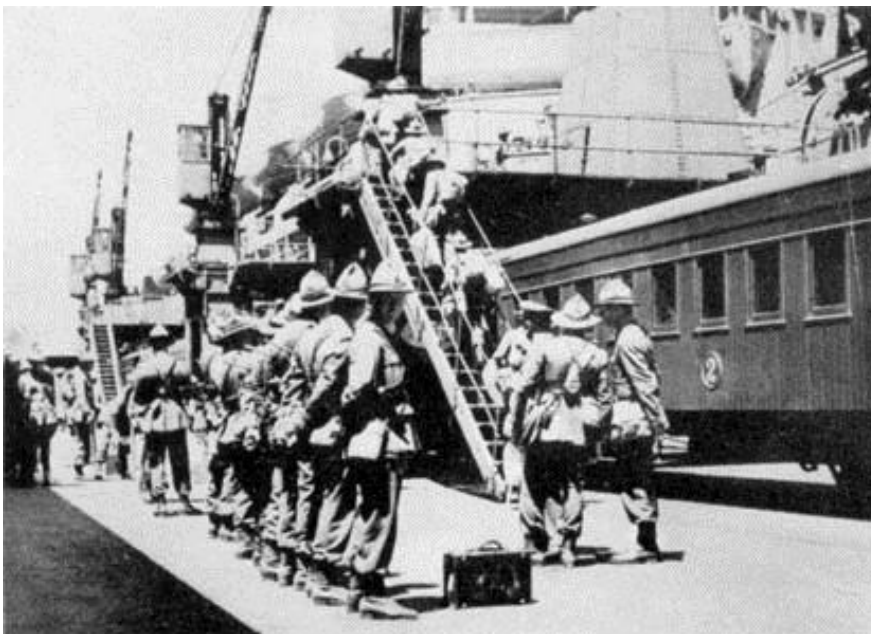
Now that you have entered the field of active service, I send you a very warm welcome, together with my best wishes for your welfare.

(Signed) George R.I.

Farewell parade, Christchurch, January 1940



ABOVE: THE TWENTIETH BATTALION AND ARMORED MARCH THROUGH THE MAIN STREET OF CHRISTCHURCH



BELOW: EMBARKING ONTO THE DUNERA

Embarking on HMT *Dunera* at Wellington, 4 January 1940



On board the *Dunera* at Lyttelton, 5 January 1940



AT SEA ON THE DUNERA L-CORPORAL N. SUTHERLAND D COMPANY BARBER AT WORK

During the wait in port the troops were paid in Egyptian money. No leave was granted, but the unit was called upon to provide working and unloading parties, fatigue parties, and guards over dumps of stores and equipment on the wharf. The warnings given during medical lectures on the risks of disease in Egypt were borne out by the dirtiness of the Egyptian laborers and the filth on the wharf, which effectively deterred most of the men from buying any of the motley collection of oranges, cigarettes, wallets, Turkish delight, and toffee so importunately offered for sale. On the wharf small children begged for *baksheesh* with all the frenzy of the hungry and the greedy. 'Gulli-gulli' men performed on the quay, but their efforts soon palled on men who were weary of life on board ship and waited impatiently for orders to disembark.

Shortly after the *Dunera* had tied up at the wharf, lighters were bringing ashore troops from the larger ships which had had to anchor in the stream. After reveille at 3.45 a.m., the Battalion disembarked at 5.30 a.m. on 14 February, gave three cheers for the ship, and for an hour stood around in a cold, almost frosty atmosphere, waiting to depart in the high, hard, uncomfortable third-class carriages of the Egyptian State Railways which were to become a very familiar mode of travel in the years ahead.

The Battalion entrained at 6.30 a.m. and, passing through Zagazig, Benha, and Cairo, reached Maadi, where it detrained and marched to Maadi Camp. The band of the Cameron Highlanders piped at the head of the column at the unaccustomedly slow pace of ninety to the minute. The men carried most of their equipment, the road was hot and dusty, and few were fit after six weeks at sea. Their entry to Maadi could hardly be said to have made an impression on the GOC, who took the salute on the march of about two miles to the unit lines. The strength of the Battalion on embarkation was 38 officers and 752 other ranks, a total of 790, this including 133 first reinforcements. The two officers and nine other ranks from the Battalion in the advance party made up the full strength of 801.



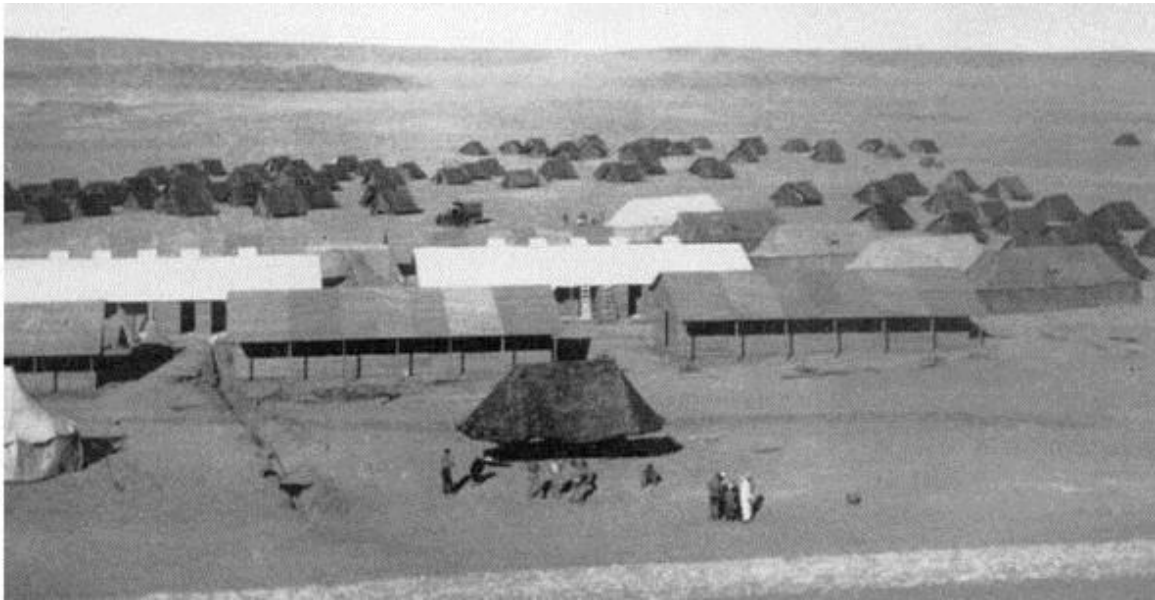
ABOVE: MAADI CAMP EGYPT

BELOW: DETRAINING AT MAADI SEPTEMBER 1940





LEFT: THE 20TH ARRIVE AT MAADI BASE CAMP, FEBRUARY 1940



ABOVE: BATTALION LINES MAADI

BELOW: THE TWENTIETH MARCHING INTO BAGGUSH



GREECE AND CRETE

On appreciating the prospect of an invasion of Greece by the Germans in 1941, the British Government decided to send troops to support the Greeks. Consequently the 2nd New Zealand Division was amongst the various Allied units dispatched to Greece in early March. Subordinate to the 4th Infantry Brigade, which was tasked with the defense of the Aliakmon Line, the 20th Battalion prepared and manned the western end of this line. On 6 April, the expected invasion began and the advance of the Germans was so rapid that a threat to the Florina Gap became apparent. The 4th Infantry Brigade was withdrawn to the Servia Pass where it manned defensive positions much superior to its previous positions.

Battle with the German forces commenced on 14 April and the brigade defended its positions for three days before being withdrawn. The 20th Battalion was to be the rearguard of the brigade for most of its withdrawal until it was evacuated to Crete on 28 April.

On Crete, the 20th Battalion was detached from 4th Brigade to form part of a new adhoc 10th Infantry Brigade, under the command of Kippenberger. The Battalion's 2nd IC, Lieutenant Colonel James Thomas Burrows, would be the temporary commander for most of the Battle of Crete. When the invasion of Crete began, the Battalion was positioned to the east of the town of Galatas. On 22 May, it was used in a counterattack on Maleme airfield, which had been allowed to be occupied by the Germans the previous day. The late arrival of its relief meant the Battalion was late to its starting position. The attack was unsuccessful and resulted in heavy casualties, although not as high as the Germans' own losses.

**BELOW: THE NEW ZEALAND DIVISION CATCHING THE TRAIN FOR ALEXANDRIA
IN NORTH EGYPT AND THEN BY BOAT TO GREECE**





LEFT: IN CRETE

A GROUP OF 20 BATTALION ON THE DAY OF ARRIVAL

From left to right the officers in the foreground are : Lt M. G. O'Callaghan, Capt C. Wilson (back to camera), Lt J. D. Aiken, Lt G. A. Brown, Maj J. T. Burrows (back to camera), Lt D. J. Fountaine, Lt-Col H. K. Kippenberger, Capt D. B. Cameron, Capt M. C. Rice (standing), 2 Lt N. J. McPhail (standing), 2 Lt C. H. Upham (holding mug), Lt R. L. D. Powrie

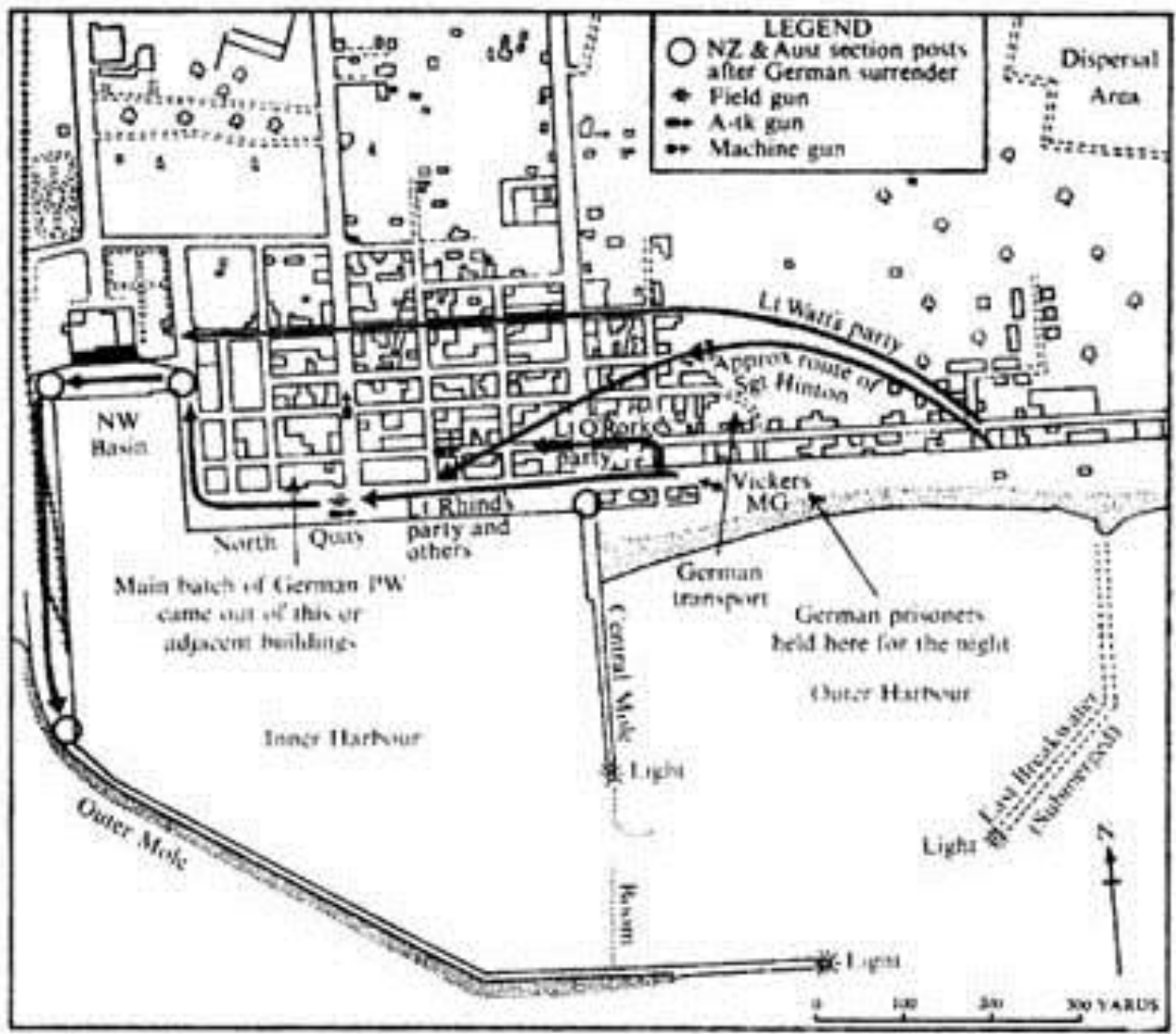


ABOVE: 20TH BATTALION COUNTER ATTACK ON MALEME

When Galatas fell to the Germans on 25 May, 20th Battalion was in danger of being cutoff. It successfully regrouped and assisted in the recapture of the town. The Battalion withdrew on 26 May, beginning a retreat to Hora Sfakion, on the southwest coast of Crete, from where it would be evacuated on 30 May. Kippenberger, with the 10th Brigade disestablished after the capture of Galatas, rejoined the Battalion. On arrival at the evacuation beaches, it was found that there was insufficient room on the Australian destroyers that was the designated transport for the Battalion, and it was forced to leave 40 men to form a rearguard under the command of Burrows. Fortunately, after manning defensive positions to prevent German infiltrating the cordon around the evacuation beaches, the rearguard was able to be evacuated the following day.



LEFT: 2ND NZEF 20TH BATTALION, WITH LIEUTENANT COLONEL HOWARD KARL KIPPENBERGER, STUDYING MOCK BATTLE PLANS IN EGYPT, DURING WORLD WAR 2



N.Z.M.S. 101/117

Drawn by Land & Survey Dept., N.Z.

THE BATTLE FOR KALAMATA WATERFRONT, 28-29 APRIL

OVERVIEW OF NORTH AFRICA

Back in Egypt, and after a short period of rest, Kippenberger set about rebuilding the Battalion, which had lost over half its original complement during the Greece and Crete campaigns. Nearly 400 replacements joined the Battalion and stragglers, separated from the Battalion for various reasons during the previous two months while in Greece and Crete, continued to arrive for several weeks as they made their way across the Mediterranean by various means, including small sailboats. By mid-June, the Battalion was back up to strength and several weeks were spent at the Battalion's previous positions at Baggush, engaged in intensive desert training.

OPERATION CRUSADER

NOTE: IT WAS DURING THIS PERIOD THAT OUR SOLDIER WAS WOUNDED...

In November 1941, the Battalion participated in Operation Crusader as part of the British Eighth Army and was engaged in offensive operations towards the Sidi Azeiz area. On the night of 25 November, along with 18th Battalion, it was tasked with the night time capture of Belhamed, a hill adjacent to Sidi Rezegh. As the units moved to their positions, Kippenberger made a navigational error which resulted in his headquarters company becoming separated from the other companies of the Battalion. It took him until daylight for him to reestablish contact with the remainder of the Battalion which, when he located it, was in its expected position having taken the hill with few losses. However, shortly after he was wounded by machine gun fire and was evacuated. The Battalion held the hill for three days before it was destroyed by 15th Panzer Division in a counterattack. Only one man managed to escape capture.

BELOW: THIS PHOTO WAS TAKEN THE SAME DAY AS OUR SOLDIER WAS WOUNDED.

HE COULD BE ONE OF THE DOTS ON THE HORIZON



Men of 20 Battalion move past Valentines of A Squadron, 8 Royal Tanks, under heavy fire near Bir el Chleta, 24 November



LEFT: LIEUTENANT COLONEL HOWARD KARL KIPPENBERGER, WHO WAS THE COMMANDING OFFICER OF 20TH BATTALION FROM ITS FORMATION UNTIL LATE 1941, WITH LIEUTENANT CHARLES HAZLITT UPHAM, EGYPT, OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 1941

REBUILDING

A number of the Battalion's personnel had not been involved in the battle, most of whom were unfit, recovering from injuries, on leave or attending training courses. These men, numbering about 137, formed the nucleus of the reformed Battalion at Baggush in early December. Other 20th Battalion men who had been temporarily deployed elsewhere also

returned to the Battalion during December. By the end of the month, the Battalion, now under the command of Burrows (Kippenberger had been promoted to brigadier and given command of 5th Infantry Brigade), had been brought back up to strength with 600 reinforcements.

For the next two months, Burrows oversaw training of his new command while it was based at Baggush and then later at Maadi. In February 1942, the Battalion was on the move, with the rest of 2nd Division, to Syria to defend against a possible attack through Turkey on the Middle East oilfields by the Germans.

In Syria, the Battalion was engaged in the preparation of defenses in its assigned sector around Djedeide fortress, digging weapons pits as well as undergoing further training. Following the attack on the Eighth Army's Gazala Line by Panzer Army Africa, the 2nd Division was recalled to Libya. On 17 June, the Battalion left for Mersa Matruh, a 900 mile journey of four days. After a period of indecision as to where the division was to be best used, it moved to Minqar Qaim with 20th Battalion remaining behind at Matruh for two days to act as security for engineers laying minefields before joining up with the division.

At Minqar Qaim, the divisions were to hold and delay the advance of the Panzer Army Africa for as long as it could while remaining intact. By the middle of the afternoon of 27 June, the division had been encircled by the 21st Panzer Division. Elements of the panzer division approached a number of the division's positions, including 20th Battalion's sector on the northern side of the Minqar Qaim escarpment, and were successfully beaten off. The division broke out that evening with 4th Brigade breaching the German lines and 20th Battalion on the northern flank of the chosen withdrawal route.

During the action at Minqar Qaim and the subsequent breakout the Battalion's casualties were light, with thirteen men killed. The Battalion reached the El Alamein line by 28 June.

EL ALAMEIN

On 14 and 15 July 1942, during the First Battle of El Alamein, the Battalion was engaged in what would be known as the Battle of Ruweisat Ridge. Ruweisat Ridge was held by the enemy and was in the center of the El Alamein line, dominating the surrounding area. Fourth Brigade was to take the western end of the ridge, with 5th Brigade tasked with the capture of the center of the ridge and the 5th Indian Brigade allocated the eastern end. British tanks, in the form of two armored brigades, were to protect the flanks and be in

support to deal with the expected counterattack. However, little thought was not given to communication and liaison between the infantry and armored brigades, nor was a clear chain of command established. This would have implications for the outcome of the battle.

After a night time advance, 20th Battalion was positioned on the ridge in reserve behind 18th and 19th Battalions. On daybreak, it was discovered that the advance had bypassed numerous strong points, leaving the German line in front of the ridge largely intact. The supporting British armor was nowhere to be seen and the supporting artillery and anti-tank units were unable to break through, leaving the two New Zealand brigades in position on the exposed ridge. Kippenberger, commanding 5th Brigade and having difficulty with radio communications, made a dash through enemy lines and managed to make contact with the British armor. The commanding officer resisted Kippenberger's entreaties to advance and it was not until a passing British general authorized the move that the British mounted up. By the time the armored support arrived, the flanking Battalion of 5th Brigade had been overrun, leaving the Battalions of 4th Brigade even more exposed and receiving fire from the enemy.

A counterattack by elements of the 15th Panzer Division was launched in the afternoon of 15 July. The limited number of anti-tank guns present were exposed and quickly immobilized or forced to withdraw. This left the infantry to be surrounded and large numbers were forced to surrender. Some soldiers made it to the positions of 19th Battalion, but it too became surrounded. By nightfall, the brigade had been overrun. Only 18th Battalion managed to escape largely intact. Of 20th Battalion, nearly 200 men were taken prisoner.

CONVERSION TO ARMOR

About half the Battalion had been wounded, killed or captured during the battle of Ruweisat Ridge and it was withdrawn to Maadi to be brought back up to strength.

It had previously been decided to form an armored brigade to provide tank support to the 2nd New Zealand Division and as a result, the 1st New Zealand Army Tank Brigade was formed.

It was still undergoing training in New Zealand in September, when it was decided to convert 4th Brigade to armor. Personnel were transferred from the tank brigade in New Zealand to bring 4th Brigade back up to strength. As one of the constituent units of the brigade, 20th Battalion was officially re-designated 20th Armored Regiment on 5 October 1942.

The regiment, with three squadrons of tanks, would spend the next year in training, learning to use the signaling equipment and guns of the tanks it was expected to use. One squadron was to be equipped with Crusaders with the other two squadrons operating Sherman's. However, the Crusaders, mechanically unreliable, would later be replaced with Sherman's.

With the close of the North African campaign in May 1943, attention then turned to the European theater of operations. Despite a preference amongst some sections of the New Zealand government for the New Zealand Division to be redeployed in the Pacific theater, it was decided that the division, having served with the Eighth Army throughout the desert campaign would remain in Europe. Accordingly, in October, the division moved to join the Eighth Army in Italy.

ITALY

The regiment disembarked at Taranto on 22 October 1943 and gradually traveled up Italy towards the Sangro River, which it duly crossed on 3 December.

In the following weeks, 20th Regiment was involved in a supporting role in 5th and 6th Brigades' attack on Orsogna, as part of the Moro River Campaign. Although the infantry made some gains, the German defenses were too strong and the attack soon faded into a stalemate, with a number of back and forth actions.

The regiment lost a number of tanks during the fighting but generally acquitted itself well and was withdrawn from the line the following month.



ABOVE: TRANSPORTING A 20TH ARMORED REGIMENT SHERMAN OVER THE PO RIVER, 1945

Following its withdrawal from the area around Orsogna, the New Zealand Division was one of a number of divisions that was transferred from the Eighth Army to the Fifth Army, and then engaged on the western side of the Apennines. This was part of an overall strategy to achieve a breakthrough at the Gustav Line to break an otherwise deadlocked Italian front. Together with the 4th Indian Division and supporting British and American artillery, the division formed the New Zealand Corps, under the command of the New Zealand divisional commander, Freyberg. The corps moved to Casino, the defenders of which had resisted American forces for several weeks.

Like at Orsogna, the regiment was to play a supporting role in the forthcoming Cassino attack, with the infantry of 5th and 6th Brigades bearing the brunt of the battle. When the attack began on 15 March, 20th Regiment was initially held as a reserve, ready to exploit any breakthrough by the infantry but this did not eventuate. The infantry struggled to make progress in the face of determined resistance. Over the next week, some of the squadrons of the regiment became involved in small scale raid actions.

On 24 March, the regiment moved into the area of Casino controlled by the New Zealand infantry, and essentially became mobile pillboxes. The tanks were vulnerable to artillery and German patrols and the troops of the various squadrons of the regiment were rotated in and out of the town in two day shifts. While the New Zealand infantry had been relieved by the Guards Brigade in the early April, 20th Regiment stayed in the line until the end of the month.

After the New Zealand Corps was disbanded, a period of rest and training in the Volturno Valley followed for 20th Regiment before it returned to action in May. It was temporarily split from 4th Brigade and its various squadrons detached in support of separate operations being conducted by 5th and 6th Brigades in advances to Avezzano.

Following the Normandy landings, the Italian campaign was reduced to a sideshow, although one which still had considerable value in tying down German forces that would otherwise be used elsewhere. The regiment, now rejoined with 4th Brigade, would be involved with supporting the infantry brigades as they advanced to Florence, entering the city in August. The New Zealand Division was transferred to the 1st Canadian Corps, then on the Adriatic Coast, and advanced up to Rimini. Here the B Squadron of the Regiment supported an attack by a Greek Mountain Brigade towards Rimini on 14 September.

On 19 and 20 October, the 4th Armored Brigade was involved in its first action as a brigade in an attack towards the Savio River, with 20th Regiment on the left flank. This was primarily a tank action, in contrast to previous battles in which the armor supported the infantry.

Having advanced seven miles to complete its objectives the regiment supported the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade in making its own attack across the river on the evening of 21 October.

The Sherman's of 18th and 20th Regiments fired an hour long barrage of high explosive shells along their front to create a diversion, allowing the Canadians to make their own landings on the far bank of the Savio.

In late 1944, the regiment crossed the Lamone River and its squadrons were involved in supporting the infantry Battalions of 6th Brigade in the attacks in and around the town of Faenza in December before wintering along the Senio River. It would be involved in supporting infantry on the front lines until early February 1945.

The regimental chaplain was appointed a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) following his efforts in organizing and evacuating wounded infantry during this phase of the war.



LEFT: SHERMAN OF 20 ARMORED REGIMENT ON THE ROAD TO TRIESTE, MAY 1945

TRIESTE AND DISBANDMENT

After a period of rest, the regiment returned to the front lines in early April. The war in Europe now dwindling to a close, it made a series of advances against the German rearguard. On 2 May, the regiment's A Company was the leading element of the 2nd New Zealand Division and entered Trieste. While most of the German garrison quickly surrendered, it was necessary to deal with some diehard elements who refused to surrender to either the New Zealanders or the Yugoslav partisans also present in the city. In fact, the partisans were reluctant to allow Germans to surrender to the New Zealanders at all.

The regiment, along with the rest of the 2nd New Zealand Division, remained in and around Trieste for several weeks to counter the presence of the partisans, who had laid claim to the city. It was not until mid-June that the partisans withdrew from the city. It would be several more weeks before it was determined by the New Zealand government that the division would not be required for service in the Pacific theatre of operations. However, the longest serving men of the regiment had been steadily

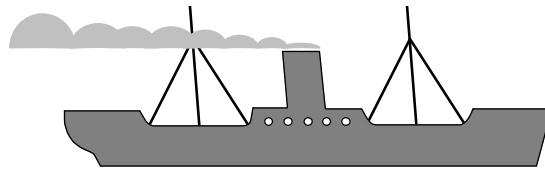
returning to New Zealand on furlough since early 1944, and most were not required to return. By the end of August, the last elements of the regiment had withdrawn from Trieste to wintering positions near Florence.

In mid-September, it was decided to send the latest reinforcement drafts, then assembling in New Zealand, to Japan to serve as an occupation force (Jay force) and that the men of 20th Regiment would not be required. This accelerated the demobilization process and accordingly 20th Armored Regiment was officially disbanded on 2 December 1945.



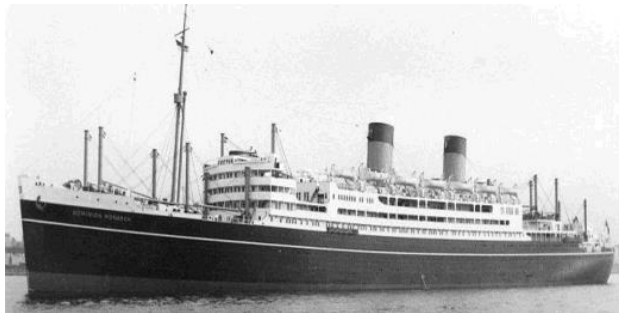
ABOVE: NEW ZEALAND SHERMAN'S

OUR SOLDIERS STORY STARTS INCLUDING COPIES OF LETTERS TO HIS MUM



After that brief overview it is time now to pick up the story of our typical New Zealand soldier and his “**20th Battalion**”.

He enlisted during September 1940 and did his military training at the Burnham Military Camp in the South Island. Our soldiers second section of the 4th Reinforcements, a total of 2301 soldiers of all ranks, left Wellington on 20 December on HMT ships *Dominion Monarch*, *Empress of Russia* and *Awatea*, arriving at Port Tewfik, Egypt on 28–30 January.



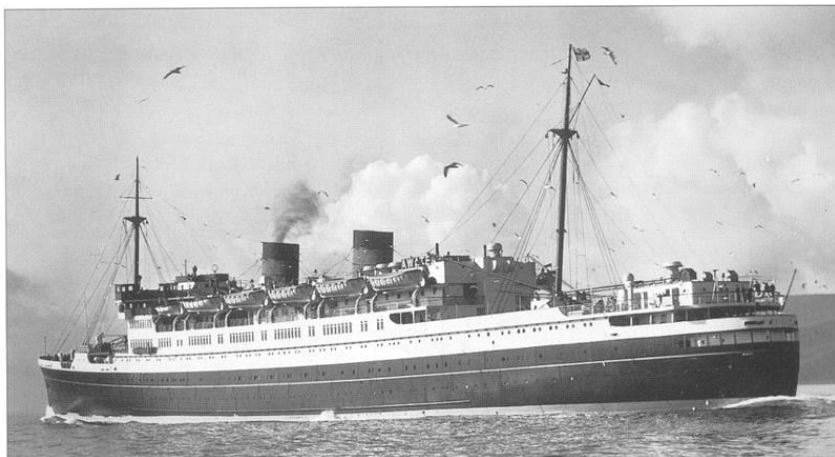
LEFT: SS. DOMINION MONARCH IN 1939

One of Shaw Savill Line's principal ships for many years was Dominion Monarch, which lived up to her regal status by having only first- class accommodation for 523 passengers. Built by Swan Hunters in the late 1930's, the 26,500-ton liner was designed for a new service from Southampton to South Africa, New Zealand and Australia.

Dominion Monarch had the distinction of being the last really big British motor liner. A quadruple-screw vessel 650 ft. long, with an 85 ft. beam, she set a new fashion by having a single mast set well forward, while her two funnels were aft of amidships. The ship had only just begun her career when the Second World War broke out and she was taken over for troopship duties. When peace returned Dominion Monarch was welcomed back to Southampton when she brought in valuable food from New Zealand. By the 1960's Shaw Savill, worried about rising fuel costs, decided to have her broken up. The last commercial voyage started from Southampton on December 30, 1961, returning the following April when all the ships in port saluted her on their whistles.



LEFT: THE EMPRESS OF RUSSIA LEAVING VANCOUVER FOR THE WAR 1939



LEFT: THE AWATEA

The glamour ships of the pre-war era were the big passenger liners. On the trans-Tasman run the Union Steam Ship Company's new 13,000 ton liner AWATEA, designed for up to 600 passengers, was the star. She held the record for the Auckland – Sydney run at an average speed of 23 knots.

Once war broke out, AWATEA, in common with other merchant ships, had a 4" (102 mm) gun mounted on her stern, manned by naval ratings known as DEMS Gunners. Her voyages extended to Vancouver, taking New Zealand airmen for training.

REFERENCE FROM HIS PERSONAL MILITARY FILE

Unit	Particulars of Report	Place	Date
D. Company. Southern Infantry	Burnham Camp	Burnham	3.10.1940
	Final Leave 18. Nov – 1. Dec	Burnham	18.11.1940
	Marched out. Foreign Service Commenced	Burnham	19.12.1940

The following letters from our soldier to his Mum and family cover the period between enlisting at Huntly, where he was working in a brick-carbonate factory and pre-arrival in Greece...

Letter One...

September 1940

Huntly

B Company 20th Battalion

Private W. E. Mold. 14756

N.Z. Expeditionary Forces

The Middle East and Mediterranean

Dear Mum,

Sorry I have not sent the kid's gumboots but I tried every shop in Huntly and they have not got any. I don't know whether I told you before, but Bert and I and another cobbler joined the Army about a fortnight ago and go up to be medical examined next Wed. I think we will pass all right seeing as we had no trouble with the Air - Force Doctor. There has been a lot of flue kicking around down here lately, everybody seems to have it. I did not go to bed. It does not seem to get me like it used to. I got a letter from Joyce at the beginning of the week and she says George Dacker's wants to buy Bess. I don't know what hacks are worth now so I think I will write and tell them to get as much as they can for her. How many pullets is Pop going to rear this year. I could sell about a hundred down here for him. One chap wants 20 or 25 if he can get them. Eddie wants 6 and a rooster and the wants you to make his a dozen. He should get an incubator. I went to a basket - ball turn - out last night in Huntly, there is about 15 teams competing and I had a good time. I play for the "Taupiri Turnip Tops". The football season is just about over down here. Huntly South the team I play for won the junior competition. We never lost a game. There will be a knock - out round and that will finish it. Bert wants me to go up the road with him now so I will post this. I don't go on till midnight ...

A COPY OF THE TELEGRAM SENT TO HIS MUM WITH THE OBVIOUS MESSAGE THAT HE HAD BEEN ACCEPTED FOR THE ARMED FORCES...

NEW ZEALAND POST OFFICE TELEGRAPHS		(Office Stamp)
TELEGRAM		
10		Received at
11/37a Huntly		12/51
J Mdd		Initials of Operator:--
Dargaville	NOTE: This Form must accompany any inquiry made respecting his Telegram.	C
<p>Flew in and carried a pig</p> <p>Bill</p>		
Tel. 142. 30,000 pads/2/39 -18597]		

Letter Two...

Burnham Military Camp, Christchurch

Sorry I have not written before this but we have been pretty busy getting our gear together and settling in our huts. We did not have much of a trip down seeing as we left Huntly Tuesday at 7 at night and did not get here till Thursday morning. They woke us up at 6.30 Wed morning for breakfast and we all had visions of bacon and eggs or something but when we got out at the station they handed us a couple of sandwiches and a cup of tea. This went on till we got to Wellington where we got a hot feed. It was pretty rough coming over on the boat. I think just about everybody was crook. I think I will like camp life all right, although I have had two days on mess duty. Yesterday we did a bit of a drill in the morning and went for a short rout march in the afternoon, about 4 miles. It was not so good in the work boots they gave us, though I don't think it worried us as much as some.

We all three are in the same platoon, but Ron is in a different hut from Bert and I. The Sarg told us last night they were going to make it tough for us next week seeing we are a fort night behind schedule. There is supposed to be a lot of Dames coming out to the camp today so we may have a bit of fun. That is about all I can think of for now so I think I will go and look up the boys ...

Letter Three...

It is over a week since I wrote, so thought perhaps I had given you the wrong address, so I wrote it out again to make sure. Camp life is great, although the last 3 days I have been on E. D. (excused duty). We all had a game of football on Wednesday, 3 or 4 heats with about 30 men aside so you can imagine what sort of a scramble it was. About 16 jokers piled onto me at one part of it and I got a bad knock on the thigh. However I hope to be at work on Monday. I don't know whether I told you before but Bert, Ron and I are in the same hut and platoon of 37 men now, so that is not so dusty, we are together all of the time. Bert and I get a lot of fun from Ron while he is writing letters. I don't know what he puts in them but he laughs and chuckles all the time he is writing them. By crikey he is a great guy, there is one chap in our hut who must of been, I think, Mummies little boy, all his life. Ron fusses round him all the time, helps him fold his blankets and helps him on with his battle dress and a hundred other things. Poor bugger, Ron says he cannot help liking him. There is a rumour going around camp that we might be going overseas before we expect. Some of the boys that were left behind from the last lot reckon that we are getting stuff that they did not get for about 3 weeks. There are about 4 places down here where you can go for the evening. Writing tables, billiard tables, papers to read, cups of tea and cakes and a dozen and one other things. There is even a picture theatre with a change of programs 3 nights a week. So you see we have always got plenty to do. Has Alex sold Bess yet? If not tell him to sell her if he can, send me half of the money. I don't want to touch what I have in Post Office till I come on final leave. You can keep half to go towards the wireless. Don't forget to remind Harold he owes me a quid, every little bit helps you know, He, He, I made a will last night so don't be surprised if you come into a few thousand one of these days. Well I reckon I have done pretty well so I will shut up now. P.S. I had some snaps taken so am sending you a couple. The other guy is Ron in case you don't know...

Letter Four...

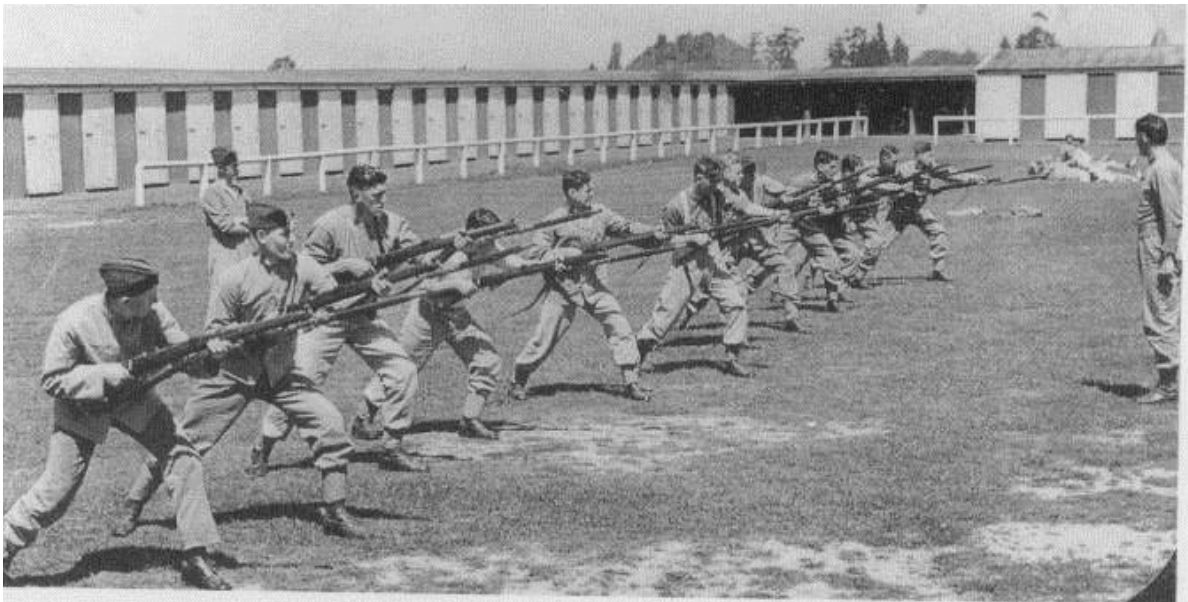
Your letter came today and I thought I had better answer it while I have a bit of time. They are keeping us going pretty steady now. Last night we were out on night manoeuvres until 9-45. To-day we have been out to the range again, and had some shooting with fixed bayonets. We all shot pretty well, I shot 21 out of a possible 25. There is going to be a big day in camp tomorrow, the Mayor is coming out and it is open to visitors. So I expect we will be on our feet all day showing them how well we can do it. We three went into Christchurch over the weekend and had a great time. Saturday night we went to a dance and Sunday I met a little girl who showed me around a bit. (Mostly parks, and gardens) You said you hoped we will still be here for Xmas, but I think we will all be out of it before then. Some of the boys are already back from their final leave, but I think I told you that before. The quid you sent me will come in handy, but I think I will have to draw a couple from the P.O. The weekend just about topped me off. You don't spend much in camp but on leave it flows like water. Well that is about the lot for this time, except I am sending you a photo of the three lads.

P.S. Don't forget to answer Ron's little note. He will think it is grand if you do ...

Letter Five...

I have got a few minutes to myself so I thought I would drop a line. They are drumming it into us now, and the rumour is that we will be on final leave next Friday, but I will believe it when I am on the train. We all went out to a firing range yesterday by truck; about 20 miles out and had a great day. We fired about 30 rounds and Bert, Ron and I all qualified. Ron is the best shot out of us three, on the five snap shots he cut the black clean out of the bull. I did not do to bad myself, 4 out of 5 bulls. Today we had the Governor General out to see us, and we all had to turn out in our glad rags and marched past him. Afterwards he wished us good luck and God speed and then did a bunk. I have not got much to say this time except my leg is just about better now, although I still have a slight limp. The drilling and lecture part of camp is O.K. but this messing about in the morning gets on our strings. I will be glad when we get overseas and have no brass to clean. They gave us our web gear the other day and it has got about a yard of brass on it. I suppose we will get used to it though. Ron said that someone had told him that the first ten years is the worst. He has just given me a note to put in with this but you don't want to believe anything he tells you, he is a mass of bulls wool. Well I think I will close now and get back to some shut eye.

P.S. Tell Molly if she finds time to drop a line ...



ABOVE: BAYONET PRACTICE. BURNHAM ARMY CAMP

Letter Six...

13 October 1940

I have not got a reply to my last letter yet but I thought I would drop you a line because we expect to be on final leave by the week end or early next week. I think it is fair dinkum this time because we have been given our sea-kits and summer-drill suits. So you can expect me home sometime next week. I don't know whether to call in at Huntly first or go straight through. I may call in there for a day going up and come back a couple of days before leaving for camp. Ron, Bert and I went to the races the other day and saw the N.Z. cup run. Ron and I had 7 bets and came out square. Not bad for beginners. It is the first race meeting I have been to in my life. Yesterday we went out and had a look at the trots but we lost 35/- (A fortnight's wages.) Bert has got a bad cold at present, but Ron and I are as fit as fiddles. This morning we were out making barb-wire entanglements and this afternoon we went for a three mile run. Every Wed arvo is sports-day; you can go for a run, box, play football, baseball or wrestle. To-morrow we go out for a final shoot at the range and Friday we get another jab with the needle. Our arms will be a mass of knobs before they are finished. I expect it is better to have them though, than get some disease overseas. Well time flies and I have got two more letters to write so I will shut up now. See you all soon...

Letter Seven...

I got your letter today and thought I would answer it and give you my real address. We have been busy to-day getting ready for our big trip. We leave camp about 4.30 and go up to Wellington tonight. I don't know when we actually go overseas but I don't suppose it will be long. I have not got the parcel yet and if it does not arrive by this afternoon it will have to be sent on. It will be just as well if it is not too big because I am just about stuck for room in my kit. I will give this to someone at the station to post if I get a chance then it won't be held back. I believe they are holding all mail for a couple of days.

So it won't be any use sending a telegram. I am writing this in the mess hour and it is just about time to fall out so I will shut up and scram...

Letter Eight...

This is the 5th letter I have written today so I will be pretty short. I just thought I would write and tell you we know for sure we won't be here for Xmas. There is 500 jokers going from Burnham and Bert, Ron, and I struck it lucky or unlucky which ever you might call it. I had my photo taken at the studio the other day so I will send them up if they are finished and if they are not I will get them to post them for me. If you get them all I will get you to send a couple to the girl. I ordered 6. Some of the boys are still coming back to camp off their final leave and they are certainly getting some stick. I am glad I got back in time although we damn near missed the boat. I am still putting on weight I am the heaviest I have been in my life. It is not so good all the same I sweat a hell of a lot more and so get more washing to do. Ron and I have had a busy time to day. We were mess orderlies at meal times and the rest of the time we have been washing and writing letters. Well I think I will go and get a milk shake now and come back and write to Joyce. She sent me a beaut fruit cake so I will save that for Xmas. I expect we will get that on the boat although we have no idea where we are going...

Letter Nine...

Just a short note to tell you my new address, because we know for sure we are going on Wednesday and I expect this will be my last chance to write. I got your parcel of my clothes to-day, but the other parcel you mentioned has not arrived yet. If you have not sent it by the time you get this, address it overseas. We had a pretty wild weekend in Town, all the boys were making the most of the last few days they have got in N.Z. We went to the welcome club Friday night for a real Xmas spread they put on for us: Lamb, green peas, new spuds and plum pudding. On Saturday we had a big parade through the streets. We left camp about 8/30 in the morning and didn't get dismissed till after 12. We got a great hearing from the crowd but we were heartily damn sick of it by the time it was all over. We hired a car on Sunday and did a tour of the Town. We went up into the Cashmere Hills and got a great view of the City. Later on in the afternoon we went out to some beach and had a swim, and for all of the hot weather we have had down here the water was still mighty cold. Well Mum there is not much to write about so I will close now and get some shut eye. I have only had about 4 hours in 3 nights.

P.S. When you get the photos send 2 to, Miss Z. Smith, Huntly West. Huntly.

EMBARKATION FOR EGYPT

Letter Ten...

On Board Ship

Just a few lines to let you know I am still in the land of the living, and fit and well. We have had a great trip so far, no rough weather at all. To-day the sea is as calm as a mill pond with hardly a ripple on it. The only thing that troubles us a bit is the heat. The sweat is running out of us all the time, even when we are sitting down. Ron and I had our hair shorn off yesterday to try and keep our heads a bit cool, and the rest of the lads reckon we look like a couple of convicts. The ship has got a swimming pool on board, and we get a quarter of an hour in it each day. It is not very big but we have a lot of fun. There is also a games deck where we do most of our drill. Once a week we go up and play anything we like, deck-tennis, golf, tug-o-war, quits, boxing and wrestling. So you see we have got plenty to keep ourselves amused. I think we will all be pleased to meet our destination though. It gets a bit monotonous seeing nothing but sea for miles around. We have seen quite a few flying fish and a few days ago one of the crew caught a fair sized shark while we were standing out of a Harbour. There seemed to be quite a few swimming around. I think everyone went down and had a gaze at it. I thought I might have got an air-mail letter before this, but I am wondering now if you got my overseas address. I wrote just before we left camp. I am hoping there will be one at our next port. Well Mum, I am about stumped for something to write about now. I cannot tell you where we have stopped, and what we have seen, until we have been in camp for a fortnight, so I will shut up now...

REFERENCE FROM OUR SOLDIERS PERSONAL MILITARY RECORDS

33rd Battalion.	Marched in Egypt	Egypt	31.1. 1941
20th Battalion	Marched in and posted to 20th Battalion	Egypt	28.2.1941

ARRIVAL EGYPT

Letter Eleven...

Maadi Camp.

8. February. 1941

We have reached our destination and settled down in Maadi camp. There is sand around for miles, but we can see part of the Nile valley and some Pyramids in the distance. We have had a few surprises since we arrived, the huts are just as good as the ones we had at Burnham, and the grub is far better than we got either in camp or on the boat. The stuff we got on board was chronic, the boys were all glad when we got ashore at the three different ports we called at to get a decent binder. There is plenty of water here also, but we don't get any hot to share and believe me it is cold. The nights are just like winter

nights at home but the days come out as hot as blazes. We had a nice bit of a sand storm the other night; it reminded me of----- the only difference is the dust is a light brown. We have been reorganized since we have been here, Bert and I are in the same Platoon but Ron has been shifted. We are all in the same Company so that is one consolation. We had leave the other day and went into Cairo. None of us were taken with it though, it is a dirty dump, and I saw a lot of things I would not have believed if I had not seen them. In the streets themselves you hardly move for kids trying to clean your boots and older natives trying to sell all kinds of rubbish. The next time we get leave I think I will go up and see some of the boys from up our way who came over in previous lots. They are in another camp some distance from us. I was talking to Jim Cloons and he was telling me all the boys from up Kaihu way are up there. We went for a 4 or 5 mile route march across the desert and I am beginning to rue the day when we will have to do 30 mls. We have got a picture show here and for every Battalion there is a wet canteen and a YMCA. Hut. We are not allowed to write about our trip over and this is all I can think of for this time ...

Letter Twelve...

I have not heard from you yet, but I will try and write once a week while we are in Maadi although there is not much news. There is a likelihood of us being shifted into our respective units in the near future. Camp life here is a lot better than I thought it would be, but the sand gets our goats some times, especially when it blows. Ron and I had a game of football yesterday but it was not much fun. We could not see the ball half the time for dust, and every time there was a scrum or we were tackled we got a mouth and nose full of sand. Half of the boys went on a 15 mile route march today, and the rest of us were out on the range. The targets were from 100 yds for a start and then went on to 200 yds. All together we fired 35 shots each. On Sunday Ron, Bert, myself and a couple of other jokers went out to the Pyramids and had a look around. We hired a guide by the name of Abdul there and he explained things to us. In the evening we went to a new club in Cairo they have started for us, and had a few drinks or two of Waitemata. We can also get N.Z. tobacco there. By the way I met Colin Baker at the Pyramids, and had a bit of a yarn with him. He told me he has chucked his stripes in but I don't know why? Most of us had a ride on a camel out there and Ron took quite a lot of photos I may be able to send you a few after a while. I have met a good few of the boys from Dargaville since I have been here and they all seem to be fit enough although some of the first jokers are beginning to think it is about time they did a bit of scrapping. I am picking we will get enough of it when we do start. Well, that is about all I can think of for this time so I will close now.

P.S. What does Pop think of the struggle now?

P.S.S. Hurry up and write...

CAIRO, EGYPT

MAADI BASE CAMP

Under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel H. K. Kippenger training commenced in the desert for our soldier and his 20th Battalion.

There were four Companies within this Battalion with *A Company* under the command of Major MacDuff, *B Company* under Captain Burrows (**our soldiers company**), *C Company* under Captain Mathewson and *D Company* under Captain Peterson. Approximately 200 soldiers per Company

These commands would change (for obvious reasons) from time to time throughout the next five years.

The initial gear issue was so outdated and inadequate it was to hinder the performance of the Battalion throughout the early part of its training. An example given was while N.Z. Engineers were demonstrating how to haul a Bren gun carrier up a cliff when they ran out of rope and left the poor Private in the carrier temporarily suspended in the air.

All men were issued with one suit of serge, a suit of denims and one of Khaki drill. Officers were equipped with revolvers, binoculars, prismatic compasses, water bottles and haversacks. Other ranks were equipped with 1908 pattern web equipment, rifles, bayonets and ammunition, with the last handed out as if it was gold.



LEFT: OUR SOLDIERS 'B COMPANY'S' CAPTAIN

'J. T. BURROUGHS' (EX ALL BLACK)

BELOW: OUR SOLDIERS B COMPANY HAVING SMOKO IN THE DESERT DURING INITIAL TRAINING

17. Early days in Maadi—a meal with B Company. My batman Brennan is on his haunches lower left.



LEFT: A TYPICAL WADI OR DESERT VALLEY (BASIN) ENCLOSED BY HILLS

AND SO A TYPICAL DAY WOULD START FOR OUR SOLDIER WITH THE FOLLOWING ROUTINE

Reveille:	0600 hrs.
Sick parade:	0615 hrs.
Breakfast:	0700 hrs.
Battalion parade:	0900 hrs.
Morning parade:	0900 - 1200 hrs.
Lunch:	1200 - 1300 hrs.
Afternoon parades:	1315 - 1600 hrs.
Tea:	1730 hrs.
Sergeants mess:	1800 hrs.
Officers mess:	1830 hrs.
First post:	2200 hrs.
Last post:	2215 hrs.
Tattoo:	2230 hrs.

Individual training with long route marches, day and night manoeuvres and shooting practice on the rifle ranges were supplemented by courses in all infantry weapons. (Bren gun, mortars, and anti-tank rifles).

Because of the occasional, boring, parade ground inspection by some military notable, parade ground standards were also given their due attention.



**LEFT: CLIMBING GEBEL MOKATTAM
DURING A ROUTE MARCH FROM
MAADI CAMP**

Recreational facilities at camp Naafis were well patronized. Through thickening clouds of smoke and to the accompaniment of the clink of 'stella' beer bottles, troops marked innumerable 'housie' tickets in quest of the coveted, but elusive 'snowball'.

Leave in Cairo with its cafes, bars, cinemas and museums, was an experience to suit all tastes. Horse races at Gezira and Heliopolis saw many New Zealand patrons, while the quaint trills and wails of cabaret singers and the shuffle of dancing feet invited the men nights of entertainment and excitement that sometimes presented the proprietors with more problems than they could handle.

Lectures and concerts also provided entertainment and also did the camp cinema, until it was smashed to the ground by irate soldiers who had been refused their money back after complaining about continual breakages and inferior films. Battalion competitions of rugby and cricket were always well represented, with N.Z. teams selected to play against South Africa and others.

By 28 February a medical inspection of all troops was complete.

With the issue of sandshoes and Tommy-guns, it was rumoured that General Freyberg's circus would be on the move.

By the 3rd March the 20th Battalion along with the balance of the N.Z. Division, had been transported to Amiriya, a bleak and dusty desert camp, situated about 12 miles from Alexandria.

The troops were housed in hastily erected tents and for the next few days carried out training in dust storms.

No leave was granted, the Naafi had sold out of beer, rations were light, the nights were cold, and the Aussies had burnt down the camp cinema.

While the Battalion was at Amiriya, the Commanding Officer (CO) issued some notes for the guidance of Section Commanders, on who fell a large share of the responsibility for maintaining the morale of their men in the monotony of a garrison role. The memorandum read...

NOTES FOR SECTION COMMANDERS

In future the Battalion will frequently be distributed in section posts to a large extent, and the maintenance of its discipline, morale, and training will be largely your responsibility.

These are some general rules you must invariably follow:

- 1/. Start the day with the same routine as in camp. Wash, shave, tidy up personal gear and bedding, clean rifles, brush clothes and equipment. Carry out personal inspection at a set hour.
- 2/. Be strictly punctual with all reliefs.
- 3/. Don't allow grousing, set an example yourself of cheerfulness and briskness.
- 4/. Keep yourself and your men tidy, haircut, clothes brushed, boots cleaned.
- 5/. The more difficult the conditions the more important this is.
- 6/. Don't allow your sentries to sit down or loll about. This only increases the danger of their falling asleep.
- 7/. When an inspection officer appears, go yourself to meet him at the entrance to your post and see that all men not resting in the tent stand to attention.
- 8/. Make certain that every man in the section, including you, can quickly deal with any Bren-gun stoppage and keep on practicing. It is madness not to be perfect in this respect.

- 9/. Insist on scrupulous cleanliness in and around your post.
- 10/. See that your men know the correct method of challenging and practice it.
- 11/. Allow no unauthorized persons inside your post.
- 12/. A soldier has to face MONOTONY, DISCOMFORT and the ENEMY. We are already at grips with the first two and if we beat them, we will have no trouble with the third.

No one was sorry to leave Amiriya for Alexandria, on or about the 12th March 1941, where the 20th Battalion embarked on the ship *The Breconshire* for their first taste of battle in Greece.

REFERENCE FROM OUR SOLDIER'S PERSONAL MILITARY FILE...

	Embarked to join Lustre Force in Greece	Middle East	12.3.1941
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GREECE CAMPAIGN

MARCH 1941



Note: Greece entered World War II on 28 October 1940, when the Italian army invaded from Albania, beginning the Greco-Italian War. The Greek army was able to stop the invasion and was even able to push the Italians back into Albania, thereby winning one of the first victories for the Allies. The Greek successes and the inability of the Italians to reverse the situation forced Nazi Germany to intervene in order to protect their main Axis partner's prestige. The Germans invaded Greece and Yugoslavia on 6 April 1941, and overran both countries within a month, despite British aid to Greece in the form of an expeditionary corps. The conquest of Greece was completed in May with the capture of Crete from the air, although the *Fallschirmjäger* suffered such extensive casualties in this operation that the Germans abandoned large-scale airborne operations for the remainder of the war. The German diversion of resources in the Balkans is also considered by some historians to have delayed the launch of the invasion of the Soviet Union by a critical month, which proved disastrous when the German army failed to take Moscow.

Apart from one storm during which the convoy sheltered by Crete, the journey across the Mediterranean was uneventful. On 15 March the troops got their first glimpse of Greece as the convoy slipped into Piraeus Harbour. The tree clad hills capped with snow rising back to rugged mountains was a huge contrast to the windblown Deserts of North Africa, and for the men from the southern parts of New Zealand, a vision of home.

Because of their already long battles with the "Fifth Columnists", the Greek people welcomed the Kiwi's with open arms and their basic good hospitality would continue throughout this campaign.

After disembarkment, the 20th Battalion made their way to a temporary camp at Hynethus, just outside Athens. Over the next few days leave was granted to all men, to give them a chance to take in the historical sites and life in Athens.

It was hard to realise that as yet Greece and Germany were not at war, but the border battles against the Italians, (*Fifth Columnists*) was evident by the presence in the streets of shabby Greek soldiers with the toes cut out of their boots to ease the pain of frost bitten feet from the cold in the mountains.

A contrast, to the striking looking Evzones in their short kilts, tasselled slippers, and long white stockings (the Greek national costume).



ABOVE: GREEK EVZONES WITH KIWI SOLDIERS

Note: Because of the short period our soldier was in Greece and the inevitable problems of transporting mail through war zones, the only two letters received by his Mum were as follows...

Letter Thirteen...

17. March. 1941

Dear Mum,

It is quite a while since I wrote and seeing I have got a bit of time to myself I thought I had best scratch a line. We are across the water from where we were and are now in a marvellous country. It is like N.Z. in a lot of ways, green paddocks and tree covered ridges. The people are great too, clean and try to do as much as they can for us. After the sand and the Wogs it is like Heaven. I would like to spend a six months holiday here. Ron and I are still together but there is a likelihood of us being split up in the next few days. We went out on leave yesterday afternoon and had a swell time. The beers just as good as Waitemata and the girls? 'Oh boy', I now know why the saying "Greek Goddesses" now. I had a feed of lamb and potatoes in Athens yesterday and it had just the same flavour as home grown stuff. I suppose it being the first I have had since leaving home made it so tasty. You don't get any butter with bread though and we have been getting margarine in camp for quite a while now. We get plenty of jam though and I don't miss it much. I am dying for a letter from home, I have only had the one and it will be awhile before I get another now seeing as we have shifted. I think the little girl has forsaken me too; I have only had a couple from her. Is Harold in the Army yet? Or have they turned him down for good. I was talking to Arthur Webster the other day before we left and he seems pretty fit although he is not as fat as he used to be. Well that is all I can think of for this time but I will write again soon when I have seen a bit more of the country.

P.S. Hurry up and write

Letter Fourteen...

Your very welcome letter arrived yesterday and I am pleased to hear your fit and well. Myself I am a box of birds. I cannot make out though why you have not had any letters from me. I have written every week since I have been over and 3 times on the trip across. We have shifted from the place I last wrote from and are now camped in some Woods away up in the country. It is a very pretty spot and it being early spring here the paddocks are green and fruit trees in blossom. We went for a short march yesterday and had a picnic in a small valley. There was a creek running through, and all along the banks were a mass of wild violets and primroses. There are no fences in this country and the farmers all live in small villages. Boys and old men herd the sheep and cattle during the day and at night they are driven home and put in stockades. I received the biscuits before I left NZ and wrote a letter the same day and told you about it. Evidently it went astray. I have not got the second one yet, but I expect it will catch up some day. The things I would like most now days are eats and tobacco. We have been getting a fair amount of bully, biscuits and marmalade lately. There are quite a lot of tortoises about here and the other day a couple of the boys had a race with them. Needless to say it was not very exciting. Ron and I were in a saloon in a small town that we were billeted in for a couple of days and one night, and some Greek soldiers were trying to teach us some

of their dances. Ron and I being in the mood got up and showed them the Palace Glide. I expect Harold is pretty wild about being called up after trying so hard to enlist with the rest of the boys. If he goes to Burnham I will most likely see him over here. Ron and I are with the SI troops. We had a bit of an accident on the way up here, the truck we were travelling in ran up a bank and tipped up. A couple of the boys were hurt a bit but nothing serious. I believe we can only get one stamp a week here, and I have already written to Zel so it may be a while before I post this. You will have to excuse this scribble but I am writing this with a pencil about an inch long. I lost the pen Molly gave to me. I am afraid this is a pretty patchy sort of a letter but I will try and do a bit better next time.

P.S. Your last letter was dated 25th Feb

17 March 1941: Preparations were made by the '20th' for the move north to take up a defensive position in the Aliakmon line.

18 March: A, B, and C Companies had their luggage loaded into two ten ton trucks. The men then marched through the streets of Athens where they received a great ovation, to the rail-siding at Rouf. The officers took up their seats in the second and third class carriages and the soldiers took up their seats on the floor of the box carriages, fifty men per carriage. The train then made its way north, through rocky gorges in mountainous country, passing Larisa where about a dozen Wellington bombers and a few Hurricanes were based. These made up the whole of the Royal Air Force in Greece, and because of this grossly miscalculation of air power by the British, the outcome of the following battles would be affected horrendously.

19 March: After arrival at Katerina C and D Companies were billeted out in houses and A and B Companies found shelter in the local theatre.

20 March: The CO left to reconnoitre the position where the 20th Battalion were to occupy. It was decided the whole of the N.Z. Division would take up a defensive position between the 19th and 12th Greek Divisions, on a line running parallel with the south bank of the Aliakmon River, running from the sea to the village of Riakia.

21 March: The 20th Battalion, with a unit transport of Lorries, moved to the rambling hillside village of Riakia. It was a rough journey over bullock tracks and through three fiords during which one vehicle overturned (with our soldier aboard), but there were no serious injuries. For the next seventeen days the 20th Battalion went to work on the stunted Oak tree ridges surrounding the small village. Priority was given to the building of fire trenches, anti-tank obstacles, wiring, and clearing scrub to provide a field of fire and lanes for patrolling.

6 April: With the signs of spring emerging through the appearance of wild flowers scattered about the village, Germany, declared war on Yugoslavia and Greece.

7 April: It was officially announced that the 2. NZEF (New Zealand Expeditionary Force) was in Greece.

Note: Because of the speed in which the Germans had beaten the Yugoslavs, their unhindered progress south created some grave concern to the British command, and so the order was given to the 20th Battalion to pack up, destroy all surplus stores and prepare to move back to the Katerini pass.

8 April: The order to retreat was given and by night they moved back.

9 April: After a very trying journey through miserable conditions of rain and snow the troops finally arrived back to the village of Lava, not far from Servia.

10 April: With two Australian machine gun platoons, and a troop of anti-tank guns, the 20th Battalion were placed on reserve behind the balance of the Allied forces at the top of the pass.

11 April: Good Friday saw a check-post established, manned by Charlie Upham's 15 Platoon out of C Company. In atrocious conditions of rain and snow, the balance of the 20th Battalion dug in weapon pits on the high ground above the road, during which D Company dug its posts in, in a cemetery, gaining firsthand knowledge of Greek burial customs.

Unchallenged enemy air attacks were observed on the Anzac and Allied troops down in the valleys, and the Greeks in Lava took to sleeping in caves above the village.

12 April: Large numbers of refugees started to stream up over the pass and back through the check-post. The remnants of an Aussie Brigade, Yugoslavs, Bulgarians and Greeks with the last carrying their boots in one hand and their rifles in the other.

Assisting Upham's platoon was a small section of Greek Military Police and a very nervous interpreter.

Because the retreating Greek soldiers only spoke Turkish, it was hard to establish if they were genuine or not, resulting with the Military police shooting some youth's and men who they thought were spies.

It was later realized that a lot of Fifth Columnists and Germans had passed through dressed as Greek soldiers.

13 April - Easter Sunday: The war finally reached the 20th Battalion, with German aircraft dive bombing 15th Platoon leaving two wounded.

14 April: During the night, the 20th Battalion were ordered forward leaving their C Company back in reserve. Under heavy machine gun fire, and several mishaps at "Hellfire Corner", the cold, tired and dirty troops eventually reached their new defensive.

15 April: This morning saw the 20th Battalion to the left of the 19th Battalion (Aussies) and New Zealand's 26th Battalion, overlooking the village of Rimnion. Together with them was one troop of 31 Anti-tank Battery and two Platoons of Aussie machine gunners.

Boundaries were clearly defined with seven medium Battery to provide fire on approaches to the 20th Battalion's front. Digging of defences was interrupted by enemy bombing and machine gunning from the air.

Enemy transport and infantry could be seen advancing across the river. Mortars were fired without any effect.

B Company observed activity on a landing field to the north-east, and it was not until much later that it was bombed by a small force of Blenheim's.

16 April: D Company patrols were unable to make contact with the Battalions to the left. They had withdrawn during the night without leaving a message.

Enemy infantry could be seen pouring over the river, and so D Company was withdrawn because its position was now exposed on the left flank.

That evening orders were received for the 20th Battalion to move back to their old position at Lava. By this time the road was full of bomb craters and in the pitch dark this made transporting very difficult.

Towels were hung from the rear of trucks as marks for the drivers following in the blackout. The rifle Companies experienced their toughest march to date, having to cross country to dodge "Hell Fire Corner" and after 8 hours arrived back in the old area exhausted.

17 April: Headquarters was moved into the village and at 11 am. The CO was summoned to Brigade HQ. The left flank of the Allies was in danger of being encircled owing to the fast drive south by the enemy and so all Brigades would withdraw south and dig in on the Thermopylae line. Here it was hoped to regroup and hold the enemy back on this line from coast to coast.

The 20th Battalion would take over the rear guard and demolish the road and bridges as they retreated.

During the afternoon transport would attempt to move south to Molos. The way was very slow, with traffic jams and constant bombing from above. Aircraft spotters travelled on the top of all vehicles.

At 8 pm the retreat of all Brigades began. D and B Companies went into position astride the road to check the troops through while C and A Companies took up positions to provide flank guards on the spurs above the road.

18 April: It was not until 8 am of this morning that the rear guards of the 20th were able to withdraw.

Under extreme pressure from the enemy it had taken all night for the Brigades to retreat.

Battalions had split up and small pockets of men were making their way back the best way they could after fierce individual battles with the enemy. Because of daylight it was with some concern that Kippenger finally gave orders for his men to retreat and demolish the road on the way.

Harassed by enemy planes and tanks at the cross roads to Mount Olympus the 20th Battalion received many casualties.

It was difficult to move with speed because of two factors.

One: The terrible road discipline from the previous retreating troops had left discarded transport scattered all over.

Two: The RAF or as "*Rare as Fairies*" as they were nicknamed had failed to give adequate air support.

18-20 April: Wally Kember, of the Bren-gun carrier Platoon, gives an account of this period...

Stand-to duties with Bren gun covering positions, overlooking the embussing area. All night in rain. Enemy attempting to bomb road below us and the hill we were on, little harm done as most of the shells landed in a stream. Early morning call to abandon positions and retreat. German tanks hot on pursuit and at Larissa we got the works good and proper. Bombing and strafing until dark. After Larissa we ran into various units - Tommies - Royal Engineers - Machine Gunners - Royal Artillery - Medical - Australian and the Armoured Division all with the same idea - get the hell out as fast as possible. Once Jerry Air Force approached it was a mad rush, trucks two and three abreast with tanks mixed in. Villages were bombed something terrible, but the storks still stuck to their nests. Made camp about midnight: Third night on end without sleep. Worst day ever spent in my life. Left camp at about 6 am and arrived Molos area 9.30 am after running the gauntlet for 27 hours, over 127 miles, on a Bren-gun carrier...

During the day and night, trucks continued to straggle into Skarfia, near Molos.

For the next two days the 20th Battalion rested in a beautiful spot, engaged in some coast watching as stragglers arrived by road and boat across the Gulf of Lamia.

The main task for the N.Z. Division was to defend the Thermopylae Pass, and during this time the enemy constantly bombed and strafed the coast road.

21 April: The 20th Battalion were ordered to take up a defensive position from Karia village to Cape Knimis.

At dusk, A and C Companies moved up on to higher ground. B Company moved down to the beach and D Company stayed put in mobile reserve. Next morning, after A and C Companies had scaled their precipitous heights and expended considerable energy hauling up ammunition, they received orders from Brigade which said, "*Owing to the capitulation of the Greeks, all British forces were to withdraw from Greece*".

22 April: Four Infantry Brigades would move south during the night to Thebes, near Kriekouki, to cover the withdrawal of the New Zealand and Australian troops.

All surplus gear was to be destroyed, including blankets, winter underclothing, cooking utensils, gas respirators and bicycles.

During the early evening the 20th moved back to a bivouac area north of Thebes.

23 April: Men and vehicles remained hidden in the olive groves, successfully avoiding observation from enemy planes.

Note: At 8 pm the 20th Battalion moved back to the summit of the Kriekouki pass and took up positions on the left, with the 18th Battalion on the right and the 19th Battalion in reserve. All New Zealand Battalions:

The ground was too rocky for digging, but where ever possible stone Sangers were built.

Water was scarce with the only well some distance from the road. The long treks for water were frequently interrupted by enemy aircraft.

24 and 25 April: It was originally planned to hold the pass for two days, thus enabling the other forces to reach the evacuation beaches at Theodhora, but because of the lack of air cover the Navy had decided to embark troops from the Peloponese. So consequently, the New Zealand Battalions were ordered to hold the Kriekouki pass for another day. It became known as the *"Twenty-four hour Pass"*.

26 April: Rifle Companies were engaged in rear guard action. Explosions could be heard in Thebes with columns of enemy vehicles seen entering the town from the east and west.

At 11 am. They saw a reconnaissance party of about 100 vehicles and tanks leave Thebes and approach the pass. The CO was hoping that he and his men would ambush them, but he couldn't get a message through to HQ in time before the Artillery opened up and scattered them.

While this skirmish was taking place the enemy had successfully parachuted into Corinth and now controlled the Isthmus to the Peloponnese.

General Freyberg then decided to embark the troops at Porto Rafti, three miles to the east of Athens.

At 8.30 pm the New Zealand Battalions started their retreat on foot to their transport some 8 miles away.

The 20th Battalion again took up the rear guard and controlled demolitions. On arrival at transport the men were issued with rum, the Battalions first rations in several days, and from here they were ordered to waste no time in driving to Athens and then to the village of Markopoulon, 3 miles beyond.

Note: The drive, under headlights, will be remembered as the wildest they had yet experienced.

27 April: Awaking to much confusion as to how many Battalions were left on Greece and the whereabouts of the embarkation parties, the Brigade Commander finally regained some order and decided that the force he had left was inadequate to take Athens.

He then gave the command to the Battalion leaders to take immediate occupation of a defensive position east of the village of Markopoulon.

New Zealand's 18 and 20 Battalions would advance forward with 19 Battalion remaining back in reserve near the beach.

All guns were to be ready for an anti-tank role.

While passing through the village to their positions a Squadron of fighter bombers suddenly appeared, viciously blasting the village and the marching column, leaving several civilian casualties with 'B Company' our soldiers Company losing some twenty men wounded or killed.

The villagers as a final unselfish gesture insisted that the wounded troops be treated before their own.

For the men of the 20th this day would feel like the longest day of their lives, but fortunately for them, the enemy by this time were under the impression that all British troops had abandoned their vehicles and had fled on foot to the coast and so therefore, no battles were engaged.

28 April: By 2 am. The 20th had slipped back through the enemies none too eager fingers and were being transported from the beach by tank landing craft to the cruiser *Ajax* and the destroyer *Kingston*.

The men felt extreme relief as they departed for Crete, but also a deep concern for those they were leaving behind.

And so ended the campaign in Greece for the 20th Battalion: They had covered the retreat of the Brigade without at any time relaxing its standard of discipline.

Note: In military circles, the role of a rear-guard position is one of the greatest tests of a units discipline and morale.

CONCLUSION FOR THE BATTLE FOR GREECE

To fight back when the odds are more or less even is a perfectly normal measure but during a battle in the small seaside town of Kalamata, a small group of the 20th Battalion, who had been separated from their Battalion, had fought back against extremely uneven odds.

This small group of the 20th Battalion and a small band of Australians, armed only with rifles and bayonets, grenades, a few machine guns and the pathetic boy's anti-tank rifles had recaptured the town from the advanced guard of a German Panzer Division. This division was equipped with machine guns, mortars, and two field guns.

Recapturing this town ranks as an infantry action of the highest order and it was during this battle that the defiant heroism of Jack Hinton from of the 20th Battalion, was fittingly rewarded the Victoria Cross.

THE 20TH BATTALIONS CASUALTIES OUT OF 800 ODD MEN ON GREECE WERE

- Killed in action. 24
- Wounded. 45
- Prisoner of war including 11 wounded. 80
- (All but three of these survived the War).
- Total: 149 casualties

Note: It should be remembered that the British Forces on Greece had very little air cover and were outnumbered by 5 Enemy soldiers to their 1.

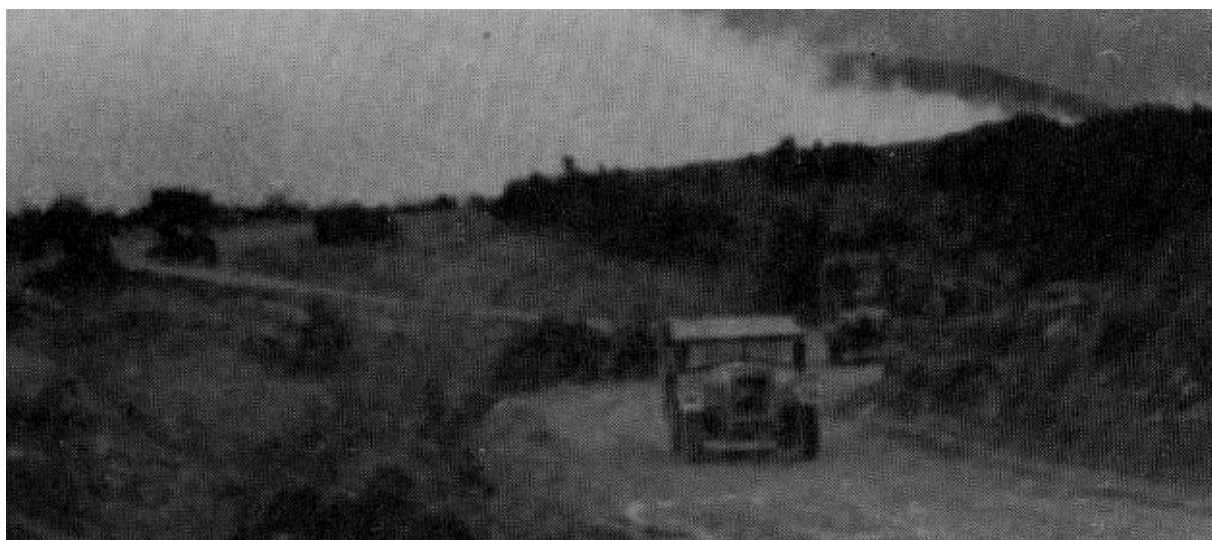
REFERENCE FROM OUR SOLDIER'S PERSONAL MILITARY FILE

Nominal Roll 20th	Reported safe in Crete	Middle East	18.5.1941
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BELOW: THE NEW ZEALAND DIVISION CATCHING THE TRAIN FOR ALEXANDRIA IN NORTH EGYPT AND THEN BY BOAT TO GREECE



BELOW: RETREAT THROUGH THE MIST COVERED SERVIA PASS ¹





LEFT: LOOKING TOWARDS KATERINI FROM THE MAORI BATTALION POSITIONS AT OLYMPUS PASS

BELOW: KIWI MACHINE GUNNERS IN GREECE





LEFT: KIWI SOLDIERS UNDER THE MANTLE OF GREEK MOUNTAINS.



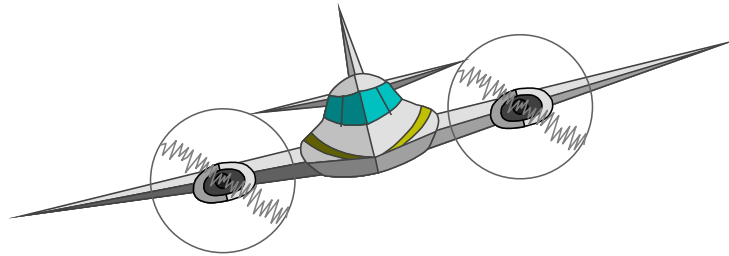
LEFT: KIWI AND GREEK SOLDIERS



BELOW: NZ HOSPITAL FOR GREEK AND CRETE CAMPAIGNERS

CRETE CAMPAIGN

APRIL 1941



Note: Before continuing on with our soldier and his Battalion's story with their retreat from Greece to Crete and the continuing battles against the Germans and their allies I thought it would be appropriate to give an account of this time from another typical New Zealand soldier. He was interviewed sometime after the battle of Crete...

HIGH NOON - MEDITERRANEAN STAND OFF

Tony Madden was only twenty when war broke out. In order to get around The New Zealand government's policy of not allowing men to go overseas until they were twenty-one, Tony lied about his age to be accepted into camp.

In camp Tony joined the Army Service Corps (ASC) as a truck driver. The training facilities in New Zealand were nowhere near adequate. Most of what was available was antiquated equipment left over from WW1.

Ammunition and Petrol was scarce and this had a great impact on the ASC, severely limiting their abilities to make adequate preparations. The shortage of ammunition meant that the infantry units took priority and as a result Tony went to war having fired five shots with a Lee Enfield 303 on the range, one burst of five and three single shots with the Bren gun. While in camp Tony's lie about his age was discovered. Tony had to obtain written permission from his mother. Tony ended up departing New Zealand with the 4th Reinforcements who were late getting into camp because the 3rd. Echelon was delayed due of an outbreak of measles.

In March 1941 they joined the rest of the New Zealand Division and embarked on the ill- fated defense of Greece. The Germans swept through Greece in a matter of weeks and the Allied Forces withdrew after destroying their equipment. Tony ended up on Crete and was incorporated into a composite Battalion that consisted of gunners with no artillery, truck drivers with no trucks and men who were not trained for the kind of battle that they were about to face...

Patrick: *The Luftwaffe spent a good couple of weeks softening up Allied positions, how do you remember the intensity of their preparations prior to the airborne invasion of Crete?*

Madden: On the morning of the 20th there, it was just on breakfast time. Me and a mate we were on guard duty up on the top, or look out duty. You could hear this great horde of aircraft engines in the distance, coming in, the blooming place was dark with them.

They started off with a whole horde of Messerschmitt fighters, they came up and they strafed up all the valleys and the ridges. The Stuka's were with them too, and they bombed everything that they could see in sight. They did that for about half an hour or so. Then it got nice and quiet, and then the troop carriers came in and dropped their paratroopers.

From then it was all on.

Patrick: *Were any paratroopers dropped over the area where you were stationed? Were you close enough to shoot the Germans as they were floating down?*

Madden: I suppose a lot of them were killed on the way down; there can be no doubt about that. They didn't actually come down where I was they were mostly further over towards Maleme and Galatas. There were a few isolated patches. It wasn't until later that I actually came up against them.

Patrick: *When was it that you first made contact with the enemy? Did you feel that the training you received prepared you for the close order fighting that occurred during the Battle for Crete?*

Madden: I'd been given a truck to take some supplies up to Maleme. When I got there they had taken some prisoners that needed to be dealt with. I think there were about four prisoners that had to go down to the prison camp. They gave me a couple of guards and these four prisoners to load into the truck and I took them down to the MP's. (Military Police)

I was on my way back again and I thought I'd go up into this village, to pick up my guitar; we'd been there before so I knew the village pretty well.

I left the truck down in the olive groves at the foot of the village and made my way into the village. I was walking up this street and I saw this chap standing in a doorway. The German uniform was very similar to the Greek Police uniform in as much as their trousers and the colour were the same. The Greek police also carried German Mauser rifles.

I wasn't sure about this fellow, whether he was a Greek policeman or not, so I called out "Hey Greek" and he came out into the open and it was a blessed German! Well ... hells teeth (Ha Ha) he was as surprised as I was you know. I just stood there and looked at him and he stood there and looked at me, I suppose that would be for about three seconds, it may even have been shorter than that but it seemed longer.

I've got to give him his due, he came to himself quicker than I did, and as soon as he moved I moved too. Then I put into practice the only piece of rifle drill that I ever took. I think it probably saved my life. It's the action where you're carrying your rifle in your right hand, and you threw it forward and caught it with your left. At the same time you threw yourself forward and assumed the prone position and you broke your fall with your right arm as you went down. This left you in the position where you were ready to take aim and fire, only my rifle didn't fire. I went to work the bolt to put one (bullet) up the spout and the bloody bolt wouldn't work then I remembered I was carrying the thing half-cocked because that was the safest way to carry it. I pulled the pin back and it was cocked and I took a shot. He'd already got away a shot at me and missed. I took a shot at him and missed, and I thought "Ah God" ... He fired another shot and I got another one away at him and missed again! His third shot didn't miss, that was the one that got me in the leg! I had my third shot ready to fire and he ducked back into the doorway that he'd come out of. I was just thinking about moving backwards and getting myself out of this situation and a second German appeared in the opposite doorway! He ran across to him and I had a pot shot at him as he went across. I missed him too, as far as I know because it never seemed to make any difference to him.

I thought "Well, Hells Teeth, I'd really better get out of here now before I really get into trouble!" I was just working my way, crawling backwards, towards the corner that I had come around and a third German popped his head up around about ten yards or so further on! He'd been behind a wall! I let one go at him

and I missed him too, made him duck though! Then I just threw caution to the wind, got up and ran round the corner and down to my truck.

Patrick: *Which German hit you?*

Madden: Hit by the first one.

Patrick: *How did that feel when you got hit? Did it immobilize you?*

Madden: Well, it's just like someone had given your boot a good kick you know! Didn't hurt at the time but hurt later on, that's when. It was just as though someone had given you a good hefty kick on the boot. Got back up to Maleme, or near enough, and got out of the truck. I couldn't stand the pain in my leg wouldn't let me stand. The chaps made a cradle, they joined their arms together and made a seat for me to sit in, I put my arms around their shoulders, they carried me up to the RAP (Regimental Aid Post) and that was that.

I was bandaged up and put on a stretcher and put down behind a little bit of a hollow, I think I had been given an injection of some sort and somebody had given me a cigarette and I think I went to sleep. They said that I would go down to the hospital ship coming in that night, and that I'd go down and be put on the ship.

Night came and went. I woke up the next morning and I was still there! They'd missed me in the dark! From there they took us into **Chanìa** and put us into an old building, I think it was a flour mill or something. We were there for maybe six days, and that was pretty harrowing there, there were some pretty close calls with the bombing. Fortunately they never got my building.

They bombed that town pretty thoroughly, for about six days we were there. There were some pretty close ones, and I remember the door being blown in at one stage and the place being filled up with dust.

There was a dirty great beam, it must have been about 18 inches square, right above me, and I thought 'God! This would be lovely if that comes down!' But, fortunately they never got a hit on the building. One night we were taken from there and out round the coast to a little village called **Kalyves** and we were put down in an olive grove.

Patrick: *Were you taken prisoner at this point?*

Madden: No, I was taken prisoner the next day and the war just sort of carried on. We'd been put into an olive grove, and just over the road from there was a school that had been taken over by an Australian Medical Unit and it was working as a hospital. In the evening of that day they took us across and put us under the control of the Australian doctor in charge.

Patrick: *Were you able to walk? How would you describe the conditions at the RAP?*

Madden: No, I was on my hands and bum as it were. With all the wounded that were coming in there, the place was chock-a block. They had erected a great big canvas awning on one side of the building that covered in a courtyard like a lean-to, and that's where they put the stretchers. So that's where I ended up. It must have been about the 27th or so.

The next day was fairly quiet, and the Australian doctor and his Orderlies, said that the whole show was pretty well finished, and that they expected to surrender any time. We were told that if we had any German souvenirs or things like that, that we should get rid of them because the Germans would accuse you of robbing the dead.

I did have one of those paratroopers' rings that I handed in, which I had swapped with one of those prisoners that I had had, because he'd had a ring and I liked the look of it, so I thought well, it's a souvenir I'll send it home. I didn't take it off him because I thought I'd make an exchange. I thought I would ask him if I gave him my ring, and he'd swap it for his. That didn't work out, I didn't have that souvenir to send

home after all because I handed it in.

It happened next morning. By this time I'd been getting around by using my hands and my bum, I could move myself that way, and I'd been around the other side of the building and a young German paratrooper came around and had a look, that was it, he just looked at us and went away and that was that. Shortly after that we knew then that we were prisoners, and we were issued little cards to sign. They were pre-printed, it just said that "I am a prisoner of war, I am in good health, I am okay" or words to that effect you know and you signed it and they went to Geneva and then from Geneva they were sent to NZ and from there posted through to our next of kin. And so that was that, I was a prisoner-of-war. Shortly after that we heard that Japan had come in and bombed Pearl Harbour and that America was at war. The only good thing out of that was that it brought America in and we weren't fighting the war by ourselves. But unfortunately, it also made you worry about your people at home too, because we thought New Zealand was pretty vulnerable.

Note: 671 New Zealanders were killed in the Battle for Crete. Another 967 were wounded. Tony was one of 2180 other Kiwis taken prisoner.

OUR SOLDIERS WAR CONTINUES...

28 April, continues: At 8.30 am while the men were awaking, *Ajax* slipped into Suda Bay sailing past a cluster of ships, some afloat and some resting on the shallow bottom. Tying up alongside a tanker the troops then disembarked onto shore, Aussies and British to the left and Kiwis to the right. Counted through a gate they then walked in their own time to an Olive grove about a mile away. Here they were able to rest and receive a welcome cup of tea, bread, cheese, an orange, chocolate and a few cigarettes from a British field kitchen. Seven miles further on the 20th Battalion finally regrouped in a bivouac area and after light rations settled down for the evening, some with blankets and some without.

29 April: After an arms inspection parade the day was spent quietly, resting, cleaning firearms and taking cover from the Luftwaffe. During the day Colonel Kippenger was transferred from the 20th Battalion to assume Command of the 4th Brigade with Major Burrows taking over Kippenger command of the 20th.



LEFT: COAST BETWEEN CANIA /KHANIA AND MALAME.²
NOTICE THE OLIVE TREE GROVES

² MAJOR IRWIN 1941.



LEFT: KHANIA CRETE. MAY 1941 CORPORAL GOODALL

30 April: The 20th moved to positions in Olive groves south-east of Galatas, and because of the shortage of entrenching tools dug in on each side of Prison Valley road with their bayonets and steel helmets.

A ship bringing tools had been sunk in Suda Bay so our soldiers had to use whatever was available.

Shorts, shirts and boots of the long narrow Indian pattern were issued and each man finally had one blanket.



LEFT: ALLIED TROOPS ARRIVING AT SUDA BAY CRETE 27TH APRIL 1941

1-12 May: During this period the men lived in section groups, cooking in improvised utensils over fires of olive branches, or furniture from deserted houses. Local supplies were scarce, but they were able to buy oranges, eggs, a little bread, potatoes, dried fruits and a very cheap wine, of which the taste soon became acquired and cultivated. There was a depressing shortage of tobacco and so smoking was limited. One of the locals had a radio and much interest was taken in the German propaganda broadcast which said -----
"The Kiwis are now beneath the Olive groves of Crete and beneath those trees will meet their doom" A syllabus of training began, with bayonet practice and arm maintenance the chief activities.

13 May: The 20th handed over its position to 6 Greek Regiment and moved to a position west of Canea. Here it took over from the 1st Battalion of the Welsh Regiment. The Battalion Companies manned the ridge from the sea back to Seven General Hospital and spent the next few days on look out and patrolling at night. A composite Company also spent a few days running communication wire for the 6th Greek regiment.



LEFT: 4 BRITISH AUSTRALIAN NEW ZEALAND TROOPS
DISEMBARK AT SUDA BAY CRETE APRIL 1941



LEFT: NZ TROOPS IN THE TRANSIT AREA BETWEEN CANEA
AND GALATOS ON ARRIVAL FROM THE GREEK MAINLAND



LEFT BELOW: 2 NZEF SOLDIERS RESTING IN A STREET IN CRETE
1941.

14 May: A composite Brigade was formed consisting of the 20th Battalion, 6 and 8 Greek Regiments, a composite Battalion of ASG and gunners acting as infantry, a Division Cavalry detachment of three Squadrons armed with rifles and bren-guns, a Platoon and half of machine-gunners from the 27th Battalion and a battery of 5 Field Regiment armed with three Italian 75-millimetre guns without sights and very little ammo. This composite Brigade was called the 10th under the command of Kippenger. During the day the Kiwi Concert Party and 4 Brigade Band arrived from Egypt along with a huge load of parcels and mail from home.

1-19 May: During this period it became very evident that the enemy were about to invade Crete. Extreme air attacks were launched against Maleme airfield to the north and Suda Bay. Several British fighters set off to intercept but all were shot down and so were all the ships in Suda Bay. Not one was left afloat.

20 May: At 7.45 am. The Blitz begins. For an hour all life and communication was paralysed by the roar of aircraft engines, the blast of bombs, cannon and machine gun fire. Suddenly there was silence, but not for long. From the west could be heard a drone, increasing in volume as hundreds of planes filled with paratroopers approached the Island. The invasion was about to begin.

The British and allied troops were spell bound. They soon realized the significance of this amazing sight as the Dornier's and Junkers, towing up to six gliders a piece, started to disgorge their loads of Paratroopers into the air. For quite a while the sky from Suda Bay, north to Maleme airfield was full of them. About this time it was rumoured that the Germans were wearing British battle dress and so runners were sent out to each unit with orders for the men to all change into shorts. This rumour was later discovered to be incorrect.

The day ended with most of the Paratroopers landing outside the 20th's perimeter, but those who landed within the Kiwi sector suffered heavy casualties. The day ended however, with some success for the enemy. They forced the NZ 22nd Battalion off Maleme airfield and also took control of the British No 7 Hospital.

21 May: Another severe blitz begins at 6.25. All day, troop carriers landed at Maleme, while other planes dropped stores, equipment, armed carriers and motor-cycles. As a reserve unit the 20th Battalion could do nothing but watch. Patients from No 7 hospital were caught up in the battle lines. There were no rations for them and many had dysentery. The enemy were expected to make a sea invasion at night and so the 20th Battalion were ordered forward to join 5 Brigade and make a counter attack on Maleme airport. Before they moved in the Navy would shell the drome, then the RAF would bomb it. After the Navy and Air force had finished their tasks the infantry of the 20th and the 28th (Maori) Battalions would move in.

The 20th were to advance up the coast side of the Maleme airport road and the Maori the other. All of this was to take place at about 1 am the following morning.

22 May: It was not until 3.30 am before C and D Companies from the 20th were in position on the start line ready to move forward. There had been many hold ups. The relieving Australian Battalion was over five hours late, they had been shot up badly from the air, the promised air support had not bombed the aerodrome and the Navy were busily engaged in repulsing the German sea borne invasion. Because of the time factor involved for the 20th Battalion to be at their objective before daylight, the position became desperate and so the CO, decided to advance with C and D Companies. A and B Companies, B being our soldiers Company were guided to the start line and were to follow the others in a mopping up role.



LEFT: GERMAN PARATROOPERS WAITING TO EMBARK ON JUNKERS-52 TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT FOR THE INVASION OF CRETE.³

Three light British tanks gave cover fire from the road, but were soon put out of action, and so the men fixed bayonets, moved forward and soon found themselves amongst the enemy. From in front, on either side, and sometimes from behind came streaks of fire, but the

tracer, gave the enemies position away, enabling the men to move in close and eliminate with grenades. The machine-gun fire was terrific and combined with the unearthly din from Tommy-guns, pistols, grenades and the shouts and screams of men it was like nothing they had ever heard before. Through the dark the men pressed resolutely on, meeting resistance in depth, in ditches, behind hedges, in the top and bottom stories of houses and in fields and gardens along the road.

Private M. Hill-Rennie of C Company gives his account of the battle...

As extreme, left, flank man, it was my job to see that no Hun's got through behind us down the road. Suddenly a machine gun nest opened up from 50 yards taking 4 of our boys. We went to ground and watched the tracer coming towards us. The explosive bullets went off in a shower of flame and smoke as they hit the Olive trees. Very soon we were ordered to crawl forward on our stomachs and take the nest which was tucked in behind a large tree. At 20 yards we opened up with cover fire, while the Platoon Officer, Lt Upham, sneaked around to one side and then with the aid of three Mill's bomb's and his revolver took the nest single-handedly. The result was, 8 dead, with 2 hobbling away. We got them later.



LEFT: GERMAN JUNKERS JU-52 DROPPING PARATROOPERS ON CRETE.⁴

As we reformed our line, I could hear shouting down at the beach, as more of our boys dealt with other nests. Dawn was approaching as we moved forward and approached a house near the road. Jerry opened up from the windows and an outhouse to the rear. Upham dashed forward, again under our cover fire, until he was at the rear of the house. Taking a Mill's bomb from his pocket he calmly moved to the door of the outhouse and placed it in the out stretched hand of a dead soldier. 'Take that you B-----ds' he said as he moved back, and after the explosion we rushed forward. There were 8

³ PHOTO FROM CAPTURED FILM

⁴ E. K. S. ROWE 1941

wounded inside, and a further 6 rushed out of the house with their hands raised. We waited for the stretcher bearers and then moved on. To the left, across the road, we could hear the war cries from the Maori's as they forged ahead. All along the line right down to the beach we ran into heavy fire as Jerry retreated back to the Drome. Soon we were in the village of Maleme, and blasting our way from one house to the next, wiping out one nest after another, while the snipers kept up a constant, deadly fire.

At one house the Hun had set up a captured British Bofors gun in behind a well. I gave covering fire to Lt Upham as he crept forward on his stomach and then took the gun out with a Mill's bomb. We carelessly ran forward and stood up behind the battered gun and the dead Jerry. At that moment a sniper opened up from the house, taking out the Kiwi on my right with a bullet in the head and wounding the Maori on my left with one in the stomach. I made a dash across the road and half way, tripped and fell flat onto my face. For five agonizing minutes I lay still like a corpse, and then he fired at me with the bullet pinging into the road under my knee. I lay still for a further 20 agonizing minutes and then sprung up and dived into the ditch where his bullets couldn't reach me. I waited for a while and then wriggled down the ditch and re-joined my outfit...

Our soldiers B Company, in extended formation "like a hair drive" had engaged in many individual battles along the coast and at first light found itself close to D Company. The majority of the enemy had withdrawn to the far end of the aerodrome and was covering the area with heavy machine-gun fire. Planes were now coming over at tree top level and were strafing up and down the lines. B Company's position was not pleasant. There was no shelter under the Olive trees and the scrub and vines were too low. The bamboo was close but some of the tracks through it were wired and booby-trapped. The Captain sent a runner back to HQ for instructions and by this time it was obvious that it was going to be impossible to take the drome. Orders were sent out to all Companies to withdraw to the hills and move in behind 28 Battalion. By this time however the 20th Battalion were scattered along the coast line and getting a message through to them all was very difficult. By mid-morning however some of the men who remained standing made their way back up a creek bed leading into the hills and took up positions in the 23rd NZ Battalions area, overlooking Maleme airport.

An excerpt from Charlie Uphams book 'The Mark of the Lion' best describes this period of the battle as follows ...

The men of the 20th and Maori Battalions had done their best but Burrows had feared it was hopeless from the start. Now he knew that nothing more could be done. Any movement from cover was drawing murderous fire. If he attempted to press the attack any further he would gain nothing and probably sacrifice the rest of the 20th Battalion.

He accepted the inevitable - that he could not now capture the Maleme airdrome.

He had to withdraw his Companies from their exposed positions to higher ground inland.

Runners had to go out to the Companies telling them where to assemble, the points to make for in the hills.

But it was a question how many messages would get through.

There was no contact with either D Company or our soldiers B Company out near the sea. They could not be left there. Somehow word had to be got through to them, even though the man who took the message would have to run a gauntlet of gun fire.

All the radios were out.

Number 15 Platoon of C Company was close by Battalion Head-quarters.

Burrows moved over to them, found Upham behind a wall. He told him the position, said that word had to get a cross to the Companies on the beach.

He wanted Upham's platoon to do it.

"Send two very good men Charlie" he advised. "They'll have their work cut out to get through"

"Right" Upham replied shortly "We'll fix it".

He peered cautiously over the wall looking at the expanse of open ground stretching between his positions and where D and B Companies were thought to be over towards the drone.

It would be about half a mile across to them and under fire the whole way. Whom would he send?

Burrows said later that he knew this was a hazardous mission. But it had to be done.

The enemy were everywhere, the exact location of our own men uncertain.

Upham crawled over to Sergeant Dave Kirk "The finest soldier I ever knew" Upham would later describe him.

He told Kirk what was required. They discussed the best route. Any route was as dangerous as another. Then Kirk said: "Who's going, boss?" Upham was busy checking his pistol, seeing how many grenades he had left. His reply was almost absent – minded. "I'm going myself of course, Dave" he said "It's a bit dicey for anyone else, though. Don't know who to send"

"Let's get started", Kirk suggested.

Upham looked at him and grinned. "I thought you'd say that".

The two men set off from Pargos, striking north-west towards the drone. They were both highly skilled in the art of movement and use of ground. They needed every ounce of it. Through the vines and the trees, dashing across the gaps, darting from cover to cover as the bullets came at them from all directions; they dodged and crawled their way forward. The countryside seemed to be whipped with fire.

They saw two of the enemy crouched in a ditch a little distance ahead. They had to go along that ditch. They had brought a Bren with them. With one long burst they cleared the way.

On and on across no man's land, until at last they broke out of the bushes and found the airstrip beneath their feet. There, right on the edge, two New Zealanders lay dead, mute proof that some of the Kiwi's had penetrated to the limit.

They skirted the edge of the field, right out to the beach. They found some of our soldiers B Company's men there and passed on the orders. But D Company, under Maxwell, had already realized the hopelessness of the position and had wisely retired back along the coastline already.



Mortar and machine- gun fire was all around them, planes were zooming down on to the drone and there was great enemy activity.

LEFT: GERMAN PARATROOPERS DESCEND ON CRETE 1941

They started the journey back...

Charles Upham later said, "Given another hour, the 20th could have reached the far end of the drome" But the precious hour and more that had been lost before the attack began and the grim fighting throughout the approach imposed further delays that sealed the fate of the battle. For the remainder of the day the men took what shelter they could from the never ending barrage of Mortars, and watched the continuous flow of enemy troop carriers delivering, as it seemed, a never ending supply of soldiers and equipment. About dusk, after some heavy strafing, the enemy attacked a ridge held by the Maori, to the left of the 20th Battalion.

Colonel Burrows describes the action...

The Jerry's gave the ridge all they had with MG and Mortar fire and then attacked with rifle and bayonet. I gathered what available men I could and prepared for a counter attack if required. The Maoris did not believe in waiting and as soon as the enemy were within 20 to 30 yards they charged down the hill yelling and shouting. Soon there was silence and I was not sure whether we had won or lost. It was not long before I heard, though, "Don't waste bullets on the B-----ds". Finally I could relax, disperse my men and settle down and prepare for a long night...



LEFT: GERMAN PARACHUTES HUNG UP IN OLIVE TREES NEAR GALATOS 1941

23 May: 5 Brigade had suffered heavy casualties, the men were considerably exhausted and so it was decided with the approval of General Freyberg that 28 Maori Battalion would withdraw to its former area,

with 23 and 21 NZ Battalions occupying areas to the east. The 20th Battalion would withdraw back through Platanias as a reserve, to a position north of Galatas. Here they would regroup and come under the command of 4 Brigade, again.

Colonel Burrows describes this time...,

I honestly could not see how we would last another day. At 4.30 am word came through to go to a conference with the rest of 5 Brigade leaders. I reached them in the dark after 10 minutes and learned we were to retreat at once to Platanias. A message I felt, should have been delivered at 10 pm. We were lucky to get it at all. A Battalion fully equipped should carry portable wireless sets. We had none, but the Germans, had plenty of them. I sent word to the Platoon leaders to fall back with the units they were attached to and then reform in Platanias. Because of approaching light we decided to withdraw across the higher ground, it would be more difficult but the men would have cover from the air. We moved in small groups with some coming under machine-gun fire and some by planes. On arrival I reported to Brigadier Harvest and learned from him that mixed groups who had withdrawn the previous day were now in position guarding the bridge into the village. However the 20th Battalion had orders to get back to Galatos, seven miles away and so A and D Companies were sent on. As I was waiting with what remained of B and C Companies the German planes started a blitz on the village, next I received a message from the Brigadier to say that an attack from the Germans was developing and I was to take charge of all troops in the area and organise them for defence. I quickly belted B (our soldiers Company) and C Company into position forming a line as thin as tissue paper. I had a Platoon of Maoris on the beach and later I learned two tanks...

All day the mixed Mortar Platoons from the Maori and the 20th exchanged fire with the enemy. Heavy casualties were inflicted on both sides.

Lt. McPhail of B Company best describes this action...

We took up a defensive position on the beach under Tui Love, of the Maori Battalion. While they were using their Mortars effectively, we could see the Germans digging in what appeared to be a Bofer's gun, between the beach and the road. One of our tanks was in the court yard of a nearby building, but seemed dubious about attacking. Tui got a Bren-gun carrier, loaded up a few Maoris and rushed the Hun. They had a heavy MG but Tui mopped them up and returned, --- a good show. The Maori treated us well; they must have found a dump. When I said we were hungry they gave us pineapple and tinned milk, and they also gave us socks and great-coats...

The day wore on, but apart from trying to push patrols along the beach, Jerry made no further serious attempt to crack the line. During the day and previous night the wounded were taken back on make-shift stretchers to an RAP section set up in a white house near Canea. The stretcher bearers had to make their way up a river-bed full of large boulder's until they reached higher ground and shelter and then scrambled up a slippery track, over a hill top and down to the treatment area in the gully below. From here the severe casualties were transported back to the Hospital in 42nd Street. Some of the trucks used were flying the Red Cross flag, and others were flying Swastika flags that the Maoris had supplied.

Note: There were a lot of cases of dysentery, probably caused by the bad drinking water, tinned food and lack of fresh vegetables. The grapes were all finished and there were only a few oranges left. No first aid stores had been received on Crete and after the battle for Maleme there were hardly any left.

As night approached, the 5th Brigade prepared to move back as soon as it was dark with B and C Companies of the NZ 20th Battalion holding their present positions until 9 pm. They then moved back to their old area near Galatos.

24 May: Morning brought another heavy blitz to the 20th Battalions area. This time there were some heavy bombs dropped, leaving huge craters. After that not a lot happened for the remainder of the day and the survivors had time to reflect on the past few days. The Battalion had suffered heavy casualties but the German's losses had been much heavier. Darkness had given the attackers the advantage of an unobserved approach, and the element of surprise was a powerful factor in the success of the advance. Many of the enemy encountered in the houses had no pants or boots on, and some were without anything on. With daylight, the situation reversed, with the enemy mounting a heavier and better directed fire and whenever the troops attempted to move they were mercilessly strafed by the Luftwaffe and so the attack gradually lost momentum and the troops went to ground.

25 May: A very critical day for the N.Z. Division. Between 4 and 6 pm, NZ 18 Battalion came under heavy fire, both from air and land. The beach end Companies were overwhelmed so C, B, and D Companies of the 20th Battalion were ordered forward to try and hold a position on Ruin ridge, north of Galatos. Within a quarter of an hour a steady crackle of rifle and Bren-gun fire broke out and continued till an hour before dark. By this time casualties were heavy and the position looked grave. The enemy had broken through between the town and Ruin ridge. At one stage C Company were fired on from behind, and it was feared that the 20th Battalion would be cut off, so Colonel Kippenger sent four runners out to find the Company Commanders with orders to withdraw. Private Cliff Ewing of D Company describes his work as a Company Runner...

We went forward through grape vines to our position on the hill behind a stone wall. When in position I was sent back to Col Kippenger, who was calmly sitting on a hill smoking his pipe, to tell him we had taken over

the position and everything was in hand. The Germans fire was terrific and I had sprinted the whole distance taking advantage of any cover. By this time the enemy had broken through on the left and were charging through a field of Oats yelling 'Hock Heil'. I was told to go back and tell the Commander to retreat to the road and back to a burning house. I ran as fast as my legs would carry me. On my left, a crowd of Germans had set up in the Oats and were spraying bullets all around. I hugged a stone wall and when level with them I sprinted on. When I reached the bottom of the gully enemy were poking about amongst the trees and some by a wall. I could hear them talking. I dashed across a track, hurdled a stone wall and raced up a grape vine slope to meet the Commander. I gave him the orders, he then told me to go further up the ridge and tell the Lt too withdraw at once down the gully. He turned and started to trot down the slope. I yelled to him "don't go down there; there was a crowd of Huns there when I came up" He said, "I am going down to have a look and will collect the left flank Companies" Later when we were withdrawing, a C Company boy said, "Your Officer got it just after he left you. I saw it"...



LEFT: GERMAN POW'S AT CANEA CRETE UNDER NZ GUARD LINED UP ON ONE SIDE OF THE STREET. SOME ARE WOUNDED

While the 20th Battalion were withdrawing from Ruin ridge, they could hear a continual roar from the enemies mortars. It seemed that the enemy were making a supreme effort to take Galatos before nightfall. Two tanks from 3 Hussars were sent to investigate and on returning reported that the village was "stiff with Jerries". Two Companies of 23rd Battalion, HQ Company of the 20th Battalion, a small group

of 18 Battalion and the two tanks were ordered by Kippenger to counter-attack and retake Galatos in a last desperate throw to retrieve the situation.

Sergeant Kimber of the Bren-gun Platoon continues the story...

Just past the fork in the road we ran into Kip. He was armed with a German Tommy- gun, we could tell by the expression on his face that the situation was very grim. After he spoke to Colonel Grey we made our way across open country. Owing to enemy fire our group was well scattered and when we reached the start point of our bayonet attack on the village there was only about a dozen of us left. Lt-Bain assumed command and led us gallantly into the village, nothing short of a 25-pounder would have stopped him. At the Church we were held up by machine-gun fire. About six of us went to the left of him and the others to the right. As we rounded a corner into a lane a machine-gun opened up on us from about 20 yards. Lt-Green and a machine gunner were killed; Dave Whittaker and a man from 18 were wounded, leaving a Maori boy and myself untouched. We tried desperately to get our Bren-gun into action, but it would not fire, so we heaved it into a bomb-crater. The machine-gun firing at us was quietened, and we eventually made it to the village square. Here there was some sharp action and from the glow of burning bomb craters we could see Germans leaving the village in all directions. Jerry is a good soldier when he has his tanks and planes in unlimited numbers supporting him during daylight but, he does not relish bayonet warfare in the dark, especially with Aussies or Kiwis. We made our way forward and at the end of the road Lt-Bain was wounded in the leg and could not carry on. Men started coming back from all directions and we were told to withdraw. We got Lt-Bain down to the road in the valley where a truck could pick him up and I returned to try and help Dave. We patched him up the best we could and started to carry him down to 18th's RAP: The going was rough, uphill and down, over stone walls. We tried all ways of carrying him without much success. As we were trying to get him over the last wall, Jerry put up a flare. We expected to

get blasted at any time. As a last resort we wrenched the door off a house and converted it to a stretcher. It took us over two hours to reach the RAP...



LEFT: 7. GENERAL HOSPITAL WITH RED CROSS FLAG ON CRETE
5

Galatos had been retaken and the 23rd were in position. The task of regaining the ground north and south of the village required at least two fresh Battalions and only the Maoris were left, so the heads decided to form a new line, running north and south of Karatsos. Five Brigade would be on the right and 19 Australian Infantry on the left. A Company of the NZ 20th Battalion would attach to 21 Battalion and the balance left would withdraw to the Olive groves

south-west of Canea. Prior to the withdrawal Lt-Colonel Burrows had sent Lt- McPhail with a Platoon of B Company to the beach to stop the enemy from pushing through and in behind the 20th. When word came to withdraw, two runners were sent to find the patrol but failed to make contact. The platoon had pushed vigorously forward along the beach and so one of the runners volunteered to stay overnight and make contact at dawn. The Platoon returned the next day.

26 May: The battle weary men spent all day resting in a ditch under the Olive trees. Not many could sleep when they tried and few had the energy even to smoke. The Village of Canea was systematically bombed and almost razed to the ground. 4th Brigade reported enemy forces breaking through on both flanks. 5th Brigade formed a new line on 42nd Street about a mile west of Suda Village. The 20th Battalion marched all night passing back through battered Suda and reached Stilos at dawn.

27 May: The composite forces of 5th Brigade, made up of 1 Welsh Regiment, Northumberland Hussars and 1 Rangers, were in action at 5.30 am and after two hours of fighting were driven back with heavy casualties. It soon became apparent that there were not enough troops to hold the front. Sufficient reinforcements and supplies could not be transported from Egypt, and so after full consideration of the situation on Crete, General Wavell decided that the Island would have to be abandoned. The N.Z. Division were instructed to provide an anti-paratrooper force on the Plain of Askifou, and a flank guard on the Georgeoupolis road. In the evening, after the disintegration of 10 Brigade, Colonel Kippenger returned to the 20th Battalion and informed his men of the Generals decision. *"We have a long hard march ahead"* he said, *"I will lead and we will rest for ten minutes of every hour. Make sure that every man is awake before we move on, and keep to a rigid march discipline"*. Many of the men already had sore and blistered feet. The boots issued were the narrower type, originally intended for the Indian troops, and so it was very important to boost each other's morale as they headed off into the night.

At about 10 pm Sergeant Kimber who had linked up with the 18th Battalion found his mates again *"We were halting on the side of the road for a spell"* he said, *"when along came the 20th Battalion with Kip at the head, limping badly with a sprained ankle. It was just great to see a unit retiring in an orderly, well organised manner, and under perfect control. For days past, one had become used to seeing a rabble of panic stricken men, and so it was with pride that I quickly re-joined my outfit. It was good to be home again"* And so the 20th Battalion continued on with its march to the south coast.

Extracts from 20 Battalion, Sergeant Borthwick's diary describes the next four days...

On the move at 2030 hrs. Passing a lot of stragglers with no arms. It was good to know that most of our lot had rifles. There was a lot of congestion on the road, we seemed to be held up by the same truck time and time again. Some chaps had no water bottles and some begged for water from those who had. Passed by three hatless Aussies singing "When there isn't girls about you do feel lonely". Our spirits improved after this incident, with some of our chaps bursting forth in song with, a stout hearted effort. As the night wore on we struck a lot of uphill going. Everybody is short of water, and when we halted chaps just slept in their tracks. Once we slept for half an hour. At daylight we were all utterly exhausted and pulled of the road to sleep, with our boots off. No sooner asleep and it seemed we were awake again. Could not eat the dry biscuits, but ate some tinned beetroot. Harold Robert's had gone off and filled our water bottles, where, might was right. The water proved later to be bad, with a lot of the chaps coming down with dysentery.

28 May: Moved out at 1000 hrs. To march too Askifou Plain, high up in the mountains ahead. Here we were to establish an anti-paratroops role. Left the road because of heavy strafing and were lead up over a steep mountain pass. Every one thirsty at the top. It took one and a half hours to descend down a very steep face to the Plain below. Moved to a village and slept out on some concrete without blankets. All night other chaps who had been left out on the mountain because of bad feet and poor health straggled in.

29 May: Up at daylight and moved two miles closer to the coast and took up a defensive position. Lay low in a gully under some trees, all day, with wrecked trucks all around us. Every one short of water. 30 enemy planes flew over at 1900 hrs. A Company who had been attached to 21 Battalion finally caught up. Orders to move at 1945 hrs. Did some uphill work, up over the road and ended up in a position on a mountain brow overlooking the beach...

By this time the effort to keep going was perhaps greater than that needed when in contact with the enemy. The ability to hang on and march night after night with very little sleep, food or water, requires a different sort of stamina. Illustrating this, Kippenger recalls an incident regarding the Battalion's Padre. The Colonel remarked: "I see you are carrying several water bottles Padre?" "Oh, yes", came the reply, "I always carry one or two in case the boys are short". It was then that the CO noticed that the Padres lips were parched and cracked. He evidently had not had a drink for a long time. In the Colonels words, "It was the most Christ-like thing I ever saw".

After a few hours rest the 20th Battalion moved down a very steep and winding goat track into, Rhododendron Valley, halting close to a cave which housed Force Headquarters. Here the CO learned that the embarkation plan only allowed for 230 men from each Battalion of 4 Brigade and the Maori Battalion to embark from the small beach at Sfarkia that night. Not counting the concert party and 4 Brigade band that still left 40 of the 20th Battalion to stay behind until the next evening. While he was considering this, firing broke out in the ravine. Fifth Brigade's rear-guard was still 6 miles back and these shots right on the back door was strange. It was soon discovered that an enemy patrol had pushed through the covering force almost to the beach and was firing at anything, hoping to create panic. An immediate defence was put in place and then C Company of the 20th was ordered back up the cliffs on the west-side of the ravine.

The account of this final sortie is given by Corporal Vincent...

The going was hard and the men were very tired, but led by Lt-Upham, they toiled up the steep slope until they observed Germans running between Rhododendron bushes in the ravine, which was otherwise devoid of cover. A party under Sergeant Major Grooby were disposed along the side of the ravine while the leading group climbed about another half mile to head of the enemy, who were soon accounted for. The sides of the ravine were so steep that one man had to be held by the legs so that he could lean over far enough to fire with his Bren. When the entire enemy to be seen had been dealt with the men returned to the mouth of the ravine where they were told that some of the Company would not be taken off that night.

Note: About 20 Germans were killed by Upham's party. For this exploit, and for his part in the battles over the last few days, Charles Upham was to be awarded his first VC.

Volunteers were then called for to stay with the rear party. After much argument, with the men insisting on staying, it was decided to draw lots. Those who were chosen to go gave ammunition, food, water and any tobacco they had to those who were to remain.

We continue at this point with an extract from Sgt Borthwick's diary...

At this stage several fellows who had not been with us in the march over the Island (they had preferred independent movement) now presented themselves with as good a face as possible when they heard that some of us were being taken off. They just had no show. We said, "Cheerio" to the chaps staying behind and moved down nearer to the beach in the dark. We had strict instructions not to let anybody break into our formation. Finally we formed a single file and Pop Lynch and I were detailed to scrutinize every man's face as they filed past to make sure there were no strangers amongst us. After what seemed an interminable period of waiting, we were finally taken off in small boats to two destroyers, 'HMAS Napier' and 'HMAS Nizam'. A great feeling of relief and as we approached the ships chaps on the outside of the boat were dangling their hands in the water just like kids. It did all seem rather miraculous...

30th May: At 9 am. There came a bombing attack by 9 Dornier's, but fortunately the bombs were all near misses, with no damage to the ships. The men washed and shaved in the wash rooms all day. Their cloths were filthy. Alexandria in North Africa was sighted at about 4 pm. and the ships docked about two hours later. The final act of the main party as they disembarked to awaiting South African transport and then on to Amiriya, is quoted by General Kippenger...

We tied up and I went up to the bridge to thank the Captain. While there I was very distressed to see RSM. Wilson hurrying down the gangplank. Then, he called for markers from 20th Battalion and I watched with pride while he collected, dressed, and placed them all as correctly and smartly as if at Maadi. The men filed down and it was good to see that everyone was armed and everyone was shaved. The RSM fell them in, handed over to the Adjutant and with full routine, the Adjutant then handed over to me, as we marched off. I stumbled, hatless and very proudly at the head, while everyone on the wharf saluted...

Meanwhile on Crete, the rear party from the 20th Battalion had taken up defensive positions to block the ravine against infiltrating German troops. Every man had an automatic and as much ammunition as he could carry.

*31 May: Fortunately the enemy did not engage with this rear-guard and that night they made their way down to the beach and from there they were taken by the destroyer, *Jackal* and *HMS Phoebe* too Alexandria.*

1 June: After much celebrating the night before, the rear party re-joined the balance of the 20th Battalion at Helwan, Egypt.

CONCLUSION FOR THE BATTLE OF CRETE

The Germans were reported to have allowed three days for the capture of the Island of Crete before moving onto Cyprus and then Syria. The twelve days resistance they struck had irremediably upset their

programme. The New Zealanders had not been beaten by the Hun infantry. They had pushed them back during the nights, but had been chased back in daylight by the enemy's planes. History now tells us that the Germans received over 7,000 casualties.

THE 20TH BATTALION RECEIVED THE FOLLOWING CASUALTIES ON CRETE...

Killed or died of wounds	80
Wounded	129
Wounded and taken Prisoner	57
Prisoner of war.	<u>32</u>
Total.	298
Greece casualties	<u>149</u>
Giving a total in both Campaigns	<u>447</u>
(Over half of the Battalion)	

A FUTILE GESTURE

The man who first ordered troops to Greece, Winston Churchill, has been the individual most frequently associated with the loss of the Balkans campaign.

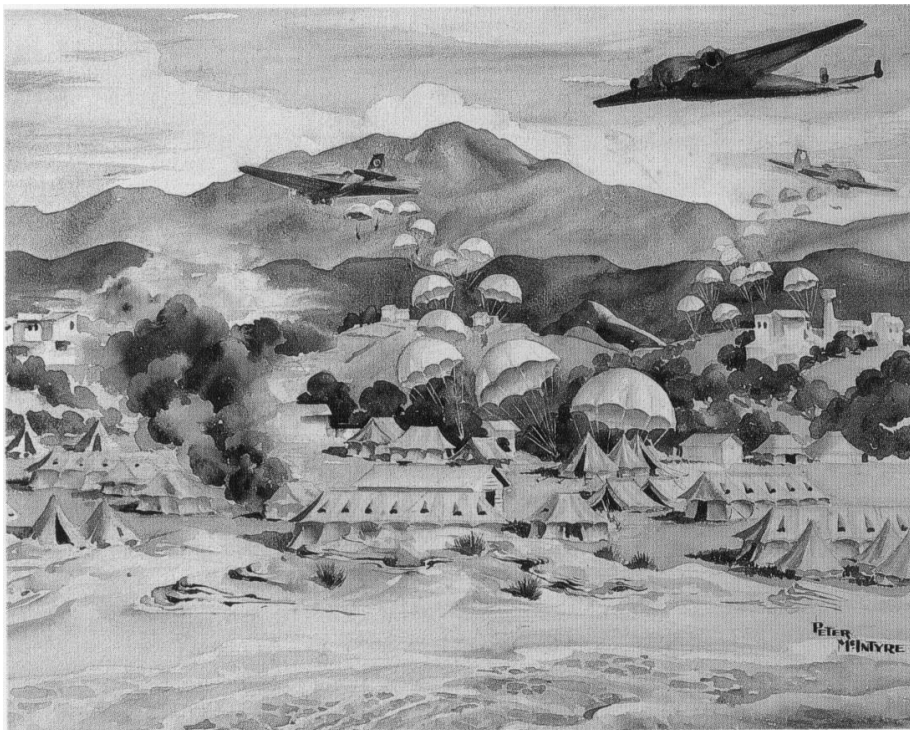
Some historians have argued in Churchill's favour, pointing out that part of the reason for the failure of Operation *Barbarossa*, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, was that the Balkans campaign delayed the start of *Barbarossa* by three months. Had the Germans invaded on March 19 1941 as originally planned, instead of June 22, they might have achieved victory prior to the onset of the Russian winter. Churchill's advocates also point out that the German preoccupation with the Balkans gave the Allies time to occupy Syria and quell the Iraqi uprising, thereby enabling them to dedicate more of their time to the defence of Egypt.

Given that these were not the reasons for which troops were committed to the defence of Greece and Crete, such claims are spurious. Today, fifty years on, it is still clear that the decision to commit troops to the defence of Crete without air cover was most unwise. For overruling those who counselled him otherwise, Churchill must shoulder much of the blame.



However great his ability as a politician and public leader, Churchill was no strategist. While he was correct in identifying Crete as being of great strategic value, he was wrong in his estimation of his ability to defend the island.

LEFT: CHURCHILL REVIEWING TROOPS IN NORTH AFRICA



GERMAN PARATROOPERS DROPPING IN AND CAPTURING THE BRITISH GENERAL HOSPITAL

'General Hospital Crete 20 May 1941'

PETER McINTYRE

National Archives of New Zealand War Art Collection No 301



LEFT: ATTENDING THE WOUNDED AMONGST THE OLIVE TREES

'NZ 5th Brigade Forward Dressing Station Near Maleme 22.5.41'

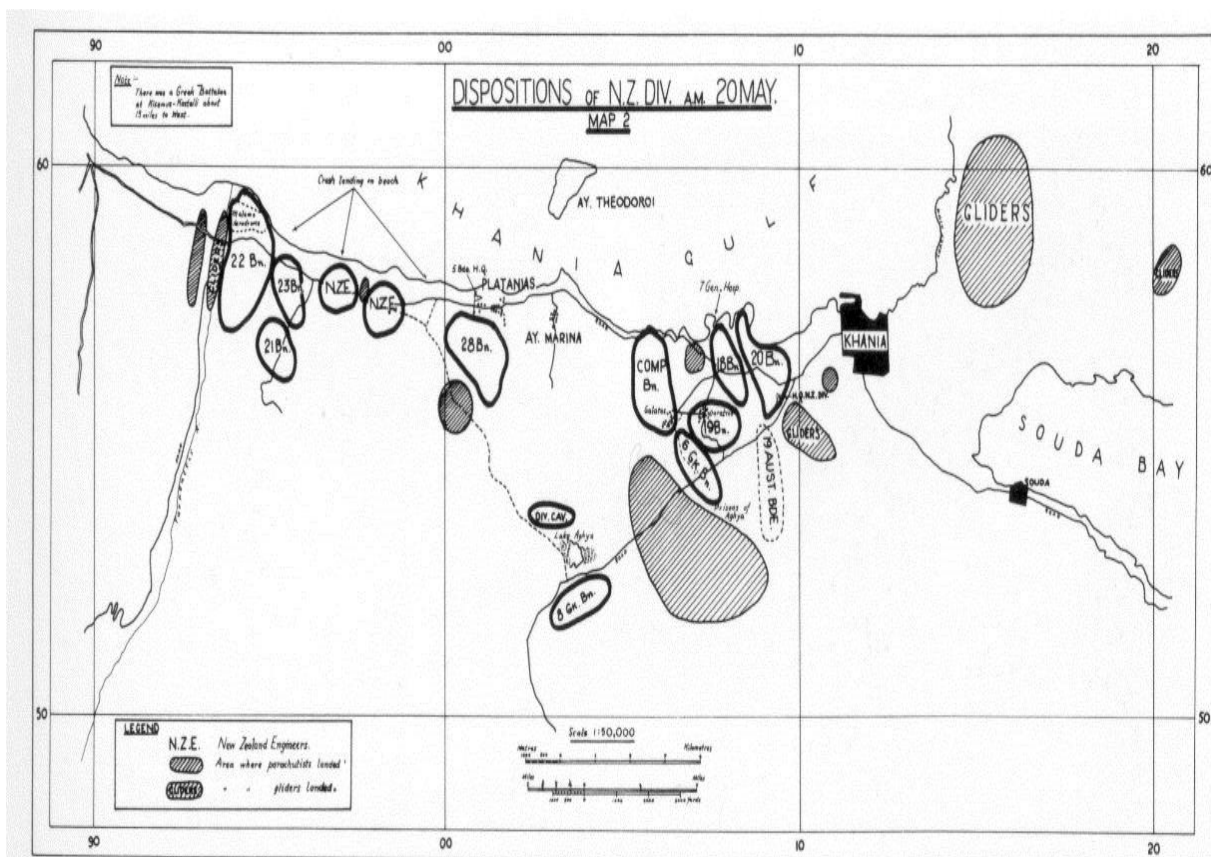
PETER McINTYRE

National Archives of New Zealand War Art Collection No 81

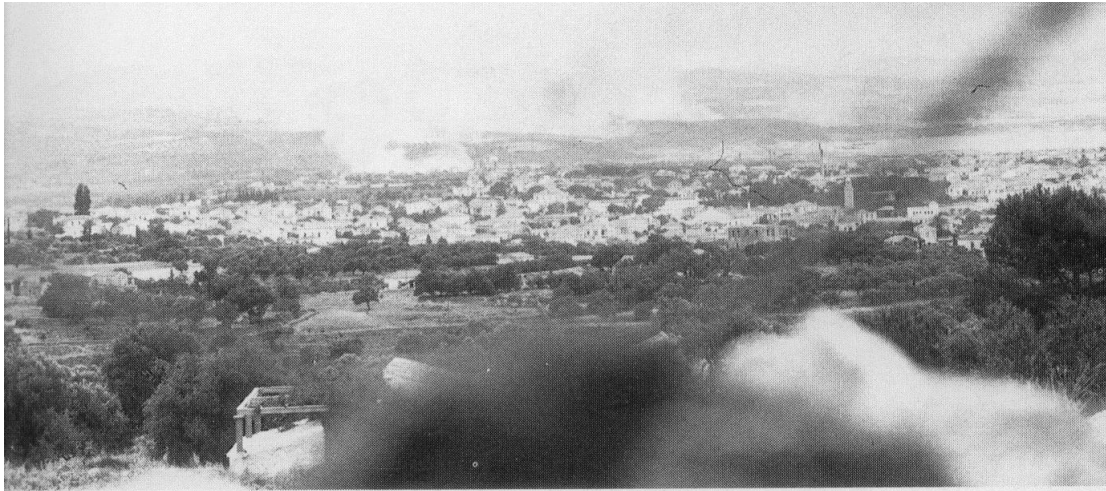


19 BATTALION OF THE NEW ZEALAND DIVISION AT SFAKIA DURING THE EVACUATION.

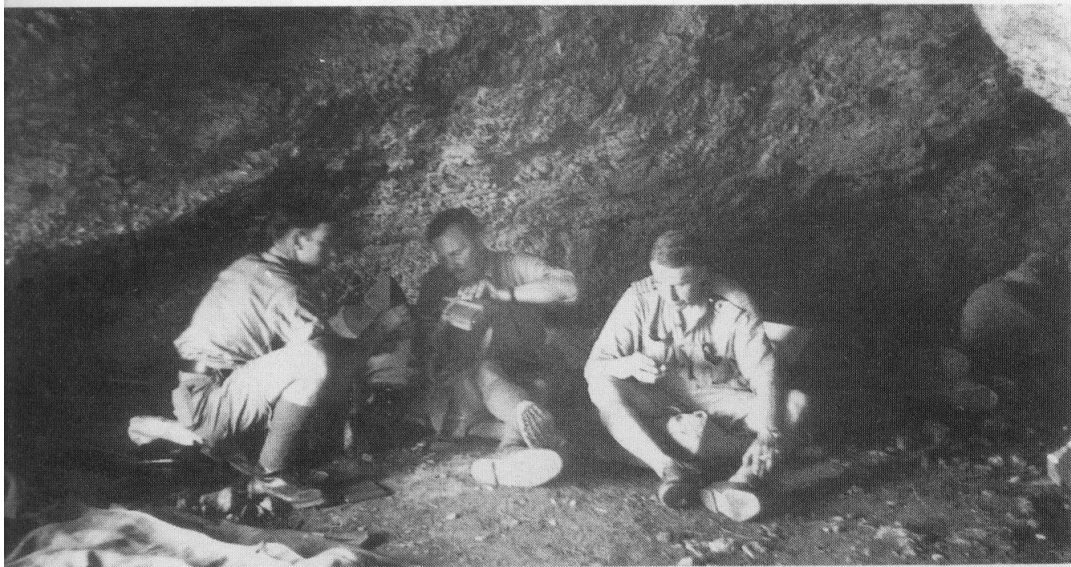
ABOVE: A QUICK CUPPA WHILE WAITING FOR THE NIGHT EVACUATION FROM SFAKIA



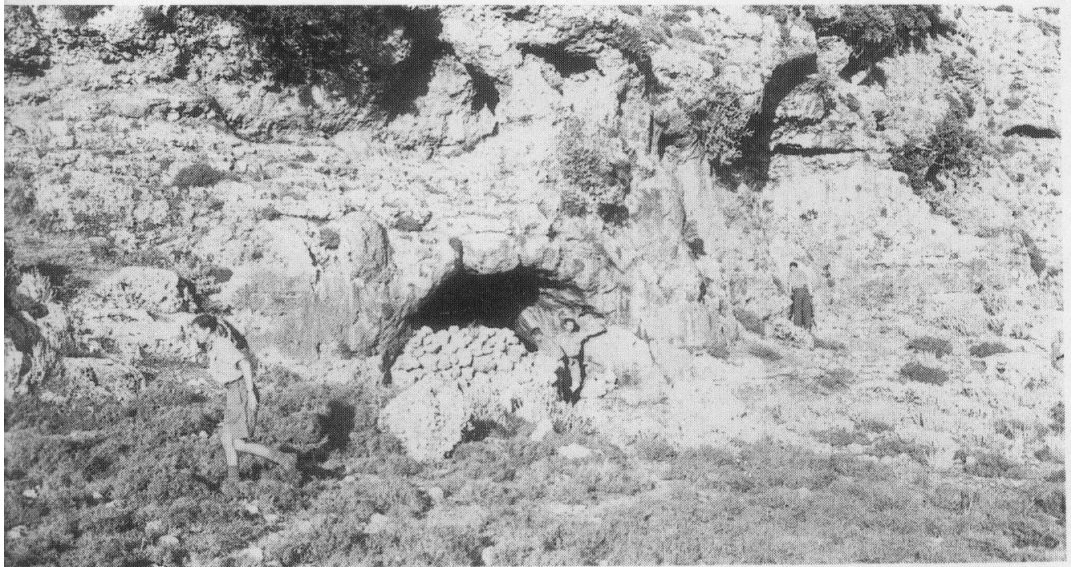
DISPOSITIONS OF THE NEW ZEALAND DIVISION, 20 MAY, 1941



View from Freyberg's battle HQ over Canea in the direction of Maleme. Note the smoke from shelling and bombing.



Inside the cave HQ during the retreat at Sphakia: Freyberg centre, naval officer on right.



Location of the cave at the foot of an outcrop. Officer in left foreground is John White.



THE FACE OF A SOLDIER
Upham photographed after the campaigns in Greece and Crete



Lieutenant-General Lord Bernard Freyberg, VC, GCMG, KCB, KBE, DSO and three bars, m.i.d., Order of Valour and MC (Greek). The statistic that in World War II New Zealand suffered more casualties, per head of population, than any other Allied country excepting Russia was probably attributable to him.

War History Collection. Alexander Turnbull Library.

ABOVE LEFT: CAPTAIN CHARLES UPHAM WAS AWARDED THE VICTORIA CROSS FOR HIS HEROIC ACTIONS ON CRETE.



Major-General Sir Howard K. Kippenberger, KBE, CB, DSO and bar, ED, m.i.d., Legion of Merit (US). An infantryman, he despised the New Zealand service corps personnel and Greek soldiers under his command.

War History Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library.



LEFT: 3 NZ GENERAL HOSPITAL 40,000 PATIENT

THE FOLLOWING PHOTOS WERE TAKEN DURING MY VISIT TO CRETE IN 1992

GERMAN CEMETERY AT MALAME, CRETE

THE PLAQUE READS AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE GERMAN CEMETERY...



On 28th October 1940 the Italian attack on Greece began.

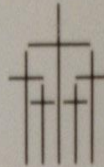
On 6th April 1941 the Deutsche Reich entered the Balkan campaign with its attack on Yugoslavia and Greece. After both these countries had capitulated, Crete, a strategically important island, was still being defended by about 33 000 British, Australian and New Zealand troops as well as about 10 000 Greek soldiers.

On 20th May a battle began, which was of particular interest in military history. About 23 500 German soldiers all of whom were either paratroops or mountain units were flown in across the sea. The first targets of the paratroops were the airports of Maleme, Rethymnon and Heraklion as well as the

capital city, Chania, on the Souda Bay. After battles at all these points involving heavy losses they only succeeded in capturing the airport of Maleme. Here the mountain troops were landed, who captured the island after many hard battles. The British fleet prevented further German troops from being brought in by sea.

By 1st June Crete had been abandoned by its defenders, who suffered the loss of 15 700 dead, wounded or captured. Many Greek soldiers and civilians also lost their lives.

The Germans losses amounted to 6 580 dead, wounded or missing. About 400 died at sea. 4 465 German soldiers of the 1941-45 war years are buried here in this cemetery.



VOLKSBUND DEUTSCHE KRIEGSGRÄBERFÜRSORGE E.V.



TAKEN FROM THE GERMAN CEMETERY WITH MALAME AIRDROME IN BACKGROUND



ABOVE: NEW ZEALAND MEMORIAL IN GALATOS



BRITISH MEMORIAL CEMETERY AT SUDA BAY

THIS BEAUTIFUL BAY WAS FULL OF DESTROYED BRITISH SHIPS DURING THE BLITZ OF CRETE

READ TEXT BELOW

THE CAMPAIGN IN CRETE 1941

The Allied force in Crete numbered about 32,000 British, Australian and New Zealand troops (of whom about 21,000 had been evacuated from Greece in late April 1941 with little but the equipment they carried) and 11,000 lightly armed Greek troops. They were organised in five widely separated defence areas along the north coast - around the three airfields at Heraklion, Retimo and Maleme and at Suda Bay and the port and capital of Canea. The bombing of the airfields from the Greek mainland made it impossible for fighter aircraft to be retained on the island and the consequent German domination of the air prevented any troop movements by day. Although the Royal Navy prevented any seaborne landings the German attack by airborne troops began on 20th May and the airfield at Maleme was quickly captured and used for landing German reinforcements. On 23rd May the remainder of the Maleme position had to be given up and its defenders retired on Canea. On the 26th the Allied line west of Canea was broken and, Suda Bay becoming indefensible, the troops from these two positions with the remainder of the Maleme garrison withdrew, under constant harassment but in good order, across the island to Sphakia on the south coast where, on the nights of the 28th to 31st, the Navy evacuated large numbers. The Heraklion and Retimo positions were also attacked by airborne troops on 20th May but both attacks were repulsed. Heraklion was successfully defended until the night of the 28th/29th when the garrison was evacuated by sea. It was planned that, at the same time, the Retimo garrison should fight its way out southward for evacuation by sea but, due to communications being cut, orders to that effect never reached it and it was overwhelmed on 31st May.

Of the total Commonwealth force in Crete of 32,000 men, 18,000 were evacuated, 12,000 taken prisoner and 2,000 killed.

SUDA BAY WAR CEMETERY, CRETE

The cemetery, within the 1941 Suda Bay defensive position, was made after the war to contain the graves of all the Commonwealth soldiers who died in Crete. Those whose graves are unidentified are commemorated on the Memorial in Phaleron War Cemetery, Athens. The burials in the cemetery are:

United Kingdom	862
Canada	1
Australia	157
New Zealand	405
South Africa	1
India	1
Others	1
Total	1527

THIS CEMETERY
WAS BUILT AND IS MAINTAINED BY THE
COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

THE ARCHITECT WAS LOUIS DE SOISSONS



ABOVE: THE WHITE MOUNTAINS

LEADING TO THE LEFT ALONG THE BOTTOM OF THIS GULLY OUR TROOPS STAGGERED TOWARDS THE MOUNTAINS IN THE DISTANCE AND THEN THROUGH A MOUNTAIN PASS DOWN TO THE BEACH AT SFAKIA.



ABOVE: RHODODENDRON VALLEY

THE GOAT TRACK AT THE BOTTOM OF THIS GULLY LED OUR TROOPS TO SAFETY



ABOVE: SFAKIA

FROM THIS BEACH OUR TROOPS WERE FERRIED OUT TO WAITING TROOP SHIPS AND THEN BACK TO ALEXANDRIA IN NORTHERN EGYPT



MYSELF WITH THE HISTORY PLAQUE ON THE BEACH AT SFAKIA

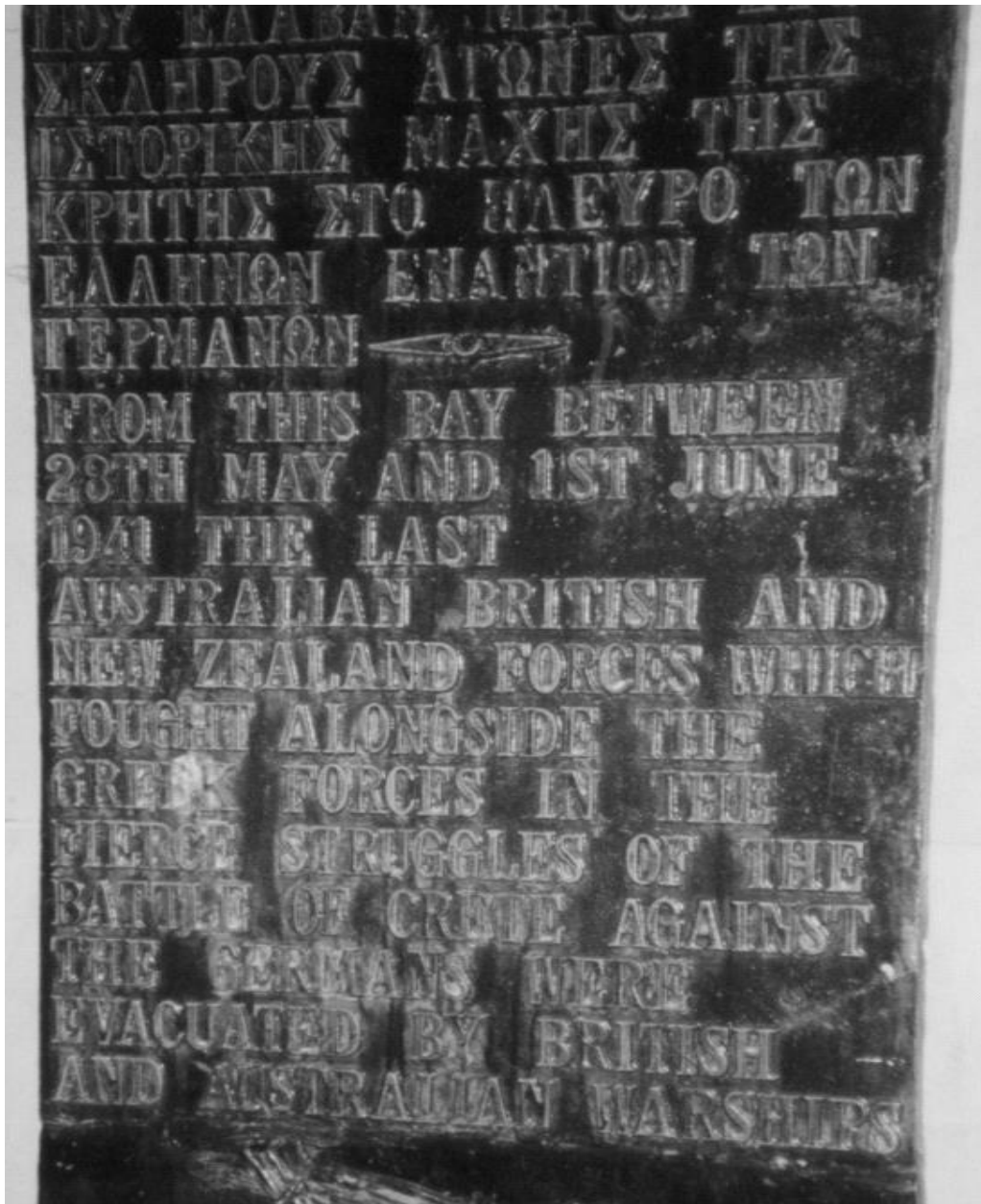
ON MY ARRIVAL IN SFAKIA I ASKED A YOUNG GIRL IN THE STREET IF SHE KNEW OF THE PLAQUE AND WHERE IT WAS. SHE TOLD ME EXACTLY.

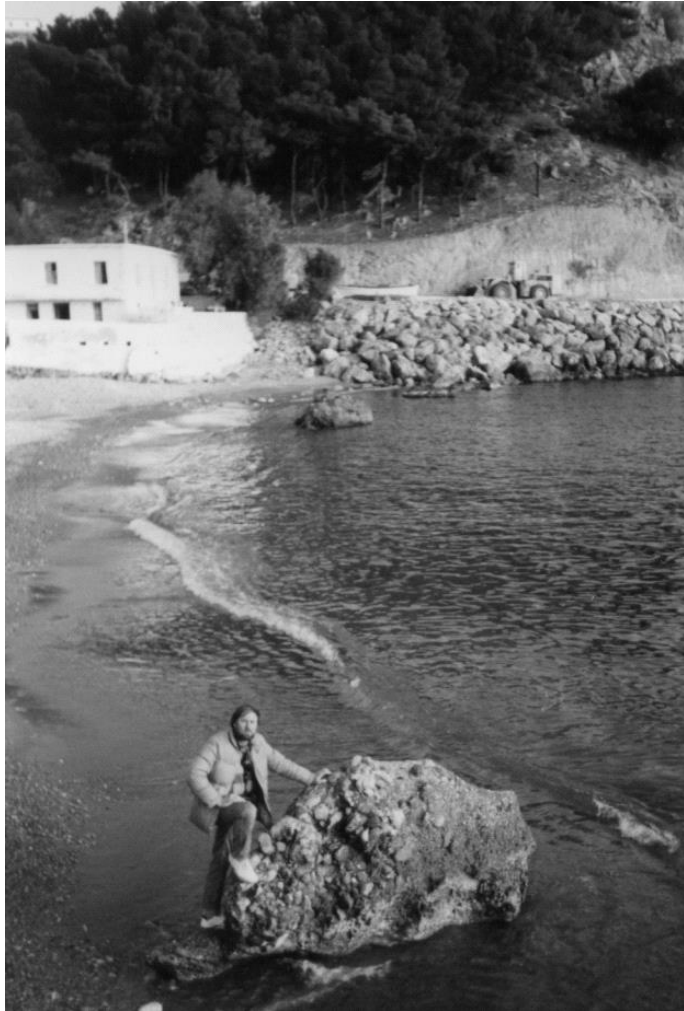
PEOPLE IN A NEARBY CAFÉ UNDERSTOOD EXACTLY WHY I WAS THERE.

THERE WERE FREE DRINKS ALL AROUND. A HUMBLING EXPERIENCE

THE PLAQUE READS

FROM THIS BAY BETWEEN 28TH MAY AND 1ST JUNE 1941 THE LAST AUSTRALIAN, BRITISH AND NEW ZEALAND FORCES WHICH FOUGHT ALONGSIDE THE GREEK FORCES IN THE FIERCE STRUGGLES OF THE BATTLE OF CRETE AGAINST THE GERMANS WERE EVACUATED BY BRITISH AND AUSTRALIAN WARSHIPS





LEFT: THE BEACH DURING DAY

AND AT TWILIGHT (BELOW)



OUR SOLDIER ESCAPES CRETE WITH ONLY SOME OF HIS COMRADES IN ARMS...

We return back to **our soldier who** was lucky enough to come off during the first night of the evacuation from Crete. He was very weak from dysentery and had to be assisted from the beach to the boats by his good friend, Ron. It is here that we pick up his letters again...

REFERENCE FROM OUR SOLDIER'S PERSONAL MILITARY FILES...

With 20 + 34 Batt	Advanced to 64 General Hospital	Middle East	30.5.1941
With 20 + 34 Batt	Advanced to 3 N.Z. General Hospital	Middle East	6.6.1941
With 20 + 34 Batt	Advanced to 1 N.Z. Convalescent Depot	Middle East	13.6.1941.
1 Con dept.	Was On Active Service. Contravening BTE standing orders. AA11 (2) Absent Without Leave, 1hr 10 minutes AA (5 (1) Punishment 72 hrs. detention plus automatic forfeiture of 2 days' pay under RW	Middle East	9.7.1941
Base RD	Depart 1 N.Z. Convalescent Depot too Base	Middle East	17.7.1941
Base RD	Marched out too 33 Battalion	Middle East	19.7.1941
	Marched in Reported from S. Inf Tng Depot	Middle East	24.7.1941
20 th Battalion	Marched out reposted to 20 Battalion.	Middle East	24.7.1941

Letter Fifteen...

Dear Mum,

Once again I'm lucky enough to be able to tell you I'm still O.K. I'm in hospital at present with an attack of the "runs". I got it the last four days in Crete. There wasn't much to eat and while we were on the march we drank any kind of water we could get hold of. A chap in the same ward as me came with the same lot as Uncle Karl so I'll be able to find him pretty easily when I get out of here.

We haven't had any mail for weeks, but I expect it was just as hard to get it on to the Island as it was to get it off. I'm expecting a whole bag full though when we do get some. Ron's still O.K. too, and we came off together. He's a better soldier than he is a footballer and that's saying something. He's certainly a wild lad when he gets going. They treat us like Kings here and the orderlies and sisters can't do enough for us. I'll be almost sorry to leave this bed of mine. I'm afraid I can't put my mind to writing letters but I expect so long as you know I'm still kicking that's the main thing ----

Letter Sixteen...

To his Sister

Dear Joyce and Alex,

Your letter arrived a couple of days ago and I was a bit surprised to receive same. It was the first word I have had from home for over a month but I have had two from Mum since then. I have been in "dock" ever since I came off Crete with a pretty severe attack of the runs. For over a week the "eye of a needle" was no trouble to me. I am up and about again though and on Friday they are sending me to a rest camp for awhile. It is nice and quite here after the 10 or 12 days "blitz" we had on Crete, but it is a hell of a lot hotter and you can't get away from the damn flies. We are lucky being in the hospital area though because any-where else they are 50 times worse. I have seen enough of this side of the world and I wish we could hurry up and win this war so I can get away home to hell out of it. I am looking forward to wetting the baby's head. Make sure you have all girls in case there's another war. One day on Crete "Jerry" was over machine-gunning us from the air, and one of our chaps got it in the backside. Another joker and I were bandaging him up "Hey" he said, hurry up and pull my pants up the "B,s" might see my shiny bum. It does not sound very funny on paper but we sure got a laugh out of it. I was talking to a chap out of the 18th and he says Colin, B's O.K. so I expect his mother has heard from him by this. I haven't heard anything of Ray Downey, and don't know whether he got off or not. There is quite a few who didn't but I expect you have read all about it in the papers. Well that is about all I can think about for this time so I will shut up now.

P.S. For Alex. Well done boy, I didn't think you had it in you ---

Letter Seventeen...

Dear Mum,

I had already written to you this week but seeing I hadn't posted it, and me getting your letter written 4th June I thought I'd reconstruct it. By the sound of your letter you evidently didn't get any of mine from Crete. I thought at least one or two of the ones I wrote before the "blitz" started would have got out, but we were told that quite a bit of mail went astray so perhaps it all did.

I don't know whether I told you before or not but I'm in a rest camp here and having fun. There's nothing wrong with me now, and I hope to get back to my old unit pretty soon. We're not far from the water here, and if we're free we can get down for a swim every day. I was a bit surprised at Harold getting married. I thought he had a bit more sense than that. I know quite a few jokers who did the same thing and will never see their young brides again. They're all right, but it's the ones left who will do the worrying. I suppose he's old enough to know what he's doing but in my opinion he's a damn fool. I had my photo taken in town the other day and will send you one with this. It's not so hot but it will give you an idea of what I look like in my "long-shorts". One of the boys told me all I needed was a shot-gun in my hand and a lion at my feet and I'd be a big game hunter.

I drew a fiver out of the money I had saved in my pay-book the other day and did a wee bit of shopping. I bought a hand-bag for Zel, and a pair of gloves for you. I didn't know what size you take, but if they won't fit perhaps they will one of the girls. I'm going to see what they'll cost to send air-mail so you may get them along with this. Bert was up to see me the other day and he's as happy and as mad as ever. It was great to see him again and we did nothing but gab for about 3 hours solid. A couple of old women had nothing on us. Well I'm afraid that's all

I can think of for now so I'll sign off.

P.S. Be the discreet mother and don't frighten my lady away. I'm not all that well fixed

CONTROVERSIAL BATTLE FOR CRETE

People have argued about the Battle for Crete since it occurred. The Allied forces on the Island knew of the enemy's intentions and had the chance to inflict a humiliating defeat on the Germans – the first they would have suffered on land during the war.

Who was responsible for the mistakes that allowed the Germans to gain control of the vital airfield at Maleme and hold it against subsequent counter-attacks?

MISTAKES AT MALEME

There is debate about the officers responsible for operations in the Maleme sector. The actions of Lieutenant-Colonel Leslie Andrew VC, the commander of 22nd Battalion in the crucial positions dominating the airfield, have come under question; some think he may have lost his nerve.

Andrew's decision to pull back off Hill 107 during the night of 20–21 May 1941 opened the way for the Germans to occupy it without opposition on the morning of the 21st.

Assuming incorrectly that two of his companies on the edge of the airfield had been overrun, Andrew decided to pull back to defensive positions before daylight, when the *Luftwaffe* (German air force) would make such a maneuver too dangerous.

The commanders of the neighbouring Battalions, Lieutenant-Colonels J M Allen (21st Battalion) and D F Leckie (23rd Battalion), have also been criticized for failing to carry out their pre-invasion orders: to counter-attack immediately if the Germans secured a lodgment on the airfield.

A failure to perceive the danger, some uncertainty in the pre-invasion orders and the lack of drive exhibited by their superior ensured that neither Battalion intervened to assist 22nd Battalion.

But the suggestion by historian Tony Simpson that Leckie had a nervous breakdown on the first morning which accounts for 23rd Battalion's failure to go to the 22nd's assistance can be discounted. Although Simpson's claim was based on the recollection of an officer of the Battalion, several others who were present have strongly rejected any suggestion that Leckie was incapacitated. Instead, they have pointed to the orders he received from his superior, Brigadier James Hargest, 5th (NZ) Brigade's commander.

Hargest has come under most scrutiny. His lethargy and lack of judgment during the first two days of the battle placed a spotlight on how he came to be serving with the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force (2.NZEF).

In 1939 he had been found unfit for overseas service but had secured a commission through his political connections as a Member of Parliament. Hargest accepted Andrew's plans to pull back from Hill 107 during

the 20th – *'if you must, you must'* – and led Leckie and Allen to believe that 22nd Battalion was holding its own at Maleme without the need for assistance. The fact that he remained at his headquarters, well removed from the scene of action, has also been criticized.

Controversy also surrounds the actions of the temporary commander of the 2nd New Zealand Division, Brigadier Edward Puttick. His failure to order a counter-attack on the German concentration in the Prison Valley on the 20th was perhaps his biggest tactical error of the campaign. He was reluctant to commit his reserves because of a fear of a further airborne landing, but more especially because of the perceived threat from the sea. He too failed to grasp the situation on the first day and ensure a more aggressive response on Hargest's part.

FREYBERG'S LEADERSHIP

Crete force commander Major-General Bernard Freyberg has also been the subject of considerable criticism. As overall commander of the Allied forces on Crete, he must take responsibility for the failure. His performance was criticized at the time by several of his subordinates. Hargest, for example, complained to Prime Minister Peter Fraser that Freyberg did not *'keep control over the conduct of operations'*, failed to take his senior officers into his confidence and occasionally left doubts as to his intentions.

Brigadier Lindsay Inglis, commander of 4th (NZ) Brigade, also raised doubts about Freyberg's conduct of the battle at a meeting with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in London shortly afterwards.

These contemporary criticisms have been echoed more recently by several British historians, including: Antony Beevor and Callum MacDonald:

In light of revelations of the ULTRA intelligence available to Freyberg, they accuse him of muddled thinking and of making a key mistake on 21 May based on a misreading of an ULTRA signal. **This, they argued, led to the counter-attack by 28th (Maori) and 20th Battalions being fatally delayed on Freyberg's orders because he expected an imminent seaborne attack.**

Freyberg made serious tactical errors in both his dispositions: especially leaving the area west of the Tavronitis River unguarded, and his miscalculated response to the invasion.

But the ULTRA argument is too simplistic as an explanation for the failure of the crucial counter-attack. Even if the attack by the Maori Battalion and our soldiers 20th had gone ahead at the earlier time there can be no certainty it would have succeeded given that it was in two-Battalion strength only and the Germans at the airfield had been reinforced by fresh troops the previous day.

SOLDIERS OPINION'S

One of the very few points of this war that my dad had discussed was the battle for Maleme Airdrome. He as well as Charles Upham said *"that given another hour under darkness they could have taken the airfield"*.

The delayed time given to start the attack did not give our very brave soldiers time under cover of night to finish the job. As daylight emerged the Germans were able to rally and hold off the attack and it became obvious to upper command that lives were being lost for no gain and so orders to withdraw were sent out to the NZ Battalions. This command would eventually lead to the evacuation of Crete by the Allied Forces.

CAMPAIGN IN LIBYA 1941

REBUILDING THE BATTALION

JUNE - OCTOBER, 1941

6 June: During a Military parade the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Peter Fraser, paid tribute to the NZ Division for their gallant efforts in Greece and Crete, and in turn congratulated the British Navy for twice rescuing NZ troops from certain capture or annihilation. After this parade the remaining 230 odd fit men of the 20th Battalion were granted a week's *'survivors'* leave. With accumulated credits in their pay books, men were soon scattered far and wide. Many visited the 2 NZ Hospital in search for friends, while others toured Upper Egypt and Palestine.

14-18 June: During this period the Battalion is brought up to full strength by a composite Battalion from the Southern Infantry Training Depot and the return of some of the old hands from the Convalescent Camp. At first some of the old hands were perhaps inclined to think that they alone knew all about soldiering, but this phase passed over during the next few months as the old and the new alike trained strenuously and prepared for *'another crack at Jerry'*. By the end of July the rebuilt 20th Battalion was ready to start exercise- manoeuvres as follows.

30-31 July: A stiff march of some 25 miles in two days to perform a dawn attack in the area of El Saff. After this exercise over 200 men were on sick parade, mostly with sore feet.

17 August: By train to Geneifa and then by lorry to the Combined Training Centre at Kabrit on the Suez Canal. Here the men practiced boat drill, rowing, scaling ladders, etc. with good swimming in between training. All Companies in turn, carried out attack exercises with tank co-operation.

25 August: The whole of the 20th moved out from camp for assault landing exercises, from *'HMS Glenroy'*. Two hours before dawn each day, landing craft stole away from the ships side and made for their respective beaches on the Sinai side of the Canal.

8-9 September: Air-raids by the Enemy on the Suez Canal increased and A Company was scrambled out to Kabrit aerodrome to stand by in case of an emergency.

12 September: The whole of 4 Brigade moved once again to the Western Desert, to an area 158 miles west of Alexandria.

The 20th Battalion would take up a position from the road to the sea. Their first tasks were the digging, maintenance and camouflaging of the existing fortified positions. There were days of sunshine and days less pleasant when sandstorms penetrated every nook and cranny of the sand-bagged dugouts, coating everything with fine dust. Nose and throats would be choked with sand and every break in the skin seemed to develop into a desert sore. Fortunately the Mediterranean was not far away. Each Company maintained its own canteen, with demand from the Naafi stores invariably exceeding supply. Canteen trucks roamed far and wide with the drivers employing many ruses to augment supplies from the suspicious British quartermasters. On many occasions' fictitious names as *'The Stewart Island Fusiliers'* and the *'Great-barrier Buffs'* was successful. On one occasion a dusky skinned member of the Battalion assisted his thirsty mates by uplifting an issue in the name of a Cypriot unit. During the balance of

September and October the Battalion took part in many Desert manoeuvres and at one stage had all the top Brass in Egypt as spectators. During this period the 20th Battalion had its second birthday and received the news that their CO, Colonel Kippenberger, would receive the DSO, and two of her soldiers, Upham and Hinton would be awarded the VC. For their commitment and bravery during the past battles: Each man was issued a bottle of beer out of Regimental funds and celebrations were generally delightful.

On the 6 Oct plans for the second Libyan offensive had been made and the 8th Army, of which the 20th Battalion were now a part of, was to take Cyrenaica. This Army consisted of three groups. Thirtieth Corps (the Armour), was to seek out and destroy the Enemy Armour and then relieve Tobruk. Thirteenth Corps, which included 4 Indian Division, the NZ Division and 1 Armoured Brigade, was to advance north, isolate the Enemies frontier forces and mop up to the west. Far to the south the Oasis Group force was to deceive the Enemy by moving from Giarabub the day before the main battle began. In addition the Tobruk garrison, 70 Division, with various supporting units, including the Polish Carpathian Brigade and 32 Army Tank Brigade, would come under command of 30 Corps when the break out operation became feasible. It was estimated that the Axis Forces in Cyrenaica numbered 110,000 men, with approximately 300 medium tanks and 1140 field and anti-tank guns. Their Air force was mainly Italian of about 500 aircraft. The 8th Army had at its disposal 500 odd cruiser tanks, 200 infantry tanks, 100 or more light tanks and about 500 Aircraft.

Our Soldier, who was amongst this offensive, continues with his letter writing...

Letter Eighteen...

Dear Mum,

I have just about given up hope of ever getting a letter from you again, because I have not had one since the one you wrote on the 4th of June. However I had a wire from Gladys and she said everything was O.K. at home. I had 3 birthday greeting wires, yours and one each from the girls. You might be a bit surprised, but I got the girls while spending a few quiet and peaceful days in clink. Jim Clune and I went absent without leave for a couple of hours and that was the penalty. However I am a free man again now, and out of the convalescent camp. I expect I will be back with my old unit tomorrow or perhaps Monday. It is mighty hot here at present and while I am writing this the sweat is just pouring of me so that I have got to keep a spare piece of paper under my wrist to keep this from getting soaked. I am not moaning but it will just give you an idea what life is like in the desert. There is a casualty list in the Church Army hut that I am writing this in and it makes a joker realise how lucky he is to be here at all. I have not heard anything of the 6th yet but if they are coming here I might get to see Harold sometime soon. Uncle Karl and Ken Bird are over here somewhere but I have not had a chance to look them up yet. Will you thank Gladys for the wire for me, and tell her I will write one day soon. I have already written to Joyce and I guess two letters a day is about my limit. I got some seeds of a tree that grows over here and if the letter will stand the strain I will stick some in with this. They are a mass of red flowers just now and look not bad. It is some sort of a wattle so it might be just as well to scold the seed. There is nothing much happens here that I can write about but I hope to go on leave soon so I will try and do better next time...

Letter Nineteen...

I have not heard from you for quite some time, but I have been shifting around a lot lately and I expect mail is having a job catching me up. I am back with the old crowd again and managed to get back into the same section again as Ron. I was mighty glad to get back too, I know all the old hands here and for the week I was at base I had fatigues every day. It is a bit funny getting back to, parade ground stuff, after being in Greece and Crete. It is not so bad though, we only work from 7 in the morning till 11.30 because of the heat, and three nights a week we do a couple of hours after tea. Old Ron is growing a mo at present, but the way it is shaping he will have to put a bit of boot black on it to make it show up. He is going to get a photo taken to send home and they would never see it unless he does. He had a game of hockey the other night, and he put on such a good show the boys were asking who he had played for in civvies life. Ron told them the only time he had played before was with a jam - tin and a willow stick when he was going to school. I was talking to a joker who was in camp with us, but did not come over till the third section and he gave me an enlarged photo of the one I had taken there so I will send it home to you after next pay day. Remember that parcel you sent me with the tooth-brush, paste etc in it? Well I just got it the other day. So I am expecting to get the others any time now. Have you got those gloves I sent you and did they fit? It was a pretty wild guess on my part so I hope they were alright. You seem to be getting a lot of cold weather over there I wish we could get a bit now and again, even when you are lying down here the sweat just runs out of you. I was talking to Ken Bird the other day and he seems fit and well. I have not seen Uncle Karl yet but may bump into him one day soon. Well I am afraid nothing much happens over here to write about so I will close this now...

Letter Twenty...

I am afraid this will be a pretty short note, paper is not so plentiful and this pencil has got to go the rounds. I have already sent a cable but I thought a letter might not go amiss. Ron and I are still together and well but I wouldn't say fit because we have had a mighty tough fortnight. A lot of marching and the grub has been a bit scarce. We are out of it now though and have had a few quite days. The boys are just about their old selves again. A chap has got a lot to be thankful for though, getting out with a whole skin. Quite a few coppers were less fortunate. I don't know where we go from here but I expect I will be there next time I write. I have seen Colin Baker and Les Moffatt since we have been here and they are both O.K. I don't know how Bert is he is in a different lot from Ron and I now. If he is still kicking, and I have got a feeling he is, I hope to see him in a day or so. The last letter I had from you was boat mail, and I was a bit surprised for getting a shake up for not writing, I thought I had been doing pretty well myself? However you should know me by this. One of the lads is yelling for this pencil so I had better close now.

P.S. I think I will take up running when I get back, I reckon I can do a hundred yards in 9 sec flat...

Letter Twenty one...

To his Sister

Dear Joyce,

I wrote you a wee letter last time and got one the same size in return so thought I would write a long one this time, but what I am going to stick in it is beyond me. You say nothing ever happens in Kaihu, well, you should try this part of the world for a while, and then you would have something to write about. I suppose you will be thinking yourself some tart now with your new lighting system and the rest of the gadgets that goes with the power. Has Alex got it in the shed? Mum was saying you are getting as thin as a rake hence the new name. What is wrong old thing is married life getting you down or is it just family worries. We have just finished a three day competition, I don't know what it was for, but some of the boys reckon it was to find out if the sand has got us as bad as it seems to have. In one part of it we had to answer 20 questions, and most of them were something after this style. Who are the main three Generals on the Russian front, and the naval place of this and that place? A man needed to be a blinking travelling book to answer them. The winning platoon was to get 3 tins of tobacco per man but I don't think 12 platoon (that is us) will get any of it because between you and me the boys either didn't give a damn, or are they properly sand happy? A chap just landed back with some snaps we had taken just after I came back from hospital and they turned out pretty good. The one of the 'Old Horse' and I looks as if I have got a good beer glow on, but it is really just sun tan (may-be). I had a short note from Harold yesterday and by the look of it the joker who censored it must have been very conscientious because half the damn thing was cut out. He evidently told me where he landed and where he is camped. The Johnny who thought he was doing his stuff might as well have saved himself the trouble because two or three days before Pete's note arrived we had heard all about his lot. I don't know what has gone wrong with the works over here, but our waters been cut down to one bottle a day and the beer is practically nil. The jokers who run our canteen landed back with a few bottles of "Sky" and while I am writing this, one of the boys trots over with a nip so I wouldn't be surprised if you have a job writing this. Ron and I have been waiting patiently for our chits to arrive for a couple of weeks now and when they arrive we are going on leave. We have not decided where yet but I hope to able to look up Harold. Ron has had a couple of parcels this week and we have been living like kings. He got a tin of butter and there is usually some bread left over from lunch. We save this for toast and make up some coffee and milk or coco for afternoon tea. Believe me she goes down good. Well I don't know what sort of an effort you would call this but I am afraid I am stumped so I will close now...

Letter Twenty two...

2nd August

Dear Mum,

It is Saturday again and I have not heard from you yet. However I had a note from Joyce last night and it seems everything is alright with you. I wrote to the Dowd family while I was in the rest camp and I got a reply from them also, Nell wrote and said the "Old Tart" was very pleased to hear from me but had all most given up hope of ever

getting a letter from me. We went out on a 24 hour stint this week, and I don't know whether I am slipping or just plain soft, but when we got back to camp I was just about all in, and minus about half an acre of hide of my feet. I think the heat was to blame though, it was as hot as blazes and we were only allowed two bottles of water. I haven't had any leave yet but Ron and I are going to try and get away in a week or two to a change of air camp they have started here. I believe it is near the sea so if we get there we will be in our glory. Ron is like a blinken duck in the water. Parts of Harold's lot have arrived here, but I don't know whether he is or not. I may go in to-morrow and make inquiries. Ask Pop if he would like to go back to the blade razor again they are very cheap over here and I could get him a real good one for a few bob. I was talking to Colin Baker yesterday and he is looking the fittest I have ever seen him, but like the rest of us is sick of sand and wants to be on the move again. I am afraid this is not much of a letter but I may be able to do a bit better after I hear from you. I believe there is some airmail in now so I won't send this until I see if there is any from you...

Letter Twenty three...

Your long looked for letter arrived the other day so thought I would answer it while I have got a bit of time. It gets harder each time to find some-thing to write about though because life over here is just a repetition from day to day. Parades, marches, eating and sleeping. Ron is trying to get a bit of sleep along side of me while I am writing this but I think the flies are causing him a bit of trouble because he is jumping kicking and swearing away to himself. I have seen quite a few of the new hands that have arrived here from up home and Huntly. Yesterday I was talking to Len Downey and he said he had a wire to say he had a son. It is hard to imagine Len as a father, but the world is full of surprises. Harold getting married for instance. I got a parcel from Zel the other day and a beauty big one from Mavis at Howick. There was butter, honey, sweets, practically a full shaving set and a dozen other things. I never ever expected one from her so it came as a big pleasant surprise. Ron just told me he wrote to you last week, so when you read it take it with a grain of salt. He told me I had better ask Mum for a recipe on how to cook rice so I don't know what he has been putting across. We had a bit of a wrestle around the hut the other day and I knocked a bit of hide off my shoulder and leg. They both started to fester up so I put a bit of that ointment on that you sent me and now they are as good as gold. It must be pretty good stuff. Well I am afraid that is me for this time, so I will drop a line to the little lady, and thank Mavis for her parcel...

Letter Twenty four...

I received your last letter about a week ago but we have been pretty busy lately and this is the first chance I have had to answer it. Ron and I are on cook house fatigues today and after we have finished washing about a mile of greasy dishes and pans we manage to get about a couple of hours to ourselves between meals. We have had a shift since I last wrote but it is not much of an improvement because we are still living on the sand and in tents. We are handy to the sea though and are able to get a swim each afternoon. It is hot to do anything in the middle of the day over here at present, so we can either have

a siesta or go swimming. If you lay down the flies nearly drive you silly and if we go for a swim we just about peg out with the heat. So we are between the devil and the deep blue sea. The usual topic of conversation now a days is, green paddocks, cold gushing streams, iced beer and fruit salad and ice cream. The other day the temperature in the hut was 120 degrees Fahrenheit. It does not seem to affect me though because I am heavier now than I have been any time of my life before. We have got a good crowd of guys in our platoon and have a lot of fun. The lads reckon Ron and I have gone sand happy and one joker told us they would not take us into the rat house when we got back because we would drive the patients crazy. We did not know whether to take it as an offence or treat it as a compliment. What do you reckon?. I have not seen Uncle Karl yet but I am closer to him now and I may be able to look him up soon. Did I tell you in the last letter about cousin Mavis sending me a parcel? Well anyway I wrote thanking her but when I came to look I could not find her address. I wonder if you could send it over. Don't forget her surname because I have forgotten that to. I am glad you got the gloves and they fit O.K. I would not save them for a wedding though because I am afraid it will be a long time from now. However one does not know which way the wind will blow, does one? It seems as though that estate of yours is a bit of a muck up. I think I would be inclined to tell them to stick it up there jumper and forget all about it. Any way it will take pretty much all you get out of it to pay the solicitors bills. Well I am afraid that is me stumped for this time, and anyway it is nearly time for me to get back to work...

Letter Twenty five...

September 4

I received your letter with Ruth's note enclosed a few days ago and although I have not much to write about, I thought I would drop you a line while I have got a bit of time to spare. We are still in the camp I mentioned in my previous letter and having a fair bit of fun one way and another. We have been doing a bit of rowing lately and most of the jokers are like myself, have never had an oar in their hands before. The chaps in charge of us just about get driven off their rockers trying to get us to work together. They have been holding a competition this last two or three days, a sort of a Brigade championship, and our platoon got into the semi-finals but we were a little unlucky today and lost. There is quite a noticeable change in the weather over here lately, especially at nights, so I am hoping by the end of the month it will be cool enough to be comfortable. By then I expect we will be back working all day again. I sent for some money and if things are still quiet when it gets here I think I will take a holiday. Ron is due for a week to so we will go together and make whoopee. He caught a lizard out in the desert the other day and brought him home to the tent. He reckons he was going to train him to keep the flies of him while he was sleeping, but I don't think Sammy liked his new surrounding, because he broke his bonds with in a few hours of captivity and did a bunk for sandy wastes. Did you get the letter Ron wrote you?. I think he is looking forward to an answer because each time I get one from you he wants to know if mum has sent the recipe yet. As a matter of fact I am looking forward to finding what it is all about myself. We have had quite a few snaps taken together lately, and when we get a chance to get them developed I will send you a couple. We have both had our hair off again, and when I was

giving the finishing touches to Ron's one of the boys snapped us. Well I think I will finish of now and print a wee bit to Ruth to put in...



LEFT: A NEW ZEALAND BATTALION AT A BEACH OF THE MEDITERRANEAN NORTH AFRICA

Letter Twenty Six...

September 12

I have not received your letter this week yet, but I think we are getting another shift in the next day or so, so I thought I would drop a line while I have got a chance. The weathers starting to get a lot cooler over here now and the flies are starting to disappear so taking it all round life is pretty good. We had a sports meeting this week and competition between the Battalions was keen. Ron and I were in a relay team but only ran into third place. How-ever our Battalion won the tug of war and the Officer commanding our company won the 100 and 220 yards races for us. We had the "Kiwi concert party" out entertaining us this week, and by gee they put on a good show. They have got two women impersonators with them and had we not known before we went I don't think we ever would have picked them. One sings soprano and the other imitates Betty Boop. Altogether there are 22 players and all are talented singers, comedians or musicians. I heard that Harold's lot have been on final leave again but unless he gets drafted out into the Battalion after he gets out here I may not get a chance to see him for some time. If you ask Mrs Clune where Jim was last Xmas you will get an idea where we are off to. Well I am afraid this is a pretty skimpy sort of a letter but I never seem to find much to write about. You will have to excuse this writing but I paid 6 pence and two cigarettes about a month ago for this pen and I think it has just about done its dash...



LEFT: TROOPS CAMPED BY THE MEDITERRANEAN

Letter Twenty seven...

September 19th

I just received your letter written 27 Aug and was pleased to get it too. I have been getting them every week now for a long time, and when one did not turn up last week I wondered why, but I can see by your letter you have been having a pretty busy time. We have arrived in a place I mentioned in my last letter and are camped in a great little possie right alongside the open sea. We are all living in two man tents and from where Ron and I sleep we both look right down on to the beach. It is a strict black out here and lying in bed listening to the breakers and the feel of the sea breeze reminds me of nights on the beach at Aranga. There is quite a bit of livestock running around here too, lizards, snakes, and this morning when I pulled my bed out to air it a blincken big scorpion about two and half inches long trotted out from under the ground sheet. Had I known he was my bed mate I don't think I would have slept as peacefully as I did. Last night after tea we were all sitting down in the sand having a yarn and reading our mail. Some of the boys were reading extracts from their letters to cobbers from their own districts, so I read that little bit from yours, saying how sorry you were for my poor feet. I have had six offers of foot powder and two of ointment already today and the boys have started to call me Mummies little boy, Ron says he would, not be surprised if the Sergeant Major was around to tuck me in at night. There have been lots of planes flying overhead all day long since we have been here, but so far they have been all friendly. I don't know how soon before we go in to action, but I hope it is not for a long time because I can stand a lot of this life here. I started this letter yesterday but had to knock off for pay parade and then we went down for a swim. By the time we got back and had tea it was a bit dark to finish it so here goes for a bit more. They gave us an extra 10 shillings to compensate for the gear we lost in Greece and Crete...? I don't know if it came out of Patriotic funds or not, but why there should be that much difference. I am blowed if I can see. Not so much myself but I know a lot of jokers who lost pounds worth of stuff. By all accounts you must have had a mighty hard winter over there and speaking of mud, I just about forget what it looks like. I expect we will be getting a shower or two in a month or so. It does rain here sometimes you know, but winter here usually means sand storms. If one can believe all he reads that baby of Joyce's must be a cute kid, and tell that fat sister of mine will you that I am sure she owes me a letter. Well I am afraid that's me stumped, so I will shut this up and drop a line to the little lady.

P.S. Thanks a lot for the stamps they will come in handy and don't forget to send me Mavis Whites address...

Letter Twenty eight...

It is Sunday again and Church parade is over so I thought I would endeavour to scratch a few lines. I have not got your letter this week yet, but I hear there is a airmail coming in today so I expect there will be one there for me. I had a nice long letter from Mary last week and she was saying she hoped I did not get too big a shock to hear about the wedding. I answered it and said it was a good excuse to have a tiddly at the milk bar. This has been a bit of a feast week for Ron and I, we have had a parcel each. Ron got a big cake from home and Zel sent me socks, hankies and chewing gum. I wrote and thanked her and told her what a wonderful little girl I think she is. How many parcels have you sent me Mum? I have only had one so far. Ron was chuckling the other day and was saying it was a good job that Scorpion I was telling you about did not get annoyed and attached our after ends (we sleep in our shirt tails) I think he spoke to soon though because while we were swimming yesterday he slipped and cut that particular part of his person on a sharp rock. He reckoned it did not hurt but I saw him pulling some hellish faces while I was painting him with iodine. I have been away for awhile and have just come back from trying to jelly some fish with some of the boys. I think we will have to be content with stew for tea though because our fishing expedition was not much of a success. It turned out like the old tail, wet ---- and no fish. The weather is great over here now, just like our summer, although I think the nights are a bit cooler. We run around with our shirts out a lot of the time and all the boys are as brown as berries. I have not seen Uncle Karl yet but when I do I think it will have to be by accident because there is not much means of transport and our units are a fair way apart. However if old Joey keeps going as well as he has been who knows we may be on the same boat heading home before many months are up. He and his "Red Feds" are putting up a great scrap and the first one I meet I will buy him a drink. I notice the papers don't talk so unkindly of him as they used to. One of the boys, Scotty by name has just come in and says he wants to put a few words on for Mum. So I will reserve the next page for the gang.

***From Scotty:** He is certainly doing a good job of work. I have just done a good job of work myself today. We went on a fishing expedition, and spent all afternoon and only got three of an unknown species, the biggest would just about end up the size of a gold fish. The 'Old Horse' was so disgusted he just boiled them up and devoured the lot, head, tail, fins and all.*

***From Ron (The Old Horse):** Hold on Mum, I cannot let Scotty get away with this or you will be thinking I am a bit greedy. As a matter of fact there were three of us in on the feed, although I cannot deny there were no heads or tails left. By the amount of swimming I did I could have cleaned up a sack full, and although there were plenty of rocks, there was no repetition of a little mishap I had last week of which Bill reckons he has told you of. He is still a bit huffy about the 'pen' I think. By the way don't bother to answer these little notes of nonsense. Just put a line or two in Bills letter and he can pass it on.*

Me again, well I think that just about covers this week's happenings so I will close now...

Letter Twenty nine...

I received your letter with the snaps enclosed a couple of days ago, and thought they were pretty good too, except the one taken down the street where Harold looks as if he has been on the binge for about a week. Molly certainly does look in the pink, doesn't she, and by the way you can tell her if she likes to write and tell me what size stockings she wears I will send her a pair for Xmas. I believe they are pretty scarce over there. There is plenty over here and cheap to .I had a letter from Joyce a while back and she was saying she had posted some parcels to me for Xmas, so here is hoping they arrive in time. A big hunk of cake or some other kind of eats would sure be appreciated at present. If you would like to do me a real favour you could send me a pair of mittens, by the time they get here it will be getting pretty cold. Even now after the sun goes down all the boys get all their woollies on. The weather is ideal at present, when the sand is not blowing, just like late spring over there, a bit nippy in the mornings and not too hot during the day. Ron caught a Chameleon the other day and has been training him to catch flies. He is a queer looking beastie, and has got a strange habit of changing colour in keeping to whatever ground he is covering. You've seen pictures of slow motion posers in action, well, that's what he looks like getting along. His eyes seem to be on swivels and can watch you and the fly he is stalking at the same time. I don't know where he keeps his tongue because he is only about 8 or 9 inches long and can reach a fly a good two feet away. We went for a swim today and had a go for some more fish. We only got a few so we fried them in our mess dines and ate them like that. They were very tasty too and the only trouble was there wasn't enough. I'd like to be able to sink my teeth into about half a snapper right now. We were supposed to start out on a three day manoeuvre tomorrow, but it's been postponed for some reason or another. I don't mind them so much the only trouble is we seem to automatically go on a starvation diet whenever we go out. Well Mum there's not very much to write about, so I'll close now and grab a bit of shut-eye.

P.S. Could you send me Harold's address as soon as you get it, there's a big chance of me going on leave before long, and I may get to somewhere where I can look him up. That letter you posted and were afraid it wouldn't go Airmail arrived OK...

Letter Thirty...

I have not had a letter from you since I last wrote, but it is the weekend again so I thought I would drop a few lines. We went out on that manoeuvre I mentioned in my last letter and the diet turned out as I predicted. The last day out we had a third of a tin of bully for break-fast and for dinner they were kind enough to dish us up a whole dog biscuit. The day before one of the boys shot a pre-historic looking animal known as an Iguana, and by the time 3 o'clock came around I was kicking my- self for not having brought him a long and made some stew or soup or something out of him . I don't suppose he would have been what you might call a delicacy, but a man cannot be to proud now a days. Yesterday there was a hell of a storm blowing over here, and by the time it dropped the gear inside our tent just looked like a small sand hill. I felt as if there was a

little one on the inside of me some place , and had visions of a few bottles of good old Mr booze to wash it out seeing as it was pay day , but unfortunately the canteen was out , and I might say is still out . However it has not made much difference to me because like a mug I sent my last pay into the wash. They have cut down our water to one bottle a day too, so it looks like a dry week for Willy. I must tell you about a pudding one of the Guys concocted out on the manoeuvre. I called it 'Archibald's Desert Special'. Put about a cup of water in a mess tin, bring it to the boil and then add six to twelve dog biscuits. It all depends how many are available. When you think they are soft enough, pour a little fruit juice over them. Then to top things off melt a couple of bars of chocolate and smear over the whole lot, then place under a shrub to cool. I don't know whether I told you before but a while ago Ron got a bit sand happy and wrote a poem. He copied it onto a Xmas card and sent it to you, but don't believe the bit about the tidy wee shack because he is about as careful about putting things in their proper place as I am. I am writing this in a dug-out and one of the boys has just made a drink of coffee and milk, so I will knock off and have a wee sup. The supper proved too much so I went to bed and this is another day. I have been on cook- house fatigues all morning, but have now got a break till tea time. Ron does not seem to be in the best of spirits today, I think he has got a touch of the flu. He is pretty tough though and I expect he will be O.K. in a day. Well I am afraid there is very little to write about - you must get sick of hearing about sun and sand, so I will close now...

Letter Thirty one...

It is the weekend again and we have come in off another three day manoeuvre. There were three letters waiting for me, so I suppose Willy's about the most cheerful boy in the Western Desert right now. I am afraid I will have to take back all I have said about starving on these stints, because what with the stuff we bought and took with us and the lot extra they dished out to us we fed like kings. If they keep up the good work the boys will want to go out every week. We sighted a herd of Gazelles on the way out, and we all started licking our lips at the thought of a bit of fresh meat. However the jolting of the truck and the speed the little beasties were travelling at proved too big a handicap for the boys with the rifles so we had to leave Mr. Gazelle to his wanderings and get back to our place in the convoy. We slept on top of the ground last night, and I felt the cold the first time for months. Had we been in NZ, I think it would have been a light frost because the top of the blanket was pretty near wet through and all the metal parts of our rifles were covered in dew. However it soon gets warm after the sun gets up, and Ron and I heated a bit of water in a fruit tin so everything was hunky dory!. I had a letter from Joyce to day and she was saying Mary had heard from Harold. Have you yet? When you do will you send me his address and then when I get a chance it will be a lot easier to look him up. Has Jack done over three months in the Terries? It seems a long time since he went into camp and if he has got any sense that is where he will stop. You want to tell him there will never be another place like N.Z. It is a pity he did not write and tell me he was going to Huntly I might have been able to give him a line or two. I have often been asked if I had any Brothers. I had a note from Ken Bird and find he is camped not far from us so if I get a chance I will nick down and see him. By his letter he sounds fit and well and as keen as mustard. We all went to the pictures early last week and enjoyed ourselves immensely. We all sat around in a semi-circle in the sand and they

had the screen stuck in the side of a covered in truck. The sound was the best I have heard in any of the camps and it was as dark as the Devil, so it was a big success. It was put on by the YMCA. Ron and I have not been on leave yet but will go as soon as our money arrives. We hope to get to Palestine but so far they have been granting no leave for there. I have got a lot of post cards, snaps one of the boys got while up there and I will send them to you when I can dig up a bit of brown paper. Well I am afraid writing foddors pretty scarce so I will close this now.

P.S. A Mrs. Elsie Pulham very kindly sent me a parcel of weeklies, so I will write her a letter of thanks-----



LEFT: NZ TROOPS OUT ON MANEUVERS IN THE WESTERN DESERT

Letter Thirty two...

October 5th

I received your last letter about 3 or 4 days ago but seeing I had only posted one to you the other day before it arrived. I thought I would wait a while before answering it. We are still in the camp I have mentioned in previous letters and enjoying life in general. We went on another fishing expedition last week and it turned out a bit more successful than the other one I told you about. We were using three plugs of jelly at a time and one shot we threw in must have landed right in a school because the water seemed white with fish. Believe me; we had some fun getting them out. The water was about 8 ft deep and after they had floated for two or three minutes they sunk. We had to swim out, dive down and grab a fish in each hand and one in our teeth and then get back to shore as best we could. We got so excited we pretty near all drowned ourselves. However we managed to get enough for a feed for the whole company and 'Oh boy' were they good. The only regrets I have is that I have got about 7 hunks of plaster on my feet where I cut them on the rocks. I had a letter from Joyce last week and if one can believe all he reads this baby of hers must be a little 'whop cacker'. She says she will send me a photo of her when she gets one and then I will be able to judge for myself. I posted two company photos a few weeks ago now and they should be there shortly. One of them, the smaller group, is all that is left of the company that went to Greece and the other is the company as it is now. They are pretty poor photos but I thought you might like them. You will have to excuse this writing but we had a fairly big 'do' last night and the old hand is not quite as steady as it might be. It is two years to-day since the first lot went into camp

and it was 12 months on the second since we did. We joined forces last night and did a fair bit of celebrating. I think this has been the longest year in my life but I suppose it is because so many events have been cramped into so short a time. I got another parcel this week, this time from the Downey boys, socks smokes, chewing gum and two books. It came as a big surprise because I have never written to them. Well Mumsy, that is about all I can think of for this week so I will close now...

Letter Thirty three...

November 4th

I am a bit late with the letter this week, but I had a fairly busy week end, last, and this is really the first chance I have had. I did not get a letter from you this week but the last one I had was dated the 13th Oct. Evidently it must have caught the plane very smartly, because it arrived about a week ago, and the latest mail I have found out is only the 16th. I had a short note from Harold last week saying he has landed O.K. and was camped some place. Ron and I have both got our money and I was hoping to be able to look him up, but we were playing foot-ball last week and the 'Old Horse' badly sprained his ankle. Ron wants me to go without him but I don't think I will bother. We have got everything planned and I don't want to go and muck everything up. We have had a small shift since last I wrote but it is only for a week. Ron is still back at where I came from and I am camping with two other jokers. I have been doing all right for myself to because they both have had parcels and we make morning and sometimes afternoon tea. For about a fortnight awhile back we had practically no beer, but last Saturday they got 48 doz for the company from someplace. Ron being lame, so another joker, Big Andy, we call him and I had a fairly big session. I don't know what time we called it off but Ron said he woke up at 2 am and I still was not at home. Believe me I did not take too kindly to packing all my gear up and move out on Sunday. We are a bit further away from the sea than we were before, but our platoon has got a truck at its disposal and we still get a swim every day. While on picket last night I was talking to one of the Wog shunters on the railway here. Evidently he has been with the Tommies all his life and he talks and swears just like them. I don't think I have laughed so much in my life before; he sure could take a Pom off to a Tee. A chap landed back last week with some snaps we had taken just after I came out of hospital, so I will enclose a couple with this. I am about 100 per cent better now than I look in the photos so you will be able to see everything is O.K. with Willy.

P.S. The boss just gave me a snap he took of our section just after we came in off a three day manoeuvre. I will keep the one of the "Old Horse" and one to send to the little lady and send you the other two...

Letter Thirty four...

November 11th

It is only a few days since I wrote, but I have a few spare moments so thought I would scratch a few lines. I have not heard from you in over a fortnight now, but I suppose I have to be less content now that Harold is over here. I had one from Mary yesterday and she said she had heard from you and everything was O.K. at home. We are back in our old camp now and I am back with Ron again. His foot is still pretty sore, but he can hobble around with his boots on and without his sticks. I think it is a fair bit worse than we first thought and will take a few weeks yet to come right. I was at a football match between our fellows and the South Africans last week and saw Bert Nicholson there. He is looking a bit thin on it and is wearing a stripe. One of his cobbers was telling me the responsibility was getting to much for him, but I cannot imagine Nick doing any undue worrying. I saw Ray Downey and Colin Baker yesterday and they both look as fit as fiddles. The weather is getting a little cooler over here now and we all have been issued with battle dresses. I got a second hand one, but a lot better than the one I got in N.Z. so I have got no cause to moan. They feel a bit strange after being in shorts for so long but I expect we will soon get used of them. The little lady sent me a studio of herself in her last letter and she is looking lovelier than ever. I am hoping that one day you two will get to know each other. She is some girl, believe me. Tell skinny I am still looking for a photo of the snooker. Well I am afraid this card is about full and pencil won't show up on the blue so I will close. Don't worry too much everything will be O.K....



LEFT: NZ BASE RUGBY TEAM LINE UP
WITH SOUTH AFRICAN BASE TEAM BEFORE
MATCH AT MAADI, EGYPT, WORLD WAR II
6

LEFT: LINE-OUT IN THE NZ BASE
VERSUS SOUTH AFRICAN BASE RUGBY
MATCH AT THE MAADI SPORTING
CLUB GROUND, EGYPT, WORLD WAR II
7





Keeping fit in the desert. A typical physical training squad in action in the Baggush sun and sand.



The 2NZEF Athletic Team at Tel Aviv, Palestine, in 1942. *Back:* Findlyson, Robertson, Olliver, *Middle:* Jones, Gardiner, McKain, Vernon, Robinson, Bradwell, Campbell, Collinge, Bain, Sharply. *Front:* Boot, Jones, Davie, Masters, McHugh.

WE RE-JOIN OUR SOLDIERS WAR

NOVEMBER 1941

Leave was granted to men and Officers and one of the last events before the NZ Division moved out was the long awaited game of rugby between South Africa and New Zealand. The Kiwi's winning by 8 points to nil.

Note: Our soldier's friend, Ron Shaw was selected to play for the Kiwi's but because of a badly sprained ankle he missed this game and consequently the oncoming battle.

November 12: For the first time in the war, the whole of the NZ Division moved forward as one force towards the frontier line. The 20th Battalion moved out of Baggush on 3-ton Lorries of 4 RMT Company, along the main road for some thirty miles, and then turned west into the desert for another ten, before halting.

November 15: The troops embussed and moved forward for another 50 miles and now they were very near the frontier wire.

November 16-17: Extra caution was needed now and so under the cover of dark they moved forward another 25 miles. The procedure followed was for the Provost section and the Intelligence Officers to move out during the day and leave two men with a petrol tin and lamp every half-mile along the route. These lamps would be lit just before the transport was due to arrive. The Guide Officer would then move along these lights during the night move, a feat not quite as simple as it sounds, as the Colonel explains...

We used no lights and most Deserts are bumpy and uneven. Leading vehicles travelled at two and a half miles in the hour but there was unavoidable concertinaing, and the tail of a column usually had to move in fit and starts at anything up to twenty miles per hour. Twenty miles was a long night march under normal conditions. The drivers could see nothing of the ground in front, those back in the column could only follow their leaders. One was constantly slithering down over steep banks, bumping against hammocks, falling heavily into abandoned slit trenches, or getting stuck in soft sand. But every difficulty would be surmounted, the lights were always found in the end, and a few minutes after daylight we halted and dispersed and every truck brewed up for breakfast. During the day the stragglers and cripples were brought in by the indefatigable LAD, (Light Aid Detachment, a section specially equipped for the recovery and repair of vehicles.) Next night the performance would start again. The men could sleep during the day, but there were conferences and affairs of various kinds for the Commanders, and I was very short on sleep before the battle opened...

November 18-19: A move at night through the gap in the frontier line and the day was spent quietly, inside Enemy country. Two Enemy planes flew over in the morning and were greeted with a great deal of fire from the Bofer's guns distributed throughout the Division. A small move in the after-noon of about ten miles brought the Battalion close to, Trigh el Abd.

November 20: A warning was received to prepare for an armoured attack from the nth-west, but as the day wore on this did not develop.

November 21: At 1.30 pm the 20th began a long move north at the head of 4 Brigade to take up a position, next morning, cutting the road between Bardia and Tobruk.

November 22: Before dawn the 20th's Companies came across evacuated Enemy transport workshops and a field hospital from which available equipment was obtained. By daylight all Platoons were in position and it was not long before the first Enemy truck approached from Bardia. During the day several were detained and their cargo confiscated, of which there was on one a large German payroll. At 10 am. a Platoon from each Company fanned out across the Desert with orders to mop up the Wadis along the edges and below the Escarpments. Contact was made with small groups of Enemy and their trucks which were dug into pens. Little resistance was shown with many prisoners captured. The days "Bag" totalled 1 German Officer and 17 other ranks, 6 Italian Officers and about 300 other ranks. The 20th's losses were 1 dead and about 5 wounded.

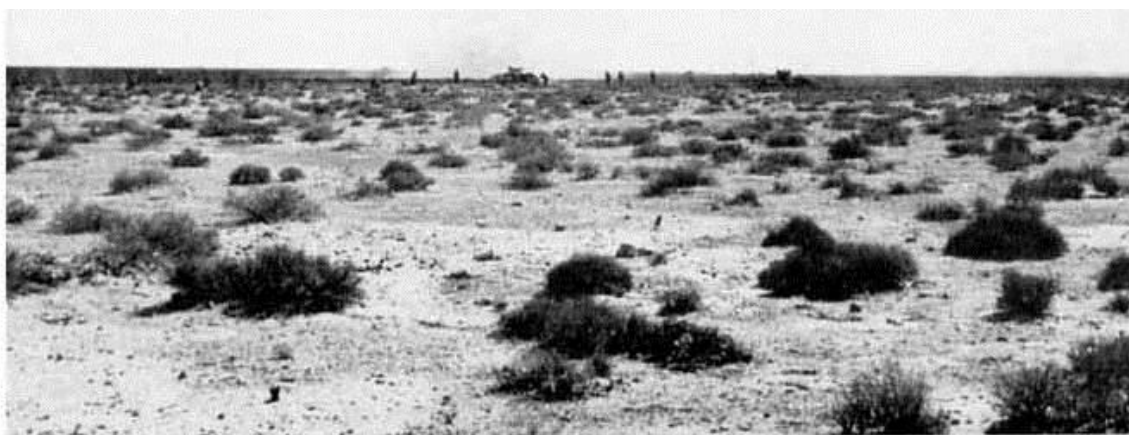
November 23: At 1.30 pm the Battalion was ordered to move south-west and link up with Division headquarters. After a detour to avoid a camel train, (which from a distance looked like a formable Enemy convoy), they finally reached Point 213 at about 4pm.. Here they were informed by General Freyberg, that 6 Brigade was heavily engaged on Sidi Rezegh, 5 Brigade was staying to contain Bardia and Sollum and 4 Brigade, less the 20th, were by then at Gambut Airport.

HQ, with 20 and 21 Battalions were to move by night and join 4 and 6 Brigades. An Enemy force to the west would have to be by-passed. Halting every half hour to check distances and bearings, Colonel Kippenger led the convoy on a wide detour and successfully arrived at Bir el Chleta about midnight.

ATTACK AT BIR EL CHLETA

Note: Our Soldier is wounded during the Battle at Bir el Chleta and becomes a prisoner of war...

November 24: The Enemy group which had been by-passed during the night had followed up and at daylight it started to shell the laager and so Freyberg ordered the 20th to drive it away. The CO went out to reconnoitre and decided to make a frontal attack: The tanks leading in and then the infantry to follow in their trucks. Machine guns, anti-tank guns and carriers would give cover fire from the right flank. This type of attack had been practiced many times before and so forming up was simple and at precisely 11.20 am the attack began. An Enemy force from the east initially diverted the tanks fire and it wasn't for some time before they could correct course, slacken speed and open fire on their original objective. Several were hit and blazed up. Others stopped but were ordered into the attack again. Meanwhile, the transport drivers who were keen to have a go, dashed forward over the stony ground, disregarding the Enemy fire until ordered to halt. The rifle Platoons then debussed, deployed, and moved through the tank line and commenced their assault.



Bir el Chleta. 10 Platoon B Company passing through the tanks

Second-Lieutenant Evan Wilson describes D Companies part in the attack...

Enemy fire was heavy but high, coming from armoured cars dug in and supported by machine guns. There was little cover and had the Enemy range been correct they would have stopped us. We proceeded to within 500 yds. And here I ordered our Mortar men forward and told them to engage, and lay down a string of bombs along the Enemies positions, during which several machine gun nests were silenced. As our Bren carriers moved forward to mop up the Enemy walked forward to surrender...

B Company was similarly engaged on the left flank, where Anti-tank shells fired at their tanks were falling short and bouncing past its ranks. As the Company entered its objective the Enemy broke and ran, and the Battalion marched back to their Lorries and embussed. The Battalion's total casualties for this battle were 2 killed and 17 wounded, but several Enemy guns and armoured cars were captured along with a further 260 men.

Note: It was during this action on the 24th November that our soldier Bill was wounded. He was shot through the thigh, fortunately missing the bone and I believe, fortunate to miss the next battle the 20th were to engage in. He was carried by stretcher to the RAP as the photo shows and then transferred 6 miles West to 6th Field Ambulance based at the Main Dressing Station for the New Zealand Division. He must have thought he had jumped from the frying pan into the fire because from the 26th Nov until the 6th of Dec along with approximately 900 other patients and medical staff he was held as a prisoner of war.



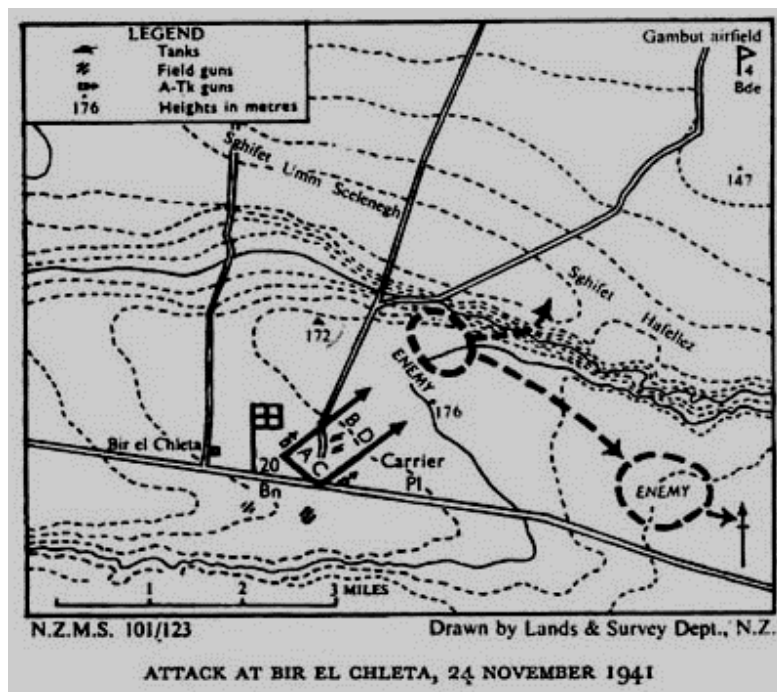
LEFT: CASUALTIES IN RECEPTION TENT OF MDS NEAR SIDI REZEGH, NOVEMBER 1941

Casualties in reception tent of MDS near Sidi Rezegh, November 1941

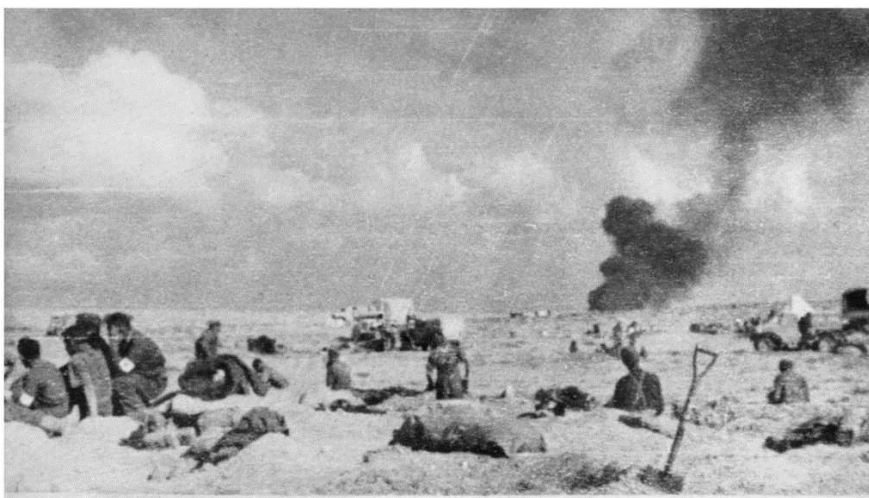
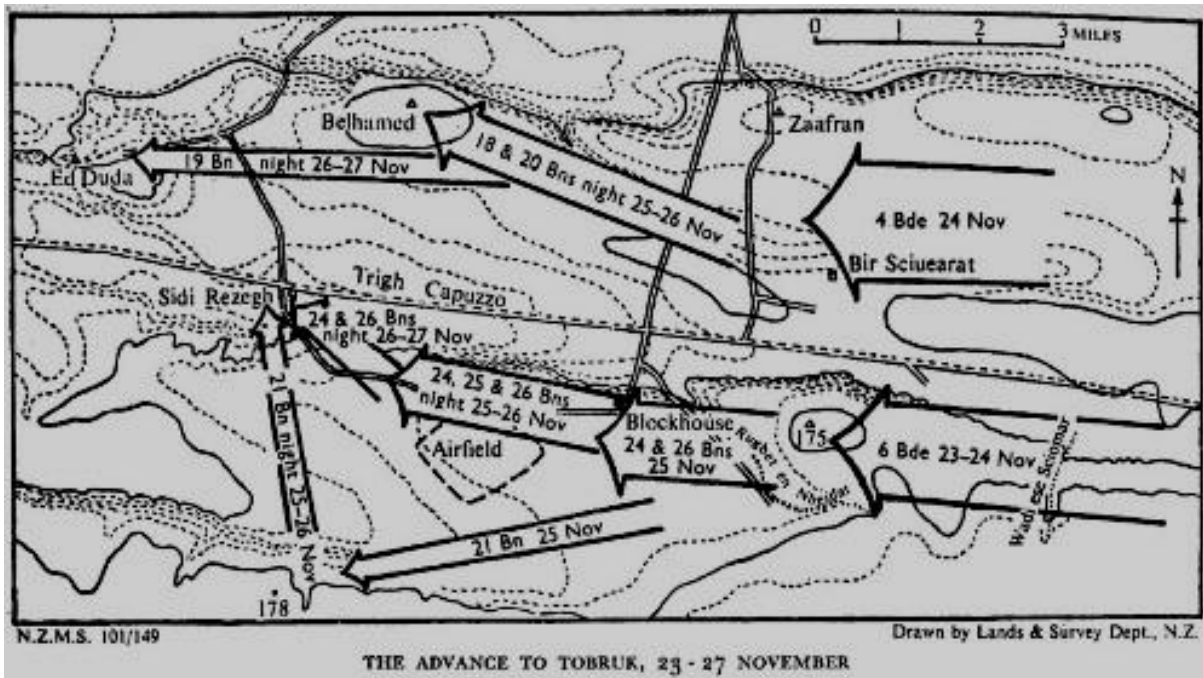
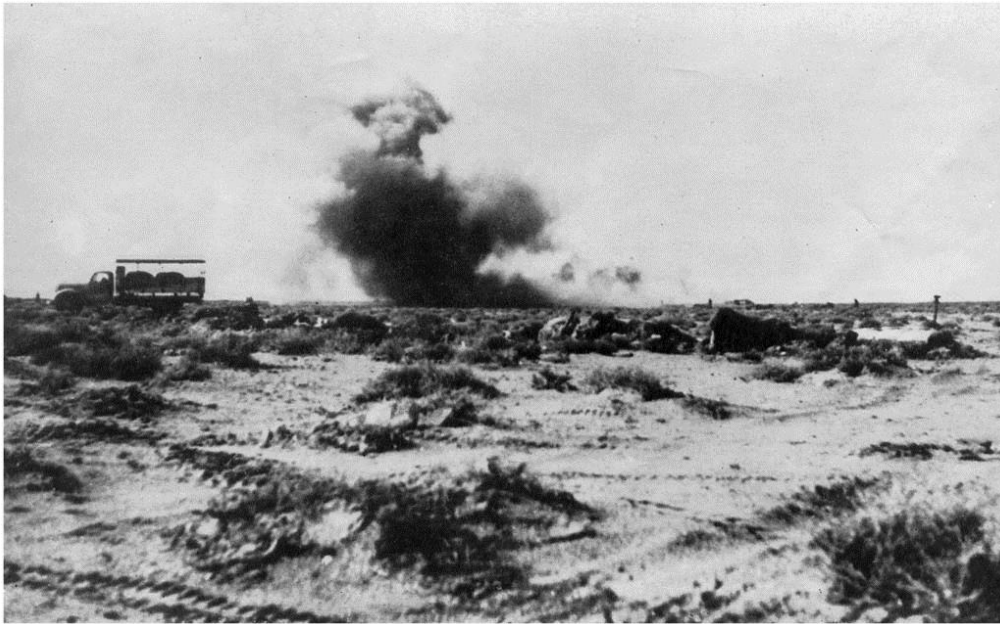


OUR SOLDIER BOTTOM RIGHT FRONT ON STRETCHER WOUNDED WITH A BULLET HOLE THROUGH HIS RIGHT THIGH.

TO BE WOUNDED EARLY IN THIS BATTLE FOR BIR EL CHLETA WAS FORTUNATE IN ONE RESPECT, FOR AS THE BATTLE PROGRESSED THE 20TH BATTALION WERE SURROUNDED BY THE ENEMY AND THE WOUNDED LAY OUT IN THE DESERT FOR THREE DAYS BEFORE THEY WERE ABLE TO RECEIVE ANY MEDICAL ATTENTION.



HEAVY SHELL-BURST AT BIR EL CHLETA



LEFT: SIDI REZEGH, 25 NOVEMBER 1941 DAY
AFTER OUR SOLDIER WAS WOUNDED



ABOVE: MOVING INTO POSITION MINQAR QAIM

PRISONER OF WAR...

The following explanation of our soldiers very difficult situation comes from the booklet *“Return to the Attack”* published by the New Zealand Army board...

Throughout the campaign the medical corps worked under great difficulties, and its problems increased as the force moved hundreds of miles from its base and real lines of communication ceased to exist. For more than a week three-quarters of the entire medical personnel were isolated from the rest of the New Zealand Division. The field ambulances with the 4th Field Hygiene Section and the Mobile Surgical Unit had been concentrated about 6 miles West of Bir el Chleta. There they formed the Main Dressing Station for the New Zealand Division attending to some 900 patients including 700 New Zealanders and nearly 100 prisoners of war.

On several occasions as the battle ebbed and flowed about the approaches of Tobruk, mobile enemy columns entered the dressing station. Nothing could be done since there was no other area to which the patients could be moved. On the afternoon of 26th November General Rommel himself paid a visit, bringing with him 22 badly wounded Germans and taking away the less serious cases. On the 28th General Freyberg visited the dressing station. Towards evening of the same day a tank battle developed about two miles to the south, involving not only the British armoured brigade but also the tanks held in reserve at Divisional Headquarters. The battle swayed away to the south – west and for a brief time all was quiet. Then suddenly without warning, enemy armoured cars and lorried infantry, approaching from the rear along the escarpment, occupied the whole area and cut off the medical units from the rest of the force.

For 9 days the dressing station remained in enemy hands. Any attempt at recapture would have turned the Wadi into a battlefield, for the Italians who took over from the Germans allowed tanks to enter the area and even placed a number of guns near the Red Cross flag. These guns attracted return fire from British artillery, and the scream of shells passing over tents in which the wounded were lying, the ever present danger of shells falling short, and the overbearing attitude of the Italians combined to make the lot of the wounded very hard. Although the Red Cross Convention expressly states that medical personnel must not be treated as prisoners of war, one Italian officer told the New Zealanders that they were prisoners and were expected to behave accordingly.

The Italians had no scruples about looting. On the 2nd of December all medical officers and orderlies were ordered to parade. While the parade was in progress Italian troops systematically and thoroughly looted the whole area, ransacking bivouacs, staff cars, and ambulances. They refrained from entering the wards and operating tents, and medical equipment was not touched. This parade was seen to have a double purpose when a large number of the medical staff, including three commanding officers, were put into ten ton diesel trucks and driven towards Derna and Benghazi, whence they were taken to Italy.

For the whole period of their capture medical staff and patients suffered from a shortage of food and an acute shortage of water. For the first four days water was rationed to one pint a day for each man for all purposes. In the hope of attracting the attention of the RAF, a ground sign **"WATER"** was displayed, but it was not seen. When an Italian water truck arrived on the fourth day, slightly relieving the shortage, it was only after a prolonged argument that permission was granted for 200 gallons to be distributed equally amongst the patients. By 5th Dec the position had become desperate. After the evening meal the Quartermaster announced that only thirty gallons of water was left. Many of the patients already had swollen tongues and cracked lips and in a day or two would certainly have died of thirst.

Early in the following morning, however, British Armoured vehicles were seen on the Western escarpment. Just in time the battle for the approaches to Tobruk had turned in our favour, making it possible to relieve the area.

Note: Our soldier was evacuated by ambulance train to the British 200 field hospital on the 7th Dec and from there to 3 New Zealand base Hospital on the 21st of December.



The hospital wadi near Sidi Rezegh after its capture by the Germans



**ABOVE: THE FIELD HOSPITAL WHERE OUR SOLDIER LAY WAITING TO BE TRANSPORTED TO BASE HOSPITAL
THE GERMANS AND ITALIANS HAD OTHER IDEAS BUT FORTUNATELY FOR OUR SOLDIER HE SURVIVED THIS PART OF HIS STORY AS WELL**



ABOVE: REMNANTS OF THE 20TH WATCHING ROMMEL'S PANZERS ANNIHILATING THEIR ARMORED VEHICLES

BELOW: THE DESERT FOX

(ROMMEL)

LEADER OF THE GERMAN FORCES IN NORTH AFRICA

FOR A FEW DAYS HE HELD ALL WOUNDED AND MEDICAL STAFF AT THE FIELD HOSPITAL (WHERE OUR SOLDIER LAID) PRISONERS OF WAR.





4 Field Ambulance desert operating theatre for El Mreir casualties

A blood transfusion in the desert, after Ruweisat



PATCHING UP THE WOUNDED OUT IN THE FIELD

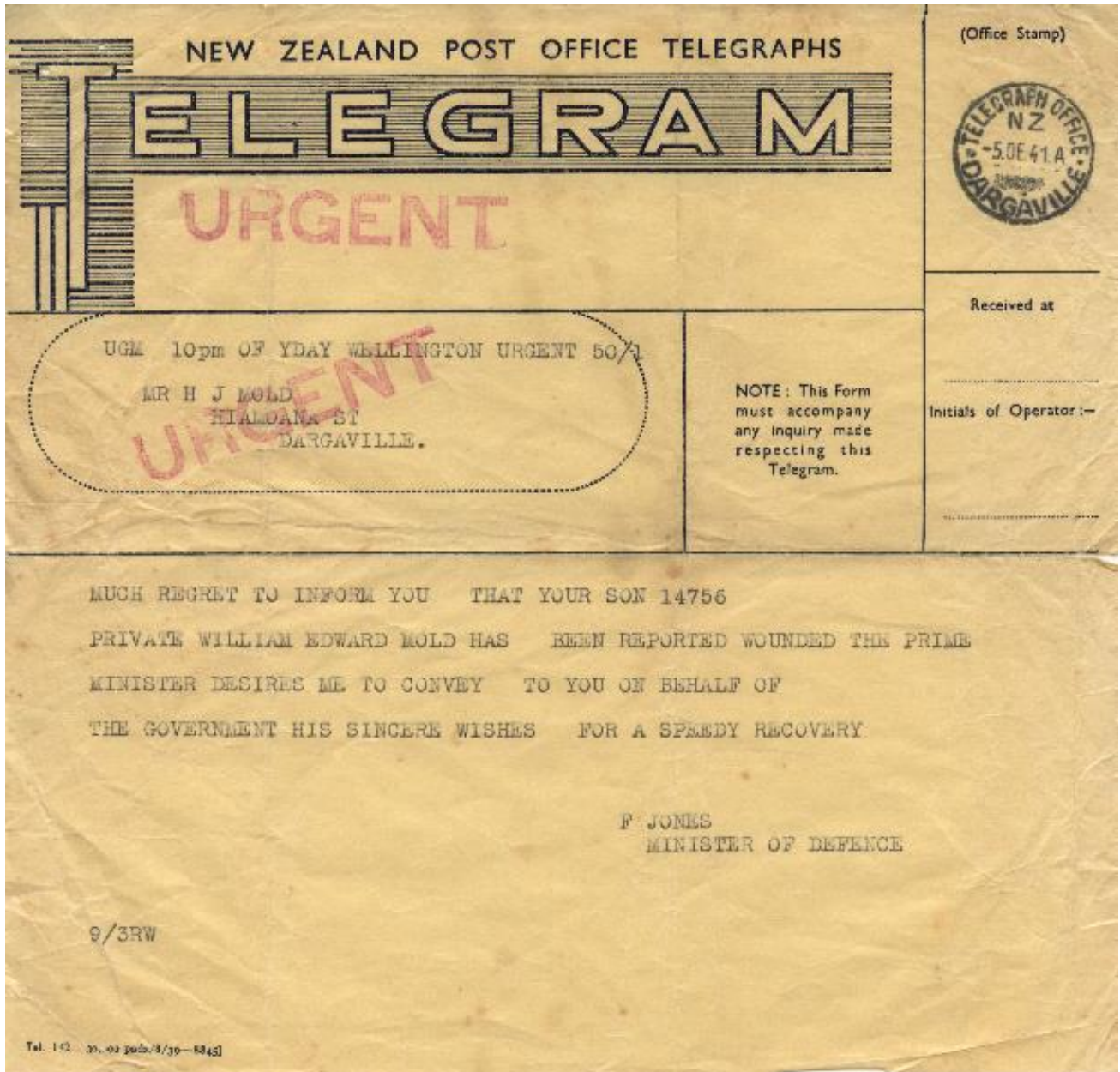


First nursing aids, NZ WAAC, arrive in Egypt on HS Maunganui

WITHOUT THE HELP OF FEMALE NURSES IN THE FIELD A LOT OF THE WOUNDED SOLDIERS WOULD HAVE SUFFERED A LOT MORE. THEY WERE BRAVE, DEDICATED AND DESERVED MEDALS AS WELL.

REFERENCE FROM OUR SOLDIERS PERSONAL MILITARY RECORDS

20 th Battalion	Battle Casualty. Wounded in action.	Middle East	24.11.41
	Battle Casualty. Advanced 6 Field Ambulance	Middle East	24.11.41
FSACCS	Adm F SA CC S	Middle East	27.11.41
F SACCS	Dchgd to 15 BBS	Middle East	30.11.41
	Evacuated by Ambulance Train	Middle East	4.12.41
200 Field Hospital	Transferred to Base Hospital	Middle East	7.12.41
	Transferred too 3 New Zealand General Hospital	Middle East	21.12.41
N.Z.RD	Discharged 1 N.Z. General Hospital att N.Z.RD	Middle East	2.1.1942.
N.Z.RD	Marched out to Sthn TDF Irng Depot	Middle East	6.1.42
S. Inf	Marched out. Posted 20 NZ Battalion	Middle East	13.1.42
20 Battalion	Marched in Posted from S.NZ.Inf.Tng. Depot	Middle East	13.1.42



A COPY OF THE TELEGRAM OUR SOLDIER'S PARENTS RECEIVED INFORMING THEM OF HIS BATTLE INJURIES

THE FOLLOWING BATTLE CONTINUED AFTER OUR SOLDIER WAS WOUNDED...

THE BATTLE FOR BELHAMED

November 25-26: The advance was continued towards the escarpment or rocky ridge of Belhamed and very soon the men came under heavy fire forcing them to take cover. The Battalion was out on a dead flat plain and their orders were not to press on against opposition. Firing continued all day and at dusk orders came down from Brigade to prepare for a night attack. Kippenger gives the best account of this move...

Inglis's orders were short and to the point. 18 and 20 Battalions were to seize and hold Belhamed. Six Brigade was attacking along Sidi Rezegh and we were to advance simultaneously. There was no question of Artillery support; it had to be a straight forward night attack with the bayonet. I expected difficulty in

keeping direction as we crossed the 6,000 yards to the slope leading to the ridge. Jan Peart, leader of the 18th and I decided on a start line and then both Battalions would attack side by side, each with two Companies forward 400 yards of the other two. It was nearly 8. pm when I got back to the lads. They had all had a meal and while they were quietly assembling I had a word with them. It was a tense moment . We all knew that desperate fighting was very close ahead.. I told them what the objective was and the plan, that our success would mean the relief of Tobruk, and that we would go through at all costs and then hold the hill against all comers. I ended by saying 'And now I want only to wish you good luck, every man of you'. It was a very wonderful thing to hear the response: 'Good luck to you, to, Sir'...

The men of the 20th will always remember the following words from their Commander as they prepared for this battle...

"Men, we are going forward tonight to take Belhamed and open the way to Tobruk. This is the crisis of the battle. We have 6,000 yards to go (there were some gasps) and after 4,000 yards we will have to fight our way. We will go straight in with bayonet and bomb and nothing will stop us. I know you will keep the high name of the 20th"...

During the impetuous advance in the darkness contact with the 18th and HQ, was lost. The 20th eventually halted on the south-west slope. The digging was hard and little depth had been achieved by daylight. The absence of Battalion HQ was disturbing. Unknown to the men, Kippenger, had lost contact with his men during the night. Because of a miscalculation of bearings by one of his young Intelligence Officers, they had ended up on a ridge deep inside Enemy Country, well ahead of his men. On learning this mistake the CO retreated some 1200 yards, surprising 60 Germans who they took prisoner and then ended up in the lines of the 18th before daylight. At dawn contact was made with the 20th but before they could move over to the Battalion, Kippenger and several Officers were wounded. Meanwhile, 20 Battalion was in a very difficult position. Shelling and Mortaring continued all day and life on Belhamed was very uncomfortable. The balance of the NZ Division made steady progress all day and during the night 6 Brigade after some of the bloodiest fighting of the Desert war, succeeded in capturing the rest of the Sidi Rezegh escarpment.

November 27: After spending a very cold night without blankets the men of the 20th discovered this morning that their line of communication with Brigade was cut, but their position had been strengthened during the night by several Anti-tank guns. During the morning Captain Quilter received an order through Colonel Peart, who at this time was Senior Officer and had the overall command of both 18 and 20th Battalions in 4 Brigade. The order given was to prepare and attack a German pocket to the south. Quilter objected and asked Colonel Peart to use his own troops as he felt the 20th was being used too much and had, had heavy casualties, particularly in Senior Officers. This upset Peart and he demanded to know who the Battalions Senior Officer was and on learning it was Captain Agar, ordered him to report to him immediately. Agar did so and protested vainly on the phone to Brigade that there was inadequate support for an attack, with two weak Companies across flat ground in daylight against a dug-in machine-gun position of at least Battalion strength. After about twenty minutes Captain Agar ran down the slope to the 20th's HQ and ordered the Adjutant to get the Commanders of B and D Companies. Officers of these two Companies in turn describe the events of the day.

OC. Lieutenant McPhail, B Company...

Orders were very brief and Captain Agar was obviously unhappy about the attack that had been ordered, which was to begin in ten minutes. I ran back to my Company and gave the story to the Platoon leaders

and told them we would have artillery support and tanks would come in from the East. We attacked with two Platoons forward and one back and came under heavy fire as soon as we moved out. The Company advanced steadily but when our artillery fire stopped the Enemy fire increased. We had advanced by bounds but halfway to the objective were pinned down by heavy fire. Casualties were becoming heavy so I sent three runners back to ask for artillery fire. We hugged the ground for the rest of the day and after last light I put a protective screen of the few able bodied men left between ourselves and the Enemy and began collection of the wounded. We improvised stretchers from battle dress tunics and rifles and carried the wounded in. A check-up revealed that there were only 32 left in the Company...

Second-Lieutenant Evan Wilson continues with his account...

Orders were received and we were told that the Germans were keen to surrender. We began our advance over very flat ground with very little cover in the form of undulations or low camel thorn grass. We deployed and for a time advanced in fits and starts for about 800 yards. It puzzled me that there was so much heavy Enemy fire and after an advance of 1000 yards with heavy casualties I realised that there was something wrong. Finally the uncomfortable realisation came that there was no intention of the Enemy to surrender. Heavy Machine gun and Mortar fire kept us checked all day. As soon as it was dark the wounded were gathered and with the help of sometimes six men, they were carried back for treatment. Some had lain out on the battle field all day without attention for up to 14 hrs. Many had died waiting, leaving at the end of the day only 28 in the Company...

During the day Battalion HQ, had not been idle. As the predicament of the infantry became apparent, Captain Quiller appealed several times for Artillery or tank support, but apparently the scarcity of ammunition would not permit it. The Mortar Platoon had not been given any task at the outset but after the failure of supporting Artillery fire Lieutenant Utlely tried to help. He states...

I thought it was time I did something in a hurry. It was obvious that if the Companies had tried to go forward they would have been killed to a man without even reaching Enemy lines. I hoped that if I could quieten the fire they might pull out without any orders. The Enemy position was just out of range but to save time we ripped some bombs down and put extra charges on others and a couple of ranging shots proved that we could hit them. Then we put a smoke screen across the German front and pumped in H.E. Our ammunition soon ran out and the only people who did any firing for the rest of the day were the Germans...

Sometime after 5 pm. the tanks which had made a sortie with the 19th returned and on their way in started to fire on the 20th in spite of recognition signals of steel helmets on rifles and green flares. They stopped firing when Captain Agar, waving his tin hat on a rifle, went out to meet them. The tanks were asked to help B and D Companies marooned out on the flat but by this time it was too late for the Squadron to replenish its ammunition and attack before dark.

The days fighting cost the Battalion 35 killed including those who died of wounds waiting for attention and 62 wounded. The wounded had no choice but to lie out on that barren fire swept field waiting for darkness to give them cover and bring relief. Many were hit again as they lay, some once, some twice and more. After the two Companies survivors had all retreated they spread themselves thinly over the defences they had formerly occupied and sought what rest the night would bring.

November 28: During the afternoon the battle commenced. This time it was better planned with tanks, Bren-gun carriers and Mortars in support. The tanks went through in small waves and with the softening up of the Artillery the Germans soon surrendered. 600 prisoners were taken for only 2 or 3 casualties. During the battle the 20th changed positions with the 18th.

November 29: A quiet day for the 20th. The Bren carriers acting as a screen went out to bury the dead from the two Companies and also the German dead from the attack on Belhamed. The burial sites were marked on a map. Captain Agar was replaced by Major Orr who then went around every Company. He found the men very tired and strained, so he sent for their personal gear so that they could shave and clean up. The Pioneer Platoon was used to thicken up the rather slim line.

November 30: By this time the men were hungry for news, as poor radio link up denied them knowledge of the whereabouts and progress of the other Brigades. An Intelligence Officer made a trip to Divisional HQ and returned with the news that 7 Armoured Division had been re-organised and 1 South Africa Brigade was approaching to assist. There was no mention of German tanks in the area but fifty Division tanks and 1000 Australians were said to be in support in the vicinity of Ed Duda and would relieve the 20th and the 18th Battalions at 10 next morning.

December 1: This was to be a disastrous day for the 20th Battalion. As they waited in the quiet of the morning, the men were battle weary and sadly reduced in numbers. Crouching for almost 6 days and nights in damp slit trenches, they were strained almost to the limit of endurance by constant shelling and mortaring. Cold, hungry and damp they had stuck it out in a grim endeavour to hold Belhamed, against all comers. And now the silence of the morning was broken once again and from a distance could be heard the thud of tank guns and the rapid fire of heavy machine-guns. Something was brewing. **Whose guns? Whose tanks?**

History now proves that it was Rommel's crack, 15 Panzer (tank) Division and along with German infantry had crept northwards during the night and were now attacking 6 Field Regiment. A fierce battle took place with Rommel soon scoring a victory and leaving a trail of disabled tanks and field guns behind him. The way was now clear for him to approach Belhamed and the 20th. They came in from the south and south-east. The tanks met B Company first and then C. Battalion HQ came next, and then last of all A and D Companies. It was only a matter of time before the field guns, which had put up a fierce resistance, were knocked out, leaving the way clear for the deadly Panzer Division to round up and force the very brave men of the 20th to surrender.

CONCLUSION FOR THE BATTLE OF BELHAMED

The overwhelming Enemy attack on Belhamed has been the subject of many discussions by men of the 20th since that sad day. From statements made by some of the Officers after this battle it was apparent that the 20th had orders from Brigade HQ, to stay in position and were promised support by tanks. They had a chance to escape when they first noticed the tanks at some distance, but to run away before they were attacked and against orders to stay in position was not the way of the 20th. By standing to, they had saved the rest of the Brigade. And so ended this one sided battle, with the unwounded walking away with their hands above their heads, the wounded were grouped for attention and on bitter Belhamed lay only scattered scraps of personal equipment and the dead who had fought to the end.

FOLLOWING ARE SOME OF THE EYE WITNESS ACCOUNTS OF HOW THIS ATTACK WENT...

First: Captain Quiller...

Just after daylight Jerry started to shell us heavily. Tanks and lorried Infantry moved across the low ground towards us raising a great deal of dust as if they were dragging something. At about 2000 yards the Division of 50 tanks split up and by this time our Field Regiments were engaging them. When they were

about 500 yards from us both B and D Companies and HQ's Bren-guns engaged them forcing the lorried Infantry and Tanks back to about 1000 yards. I could see through the smoke and dust one of the Tank Commanders looking us over and then suddenly about ten Tanks opened up on our three 2-pounders which were smartly wiped out. Just about then a German shell hit our own Mortar Bombs and from then on B and C were hidden from my view. The telephone line to B went out and I had no further communication with them. Brigade HQ, made contact and told me to hang on as our tanks would soon be attacking in our area. I passed this message on to the Companies but about 15 minutes later a Signaller attached to C reported that B had been cleaned up and were being marched off by the Germans. At the same time, the Signaller told me that Tanks were approaching from the east. I told him that they must be our number one group, but he told me they were firing on C. By this time we were being heavily mortared from the south and I saw German Infantry advancing towards D. Within a few minutes my Signaller drew my attention to a Tank at about 40-50 yards away to the rear of Battalion HQ. At the same time there were about 2 Tanks in amongst A. There was about 5-6 Infantry with each Tank and at this point their Commander waved us from our slitties. We were shepherded fairly smartly with A out to join C and D was brought along behind us shortly after. We were then marched at a jog for about 2000 yards where our walking wounded was taken away by a German Doctor and assistants. I had been in contact with the 8th right up until the end. They did not tell me that they were withdrawing back over the escarpment. I did not find out until much later that they had all, except for one Mortar Platoon which had been attached to one of our Companies, re-established themselves back about half a mile in behind a mine field...

Lance-Corporal McConchie of the Pioneer Platoon was in a position near our soldiers B Company and gives some idea of the way in which the Tank attack was opposed...

Shortly after dawn, word went round to stand for an AFV attack. We had had several warnings of this nature on previous days with negative results and this time we did not expect anything to eventuate. In about twenty minutes, I spotted a column of about a dozen Tanks advancing up a wide Wadi at about 800 yards distance. I thought they were our own Tanks as I could see our Artillery over in the Battalion area preparing breakfast and they did not seem to be disturbed at all. Suddenly the Tanks opened fire which soon got the Artillery moving and four Quads came rushing over to the left flank of B Company. The first column of Tanks advanced onto the Battalion area setting fire to several trucks and another Column of about 15 Tanks commenced a zigzag approach from behind. They came on in threes, each one supplying protection for the other two. Their obvious objective was the two, two pounders and the anti-Tank guns a hundred yards to my right and the 25 pounders to my left. At about 150 yards they stopped and threw over several smoke bombs which exploded about our Artillery making direct shooting for them very difficult. The 2 pounder to my right opened fire but was soon put out of action. Through the haze and smoke we could see Enemy mortar and machine-gun units coming up in the rear. A/Sgt Lockhead ordered us to open fire and at once we could see this having a good effect as the Enemy quickly went to ground. My particular target was three machine-gun combinations and I had great satisfaction at seeing two of these careering around out of control with the seats empty. Shortly before the Enemy opened fire a British Tank Officer wandered through our ranks and told us that our Tanks were coming in on the right flank. He seemed to be making a big joke out of it all and told us to make sure and fire at the slits of the Enemy Tanks. He moved off and a few moments later I heard a moan. I looked around and saw this Officer lying on the ground, so I crawled over and dragged him into a nearby hole. Three tanks had approached to within 60 yards and I had visions of being run over and squashed. I fired half a magazine at the slits but received such a hail of bullets I decided it was a waste of time firing at a Tank once he had spotted you. Private "Gun" Leckie in a trench to my right was annoying the Tanks with his Boye's, A-Tk Rifle. One of the Tanks quickly replied with its 75 mm and, "Gun", his Rifle and half of the parapet were destroyed. I glanced over my shoulder and saw one of our 25 pounders still firing but along with the others it soon went up in smoke. I concentrated my fire towards the rear but on looking behind I saw our fellows coming out with their hands up. I stopped firing

and lay down as flat as I could in the hole hoping I might be missed, but it wasn't long before one of the Tanks came rumbling up with its turret open. A German appeared with a Tommy-gun, pointed it at us and said "Op,op". They herded us up, and on the way passed their Tanks I noticed they had huge piles of firewood attached by chain. Apparently the object of raising dust, created camouflage and gave us a false sense of numbers. The Germans were also flying around in our captured ambulances, and I could see that our fire must of had good affect, as each were crowded with wounded even standing on the running board. They had ADS alongside a Mosque, and we carried our wounded there...

About 8 miles away, a prisoner in the captured NZ medical centre, the wounded Colonel Kippenger watched anxiously the swirl of dust and smoke around Belhamed and tried unhappily to piece together the story of his Battalion's last stand. In a letter home a few weeks later he wrote...

Really we don't know much of it. I was hit on the 26th and was succeeded in turn by Mitchell, Fountaine, Agar and then Orr who took over on the 29th. At that time, the Battalion was still at Belhamed, a feature near Tobruk which we took on the night of the 25th. Our Company strengths were reported with A, with 60 men, B - 38, C - 80, D - 32, HQ and Mortars, Bren Carriers, AA Platoon, Signallers - 76. A total of 286 men. There were 9 Officers left. A further 128 men were not on the hill. These being the Drivers, Cooks, Company Q,, Staff, Storemen, etc. They were all tired after 10 days fighting but the Padre says they were in great spirits.

*Just after first light a powerful Tank and Infantry attack developed and we know hardly any more. The 18th, next door, were not attacked seriously and sidestepped out of the way with 50 casualties. The whole brunt of the blow fell on the 20th, plus 16 guns of Field Regiment and a Troop of Bofors and AA guns. The gunners died at their guns. The Corps CRA who has been in the Field, says that every gun had 3 to 6 men dead. The Tanks tactics were to approach to 800 - 1000 yards, stop, hull down with just turret and gun showing, pound Hell out of anything that was showing with 2 and 6 pounders, machine guns, and then the Infantry would come through and mop up. The 18th say that my Companies, fighting magnificently, beat them back 3 times, but gradually the return fire weakened and the Tanks edged closer and closer. From 8000 yards away I watched through my glasses the swirl of smoke and dust from the explosions and the Tanks moving about: It was to be the end of as good a Battalion as was ever in the Kings service. **"May I never pass through such an hour again".***

Note: The Colonel escaped from the dressing station in a lorry with a party of 20th Battalion on the morning of the 4th December. Arriving safely at Baggush a few days later, he was greeted by General Freyberg with the words "You're a Brigadier", and on recovering from his wound took command of 5 Brigade.

THE 20TH BATTALIONS CASUALTIES IN THIS CAMPAIGN WERE...

Killed in action and died of wounds.	59
Wounded	126
Prisoners of war including wounded	<u>363</u>
A total of	<u>548</u>

After a week in Tobruk the balance of the 20th made their way back to Baggush. During this time the Desert battle still raged westward. By the middle of December the remaining 10 Officers and 183 soldiers

of the Battalion were brought back up to full strength, and under the Command of the now 'Colonel Burrows', training commenced, until the end of the year.

OUR SOLDIER CONTINUES WITH HIS LETTER WRITING...



Letter Thirty Five...

December 11th

Dear Mum,

I have covered a lot of ground and had quite a time since last I wrote last, but I am back where I started from and in hospital now. I did not last long in this scrap, the second bit of a go we had, someone plonked me through the thigh. It missed the bone completely and is not giving me much trouble. The biggest worry was getting back here. We were up near (-----) when I got it and I had to travel (-----) miles across the desert to get to the rail-head. However it is all over now and I am writing this in a real bed, spring mattress, sheets and all. There is no need to worry about Willy at all, the swellings gone down on my leg and I am feeling as fit as a fiddle. I have not heard any- thing of Ron since the stink started, but as I think I told you he is LOB. (Landed on base), and I don't think he has been into it yet. I am in a Tommy hospital at present so I don't know how I will get on for mail and more especially Xmas parcels you have sent. Things normally work out O.K. though and I expect I will get them in good time. Well I am afraid I have not got very much to write about so I will close now...

Letter Thirty Six...

Although it is only a few days since I last wrote, I thought I would drop you a few lines to let you know I am feeling as fit as a fiddle and that my leg is coming on famously. I got up on my crutches for the first time the other day but it was not much of a success. I guess three weeks on my back must have weakened my one good pin some-what, because I ended up by doing a back loop onto the deck. The rest of the lads in the ward laughed like Hell and thought it was a hang of a joke, but Willy could not even raise a smile. However I have mastered the damn things now and am allowed up for half an hour a

day. We have had quite a bit of fun here one way and another, we have got a Cockney in the ward with us and he keeps us in fits. The other day one of the sisters, was just stooping down to pick up a bucket of water she'd been using on one of the boys when in walked Joe. He gave her a light tap on the rump and said, "Just a minute lady, you might strain the old tummy" and then marched off with it. The ward roared and the lady in question turned about seven different colours in five seconds. She's a hang of a fine sort though and didn't take offence. She's been as busy as a bee these last few days getting some big surprise ready, to spring on us on Xmas day. She says something about making us into big bold pirates, so I'm picking we'll have plenty of fun. I haven't heard anything of Harold or Ron since the fun started, but I wouldn't be surprised if Ron and perhaps Harold too are stuck into things up the "blue" now. Here's hoping they have a bit more luck than I did and make it through to Tripoli. Things seem to be going O.K. up there according to the paper, but she was pretty lively for a kick off believe me. I had a nice long letter from the little lady the other day, and find that she still thinks I'm not a bad sort of a guy so Willy is starting to feel all bucked up and jolly again. Well I'm afraid I've just about run out of something to gas about so I'll shut up now...

Letter Thirty Seven...

December 26th

I received your letter written 24 Nov, some time ago, but seeing there is very little happening I have been waiting for a while before answering it. I was writing to Ron the day it arrived so I put your note in with mine. I have had a shift since I last wrote and am now in one of our own hospitals. It is great here to and a man feels more at home with his own. Up till yesterday there was big preparations in the wards getting things all dolled up for Xmas. It looked pretty good to with streamers, balloons, and coloured paper around the light shades. The night sister acted as Santa and brought us each in a parcel. They put on a great spread for Xmas dinner too. Poultry, green peas, mashed and roasted potatoes, and then for desert a rumpty plum duff. The only problem though it was --'dry'. Although they did give us a bottle between two. Needless to say it was only a teaser. I haven't heard anything from the boys yet, but from what I can make out our B.N. got pretty well smacked up. That's the rotten part of this bloody war, you get to know and make real coppers of jokers, and before you know where you are, they're gone and new faces fill their places. My leg's getting a lot better now, and I can hobble round without it giving me much trouble. I give myself another fortnight and then I'll be ready for the road again. I haven't had any Xmas parcels yet, but seeing I've been chopped and changed around that much they're having a job catching up with me. That is so long as the Jap's haven't sunk them on the way over. I expect it caused a big stir in New Zealand when they came in, but after all they've been expected haven't they? I believe though if Jerry had started running a couple of days sooner they'd still be sitting on the fence. Well that's me stumped for something to write about so I'll close now.

PS. I got a wire from Mary today.

27th,

I got your nice long letter written 7th Dec so thought I'd add a bit to this. I hope you got my wire and letter before Xmas so that you wouldn't have too dull a time. I got letters

from Joyce, Mrs Pulham and Zel yesterday too, so you see I'm pretty well off for mail. I'm sorry about not being able to get word to Harold, but as I think I told you before, I lost his address. Next letter you write will you send it over, just in case he doesn't write again. I hope you had a Merry Xmas and there's no need to worry for I'm as fit as a fiddle. I'll shut up now...

Letter Thirty Eight...

I have not heard from you for quite a while, but thought I would drop you a line to let you know all is well and Willies happy in the service. I am out of hospital and back with the old Company. That is what is left of it. There is about ten of the old hands left with about six more to come back out of hospital. Ron is still going strong, and has gone in for cooking since I last saw him. He has got that fat he can hardly see out of his eyes. He reckons the work suits him. He and I and "Big Andy" went into Cairo yesterday and had a bit of a reunion. Mr Booze flowed pretty freely and we all got very drunk. I am feeling pretty good this morning all the same except the hands are a bit shaky as I expect you can tell. I have put on a stone and four pounds since I came out of hospital, so the old body must still be in good working order. The old pin is getting better slowly but I am still carrying a bit of a limp. Nothing much though and it should be as good as gold in a week or so. I have had a hang of a lot of parcels lately; I got six in all of a heap. So you can see I have been living of the fat of the land. I got your plum pudding while I was in hospital, but did not get the other big parcel till I got back here. The mittens Mary knitted for me arrived too, and they are little rumties. I mean to write, but just in case I don't for a day or so, will you thank her for me. I had another letter from Harold and he sounds pretty fit with the exception of his ankle. I have got his proper address now, so I will write to him pretty smartly. If you see Mrs Downey tell her will you, that Ray is a prisoner of war and when last seen, just before he went on the boat for Italy, was as fit as a fiddle, but a bit narked. Tell her John Thomas was with him all the time but managed to escape. Well Ma, I am mess orderly to-night and have got a yard of bread to cut up and butter so I had better scam. I will write again one day soon.

P.S. The old boats come in at last, aye?...

Letter Thirty Nine...

25. February. 1942

Dear Mum,

I have not written for quite some time now, but I have not had a letter from you for about a month and there is very little to write about. We are still in the same camp from where I last wrote and I am still running the canteen. It is a pretty sweet job and is giving my leg a chance to get right. It is still a bit stiff but getting better all the time. Ron and I went on leave last week and had a great time. Harold was camped near Cairo at the time and we paid him a couple of visits. The first night we went out things went so well we did not get back to town until about ten next morning. I bought and sent you a couple of pairs of stockings while there so I hope they arrive O.K. and that they will fit. I

meant to send you something decent this time but I am afraid one can not drink beer and have money to. Harold has shifted up near us now and yesterday he and Ken Bird were down to see me. I got a hang of a shock to see Ken because I had heard he and his gun had got blown sky high. When I told him about it he thought it was a hell of a joke and said the gun went up alright but he was hanging onto the ground so tight they could not shift him. He is still in good nick and seems happy in the service. He, Harold, Bert Nickolson, and another couple of cobbers are coming down on Friday night and we are going to have a bit of a reunion. We have been playing a lot of foot-ball over here lately, and ours is the crack company team of the Battalion. Ron plays and last week he got a beaut smack in the eye. It was completely closed up before the game was finished, and by night you could just about hang your hat on it. I went out yesterday and had a few shots with the bren-gun, just to keep my eye in, and broke seven out of the ten bottles which represented targets. It was the best shot for our section and the boys reckon they will never here the last of it. Well I am afraid that is me stumped for this time so I will shut up now----

A LETTER FROM HIS GOOD FRIEND, RON

Letter Forty...

Dear Mother, Pop and Family,

Just in case you were giving up hope of getting a reply to your letter, I thought I had better sit down and try and scratch a few lines. Now that the Airmail has been cut out I suppose you are like us and only get your letters in bundles and at very irregular intervals, but they are always welcome no matter how old they may be. Just after Xmas we came down from the Desert and I met Bill at base camp. He was just out of hospital and was still limping a bit and a bit pale on it. However he soon came back to the Coy where he got a good easy as our canteen manager, (and still is) and the rest certainly did him a lot of good, as he is just 100 % now with plenty of kick in him. I have been having a pretty easy time myself for the last 3 months, giving the cooks a hand, as one of the boys has been off with a scalded foot and football injuries, but he is just about O.K. again now, so I have visions of "The Old Horse" sweating off a bit of fat shortly. Talking of footy reminds me (and I don't take much reminding) of a beautiful black eye I received in our last camp in Egypt. A joker went to fend me off, and being a clever fellow I managed to let him poke me in the eye, but by the way it felt, and the size it puffed, I reckon it must have been his hand at least. Any how the Southland boys, (ours is Southland Company) got quite a bit of amusement out of the N. Islanders misfortune, and I didn't go blind, so everything turned out O.K. Am getting a few digs today, as I have my washing out to dry, and everyone stops to admire----my DARNED underpants. The pants are white, and the hole is about 4 inches square and darned with scarlet wool. Just when I thought I was getting good too. Why now I only tie my fingers up for three days after a bit of sewing. While the eye was still up Bill and I went for a week's leave to Cairo, and I just had to glare at a Wog and he was off, so you see a black eye has its points. We had a great time on leave and went out and spent a great night with Harold and Bert. They are both 100%. We met them both again about 5 weeks ago, just before we left Egypt and moved to our present camp in Syria. It was a five day rail and motor journey, and the bus trip from Haifa in Palestine, past the Sea of Galilee, to Damascus in Syria, being

exceptionally good. All the land along the Palestine road that was not in crop was under the plough and you would laugh to see a bullock and donkey, camel and bullock, or two of each drawing their ploughs at snail's pace. You could get a sugar bag of oranges for a bob. The weather was excellent for the trip, but rained for the last day, and was very cold when we landed here. We are in tin huts however so are O.K. The country here is very stony, and seems much poorer than Palestine, although it may only be on account of the colder weather and lack of fertilisers. Being spring, the weather is very changeable, we get a mixture of warm days, rain, hail and a little snow one night. There has been snow on the hill tops since we landed, and on the worst nights we were issued with rum which was certainly O.K. at bedtime. The natives here are extremely poor, and are continually scratching round in the swill drums, picking out waste scraps we throw out that I would bury at home. However that seems to be the plight of the people who have been involved in war, and I think Europe will be an impoverished continent after it is all over. I would hate to see our N.Z. kiddies, living like the ones here. An Arab family passed along the road the other day evidently shifting camp. A camel had the tent and a few chattels aboard, while the older members walked and led donkeys carrying odds and ends, and one had a pack saddle on, with a little toddler on each side. Well Mother I've rambled on enough I think, so I had better sign off. Find enclosed a couple of recent snaps and don't look too hard for mistakes. Hoping this finds you all in the pink, I will say cheerio for now with best wishes from,

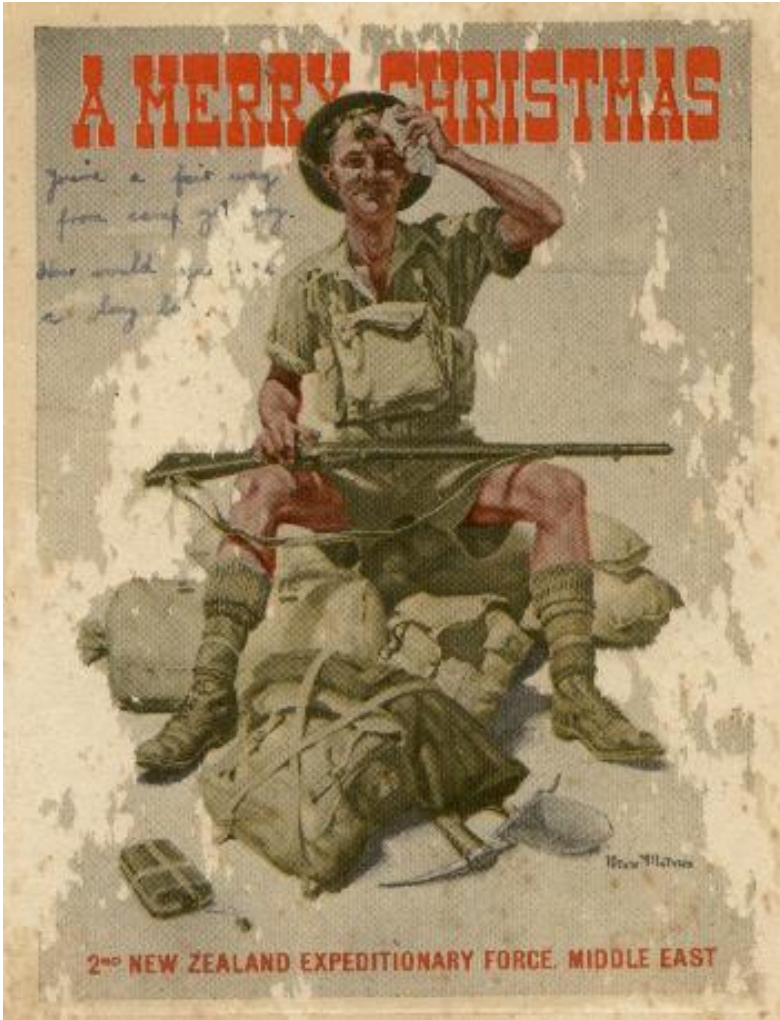
Ron.

RON CONTINUES TO THE MOLD FAMILY

Letter Forty One...

Dear Mum Mold, How are you? Bill and I are in the Y.N. doing a spot of writing and he just showed me an extract of his letter to you in which he states we were doing some crack shooting. I think if you divided by two and then took the answer with a pinch of salt you would be pretty near the mark. Bill's leg is coming along pretty good now and he is in harness again. All the boys (including myself) gave him socks and kept asking him how much longer his holiday was going to last. He can take it though. Bertie is a lively spark in the hut and when we have any spare time we can always find someone to rag. I knocked off my letter to scribble this little note so I think I will have to continue. Hoping this finds you all in the best of health,

I am one of the three, Ron.



1941 CHRISTMAS CARD

CHRISTMAS CARD SENT TO HIS PARENTS FROM OUR SOLDIER (SQUEAK) AND HIS FRIEND RON (THE OLD HORSE).

THIS WAS THEIR FIRST CHRISTMAS AWAY FROM HOME. THE FIRST OF MANY MORE...

WRITTEN IN THIS CARD IS A LIGHT HEARTED POEM WRITTEN BY RON SHAW AS FOLLOWS...

*In number eight section, is a man from up North
Who carries the handle, the plodding old horse?
His little home town is a place of renown
Where coal fields, Kai puha and kumara are found
He lives with young Squeak way down the back
And they sure have a neat and tidy we shack
Of course it is due to the efforts they say
When the old horse gets cracking while Squeak is away*

*While fishing the rocks at the end of the week
The Old horse being careless was knocked off his feet
The first end to land I'm sure I can't tell
Squeak dabbed him with iodine it sure made him yell
Now remarks of that sort are very kind
Especially to a man with a tender behind*

*Now wee Willie Mold which is Squeaks proper name
Has no great ambition of Military fame
But right here and now just let it be said
His one nasty habit is kicking in bed
At digging and trenching he's no terror with the spade
Star gazing as he praises his maid
And keeps on for hours even after he's told
No wonder the old horse is looking so old*

*Now mother and friends while reading these lines
Would never quite guess how for home we do pine
When we are eating dog biscuits and bully at noon
We remember Mum's cooking and hope we are trying it soon
Now when Santa's around and Pop's carving the duck
Just back with your plate and wish us good luck*

We can just picture you all nodding with your heads to one another and saying "Well the boys have gone sand happy at last".

Ron.

Note; The first half of the poem relates to the time these two comrades had together in Huntly, New Zealand and the second half relates to their time in Egypt before their first battle.

A SOLDIERS OVERVIEW...

INFANTRY BRIGADIER HOWARD KIPPENBERGER

We had a week's leave and then came back to Helwan to rebuild. The Twentieth had all told 300 casualties out of the 851 who had gone to Greece and received 400 reinforcements in one draft. They were marched in on a ceremonial parade and we settled down for training in very hot weather.

A battle was fought near Sollum, known by its code name as 'Battle-axe'. It was not a success but we took little interest. I went into hospital with a recurrence of malaria and was joined by John Gray and Jim with jaundice. I convalesced at Moascar, bathing and sailing on Lake Timsah, dining and drinking at the French Club, and being eaten alive by bedbugs, and returned to the Battalion early in August. We moved to an unpleasant camp at Kabrit on the Canal and did a combined training course. Brigadier Puttick returned to New Zealand on promotion and Inglis took over 4 Brigade, making his mark at once with a characteristically thorough inspection.

In September, after a leave in Palestine, we moved back to the Western Desert and again camped at Bagush. Tobruk was still besieged and we concluded that we were to share in its relief. Jim was promoted and went to command an infantry training depot and McKergow from the Twenty-sixth became second-in-command. There had been many changes and my rifle company commanders were now Mitchell, Agar, Fontaine, and Manchester, of whom only Fontaine had been in Greece and Crete.

One spell of training is very like another; very important, very interesting for the trainers, but there is not much to be said about it. We trained and exercised solidly, practiced night and day attacks and movement in desert formation, got to know one another, and became very fit.

Word came through of Upham's VC (Victoria Cross for bravery) and there was great rejoicing. Jim sent a nicely worded message of congratulation from his depot. A week later we heard that Sergeant Hinton, also of C. Company, had been awarded a VC. We had left him at Athens with the reinforcements and he had been captured at Kalamata. A notice appeared in the lines...

'Join the 20th and get a VC.'—and another message came from Jim...

Headquarters
Southern Inf. Trg. Depot,
18th October, 1941.
Memorandum for
Headquarters,
20th Battalion,
2nd NZEF

HONORS & AWARDS

Reference our communication 11/1/4630 dated 15th October 1941, for 2nd Lieut. Upham read 2nd Lieut. Upham and Sergeant J. D. Hinton.

It would be a convenience to this Headquarters if in future, the names of members of the Twentieth Battalion who win Victoria Crosses were published in one list and not on different days as appears to be the present practice.

Sgd. J. T. Burrows Lieut.-Colonel

The company areas were rather far apart but every Saturday night all officers came in to headquarters mess and we had very happy and valuable parties. There was a famous divisional Rugby match against the South Africans, inter-company and inter-Battalion matches. We ran a very good inter-platoon competition in drill and tactics, easily won by Upham's platoon. It was a happy, fruitful period which might have lasted indefinitely for all we knew or cared of future plans, and then it suddenly ended.

CO's were told to take a few days' leave, but that they might be recalled for a divisional exercise. I went down to Maadi and had been there twenty-four hours when I was recalled as the exercise was about to begin. Grooby and Vincent at the depot after spells in hospital, waited anxiously on me, and I took them back, Grooby to his death, Vincent to years of imprisonment.

Back up the desert road and at Battalion Headquarters everything was packed and ready to move. No one doubted that the exercise would be held in Libya and that the enemy would co-operate.

The General gave the outlines of the plan to all senior officers. I paraded the Battalion and with maps told everything I knew. We had a final party. Upham, McPhail, Maxwell, and the others I had decided to leave behind sat gloomily in corners. At the last moment I relented and took McPhail and Chesterman extra to establishment.

In the morning of 12 November we took our place in the column, moved through Matruh and down the Siwa road, and in the evening formed up at the head of 4 Brigade for the great approach march. Until the end of the war it was the opinion of old hands that the morale of the New Zealand Division was at its peak for this campaign. Certainly in the Twentieth it was terrific; we felt like runners, tense for the pistol.

This great approach march will always be remembered by those who took part in it though the details are vague in memory. The whole Eighth Army, Seventh Armored Division, First South African Division, and the Second New Zealand and Fourth Indian Divisions moved westwards in an enormous column, the armor leading. The Army moved south of Sidi Barrani, past the desolate Italian camps of the previous year, along the plateau south of the great escarpment, through the frontier wire into Libya, south of the enemy garrisons in the Sidi Omars, and wheeled north. Then, just as we were rejoicing in the conception of a massive move on Tobruk, disregarding the immobile frontier garrisons and crushing everything in our path, the whole Army broke up and departed different ways. This was the era of the Brigade Group and the 'Jock' column. It has been said that at the Somme in 1916 British tactical doctrines reached their lowest depths, and it seemed to me that Libya '41, or the Winter Battle, or Auchinleck's Offensive, or 'Crusader', as it was variously called, was fought with an equally total disregard of what one had understood to be the principles of war—with two exceptions.

Surprise was achieved and thrown away, but there certainly was economy of force, a nicely calculated or perhaps unavoidable minimum for every operation, and there was a most obstinate maintenance of the objective. The Army battled on, regardless of setbacks and losses, until it had fought the Germans to a standstill. Then it gathered the fruits of a great victory, relieved Tobruk, and mopped up the frontier garrisons. So perhaps the management was not so bad as we were inclined to think. It was a fantastic battle, fought during the short days and moonlight nights under lowering skies. There were no flanks, the enemy was as likely to appear in what one thought was the rear as in front, Headquarters were constantly on the move, usually running hard from some roving column, the whole picture changed daily in kaleidoscopic fashion. We had rather more than parity in the air but two grave weaknesses. Our armor had nothing better than a two-pounder gun against the 75 mm. of the German tanks, and our infantry with only four two-pounders per Battalion were helpless in the stony desert against the German tanks.

We did a short night move, some 14 miles, and then two long day moves of 50 to 70 miles. These were easy, there was little dust and we rolled along, trucks 150 yards apart stretching far out of sight, a monotonous, never-changing procession like a convoy at sea. Then we started on the night moves. The trucks closed in until we were in 9 columns, not more than 20 yards apart and trucks almost head to tail.

This was done just before last light each evening and meantime the provost sections went ahead planting posts with lanterns at ½-mile intervals along the intended bearing. All the brigades had different desert formations. In 4 Brigade at this time 20 Battalion led in 9 columns with companies abreast, 18 Battalion and 19 Battalion followed, each in 3 columns behind the flanks, and Brigade Headquarters and the attached troops, field, anti-tank, and anti-aircraft gunners, sappers, Field Ambulance, and supply vehicles followed the centre 3 columns. Fully closed up there, was a mass of over 800 vehicles on a front of some 200 yards and a depth of 1,500 or so. When dispersed in the day-time the front was about 1 mile and the depth anything up to 10.

Brigade groups followed one another, so that when each closed up for the night move there were gaps between them of about nine miles and they had to halt with similar gaps to leave room for dispersion at daylight—always made forward and outward. We had practiced movement in desert formation, by night and by day, very often. Every truck had its allotted place and everyone knew it. The Division in the desert always moved on the one axis, marked by black diamond discs or by lights. Each formation and each unit had its regular and often-rehearsed drill for passing defiles, changing direction, dispersing and closing in, deploying to attack, or taking up a defensive position. One great advantage to commanders, staff officers, and dispatch riders was that once a truck was identified it was easy to find the headquarters of the formation, unit, or sub-unit to which it belonged, as relative positions were known and familiar and unchanged.

This carefully studied and very often practiced system enabled the Division to carry out many great moves, from Egypt to Tunisia, with comparative ease and speed. In time we came to think, not without reason, that we knew all that needed to be known about the movement and the maneuvering of masses of transport in the desert.

With every care and attention to system and detail these night moves were weary and slow. In the move into Libya it was my responsibility, as the Commanding Officer of the leading Battalion, to lead the Brigade on to the line of lights and hold it on the line, which sounds easy enough. The vehicles of the Brigade ahead disappeared as they moved forward to concentrate. My first task was to find the three lights marking the brigade starting-point, and these were invariably where I did not expect them. If, as happened once or twice, I failed to find them before starting-time, the only course was to lead off on the correct bearing, peering anxiously ahead into the darkness until a light was picked up. At the time the provost people had a maddening habit of planting lights in hollows where these occurred at the correct half-mile intervals, and they would be passed altogether if there was the slightest discrepancy in course, or not seen until almost trampled under. Sometimes there were gaps in the line of lights, perhaps through one being knocked over and broken, and then we crawled on in acute anxiety until the next was picked up. In later times the provost detachments had learned more about our limitations and difficulties, planted their lights more frequently and prominently, and even let us know what spot in the desert they calculated to be the start-point. But the move into Libya remains in memory as a nightmare of anxiety.

Apart from these difficulties the night moves were not easy. We used no lights and most deserts are bumpy and uneven. Leading vehicles travelled at two and a half miles in the hour but there was unavoidable concertinaing, and the tail of a long column usually had to move in fits and starts at anything up to twenty miles an hour. Twenty miles was a long night march under normal conditions. The drivers could see nothing of the ground in front, those back in the column could only follow their leaders. One was constantly slithering down over steep banks, bumping against hummocks, falling heavily into abandoned slit trenches, or getting stuck in soft sand. But every difficulty would be surmounted, the lights were always found in the end, and a few minutes after daylight we halted and dispersed and every truck brewed up for breakfast. During the day the stragglers and cripples were brought in by the indefatigable LAD⁸ and next night the

8 LAD: LIGHT AID DETACHMENT, A SECTION SPECIALLY EQUIPPED FOR THE RECOVERY AND REPAIR OF VEHICLES.

performance would start again. The men could sleep during the day, but there were conferences and affairs of various kinds for commanders, and I was very short of sleep before the battle opened.

We crossed the frontier into Libya through a gap made in the wire on the night of the 18th. A few miles on I lost the line of lights and worked farther and farther off-course in looking for them. It was undesirable to stop the column to take a bearing unless unavoidable. But I got a shock when Inglis came up from the rear, stopped me, and said, 'Kip, you're ninety degrees off your course.' I denied it, but took a bearing and found he was right; in fact, we were more than ninety degrees off. I accordingly led on round to complete a circle, and my car, travelling at three miles an hour, moved across the rear of the column, bounding along at twenty, on to the right track again. Very few knew that we had carried out this odd movement.

At a conference next day we heard something more about the plan. The armor had gone ahead 'to seek out and destroy the German armor'—4 Indian Division was to capture the enemy position in the Omars, now east of us. The South African and New Zealand Divisions were to remain in laager and await events. We made a short move and halted.

On 20 November we stayed in our laager all day, listening to the rumble and thudding of tank battles far ahead over the rim of the horizon. I went for a run round and saw the start of an attack by an Indian brigade on one of the Omar's. Two hundred enemy tanks were reported ten miles ahead but they came no nearer. Two German planes flew over the laager, came low to look, and went away in a great hurry with everyone firing at them.

The morning of the 21st passed quietly. At 12.30 p.m. we moved very suddenly. To my keen and doubtless ill-informed disappointment the Division split up at once. 6 Brigade went to help the support group of the Armored Division, already hotly engaged and hard-pressed on Sidi Rezegh escarpment. 4 Brigade moved northwards to cut the Bardia-Tobruk road, 5 Brigade north-east to deal with or mask the positions about Sollum.

We moved for seventeen hours continuously, in the latter stages a very hard march. Near Sidi Azeiz, about midnight, we ran slap against a deep trench which had no right to be there. A crossing place was found but in the rain and darkness it was a desperate struggle to get over. Somehow it was done, and in some miraculous way the drivers sorted themselves out again into their correct positions. Boyle and Chesterman, in an eight-cwt. truck, were navigating for me. At 5 a.m., before first light, they said we were within half a mile of the escarpment at the Bir Ez Zemla, a mile west of Menastir. They were right and it was a very good bit of navigation.

The Brigade halted and shook out into its day-time formation. I sent Mitchell's company forward to go down the escarpment on foot and get established across the Tobruk-Bardia road and then we rested until daylight.

Very soon after dawn I arrived on the escarpment and in the growing light saw a pleasing scene. The escarpment here was steep and about a hundred feet high, un-scalable for vehicles except by one very steep track. On the road below, half a mile away, several trucks were stopped, one blazing, and grenades were bursting round another which also broke into flames. Numerous German trucks dug into pens were scattered between the road and the escarpment, and hundreds of enemy soldiers in groups were staring at the blazing trucks. Half a mile to the east, on the edge of the escarpment, was a group of tents, more transport, and men bustling round in an agitated manner. Obviously it was a complete surprise.

The companies had come up in their trucks and were waiting close behind me. I ordered Agar to debus with B. Company and attack across the flat, Manchester to take D. Company in its trucks right up to the camp and go in with the bayonet, and kept Fountaine with C. Company in its trucks in reserve. The carriers found the track down, and Guthrey went down with them to sweep between the road and the sea, three miles away.

Everything went like wedding bells. The companies moved quickly, and the enemy, with A. Company already in their midst, were too surprised to offer much resistance. In an hour's time we had 200 prisoners, armored cars, and some thirty trucks, with only one casualty. One truck, taken by A. Company, was marked A6 and proved to be their own, lost in Greece, and with some possessions of Washbourn's still on board.

This was a good start and I looked round for something more to do. No more enemy were to be seen in the Bardia direction but there were still some about, west of Mitchell's position and fairly close. I went down and saw that he was comfortable, went back and told Fontaine to take his company down and mop these parties up, made sure that the gunners were ready to support, and sat down for breakfast, surveying the scene with satisfaction. It suddenly changed rather alarmingly. Some German armored cars and a couple of self-propelled guns appeared from the Tobruk direction, opened fire at long range and then closed steadily on Fontaine's company. We had no anti-tank guns down the escarpment yet and, though C. Company fired briskly with Brens and rifles, it was obviously soon going to be in trouble. Fontaine handled his company skilfully, keeping up a steady fire and stepping platoon by platoon leftwards to the shelter of the tank proof escarpment. This was the only thing to do but it exposed Mitchell, and our gunners seemed maddeningly deliberate over getting into action. The German AFV's⁹ continued to close—more dash and they would have punished us heavily—but just when matters were looking really serious, Carson, my old friend of Crete, got his troop into action and the Germans at once withdrew. The guns shelled them happily till the range was over 14,000 yards but did no damage.

C. Company collected on top of the escarpment. Only one man, a nice lad called Hill-Rennie, had been killed and a few wounded, but the men looked rather rattled and were worrying more than they should have. Many more Germans had appeared from holes in the ground when their AFV's were about and the situation needed clearing up.

I went back to Brigade Headquarters, a mile back from the escarpment. Parties of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth were kicking footballs about; Inglis was tied to the telephone to Division. He told me to take the squadron of Valentine tanks, attached to the Brigade and counter-attack as I thought fit.

We soon worked out a plan. The tanks were to move down the only track, face westwards astride the road, and advance to a depth of three miles. A company of infantry was to follow them, mopping up and dealing with any anti-tank guns. I gave this task to C. Company to stop it from brooding, detailed D. to mop up the wadi's along the escarpment, and took B. in its trucks along the top, meaning to come in behind the Germans at an appropriate time and place.

The plan worked very nicely. The tanks moved smoothly down, deployed, and advanced at a steady pace, Fontaine close on their heels. The enemy cars and guns moved well back; their infantry surrendered as they were overrun. The only contretemps was that when I emerged with B. Company on the escarpment a mile ahead of our tanks they opened a warm fire on us and we retired rather hastily. By dark we had another 230 prisoners in hand with three or four more casualties. I pulled tanks and C. Company back to the top of the escarpment, left A. Company in its position with some two-pounders, and felt that it was quite a good day. The night was bitterly cold, and Rhodes, my Adjutant, gave himself a great deal of work trying to get hot food and blankets for our 430 prisoners.

During the action the remainder of the Brigade had moved westwards on Gambut without waiting for the result of my attack. I was to be relieved by 22 Battalion from 5 Brigade and follow next day.

Early on the morning of the 23rd advance parties arrived from the Twenty-second. I was showing them my dispositions when the Germans attacked again from the Tobruk direction, this time with thirteen AFV's of different sorts and sizes, and some scores of infantry lorries. Infantry and anti-tank guns opened briskly, but

9 AFV: ARMORED FIGHTING VEHICLE. TANK OR ARMORED CAR OR SELF-PROPELLED GUN.

as the enemy seemed to mean business, I hurried my squadron of tanks down the escarpment again. Unluckily this move could not be concealed and the enemy scuttled off smartly.

Division called for me to move without delay to Point 212, fifteen miles westward, on the Trigh Capuzzo, the so-called road from Capuzzo to Tobruk. 22 Battalion was arriving, so without waiting for formal relief I called in A. Company and the tanks, formed up into desert formation, and set off. The Twenty-second had some very hard fighting later in the positions they took over from us.

About 4 o'clock in the afternoon, after one detour to avoid some camels which looked suspicious, we arrived at Point 212, where Divisional Headquarters and 21 Battalion were waiting. General Freyberg told me that 6 Brigade was heavily engaged on Sidi Rezegh, 5 Brigade was staying to watch Bardia and Sollum, and Inglis with 4 Brigade, less the Twentieth, was by now at Gambut. Divisional Headquarters, with the Twentieth and Twenty-first, was to move through the night and join 4 and 6 Brigades. An enemy force with guns was in contact farther west along the Trigh and would have to be by-passed. I was to take the lead and guide the group to Bir ¹⁰ Chleta, another fifteen miles to the west, where it would be between the two Brigades.

This was a really difficult piece of navigation. We had to swing round the Germans ahead and then back on to the Trigh before we got on top of the unclimbable Sidi Rezegh escarpment. We moved very carefully, halting every half-hour to check distances and bearings, which we plotted by torchlight in the back of my car under a blanket. Flares, only used freely by the enemy, were going up in all directions and we several times had to alter course. But it was accurately done, and at midnight I was able to tell the General that we were at Bir Chleta and that the high ground looming to the south of us was the Sidi Rezegh escarpment. The Twenty-first immediately moved off to join 6 Brigade; the rest of us got into laager and had several hours sleep. A German Staff car ran into the laager during the night and its occupants were very surprised to be taken prisoner.

Soon after daylight I was ordered to move to Point 172, a mile or so to the north, make contact with 4 Brigade, now at Gambut, and come under Inglis's command again. He was about to resume the move westwards parallel with 6 Brigade's advance on the Sidi Rezegh escarpment. The enemy group which we had by-passed had now followed us up and was shelling our laager, so I was also told to drive them away. Obviously this would have to be done before we joined 4 Brigade.

The Battalion carriers moved a mile to the east to form a screen and I went out to reconnoiter. Three miles north-east of Bir Chleta there were about a hundred vehicles, recognizable as German, moving about in an uncertain fashion. I still had the squadron of tanks and a platoon of machine-guns under command, so decided to make a frontal attack with tanks leading and the infantry following in their trucks, machine-guns, anti-tank guns, and carriers giving covering fire from the right flank. Orders group was waiting when I got back. We had practiced this sort of attack, though never with these particular tanks, and orders were simple.

The Twentieth formed up in its trucks with its right flank on the Bir, B. and D. Companies leading on a front of 1,000 yards. C. and A. Companies lined up 600 yards behind them with Battalion Headquarters and the mortars immediately behind again. When the forming up was completed the tanks were to pass through in line abreast and advance at ten miles an hour on a bearing of forty degrees, the infantry following. If the tanks could overrun the enemy so much the better; the infantry would mop up. If the tanks were checked the infantry would debus, pass through, and assault. 4 Field Regiment would support with observed fire and I emphasized that speed and violence were the essence of the affair. No time was wasted in giving these orders but it took an hour for everyone to move into position. Meanwhile I ran in a carrier to Point 172,

10 BIR: A WELL, ALWAYS MARKED BY THE HEAP OF EXCAVATED SOIL AND SO A TACTICAL FEATURE IN THE DESERT.

which was on the edge of the next escarpment above Gambut, and saw the rest of 4 Brigade already moving westwards in exactly the opposite direction to that in which we were about to attack.

I returned to find the Battalion formed up and the tanks passing through. They did not check, charged on at about fifteen miles an hour on a bearing more like seventy degrees than the prescribed forty, spotted our carriers moving out of the way to the right flank, opened fire and knocked out two of them, one bursting into flames, and carried madly on. Things happened very quickly. Through the control tank I yelled to the tanks to get on the right bearing but without result. The infantry trucks leapt forward, keeping stubbornly to the correct bearing and steadily increasing speed. The guns opened, unluckily on the wrong target, a newly appeared mass of transport miles farther away. The machine-gun platoon had got well forward and came briskly into action, as did the carriers. So did the enemy, with guns, mortars, and automatics. The tanks saw the enemy and swung in to their correct course, slackened speed, and opened fire. Several were hit and blazed up, others stopped. Rhodes and I had followed up in a carrier and we stopped to speak to the control tank, sheltering in its lee from a hail of bullets. The tank commander called me and said: 'I've had seven tanks hit; I'll have to stop.' I had just seen the leading companies debus and advance, one steadily and nicely spaced, the other in rushes and evidently under fire. I replied: 'The infantry are attacking; go on or I'll court-martial you.' This was unfair to a very gallant officer, killed a few days later, but it was no time for politeness. The tanks went on slowly, firing fast, but the infantry passed through them and closed swiftly and savagely. I passed through the empty trucks coming back to get out of range and found that the fight was over. Most of the enemy transport had got away but about a dozen trucks were abandoned and we had captured three 88's with their crews all dead, except one slightly wounded man whom we picked up. I ordered the companies to move back at once and em-bus. A detail was left to cover the tanks, whose recovery vehicles quickly came up, and to mop up. They collected 260 prisoners of 361 German Infantry Regiment. Our loss was twenty-one and seven tanks, of which several were soon runners again.

Our transport had gone rather too far and I overtook the infantry trudging back. They were very cheerful and pleased with themselves. I was still rather excited when I met Gentry, the G. 1, and told him: 'Tell the General my infantry are beautiful.' We reached the trucks, got into desert formation with the carriers as a screen ahead, and moved west. At 4.30 p.m. we drew level with 4 Brigade, to which I sent a message that we had had a nice fight, and until dark we moved steadily on, going seven miles without opposition. At dark we halted for the night, expecting a good deal to do in the morning. There was an orders conference at Brigade at ten but I had the first real sleep since the campaign had opened. ¹¹



20 Battalion Band

SYRIAN CAMPAIGN

MARCH 1942

MOVE TO SYRIA THROUGH PALESTINE/ISRAEL

NEW ZEALAND MEDICAL SERVICES

Note: During February 1942, warning was received of a move to Syria. A German invasion southwards through Turkey to the Middle-East oilfields and the Suez Canal were possible and the defensive scheme included tasks for the **NEW ZEALAND DIVISION**...



Egypt, Palestine, and Syria

The New Zealand Division would move from the Desert and there man and complete the defenses of the Djedeide fortress, a part of the defensive system of Syria and Palestine which had been prepared in case the Germans should break through the Caucasus or cut through Turkey. The line which the New Zealand Division was to hold was across the plains of Al Bekaa, from the slopes of the Lebanon's across the valley to the far slopes of the Anti-Lebanon's, denying the enemy the use of all major arteries of communication from the North to Southern Syria.

The Australians manned a similar fortress on the Mediterranean slopes of the Lebanon's, while British and French units guarded the far slopes of the Anti-Lebanon's and the *Damascus-Beirut road*.

At the direction of (Brigadier MacCormick) the Deputy Director Medical Services 2 NZEF and (Colonel

Kenrick), Assistant Director Medical Services NZ Division, senior officers, made a reconnaissance trip to Palestine and Syria between 14 and 20 February 1942.

After inspecting possible hospital sites at Jerusalem, Nathanya, Kfar Vitkin, Nazareth, Haifa, Sidon, Beirut, and Zahle, the Deputy Director of Medical Services recommended to the *General Officer Commanding*

(British) that 1 CCS should be located at Zahle, while 2 General Hospital and 1 Convalescent Depot should be situated at Kfar Vitkin, on the coast approximately half-way between Haifa and Tel Aviv. When a request for material for constructional work on the coastal site was vetoed by General Headquarters owing to shortage of supplies, it was decided to locate 2 General Hospital in Nazareth.

MEDICAL UNITS AND LINES OF EVACUATION, SYRIA, MARCH 1942 – APRIL 1943

Note: RAP = Regimental Aid Post.

Subsequently Colonel Kenrick, in company with the AA & QMG, made an inspection of the divisional area between Ras Baalbek to the North and Baalbek valley. This valley was a highly malaria area and, as the previous winter had been wet, it appeared that anti-malaria measures would have to be carried out by all units from 15 March onwards: The Bekaa valley, although itself 2500 to 3000 feet above sea level, was marshy in places. The climate in Syria was cold in the winter and humid in summer. Among the endemic diseases were malaria, sand-fly fever, and venereal disease, and ADMS NZ Division early issued special instructions in regard to these?

The New Zealand Division began its move to Syria on 23 February, when advance parties from 4 Infantry Brigade left for the Djedeide area. The main body of 4 Brigade, including 4 Field Ambulance, left Kabrit for Syria by road and rail on 1 March and the days following:

6 Brigade with 6 Field Ambulance set out on 10 March. Both 4 and 6 Field Ambulances received additional transport in the last days of February which assisted in the move, although most of the members of the units and their equipment were transported by train to Haifa, and thence by trucks. In Syria the Division came under command of the Ninth Army.



LEFT: NEW ZEALAND ARMY TRUCKS AND THE LOCALS' DONKEY-DRAWN CARTS JOSTLE FOR SPACE ON THE ROAD FROM DAMASCUS IN SYRIA TO BEIRUT, LEBANON. THE NEW ZEALAND DIVISION WAS SENT TO SYRIA IN FEBRUARY 1942, AS PART OF ALLIED PREPARATIONS TO COUNTER A POSSIBLE GERMAN INVASION OF THE MIDDLE EAST FROM THE NORTH – A THREAT THAT NEVER EVENTUATED. IN JUNE THE NEW ZEALANDERS WERE RUSHED BACK TO THE EGYPTIAN DESERT TO HELP FEND OFF A MORE IMMEDIATE DANGER, A RENEWED GERMAN-ITALIAN OFFENSIVE FROM THE WEST.



ABOVE: AN OLD MAP OF PALESTINE/ISRAEL

ANOTHER CAMPAIGN FOR THE TWENTIETH BATTALION CONTINUES...

March 1: The move began with the troops entraining in the afternoon and arriving in Kantara about midnight. They then crossed the Suez Canal to a much longed for hot meal and then entrained again for the journey across the dreary Sinai and then into Palestine.

March 2: Arriving a few miles south of Haifa in the afternoon, the troops marched to a transit camp at Tira, where tented accommodation and a hot meal were well received after a long day in the train.

March 3: The day was spent with some of the men climbing Mt Carmel while others rested, laundered, or wrote letters.

March 4: The troops boarded observation buses and then with Jewish drivers set off across the Plain of Esdraelon skirting Nazareth and then north for a lunch and refuelling break in Tiberias, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. From here they skirted the sea and continued on to the border check-post at Rosh Pinna, passing the well-known, sea-level sign. Now in the French administrated country of Syria the convoy proceeded north around the snow-capped peak of Mount Hermon and eventually arriving in Damascus in the evening. They made camp a few miles out in some old French barracks at Kaboun and next morning boarded RASC trucks for their last day of travel north to a camp near the village of El Aine, on the foothills of the Anti-Lebanon range. It was here that the NZ Division would spend the next four months with the chief task of preparing a defensive position covering the northern entrance to the Bekaa valley between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon range, about 20 miles north of Baalbeck.

Time passed by quickly for the 20th and apart from apprehending some enemy agents in the Ras Baalbeck area and recovering 4 truckloads of stolen equipment from a nearby village, the men spent rather an uneventful time. They did however get a chance to learn how to ski during their mountain military training. Desert manoeuvres would also continue.



Keeping fit in the desert. A typical physical training squad in action in the Baggush sun and sand.



The 2NZEF Athletic Team at Tel Aviv, Palestine, in 1942. *Back:* Findlyson, Robertson, Olliver, *Middle:* Jones, Gardiner, McKain, Vernon, Robinson, Bradwell, Campbell, Collinge, Bain, Sharply. *Front:* Boot, Jones, Davie, Masters, McHugh.

TOP: FITNESS TRAINING IN THE DESERT
BOTTOM: THE ATHLETIC TEAM IN ISRAEL



LEFT: ALPINE TRAINING IN LEBANON

OUR SOLDIER TELLS HIS MUM ABOUT THIS PERIOD

Letter Forty Two...

5. April. 1942

I have not written for a long time now but I have sent a couple of cables to let you know I am still O.K. I had a letter from Joyce and Mary last week, but I have not had one from you for months. However Joyce tells me everything is alright at home. We have had a big move since I last wrote and we are now camped away up in Syria. The country around about is a lot after the style of Greece and is a pleasant change from the land of sand. The weather has been a devil of a lot colder though and a lot of the boys went down with the flue. However once we get acclimatized we will feel a lot better for the change. We will get a chance to cough some of the sand out from the insides anyway. The natives are a lot cleaner here than the Wogs were in Egypt and seem a bit more prosperous. Like all these countries though, they look half starved, and they would "clefty" a worm from a blind hen. The other day while we were on our way for the canteen goods (I still run it) we stopped to pick a chap up. While we were there a Wog came up and was talking to us, and as we moved off, I noticed him getting off across the paddock with the tyre jack under his arm. Norm the driver immediately gave chase with the truck. The Wog dropped the jack and took off. He must have been pretty fit because he kept going for about twenty minutes yelling blue murder all the time. The thought of getting run down must have lent him wings to his feet, because we kept about a chain away from him all the way. However the race was too much for him and he finally collapsed. He was frothing at the mouth when we went over to him, and gave us to understand he would not clefty again. The old leg is just about as good as it ever was now, although it is a lot skinnier than the other one. It does not give me any pain though and I expect it will come right with a bit of walking. I have not heard from Harold since we left Egypt but I know where he is and will drop him a line one day soon. There is not much in the way of entertainment about here so each week one of the companies has been putting on a

concert. It is our turn next week but I don't know how we will get on because as one of the boys said, the only thing this company is good for is drinking beer. However if they give us enough of that we will make a row anyhow. I will close now...

Letter Forty Three...

24. April 1942

I received a letter to day from you the first one in ages, but I expect we will have to expect it now that the Airmail has gone "futt". Zel has been keeping up the good work though and I have had six from her in the past fortnight. Like you, she has not had any from me for over a month, and in the last couple has told me off fairly smartly. All the same, I have written and I am blowed if I know where they have got to. One of the blokes in our platoon got a letter from home saying they had not heard from him since November and he is a joker that writes pretty consistently, so perhaps my letters have gone the same way as his. We are still camped away up in Syria, and I am still running the canteen. My leg is quite better now and I am thinking seriously of going back to the platoon to get toughened up a bit. Ron has left the cook house and is back with the boys again. A lot of the new hands reckoned he would take it hard, but they don't know Ron, that joker is happy anywhere. I went in with the canteen truck the other day to Beirut and had one of the best motor trips in my life. Where we are camped is about 3,000 ft. above sea level and from there we had to climb another 10 to 15,000 ft. over a mountain range to get to the town. As we went over the top believe me, we got a great view of the surrounding country side. A big plain on one side and the sea on the other. Every now and then we would come to a village perched on the side of a slope, where the natives with the help of a couple of cows or donkeys had ploughed right up to snow line. We had the truck to ourselves while we were there so had a good look around the town. It is a lot cleaner than most places in this part of the World and the majority of people are French. We did not leave until 11.30 at night. After we got what we wanted we went to a few Cabarets and saw one or two "hot" floor shows. Most of them are pretty crude but it is something to pass the time away. We all had our photos taken down at the water front, while we were sitting in the truck, so I will put it in with this. I have not seen Harold since we moved up here, but his crowd has moved up to within 4 or 5 miles of us, so hope to be able to nick across and look him up one day soon. The weather has warmed up considerably this last week or so and we are all back in shorts and shirts again. We have got to be back in longs by sun down though because of the "mossies". I believe there is a fair bit of fever in this country. Next time you see Mary will you thank her for her letters and tell her I will drop her line soon. That is all I can think of for now so I will shut up.

P.S. I sent you a wee parcel while on leave and I have been wondering if you got it?

Letter Forty Four...

16. May. 1942

I have not had a letter from you for some time now but I did get your wire last week saying you had received the parcel O.K. I sent one to Zel at the same time as well, but I have not heard whether she has got hers or not. I got a letter from Joyce with some photos of her nipper enclosed. She is some kid isn't she? I bought a pair of shoes for her a

long time ago but have failed to get them away as yet. One of the boys reckoned if I didn't get a wriggle on they would only be getting home in time for her kids. The weather has got a lot warmer over here lately and we are all in shorts now and as brown as berries again. We miss our swims up here, with the exception of a swimming pool in Baalbeck, there is no where we can get a dip. I have spent one day there so far, but believe me she was good. It is a wonderful pool with fresh water running through all the time. Ron has been taking a lot of snaps lately and I have been getting one of each from him, so from now on I will stick a few in with my letters just to give you an idea of what the place is like. He has got a beaut camera and the snaps have turned out pretty good. Our platoon is going out on a picnic tomorrow, but I have got to do a job for the canteen. I would like to go all the same because one of the other platoon's was out today and they tell me she is a pretty good show. They took a real picnic spread with them and spent the day on the banks of some river. I don't know whether I told you or not but Ron is back with the platoon again now. He is still as fit and as cheerful as ever but has lost a bit of the condition he put on while in the cook house. I tell him if he keeps losing it at the present rate he should be able to see his feet in about a fortnight. Do you remember a chap, Ernie Clark I used to write about, and who is a prisoner of war now? Well I had a short note from him from Germany today. He was a great cobbler and my bed mate right through Greece and Crete, so you can imagine how pleased I was to hear from him. The last I saw of him I thought he was a gone coon because he was shot to pieces and did not look the brightest. He must be pretty tough though because he tells me he is now cracking rocks and doing it pretty hard--"I bet". The Clark family shure had a rough time. The youngest brother Bill was killed, Ern a prisoner and Gibb has gone home disabled after this last stink. Well I have just read this through and it sounds a bit morbid in places, but I am not really. The truth of the matter is I am fit, fat and happy in the service...

Letter Forty Five...

2. June. 1942

I received your nice long letter written 12th April yesterday and believe me I was pleased to get it to, seeing I had not heard from you for almost 8 weeks. As a matter of fact I was beginning to think I was a bit of a black sheep, but according to your letter you had waited just as long for mine so we will have to blame the boat. Like you we have been having a long dry spell over here, it must be three months since we had rain. It is not nearly so hot up here though as it was in Egypt last summer, I suppose it is because we are fairly near the sea and there is always a cool breeze blowing off the mountains where there is still a bit of snow on the tops. All the natives around about are busy harvesting at the moment and believe me their methods are crude. They pull it all instead of cutting, tie it into great bundles and then cart it away to their village. To see the old camels getting along you would think they were mini hay stacks. They put such a load on the poor beasties it is a wonder they don't break their backs. The camel boy usually rides in front on a wee donkey and the joker with the hump just mooches along behind. I will try and get a snap of them one of these days, when I am away after beer and send you one. I have got a lot of good snaps at the present time and will put a few in with each letter just to give you an idea of what the place is like. Ron has got a good camera and he and I go fifty-fifty with the films and get two taken of each. The "Old Horse" is still going strong and last night he and another chap were up here and finished up by going on the binge- Pete bought a bottle of gin with him. I was not drinking myself

owing to the fact I was just recovering from an attack of the runs. The boys were telling me this morning he went up into the hut and reckoned he had lost his teeth. Of cause the boys got to work on him. It served him right for getting sprung. That is all right said Ron, I got a crafty notion and put them in my jacket. The boys all went out on a manoeuvre last week, but I stopped behind on a picket job. While up there I went down to a nearby village and watched those making carpets. I bought a small one so will post it tomorrow with this. It is not very big but should be big enough to get out of bed on to in the morning. In the last letter from Zel she was saying you had written to each other and that you wanted her photo. She also said she hoped you will like her and I am sure you will because she is some "Gal". Any way she has stuck to me so far which is more than can be said of most of the overseas boys, girls. However I don't suppose you can blame them though because this waiting business must get pretty monotonous. I for one feel as if I have been over here for about a life time. Good news on the air tonight but, and things seem as if they are on the turn. A few more raids like the last two will make old "Mud Guts" scratch his mow a bit, and as one of the boys said I bet he has got a nasty taste in his mouth this morning. Well I seem to have written a lot and said nothing. Ken Bird was up here the other night and we had a con-flab about old times...