

28th Māori Battalion

A Brief History of the Māori Battalion

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"No infantry had a more distinguished record, or saw more fighting, or alas, had such heavy casualties."

Lieutenant-General Bernard Freyberg, Commander of the 2 NZEF, commending the 28th Māori Battalion.

Look for further information:
28th Māori Battalion (28maoribattalion.org.nz)

• A Brief History of The Maori Battalion 1939 - 1946 •

With some slight alterations, the following text is that which accompanies the Maori Battalion Display which stood for 12 months at the Queen Elizabeth II Army Memorial Museum at Waipuru, and which is now permanently displayed at the Manawatu Museum, Palmerston North, where the Battalion was first formed.

FORMATION

With the declaration of war on September 3, 1939, the New Zealand Government resolved to raise a Division-sized Expeditionary Force. Led by Sir Apirana Ngata, the Maori community again called for a Maori military unit to be included in the Expeditionary Force. In early October, the Government agreed to raise a Maori Battalion.

It was decided that due to a lack of suitably experienced Maori Officers and N.C.O's, key positions in the Battalion would initially be filled by selected Pakeha. It was announced that Major G. Dittmer MBE, MC, of the N.Z. Staff Corps would command the Battalion. His second-in command would be Lieut. Colonel G. F. Bertrand, a part Maori who was a Territorial Officer and teacher at New Plymouth Boys High School. Both men had seen service in W.W.I. Bertrand would, of course be posted to the Maori Battalion as a Major and Dittmer would be promoted to Lieut. Colonel.

Major Dittmer visited mobilisation camps throughout New Zealand, and was permitted to select prospective Officer and NCO candidates from amongst the recruits for assessment and training. This training commenced in Trentham in November, with few of the intake having had any previous military experience.

TRAINING

Recruitment to fill the ranks of the Battalion had commenced in the second week of October, and by the end of the month 900 men had come forward. While, with a few exceptions, only Maoris could serve in the Maori Battalion, Maoris were able to join other units if they so wished. The four Companies of the Battalion were to be organised on a tribal basis (see maps), with Headquarters Company being drawn from the surplus from each area. Maori recruitment officers were appointed to keep numbers up throughout the war.

The Battalion first assembled on January 26, 1940, at the Palmerston North Showgrounds. The Maoris' peacetime communal lifestyle was to prepare them admirably for the military way of life. However, very few had any experience of such specialist trades as mechanic, signaller, or medical orderly. As a consequence, the soldiers who were to perform these specialist functions had to be trained from scratch.

When 500 members of the Battalion took part in the Waitangi Centennial celebrations just two weeks after arriving in Palmerston North, their turnout and standard of drill belied their lack of training. Further public displays followed, including a Ball given in the Battalion's honour by the Mayoress and ladies of Palmerston North, a parade and inspection by the Governor General, and an ANZAC Day parade through the streets of Palmerston North. In addition, the stirring words of the Maori Battalion Marching Song were being heard throughout the Country.

Maori Battalion march to victory
Maori Battalion staunch and true
Maori Battalion march to glory
Take the honour of your people with you.....

DEPARTURE

On May 1, 1940, the officially named 28 N.Z. (Maori) Battalion embarked on the troopship 'Aquitania' as part of the Second Echelon. Soon after daybreak the next day, the troopships sailed. Amongst the crowds which thronged the wharf for the farewell the men were Maori girls singing songs of farewell. The Maori Battalion returned the compliment by singing 'Po Atarau'.

Training continued at sea, with commanders at all levels being lectured by Major Bertrand in administration and organisation, and their own roles within the Battalion structure. A Shipboard routine was quickly established, with reveille at 6.00 am, breakfast, and then a three hour training period. After lunch, another two training periods were held. Dinner was served at 5.30 pm, after which the men made most of their own entertainment. Concerts, singing, and 'Housie' proved popular, as did a number of more clandestine activities, such as 'Two-up' and Crown and Anchor.

PROBLEMS IN SOUTH AFRICA

When the ships reached Fremantle on May 10, the troops were given several hours shore leave before the convoy proceeded. The possibility of Italy's entering the war on the side of Germany, raising the spectre of a closure of the Suez Canal, caused the redirection of the convoy. On May 26 the ships reached Capetown, South Africa, where it was found that the 'Aquitania' and the 'Queen Mary' were unable to berth due to their size. Both ships sailed to the naval base at Simonstown, where shore leave was granted to the Pakeha troops only.

Only after Brigadier J. Hargest, the Commander of 5 Brigade (of which the Maori Battalion was a part), had cabled the New Zealand Government was the decision changed. Four days after arriving off the coast of South Africa, the Maoris were taken by bus to a luncheon hosted by the Mayoress and ladies of Capetown. After singing 'Maori Battalion' and 'Po Atarau' for their hosts, they were given until 2.15 pm less than an hour to see the city, the first native contingent ever to be allowed to do so. Thereafter they returned to their ship.

UNITED KINGDOM

On May 31, the convoy left South Africa for the final stage of its voyage. The 17,000 mile journey came to an end on June 16, when the ships dropped anchor off the coast of Scotland. The next day, the Maori Battalion moved by rail to the South of England.

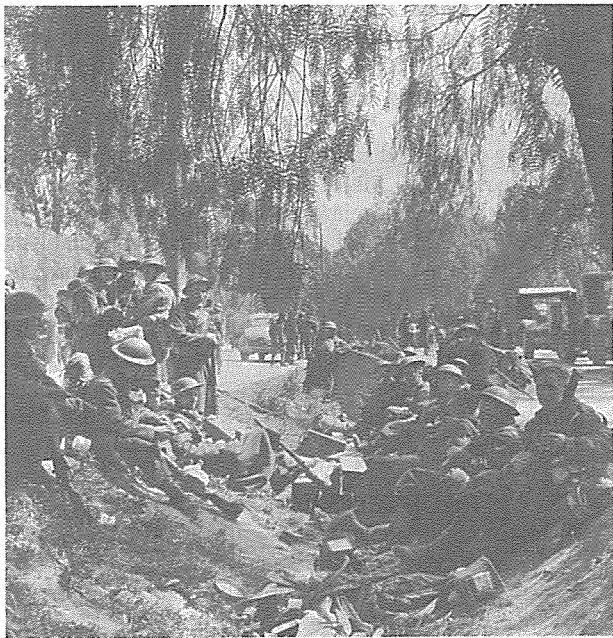
With the German threat to Britain at its height, the Second Echelon was organised as a sub-strength Division. After four days leave in London, the Maori Battalion began training for the expected invasion. Particular emphasis was given to anti-gas training and route marches.

The Maoris proved popular wherever they went. In Farnham, the Battalion took part in the local swimming championships, winning every race on the programme.

The Battalion hockey and rugby teams also performed with distinction, with the latter being invited to play a Welsh fifteen at Llangley Park. The Welsh won, 12 to 3.

On December 16, the advance elements of the Battalion departed for Egypt, to join the First Echelon. After spending a White Christmas in the United Kingdom, the remainder of the Battalion followed on January 12, 1941.

GREECE



Evacuation of Greece. Roadside scene during the retreat of the ports of embarkation. AFP

The convoy's route to Egypt took it around the Cape of Good Hope. This time, however, there were no problems arranging leave in South Africa.

On March 3, the Maori Battalion reached Egypt. Thanks to the time spent in Britain, they were fitter and better prepared for war than they had been when they had left Wellington eight months earlier.

They did not have long to wait. On March 25, they were taken by train to Alexandria, to embark on the troopship 'Cameronia'. Their destination was Greece. Since early March, elements of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force had been en route to Greece, in anticipation of a German invasion.

Between March 29 and April 5, 5 Brigade (including the Maori Battalion) deployed to Northern Greece, where it prepared and occupied reserve positions covering the two passes to the North and East of Mount Olympus. The remainder of the New Zealand Division, 4th and 6th Brigades, were preparing positions further north.

ENEMY CONTACT

The German invasion of Yugoslavia and Greece was launched on April 6. Within three days, the German Army had captured Salonika and destroyed the Greek East Macedonian Army. At the same time, the Greek forces in the east were coming under increasing pressure. With the Allied positions now threatened with infiltration or, at worst, encirclement, a fighting withdrawal began. As the forward Brigades fell back, 5th Brigade found itself in the front line.

THE FIRST CASUALTIES

At 10.30 am on April 15, a German column was sighted advancing towards 5 Brigade's positions. As it came within range it was scattered by artillery fire, with the Maori Battalion's 3-inch mortars and Machine Gun Section adding their firepower to the fray. Later that day German artillery shelled 5th Brigade's positions, inflicting the Maori Battalion's first combat casualties of the war.

WITHDRAWAL

The decision to withdraw the entire Division to Thermopylae, 100 miles to the South, had already been made. There, it was planned, the Allies would establish a defensive line from coast to coast.

The German probing intensified throughout the day of the 16th, making several concerted attacks. With the fall of darkness, the Maori Battalion began to withdraw. To the rear of the retiring Battalion, two Corporals fired random bursts of light machine gun fire into the darkness.

Heavy rain and strong winds hindered their progress, and every step along the rough and slippery tracks was fraught with peril. The conditions made communication between the withdrawing units almost impossible, resulting in one section being left behind. It was captured three weeks later, while trying to rejoin the Battalion.

A TASTE OF HOME

The Maori Battalion's withdrawal route took it through the village of Lamia. There, the Maoris' morale was raised by their being able to buy kina, or sea eggs, from the local fish shops. For many in the Battalion, it was their first taste of the delicacy for some months.

THE THERMOPYLAE LINE

By April 20, the ANZAC Corps (including the New Zealand Division) had completed its withdrawal south of the Sphorkios River to the Thermopylae Line. There the terrain lent itself naturally to defence, with mountain ranges connecting the two coasts, thereby providing a barrier to armoured movement. As with the Olympus range, there were only two passes, through the Thermopylae ranges. However, this time the Allied defensive line would be shorter and more concentrated.

The preparations for the defence, of the Thermopylae line were nearing completion when, on April 22, it was announced that Greece was to be evacuated. That evening, the Maori Battalion began to withdraw. Once again, confusion and congestion on the roads led to parts of the Battalion being temporarily separated from the main body.

CONFUSION AND CAPTIVITY

At dawn on April 24, the Maori Battalion reached Athens. Their final day in Greece was spent under the shelter of a pine forest near the ancient battlefield of Marathon.

There they wrecked all their vehicles, except those which would be required for the final journey to the beach near the fishing village of Porto Rafti. That night, the bulk of the Battalion was evacuated on the Glengyle.

Those initially left behind included those elements which had been detached to cover the Division's withdrawal, and those which had been lost during the confused night moves. While some were able to attach themselves to, and be evacuated with, other Allied units, most were destined to go into captivity.

As it had been for the entire New Zealand Expeditionary Force, the Greek fiasco had been an ignominious start to the Maori Battalion's war. The Battalion had lost 10 dead and 6 wounded, while 94 had been taken prisoner-of-war. Worse, however, was to follow.

CRETE

The 'Glengyle' reached Crete on April 25. Immediately after disembarking, the Maoris marched three miles to Canea, the Island's capital. The next day, 5 Brigade was deployed to the area surrounding Maleme air field, which had already been identified as vital to the defence of Crete.

At the end of the month, General Freyberg was appointed Commanding Officer of all Allied troops on Crete, and ordered to hold the island. Brigadier Puttick, temporarily in charge of the New Zealand Division, gave 5th Brigade the task of defending the area between Maleme airfield and Platanias.

AIRBORNE INVASION

The German invasion was launched on the morning of May 20, with the dropping of hundreds of paratroops. While none dropped directly into the Maori Battalion's positions, the Maoris quickly mopped up those who fell immediately outside their perimeter. Throughout the remainder of the first day, the Maoris assisted the more hard-pressed neighbouring Battalions.

COUNTERATTACK AT MALEME

By the end of May 21, Maleme airfield was in enemy hands. With pressure mounting and more and more Germans landing, a counterattack to recapture the airfield was planned for that night. The operation would involve 20 and 28 Battalions.

Originally planned to start at 1.00 am on May 22, the attack was doomed to failure when 20 Battalion arrived at the start line two hours late. That the delay was not 20 Battalion's fault meant little. What really mattered was that, by daylight, the Maoris were still half a mile from their first objective, and the airfield was another half mile beyond that. Worse, German opposition was becoming stronger and better organised. As the day wore on, the attack ground to a halt and, although 20 Battalion had reached its edge, the airfield remained in German hands.

Shortly before dawn on May 23, 5 Brigade began to withdraw to Platanias. With Maleme airfield now securely held by the Germans, enemy reinforcements were being flown in. Under growing pressure, the Allied troops were forced further back, towards Suda Bay.

Army No: 39335

L/Corporal Bernard Hardiman M.M.

During the Bn withdrawal from MALEME this NCO asked to be allowed to carry back one of his men who had been badly wounded in the early stages of the withdrawal. The first part of his task was accomplished under enemy fire. He could not keep up with the rear-guard, therefore remained behind and carried the wounded soldier for two days behind the enemy lines. He became so exhausted in the end that he decided to place the wounded soldier near a roadway and return to the unit, which he accomplished, having to evade several bodies of the enemy in doing so.

A MESSAGE FROM FREYBERG

The Maoris' morale, already affected by withdrawal and the prospect of defeat, was bolstered by the arrival of the following Message from Divisional Headquarters

'Inform KELA (28 Maori Battalion) that GOC (Freyberg) intends to cable N.Z. informing of their splendid conduct and dash during the operation of the past few days'.

42nd STREET

On May 27, with the vital areas of Maleme and Galatas in German hands, the decision M5 made to evacuate Crete. The force in the Suda Bay area was ordered to withdraw, over the White Mountains, to Sfakia on the southern coast. By this stage, 5 Brigade was deployed along a sunken road called 42nd Street, to the west of Suda village.

The German 141st Mountain Regiment was advancing towards Suda, with the objective of securing the roads to the west of the town. As they came within small arms fire range, 5 Brigade launched an impromptu bayonet charge

'The Maoris of 28 Battalion began it, most witnesses agree. They had watched the Germans coming, the efficient, almost contemptuous, drive of a victorious army...Forward went the Maoris with an elan almost incredible in men who had already endured so much. Within seconds they were followed by 21 Battalion, the 19th, the 22nd, the 23rd such of them as still remained... They went forward, walking grimly at first, firing at the grey uniforms in the grass, using the bayonet ruthlessly on those who resisted...For the enemy, the sight of troops advancing into the fire with such sharp pugnacity was too much. They fought for a moment, wavered, then fled. And they were destroyed as they ran. In a spirit of exhilaration for which there can be no words, our men swept the Germans back from 42nd Street nearly half a mile.'

(Kenneth Sandford, 'Mark of the Lion')

Given the total lack of planning, given to the bayonet charge, Allied casualties were surprisingly light. German losses, however, were far more severe. The 1st Battalion of the 141st Mountain Regiment, which bore the brunt of the attack, was virtually eliminated in its first ever engagement.

WITHDRAWAL AND EVACUATION

The Maori Battalion began its withdrawal south on the night of May 27. Two of its Companies, however, were to remain behind to delay the German pursuit while new positions were being established. The rear-guard rejoined the remainder of the Battalion on the Askifou plain, atop the White Mountains, late the next day.

On May 30, the Battalion began the final march to Sfakia, where they were told that 144 of their number were to remain behind to protect the Force Headquarters. At midnight on May 31, the bulk of the Maori Battalion began to embark for evacuation to Egypt. The next day, the 'Suicide Company' (as those who had remained on Crete had been nicknamed) was amongst the last Allied troops to leave Crete.

• NORTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN •

After the return to Egypt, the Maori Battalion was reinforced and reorganised. One of its first duties was a ceremonial parade for the King and Queen of Greece, with several hakas being included in the programme.

The Battalion's work time was divided between training in the new desert environment and helping with road construction. The monotony of the work was only broken by leave, and such activities as concert parties and organised sport. As they had in the United Kingdom, the Maoris excelled in sport, particularly swimming, rowing and rugby.

OPERATION CRUSADER

On November 11, 5 Brigade moved from Baggush to Mersa Matruh, where the New Zealand Division was being concentrated. Once assembled, the Division moved westward towards Libya part of Operation 'Crusader', and the Allies returned to the offensive. 5 Brigade was to occupy the Sollum-Musaïd-Capuzzo area, thus isolating the enemy forces at Halfaya Pass and Bardia, and providing a base for further operations against the Axis-held ports.

HEAVY GOING

In its first action in North Africa, the Maori Battalion attacked Upper Sollum on November 23, capturing the town and 250 prisoners. Further to the west, however, the

Allied forces were finding the opposition far stronger. Following heavy casualties sustained during successful enemy counter attacks 4 and 6 Brigades withdrew from Libya at the end of the month. 5 Brigade moved westward to Menastir, where it was to hold the road between Bardia and Tobruk. This isolated the Bardia garrison, which had earlier been bypassed by 8 Army's advance.

The Maori Battalion had completed its positions overlooking the road by December 2. The next morning, an enemy column was seen approaching from the west. Opening fire when the foremost vehicle was only 60 metres away, the Maoris destroyed the column, inflicting 240 casualties. On December 4, the Brigade withdrew to the Sollum-Capuzzo area to regroup.

GAZALA

By December 7, the Allies were at last gaining the upper hand in Cyrenaica, forcing Rommel to withdraw westward towards Gazala. A few days later, 5 Brigade was sent to locate the enemy positions in the Gazala area, while at the same time avoiding major contact. During their advance westward, the Maori Battalion captured 1800 prisoners, mostly Italians and numerous field and antitank guns, while suffering only minor losses themselves.

At the end of the year, the Battalion moved back to Baggush, where Christmas and New Year were celebrated in a combined function on New Year's Eve.

N.Z.E.F. TIMES — MONDAY, JANUARY 5, 1942

MAORI BATTALION

STIFF ENGAGEMENTS IN DESERT BATTLE

OFFICER'S DESCRIPTION

(From a N.Z. War Correspondent)

Five hectic actions by the Maori Battalion which is attached to the Fifth N.Z. Brigade were described to me today by a young Maori officer as he lay in bed in a New Zealand general hospital recovering from shrapnel wounds in the mouth.

After the Maoris had taken Sollum barracks with a brilliant dawn attack, they were given various roles around the Sollum area. Only once were they able to go into the bayonet charge in which they revel. With blood-curdling yells they struck terror into the hearts of Germans and Italians near Gazala when they attacked with the bayonet at night. Arrows and Ngapibus combined in a daring attack upon a fort situated on high ground. As soon as the enemy realised that the Maoris were attacking with the bayonet, both Germans and Italians scattered in confusion. Many surrendered, yelling for mercy, and many Germans who attempted to escape were later rounded up.

PANZERS DEFEATED

One day when the Maori Battalion was out on a patrol job near Manister, between Sollum and Bardia they found themselves up against heavy units of Rommel's Panzers. Along the road came a big concentration of motor transport. The Maoris quickly consolidated, one company taking up a position on the left of the road and the other on the right of the road. The Germans were coming from the direction of Tobruk.

Some distance away the Germans stopped but, after a conference which the Maoris watched through glasses, they decided to continue. The Maoris waited until the Hun was a hundred yards away and then opened up with everything.

For three hours the battle raged, but the Germans cracked under the

relentless Maori onslaught. A hundred and fifty German prisoners, and much material and equipment was the Maori prize. The battlefield was littered with German dead, totalling 300.

Not long after the Maoris had taken Sollum barracks, they were given the task of preventing an enemy convoy from moving out of Hellfire Pass towards Bardia. One company took up a position commanding ground at Musaïd which is on the Egyptian side of the frontier wire. Three times heavy concentrations of Germans attacked but they could not budge the Maoris who gave them a terrific pasting. After the third attempt they retired with badly depleted numbers and leaving behind them much blazing transport.

When the Fifth Brigade moved up past Tobruk towards Gazala over ground where New Zealanders had done some of the heaviest fighting of the Libyan campaign, they had an uninterrupted journey across the desert. It was not until they were near Acroma, well to the west of Tobruk, that they ran into any trouble.

HECTIC PERIOD

They found their way barred by heavily armed and well dug-in Germans and Italians. The Maoris found themselves under a hail of mortar and machinegun fire. It was a hectic period. One German machine-gun post was causing considerable trouble but with the skilful use of a smokescreen, a Maori corporal led his section across the battlefield and rushed the enemy post with the bayonet. The officer said that through the smoke he could see his corporal leading his section, a rifle in one hand and a Very light pistol in the other.

A minute later the Very light rocketed skywards as a signal that the post had been captured. The single section had taken the post and a hundred other Germans and Italians who were rounded up at the point of the bayonet.

This was the prelude to a day's solid fighting but, as the Fifth Brigade pushed forward, the Germans withdrew leaving the Italians as a screen to cover their retreat. Then came the Fifth Brigade's last brilliant effort—the capture of Gazala.

Around Gazala in final sweeping back of Rommel's columns, N.Z. Maori Battalion did magnificent work earning high praise



Smile of the big push. Soldier with captured German Tommy Gun, near Gazala

SYRIA

In March 1942, the Maori Battalion (now part of 6th Brigade) moved to Syria, as part of an Allied counter to a possible Axis thrust towards the Suez Canal and the Middle East oilfields. The time in Syria was spent training and constructing roads. On June 15, the New Zealand Division was ordered back to the desert, where German counterattacks were resulting in the loss of some of the territory gained during Operation 'Crusader'.

The Maori Battalion was the first unit in the Division to reach Mersa Matruh, arriving on June 19. By then, the situation was serious, with the Afrika Corps piercing the Tobruk defences and capturing the port and its entire garrison.

MINQAR QAIM

To counter the Axis threat to Egypt, elements of the 8th Army were hurriedly deployed along the possible Axis lines of advance. Amongst them were 4th and 5th Brigades (the latter of which now, again, included the Maori Battalion), which deployed to Minqar Qaim on June 26. Through out the next day, enemy movement was seen beyond the Division's perimeter, although actual contact had been limited. While 13 Corps, of which the New Zealand Division was part, had authorised withdrawal early on June 27, General Freyberg had decided to wait until nightfall. By then, the New Zealanders had been surrounded by the 21st Panzer Division.

BREAKOUT

The Division's only hope lay in a successful breakout and rapid withdrawal into the desert. The breakout was planned for half an hour past midnight, with the Maori Battalion acting as the right rear unit of the assaulting force. Every man knew that failure would mean the annihilation of the New Zealand Division.

Most of the enemy's defences were located on the 19th and 20th Battalion's axes of advance, which meant that the Maoris had an easier time with the opposition. The New Zealanders threw themselves against the German lines with a ferocity born of desperation, and punched a hole right through the shocked defenders. The breakout effected, the Battalions embussed on the waiting transport, and the Division drove headlong eastward into the night, towards the Alamein Line.

PARRY AND THRUST

For the next three months, the campaign was one of parry and thrust, with neither side able to deliver a decisive blow against the other. The New Zealand Division suffered very heavy casualties at the battles of Ruweisat Ridge (July 1516) and El Mreir (July 2122), and, although neither action involved the Maori Battalion, the Maoris suffered their share of casualties in the ceaseless round of air attacks and artillery barrages attracted by the fighting.

EL MRIER

Army No: 39424

Captain William Porter M.C. & BAR

Capt Porter was a Company Commander in the attack made by the Battalion on the Eastern End of EL MRIER depression on the night 25/26 August. He led his company with fine dash and determination and his courage and leadership were inspiring. His example set the standard which enabled his company to overrun capture and destroy sixteen enemy MG Posts in succession.

With intelligence reports indicating a major Axis offensive at the end of August, the Maori Battalion was ordered to conduct a night attack against the Italian positions on the El Mreir Depression. The raid was launched before dawn on August 26, and took the Italians completely by surprise. At a cost of just 20 of their own, the Maoris killed or captured nearly 150 Italians.

Army No: 65434
Sergeant John August M.M.

This NCO commanded one of the leading platoons in the attack made by the Battalion on enemy positions in EL MRIER depression on the night 25/26 August. Sgt AUGUST showed outstanding qualities of leadership, controlling and leading his men in difficult conditions under shell fire, and in smoke and dust. His coolness and personal courage was a continual source of inspiration to his men, who largely owing to the example he set successfully attacked and captured in succession eight enemy MG posts, taking prisoners and equipment and inflicting heavy casualties.

ROMMEL'S LAST OFFENSIVE

At 2.00 am on August 31, Rommel launched his last offensive against the Allied forces in Egypt. Within two days, the Afrika Korps had been halted south of El Halfa. Faced with British air supremacy and a shortage of petrol, Rommel decided to discontinue the offensive.

A silent attack to disrupt Rommel's withdrawal route in the Munnasib Depression was planned for the nights of September 3/4. The attack involved 5th Brigade and 132nd British Infantry Brigade. In the confusion, the Maoris overran their objective and penetrated deep into enemy territory. The possibility of the Battalion's being isolated was increased by the virtual annihilation of 132nd Brigade on one flank, and the failure of the armour to come up in support as promised. A request to 5th Brigade Headquarters led to the artillery laying a smoke screen, through which the Maoris beat a speedy withdrawal. The haste with which the Maoris withdrew belied the success of the overall operation, as the Battalion accounted for over 600 enemy casualties, while only suffering 75 of its own.

EL ALAMEIN

A hitherto obscure railway station called El Alamein was to be the launching point for General Montgomery's return to the offensive, codenamed Operation 'Lightfoot'. The New Zealand Division was one of four which would advance over an eight mile front, with the objective of punching through the Axis defences, thereby allowing 8th Army's armour into the desert beyond. The Maori Battalion was to have the unusual task of mopping up after the lead Battalions of both 5th and 6th Brigades, which were to advance in tandem. The Maoris were thus, in effect, divided between two Brigades and spread over a front of two miles. Behind the Maoris would be the 21st and 22nd Battalions of 5th Brigade, and 25th and 26th Battalions of 6th Brigade within their respective boundaries.

Army No: 34879
Lieutenant/Colonel Fred Baker D.S.O.

In the battle of ALAMEIN from 23 Oct, 1942 up to the battle on 1/2 Nov, when he was seriously wounded, Lt-Col BAKER showed himself to be a worthy commander of a hard fighting battalion. During difficult and confused situation and whilst under heavy fire his firmness and fine personal example of cheerfulness and courage materially assisted to maintain the spirits of his men.

In the attack on Point 209 on 1 Nov, he commanded with outstanding spirit in a hard fought attack and whilst doing so suffered severe wounds. He showed exceptional thoroughness and skill throughout.

Army No: 25982
Lance Corporal (T/Cpl) James Pirihi M.M.

T/Cpl PIRIHI is a stretcher bearer who had continually shown outstanding courage and unswerving devotion to duty. In the action of 23/24 Oct, 1942 at MITERIYA RIDGE he dressed and splinted a fractured limb under heavy shell fire and MG fire. Throughout the night and for the best part of the following day he worked cheerfully and untiringly treating, evacuating and burying casualties until none remained on the field. In the action 1/2 Nove, 1942 at Point 209 he again showed great devotion to duty administering to friend and foe alike. In one instance in the face of enemy MG fire he dressed the wounds of a GERMAN soldier and finally carried him out to safety personally. His behaviour and courage is of the highest order and is a source of inspiration to all his comrades.

The offensive began on the night of October 23, with the heaviest artillery barrage in history. Although the assaulting troops made good progress, by dawn the hoped for breach in the German lines had not been made. Four days later, the entire Division was withdrawn and regrouped for another thrust.

Army No: 25833
Sergeant Rihimona Davis D.C.M.

During the battle of ALAMEIN. In the attack on DEIR EL MUNASSIB on the night 3/4 Sept 1944, Sgt DAVIS, single handed, attacked and killed the crew of ten manning an 88mm gun. He then used the 88mm gun effectively against the enemy, knocking out two MG posts. When the enemy counter attacked with grenades and MG fire etc, and while the Coy was in a precarious position, Sgt DAVIS used a captured MG against them effectively. His leadership and control was a potent factor in the success of the attack and the defeating of the counter attack, and he showed courage and initiative throughout the action.

OPERATION 'SUPERCHARGE'

Two British Infantry Brigades came under the command of the New Zealand Division for this second thrust, code-named Operation 'Supercharge'. One of the British Brigades, 151st Brigade, was given command of the Maori Battalion for the attack.

Operation 'Supercharge' was launched early in the morning of November 2. From the outset, the Maori Battalion lacked cohesion as a unit, with little or no communication within the Battalion itself, or between it and its higher command. This was due to both the stubborn resistance of the Germans and the poor orders received from 151st Brigade. As a result of the confusion, dawn found the Battalion dispersed and disorganised, and (largely because of the lack of communication with other units during the night), partially isolated. Had the enemy not been under such pressure elsewhere, he would have found the Maori Battalion an easy target. With nearly 100 of its number (including 8 Officers) killed, wounded, or missing, the night had been costly.

THE PURSUIT BEINGS

Overall, however, the operation had been a success. A breach had been made for the armour, which now poured through the enemy lines. On November 2, Rommel ordered the withdrawal of the Panzer Army from the Alamein line. 8th Army's pursuit began on November 4, with the New Zealand Division and the Maori Battalion well to the

forefront. From the 'parry and thrust' of pre-El Alamein days, the North African campaign now became one of pursuit, with the Afrika Korps staging a series of rearguard actions.

TRIPOLI

Exactly three months after the battle of El Alamein, the advance elements of 8th Army entered Tripoli, having advanced 1400 miles. The Maori Battalion was the second New Zealand unit into Tripoli, the first being 27 (Machine Gun) Battalion.

While the Division rested in Tripoli, each Battalion took turns at working the docks. However, there was still time for the recreation. In a closely-fought game, the Maoris won the Divisional rugby tournament, beating Signals 86.

TEBAGA GAP

The Maori Battalion's part in the pursuit of the Afrika Korps continued when, on March 1, 1943, the New Zealand Corps was deployed to Medenine, near the Mareth Line. After a series of German attacks were beaten off, the New Zealanders were assigned to capture Tebaga Gap, a pass through which a road ran to the rear of the heavily-defended Mareth Line.

Army No: 39497
Sergeant P. Walters M.M.

During the attack on Point 209 on 26 March, 1943, Sgt WALTERS was in charge of a section of carriers whose task it was to give protection to the right flank. He executed this duty in a most aggressive manner engaging all and sundry that showed any sign of movement and operating from well out on the flank. It was not until the Battalion had fully completed its consolidation that he reported back, by which time it was well after dark. Sgt WALTERS again played a telling part during the Battalion attack on Point 209 proper on 27 March, 1943. The Infantry had been pinned to the ground by heavy resistance from Point 209. It was decided to call in the carriers to give support to the attack. Sgt WALTERS operation, from a flank, used his carriers with such dash and determination that it was evident his boldness completely disorganised the enemy. The enemy garrison of Point 209 amounting to over two hundred Germans surrendered.

As part of the overall plan, the Maori Battalion's objectives were two connected features overlooking the Gap, Hikurangi and Point 209.

Army No: 39612
Private K. Edward M.M.

During the attack of March 26 Pte. EDWARD was attached as SB to the company that made the attack on Point 209. All other SB's attached to this company had become casualties themselves during the approach on to the hill feature so that by the time the company had got on to its objective, Pte EDWARD was the only stretcher bearer left. When the company reached the crest of the hill heavy fighting took place, the enemy making several counterattacks and inflicting heavy casualties on the company. Pte EDWARD worked under extremely difficult conditions, going from one end of the company to the other under continuous mortar and MG fire. But without the slightest regard for his own personal safety he worked unceasingly throughout the whole night and the better part of the next day until his company was relieved, not only dressing the wounded but also carrying them down the hill to safety. During this action Pte EDWARD showed unswerving devotion to duty in the face of tremendous odds and also showed personal courage and fortitude of a very high order.

The attack began late in the afternoon of March 26. Although the Maoris were able to establish a hold on Hikurangi, the attack bogged down under heavy fire from the higher Point 209. Throughout the night, the Germans made a series of counterattacks, but were unable to recapture Hikurangi. Second Lieutenant M. N. Ngarimu won a posthumous Victoria Cross for his inspired leadership in resisting these counterattacks.

At 3.00 pm on March 27, the Maori Battalion launched the final push up Point 209, after German prisoners had indicated that the defenders were short of supplies and ammunition. The information proved correct, and Point 209 fell.

**Army No: 65203
Private Fred Te Namu M.M.**

Private TE NAMU showed exceptional courage during the attack on Point 209, on the night of 1/2 Nov, 1942, when his section attacked a strongly held A/Tk position. With hand grenades and rifle he killed seven of the enemy, wounding several more. Later he led his section forward destroying two more enemy post and mounted on of the captured MG's, manning it for the remainder of the night and the whole of the next day under heavy mortar and MG fire. His conduct throughout the action was source of inspiration to his comrades.

TAKROUNA

Following the capture of Tebaga Gap, the enemy abandoned the Mareth Line, and the pursuit continued. As the advance approached the mountains blocking movement into northern Tunisia, the New Zealand Division was given the task of capturing the vital Takrouna feature to the north of Enfidaville. Takrouna's importance lay in the fact that it dominated a single road through the mountains. Steep approaches to the pinnacle made the feature a most formidable objective.

**Army No: 39304
Corporal Neville Bennet, Cook M.M.**

Cpl COOK commanded one of the sections of the forward left platoon of 'A' Coy who were detailed to attack and take an objective to the right of TAKROUNA Village on the night 19/20 April, 1943. He displayed outstanding courage, coolness and leadership throughout the attack. His Coy came under terrific enemy shell, mortar and MG fire causing heavy casualties including all Officers. Entirely regardless of his own personal safety he tended to the wounded and with a small band of helpers organised the moving of the wounded to shelter. During this action the whole of his Coy area was continually under enemy fire. By his resourcefulness and devotion to duty however, he was able to have all the wounded in his Coy evacuated to the RAP by early evening of the 20 April, 1943.

The attack began on the night of April 19/20. After advancing through Olive groves lined with solid walls of cactus, the Maori Battalion began its assault on the feature. By dawn, two parties of Maoris had fought their way to the top of the feature and engaged the enemy in the buildings, and at 8.00 am the first enemy prisoners of war were being led down the slopes of Takrouna. The battle for the feature raged for three days, with attackers and defenders fighting hand to hand amongst the old buildings atop the feature. The struggle was a far cry from the one-sided victories of

earlier battles, with the Italians fighting literally to the death. After the final spark of resistance was extinguished, the New Zealanders were relieved by a British Division.

**Army No: 67620
Private Tepene Heka M.M.**

Pte HEKA was a member of 'A' Coy detailed to attack and take an objective to the right of TAKROUNA Village on night 19/20 April, 1943. Under heavy enemy shelling, A/Tk, mortar and MG fire the Coy had to go to ground. Entirely regardless of his own personal safety Pte HEKA dashed from cover and attacked an A/Tk post single-handed, killed the leader of the post while other members of the gun crew quickly surrendered. Then he attacked three MG posts and succeeded in putting these out of action and taking fourteen prisoners in all. By his aggressiveness, initiative and courage our troops were able to continue their advance.



A copy H.Q. at Takrouna

THE LAST ENCOUNTER IN NORTH AFRICA

British and American Armies were driving toward Tunis and the 8th Army which had come so far and fought so well, was relegated to the role of exerting pressure and pinning down as many Axis troops as possible.

**Army No: 39483
Sergeant Waru Te Waiti M.M.**

Sgt Te Waiti was a member of 'A' Coy which attacked and captured Point 237 on the evening of 7 May, 1943. Early in the morning of 8 May, 1943, his Coy immediately came under heavy enemy mortar fire throughout the day which played havoc with lines of communication from his Coy HQ to Bn HQ when ultimately at 0800 hrs the lines were totally destroyed and were unreparable. Despite such heavy enemy fire, however, and without any due regard for his own personal safety, Sgt TE WAITI immediately offered his services as runner for the carrying of messages and information from his Coy HQ to Bn HQ. This job he carried out for the whole of the day under hazardous and most difficult conditions until lines of communication were again established by early evening. Throughout the action Sgt TE WAITI showed loyalty to his Coy, determination, courage and fortitude of the highest order.

The 5 Brigade, started a two week recreation period which in fact lasted two hours. So the Maori Battalion was off to an area known as Djibibina in the vicinity of Pondu Fahs, some 15 miles west of Takrouna.

On the night of May 7/8, 1943, 'A' & 'D' Companies of the Battalion were required to capture two small hills on the Brigade front. This they did with A Company's position being a lot more dangerous and testing than that of D Company's, with consequently more casualties to A. The enemy which was near to total capitulation in North Africa kept up an almost continuous 48 hour bombardment of

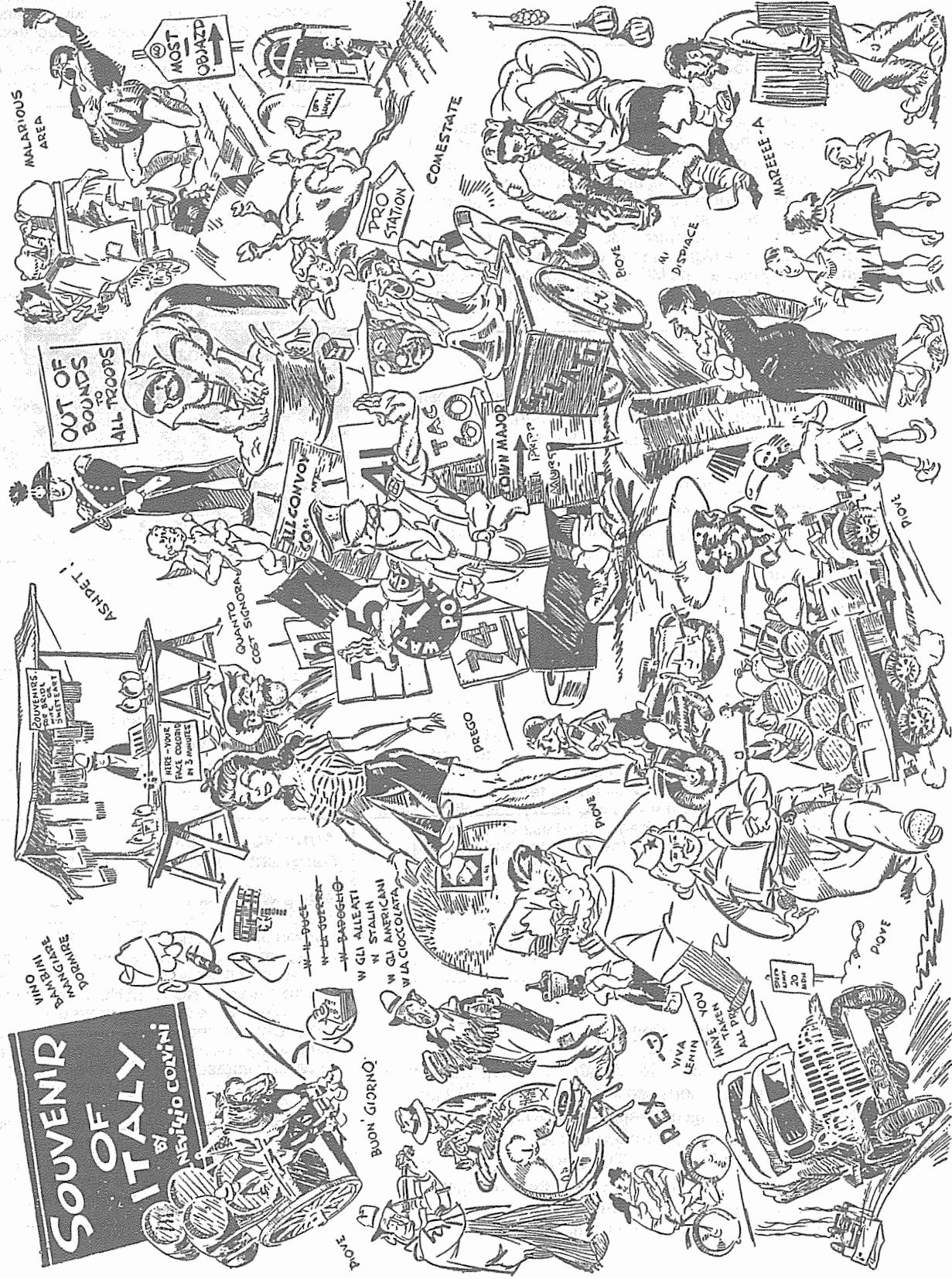
what had been their own weapon-pits.

In less than a week all fighting had ceased in North Africa.

SURRENDER

In mid-May, the last of the Axis forces in North Africa surrendered. The victories at Tebaga Gap and Takrouna had considerably increased the reputation of the Maori Battalion, although the cost had been high. Since returning to North Africa from Crete two years before, the Maori Battalion's casualties numbered 270 dead, 815 wounded and 20 captured.

SUPPLEMENT TO NZ EFFTIMES · CHRISTMAS · 1944



• ITALIAN CAMPAIGN •

The Maori Battalion arrived in Italy in late October 1943, with the onset of the Italian winter. After moving to a sector of the front beside the Adriatic Sea with the New Zealand Division, the Maoris took part in the Battle of Orsogna.

ORSOGNA

The township of Orsogna was located on the eastern end of the German Winter Line, a defensive perimeter stretching the width of the Italian peninsula. An attack by the New Zealand Division on German forces dug in around Orsogna in early December had failed after a major enemy counter attack. A second assault on the town, involving the 5th Brigade, was planned for December 7.

This second attack was supported by heavy aerial and artillery bombardment. After a hazardous climb up the steep approaches to the town, the Maoris came to grips with the defenders.

Army No: 64296 Private Taone Nathan M.M.

During the attack on FONTE GRANDE on 24 Dec, 1943, Pte NATHAN was working as a stretcher bearer, in which capacity he showed outstanding courage and coolness under continual fire during the whole day. From first light until dusk he led different parties forward to the F.D.L.'s, and under intense mortar and machine gun fire personally assisted in the evacuation of all wounded from one Company area. On one occasion when enemy fire was particularly intense, Pte NATHAN went forward twice alone and brought back two wounded men to a position under cover. Pte NATHAN, due to his courage and gallantry under fire, was undoubtedly instrumental in saving several lives.

Vigorous hand-to-hand fighting ensued, with no quarter being asked or given. In the face of enemy counterattacks, supported by tanks, the New Zealanders' advance gradually ground to a halt.

When the final onslaught was launched on December 23, the 5th Brigade penetrated the German positions to the northwest of Orsogna. However, when the fighting died down, the township remained in German hands. At this stage, with wet weather and shortages of supplies to contend with, Field Marshal Montgomery stopped the Orsogna campaign. With the rest of the New Zealand Division, the Maori Battalion was withdrawn from the front line in mid-January, 1944.

Army No: 801792 Private Rawiri Hemi M.M.

During the battle for FONTE GRANDE on the morning of 24 Dec, 1943, Pte HEMI took charge of his section which was encountering very heavy mortar and small arms fire. This did not deter Pte HEMI from leading his section forward with vigour and skill, and he personally knocked out one machine gun post with his Bren and was instrumental in silencing two others.

Whilst his company was consolidating, in broad daylight, Pte HEMI went forward and, with complete disregard for his own safety, dragged a wounded comrade back to safety. He also helped to carry out another wounded soldier whilst under heavy fire from enemy snipers.

This soldier was an inspiration to his men and showed exceptional courage, resourcefulness and ability.

CASSINO

'I am very pleased that the New Zealanders have had a smack in the nose....

Army No: 68371 2/Lieutenant Ben G. Christy M.C.

In the attack on CASSINO on the night 18/19 March, 2/Lt CHRISTY displayed outstanding bravery and qualities of leadership. Despite heavy shelling and intense machine gun fire he led his men to the attack, and when finally pinned to the ground he initiated a flanking movement and personally cleared out a machine gun post. His example was an inspiration to his men and it was largely due to his efforts that his platoon was able to account for an appreciable number of the enemy. In all operations he has shown outstanding bravery and devotion to duty.

Field Marshal Kesselring, after the Maori Battalion's attempt to capture Cassino railway station was repulsed with heavy casualties.

After a fortnight spent resting and training in a reserve area, the New Zealand Division returned to the front. By early 1944, the Allied drive up Italy had bogged down, as German resistance stiffened and bad weather slowed all movement. The sector in which the New Zealanders now found themselves was dominated by Monte Cassino, a huge feature overlooking the Allied line of advance. Earlier Allied attacks on the German positions had failed.

Army No: 67608 L/Corporal Dick Alex M.M.

During the attack on CASSINO on the night 19/20 March, 1944, L/CPL ALEX displayed outstanding bravery and devotion to duty. Working under heavy enemy fire he dressed all casualties and his complete disregard of personal safety not only saved many lives but was an inspiration to his fellow workers. The following morning, after having worked all night, he volunteered to accompany a patrol into enemy territory, and again working under heavy fire he dressed wounded often in full view of the enemy, and in close proximity to the enemy. Owing to his personal bravery and fine work throughout the entire action he was instrumental in saving many lives and in alleviating the suffering of the wounded.

NIGHT ATTACK

The New Zealand Division was to be part of a new thrust against the Cassino defences. The Maori Battalion was selected as the spearhead unit, with the task of capturing the Cassino railway station. This would involve an advance over several hundred metres of swampy ground.

During the morning of February 15, the monastery atop Monte Cassino was subjected to heavy bombing. Two days later, the ground attack began under cover of darkness. Under heavy fire, the Maoris reached the outer defences of the railway station, where breaches were quickly made in the barbed wire. While the survivors of the advance established themselves, artillery hammered Cassino township.

However, because the Engineers had not been able to bridge all the water courses before day break the New Zealand tanks weren't able to support the infantry and neither could the antitank guns.

WITHDRAWAL

By dawn, the Maoris were under fire from three sides. The Allied artillery laid down a smoke screen around their positions to restrict German observation, thereby relieving some of the pressure. Casualties continued to mount throughout the day, as the Maoris clung grimly to their positions. Only after the enemy launched an armoured counterattack was the order to withdraw given.

THE BATTLE CONTINUES

By mid-March, the Allies were ready for another attempt to capture Monte Cassino. After four days of fighting, during which the Maori Battalion had a reserve role, two of its Companies were ordered to clear the south western sector of Cassino. In a hand-to-hand struggle amongst what remained of Cassino's buildings, the enemy prevailed, and Cassino remained in German hands. At the end of the first week of April, the New Zealanders were withdrawn from the Cassino front for a much-needed rest.

THE ADVANCE ON FLORENCE

The Battalion spent a fortnight in the Volturno Valley, recovering from the rigours of the Cassino campaign. With the capture of Monte Cassino by a Polish Division in mid-May having removed the last major obstacle blocking the road to Rome, the Germans began to fall back. The drive up Italy, which had bogged down on the slopes of Monte Cassino, now began to regain its momentum. On June 4, Rome was occupied by American troops.

The New Zealand Division, advanced up the centre of the peninsula, found the enemy to its immediate front offering minor opposition before falling back. The situation changed as the New Zealanders neared Florence, with the German rearguard intent on buying time for the preparation of the defences of the Gothic Line, further to the north. When the final push towards Florence began in late July, the Maori Battalion was to the forefront. After several days of almost continual contact with the enemy, they were the first unit to reach the outskirts of the city.

Army No: 62740 2/Lieutenant Percy Lambly M.C.

During the attack 2 August, 1944 on VILLA DA BABERINA 2/Lt LAMBLY's platoon was ordered to advance and secure the right flank of the Coy. This he did with skill and determination. During the advance his platoon was subjected to heavy mortar and shell fire resulting in his being seriously wounded. When ordered by his Coy commander to report to RAP he refused, and although suffering intense pain continued to lead the attack, displaying courage and leadership of the highest order. This officer was himself first on the objective, personally annihilating one anti-tank gun. After reporting success he lost consciousness. 2/Lt LAMBLY's grim determination and gallantry was instrumental in enabling the rest of his Coy in reaching their objective. At all times he showed devotion to duty of the highest order.

THE GOTHIC LINE

Across the mountainous range to the northwest of the port of Rimini stretched the enemy's next major line of defence, the Gothic Line. The Allied strategy called for the Gothic Line to be breached on the western and eastern coasts of the Italian peninsula, with the New Zealand Division to be involved on the latter front. This eastern thrust would require a 45 kilometre push up the corridor between the mountains and the sea to Rimini.

By the time the Maori Battalion was called into the front line, the Germans had evacuated Rimini. On September 21, the Maoris moved up to help force a path across the canals to the north of the city. By this stage, however, the autumn rains were slowing the advance down again, causing the Allied commanders to transfer their efforts to the higher ground to the west.

Despite the change, little progress was made. At this stage, factors elsewhere began to influence events in Italy, with Allied troops being withdrawn to fight in France and the Balkans. In late October, the New Zealand Division was itself withdrawn from the front.

A WELL-EARNED BREAK

For the next month, the Battalion took a well-earned break away from the front line. The days were occupied with leave, concert parties, and the ever-popular rugby matches against other units. Heavy snowfalls raised the prospect of a white Christmas, although thoughts of Yuletide festivities quickly disappeared when the New Zealanders returned to the front in late November.

FAENZA

Their objective was the township of Faenza. Held by the Germans in strength, and separated from the Allied lines by two swift-flowing canals, Faenza provided a most daunting target for an attack. After establishing themselves on the outskirts of the town, the New Zealanders were tasked with seizing crossings on the Senio River, north of Faenza. 5th Brigade was to threaten the enemy's likely withdrawal route from Faenza ('Route 9'), which, it was hoped, would force the Germans to evacuate the town without the requirement of a direct assault.

The attack began at 11.00 pm on December 14. Temporarily without the support of their antitank weapons (which were to move up at first light), the Maoris made good progress until they made contact with enemy tanks. Thereafter they were quickly pinned down.

Army No: 812614 Private Wynard Panoho M.M.

During the attack on CASA LE MORTE on the night 14/15 Dec, 1944, two of the attacking Cos on right of Battalion sector suffered heavy casualties. Under enemy shelling Pte PANOH who as a stretcher bearer began to evacuate the wounded, often times crossing minefields in order to reach the forward aid post about eight hundred to one thousand yards from farthest casualties. Throughout the night he worked, sometimes with help of others but mostly on his own, giving first aid and carrying wounded back. Without thought for his own safety, he maintained his work under enemy spandau fire even after first light during which time the enemy had already begun a counter-attack on the forward right-hand Coy. Undoubtedly, Pte PANOH's work in this action saved the lives of several members of his unit and throughout the day and during the whole of the Battalion's action for the next two days, he showed outstanding devotion to duty.

With daylight, the Maoris resumed their attack, only to find that the enemy had withdrawn.

Army No: 801916
L/Sgt Ralph Cullen M.M.

During the attack on CASA LA MORTE on night 14/15 Dec, 1944, L/Sgt CULLEN was in command of a Platoon and had to lead his platoon through heavily mined ground to his objective which was a strongly held enemy strong point. Before the objective was reached, he found the country difficult to negotiate owing to canals behind minefields. Without hesitation he led twelve men from flank and began a determined assault which brought down enemy defensive fire among the platoon. The enemy opened fire pinning him and his men. Realising that the enemy fire was too severe he changed his tactics by attacking frontally, thus evading casualties. He led his men with dash and determination resulting in the capture of the objective and the killing of many of the enemy. After capture, the objective was found to be a key point to the defences and to contain many Spandas. By his outstanding initiative and dash, L/Sgt CULLEN inspired his men to gain the objective without serious casualties. Throughout this action and subsequent actions, he had shown leadership of the highest order.

THE LAST CHRISTMAS

Four days before Christmas, the Maoris were pulled out of the frontline. The last Christmas of the war was celebrated with the traditional hangi, with meat being 'scrounged' from local farms to supplement that provided by the Army.

ON TO TRIESTE

In early April, 1945, the New Zealand Division returned to the front, where preparations were being made for the crossing of the Senio River. After the enemy positions had been subjected to an intense aerial and artillery bombardment, the Maori Battalion crossed the Senio virtually unopposed, to be met by Germans surrendering en masse.

Army No: 6102
Lieutenant (T/Capt) Ivon G. Harris M.C.

Lieut (T/Capt) HARRIS commanded 'A' Company during the attack to establish a bridgehead over the river SANTERNO on 11 April, 1945. With dash and determination he led his men across the river, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy. Immediately he consolidated on his objective, the enemy counter attacked with two TIGER tanks and infantry. Lieut (T/Capt) HARRIS though his company was without A/Tk guns or tanks, rallied his men to hold their ground and destroy the enemy infantry, which they ultimately did. This thrashing of the enemy caused his tanks to withdraw. Throughout the night the enemy counter attacked several times but was defeated thoroughly each time. Early in the morning of the next day, the bridge having been established and all tanks and support arms having arrived, Lieut (T/Capt) HARRIS, organised a fire plan which eventually inflicted many casualties on the enemy, resulting in the stemming of three enemy counter attacks by TIGER tanks and infantry. Throughout this action Lieut (T/Capt) HARRIS showed skill, resource and courage of the highest order and the success of his company was due entirely to his inspiring leadership.

For the Maori Battalion, the last month of the war was one of pursuit of a defeated enemy, with such opposition as there was becoming weaker and more disorganised daily. With the final collapse of German resistance in Italy on May 2, however, a new menace appeared.

Army No: 801643
Private Robert Mclean M.M.

During the crossing of the SANTERNO river on the 10 April, 1945, Pte MCLEAN commanded the section which was detailed to form the Company's initial bridgehead, during which he displayed outstanding courage and initiative in that, moving forward under hostile shelling and spandau fire, he led his section against enemy resistance wherein the section destroyed one enemy mortar and crew while he personally captured a spandau post killing fifteen of the enemy. The bridgehead thus created his Coy passed through to fight their way to their final objective, after which Pte MCLEAN led his section up to consolidate on the final objective.

After consolidation the enemy counter attacked several times but the sector his section held was defended gallantly by his men and on the whole, the success of the section and his platoon was due to the dash and gallant leadership of this soldier.

Yugoslav partisans, under Marshal Tito, were refusing to leave the port city of Trieste, which had been ceded to Italy after World War One. The New Zealand Division was put on three hours notice to move, after which the Maori Battalion moved closer to the Yugoslav positions. A week of tension followed, with the issue only being resolved when an agreement was signed in Belgrade on June 9, providing for the issue to be decided at the post-war Peace Conference. The war was finally over.

Army No: 801807
Private James Kira M.M.

Pte KIRA during the crossing of the SANTERNO river on 12 April, 1945, found the crossing on his platoon front very deep. Without hesitation he swam across and single handed, destroyed two spandau posts which were very close together. While engaged in dealing with these posts, he was fired upon by a sniper. Without thought for his personal safety he moved forward, located and destroyed the sniper post by which time the rest of his platoon arrived and everyone moved forward to fight to the final objective. During this action this soldier displayed courage of the highest order and his conduct was an inspiration to his fellow soldiers.

Army No: 801843
Corporal Pou, Rakena D.C.M.

During the crossing of the SENIO river on the night 9 April, 1945, Cpl RAKENA's platoon Sgt was mortally wounded. Being the senior section leader he took over the platoon. The platoon came under very intense small arms fire. With complete disregard for his own personal safety he charged two enemy Spandau posts single handed, killing the entire crews. The remaining spandau posts surrendered. After having rallied his men the enemy began to bazooka them. Displaying outstanding courage Cpl RAKENA went forward firing his bren gun from the hip, capturing the bazooka and killing the crew. This opposition having been eliminated the whole Coy advanced. During the whole advance to MASSA LOMBARDA this NCO showed courage of the highest order and was a constant source of inspiration to his Coy. The success of his Coy was due in no small measure to his initiative and superb leadership.

THE BATTALION RETURNS

Prior to returning to New Zealand, the Maori Battalion sent representatives to memorial services in military cemeteries in Crete, Cassino and near the Sangro

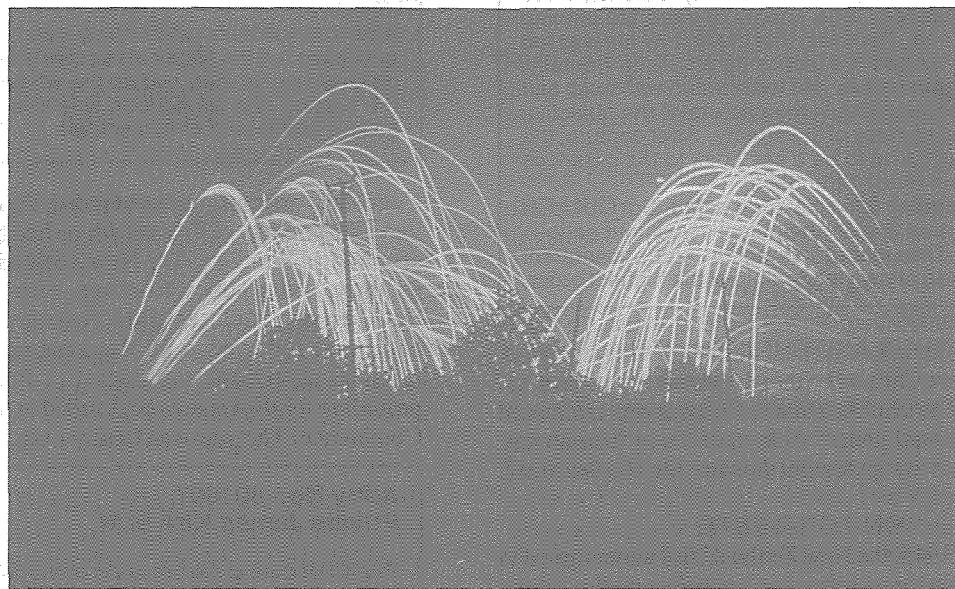
A 270-strong contingent was to be sent to Japan as part of 'J-Force', the occupation force. Although there was no shortage of volunteers, enlistment in this contingent was restricted to single men of the latest Reinforcement.

AOTEA QUAY

It was at the Italian port of Bari, on December 26 that the Maori Battalion embarked on the troopship 'Dominion Monarch', bound for New Zealand. After stops at Port Tewfik (Egypt) and Fremantle the ship reached Wellington Heads early in the morning of January 23, 1946. There, the troops had to wait until midday before weather conditions would permit them to enter the harbour.

Once ashore, the Maoris were greeted with all the ceremony traditionally given to a returning war party. Their leader, Lieutenant-Colonel Henare was challenged, after which chants of mourning were raised for those who had not returned. The final act of ceremony necessary before the men could mingle with their loved ones was the cleansing of the blood of their enemies and the lifting of the tapu of the warrior. Hakas, action songs, speeches, and a meal followed.

With the conclusion of the ceremonies, the men dispersed to their own Marae throughout the country, to be welcomed again by their own tribes and kinsfolk.



The scene characteristics in the New Zealand Divisional area near TRIESTE on the night that the news that the war with Germany was over.

