

# 28th Māori Battalion

## A Māori at Sandhurst

Accession Number 1996.447: This is an excerpt of the recollections of members of the 28th Māori Battalion published in the 14th reunion magazine "The Maori Battalion Remembers" held by the National Army Museum Te Mata Toa and protected by copyright law



**"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.*

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# A MAORI AT SANDHURST ROYAL MILITARY COLLEGE

Most New Zealanders know nothing about Sandhurst; very few even know where it is. Military men do; and for them it has a mystique hard to define. However, we do know that for them, it is the "Holiest of Holies" the Mecca for officer cadets. In Britain, if you are a "Sandhurst Man", socially you are made. So it was with a deep sense of pride that I found myself selected, along with Jim Tuhiwai, Ruhi Pene, and Henry Toka to attend Sandhurst as officer cadets.

Early in September, 1940, the invasion alarm went out while the Battalion was at Dogmersfield; so they moved out with all speed to the SE Coast, vicinity of Devon, while the four of us went to Aldershot to join the New Zealanders also selected to go to Sandhurst. In due course, Jim Tuhiwai and I were among the ten selected for the first of two drafts.

I think it is appropriate that I speak of my feelings as the truck taking us stopped for identification at the main gates of Sandhurst. I realised that Jim and I were the first of our race to cross that threshold, and that, if we were to make any impact and leave a lasting impression on this august seat of Military lore and learning; the effort would have to be great. There and then I made two decisions; — (1) I would not drink any alcohol whatsoever during the entire time I would be there. (2) I would make an honest endeavour to read and study the Bible. I thought the time was appropriate to read every night some portion of the Scripture.

The Royal Military College is divided into the OLD Building and the NEW Building some 400 metres away. In front of the OLD Building is the Parade Ground looking out towards the lake nearby. There is a roadway between the lake and the Parade Ground, and from the roadway a short path to the Parade Ground — this is "The Kings Walk." Only the reigning monarch is permitted to set foot and walk on this hallowed ground.

Once a week, at 0800hrs, Thursday morning a Battalion Parade was held on this Parade Ground under RSM Brand, 23 years a Grenadier Guardsman. Nicknamed "Shagger", I never found out how he got such a name. He was an awesome figure, and had a voice to match; in fact, the title of "The voice" was passed on from him to RSM Brittain.

Every company had it's cadre of instructors — WO's and SGTs all drawn from the Brigade of Guards. They were absolutely immaculate and eagle-eyed; so the Battalion Parade was a very tense thing for us rookies, where the slightest misdemeanour or momentary lapse was immediately picked up by the RSM. The miscreants name would be noted in a note-book, and the WO or SGT would shout out "O C Smith, 14 Platoon, C. Company, SIR; Idle on Parade SIR: twiddling the fingers of his left hand, SIR." Another one for the Battalion Orderly Room; and every parade usually got a harvest of half a dozen of more. In due course, and only when he was fully satisfied with the parade would RSM Brand hand over the the Adjutant, Major Goulburn, Grenadier Guards, mounted on a charger, sometimes black, more often white. A magnificent sight, he

would ride along the front rank of the Battalion, and even between ranks. Not once did I flinch when a horse's rump threatened to push me off balance. Eventually, the companies would be dismissed to be marched back to their respective parade grounds to continue with the syllabus.

A & B Companies and the Armoured Regiment occupied the OLD Building, while C & D Companies, the New Building. I was in C. Company.

We had a batman to about 6 Officer cadets. These batmen were all elderly or middle-aged and had worked most of their lives in and around Sandhurst. Our man was a gem and really looked after us. Besides making our beds and keeping the rooms tidy, he attended to the cleaning and polishing of gear, boots, badges, and white puggaree. If however, any of these items did not pass inspection on parade, the cadet would be punished, not the batman.

SUNDAY. This was always a great day; and for the local gentry a most colourful occasion. On this morning, the commandant, General M. Kemp-Welch DSO would inspect one of the Companies. This was followed by a march past of the Battalion, led by the RMC Band (48 strong) and followed by the company of ATS, which sported many blue-blooded young ladies. It was always a most colourful sight with the gentry, men, women and children, in their Sunday best, lining the route of the march and the Chapel.

On one occasion, Jim Tuhiwai and I had the honour of being selected as the Generals "Stick Men". Tradition had it that it is the duty of the "Stick Men" to clear his path and to protect him. We were trained intensively by the RSM Brand until he was satisfied we were up to the required standard.

This particular Sunday morning dawned fine and mild. Jim and I donned our regalia. Over our uniforms we wore a wide white leather belt with a large silver buckle; a white leather bandolier was slung over one shoulder. A Silver-tipped cane completed the outfit.

At 0900hrs, standing erect on the running board on either side of the General's Daimler tourer, we accompanied the chauffeur to the General's home. With the General safely esconced in the back seat, and with Jim and I again mounted on the running boards, the car moved at a steady speed to inspect C. Company. On arrival, I stepped to the ground, opened the car door and stood to attention while Jim hurried around and took up his position 3 paces to my right — rigidly at attention with canes to the horizontal, tucked under the left armpit. As soon as the General had dismounted, and with the RMC Band playing appropriate

music, we moved off at a slow march to and along the front rank of the leading platoon; then rank after rank until the entire company had been inspected. When the inspection was over, we escorted the General once again to his car and took up our positions on the running boards. The car then moved, slowing to the saluting base outside the College Chapel, to be met by a vast crowd of the local gentry. On debussing the General was again escorted by us to his stand on the Saluting Base. Having done this, Jim and I marched briskly to our appointed places on either side of the Saluting Base, about 10 yards apart, and rigid as statues. The signal was then given and the March Past began, led by the RMC Band. As the Band reached the Saluting Base, they performed a right wheel and a counter-march, and so took up their position directly opposite and facing the Saluting Base and playing all the while. Then C. Company came into sight, marching in column of route; then A Company, followed by B and then D Company, the Armoured Regiment. Finally, and with every bit as much swank and swagger, came the ladies, the ATS Company. As the head of each column reached us, the order "Eyes Right" was given, and so the entire College passed us. What a magnificent and moving sight, and I had a most conspicuous position from which to see it. When the General finally turned from the Saluting Base, we preceded him into the Chapel and took our seats immediately below and in front of him seated in a raised box to one side of, and facing the congregation. The entire Chapel was filled with the soldiery in the body of the Chapel while the public occupied the Gallery. After the service and after we had escorted the General back to his home, our duties were over. I don't suppose there are many men today who can lay claim to having been the General's "Stick Man" at Sandhurst. Jim was killed later, but that day we were proud men.

A weekly event that was relished by us was the once a week drilling of the ATS Company by "Shagger" Brand on the Battalion Parade Ground. This took place after the Battalion parade on Thursday, when the Battalion was involved with its own training syllabus. If, however, we were fortunate enough to be near the Battalion parade ground, "Shagger" never failed to entertain us as he drilled the girls. If he was merciless with us men, he was no less cruel on the girls. He really hammered them for a half hour. He was not content with the normal, recognised pace of 120 to the minute; at times he would have them doing 156 to the minute, pouring out a steady stream of orders interspersed with "Stick your bosoms out, ladies, stick your bosoms out".

A feature of the training at Sandhurst was the emphasis on words of command given out loudly and clearly. We were encouraged and even bullied into making ourselves heard. The way this was done was to line up 20 men on one side of the Battalion parade ground, and facing them 200 yards away on the other side of the parade ground, another 20 men. Behind each man was an instructor. The two columns were numbered off from the right; so each man knew who his opposite number was. One column would start by each instructor telling his man what word of command to give. The soldier would have to give his command over 19 others, all shouting 19 different words of command in a voice loud enough for his opposite number to distinguish, and repeat to him.

You can imagine the pandemonium with each one trying to outdo the others. I was really sorry for one chap called Nicklin. He was a biggish man, inclined to fat; and like men of that shape and size, he had rather a soft voice of high pitch. Well, he came under Shagger's notice because of his very poor efforts; so the poor chap was required to remain behind time and again. He would have to stand down by "The King's Walk" and repeat the commands bellowed at him by the RSM 200 yards away.

As the rest of us departed, we would hear in the distance, the RSM's voice screaming "Louder, louder" then again, "Louder, louder". Poor chap; I'm sure if he survived the war, he would still be having nightmares of Shagger's voice in his ear shouting "Louder, louder".

Another feature of Sandhurst was the Annual Map Race. This is divided into two parts, the Indoor and the Outdoor. The maximum time for the race was one hour and forty five minutes. If you failed to complete either part in the allotted time, you failed. I completed the Indoor part in 21 minutes, and the whole race in 64 minutes and won a magnum of French Champagne. My platoon Commander was pleased that it was one of his own Platoon who had put up this remarkable time. No doubt it reflected credit on him.

Thursday night was formal dinner night in the Mess. The dining hall or Mess-room of the New Building was a huge room. Draped around the high walls were the battle honours of the regiment of the Brigade of Guards; some must have been very old as they were in tatters. Both C & D Companies messed there at huge tables, black with age, able to seat 42 men, 20 a side and one at each end, so each Platoon had its own table. The Platoon Commander always sat at the Head, and the Officer Cadet sergeant for the week sat at the base. At the far end of the mess hall was a stage.

On formal night each Platoon had a guest; usually an Officer from the nearby Academy or the staff not connected with the Company. They were resplendent in the Regimental Mess Kit, Blues, Scarlets and Tartans, all signifying their own regiments. Right on the hour, 1900hrs a huge gong would be struck by the Head Steward, and we would all proceed to the Mess Hall led by the Officers, and stand to attention until given the signal to be seated. On the stage would be the RMC Band who would play appropriate dinner music throughout the meal. They too presented a magnificent sight, and numbered usually around 24.

Every dinner had a printed menu, and alongside each course the title of the particular piece of music the band would play. The service provided by waitresses drawn from the ATS Company was always quick and efficient; the food excellent, and the music unobtrusive so there was the constant hum of conversation. At the conclusion of the meal, and just before coffee, the port would be handed around in the traditional manner, and the loyal toast drunk. Changes would take place among the band members. French horns, bassoons, flutes and cornets would be replaced by saxaphones, clarinets and trumpets. The double bass player would put his bow away. The tym-pianist would trundle out his arsenal of jazz drummers kit, and in a few minutes would be swinging into the hits of the day; Goodman, Dorsey and Glen Miller would hold sway for the next half hour. It was a most popular finale to a pleasant dinner.

At the conclusion of the course I had the honour of being told that if I wish to apply for a Commission in the Grenadier Guards, my application would receive every consideration. To me, it was a unique thing which may never ever happen again to a Maori, and I thought of the honour to our Maori people; but first, I had to ask my father. I asked for time to send a cable to N.Z. I did send that cable, and my father refused. His reply was "No". The lands of your fore-fathers are here, and I am only hanging on till you get back." So in the end I turned down the offer, and in due course joined the NZEF and our Battalion in time to leave for the Middle East. I have had my regrets. I would have liked to be a Grenadier Guards Officer. I know my people would have been proud of the fact; but whether or not I would have survived the war is another question. However, questions of survival apart, I would have done my very best.

**Rangi Logan**