

28th Māori Battalion

Te Rau Aroha

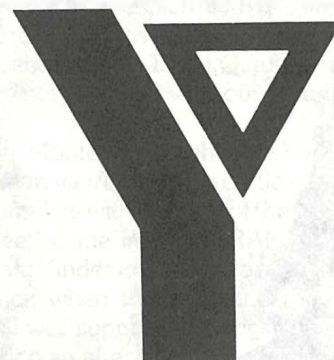
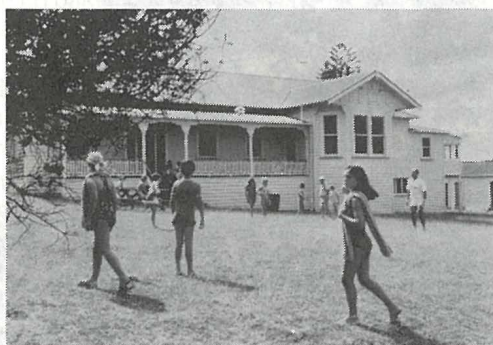
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"No infantry had a more distinguished record, or saw more fighting, or alas, had such heavy casualties."

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

Look for further information:
[28th Māori Battalion \(28maoribattalion.org.nz\)](http://28maoribattalion.org.nz)



Remember The YM?

The Young Men's Christian Association that provided us with tea, cocoa and cakes, ping-pong and writing material — films, fellowship and Faith, in '218 centres' throughout New Zealand, the Pacific, North Africa, Italy and wherever else Kiwis did a stint.

Since its founding 140 years ago in England, and 128 in New Zealand the 'Y' has worked strenuously for youth. In WWI YMCA officers shared with the troops the hardships and perils of the trenches at Flanders, and again in WWII they followed closely our erratic progress in hazardous ventures on sea, sand, mud and air. They shared our wounds.

Today, more than ever before, there is the need for the YMCA's traditional philosophy of, the unity of body, mind and spirit, to be preached, assimilated and practised — The need for a strong input of practical Christianity

A regional project is being undertaken by the Auckland and North Shore YMCA's — a \$140,000 fundraising drive for an Adventure and Education Centre at the original Shakespear homestead at Shakespear Bay on the Whangaparaoa Peninsula.

The local is the ARA Regional Park overlooking the Bay. Many of the activities will centre around this delightful marine and farm environment. Sailing, snorkelling, swimming and water safety instruction will be features. The youngsters will experience all the fun of a YMCA holiday — challenge courses, orienteering, games, team sports, music, plus the friendship and spirit that develop when kids have the chance to do things together.

The project is nearing completion and the first camp is in the 1984 May holidays. \$85,000 has been raised, but the YMCA is still working hard to raise the balance.

Between the two WW's thousands of NZ boys benefitted from their holidays at YMCA Camp Hunua and thousands of their children and grandchildren have enjoyed holidays there since — now Camp Adair.

North Shore can do even better with this opportunity for a genuinely amphibious operation to launch its youth into the 21st Century.

Please consider supporting this project. Whether large or small, your contribution will be greatly appreciated. Contact the Auckland YMCA for further details or send your donation to:

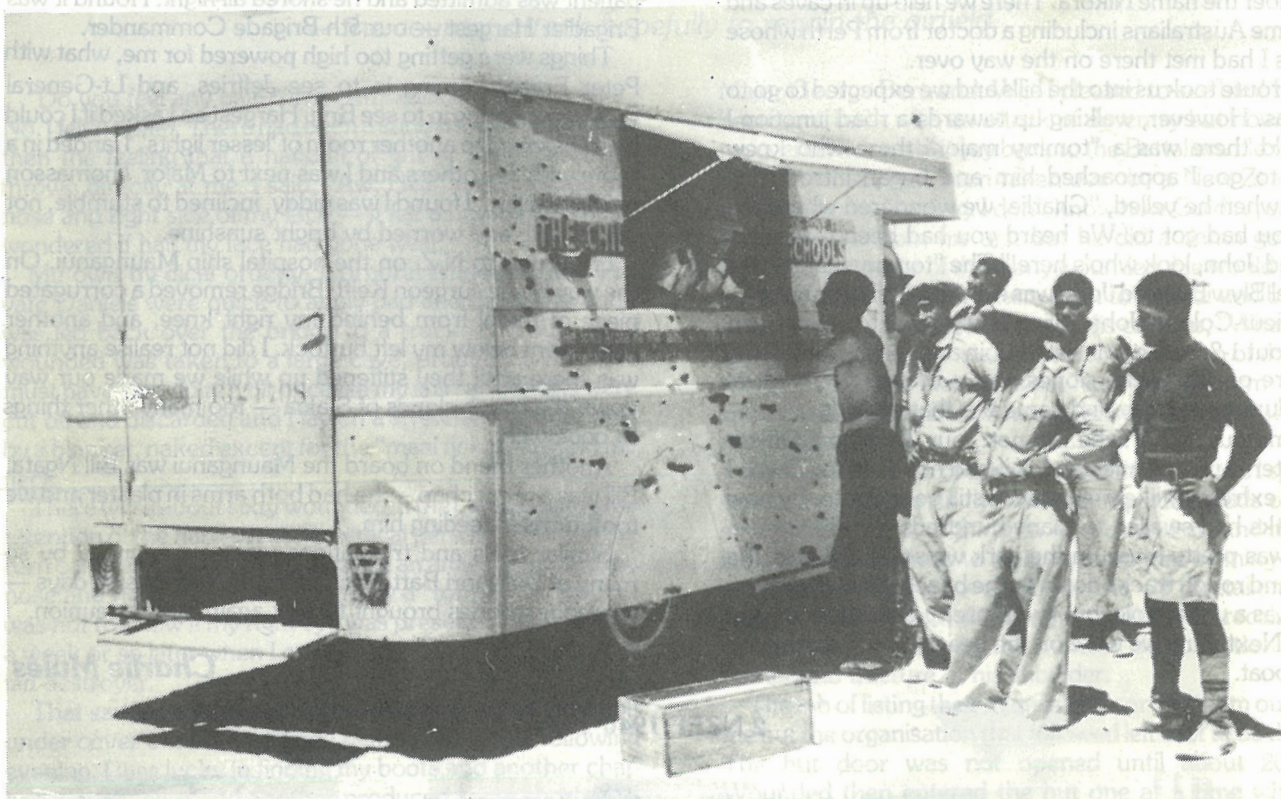
**Shakespear Lodge Appeal
Auckland YMCA — Freepost No. 683
P.O. Box 68-444 Newton**

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'Te Rau Aroha'

The Mobile Canteen The YM — Truck

The following accounts tell something of the experiences and work of two of our best known Y.M.C.A. Officers, Charlie Bennett and Norm Perry. It is very interesting to note that both men graduated from the Bible Training Institute in Auckland in the Mid 30's and that both men continued to work with and for our Maori people after the war — Charlie in Mission work and Norm who had been in the Maori Mission Field before the war, in business and with the Maori Council.



The 28 Battalions official History tells the story of the mobile canteen's arrival at a place some 17 miles South-East of Tobruk, on the 9th December, 1941. The scene is one of miles and miles of desolate stony desert with patches of low scrub. The troops are sitting around through a miserably cold day of wind and driving rain; but are cheered in the afternoon by the arrival of a mobile canteen, purchased in N.Z. by donations from children in the Maori Schools.

Mr Charles E. Bennett, the Y.M.C.A. representative who operated the canteen, presented a tin of N.Z. tobacco and a cake of chocolate to all who called on him, irrespective of unit — 'Charlie Y.M.', as Bennett was soon christened (to differentiate him from Charles M. Bennett who was to become the 5th of the Battalion's ten commanders), seldom ran short of supplies. He later acquired a wireless set, reputedly a 'gift' from the Italians in Libya. The wireless was to become an extra source of solace for hundreds of lonely men through hundreds of waiting hours.

On many occasions when away from the immediate vicinity of the enemy, men would gather round the Y.M. truck and listen to B.B.C broadcasts, the Anzac session, (so thoughtfully provided for us by the likes of Lord Haw-Haw), and the nostalgic haunting refrain of Lili Marlene. For so many of us Lili Marlene became the soldiers theme song. The linguists among us sang in English, German and Italian. The less gifted, listened, hummed a little, joined in the chorus, absorbed the sentiment, and reacted accordingly to how closely we identified with Lili and her soldier, and according to the level of our own emotional commitment before we left home.

TE RAU AROHA: In The Thick of It.

5th July 1942, the Battalion, now attached to 4th Brigade, moves out from its short stay in the relative security of the Kaponga Box.

We were in desert formation, that is, vehicles spaced some 150 yards apart, when within an hour or setting out

the brigade encountered a considerable area of soft sand, whereupon all vehicles tended to bunch, as if approaching a ford. We hadn't fanned out properly after converging on the comparatively narrow strip of firm ground when the Luftwaffe struck. Before we realised what was happening bombs were bursting all around us, for what with the deafening roar of hundreds of trucks in low gear, surprise was complete.

It was just one week after my first action. Three incidents of that day are carved deep in my memory — my first experience of the death rattle, which until that day I had thought of as a Zane Grey fiction. Major Dick Chesterman, Pakeha teacher — soldier, had joined us at O.C. H.Q. Coy just before we left Syria — he died at my feet. A few yards further on, our Anti-Tank store truck out of which George Harrison and Ned Davis had hurled themselves was burning furiously while ammunition exploded and the five men who had not been able to jump clear were incinerated.

And there amidst the horror and stench, black acrid smoke and churned up sand stood 'Te Rau Aroha', all four tyres flattened, half-a-dozen gaping wounds in her side, but the wireless still broadcasting a popular song and fruit syrup and milk, dripping from Charlie Y.M.'s recently replenished stocks of tinned goods. Charlie himself was safe — a bit dazed, and as he contemplated his cripple caravan he turned toward me and murmured, "We're lucky to be alive, Harry."

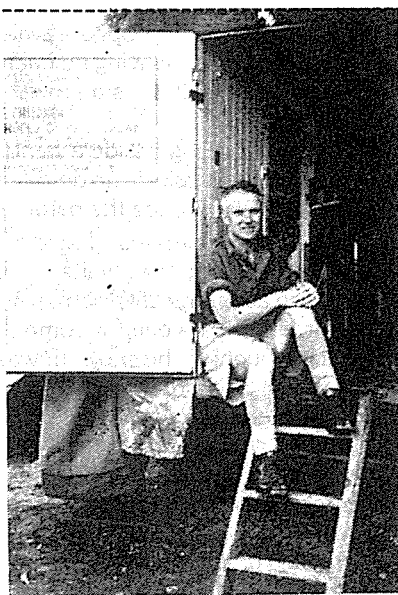
I first met Charlie in June 1935, during the time of the annual sale of the Whitcombe & Tombs bookshop in Queen Street, Auckland. I was looking in the window waiting for the tram which was to take me to my game at Eden Park, when I heard a voice behind me ask 'Are you saved?' There was Charlie, recently enrolled at the Bible Training Institute, which used to be near the top end of Queen Street. During the two years of Charlie's course at the Institute I often had tea with him and at such times we would usually discuss the possibilities of my salvation, but when we met up in Syria six years later, though we had long discussions on all sorts of topics, Charlie seemed to be more interested in me as a Maori than in me as an individual. His subsequent post-war work with the United Maori Mission was in fact an extension of his work with our Battalion. Charlie's role was unique — he provided a constant supply of little luxuries, which he often risked his life to obtain and distribute, but his abiding concern for the 'boys' as men, with souls to be saved for his Master. His faith was uncompromising and he himself was an unassuming disciple, he didn't usually preach, but for those of us who got to know him well, Charlie's manner of going about his business was a sermon in itself.

Harry Lambert

Te Rau Aroha in Italy: Norm Perry takes up the story.

It was a big change for Te Rau Aroha, the YMCA van/canteen, to move over from roaming desert sands to Italian roads, tracks, bailey bridges, rivers, snow, mud and slush in olive groves or by river-banks, bombed out railway station or brick factory.

As Y.M. Secretary, I went with the Battalion advance party to Taranto. Some C Company characters had raided a mansion, having been assured by Alfredo the ex-cook of that establishment, that it had been the home of one of Mussolini's henchmen and in no time they had a grand piano ready to travel North with the boys on the way to Rome. The piano, without legs of course, rested easily on



Charlie Y.M.

the bottom of the biggest truck well covered with kit bags and QM stores. It had to be with B Ech, for the canteen was now, with the Y.M. Centre at the Base Camp or rest area; The Y.M. team moved forward by any means they could; and from what places they could organise the mobile film unit, concerts and sports, and pack and distribute the cigarettes and chocolates, or whatever, into the line.

The film unit was well organised to visit 28th Battalion as near the line as possible. In the Sangro and Cassino areas it was great to have films right behind the 'hills' with shells going overhead in both directions. Who would forget "Yankey Doodle Dandy" behind Mount Trochia and witnessing the General, flabbergasted at having pictures up there, and his order "Get back where the Y.M. is supposed to be!"

With Peta Awatere and the piano accordion, the guitars and the Grand piano on box-legs and all the other paraphernalia — the centre for Y.M. singalongs and concerts were a sign, with the ever present goal posts, that 'the Maori Battalion was/is here!'

Christmas 1943 approached with the battalion in snow and mud ready to follow up the Sangro attack to go for the hilltop town or Orsogna. Surrounded by a whole British Division was fascinating. The tommies made a beeline for the canteen only to turn away without further ado when their only love, **smokes** ('Have you got any woodbines, chum?') were not available. They obviously had not heard of, or were not interested in famous N.Z. quality cigarettes.

As promised Sir Apirana Ngata had achieved the impossible. In the very Christmas week 1943, out of the blue so to speak, two trucks arrived and unloaded rusty battered old cream cans still showing Ngatiporou, Whanau a Apanui and Tuhoe dairy factory supply numbers, and the familiar brass plate of the makers Alex Harvey & Sons. There were delicacies well covered in pork fat; tuna, paka tahu, mutton bird, karengo, kahawai, pipi and so on and on. Te Rau Aroha became the assembly and despatch point to get these gifts up to the front line and for Christmas dinner at B Ech. There was only one casualty scene. Taha Kemara finished up holding only a rope and the nose of his leading mule in his hand and the remains of the others, dead and alive were scattered around or galloping back down the hill. The food was too precious to waste so a Y.M. team made it a recovery exercise. The oysters and mussels were held

back for New Year and became the 'Special', with Sergeant Kukutai cooking them in batter. Having no baking powder he discovered the use of fruit salts as 'sure to rise' and none better than this.

While sheltering from shelling beside a family vault the Y.M. found rolls of high quality cloth; no doubt hidden by a shopkeeper hoping to restock once the battle had moved north. So the Y.M. staff, the padre and medical orderlies were soon cutting and sewing pure white cloth into pull-over shrouds/capes to assist the 28th patrols and forward platoons each night, and in the day for some who had to move around, as they fought in the snow: (It was here that the redoubtable Charlie Shelford crawled down to a fallen SS Officer to get his luger pistol for, believe it or not, the Y.M., as he considered it unsafe for the Y.M. Secretary to escort prisoners back without the security of a weapon!!!).

When the canteen joined the convoy to the Cassino battlefield some of the transport section boys, probably tired of Y.M. borrowing their vehicles, decided that Te Rau Aroha needed a little son, a mobile addition to look after the old man so to speak; so a jeep was born, assembled in a few days from bits and pieces of a shot-up jeep at the end of highway 6 where Yanky Officers had abandoned it, and

from dumps around the countryside. Te Rau Aroha junior was an awkward looking jeep, complete with two stretcher carriers welded on. That there was no hood or windscreen was unimportant. It went in to the Tac H.Q. full of refreshments and as likely as not returned with our wounded or prisoner wounded.

Came the day, after Monte Cairo, when Te Rau Aroha Junior joined the old man van/canteen in battle scars. The canteen was there, complete with wounds of the desert still showing, when the jeep came in to the RAP. The Y.M. Secretary and Sergeant Anderson having been wounded were being taken back when the jeep, and they, were strafed. The jeep, still well supplied with cigs and chocolates ready for the sit down after taking the bridge before Sora, were riddled — with the Secretary and Anderson landing back to Bari and then to hospital ship bound for N.Z.

Enter another chapter with the faithful canteen and wounded baby jeep over-coming all challenges of mountain steep roads and rivers to join the 28th convoy north, beyond Rome, under the tender care of Sergeant Kukutai and Bunny Peawini.

BACK IN N.Z.: 'TE RAU AROHA' DOES THE ROUNDS.



The war ended. Maori Soldiers were coming back to welcomes on all Maraes. Soon we were advised that the mobile canteen which had been attached to the Battalion was making a courtesy call on all Native Schools. Children from these had raised the money to buy it in the first place.

The scarred old truck, canopied, camouflaged, rattled down the hill and came grinding up the school drive, right across the playground and into the shade of the trees near the shelter-shed. The top of the truck was nearly removed by a large branch under which it just managed to scrape.

"Wheel!" squealed Pinia in excitement. "It won't fit".

The driver climbed out, and then Mr Charlie Bennett. Mr Bennett talked to the assembled children, thanking them for their contributions to the cost of the canteen and telling them stories of its adventures and functions over the long years when it was a comfort and a reminder of home to the soldiers in the desert. He showed them the inside set-up

and answered their questions.

"What happened to the paint?" someone asked. "It's all smudgy."

Mr Bennett explained the camouflage. This was thought to be a very cunning idea.

Over at the house Huia served the visitors with morning tea while the children had playtime. We asked the senior pupils to guard the canteen in case the war games inspired by all this became too realistic. The Maori Battalion was intent on cleaning up all the combined forces of the Tiamana by the sound of it.

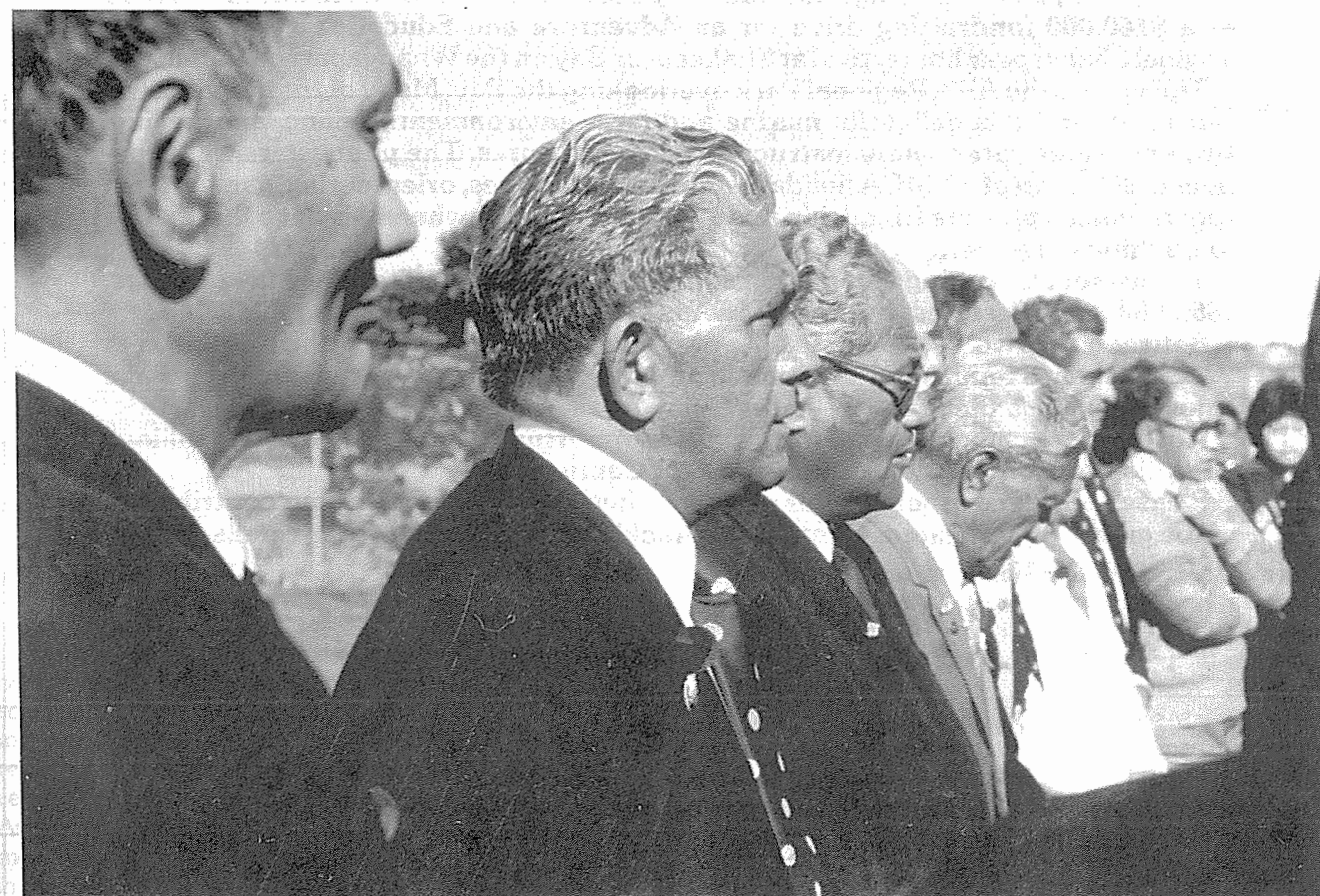
"You go dead!" yelled Hetaraka, carefully aiming a stick-rifle at his twin. Mei protested that he didn't want to be an old German. Nobody did.

From: Te Hapua Maori School Log.

J. Wordsworth.



Charlie YM relives some old memories



Honouring Charlie Y.M. — at Waikaraka Cemetery — Auckland.