

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

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**All unambiguous end-of-line hyphens have been removed, and the trailing part of a word has been joined to the preceding line. Every effort has been made to preserve the Māori macron using unicode.**

**Some keywords in the header are a local Electronic Text Centre scheme to aid in establishing analytical groupings.**

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**Jason Darwin**

**Verified name tags around names of people, places and organisations.**

**31 August 2004**

**Jamie Norrish**

**Added link markup for project in TEI header.**

**9 August 2004**

**Jamie Norrish**

**Added missing text on page before title page.**

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**Jamie Norrish**

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**Jamie Norrish**

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**Edmund King**

**Fixed TechBooks transcription error -- Mr. Eraser for Mr. Fraser -- noted by site user.**

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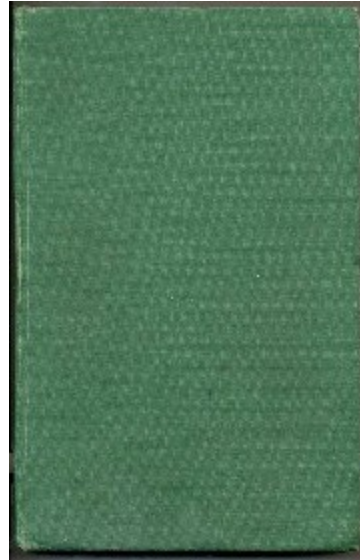
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**DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
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## DOCUMENTS

**Relating to New Zealand's Participation in the Second World War 1939-  
45**

***VOLUME II***

**WAR HISTORY BRANCH**

**DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND**

**1951**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## PREFACE

### *PREFACE*

**THE ORIGINALS** of the documents published in this volume are held in the **Prime Minister's Department** and the **Service Departments**. All communications between the **New Zealand Government** and the Governments of the **United Kingdom** and of the Commonwealth of **Australia**, and between the **New Zealand Government** and the **General Officer Commanding 2nd NZEF** in the **Middle East** and official New Zealand representatives abroad, have not been published, but those omitted are of a trivial and personal nature only.

There has been no restriction on access to documents and no censorship. An arbitrary numbering has been adopted, but the despatches are otherwise in their original form except for some paraphrasing to comply with security requirements. In no case has the sense been altered.

The research for the three volumes in this series has been the work of **L. S. Hart**, formerly of the staff of **War History Branch**, and **C. R. McColl**, and the documents have been prepared for publication by **W. A. Glue**.

**Editor-in-Chief,  
New Zealand War Histories**



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

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**PROPOSED FORMATION OF AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND ARMY  
CORPS**

# *Proposed Formation of Australian and New Zealand Army Corps*

1

*The Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia*<sup>1</sup> to the Prime Minister of New Zealand<sup>2</sup>

4 March 1940

The increase of the 2nd **Australian Imperial Force** to an Army Corps comprising two divisions with the necessary Corps troops is at present being considered by my Government. They desire to know whether your Government would be willing to combine the New Zealand Forces in an Australian and New Zealand Army Corps under the command of the General Officer Commanding, **Australian Imperial Force**.<sup>3</sup>

As the name Anzac has become synonymous with the highest degree of military prowess, the opportunity of recreating a force to carry on the traditions associated with this name has considerable appeal to us. Such a step would be inspiring to the national morale of **Australia** and New Zealand in particular and of the Empire generally. There is also a close psychological affinity between our

---

<sup>1</sup> Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth of **Australia** during the war were:

Apr 1939 – Aug 1941	Rt. Hon. Robert Gordon Menzies, PC, KC.
Aug 1941 – Oct 1941	Rt. Hon. Arthur William Fadden, PC.
Oct 1941 – death, Jul 1945	Rt. Hon. John Curtin, PC.
Jul 1945 – Dec 1949	Rt. Hon. Joseph Benedict Chifley, PC. (Died 13 Jun 1951.)

<sup>2</sup> Prime Ministers of New Zealand during the war were:

28 Nov 1935 – death, 26 Rt. Hon. Michael Joseph Savage, PC.

**Mar 1940**

**1 Apr 1940 – 13 Dec 1949 Rt. Hon. Peter Fraser, PC, CH. (Died  
12 Dec 1950.)**

**<sup>3</sup> Field-Marshal Sir Thomas Albert Blamey, GBE, KCB, CMG, DSO; GOC 6th Division, AIF, 1939–40; GOC 1st Australian Corps, 1940–41; title altered in 1941 to GOC AIF in **Middle East**; commanded **Anzac Corps in Greece**, Apr 1941; Deputy Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, 1941; Commander-in-Chief, Allied Land Forces, South-West Pacific Area, 1942–45; died 27 May 1951.**

---

**troops. The effect of such a decision would certainly not be encouraging to the enemy and would be a further demonstration of the solidarity of ourselves with the **United Kingdom**. The concentration of our forces in one Army Corps has also mutual operational and administrative advantages.**

**The interests of your forces and your Government would be fully safeguarded in the organisation advocated for the administration of the Corps and by your senior officer's <sup>1</sup> right of direct communication with the **New Zealand Government**. <sup>2</sup>**

**We would appreciate early advice of your views. If the proposal meets with your concurrence it is suggested that a staff representative be sent to **Australia** early to discuss the working out of details.**

**It is requested that this message be treated with the utmost secrecy, particularly the reference to the possible expansion of our forces, which will not be announced here before Wednesday evening.**

---

**<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant-General Lord Freyberg, VC, GCMG, KCB, KBE, DSO, LL.D; GOC 2nd NZEF, 21 Nov 1939–22 Nov 1945; Governor-General of New Zealand 17 Jun 1946–; at time of reference **Major-General B. C. Freyberg**.**

<sup>2</sup> See Volume I, *Appointment of Commander, 2nd NZEF* (No. 39). The appropriate paragraph of the GOC's charter reads:

( *b* ) To communicate directly with the **New Zealand Government** and with the Army Department concerning any matter connected with the training and administration of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force.

---

2

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of Australia*

4 March 1940

I will bring before the Government the subject referred to in your telegram of 4 March and will then cable you again.

3

*The Governor-General of New Zealand <sup>1</sup> to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs <sup>2</sup>*

23 March 1940

In a telegram dated 4 March the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of **Australia** asks whether the **New Zealand Government** would be willing to combine the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force with the 2nd **Australian Imperial Force** to form an Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. My Ministers would be glad to receive an early expression of the views of the **War Office** on this proposal. <sup>3</sup> The telegram reads as follows:

[Text of telegram **No. 1**]

---

<sup>1</sup> Governors-General of New Zealand during the war were:

1935– Rt. Hon. George Vere Arundell Monckton-Arundell, 8th  
41 Viscount Galway, PC, GCMG, DSO, OBE; died Mar 1943.

1941– Marshal of the **Royal Air Force** Sir Cyril Louis Norton  
46 Newall, GCB, OM, GCMG, CBE, AM. (Created Baron, 18 Jul  
1946.)

<sup>2</sup> Secretaries of State for Dominion Affairs in the United  
Kingdom Government during the war were:

28 Jan 1939–3 Sep 1939 **Rt. Hon. Viscount Caldecote**, PC, CBE, KC  
(then Sir Thomas Inskip).

3 Sep 1939–12 May 1940 **Rt. Hon. Robert Anthony Eden**, PC, MC.

12 May 1940–5 Oct 1940 **Viscount Caldecote**.

5 Oct 1940–21 Feb 1942 **Rt. Hon. Viscount Cranborne**, PC.

21 Feb 1942–28 Sep 1943 **Rt. Hon. Clement Richard Attlee**, PC, CH.

28 Sep 1943–3 Aug 1945 **Viscount Cranborne**.

3 Aug 1945–7 Oct 1947 **Rt. Hon. Viscount Addison**, KG, PC.

On 2 Jul 1947 the title of this office was changed to  
Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations.

<sup>3</sup> A similar telegram was sent to **General Freyberg**.

---

4

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence* <sup>4</sup>  
[ Extract ]

26 March 1940

Sentimental and practical issues, with personal and military as well as constitutional ramifications, are raised by your cable. No doubt Australian sentiment is reflected in the Australian Prime Minister's cable. I am unable to estimate if the revival of Anzac and linking with the Australian war effort would have much appeal to New Zealand, but you are better able to estimate the effect of this.

**Practical advantages would be gained by fighting in a Corps with Australian divisions, as their great value on the flank and General Blamey's experience give confidence. If the Corps is agreed to, the organisation and administration of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force must be safeguarded and everything regarding hospitals, welfare of the men, promotion, and supervision of the corps of officers must be kept completely free from the possibility of Australian control or even supervision.**

**Further, the Australian approach to defence problems requires Cabinet's consideration as it is not entirely similar to the [New Zealand Government's](#). New Zealand desires to assist in the manner best conforming to the British war effort and may not wish to be associated automatically with a possible aggressive Australian attitude regarding strategy.... <sup>1</sup> I would suggest, therefore, that Cabinet reserve to themselves all the powers reserved with the British Government and possibly strengthen them if you link at this stage. If we agree to combine for active operations, the question arises whether to form the Army Corps before or after our theatre of war is decided. I would suggest that the committing of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force to a theatre of war should still be decided by the Government of New Zealand, with my emergency powers fully retained, <sup>2</sup> and not by the Australian Corps commander as the agent of the Australian Cabinet. When we have entered a theatre of war the normal channels of command, as defined in the prearranged diagram, must be observed.**

**To sum up, my opinion is that we should link up for operational control only; that the time to link has not yet arrived; that we should continue training under the GOC British Troops in Egypt <sup>3</sup> until active operations are anticipated; that then we should enter the Corps on terms of equality.**

**General Blamey's experience may entitle him to be the first commander but care should be taken not to create a vested interest for [Australia](#), and succession to the command when a vacancy occurs**

should be available to New Zealand.

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<sup>4</sup> **Hon. F. Jones**, Minister of Defence, 1935–49.

<sup>1</sup> A personal reference has been omitted.

<sup>2</sup> See Volume I, *Appointment of Commander, 2nd NZEF* (No. 39).

<sup>3</sup> **Field-Marshal Lord Wilson**, GCB, GBE, DSO (then Lieutenant-General Henry Maitland Wilson); GOC-in-C, British Troops in Egypt, 1939–40; Military Governor and GOC-in-C, **Cyrenaica**, 1941; GOC-in-C, British Troops in **Greece**, 1941; GOC British Forces in Palestine and Trans-Jordan, 1941; C-in-C Allied Forces in **Syria**, 1941 (GOC 9th Army); C-in-C **Persia-Iraq** Command, 1942–43; C-in C **Middle East**, 1943; Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean Theatre, 1944; Head of British Joint Staff Mission in **Washington**, 1945–47.

---

5

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Governor-General of New Zealand*

12 April 1940

With reference to your telegram of 23 March ( **No. 3**). The formation of an **Anzac Corps** would be welcomed by the Army Council, particularly in view of the magnificent traditions connected with the name. At the same time, they desire to make the following comments:

Since the complete Corps would not be ready for active service until some distant date, it is not possible for the Council to be certain at this stage that a three-division Corps of Australian and New Zealand troops would be required to take the field as a complete Corps. Therefore, they suggest that if such a Corps is formed, the New Zealand and Commonwealth Governments should both be prepared to agree to the New Zealand Division being detached from the Australian Forces, either



for operations in another theatre of war or for its combination with a **United Kingdom** division, in order to form a two-division Corps should operational necessities at the time make either of these courses desirable.

The Army Council has been asked by the Commonwealth Government what Corps troops the Commonwealth should provide for a two-division Corps. A list of the Corps troops considered necessary is being forwarded to **Australia**, together with a list of the additional Corps troops needed for a three-division Corps. Copies of these two lists are also being despatched by air mail to Army Headquarters, **Wellington**. As the Commonwealth Government may ask for the balance of Corps troops not raised in **Australia** to be provided by New Zealand, the **New Zealand Government**, before coming to any agreement with the Commonwealth Government, may wish to consider the extent of this commitment. <sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> After considering a report on the proposal by the Chief of the General Staff, Major-General J. E. Duigan (in general, he concurred with **General Freyberg's** views), the New Zealand Cabinet Defence Committee on 17 May 1940 decided that the matter should be discussed with the Australian authorities by the Hon. W. Nash during a forthcoming visit to the Commonwealth. However, the projected visit by Mr. Nash did not take place.

---

6

*Letter from the Minister of Defence to General Freyberg*  
*[ Extract ]*

27 May 1940

MY DEAR GENERAL

,  
.... Relative to the question of linking up with the AIF, this matter was before **War Cabinet** when I took the opportunity of placing your views before my colleagues. The opinion expressed was that you had set out exceedingly well the arguments for and against and that your

conclusions were sound. It had been provisionally arranged for the Hon. Mr. Nash <sup>1</sup> to proceed to **Australia** this week when he might have had an opportunity of discussing this matter with the authorities. His proposed visit, however, has had to be deferred. If there is any linking up, I feel sure it will be for only operational purposes....

---

<sup>1</sup> **Rt. Hon. W. Nash**, PC, Minister of Finance and Customs, 1935–49; New Zealand Minister at **Washington**, 1942–44; Deputy Prime Minister, 1940–49; Leader of the Opposition, 1951—.

---

7

*General Wavell, <sup>2</sup> General Headquarters, Middle East, to General Freyberg <sup>3</sup>*

8 July 1940

Your telegram of 4 July. <sup>4</sup>

To meet a possible attack on Egypt from the **Western Desert**, it is essential to organise into some battle order the incomplete formations available here. The principal factor affecting this organisation is the shortage of Signals units.

A draft Order of Battle was drawn up for discussion to enable the troops available to be most efficiently organised and commanded in the event of attack. The shortage of Signals made it most economical to form an Anzac Division of one Australian and one New Zealand brigade.

The Order of Battle was discussed on 5 July and it was decided to have separate Australian and New Zealand brigade groups instead of the Anzac Division. This arrangement is less economical of Signals but is workable. The New Zealand Brigade Group includes all New Zealand troops. Brigadier Puttick <sup>1</sup> is quite satisfied with the new proposal. It is not intended to implement the Order of Battle till an attack appears probable.

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<sup>2</sup> **Field-Marshal Earl Wavell**, PC, GCB, GCSI, GCIE, CMG, MC (then General Sir Archibald Wavell); GOC-in-C, **Middle East**, 1939–41; GOC-in-C, **India**, 1941–43; Supreme Commander, South-West Pacific, Jan–Mar 1942; Viceroy and Governor-General of **India**, 1943–47; died 24 May 1950.

<sup>3</sup> **General Freyberg** was at this time in the **United Kingdom** training the **Second Echelon**.

<sup>4</sup> Not published. See Volume I, *Concentration of the 2nd NZ Division* (No. 245). This telegram read:

Have just received from Puttick your proposals for reorganisation with its repercussions upon the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in Egypt. As no such change can be made without the approval of the **New Zealand Government**, I hope these proposals will not be proceeded with. I do not wish to have to disclose to the **New Zealand Government** the proposals as outlined by you to break up the New Zealand Force, as they would make a most unfavourable impression in New Zealand official circles with repercussions you probably have not foreseen. The answer to any such proposals would, I am sure, be an uncompromising refusal.

<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Puttick, KCB, DSO; commanded 4th New Zealand Infantry Brigade, 1940–41, and New Zealand troops in Egypt in 1940 during absence of **General Freyberg** in **United Kingdom**; commanded **2nd NZ Division** (4th and 5th Brigades) in **Crete**, May 1941; Chief of the General Staff and General Officer Commanding, **New Zealand Military Forces**, 1941–45.

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8

*General Freyberg ( Greece) to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*  
[ Extract ]

6 April 1941

After a difficult journey from Egypt the complete Division has moved

forward into **Macedonia** and is preparing a defensive position. We are now linked with the **6th Australian Division**; thus the **Anzac Corps** is again in being. General Blamey's experience and the Australians' fighting qualities will prove great assets.... <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Volume I, *Greece* (No. 357) for complete text.

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9

*Headquarters 1st Australian Corps to Advanced Headquarters, New Zealand Division (Greece)*

12 April 1941

From 6 p.m. 12 April 1941 the 1st Australian Corps will be known as **Anzac Corps**. The GOC **Anzac Corps** <sup>3</sup> in making this announcement desires to say that the reunion of the Australian and New Zealand Divisions gives all ranks the greatest uplift. The task ahead, although difficult, is not nearly so desperate as that which our fathers faced in April twenty-six years ago. <sup>4</sup> We go to it together with stout hearts and the certainty of success.

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<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas Blamey.

<sup>4</sup> The landing on Gallipoli Peninsula by the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps on 25 Apr 1915.

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10

*General Freyberg to Headquarters Anzac Corps*

13 April 1941

The reunion of the Australian and New Zealand Divisions is welcomed with the greatest satisfaction by all ranks of the New Zealand Division. Will you please send this message to our comrades of the **6th Australian Division**.

11

*General Freyberg ( Crete) to the Minister of Defence*

[ Extract]

1 May 1941

For the information of the Prime Minister, I saw General Wavell here yesterday and he informed me that General Blamey had expressed the desire to keep the **Anzac Corps** in being for possible war in Palestine. I told the Commander-in-Chief that I had no power to make such a decision, and that my Government would have to be consulted. I think that General Wavell will approach you on this matter... <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Volume I, *Crete* (No. 389) for complete text.

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12

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Prime Minister of New Zealand* <sup>2</sup>

7 May 1941

The Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, has intimated that he would welcome the suggestion which has been made that the **6th Australian Division** and the New Zealand Division should again be formed into an **Anzac Corps** when they have been re-equipped. General Wavell observes that the formation of the **Anzac Corps** in **Greece** gave satisfaction and was appreciated by both divisions. He proposes that the Corps should be stationed in Palestine for that country's defence and recommends that **General Freyberg** should be selected to command it.

Subject to the concurrence of His Majesty's Governments in the Commonwealth of **Australia** and New Zealand, His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom** favour the proposed re-formation of an **Anzac Corps** and the suggested appointment of **Freyberg** as Corps Commander. We are, however, anxious that **Freyberg** should continue as Commander of the Allied forces in **Crete** for the present.

I should be glad to learn as soon as possible whether the above suggestions commend themselves to the Australian and New Zealand Governments.

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<sup>2</sup> Addressed also to the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia.

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13

*The acting Prime Minister of New Zealand <sup>1</sup> to the acting Prime Minister of Australia <sup>2</sup>*

9 May 1941

You will have received the telegram of 7 May from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs stating that the Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, would welcome the suggestion that the Australian and New Zealand Divisions should be reformed into an **Anzac Corps** after they have been re-equipped, and that **General Freyberg** should be selected as Corps Commander in succession to General Blamey. <sup>3</sup> **War Cabinet** has discussed the matter, and it is felt that the reconstitution of the **Anzac Corps** would give the greatest satisfaction to both the divisions and would be most warmly welcomed by the peoples of **Australia** and this country, to whom the undying traditions of Anzac are an illustrious part of their common heritage. An early expression of your views on the proposals contained in the Secretary of State's telegram would be gladly received by the **New Zealand Government**. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hon. W. Nash. Mr. Fraser had left New Zealand on 3 May on a visit to the **Middle East** and the **United Kingdom**. He arrived in **Cairo** on 15 May.

<sup>2</sup> During the absence of the Australian Prime Minister, the **Rt. Hon. R. G. Menzies**, in the **United Kingdom** in 1941, the Hon. A. W. Fadden was acting Prime Minister.

<sup>3</sup> General Blamey had been appointed Deputy Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, on 23 Apr 1941.

<sup>4</sup> There is no trace of a reply to this telegram.

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14

*The acting Prime Minister of New Zealand to General Freyberg (Crete)*

9 May 1941

The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs has informed the **New Zealand Government** that the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, would welcome the suggestion that the **6th Australian Division** and the New Zealand Division should, after being re-equipped, be reformed into an **Anzac Corps**. General Wavell has also recommended that you should command the Corps. However, the British Government are anxious that you should continue for the present as Commander of the Allied forces in **Crete**. The proposals are warmly welcomed by us, and we are at present awaiting the Commonwealth Government's views. We would, of course, be glad to have any advice on these matters you may care to offer. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A similar telegram was sent to the Governor of the Straits Settlements, **Singapore**, for Mr. Fraser, then *en route* to Egypt.

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15

*General Freyberg (Crete) to the acting Prime Minister*

11 May 1941

I have to thank you for your message of 9 May. While fully appreciating the honour of commanding the **Anzac Corps** and while realising that the association of Anzac has much to recommend it from an operational viewpoint, I would personally prefer to stay with the New

**Zealand Division. However, if the New Zealand and Commonwealth Governments so desire, I am prepared to accept the appointment provided that I can remain a servant of the **New Zealand Government** by continuing to be GOC 2nd NZEF, and provided the New Zealand Division remains part of the Corps I command. It may be possible for me to fly to Egypt and back in a day so that I could discuss this and other matters with the Prime Minister personally. Meanwhile, in accordance with the British Government's request, I must of course remain here with our two New Zealand brigades until we are relieved or until the danger to **Crete** is past. Our troops are in good form.**

**16**

***The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg ( Crete)***

**15 May 1941**

**We have just received your telegram of 11 May. The arrangements proposed by you would be most acceptable to us, and I suggest you should take the earliest possible opportunity to discuss the matter with the Prime Minister, whom I will advise. I would be glad also if a copy of your message could be shown to the Prime Minister in **Cairo**.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> In a telegram to **Cairo** on 17 May **General Freyberg** repeated for Mr. Fraser's information telegrams **Nos. 14, 15, and 16**.

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**17**

***The Hon. W. Nash to the Rt. Hon. P. Fraser ( Cairo)***

***[ Extract]***

**16 May 1941**

**The Australian Government has not so far replied to our telegram of 9 May ( **No. 13**) on the formation of the **Anzac Corps**. I have asked **Freyberg** to have shown to you a copy of his message to me dated 11 May ( **No. 15**). His desire to remain under the authority of the **New Zealand Government** and to continue as GOC 2nd NZEF if appointed**



**Corps Commander is favourably regarded by War Cabinet. It is suggested that you have an early discussion with him and advise us of your views as soon as possible....** <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In the text omitted Mr. Nash requested information on the date and place of arrival in **Australia** of General Sir Guy Williams, then Military Adviser to the **New Zealand Government**. See also

18

*The Rt. Hon. P. Fraser (Cairo) to the Hon. W. Nash*

9 June 1941

With regard to the proposed formation of an **Anzac Corps**, I have made further inquiries here with Blamey and Wavell but I understand that no further developments have occurred and the matter is still in abeyance. If such a Corps should be formed and **Freyberg** appointed to command it, then the command of the New Zealand Division would normally fall to either Brigadier Puttick or Brigadier Miles, <sup>3</sup> the former of course being senior. Both these officers have received the highest commendation from **Freyberg** and from everybody in a position to judge, and it is **Freyberg's** opinion that either of them would be very suitable either as Divisional commanders in the field or as officers in New Zealand. I agree and feel that with their recent war experience it is not possible to go beyond them. As soon as you have discussed the matter adequately with Sir Guy Williams, <sup>1</sup> I would be glad if you would let me have, at the earliest possible opportunity, the views of **War Cabinet** and the Minister of Defence so that reorganisation in Egypt can be facilitated.

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<sup>3</sup> Brigadier R. Miles, CBE, DSO, MC, ED; Commander Royal New Zealand Artillery, 1940–41; commanded 2nd NZEF ( **UK** ) 1940; wounded and prisoner of war, 1 Dec 1941; escaped to **Switzerland** with Brigadier J. Hargest from prison camp near **Florence**, 29 Mar 1943; died in **Spain** on way to **United Kingdom**, Oct 1943.

<sup>1</sup> General Sir Guy Charles Williams, KCB, CMG, DSO; Military Adviser to the **New Zealand Government**, May–Nov 1941.

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19

*The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg (Cairo)*

12 June 1941

The New Zealand Government, in giving further consideration to the formation of an **Anzac Corps**, would like to have your opinion on the implications involved. **War Cabinet** are particularly concerned about the additional commitment for Corps troops. It is assumed, of course, that the proposed Corps would consist of two divisions only, thus increasing their own share of the Corps troops. While the Government have information concerning the nature and number involved, any additional comments you feel able to give would be welcomed.

20

*Army Headquarters (Wellington) to Headquarters 2nd NZEF (Cairo)*

20 June 1941

Colonel Conway<sup>2</sup> arrived on 16 June. His papers despatched by safe-hand air mail have been received. Please cable immediately, firstly, whether our losses in **Crete** will require any alteration in the reinforcement figures already agreed upon,<sup>3</sup> and secondly, whether **General Freyberg** and the Prime Minister reached an agreement on the formation of the **Army Tank Brigade**, as proposed by **War Office**, and the formation and training of this brigade in New Zealand.<sup>4</sup> For your information, Conway had discussions at Army Headquarters, **Melbourne**, regarding the formation of **Anzac Corps**, but no definite conclusions were reached as **Australia** is investigating the manpower situation in order to decide what formations can be maintained overseas. If this matter was discussed by **General Freyberg** and the Prime Minister, please advise what decisions were made. A reply to this cable is required in connection with the preparation of a revised report on manpower needs.

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<sup>2</sup> Brigadier A. E. Conway, CB, OBE, Adjutant-General, **New Zealand Military Forces**, 1940–46, who had been in the **Middle East** for consultations on the reinforcement and reorganisation of the 2nd NZEF.

<sup>3</sup> See

## ***Reinforcement of 2nd NZEF, 1940–42.***

**<sup>4</sup> See**

21

*General Freyberg to the acting Prime Minister*

21 June 1941

Reference your telegram of 12 June ( **No. 19**). On returning from **Crete** I found that negotiations had been in progress between Conway and Brigadier Stevens. <sup>1</sup>

I talked with the Prime Minister and various matters are at present being considered. As soon as the full facts are available I will telegraph you. The delay is regretted, but I was not in a fit state to give the matter proper consideration on my return from **Crete**. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Major-General W. G. Stevens, CB, CBE; Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster-General, **2nd NZ Division**, 1940; Officer in charge of Administration, 2nd NZEF, 1940–45; GOC 2nd NZEF, 22 Nov 1945–6 Jul 1946.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Nash replied on 25 Jun that the **New Zealand Government** would be glad to have **General Freyberg's** views in due course.

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22

*General Freyberg to the acting Prime Minister*

25 June 1941

Please refer to your telegram of 12 June ( **No. 19**). The term 'Corps troops' is a misnomer to some extent as many units of the nature indicated in FFC 36 <sup>3</sup> support the Division whether they form part of the Corps or not, *e.g.*, a medium regiment and a heavy anti-aircraft regiment are allotted on the scale of one for each division as required, but normally are not under the direct orders of the Divisional Commander; also all services behind the Division, such as Signal units, **Reserve**

**Mechanical Transport Company, &c.**, working in the gap between Divisional and Corps headquarters. Up to the present the British Army has found this quota of units for us behind the actual Division. It has always been a source of criticism, and it is most desirable as equipment becomes available and manpower in the **United Kingdom** becomes the bottleneck, that we should take over our share. Without any doubt it is an imperative essential to have our Corps troops if we are in the **Anzac Corps**. A Corps of three divisions is certainly referred to in FFC 36, but I gather that our quota would not be increased if the Corps is of two divisions only. Most Corps troops units are allotted to a Corps on the basis of so many for each division in such Corps. I strongly recommend that you accept responsibility if the manpower situation permits, and as the rearrangement will require a great deal of planning here, especially as regards new commanders and staff officers, I would be grateful to learn whether the Government agree in principle to the proposals. As men can be made available, details can be altered to suit the **New Zealand Government**.

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<sup>3</sup> Field Force Committee, **War Office**, Organisation Plan 36 (Part 12–2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force) contained proposals for the organisation of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. The organisation was on the basis of one New Zealand Division forming part of an **Anzac Corps** of three divisions (the other two divisions being Australian), one New Zealand **Army Tank Brigade**, and one independent brigade (B Force) in **Fiji**. The plan gave details of the composition and strength of the force and of new units to be formed, and the estimated numbers of reinforcements required to maintain it at various periods of activity.

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23

*Headquarters 2nd NZEF to Army Headquarters (Wellington)*

25 June 1941

Your telegram of 20 June ( **No. 20**).

As indicated in my telegram of 21 June <sup>1</sup> I will cable the amended

## **7th Reinforcement figures today.**

**The formation of the Tank Brigade was agreed to in principle by the Prime Minister, but he stated that the final decision would not be made until the New Zealand authorities had investigated the implications and had consulted him by cable. <sup>2</sup>**

**The Prime Minister also agreed that New Zealand should find its quota of Corps troops, but on the same understanding as above.**

**With regard to the formation of the **Anzac Corps**, the Prime Minister consulted Generals Wavell and Blamey and afterwards talked over the proposal with me. All were agreed in wanting it, and if the **New Zealand Government** favour the proposal, it only requires the Commonwealth Government's agreement to bring it into existence.**

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<sup>1</sup> See *Reinforcement of 2nd NZEF, 1940–42* (No. 47).

<sup>2</sup> See

24

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister of New Zealand* <sup>1</sup>  
*[ Extract ]*

20 September 1941

Your telegram of 17 September. <sup>2</sup>

.... <sup>3</sup> I have explained to General Auchinleck <sup>4</sup> the **New Zealand Government's** view on the formation of the **Anzac Corps**. The Commonwealth Government have not yet expressed their view. However, it is not possible to form the **Anzac Corps** yet as the **6th Australian Division** is not yet equipped and trained after **Greece** and **Crete**, and the **9th Australian Division** is in **Tobruk**. If still desired, it might be possible to do so after some months, depending on the result of the operations now contemplated. <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Fraser had returned to New Zealand on 14 Sep.

<sup>2</sup> See *Libyan Campaign, 1941-42* (No. 97).

<sup>3</sup> See *Libyan Campaign, 1941-42* (No. 99) for complete text.

<sup>4</sup> Field-Marshal Sir Claude John Eyre Auchinleck, GCB, GCIE, CSI, DSO, OBE; GOC-in-C, **India**, 1941; GOC-in-C, **Middle East**, 1941-42; GOC-in-C, **India**, 1943-47.

<sup>5</sup> No further telegrams between the two Governments on this subject can be traced.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 1 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA<sup>1</sup> TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND<sup>2</sup>

1

*The Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia<sup>1</sup> to the Prime  
Minister of New Zealand<sup>2</sup>*

4 March 1940

The increase of the 2nd **Australian Imperial Force** to an Army Corps comprising two divisions with the necessary Corps troops is at present being considered by my Government. They desire to know whether your Government would be willing to combine the New Zealand Forces in an Australian and New Zealand Army Corps under the command of the General Officer Commanding, **Australian Imperial Force**.<sup>3</sup>

As the name Anzac has become synonymous with the highest degree of military prowess, the opportunity of recreating a force to carry on the traditions associated with this name has considerable appeal to us. Such a step would be inspiring to the national morale of **Australia** and New Zealand in particular and of the Empire generally. There is also a close psychological affinity between our

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<sup>1</sup> Prime Ministers of the Commonwealth of **Australia** during the war were:

Apr 1939 – Aug 1941	Rt. Hon. Robert Gordon Menzies, PC, KC.
Aug 1941 – Oct 1941	Rt. Hon. Arthur William Fadden, PC.
Oct 1941 – death, Jul 1945	Rt. Hon. John Curtin, PC.
Jul 1945 – Dec 1949	Rt. Hon. Joseph Benedict Chifley, PC. (Died 13 Jun 1951.)

**<sup>2</sup> Prime Ministers of New Zealand during the war were:**

**28 Nov 1935 – death, 26 Mar 1940 Rt. Hon. Michael Joseph Savage, PC.**

**1 Apr 1940 – 13 Dec 1949 Rt. Hon. Peter Fraser, PC, CH. (Died 12 Dec 1950.)**

**<sup>3</sup> Field-Marshal Sir Thomas Albert Blamey, GBE, KCB, CMG, DSO; GOC 6th Division, AIF, 1939–40; GOC 1st Australian Corps, 1940–41; title altered in 1941 to GOC AIF in **Middle East**; commanded **Anzac Corps** in **Greece**, Apr 1941; Deputy Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, 1941; Commander-in-Chief, Allied Land Forces, South-West Pacific Area, 1942–45; died 27 May 1951.**

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**troops. The effect of such a decision would certainly not be encouraging to the enemy and would be a further demonstration of the solidarity of ourselves with the **United Kingdom**. The concentration of our forces in one Army Corps has also mutual operational and administrative advantages.**

**The interests of your forces and your Government would be fully safeguarded in the organisation advocated for the administration of the Corps and by your senior officer's <sup>1</sup> right of direct communication with the **New Zealand Government**. <sup>2</sup>**

**We would appreciate early advice of your views. If the proposal meets with your concurrence it is suggested that a staff representative be sent to **Australia** early to discuss the working out of details.**

**It is requested that this message be treated with the utmost secrecy, particularly the reference to the possible expansion of our forces, which will not be announced here before Wednesday evening.**

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**<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant-General Lord Freyberg, VC, GCMG, KCB, KBE, DSO, LL.D; GOC 2nd NZEF, 21 Nov 1939–22 Nov 1945; Governor-**

**General of New Zealand 17 Jun 1946–; at time of reference  
Major-General B. C. Freyberg.**

<sup>2</sup> See Volume I, *Appointment of Commander, 2nd NZEF* (No. 39).  
The appropriate paragraph of the GOC's charter reads:

( *b*) To communicate directly with the **New Zealand Government** and with the Army Department concerning any matter connected with the training and administration of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

2 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF  
AUSTRALIA

2

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of  
Australia*

**4 March 1940**

**I will bring before the Government the subject referred to in your  
telegram of 4 March and will then cable you again.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 3 – THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF NEW ZEALAND<sup>1</sup> TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS<sup>2</sup>

3

*The Governor-General of New Zealand<sup>1</sup> to the Secretary of State  
for Dominion Affairs<sup>2</sup>*

23 March 1940

In a telegram dated 4 March the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of **Australia** asks whether the **New Zealand Government** would be willing to combine the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force with the 2nd **Australian Imperial Force** to form an Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. My Ministers would be glad to receive an early expression of the views of the **War Office** on this proposal.<sup>3</sup> The telegram reads as follows:

[Text of telegram **No. 1**]

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<sup>1</sup> **Governors-General of New Zealand during the war were:**

1935– Rt. Hon. George Vere Arundell Monckton-Arundell, 8th  
41 Viscount Galway, PC, GCMG, DSO, OBE; died Mar 1943.

1941– Marshal of the **Royal Air Force** Sir Cyril Louis Norton  
46 Newall, GCB, OM, GCMG, CBE, AM. (Created Baron, 18 Jul  
1946.)

<sup>2</sup> **Secretaries of State for Dominion Affairs in the United  
Kingdom Government during the war were:**

28 Jan 1939–3 Sep 1939 **Rt. Hon. Viscount Caldecote**, PC, CBE, KC  
(then Sir Thomas Inskip).

3 Sep 1939–12 May 1940 **Rt. Hon. Robert Anthony Eden**, PC, MC.

**12 May 1940–5    Viscount Caldecote.**

**Oct 1940**

**5 Oct 1940–21    Rt. Hon. Viscount Cranborne, PC.**

**Feb 1942**

**21 Feb 1942–28    Rt. Hon. Clement Richard Attlee, PC, CH.**

**Sep 1943**

**28 Sep 1943–3    Viscount Cranborne.**

**Aug 1945**

**3 Aug 1945–7    Rt. Hon. Viscount Addison, KG, PC.**

**Oct 1947**

**On 2 Jul 1947 the title of this office was changed to  
Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations.**

<sup>3</sup> **A similar telegram was sent to General Freyberg.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 4 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE<sup>4</sup> – [EXTRACT]

4

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*<sup>4</sup>

*[Extract]*

26 March 1940

**Sentimental and practical issues, with personal and military as well as constitutional ramifications, are raised by your cable. No doubt Australian sentiment is reflected in the Australian Prime Minister's cable. I am unable to estimate if the revival of Anzac and linking with the Australian war effort would have much appeal to New Zealand, but you are better able to estimate the effect of this.**

**Practical advantages would be gained by fighting in a Corps with Australian divisions, as their great value on the flank and General Blamey's experience give confidence. If the Corps is agreed to, the organisation and administration of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force must be safeguarded and everything regarding hospitals, welfare of the men, promotion, and supervision of the corps of officers must be kept completely free from the possibility of Australian control or even supervision.**

**Further, the Australian approach to defence problems requires Cabinet's consideration as it is not entirely similar to the **New Zealand Government's**. New Zealand desires to assist in the manner best conforming to the British war effort and may not wish to be associated automatically with a possible aggressive Australian attitude regarding strategy....<sup>1</sup> I would suggest, therefore, that Cabinet reserve to themselves all the powers reserved with the British Government and possibly strengthen them if you link at this stage. If we agree to combine for active operations, the question arises whether to form the**

Army Corps before or after our theatre of war is decided. I would suggest that the committing of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force to a theatre of war should still be decided by the Government of New Zealand, with my emergency powers fully retained,<sup>2</sup> and not by the Australian Corps commander as the agent of the Australian Cabinet. When we have entered a theatre of war the normal channels of command, as defined in the prearranged diagram, must be observed.

To sum up, my opinion is that we should link up for operational control only; that the time to link has not yet arrived; that we should continue training under the GOC British Troops in Egypt<sup>3</sup> until active operations are anticipated; that then we should enter the Corps on terms of equality.

General Blamey's experience may entitle him to be the first commander but care should be taken not to create a vested interest for **Australia**, and succession to the command when a vacancy occurs should be available to New Zealand.

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<sup>4</sup> **Hon. F. Jones**, Minister of Defence, 1935–49.

<sup>1</sup> A personal reference has been omitted.

<sup>2</sup> See Volume I, *Appointment of Commander, 2nd NZEF* (No. 39).

<sup>3</sup> **Field-Marshal Lord Wilson**, GCB, GBE, DSO (then Lieutenant-General Henry Maitland Wilson); GOC-in-C, British Troops in Egypt, 1939–40; Military Governor and GOC-in-C, **Cyrenaica**, 1941; GOC-in-C, British Troops in **Greece**, 1941; GOC British Forces in Palestine and Trans-Jordan, 1941; C-in-C Allied Forces in **Syria**, 1941 (GOC 9th Army); C-in-C **Persia-Iraq** Command, 1942–43; C-in C **Middle East**, 1943; Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean Theatre, 1944; Head of British Joint Staff Mission in **Washington**, 1945–47.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 5 – THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS TO THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF NEW ZEALAND

5

### *The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Governor-General of New Zealand*

12 April 1940

With reference to your telegram of 23 March ( **No. 3**). The formation of an **Anzac Corps** would be welcomed by the Army Council, particularly in view of the magnificent traditions connected with the name. At the same time, they desire to make the following comments:

Since the complete Corps would not be ready for active service until some distant date, it is not possible for the Council to be certain at this stage that a three-division Corps of Australian and New Zealand troops would be required to take the field as a complete Corps. Therefore, they suggest that if such a Corps is formed, the New Zealand and Commonwealth Governments should both be prepared to agree to the New Zealand Division being detached from the Australian Forces, either for operations in another theatre of war or for its combination with a **United Kingdom** division, in order to form a two-division Corps should operational necessities at the time make either of these courses desirable.

The Army Council has been asked by the Commonwealth Government what Corps troops the Commonwealth should provide for a two-division Corps. A list of the Corps troops considered necessary is being forwarded to **Australia**, together with a list of the additional Corps troops needed for a three-division Corps. Copies of these two lists are also being despatched by air mail to Army Headquarters, **Wellington**. As the Commonwealth Government may ask for the balance of Corps troops

not raised in **Australia** to be provided by New Zealand, the **New Zealand Government**, before coming to any agreement with the Commonwealth Government, may wish to consider the extent of this commitment. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> After considering a report on the proposal by the Chief of the General Staff, Major-General J. E. Duigan (in general, he concurred with **General Freyberg's** views), the New Zealand Cabinet Defence Committee on 17 May 1940 decided that the matter should be discussed with the Australian authorities by the Hon. W. Nash during a forthcoming visit to the Commonwealth. However, the projected visit by Mr. Nash did not take place.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 6 – LETTER FROM THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE TO GENERAL FREYBERG – [EXTRACT]

6

### *Letter from the Minister of Defence to General Freyberg* *[ Extract ]*

27 May 1940

MY DEAR GENERAL

,  
.... Relative to the question of linking up with the AIF, this matter was before **War Cabinet** when I took the opportunity of placing your views before my colleagues. The opinion expressed was that you had set out exceedingly well the arguments for and against and that your conclusions were sound. It had been provisionally arranged for the Hon. Mr. **Nash**<sup>1</sup> to proceed to **Australia** this week when he might have had an opportunity of discussing this matter with the authorities. His proposed visit, however, has had to be deferred. If there is any linking up, I feel sure it will be for only operational purposes....

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<sup>1</sup> **Rt. Hon. W. Nash**, PC, Minister of Finance and Customs, 1935–49; New Zealand Minister at **Washington**, 1942–44; Deputy Prime Minister, 1940–49; Leader of the Opposition, 1951—.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 7 – GENERAL WAVELL,<sup>2</sup> GENERAL HEADQUARTERS, MIDDLE EAST, TO GENERAL FREYBERG<sup>3</sup>

7

*General Wavell, <sup>2</sup> General Headquarters, Middle East, to General Freyberg <sup>3</sup>*

8 July 1940

Your telegram of 4 July. <sup>4</sup>

To meet a possible attack on Egypt from the **Western Desert**, it is essential to organise into some battle order the incomplete formations available here. The principal factor affecting this organisation is the shortage of Signals units.

A draft Order of Battle was drawn up for discussion to enable the troops available to be most efficiently organised and commanded in the event of attack. The shortage of Signals made it most economical to form an Anzac Division of one Australian and one New Zealand brigade.

The Order of Battle was discussed on 5 July and it was decided to have separate Australian and New Zealand brigade groups instead of the Anzac Division. This arrangement is less economical of Signals but is workable. The New Zealand Brigade Group includes all New Zealand troops. Brigadier Puttick <sup>1</sup> is quite satisfied with the new proposal. It is not intended to implement the Order of Battle till an attack appears probable.

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<sup>2</sup> **Field-Marshal Earl Wavell**, PC, GCB, GCSI, GCIE, CMG, MC (then General Sir Archibald Wavell); GOC-in-C, **Middle East**, 1939–41; GOC-in-C, **India**, 1941–43; Supreme Commander, South-West Pacific, Jan–Mar 1942; Viceroy and Governor-General of **India**, 1943–47; died 24 May 1950.

<sup>3</sup> **General Freyberg** was at this time in the **United Kingdom** training the **Second Echelon**.

<sup>4</sup> Not published. See Volume I, *Concentration of the 2nd NZ Division* (No. 245). This telegram read:

Have just received from Puttick your proposals for reorganisation with its repercussions upon the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in Egypt. As no such change can be made without the approval of the **New Zealand Government**, I hope these proposals will not be proceeded with. I do not wish to have to disclose to the **New Zealand Government** the proposals as outlined by you to break up the New Zealand Force, as they would make a most unfavourable impression in New Zealand official circles with repercussions you probably have not foreseen. The answer to any such proposals would, I am sure, be an uncompromising refusal.

<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Puttick, KCB, DSO; commanded 4th New Zealand Infantry Brigade, 1940–41, and New Zealand troops in Egypt in 1940 during absence of **General Freyberg** in **United Kingdom**; commanded **2nd NZ Division** (4th and 5th Brigades) in **Crete**, May 1941; Chief of the General Staff and General Officer Commanding, **New Zealand Military Forces**, 1941–45.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 8 – GENERAL FREYBERG (GREECE) TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND – [EXTRACT]

8

*General Freyberg ( Greece) to the Prime Minister of New Zealand  
[ Extract]*

**6 April 1941**

**After a difficult journey from Egypt the complete Division has moved forward into *Macedonia* and is preparing a defensive position. We are now linked with the *6th Australian Division*; thus the *Anzac Corps* is again in being. General Blamey's experience and the Australians' fighting qualities will prove great assets.... <sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> See Volume I, *Greece* (No. 357) for complete text.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 9 – HEADQUARTERS 1ST AUSTRALIAN CORPS TO ADVANCED HEADQUARTERS, NEW ZEALAND DIVISION (GREECE)

9

### *Headquarters 1st Australian Corps to Advanced Headquarters, New Zealand Division ( Greece)*

**12 April 1941**

**From 6 p.m. 12 April 1941 the 1st Australian Corps will be known as Anzac Corps. The GOC Anzac Corps<sup>3</sup> in making this announcement desires to say that the reunion of the Australian and New Zealand Divisions gives all ranks the greatest uplift. The task ahead, although difficult, is not nearly so desperate as that which our fathers faced in April twenty-six years ago.<sup>4</sup> We go to it together with stout hearts and the certainty of success.**

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<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas Blamey.

<sup>4</sup> The landing on Gallipoli Peninsula by the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps on 25 Apr 1915.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 10 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO HEADQUARTERS ANZAC CORPS

10

### *General Freyberg to Headquarters Anzac Corps*

**13 April 1941**

**The reunion of the Australian and New Zealand Divisions is welcomed with the greatest satisfaction by all ranks of the New Zealand Division. Will you please send this message to our comrades of the **6th Australian Division.****



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 11 – GENERAL FREYBERG (CRETE) TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE – [EXTRACT]

11

### *General Freyberg ( Crete) to the Minister of Defence* *[ Extract]*

**1 May 1941**

**For the information of the Prime Minister, I saw General Wavell here yesterday and he informed me that General Blamey had expressed the desire to keep the *Anzac Corps* in being for possible war in Palestine. I told the Commander-in-Chief that I had no power to make such a decision, and that my Government would have to be consulted. I think that General Wavell will approach you on this matter... <sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> See Volume I, *Crete* (No. 389) for complete text.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 12 – THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND<sup>2</sup>

12

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*<sup>2</sup>

7 May 1941

The Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, has intimated that he would welcome the suggestion which has been made that the **6th Australian Division** and the New Zealand Division should again be formed into an **Anzac Corps** when they have been re-equipped. General Wavell observes that the formation of the **Anzac Corps** in **Greece** gave satisfaction and was appreciated by both divisions. He proposes that the Corps should be stationed in Palestine for that country's defence and recommends that **General Freyberg** should be selected to command it.

Subject to the concurrence of His Majesty's Governments in the Commonwealth of **Australia** and New Zealand, His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom** favour the proposed re-formation of an **Anzac Corps** and the suggested appointment of **Freyberg** as Corps Commander. We are, however, anxious that **Freyberg** should continue as Commander of the Allied forces in **Crete** for the present.

I should be glad to learn as soon as possible whether the above suggestions commend themselves to the Australian and New Zealand Governments.

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<sup>2</sup> Addressed also to the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of **Australia**.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 13 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND<sup>1</sup> TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA<sup>2</sup>

13

*The acting Prime Minister of New Zealand<sup>1</sup> to the acting Prime  
Minister of Australia<sup>2</sup>*

9 May 1941

You will have received the telegram of 7 May from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs stating that the Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, would welcome the suggestion that the Australian and New Zealand Divisions should be reformed into an **Anzac Corps** after they have been re-equipped, and that **General Freyberg** should be selected as Corps Commander in succession to General Blamey.<sup>3</sup> **War Cabinet** has discussed the matter, and it is felt that the reconstitution of the **Anzac Corps** would give the greatest satisfaction to both the divisions and would be most warmly welcomed by the peoples of **Australia** and this country, to whom the undying traditions of Anzac are an illustrious part of their common heritage. An early expression of your views on the proposals contained in the Secretary of State's telegram would be gladly received by the **New Zealand Government**.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hon. W. Nash. Mr. Fraser had left New Zealand on 3 May on a visit to the **Middle East** and the **United Kingdom**. He arrived in **Cairo** on 15 May.

<sup>2</sup> During the absence of the Australian Prime Minister, the **Rt. Hon. R. G. Menzies**, in the **United Kingdom** in 1941, the Hon. A. W. Fadden was acting Prime Minister.

<sup>3</sup> General Blamey had been appointed Deputy Commander-in-

**Chief, Middle East, on 23 Apr 1941.**

**<sup>4</sup> There is no trace of a reply to this telegram.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 14 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO GENERAL FREYBERG (CRETE)

14

*The acting Prime Minister of New Zealand to General Freyberg (Crete)*

9 May 1941

The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs has informed the **New Zealand Government** that the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, would welcome the suggestion that the **6th Australian Division** and the New Zealand Division should, after being re-equipped, be reformed into an **Anzac Corps**. General Wavell has also recommended that you should command the Corps. However, the British Government are anxious that you should continue for the present as Commander of the Allied forces in **Crete**. The proposals are warmly welcomed by us, and we are at present awaiting the Commonwealth Government's views. We would, of course, be glad to have any advice on these matters you may care to offer. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A similar telegram was sent to the Governor of the Straits Settlements, **Singapore**, for Mr. Fraser, then *en route* to Egypt.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 15 – GENERAL FREYBERG (CRETE) TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER

15

### *General Freyberg ( Crete) to the acting Prime Minister*

11 May 1941

I have to thank you for your message of 9 May. While fully appreciating the honour of commanding the **Anzac Corps** and while realising that the association of Anzac has much to recommend it from an operational viewpoint, I would personally prefer to stay with the New Zealand Division. However, if the New Zealand and Commonwealth Governments so desire, I am prepared to accept the appointment provided that I can remain a servant of the **New Zealand Government** by continuing to be GOC 2nd NZEF, and provided the New Zealand Division remains part of the Corps I command. It may be possible for me to fly to Egypt and back in a day so that I could discuss this and other matters with the Prime Minister personally. Meanwhile, in accordance with the British Government's request, I must of course remain here with our two New Zealand brigades until we are relieved or until the danger to **Crete** is past. Our troops are in good form.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 16 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG (CRETE)

16

*The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg ( Crete)*

15 May 1941

**We have just received your telegram of 11 May. The arrangements proposed by you would be most acceptable to us, and I suggest you should take the earliest possible opportunity to discuss the matter with the Prime Minister, whom I will advise. I would be glad also if a copy of your message could be shown to the Prime Minister in Cairo. <sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> In a telegram to **Cairo** on 17 May **General Freyberg** repeated for **Mr. Fraser's** information telegrams **Nos. 14, 15, and 16.**

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

17 – THE HON. W. NASH TO THE RT. HON. P. FRASER (CAIRO) –  
[EXTRACT]

17

*The Hon. W. Nash to the Rt. Hon. P. Fraser ( Cairo)*  
*[ Extract]*

16 May 1941

The Australian Government has not so far replied to our telegram of 9 May ( No. 13) on the formation of the **Anzac Corps**. I have asked **Freyberg** to have shown to you a copy of his message to me dated 11 May ( No. 15). His desire to remain under the authority of the **New Zealand Government** and to continue as GOC 2nd NZEF if appointed Corps Commander is favourably regarded by **War Cabinet**. It is suggested that you have an early discussion with him and advise us of your views as soon as possible....<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In the text omitted Mr. Nash requested information on the date and place of arrival in **Australia** of General Sir Guy Williams, then Military Adviser to the **New Zealand Government**. See also



# ***Formation of New Zealand Armoured Brigade.***

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 18 – THE RT. HON. P. FRASER (CAIRO) TO THE HON. W. NASH

18

*The Rt. Hon. P. Fraser (Cairo) to the Hon. W. Nash*

9 June 1941

With regard to the proposed formation of an **Anzac Corps**, I have made further inquiries here with Blamey and Wavell but I understand that no further developments have occurred and the matter is still in abeyance. If such a Corps should be formed and **Freyberg** appointed to command it, then the command of the New Zealand Division would normally fall to either Brigadier Puttick or Brigadier Miles, <sup>3</sup> the former of course being senior. Both these officers have received the highest commendation from **Freyberg** and from everybody in a position to judge, and it is **Freyberg's** opinion that either of them would be very suitable either as Divisional commanders in the field or as officers in New Zealand. I agree and feel that with their recent war experience it is not possible to go beyond them. As soon as you have discussed the matter adequately with Sir Guy Williams, <sup>1</sup> I would be glad if you would let me have, at the earliest possible opportunity, the views of **War Cabinet** and the Minister of Defence so that reorganisation in Egypt can be facilitated.

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<sup>3</sup> Brigadier R. Miles, CBE, DSO, MC, ED; Commander Royal New Zealand Artillery, 1940–41; commanded 2nd NZEF ( **UK**) 1940; wounded and prisoner of war, 1 Dec 1941; escaped to **Switzerland** with Brigadier J. Hargest from prison camp near **Florence**, 29 Mar 1943; died in **Spain** on way to **United Kingdom**, Oct 1943.

<sup>1</sup> General Sir Guy Charles Williams, KCB, CMG, DSO; Military Adviser to the **New Zealand Government**, May–Nov 1941.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 19 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG (CAIRO)

19

*The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg ( Cairo)*

**12 June 1941**

**The New Zealand Government, in giving further consideration to the formation of an *Anzac Corps*, would like to have your opinion on the implications involved. *War Cabinet* are particularly concerned about the additional commitment for Corps troops. It is assumed, of course, that the proposed Corps would consist of two divisions only, thus increasing their own share of the Corps troops. While the Government have information concerning the nature and number involved, any additional comments you feel able to give would be welcomed.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 20 – ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON) TO HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEAF (CAIRO)

20

*Army Headquarters (Wellington) to Headquarters 2nd NZEF (Cairo)*

20 June 1941

Colonel Conway<sup>2</sup> arrived on 16 June. His papers despatched by safe-hand air mail have been received. Please cable immediately, firstly, whether our losses in **Crete** will require any alteration in the reinforcement figures already agreed upon,<sup>3</sup> and secondly, whether **General Freyberg** and the Prime Minister reached an agreement on the formation of the **Army Tank Brigade**, as proposed by **War Office**, and the formation and training of this brigade in New Zealand.<sup>4</sup> For your information, Conway had discussions at Army Headquarters, **Melbourne**, regarding the formation of **Anzac Corps**, but no definite conclusions were reached as **Australia** is investigating the manpower situation in order to decide what formations can be maintained overseas. If this matter was discussed by **General Freyberg** and the Prime Minister, please advise what decisions were made. A reply to this cable is required in connection with the preparation of a revised report on manpower needs.

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<sup>2</sup> Brigadier A. E. Conway, CB, OBE, Adjutant-General, **New Zealand Military Forces**, 1940–46, who had been in the **Middle East** for consultations on the reinforcement and reorganisation of the 2nd NZEF.

<sup>3</sup> See

## ***Reinforcement of 2nd NZEF, 1940–42.***

**<sup>4</sup> See**

# ***Formation of New Zealand Armoured Brigade.***

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 21 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER

21

*General Freyberg to the acting Prime Minister*

21 June 1941

Reference your telegram of 12 June ( **No. 19**). On returning from **Crete** I found that negotiations had been in progress between Conway and Brigadier Stevens. <sup>1</sup>

I talked with the Prime Minister and various matters are at present being considered. As soon as the full facts are available I will telegraph you. The delay is regretted, but I was not in a fit state to give the matter proper consideration on my return from **Crete**. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Major-General W. G. Stevens, CB, CBE; Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster-General, **2nd NZ Division**, 1940; Officer in charge of Administration, 2nd NZEF, 1940–45; GOC 2nd NZEF, 22 Nov 1945–6 Jul 1946.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Nash replied on 25 Jun that the **New Zealand Government** would be glad to have **General Freyberg's** views in due course.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 22 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER

22

### *General Freyberg to the acting Prime Minister*

25 June 1941

Please refer to your telegram of 12 June ( **No. 19**). The term 'Corps troops' is a misnomer to some extent as many units of the nature indicated in FFC 36 <sup>3</sup> support the Division whether they form part of the Corps or not, *e.g.*, a medium regiment and a heavy anti-aircraft regiment are allotted on the scale of one for each division as required, but normally are not under the direct orders of the Divisional Commander; also all services behind the Division, such as Signal units, **Reserve Mechanical Transport Company**, &c., working in the gap between Divisional and Corps headquarters. Up to the present the British Army has found this quota of units for us behind the actual Division. It has always been a source of criticism, and it is most desirable as equipment becomes available and manpower in the **United Kingdom** becomes the bottleneck, that we should take over our share. Without any doubt it is an imperative essential to have our Corps troops if we are in the **Anzac Corps**. A Corps of three divisions is certainly referred to in FFC 36, but I gather that our quota would not be increased if the Corps is of two divisions only. Most Corps troops units are allotted to a Corps on the basis of so many for each division in such Corps. I strongly recommend that you accept responsibility if the manpower situation permits, and as the rearrangement will require a great deal of planning here, especially as regards new commanders and staff officers, I would be grateful to learn whether the Government agree in principle to the proposals. As men can be made available, details can be altered to suit the **New Zealand Government**.



<sup>3</sup> **Field Force Committee, War Office, Organisation Plan 36 (Part 12–2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force) contained proposals for the organisation of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. The organisation was on the basis of one New Zealand Division forming part of an Anzac Corps of three divisions (the other two divisions being Australian), one New Zealand Army Tank Brigade, and one independent brigade (B Force) in Fiji. The plan gave details of the composition and strength of the force and of new units to be formed, and the estimated numbers of reinforcements required to maintain it at various periods of activity.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 23 – HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEF TO ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON)

23

### *Headquarters 2nd NZEF to Army Headquarters (Wellington)*

25 June 1941

Your telegram of 20 June ( **No. 20**).

As indicated in my telegram of 21 June <sup>1</sup> I will cable the amended 7th Reinforcement figures today.

The formation of the Tank Brigade was agreed to in principle by the Prime Minister, but he stated that the final decision would not be made until the New Zealand authorities had investigated the implications and had consulted him by cable. <sup>2</sup>

The Prime Minister also agreed that New Zealand should find its quota of Corps troops, but on the same understanding as above.

With regard to the formation of the **Anzac Corps**, the Prime Minister consulted Generals Wavell and Blamey and afterwards talked over the proposal with me. All were agreed in wanting it, and if the **New Zealand Government** favour the proposal, it only requires the Commonwealth Government's agreement to bring it into existence.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Reinforcement of 2nd NZEF, 1940-42* (No. 47).

<sup>2</sup> See

# ***Formation of New Zealand Armoured Brigade.***

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 24 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND<sup>1</sup> – [EXTRACT]

24

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*<sup>1</sup> [ Extract]

20 September 1941

Your telegram of 17 September.<sup>2</sup>

....<sup>3</sup> I have explained to General Auchinleck<sup>4</sup> the **New Zealand Government's** view on the formation of the **Anzac Corps**. The Commonwealth Government have not yet expressed their view. However, it is not possible to form the **Anzac Corps** yet as the **6th Australian Division** is not yet equipped and trained after **Greece** and **Crete**, and the **9th Australian Division** is in **Tobruk**. If still desired, it might be possible to do so after some months, depending on the result of the operations now contemplated.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Fraser had returned to New Zealand on 14 Sep.

<sup>2</sup> See *Libyan Campaign, 1941–42* (No. 97).

<sup>3</sup> See *Libyan Campaign, 1941–42* (No. 99) for complete text.

<sup>4</sup> Field-Marshal Sir Claude John Eyre Auchinleck, GCB, GCIE, CSI, DSO, OBE; GOC-in-C, **India**, 1941; GOC-in-C, **Middle East**, 1941–42; GOC-in-C, **India**, 1943–47.

<sup>5</sup> No further telegrams between the two Governments on this subject can be traced.



**DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II**

**THE OPERATIONS OF THE 2ND NEW ZEALAND DIVISION IN GREECE AND  
CRETE — 25 — REPORT BY MAJOR-GENERAL B. C. FREYBERG TO THE  
MINISTER OF DEFENCE<sup>1</sup>**

# *The Operations of the 2nd New Zealand Division in Greece and Crete*

25

REPORT BY <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This report was presented to both Houses of the General Assembly on 9 Oct 1941.

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12 September 1941

By the end of March the New Zealand Division was concentrated in **Macedonia**. The 5th Brigade Group had arrived from England, thus the three contingents were together for the first time in the history of the Division. Their first role was preparing a defensive position, in conjunction with the Greeks, from the coast south of the River **Aliakmon** to **Veria Pass**. The long front was too vulnerable for the forces available and, following the enemy's attack on **Yugoslavia** and **Greece** on 6 April, the Division was ordered to retire to a strong position on the line of the Passes, the 4th Brigade Group to **Servia**, the 5th and 6th Brigade Groups to **Olympus**. A quick withdrawal was made in rain and snow. This was accomplished without loss of equipment or supplies, the troops showing a high standard of discipline and endurance in their first trial. Rain and overcast skies were a blessing, as no enemy aircraft molested our forces. This retirement was completed by 10 April.

On the 12th the Australians and New Zealanders were formed into the 2nd **Anzac Corps**, giving great satisfaction. From the 10th the Division fought several actions mainly as three separate brigade groups, each comprising all arms. The Machine Gun Battalion detachment on the Yugoslav frontier fired the first New Zealand shots at **Veve** at 9 p.m. on 10 April. On the 13th the Divisional Cavalry and Artillery on the **Aliakmon River** fought delaying actions, retiring over **Olympus Pass** on the 14th. The 4th and 5th Brigade Groups under Brigadiers **Puttick** and **Hargest** <sup>2</sup> respectively came into action simultaneously at the historic

**Servia** and **Olympus Passes**. The 4th Brigade Group held **Servia Pass** while Imperial and Greek troops from the **Florina Gap** withdrew. The infantry action was severe and the Germans suffered heavy casualties. The 5th Brigade Group, plus the Maoris, were holding the long line of the **Olympus** position, and the **21st Battalion** held the coastal defile and railway tunnel near **Platamon**. At **Olympus** the Artillery, firing a phenomenal number of rounds, smashed the German tank advance, the infantry beating off heavy attacks made through the woods under cover of mist. The success of the German thrust against the Greeks on the left threatened the rear of the **Olympus** position and a withdrawal to the **Thermopylae line** was ordered for 16 and 17 April, Brigadier Barrowclough's <sup>1</sup> 6th Brigade Group moving to a covering position south of **Elasson**. After fighting with great determination and repulsing heavy attacks, the 4th and 5th Brigade Groups and the Australians retired again under the cover of mists to the south of the 6th Brigade Group. Meanwhile, the **21st Battalion** had been forced back from the tunnel by tremendous odds, including a large armoured force. Later, with Brigadier Allen's <sup>2</sup> Australian Brigade Group, they held the **Peneios Gorge** position. The **21st Battalion** suffered heavy casualties. The stands at **Peneios** and **Elasson**, where British, Australian, and New Zealand artillery took toll of enemy tanks, breaking their attacks, were vital.

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<sup>2</sup> Brigadier J. Hargest, CBE, DSO, MC; Member of Parliament, 1931–44; commanded **5th NZ Infantry Brigade**, 1 May 1940 – 27 Nov 1941; p.w. **Sidi Azeiz**, 27 Nov 1941; escaped 29 Mar 1943 from prison camp near **Florence**; killed in action, **France**, 12 Aug 1944.

<sup>1</sup> Major-General H. E. Barrowclough, CB, DSO, MC, ED; commanded 7th NZ Infantry Brigade in **United Kingdom**, 1940; commanded 6th Infantry Brigade, May 1940–Feb 1942; GOC 2nd NZEF in **Pacific** and GOC **3rd NZ Division**, Aug 1942–Oct 1944.

<sup>2</sup> Major-General A. S. Allen, CB, CBE, DSO; commanded 16th Australian Infantry Brigade, 1940–41; GOC 7th Australian Division in **Syria** and **New Guinea**, 1941–43; GOC Northern



## *Withdrawal from Greece*

The force was finally disengaged on the night of 13 April and the Division withdrew 100 miles to the **Thermopylae line**. The remarkable success of this withdrawal surprised both the enemy and ourselves. The Division now prepared a line at the historic **Thermopylae Pass** while the Australians barred the other **Athens** road. This was destined to be only a temporary position as the collapse of the gallant Greek Army made the continuation of the fight impossible. Brigadier Barrowclough's force, with Divisional Artillery and British batteries, held the Pass. At dusk on Anzac Eve they beat off a strong German attack, 25-pounders destroying a large number of tanks. Disengaging by dark, the 6th Brigade Group withdrew through the 4th Brigade Group and the Australian artillery holding a covering position south of **Thebes**. That night the 5th Brigade Group successfully embarked for **Crete**. The Artillery and other Divisional troops, totalling 3600, embarked on the night of 26–27 April. On the 27th the 4th Brigade Group, after being cut off by parachute attacks on the **Corinth Canal**, fought a determined rearguard action almost on the beach at **Porto Rafti**, near **Marathon**, keeping the enemy at bay and embarking safely. Meanwhile the **Divisional Headquarters** and the 6th Brigade Group moved to the **Peloponnese**, crossing the **Corinth Canal** just ahead of a parachute attack on the morning of the 26th. The **26th Battalion** attacked and held the airborne troops, and subsequently, with the remainder of the 6th Brigade Group and the attached British and Australian troops, continued the withdrawal through **Tripolis** and **Sparta** to **Monemvasia**. The final evacuation took place on the night of the 28th.

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the service reached a high standard. The achievements of the infantry, and of the Artillery under Brigadier Miles, have already been mentioned. The demolition of roads and bridges by the Engineers, by delaying the enemy continually, was a great contribution to successful withdrawal. Signals maintained communications during most difficult operations. The Army Service Corps, including the Reserve Motor Transport Company, played a great part in supplying the forces throughout the whole of the operations and in carrying troops. The **Medical Services** carried out their duties with great efficiency. Almost all the wounded who could be moved were evacuated. The 6th Brigade Group and the **6th Field Regiment** were ordered to Egypt, the remainder disembarking at Crete.

## *Crete*

In **Crete** the New Zealand Division, commanded by Brigadier Puttick, comprised the 4th Brigade Group (Brigadier Inglis), <sup>1</sup> 5th Brigade Group (Brigadier Hargest), and 10th Composite Brigade Group ( **Colonel Kippenberger**), <sup>2</sup> the last including an improvised New Zealand battalion of Artillery and ASC personnel and two Greek battalions. Living conditions were hard owing to the shortage of blankets, clothing, cooking utensils, knives, forks, spoons, &c. The first twenty-days' period was spent in preparation, digging,

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<sup>1</sup> Major-General L. M. Inglis, CB, CBE, DSO, MC; CO 27th NZ (Machine Gun) Battalion, Jan–Aug 1940; commanded **4th NZ Infantry Brigade**, 1941–42, and 4th Armoured Brigade, 1942–44; commanded **2nd NZ Division**, 27 Jun – 16 Aug 1942 and 6 Jun – 31 Jul 1943; Chief Judge of the Control Commission Supreme Court in the British Zone of Occupation, **Germany**, 1947–50.

<sup>2</sup> Major-General Sir Howard K. Kippenberger, KBE, CB, DSO, ED; CO 20th NZ Battalion, Sep 1939 – Apr 1941, Jun–Dec 1941; commanded 10th Infantry Brigade, **Crete**, May 1941; commanded **5th NZ Infantry Brigade**, Jan 1942 – Jun 1943, Nov 1943 – Feb 1944; commanded **2nd NZ Division**, 30 Apr – 13 May

1943 and 9 Feb – 2 Mar 1944; commanded 2nd NZEF Prisoner of War Reception Group in **United Kingdom**, 1944–45; Editor-in-Chief, NZ War Histories.

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wiring, and putting in guns as quickly as available supplies and equipment arrived. Supply difficulties increased as the air attacks developed. The number of planes available, the exposed position of the aerodromes, and the scale of the enemy air attack made it impossible for the **RAF** to operate from **Crete**. I asked that the few remaining fighter aircraft be sent to Egypt to avoid the useless loss of lives of the pilots who had fought gallantly against tremendous odds. The Egyptian aerodromes were too far away to give effective help and the Germans had complete air superiority.

The battle started on 20 May with a tremendous air bombardment followed by glider and parachute landings over the **Canea- Maleme** area. The [New Zealand] troops were in the **Maleme- Canea** sectors where the main attack was launched. The majority of the parachutists were mopped up but some gained a footing in the areas away from the defences. The Greek King was nearly captured. The Maleme sector was vital, and here the 5th Brigade Group, including some battalions of the 4th Brigade Group, met the attack from the west while the 4th and 10th Brigade Groups fought along Galatas Ridge. On the first day relays of enemy aircraft strafed our positions and fierce hand-to-hand fighting raged on **Maleme** aerodrome. At the close of the day the forces faced each other on the east and west of the aerodrome. On the second day, although the aerodrome remained no-man's-land and was under fire from captured Italian guns manned by our Artillery, troop-carriers landed there and beyond the aerodrome in the riverbed, regardless of losses. Parachute reinforcements also arrived and the savage air bombardment continued. A three-hour attack on **Galatas** was repulsed. That night we watched the Navy send seaborne invaders to the bottom. A counter-attack before dawn on the third day reached **Maleme** aerodrome but heavy dive-bombing at daylight made further progress impossible, and later in the day an attack by the enemy on our flank forestalled our plan

for another counter-attack and forced us to withdraw to a shorter line. Heavy fighting continued on the fourth and fifth days on the new line and at **Galatas**, where the attacks were again repulsed. Sunday, the sixth day, was critical and hard for the tired Australian and New Zealand troops. After continuous air strafing all day a strong enemy attack took **Galatas** in the evening, but the British light tanks and New Zealand infantry retook it at the point of the bayonet. In my opinion this was one of the great efforts in the defence of **Crete**. With Maleme aerodrome no longer under fire, the troop-carriers poured in reinforcements of men and equipment. Tired troops could not withstand this indefinitely and on Sunday night the New Zealand Division and the Australians were ordered to withdraw to a new line west of **Suda**.

Between Canea and **Maleme** the New Zealand Division, later supported by Brigadier Vasey's <sup>1</sup> Australian Brigade, had fought for six days without respite. More than twenty fierce bayonet counterattacks were carried out. The fighting was the most bitter of this war and such fierce hand-to-hand fighting has seldom been seen, while the scale of the enemy air attack was unprecedented. With Brigadier Vasey's brigade, our 5th Brigade covered the withdrawal from **Suda**. Here at the finish of our real defence the men in the front line said, 'Let's fix bayonets and go for them.' A joint New Zealand and Australian bayonet charge drove the enemy back over 1000 yards, but the position could not be held. On the withdrawal to Sphakia Beach our battalions fought rearguard actions together with Australians and **Royal Marines**. The bulk of the fighting troops were evacuated but losses were heavy. Many of our wounded had to be left behind with doctors and medical orderlies who had spontaneously volunteered to stay with them.

The above is only a brief outline, largely confined to a record of our own units, in an effort to give a picture of the campaign to those at home. We pay tribute to all our comrades—British, Australian, and Greek—who fought so gallantly in both campaigns. Our greatest admiration and gratitude goes to the **Royal Navy**, who guarded **Crete** so effectively from seaborne invasion and brought so many safely back from **Greece**

and **Crete**. History will show these campaigns in their true perspective.

Fresh facts are coming to hand. In **Crete** the enemy underestimated our strength and expected to capture the island with parachutists alone. He failed and had to lay on a full-scale attack which used up in all 35,000 highly trained and perfectly equipped troops. Although successful, his losses were great and he was severely mauled. He lost at least 4000 killed, 2000 drowned, and 11,000 wounded. <sup>2</sup> By having to fight he was delayed a month in

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<sup>1</sup> Major-General G. A. Vasey, CB, CBE, DSO, DSC; then commanding 19th Australian Infantry Brigade; GOC 7th Australian Division; later Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Allied Land Forces, South-West Pacific Area; killed in aircraft accident, 5 Mar 1945.

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Killed	1991
Missing (incl 324 lost at sea when convoy intercepted)	1995
Wounded	2652
	6638

From the same sources, it is now known that about 21,000 German troops were engaged.

The ratio of German wounded to killed and missing (practically all the latter must have been killed) appears abnormally low. The New Zealand figures were 643 killed, 1535 wounded; a ratio of approximately 4:9. It is probable that the great majority of the German casualties on the first day (parachutists who dropped in occupied areas) were killed.

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his plans, and when the time came he had neither material nor

troops nor the inclination to face further air landings in either the **Western Desert** or in **Syria**. What is more important, he has now no illusions about the fate which awaits any attempt at airborne operations against Great Britain. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See also Volume I, *Greece* and *Crete*.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

12 SEPTEMBER 1941

12 September 1941

By the end of March the New Zealand Division was concentrated in **Macedonia**. The 5th Brigade Group had arrived from England, thus the three contingents were together for the first time in the history of the Division. Their first role was preparing a defensive position, in conjunction with the Greeks, from the coast south of the River Aliakmon to Veria Pass. The long front was too vulnerable for the forces available and, following the enemy's attack on **Yugoslavia** and **Greece** on 6 April, the Division was ordered to retire to a strong position on the line of the Passes, the 4th Brigade Group to **Servia**, the 5th and 6th Brigade Groups to **Olympus**. A quick withdrawal was made in rain and snow. This was accomplished without loss of equipment or supplies, the troops showing a high standard of discipline and endurance in their first trial. Rain and overcast skies were a blessing, as no enemy aircraft molested our forces. This retirement was completed by 10 April.

On the 12th the Australians and New Zealanders were formed into the 2nd **Anzac Corps**, giving great satisfaction. From the 10th the Division fought several actions mainly as three separate brigade groups, each comprising all arms. The Machine Gun Battalion detachment on the Yugoslav frontier fired the first New Zealand shots at Veve at 9 p.m. on 10 April. On the 13th the Divisional Cavalry and Artillery on the **Aliakmon River** fought delaying actions, retiring over **Olympus Pass** on the 14th. The 4th and 5th Brigade Groups under Brigadiers Puttick and Hargest <sup>2</sup> respectively came into action simultaneously at the historic **Servia** and Olympus Passes. The 4th Brigade Group held **Servia Pass** while Imperial and Greek troops from the Florina Gap withdrew. The infantry action was severe and the Germans suffered heavy casualties. The 5th Brigade Group, plus the Maoris, were holding the long line of the **Olympus** position, and the **21st Battalion** held the coastal defile and



railway tunnel near **Platamon**. At Olympus the Artillery, firing a phenomenal number of rounds, smashed the German tank advance, the infantry beating off heavy attacks made through the woods under cover of mist. The success of the German thrust against the Greeks on the left threatened the rear of the **Olympus** position and a withdrawal to the **Thermopylae line** was ordered for 16 and 17 April, Brigadier Barrowclough's <sup>1</sup> 6th Brigade Group moving to a covering position south of **Elasson**. After fighting with great determination and repulsing heavy attacks, the 4th and 5th Brigade Groups and the Australians retired again under the cover of mists to the south of the 6th Brigade Group. Meanwhile, the **21st Battalion** had been forced back from the tunnel by tremendous odds, including a large armoured force. Later, with Brigadier Allen's <sup>2</sup> Australian Brigade Group, they held the **Peneios Gorge** position. The **21st Battalion** suffered heavy casualties. The stands at Peneios and **Elasson**, where British, Australian, and New Zealand artillery took toll of enemy tanks, breaking their attacks, were vital.

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<sup>2</sup> Brigadier J. Hargest, CBE, DSO, MC; Member of Parliament, 1931–44; commanded **5th NZ Infantry Brigade**, 1 May 1940 – 27 Nov 1941; p.w. **Sidi Azeiz**, 27 Nov 1941; escaped 29 Mar 1943 from prison camp near **Florence**; killed in action, **France**, 12 Aug 1944.

<sup>1</sup> Major-General H. E. Barrowclough, CB, DSO, MC, ED; commanded 7th NZ Infantry Brigade in **United Kingdom**, 1940; commanded 6th Infantry Brigade, May 1940–Feb 1942; GOC 2nd NZEF in **Pacific** and GOC **3rd NZ Division**, Aug 1942–Oct 1944.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## WITHDRAWAL FROM GREECE

### *Withdrawal from Greece*

The force was finally disengaged on the night of 13 April and the Division withdrew 100 miles to the **Thermopylae line**. The remarkable success of this withdrawal surprised both the enemy and ourselves. The Division now prepared a line at the historic **Thermopylae Pass** while the Australians barred the other **Athens** road. This was destined to be only a temporary position as the collapse of the gallant Greek Army made the continuation of the fight impossible. Brigadier Barrowclough's force, with Divisional Artillery and British batteries, held the Pass. At dusk on Anzac Eve they beat off a strong German attack, 25-pounders destroying a large number of tanks. Disengaging by dark, the 6th Brigade Group withdrew through the 4th Brigade Group and the Australian artillery holding a covering position south of **Thebes**. That night the 5th Brigade Group successfully embarked for **Crete**. The Artillery and other Divisional troops, totalling 3600, embarked on the night of 26–27 April. On the 27th the 4th Brigade Group, after being cut off by parachute attacks on the **Corinth Canal**, fought a determined rearguard action almost on the beach at **Porto Rafti**, near **Marathon**, keeping the enemy at bay and embarking safely. Meanwhile the **Divisional Headquarters** and the 6th Brigade Group moved to the **Peloponnese**, crossing the **Corinth Canal** just ahead of a parachute attack on the morning of the 26th. The **26th Battalion** attacked and held the airborne troops, and subsequently, with the remainder of the 6th Brigade Group and the attached British and Australian troops, continued the withdrawal through **Tripolis** and **Sparta** to **Monemvasia**. The final evacuation took place on the night of the 28th.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## CRETE

### *Crete*

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## REINFORCEMENT OF 2ND NEW ZEALAND EXPEDITIONARY FORCE, 1940-

42

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 26 – THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF<sup>1</sup> (WELLINGTON) TO THE WAR OFFICE (LONDON)

26

*The Chief of the General Staff<sup>1</sup> (Wellington) to the War Office (London)*

6 December 1939

The following provision is being made here for reinforcements for the 2nd NZEF:

Every echelon will include normal first reinforcements. The Second Echelon will include second reinforcements for the **First Echelon** on a similar scale. The Third Echelon will include third reinforcements for the **First Echelon** and second reinforcements for the **Second Echelon**, also on a similar scale. Advice is required whether this is considered adequate, and also what subsequent scale of reinforcements should be provided and the frequency of their despatch from this country.

I would be grateful for information regarding the dates on which shipping will be available for the Second and Third Echelons. In view of the desirability of completing the concentration of the Division with the least possible delay, and as training is to be completed with modern equipment overseas, the period of training in New Zealand can be curtailed if necessary. This would allow me to economise on the building programme for housing the troops here during the winter months.

Please inform **General Freyberg**.

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<sup>1</sup> Major-General J. E. (later Sir John) Duigan, KBE, CB, DSO; Chief of the General Staff, **New Zealand Military Forces**, 1937–41; created KBE 11 Jul 1940; died 9 Jan 1950.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

27 – THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF (WELLINGTON) TO THE WAR  
OFFICE

27

*The Chief of the General Staff ( Wellington) to the War Office*

**2 January 1940**

**With reference to my telegram of 6 December.**

**Can you now advise the scale and frequency of reinforcements  
required after the despatch of the **Third Echelon**?**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 28 – WAR OFFICE TO THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF (WELLINGTON)

28

### *War Office to the Chief of the General Staff ( Wellington)*

6 January 1940

With reference to your telegrams dated 6 December ( **No. 26**) and 2 January ( **No. 27**).

**Reinforcements will be required from New Zealand at a low rate during the training period and at a high rate from the date that the contingent is engaged in active operations. The proposals for reinforcements contained in your telegram of 6 December are considered adequate to cover the training period. To cover active service wastage **War Office** propose that, in addition to those mentioned in your telegram, the following reinforcements be despatched:**

**One month's active service wastage for the entire contingent, approximately 2000, to accompany the third flight. Similar numbers to arrive monthly from 1 October onwards.**

**For reasons of escort and convoy, it will probably be necessary for Australian and New Zealand reinforcements to sail together at intervals of two or three months, which would entail 4000 or 6000 being despatched from New Zealand in September and similar numbers every two or three months. The suggested scale of reinforcements is now being worked out in greater detail and the shipping programme considered in conjunction with Admiralty, Board of Trade, and Australian representatives. A detailed programme of reinforcement sailings will shortly be cabled out for your consideration.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 29 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR NEW ZEALAND (LONDON)<sup>1</sup>

29

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the High Commissioner for  
New Zealand ( London) <sup>1</sup>*

15 January 1940

With reference to the scale of reinforcements for the 2nd NZEF,  
please see the telegram of 6 January from **War Office** to the Chief of the  
New Zealand General Staff.

The high rate of reinforcement contemplated is giving us concern. It  
is considerably greater than that which we had allowed for, namely 10  
per cent a month, based on experience in the last war. In view of the  
large manpower requirements for the air training scheme, plus the  
special formations extra to Divisional establishment already

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<sup>1</sup> **Rt. Hon. W. J. Jordan, PC; New Zealand High  
Commissioner in the United Kingdom, 1936–51.**

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agreed upon, <sup>1</sup> we are concerned whether we will be able to maintain  
such a high rate of reinforcement on a voluntary basis. We would be  
grateful if you and Park <sup>2</sup> could therefore discuss this matter with the  
**War Office** and advise us whether, having regard to the actual  
experience of this war, any substantial reduction in the scale of  
reinforcement contemplated in the **War Office** telegram of 6 January  
will be possible.

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<sup>1</sup> See Volume I, *Special Units*.

<sup>2</sup> Brigadier R. S. Park, CBE, New Zealand Military Liaison Officer, London, 1939–46; commanded 2nd NZEF ( UK) 1941–46; appointed New Zealand representative on the Joint Planning Staff, Chiefs of Staff Committee, London, Feb 1942; Commandant, Northern Military District, May 1947 – Feb 1950; Commander K Force ( Korea) Aug 1950–.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 30 – THE NEW ZEALAND MILITARY LIAISON OFFICER (LONDON) TO THE PRIME MINISTER

30

### *The New Zealand Military Liaison Officer ( London) to the Prime Minister*

**16 February 1940**

**In connection with your telegram of 15 January, it has been ascertained that detailed figures for reinforcements, based on the approved amended war wastage rates and having in view the possibility of the New Zealand Division operating in **France** when trained, have now been worked out by **War Office**. Reinforcements will also need to arrive in sufficient time to allow training to be completed with modern equipment.**

**The suggested scale of reinforcements, with the date at which they should arrive in the **Middle East**, is:**

**September 1800**

**October 1800**

**November 1500**

**December 1000**

**January 1500**

**The Admiralty and the Ministry of Shipping desire to convoy reinforcements in flights at intervals of three months.**

**A total of 3600 reinforcements should accompany the third flight and 4000 should sail early in October, with a further sailing in January**



**next year.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 31 – THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF (WELLINGTON) TO HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEF (CAIRO)

31

*The Chief of the General Staff ( Wellington) to Headquarters 2nd  
NZEF ( Cairo)*

9 March 1940

Your telegram of 4 March. <sup>1</sup> It is proposed to send the following reinforcements in addition to first reinforcements:

With the **Second Echelon**: second reinforcements to **First Echelon** units—total 688.

With the **Third Echelon**: third reinforcements to **First Echelon** units and second reinforcements to **Second Echelon**—total 1300.

It is also proposed to provide an additional reinforcement of 1600 all ranks to accompany the **Third Echelon**.

The 4th Reinforcements will consist of 4100 all ranks, plus proposed additional 2000 all ranks—total 6100 all ranks.

The 5th and subsequent reinforcements will each consist of 4100 all ranks. <sup>2</sup>

The proposed extra 1600 all ranks with the **Third Echelon** and the extra 2000 all ranks with the 4th Reinforcements are to meet the scale suggested by the **War Office** for September and October. It is not possible to obtain, train, and despatch the full quota of 3600 with the **Third Echelon**, as suggested by the **War Office**, so it is proposed to spread this number over the third and fourth drafts.

The average three-monthly wastage from all units of the New

**Zealand Expeditionary Force has been calculated at 4100, based on six months' intense activity, three months' normal, and three months' no activity, and allowing for wastage from 4100 during the voyage and three months' training. <sup>3</sup> Please advise your actual monthly wastage.**

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**<sup>1</sup> Not published. In this telegram Headquarters 2nd NZEF asked for information of Army Headquarters' intentions regarding reinforcement drafts with the **Third Echelon** and later contingents.**

**<sup>2</sup> After a number of cables and letters had been exchanged **General Freyberg** recommended that the above proposals should be carried out. Discussions were also held with Colonel N. S. Falla, Commandant 2nd NZEF Base, who visited New Zealand in April.**

**<sup>3</sup> On 4 Jun Headquarters 2nd NZEF advised that the figure 4100 was correctly based on six months' intense and six months' normal activity. Army Headquarters replied that its telegram ( **No. 31**) should be corrected accordingly.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 32 – HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEF (CAIRO) TO ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON)

32

*Headquarters 2nd NZEF (Cairo) to Army Headquarters (Wellington)*

21 August 1940

The Order of Battle for the **Third Echelon** has just been received from England. Your telegrams of 9 March ( **No. 31**) and 27 April <sup>1</sup> indicated that 2900 reinforcements, other than first reinforcements, were coming with this contingent. The latest list shows no reinforcements other than 638 first reinforcements. Are no other reinforcements coming with the draft?

Pending a decision, it is desirable to have a larger number of reinforcements in view of the demands of the Base organisation which has not yet been built up.

The first intimation of the proposed despatch of a group of nondivisional Engineers units was received here from England on 19 August. <sup>2</sup> Please repeat to this Headquarters any further telegrams regarding the constitution or movement of echelons or reinforcement contingents. Please advise urgently the composition of the reinforcements sailing with the **Third Echelon**.

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<sup>1</sup> Not published. This telegram gave the numbers of officer and other rank reinforcements by arms of the service which would sail with the **Third Echelon**.

<sup>2</sup> See Volume I, *Special Units—Railway, Forestry, and Army Troops Companies, New Zealand Engineers*.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 33 – ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON) TO HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEAF (CAIRO) – [EXTRACT]

33

### *Army Headquarters (Wellington) to Headquarters 2nd NZEF (Cairo)* *[ Extract ]*

24 August 1940

Your telegram of 21 August. The Government has decided to limit the **Third Echelon** to 6131 all ranks....<sup>3</sup> The balance of the reinforcements with the **Third Echelon** are required for other purposes....

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<sup>3</sup> Details of the composition of the **Third Echelon** have been omitted.

<sup>4</sup> See Volume I, *Third Echelon*. Early in August the **New Zealand Government** decided, in view of the threat of Japanese aggression, to retain from the reinforcements intended for despatch with the **Third Echelon** a force of 3050 all ranks to garrison **Fiji**.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 34 – ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON) TO GENERAL FREYBERG (LONDON)

34

### *Army Headquarters (Wellington) to General Freyberg (London)*

2 September 1940

The numbers of reinforcements agreed upon were as specified in our telegram of 9 March ( **No. 31**). Excluding first reinforcements, the total number with the **Third Echelon**, plus the 4th and 5th Reinforcements, was to be 13,100 all ranks. However, the programme of despatch has now been altered as follows to meet the changed situation:

A total of 606 reinforcements accompanied the **Third Echelon** <sup>1</sup> in addition to its first reinforcements, the remainder of the reinforcements originally intended for despatch with the **Third Echelon** being required for other purposes. As already advised, it is intended that the 4th and 5th Reinforcements will each consist of 6500 all ranks, <sup>2</sup> thus approximately completing the original programme and strength. The estimates of reinforcements to replace wastage in twelve months, viz., 16,200 all ranks, were based on the rates prescribed for **France**, and the original programme and strength of drafts were arranged accordingly. Similar estimates on the **Middle East** scale totalled 9700 all ranks.

Having regard to the alteration in the situation and the change in the probable theatre of operations of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force since the original estimates and plans were made, your views on the amended programme given above and the strength of the reinforcements required for despatch with the 6th and 7th Reinforcements would be welcomed. <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Third Echelon left New Zealand for Egypt on 28 Aug.

<sup>2</sup> **This telegram or memorandum cannot be traced. See also *Formation of New Zealand Armoured Brigade (No. 67)*.**

<sup>3</sup> **General Freyberg** replied on 19 Sep that he would send early in October the estimated requirements of 2nd NZEF based on the new situation. These were given in a letter on 26 Oct, not reproduced in this volume.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

35 – GENERAL FREYBERG (EGYPT)<sup>4</sup> TO THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL  
STAFF (WELLINGTON)

35

*General Freyberg (Egypt)<sup>4</sup> to the Chief of the General Staff (Wellington)*

30 September 1940

**Are you able to do anything to hurry up reinforcements for us here? One brigade in England will not be here before the end of December. Any number would be welcome even though they were given only one month's military training.**

**Please let me know when you receive the appreciation of the situation in Egypt I did for the British Cabinet, and which I sent you personally by mail from England.**<sup>1</sup>

**The Third Echelon has just begun to arrive in camp here. All are well.**

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<sup>4</sup> **General Freyberg returned to Egypt from the United Kingdom on 24 Sep.**

<sup>1</sup> **See Volume I, Appendix IV, 'The Position in Egypt', Memorandum by Major-General B. C. Freyberg, 29 Jul 1940.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 36 – THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF (WELLINGTON) TO GENERAL FREYBERG – [EXTRACT]

36

### *The Chief of the General Staff ( Wellington) to General Freyberg [ Extract]*

2 October 1940

Your telegram of 30 September. Outbreaks of measles and influenza have hampered the training of reinforcements. The 4th Reinforcements are now in camp. I will do everything possible and will discuss expediting their despatch with **War Cabinet**.... <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In the text omitted General Duigan advised that he would shortly be leaving New Zealand for **Delhi** to lead the New Zealand mission on munitions and supplies, and suggested that he should visit Egypt after the conference for discussions with **General Freyberg**. **General Freyberg** cabled the Minister of Defence on 3 Oct that 'exchange of views would be valuable to policy', and General Duigan arrived in Egypt on 28 Nov.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 37 – THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE TO GENERAL FREYBERG

37

### *The Minister of Defence to General Freyberg*

**3 October 1940**

**Your telegram of 30 September ( No. 35) to General Duigan. A total of 2100 troops who have had three months' training is available here for immediate despatch. In view of your request for immediate reinforcements, we are endeavouring to arrange to send them as soon as possible and will advise you of the result. The appreciation you made for the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom has not yet arrived here.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 38 – THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE TO GENERAL FREYBERG

38

### *The Minister of Defence to General Freyberg*

12 October 1940

With reference to your telegram of 30 September ( **No. 35**) and my reply of 3 October. Because of the growing tension in the **Far East** we have reconsidered the proposal to despatch to you forthwith the 2100 troops who have had three months' training, and are now considering sending them to **Fiji** at the earliest possible moment. We fully realise, however, the urgent desirability of supplying you with the reinforcements that you need, and we suggest for your consideration the following alternatives:

That we should send by the convoy due to leave about the middle of November, an equivalent number of troops selected from those members of the 4th Reinforcements who have had previous Territorial training, and who will by then have been in camp for approximately one month, but including the following with at least four months' training:

**250 officers and NCOs**

**100 Divisional Cavalry**

**294 Maoris**

**50 Medical**

The second alternative is to hold for further training the 2100 mentioned above and despatch them with the normal 4th Reinforcements, due to leave early in December, which will then number 6500.

**We would be grateful if you would send us your comments on these proposals immediately.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 39 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

39

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

12 October 1940

**The difficulty in the Pacific is realised and I wish to help by all possible means. I would be glad to accept the first alternative in your message of 12 October in place of those you desire for Fiji. We would be prepared to accept all reinforcements with one month's service now that Base is functioning.** <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **The 4th Reinforcements sailed in three sections. The first section left New Zealand on 8 Nov 1940, the second section on 20 Dec 1940, and the third section on 1 Feb 1941.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 40 – ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON) TO GENERAL FREYBERG

40

### *Army Headquarters ( Wellington) to General Freyberg*

**27 November 1940**

**Present indications are that the ships available will take only approximately 3000 4th Reinforcements. In anticipation of this being so, would you please cable what the composition of the draft should be.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 41 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON)

41

### *General Freyberg to Army Headquarters ( Wellington)*

**29 November 1940**

**Your telegram of 27 November has been received with consternation. It is earnestly requested that every endeavour be made to send the full number. I would point out that the original reinforcements to accompany the **Third Echelon** were drastically reduced and that undue numbers have been allotted to units outside the Division. I am engaged in the first stages of forming new units and a regular supply of personnel is essential. If, however, the draft must be reduced, please leave behind in order of priority as not required: ( a) 18th Army Troops Company, ( b) Non-divisional Engineers, ( c) 8th Field Company, ( d) Machine gunners, ( e) **Divisional Engineers**, and ( f) infantry up to whatever number necessary. It is most important that the personnel withdrawn should follow urgently. I will telegraph shortly about the composition of the 5th Reinforcements.** <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This telegram is not published.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 42 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE – [EXTRACT]

42

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

*[ Extract ]*

**2 December 1940**

.... <sup>2</sup> With reference to your telegram of 2 December, <sup>3</sup> I feel that I must most strongly represent that should we be cast for an operational role we must have at least three months' reinforcements, amounting to 4200, fully trained, in our Base depots. Owing to the need for sending troops to **Fiji**, I would point out that we were 2300 reinforcements short with the **Third Echelon**, and with expansion and new units to be formed immediately we shall require an additional 2600 not originally budgeted for. Even if the 4th Reinforcements arrive to time and complete, we should only just be able to have reserves ready by the end of March. I have gone into the whole reinforcement position with General Duigan, who will arrive in New Zealand about the New Year. I strongly urge, and he agrees, sending the 4th Reinforcements complete and trying to expedite part of the 5th Reinforcements to arrive by March. This could be done by drawing some men from **Fiji**.

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<sup>2</sup> See Volume I, *Concentration of the 2nd NZ Division* (No. 263) for complete text.

<sup>3</sup> Not published. This telegram from Army Headquarters to Headquarters 2nd NZEF advised that the shipping position prevented the despatch of the remainder of the 4th Reinforcements until late January, and notified a reduction in the size of the draft (2nd section, 4th Reinforcements) then being prepared for embarkation.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 43 – ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON) TO GENERAL FREYBERG

43

### *Army Headquarters ( Wellington) to General Freyberg*

**9 December 1940**

**Your telegram of 2 December has been interpreted to mean that you desire 2600 of the 5th Reinforcements to be sent with the third section, 4th Reinforcements, and that you do not require 2600 additional to the 5th Reinforcements (6500), 6th Reinforcements (4100), 7th Reinforcements (4100). Will you please confirm and state the composition of the 2600 by arms. Inquiries are being made whether shipping will be available, but at present the indications are unfavourable.**

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

44 – HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEF (CAIRO) TO ARMY HEADQUARTERS  
(WELLINGTON)

44

*Headquarters 2nd NZEF ( Cairo) to Army Headquarters ( Wellington)*

12 December 1940

Reference your telegram of 9 December.

Provided the original total for the 4th Reinforcements (6500), 5th Reinforcements (6500), and 6th Reinforcements and later (each 4100) is adhered to without any deficiency, no additional numbers will be required. We will be glad of as many 5th Reinforcements as are available as early as can be arranged. The composition of the first portion should be as given in my telegram of 5 December <sup>1</sup> up to the total of 55 officers and 2248 other ranks given therein. Any balance should consist of replacements for cavalry and infantry in that order.

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<sup>1</sup> Not published.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 45 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

45

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

27 February 1941

With reference to the latter part of my telegram of 2 December ( **No. 42**), I am most relieved that the final portion of the 4th Reinforcements is now approaching these shores. As you recognise, we are entering an operational period when our reinforcement depots must be full. Having regard to the physical condition of the troops at the end of the long voyage, the period of training here must be reckoned as three months. As all calculations are based upon the arrival of the 5th Reinforcements on 1 April, I would be most grateful for their early despatch, especially the replacement portion of the contingent, for which see paper 12/1/2035 of 18 January. <sup>2</sup> Priority of despatch should be ( *a*) replacements portion, ( *b*) new units portion. With reference to paragraph 34 of the above paper, the Medium Battery of Artillery is not now required and personnel should be allocated to the replacements portion in proportion to all arms. <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Not published. This was a paper on 'Expansion of 2nd NZEF' by the Officer in charge of Administration (Colonel W. G. Stevens). The 5th Reinforcements left New Zealand on 7 Apr.

<sup>3</sup> In a telegram sent on 2 Mar Headquarters 2nd NZEF advised that personnel of the Medium Battery should be converted into a Light Anti-Aircraft Battery.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 46 – HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEF TO ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON)

46

### *Headquarters 2nd NZEF to Army Headquarters (Wellington)*

31 March 1941

Your telegram of 26 March. <sup>4</sup>

Wastage prior to the arrival of the 5th Reinforcements will reduce the figures much below the 4800 mentioned by you. The transfer of Cavalry and Artillery was only a suggestion and may not be put into effect. Wastage from the **Second Echelon** was higher than expected and a steady drain, particularly on infantry, has resulted from the formation of Base training and administration establishments and the establishment of Advanced Base. Contingents have arrived so far at longer intervals than was first estimated, and the increase in battalion establishment from the lower to higher [scale] has to be implemented somewhat sooner than was expected. Therefore, I suggest that additional infantry and Maori reinforcements be added to the 6th Reinforcements over and above the normal 7th Reinforcements.

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<sup>4</sup> Not published. This telegram from the Adjutant-General (Colonel A. E. Conway) concerned the composition of the 6th Reinforcements. The part to which telegram **No. 46** refers read: 'According to my reckoning you will have on the arrival of the 5th Reinforcements approximately 4800 infantry and 200 Maori reinforcements, exclusive of first reinforcements and of 300 Cavalry and 200 Artillery reinforcements which you propose changing to infantry. Is it intended, if 50 per cent infantry and Maoris are added to the 6th Reinforcements, that the 7th Reinforcements (normally 4100) be correspondingly reduced?'

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 47 – HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEF TO ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON)

47

### *Headquarters 2nd NZEF to Army Headquarters (Wellington)*

21 June 1941

With reference to your telegram of 20 June. <sup>1</sup>

Our losses in Artillery, Engineers, **Army Service Corps**, and **Medical Corps** [in Crete] were abnormally high. We will be asking for an increase in these arms in the 7th Reinforcements and a proportionate decrease in other arms, but the exact figures will not be available until about 25 June. <sup>2</sup> We will reply tomorrow regarding the Tank Brigade and Corps troops. <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See *Proposed Formation of Australian and New Zealand Army Corps* (No. 20).

<sup>2</sup> A telegram from Headquarters 2nd NZEF, dated 24 Jun, giving in detail the amended figures for replacements in the 7th Reinforcements has not been reproduced in this volume.

<sup>3</sup> See *Proposed Formation of Australian and New Zealand Army Corps* (Nos. 22 and 23).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 48 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO GENERAL FREYBERG

48

### *The acting Prime Minister of New Zealand to General Freyberg*

9 July 1941

Consideration is being given by the Government to the New Zealand Expeditionary Force and related questions, but before coming to a decision it is necessary to have certain information from you.

You have 31,000 troops serving in Egypt according to our estimates. Of this number some 26,000 are regarded as establishment, leaving a surplus of approximately 5000 reinforcements. At present 4000 are *en route* to the **Middle East** and another 1600 are due to sail this month. Here in New Zealand we have 4100 training for transhipment in September. Provided there is no high degree of wastage you should have about 14,700 reinforcements by October.

Difficulty is being caused at present by the manpower situation, and in considering the formation of the **Army Tank Brigade** we must know at once whether on these figures you have more than sufficient reinforcements. Instead of sending the 8th Reinforcements, it may be necessary to hold that number to be trained for an **Army Tank Brigade**.

Until the prior questions of the **Army Tank Brigade** and the reinforcements have been considered in relation to the present manpower position, the proposals relating to Corps and Line of Communication troops are necessarily deferred. <sup>1</sup>

It is most essential that full details of the strength of the 2nd NZEF and the use of all troops in relation to the above figures should be supplied immediately. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See *Formation of New Zealand Armoured Brigade* (No. 74).

<sup>2</sup> A copy of this telegram was also sent to Mr. Fraser in **London**.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 49 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER

49

### *General Freyberg to the acting Prime Minister*

10 July 1941

Your telegram of 9 July.

The maximum number overseas, that is on the arrival of the 5th Reinforcements, was 32,300. Killed, prisoner of war, missing, and returned to New Zealand amount to 5800. Left in Egypt total 26,500, not 31,000 as estimated by you. Even under normal conditions, at any one time there are approximately 1800 in hospital, leaving 24,700 available fit for duty in the field and at Base. The establishment is 26,000 so that at the moment there is a deficiency of 1300 and not a surplus of 5000.

The 6th and 7th contingents number 9700. The deficiency of 1300 above, plus the estimated wastage of 600 between now and October, reduce the figure to 7800, of whom a large part will still require about two months' training. The figure should thus be 7800 and not 14,700. <sup>3</sup>

Should the 8th Reinforcements not be sent, it means that we get no further reinforcements for six months. On the wastage table 7800 should be sufficient for eight months, but against that I would stress the following two points: First, the period October to March is likely to be the next period of great activity for the Division, and losses over that period might well exceed 7800; second, the wastage table is now regarded as giving much too low a figure for periods of normal and no activity.

Therefore, I would strongly deprecate withholding the 8th Reinforcements as the fighting units might find themselves with no



replacements available.

Finally, to enable future planning of the 2nd NZEF, I would appreciate early information of the Government's decisions. The men have now fully recovered from the recent difficult times and are in good condition. Units are almost up to strength. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Army Headquarters replied on 22 Jul: 'For the purpose of estimating future reinforcements we have accepted the position as set out in the first two paragraphs of your telegram of 10 July.'

<sup>1</sup> This telegram was repeated to Mr. Fraser in **London**.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 50 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

50

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

31 October 1941

I wish to report that I came back from the **Western Desert** for two days to inspect the 6th and 7th Reinforcements, the latter having just arrived. <sup>2</sup> They are an excellent body of troops.

I am very impressed with all I have seen. The men are a fine lot and have made a good impression. I have had good reports on all sides.

I have also taken the opportunity of seeing the young women now installed in the Club. It is early in the day yet to report how the arrangement is working but I have every reason to feel satisfied with the results so far. Yesterday the Commander-in-Chief <sup>3</sup> inspected our Base and reviewed 7000 reinforcements. He was most struck by all he saw. I am sending a copy of his letter of appreciation. <sup>4</sup>

Today I leave **Cairo** by air for the **Western Desert** where everybody is in excellent heart. We are closely associated with the South Africans, an association appreciated by us. On 5 November the New Zealand Division Rugby football team plays a test match in the **Western Desert** against a representative South African team. The match should be keenly contested.

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<sup>2</sup> The 6th Reinforcements left New Zealand on 27 Jun and the 7th Reinforcements on 15 Sep 1941.

<sup>3</sup> General Auchinleck succeeded General Wavell as Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, on 5 Jul 1941.



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 51 – HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEF TO THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF (WELLINGTON)<sup>1</sup>

51

*Headquarters 2nd NZEF to the Chief of the General Staff (Wellington)* <sup>1</sup>

**8 December 1941**

Could you indicate if war with **Japan** will in any way affect the supply of reinforcements to the **Middle East**? We have sufficient trained men to make the Division up to full strength again almost at once.

Casualties appear to be between 4000 and 5000, <sup>2</sup> leaving a balance of about 3500 which, in view of the future likely employment of the New Zealand Division, should suffice for some months.

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<sup>1</sup> Major-General E. (later Lieutenant-General Sir Edward) Puttick had returned to New Zealand in Sep 1941 to assume the appointment of Chief of the General Staff and General Officer Commanding, **New Zealand Military Forces**, on the retirement of Major-General Sir John Duigan.

<sup>2</sup> See

## ***Libyan Campaign, 1941-42.***

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 52 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

52

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

26 December 1941

Your telegram of 8 December. In view of the situation in the **Pacific** and the threat to **Fiji**, which has recently increased enormously in importance, we are considering the necessity of diverting to that area some or all of the 8th Reinforcements intended for the **Middle East**. We have, of course, no intention of ignoring our responsibility for maintaining the Middle East Forces at proper strength, though neither we nor you can disregard the possibility that events in this part of the world may greatly increase our difficulties in this respect. If it becomes necessary to divert the 8th Reinforcements as suggested,<sup>3</sup> I feel sure you will understand the position, and I should greatly appreciate your comments.

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<sup>3</sup> On 27 Dec Army Headquarters advised Headquarters 2nd NZEF that the sailing of the 8th Reinforcements had been indefinitely postponed.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 53 – THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF (WELLINGTON) TO GENERAL FREYBERG

53

### *The Chief of the General Staff ( Wellington) to General Freyberg*

2 January 1942

The complete mobilisation of the New Zealand Forces has been ordered for 10 January, providing twenty-three battalions and eighteen being formed, nine mounted rifle regiments, four field regiments, and miscellaneous and ancillary troops. Medium guns and howitzers are being utilised to cover various anchorages, leaving only one troop of 6-inch howitzers for the field forces. Field artillery includes thirty-six 25-pounders and fifty 18-pounders. The total strength will be approximately 50,000 by 10 January, rising to 62,000 about one month later, and 68,000 ultimately, all exclusive of the **Home Guard**. We had already advanced the annual training date for part of the force from January to 15 December, on which date approximately 30,000 troops of all categories, including New Zealand Expeditionary Force reinforcements, were in camp.

**Fiji** is of the first importance as an essential link in the **United States** air reinforcing chain and for other reasons, and we reinforced it in December with eighteen field guns and howitzers, four 3-inch anti-aircraft guns, six anti-aircraft searchlights, and 700 men to complete the third battalion. Further reinforcements comprising approximately 4000 troops, four 25-pounders, four Bofors, two 60-pounders, and two 6-inch howitzers are being sent in two flights to raise the force to two brigade groups and two reserve battalions organised as a division. The first flight has sailed and the remainder go in a few days. Arms and equipment have been found from New Zealand, resulting in shortages here, but the **United States** is despatching the equivalent, plus other

equipment, urgently to **Fiji** and New Zealand, when adjustments will be made if the situation permits.

We have had to use the 8th Reinforcements and Potter <sup>1</sup> as Brigade Commander, Goss, <sup>2</sup> G1, Sugden <sup>3</sup> and Barry <sup>4</sup>, battalion commanders,

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<sup>1</sup> Brigadier L. Potter, CBE, DSO; commanded 14th NZ Brigade Group and Western Area, **Fiji**, Jan-Jul 1942; commanded 14th Brigade, **3rd NZ Division**, 1942-44; Commandant, Central Military District, Dec 1944- Jun 1946; commanded 2nd NZEF ( **Japan**) 1946-48.

<sup>2</sup> Brigadier L. G. Goss, CB; GSO 1, Army HQ, **Wellington**, 1939-41; commanded 8th NZ Brigade Group, **Fiji**, Jan-Mar 1942; Assistant Chief of the General Staff, Army HQ, May-Nov 1942; commanded 15th Brigade, 2nd NZEF IP, Nov 1942-Jul 1943; commanded 8th Brigade, **3rd NZ Division**, Dec 1943-Sep 1944; Deputy Chief of the General Staff, **New Zealand Military Forces**, Sep 1944-Jul 1946.

<sup>3</sup> Colonel A. H. L. Sugden; Commandant Army School of Instruction, **Trentham**, 1940-41; CO 37th Battalion, 2nd NZEF IP, Dec 1941-Jul 1944; Commandant Army School of Instruction, Apr 1945-Jan 1947; Area Commander, **Wellington**, Jan-Mar 1947.

<sup>4</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel J. W. Barry, MBE; Staff Officer Training, **Trentham**, 1940-41; CO 36th Battalion, 1941-43; commanded N Force ( **Norfolk Island**) Sep 1942-Apr 1943; Area Commander, **Wanganui**, Sep 1943-Apr 1947.

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for **Fiji**, and Parkinson <sup>1</sup> for the Army Reserve Brigade here. The Tank Brigade has been organised to provide one battalion of thirty tanks under Groves <sup>2</sup> and three battalions of infantry, all in Army Reserve here, but the training of the Tank Brigade is proceeding. The 9th Reinforcements assemble immediately for a month's intensive training before being posted to units here.



<sup>1</sup> Major-General G. B. Parkinson, CBE, DSO; CO 4th NZ Field Regiment, Jan 1940—Aug 1941; commanded 1st **NZ Army Tank Brigade** and 7th Infantry Brigade Group (in NZ) 1941–42; commanded NZ Maadi Camp, Feb—Mar 1943; 6th Infantry Brigade, 1943–44; commanded **2nd NZ Division (Cassino)**, 3–27 Mar 1944; Commander Royal Artillery, **2nd NZ Division**, Jun—Aug 1944; commanded **6th NZ Infantry Brigade**, Aug 1944—Jun 1945; commanded NZ Troops in Egypt and NZ Maadi Camp, Jul—Nov 1945; Quartermaster-General, Army HQ, Jan—Sep 1946; NZ Military Liaison Officer, **London**, 1946–49; Commandant, Southern Military District, 1949–.

<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel H. B. M. Groves, MC, **Royal Tank Regiment**; on loan to **New Zealand Military Forces**, 23 Aug 1941–25 Sep 1944; Commandant NZ Armoured Fighting Vehicle School, **Waiouru**, 1941–44.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 54 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

54

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

5 January 1942

Since receiving your telegram of 26 December ( **No. 52**) a telegram from General Puttick ( **No. 53**) has also reached me. From it I gather that the 8th Reinforcements have now been used for other purposes and the 9th Reinforcements also are intended to be posted to units in New Zealand or **Fiji**.

I fully appreciate the present circumstances in the **Pacific** and know that the best employment of reinforcement drafts is a matter for you to decide. The reinforcement situation here is quite satisfactory for some months to come.

The final estimate of casualties here is 4000 all ranks <sup>3</sup> and on that assumption, when all units are made up to War Establishment (which will be shortly), there will be some 4500 reinforcements available. After making allowance on the one hand for those wounded who return to duty and, on the other, for some small wastage in the next three months, it appears that on 1 April the total reinforcements available will, on a conservative estimate, be 5000. Provided that the next campaign in which the Division is engaged (and which should commence about 1 April) is a normal one and does not involve prisoners of war on the scale of **Greece** and **Crete**, this figure of 5000 should be adequate to maintain the force until 1 August 1942, by which date it is hoped you will have been able to despatch some reinforcements. The position here is thus satisfactory for the next six months at least.

In the circumstances, however, I do not propose to proceed with the formation of the Medium Regiment and have intimated to General

**Headquarters that the desirability of keeping the Division up to full strength will prevent us forming any other new units, however small.**

**I hope it will be possible to despatch the **Army Tank Brigade** to the **Middle East** even at a later date in 1942, but I appreciate that delay is inevitable in the present circumstances. <sup>1</sup>**

**Should you so desire, I am prepared to release at once Brigadier Wilder <sup>2</sup> and Lieutenant-Colonels Dittmer <sup>3</sup> and Andrew. <sup>4</sup> Brigadier Wilder commanded the 5th Brigade in **Libya** with distinction after Brigadier Hargest was captured. All three officers have had extensive experience in the field in **Greece, Crete, and Libya**. In addition I will do all I can to meet any other requests that General Puttick may make.**

**In a telegram which will probably be despatched tomorrow, I am sending an appreciation regarding the future employment of the Division. <sup>5</sup>**

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<sup>3</sup> See

***Libyan Campaign, 1941–42, page 84, note 1.***

**<sup>1</sup> See**

## *Formation of New Zealand Armoured Brigade.*

<sup>2</sup> Major-General A. S. Wilder, DSO, MC; CO 25th NZ Battalion, Mar 1940–Sep 1941; commanded **5th NZ Infantry Brigade**, 6 Dec 1941–17 Jan 1942; commanded 5th Division, Apr 1942–Jan 1943, and 1st Division (in NZ), Jan–Nov 1943.

<sup>3</sup> Brigadier G. Dittmer, CBE, DSO, MC; CO 28th NZ (Maori) Battalion, Jan 1940–Feb 1942; commanded 1st Infantry Brigade Group, Northern Military District, Apr–Aug 1942; commanded 1st Division, Aug 1942–Jan 1943, and 1st Infantry Brigade Group (in NZ), Jan–Aug 1943; commanded **Fiji Military Forces and Fiji Infantry Brigade Group**, Sep 1943–Nov 1945; Camp Commandant, Papakura Military Camp, 1946; Commandant, Central Military District, 1946–48.

<sup>4</sup> Brigadier L. W. Andrew, VC, DSO; CO 22nd NZ Battalion, Jan 1940–Mar 1942; commanded **5th NZ Infantry Brigade**, 27 Nov–6 Dec 1941; Fortress Commander, Wellington Area, 1942–43; Area Commander, **Wellington**, Nov 1943–Dec 1946; Commandant, Central Military District, 1948–.

<sup>5</sup> See *Libyan Campaign, 1941–42* (No. 116).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 55 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

55

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

**7 January 1942**

**I should like you to know at once that I am very much obliged to you for your telegram of 5 January and also that **War Cabinet** warmly appreciate your attitude in this matter. I shall communicate with you further with reference to detailed proposals.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 56 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF (WELLINGTON)

56

### *General Freyberg to the Chief of the General Staff (Wellington)*

15 January 1942

Reference my telegram of 5 January ( **No. 54**) to the Prime Minister and your telegram of 2 January ( **No. 53**).

We are training to take the field at the latest by 1 April. It is therefore desirable to make any changes in appointments as soon as possible.

Our present Brigadiers are Inglis, **Kippenberger**, Barrowclough, and Weir. <sup>1</sup> The loss in Commanding Officers and Artillery officers has been heavy.

It would help us if you stated your requirements by numbers and categories rather than by names, and we could submit names to you. You can, of course, depend on our wholehearted support. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Major-General C. E. Weir, CB, CBE, DSO; CO 6th NZ Field Regiment, Sep 1939–Dec 1941; CRA **2nd NZ Division**, Dec 1941–Jun 1944; commanded **2nd NZ Division**, 4 Sep–17 Oct 1944; commanded 46th British Division, Nov 1944–Sep 1946; Commandant, Southern Military District, 1948–49.

<sup>2</sup> General Puttick replied on 18 Jan that he would welcome any officers and NCOs either on loan or permanently. Personnel with active service experience 'able to teach the doctrine of modern warfare' were required; they would be employed at schools of instruction and with units.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 57 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG – [EXTRACT]

57

*The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

*[ Extract ]*

17 March 1942

....<sup>3</sup> The question of reinforcements for the Division in the **Middle East** is causing us serious concern, and neither you nor we can ignore the possibility that future developments may be such as to prevent their despatch altogether. We gather from paragraph 8 of your telegram of 3 March<sup>4</sup> that this thought has not been absent from your mind, and, should the position develop as we fear it may, then we may have to consider the possibility, if reinforcements cannot be despatched, of progressively reducing the size of our force in the **Middle East**. We should, of course, deeply regret this, but the possibility exists and must be contemplated. We would wish you to know in this connection, with the highest degree of secrecy, that in considering the forces to be made immediately available to New Zealand and **Australia**, President Roosevelt has offered to send three divisions at a comparatively early date (one of which is intended for New Zealand and two for **Australia**) on condition that the Australian and New Zealand Divisions now in the **Middle East** should remain there, the object being, of course, to minimise the use of shipping, the provision of which for other necessary purposes raises considerable difficulties. We would, of course, very much wish to have had our Division returned to the **Pacific** area for many and obvious reasons, but in view of President Roosevelt's request, the extreme difficulty of providing the necessary shipping, and the risk involved, we think we must accept the retention of the New Zealand Division in the **Middle East**, in the meantime at any rate. In order to put you fully into the picture I attach hereto an extract from a communication addressed

by me to Mr. Churchill on 15 March, which, while explaining our general views, indicates that we do not at the moment ask for the return of our Division.

The extract is as follows: <sup>1</sup>

We note also that the despatch of the [ **United States**] division is subject to the condition that our own Division remains in the **Middle East**. This raises for us problems of the first magnitude. It is a fact, as you have so kindly emphasised, that we have not asked for the return of the New Zealand Division and we do not ask it now. But Australian troops are, we are informed, being returned, and with your experience you will realise what a difficult position we will have to face here when this fact becomes known. Our troops have been in the **Middle East**, divorced from their homes and their people, for two years. Added to their natural desire to see their people again is a much more serious feeling which, I am told, is becoming marked in the Division, that their proper place when their own country is in danger is in the **Pacific** theatre, and I must say that we have a lot of sympathy with that point of view, which may well be the cause of grave embarrassment and that before long. Again, on this aspect of the matter, the pressure on New Zealand's manpower at the moment and the physical difficulties of transporting troops to the **Middle East** are such that at present we do not see the possibility of reinforcing the Division. Actually **General Freyberg** has enough troops at the moment to carry him on without reinforcements for a lengthy period, but the time must arise when the question of reinforcing or not reinforcing will present very great difficulties to us. Finally, on this particular subject, our Division is now trained and experienced in war itself and thus would unquestionably be of infinitely greater value to us in this theatre than any American division can be until it has had equal experience.

As you know, we are preparing here as rapidly as possible, and to the extent that our resources will allow, the forces that we consider necessary to meet any attack on New Zealand and **Fiji**, and I think you should know also that in order to provide a stiffening of experienced

**officers and other ranks we may find it necessary to ask you to return a substantial number of officers and men for this purpose. We have come to no definite decision as yet, and we must of course always have regard to shipping and escort difficulties, but there is no doubt in our minds as to the desirability of the proposal, which, if ultimately decided upon, might necessitate our endeavouring to supply you with a corresponding number of reinforcements. Will you please let us have your opinion of this proposal?**

**If you have any other comments that you wish to make on the contents of this communication, we should of course be very happy to receive them.**

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<sup>3</sup> See *Syria (No. 133)* for text omitted.

<sup>4</sup> See *Syria (No. 132)*. Paragraph 8 reads: 'In view of the general situation I will conserve resources to the limit of my powers.'

<sup>1</sup> See Volume III, *Defence of New Zealand* for complete text.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 58 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

58

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

28 March 1942

Many thanks for the information in your telegram of 17 March which enables me to frame policy here.

Your cable raises questions of policy on which I shall require guidance. The reasons for the decision to retain the Division in the **Middle East** are noted. You ask for comments. At present there is no outward sign of unrest or feeling that the men should return to New Zealand. As reported, we have tackled the question on what I hope are sound grounds and have given a reassuring picture of the measures taken in New Zealand. <sup>1</sup> I think that the majority have accepted the situation with stolid wisdom though the arrival of the American division in New Zealand is bound to cause considerable comment. I personally agree that the New Zealand Division would be more valuable in New Zealand than any other, and if New Zealand is attacked I feel that our place should be at home. But if high policy reasons make it necessary to stay here, the decision will be accepted. I understand from your message that the **9th Australian Division** is remaining here. Their return would certainly cause dissatisfaction. We can now point out that both the Australians and

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<sup>1</sup> See *Syria*, page 101, note 2.

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ourselves have been retained for reasons of practical strategy. It can be explained that our return would add to the present heavy demands on Allied shipping and escorting vessels as new formations would also have

**to come by sea to relieve us. Further, with attack against the [Middle East](#) imminent, the value in a vital theatre of the highly trained and fully equipped Division can be pointed out. I feel certain the New Zealand Expeditionary Force will respond as they have done before in the very hard times in [Greece](#), [Crete](#), and [Libya](#).**

**Regarding a stiffening from the New Zealand Division for the New Zealand Forces, may I make a suggestion with every wish to help? I consider that any proposal involving the return of part of the force here will create uneasiness amongst those left behind. I feel personally that although private soldiers may be some help, what is really wanted and what you will ask for will be further officers and NCOs. The following help is already just arriving or is on the way to New Zealand. Several battalion commanders and three Brigadiers, including Stewart. <sup>1</sup> Barrowclough is fit to train and command a division and the other Brigadiers and battalion commanders are fit to command and train brigades. We have also sent 40 other officers and 60 NCO instructors and leaders. This measure caused no unrest, and the system could be continued within the limits of our resources without causing unrest. We cannot send many more senior officers as we now have none of the original Brigadiers and only one original commanding officer. We could send, however, 50 officers and 100 NCOs in view of the good officer material to draw upon here. Perhaps you could replace them with 200 other ranks.**

**As the campaigning season is approaching and the Division may soon be on the brink of active operations, I would appreciate early advice from you of the Government's decision, stating the arms and categories of the help you wish. We are taking all steps to conserve our strength. We are recalling all detachments and may have to recall the temporary help sent to the Greek Army. <sup>2</sup>**

**I have not mentioned the general situation in the [Middle East](#) but intend to do [an appreciation] during the coming week. <sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Major-General K. L. Stewart, CB, CBE, DSO; GSO 1, **2nd NZ Division**, 1940–41; Deputy Chief of the General Staff (in NZ), 1941–43; commanded 5th Brigade, Aug—Nov 1943, 4th Armoured Brigade, Nov 1943–Mar 1944, and 5th Brigade, Mar—Aug 1944; prisoner of war, **Florence**, 1 Aug 1944; commanded 9th Infantry Brigade ( **J Force**), Nov 1945–Jul 1946; Adjutant-General, **New Zealand Military Forces**, Aug 1946–Mar 1949; Chief of the General Staff, Apr 1949–.

<sup>2</sup> New Zealand officers and NCOs were attached to the **Royal Greek Army** to help train and instruct the Greeks in the use of British weapons.

<sup>3</sup> See *Syria* (No. 136).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 59 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

59

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

6 April 1942

**War Cabinet** is gratified to learn from your telegram of 28 March that there is no sign of unrest or feeling within your Division for its return to New Zealand. We fully realise that when the American division arrives in New Zealand and its presence becomes known, the attitude of your troops may change. We are confident, however, that they will accept your explanation of the strategic reasons which dictate the retention of the 2nd NZEF in the **Middle East** and that they will respond as they have always done.

There is no question at present of the return to New Zealand of any part of your force other than individuals.

We are grateful for the offer of more officers and NCOs and will gladly accept them. Our greatest need is for staff officers, commanding officers, company commanders, and senior NCOs of all arms, and especially in heavy anti-aircraft artillery. We realise that you also are probably short in these categories, and we therefore think it best not to limit your selection by stating the arms and categories required. We can employ all you send, irrespective of rank or arm.

Will you please inform General Puttick of the names of those you are sending, together with the appointment which you consider each man can best fill.

We will send you 200 other ranks in replacement. Please telegraph General Puttick specifying the arms of the service desired. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On 26 Apr **General Freyberg** requested that 175 infantry and 25 signals personnel be sent.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 60 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

60

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

10 July 1942

The present campaign <sup>2</sup> again raises the reinforcement question. At the moment we have 3500 reinforcements available while known casualties as at 9 July amount to approximately 900. We shall be better off than the estimate of 1 August given in my telegram of 5 January (No. 54), and will probably be able to carry on until 1 October, at which date the 2nd NZEF may be up to establishment but no reinforcements may be left.

For purposes of training and future policy I assume the Division is to remain in the **Middle East** for the present. I realise this is a matter for the **New Zealand Government**, but it is perhaps not out of place to say that the Division is most highly thought of and withdrawal would cause dismay at General Headquarters, **Middle East**, especially at the moment, when the **Middle East** garrison is not adequate.

In your telegram of 17 March (No. 57) you warned me that in certain circumstances it might be necessary to reduce the size of the 2nd NZEF. I always have this in mind although, as you will understand, I feel it would be a sad step to break up our existing organisation with all its associations and its great fighting record. As it will be many months before any men can arrive here, and as I shall have to discuss the matter with the Commander-in-Chief, <sup>1</sup> I should like to have some early indication of the **New Zealand Government's** policy.

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<sup>2</sup> See

## *The Battle for Egypt.*

**<sup>1</sup> General Auchinleck.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 61 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM<sup>2</sup> TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

61

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom<sup>2</sup> to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

25 July 1942

The question of keeping the New Zealand Division up to strength has been raised by General Auchinleck. In asking you to consider ways and means of maintaining this splendid unit on its present basis I cannot do better than quote Auchinleck's own words: 'The value to the **Middle East** of a trained, acclimatised force such as the New Zealand Division is very great, and I view its possible reduction at the present stage with great concern.'<sup>3</sup>

The alternatives to the despatch of reinforcements for the existing force would be either to break up the New Zealand Base organisation with its training centres, schools of instruction, &c., or gradually reduce the Division in size. I should be sorry to see either alternative adopted and hope they can be avoided by the despatch of reinforcements from New Zealand.

I think you intended this month to review the possibility of moving your **Army Tank Brigade** to the **Middle East**. If you decided to keep it in New Zealand for the present, I certainly would not press for its despatch overseas.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Prime Ministers of the **United Kingdom** during the war were:

28 May 1937–11  
May 1940

Rt. Hon. Arthur Neville Chamberlain, PC.

**11 May 1940–26 Jul 1945 Rt. Hon. Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill, PC, OM, CH.**

**26 Jul 1945–to date Rt. Hon. C. R. Attlee, PC, CH.**

**<sup>3</sup> This extract is from a cable from General Auchinleck to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (General Sir Alan Brooke), dated 23 Jul.**

**<sup>1</sup> See**

# ***Formation of New Zealand Armoured Brigade.***

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 62 – ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON) TO HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEAF

62

### *Army Headquarters ( Wellington) to Headquarters 2nd NZEF*

**5 August 1942**

**The Government is considering sending reinforcements to you. It is anticipated that approval will be given to: ( a) the despatch at an early date of approximately 2500 or such smaller number as you may recommend as sufficient to meet immediate requirements, and ( b) that a further draft not exceeding 2500 would be made available towards the end of this year.**

**Next year's programme is to depend on future developments in the Middle East and the Pacific.**

**The manpower situation here calls for economy, and we suggest that you examine your Base and keep your recommendations for ( a) and ( b) down to the minimum.**

**Please cable your recommendations as to the size of ( a) and ( b) and the composition of ( a) by arms.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 63 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

63

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

5 August 1942

Your telegram of 25 July ( **No. 61**). The question of the reinforcement of the New Zealand Division in the **Middle East** had already been raised with us by **General Freyberg**, and we have now decided that in spite of our preoccupations as to the defence of New Zealand and possible operations in this part of the world, in connection with which we have been asked to send New Zealand troops to **Pacific** areas, <sup>2</sup> and the really serious questions of manpower that are now confronting us, we must nevertheless, in the meantime at any rate, reinforce the Division. Accordingly, arrangements are being made to despatch a draft as soon as possible.

Will you please give Mr. Nash <sup>1</sup> a copy of this message.

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<sup>2</sup> See Volume III, *Formation and Employment of 3rd New Zealand Division*.

<sup>1</sup> The Hon. W. Nash, New Zealand Minister in **Washington**, was at this time in **London** for discussions on financial and marketing matters. While in **London** he attended meetings of the United Kingdom War Cabinet.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

64 – THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS<sup>2</sup> TO THE  
PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

64

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs<sup>2</sup> to the Prime Minister  
of New Zealand*

6 August 1942

Your telegram of 5 August. His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom** are most grateful to the **New Zealand Government** for their decision to despatch further reinforcements for their Division in the **Middle East**, in spite of their preoccupations with the defence of New Zealand with which we fully sympathise. We ask you to accept our warm thanks and assure you that this further proof of New Zealand's readiness at all times to co-operate with us is the more highly valued.

Mr. Nash has been informed.

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<sup>2</sup> **Rt. Hon. C. R. Attlee**. At this time Mr. Churchill was in Egypt on his way to **Moscow** for conversations with M. Stalin.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 65 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF (WELLINGTON) – [EXTRACT]

65

### *General Freyberg to the Chief of the General Staff ( Wellington) [ Extract]*

**8 August 1942**

Your telegram of 5 August ( **No. 62**) was received with thanks and with much relief.

The policy as to where the New Zealand Expeditionary Force is to fight is purely a matter for the **New Zealand Government**. However, I must make administrative plans ahead, and for these purposes it would appear that it is the intention to keep the 2nd NZEF in the **Middle East** for at least another six months. During that period the 2nd New Zealand Division must be available for such active service as is required of it.

The estimated 'total loss' to date is 3250, made up of killed, died of wounds, missing, and one-third of the wounded. On that basis the reinforcement position at the moment shows a small surplus of 150, which is negligible. It is obvious that casualties in the present action are not yet finished. 'Total loss' is increasing daily.

The next draft can presumably not arrive before the middle of October and will require acclimatisation and training before they are employed forward. They will be available for absorption about November, *i.e.*, in about four months time. This draft when it arrives will only compensate for losses in the four months preceding its arrival and will not be available as hitherto to meet losses in the next following four months.

In other words, the 2nd NZEF will show a steady fall below

establishment from now on until the draft arrives and will then momentarily be up to establishment again.

The full draft of 2500 thus cannot really meet the requirements of keeping the force up to establishment for the period following its arrival, but will only compensate for losses already incurred.

You will thus appreciate that with active operations ahead from now onward it will be necessary to ask that the full 2500 in both cases be sent. In fact, to put us in the very satisfactory position occupied hitherto, we would require a first draft of about 4700, of which 2500 would bring us up to establishment on the date of arrival and 2200 would allow for wastage in the following three months, *i.e.*, until the arrival of the next draft.

Base establishments have already been combed out here and depots left with minimum staffs pending the arrival of reinforcements.

We will have, therefore, to leave the size of the draft to be fixed by the Government at the highest figure that the manpower situation will allow.... <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Details of the composition of the draft have been omitted.

On 29 Aug War Cabinet approved the despatch to the Middle East of 5500 men, inclusive of a tank battalion and a proportion of technical personnel. Headquarters 2nd NZEF was advised of this decision on 31 Aug—see *Formation of New Zealand Armoured Brigade (No. 89)*. This draft, the 8th Reinforcements (5492 all ranks) sailed from New Zealand in the *Aquitania* on 12 Dec 1942.

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**DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II**

**FORMATION OF NEW ZEALAND ARMoured BRIGADE**

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

4 October 1940

In the light of the fighting in **Poland** and **France**, a committee under General Bartholomew <sup>1</sup> was set up to consider reorganisation of the Army, and the following recommendations concerning the organisation of a division have been agreed to by the **War Office**:

- (1) The formation of a reconnaissance unit of headquarters and three companies, each consisting of motor-cycles, scout cars, Bren carriers, and infantry in trucks.
- (2) Field Artillery regiments to be three batteries, each of eight guns.
- (3) Divisional anti-tank artillery to be 76 2-pounder guns, twelve on self-propelled mounting with a reconnaissance unit, the remainder in four batteries each of sixteen guns; infantry anti-tank companies to be abolished.
- (4) The addition of one light anti-aircraft artillery regiment of 48 Bofors guns to the division.
- (5) The addition of one 6-inch howitzer regiment to the division.
- (6) One platoon of infantry for the protection of each division and brigade headquarters.
- (7) Battalion mortar platoons to be increased from two to six 3-inch mortars.
- (8) Two-inch mortars in battalions to be increased by one per section of carriers, that is, an extra four.
- (9) Infantry carrier platoons to be increased to fourteen carriers and some motor-cyclists.

My opinion is that the **New Zealand Government** should agree to these changes in principle, leaving the question of implementation to be decided by the availability of equipment.

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<sup>1</sup> General Sir William Henry Bartholomew, GCB, CMG, DSO; GOC-in-C, Northern Command, **York**, 1937–40; North Eastern Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence, 1940–45.

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Details would require consideration but, generally speaking, (1) can be effected when equipment is available and I intend using infantry anti-tank personnel, (2) and (6) can be carried out immediately by me, (3), (7), (8), and (9) can be effected when equipment and personnel are available. While agreeing that the inclusion of (4) and (5) would increase the fighting power of the Division, I consider their provision at the moment, apart from additional expense, is not so important. They could be provided, starting with a battery of each. In any case, the weapons themselves will not be ready for many months.

While agreeing that New Zealand should adhere to the British organisation wherever possible, I feel that the above proposals do not go far enough in one respect as the Division would still lack mobile hitting and holding power. I suggest that a cruiser tank unit is wanted. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff <sup>1</sup> originally suggested that although this would be an advantage it would be better to wait until a general change could be made. Later in the discussion he agreed that there was no reason why the New Zealand Expeditionary Force should not depart from the normal by adding a unit to the divisional organisation under the nomenclature of Corps troops, as already done by us in the case of the Machine Gun Battalion and **Reserve Mechanical Transport Company**, and by the Canadians who have already added brigade reconnaissance groups, &c. I strongly recommend therefore that, in addition to the nine agreed changes, the addition of a battalion of cruiser tanks be made enabling me to regroup the 2nd NZEF by making an armoured brigade consisting of:

- (i) **Divisional Cavalry Regiment**—already in existence but to be re-equipped with scout cars and carriers.
- (ii) Cruiser tank battalion—additional.
- (iii) 27th Machine Gun Battalion—already in existence.
- (iv) Battalion of infantry in the section existing for **Reserve Mechanical Transport Company**—this will not need any increase as there are already ten battalions in the Division.
- (v) To this group can be attached a regiment from the Divisional Artillery.

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<sup>1</sup> **Chiefs of the Imperial General Staff during the war were:**

**7 Sep 1939 – 26 May 1940**      **Field-Marshal Lord Ironside**, GCB, CMG, DSO (then General Sir William Edmund Ironside).

**27 May 1940 – 24 Dec 1941**      **Field-Marshal Sir John Greer Dill**, GCB, CMG, DSO (then General Sir John Dill). Head of British Joint Staff Mission, **Washington**, 1942–death, 4 Nov 1944.

**25 Dec 1941 – 25 Jun 1946**      **Field-Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke**, KG, GCB, OM, DSO (in 1941, General Sir Alan Francis Brooke).

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**General Wavell, with whom I have talked over the above recommendations, is in complete agreement with the proposals as outlined by me. With such a brigade the Division would be a most formidable fighting formation, well fitted to undertake any operation in the **Western Desert** with an undoubted reduction in casualties. Doubtless you will receive through the Liaison Officer further advice from the **War Office**.** <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **Subsequent telegrams from the New Zealand Liaison Officer in **London** to Army Headquarters ( **Wellington**) contained details of the reorganisation and have not been reproduced in this volume.**

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**67**

### ***The Prime Minister to General Freyberg***

**18 October 1940**

**Your telegrams of 4 and 8 October.** <sup>2</sup>

**We have as yet received no communication from the **War Office** but, assuming it concurs, the Government approve all changes in principle, the changes to be made as and when equipment becomes available. We**

**presume that you will form the new units and find the increases from personnel already overseas. Should this course be followed, will the reinforcement programme already arranged cover requirements, that is, 6500 4th Reinforcements and 6500 5th Reinforcements?** <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> **General Freyberg's telegram of 8 Oct is not published. In it he estimated the numbers of officers and other ranks required to meet the nine recommendations of the Bartholomew report and his own supplementary recommendations.**

<sup>3</sup> **See**

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*Headquarters 2nd NZEF to the Prime Minister*

21 October 1940

Your telegram of 18 October.

The reinforcement programme already arranged is adequate. We would form the units from personnel overseas.

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*New Zealand Military Liaison Officer ( London) to the Minister of Defence*

4 December 1940

The views of the **War Office** on **General Freyberg's** proposals to form an armoured brigade are as follows:

The War Office strongly approve of the desire of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force to have its own armoured formation. It is considered preferable in the existing circumstances to send to the Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, fully trained reinforcements from the **United Kingdom**, instead of relying on training from the beginning troops in the **Middle East** to make up armoured formations. It would be wrong policy to equip a New Zealand armoured brigade by drawing upon equipment scheduled for trained troops from the **United Kingdom**, who can effectively man tanks soon after they have been issued.

New sources of tank supply must be tapped to equip a New Zealand armoured brigade, or else the issue of equipment to the brigade must take its place in the present production programme when the state of training of the New Zealand troops justifies its introduction. It is possible that **General Freyberg** has underestimated the time it takes to train a tank soldier from the beginning. Events in the **Middle East** in the



near future also seem likely to render reorganisation and training there a difficult matter.

Therefore, the formation of a New Zealand armoured brigade must be considered a comparatively long-term project. The source from which equipment could be supplied would be a matter for discussion after the **New Zealand Government** have expressed their views generally on the scheme. In the meantime, the following suggestions on the organisation which could be adopted for a New Zealand armoured brigade are put forward. The brigade should include an armoured car regiment, two armoured regiments, and a machine gun battalion, with the necessary workshop repair organisations, &c.

These views have been communicated direct to **General Freyberg** by the **War Office**.

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*The Rt. Hon. P. Fraser (Cairo) to the acting Prime Minister of New Zealand*<sup>1</sup>

23 May 1941

General Williams's movements have now been altered,<sup>2</sup> and he expects to leave **Cairo** on Friday 23 May, staying two days at **Basra**, a week at **Singapore**, and arriving at Darwin on 7 June and **Sydney** on 9 June. He will then stay a week in **Australia**, arriving in New Zealand on 15 June. I have had a preliminary discussion with him on general questions and in particular on manpower. He strongly recommends the immediate institution in New Zealand of a school of instruction for armoured fighting vehicles, which would give us the additional advantage of obtaining some forty tanks for training purposes in New Zealand, and which could be used in operations if the necessity arose. This would [mean] our agreeing to raise a tank brigade, for which about half the men required are already allowed for and are in Egypt. If the proposal to reform the **Anzac Corps** is adhered to we would be required to produce our proportion of Corps troops, and the additional commitment

of manpower for these troops and for the complete tank brigade would amount to 7000 men to be allowed for this year. On the other hand, the return to active service of sick and wounded, which has not been provided for in our manpower calculations, will reduce the total number of 16,000 per annum formerly adopted to 10,000 per annum, and as the reinforcement required for Corps troops and the tank brigade would normally amount to 3000 per annum, this would make a total estimated annual reinforcement from 1942 onwards of 13,000, as against our previous estimate of 16,000. <sup>3</sup>

General Williams will also have proposals for an armoured division amounting to some 25,000 men to be supplied from New Zealand, probably from the Territorial forces, if and when the Far Eastern situation warrants sending these troops abroad. However, he has temporarily abandoned this proposal, which will, no doubt, be raised with me in **London**, and to which it seems to me there are insuperable objections. My own feeling is that we would be expected to provide our proportion of Corps troops, and I am favourably disposed towards the tank brigade proposals which have already been approved and partially provided for; further, training in New Zealand has clear defence advantages. But I think that these matters would be entirely for consideration in **Wellington**, and I am advising you of the facts in order that you may give the matter preliminary consideration before General Williams arrives. Meanwhile, as a tank brigade of some kind obviously will be required by the New Zealand Division, I have approved the training here of the necessary instructors, some 100 men, who, if the proposal to train the brigade in New Zealand is not proceeded with, will be utilised here. I have not yet discussed these proposals with **Freyberg**, who may perhaps object to the training of the tank brigade in New Zealand, but the advantages of this course are so great that I hope to obtain his approval when I meet him.

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<sup>1</sup> Hon. W. Nash.

<sup>2</sup> A telegram from Mr. Fraser (in **Cairo**) on 19 May advised the **New Zealand Government** of the probable dates of General Williams's departure from the **Middle East** and arrival in **Australia**.

<sup>3</sup> See

71

*The acting Prime Minister to the Rt. Hon. P. Fraser ( Cairo)*

**6 June 1941**

**Even allowing for the return of sick and wounded, we cannot reconcile our calculations with the figure of 10,000 given in your telegram of 23 May as the annual wastage of the present New Zealand Expeditionary Force.**

**Colonel Conway is expected back shortly and we propose to defer consideration of this question until his arrival. It is felt that he will have participated in the discussions and will be able to elaborate your calculations.**

72

*The Rt. Hon. P. Fraser ( Cairo) to the acting Prime Minister of New Zealand*

*[ Extract]*

**9 June 1941**

**During my talks with General Williams we discussed a quite impracticable scheme from Dill <sup>1</sup> providing for the formation by New Zealand of an armoured division, which would number 28,000, for service overseas after the threat of danger to the Dominion has passed....**

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**<sup>1</sup> General Sir John Dill, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.**

**<sup>2</sup> A personal reference has been omitted.**

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**After discussion with Conway and myself, General Williams abandoned the idea of the armoured division as being beyond our**

capacity, although he said I would be confronted with the suggestion in **London**.

The question of the Tank Brigade and Corps troops was also discussed with Williams and Conway. I want **War Cabinet** to discuss both questions on their merits, having due regard to the manpower and industrial position.

The formation of an **Anzac Corps** composed of one New Zealand and one Australian division has been agreed to in principle, although the matter has not yet been decided between the New Zealand and Australian Governments.... <sup>1</sup>

With regard to the Tank Brigade, Williams said that if the training of men for overseas were done in New Zealand then up to forty tanks could be provided from the **United Kingdom**. If this is not over-optimistic and is agreed to by Dill and the **War Office** when I reach **London**, the tanks will be a great contribution to the defence of New Zealand and the scheme is good. The effect on manpower of both Corps troops and **Army Tank Brigade** will be explained in detail by Conway, but it would appear that with Corps troops and the **Army Tank Brigade** the manpower limit will have been reached by the end of 1943.

**Freyberg** subsequently agreed that the training of the Tank Brigade can be carried out in New Zealand with advantage if tanks are made available there. The necessary instructors must be sent to New Zealand from the school in the **Middle East** after training. Although not sure whether this can be done, he will, if possible, get New Zealand instructors trained in time.

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<sup>1</sup> A reference to New Zealand's contribution of Corps troops has been omitted. See also

73

*Headquarters 2nd NZEF to Army Headquarters ( Wellington)  
[ Extract]*

25 June 1941

Your telegram of 20 June. <sup>2</sup>

The formation of the Tank Brigade was agreed to in principle by the Prime Minister, but he stated that the final decision would not be made until the New Zealand authorities had investigated the implications and had consulted him by cable.

The Prime Minister also agreed that New Zealand should find its quota of Corps troops but on the same understanding as above.... <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See *Proposed Formation of Australian and New Zealand Army Corps* (No. 20).

<sup>1</sup> See *Proposed Formation of Australian and New Zealand Army Corps* (No. 23) for complete text.

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74

*The acting Prime Minister to the Rt. Hon. P. Fraser ( London)*

9 July 1941

This morning **War Cabinet** had a discussion with General Williams, who impressed us as being very sound and most helpful. However, his proposals raise real difficulties in regard to manpower. To give effect either to the proposals to provide Corps or Line of Communication troops for overseas or to his proposals for the **Territorial Force** would involve calling up married men by September this year. We feel there are sound

reasons, both practical and political, why this step should not be taken for the present.

It is felt, however, that we should form the **Army Tank Brigade** to be trained in New Zealand, and we are now awaiting a reply from **Freyberg** to the telegram which I repeated to you today.<sup>2</sup> It may of course be necessary to talk further about reinforcements, but this should not affect the main decision, which is well within our commitment under the old scale. It is suggested that you discuss immediately with the **War Office** the question of releasing the equipment for training the **Army Tank Brigade**. I understand that a list of this equipment was given to you in Egypt by General Williams.

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<sup>2</sup> See *Reinforcement of 2nd NZEF, 1940–42* (No. 48).

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75

*The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

31 July 1941

Formal approval has now been given by **War Cabinet** to the formation of the **Army Tank Brigade** as proposed in FFC 36.<sup>3</sup> Instructions have been given that preparations should be put in hand forthwith to call up the 3200 men required.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See page 13, note 3.

<sup>4</sup> This telegram was repeated to Mr. Fraser in **London**.

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*General Freyberg to the acting Prime Minister*

1 August 1941

I am pleased that approval has been given to the formation of the

**Army Tank Brigade. Are Signals, Army Service Corps, Medical, and Ordnance units for the Brigade included in the figures of the men called up, as we make the total required 3532, including officers?**

**Seven officers and 66 other ranks sail for New Zealand today as instructors for the Armoured Fighting Vehicle School.**

**77**

***Army Headquarters ( Wellington) to Headquarters 2nd NZEF***

**4 August 1941**

**Your telegram of 1 August to the acting Prime Minister.**

**Steps to select officers for the **Army Tank Brigade** are now being taken and it is desired to have your recommendations for any appointments, especially those of Brigade Commander and battalion commanders. Regular and Territorial officers in New Zealand will be considered along with those recommended by you. <sup>1</sup>**

**The Brigade will be trained in New Zealand <sup>2</sup> and will proceed overseas about the end of March next year.**

**The disparity in our respective totals is due apparently to the non-inclusion here of the Tank Transporter Company which is included in Corps troops.**

**The formation of Corps troops is still being considered.**

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<sup>1</sup> **A number of telegrams on the appointment of officers for the **Army Tank Brigade** were exchanged at this stage but have not been reproduced. The Brigade Commander was Brigadier G. B. Parkinson, who commanded the 4th NZ Field Regiment at the time of his appointment. He returned to New Zealand in Nov 1941.**

<sup>2</sup> **At Waiouru.**

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*The acting Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs* <sup>3</sup>

*[ Extract ]*

**4 September 1941**

**After full consultation with their Military Adviser, General Sir Guy Williams, His Majesty's Government in New Zealand have now given careful consideration to FFC 36. Arising from these proposals and the recommendations of General Williams, it has been decided to make provision, in addition to this Dominion's existing manpower commitments, for an additional 3500 men for an **Army Tank Brigade**, plus an additional 2000 men for Corps and Line of Communication troops.... <sup>1</sup> The provision of the rest of the proposals of FFC 36 is still under consideration.**

**The Home Defence forces here are being reorganised and brought up to the standard of overseas troops, with a view to providing one force from which reinforcements for overseas can be obtained and, at the same time, a more adequately trained and organised body for the defence of the Dominion. In view of the heavy manpower commitments, which are proving and will increasingly prove a very heavy strain on the resources of the Dominion, and the complete inadequacy of the present fighting and training equipment in this country, His Majesty's Government in New Zealand lay particular emphasis on the defence equipment required. It is desired to stress also that, unlike the other Dominions, New Zealand is unable to manufacture essential arms for its own use and therefore is dependent almost entirely on overseas sources for these defence needs. Furthermore, in order that the troops proceeding overseas will be trained with the same type of fighting equipment as will be made available to them on arrival overseas, New Zealand's immediate training programme requires modern equipment. For these reasons, and most particularly because of the existing great scarcity of fighting equipment in the country, His Majesty's Government**

in New Zealand press strongly for the earliest priority in the undermentioned items of equipment already on order. The figures quoted are inclusive of all equipment already approved for release.

Rifles and bayonets	38,000
Anti-tank rifles	582
Bren guns	2500
Two-pounder or six-pounder anti-tank guns, latter preferred	48
Bofors guns	64
3.7-inch anti-aircraft guns	16
Light tanks, for preference US Pattern M.3- 12½ ton	170
6-inch guns for fixed defences (with agreed scale of ammunition for artillery weapons)	10

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<sup>3</sup> Viscount Cranborne.

<sup>1</sup> The text omitted contained details of these proposals in terms of FFC 36, giving the serial numbers of each unit and the dates at which they would be ready to go overseas.

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79

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Prime Minister of New Zealand* <sup>1</sup>  
[ Extract ]

18 September 1941

Your telegram of 4 September.

The further units of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force which His Majesty's Government in New Zealand have decided to offer for service overseas, are warmly welcomed by His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom**, who deeply appreciate the spirit which has prompted the offer. We shall await with interest the result of the further consideration being given to the remainder of the proposals in FFC 36.

The proposals regarding the Home Defence forces are also noted with interest. As regards equipment, considerable quantities of some of the items required have already been released and the possibilities of supplying the remainder are now being considered....<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Fraser had returned to New Zealand from the **United Kingdom** on 14 Sep.

<sup>2</sup> The text omitted contained references to other telegrams concerning New Zealand's fixed defences and naval ammunition requirements.

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80

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs*<sup>3</sup> to the Prime Minister of New Zealand

3 March 1942

With reference to your telegram of 12 October.<sup>4</sup> It was contemplated that the New Zealand **Army Tank Brigade** would be ready to go overseas this month. In the present circumstances it is suggested that the Brigade remain in New Zealand until July, when the matter should be reconsidered.

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<sup>3</sup> The **Rt. Hon. C. R. Attlee** had succeeded Viscount Cranborne as Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs in Feb 1942.

<sup>4</sup> Not published. This telegram contained amendments to FFC 36 details given in that section of the text of **No. 78** which is not published here. The changes were made as a result of representations from Headquarters 2nd NZEF on the order in which units were required in the **Middle East**.

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*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for*

9 March 1942

Your telegram of 3 March. We agree that in the present circumstances the New Zealand **Army Tank Brigade** be held in the Dominion until July, when its despatch overseas can be reviewed in the light of the strategic situation in the **Pacific** at that time.

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*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

8 August 1942

In your telegram of 11 March <sup>1</sup> you said that the decision to retain the Armoured Brigade in New Zealand would be reviewed in July 1942. In Libya last November and in the recent fighting our infantry brigades have been overrun by tanks on three occasions, with heavy casualties, especially prisoners. <sup>2</sup> We have felt keenly the lack of our own armoured component. I am endeavouring to obtain some Grant tanks for the Divisional Cavalry which would be a help, but the Armoured Brigade would of course strengthen us immensely in attack and defence. I would therefore be very grateful to have an indication from you as to the possibility of the Armoured Brigade being despatched to us. The New Zealand Government may consider that the tanks should be retained, but would they then agree to send trained personnel, in which case I am certain equipment could be made available for them from the **Middle East** pool.

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<sup>1</sup> On 11 Mar General Puttick had advised Headquarters 2nd NZEF of the postponed despatch of the **Army Tank Brigade**, in similar terms to **No. 81**.

<sup>2</sup> The three occasions were **Belhamed** (Nov–Dec 1941), **Ruweisat Ridge** (15 Jul 1942), and **El Mreir Depression** (22 Jul 1942).

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## *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

14 August 1942

Your telegram of 25 July. <sup>3</sup>

**General Freyberg** has now asked whether the **Army Tank Brigade** could be sent to Egypt. He suggests that if the Valentine tanks (of which we have 120) cannot be spared, the Brigade could probably be equipped there. To assist us in considering the question we would like advice on this point. We understand the power and value of this brigade whether in New Zealand or in the **Middle East**, but we are not in a position to appreciate fully the relative claims of the **Middle East** and of the defence of New Zealand.

With the reservation that he has insufficient information, the Chief of the General Staff here suggests that in all the circumstances the Brigade should be sent to the **Middle East** with all the tanks available at the date of despatch, less 40 to 60 to be retained in New Zealand, and with the proviso that the despatch to New Zealand of General Stuart tanks (of which we have 24) should be hastened as far as possible; also, that the strain on our manpower could be reduced by not sending reinforcements to the Brigade and by requiring the Division to adopt the organisation of one tank brigade and two infantry brigades in due course. A broad survey of the situation as it affects the problem would greatly help us in reaching a decision.

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<sup>3</sup> See *Reinforcement of 2nd NZEF, 1940–42* (No. 61).

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84

## *The Minister of Defence to General Freyberg*

14 August 1942

Your telegram of 8 August ( **No. 82**) is being considered by **War**

**Cabinet.** We have informed **London** of your proposal and have asked for a broad survey of the situation as it affects the problem and for information whether tanks would be available in Egypt. The Chief of the General Staff suggests that if the Brigade is to be sent it should be on the understanding that reinforcements for it will not be despatched subsequently, and that ultimately you could adopt the British organisation of one tank brigade and two infantry brigades to meet the position that would arise. He also suggests that all the tanks available at the date of despatch should accompany the brigade, less 40 to 60 to be retained here. We would like your comments and also any definite information as to whether tanks would be available in Egypt.

**85**

*The Chief of the General Staff ( Wellington) to General Freyberg*

**16 August 1942**

Your telegram of 8 August ( **No. 82**) raises a question of great difficulty both of policy and of manpower. **War Cabinet** consider that the situation in the **Pacific** might well be critical and that they must be prepared for an attack on **Fiji** and **New Caledonia**, and on New Zealand itself. They are of the opinion that the maintenance of your Division, plus the **Army Tank Brigade**, and the necessity for maintaining strong forces here, both for local defence and possibly for operations in the **Pacific** directly affecting the security of New Zealand, would place an intolerable burden on our already greatly attenuated manpower. They cannot provide all these requirements to the full and are considering what is the utmost they can do so far as the **Middle East** is concerned. In these circumstances I have suggested that in order to have your own armour you might prefer to modify the present Divisional organisation. Cabinet have agreed to my obtaining your opinion on the following alternatives, or any others you may suggest, to assist them in deciding what they can send you, but without committing them in any way:

**Firstly: 4700 reinforcements and one tank battalion, plus details.**

**Secondly: 2500 reinforcements and the Tank Brigade, on the understanding that the Division is reduced to the new British organisation of one armoured brigade and two infantry brigades, plus of course the usual divisional troops. I have pointed out that the second alternative would give you:**

- ( Reinforcements to meet wastage up to the date of arrival.**
  - a)**
  - ( Approximately 2400 reinforcements in hand from the surplus**
    - b) infantry brigade.**
    - ( Probably a considerable reduction in future casualties through**
      - c) having your own armour.**

**I have also stated that, while I think the modified division better suited for country where tanks can operate fully, the three infantry brigades would be preferable in enclosed or mountain country. I could, of course, offer no opinion as to the prospects of your operating in the latter type of country. As regards the question of tanks accompanying the battalion or brigade, **War Cabinet** would like definite information whether or not tanks, together with associated equipment, would be available in Egypt immediately on the arrival of the Brigade. We have, as you know, 120 Valentines, plus 20 on the water and more released from production. I have 24 General Stuart tanks, with 24 on the water and large numbers released, and consider that if the Valentines go to you I should hold 40 to 60 Valentines to support my General Stuart tanks. I would also prefer to send the minimum of ancillary services and their equipment because of shortages for the armour remaining here. I suggest you forward your observations urgently, reserving if necessary the question of the tanks themselves until you are able to get definite information.**

**Any serious deterioration in the **Pacific** situation in the meantime would, of course, affect the whole question.**

**20 August 1942**

**Your telegram of 16 August.**

**I realise your difficulties and appreciate the Government's efforts to help in submitting alternative schemes.**

**I prefer your first suggestion of 4700 reinforcements and one tank battalion.**

**One infantry brigade, probably the 4th, would be reorganised as a tank brigade, each battalion becoming a tank battalion.**

**The tank battalion sent from New Zealand would, I am afraid, have to be split up to form a nucleus for the three battalions to be formed here, but care will be taken to see that all ranks, up to and including the commanding officer, are employed in positions worthy of their rank and experience.**

**In the change-over of the present Division, I would propose to retain the Maori and Machine Gun Battalions and to turn the Divisional Cavalry into a reconnaissance regiment.**

**The training of technical personnel will have to be set in hand at an early date. In this respect I realise the position that must exist in New Zealand regarding technicians and can only leave it to you to help as much as you can.**

**The question of the availability of equipment here is being taken up with General Headquarters, **Middle East**, but I consider it essential that concurrently the **New Zealand Government** should approach the United Kingdom Government in the matter.**

**Details will be worked out by Stevens once the Government has agreed in principle. An early decision would be of great help.**

**87**

***The Chief of the General Staff ( Wellington) to General Freyberg***



**22 August 1942**

**I am referring your telegram of 20 August to War Cabinet who will no doubt require my comments. I think you should know these in case you wish to reply to them. They are as follows:**

**The Tank Brigade has been well trained for twelve months, especially technically. The latter takes a long time, many trades are involved and [tradesmen] difficult to get even here. Over 50 per cent of the battalions alone are tradesmen. I anticipate that Freyberg will have extreme difficulty in raising sufficient technicians to expand one tank battalion to a full brigade.**

**If one tank battalion goes it must have its proportion of repair and maintenance troops. This involves a considerable upset in the present formation. We cannot send more than the due proportion without accentuating the present difficulty concerning tradesmen in all New Zealand formations.**

**The expanded tank brigade in Egypt will not be effective for months, during perhaps a critical period when the Division would have neither a tank brigade nor a third infantry brigade. It is doubtful if the tank brigade formed in Egypt could approach the efficiency of the existing tank brigade for twelve months, even if it could find sufficient technicians, &c. The splitting up of a fine tank battalion on arrival largely sacrifices the progress achieved and is likely to cause feeling, while the remainder of the Brigade in New Zealand will be disgruntled at being left behind.**

**From the New Zealand Army point of view, the draw-off of farmers, industry, &c., is so severe that the despatch of the full 4700 reinforcements will have an increased adverse effect on home defence.**

**These reinforcements will include many married men drawn in an overseas ballot many months later than the Tank Brigade, which consists of single men due for overseas next after the 7th Reinforcements.**

**I cannot see any advantage in Freyberg's proposal other than:**

- ( Men posted from the infantry brigade to form the tank brigade will**
  - a) have had war service as infantry.**
- ( It is easier to dispose of the officers and NCOs of the infantry brigade**
  - b) if absorbed by the tank brigade than if used as reinforcements, and disappointment and feeling at loss of identity of units would be reduced.**

**In my opinion these advantages are negligible compared to the disadvantages involved and the advantages in sending the Tank Brigade from here. Officers and NCOs from the surplus infantry brigade should greatly strengthen the other brigades by providing experienced men to meet casualties and should not take long to absorb in formations, Base, and courses.**

**My conclusions are that if the Division is to have a tank brigade the best course is:**

- ( Send the Tank Brigade complete. The reserve held to meet wastage**
  - a) here provides sufficient personnel to man 40 to 60 tanks which should be retained in New Zealand if tanks accompany the Brigade.**
- ( On the arrival of the Tank Brigade, and after desert training,**
  - b) withdraw the selected infantry brigade from the 2nd NZEF and use as reinforcements.**
- ( Send all tanks, less 40 to 60, with the Brigade unless Freyberg reports**
  - c) that suitable tanks are immediately available in Egypt.**

**If only one tank battalion goes, then the Division should retain its three infantry brigades and not attempt to form a tank brigade.**

**I suggest you give me your comments urgently.**

**88**

***General Freyberg to the Chief of the General Staff ( Wellington)***

**23 August 1942**

**Reference your telegram of 22 August.**

**In replying to your telegram of 16 August ( No. 85) I assumed that**

both your suggestions were considered practicable from the New Zealand point of view and recommended the first as it seemed to cause less dislocation for you and would have avoided breaking up the Brigade here. Having read your latest telegram ( **No. 87**), however, I appreciate your reasons for preferring to send the whole brigade and agree also with the advantages mentioned from our point of view.

In the circumstances, do not press the objection to breaking up the 6th Brigade <sup>1</sup> as the sentimental aspect is, of course, outweighed by the advantage of having an armoured brigade in the Division as soon as possible. Regarding the question of sending tanks with personnel, I am informed by Stevens who saw the new Chief of the General Staff <sup>2</sup> that tanks would be available here.

You will appreciate the present difficulties of communication with **Divisional Headquarters** separated from Headquarters 2nd NZEF.

We have just commenced a period of special vigilance as we expect a German offensive in the next few days. The weather is very hot and there are innumerable flies. The situation has improved here. The troops, although tired, are very cheerful and can be relied upon to do well.

The 4th Brigade is still at **Maadi**.

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<sup>1</sup> The 6th Brigade had been provisionally selected for disbandment had the complete **Army Tank Brigade** been despatched to the **Middle East**.

<sup>2</sup> Major-General R. L. (later General Sir Richard) McCreery, KCB, KBE, DSO, MC, succeeded Lieutenant-General T. W. Corbett, CB, MC, as Chief of the General Staff, **Middle East**, in Aug 1942.

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**31 August 1942**

**The despatch of 5500 men, inclusive of a tank battalion and a proportion of technical personnel, has been approved by War Cabinet, who are also prepared to consider the despatch of tanks for the battalion if equal or better tanks are not available in the Middle East. The question of sending any additional tank battalions or technical reinforcements in future must remain in abeyance in view of the present Pacific situation.**

**The possible date of departure will be telegraphed later. We would like an early reply whether tanks or technical vehicles are actually required.**

**90**

*General Freyberg to the Chief of the General Staff ( Wellington)  
[ Extract]*

**2 September 1942**

**Your telegram of 31 August.**

**You will have realised that the decision to have an armoured component in the 2nd New Zealand Division amends the figures of requirements as given in my telegrams of 8 August <sup>1</sup> and 15 August <sup>2</sup>. For instance, one third of the infantry now becomes Armoured Corps and there is a big increase in ASC.... <sup>3</sup>**

**I am under the impression that with the exception of the tank battalion you will not be able to send any large number of trained New Zealand Armoured Corps personnel, including technicians, but that we will have to train infantry drafts for this purpose. Would you please confirm this.**

**The question of tanks is now under discussion with GHQ and a firm reply should be available in a few days. Present indications are that no tanks will be required from New Zealand.**

As stated in my telegram of 20 August ( **No. 86**) it seems inevitable that the tank battalion will have to be broken up to provide ( *a*) instructors, and ( *b*) a nucleus of trained and skilled personnel for the new regiments here. Would it help you if instead of a completely organised battalion you were to send an equal total of officers, NCOs, tradesmen, and other ranks but merely as drafts that could be drawn from the whole of the **Army Tank Brigade**. Please advise if this appeals to you, and final confirmation will then be cabled from here.

The 4th Infantry Brigade is the one selected for the change to the Armoured Brigade.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Reinforcement of 2nd NZEF, 1940–42* (No. 65).

<sup>2</sup> Not published. Contained details of the composition of the 8th Reinforcement draft, subsequently amended.

<sup>3</sup> Text omitted refers to the preparation and despatch of later telegrams giving details of reinforcement requirements.

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91

*Headquarters 2nd NZEF to Army Headquarters ( Wellington)*

2 September 1942

Reference telegram of 2 September.

General Headquarters state that after consideration they would be very glad to have the tanks, together with any technical vehicles you can spare.

92

*The acting Prime Minister of New Zealand <sup>1</sup> to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs*

**9 September 1942**

It has now been decided to despatch a total of 5500 reinforcements to the **Middle East**, including one battalion of the **Army Tank Brigade** which has been formed in this Dominion. **General Freyberg** has been advised to this effect, and he informs us that he will use this battalion as a nucleus for the formation of an armoured brigade, the 4th New Zealand Infantry Brigade being used for the purpose. Having regard to the very critical position which still obtains in the **Pacific**, it will be appreciated that it was with some reluctance that we decided to despatch the tank battalion, but we are doing this because we wish to increase the measure of protection for the Division in action and at the same time enhance its value as a striking force. We are of course quite willing to send with the tank battalion its complement of Valentines, should this be considered essential, and we understand that General Headquarters, **Middle East**, would be very glad to have them, but we desire to point out that they are in no way a match for the tanks now being used by the enemy in the **Middle East** theatre. We are very concerned, therefore, to ensure that the battalion, and ultimately the Armoured Brigade when formed, are equipped with the most modern tanks available so that in action they may be in all respects equal, if not superior, in their striking power to the forces against which they will be engaged. If our armoured force can be equipped with the best tanks available, as we hope may be the case, then we would not propose to send the Valentine tanks from New Zealand unless you consider it essential.

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<sup>1</sup> **Hon. D. G. Sullivan**, Minister of Industries and Commerce, was acting Prime Minister during the absence of Mr. Fraser in the **United States** and **Canada**. The Prime Minister left New Zealand on 21 Aug and arrived back on 16 Sep. During the visit, which was made at the invitation of President Roosevelt, Mr. Fraser had discussions with the President and attended meetings of the **Pacific War Council**. He also visited the Prime Minister of **Canada**, the Rt. Hon. W. L. Mackenzie King.

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93

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the acting Prime Minister of New Zealand*

11 September 1942

Your telegram of 9 September.

The recent decision of His Majesty's Government in New Zealand to send substantial reinforcements to the **Middle East**, including a battalion of the **Army Tank Brigade**, has been noted with great interest and appreciation. It is a source of great encouragement to His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom** to be able thus to rely on New Zealand's splendid co-operation in this field. The provision of equipment for the New Zealand armoured troops will be the subject of a further reply as early as possible.

94

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

2 October 1942

Further to my telegram of 11 September, the **War Office** agree that the Valentines should not accompany the tank battalion personnel to the **Middle East**. It is proposed ultimately to equip the Armoured Brigade in the same way as the other armoured brigades in the Middle East on Crusader Mark III and Grant and Sherman basis. The Brigade's training equipment is expected to be available in January 1943. <sup>1</sup>

The Chief of the General Staff ( **Wellington**) has been informed direct.

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<sup>1</sup> The 3rd Battalion, 1st **NZ Army Tank Brigade**, left New Zealand with the 8th Reinforcements on 12 Dec 1942. The battalion was disbanded on its arrival in the **Middle East**. The 1st Battalion was retained in New Zealand on home defence until Jun 1943, when

**it was disbanded, most of its personnel being posted to the 9th and 10th Reinforcements. The 2nd Battalion, originally intended to form part of the 3rd Division, was also disbanded in Jul 1943. About 270 officers and men from the 2nd Battalion formed the 3rd Division Tank Squadron and served in the Pacific, while most of the remainder were posted to the 10th Reinforcements and served in the Middle East.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 66 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

66

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

4 October 1940

In the light of the fighting in **Poland** and **France**, a committee under **General Bartholomew** <sup>1</sup> was set up to consider reorganisation of the **Army**, and the following recommendations concerning the organisation of a division have been agreed to by the **War Office**:

- (1) The formation of a reconnaissance unit of headquarters and three companies, each consisting of motor-cycles, scout cars, Bren carriers, and infantry in trucks.
- (2) Field Artillery regiments to be three batteries, each of eight guns.
- (3) Divisional anti-tank artillery to be 76 2-pounder guns, twelve on self-propelled mounting with a reconnaissance unit, the remainder in four batteries each of sixteen guns; infantry anti-tank companies to be abolished.
- (4) The addition of one light anti-aircraft artillery regiment of 48 Bofors guns to the division.
- (5) The addition of one 6-inch howitzer regiment to the division.
- (6) One platoon of infantry for the protection of each division and brigade headquarters.
- (7) Battalion mortar platoons to be increased from two to six 3-inch mortars.
- (8) Two-inch mortars in battalions to be increased by one per section of carriers, that is, an extra four.
- (9) Infantry carrier platoons to be increased to fourteen carriers and some motor-cyclists.

My opinion is that the **New Zealand Government** should agree to these changes in principle, leaving the question of implementation to be decided by the availability of equipment.

<sup>1</sup> General Sir William Henry Bartholomew, GCB, CMG, DSO; GOC-in-C, Northern Command, **York**, 1937–40; North Eastern Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence, 1940–45.

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Details would require consideration but, generally speaking, (1) can be effected when equipment is available and I intend using infantry anti-tank personnel, (2) and (6) can be carried out immediately by me, (3), (7), (8), and (9) can be effected when equipment and personnel are available. While agreeing that the inclusion of (4) and (5) would increase the fighting power of the Division, I consider their provision at the moment, apart from additional expense, is not so important. They could be provided, starting with a battery of each. In any case, the weapons themselves will not be ready for many months.

While agreeing that New Zealand should adhere to the British organisation wherever possible, I feel that the above proposals do not go far enough in one respect as the Division would still lack mobile hitting and holding power. I suggest that a cruiser tank unit is wanted. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff <sup>1</sup> originally suggested that although this would be an advantage it would be better to wait until a general change could be made. Later in the discussion he agreed that there was no reason why the New Zealand Expeditionary Force should not depart from the normal by adding a unit to the divisional organisation under the nomenclature of Corps troops, as already done by us in the case of the Machine Gun Battalion and **Reserve Mechanical Transport Company**, and by the Canadians who have already added brigade reconnaissance groups, &c. I strongly recommend therefore that, in addition to the nine agreed changes, the addition of a battalion of cruiser tanks be made enabling me to regroup the 2nd NZEF by making an armoured brigade consisting of:

- (i) **Divisional Cavalry Regiment**—already in existence but to be re-equipped with scout cars and carriers.
- (ii) **Cruiser tank battalion**—additional.
- (iii) **27th Machine Gun Battalion**—already in existence.

- (iv) **Battalion of infantry in the section existing for Reserve Mechanical Transport Company**—this will not need any increase as there are already ten battalions in the Division.
- (v) To this group can be attached a regiment from the Divisional Artillery.
- 

<sup>1</sup> **Chiefs of the Imperial General Staff during the war were:**

**7 Sep 1939 – 26 May 1940**      **Field-Marshal Lord Ironside, GCB, CMG, DSO (then General Sir William Edmund Ironside).**

**27 May 1940 – 24 Dec 1941**      **Field-Marshal Sir John Greer Dill, GCB, CMG, DSO (then General Sir John Dill). Head of British Joint Staff Mission, Washington, 1942–death, 4 Nov 1944.**

**25 Dec 1941 – 25 Jun 1946**      **Field-Marshal Viscount Alanbrooke, KG, GCB, OM, DSO (in 1941, General Sir Alan Francis Brooke).**

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**General Wavell, with whom I have talked over the above recommendations, is in complete agreement with the proposals as outlined by me. With such a brigade the Division would be a most formidable fighting formation, well fitted to undertake any operation in the Western Desert with an undoubted reduction in casualties. Doubtless you will receive through the Liaison Officer further advice from the War Office.** <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **Subsequent telegrams from the New Zealand Liaison Officer in London to Army Headquarters (Wellington) contained details of the reorganisation and have not been reproduced in this volume.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 67 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

67

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

18 October 1940

Your telegrams of 4 and 8 October. <sup>2</sup>

We have as yet received no communication from the **War Office** but, assuming it concurs, the Government approve all changes in principle, the changes to be made as and when equipment becomes available. We presume that you will form the new units and find the increases from personnel already overseas. Should this course be followed, will the reinforcement programme already arranged cover requirements, that is, 6500 4th Reinforcements and 6500 5th Reinforcements? <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> **General Freyberg's** telegram of 8 Oct is not published. In it he estimated the numbers of officers and other ranks required to meet the nine recommendations of the Bartholomew report and his own supplementary recommendations.

<sup>3</sup> See

## ***Reinforcement of 2nd NZEF, 1940–42.***

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

68 – HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEF TO THE PRIME MINISTER

68

*Headquarters 2nd NZEF to the Prime Minister*

**21 October 1940**

**Your telegram of 18 October.**

**The reinforcement programme already arranged is adequate. We would form the units from personnel overseas.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 69 – NEW ZEALAND MILITARY LIAISON OFFICER (LONDON) TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

69

### *New Zealand Military Liaison Officer ( London) to the Minister of Defence*

4 December 1940

The views of the **War Office** on **General Freyberg's** proposals to form an armoured brigade are as follows:

The War Office strongly approve of the desire of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force to have its own armoured formation. It is considered preferable in the existing circumstances to send to the Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, fully trained reinforcements from the **United Kingdom**, instead of relying on training from the beginning troops in the **Middle East** to make up armoured formations. It would be wrong policy to equip a New Zealand armoured brigade by drawing upon equipment scheduled for trained troops from the **United Kingdom**, who can effectively man tanks soon after they have been issued.

New sources of tank supply must be tapped to equip a New Zealand armoured brigade, or else the issue of equipment to the brigade must take its place in the present production programme when the state of training of the New Zealand troops justifies its introduction. It is possible that **General Freyberg** has underestimated the time it takes to train a tank soldier from the beginning. Events in the **Middle East** in the near future also seem likely to render reorganisation and training there a difficult matter.

Therefore, the formation of a New Zealand armoured brigade must be considered a comparatively long-term project. The source from which

equipment could be supplied would be a matter for discussion after the **New Zealand Government** have expressed their views generally on the scheme. In the meantime, the following suggestions on the organisation which could be adopted for a New Zealand armoured brigade are put forward. The brigade should include an armoured car regiment, two armoured regiments, and a machine gun battalion, with the necessary workshop repair organisations, &c.

These views have been communicated direct to **General Freyberg** by the **War Office**.



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 70 – THE RT. HON. P. FRASER (CAIRO) TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND<sup>1</sup>

70

*The Rt. Hon. P. Fraser (Cairo) to the acting Prime Minister of New Zealand*<sup>1</sup>

23 May 1941

General Williams's movements have now been altered,<sup>2</sup> and he expects to leave **Cairo** on Friday 23 May, staying two days at **Basra**, a week at **Singapore**, and arriving at Darwin on 7 June and **Sydney** on 9 June. He will then stay a week in **Australia**, arriving in New Zealand on 15 June. I have had a preliminary discussion with him on general questions and in particular on manpower. He strongly recommends the immediate institution in New Zealand of a school of instruction for armoured fighting vehicles, which would give us the additional advantage of obtaining some forty tanks for training purposes in New Zealand, and which could be used in operations if the necessity arose. This would [mean] our agreeing to raise a tank brigade, for which about half the men required are already allowed for and are in Egypt. If the proposal to reform the **Anzac Corps** is adhered to we would be required to produce our proportion of Corps troops, and the additional commitment of manpower for these troops and for the complete tank brigade would amount to 7000 men to be allowed for this year. On the other hand, the return to active service of sick and wounded, which has not been provided for in our manpower calculations, will reduce the total number of 16,000 per annum formerly adopted to 10,000 per annum, and as the reinforcement required for Corps troops and the tank brigade would normally amount to 3000 per annum, this would make a total estimated annual reinforcement from 1942 onwards of 13,000, as against our previous estimate of 16,000.<sup>3</sup>

General Williams will also have proposals for an armoured division amounting to some 25,000 men to be supplied from New Zealand, probably from the Territorial forces, if and when the Far Eastern situation warrants sending these troops abroad. However, he has temporarily abandoned this proposal, which will, no doubt, be raised with me in **London**, and to which it seems to me there are insuperable objections. My own feeling is that we would be expected to provide our proportion of Corps troops, and I am favourably disposed towards the tank brigade proposals which have already been approved and partially provided for; further, training in New Zealand has clear defence advantages. But I think that these matters would be entirely for consideration in **Wellington**, and I am advising you of the facts in order that you may give the matter preliminary consideration before General Williams arrives. Meanwhile, as a tank brigade of some kind obviously will be required by the New Zealand Division, I have approved the training here of the necessary instructors, some 100 men, who, if the proposal to train the brigade in New Zealand is not proceeded with, will be utilised here. I have not yet discussed these proposals with **Freyberg**, who may perhaps object to the training of the tank brigade in New Zealand, but the advantages of this course are so great that I hope to obtain his approval when I meet him.

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<sup>1</sup> Hon. W. Nash.

<sup>2</sup> A telegram from Mr. Fraser (in **Cairo**) on 19 May advised the **New Zealand Government** of the probable dates of General Williams's departure from the **Middle East** and arrival in **Australia**.

<sup>3</sup> See

## ***Reinforcement of 2nd NZEF, 1940–42.***

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

71 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER TO THE RT. HON. P. FRASER (CAIRO)

71

*The acting Prime Minister to the Rt. Hon. P. Fraser ( Cairo)*

**6 June 1941**

**Even allowing for the return of sick and wounded, we cannot reconcile our calculations with the figure of 10,000 given in your telegram of 23 May as the annual wastage of the present New Zealand Expeditionary Force.**

**Colonel Conway is expected back shortly and we propose to defer consideration of this question until his arrival. It is felt that he will have participated in the discussions and will be able to elaborate your calculations.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 72 – THE RT. HON. P. FRASER (CAIRO) TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND – [EXTRACT]

72

*The Rt. Hon. P. Fraser ( Cairo) to the acting Prime Minister of New  
Zealand*

*[ Extract]*

9 June 1941

During my talks with General Williams we discussed a quite impracticable scheme from Dill <sup>1</sup> providing for the formation by New Zealand of an armoured division, which would number 28,000, for service overseas after the threat of danger to the Dominion has passed....

<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> General Sir John Dill, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

<sup>2</sup> A personal reference has been omitted.

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After discussion with Conway and myself, General Williams abandoned the idea of the armoured division as being beyond our capacity, although he said I would be confronted with the suggestion in **London**.

The question of the Tank Brigade and Corps troops was also discussed with Williams and Conway. I want **War Cabinet** to discuss both questions on their merits, having due regard to the manpower and industrial position.

The formation of an **Anzac Corps** composed of one New Zealand and one Australian division has been agreed to in principle, although the

**matter has not yet been decided between the New Zealand and Australian Governments....** <sup>1</sup>

**With regard to the Tank Brigade, Williams said that if the training of men for overseas were done in New Zealand then up to forty tanks could be provided from the **United Kingdom**. If this is not over-optimistic and is agreed to by Dill and the **War Office** when I reach **London**, the tanks will be a great contribution to the defence of New Zealand and the scheme is good. The effect on manpower of both Corps troops and **Army Tank Brigade** will be explained in detail by Conway, but it would appear that with Corps troops and the **Army Tank Brigade** the manpower limit will have been reached by the end of 1943.**

**Freyberg** subsequently agreed that the training of the Tank Brigade can be carried out in New Zealand with advantage if tanks are made available there. The necessary instructors must be sent to New Zealand from the school in the **Middle East** after training. Although not sure whether this can be done, he will, if possible, get New Zealand instructors trained in time.

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<sup>1</sup> A reference to New Zealand's contribution of Corps troops has been omitted. See also

***Proposed Formation of Australian and New Zealand Army Corps.***

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 73 – HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEF TO ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON) – [EXTRACT]

73

### *Headquarters 2nd NZEF to Army Headquarters ( Wellington)* *[ Extract]*

25 June 1941

Your telegram of 20 June. <sup>2</sup>

The formation of the Tank Brigade was agreed to in principle by the Prime Minister, but he stated that the final decision would not be made until the New Zealand authorities had investigated the implications and had consulted him by cable.

The Prime Minister also agreed that New Zealand should find its quota of Corps troops but on the same understanding as above.... <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See *Proposed Formation of Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (No. 20)*.

<sup>1</sup> See *Proposed Formation of Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (No. 23)* for complete text.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 74 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER TO THE RT. HON. P. FRASER (LONDON)

74

*The acting Prime Minister to the Rt. Hon. P. Fraser ( London)*

9 July 1941

This morning **War Cabinet** had a discussion with General Williams, who impressed us as being very sound and most helpful. However, his proposals raise real difficulties in regard to manpower. To give effect either to the proposals to provide Corps or Line of Communication troops for overseas or to his proposals for the **Territorial Force** would involve calling up married men by September this year. We feel there are sound reasons, both practical and political, why this step should not be taken for the present.

It is felt, however, that we should form the **Army Tank Brigade** to be trained in New Zealand, and we are now awaiting a reply from **Freyberg** to the telegram which I repeated to you today. <sup>2</sup> It may of course be necessary to talk further about reinforcements, but this should not affect the main decision, which is well within our commitment under the old scale. It is suggested that you discuss immediately with the **War Office** the question of releasing the equipment for training the **Army Tank Brigade**. I understand that a list of this equipment was given to you in Egypt by General Williams.

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<sup>2</sup> See *Reinforcement of 2nd NZEF, 1940-42* (No. 48).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 75 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

75

*The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

**31 July 1941**

**Formal approval has now been given by War Cabinet to the formation of the Army Tank Brigade as proposed in FFC 36. <sup>3</sup> Instructions have been given that preparations should be put in hand forthwith to call up the 3200 men required. <sup>4</sup>**

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<sup>3</sup> See page 13, note 3.

<sup>4</sup> This telegram was repeated to Mr. Fraser in London.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 76 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER

76

*General Freyberg to the acting Prime Minister*

**1 August 1941**

**I am pleased that approval has been given to the formation of the Army Tank Brigade. Are Signals, Army Service Corps, Medical, and Ordnance units for the Brigade included in the figures of the men called up, as we make the total required 3532, including officers?**

**Seven officers and 66 other ranks sail for New Zealand today as instructors for the Armoured Fighting Vehicle School.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 77 – ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON) TO HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEAF

77

### *Army Headquarters (Wellington) to Headquarters 2nd NZEF*

4 August 1941

Your telegram of 1 August to the acting Prime Minister.

Steps to select officers for the **Army Tank Brigade** are now being taken and it is desired to have your recommendations for any appointments, especially those of Brigade Commander and battalion commanders. Regular and Territorial officers in New Zealand will be considered along with those recommended by you. <sup>1</sup>

The Brigade will be trained in New Zealand <sup>2</sup> and will proceed overseas about the end of March next year.

The disparity in our respective totals is due apparently to the non-inclusion here of the Tank Transporter Company which is included in Corps troops.

The formation of Corps troops is still being considered.

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<sup>1</sup> A number of telegrams on the appointment of officers for the **Army Tank Brigade** were exchanged at this stage but have not been reproduced. The Brigade Commander was Brigadier G. B. Parkinson, who commanded the 4th NZ Field Regiment at the time of his appointment. He returned to New Zealand in Nov 1941.

<sup>2</sup> At Waiouru.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 78 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS<sup>3</sup> – [EXTRACT]

78

*The acting Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Secretary of State  
for Dominion Affairs*<sup>3</sup>

[ Extract ]

4 September 1941

After full consultation with their Military Adviser, General Sir Guy Williams, His Majesty's Government in New Zealand have now given careful consideration to FFC 36. Arising from these proposals and the recommendations of General Williams, it has been decided to make provision, in addition to this Dominion's existing manpower commitments, for an additional 3500 men for an **Army Tank Brigade**, plus an additional 2000 men for Corps and Line of Communication troops....<sup>1</sup> The provision of the rest of the proposals of FFC 36 is still under consideration.

The Home Defence forces here are being reorganised and brought up to the standard of overseas troops, with a view to providing one force from which reinforcements for overseas can be obtained and, at the same time, a more adequately trained and organised body for the defence of the Dominion. In view of the heavy manpower commitments, which are proving and will increasingly prove a very heavy strain on the resources of the Dominion, and the complete inadequacy of the present fighting and training equipment in this country, His Majesty's Government in New Zealand lay particular emphasis on the defence equipment required. It is desired to stress also that, unlike the other Dominions, New Zealand is unable to manufacture essential arms for its own use and therefore is dependent almost entirely on overseas sources

for these defence needs. Furthermore, in order that the troops proceeding overseas will be trained with the same type of fighting equipment as will be made available to them on arrival overseas, New Zealand's immediate training programme requires modern equipment. For these reasons, and most particularly because of the existing great scarcity of fighting equipment in the country, His Majesty's Government in New Zealand press strongly for the earliest priority in the undermentioned items of equipment already on order. The figures quoted are inclusive of all equipment already approved for release.

<b>Rifles and bayonets</b>	<b>38,000</b>
<b>Anti-tank rifles</b>	<b>582</b>
<b>Bren guns</b>	<b>2500</b>
<b>Two-pounder or six-pounder anti-tank guns, latter preferred</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Bofors guns</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>3.7-inch anti-aircraft guns</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Light tanks, for preference US Pattern M.3- 12½ ton</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>6-inch guns for fixed defences (with agreed scale of ammunition for artillery weapons)</b>	<b>10</b>

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**<sup>3</sup> Viscount Cranborne.**

**<sup>1</sup> The text omitted contained details of these proposals in terms of FFC 36, giving the serial numbers of each unit and the dates at which they would be ready to go overseas.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 79 – THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND<sup>1</sup> – [EXTRACT]

79

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*<sup>1</sup>

[ Extract ]

18 September 1941

Your telegram of 4 September.

**The further units of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force which His Majesty's Government in New Zealand have decided to offer for service overseas, are warmly welcomed by His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom**, who deeply appreciate the spirit which has prompted the offer. We shall await with interest the result of the further consideration being given to the remainder of the proposals in FFC 36.**

**The proposals regarding the Home Defence forces are also noted with interest. As regards equipment, considerable quantities of some of the items required have already been released and the possibilities of supplying the remainder are now being considered....**<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Fraser had returned to New Zealand from the **United Kingdom** on 14 Sep.

<sup>2</sup> The text omitted contained references to other telegrams concerning New Zealand's fixed defences and naval ammunition requirements.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 80 – THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS<sup>3</sup> TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

80

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs<sup>3</sup> to the Prime Minister  
of New Zealand*

3 March 1942

With reference to your telegram of 12 October.<sup>4</sup> It was contemplated that the New Zealand **Army Tank Brigade** would be ready to go overseas this month. In the present circumstances it is suggested that the **Brigade** remain in New Zealand until July, when the matter should be reconsidered.

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<sup>3</sup> The **Rt. Hon. C. R. Attlee** had succeeded **Viscount Cranborne** as **Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs** in Feb 1942.

<sup>4</sup> Not published. This telegram contained amendments to **FFC 36** details given in that section of the text of **No. 78** which is not published here. The changes were made as a result of representations from **Headquarters 2nd NZEF** on the order in which units were required in the **Middle East**.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

81 — THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE SECRETARY OF  
STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS

81

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for  
Dominion Affairs*

**9 March 1942**

**Your telegram of 3 March. We agree that in the present  
circumstances the New Zealand **Army Tank Brigade** be held in the  
Dominion until July, when its despatch overseas can be reviewed in the  
light of the strategic situation in the **Pacific** at that time.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 82 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

82

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

8 August 1942

In your telegram of 11 March <sup>1</sup> you said that the decision to retain the Armoured Brigade in New Zealand would be reviewed in July 1942. In Libya last November and in the recent fighting our infantry brigades have been overrun by tanks on three occasions, with heavy casualties, especially prisoners. <sup>2</sup> We have felt keenly the lack of our own armoured component. I am endeavouring to obtain some Grant tanks for the Divisional Cavalry which would be a help, but the Armoured Brigade would of course strengthen us immensely in attack and defence. I would therefore be very grateful to have an indication from you as to the possibility of the Armoured Brigade being despatched to us. The New Zealand Government may consider that the tanks should be retained, but would they then agree to send trained personnel, in which case I am certain equipment could be made available for them from the **Middle East** pool.

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<sup>1</sup> On 11 Mar General Puttick had advised Headquarters 2nd NZEF of the postponed despatch of the **Army Tank Brigade**, in similar terms to **No. 81**.

<sup>2</sup> The three occasions were **Belhamed** (Nov–Dec 1941), **Ruweisat Ridge** (15 Jul 1942), and **El Mreir Depression** (22 Jul 1942).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 83 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

83

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

14 August 1942

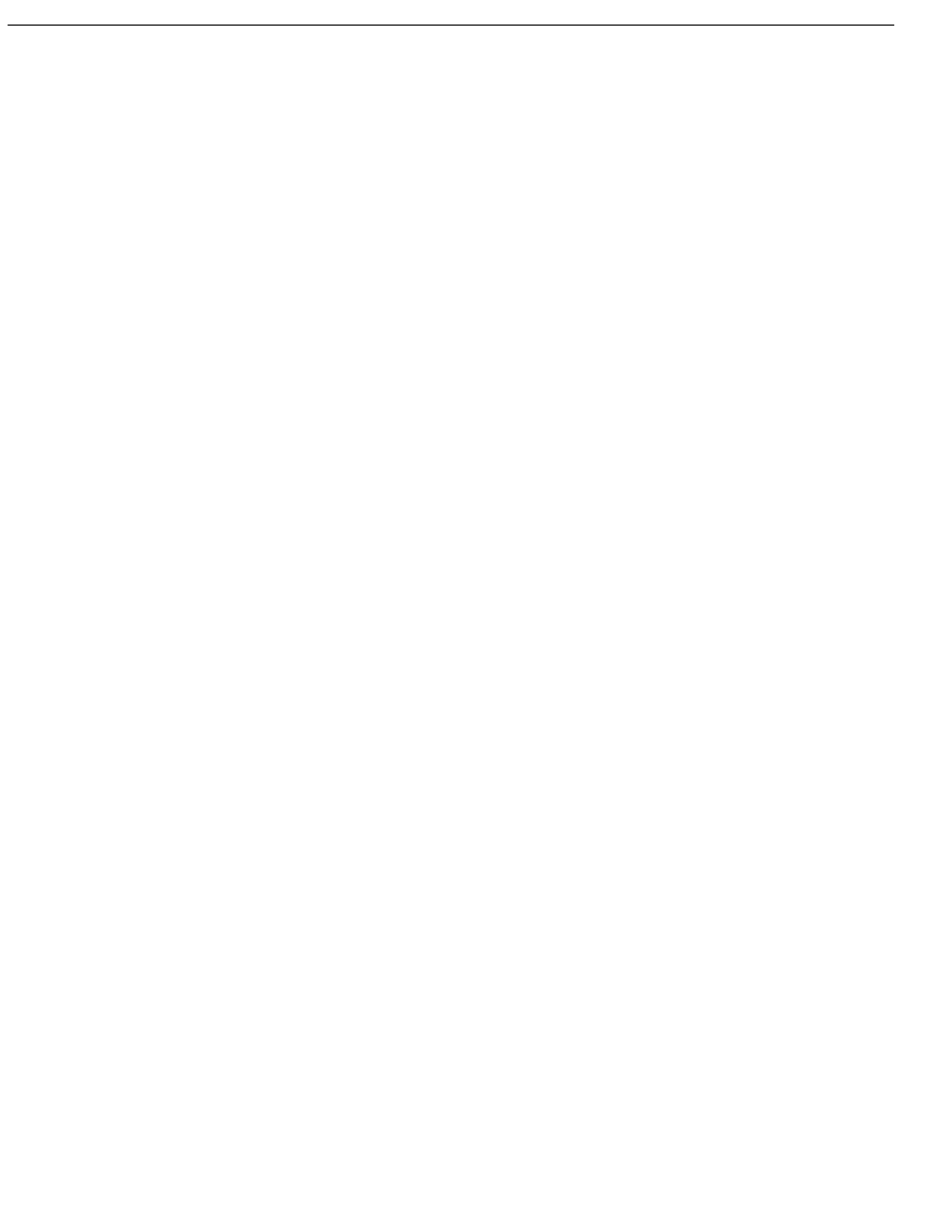
Your telegram of 25 July. <sup>3</sup>

**General Freyberg** has now asked whether the **Army Tank Brigade** could be sent to Egypt. He suggests that if the Valentine tanks (of which we have 120) cannot be spared, the Brigade could probably be equipped there. To assist us in considering the question we would like advice on this point. We understand the power and value of this brigade whether in New Zealand or in the **Middle East**, but we are not in a position to appreciate fully the relative claims of the **Middle East** and of the defence of New Zealand.

With the reservation that he has insufficient information, the Chief of the General Staff here suggests that in all the circumstances the Brigade should be sent to the **Middle East** with all the tanks available at the date of despatch, less 40 to 60 to be retained in New Zealand, and with the proviso that the despatch to New Zealand of General Stuart tanks (of which we have 24) should be hastened as far as possible; also, that the strain on our manpower could be reduced by not sending reinforcements to the Brigade and by requiring the Division to adopt the organisation of one tank brigade and two infantry brigades in due course. A broad survey of the situation as it affects the problem would greatly help us in reaching a decision.

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<sup>3</sup> See *Reinforcement of 2nd NZEF, 1940-42* (No. 61).



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 84 – THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE TO GENERAL FREYBERG

84

### *The Minister of Defence to General Freyberg*

14 August 1942

Your telegram of 8 August ( **No. 82**) is being considered by **War Cabinet**. We have informed **London** of your proposal and have asked for a broad survey of the situation as it affects the problem and for information whether tanks would be available in Egypt. The Chief of the General Staff suggests that if the Brigade is to be sent it should be on the understanding that reinforcements for it will not be despatched subsequently, and that ultimately you could adopt the British organisation of one tank brigade and two infantry brigades to meet the position that would arise. He also suggests that all the tanks available at the date of despatch should accompany the brigade, less 40 to 60 to be retained here. We would like your comments and also any definite information as to whether tanks would be available in Egypt.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 85 – THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF (WELLINGTON) TO GENERAL FREYBERG

85

### *The Chief of the General Staff ( Wellington) to General Freyberg*

16 August 1942

Your telegram of 8 August ( **No. 82**) raises a question of great difficulty both of policy and of manpower. **War Cabinet** consider that the situation in the **Pacific** might well be critical and that they must be prepared for an attack on **Fiji** and **New Caledonia**, and on New Zealand itself. They are of the opinion that the maintenance of your Division, plus the **Army Tank Brigade**, and the necessity for maintaining strong forces here, both for local defence and possibly for operations in the **Pacific** directly affecting the security of New Zealand, would place an intolerable burden on our already greatly attenuated manpower. They cannot provide all these requirements to the full and are considering what is the utmost they can do so far as the **Middle East** is concerned. In these circumstances I have suggested that in order to have your own armour you might prefer to modify the present Divisional organisation. Cabinet have agreed to my obtaining your opinion on the following alternatives, or any others you may suggest, to assist them in deciding what they can send you, but without committing them in any way:

**Firstly: 4700 reinforcements and one tank battalion, plus details.**

**Secondly: 2500 reinforcements and the Tank Brigade, on the understanding that the Division is reduced to the new British organisation of one armoured brigade and two infantry brigades, plus of course the usual divisional troops. I have pointed out that the second alternative would give you:**

- ( Reinforcements to meet wastage up to the date of arrival.
  - a)
  - ( Approximately 2400 reinforcements in hand from the surplus
  - b) infantry brigade.
  - ( Probably a considerable reduction in future casualties through
  - c) having your own armour.

I have also stated that, while I think the modified division better suited for country where tanks can operate fully, the three infantry brigades would be preferable in enclosed or mountain country. I could, of course, offer no opinion as to the prospects of your operating in the latter type of country. As regards the question of tanks accompanying the battalion or brigade, **War Cabinet** would like definite information whether or not tanks, together with associated equipment, would be available in Egypt immediately on the arrival of the Brigade. We have, as you know, 120 Valentines, plus 20 on the water and more released from production. I have 24 General Stuart tanks, with 24 on the water and large numbers released, and consider that if the Valentines go to you I should hold 40 to 60 Valentines to support my General Stuart tanks. I would also prefer to send the minimum of ancillary services and their equipment because of shortages for the armour remaining here. I suggest you forward your observations urgently, reserving if necessary the question of the tanks themselves until you are able to get definite information.

Any serious deterioration in the **Pacific** situation in the meantime would, of course, affect the whole question.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 86 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF (WELLINGTON)

86

### *General Freyberg to the Chief of the General Staff (Wellington)*

20 August 1942

Your telegram of 16 August.

I realise your difficulties and appreciate the Government's efforts to help in submitting alternative schemes.

I prefer your first suggestion of 4700 reinforcements and one tank battalion.

One infantry brigade, probably the 4th, would be reorganised as a tank brigade, each battalion becoming a tank battalion.

The tank battalion sent from New Zealand would, I am afraid, have to be split up to form a nucleus for the three battalions to be formed here, but care will be taken to see that all ranks, up to and including the commanding officer, are employed in positions worthy of their rank and experience.

In the change-over of the present Division, I would propose to retain the Maori and Machine Gun Battalions and to turn the Divisional Cavalry into a reconnaissance regiment.

The training of technical personnel will have to be set in hand at an early date. In this respect I realise the position that must exist in New Zealand regarding technicians and can only leave it to you to help as much as you can.

The question of the availability of equipment here is being taken up



with General Headquarters, **Middle East**, but I consider it essential that concurrently the **New Zealand Government** should approach the United Kingdom Government in the matter.

Details will be worked out by Stevens once the Government has agreed in principle. An early decision would be of great help.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 87 – THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF (WELLINGTON) TO GENERAL FREYBERG

87

### *The Chief of the General Staff ( Wellington) to General Freyberg*

22 August 1942

I am referring your telegram of 20 August to **War Cabinet** who will no doubt require my comments. I think you should know these in case you wish to reply to them. They are as follows:

The Tank Brigade has been well trained for twelve months, especially technically. The latter takes a long time, many trades are involved and [tradesmen] difficult to get even here. Over 50 per cent of the battalions alone are tradesmen. I anticipate that **Freyberg** will have extreme difficulty in raising sufficient technicians to expand one tank battalion to a full brigade.

If one tank battalion goes it must have its proportion of repair and maintenance troops. This involves a considerable upset in the present formation. We cannot send more than the due proportion without accentuating the present difficulty concerning tradesmen in all New Zealand formations.

The expanded tank brigade in Egypt will not be effective for months, during perhaps a critical period when the Division would have neither a tank brigade nor a third infantry brigade. It is doubtful if the tank brigade formed in Egypt could approach the efficiency of the existing tank brigade for twelve months, even if it could find sufficient technicians, &c. The splitting up of a fine tank battalion on arrival largely sacrifices the progress achieved and is likely to cause feeling, while the remainder of the Brigade in New Zealand will be disgruntled at

**being left behind.**

**From the New Zealand Army point of view, the draw-off of farmers, industry, &c., is so severe that the despatch of the full 4700 reinforcements will have an increased adverse effect on home defence.**

**These reinforcements will include many married men drawn in an overseas ballot many months later than the Tank Brigade, which consists of single men due for overseas next after the 7th Reinforcements.**

**I cannot see any advantage in Freyberg's proposal other than:**

- ( Men posted from the infantry brigade to form the tank brigade will**
  - a) have had war service as infantry.**
  - ( It is easier to dispose of the officers and NCOs of the infantry brigade**
    - b) if absorbed by the tank brigade than if used as reinforcements, and disappointment and feeling at loss of identity of units would be reduced.**

**In my opinion these advantages are negligible compared to the disadvantages involved and the advantages in sending the Tank Brigade from here. Officers and NCOs from the surplus infantry brigade should greatly strengthen the other brigades by providing experienced men to meet casualties and should not take long to absorb in formations, Base, and courses.**

**My conclusions are that if the Division is to have a tank brigade the best course is:**

- ( Send the Tank Brigade complete. The reserve held to meet wastage**
  - a) here provides sufficient personnel to man 40 to 60 tanks which should be retained in New Zealand if tanks accompany the Brigade.**
  - ( On the arrival of the Tank Brigade, and after desert training,**
    - b) withdraw the selected infantry brigade from the 2nd NZEF and use as reinforcements.**
    - ( Send all tanks, less 40 to 60, with the Brigade unless Freyberg reports**
      - c) that suitable tanks are immediately available in Egypt.**

**If only one tank battalion goes, then the Division should retain its three infantry brigades and not attempt to form a tank brigade.**

**I suggest you give me your comments urgently.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 88 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF (WELLINGTON)

88

### *General Freyberg to the Chief of the General Staff (Wellington)*

23 August 1942

Reference your telegram of 22 August.

In replying to your telegram of 16 August ( **No. 85**) I assumed that both your suggestions were considered practicable from the New Zealand point of view and recommended the first as it seemed to cause less dislocation for you and would have avoided breaking up the Brigade here. Having read your latest telegram ( **No. 87**), however, I appreciate your reasons for preferring to send the whole brigade and agree also with the advantages mentioned from our point of view.

In the circumstances, do not press the objection to breaking up the 6th Brigade <sup>1</sup> as the sentimental aspect is, of course, outweighed by the advantage of having an armoured brigade in the Division as soon as possible. Regarding the question of sending tanks with personnel, I am informed by Stevens who saw the new Chief of the General Staff <sup>2</sup> that tanks would be available here.

You will appreciate the present difficulties of communication with **Divisional Headquarters** separated from Headquarters 2nd NZEF.

We have just commenced a period of special vigilance as we expect a German offensive in the next few days. The weather is very hot and there are innumerable flies. The situation has improved here. The troops, although tired, are very cheerful and can be relied upon to do well.

**The 4th Brigade is still at Maadi.**

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**<sup>1</sup> The 6th Brigade had been provisionally selected for disbandment had the complete Army Tank Brigade been despatched to the Middle East.**

**<sup>2</sup> Major-General R. L. (later General Sir Richard) McCreery, KCB, KBE, DSO, MC, succeeded Lieutenant-General T. W. Corbett, CB, MC, as Chief of the General Staff, Middle East, in Aug 1942.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 89 – ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON) TO HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEAF

89

### *Army Headquarters ( Wellington) to Headquarters 2nd NZEF*

**31 August 1942**

**The despatch of 5500 men, inclusive of a tank battalion and a proportion of technical personnel, has been approved by War Cabinet, who are also prepared to consider the despatch of tanks for the battalion if equal or better tanks are not available in the Middle East. The question of sending any additional tank battalions or technical reinforcements in future must remain in abeyance in view of the present Pacific situation.**

**The possible date of departure will be telegraphed later. We would like an early reply whether tanks or technical vehicles are actually required.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 90 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF (WELLINGTON) – [EXTRACT]

90

### *General Freyberg to the Chief of the General Staff ( Wellington) [ Extract]*

**2 September 1942**

**Your telegram of 31 August.**

**You will have realised that the decision to have an armoured component in the 2nd New Zealand Division amends the figures of requirements as given in my telegrams of 8 August <sup>1</sup> and 15 August <sup>2</sup>. For instance, one third of the infantry now becomes Armoured Corps and there is a big increase in ASC.... <sup>3</sup>**

**I am under the impression that with the exception of the tank battalion you will not be able to send any large number of trained New Zealand Armoured Corps personnel, including technicians, but that we will have to train infantry drafts for this purpose. Would you please confirm this.**

**The question of tanks is now under discussion with GHQ and a firm reply should be available in a few days. Present indications are that no tanks will be required from New Zealand.**

**As stated in my telegram of 20 August ( [No. 86](#)) it seems inevitable that the tank battalion will have to be broken up to provide ( *a*) instructors, and ( *b*) a nucleus of trained and skilled personnel for the new regiments here. Would it help you if instead of a completely organised battalion you were to send an equal total of officers, NCOs, tradesmen, and other ranks but merely as drafts that could be drawn from the whole of the [Army Tank Brigade](#). Please advise if this appeals to**



**you, and final confirmation will then be cabled from here.**

**The 4th Infantry Brigade is the one selected for the change to the Armoured Brigade.**

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<sup>1</sup> See *Reinforcement of 2nd NZEF, 1940–42 (No. 65)*.

<sup>2</sup> Not published. Contained details of the composition of the 8th Reinforcement draft, subsequently amended.

<sup>3</sup> Text omitted refers to the preparation and despatch of later telegrams giving details of reinforcement requirements.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 91 – HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEF TO ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON)

91

*Headquarters 2nd NZEF to Army Headquarters ( Wellington)*

**2 September 1942**

**Reference telegram of 2 September.**

**General Headquarters state that after consideration they would be very glad to have the tanks, together with any technical vehicles you can spare.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 92 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND<sup>1</sup> TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS

92

*The acting Prime Minister of New Zealand<sup>1</sup> to the Secretary of  
State for Dominion Affairs*

9 September 1942

It has now been decided to despatch a total of 5500 reinforcements to the **Middle East**, including one battalion of the **Army Tank Brigade** which has been formed in this Dominion. **General Freyberg** has been advised to this effect, and he informs us that he will use this battalion as a nucleus for the formation of an armoured brigade, the 4th New Zealand Infantry Brigade being used for the purpose. Having regard to the very critical position which still obtains in the **Pacific**, it will be appreciated that it was with some reluctance that we decided to despatch the tank battalion, but we are doing this because we wish to increase the measure of protection for the Division in action and at the same time enhance its value as a striking force. We are of course quite willing to send with the tank battalion its complement of Valentines, should this be considered essential, and we understand that General Headquarters, **Middle East**, would be very glad to have them, but we desire to point out that they are in no way a match for the tanks now being used by the enemy in the **Middle East** theatre. We are very concerned, therefore, to ensure that the battalion, and ultimately the Armoured Brigade when formed, are equipped with the most modern tanks available so that in action they may be in all respects equal, if not superior, in their striking power to the forces against which they will be engaged. If our armoured force can be equipped with the best tanks available, as we hope may be the case, then we would not propose to send the Valentine tanks from New Zealand unless you consider it

essential.

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<sup>1</sup> **Hon. D. G. Sullivan, Minister of Industries and Commerce, was acting Prime Minister during the absence of Mr. Fraser in the United States and Canada. The Prime Minister left New Zealand on 21 Aug and arrived back on 16 Sep. During the visit, which was made at the invitation of President Roosevelt, Mr. Fraser had discussions with the President and attended meetings of the Pacific War Council. He also visited the Prime Minister of Canada, the Rt. Hon. W. L. Mackenzie King.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 93 – THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

93

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the acting Prime  
Minister of New Zealand*

**11 September 1942**

**Your telegram of 9 September.**

**The recent decision of His Majesty's Government in New Zealand to send substantial reinforcements to the **Middle East**, including a battalion of the **Army Tank Brigade**, has been noted with great interest and appreciation. It is a source of great encouragement to His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom** to be able thus to rely on New Zealand's splendid co-operation in this field. The provision of equipment for the New Zealand armoured troops will be the subject of a further reply as early as possible.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 94 – THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

94

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

**2 October 1942**

Further to my telegram of 11 September, the **War Office** agree that the Valentines should not accompany the tank battalion personnel to the **Middle East**. It is proposed ultimately to equip the Armoured Brigade in the same way as the other armoured brigades in the Middle East on Crusader Mark III and Grant and Sherman basis. The Brigade's training equipment is expected to be available in January 1943. <sup>1</sup>

The Chief of the General Staff ( **Wellington**) has been informed direct.

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<sup>1</sup> The 3rd Battalion, 1st **NZ Army Tank Brigade**, left New Zealand with the 8th Reinforcements on 12 Dec 1942. The battalion was disbanded on its arrival in the **Middle East**. The 1st Battalion was retained in New Zealand on home defence until Jun 1943, when it was disbanded, most of its personnel being posted to the 9th and 10th Reinforcements. The 2nd Battalion, originally intended to form part of the 3rd Division, was also disbanded in Jul 1943. About 270 officers and men from the 2nd Battalion formed the 3rd Division Tank Squadron and served in the **Pacific**, while most of the remainder were posted to the 10th Reinforcements and served in the **Middle East**.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## LIBYAN CAMPAIGN, 1941-42

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 95 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

95

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**13 September 1941**

**I have to report that the Division is trained and up to war strength and is now moving in stages to the **Western Desert**. The reinforcements here in **Maadi** are shaping well and will be fit to take their place in a month.**

**Tomorrow I move from here to Headquarters in the desert, therefore delay will occur in answering cables. Everyone is in excellent spirits and good health.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 96 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO GENERAL FREYBERG

96

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to General Freyberg*

16 September 1941

I gather from your telegram of 13 September that it is contemplated the Division should be employed in early operations. In view of the experience in **Greece** and particularly in **Crete**, I should be grateful if you would send me at once, if necessary after consultation with the Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, the following information:

- (1) In what operations is the Division to be engaged?
- (2) What is its role?
- (3) Is it completely equipped up to War Establishment in all respects?
- (4) If not, what are the deficiencies?
- (5) Are you satisfied that the Division is ready for action both in respect of training and equipment?
- (6) Is adequate AFV <sup>1</sup> support available for the operations contemplated?
- (7) Is adequate air support available for these operations, and have appropriate arrangements been made for its use in conjunction with the land forces?

This information is required by the Government to satisfy themselves and, should it be necessary to do so, to assure the people of New Zealand that our troops have not been committed to battle without every possible precaution and preparation to meet every calculable emergency being taken.

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<sup>1</sup> Armoured Fighting Vehicle.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 97 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

97

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

**17 September 1941**

**Besides the information asked for in my telegram of 16 September, would you please advise whether the New Zealand Division is to be associated in a Corps with any other division or divisions and, if so, under whose command and with which division or divisions.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 98 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

98

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

19 September 1941

Your telegram of 16 September ( **No. 96**).

My telegram of 13 September ( **No. 95**) was intended to notify you that the period of refitting and training the Division was over and that we were moving to the **Western Desert** for a possible operational role.

The answers to your questions are:

- (1) We are at present engaged in intensive desert training for defensive or offensive operations.
- (2) Our role has not yet been disclosed. As you will realise, it depends on many circumstances.
- (3) The Division is probably the best-equipped unit in the **Middle East** and is right up to War Establishment except for items which are not available here or are at present in process of being made up.
- (4) Deficiencies at present are twenty-eight light tanks for the Divisional Cavalry and a proportion of light anti-aircraft guns, both of which will shortly be supplied. The Anti-Aircraft Regiment is at present on aerodrome defence duties but is returning to the Division shortly for training in mobile desert operations. The shortage of anti-tank rifles in the 5th Brigade is to be made up shortly.
- (5) Yes. The are made up it will be fit for war in every way. Division is trained, and when the the deficiencies mentioned

**in  
paragraph**

**(4)**

**(6)**

**The importance of armoured fighting vehicles is fully realised, and our strength is now much greater and adequate to deal with the estimated situation in the **Western Desert**.**

**(7)**

**The importance of air support is realised and no operations could be contemplated unless it is adequate. The situation, of course, is entirely different from **Crete**, as fighter aerodromes are available at all stages. Since your visit here the attitude to air co-operation between the **Royal Air Force** and the Army has completely changed. The **Royal Air Force** are doing their utmost, and combined exercises are being carried out.**

**I do not think there is any division in the **Middle East** superior to ours. I am certain that as a force we have been treated better than any other in respect of equipment, and when we get our light tanks, which are promised, and our Anti-Aircraft Regiment is trained and desert-worthy, we shall be well trained and fit for war. As may be realised, there is a vital need for secrecy at the moment, and I earnestly ask that no public statement be made just now other than that the Division is in good heart. The Commander-in-Chief has seen a copy of your telegram and of this reply.**

**A reply to your telegram of 17 September ( **No. 97**) will be sent shortly.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 99 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

99

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

20 September 1941

Your telegram of 17 September ( **No. 97**).

The Division will be part of a Corps commanded by Lieutenant-General A. Godwin-Austen, <sup>1</sup> specially selected after a successful command in **East Africa** and **Abyssinia**. We will be with the Indian Division and possibly a South African division. The Commander-in-Chief has authorised me to tell you for your personal information that General Cunningham <sup>2</sup> late Commander-in-Chief East African campaign, will be in command of operations as a whole.

I have explained to General Auchinleck the **New Zealand Government's** view on the formation of the **Anzac Corps**. The Commonwealth Government have not yet expressed their view. However, it is not possible to form the **Anzac Corps** yet as the **6th Australian Division** is not yet equipped and trained after **Greece** and **Crete**, and the **9th Australian Division** is in **Tobruk**. If still desired, it might be possible to do so after some months, depending on the result of the operations now contemplated.

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<sup>1</sup> General Sir Alfred Reade Godwin-Austen, KCSI, CB, OBE, MC; commanded 13th Corps in **Libya**, Sep 1941 – Jan 1942; **War Office**, 1943–45; Quartermaster-General, India Command, **New Delhi**, 1945; Principal Administrative Officer, India Command, 1945–46.

<sup>2</sup> General Sir Alan Gordon Cunningham, GCMG, KCB, DSO, MC; GOC East African Forces, 1940–41; GOC-in-C, **8th Army**, 1941;

**GOC Northern Ireland, 1943–44; GOC-in-C, Eastern Command, 1944–45; High Commissioner and GOC-in-C, Palestine, 1945–48.**

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

100 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER  
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

100

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the  
United Kingdom*

**4 October 1941**

**For various reasons it would help me very much here if you could,  
for my own personal information, give me an indication when the action  
in the **Western Desert** is likely to begin.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 101 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

101

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

5 October 1941

Your telegram of 4 October.

Owing to the Australian demand to release all their troops from **Tobruk**, which complicated our plans, the date of the operation is uncertain. <sup>1</sup> I hope these difficulties will be overcome and will cable you later.

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<sup>1</sup> Representations had been made by the Commonwealth Government for the relief and withdrawal of the **9th Australian Division** from **Tobruk**.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 102 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

102

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

9 October 1941

I forecast in the appreciation <sup>2</sup> sent to you last year the equal chance this summer of **Germany** attacking either **Turkey** or **Russia** with the object of obtaining wheat, petrol, and lubricants for the long war

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<sup>2</sup> See Volume I, *Concentration of the 2nd New Zealand Division* (No. 250).

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necessary to smash the British Empire. We now know that German plans in **Syria** and **Iraq** were upset by the losses in **Crete**. How far he will succeed in getting the above commodities from Russian territory, and when they will be available, is difficult to say. It is certainly possible that in the process of this year's fighting the **German Air Force** and mechanised army may exhaust their reserves and wear out their machines. There are indications of this, and the authorities are hopeful that such may be the case.

This is a war of machines. Without the preponderance **Germany** has so far possessed, the offensive in **Russia** would have been impossible, and should losses be sufficiently great the enemy will have to change his effort and withdraw into a smaller area on the defensive. That stage may be reached before long.

After **Crete** the situation in the **Western Desert** developed on these lines: Under pressure from the **United Kingdom**, the **Western Desert Force** made an attack on the German position running south from **Sollum**. At that time maintenance difficulties made it impossible to keep

a large number of troops in the forward areas, and there was only a thin outpost position in the front. No additional troops were available for offensive action. The attack had to come forward quickly from sixty miles away from the enemy. An attack requires the concentration of several thousand motor vehicles, guns, tanks, &c., and involves an approach march across open desert providing no cover. Owing to the distances, it is not easy to make an approach march by night and carry out a dawn attack. In spite of these factors, in the June attack we employed inferior forces, especially armoured fighting vehicles and aircraft, with little chance of achieving surprise. The outcome was that we suffered a decided reverse and lost a large number of tanks. After the battle several commanders were sent to other jobs. Upon this fact I do not comment.

The new Commander-in-Chief <sup>1</sup> was urged by the United Kingdom Government to do an offensive in the **Western Desert** as soon as he arrived, and it is rumoured that he refused until the necessary resources were available. Resources for the **Western Desert** comprise not only the provision of fighting forces but of maintenance and transportation services also. Maintenance is often the deciding factor. There is no doubt that in the **Middle East** good use has been made of the breathing space.

The situation here is now as follows:

The railway and pipeline have been extended well to the west, which will ease the maintenance situation.

The New Zealand, South African, and Indian divisions have been re-equipped.

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<sup>1</sup> General Auchinleck.

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The AFV situation has improved on our side and we are reported to have a superiority in numbers of five to four.

**The enemy has decided superiority in numbers in the air. Reports give this superiority as three to two, and it must be anticipated that he will also reinforce from Greece, Crete, and Sicily. However, our Air Force is reported to be considerable and we have plenty of airfields in depth from which to operate.**

**From the enemy point of view, they have had five months to improve the forward defences and have not been idle. They have undoubtedly reinforced the Libyan front with men and material, including guns, tanks, and a large number of tank mines. They are past masters at putting out strong rearguards and launching strong counter-attacks with mechanised forces. Their General Staff is competent and they have resources.**

**In the circumstances the proposed operations are difficult but, nevertheless, offer a good chance of success. The result depends to a great extent on our ability to effect strategic surprise as to the date and direction of our attack, to break quickly through the crust of the German defences, and to smash the mechanised counter-stroke. This, like all modern battles, is in the first place a battle of machines and exploitation by lorry-borne fighting troops of all arms.**

**Should we succeed there is a reasonable chance of clearing the north coast of Africa. These are vital times, and our ability to play an early part in view of the fierce fighting in Russia is important. I can assure the New Zealand Government that there are no better equipped or trained troops in the Middle East than their Division. The men are in excellent physical and mental condition and will be fully trained, individually and collectively. At present we are in the process of carrying out three brigade battles under the full support of artillery and trench mortars, followed by two divisional rehearsals.**

**We have already taken part in two reverses, and I feel my responsibilities deeply. I realise how important it is from the point of view of the people of New Zealand, as well as the fighting men themselves, to have a success. I can assure you that nothing is being**

<sup>1</sup> The Prime Minister replied on 6 Nov: 'I would like you to know how very much all members of **War Cabinet** appreciated the timely and most useful views expressed in your telegram of 9 October.... We are greatly heartened by your assurance that there are no better equipped or trained troops than the New Zealanders in the **Middle East**. Your own care in achieving this result is fully realised and as fully appreciated.'

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 103 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

103

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

13 October 1941

I wish to thank you for your telegram of 5 October ( **No. 101**). I shall be glad to receive the information as soon as it is available.

In the light of our experience in **Greece**, and particularly in **Crete**, you will understand that we are naturally apprehensive lest our troops should again, and for the third time, be committed to battle without adequate air support and in circumstances in which they are unable to defend themselves against unrestricted air attacks. We fully realise the exigencies of the present situation and the necessity for striking an early blow in the Desert, not only to improve our own position while the enemy is heavily engaged elsewhere, but also to ease to some degree the pressure upon **Russia** by such a diversion. Nothing could be further from our intention than to add unnecessarily to your burdens at such a time as this, but we would, if this is at all possible, be glad to be advised of the best appreciation possible of the prospective air, tank, and AFV strengths of the enemy and ourselves in the **Middle East**, with such details as may be possible as to the types of machines available on both sides and the degree to which and the time within which the enemy, air, tank, and AFV forces respectively could be reinforced from **Europe**. We should also greatly welcome an assurance that the question of air support, which we, having regard to our experience in the past, regard as a vital factor, has been fully considered and appreciated by those responsible, and that a situation in which our men are called upon to fight without the necessary means of defence and offence, particularly

**in aircraft, tanks, and AFVs, will not recur.**



DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

104 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME  
MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

104

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

15 October 1941

**Your telegram of 13 October.**

**The long delay in striking has been caused by the need to gather  
ample air and tank strength, and we believe this has now been achieved  
in full measure. I do not think the enemy will be able to alter these  
conditions before the day comes. I will cable you more fully early next  
week.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 105 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

105

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

24 October 1941

Your telegram of 13 October ( **No. 103**).

In order to make quite sure of the relative air figures I sent **Air Chief Marshal Freeman** <sup>1</sup> to **Cairo** to confer with Air Marshal Tedder. <sup>2</sup> The following are the agreed figures of the Home and Middle Eastern staffs: British air forces 660; Axis forces 642. Probable serviceability of these forces: Day 1—British forces 528; Axis forces 385. Of these latter, little more than 100 are German. Moreover, all the Axis forces are in the shop window. We expect to have about 50 per cent reserves behind the counter. **Germany** has also in the Aegean and **Crete** 156 all types, excluding all short-range fighters. In Malta we have 64 bombers. No doubt is entertained by the Commanders that we shall have good air superiority unless the situation alters markedly.

General Auchinleck assures me that the New Zealand Division will have all proper protection. We must not, however, repeat the mistake of the action on 15–18 June <sup>3</sup> by frittering away superiority to put up small local umbrellas over each unit and detachment, thus losing the chance of beating the main enemy air force out of the sky.

Much has been risked in delay in order to gather sufficient armoured forces. It is unlikely that the enemy can reinforce his armour before the battle. We shall have 658 infantry tanks, cruiser tanks, and American cruisers of 12 tons or upwards, against 168 comparable Axis vehicles.

The Axis has in addition 234 9-ton light tanks, which play a serious part. The armoured battle is what matters and we hope to force the enemy to it. The destruction of his armoured force would bring ruin to the rest.

The infantry are limited only by transport, but are declared to be superior in numbers to the enemy. General Auchinleck hopes to deploy 450 field guns and over 500 anti-tank guns, with 325 Bofors and over 100 heavy mobile anti-aircraft guns, the last-named exclusive of those in **Tobruk**. Our columns will therefore be protected by their own flak to an extent never before known by us.

All the above is of fateful secrecy. **War Cabinet** here have declined to be informed of the date of the offensive. Unless the situation alters in the interval, we are justified in sober confidence.

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<sup>1</sup> Air Chief Marshal Sir Wilfrid Rhodes Freeman, GCB, DSO, MC; Vice-Chief of Air Staff, 1940; Chief Executive, Ministry of Aircraft Production, 1942–45.

<sup>2</sup> Marshal of the **Royal Air Force** Lord Tedder, GCB; AOC-in-C, **Royal Air Force, Middle East**, 1941–43; AOC-in-C, **Mediterranean Air Command**, 1943; Deputy Supreme Commander under General Eisenhower, 1943–45; Chief of the Air Staff, 1946–50.

<sup>3</sup> Operation 'Battleaxe', in which British forces attempted to sieze **Halfaya** Pass and capture **Sollum**, **Capuzzo**, and **Bardia**.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

106 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER  
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

106

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the  
United Kingdom*

**25 October 1941**

**I am most grateful to you for your telegram of 24 October, which is  
most helpful and is greatly appreciated.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 107 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

107

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

21 November 1941

**New Zealand is deeply stirred by the news that our troops are on the march once more. The progress of the action in the days that lie ahead will be followed with intense interest and in the confident hope that the result will be worthy of the magnificent qualities of the New Zealand Division. On behalf of the Government and people of New Zealand I wish you and the officers and men under your command every success.** <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Between 21–29 Nov brief reports on the battle were sent regularly to the Prime Minister by Mr. Jordan, then (with Colonel Park) on a visit to the 2nd NZEF in Egypt. **General Freyberg's** long report on the campaign ( **No. 111** of 7 Dec) makes the inclusion of Mr. Jordan's telegrams in this volume unnecessary. Mr. Jordan and Colonel Park returned to England by air on 30 Nov.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 108 – GENERAL AUCHINLECK TO THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF (WELLINGTON)

108

### *General Auchinleck to the Chief of the General Staff ( Wellington)*

3 December 1941

I have just seen **General Freyberg** who is well and in good heart. He has with him the remainder of the 4th and 6th Infantry Brigades which had to withdraw from **Sidi Rezegh** because of very heavy enemy pressure. These brigades fought magnificently and inflicted very heavy losses on the enemy, but I fear their own losses have also been severe. They are now going to **Baggush** to reform and refit.

Part of the 4th and 6th Brigades and the divisional transport are with the **Tobruk** garrison, which is still holding the salient created by our sally and **Belhamed**.

The 5th Infantry Brigade is still in the **Bardia** area and I believe has not yet been heavily engaged, though its headquarters was apparently captured at an early stage of the battle. <sup>1</sup> It has now, however, a reorganised headquarters and is operating successfully under the orders of the **4th Indian Division**.

I deeply regret the casualties, but the Division fought magnificently and its losses will not be in vain.

**General Freyberg** is communicating with the Prime Minister.

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<sup>1</sup> On 27 Nov Headquarters 5th Brigade was overrun by German tanks at **Sidi Azeiz**. Its commander, Brigadier J. Hargest, was captured, together with 46 officers and 650 other ranks.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 109 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

109

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

**3 December 1941**

After several days of heavy fighting round **Tobruk** the 4th and 6th Infantry Brigade Groups, together with the **21st Battalion**, withdrew under pressure. The fighting has been severe and our losses are heavy. At present it is not possible to give any estimate of our casualties as part of the Division is with me, part in **Tobruk**, and part with the **4th Indian Division** near **Bardia**. So far as I can say, the 5th Infantry Brigade, who are still operating round **Bardia** under the orders of the **4th Indian Division**, have not had heavy fighting and their losses are not great. I am sending this telegram from the battlefield by a General Headquarters staff officer who is flying back to **Cairo**. Days must elapse before I can get back to telegraph communications, and longer to get the complete facts necessary for a fuller report which will follow in stages.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 110 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

110

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

4 December 1941

**It was with very great relief that I received your message from the battlefield and also the further advice from General Auchinleck that you are well and in good heart. His report that the Division had fought magnificently was fully in keeping with our own expectations. Will you please convey, on behalf of the Government and people of New Zealand, a message of congratulation to the officers and men under your command. The reports of the bitter fighting in which you have been engaged have led us to expect severe casualties. I can assure you that the people of the Dominion are deeply moved by the achievements of the heroic and indomitable New Zealand Division in the face of such heavy odds, and on their behalf I would like to send through you a message of sincere sympathy to all those who have been wounded in battle and to express the hope that they will speedily recover.**



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 111 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

111

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

7 December 1941

Further to my telegram of 3 December ( **No. 109**) from the battlefield, I beg to report on the operations of the New Zealand Division in the Libyan campaign up to the present phase marked by the withdrawal from the **Tobruk** sector of the 4th and 6th Brigades for rest and refit. They have reached **Baggush**. The 5th Brigade remains under the command of the **4th Indian Division** near **Bardia**.

I am still unable to give the casualty figures, but every effort is being made to ascertain the position and you will be advised the approximate figures, followed by a detailed return at the earliest possible moment.

The general plan of campaign has already been explained by Colonel Stewart. <sup>1</sup> I can only add that it was made with the greatest care for the safety of the Division as well as the other troops involved. I was not, of course, aware of what was in the Army Commander's mind as to the conduct of the battle. In my opinion the degree of success would depend upon the relative air strengths and the result of the armoured battle. In the air the **RAF** established complete mastery similar to the **Luftwaffe's** in **Greece**. The methods now employed are really effective and with more practice will be a great factor in our ultimate success. Optimistic hopes of quick victory were doomed to disappointment because the armoured battle was not conclusive. The enemy's resources were probably greater than was estimated and his repair organisation was good. However, our tank resources are growing. With the experience gained I am confident that the German armoured forces in **Libya** will be neutralised.

<sup>1</sup> Colonel K. L. Stewart returned to New Zealand in October to assume the appointment of Deputy Chief of the General Staff.

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As a result of the first armoured encounters the German armoured columns retired to the north-west, permitting the rest of the plan to be put into operation. The first objective of encircling and cutting off the enemy fortress line at **Bardia - Halfaya - Sidi Omar** was brilliantly carried out by the New Zealand Division. The relief of **Tobruk**, although nearly achieved, remains to be carried out. Operations are continuing at present.

Operations for the New Zealand Division started with a long approach march of about 200 miles from **Baggush** to the frontier by night and day moves. To our south the Armoured Division and the **1st South African Division** advanced on an even longer axis.

On the night of 18 November we crossed into **Libya** and remained dispersed in a position of defence. The Army Commander would not commit the Division until he considered the enemy armoured force disposed of. All commanders had studied a relief model of the area and everybody knew the scheme thoroughly. We were complete in every detail of equipment, including anti-tank and antiaircraft artillery and a battalion of 'I' tanks distributed among our brigade groups, every care being taken not to expose vulnerable columns to the German armoured divisions.

On 19 November the entire Division moved forward in desert formation covered by the Divisional Cavalry. The speed and manoeuvrability of the mass of over 3000 vehicles was remarkable. The Divisional Cavalry rushed **Sidi Azeiz** at dusk, capturing many prisoners. Brigadier Hargest continued on during darkness and the **23rd Battalion** carried out a successful attack on Fort **Capuzzo**, achieving complete surprise. Many prisoners were taken and the water pipeline to **Halfaya** fortress and the supply line to **Sidi Omar** cut. Meanwhile Brigadier Inglis led the 4th Brigade forward by night to capture the escarpment north-

west of **Bardia**, cutting the **Bardia- Tobruk** road. The 4th Brigade was attacked by tanks, artillery, and infantry but the **20th Battalion** and 'I' tanks counterattacked successfully, destroyed the enemy, and took 370 prisoners, two armoured cars, and some guns. In these operations we suffered only slight casualties. The 6th Brigade Group, under Brigadier Barrowclough, moved to Trigh **Capuzzo** into **Divisional Reserve**.

On the following night the **Maori Battalion** took **Musaid** and the **Sollum** Barracks, prisoners, guns, and equipment being captured, including the newest German radio direction-finding set. The German fortress line was thus severed from its supply base at **Bardia**.

The 6th Brigade Group was ordered to move towards **Tobruk** under 30th Corps and was detached temporarily from my command. They moved off complete in every detail, including a squadron of 'I' tanks. At a later stage Brigadier Barrowclough received orders to advance with all speed to occupy Point 175 and protect a flank of the **Support Group** heavily engaged at **Sidi Rezegh**. Fighting their way forward they found Point 175 strongly held. In a bloody encounter it was taken, but 13 of 15 tanks and 50 per cent of the **25th Battalion** were casualties. The **26th Battalion** was sent farther west to support the 5th South African Brigade on **Sidi Rezegh**, where they were attacked by a Panzer division. The South Africans were overrun by tanks. The **26th Battalion** held its ground completely isolated and knocked out more than 20 tanks, later being withdrawn into the 6th Brigade lines.

The rest of the Division remained in position near **Bardia** until orders were given to take all the troops that could be spared from the **Bardia** front to join the 6th Brigade and move on **Tobruk**, with the object of cutting the by-pass road and establishing a corridor into the fortress.

The 4th Infantry Brigade was disengaged and moved to **Gambut**, capturing the aerodrome, 130 prisoners, and a considerable quantity of material. **Divisional Headquarters**, together with the 20th and 21st Battalions, followed, the **20th Battalion** cleaning up enemy positions *en route*.

The advances by day and night along the Trigh **Capuzzo** of the 4th and 6th Brigades and **21st Battalion** were brilliantly carried out. Both sides had decided on simultaneous bold strokes. While we moved on **Tobruk**, General Rommel moved his armoured force, together with the Italian Ariete Division, in an effort to recapture the **Bardia- Sidi Omar** fortress line. He took all his tanks and 3000 motor vehicles to just south of **Sidi Omar**. It is a fair assumption that but for strong pressure at **Tobruk** the full force of the German motorised infantry formations would have moved on **Bardia** to relieve the encircled garrisons. If he had succeeded our offensive would have failed.

Our advance upon **Tobruk** developed into a fiercely fought battle. For the most part we attacked at night with the bayonet to disorganise heavily defended localities. The taking of **Sidi Rezegh** spur by the 24th and 26th Battalions was a very fierce battle. It was strongly held by German infantry and the 6th Italian Bersaglieri Regiment, dug in and supported by large numbers of anti-tank guns. Heavy casualties were inflicted on both sides. We also took several hundred prisoners and material. At the same time 18th and 20th Battalions carried out a very fine night attack upon **Belhamed** spur, overrunning three enemy positions, killing the majority, and taking 150 prisoners. Carefully coordinated attacks by infantry, cavalry, and tanks on the next day and night, including an advance by the **19th Battalion** of 10,000 yards, resulted in our joining hands with the **Tobruk** garrison at **Ed Duda**. In these attacks many anti-tank and field guns were destroyed and about 1000 prisoners taken. These attacks largely destroyed the German units opposite us, and had we had reserves available then we could have taken the next ridge, dominated the sector, and cleared the way into **Tobruk**. As it was, General Rommel, seeing the threat to the whole forward position, concentrated all his available resources and attacked us from every side. We expected the 1st South African Brigade to arrive on the night of 30 November—1 December to support the 6th Brigade Group on the southern flank. Our own 5th Brigade Group was to come as soon as it could be relieved by the **4th Indian Division**, but the relief never took place. Although the South African Brigade came, it arrived too late to

influence the situation.

Heavy attacks by tanks and infantry against the depleted 6th Brigade forced us off Point 175 on the 29th and off **Sidi Rezegh** on the 30th, when two battalions were overrun. On the morning of 1 December attacks round both flanks of the 6th Brigade converged with 51 tanks on **Belhamed**. Eleven tanks were destroyed, but the already depleted **20th Battalion** was overrun and a wedge was driven between our battalions on **Ed Duda** and the rest of the force. Both Divisional Headquarters and the 6th Brigade Headquarters narrowly escaped destruction or capture. Attacks continued unsuccessfully against the remainder of the 4th Brigade Group until dusk when the whole force, other than the 18th and part of the 19th Battalions which remained with the **Tobruk Force**, disengaged with its transport and moved south-west to junction with our armoured forces, by whom our further movement to the south was covered. <sup>1</sup>

We have been fighting almost entirely against Germans in **Libya**—Panzer divisions and motorised infantry. At the start of the operations their morale was noticeably high and they were commanded with determination and dash. In the attack to open the corridor, however, it is significant that over a thousand Germans were taken by the **Tobruk** garrison and ourselves without much resistance. The fighting was fierce and losses on both sides were heavy. The general situation, owing to the very long distances covered in our advance, was confused. Our long lines of communication were open to raids, and supply columns frequently changed hands according to the progress of the armoured battles in the central desert area. In one raid Headquarters 5th Brigade was captured with Brigadier Hargest. At another stage 6th Brigade captured General von Ravenstein, Divisional Commander of the 21st Panzer Division, complete with most valuable documents. Convoys of wounded were captured and

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<sup>1</sup> In a telegram to the Minister of Defence on 15 Dec **General Freyberg** advised that the units left in **Tobruk** had arrived at

recaptured and Dressing Stations dealt with friend and foe alike. In one case General Rommel visited one of our Advanced Dressing Stations. I regret to report that a large Main Dressing Station outside **Tobruk** was captured by the enemy during the last days of the fighting, with a loss of 700 wounded and about 500 medical personnel, but it is hoped it will be recaptured.

Our losses are great, especially to the 6th Brigade Group who were detached from the Division during the early days of the offensive. Losses to the 4th Brigade and **21st Battalion** were also heavy. We have also lost many senior officers. <sup>1</sup>

The results achieved by the offensive in which we took such an active part are considerable. The enemy fortress line is cut off and its loss will cripple the whole German plan in North Africa and deprive him of a great amount of warlike stores and equipment. All German units have been thrown into the battle, in the course of which we have severely handled many, capturing a large number of prisoners and destroying much equipment.

One result of our operations was that the **4th Indian Division** was given time to capture Sidi and Libyan Omars while the Armoured Division has been enabled to refit after its encounters. It must be realised that this is not a battle where the capture of ground or positions are of the greatest consequence. It is a battle to destroy the German elements in **Libya**, the Italians being of small consequence. It is fair to claim that the part played by the Division to date has destroyed a large portion of the German force, together with a great deal of their equipment and material, and it will prove a great contribution in the main Libyan campaign which still proceeds.

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<sup>1</sup> New Zealand casualties in the 2nd Libyan Campaign (Nov 1941 – Feb 1942) were:

<b>Killed</b>	<b>671</b>
<b>Died of wounds</b>	<b>208</b>
<b>Died on active service (includes deaths through sickness, accident, &amp;c.)</b>	<b>202</b>
<b>Wounded</b>	<b>1699</b>
<b>Prisoners of war (includes 201 wounded and prisoners of war and 5 died of wounds while prisoners of war)</b>	<b>2042</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4822</b>

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 112 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

112

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

8 December 1941

Further to my telegram of 7 December, the following are some details of the regrettable loss of senior officers during the campaign. Brigadier Hargest and Lieutenant-Colonel K. W. Fraser <sup>1</sup> were captured and Major A. N. Grigg, MP, <sup>2</sup> was killed near **Bardia** while the 5th Brigade were under the **4th Indian Division**. General Rommel in his turning movement came into **Bardia** for supplies. On the way back his column attacked 5th Brigade Headquarters three times, eventually overrunning them. Forty-seven were killed and the remainder taken prisoner.

Lieutenant-Colonel John Allen, MP, <sup>3</sup> was killed instantly by machine-gun fire from a German strongpoint while going round his battalion on **Sidi Rezegh** spur. Lieutenant-Colonels G. Dittmer, **H. K. Kippenberger**, and J. R. Page <sup>4</sup> were wounded and were in the Main Dressing Station in the battle area. The intention was to evacuate everyone to **Tobruk** as soon as possible as convoys on the Line of Communication were liable to attack by AFVs. The Main Dressing Station was unfortunately captured the day before the corridor was opened. I am very glad to report, however, that Dittmer and **Kippenberger** and about sixty others have since escaped and are safe. Page is still missing. It is still hoped the hospital will be recaptured.

Brigadier Miles was wounded and captured on 1 December when **Divisional Headquarters** was attacked. On the same day Lieutenant-Colonel T. H. E. Oakes <sup>5</sup> died from wounds and Lieutenant-Colonel C. Shuttleworth <sup>6</sup> went missing.



<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel K. W. Fraser, OBE, ED; CO 5th NZ Field Regiment, 1 May 1940–27 Nov 1941; prisoner of war, **Sidi Azeiz**, 27 Nov 1941.

<sup>2</sup> Major A. N. Grigg, MC; Member of Parliament, 1938–41; killed in action, 27 Nov 1941.

<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel J. M. Allen; Member of Parliament, 1938–41; CO 21st NZ Battalion, 17 May – 28 Nov 1941; killed in action, 28 Nov 1941.

<sup>4</sup> Brigadier J. R. Page, DSO; CO 26th NZ Battalion, 15 May 1940–27 Nov 1941; wounded, **Sidi Rezegh**, 27 Nov 1941; held various staff appointments in New Zealand, 1942–47; Military Secretary, 1947–49; Commandant, Northern Military District, 1950-.

<sup>5</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel T. H. E. Oakes, MC; **Royal Artillery** (retd.); CO 7th NZ Anti-Tank Regiment, 14 May – 30 Nov 1941; killed in action, 30 Nov 1941.

<sup>6</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel C. Shuttleworth, DSO; CO 24th NZ Battalion, 23 Jan 1940 – 30 Nov 1941; prisoner of war, 30 Nov 1941; died in **United Kingdom**, 15 May 1945.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

113 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME  
MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

113

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

**9 December 1941**

**I am deeply grieved about the severe losses your heroic Division has suffered in the forefront of the battle. All the accounts I have received pay the highest tribute to their brilliant work. The war is going well in Libya, in Russia, on the Atlantic, and in the United States. I send you every good wish and kindest regards.**

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

114 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER  
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

114

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the  
United Kingdom*

**10 December 1941**

**Thank you very much indeed for the message in your telegram of 9  
December. We are proud of the work of the New Zealand Division and  
trust that their ordeal will have contributed materially to major victory.  
I should very much like to publish your message, which would I know  
give great pleasure to the people of New Zealand, and I should be grateful  
for your permission to do so. All good wishes.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 115 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

115

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

13 December 1941

I have to report that the 4th and 6th Infantry Brigades are refitting at **Baggush**. They are nearly up to strength from the well-trained reinforcements we had at **Maadi**. Morale is exceedingly high. The men feel that the fighting of the Division was the turning point in the battle, which in my opinion is now over. I doubt whether either the 155th German Motorised Regiment or the German Afrika Korps, routed by the 4th and 6th Brigade Groups respectively, will be able to fight for a long time to come. I consider that **Benghazi** may be recaptured soon without heavy resistance.

The 5th Brigade Group are in the forefront at the moment, where the enemy is surrendering without much fighting. The enemy may fight on the **Derna- Mechili** line. <sup>1</sup> Our fighters, based well forward at **Sidi Rezegh** and **Tobruk**, dominate the enemy.

For the personal information of my Minister and the Chief of the General Staff, the Division is now to refit and train for future operations on the Syrian front. I consider it will take two months' hard training to get units and formations up to the requisite pitch. We have lost all commanding officers <sup>2</sup> and almost all company commanders in the 20th, 21st, 24th, 25th, and 26th Battalions. Some will return in

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<sup>1</sup> Rommel did not attempt to hold this line. From Gazala he moved back to **Agedabia**, south of **Benghazi**, and early in January retired to the **El Agheila** line.

<sup>2</sup> **Lieutenant-Colonel H. K. Kippenberger, CO 20th Battalion, was wounded on 26 Nov; Lieutenant-Colonel J. M. Allen, 21st Battalion, killed in action, 28 Nov; Lieutenant-Colonel C. Shuttleworth, 24th Battalion, prisoner of war, 30 Nov; Lieutenant-Colonel G. J. McNaught, 25th Battalion, wounded 23 Nov; and Lieutenant-Colonel J. R. Page, 26th Battalion, wounded 27 Nov.**

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**time. There are good young men coming on to fill the gaps. Until the battle in the west is finished we shall be on a low priority for equipment.**

**Would Cabinet like a short appreciation with particular reference to the position on the Syrian front next spring? I could collect material and do this after visiting there later in the month. <sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> See

**Syria.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 116 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

116

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

10 January 1942

I have to report that the Division concentrated at **Baggush** and is now moving by rail to the Canal area to train for possible spring battles. The question of its future employment is now under consideration. I would greatly appreciate the guidance of the **New Zealand Government** in the matter.

There can be no doubt that 1942 will be a difficult year. General Auchinleck is now making outline plans. These must be contingent on the action of the enemy. He has now approached me regarding the future role of the New Zealand Division. I asked the Chief of the General Staff, **Middle East**,<sup>2</sup> to put his proposals on paper. They are as follows:

The Commander-in-Chief has now decided that the New Zealand Division shall move to **Kabrit** to reorganise and train. He feels that he must have a really good division as General Headquarters Reserve and it will undoubtedly be wanted, but who can say whether it will be wanted on the Northern front or the Western front, or possibly for an overseas expedition. He feels that it will be of the greatest value to him to have the New Zealand Division in General Headquarters Reserve, and of course he wants to keep it together and well knows that spirit and *esprit de corps* will soon make it as hard a fighting machine as ever before. There is just one point he has asked me to consult you about. Do you think there will be any adverse reaction on the part of the **New Zealand Government** if, when the time comes, your Division is used as a landing force in an overseas expedition?

I have discussed with the Commander-in-Chief the problems which

must arise in an overseas expedition. The importance of air cover is completely understood, and no operation could be contemplated without having this assured. I am also sure that any operation embarked upon would be one that has been thoroughly worked out with all three Services. There is no doubt, however, that a landing operation on an open beach in the face of opposition is difficult. But there is also no doubt that there is no division in the **Middle East** better fitted to carry out the difficult role of securing such a landing.

I consider, however, that in view of the whole world position no major overseas operation will be attempted unless the German military situation deteriorates considerably. It would seem, therefore, that the latter part of the Commander-in-Chief's proposal would be less likely than the former.

There may, of course, be smaller operations that have to be undertaken from time to time as part of bigger schemes. I suggest with all respect that in employing troops in these smaller operations you allow me to exercise my discretion. With your present preoccupation in **Pacific** affairs it is hardly fair to ask you to devote time to what, after all, will be comparatively minor operations. In any project for employing troops in a major operation, such as the overseas expedition referred to in the previous paragraph, I will of course obtain the Government's prior concurrence as hitherto.

I should be very glad to have the Government's views on the matters mentioned above. The troops here are in the very highest form and I am confident that within a month we will have the Division in its best condition once again.

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<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Francis Smith, KCB, KBE, DSO, MC; Deputy Chief of General Staff, **Middle East**, 1939–40; Chief of the General Staff, **Middle East**, 1941–42; GOC London District, 1942–44; GOC-in-C, **Persia** and Iraq Command, 1944–45; GOC-in-C, Eastern Command, **India**, 1945–46; Chief of the General Staff, **India**, 1946; GOC British Forces in **India** and Pakistan, 1947–48.





# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 117 – THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE TO GENERAL FREYBERG

117

### *The Minister of Defence to General Freyberg*

21 January 1942

Your telegram of 10 January has now been considered by **War Cabinet**, whose views on the questions you raise are as follows:

Our general attitude in regard to the use of the New Zealand Forces is that they should be employed at the time and place and in the circumstances where they can be utilised to the best advantage of the common cause.

At the time we should naturally wish, as in the past, to be consulted before they are committed to any particular operation. In the absence of further information we do not feel that we are in a position to make any detailed comment or indeed to reply to the inquiry made by the Chief of the General Staff, **Middle East**, as to whether we would have any objection should the Division be used as a landing force in an overseas expedition. Before forming an opinion on such a matter we should wish to know a great deal more of the proposals, and if any information is at present available, for example, as to the area to which such an expedition might be proposed, we should be grateful to have it at once.

In any case, it seems to us that with the situation as it is in the **Far East**, the demand for reinforcements in that area is likely for some time to come to preclude an overseas expedition elsewhere. In particular the demand for air support in the **Far East** would seem to us to render impossible for some time to come the provision of adequate air support which, as you point out, would be essential before such an expedition could be successful.

**We are not without doubt also as to the possible smaller operations to which you refer, and we shall be grateful for any further information you may be able to give us regarding these possibilities.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 118 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

118

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

24 January 1942

Further to my telegram of 10 January ( **No. 116**). I have shown your telegram of 21 January to the Commander-in-Chief who states that ‘there is no immediate operation contemplated in which it is proposed to use the whole Division. As in the past, the **New Zealand Government** will be consulted before any major role is assigned to the New Zealand Division. But the opportunity may arise during a campaign to land a brigade group in the rear of the enemy as part of a larger plan to defeat the enemy forces. In such an event time might not allow reference to the **New Zealand Government**, and the Commander-in-Chief would be glad of an assurance that, if in the opinion of the **Middle East Defence Committee** such a landing is desirable, New Zealand troops could be so employed. Adequate support of all kinds, including air support, would be provided. If a New Zealand brigade takes part in such an operation it would be detached only temporarily from the remainder of the New Zealand Division.’

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 119 – THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE TO GENERAL FREYBERG

119

### *The Minister of Defence to General Freyberg*

29 January 1942

**Your telegram of 24 January. We should much prefer it if, when an operation of the kind referred to by the Commander-in-Chief is contemplated, we could be advised beforehand and thus given an opportunity of forming and expressing our views. But should such prior consultation be found impossible in the circumstances as they arise, we would not insist on it and would be prepared to leave the matter to your judgment, always, however, on the condition that you are personally and fully satisfied both as to the feasibility of the proposed operation and the adequacy of the support—land, sea, and air—that is to be afforded.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 120 – LETTER FROM GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE – [EXTRACT]

120

### *Letter from General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence [ Extract]*

6 February 1942

MY DEAR MINISTER

,

I have the honour to enclose a copy of a report <sup>1</sup> that has been drawn up for circulation here among the troops so that they could be taught the lessons of this very difficult battle in which they have played so prominent a part.... <sup>2</sup>

Before the battle started I had an opportunity of talking to the Army Commander and I expressed the opinion then that if he attacked **Tobruk**, which was surrounded by four Italian divisions and one German division, with two South African brigades he would fail, and that it seemed to me that the New Zealand Division would be ordered to march on **Tobruk**. I told him I had made all my plans to make this move and that all my officers had been studying the problem. I begged him, however, if the occasion should arise, to send us as a three-brigade division, and I pointed out the weakness in my opinion of a binary division <sup>3</sup> in such an operation. I doubt if I made any impression on General Cunningham. He thought I was over-anxious and I thought him over-confident.

The move up of the Division, the capture of **Capuzzo**, and the driving of a wedge into the enemy fortress line was carried out brilliantly by the Division, and it was as fine a piece of work as could be imagined. The

work of the 5th Brigade under Brigadier Hargest, which led the advance northwards, was admirable. Our casualties for this operation, which came as a complete surprise to the enemy, were negligible. We now know from the statements of prisoners that the capture of **Capuzzo** completely upset their plans for the defence of the fortress line. It upset the whole of their communications. The wedge was held throughout the critical days of the battle, three battalions of the 5th Brigade keeping a very large German and Italian garrison on the defensive for a fortnight.

When the crisis came on 22 November conferences were being held, and as a result of the indecisive armoured battles the word 'Withdrawal' was being mentioned. You will notice in the account my correspondence with the Corps Commander where I pressed for resolute action against **Tobruk**, asking that our 5th Brigade be sent as soon as possible. Had this been done the main fight for **Tobruk** would have been over on 25 or 26 November, by which time we should have destroyed the German positional infantry and been in a position to deal with Rommel's armoured divisions on their return from the counter-stroke into Egypt. However, it is no use being wise after the event. As it was we went forward and dislocated the whole of the enemy defences and joined up with the **Tobruk** garrison, thus forcing General Rommel to recall his Panzer divisions for the battle of **Tobruk**. I might point out here the position I found myself in on 23 November. The 6th Brigade had been ordered up to the **Sidi Rezegh** position, 45 miles away from where we were at **Sidi Azeiz**, to support the South African brigade which had become isolated there. We had either to support Brigadier Barrowclough or lose him, for it was obvious that all was not going well. At this time, of course, the Brigadier had been detached from my command and was working under 30th Corps. You will see from the maps round about 29 and 30 November and 1 December what a very critical and vulnerable position your Division was in during those anxious days.

The Division is now concentrated at **Kabrit**, training and refitting, and the men are in good condition, physically and mentally. I am certain that when the time comes for the Division to take its place

again they will be as highly trained and as fit as ever before. I need hardly say that we watch anxiously developments in the **Pacific** and are always looking forward to good news from the South Pacific front.

With best wishes,  
Yours, &c.

B. C. FREYBERG

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<sup>1</sup> 'Report on the New Zealand Division in **Cyrenaica** and Lessons of the Campaign.'

<sup>2</sup> In the text omitted **General Freyberg** stated that the report had yet to be approved by the Commander-in-Chief.

<sup>3</sup> A two-brigade division.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 121 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

121

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**6 February 1942**

**I have just received orders for the New Zealand Division to move for a full operational role in the **Western Desert**, commencing with the 5th Brigade Group on the 10th, followed by the 4th Brigade on the 16th and the 6th Brigade on the 22nd. The New Zealand Division will relieve troops coming out to rest and refit. Equipment is being made up completely in the next two days, except for some transport which will be issued on arrival in **Eighth Army** area. We are now up to strength in officers and men and the Division is in good condition. I expect a defensive role, but this depends on the Commander-in-Chief's future policy, which has not yet been divulged to me. Would the Government please acknowledge this message.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 122 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

122

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

**7 February 1942**

**The receipt of your telegram of 6 February is acknowledged. While we must accept the position, we are most disappointed that circumstances now apparently require further operations by the New Zealand Division so soon after its recent heavy losses. We assume that nothing but the serious nature of the emergency <sup>1</sup> has necessitated this step, and we would wish this communication to be shown to the Commander-in-Chief.**

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<sup>1</sup> On 21 Jan a German counter-offensive was launched from **El Agheila**.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 123 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

123

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

1 February 1942

**Major-General Freyberg** has just advised us that the New Zealand Division has again been ordered to move for a full operational role in the **Western Desert**. We have of course told him that we must accept the position, but that we are most disappointed that circumstances already require further operations by the New Zealand Division so soon after its recent heavy losses, and that we assume that nothing but the serious nature of the emergency has made this step necessary. We have also asked him to convey this communication to the Commander-in-Chief.

I feel you should be told that the ill-informed comments emanating recently from **America** and elsewhere concerning the very large forces retained inactive in the **United Kingdom** as compared with the needs elsewhere, the despatch of American troops to Northern Ireland, and the use of Dominion forces in the **Middle East** have been taken up with some force in this Dominion and were indeed reflected, with some degree of embarrassment to us, at the secret session of Parliament yesterday. The New Zealand Forces certainly have had their full share of heavy fighting and have, as you know, suffered very grievous losses, and I greatly fear that their renewed employment will add weight to this point of view, especially since their employment now will be misrepresented here as an indication that their last campaign was useless and that the job must be done again. Indeed, point may well be added to a demand that the New Zealand Forces should be returned to the **Pacific** area to meet the danger nearer home. As you know, such consensus of sentiments may have

**mischievous results. To counter any such propaganda and to allay any possible public feeling, I should be most grateful if you would let me have, as far as possible for public use, a full statement of the number of troops at present held in the [United Kingdom](#) and of the reasons for their retention—reasons which I do not for a moment suggest are not completely conclusive.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 124 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

124

### *The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

9 February 1942

Your telegram of 7 February.

Although not their fully trained divisions, the American troops brought to **Britain** have set free a larger number of mature British divisions for service in the **Middle East** and the Far East. The mere sending of a few American divisions to **Suez, Basra**, or the Dutch East Indies would hardly justify the opening of a new front with a new power, different weapons, and independent rearward services. This may come, but not yet.

In the meantime only one thing keeps British divisions in this island, namely the shortage of troop-carrying tonnage. The use of shipping on the short haul from the **United States** to **Britain** is not comparable with the round-the-Cape voyage to the East. Are you aware that every month for more than a year past we have sent the equivalent of one New Zealand division from here to the **Middle East**? The great bulk of this is for upkeep. I was so hard pressed for tonnage to send some new divisional formations to the **Middle East** that six months ago I begged from President Roosevelt the use of some of his fast transports. Today, but for this, the 18th Division would not be at **Singapore**, and much may turn on that. <sup>1</sup> Every effort is being made to find the additional shipping over and above the monthly upkeep to send divisions out of this country. The limiting factor is not, and has not for many months been, the safety of the **United Kingdom**, but rather the difficulty

of moving by sea at the speeds necessary for troop convoys, and with the proper escorts, the monthly quotas which have frequently exceeded 35,000 men. Do not allow anyone therefore to reproach the Mother Country with an undue regard for her own security.

The necessity to use the New Zealand Division again so soon grieves me, and the fact proves the emergency. I am, of course, disappointed with what has happened on the Desert front, but I have confidence in Auchinleck. I believe he has not yet shot his bolt and the enemy's position seems highly delicate. We must abide the issue of the event with fortitude.

Now that war with **Japan** has broken out upon us I am most anxious to work all New Zealand and Australian troops back into the Japanese theatre, but this again depends entirely upon shipping. Night and day we work to find more tonnage: all is continually filled. January's losses in American waters and in the **Far East** have exceeded the three preceding months combined. The big tide of American shipbuilding has only just begun to flow.

Your consent to the renewed engagement of your Division is keenly appreciated. I wish there were time to exchange them with the **5th Indian Division** in **Cyprus** or with the remaining bulk of the British 50th Division in **Syria** and **Iraq**, but evidently the crisis is coming too quickly for that. Hard times are the test and New Zealand has never failed.

Every good wish.

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<sup>1</sup> **Singapore** fell on 15 Feb 1942.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 125 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

125

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

9 February 1942

As requested, I have shown your telegram of 7 February ( **No. 122**) to the Commander-in-Chief. The situation here is as follows:

In the Western Desert General Rommel has been reinforced and for the moment has the initiative. He is stronger in tanks than we are but the balance will soon be put right. The fighting has been heavy and the losses on both sides considerable. Maintenance is the vital factor in this battle. We are in much the stronger position in this respect, operating from the railhead now across the frontier. The present situation is considered satisfactory, adequate reserves of men and material are available and, generally speaking, there is no immediate cause for anxiety. Our proposed move forward was due to the fact that some of the formations which took part in the more recent operations in Western Cyrenaica will have to be replaced and brought back to refit.

I saw the Commander-in-Chief last night and again today. He sympathises with the point of view expressed in your telegram and has now altered his plans by bringing in another division in our place. There will be a short time-lag of between three weeks and one month, and to tide over this period he has asked me to place the 5th Brigade Group at the disposal of **Eighth Army**. I have agreed to this course.

The present position is that the 5th Brigade Group will move to Reserve Eighth Army on 11 February as originally arranged, but the remainder of the Division will continue to train in the Canal Area in General Headquarters Reserve. The 5th Brigade Group reverts to my command at the end of the period mentioned. At a later date the whole

**Division is to move to Syria to work on the northern defences under the command of Ninth Army. <sup>1</sup> These arrangements will hold good, subject of course to any serious German advance in Libya.**

**I hope that these fresh arrangements meet with your approval and will lessen the feeling of anxiety on our behalf.**

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<sup>1</sup> See



**Syria.**

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

126 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER  
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

126

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the  
United Kingdom*

11 February 1942

Your telegram of 9 February ( **No. 124**) is most helpful to us, as indeed are all your messages, and I am most grateful to you for it, **Freyberg** now informs me that the Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, is now making other arrangements which will involve the use for a limited time of one brigade only of the New Zealand Division, and I am asking him to inform General Auchinleck of our appreciation of this decision, which is a great relief to us.

With the information you have given us, we will, I think, be able to deal adequately with any criticism concerning the retention of British troops in the **United Kingdom**. I took the opportunity during the secret session this afternoon of reading from your telegram the appropriate references to this matter, and the result is contained in my immediately following telegram which is being published here.

Public opinion in New Zealand is sound and is reacting healthily to bad news. As you say, 'Hard times are the test', and you may rely upon us. But equipment is badly needed here and we look to you to do the best you properly can for us.

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

127 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER  
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

127

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the  
United Kingdom*

**12 February 1942**

**The House of Representatives, assembled today in secret session, having heard and discussed a full and frank review of the present situation, including your own most recent comments, have unanimously asked me to convey to you an intimation of their appreciation and understanding of the position, and to assure you of the unshaken determination of the Parliament, Government, and people of New Zealand to prosecute this war to victory, irrespective of the fluctuations of the struggle.**

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

128 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME  
MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

128

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

**12 February 1942**

**I am most grateful for your very kind message. In this dark hour the  
resolution of the New Zealand Parliament is a great encouragement.**

**I will cable you separately about equipment.**

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

129 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO GENERAL FREYBERG

129

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to General Freyberg*

**12 February 1942**

**I am grateful for your telegram of 9 February ( No. 125). We fully agree with the new proposal and would be glad if you will inform the Commander-in-Chief how much we appreciate his decision, which has been a great relief to us.**

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

SYRIA

130  
*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*  
[ Extract]

13 December 1941

.... <sup>1</sup> For the personal information of my Minister and the Chief of the General Staff, the Division is now to refit and train for future operations on the Syrian front. I consider it will take two months' hard training to get units and formations up to the requisite pitch.... Until the battle in the west is finished we shall be on a low priority for equipment.

Would Cabinet like a short appreciation with particular reference to the position on the Syrian front next spring? I could collect material and do this after visiting there later in the month. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For complete text See *Libyan Campaign, 1941–42* (No. 115).

<sup>2</sup> The Minister of Defence replied on 16 Dec that War Cabinet would welcome this appreciation. See No. 132.

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131  
*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*  
[ Extract]

15 February 1942

Further to my telegram of 9 February. <sup>3</sup> The 5th Brigade Group is now in the **Western Desert** in Eighth Army Reserve.

I am leaving for **Syria** by air tomorrow with the principal members of my staff to reconnoitre administrative areas and defensive positions prior to the arrival of the Division. I will not be back for some days, and

there may therefore be a time-lag in any cables. All are well....<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See *Libyan Campaign, 1941–42* (No. 125).

<sup>4</sup> A personal message has been omitted.

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132

## *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

3 March 1942

Following a detailed reconnaissance in **Syria** and a visit to the 5th Brigade Group in the **Western Desert**, I have to report as follows:

The 5th Brigade are in good spirits and health. I am endeavouring to get them back for refit and short musketry and artillery training before following the rest of the Division to **Syria**. Although the 5th Brigade are detached temporarily, as is usual with detachments I am experiencing difficulty in having them released.

The move to **Syria** is now in progress with **Divisional Headquarters** and advanced parties on the way. The 4th Brigade moves by train today, followed by the 6th Brigade. We shall have an advanced formation at **Aleppo** and shall be preparing and digging extensive defences facing north in the **Bekaa Valley**, north of **Baalbek**, flanked on either side by the **Lebanon** and Anti-**Lebanon** mountains, 9000 and 6000 feet respectively. The conditions are similar to **Greece**.

The Division is now fully equipped, except for a shortage of transport, and has been training actively since **Libya**. Small arms have been reclassified, artillery reshot, and the usual amount of marching done. Individual training now ceases. Collective training will be for mountain warfare and for the Syrian Desert, which differs from the **Western Desert**. The next three months will be hard work— extensive digging and pillbox-making in the northern defences and road-making into the mountains to enable us to use our guns in the high ranges. The



lack of roads from the north and east will prevent the enemy using field artillery should they attack across high ground. Training for mountain warfare will separate us from mechanical transport, and infantry sections will have pack mules. In this warfare tanks play a less important part while musketry comes much to the fore.

As the Division will be approximately 650 miles by road from Maadi Base, the question of moving arises. I feel, however, that the present arrangement is not at all permanent and existing conditions at **Maadi** are very good. I propose, if the Government agree, to leave the main base at **Maadi** and open the smallest possible advanced base on the coast at **Nathanya**, south of **Haifa**, for a depot convalescent camp and General Hospital. I also propose to open a Casualty Clearing Station in or near **Beirut**. None of these will necessitate new construction.

The prevalence of malaria in **Syria** raises serious medical problems. The matter, of course, is in hand and I hope casualties will be kept to the minimum. The climate at present is cold but it is hot in the summer. As this is the third summer in the **Middle East**, it is planned to send each unit to the seaside at Advanced Base for a fortnight during the hot weather.

**Beirut** is our closest big town and is very expensive. I propose, when the AIF leave there, to take over the club for officers and men. I am also opening a centre for the men at **Baalbek**. This can all be carried out with the profits from the Forces Club in **Cairo** and will not make inroads into the Patriotic Fund, which must now cover a larger field.

The men are greatly pleased at moving to **Syria**.

In view of the general situation I will conserve resources to the limit of my powers.

I join Headquarters in **Syria** by air this week.

Will you please acknowledge this and say if the Government agree in principle.

*The Prime Minister to General Freyberg**[ Extract ]*

17 March 1942

**War Cabinet** have noted with interest and agree in principle with your telegram of 3 March on which we have the following detailed comments to make:

- ( We would be most reluctant at this distance to endeavour to interfere a) with the concentration of troops considered necessary by the Commander-in-Chief to meet any possible threat in the **Western Desert**, but if you consider it proper and necessary that we should make representations for the return of the 5th Brigade, which of course we would desire at as early a date as possible, you will no doubt advise us.
- ( The question of the location of the Base we must leave to your b) discretion and we see no objection to the proposals that you make.
- ( The possibility of malaria is disturbing and we rely on you and your c) medical officers to take every possible step by way of precaution.... <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See *Reinforcement of 2nd NZEF, 1940–42 (No. 57)* for rest of text.

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*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

21 March 1942

I have just returned from our northern area in **Syria**, where we reconnoitred the Turkish frontier from the sea across to the Euphrates. From a defensive point of view the mountain passes on the north-western front are strong and like the mountain passes of **Olympus in Greece**. The frontier from the north and north-east has no easily occupied defensive position and affords an enemy easy access over ideal tank country. I am certain the line cannot be held in the event of a serious enemy attack unless we have substantial forces and strong

armoured and air components. As there is no likelihood of any immediate attack through **Turkey** there is no need for anxiety, but I am watching the larger aspect of the situation and will keep you in constant touch.

The Division is now situated as follows:

The 6th Brigade Group, under Brigadier Clifton, <sup>1</sup> are in the northern area (Headquarters at **Aleppo**) with detachments on the Turkish frontier guarding demolition charges on roads, railway tunnels, and bridges.

The 4th Brigade Group are digging and wiring a defensive position facing north on the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, guarding the **Bekaa Valley**.

**Divisional Headquarters** and divisional troops are at **Baalbek**.

All ranks are delighted with the green fields and trees and are feeling the benefit of a colder climate. All are in good health and spirits. I have made notes from General Puttick's statement about the position in New Zealand and all ranks are being given the relevant facts. <sup>2</sup>

The 5th Brigade Group were not released from the **Western Desert** by the promised date but are now due at **Maadi** on 26 March, where they refit, rejoining the Division by the first week in April.

In our new defensive position we shall have a brigade group of Greeks under command. These are men evacuated from **Crete**, as yet partially armed and not trained. After the evacuation from **Greece** we were asked by General Headquarters, **Middle East**, to train the Greeks. We have sent to the **Royal Greek Army** numbers of New Zealand officers and instructors to help them in the use of British weapons. Further, we have taken Greek officers and men into our training establishments at **Maadi**. Thus we have made our contribution to the general pool of instruction in the **Middle East**. I knew it would have your approval. The Greek Government bore all necessary expenses. The **Greek Brigade Group** will come up to **Syria** to complete their collective training under our guidance and will then come under our operational command.

During these difficult times I intend to send you a weekly cable when there is anything to report, giving the **New Zealand Government** the situation of their forces in the **Middle East**.

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<sup>1</sup> Brigadier G. H. Clifton, DSO, MC; Brigade Major, **5th NZ Infantry Brigade**, 1940; Commander Royal Engineers, **2nd NZ Division**, 1940–41; Chief Engineer, 30th Corps, Oct 1941 – Feb 1942; commanded 6th Brigade, Feb-Sep 1942; prisoner of war, **Alamein**, 4 Sep 1942; escaped in **Germany**, Mar 1945; liaison officer with organisation for Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees ( **Far East**), 1945; seconded to HQ BCOF ( **Japan**), 1946–47; NZ Military Liaison Officer, **London**, 1949-.

<sup>2</sup> This statement on the defence of New Zealand was contained in a telegram from General Puttick to **General Freyberg** on 5 Mar. In it General Puttick gave details of the strength and equipment of the forces in New Zealand and stressed the strategic importance of the Dominion in the prosecution of the war. The reason for the statement was that **Middle East** field censorship weekly summaries had shown some resentment in the 2nd NZEF at the suggestion that **United States** troops should be stationed in New Zealand. General Puttick emphasised the importance of **United States** naval and air aid to the defence of New Zealand and **Fiji** in particular, and added: ‘No USA forces are in New Zealand, but the Government and Chiefs of Staff would welcome them in almost any strength. Naturally we would all prefer our own troops from the **Middle East**, but we realise that strategical, shipping, and time factors predominate at present.’

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135

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

10 April 1942

I am now back in **Syria** after a visit to General Headquarters and Base, during which I inspected the 5th Brigade at **Maadi**. The brigade is fully equipped up to strength, with all its transport, and has never been in better shape. There has been no sickness, and the men are fit and have enjoyed a week's well-earned refitting leave at **Maadi**. While in the

**Western Desert** they dug a defensive position in solid rock at **El Adem**.

On 8 April they entrained for **Aleppo** to take over from the 6th Brigade on the Turkish frontier guarding demolitions on roads, railways, and bridges. The 6th Brigade on relief will move about 20 April to the **Bekaa Valley** fortress area to prepare the western flank on the Lebanon Mountains. The 4th Brigade is still working on the eastern flank in the Anti-Lebanon Mountains while the Artillery, Engineers, and Cavalry work in the valley between. All work proceeds at maximum speed.

General Auchinleck inspected the defences here recently with General Wilson and expressed satisfaction with what he saw. Later I accompanied them by air on a reconnaissance from **Aleppo** to Mosul. With the arrival of the 5th Brigade the Division will again be concentrated, though **Aleppo** is 180 miles from the defensive position in the **Bekaa Valley**. Conditions here are good though a shortage of potatoes, which has removed them from the ration for six months, has upset the balance of the ration. Mosquitoes have appeared in the north but no cases of malaria are yet reported. The general health is excellent.

I have discussed the position with Australian senior officers. They state that all ranks of the AIF now in the **Middle East** would be much happier if their situation of uncertainty were settled one way or the other. I informed them that the 2nd NZEF would be remaining in the **Middle East**. The Australians now have approximately the same number of troops in the **Middle East** as are in the 2nd NZEF, that is, the equivalent in numbers of two British divisions. Our figures, including non-divisional units, are about 2000 officers and 30,000 men. General Morshead, <sup>1</sup> commanding the **9th Australian Division**, has gone to **Cairo** to take over the AIF Headquarters following the departure of General Blamey, <sup>2</sup> leaving the senior Brigadier to command in the field. As soon as the Australians are announced to be staying I shall issue a clear statement of policy to the men. There is no discontent among the men.

Public Relations have produced a New Zealand film of the **Crete** and **Libyan** campaigns entitled 'Return to the Attack'. It is to be sent to New

Zealand and England. I consider it a good film.

I am at present working on a **Middle East** appreciation which I shall forward as soon as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir Leslie James Morshead, KCB, KBE, CMG, DSO; commanded 18th Infantry Brigade, AIF, 1940–41; GOC 9th Division, 1941–42; commanded Australian Corps in **Middle East**, 1942–43; GOC 2nd Australian Army, 1944.

<sup>2</sup> General Blamey was appointed Commander-in-Chief, Allied Land Forces in the South-West Pacific Area in March.

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136

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

16 April 1942

The following appreciation of the position on the Russian and **Middle East** fronts is forwarded for your personal information.

The evidence shows that **Germany** has made administrative arrangements to resume the offensive on several fronts, either simultaneously or in succession. The possible fronts are:

- (1) **Russia**;
- (2) **Turkey**—by land, sea, and air;
- (3) **Cyprus** and **Syria**—by sea and air;
- (4) North Africa.

Despite Axis pressure **Turkey** remains a potential ally, and in all plans for the defence of the **Middle East** her attitude is of great importance. It is thought that **Turkey** will not acquiesce in the passage of German troops unless the Russians are utterly defeated or beaten so badly that they lose **Moscow** and are driven behind the Volga, thus allowing **Germany** to concentrate large forces in **Thrace** and the Caucasus. It is difficult to estimate the Turkish strength: her Government is over-centralised, her army is inadequately equipped, and

they miss Kemal's leadership. **Turkey**, however, remains confident, perhaps over-confident.

At present there is no indication of German reinforcement of the **Balkans** and Aegean area, and although administrative arrangements may be complete it would be some weeks before the necessary re-disposition of forces could be effected.

In view of the present weakness of our naval forces in the Eastern Mediterranean and our weak military garrison, the invasion of **Cyprus** and **Syria** by sea and air might appear an attractive proposition. The condition precedent, however, would be overwhelming air superiority, only attainable by the use of airfields in **Anatolia** at present not available. The **Royal Air Force** opinion is that, even if **Germany** remained on the defensive in **Russia**, insufficient troop-carrying and transport aircraft are available for a purely airborne attack on **Cyprus**. This can be ruled out for the present. It is also unlikely and against all teaching that **Germany** will open up a fresh front until a decision is reached on the main front in **Russia**. It is probable, however, that she will attack in the **Western Desert** to improve the jumping-off position against Egypt and to help **Japan** in the **Far East**.

Evidence also suggests that the Germans have been fully extended in **Russia** during the winter. There are doubts about this, but in any case it appears certain that by drawing extensively on their allies and by a comb-out of German industry, they have collected a considerable striking force, including armour, for the spearhead of a new offensive against **Russia**. **Germany's** first objective must be to remove the threat of the Russian Army. If she achieves that, I think the Japanese successes in **Burma** will tend to draw the German effort south as soon as possible to break our hold on the **Middle East** and the **Mediterranean**. She will aim to carry out a winter campaign attacking **Iraq**, **Syria**, and the **Western Desert**. Our position here will then be difficult, but the administrative difficulties facing the Germans must not be forgotten as communications through the Caucasus and **Turkey** in the winter are



very bad, and the sea route to **Africa** requires a large enemy air force to neutralise **Malta**.

On the evidence available it would be of little value to express an opinion on the future. Everything depends on the result of the battle in **Russia** this summer. Assuming, however, that the German offensive commences in mid-May, as seems possible, and succeeds, certain calculations are given.

*Attack on **Iraq** through the **Caucasus**:*

From the start of the offensive in **Russia** to the capture of **Stalingrad**—one month.

Consolidation and regrouping—two to three weeks.

Advance to frontiers of **Turkey** and **Persia**—eight weeks.

Total time for four divisions to arrive at the Persian frontier—14 to 15 weeks.

*Attack on **Syria** through **Acquiescent Turkey**:*

To capture **Stalingrad**—one month.

To withdraw troops from the **Stalingrad** front and concentrate in **Thrace**—one month.

To move four divisions through **Turkey** to the Turkish-Syrian frontier—two and a half months.

Thus, if the German offensive succeeded, four German divisions could cross the Persian frontier by the end of August and four divisions could cross the Turkish-Syrian frontier by the middle of September.

To sum up: **Germany** has undoubtedly mobilised all her forces and those of her allies for a supreme effort this year. The situation is parallel in many ways to 1918 with the result much in the balance. If Germany succeeds in **Russia** and **Turkey** capitulates without fighting, and no



reinforcements of men, tanks, aeroplanes, and ships arrive in the **Middle East**, we must go on the defensive in the **Western Desert**, **Syria**, and **Iraq**. We must be prepared for loss of territory and for very heavy fighting during the late summer. On the other hand, **Russia** may prove a tougher proposition than we expect. In any case, should **Germany** fail to get the decision against **Russia**, her position will be perilous. Come what may, we must be prepared to fight very hard during 1942, either in defence of the **Middle East** or in attacking the Axis wherever possible, to support our ally **Russia** and possibly **Turkey**.

A cable dealing with the proposed operational role for the New Zealand Division follows.

137

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

18 April 1942

Further to my telegram of 16 April. The Commander-in-Chief has seen my appreciation and comments as follows:

I agree generally but have the following comments. I should not describe **Turkey** as over-confident. I doubt if **Germany's** plans in the **Middle East** will be influenced by the desire to assist **Japan** directly. Your estimate of the middle of September is presumably based on the assumption that the enemy must first capture **Stalingrad** before forces for **Turkey** can be released. The War Office think that with **Turkey** acquiescent the Germans may be on the Syrian border by mid-July.

138

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

18 April 1942

Reference my telegrams of 16 and 18 April ( **Nos. 136** and **137**). The Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, has asked me to consult the **New Zealand Government** about the possible employment of the New Zealand Division in an operational role. In the summer we may have to send the

**Royal Air Force into Turkey** if she is attacked, irrespective of the situation in **Russia** or elsewhere. If the **RAF** go they will be operating from aerodromes built by us in western **Anatolia**, in positions enabling them to give fighter and bomber cover over the Turkish defences at Catalga and Bulair lines, covering the Bosphorus and Dardanelles and the sea approaches to **Gallipoli**. The importance of this assistance to **Turkey**, as well as the delay and damage inflicted upon invading German forces, needs no comment.

The role of the Division and attached troops would be to move in troops by road and anti-aircraft guns by rail to protect the **RAF** and landing grounds from enemy airborne attacks and possible land raids by mechanised forces. It is pointed out that the force so allotted will have the Turkish Army and the Sea of Marmara between it and the main Axis forces attacking from **Thrace**.

The Commander-in-Chief is anxious to allot the New Zealand Division and another brigade group, probably of the **4th Indian Division**, for the task. A decision is urgently required so that joint planning with the prospective Air Commander can begin now.

Realising that the **New Zealand Government** is not in a position to form a clear opinion either on the risks or conditions of the proposed operation, I send my opinion to enable you to make a decision.

- (1) I have nothing to add to my appreciation regarding the Turkish position.
- (2) The operation envisaged is a difficult one. The move in would be over difficult country and bad roads. The New Zealand force will be completely mobile; the main body would move by road 700 miles, and the force covering the advanced aerodromes an additional 250 miles.
- (3) While the Axis forces are assembling in **Thrace**, the special force could assemble in the **Aleppo** area preparatory to a rapid advance taking ten to fourteen days.
- (4) The Turkish defences in **Thrace** are prepared and a considerable sea obstacle exists. On the other hand, there is the threat to the left front and flank of sea and air landings from the Aegean and the Dodecanese Islands, but such a force would be immobile for some

time as port facilities and difficulties of transportation would prevent a large number of vehicles being landed.

- (5) If withdrawal became necessary our main troubles would come from air attack, but considerable anti-aircraft and air defence in depth could be provided.
- (6) The proposed operation is bound to have some measure of success and gain great advantages. The alternative would be to desert **Turkey**, and she might capitulate and hand over undamaged the whole of her communications. Under a Quisling Government Turkish forces might be used against us. Even if we got part of the way in and had to withdraw prematurely, roads, railways, bridges, &c., could be demolished and the enemy advance handicapped so that attack on **Syria** might be delayed and even prevented by the winter snowfall.
- (7) The Turkish-Syrian frontier itself cannot be defended, and early withdrawal from it would entail the certain loss of **Cyprus**, the premature opening of the ports of **Beirut** and **Tripoli**, and the surrender of the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean sea routes. Further, if the **Suez Canal** is to be held until reinforcements arrive, the German advance through **Turkey** must be met as far from the Canal as possible.

To sum up, we are now fully equipped and in the course of six weeks will be fully trained. There is no division in the **Middle East** so well fitted to carry out the proposed role. If for any reason you decide against the proposal, another division less well trained would have to do it. The difficulties of getting in and of a possible withdrawal must be fully realised, but provided our headquarters are with the foremost troops and our signal communications are good, we can keep in touch with the position ahead and to our flank and extricate the force should the worst happen. In all the circumstances I feel that you would be justified in accepting the proposed role.

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*The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

22 April 1942

The information contained in your telegrams ( **Nos. 136– 8**) is much appreciated and we have given most careful thought to the considerations to which you call attention.

**On the following assumptions, namely:**

- (1) that the move is undertaken only with the full support and approval of **Turkey**;**
- (2) that an assurance is given by the Commander-in-Chief ( a ) that adequate air support is provided sufficient to ensure that the Division does not have to go through another **Greece** or **Crete**, and ( b ) that adequate forces will be available to protect the Syrian flank and, if necessary, to assist in supporting and extricating the Division, we agree that the Division should be used for the operational role proposed.**

**You will, of course, keep us advised of the situation from time to time.**

**140**  
***General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence***

**10 May 1942**

**Reference your telegram of 22 April.**

**The Commander-in-Chief is most grateful for the helpful attitude of the **New Zealand Government**. The question of assurances will be the subject of further communications.**

**I have to report that with Colonels Gentry <sup>1</sup> and Maxwell <sup>2</sup> I attended detail planning meetings at General Headquarters, **Cairo**, examining the whole question from the point of view of organisation, equipment, timing, and forward movement to the concentration area. The scarcity of information about the state of the roads and the country through which we would have to move makes planning most difficult. General Headquarters, **Middle East**, are therefore trying to arrange with the Turkish Government to send in four New Zealand officers—road engineer, doctor, signals, and General Staff officers—for a fortnight's reconnaissance to report on communications, roads, water supply, hygiene arrangements, &c. On receipt of their reports we shall be in a better position to deal with the problems of planning and administration.**

As instructed, I will keep you in touch with the situation as it develops. I am at present preparing a statement on the present state of training and efficiency of the 2nd NZEF.

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<sup>1</sup> Brigadier W. G. Gentry, CBE, DSO; GSO 2, **2nd NZ Division**, 1940; AA & QMG, 1940–41; GSO 1, 1941–42; commanded 6th Brigade, 1942–43; Deputy Chief of the General Staff (in NZ), 1943–44; commanded New Zealand Troops in Egypt, 6th NZ Division, and NZ Maadi Camp, Aug 1944 – Feb 1945; commanded 9th NZ Brigade (in **Italy**), 1945; New Zealand representative on Joint Chiefs of Staff Organisation in **Australia**, Mar-Jul 1946; Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Jul 1946 – Nov 1947; Adjutant-General, Apr 1949-.

<sup>2</sup> Colonel D. T. Maxwell, OBE; Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General, 2nd NZEF, 1940; GSO 2, Oct 1940 – Jan 1941; GSO 2 and later AA & QMG, 2nd NZEF Base, 1941; AA & QMG, **2nd NZ Division**, Oct 1941 – Jun 1942; returned to New Zealand for duty Aug 1942 and held various senior staff appointments, including Commandant, New Zealand Staff College, Aug 1943 – Mar 1944; posted to 2nd NZEF ( **Japan**), Mar 1946; Commander British Commonwealth Sub-Area, **Tokyo**, Jun 1946 – Jul 1947; Commander Area 5, **Wellington**, Nov 1947 – Oct 1948; NZ Joint Services Liaison Staff, **Melbourne**, Nov 1948-.

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141

## *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

4 June 1942

In my appreciations ( **Nos. 136– 8**) plans to meet a German attack through **Turkey** have been the main consideration. Although these plans are still being considered, there is no indication at present of an attack developing. Information indicates that the main German thrust is aimed at the oilfields in and around the Persian Gulf, and the planning now being given first priority is the defence of **Persia** from attack through the Caucasus. The capture of the Persian oil supply would be a great loss to the Allies, especially in the **Middle East**.

**This message is to inform you of the trend of thought here, and also to advise you that I have been asked at short notice to leave tomorrow with the GSO 1 <sup>1</sup> for ten days' reconnaissance in Persia. The reconnaissance is purely exploratory. I shall keep you fully informed of any possible change in policy, which will be referred to you in the ordinary way.**

**I have to thank you and the Government for my promotion, <sup>2</sup> which will help me in my dealings here and elsewhere.**

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**<sup>1</sup> Colonel W. G. Gentry.**

**<sup>2</sup> In a telegram sent on 3 Jun the Prime Minister advised General Freyberg that he had been granted the temporary rank of Lieutenant-General as from 1 Mar 1942.**

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

130 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE –  
[EXTRACT]

130

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

[ Extract ]

13 December 1941

.... <sup>1</sup> For the personal information of my Minister and the Chief of the General Staff, the Division is now to refit and train for future operations on the Syrian front. I consider it will take two months' hard training to get units and formations up to the requisite pitch.... Until the battle in the west is finished we shall be on a low priority for equipment.

Would Cabinet like a short appreciation with particular reference to the position on the Syrian front next spring? I could collect material and do this after visiting there later in the month. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For complete text See *Libyan Campaign, 1941-42* (No. 115).

<sup>2</sup> The Minister of Defence replied on 16 Dec that War Cabinet would welcome this appreciation. See No. 132.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

131 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE –  
[EXTRACT]

131

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*  
[ Extract]

15 February 1942

Further to my telegram of 9 February. <sup>3</sup> The 5th Brigade Group is now in the **Western Desert** in Eighth Army Reserve.

I am leaving for **Syria** by air tomorrow with the principal members of my staff to reconnoitre administrative areas and defensive positions prior to the arrival of the Division. I will not be back for some days, and there may therefore be a time-lag in any cables. All are well.... <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See *Libyan Campaign, 1941-42* (No. 125).

<sup>4</sup> A personal message has been omitted.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 132 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

132

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

3 March 1942

Following a detailed reconnaissance in **Syria** and a visit to the 5th Brigade Group in the **Western Desert**, I have to report as follows:

The 5th Brigade are in good spirits and health. I am endeavouring to get them back for refit and short musketry and artillery training before following the rest of the Division to **Syria**. Although the 5th Brigade are detached temporarily, as is usual with detachments I am experiencing difficulty in having them released.

The move to **Syria** is now in progress with **Divisional Headquarters** and advanced parties on the way. The 4th Brigade moves by train today, followed by the 6th Brigade. We shall have an advanced formation at **Aleppo** and shall be preparing and digging extensive defences facing north in the **Bekaa Valley**, north of **Baalbek**, flanked on either side by the **Lebanon** and Anti- **Lebanon** mountains, 9000 and 6000 feet respectively. The conditions are similar to **Greece**.

The Division is now fully equipped, except for a shortage of transport, and has been training actively since **Libya**. Small arms have been reclassified, artillery reshot, and the usual amount of marching done. Individual training now ceases. Collective training will be for mountain warfare and for the Syrian Desert, which differs from the **Western Desert**. The next three months will be hard work— extensive digging and pillbox-making in the northern defences and road-making into the mountains to enable us to use our guns in the high ranges. The lack of roads from the north and east will prevent the enemy using field artillery should they attack across high ground. Training for mountain

warfare will separate us from mechanical transport, and infantry sections will have pack mules. In this warfare tanks play a less important part while musketry comes much to the fore.

As the Division will be approximately 650 miles by road from Maadi Base, the question of moving arises. I feel, however, that the present arrangement is not at all permanent and existing conditions at **Maadi** are very good. I propose, if the Government agree, to leave the main base at **Maadi** and open the smallest possible advanced base on the coast at **Nathanya**, south of **Haifa**, for a depot convalescent camp and General Hospital. I also propose to open a Casualty Clearing Station in or near **Beirut**. None of these will necessitate new construction.

The prevalence of malaria in **Syria** raises serious medical problems. The matter, of course, is in hand and I hope casualties will be kept to the minimum. The climate at present is cold but it is hot in the summer. As this is the third summer in the **Middle East**, it is planned to send each unit to the seaside at Advanced Base for a fortnight during the hot weather.

**Beirut** is our closest big town and is very expensive. I propose, when the AIF leave there, to take over the club for officers and men. I am also opening a centre for the men at **Baalbek**. This can all be carried out with the profits from the Forces Club in **Cairo** and will not make inroads into the Patriotic Fund, which must now cover a larger field.

The men are greatly pleased at moving to **Syria**.

In view of the general situation I will conserve resources to the limit of my powers.

I join Headquarters in **Syria** by air this week.

Will you please acknowledge this and say if the Government agree in principle.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 133 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG – [EXTRACT]

133

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg* *[ Extract ]*

17 March 1942

**War Cabinet** have noted with interest and agree in principle with your telegram of 3 March on which we have the following detailed comments to make:

- ( We would be most reluctant at this distance to endeavour to interfere a) with the concentration of troops considered necessary by the Commander-in-Chief to meet any possible threat in the **Western Desert**, but if you consider it proper and necessary that we should make representations for the return of the 5th Brigade, which of course we would desire at as early a date as possible, you will no doubt advise us.
- ( The question of the location of the Base we must leave to your b) discretion and we see no objection to the proposals that you make.
- ( The possibility of malaria is disturbing and we rely on you and your c) medical officers to take every possible step by way of precaution.... <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See *Reinforcement of 2nd NZEF, 1940-42 (No. 57)* for rest of text.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 134 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

134

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

21 March 1942

I have just returned from our northern area in **Syria**, where we reconnoitred the Turkish frontier from the sea across to the Euphrates. From a defensive point of view the mountain passes on the north-western front are strong and like the mountain passes of **Olympus** in **Greece**. The frontier from the north and north-east has no easily occupied defensive position and affords an enemy easy access over ideal tank country. I am certain the line cannot be held in the event of a serious enemy attack unless we have substantial forces and strong armoured and air components. As there is no likelihood of any immediate attack through **Turkey** there is no need for anxiety, but I am watching the larger aspect of the situation and will keep you in constant touch.

The Division is now situated as follows:

The 6th Brigade Group, under Brigadier Clifton, <sup>1</sup> are in the northern area (Headquarters at **Aleppo**) with detachments on the Turkish frontier guarding demolition charges on roads, railway tunnels, and bridges.

The 4th Brigade Group are digging and wiring a defensive position facing north on the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, guarding the **Bekaa Valley**.

**Divisional Headquarters** and divisional troops are at **Baalbek**.

All ranks are delighted with the green fields and trees and are feeling the benefit of a colder climate. All are in good health and spirits. I have made notes from General Puttick's statement about the position in New

**Zealand and all ranks are being given the relevant facts.** <sup>2</sup>

**The 5th Brigade Group were not released from the Western Desert by the promised date but are now due at Maadi on 26 March, where they refit, rejoining the Division by the first week in April.**

**In our new defensive position we shall have a brigade group of Greeks under command. These are men evacuated from Crete, as yet partially armed and not trained. After the evacuation from Greece we were asked by General Headquarters, Middle East, to train the Greeks. We have sent to the Royal Greek Army numbers of New Zealand officers and instructors to help them in the use of British weapons. Further, we have taken Greek officers and men into our training establishments at Maadi. Thus we have made our contribution to the general pool of instruction in the Middle East. I knew it would have your approval. The Greek Government bore all necessary expenses. The Greek Brigade Group will come up to Syria to complete their collective training under our guidance and will then come under our operational command.**

**During these difficult times I intend to send you a weekly cable when there is anything to report, giving the New Zealand Government the situation of their forces in the Middle East.**

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<sup>1</sup> Brigadier G. H. Clifton, DSO, MC; Brigade Major, **5th NZ Infantry Brigade**, 1940; Commander Royal Engineers, **2nd NZ Division**, 1940–41; Chief Engineer, 30th Corps, Oct 1941 – Feb 1942; commanded 6th Brigade, Feb-Sep 1942; prisoner of war, **Alamein**, 4 Sep 1942; escaped in **Germany**, Mar 1945; liaison officer with organisation for Recovery of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees ( **Far East**), 1945; seconded to HQ BCOF ( **Japan**), 1946–47; NZ Military Liaison Officer, **London**, 1949-.

<sup>2</sup> This statement on the defence of New Zealand was contained in a telegram from General Puttick to **General Freyberg** on 5 Mar. In it General Puttick gave details of the strength and equipment of the forces in New Zealand and stressed the strategic importance of the Dominion in the prosecution of the

war. The reason for the statement was that **Middle East** field censorship weekly summaries had shown some resentment in the 2nd NZEF at the suggestion that **United States** troops should be stationed in New Zealand. General Puttick emphasised the importance of **United States** naval and air aid to the defence of New Zealand and **Fiji** in particular, and added: 'No USA forces are in New Zealand, but the Government and Chiefs of Staff would welcome them in almost any strength. Naturally we would all prefer our own troops from the **Middle East**, but we realise that strategical, shipping, and time factors predominate at present.'

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 135 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

135

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

10 April 1942

I am now back in **Syria** after a visit to General Headquarters and Base, during which I inspected the 5th Brigade at **Maadi**. The brigade is fully equipped up to strength, with all its transport, and has never been in better shape. There has been no sickness, and the men are fit and have enjoyed a week's well-earned refitting leave at **Maadi**. While in the **Western Desert** they dug a defensive position in solid rock at **El Adem**.

On 8 April they entrained for **Aleppo** to take over from the 6th Brigade on the Turkish frontier guarding demolitions on roads, railways, and bridges. The 6th Brigade on relief will move about 20 April to the **Bekaa Valley** fortress area to prepare the western flank on the Lebanon Mountains. The 4th Brigade is still working on the eastern flank in the Anti-Lebanon Mountains while the Artillery, Engineers, and Cavalry work in the valley between. All work proceeds at maximum speed.

General Auchinleck inspected the defences here recently with General Wilson and expressed satisfaction with what he saw. Later I accompanied them by air on a reconnaissance from **Aleppo** to Mosul. With the arrival of the 5th Brigade the Division will again be concentrated, though **Aleppo** is 180 miles from the defensive position in the **Bekaa Valley**. Conditions here are good though a shortage of potatoes, which has removed them from the ration for six months, has upset the balance of the ration. Mosquitoes have appeared in the north but no cases of malaria are yet reported. The general health is excellent.

I have discussed the position with Australian senior officers. They state that all ranks of the AIF now in the **Middle East** would be much

happier if their situation of uncertainty were settled one way or the other. I informed them that the 2nd NZEF would be remaining in the **Middle East**. The Australians now have approximately the same number of troops in the **Middle East** as are in the 2nd NZEF, that is, the equivalent in numbers of two British divisions. Our figures, including non-divisional units, are about 2000 officers and 30,000 men. General Morshead, <sup>1</sup> commanding the **9th Australian Division**, has gone to **Cairo** to take over the AIF Headquarters following the departure of General Blamey, <sup>2</sup> leaving the senior Brigadier to command in the field. As soon as the Australians are announced to be staying I shall issue a clear statement of policy to the men. There is no discontent among the men.

Public Relations have produced a New Zealand film of the **Crete** and **Libyan** campaigns entitled 'Return to the Attack'. It is to be sent to New Zealand and England. I consider it a good film.

I am at present working on a **Middle East** appreciation which I shall forward as soon as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir Leslie James Morshead, KCB, KBE, CMG, DSO; commanded 18th Infantry Brigade, AIF, 1940–41; GOC 9th Division, 1941–42; commanded Australian Corps in **Middle East**, 1942–43; GOC 2nd Australian Army, 1944.

<sup>2</sup> General Blamey was appointed Commander-in-Chief, Allied Land Forces in the South-West Pacific Area in March.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 136 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

136

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

16 April 1942

The following appreciation of the position on the Russian and Middle East fronts is forwarded for your personal information.

The evidence shows that Germany has made administrative arrangements to resume the offensive on several fronts, either simultaneously or in succession. The possible fronts are:

- (1) Russia;
- (2) Turkey—by land, sea, and air;
- (3) Cyprus and Syria—by sea and air;
- (4) North Africa.

Despite Axis pressure Turkey remains a potential ally, and in all plans for the defence of the Middle East her attitude is of great importance. It is thought that Turkey will not acquiesce in the passage of German troops unless the Russians are utterly defeated or beaten so badly that they lose Moscow and are driven behind the Volga, thus allowing Germany to concentrate large forces in Thrace and the Caucasus. It is difficult to estimate the Turkish strength: her Government is over-centralised, her army is inadequately equipped, and they miss Kemal's leadership. Turkey, however, remains confident, perhaps over-confident.

At present there is no indication of German reinforcement of the Balkans and Aegean area, and although administrative arrangements may be complete it would be some weeks before the necessary re-disposition of forces could be effected.

In view of the present weakness of our naval forces in the Eastern Mediterranean and our weak military garrison, the invasion of **Cyprus** and **Syria** by sea and air might appear an attractive proposition. The condition precedent, however, would be overwhelming air superiority, only attainable by the use of airfields in **Anatolia** at present not available. The **Royal Air Force** opinion is that, even if **Germany** remained on the defensive in **Russia**, insufficient troop-carrying and transport aircraft are available for a purely airborne attack on **Cyprus**. This can be ruled out for the present. It is also unlikely and against all teaching that **Germany** will open up a fresh front until a decision is reached on the main front in **Russia**. It is probable, however, that she will attack in the **Western Desert** to improve the jumping-off position against **Egypt** and to help **Japan** in the **Far East**.

Evidence also suggests that the Germans have been fully extended in **Russia** during the winter. There are doubts about this, but in any case it appears certain that by drawing extensively on their allies and by a comb-out of German industry, they have collected a considerable striking force, including armour, for the spearhead of a new offensive against **Russia**. **Germany's** first objective must be to remove the threat of the Russian Army. If she achieves that, I think the Japanese successes in **Burma** will tend to draw the German effort south as soon as possible to break our hold on the **Middle East** and the **Mediterranean**. She will aim to carry out a winter campaign attacking **Iraq**, **Syria**, and the **Western Desert**. Our position here will then be difficult, but the administrative difficulties facing the Germans must not be forgotten as communications through the Caucasus and **Turkey** in the winter are very bad, and the sea route to **Africa** requires a large enemy air force to neutralise **Malta**.

On the evidence available it would be of little value to express an opinion on the future. Everything depends on the result of the battle in **Russia** this summer. Assuming, however, that the German offensive commences in mid-May, as seems possible, and succeeds, certain calculations are given.

### *Attack on Iraq through the Caucasus:*

From the start of the offensive in **Russia** to the capture of **Stalingrad**—one month.

Consolidation and regrouping—two to three weeks.

Advance to frontiers of **Turkey** and **Persia**—eight weeks.

Total time for four divisions to arrive at the Persian frontier—14 to 15 weeks.

### *Attack on Syria through Acquiescent Turkey:*

To capture **Stalingrad**—one month.

To withdraw troops from the **Stalingrad** front and concentrate in **Thrace**—one month.

To move four divisions through **Turkey** to the Turkish-Syrian frontier—two and a half months.

Thus, if the German offensive succeeded, four German divisions could cross the Persian frontier by the end of August and four divisions could cross the Turkish-Syrian frontier by the middle of September.

To sum up: **Germany** has undoubtedly mobilised all her forces and those of her allies for a supreme effort this year. The situation is parallel in many ways to 1918 with the result much in the balance. If Germany succeeds in **Russia** and **Turkey** capitulates without fighting, and no reinforcements of men, tanks, aeroplanes, and ships arrive in the **Middle East**, we must go on the defensive in the **Western Desert**, **Syria**, and **Iraq**. We must be prepared for loss of territory and for very heavy fighting during the late summer. On the other hand, **Russia** may prove a tougher proposition than we expect. In any case, should **Germany** fail to get the decision against **Russia**, her position will be perilous. Come what may, we must be prepared to fight very hard during 1942, either in defence of the **Middle East** or in attacking the Axis wherever possible, to

support our ally **Russia** and possibly **Turkey**.

**A cable dealing with the proposed operational role for the New Zealand Division follows.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 137 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

137

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

18 April 1942

**Further to my telegram of 16 April. The Commander-in-Chief has seen my appreciation and comments as follows:**

**I agree generally but have the following comments. I should not describe **Turkey** as over-confident. I doubt if **Germany's** plans in the **Middle East** will be influenced by the desire to assist **Japan** directly. Your estimate of the middle of September is presumably based on the assumption that the enemy must first capture **Stalingrad** before forces for **Turkey** can be released. The War Office think that with **Turkey** acquiescent the Germans may be on the Syrian border by mid-July.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 138 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

138

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

18 April 1942

Reference my telegrams of 16 and 18 April ( Nos. 136 and 137). The Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, has asked me to consult the **New Zealand Government** about the possible employment of the New Zealand Division in an operational role. In the summer we may have to send the **Royal Air Force** into **Turkey** if she is attacked, irrespective of the situation in **Russia** or elsewhere. If the **RAF** go they will be operating from aerodromes built by us in western **Anatolia**, in positions enabling them to give fighter and bomber cover over the Turkish defences at **Catalga** and **Bulair** lines, covering the **Bosporus** and **Dardanelles** and the sea approaches to **Gallipoli**. The importance of this assistance to **Turkey**, as well as the delay and damage inflicted upon invading German forces, needs no comment.

The role of the Division and attached troops would be to move in troops by road and anti-aircraft guns by rail to protect the **RAF** and landing grounds from enemy airborne attacks and possible land raids by mechanised forces. It is pointed out that the force so allotted will have the Turkish Army and the Sea of Marmara between it and the main Axis forces attacking from **Thrace**.

The Commander-in-Chief is anxious to allot the New Zealand Division and another brigade group, probably of the **4th Indian Division**, for the task. A decision is urgently required so that joint planning with the prospective Air Commander can begin now.

Realising that the **New Zealand Government** is not in a position to form a clear opinion either on the risks or conditions of the proposed

operation, I send my opinion to enable you to make a decision.

- (1) I have nothing to add to my appreciation regarding the Turkish position.
- (2) The operation envisaged is a difficult one. The move in would be over difficult country and bad roads. The New Zealand force will be completely mobile; the main body would move by road 700 miles, and the force covering the advanced aerodromes an additional 250 miles.
- (3) While the Axis forces are assembling in **Thrace**, the special force could assemble in the **Aleppo** area preparatory to a rapid advance taking ten to fourteen days.
- (4) The Turkish defences in **Thrace** are prepared and a considerable sea obstacle exists. On the other hand, there is the threat to the left front and flank of sea and air landings from the Aegean and the Dodecanese Islands, but such a force would be immobile for some time as port facilities and difficulties of transportation would prevent a large number of vehicles being landed.
- (5) If withdrawal became necessary our main troubles would come from air attack, but considerable anti-aircraft and air defence in depth could be provided.
- (6) The proposed operation is bound to have some measure of success and gain great advantages. The alternative would be to desert **Turkey**, and she might capitulate and hand over undamaged the whole of her communications. Under a Quisling Government Turkish forces might be used against us. Even if we got part of the way in and had to withdraw prematurely, roads, railways, bridges, &c., could be demolished and the enemy advance handicapped so that attack on **Syria** might be delayed and even prevented by the winter snowfall.
- (7) The Turkish-Syrian frontier itself cannot be defended, and early withdrawal from it would entail the certain loss of **Cyprus**, the premature opening of the ports of **Beirut** and **Tripoli**, and the surrender of the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean sea routes. Further, if the **Suez Canal** is to be held until reinforcements arrive, the German advance through **Turkey** must be met as far from the Canal as possible.

To sum up, we are now fully equipped and in the course of six weeks will be fully trained. There is no division in the **Middle East** so well fitted to carry out the proposed role. If for any reason you decide against the proposal, another division less well trained would have to do it. The difficulties of getting in and of a possible withdrawal must be fully

**realised, but provided our headquarters are with the foremost troops and our signal communications are good, we can keep in touch with the position ahead and to our flank and extricate the force should the worst happen. In all the circumstances I feel that you would be justified in accepting the proposed role.**



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 139 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

139

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

22 April 1942

The information contained in your telegrams ( Nos. 136– 8) is much appreciated and we have given most careful thought to the considerations to which you call attention.

On the following assumptions, namely:

- (1) that the move is undertaken only with the full support and approval of **Turkey**;
- (2) that an assurance is given by the Commander-in-Chief ( *a*) that adequate air support is provided sufficient to ensure that the Division does not have to go through another **Greece** or **Crete**, and ( *b*) that adequate forces will be available to protect the Syrian flank and, if necessary, to assist in supporting and extricating the Division, we agree that the Division should be used for the operational role proposed.

You will, of course, keep us advised of the situation from time to time.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 140 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

140

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

10 May 1942

Reference your telegram of 22 April.

The Commander-in-Chief is most grateful for the helpful attitude of the **New Zealand Government**. The question of assurances will be the subject of further communications.

I have to report that with Colonels Gentry <sup>1</sup> and Maxwell <sup>2</sup> I attended detail planning meetings at General Headquarters, **Cairo**, examining the whole question from the point of view of organisation, equipment, timing, and forward movement to the concentration area. The scarcity of information about the state of the roads and the country through which we would have to move makes planning most difficult. General Headquarters, **Middle East**, are therefore trying to arrange with the Turkish Government to send in four New Zealand officers—road engineer, doctor, signals, and General Staff officers—for a fortnight's reconnaissance to report on communications, roads, water supply, hygiene arrangements, &c. On receipt of their reports we shall be in a better position to deal with the problems of planning and administration.

As instructed, I will keep you in touch with the situation as it develops. I am at present preparing a statement on the present state of training and efficiency of the 2nd NZEF.

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<sup>1</sup> Brigadier W. G. Gentry, CBE, DSO; GSO 2, **2nd NZ Division**, 1940; AA & QMG, 1940-41; GSO 1, 1941-42; commanded 6th Brigade, 1942-43; Deputy Chief of the General Staff (in NZ),

**1943–44; commanded New Zealand Troops in Egypt, 6th NZ Division, and NZ Maadi Camp, Aug 1944 – Feb 1945; commanded 9th NZ Brigade (in Italy), 1945; New Zealand representative on Joint Chiefs of Staff Organisation in Australia, Mar-Jul 1946; Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Jul 1946 – Nov 1947; Adjutant-General, Apr 1949-.**

**<sup>2</sup> Colonel D. T. Maxwell, OBE; Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General, 2nd NZEF, 1940; GSO 2, Oct 1940 – Jan 1941; GSO 2 and later AA & QMG, 2nd NZEF Base, 1941; AA & QMG, 2nd NZ Division, Oct 1941 – Jun 1942; returned to New Zealand for duty Aug 1942 and held various senior staff appointments, including Commandant, New Zealand Staff College, Aug 1943 – Mar 1944; posted to 2nd NZEF ( Japan), Mar 1946; Commander British Commonwealth Sub-Area, Tokyo, Jun 1946 – Jul 1947; Commander Area 5, Wellington, Nov 1947 – Oct 1948; NZ Joint Services Liaison Staff, Melbourne, Nov 1948-.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 141 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

141

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

4 June 1942

In my appreciations ( **Nos. 136– 8**) plans to meet a German attack through **Turkey** have been the main consideration. Although these plans are still being considered, there is no indication at present of an attack developing. Information indicates that the main German thrust is aimed at the oilfields in and around the Persian Gulf, and the planning now being given first priority is the defence of **Persia** from attack through the Caucasus. The capture of the Persian oil supply would be a great loss to the Allies, especially in the **Middle East**.

This message is to inform you of the trend of thought here, and also to advise you that I have been asked at short notice to leave tomorrow with the GSO 1 <sup>1</sup> for ten days' reconnaissance in **Persia**. The reconnaissance is purely exploratory. I shall keep you fully informed of any possible change in policy, which will be referred to you in the ordinary way.

I have to thank you and the Government for my promotion, <sup>2</sup> which will help me in my dealings here and elsewhere.

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<sup>1</sup> Colonel W. G. Gentry.

<sup>2</sup> In a telegram sent on 3 Jun the Prime Minister advised **General Freyberg** that he had been granted the temporary rank of Lieutenant-General as from 1 Mar 1942.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## THE BATTLE FOR EGYPT

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 142 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

142

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

14 June 1942

I arrived back at **Cairo** from North-West Persia <sup>1</sup> on the night of the 13th for a Commander-in-Chief's conference on the 15th, to find the situation in the **Western Desert**, where there has been heavy fighting for the last three weeks, still obscure. There is no doubt that there have been considerable losses on both sides, not only in men but also in tanks, equipment, and transport. Upon arrival here I was warned that as a precautionary measure the New Zealand Division might have to move across to give depth to the defence. This afternoon the Commander-in-Chief confirmed the fact that we were to move to the Libyan frontier area to take up a defensive position. The move, which is to commence at once, will take ten days or more to carry out. The men are in excellent condition and the extra training has been of great value to the new commanders. The health of all ranks is good. We have had only seven cases of malaria while in **Syria**. I will, of course, keep you in touch with the situation as it develops.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Syria* (No. 141).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 143 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

143

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

20 June 1942

The Division is now passing through the Delta and will arrive at its destination west of **Mersa Matruh** on 25 June.

The situation in the **Western Desert** is that **Eighth Army** has been forced onto the defensive and holds a line on the Libyan frontier with a garrison at **Tobruk**.

The New Zealand Division may be used either in a defensive role, or later, should opportunity present itself, for a counter-stroke in an offensive role together with other troops.

The state of your Division is good. The men have benefited from the period of training in **Syria**. Although we greatly miss our tried commanders, the younger ones are maturing quickly. We are complete in equipment except for infantry anti-tank guns and a few controlled stores, which are to be supplied in **Eighth Army** area. We are short of transport.

Will you please acknowledge this cable. I shall, of course, keep the Government in touch, but that will be more difficult as operations approach. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Prime Minister replied on 22 Jun that the Government fully understood the situation.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 144 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

### 144 *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**24 June 1942**

**Further to my telegram of 20 June, there is no doubt that our forces in the **Western Desert** have suffered a major reverse and the situation at the moment causes anxiety. General Auchinleck has a difficult task here with inadequate resources and inferior tank, tank gun, and anti-tank gun.**

**The enemy must be stopped, and this will be achieved only after heavy fighting. Casualties must be expected.**

**The bulk of the Division is already at **Matruh**, but we are to be relieved and will move almost at once to an area to the south. We shall take the field as a division, less the 6th Brigade, which remains in the rear. The infantry brigades will be changed for purposes of rest. Everyone is in excellent heart and I am certain the Division will not lower its reputation.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 145 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

145

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**27 June 1942**

**Regret I was hit on the evening of the 27th, but I shall not be long recovering. I have handed over to Brigadier Inglis <sup>2</sup> who, I am certain, will do the job well. Anticipating your approval I have promoted him acting Major-General. We have been holding a position <sup>1</sup> and have been attacked from north, south, and east. All attacks have been repulsed. The troops have been excellent and morale is high.**

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**<sup>2</sup> Major-General L. M. Inglis commanded the Division from 27 Jun to 16 Aug 1942.**

**<sup>1</sup> Minqar Qaim.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 146 – HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEF (CAIRO)<sup>2</sup> TO THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF (WELLINGTON)

146

*Headquarters 2nd NZEF (Cairo)<sup>2</sup> to the Chief of the General Staff (Wellington)*

29 June 1942

**General Freyberg wishes the Government to have a brief report of the action up to the time he left the Division. The report is as follows:**

**On 26 June it was decided to move the Division out of the **Matruh** area into position on a high escarpment located due south of Wadi Naghamish and running east and west. General Puttick knows the area. This position was occupied on the night of 26–27 June.**

**On 27 June the defensive arrangements were completed, the Division being well equipped with 6-pounder anti-tank guns and having the full Divisional Artillery of seventy-two 25-pounders. In the early morning columns were seen moving to the north. These were from the 21st Panzer Division, which deployed and attacked continuously during the day.**

**This was satisfactory to us as we were in position for that purpose. Five separate attacks were made, one infantry attack against the 4th Infantry Brigade under Inglis and one infantry attack against the centre group under Gray.<sup>3</sup> Three tank attacks followed from the east, south-east, and south-west against the 4th Infantry Brigade and the 5th Infantry Brigade under **Kippenberger**.**

**Some of the German columns carried out complicated manœuvres within artillery range and our guns got good targets. Prisoners said their casualties were high.**

In conformity with the general plan a withdrawal was carried out during the night of 27–28 June, the Division being under Inglis. There were guns all round, and the most effective method of withdrawal was what may be called crash tactics, *i.e.*, a charge straight through. This was successful.

**General Freyberg** was wounded at 5 p.m. on 27 June. I have since confirmed that the withdrawal was successful. The Division, less the 6th Infantry Brigade Group, is intact. The 6th Infantry Brigade Group, which has been detached to the rear, is now moving forward again. **General Freyberg** is undaunted by his wound.

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<sup>2</sup> This telegram was from Brigadier W. G. Stevens, Officer in charge of Administration, 2nd NZEF.

<sup>3</sup> Brigadier J. R. Gray, ED; CO 18th NZ Battalion, 27 Sep 1939–6 Nov 1941, 28 Mar–29 Jun 1942; commanded 4th Infantry Brigade, 29 Jun – 5 Jul 1942; killed in action, 5 Jul 1942.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 147 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

### 147 *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

1 July 1942

Further to my telegram of 24 June ( **No. 144**), I have to report on the operations of the New Zealand Division up to 30 June.

As you know, on my return from the reconnaissance in **Persia** the Division was ordered from **Syria** to the **Western Desert**, originally to a position west of **Matruh**. The early fall of **Tobruk** altered the situation and we were ordered to garrison **Matruh** as a temporary measure. I was very glad when we were ordered south 12,000 yards to the escarpment, where in co-operation with armoured forces our great mobility could be used to the best advantage. We were in position on the evening of the 26th, twenty-four hours earlier than the time given, and the battle started on the morning of the 27th. The enemy were reported by-passing **Matruh** and advancing east along the main escarpment overlooking the main road. A small mobile column from the New Zealand Division was sent out which shelled the enemy and forced them to deploy south and attack us as expected. We were in a strong position and had covered our flanks with minefields, while the armoured division <sup>1</sup> operated to our south. Our role was to gain time and inflict as much damage as possible on the enemy, but to remain intact ready to fall back on receipt of the code-word. We were attacked on the north, south, and east by the 21st Panzer Division and elements of an infantry division and were shelled throughout the day. Supported by our armoured division we repulsed the enemy tank attack, and the enemy infantry attacks were also repulsed. The enemy suffered heavy casualties. By evening, however, when the code-word was received to retire to the **Alamein** position, there were enemy concentrations all round. During the last phase of the attack I

was forward to see what was happening and was hit by a shell. I handed over to Brigadier Inglis, who arranged details of the withdrawal. A most successful night attack was carried out by the 4th Brigade, who broke through the encircling forces at the point of the bayonet. Bright moonlight made the move of the large body of transport hazardous and the column had to run the gauntlet of enemy tanks, causing disorganisation and casualties. An estimate of the casualties for the fighting to date is 150 killed and 450 wounded. The withdrawal was successfully executed and the Division is now reorganised, the 4th and 5th Brigades as a mobile battle group pivoting on the 6th Brigade, who hold the main southern fortress position in the Alamein Line. The Division is ready and Colonel Gentry has sent me a message saying 'troops' tails right up.' The situation generally is serious but not alarming and is developing as expected.

I write this in hospital at [Helwan](#). My neck has been operated on and they are well satisfied. I will be back as soon as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> 1st Armoured Division.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 148 – HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEF TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

148

### *Headquarters 2nd NZEF to the Minister of Defence*

5 July 1942

The following is a brief report on the situation as at 3 p.m. on 4 July:

The New Zealand Division is operating in the south about twenty miles from the coast in the **Alamein** position, the 6th Brigade holding the Box and the 4th and 5th Brigades forming a mobile striking force with an offensive role against the enemy flank. We have clear air superiority and the indications are that we now have clear tank superiority. The enemy was severely mauled by our armour in the centre, the salient was straightened, and the enemy withdrew. Several hundred prisoners were taken. Enemy morale is reported to be low, his men being tired and hungry and discouraged, while our morale is very high. The position improves hourly with the arrival of reinforcements. It is too early to get a clear picture, but the above shows a change for the better which should be maintained. A report from Army Headquarters this morning states that the attack by our 5th Infantry Brigade during the night was completely successful, creating havoc (their actual word) among the enemy. Our losses to date are not heavy. Definite figures will follow as soon as they are available.



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 149 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

149

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

11 July 1942

I regret to report that Brigadier Gray, temporarily commanding 4th Infantry Brigade, was killed in action on 5 July, also his Brigade Major, Bassett. <sup>1</sup> Gray was the last of the original unit commanders and is a great loss. He fought most gallantly in **Greece** and **Crete** and commanded the Brigade Group with distinction. Bassett was one of our most promising young staff officers. Burrows is now commanding the Brigade. <sup>2</sup>

I have just received a short report from Inglis giving the above information and reporting a successful night attack by the 5th Brigade Group. His estimate of casualties, which must be taken as approximate, is 250 killed and 1000 wounded. The Division continues to do well and morale is high. There is no doubt that the part played by the Division in these operations has been most important in the defence of Egypt.

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<sup>1</sup> Major B. I. Bassett; 23rd NZ Battalion; Brigade Major 4th Infantry Brigade, Aug 1941 – Jan 1942, 1 Jun – 5 Jul 1942; killed in action, 5 Jul 1942.

<sup>2</sup> Brigadier J. T. Burrows, DSO, ED; CO 20th NZ Battalion, 8 Dec 1941–27 Jun 1942; commanded 4th Infantry Brigade, 27–29 Jun 1942, 5 Jul – 15 Aug 1942; commanded **20th Battalion** and Armoured Regiment, 1942–43; commanded 5th and 6th Brigades in **Italy**, 1944; Rector, Waitaki Boys' High School, 1945–49; Commandant, Papakura Military Camp, Mar 1950–.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 150 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

150

### *The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

12 July 1942

Already fresh fame has been brought to New Zealand's arms at this vital keypoint of the war by the Division which you consented to leave in the **Middle East**.<sup>3</sup> It is doing splendid work in the **Western Desert**.

The unforeseeable tide of disaster which drove us from **Gazala** to **Alamein** with the loss of **Tobruk** and 50,000 men has now been stemmed for the time being. Strong reinforcements have been received by General Auchinleck, raising his Army to 100,000 men, with another 20,000 well forward in the Delta behind them. Thus he is able to double Rommel in men. He has a fair equality in artillery but is still somewhat weaker in armour than the enemy. This imposes prudence upon him for two reasons: firstly, a  
retire-

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<sup>3</sup> See *Reinforcement of 2nd NZEF, 1940-42* (No. 57).

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ment

is much worse for him than for Rommel, who has nothing but deserts behind him, and, secondly, far more strength is coming to General Auchinleck than to the enemy. For instance, the 8th Armoured Division with 350 Valentine tanks has landed and will soon be in action. About 400 tanks of all types, which were despatched before the battle

**began, will reach General Auchinleck in July and early August as replacements. By the end of July the 44th British Infantry Division, 15,000 strong with 72 guns, and fully equipped, should have arrived, followed a month later by the 51st British Infantry Division.**

**Four months ago I obtained from President Roosevelt the shipping to carry an additional 40,000 men to the East without deciding on their destination till they rounded the Cape. This was very fortunate as without these the reinforcements now proved so needful by the hazards of war could not have been at hand.**

**When in [Washington](#) I obtained from the President 300 Shermans, the latest and finest tanks in the American Army. They were taken from the very hands of the American troops who eagerly awaited them, and were sent by special convoy direct to [Suez](#). One hundred 105-millimetre self-propelled guns, which definitely outmatch the 88-millimetre, went with them, the whole being accompanied by a large number of American key men. These should arrive early in September.**

**Apart from the 8th Armoured Division, and in addition to the two armoured and one army tank brigades now in action forward, we have in the Delta the personnel of four armoured brigades awaiting re-equipment. About half these men are desert trained in tanks. Therefore, we should be able to bring into action incomparably the most powerful and best-trained armoured division yet seen in the [Middle East](#) or indeed anywhere. But I hope the issue will be decided in our favour earlier. This is especially desirable because of the dangers that may develop, though I do not say they will, on the northern approaches to Egypt.**

**Of scarcely less importance are the air reinforcements given me by the President on the morrow of [Tobruk](#). As you know, we have not hitherto been able for technical as well as military reasons to provide heavy bomber squadrons for the [Middle East](#), though they have often asked for them. Now, however, the President has assigned to the defence of Egypt the Halpro Group <sup>1</sup> of twenty Liberators, which was on its way to [India](#) after bombing Roumanian oilfields, ten other Liberators which**

had already reached **India**, and a group of thirty-five Liberators from the **United States**. With the addition of

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<sup>1</sup> The Halverson Project (abbreviated Halpro) was the name given to the first attack on the **Ploesti** oilfields by **United States** heavy bombers on 12 Jun 1942. The force was commanded by Colonel H. A. Halverson, **United States Air Force**.

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our own Liberators, this gives us about eighty-five of these heavy bombers which should all be available this month. Our two **Halifax** squadrons will come into action at the same time, making 117 heavy bombers in all. It is this force I rely upon to beat up the ports of **Tobruk** and **Benghazi**, hampering Rommel's reinforcements, besides of course, playing the part of a battle fleet in preventing a seaborne invasion of Egypt. Great enterprises are in preparation for the revictualling of **Malta**, but as these deal with future operations I am sure you will not wish me to mention details. Besides the above the President sent across in the carrier *Ranger*, <sup>1</sup> which should soon be reaching **West Africa**, about seventy of the latest Kittyhawks.

Besides this, every preparation has been made to defend the Delta if the battles in the desert should go against us. Here we have very large numbers of men, all of whom have been ordered to take part in the defence of Egypt exactly as if it was England that was invaded. The cultivation and irrigation of the Delta have made it literally the worst ground in the world for armoured vehicles, and armour as a factor would lose a great deal of its predominance. All ideas of evacuation have been repressed, the intention being to fight to the end for every yard of ground. However, as I have said, I do not think this situation will arise.

We are having a great struggle to carry supplies to **Russia**. One-fifth of the June convoy was sunk and I fear less than half the July convoy got through. The difficulties and dangers of this route, especially during the season of perpetual daylight, are enormous. This is serious as it is almost the only thing we can do for our valiant ally who is taking such a

heavy toll of **Hitler's** armies and will, I am confident, endure to the end. To show you what a good comrade Premier Stalin is proving himself, the Russians have offered us three divisions of partly equipped Poles for the **Levant-Caspian** theatre and have transferred to Egypt forty **Boston** fighter-bombers which were on the way to them through **Basra**. In this last matter the President was my intermediary.

In these difficult days, as it did in the struggle against Napoleon, the House of Commons has proved a rock, and I have also been greatly encouraged by the goodwill of your Government and people. Even though the struggle will be long and we must not relax for an instant, I have never felt more sure that complete ultimate victory will be ours.

We are looking forward to welcoming Mr. Nash. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> USS *Ranger*, light aircraft carrier, 14,500 tons, eight 5-inch guns.

<sup>2</sup> The Hon. W. Nash, New Zealand Minister in **Washington**, went to **London** in the third week of July for discussions on financial and marketing problems. He also attended meetings of the United Kingdom War Cabinet, returning to **Washington** on 18 Aug.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 151 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

151

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

14 July 1942

**As always your messages are encouraging and inspiring. I am particularly grateful for the information that you have been so kind as to forward and very much touched by your reference, both in your telegram of 12 July and in your recent speech, to the New Zealand troops and the attitude of this Dominion towards the war. <sup>1</sup>**

**It is certainly most heartening to us to learn of the large reinforcements that may be expected shortly in the **Middle East**, and indeed of the substantial forces and equipment that are already at the disposal of General Auchinleck. I am particularly encouraged to learn that reinforcements can be sent to Auchinleck in greater force than the Axis can supply them to Rommel. We had ourselves felt that unless Auchinleck could turn Rommel out of Egypt at a very early date, then the advantages of the situation to the enemy, with his sources of reinforcement so much nearer in point of time and distance and so much greater in potential strength, would progressively increase as the weeks and months passed.**

**The defence of **Malta** has been an inspiration to us, and we must all hope that it will be possible to retain this strongpoint without too grievous a cost to us in running supplies. The increasing success of enemy attacks on our convoys to **Russia** is of course a great disappointment to us, as it must be to you and to our Russian friends. The continued gravity of the Axis air and sea attacks on our shipping**

raises most weighty problems, especially in view of the lengthy and burdensome supply and reinforcement routes that we must maintain, and of the possibility that the Japanese may decide, as there are indications they will, to devote part of their submarine and surface strength to attacks on shipping, both in the **Indian Ocean** and in the **Pacific**. The reason for our present increased shipping losses has never been fully understood by us. There was a period when the Battle of the **Atlantic** seemed to be going well on the whole. We can understand that the comparative unreadiness of the **United States** to meet the submarine menace in American waters must

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<sup>1</sup> In the course of a speech in the House of Commons on 2 Jul Mr. Churchill said:

Although I am not mentioning reinforcements, there is one reinforcement which has come, which has been in close contact with the enemy, and which he knows all about. I mean the New Zealand Division. The Government of New Zealand, themselves under potential menace of invasion, authorised the fullest use being made of their troops, whom they have not withdrawn or weakened in any way. They have sent them into the battle, where, under the command of the heroic **Freyberg**, again wounded, they have acquitted themselves in a manner equal to all their former records. They are fighting hard at the moment.

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naturally lead to a temporary increase in sinkings in that part of the world, but this scarcely appears to account for the whole of the increase, and I wonder whether you can tell us what other factors, if any, are operating: for example, whether there have been substantial additions to the Axis submarine strength and how this has come about, or whether new and more effective methods have been evolved by them, or any other reasons that may account for the serious position which we are all facing today.

I am very reluctant indeed to bother you with such questions, but these thoughts have occurred to me as a result of your telegram and think it would be useful if I could be informed as fully as possible of the

**whole picture, good and bad, before my visit in the near future to the United States.** <sup>1</sup>

**With all good wishes.**

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<sup>1</sup> **See page 67, note 1.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 152 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

152

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

14 July 1942

I much regret to advise that Colonel Tui Love, <sup>2</sup> commanding **28th (Maori) Battalion**, has died of wounds received four days ago. Colonel Love was commanding his battalion with great courage and distinction and his loss to the Division is very great.

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<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel E. Te W. Love; CO 28th NZ (Maori) Battalion, 13 May – 12 Jul 1942; died of wounds, 12 Jul 1942.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 153 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE [EXTRACT]

153

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence [Extract]*

14 July 1942

The following is a short report on the situation in the **Western Desert** based on liaison officer's reports and situation reports from Inglis:

The 4th and 5th Brigades, Divisional Cavalry, and all the Artillery remain in the forward area in touch with the enemy. The 6th Brigade has been temporarily withdrawn to **Wadi Natrun**. The guns the New Zealand Division captured a week ago were the entire artillery of the **Ariete Division**. Our troops are in good condition and keen for decisive action, for which neither side appears ready. I cannot comment on the situation without having the full picture. I propose to attend the Commander-in-Chief's conference here ( **Cairo**) tomorrow, after which I will begin to prepare an appreciation of the general situation for your information.

Our casualties are heavy but many of the wounds are light, and the shorter line of communication has had a good effect on the wounded, who reach hospital in excellent condition and recover rapidly.

Reports from the Division pay a glowing tribute to the gallantry and devotion to duty of the American Volunteer Field Service ambulance units serving with us. I suggest you might like to repeat this to Mr. Nash

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<sup>1</sup> In the text omitted **General Freyberg** discussed catering facilities established at **Maadi** for the 2nd NZEF.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 154 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

154

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

18 July 1942

I have to report that the 4th and 5th Brigades, Divisional Artillery, and Divisional troops have again been in action. On the night of 14–15 July we did a night attack with an Indian division and reached our objective in a six-mile advance against strong enemy defences in depth. Over 1500 prisoners were captured. We suffered moderate casualties during the advance and, I fear, heavy casualties when the enemy counter-attacked in strength with tanks on the following day. The 19th and 20th Battalions of the 4th Brigade and the **22nd Battalion** of the 5th Brigade suffered most heavily. So far there are no official details of casualties. The above details are based on a verbal report from Brigadier Burrows. The 4th Brigade has now been relieved by the 6th Brigade, the latter not yet having been in action. I am awaiting a further report from Inglis.

I regret to report that Colonel Sam Allen, <sup>2</sup> commanding the **21st Battalion**, died of wounds. He is another great loss. He was commanding the battalion with gallantry and distinction.

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<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel S. F. Allen, OBE; CO 2nd **NZ Divisional Signals**, Jan 1940 – Sep 1941; CO **21st Battalion**, Dec 1941 – May 1942, 13 Jun – 15 Jul 1942; commanded 5th Infantry Brigade, 10 May – 12 Jun 1942; killed in action, 15 Jul 1942.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 155 – HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEF TO ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON)

155

### *Headquarters 2nd NZEF to Army Headquarters (Wellington)*

**23 July 1942**

**The New Zealand Division carried out an attack during the night of 21–22 July and day of 22 July <sup>1</sup>. The fighting was severe and casualties, it is feared, are heavy. It is regretted that Lieutenant-Colonel Greville has been killed. <sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> **El Mreir Depression.**

<sup>2</sup> **Lieutenant-Colonel A. W. Greville; commanded advanced party 2nd NZEF, 1939; Deputy Assistant Quartermaster-General, 1940–41; CO 24th Battalion, Dec 1941 – Jul 1942; killed in action, Alamein, 22 Jul 1942.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 156 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

156

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

9 August 1942

I have just finished visiting our General Hospitals at **Beirut**, the Canal Area, and **Helwan** following personal experience of the greatest skill and care at No. 1 General Hospital while recovering from my wound. I feel that at the present moment, when there are so many battle casualties in our hospitals, you would be reassured to know something of the wonderful work of our medical services in looking after battle casualties.

Our hospitals are excellently equipped. The saline bath recently bought by the **New Zealand Government** and installed here is invaluable as the most modern treatment for certain types of wounds. The skill of the doctors and the nursing is of the highest standard and all serious cases have special day and night nurses.

The Director of **Medical Services**<sup>3</sup> reports that the wounded arrive in excellent condition due to quick evacuation, including evacuation by air ambulances now in constant use, and to the high standard of medical attention by our field ambulances, whose excellent equipment and efficiency have greatly impressed the Medical Mission at present visiting the **Middle East**.<sup>4</sup> A wonderful spirit of efficiency and devotion to duty is evident amongst all doctors, sisters, and attached services both in the hospitals and in the field. Finally, the great work of the medical services receives continual inspiration from the magnificent spirit of our wounded.

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<sup>3</sup> Brigadier H. S. Kenrick, CB, CBE, ED, was Director of **Medical**

**Services, 2nd NZEF, at this time. He held this appointment from 10 May – 18 Sep 1942 and 17 Apr 1943–22 May 1945. Brigadier K. MacCormick, CB, CBE, DSO, ED, was Deputy Director of Medical Services, 1 Oct 1940–8 Apr 1942, and Director of Medical Services, 8 Apr-10 May 1942 and 18 Sep 1942–17 Apr 1943.**

**<sup>4</sup> A British group headed by Lieutenant-Colonel W. C. Wilson, FRCSE, Regius Professor of Surgery, University of Aberdeen, sent specially to the **Middle East** to do medical research.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 157 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

157

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

11 August 1942

I have to report that I took over command of the Division yesterday but today received orders to take over command of 13th Corps temporarily due to the death of General Gott. <sup>1</sup> I have recalled Inglis to command the Division until someone arrives to take over command of the Corps. I will keep you in touch with the situation. Present indications are that the enemy will resume the offensive at an early date.

I visited the 5th and 6th Brigades today and found everyone fit and in good heart.

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<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant-General W. H. E. Gott, CBE, DSO, MC; GOC 7th Armoured Division, Sep 1941-Feb 1942; commanded 13th Corps, Feb-Aug 1942; killed in aircraft accident, 9 Aug 1942.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 158 – GENERAL FROYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

158

### *General Froyberg to the Minister of Defence*

17 August 1942

**I am now back in command of the Division.**

**The Division, less the 4th Infantry Brigade, is holding part of the forward position in the **Western Desert**. The 19th, 20th, 22nd, and 24th Battalions, which suffered most heavily, are at **Maadi** with Headquarters 4th Infantry Brigade refitting and training as fast as possible, but they are not up to establishment except for the **22nd Battalion**, which returns here in a few days.**

**I feel it is my duty to report for your information that the situation here will be difficult for the next few weeks until additional heavy American tanks arrive. If the enemy attacks within the next week, **Eighth Army** will be hard put to it to maintain its position. Present indications point to the possibility of an enemy attack after 22 August.**

**Although heavy casualties during July blunted the Division, everyone is in good spirits, and I am certain the Division will again give a good account of itself. The knowledge that we are to be reinforced has given great satisfaction.** <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See *Formation of New Zealand Armoured Brigade* (No. 85).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 159 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF (WELLINGTON)

159

### *General Freyberg to the Chief of the General Staff (Wellington)*

17 August 1942

Many thanks for your cable. <sup>1</sup> Your congratulations to the Division have been published as a special order and I am showing the secret part to senior officers. The steady progress in equipment and organisation and the proposed offensive role are good news. I realise your difficulties with different medical categories and age groups. I feel sure that Barrowclough will do the proposed job admirably.

The position here is uncertain. Sweeping changes of command <sup>2</sup> were needed to bring fresh minds to bear on old problems of desert righting. The next few weeks will be difficult.

The help you are giving us is greatly appreciated. The decision to reinforce the 2nd NZEF was received with great satisfaction also in official quarters in the **Middle East** and **War Office**.

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<sup>1</sup> Not published. See Volume III, *Defence of New Zealand*. In this telegram, dated 11 Aug, General Puttick reviewed the progress made in building up the Dominion's Home Defence forces. He stated that preparations were being made, subject to Government approval, to despatch the 3rd Division, under the command of Major-General Barrowclough, for an offensive role in the **Pacific**. Reinforcements for the 2nd Division were also being assembled.

<sup>2</sup> On 15 Aug General Sir Harold Alexander had succeeded General Auchinleck as Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, and on 13 Aug Lieutenant-General B. L. Montgomery had succeeded General

**Auchinleck as GOC 8th Army. While Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, General Auchinleck had also commanded 8th Army from 25 Jun 1942.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 160 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

160

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

10 September 1942

As you know from **Middle East** situation reports, the Division has again been in action during the latest thrust into Egypt. The enemy offensive commenced on the night of 30–31 August, gaps being made in the minefield south of the New Zealand position. The minefields were not contested seriously, and next day the enemy advanced eastwards driving back our light armoured patrols. The enemy then swung north and came in contact with British heavy armoured formations working in pre-arranged battle positions, backed by large numbers of field guns and anti-tank guns east of the New Zealand position. The only tank battle joined took place in the evening of 31 August, when the enemy failed against our armour and artillery. Meanwhile the **RAF** and light armour were harassing the enemy's communications with success. During 1 and 2 September the enemy probed northwards without joining battle, and on the 3rd his withdrawals commenced.

Up to this stage the New Zealand Division was not seriously engaged except for the Artillery, which had harassed the northern flank of the enemy advance. Prior to the offensive our role had been to carry out harassing raids to upset the enemy's plans. Battalions of the 5th and 6th Brigades carried out very successful raids under heavy artillery barrages, important identifications being obtained and uneasiness caused on the central front. A large-scale raid on the night of 30–31 August coincided with the date of the enemy attack and probably caused considerable confusion. As the battle progressed, an enemy attack against the southern or south-eastern flank appeared to be imminent but did not develop. Offensive action was planned, and on the night of 3–4

September we attacked south in co-operation with British troops and tanks. The latter were held up by heavy fire. In our sector we reached our objectives, upsetting the relief of the German 90th Light Division by the Italian Trieste Division. Many of the enemy were killed, prisoners were taken, and equipment destroyed. On 4 September two counter-attacks from the south by German infantry, one with tanks, were launched, both being repulsed with heavy enemy losses, and three out of four enemy tanks coming forward were destroyed by six-pounder anti-tank guns. A further attack from the west was stopped by the fire of 120 guns. The New Zealand Artillery has played an important part in the battle. Antiaircraft gunners brought down several planes each day during the height of the enemy attack. On the night of 4–5 September, to avoid casualties by holding ground of no further tactical value, we withdrew to our original position. Since then the enemy has stabilised his front on minefields down to [Himeimat](#).

The enemy certainly intended his attack to go through, but I do not consider that his withdrawal means he is on the defensive. The results of the recent engagements were highly satisfactory but were certainly not decisive. The time gained, however, makes us immeasurably stronger as reinforcements arrive and troops are trained for desert conditions. Our casualties during the latest operations were approximately 70 killed, 40 missing, and 250 wounded. <sup>1</sup> I am exercised over our losses of senior officers in the last two months: one Brigadier and five commanding officers killed, one Brigadier and three commanding officers captured. <sup>2</sup>

The New Zealand Division is now being relieved for a rest by the sea. Leave is being arranged, also baths, canteens, concert party, bands, &c. A period of refitting and training follows with a British armoured brigade under command. The 4th Brigade is now reorganising to become an armoured brigade, courses, &c., being arranged. After the long spell of active operations in the heat, the men deserve a rest and will benefit from it. I can assure you that in the fighting here they carried out their role in the manner expected of the New Zealand Division.

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<sup>1</sup> These are the figures given in **General Freyberg's** papers. The figures in the telegram on the Prime Minister's Department file are 40 killed, 20 missing, and 300 wounded.

<sup>2</sup> Brigadier J. R. Gray and Lieutenant-Colonels E. Te W. Love, S. F. Allen, A. W. Greville, J. N. Peart, and J. T. Russell were killed. Brigadier G. H. Clifton and Lieutenant-Colonels C. N. Watson, C. D'A. George, and R. J. Lynch were taken prisoner, Lynch dying of wounds on 26 Sep 1942 while a prisoner of war.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 161 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

161

### *The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

14 September 1942

We are grateful to you for the résumé of operations in the recent engagement in Egypt which you give in your telegram of 10 September, and are glad to learn that once again the Division gave a satisfactory account of itself. The position regarding senior officers does occasion some concern and we have, after discussion with General Puttick, agreed that he should communicate with you further on this matter. <sup>1</sup> The Division has thoroughly earned the rest and we feel sure that all ranks will benefit by it. Best wishes to all ranks.

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<sup>1</sup> Subsequent telegrams dealt with the release and employment of certain named officers and have not been reproduced in this volume.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 162 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

162

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

3 October 1942

The Division was withdrawn from the line on 10 September and spent seven days by the seaside. Four clear days' **Cairo** leave was given to 40 per cent of the Division. The amenities of the special leave camp at **Maadi** and the Club <sup>2</sup> were fully enjoyed. Much Christmas shopping for New Zealand was done, as the post offices showed. We are now back training, refreshed by the short break.

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<sup>2</sup> New Zealand Forces Club, **Cairo**.

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The 4th Brigade remains at **Maadi** preparing for an armoured role. <sup>1</sup> It will be five or six months before they are ready to take the field.

The complete change in **Middle East** management has cleared the air. One good result is that they now insist that divisions must be kept intact. The result of this simple decision will be manifest in our future battles. It makes the position here much easier, as for two and a half years I have striven to prevent the New Zealand Division being divided into brigade groups, being convinced that by fighting as a division the maximum power is developed. They have gone further and adopted the German model of a permanent Desert Corps kept intact to train and fight as such. The New Zealand Division has been selected as the infantry division for the Desert Corps, otherwise comprising armoured divisions. As reported earlier, until our Armoured Brigade is ready the Army Commander has placed under our command the 9th British Armoured Brigade, comprising one Regular and two Yeomanry tank

**battalions and a motor battalion—excellent material, well equipped, but as yet lacking necessary training. We are thus the first division with the new British organisation to take the field in the war and we are now training hard to get full fighting efficiency. We are more powerfully armed than either a panzer division or a British armoured division, and the days of infantry being overrun by enemy armour, as on 1 December 1941 and 15 and 22 July 1942, <sup>2</sup> which brought long lists of prisoners, are I hope past.**

**Last week we held a full-scale Divisional exercise with full artillery support, firing live ammunition and employing the most modern tanks. I was greatly impressed by the result.**

**As you know, I have been concerned by the losses of senior officers. It is too early to say how the new commanding officers are shaping, but I feel certain that after the present training period they will do well. The offer of help received from Army Headquarters is much appreciated and I have communicated direct with General Puttick. <sup>3</sup>**

**On 30 September at ceremonial parades General [Montgomery](#) <sup>4</sup> presented immediate awards, including the Victoria Cross to Sergeant**

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<sup>1</sup> See



## *Formation of New Zealand Armoured Brigade.*

<sup>2</sup> **Belhamed, Ruweisat Ridge, and El Mreir Depression.**

<sup>3</sup> **These telegrams have not been reproduced.**

<sup>4</sup> **Field-Marshal Viscount Montgomery, KG, GCB, DSO; GOC 3rd Division, 1939–40; commanded 5th Corps, 1940; GOC 8th Army, Aug 1942–Jan 1944; GOC-in-C, British Group of Armies and Allied Armies, Northern France, 1944; commanded 21st Army Group, 1944–45; commanded British Army of the Rhine, 1945–46; Chief of the Imperial General Staff, 1946–48; Permanent Military Chairman of Commanders-in-Chief Committee, Permanent Defence Organisation, 1948–; Deputy Supreme Commander, Allied Powers in Europe, 1951–.**

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**Elliott. <sup>1</sup> The troops looked fine and the marching was of a high order. General Montgomery said afterwards that he was greatly inspired by the appearance of the New Zealand Division, and in addressing a parade of the 9th Armoured Brigade later in the afternoon he said: ‘It is a great honour to have been placed with the 2nd New Zealand Division. They are a veteran division, and I know you will strive to live up to the record they have established here in the Middle East.’**

**The weather is now cooler and flies are fewer. As you know, the Division has been through a difficult period, but the men are very fit and in excellent heart. Better equipped than ever before, your Division, after the present training period, will be ready as part of the Desert Corps for any future operations in the Battle of Egypt.**

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<sup>1</sup> **Sergeant K. Elliott was awarded the Victoria Cross for most conspicuous gallantry at Ruweisat Ridge on 15 Jul 1942. He was commissioned in May 1943.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 163 – LETTER FROM GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

163

### *Letter from General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

14 October 1942

DEAR PRIME MINISTER

I am back from the **Western Desert** for thirty-six hours to see the **Commander-in-Chief** about keeping the **New Zealand Government** in touch at all times with the situation. It takes a new **Commander-in-Chief** some time to understand the relationship of a **Dominion** force to its own **Government**. They are prone to look upon us as just another **British** division. They are inclined to tell us what we may send in the way of information. If I were to agree to the last proposal it would have had the effect of muzzling me completely. I meet him tomorrow morning and shall tell him that I am in duty bound to send you a full and frank opinion of any operation contemplated where the **Division** is to be employed, that I have done so in the past, and that the **New Zealand Government** expect it of me in the future. I do not expect I shall have any difficulty except under two distinct headings.

The **Commander-in-Chief** is always anxious about our sending any dates or intentions dealing with future operations, and in this I know you will fully appreciate and understand their point of view. The second restriction they wish to impose from our point of view is less easy for us to sympathise with. They want to stop any candid account from me being sent after the battle. It is inconvenient, I agree, in many cases, because it may throw too much light upon aspects which they wish to repress. An instance in point was the fighting round **Tobruk** in November last year when the **Division** came in at **Sidi Rezegh** and saved the

situation. We have no wish to make difficulties, but I do feel that we owe it to the men when they fight so magnificently to let the people of New Zealand know the whole truth.

As you will have gathered from my cables to you earlier in the year, they were very anxious about **Turkey** and, indeed, **Persia** and our northern flank generally. <sup>1</sup> The loss of the Persian oilfields would have been a great blow to the war effort out here in the **Middle East**. In all those negotiations I felt that the **New Zealand Government** had to be told the full story as, difficult as it all was, I assured General Auchinleck that it was the only way—that you were entitled to know.

The spring here was a difficult period. We were training the Division in desert warfare and planning also for an 800-mile advance up to the Dardanelles. Then, without any warning, I was sent on a reconnaissance of the area in north-west **Persia** near the Caspian Sea. It was a long, hot, tiring motor journey across the desert, often 120 degrees in the shade, then up into the snows of the Persian Highlands over 10,000 feet up. I sent you cables about this because I do not think it right that an operation should be contemplated without your being informed. <sup>2</sup>

It was while I was near the Caspian Sea that we heard that **Bir Hacheim** had fallen, and then I knew we should be wanted in the **Western Desert**. I came back by air to **Cairo**. I arrived on 15 June in time to send the cable which started the New Zealand Division upon the most remarkable military move in history. <sup>3</sup> They came down 1200 miles in eight days by MT to **Mersa Matruh**, ready to fight on 25 June. On arrival I received three separate sets of orders:

- (1) To go on to the frontier.
- (2) To take up a defensive position west of **Mersa Matruh**.
- (3) To occupy the defences of **Mersa Matruh**.

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<sup>1</sup> See

**Syria.**

<sup>2</sup> See **Syria (No. 141)**. In a further telegram on 20 Jun **General Freyberg** reported on this reconnaissance as follows:

The journey across Mesopotamia to the Caspian area and back was very severe. I returned to go down with a touch of sun but am better. Extreme heat up to 120 degrees in the plains but cold on the plateaus and mountain passes up to 10,000 feet and temperature freezing point. Should operations take place we would need an advanced base north of **Basra**, sending hospitals and reinforcements by the **Red Sea** and Persian Gulf at the hottest time of the year. The Basra area is very hot and malarial.

<sup>3</sup> See **No. 142**.

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This continual vacillation shook me, but not nearly as much as the tempo or condition of the troops coming down the **Sidi Barrani** road. I was anxious when I sent you my telegram telling you there would be hard fighting. <sup>1</sup> What I was most anxious about was not to allow panic orders to put us in an impossible position. I was determined to appeal to the **New Zealand Government** if necessary and I went to see the Eighth Army Commander <sup>2</sup> to protest against being shut up in **Mersa Matruh**. This could only have ended in one way. My next orders were to go into the **Naghamish Wadi** <sup>3</sup>—also an impossible position. Again I pointed out the inadvisability of committing a highly trained division to such a mission. Eventually I persuaded them to let us meet the full thrust of the German Army head on. We picked an area on the high ground south of **Mersa Matruh**, where there was room to manoeuvre and use our powerful guns to the full.

We had painted out our Divisional sign on the vehicles and taken off our New Zealand badges, and our advent into the battle was electric. We hit the 21st Panzer Division very hard. It was a complete surprise to them to meet us. They turned and attacked us five separate times, twice with all their tanks, and were repulsed each time. It was during the last

of these attacks that I was hit. I had gone forward to see how our front troops were faring. In this class of warfare the car is the only method of travel—on foot is too slow. I suppose it is the law of averages that settles these things. It is difficult to command unless you are on the spot to see for yourself. There are times in all battles when a Commander must go forward or be out of touch.

So much for that side of the battle. I am sad about our losses. The loss of Colonel Love was great. I am sure that the losses must be offset against the fact that but for the resolute fighting qualities of our men Egypt would have been in enemy hands at this moment.

The hot weather is now over.

Long before you receive this letter you will have news of further battles. I know the Division will do well. I hope the results will be as good as they should be....<sup>4</sup>

I have, &c.

B. C. FREYBERG

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<sup>1</sup> No. 144.

<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant-General N. M. (later General Sir Neil) Ritchie, KCB, KBE, DSO, MC; GOC 51st Highland Division, 1940–41; GOC **8th Army** 26 Nov 1941–25 Jun 1942; commanded 52nd Lowland Division, 1942–43; 12th Corps, British Liberation Army, 1944–45; GOC-in-C Scottish Command, 1945–47; C-in-C Allied Land Forces, South-East Asia, 1947–49; Chairman and Commander of British Joint Services Mission, **Washington**, 1949–.

<sup>3</sup> **First Echelon** units had been employed in digging an anti-tank ditch here in June and July 1940.

<sup>4</sup> A personal message has been omitted.



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 164 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

164

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

15 October 1942

The following message is sent with the concurrence of the Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, to whom it has been shown:

The New Zealand Division has been allotted a role for the forthcoming offensive of **Eighth Army** in respect of which I wish to give you the following information:

We are at present in 10th Corps, described in my telegram of 3 October ( **No. 162**) as the Desert Corps. The plan provides for the New Zealand Division to take part in the initial attack and operations as a mobile division, with armoured divisions, to exploit success should that be possible.

Full use has been made of the present training period to train the new commanders and staff officers and to co-operate with our armoured brigade. We are, in my opinion, well trained for any operation we may be fighting in.

As reported in my telegram of 3 October, we are better equipped than ever before. Further, the **9th Armoured Brigade** with us and the British armoured divisions have been greatly strengthened by the arrival of modern, powerful tanks. The situation has changed completely and we have substantial tank and air superiority.

Secrecy is of course vital. You will be advised of the commencement of operations by General Headquarters in the usual way. It is hoped that strategic surprise will be achieved. Tactical surprise is of paramount

**importance. I earnestly ask, therefore, that as before no public statement be made concerning your Division before our presence in the line is announced in the official communique. We have no illusions about the hard fighting still to be done, but for the first time it would appear that we will meet the enemy without weakness in vital items of equipment. Would you kindly acknowledge this cable.**



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 165 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

165

### *The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

28 October 1942

The great battle in Egypt has opened well, although one cannot yet forecast its result. The enemy are short of ammunition and fuel, and we have just destroyed a most important tanker on which they were counting. Our forces are substantially superior in the air, in armour, including the best armour, in artillery fire, and in numbers, and they have far easier lines of communication. Rommel is seriously ill and has only been brought back as an extreme measure. In **Alexander**<sup>1</sup> and Montgomery we have Generals determined to fight the battle out to the very end. Should they succeed, it will be very difficult for the enemy army to make a good retreat on account of his shortage of transport and fuel. It is therefore much better for us to fight him to a finish on this ground than farther west.

You will have seen with pride and pleasure all that your valiant New Zealanders are doing and the part they are playing in what may well be a memorable event.

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<sup>1</sup> **Field-Marshal Viscount Alexander**, KG, GCB, GCMG, CSI, DSO, MC; GOC-in-C, Southern Command, 1940–42; GOC Burma, 1942; C-in-C **Middle East**, 1942–43; commanded 18th Army Group, 1943; Deputy C-in-C, North Africa, and Allied Forces, **Mediterranean**, 1943; GOC Allied Forces and Military Governor, **Sicily**, 1943–44; C-in-C Allied Armies in **Italy**, 1944; Supreme Allied Commander, Mediterranean Theatre, 1944–45; Governor-General of **Canada**, 1946–.



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 166 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

166

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

30 October 1942

As you know, the Division has again been in action in the Battle for Egypt. In the opening attack on the night of 23 October your Division went forward with the South Africans on one flank and the Highlanders and Australians on the other. <sup>2</sup> It was a very long and difficult night attack against prepared positions and over ground thickly sown with mines and booby traps. While our artillery were firing the greatest timed concentrations yet seen in **Africa**, our infantry went through to their objective, the vital **Miteiriya Ridge**, which they captured in company with South African forces. They were followed by the sappers, who cleared gaps in the minefields for tanks and guns. All counter-attacks were repulsed during the succeeding days and our position was made secure by a further night attack.

We have just been withdrawn from our sector for further operations in the course of the next few days. Our casualties to date are as follows:

**Killed: 15 officers, 148 other ranks**

**Wounded: 46 officers, 901 other ranks**

**Missing: 5 officers, 162 other ranks**

I have made it clear to the Army Commander that since June we have had very heavy casualties. For the next attack he has attached to us two British brigades, <sup>1</sup> which will enable us to conserve our infantry for a mobile role if and when a gap is made for the armour to go through. As a result of the operations I can report that our present

equipment compares favourably with the Germans'. Air support has been on a satisfactory scale.

I am sending this report from the battlefield just before we move into a new position. I hope you will therefore forgive its brevity due to pressure of operational matters. This is a hard battle and I want the **New Zealand Government** to know that the next phase will also be severe and difficult. I can assure you that the training of your Division has stood the test of a most exacting battle and that the morale of the men is excellent.

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<sup>2</sup> These were the 1st South African, 51st Highland, and 9th Australian Divisions.

<sup>1</sup> The 151st (Tyneside) Brigade and 152nd Highland Brigade from the 50th British Division and 51st Highland Division respectively.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 167 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

### 167 *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**3 November 1942**

**As forecast in my telegram of 30 October, following the consolidation of the front after the capture of **Miteiriya Ridge**, the New Zealand Division moved north alongside the Australian Division and took over the line with the 6th Brigade. To conserve our strength two brigades of English and Scottish troops were placed under the command of the New Zealand Division, and at moonrise in the early morning of 1-2 November they launched an attack under an intense artillery bombardment. We finally breached all the enemy minefields and passed through our own **9th Armoured Brigade** and one armoured division, which joined battle with the German Panzer divisions. The attack was planned and controlled entirely by the New Zealand Division and was a great success. Approximately two thousand prisoners were captured, the majority being Germans.**

**The present situation here is shaping well. I feel that it is rash to make a forecast regarding the fighting here in the **Western Desert**, which has been productive of so many disappointments. For the information of the Government, perhaps it would help if I gave my opinion for what it is worth. I feel that the future here is bright. I believe the German resistance was finally broken by the last attack and the cumulative effect of artillery fire during the last ten days. I feel that the present German position is precarious, that we shall push him back in the near future to the frontier, and later, under certain conditions, I am led to hope we may eventually clear **Africa**.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 168 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

168

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

**5 November 1942**

**The Minister of Defence and I are most grateful for your messages, which we have found most informative and helpful and which we have warmly welcomed. We are delighted to hear of the success of the New Zealand Division under your leadership, and on behalf of the Government and people of New Zealand I should be glad if you would accept and convey to all ranks our warmest congratulations and every good wish.**

**The operations have been closely followed here from day to day, and we are proud to know that the New Zealand Division has once again proved its qualities and has maintained its world-wide reputation as a fighting force second to none.**

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

169 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME  
MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

169

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

**5 November 1942**

**The fresh distinction gained by the 2nd New Zealand Division under  
Bernard Freyberg in the memorable Battle of Egypt calls for my warmest  
congratulations. They have played a glorious part in what may well  
become a decisive victory.**

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

170 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER  
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

170

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the  
United Kingdom*

**6 November 1942**

**Thank you so much for the very kind message in your telegram of 5  
November. We are delighted at the turn events have taken and are very  
proud of our Division.**



DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

171 – THE COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, MIDDLE EAST, TO THE CHIEF OF THE  
GENERAL STAFF (WELLINGTON)

171

*The Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, to the Chief of the General  
Staff ( Wellington)*

**6 November 1942**

**In the Eighth Army's victory in the Western Desert, the 2nd New Zealand Division under General Freyberg has played a part worthy of its splendid history. Its fighting spirit and achievements during the decisive battles of the last two weeks have been magnificent.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 172 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

172

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

8 November 1942

Further to my telegram of 3 November ( **No. 167**), the situation has continued to develop favourably.

On 4 November the New Zealand Division, with the British Light Armoured Brigade <sup>1</sup> and a battery of medium artillery under command, motored out from south of the breach made on 2 November, swung south of the armoured battle then in progress, and thrust north on **Fuka**. On the evening of 5 November we contacted the enemy rearguard position south of **Fuka**, covered by a minefield, tanks, and guns. Eight enemy tanks were destroyed during the day and prisoners taken, including GOC Trento Division and his staff. A breach was forced in the minefield by evening and the enemy retired that night. On 6 November the New Zealand Division was directed on the **Baggush** area. Our forward elements found that the enemy had withdrawn farther west but were holding a rearguard position near **Minqar Qaim**, where they were engaged by another British armoured formation which destroyed 15 enemy tanks and 12 guns. Meanwhile, dense traffic moving west was reported on the roads west of **Matruh**.

On the main road, on aerodromes, and in the positions the enemy tried to hold, there is abundant evidence of disorganised retreat. Abandoned vehicles, aircraft, guns and equipment, and groups of disarmed enemy being marched eastward are to be seen from **Alamein** to **Baggush**. Some enemy groups are endeavouring to get away westward; others were cheerfully giving themselves up.

It remains to be seen whether the enemy has reserve dumps of

<sup>1</sup> 4th Light Armoured Brigade.

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to re-equip the disorganised forces he has been able to extricate. The depleted Panzer Corps are reported to be streaming west of **Sidi Barrani** today. I thought they would endeavour to hold the frontier or go right back to **Agheila**. I consider the latter course is more likely.

Today, owing to heavy rainfall, we are held up in the waterlogged desert and petrol and supplies have not yet reached us. Tomorrow we have been ordered to take **Matruh**, if that is necessary, and then press on along the coast road towards **Sollum**. British armoured formations are moving west with all speed in the south with the intention of cutting off the enemy's retreat, while the **RAF** batters the coast road and the **Halfaya** defile.

I am glad to report that during these recent operations our casualties have been light: 3 killed and 17 wounded. This situation will continue until the enemy stands and endeavours to stabilise the front.

Despite the miserable climatic conditions of the last two days, spirits are high in the present atmosphere of victory. I feel that, although optimistic, the forecast in my last cable <sup>1</sup> may not prove inaccurate.

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<sup>1</sup> No. 167.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 173 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

173

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

15 November 1942

**Your inspiring message of congratulation to the Division from the Government and people of New Zealand has just reached us, having been delayed owing to congestion in signals traffic. <sup>2</sup> An extract has been published in orders and will, I know, be deeply appreciated by all ranks. We are indeed glad that on this occasion the atmosphere of victory replaces the grim stories of withdrawals and rearguards which the Government and people of New Zealand have borne so unflinchingly for the last two years. May it mark the turning of the tide leading to final victory and our return home. This success has been a proud moment for us all and one which the New Zealand Division deserves after fighting so many gallant battles against very great odds.**

**I deeply appreciated your personal message to me and am glad my reports before the offensive and from the battlefield have been of help to you.**

**A brief account of the campaign for publication follows.**

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<sup>2</sup> No. 168.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 174 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

174

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

19 November 1942

We are now outside **Tobruk**. Our advance from the **Alamein** position took just over a week, during which British armoured formations and the 2nd New Zealand Division drove the defeated enemy from Egypt. I am taking advantage of a short lull to cable a brief report for publication in the hope that it will give the people of New Zealand a connected story of the battles in which the 2nd New Zealand Division has been engaged.

When the German attack in August failed to pierce the Allied position at **Alamein**, the enemy had either to stake all on holding his line with its difficult communications or go right back. Rommel decided to stay, and while **Eighth Army** trained for the attack the enemy extended his minefields and prepared defences in great depth. The nature of the country, the extent of the minefields, and the number of automatic weapons made a daylight attack extremely hazardous, while a night attack was most difficult owing to the depth to which it had to penetrate. The best solution, therefore, was to attack in moonlight, and the October full moon was fixed for the offensive.

The Division was withdrawn from the line on 11 September after taking part in the battles of **Minqar Qaim**, **Ruweisat Ridge**, and **Alamein**—nearly three months in the front line during the heat of the Egyptian summer. The men were tired, but after a short break they started to train for the next exacting battle. Spirits were high for we were about to attack. On ground similar to the ridge we were to attack, we rehearsed during the September full moon with tanks, artillery, and all infantry supporting arms firing live ammunition. The spirit of

optimism increased as the infantry, artillery, and the new heavy tanks trained together. The remaining two weeks were used to correct shortcomings and improve technique. Nobody doubted our ability to capture **Miteiriya Ridge**. We felt confident the infantry would overcome any opposition in a night attack. The problem was to lift the minefields and get forward the vehicles of the supporting arms and the tanks. If we could achieve this, no enemy counter-attack could succeed against our defences of six-pounder and two-pounder anti-tank guns and heavy tanks in hull-down positions ready to prevent our infantry from being overrun.

On 14 October we ceased training and started to assemble for the attack. For days before the attack the ASC companies under the command of Colonel Crump <sup>1</sup> were bringing ammunition and supplies up to the front line.

To achieve surprise, deception and camouflage played a large part in our preparations. Guns and ammunition were brought up and dug in by night. The guns had been calibrated and surveyed in so that they would not need to open fire to register and thus give away their presence.

The infantry brigades brought up before daylight on the 23rd lay waiting all day for the attack that night while their transport was withdrawn. At dusk on 23 October the routes from the back areas to our front line began to fill up in orderly sequence with anti-tank guns, Bren carriers, mortars, and tanks to support the infantry, and behind them again there rumbled up the heavy tanks and transport of the British armoured divisions. It was brilliant moonlight. Every man was tense as zero hour approached. Suddenly, with a single crash, over 500 guns opened fire in the greatest barrage seen in **Africa**. The opening roar of the guns was the sign for the assault infantry armed with rifle and bayonet, tommy gun and Bren, to move to the start line, and half an hour later they went forward with the barrage. The 5th Infantry Brigade was on the right, commanded by **Brigadier Kippenberger**, and the 6th Infantry Brigade on the left, commanded by Brigadier Gentry. The attack was planned in two phases. The **23rd Battalion** on the right and

the **24th Battalion** on the left were to capture the enemy's forward defences. The Maori Battalion had the role of mopping up centres of resistance left in the course of the advance. The 21st and 22nd Battalions on the right and the 25th and 26th Battalions on the left were to leapfrog over the first two battalions to capture the final objective, **Miteiriya Ridge**. The enemy defences were manned by German infantry, and throughout the 6000-yards advance strongpoint after strongpoint had to be taken at the point of the bayonet. In clouds of dust and smoke the inevitable uncertainty of war prevailed (in some companies all the officers became casualties) but the attack went on. For hours the situation was obscure, but at last signals came back from one battalion and then another, 'We are on the objective'.

By morning **Miteiriya Ridge** was in our hands. The infantry assault was magnificently carried out by our infantry and by the Australians, Highlanders, and South Africans on the whole Corps front. In such an attack casualties must be expected and we had all suffered, but we had driven a great wedge in the enemy line. I pay tribute here to the great work of our Divisional medical services

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<sup>1</sup> Brigadier S. H. Crump, CBE, DSO; CRASC, **2nd NZ Division**, 1940–45; commanded rear party organisation in **Mediterranean**, 1946–47; commanded 2nd NZEF ( **Japan**), Jun-Sep 1947; on staff of HQ BCOF and NZ representative on Disposals Board in **Japan**, 1948–49.

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under Colonel Ardagh <sup>1</sup> who looked after the wounded. Many lives were saved by our blood transfusion units and the fully equipped surgical team.

While the infantry assault went forward, our engineers and provost followed close behind. The success of the attack depended on the skill and determination with which they lit tracks on the line of advance and detected and lifted all the mines and booby traps on the whole route from our own front line to the final objective. Great credit is due to the

**Divisional Engineers** under Lieutenant-Colonel Hanson <sup>2</sup> and to the provost personnel for their vital work. Anti-tank guns and infantry weapons were rushed along the lit routes to be dug in on the objective before daylight. The tanks followed, and by dawn we were ready to meet the Panzer counter-thrust.

During 24 and 25 October the fighting on **Miteiriya Ridge** continued, but both brigades, supported by artillery, anti-tank guns, machine guns and tanks, held all ground, and on the night of 25–26 October the 6th Brigade went forward in another determined attack which consolidated the position. I wish to pay tribute to the gallant support of the tank regiments of the **9th Armoured Brigade** under Brigadier Currie <sup>3</sup> who went into action with us for the first time.

We held the line until 27 October, when we handed over the sector to the **1st South African Division** for a short relief before returning to the line alongside the Australians, who had been attacking continuously and most successfully along the coast.

On the night of 1–2 November we attacked again to breach the enemy position for our armour to sally out. To conserve the strength of our infantry brigades weakened by losses in the earlier attacks, General Montgomery placed the Tyneside Brigade and the Highland Brigade under command. These two brigades and the **Maori Battalion** attacked, supported by an even greater concentration of artillery than in the first attack, under the command of our CRA, Brigadier Weir. By the end of the attack the gunners had fired nearly 8000 rounds per gun without rest during the ten days of battle.

The infantry went forward with great dash, admirably supported by our engineers, machine-gunners, signalmen, and the whole Divisional organisation, and captured all their objectives. Despite heavy casualties, tanks of the **9th Armoured Brigade** and the Divisional Cavalry broke through the enemy gunline. It was this attack,



<sup>1</sup> Brigadier P. A. Ardagh, CBE, DSO, MC; OC Surgical Division, 2nd NZ General Hospital, Aug 1940 – Oct 1941; commanded 1st NZ Casualty Clearing. Station, Nov 1941 – Jan 1942, Feb–May, 1942; commanded **Mobile Surgical Unit**, 9 Jan – 27 Feb 1942; ADMS **2nd NZ Division**, May 1942 – Feb 1943; seconded to British Army for duty as **DDMS, 30 Corps**, Feb 1943; died in **United Kingdom**, 6 Apr 1944.

<sup>2</sup> Brigadier F. M. H. Hanson, DSO, OBE, MM; commanded 7th Field Company, **NZ Engineers**, Jan 1940 – Aug 1941; Commander Royal Engineers, **2nd NZ Division**, Oct 1941 – Apr 1944, Nov 1944 – Jan 1946; Chief Engineer, 2nd NZEF, 1943–46.

<sup>3</sup> Brigadier J. C. Currie, DSO, MC.

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following so quickly on the first series of attacks, that finally made the breach through which 10th Corps, comprising two armoured divisions and the mobile 2nd New Zealand Division, was passed on 4 November.

The role of the armoured divisions was to seek out and destroy the Panzer divisions, while the 2nd New Zealand Division and the British 4th Light Armoured Brigade, comprising tanks and armoured cars under our orders, were to move west, avoiding the armoured battle to the north, and cut the enemy communications at **Fuka**, 60 miles behind the enemy line. It was a difficult manoeuvre, especially as the majority of our battalions had to embus from positions in the front line. Congestion and shelling at the gap and an armoured battle *en route* delayed progress, and when darkness came the brigades were still miles apart. Concentration by night in unknown enemy country, 25 miles behind his line, is a difficult operation, and it was not till two hours before dawn on the 5th that all units had concentrated, using as an assembly beacon a blazing ammunition lorry hit by enemy fire in a night skirmish.

Before dawn on the 5th our advance continued, the force moving in desert formation over open desert with armoured cars and tanks ahead.

At daylight we encountered a column of the latest type of German Mark 3 and 4 tanks, eight of which the 4th Light Armoured Brigade surprised and disposed of in as many minutes. Fires and explosions from enemy dumps on the coast could be seen during the day as we moved westwards, and reports of precipitate retreat were received. Later in the day our tanks and artillery drove off the rearguard covering the **Fuka** position.

On 6 November we were directed on **Baggush**, where unfortunately a heavy storm turned the desert into a morass, and all wheeled transport not using the coastal road was bogged. The enemy made full use of this respite but had to leave behind many guns and trucks caught in the mud.

On the 8th the weather improved and we pushed on, passing within sight of our June battlefield at **Minqar Qaim**. The enemy at this stage had evacuated **Matruh** fortress and the Division and attached troops were directed on **Sidi Barrani**.

**Sidi Barrani** was occupied on the 9th, and on 10 November we advanced on the heavily defended escarpment at **Halfaya**. The pursuit continued along roads strewn with all manner of wreckage and abandoned vehicles, eloquent tribute to the **RAF**, whose fighters and bombers had given the Army magnificent support throughout the battle.

Below **Halfaya** escarpment our light armoured advanced guard was held up by the enemy covered by a minefield, but as we deployed to attack the enemy withdrew. By dark on the 10th the 5th Brigade moved forward through the minefield to the support of the 4th Light Armoured Brigade. **Halfaya**, the last of the Axis fortresses to fall last year, is a formidable defensive position. A surprise attack was decided on, and just before daylight on Armistice Day 110 men of the **21st Battalion** went in with Bren guns and bayonets. It was a complete success. We had one killed and one wounded and took 612 prisoners, some German but mainly Italians of the Pistoia Division, whose motto is 'Valiant even unto Death!' **Sollum** fell automatically and Egypt was clear of the

**enemy.**

**The enemy is still retreating and we are now waiting to go forward to the final objective.**

**Your Division has again added to its record by a series of battles and operations which reflect the greatest credit on Brigadiers, commanding officers, and junior commanders for the way they have trained and commanded during battle. The courage and tenacity of our fighting soldiers remains of the highest order. The training, equipment, and efficiency of the Force has stood the test of a most exacting campaign <sup>1</sup> and we look to the future with confidence.**

**I am sending this from my office truck. An official and detailed account of the campaign with maps, diagrams, and lessons is in course of preparation.**

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**<sup>1</sup> New Zealand casualties in the Battle of Egypt (20 Jun – 21 Nov 1942) were:**

<b>Killed</b>	<b>866</b>
<b>Died of wounds</b>	<b>414</b>
<b>Died on active service (includes deaths through sickness, accident, &amp;c.)</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Wounded</b>	<b>3704</b>
<b>Prisoners of war (includes 250 wounded and prisoners of war and 36 died of wounds while prisoners of war)</b>	<b>1950</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>6984</b>

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**DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II**

**PROPOSED WITHDRAWAL OF 2ND NEW ZEALAND DIVISION (NOVEMBER-  
DECEMBER 1942)**

*Proposed Withdrawal of 2nd New Zealand Division (November-December 1942)*

175

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom (Wellington) <sup>1</sup>*

14 November 1942

We are very anxious, as you know, to retain the New Zealand Division in the **Middle East**, in the first place because of the excellent work it has done, more particularly in the present operations. It was also our hope that it would be re-formed into a still more powerful weapon as a result of the promotion of the New Zealand Armoured Brigade in accordance with the arrangements contemplated in the **New Zealand Government's** telegram of 9 September. <sup>2</sup> The shipping position is growing more and not less difficult and current operations naturally involve increased demands upon shipping, so that very serious embarrassment would be caused by the diversion of further shipping to replace the New Zealand Division in the **Middle East**. Lastly, however favourably the present North African operations may develop, the threat from the Caucasus to the **Persia-Iraq** Command will still remain and may become a grave danger, and we cannot afford to neglect our strength there or to weaken it unnecessarily.

At the same time, Mr. Fraser's difficulties as regards manpower are fully appreciated. Having regard to the manpower situation in New Zealand, the repeated requests by the **United States** authorities for more New Zealand troops for the **Pacific** theatre are clearly an embarrassment to the **New Zealand Government**. <sup>3</sup> It would seem desirable to obtain the considered advice of the **Combined Chiefs of Staff** at **Washington**, who would look at the position in the light of the general situation (including both the North Africa and **Persia-Iraq** and **Pacific** theatres) and the shipping position as a whole. Please suggest to Mr. Fraser that the desirability of this course should be urged upon the **United States** authorities. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Harry Fagg Batterbee, GCMG, KCVO, High Commissioner for the **United Kingdom** in New Zealand, 1939–45.

<sup>2</sup> See *Formation of New Zealand Armoured Brigade (No. 92)*.

<sup>3</sup> See Volume III, *Formation and Employment of 3rd New Zealand Division*.

<sup>4</sup> A copy of this message was delivered to Mr. Fraser on 18 Nov.

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*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

19 November 1942

I feel that the time has come when I must raise with you the question of the return from the **Middle East** of the 2nd New Zealand Division. In doing so I assure you that I am fully aware of the exigencies of the war situation both in this part of the world and in the North African theatre. For some considerable time we in New Zealand have been of the opinion that, in view of the growing difficulties of the manpower position and of our increased and increasing commitments in the **Pacific** area, this request should be made, but both my colleagues and I felt that it would be inappropriate to do so in the adverse circumstances which have existed hitherto in the **Middle East** and in **Russia**. However, it was always my intention at the proper time and when the situation in Egypt became easier, to place the whole position before you. It was felt as late as August of this year, when approval was given for the despatch of reinforcements for the **Middle East**,<sup>1</sup> that the urgent needs of that theatre outweighed those of the area in which New Zealand itself is situated. Now, however, with the launching of the most promising Anglo-American offensive,<sup>2</sup> the immediate security of the

**Middle East**, which we have always regarded as of such vital importance, appears for all practical purposes to have been achieved, and with the accession of large new forces from the **United States** and **Britain** the presence of one New Zealand division in this theatre becomes a matter of diminishing importance. Here in the **Pacific**, on the other hand, we are faced not only with the possibility that **Japan** may launch further offensive action, both to retrieve the situation resulting from her recent setbacks and to take advantage of the preoccupations of the **United Nations** in **Europe** and in **Africa**, but also with what we regard as the necessity that the **United Nations** should launch a counter-offensive at the earliest possible date. It is felt that the place of the 2nd New Zealand Division in either case is here in the South Pacific.

Now that, at our own request, the New Zealand land and air forces have been placed under the Commander of the **South Pacific Area**,<sup>3</sup> we anticipate that increasingly heavy demands will inevitably be made upon the resources of this Dominion, both in manpower and in materials. Already, as you know, in response

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<sup>1</sup> See *Formation of New Zealand Armoured Brigade (No. 89)*.

<sup>2</sup> **United States** and British forces under the command of General Eisenhower landed in North Africa on 8 Nov.

<sup>3</sup> **Vice-Admiral W. F. Halsey**, United States Navy, had succeeded Vice-Admiral R. L. Ghormley on 18 Oct 1942 as Commander South Pacific Area. See also Volume III.

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to requests from the Commander of the **South Pacific Area**, we have readily and promptly agreed to send a New Zealand division for service in the Islands, and part of it has already proceeded to its several destinations.<sup>1</sup> It has been decided that, in addition to our Army commitments, the New Zealand Air Force also should be trained and equipped to undertake an offensive role in the **Pacific**, and I should add

that for some time now a large proportion of our limited force of modern aircraft has been operating in **Guadalcanal**, **Espiritu Santo**, and other **Pacific** islands. New Zealand is now endeavouring to complete preparations for an air force of sixteen squadrons to serve in the **Pacific**, with an ultimate aim of achieving a force of thirty squadrons.

It will be appreciated that with our extremely limited manpower resources, which have now reached straining point, it is impossible for us to maintain two divisions overseas and an adequate Home Defence force in addition to our air commitments, which include of course the Empire Air Training Scheme, and our comparatively small, but increasingly useful, naval units. In fact the limit of our manpower resources in New Zealand has been reached. Up to the present over 163,000 men and 5000 women have been taken from industry. We now find ourselves unable to reach the establishment which our Chiefs of Staff laid down as the minimum force required for the defence of the Dominion. <sup>2</sup>

The question of production of food and other supplies, both for the **United Kingdom** and the **South Pacific Area**, also arises. The United States Forces are becoming increasingly dependent on New Zealand's resources for those essential supplies and services which we must endeavour to provide under the Mutual Aid Agreement. <sup>3</sup> To maintain production it has already become necessary to strip the Army of a large number of its personnel and return such men to industry, and in considering the needs of essential industry and our commitments in respect of the armed forces, we are now forced to come to the decision to reduce establishment below the level which our military advisers regard as sufficient.

I think that you should be told also of the attitude of the New Zealand people, both Maori and European, towards the return of the 2nd Division from overseas. The First Echelon left New Zealand three years ago next January and the greater proportion of



<sup>1</sup> See Volume III, *Formation and Employment of 3rd NZ Division*. The **3rd NZ Division** sailed from New Zealand for **New Caledonia** in November–December 1942. In October the 34th Battalion had been detached from the 3rd Division to garrison **Tonga** and the 36th Battalion was sent to **Norfolk Island**.

<sup>2</sup> See Volume III, *Defence of New Zealand*.

<sup>3</sup> On 3 Sep 1942, by an exchange of notes between the United States Secretary of State (Cordell Hull) and the New Zealand Minister in **Washington** (Hon. W. Nash), New Zealand and the **United States** agreed to exchange mutual aid.

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the men now fighting in the **Middle East** have been away from this country for well over two years. There is general feeling in the country that our men have a strong claim to return, particularly in view of the extremely heavy casualties which our Division has suffered—some 18,500 so far out of a total of 43,500 sent to the **Middle East**—and further, that our own tried and well-trained troops should be used in the **Pacific** area for the defence of New Zealand.

Lastly, I must draw your attention to the effect on public opinion in New Zealand of the possible withdrawal of the **9th Australian Division** from the **Middle East**, concerning which Mr. Curtin has now sent me advice. <sup>1</sup> It will be appreciated that it would be absolutely impossible for the **New Zealand Government** to resist the strong feeling to which I have referred should it become known that all three Australian divisions have returned. Therefore, I feel bound to place the whole matter fully and frankly before you and to ask that effect should be given to this request as soon as circumstances permit.

I fully realise that there will be difficulties and embarrassments, particularly in regard to shipping, but I hope that it will be possible to make some adequate and early provision.

The despatch of the reinforcements which we had undertaken to send to the **Middle East**, and for which transport is already bound for New Zealand is, of course, the urgent question at the moment. It will be necessary, therefore, to give further consideration to this matter upon receipt of your reply to this telegram.

In conclusion, I would like to make it plain that it is not our intention to regard the 2nd NZEF as a force to be stationed permanently in New Zealand itself. We are firmly convinced that a long and difficult conflict with **Japan** lies ahead, irrespective of the success of any operations against **Italy** and **Germany**, and that a forward move against **Japan** must be made by the **United Nations** at the earliest possible date. We would wish to participate to the fullest extent of our capacity in any such offensive in the **Pacific**.

Unmistakable evidence of its fixed determination to fight this war through to the end has, I hope, been given by this Dominion, and the losses we have suffered in successive campaigns are proof of the spirit of the New Zealand people and of their willingness to make every sacrifice to this end.

I know that you will give full and sympathetic consideration to this matter, and that the reasons which induce me to raise it will be appreciated.

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<sup>1</sup> This telegram, dated 16 Nov, is not published. It contained for Mr. Fraser's information a copy of a telegram from Mr. Curtin to President Roosevelt on the withdrawal of the 9th Division from the **Middle East**.

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**Your telegram of 19 November.**

**It would cause me much regret to see the New Zealand Division quit the scene of its glories, but I quite understand your feelings and am aware how embarrassing the withdrawal of the **9th Australian Division** would be to you. At my request the whole situation is being reviewed by the Chiefs of Staff in **London**. In the meanwhile, I send you a copy of the telegram I have today despatched to Mr. Curtin. I am sure that, having regard to the great contribution the **United States** are now making to the defence of the Southern Pacific and the still greater efforts we must expect from them, it would be a mistake for **Australia** and New Zealand to ignore the opinion of the **United States** military authorities.**

**178**

***The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand***

**24 November 1942**

**The following is a repetition of my telegram to Mr. Curtin:**

**We recognise, of course, that the withdrawal of the **9th Australian Division** from the **Mediterranean** theatre rests with the Commonwealth Government. However, the **United States Forces** are now heavily engaged both in helping to defend **Australia** and in mastering French North Africa as a prelude to further action in **Europe**. Therefore, they are entitled to have the opportunity of considering the position as a whole and of making any representations to you which may appear to them desirable.**

**It appears probable that the Eastern Mediterranean will be the scene of large-scale action in the early spring, and the position of **Turkey** is therefore of peculiar interest. Should the **9th Australian Division** be withdrawn to **Australia**, it will, of course, have to be replaced in time either by British or American forces. The present acute and aggravated shipping stringency makes it necessary to save tonnage as much as possible. For instance, it might be most economical to move one of the**

American divisions in **Australia** or destined for the **Pacific** direct to **Suez**, where the 9th Australian Division could be picked up on the return journey. There might be no other way of maintaining the necessary strength in the **Middle East**. On the other hand, it might be possible to transport the Australians from the **Middle East** as an isolated shipping operation. This again would necessarily be at the expense of our general power to move troops about the world, and would have to be considered in its relation to the dominating military exigencies. The matter is one on which the **Combined Chiefs of Staff** at **Washington**, who alone have the central point of view, should advise in the first instance.

So far as we are concerned, your wishes, of course, will not be opposed, although we greatly regret the departure from the **Middle East** theatre of a division which has rendered distinguished service. The object should be to bring the greatest number of **United Nations'** divisions into contact with the enemy, and certainly it would appear more helpful to the common cause if fresh troops were moved from the **United States** into the **Pacific** and into action against **Japan**, rather than that troops already engaged with the enemy in another part of the world should be withdrawn.

I feel bound to put these points before you as I know the great importance which you have always attached to American opinion, and also how much you value the substantial aid the **United States** has given to the defence of **Australia**.

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*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

2 December 1942

Your telegram of 19 November ( **No. 176**).

The following is the text of a further telegram I have sent to Mr. Curtin about the return of the **9th Australian Division**:

My professional advisers and I are very sorry that you continue to press for the move of the **9th Australian Division**, which we do not consider is in accordance with the general strategic interests of the **United Nations**.

Nevertheless, to meet your wishes I shall recommend to the President that the **9th Australian Division** returns to **Australia** as soon as shipping can be provided. This will probably be early in the New Year. I may say that a loss to us in personnel shipping-lift of 10,000 men in the WS <sup>1</sup> convoys and 20,000 in the trans- **Atlantic** build-up for the invasion of the Continent will result from this move.

We very much regret that we cannot arrange for the equipment of your division to be returned to **Australia**. The cost to our offensive operations of the cargo and MT <sup>2</sup> shipping necessary for this movement could not be faced.

You will like to know that, in response to an urgent request by the Americans for naval help in the **Pacific**, we are proposing to offer them the two modern armoured aircraft carriers *Victorious* <sup>3</sup> and *Illustrious* <sup>4</sup>, under the command of a British Admiral, for service under American orders in the **Pacific**. These are among the most vital units we possess, and we have only four of this class. In exchange we are asking for the *Ranger* from the **Atlantic**. I hope that an additional and important re-insurance for the safety of **Australia** will result from this movement.

The fact that we are losing the Australian Division makes the retention of the New Zealand Division in the **Middle East** more necessary for us though your difficulties are understood. The return of the New Zealand Division would involve a further loss in shipping-lift of 10,000 men in WS convoys and 40,000 in the trans- **Atlantic** build-up for the invasion of the Continent. The reason for the loss of lift for the move of the New Zealand Division being greater than that for the move of the Australian Division is that the big personnel ships happen to be arriving at **Suez** at a convenient time for the move of the latter. To move the New Zealand Division they would have to return to Egypt from **Australia**.

I could not, therefore, commit myself to any definite date for the shipping.

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<sup>1</sup> WS were the letters used by the Admiralty to designate convoys outward bound from the **United Kingdom**, as distinct from inward-bound, or US, convoys.

<sup>2</sup> Mechanical transport.

<sup>3</sup> HMS *Victorious*, Fleet aircraft carrier, 23,000 tons, 16 4.5-inch guns.

<sup>4</sup> HMS *Illustrious*, Fleet aircraft carrier, 23,000 tons, 16 4.5-inch guns.

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*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia*

4 December 1942

For your information I am repeating in my immediately following telegram a message I have sent today to Mr. Churchill regarding the return of the 2nd New Zealand Division from the **Middle East**.

It will be noticed that we fully realise, and have indicated to Mr. Churchill, that the situation of **Australia** is not necessarily the same as in New Zealand and, indeed, that in material respects they do differ.

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*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

4 December 1942

We have given most anxious consideration to your telegram of 2

December ( **No. 179**), and the general question was discussed at length yesterday in a secret session of the House of Representatives.

The facts set out in your telegram under reply and the dangers involved in attempting in the present circumstances to move the 2nd New Zealand Division have greatly impressed us, and we have come to the conclusion—unanimously shared by all my colleagues and by all the members of the House of Representatives—that we cannot take the responsibility, in the circumstances that you outline, of pressing for the return of the New Zealand troops at this juncture. We realise that our situation differs in material respects from that of **Australia** and we feel that we must leave the 2nd New Zealand Division in the **Middle East** for a further period. At the same time, we feel that we must make it clear that the considerations advanced in my telegram of 19 November ( **No. 176**) retain, in our opinion, their full validity and cogency, and in addition we attach great weight to an aspect which was not then brought to your notice, namely, that it would be neither wise nor proper to allow the offensive against the Japanese in the South Pacific to be conducted entirely by the Americans without substantial British collaboration.

We know that you fully realise the difficulties of these problems with which we have to contend, and the very generous and understanding attitude that you have taken throughout and, in particular, the sympathetic consideration you have given to my telegram of 19 November, have been warmly appreciated.

I am sure that you will understand it if in different circumstances and at a later date we again feel ourselves obliged to raise this matter.

I am sending Mr. Curtin a copy of this telegram.

182

*The New Zealand Minister ( Washington )<sup>1</sup> to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*



**5 December 1942**

**The following is for the Chief of the General Staff from Brigadier Williams: <sup>2</sup>**

**At a meeting on 4 December which I attended, the **Combined Chiefs of Staff** considered the question of the return of the Australian and New Zealand divisions from the **Middle East**.**

**The following is the decision reached:**

- ( Every military argument is against the move, which will involve a**
  - a) definite reduction of impact upon the enemy in 1943 and a major diversion of shipping resources urgently required.**
  - b) The ships required for the move would not be available for urgent troop movements for three months at least. This would seriously dislocate **United Kingdom** and **United States** movements now in train.**

**Both the Australian and New Zealand representatives strongly represented the manpower situation, as well as the demands being made for Australian and New Zealand troops in the South-West and South Pacific and the likelihood of them increasing.**

**The United States Chiefs of Staff spoke bluntly against the move. Marshall <sup>3</sup> stated that he was fully convinced that the defence of **Australia** and New Zealand would be weakened by the return of these divisions at this stage. The Combined Staffs were now hard put to find ships for movements already approved. Lack of ships was preventing the reinforcement of **Burma** and the **Far East**, where operations under consideration would put troops in contact with the enemy. This would have important repercussions on the defence of **Australia** and New Zealand. He appreciated the points advanced but expressed grave concern regarding military implications which impeded the war effort as a whole.**

**It was stated by the Combined Planners that if movement was decided for reasons other than military: ( a) shipping could be found for personnel only at the expense of **United Kingdom** and **United States** troop movements, but not for the return of divisional**



<sup>1</sup> Hon. W. Nash.

<sup>2</sup> Brigadier A. B. Williams, DSO; Commander Royal New Zealand Artillery, Army HQ, Dec 1939–Feb 1942; New Zealand Army representative on British Joint Staff Mission, **Washington**, Feb 1942–Oct 1943; Commandant, Central Military District, Oct 1943–Dec 1944; Commandant, Northern Military District, Mar 1945–Apr 1947.

<sup>3</sup> General of the Army the Hon. George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff, United States Army, 1939–45; Special Representative of the President to **China** (as Ambassador), 1945–47; Secretary of State, 1947–49; Secretary of Defence, 1950–51.

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equipment; ( *b* ) the ship now *en route* to New Zealand <sup>1</sup> for reinforcements would have to be stopped and returned to South Africa empty.

During the discussion Marshall stated that another **United States**; division was now *en route* to **Australia**; he also suggested that if it was not possible to reinforce the divisions in the **Middle East** it would be better in the circumstances to reduce establishments. Dill pointed out that maintaining troops with dwindling numbers was bad for morale, but he appreciated that shipping considerations were of enormous importance.

It was also pointed out that the move would weaken the forces, in the **Middle East** while operations are in progress, and that the reduction of forces for subsequent operations envisaged would have a bad effect on the British and Indian troops who have been in the **Middle East** for a longer period.

The decision of the **Combined Chiefs of Staff** is being submitted to Mr. Churchill and the President.

183

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

6 December 1942

We are deeply grateful to you and to the Government and people of New Zealand for the most generous manner in which you have responded to our appeal to allow the glorious New Zealand Division to represent the Dominion on the African battlefield. Naturally you are free to reconsider your decision at any time, especially if your own situation deteriorates. I am sure that our feelings of admiration for New Zealand and all she stands for will be shared by the President of the **United States**.

It looks as if Rommel will not stand at **Agheila**, and by the time this reaches you he may well be taking another big bound backwards. We shall follow hotfoot on his heels. The haunting anxiety that the fortress of **Malta** would be starved out, which we have endured for so many months and for the sake of which we have made such heavy sacrifices both in warships and supply vessels, has been swept away by the arrival there of a second British convoy from **Alexandria**. In **Tunisia** our vanguards have been sharply checked and it will be necessary to go over to the defensive for a week or more while air and armour come up from the main body. While the going was good it was quite right to go on pell-mell, and thereby we have gained an immense amount of territory, including seaports from which we can strike with our surface craft at enemy convoys. Everything will be done to drive the Axis out of **Tunisia** at the earliest moment. The war in that theatre is very costly for them because of the immense toll we shall levy on their reinforcements.

The United States have preferred to have only one British armoured carrier <sup>1</sup> and to keep their own *Ranger* instead of sending us the *Ranger* and taking two armoured carriers from us. The latter plan would have

been preferred by us as it would have given us more say in the tasks we will be set. Still, as a result of the moves there will be two more carriers in the **Pacific**. All good wishes and kindest regards.

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<sup>1</sup> HMS *Victorious* joined the United States Pacific Fleet in March 1943.

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184

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the New Zealand Minister ( Washington)*

1 December 1942

Your telegram of 5 December ( **No. 182**). The matter referred to in Williams's message to Puttick has been disposed of for the present so far as New Zealand is concerned, as indicated in my telegram of 5 December. <sup>2</sup>

In view of the implication that consideration for the defence of New Zealand was the reason for my raising the question of the return of the New Zealand Division with Churchill, I am most anxious that our attitude should not be misunderstood, and I should be glad if you could find it possible to make it plain to all concerned that this was not the case. The desirability of associating ourselves in some substantial manner with the offensive in the South Pacific was the primary consideration in our minds. Our power to do this is, of course, at present very much limited by manpower difficulties, though we are as you know endeavouring to prepare the 3rd Division for this task. In this connection, and with reference to your most secret and personal telegram of 4 December, <sup>3</sup> you should note that the 3rd Division is at present very much scattered with portions in **New Caledonia**, New Zealand, **Fiji**, Norfolk, and **Tonga**. Until it has been concentrated, strengthened, equipped, and trained as a unit for its task, it cannot be ready for offensive operations. This will, of course, take some time.

<sup>2</sup> Not published. This telegram from Mr. Fraser repeated for Mr. Nash's information the texts of **Nos. 177- 9 and 181.**

<sup>3</sup> Not published. In this telegram Mr. Nash reported on discussions with Sir John Dill, Head of the British Joint Staff Mission, **Washington**, and **Admiral E. J. King**, Commander-in-Chief United States Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations, on the utilisation of New Zealand troops in the **Pacific**. He stated that Admiral King had said that he 'was anxious to use our men in the best way possible. He recognised their fighting quality and would see they were used. Some relief was needed for the men on **Guadalcanal** and we might be able to help.'

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*Letter from the United States Naval Attaché ( Wellington) to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

8 December 1942

MY DEAR MR. PRIME MINISTER:

I have the honour to transmit the following radio message from the President of the **United States of America**:

I have been delighted to learn you are leaving the New Zealand Division in the **Middle East** for the present. This action on the part of your Government is a renewed evidence of our mutual military interests. I believe you have done the right thing. It is altogether generous. Roosevelt.

J. P. OLDING

Captain, **US Navy**,  
US Naval Attaché

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*Letter from the Prime Minister to the United States Naval Attaché*

**11 December 1942**

**DEAR CAPTAIN OLDING**

,

**I am very much obliged to you for your note of 8 December conveying to me the text of a message from President Roosevelt. Would you be good enough to forward the following reply from me to the President:**

**Thank you so much for your kind message. As you know, our one object is to further the common cause to the best of our ability and resources. We are most anxious to assist effectively in due course in the offensive in the South Pacific, and this was our primary motive in raising with Churchill the possibility of the return to this area of our Division in the **Middle East**.**

**In the circumstances we have agreed that this is at present impracticable, and though our contemplated co-operation in the **Pacific** will necessarily be less powerful we will, nevertheless, do all we can.**

**Yours sincerely**

,

**P. FRASER**

,

**Prime Minister**

**187**

*The Prime Minister of Australia to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

**14 December 1942**

**Your telegram of 4 December ( **No. 180**).**

In my immediately following telegram I am communicating for your information the text of a message which I have sent to the President regarding the return of the 9th Division to **Australia**.<sup>1</sup>

Although New Zealand and **Australia** are in separate areas, you will recall from our exchange of telegrams in March, when the proposals for the sub-division of the **Pacific** theatre were being discussed, that we both considered that our two countries should be in the one strategical area. We accepted the arrangements but retained our view that, from the aspect of defence, our two countries were interdependent and that, to quote from your telegram of 26 March,<sup>2</sup> ‘**Australia** and New Zealand were inevitably one strategical whole in which already a substantial degree of co-operation, both military and economic, has been achieved.’

You will agree, I am sure, that nothing has since transpired to alter that view, and the division which has been made should not affect a united front against **Japan** by **Australia** and New Zealand. To that end we have sought to assist you with munitions and other supplies to the greatest extent of our capacity.

The struggle in **New Guinea** has, I believe, important implications from the point of view of the security of New Zealand. You will note from my telegram to the President the difficulties of the **New Guinea** campaign, and the fact that there is a pressing need for the services of the 9th Division in the South-West Pacific Area. You

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<sup>1</sup> Not published. In this telegram Mr. Curtin emphasised the pressing need for the services of the **9th Australian Division** in the South-West Pacific Area because of the ‘immense wastage’ in personnel in **New Guinea** through battle casualties and malaria and the need for the 6th and 7th Divisions to have a prolonged rest after the Buna operations. He also advised President Roosevelt that the manpower position in the Commonwealth necessitated a reduction in the strength of the Australian Army by two divisions.

<sup>2</sup> See Volume III, *Command in the Pacific: Extension of Anzac Area*.

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will also recall from paragraph 11 of my message of 16 November to President Roosevelt <sup>1</sup> that our advisers consider that three further divisions are necessary in the South-West Pacific Area, of which the **9th Australian Division** will be one. In view of the very direct interest which New Zealand has in the outcome of operations in **New Guinea**, we feel that you should be in no doubt about the situation confronting our forces there. In Timor, where we have small guerrilla forces only, a considerable increase in enemy activity and reinforcements has also been noted.

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<sup>1</sup> Not published. Paragraph 11 read:

Decisions on global strategy have been taken by Mr. Churchill and yourself. At considerable risk to the security of **Australia**, the Commonwealth Government has shown a ready willingness to co-operate in other theatres. This has been demonstrated by the service overseas of our naval, land, and air forces and our continued participation in the Empire Air Training Scheme. The Government considers that the contributions it has made to other theatres entitles it to the assurance that the fullest possible support will be given to the situation in the **Pacific**. You will recall that the military advisers of the Commonwealth Government consider that three further divisions are necessary in the South-West Pacific area. In view of its responsibilities for the local defence of **Australia** and in the light of the views of its advisers, the Government feels that the maximum strength of the Australian forces should be concentrated in the South-West Pacific area to meet all the contingencies of the military situation in the **Pacific**.

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16 December 1942

I have to thank you very much for your telegram of 14 December and for the texts of your communications to President Roosevelt and of Earle Page's message to Mr. Bruce.<sup>2</sup> The views that we have previously expressed on the sub-division of the **Pacific** theatre have not been altered in the slightest degree, and we are as firmly convinced now as we were then that **Australia** and New Zealand should be in the one strategical area. However, like you we accepted the arrangements and are doing our best to make them work. It is a great satisfaction to us to know that **Australia** still holds the same view and, as I am sure you know, we have never been unmindful or unappreciative of the assistance that is being given us by the Commonwealth. The importance to us and to the Allied cause in the **Pacific** of the magnificent effort made by **Australia** in **New Guinea** under such tremendous difficulties is fully realised, and we fully concur in your view that the struggle in **New Guinea** has important implications from the point of view of New Zealand's security. The struggle in the South Pacific has, of course, similar implications from the standpoint of the security of **Australia**, and, as you no doubt know, in spite of the very real manpower difficulties that we are experiencing, we are now in the process of sending a division to **New Caledonia** which will play its part in operations against the Japanese in due course. There is no doubt whatever in our minds that nothing that happens in the South-West Pacific can fail to affect the South Pacific and vice versa, and we fully share your view that whatever the division of the **Pacific** we must both regard our problems as one and should co-operate to the fullest possible extent in policy and in the exchange of material, information, and if necessary, of actual forces.

With regard to the question of the return to the **Pacific** of the 2nd New Zealand Division now in the **Middle East**, our primary object in raising this matter with Mr. Churchill was to enable us to play a more effective part in operations in the **Pacific**. We fully realised then, as we do now, that Australian and New Zealand problems are one in essence. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding this general principle, we felt that



different considerations did apply to the return of the **9th Australian Division** as compared with that of the 2nd New Zealand Division, and that the decision to be made by **Australia** did indeed differ materially because of different circumstances from that to be made by New Zealand. Of such fundamental importance did the matter seem to us that we felt it necessary to refer it to Parliament in secret session, and it was the unanimous opinion of the House that it would be impossible for us to press at this time for the return of our Division. As you know, I personally and specifically reserved the right to raise the matter again, and I hope it will be possible for us to keep in the closest contact in the future on this question.

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<sup>2</sup> This message, dated 15 Dec, from the Rt. Hon. Sir Earle Page to the Rt. Hon. S. M. Bruce, High Commissioner for **Australia** in **London**, is not published. It contained Page's views on the need for the immediate return of the 9th Division to **Australia**.

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189

*The Prime Minister of Australia to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

18 December 1942

I wish to thank you for your telegram of 16 December.

I am pleased to know that we remain in complete agreement on the aspect of the strategical interdependence of our two countries. Your remarks on the question of the return of the 2nd New Zealand Division to the **Pacific** are noted. On this matter I should greatly appreciate the maintenance of the closest contact between us.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 175 – THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM (WELLINGTON)<sup>1</sup>

175

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the High  
Commissioner for the United Kingdom (Wellington)*<sup>1</sup>

14 November 1942

We are very anxious, as you know, to retain the New Zealand Division in the **Middle East**, in the first place because of the excellent work it has done, more particularly in the present operations. It was also our hope that it would be re-formed into a still more powerful weapon as a result of the promotion of the New Zealand Armoured Brigade in accordance with the arrangements contemplated in the **New Zealand Government's** telegram of 9 September.<sup>2</sup> The shipping position is growing more and not less difficult and current operations naturally involve increased demands upon shipping, so that very serious embarrassment would be caused by the diversion of further shipping to replace the New Zealand Division in the **Middle East**. Lastly, however favourably the present North African operations may develop, the threat from the Caucasus to the **Persia-Iraq** Command will still remain and may become a grave danger, and we cannot afford to neglect our strength there or to weaken it unnecessarily.

At the same time, Mr. Fraser's difficulties as regards manpower are fully appreciated. Having regard to the manpower situation in New Zealand, the repeated requests by the **United States** authorities for more New Zealand troops for the **Pacific** theatre are clearly an embarrassment to the **New Zealand Government**.<sup>3</sup> It would seem desirable to obtain the considered advice of the **Combined Chiefs of Staff** at **Washington**, who would look at the position in the light of the general situation (including both the North Africa and **Persia-Iraq** and **Pacific** theatres) and the

shipping position as a whole. Please suggest to Mr. Fraser that the desirability of this course should be urged upon the **United States** authorities. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sir Harry Fagg Batterbee, GCMG, KCVO, High Commissioner for the **United Kingdom** in New Zealand, 1939–45.

<sup>2</sup> See *Formation of New Zealand Armoured Brigade (No. 92)*.

<sup>3</sup> See Volume III, *Formation and Employment of 3rd New Zealand Division*.

<sup>4</sup> A copy of this message was delivered to Mr. Fraser on 18 Nov.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 176 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

176

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

19 November 1942

I feel that the time has come when I must raise with you the question of the return from the **Middle East** of the 2nd New Zealand Division. In doing so I assure you that I am fully aware of the exigencies of the war situation both in this part of the world and in the North African theatre. For some considerable time we in New Zealand have been of the opinion that, in view of the growing difficulties of the manpower position and of our increased and increasing commitments in the **Pacific** area, this request should be made, but both my colleagues and I felt that it would be inappropriate to do so in the adverse circumstances which have existed hitherto in the **Middle East** and in **Russia**. However, it was always my intention at the proper time and when the situation in Egypt became easier, to place the whole position before you. It was felt as late as August of this year, when approval was given for the despatch of reinforcements for the **Middle East**,<sup>1</sup> that the urgent needs of that theatre outweighed those of the area in which New Zealand itself is situated. Now, however, with the launching of the most promising Anglo-American offensive,<sup>2</sup> the immediate security of the **Middle East**, which we have always regarded as of such vital importance, appears for all practical purposes to have been achieved, and with the accession of large new forces from the **United States** and **Britain** the presence of one New Zealand division in this theatre becomes a matter of diminishing importance. Here in the **Pacific**, on the other hand, we are faced not only with the possibility that **Japan** may launch further

offensive action, both to retrieve the situation resulting from her recent setbacks and to take advantage of the preoccupations of the **United Nations** in **Europe** and in **Africa**, but also with what we regard as the necessity that the **United Nations** should launch a counter-offensive at the earliest possible date. It is felt that the place of the 2nd New Zealand Division in either case is here in the South Pacific.

Now that, at our own request, the New Zealand land and air forces have been placed under the Commander of the **South Pacific Area**,<sup>3</sup> we anticipate that increasingly heavy demands will inevitably be made upon the resources of this Dominion, both in manpower and in materials. Already, as you know, in response

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<sup>1</sup> See *Formation of New Zealand Armoured Brigade (No. 89)*.

<sup>2</sup> **United States** and British forces under the command of General Eisenhower landed in North Africa on 8 Nov.

<sup>3</sup> **Vice-Admiral W. F. Halsey**, United States Navy, had succeeded Vice-Admiral R. L. Ghormley on 18 Oct 1942 as Commander South Pacific Area. See also Volume III.

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to requests from the Commander of the **South Pacific Area**, we have readily and promptly agreed to send a New Zealand division for service in the Islands, and part of it has already proceeded to its several destinations.<sup>1</sup> It has been decided that, in addition to our Army commitments, the New Zealand Air Force also should be trained and equipped to undertake an offensive role in the **Pacific**, and I should add that for some time now a large proportion of our limited force of modern aircraft has been operating in **Guadalcanal**, **Espiritu Santo**, and other **Pacific** islands. New Zealand is now endeavouring to complete preparations for an air force of sixteen squadrons to serve in the **Pacific**, with an ultimate aim of achieving a force of thirty squadrons.

It will be appreciated that with our extremely limited manpower

resources, which have now reached straining point, it is impossible for us to maintain two divisions overseas and an adequate Home Defence force in addition to our air commitments, which include of course the Empire Air Training Scheme, and our comparatively small, but increasingly useful, naval units. In fact the limit of our manpower resources in New Zealand has been reached. Up to the present over 163,000 men and 5000 women have been taken from industry. We now find ourselves unable to reach the establishment which our Chiefs of Staff laid down as the minimum force required for the defence of the Dominion. <sup>2</sup>

The question of production of food and other supplies, both for the **United Kingdom** and the **South Pacific Area**, also arises. The United States Forces are becoming increasingly dependent on New Zealand's resources for those essential supplies and services which we must endeavour to provide under the Mutual Aid Agreement. <sup>3</sup> To maintain production it has already become necessary to strip the Army of a large number of its personnel and return such men to industry, and in considering the needs of essential industry and our commitments in respect of the armed forces, we are now forced to come to the decision to reduce establishment below the level which our military advisers regard as sufficient.

I think that you should be told also of the attitude of the New Zealand people, both Maori and European, towards the return of the 2nd Division from overseas. The First Echelon left New Zealand three years ago next January and the greater proportion of

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<sup>1</sup> See Volume III, *Formation and Employment of 3rd NZ Division*. The **3rd NZ Division** sailed from New Zealand for **New Caledonia** in November–December 1942. In October the 34th Battalion had been detached from the 3rd Division to garrison **Tonga** and the 36th Battalion was sent to **Norfolk Island**.

<sup>2</sup> See Volume III, *Defence of New Zealand*.

<sup>3</sup> On 3 Sep 1942, by an exchange of notes between the United States Secretary of State (Cordell Hull) and the New Zealand Minister in **Washington** (Hon. W. Nash), New Zealand and the **United States** agreed to exchange mutual aid.

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the men now fighting in the **Middle East** have been away from this country for well over two years. There is general feeling in the country that our men have a strong claim to return, particularly in view of the extremely heavy casualties which our Division has suffered—some 18,500 so far out of a total of 43,500 sent to the **Middle East**—and further, that our own tried and well-trained troops should be used in the **Pacific** area for the defence of New Zealand.

Lastly, I must draw your attention to the effect on public opinion in New Zealand of the possible withdrawal of the **9th Australian Division** from the **Middle East**, concerning which Mr. Curtin has now sent me advice. <sup>1</sup> It will be appreciated that it would be absolutely impossible for the **New Zealand Government** to resist the strong feeling to which I have referred should it become known that all three Australian divisions have returned. Therefore, I feel bound to place the whole matter fully and frankly before you and to ask that effect should be given to this request as soon as circumstances permit.

I fully realise that there will be difficulties and embarrassments, particularly in regard to shipping, but I hope that it will be possible to make some adequate and early provision.

The despatch of the reinforcements which we had undertaken to send to the **Middle East**, and for which transport is already bound for New Zealand is, of course, the urgent question at the moment. It will be necessary, therefore, to give further consideration to this matter upon receipt of your reply to this telegram.

In conclusion, I would like to make it plain that it is not our intention to regard the 2nd NZEF as a force to be stationed permanently in New Zealand itself. We are firmly convinced that a long and difficult

conflict with **Japan** lies ahead, irrespective of the success of any operations against **Italy** and **Germany**, and that a forward move against **Japan** must be made by the **United Nations** at the earliest possible date. We would wish to participate to the fullest extent of our capacity in any such offensive in the **Pacific**.

Unmistakable evidence of its fixed determination to fight this war through to the end has, I hope, been given by this Dominion, and the losses we have suffered in successive campaigns are proof of the spirit of the New Zealand people and of their willingness to make every sacrifice to this end.

I know that you will give full and sympathetic consideration to this matter, and that the reasons which induce me to raise it will be appreciated.

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<sup>1</sup> This telegram, dated 16 Nov, is not published. It contained for Mr. Fraser's information a copy of a telegram from Mr. Curtin to President Roosevelt on the withdrawal of the 9th Division from the **Middle East**.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

177 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME  
MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

177

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

24 November 1942

Your telegram of 19 November.

It would cause me much regret to see the New Zealand Division quit the scene of its glories, but I quite understand your feelings and am aware how embarrassing the withdrawal of the **9th Australian Division** would be to you. At my request the whole situation is being reviewed by the Chiefs of Staff in **London**. In the meanwhile, I send you a copy of the telegram I have today despatched to Mr. Curtin. I am sure that, having regard to the great contribution the **United States** are now making to the defence of the Southern Pacific and the still greater efforts we must expect from them, it would be a mistake for **Australia** and New Zealand to ignore the opinion of the **United States** military authorities.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 178 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

178

### *The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

24 November 1942

The following is a repetition of my telegram to Mr. Curtin:

We recognise, of course, that the withdrawal of the **9th Australian Division** from the **Mediterranean** theatre rests with the Commonwealth Government. However, the **United States Forces** are now heavily engaged both in helping to defend **Australia** and in mastering French North Africa as a prelude to further action in **Europe**. Therefore, they are entitled to have the opportunity of considering the position as a whole and of making any representations to you which may appear to them desirable.

It appears probable that the Eastern Mediterranean will be the scene of large-scale action in the early spring, and the position of **Turkey** is therefore of peculiar interest. Should the **9th Australian Division** be withdrawn to **Australia**, it will, of course, have to be replaced in time either by British or American forces. The present acute and aggravated shipping stringency makes it necessary to save tonnage as much as possible. For instance, it might be most economical to move one of the American divisions in **Australia** or destined for the **Pacific** direct to **Suez**, where the 9th Australian Division could be picked up on the return journey. There might be no other way of maintaining the necessary strength in the **Middle East**. On the other hand, it might be possible to transport the Australians from the **Middle East** as an isolated shipping operation. This again would necessarily be at the expense of our general

power to move troops about the world, and would have to be considered in its relation to the dominating military exigencies. The matter is one on which the **Combined Chiefs of Staff at Washington**, who alone have the central point of view, should advise in the first instance.

So far as we are concerned, your wishes, of course, will not be opposed, although we greatly regret the departure from the **Middle East** theatre of a division which has rendered distinguished service. The object should be to bring the greatest number of **United Nations'** divisions into contact with the enemy, and certainly it would appear more helpful to the common cause if fresh troops were moved from the **United States** into the **Pacific** and into action against **Japan**, rather than that troops already engaged with the enemy in another part of the world should be withdrawn.

I feel bound to put these points before you as I know the great importance which you have always attached to American opinion, and also how much you value the substantial aid the **United States** has given to the defence of **Australia**.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 179 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

179

### *The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

2 December 1942

Your telegram of 19 November ( **No. 176**).

The following is the text of a further telegram I have sent to Mr. Curtin about the return of the **9th Australian Division**:

My professional advisers and I are very sorry that you continue to press for the move of the **9th Australian Division**, which we do not consider is in accordance with the general strategic interests of the **United Nations**.

Nevertheless, to meet your wishes I shall recommend to the President that the **9th Australian Division** returns to **Australia** as soon as shipping can be provided. This will probably be early in the New Year. I may say that a loss to us in personnel shipping-lift of 10,000 men in the WS <sup>1</sup> convoys and 20,000 in the trans- **Atlantic** build-up for the invasion of the Continent will result from this move.

We very much regret that we cannot arrange for the equipment of your division to be returned to **Australia**. The cost to our offensive operations of the cargo and MT <sup>2</sup> shipping necessary for this movement could not be faced.

You will like to know that, in response to an urgent request by the Americans for naval help in the **Pacific**, we are proposing to offer them the two modern armoured aircraft carriers *Victorious* <sup>3</sup> and *Illustrious* <sup>4</sup>,

under the command of a British Admiral, for service under American orders in the **Pacific**. These are among the most vital units we possess, and we have only four of this class. In exchange we are asking for the *Ranger* from the **Atlantic**. I hope that an additional and important re-insurance for the safety of **Australia** will result from this movement.

The fact that we are losing the Australian Division makes the retention of the New Zealand Division in the **Middle East** more necessary for us though your difficulties are understood. The return of the New Zealand Division would involve a further loss in shipping-lift of 10,000 men in WS convoys and 40,000 in the trans- **Atlantic** build-up for the invasion of the Continent. The reason for the loss of lift for the move of the New Zealand Division being greater than that for the move of the Australian Division is that the big personnel ships happen to be arriving at **Suez** at a convenient time for the move of the latter. To move the New Zealand Division they would have to return to Egypt from **Australia**. I could not, therefore, commit myself to any definite date for the shipping.

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<sup>1</sup> WS were the letters used by the Admiralty to designate convoys outward bound from the **United Kingdom**, as distinct from inward-bound, or US, convoys.

<sup>2</sup> Mechanical transport.

<sup>3</sup> HMS *Victorious*, Fleet aircraft carrier, 23,000 tons, 16 4.5-inch guns.

<sup>4</sup> HMS *Illustrious*, Fleet aircraft carrier, 23,000 tons, 16 4.5-inch guns.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

180 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER  
OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

180

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the  
Commonwealth of Australia*

**4 December 1942**

**For your information I am repeating in my immediately following telegram a message I have sent today to Mr. Churchill regarding the return of the 2nd New Zealand Division from the **Middle East**.**

**It will be noticed that we fully realise, and have indicated to Mr. Churchill, that the situation of **Australia** is not necessarily the same as in New Zealand and, indeed, that in material respects they do differ.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 181 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

181

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

4 December 1942

We have given most anxious consideration to your telegram of 2 December ( **No. 179**), and the general question was discussed at length yesterday in a secret session of the House of Representatives.

The facts set out in your telegram under reply and the dangers involved in attempting in the present circumstances to move the 2nd New Zealand Division have greatly impressed us, and we have come to the conclusion—unanimously shared by all my colleagues and by all the members of the House of Representatives—that we cannot take the responsibility, in the circumstances that you outline, of pressing for the return of the New Zealand troops at this juncture. We realise that our situation differs in material respects from that of **Australia** and we feel that we must leave the 2nd New Zealand Division in the **Middle East** for a further period. At the same time, we feel that we must make it clear that the considerations advanced in my telegram of 19 November ( **No. 176**) retain, in our opinion, their full validity and cogency, and in addition we attach great weight to an aspect which was not then brought to your notice, namely, that it would be neither wise nor proper to allow the offensive against the Japanese in the South Pacific to be conducted entirely by the Americans without substantial British collaboration.

We know that you fully realise the difficulties of these problems with which we have to contend, and the very generous and understanding

**attitude that you have taken throughout and, in particular, the sympathetic consideration you have given to my telegram of 19 November, have been warmly appreciated.**

**I am sure that you will understand it if in different circumstances and at a later date we again feel ourselves obliged to raise this matter.**

**I am sending Mr. Curtin a copy of this telegram.**



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 182 – THE NEW ZEALAND MINISTER (WASHINGTON)<sup>1</sup> TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

182

*The New Zealand Minister ( Washington) <sup>1</sup> to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

5 December 1942

The following is for the Chief of the General Staff from Brigadier  
Williams: <sup>2</sup>

At a meeting on 4 December which I attended, the **Combined Chiefs  
of Staff** considered the question of the return of the Australian and New  
Zealand divisions from the **Middle East**.

The following is the decision reached:

- ( Every military argument is against the move, which will involve a
  - a) definite reduction of impact upon the enemy in 1943 and a major diversion of shipping resources urgently required.
  - b) The ships required for the move would not be available for urgent troop movements for three months at least. This would seriously dislocate **United Kingdom** and **United States** movements now in train.

Both the Australian and New Zealand representatives strongly represented the manpower situation, as well as the demands being made for Australian and New Zealand troops in the South-West and South Pacific and the likelihood of them increasing.

The United States Chiefs of Staff spoke bluntly against the move. Marshall <sup>3</sup> stated that he was fully convinced that the defence of **Australia** and New Zealand would be weakened by the return of these divisions at this stage. The Combined Staffs were now hard put to find ships for movements already approved. Lack of ships was preventing the

reinforcement of **Burma** and the **Far East**, where operations under consideration would put troops in contact with the enemy. This would have important repercussions on the defence of **Australia** and New Zealand. He appreciated the points advanced but expressed grave concern regarding military implications which impeded the war effort as a whole.

It was stated by the Combined Planners that if movement was decided for reasons other than military: ( *a* ) shipping could be found for personnel only at the expense of **United Kingdom** and **United States** troop movements, but not for the return of divisional

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<sup>1</sup> Hon. W. Nash.

<sup>2</sup> Brigadier A. B. Williams, DSO; Commander Royal New Zealand Artillery, Army HQ, Dec 1939–Feb 1942; New Zealand Army representative on British Joint Staff Mission, **Washington**, Feb 1942–Oct 1943; Commandant, Central Military District, Oct 1943–Dec 1944; Commandant, Northern Military District, Mar 1945–Apr 1947.

<sup>3</sup> General of the Army the Hon. George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff, United States Army, 1939–45; Special Representative of the President to **China** (as Ambassador), 1945–47; Secretary of State, 1947–49; Secretary of Defence, 1950–51.

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equipment; ( *b* ) the ship now *en route* to New Zealand <sup>1</sup> for reinforcements would have to be stopped and returned to South Africa empty.

During the discussion Marshall stated that another **United States**; division was now *en route* to **Australia**; he also suggested that if it was not possible to reinforce the divisions in the **Middle East** it would be better in the circumstances to reduce establishments. Dill pointed out that maintaining troops with dwindling numbers was bad for morale, but he appreciated that shipping considerations were of enormous

**importance.**

**It was also pointed out that the move would weaken the forces, in the **Middle East** while operations are in progress, and that the reduction of forces for subsequent operations envisaged would have a bad effect on the British and Indian troops who have been in the **Middle East** for a longer period.**

**The decision of the **Combined Chiefs of Staff** is being submitted to Mr. Churchill and the President.**

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<sup>1</sup> ***Aquitania*, 44,786 tons, Cunard White Star.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 183 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

183

### *The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

6 December 1942

We are deeply grateful to you and to the Government and people of New Zealand for the most generous manner in which you have responded to our appeal to allow the glorious New Zealand Division to represent the Dominion on the African battlefield. Naturally you are free to reconsider your decision at any time, especially if your own situation deteriorates. I am sure that our feelings of admiration for New Zealand and all she stands for will be shared by the President of the **United States**.

It looks as if Rommel will not stand at **Agheila**, and by the time this reaches you he may well be taking another big bound backwards. We shall follow hotfoot on his heels. The haunting anxiety that the fortress of **Malta** would be starved out, which we have endured for so many months and for the sake of which we have made such heavy sacrifices both in warships and supply vessels, has been swept away by the arrival there of a second British convoy from **Alexandria**. In **Tunisia** our vanguards have been sharply checked and it will be necessary to go over to the defensive for a week or more while air and armour come up from the main body. While the going was good it was quite right to go on pell-mell, and thereby we have gained an immense amount of territory, including seaports from which we can strike with our surface craft at enemy convoys. Everything will be done to drive the Axis out of **Tunisia** at the earliest moment. The war in that theatre is very costly for them because of the immense toll we shall levy on their reinforcements.

**The United States have preferred to have only one British armoured carrier <sup>1</sup> and to keep their own *Ranger* instead of sending us the *Ranger* and taking two armoured carriers from us. The latter plan would have been preferred by us as it would have given us more say in the tasks we will be set. Still, as a result of the moves there will be two more carriers in the **Pacific**. All good wishes and kindest regards.**

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**<sup>1</sup> HMS *Victorious* joined the United States Pacific Fleet in March 1943.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 184 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE NEW ZEALAND MINISTER (WASHINGTON)

184

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the New Zealand Minister (Washington)*

1 December 1942

Your telegram of 5 December ( **No. 182**). The matter referred to in Williams's message to Puttick has been disposed of for the present so far as New Zealand is concerned, as indicated in my telegram of 5 December. <sup>2</sup>

In view of the implication that consideration for the defence of New Zealand was the reason for my raising the question of the return of the New Zealand Division with Churchill, I am most anxious that our attitude should not be misunderstood, and I should be glad if you could find it possible to make it plain to all concerned that this was not the case. The desirability of associating ourselves in some substantial manner with the offensive in the South Pacific was the primary consideration in our minds. Our power to do this is, of course, at present very much limited by manpower difficulties, though we are as you know endeavouring to prepare the 3rd Division for this task. In this connection, and with reference to your most secret and personal telegram of 4 December, <sup>3</sup> you should note that the 3rd Division is at present very much scattered with portions in **New Caledonia**, New Zealand, **Fiji**, Norfolk, and **Tonga**. Until it has been concentrated, strengthened, equipped, and trained as a unit for its task, it cannot be ready for offensive operations. This will, of course, take some time.

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<sup>2</sup> Not published. This telegram from Mr. Fraser repeated for Mr. Nash's information the texts of **Nos. 177- 9** and **181**.

<sup>3</sup> Not published. In this telegram Mr. Nash reported on discussions with Sir John Dill, Head of the British Joint Staff Mission, **Washington**, and **Admiral E. J. King**, Commander-in-Chief United States Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations, on the utilisation of New Zealand troops in the **Pacific**. He stated that Admiral King had said that he 'was anxious to use our men in the best way possible. He recognised their fighting quality and would see they were used. Some relief was needed for the men on **Guadalcanal** and we might be able to help.'

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

185 – LETTER FROM THE UNITED STATES NAVAL ATTACHÉ  
(WELLINGTON) TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

185

*Letter from the United States Naval Attaché ( Wellington) to the  
Prime Minister of New Zealand*

**8 December 1942**

**MY DEAR MR. PRIME MINISTER:**

**I have the honour to transmit the following radio message from the  
President of the United States of America:**

**I have been delighted to learn you are leaving the New Zealand  
Division in the Middle East for the present. This action on the part of  
your Government is a renewed evidence of our mutual military interests.  
I believe you have done the right thing. It is altogether generous.  
Roosevelt.**

**J. P. OLDING**

**Captain, US Navy,  
US Naval Attaché**



DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

186 – LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE UNITED STATES  
NAVAL ATTACHÉ

186

*Letter from the Prime Minister to the United States Naval Attaché*

11 December 1942

DEAR CAPTAIN OLDING

,  
I am very much obliged to you for your note of 8 December conveying to me the text of a message from President Roosevelt. Would you be good enough to forward the following reply from me to the President:

Thank you so much for your kind message. As you know, our one object is to further the common cause to the best of our ability and resources. We are most anxious to assist effectively in due course in the offensive in the South Pacific, and this was our primary motive in raising with Churchill the possibility of the return to this area of our Division in the **Middle East**.

In the circumstances we have agreed that this is at present impracticable, and though our contemplated co-operation in the **Pacific** will necessarily be less powerful we will, nevertheless, do all we can.

Yours sincerely

,  
P. FRASER

,  
Prime Minister

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 187 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

187

### *The Prime Minister of Australia to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

14 December 1942

Your telegram of 4 December ( **No. 180**).

In my immediately following telegram I am communicating for your information the text of a message which I have sent to the President regarding the return of the 9th Division to **Australia**.<sup>1</sup>

Although New Zealand and **Australia** are in separate areas, you will recall from our exchange of telegrams in March, when the proposals for the sub-division of the **Pacific** theatre were being discussed, that we both considered that our two countries should be in the one strategical area. We accepted the arrangements but retained our view that, from the aspect of defence, our two countries were interdependent and that, to quote from your telegram of 26 March,<sup>2</sup> ‘**Australia** and New Zealand were inevitably one strategical whole in which already a substantial degree of co-operation, both military and economic, has been achieved.’

You will agree, I am sure, that nothing has since transpired to alter that view, and the division which has been made should not affect a united front against **Japan** by **Australia** and New Zealand. To that end we have sought to assist you with munitions and other supplies to the greatest extent of our capacity.

The struggle in **New Guinea** has, I believe, important implications from the point of view of the security of New Zealand. You will note from my telegram to the President the difficulties of the **New Guinea**

campaign, and the fact that there is a pressing need for the services of the 9th Division in the South-West Pacific Area. You

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<sup>1</sup> Not published. In this telegram Mr. Curtin emphasised the pressing need for the services of the **9th Australian Division** in the South-West Pacific Area because of the 'immense wastage' in personnel in **New Guinea** through battle casualties and malaria and the need for the 6th and 7th Divisions to have a prolonged rest after the Buna operations. He also advised President Roosevelt that the manpower position in the Commonwealth necessitated a reduction in the strength of the Australian Army by two divisions.

<sup>2</sup> See Volume III, *Command in the Pacific: Extension of Anzac Area*.

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will also recall from paragraph 11 of my message of 16 November to President Roosevelt <sup>1</sup> that our advisers consider that three further divisions are necessary in the South-West Pacific Area, of which the **9th Australian Division** will be one. In view of the very direct interest which New Zealand has in the outcome of operations in **New Guinea**, we feel that you should be in no doubt about the situation confronting our forces there. In Timor, where we have small guerrilla forces only, a considerable increase in enemy activity and reinforcements has also been noted.

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<sup>1</sup> Not published. Paragraph 11 read:

Decisions on global strategy have been taken by Mr. Churchill and yourself. At considerable risk to the security of **Australia**, the Commonwealth Government has shown a ready willingness to co-operate in other theatres. This has been demonstrated by the service overseas of our naval, land, and air forces and our continued participation in the Empire Air Training Scheme. The Government considers that the contributions it has made to other theatres entitles it to the assurance that the fullest possible support will be given to the

**situation in the Pacific. You will recall that the military advisers of the Commonwealth Government consider that three further divisions are necessary in the South-West Pacific area. In view of its responsibilities for the local defence of Australia and in the light of the views of its advisers, the Government feels that the maximum strength of the Australian forces should be concentrated in the South-West Pacific area to meet all the contingencies of the military situation in the Pacific.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 188 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA

188

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of Australia*

16 December 1942

I have to thank you very much for your telegram of 14 December and for the texts of your communications to President Roosevelt and of Earle Page's message to Mr. Bruce. <sup>2</sup> The views that we have previously expressed on the sub-division of the **Pacific** theatre have not been altered in the slightest degree, and we are as firmly convinced now as we were then that **Australia** and New Zealand should be in the one strategical area. However, like you we accepted the arrangements and are doing our best to make them work. It is a great satisfaction to us to know that **Australia** still holds the same view and, as I am sure you know, we have never been unmindful or unappreciative of the assistance that is being given us by the Commonwealth. The importance to us and to the Allied cause in the **Pacific** of the magnificent effort made by **Australia** in **New Guinea** under such tremendous difficulties is fully realised, and we fully concur in your view that the struggle in **New Guinea** has important implications from the point of view of New Zealand's security. The struggle in the South Pacific has, of course, similar implications from the standpoint of the security of **Australia**, and, as you no doubt know, in spite of the very real manpower difficulties that we are experiencing, we are now in the process of sending a division to **New Caledonia** which will play its part in operations against the Japanese in due course. There is no doubt whatever in our minds that nothing that happens in the South-West Pacific can fail to affect the South Pacific and vice versa, and we fully

share your view that whatever the division of the **Pacific** we must both regard our problems as one and should co-operate to the fullest possible extent in policy and in the exchange of material, information, and if necessary, of actual forces.

With regard to the question of the return to the **Pacific** of the 2nd New Zealand Division now in the **Middle East**, our primary object in raising this matter with Mr. Churchill was to enable us to play a more effective part in operations in the **Pacific**. We fully realised then, as we do now, that Australian and New Zealand problems are one in essence. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding this general principle, we felt that different considerations did apply to the return of the **9th Australian Division** as compared with that of the 2nd New Zealand Division, and that the decision to be made by **Australia** did indeed differ materially because of different circumstances from that to be made by New Zealand. Of such fundamental importance did the matter seem to us that we felt it necessary to refer it to Parliament in secret session, and it was the unanimous opinion of the House that it would be impossible for us to press at this time for the return of our Division. As you know, I personally and specifically reserved the right to raise the matter again, and I hope it will be possible for us to keep in the closest contact in the future on this question.

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<sup>2</sup> This message, dated 15 Dec, from the Rt. Hon. Sir Earle Page to the Rt. Hon. S. M. Bruce, High Commissioner for **Australia** in **London**, is not published. It contained Page's views on the need for the immediate return of the 9th Division to **Australia**.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 189 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

189

*The Prime Minister of Australia to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

**18 December 1942**

**I wish to thank you for your telegram of 16 December.**

**I am pleased to know that we remain in complete agreement on the aspect of the strategical interdependence of our two countries. Your remarks on the question of the return of the 2nd New Zealand Division to the Pacific are noted. On this matter I should greatly appreciate the maintenance of the closest contact between us.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## CAMPAIGN IN TRIPOLITANIA AND TUNISIA

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 190 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

190

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

3 December 1942

The situation on the **Mediterranean** front seems favourable to the Allies. The German General Staff appears to have been thrown off balance by recent coups and to have reacted violently to our landing in **Morocco** and **Tunisia**. Our forces there are pushing steadily on, while the enemy are bringing in reinforcements by sea and air to **Bizerta** and **Tunis** from any source available. It is difficult to say without precise information how long it will be before our forces there can clear up the situation. It may be possible to get a quick decision, failing which they will build up a firm base from reserves to attack in force, which would take about a month.

In appreciating the situation on our front I have purposely discounted the effect of the Tunisian operations on the campaign in **Tripolitania**. The local situation here is much in our favour. Our air superiority seems complete whilst the weight of our artillery and the number of new American tanks have placed us in a winning position. Our aim is to maintain the momentum of the attack and give the enemy no respite until he is ejected from **Africa**. Undoubtedly the Germans and Italians have suffered a major defeat and have, in fact, been routed. Since the battle ended at **Alamein** on 4 November, however, there has been no contact with the main enemy forces, and it must be remembered that the enemy has on two occasions staged a counter-attack from **Agheila** with dramatic results. <sup>1</sup> Administrative difficulties prevent an immediate attack on **Agheila**, but we must resume the offensive as soon as maintenance problems allow. We have the men and material in Egypt, and I believe we can capture **Tripoli** without direct

intervention by the forces in **Tunisia**. I feel that speed is essential and that it justifies sacrifices now which will prevent heavier losses later.

The Division has been in the **Bardia- Tobruk** area for three weeks. The 4th Brigade is still at **Maadi** training.

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<sup>1</sup> The first German counter-offensive, which began on 2 Apr 1941, resulted in the capture of **Benghazi, Bardia, and Sollum** and the long siege of **Tobruk**. In the second offensive, begun on 21 Jan 1942, the Germans captured **Tobruk**, crossed the frontier into Egypt, and reached **El Alamein** before their advance was checked.

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For the information of the Government, the **Eighth Army** is resuming the offensive westwards in the near future with the 30th Corps, comprising British infantry divisions, two British armoured divisions, and the New Zealand Division. We have been warned that we are to move west about 10 December. The 30th Corps is to carry out the attack on **Agheila**. The New Zealand Division, with armoured support, is to go through after the capture of **Agheila** to exploit and advance on **Tripoli**. It is difficult to forecast the degree of resistance likely to be encountered, but we must be prepared for a series of hard-fought, advance-guard battles. Should the battle in **Tunisia** go well, however, the resistance will not be so formidable.

Your Division is in excellent condition, well trained and equipped. The men are rested, and many lightly wounded and jaundice cases are coming back. We are, however, greatly below War Establishments in infantry and artillery and will remain so until reinforcements arrive. <sup>1</sup> These will bring us to War Establishment and leave approximately 2000 over. It is impossible to forecast the length of the African campaign, but the main difficulties are administrative and I feel that the reinforcements now on the way will enable the Division to complete the campaign. If the policy is for the Division to continue fighting in the **Middle East**, then further reinforcements will, of course, be necessary.

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<sup>1</sup> **The 8th Reinforcements left New Zealand on 12 Dec 1942.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

191 – HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEF (CAIRO) TO ARMY HEADQUARTERS  
(WELLINGTON)

191

*Headquarters 2nd NZEF ( Cairo) to Army Headquarters ( Wellington)*

**18 December 1942**

**The 2nd New Zealand Division is now on the coast about forty to fifty miles west of [El Agheila](#), having cut off parties of the enemy rearguard. Presume it is clear to you that it was the New Zealand Division, with a British armoured brigade under command, which carried out the outflanking march round the south of the enemy position.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 192 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

192

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

22 December 1942

The operations foreshadowed in my earlier cables are now over. These resulted in turning the strong enemy position at **Agheila** and in driving the Axis forces back nearly 200 miles. Our casualties, I am thankful to say, were comparatively light: killed—3 officers and 11 other ranks; wounded—8 officers and 53 other ranks; missing—3 officers and 9 other ranks.

Our role involved a series of desert moves totalling over 600 miles. On 5 December we moved from **Bardia** across the desert past our November 1941 battlefields and south of the Jebel <sup>1</sup> to an assembly position near **Agedabia**, 350 miles away. At **Agedabia** we were joined by a British armoured brigade and replenished to be self-contained with food, water, ammunition, and petrol for twelve days, since we could not expect any line of communication until **Eighth Army** fought its way through on the coast. Full medical arrangements were made. Two full field ambulances, one light field ambulance, and two complete surgical teams were with us, also additional equipment for brain, chest, and abdominal surgery, and a blood transfusion unit with supplies of blood preserved in refrigerators. Invaluable medical comforts and **Red Cross** supplies were provided by the **New Zealand Red Cross**.

On 13 December plans were complete, and our several thousand vehicles set out in desert formation on a wide encircling movement of over 250 miles round the southern flank of the **Agheila** position, to threaten and if possible cut off the **Panzer Army**. The success of the operation depended on negotiating hitherto uncrossed desert. To obtain

surprise, wireless silence was imposed until contact was gained with the enemy. We were also helped by heavy rain which laid the tell-tale dust.

The first stage of soft, bad going was negotiated by day and later stages by night. Then came the last dash to the north of forty miles, starting at dawn on the 15th. By that night the 6th Brigade had almost reached the coast road. This manoeuvre was a complete surprise to the enemy, who had to turn and fight to get out of the forward position or be surrounded. Our force was too small to cover all lines of retreat, and the **Panzer Army** escaped, but the enemy were severely mauled by our armour, artillery, and infantry as they withdrew, losing tanks and a considerable number of anti-tank guns.

During the afternoon of the 16th we made preparations for a further move to the west, and at dawn on the 17th we moved thirty miles to outflank the enemy covering the position west of **Nofilia**. Again the enemy rearguard was surprised by the speed with which our force moved and struck. In the ensuing fighting our armour and 5th Brigade caused the enemy further losses in equipment, capturing 250 prisoners, and the enemy withdrew under cover of darkness. It remains to be seen where they will make the next stand.

The success of the operation was largely due to the skill and efficiency of our drivers and mobile workshops, who have kept our vehicles in serviceable condition notwithstanding the roughness of the desert going.

I have just visited our wounded. In an isolated spot in the Tripolitanian Desert they receive the best surgical treatment in what amounts to a fully equipped field hospital, being carried back by ambulances as soon as the road is clear. The most serious cases are evacuated by air ambulances over many hundreds of miles of desert to our hospital in Egypt.

As usual, your Division maintained that high standard of efficiency and fighting spirit expected of it. The health and spirit of the men are

**excellent.**

**Although we are in the forward area we are making the best possible preparations for Christmas Day. Patriotic Fund parcels and some Christmas fare are on the way up. We shall be thinking of you all.**

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**<sup>1</sup> Gebel Akhdar.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 193 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

193

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

30 December 1942

In my appreciation dated 3 December ( No. 190) I discounted the effect of the Tunisian operations on the campaign here because, from all accounts, progress was not relatively as good as was hoped. Strong German resistance was unexpected, transport difficulties were great, and the Allied striking force available was small. Although the Allied forces in **Tunisia** are not a direct threat to the Axis in **Tripoli**, the enemy has been forced to fight on two fronts. Detached operations of this nature are contrary to all German military teaching. Notwithstanding the check in **Tunisia**, I feel that the whole situation is shaping well for the Allies, and that the Axis commitments in North Africa will become an increasingly heavy drain on enemy air, land, and sea resources as we progress westwards, and will eventually lead to a severe Axis defeat.

The position on the front in **Tripolitania** is as follows: the enemy has been forced to retreat at high speed over 200 miles from the stronghold at **Agheila**. As he went he demolished bridges and wells, ploughed aerodromes, and sowed mines with the object of imposing the maximum delay. Although hustled and mauled west of **Agheila**, the main Axis force was not brought to battle, and Rommel is estimated to have a force of 40,000 Germans, 25,000 Italians, and an uncertain number of tanks. Further advance westwards must consequently be by strong forces. At present we are delayed by maintenance difficulties due to the length of our line of communication, enemy demolitions, and the limited supply facilities at **Benghazi**. The enemy position, however, is insecure. Owing to our submarine and air attacks, **Tripoli** is almost unusable and enemy shipping losses in the **Mediterranean** are very heavy. The evidence

indicates that Rommel is so deficient in equipment and warlike stores that he may not be able to risk a large-scale battle. Further, his shortages in mechanical transport and petrol make it impossible for him to move his whole force except by staging. His policy therefore appears to be to fight for time to ferry out his immobile troops, with rearguards covering natural tank obstacles formed by deep wadis, and by carrying out demolitions and laying mines.

I feel that it is rash to make a forecast, but on the evidence at present available I feel that Rommel will not fight seriously to hold **Tripolitania**. My opinion, for what it is worth, is that the enemy will be forced back in the next week or so, that we shall be in **Tripoli** by January, <sup>1</sup> and that it is possible that **Africa** will be cleared of Axis forces in the next few months. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> British and New Zealand units entered **Tripoli** on 23 Jan 1943.

<sup>2</sup> The Axis forces in North Africa surrendered on 13 May 1943.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 194 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

194

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

13 January 1943

For the information of the **New Zealand Government**, your Division has again a mobile role in the forthcoming advance of **Eighth Army**. We are now moving westwards by stages.

The situation has developed much as appreciated in my telegram of 30 December. We have superiority in tanks and in the air but nothing is being taken for granted. Your Division is adequately trained and equipped for its role. We have a British regiment of heavy tanks, a heavy anti-aircraft regiment, and a medium battery under command.

I have been round all the battalions during the last two days and everyone is in good heart. I have had good reports of the reinforcement draft now at **Maadi**. Parkinson <sup>1</sup> is here and Weir <sup>2</sup> is due today, the former for a visit and the latter to follow the campaign.

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<sup>1</sup> Brigadier G. B. Parkinson (see [page 38, note 1](#)) had recently returned to the **Middle East** after commanding the 1st **NZ Army Tank Brigade** in New Zealand.

<sup>2</sup> Major-General Sir Norman (then Brigadier N. W. McD.) Weir, KBE, CB; Commandant, Northern Military District, 1939–40; Central Military District, 1940–42; GOC 4th Division (in NZ), 1942; Officer in charge of Administration, 2nd NZEF, and Commander 6th NZ Division and NZ Maadi Camp, Aug–Nov 1943; commanded NZ Troops in Egypt, 6th NZ Division, and NZ Maadi Camp, Nov 1943–Aug 1944; Quartermaster-General, Army HQ, 1944–45; Chief of the General Staff, **New Zealand Military Forces**, 1 Jan 1946–31 Mar 1949.



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 195 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

195

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**25 January 1943**

**May I on behalf of all ranks of the 2nd New Zealand Division send to the Government and people of New Zealand best wishes from **Tripoli**. The Divisional Cavalry and units of the 5th Brigade Group entered the city from the south-west on 23 January, on the same morning as British troops who had advanced by the coast road entered from the east.**

**I am glad to say that casualties have been light: 12 killed and 64 wounded. The men are in excellent health and spirits.**

**A short account of operations will follow.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 196 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

196

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

26 January 1943

I have just returned from **Tripoli** along the Division's marked axis of advance. When we broke through at **Alamein** we marked our route with diamond signs on iron pickets. Since the first picket was driven in there on 2 November, these signs have been set up at 700-yard intervals along the desert thrust line for over 1400 miles. For the present the last picket stands in the main square of **Tripoli**.

During the last operation we have covered 450 miles since leaving **Sirte**. As before, we travelled self-contained in ammunition, petrol, water, and food, and fully equipped for a desert move. The Division formed the fast-moving, left flank of **Eighth Army** ready to envelop the enemy should they stand and fight, but they showed no inclination to do so after the **Buerat** position was turned on 15 January. Nevertheless the enemy manóuvred with skill behind a series of rearguards, and several brisk engagements took place between tanks and artillery on both sides. The enemy always withdrew, however, when we deployed. German bombers made several attacks on the advancing columns, but the Allied Air Force maintained air superiority, harrying the enemy withdrawal by day and night.

The chief obstacle to progress was the broken nature of the country, including precipitous wadis, soft, hummocky desert, and narrow defiles through the **Jebel** ranges. <sup>1</sup> The enemy impeded our advance by demolitions and minefields. The Engineers, however, cleared the minefields, by-passed demolitions, and improved the mountain roads, and despite these and natural obstacles the advance was rapid. On 23

January, eight days after the first engagement with the enemy, the Divisional Cavalry and troops of the 5th Infantry Brigade entered **Tripoli**. The speed of the advance undoubtedly upset the enemy's schedule. Demolitions and minefields became fewer as we advanced and important aerodromes were captured only partially obstructed, thus enabling our fighters and bombers to follow up the enemy retreat without interruption.

The capture of **Tripoli** completes a phase of successful fighting which started just three months ago. The enemy has been driven from Egypt, **Cyrenaica**, and **Tripolitania**. It is an important step giving the Allies a naval base and airfields, and completes the relief of the hard-pressed garrison of **Malta**. It also advances our aim of clearing the enemy from **Africa** and opening the **Mediterranean**, but before this is finally achieved decisive battles in **Tunisia** have yet to be fought.

The Division is now resting in pleasant surroundings and taking advantage of an unlimited water supply to clean up after three months' campaigning in the desert, with a short allowance of brackish water and hard battle rations. Fresh food and bread is now becoming available. The health of the force is excellent and spirits are high. It has been a considerable source of satisfaction to all ranks to have played a part in capturing **Tripoli**, for so long a goal of the Army in the **Middle East**.

For your information a short appreciation of the situation follows later. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **Gebel Nefusa and Gebel Garian.**

<sup>2</sup> **No. 199.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 197 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

197

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

**2 February 1943**

**My colleagues and I are very grateful to you for your telegram of 26 January and for your previous communications explaining the course of the recent fighting. Will you please accept and convey to all under your command, officers, NCOs, and men, the warmest congratulations of the Government and people of New Zealand on this new achievement of our Division. We have watched your progress day by day with the greatest enthusiasm and we share with you all justifiable satisfaction in a job of work well done. **Alamein to Tripoli** will for all time be a proud battle honour in the annals of military history, and it is of profound significance in the present stage of the struggle for democratic freedom.**



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 198 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

198

### *The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

5 February 1943

Yesterday I watched with the greatest pleasure and admiration some 12,000 men of the New Zealand Division parade and march past near **Tripoli** under my old friend **Bernard Freyberg**, their brilliant and heroic commander. The impression made upon me by those splendid troops gave me the utmost confidence in the part they will play in the near future, and all my feeling of gratitude to New Zealand for the high and broad strategic conception which has enabled her sons to fight in the vanguard of the victorious Desert Army was renewed. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A similar report on this parade was received by the Minister of Defence from **General Freyberg**, who described it as 'the most impressive and moving parade of my whole career.'

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 199 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

199

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

2 March 1943

The following is an appreciation on the general situation and the position here:

It is difficult to determine the situation in North Africa without considering the larger aspect of the war, as the Russian counter-offensive overshadows other events and may have far-reaching effects on the course of the war. Although the results of the Russian fighting are considerable, it would be wrong to overestimate the effect of the present successes. There is no evidence suggesting that **Germany** is short of petrol, food, or equipment. There is, however, no doubt that **Germany** is facing a serious manpower shortage, which has been made worse by the losses in **Russia**. To win the war **Germany** must defeat **Russia**. To do this she must resume the offensive. As she still has the larger and more powerful army, it is possible for her to resume the offensive in the summer provided she can withdraw part of her army and refit. Her offensive could not be launched much before July, which would leave three and a half months' campaigning weather to defeat the Russian Army with a much weaker German Army than she used last year. Although hopes of the success of such an offensive cannot be high, the alternative would be to go on the defensive, surrendering the initiative to the Allies, which could only end in defeat.

The position in North Africa looks black for the Axis. To lose the bridgehead would not only be a blow politically and from the prestige point of view, but it would liberate two large armies and air forces and would open up the **Mediterranean** for our shipping to the **Middle East**,

## **India, and the Pacific.**

Further, the position in **Turkey** must give the Axis leaders cause for concern, as the use of her aerodromes would enable us to capture Rhodes, **Crete**, and eventually invade **Greece**. This threat is serious as the Axis position in the **Balkans** might well become unbalanced.

To sum up the present Axis position: although badly shaken they have enough troops for another summer offensive and are forced to attack the Russians. To avoid being attacked by the British and Americans in South-East Europe, they must hold the North African commitment no matter what it costs in material and men. There is ample evidence they intend to do so and they are still reinforcing the garrisons in **Tunis**. Here again they have considerable resources, and they may even resume the offensive against the **Eighth Army**.

The advance of the **Eighth Army** is temporarily delayed by maintenance. We are facing the **Mareth Line**, which is a strong, concrete defensive position covered by mines, with a rear position near **Gabes**, 25 miles to the north. The enemy has the men and material to contest our further advance. I feel that the Axis will fight hard here, realising that defeat must follow any further withdrawal. Once these positions are captured, I feel we shall drive the Axis forces northwards, and if all goes well, the Axis must eventually face defeat bordering on disaster.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 200 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

200

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

10 March 1943

I have to report that your Division has been in action in the fighting on the **Mareth Line**. The likelihood of the enemy counter-attacking **Eighth Army** became apparent when all three Panzer divisions moved from central to southern **Tunisia**. Our forward troops, which had pushed on to relieve the pressure on the Americans in central **Tunisia**, were dangerously stretched and were not balanced to meet a counter-attack. At very short notice we were called forward to strengthen the line by taking over the **Medenine** sector. A move of 180 miles by a single road began on the night of 1-2 March, and by midday on 3 March the Division was dug in ready for the attack which appeared to be imminent. Actually we had two more valuable days for completing our preparations. The enemy attack was launched on the 6th along the whole front. The main thrust by infantry and tanks came in against two British brigades to our north and against our right flank held by the **Maori Battalion**. The attack on our front was repulsed without difficulty. The enemy withdrew out of range after having five tanks set on fire by six-pounder guns. To our north, heavy but rather crude attacks continued throughout the day. They made no impression on the British gunlines. The enemy lost 52 tanks definitely counted on the battlefield, and others were damaged but were recovered by the enemy. Casualties amongst the enemy infantry were also heavy. Whatever the enemy's intentions, the reception he got discouraged any further attempt and the Panzer divisions withdrew behind the **Mareth Line**. There is no doubt that the enemy underestimated the strength of the force here and suffered a serious reverse, without interfering in any way with our preparations.

I am glad to say that New Zealand casualties in this operation were light: killed—one officer, 5 other ranks; wounded—3 officers, 40 other ranks.

In other operations now pending your Division has an important role. We have under command a British heavy armoured brigade group, a British armoured car regiment, a medium artillery regiment, and the Fighting French Force under General Leclerc. <sup>1</sup> For operations the formation is described as the **New Zealand Corps**. The Division is excellently equipped and the men have complete

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<sup>1</sup> General Leclerc, CB, DSO and bar; Governor of French Cameroons, 1940; Military Commander of French Equatorial Africa; GOC 2nd French Armoured Division; GOC French Far East Forces, 1945; Inspector-General of French Armies in North Africa, 1946; killed in air accident, 28 Nov 1947.

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confidence in their weapons. Nothing is being taken for granted and the enemy's strength will not be underestimated. Detailed planning is at present in progress.

I have been looking forward to Mr. Jones's visit <sup>1</sup> and still hope he arrives in time. I feel it is most important that he should see the fighting men, and although we shall be in a most advanced position I am doing all I can to arrange for him to come up and see as many as possible. To do so he will have to arrive here before the 16th or wait until after the battle.

The news of the victory in the **Pacific** was received here with the greatest satisfaction. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Jones left New Zealand by air on 17 Feb on a visit to New Zealanders in the three services in the **Middle East, United Kingdom, Canada**, and the **Pacific**. He arrived in **Cairo** on 16 Mar. At that time the **New Zealand Corps** was preparing its outflanking move south of the **Mareth Line** and Mr. Jones's visit

to the Division had therefore to be postponed. He left Egypt for the **United Kingdom** on 3 Apr, returned to **Tunisia** on the 27th, and, after visiting New Zealand troops in the forward area and in Egypt, left **Cairo** again for the **United Kingdom** on 14 May.

<sup>2</sup> This was the battle of the Bismarck Sea, 2–4 Mar 1943, in which a Japanese convoy of eight destroyers, one special service vessel, and eight transports bound for Lae, **New Guinea**, was attacked by Allied aircraft, four of the destroyers and all the other ships being sunk.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 201 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

201

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

**30 March 1943**

**I have been following with close attention the deeds of your magnificent New Zealanders in the recent fighting in Tunisia. They have played an outstanding part in the stiff fighting with the pick of the Germans in our outflanking movement through El Hamma, and are now through Gabes. It is a source of deep pride and satisfaction to us that they are at our side in the thick of the battle during these momentous days.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 202 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

202

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**31 March 1943**

**The successful turning of the *Mareth Line* ends another phase in the North African campaign. Yesterday your Division entered *Gabes* and is now moving north. I understand that the importance of the part played by the Division has already been announced officially. As forecast in my recent telegram ( *No. 199*), the fighting was very strenuous on the whole front and casualties were heavy. We have had approximately 150 killed and 350 wounded. The German and Italian forces opposing us were badly mauled, and we captured in our three attacks 5000 prisoners and destroyed or captured a large number of tanks, guns, and a considerable amount of equipment. All ranks are in excellent spirits.**

**I know you will forgive this short telegram from the battlefield. I will prepare a detailed account for publication as soon as the operational situation permits.**



DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

203 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER  
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

203

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the  
United Kingdom*

**1 April 1943**

**Your very kind message of 30 March ( No. 201) is warmly appreciated. The people of New Zealand are intensely proud of the record and achievements of their Division and are pleased that our men have fought so valiantly and successfully with their fine comrades of the **Eighth Army** in this decisive stroke against the Axis forces. I will have great pleasure in forwarding your message to **Lieutenant-General Freyberg** and the gallant men of his Division.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 204 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

204

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

5 April 1943

I have the honour to report that your Division has just concluded another successful operation. I send this report from the battlefield just north of **Gabes** during a lull in operations, in the hope that the magnificent part played by the men of your forces and of the British, French, and Greek troops working under our command as the **New Zealand Corps** can be known to the people at home in New Zealand.

The battle for the **Mareth Line** is now over and, although further fierce fighting lies ahead, **Eighth Army** is on the move towards **Tunis** and the finish of the North African campaign.

On 6 March Panzer Armée Rommel counter-attacked **Eighth Army** from the **Mareth Line** and was repulsed with heavy losses. Your Division was holding part of the front in this action. It was a successful one-day battle in which our massed artillery smashed the enemy tank and infantry attacks before they could penetrate our line. Following this sharp reverse, the enemy withdrew Panzer Armée behind the **Mareth** defences, and it was clear that he intended to hold this strong natural position with its concrete defences built by French military engineers on the Maginot Line model. All approaches were covered by strongpoints, and a system of military roads behind the position allowed quick movement of mobile reserves.

To counter the Allied attack, Rommel held his defences with Italian and German positional infantry and kept the two Panzer divisions of his **Afrika Korps** in mobile reserve ready to move against any threatened front, while the 10th Panzer Division faced the Americans on the roads

from **Gafsa**.

The Eighth Army plan of attack was to carry out a two-pronged thrust by a frontal assault on the **Mareth Line** and an outflanking movement through the desert from an assembly area 80 miles to the south. Our force for this operation was known as the **New Zealand Corps**. Grouped with the New Zealand Division were the British 8th Armoured Brigade under Brigadier Harvey <sup>1</sup> (3rd **Royal Tank Regiment**, **Staffordshire Yeomanry** and **Nottinghamshire Yeomanry**, 1st Battalion Buffs), King's Dragoon Guards, British medium field and anti-tank artillery regiments, and Fighting French forces, under the command of General Leclerc, and a detachment of the **Royal Greek Army**.

Although the going was extremely bad and the country ill-suited for a flanking movement, the enemy was clearly very nervous about his flank, a result no doubt of our past activities at **Agheila** and **Tripoli**. Enemy reconnaissance planes were over the desert approaches each day. Despite the steps taken to ensure surprise, there is no doubt the enemy expected another 'left hook'. As organised, **New Zealand Corps** was an extremely fast-moving and hard-hitting formation admirably suited for making a surprise appearance on the battlefield. It relied for its striking power upon the Tank Brigade and its very powerful artillery group under our CRA, Brigadier C. E. Weir.

Since the enemy expected a flanking movement there was little chance of achieving strategic surprise. There is no doubt, however, that as a result of our manóuvres round Rommel's flank since the Battle of **Alamein**, the enemy did not really know what was coming next. Added to this, they were short of trustworthy reserves, and there still appeared scope for again foxing Rommel. Our aim was to achieve the greatest degree of tactical surprise possible by dashing in quickly and delivering a sudden violent attack. We planned to lie up in a position that threatened two weak points in their defences—high ground at **Matmata**, south of **Mareth**, and a gap farther west between **Djebel Tebaga** and the **Matmata Hills**, which led to **El Hamma** and **Gabes**.

In many ways the battle for the **Mareth Line** bears a close resemblance to the attack on **Agheila**, when your Division with a British armoured brigade carried out an outflanking movement and forced the enemy to withdraw to avoid encirclement. It involved moves by night of 27,000 men and 6000 vehicles, tanks, and guns to an assembly area in the desert, and a race to the objective across unknown and difficult country, followed by a series of quick but overwhelming attacks.

On 11 March **New Zealand Corps** began to assemble. The whole force was self-contained, with eleven days' food, water, and ammunition and with petrol for 350 miles. By the 18th assembly was complete. Weeks of careful study of the ground from air photographs and patrol reports and detailed planning culminated in an explanation of the operation to all officers and NCOs on a plaster relief model of the area over which we were to move.

We moved all night on 19 March intending to make a surprise approach march by night on the 20th to coincide with the frontal assault on the **Mareth Line**. When, however, it seemed likely that the enemy were aware of our assembly, we decided to waste no further effort on deception but to rely entirely on speed. We therefore moved in daylight on the 20th in desert formation and raced north to break through to **El Hamma** and **Gabes**.

The going was never good and later it became so bad that no progress could be made by night, so that it was not until 3 p.m. on the 21st that armoured cars of the King's Dragoon Guards and light tanks of the Divisional Cavalry gained contact with the enemy. The enemy position, covered by a minefield, was astride the **Kebili- Gabes** road, close to where it runs through a narrow valley between the precipitous **Djebel Tebaga** range and the mountainous country which forms the right flank of the **Mareth Line**. With only three hours of daylight left, our artillery was deployed and registered before dusk. At 10 p.m., in full moonlight, the 25th ( **Wellington**) Battalion and 26th ( **South Island**) Battalion of the 6th New Zealand Infantry Brigade under Brigadier Gentry,

accompanied by engineers of the 8th Field Company to clear gaps in the minefield and followed by a squadron of Sherman tanks of the 3rd **Royal Tank Regiment**, staged a brilliant attack which went through the minefield and captured Point 201. During this night attack 1500 Italian prisoners were captured. The early capture of Point 201 gave us secure entry through the enemy's prepared defences. We learned later that infantry of the 21st Panzer Division arrived next morning to take over the defences from their Italian allies, but they came twelve hours too late.

Although we had won a footing, the enemy still held high ground on either side of the pass, giving him observation for his artillery, and during the following days our troops were heavily shelled by a large concentration of enemy guns.

On 23 March **Eighth Army's** bridgehead on the **Mareth Line** was lost after a heavy German counter-attack, and General Montgomery decided to switch his main thrust to reinforce success on our front. The 10th Corps, including the 1st Armoured Division, was sent to join us. While they were making a three-day approach march through the desert, plans were hurried on to stage an attack as soon as the 1st Armoured Division arrived. To gain observation and gun positions a series of operations on both flanks was carried out. One of these was a brilliant attack at sunset on 24 March by the 3rd **Royal Tank Regiment** and **Nottinghamshire Yeomanry** of 8th Armoured Brigade, with most effective co-operation from massed artillery and **RAF** fighter-bombers. This not only resulted in the capture of high ground on the left flank where German 88-millimetre guns had been sited, but also gained important observation points for our artillery.

Meanwhile we were making our plan to break through his defences. It was to be carried out in three phases:

*Phase 1:* The capture of a mountain peak on our right flank to deny enemy observation of our assembly areas for attack.

**Phase 2: Blitz attack by New Zealand Corps to force a gap to El Hamma.**

**Phase 3: Passing of 1st Armoured Division through the gap to capture El Hamma.**

Phase 1 was carried out brilliantly by the 21st ( **Auckland**) Battalion in the early hours of the morning of the 26th, when vital ground was taken in a moonlight attack.

Phase 2, which was given the code-name 'Supercharge II' was planned to start on the afternoon of the 26th. As usual, every effort was made to make this main attack a surprise. The 8th Armoured Brigade withdrew by dark and remained camouflaged in the wadis behind Point 201. The 23rd ( **South Island**) Battalion and 28th ( **Maori**) Battalion of the 5th Infantry Brigade under **Brigadier Kippenberger**, and the 24th ( **Auckland**) Battalion of the 6th Brigade assembled and lay up ready for the attack, while the 25th ( **Wellington**) Battalion occupied a position on high ground on the left flank ready to advance with the other assault infantry. During the morning of 26 March the artillery of the 1st Armoured Division came in and by midday all preparations were complete. Our only anxiety was that the dust-storm might interfere with our air co-operation.

Meanwhile the enemy had also made his preparations and greatly reinforced his forces in the gap. The 21st Panzer Division had been joined by the German 164th Light Division, and on the day of the attack the 15th Panzer Division had been switched to our front from the **Mareth Line**.

At three o'clock on 26 March, as I drove up the valley in my tank, all was quiet except for occasional shellfire. There was no unusual movement or sign of coming attack. Exactly half an hour later, the first squadrons of the **RAF** roared overhead and relays of Spitfires, Kitty-bombers, and tank-busters swept over the enemy positions giving the greatest measure of air support ever seen by our army. At four o'clock

200 field and medium guns opened their bombardment on a front of 5000 yards. In an instant the attack developed and 150 tanks and three battalions of infantry appeared as from nowhere, advancing in the natural smokescreen provided by the dust-storm. It was a most awe-inspiring spectacle of modern warfare. The roar of bombers and fighters ahead of our advance merged with our barrage of bursting shells. Following close behind this intense barrage as it advanced came waves of Sherman tanks, carriers, and infantry and sappers on foot, preceded by three squadrons of Crusader tanks. Behind **New Zealand Corps**, coming down the forward slopes just in the rear of our front line, were 150 tanks of the 1st Armoured Division, followed by their Motor Brigade in lorries, advancing in nine columns.

Hitherto all our big attacks had been by moonlight, and although the enemy was expecting us to attack we again achieved surprise by attacking in daylight.

Without check our armour swept through to the final objective, a depth of 6000 yards. Enemy tanks were destroyed or driven back, Anti-tank guns and artillery were overrun or captured. Meanwhile our infantry battalions, moving behind the armour, attacked the remaining enemy strongpoints, and fierce hand-to-hand fighting took place to clear the objectives and secure the high ground on both flanks. By dusk all enemy resistance had been overcome, except for the high ground at Point 209 and a strongpoint outside the left flank where the German garrisons still held out. During the night the 24th (**Auckland**) Battalion attacked and cleared the left flank, taking a large number of prisoners.

By moonlight on the night of the 26th, Phase 3 was completed when the 1st Armoured Division was launched from our bridgehead. Next morning they had reached the outskirts of **El Hamma**.

All day on the 27th mopping up of the enemy garrison continued. At Point 209 a bitter fight raged between the **Maori Battalion** and the 2nd Battalion of the 433rd Panzer Grenadier Regiment, which finally ended by remnants of the German garrison, complete with commanding



officer, surrendering.

The capture of the defile was a decisive defeat for the enemy and a triumph for our co-ordinated attack by tanks and infantry with powerful air and artillery support. It is true to say that all three German divisions as well as the Italian divisions opposed to us were severely mauled. A great many enemy killed and wounded were left on the battlefield and between 5000 and 6000 prisoners were taken, many being Germans from the **Afrika Korps**. Over forty tanks and a great many guns, MT, and all kinds of equipment were destroyed or captured. But the most important result of the battle was that the **Mareth Line** became untenable, and heavy casualties, which further frontal assaults would have involved, were avoided.

As soon as all resistance had ceased in the defile, **New Zealand Corps**, led by the King's Dragoon Guards, New Zealand Divisional Cavalry, and 8th Armoured Brigade, fanned out north-east and east towards the coast road. Many prisoners were taken, including two battalions of Italian infantry who surrendered with all their equipment. The 8th Armoured Brigade dispersed the last rearguard of the 15th Panzer Division, knocking out four more tanks and three 88-millimetre guns, and **Gabes** and **El Hamma** fell into our hands.

The battle was the hardest since **Alamein** and we have suffered inevitable casualties. I would like you to know that as usual in these wide desert moves our fully equipped surgical teams were with us, together with every possible facility for looking after our wounded, who were then flown out by air ambulance to our Base hospitals in **Tripoli** and Egypt.

Once again the officers and men of your Division displayed the fighting qualities that are now expected of them. Our staff and Divisional organisation and all our services worked smoothly and carried out most efficiently the additional responsibilities of a Corps. The exploits of units and individuals cannot be described in so short a report as this, but many of these will become known when immediate awards



for gallantry on the battlefield are published. I know that the officers and men of the New Zealand Division would wish me to pay tribute here to our comrades of the British and Allied units who formed half of the **New Zealand Corps**. Our success was due in no small measure to the gallant fighting of the British armoured units. Nor do we forget General Leclerc's Fighting French and the detachment of the **Royal Greek Army** who covered our assembly in the early stages and held our right flank secure during the battle. Last but not least we owe a great debt to our comrades in the Allied Air Forces. The battle here is by no means over, but I can assure the people at home that, equipped and trained as we are, the New Zealand Division and all the British and Allied formations with us are confident of a victorious conclusion to the campaign in North Africa.

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<sup>1</sup> Brigadier C. B. C. Harvey.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

205 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME  
MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

205

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

**7 April 1943**

**The Desert Army assaulted the Akarit position in the darkness of a moonless night. The enemy were surprised and overwhelmed. Their front is broken. The 30th Corps holds all the dominant key positions. The 10th Corps, with your Division as ever in the van, has been hurled through the gap into the open country. Two thousand prisoners were taken in the first six hours. Others are flowing in.**

**This operation is the first of a series of battles now to be delivered by the 18th Army Group under General Alexander, and I look for considerable mauling of the enemy before he gets back to the Tunisian tip, where he is already being strongly attacked by the **First Army**.**

**Please keep all military details secret until official announcements are made.**

**Every good wish.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 206 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

206

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

11 April 1943

Since my telegram of 5 April ( No. 204) **Eighth Army** has advanced north of **Sfax** and the advance continues. This is to report that your Division, led by the British 8th Armoured Brigade, broke through after the 50th and 51st (Highland) Divisions had made a bridgehead across **Wadi Akarit**. The enemy opposed our advance with tanks and the usual rearguard of infantry and anti-tank guns but was forced to retreat. Our casualties were slight.

It is appreciated that the enemy will hold a line north of **Sousse** at **Enfidaville**. The Akarit position was a strong one and the enemy fought to hold it, but again suffered severe losses in men and equipment and we have captured several aerodromes. In my opinion, although he may fight hard, the enemy cannot long postpone final defeat in this theatre.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 207 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

207

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

11 May 1943

**There is no doubt that the German Army has suffered a disaster of the first magnitude in North Africa, second only to [Stalingrad](#). The German General Staff clearly intended to hold here, and the speed with which they have been smashed is a great blow to their military prestige and the efficiency of their equipment.**

**The conclusion of the campaign here releases two British armies and French and American forces, together with immense air forces, for the next phase of the war. The stage has been reached where I felt that a review of the situation as I see it might be of assistance to the [New Zealand Government](#).**

**In my opinion the forecast for the future is favourable provided full advantage is taken of our opportunities. We must ensure that [Germany](#) does not cripple [Russia](#) in the third offensive. The enemy's resources must be stretched by carrying out attacks wherever they can be launched successfully.**

**An important factor in opening a new front is the existence of a highly organised supply and maintenance system essential for a mechanised army. As we learnt in [Algeria](#), a base system takes many months to build up and without it neither the Army nor the [Air Force](#) can operate successfully. The Allies now have three bases stocked and available—England, Egypt, and French North Africa. Without knowing future plans and expressing merely my own opinion, I feel that the opening of a Second Front in [France](#) at present would be unwise. The army in England lacks fighting experience while the veteran German**

Army mans the highly organised defences on the French coast. We cannot afford to make a mistake at this stage, and a safer plan would appear to be to stretch the enemy by carrying out attacks along the **Mediterranean** coast from bases in Egypt on the east and French North Africa on the west. A new front in **France** could be opened when the full force of these attacks has stretched Axis resources and weakened the Germany Army in **France**.

To carry out this policy we have in the **Middle East** at present not only our best trained and most experienced troops but also a strong Navy and very powerful air forces, which up till now have been fully employed in North Africa. **Italy** is now at the mercy of the joint air forces, which will soon reduce her already low morale. Any anti-war movement in **Italy** will be reflected immediately throughout her war-weary and dispirited army in **Albania**, **Greece**, and **Yugoslavia**, where there are about twenty-eight Italian divisions.

I feel that the present initiative should be exploited and every opportunity taken to fight **Germany** quickly and fiercely on as broad a front as possible, and, in my opinion, if this is done the summer campaigning months of 1943 may prove decisive.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 208 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER<sup>1</sup> – [EXTRACT]

208

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*<sup>1</sup>

[Extract]

17 May 1943

I have to report that on the collapse of enemy resistance in **Tunisia** I at once made arrangements for the Division to be withdrawn in order to have the maximum time for implementing the scheme for returning personnel. I have just reached **Cairo** by air with my staff, and the Division, following by road, is expected to reach here about 3 June. Everybody will be accommodated at **Maadi**, and leave camps will be arranged near **Alexandria** and in Palestine. The troops are tired after the campaign but are in good heart.

As you will remember, I was anxious about the prospect of heavy casualties in the final stage of the campaign. I am very glad to be able to notify the Government that casualties have been much lower than anticipated, the success of the attack in the north making further attacks on our front unnecessary. Casualties since we left **Tripoli**, that is from 1 March to 13 May, are as follows:

**Killed: 20 officers, 269 other ranks**

**Died of wounds: 7 officers, 59 other ranks**

**Wounded: 100 officers, 1320 other ranks**

**Missing: 6 officers, 71 other ranks**

**Total: 133 officers, 1719 other ranks....**<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **This telegram was repeated to the Hon. F. Jones in London.**

<sup>2</sup> **See *Furlough Scheme (No. 260)* for rest of text.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 209 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

209

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

27 May 1943

I have the honour to report as follows on the operations in **Tunisia**. In my last cabled report sent from near **Gabes** on 5 April ( **No. 204**) I described our 'left hook' which turned the **Mareth Line**. This short account, which I began in **Tunis** just five weeks later, tells the story of the part played by your Division in the last phase of **Eighth Army's** long advance and in the final great battle fought by British, American, and French forces to smash the Axis bridgehead and end the North African campaign.

On being turned out of the **Mareth Line** the enemy withdrew to a position on **Wadi Akarit**, closely followed by the New Zealand Division and the 1st British Armoured Division. It soon became clear that the enemy would endeavour to hold this line since any further withdrawal would open the way for **Eighth Army** to join hands with American forces advancing from **Gafsa**.

The position was naturally strong, with the sea on one side and impassable salt marshes on the other. A full-scale frontal attack was therefore necessary, and three infantry divisions, the British 50th, 51st (Highland), and 4th Indian, were deployed for the assault. At this stage the New Zealand Division was withdrawn into reserve and, with the British 1st Armoured Division, was given the role of breaking through once a breach was made.

From a nearby hill I watched **Eighth Army** concentrate for the attack. Continuous lines of transport were coming up the roads and over the entire landscape as far as the eye could see, tanks, guns, and trucks



of a motorised army were assembled.

On 6 April the attack was launched. After heavy infantry fighting a bridgehead across the Wadi was won and the New Zealand Division, led by armoured cars of the King's Dragoon Guards, light tanks of the New Zealand Divisional Cavalry, and heavy tanks of the British 8th Armoured Brigade, followed through. As soon as there was room to manoeuvre we opened out into desert formation and advanced north, harassing the retreating enemy and cutting off considerable numbers. What remained of the Italian Saharan Corps, with General Mannerini and his complete staff, were amongst the prisoners.

On 7 April British armoured cars on our left met American troops advancing on **Maknassy** and the junction of Allied forces from the east and west, which the enemy had fought so long to prevent, was effected. With every hour our grip on the **Tunis** bridgehead was tightening.

Near **Sfax**, with more room to manoeuvre, we planned another left hook. The enemy, however, anticipated this danger and retreated fast, leaving valuable installations and stores in the **Sfax** area intact. **Sfax** was occupied on 9 April and **Sousse** on the 12th. Our advancing forces met with little opposition, apart from the usual enemy rearguard artillery and sporadic attacks from the **Luftwaffe**, temporarily able to operate more freely because we had advanced beyond range of our own fighter cover. The advance continued as fast as ways could be found through very different country from the desert to which we were accustomed. We drove through beautiful olive groves and fields bright with scarlet poppies, yellow chrysanthemums, and marguerite daisies, and made fragrant by purple sweet night-scented stocks. This part of our move was memorable. The French people greeted our troops with great enthusiasm, throwing flowers to our men as they passed through towns decked with the flags of the Allies.

Advancing north of **Sousse** we were faced by the formidable mountain chain which forms a natural rampart protecting **Tunis** from the south and west. Here the forces of Arnim and Messe (who had

succeeded Rommel) were preparing to meet the Allied assault. Heavily reinforced, the enemy held all the important passes and dominated every way of approach to **Tunis**.

In front of this natural stronghold **Eighth Army** deployed, linking up with other armies under the command of General Alexander, the entire force including most powerful air forces and the Navy operating as a single war machine under the direction of General Eisenhower.<sup>1</sup> The encircling Allied forces were in four main groups: the American Corps switched from the **Gafsa** front was in the north, then the British First Army, then General Giraud's French Army, and lastly in the south the **Eighth Army**. The plan was to make the main attack on the **First Army** front where the ground favoured the use of tanks. **Eighth Army's** operations were planned to pin as many enemy troops as possible on the southern sector and thus help the main thrust in the north.

The enemy position opposite us was in great depth. The forward line lay at the base of steep hills with positions on spurs and peaks rising behind it. These highlands, rising out of a plain as flat as a billiard table, gave the enemy a commanding position with perfect observation over the country across which we had to attack. Surprise

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<sup>1</sup> General of the Army D. D. Eisenhower, Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces in North Africa, 1942–44; Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force in Western Europe, 1944–45; commanded **United States** occupation zone, **Germany**, 1945; Chief of Staff, United States Army, 1945–48; Supreme Commander, Allied Powers in **Europe** (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) 1950—.

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could only be obtained by assembling our attacking troops at night, which entailed bringing our artillery forward on to the plain on the night of the attack. The guns had to remain silent until zero hour, and we knew that if we did not gain our objectives they would be overlooked and would not be able to remain forward in daylight to support the infantry. Further difficulties for the attackers were two deep wadis, an

old Roman viaduct, a minefield laid in barley fields, and giant cactus hedges, all of which had to be dealt with by our sappers and infantry before the vehicles with supporting arms could be got forward.

At midnight on 19 April **Eighth Army** began the Allied general offensive which for the next three weeks raged along the whole front. This attack was carried out by the New Zealand Division and the **4th Indian Division**. We were on the coastal sector with the Indian Division on our left. We attacked with the 6th Brigade on the right (under the command of Brigadier Gentry) and the 5th Brigade on the left (under **Brigadier Kippenberger**). Our objectives were **Takrouna** feature and a long spur to the east of it. Following behind our infantry were tanks of the British 8th Armoured Brigade (under Brigadier Harvey) ready to go through at first light.

At the appointed hour the infantry went forward behind a heavy artillery barrage from our field and medium artillery and guns of other formations (under our CRA, Brigadier Weir). On the right the 6th Brigade made good progress, meeting only slight opposition, and German troops from the 90th Light Division left **Enfidaville** village without fighting. On the left, however, the 5th Brigade met fierce resistance. **Takrouna** was a rocky crag surmounted by a village, which from the plain below looked like some medieval castle. It had been turned into a fortress bastion of the enemy's **Enfidaville** line and, as we learnt later from prisoners, it was considered by the enemy to be impregnable. The fighting here was as hard as any experienced in the whole campaign. Most intense fire was met, many officers became casualties, every commanding officer in the 5th Brigade was wounded, communications broke down, and it was impossible to get clear reports of the situation. It was a night of anxiety for everybody. Could the guns be left out on the plain? Were the infantry supporting weapons getting forward? Reports came in that the infantry were advancing yard by yard and eventually we learnt that a small party from the **Maori Battalion** had scaled the cliff and gained a foothold in **Takrouna** village, while the 21st and 23rd Battalions were holding firm on either side of the feature. The **21st Battalion** on the left had almost

reached its objective but was withdrawn before daylight because its position was untenable with **Takrouna** untaken.

Throughout the next day, despite heavy fire, the flanks held, while in the village on the pinnacle of rock house-to-house and hand-to-hand fighting went on. Our foothold there vastly improved our artillery position by giving valuable observation over enemy positions, and despite the heavy artillery fire which blasted the top of the rock our OP <sup>1</sup> officers remained there all day to direct the fire of our guns.

During the night of 20 April our line was consolidated and the 6th Brigade linked up with the sorely pressed 5th Brigade. All night grim fighting went on in **Takrouna** village, and next morning an enemy pocket was still holding out obstinately in the top houses of the village. It was finally sniped by a 25-pounder gun. Lower down on the west of the hill, **Takrouna** village remained firmly held. This position was battered by artillery all day on the 21st, and towards evening parties from the 21st and 28th (Maori) Battalions stormed the village, taking remnants of the garrison prisoner. Two field guns, ten small pieces, 72 machine guns, and many light machine guns and 732 prisoners were captured—a clear indication of the strength of the position.

The capture of **Takrouna** feature left us firmly established on a line which constituted an immediate threat to the rest of the enemy's **Enfidaville** line. **Eighth Army's** role at this stage was to maintain pressure all along the front and keep a large enemy force fully engaged on our sector. On 24 and 25 April the 6th Brigade (under Brigadier Parkinson), with tanks of the 8th Armoured Brigade in support, carried out two night advances and captured several more features which increased still further the dent in the enemy line. The enemy reacted violently but, despite counter-attacks and very intense artillery and mortar fire, our salient was firmly held.

Meanwhile, in the north the **First Army** attack had been launched on 23 April, and after extremely heavy fighting on the following days important heights were captured and the enemy's line bent back. At the

end of the first week of our offensive no weakness had been revealed in the enemy defences on either the First or **Eighth Army** fronts, and we had nowhere captured the enemy main line of resistance. Our losses had been severe and it was obvious that more heavy blows would have to be struck before we could break through. On the **Enfidaville** front the nature of the country made it impossible to gain a penetration of more than a few miles in any single successful attack, but on the **First Army** front the topography was more favourable. It was at this stage that the Allied forces were regrouped for an all-out attack on the **First Army** sector by

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<sup>1</sup> Observation post.

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two infantry divisions and two armoured divisions, assisted by simultaneous advances in the north and south by American and French forces. The New Zealand Division was relieved from the **Takrouna** front to support French operations in the direction of Pont du Fahs.

The new attack in the north could not have been unexpected, but under the weight of the combined blow of infantry and armoured divisions of the First and Eighth Armies, supported by very powerful artillery and air support, the enemy defences crumpled. From north to south the Allies advanced. The collapse was so sudden that Commanders suspected a trap, but it soon became clear that the enemy had become completely disorganised. **Tunis** and **Bizerta** were occupied and our armoured divisions swept across the base of the Cape Bon Peninsula before the enemy could regroup to face them.

On the southern flank of this attack, the New Zealand artillery had been very active supporting the French, and the 5th Brigade had made three night advances, capturing prisoners and equipment. In an enemy counter-attack on this front a company of the **28th (Maori) Battalion** were surrounded and had to fight their way out. Next morning they counter-attacked, retook the position, and captured 75 prisoners—a characteristic operation to end the New Zealand Division's part in the

**battle.**

**The Allied success in the north had made the position of the large force of positional infantry on our front most precarious. On 11 May we sent a letter back with a German prisoner to General Graf von Sponeck, Commander of the 90th Light Division, pointing out that further resistance was useless. He refused to surrender unconditionally but did so next day when his headquarters was attacked from the rear by the British Armoured Division. On 12 May we picked up a wireless message to us from Marshal Messe, commanding the enemy **First Army**, which included the 90th Light Division, 164th Division, and 20th Italian Corps. Emissaries from both the German and Italian commanders came into our lines, and Marshal Messe, complete with his staff, surrendered unconditionally to me on 13 May. With him came General Liebenstein, commanding the German 164th Division. Resistance now ceased and white flags appeared everywhere. Many of the prisoners from the enemy **First Army** were collected by British forces striking south from Cape Bon Peninsula, but another 31,558 were taken on our Corps front. For many days prisoners, both German and Italian, were marching back to prisoner-of-war cages in the rear.**

**So ended the battle for North Africa, with a disaster for the enemy comparable to **Stalingrad**. The **Tunis** bridgehead, which the Germans had boasted would be held, was in our hands, and over 200,000 prisoners and great numbers of guns, tanks, and other weapons and equipment of all kinds were captured. The presence of ships of the **Royal Navy** actually in the Gulf of **Tunis** and continuous sweeps of Allied bombers successfully discouraged any attempt at evacuation by the Italian Navy, which did not put to sea. The whole Axis force in the **Tunis** bridgehead will be reported in **Germany** and **Italy** killed, wounded, or prisoner of war.**

**At the conclusion of this North African campaign I want to place on record the deep admiration I feel for the magnificent qualities and great work done by all ranks under my command. We have been fighting continuously for almost a year, battle after battle, with little respite, on**

**hard rations and short supplies of indifferent water. The endurance and courage of all ranks under conditions of great discomfort and peril have been beyond praise and their resource, good humour, and wisdom have made them ideal material for a fast-moving, hard-hitting force such as ours. The Division has never faltered or failed in any of the difficult and hazardous missions it has been set, and no one realises as I do how much they have achieved. No commander has ever been better served. <sup>1</sup>**

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**<sup>1</sup> New Zealand casualties in North Africa from 22 Nov 1942–17 Sep 1943 were:**

<b>Killed</b>	<b>372</b>
<b>Died of wounds</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Died on active service(includes deaths through sickness, accident, &amp;c.)</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Wounded</b>	<b>1534</b>
<b>Prisoners of war(includes 11 wounded and prisoners of war and 2 died of wounds while prisoners of war)</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2120</b>

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 210 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

210

### *The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

14 April 1943

With some confidence we may now look forward to the destruction of the Axis forces in **Africa**. At our conference at **Casablanca** <sup>1</sup> it was decided that the next stroke should be HUSKY. <sup>2</sup> The strategic advantages of this conquest will be apparent to you. Six **British** and four **United States** divisions will be used in the first instance for this purpose, together with all our landing craft, the whole operation being protected by a superior **British** battle fleet with dominating air support from the **Tunisian** tip and from **Malta**. Should success attend HUSKY it will be exploited to the full, with effects upon **Italy** and upon the whole war which cannot be measured but which will certainly be substantial.

For this operation the **New Zealand Division** is particularly requested by **General Alexander**, who, under the **Supreme Commander**, **General Eisenhower**, will be in charge of HUSKY. **General Montgomery** has represented that the **30th Corps**, comprising the **New Zealand** and **51st Highland Divisions**, is the most experienced and highly trained, and works together with unsurpassed cohesion. We hope, therefore, that the **New Zealand Government** will allow its famous **Division** to win further honour in **Europe** for the **Dominion**.

If the **New Zealand Division** is to be used in **Sicily**, it would be sent back to **Egypt** at once to have two months' intensive training in amphibious landings. We are arranging for a special ship with escort to bring the **3000 New Zealand reinforcements** <sup>3</sup> direct to join the **Division**

**in Egypt. You have been informed by the Admiralty of these arrangements. We earnestly hope that you will be able to help us in this important way.**

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**<sup>1</sup> President Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill met at **Casablanca** on 14–24 Jan 1943.**

**<sup>2</sup> The code-name for the invasion of **Sicily**.**

**<sup>3</sup> The 9th Reinforcements left New Zealand for the **Middle East** on 14 May 1943.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 211 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

211

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

16 April 1943

I regret that for the time being I am unable to provide an answer to the question raised in your telegram of 14 April as I have undertaken to consult Parliament before any such decision is given. It will be necessary, therefore, for me to make arrangements for a special meeting of the House of Representatives, which would normally meet on 19 May, and I am afraid that this will not be possible before 5 May. I would like your immediate advice whether a decision could be delayed until then.

A sudden summons of Parliament for next week might give rise to undue alarm and speculation in the country, and I am reluctant to create such a situation. In view of the utmost secrecy which must attach to the movement to which you refer, a meeting at such short notice might be most unwise. Reference to the project would of course be made only in general terms as a request for the use of our troops in **Europe**. Again, another factor which I must necessarily consider is the effect of any secret session thus summoned on the annual Labour Party conference at Easter, and while I could call the House before then if necessary, there are, I feel, sound reasons why I should not.

Perhaps I should explain that the situation upon which a decision on this whole matter rests, arises from the last meeting of Parliament convened specially to discuss and approve the policy of the Government in relation to the armed forces and manpower generally. As I have already indicated to you in my telegram of 19 November, <sup>1</sup> there is, and

has been, considerable feeling and difference of opinion both in the country and in Parliament as to the future role of the 2nd Division—a question again brought to the forefront by the announcement of the return from the **Middle East** of the last of the Australian forces.

The Government's manpower proposals, which included the reinforcement of both our Divisions for the rest of the year, were finally approved by the House after a full discussion of the role of the 2nd NZEF, during which I gave an undertaking that its retention in North Africa, its participation in a European campaign, or its return to New Zealand would be considered at the end of the Tunisian campaign, and that there would be no question of our men being used in any other theatre without the prior knowledge and approval of the House.

I would be glad if you could discuss the matter with Mr. Jones, our Minister of Defence, <sup>1</sup> who should still be in **London**, and acquaint him with the terms of this message.

<sup>1</sup>See page 166, note 1.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Proposed Withdrawal of 2nd New Zealand Division ( Nov–Dec 1942)*, (No. 176).

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

212 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO GENERAL FREYBERG

212

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to General Freyberg*

**17 April 1943**

**It is most essential that Mr. Jones should discuss with you personally at the earliest possible convenient date the future activity of the Division, and I would be glad of immediate advice as to when this visit could be arranged so that I can send him the necessary directions.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 213 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

213

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

**18 April 1943**

**I could see Mr. Jones here at once if it is so desired. Operations have now reached a semi-static state very different from the **Mareth** operations in progress when Mr. Jones was in the **Middle East** last month. I could make adequate arrangements here for his safety, and suggest that he comes via **Algiers** to see Generals Eisenhower and Alexander. You will realise that it may be difficult to see all the troops here. His presence in the forward area would be most welcome.**



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 214 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

214

### *The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

18 April 1943

Your telegram of 16 April ( **No. 211**). I understand the necessity for you to honour your pledge by consulting your Parliament on the future employment of the New Zealand Division. The use of a division for HUSKY involves immediate withdrawal to Egypt for special training in amphibious operations. The decision as to which division shall go cannot wait until May. There would be no advantage, therefore, in calling your Parliament for an earlier date than the 19th.

I should like to know whether you feel we should be justified in acting on the assumption of a favourable response from your Parliament so that we can proceed with the withdrawal of the New Zealand Division from **Tunisia** and its special training. If, on the other hand, you felt serious doubts, we should have to select another division.

As you suggested, this matter has been discussed with Mr. Jones. He has already informed you of the proposal to relieve a proportion of the personnel with fresh troops from New Zealand, if they can be made available, in order to bring back those who have been overseas longest.<sup>1</sup> We believe that the necessary arrangements could be made for, say, 20 per cent without impairing the efficiency of the Division.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Furlough Scheme (No. 253)*.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

215 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME  
MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

215

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

**19 April 1943**

**The following telegram, dated 18 April, has been received from  
General Alexander:**

**Any news of New Zealand? I am gravely concerned by this delay. I  
can make no plans for battle unless I get an answer.**

**Please read this in conjunction with the other telegram that I have  
sent you. I earnestly hope you can assume the responsibility of giving a  
favourable answer.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 216 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

216

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

19 April 1943

The fullest consideration has been given by **War Cabinet** to your telegram of 18 April ( **No. 214**). We fully realise the necessity for an early decision as to the composition and training of the force for the special operation, and I should like to say how deeply sensible we are of the very high honour which is being paid to our Division. In view, however, of the decided differences of opinion which were manifest when the future role of the 2nd New Zealand Division was last discussed by Parliament, I feel I am unable to forecast their decision with certainty. It is with regret, therefore, that I cannot give you in advance the assurance you require. There is also the possibility that any such assurance on my part at this stage could, and indeed probably would, be interpreted by members as a commitment not in accord with the spirit of my pledge to them and would prejudice their final decision.

Meanwhile, I think that Mr. Jones should go immediately to **Tunisia** to discuss these matters with **General Freyberg**, who has advised me today that he could see Mr. Jones in the forward area at once. <sup>1</sup> This arrangement would enable me to place the views of both **General Freyberg** and the Minister of Defence before Parliament, which after full discussion will then decide the future role of the Division.

I would like to say how very much I appreciate your acceptance of the proposal that a proportion of the personnel of the Division should be relieved by further troops from New Zealand, and trust that it will be

**possible at an early date to make the necessary arrangements to bring back progressively 20 per cent of those men who have been overseas longest.**

**Would you please convey to Mr. Jones the contents of this message.**

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**<sup>1</sup> No. 213.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 217 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

217

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the  
United Kingdom*

19 April 1943

Your telegram of 19 April ( **No. 215**).

You will have gathered from my immediately preceding telegram that it is impossible for me to assume responsibility for a favourable answer. When Parliament meets, your request and views, carrying great weight as they do here as elsewhere, will be faithfully placed before the House of Representatives with all their force, as will any further message which you may deem it advisable to send, and which we will gladly receive, on the general question of the future activities of the Division. **War Cabinet** asks me to state that if, in the meantime, up to the date when Parliament meets, you considered it possible and advisable, without detrimentally affecting your plan, to take the New Zealand Division out of **Tunisia** for special training, we would agree, provided it is clearly understood that such agreement does not commit the Division to the task indicated before Parliament has an opportunity of coming to a decision on the matter.

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

218 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME  
MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

218

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

**20 April 1943**

**Your telegram of 19 April. There is only time and plan to train one more division in amphibious action, and if the New Zealand Division cannot be counted on for certain another must at once be selected. There is thus no possibility of waiting until any date in May. Therefore I am informing General Alexander that your Division cannot take part in the assault phase of the landing in Sicily. I still hope, on symbolic and historic as well as military grounds, that it may be available for the follow-up in Europe.**

**Your wishes about Mr. Jones will be complied with.**

**Tonight (19–20 April) the main battle is joined in Tunisia and your Division is attacking with the rest of Eighth Army. May God bless your brave men is my prayer.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 219 – THE HON. F. JONES (LONDON) TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

219

*The Hon. F. Jones (London) to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

21 April 1943

I received your telegram of 19 April <sup>1</sup> and returned to **London** today from **Oxford** to read your personal message to Mr. Churchill. <sup>2</sup> In view of your promise to Parliament I realise that it is not possible for you to give an assurance or enter into any commitments regarding the suggested employment of the Division.

As it is necessary that the specialised training of the required force be undertaken immediately, the United Kingdom Government cannot afford to risk the delay that would inevitably ensue to the projected plans if, after our troops commenced the course, it ultimately transpired that Parliament's decision was not favourable. Some other division would then have to be assigned to the task and the proposed plans would be unduly delayed. Therefore the United Kingdom Government have now advised General Alexander, who was pressing for an immediate decision in the matter, that our troops will not be available for the task suggested.

I am now awaiting transport to **Africa**, where I will discuss with **General Freyberg** and other officers concerned any further proposals concerning the Division. As soon as possible I will send you a report on these discussions.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Furlough Scheme* (No. 254).

<sup>2</sup> No. 216.





DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

220 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE HON. F. JONES (LONDON)

220

*The Prime Minister to the Hon. F. Jones ( London)*

22 April 1943

**Thank you for your message of 21 April. I fully realise the difficulties confronting Mr. Churchill, but under the circumstances I had no alternative but to stand by my pledge to Parliament. Please discuss the matter fully with **General Freyberg**, to whom I am sending the message contained in my immediately following telegram. <sup>1</sup>**

**I trust that you will be able to leave for **Africa** immediately, and I will be glad to have your report as soon as possible.**

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<sup>1</sup> See *Furlough Scheme (No. 255)*.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

221 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME  
MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

221

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

**25 April 1943**

**With reference to my telegram of 20 April. ( No. 218), I have received  
advice from General Alexander that he is eager to have the New  
Zealanders as a follow-up division, and that a decision by 20 May will be  
in time for this.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 222 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

222

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

29 April 1943

**As has already been made clear in my earlier messages, the future role of the 2nd NZEF is a matter for decision by Parliament, before whom I now propose to place the whole position.**

**Although normally Parliament would meet on 19 May, in view of your latest message it may be necessary for me to bring the date forward, but in any event, before discussing it in the House, I must present the whole matter first of all to my own Cabinet and then to the Labour Party.**

**While I will place before members any request, based on strategic grounds, for the retention of the Division put forward by the British and United States military authorities, I can assure you that no views would carry greater weight in this Dominion than those of yourself and Mr. Roosevelt.**

**I have referred already to my own difficulties, but I should like to stress the following considerations. According to the present estimates of the manpower situation, the essential facts of which are contained in a separate note,<sup>1</sup> it will not be possible for New Zealand to maintain divisions both in the Mediterranean and in the Pacific beyond the end of the present year. Even if the 2nd Division is retained in the Mediterranean, the question must then arise whether the men in the Mediterranean division are to be used to reinforce the Pacific division or**

vice versa. The Grade A men to provide reinforcements for two divisions are simply not available here. Despite every effort to comb out industry, sufficient key men must be retained to maintain essential production, and especially primary production, at a time when the target programme is being set at increasingly higher levels and when there is, moreover, every prospect that we will be supplying our own men actively engaged in the **Pacific** area, while demands for foodstuffs and services of all kinds under reciprocal aid are continually increasing.

Because of this acute manpower stringency, Parliament will feel that with the close of the Tunisian campaign the time has come to make the decision between the European and **Pacific** theatres.

In my view it is of the greatest political importance that the British elements in the **United Nations'** forces in the **Pacific** should be as strong as possible when the time comes to start offensive operations against **Japan**. I assure you that there is a full appreciation in New Zealand of the desirability of being in the strongest political position when the future of the **Pacific** is being considered after the war.

Another factor in the situation is the political one. There is a strong section, particularly among Government supporters, who desire the early return of the Division at the conclusion of the Tunisian campaign. On the other hand, there is in Parliament and throughout the country a large measure of feeling in favour of the retention of our Division in the **Mediterranean** theatre. I am most anxious to prevent any general split on this question and I attach the highest importance, from the point of view of the unity of the country and the furtherance of the war effort, to obtaining as unanimous a vote as possible on whatever decision is arrived at. A message from you, which I could read to Parliament in secret session, appealing for the retention of the Division 'on symbolic and historical as well as military grounds' would, I feel, have very great influence, especially if you could associate President Roosevelt with yourself in the message. It is my earnest hope that this may be possible, both because President Roosevelt's name, alongside your own, would powerfully reinforce the appeal, and because, as the **United States** is

responsible for the conduct of military operations both in North Africa and in the **Pacific**, I feel that the New Zealand Parliament should be apprised of the **United States'** view. Therefore, I should be most grateful if a message such as I have indicated could be sent.

## **MANPOWER**

The fourth year of war has brought New Zealand's manpower problem to an acute stage. To maintain overseas demands, and at the same time meet heavy industrial commitments, it has been necessary to reduce the Home Defence forces by some 25,000 men to a cadre and care and maintenance basis, and to reallocate the personnel to essential industry and for overseas units.

The Government's manpower policy for the year ending March 1944, recently approved by Parliament, involves an intake for the Armed Services of nearly 31,600 men (namely—Air 10,000, Navy 2300, and Army 19,300). The Government have further decided to replace 20 per cent of the longest service personnel of the 2nd Division in the **Middle East**. While this will place a heavy and immediate strain upon the remaining available men for overseas service, it should, on the other hand, assist the immediate decision as to the retention of the 2nd Division.

On account of the heavily increased commitments on industrial manpower to meet the requirements of the Allied forces in the **Pacific**, and also the expansion of the **Air Force**, only 12,000 Grade I men aged 21 to 40 will be available for the Army overseas for the twelve months ending March 1944. Apart altogether from the relief scheme for the 2nd Division, drastic readjustments will be required in order to provide the remainder of overseas manpower requirements already planned.

While every effort will be made to meet the overseas demands up to the end of the present year, beyond that date the maintenance of two divisions, in addition to **Air Force** and Naval requirements, will not be possible. Indeed, the question must then arise in the most acute form as

**to which division is to provide further reinforcements for the other.**

**28 April 1943**

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<sup>1</sup> **Appended to this telegram.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

29 APRIL 1943

29 April 1943

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Although normally Parliament would meet on 19 May, in view of your latest message it may be necessary for me to bring the date forward, but in any event, before discussing it in the House, I must present the whole matter first of all to my own Cabinet and then to the Labour Party.

While I will place before members any request, based on strategic grounds, for the retention of the Division put forward by the British and **United States** military authorities, I can assure you that no views would carry greater weight in this Dominion than those of yourself and Mr. Roosevelt.

I have referred already to my own difficulties, but I should like to stress the following considerations. According to the present estimates of the manpower situation, the essential facts of which are contained in a separate note, <sup>1</sup> it will not be possible for New Zealand to maintain divisions both in the **Mediterranean** and in the **Pacific** beyond the end of the present year. Even if the 2nd Division is retained in the **Mediterranean**, the question must then arise whether the men in the **Mediterranean** division are to be used to reinforce the **Pacific** division or vice versa. The Grade A men to provide reinforcements for two divisions are simply not available here. Despite every effort to comb out industry, sufficient key men must be retained to maintain essential production, and especially primary production, at a time when the target programme is being set at increasingly higher levels and when there is, moreover, every prospect that we will be supplying our own men actively engaged

in the **Pacific** area, while demands for foodstuffs and services of all kinds under reciprocal aid are continually increasing.

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Another factor in the situation is the political one. There is a strong section, particularly among Government supporters, who desire the early return of the Division at the conclusion of the Tunisian campaign. On the other hand, there is in Parliament and throughout the country a large measure of feeling in favour of the retention of our Division in the **Mediterranean** theatre. I am most anxious to prevent any general split on this question and I attach the highest importance, from the point of view of the unity of the country and the furtherance of the war effort, to obtaining as unanimous a vote as possible on whatever decision is arrived at. A message from you, which I could read to Parliament in secret session, appealing for the retention of the Division 'on symbolic and historical as well as military grounds' would, I feel, have very great influence, especially if you could associate President Roosevelt with yourself in the message. It is my earnest hope that this may be possible, both because President Roosevelt's name, alongside your own, would powerfully reinforce the appeal, and because, as the **United States** is responsible for the conduct of military operations both in North Africa and in the **Pacific**, I feel that the New Zealand Parliament should be apprised of the **United States'** view. Therefore, I should be most grateful if a message such as I have indicated could be sent.



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## MANPOWER

### *MANPOWER*

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While every effort will be made to meet the overseas demands up to the end of the present year, beyond that date the maintenance of two divisions, in addition to **Air Force** and Naval requirements, will not be possible. Indeed, the question must then arise in the most acute form as

**to which division is to provide further reinforcements for the other.**

**28 April 1943**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 223 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

223

### *The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

3 May 1943

Pray give the following message, if you think it useful, to your  
Parliament in secret session:

There have been few episodes of the war more remarkable than the  
ever-famous fighting march of the Desert Army from the battlefields of  
**Alamein**, where they shielded **Cairo**, to the gates of **Tunis**, whence they  
menace **Italy**. The New Zealand Division has always held a shining place  
in the van of this advance. Foremost, or among the foremost, it has ever  
been. There could not be any more glorious expression of the links  
which bind together the British Commonwealth and Empire, and bind in  
a special manner the hearts of the people of the British and New Zealand  
isles, than the feats of arms which the New Zealanders, under the  
leadership of **General Freyberg**, have performed for the liberation of the  
African continent from German and Italian power.

There are new tasks awaiting the British, American, and Allied  
armies in the **Mediterranean** perimeter. As conquerors, but also as  
deliverers, they must enter **Europe**. I earnestly trust that the New  
Zealand Division will carry on with them. Both General Alexander and  
General Montgomery have expressed their ardent wishes that this may  
be so. In this way the association of the New Zealand Division and the  
51st Highland Division, 'one equal temper of heroic minds', <sup>1</sup> will be  
preserved in the 30th Corps. In this way the aptitudes for war, which  
veteran troops acquire at such high cost, will play their part in the

unfolding and in the shaping of events. On military grounds the case is strongly urged by our trusted Generals.

Yet it is not on those grounds that I make this request to the Government and people of New Zealand. I make it even more upon the sentiments which unite our Commonwealth of Nations. I can, of course, replace the New Zealand Division with another well-trained division from the **United Kingdom**. It is the symbolic and historic value of our continued comradeship in arms that moves me. I feel that the intervention of the New Zealand Division on European soil, at a time when the homeland of New Zealand is already so strongly engaged with **Japan**, will constitute a deed of fame to which many generations of New Zealanders will look back with pride.

On the other hand, should you feel it necessary to withdraw your troops, I wish to assure you that the gratitude of the Mother Country towards the people of New Zealand and the admiration which we feel for her valiant and faithful manhood will in no way be diminished.

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<sup>1</sup> 'one equal temper of heroic hearts'— *Ulysses* (Tennyson).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 224 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

224

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

4 May 1943

On 1 May I was instructed by General Montgomery to take over command of 10th Corps when General Horrocks <sup>1</sup> was sent to replace a Corps Commander wounded on the **First Army** front. <sup>2</sup> After discussing the matter with Mr. Jones I accepted temporarily. **Brigadier Kippenberger** has assumed temporary command of the Division, which remains in 10th Corps. These are purely temporary measures.

While discussing this appointment with Mr. Jones, he told me of a message he had handed to Mr. Churchill from you concerning my possible war employment. <sup>3</sup> I was very much touched and gratified that, at a time when you are so preoccupied with vital issues, you should have found time to think of this matter. That you did is, I feel, an expression of confidence in me for which I shall always be most grateful. For my part I am wholly contented. I feel that your Division, owing to its fighting qualities and efficiency, has been of incalculable value here in the **Middle East** and has played a far greater part than that of any normal division. I feel, therefore, that as GOC 2nd NZEF I have been of more use to the war effort than I should have been commanding an Army Corps.

I deeply appreciate your kind thought, but my personal wish is to return to the Division and the 2nd NZEF. From a personal point of view I have no military ambitions save one—to be at the head of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force and bring it back at the end of the war, which, please God, will be soon. If for reasons of the higher conduct of the war I am required elsewhere, then I must review the situation, but

<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir Brian G. Horrocks, KBE, CB, DSO, MC; commanded in turn 44th (Home Counties) Division, 9th Armoured Division, 13th Corps, and 10th Corps in Egypt, **Cyrenaica**, and **Tunisia**, and 9th Corps in **Tunisia**; commanded 30th Corps, British Liberation Army, 1944–45; GOC-in-C, Western Command, 1946; GOC-in-C, British Army of the Rhine, 1948.

<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant-General J. T. (later General Sir John) Crocker, GCB, KBE, DSO, MC; commanded a corps in **Tunisia** (1942–43) and in **France** and **Germany** (1944–45); GOC-in-C, Southern Command, 1945–47; C-in-C Middle East Land Forces, 1947–.

<sup>3</sup> In a telegram sent to **London** on 3 Apr, Mr. Fraser asked Mr. Jones to discuss **General Freyberg's** position with Mr. Churchill and Sir James Grigg, Secretary of State for War. 'While it would, of course, have been preferable to have ascertained **Freyberg's** own feelings on the matter,' the telegram ran, 'you could I think in the present circumstances raise the question somewhat in these terms: **Freyberg** has more than fulfilled all our expectations and we are deeply appreciative of his outstanding services to New Zealand. As Commander of the New Zealand Division in five campaigns, in which he has acquitted himself with the greatest distinction, we feel that he is due for some further recognition. You should make it clear that while nothing is further from our desires than to lose him, it would be a source of the greatest regret to us if his association with the New Zealand Forces should react detrimentally to his own prospects for a senior command.'

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with the New Zealand War Cabinet, without whose knowledge I shall not of course act.

A short appreciation of the present position in North Africa follows. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See *Campaign in Tripolitania and Tunisia* (No. 207).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 225 – THE HON. F. JONES TO THE PRIME MINISTER

225

*The Hon. F. Jones to the Prime Minister*

6 May 1943

*En route* from England I met at their respective headquarters General Eisenhower, Admiral Cunningham, <sup>2</sup> Air Chief Marshal Tedder, General Alexander, Air Vice-Marshal Coningham, <sup>3</sup> and General Montgomery and had interesting and valuable talks with them and some of their senior staff officers.

Cunningham and Tedder asked specially to be remembered to you and recalled the strenuous days during your visit. With the exception of a few members of the Artillery still in the front line, I had highly satisfactory talks with nearly all of the officers and men of every unit in the forward area, notwithstanding that they were widely dispersed. I was very pleased with my reception, and it was made quite evident by the men that they greatly appreciated the action of the Government in sending a representative to visit them. Many questions were asked, including that of the return of the Division to New Zealand, the possibility of getting leave to visit their homes, and other points on minor matters. I think there is a general desire on the part of the Division to return to New Zealand, as they raised this question and also the question of whether a period of leave could be granted them to visit their homes. I informed them that proposals regarding leave were receiving consideration and that I was hopeful it would be possible for a proportion of the troops with long service to proceed on leave, provided shipping could be arranged. While I made it perfectly clear that I was making no promise, still they seemed satisfied with my remarks. I formed the impression that there was no desire on the part of the men here to fight in the **Solomons**.



My discussions with **Freyberg** were most helpful, and while I was with him he received advice of his appointment to Corps Commander, <sup>1</sup> which position he accepted temporarily pending the decision of our Government, to which he is responsible. In the meantime he has selected **Brigadier Kippenberger** to relieve him. This officer has given yeoman service and is held in exceptionally high esteem. I assured **Freyberg** that it was the wish of the Government that the Division should be part of his Corps, and that if this could be arranged I felt certain that **War Cabinet** would desire him to continue to be attached to the New Zealand Expeditionary Force as General Officer Commanding. My opinion is that the superseding of **Freyberg** by junior officers has not been fair to him, and even now that his opportunity of filling a higher position appears to have come, he is reluctant to divorce himself from the Division to which he has become so firmly attached. If War Cabinet agree that his acceptance of the position of Corps Commander will make for the more successful prosecution of the war, then he will accept, in which case we should press for the Division being part of his Corps, except in the event of emergency, and also for his being GOC 2nd NZEF.

I concur with **Freyberg's** view that after the Tunisian campaign the Division should be rested, reorganised, and trained, and that the 4th Armoured Brigade be properly equipped as part of the Division. The delay in equipping the Brigade has been most unsatisfactory. When I met Montgomery he expressed the wish that the Division should not be taken back to New Zealand. If **Freyberg** is appointed permanently as Corps Commander, Montgomery is agreeable to the Division being part of his Corps, unless of course in an emergency, and is of the opinion that **Freyberg** should maintain his connection with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force and his relationship with our Government as the senior officer of the same. Montgomery agreed that the 4th Armoured Brigade should be fully equipped and form part of the Division, but was of the opinion that he should have the right to use this brigade independently of the Division, in accordance with his grouping policy. Although he would, wherever possible, keep the Division in any specified Corps that our Government desired, Montgomery could not

agree to it as a firm policy. **Freyberg** is of the opinion that while the placing of the 4th Brigade in the British armoured pool when Montgomery groups for battle may suit the latter, it would be contrary to the principle laid down by our Government. In expressing his views, Montgomery overlooks that, after all, our forces are not part of the British Army but are forces of a sovereign state.

Being unable to see **Freyberg** when I was here in March, and appreciating that he had experienced strenuous campaigning without a let-up, I wrote to him suggesting *inter alia* that he consider visiting New Zealand after the Tunisian campaign. I discussed the matter with him last week, and if the request were made for his release and necessary leave he would be favourable to undertaking the journey by air. In reply to my inquiry, he was of the opinion that in the event of his appointment as Corps Commander being permanent, General Barrowclough was the most suitable and acceptable officer to take charge of the Division, and, if he was not available, then **Brigadier Kippenberger**, who is also most acceptable and has given splendid service. I agree with this opinion. This question could be further discussed in the event of **Freyberg** making the journey, and in the meantime **Kippenberger** could continue to act as at present. Personally I think such a visit would be beneficial and helpful from many aspects.

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<sup>2</sup> Admiral of the Fleet Viscount Cunningham, KT, GCB, OM, DSO; Commander-in-Chief, **Mediterranean**, 1939–42; Naval C-in-C, Expeditionary Force, North Africa, 1942; C-in-C Allied Naval Forces, **Mediterranean**, 1943; First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff, 1943–46.

<sup>3</sup> Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham, KCB, KBE, DSO, MC, DFC, AFC; AOC Western Desert, 1941–43; commanded Allied Air Forces, **Tunisia**, 1943; AOC 1st **Tactical Air Force**, French North Africa, 1943; AOC-in-C 2nd **Tactical Air Force**, North-West Europe, 1944–45; killed in aircraft accident, 30 Jan 1948.

<sup>1</sup> See **No. 224**.



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 226 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

226

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

7 May 1943

I am deeply appreciative of the terms of your telegram of 4 May ( **No. 224**). Personally I cannot conceive of a more regrettable occurrence than your severance from the command of the 2nd NZEF, and this feeling is shared by all my colleagues in the Government, but I felt—and they did, too—that it would be most unfair if your loyalty to New Zealand should react detrimentally on your own military career. It was with this in mind that I asked Mr. Jones to place the position before Mr. Churchill. <sup>1</sup>

I cannot for the moment foretell what attitude Parliament will take towards the future role of the 2nd Division. Their decision, which must now be taken after weighing all the facts, is of the greatest consequence both for New Zealand and for our men overseas. The simple fact is that we no longer have the Grade A men to maintain two divisions abroad, and within a few months the question must be determined which division is to be used to reinforce the other. Despite every effort to comb out industry, there must be retained sufficient key men to maintain essential production, especially at a time when we are continually receiving increased demands from the **United Kingdom** for dairy produce and meat, and from the United

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<sup>1</sup> See page 192, note 3.

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States, for their forces in the **Pacific**, for foodstuffs, clothing, and services of all kinds under reciprocal lend-lease, and for our own forces

in all arms in the **Pacific**.

You know, as I do, the very strong arguments in favour of the retention of the Division in the European theatre. On the other hand, I believe it to be of the greatest political importance that, when the time comes to start offensive operations against **Japan**, the British elements in the **United Nations'** forces in the **Pacific** should be as strong as possible. It is not only a question of the immediate defence and security of our own shores and our island territories; we must also take the long view and ensure that when the future of the **Pacific** is being considered after the war, we, in common with the other portions of the British Commonwealth concerned, are in the most favourable possible political position. Another factor which we cannot ignore is the relationship of this country with **Australia**. Though our own shores may not for the moment be threatened to the same extent as theirs, nevertheless we are both close partners in a most critical venture which directly and equally affects our common destinies.

Parliament will, of course, take cognizance of these and the other relevant considerations, but what will carry the greatest weight is undoubtedly the manpower situation, a report upon which I am forwarding by safe-hand means. <sup>1</sup>

The proposed system of reliefs, while accentuating our manpower problems during the current year, will nevertheless influence Parliament's decision as to the return of the Division as a whole.

I would like to say in conclusion how deeply stirred we have been by the reports of the heroic efforts of our men in the advance towards **Tunis**. We trust that casualties will not be unduly heavy and that, whatever the future role of the 2nd NZEF is to be, our men will not feel that their absence from home has at any time meant an absence from our thoughts. The constant prayer of all of us is for their safe and speedy return from a great task successfully and nobly accomplished.

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<sup>1</sup> This was a report, dated 5 May 1943, by the Director of

**National Service (Mr. J. S. Hunter) on the replacement of long-service personnel of the 2nd Division in the Middle East by men from New Zealand. The report stated that 9281 officers and other ranks of the first three echelons (of whom 1920 were married on enlistment) were still serving in the Division. 'The supply of 9000 Category A men as replacements for men now in the Middle East, in addition to the usual reinforcements (which are themselves in question) could not be countenanced without the most careful consideration, as this number simply cannot be made available under any reasonably likely set of circumstances,' the report continued. 'The supply of even a fraction of this number would serve only to hasten the necessity for such adjustments as the use of 20-year-old men or Grade II men in overseas theatres, and would add its share to the depletion of industrial manpower unless those returning in exchange are brought into employment within a fairly short time after their arrival in New Zealand.'**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 227 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE HON. F. JONES

227

*The Prime Minister to the Hon. F. Jones*

7 May 1943

I was very glad to receive your personal telegram ( **No. 225**) and to learn of the extent and success of your visit to the forward areas. I am, however, at a loss to understand what is meant by your 'impression that there is no desire on the part of the men here to fight in the **Solomons**'. What exactly is in their minds if they don't want to go into the **Pacific** after they return? Do they wish merely to have leave and then return to the **Middle East**? Has it been made quite clear to them that Americans are here not as garrison troops for the defence of New Zealand, but that they are using this country only as a base for training or recuperating after service in the **Pacific**? It is I think essential that this state of affairs should be clearly understood.

You will appreciate the importance which Parliament will attach to your views, and I would like to be certain that it is your considered opinion that the officers and men wish the Division to return to New Zealand, or alternatively, that their own desires would be met by furlough, for a proportion at a time, of the longest service men.

The second point upon which I am in doubt concerns **Freyberg's** appointment as a Corps Commander. In his telegram to me dated 4 May ( **No. 224**) he states he was instructed by Montgomery to take over command of 10th Corps when General Horrocks was sent to take the place of a Corps Commander wounded on the **First Army** front, and that he had accepted temporarily after discussing the matter with you. He also told me that **Kippenberger** was temporarily in command of our Division in 10th Corps. From the tenor of his remarks I assumed that

**this was a purely temporary measure, and having had no other advice of an official character I did not assume that the [New Zealand Government](#) was required either to give consent to such a temporary arrangement or to consider it as a permanent appointment for which their consent was being requested. Would you please elucidate this point so that I may bring it before [War Cabinet](#)?**

**The fact that the 4th Armoured Brigade is still without full equipment is most disturbing, and I would be glad if you would represent this matter in the strongest terms when you return to [London](#). I agree entirely that the 4th Armoured Brigade should not be placed in the British armoured pool, but that it must remain an integral part of the 2nd New Zealand Division under our own control.**

**The suggestion that [Freyberg](#) should visit New Zealand is, I think, an excellent one, and I will discuss this and the other matters raised in your telegram with [War Cabinet](#) at the earliest opportunity.**



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 228 – THE HON. F. JONES TO THE PRIME MINISTER

228

*The Hon. F. Jones to the Prime Minister*

10 May 1943

Replying to your telegram of 7 May. In my talks I always made quite clear each of the points you mention regarding American troops in New Zealand and, moreover, emphasised that the question of their being returned to the Dominion to replace Americans did not arise. Seemingly the Division knows something of the conditions prevailing in the **Solomons** and **New Guinea** and of how the health of the troops has been affected by malaria, &c., apart from conflict with the enemy. While I feel sure that as heretofore they would be prepared to serve where required, still I am convinced that if given the option the majority would prefer this theatre of war, where health conditions generally are certainly considerably superior. Although the officers were present whenever I addressed their men, they did not express any opinion regarding the return of the Division; consequently I do not know their minds on this point.

If each soldier were given an opportunity of expressing his individual opinion, my belief is that the great majority would wish to return. I base this view on the fact that at question time references were invariably made by the men to: (i) the return of Australian troops, (ii) that portion of the statement published in the *NZEF Times* of 29 March, wherein it was said that in the House in reply to an interjection [the statement was made] that the men collectively did not wish to return home. (The general opinion of the men who spoke was that the statement did not express their views.) Nevertheless, I do not think that at present the men are expecting to be returned, and if the manpower situation in the Dominion prevents the putting into operation of the plan outlined in my

telegram of 30 April, <sup>1</sup> then I suggest, and believe it would be welcomed, that as many as can be spared from time to time be granted furlough and returned to the Division after a reasonable period of leave, the order of granting furlough to be on the same basis as suggested in the previous plan.

If the idea of furlough be adopted, I think the earlier men should be medically examined whilst in New Zealand to ascertain whether they are fit to undertake further active service. If, on the other hand, you prefer the plan outlined in my telegram of 30 April, and the manpower situation will enable it to be carried out, then the question to be decided is what is to be done with the troops on their return. Can they be usefully employed as part of home defence or put back into industry, so releasing fit men for service overseas; if so, can they be given the option of re-enlisting either in the 2nd or 3rd Division? I believe that after a period of leave in New Zealand a large number would want to serve again in the 2nd Division.

A further telegram regarding **Freyberg's** position will follow shortly.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Furlough Scheme (No. 256)*.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 229 – THE HON. F. JONES TO THE PRIME MINISTER

229

*The Hon. F. Jones to the Prime Minister*

10 May 1943

With reference to the second point of your message of 7 May ( **No. 227**).

**General Freyberg** was notified of his appointment as Corps Commander whilst I was at his headquarters, but he thought it was to be only temporary. I told him that from my conversation with Montgomery I understood it was to be permanent, and my view seems to be confirmed by the following telegram received by me from **Freyberg** on Saturday last:

I have received a cable of congratulation from Mr. Churchill on being given command of 10th Corps. Presumably he has acted on Mr. Fraser's cable. <sup>1</sup> When the Government comes to consider whether I am to go or to stay, the question of my successor will no doubt be considered also. I have thought over the problem and feel that in fairness to everybody the whole list of probabilities should be considered: Barrowclough, Inglis, **Kippenberger**, and also Miles and Hargest. <sup>2</sup> I feel that the question should be reviewed by the New Zealand War Cabinet quite apart from local feelings here. If my opinion is required as to the order of suitability, I could give it after the Government has decided which are available.

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<sup>1</sup> See page 192, note 3.

<sup>2</sup> Brigadiers Miles and Hargest had escaped together from a prison camp near **Florence** (Campo 12) on 29 Mar 1943 and at

this date were in **Switzerland**.

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Assuming I go permanently, I feel that the handing over of the Division can be done quite easily, but handing over the command of the 2nd NZEF raises the question of the special powers granted to me personally. I will, of course, remain GOC 2nd NZEF until such time as the **New Zealand Government** decides on the change.

If it is possible at the end of this campaign to make a quick trip to report to the New Zealand War Cabinet, it might be of assistance to them, and I would endeavour to do this if they so desired.

**Freyberg's** reluctance to leave the New Zealand Expeditionary Force is understandable, and I think he would like a lead from **War Cabinet** as to whether he should accept the higher position permanently. If you are of the opinion that he should accept, then a decision should also be reached whether he should continue to hold the position of GOC 2nd NZEF, and who should be appointed to the command of the Division. You may prefer that either one or all of these questions should stand over until **Freyberg** visits New Zealand, and that in the meantime his promotion and consequential changes should be temporary. I think representations should be made by you to the British Government asking for the release of **Freyberg** to visit New Zealand as soon as possible after the Tunisian campaign. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See **No. 238**.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 230 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

230

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

13 May 1943

Thank you for your clear and informative cable explaining the manpower situation and the possible future employment of the Division.  
<sup>2</sup> I feel for you in making the decision which may be forced upon you.

Although the question is outside my province, I would like to let you know privately my own feelings, which may be of help to you. I feel I should do so because no one perhaps realises as I do what the New Zealand Expeditionary Force means to the **Middle East**. I hope you will not think anything I write is being put forward in support of any course of action. I realise I am not in possession of the full facts and am therefore not competent to express an opinion.

It seems to me, looking back over the very difficult years, that your Division stands athwart most of the big moments: the desperate fight in **Crete** which seems to have had such momentous results though at so great a price; the terrible fighting in **Libya** near **Tobruk** when we turned defeat into partial victory; the dash from **Syria** to the **Western Desert** which stemmed the retreat and helped to save Egypt; the battle of **Alamein** where the Division fought so gallantly to break the line; the great trek at **Agheila** which rattled the enemy out of his stronghold; the left hook at the Hamma Gap which turned the **Mareth Line**, without which this ending would not have been possible. All these and more have been accomplished. It seems to me that just as Mr. Churchill has inspired a nation with words so your Division has been his counterpart with deeds. If the New Zealand Division never fought again it would rank as one of the finest divisions of all time and be spoken of as we speak

today of Craufurd's Light Division in the Peninsular. <sup>1</sup>

If your Division can remain in the **Middle East**, needless to say your decision will be welcomed on all sides. It has stood the test as a fighting machine in many campaigns. We know our enemy and know how to fight him, and we would face the future with complete confidence in our organisation, training, and equipment. In the next phase, should a new front be opened through the **Balkans**, nothing could capture the imagination more and nothing could be of greater encouragement to the people of **Greece** and **Crete** than the return of the New Zealand Division to avenge its defeats. Looking upon all theatres of the war, whether here or in the **Pacific**, as one battlefield, I am certain your Division could make an outstanding contribution here in the coming offensive.

If, however, your Division must be withdrawn, it will take with it the admiration and affection of all who have been associated with it. Further, the courageous decision of the **New Zealand Government** to leave the Division in the **Middle East** when our shores were imperilled will never be forgotten, and if it is decided that the New Zealand Expeditionary Force must be withdrawn there will be no feeling that it has left the job unfinished.

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<sup>2</sup> No. 226.

<sup>1</sup> The Light Brigade (43rd, 52nd, and 95th Battalions) under Major-General Robert Craufurd (1764–1812) fought in the Peninsular War between 1808–12 at Buraco, Fuentes d'Onoro, and at the storming of Ciudad Rodrigo, where General Craufurd was mortally wounded (19 Jan 1812) and died on 24 Jan.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 231 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM (WASHINGTON)<sup>1</sup>

231

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the  
United Kingdom ( Washington) <sup>1</sup>*

14 May 1943

Following upon a further review of the manpower situation and in anticipation of a full discussion in Parliament next week, we are forced to the conclusion that there is no possibility beyond the end of the year of New Zealand's maintaining two divisions and detached troops overseas and also the rapidly expanding **Air Force**, the units of which are being moved up into the offensive area in the **Pacific** as quickly as equipment comes to hand. There are, of course, in addition our commitments under the Empire Air Training Scheme and those to the **Royal Navy**. There is just not sufficient suitable manpower available to maintain and reinforce all these forces.

It would be entirely unwise, we feel, to let either the **Pacific** or the **Mediterranean** division complete its organisation and training and prepare for, and perhaps go into, action in major theatres of war knowing that within a few months from now it was inevitable that one force was to be used for the purpose of reinforcing the other. We attach full weight to the importance of our Division participating in any invasion of **Europe** alongside their tried and trusted comrades of the **Eighth Army**, but we are also fully aware of the necessity for maintaining the British element in the **United Nations'** forces in the **Pacific** to the greatest strength possible. Full consideration must be given to the desirability of New Zealand's forces, on land as well as in the air, playing their part in the **Pacific** war, which so directly affects our own immediate interests and security. This Dominion is, of course,

the only country from which British forces can at present be made available for service in the **South Pacific Area**.

The time to face up to the problem is, we feel, the present, and we would be most grateful if you would take the opportunity while you are in **Washington** to discuss the matter with the President, and, having in mind New Zealand's inability to provide divisions for each theatre, advise as to where you and, if possible, the **Combined Chiefs of Staff**, consider that New Zealand troops could most usefully be employed.

We have re-examined very closely the figures relating to the manpower situation and the needs of both the armed forces and industry. There is a continual combing-out for the purpose of substituting

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<sup>1</sup> Mr Churchill arrived in **Washington** on 11 May for discussions with President Roosevelt. This telegram was sent to him through the British Ambassador at **Washington** (Lord Halifax).

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Grade II men for Grade I men in essential industry, and this process will be developed to the fullest possible extent despite all the very real practical difficulties involved in small-scale enterprise such as is common in this country. Indeed we feel that we have already gone too far in certain directions, particularly in the basic primary industries, and this at a time when demands from the **United Kingdom** and the **United States** and our own overseas forces are continually increasing. Only a few days ago we were made aware that shipping in the **Pacific** is likely to be reduced by 25 per cent, with the result that the American forces serving in this area will become even more dependent upon New Zealand resources in foodstuffs, clothing, and services of many kinds. We were also told that the heavy demands of the present year for foodstuffs alone are likely to be increased by at least 50 per cent in the forthcoming twelve months.



**It is of course for Parliament to express its will after considering all the factors involved, and members will undoubtedly attach the greatest importance to the views of the President and yourself. Their one objective, I can assure you, and that of the Government and people of New Zealand, is to ensure that this Dominion should, in the future as in the past, make the greatest and most effective contribution which the capacity and resources of the country render possible. <sup>1</sup>**

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**<sup>1</sup> This telegram was repeated on 15 May to the High Commissioner for New Zealand in [Australia](#).**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 232 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR NEW ZEALAND (CANBERRA)<sup>2</sup>

232

*The Prime Minister to the High Commissioner for New Zealand (Canberra)*<sup>2</sup>

15 May 1943

The summary following sets out the main aspects of the problem to which I referred in my telegram of 14 May to Mr. Churchill, which was repeated to you earlier today.

Mr. Churchill asked last month that the New Zealand Division be used as an assault force for a special operation in **Europe**, for which purpose it was to be withdrawn immediately for training. I replied that in view of my pledge to Parliament that the future role of the Division would be reviewed at the end of the African campaign, I regretted I was not in a position to express my concurrence, but that I would place the whole matter before Parliament for their

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<sup>2</sup> Sir Carl A. Berendsen, KCMG; Permanent Head, Prime Minister's Department, **Wellington**, 1932-43; High Commissioner for New Zealand in **Australia**, 1943-44; New Zealand Minister in the **United States**, 1944-; at the time of this reference, Mr. C. A. Berendsen, CMG.

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consideration. Mr. Churchill accepted the position and another division was allotted for the task and sent into training. There-upon we were requested to consider making our force available as a follow-up division.

Mr. Jones discussed the whole matter with Mr. Churchill while in

**London**, and it was proposed, as a further result of their talks, that a scheme of relief for the longest service personnel of the Division should be instituted, covering up to 20 per cent of strength.

I then arranged with **General Freyberg** for Mr. Jones to proceed to the forward areas in **Tunisia** to examine and discuss every issue with him and to advise me as soon as possible. I have since received Mr. Jones's reports.

It appears, on first examination, that a large measure of relief for the men of the first three echelons would be possible, but only at the expense of the final capital troops required for the 3rd Division. Should Parliament agree to the retention of the 2nd NZEF in the **Middle East**, the relief scheme thus provided would be instituted. Shipping available in June would bring the men back to New Zealand early in July, their places on shipboard being taken by the relief force.

The whole question has so far been discussed in **War Cabinet** only; I have yet to broach it with the ordinary Cabinet, probably on Monday, following, I hope, the receipt of the message from Churchill and Roosevelt. <sup>1</sup> Discussion must then take place in caucus and in Parliament itself on 19 May.

Mr. Jones, on my directions, also raised with Mr. Churchill the question of **Freyberg's** promotion. As you know, we felt that **Freyberg's** loyalty to New Zealand should not be allowed indefinitely to react detrimentally against his chances of promotion. I have now been informed that **Freyberg** has been appointed temporarily to the command of the 10th Corps and that the permanency of this arrangement will depend apparently upon the **New Zealand Government's** advice to **Freyberg** himself. Mr. Jones strongly urges that **Freyberg** should be asked to pay a flying visit to New Zealand to discuss this and other related problems.

The major issue is, however, the future role of the Division, and this raises large questions of the utmost complexity. There are, first of all,

the direct requests from Churchill, and these will, I expect, be reinforced by one from Roosevelt. It is not only difficult at all times to resist an appeal of this nature from the **United Kingdom**, but there is much to be said for our standing by **Britain** to the very end.

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<sup>1</sup> No. 237.

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Manpower is, however, the overriding factor, as I explained in my telegram to Churchill, and since we cannot maintain both divisions we must choose the one or the other. If the **Middle East** division is to stay and the **Pacific** division is to be used to reinforce it, we are confronted with consequences both immediate and far-reaching in their nature. We undertook, when our manpower resources and the perils confronting us were both greater than they are today, to provide a division for offensive operations in the **Pacific**. Now, with diminishing manpower and, fortunately, with the greater degree of security, the point has been reached when we will probably have to tell Halsey <sup>1</sup> that we cannot complete our undertaking; though we could nevertheless for some time maintain a two-brigade group, and if, as now seems possible, we could obtain a Fijian brigade, we might yet provide a mixed 3rd New Zealand Division. <sup>2</sup>

We are, of course, alive to the necessity of avoiding any reduction of morale amongst our men in **New Caledonia** by changes which would delay unduly their offensive role or probably might result in their being used solely as garrison troops.

You will appreciate, and I will not enumerate, the very sound reasons why we should, from the long-term political point of view, maintain the strongest possible military and air forces in the **Pacific**. Even if we do not keep up the Division, we could, on the basis of our **Air Force** (which is likely to reach the 42,000 mark before long) still play no small part in offensive operations. This effective form of assistance could and should in fact entitle us to claim a say and a share in what is decided in the **Pacific** area, both now and in the future.

The effect of our decision upon relations with **Australia** has also not been overlooked. Just as the return of Australian troops has had an unsettling effect upon our own people, the retention of our Division must similarly continue to exercise an influence on Commonwealth troops and public opinion. We realise, too, that if we retain our Division in the **Middle East**, and if by so doing this necessitates the withdrawal of our **Pacific** division now, or ultimately, then **Australia** may feel we are taking our share of responsibilities in the **Pacific** too lightly. The Commonwealth Government may indeed consider that such action runs directly counter to their plea for greater energy and greater resources in the **Pacific** area. For our part we feel that the **Pacific** danger for us, though diminished, still persists, but that with the ever-increasing momentum of the flow of **United States** men and materials our position is being rendered increasingly more secure than is that of **Australia**. The circumstances of the two countries are undoubtedly different.

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<sup>1</sup> Admiral W. F. Halsey, Commander South Pacific Forces and **South Pacific Area**, 18 Oct 1942–15 Jun 1944.

<sup>2</sup> See Volume III, *Formation and Employment of 3rd New Zealand Division*.

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Leaving aside the strategic factors, of which you are well aware, we must consider finally the feelings of the men themselves on this matter and of the country generally. Whether the Division is withdrawn or not, a relief scheme to provide furlough appears to be essential. It is just unfortunate that it is beyond our capacity to supply fresh troops except at the expense of the 3rd Division. The facts of the situation appear to render no other solution possible. Above all things I want to avoid, and in good time, any form of collapse in our war effort due to straining our resources beyond their utmost practicable limit.

I cannot at this stage foretell what the decision of Parliament will be, nor, for that matter, how my own Cabinet will see the problem. We

**have throughout realised the necessity for taking the Commonwealth Government into our confidence, but until we had come to a decision ourselves, and the Government Cabinet could be informed and express their opinion, I have been reluctant to have the matter thus discussed. If, however, you feel that it would be unwise to delay discussing the question with Mr. Curtin, you are at full liberty to make the approach and to acquaint him with the nature of the problem which confronts us.**

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

233 – THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR NEW ZEALAND (CANBERRA) TO  
THE PRIME MINISTER

233

*The High Commissioner for New Zealand ( Canberra) to the Prime  
Minister*

16 May 1943

**I am sure it would be unwise not to keep Mr. Curtin (who arrives here tomorrow) fully informed of our situation and of the most difficult decision you must take in the near future. I propose to ask for an early interview, if possible tomorrow, and will telegraph his reaction. I have little doubt what he would prefer us to do, but none at all as to his fully understanding our difficulties.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 234 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

234

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

17 May 1943

I am deeply appreciative of the terms of your telegram of 13 May (No. 230) and assure you that we feel that the glorious record of the New Zealand Division is beyond praise. At its opening session Parliament will take the opportunity of expressing in a resolution the heartfelt gratitude and pride of the people of New Zealand in the achievements of their men.

The problem with which the Government and Parliament are now faced is indeed most difficult, and until after the discussion this week no decisions affecting the 2nd NZEF can be made. These decisions will include, of course, the War Office proposals for reliefs <sup>1</sup> and those put forward by Mr. Jones. <sup>2</sup>

As to your own position, I would like to offer you my most sincere congratulations on your appointment as Corps Commander, and in this connection I would be most grateful if you could advise me on the following points:

Firstly, is your appointment, upon which we have not received any official information other than from yourself and Mr. Jones, to be regarded as permanent or temporary?

Secondly, if I were to ask you to pay a flying visit to New Zealand for discussions on the matters referred to in your messages and mine, would you possibly be in a position to accept?

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<sup>1</sup> See *Furlough Scheme* (No. 258).



<sup>2</sup> See Nos. 225, 228, and 256.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 235 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

235

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

17 May 1943

Thank you very much for your cable and your congratulations. After my cable of 4 May ( **No. 224**) to you, I received a message of congratulation from Mr. Churchill which led me to think he had acted on your cable concerning my employment. On 9 May, however, the position became clearer and I was able to advise Mr. Jones that the appointment was temporary only and that General Horrocks would take over 10th Corps again at the end of the campaign. Further, I understand I am to be offered an Army Corps in the **Middle East** later. I have since handed over the Corps and returned to the Division. I have been given no indication as to when the matter is likely to be raised again, and from my point of view the later the better. In any case, no action will be taken without referring the whole question to you. I am sorry this uncertainty should have been an added complication at this stage.

I would gladly make a flying visit to New Zealand if you so desire. <sup>1</sup> If the decision of Parliament is that the force should remain here for the present, may I have the earliest notification so that arrangements for implementing the scheme for returning personnel can be put into operation before I leave. The time factor is the difficulty with regard to my proposed visit. After I have seen the Commander-in-Chief I shall know when I am required here for planning, &c., and I shall cable you later. In any case my stay would necessarily be short.

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<sup>1</sup> The Prime Minister replied on 18 May that it would be of the greatest help to the Government if **General Freyberg** could pay a short visit to the Dominion and offered assistance in obtaining

**passage by air.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 236 – THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR NEW ZEALAND (CANBERRA) TO THE PRIME MINISTER

236

### *The High Commissioner for New Zealand (Canberra) to the Prime Minister*

17 May 1943

Your telegrams of 15 May. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Prime Minister at noon today, and the following is an *aide-mémoire* of the views he expressed, which he wrote himself, and which he has now transmitted to me for your, and my, personal knowledge only:

Basic strategy imposes upon **Australia** holding the **Pacific** until **Hitler** has been defeated. A holding war in the **Pacific** imposes prolonged attrition on **Australia** and New Zealand whose manpower resources, already strained, may well be exhausted before **Hitler** is defeated. Should this happen, the failure would be disastrous in that the strategy would collapse, and its collapse would be due to our failure to provide the role assigned to us.

**Japan** is building up and on sea, land, and air is wearying us daily. More recently the combined effects of Japanese air and submarine attacks have been greatly to weaken our mountings for limited offensives, which are integral to our holding role.

The Kenney-Sutherland mission <sup>3</sup> was basically for greater air allocations. It is, however, clear that military and economic strength, plus transportation capacity, are integral to the effective use of air power. Therefore, the combined manpower of **Australia** and New Zealand is now deficient for all requirements in a lengthy holding of our **Pacific** bases.

On the higher diplomatic plane the fact that New Zealand would use up its **Pacific** division to (maintain ?) its **Middle East** division at strength would always prejudice the joint submissions of Halsey and MacArthur <sup>1</sup> for **Pacific** requirements, apart from the repercussion upon the Australian Government.

Finally, New Zealand was a party to the set-up in the **Pacific** and therefore, with **Australia**, obliged to agree to directives given MacArthur and Halsey. These directives require the use of our combined total resources as things are, and the total we have will be deficient if the strain is prolonged.

Malaria and tropical diseases in **New Guinea** and the **Solomons** cause heavy wastage in our forces. It could happen that a time would come when fighting and disease combined would compel **Australia** to ask for land forces to keep positions vital to holding.

This raises the question of whose forces should be sought. It is, in fact, desirable that the Union Jack should fly here as the standard of British interest in the **Pacific**. This presents serious physical problems, probably not surmountable, and makes all the more desirable joint Dominion forces as preferable to those of a foreign ally.

The Prime Minister obviously felt strongly on this matter as indicated by incidental remarks during the discussion, for example: 'that is precisely the line that Churchill and Roosevelt took with me, and if I had listened to them we would have lost **New Guinea**,' and 'it is tough that we should be asked to supply munitions to New Zealand while New Zealand troops are still in the **Middle East**.' While he reiterated that the decision must be entirely that of the **New Zealand Government**, and while he fully understood our perplexities, his opinion was unquestionably clear that all New Zealand troops should be available for the **Pacific**, a conclusion with which, on the balance narrowly, but definitely, I myself agree.

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<sup>2</sup> Nos. 231 and 232.

<sup>3</sup> General George C. Kenney, Commander Allied Air Forces in South-West Pacific, and Lieutenant-General Richard K. Sutherland, Chief of Staff to General MacArthur, 1939–45.

<sup>1</sup> General of the Army Douglas MacArthur; Commander-in-Chief United States Forces in the **Philippines**, 1941–42; Supreme Commander Allied Forces, South-West Pacific Area, 1942–45; C-in-C **Far East** and Supreme Commander for Allied Powers in **Japan**, 1945–51; Commander-in-Chief, United Nations Forces in **Korea**, 1950–51.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 237 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

237

### *The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

17 May 1943

Your telegram of 14 May ( **No. 231**) received through Lord Halifax. <sup>1</sup>

Both the President and I feel very strongly that it would be a great pity to withdraw the New Zealand Division from the **Mediterranean** theatre where it has given such splendid service. We hope means will be found to sustain both divisions in their present strength and station. If this cannot be done, it would be better when the time comes to accept a lower establishment. In the meantime, arrangements for meeting any deficiency in **Fiji** can be considered. <sup>2</sup>

The need for further training of the 2nd New Zealand Division after the arrival of the new draft and the relief of veterans will prevent that Division from coming into action again before September, and its Armoured Brigade will not be battle-worthy before October. Therefore, no serious drain need be expected until the last two months of the year. However, it will be of the greatest importance to have them available then.

Besides the above reasons, I must point out that the shipping required to repatriate the 2nd New Zealand Division will entail a far greater loss in manpower to the **United States** build-up in Great Britain for attacking **France** in 1944. Carrying the **9th Australian Division** home will weaken that build-up by about 40,000 men. Thus not merely would we have no gain but actually a serious blow would be inflicted on us in

other quarters.

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<sup>1</sup> Rt. Hon. the Earl of **Halifax**, KG, PC, OM, GCSI, GCIE; Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 1938–40; British Ambassador at **Washington**, 1941–46.

<sup>2</sup> At this date the **3rd NZ Division** was in **New Caledonia**.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 238 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR<sup>3</sup>

238

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for War*  
<sup>3</sup>

19 May 1943

An urgent request has been sent by the **New Zealand Government** to **General Freyberg**, GOC 2nd NZEF in the **Middle East**, to pay a short visit to New Zealand at once for the purpose of discussing in particular the future role of the 2nd New Zealand Division. It would be appreciated, therefore, if arrangements could be made for his immediate release and for the highest air priority to be given to him and to one other officer.

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<sup>3</sup> Rt. Hon. Sir (Percy) James Grigg, PC, KCB, KCSI; Secretary of State for War, 23 Feb 1942–4 Aug 1945.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 239 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

239

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

21 May 1943

I wish to inform you that Parliament today gave its concurrence to the retention of the 2nd NZEF in the **Mediterranean** theatre. The full position was placed before members, who considered every aspect. I can assure you that the House paid great heed to your own very eloquent appeal of 3 May <sup>1</sup> and also to the joint opinions expressed by President Roosevelt and yourself. Other telegrams from **General Freyberg** and the Minister of Defence (Mr. Jones) were also cited in support of the retention and use of the Division in **Europe**. There was, on the other hand, the known viewpoint of **Australia** and the keenly felt realisation that the Government and people of the Commonwealth would undoubtedly regard New Zealand's action as one of reluctance not only to assist to the fullest extent of our resources in the **Pacific** battle, in which the dangers to both our countries are so close, but also to take our share in the burden arising from tropical disease which takes so grim and heavy a toll among those serving in the forward areas. The choice was, therefore, by no means clear or easy, and it was in fact only made after most serious reflection and discussion in which members of all parties found themselves torn between conflicting thoughts and emotions. The decision was, however, finally arrived at with few dissentients.

In view of the increasing manpower difficulties of this Dominion, Parliament further accepted the view, to which you yourself refer, <sup>2</sup> that as and when it becomes necessary the establishment of the Division

should be reduced.

The future use of the 2nd NZEF will, of course, depend on the time it takes to absorb the relief force and also the 4th Armoured Brigade, which it is noted from your telegram under reference will not be battle-worthy until October. It is naturally the wish of the **New Zealand Government** that this brigade be re-absorbed into the New Zealand Division as soon as possible.

All these and other matters will, of course, be discussed with **General Freyberg**, whom I have requested to pay a flying visit to New Zealand within the next few weeks.

Arrangements are being made immediately to carry out the relief scheme as discussed in **London** by the New Zealand Minister of

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<sup>1</sup> No. 223.

<sup>2</sup> No. 237.

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Defence and yourself. <sup>1</sup> The provision of the *Nieuw Amsterdam* <sup>2</sup> for this purpose, as proposed by the **War Office**, <sup>3</sup> is warmly welcomed. I must, however, request that in accordance with the practice the **New Zealand Government** have always adopted, this ship shall be escorted both ways. While it is realised that the escort of fast ships is not in accord with Admiralty policy, the Government and people of New Zealand are naturally anxious that no possible precaution should be omitted against any risk of attack. The loss of 6000 men to a small country like New Zealand would be a disaster of the first magnitude.

Please give a copy of this message to Mr. Jones. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See *Furlough Scheme* (No. 253).

<sup>2</sup> *Nieuw Amsterdam*, **Holland-Amerika Line**, 36,287 tons.

<sup>3</sup> See *Furlough Scheme* (No. 258).

<sup>4</sup> This telegram was also repeated to Mr. Berendsen in **Canberra**.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 240 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR NEW ZEALAND (CANBERRA)

240

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the High Commissioner for  
New Zealand ( Canberra)*

22 May 1943

The decision of the Government and Parliament has already been conveyed to you in the telegram which I sent to Mr. Churchill last night, and I can assure you that this decision was, as you had anticipated, a most difficult one to reach.

The report of your interview with Mr. Curtin was most valuable, as was the *aide-mémoire* he was good enough to send for my information and consideration. Its full meaning and significance received the most careful consideration of the **War Cabinet**, the Government Cabinet, and the House, along with the views of Mr. Churchill, President Roosevelt, the **Combined Chiefs of Staff**, Generals Alexander, Montgomery and **Freyberg**, and our Minister of Defence, Mr. Jones, who on his visit to the Division in the forward areas had discussed the matters both with the Generals and with many of the men assembled to meet him. The fullest information available was placed before the House, in which the discussion took place in an atmosphere almost entirely removed from party politics and partisanship. There was much worried consideration on every aspect of the problem and much searching of heart and conscience by Ministers and members alike. All the relevant facts, including Mr. Curtin's opinion, which was given prominence, were analysed and re-analysed.

Mr. Churchill expressed the opinion jointly with President Roosevelt (in reply to my message of 14 May ( **No. 231**) repeated to you) that it

would be a pity to withdraw the New Zealand Division from the **Mediterranean** theatre, and it was hoped that means would be found to sustain both divisions in their present strength and station. <sup>1</sup> The message added that if this could not be done then it would be better when the time came to accept a lower establishment, and arrangements could in the meantime be made for meeting any deficiency in **New Caledonia**. This joint telegram concluded by referring to the loss in manpower for the build-up in **Europe** entailed by the removal of the **9th Australian Division** and, by inference, it left no doubt as to the further serious blow which the transport of the 2nd NZEF would similarly entail upon the accumulation of **United States** forces for the attack on **Europe**.

While I outlined in my telegram to you of 15 May ( **No. 232**) the main considerations and views which had been conveyed to us, I should I feel complete your information by setting out the opinions expressed by Mr. Jones.

His first recommendation from **Tunisia** was that Parliament should be asked to empower **War Cabinet** to agree to the Division being used for future operations after reorganisation. <sup>2</sup> Following upon his talks with the men, Mr. Jones expressed the belief that while there was a general desire on the part of the men to return home, there was no desire to fight in the **Solomons**. 'While I feel sure,' he stated, 'they would be prepared to serve where required, still I am convinced that if given the option the majority would prefer this theatre of war, where health conditions generally are certainly considerably superior.' The force of this consideration was neither minimised nor over-stressed, but the House were in entire accord that if such action were demanded in the essential conduct of the war or the safety of the country we would not hesitate to send our men into any locality, however hazardous from the point of view of health, nor would they object to go. We are most anxious that there should be no feeling on the part of Australians or Americans that we are in any way shirking, or leaving to them, service in the tropics. Our men in **New Caledonia**, and our airmen and naval units in **Guadalcanal** and **Espiritu Santo**, and no doubt in the areas

which may later be captured, will necessarily be subject to all those tropical conditions which are causing so intense a strain and toll on men's endurance. Mr. Jones summed up by giving us his opinion that the great majority of the 2nd Division would wish to return home, but that, on the other hand, the men had no expectation that

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<sup>1</sup> No. 237.

<sup>2</sup> See *Furlough Scheme* (No. 256).

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there would be a general withdrawal of the Division. They would welcome a period of furlough, and this, Mr. Jones thought, would satisfy them; and moreover, that after a period of leave a large number would want to serve again with the 2nd Division.

A matter to which Mr. Jones devoted great care and attention was this question of the relief on furlough of the longest service personnel. He recommended that the remaining men of the first three echelons, some 9000, should be returned if an equivalent number of men were available in New Zealand to replace them. On investigation, the relief of 6000 in June appeared to be practicable, with an equivalent number returning in July to fill their places. These will require to be re-absorbed, together with the 4th Armoured Brigade, which will not be battle-worthy until October, before which date the Division is hardly likely to be ready for action.

Churchill's direct appeal dated 3 May <sup>1</sup> and [Freyberg's](#) telegram, <sup>2</sup> couched in moving terms, together with those of Mr. Jones, undoubtedly carried great weight in the House. Copies of these messages will be sent to you by mail. After prolonged discussion on Tuesday at a joint meeting of both Government and War Cabinets, it was decided to submit the following proposals to the House of Representatives:

1. That the 2nd NZEF should remain in the [Middle East](#) and that it should be available for operations in [Europe](#).

2. That both forces— **Mediterranean** and **Pacific**—should be maintained for as long as possible with increasingly smaller establishments in accordance with the availability of manpower.
  3. That the relief scheme for **Middle East** men discussed by Mr. Jones with Mr. Churchill and **General Freyberg** should be put into operation in the first instance on the basis of the plan put forward by the **War Office**, namely, for the relief of some 6000 of the men of the first three echelons on condition that they be replaced by men from New Zealand.
  4. That no further replacements for the **Middle East** division be provided for until those returned to New Zealand under the leave scheme should again become available for service.
  5. That further reinforcements for the **Middle East** and **Pacific** divisions be suspended during 1943. *Note:* It seems possible that the **Middle East** division might be sustained for a considerable period by drawing upon its ancillary units.
  6. That the **Pacific** division be reorganised on a reduced scale, such reorganisation to include adjustments between this division and its capital troops at present concentrated in New Zealand.
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<sup>1</sup> No. 223.

<sup>2</sup> No. 230.

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It was also decided to complete negotiations for the incorporation of a **Fijian Mobile Brigade** in the **3rd Division**, subject to discussion with **Halsey** and **Barrowclough**. <sup>1</sup>

Though merely referred to in the House so far, it is also the Government's intention to re-examine the Home Defence position with a view to accepting **General Puttick's** memorandum of 8 March in which he suggested a reversion to the old Territorial system and the abandonment of the cadres. <sup>2</sup> This would not only release additional Grade I men for the overseas forces, but it would enable probably some 6000 or so Grade II men to be released for industry.

Other recommendations concerned the **Air Force**, which is now



being forced by circumstances to draw heavily upon the Army for its personnel.

The discussion in the House was in secret session and was comparatively short. I spoke on Thursday evening and was followed on Friday forenoon by Mr. **Holland**<sup>3</sup> speaking for the Opposition as a whole ....<sup>4</sup> Although no vote was taken, only six or seven members could be said to favour the return of the 2nd NZEF to New Zealand, and four or five of them would not have voted against the Government if a division had been taken.

The general attitude was that the Division should be used where it could be most effective in the world war, and on the balance it was felt that it would be most effective in operations in the **Mediterranean** area.

I would like you to assure Mr. Curtin that this decision is by no means based on any undervaluation by the **New Zealand Government** and Parliament of the importance of the situation in the **Pacific**, and that we are at all times anxious and willing to co-operate with **Australia** to the full extent of our resources. In addition to the **Pacific** force in **New Caledonia**, which still amounts to more than two brigades, and the troops in **Fiji** and the garrisons in **Tonga** and **Norfolk Island**—in all totalling over 19,000 men—there are our **Air Force** groups serving in **Guadalcanal**, **Espiritu Santo**, and **New Caledonia** and **Fiji**—now amounting to seven squadrons containing eighty-nine planes, which will be increased as planes arrive to fourteen squadrons and 6600 men. Our **Air Force** in New Zealand itself at present consists of eight squadrons and various types of planes, including trainers, in all totalling nearly 600, with personnel of close on 28,000 in New Zealand and 3000 in the **Pacific**. We understand that planes are the most urgent requirement for which **Australia** is pressing in **Washington**, and we feel that our 18—squadron programme,

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<sup>1</sup> See Volume III, *Formation and Employment of 3rd NZ Division*.

<sup>2</sup> Not published.

<sup>3</sup> **Rt. Hon. S. G. Holland**, PC, CH; Leader of the Opposition, 1940–49; Prime Minister of New Zealand 13 Dec 1949–.

<sup>4</sup> Text omitted refers to opinions expressed by individual members in the secret session.

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for which allocations of aircraft have been promised, will constitute a considerable New Zealand contribution to the striking power and defences of the South and South-West Pacific. We are of course also assisting to the fullest extent possible through our naval units. The *Leander*<sup>1</sup> is under the orders of COMSOPAC,<sup>2</sup> as will be the *Achilles*<sup>3</sup> when she returns from **Britain** after refit. There are, in addition, our minesweepers, and we are also giving to the Americans in the forward areas valuable assistance in equipment and trained personnel for radio direction-finding work. Taking all these forms of military activity into account, together with the industrial effort, it cannot be contended, I feel, that New Zealand is not making a real and whole-hearted contribution in the **Pacific** area.

When **General Freyberg** arrives here, as I expect he will during the course of the next few weeks, I hope it may be possible to arrange for discussions on both the **Pacific** and European spheres between representatives of the Commonwealth and New Zealand Governments, **General Freyberg**, General MacArthur, and Admiral Halsey. On such an occasion I am sure that the viewpoints of both Governments could be discussed and clearly understood and appreciated.

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<sup>1</sup> HMNZS *Leander*, 6-inch cruiser, 7270 tons; badly damaged by a torpedo in night action off **Kolombangara**, 12–13 Jul 1943; went to the **United States** for repairs and rearming and afterwards reverted to the **Royal Navy**.

<sup>2</sup> **Commander South Pacific Area (Admiral W. F. Halsey).**

<sup>3</sup> **HMNZS *Achilles*, 6-inch cruiser, 7030 tons.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 241 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

241

### *The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

26 May 1943

Your telegram of 21 May ( **No. 239**).

The farsighted decision of the Parliament of New Zealand, given almost unanimously under your outstanding and courageous leadership, to leave the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force in the **Mediterranean** area, has filled me and my colleagues with gratitude and admiration and will, I know, be received with lively pleasure by their comrades-in-arms in **Africa**. This characteristic response will have results of high importance to the common cause of the **United Nations**. The loyalty and courage of New Zealand, which is so dear to all of us, have never shone so brightly as in these grim years of war, especially during the last year when you have been threatened in your homeland by **Japan**. The (proportion ?) and greatness of your determination that your Division should continue to play its part in the liberation of **Europe** will only fully be seen when facts which now must be secret can be made public.

But, in the meantime, let me, while sending you my heartfelt thanks and appreciation, reaffirm the pledge I have so often given, and which I repeated in my speech to Congress, that the Mother Country will wage unflinching and relentless war against **Japan**, side by side with the **United Nations**, to our fullest capacity in accordance with the best strategic employment, while there is breath in our bodies and while blood flows in our veins.

**With reference to the last paragraph of your telegram of 21 May, I am very happy to give you the assurance for which you ask.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 242 – THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR NEW ZEALAND (CANBERRA) TO THE PRIME MINISTER

242

### *The High Commissioner for New Zealand ( Canberra) to the Prime Minister*

28 May 1943

My interview with the Prime Minister as a result of your telegrams <sup>1</sup> was, as you will have expected, far from [easy ?]. The Prime Minister's reactions were strong. I took the line that while I understood and sympathised with him, the decision which had been come to was the result of a most meticulously careful and anxious consideration of all relevant factors, some of which, for example the detailed views of **Freyberg** and Churchill, were not available to us here. You had obviously gone to considerable lengths in expounding the Australian point of view in order that Mr. Curtin's views should be given the fullest possible weight. The decision had been almost a unanimous one. In any case the decision had been taken and could not now be altered, and anything which might possibly be construed as recriminations between **Australia** and New Zealand could do no good and, indeed, would probably do harm.

At the conclusion of the conversation, which grew somewhat less difficult as it progressed, the Prime Minister said he would like to consider what, if anything, he would wish me to convey to you, and undertook to let me know if and when he wished a message to be sent. I have been waiting for three days for him to move in the matter and I am inclined to think now that he will say nothing. I hope this is the case, as I am sure it will be the best solution, and that any temporary awkwardness is much more likely to disappear normally and rapidly if nothing further is said. I am certain that it would be most unwise for either you or I to raise this matter again unless and until Mr. Curtin

does so. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nos. 239 and 240.

<sup>2</sup> On 31 May Mr. Berendsen was advised: 'The Prime Minister and War Cabinet very much regret to learn of Curtin's reaction, but they agree entirely as to the course you advise.'

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 243 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

243

### *The Prime Minister of Australia to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

1 June 1943

Your High Commissioner has made known to me the decision of your Parliament regarding the retention of your Division in the **Middle East**. I do not presume to offer any opinion on the conclusion reached as this represents the will of the New Zealand people. It does not, however, alter the facts:

- (1) That the immediate defence of New Zealand is in the Pacific Ocean, and that the concentration of enemy strength is in the islands to the north of **Australia**, which is between the enemy and New Zealand. If we had not insisted on the return of the AIF, **New Guinea** would have been lost and we would have now been fighting on the mainland of **Australia**.
- (2) The place of every soldier New Zealand keeps away from the **Pacific** theatre has to be filled by either an Australian or an American.
- (3) **Australia** has given substantial material aid to increase and sustain New Zealand's war effort on the basis of our common defence in the **Pacific**. In effect, this has amounted to an export of our limited manpower.
- (4) It would seem to have been preferable to have had the conference which you suggested to the High Commissioner, before this important decision was taken. Having regard to the set-up which governs global strategy and operations in the respective theatres, and the machinery in **Washington** and **London** on which the various Governments are represented, it is not apparent what can be achieved by such a conference between the representatives mentioned, particularly as the Commanders of the South and South-West Pacific Areas are not directly responsible to the Governments of



**New Zealand or Australia.**

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

244 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE HIGH  
COMMISSIONER FOR NEW ZEALAND (CANBERRA)

244

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the High Commissioner for  
New Zealand ( Canberra)*

**2 June 1943**

**Have you seen Curtin's comments on the **New Zealand Government's**  
decision, contained in his telegram to me of 1 June ?**

**The terms of our reply are now under consideration.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 245 – THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR NEW ZEALAND (CANBERRA) TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

245

*The High Commissioner for New Zealand ( Canberra) to the Prime  
Minister of New Zealand*

**3 June 1943**

**Your telegram of 2 June.**

**Curtin is in Sydney. I was informed yesterday by the External Affairs Department that a telegram, of which I was to receive a copy, had been despatched to you, and was given the gist of it and have received the copy this morning.**

**I cannot see that any useful purpose would be served by entering into an argument on this matter, particularly at present.**

**As I see it, the plain fact is that after most careful and painstaking examination two Dominions have come to separate decisions which are fundamentally divergent (from one point of view though perhaps not from others). Both Dominions have made their decisions and are irrevocably bound by them, and my feeling is that the only course is for each of us now to make the best of the situation. If you reply to the Prime Minister's statements one by one, then the probability is that an argument will develop, and as the decisions cannot be altered now this could not possibly do good and would probably do harm.**

**I am bound to say that I cannot see how any useful purpose is likely to be achieved in this matter (whatever it might be in other respects) by the proposed conference, even if it could be brought about, which might not be easy in view of the fact that Halsey and MacArthur have just concluded conversations.**

**Shortly, I think we have got to agree to differ on this important matter; that we must make the best of the situation; that in time a pretty good best can be made of it; and that it would be useless and definitely unwise to argue now that the decision has been made.**

**My suggestion, for what it is worth, is that you reply to Mr. Curtin somewhat on these lines:**

**Fully appreciate and understand his point of view; that your decision, like [Australia's](#), was taken after most anxious thought and after attaching the fullest weight to every possible consideration, including the known views and policy of [Australia](#); that they were both completely honest decisions on facts as each saw them; that New Zealand deplures any divergency in policy of the two Dominions just as [Australia](#) does; that we must both endeavour to keep such divergencies to the minimum; and that you hope it will be still possible with this object for us to continue to collaborate and, within the limits of our respective policies, to co-ordinate our war activities to the utmost degree that this is possible.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 246 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

246

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

4 June 1943

There is no doubt that the **New Zealand Government's** decision to keep the 2nd NZEF in the **Middle East** has been welcomed on all sides.<sup>1</sup> The scheme for the return of personnel on leave has worked smoothly and has been very well received by the men generally.

I expect to leave here by air on 6 or 7 June, travelling via England, which is the fastest route.

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<sup>1</sup> **General Freyberg** was advised of this decision on 22 May. See *Furlough Scheme (No. 261)*.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

247 – LETTER FROM PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT TO THE PRIME MINISTER  
OF NEW ZEALAND

247

*Letter from President Roosevelt to the Prime Minister of New  
Zealand*

9 June 1943

DEAR MR. PRIME MINISTER

Just before Winston Churchill left here, he told me that your Parliament had agreed that the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force should be kept in the **Mediterranean**. Congratulations and thanks!

I hope much that the next **Mediterranean** operations will be so speedy and so successful that your troops can get home to rest a bit and be ready for the operations against **Japan**.

I do hope that Mrs. Roosevelt can visit you.<sup>2</sup> We are all doing much talking about it—but don't say anything yet! Give my regards to Walter Nash.

With every good wish,  
As ever yours

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

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<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Roosevelt arrived in New Zealand by air on 27 Aug 1943 and left again on 3 Sep for **Australia**.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 248 – LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

248

*Letter from the Prime Minister of New Zealand to President  
Roosevelt*

14 July 1943

DEAR PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

I wish to acknowledge and thank you for your very kind personal letter of 9 June, in which you refer to the decision of Parliament that the 2nd New Zealand Division should remain in the **Mediterranean** theatre.

This decision was arrived at only after long and anxious consideration of the rival claims of the two regions— **Pacific** and **European**— and of the advice and opinions of those concerned, including Mr. Churchill and yourself and the **Combined Chiefs of Staff**, and of the growing manpower difficulties under which we are now labouring in the fourth year of war.

Having decided the matter, it is our intention to continue to maintain the 2nd Division for future operations in the **European** theatre as long as our resources and the needs of the situation permit. It is also our intention to maintain the 3rd Division in the **Pacific** as a two-brigade force for immediate service with Admiral Halsey's forces, up till such time as our remaining manpower resources will not permit of its reinforcement.

Our **Pacific** air and naval commitments will, of course, have first priority, and we will continue to devote our full productive effort towards

the sustenance of your forces and our own in the **South Pacific Area**.

I was delighted to learn that you were hoping that Mrs. Roosevelt could visit this part of the world, and I can assure you we join with you in that regard and would assure her of a most enthusiastic and warm-hearted welcome.

I regret that it will not be possible for Mr. Nash to return to **Washington** before our General Election is held. This should take place, I anticipate, in the latter half of September, and naturally Mr. Nash's future movements will depend upon its outcome.

Kind regards,  
Yours sincerely

P. FRASER



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 249 – ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON) TO HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEAF (CAIRO)

249

*Army Headquarters (Wellington) to Headquarters 2nd NZEF (Cairo)*

5 February 1943

Personal for Brigadier Stevens.

The Government has been considering the practicability of bringing back to New Zealand personnel who have been absent from New Zealand for three years and increasing the reinforcement draft to compensate. It is suggested that the next reinforcement draft of 2000, to leave approximately at the end of March, could be increased to 3000. <sup>1</sup> It is desired to know the reaction at your end and whether you have any proposals to implement the scheme. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The 9th Reinforcements left New Zealand on 14 May 1943.

<sup>2</sup> The replacement of long-service personnel with reinforcements from New Zealand had also been considered by **General Freyberg** and Brigadier Stevens. In a letter to **General Freyberg** on 12 Jan 1943, Brigadier Stevens had written: 'I have been thinking a lot about the possibility of exchanging old hands with new arrivals, who would have to be additional to the normal drafts from New Zealand. I think we would be well advised in due course to make the suggestion to Army HQ ourselves. Similar action was taken in 1918. I have not discussed it with anybody yet, but have jotted down odd thoughts on the subject....'

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 250 – HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEF TO ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON)

250

### *Headquarters 2nd NZEF to Army Headquarters (Wellington)*

8 February 1943

In reply to your telegram of 5 February.

The possibility of such a change-over of personnel has actually been discussed with the GOC at intervals in the last few months.

While the 2nd NZEF is so widely dispersed as at present (Syrian **Tripoli** to Libyan **Tripoli**) and as the 2nd New Zealand Division will probably be engaged in active operations for several months, the procedure for such a change-over presents obvious difficulties. I think also that the change-over will have to some degree an unsettling effect on the force. I am taking immediate steps to consult the GOC.

In the meantime the following points are relevant:

- ( There are roughly 3200 of the **First Echelon** still serving, all of whom a) have now served three years; also 3000 of the **Second Echelon** whose three years are up in May, and 3200 of the **Third Echelon** whose three years are up in August. If the change-over is to be after three years' service the numbers to be sent from New Zealand will have to approach the above figures, i.e., exceed 10,000, and drafts would have to arrive at appropriate dates. It would in many ways be preferable to change over a whole echelon at one time.
- ( Exigencies of the service here may demand the retention of certain b) key personnel.
- ( Those selected for return would come from arms of the service c) proportionately to the numbers still serving. The draft from New Zealand should consist of the same numbers.
- ( Shipping difficulties might impose long delays. We could probably

**d) arrange, however, to have our draft for return assembled at [Maadi](#) by the time the draft from New Zealand arrived.**

**The general conclusion is that we were beginning to expect something of the kind, and that if the Government think the scheme advisable we must do our best to comply. I must make it clear that these are my views only, and that the GOC will doubtless have certain points to put forward.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 251 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

251

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

11 February 1943

I have received a copy of Army Headquarters' message of 5 February (No. 249) to Brigadier Stevens. Although a question of policy outside my province, I had considered raising the matter with you at the conclusion of this campaign. We are at present preparing for further operations, and as you will realise it would be most unsettling to the Division to have the matter mentioned at this stage. If for any reason the Government should decide to implement the scheme before the **Tunis** operation is completed, I would earnestly suggest that the Division should be withdrawn from an operational role before the matter is promulgated.

I shall discuss the question of implementing the Government's policy with Stevens and cable suggestions later.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 252 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

252

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

24 February 1943

Further to my telegram of 11 February. For your information, the return of the **9th Australian Division** has not had any unsettling effect on the men, who appear keen to see this campaign through. I am certain, however, that the policy of returning men after three years' service has much to commend it.

I have now had an opportunity of discussing discreetly with the Brigadiers the question of implementing the policy, and I feel certain a satisfactory scheme could be arranged when the Division is withdrawn from its operational role. It has been pointed out that many **First Echelon** men are in key positions, but these could be replaced, just as battle casualties are replaced, without interfering with the efficiency of the Division. As suggested, the change can be most easily effected during the period of reorganisation.

With the object of arriving at a fair solution which would cause the maximum satisfaction and the least criticism here and in New Zealand, the following suggestions are made.

There is no doubt that some men would not wish to return to New Zealand until the end of the war, but leaving the matter to choice would place the individual in an invidious position. It is felt that length of service overseas should be the sole basis of selection, that selection should be by ballot, and that return to New Zealand should be compulsory without right of appeal. Further, it is felt that the men returned to New Zealand should be given the right to return to the **Middle East** at a later date should they so desire. We should, of course,



**be glad to have them back and would keep jobs for them.**

**With regard to officers, a quota of one per twenty-five men, up to and including the rank of major, could be selected on the same conditions. Officers above the rank of major would have to be considered individually, but a quota could be included in each group returned.**

**There are 1400 of the **First Echelon** with the Division here and 1800 in the 4th Brigade and other units at **Maadi** and elsewhere. It is assumed that only part of this total would be returned to New Zealand at one time. In making a selection, questions such as age, marriage, number of children, &c., might be taken into consideration, but as all would be sent back in due course it is felt very strongly here that selection by lot, as recommended above, would be the fairest and would cause the least controversy.**

**Lastly, I feel that it would help the smooth running of the scheme if the policy was not announced until it was ready to be implemented. The men here would be withdrawn from the Division after the ballot and would go to Base for return to New Zealand on duty. The Government's policy could be announced at the same time here and in New Zealand, together with the names of the first group returning.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 253 – THE HON. F. JONES (LONDON) TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

253

*The Hon. F. Jones ( London) to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

17 April 1943

Yesterday, after lunching with Mr. Churchill, I had a long talk with him on the question of our Division in North Africa. I was shown the cable he sent you regarding its proposed future employment <sup>1</sup> and he expressed the hope that your reply would be favourable.

I asked him whether, in the event of our being able to send additional troops as replacements with the next batch of reinforcements, it would be possible to release gradually for return to the Dominion those troops who had seen much combatant service. He was quite favourable to the idea provided arrangements could be made accordingly. He immediately sent for General Ismay, <sup>2</sup> with whom we both discussed the matter, and that officer has been directed to investigate and report to Mr. Churchill, who will then advise me. If the idea should be found practicable and be approved, kindly let me know how many additional troops could be sent with the next draft of reinforcements which I understand may be leaving shortly.

With reference to your cable of 3 April, <sup>3</sup> I raised the matter several days ago with Sir James Grigg and again yesterday with Mr. Churchill. The latter is looking into the prospect of granting **General Freyberg** a senior command and, at the same time, of meeting your wishes that he continue to be associated with the New Zealand Forces.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Proposed Withdrawal of 2nd New Zealand Division ( April-May 1943)*, (No. 210).

<sup>2</sup> General Lord Ismay, GCB, CH, DSO; at time of reference Lieutenant-General Sir Hastings Ismay; Chief of Staff to Minister of Defence, 1940–46; Deputy Secretary (Military) to United Kingdom War Cabinet, 1940–45; Additional Secretary (Military) to Cabinet, 1945–46; Chief of Staff to Viceroy of **India**, 1947.

<sup>3</sup> Not published. See [page 192, note 3](#).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

254 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE HON. F. JONES (LONDON)

254

*The Prime Minister to the Hon. F. Jones ( London)*

19 April 1943

Your telegram of 17 April.

The proposed arrangements for the replacement of the longest service men in the Division are much appreciated. I have just sent another personal message to Mr. Churchill about the use of New Zealand troops and have asked him also to convey its contents to you. <sup>1</sup> It is essential for you to discuss all these matters as early as possible with **General Freyberg**, who, in response to my request that he sees you at once, has just informed me that this can be arranged. He states:

Operations have now reached a semi-static state very different from the **Mareth** operations in progress when Mr. Jones was in the **Middle East** last month. I can make adequate arrangements here for his safety, and suggest that he comes via **Algiers** to see Generals Eisenhower and Alexander. You will realise that it may be difficult to see all the troops here. His presence in the forward area would be most welcome. <sup>2</sup>

Will you please endeavour to return to the **Middle East** at once and report to me as early as possible before Parliament meets on 19 May on the various matters discussed with Mr. Churchill.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Proposed Withdrawal of 2nd New Zealand Division ( April-May 1943)*, (No. 216).

<sup>2</sup> For full text see No. 213.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 255 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG<sup>3</sup>

255

*The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*<sup>3</sup>

22 April 1943

Thank you for your most helpful message of 18 April.<sup>4</sup> I have now been advised by Mr. Jones that he is awaiting transport to **Africa**.

I am most reluctant to intrude matters upon you in the midst of the anxieties of battle, and I appreciate that it may be some days before you are able to receive this message. At the moment our chief desire and care is, I assure you, that every success will be achieved by the Division in this momentous battle without undue loss and strain.

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<sup>3</sup> This telegram was repeated to Mr. Jones in **London**.

<sup>4</sup> See *Proposed Withdrawal of 2nd New Zealand Division (April-May 1943)*, (No. 213).

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The whole future role of the 2nd Division must now be decided by Parliament, and much depends upon Mr. Jones's report to me before the opening of the session on 19 May. He will inform you of his discussions with Mr. Churchill and the **New Zealand Government**, and the reasons for the decisions that have been taken.

I think you should know that there is a considerable difference of opinion in the country and in Parliament as to the future role of the 2nd Division. At the last session, called specially for the purpose of discussing the Government's policy in relation to the manpower needs of the armed forces and industry, approval was given to the reinforcement of both the 2nd and 3rd Divisions on the clear understanding that the

number of Grade I men available would suffice for only another year. Parliament also understood, and I gave my pledge accordingly, that the retention of the 2nd Division for future operations, or its return to New Zealand, would be considered at the end of the Tunisian campaign, and that there would be no question of our men being used in any theatre other than North Africa without the prior knowledge and approval of the House.

There is strong feeling on the part of the people, Parliament, and the Government that those who have served in the 2nd NZEF longest should be brought back on furlough, even if the Division as a whole is not brought back. This matter has also been discussed by Mr. Jones with Mr. Churchill, who agreed to the suggestion that a proportion of the personnel of the Division should be relieved by fresh troops sent from New Zealand for this purpose. Mr. Churchill expressed the opinion that arrangements could be made for, say, 20 per cent to be relieved without impairing the efficiency of the Division. <sup>1</sup> Our own War Cabinet, who have had the question under consideration for some time, are of the opinion that the following qualifications and conditions should be adopted in giving effect to any plan for returning long-service personnel from the 2nd NZEF to New Zealand:

- (1) First preference to be given to men who have had the longest and most meritorious service in active operations, with,
- (2) Special consideration to be given to married men with heaviest family responsibilities, and,
- (3) To only sons.

In addition, full weight should of course continue as at present to be given to the men's physical and mental condition.

It is appreciated that this is merely a statement of principles and that procedure must be left to your own discretion, and that, in any case, you would wish to discuss the whole matter with Mr. Jones.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Proposed Withdrawal of 2nd New Zealand Division* (April-May 1943), (No. 214).

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**Our understanding of the arrangements is that 20 per cent relief would eventually affect the whole Division, but that it would be carried out in stages as your military requirements and available shipping might permit. As a first instalment towards replacement, Army Headquarters have been instructed to use the *Dominion Monarch*<sup>1</sup> to the utmost capacity, and some 500 men are being sent with the 9th Reinforcements.<sup>2</sup> Future drafts depend, of course, upon Parliament's decision as to the future role of the Division.**

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**<sup>1</sup> *MV Dominion Monarch*, Shaw Savill and Albion Co., Ltd., 27,155 tons.**

**<sup>2</sup> The total strength of the 9th Reinforcements was 3500 all ranks.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 256 – THE HON. F. JONES<sup>3</sup> TO THE PRIME MINISTER

256

*The Hon. F. Jones<sup>3</sup> to the Prime Minister*

30 April 1943

I have discussed the questions of the future employment of the Division and the return of long-service personnel with **General Freyberg**.

Provided the war in North Africa ends shortly, it would seem advisable not to withdraw the Division from active operations until the campaign is over.

As you know, the Division has taken part in all the fighting since June last, and **General Freyberg** is of the opinion that at the close of this campaign opportunity should be taken to carry out a general reorganisation of the Division. The 4th Armoured Brigade has to be re-absorbed, the services require to be adapted as a result of becoming an armoured formation, and combined training will be necessary. It would be approximately three months from the close of the Tunisian campaign before the Division would be ready to take the field in any future operations.

I suggest that Parliament be asked to empower **War Cabinet** to agree to the Division being used for future operations after reorganisation is complete, subject to the usual safeguards in operation between the **United Kingdom** and New Zealand Governments as to the employment of the Division.

I feel that we should press the British Government to issue the 4th Armoured Brigade with equipment with the least possible delay so that the Division can take the field complete. The 4th Armoured Brigade has now been at Base training with incomplete equipment for eight months,



and it is highly desirable that this period should not be extended beyond the time required by the Division to reorganise.

The return of long-service personnel has been considered in great detail, including the implementing of the conditions set out in your telegram of 22 April. **General Freyberg** is of the opinion that the scheme can be introduced without loss of efficiency provided that it is done gradually. He considers the **New Zealand Government's** plan could be implemented satisfactorily during the period of reorganisation.

The following figures are of interest: Of the **First Echelon** there are at present serving with the Division 207 officers, 1334 other ranks; with the 4th Armoured Brigade, now at **Maadi Camp**, 52 officers and 485 other ranks; and with non-divisional and Base units, &c., 154 officers and 911 other ranks, making a total of 413 officers and 2730 other ranks. Of this total 125 officers and 373 other ranks were married on enlistment.

The figures for the **Second Echelon** are as follows: Still serving in the 2nd NZEF—323 officers and 2653 other ranks, of whom 121 officers and 529 other ranks were married on enlistment.

For the **Third Echelon**: 262 officers and 2900 other ranks are still serving, of whom 107 officers and 665 other ranks were married on enlistment.

**General Freyberg** considers that there will be no difficulty in giving preference to married men who have had the longest service overseas. Size of family could also be taken into account.

As there are no records here showing 'only sons' that information would have to be supplied by New Zealand. Does this refer to only surviving sons? If not, I consider the implementing of your suggestion would inevitably create difficulty, as for instance in cases where a family is comprised of males only and all are serving. It might be possible to deal with this category by the existing machinery for compassionate leave.

The only real difficulty appears to be the question of applying the principle of meritorious service in active operations. All three echelons entered active operations at the same time and the Second and Third Echelons have seen more fighting than the First. It would be impracticable to examine individual cases and it would be most invidious to try to compare meritorious service between echelons.

It is felt by **General Freyberg** that the fairest method would be to accept length of service overseas as the determining factor in selecting categories for return. Preference within that category could be given, firstly, to married men, secondly, to single men who have served in the field, and thirdly, to single men in non-divisional and Base units. This procedure, it is felt, would meet the conditions suggested in your cable and could be carried out in turn with the Second and Third Echelons and later drafts.

The order of return would then be, excluding for the moment the question of only sons:

- (i) Married men in the **First Echelon**.
- (ii) Single men in the **First Echelon** who have served in the field.
- (iii) Single men in the **First Echelon** in non-divisional and Base units.
- (iv) Married men in the **Second Echelon**.
- (v) Single men in the **Second Echelon** who have served in the field.
- (vi) Single men in the **Second Echelon** in non-divisional and Base units; and so on.

Where any category exceeds the number of vacancies, selection should be by ballot.

It is suggested that the scheme should be implemented as soon as reinforcements arrive, assuming the Division is free from operational duty. **General Freyberg** considers he could release 500 men over and above those released by the extra 500 being despatched. This means, assuming the Division is then at Base, that up to 1000 men could be sent back to New Zealand by the earliest available ship after the arrival of reinforcements.

Officers present certain special difficulties as a very large proportion of the senior officers, including many commanding officers, belong to the **First Echelon**. I feel they should be released on a quota basis by selection. The initial quota will be one officer to twenty other ranks. The position is to be reviewed from time to time and the quota increased as circumstances enable this to be done.

For certain more senior officers whose responsibilities and duties have been most arduous, it would be advisable to arrange special leave to New Zealand for short periods as they can be spared.

It is considered here that any of the 2nd NZEF personnel should be allowed, if they so wish, to come back later to the **Middle East**.

It is most desirable that you should give some indication of what action is to be taken with the men when they reach New Zealand, *e.g.*, are they to be liable for further overseas service, and if so, what length of leave with pay are they to receive, or are they to be discharged, &c.

There is a small number of men who enlisted in England in 1939–40. Presumably, if they so wish, they should be given leave to England. Their subsequent disposal is complicated by possible liabilities under **United Kingdom** legislation. For instance, in the event of being discharged, would they be liable for further service with the United Kingdom Forces?

Men in sufficient numbers to complete the relief of the **First Echelon** should be despatched from New Zealand at the earliest opportunity. This means roughly 2500 all ranks over and above the 500 already arranged for.

Once this scheme of reliefs is started it could follow through with the **Second and Third Echelons**, but the rate of release will necessarily depend on the rate that replacement personnel will arrive, the availability of shipping, and the operational situation at the time.

**I suggest for your consideration that you negotiate with the **United Kingdom** authorities to have one vessel so placed at your disposal as to ensure the conveyance of the men released and of those to relieve them.**

**It will, of course, be necessary for the normal reinforcement drafts to continue.**

**At the present moment the Railway Construction and Maintenance Group is really employed only part time, and the Railway Operating Group is not employed. In due course, members of these units will be returning to New Zealand as part of the Second and Third Echelons, &c. It is for consideration whether the Government should now reduce overseas commitments by not providing reliefs for this personnel. The two Groups would thus gradually disappear. <sup>1</sup> The Army Troops Companies and Mechanical Equipment Company are fully employed, but their retention here is open to consideration by the Government. The Government could reduce its manpower commitments overseas by the gradual return of all these units or by using them as reinforcements for the Division.**

**Regarding cases of graded men now at Base, these will continue to be reviewed on medical grounds as at present and will continue to be returned at an increasing rate. Those who are graded through the result of wounds or sickness suffered whilst with the Division will be dealt with under the scheme of release given in detail above.**

**It is fully realised that any scheme of this nature must bear the closest examination. It would be impossible to satisfy all those interested, but I feel that there would be the minimum of criticism here and in New Zealand if length of service overseas is decided upon as the basis for fixing categories. Length of service is fact and easily determined. Merit, on the other hand, is very much a matter of opinion on which views are certain to be heated and divergent, especially where husbands and sons and wives and mothers are concerned. The scheme as suggested would be simple to put into operation and regulate, and its fairness as a policy would be unassailable by the men here or in New**

**Zealand.**

**General Freyberg has a copy of this telegram.**

**A further telegram on other matters follows in a few days time.**

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**<sup>3</sup> Mr. Jones had arrived in Tunisia from the United Kingdom on 27 Apr.**

**<sup>1</sup> In a telegram dated 3 May, Brigadier Stevens advised that General Headquarters, Middle East, proposed to use the Railway Construction and Maintenance Group and the Railway Operating Group in forthcoming operations and had asked whether there would be any objection to such employment. The request was considered by War Cabinet, which decided to defer its decision until Parliament had reached a decision on the future role of the Division. In a telegram to Headquarters 2nd NZEF on 5 May, the Prime Minister said that War Cabinet also felt 'that no decision should in the meantime be taken on the breaking up of the units as suggested in Mr. Jones's message of 30 April until Parliament has come to a decision on their use in future operations.' He added that as Parliament did not meet until 19 May no decision was possible before that date.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 257 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

257

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

2 May 1943

Mr. Jones left us yesterday morning after spending four days with us. Very opportunely, our brigades were withdrawn from the line for a short rest while he was here, and he has been able to go round most units and talk to the men. He saw them, of course, in adverse conditions, very tired from the difficult operation, but there is no doubt that his coming to the forward areas to see them was greatly appreciated. He was also able to go round in a tank and see part of the front, including the fortress village of **Takrouna**.

The lull in operations gave the opportunity for several long talks with Mr. Jones. I was able to give him details of the administrative layout, medical services, amenities, &c., and we also discussed policy questions, including the question of the return of long-service personnel, which was the subject of a telegram to you. <sup>1</sup> It has been the greatest help to have been able to discuss these very important matters together, and I cannot say how glad I am that he was able to visit us here.

Mr. Jones called on General Alexander on the way over and saw General Montgomery here. He goes now by air to **Tripoli** to see our hospital and Advanced Base, then to **Benghazi** to see the units there, and so back to **Cairo**.

There is no doubt that this visit has been of the greatest assistance to me, and I have been able to put him in the whole picture in a way that would not have been possible by letter or cable.

I feel certain that Mr. Jones was satisfied with all he saw during his

**careful inspection of the 2nd NZEF in the Middle East.**

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<sup>1</sup> No. 256.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 258 – WAR OFFICE (LONDON) TO ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON)

258

### *War Office ( London) to Army Headquarters ( Wellington)*

11 May 1943

Pending a decision by the **New Zealand Government** regarding the retention in the **Middle East** of the 2nd New Zealand Division, we must consider the provision of shipping for reinforcements and for the replacement of long-service men.

General Alexander has consulted **General Freyberg**, who agrees that it would be advisable to send back 20 per cent of his total strength and that 6000 replacements will be required. As 3500 reinforcements are due in the **Middle East** in the middle of June, we understand that a further 5000 will be required by 1 August if the Division is to be available for operations after 1 September.

The only means of shipping this number in time is by the *Nieuw Amsterdam* (capacity 6500), due at **Suez** on 10 June. This ship could leave **Suez** four days later with returning personnel for New Zealand, if available, and pick up reinforcements at **Wellington** between 7–12 July and be due at **Suez** again on 4 August. All dates are approximate. The Admiralty state that provision of escorts would be difficult. Because of her speed, this ship is included in the class permitted to run filled to capacity unescorted.

We would be grateful for the earliest information regarding the availability of the 5000 replacements on the date required and whether you would agree to a possible fast, unescorted sailing, as in the above paragraph. <sup>1</sup>



This telegram is purely exploratory as the proposals in the third paragraph are dependent on the **New Zealand Government's** decision regarding the retention of their Division in the **Middle East** and on the returning personnel arriving in the **Middle East** in time for the outward journey. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See *Proposed Withdrawal of 2nd New Zealand Division* (April-May 1943), ( **No. 239**). The New Zealand Government's request that the ship be escorted both from and to the **Middle East** was agreed to by Mr. Churchill ( **No. 241**).

<sup>2</sup> This refers to the return to Egypt of furlough personnel with the Division in **Tunisia**. In the event, the whole Division returned to **Maadi Camp** at the end of May and early in June.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 259 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG<sup>3</sup>

259

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*<sup>3</sup>

14 May 1943

Full consideration is being given to the proposed scheme of relief of long-service personnel, and while it is felt that the complete proposal as envisaged in Mr. Jones's telegram of 30 April ( **No. 256**), is beyond the immediate manpower capacity of the Dominion, <sup>1</sup> a large measure of relief may be possible if it is decided that the Division should remain in the **Middle East**.

Pending a complete review of manpower and a final decision on the role of the Division after discussion by Parliament, it is desired that preliminary investigations and preparations should be continued for the inauguration of a relief scheme. A final decision as to the extent to which this can be carried out will be conveyed to you at an early date. As you are aware, 500 men are leaving with the 9th Reinforcements. **War Cabinet** have meanwhile come to the conclusion that the First, Second, and Third Echelons should be grouped as one and that the following order of return should be adopted:

- ( a) Married men who have had active field service.
- ( b) Remaining married men.
- ( c) Single men who have had active field service.
- ( d) Remaining single men.

Comments on questions raised in Mr. Jones's telegram under reference are as follows:

- (1) The special considerations concerning officers are agreed to.
- (2) Three months' leave on full pay and allowances from the date of disembarkation in New Zealand will be granted, and on the expiration

of leave, personnel will in general be liable for further overseas service.

- (3) The wishes of the returned personnel are being observed generally, and this aspect <sup>2</sup> will continue to receive full consideration.
- (4) Men enlisting in the **United Kingdom** should have the choice of going to the **United Kingdom** or New Zealand under the same conditions as in paragraph 2.
- (5) It is agreed that 'only sons' should be dealt with under compassionate leave machinery.
- (6) If the employment of the Railway Construction and Maintenance Group and the Railway Operating Group is agreed to by Parliament, it would seem preferable that at least a proportion of those eligible should be included in the first leave party. Further consideration will be given to this aspect when Parliament meets on 19 May.
- (7) Since the terms of this message were approved, a telegram dated 11 May has been received from the **War Office**, a copy of which has no doubt been repeated to you, proposing that 20 per cent of the total strength of the Division should be returned and that 6000 replacements would be required. This suggestion is now being examined, and the decision will be conveyed to you after discussion in Parliament on the whole question.

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<sup>3</sup> This telegram was repeated to Mr. Jones in **London**.

<sup>1</sup> See page 196, note 1.

<sup>2</sup> The paragraph of Mr. Jones's telegram referred to read: 'It is considered here that any of the 2nd NZEF personnel should be allowed, if they so wish, to come back later to the **Middle East**.'

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 260 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER<sup>1</sup> – [EXTRACT]

260

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*<sup>1</sup>

*[Extract]*

17 May 1943

I have to report that on the collapse of enemy resistance in **Tunisia** I at once made arrangements for the Division to be withdrawn in order to have the maximum time for implementing the scheme for returning personnel....<sup>2</sup>

I received your telegram of 14 May today. Preliminary investigations are being made to ascertain the effect of **War Cabinet's** proposals. The method of selection you propose was considered by us during discussions here, but that set out in Mr. Jones's telegram of 30 April ( **No. 256**) was felt to be preferable. With matters of fact governing selection, the scheme treating the First, Second, and Third Echelons as one is quite workable. It avoids comparisons between echelons and would be quick and fair. From the operational point of view it has one distinct advantage in that it distributes replacement evenly between all units of the Division.

Reference your paragraph 7. I have seen the cable to which you refer.<sup>3</sup> To date we have been considering a first draft numbering 1000 to be returned at the earliest opportunity. The whole question of the return of married men with service in the field is being examined, and we will do the utmost to get the maximum number away in this fast ship. Opportunity will be taken to send senior key officers on leave, and as many low category men as possible will be included. It would help us if Army Headquarters could see their way to send technical personnel to replace key personnel here. Investigations are in progress to ascertain

what key personnel will be required. It will be realised, of course, that we cannot release the larger number referred to until reliefs arrive in Egypt.

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<sup>1</sup> This telegram was also repeated to Mr. Jones in **London**.

<sup>2</sup> See *Campaign in Tripolitania and Tunisia (No. 208)* for text omitted.

<sup>3</sup> No. 258.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 261 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

261

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

22 May 1943

I wish to advise you that Parliament has today given its concurrence to the retention of the Division in the **Mediterranean** theatre.

Under these circumstances I trust that it will be possible to give full effect to the relief scheme to the extent rendered possible by the use of the *Nieuw Amsterdam*. The New Zealand Government cannot, of course, accept the risk of this ship sailing unescorted and representations to this effect will be made to the **United Kingdom** authorities.

It is desired that special care be taken to ensure that the Maoris who left with the Second and Third Echelons are returned with the first relief detachment.

It will, I feel, be a great advantage to have personal discussions with you concerning all matters relating to the Division, and I am looking forward to welcoming you to New Zealand very shortly.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 262 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

262

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

22 May 1943

Your telegram of 22 May. I know everybody here will welcome the decision of Parliament, and it will be realised that the **New Zealand Government** has again taken a far-sighted view in this difficult matter.

We are preparing the scheme for the return of personnel, and there are two points on which I would like guidance urgently.

First, on the question of the size of the draft. Previously we visualised replacements arriving in the **Middle East** before sending men back from here. If we now return 6000 on 14 June with reliefs arriving on 4 August, as suggested, the Division could not take the field before 1 October. If 4000 are sent back we could with difficulty take the field on 1 September. Could you let me know what your arrangements are with the United Kingdom Government regarding the future employment of the Division? I suggest it would be better for us to send 4000 and be prepared for an operational role by 1 September.

Second, the question of Maoris. If we sent all the Maoris from the Second and Third Echelons it would put the battalion out of action for some months. I suggest that the Maoris be treated on exactly the same basis for both officers and men as other units.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 263 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

263

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

22 May 1943

Further to my earlier telegram ( **No. 262**). I have examined the scheme for returning either 4000 or 6000 all ranks by the *Nieuw Amsterdam*, leaving **Suez** on 14 June. It is based on your telegram of 14 May ( **No. 259**).

I feel that the smaller draft may be just possible, but if 6000 are sent it will have an effect on efficiency and will cause considerable delay. While there can be no doubt that the long-term policy of relief of war-weary personnel is wise, the loss of such great numbers must inevitably lead to some disorganisation in view of the large proportion of men holding key positions who come from the first three echelons. We have seen here how inexperienced divisions have had considerable casualties which are avoided by battle-worthy formations, and I know you would wish me to ensure that the fighting efficiency and *esprit de corps* of your Division are unimpaired. After careful investigation I feel that, although it is possible to return the full quota of private soldiers in either the 6000 or 4000 draft, the change-over of officers, NCOs, and certain technicians must be more gradual. I have therefore fixed what I consider are safe proportions for the return of officers, NCOs, and technical personnel, and have provided that officers of the rank of substantive major and above will be deemed key personnel and will not be eligible for the ballot. To meet this case it has already been agreed by the **New Zealand Government** that I can send for short leave in New Zealand a small quota of senior officers who require a change of climate.

The following is an outline of the scheme for the return of a draft of



**4000:**

- (1) The draft will comprise 200 officers and 3800 other ranks.**
- (2) All of the first three echelons will return. Total, 1538.  
married other ranks  
(including all married  
NCOs)**
- (3) After deducting married other ranks, there will be vacancies for approximately 35 per cent of unmarried other ranks with field service who are eligible under the scheme.**
- (4) It is not considered that it would be possible to send 35 per cent of eligible unmarried NCOs and technicians, and a smaller proportion will be fixed.**
- (5) Selection will be by ballot by arms of the service.**
- (6) It is considered that one officer to 20 other ranks can be spared.**
- (7) All married officers below the rank of substantive major and not in special technical employment will be returned. Total, 120.**
- (8) It is considered that approximately half of the technical officers below the rank of substantive major can be spared. Total, 30.**
- (9) Approximately 50 vacancies remain for ballot by arms of the service for unmarried officers below the rank of substantive major.**
- (10) A small number of officers of the rank of substantive major and above who are deemed to hold key positions will be selected for periods of short leave in New Zealand, on the expiration of which they will return to the Division.**
- (11) Doctors and nurses are covered by separate cables from New Zealand. <sup>1</sup> Dental officers are provided for by the existing system of exchange.**
- (12) Once selected in the ballot return to New Zealand will be compulsory.**
- (13) After three months' leave on full pay in New Zealand, all ranks who are medically fit will be eligible for return to**

**the 2nd New Zealand Division.**

**It is felt that this scheme is as fair and straightforward as possible. If the [New Zealand Government](#) agrees with the general outline of the policy, would you please let me know if we can proceed to work out details?**

**I am going into the question of a cover scheme here to keep secret this large-scale move of troops in a single ship. No announcement will be made here until after the arrival of the men in New Zealand. It will be for your consideration whether any similar step should be taken in New Zealand.**

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**<sup>1</sup> Not published. The number of doctors and nurses able to return on furlough was dependent on the replacements which could be provided from New Zealand.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 264 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

264

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

22 May 1943

With reference to your telegram of 22 May ( **No. 261**), I am cabling separately on the general question of the scheme. I should be pleased, however, to receive an early direction regarding non-divisional Engineers. They are sharing in the scheme of exchange on equal terms with other field units. After the draft has left in June the situation will be as follows:

- ( **The Railway Construction and Maintenance Group will have**
  - a) sufficient to maintain two companies instead of the present three. General Headquarters, Middle East, desire to use this Group, or what is left of it, in the forthcoming operations.**
  - ( The Railway Operating Group will have sufficient to maintain one**
    - b) company instead of two. General Headquarters desire to use this Group, or what is left, in the forthcoming operations.**
    - ( The 18th Army Troops Company is practically unaffected. General**
      - c) Headquarters desire particularly to use this company in the forthcoming operations.**
      - ( The 19th Army Troops Company is affected to a small degree and the**
        - d) 21st Mechanical Equipment Company not at all. These companies are carrying on with their present work in North Africa.**

I presume that the approval given in your telegram of 22 May applies to these units also, and that I can now tell General Headquarters that they may be used within their remaining capacity, but I would be pleased to have confirmation of this.

As regards their later disposal, there would appear to be three possibilities:

- (i) To keep them up to their original strength—in which case

**replacements will be required when the draft returns from New Zealand in early August.**

**(ii) Not to send replacements but allow them to gradually disappear.**

**(iii) To break them up here and use them as reinforcements for the 2nd New Zealand Division.**

**I suggest that their future disposal could be discussed when I am in New Zealand.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 265 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

265

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

23 May 1943

Your telegram of 22 May ( **No. 262**).

The final approval of Parliament to the retention of the 2nd Division in the **Middle East** was determined by the proposal to afford relief to the longest service personnel of the first three echelons, and it was understood and definitely stated that the initial 6000 would return in the *Nieuw Amsterdam* early in June (as proposed in the **War Office** telegram of 11 May), and be replaced by 6000 to return early in July. In his telegram to me dated 17 May <sup>1</sup> Mr. Churchill stated:

The need for further training of the 2nd New Zealand Division after the arrival of the new draft and the relief of veterans will prevent that Division from coming into action again before September, and its Armoured Brigade will not be battle-worthy before October. Therefore, no serious drain need be expected until the last two months of the year. However, it will be of the greatest importance to have them available then.

In informing Mr. Churchill of Parliament's decision, <sup>2</sup> I stated that the future use of the 2nd NZEF would depend on the time taken to absorb the relief force and also the 4th Armoured Brigade, and added that it was the wish of the **New Zealand Government** that the 4th Brigade should be re-absorbed into the New Zealand Division as soon as possible.

It was assumed here that the Division would not in fact be required to go into action until all three brigades had been re-absorbed, and that

**this was not likely until October at the earliest.**

**There is, therefore, no definite arrangement with the [United Kingdom](#) authorities regarding the early use of the Division, and we have assumed from the [War Office](#) telegram referred to above that General Alexander and yourself had made allowance for the delay occasioned by the need for absorption of the relief draft.**

**We had not overlooked the statement contained in the last sentence of your telegram of 17 May ( [No. 260](#)), but we were of the opinion that the fact that the Division could not be ready until a later date would permit the relief scheme proposed in the [War Office](#) telegram to be carried out in the order proposed therein. I regret that there should be so much haste in concluding these arrangements, but circumstances have not permitted any other course. I trust that General Alexander will accept the situation. You will, of course, realise that it was a condition of Parliament's agreement to the retention of the Division that the large-scale relief scheme would be put into operation immediately.**

**It is important that the full proportion of Maoris should be returned, and it is agreed that these should be in at least the same proportion as in the case of other units.**

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<sup>1</sup> See *Proposed Withdrawal of 2nd New Zealand Division (April–May 1943)*, ([No. 237](#)).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* ( [No. 239](#)).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 266 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

266

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

23 May 1943

Reference your telegram of 23 May. I now fully understand the position and will proceed with arrangements for the return of the 6000 draft. The outline scheme as set out in my telegram of 22 May ( **No. 263**) remains the same except for the following alterations in numbers and percentages:

**Paragraph (1): Substitute 5800 other ranks.**

**Paragraphs (3) and (4): Substitute two-thirds for 35 per cent.**

**Paragraph (6): Substitute 30 for 20.**

**It is considered that the number of officers for return cannot be increased.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 267 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

267

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

24 May 1943

Your telegram of 22 May ( **No. 264**). Thank you for your information regarding non-divisional Engineers. It was the intention of the Government and Parliament that the full measure of relief and approval for their operational use should be applicable to non-divisional units. One of the subjects the Government particularly desired to discuss with you was the whole question of future reinforcements for the 2nd Division, and I am prompted in replying to this telegram to refer, as I had intended to do in a separate message today, both to the general aspect and to the particular points you raise.

I informed Mr. Churchill in **Washington** on 14 May <sup>1</sup> that manpower would, in the immediate future, be insufficient for the maintenance of all the Dominion's overseas commitments, including both the 2nd and 3rd Divisions, and I asked him to discuss the matter with the President and, if possible, with the **Combined Chiefs of Staff**, and to advise me, for the guidance of the Government and Parliament, as to where in their opinion New Zealand's troops could be most usefully employed.

Mr. Churchill replied that they hoped means would 'be found to sustain both divisions in their present strength and station,' and added, 'If this cannot be done, it would be better when the time comes to accept a lower establishment.'<sup>2</sup>

The proposals submitted by the Government to Parliament, and approved, were:

1. That the 2nd NZEF should remain in the **Middle East** and that it



should be available for operations in **Europe**.

2. That both forces— **Mediterranean** and **Pacific**—should be maintained for as long as possible with increasingly smaller establishments in accordance with the availability of manpower.
3. That the relief scheme for **Middle East** men discussed by Mr. Jones with Mr. Churchill and **General Freyberg** should be put into operation in the first instance on the basis of the plan put forward by the **War Office**, namely, for the relief of some 6000 of the men of the first three echelons, on condition that they be replaced by men from New Zealand.
4. That no further replacements for the **Middle East** division be provided for until those returned to New Zealand under the leave scheme should again become available for service.
5. That further reinforcements for the **Middle East** and **Pacific** divisions be suspended during 1943. ( *Note: I informed the House that it seemed possible that the **Middle East** division might be sustained for a considerable period by drawing upon its ancillary units.*)
6. That the **Pacific** division be reorganised on the reduced scale, such reorganisation to include adjustments between this division and its capital troops at present concentrated in New Zealand.

It is realised that the implementation of these decisions calls for thorough examination and early discussion, not only with yourself but also with the **United States** authorities in the **Pacific**. It is my intention during your visit to arrange if possible for a joint meeting

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<sup>1</sup> See *Proposed Withdrawal of 2nd New Zealand Division* (April-May 1943), (No. 231).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid* ( No. 237).

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with Australian, **United States**, and our own representatives to exchange views and decide upon a programme of using the remaining manpower resources of the Dominion in the best interests of the war effort.

The maintenance of both the **Mediterranean** and **Pacific** forces for as long as possible precipitates the reinforcement difficulty in an acute and

**urgent form. In accordance with the third proposal above, it is considered that the 2nd Division should begin to draw upon its ancillary units.**

**It may not of course be possible to apply this rule to all the Railway units, but your 'possibility (iii)' <sup>1</sup> corresponds with what has been discussed and approved in Parliament. I am under the impression, however, that some of the Railway units were composed of volunteers recruited for their special task, in which case there may be difficulties in using them for divisional units. Actually their return to New Zealand might be advisable owing to the present very serious manpower difficulties which the Railways are experiencing at a time when petrol and rubber restrictions have thrown large additional burdens upon them.**

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**<sup>1</sup> See No. 264, 'To break them up here and use them as reinforcements for the 2nd New Zealand Division.'**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 268 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

268

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

24 May 1943

Thank you for your telegram of 24 May which clears up a number of points.

There still remains the question of non-divisional units. As they have had few casualties, over a thousand qualify for return. We are examining paragraph 5 of your proposals regarding 'ancillary units'. Non-divisional units presumably come under this heading. As Engineer personnel are difficult to replace in divisional units I feel it would be inadvisable to accept commitments in forthcoming operations for the non-divisional Engineers. My recommendations are accordingly as follows:

- (i) The Railway Construction and Maintenance Group to remain on present maintenance work and be drawn on as required for reinforcements for the **Divisional Engineers**.
- (ii) Railway Operating Group personnel of the first three echelons are going back to New Zealand forthwith as part of the current scheme. The remainder of the Group complete should go back to New Zealand as soon as shipping is available. I feel that this will meet your wishes, particularly in view of the last sentence of your telegram.
- (iii) The 18th Army Troops Company to be broken up as reinforcements for the **Divisional Engineers**.
- (iv) The 19th Army Troops Company and the 21st Mechanical Equipment Company to remain on present work and be drawn on for reinforcements as required.

If you approve of the above proposals I would advise General Headquarters here at once. I am not aware whether, in addition, it will be necessary for you to notify **War Office** of the gradual disappearance of these units.

**Would you please let me have your views?**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 269 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

269

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

25 May 1943

Your telegram of 22 May ( **No. 263**) was not received until some hours after the despatch of my message to you of 23 May ( **No. 265**), and owing to my absence and that of other members of **War Cabinet** from **Wellington** yesterday, it was not possible to give consideration to your further representations in support of the suggestion for the smaller draft.

Your willingness, as always, to make every effort to comply with the wishes of the Government, as expressed in your telegram of 23 May ( **No. 266**) is warmly appreciated, but **War Cabinet** would be most reluctant to lay down any policy which you would regard as having a too detrimental effect on the efficiency of the Division. Accordingly, the situation to which you draw attention in your message of 22 May ( **No. 263**) has today been given very full and careful re-examination.

While **War Cabinet** are anxious to get the 6000 men of the first three echelons back to New Zealand by the *Nieuw Amsterdam*, and have given this definite undertaking to Parliament, they do not wish by any of their instructions to compel you to take such action as will seriously impair the battle-worthiness of the Division through over-depletion of tried and experienced soldiers, thus unduly endangering the lives of new arrivals. If, on full examination of all the factors, you still consider that the withdrawal of 6000 will make it impossible for the Division to reach the required efficiency by October, when it is estimated that the Armoured Brigade will be equipped, **War Cabinet** will agree to your using discretion in arranging numbers in respect of the first three echelons so long as

**every endeavour is exercised to make up a reasonable minimum reduction in their number from other units, possibly non-divisional, if this should prove practicable. I will appreciate your further help in this difficult situation, and would ask that the maximum number which it is practicable to send should be returned.**

**The general outline of policy contained in your telegram of 22 May is in accord with the wishes of the Government. Since this message was drafted I have received your telegram of 24 May ( No. 268). Your proposals concerning the non-divisional units are accepted and you should advise General Headquarters. War Office will be notified accordingly.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 270 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

270

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

25 May 1943

**Thank you for your telegram of 25 May.**

**I have consulted all my Brigadiers and technical commanders. They all agree that 6000 can be sent without damaging the battle-worthiness of the Division, so long as the limits I suggested in my telegram of 23 May ( **No. 266**) regarding key officers, junior officers, NCO leaders, instructors, and technicians are adhered to. We are all quite certain that by 1 October your Division will be fully fit for any operational role.**

**The ballot commences tomorrow morning and will take two days. We shall not allow any interference with it.**

**As the men will, I hope, be returning with a good deal of accumulated pay, will Cabinet agree to my keeping back any known Crown and Anchor players without giving any reasons?**

**I have notified General Headquarters about non-divisional units in terms of my telegram of 24 May ( **No. 268**).**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 271 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

271

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

25 May 1943

Reference my visit to New Zealand.

Before I go I feel that I must finalise arrangements for the return of personnel, and I want to see and thank the men after the ballot is drawn. I am now examining reduction of establishments and dilution with women from New Zealand, Egyptian native labour, and Italian prisoners. If I am to clear up matters here and come prepared to discuss the future, I feel that the earliest I could leave here by air would be 7 June. Would this fit in with your arrangements? <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> General Freyberg left Cairo by air on 6 Jun for the United Kingdom, and arrived in New Zealand on the 20th. He left again on 10 Jul for the Middle East, via Australia, the United States, and United Kingdom, and arrived back in Cairo on 31 Jul. On his way to New Zealand he visited the 3rd Division in New Caledonia.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

272 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

272

*The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

25 May 1943

**Your telegrams of 25 May ( Nos. 270– 1). I am very glad that you will be able to send back the full 6000 and agree entirely that any non-desirable elements should be kept back as you suggest.**

**The date of your departure for New Zealand will suit our arrangements.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 273 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS

273

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs*

27 May 1943

**With reference to New Zealand non-divisional units with the Middle East Forces.**

**His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom** will be aware from earlier messages that this Dominion is facing serious difficulties through the exhaustion of its manpower, both in respect of fulfilling its overseas military commitments and the needs of essential industry. In particular, certain key industries with depleted staffs, such as transport, engineering, and construction, are becoming overtaxed in their efforts to cope with the demands of the **United States Forces** in this area.**

**Therefore it has been found necessary to re-examine the strength and composition of New Zealand's forces overseas, particularly in the **Middle East**, with two objects in view: first, to ascertain whether it would be possible, in view of the Government's decision to suspend reinforcements for the 2nd NZEF, to draw upon ancillary units for future reinforcements; and second, to effect a transfer of technicians back to New Zealand for essential industry.**

**We have discussed the matter fully with the GOC 2nd NZEF, and in accordance with the instructions issued by this Government, he has already advised General Headquarters, **Middle East**, of the proposal to transfer technicians in some of the non-divisional units in the **Middle East** back to New Zealand as part of the relief scheme, and to absorb the**

remaining men from such units into appropriate divisional formations.

His Majesty's Government in New Zealand would be grateful if you would advise the **War Office** of the position and inform them of the necessity for the gradual disappearance and ultimate withdrawal of the following non-divisional units, which up to the present have been under the control of General Headquarters:

**Railway Construction and Maintenance Group**

**Railway Operating Group**

**18th and 19th Army Troops Companies**

**21st Mechanical Equipment Company**

Because of the very heavy demands for timber construction work for the **United States Forces** in New Zealand and the **Pacific**, consideration is also being given to the withdrawal of one or more of the New Zealand Forestry companies, which since 1940 have been stationed in the **United Kingdom**. This matter will be the subject of a later message. <sup>1</sup>

Please give Mr. Jones a copy of this message.

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<sup>1</sup> Not published.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 274 – MEMORANDUM FROM GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE – REINFORCEMENTS FOR 2ND NZEF

274

MEMORANDUM FROM

### REINFORCEMENTS FOR 2<sup>ND</sup> NZEF

4 July 1943

For your information I set out below the estimated reinforcement strength state for 2nd NZEF as it is likely to fluctuate during the next nine months.

The figures, which in many cases must be taken as approximate, have been arrived at on the assumption that the policy of returning leave personnel to the **Middle East** is as follows:

- ( 5000 of the 6000 at present returning to New Zealand (or their a) replacements) arrive back in the **Middle East** early in December.
- ( 3200 all ranks still to be sent on leave arrive back in New Zealand in b) December next.
- ( 3200 all ranks (or their replacements) arrive back in the **Middle East** c) from leave in April 1944.

For the purpose of all calculations, the sick in hospital and in convalescent homes have been taken at a constant figure somewhere between 2500 and 3000 all ranks. This estimate is inclined to be high even for the **Middle East**. In a colder climate the sick rate would probably be reduced by 25 per cent.

The provision of officers for the Division presents no difficulty, there being a surplus for all arms of 400 on the establishments of 2nd NZEF. No figures with regard to officers are therefore shown.

*Position on 14 July:*

( 6000 all ranks at sea returning to New Zealand.

a)

( 9th Reinforcements which arrived in Egypt during June will have

b) been absorbed into their units.

( The Division will be minus 600 all ranks. There is the further

c) reduction in active strength of 2500 to 3000 all ranks in hospitals, &c.

### *Position on 14 August*

On the arrival in the **Middle East** of the *Nieuw Amsterdam* early in August with 6000 officers and men, the position will be as follows:

( a) Division up to strength.

( b) 2500 all ranks in depots ready for posting as reinforcements.

( c) 2500 to 3000 all ranks in hospitals, &c.

*Note:* By 1 October the Division will have absorbed its reinforcements and should be ready trained to take the field complete with its own Armoured Brigade.

### *Position on 14 December:*

On the return of 5000 all ranks from the leave draft to the **Middle East** early in December, the position will be as follows:

( a) The Division up to strength.

( b) 3200 all ranks on their way to New Zealand on leave.

( c) 4300 all ranks in the depots for reinforcements.

( d) 2500 to 3000 all ranks in hospitals.

Total in depots and in hospitals, &c. 7300 all ranks

Less six months' no activity wastage 1000 all ranks

Available reinforcements in theatre 6300 all ranks

*Note:* No wastage assessed for follow-on to HUSKY.

### *Position on 14 April:*

**On the return of 3200 leave draft to the Middle East in April next, the position will be as follows:**

- ( a) The Division up to strength.**
- ( b) 7500 all ranks in the depots for reinforcements.**
- ( c) 2500 to 3000 all ranks in hospitals, &c.**

**Total in depots and hospitals, &c.            10,500 all ranks**  
**Less nine months' no activity wastage 1,500 all ranks**  
**Available reinforcements in theatre        9,000 all ranks**

**Note: No wastage assessed for possible losses in follow-on to HUSKY.**

### **Conclusions:**

**These reinforcements are for any operations in the Middle East for the next twelve months. If casualties for the follow-on to HUSKY are not severe, it is considered that further operations in Europe can be envisaged safely with the estimated reinforcements available.**

**B. C. FREYBERG**

**Lieutenant-General,  
Commanding 2nd NZEF**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 275 – THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

275

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

9 July 1943

Your telegram of 27 May ( **No. 273**).

**It is recognised that the requirements of New Zealand's forces overseas and of her essential industry at home must have first call on her available manpower resources, and the necessity for the ultimate disbandment of specialised non-divisional units in the **Middle East** is therefore fully understood. Having in view, however, the increasing use of technical plant, the high standard of technical training of the units concerned, and the shortage of similar units in the **Middle East** for forthcoming operations, His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom** would be grateful if it could be found possible to postpone the disbandment of the 21st Mechanical Equipment Company for as long as possible, and of the 19th Army Troops Company for three months at least.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 276 – THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS<sup>1</sup> TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR NEW ZEALAND (CANBERRA)

276

*The Minister of External Affairs*<sup>1</sup> to the High Commissioner for New Zealand (Canberra)

10 July 1943

The following telegram has been received from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs:

[Text of telegram No. 275]

It may be as well to defer the decision upon this matter until **General Freyberg** has seen **General Brooke**,<sup>2</sup> but in the meantime I would be glad to have any comments he wishes to make.

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<sup>1</sup> The External Affairs Act, 1943, was passed on 11 Jun 1943. The Act made provision for the administration under the Minister of External Affairs of the external and foreign affairs of the Dominion, including relations with other countries, communications between the Government of New Zealand and other governments, and the representation of New Zealand in other countries and of other countries in the Dominion. The Prime Minister (Mr. Fraser) held this portfolio.

<sup>2</sup> **General Freyberg** had left by air for **Australia** on the morning of 10 Jul on his way back to the **Middle East** via the **United States** and **United Kingdom**, where he was to have discussions with **General Brooke**, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 277 – THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR NEW ZEALAND (CANBERRA) TO THE PRIME MINISTER

277

*The High Commissioner for New Zealand ( Canberra) to the Prime Minister*

15 July 1943

**General Freyberg** left early on Wednesday morning after a most successful visit on which I am reporting by mail.

The Hon. Mr. Jones and Sherwood <sup>1</sup> are in **Canberra**; both are well; they are leaving **Sydney** on Saturday.

The following message is from **General Freyberg** for the Prime Minister:

Reference your telegram of 10 July, I shall cable you further after seeing the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. In the meantime I would point out that the drafts which are leaving New Zealand at present were framed on the assumption that the Engineer personnel of the 18th and 19th Army Troops Companies would be available as Engineer reinforcements. An alteration in policy would mean that the **Divisional Engineers** would be under strength and without reinforcements. Further, the figures submitted to **War Cabinet** in my memorandum <sup>2</sup> were based on the same assumption. If the 18th and 19th Army Troops, Railway Construction, and **Railway Operating Companies** are not available we shall require over 2000 Grade I men over and above those already agreed to. In the circumstances, it is felt that unless 2000 Grade I men can be made available at once, the original decision to absorb non-divisional units either into industry or into the New Zealand Division should stand.

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<sup>1</sup> **F. M. Sherwood, CBE, Secretary to the Minister of Defence.**

<sup>2</sup> **No. 274.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 278 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG (WASHINGTON)

278

*The Prime Minister to General Freyberg ( Washington)*

17 July 1943

**Before making a final decision on the use of ancillary troops we will wait for your further comments after seeing the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. In view of the manpower situation, we see no alternative but to adhere to the original decision that the ancillary units in the **Middle East** should be used either as reinforcements for the 2nd New Zealand Division or be returned for essential work in New Zealand. If, in your view, the temporary use of either unit is considered necessary or desirable, we would readily agree, provided this did not mean any corresponding replacement of personnel from New Zealand.**

**Would you please make the position quite clear to the **War Office**.**

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

279 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG (CAIRO)

279

*The Prime Minister to General Freyberg ( Cairo)*

13 August 1943

I would be grateful for your final comments on the **United Kingdom's** request for the retention of the **21st Mechanical Equipment Company** and **19th Army Troops Company**. I assume that you discussed this matter as was intended while you were in **London**.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 280 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

280

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

14 August 1943

Reference your telegram of 13 August regarding ancillary units.

As directed, I advised the Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff<sup>1</sup> at the **War Office** that in view of manpower difficulties the **New Zealand Government** had decided that personnel of all ancillary units, including the 21st Mechanical Equipment Company and 19th Army Troops, would have to be used as reinforcements for the 2nd New Zealand Division or be returned to New Zealand in exchange for the equivalent number of reinforcements for the 2nd New Zealand Division. The Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff appreciated the position and undertook to advise General Headquarters, **Middle East**. It is understood that the remaining personnel of all ancillary units not absorbed in the 2nd New Zealand Division will be returned with the next draft irrespective of time of service overseas.

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<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir Ronald M. Weeks, KCB, CBE, DSO, MC; Deputy Chief of Imperial General Staff, **War Office**, 1942-45; Chief of Staff (British Zone) Control Commission for **Germany**, Jun-Aug 1945.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 281 – ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON) TO GENERAL FREYBERG

281

*Army Headquarters (Wellington) to General Freyberg*

29 August 1943

**RUAPEHU DRAFT**

1

**War Cabinet** has decided that all married men with children, all men of 41 or over, and all Maoris, with the exception of those officers, warrant officers, senior NCOs, specialists, and tradesmen regarded as essential to the 2nd NZEF, are to be retained in New Zealand and returned to civil life, but any of such men who wish to return to the **Middle East** may so elect.

Code-name for first furlough draft. This draft left Egypt in the *Nieuw Amsterdam* on 15 Jun and arrived in **Wellington** on 12 Jul.

As regards the balance of the draft, it is anticipated that there will be some who by reason of special domestic circumstances or on account of particular suitability for employment in work of national importance, *e.g.*, farming, sawmilling and forestry, and coal miners, should be held here. Men of this type will be required to apply, and applications will be referred to Armed Forces Appeal Boards for investigation and recommendation as to release, the Army to have the final decision in order to obviate loss of officers and others regarded as essential to you.

In announcing this decision in the press, it will be emphasised that the retention in New Zealand of any large number of the Ruapehu draft will not only affect the efficiency of the Division, but will also prejudice the return of further men to New Zealand for furlough who are entitled to similar consideration. Appeal Boards will also be directed to keep

these points in mind when dealing with applications.

While no firm figures are at present available, it appears that this decision, plus medical boarding after the draft reassembles, may result in between 1500 and 2000 Ruapehus being exempted from returning to the **Middle East**. Whatever number is exempted will be made good by replacements from men now in camp, plans having been made in anticipation.

Announcement of the decision is being withheld so that you may have the opportunity of forwarding any observations to **War Cabinet**. They realise that you would no doubt prefer to have battle-experienced troops back, but after long and careful deliberation, concluded that conditions here demanded that the decision be made.

In order that we may be in the position to determine whether the release of officers, but more particularly warrant officers, NCOs, specialists and tradesmen, should be opposed, we would greatly appreciate any instructions which will assist us in dealing with such cases I <sup>1</sup> propose discussing the position of officers and warrant officers with Stevens and Rudd <sup>2</sup> and do not anticipate any difficulty with these, but it will be very difficult for us to determine the value of NCOs, specialists, and tradesmen to you. If you could give any indication, either by names or rank, of warrant officers and NCOs you want back, and if you are prepared to agree to the exchange of tradesmen, our task will be simplified, especially as time is very limited for dealing with applications.

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<sup>1</sup> This telegram was signed by the Adjutant-General ( **Brig A. E. Conway**).

<sup>2</sup> Brigadier W. G. Stevens, Officer in charge of Administration, 2nd NZEF, and Lieutenant-Colonel L. F. Rudd, Military Secretary; both were then in New Zealand on furlough.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 282 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS<sup>3</sup>

282

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for  
Dominion Affairs*<sup>3</sup>

8 November 1943

Transportation arrangements for some 3000 New Zealand troops from the **Middle East** to New Zealand have been the subject of communications between the Director of Sea Transport<sup>4</sup> and the New Zealand Naval Board.<sup>5</sup> The troops largely comprise that portion of the New Zealand furlough draft due to leave the **Middle East** on the return of the first party from New Zealand. Arrangements for the transport of the earlier draft were made at the instance of Mr. Churchill in May last.

His Majesty's Government in New Zealand most earnestly desire that the Director of Sea Transport's proposal that the second draft be transhipped at **Bombay** into **United States** transports, thereby delaying a large proportion of the men in **India** for several weeks, should be avoided. As an alternative, therefore, it is requested that consideration be given to using the *Mooltan*<sup>6</sup> for this purpose after the disembarkation of the New Zealand troops returning to the **Middle East** approximately in mid-January. It is now expected that by that date there will be 3500 to 4000 troops to return. It is also requested that escort be provided for the voyage from **Suez** to New Zealand.

It would be greatly appreciated if you could give this matter your personal consideration.

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<sup>3</sup> The **Rt. Hon. Viscount Cranborne** had again become Dominions Secretary on 28 Sep 1943.



<sup>4</sup> **Sir William G. Hynard, Kt, CB, CBE; Director of Sea Transport, 1939–42; Assistant Director-General, Ministry of War Transport, 1942–44; representative of the Ministry of War Transport in Canada, 1944–46.**

<sup>5</sup> **Not published. In this telegram the Director of Sea Transport suggested that the most economical use of shipping would be to transport the troops from the Middle East to Bombay in a British troopship and tranship them there to a United States troopship proceeding via the South-West Pacific to New Zealand.**

<sup>6</sup> **SS *Mooltan*, Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company 20,952 tons.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 283 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS

283

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs*

23 November 1943

Undesirable delay is being experienced in securing a ship to take the draft of 5000 ex-furlough and reinforcement personnel to the **Middle East**. In the first instance the Admiralty was informed that the draft would be ready to embark on 30 October, but we found it necessary to postpone its departure until 30 November. The *Mooltan*, with a capacity of 4289 only, was then allotted and was scheduled to arrive here on 9 December, but we have just been informed that it will not now arrive until early January. This further delay will result in our 2nd Division being without a large number of experienced officers and NCOs who are returning from furlough, and will also disturb the reinforcement training plan in Egypt, besides delaying the departure for New Zealand of the second furlough party referred to in my telegram of 8 November.

His Majesty's Government in New Zealand realise that it is probably impracticable to speed up the arrival of the *Mooltan*, but it would be greatly appreciated if arrangements could be made for an earlier embarkation, and preferably in a ship capable of taking the whole draft of 5000.

With further reference to my telegram of 8 November, I have now been informed that the approximate number to be lifted will be 2700.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 284 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

284

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

23 November 1943

Stevens is back and has told me of the delay and shipping difficulties before the Ruapehu draft returns to the **Middle East**. As I understand it, the forecast of returning reinforcements is at present as follows:

- ( 4000, including returning Ruapehu personnel, leave New Zealand in  
a) mid-December.
- ( 1000, to make the total 5000, leave at a later date, which may be as  
b) late as June 1944, i.e., when returning Wakatipu <sup>1</sup> personnel leave  
New Zealand.

The delays will have a serious effect on the fighting efficiency of the Division during the ensuing year, as will be seen from a comparison with the timetable envisaged when the leave scheme was discussed with **War Cabinet** last July, when it was then proposed that:

- ( The returning 5000 Ruapehu were to leave New Zealand about 1  
a) November.
- ( Wakatipu draft complete were to leave the **Middle East** about 7  
b) December.
- ( Returning Wakatipu draft complete were to leave New Zealand about  
c) mid-April.

Our estimates of wastage and replacements were based upon the timetable given in the above paragraph. To be in a thoroughly satisfactory position and to allow for yet further delays, for example, as a result of shipping deficiencies, I think it would be wise if an extra 1000, i.e., 2000 in all, were sent with the draft returned in paragraph 1 ( b) above, if possible by special ship, not waiting for returning Wakatipu personnel, who may be further delayed.

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<sup>1</sup> **Code-name for second furlough draft.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 285 – THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS TO THE PRIME MINISTER

285

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Prime Minister*

9 December 1943

When I received your telegram of 8 November ( No. 282), I at once went into the matter personally as you asked. Since then I have also received your telegram of 23 November ( No. 283). I am informed that arrangements were made to meet your original request for the embarkation of 5000 at the end of October, but that these arrangements had to be cancelled because their departure was postponed until the end of November.

Information was received on 2 November from the Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, that the numbers available to embark would then be 4000 only and that a further 1000 would follow later. The *Mooltan*, the largest ship available at the time, with a capacity of 4289, seemed suitable for the first part of this move. Unfortunately this ship has been delayed in **India** and is now scheduled to arrive at **Wellington** about 2 January, sailing about a week later and arriving at **Suez** about 11 February. She will be escorted throughout the voyage to the **Middle East**. Unfortunately no prospect of improving this programme can be seen and I am afraid that at this date no ship larger than the *Mooltan* is available. If there is a balance of 700 to 1000 to follow later, it is hoped that the opportunity will occur to move them from New Zealand to the Cape in late January or early February for subsequent passage on to the **Middle East** in February. As soon as these arrangements are confirmed I will send you further information. I am very sorry that it has not been possible to meet your wishes in the matter, but I give you my personal assurance that in the present extremely difficult shipping position the

**proposed arrangements are the best we can do.**

**As regards your telegram of 8 November, we are still exploring the possibility of making alternative arrangements which will meet the **New Zealand Government's** request that the men should proceed direct from the **Middle East** to New Zealand, and I hope to telegraph you again soon on this matter.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 286 – THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS TO THE PRIME MINISTER

286

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Prime Minister*

10 December 1943

Please refer to my telegram of 9 December.

The balance of 700 to 1000 men due to return from New Zealand to the **Middle East** can, I understand, be transported to the Cape by the *Nieuw Amsterdam*, due to arrive at **Wellington** about 11 January. If this arrangement is acceptable to the New Zealand authorities, the necessary arrangements can be made to carry them at an early date from the Cape to the **Middle East** in an escorted convoy.

Because of her high speed the *Nieuw Amsterdam* is not normally escorted, but in view of your Government's request, the question of escort for the voyage from **Wellington** to the Cape has been carefully considered. It has now been found, however, that no escort vessel fast enough to keep pace with her is available at the time of sailing. There will not be another opportunity of moving this party for some considerable time. In the circumstances I shall be glad to learn whether or not you approve the employment of the *Nieuw Amsterdam* without escort, bearing in mind the small number of troops involved and the comparative safety of the southerly route to be taken.

With further reference to your telegram of 8 November ( **No. 282**), I greatly regret that it has been found impossible to meet your request that the 2700 men requiring transport from the **Middle East** to New Zealand should be carried direct to **Wellington** without transhipment.

The ship which you suggest for this move, the *Mooltan*, has a

capacity of 4289, so that its use to transport the New Zealand draft from the **Middle East** to New Zealand would mean that accommodation for about 1600 would be unoccupied for about ten weeks. Our shipping commitments in the first quarter of 1944 are so heavy that we shall be hard put to it to meet them in any case, and failure to use all the available capacity would not only be uneconomical but would also inevitably have an adverse effect on all our plans for personnel movement early next year. As it was known that a **United States** ship, which was available to carry out the move without affecting the movement of any other troops, was due to return almost empty from **Bombay** to the **United States** via New Zealand about the end of January, the best solution seemed to be to ship the New Zealand draft from the **Middle East** to **Bombay** and to transfer them to this **United States** ship.

The question was again raised with the **United States** authorities on receipt of your telegram of 8 November, when the request was made that a **United States** ship *en route* for the **Pacific** might be diverted to **Suez** to pick up the New Zealand party. However, the **United States** authorities have now replied that in view of the shortage of shipping they cannot accept the consequent delay. In the circumstances I hope that you will approve the arrangements set out in the fourth paragraph, particularly since there is no reason to fear that the New Zealand furlough draft will be delayed for any considerable period in **India**. Arrangements have already been made for the 2700 to be escorted from **Suez** to **Bombay**, and we also have in hand the provision of an escort for the rest of the voyage to New Zealand.



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 287 – ARMY HEADQUARTERS (WELLINGTON) TO HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEAF (CAIRO)

287

*Army Headquarters (Wellington) to Headquarters 2nd NZEF (Cairo)*

11 December 1943

We have been endeavouring to get a ship to move 5000 returning Ruapehus and replacements and have now been informed definitely that the *Mooltan* is the only ship available. Her capacity is stated as 4289, and we will despatch up to this number according to suitability of accommodation. Her estimated time of departure is 12 January and she should arrive about 21 February. The draft will be organised proportionately by arms. At present there are approximately 1800 Ruapehus available to return, but it is expected there will be further defections and these will be replaced by new men.

No definite arrangements have yet been made for the despatch of the balance, but the United Kingdom Government forecasts departure possibly late in January or early February.

**War Cabinet** has not approved **General Freyberg's** request for an additional 1000. <sup>1</sup>

The United Kingdom Government was informed that **War Cabinet** preferred that the Wakatipu draft should not be transhipped at **Bombay**, and the United Kingdom Government has now replied that the possibility of a direct ship is being explored and that they hope to give a definite decision shortly. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See No. 284.

<sup>2</sup> Although dated 10 Dec, **No. 286** was not received until 7.35 a.m. on 12 Dec, *i.e.*, after **No. 287** had been despatched.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 288 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

288

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

14 December 1943

Army Headquarters has advised Brigadier Stevens by cable that the suggestions in my telegram of 23 November ( **No. 284**) have not been agreed to by **War Cabinet**. Before you send me your decision may I raise the following points:

When I met **War Cabinet** on 3 July the question of manpower and its effect on the future employment of the Division were considered. The statement I submitted, setting out requirements to ensure that your Division would be battle-worthy, was accepted. <sup>3</sup> In it certain dates for return to the **Middle East** of the Ruapehu and Wakatipu drafts were envisaged, and it was expected that 60 per cent of the trained soldiers would come back from New Zealand. As a result of the unavailability of shipping and other difficulties with which you have been faced, neither condition will be fulfilled. Although this will not in the long run have an adverse effect on the fighting efficiency of the Division, it will involve delay in making the men battle-worthy and will cause a shortage of reinforcements during the campaigning season in 1944. It was to rectify this shortage and enable us to return the married men of the 4th Reinforcements promptly, that the extra 1000 were asked for in my telegram of 23 November.

Since we are at present engaged in active operations and I have not got my complete records with me, I have asked Stevens to draft a cable setting out figures to compare the situation as contemplated on 3 July with the present position. I feel that these figures will be a help to **War Cabinet** in considering this difficult question.

**We are now fighting north of the Sangro. The weather and ground are difficult but all goes well. Casualties have not been heavy and everyone is in good heart. I will send a detailed report later.** <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> No. 274.

<sup>1</sup> See *Campaign in Italy, 1943–44* (No. 310).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 289 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS

289

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs*

15 December 1943

Your telegram of 10 December ( **No. 286**). His Majesty's Government in New Zealand much appreciate the attention given by you to the questions relating to the transport of New Zealand troops to and from the **Middle East**. The arrangements now proposed for the transshipment of the second furlough draft and its escort to New Zealand are fully acceptable.

His Majesty's Government in New Zealand regret, however, that they feel unable to depart from the principle, to which they have rigidly adhered throughout the war, that any large body of New Zealand troops should not be permitted to sail unescorted. While they appreciate the comparative safety of the southerly route for a fast ship such as the *Nieuw Amsterdam*, they consider that there is an element of risk in such an arrangement which they cannot accept. Although the number involved is only approximately 1000, their loss to a small country like New Zealand would have a most damaging effect upon the war effort of this Dominion.

In view of the urgent need for these men in the **Middle East**, His Majesty's Government in New Zealand hope that arrangements can be made to transport these troops in an escorted vessel. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> An alternative arrangement for the transport of these troops in an escorted ship was submitted by the Dominions Secretary to

**the Prime Minister on 17 Dec. The size of the draft was increased ( General Freyberg's request for an additional 1000 was approved by the Government), and it sailed from Wellington on 31 Mar 1944 as the 2nd section, 11th Reinforcements.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 290 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

290

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

28 December 1943

Further to my telegram of 14 December ( **No. 288**).

I know that you realise that the delay in the return of Ruapehu and the small percentage of battle-worthy personnel included in the draft will raise problems here, and I shall endeavour to set out below the complete picture as I see it to help **War Cabinet** in their decisions.

You need have no misgivings about the battle-worthiness of your Division at present. Ten thousand new men who fought for the first time in **Italy**, and our Armoured Brigade, have now been in action. The Division as now organised is as fine a fighting formation as ever before. Looking ahead, however, there are certain aspects of the reinforcement situation which are causing me concern.

The figures in my memorandum of 4 July ( **No. 274**) submitted to **War Cabinet** show the number of reinforcements that were considered adequate for the campaigning season of 1944. Our aim was to have back in the **Middle East** by mid-April 1944 both the Ruapehu and Wakatipu drafts with as large a proportion of battle-worthy personnel as possible. This expectation will not be fulfilled, and I am concerned by the slow build-up of our reinforcement pool and, in particular, by the shortage of trained, battle-experienced personnel. Our estimated available reinforcements on 14 December were adequate only because of the return of the Ruapehu draft. Our estimate for 14 April contemplated the return of the Wakatipu draft. Each draft was to include a considerable number of trained personnel. In point of fact both the Ruapehu and Wakatipu drafts are out of active operations at present and only the

**Ruapehu draft will be back before April 1944.**

**Referring to the position as at 14 April 1944, set out in my memorandum, 9000 estimated total in depots, hospitals, &c., will be considerably reduced. Two thousand seven hundred Wakatipu draft will be in New Zealand, and 200 balance of the Ruapehu and Wakatipu drafts will have left. In addition the losses in the present operations (follow-on to HUSKY) must be deducted as well as the current number in hospitals, convalescent depots, &c. Further, should it be decided to send married men of the 4th Reinforcements on leave in April, another 800 must be deducted.**

**There is no doubt that from April until the Wakatipu personnel return in July our reinforcement position has been greatly weakened. As a result, the Division may have to fight during the summer of 1944 with units below War Establishment. Although a handicap, we could do it as we have done before, but what I want to avoid is sending into battle partly trained men. This might occur if casualties are heavy during the early summer campaigning months. To guard against this situation I make the following suggestions:**

**The return of 800 married 4th Reinforcements could be faced with less anxiety if an additional 800 men were sent in March with the balance of the 11th Reinforcements. <sup>1</sup> Further, if 1000 of the 12th Reinforcements could be sent with the balance of Ruapehu, or at the earliest date thereafter, we could build up a trained reserve which would be available in July. Lastly, it would greatly assist if the main draft of the 12th Reinforcements could be made up of infantry who have been specially trained in New Zealand before leaving, so that they would be fit to take the field without further training after the usual hardening process in the theatre of war.**

**From the situation as given above, it will be clear to you that single men of the 4th Reinforcements could not be sent back without having 3000 fully trained men actually available to take their place in the fighting line.**



**There is one more factor I want War Cabinet to realise, viz., the psychological effect upon the men as the leave period approaches. In dealing with this factor we have to face the fact that once a man knows his turn is coming he ceases to be such a good soldier. For this reason 2700 Wakatipu men could not be used on operational duty. An incident in Italy during the battle of Salerno confirms this. There was grave trouble with a draft of 1500 men who had been warned for duty in England for the Second Front but were at the last minute sent as reinforcements for British divisions on the Naples front. I am certain that once the men are detailed for leave they must be taken out of the area of active operations. For this reason, it is for your consideration whether the 4th Reinforcements should not be dealt with as a whole late in 1944. <sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> **War Cabinet** agreed to supply an additional 1000 men for the draft (2nd section, 11th Reinforcements).

<sup>2</sup> **See**

***Maintenance of 2nd New Zealand Division; the Replacement Scheme.***

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**DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II**

**DESPATCH OF 2ND NEW ZEALAND DIVISION TO ITALY**

291

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

21 August 1943

As you know, I saw the Prime Minister [of the **United Kingdom**] and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff on the way back from New Zealand. I also saw the heads of the Intelligence services. A great spirit of optimism prevails in the highest quarters, based on the following facts:

The German offensive on the Eastern front this summer was stopped without difficulty by the Russian Army, who have since resumed the offensive. The operations against the Italians were going well, and Mussolini and the Fascist regime had collapsed. In official circles it was expected that the war against **Germany** will be over during 1944, and some contended that the German Army could be disposed of this year.

I feel that the optimism to a great extent is justified. This winter is likely to see great change in the Axis position, but a forecast of the future is difficult because there are so many uncertain factors. **Germany** is to all intents fighting on two fronts, a situation she has always tried to avoid. Although she has 289 fighting divisions on her Order of Battle, there is every indication that she has not the men to maintain them. She has few reserves in depots in the rear and some of the fighting divisions on the Russian front are reported to be 40 per cent below strength. It is certain that the enemy is desperately short of men and, with an enormous front to hold, is weak everywhere.

Although our air attacks are formidable, we do not know yet to what extent bombing has softened the powers of resistance of the civilian population in **Germany**. Neutral countries who still have embassies in **Germany** are in a better position to judge this, and possibly increased anti-Nazi feeling in **Sweden** and other countries is significant. Undoubtedly the fall of the Fascist regime in **Italy** and the heavy

**bombing of industrial Germany** have made it impossible to keep the truth from the German people. They now realise there is no hope of avoiding ultimate defeat.

From a purely military point of view **Germany's** position is desperate. They have lost the Battle of the **Atlantic**. Their air forces have been eclipsed on every front and there is no doubt that from a production point of view the Allies are definitely on top. The longer the war goes on the better will the equipment position become. Further, the Axis armies have been outfought on every battlefield during the last twelve months. The situation on all fronts is so grave that the **German General Staff** must reconsider the policy of major strategy. The most sane decision for **Germany** would be a general withdrawal on the Eastern front to escape further disasters in the autumn and winter. Such withdrawals, however, would render **Germany** more vulnerable to air attacks, and giving up conquered territory would be an admission of defeat which would weaken the power of the Fuehrer in a way they could not risk in view of what has happened in **Italy**. Notwithstanding all these facts, there is no doubt that German anti-Bolshevik propaganda has made the Germans desperate, and they will fight the Russians to the finish on the Eastern front, realising that the only hope for their population is to wear out the Russian Army before **Germany** is reached. Whatever happens in the **Mediterranean**, the Germans can be expected to attempt to hold on on the Russian front. Their position, however, is precarious, and in holding on they risk being overwhelmed by the Russians during the autumn and winter.

The bulk of the land fighting this year has been carried on by our Russian allies. We are engaging at the most ten German divisions on the **Mediterranean** front, while on the Eastern front the Russian armies are fighting 198 German divisions. It is unfortunate that all our support landing craft and trained troops are in the **Mediterranean**. They could not be moved in time to use them again this summer for an invasion from England and no landing operations could be attempted there until April or May 1944.

Although the main battle will be fought by the Russians, the Americans and ourselves must intervene and fight the Germans wherever we can. It is hoped that the theatre of war will be picked so that we can keep our armies concentrated and make full use of our greatly superior tanks.

Three courses appear open to the Allies. We can operate either against the **Balkans**, **Italy**, or the South of **France**. The **Balkans** are not suitable for armoured battles. **Italy** and **France** remain. Without knowing the result of the conference at **Ottawa**,<sup>1</sup> I feel that every effort will be made to knock out **Italy** and later to open up a second front through **France** from the south.

A cipher message follows about the training and probable role of the New Zealand Division.

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<sup>1</sup> This conference, between President Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill, was held at **Quebec** from 17–24 Aug 1943.

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292

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

28 August 1943

There is no doubt that the pendulum is swinging violently against the Axis. One of the decisive battles of the war is being fought in the **Ukraine**, where the Russians are making headway, while in the **Mediterranean** the Axis position may deteriorate more quickly than was contemplated when I saw Generals Alexander and Montgomery four weeks ago. In the circumstances it is premature to forecast the Division's future role at present. We have, however, been given the first week in November as the new provisional date to be ready for an operational role, and I wish to report on the equipment situation, training, and fitness for battle of your Division.

I may say that I welcome the postponement of the possible date of

employment because the malarial season will be over, nothing will now interfere with the elections, <sup>1</sup> and it will give valuable extra time for training.

When I discussed training in **Sicily** it was felt by the Army Commanders that the Division should be used in the traditional role as a mobile, hard-hitting force. I agreed. There are now many divisions trained to carry out the initial landings, but we are the only British division equipped, trained, and experienced for outflanking operations.

We are now drawing equipment and training for a mobile role. Although the use of the Division in the initial landings of the follow-on operations is not envisaged, I feel that in the **Mediterranean**, or any theatre where there is a sea flank, any force organised like ours must also be prepared to carry out left or right hooks by sea-borne outflanking movements. Our training programme, therefore, for September and October is to prepare the Division for:

- (i) Any operation that may be demanded of a mobile division, and,
- (ii) An outflanking movement by sea.

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<sup>1</sup> The New Zealand General Election was held on 25 Sep 1943.

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Details of the training policy are as follows: Individual and unit training ends in the second week of September. The Division, complete with the 4th Armoured Brigade, will move from **Maadi** on 17 September to Burg el Arab, west of **Alexandria**, to carry out full-scale divisional exercises. This period of training will end in the second week of October. During the remainder of October the brigade groups will move to the Combined Training Centre to train with landing craft for an outflanking movement by sea.

I have now had time to inspect the Division and to judge the effect on battle-worthiness of sending leave personnel to New Zealand. <sup>1</sup> Upon the whole all goes well, but there are obvious weaknesses at present.

**There are many officers and NCOs and some thousands of men from the last reinforcement drafts who have not, of course, seen action, and the infantry are undoubtedly short of experienced company commanders. Experience has shown that unbattleworthy troops suffer a much higher percentage of casualties than experienced units. In the present state of the Division training is of the greatest importance, and we have been forced to go back to the most elementary stages before we can tackle full-scale divisional exercises.**

**I am well pleased with the last reinforcements, who are a good lot of men. With experience they will come up to the usual high standard set by your Division.**

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<sup>1</sup> See



293

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

14 September 1943

Since my telegram of 28 August I have been warned that the New Zealand Division may be asked to leave for **Italy** earlier than the first week in November.

At present the situation in **Italy** is confused, but we do know Rommel is in command with large forces, including two, and probably four, armoured divisions. <sup>2</sup> Realising that time is on our side, Rommel can be depended on to attack and take advantage of the situation while we have insufficient troops on the mainland. It is certain there will be heavy fighting during the late summer and winter, and all available British troops will be wanted in **Italy**. Undoubtedly the New Zealand Division, organised and equipped as it is, would be of the greatest assistance at the present stage.

In my telegram of 28 August I stressed the need for training. The proposed acceleration of the move would shorten the training period by a month, and we should not be able to complete combined operations training. All divisional training, however, will be completed by the end of the first week of October, and we shall be fit to carry out any role as a mobile division. I do not consider combined training essential at the present juncture since the Division would be landed at a port and not on an open beach.

Our individual and unit training is complete, and at the moment the Brigadiers are carrying out brigade training schemes. During the next fortnight the whole force is being hardened. We are carrying out a 100-mile route march to Burg el Arab. A full-scale divisional exercise will then be held with our own Armoured Brigade and using live ammunition. It is early in the day yet to say how the younger commanders are

measuring up to their added responsibilities, but I am confident that the Division will take the field fully trained and will live up to its past reputation.

The equipment situation is generally good. By the end of September the Division will be better equipped than ever before. The 4th Armoured Brigade will be armed exclusively with Sherman tanks, thus increasing its striking power by at least 50 per cent. There is, however, one deficiency which presents a problem. There is a shortage in the **Middle East** of load-carrying vehicles and the Division is short of 405 3-ton lorries. I consider these should be provided before the Division can accept a mobile operational role.

Subject to vehicle deficiencies being made good, I consider that the Division will be equipped, trained, and fit to embark for an operational role by the end of the first week in October. Would you please acknowledge this cable and let me have the instructions of **War Cabinet** on the proposal to send the Division to **Italy** in October?

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<sup>2</sup> At this date Rommel commanded Army Group B, Northern **Italy**. **Field-Marshal A. Kesselring**, Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean, 1942–43, was at this time Commander-in-Chief Southern **Italy**.

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294

*The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

18 September 1943

Your telegram of 14 September. We are glad to have your report on the state of training, equipment, and condition of the Division. **War Cabinet** are prepared to authorise embarkation for an operational role, provided all deficiencies in lorries are made good and you are entirely satisfied in all other respects as to the full capacity of the Division to carry out its allotted task.

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence***24 September 1943**

As instructed, I notified the Commander-in-Chief of your consent to committing the Division subject to the conditions mentioned. I am glad to report that complete equipment and MT is now being supplied, and we are to join **Eighth Army**. General Montgomery has asked me to fly to **Italy** to discuss future plans. He proposes to use the New Zealand force as an independent minor Corps directly under his command. <sup>1</sup> I expect to leave for **Taranto** on 3 October after the divisional exercise to make arrangements for a rear administrative organisation not present in the Division but necessary in a Corps. After seeing General Montgomery I shall be in a position to inform you of the composition of the **New Zealand Corps** and our role. I do not expect to return to Egypt before the Division leaves for **Italy**.

Meanwhile we are concentrating at Burg el Arab. Fifty per cent of the Division, still marching from **Cairo**, arrive here during the next two days. It has been obvious that the hot summer and living at **Maadi** have made the men soft, and this hardening process was a most necessary preparation before facing the ordeal of a winter campaign in **Europe**.

We are fully aware of the risk of pestilence in **Europe** this winter. Two pairs of boots, New Zealand winter underclothing, battle dress, leather jerkins, and bivouac shelters are being issued. Precautions against lice include mobile laundries and disinfestors, and the whole force is being inoculated against typhus. We are in the throes of collective training, activity ending on 2 October.

The present embarkation arrangements provide for personnel sailing in two flights about 6 and 13 October. Transport comprising 4600 tanks, guns, and vehicles will move in four lifts, the last leaving about 3 November. When we include reinforcements and a General Hospital, we shall have 22,000 personnel crossing the **Mediterranean**. I feel that it

would be advisable for the **New Zealand Government** to raise the question of naval escort and air protection for this move in the appropriate quarter.

Health is good and all ranks are in excellent spirits.

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<sup>1</sup> The **New Zealand Corps** was not in fact formed until 3 Feb 1944 (see No. 314).

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296

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

26 September 1943

The New Zealand Government has been notified by **General Freyberg** of the impending movement of the 2nd New Zealand Division. He reports that the Division is joining the **Eighth Army** and that the conditions upon which the **New Zealand Government** agreed to the use of their troops—namely the making good of certain deficiencies in mechanical transport and equipment—have been complied with.

One question remains to which the **New Zealand Government** attach the maximum importance, that of safe transport across the **Mediterranean**, and in this respect I feel I can, and should, request your ever-ready personal interest and assistance. This Government's attitude on this particular question has been appreciated by yourself whenever it has been raised, and I know that you will, without further emphasis or reiteration on my part, respond to this request, as you have always done previously, by ensuring that throughout the various stages of their transfer the 22,000 men New Zealand has made available will have about them and above them the fullest naval escort and the strongest air protection.

It is a source of the greatest pride to us that our Division is to resume its association with the **Eighth Army**. We are confident that the

men of the 2nd NZEF will again display those fighting qualities which have characterised their part in the other campaigns they have fought in the **Mediterranean** theatre.

**297**

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*  
*[ Extract ]*

**27 September 1943**

Your message of 26 September has been transmitted textually to Admiral Cunningham who will, I am sure, take all possible precautions. We have a pretty strong control now over these waters. I look forward eagerly to seeing the New Zealand Division in action in these historic scenes.... <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A personal message has been omitted.

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**298**

*The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*  
*[ Extract ]*

**28 September 1943**

Your telegram of 24 September ( **No. 295**).

I was very pleased to have your most satisfactory report on the equipment situation and state of training, and, in particular, to learn of your comprehensive precautionary measures for a winter campaign.

Mr. Churchill's personal assistance was requested in ensuring the fullest naval escort and the strongest air protection, and he has advised me that my message has been conveyed to Admiral Cunningham.

It will, I know, be a source of pride and satisfaction, both to the troops and to the New Zealand people, that the association of the 2nd

New Zealand Division with the **Eighth Army** is to be resumed. On this, as on all previous occasions when our men have gone into action, it will be our constant prayer that, despite the arduous nature of the campaign, casualties will not be unduly heavy. Your able leadership and devoted care for the welfare of the men is a matter of great assurance to us.... <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The return of the first furlough draft to the **Middle East** is discussed in the text omitted.

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299

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

1 October 1943

Your telegram of 26 September ( **No. 296**). The following message has been received from Admiral Cunningham:

Please assure Mr. Fraser that every care will be taken of our old friends the New Zealand troops on their passage through the **Mediterranean**. We know their value too well to leave any precaution untaken which will assure their safe arrival where they can bring their weight against the enemy. The matter is receiving my personal attention.

300

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

6 October 1943

I have to report that we have concluded our training and the Division is now moving to a transit camp prior to embarking for **Italy**. The training has been thorough and, I feel, satisfactory. When I came back from New Zealand I felt that a hot summer in **Cairo** was not a fitting preparation for a winter campaign on the Continent. I therefore made the training progressively severe to fit them for the obvious battles which will be the common lot of all troops that are in position to fight

the Germans during the winter. We followed up the three months' intensive training with a 100-mile march from **Cairo** to Burg el Arab and a divisional exercise, complete with the newly-joined Armoured Brigade. I consider that the Division is now as fit as we can make it to take the field.

Our Armoured Brigade have yet to encounter enemy armour in battle and until they have, of necessity, will be a weak spot in the Division. I am, however, quite certain that they will do well. The final stage of our divisional training was the lifting of a minefield and breaking through an enemy gunline to enable us to pass through our Armoured Brigade. We were employing a technique which we ourselves developed. It involves a surprise attack at night with unregistered artillery working upon survey data. It is admittedly a difficult form of attack but has been the basis of all our past successes. To ensure that the Division is capable of carrying out this form of attack, it is essential that it should be carried out under active service conditions, which involves close support with live ammunition. This we did on the night of 29–30 September. While I am satisfied with the result, I have to report that during this attack we had eight casualties in the **Maori Battalion**—three killed and five wounded. This was due to a gun shooting short during one part of the barrage. We had a similar case during training in September 1941, prior to the advance to **Tobruk**. The case has been investigated in full.

For the next two days I am at **Maadi** on New Zealand Expeditionary Force business trying to foresee the changes that may be necessary here during the ensuing year as a result of the move of the Division so far from our Base. I feel that when we leave for **Italy** we shall not return. The question of what organisation is necessary behind us here in Egypt has to be considered. I am of the opinion that we should start to cut down our commitments in Egypt to a minimum, retaining only that which is necessary for the Base. We shall have to have an Advanced Base, possibly at **Taranto**, and this will be stepped up behind us as we move towards **France**. We may also have Advanced Headquarters 2nd NZEF there, as all questions of administrative policy become difficult

when so far from our Base. It will be necessary now to cut down all our commitments in Egypt. I have talked this over with my staff in the last few days and am having the problem examined in detail.

With regard to general future policy, we appear destined to fight with the **Eighth Army** in the immediate future. We must expect heavy fighting and be prepared to face the resulting casualties. At a later date a second front may be started, but it is uncertain whether or not they will want the New Zealand Division to take part in it. I will, as in the past, keep you in touch.

I leave here by air for **Foggia** on the 7th with part of my Divisional staff, the remainder following on the 8th. We shall be staying there with General Montgomery, and I shall take the first opportunity I have to send you more detailed information after my talk with him.

The health of the men is good; they are fit and in excellent spirits. As you can realise, a move into a new theatre of war is an anxious moment. I feel that all that could be done has been done.

301

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

11 October 1943

I am glad to report that the 6th Brigade Group and **Divisional Headquarters** have arrived safely at **Taranto**.<sup>1</sup> The transports were protected by a strong escort of six destroyers and air cover. The men enjoyed an easy crossing and arrived in excellent condition. As surprise is such a great factor in the success of a force such as ours, special measures have been taken to keep the move secret here and in Egypt. All New Zealand identification signs have been removed and the destination is only divulged to the men after embarkation. The troops on arrival here went straight to the bivouac area on relatively high ground west of the town and have had fine weather to set up camp in the olive groves. The malaria season is now on the wane, but full precautions are being taken.



The Divisional staff preceded the Division by air, and I have just returned from visiting General Montgomery in the forward area. All of the **Eighth Army** were most cordial in their welcome and obviously glad we shall be with them again.

We shall not be concentrated with all our equipment until 15 November at the earliest. General Montgomery's present intention is to use us as a hard-hitting, fast-moving force directly under his command. We would operate as the **New Zealand Corps** and have under command an additional British armoured brigade, a medium artillery regiment, and a British cavalry regiment. We would be a powerful force, as your Division by itself is probably the best-equipped division in existence, equal in fighting power at present strengths to two German divisions.

It seems clear that the implementing of the policy settled at **Ottawa** for the future conduct of the war will have repercussions here. It is evident that Allied strategy is to open another front in Western Europe in addition to the Russian and Italian fronts. The selection of battle-experienced leaders and formations from the **Middle East** theatre to form the hard core of the new front is in progress. Many rumours as to the command are current and the names of Marshall, Alexander, and Montgomery are mentioned. Only one of the last two would go. It is also known that some battle-worthy divisions are going to England, but there is no suggestion here that the New Zealand Division might be one of them.

I shall cable reporting the arrival of the troops as they reach **Italy** and will keep you informed as the situation develops.

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<sup>1</sup> The first personnel flight arrived at **Taranto** on 9 Oct.

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Your most secret message of 6 October ( **No. 300**) received. We were very pleased to receive your report on the state of training of the Division and its general fitness for the forthcoming operations, in which we are certain that under your able leadership it will give a good account of itself. We note that the question of the Base organisation is now under examination and will be interested to know later what arrangements you finally propose should be made. <sup>1</sup>

Our warmest good wishes go to you, and to all under your command, in the forthcoming move and the operations which lie ahead of you.

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<sup>1</sup> A telegram from **General Freyberg** on 18 Oct, which contained details of the revised Base organisation, has not been reproduced. Briefly, an Advanced Base was established in the **Bari** area while Rear Base remained at **Maadi**. **General Freyberg's** proposals were approved by **War Cabinet**. In January Headquarters 2nd NZEF also moved to the **Bari** area from Egypt.

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303

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

27 October 1943

Today, on the anniversary of the Battle of **Alamein**, I have to report that after two and a half years the Division has returned to the Continent of **Europe**. We have rejoined **Eighth Army** in **Italy** and have received a very warm welcome from General Montgomery and his staff.

The journey across the **Mediterranean**, now dominated by the Allied navies and air forces, was uneventful, and a smooth voyage in ideal conditions was greatly enjoyed by all ranks. We are now bivouacked in pleasant surroundings amongst olive groves and stone-walled fields. The men are in excellent health and very fit. Footballs have appeared. Everyone is feeling the benefit of the more bracing climate and enjoying seeing new country.

Arrangements for Advanced Base are well in hand. We have now

taken over a new modern building and a small restaurant in the city <sup>1</sup> as a New Zealand Forces Club for men on leave. A management team from **Cairo** has arrived and supplies of New Zealand goods are on the way.

Great advances have been made since **Alamein**, and now that the final phase of the war against **Germany** appears to be in sight there is a feeling of exhilaration in the air. After their rest in Egypt and a period of training, all ranks are ready for the next role, whatever it may be. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **Bari**.

<sup>2</sup> At General Alexander's request, publication of this message was delayed for some weeks for operational reasons. The New Zealand Government was anxious that the news of the arrival of the Division in **Italy** should first be announced in New Zealand before being broadcast from the **BBC** or published in the overseas press, and also that the initial announcement should not be to the effect that the Division was taking part in an engagement. Several telegrams dealing with the release of this announcement were exchanged but have not been reproduced. A statement by the Deputy Prime Minister (Hon. W. Nash) that the Division had rejoined **Eighth Army** in **Italy** was published in the New Zealand press on 23 Nov.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 291 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

291

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

21 August 1943

As you know, I saw the Prime Minister [of the **United Kingdom**] and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff on the way back from New Zealand. I also saw the heads of the Intelligence services. A great spirit of optimism prevails in the highest quarters, based on the following facts:

The German offensive on the Eastern front this summer was stopped without difficulty by the Russian Army, who have since resumed the offensive. The operations against the Italians were going well, and Mussolini and the Fascist regime had collapsed. In official circles it was expected that the war against **Germany** will be over during 1944, and some contended that the German Army could be disposed of this year.

I feel that the optimism to a great extent is justified. This winter is likely to see great change in the Axis position, but a forecast of the future is difficult because there are so many uncertain factors. **Germany** is to all intents fighting on two fronts, a situation she has always tried to avoid. Although she has 289 fighting divisions on her Order of Battle, there is every indication that she has not the men to maintain them. She has few reserves in depots in the rear and some of the fighting divisions on the Russian front are reported to be 40 per cent below strength. It is certain that the enemy is desperately short of men and, with an enormous front to hold, is weak everywhere.

Although our air attacks are formidable, we do not know yet to what extent bombing has softened the powers of resistance of the civilian population in **Germany**. Neutral countries who still have embassies in

**Germany** are in a better position to judge this, and possibly increased anti-Nazi feeling in **Sweden** and other countries is significant. Undoubtedly the fall of the Fascist regime in **Italy** and the heavy bombing of industrial **Germany** have made it impossible to keep the truth from the German people. They now realise there is no hope of avoiding ultimate defeat.

From a purely military point of view **Germany's** position is desperate. They have lost the Battle of the **Atlantic**. Their air forces have been eclipsed on every front and there is no doubt that from a production point of view the Allies are definitely on top. The longer the war goes on the better will the equipment position become. Further, the Axis armies have been outfought on every battlefield during the last twelve months. The situation on all fronts is so grave that the **German General Staff** must reconsider the policy of major strategy. The most sane decision for **Germany** would be a general withdrawal on the Eastern front to escape further disasters in the autumn and winter. Such withdrawals, however, would render **Germany** more vulnerable to air attacks, and giving up conquered territory would be an admission of defeat which would weaken the power of the Fuehrer in a way they could not risk in view of what has happened in **Italy**. Notwithstanding all these facts, there is no doubt that German anti-Bolshevik propaganda has made the Germans desperate, and they will fight the Russians to the finish on the Eastern front, realising that the only hope for their population is to wear out the Russian Army before **Germany** is reached. Whatever happens in the **Mediterranean**, the Germans can be expected to attempt to hold on on the Russian front. Their position, however, is precarious, and in holding on they risk being overwhelmed by the Russians during the autumn and winter.

The bulk of the land fighting this year has been carried on by our Russian allies. We are engaging at the most ten German divisions on the **Mediterranean** front, while on the Eastern front the Russian armies are fighting 198 German divisions. It is unfortunate that all our support landing craft and trained troops are in the **Mediterranean**. They could

not be moved in time to use them again this summer for an invasion from England and no landing operations could be attempted there until April or May 1944.

Although the main battle will be fought by the Russians, the Americans and ourselves must intervene and fight the Germans wherever we can. It is hoped that the theatre of war will be picked so that we can keep our armies concentrated and make full use of our greatly superior tanks.

Three courses appear open to the Allies. We can operate either against the **Balkans, Italy**, or the South of **France**. The Balkans are not suitable for armoured battles. **Italy** and **France** remain. Without knowing the result of the conference at **Ottawa**,<sup>1</sup> I feel that every effort will be made to knock out **Italy** and later to open up a second front through **France** from the south.

A cipher message follows about the training and probable role of the New Zealand Division.

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<sup>1</sup> This conference, between President Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill, was held at **Quebec** from 17-24 Aug 1943.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 292 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

292

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

28 August 1943

**There is no doubt that the pendulum is swinging violently against the Axis. One of the decisive battles of the war is being fought in the **Ukraine**, where the Russians are making headway, while in the **Mediterranean** the Axis position may deteriorate more quickly than was contemplated when I saw Generals Alexander and Montgomery four weeks ago. In the circumstances it is premature to forecast the Division's future role at present. We have, however, been given the first week in November as the new provisional date to be ready for an operational role, and I wish to report on the equipment situation, training, and fitness for battle of your Division.**

**I may say that I welcome the postponement of the possible date of employment because the malarial season will be over, nothing will now interfere with the elections, <sup>1</sup> and it will give valuable extra time for training.**

**When I discussed training in **Sicily** it was felt by the Army Commanders that the Division should be used in the traditional role as a mobile, hard-hitting force. I agreed. There are now many divisions trained to carry out the initial landings, but we are the only British division equipped, trained, and experienced for outflanking operations.**

**We are now drawing equipment and training for a mobile role. Although the use of the Division in the initial landings of the follow-on operations is not envisaged, I feel that in the **Mediterranean**, or any theatre where there is a sea flank, any force organised like ours must also be prepared to carry out left or right hooks by sea-borne outflanking**

**movements. Our training programme, therefore, for September and October is to prepare the Division for:**

- (i) Any operation that may be demanded of a mobile division, and,**
  - (ii) An outflanking movement by sea.**
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**<sup>1</sup> The New Zealand General Election was held on 25 Sep 1943.**

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**Details of the training policy are as follows: Individual and unit training ends in the second week of September. The Division, complete with the 4th Armoured Brigade, will move from **Maadi** on 17 September to Burg el Arab, west of **Alexandria**, to carry out full-scale divisional exercises. This period of training will end in the second week of October. During the remainder of October the brigade groups will move to the Combined Training Centre to train with landing craft for an outflanking movement by sea.**

**I have now had time to inspect the Division and to judge the effect on battle-worthiness of sending leave personnel to New Zealand. <sup>1</sup> Upon the whole all goes well, but there are obvious weaknesses at present. There are many officers and NCOs and some thousands of men from the last reinforcement drafts who have not, of course, seen action, and the infantry are undoubtedly short of experienced company commanders. Experience has shown that unbattleworthy troops suffer a much higher percentage of casualties than experienced units. In the present state of the Division training is of the greatest importance, and we have been forced to go back to the most elementary stages before we can tackle full-scale divisional exercises.**

**I am well pleased with the last reinforcements, who are a good lot of men. With experience they will come up to the usual high standard set by your Division.**

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**<sup>1</sup> See**



## ***Furlough Scheme.***

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 293 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

293

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

14 September 1943

Since my telegram of 28 August I have been warned that the New Zealand Division may be asked to leave for **Italy** earlier than the first week in November.

At present the situation in **Italy** is confused, but we do know Rommel is in command with large forces, including two, and probably four, armoured divisions. <sup>2</sup> Realising that time is on our side, Rommel can be depended on to attack and take advantage of the situation while we have insufficient troops on the mainland. It is certain there will be heavy fighting during the late summer and winter, and all available British troops will be wanted in **Italy**. Undoubtedly the New Zealand Division, organised and equipped as it is, would be of the greatest assistance at the present stage.

In my telegram of 28 August I stressed the need for training. The proposed acceleration of the move would shorten the training period by a month, and we should not be able to complete combined operations training. All divisional training, however, will be completed by the end of the first week of October, and we shall be fit to carry out any role as a mobile division. I do not consider combined training essential at the present juncture since the Division would be landed at a port and not on an open beach.

Our individual and unit training is complete, and at the moment the Brigadiers are carrying out brigade training schemes. During the next fortnight the whole force is being hardened. We are carrying out a 100-mile route march to Burg el Arab. A full-scale divisional exercise will

then be held with our own Armoured Brigade and using live ammunition. It is early in the day yet to say how the younger commanders are measuring up to their added responsibilities, but I am confident that the Division will take the field fully trained and will live up to its past reputation.

The equipment situation is generally good. By the end of September the Division will be better equipped than ever before. The 4th Armoured Brigade will be armed exclusively with Sherman tanks, thus increasing its striking power by at least 50 per cent. There is, however, one deficiency which presents a problem. There is a shortage in the **Middle East** of load-carrying vehicles and the Division is short of 405 3-ton lorries. I consider these should be provided before the Division can accept a mobile operational role.

Subject to vehicle deficiencies being made good, I consider that the Division will be equipped, trained, and fit to embark for an operational role by the end of the first week in October. Would you please acknowledge this cable and let me have the instructions of **War Cabinet** on the proposal to send the Division to **Italy** in October?

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<sup>2</sup> At this date Rommel commanded Army Group B, Northern **Italy**. **Field-Marshal A. Kesselring**, Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean, 1942-43, was at this time Commander-in-Chief Southern **Italy**.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 294 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

294

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

**18 September 1943**

**Your telegram of 14 September. We are glad to have your report on the state of training, equipment, and condition of the Division. War Cabinet are prepared to authorise embarkation for an operational role, provided all deficiencies in lorries are made good and you are entirely satisfied in all other respects as to the full capacity of the Division to carry out its allotted task.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 295 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

295

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

24 September 1943

As instructed, I notified the Commander-in-Chief of your consent to committing the Division subject to the conditions mentioned. I am glad to report that complete equipment and MT is now being supplied, and we are to join **Eighth Army**. General Montgomery has asked me to fly to **Italy** to discuss future plans. He proposes to use the New Zealand force as an independent minor Corps directly under his command. <sup>1</sup> I expect to leave for **Taranto** on 3 October after the divisional exercise to make arrangements for a rear administrative organisation not present in the Division but necessary in a Corps. After seeing General Montgomery I shall be in a position to inform you of the composition of the **New Zealand Corps** and our role. I do not expect to return to Egypt before the Division leaves for **Italy**.

Meanwhile we are concentrating at Burg el Arab. Fifty per cent of the Division, still marching from **Cairo**, arrive here during the next two days. It has been obvious that the hot summer and living at **Maadi** have made the men soft, and this hardening process was a most necessary preparation before facing the ordeal of a winter campaign in **Europe**.

We are fully aware of the risk of pestilence in **Europe** this winter. Two pairs of boots, New Zealand winter underclothing, battle dress, leather jerkins, and bivouac shelters are being issued. Precautions against lice include mobile laundries and disinfestors, and the whole force is being inoculated against typhus. We are in the throes of collective training, activity ending on 2 October.

The present embarkation arrangements provide for personnel sailing

in two flights about 6 and 13 October. Transport comprising 4600 tanks, guns, and vehicles will move in four lifts, the last leaving about 3 November. When we include reinforcements and a General Hospital, we shall have 22,000 personnel crossing the **Mediterranean**. I feel that it would be advisable for the **New Zealand Government** to raise the question of naval escort and air protection for this move in the appropriate quarter.

Health is good and all ranks are in excellent spirits.

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<sup>1</sup> The **New Zealand Corps** was not in fact formed until 3 Feb 1944 (see No. 314).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 296 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

296

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

26 September 1943

The New Zealand Government has been notified by **General Freyberg** of the impending movement of the 2nd New Zealand Division. He reports that the Division is joining the **Eighth Army** and that the conditions upon which the **New Zealand Government** agreed to the use of their troops—namely the making good of certain deficiencies in mechanical transport and equipment—have been complied with.

One question remains to which the **New Zealand Government** attach the maximum importance, that of safe transport across the **Mediterranean**, and in this respect I feel I can, and should, request your ever-ready personal interest and assistance. This Government's attitude on this particular question has been appreciated by yourself whenever it has been raised, and I know that you will, without further emphasis or reiteration on my part, respond to this request, as you have always done previously, by ensuring that throughout the various stages of their transfer the 22,000 men New Zealand has made available will have about them and above them the fullest naval escort and the strongest air protection.

It is a source of the greatest pride to us that our Division is to resume its association with the **Eighth Army**. We are confident that the men of the 2nd NZEF will again display those fighting qualities which have characterised their part in the other campaigns they have fought in the **Mediterranean** theatre.





DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

297 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME  
MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND – [EXTRACT]

297

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

*[ Extract ]*

**27 September 1943**

**Your message of 26 September has been transmitted textually to  
Admiral Cunningham who will, I am sure, take all possible precautions.  
We have a pretty strong control now over these waters. I look forward  
eagerly to seeing the New Zealand Division in action in these historic  
scenes.... <sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> **A personal message has been omitted.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 298 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG – [EXTRACT]

298

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg* *[ Extract ]*

28 September 1943

Your telegram of 24 September ( No. 295).

I was very pleased to have your most satisfactory report on the equipment situation and state of training, and, in particular, to learn of your comprehensive precautionary measures for a winter campaign.

Mr. Churchill's personal assistance was requested in ensuring the fullest naval escort and the strongest air protection, and he has advised me that my message has been conveyed to Admiral Cunningham.

It will, I know, be a source of pride and satisfaction, both to the troops and to the New Zealand people, that the association of the 2nd New Zealand Division with the **Eighth Army** is to be resumed. On this, as on all previous occasions when our men have gone into action, it will be our constant prayer that, despite the arduous nature of the campaign, casualties will not be unduly heavy. Your able leadership and devoted care for the welfare of the men is a matter of great assurance to us.... <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The return of the first furlough draft to the **Middle East** is discussed in the text omitted.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

299 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME  
MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

299

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

1 October 1943

Your telegram of 26 September ( **No. 296**). The following message has  
been received from Admiral Cunningham:

Please assure Mr. Fraser that every care will be taken of our old  
friends the New Zealand troops on their passage through the  
**Mediterranean**. We know their value too well to leave any precaution  
untaken which will assure their safe arrival where they can bring their  
weight against the enemy. The matter is receiving my personal  
attention.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 300 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

300

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

6 October 1943

I have to report that we have concluded our training and the Division is now moving to a transit camp prior to embarking for **Italy**. The training has been thorough and, I feel, satisfactory. When I came back from New Zealand I felt that a hot summer in **Cairo** was not a fitting preparation for a winter campaign on the Continent. I therefore made the training progressively severe to fit them for the obvious battles which will be the common lot of all troops that are in position to fight the Germans during the winter. We followed up the three months' intensive training with a 100-mile march from **Cairo** to Burg el Arab and a divisional exercise, complete with the newly-joined Armoured Brigade. I consider that the Division is now as fit as we can make it to take the field.

Our Armoured Brigade have yet to encounter enemy armour in battle and until they have, of necessity, will be a weak spot in the Division. I am, however, quite certain that they will do well. The final stage of our divisional training was the lifting of a minefield and breaking through an enemy gunline to enable us to pass through our Armoured Brigade. We were employing a technique which we ourselves developed. It involves a surprise attack at night with unregistered artillery working upon survey data. It is admittedly a difficult form of attack but has been the basis of all our past successes. To ensure that the Division is capable of carrying out this form of attack, it is essential that it should be carried out under active service conditions, which involves close support with live ammunition. This we did on the night of 29–30 September. While I am satisfied with the result, I have to report that during this

attack we had eight casualties in the **Maori Battalion**—three killed and five wounded. This was due to a gun shooting short during one part of the barrage. We had a similar case during training in September 1941, prior to the advance to **Tobruk**. The case has been investigated in full.

For the next two days I am at **Maadi** on New Zealand Expeditionary Force business trying to foresee the changes that may be necessary here during the ensuing year as a result of the move of the Division so far from our Base. I feel that when we leave for **Italy** we shall not return. The question of what organisation is necessary behind us here in Egypt has to be considered. I am of the opinion that we should start to cut down our commitments in Egypt to a minimum, retaining only that which is necessary for the Base. We shall have to have an Advanced Base, possibly at **Taranto**, and this will be stepped up behind us as we move towards **France**. We may also have Advanced Headquarters 2nd NZEF there, as all questions of administrative policy become difficult when so far from our Base. It will be necessary now to cut down all our commitments in Egypt. I have talked this over with my staff in the last few days and am having the problem examined in detail.

With regard to general future policy, we appear destined to fight with the **Eighth Army** in the immediate future. We must expect heavy fighting and be prepared to face the resulting casualties. At a later date a second front may be started, but it is uncertain whether or not they will want the New Zealand Division to take part in it. I will, as in the past, keep you in touch.

I leave here by air for **Foggia** on the 7th with part of my Divisional staff, the remainder following on the 8th. We shall be staying there with General Montgomery, and I shall take the first opportunity I have to send you more detailed information after my talk with him.

The health of the men is good; they are fit and in excellent spirits. As you can realise, a move into a new theatre of war is an anxious moment. I feel that all that could be done has been done.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 301 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

301

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

11 October 1943

I am glad to report that the 6th Brigade Group and **Divisional Headquarters** have arrived safely at **Taranto**.<sup>1</sup> The transports were protected by a strong escort of six destroyers and air cover. The men enjoyed an easy crossing and arrived in excellent condition. As surprise is such a great factor in the success of a force such as ours, special measures have been taken to keep the move secret here and in Egypt. All New Zealand identification signs have been removed and the destination is only divulged to the men after embarkation. The troops on arrival here went straight to the bivouac area on relatively high ground west of the town and have had fine weather to set up camp in the olive groves. The malaria season is now on the wane, but full precautions are being taken.

The Divisional staff preceded the Division by air, and I have just returned from visiting General Montgomery in the forward area. All of the **Eighth Army** were most cordial in their welcome and obviously glad we shall be with them again.

We shall not be concentrated with all our equipment until 15 November at the earliest. General Montgomery's present intention is to use us as a hard-hitting, fast-moving force directly under his command. We would operate as the **New Zealand Corps** and have under command an additional British armoured brigade, a medium artillery regiment, and a British cavalry regiment. We would be a powerful force, as your Division by itself is probably the best-equipped division in existence, equal in fighting power at present strengths to two German divisions.

**It seems clear that the implementing of the policy settled at [Ottawa](#) for the future conduct of the war will have repercussions here. It is evident that Allied strategy is to open another front in Western Europe in addition to the Russian and Italian fronts. The selection of battle-experienced leaders and formations from the [Middle East](#) theatre to form the hard core of the new front is in progress. Many rumours as to the command are current and the names of Marshall, Alexander, and Montgomery are mentioned. Only one of the last two would go. It is also known that some battle-worthy divisions are going to England, but there is no suggestion here that the New Zealand Division might be one of them.**

**I shall cable reporting the arrival of the troops as they reach [Italy](#) and will keep you informed as the situation develops.**

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**<sup>1</sup> The first personnel flight arrived at [Taranto](#) on 9 Oct.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 302 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

302

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

12 October 1943

Your most secret message of 6 October ( **No. 300**) received. We were very pleased to receive your report on the state of training of the Division and its general fitness for the forthcoming operations, in which we are certain that under your able leadership it will give a good account of itself. We note that the question of the Base organisation is now under examination and will be interested to know later what arrangements you finally propose should be made. <sup>1</sup>

Our warmest good wishes go to you, and to all under your command, in the forthcoming move and the operations which lie ahead of you.

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<sup>1</sup> A telegram from **General Freyberg** on 18 Oct, which contained details of the revised Base organisation, has not been reproduced. Briefly, an Advanced Base was established in the **Bari** area while Rear Base remained at **Maadi**. **General Freyberg's** proposals were approved by **War Cabinet**. In January Headquarters 2nd NZEF also moved to the **Bari** area from Egypt.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 303 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

303

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

27 October 1943

Today, on the anniversary of the Battle of **Alamein**, I have to report that after two and a half years the Division has returned to the Continent of **Europe**. We have rejoined **Eighth Army** in **Italy** and have received a very warm welcome from General Montgomery and his staff.

The journey across the **Mediterranean**, now dominated by the Allied navies and air forces, was uneventful, and a smooth voyage in ideal conditions was greatly enjoyed by all ranks. We are now bivouacked in pleasant surroundings amongst olive groves and stone-walled fields. The men are in excellent health and very fit. Footballs have appeared. Everyone is feeling the benefit of the more bracing climate and enjoying seeing new country.

Arrangements for Advanced Base are well in hand. We have now taken over a new modern building and a small restaurant in the city <sup>1</sup> as a New Zealand Forces Club for men on leave. A management team from **Cairo** has arrived and supplies of New Zealand goods are on the way.

Great advances have been made since **Alamein**, and now that the final phase of the war against **Germany** appears to be in sight there is a feeling of exhilaration in the air. After their rest in Egypt and a period of training, all ranks are ready for the next role, whatever it may be. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **Bari**.

<sup>2</sup> At General Alexander's request, publication of this message was

delayed for some weeks for operational reasons. The New Zealand Government was anxious that the news of the arrival of the Division in **Italy** should first be announced in New Zealand before being broadcast from the **BBC** or published in the overseas press, and also that the initial announcement should not be to the effect that the Division was taking part in an engagement. Several telegrams dealing with the release of this announcement were exchanged but have not been reproduced. A statement by the Deputy Prime Minister (Hon. W. Nash) that the Division had rejoined **Eighth Army** in **Italy** was published in the New Zealand press on 23 Nov.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

304 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

304  
*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

16 November 1943

I have to report that your Division moved into the line on the **Sangro River** on 11 November. We are working in most difficult mountainous country as an independent force directly under General Montgomery in the forthcoming offensive on the **Sangro River** line. We have attached to us an Indian brigade group.

The Division is in my opinion well equipped and fit to carry out the pending operations. It is cold and wet weather. All are well and in good spirits.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 305 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

305

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

26 November 1943

**The New Zealand Division will be attacking on or about the 28th. It would be much appreciated if you could send a message from yourself and the people of New Zealand to be published in Orders.** <sup>1</sup>

**A long report on operations of the *Long Range Desert Group* follows.**

2

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<sup>1</sup> **This message is not published. On 9 Nov the Prime Minister had cabled that he would send a message from the Government and people of New Zealand to the Division before it went into action.**

<sup>2</sup> **See *New Zealand Squadron, Long Range Desert Group, in the Dodecanese* (No. 353).**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 306 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS

306

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs*

4 December 1943

We are much embarrassed as a Government by the lack of any direct information about the fighting in which the 2nd New Zealand Division is engaged in **Italy**. In some measure this lack of official news is presumably due to the fact that General Eisenhower's headquarters are responsible for the issue of communiqués and there is no direct contact between him and this Government.

**General Freyberg** is of course fully occupied in the conduct of the operations of his Division and cannot, in any case, supply the wider appreciations which would give the Government an adequate account of the progress of the campaign. Headquarters 2nd NZEF are, however, being requested to supply what they can. <sup>1</sup>

Representations to General Eisenhower or General Alexander for regular and up-to-date information would be greatly appreciated, as would any arrangements His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom** could make to amplify the information contained in the daily war telegrams and those from the **War Office** to the Chief of the General Staff.

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<sup>1</sup> A telegram on 4 Dec from Army Headquarters to Brigadier Stevens advised that the Prime Minister was disturbed by the lack of news of the Division. 'We get daily war messages from the Dominions Office and reports from **War Office**, but these are very



**meagre and unsatisfying to the Prime Minister,' the telegram ran. 'He has asked the Dominions Office for fuller reports and has stated that we are asking you to furnish reports also. The Prime Minister realises that the GOC is very busy and unable to supply frequent reports and that there may be restrictions by the Higher Command, but ... he is naturally anxiously awaiting an interim report.'**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 307 – THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

307

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

9 December 1943

Your telegram of 4 December.

We very much regret that you have been embarrassed by lack of information about military operations in **Italy**. The information which we have sent you has represented the gist of all that was available here on the general course of the operations.

We are in some doubt whether your anxiety arises from lack of information on the part played by the 2nd New Zealand Division or about the broader picture of the course of events.

With regard to the former, my immediately following telegram gives a full summary prepared by the **War Office** of all the information regarding the 2nd New Zealand Division which has been received there since its arrival in **Italy**. You will see that the main operational event has been the fighting around **Orsogna** which has been referred to in our daily war telegrams.

As regards the broader picture, the policy we intended to pursue in **Italy** was set out in the message conveyed to you through the High Commissioner at the beginning of September, summarising the main conclusions reached at the **Quebec** conference.<sup>2</sup> No change has been made in that policy, which has been pursued resolutely, although our advance has been slowed down by the weather, enemy demolitions, and the suitability of the country for defence.

As for enemy action, we anticipated (see our telegram of 3 July 1943) <sup>1</sup> that **Germany's** general strategy would be to remain strictly on the defensive on all fronts. Nothing has occurred to modify this opinion, and the latest appreciation by our intelligence advisers, dated 24 November 1943, with reference to **Italy**, may be summarised as follows:

Assuming that the situation on the Russian front continues to develop favourably for the **United Nations**, then German commitments in **Russia**, the potential threat across the Channel, the necessity for safeguarding the **Balkans**, her marked inferiority in the air in **Italy** (which cannot be remedied), and the difficulties of communications in central **Italy** all combine to impose on **Germany** a basically defensive strategy in **Italy**. Her object will be to delay our advance northwards by demolitions and strong rearguard action but to avoid a decisive battle. She will retain in **Italy** only such forces as are necessary to the employment of this strategy. She will give priority to the claims of **Russia** and the **Balkans** and, later, to **France**. To avoid disaster on these fronts she will be prepared to reduce her forces in **Italy**, even if this involved, sooner or later, a withdrawal under pressure from northern **Italy** to the more easily defended lines of the French and Austrian Alps.

We have carefully considered whether General Eisenhower or General Alexander could be asked to send special informatory telegrams to the **New Zealand Government**, but in view of their many and heavy other commitments we do not feel we should be justified in calling upon them to do more at present, and we will continue to repeat to you the information which they send us. We are sure that you will appreciate the position and will agree with this. Please let us know if there are any particular aspects about which you feel you should have received further details, and we will do our best to have the deficiency remedied.

We greatly hope that the position will be improved by the above arrangements, and as a result of your request to Headquarters 2nd NZEF to supply you with what they can.

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<sup>2</sup> Not published.

<sup>1</sup> Not published. This telegram from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the High Commissioner for the **United Kingdom** in New Zealand contained a summary of an appreciation by the United Kingdom Government's intelligence advisers on the probable course of German strategy in 1943. The conclusion of this appreciation was that German plans for an offensive against **Russia** had been upset by the sudden collapse of the Axis forces in **Tunisia**, the continued Russian pressure against the Taman Peninsula, and the intensification of Allied air attacks. As a result, **Germany** had been forced to adopt a policy of active defence on the Russian front and on all other fronts would probably remain strictly on the defensive.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 308 – THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

308

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

9 December 1943

The following is the summary of operations of the 2nd New Zealand Division in **Italy** referred to in my immediately preceding telegram:

The 2nd New Zealand Division arrived in **Italy** from Egypt during the latter half of October and **Divisional Headquarters** was established at **Taranto**. For a month the Division collected its vehicles and tanks, concentrated, and put the finishing touches to its training in the heel area. On 20 November the 6th New Zealand Infantry Brigade came into the line on the left of 5th Corps near **Perano**, while remaining under the command of **Eighth Army**, and sent patrols over the **Sangro River** the following day. The 5th New Zealand Infantry Brigade took up positions on the left of the 6th Brigade on 21 November. By 27 November crossings over the river had been reconnoitred in preparation for the main **Eighth Army** attack which took place that night.

The Division, under the direct command of General Montgomery, attacked on the axis **Perano- Orsogna**, and the latter town was captured on 3 December. Fierce fighting took place in this area for the next two days, the Germans mounting a particularly heavy counterattack supported by tanks on 5 December, forcing the forward troops back from **Orsogna**. On 7 December New Zealand troops again attacked from the line of the road **Orsogna- Ortona** and started well. As yet there is no information as to the movements of the 4th New Zealand Armoured Brigade.



DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
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309 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE –  
[EXTRACT]

309

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

[ Extract ]

14 December 1943

.... <sup>1</sup> We are now fighting north of the **Sangro**. The weather and ground are difficult but all goes well. Casualties have not been heavy and everyone is in good heart. I will send a detailed report later.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Furlough Scheme (No. 288)* for complete text.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 310 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

310

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

15 December 1943

I have the honour to report that the 2nd New Zealand Division has been in action in **Italy**. Your Division rejoined the **Eighth Army** in November and has just taken part in the offensive which forced a crossing of the **Sangro** and broke through the enemy's winter line.

In conditions completely different from those we were used to in North Africa, your Division carried out a most difficult operation in a way which showed that the veterans of the desert and the men who had not seen action before have become a well-balanced fighting formation, excellently equipped and trained for this campaign in **Europe**.

The preliminary fighting in the advance to the **Sangro River**, across difficult country in very bad weather, was carried out by an Indian brigade under our command, supported by our tanks and artillery. Fighting rearguard actions, to which the German Army is now well accustomed, the enemy contested each river valley and hilltop village through which the Italian roads wend their way. Not only had the enemy rearguards to be dislodged but demolitions on a grand scale had to be bridged; in some places vehicles were winched through one by one until firm ground was reached. Trucks slipped and got bogged in the sea of mud and at times it seemed impossible that the blocks in the mass of transport would be cleared. Neither weather nor enemy rearguards, however, stopped the advance and our whole force with all its transport, tanks, and guns was brought forward over the narrow mountain roads.

At the approaches to the **Sangro River** enemy resistance stiffened. British and Indian infantry of the Indian infantry brigade, supported by



tanks of our **19th Armoured Regiment** and by our Artillery, carried out a most gallant attack, crossed the upper reaches of the river, and captured the high ground from which the enemy had been able to observe our movements and bring down artillery fire.

South of the **Sangro River** our 5th and 6th Infantry Brigades under Brigadiers **Kippenberger** and Parkinson deployed for the next phase in the battle. Then heavy rain fell again, brought the river to flood level, and delayed our attack. Apart from the weather the operation was most difficult, as the wide riverbed is dominated by the commanding heights of the north bank. The plan was to carry out a night attack, and the troops were waiting ready for the river to fall. On 26 November the weather improved.

The battle of the **Sangro** opened along the **Eighth Army** front on the night of the 27th, with the New Zealand Division on the left flank. Moving forward in pitch dark, our infantry crossed the river with the aid of ropes, formed up on the north bank at two in the morning, and assaulted the heights. This attack by the 5th and 6th Brigades under an artillery barrage on a front of 6000 yards was brilliantly carried out. The enemy was driven from all our objectives, leaving many dead and over 300 prisoners behind. In the riverbed itself the engineers worked all night and next day under intense shellfire, making tracks through and building bridges to get supporting arms and tanks across to secure the bridgehead. Until the bridges were completed only a few tanks could be got across owing to mud and quicksands, but before the enemy had recovered from the initial surprise the artillery was brought forward and the infantry again advanced. A daylight infantry attack on high ground took the enemy by surprise and **Castelfrentano** was occupied. By the capture of this hill town on the highest ridge overlooking the **Sangro River**, both the 5th and 6th Brigades established themselves astride Kesselring's much-vaunted winter line.

There can be no doubt that the enemy intended to hold his defensive system covering the line of the River Sangro. It was very strong,

consisting of deep reinforced trenches and dugouts, a complete communication-trench system, and electrically lit living quarters, and the whole system was covered by extensive minefields and barbed wire. The men who stormed it would look back with satisfaction from this natural fortress of hills and skilfully planned defences and realise what they had achieved.

While your Division attacked along the high ground, other formations, supported by the powerful Allied Air Force, advanced on the coastal sector; the **Eighth Army** broke through the German line on a wide front. The battle of the **Sangro** is an important step forward, but the enemy is still fighting back hard, and I must warn the **New Zealand Government** that heavy fighting lies ahead before the enemy is driven north of **Rome**.

May I quote in this despatch a letter I have just received from the Army Commander referring to the part played by your Division in the battle:

I would like to congratulate the 2nd New Zealand Division on the splendid achievement of the last few days. Since the Division came into the battle line of the **Eighth Army** after a long absence, it has been faced with the forces of nature and by a determined enemy in strongly prepared positions. The Division has dealt with the forces of nature and with the enemy in a manner that is beyond all praise. The part played by New Zealand troops in the battle of the **Sangro** should make all those in the home country very proud of their soldiers serving in **Italy**.

Please tell your officers and men how pleased I am with what they have done. Further tasks lie ahead but, having smashed through the enemy's winter line, we are now well placed to tackle the enemy in the open. Good luck to you all.

(Signed) B. L. MONTGOMERY,  
General, **Eighth Army**

I am writing this account in my office truck in the forward area

**waiting for the bombardment of another attack to open. The moon is full. It is a cold, overcast winter night. Conditions are hard, but everyone is in excellent spirits, and I am glad to report that in spite of strong enemy resistance our losses to date have not been unduly heavy.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 311 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

311

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

11 January 1944

For your personal information, the **Eighth Army** front is likely to remain quiet until the ground dries, which may not be until March. <sup>1</sup> There has been hard fighting on this front. <sup>2</sup> The enemy lost his winter line, but by bringing in fresh formations he has succeeded at a cost in keeping the **Eighth Army** south of the Pescara River until the bad weather set in. The obvious geographical difficulties of the country have been increased greatly by recent heavy rain and snow. Conditions which always favoured defence are now ideal from the enemy's point of view. Snow is lying on the whole of our front and cross-country 'going' is impassable.

On the **Fifth Army** front progress is being made, and the policy is to launch a heavy offensive there to capture **Rome**. The plan is to move certain formations, including your Division, from the **Eighth Army** to the **Fifth Army** front. To gain surprise secrecy is essential. We are moving with wireless silence and with divisional signs and badges removed. I cannot comment on the Army plan, which I do not yet know, but one should not be over-optimistic at this stage. Mud is a very bad obstacle and the weather is likely to interfere with air co-operation. Your Division is to be in reserve with the role of exploiting any break-through which is made. For this, as you know, the force is fully equipped and trained, and I am confident that your Division, experienced as it is now in these conditions, will give an excellent account of itself should the opportunity to exploit occur.

Conditions here are unlike anything we have experienced since

**Greece.** On New Year's Eve we had a blizzard, with a wind of gale force and heavy snow. Hardships have been accepted with the usual spirit. During this comparatively static period of fighting on the **Orsogna** front, reliefs have been possible and the men have been able to get under cover. Winter boots and clothing have proved excellent, and I am very glad to report that the sick rate is most satisfactory.

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<sup>1</sup> Another version of this telegram reads: 'which may be some time.'

<sup>2</sup> New Zealand casualties in **Italy** from 12 Nov 1943–31 Jan 1944 were:

<b>Killed</b>	<b>298</b>
<b>Died of wounds</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Died on active service (includes deaths through sickness, accident, &amp;c.)</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Missing</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Wounded</b>	<b>1116</b>
<b>Prisoners of war (includes 16 wounded and prisoners of war and 4 died of wounds while prisoners of war)</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1640</b>

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 312 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

312

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

31 January 1944

Since my telegram of 11 January we have moved across **Italy** to the **Fifth Army** sector and have been waiting in General Headquarters Reserve. The change to this front has been welcome. The Division is camped in an excellent area twenty miles behind the line. We have had unbroken fine weather and useful training in the hills and on river crossings with various types of bridges and boats has been carried out. Our presence in this sector is still being kept secret.

So far the battle has progressed slowly. The British, French, and American Corps have made gains after hard fighting. The enemy is taking advantage of the ideal defensive country and is contesting every piece of high ground. The landing in the north was a surprise to the enemy and met with virtually no opposition. <sup>1</sup> They have been consolidating and building up the beach-head and there has been no heavy fighting to date.

Yesterday I was sent for by General Alexander. His plan is to form the **New Zealand Corps** to carry out an operation with the object of breaking through and joining up with the beach-head. The 4th Indian Infantry Division and four field, five medium, and one heavy regiment of British artillery are to be placed under my command. Reconnaissance and planning are now in progress to be ready to take part in the battle in the near future.

The enemy appears to be stretched but apparently has been ordered to hold the present line and **Rome** at all costs. It will be clear to **War Cabinet**, therefore, that heavy fighting and inevitable casualties must be

**expected.**

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<sup>1</sup> **The 6th United States Corps landed at [Anzio](#) on 22 Jan 1944.**

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

313 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

313

*The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

**2 February 1944**

**Thank you for your message of 31 January. We wish you all success in what will undoubtedly be severe fighting in the strenuous days ahead.**



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 314 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

### 314 *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

14 February 1944

As you know, we have temporarily become the **New Zealand Corps** for the coming operation, and in addition to the Indian Division another British division may be placed under our command. In order to keep clear of detail I have, subject to your approval, brought in **Brigadier Kippenberger** to command the New Zealand Division temporarily with the rank of Major-General. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The appointment was approved by **War Cabinet** in a telegram dated 16 Feb in which it wished the **New Zealand Corps** 'all success'. A telegram from **General Freyberg** on 2 Mar (not published) advised that **General Kippenberger** had been wounded and that **Brigadier G. B. Parkinson** had been appointed to command the Division temporarily.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 315 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

315

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

19 February 1944

Press messages received today from **London** report **Berlin** radio as stating that the New Zealand and 4th Indian Divisions are now fighting in the **Cassino** area. We are not permitting publication in the meantime, but as the press in **Australia** *inter alia* will carry the story we would appreciate immediate advice as to whether the announcement, which we would wish to release for Monday morning's papers, that the New Zealand Division is now fighting in the **Cassino** area, may be made.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 316 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

316

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

**20 February 1944**

**Your telegram of 19 February. Since you cabled the BBC has announced that New Zealand troops have been in action in the Cassino area. As you know, the transfer of the Division to the west coast was secret, and General Alexander kept our presence secret until the battle began.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 317 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

### 317 *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

14 March 1944

As you will know from the news, bad weather here has prevented any large-scale operations. The **New Zealand Corps**, now composed of the 2nd New Zealand Division, the 78th British Division, and the **4th Indian Division**, together with over 500 guns and an American armoured force under command, is waiting to resume the offensive in the **Cassino** area. We are undoubtedly facing one of the most difficult operations of all our battles. The enemy position is a natural fortress flanked by the Rapido River. The **New Zealand Corps'** plan is a very detailed one. It provides for the fullest use being made of our great air and artillery strength and aims to pass through over 400 tanks.

Regrouping of the armies is now taking place. **Eighth Army** will take over the sector on this front and, as soon as the present phase of the battle is over, we will resume divisional status and become part of 13th Corps under **Eighth Army**.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 318 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

318

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

31 March 1944

I am preparing a report on the fighting in **Cassino** for publication if desired. You will realise, however, that with further operations pending, reference to certain aspects of the battle which might be of assistance to the enemy will have to be omitted. This cable is to inform you of the present situation and our role for the immediate future.

The **New Zealand Corps'** attack, with the object of breaching the enemy's **Cassino** position and passing the armour through, opened on 15 March. A week of extremely heavy fighting followed. As you will have realised from the reports, we have achieved some success but have failed to break through and deploy our armour. Battles of this kind, like **Alamein** and **Mareth**, can be divided into three phases, the break-in, the encounter battle, and the break-out. Here the break-in was successfully accomplished, and in the encounter battle we have seized a number of dominating features. We now occupy the castle at Point 193 and hold the major part of the town and **Cassino** railway station. We have also secured crossings over the main channel of the Rapido River. These gains will be of the greatest value when the offensive is resumed by other troops.

We had hoped that by using a tremendous weight of bombs and following up fast we would break through while the enemy was disorganised. The blitz attack certainly disorganised the enemy, but the damage which the bombing caused to the roads and approaches through to the **Liri Valley** proved an insuperable obstacle to wheeled and tracked vehicles. The resulting delay lost us the advantage of surprise. The

**enemy held grimly to the western edge of the town and it became a question of regrouping for another full-scale attack.**

**The fighting has been hard and bitter. Casualties in the **New Zealand Corps**, both in the **4th Indian Division** and in the 2nd New Zealand Division, have not been light. We have, however, fought the enemy hard and his casualties, especially in his Parachute Division, have been high. This in itself is important at this stage when the enemy is stretched. Our casualties in the New Zealand Division on this front from 6 February to 28 March have been 211 killed, 1156 wounded, and 141 missing.**

**Regrouping of the armies is now taking place and we are handing over the front to 13th Corps. We are still in the line holding **Cassino**. The enemy counter-attacked the railway station this morning and was repulsed with considerable losses. We are to be relieved shortly and will move to a quieter sector of the front in the north to recuperate and absorb our reinforcements. The troops are tired but will recover quickly with rest.**

**A cable describing the course of the battle follows.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 319 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

319

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

4 April 1944

I have the honour to report on the part played by the New Zealand Forces in recent operations at **Cassino**. Reports of fighting from our war correspondents have been sent to New Zealand, and my purpose is merely to give a brief connected picture of our operations during the last two months.

In earlier cables I reported to you that we had temporarily become the **New Zealand Corps** under the Fifth American Army for operations with the **4th Indian Division**, a British division, and with British and American armour and guns under command. As stated in my secret cipher message when our role was assigned to us, we had no illusions about the difficulties of the task ahead. I cabled then, 'We are undoubtedly facing one of the most difficult operations of all our battles.' <sup>1</sup>

The **Cassino** position is a formidable one, and not for the first time in history it has barred the way to armies advancing into the **Liri Valley** which leads to **Rome**. **Cassino**, once a substantial stone town, lies at the foot of **Monastery Hill**, which rises sharply out of the plain, not unlike the rock of Gibraltar in steepness and height. The road and railway to **Rome** pass through **Cassino**, the narrow plain over which we had to advance is flooded, wired, and mined, and the entire defensive system is covered by the small but swift-flowing Rapido River. From the vantage point of the Monastery the enemy can watch and bring down fire on every movement on the roads or open country in the plain below.

This natural fortress of the enemy's **Gustav Line** held up the

American advance earlier in the year, and it was from an American Corps that we took over after coming across from the **Eighth Army** front. As we drove forward we saw the ideal defensive country from which the American, British, and French troops of **Fifth Army** had driven the enemy after months of heavy and most gallant fighting. At **Cassino** they attacked again and again, gaining important peaks to the north and a foothold in the northern edge of the town itself. These were the positions we took over, the **4th Indian Division** moving into the mountains to the north while the 2nd New Zealand Division occupied the northern outskirts of **Cassino**.

Since the middle of February we have maintained pressure on the **Cassino** front. The enemy has been attacked from the air and bombarded by artillery and has been forced to deploy his reserves

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<sup>1</sup> No. 317.

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to meet the threat of a break-through. He put in his best available troops to hold **Cassino** and the heights above it. On 15 February the Benedictine Monastery was destroyed by heavy air bombardment, a step which was forced upon us because, despite enemy protests to the contrary, it was being used as an observatory for military purposes.

Prior to the main attack on **Cassino** itself, the **4th Indian Division** fought a battle on the steep rocky slopes to the north of the Monastery. They gained ground on Point 593 and have held it ever since despite enemy counter-attacks and very difficult conditions. The enemy had prepared their positions in advance and their strongpoints blasted into rock had to be stormed at night with hand grenade and bayonet.

On 17 and 18 February the **28th (Maori) Battalion** carried out an operation to cross the Rapido River south of the town. A bridgehead was won and the engineers were within an ace of getting demolitions repaired and bridges through after magnificent work, but dawn came an hour too soon. By daylight the enemy could pick out their targets from



**Monastery Hill** and further work was impossible under continuous fire. Supporting arms could not be got up and our bridgehead was driven back by an enemy tank attack.

Meanwhile, plans were made for a full-scale attack supported by very heavy air and artillery bombardment. This was to be followed by an infantry assault which, if fully successful, would make a break for the armour into the valley beyond. The attack on **Cassino** and **Monastery Hill** by the 2nd New Zealand Division and **4th Indian Division**, dependent as it was upon tank and air support, required firm going for the tanks and clear visibility for the bombers. This meant weeks of patient waiting since weather conditions in February and March in **Italy** leave much to be desired. At last on 15 March it seemed that the weather was right and the attack was launched.

Before dawn that morning the New Zealand troops on the northern outskirts of **Cassino** were withdrawn and at half past eight a terrific air attack began. For the first time heavy bombers of the Strategic Air Force, as well as medium and light bombers, took part in a close air support programme of unprecedented weight. From an observation post I watched already battered **Cassino** reduced to rubble. Squadron after squadron of Fortresses, Liberators, Mitchells, and, Marauders of the American Air Force came in, with short intervals between groups to allow the huge clouds of dust and smoke to clear. Flashes of flame from bursting bombs leaped from the buildings and from the slopes above the town, explosions reverberated through the hills and shook the ground under our feet. No enemy aircraft appeared during the attack. Enemy anti-aircraft guns were neutralised by artillery and none fired after half past ten.

At twelve o'clock precisely the last flight of medium bombers planted their bombs with impressive accuracy. Twelve o'clock was zero hour, when the Allied artillery (under our CCRA, Brigadier C. E. Weir) opened fire and the infantry attacked. Your Division (under Major-General Parkinson) had the task of storming **Cassino**. During the air attack there had been no artillery fire on **Cassino** as dust and smoke would have

obscured the target for aircraft, but at zero hour between five and six hundred guns of all calibres opened on the Corps front, a bombardment heavier than at **Alamein**. Behind the creeping barrage infantry, engineers, and tanks advanced into **Cassino** from the north.

The approach was a bottleneck restricted by massive mountains on the west and by the Rapido River on the east. Only one battalion could be deployed at a time, a factor which was a great handicap to our operations. The positions we had withdrawn from were occupied without trouble; our first objective, **Castle Hill**, a steep miniature of the Monastery feature just north of the town, was stormed and captured by the **25th Battalion**, and the **26th Battalion**, followed by the **19th Armoured Regiment**, attacked **Cassino** itself. At first our attack met little opposition and casualties were very light. The prisoners taken were stunned and reported heavy casualties from the bombing. The town was completely wrecked, and the whole area was covered with wide, deep craters up to 60 feet across which could not be crossed by our armour. In some places where bombs had missed buildings or had not penetrated reinforced basements, there were snipers and enemy posts which were holding out, and on the western edge of the town the enemy position blasted into the base of the hill remained intact. From positions south of **Monastery Hill** enemy nebelwerfers and trench mortars came into action. Our artillery, bombers, and fighter-bombers engaged these enemy mortar areas and continued the attack in depth on enemy positions on **Monastery Hill** and on gun areas in the valley beyond.

By evening good progress had been made and the stage was set for the next vital phase of the attack. This was to take advantage of enemy disorganisation during the moonlight. **Cassino** was to be mopped up by New Zealand battalions. Troops from the **4th Indian Division** were to take over **Castle Hill** from our **25th Battalion** and then attack **Monastery Hill**. American and New Zealand engineers were to put a bridge over the Rapido on the main **Rome** road and clear routes forward to bring tanks through the town.

Up to this moment the operation had developed as planned. At nightfall, however, the weather broke and torrential rain fell throughout the night. Visibility was poor and the moon made little or no difference. It was impossible to keep control in the pitch dark and progress in **Cassino** was slow. When the **4th Indian Division** moved, **Cassino** town had not been cleared. As a result they could not deploy on the precipitous slopes of **Monastery Hill**, and there was inevitable delay and loss of cohesion. In these conditions the achievement of the Gurkha Battalion in capturing 'Hangman's Hill', the point just below the Monastery, before dawn was a magnificent one. But they were too thin on the ground to attack **Monastery Hill**.

The engineers' task of making routes and bridging gaps was also greatly hampered and slowed down by conditions. Owing to the low-lying nature of the ground, craters were full of water and mud and bridges had to be built across the gaps. Despite all difficulties, however, the engineers built steel bridges over the Rapido River before dawn.

On the morning of the 16th **Monastery Hill** was still in enemy hands and **Cassino** had not been cleared; indeed, the enemy had had opportunity during the night to clear away debris and reorganise a number of strongpoints. It was clear that hope of obtaining full advantage of a surprise attack and breaking through with armour had gone and that further progress would be slow. **Cassino** had to be cleared so that the New Zealand Division could link up with the Indian Division on Hangman's Hill. At first light New Zealand infantry of 6th Brigade, with tank support, went on with their task.

Apart from isolated posts, the main enemy resistance was in the concrete defences in the south-west corner of the town, known as the Continental Hotel area, and at two points at the foot of **Castle Hill**, blasted into the face of the hill, where the enemy resisted fiercely. It was against these points that the New Zealand infantry concentrated during the following days. Close up behind the infantry the engineers built bridges, and with bulldozers and hand labour gradually cleared routes

through. On the 17th tanks of the **19th Armoured Regiment** were brought into the town, and that morning our **26th Battalion**, supported by a squadron of tanks, swung south and made an important advance, capturing **Cassino** railway station after fierce fighting. Enemy tanks and anti-tank guns attempted to intervene but were dealt with by our tanks and artillery.

From now on **Cassino** became the scene of most bitter fighting, and our battalions of 5th Brigade (under Brigadier Burrows) joined 6th Brigade (under Brigadier Bonifant) <sup>1</sup> in the battle for the strong-points. Our infantry, closely supported by our tanks, fought forward from one heap of rubble to another and dug out snipers in ones and twos. Walls of houses in the west of the town where the enemy held out were literally blown down in sections by our tanks.

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<sup>1</sup> Brigadier I. L. Bonifant, DSO, ED; CO 25th NZ Battalion, Sep 1942 – Jan 1943; commanded **NZ Divisional Cavalry**, Jan 1943 – Apr 1944; commanded 6th Brigade, 3–27 Mar 1944; 5th Brigade, Jan – May 1945; 6th Brigade, Jun – Oct 1945; Area Commander, **Christchurch**, Apr – Aug 1948.

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On the 19th 180 prisoners were taken from two strongpoints, but the enemy still held the western edge of the town securely and was able to supply and reinforce it by night. For a week, under cover of smoke by day and in waning moonlight by night, the battle went on. By day and night the town was shelled and mortared by the enemy, while our own guns were continuously in action masking enemy observation points on **Monastery Hill** with smoke and breaking up enemy formations and shelling his gun areas.

While your Division fought in **Cassino**, British and Indian troops of the **4th Indian Division** fought back counter-attacks in the hills. We were forced off Point 165, but **Castle Hill** was firmly held by infantry from Essex and Kent. The garrison has already repulsed five counter-attacks made against it. The Gurkhas on Hangman's Hill and a company

of our **24th Battalion** on Points 146 and 202 became isolated but held on with great determination. They were supplied by air by American dive-bombers and fighter-bombers which dropped ammunition, water, and food in parachute containers with remarkable accuracy onto such difficult targets. The full success of our operation depended on our ability to clear **Cassino** and link up with these isolated garrisons so that the attack could go on to take the Monastery. This could not be accomplished and eventually the isolated troops had to be withdrawn by night.

In an attack against an enemy position such as this, the operation always divides itself into three phases: the break-in battle, the encounter battle, and the break-out. Our plan was to reduce the second phase to a minimum by the violence of our initial blow, but blitz bombing proved a double-edged weapon and produced obstacles which made speedy deployment of our armour impossible. At Alamein, and in the Battle of **Mareth** just one year ago, the third phase was reached after several days' heavy fighting and decisive battles were won. At **Cassino** the strong defence held, and we have not reached the third phase. We have, however, broken into his main defensive system, and in the fierce battles which ensued we have caused the enemy heavy casualties. We have won and now hold part of our objective. We have a bridgehead across the main Rapido River, and we hold **Castle Hill** and the bulk of the town and the railway station.

In this battle we have been fighting in the Fifth American Army. I would like to record here our pride in doing so and our deep appreciation of the help and co-operation we have had from General Mark Clark,<sup>1</sup> his staff, and all formations with which we have served.

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<sup>1</sup> General Mark W. Clark, **US Army**; Chief of Staff and Deputy to General Eisenhower (European Theatre of Operations) 1942; GOC **5th Army**, 1943–44; commanded 15th Army Group, 1944–45; **United States Forces in Austria**, 1945–47.

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**May I quote from a letter I have just received from our Army Commander:**

**Undiscouraged by the hardships of unfavourable weather and extremely difficult terrain, and in the face of a desperate and stubborn enemy, your command has fought with outstanding valour and determination. The fine spirit of co-operation and teamwork displayed by your Corps and by other components of the **Fifth Army** has shown the enemy clearly that the Allies are truly united nations and as such will fight together to final victory.**

**Many gallant exploits have been performed by the British, American, Indian, and New Zealand troops who fought over those steep hills and in the town. Units and individuals cannot be mentioned in this report but some will be recognised when awards are announced.**

**I am adding this paragraph on returning from a visit to the units in the line. After the hard battle the troops were tired, but they are recovering quickly and are in good heart. <sup>1</sup>**

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**<sup>1</sup> New Zealand casualties from 1 Feb – 10 Apr 1944 were:**

<b>Killed</b>	<b>261</b>
<b>Died of wounds</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Died on active service (includes deaths through sickness, accident, &amp;c.)</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Missing</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Wounded</b>	<b>1233</b>
<b>Prisoners of war (includes 7 wounded and prisoners of war and 1 died of wounds while prisoner of war)</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1655</b>

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 320 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE<sup>2</sup>

320

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*<sup>2</sup>

23 April 1944

The line on which **New Zealand Corps** stabilised after the last attack is still held and regrouping of forces continues preparatory to further operations on a large scale by the Fifth and Eighth Armies. Meanwhile, the Germans continue to strengthen their defences, and it is clear that they will fight to hold the formidable defences which flank and cover the **Liri** and **Sacco** valleys which lead to **Rome**.

It is impossible to assess the degree of success likely in the next attack. As we well know, the operation is most difficult. The opposing armies are of approximately the same strength in infantry, and our superiority in the air, tanks, and artillery is neutralised to a great extent by the mountainous nature of the country. The front on which the attack must be launched is obvious and little chance exists of gaining surprise.

Your Division is at present responsible for the line to the north of **Cassino** and has under command a Canadian brigade group and a brigade of British parachute troops. This is a comparatively quiet mountain sector. One of our brigades is resting at a time, and we are taking the opportunity to carry out certain reorganisation necessary for fighting in the mountains. For the moment the Division is under strength, but reinforcements are arriving from Egypt. We shall not take part in the initial stages of the next operation.

Everybody is well, and the men have recovered from the heavy fighting in **Cassino**.

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<sup>2</sup> This telegram was repeated to the New Zealand Military Liaison Officer, **London** (Brigadier R. S. Park) for the Prime Minister. Mr. Fraser, who had left **Auckland** on 8 Apr, arrived in **London** on the 27th after a short visit to the **United States**. He attended the conference of Commonwealth Prime Ministers from 1–16 May, visited New Zealand troops in **Italy** and **Egypt**, and returned to New Zealand via **Canada** and the **United States** on 18 Jul.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

321 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND<sup>1</sup> TO THE RT.  
HON. P. FRASER (LONDON)

321

*The acting Prime Minister of New Zealand<sup>1</sup> to the Rt. Hon. P. Fraser  
(London)*

**28 April 1944**

**Please see Freyberg's telegram of 23 April repeated to the New  
Zealand Military Liaison Officer (London).**

**In view of the substantial difficulties involved in this operation, I  
cannot but feel some uneasiness as to the position. I would appreciate  
your comments.**

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<sup>1</sup> Hon D. G. Sullivan, Minister of Industries and Commerce,  
1935–47; died 8 Apr 1947.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 322 – THE RT. HON. P. FRASER (LONDON) TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER

322

*The Rt. Hon. P. Fraser ( London) to the acting Prime Minister*

2 May 1944

Your telegram of 28 April.

I delayed answering your telegram until I had had an opportunity of discussing the Italian war situation, which I have now done in the Prime Ministers' conference with the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and General Maitland Wilson. The present position, future plans, and the objectives of the campaign were today examined in detail. The military authorities regard the prospects of success as reasonably good, and the British War Cabinet and Chiefs of Staff are satisfied that there is no alternative but to re-engage the Germans to prevent their withdrawing any of their divisions from **Italy** for the purpose of combating the Second Front in the west or sending them perhaps to the Eastern front. <sup>1</sup> The fighting will undoubtedly be difficult in the initial stages, during which, however, **Freyberg** says our troops will not take part. He would, I feel sure, advise us, as he always does, if in his opinion the situation called for special representations from the **New Zealand Government**.

At this most critical period in the war it is clear that our Division must continue to play the important role assigned to it.

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<sup>1</sup> The Second Front was not opened till a month later (6 Jun).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 323 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER (CAIRO)<sup>2</sup>

323

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister ( Cairo) <sup>2</sup>*

4 June 1944

**The fall of Rome appears imminent and everything is going well.**

**After pushing the enemy back north of Sora, the axis of our advance is being switched and the plan is to pass us through farther south from Route 6 as soon as the situation allows. We will be directed on Rieti-Terni and then, if all goes well, towards the Pisa- Rimini line, east of Florence. During the next few days we will break contact here and assemble for a quick move through.**

**Reports from the 8th Indian Division praise the excellent work of our 18th Armoured Regiment which has been fighting under their command. They will rejoin us in the next few days.**

**I am preparing a short report for publication in New Zealand if desired.**

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<sup>2</sup> **The Prime Minister had arrived in Italy on 26 May.**

**Accompanied by General Puttick, he visited units of the Division in the forward area and had discussions with General Freyberg. On 4 Jun he left Bari for Egypt on a visit to Base units, returned to Italy on the 8th, and left next day for the United Kingdom, via Algiers.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 324 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER (LONDON)

324

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister ( London)*

20 June 1944

**Our progress here on the Italian front is most encouraging, the enemy still retreating under pressure. There is evidence that they want to delay our advance south of the [Pisa- Rimini](#) line. He is, however, losing large quantities of equipment and transport, partly from lack of petrol for his motor transport and also by air action. Unless reinforced by several fresh divisions, it seems very doubtful whether they will be able to hold the [Pisa- Rimini](#) line for long. At the moment maintenance is delaying us. Further, owing to the lack of roads, only a portion of the Fifth and Eighth Armies can be deployed during the advance. Owing to damage to the railways there is a shortage of transport, and all available New Zealand second- and third-line transport is working forward to maintain the most advanced troops. We as a division are grounded, and there is every chance that we shall have a further month in which to rest our men and absorb some of our newly-joined reinforcements before undertaking active operations. This period of inactivity is welcomed by us as it will enable the New Zealand forces to train and also to further conserve our strength.**

**The New Zealand Club in [Rome](#), the Quirinale Hotel, opens its doors to our men on Friday, 23 June. It is a large luxury hotel. We will serve 2000 meals a day at a small charge to officers, sisters, and other ranks. The Club staff arrives today, and in addition we will employ 150 Italians to wait and cook. We are arranging tours of the [Vatican](#) and ancient monuments and hope to get the bulk of our force to visit [Rome](#) before we move to further active operations.**

**A cable regarding long- and short-term policy follows. <sup>1</sup> All goes very well. The morale of the force is high.**

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**<sup>1</sup> See Maintenance of 2nd New Zealand Division; the Replacement Scheme (No. 384).**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 325 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER (WASHINGTON)

325

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister ( Washington)*

8 July 1944

We have just received orders from **Eighth Army** to move forward 200 miles in the direction of **Florence** into Army Reserve preparatory to being given an operational role. It is understood this will involve either holding a firm base or making a limited advance. I will cable details later.

This may complicate the withdrawal of the 4th Reinforcements, but the machinery has been set in motion and the quota will be withdrawn as soon as possible. <sup>2</sup>

The Club in **Rome** is being a great success. Nearly half the Division have been there.

The men are well, and we have carried out some valuable training while we have been in this area.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

326 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER (WASHINGTON)<sup>1</sup> –  
[EXTRACT]

326

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister ( Washington) <sup>1</sup>*  
*[ Extract]*

13 July 1944

.... <sup>2</sup>We took over portion of the front last night and are carrying out an attack in conjunction with the 6th Armoured Division on the 15th. Everyone is in great heart and all goes well.

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<sup>1</sup> Telegrams Nos. 323– 6 were also repeated to the Minister of Defence.

<sup>2</sup> In the text omitted **General Freyberg** submitted for approval the draft of an announcement concerning leave for long-service personnel and the withdrawal of the first quota of the 4th Reinforcements.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 327 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

327

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

18 July 1944

The enemy so far have not identified the New Zealand Division in the line. For security reasons therefore, our part in the attack on the night of 14 July has not been reported by the BBC or the press. For your information, our 6th Infantry Brigade captured the **Lignano** feature which was the key to the enemy position covering **Arezzo**. The British 6th Armoured Division and the Guards Brigade attacked on our left, captured **Arezzo** and, following up, have gained an important bridgehead over the **Arno**. Your Division is now in reserve. Our future role will be to move along the valley of the **Arno** close to **Florence**, depending on the way the battle develops during the next few days.

We have taken opportunity of the lull to implement the leave scheme for the 4th Reinforcements. The announcement was made yesterday (17 July) and the first quota will go back to Advanced Base on the 20th. We are arranging that all who have not seen **Rome** will have a day there on the way back. I will see the men on parade before they leave to thank them for what they have done and to wish them God-speed. The news here is good and all are in excellent spirits.



DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

328 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

328

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**23 July 1944**

**We have moved north and are now in action south of Florence with the role of driving the enemy on our front across the Arno.**

**The first quota of the 4th Reinforcements (1500 strong) has gone to Advanced Base.**

**When the ban on our presence in the line is removed I will send you a short report on recent operations for publication if desired.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 329 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

329

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**3 August 1944**

**During the past week the Division has made considerable advances south of **Florence** and the forward troops are now in sight of the city. Enemy rearguards have fought stubbornly for every piece of high ground covering the approaches to the **Arno River**. He has been forced to expose his troops, however, and has suffered severely under our heavy artillery bombardment and in costly counter-attacks. Our own casualties have not been light. The approximate figures up to 1 August inclusive, for the operations south of **Florence** are: killed 126, wounded 575, missing 39.**

**I felt you would like a short report on the position in view of the **BBC** reports on the fighting. I will send a further report when **Florence** has fallen.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 330 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

330

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**8 August 1944**

**I have the honour to report on the part played by your Division in the latest phase of the Italian campaign which has carried our line from **Cassino** to **Florence**.**

**Except for two of the armoured regiments, your Division did not take part in the May offensive of Fifth and Eighth Armies which broke the Gustav and Adolf Hitler Lines. Early in April regrouping of the Armies was carried out, and we handed over our hard-won gains at **Cassino** to other formations and took over a sector in the north in the lower slopes of the **Apennines** which French troops had captured earlier in the year. The mountainous front gave little scope for offensive action except active patrolling at night. During the day all movement ceased as the high peaks gave both sides excellent observation over the other's positions and approach routes. Our job was to keep as many troops as possible occupied, and this I think we did in company with the British, Canadian, and South African brigades which were under our command.**

**Your Division was on the right of the **Polish Corps** when the main battle opened, and we were in close touch with them and our artillery supported the **Polish Corps**. Their attacks against the stony peaks north of **Cassino** and the assault by British divisions across the Rapido River, south of the town, were carried out with the greatest gallantry and skill, and after bitter fighting **Cassino** and the Monastery were outflanked and captured. The gains won by your Division in the Battle of **Cassino** during March proved of great value in these operations. In the outflanking movement which cut Route 6 our **19th Armoured Regiment** supported**

the British infantry, and during the further advance the **18th Armoured Regiment** played a distinguished part in the operations which broke the Adolf Hitler Line and drove the enemy back down the road to **Rome**.

Hard fighting along the whole front finally broke through Kesselring's defences and forced him to withdraw. From our mountain sector we also advanced. Infantry and tanks never lost contact and the enemy rearguards were driven in one after another. Demolitions were repaired and mines cleared, and our whole force deployed in the plain north of **Atina**. Moving north again, the enemy was driven into the high country north of **Sora**.

**Rome** fell on 5 June. The campaign to capture the Italian capital was long and hard but in the end a great victory was won, the enemy losing large numbers of prisoners and much equipment. Driven from ideal defensive country, the Germans have suffered a severe defeat both to their arms and their prestige.

After the fall of Rome the Allies pressed on their advance and in two months the enemy has been driven back north of the **Arno River**. For security reasons the part played by the 2nd New Zealand Division in these subsidiary operations did not receive any public notice until after some of the operations were over. Your force has actually been in action on two sectors of **Eighth Army's** front, first in the battle for **Arezzo** and then in the attack to drive the enemy north of **Florence**.

After a fortnight's rest and training south of **Rome**, the Division was called forward to rejoin **Eighth Army** in the line. On the night of 8 July the Division began to move. The columns passed through the outskirts of **Rome** and northwards to an assembly area not far from Hannibal's battlefield at **Lake Trasimene**. By 13 July the 6th Infantry Brigade (under Brigadier Burrows) had taken over its sector of the line. The country facing them overlooked our positions. This Lignano feature had to be taken to cover the flank of the British Armoured Division and the Guards Brigade on our left, which were to drive through to **Arezzo**.

On the night of 14 July the 6th Brigade attacked under artillery bombardment. The **26th Battalion** had already occupied high ground on the right. The **24th Battalion** went forward in the centre and the **25th Battalion** attacked **Lignano** peak itself. The attack was a complete success and by daybreak **Lignano** was firmly in our hands. While the infantry consolidated, armoured cars of the **Divisional Cavalry Regiment** and engineers pushed up the road on the enemy flank. Meanwhile, on our left the British attack went in and made good progress. The enemy did not counter-attack, and that night withdrew from **Arezzo** and our advance north was resumed.

The enemy continued to offer stubborn resistance wherever the nature of the country favoured defence, and on 21 July your Division was switched to another sector farther west on the left of the **6th South African Division**, who had reached this area in their advance from south of **Rome**. Our role was to take over a narrow front and drive a wedge through to the **Arno River**, south-west of **Florence**. **Florence** itself is not a military objective as the city lies in a valley dominated from the north and south, but the object of the operations was to clear the enemy from the last high ground before his so-called **Gothic Line** is reached.

The Division took over its new sector on 21 July, and the next day the 5th Brigade (under Brigadier Stewart) advanced, supported by tanks of the 4th Armoured Brigade and covered by our artillery. For the next four days the 5th Brigade pushed the enemy gradually back in stiff fighting. As soon as an enemy position was taken by tanks and infantry attacking together, the tanks went on until they reached the next inevitable demolition, mined and covered by anti-tank guns and heavily armoured Tiger tanks armed with 88-millimetre guns. These enemy rearguards had to be driven back by artillery and infantry while the engineers built bridges or bulldozed tracks round demolitions. Action followed action. At every point where the enemy could fight a rearguard he held on grimly. The 6th Brigade (under Brigadier Burrows) and the 4th Armoured Brigade (under Brigadier Inglis) came into the line with the 5th Brigade, and for a fortnight the battle went on. The enemy tried

hard to prevent a wedge being driven into his line south of the **Arno River**. He deployed all his available reserves and faced our advance with regiments of the 4th Parachute Division and 29th Panzer Grenadier Division. He kept our position under constant shellfire. He counterattacked our gains with infantry and tanks. In putting in counterattacks the enemy had to expose his forces, not only to our infantry and supporting weapons but also to the thousands of shells of our artillery (under our CRA, Brigadier Parkinson). The battlefield itself, as well as reports from prisoners, testified to the heavy losses the enemy suffered. Our policy in this operation was to deploy all our artillery, then attack and drive the enemy from his organised defences. This forced the enemy to hold unprepared rearguard positions on successive ridges with his infantry. We then hammered him with the full weight of our artillery, tanks, and close-support aircraft. We had over 150 field and medium guns for this operation capable of firing over 40,000 shells a day. Altogether the softening-up process proved very successful and we eliminated large numbers of the enemy.

On 26 July the 5th Brigade were held up short of Casciano town, which was on a spur dominating Route 2, the main road to **Florence**. That afternoon Casciano was dive-bombed by the **Royal Air Force**, and next morning it was occupied after slight opposition. The attack put us in a much stronger position, and from the tower of Casciano, **Florence** was clearly visible ten miles to the north. Farther west the 6th Brigade and tanks advanced the same day, won a bridgehead over the Pesa River, and captured the village of **Cerbaia**. Tanks were unable to cross at **Cerbaia**, but armoured cars of the Divisional Cavalry reconnoitred other crossings of the river and tanks were got across ready to meet enemy counter-attacks. The same day infantry and tanks of the 4th Armoured Brigade began to move through Casciano.

Heavy fighting ensued. The 6th Brigade advanced on the night of 27 July and captured the high ground beyond **Cerbaia**. This success caused violent enemy reaction, as the whole enemy position south of **Florence** was threatened. Strong counter-attacks were launched against the 6th

Brigade one after another and we were forced to yield ground. Heavy counter-attacks continued throughout the 28th, the Germans throwing in their best troops, supported by Tiger tanks. Communications were cut and for a long time the situation was obscure. Then messages came through from one company that they were holding firm and then from another asking for more ammunition.

We were now in a most difficult situation as the village of **San Michele**, situated on a ridge on our left flank, dominated our new positions, and before any further progress could be made it was necessary to capture and occupy the village. An attack was staged on the night of the 28th when the village was taken by frontal attack.

On the 29th plans were made to attack again as soon as guns could be deployed forward of the Casciano Ridge. It was another day of heavy shellfire and activity along the whole front. That evening the enemy launched a strong surprise attack on **San Michele** with tanks and infantry rushed up in lorries. They came in so quickly that they got into Michele before defensive fire from the guns could be brought down. Again the fog of war descended over the town. Then enemy tanks were reported coming through south of **San Michele**, but their infantry were repulsed. We sent fresh tanks and infantry into the counter-attack in the early hours of the morning and **San Michele** was cleared of the enemy. When our counterattack closed on **San Michele**, they found our infantry holding on in demolished buildings just as the enemy paratroops did at **Cassino**. This dogged defence prevented the enemy infantry from getting possession of the village. Although enemy Tiger tanks had possession of the street of the town and had smashed the buildings in which our infantry had strongpoints, they could not clear the area, and without infantry support they had to withdraw when darkness came. This most gallant defence of **San Michele** discouraged any further counter-attacks and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy.

Owing to the hilly nature of the country and the winding roads, it was not possible to advance to any great depth. Instead each brigade had to push forward on a narrow front along the three ridges in separate



though co-ordinated attacks. On 29 and 30 July limited advances were made, and on the night of the 30th the 5th Brigade attacked again to take the last high ground in front of **Florence**. This attack made excellent progress, and on the following night (31 July) the **Maori Battalion** and tanks got close to the top of the ridge. They held on there during 1 August and that night all three brigades again attacked. The 4th Brigade in the centre and the 6th Brigade on the left gained their objectives, but the 5th Brigade were themselves counter-attacked in assembly before their attack commenced and no progress was made. During 2 August our advanced positions held and that night the 5th Brigade also reached the top of the hill, the last dominating feature overlooking **Florence**. During 3 August tanks of the 4th Armoured Brigade fanned out and drove in the last enemy rearguards, who withdrew over the **Arno**, blowing the bridges behind them. In this final series of attacks infantry of the 5th Brigade and tanks of the 4th Armoured Brigade never gave the enemy any rest, and in skilfully executed attacks the wedge was driven right through to the river.

When we attacked down the axis of the main road, Indian and South African divisions on our left and right respectively had conformed along the edge of our wedge, working through very difficult country and driving in enemy rearguards in their path. The South Africans and ourselves converged on the main road in the closing stages and South African tanks and infantry were the first to reach the outskirts of **Florence**. Kesselring's forces now occupy a portion of **Florence** north of the River Arno. They have blown all the bridges over the River Arno (except **Ponte Vecchio**) and appear prepared to fight in spite of their own declaration that **Florence** was an open city.

During this fighting your Division has played a notable and gallant part in **Eighth Army's** advance. I have just received the following message from General Kirkman, <sup>1</sup> Commander of 13th Corps, which pays tribute to our troops:

Now that we have entered **Florence**, I should like to say how much



13th Corps owes to **2nd NZ Division** during its recent fighting. In the battles for **Arezzo** and **Florence** your troops, as always, fought magnificently, and gave us the extra punch that was necessary to eject the enemy from his chosen positions in the very difficult country south of the River Arno.

The **2nd NZ Division** has undoubtedly inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy, and I congratulate all ranks on their great success.

Since writing this report I have received the following message from General Leese: <sup>2</sup>

I must write to thank your Division for their great achievement in gaining the high ground before **Florence**, to which our recent success is so largely due.

The spirit they showed in their gallant attacks against determined opposition, their steadfastness under repeated counter-attacks and heavy shell and mortar fire, were beyond praise. This is the more noteworthy after their hard fighting earlier before **Arezzo**.

The recent feats of the New Zealanders will have added to the pride which their people at home feel in the Division, and to the laurels it had already won in **Greece**, **Crete**, and in the African campaign.

My best thanks to you, your staff, and the Brigade Commanders, and all my best wishes.

(Signed) OLIVER LEESE

We have now been fighting hard for nearly four years. Notwithstanding this, your Division continues to carry out the missions assigned to them. They never falter, or fail to capture an objective or hold a position once gained. Their conduct in these operations, as always, has been well up to the standard that is expected of them.

We have moved to a relatively quiet sector which will give us time to absorb our reinforcements. All goes well here in **Italy** and the men have

recovered from the strain that these operations have imposed on them.

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<sup>1</sup> General Sir Sidney C. Kirkman, KBE, CB, MC; GOC 50th Division, 1943; commanded 13th Corps ( **Italy**) 1944; GOC-in-C Southern Command, 1945; Deputy Chief of Imperial General Staff, 1945–47; Quartermaster-General to the Forces, 1947–.

<sup>2</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir Oliver Leese, KCB, CBE, DSO; succeeded General Sir Bernard Montgomery as GOC Eighth Army in Jan 1944; previously commanded in turn West Sussex, 15th (Scottish), and Guards Armoured Divisions, 1941, and 30th Corps, 1942–3; GOC **8th Army**, Jan–Oct 1944; commanded Allied Land Forces, South-East Asia, 1944–45; GOC Eastern Command, 1945–46.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 331 – LETTER FROM LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR OLIVER LEESE, GOC EIGHTH ARMY, TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

331

*Letter from Lieutenant-General Sir Oliver Leese, GOC Eighth Army,  
to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

11 August 1944

DEAR PRIME MINISTER

,

When I had the pleasure of meeting you before the battle you said you would like news from time to time of your New Zealand Division.

Much has happened since then. The Army has advanced in two main phases, from **Cassino** to **Rome**—75 miles, and then from **Rome** to **Florence**—145 miles. Only by seeing the country, as you did, can one form an idea of the magnitude of our troops' achievements in this advance against picked German formations holding positions long prepared.

Throughout, the part of the New Zealand Division has been as prominent as its reputation and quality deserved. Bernard Frey-berg has been, as always, a tower of strength, lion-hearted, bold and determined, an inspiration to every man in the Division.

Their first task was the difficult and unaccustomed one of a holding role in the mountains, under 10th Corps. This led to the follow-up through the Atina Valley, in even harsher country, on our left flank.

In July, under 13th Corps, they had a hard task, culminating in their well-planned onslaught on **Arezzo**. They played a valuable part in seizing this hinge position, vital to our further advance. Next they had

**much hill fighting under heavy shell and mortar fire, and withstood fierce counter-attacks. Finally they succeeded by determined assaults in forcing the Germans off the high ground which dominated the town. Throughout the advance on Florence their drive and steadfastness were noteworthy, and their final attack was the decisive factor in our success.**

**The nature of our operations has hitherto prevented their being employed in the mobile role for which they are best fitted. I hope when we reach more open country beyond the Apennines we shall be able to use them to great advantage.**

**I have said enough to show how grateful we all are to General Freyberg, his staff, and the New Zealand Division, whose name in the Eighth Army never stood higher than today. Their people at home may justly be as proud of their part in this campaign as they were of their previous exploits in Greece, Crete, and in the African campaign.**

**You know how pleased I shall be if there is ever anything we can do to help our New Zealanders, and I trust you will let me know at any time of your special wishes.**

**Yours ever**

**OLIVER LEESE**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 332 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

332

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

13 September 1944

In view of **BBC** broadcasts concerning the heavy fighting on the **Eighth Army** front, I feel that you would wish to know the present position here as it affects your Division. The fortunes of the battle have fluctuated but at no time have we looked like breaking through. As you know, the original plan to break the **Gothic Line** involved attacking due north from **Florence** across to **Bologna**. This meant attacking positions running along very steep hills comparable in strength to **Cassino**. As there was no element of surprise, the chances of a quick and cheap success were not great. I personally was strongly against it at this stage, and in my opinion the plan to attack on the Adriatic front, which was eventually adopted, had a greater chance of success. The initial attack of the **Eighth Army** drove the enemy off his main defences, but no gap was made and the advantage of surprise has gone. I feel that the enemy will now endeavour to hold on in the hope that bad weather will intervene as it did last autumn. When wet weather comes in October the **Po Valley** will no longer be possible for armour. If the operations at present in progress do not result in a break-through, I do not think any quick or decisive success in this theatre can be expected. There is, however, a chance that events in the **Balkans** and elsewhere will cause the enemy to fall back behind the Po sooner than we can force him back by attacking here.

The Division has moved forward and is now under the command of the Canadian Corps. The **Greek Brigade** <sup>1</sup> are already holding

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<sup>1</sup> See

part of the line. They are shaping well and their presence with the Division in the next battle will enable us to spread our infantry casualties over three instead of two infantry brigades. Our Divisional Artillery has also moved forward to support the Canadian Corps in the present battle, but the remainder of the Division is still in the rest area training and also making good use of the excellent bathing beaches. It is not possible to estimate how long the Division will be out of actual battle, but I trust it will be for some time as casualties in the present type of fighting are not light.

We have opened a luxury hotel in **Florence** in which other ranks have 95 per cent of the bedroom accommodation.

I am writing this from hospital, where I am making satisfactory progress. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **General Freyberg** had been injured on the morning of 3 Sep when the reconnaissance aircraft in which he was travelling crashed on landing. While he was in hospital Major-General C. E. Weir was in temporary command of the Division (5 Sep – 14 Oct 1944).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 333 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

333

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

21 September 1944

For the information of **War Cabinet**, the 2nd New Zealand Division, under command of the Canadian Corps, is moving forward through the bridgehead won by the Canadians over the Marecchia River. The **Greek Brigade** have taken **Rimini**. They have done well and will now be advancing as part of the New Zealand Division. The enemy appears to be weaker on the front and may be withdrawing to another position. The situation on **Fifth Army** front also appears very favourable. Unfortunately the weather has broken and the forecast is not good.

A cable follows replying to recent cables from the Prime Minister. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See *Maintenance of 2nd New Zealand Division* (No. 394).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 334 – LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL LEESE

334

### *Letter from the Prime Minister to General Leese*

25 September 1944

DEAR GENERAL LEESE

It was a very great pleasure to me to receive your letter of 11 August,<sup>3</sup> and I would like to say how deeply I appreciate your thoughtfulness in writing to me about the work of the 2nd New Zealand Division.

I was greatly impressed by what I saw on my own visit and was able to make a very full report to Cabinet and to Parliament on their organisation and achievements.

We have been awaiting the decisions of the Quebec Conference before coming to a final decision as to the disposition of our forces, but we have now decided that the New Zealand Division is to remain in **Italy** until the conclusion of the Italian campaign.<sup>1</sup> Unless the situation in the **Pacific** necessitates a reversal of our present plans, we propose to use the personnel of the 3rd ( **Pacific**) Division, which is now out of action, as replacements for the longer-service personnel of the Division in your Army. Many of the men in **Italy** have been overseas since 1940 and it seems essential that some system of relief should be instituted.

We were all greatly distressed to learn of **General Freyberg's** accident. As you know, he is held throughout the country in the greatest honour and esteem, and it is a great relief to know that he is making such a good recovery.

We watch the progress of the battle in **Italy** from day to day with the



greatest interest and I know, from the appreciations I have received from **General Freyberg**, how difficult is the task of piercing the **Gothic Line** in time to permit our armour to be used on the plains before the onset of bad weather.

I would like to thank you for the high opinions you have expressed about **General Freyberg**, his staff, and the New Zealand Division. I can assure you that they are very proud to be serving in the **Eighth Army** and under your command, and I know that it is their keen desire to remain in the forefront of the battle until final victory has been achieved.

With kindest personal regards,  
Yours sincerely

**P. FRASER**

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<sup>3</sup> No. 331.

<sup>1</sup> See *Maintenance of 2nd New Zealand Division* (No. 392).

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

335 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

335

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

16 October 1944

**I resumed command of the Division on 14 October.**

**The front has dried up during a week of fine weather but is still very difficult for tanks. We have made some progress and the enemy is being forced back to his next rearguard positions. The Division is due to be relieved on the 25th, after which I will report more fully.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 336 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

336

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

22 October 1944

The Division has now completed its task here and we are being relieved today by the 5th Canadian Division. We go to an area inland from **Ancona** for about a month's rest.

In the operations here the Division has fought most doggedly in very difficult country. <sup>1</sup> Both infantry brigades have carried out a series of successful attacks across rivers and canals, and the 4th Armoured Brigade despite soft and difficult going has exploited forward and made considerable gains. In our last attack, on the morning of 18 October, the 6th Infantry Brigade crossed the Pisciatello River, bridges were put over, and the 4th Armoured Brigade passed through. Since then the enemy has been forced back to the Savio River.

While in the next area I will have an announcement made concerning the replacement scheme. I then propose to visit Egypt to see Base establishments and discuss training and various problems of replacement drafts and drafts of long-service personnel in transit.

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<sup>1</sup> New Zealand casualties from 11 Apr – 26 Oct 1944 were:

<b>Killed</b>	<b>486</b>
<b>Died of wounds</b>	<b>151</b>
<b>Died on active service (includes deaths through sickness, accident, &amp;c.)</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Missing</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Wounded</b>	<b>2364</b>
<b>Prisoners of war (includes 12 wounded and prisoners of war</b>	<b>57</b>

**and 1 died of wounds while prisoner of war)**

**Total**

**3139**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 337 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

### 337 *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**22 November 1944**

**We are due to move back to the line about 26 November to take part in an attack with Canadian and British forces. The policy is to take advantage of whatever good weather remains and maintain pressure so that the German divisions committed here cannot be transferred to other fronts.**

**The Division has benefited greatly from the rest period. Units have been billeted in towns and villages in the mountains. There has been time for a good clean-up and some useful training. Football has aroused the usual keen interest and a unit competition is now in progress.**

**A short-term policy of reorganisation has been carried out for the forthcoming operations. Both infantry brigades have been increased to four-battalion brigades by adding the 22nd (Motor) Battalion to the 5th Brigade and the Divisional Cavalry, now an infantry battalion, to the 6th Brigade. This will be a great help.**

**General Barrowclough has arrived and we have already had useful discussions to settle details about officers we can absorb from the 3rd Division. <sup>1</sup> When we go into the line General Barrowclough will come forward and see the conditions we are facing here. Brigadier Park is due today on a liaison visit from England.**

**All goes well.**

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<sup>1</sup> See *Maintenance of 2nd New Zealand Division* ( Nos. 396– 7).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 338 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

338

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**23 December 1944**

**In case the German broadcast in English reached New Zealand I feel I should let you know that our casualties in the two battles we have fought in December have not been heavy. In the operation by the 5th Brigade to capture **Faenza** we had 220 casualties. The enemy had considerable losses in killed and wounded and we took 375 German prisoners. In the operation by the 6th Brigade to clear the **Bologna** road north of **Faenza** we had 120 casualties. The enemy was again hit heavily by our artillery and 180 prisoners were taken. While local operations continue there is a steady 20 casualties per day.**

**Casualties from 28 November to 22 December are 81 killed, 467 wounded, and 10 missing.**

**For your information, our losses have been small compared with those of other formations.**

**DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II**

**NEW ZEALAND SQUADRON, LONG RANGE DESERT GROUP, IN THE  
DODECANESE OPERATIONS**



## *New Zealand Squadron, Long Range Desert Group, in the Dodecanese Operations*

339

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

19 September 1943

I have just been advised that the New Zealand Squadron of the **Long Range Desert Group** and other British troops have been landed on a Greek island without opposition. The new Chief of the General Staff <sup>1</sup> now realises that the practice is to refer the matter to the **New Zealand Government** before committing any New Zealand troops to a theatre of war, and that the principle has been infringed in this case. The reason was that after discussion with **War Cabinet** in New Zealand I had informed [General Headquarters] **Middle East** that the **New Zealand Government** agreed in principle to the employment of the LRDG in **Greece**, and this was taken as authority. The mistake is regretted.

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<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir Ronald MacKenzie Scobie, KBE, CB, MC (then Lt-Gen R. M. Scobie); GOC **Tobruk** Fortress, 1941; GOC **Malta**, 1942; Chief of the General Staff, **Middle East**, 1943; GOC **Greece**, 1944–46.

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## 340

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

12 October 1943

Although the LRDG are General Headquarters troops not under my control in any way, I try, as you know, to keep touch. I asked for a report on the New Zealand Squadron before leaving Egypt and have received the following:

The New Zealand Squadron is based on Calino with two patrols on islands farther west. Casualties believed nil.

**I am not entirely happy about the LRDG now that we are moving to a different theatre. It may not be practicable to withdraw the New Zealand Squadron, but I feel, if and when it can be relieved, that the time has come when it should be recalled and our commitment with the LRDG should cease.**

**I have asked Middle East for a further report and will keep you in touch.**

**341**

***The Minister of Defence to General Freyberg***

**20 October 1943**

**Your telegram of 12 October.**

**Your views as to the future use of the LRDG impress us as being thoroughly sound, and we will await a further report and your advice as to the appropriate time and manner in which representations might be made.**

**342**

***General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence***

**23 October 1943**

**Reference your telegram of 20 October, I have now received the following from the Chief of the General Staff, Middle East:**

**The New Zealand Squadron is now concentrated on Leros with the whole of the LRDG and has been doing excellent work.**

**Intelligence reports indicate that attack on Leros is imminent. I am out of touch and do not know future plans. I feel, however, that the situation is unsound as there is no air cover on Leros and, for your personal information, to the best of my knowledge there are no suitable troops to reinforce the islands. This, of course, is criticism of higher policy without full knowledge of the facts. I feel that it may be difficult**

to extricate them at the moment, but feel that you should now raise the matter of asking for the return of the New Zealand Squadron as soon as the tactical situation permits. This would be consistent with your general manpower policy. Further, there is no scope now for the employment of the LRDG. The number of New Zealand personnel involved is three officers and approximately seventy men.

343

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

29 October 1943

Further to my telegram of 23 October.

I have just been advised that the LRDG squadron requires 25 reinforcements urgently. This raises the whole question. As I am not in the picture I will cable you again after obtaining further particulars.

344

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

1 November 1943

Reference my telegram of 29 October. The only information available from **Middle East** is that one officer and 24 other ranks of the New Zealand Squadron, LRDG, are missing as the result of recent amphibious operations. This represents approximately one-third of the New Zealand Squadron.

345

*The Prime Minister to the High Commissioner for New Zealand (London) <sup>1</sup>*

2 November 1943

The New Zealand Government have had under further consideration the question of their non-divisional units serving in the **Mediterranean** area, both in relation to existing manpower difficulties and to control by

the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. It is felt that the time has come to raise the question of the withdrawal of the New Zealand Squadron known as the **Long Range Desert Group**. This unit is at present concentrated at **Leros**, and it is desired that as soon as convenient it should be detached from its present role and placed under the direct control of the GOC 2nd NZEF. The number of New Zealand personnel involved is now two officers and approximately 46 men, there having been 25 casualties in the past few days. It would be appreciated if this matter could be represented to the urgent attention of the appropriate **United Kingdom** authorities.

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<sup>1</sup> This telegram was repeated to **General Freyberg**.

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346

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

7 November 1943

Reference the question of the withdrawal of the New Zealand Squadron of the LRDG.

I am 1800 miles away and out of contact with **Middle East**<sup>1</sup> and realise that relief will not be easy. I have just received the following telegram from General Wilson:

While fully appreciating the manpower difficulties necessitating the proposal, I must point out that the Squadron is now engaged in important operations and is doing most valuable work for which it is specially trained. It would be impossible to replace it at such short notice. I suggest for your consideration that the Squadron remains with the LRDG for the time being until we can train a replacement, on condition that we replace other rank casualties with British personnel or replace New Zealand sub-units with complete British sub-units according to the circumstances. This will ensure that command of New Zealand personnel remains under New Zealand officers. If you agree, I would be most grateful if you would take the matter up with the **New Zealand**

**Government** on the above lines.

I feel that in view of General Wilson's cable you should agree to his proposal to return the New Zealand Squadron as soon as the tactical situation allows him to do so. I feel you should also agree to his proposal to replace other rank casualties as he may deem fit.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Despatch of 2nd New Zealand Division to Italy* (No. 303).

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347

*The High Commissioner for New Zealand ( London) to the Prime Minister*

16 November 1943

Your telegram of 2 November ( No. 345).

The Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, states in reply to an enquiry by **War Office** as to the earliest possible date on which the New Zealand Squadron could be released, that the Squadron is at present employed in operations in the Aegean and cannot be immediately replaced owing to the cessation of New Zealand reinforcements. The present policy is to replace detachments of the Squadron which have become non-operational on account of casualties by complete **United Kingdom** sub-units raised for the purpose. The Commander-in-Chief estimates that the time required to replace the Squadron in this way would be about three months. I gather this policy has been agreed to by **Freyberg**, who has explained the procedure to you, but it is not clear whether his report had been considered by you when you telegraphed me. I shall be glad to learn whether this procedure will meet your wishes. If so, **War Office** will issue the necessary instructions.

348

*The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

18 November 1943

My telegram of 2 November. <sup>1</sup>

We have followed with considerable concern the events leading up to the deterioration of the situation on **Leros** and its final capitulation, <sup>2</sup> and we are most anxious to obtain as soon as possible the fullest available information as to the fate of the **Long Range Desert Group**.

The use of the New Zealand Squadron and the part played by our men in this undertaking, the nature and object of which we are ignorant and indeed are at a loss to understand, are matters upon which a full report is urgently desired, and it would be appreciated if this could be obtained and made available to the **New Zealand Government** at the earliest possible moment.

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<sup>1</sup> No. 345.

<sup>2</sup> The forces on **Leros** surrendered on 16 Nov.

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349

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

20 November 1943

I have to acknowledge your telegram of 18 November concerning the New Zealand Squadron, LRDG. I am not able to give the facts as to the nature or object of the undertaking in the Dodecanese Islands, neither do I know the part played by the New Zealand Squadron. I have therefore cabled the Chief of the General Staff, **Middle East**, and have asked him to supply the facts to me as soon as possible, when I will cable details to you in New Zealand. This may take some days. I had, however, previously ascertained from **Middle East** the casualties incurred, and for the guidance of the Government, as far as could be estimated at 4.30 p.m. on 17 November, they are as follows: Missing from Levita, 1 officer and 22 other ranks; missing from **Leros**, 4 officers and 21 other ranks;

now in the **Middle East** at **Haifa**, 5 officers and 57 other ranks, making a total of 48 missing and 62 safe in the **Middle East**.

These figures may alter as other men may turn up in the next day or two. You will be kept posted and full details of names will be sent through **2nd Echelon** to Army Headquarters in the usual way.

**350**

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs*

**22 November 1943**

Events in the Dodecanese Islands have greatly disturbed the **New Zealand Government**. They have throughout been at a loss to understand the objective of these operations which, without full information as to the facts, they cannot help regarding as ill-advised in their nature and most unfortunate in their consequences. They would also appreciate information as to the manner and scope in which it was anticipated this operation was to have been carried out.

Owing to the participation of the New Zealand commando unit known as the Long Range Desert Patrol Group, <sup>1</sup> the deterioration in the situation has naturally been watched with particular concern.

His Majesty's Government in New Zealand wish to observe that they were never consulted as to the use of their troops in this connection nor, they are advised, was their Commanding Officer in the **Middle East** advised until the men had actually landed.

The reversion of this unit to the control of the GOC 2nd NZEF had already been discussed with the **United Kingdom** authorities, and it would seem appropriate at this stage to make it clear that His Majesty's Government in New Zealand desire that this unit should cease to be under the control of General Headquarters, **Middle East**, and that any survivors, about whom early information is requested, should be made available for service with the 2nd New Zealand Division.

<sup>1</sup> When the unit was formed in July 1940, it was first known as the **Long Range Desert Patrol**. With the expansion of the unit into several squadrons the title was changed to **Long Range Desert Group**. Besides New Zealanders, British and Rhodesian patrols of the **Long Range Desert Group** also took part in the **Dodecanese** operations.

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351

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

23 November 1943

The substance of an appreciation by the Chiefs of Staff Committee on the recent operations in the **Dodecanese**, which it is thought will supply the answer to the points raised in the first paragraph of your telegram of 22 November, is contained in my immediately following telegram. It may be observed, with reference to the first paragraph of this appreciation, that risks somewhat similar to those accepted in the **Dodecanese** had been taken in the capture of **Sardinia** and **Corsica** with successful results. One further point which has not been covered by this appreciation, and to which attention should be called, is that if the Turkish Government had acceded to the request made to them by the Foreign Secretary <sup>1</sup> for the grant of air bases, the necessary air support would have been available for operations in the islands (see my telegrams of 6 and 7 November). <sup>2</sup> A further telegram regarding the points raised in later paragraphs of your telegram will be sent.

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<sup>1</sup> **Rt. Hon. R. A. Eden**, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 23 Dec 1940–26 Jul 1945.

<sup>2</sup> Not published. A brief report of Mr. Eden's discussions with the Turkish Foreign Minister (M. Numan Menemenjoglu) on 5–7 Nov 1943 was given in these telegrams.

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*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

23 November 1943

The following is the substance of the appreciation by the Chiefs of Staff referred to in my immediately preceding telegram:

Our two main objects in shaping our plans for operations in the Eastern Mediterranean concurrent with the assault on the mainland of **Italy** at **Salerno** were: ( a ) To assist the main operation against **Italy**; ( b ) to exploit in the Aegean the general weakness of the German position likely to result from the Italian collapse.

As it was realised that amphibious operations against the mainland of **Italy** conducted in the face of a determined and formidable enemy would be extremely hazardous, it became a cardinal point in our **Mediterranean** strategy to seek to divert the enemy's strength or, failing that, to confront him elsewhere with commitments sufficiently serious to prevent the movement of reinforcements into the main theatre of **Italy**. In particular, any diversion of the enemy's air strength during our assault would be of very material assistance while our protective fighters were operating at extreme range.

In an appreciation made in early September we considered that the position in the Aegean Islands was as follows: Of the outer ring, **Crete** was held by 55,000 troops, the western half of the island, containing the important airfields, by 30,000 Germans, with the Italians east of Candia; Rhodes—which is the key to the **Dodecanese** group—by 9000 Germans and 40,000 Italians. There were 1000 Germans in **Scarpanto**, lying between Rhodes and **Crete**, forming one-quarter of the total garrison. There were also Germans in the larger islands of the North Aegean in Lemnos, Mitylene, and Chios, but in the **Dodecanese**, other than Rhodes, there were only Italians—some 14,000. We hoped to obtain the assistance of these Italians in the seizure and organisation of bases from

which we might harass the sorely extended Germans and obtain strategic gains of great value, especially the diversion of the enemy's air strength at a critical period in the **Salerno** landings. We realised that risks were involved—we would be acting inside the enemy's 'fortress', with tenuous lines of supply open to enemy air reconnaissance and the virtual certainty of air attack, against which our defence would be seriously handicapped—but the Commander-in-Chief in the **Middle East** considered that the risks were legitimate risks. With this His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom** agreed.

### *Action after the Fall of Italy*

General Alexander's **Fifth Army** landed in Salerno Bay on 9 September, and **Italy** made unconditional surrender to the Allies. General Wilson despatched a small party for Rhodes on the same day, but the overwhelming strength of the Italians, though numerical, was illusory for they evinced no desire to turn against the Germans and our party was refused permission to land. It was clear that without mounting a major expedition nothing was to be achieved in Rhodes and attention was turned to the smaller islands. By virtue of its airfield at Antimachia—the only airfield in these smaller islands—**Cos** was much the most important, and in one week 400 troops were ferried in. At the same time smaller contingents were introduced into **Leros** and **Castelrosso**.

The task of reinforcement went on steadily.

### *The Significance of Cos*

We occupied the airfield on **Cos** on 15 September, and it thus became the key to the whole situation in the Aegean. The continued possession of **Cos** would have enabled us to provide effective short-range fighter cover in the Aegean within a radius of about 100 miles of **Cos**, including the sea approaches from the Eastern Mediterranean and to **Leros** and **Samos**. A reasonable degree of security against air attacks for our shipping and naval forces could be provided under this fighter cover. There was, however, only one good airfield—Antimachia—at **Cos**, and

though preparation and improvement of two additional strips was immediately undertaken, General Headquarters, **Middle East** were, owing to restricted space and shortage of supplies in **Cos**, able to base only one and a half squadrons of Spitfires there before the enemy assault began; and apart from **Cos**, our nearest airfield was in **Cyprus**, about 350 miles away.

Besides, the requirements of the vital assault on **Italy** prohibited the diversion of any considerable part of the North-West African Air Force's striking power and thus prevented during this phase of the Aegean operations the use of the North African Air Force's heavy and medium bombers against the enemy's Greek and Aegean airfields. It is in this and all other respects essential, if the Aegean operations are to be fairly and impartially judged, that the **Mediterranean** should be seen as one closely interwoven strategic theatre.

### *The Attack on Cos*

Immediately the threat in the Aegean was perceived, the enemy transferred more squadrons, of which some came from the Russian and Western fronts, to the Eastern Mediterranean, bringing the total to about 35 per cent of the air strength in the whole theatre. With these reinforcements he was able to neutralise our airfield at **Cos** with heavy air attacks escorted by short-range fighters and, after a short struggle, to render our air defence inoperative. He was then able to assault and overwhelm the land garrison on 3 October.

The opposing British and German forces were about equal in numbers, but the enemy had effective air superiority over its sea and air communications. After the airfield at **Cos** had been neutralised this local superiority could only be challenged by long-range Beaufighters which had to fly from our nearest base at **Cyprus**, some 350 miles away, and were of a type unable to influence the situation much in the face of the enemy short-range fighters. The 4000 Italian troops offered no assistance to our troops.

## *The Decision to hold Leros and Samos*

German sensitiveness to events in the Aegean was made abundantly clear by the strength of their reaction to our operations in this area; at considerable sacrifice to their affairs in **Italy**, **Russia**, and **France** they had accumulated air and land strength to eject us from **Cos**. **Cos** contained the only airfield so **Cos** was attacked first; having gained control there they were in a greatly improved position to force the surrender of the other islands.

It became clear that the fall of **Cos** was intended to be followed immediately by an assault on **Leros** and Samos. Bombing attacks began on 4 October, but on 7 October naval forces found and destroyed six landing craft and two merchant vessels off Stampalia.<sup>1</sup> The Commanders in the **Middle East** had now to decide whether or not to continue their precarious tenure in **Leros** and Samos.

The loss of **Cos** not only provided the enemy with a useful landing ground within thirty miles of **Leros**, but excluded our short-range fighters from the Aegean area—our nearest remaining airfield to **Leros** being some 350 miles away at **Cyprus**. If we had evacuated the islands we were still holding—at the best an extremely hazardous operation—we could still have continued our harassing attacks on the enemy's communications with light, highly mobile naval forces and with air forces, since neither our naval nor our air forces were able to use **Leros** or Samos as bases. The enemy, however, would have felt that our threat to the Aegean and the **Balkans** was removed and could have accordingly reduced—at this critical period in **Italy** and **Russia**—the concentration of air and land forces which we had forced him to make in **Greece** and the Aegean. Finally, if the assault on **Leros** could be delayed by interfering with the enemy's preparations, and if we could use the interval for strengthening the garrison, we had good hopes that the attack could be beaten off. The Germans have found it difficult to mount a second assault without a considerable period of preparation, during which the situation in the theatre as a whole might have changed to our further

advantage. Taking into account all these factors and with full knowledge of the hazards involved, the Commanders-in-Chief, **Middle East**, decided we should hold on to the islands we had occupied. In this they had the full support and approval of the United Kingdom Government.

A naval striking force was maintained in the South Aegean. At the same time it became possible to direct bombers from the North-West African Air Force, together with others based in the **Middle East**, to attack airfields in **Greece** and the Aegean.

### *The Threat to Leros*

After the fall of **Cos** the enemy proceeded to occupy the small islands round **Leros** and to increase the scale of air bombardment. Our air forces made frequent reconnaissance reports of the movements of landing craft among these islands, which they attacked on every opportunity. Attacks on the airfields in Rhodes and **Greece** were also made. Unfortunately, the weather interfered greatly with these attacks and we were unable to pin down the air forces as we should have wished. Every opportunity was taken to put more defenders into **Leros**. This, however, was not effected without casualties.

### *The Attack on Leros*

At 6.30 a.m. on 12 November the long-awaited assault came. The British garrison amounted to nearly 4000, the Italians to about 6000. The enemy succeeded that day in establishing bridgeheads on the east coast, in the north, and in the centre of the island.

**Leros** falls geographically into three sectors, the centre sector being a narrow waist in which is **Leros** town. Parachute troops, were dropped on Rachi Ridge, in the waist between the northern and central sectors, on the first afternoon. Throughout the day bombing was severe, and our long-range fighters were unable appreciably to interrupt it as they suffered heavily under the attack of enemy short-range fighter cover.

**More parachute troops were dropped on Rachi during the night of 12–13 November, and the garrison was severed, with its main strength to the south. The following day the enemy reinforced his lodgements, but by night the defenders in the north counter-attacked and pushed them back towards the sea.**

**Early on the morning of Sunday, 14 November, a portion of the parachute troops from Rachi Ridge launched an attack to the south against our troops in the central sector of the island. This attack was resisted and beaten off and, profiting from the new situation and supported by an attack against Rachi Ridge by the troops in the northern sector, our troops counter-attacked towards the same objective. The enemy was driven from the high ground, enabling our communications to be re-established. The enemy in the area was now confined to the area south of Quaranta, at the head of Alinda Bay. On Monday our attack was renewed but, in the face of relentless and unceasing attack from the air, it was unsuccessful. That night reinforcements were landed by the enemy.**

### ***Reinforcements***

**On Tuesday, 16 November, Fortress Headquarters, just south of Leros town at Meraviglia, was heavily bombed, and attacks developed against it from the German forces which had been on the Rachi Ridge and from the original bridgehead on the east coast of the central sector. However, the situation was sufficiently restored for the Commander to wireless that given further reinforcements to his exhausted troops and more air cover he could hold out. Affairs deteriorated rapidly in the evening and the island fell.**

**The garrison was for five days at the mercy of the enemy's concentrated bombing attacks, for which it is estimated that he had now concentrated in Greece and the Aegean some 400 aircraft. In the end this produced a weariness too great to be resisted. From sheer exhaustion the end became inevitable. Moreover, enemy air superiority had cut air and sea communications with Leros, except for such supplies**

and reinforcements as could be got in at night by sea and by dropping from aircraft. Our troops had fought throughout with the utmost courage and gallantry. The losses were not all ours; throughout the fighting very severe casualties were inflicted and the Navy took full toll of enemy efforts to bring in reinforcements, in spite of the increasing difficulties of operating surface forces in the face of heavy air attack in the bright moonlight: on 14 November alone three landing craft with German reinforcements were sunk, and in the early stages of the battle others were destroyed by accurate artillery fire from the island. German casualties, although not accurately known, were such that for some time the fate of the island hung in the balance; the victory might well have been ours had the conditions been only a little less in the enemy's favour. The enemy has announced that he captured on **Leros** 200 British officers and 3000 other ranks. If these figures can be taken as correct our casualties will have been in the neighbourhood of 500.

## *Conclusions*

We went into the Aegean with our eyes open and with the following objects:

- (i) to contain the German forces;
- (ii) to gather what we might from the fall of **Italy**; and
- (iii) to retain the islands if possible and to harass the German communications.

In the event the enemy reacted very strongly to the threat, and thus we were unable to hold the islands, though we succeeded in containing superior forces at what was a critical time in **Italy** and **Russia**.

From 9 September to 19 November the known enemy naval losses in the Aegean alone amount to at least 30,000 tons. He has lost a substantial part of the shipping available to him in the **Mediterranean**, and it is estimated that 4000 of his troops must have been drowned.

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<sup>1</sup> An island approximately 30 miles west of **Cos**.

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*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

26 November 1943

In reply to the telegram of 18 November ( **No. 348**) asking for the fullest information on the operations at **Leros** under the following headings:

- (i) The nature and object of the operations;
- (ii) the part played by the New Zealand Squadron;
- (iii) the fate of the New Zealand Squadron, **Long Range Desert Group**,

I beg to state that when the LRDG were committed to an operational role on **Cos** and **Leros** I reported the matter at once to the **New Zealand Government**, *vide* my telegram of 19 September ( **No. 339**), and also brought to the notice of the Chief of the General Staff the fact that the normal procedure when fresh operational commitments of New Zealand troops were made had been departed from, and that the **New Zealand Government** had not been notified beforehand. I discussed at once the situation with the Chief of the General Staff and understood that they had landed without opposition on **Leros** and **Cos**, and that this was only part of a larger plan as further large-scale operations in the **Dodecanese** were pending. As is usual where future operations are concerned, I asked no specific questions as to their nature, but understood that Rhodes was the objective and that the operations were undertaken with the object of interfering with the enemy's sea communications in the **Aegean Sea**.

When the enemy counter-attacked and **Cos** was retaken, it was obvious that we had missed what slender chance existed and there appeared no reason to continue the commitment a day longer than was necessary to effect their evacuation. I therefore cabled the **New Zealand Government** from **Italy** on 12 October ( **No. 340**) saying that I was out of touch with the **Middle East** situation and the LRDG, and suggested that in view of the unsatisfactory nature of the commitment the **New Zealand Government** should now recall the LRDG on the earliest possible opportunity and disband them. When General Wilson's SOS, contained in



my cable of 7 November ( **No. 346**), which I forwarded to the **New Zealand Government**, arrived, I must admit I felt that the situation would not allow of their withdrawal, and in any case a hasty withdrawal of the New Zealand Squadron at the last moment before the attack would leave New Zealand open to the possible charge of deserting our British comrades on the eve of battle. I therefore felt that we must leave the question of their early replacement to General Wilson's discretion. When your cable of 18 November ( **No. 348**) arrived I repeated the relevant part to General Wilson, asking him for information upon which to base my reply to you, and I forward his answer:

The outcome of the operations in the Aegean has been a serious blow to all of us, as you will imagine. It was touch and go on **Leros** but in the end air supremacy won. We took the risk when we went in in September but we had then hoped to follow up with an attack on Rhodes.

Unfortunately, conditions at the other end of the **Mediterranean** and in the **Pacific** did not allow the allocation of the necessary craft and air support and this had temporarily to be abandoned. In the meantime, every effort was made to strengthen our position in the Aegean and it was decided to try and hold on in view of the very valuable diversion it caused to the main effort in **Italy** and **Russia**. The force diverted included up to 400 aircraft, also 6000 highly trained troops for the assault, and others for garrisoning the islands he was forced to occupy by our raiding. The assault force for **Leros** was drawn from five different formations, demonstrating thereby the extent to which he was stretched. One-third of the enemy shipping in the Aegean was sunk and the Axis supply line to Rhodes interrupted for two months.

The LRDG were used as outposts and for raiding and patrolling in enemy-held islands, a task for which they are ideally suited. Their operations were of the greatest value, and all the evidence proves that they were a serious thorn in the enemy's side, whilst the information given by their outposts proved invaluable to all Services.

As far as we know at present the situation of the New Zealand LRDG

**squadron is as follows:**

**Now in the Middle East: 5 officers, 58 other ranks.**

**Missing at Levita: 1 officer, 22 other ranks.**

**Missing at Leros: 2 officers, 21 other ranks.**

**Of those missing at Leros, I am glad to say about half are believed to be safe and on their way back. This will be confirmed shortly. All the LRDG are now being withdrawn from the Aegean.**

**The Levita operation referred to in the above paragraph was a raid on that island by the LRDG with the object of clearing it of a small party of the enemy whose occupation interfered with our naval action. Our force was unable to contact the enemy until dawn and thereafter was heavily dive-bombed, pinned, and split into small groups which were later overcome by a reinforced enemy. Details are lacking, but the majority of the one officer and 22 other ranks are thought to be prisoners.**

**Please convey to the New Zealand Government my fullest sympathy in their loss. These men were of the finest type and did invaluable work. We are more than grateful for the assistance and I can assure you their efforts were not in vain.**

**I do not know all the facts, neither do I wish to criticise, but for the private information of the New Zealand War Cabinet I can say that I never liked the plan, which broke the first principle of modern warfare 'that you must win the air battle before you embark on the land or sea battle.' Even at the beginning of the operation we failed to establish air cover over Leros or Cos. Later, when the Germans concentrated fighters and dive-bombers in Rhodes and Crete, they isolated our garrisons and mopped them up at will. I am told that two Indian brigades were lost but I cannot vouch for this. From the New Zealand point of view, out of 108<sup>1</sup> we appear to have saved 63, and some more may still turn up. That is**

better than I had hoped. I am glad that the LRDG will now be recalled. Small detached operational units or formations require careful watching.

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<sup>1</sup> The figures in General Wilson's report total 109.

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354

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the High Commissioner for New Zealand ( London)*

*[ Extract]*

27 November 1943

I am still not able to participate actively in the work of the Government although I am consulted on important matters. However, in spite of my compulsory inactivity, <sup>2</sup> there are two recent matters about which I feel so keenly as being most detrimental to New Zealand's war effort that I must ask you to place my own views personally before the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, Lord Cranborne, and Mr. Attlee.

<sup>3</sup> The first deplorable event is the fall of Leros; the second, the release of Sir Oswald Mosley. <sup>4</sup>

In regard to the capture of Leros, New Zealand is directly concerned. Without either the knowledge or consent of the New Zealand Government or, apparently, of General Freyberg, who would have immediately consulted us, a number of our Long Range Desert Group troops were ordered to take part in the attack on and occupation of some of the Dodecanese Islands. This was a breach of our agreement with the British Government and Army authorities. The circumstances surrounding the loss of Leros have already largely destroyed my own faith in the present Middle East Command, if it was responsible, and when it becomes known that a number of New Zealanders were stupidly sacrificed without even consent for their inclusion in the task force being asked from our Government, the disappointment and bitterness here will be intensified many times over. General Wilson's statement regarding the capture of Leros, with its out-dated, unhappy, and totally

irrelevant references to **Greece** and **Crete**, was rejected unanimously, even contemptuously. <sup>1</sup> It is felt that to have 1944 war problems dealt with by Commanders with 1941 minds is most dangerous and may be disastrous. The sooner the excuses given by General Wilson, who is a man generally admired by New Zealand soldiers, are forgotten the better.

In the meantime, we have the rehabilitation of the sense of the great power of **Germany** re-established in the Eastern Mediterranean, as witness the attitude of **Turkey**. I am very glad that as a set-off there we have the heightened prestige of **Britain** over the **Lebanon** trouble. Nothing could be better or more creditable than the attitude in that affair of the British Government.

Since writing the foregoing I have read the cabled press report of Mr. Attlee's statement in the House of Commons <sup>2</sup> and the telegram from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, dated 23 November ( **No. 352**), containing the substance of the appreciation by the Chiefs of Staff. These statements have not enabled me to modify in the least my opinion of the whole unhappy blunder, except that they made it clear that the responsibility in the first place rested with the Chiefs of Staff, not with the **Middle East Command**, but apparently the latter acquiesced. Apart from all the other mistakes and miscalculations, the decision to leave the force on **Leros** to become the easy prey of the German air and land forces combined was wrong and, indeed, most reprehensible. The useless sacrifice of fine men in such a fashion is proof that the tragic lesson of **Greece** and **Crete** has not been fully assimilated and understood by some of those in the High Command, or else they are prepared not so much to take a risk, as stated by Mr. Attlee, as to gamble on a poor chance with men's lives. I strongly protest against any of our men being sacrificed in such a fashion.

.... <sup>1</sup> In New Zealand we are approaching a very difficult time. The Government won the election with a reduced majority, declaring for a continued war effort to the limit of our resources and against the Opposition claims that we had done too much and were over-committed. There is a good deal of criticism at present, even inside the Labour

Party, at New Zealand having fighting forces in both **Italy** and the South Pacific, and the feeling is growing that one of our forces should be withdrawn. Our position has been weakened by the Mosley release, which has aroused opposition to and distrust in the responsible British authorities. The mistake should be rectified at once so that the confusion caused can be cleared away as soon as possible and the harmful situation, with its bad effects in the Dominions as well as in **Britain**, ended completely....

<sup>1</sup>The text omitted refers to the release of Sir Oswald Mosley.

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<sup>2</sup> Mr. Fraser had recently left hospital and was then convalescent.

<sup>3</sup> The **Rt. Hon. C. R. Attlee** had been Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs (21 Feb 1942–28 Sep 1943) at the time the islands were occupied. At this date he was also acting Prime Minister during the absence of Mr. Churchill at the **Cairo** and **Teheran** conferences.

<sup>4</sup> Sir Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Union of Fascists, was imprisoned from May 1940 until 20 Nov 1943, when he was released on medical grounds.

<sup>1</sup> In a statement which was published in the New Zealand press on 19–20 Nov, General Wilson said that he considered **Leros** was worth while as a diversionary operation alone. He recalled the British withdrawal from **Greece**—a campaign that history had proved worth while—and added that he thought the same thing would be said about **Leros** and **Cos**.

<sup>2</sup> Published in the New Zealand press on 26 Nov 1943.

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**3 December 1943**

Further to my report of 26 November on the LRDG. The Officer Commanding the New Zealand Squadron <sup>2</sup> has come to see me here in **Italy**. New Zealand casualties for the **Leros** operation are further reduced, only seven other ranks now being missing. The total casualties, therefore, are one officer, 29 other ranks.

<sup>2</sup>Major A. I. Guild, CO A (NZ) Squadron, LRDG, 1942–43.

With reference to the last paragraph of the report, the information regarding the loss of two Indian brigades was incorrect. The garrison of the islands comprised four British battalions and some anti-aircraft and 25-pounder artillery. The statement of the Officer Commanding the New Zealand Squadron confirms the opinions expressed in my cables and reports. I am arranging that the personnel of the New Zealand Squadron now in **Haifa** should be recalled to **Maadi** for employment as reinforcements to the New Zealand Division.

**356**

*The High Commissioner for New Zealand ( London) to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

**6 December 1943**

I have been asked by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to transmit to you personally and informally the following expression of his views on **Leros** with which Mr. Attlee also associates himself:

It seems to me essential that we should go back to the position as it was when the decision to enter upon these operations was taken. At that time the surrender of **Italy** and the apparent willingness of the Italians to co-operate with us against the Germans offered a prospect of gaining immediate and substantial advantages which we certainly would have been wrong to neglect. With this in mind it was clearly proper to take some risks—risks which were successfully taken in the case of **Sardinia** and **Corsica**, with the result that the Allies are now in secure and effective possession of those great islands. If we had not also tested out

the position in the Aegean to see whether similar advantages could be secured there we should surely have been open to blame. In this our hopes were disappointed: first on Rhodes, where a large Italian garrison surrendered without a blow and the Germans were able to prevent our forces landing at all; and next in **Cos**, where the lack of effective Italian support made it possible for the Germans to seize the island before our forces had had time to establish themselves. It was then necessary to decide whether to try to retain our foothold in **Leros**. The arguments in favour were that we were successfully diverting a considerable portion of the German air effort from **Italy** and to a lesser degree from **Russia**, that as a result of the forthcoming discussions with the Turkish representatives there appeared to be a fair chance of obtaining air facilities in **Turkey**, and, lastly, that even apart from this it was thought there was a good chance of our being able to hold the island in any case. In fact this nearly succeeded, and it was only by a narrow margin that the final German assault was not beaten off by our troops.

It is impossible to conduct a war without taking risks, and looking back over the whole story I think that we should have been far more to blame if we had not taken the risk which, had it succeeded, would have given us great advantages and made a contribution to shortening the war.

Secondly, on the question of the employment of New Zealand personnel of the **Long Range Desert Group** in these operations, full inquiry has been made and the following is the position: For some three years the Group—a British unit under the direct command of General Headquarters, **Middle East**—has included New Zealand personnel. The group has operated throughout North Africa during this period without comment or question from the **New Zealand Government**. The Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, has reported that **General Freyberg** was kept in the picture and agreed to the use of the New Zealand Squadron in the Aegean operations before it was actually involved in fighting there. It is understood that **General Freyberg** informed the **New Zealand Government** at the time that he had given his approval. The



number of New Zealand personnel employed was seven officers and 73 other ranks, of which, unfortunately, one officer and 29 other ranks are missing as a result of the Aegean operations.

As regards the replacement of this personnel, it was agreed with **General Freyberg** that they should be gradually replaced. However, in view of the further wishes now expressed by the **New Zealand Government** in their telegram of 22 November ( **No. 350**), and as the Squadron has now been withdrawn from the Aegean, the Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, has been instructed to send the remaining personnel to the New Zealand Depot, where they will be available as required for the New Zealand Division.

The above information constitutes the reply promised in the Secretary of State's telegram of 23 November ( **No. 351**).

**357**

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the High Commissioner for New Zealand ( London)*

**21 December 1943**

I would like you to accept my thanks for the close personal attention you gave to my telegram of 27 November ( **No. 354**). Owing to my second period in hospital this acknowledgment has been delayed. However, I am back at work again, although just getting into second gear.

You will not be surprised to learn from me that I do not consider the explanations of the **Leros** collapse by the Secretary of State for the Dominions to be satisfactory. I do not wish to drag out the discussion of the matter, but at your convenience you can indicate this fact to both Lord Cranborne and Mr. Attlee.

With reference to the statement in the message of the Secretary of State for the Dominions that 'It is impossible to conduct a war without taking risks', I have to state in reply that I agree, but in my opinion the position at **Leros**, which should have been apparent to anyone with a



**knowledge of what happened in Greece and Crete, was not that a reasonable risk was taken but that the men concerned were sent to certain defeat—they were foredoomed. Corsica and Sardinia cannot be accepted as parallel instances. In my opinion, the falling back on Leros without adequate air cover, because Rhodes was a disappointment, showed unrealistic and inefficient thinking and planning.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 339 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

339

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

19 September 1943

I have just been advised that the New Zealand Squadron of the **Long Range Desert Group** and other British troops have been landed on a Greek island without opposition. The new Chief of the General Staff <sup>1</sup> now realises that the practice is to refer the matter to the **New Zealand Government** before committing any New Zealand troops to a theatre of war, and that the principle has been infringed in this case. The reason was that after discussion with **War Cabinet** in New Zealand I had informed [General Headquarters] **Middle East** that the **New Zealand Government** agreed in principle to the employment of the LRDG in **Greece**, and this was taken as authority. The mistake is regretted.

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<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir Ronald MacKenzie Scobie, KBE, CB, MC (then Lt-Gen R. M. Scobie); GOC **Tobruk** Fortress, 1941; GOC **Malta**, 1942; Chief of the General Staff, **Middle East**, 1943; GOC **Greece**, 1944–46.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 340 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

340

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

12 October 1943

**Although the LRDG are General Headquarters troops not under my control in any way, I try, as you know, to keep touch. I asked for a report on the New Zealand Squadron before leaving Egypt and have received the following:**

**The New Zealand Squadron is based on Calino with two patrols on islands farther west. Casualties believed nil.**

**I am not entirely happy about the LRDG now that we are moving to a different theatre. It may not be practicable to withdraw the New Zealand Squadron, but I feel, if and when it can be relieved, that the time has come when it should be recalled and our commitment with the LRDG should cease.**

**I have asked **Middle East** for a further report and will keep you in touch.**

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

341 – THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE TO GENERAL FREYBERG

**341**

*The Minister of Defence to General Freyberg*

**20 October 1943**

**Your telegram of 12 October.**

**Your views as to the future use of the LRDG impress us as being thoroughly sound, and we will await a further report and your advice as to the appropriate time and manner in which representations might be made.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 342 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

342

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

23 October 1943

Reference your telegram of 20 October, I have now received the following from the Chief of the General Staff, **Middle East**:

The New Zealand Squadron is now concentrated on **Leros** with the whole of the LRDG and has been doing excellent work.

Intelligence reports indicate that attack on **Leros** is imminent. I am out of touch and do not know future plans. I feel, however, that the situation is unsound as there is no air cover on **Leros** and, for your personal information, to the best of my knowledge there are no suitable troops to reinforce the islands. This, of course, is criticism of higher policy without full knowledge of the facts. I feel that it may be difficult to extricate them at the moment, but feel that you should now raise the matter of asking for the return of the New Zealand Squadron as soon as the tactical situation permits. This would be consistent with your general manpower policy. Further, there is no scope now for the employment of the LRDG. The number of New Zealand personnel involved is three officers and approximately seventy men.

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

343 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

343

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**29 October 1943**

**Further to my telegram of 23 October.**

**I have just been advised that the LRDG squadron requires 25 reinforcements urgently. This raises the whole question. As I am not in the picture I will cable you again after obtaining further particulars.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 344 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

### 344 *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**1 November 1943**

**Reference my telegram of 29 October. The only information available from [Middle East](#) is that one officer and 24 other ranks of the New Zealand Squadron, LRDG, are missing as the result of recent amphibious operations. This represents approximately one-third of the New Zealand Squadron.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 345 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR NEW ZEALAND (LONDON)<sup>1</sup>

345

*The Prime Minister to the High Commissioner for New Zealand (London)*<sup>1</sup>

2 November 1943

The New Zealand Government have had under further consideration the question of their non-divisional units serving in the **Mediterranean** area, both in relation to existing manpower difficulties and to control by the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. It is felt that the time has come to raise the question of the withdrawal of the New Zealand Squadron known as the **Long Range Desert Group**. This unit is at present concentrated at **Leros**, and it is desired that as soon as convenient it should be detached from its present role and placed under the direct control of the GOC 2nd NZEF. The number of New Zealand personnel involved is now two officers and approximately 46 men, there having been 25 casualties in the past few days. It would be appreciated if this matter could be represented to the urgent attention of the appropriate **United Kingdom** authorities.

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<sup>1</sup> This telegram was repeated to **General Freyberg**.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 346 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

346

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

7 November 1943

Reference the question of the withdrawal of the New Zealand Squadron of the LRDG.

I am 1800 miles away and out of contact with **Middle East**<sup>1</sup> and realise that relief will not be easy. I have just received the following telegram from General Wilson:

While fully appreciating the manpower difficulties necessitating the proposal, I must point out that the Squadron is now engaged in important operations and is doing most valuable work for which it is specially trained. It would be impossible to replace it at such short notice. I suggest for your consideration that the Squadron remains with the LRDG for the time being until we can train a replacement, on condition that we replace other rank casualties with British personnel or replace New Zealand sub-units with complete British sub-units according to the circumstances. This will ensure that command of New Zealand personnel remains under New Zealand officers. If you agree, I would be most grateful if you would take the matter up with the **New Zealand Government** on the above lines.

I feel that in view of General Wilson's cable you should agree to his proposal to return the New Zealand Squadron as soon as the tactical situation allows him to do so. I feel you should also agree to his proposal to replace other rank casualties as he may deem fit.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Despatch of 2nd New Zealand Division to Italy* (No. 303).

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

347 – THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR NEW ZEALAND (LONDON) TO THE  
PRIME MINISTER

347

*The High Commissioner for New Zealand ( London) to the Prime  
Minister*

16 November 1943

Your telegram of 2 November ( **No. 345**).

The Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, states in reply to an enquiry by **War Office** as to the earliest possible date on which the New Zealand Squadron could be released, that the Squadron is at present employed in operations in the Aegean and cannot be immediately replaced owing to the cessation of New Zealand reinforcements. The present policy is to replace detachments of the Squadron which have become non-operational on account of casualties by complete **United Kingdom** sub-units raised for the purpose. The Commander-in-Chief estimates that the time required to replace the Squadron in this way would be about three months. I gather this policy has been agreed to by **Freyberg**, who has explained the procedure to you, but it is not clear whether his report had been considered by you when you telegraphed me. I shall be glad to learn whether this procedure will meet your wishes. If so, **War Office** will issue the necessary instructions.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 348 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

348

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

18 November 1943

My telegram of 2 November. <sup>1</sup>

We have followed with considerable concern the events leading up to the deterioration of the situation on **Leros** and its final capitulation, <sup>2</sup> and we are most anxious to obtain as soon as possible the fullest available information as to the fate of the **Long Range Desert Group**.

The use of the New Zealand Squadron and the part played by our men in this undertaking, the nature and object of which we are ignorant and indeed are at a loss to understand, are matters upon which a full report is urgently desired, and it would be appreciated if this could be obtained and made available to the **New Zealand Government** at the earliest possible moment.

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<sup>1</sup> No. 345.

<sup>2</sup> The forces on **Leros** surrendered on 16 Nov.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 349 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

349

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

20 November 1943

I have to acknowledge your telegram of 18 November concerning the New Zealand Squadron, LRDG. I am not able to give the facts as to the nature or object of the undertaking in the Dodecanese Islands, neither do I know the part played by the New Zealand Squadron. I have therefore cabled the Chief of the General Staff, **Middle East**, and have asked him to supply the facts to me as soon as possible, when I will cable details to you in New Zealand. This may take some days. I had, however, previously ascertained from **Middle East** the casualties incurred, and for the guidance of the Government, as far as could be estimated at 4.30 p.m. on 17 November, they are as follows: Missing from Levita, 1 officer and 22 other ranks; missing from **Leros**, 4 officers and 21 other ranks; now in the **Middle East** at **Haifa**, 5 officers and 57 other ranks, making a total of 48 missing and 62 safe in the **Middle East**.

These figures may alter as other men may turn up in the next day or two. You will be kept posted and full details of names will be sent through **2nd Echelon** to Army Headquarters in the usual way.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 350 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS

350

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs*

22 November 1943

Events in the Dodecanese Islands have greatly disturbed the **New Zealand Government**. They have throughout been at a loss to understand the objective of these operations which, without full information as to the facts, they cannot help regarding as ill-advised in their nature and most unfortunate in their consequences. They would also appreciate information as to the manner and scope in which it was anticipated this operation was to have been carried out.

Owing to the participation of the New Zealand commando unit known as the Long Range Desert Patrol Group, <sup>1</sup> the deterioration in the situation has naturally been watched with particular concern.

His Majesty's Government in New Zealand wish to observe that they were never consulted as to the use of their troops in this connection nor, they are advised, was their Commanding Officer in the **Middle East** advised until the men had actually landed.

The reversion of this unit to the control of the GOC 2nd NZEF had already been discussed with the **United Kingdom** authorities, and it would seem appropriate at this stage to make it clear that His Majesty's Government in New Zealand desire that this unit should cease to be under the control of General Headquarters, **Middle East**, and that any survivors, about whom early information is requested, should be made available for service with the 2nd New Zealand Division.

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<sup>1</sup> When the unit was formed in July 1940, it was first known as the **Long Range Desert Patrol**. With the expansion of the unit into several squadrons the title was changed to **Long Range Desert Group**. Besides New Zealanders, British and Rhodesian patrols of the **Long Range Desert Group** also took part in the **Dodecanese operations**.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 351 – THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

351

### *The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

23 November 1943

The substance of an appreciation by the Chiefs of Staff Committee on the recent operations in the **Dodecanese**, which it is thought will supply the answer to the points raised in the first paragraph of your telegram of 22 November, is contained in my immediately following telegram. It may be observed, with reference to the first paragraph of this appreciation, that risks somewhat similar to those accepted in the **Dodecanese** had been taken in the capture of **Sardinia** and **Corsica** with successful results. One further point which has not been covered by this appreciation, and to which attention should be called, is that if the Turkish Government had acceded to the request made to them by the Foreign Secretary <sup>1</sup> for the grant of air bases, the necessary air support would have been available for operations in the islands (see my telegrams of 6 and 7 November). <sup>2</sup> A further telegram regarding the points raised in later paragraphs of your telegram will be sent.

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<sup>1</sup> **Rt. Hon. R. A. Eden**, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 23 Dec 1940–26 Jul 1945.

<sup>2</sup> Not published. A brief report of Mr. Eden's discussions with the Turkish Foreign Minister (M. Numan Menemenjoglu) on 5–7 Nov 1943 was given in these telegrams.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 352 — THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

352

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

23 November 1943

The following is the substance of the appreciation by the Chiefs of Staff referred to in my immediately preceding telegram:

Our two main objects in shaping our plans for operations in the Eastern Mediterranean concurrent with the assault on the mainland of **Italy** at **Salerno** were: ( *a*) To assist the main operation against **Italy**; ( *b*) to exploit in the Aegean the general weakness of the German position likely to result from the Italian collapse.

As it was realised that amphibious operations against the mainland of **Italy** conducted in the face of a determined and formidable enemy would be extremely hazardous, it became a cardinal point in our **Mediterranean** strategy to seek to divert the enemy's strength or, failing that, to confront him elsewhere with commitments sufficiently serious to prevent the movement of reinforcements into the main theatre of **Italy**. In particular, any diversion of the enemy's air strength during our assault would be of very material assistance while our protective fighters were operating at extreme range.

In an appreciation made in early September we considered that the position in the Aegean Islands was as follows: Of the outer ring, **Crete** was held by 55,000 troops, the western half of the island, containing the important airfields, by 30,000 Germans, with the Italians east of Candia; **Rhodes**—which is the key to the **Dodecanese** group—by 9000 Germans

and 40,000 Italians. There were 1000 Germans in **Scarpanto**, lying between Rhodes and **Crete**, forming one-quarter of the total garrison. There were also Germans in the larger islands of the North Aegean in Lemnos, Mitylene, and Chios, but in the **Dodecanese**, other than Rhodes, there were only Italians—some 14,000. We hoped to obtain the assistance of these Italians in the seizure and organisation of bases from which we might harass the sorely extended Germans and obtain strategic gains of great value, especially the diversion of the enemy's air strength at a critical period in the **Salerno** landings. We realised that risks were involved—we would be acting inside the enemy's 'fortress', with tenuous lines of supply open to enemy air reconnaissance and the virtual certainty of air attack, against which our defence would be seriously handicapped—but the Commander-in-Chief in the **Middle East** considered that the risks were legitimate risks. With this His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom** agreed.

### *Action after the Fall of Italy*

General Alexander's **Fifth Army** landed in Salerno Bay on 9 September, and **Italy** made unconditional surrender to the Allies. General Wilson despatched a small party for Rhodes on the same day, but the overwhelming strength of the Italians, though numerical, was illusory for they evinced no desire to turn against the Germans and our party was refused permission to land. It was clear that without mounting a major expedition nothing was to be achieved in Rhodes and attention was turned to the smaller islands. By virtue of its airfield at Antimachia—the only airfield in these smaller islands—**Cos** was much the most important, and in one week 400 troops were ferried in. At the same time smaller contingents were introduced into **Leros** and Castelrosso.

The task of reinforcement went on steadily.

### *The Significance of Cos*

We occupied the airfield on **Cos** on 15 September, and it thus became the key to the whole situation in the Aegean. The continued

possession of **Cos** would have enabled us to provide effective short-range fighter cover in the Aegean within a radius of about 100 miles of **Cos**, including the sea approaches from the Eastern Mediterranean and to **Leros** and **Samos**. A reasonable degree of security against air attacks for our shipping and naval forces could be provided under this fighter cover. There was, however, only one good airfield—**Antimachia**—at **Cos**, and though preparation and improvement of two additional strips was immediately undertaken, General Headquarters, **Middle East** were, owing to restricted space and shortage of supplies in **Cos**, able to base only one and a half squadrons of Spitfires there before the enemy assault began; and apart from **Cos**, our nearest airfield was in **Cyprus**, about 350 miles away.

Besides, the requirements of the vital assault on **Italy** prohibited the diversion of any considerable part of the North-West African Air Force's striking power and thus prevented during this phase of the Aegean operations the use of the North African Air Force's heavy and medium bombers against the enemy's Greek and Aegean airfields. It is in this and all other respects essential, if the Aegean operations are to be fairly and impartially judged, that the **Mediterranean** should be seen as one closely interwoven strategic theatre.

### *The Attack on Cos*

Immediately the threat in the Aegean was perceived, the enemy transferred more squadrons, of which some came from the Russian and Western fronts, to the Eastern Mediterranean, bringing the total to about 35 per cent of the air strength in the whole theatre. With these reinforcements he was able to neutralise our airfield at **Cos** with heavy air attacks escorted by short-range fighters and, after a short struggle, to render our air defence inoperative. He was then able to assault and overwhelm the land garrison on 3 October.

The opposing British and German forces were about equal in numbers, but the enemy had effective air superiority over its sea and air communications. After the airfield at **Cos** had been neutralised this local

superiority could only be challenged by long-range Beaufighters which had to fly from our nearest base at **Cyprus**, some 350 miles away, and were of a type unable to influence the situation much in the face of the enemy short-range fighters. The 4000 Italian troops offered no assistance to our troops.

### *The Decision to hold Leros and Samos*

German sensitiveness to events in the Aegean was made abundantly clear by the strength of their reaction to our operations in this area; at considerable sacrifice to their affairs in **Italy**, **Russia**, and **France** they had accumulated air and land strength to eject us from **Cos**. **Cos** contained the only airfield so **Cos** was attacked first; having gained control there they were in a greatly improved position to force the surrender of the other islands.

It became clear that the fall of **Cos** was intended to be followed immediately by an assault on **Leros** and Samos. Bombing attacks began on 4 October, but on 7 October naval forces found and destroyed six landing craft and two merchant vessels off Stampalia.<sup>1</sup> The Commanders in the **Middle East** had now to decide whether or not to continue their precarious tenure in **Leros** and Samos.

The loss of **Cos** not only provided the enemy with a useful landing ground within thirty miles of **Leros**, but excluded our short-range fighters from the Aegean area—our nearest remaining airfield to **Leros** being some 350 miles away at **Cyprus**. If we had evacuated the islands we were still holding—at the best an extremely hazardous operation—we could still have continued our harassing attacks on the enemy's communications with light, highly mobile naval forces and with air forces, since neither our naval nor our air forces were able to use **Leros** or Samos as bases. The enemy, however, would have felt that our threat to the Aegean and the **Balkans** was removed and could have accordingly reduced—at this critical period in **Italy** and **Russia**—the concentration of air and land forces which we had forced him to make in **Greece** and the

Aegean. Finally, if the assault on **Leros** could be delayed by interfering with the enemy's preparations, and if we could use the interval for strengthening the garrison, we had good hopes that the attack could be beaten off. The Germans have found it difficult to mount a second assault without a considerable period of preparation, during which the situation in the theatre as a whole might have changed to our further advantage. Taking into account all these factors and with full knowledge of the hazards involved, the Commanders-in-Chief, **Middle East**, decided we should hold on to the islands we had occupied. In this they had the full support and approval of the United Kingdom Government.

A naval striking force was maintained in the South Aegean. At the same time it became possible to direct bombers from the North-West African Air Force, together with others based in the **Middle East**, to attack airfields in **Greece** and the Aegean.

### *The Threat to Leros*

After the fall of **Cos** the enemy proceeded to occupy the small islands round **Leros** and to increase the scale of air bombardment. Our air forces made frequent reconnaissance reports of the movements of landing craft among these islands, which they attacked on every opportunity. Attacks on the airfields in Rhodes and **Greece** were also made. Unfortunately, the weather interfered greatly with these attacks and we were unable to pin down the air forces as we should have wished. Every opportunity was taken to put more defenders into **Leros**. This, however, was not effected without casualties.

### *The Attack on Leros*

At 6.30 a.m. on 12 November the long-awaited assault came. The British garrison amounted to nearly 4000, the Italians to about 6000. The enemy succeeded that day in establishing bridgeheads on the east coast, in the north, and in the centre of the island.

**Leros** falls geographically into three sectors, the centre sector being a narrow waist in which is **Leros** town. Parachute troops, were dropped on Rachi Ridge, in the waist between the northern and central sectors, on the first afternoon. Throughout the day bombing was severe, and our long-range fighters were unable appreciably to interrupt it as they suffered heavily under the attack of enemy short-range fighter cover. More parachute troops were dropped on Rachi during the night of 12–13 November, and the garrison was severed, with its main strength to the south. The following day the enemy reinforced his lodgements, but by night the defenders in the north counter-attacked and pushed them back towards the sea.

Early on the morning of Sunday, 14 November, a portion of the parachute troops from Rachi Ridge launched an attack to the south against our troops in the central sector of the island. This attack was resisted and beaten off and, profiting from the new situation and supported by an attack against Rachi Ridge by the troops in the northern sector, our troops counter-attacked towards the same objective. The enemy was driven from the high ground, enabling our communications to be re-established. The enemy in the area was now confined to the area south of Quaranta, at the head of Alinda Bay. On Monday our attack was renewed but, in the face of relentless and unceasing attack from the air, it was unsuccessful. That night reinforcements were landed by the enemy.

### *Reinforcements*

On Tuesday, 16 November, Fortress Headquarters, just south of **Leros** town at Meraviglia, was heavily bombed, and attacks developed against it from the German forces which had been on the Rachi Ridge and from the original bridgehead on the east coast of the central sector. However, the situation was sufficiently restored for the Commander to wireless that given further reinforcements to his exhausted troops and more air cover he could hold out. Affairs deteriorated rapidly in the evening and the island fell.

The garrison was for five days at the mercy of the enemy's concentrated bombing attacks, for which it is estimated that he had now concentrated in Greece and the Aegean some 400 aircraft. In the end this produced a weariness too great to be resisted. From sheer exhaustion the end became inevitable. Moreover, enemy air superiority had cut air and sea communications with Leros, except for such supplies and reinforcements as could be got in at night by sea and by dropping from aircraft. Our troops had fought throughout with the utmost courage and gallantry. The losses were not all ours; throughout the fighting very severe casualties were inflicted and the Navy took full toll of enemy efforts to bring in reinforcements, in spite of the increasing difficulties of operating surface forces in the face of heavy air attack in the bright moonlight: on 14 November alone three landing craft with German reinforcements were sunk, and in the early stages of the battle others were destroyed by accurate artillery fire from the island. German casualties, although not accurately known, were such that for some time the fate of the island hung in the balance; the victory might well have been ours had the conditions been only a little less in the enemy's favour. The enemy has announced that he captured on Leros 200 British officers and 3000 other ranks. If these figures can be taken as correct our casualties will have been in the neighbourhood of 500.

## *Conclusions*

We went into the Aegean with our eyes open and with the following objects:

- (i) to contain the German forces;
- (ii) to gather what we might from the fall of Italy; and
- (iii) to retain the islands if possible and to harass the German communications.

In the event the enemy reacted very strongly to the threat, and thus we were unable to hold the islands, though we succeeded in containing superior forces at what was a critical time in Italy and Russia.

From 9 September to 19 November the known enemy naval losses in

**the Aegean alone amount to at least 30,000 tons. He has lost a substantial part of the shipping available to him in the **Mediterranean**, and it is estimated that 4000 of his troops must have been drowned.**

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<sup>1</sup> **An island approximately 30 miles west of **Cos**.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

23 NOVEMBER 1943

23 November 1943

The following is the substance of the appreciation by the Chiefs of Staff referred to in my immediately preceding telegram:

Our two main objects in shaping our plans for operations in the Eastern Mediterranean concurrent with the assault on the mainland of **Italy** at **Salerno** were: ( a ) To assist the main operation against **Italy**; ( b ) to exploit in the Aegean the general weakness of the German position likely to result from the Italian collapse.

As it was realised that amphibious operations against the mainland of **Italy** conducted in the face of a determined and formidable enemy would be extremely hazardous, it became a cardinal point in our **Mediterranean** strategy to seek to divert the enemy's strength or, failing that, to confront him elsewhere with commitments sufficiently serious to prevent the movement of reinforcements into the main theatre of **Italy**. In particular, any diversion of the enemy's air strength during our assault would be of very material assistance while our protective fighters were operating at extreme range.

In an appreciation made in early September we considered that the position in the Aegean Islands was as follows: Of the outer ring, **Crete** was held by 55,000 troops, the western half of the island, containing the important airfields, by 30,000 Germans, with the Italians east of Candia; **Rhodes**—which is the key to the **Dodecanese** group—by 9000 Germans and 40,000 Italians. There were 1000 Germans in **Scarpanto**, lying between **Rhodes** and **Crete**, forming one-quarter of the total garrison. There were also Germans in the larger islands of the North Aegean in **Lemnos**, **Mitylene**, and **Chios**, but in the **Dodecanese**, other than **Rhodes**, there were only Italians—some 14,000. We hoped to obtain the assistance of these Italians in the seizure and organisation of bases from

**which we might harass the sorely extended Germans and obtain strategic gains of great value, especially the diversion of the enemy's air strength at a critical period in the [Salerno](#) landings. We realised that risks were involved—we would be acting inside the enemy's 'fortress', with tenuous lines of supply open to enemy air reconnaissance and the virtual certainty of air attack, against which our defence would be seriously handicapped—but the Commander-in-Chief in the [Middle East](#) considered that the risks were legitimate risks. With this His Majesty's Government in the [United Kingdom](#) agreed.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## ACTION AFTER THE FALL OF ITALY

### *Action after the Fall of Italy*

General Alexander's **Fifth Army** landed in Salerno Bay on 9 September, and **Italy** made unconditional surrender to the Allies. General Wilson despatched a small party for Rhodes on the same day, but the overwhelming strength of the Italians, though numerical, was illusory for they evinced no desire to turn against the Germans and our party was refused permission to land. It was clear that without mounting a major expedition nothing was to be achieved in Rhodes and attention was turned to the smaller islands. By virtue of its airfield at Antimachia—the only airfield in these smaller islands—**Cos** was much the most important, and in one week 400 troops were ferried in. At the same time smaller contingents were introduced into **Leros** and Castelrosso.

The task of reinforcement went on steadily.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COS

### *The Significance of Cos*

We occupied the airfield on **Cos** on 15 September, and it thus became the key to the whole situation in the Aegean. The continued possession of **Cos** would have enabled us to provide effective short-range fighter cover in the Aegean within a radius of about 100 miles of **Cos**, including the sea approaches from the Eastern Mediterranean and to **Leros** and **Samos**. A reasonable degree of security against air attacks for our shipping and naval forces could be provided under this fighter cover. There was, however, only one good airfield—**Antimachia**—at **Cos**, and though preparation and improvement of two additional strips was immediately undertaken, **General Headquarters, Middle East** were, owing to restricted space and shortage of supplies in **Cos**, able to base only one and a half squadrons of Spitfires there before the enemy assault began; and apart from **Cos**, our nearest airfield was in **Cyprus**, about 350 miles away.

Besides, the requirements of the vital assault on **Italy** prohibited the diversion of any considerable part of the **North-West African Air Force's** striking power and thus prevented during this phase of the Aegean operations the use of the **North African Air Force's** heavy and medium bombers against the enemy's Greek and Aegean airfields. It is in this and all other respects essential, if the Aegean operations are to be fairly and impartially judged, that the **Mediterranean** should be seen as one closely interwoven strategic theatre.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## THE ATTACK ON COS

### *The Attack on Cos*

Immediately the threat in the Aegean was perceived, the enemy transferred more squadrons, of which some came from the Russian and Western fronts, to the Eastern Mediterranean, bringing the total to about 35 per cent of the air strength in the whole theatre. With these reinforcements he was able to neutralise our airfield at **Cos** with heavy air attacks escorted by short-range fighters and, after a short struggle, to render our air defence inoperative. He was then able to assault and overwhelm the land garrison on 3 October.

The opposing British and German forces were about equal in numbers, but the enemy had effective air superiority over its sea and air communications. After the airfield at **Cos** had been neutralised this local superiority could only be challenged by long-range Beaufighters which had to fly from our nearest base at **Cyprus**, some 350 miles away, and were of a type unable to influence the situation much in the face of the enemy short-range fighters. The 4000 Italian troops offered no assistance to our troops.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## THE DECISION TO HOLD LEROS AND SAMOS

### *The Decision to hold Leros and Samos*

German sensitiveness to events in the Aegean was made abundantly clear by the strength of their reaction to our operations in this area; at considerable sacrifice to their affairs in **Italy**, **Russia**, and **France** they had accumulated air and land strength to eject us from **Cos**. **Cos** contained the only airfield so **Cos** was attacked first; having gained control there they were in a greatly improved position to force the surrender of the other islands.

It became clear that the fall of **Cos** was intended to be followed immediately by an assault on **Leros** and Samos. Bombing attacks began on 4 October, but on 7 October naval forces found and destroyed six landing craft and two merchant vessels off Stampalia.<sup>1</sup> The Commanders in the **Middle East** had now to decide whether or not to continue their precarious tenure in **Leros** and Samos.

The loss of **Cos** not only provided the enemy with a useful landing ground within thirty miles of **Leros**, but excluded our short-range fighters from the Aegean area—our nearest remaining airfield to **Leros** being some 350 miles away at **Cyprus**. If we had evacuated the islands we were still holding—at the best an extremely hazardous operation—we could still have continued our harassing attacks on the enemy's communications with light, highly mobile naval forces and with air forces, since neither our naval nor our air forces were able to use **Leros** or Samos as bases. The enemy, however, would have felt that our threat to the Aegean and the **Balkans** was removed and could have accordingly reduced—at this critical period in **Italy** and **Russia**—the concentration of air and land forces which we had forced him to make in **Greece** and the Aegean. Finally, if the assault on **Leros** could be delayed by interfering

with the enemy's preparations, and if we could use the interval for strengthening the garrison, we had good hopes that the attack could be beaten off. The Germans have found it difficult to mount a second assault without a considerable period of preparation, during which the situation in the theatre as a whole might have changed to our further advantage. Taking into account all these factors and with full knowledge of the hazards involved, the Commanders-in-Chief, **Middle East**, decided we should hold on to the islands we had occupied. In this they had the full support and approval of the United Kingdom Government.

A naval striking force was maintained in the South Aegean. At the same time it became possible to direct bombers from the North-West African Air Force, together with others based in the **Middle East**, to attack airfields in **Greece** and the Aegean.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## THE THREAT TO LEROS

### *The Threat to Leros*

After the fall of **Cos** the enemy proceeded to occupy the small islands round **Leros** and to increase the scale of air bombardment. Our air forces made frequent reconnaissance reports of the movements of landing craft among these islands, which they attacked on every opportunity. Attacks on the airfields in Rhodes and **Greece** were also made. Unfortunately, the weather interfered greatly with these attacks and we were unable to pin down the air forces as we should have wished. Every opportunity was taken to put more defenders into **Leros**. This, however, was not effected without casualties.



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## THE ATTACK ON LEROS

### *The Attack on Leros*

**At 6.30 a.m. on 12 November the long-awaited assault came. The British garrison amounted to nearly 4000, the Italians to about 6000. The enemy succeeded that day in establishing bridgeheads on the east coast, in the north, and in the centre of the island.**

**Leros falls geographically into three sectors, the centre sector being a narrow waist in which is Leros town. Parachute troops, were dropped on Rachi Ridge, in the waist between the northern and central sectors, on the first afternoon. Throughout the day bombing was severe, and our long-range fighters were unable appreciably to interrupt it as they suffered heavily under the attack of enemy short-range fighter cover. More parachute troops were dropped on Rachi during the night of 12-13 November, and the garrison was severed, with its main strength to the south. The following day the enemy reinforced his lodgements, but by night the defenders in the north counter-attacked and pushed them back towards the sea.**

**Early on the morning of Sunday, 14 November, a portion of the parachute troops from Rachi Ridge launched an attack to the south against our troops in the central sector of the island. This attack was resisted and beaten off and, profiting from the new situation and supported by an attack against Rachi Ridge by the troops in the northern sector, our troops counter-attacked towards the same objective. The enemy was driven from the high ground, enabling our communications to be re-established. The enemy in the area was now confined to the area south of Quaranta, at the head of Alinda Bay. On Monday our attack was renewed but, in the face of relentless and unceasing attack from the air, it was unsuccessful. That night**

**reinforcements were landed by the enemy.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## REINFORCEMENTS

### *Reinforcements*

On Tuesday, 16 November, Fortress Headquarters, just south of **Leros** town at Meraviglia, was heavily bombed, and attacks developed against it from the German forces which had been on the Rachi Ridge and from the original bridgehead on the east coast of the central sector. However, the situation was sufficiently restored for the Commander to wireless that given further reinforcements to his exhausted troops and more air cover he could hold out. Affairs deteriorated rapidly in the evening and the island fell.

The garrison was for five days at the mercy of the enemy's concentrated bombing attacks, for which it is estimated that he had now concentrated in **Greece** and the Aegean some 400 aircraft. In the end this produced a weariness too great to be resisted. From sheer exhaustion the end became inevitable. Moreover, enemy air superiority had cut air and sea communications with **Leros**, except for such supplies and reinforcements as could be got in at night by sea and by dropping from aircraft. Our troops had fought throughout with the utmost courage and gallantry. The losses were not all ours; throughout the fighting very severe casualties were inflicted and the Navy took full toll of enemy efforts to bring in reinforcements, in spite of the increasing difficulties of operating surface forces in the face of heavy air attack in the bright moonlight: on 14 November alone three landing craft with German reinforcements were sunk, and in the early stages of the battle others were destroyed by accurate artillery fire from the island. German casualties, although not accurately known, were such that for some time the fate of the island hung in the balance; the victory might well have been ours had the conditions been only a little less in the enemy's favour. The enemy has announced that he captured on **Leros** 200 British

**officers and 3000 other ranks. If these figures can be taken as correct our casualties will have been in the neighbourhood of 500.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## CONCLUSIONS

### *Conclusions*

**We went into the Aegean with our eyes open and with the following objects:**

- (i) to contain the German forces;**
- (ii) to gather what we might from the fall of **Italy**; and**
- (iii) to retain the islands if possible and to harass the German communications.**

**In the event the enemy reacted very strongly to the threat, and thus we were unable to hold the islands, though we succeeded in containing superior forces at what was a critical time in **Italy** and **Russia**.**

**From 9 September to 19 November the known enemy naval losses in the Aegean alone amount to at least 30,000 tons. He has lost a substantial part of the shipping available to him in the **Mediterranean**, and it is estimated that 4000 of his troops must have been drowned.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 353 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

353

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

26 November 1943

In reply to the telegram of 18 November ( **No. 348**) asking for the fullest information on the operations at **Leros** under the following headings:

- (i) The nature and object of the operations;
- (ii) the part played by the New Zealand Squadron;
- (iii) the fate of the New Zealand Squadron, **Long Range Desert Group**,

I beg to state that when the LRDG were committed to an operational role on **Cos** and **Leros** I reported the matter at once to the **New Zealand Government**, *vide* my telegram of 19 September ( **No. 339**), and also brought to the notice of the Chief of the General Staff the fact that the normal procedure when fresh operational commitments of New Zealand troops were made had been departed from, and that the **New Zealand Government** had not been notified beforehand. I discussed at once the situation with the Chief of the General Staff and understood that they had landed without opposition on **Leros** and **Cos**, and that this was only part of a larger plan as further large-scale operations in the **Dodecanese** were pending. As is usual where future operations are concerned, I asked no specific questions as to their nature, but understood that Rhodes was the objective and that the operations were undertaken with the object of interfering with the enemy's sea communications in the **Aegean Sea**.

When the enemy counter-attacked and **Cos** was retaken, it was obvious that we had missed what slender chance existed and there appeared no reason to continue the commitment a day longer than was necessary to effect their evacuation. I therefore cabled the **New Zealand**

**Government from Italy on 12 October ( No. 340)** saying that I was out of touch with the **Middle East** situation and the LRDG, and suggested that in view of the unsatisfactory nature of the commitment the **New Zealand Government** should now recall the LRDG on the earliest possible opportunity and disband them. When General Wilson's SOS, contained in my cable of 7 November ( **No. 346**), which I forwarded to the **New Zealand Government**, arrived, I must admit I felt that the situation would not allow of their withdrawal, and in any case a hasty withdrawal of the New Zealand Squadron at the last moment before the attack would leave New Zealand open to the possible charge of deserting our British comrades on the eve of battle. I therefore felt that we must leave the question of their early replacement to General Wilson's discretion. When your cable of 18 November ( **No. 348**) arrived I repeated the relevant part to General Wilson, asking him for information upon which to base my reply to you, and I forward his answer:

The outcome of the operations in the Aegean has been a serious blow to all of us, as you will imagine. It was touch and go on **Leros** but in the end air supremacy won. We took the risk when we went in in September but we had then hoped to follow up with an attack on Rhodes.

Unfortunately, conditions at the other end of the **Mediterranean** and in the **Pacific** did not allow the allocation of the necessary craft and air support and this had temporarily to be abandoned. In the meantime, every effort was made to strengthen our position in the Aegean and it was decided to try and hold on in view of the very valuable diversion it caused to the main effort in **Italy** and **Russia**. The force diverted included up to 400 aircraft, also 6000 highly trained troops for the assault, and others for garrisoning the islands he was forced to occupy by our raiding. The assault force for **Leros** was drawn from five different formations, demonstrating thereby the extent to which he was stretched. One-third of the enemy shipping in the Aegean was sunk and the Axis supply line to Rhodes interrupted for two months.

The LRDG were used as outposts and for raiding and patrolling in enemy-held islands, a task for which they are ideally suited. Their

**operations were of the greatest value, and all the evidence proves that they were a serious thorn in the enemy's side, whilst the information given by their outposts proved invaluable to all Services.**

**As far as we know at present the situation of the New Zealand LRDG squadron is as follows:**

**Now in the [Middle East](#): 5 officers, 58 other ranks.**

**Missing at [Levita](#): 1 officer, 22 other ranks.**

**Missing at [Leros](#): 2 officers, 21 other ranks.**

**Of those missing at [Leros](#), I am glad to say about half are believed to be safe and on their way back. This will be confirmed shortly. All the LRDG are now being withdrawn from the Aegean.**

**The Levita operation referred to in the above paragraph was a raid on that island by the LRDG with the object of clearing it of a small party of the enemy whose occupation interfered with our naval action. Our force was unable to contact the enemy until dawn and thereafter was heavily dive-bombed, pinned, and split into small groups which were later overcome by a reinforced enemy. Details are lacking, but the majority of the one officer and 22 other ranks are thought to be prisoners.**

**Please convey to the [New Zealand Government](#) my fullest sympathy in their loss. These men were of the finest type and did invaluable work. We are more than grateful for the assistance and I can assure you their efforts were not in vain.**

**I do not know all the facts, neither do I wish to criticise, but for the private information of the New Zealand War Cabinet I can say that I never liked the plan, which broke the first principle of modern warfare 'that you must win the air battle before you embark on the land or sea battle.' Even at the beginning of the operation we failed to establish air**



cover over **Leros** or **Cos**. Later, when the Germans concentrated fighters and dive-bombers in Rhodes and **Crete**, they isolated our garrisons and mopped them up at will. I am told that two Indian brigades were lost but I cannot vouch for this. From the New Zealand point of view, out of 108<sup>1</sup> we appear to have saved 63, and some more may still turn up. That is better than I had hoped. I am glad that the LRDG will now be recalled. Small detached operational units or formations require careful watching.

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<sup>1</sup> The figures in General Wilson's report total 109.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 354 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR NEW ZEALAND (LONDON) – [EXTRACT]

354

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the High Commissioner for  
New Zealand ( London)*

*[ Extract]*

27 November 1943

I am still not able to participate actively in the work of the Government although I am consulted on important matters. However, in spite of my compulsory inactivity, <sup>2</sup> there are two recent matters about which I feel so keenly as being most detrimental to New Zealand's war effort that I must ask you to place my own views personally before the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, Lord Cranborne, and Mr. Attlee. <sup>3</sup> The first deplorable event is the fall of Leros; the second, the release of Sir Oswald Mosley. <sup>4</sup>

In regard to the capture of Leros, New Zealand is directly concerned. Without either the knowledge or consent of the New Zealand Government or, apparently, of General Freyberg, who would have immediately consulted us, a number of our Long Range Desert Group troops were ordered to take part in the attack on and occupation of some of the Dodecanese Islands. This was a breach of our agreement with the British Government and Army authorities. The circumstances surrounding the loss of Leros have already largely destroyed my own faith in the present Middle East Command, if it was responsible, and when it becomes known that a number of New Zealanders were stupidly sacrificed without even consent for their inclusion in the task force being asked from our Government, the disappointment and bitterness here will be intensified many times over. General Wilson's statement regarding the capture of Leros, with its out-dated, unhappy, and totally

irrelevant references to **Greece** and **Crete**, was rejected unanimously, even contemptuously. <sup>1</sup> It is felt that to have 1944 war problems dealt with by Commanders with 1941 minds is most dangerous and may be disastrous. The sooner the excuses given by General Wilson, who is a man generally admired by New Zealand soldiers, are forgotten the better.

In the meantime, we have the rehabilitation of the sense of the great power of **Germany** re-established in the Eastern Mediterranean, as witness the attitude of **Turkey**. I am very glad that as a set-off there we have the heightened prestige of **Britain** over the **Lebanon** trouble. Nothing could be better or more creditable than the attitude in that affair of the British Government.

Since writing the foregoing I have read the cabled press report of Mr. Attlee's statement in the House of Commons <sup>2</sup> and the telegram from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, dated 23 November ( **No. 352**), containing the substance of the appreciation by the Chiefs of Staff. These statements have not enabled me to modify in the least my opinion of the whole unhappy blunder, except that they made it clear that the responsibility in the first place rested with the Chiefs of Staff, not with the **Middle East Command**, but apparently the latter acquiesced. Apart from all the other mistakes and miscalculations, the decision to leave the force on **Leros** to become the easy prey of the German air and land forces combined was wrong and, indeed, most reprehensible. The useless sacrifice of fine men in such a fashion is proof that the tragic lesson of **Greece** and **Crete** has not been fully assimilated and understood by some of those in the High Command, or else they are prepared not so much to take a risk, as stated by Mr. Attlee, as to gamble on a poor chance with men's lives. I strongly protest against any of our men being sacrificed in such a fashion.

.... <sup>1</sup> In New Zealand we are approaching a very difficult time. The Government won the election with a reduced majority, declaring for a continued war effort to the limit of our resources and against the Opposition claims that we had done too much and were over-committed.

**There is a good deal of criticism at present, even inside the Labour Party, at New Zealand having fighting forces in both **Italy** and the South Pacific, and the feeling is growing that one of our forces should be withdrawn. Our position has been weakened by the Mosley release, which has aroused opposition to and distrust in the responsible British authorities. The mistake should be rectified at once so that the confusion caused can be cleared away as soon as possible and the harmful situation, with its bad effects in the Dominions as well as in **Britain**, ended completely....**

<sup>1</sup>The text omitted refers to the release of Sir Oswald Mosley.

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<sup>2</sup> Mr. Fraser had recently left hospital and was then convalescent.

<sup>3</sup> The **Rt. Hon. C. R. Attlee** had been Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs (21 Feb 1942–28 Sep 1943) at the time the islands were occupied. At this date he was also acting Prime Minister during the absence of Mr. Churchill at the **Cairo** and **Teheran** conferences.

<sup>4</sup> Sir Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Union of Fascists, was imprisoned from May 1940 until 20 Nov 1943, when he was released on medical grounds.

<sup>1</sup> In a statement which was published in the New Zealand press on 19–20 Nov, General Wilson said that he considered **Leros** was worth while as a diversionary operation alone. He recalled the British withdrawal from **Greece**—a campaign that history had proved worth while—and added that he thought the same thing would be said about **Leros** and **Cos**.

<sup>2</sup> Published in the New Zealand press on 26 Nov 1943.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 355 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

355

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**3 December 1943**

**Further to my report of 26 November on the LRDG. The Officer Commanding the New Zealand Squadron <sup>2</sup> has come to see me here in Italy. New Zealand casualties for the Leros operation are further reduced, only seven other ranks now being missing. The total casualties, therefore, are one officer, 29 other ranks.**

<sup>2</sup>Major A. I. Guild, CO A (NZ) Squadron, LRDG, 1942-43.

**With reference to the last paragraph of the report, the information regarding the loss of two Indian brigades was incorrect. The garrison of the islands comprised four British battalions and some anti-aircraft and 25-pounder artillery. The statement of the Officer Commanding the New Zealand Squadron confirms the opinions expressed in my cables and reports. I am arranging that the personnel of the New Zealand Squadron now in Haifa should be recalled to Maadi for employment as reinforcements to the New Zealand Division.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 356 – THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR NEW ZEALAND (LONDON) TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

356

*The High Commissioner for New Zealand ( London) to the Prime  
Minister of New Zealand*

6 December 1943

I have been asked by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to transmit to you personally and informally the following expression of his views on **Leros** with which Mr. Attlee also associates himself:

It seems to me essential that we should go back to the position as it was when the decision to enter upon these operations was taken. At that time the surrender of **Italy** and the apparent willingness of the Italians to co-operate with us against the Germans offered a prospect of gaining immediate and substantial advantages which we certainly would have been wrong to neglect. With this in mind it was clearly proper to take some risks—risks which were successfully taken in the case of **Sardinia** and **Corsica**, with the result that the Allies are now in secure and effective possession of those great islands. If we had not also tested out the position in the Aegean to see whether similar advantages could be secured there we should surely have been open to blame. In this our hopes were disappointed: first on Rhodes, where a large Italian garrison surrendered without a blow and the Germans were able to prevent our forces landing at all; and next in **Cos**, where the lack of effective Italian support made it possible for the Germans to seize the island before our forces had had time to establish themselves. It was then necessary to decide whether to try to retain our foothold in **Leros**. The arguments in favour were that we were successfully diverting a considerable portion of the German air effort from **Italy** and to a lesser degree from **Russia**, that as a result of the forthcoming discussions with the Turkish

representatives there appeared to be a fair chance of obtaining air facilities in **Turkey**, and, lastly, that even apart from this it was thought there was a good chance of our being able to hold the island in any case. In fact this nearly succeeded, and it was only by a narrow margin that the final German assault was not beaten off by our troops.

It is impossible to conduct a war without taking risks, and looking back over the whole story I think that we should have been far more to blame if we had not taken the risk which, had it succeeded, would have given us great advantages and made a contribution to shortening the war.

Secondly, on the question of the employment of New Zealand personnel of the **Long Range Desert Group** in these operations, full inquiry has been made and the following is the position: For some three years the Group—a British unit under the direct command of General Headquarters, **Middle East**—has included New Zealand personnel. The group has operated throughout North Africa during this period without comment or question from the **New Zealand Government**. The Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, has reported that **General Freyberg** was kept in the picture and agreed to the use of the New Zealand Squadron in the Aegean operations before it was actually involved in fighting there. It is understood that **General Freyberg** informed the **New Zealand Government** at the time that he had given his approval. The number of New Zealand personnel employed was seven officers and 73 other ranks, of which, unfortunately, one officer and 29 other ranks are missing as a result of the Aegean operations.

As regards the replacement of this personnel, it was agreed with **General Freyberg** that they should be gradually replaced. However, in view of the further wishes now expressed by the **New Zealand Government** in their telegram of 22 November ( **No. 350**), and as the Squadron has now been withdrawn from the Aegean, the Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East**, has been instructed to send the remaining personnel to the New Zealand Depot, where they will be available as required for

**the New Zealand Division.**

**The above information constitutes the reply promised in the Secretary of State's telegram of 23 November ( No. 351).**



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 357 — THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR NEW ZEALAND (LONDON)

357

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the High Commissioner for  
New Zealand ( London)*

**21 December 1943**

**I would like you to accept my thanks for the close personal attention you gave to my telegram of 27 November ( No. 354). Owing to my second period in hospital this acknowledgment has been delayed. However, I am back at work again, although just getting into second gear.**

**You will not be surprised to learn from me that I do not consider the explanations of the **Leros** collapse by the Secretary of State for the Dominions to be satisfactory. I do not wish to drag out the discussion of the matter, but at your convenience you can indicate this fact to both Lord Cranborne and Mr. Attlee.**

**With reference to the statement in the message of the Secretary of State for the Dominions that 'It is impossible to conduct a war without taking risks', I have to state in reply that I agree, but in my opinion the position at **Leros**, which should have been apparent to anyone with a knowledge of what happened in **Greece** and **Crete**, was not that a reasonable risk was taken but that the men concerned were sent to certain defeat—they were foredoomed. **Corsica** and **Sardinia** cannot be accepted as parallel instances. In my opinion, the falling back on **Leros** without adequate air cover, because **Rhodes** was a disappointment, showed unrealistic and inefficient thinking and planning.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## MAINTENANCE OF 2ND NEW ZEALAND DIVISION; THE REPLACEMENT SCHEME

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 358 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE HON. W. NASH, NEW ZEALAND MINISTER AT WASHINGTON – [EXTRACT]

358

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Hon. W. Nash, New  
Zealand Minister at Washington*

*[ Extract ]*

12 January 1944

Before my departure for **Australia** <sup>1</sup> there are a number of important matters concerning which the need for decisions is becoming urgent.... <sup>2</sup>

There is also the question of manpower. Obviously the situation cannot be allowed to drift any longer. I feel that we have no alternative but to decide to withdraw one division for the replacement and reinforcement of the other, and I would be very glad if you would make an early approach to President Roosevelt on this matter, acquaint him with the difficulties with which we are confronted, and seek his advice as to the choice which should be made. The previous suggestion put forward that both divisions should be allowed gradually to diminish in size <sup>3</sup> is to my mind insupportable, and I feel that we cannot make to Parliament or to the people a recommendation of that nature.

I feel also that it will be necessary for you to discuss this matter personally with Mr. Churchill and, for this and the other reasons indicated above, would therefore suggest that you should go to **London** almost immediately, and in the case of the manpower question let me have the results of your discussion in time for the meeting of Parliament on 22 February.

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Fraser left **Auckland** on 13 Jan for discussions in **Canberra** between representatives of the Commonwealth and New Zealand

**Governments. He returned to New Zealand at the end of January.**

**<sup>2</sup> The text omitted dealt with overseas trade matters which the Prime Minister considered should be discussed with the United Kingdom Government.**

**<sup>3</sup> See *Proposed Withdrawal of 2nd New Zealand Division (April–May 1943)* (No. 237).**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 359 – THE NEW ZEALAND MINISTER (WASHINGTON) TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND (CANBERRA)

359

### *The New Zealand Minister ( Washington) to the Prime Minister of New Zealand ( Canberra)*

14 January 1944

I have today discussed with the President at the White House the question of manpower as instructed in your telegram of 12 January. I gave him full details of the manpower position in the Dominion, the **Pacific**, and the **Mediterranean**, particularly in its relation to the forces in the **Pacific** and **Mediterranean**. He appeared generally to think that the balance of the case lay with our continuing to operate a division in the **Pacific** on account of our proximity and particular interest, stating that he felt it would be better for us to be at the entry to **Tokyo** rather than at the entry to **Berlin**.

The decision as originally communicated to you to keep two divisions in the field was made with Mr. Churchill after full consideration of the psychological effect of withdrawal from **Europe** and also the need of New Zealand being represented in the **Pacific** area. <sup>1</sup> I pointed out to the President that from my discussions with Admiral Halsey it did not appear that our force in the **Pacific** could be fully used on its present strength. My interview with Halsey is the subject of a separate cable. <sup>2</sup>

The President said that whilst at the moment it did not appear to be an affair upon which he could express his personal opinion, he felt positively that we ought to be in the **Pacific**, although he thought the withdrawal of our division from the European area would interfere with the operational programme preliminary to the next three months. It



might be possible in his opinion, however, to assign a British division to take the place of ours in **Europe**, although it appeared to me that transportation and readjustment would be difficult at the present time. However, I have promised to put our manpower position and its relation to the two forces in the field in writing, and then the President will communicate personally with Mr. Churchill.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Proposed Withdrawal of 2nd New Zealand Division (April–May 1943)* (No. 237).

<sup>2</sup> Not published. In this telegram, dated 15 Jan, Mr. Nash stated that he had advised Admiral Halsey that New Zealand could not provide any further reinforcements for land operations but would maintain its Navy and **Air Force** commitments. Admiral Halsey had told him that his understanding of New Zealand's undertaking was that it would provide a full division and that his use of the present New Zealand force was continually limited by its size. In another telegram on the same day, Mr. Nash forwarded for the Prime Minister's information a confidential personal opinion from Sir John Dill to the effect that the **New Zealand Government** should notify Mr. Churchill and Mr. Roosevelt that it desired to withdraw the 2nd New Zealand Division from **Europe** by August next, and that the United Kingdom Government be requested to make arrangements accordingly.

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One difficulty that I foresee at the moment is Mr. Churchill's absence from **London** <sup>1</sup> and it may be difficult to obtain access to him, although under necessitous circumstances I could, of course, on your request probably make the necessary arrangements for an interview.

The President is leaving **Washington** for some days at **Hyde Park** to enable him to recover from influenza, from which he has been suffering for some time. He will probably be back towards the end of next week. In the meantime, he said that if I would give him the case he would examine it at once. I propose to talk the whole matter over with Sir John Dill and then to present the case to the President.

Meanwhile, I think it would be helpful if you would immediately communicate with **London** to find out if arrangements can be made for me to see Mr. Churchill. With this information I will take the necessary steps to get to **London**, but it would not be wise for me to leave until I have the President's reply to the representations which are being made in writing.

I am planning to go to **New York** on Monday and Tuesday and to spend some time with **Fisher**<sup>2</sup> discussing other questions, after which I will communicate with you as to the best means of getting over to **London**, which I suggest might be in the first week in February.

One point of interest from the conversation with the President is the fact that he said that immediately this conflict is over he thought there would be four or five years of sound prosperity. I qualified this personally by saying, 'if we can get some agreement which can enable us to make the change from war to peace without conflicts which look to be growing in various countries.'

If you are able to give me your personal views as between the **Pacific** and European zones, I would much appreciate the policy at your earliest convenience.

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<sup>1</sup> After attending the **Cairo** and **Teheran** conferences Mr. Churchill developed pneumonia. He spent some weeks in the **Middle East** convalescing and returned to **London** on 18 Jan.

<sup>2</sup> **Dr. A. G. B. Fisher**, Counsellor, New Zealand Legation, **Washington**, 1944; Chief of Division, Research Department, International Monetary Fund, 1946–.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 360 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND (CANBERRA) TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

360

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand (Canberra) to the Prime  
Minister of the United Kingdom*

19 January 1944

I am delighted to learn of your return home and trust that you are now recovering speedily and completely. I hesitate to make calls upon your time and energy so soon after your arrival, but I was on the point of requesting the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to ascertain when it would be possible for Mr. Nash, who is now back in **Washington**, to discuss with you and obtain your advice on the disposition of New Zealand's armed forces overseas. The whole question of our overseas commitments has now to be reviewed, in view of the fact that New Zealand has reached the end of its resources of manpower not engaged in essential industry and fit and available for service in the armed forces. The new Parliament meets next month, and from the Government's point of view it is imperative that it should be in a position to place its policy before the House and obtain approval, in particular, on the question of the disposition of the two overseas divisions.

I would be most grateful therefore if Mr. Nash could discuss the matter with you at the earliest possible opportunity and obtain your views. He could, if convenient to you, leave **Washington** for **London** at short notice within the next fortnight. I would be very glad to have your decision on this request in **Canberra** as I expect to be here for another eight or nine days.

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

361 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME  
MINISTER OF NEW NEW ZEALAND (CANBERRA)

361

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of  
New New Zealand ( Canberra)*

**21 January 1944**

**Thank you very much for your kind message of 19 January. I shall be delighted to see Nash and to discuss with him the disposition of your forces overseas. We naturally realise your difficulties over manpower problems which are very similar to our own. Please tell Nash to come as soon as he likes and to let me know when he intends to arrive.**

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

362 — LETTER FROM THE HON. W. NASH, NEW ZEALAND MINISTER AT  
WASHINGTON, TO PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

362

*Letter from the Hon. W. Nash, New Zealand Minister at Washington,  
to President Roosevelt*

24 January 1944

MY DEAR MR. PRESIDENT

May I first thank you for your courtesy in arranging at such short notice to discuss the problem stated by me to you in connection with manpower in New Zealand.

My delay in making the case in writing has been due to my desire to obtain Mr. Fraser's latest views on the situation. He has now advised me that Mr. Churchill would be glad to see me in **London** as soon as possible.

The position in New Zealand requires some clarification in order to determine the most effective method by which we can use our manpower to help the war effort.

Our position at the time of the most recent full analysis was as follows:

Total number of males between the ages of 14-64	600,000
Of this total those engaged either full time with war and defence forces—in munition and war equipment manufacture—essential work, or minor, less essential work numbered	5,60,000
Total number of males between Service ages (18-40)	330,000
Of this total, at middle of last year those serving full time in Army, Navy, or Air services (exclusive of casualties) numbered	149,000

Of this 149,000, the forces overseas totalled

70,000

The large proportion engaged in full-time war services is causing a reduction in our production of primary products. When I left New Zealand, for instance, in December last it was not possible to obtain full production in our meat freezing works (corresponding to your meat packing-houses) owing to shortage of manpower. Our butter, cheese, and meat production from the farms is also declining owing to shortage of manpower (and of fertiliser, which is in very short supply).

We are anxious to use our full resources to finish the war at the earliest possible date and also to meet all our commitments overseas, but we have to determine now where our manpower can best be used.

Where is the need greatest?

- ( a ) Is it in providing airmen for **Europe, India, and the Pacific**?
- ( b ) Is it to meet naval requirements in the **Pacific** and other areas?
- ( c ) Or in maintaining a Division in the **Mediterranean** zone?
- ( d ) Or in maintaining two brigades in the **South Pacific Area**?

On present evidence we have decided to endeavour to maintain our air strength—which on 31 October last totalled 40,547 men—and to provide for expansion already planned; this means that the airmen required will absorb most of the young men reaching Service age (18 years for service in New Zealand, 21 years for service overseas).

It is proposed to maintain the Navy at its present strength—8356

The Army strength at 31 October was:

In New Zealand	31,402
In the South Pacific war zone	21,903
In Europe	33,505
Minor additions	206
This gave a total of	87,016

If the **Air Force** is to be fully provided for and the Navy strength maintained there are no resources from which we can send reinforcements to either the European or **Pacific** armies.

When the question as to the place where New Zealand's manpower could best be used was raised early last year, the advice given by yourself and Mr. Churchill was to keep the land forces in the field in both the European and **Pacific** areas—even though it was not possible to send men to replace casualties, &c. It is thought that on present evidence it would be unwise to pursue this policy to its limit.

It is not possible with our existing resources of men and women to maintain the strength of our present forces.

The problem therefore resolves itself into requiring the answer to the question: How can New Zealand best serve?

( By maintaining and expanding its air forces?

a)

( By maintaining its present naval strength?

b)

( By maintaining its Division in **Europe**?

c)

( By maintaining its forces in the **Pacific** zone?

d)

( By maintaining and if possible expanding its production of food e) supplies, particularly butter, cheese, and meat?

Presuming that it is decided that the wisest course would be to maintain a force in one zone only—European or **Pacific**—in which place could New Zealand best serve the war effort?

A further question which immediately arises is—If any changes of the present programme are to be made *when* would be the best time for them to take place?

If you so desired, I could set out the reasons for and against utilising our forces in the **Pacific** or European zones, but they are so well known to you that I have presumed it not necessary to do so. This, of course, would include the timing of changes and the other factors associated with the fluid nature of the war in **Europe** and the **Pacific**.

The New Zealand Government would be helped by your advice as to

what you consider is the best course to follow under present circumstances.

My present plans are being made on the assumption that (weather permitting) I will leave for **London** to obtain Mr. Churchill's advice not later than the end of next week. If I could obtain your opinion and advice prior to my leaving it would help me to prepare my report from **London** to Mr. Fraser for submission to the New Zealand War Cabinet, with whom the final decision will rest.

Again thanking you for your help and advice, and with every good wish,

I am,  
Yours sincerely

WALTER NASH



DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

363 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER  
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

363

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the  
United Kingdom*

**1 February 1944**

I am most grateful for your kind message <sup>1</sup> which I received in  
**Canberra** on 22 January through the United Kingdom High  
Commissioner in **Australia**. Mr. Nash now hopes to leave the **United  
States** on 4 February, and I am asking him to arrange to see you as soon  
as convenient after his arrival.

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<sup>1</sup> No. 361.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

364 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE HON. W. NASH  
(WASHINGTON)

364

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Hon. W. Nash (Washington)*

1 February 1944

I have received your message of 25 January addressed to me at **Canberra**.<sup>2</sup> Following my return to **Wellington** yesterday, I discussed with members of **War Cabinet** the views of the President, Dill, and Halsey as set out in your earlier messages regarding the disposition of New Zealand military forces overseas.

The whole position must of course be thoroughly examined by **War Cabinet** and the Government, who will be guided by the advice received from Roosevelt and Churchill. If the Second Front is successfully launched and the campaign in **Italy** progresses satisfactorily, there is clearly a strong case for withdrawing the 2nd New Zealand Division from **Europe** altogether to enable us to sustain a full division in the **Pacific** and to maintain, and if possible increase, food production. As indicated in my message of 12 January ( **No. 358**), a clear-cut decision by us in favour of maintaining one division or the other would, in my opinion, be preferable to the present policy of reinforcing neither and of allowing each to diminish gradually in size.

I am very glad that you will be able to leave for the **United Kingdom** on 4 February and I have advised Mr. Churchill accordingly. Will you please arrange direct with him a suitable time for an interview?

Presumably you will not delay your departure until the President has replied to your written communication.

**We are most anxious to come to a decision one way or the other before Parliament meets on 22 February to enable us to be in a position to state definitely what policy the Government proposes to follow. You will appreciate the desirability of having the earliest possible information to enable the necessary prior discussions to be held in **War Cabinet**, Cabinet, and caucus.**

**You will by now have received the survey of manpower prepared by the **National Service Department** on 1 January, which sets out the whole position and the outlook for 1944. <sup>1</sup>**

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**<sup>2</sup> Not published. In this telegram Mr. Nash notified Mr. Fraser of his plans for departure to the **United Kingdom**.**

**<sup>1</sup> Not published.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 365 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

365

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

**1 February 1944**

**Mr. Nash has been instructed to go to London next week to discuss with Mr. Churchill New Zealand's manpower difficulties and to seek his advice regarding the disposition of our overseas forces.**

**We cannot, as you know, reinforce either Division except by withdrawing one for this purpose. The Government must decide its policy in this regard before Parliament meets on 22 February, and Mr. Nash is therefore consulting both the President and Mr. Churchill as to the theatre in which New Zealand forces can most usefully serve, and to what extent manpower should be diverted from military purposes to those of food production. I will keep you informed on the progress of these discussions.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 366 – THE HON. W. NASH (WASHINGTON) TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

366

*The Hon. W. Nash ( Washington) to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

**2 February 1944**

**The following is the text of a reply from the White House, dated 1 February 1944, to my letter to President Roosevelt:**

**MY DEAR MR. NASH,**

**I have received the comments of the American Joint Chiefs of Staff on your letter of 24 January regarding the employment of New Zealand manpower to the best advantage in our common war effort. They advise me that the military implications involved are as follows:**

- ( Shipping requirements.**
  - a)**
  - ( The relative importance to the war effort of the New Zealand military**
  - b) and food production programmes.**
  - ( The effect of a reduction in the **Mediterranean** forces on operations**
  - c) planned for the near future.**
  - ( The concentration of the New Zealand effort closer to the homeland.**
  - d)**
  - ( The possible precedent for others of the **United Nations** with forces**
  - e) overseas to press for the release of these forces at times that might prove inopportune.**

**Believing this matter to be of concern to both Great Britain and the **United States**, the American Chiefs of Staff recommend that it be considered by the **Combined Chiefs of Staff**, and that the question should be referred to the Combined Staff by the British Government.**

**I therefore suggest that you consider referring the entire matter to the Prime Minister of Great Britain.**

**Most sincerely,  
FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT,  
President**

**The present plans provide for my departure direct from [Washington](#) on Saturday morning. I will approach the Prime Minister immediately after my arrival with a view to discussing the subject early next week.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 367 – THE HON. W. NASH (LONDON) TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

367

*The Hon. W. Nash (London) to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

9 February 1944

I have just left the Prime Minister, who, while affirming he is well, did not look to me in the best of health. He said he was anxious to meet me but that he would like to postpone discussion of the subject of my visit until he sees me early next week. In the meantime, he stated that it would be preferable for the Corps now under **Freyberg**, which includes the New Zealand Division, to carry out a special assignment already planned. <sup>1</sup> Mr. Churchill wants us to be in on the fall of Rome, for which plans are maturing. I stressed the urgency of examining New Zealand's position and he agreed to give further immediate study to the question. I am to lunch with him next Friday and may then complete arrangements for a full discussion and to receive his final opinion. During our conversation, which lasted twenty minutes, he mentioned all the possibilities we had discussed of rearrangement in the **Mediterranean** zone, but his main desire now is to complete the present plans even if you decide that the return of our men must take place at the conclusion of the operation now planned. I will communicate with you again tomorrow.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Campaign in Italy, 1943–44* (No. 314).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 368 – THE HON. W. NASH (LONDON) TO THE PRIME MINISTER

368

*The Hon. W. Nash ( London) to the Prime Minister*

16 February 1944

Mr. Churchill and I have again discussed the position. He wants us to maintain our Division in **Italy** until **Rome** is taken at an anticipated early date. <sup>2</sup> The Germans are placing very large forces in **Italy** which may delay the anticipated result. After **Rome** his desire is to hold at least a brigade of New Zealanders in **Europe** attached to other forces, with **Freyberg** in command. On the general statistical position of the respective Services he would like me to talk with Cranborne, Grigg, and Sinclair. <sup>3</sup> At the conclusion of our conversation I suggested he should cable his views direct to you, which he will do after showing the text to me. I will see the Ministers mentioned, if possible tomorrow, and will then again telegraph you.

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<sup>2</sup> **Rome** fell on 4 Jun 1944.

<sup>3</sup> Rt. Hon. Sir Archibald Sinclair, Kt, PC, CMG; Secretary of State for Air, 1940–45.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

369 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER  
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

369

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the  
United Kingdom*

**17 February 1944**

**I am most anxious, in view of the meeting of Parliament on 22  
February, to have your views on the disposition of New Zealand's forces  
overseas.**

**Your advice, after discussion with Mr. Nash, if possible before the  
weekend, will enable the Government to arrive at a decision, which must  
be conveyed to Parliament next week.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 370 – THE HON. W. NASH (LONDON) TO THE PRIME MINISTER

370

*The Hon. W. Nash ( London) to the Prime Minister*

18 February 1944

Excepting that he considers the New Zealand Division a major military asset and a political asset also, Grigg's views correspond closely to those of Mr. Churchill. Sinclair, whom I have just left, is planning a reduction of 1300 men in our commitments to the Air Training Scheme in **Canada**. This will provide for a gradual reduction in personnel, commencing next month, from the present annual commitments of 2500 <sup>1</sup> to 1200. I am to see **Llewelin** <sup>2</sup> at 4.30 this afternoon about food requirements, and the Chiefs of Staff on the whole position at 11 a.m. on Saturday, but it will be difficult for them to supply helpful advice before Monday.

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<sup>1</sup> See page 341, note 2.

<sup>2</sup> Colonel the Rt. Hon. John J. Llewelin, PC, CBE, MC (later **Lord Llewelin**); Minister of Food, 1943–45.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
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371 — THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME  
MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

371

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

**19 February 1944**

**Your telegram of 17 February ( No. 369). I have discussed the disposition of your overseas forces with Mr. Nash, who has, I understand, already telegraphed to you the substance of our talk. He is discussing with Service Ministers before the weekend the more detailed problems arising from your manpower position. I hope that he will be able to obtain from them all the additional information you need.**

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

372 – THE HON. W. NASH (LONDON) TO THE PRIME MINISTER

372

*The Hon. W. Nash ( London) to the Prime Minister*

**22 February 1944**

**I have been advised by the Chiefs of Staff that they have prepared a memorandum on our manpower position and that it is now with Churchill before being sent to the United States Chiefs of Staff for concurrence in the views expressed. Cranborne, who came to see me this morning owing to his office having been bombed on Sunday, says that the Prime Minister would like the rest of the week to consider the proposals. I have pointed out how impossible that is for you and have requested Cranborne to try to get a reply tonight or tomorrow. If he does not succeed I will endeavour to see Churchill again tomorrow. To assist me when seeing Churchill, could you advise me of the present position regarding the submission of your policy to Parliament?**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 373 – THE HON. W. NASH (LONDON) TO THE PRIME MINISTER

373

*The Hon. W. Nash ( London) to the Prime Minister*

**23 February 1944**

**I saw Cranborne again this morning, and subsequently General Ismay came in to say that whilst the Chiefs of Staff had given much thought to our manpower position and the present location of troops, they cannot make a definite recommendation until they have consulted the United States Chiefs of Staff at **Washington**; they have done this but up to the present there has been no reply. It is my conjecture that their present view is along the line that the two brigades in the **Pacific** might return until there is something more definite in **Italy**, when you could determine the next step. I also have the impression that the Chiefs of Staff feel just now that the presence of our Division in **Italy** is almost imperative until there is a favourable change in the position there. In any case, if you are to maintain production of the food so urgently required, you must have some men back by August. I am satisfied that this view will be supported by the **Combined Chiefs of Staff**.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 374 – THE HON. W. NASH (LONDON) TO THE PRIME MINISTER

374

*The Hon. W. Nash ( London) to the Prime Minister*

**27 February 1944**

**The following most secret message dated 26 February has just been received from Field-Marshal Dill, Head of the British Joint Staff Mission to Washington:**

**I have had a busy day trying to get a firm recommendation from the United States Chiefs of Staff, and I may say the Navy in particular feel that the problem really is a serious one and that they must not be unfairly rushed. With many apologies from the War Department, I have just received the following:**

**‘The United States Chiefs of Staff appreciate New Zealand's need of manpower in the maintenance of its production of food supplies. The source from which the manpower is to be obtained, however, presents a complicated question due to requirements in the **Mediterranean** and in the **Pacific**, as well as to the changes in the situation which may occur prior to the time the men are needed. The United States Chiefs of Staff, in view of the above, wish to defer recommendation until they have given the source of this personnel further consideration.’**

**Dill continues:**

**I am afraid this does not help much, but it does at least accept the need of manpower in the maintenance of production. The War Department is doing what it can to hasten matters, but I fear it may be impossible to get a firm answer till Tuesday, 29 February, which means that you may not get it till 1 March.**

**I will telegraph again as soon as further information is available. In the meantime, I would suggest that you consider notifying the **United Kingdom** that you wish the New Zealand Division (less a brigade made up of men whose first engagement was subsequent to the conclusion of the North African campaign) to leave **Europe** for return to New Zealand after the fall of Rome, or about 1 August next, whichever is the earlier date, and also that you did not propose to send any further personnel for training in **Canada** under the Empire Air Training Scheme after the end of the present calendar year. Leaving the Navy at its present strength, this would mean that our overseas commitments would be confined to 500 airmen a year for the **United Kingdom**, plus the personnel required to serve twenty-five squadrons in the **Pacific**, with a brigade of the 2nd NZEF in **Europe**, plus whatever Army strength you decide to maintain in the South Pacific.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 375 – THE HON. W. NASH (LONDON) TO THE PRIME MINISTER

375

*The Hon. W. Nash ( London) to the Prime Minister*

29 February 1944

The following is the text of the Chiefs of Staff memorandum dated 23 February 1944:

We have considered Mr. Nash's memorandum on New Zealand manpower <sup>1</sup> and the supplementary statement made by him at our meeting on Saturday morning. As we see it, broadly the position is that to maintain and, if possible, slightly increase the output of meat and dairy produce which is required to meet the urgent needs of the **United Kingdom** and American forces in the **South Pacific Area**, New Zealand requires additional manpower for farms, dairy factories, and freezing plants. We do not know the exact quantity of additional manpower required but we assume it to be somewhere in the neighbourhood of ten thousand men. The armed forces of New Zealand constitute the only source from which the manpower can be found. Our advice has been asked as to how this withdrawal of manpower from the armed forces can be arranged so as to cause the least harm to operations against the enemy.

An authoritative answer to the question can only be given on consultation with the United States Chiefs of Staff. We are telegraphing to **Washington** and are telling the United States Chiefs of Staff of the questions which have been put and of the reply which we consider should be given. We are telling them that in the meantime our views, which can only be regarded as an interim reply in no way committing the United States Chiefs of Staff, are being communicated to the **New Zealand Government** in view of the speed enjoined upon us by Mr. Nash.



Before expressing our views we would like to draw attention to the security aspect of any public discussion in New Zealand of manpower facts and their effect upon the distribution of the New Zealand war effort, and, except in very guarded terms, we trust that no statement will be made which reveals the intentions of the **New Zealand Government** with regard to their armed forces. We give below our comments and suggestions on the various possibilities

**NAVY** On 31 December 1943 New Zealand had a little over 8000 men serving in the **Royal Navy** and the **Royal New Zealand Navy**, of which about 5000 were in New Zealand and the **Pacific** and about 3500 elsewhere. The total number is small and largely consists of highly trained men of excellent quality. We do not recommend any reduction in the number.

**AIR FORCE** The various commitments under this heading are as follows:

In the Pacific New Zealand has undertaken to man twenty squadrons which the **United States** have undertaken to equip. At present New Zealand sends 2500 <sup>2</sup> men a year to train in **Canada** under the Empire

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<sup>1</sup> Not published. This memorandum was substantially the same as that submitted by Mr. Nash to President Roosevelt on 24 Jan ( **No. 362**).

<sup>2</sup> A note on this telegram in the Prime Minister's Department file reads: 'The figure 2500 is incorrect and should have been 2054....'

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**Air Training Scheme.** New Zealand sends 500 men a year to the **United Kingdom** to join the **Royal Air Force** as air crews. The total strength to which these commitments gave rise on 31 December 1943 was 37,000 men, of which somewhat over 30,000 were in New Zealand and the **Pacific**, 4000 in the European zone, and 2000 in **Canada, India, &c.** The Secretary of State for Air has agreed that the number of men to be sent to **Canada** under the Empire Air Training Scheme should be

reduced from 2500 a year to 1200 a year, and this will give some small measure of relief. We do not advise any reduction in the small number now sent to the **United Kingdom** each year. It remains to consider whether there could be any reduction in the size of the air commitment in New Zealand and the **Pacific**. We think it would be unwise to retract from the commitment of twenty squadrons. A force of smaller dimensions would not be commensurate with the part New Zealand naturally desires to play in the **Pacific** war, in which air operations are of such importance. Therefore, we do not recommend any appreciable reduction in the size of the air force to be maintained by New Zealand.

*ARMY* New Zealand has two principal overseas commitments under this heading—the maintenance of one division in the **Mediterranean** theatre and the maintenance of a force now comprising two brigade groups in the South Pacific theatre. One or other of these commitments must be affected by any substantial withdrawal of manpower from the Army. On 31 December 1943 there were 30,500 in the **Mediterranean** theatre and 19,600 in the South Pacific theatre. We attach great importance to the continued presence in **Italy** of New Zealand forces. From every point of view we derive great advantage from the participation of these forces in the war against **Germany**. Thus, even if it were possible at the present time, we would be very much averse to the complete withdrawal of the New Zealand Division; rather than see this happen we would prefer that it should be allowed to fall in strength to one brigade. At the present juncture, however, it is not possible to contemplate any withdrawal. The Division is engaged in the great battle for **Rome** and, until that city has been captured, no change in the Division's constitution is possible. No exact date can be set for the event and thus there seems no possibility of the provision of the men required on the farms in August by withdrawals from the European theatre. However, we would not exclude the possibility of a reduction in the strength of the Division at a later date if such a course were still necessary, but we would hope that at least one brigade would continue in the European theatre until the defeat of **Germany**.

With regard to the New Zealand force of two brigade groups taking part in operations in the Solomon Islands: apart from the fact that operations in this theatre are of secondary importance compared with those in which the New Zealand Division in **Italy** is engaged, it appears to us that the immediate need for the maintenance of this force may have diminished with the successful conclusion of the Solomon Islands campaign. The Pacific war is one in which the availability of land forces is not likely to be a governing factor. The transfer to New Zealand of these two brigade groups, moreover, would present less of a shipping problem than any large-scale withdrawal from the **Mediterranean** and could be carried out in the time available.

Our conclusion, therefore, is that the immediate need for manpower for the production of meat and dairy produce should be met by the temporary withdrawal of the two New Zealand brigade groups engaged in the Solomon Islands. This would enable New Zealand to tide over the period when labour demands are at their highest, namely, from August to December. We may reasonably hope that developments in the European theatre will allow the later withdrawal of part or all of the New Zealand Division in time enough to constitute a complete division for further operations in the **Pacific** in 1945. The importance which the **New Zealand Government** attaches to New Zealand forces playing their full part in the **Pacific** war is realised. We suggest, however, that there will be ample scope for the employment there of a New Zealand division in 1945, and that in the meantime New Zealand can be well represented in that theatre by her Navy and **Air Force**.

The following is the text of the reply of the United States Chiefs of Staff, **Washington**, dated 28 February 1944:

Reference British Chiefs of Staff memorandum of 23 February. We have studied CCS 499 <sup>1</sup> and concur in the recommendation contained therein, subject to the following:

( The New Zealand Government should be requested to furnish the  
a) **Combined Chiefs of Staff** definite figures on the number of men

required to be withdrawn from the armed forces for the purposes indicated.

( Such withdrawals should be made from the New Zealand Army forces  
b) in the South-West Pacific considered as a whole rather than limiting consideration solely to the 3rd New Zealand Division. The New Zealand Government and the Commander South Pacific Area and South Pacific Forces <sup>2</sup> should confer and jointly determine the units from which these withdrawals will be made.

( The withdrawals should not be made before the completion of FOREARM  
c) and MERCANTILE <sup>3</sup> and the consolidation of those positions. <sup>4</sup>

Both memoranda were delivered to me this morning. The delay in the delivery of the memorandum dated 23 February was due to Churchill's reluctance to make any recommendation until the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff had had the opportunity of examining it. This seems to clear the points you raise. If you desire further information please advise me.

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<sup>1</sup> This was a memorandum dated 26 Feb 1944 from the British Chiefs of Staff to the British representatives on the **Combined Chiefs of Staff**. It contained a summary of the British Chiefs of Staff's recommendations and enclosed as appendices the memorandum presented to them by Mr. Nash and their own draft memorandum.

<sup>2</sup> Admiral Halsey.

<sup>3</sup> These were the code-names for the operations against **Kavieng** airfield on **New Ireland** and against Manus (Admiralty) Island respectively.

<sup>4</sup> In a telegram to Mr. Nash on 7 Mar the Prime Minister advised that the total number of men required from the Armed Forces was 17,500, comprised as follows: 10,650 for farms, dairy factories, and freezing works, 1950 for rural housing and ancillary occupations, 4900 for sawmilling, mines, railways, housing, and hydro-electric development. He added that the **New Zealand Government** was anxious to discuss the whole matter with the Commander South Pacific Area and that it was agreed

**that the time of withdrawal of any troops in the forward areas must be dependent on strategic considerations.**

**A copy of this telegram was also sent to **Washington** with instructions that the British representatives on the **Combined Chiefs of Staff** be advised of New Zealand's attitude towards the three conditions stipulated by the United States Chiefs of Staff.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 376 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE HON. W, NASH (LONDON)

376

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Hon. W, Nash (London)*

1 April 1944

Parliament yesterday accepted the Government's proposals which were based on the recommendations of the **United Kingdom** and United States Chiefs of Staff as communicated by you, and followed negotiations with COMSOPAC's representatives and General Barrowclough.

In accordance with priority categories arranged with the New Zealand manpower authorities, the plan provides for the release of 11,000 men from the 3rd Division by October and is based on the assumption that the 3rd Division will not go out of existence, but that a nucleus will be retained capable of re-expansion if the reconstitution of the **Pacific** division later becomes possible.

To enable the situation in **Europe** to become clearer and to permit of reconsideration of withdrawal of the 2nd Division after the fall of Rome, or at some other appropriate time, the proposals have been adopted as an interim policy.

The scheme allows of the present assignment in **Green Island** and the Treasury Group being completed; it provides for the ultimate concentration of unit cadres in **New Caledonia**; it ensures continuity of association with the American Command; it keeps the cadre force acclimatised; it saves shipping back to New Zealand equipment which might later be shipped forward again if the Division is reformed; it enables us to use the good camp, recreational, hospital, and training

conditions of **New Caledonia**. In any case, the 3rd Division would, in June, have been in the forward area nine months and relief would normally be expected in June or thereabouts. <sup>1</sup>

This is merely an interim policy, and the question of whether the 3rd Division is to continue or to be completely liquidated cannot be decided until the problem of the withdrawal of the 2nd Division from **Europe** has been finally considered. I hope to discuss this matter when I am in **London** and when I see **Freyberg**. <sup>2</sup>

Will you please advise Mr. Churchill and the **Combined Chiefs of Staff**.

No publicity whatever is being given to the withdrawal, which will be referred to wherever possible as a controlled diversion of manpower from the **Pacific** to food production and allied occupations. Plans for utilising the services of the men released have been worked out and also plans for increased farm production. The outstanding question remains that of the price for butterfat and progress is being made in the negotiations.

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<sup>1</sup> See also Volume III; *Formation and Employment of 3rd New Zealand Division*.

<sup>2</sup> See page 291, note 2.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 377 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO GENERAL FREYBERG

377

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to General Freyberg*

**1 April 1944**

Following consideration of the **United Kingdom** and United States Chiefs of Staff's recommendations and negotiations with the American Commander and General Barrowclough in the South Pacific, the Government have decided to withdraw 11,000 men from the 3rd Division by October, the remainder to be retained as a nucleus capable of re-expansion if the reconstitution of the Division for further **Pacific** operations becomes possible.

The men withdrawn are to be given leave without pay and directed into farming and allied occupations, or to substitute for men in essential industry with farming experience, or to be used as replacements for men in the armed forces who are willing to undertake work on farms.

It will be for consideration whether or not the 2nd Division in whole or in part should return to New Zealand after the fall of Rome or by some specified date. I propose to discuss this matter in **London**, and when I visit **Italy** to see you and the men of the Division I hope to have the opportunity to discuss this question with you also.



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 378 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

378

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

2 April 1944

Reference your telegram of 1 April.

You will remember that on 10 July last when I left New Zealand you said I might write direct to you if I felt the situation so demanded. Since receiving your cable giving the opinions of the Chiefs of Staff <sup>1</sup> I have felt that you should know what is in my mind at present. In your last cable you say that it will be 'for consideration whether the 2nd Division in whole or in part should return' at a later date. As you will be discussing this in England before I see you I felt I should cable my views for what they are worth.

I am nervous for the safety of small detached forces in battle. Experience has shown that the safety of the 2nd NZEF has been best served when it has been kept together under its own commanders. I would therefore strongly advise you that when the time comes to make any change you should withdraw the whole force and not leave a brigade group as the Chiefs of Staff suggest. I give this advice after commanding your Expeditionary Force for four years, during which there have been difficult times.

In the last two months here on this front great firmness has been needed in dealing with the present most difficult tactical situation. In similar circumstances the commander of a small independent force is in an impossible position. Further, whenever a situation deteriorates there is a tendency to use independent brigade groups to stop gaps in the same way as the **Long Range Desert Group** was committed at **Leros**. I know from experience that small independent forces are far too vulnerable.

**I trust you will not resent my expressing my opinion before it is asked for on a question of major policy which is not my concern. As, however, there may be aspects of the situation of which you may not be fully aware, I feel that you would wish to know my views in advance before your conversations in **London**.**

**I look forward very much to welcoming you in **Italy**. As I do not know when you leave I would be grateful if you would acknowledge this cable.**

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<sup>1</sup> **Not published. Mr. Nash's telegram of 29 Feb ( **No. 375**) was repeated to **General Freyberg** on 3 Mar.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 379 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

379

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

**3 April 1944**

**Your telegram of 2 April. I very much appreciate and thank you for the expression of your views on the proposal to retain any portion of the 2nd Division in **Europe** in the event of withdrawal. My own views are entirely in accordance with those you put forward. I can assure you that I am most anxious that you should communicate with me at any time on any problem affecting the Division.**

**I am leaving New Zealand on Saturday, 8 April, and expect to be in **London** towards the end of the month. I have asked Puttick to come to **London** and hope it will be possible for him to accompany me to **Italy**, probably at the beginning of June.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 380 – GENERAL PUTTICK TO GENERAL FREYBERG

380

### *General Puttick to General Freyberg*

5 April 1944

The Prime Minister has shown me your telegram of 2 April ( **No. 378**). I forcibly expressed identical views a month ago. <sup>1</sup> There is little chance of a brigade group being left if the Division withdraws. If some reduction other than complete withdrawal becomes imperative in order again to participate against the Japanese, I have suggested that consideration be given to converting the 2nd Division to an armoured division, which would reduce establishments by 5000 and which I stated as infinitely preferable to the brigade group idea. Present indications point to the probability of withdrawal of the whole Division rather than reduction, because of strong public sentiment and the desire to replace A grade men in industry by long-service soldiers. Furlough men are still refusing to embark on this account.

I am leaving for **London** separately on 12 April via **Noumea**, **Honolulu**, and **Washington**, arriving in **London** about 30 April, and I hope to visit you later. I would appreciate any views care Brigadier Park, **London**.

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<sup>1</sup> In a memorandum dated 29 Feb 1944, addressed to the Prime Minister, General Puttick wrote: 'It is most unsatisfactory, in all respects, for forces of less than a complete division to be employed as part of the forces of another country Personally I should not care to command the brigade group in such circumstances.... I look with extreme disfavour on participation [in the war against **Germany**] with anything below the division.'

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 381 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO GENERAL PUTTICK

381

### *General Freyberg to General Puttick*

7 April 1944

Thank you for your telegram of 5 April. I am glad you agree. I have given the whole subject a good deal of thought and feel that if a small formation were left our reputation which stands so high might be tarnished. I realise that the question must be decided in New Zealand, but I am very much in favour of a clean break when the time comes.

With regard to a possible change-over to an armoured division, I think you will find the general opinion in England is that we have over-produced in armoured formations and that what is now required is an increase in infantry divisions with one armoured regiment. There are six armoured divisions in the **Mediterranean** theatre (1st British, 6th British, Polish, Canadian, South African, and ourselves) to say nothing of American formations, and none of these can be used.

While the infantry divisions here are overworked owing to the genuine shortage, the bulk of the extravagantly equipped formations have not seen a shot fired for a full year. They are feeling the effect of being LOB <sup>1</sup> and need fresh battle experience. The answer may be to send some to the Second Front.

I will cable any other matters to you in **London**. I wanted you to know the feeling here with regard to armoured divisions. I am looking forward very much to seeing you here in **Italy**.

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<sup>1</sup> Left out of battle.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 382 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER<sup>2</sup>

382

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*<sup>2</sup>

9 June 1944

In the light of our conversations<sup>3</sup> I have considered the question of the future employment of the 2nd NZEF. I give you my opinion as GOC 2nd NZEF, and primarily from the point of view of the Force. I realise that the ultimate decision will be made on a high plane, taking into consideration factors which are outside my sphere.

After careful consideration I have come to the conclusion that there are strong reasons why the 2nd NZEF should be withdrawn to New Zealand if and when a favourable opportunity arises.

The position as I see it is as follows:

I am certain that, if necessary, your Division could carry on and add fresh honours to its record. There are, however, various factors affecting the efficiency of the Force which must be taken into consideration. The inevitable effect of fierce fighting over a long period, on even the best troops in the world, is becoming apparent. There is no doubt in my mind that the high-water mark of our battle-worthiness was reached at **Sidi Rezegh** and **Belhamed** in November 1941. In that campaign, and in the other costly **Western Desert** battles which followed, many of our best men became casualties, and gradually the keen fighting edge of the Force was blunted. For a period the gradual reduction in offensive spirit was offset by the increased efficiency of the divisional machine and the ever-increasing battle experience of our commanders. Time has gone on. Another long campaign in **Italy** has followed. I know the great stress of battle which large numbers of men have been through, and we cannot disregard its effect, especially on battle-weary leaders. Signs are not

**lacking now that many of the old hands require a prolonged rest. I feel, therefore, that if there is to be heavy fighting throughout 1945 a replacement scheme would be required for all long-service personnel. Such a change-over would not be easy, but I feel it would be essential in the interests of the efficiency of the Force. That being so, and taking into consideration your manpower difficulties and probable future commitments in the war against **Japan**, I have come to the conclusion that the time may well be opportune for the complete withdrawal of the 2nd NZEF.**

**If it is decided that the 2nd NZEF should be withdrawn there will be no suggestion that we have left our work unfinished. Your Division has played a great part—even greater perhaps than many realise—during the past four and a half years. It would leave here with great honour.**

**In considering this matter I have assumed that the Second Front is established successfully, and that there is no clear indication that **Germany** is about to collapse; in short, that the war against **Germany** may last throughout 1945. If the Second Front went very well and the defeat of **Germany** seemed certain within a measurable time, I feel it would be a pity to withdraw the Division with victory in sight. On the other hand, if, as is always possible, the Second Front failed, a difficult situation would confront the Allies here in **Italy**. The enemy could move divisions from **France** to **Italy**, in which case it might well be impossible to weaken the forces here by withdrawing your Division. In either of these cases, the first involving a quick advance without strong resistance and the second a defensive action, the cost would not be too heavy and we could carry on with our existing reinforcements. It is only if we have to face months of offensive fighting and ‘slogging matches’ that I consider a changeover of personnel is essential.**

**If the decision is made to withdraw the 2nd NZEF we would, nevertheless, have to remain here for a period of months until the Second Front is established and shipping becomes available. I would strongly advise you not to withdraw the Force to Egypt for a long wait in**

a transit camp as this would be likely to produce trouble. Until shipping is available I would recommend a short-term policy of continuing here in an operational role. In my opinion the advance to the **Pisa- Rimini** line is unlikely to involve any heavy offensive fighting. When that line is reached there will probably be a pause for regrouping, and I would recommend that the opportunity should be taken to implement a replacement policy.

The scale of replacement will of course depend on the length of time the 2nd NZEF is destined to remain in **Europe**. Whatever the decision as to the future may be, I consider the withdrawal of the 4th Reinforcements should commence before the Division takes part in another heavy offensive action. In previous estimates of reinforcements no provision was made for any replacement scheme, and, assuming the Division remains in an operational role for the remainder of the 1944 campaign, 3200 4th Reinforcements would have to be replaced by personnel from New Zealand. We would be able to carry on if 2000 were sent in replacement. Our reinforcement pool would then be sufficient to carry us through four months of intense fighting and two months of normal wastage to the end of this year. If the decision is to keep the 2nd NZEF in **Europe** for an indefinite period, then the 5th Reinforcements and succeeding drafts will have to be replaced as their turn occurs. It should also be noted that if replacement, as opposed to furlough, is instituted, as I believe in the interests of efficiency it should be, personnel of the First, Second, and Third Contingents who have returned to the Division would in fairness have to be given the opportunity of being replaced.

Briefly, my conclusions are as follows:

- (i) There should be a long-term policy for returning your Expeditionary Force to New Zealand for reorganisation with a view to fielding a new force in the war against **Japan**.
- (ii) There should be an immediate short-term policy which would contemplate fighting on here until the strategic situation becomes clearer. This period could be extended to the end of the 1944 campaigning season, provided that 2000 replacements for the 4th



**Reinforcements are sent from New Zealand at an early date.  
The above message has been handed to the Prime Minister.**

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**<sup>2</sup> Repeated to the Minister of Defence.**

**<sup>3</sup> See page 293, note 2.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 383 – THE RT. HON. P. FRASER (LONDON) TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER<sup>1</sup>

383

*The Rt. Hon. P. Fraser (London) to the acting Prime Minister*<sup>1</sup>

13 June 1944

My tour of Divisional units in **Italy** and New Zealand Expeditionary Force bases at **Bari** and **Egypt** has been very satisfactory indeed. I have had most useful discussions with **General Freyberg** and serving officers, and on all occasions my reception among the troops was most friendly. The spirit that prevails is excellent, especially in the forward areas, where the progress of the campaign has naturally had a stimulating effect. I was able to see for myself how very efficiently the forward moves were being carried out. **General**

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<sup>1</sup> Hon. D. G. Sullivan.

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PAGE 251  
**Freyberg** and his staff impressed me very much. The hospitals are particularly good and great credit is due to those in control. My opinion was reinforced by comments made to me by two visiting British officers whom I met—the Directors of **Medical Services** in the **Mediterranean** and **Italy**. Everything I saw enhanced my opinion of our very fine force, the men who are leading it, and those who are serving in all ranks.

I had the opportunity of meeting groups of men wherever I went and I discussed with them very frankly the problems confronting the Division, and especially the difficulties regarding furlough. I should make it clear that I made no commitments and indicated very plainly that I could make no promises, although my views would, I thought, carry weight in our discussions back in New Zealand as to the future of

the Division.

I explained the necessity for making adjustments in our manpower and the reasons why we could not maintain two divisions overseas. I also discussed the immediate difficulties regarding shipping and the weight which had to be attached to such factors as the launching of the Second Front and the situation existing until the stabilising of a new front in **Italy**, after which the future of the Division would have to be reconsidered. I emphasised that the question had to be taken up with the British and American Chiefs of Staff as to the area in which we were to serve for the future— **Europe** or the **Pacific**— and that we would be influenced in coming to our decision by such advice.

I explained that if the Division was to remain in **Europe** until the defeat of **Germany** then, in my opinion, it would be necessary to relieve the longer-serviced men by means of a replacement scheme rather than furlough. If we were to concentrate on the **Pacific**, then the reorganised Division for 1945 would have to be built up from those with shorter service in both existing divisions and from the remaining manpower resources in New Zealand. This would involve the return of the 2nd Division and the relief of the older and longer-serviced men by those now in industry who had not seen service overseas.

This, in general, is the ground I covered in talking to the men.

**General Freyberg** has prepared an appreciation which is being forwarded to the Minister of Defence. <sup>1</sup> I propose to discuss the matter myself with the Chiefs of Staff in **London** and **Washington** and to endeavour to obtain some indication or decision as to the possible use for the reorganised Pacific Division. This should enable me to be in a position to report to **War Cabinet** on my return so that a final decision may be made.

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<sup>1</sup> No. 382.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 384 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND (LONDON)<sup>1</sup>

384

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister of New Zealand (London)*<sup>1</sup>

28 June 1944

Many thanks for keeping me informed by your telegram of 16 June.<sup>2</sup>  
The short-term policy is now in action.

Unless enemy resistance cracks by November, the state of the ground and weather conditions generally after October preclude active campaigning on the Italian front. There are, therefore, only four months when active fighting is possible, and of these one month will be spent by us in the **Rome** area waiting for the railways to be pushed forward.

Whatever the **New Zealand Government's** long-term decision may be, with **Rome** now in our hands and the Second Front well established I feel that some statement should be made as to the future of the 4th Reinforcements. If you decide to open leave, or rather replacement, for the 4th Reinforcements, I suggest that a plan similar to the one suggested by me during your visit be implemented by taking a percentage by ballot, the ballot to be carried out by arms of the service, on a quota to be decided by me after consultation with the senior commanders of the Division.

I am of the opinion, so long as a firm decision as to the replacement policy is announced and selection is entirely by ballot, that the return of even a portion of the 4th Reinforcements will not only keep faith with what the men may expect after your visit but it will be good for the morale of the remainder of the force.

Before the plan can be implemented, a decision will first be needed

as to whether replacement or leave is to be the policy. Should you decide upon replacement approximately 3200 men will be affected, and it will only be possible to release such a number by degrees, and only then if 2000 men are made available here as reinforcements as soon as possible. Until this question is decided by the **New Zealand Government** it would not be possible to send more than a small quota back to New Zealand. I have cut the replacement down to the lowest figure possible. If 2000 are agreed upon I feel reasonably certain that we can continue to take our part in the ensuing battles in accordance with the short-term policy. If the German Army

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<sup>1</sup> Repeated to the Minister of Defence.

<sup>2</sup> Not published. This telegram read in part:

I had a brief discussion with the Chiefs of Staff this morning and obtained information as to the plans they are considering for the use of British forces in the **Pacific**. While no concrete proposals are likely for some weeks, it seems reasonably clear that they will not conflict with the conclusions arrived at in your appreciation. I hope to have a further talk with General Brooke and also with the United States Chiefs of Staff in **Washington....**

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is not defeated this summer and winter arrives, the long-term policy of the **New Zealand Government** could then be implemented. I feel most optimistic about the immediate prospects of an early victory over the German forces in the field and am anxious that New Zealand should be represented in the final phase to reap the full benefit of all their great sacrifices, but I realise that these are policy questions to be decided by the New Zealand-Government.

In the meantime, pending your decision, we can carry on as we are, but an early decision will be appreciated upon the question of leave or replacement of the 4th Reinforcements, which will of course bring with it shipping problems between the **Middle East** and New Zealand. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In a personal telegram to **General Freyberg** on 29 Jun Brigadier Conway advised that the short-term policy was likely to be adopted by **War Cabinet**.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

385 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

385

*The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

1 July 1944

Your telegram of 28 June.

Two thousand men will be despatched to relieve the 4th Reinforcements. As soon as the preliminaries are completed the **United Kingdom** authorities will be asked to provide the necessary shipping on the dates required.

We are glad to know that the Division has been able to secure a rest and that the troops are enjoying themselves. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See *Campaign in Italy, 1943–44* (No. 324).

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

386 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND (WASHINGTON) TO  
GENERAL FREYBERG

386

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand ( Washington) to General  
Freyberg*

**7 July 1944**

**I understand that 2000 men can be made available and I am requesting the acting Prime Minister to advise you of War Cabinet's decision. Providing this is favourable, I hope it will be possible for you to proceed with the 4th Reinforcements without waiting for a final decision on the question of furlough or replacement. This will, however, be given the earliest possible attention on my return.**



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 387 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

### 387 *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

21 August 1944

**There can be no doubt that the finish of the war is only a matter of time. This will bring with it large problems, one of the biggest being the method of return of the 2nd NZEF to New Zealand.**

**In accordance with the policy which has been observed between us for the last four years, I report to you a conversation with General Alexander on 6 August. He referred to post-war questions. In the event of peace he said that Dominion troops would probably go home first. It is proposed to send two British corps to **Austria** as a garrison. He said it had been suggested that the New Zealand Division might be sent to garrison **Greece** for a short time and then go home. I told him that this would be a matter for consideration by the **New Zealand Government**.<sup>1</sup> As there are many sides to the Greek question, I feel that careful consideration should be given before this proposal is agreed to. I am, of course, purely reporting a casual conversation for the private information of **War Cabinet**. I should be glad to know if you wish me to keep you in touch unofficially with these embryo plans and if you would wish me to give you my personal views on definite proposals, if and when they are made.**

**We have now handed over the sector west of **Florence** to the Americans and are resting out of the line. We are to be in Army reserve for the next phase in our traditional role of exploitation as a fast-moving force. Everything is going well and all ranks are in good health and spirits. There is a distinct feeling of victory in the air.**

**On 17 August I travelled by air to **Taranto** and inspected the **Greek****

**Brigade** and arranged plans for their battle training. I was much impressed by their bearing. Their keenness to serve with the New Zealand Division was very obvious. <sup>2</sup> I also inspected all three Base hospitals, the **Convalescent Depot**, and the **Bari** and **Rome** clubs. I am glad to be able to report that the condition of our battle casualties is most satisfactory although, of course, there are the usual number of very sad cases. Penicillin has done much to make wounds heal cleanly and quickly. Both clubs are very popular and efficiently run.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Proposal to Use New Zealand Detachment for Garrison Duties in Greece*.

<sup>2</sup> See *Attachment of Greek Brigade to 2nd New Zealand Division*.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 388 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

388

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

25 August 1944

**Thank you for your telegram of 21 August. It would be most helpful if you could keep in touch with the garrison plans to which you refer and convey your personal views on such definite proposals as may be made.**

**As we are still awaiting some indication from the **United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff** regarding our future military role in the **Pacific**, we are still unable to make a final decision as to the future of the two divisions, but I trust that this will not be much longer delayed.**

**We have found it necessary to agree to the withdrawal of the whole of Barrowclough's force to New Zealand, and arrangements are now being made to this end.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 389 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

389

*The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

28 August 1944

**War Cabinet** have now discussed your telegram of 21 August ( **No. 387**). They are unanimous in their view that the New Zealand Division should not do garrison duty anywhere after the Armistice. They would appreciate, however, being kept advised of any plans which may be submitted to you.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 390 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

390

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

9 September 1944

I wish to thank you for making available to us a copy of your message to Mr. Curtin, the implications of which are of immediate concern to New Zealand. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Volume III, *Proposals for Participation in Operations against Japan*. In this telegram, dated 23 Aug, Mr. Churchill repeated for the information of the two Dominion Prime Ministers a telegram sent by the **United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff** to the United States Chiefs of Staff explaining the conclusions reached by the **Defence Committee** on the strategy for the war against **Japan**.

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You are well aware of the problem we face in regard to our two divisions. I appreciate the ready acceptance given by yourself and the Chiefs of Staff to the general understanding that our 2nd Division should return from **Italy**, when it could be spared, in order to enable us to build up a new division for service in the war against **Japan**.

Since I saw you there has been a further change in the disposition of our forces in the **Pacific**. You will recall that it was decided, on the advice of the **Combined Chiefs of Staff**, to withdraw the 3rd Division from active operations in the **Pacific** and to concentrate cadres in **New Caledonia**, which were to be used for rebuilding a new division for service against the Japanese in 1945. However, at the instance of the

Americans, these cadres have now been moved from **New Caledonia** back to New Zealand.

We have delayed making a final decision on the disposition of our land forces overseas, firstly, because we were reluctant to take our 2nd Division out of action in the European theatre unless we had some firm indication that New Zealand troops would be required in the **Pacific** and would be given a definite role in the war against **Japan**, and secondly, because we did not want to ask for the withdrawal of our Division in **Italy** at a time when the forces there were actively engaged in what may well be the final victorious stage of the war against **Germany**, and in operations in which, as you yourself advised me only a few days ago, the Division is sorely needed. <sup>1</sup>

It was assumed from the tentative plans being discussed while I was in **London** that a New Zealand division would take its place with **United Kingdom** and Australian divisions in a British Commonwealth force, but from your telegram to Mr. Curtin it would appear that the British Commonwealth task force—land, sea, and air—is now rated only as a second alternative to a British naval force, which it is desired should serve with the Americans.

Any final decision has been made impracticable by this continued lack of certainty about the probable future use of our men and the rapidly changing circumstances in **Europe**. At this stage, however, we have come to the conclusion we should decide that our Division in **Europe** should continue to be maintained and that its future should be reviewed at the close of the Italian campaign, and, further, that cadres of the 3rd ( **Pacific**) Division should therefore be disbanded and the men used as replacements and reinforcements for the 2nd

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<sup>1</sup> In a telegram to Mr. Fraser on 25 Aug Mr. Churchill reported briefly on his visit to the Division in **Italy**. The telegram read:

I saw with great pleasure about 15,000 men of your really

magnificent Division in the best of spirits and had lunch with **General Freyberg** and his officers yesterday. I told them a good many things they had not heard and would not hear in the ordinary course. **Freyberg** sends his respects and good wishes and so do I.

The Division is sorely needed in the forthcoming operations.

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Division. It will be appreciated that this course will necessarily delay the building up of another **Pacific** division should such a force be required.

In view of its bearing on the future participation of New Zealand troops in the war, I would be glad to have at the earliest possible opportunity the decision of His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom** as to their present plans for the participation of British Commonwealth forces in the war in the **Pacific**.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Volume III, *Proposals for Participation in Operations against Japan*.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 391 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG – [EXTRACT]

391

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg* *[ Extract ]*

9 September 1944

We were very glad to learn today that your second operation had proved successful and that your general condition was good. We send our best wishes for your speedy improvement and recovery. <sup>2</sup>

I am forwarding for your secret and personal information, but only when you are in a position to give attention to official matters, a message I am sending to Mr. Churchill, from which you will see that owing to the lack of any specific advice from the **United Kingdom** authorities regarding the nature and role of British Commonwealth forces in the war against **Japan**, it has not been, nor is it now, possible to reach any final decision regarding the future role, or even the further participation, of New Zealand land forces in the war in the **Pacific**. We expect to reach the decision referred to after the weekend and I will advise you immediately we do so.... <sup>3</sup>

Following is the text of the telegram sent to Mr. Churchill:

[Text of telegram **No. 390.**]

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<sup>2</sup> See page 304, note 1.

<sup>3</sup> In the text omitted Mr. Fraser referred to the possible disbandment of the 3rd Division and the future employment of certain officers.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 392 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

392

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

13 September 1944

Questions relating to the disposition of New Zealand's land forces are still under discussion, but **War Cabinet** last night gave approval to the recommendations contained in this message. I would be glad if you would let me have your comments as soon as you feel able to do so.

#### **Recommended:**

- (1) That the 2nd Division be maintained and its future employment be reviewed after the conclusion of the Italian campaign.**
- (2) That the question of participation of New Zealand land forces in the war against **Japan** be deferred until further and more definite information is received from the **Combined Chiefs of Staff** regarding the employment of British Commonwealth forces in the **Pacific**.**
- (3) That the cadres of the 3rd Division be disbanded and the personnel be made available for service with the 2nd Division.**
- (4) That long-service personnel in the 2nd Division, namely men of the 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th Reinforcements, be replaced in succession from the existing pool in New Zealand, including residue of 3rd Division, those temporarily released to industry from that Division, Grade A men held on appeal, and all others liable for military service.**

**( Note: It is not intended that the call up for overseas service should include men over 36 years of age, men with three or more children, or those who have had three years or more overseas service.)**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 393 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

393

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

16 September 1944

It seems necessary, in view of the return of a proportion of the 4th Reinforcements on Monday, to make a statement on the substitution of the replacement scheme for that of furlough. My statement will probably be along the lines indicated below. Should you desire to make any comments, I would be glad to have them before Tuesday morning, 18 September, at the latest. <sup>1</sup>

As a result of a further review of the manpower situation and a consideration of the respective roles at present being undertaken by the two New Zealand overseas divisions, **War Cabinet** have decided that, while the 3rd Division will remain in being for the present in cadre form, a proportion of the personnel of that Division will be drafted to the District Mobilisation Camps in the Districts in which the homes of the men are situated.

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<sup>1</sup> **General Freyberg** replied on 17 Sep: 'I am certain your statement will be read here with general satisfaction.'

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These men, if fit and of the required age and domestic status, will then be liable for inclusion in drafts for the **Middle East**, where they will replace the longer-service personnel of the 2nd Division.

The men temporarily released to industry earlier in the year will, of course, remain liable for call up for overseas service and, together with Grade A men held on appeal and all others liable for military service, will also be used as replacements for the Middle East Forces.

**The policy of replacement will take the place of the furlough scheme in future, and as men become available for sending overseas the various reinforcements will be returned in succession, and also the men of the First Second, and Third Echelons who returned to the Middle East at the conclusion of their furlough. Men so returned to New Zealand under the replacement scheme will be subject to direction into essential industry.**

**I am grateful for your report on the Division and your appreciation.<sup>1</sup> War Cabinet join with me in expressing our great pleasure that your progress is satisfactory.**

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<sup>1</sup> See *Campaign in Italy, 1943–44* (No. 332).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 394 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER – [EXTRACT]

394

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

*[ Extract ]*

21 September 1944

Reference your cables ( **Nos. 391– 3** ) on the future of the 2nd NZEF.

As you have pointed out to Mr. Churchill, it is difficult without more precise information to make plans for the future war effort of New Zealand. In view of this uncertainty, I feel that the only course open to the **New Zealand Government** is to implement the long-term policy for the war in **Europe**, which we discussed while you were here and which is outlined in your message of 16 September ( **No. 393** ). I feel this policy is quite possible. As I indicated to you at my headquarters at **Sora**, when the 13th Reinforcements arrive we will be really very well off, better I believe than any other division here in **Italy**. Without any further troops we could carry on until the end of March 1945. Numbers, however, are not the only consideration, and if it came to heavy fighting in 1945 I feel that a large number of long-service men would have to be replaced by fresh men. Further, a large number of our battle-weary officers would also require relief. I feel your early announcement, in general terms, of the replacement scheme will have a very good effect. It will show that New Zealand intends to play her full part to the end of the European war, while the replacement scheme will be received with great satisfaction by the troops. I feel, however, that the early collapse of **Germany** will make it unnecessary to implement the full long-term policy.

The implementing of the scheme will of course depend upon the arrival of replacements, which is again dependent upon shipping. The

number of men to be replaced in the near future comprises returned Ruapehu and Wakatipu <sup>1</sup> personnel 1050, 5th Reinforcements 3256, 6th Reinforcements 1908, and 7th Reinforcements 3434, totalling 9648. I understand from Conway's cable to Stevens <sup>2</sup> that 4000 replacements would be available to leave New Zealand at the end of October and 3000 at the end of each quarter following. This would enable us to send back the whole of the 5ths, 6ths, and 7ths, and Ruapehu and Wakatipu personnel by the end of May. I would suggest that the first draft to be returned should comprise the 5th Reinforcements, plus a proportion of Fiji personnel <sup>3</sup> and a proportion of Ruapehu and Wakatipu personnel selected by ballot, followed by the 6th Reinforcements, plus the remainder of Fiji and Ruapehu and Wakatipu personnel, then the remainder of the 7th Reinforcements. The first draft could leave here as soon as adequately trained replacements are available, i.e., about December at the earliest.

With regard to breaking up the cadre of the 3rd Division, I feel that this depends upon War Cabinet's future policy, and there are various factors which will affect this. Will the 3rd Division absorb the 2nd Division or vice versa, or will you form an entirely new division? It also depends on whether the new force is to be used in island hopping and jungle fighting or in a theatre where a division organised and equipped such as the 2nd Division can be used. If such a theatre is contemplated, e.g., China, there would be reasons for keeping the future organisation similar to that of the 2nd Division; and similarly, if island hopping or jungle fighting is envisaged, the new force would be organised on similar lines to the 3rd Division. I feel, however, as you do, that since the whole situation is uncertain it is really impossible to form any opinion until the policy in the Pacific is clarified. If China is likely to be the theatre in which the British Commonwealth force is to be used, I suggest for your consideration that you could offer to raise and train a new division based on the existing organisation of the 2nd Division, to be used as a follow-up division. I feel that the new force could be organised and trained in approximately six months from the disbandment of the existing Division.... <sup>4</sup>

**My wound, thanks to good care at No. 1 General Hospital, and penicillin, has now healed and I am up for part of the day. Please forgive my delay in replying to your cables.**

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**<sup>1</sup> Code-names for first and second furlough drafts.**

**<sup>2</sup> Not published.**

**<sup>3</sup> Men who had served in **Fiji** before being sent to the **Middle East**.**

**<sup>4</sup> In the text omitted some officer appointments are discussed.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 395 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

395

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

21 September 1944

The Prime Minister proposes to make a statement in Parliament tonight in the following terms:

As a result of the Quebec Conference <sup>1</sup>, and of advice just received from Mr. Churchill, <sup>2</sup> it is now possible to come to decisions regarding the role of our armed forces in the remaining phases of the war against **Germany** and in the war against **Japan**, and for a decision to be made regarding the disposition of New Zealand land forces overseas. **War Cabinet** have had this question under continual examination, and it has also been the subject of discussions with both the British and American Chiefs of Staff, as well as with Mr. Churchill.

Since the beginning of the year, it has been agreed that New Zealand cannot maintain two divisions overseas, a large **Air Force**, and its naval contribution, and, at the same time, increase production of foodstuffs and raw materials, which are so urgently needed and are so essential for the **United Kingdom** and for the Allied forces in the **Pacific**.

In the light of the **Quebec** decisions, and in view of the developments in **Europe** and the **Pacific**, it has been decided, therefore, that New Zealand land forces, at the present time, can be of the greatest use in **Italy**, and that the 2nd Division should remain overseas until the conclusion of the Italian campaign, after which its future role will again be examined.

It may be necessary at a later stage to give consideration to the question of making New Zealand land forces available in the war against

**Japan.** Meanwhile, however, the personnel of the 3rd Division now in camp, and those who are due to return to camp on the expiration of their leave, will be drafted to District Mobilisation Camps, where the men will become available for posting to the 2nd Division.

Because of the developments and decisions to which I have referred, it is now possible to make arrangements for the introduction of a scheme for the replacement of long-service personnel in the 2nd Division. I discussed this question with **General Freyberg** while I was in **Italy**, and it has since been thoroughly examined and details are being worked out. The object of this scheme is progressively to relieve the men who have been overseas for three years, or more, by others who have not so far had an opportunity to serve and by those who have had a short period of service overseas.

The replacement drafts from New Zealand will comprise, in the first place, men still remaining in the 3rd Division who are fit and of the required age and domestic status, and Grade A men held on appeal, as soon as they can be released, and all others liable for military service, including men from the 3rd Division temporarily released to industry earlier in the year and who remain liable to be called up for overseas service.

The policy of replacement will take the place of the furlough scheme in future, and as men become available for sending overseas the various reinforcements will be returned in succession, and also the men of the First, Second, and Third Echelons who returned to the **Middle East** at the conclusion of their furlough.

It must be made clear that, under the replacement scheme, men who return to New Zealand will be released from military service and directed into essential industry. This direction is necessary so long as the war lasts for two reasons, firstly, to enable a scheme of industrial replacement to be carried out, namely, the substitution of men in essential industry now held back from military service by those of similar skill who return from overseas, and, secondly, to enable New



**Zealand to continue to produce the foodstuffs and raw materials which are so essential a contribution to our own and the **United Nations'** war effort.**

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**<sup>1</sup> The second Quebec Conference between Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt took place from 11–16 Sep.**

**<sup>2</sup> A summary of the major operational decisions reached at the Quebec Conference was sent by Mr. Churchill to Mr. Fraser on 18 Sep. Under the heading *Italy* the telegram read:**

**General Alexander's offensive into the **Po Valley** and beyond is to be pressed with the utmost vigour. It has been agreed that no major units shall be withdrawn from **Italy** until the outcome of these operations is known. It has also been agreed that sufficient assault and landing craft shall be retained in the **Mediterranean** for a considerable amphibious operation in the **Adriatic**.**

**For complete text of this telegram see Volume III, *Proposals for Participation in Operations against Japan*.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 396 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG – [EXTRACT]

396

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg* *[ Extract ]*

27 September 1944

The arrangements you outline for the replacement scheme seem most satisfactory. It would appear from the **Quebec** decisions that there is no immediate prospect of New Zealand troops being allotted an offensive role with any British Commonwealth land force in the war against **Japan**, though the possibility cannot be entirely discounted....<sup>1</sup> It seems desirable, despite the existing uncertainties which render planning for the future so unsatisfactory, that Barrowclough should proceed to the **Mediterranean** theatre for discussions with you regarding the possible planning of any new or reorganised division and, with this end in view, to discuss the possibility of your absorbing a proportion of his officers.

Barrowclough has represented that special consideration should be given to the officers, warrant officers, and non-commissioned officers of the 3rd Division, and points out that if the usual proportion of reinforcement officers, WOs, and NCOs only is included in replacement drafts this will result in large numbers being retained in New Zealand.

Practically all the officers, WOs, and NCOs are of an age which renders them liable for further compulsory service, and it would be undesirable to hold them in New Zealand indefinitely while their men are sent abroad again, and some of them immediately. Apart from the difficulties of reducing officers, WOs, and NCOs in rank, there would be a feeling of unfairness, especially among those who have held rank for several years, some since before the war. The position of these officers,

**&c., is analogous to those who after the demobilisation of the Home Defence forces were demoted and included in the 2nd Division reinforcement drafts, mostly as temporary sergeants, with the exception that the 3rd Division officers, &c., have in their favour the fact that they hold substantive rank in a 2nd NZEF formation.**

**Barrowclough proposes that replacement drafts from here should have a full complement of officers, WOs, and NCOs, carefully selected as suitable for further service, to form a pool from which some of your replacements might be drawn to fill casualties and vacancies caused by the return to New Zealand of long-service officers, &c. He further suggested that those not used as replacements should remain at **Maadi** and undergo training until such time as the 2nd Division is withdrawn, and then be available for inclusion in any new division, if its formation is decided upon, especially for replacing long-service officers.**

**Barrowclough further proposes:**

- ( That the officers to be sent with drafts should be captains and below.  
a)**
- ( That officers (captains and below), WOs, and NCOs should proceed in  
b) their present ranks and the question of reducing them be left over until they can be measured against their opposite numbers in the 2nd Division.**
- ( That acceptance of officers above captain, to replace senior officers  
c) whom you are prepared to release either now or in event of reorganisation of the Division, be the subject of consultation with you.**

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**<sup>1</sup> In the text omitted some officer appointments are discussed.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 397 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

397

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

30 September 1944

Reference your telegram of 27 September.

I note the **Quebec** decisions and am glad our suggestions for the replacement scheme meet with your approval. We are at present going into the figures and making a detailed survey of the situation.

With regard to General Barrowclough's visit here, would you say how glad we would be to have him. It will give us the opportunity to talk over our mutual problems and he will see the present machinery and organisation of the 2nd Division.

I quite understand General Barrowclough's desire that officers, warrant officers, and NCOs of the 3rd Division should be given special consideration, and he can rest assured that as far as we are concerned this will be done. I realise the difficulty that would arise if the original arrangement with Army Headquarters limiting the proportion of officers, warrant officers, and NCOs in reinforcement drafts were adhered to. I am certain that suitable arrangements can be made, especially as our replacement scheme envisages returning to New Zealand a large proportion of battle-worn combatant officers and NCOs of the 2nd Division.

I will go into the figures with the Commanders of the various arms and will cable the numbers we can accept with replacement drafts. As a minimum estimate, however, the following officers up to captains could be accepted: Armour 55, Field Artillery 30, Engineers 30, Signals 14, Northern Infantry 55, Central Infantry 70, Southern Infantry 70, Maori

**25, Machine Gun 5, Army Service Corps 5, Electrical and Mechanical Engineers 5, Total 364. I would be prepared to accept the full complement of NCOs but foresee difficulties with regard to warrant officers. We would not be able to absorb these as they would not be able to run the NCOs of our field units. If, however, there are any who are young and worthy of commissions I would be prepared to consider taking them as subalterns. In addition to the above officers we could accept all Grade 3 staff officers and selected Grade 2 staff officers by arrangement. We would be ready to take up to 200 officers by the first available ship. It would help if the additional officers sent under this scheme could be in addition to the officers already coming with the next replacement draft.**

**I have complete confidence in General Barrowclough's judgment in the selection of officers suitable for command in the field, and I would be very grateful if before he comes here he would supervise the selection of the first quota of officers, warrant officers, and NCOs selected from the 3rd Division.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 398 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

398

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

8 October 1944

I have just returned to Headquarters 2nd NZEF after visiting General Alexander and the Army Commander. <sup>1</sup> I am now in a better position to give you an appreciation of the general situation and a forecast regarding the future here. I will give you my views in this cable. I also discussed the question of our reorganisation with the Commander-in-Chief and am preparing a second cable setting out the tentative proposals we are making for implementing the replacement scheme.

As far as one is able to form an opinion here, there appears to be no evidence to show that an early German collapse on any front is likely.

In Russia operations on the central front have become static, due mainly to the rainy season. When the frosts come in November heavy fighting can be expected, and it is possible this may have a far-reaching effect on the whole situation in **Europe**.

On the Western front great gains have been made. The present situation is satisfactory but perhaps a little disappointing. Although the battle has gone well, momentum has now been lost at a critical point in the campaign, and further offensive operations on a big scale have been delayed owing to the lack of good ports and the consequent shortage of maintenance. This is the result of strategy which, in the light of what has happened and speaking after the event, is open to a certain degree of criticism. The Allied armies face an acute administrative problem. Of the liberated ports only Cherbourg is operating well. Calais, Boulogne, and Le Havre are mainly personnel ports and **Brest** will not be in full operation for seventy days. It would take a major amphibious operation

to clear Antwerp. St. Nazaire and Bordeaux are badly wanted but are, however, still strongly held by the enemy. This situation would probably not have arisen if the strategy had been to exploit on a broad front as far as the line of the Marne and then to concentrate all weight and maintenance in a deep thrust through **Holland**, the Rhine Valley, and the Saar, leaving sufficient troops to clear up the most important ports and so speed up maintenance generally. Although there is a large Allied force in **France** and **Belgium** (some fifty-seven divisions), they are so widely dispersed that it has not been possible to maintain them and build up sufficient strength in troops and supplies to stage a quick, powerful thrust at any point in the Siegfried Line before it was manned. Thus the Allies on the Western front are faced with another break-in battle, for which little time remains before the bad weather sets in.

In **Italy** there is little chance of the enemy being driven back to the Alps before the weather breaks. Present indications are that he will endeavour to hold his ground, and that when weather conditions restrict our air operations the German armies facing us will go back in their own time to the line of the **Adige River- Verona- Switzerland**. The campaign here, however, has had important results. Twenty-eight German divisions have been kept fully occupied during very vital months and they have suffered heavy losses in men and equipment.

It seems possible, therefore, that there may be heavy fighting here next spring and, in view of the Government's decision to continue to take a full part in this theatre during 1945, I advise **War Cabinet** that owing to the battle-weary condition of the force a major reorganisation should be carried out during the winter months so that a comparatively fresh division will be ready in the spring. A further cable setting out detailed proposals for your consideration follows immediately.

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<sup>1</sup> General Sir Richard L. McCreery, KCB, KBE, DSO, MC; Chief of General Staff, **Middle East**, 1942–43; commanded 10th Corps (**Italy**) 1943–44; GOC **8th Army** Oct 1944–45; GOC-in-C British Forces of Occupation in **Austria**, 1945–46; GOC-in-C British Army of Occupation of the Rhine, 1946–48; British Army

**representative, Military Staff Committee, United Nations, 1948-.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 399 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

399

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

8 October 1944

I have made as thorough an examination as possible of the problems of reorganisation which face us, and the more I go into details the more certain I become that we shall have to replace at an early date all officers and other ranks who have taken part in the fighting up to and including the Battle of **Alamein**. Battle-weariness is by no means confined to junior ranks. We must consider up to lieutenant-colonels. If, therefore, everybody who came overseas with the first seven contingents is included, it will mean approximately 600 officers and 10,000 NCOs and men. In coming to this drastic conclusion, which accelerates your original proposals for sending replacement drafts overseas, I have taken all factors into consideration. In my telegram of 9 June ( **No. 382**) I recommended that the 2nd NZEF should be withdrawn. I gave this advice because a large proportion of your Division was battle-weary after fighting hard for a longer period and after suffering greater casualties than any other division, and because it appeared that the manpower position in New Zealand would not allow a drastic replacement scheme. Since then my opinion has been strengthened by the experience of 30th Corps in **France**. The 30th Corps, composed of the 50th, 51st, and 7th Armoured Divisions, veterans from North Africa, have not done as well as fresh British and American troops. So far your Division has kept going and maintained its high standard, but only by the most careful nursing. We have had some cases of men going absent from their units on the eve of operations, a state of affairs which has not happened since before **Alamein**.

In view of the present situation, large-scale reorganisation with

trained soldiers now becomes necessary, and the decision to break up the 3rd Division makes it practicable. Your statement on the replacement policy has already been published and has had a good reception generally by all ranks. Naturally, it will also have an unsettling effect until a further statement in greater detail can be made.

Set out below are tentative arrangements I have made for implementing your replacement policy.

I discussed reorganisation with the Commander-in-Chief and the Army Commander, who are in complete agreement with your outline plan and, in fact, have pressed the British Government to institute a similar system of replacement of long-service officers and men in the British Army.

I have arranged that the New Zealand Division, plus the **Greek Brigade**, will be relieved on 21 October by the **Polish Corps** and will be out of the line for about a month resting and training. Prior to that, on about the 10th or 12th, I will resume command <sup>1</sup> and settle details of the replacement scheme with Brigadiers and unit commanders. Once these details are fixed and the **New Zealand Government** give their approval, the plan will be implemented and the first stage announced to the troops as soon as we are in our rest area. I have arranged that the Division should be out of the line in a rear area for training and reorganisation during February and March to enable the second phase of the replacement programme to be completed.

In the outline plan set out below you will note that I have based arrangements for implementing the scheme on the dates of arrival of the replacement drafts, and I am asking that the despatch of the drafts from New Zealand should be accelerated. If this is done I consider the Division can be reorganised and trained to take the field in April 1945. By that date all the long-service troops would be withdrawn and the majority would be *en route* to New Zealand.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Campaign in Italy, 1943–44* (No. 335).

**TABLE OF ARRIVAL OF REPLACEMENTS**

<i>Estimated time of departure from New Zealand</i>	<i>Estimated time of arrival in Italy</i>	<i>Numbers available</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
—	15 October	1500 12th	Trained ready to take the Reinforcements field.
—	7 December	2100 13th	Trained ready to take the Reinforcements field.
31 October	7 January	3500 14th replacement draft	Arrive Egypt 1 December. One month's training only as they will be trained soldiers.
15 December	30 January	3000 15th replacement draft	Arrive Egypt 15 January. Complete training with units in <b>Italy</b> .
15 January	1 April	3000 16th replacement draft	Arrive Egypt 15 February. Complete training in Egypt.

As you will realise, everything depends upon getting shipping to schedule, and the inclusion of as many trained officers and men from the 3rd Division, at least with the first two replacement drafts, will greatly assist us here. To help fill officer vacancies we would be prepared to accept lieutenant-colonels by arrangement, 30 young and specially recommended majors, 90 young captains, and 430<sup>1</sup> subalterns who saw service in the **Pacific** with the 3rd Division, the bulk of these to come with the 14th replacement draft. We will also accept a full complement of NCOs, up to the rank of sergeant, who have similarly seen service in the **Pacific**. I know General Barrowclough will select only young, keen men at this late stage in the war. His co-operation will be invaluable.

*Policy of Withdrawal from the Division*

(1) Men will be withdrawn to Advanced Base as soon as replacements are available in the field, preference being given to men in fighting units.

<sup>1</sup> In a telegram on 10 Oct from HQ 2nd NZEF to Army Headquarters this figure was increased to 680.

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- (2) The 12th and 13th Reinforcements will be put into units as soon as possible after their arrival in **Italy**. This will mean that by early December we will be able to release from field duty and send to Advanced Base all the first draft (Tongariro), which comprises all the Ruapehu and Wakatipu personnel, half the **Fiji** personnel, and portion of the 5th Reinforcements.
- (3) There may be casualties between 7 December and 7 January, in which case these men might have to be sent back into the line, but on the arrival in **Italy** of the 14th Reinforcements (7 January) this first draft can proceed to Egypt *en route* to New Zealand. A second draft comprising all the remaining **Fiji** personnel and 5th and 6th Reinforcements can be relieved from field duty and sent to Advanced Base.
- (4) With the arrival in **Italy** of the 15th Reinforcements at the end of January, the second draft referred to in (3) above can proceed to New Zealand. All 7th Reinforcements personnel can be relieved from field duty. The Division will be out of the line until the end of March, so allowing the 15th Reinforcements to train with units.
- (5) On the arrival in **Italy** of the 16th Reinforcements, the 7th Reinforcements personnel can be despatched to New Zealand.

To sum up, I have summarised in the following table the various phases in implementing the scheme during the next six months:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
10–21 October	New Zealand Division in the line on the Adriatic coast. Details of replacement scheme to be settled with formation commanders.
21 October – 21 November	Relief by <b>Polish Corps. Greek Brigade</b> to train and later return to <b>Greece</b> . <sup>1</sup> We commence to implement the replacement scheme by bringing in the 12th Reinforcements.
21 November – 31 January	Division in the line following up German Army in the <b>Po Valley</b> . Further phase of the scheme will be implemented, bringing in the 13th Reinforcements.
February-	Division will be out of the line. The 15th replacement draft

**March** will arrive—the replacement scheme will be completed and the force will reorganise and train.

**April** Reorganised Division will be ready to take the field with the 16th replacement draft available as reinforcements.

As you will realise, this is a major reorganisation proposal for the long-term policy which I have always thought would be necessary

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<sup>1</sup> See *Attachment of Greek Brigade to 2nd New Zealand Division*.

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if the 2nd Division was to fight through 1945. I realise that the plan depends on the availability of shipping and, further, that **War Cabinet** may wish to make alterations in detail. I would be grateful for your observations on the outline plan, including comments on possible accelerated shipping of replacement drafts from New Zealand.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 400 – THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE TO GENERAL FREYBERG

400

### *The Minister of Defence to General Freyberg*

13 October 1944

Thank you for your telegram of 8 October, which has been carefully considered by **War Cabinet**. As you know, the main reason for withdrawing the 3rd Division from the **Pacific** was to return some 11,000 men to essential industries, viz., farming, dairy factories, freezing works, coal mines, sawmilling, and building construction. These men were released on indefinite leave without pay and their absorption in industry is greatly assisting production. The busy season on farms, dairy factories, and freezing works is approaching while other industries which are under-manned are working at pressure. The programme for replacement drafts given by Army Headquarters <sup>1</sup> was based on the ability to recall men of the 3rd Division as they were replaced by 2nd Division men returning to New Zealand and the tapering off of seasonal labour requirements, also by the call-up of men reaching the age of 21 and appeal releases. The number of 3rd Division men available for replacement drafts has been considerably reduced by exempting men over 36, married men with more than two children, those with more than three years' service overseas, and by medical examinations.

Your proposal to accelerate replacement would be readily agreed to by the Government if the men were available, but the manpower position definitely restricts the provision of men to the following:

14th Reinforcements	3000	Estimated time of departure, mid-November;
15th Reinforcements	3500	Estimated time of departure, mid-January;
16th	2500–	Estimated time of departure, April;

**Reinforcements 3000**

**and, as you appreciate, the moves are dependent on shipping being available when required.**

**The new figures given for officers will accommodate practically all available officers, and while it was intended to send only 200 with the 14th Reinforcements this number can be increased, but it is desired to retain a proportion (a number of whom are in essential industry and not immediately available) to train and proceed with later drafts. This matter will be pursued with you by Army Headquarters.**

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<sup>1</sup> See reference in **No. 394.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 401 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

401

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

15 October 1944

Reference your telegram of 13 October.

As you know, the proposals in my telegram of 8 October ( **No. 399**) were those which would suit us best. I realised that the manpower situation in New Zealand and the availability of shipping might well make modifications necessary. I have considered the plan in view of the dates of replacements you give, and I feel that if the drafts arrive as forecast in your message we shall be able to carry out re-organisation by stages as planned, except that the relief of the 7th Reinforcements will have to be postponed until a later date. If the estimated time of departure for the 14th and 15th Reinforcements, as given in your telegram, could be adhered to, this would mean that both drafts would then be here when the Division is out of the line for the reorganisation and training period in February-March next.

With regard to officers, detailed figures have been supplied to Army Headquarters and we will be glad to accept as many as can be released.

I returned to the Division in the line on the 11th and will take over as soon as possible. All goes well.



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 402 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

402

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

22 October 1944

Since my return to the Division the replacement scheme has been fully examined. In addition, we have gone into all possible ways of cutting down non-effective personnel by reducing our war establishments. We have come to the conclusion that owing to the superior equipment of the Allies, especially in aircraft and tanks, we can now make reductions in some of our defensive equipment, and a further reduction can be made in some of our administrative units. These reductions will not affect the fighting power of the Division.

The list of units and reductions follows. It will be noted that the Artillery and the **Army Service Corps** are the main arms affected. We can now reduce our **Army Service Corps** load-carrying vehicles since there is little chance of a large-scale break-through in **Italy**.

<i>Units being disbanded</i>	<i>Officers</i>	<i>Other Ranks</i>
<i>New Zealand Artillery</i>		
<b>14th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment</b>	34	590
<b>Two batteries 7th Anti-Tank Regiment</b>	26	318
<b>Two troops 36th Survey Battery</b>	10	222
<i>New Zealand Army Service Corps</i>		
<b>6th Reserve MT Company</b>	11	431
<b>18th Tank Transporter Company</b>	12	443
<b>One platoon 1st Ammunition Company</b>	2	104
<b>Detachment 2nd Ammunition Company</b>	Nil	17
<b>One platoon 1st Petrol Company</b>	2	102
<b>Detachment 1st Supply Company</b>	Nil	14

<b>Detachment 4th Reserve MT Company</b>	<b>Nil</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>NZ Water Issue Section</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>
<b><i>New Zealand Medical Corps</i></b>		
<b>One company 4th Field Ambulance</b>	<b>Nil</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>One company 5th Field Ambulance</b>	<b>Nil</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>One company 6th Field Ambulance</b>	<b>Nil</b>	<b>35</b>
<b><i>27th (Machine Gun) Battalion</i></b>		
<b>One company</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>135</b>
<b><i>New Zealand Electrical and Mechanical Engineers</i></b>		
<b>14th Light Anti-Aircraft Workshops</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>2528</b>

**These considerable reductions in establishments are not the result of hurried decision. In December 1943 I was in favour of reductions, but General Montgomery thought there was still the chance of a breakthrough and any question of reorganisation was postponed. By making these reductions now we will be able to implement the replacement scheme at an earlier date than would otherwise have been possible, and our requirements for future reinforcements from New Zealand will be lessened.**

**If the war continues into next year, as I feel it may, further reorganisation of the Division should be considered. As War Cabinet is aware, our organisation was designed for desert conditions, for which it was ideally suited. It was hoped that the Division would be used in a mobile role in **Italy**, but as you know this has never been possible. Instead we have been used as an infantry division, and as such all the fighting has been done by two instead of three infantry brigades. At present there is a shortage of infantry both in **Italy** and in **France**, while at the same time there seems to be more armour than can be employed. This is certainly so in **Italy** where we are fighting in close country and mountains.**

**The question then arises whether our infantry strength should be increased. This could be done at the expense of the Divisional Cavalry and by taking the 22nd Motor Battalion and one armoured regiment**

from the 4th Armoured Brigade. This would leave the Division with two regiments of Sherman tanks, which is adequate for any role we are likely to have here. A further factor which would support this reorganisation is that it may be difficult, owing to the number of men of the Armoured Brigade returning to New Zealand under the replacement scheme, to maintain three armoured regiments.

There is an alternative method of increasing the infantry component. Each of our existing infantry brigades could be made four-battalion brigades by using the 22nd Motor Battalion and converting the Divisional Cavalry to infantry.

As you know, under the powers granted to me by the **New Zealand Government**<sup>1</sup> I am authorised to make changes in organisation, but as the reorganisation envisaged above depends on questions of future policy, I feel that **War Cabinet** may wish to obtain the opinion of the Chief of Staff,<sup>2</sup> or you might authorise me to get an opinion from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff direct. I have discussed the matter with the Commander-in-Chief and the Army Commander, and from the point of view of the Army here there is no doubt that any reorganisation which will increase our infantry component will be favoured.

I realise, however, that from New Zealand's point of view other questions must be considered. Is the change advisable from the point of view of New Zealand's war effort? Is it in the interests of the New Zealand Forces? Could the change be effected in time to justify it?

I am only investigating the question and am not able at present to make any recommendations. I feel, however, that **War Cabinet** should be informed of the trend of opinion here. No action will be taken, of course, without referring the full facts to you and obtaining **War Cabinet's** approval.

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<sup>1</sup> See Volume I, *Appointment of Commander, 2nd NZEF* (No. 39).

<sup>2</sup> In a memorandum to the Minister of Defence dated 30 Oct, General Puttick stated that he agreed with **General Freyberg's** proposals. He recommended that **General Freyberg** be authorised to make any adjustments in organisation which he, in consultation with the Commander-in-Chief and the Army Commander, considered advisable.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 403 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG (CAIRO) – [EXTRACT]

403

*The Prime Minister to General Freyberg ( Cairo)*

*[ Extract]*

**24 October 1944**

**General Barrowclough is leaving next week for discussions with you in accordance with the arrangements already made. The object of his visit is, first of all, to consider the question of absorption of officers in the 2nd Division and to discuss also reorganisation in the light of the possible future use of New Zealand land forces in the war against **Japan**. There appears at the present time to be little prospect of our forces being so required, although it would be unwise to dismiss the possibility entirely. Barrowclough raised with **War Cabinet** the question of his being appointed to command any force which may be formed to serve against **Japan**, and he was given the assurance that he would receive most favourable consideration though no commitment could of course be given.... <sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> In the text omitted some officer appointments are discussed.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 404 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

404

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

29 October 1944

The Division is having a month's rest in an area in the hills south of **Ancona**. The men are all in billets and the opportunity is being taken to have a general tidy-up. Leave parties are in full swing to **Florence** and **Rome**. As you know, the announcement of replacement was made while we were fighting on the Rubicon River. For the information of **War Cabinet**, the scheme as announced was very well received by all ranks of the 2nd NZEF. I feel from conversations I have had that everybody feels that the decision is the right one.

The following is an extract from the censorship report for the period 1-15 October:

*Replacement scheme:* The announcement of the scheme for replacing all Kiwis now in **Italy** who have over three years' overseas service, described, by one writer as 'the big thing of the moment', has naturally aroused much discussion, particularly on the part of those who would thus qualify for return to New Zealand. Early reinforcements are delighted at the prospect—particularly since the measure provides not merely for furlough but for permanent replacement—and all seem to regard it as very sound policy to send 3rd New Zealand Division personnel and essential industry workers to fill the vacancies overseas. In the minds of many, however, there seems to be some doubt if the Government will actually carry out the scheme as planned; others, although apparently accepting the plan as entirely *bona fide*, imply that its implementation is not likely to be a speedy process.

I have now had the whole ground examined and am certain this

**policy is the only possible one for a Division that has been as heavily engaged as ours. While I see no difficulty in releasing 9000 men, I am exercised over the number and class of officer that is entitled to be replaced. When I tell War Cabinet that the entire top and middle strata of officers of the 2nd NZEF are within the categories entitled to go, you will realise the extent of the change-over. Obviously it must be done in stages, and during the last few days a general policy for groups of officers has been decided and all unit commanders and seconds-in-command are being interviewed personally and the matter finalised.**

**Immediately after coming out of the line I met all the officers down to company commander level to explain the replacement scheme.**

**The principle governing the change-over of officers was defined as follows:**

**‘That at all times we must have serving with fighting units and sub-units, i.e., battalions, regiments, companies, batteries, &c., commanders and seconds-in-command capable of laying on any class of battle, and no officers will go until their reliefs are considered fully competent to take over.’**

**After talking to the officers of the Division I issued the following statement for them to pass on to all ranks:**

**The policy now is to release long-service personnel for return to New Zealand as soon as trained replacement drafts arrive in Italy. This will be carried out by stages until all personnel with three years' service and over have been released. By the end of December or early in January the first replacement draft will be ready to join the Division and the first draft of long-service personnel will be released.**

**The draft will comprise the following:**

**Other ranks of the First, Second, and Third Contingents who have returned from New Zealand after furlough.**

**Other ranks of the 5th Reinforcements.**

**Other ranks who came to the Middle East after service in Fiji.**

**A proportion of officers and NCOs of the same categories who can be spared.**

**The scheme will then be continued by stages as replacements arrive from New Zealand.**

**This is a large-scale reorganisation which has been made possible by disbanding the 3rd New Zealand Division. The 3rd New Zealand Division, although not as battle-experienced as the 2nd New Zealand Division, was a very highly trained force, and from it selected officers and NCOs will come to the 2nd New Zealand Division in the ranks they held in the 3rd New Zealand Division. This will be done on a proportion basis, and the rights of officers and NCOs of the 2nd New Zealand Division will be properly safeguarded. Further, the ordinary flow of promotion from the ranks will continue as before.**

**The guiding principle in carrying out the reorganisation is that the efficiency of the Division must remain unimpaired. Therefore, the successful working of the scheme will depend on how quickly and how smoothly the replacements from the 3rd New Zealand Division are absorbed into our units.**

**In all, 600 officers and 9300 other ranks will be relieved in three drafts as follows:**

**First draft: 300 officers, 5300 other ranks—early January.**

**Second draft: 6th Reinforcements (100 officers, 1200 other ranks)—end of March.**

**Third draft: 7th Reinforcements (200 officers, 2800 other ranks)—in June.**

**These numbers and dates are approximate and depend on**



replacement drafts arriving according to schedule.

It is too early to say how the men will receive this further statement, but I believe it will have a settling effect. I must admit I was a little troubled about making the first announcement while the Division was in the line, but it did not affect efficiency and the men fought most resolutely in the recent operations.

As you will realise, **Maadi Camp** and the **Cairo** training establishments will now have to be expanded and geared up to train and pass to **Italy** the 500 officers and 10,000 other ranks for replacement, and the return of a similar number of long-service officers and men *en route* to New Zealand. I am leaving by air with Brigadier Stevens tomorrow for Egypt and will go into plans for speeding up reinforcement training. I will be there for about ten days, during which I will have a short rest, returning here before the Division goes back into the line. I will then send you an appreciation of the situation.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 405 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

405

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

1 November 1944

Your telegram of 22 October ( **No. 402**). **War Cabinet** greatly appreciate the thorough manner in which the problem of the reorganisation of the Division is being dealt with.

Your proposals have been examined in conjunction with the Chief of the General Staff and it is agreed that the units listed in the second paragraph of your telegram should be disbanded.

Any reductions you make will of course help us considerably, as the manpower in sight in the next six months is no more than sufficient to implement the replacement scheme agreed upon, and no extra 'personnel' for reinforcements, as distinct from 'replacements', will be available in that period.

It is considered that you should proceed with further reorganisation within the Division as you think fit along the lines best suited to the task to hand.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 406 – GENERAL FREYBERG (CAIRO) TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

406

### *General Freyberg ( Cairo) to the Minister of Defence*

**1 November 1944**

**I have seen Conway's telegram of 31 October to Stevens. <sup>1</sup>**

**I hope there will be no considerable delay in the sailing date of the 14th Reinforcements. The successful implementing of the replacement scheme depends on the arrival of the 14th Reinforcements to replace in part 350 officers and 5300 other ranks to be released, and upon their arrival in time to be absorbed into the Division before the active campaigning season starts. I am not aware of the actual shipping situation, but I am letting you know my feeling of anxiety as you may wish to make representations on **War Cabinet** level.**

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**<sup>1</sup> Not published. Brigadier Conway reported that the departure of the 14th Reinforcements from New Zealand would probably be delayed because of the difficulty being experienced by the **War Office** in arranging shipping at short notice.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 407 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

### 407 *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

17 November 1944

Will you see my telegram of 1 November and Conway's telegram of 14 November. <sup>2</sup> As you know, the whole replacement scheme was framed to enable the Division to utilise the months of February and March for collective training of new personnel. The result of delaying the departure of the 14th Reinforcements until the first week in January will have most adverse repercussions upon the smooth working of the replacement scheme. The scheme as a whole has had a good effect upon the spirit of the Division. Already the 5300 other ranks of the Tongariro draft will have to be sent back into the line in a week's time to carry out active operations. This is unavoidable, but I feel that further delay in sending back these men to New Zealand will make the implementing of the replacement scheme more difficult. Can the strongest representation be made to the United Kingdom Government to get the 14th Reinforcements away a month earlier ?

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<sup>2</sup> Not published. In this telegram Brigadier Conway reported that the estimated date of departure from New Zealand of the 14th Reinforcements was approximately 6 Jan 1945.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 408 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

408

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

22 November 1944

**War Cabinet** went into the question of sailings very thoroughly with Army Headquarters and with representatives of the Director of Sea Transport. From the outset I can assure you that strong pressure was exerted for early transport, but there now appears to be little prospect of speeding up the arrival of the vessel allocated. <sup>1</sup> This is a very fast ship which has now left the **United Kingdom** for **Australia**, whence it will come to New Zealand. At this late stage we are advised that there appears to be no possibility of obtaining any other earlier vessel.

**War Cabinet** fully recognise the difficulties which the timetable imposes upon the replacement scheme and, with you, very much regret that the 5300 other ranks of the Tongariro scheme will have to be sent back into the line. It is assumed that this action would, however, have been necessary whether or not the 14th Reinforcements had left a month earlier than shipping now renders possible.

It is felt that consideration may have to be given to the alternatives of either using up the reinforcement pool now to the fullest extent or of withdrawal of the Division as a whole from active operations for sufficient time to absorb replacement drafts. I would be glad to have your views.

Although there may be difficulties in obtaining sufficient suitable men at short notice, the shipping arrangements now in train should enable later reinforcements to be despatched on time. All good wishes for your next operations.

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<sup>1</sup> *Empress of Scotland* (formerly *Empress of Japan*), 26,032 tons, Canadian- **Pacific**; sailed from **Wellington** with 14th **Reinforcements** on 5 Jan 1945.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 409 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

409

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

1 December 1944

Reference your telegram of 22 November.

I agree with you that should it be necessary to go back into the line before the 14th Reinforcements arrive the whole situation will have to be reviewed, and it may be necessary to ask for an additional period in the rest area. The delayed departure of the 14th Reinforcements did not affect the present position here in **Italy**. We have always been quite definite that replacement must take place in **Italy** before long-service men are returned. As you know, 5300 men are involved in the next relief. I feel that all must go at the same time. The Division is now up to strength. The 13th Reinforcements will be available here by 14 January, and when we come out to train and effect the change-over there will be about 4300 men in our Base depots to replace 5300 returning to New Zealand. I propose to send the 5300 back to Egypt at once and train 1000 short until the 14th Reinforcements are available about the end of February. As it has been arranged for the Division to be out of the line until the end of March, it should be possible for us to carry out most of our collective training before undertaking any further operational role. I am sorry if my cable gave **War Cabinet** concern. I realise the shipping difficulties. The dates now fixed can be made to fit in with our training scheme. I will let you know from time to time how the replacement scheme is progressing.

As you know, we have been engaged in operations. So far these have not been on a large scale, as the battle is again rather static owing to heavy rain and swollen rivers across our front. We now await the dry

**spells which usually occur in December.**

**I am preparing a cable dealing with the proposed long-term reorganisation for the [New Zealand Government's](#) approval. Later I will send a short appreciation on the general situation.**



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 410 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

410

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

4 December 1944

Further to my telegrams of 22 October ( **No. 402**) and 1 November ( **No. 406**) and your telegram of 1 November ( **No. 405**).

The reasons for the reorganisation of the Division and proposals for the short-term policy have already been outlined in previous cables, and as you know we now have two four-battalion brigades, the 22nd Motor Battalion and the **Divisional Cavalry Regiment** having been incorporated as infantry battalions in the 5th and 6th Brigades respectively.

Looking ahead to next year and possible future fighting either in **Europe** or in the war against **Japan**, it seems inevitable, owing to the general shortage of infantry divisions, that we will be used mainly as an infantry division. I have come to the conclusion therefore, after making every inquiry, that we should form a third infantry brigade to relieve the strain on the front-line infantry and spread our casualties over nine instead of six battalions. We can do this by using the 22nd Motor Battalion, the **Divisional Cavalry Regiment**, and the 27th (Machine Gun) Battalion as infantry battalions.

The proposed reorganisation allows us to retain the three armoured regiments, with certain reductions in strength. We do not need our 168 tanks in the present conditions and, in any case, we cannot maintain them at full strength as we will lose so many trained personnel under the replacement scheme that it would be impossible to train reinforcements in time to take the field next spring. It is proposed therefore, to reduce the size of each squadron by one troop, a total reduction in the Armoured Brigade of about thirty-six tanks involving

**the saving of ten officers and 200 other ranks. This method of reducing our armoured component, enabling us to keep all three armoured regiments, means that one regiment is available to support each infantry brigade.**

**The reorganisation will be completed by the addition of two small sub-units—an assault squadron of engineers with armoured bulldozers and self-propelled bridges on Sherman tanks, and a small unit of two platoons of traffic police. These units will involve an increase in establishments of thirteen officers and 208 other ranks.**

**The above reorganisation can be carried out during our next rest period.**

**I would like War Cabinet to realise the effect of the replacement scheme and reorganisation on the Division which will take the field next spring. We will have virtually a new division, well balanced and suited for fighting in close country in Europe, and, by retaining our Armoured Brigade organisation on reduced establishment, our organisation will be flexible should the force be required for a more mobile role either in Europe or in another theatre. Many of our commanders and staff will be new and untried. As a result of the replacement scheme and usual wastage we have lost in the last six months six Brigadiers—Kippenberger, Inglis, McD. Weir, C. E. Weir, Stewart, and Burrows. Their places have been taken by Parkinson, Gentry, Queree, <sup>1</sup> Pleasants, <sup>2</sup> Campbell, <sup>3</sup> and Bonifant, two of whom were captains and two subalterns when this war started. On my staff my GSO 1, AA and QMG, and ADMS <sup>4</sup> will all have left within a month. Most unit commanders are new young men, and 600 officers and all other ranks, with the exception of some 8th Reinforcements, have not seen service in North Africa.**

**Although the Division will lose many experienced officers and NCOs, I am still convinced that the policy of withdrawing long-service personnel is right. What the Division may lack in experience will be made up in virility. After the next period of training in the rear area, your Division will take the field in 1945 fresher than any other Allied**

formation. We will be fighting against a shaken enemy, and I am certain the force will live up to the reputation of the 2nd New Zealand Division.

Would you let me know if the proposed reorganisation has the approval of **War Cabinet**.

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<sup>1</sup> Brigadier R. C. Queree, CBE, DSO; Brigade Major, New Zealand Artillery, Oct 1940 – Jun 1941; GSO 2, **2nd NZ Division**, Jun-Aug 1941, Jan-Jun 1942; CO 4th NZ Field Regiment, Jun-Aug 1942; GSO 1, **2nd NZ Division**, Sep 1942 – Dec 1943, Jan-Jun 1944; BGS **NZ Corps**, 9 Feb – 27 Mar 1944; CO 5th Field Regiment, Jun-Aug 1944; CRA **2nd NZ Division**, Aug 1944 – Feb 1945, Mar-Jun 1945; QMG, Army HQ, May 1948 – Nov 1950.

<sup>2</sup> Brigadier C. L. Pleasants, DSO, MC, ED; CO 18th NZ Battalion and Armoured Regiment, Jul 1942 – Mar 1944; second-in-command **4th NZ Armoured Brigade**, Mar – Sep 1944; commanded **5th NZ Infantry Brigade**, 1–22 Aug 1944; 4th Armoured Brigade, Sep-Nov 1944; 5th Brigade, Nov 1944 – Jan 1945 and May 1945–1946; Camp Commandant and Commandant Royal NZ Armoured Corps School, **Waiouru**, Aug 1948 – Mar 1949; Officer Commanding Fiji Military Forces, Mar 1949–.

<sup>3</sup> Brigadier T. C. Campbell, DSO, MC; CO 22nd NZ Battalion, Sep 1942 – Apr 1944; commanded **4th NZ Armoured Brigade**, Jan-Dec 1945; Area Commander, **Wellington**, 1947; GSO 1 (Training and Staff Duties), Army HQ, Nov 1947 – Feb 1949; Commander of Army Schools, Apr 1951–.

<sup>4</sup> General Staff Officer, 1st Grade, Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster-General, and Assistant Director of **Medical Services**.

Refer to **Index** for other biographical footnotes.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 411 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

411

*The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

16 December 1944

**War Cabinet** have considered and approved your plan of reorganisation as set out in your telegram of 4 December. The effect of the replacement scheme is fully realised, and we share your confidence that the reorganised Division will live up to the reputation won by its distinguished veteran officers and men.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 412 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

412

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

18 December 1944

I very much regret to advise you that the **National Service Department** and Army have reported that it will not be possible for the 15th and 16th Reinforcements to be ready for sailing on the dates previously proposed. <sup>1</sup>

After full examination of the facts and with a full realisation of the embarrassment this situation must cause you in your reorganisation, **War Cabinet** have reluctantly come to the conclusion that there is no practicable alternative at the present time.

This delay has been caused mainly by the fact that owing to their employment in the production of essential foodstuffs, which is now at the height of the season, 3rd Division personnel temporarily released to industry have not been returned to the Army on the dates expected. Difficulty is also being experienced in obtaining the release of men held on appeal, the majority of whom are also employed in primary industries. Armed Forces Appeal Boards are urgently reviewing the cases of all men who have previously been held up from military service, but in spite of a very rigorous examination of all fit men held on appeal, it is not anticipated that sufficient men will be available to enable the 15th Reinforcements to sail before the middle of April and the 16th Reinforcements by the middle of June. As the Division will be out of the line during the months of February and March, and as the 14th Reinforcements will be in the **Middle East** early in February, I anticipate that the revised sailing dates for the 15th and 16th Reinforcements should not interfere with the despatch of the Tongariro draft early in

**March as originally arranged. The return of these men will greatly facilitate the release of further men from industry to enable the replacement scheme to be continued.**

**Members of the War Cabinet join with me in extending congratulations to the New Zealand Division for its part in the capture of Faenza, the announcement of which has just come over the air.** <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See No. 400.

<sup>2</sup> See *Campaign in Italy, 1943–44* (No. 338).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 413 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

413

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

27 December 1944

Reference your telegram of 18 December. I realise that there must be great difficulties in New Zealand which have forced **War Cabinet** to alter their original proposals.

Despite changes in the replacement plan I feel that the **Tongariro** personnel should be released from the field as soon as the 13th Reinforcements are available in **Italy**, as any further delay would have an adverse effect. They will then be ready to leave **Italy** as planned. You will realise, however, that our resources will be severely strained by the release of the 4th and 5th Reinforcements, plus returned furlough personnel, plus **Pacific** personnel, total 9300, while receiving only the 13th and 14th Reinforcements, total 5600. When the **Tongariro** draft leaves, the Division will be between 1000 and 2000 under strength until the 14th Reinforcements arrive in **Italy**. When the 14th Reinforcements arrive here in February I estimate that we will have a reinforcement pool of 2100, less whatever we lose in current battles.

I felt when the plans were made that we could accept this situation because 3500 15th Reinforcements were due in March. On arrival we would have been able to balance the reinforcement pool and release the 6th Reinforcements, totalling about 1200. As a result of the new arrangements we will have to face campaigns in the spring with 1000 to 1500 in the pool. The position may become very difficult in the event of heavy fighting. The reinforcement pool will be exhausted and we shall be faced with having to fight below strength until the 15th Reinforcements arrive towards the end of June. In the event of heavy

**casualties or epidemic it would not be possible to remain operational.**

**You will realise that it will not be possible now to release the 6th Reinforcements until the 15th Reinforcements arrive in **Italy**, and similarly we cannot release the 7th Reinforcements until the 16th Reinforcements arrive.**

**There is another factor which may affect adversely our replacement scheme and our reorganisation, viz., the trouble in **Greece**, which will make it difficult for the Army Commander to release us from an operational role as early as was anticipated. Our move to the rest area in January may well be delayed since troops have been taken from **Italy** to **Greece**. We are faced with a great shortage of troops in **Italy** and I know that they are counting on your Division more than ever.**

**The figures given above are only approximate. I am sending this cable from **Faenza** during operations.**

**I will take the first opportunity of seeing Field-Marshal Alexander regarding future policy and will advise you further after I have seen him.**



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 414 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE<sup>1</sup>

414

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*<sup>1</sup>

29 January 1945

In my telegram of 27 December I forecast the possible postponement of our relief from the line owing to the diversion of reserves to **Greece**. Unfortunately this has happened and, except for the battalions which are being withdrawn from the line to train and form the new 9th New Zealand Infantry Brigade, the Division will not be relieved until early in March.

Although this delay makes the implementing of the next stage of the replacement scheme more difficult, I do not think that the withdrawal of personnel should be postponed. The change-over is possible in the line as the front at present is static, casualties are light, and units in the line are comparatively comfortable. By carrying out the next stage of replacement now we will be able to adhere to the shipping plans made long in advance, and the Tongariro draft will leave for Egypt at the beginning of March.

As you will realise, we will be nearly 2000 short between 2 February, when the Tongariro personnel are withdrawn, and the end of March, when the 14th Reinforcements become available to join the Division in the field. Although this will place a strain on the Division, I feel that it is the correct decision. We have accepted an operational role before below strength—when we went into the line for the Battle of **Alamein** we were 2000 short. I would like you to know that, although many might have been unsettled by the thought of going home, the morale of the force in recent battles has been excellent. However, although morale is good it is clear from censorship reports that Tongariro personnel have

been waiting for the announcement of their relief which was promised early in the New Year, and I am certain any further delay would be a mistake.

Trained reinforcements are due here from Advanced Base on 2 February and the change-over will be made in the forward area. On the morning of 3 February the first flight of personnel from combatant units will leave the front line *en route* for **Maadi Camp**.

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<sup>1</sup> This telegram was repeated to the **Hon. D. G. Sullivan**, who was then visiting New Zealand troops in Egypt and, later, in **Italy**.

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No announcement will be made until I issue a special order on 2 February along the following lines:

On 25 October 1944 a statement was issued to all ranks dealing with the **New Zealand Government's** policy of replacement. <sup>1</sup> It was announced then that long-service personnel would be released by stages as soon as trained replacement drafts arrived in **Italy**. Although only a portion of the necessary replacements are available to join the Division, and although it will leave the Division temporarily below strength, the next stage of the replacement scheme will now be implemented. In all, 5600 all ranks are affected. (Categories affected will then be given.)

The policy to release long-service men is to proceed as reinforcements are available, but the next replacement draft will not arrive in **Italy** for some months.

Starting tomorrow, the first flight composed of Armoured, Artillery, Infantry, Engineers, Signals, and **Provost Corps** will be withdrawn from the Division. The remainder of the personnel being released will be withdrawn in the following order on dates to be announced later:

- (1) Personnel of administrative services.
- (2) Personnel of Line of Communication units and Base.
- (3) Certain key officers, NCOs, and technical personnel who cannot be

**relieved until they are replaced by the arrival of personnel due with the next draft from New Zealand.**

**The statement will conclude with a message of thanks and farewell.**

**Mr. Sullivan, who will be with us on 4 and 5 February, will see some of the men before they leave.**

**The general news on all fronts is most encouraging.**

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**<sup>1</sup> See No. 404.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 415 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

415

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

3 February 1945

After full consideration of the manpower situation, **War Cabinet** have approved the despatch of two further replacement drafts for the 2nd Division, the 15th Reinforcements to leave in April and the 16th in mid-June.

In order to provide the necessary men and such additional numbers as may be required before the end of 1945, a further comb-out of category A men held on appeal is being instituted. Appeal Boards are being instructed to dismiss without qualification 20 per cent of the appeals reviewed between now and May of this year, except in the sawmilling and coal-mining industries.

As you fully appreciate, we have exhausted Grade A men except for the 32,000 still held on appeal and, for Army purposes, some 3500 who come of age each year. On the other hand, we are very anxious that the Division should be maintained as long as possible, and that fit men who have never seen overseas service should be replaced by those returning to enable this to be done. While, however, our immediate manpower problems may be surmounted, it is difficult to foresee what can be done for the remainder of the period of hostilities, assuming that the Japanese war will not conclude for another two years after the defeat of **Germany**.

I have now received a personal message from Mr. Churchill regarding the future role of the 2nd New Zealand Division. <sup>1</sup> On the assumption that New Zealand would wish to be represented in active operations against the Japanese after **Germany's** defeat, Mr. Churchill suggests that

**the following broad alternatives for the employment of the 2nd Division are open:**

- ( to operate in South-East Asia Command under Admiral Mountbatten;**  
**a)**
- ( to return to New Zealand and thereafter, possibly, to be reformed for**  
**b) operations in the Pacific under United States command, either in**  
**conjunction with the Australian divisions or as a unit in a United**  
**States force.**

**The message goes on to refer to the fact that the development of operations for the reconquest of the Japanese-occupied territories in the South-East Asia Command depends upon the quantity and quality of the forces which the British Commonwealth can build up against the enemy.**

**It is considered that the presence of the New Zealanders would bring at once a contribution of the first order. On the other hand, it is not known what tasks the United States Chiefs of Staff would allot to the Australian forces after the completion of the Philippine campaign, nor of the role which they would assign to a New Zealand Division if it were placed under American command.**

**Before we can express any views on this matter it is necessary to ascertain the facts and to prepare an appreciation of the various problems involved.**

**Manpower is obviously the key, and it will be necessary to know whether or not a reconstituted Division could be sustained for at least a further twelve months after the end of 1945.**

**There is also the question of whether or not the Division should, from the point of view of morale, first return to New Zealand before proceeding to any other theatre. The obvious danger is that it might be impracticable to reassemble any such force after it had returned home.**

**I would be very glad to have your appreciation and particularly your views as to the practicability of the Division proceeding direct to a new theatre of war, such as the South-East Asia Command, without**

returning to New Zealand.

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<sup>1</sup> See Volume III, *Proposals for Participation in Operations against Japan*.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 416 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

416

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

**8 February 1945**

**Your telegram of 3 February will require some little time to consider. Figures are being worked out and I am making certain inquiries. I feel, as no doubt you do, that the sooner a decision can be reached and announced here the better. If the announcement that the Division was to take part in the war against **Japan** came after the termination of the war with **Germany**, when the troops were thinking of going home, it would be impossible to avoid great disappointment.**

**I will cable my appreciation as soon as possible.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 417 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

### 417 *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

8 February 1945

As I reported to you in my telegram of 29 January ( **No. 414**), the Division has had to remain in the line owing to the diversion of reserve divisions to **Greece**. Our line on the **Eighth Army** front was thinly held and there were no other reserves available. At present the **Eighth Army** is regrouping, which will enable our relief to take place in March. The Division will then be withdrawn to the rear area for rest and training. In the meantime, however, as a result of the Russian offensive some German divisions have been withdrawn from **Italy**, and we have been warned to be ready to attack and follow up should the opportunity present itself. Any attack which may take place depends on the enemy thinning out considerably, which is not considered likely before the last week of February at the earliest. From a health point of view it would be a great advantage if the front can be advanced as the present area is highly malarial. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Division was at this time in the **Faenza** sector.

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I am glad to be able to report that Tongariro personnel are being withdrawn successfully by stages. Men from the first-line units have already gone back. I have spoken to as many as possible and thanked them for their services. I am sure this change-over will have a good effect. Mr. Sullivan's arrival was most opportune as he was able to see some of the Tongariro personnel on parade and talk to them. I will cable separately the Army Commander's message to the Tongariro draft, which you may wish to publish on their arrival in New Zealand. <sup>1</sup>



**I am also to report that our reorganisation programme proceeds smoothly. Our new 9th Infantry Brigade has been formed and the Machine Gun Battalion, Divisional Cavalry, and the 22nd Battalion have moved back to train together. Brigadier Gentry is to command the brigade. To give us a reserve which may be used in the operation mentioned above, the 43rd Gurkha Brigade has been placed under command.**

**I have had very useful discussions with Mr. Sullivan and have explained our problems to him. On his return he will be able to give you a better picture of our difficulties than I can in a cabled message. I have taken the opportunity of the lull in operations to accompany Mr. Sullivan on the last stage of his tour and hope to go with him to see Field-Marshal Alexander. He has seen many units, including the Maoris, in the line and will have visited all our hospitals before he leaves.**

**I return to the Division on 10 February. All goes well.**

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**<sup>1</sup> General McCreery's message is not reproduced.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 418 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

418

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

17 February 1945

Reference your telegram of 3 February ( **No. 415**).

My appreciation is delayed for a few days while I verify certain facts and figures. Meanwhile, I give you my personal opinion on the general situation. It is more optimistic than my appreciation, which for planning purposes must be based on a conservative forecast.

From information gleaned from a number of sources, including high officers from South-East Asia Command and United States Pacific forces, it would seem that the Japanese soldier falls far below the German standards when the odds are against him. Operations in the **Pacific** and **Burma** have made good progress. It is possible that the existing forces in South-East Asia Command will clear up **Burma** and embark on operations in **Malaya** without waiting for reinforcements from the European theatre. Further, the defeat of **Germany**, which cannot be long delayed, will have a great effect on Japanese morale.

My personal opinion is that **Japan** may be defeated before the end of 1946, in which case our participation in the Japanese war would be very short. <sup>1</sup> Even if the war in **Europe** ended on 1 July and the Division reformed in Egypt, I do not think it would be ready to take the field until March 1946 at the earliest.

However, planning must be based on a more conservative forecast, and whatever happens I feel that should the **New Zealand Government** decide to take an active part, the announcement that the Division will take part in the war against **Japan** after the defeat of **Germany** will have

**a good effect with the Allies.**

**I realise the need for an early announcement of policy and my appreciation will follow as soon as possible.**

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<sup>1</sup> See Volume III, *Proposals for Participation in Operations against Japan*.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 419 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

419

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

19 February 1945

Reference your telegram of 3 February ( **No. 415**).

This is a most difficult appreciation, and in giving my opinion from the point of view of the 2nd NZEF I realise that I do not know all the facts which will influence you in making a decision. I also realise that in endeavouring to take the broad view I have dealt with subjects which are outside my sphere of responsibility.

You have asked me to give you a general appreciation with particular reference to one point. Bearing in mind **War Cabinet's** decision to maintain the Division in the field as long as possible, I have set myself the following three questions to answer:

- (1) Should the 2nd NZEF serve in South-East Asia Command or under **United States** command?
- (2) Should the 2nd NZEF be withdrawn to New Zealand to reform, or should it reorganise in Egypt or elsewhere?
- (3) Will the requirements for the reorganisation and reinforcement of the 2nd New Zealand Division for the war against **Japan** be practicable in view of the manpower position in New Zealand?

Looking at the general situation in **Europe**, it is thought that the war in **Europe** will be over between July and November, while in the **Far East** the Japanese position will be greatly weakened during 1945. Much will of course depend on events in **Europe**. Should Russia take an active part in the **Far East** the Japanese position on the mainland may become unbalanced, as her position in the **Pacific** has become through the capture of the **Philippines**. It is possible therefore, except for mopping

up, that **Japan** will be defeated by the end of 1946.

Assuming the above forecast is approximately correct and the war in **Europe** ends (taking the earliest possible date) by July, I consider that the Division could be reorganised ready to take the field by March 1946, but this will also depend on shipping. Detailed proposals for reorganisation will be given later in this cable.

Dealing with the first question, your experience of the **Pacific** places you in a better position to judge the rival merits of the two alternative theatres suggested by Mr. Churchill.

From intelligence reports available it appears that by far the greater part of the Japanese land forces are grouped in **China**, **Manchuria**, and **Japan** itself. It is in those areas that the main and decisive battles for the defeat of **Japan** must take place. Now that **Guam** and **Manila** can be used as naval and air bases, **Burma**, **Malaya**, and **Sumatra** are by-passed and to a great extent cut off. Operations there become of secondary importance, in the nature of widespread 'mopping up' and as moves to open up communications through the Malacca Straits. If employed in **China** and **Japan**, the New Zealand Division would be used not only at the point of greatest military importance but in a theatre where our heavy equipment could be used to advantage. One main route towards **China** and **Japan** has already been opened up by the American capture of the **Philippines**, and it is only through this area that any assault against **China** and **Japan** can at present be mounted. If Burma is cleared and **Malaya** captured by the time the New Zealand Division can take the field, which appears just possible, South-East Asia Command might exploit the alternative route thus opened towards the decisive area.

Action in **China** or **Japan** by New Zealand troops therefore appears possible, either as part of a drive from the Central Pacific or in the South-East Asia Command theatre later, following the opening of the Malacca Straits. From a purely military point of view I feel that the most effective role for the New Zealand Division would be in conjunction with the AIF under **United States** command against the main Japanese army

in **China** or **Japan**. I realise, however, that there are other factors to be considered, including the future role of the AIF. If participation in the **Pacific** theatre is not practicable, the New Zealand Division could be used in the South-East Asia Command theatre, for which our basic training and equipment are quite suitable.

Dealing with the second question, the decision whether the New Zealand Division should be withdrawn to New Zealand to reform will be affected by the theatre which is chosen. If the Division is to serve with the AIF in the **Pacific** under **United States** command, it would be difficult to justify to the troops reorganisation overseas. I share the opinion of **War Cabinet**, however, regarding the difficulty of retaining organisation if the Division returns to New Zealand after the defeat of **Germany**, as this may well be a determining factor. If no suitable employment of New Zealand forces is possible with the AIF under **United States** command, or you decide against bringing back the Division to New Zealand for other reasons and South-East Asia Command is chosen, there is a great deal to be said from a military point of view for carrying out reorganisation in Egypt, where we already possess a Base organisation and training facilities. If reorganisation took place there it would save both time and shipping.

There is one possible difficulty regarding return to New Zealand which you should know about. It has been suggested that the British Government may decide to grant short leave in England to all troops before sending them to the **Far East**. Our troops might expect similar treatment.

If the decision is taken to take part in the war against **Japan**, I feel that an early announcement here should be made. It would be a mistake to leave this until after the finish of the European war, when there will be a reaction and everybody will be thinking of going home. If the announcement is made, including a statement of the replacement policy, the men will know what to expect, and I feel that the decision will be accepted without feelings of great disappointment.

**I have left the problem of manpower until the last because it has to be dealt with in detail. Whichever theatre may be chosen the situation would be the same, except that, as you have observed, there would be more difficulty in re-concentrating the Division once they have been on leave in New Zealand, while on the other hand the question of retaining part of the Division in Egypt would require careful arrangement.**

**Our present replacement plans are well known to you. By the end of the war with **Germany** the 6th Reinforcements will have gone home and more than half of our long-service officers and NCOs will have been released. New officers and junior leaders will be short-service men, as also will be all our infantry. This is an excellent start, but I feel that the reorganised Division should take the field with none but key officers and men with over two years and six months service overseas. Planning on the earliest possible date that the war will be over in **Europe** (by July), and that shipping is available, the Division could be back in Egypt by August. If we were reorganising in Egypt, long-service men could be returned to New Zealand. The 16th Reinforcements would be in Egypt and the replacements for the long-service personnel returning to New Zealand after the end of the war with **Germany** could leave in two drafts—estimated time of arrival in Egypt, November and January. Assuming that plans along these lines were adopted, the reformed Division should be ready to take the field by March 1946.**

**The following is a summary of the proposed replacement of long-service personnel (all figures are approximate only and do not allow for wastage between February and the end of the European war):**

**By September 1945 the 6th and 7th Reinforcements, totalling 4000, will have returned or be on the way to New Zealand, thus completing the present phase of the replacement scheme.**

**The following should return to New Zealand at the end of the war with **Germany**:**

**8th Reinforcements with three years' service overseas on 1 4650**

**January 1946**

**9th Reinforcements with two years seven months overseas on 1 2880**

**January 1946**

**10th Reinforcements with two years four months overseas on 1 4820**

**January 1946**

**Total returning 12,350**

**To replace the 8th, 9th, and 10th Reinforcements we could accept 11,000 as we could make a saving of about 1000 on Lines of Communication.**

**The following is a summary of the position at the end of the war with **Germany**:**

**Number remaining in Division 18,000**

**Returning to New Zealand 12,350**

**Total 30,350**

**The following is the position after reorganisation of the Division to take the field in the new theatre in 1946:**

**Division up to strength 18,000**

**Lines of Communication, hospitals, &c. 5,000**

**Reinforcement Depot and on the sea 7,000**

**Total 30,000**

**Reinforcements required during 1946 would be 4000 for **China**. Owing to the climate, South-East Asia Command might require more.**

**To sum up, I have answered the three questions as fully as I can. On the facts as I know them it would seem that if suitable arrangements can be made to serve with the AIF in **China** or **Japan**, New Zealand and **Australia** together could play a part in a decisive theatre, thus serving national as well as Allied interests. If this theatre is chosen I consider the force would have to be withdrawn to New Zealand to reform. If for any reason the **Pacific** theatre is not considered advisable and South-East Asia Command is chosen, I feel that Egypt would be the most suitable place for reorganisation. Although it is difficult to forecast mass psychology, this decision would in my opinion be accepted here provided**



**the Government's policy, including the replacement scheme, is announced to the troops before the end of the war in [Europe](#).**

**I realise that your decision to maintain the Division in the field as long as possible depends on manpower, and my detailed proposals are intended to give you an idea of the reorganisation which I consider would be necessary. I am convinced that the success of this difficult change-over would depend on the generous replacement of all long-service personnel.**

**I should be glad if you would acknowledge this cable.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 420 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

420

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

27 February 1945

Although we are still in the line astride Route 9 west of **Faenza**, we have completed the change-over of officers and NCOs from the 3rd Division and men from the 13th Reinforcements. We are 1000 under strength until the men of the 14th Reinforcements are available. All Brigadiers speak highly of the replacements and I have met and talked to all the officers and NCOs, who will, I know, do well.

The Tongariro draft are now all away either at **Maadi** or *en route* to Egypt. They will leave Port Tewfik about 16 March in the biggest convoy yet sent back to New Zealand. They travel in four good ships and comprise approximately 600 officers and nursing sisters and 5700 other ranks. I will confirm numbers by cable.

The change-over has been carried out smoothly in spite of difficulties. We are due to be relieved in March and will be out of the line for a month's rest and training in the back area. We then come forward to take part in the general offensive which will be launched when the ground dries up.

I expect to be able to bring the Division up to full strength for training in March, and the Division will take the field in April in good shape with three infantry brigades and three armoured regiments.

The 9th Infantry Brigade are now fully formed, complete in every detail. They are training hard in a rear area.

The continuation of the replacement scheme has given general

**satisfaction. The long-term reorganisation of the Division is now completed. I am confident that after rest and training the Division will take the field in excellent condition. Morale is very high.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 421 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

421

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

28 March 1945

I am to report that the long-term reorganisation has now been successfully completed. The 9th Infantry Brigade has now been formed and its training is being completed. I have now inspected all units of the Division and am greatly impressed with the high standard that has been achieved during this short training period in the rear area.

The Division is now up to strength. The change-over of long-term personnel has been carried out smoothly and without hitch. We have absorbed into our organisation officers, NCOs, and men of the 3rd Division. During my inspections I heard excellent accounts of them and I am certain they will do well. We are now organised with the right balance of arms. It is basically sound—three infantry brigades and a brigade of armour. In addition, we have the advantage of having non-battleweary, short-service men with highly experienced leaders.

The Division is organised so that each infantry brigade has its own tank regiment, and in point of fact, each infantry brigade group is a small panzer division. We are still very mobile.

We are now coming to the end of our period of rest. We move into the line early in April and take part in a battle upon a broad front to break through and destroy the army opposite us. There is no doubt that this country from the point of view of defence favours the enemy, who has the advantage of having spent the whole of the winter months in putting down minefields and wire and preparing the position as strongly as possible. The enemy will fight hard and we must be prepared for casualties, but the health of the force is good and morale could not be

**higher. I feel confident that we shall do well in this next battle.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 422 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER (LONDON)<sup>1</sup> – [EXTRACT]

422

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister ( London) <sup>1</sup>*

*[ Extract]*

**7 April 1945**

**We are now in the line on the eve of active operations. We are up to strength, everybody is in very good health, and morale could not be higher. I consider that the Division has never been in better condition.**

**From the medical point of view it is very desirable that the end should come quickly as we are in the worst malarial area in **Italy**. I am hopeful that we shall either move north or withdraw south before the difficult months of June to September.**

**For your information the following is the text of my telegram of 28 March to the Minister of Defence.**

**[Text of No. 421]**

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Fraser had gone to **London** at the end of March to attend discussions between representatives of Governments of the British Commonwealth as a preliminary to the United Nations Conference at **San Francisco** (25 Apr – 26 Jun) at which he lead the New Zealand Delegation. He returned to New Zealand early in July.

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**DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II**

**ATTACHMENT OF GREEK BRIGADE TO 2ND NEW ZEALAND DIVISION**

## *Attachment of Greek Brigade to 2nd New Zealand Division*

423

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

8 August 1944

I have been asked by the Commander-in-Chief, at the request of the **Greek Government**, if we would be prepared to take the **Greek Brigade** <sup>1</sup> under our wing. The purpose would be first to direct their training and make them battle-worthy, and later, I understand, the intention is that they should fight under our command. I have told the Commander-in-Chief that the matter would have to be referred to the New Zealand War Cabinet.

As you will realise, having the Greeks with us would have certain advantages. It would mean an extra infantry brigade and consequent spreading of casualties. I also believe it would be a great help to the Greeks, who have always shown a desire to serve with the New Zealand Division.

Could you advise whether the proposal meets with the approval of **War Cabinet**.

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<sup>1</sup> The 3rd Greek Mountain Brigade under the command of Colonel T. Tsakalotos.

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424

### *The Minister of Defence to General Freyberg*

12 August 1944

Your telegram of 8 August. **War Cabinet** concur in your advising the Commander-in-Chief that you are prepared to have the **Greek Brigade** under your command.

425



## *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

13 August 1944

Reference your cable about the Greeks, I note you agree to fall in with the Commander-in-Chief's wishes. I would, however, like to have the following cable from you to safeguard me in the event of political difficulty:

### *From War Cabinet to General Freyberg:*

**War Cabinet** agree provisionally that you should help train the **Greek Brigade** and also take them under your command, but in view of the history of this force in the last twelve months with political difficulties and the military mutiny, you are to keep us informed of the situation, and if there is any recurrence of political difficulty you are to report it here and act on our instructions. Will you convey our good wishes to the Commander-in-Chief with this message. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A message in these terms was sent to **General Freyberg** on 17 Aug by the Prime Minister.

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426

## *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

*[ Extract ]*

21 August 1944

.... On 17 August I travelled by air to **Taranto** and inspected the **Greek Brigade** and arranged plans for their battle training. I was much impressed by their bearing. Their keenness to serve with the New Zealand Division was very obvious.... <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For complete text of this telegram see *Maintenance of 2nd New Zealand Division* ( **No. 387**). After taking part in the capture of **Rimini** and the crossing of the Rubicon River, the Brigade left **Italy** for **Greece** on 7 Nov 1944.



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 423 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

423

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**8 August 1944**

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As you will realise, having the Greeks with us would have certain advantages. It would mean an extra infantry brigade and consequent spreading of casualties. I also believe it would be a great help to the Greeks, who have always shown a desire to serve with the New Zealand Division.

Could you advise whether the proposal meets with the approval of **War Cabinet**.

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<sup>1</sup> The 3rd Greek Mountain Brigade under the command of Colonel T. Tsakalotos.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

424 – THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE TO GENERAL FREYBERG

424

*The Minister of Defence to General Freyberg*

12 August 1944

Your telegram of 8 August. **War Cabinet** concur in your advising the **Commander-in-Chief** that you are prepared to have the **Greek Brigade** under your command.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 425 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

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### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

13 August 1944

Reference your cable about the Greeks, I note you agree to fall in with the Commander-in-Chief's wishes. I would, however, like to have the following cable from you to safeguard me in the event of political difficulty:

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<sup>1</sup> A message in these terms was sent to **General Freyberg** on 17 Aug by the Prime Minister.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

13 AUGUST 1944

**13 August 1944**

**Reference your cable about the Greeks, I note you agree to fall in with the Commander-in-Chief's wishes. I would, however, like to have the following cable from you to safeguard me in the event of political difficulty:**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## FROM WAR CABINET TO GENERAL FREYBERG:

### *From War Cabinet to General Freyberg:*

**War Cabinet** agree provisionally that you should help train the **Greek Brigade** and also take them under your command, but in view of the history of this force in the last twelve months with political difficulties and the military mutiny, you are to keep us informed of the situation, and if there is any recurrence of political difficulty you are to report it here and act on our instructions. Will you convey our good wishes to the **Commander-in-Chief** with this message. <sup>1</sup>

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

426 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE –  
[EXTRACT]

426

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

[ Extract ]

21 August 1944

.... On 17 August I travelled by air to **Taranto** and inspected the **Greek Brigade** and arranged plans for their battle training. I was much impressed by their bearing. Their keenness to serve with the New Zealand Division was very obvious.... <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For complete text of this telegram see *Maintenance of 2nd New Zealand Division* ( No. 387). After taking part in the capture of **Rimini** and the crossing of the Rubicon River, the Brigade left **Italy** for **Greece** on 7 Nov 1944.

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**DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II**

**PROPOSAL TO USE NEW ZEALAND DETACHMENT FOR GARRISON DUTIES  
IN GREECE**

## *Proposal to Use New Zealand Detachment for Garrison Duties in Greece*

427

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

24 September 1944

I have just received the following cable from General Wilson:

We will shortly be sending a force into **Athens** on the German evacuation. For association's sake I am anxious to include a New Zealand detachment, not exceeding 300. The popularity of New Zealand troops with the Greek civil population is very great. I am informed that the New Zealand reinforcements in Egypt might provide a potential source for this detachment without prejudice to the New Zealand forces operating in **Italy**.

I have advised General Wilson that the question is being referred to you and that I will cable him as soon as I get your reply. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See also *Maintenance of 2nd New Zealand Division* ( Nos. 387 and 389).

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428

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

26 September 1944

Your telegram of 24 September.

I feel personally that we should not send troops to **Greece** in view of **War Cabinet's** decision conveyed to you earlier, <sup>2</sup> and in view also of the possibility of strife breaking out between various Greek factions, which might involve our interference. I must ascertain the opinion of **War Cabinet**, but before doing so would appreciate your own views.

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429

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

27 September 1944

Reference your telegram of 26 September in which you ask for my views.

If it were a question of sending the force to liberate **Greece** the position would be different, but I feel, as you do, that at this stage it would not be advisable to take part. As you know, there are several factions in **Greece**, with all of which we are on friendly terms, and if we were to involve ourselves at this stage in support of one or other of the parties we might prejudice our very friendly relations with the rest of the Greek people. There is an additional reason which would make it difficult to send a detachment. Owing to the return of the 4th Reinforcements and the present rather high jaundice rate throughout the Division, our reinforcement situation will be at a rather low ebb until the 13th Reinforcements arrive and are trained. In any case, as a result of replacement schemes very few of the original New Zealand Division who fought in **Greece** will be available. Further, this proposal would mean making a detachment, which has always been against our policy.

I would suggest that the invitation might be declined for the reasons that the men who fought in **Greece** and **Crete** are not available and that, in any case, the reinforcement situation due to replacement schemes and illness would make it extremely difficult for us to spare personnel.

Later on, perhaps, when the position in **Greece** is stabilised, you might consider sending to **Greece** and **Crete** a token force of New Zealanders who fought there to hold memorial services at the graves of our fallen comrades.

Will you please cable **War Cabinet's** decision? In the meantime I have warned General Wilson that you may decide against sending a force to **Greece**.

430

*The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

29 September 1944

Your telegram of 27 September.

**War Cabinet** have reaffirmed their decision that members of the 2nd NZEF are not to be employed in garrison duties now or after the conclusion of hostilities with **Germany**. They do not favour the present proposal and desire that the Commander-in-Chief should be advised that the invitation to send men to **Greece** must be declined. You could add that this decision is also rendered necessary by the fact that the reinforcement situation, due to the replacement scheme and illness, would make it extremely difficult to spare personnel at the present time and, further, that the men who fought in **Greece** and **Crete** are no longer available.

We are in complete accord with your suggestion to send a token force to **Greece** and **Crete** to hold memorial services at the graves of fallen New Zealanders. This matter will be given full and sympathetic consideration when you advise that the time is appropriate.

431

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs*

29 September 1944

Your telegram of 26 September. <sup>1</sup>

The New Zealand Government desire that arrangements should be made for the New Zealand forces in the **Mediterranean** theatre to be repatriated as early as possible after the defeat of **Germany**, or earlier if

**this should be decided upon. Although it is recognised that the repatriation timetable will depend upon the prevailing circumstances with regard to shipping, &c., it is not desired that New Zealand forces should be used in occupation or internal security measures, either in **Europe** or the **Middle East**, during any such interval before repatriation.**

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<sup>1</sup> Not published. In this telegram to the Dominion Governments the Dominions Secretary advised that arrangements for the occupation of certain areas in the **Mediterranean** theatre in the event of German disintegration or withdrawal had been considered by the British and United States Chiefs of Staff. 'We are proceeding on the assumption that you will wish arrangements to be made for your forces in this theatre to be repatriated as early as possible after the defeat of **Germany**,' the telegram ran. 'You will, however, appreciate that the repatriation timetable will depend on prevailing circumstances with regard to shipping, &c., which may involve some inevitable delay between the cessation of hostilities with **Germany** and the date of embarkation. We should be glad to know if you would permit Dominion forces to be used during any such interval in occupation duties in **Austria**, **Greece**, or the **Dodecanese**, or for internal security duties in the **Middle East** should this be considered desirable.'

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**432**

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

**30 September 1944**

Reference your telegram of 29 September ( **No. 430**).

As directed, I have cabled General Wilson quoting extracts from your cable and declining the invitation to send a force to **Greece**.

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

427 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

427  
*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

24 September 1944

I have just received the following cable from General Wilson:

We will shortly be sending a force into **Athens** on the German evacuation. For association's sake I am anxious to include a New Zealand detachment, not exceeding 300. The popularity of New Zealand troops with the Greek civil population is very great. I am informed that the New Zealand reinforcements in Egypt might provide a potential source for this detachment without prejudice to the New Zealand forces operating in **Italy**.

I have advised General Wilson that the question is being referred to you and that I will cable him as soon as I get your reply. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See also *Maintenance of 2nd New Zealand Division* ( Nos. 387 and 389).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 428 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

428

*The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

**26 September 1944**

**Your telegram of 24 September.**

**I feel personally that we should not send troops to Greece in view of War Cabinet's decision conveyed to you earlier,<sup>2</sup> and in view also of the possibility of strife breaking out between various Greek factions, which might involve our interference. I must ascertain the opinion of War Cabinet, but before doing so would appreciate your own views.**

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid ( No. 389).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 429 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

429

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27 September 1944

Reference your telegram of 26 September in which you ask for my views.

If it were a question of sending the force to liberate Greece the position would be different, but I feel, as you do, that at this stage it would not be advisable to take part. As you know, there are several factions in Greece, with all of which we are on friendly terms, and if we were to involve ourselves at this stage in support of one or other of the parties we might prejudice our very friendly relations with the rest of the Greek people. There is an additional reason which would make it difficult to send a detachment. Owing to the return of the 4th Reinforcements and the present rather high jaundice rate throughout the Division, our reinforcement situation will be at a rather low ebb until the 13th Reinforcements arrive and are trained. In any case, as a result of replacement schemes very few of the original New Zealand Division who fought in Greece will be available. Further, this proposal would mean making a detachment, which has always been against our policy.

I would suggest that the invitation might be declined for the reasons that the men who fought in Greece and Crete are not available and that, in any case, the reinforcement situation due to replacement schemes and illness would make it extremely difficult for us to spare personnel.

Later on, perhaps, when the position in Greece is stabilised, you might consider sending to Greece and Crete a token force of New Zealanders who fought there to hold memorial services at the graves of



**our fallen comrades.**

**Will you please cable War Cabinet's decision? In the meantime I have warned General Wilson that you may decide against sending a force to Greece.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 430 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

430

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

29 September 1944

Your telegram of 27 September.

**War Cabinet** have reaffirmed their decision that members of the 2nd NZEF are not to be employed in garrison duties now or after the conclusion of hostilities with **Germany**. They do not favour the present proposal and desire that the Commander-in-Chief should be advised that the invitation to send men to **Greece** must be declined. You could add that this decision is also rendered necessary by the fact that the reinforcement situation, due to the replacement scheme and illness, would make it extremely difficult to spare personnel at the present time and, further, that the men who fought in **Greece** and **Crete** are no longer available.

We are in complete accord with your suggestion to send a token force to **Greece** and **Crete** to hold memorial services at the graves of fallen New Zealanders. This matter will be given full and sympathetic consideration when you advise that the time is appropriate.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 431 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS

431

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs*

29 September 1944

Your telegram of 26 September. <sup>1</sup>

The New Zealand Government desire that arrangements should be made for the New Zealand forces in the **Mediterranean** theatre to be repatriated as early as possible after the defeat of **Germany**, or earlier if this should be decided upon. Although it is recognised that the repatriation timetable will depend upon the prevailing circumstances with regard to shipping, &c., it is not desired that New Zealand forces should be used in occupation or internal security measures, either in **Europe** or the **Middle East**, during any such interval before repatriation.

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**internal security duties in the Middle East should this be considered desirable.'**

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

432 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

432

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

**30 September 1944**

**Reference your telegram of 29 September ( No. 430).**

**As directed, I have cabled General Wilson quoting extracts from your cable and declining the invitation to send a force to Greece.**

**DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II**

**END OF CAMPAIGN IN ITALY**

433

*General Freyberg to the acting Prime Minister of New Zealand*<sup>1</sup>

7 April 1945

As you know, the Division is now on the eve of active operations and we are taking into battle large numbers of new officers and men who will be seeing action for the first time. I would greatly appreciate if you could send to us, to be issued as a Special Order of the Day before going into action, a message from you and the people of New Zealand.

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<sup>1</sup> During the absence of the Prime Minister at the United Nations Conference at **San Francisco** the Hon. W. Nash was acting Prime Minister.

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434

*The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

9 April 1945

Your telegram of 7 April.

Will you please arrange for the following message to be published in orders:

The news of the day is good—the coming news is better—the day for destroying the enemy is at hand. Every day is bringing new triumphs for the **United Nations**, and everywhere the prospect of their complete victory grows clearer, nearer, and more substantial.

Although operations may yet be hard and difficult and may still last some time in **Germany** and **Japan**, the armies of the British Commonwealth, the **United States**, **Russia**, and the other **United Nations** are gradually overwhelming the forces of the enemy. The New Zealand Division is now entering a battle which probably will be the most crucial

of the arduous campaign in **Italy**.

The people and Government of New Zealand will tensely watch your operations with the greatest confidence. Time and again the New Zealand Division has proved its mettle at the highest level of quality as a fighting force. You will do it again. Be yourselves once more and there can be no doubt of the victorious result.

Godspeed to you all.

**435**

*General Freyberg to the acting Prime Minister*

**10 April 1945**

Your telegram of 9 April.

Thank you for the message from the Government and the people of New Zealand, which is being published as a Special Order to the troops. We greatly appreciate your message, especially at the present time when we have such a large number of officers and men fighting for the first time with the Division.

For your information, the Division carried out a brilliant attack last night to cross the **Senio River**. Bridges were put across, then the troops crossed with all their heavy equipment and took all their objectives. They captured nearly 800 prisoners for the loss of 81, mostly slight casualties. They are now pursuing the enemy hard and the battle will go on for several days. We are now facing up to the **Santerno River**.

As soon as possible I will send you my comments on the battle and an account for publication in the press should you desire.

**436**

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**22 April 1945**

On Anzac Day 1945 I send this message from my office truck during



our pursuit of the enemy forces to the River Po. Since 9 April the New Zealand Division, with the 43rd Gurkha Brigade Group and ten additional regiments of British artillery under command, has been attacking continuously. During that period we have carried out four heavy offensives and have destroyed three German divisions—the 98th, 278th, and the much hated 4th Parachute Division who landed against us in **Crete**. Your Division has captured five defended river lines—the **Senio, Santerno, Sillaro, Gaiana, and Idice**.

Although the enemy has tried desperately to hold us, he is now broken in **Italy** and we are moving forward rapidly to the final stage. During these last battles the Division has fought with a toughness and determination equal to all its past record. I am greatly impressed by all ranks of the 3rd Division who have taken part in these battles. They have done excellently. I send to the former Anzacs of both wars in New Zealand a message of greeting. Our thoughts are constantly with you. May this soon be over so that we can return to our homes.

**437**  
*The Minister of Defence to General Freyberg*

**25 April 1945**

Your message of greetings from the Division in commemoration of Anzac is most warmly appreciated by all Anzacs here. The news of the great progress made by the Division and the British and Gurkha forces under your command has gladdened the hearts of all of us. It is with the deepest of interest that we have followed the advance of the Division and the Allied Armies in **Italy**, and all Anzacs share the pride felt by the Division in its conquest of its old enemies, the 4th Parachute Division. The gallant record of the first Anzacs who landed at **Gallipoli** thirty years ago is being gloriously sustained today by the Australian and New Zealand forces in all theatres. All Anzacs here wish you and your men all good fortune and good hunting. You are ever in our thoughts.

**438**

# *The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the acting Prime Minister of New Zealand* <sup>1</sup>

**30 April 1945**

**Field-Marshal Alexander has today reported that representatives of General von Vietinghoff, <sup>2</sup> German Commander-in-Chief, South-West, and SS General Wolff, <sup>3</sup> Supreme Commander of SS and **Police** and Plenipotentiary General of German Wehrmacht in **Italy** respectively, signed terms of surrender at 12 noon, GMT, 29 April. The command affected includes all **Italy** (except the portion of Venezia**

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<sup>1</sup> This telegram was repeated to the United Kingdom Delegation at **San Francisco**.

<sup>2</sup> Colonel-General Heinrich von Vietinghoff; commanded 10th Army in **Italy**, 1943; German Commander-in-Chief South-West.

<sup>3</sup> General Karl Wolff; German Commander-in-Chief North **Italy**, 1945.

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**Giulia east of the Isonzo River), Vorarlberg, Tyrol, and Salzburg provinces and part of Carinthia. The importance of this great portion of **Austria** which is now surrendered to our military commander should not be underrated. It is impossible yet to estimate the bag but I should expect it to prove a record haul of prisoners.**

**Hostilities are to cease at 12 noon, GMT, 2 May. President Truman <sup>1</sup> has suggested that the announcement of surrender be made first by Field-Marshal Alexander, and instructions have been sent to the latter accordingly. It is important that no publicity whatsoever is permitted until the terms become effective.**

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<sup>1</sup> On the death of President Roosevelt on 12 Apr 1945 Mr. H. S.

**Truman (Vice-President since 7 Nov 1944) became President of the United States.**

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**439**

### *The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

**2 May 1945**

**The heart of every New Zealander is overflowing with today's news, with relief that a stubborn campaign through rough country and bitter weather is ended, and with pride that New Zealanders, who have always shared in the hard going, should have been triumphantly at the spearhead of victory.**

**We are proud beyond words of our men and of their Commander. To you, their great Commander, and to them we extend our deepest gratitude.**

**The following message has just been received from Mr. Churchill: 'New Zealand troops were in at the death and have fought with splendid tenacity throughout.'** <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mr. Fraser also sent to **General Freyberg**, from **San Francisco**, a similar message of congratulation.

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**440**

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**5 May 1945**

**As I reported to War Cabinet, the New Zealand forces have taken a very full part throughout this final stage of the war here in Italy. I now send you for your information, and for publication in the press should you so desire, the following account of these important operations. Field-Marshal Alexander has no objection to publication.**

**After a short period of training in the area near Matelica the Division**

went back into the line on 1 April to take part in the final battles, the object of which was to destroy the German Tenth and Fourteenth Armies in the broad open **Po Valley**, force a crossing of the River Po, and then, among other plans, to push north-east and join up with **Marshal Tito's** forces in the vicinity of **Trieste**.

In this offensive the Allied armies faced many difficulties. The country with its many mountains, rivers, canals, and ditches favoured the defence. The Allied and German armies were about an even match in numbers. The enemy had 25 divisions in **Italy**, 18 of which were lined up opposite the Eighth and Fifth Armies. These included some of the **Wehrmacht's** best and most experienced formations, troops which had obtained, in the Italian fighting, a very high degree of skill and a strategy of defensive fighting which Field-Marshal Kesselring promptly fostered to the utmost. They included the 1st Parachute Division, our opponents in **Cassino**, 4th Parachute Division, whose units led the attack on **Crete**, 90th Panzer Grenadier Division, the successor to the 90th Light Division we defeated and captured in North Africa, the 26th Panzer and 29th Panzer Grenadier Divisions, while the infantry were well tried and confident. These troops were the cream of the German Army. They had under command Tiger and Panther tanks as well as other armour.

As against these forces we had fewer but larger divisions. The balance, however, was weighted heavily in our favour as regards equipment, air support, artillery, and tanks.

During the winter months the best use had been made by the enemy of the country and by the spring the positions to be attacked were formidable. I believe the flanks of the enemy line were secure. The northern flank rested on marshy, inundated areas on the Adriatic, while to the south the line lay along the **Apennines**. The only possible area suitable for offensive action was on the flat ground in between, which had few roads and was crossed by seven formidable river barriers, beginning with the **Senio** and ending with the **Adige**. These rivers had no junctions left and, particularly in the case of the first four, were heavily

defended, mined, and wired. The rivers themselves, owing to the peculiar formation of the floodbanks, were from a tactical point of view almost ideal for infantry defensive positions. The floodbanks were in many cases 30 feet high, tapering from a base of 100 feet thick up to a flat apex 10 feet wide. Further, the stopbanks were only 120 feet apart and the enemy was dug in tightly on both banks. When the near bank was attacked you were shot at from the trenches on the far side. Between the banks themselves were mines and wire. The enemy slit-trenches on these floodbanks were most difficult artillery targets. The water gap itself, although only 40 feet wide, was 10 feet deep between the canalised perpendicular banks, 15 feet deep, dropping almost vertically down to the water's edge.

Altogether the position was a most difficult one to capture. Field-Marshal Alexander's plan was to attack in the flat country in the centre, thereby drawing off the enemy brigades from the mountains and the marshes, and, when this had been achieved, to push between the marshes through the narrow **Argenta Gap** on the northern flank. When all enemy reserves had been drawn off from the mountains, the final blow was to be struck by the Fifth American Army attacking through the hills towards **Bologna**. The underlying intention behind the whole plan was to defeat the German forces in their existing defences so that further enemy resistance on the big obstacles of the Po and the Adige Rivers would not be possible.

Your Division, a part of the 5th British Corps, was given the role of slogging across the rivers in the centre and fighting hard battles to carry out the job of smashing as much of the German Army as possible, drawing off the enemy reserves and thereby weakening the flanks so that other formations could push through. It is a fair statement to say that during these operations the New Zealand Division, which had grouped with it nine British artillery regiments, carried out its part most thoroughly. The enemy fought right through without respite from D-day to the final phase at **Trieste**. In the process your Division destroyed three German divisions—4th Parachute Division, the 98th and the 278th

**Divisions. In all these operations we were most ably supported by the 12th Lancers, the 42nd British Medium Artillery Regiment and, later on, by Brigadier Barker's 43rd Gurkha Brigade. <sup>1</sup>**

**In the original plan it had never been intended that our thrust should break the enemy line. It was assumed that the main breakthrough would occur to the north through the marshland of **Argenta**.**

***April 29.* So successful, however, were the operations of the 2nd New Zealand Division and the troops on our immediate flanks that five rivers south of the Po and the **Adige** were crossed more quickly than was estimated, and the operations which started as subsidiary ones finished up by smashing the enemy line and enabling the New Zealand Division to break through to **Venice**. We are, as I start writing this cable, across the rivers **Piave**, **Tagliamento**, and **Isonzo**, and we move forward tomorrow towards the capture of **Trieste**. We have joined up with the forces of **Marshal Tito**.**

**In all, your Division fought five major battles against the pick of the Germany Army. These battles were those of the rivers **Senio**, **Santerno**, **Sillaro**, **Gaiana**, and **Idice**. The plan of attack on each**

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<sup>1</sup> Brigadier A. R. Barker, DSO, OBE, MC.

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**of these obstacles was not merely to secure a crossing on which to drive the enemy back, but to destroy his forces. In this way alone could his divisions be broken and prevented from reforming a line farther back. Our policy has been, as always, to hit the enemy a tremendous blow with every available offensive weapon—often with from 250 to 300 guns and 400 to 500 planes, supported by 150 tanks. During the four hours' bombardment supporting each of the main battles our guns fired up to a quarter of a million rounds. These terrific bombardments enabled the infantry to advance and crush the enemy on our front, and then to push through the gap we had made to the next defended river line. We**

always attacked at night on a broad front with two brigades forward and one brigade in reserve. Later, to ease the hard-worked New Zealand Division infantry, we were given the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Infantry Brigade. This enabled us to carry on delivering blow after blow by relieving the forward brigades after each operation.

It was battles such as these which paved the way to victory. On the **Senio** and the **Santerno** we smashed completely the 98th Division. On the **Sillaro** we broke the back of the 278th Division. On the **Gaiana** and the **Idice** we paid off the final of our old scores with the 4th Parachute Division and part of the 1st Parachute Division. The 4th Parachute Division, fully confident that they could hold the rivers where less fanatic divisions had failed, dug themselves in on the west stopbank of the **Gaiana**. The bombardment on the Parachute Division was the heaviest of the war, estimated at 100 rounds for every man holding the river line, and in support of this bombardment 44 flame-throwing tanks attacked the line of the stopbank with flames. It was little wonder that our success was complete. On the **Idice**, the next obstacle, we were not faced with organised resistance and were able to rush the riverbanks without difficulty.

The destruction of the enemy divisions against us was a big factor in smashing the Germans here in **Italy**. No division that opposed us could stand up to the methods employed. During the early stages of the offensive the fighting was bitter. We captured between 2000 and 3000 infantry, all part of **Germany's** finest fighting infantry. The enemy was well beaten and could put up only half-hearted resistance on the formidable river barriers of the **Po** and the **Adige**. These were crossed with the greatest skill in assault boats and bridged with folding-boat equipment for our light transport and 40-ton rafts for our tanks and heavy artillery. In this way 150 heavy tanks and 5000 vehicles and guns of the Division were passed over and we were able to commence a successful advance to **Padua** and beyond.

It will be of great interest to you to know that the opinions I have expressed as to the importance of our contribution are borne out to a



great extent by others, and I quote a cable from the Army Commander and a charming letter I received today from the Commander of the gallant **2nd Polish Corps** <sup>1</sup> who fought upon our left flank:

Personal for **General Freyberg** from Army Commander. My heartiest congratulations on reaching **Trieste**. To have led the advance of the **Eighth Army** from the River Senio to the Alps is a magnificent achievement for your troops.

MY DEAR GENERAL,

On behalf of all officers and men of the **2nd Polish Corps** I feel that I must write to express to you our unbounded admiration of your truly magnificent achievements since the offensive against the River Senio.

The Polish soldier knows well that his own successes were to a very considerable degree dependent upon the brilliant actions which were fought on his right. Since that period, during which we had the honour of attacking alongside your troops, your incomparable fighting qualities have been still more evidenced by the speed of your advance against the toughest troops which the enemy could muster, and these qualities have aroused a feeling of respect, admiration, and comradeship which will live in our memories throughout the years of peace.

May I say, too, how deeply grateful we are for the help which you have given to our people. The sympathy which you have shown will never be forgotten by the Polish fighting soldiers.

Yours very sincerely,  
Z. BOHUSZ-SZYSZKO

It is fair to add that the speed of our advance was only possible because of the engineering work of our **Divisional Engineers**, under the command of Colonel Hanson, whose work was of a very high order.

Once the crust of the enemy resistance was broken just south of **Padua**, we carried out the advance through **Padua** itself on to the River



**Piave, including the capture of [Venice](#). In two successive days' moves we had advanced 80 miles, capturing many thousands of prisoners.**

**As the bridges over the River Po had all been destroyed some months back by our own air forces, a halt of 24 hours became necessary to bridge the gap, and the Division took advantage of this to do maintenance, service tanks, and gather up and evacuate the huge number of enemy prisoners who were by now becoming an embarrassment.**

**The last stages of our advance to join up with [Marshal Tito's](#) forces show the Division again in its traditional role—a 'left hook' carried out magnificently. I wish you could have seen the triumphal move of this highly trained force along the coast over the [Piave](#) and [Isonzo](#), in places fighting hard and, as opposition broke down, moving long distances through towns and villages full of cheering**

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**<sup>1</sup> Major-General Zygmunt Bohusz-Szyszko.**

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**and happy people, with all our vehicles, tanks, and guns garlanded with flowers. The last part of the advance was a sustained attack to free [Trieste](#). It will always be a proud moment for the New Zealand Division that we were able to be of assistance to the Yugoslav Army in helping to free [Trieste](#).**

**I cannot say how many German prisoners were taken during the move from the Po. I can only estimate the numbers at between 30,000 and 40,000. Our casualties, I am glad to say, have not been unduly heavy for the scope of the operations. <sup>1</sup>**

**I hope that this will be the last report that I shall have to send you of active operations. I write this one on the outskirts of [Trieste](#). As in the past, I do so from my office truck which has served me as a battle headquarters during all past days. Now that we have reached the conclusion of the European war, I hope that I may be permitted to tell**

the people of New Zealand what a great force this Division of theirs is. No tribute I can pay does justice to the individuals whose work has contributed to our great successes. A successful commander depends in battle upon his subordinates. No praise can be sufficiently high for our commanders and staff. I wish especially to mention Brigadier Parkinson, commanding the 6th New Zealand Infantry Brigade, Brigadier Bonifant, commanding the 5th New Zealand Infantry Brigade, and Brigadier Gentry, commanding the newly-formed 9th New Zealand Infantry Brigade, which distinguished itself so greatly during the battle of the **Gaiana River** and the advance to **Trieste**. Outstanding work has been done by Colonel Hanson wherever commanding the **Divisional Engineers**, and by Colonel Campbell, commanding the 4th New Zealand Armoured Brigade. The work of Brigadier Queree, commanding the Divisional Artillery during the five battles from the **Senio** to Gaiana and beyond, has been well up to that high standard which has always been the characteristic of the New Zealand Artillery. The work of the **Army Service Corps**, under Brigadier Crump, in keeping us fed and maintained over difficult obstacles and long lines of communication has been up to the highest traditions of the desert days.

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<sup>1</sup> New Zealand casualties from 27 Oct 1944–2 May 1945 were:

<b>Killed</b>	<b>324</b>
<b>Died of wounds</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Died on active service (includes deaths through sickness, accident, &amp;c.)</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Wounded</b>	<b>2092</b>
<b>Prisoners of war (includes 1 died of wounds while prisoner of war)</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2608</b>

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On my own staff Colonels Gilbert, <sup>1</sup> Elliott, <sup>2</sup> and Cook <sup>3</sup> and Major Cox, <sup>4</sup> the Intelligence Officer, have been of the greatest assistance and help. Their work has been of a high order.

But it is not of these senior officers, good as they have been, that

one thinks of the most after battles such as we have been through. No division, no matter how good the Commander and staff may be, could achieve such results during the last year of heavy fighting unless the rank and file of the force were of the highest class. Our New Zealand troops have gone into these battles day after day and night after night with a quiet, steady determination and a spirit which I have not seen equalled elsewhere in my experience of warfare. In the New Zealander you have qualities of heart and mind that place him high among men. It is to resolute courage in our junior officers and men that this Division owes its fighting record. No men could have done more than they have done—never daunted, always calm, no matter how great the odds against them have been. No commander has been served as I have been during these difficult five and a half years. I have been the most fortunate and privileged of commanders to have led such a Division.

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<sup>1</sup> Colonel H. E. Gilbert, DSO, OBE; GSO 1, **2nd NZ Division**, Nov 1944–1946; NZ Representative on Joint Chiefs of Staff Organisation in **Australia**, Jul 1946-Jul 1947; GSO 1, Army HQ, Mar 1948-Mar 1949; Director of Plans and Intelligence, Mar 1949.-

<sup>2</sup> Colonel R. A. Elliott, OBE, ED; Assistant Director of **Medical Services**, **2nd NZ Division**, Dec 1944-Oct 1945.

<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel J. P. Cook, OBE; Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster-General, **2nd NZ Division**, Dec 1944-Nov 1945.

<sup>4</sup> Major G. S. Cox, MBE; GSO 2 (Intelligence), **2nd NZ Division**, Oct 1944-May 1945; Chargé d'Affaires, New Zealand Legation, **Washington**, 1942–44.

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We are all deeply touched by the warmth of your praise of this great Division of yours. <sup>5</sup> Now that the end here in **Europe** has come we can look back with pride upon the great achievements of this force, small in numbers compared with the large forces that are involved but which by sheer courage and the ability of its manhood has fought itself into the front rank of fighting formations of this or any war.

May I say how conscious I have always been of the great support I have received from **War Cabinet** and also how much I appreciate your kind references to me, their Commander. Your much-valued message will of course be passed on to all ranks.

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<sup>5</sup> No. 439.

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442

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the acting Prime Minister of New Zealand* <sup>1</sup>

8 May 1945

Final victory over our German enemy is now achieved, and on behalf of the Government and people of the **United Kingdom** I send our greetings and congratulations to our kinsfolk in New Zealand on their great share in our common victory. During the darkest hours we in the Mother Country were ever strengthened by the knowledge of the sure sympathy and support of New Zealand. Your courage and steadfastness never faltered. Even when the enemy was almost at your gates you allowed nothing to hamper the contribution which New Zealand has made through her sons on the field of battle and through her workers on the farm and in the factory. The New Zealand Division, which has marched from **Alamein** through all the battles in **Tunis, Sicily, and Italy**, is now in the van of General Alexander's conquering armies. Let us now go forward together with great determination to inflict, as we shall at no distant date, the same crushing defeat on the Japanese aggressor.

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443

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

13 May 1945

Further to my telegram of 5 May ( **No. 440**).

At the conclusion of this hard campaign, I have the honour to bring to your notice the excellent work done by the services at Lines of Communication and Base during the whole period of the war.

As you will remember, our original plan was to train in Egypt and go to **France**, transferring our Base to Colchester in England. This handicapped our starting welfare organisations. When France fell we settled down to Egypt as a Base and this meant that our planning for Lines of Communication was not started until September 1940. In my work here as Commander of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force I have been responsible for the organisation, administration, and training as well as command of your Force in the field. I have been most fortunate in having Brigadier Stevens as a most excellent head of the administrative services. His help, and the help of all those working under him, and the work of the **Medical Services**, which are under my direction, have been of the greatest assistance.

The object of Line of Communication and Base troops is to support and maintain the fighting troops in the field. The importance of this organisation to the fighting portion of the New Zealand Division has been very great; there is no doubt that New Zealand personnel in the field appreciate an organisation [run] by New Zealanders.

Work at Base and Lines of Communication is not spectacular. I feel a debt is owed to all those employed there. It will not be desirous for me within the limits of a cable to do more than enumerate the various functions performed, and I hope that brevity will not be taken as

showing slight appreciation of their value.

The keeping of the fighting efficiency of our Division has been a complex problem dependent upon the correct balance of supporting arms, the battle-worthiness of the commanders, and the morale of the fighting forces themselves. War-weariness, however, plays an adverse part towards the end of a long war. At **Sidi Rezegh**, in November 1941, our men were excellent, and although we have never reached a higher standard on the part of the individual soldiers, yet the increased skill and efficiency of our machine enhanced the military value of our organisation.

The whole object of military organisation and training is to maintain the fighting efficiency of the individual, without which success in battle is not possible. I attribute the high morale of the New Zealand Forces largely to the fact that we are a national army with great *esprit de corps*, and also to our early life and education in New Zealand. Further, our reinforcement position has been good, which has enabled us to look after the convalescent stage of all ranks so that no one has been returned to duty before he was thoroughly fit.

The greatest individual factor in keeping us a unified force lay in the fact that we had 'all ranks' clubs, where we all met under the same roof—officers, sisters, VADs, and other ranks. We started with **Cairo**, then **Bari**, **Rome**, **Florence**, and now in Danieli's Hotel in **Venice**. I can safely say that these institutions kept us together and were in fact the homes of the Division to which we turned during our periods of rest overseas. These clubs owe their efficiency to the sound organisation of our first club in **Cairo**, which was the work of Brigadier Falla and Major Harvey Turner.

In the opinion of members of the 2nd NZEF, and this opinion is borne out by comments from outside sources, the New Zealand **Medical Services** are without equal. The standard of surgical and medical treatment and administration of hospitals, casualty clearing stations, field ambulances, and convalescent depots has been most important in

keeping up the high standard of morale in your Force overseas. The personal interest shown by the medical staff has established a sense of confidence in all who have come under their care.

These results have been due to my first Director of **Medical Services**, Brigadier MacCormick, who laid the foundations in 1940–42, and to his successor, Brigadier Kenrick. With these I associate the head of the **Dental Services** for nearly the whole of the war, Lieutenant-Colonel J. F. Fuller. The standard set by this service was equal to that of the medical service.

The New Zealand Nursing Service has been excellent and the good results achieved have been largely due to their devoted work. **Miss E. M. Nutsey** was our first Principal Matron, and her excellent work has been continued by her successor, **Miss E. C. Mackay**. The Medical Division of the New Zealand Women's Army Auxiliary Corps under Miss M. King has rendered most valuable support to [the nursing] service.

I feel that during the course of the war our welfare services have developed into the most efficient in this theatre of the war. The National Patriotic Fund Board, through the medium of its Overseas Commissioner, Colonel F. Waite, has shown the utmost co-operation and understanding of our needs. The YMCA has done great service, both with the units in the field and on Lines of Communication, and the whole Division is most appreciative of the work done. The representatives with the units have always been prepared to work in the most forward areas, however unpleasant the conditions, and on many occasions following the men into battle and helping to evacuate the wounded. No praise can be too high for them. The Red Cross organisation, the Church Army, the staffs of our many clubs, the **Kiwi Concert Party**—all have played their part. I would like to mention Mr. H. W. Shove, first Commissioner of the **YMCA**, Miss M. A. Neely, who has directed the Welfare Division of the **WAAC**, and Captain T. Vaughan, who has been the guiding light of the **Kiwi Concert Party**.

Included in the Base and training establishments are a large number



of training and administrative units, too many to enumerate. Their work has been of a high standard throughout.

**2nd Echelon** of 2nd NZEF has dealt with all questions of records in a manner which has won praise, not only from the 2nd NZEF but from the authorities in New Zealand. The Pay Department has throughout shown efficiency and has approached all pay problems of members of the Force in a most sympathetic and wise manner. Our warmest thanks are due to Colonel F. Prideaux, who has been the Chief Paymaster and Financial Adviser to me since the commencement.

The spiritual welfare of troops of all denominations has been in excellent hands. We have been able to allot one chaplain to every unit of battalion size and every help has been given by the regimental officers to chaplains and priests in the execution of their duties. Their work has been unwearying. The foundation of this service was laid by the first Senior Chaplain, Bishop G. V. Gerard, and carried out by his successors, the Rev. J. W. McKenzie and Rev. G. A. D. Spence. We have all had the greatest co-operation from our Roman Catholic priests and we are all most grateful to their head, Father L. P. Spring.

A further factor which has helped us efficiently has been our postal service which handled the large number of letters and parcels from New Zealand, and our thanks are due to Lieutenant-Colonel A. V. Knapp, who for a long period was Chief Postal Officer. Those who sent parcels to us played an important part in keeping our force efficient, especially in the desert campaigns.

The Public Relations staff—which comprised war correspondents, *NZEF Times* staff, photographers, the broadcasting unit, cinematograph unit, and the official artist—have carried out their varied work in a first-class manner. They all worked under difficult conditions. After the capture in **Greece** of Captain J. H. Hall, Major M. S. Carrie took over and was a most conscientious head. Captain E. G. Webber, his successor, who was also foundation editor of the *Times*, has carried on most efficiently. The work of the Official Artist, Captain P. McIntyre, needs no



commendation from me.

The Legal Department, controlled first by Lieutenant-Colonel C. A. L. Treadwell and, for the last three years, by Lieutenant-Colonel C. B. Barrowclough, has been of great assistance to all ranks of the Force in the administration of military law, and to many members of the Force in their personal problems. The Chief Auditor, Lieutenant-Colonel H. C. Steere, and his staff have helped us in all our financial and accounting problems. The Education and Rehabilitation Service has just started and its work has largely still to be done. I am sure it will equal the standard set by the other services.

The Clerical Division of the NZWAAC is also a recent addition to the Force. Like the other women's services, its work is of the first order.

Our two units engaged on graves registration and concentration attract little attention, but their work is of the usual New Zealand standard.

In conclusion, no words of mine can do justice to the great assistance we have all had from Army Headquarters in **Wellington**. The tone of all our dealings with them has been on a high co-operative basis. They have helped me right from the start to the finish with knowledge and understanding of our many difficulties. I personally am most conscious of all I owe to them, in the first case to General Duigan, and later to General Puttick and Brigadier Conway. What their help has meant to me only I can say.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 433 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND<sup>1</sup>

433

*General Freyberg to the acting Prime Minister of New Zealand*<sup>1</sup>

**7 April 1945**

**As you know, the Division is now on the eve of active operations and we are taking into battle large numbers of new officers and men who will be seeing action for the first time. I would greatly appreciate if you could send to us, to be issued as a Special Order of the Day before going into action, a message from you and the people of New Zealand.**

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<sup>1</sup> During the absence of the Prime Minister at the United Nations Conference at **San Francisco** the Hon. W. Nash was acting Prime Minister.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 434 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

434

### *The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

9 April 1945

Your telegram of 7 April.

Will you please arrange for the following message to be published in orders:

The news of the day is good—the coming news is better—the day for destroying the enemy is at hand. Every day is bringing new triumphs for the **United Nations**, and everywhere the prospect of their complete victory grows clearer, nearer, and more substantial.

Although operations may yet be hard and difficult and may still last some time in **Germany** and **Japan**, the armies of the British Commonwealth, the **United States**, **Russia**, and the other **United Nations** are gradually overwhelming the forces of the enemy. The New Zealand Division is now entering a battle which probably will be the most crucial of the arduous campaign in **Italy**.

The people and Government of New Zealand will tensely watch your operations with the greatest confidence. Time and again the New Zealand Division has proved its mettle at the highest level of quality as a fighting force. You will do it again. Be yourselves once more and there can be no doubt of the victorious result.

Godspeed to you all.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 435 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER

435

*General Freyberg to the acting Prime Minister*

10 April 1945

Your telegram of 9 April.

**Thank you for the message from the Government and the people of New Zealand, which is being published as a Special Order to the troops. We greatly appreciate your message, especially at the present time when we have such a large number of officers and men fighting for the first time with the Division.**

**For your information, the Division carried out a brilliant attack last night to cross the **Senio River**. Bridges were put across, then the troops crossed with all their heavy equipment and took all their objectives. They captured nearly 800 prisoners for the loss of 81, mostly slight casualties. They are now pursuing the enemy hard and the battle will go on for several days. We are now facing up to the **Santerno River**.**

**As soon as possible I will send you my comments on the battle and an account for publication in the press should you desire.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 436 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

436

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**22 April 1945**

**On Anzac Day 1945 I send this message from my office truck during our pursuit of the enemy forces to the River Po. Since 9 April the New Zealand Division, with the 43rd Gurkha Brigade Group and ten additional regiments of British artillery under command, has been attacking continuously. During that period we have carried out four heavy offensives and have destroyed three German divisions—the 98th, 278th, and the much hated 4th Parachute Division who landed against us in **Crete**. Your Division has captured five defended river lines—the **Senio, Santerno, Sillaro, Gaiana, and Idice**.**

**Although the enemy has tried desperately to hold us, he is now broken in **Italy** and we are moving forward rapidly to the final stage. During these last battles the Division has fought with a toughness and determination equal to all its past record. I am greatly impressed by all ranks of the 3rd Division who have taken part in these battles. They have done excellently. I send to the former Anzacs of both wars in New Zealand a message of greeting. Our thoughts are constantly with you. May this soon be over so that we can return to our homes.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 437 – THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE TO GENERAL FREYBERG

437

### *The Minister of Defence to General Freyberg*

25 April 1945

Your message of greetings from the Division in commemoration of Anzac is most warmly appreciated by all Anzacs here. The news of the great progress made by the Division and the British and Gurkha forces under your command has gladdened the hearts of all of us. It is with the deepest of interest that we have followed the advance of the Division and the Allied Armies in **Italy**, and all Anzacs share the pride felt by the Division in its conquest of its old enemies, the 4th Parachute Division. The gallant record of the first Anzacs who landed at **Gallipoli** thirty years ago is being gloriously sustained today by the Australian and New Zealand forces in all theatres. All Anzacs here wish you and your men all good fortune and good hunting. You are ever in our thoughts.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 438 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND<sup>1</sup>

438

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the acting Prime  
Minister of New Zealand*<sup>1</sup>

30 April 1945

Field-Marshal Alexander has today reported that representatives of General von Vietinghoff,<sup>2</sup> German Commander-in-Chief, South-West, and SS General Wolff,<sup>3</sup> Supreme Commander of SS and **Police** and Plenipotentiary General of German Wehrmacht in **Italy** respectively, signed terms of surrender at 12 noon, GMT, 29 April. The command affected includes all **Italy** (except the portion of Venezia

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<sup>1</sup> This telegram was repeated to the United Kingdom Delegation at **San Francisco**.

<sup>2</sup> Colonel-General Heinrich von Vietinghoff; commanded 10th Army in **Italy**, 1943; German Commander-in-Chief South-West.

<sup>3</sup> General Karl Wolff; German Commander-in-Chief North **Italy**, 1945.

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Giulia east of the Isonzo River), Vorarlberg, Tyrol, and Salzburg provinces and part of Carinthia. The importance of this great portion of **Austria** which is now surrendered to our military commander should not be underrated. It is impossible yet to estimate the bag but I should expect it to prove a record haul of prisoners.

**Hostilities are to cease at 12 noon, GMT, 2 May. President Truman <sup>1</sup> has suggested that the announcement of surrender be made first by Field-Marshal Alexander, and instructions have been sent to the latter accordingly. It is important that no publicity whatsoever is permitted until the terms become effective.**

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**<sup>1</sup> On the death of President Roosevelt on 12 Apr 1945 Mr. H. S. Truman (Vice-President since 7 Nov 1944) became President of the [United States](#).**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 439 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

439

### *The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

2 May 1945

**The heart of every New Zealander is overflowing with today's news, with relief that a stubborn campaign through rough country and bitter weather is ended, and with pride that New Zealanders, who have always shared in the hard going, should have been triumphantly at the spearhead of victory.**

**We are proud beyond words of our men and of their Commander. To you, their great Commander, and to them we extend our deepest gratitude.**

**The following message has just been received from Mr. Churchill: 'New Zealand troops were in at the death and have fought with splendid tenacity throughout.'** <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mr. Fraser also sent to **General Freyberg**, from **San Francisco**, a similar message of congratulation.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 440 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

440

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

5 May 1945

As I reported to **War Cabinet**, the New Zealand forces have taken a very full part throughout this final stage of the war here in **Italy**. I now send you for your information, and for publication in the press should you so desire, the following account of these important operations. Field-Marshal Alexander has no objection to publication.

After a short period of training in the area near **Matelica** the Division went back into the line on 1 April to take part in the final battles, the object of which was to destroy the German Tenth and Fourteenth Armies in the broad open **Po Valley**, force a crossing of the River Po, and then, among other plans, to push north-east and join up with **Marshal Tito's** forces in the vicinity of **Trieste**.

In this offensive the Allied armies faced many difficulties. The country with its many mountains, rivers, canals, and ditches favoured the defence. The Allied and German armies were about an even match in numbers. The enemy had 25 divisions in **Italy**, 18 of which were lined up opposite the Eighth and Fifth Armies. These included some of the **Wehrmacht's** best and most experienced formations, troops which had obtained, in the Italian fighting, a very high degree of skill and a strategy of defensive fighting which Field-Marshal Kesselring promptly fostered to the utmost. They included the 1st Parachute Division, our opponents in **Cassino**, 4th Parachute Division, whose units led the attack on **Crete**, 90th Panzer Grenadier Division, the successor to the 90th Light Division we defeated and captured in North Africa, the 26th Panzer and 29th Panzer Grenadier Divisions, while the infantry were

well tried and confident. These troops were the cream of the German Army. They had under command Tiger and Panther tanks as well as other armour.

As against these forces we had fewer but larger divisions. The balance, however, was weighted heavily in our favour as regards equipment, air support, artillery, and tanks.

During the winter months the best use had been made by the enemy of the country and by the spring the positions to be attacked were formidable. I believe the flanks of the enemy line were secure. The northern flank rested on marshy, inundated areas on the Adriatic, while to the south the line lay along the **Apennines**. The only possible area suitable for offensive action was on the flat ground in between, which had few roads and was crossed by seven formidable river barriers, beginning with the **Senio** and ending with the **Adige**. These rivers had no junctions left and, particularly in the case of the first four, were heavily defended, mined, and wired. The rivers themselves, owing to the peculiar formation of the floodbanks, were from a tactical point of view almost ideal for infantry defensive positions. The floodbanks were in many cases 30 feet high, tapering from a base of 100 feet thick up to a flat apex 10 feet wide. Further, the stopbanks were only 120 feet apart and the enemy was dug in tightly on both banks. When the near bank was attacked you were shot at from the trenches on the far side. Between the banks themselves were mines and wire. The enemy slit-trenches on these floodbanks were most difficult artillery targets. The water gap itself, although only 40 feet wide, was 10 feet deep between the canalised perpendicular banks, 15 feet deep, dropping almost vertically down to the water's edge.

Altogether the position was a most difficult one to capture. Field-Marshal Alexander's plan was to attack in the flat country in the centre, thereby drawing off the enemy brigades from the mountains and the marshes, and, when this had been achieved, to push between the marshes through the narrow **Argenta Gap** on the northern flank. When all enemy reserves had been drawn off from the mountains, the final

blow was to be struck by the Fifth American Army attacking through the hills towards **Bologna**. The underlying intention behind the whole plan was to defeat the German forces in their existing defences so that further enemy resistance on the big obstacles of the Po and the Adige Rivers would not be possible.

Your Division, a part of the 5th British Corps, was given the role of slogging across the rivers in the centre and fighting hard battles to carry out the job of smashing as much of the German Army as possible, drawing off the enemy reserves and thereby weakening the flanks so that other formations could push through. It is a fair statement to say that during these operations the New Zealand Division, which had grouped with it nine British artillery regiments, carried out its part most thoroughly. The enemy fought right through without respite from D-day to the final phase at **Trieste**. In the process your Division destroyed three German divisions—4th Parachute Division, the 98th and the 278th Divisions. In all these operations we were most ably supported by the 12th Lancers, the 42nd British Medium Artillery Regiment and, later on, by Brigadier Barker's 43rd Gurkha Brigade. <sup>1</sup>

In the original plan it had never been intended that our thrust should break the enemy line. It was assumed that the main breakthrough would occur to the north through the marshland of **Argenta**.

*April 29.* So successful, however, were the operations of the 2nd New Zealand Division and the troops on our immediate flanks that five rivers south of the Po and the **Adige** were crossed more quickly than was estimated, and the operations which started as subsidiary ones finished up by smashing the enemy line and enabling the New Zealand Division to break through to **Venice**. We are, as I start writing this cable, across the rivers **Piave**, Tagliamento, and **Isonzo**, and we move forward tomorrow towards the capture of **Trieste**. We have joined up with the forces of **Marshal Tito**.

In all, your Division fought five major battles against the pick of the

**Germany Army. These battles were those of the rivers Senio, Santerno, Sillaro, Gaiana, and Idice. The plan of attack on each**

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<sup>1</sup> **Brigadier A. R. Barker, DSO, OBE, MC.**

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**of these obstacles was not merely to secure a crossing on which to drive the enemy back, but to destroy his forces. In this way alone could his divisions be broken and prevented from reforming a line farther back. Our policy has been, as always, to hit the enemy a tremendous blow with every available offensive weapon—often with from 250 to 300 guns and 400 to 500 planes, supported by 150 tanks. During the four hours' bombardment supporting each of the main battles our guns fired up to a quarter of a million rounds. These terrific bombardments enabled the infantry to advance and crush the enemy on our front, and then to push through the gap we had made to the next defended river line. We always attacked at night on a broad front with two brigades forward and one brigade in reserve. Later, to ease the hard-worked New Zealand Division infantry, we were given the 43rd Gurkha Lorried Infantry Brigade. This enabled us to carry on delivering blow after blow by relieving the forward brigades after each operation.**

**It was battles such as these which paved the way to victory. On the Senio and the Santerno we smashed completely the 98th Division. On the Sillaro we broke the back of the 278th Division. On the Gaiana and the Idice we paid off the final of our old scores with the 4th Parachute Division and part of the 1st Parachute Division. The 4th Parachute Division, fully confident that they could hold the rivers where less fanatic divisions had failed, dug themselves in on the west stopbank of the Gaiana. The bombardment on the Parachute Division was the heaviest of the war, estimated at 100 rounds for every man holding the river line, and in support of this bombardment 44 flame-throwing tanks attacked the line of the stopbank with flames. It was little wonder that our success was complete. On the Idice, the next obstacle, we were not faced with organised resistance and were able to rush the riverbanks**

without difficulty.

The destruction of the enemy divisions against us was a big factor in smashing the Germans here in **Italy**. No division that opposed us could stand up to the methods employed. During the early stages of the offensive the fighting was bitter. We captured between 2000 and 3000 infantry, all part of **Germany's** finest fighting infantry. The enemy was well beaten and could put up only half-hearted resistance on the formidable river barriers of the Po and the **Adige**. These were crossed with the greatest skill in assault boats and bridged with folding-boat equipment for our light transport and 40-ton rafts for our tanks and heavy artillery. In this way 150 heavy tanks and 5000 vehicles and guns of the Division were passed over and we were able to commence a successful advance to **Padua** and beyond.

It will be of great interest to you to know that the opinions I have expressed as to the importance of our contribution are borne out to a great extent by others, and I quote a cable from the Army Commander and a charming letter I received today from the Commander of the gallant **2nd Polish Corps** <sup>1</sup> who fought upon our left flank:

Personal for **General Freyberg** from Army Commander. My heartiest congratulations on reaching **Trieste**. To have led the advance of the **Eighth Army** from the River Senio to the Alps is a magnificent achievement for your troops.

MY DEAR GENERAL,

On behalf of all officers and men of the **2nd Polish Corps** I feel that I must write to express to you our unbounded admiration of your truly magnificent achievements since the offensive against the River Senio.

The Polish soldier knows well that his own successes were to a very considerable degree dependent upon the brilliant actions which were fought on his right. Since that period, during which we had the honour of attacking alongside your troops, your incomparable fighting qualities have been still more evidenced by the speed of your advance against the

toughest troops which the enemy could muster, and these qualities have aroused a feeling of respect, admiration, and comradeship which will live in our memories throughout the years of peace.

May I say, too, how deeply grateful we are for the help which you have given to our people. The sympathy which you have shown will never be forgotten by the Polish fighting soldiers.

Yours very sincerely,  
Z. BOHUSZ-SZYSZKO

It is fair to add that the speed of our advance was only possible because of the engineering work of our **Divisional Engineers**, under the command of Colonel Hanson, whose work was of a very high order.

Once the crust of the enemy resistance was broken just south of **Padua**, we carried out the advance through **Padua** itself on to the River Piave, including the capture of **Venice**. In two successive days' moves we had advanced 80 miles, capturing many thousands of prisoners.

As the bridges over the River Po had all been destroyed some months back by our own air forces, a halt of 24 hours became necessary to bridge the gap, and the Division took advantage of this to do maintenance, service tanks, and gather up and evacuate the huge number of enemy prisoners who were by now becoming an embarrassment.

The last stages of our advance to join up with **Marshal Tito's** forces show the Division again in its traditional role—a 'left hook' carried out magnificently. I wish you could have seen the triumphal move of this highly trained force along the coast over the **Piave** and **Isonzo**, in places fighting hard and, as opposition broke down, moving long distances through towns and villages full of cheering

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<sup>1</sup> Major-General Zygmunt Bohusz-Szyszko.

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and happy people, with all our vehicles, tanks, and guns garlanded with flowers. The last part of the advance was a sustained attack to free **Trieste**. It will always be a proud moment for the New Zealand Division that we were able to be of assistance to the Yugoslav Army in helping to free **Trieste**.

I cannot say how many German prisoners were taken during the move from the Po. I can only estimate the numbers at between 30,000 and 40,000. Our casualties, I am glad to say, have not been unduly heavy for the scope of the operations. <sup>1</sup>

I hope that this will be the last report that I shall have to send you of active operations. I write this one on the outskirts of **Trieste**. As in the past, I do so from my office truck which has served me as a battle headquarters during all past days. Now that we have reached the conclusion of the European war, I hope that I may be permitted to tell the people of New Zealand what a great force this Division of theirs is. No tribute I can pay does justice to the individuals whose work has contributed to our great successes. A successful commander depends in battle upon his subordinates. No praise can be sufficiently high for our commanders and staff. I wish especially to mention Brigadier Parkinson, commanding the 6th New Zealand Infantry Brigade, Brigadier Bonifant, commanding the 5th New Zealand Infantry Brigade, and Brigadier Gentry, commanding the newly-formed 9th New Zealand Infantry Brigade, which distinguished itself so greatly during the battle of the **Gaiana River** and the advance to **Trieste**. Outstanding work has been done by Colonel Hanson wherever commanding the **Divisional Engineers**, and by Colonel Campbell, commanding the 4th New Zealand Armoured Brigade. The work of Brigadier Queree, commanding the Divisional Artillery during the five battles from the **Senio** to Gaiana and beyond, has been well up to that high standard which has always been the characteristic of the New Zealand Artillery. The work of the **Army Service Corps**, under Brigadier Crump, in keeping us fed and maintained over difficult obstacles and long lines of communication has been up to the highest traditions of the desert days.



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**<sup>1</sup> New Zealand casualties from 27 Oct 1944–2 May 1945 were:**

<b>Killed</b>	<b>324</b>
<b>Died of wounds</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Died on active service (includes deaths through sickness, accident, &amp;c.)</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Wounded</b>	<b>2092</b>
<b>Prisoners of war (includes 1 died of wounds while prisoner of war)</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2608</b>

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**On my own staff Colonels Gilbert, <sup>1</sup> Elliott, <sup>2</sup> and Cook <sup>3</sup> and Major Cox, <sup>4</sup> the Intelligence Officer, have been of the greatest assistance and help. Their work has been of a high order.**

**But it is not of these senior officers, good as they have been, that one thinks of the most after battles such as we have been through. No division, no matter how good the Commander and staff may be, could achieve such results during the last year of heavy fighting unless the rank and file of the force were of the highest class. Our New Zealand troops have gone into these battles day after day and night after night with a quiet, steady determination and a spirit which I have not seen equalled elsewhere in my experience of warfare. In the New Zealander you have qualities of heart and mind that place him high among men. It is to resolute courage in our junior officers and men that this Division owes its fighting record. No men could have done more than they have done—never daunted, always calm, no matter how great the odds against them have been. No commander has been served as I have been during these difficult five and a half years. I have been the most fortunate and privileged of commanders to have led such a Division.**

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**<sup>1</sup> Colonel H. E. Gilbert, DSO, OBE; GSO 1, [2nd NZ Division](#), Nov 1944–1946; NZ Representative on Joint Chiefs of Staff Organisation in [Australia](#), Jul 1946-Jul 1947; GSO 1, Army HQ, Mar 1948-Mar 1949; Director of Plans and Intelligence, Mar 1949.-**

<sup>2</sup> Colonel R. A. Elliott, OBE, ED; Assistant Director of **Medical Services, 2nd NZ Division**, Dec 1944-Oct 1945.

<sup>3</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel J. P. Cook, OBE; Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster-General, **2nd NZ Division**, Dec 1944-Nov 1945.

<sup>4</sup> Major G. S. Cox, MBE; GSO 2 (Intelligence), **2nd NZ Division**, Oct 1944-May 1945; Chargé d'Affaires, New Zealand Legation, **Washington**, 1942-44.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 441 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER

441

*General Freyberg to the acting Prime Minister*

7 May 1945

We are all deeply touched by the warmth of your praise of this great Division of yours. <sup>5</sup> Now that the end here in **Europe** has come we can look back with pride upon the great achievements of this force, small in numbers compared with the large forces that are involved but which by sheer courage and the ability of its manhood has fought itself into the front rank of fighting formations of this or any war.

May I say how conscious I have always been of the great support I have received from **War Cabinet** and also how much I appreciate your kind references to me, their Commander. Your much-valued message will of course be passed on to all ranks.

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<sup>5</sup> No. 439.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 442 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND<sup>1</sup>

442

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the acting Prime  
Minister of New Zealand*<sup>1</sup>

8 May 1945

**Final victory over our German enemy is now achieved, and on behalf of the Government and people of the [United Kingdom](#) I send our greetings and congratulations to our kinsfolk in New Zealand on their great share in our common victory. During the darkest hours we in the Mother Country were ever strengthened by the knowledge of the sure sympathy and support of New Zealand. Your courage and steadfastness never faltered. Even when the enemy was almost at your gates you allowed nothing to hamper the contribution which New Zealand has made through her sons on the field of battle and through her workers on the farm and in the factory. The New Zealand Division, which has marched from [Alamein](#) through all the battles in [Tunis](#), [Sicily](#), and [Italy](#), is now in the van of General Alexander's conquering armies. Let us now go forward together with great determination to inflict, as we shall at no distant date, the same crushing defeat on the Japanese aggressor.**

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<sup>1</sup> Repeated to the United Kingdom Delegation, [San Francisco](#).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 443 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

443

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

13 May 1945

Further to my telegram of 5 May ( **No. 440**).

At the conclusion of this hard campaign, I have the honour to bring to your notice the excellent work done by the services at Lines of Communication and Base during the whole period of the war.

As you will remember, our original plan was to train in Egypt and go to **France**, transferring our Base to Colchester in England. This handicapped our starting welfare organisations. When France fell we settled down to Egypt as a Base and this meant that our planning for Lines of Communication was not started until September 1940. In my work here as Commander of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force I have been responsible for the organisation, administration, and training as well as command of your Force in the field. I have been most fortunate in having Brigadier Stevens as a most excellent head of the administrative services. His help, and the help of all those working under him, and the work of the **Medical Services**, which are under my direction, have been of the greatest assistance.

The object of Line of Communication and Base troops is to support and maintain the fighting troops in the field. The importance of this organisation to the fighting portion of the New Zealand Division has been very great; there is no doubt that New Zealand personnel in the field appreciate an organisation [run] by New Zealanders.

Work at Base and Lines of Communication is not spectacular. I feel a debt is owed to all those employed there. It will not be desirous for me

within the limits of a cable to do more than enumerate the various functions performed, and I hope that brevity will not be taken as showing slight appreciation of their value.

The keeping of the fighting efficiency of our Division has been a complex problem dependent upon the correct balance of supporting arms, the battle-worthiness of the commanders, and the morale of the fighting forces themselves. War-weariness, however, plays an adverse part towards the end of a long war. At **Sidi Rezegh**, in November 1941, our men were excellent, and although we have never reached a higher standard on the part of the individual soldiers, yet the increased skill and efficiency of our machine enhanced the military value of our organisation.

The whole object of military organisation and training is to maintain the fighting efficiency of the individual, without which success in battle is not possible. I attribute the high morale of the New Zealand Forces largely to the fact that we are a national army with great *esprit de corps*, and also to our early life and education in New Zealand. Further, our reinforcement position has been good, which has enabled us to look after the convalescent stage of all ranks so that no one has been returned to duty before he was thoroughly fit.

The greatest individual factor in keeping us a unified force lay in the fact that we had 'all ranks' clubs, where we all met under the same roof—officers, sisters, VADs, and other ranks. We started with **Cairo**, then **Bari**, **Rome**, **Florence**, and now in Danieli's Hotel in **Venice**. I can safely say that these institutions kept us together and were in fact the homes of the Division to which we turned during our periods of rest overseas. These clubs owe their efficiency to the sound organisation of our first club in **Cairo**, which was the work of Brigadier Falla and Major Harvey Turner.

In the opinion of members of the 2nd NZEF, and this opinion is borne out by comments from outside sources, the New Zealand **Medical Services** are without equal. The standard of surgical and medical

treatment and administration of hospitals, casualty clearing stations, field ambulances, and convalescent depots has been most important in keeping up the high standard of morale in your Force overseas. The personal interest shown by the medical staff has established a sense of confidence in all who have come under their care.

These results have been due to my first Director of **Medical Services**, Brigadier MacCormick, who laid the foundations in 1940–42, and to his successor, Brigadier Kenrick. With these I associate the head of the Dental Services for nearly the whole of the war, Lieutenant-Colonel J. F. Fuller. The standard set by this service was equal to that of the medical service.

The New Zealand Nursing Service has been excellent and the good results achieved have been largely due to their devoted work. **Miss E. M. Nutsey** was our first Principal Matron, and her excellent work has been continued by her successor, **Miss E. C. Mackay**. The Medical Division of the New Zealand Women's Army Auxiliary Corps under Miss M. King has rendered most valuable support to [the nursing] service.

I feel that during the course of the war our welfare services have developed into the most efficient in this theatre of the war. The National Patriotic Fund Board, through the medium of its Overseas Commissioner, Colonel F. Waite, has shown the utmost co-operation and understanding of our needs. The YMCA has done great service, both with the units in the field and on Lines of Communication, and the whole Division is most appreciative of the work done. The representatives with the units have always been prepared to work in the most forward areas, however unpleasant the conditions, and on many occasions following the men into battle and helping to evacuate the wounded. No praise can be too high for them. The Red Cross organisation, the Church Army, the staffs of our many clubs, the **Kiwi Concert Party**—all have played their part. I would like to mention Mr. H. W. Shove, first Commissioner of the **YMCA**, Miss M. A. Neely, who has directed the Welfare Division of the **WAAC**, and Captain T. Vaughan, who has been the guiding light of the **Kiwi Concert Party**.

Included in the Base and training establishments are a large number of training and administrative units, too many to enumerate. Their work has been of a high standard throughout.

**2nd Echelon** of 2nd NZEF has dealt with all questions of records in a manner which has won praise, not only from the 2nd NZEF but from the authorities in New Zealand. The Pay Department has throughout shown efficiency and has approached all pay problems of members of the Force in a most sympathetic and wise manner. Our warmest thanks are due to Colonel F. Prideaux, who has been the Chief Paymaster and Financial Adviser to me since the commencement.

The spiritual welfare of troops of all denominations has been in excellent hands. We have been able to allot one chaplain to every unit of battalion size and every help has been given by the regimental officers to chaplains and priests in the execution of their duties. Their work has been unwearying. The foundation of this service was laid by the first Senior Chaplain, Bishop G. V. Gerard, and carried out by his successors, the Rev. J. W. McKenzie and Rev. G. A. D. Spence. We have all had the greatest co-operation from our Roman Catholic priests and we are all most grateful to their head, Father L. P. Spring.

A further factor which has helped us efficiently has been our postal service which handled the large number of letters and parcels from New Zealand, and our thanks are due to Lieutenant-Colonel A. V. Knapp, who for a long period was Chief Postal Officer. Those who sent parcels to us played an important part in keeping our force efficient, especially in the desert campaigns.

The Public Relations staff—which comprised war correspondents, *NZEF Times* staff, photographers, the broadcasting unit, cinematograph unit, and the official artist—have carried out their varied work in a first-class manner. They all worked under difficult conditions. After the capture in **Greece** of Captain J. H. Hall, Major M. S. Carrie took over and was a most conscientious head. Captain E. G. Webber, his successor,



who was also foundation editor of the *Times*, has carried on most efficiently. The work of the Official Artist, Captain P. McIntyre, needs no commendation from me.

The Legal Department, controlled first by Lieutenant-Colonel C. A. L. Treadwell and, for the last three years, by Lieutenant-Colonel C. B. Barrowclough, has been of great assistance to all ranks of the Force in the administration of military law, and to many members of the Force in their personal problems. The Chief Auditor, Lieutenant-Colonel H. C. Steere, and his staff have helped us in all our financial and accounting problems. The Education and Rehabilitation Service has just started and its work has largely still to be done. I am sure it will equal the standard set by the other services.

The Clerical Division of the NZWAAC is also a recent addition to the Force. Like the other women's services, its work is of the first order.

Our two units engaged on graves registration and concentration attract little attention, but their work is of the usual New Zealand standard.

In conclusion, no words of mine can do justice to the great assistance we have all had from Army Headquarters in **Wellington**. The tone of all our dealings with them has been on a high co-operative basis. They have helped me right from the start to the finish with knowledge and understanding of our many difficulties. I personally am most conscious of all I owe to them, in the first case to General Duigan, and later to General Puttick and Brigadier Conway. What their help has meant to me only I can say.

**DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II**

**TRIESTE**

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand ( San Francisco) to the acting Prime Minister*

14 May 1945

I have received a message from Mr. Churchill regarding the implications of Tito's occupation of **Trieste**, and he has sent me copies of the messages exchanged between President Truman and himself. <sup>1</sup> I have asked that all these cables, which set out the issues quite clearly, should be sent on to you at once.

In my own mind, there is no doubt that these acts of encroachment for the purpose of snatching territory by force of arms before a peace conference can meet and adjust territorial claims are just that form of aggression against which the **United Nations** have fought for over five and a half years and are still fighting, and which, if unchecked, will nullify and destroy all that has been won. In that case, the heavy sacrifices of New Zealand, as well as of the **United Nations** generally, will be in vain. In my opinion, therefore, Tito or any other similar aggressor—Allied or otherwise—must be halted at the earliest possible stage. You will see from the telegrams that Field-Marshal Alexander is asking what part of his present troops will be at his disposal in the event of action which might develop into hostilities against **Yugoslavia's** deliberate aggression.

I do not see how we can do otherwise than agree to authorise the Commander-in-Chief to use our Division, which is actually on the

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<sup>1</sup> Not published. On 12 May the President sent a personal message to Mr. Churchill containing the text of a message which he proposed should be delivered to **Marshal Tito** by the **United Kingdom** and United States Ambassadors at Belgrade. 'I have come to the conclusion that we must decide now whether we should uphold the fundamental principles of territorial

settlement by orderly process against force, intimidation, or blackmail,' his telegram ran '.... The problem is essentially one of deciding whether our two countries are going to permit our allies to engage in uncontrolled land-grabbing or tactics which are all too reminiscent of those of **Hitler** and **Japan**.' He suggested that the **United Kingdom** and **United States** should insist that 'Field-Marshal Alexander should obtain complete and exclusive control of **Trieste** and **Pola**, the line of communication through **Gorizia** and **Monfalcone**, and an area sufficiently to the east of this line to permit proper administrative control.'

Mr. Churchill replied: 'I agree with every word you say and will work with all my strength on the line you propose.... If [the situation] is handled firmly before our strength is dispersed, **Europe** may be saved another bloodbath. Otherwise the whole fruits of our victory may be cast away and none of the purposes of World Organisation to prevent territorial aggression and future wars will be attained.' He detailed the eighteen divisions available to Field-Marshal Alexander in the event of hostilities against **Yugoslavia**, adding that he would have to obtain permission from the New Zealand and South African Governments for the use of their two divisions.

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spot, in the hope and the belief that a firm stand now against Tito in this particular instance will not only deter him from taking similar action in other neighbouring territories but will prevent an extension of such dangerous and inadmissible actions, which clearly must lead either again to war in the future or to further disastrous concessions on our part.

I have discussed with a **United Kingdom** representative here the matters raised in Mr. Churchill's message, and I informed him that I would place my views before the **New Zealand Government** at once with the request that the question of the use of the Division for the purpose of stopping aggression on the part of the Tito Government and forces be given immediate and favourable consideration, and that the decision of **War Cabinet** and the Government Cabinet might be conveyed to Mr. Churchill. I am also informing Mr. Churchill that, in my opinion, the proposed action by the **United Kingdom** and the **United States** must only

be taken when it has been demonstrated clearly and beyond dispute to the world that every effort to arrange a fair and reasonable agreement on the important matters in dispute, in strict accord with the principles for which the **United Nations** have fought and are still fighting, has failed through the obstinate and definitely aggressive attitude of the **Government of Yugoslavia**. <sup>1</sup>

I am also asking Mr. Churchill for an assurance that the proposed action by the British and **United States** will not involve interference in any way with the purely internal affairs of **Yugoslavia**, such as the restoration of the monarchy, and that our troops will not be used for that or similar purposes.

I am advising **Freyberg** in the above sense of my views and asking that he keep the Government and me informed as to his appreciation of the situation and of current developments. <sup>2</sup>

I deeply deplore this most regrettable development arising after the people of New Zealand believing, as everybody did everywhere else, that peace as well as victory had been won in **Europe** and that the war there had ended. I also very much regret that there should be any clash with the Government of **Yugoslavia**, as I have greatly admired the splendid fight put up by Tito and the Partisans against the Germans, which to the largest extent the **United Kingdom** and the **United States** made possible. It appears to me, however, that a prompt stand is inevitable at this moment if the principles for which so many of our men fought and died are not to be trampled underfoot and aggression again enthroned.

Would you please repeat your reply to me.

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<sup>1</sup> No. 445.

<sup>2</sup> No. 446.

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand (San Francisco) to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

14 May 1945

I am personally in entire agreement with the proposed action of the **United Kingdom** and the **United States** to halt aggression on the part of **Yugoslavia**, and consider that it is our duty to assist by making our Division available to Field-Marshal Alexander for that purpose. The proposed action by the **United Kingdom** and the **United States**, however, must only be taken after it has been demonstrated clearly and beyond dispute to the world that every effort to arrange a fair and reasonable agreement on the important matters in dispute, in strict accord with the principles for which the **United Nations** have fought and are still fighting, has failed through the obstinate and definitely aggressive attitude of the Government of **Yugoslavia**.

I feel with you that if action is not taken, after every effort to reach an agreement has failed, all that we have won during five and a half years' fighting will be lost. I am, of course, particularly interested in the **Trieste** area, where the New Zealand Division is stationed at present.

I have placed my view of the matter plainly and definitely before my colleagues of the **New Zealand Government** and **War Cabinet**.

I would be glad if you would enable me to give an assurance to the **New Zealand Government** in line with New Zealand's policy—although personally I take it for granted—that the British and **United States** proposed action will be strictly confined to the resistance of aggression and will not involve interference in any way with the purely internal affairs of **Yugoslavia**, such as the restoration of the monarchy, and that our troops will not be used for that or similar purposes.

I would be obliged if you could please let me have this assurance immediately so that it can be conveyed at once to New Zealand. <sup>1</sup> Kind regards.

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446

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand ( San Francisco) to General Freyberg*

16 May 1945

**The whole question of the implications of Tito's action in occupying Trieste and other territories has been raised with us by the United Kingdom Government.**

**It is clear that this situation may have the gravest possible consequences for the future, and the dangers of permitting unilateral encroachments on the part of Tito or any other of our allies are so great as to necessitate our taking the most serious view of the present situation.**

**I myself feel that everything for which we have fought and are still fighting will be nullified, and that our whole attempt through this war to prevent aggression will have been in vain. In the event of an outbreak of hostilities Field-Marshal Alexander has asked what part of his present forces will be at his disposal. I do not see how we can do otherwise than authorise the use of our Division, which happens to be at the very point at which the trouble has occurred. The wider issue seems clear, and this decision is based on the belief that a firm stand in this particular instance will not only deter Tito from taking similar action in neighbouring areas but will serve to quell an extension of such situations which can be met only by further disastrous concessions on our part or with another war.**

**My views have been placed before the New Zealand Government with the request that they be considered immediately and a decision conveyed to the United Kingdom Government. I wish to keep you apprised of my view of this turn of events, and would like an early appreciation of your own views on the present situation and of its**

current developments. Please repeat your reply both to me here in **San Francisco** and to New Zealand.

**447**

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister ( San Francisco)*

**16 May 1945**

**Your emergency operations cable of 16 May is acknowledged.**

**I am preparing an early appreciation as requested. This will take some hours. I send you an interim report. The situation on our level as between the Commanders on the spot is cordial and there is no reason to fear immediate trouble. While I am of the opinion that the situation will get worse before it gets better, bringing with it possibilities of trouble, I do not see how you can do otherwise than authorise the use of the Division, which happens to be at the critical point, neither would any of the force wish you to do otherwise. We are disposed therefore for any possibility.**

**A more detailed appreciation on the present situation and current events follows in eight hours.**

**448**

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister ( San Francisco)*

**16 May 1945**

**Reference your emergency operations cable of 16 May.**

**The Division at the present moment finds itself carrying out a role fraught with political consequences of a grave nature.**

**In accordance with our orders we advanced across north-eastern Venezia towards **Trieste**, where such of the enemy as had not been cleared from the city by the **Yugoslav Fourth Army** surrendered to us. I was informed that an agreement had been reached between **Marshal Tito** and Field-Marshal Alexander that the port of **Trieste** and lines of**



communication through **Gorizia** to the north-west were to be used by us for supplying British armies operating towards **Austria**.<sup>1</sup>

On the spot, however, it has become clear that a serious divergence of views exists between our High Command and the Yugoslav Government as to how this agreement is to be interpreted. Following behind our advance were British port authorities and operating parties, an Area Headquarters, and officials of **Allied Military Government**, and it appears clear that the view of Field-Marshal Alexander was that we should occupy **Venezia Giulia** up to the Austrian frontier<sup>2</sup> in the same way that the remainder of **Italy** had been occupied.

The Yugoslav authorities have taken and are acting upon exactly the opposite view. They are regarding the agreement as one under which they would permit us to establish and use port and transport facilities in a **Trieste** and **Venezia Giulia** area controlled and run by them. They have stated now that they understood we would not send our troops east of the Isonzo River, the natural boundary between **Venezia Giulia** and the remainder of northern **Italy**, and they are acting in a way which implies without question that they consider it is their form of Government and not the **Allied Military Government** which should be established there.

This has produced a situation which is not only fraught with political complications but even the risk of armed conflict with the Yugoslav Army.

From the military point of view the situation is briefly this: the Yugoslav Government consider that we have intruded into one of their operational zones and have asked us to withdraw behind the **Isonzo**. **Marshal Tito's** Chief of Staff added that they could not be responsible for the consequences if we did not. We have replied in strong terms that we would hold the Yugoslav Army responsible if fighting breaks out and have taken the necessary steps to dispose our troops to meet any outbreak of fighting.

On the political side the situation is that in the area of **Trieste** and

**Gorizia**, and throughout **Venezia Giulia**, the Yugoslav Government is imposing vigorously its own political structure. The authorities under their sponsorship are running administration as part of **Yugoslavia** and crushing all opposition. This has involved not only the arrest of all Fascist elements, but of Italian national elements likely to oppose the incorporation of this area in **Yugoslavia**. The towns and villages are placarded with Tito posters and slogans. Yugoslav flags are flown everywhere and the Italian flag fired on unless it carries a red star in its centre. With the exception of the town of **Trieste**, the population between 16 and 49 is being mobilised, regardless of race, for service with the Yugoslav Army. All Italian Partisan organisations, even those that opposed the Germans, have been suppressed. A curfew has been enforced on the civilian population without reference to the Commander of our forces in **Trieste**. There have been reports of executions of opponents of the new regime, some of them of a summary nature. Movement of food from the outlying districts of **Trieste** has been controlled and, under present conditions, semi-starvation will soon prevail.

These conditions are bearing hard on the Italians of **Trieste**, who form a large proportion of the population of that and other towns of the region, though they are accepted willingly by the Slovene population, long oppressed by the Italians. Our headquarters have been approached repeatedly by Italians seeking protection or evacuation, a fact which causes further possibilities of friction with the Yugoslavs, who regard us as potential protectors of their opponents.

Although we have had the assistance of the capable military mission to deal with the Yugoslav Army on military issues, our dealings are hampered by the lack of rulings on policy. The result is that we are getting into a position which offends both sides. We offend the Yugoslavs by remaining here in what they consider to be their territory and at least observing, even if not checking, actions they are carrying out. We offend the Italians and conservative elements of the population by standing by while in effect a revolution to bring the country under a Communist **Yugoslavia** is carried out around us. We are coping daily by

*ad hoc* military decisions with events which have political implications of great complexity.

These are my views on the present situation and of its current developments, which are factual. I am glad we have an American and British detachment with us in **Trieste**. I have not expressed an opinion on the wider issue because I am not in a position to do so. I do feel that strong diplomatic action is needed rather than military force. I fully agree with the opinions you express in your cable. I am a little uncertain only when it comes to the application of any ideal or principle in **Balkan** countries, where terrible things have happened and are still happening. I feel, as you do, that a firm stand in this particular instance may deter and produce the solution that you seek. On the other hand, it would be wrong to base decisions on the assumption that **Marshal Tito** is bluffing. The situation may become worse before it is better, and the Allies must be prepared to enforce their will if necessary. I consider that with the shortage of troops here, and feeling as you do, full operational control of your Division should be given.

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<sup>1</sup> After discussions with **Marshal Tito** at Belgrade in February 1945, Field-Marshal Alexander on 30 April informed Tito of his intentions in respect of operations by Allied troops in **Venezia Giulia**. His plans were to secure the port of **Trieste** and lines of communication through **Italy** to **Trieste**, and to secure lines of communication from **Trieste** to **Austria** necessary for further advance into **Austria**. Tito's reply was that the situation had greatly changed since the Belgrade discussions in that the Yugoslavs had broken through the German defensive line from **Fiume** to **Trieste** and had already liberated 'nearly the whole of **Istria**'. He defined the western boundary of Yugoslav operations as the Isonzo River and, although prepared to grant the Allies the use of the ports of **Trieste** and Pola as well as the railway line **Trieste-Tarvisio** for supplying Allied troops in **Austria**, he asked in effect that Allied operations should stop at the Isonzo River line. Yugoslav military and civil authorities would, he said, continue to function in this area.

<sup>2</sup> Another version of this telegram reads: 'up to the 1939

449

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand ( San Francisco) to the acting  
Prime Minister  
[ Extract]*

16 May 1945

Thank you for your telegram of 16 May. <sup>1</sup> You will have received earlier today the pledge which Mr. Churchill has sent me that the proposed operations will not be concerned in any way with the internal affairs of **Yugoslavia**, in which none of the Allies desires to interfere. <sup>2</sup>

The immediate question, as I see it, is that of stopping aggression which, if unchecked, will inevitably extend in the instance of **Yugoslavia** beyond Italian territories to those of **Austria**, **Hungary**, and **Greece**, and the peace conference will be quite unable to compose the resulting situations which may lead to further wars. In other words, the present crisis calls not only for a stand on the immediate issue but on the future of a lasting peace.

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<sup>1</sup> Not published. In this telegram Mr. Nash repeated to the Prime Minister the views of individual members of **War Cabinet**.

<sup>2</sup> No. 450.

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In my view, unless the President and the Prime Minister of the **United Kingdom** are backed up now, it is not only the peace but the war appears to have been lost.... <sup>1</sup> We cannot, in my view, countenance on the part of **Yugoslavia**, or any other of our allies, a repetition of the smash and grab policy against which we went to war.

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<sup>1</sup> A personal reference has been omitted.

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450

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the acting Prime Minister of New Zealand*

17 May 1945

Mr. Fraser at **San Francisco** has asked me to repeat to you the following personal message which I sent him on 15 May:

Many thanks for your message. <sup>2</sup> I gladly give the assurance you ask for in your last paragraph. The proposed operations will take place, if they do, on Italian not Yugoslav soil and will be in no way concerned with the internal affairs of **Yugoslavia**, in which we have no desire to interfere.

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<sup>2</sup> No. 445.

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451

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister ( San Francisco) <sup>3</sup>*  
*[ Extract]*

20 May 1945

.... The general situation here is at the moment most unsatisfactory. There is the makings of trouble both here and in **Austria**. The Yugoslavs have moved a large force into and around **Trieste** and **Gorizia**. We are now following suit, and the 2nd American Corps are moving in between our 13th Corps and 5th British Corps in **Austria**. The 10th Indian Division is moving into line to the north of the New Zealand Division. When these moves are completed we shall be in a stronger position.

In considering the military side of this situation it is just as important not to overestimate the strength of the Yugoslav Army as it is [not] to underestimate it. Their army with its horses, its lack of heavy equipment and transport, compares unfavourably with Allied formations. In this war material has counted for much, and the Yugoslav Army is

not upon a continental basis. Nevertheless, I want the **New Zealand Government** to know the fact that we are sitting at the point of greatest tension and that fighting may break out. If it does we must expect a number of casualties.... <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Nos. 447, 448, and 451 were repeated to Mr. Nash.

<sup>1</sup> The text omitted refers to the relief of the 6th and 7th Reinforcements and their return to New Zealand.

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452

*The acting Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

23 May 1945

Thank you for your messages. <sup>2</sup> We have considered the position very fully and carefully. The offer made by the Yugoslav Government <sup>3</sup> appears to open the way to a settlement of the dispute. Accepting the spirit of the words of this message, the **New Zealand Government** anticipate that an agreement will be reached that will avoid armed conflict and will give the Yugoslav Government and its forces the opportunity to work in harmony with the Allied forces in the area and in accord with the principles that you and President Truman have enunciated.

The progress already made since the receipt of your own and President Truman's messages is so great, and the principles for which we have fought so near to realisation, that we feel sure that a continuance of the negotiations in the spirit of the offer made by Tito will result in complete agreement and the attainment of your objective.

I am repeating this message to Mr. Fraser at **San Francisco** and to **General Freyberg**.

<sup>2</sup> **No. 450.** Another message from Mr. Churchill dated 14 May, enclosing the texts of President Truman's message to him and his reply (see [page 415, note 1](#)) has not been reproduced.

<sup>3</sup> The New Zealand Government was advised of this offer in a telegram on 21 May from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, which read as follows:

The following note has today, 21 May, been received from the Yugoslav Government:

The Yugoslav Government agree to the establishment of the **Allied Military Government**, under the authority of the Allied Supreme Commander in the **Mediterranean**, in the Slovene littoral area on the basis of the demarcation line proposed by Field-Marshal Alexander, subject to certain minor modifications to be suggested later by the Yugoslav Government. At the same time, the Yugoslav Government in accepting in principle such a solution consider indispensable:

- (i) That representatives of the Yugoslav Army should be included in the military administration of this area.
- (ii) That units of the Yugoslav Army should remain in that area (being of course under the command of the Supreme Allied Commander in the **Mediterranean**).
- (iii) That, as it has been already stated in the proposals of Field-Marshal Alexander, the Allied Military Administration should act through the civil authorities which are already set up in that area.

The Yugoslav Government propose that the Governments of Great Britain and the **United States** start immediate negotiations with the Yugoslav Government in order to settle all questions in this connection.

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453

*General Freyberg to the acting Prime Minister*

23 May 1945

After a period of tension here, when it looked as if hostilities with



**the Yugoslav forces were imminent, the situation has eased considerably. The Yugoslav Government has sent a friendly note and, although there are still divergences of opinion which will require adjustment, I believe that the matter will be solved amicably and it will then be possible for the New Zealand Division to be released from its operational role. This may not be until the end of June. When the situation here allows, I will fly to Allied Force Headquarters to talk over the whole question of our possible move with Field-Marshal Alexander and his staff. These talks will only be of an exploratory nature. No action will be taken without your concurrence. I will keep War Cabinet in touch with opinion here.**

**454**

***The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg***

**30 June 1945**

**My immediately following telegram contains the text of a press report dated 27 June from the Yugoslav News Agency. I would be grateful if you would let me have the facts and your comments regarding the action allegedly taken by New Zealanders, and, in addition, if you would advise me of the present position in regard to the operational employment of the Division as well as the immediate prospects.**

**455**

***The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg***

**30 June 1945**

**Reference my immediately preceding telegram.**

**The following is the text of the report: The Trieste trade unions have sent cables to the British, Russian, French, and Italian trade union organisations protesting against the British and American Military Government's policy towards them. The protest alleges that the Military Government is confiscating and requisitioning trade union property and also making arrests, and appeals to the trade union organisations to do**



their utmost to end the Military Government's unfriendly policy.

According to the Yugoslav News Agency, New Zealanders have searched the Slovene Home of Culture in Trieste and made arrests.

456

*General Freyberg to the acting Prime Minister*

3 July 1945

Your telegram of 30 June.

The incident of the trades union cables appears to be part of a general Yugoslav press and radio campaign at present being carried out with the object of discrediting the Allied Military Government in the occupation zone of Venezia Giulia. On 24 June Headquarters Eighth Army ordered simultaneous parades throughout the Army area of all Partisan forces, who were publicly thanked and informed that as their task was done they were to be officially disbanded and would be required to hand in their arms forthwith. In Trieste there was an armed Partisan organisation known as the *Difesa Popolare*,<sup>1</sup> whose members consisted of imported Yugoslav sympathisers, local Slovenes, and political prisoners released from the local prisons by the Yugoslav forces after their arrival in May. As far as is known, the *Difesa Popolare* is not officially associated with the local trades unions, which have come to light only since May but which contain a proportion of Slovene working men. This *Difesa Popolare* had, since the departure of the regular Yugoslav Army on 12 June, taken up a very truculent and anti-Allied attitude, had been responsible for considerable looting and intimidation, and was proving a serious embarrassment to the Allied Military Government authorities. The strength of the organisation in Trieste was estimated at from two to three thousand. It was suspected that there might be a poor attendance of the *Difesa Popolare* on the 24 June parade, and that a plan might have been made to conceal at least a portion of their arms and munitions. Military guards were accordingly posted on the buildings known to be occupied by the *Difesa Popolare*

and these buildings were searched by British, American, and New Zealand military police who confiscated any arms and munitions found therein. This search was carried out while the parade was actually being held. In fact, the parade was well attended by some 1420 individuals who, in the main, appeared only too glad to hand in their arms. There were no incidents or disorders of any kind and at no stage was any military action in support of the police necessary. From the parade and from the search of the buildings a quantity of arms and munitions totalling approximately eighteen 3-ton lorry loads was removed. The so-called Slovene Home of Culture was, in fact, the former Italian Fascist headquarters in Trieste and is now in use as Allied Military Government offices. It was one of the buildings searched without incident by the Allied military police on 24 June.

In these difficult and often aggravating circumstances the conduct of the New Zealand troops was at all times exemplary.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated as 'Popular Defence' or 'People's Defence'.

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457  
*General Freyberg to the acting Prime Minister*  
[ Extract ]

3 July 1945

The present position in Trieste and in Venezia Giulia generally has improved. After many conferences the Yugoslav forces have moved out of the immediate area Trieste- Gorizia. Thus the original line of communication is ensured for the Allied forces occupying Austria. It seems therefore that from the military point of view the situation now is satisfactory.

The actual move back from Trieste of the Yugoslav Army was carried out on 12 June, and on 24 June the Partisans were disbanded and their arms collected without incident.

I am certain that the part played by the New Zealand Division in this last difficult stage of operations here has had a far-reaching effect upon the Allied scheme for the occupation of **Austria**. I consider that we could now be relieved from our present operational role whenever our move is necessary. It is doubtful, however, if we will be relieved until the policy of the **New Zealand Government** as to future employment is finally announced.... <sup>1</sup>

Everyone is in great form and everything goes well.

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<sup>1</sup> Details concerning the return of long-service personnel to New Zealand and the disposal of equipment have been omitted. See Volume III, *Proposals for Participation in Operations against Japan* for policy as to future employment of the 2nd NZEF.

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458

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand* <sup>1</sup> to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs <sup>2</sup>

18 July 1945

From messages received earlier from **General Freyberg** it was understood that the New Zealand Division was expected to be withdrawn from operations by 20 June. <sup>3</sup> The Division is still in an operational role in **Trieste**, and we are anxious that it should be withdrawn as soon as possible and arrangements made to repatriate the men who are to return to New Zealand, particulars of whom were given in my telegram of 21 June last. <sup>4</sup> We should be glad, therefore, of very early advice of the date when the Division will be withdrawn from its operational role.

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Fraser had arrived back in New Zealand on 5 Jul.

<sup>2</sup> This telegram was repeated to **General Freyberg** on 19 Jul.

<sup>3</sup> See page 437, note 2.

<sup>4</sup> See *R eturn of 2nd Division to New Zealand (No. 469)*.

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459

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

22 July 1945

Reference your telegram of 19 July. <sup>5</sup> We begin the move today from **Trieste** to a concentration area north of **Rome**. <sup>6</sup> The move will be completed in twelve days, except for part of the Armoured Brigade which is remaining in the present area until the **New Zealand Government's** policy is finalised. As soon as we are concentrated in the new area, I shall withdraw the 8th Reinforcements and send them to Advanced Base ready for onward passage to New Zealand when shipping is available.

A further cable dealing with the short-comings of shipping follows. <sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> No. 458.

<sup>6</sup> Near Lake Trasimene.

<sup>7</sup> Not published. Contained details of the shipping programme for the repatriation of New Zealand personnel from **Italy** and the **Middle East** to New Zealand and the composition of later drafts to be returned.

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460

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

2 August 1945

Your telegram of 18 July ( **No. 458**) regarding the withdrawal of the 2nd New Zealand Division from operations in **Italy**. The Division commenced to hand over its present role in **Trieste** on 22 July and is

**moving down to the Spoleto area.**

**No specific date has been given for the completion of the move but the assumption is that it will be in the very near future.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 444 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND (SAN FRANCISCO) TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER

444

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand ( San Francisco) to the acting  
Prime Minister*

14 May 1945

I have received a message from Mr. Churchill regarding the implications of Tito's occupation of **Trieste**, and he has sent me copies of the messages exchanged between President Truman and himself. <sup>1</sup> I have asked that all these cables, which set out the issues quite clearly, should be sent on to you at once.

In my own mind, there is no doubt that these acts of encroachment for the purpose of snatching territory by force of arms before a peace conference can meet and adjust territorial claims are just that form of aggression against which the **United Nations** have fought for over five and a half years and are still fighting, and which, if unchecked, will nullify and destroy all that has been won. In that case, the heavy sacrifices of New Zealand, as well as of the **United Nations** generally, will be in vain. In my opinion, therefore, Tito or any other similar aggressor—Allied or otherwise—must be halted at the earliest possible stage. You will see from the telegrams that Field-Marshal Alexander is asking what part of his present troops will be at his disposal in the event of action which might develop into hostilities against **Yugoslavia's** deliberate aggression.

I do not see how we can do otherwise than agree to authorise the Commander-in-Chief to use our Division, which is actually on the

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<sup>1</sup> Not published. On 12 May the President sent a personal

message to Mr. Churchill containing the text of a message which he proposed should be delivered to **Marshal Tito** by the **United Kingdom** and United States Ambassadors at Belgrade. 'I have come to the conclusion that we must decide now whether we should uphold the fundamental principles of territorial settlement by orderly process against force, intimidation, or blackmail,' his telegram ran '.... The problem is essentially one of deciding whether our two countries are going to permit our allies to engage in uncontrolled land-grabbing or tactics which are all too reminiscent of those of **Hitler** and **Japan**.' He suggested that the **United Kingdom** and **United States** should insist that 'Field-Marshal Alexander should obtain complete and exclusive control of **Trieste** and Pola, the line of communication through **Gorizia** and **Monfalcone**, and an area sufficiently to the east of this line to permit proper administrative control.'

Mr. Churchill replied: 'I agree with every word you say and will work with all my strength on the line you propose.... If [the situation] is handled firmly before our strength is dispersed, **Europe** may be saved another bloodbath. Otherwise the whole fruits of our victory may be cast away and none of the purposes of World Organisation to prevent territorial aggression and future wars will be attained.' He detailed the eighteen divisions available to Field-Marshal Alexander in the event of hostilities against **Yugoslavia**, adding that he would have to obtain permission from the New Zealand and South African Governments for the use of their two divisions.

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spot, in the hope and the belief that a firm stand now against Tito in this particular instance will not only deter him from taking similar action in other neighbouring territories but will prevent an extension of such dangerous and inadmissible actions, which clearly must lead either again to war in the future or to further disastrous concessions on our part.

I have discussed with a **United Kingdom** representative here the matters raised in Mr. Churchill's message, and I informed him that I would place my views before the **New Zealand Government** at once with the request that the question of the use of the Division for the purpose of stopping aggression on the part of the Tito Government and forces be

given immediate and favourable consideration, and that the decision of **War Cabinet** and the Government Cabinet might be conveyed to Mr. Churchill. I am also informing Mr. Churchill that, in my opinion, the proposed action by the **United Kingdom** and the **United States** must only be taken when it has been demonstrated clearly and beyond dispute to the world that every effort to arrange a fair and reasonable agreement on the important matters in dispute, in strict accord with the principles for which the **United Nations** have fought and are still fighting, has failed through the obstinate and definitely aggressive attitude of the Government of **Yugoslavia**. <sup>1</sup>

I am also asking Mr. Churchill for an assurance that the proposed action by the British and **United States** will not involve interference in any way with the purely internal affairs of **Yugoslavia**, such as the restoration of the monarchy, and that our troops will not be used for that or similar purposes.

I am advising **Freyberg** in the above sense of my views and asking that he keep the Government and me informed as to his appreciation of the situation and of current developments. <sup>2</sup>

I deeply deplore this most regrettable development arising after the people of New Zealand believing, as everybody did everywhere else, that peace as well as victory had been won in **Europe** and that the war there had ended. I also very much regret that there should be any clash with the Government of **Yugoslavia**, as I have greatly admired the splendid fight put up by Tito and the Partisans against the Germans, which to the largest extent the **United Kingdom** and the **United States** made possible. It appears to me, however, that a prompt stand is inevitable at this moment if the principles for which so many of our men fought and died are not to be trampled underfoot and aggression again enthroned.

Would you please repeat your reply to me.

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<sup>1</sup> No. 445.





# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 445 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND (SAN FRANCISCO) TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

445

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand ( San Francisco) to the Prime  
Minister of the United Kingdom*

14 May 1945

I am personally in entire agreement with the proposed action of the **United Kingdom** and the **United States** to halt aggression on the part of **Yugoslavia**, and consider that it is our duty to assist by making our **Division** available to **Field-Marshal Alexander** for that purpose. The proposed action by the **United Kingdom** and the **United States**, however, must only be taken after it has been demonstrated clearly and beyond dispute to the world that every effort to arrange a fair and reasonable agreement on the important matters in dispute, in strict accord with the principles for which the **United Nations** have fought and are still fighting, has failed through the obstinate and definitely aggressive attitude of the **Government of Yugoslavia**.

I feel with you that if action is not taken, after every effort to reach an agreement has failed, all that we have won during five and a half years' fighting will be lost. I am, of course, particularly interested in the **Trieste** area, where the **New Zealand Division** is stationed at present.

I have placed my view of the matter plainly and definitely before my colleagues of the **New Zealand Government** and **War Cabinet**.

I would be glad if you would enable me to give an assurance to the **New Zealand Government** in line with **New Zealand's policy**—although personally I take it for granted—that the **British** and **United States** proposed action will be strictly confined to the resistance of aggression

**and will not involve interference in any way with the purely internal affairs of [Yugoslavia](#), such as the restoration of the monarchy, and that our troops will not be used for that or similar purposes.**

**I would be obliged if you could please let me have this assurance immediately so that it can be conveyed at once to New Zealand. <sup>1</sup> Kind regards.**

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<sup>1</sup> No. 450.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 446 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND (SAN FRANCISCO) TO GENERAL FREYBERG

446

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand ( San Francisco) to General Freyberg*

16 May 1945

**The whole question of the implications of Tito's action in occupying Trieste and other territories has been raised with us by the United Kingdom Government.**

**It is clear that this situation may have the gravest possible consequences for the future, and the dangers of permitting unilateral encroachments on the part of Tito or any other of our allies are so great as to necessitate our taking the most serious view of the present situation.**

**I myself feel that everything for which we have fought and are still fighting will be nullified, and that our whole attempt through this war to prevent aggression will have been in vain. In the event of an outbreak of hostilities Field-Marshal Alexander has asked what part of his present forces will be at his disposal. I do not see how we can do otherwise than authorise the use of our Division, which happens to be at the very point at which the trouble has occurred. The wider issue seems clear, and this decision is based on the belief that a firm stand in this particular instance will not only deter Tito from taking similar action in neighbouring areas but will serve to quell an extension of such situations which can be met only by further disastrous concessions on our part or with another war.**

**My views have been placed before the **New Zealand Government** with**

**the request that they be considered immediately and a decision conveyed to the United Kingdom Government. I wish to keep you apprised of my view of this turn of events, and would like an early appreciation of your own views on the present situation and of its current developments. Please repeat your reply both to me here in **San Francisco** and to New Zealand.**

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

447 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER (SAN FRANCISCO)

447

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister ( San Francisco)*

16 May 1945

**Your emergency operations cable of 16 May is acknowledged.**

**I am preparing an early appreciation as requested. This will take some hours. I send you an interim report. The situation on our level as between the Commanders on the spot is cordial and there is no reason to fear immediate trouble. While I am of the opinion that the situation will get worse before it gets better, bringing with it possibilities of trouble, I do not see how you can do otherwise than authorise the use of the Division, which happens to be at the critical point, neither would any of the force wish you to do otherwise. We are disposed therefore for any possibility.**

**A more detailed appreciation on the present situation and current events follows in eight hours.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 448 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER (SAN FRANCISCO)

448

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister ( San Francisco)*

16 May 1945

Reference your emergency operations cable of 16 May.

The Division at the present moment finds itself carrying out a role fraught with political consequences of a grave nature.

In accordance with our orders we advanced across north-eastern Venezia towards Trieste, where such of the enemy as had not been cleared from the city by the Yugoslav Fourth Army surrendered to us. I was informed that an agreement had been reached between Marshal Tito and Field-Marshal Alexander that the port of Trieste and lines of communication through Gorizia to the north-west were to be used by us for supplying British armies operating towards Austria. <sup>1</sup>

On the spot, however, it has become clear that a serious divergence of views exists between our High Command and the Yugoslav Government as to how this agreement is to be interpreted. Following behind our advance were British port authorities and operating parties, an Area Headquarters, and officials of Allied Military Government, and it appears clear that the view of Field-Marshal Alexander was that we should occupy Venezia Giulia up to the Austrian frontier <sup>2</sup> in the same way that the remainder of Italy had been occupied.

The Yugoslav authorities have taken and are acting upon exactly the opposite view. They are regarding the agreement as one under which they would permit us to establish and use port and transport facilities in a Trieste and Venezia Giulia area controlled and run by them. They have stated now that they understood we would not send our troops east of

the Isonzo River, the natural boundary between **Venezia Giulia** and the remainder of northern **Italy**, and they are acting in a way which implies without question that they consider it is their form of Government and not the **Allied Military Government** which should be established there.

This has produced a situation which is not only fraught with political complications but even the risk of armed conflict with the Yugoslav Army.

From the military point of view the situation is briefly this: the Yugoslav Government consider that we have intruded into one of their operational zones and have asked us to withdraw behind the **Isonzo**. **Marshal Tito's** Chief of Staff added that they could not be responsible for the consequences if we did not. We have replied in strong terms that we would hold the Yugoslav Army responsible if fighting breaks out and have taken the necessary steps to dispose our troops to meet any outbreak of fighting.

On the political side the situation is that in the area of **Trieste** and **Gorizia**, and throughout **Venezia Giulia**, the Yugoslav Government is imposing vigorously its own political structure. The authorities under their sponsorship are running administration as part of **Yugoslavia** and crushing all opposition. This has involved not only the arrest of all Fascist elements, but of Italian national elements likely to oppose the incorporation of this area in **Yugoslavia**. The towns and villages are placarded with Tito posters and slogans. Yugoslav flags are flown everywhere and the Italian flag fired on unless it carries a red star in its centre. With the exception of the town of **Trieste**, the population between 16 and 49 is being mobilised, regardless of race, for service with the Yugoslav Army. All Italian Partisan organisations, even those that opposed the Germans, have been suppressed. A curfew has been enforced on the civilian population without reference to the Commander of our forces in **Trieste**. There have been reports of executions of opponents of the new regime, some of them of a summary nature. Movement of food from the outlying districts of **Trieste** has been controlled and, under present conditions, semi-starvation will soon prevail.



**These conditions are bearing hard on the Italians of Trieste, who form a large proportion of the population of that and other towns of the region, though they are accepted willingly by the Slovene population, long oppressed by the Italians. Our headquarters have been approached repeatedly by Italians seeking protection or evacuation, a fact which causes further possibilities of friction with the Yugoslavs, who regard us as potential protectors of their opponents.**

**Although we have had the assistance of the capable military mission to deal with the Yugoslav Army on military issues, our dealings are hampered by the lack of rulings on policy. The result is that we are getting into a position which offends both sides. We offend the Yugoslavs by remaining here in what they consider to be their territory and at least observing, even if not checking, actions they are carrying out. We offend the Italians and conservative elements of the population by standing by while in effect a revolution to bring the country under a Communist Yugoslavia is carried out around us. We are coping daily by *ad hoc* military decisions with events which have political implications of great complexity.**

**These are my views on the present situation and of its current developments, which are factual. I am glad we have an American and British detachment with us in Trieste. I have not expressed an opinion on the wider issue because I am not in a position to do so. I do feel that strong diplomatic action is needed rather than military force. I fully agree with the opinions you express in your cable. I am a little uncertain only when it comes to the application of any ideal or principle in Balkan countries, where terrible things have happened and are still happening. I feel, as you do, that a firm stand in this particular instance may deter and produce the solution that you seek. On the other hand, it would be wrong to base decisions on the assumption that Marshal Tito is bluffing. The situation may become worse before it is better, and the Allies must be prepared to enforce their will if necessary. I consider that with the shortage of troops here, and feeling as you do, full operational control of**

your Division should be given.

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<sup>1</sup> After discussions with **Marshal Tito** at Belgrade in February 1945, Field-Marshal Alexander on 30 April informed Tito of his intentions in respect of operations by Allied troops in **Venezia Giulia**. His plans were to secure the port of **Trieste** and lines of communication through **Italy** to **Trieste**, and to secure lines of communication from **Trieste** to **Austria** necessary for further advance into **Austria**. Tito's reply was that the situation had greatly changed since the Belgrade discussions in that the Yugoslavs had broken through the German defensive line from **Fiume** to **Trieste** and had already liberated 'nearly the whole of **Istria**'. He defined the western boundary of Yugoslav operations as the Isonzo River and, although prepared to grant the Allies the use of the ports of **Trieste** and Pola as well as the railway line **Trieste-Tarvisio** for supplying Allied troops in **Austria**, he asked in effect that Allied operations should stop at the Isonzo River line. Yugoslav military and civil authorities would, he said, continue to function in this area.

<sup>2</sup> Another version of this telegram reads: 'up to the 1939 frontiers'.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 449 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND (SAN FRANCISCO) TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER – [EXTRACT]

449

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand ( San Francisco) to the acting  
Prime Minister*

*[ Extract]*

16 May 1945

Thank you for your telegram of 16 May. <sup>1</sup> You will have received earlier today the pledge which Mr. Churchill has sent me that the proposed operations will not be concerned in any way with the internal affairs of **Yugoslavia**, in which none of the Allies desires to interfere. <sup>2</sup>

The immediate question, as I see it, is that of stopping aggression which, if unchecked, will inevitably extend in the instance of **Yugoslavia** beyond Italian territories to those of **Austria**, **Hungary**, and **Greece**, and the peace conference will be quite unable to compose the resulting situations which may lead to further wars. In other words, the present crisis calls not only for a stand on the immediate issue but on the future of a lasting peace.

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<sup>1</sup> Not published. In this telegram Mr. Nash repeated to the Prime Minister the views of individual members of **War Cabinet**.

<sup>2</sup> No. 450.

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In my view, unless the President and the Prime Minister of the **United Kingdom** are backed up now, it is not only the peace but the war appears to have been lost.... <sup>1</sup> We cannot, in my view, countenance on the part of **Yugoslavia**, or any other of our allies, a repetition of the

**smash and grab policy against which we went to war.**

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<sup>1</sup> **A personal reference has been omitted.**

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

450 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE ACTING  
PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

450

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the acting Prime  
Minister of New Zealand*

17 May 1945

Mr. Fraser at **San Francisco** has asked me to repeat to you the  
following personal message which I sent him on 15 May:

Many thanks for your message. <sup>2</sup> I gladly give the assurance you ask  
for in your last paragraph. The proposed operations will take place, if  
they do, on Italian not Yugoslav soil and will be in no way concerned  
with the internal affairs of **Yugoslavia**, in which we have no desire to  
interfere.

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<sup>2</sup> No. 445.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 451 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER (SAN FRANCISCO)<sup>3</sup> – [EXTRACT]

451

*General Freyberg to the Prime Minister ( San Francisco) <sup>3</sup>*

*[ Extract]*

20 May 1945

.... The general situation here is at the moment most unsatisfactory. There is the makings of trouble both here and in **Austria**. The Yugoslavs have moved a large force into and around **Trieste** and **Gorizia**. We are now following suit, and the 2nd American Corps are moving in between our 13th Corps and 5th British Corps in **Austria**. The 10th Indian Division is moving into line to the north of the New Zealand Division. When these moves are completed we shall be in a stronger position.

In considering the military side of this situation it is just as important not to overestimate the strength of the Yugoslav Army as it is [not] to underestimate it. Their army with its horses, its lack of heavy equipment and transport, compares unfavourably with Allied formations. In this war material has counted for much, and the Yugoslav Army is not upon a continental basis. Nevertheless, I want the **New Zealand Government** to know the fact that we are sitting at the point of greatest tension and that fighting may break out. If it does we must expect a number of casualties.... <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Nos. 447, 448, and 451 were repeated to Mr. Nash.

<sup>1</sup> The text omitted refers to the relief of the 6th and 7th Reinforcements and their return to New Zealand.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 452 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

452

### *The acting Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

23 May 1945

**Thank you for your messages. <sup>2</sup> We have considered the position very fully and carefully. The offer made by the Yugoslav Government <sup>3</sup> appears to open the way to a settlement of the dispute. Accepting the spirit of the words of this message, the **New Zealand Government** anticipate that an agreement will be reached that will avoid armed conflict and will give the Yugoslav Government and its forces the opportunity to work in harmony with the Allied forces in the area and in accord with the principles that you and President Truman have enunciated.**

**The progress already made since the receipt of your own and President Truman's messages is so great, and the principles for which we have fought so near to realisation, that we feel sure that a continuance of the negotiations in the spirit of the offer made by Tito will result in complete agreement and the attainment of your objective.**

**I am repeating this message to Mr. Fraser at **San Francisco** and to **General Freyberg**.**

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<sup>2</sup> **No. 450.** Another message from Mr. Churchill dated 14 May, enclosing the texts of President Truman's message to him and his reply (see [page 415, note 1](#)) has not been reproduced.

<sup>3</sup> **The New Zealand Government was advised of this offer in a**

telegram on 21 May from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, which read as follows:

The following note has today, 21 May, been received from the Yugoslav Government:

The Yugoslav Government agree to the establishment of the **Allied Military Government**, under the authority of the Allied Supreme Commander in the **Mediterranean**, in the Slovene littoral area on the basis of the demarcation line proposed by Field-Marshal Alexander, subject to certain minor modifications to be suggested later by the Yugoslav Government. At the same time, the Yugoslav Government in accepting in principle such a solution consider indispensable:

- (i) That representatives of the Yugoslav Army should be included in the military administration of this area.
- (ii) That units of the Yugoslav Army should remain in that area (being of course under the command of the Supreme Allied Commander in the **Mediterranean**).
- (iii) That, as it has been already stated in the proposals of Field-Marshal Alexander, the Allied Military Administration should act through the civil authorities which are already set up in that area.

The Yugoslav Government propose that the Governments of Great Britain and the **United States** start immediate negotiations with the Yugoslav Government in order to settle all questions in this connection.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 453 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER

453

*General Freyberg to the acting Prime Minister*

23 May 1945

**After a period of tension here, when it looked as if hostilities with the Yugoslav forces were imminent, the situation has eased considerably. The Yugoslav Government has sent a friendly note and, although there are still divergences of opinion which will require adjustment, I believe that the matter will be solved amicably and it will then be possible for the New Zealand Division to be released from its operational role. This may not be until the end of June. When the situation here allows, I will fly to Allied Force Headquarters to talk over the whole question of our possible move with Field-Marshal Alexander and his staff. These talks will only be of an exploratory nature. No action will be taken without your concurrence. I will keep War Cabinet in touch with opinion here.**

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

454 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

454

*The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

**30 June 1945**

**My immediately following telegram contains the text of a press report dated 27 June from the Yugoslav News Agency. I would be grateful if you would let me have the facts and your comments regarding the action allegedly taken by New Zealanders, and, in addition, if you would advise me of the present position in regard to the operational employment of the Division as well as the immediate prospects.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 455 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

455

*The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

30 June 1945

Reference my immediately preceding telegram.

**The following is the text of the report: The Trieste trade unions have sent cables to the British, Russian, French, and Italian trade union organisations protesting against the British and American Military Government's policy towards them. The protest alleges that the Military Government is confiscating and requisitioning trade union property and also making arrests, and appeals to the trade union organisations to do their utmost to end the Military Government's unfriendly policy.**

**According to the Yugoslav News Agency, New Zealanders have searched the Slovene Home of Culture in **Trieste** and made arrests.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 456 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER

456

*General Freyberg to the acting Prime Minister*

3 July 1945

Your telegram of 30 June.

The incident of the trades union cables appears to be part of a general Yugoslav press and radio campaign at present being carried out with the object of discrediting the **Allied Military Government** in the occupation zone of **Venezia Giulia**. On 24 June Headquarters Eighth Army ordered simultaneous parades throughout the Army area of all Partisan forces, who were publicly thanked and informed that as their task was done they were to be officially disbanded and would be required to hand in their arms forthwith. In Trieste there was an armed Partisan organisation known as the *Difesa Popolare*,<sup>1</sup> whose members consisted of imported Yugoslav sympathisers, local Slovenes, and political prisoners released from the local prisons by the Yugoslav forces after their arrival in May. As far as is known, the *Difesa Popolare* is not officially associated with the local trades unions, which have come to light only since May but which contain a proportion of Slovene working men. This *Difesa Popolare* had, since the departure of the regular Yugoslav Army on 12 June, taken up a very truculent and anti-Allied attitude, had been responsible for considerable looting and intimidation, and was proving a serious embarrassment to the **Allied Military Government** authorities. The strength of the organisation in **Trieste** was estimated at from two to three thousand. It was suspected that there might be a poor attendance of the *Difesa Popolare* on the 24 June parade, and that a plan might have been made to conceal at least a portion of their arms and munitions. Military guards were accordingly posted on the buildings known to be occupied by the *Difesa Popolare*

and these buildings were searched by British, American, and New Zealand military police who confiscated any arms and munitions found therein. This search was carried out while the parade was actually being held. In fact, the parade was well attended by some 1420 individuals who, in the main, appeared only too glad to hand in their arms. There were no incidents or disorders of any kind and at no stage was any military action in support of the police necessary. From the parade and from the search of the buildings a quantity of arms and munitions totalling approximately eighteen 3-ton lorry loads was removed. The so-called Slovene Home of Culture was, in fact, the former Italian Fascist headquarters in Trieste and is now in use as Allied Military Government offices. It was one of the buildings searched without incident by the Allied military police on 24 June.

In these difficult and often aggravating circumstances the conduct of the New Zealand troops was at all times exemplary.

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<sup>1</sup> Translated as 'Popular Defence' or 'People's Defence'.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 457 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER – [EXTRACT]

457

*General Freyberg to the acting Prime Minister*  
*[ Extract ]*

3 July 1945

The present position in **Trieste** and in **Venezia Giulia** generally has improved. After many conferences the Yugoslav forces have moved out of the immediate area **Trieste- Gorizia**. Thus the original line of communication is ensured for the Allied forces occupying **Austria**. It seems therefore that from the military point of view the situation now is satisfactory.

The actual move back from **Trieste** of the Yugoslav Army was carried out on 12 June, and on 24 June the Partisans were disbanded and their arms collected without incident.

I am certain that the part played by the New Zealand Division in this last difficult stage of operations here has had a far-reaching effect upon the Allied scheme for the occupation of **Austria**. I consider that we could now be relieved from our present operational role whenever our move is necessary. It is doubtful, however, if we will be relieved until the policy of the **New Zealand Government** as to future employment is finally announced.... <sup>1</sup>

Everyone is in great form and everything goes well.

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<sup>1</sup> Details concerning the return of long-service personnel to New Zealand and the disposal of equipment have been omitted. See Volume III, *Proposals for Participation in Operations against Japan* for policy as to future employment of the 2nd NZEF.



# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 458 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND<sup>1</sup> TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS<sup>2</sup>

458

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand*<sup>1</sup> to the Secretary of State for  
*Dominion Affairs*<sup>2</sup>

18 July 1945

From messages received earlier from **General Freyberg** it was understood that the New Zealand Division was expected to be withdrawn from operations by 20 June.<sup>3</sup> The Division is still in an operational role in **Trieste**, and we are anxious that it should be withdrawn as soon as possible and arrangements made to repatriate the men who are to return to New Zealand, particulars of whom were given in my telegram of 21 June last.<sup>4</sup> We should be glad, therefore, of very early advice of the date when the Division will be withdrawn from its operational role.

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Fraser had arrived back in New Zealand on 5 Jul.

<sup>2</sup> This telegram was repeated to **General Freyberg** on 19 Jul.

<sup>3</sup> See page 437, note 2.

<sup>4</sup> See *R eturn of 2nd Division to New Zealand* (No. 469).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 459 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

459

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

22 July 1945

Reference your telegram of 19 July. <sup>5</sup> We begin the move today from **Trieste** to a concentration area north of **Rome**. <sup>6</sup> The move will be completed in twelve days, except for part of the Armoured Brigade which is remaining in the present area until the **New Zealand Government's** policy is finalised. As soon as we are concentrated in the new area, I shall withdraw the 8th Reinforcements and send them to Advanced Base ready for onward passage to New Zealand when shipping is available.

A further cable dealing with the short-comings of shipping follows. <sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> No. 458.

<sup>6</sup> Near Lake Trasimene.

<sup>7</sup> Not published. Contained details of the shipping programme for the repatriation of New Zealand personnel from **Italy** and the **Middle East** to New Zealand and the composition of later drafts to be returned.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

460 – THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS TO THE  
PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

460

*The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

**2 August 1945**

**Your telegram of 18 July ( No. 458) regarding the withdrawal of the  
2nd New Zealand Division from operations in Italy. The Division  
commenced to hand over its present role in Trieste on 22 July and is  
moving down to the Spoleto area.**

**No specific date has been given for the completion of the move but  
the assumption is that it will be in the very near future.**

**DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II**

**RETURN OF 2ND DIVISION TO NEW ZEALAND**

## *Return of 2nd Division to New Zealand*

461

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

6 May 1945

Now that the war in **Europe** and danger of battle casualties is over and the 15th Reinforcements are available in Egypt after six weeks' training, it would appear opportune for me to accelerate the **New Zealand Government's** replacement scheme by sending back immediately the 6th and 7th Reinforcements, which number approximately 3000. This will necessitate special shipping arrangements being made. Before any steps are taken I must first be relieved of my present operational role and I would appreciate having the approval of **War Cabinet**. The despatch of the 6th and 7th Reinforcements would reduce the number of troops exposed to malaria, although for the time we remain in **Italy** we would be under strength, but when we join up with the 15th Reinforcements in Egypt that would be remedied. Will you say if **War Cabinet** concurs in my proposal?

462

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence* <sup>1</sup>

8 May 1945

I am happy to report that notwithstanding the recent strenuous campaign all members of the force are in the best of spirits and morale is very high. Now that the war in **Europe** is over it is easy to understand that inquiry is already being made as to the future. I realise this matter is under consideration and that some weeks may elapse before the **New Zealand Government** make their decision. I feel that a short interim statement to meet the present situation should be made to all ranks of the 2nd NZEF in the Central Mediterranean Forces.

This would tend to anticipate and allay possible dissatisfaction among long-service personnel and equally give an incentive to more

recent reinforcements to keep fit and efficient. It would seem

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<sup>1</sup> This telegram was also sent to the Prime Minister at **San Francisco**, via the New Zealand Military Liaison Officer, **London**.

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desirable to publish at an early date a statement regarding the policy of replacement and possible future participation in the **Pacific**. I have therefore prepared the following statement for **War Cabinet's** consideration: <sup>1</sup>

The New Zealand Government's policy was announced in October of last year to the effect that the replacement scheme would be carried on so that all long-service men would go home to New Zealand and be replaced from men drawn from industry. This policy has been carried out in the past and the First, Second, and Third Echelons, together with the 4th and 5th Reinforcements, in all 16,000 men, have been sent home to New Zealand. With the arrival in Egypt of the 15th Reinforcements and the finish of the war in **Europe**, we are now in a position to speed up the replacement scheme.

Under the original plan, it was considered that the 6th Reinforcements would be withdrawn in June, when the 15th Reinforcements were available in the field, and the 7th Reinforcements in September. It is now proposed to send the 6th Reinforcements at once, with the 7th Reinforcements to follow as soon as possible, or perhaps even at the same time. This will have the effect of reducing the strength of the Division in **Italy** to between 3000 and 4000 below War Establishment. This can be accepted under the existing circumstances but not before Field-Marshal Alexander releases us from our present operational role here in **Italy**. <sup>2</sup>

Regarding the war in the **Pacific**, an announcement of possible policy will be made by the **New Zealand Government** in the near future. It is obviously desirable that New Zealand land forces should be represented. It is not possible for us to give any guidance in the matter

as the question is still under consideration between the New Zealand and British Governments and, furthermore, is dependent upon shipping. When a decision is reached it is certain that men with long service overseas will go back to New Zealand and that men with short service overseas would be used in any future operations.

An early reply would be most helpful.

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<sup>1</sup> Several changes were made by **War Cabinet** to the text of this statement. **General Freyberg** was advised of these changes in a telegram dated 16 May, in which it was stated that 'the purpose of these amendments is to give special emphasis to the importance of shipping at this juncture.'

At this time ships were required for the deployment of forces from **Europe** and the **Middle East** for the war against **Japan**.

<sup>2</sup> See *Trieste*.

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463

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand ( San Francisco) to the acting Prime Minister*

14 May 1945

Your telegram of 12 May. <sup>3</sup> I fully agree with the terms of **Freyberg's** proposed statement regarding replacement and possible future participation of the Division in the **Pacific**, and with **War Cabinet's** proposal that a similar statement should be made in New Zealand. I cannot usefully offer any comments on the future of the Division until I have received the Chiefs of Staff appreciation. <sup>1</sup> I feel that we will need to take into consideration the effect on public opinion in New Zealand of **Eisenhower's** statement here that no soldier who has served in both the North African and European campaigns should be sent to the **Pacific**.

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<sup>3</sup> See Volume III, *Proposals for Participation in Operations*

*against Japan*. Mr. Nash reported that there was general speculation in New Zealand on the future of the 2nd Division and public desire for a definite statement of the **New Zealand Government's** intentions. He stated that **War Cabinet** considered an interim statement should be made informing the public of the stage reached in the Government's negotiations.

<sup>1</sup> Volume III, *Proposals for Participation in Operations against Japan*.

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464  
*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence* <sup>2</sup>  
[ Extract ]

15 May 1945

I know from your telegram of 3 February <sup>3</sup> that the New Zealand War Cabinet 'are very anxious that the Division should be maintained as long as possible'. While I do not wish to influence the New Zealand War Cabinet in making their decision, in view of their stated desire and the changed manpower position I am putting forward fresh proposals which I believe would enable the **New Zealand Government** to retain the 2nd New Zealand Division in the field to the end of 1946. I am, of course, not in a position to know if the proposal is a practical one from the New Zealand manpower point of view.

In making my appreciation to **War Cabinet** in February of possible requirements for 1945, I had to be conservative. <sup>4</sup> Although I thought the war would be over by the end of June, provision had to be made to carry on to November. There was another aspect of planning for the future. The fighting in **Italy** during 1944 had been hard, with heavy casualties, and should the Division be engaged through the summer of 1945 it would be exhausted. This would necessitate the replacement not only of the 6th, 7th, and 8th, but probably the 9th and 10th Reinforcements, before embarking on a fresh theatre of war.

The quick and comparatively inexpensive end to the war with

**Germany** has changed the manpower situation which appeared to face the **New Zealand Government** earlier in the year.

In the first place the offensive, fierce while it lasted, was only of twenty-three days' duration from D-day to the day of capitulation, and during the last eight of which we had little fighting. Casualties have been less than had been allowed for and the future wastage for 1945 reduced to loss by sickness. The result is to reduce by 3000 the estimated wastage to the end of 1945 as visualised in your telegram of 8 April. <sup>1</sup>

As reported, we had strengthened the Division for this summer offensive by returning all war-weary personnel and by adding a third infantry brigade. When the Division took the field it was in excellent condition and, in view of the little fighting it has done, it is still fresh and fit to go on should the need arise.

If such a course were adopted, I feel that although the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th Reinforcements should return at once it is for consideration whether the 10th Reinforcements, who have been only one year eight months in the war theatre, with comparatively little fighting, should be returned. No personnel to date have been returned to New Zealand with less than three years and six months' service. With regard to 3rd Division other ranks, few fought in the last battles. Although their service overseas may entitle them to be considered, it is early to think of their relief. I feel that the 3rd Division personnel, especially as they have all had a period in New Zealand, should stay for further service overseas if the Division goes on to another theatre. In pursuance of this policy I would suggest that only a percentage of the time spent in the Islands should count for purposes of replacement.

If these two proposals are agreed to by **War Cabinet**, and I feel they are fair, then the position at the end of 1945 would be as follows:

<b>Overseas strength in all ranks of the 2nd NZEF on 5 May 1945</b>	<b>29,100</b>
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<b>Less all ranks to return to New Zealand at once:</b>		
( a) Tongariro		130
( b) 6th Reinforcements		1300
( c) 7th Reinforcements		2400
( d) 8th Reinforcements		4500
( e) 9th Reinforcements		2800
( f) Officers 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th Reinforcements	525	11,655
Leaving		17,445
Add 15th and 16th Reinforcements		6,500
<b>Total</b>		<b>23,945</b>
Less wastage one-third of battle casualties	315	
Seven months' no activity wastage	630	
		945
<b>Approximate total overseas at end of 1945</b>		<b>23,000</b>
		<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Repeated to Mr. Fraser at **San Francisco**.

<sup>3</sup> See *Maintenance of 2nd New Zealand Division* (No. 415).

<sup>4</sup> See *Maintenance of 2nd New Zealand Division* (No. 419).

<sup>1</sup> See Volume III, *Proposals for Participation in Operations against Japan*.

<sup>2</sup> See Volume III, *Proposals for Participation in Operations against Japan*, for rest of text.

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465

*The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg* <sup>1</sup>

16 May 1945

Your telegram of 6 May ( **No. 461**). We are very anxious that as many men as can be spared be returned to New Zealand as soon as possible,

and have noted with interest your proposal for the return of the 6th and 7th Reinforcements subject to the release of the Division from its present operational role. We would not of course wish, by preferring such a request at this juncture, to cause any embarrassment to the Commander-in-Chief, and would be glad if, in order that we might consider the matter further, you could advise us whether or not it has been discussed with Field-Marshal Alexander and what views he holds. Provided Alexander agrees, then we would raise the question of shipping with the **United Kingdom** authorities.

We have, however, just been informed by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs <sup>2</sup> that plans have been prepared for the allocation of troop transport capacity during the next six months. These provide for the movement of 20,000 from the New Zealand Division in the first quarter and 2700 in the second (an estimated percentage of 66) subject to the approval of the **Combined Chiefs of Staff** and the United Kingdom Government. These plans are moreover liable to modification in the light of operational requirements in the war against **Japan**. If these arrangements mature then a substantial proportion of the Division will, in any case, be returned to New Zealand before the end of September, which is entirely in accordance with our wishes.

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<sup>1</sup> Repeated to Mr. Fraser at **San Francisco**.

<sup>2</sup> The information contained in this paragraph is a summary of advice received by the **New Zealand Government** in two telegrams dated 10 May from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs. The telegrams have not been reproduced in this volume.

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466  
*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

23 May 1945

While I appreciate that the bigger question of the ultimate

destination of the 2nd NZEF is a matter of high policy to be determined by **War Cabinet**, I have felt for some time that there are matters of detail, such as the disposal of divisional equipment and the method of return of the New Zealand Division, that should be discussed independently of the final decision.

The role in which we are now employed <sup>1</sup> appears likely to last for anything from one or more months, after which we will be relieved by another division. Our operational employment will then be finished.

I assume that no matter what the final decision may be, the whole of the 2nd NZEF will be concentrated in Egypt. There we can either reorganise for future employment or else embark in one lift or by stages for New Zealand.

It will, I know, take some time to arrange for shipping. Embarkation will probably be from **Taranto**. When the main decision has been made, I propose that the Division and other troops in **Italy** should be withdrawn to the south and embarked for Egypt.

The question of the movement of personnel of the 2nd NZEF to Egypt is straightforward, but it is complicated by the question of the disposal of equipment, which must be dependent on shipping and your own future equipment requirements in New Zealand. All our present equipment is, I understand, the property of the **New Zealand Government** and, if they so desire, could be taken to New Zealand. This would require, however, a greater quantity of shipping. You will recall that in the move from Egypt to **Italy**, whereas seven ships were required for personnel, forty-two were needed for vehicles and heavy equipment. If, however, it is not all required in New Zealand, the disposal of it is presumably a matter for negotiation between the **United Kingdom** and New Zealand Governments. Whether or not the equipment is disposed of here affects planning considerably.

So much for the problem of the war equipment of the Division. The second question I want to consider is the return of the New Zealand

**Division to New Zealand. Is the force to go back by drafts depending on length of service, or as a Division by units, or a combination of both? This question is not a simple one and I am dealing with various aspects of it in a further cable. <sup>2</sup>**

**In your telegram of 16 May you quote the provisional plans for the allocation of troop transport between Egypt and New Zealand. The supply offered to you is most encouraging and exceeds expectations, both in the speed with which it is to be made available and the numbers to be returned. If this schedule can be fulfilled and we can get the Division clear of operational commitments in the next few weeks, we could make the necessary arrangements at this end. It is certain that there is no time to be lost in making arrangements for the transfer home of 20,000 men by September, and to ensure against loss of time an early decision should be given upon the following questions:**

**When released from operational control:**

- (i) Is the Division going back to New Zealand?**
- (ii) Do you want some of the 2nd New Zealand Division for future service against **Japan**?**
- (iii) What equipment, if any, do you want to take back to New Zealand?**

**As the whole question of the return of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force to New Zealand is most involved and has political aspects, I am preparing for your consideration a separate appreciation on this question, which follows at once.**

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<sup>1</sup> See

**467**  
*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

**4 June 1945**

**In continuation of my telegram of 23 May. It is realised that no decision has as yet been made by the **New Zealand Government** as to the future war effort of the New Zealand forces against **Japan**. In view of your manpower difficulties and the importance of the early return of the 6th and 7th Reinforcements, some forecast has to be made to enable the **New Zealand Government** to order the necessary shipping. Our estimated requirements are based, therefore, on the assumption that the force will concentrate in Egypt, that the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th Reinforcements will return to New Zealand by the quickest route, and that the remainder of the Division, plus the 16th Reinforcements, will reorganise for possible future operations in South-East Asia Command or other theatre. Once the Division is released from operational duties, on a date to be known as D-day, it will be possible for us to embark men for Egypt as fast as shipping can be provided in **Italy** and Egypt, subject to the ten days' journey to **Taranto** and the possible delay of the handing-in of our surplus equipment at Ordnance bases at **Naples**. Should it be necessary from the shipping point of view to embark all or part of those returning direct to New Zealand from **Italy**, this could probably be done, but presents many disadvantages over spending a short period in Egypt.**

**As instructed, I have now conferred with Field-Marshal Alexander, who fully appreciates the difficult manpower situation in New Zealand and wishes to do all he can to help. He feels, however, that the present unsatisfactory Yugoslav position which keeps the New Zealand forces in Northern **Italy** will resolve itself in the course of a few days. In his opinion it will be safe to forecast D-day at the latest between 14 and 30**

**June. The move from Trieste to Taranto will be in our own MT and will take ten days. Although we are now 1100 below War Establishment as a result of sending off the 6th Reinforcements, we have examined the possibility of sending 70 per cent of the 7th Reinforcements as soon as possible and will get the remainder of the 7th Reinforcements, plus the 8th, away as soon as we get the Division to Taranto. If shipping is available, it is quite possible that the 6th and part of the 7th Reinforcements, amounting to approximately 3500, could embark from Egypt by 14 July, and the remainder of the 7th, plus the 8th, in all 5200, by D plus 40. The whole of the remainder of the 2nd NZEF could be concentrated in Egypt by D plus 60, and the 9th and 10th Reinforcements, less certain key personnel, would be ready to commence embarkation by D plus 80.**

**To sum up:**

**D-day between 14 June and 30 June.**

**14 July: 6th and part of the 7th Reinforcements (3500 in all) embark in Egypt for New Zealand.**

**D plus 40: Remainder of the 7th, plus the 8th (5200 in all) embark in Egypt for New Zealand.**

**D plus 60: Remainder of the NZEF concentrated in Egypt.**

**D plus 80: 9th and 10th Reinforcements (7500 in all) embark in Egypt for New Zealand.**

**D plus 80 to D plus 170: New Zealand force re-equipping and training.**

**D plus 170: New Zealand force ready to move to possible theatre of war.**

**These figures do not include ex-3rd Division men or all entitled officers of the 6th to 10th Reinforcements. If these are added the total will be 2000 more. It must be pointed out that shipping from Italy to**

**Egypt must be available so that the reinforcements returning to New Zealand arrive in Egypt ten days before embarkation for New Zealand. At the present time, Allied Force Headquarters reports that there is no indication of shipping to Egypt being available, and this will probably be the case until a decision is reached on the whole major question of shipping.**

**468**

***The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg***

**8 June 1945**

**Thank you for your telegram of 4 June. We note the arrangements proposed with respect to the withdrawal and moving of the force from Italy to Egypt and concur in the action you propose taking. If there should be any way that we can assist in connection with the provision of the necessary shipping then doubtless you will let us know.**

**469**

***The acting Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs***

**21 June 1945**

**We have been informed by General Freyberg of his plans for the return to New Zealand of those men of the Division whom he has decided will be repatriated. <sup>1</sup> There is a total altogether of 20,700, and we are anxious and very much hope that you will find it possible to meet us in this and to arrange that the shipping is available about the dates that the men are ready to leave. This will ensure that those men who will normally return to food production and associated industries of high priority in New Zealand are available to accept employment at the earliest possible date.**

**Shipping from Egypt will be required as follows:**

**14 July        5000**

30 July 5500  
30 September

Total 20,000 all ranks

An early assurance that shipping will be available for the repatriation of these men on the dates required would be appreciated.

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<sup>1</sup> Two telegrams from **General Freyberg** on 10 Jun, giving the numbers to be repatriated in the 6th to 10th Reinforcements and reclassified ex-3rd Division personnel (a total of 20,700), have not been reproduced. In the second of these telegrams **General Freyberg** asked the **New Zealand Government** to make representations to the United Kingdom Government for the provision of shipping.

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## 470 *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

6 July 1945

As you will realise, the schedule of shipping asked for in my telegram of 10 June <sup>1</sup> was based on the assumption that we would be relieved from our operational role by 20 June. We could in fact have been relieved by 20 June, but it is now 6 July and we are still in **Trieste**. Shipping arrangements have now been confirmed for the 6th and 7th Reinforcements, who are scheduled to leave Egypt about the middle to end of July as originally estimated. D-day, as in my telegram of 10 June, <sup>2</sup> for the move of the remainder of force, is not yet known. Consequently the original forecast of shipping dates will have to be revised. Further, shipping and equipment problems are clearly interdependent, and it seems likely that **War Office** intends to treat equipment and the move of 2nd NZEF as one problem. The War Office are awaiting official confirmation of the **New Zealand Government's** decision for the provision of the force against **Japan** <sup>3</sup> before setting the necessary arrangements in train. We presume that they will take into account our problems of movement to the port of embarkation in **Italy**, and the time factor involved in any handing-in of equipment here, by giving us adequate notice of shipping arrangements.



<sup>1</sup> Not published. The schedule is that given in **No. 469**.

<sup>2</sup> Not published. **General Freyberg** advised that D-day could be taken as approximately 20 Jun.

<sup>3</sup> See Volume III, *Proposals for Participation in Operations against Japan*.

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471

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs*

4 August 1945

With reference to our message of 21 June ( **No. 469**) concerning shipping for the repatriation of personnel of the 2nd New Zealand Division returning to the Dominion.

Early advice would be appreciated of the proposed plans for the repatriation of personnel from **Italy** and the **Middle East**. We have been advised that one vessel with a capacity of 3600 has been allotted and is due to sail almost immediately from the **Middle East**. <sup>4</sup> Some 15,300 all ranks (2300 officers and 13,000 other ranks) <sup>1</sup> will then remain, and from advice just received we understand that another large trooper has been allocated. We do not know, however, when this vessel is likely to depart.

The many demands upon shipping resources at this time for the deployment of forces in new theatres of operations and the return of others to their own countries are recognised, but we are most anxious to ensure that all personnel of the Division to be repatriated should be returned to New Zealand as soon as possible. We must point out that the early return of men from the **Middle East** to New Zealand will assist us in maintaining, and if possible increasing, supplies of foodstuffs, and in providing housing and other essential services for the rehabilitation of

service personnel. The majority of the men in the reinforcement draft at present awaiting despatch have been withdrawn from food production and other primary and essential industries, and the earliest possible return of men from **Italy** and the **Middle East** to replace them, to provide for expansion of essential activities, and to ensure the despatch of further reinforcements for the **Pacific** land force, would therefore be of the greatest assistance to us.

In view of the services rendered by the New Zealand Division in the **Middle East** and **Europe** since the beginning of the war with **Germany** until its end, we trust that arrangements will be made to ensure repatriation to New Zealand at the earliest possible date, whether via the **Middle East** or **Panama**, of all men who are to return. We would much appreciate very early advice of your proposals.

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<sup>4</sup> This telegram from **General Freyberg**, dated 22 Jul, is not published. The vessel was the *Strathaird*.

<sup>1</sup> The above should read: (2300 all ranks from the Middle East Forces and 13,000 all ranks from the Central Mediterranean Forces). These were the grand totals of a table giving the numbers awaiting repatriation after the departure of the *Stratbaird* which was included in **General Freyberg's** telegram of 22 Jul to the Minister of Defence.

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472

*The Prime Minister to General Freyberg ( London) <sup>2</sup>*

14 August 1945

I have to thank you for your telegram of 11 August. <sup>3</sup> Except that we are endeavouring to prepare for demobilisation at the quickest possible rate, our plans are also at a standstill. A further telegram on policy will depend on the Japanese reaction, and meanwhile I think you should stay in **London**. In anticipation of the cessation of hostilities, **War Cabinet** are of the opinion that you should make personal representations to **War**

**Office** and to the Ministry of War Transport regarding transport. Apart from the question of the return of the 11th and later Reinforcements, we are disturbed at the prospect of delays in bringing the main body of 20,000 men back to New Zealand. From recent reports it would appear there is a likelihood of unrest amongst the men in Egypt, <sup>1</sup> and for this and every other reason we feel we should take all possible steps to obtain the necessary shipping. Please ask **Campbell** <sup>2</sup> to show you our previous telegrams to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs on the transport situation. <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> **General Freyberg** had gone to **London** at the end of July to discuss with **War Office** plans for the repatriation of the 2nd Division and for the participation of a New Zealand force in the war against **Japan**.

<sup>3</sup> See Volume III, *Proposals for Participation in Operations against Japan*. **General Freyberg** advised that plans for the participation of an Empire land force in operations against the mainland of **Japan** were at a standstill as a result of the Japanese surrender offer on 10 Aug.

<sup>1</sup> In a telegram to the Minister of Defence on 13 Aug (not published) **General Freyberg** suggested that he should take advantage of his presence in **London** to discuss with the **War Office** the possibility of arranging leave in the **United Kingdom** for New Zealand troops in **Italy** awaiting repatriation. 'To date the men have been good humoured and have given little trouble,' he said, 'but they are being called upon to face a period under trying conditions, and it is probable that there may be unrest after a time. I feel that the offer of short leave to the **United Kingdom** would do much to avoid possible trouble.'

The proposal was approved by the Government.

<sup>2</sup> **Dr. R. M. Campbell**, Official Secretary to the High Commissioner for New Zealand in the **United Kingdom**; Chairman of the **Public Service Commission**, 1 Nov 1946-.

473

*General Freyberg ( London) to the Prime Minister*

16 August 1945

Your telegram of 14 August. Shipping discussions at the **War Office** show that the whole question of allocations is now being considered on the broadest lines. They estimate that no statement of policy could be expected for from seven to fourteen days from the day of the Japanese surrender. I represented the New Zealand point of view to the **War Office**, who held out little hope of the existing arrangements being speeded up as, with the successful conclusion of the Japanese war, the Chiefs of Staff will have to compete with civilian ministries for shipping priorities. As you know, a great deal depends upon whether the **United States** demands can be reduced. It seems doubtful if existing military plans will be speeded up. I have done what I can on my level, but matters of policy of allocation are on too high a plane for me to do much good. I feel that the best plan is for you to cable direct to the British Prime Minister, as all other interests are doing. I am watching the situation here in **London**, and as soon as the United Kingdom Government's policy is issued will cable you my appreciation and outline plan for the return of the force to New Zealand.

474

*General Freyberg ( London) to the Prime Minister*

28 August 1945

Reference your telegram of 28 August. <sup>1</sup> I am sorry that I have not been able to send any shipping programme as the question of priorities in shipping is being dealt with on a Cabinet level and no decision is likely to be given until 10 September. I have certain facts and figures that I have gained by my contacts in the **War Office**, and for what they are worth I send you the following observations. These facts and figures

are certain to undergo changes before they are cabled to you officially through Government channels. I need hardly say that it is being dealt with on a very high level and that I take no part in any of the deliberations.

I have seen the **War Office** shipping plans. So far as I can find out the proposals for shipping the New Zealand Forces from the **Mediterranean** theatre of war are as follows. In arriving at these figures some fresh priorities as a result of the cessation of hostilities against **Japan** have to be provided for.

**Priority one: Movement of occupational troops.**

**Priority two: Repatriation of prisoners of war from the **Far East**.**

**Priority three: Movement back of PYTHON<sup>2</sup> and long-service British troops, and the repatriation of Dominion forces.**

No figures can yet be given as firm. The whole shipping situation is being reviewed on 4 September by the Chiefs of Staff and on 8 September by **War Cabinet**. The decision will be given on 10 September. At the moment the latest figures from the **War Office** for shipping to New Zealand are as follows:

(1) Mid-September from <b>Italy</b> and Egypt	2,400
(2) October to December from <b>Italy</b>	13,000
(3) January to March from <b>Italy</b>	9,100
Total	24,500

Lift No. 1 above is firm and provision for this number will be made. If 5000 troops for the occupational brigade are found from the **Mediterranean** area, this will reduce our total from lift No. 2 by that number. It must be clearly understood that since I have got these figures through unofficial sources they cannot in any sense be taken as official, and I would be glad if you do not comment on them to the **United Kingdom**. No decision is possible, therefore, until after 10 September.

<sup>1</sup> Not published. The Prime Minister in this telegram requested information on details of the **United Kingdom** leave scheme proposals, and stated that Cabinet was concerned at the possible effect of a public announcement about the scheme being made in New Zealand before the arrangements for the return of the Division had been announced.

<sup>2</sup> This was the code-name given to the British scheme, which came into operation in September 1943, for the exchange between the **United Kingdom** and overseas theatres and garrisons of personnel who had had long service overseas.

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*The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

30 August 1945

Our inability to obtain any indication of the plans of His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom** for the provision of shipping for the return of New Zealand personnel in the **Middle East** who are now awaiting repatriation to New Zealand, is causing my colleagues and I much concern. One vessel is already *en route* to New Zealand and we understand that another ship is projected to leave in September. We are being embarrassed by the present uncertainty, not only as a result of feelings among relatives, but also in view of the persistent and reasonable demands on the part of food production, rehabilitation, and other most essential industries for skilled labour, large elements of which are included amongst all groups of the men at present awaiting return. We trust that for these reasons, and for those advanced in my telegram of 4 August to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs ( **No. 471**), early and adequate shipping can be provided. An immediate indication of the plans for the return of the personnel now awaiting transport in Egypt and **Italy** would be welcomed.

476

# *The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

**1 September 1945**

**Your telegram of 30 August.**

**I regret that it has not been possible earlier to give you details of our plans for the repatriation of your forces, but I am sure you will realise that the rapidly changing situation has involved a complete review of all the available shipping and the drawing up of new plans. The **Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington** are now undertaking this review for the period October 1945 to June 1946, and I can at once assure you that New Zealand claims to shipping space will be considered alongside those of the **United Kingdom** and other parts of the British Commonwealth. It will not be possible to let you know how many New Zealanders can be moved from October onwards until this review is completed.**

**However, I am able to tell you that the *Strathaird*<sup>1</sup> is now on its way to you from Egypt carrying 3700 of your people (this includes some families), and the *Dominion Monarch*<sup>2</sup>, with another 750, from the **United Kingdom**. In addition, the *Strathmore*<sup>3</sup> is due to sail from Egypt in September with 4000 men, and the *Stirling Castle*<sup>4</sup> from the **United Kingdom** with 4500.**

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<sup>1</sup> **Peninsular and Oriental Line, 22,281 tons.**

<sup>2</sup> **Shaw Savill and Albion Company, 27,155 tons.**

<sup>3</sup> **Peninsular and Oriental Line, 23,428 tons.**

<sup>4</sup> **Union-Castle Mail Steamship Company, Ltd., 25,550 tons.**

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## *United Kingdom*

**6 September 1945**

In view of the distances involved and the fact that our Division has been kept in **Europe** and the **Middle East** since the first year of the war, we feel that some special consideration should be given to our claims for urgent repatriation. It is disappointing to learn from your telegram of 1 September that the most that can be indicated regarding shipping to bring our troops to New Zealand is that our claims will be considered alongside those of others. Apart from the reasons put forward in my telegram of 30 August ( **No. 475**), there is, in addition, the question of possible unrest, amongst the troops who have already been held for some months in **Italy** and in the **Middle East**. Therefore, I must most earnestly request that strong representations be made to the **Combined Chiefs of Staff** in **Washington** for special consideration to be given to the early transport home of New Zealand troops. <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> A copy of this telegram was also sent to the New Zealand Minister at **Washington** (Mr. C. A. Berendsen), who was requested to discuss the matter personally with Field-Marshal Wilson to seek his support of the Government's representations at meetings of the **Combined Chiefs of Staff**.

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**478**

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

**8 September 1945**

Your telegram of 6 September. I fully realise and sympathise with your keen desire for the urgent repatriation of New Zealand troops. We are reviewing as a matter of extreme urgency our overall shipping commitments and resources in the light of the changed situation; but I feel bound to tell you that even greater shortages of shipping than we had feared are revealed by our examination to date. The points you make about the long distance from home and the length of time abroad of New



**Zealand troops will be taken fully into account when making up the balance sheet. Now that operational movements of **United States** forces to the **Pacific** can no longer be claimed to have overriding priority, we shall be approaching the Americans to ask for a larger share of the available shipping.**

**479**

***General Freyberg to the Prime Minister***

**18 September 1945**

**Reference your telegram of 17 September. <sup>1</sup>**

**My previous statement has been corrected in accordance with your proposed amendments, and I agree that no statement should be made in **Italy** before yours has been made in New Zealand. I suggest that Saturday, 22 September, would be a suitable date.**

**While I agree that our efforts to get suitable shipping allocated should be stressed to all ranks, it is not easy for me to suggest here that we should have better treatment than **United Kingdom** troops. I feel that the situation could be dealt with better at a conference than as an official statement, and I propose to do so at my conference on Saturday when the whole matter will be dealt with.**

**Dealing with the scale of accommodation, I do not think we have had any trouble over accommodation standards on board returning troopships. Although it would be good to press this matter on the United Kingdom Government, I feel that to emphasise that there is a possibility of bad accommodation to the troops would be unwise. Further, our men do not expect the same standards as in 1940 to apply in 1945, at the end of a long war when passenger shipping losses have been heavy. The general feeling here is that the troops are prepared to accept the conditions obtaining on board transports, provided that by doing so they will be enabled to return at the earliest date. Such trouble as we have knowledge of in the past has in nearly every case been attributable to the despatch of troops in hastily assembled drafts whose officers and**

NCOs were without previous knowledge of their men. All possible steps will be taken to avoid this happening.

Our main object in initiating the proposition for leave to the **United Kingdom** was to alleviate the long period of waiting among those troops who would otherwise be forced to remain in **Italy** until the spring of next year. If we attempt to despatch men on leave to the **United Kingdom** out of their correct reinforcement drafts, as we should if we send the occupational force, not only should we cause resentment among the old hands but we would complicate the leave scheme for the remainder of the troops in **Italy** to such an extent that the scheme would not be workable. Our own problems in concentrating and training the occupational force are not easy and can only be carried out with careful arrangement. It is to be pointed out that half of the occupational force is still in **Egypt** with the 15th Reinforcements, and that they will require considerable reorganisation and training before being despatched to **Japan**. I do not see how the occupational force can be concentrated in **Italy** and fully trained before the end of November. Should leave be granted to them it would delay their despatch for at least two months.

To sum up, I feel that if a clear statement of policy is made during the next few days, all will go smoothly according to plan:

- (i) The occupational force could be assembled quickly from the single men of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Reinforcements and shipped East direct from **Italy**; and,
- (ii) the 8th, 9th, and 10th Reinforcements would leave in succession for home; and,
- (iii) meanwhile the **United Kingdom** leave scheme would start to operate for personnel awaiting return to New Zealand. In my opinion, there would be little disappointment or trouble.

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<sup>1</sup> On 13 Sep **General Freyberg** had submitted for the Government's approval the draft of a statement on the return of personnel to New Zealand, the provision of an occupation force for **Japan**, and the **United Kingdom** leave scheme. This statement was approved on 17 Sep by the Prime Minister, who

suggested, however, that more emphasis should be given in it to the efforts being made to obtain the best possible shipping facilities for the voyage home, and further, that the troops selected to garrison **Japan** should also be given leave in the **United Kingdom**.

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480

## *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

9 October 1945

My work as your Force Commander is now nearly finished. I am to report that all major decisions have now been made for getting the 2nd NZEF back to New Zealand. The Division is in winter quarters in **Florence** and **Siena** with good amenities. The **United Kingdom** leave scheme is about to begin and 105 all ranks per day are going to the **United Kingdom** by motor transport, with the women's services going by train through **Switzerland**. The new club staff has arrived in **London**, where I understand the Club will be opened shortly. The **United Kingdom** leave scheme is popular. <sup>1</sup>

**Jayforce** is coming into being on or about 15 October and it will be built up and organised in the course of two months. <sup>2</sup> We are having to detail a number of key men and most of the officers from reinforcements earlier than the 13ths. In view of your desire for leave to England for **Jayforce** personnel, <sup>3</sup> we are arranging to send about 100 officers and men of all earlier reinforcement drafts posted to **Jayforce** with the first leave party. They will return before the force leaves for **Japan**.

We have now completed arrangements for handing in equipment. This is going ahead smoothly and will be completed in the course of a few weeks.

The general condition of the troops is good but there is a certain degree of restlessness. Provided we can keep the constant flow of men to New Zealand at a reasonable rate there should be no trouble. I wish it were possible to know when all will be back in New Zealand. A rough

statement of the position is as follows:

Present total strength in Egypt	6,300
Present total strength in Italy	16,200
Grand total	22,500
SS <i>Mooltan</i> to New Zealand, early November	3,100
Jayforce to Japan, December	4,000
Possible further ship to New Zealand, December	4,000
Total to go from Egypt and Italy in last quarter of 1945	11,100

The position at the end of the year in the Mediterranean theatre, taking the above forecast, will be:

Strength in Egypt	2,500
Strength in Italy	8,900
Total	11,400

If we get subsequent ships nearly every month, plus one more lift by the hospital ship *Oranje*<sup>4</sup> taking 800, all New Zealand troops should have left the Mediterranean in March 1946. This, of course, is only an estimate.

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<sup>1</sup> See page 439, note 1.

<sup>2</sup> See Volume III, *Participation in Occupation of Japan*.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 443, note 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Nederland N.V. Stoomvaart Maatschappij*, 20,017 tons.

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As far as I can see, there should now be no further need for me to stay on after I have attended the memorial services and said goodbye. My movements are as follows:

12 October—attend memorial services at the Sangro

14 October—attend memorial services at Cassino

**20 October—arrive in [United Kingdom](#) for Oxford Degree <sup>1</sup>**

**29 October—return to [Italy](#)**

**9 November—attend memorial service at [Alamein](#)**

**About 13 November—return to [Italy](#) and say goodbye and thank the people in [Bari](#), [Rome](#), and [Florence](#); also hand over the command of the 2nd NZEF and leave [Italy](#) for the [United Kingdom](#).**

**It now remains for you to choose my successor. I realise that this is a matter for the [New Zealand Government](#). As I expect you would ask my opinion in such a matter affecting the 2nd NZEF, I should advise that Brigadier Stevens be chosen. He is the senior Brigadier and has been in charge of the Base and Force administration during the whole of the war. He knows the history of our financial agreements.**

**Whoever does the clearing up here should for all reasons be given the rank of Major-General. The special and financial powers which the [New Zealand Government](#) gave me have borne the test of five and a half years of war and peace. <sup>2</sup> I feel there is no reason to alter these powers except to suggest a reduction and rearrangement of the entertainment allowance. In a following cable <sup>3</sup> I shall send a memorandum summarising the powers which were delegated to me.**

**To sum up, I should be greatly assisted in my final work here if I could be informed:**

- ( Of your agreement to my handing over command of the NZEF when I**
  - a) think it advisable (about 13 November).**
  - b) The name of my successor.**
  - c) Whether you agree to his being made a Major-General.**
  - d) my relief as GOC 2nd NZEF.**

<sup>1</sup> DCL ( **Oxford**).

<sup>2</sup> See Volume I, *Appointment of Commander, 2nd NZEF* (Nos. 39 and 40).

<sup>3</sup> Not published.

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**481**  
*The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*  
*[ Extract ]*  
*17 October 1945*

**I am grateful for your report on the existing situation and for your comments on future arrangements.**

**The New Zealand Government fully agree to your handing over command of the 2nd NZEF in November or at such other time as you think advisable. It is agreed that Brigadier Stevens should be your successor and that he should be given the rank of Major-General.**

**It is also agreed that he should continue to use the special and financial powers which were originally given to you by the **New Zealand Government**, subject to a reduction and rearrangement of entertainment allowances as you suggest.... <sup>1</sup>**

**Consideration is being given to the suggested amendments to the memorandum of special and financial powers for the Commander of **J Force**, and this will also be discussed with Brigadier Stewart.**

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<sup>1</sup> **The text omitted referred to the allocation of entertainment allowances to Major-General C. E. Weir, GOC 46th British Division, and to the Officer Commanding **J Force** (Brigadier K. L. Stewart).**

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*The Prime Minister to Headquarters 2nd NZEF ( Cairo)*

8 November 1945

The following statement was made in the House of Representatives today by the Prime Minister:

I wish to announce that **Lieutenant-General Sir Bernard Freyberg**, VC, KCB, KBE, CMG, DSO, LL.D, DCL, is relinquishing command of the 2nd NZEF and is now handing over to his successor, Major-General W. G. Stevens. A Gazette notice to this effect will be issued this afternoon.

The date on which **General Freyberg** gives up his Command will be 22 November, the sixth anniversary of his appointment in 1939. This occasion is, I feel, one which calls for a special expression of appreciation and gratitude on the part of Parliament and the Government and people of New Zealand.

**General Freyberg** has led the 2nd New Zealand Division from its inception and throughout its history he has shared with his men in its splendid feats of courage, endurance, and victorious achievement.

Thanks and praise to its Commander are inseparable from our pride in the 2nd New Zealand Division. The magnificent record of our fighting men must always be associated with their leader.

In **Greece** and **Crete**, in the battles of the African campaigns, at **Minzar Qaim**, at **Alamein**, and in the famous 'left hook' at **El Hamma**, he and his men continually enhanced their great reputation, and so it was right through the Italian campaign, on the **Sangro**, at **Cassino**, and the **Senio River**, until our Division finally reached **Trieste**.

The men of our Division, which under **General Freyberg** became as honoured by our Allies as it was feared and respected by our foes, will always be proud of the service and success to which he led them as the spearhead of the **Eighth Army**. Although in the darkest days the Division

had to undertake desperate enterprises, **General Freyberg's** responsibility for the lives of his men always weighed most heavily with him. There were times when he invoked his right, which had been assured by the Government in New Zealand, to refuse to take part in ventures in which he considered the cost would outweigh the gain.

Of constant importance, too, was his determination that the Division would always be provided with the highest possible standard of equipment and the fullest armoured support. It was the emphasis he laid on equipment that gave the Division that extraordinary mobility which enabled it to deliver the very effective series of **Freyberg** 'left hooks' from **Alamein** to the **Mareth Line**.

His care of his men out of the line during times of rest was no less thorough. It was recognised in the **Middle East** and appreciated by New Zealanders that the Forces Clubs and other amenities they enjoyed were unequalled. He was determined that his men got nothing but the best.

For **General Freyberg** the campaign in **Crete** did not end with the withdrawal of our troops in 1941. At the end of September of this year a party of New Zealanders flew to **Crete** for a special memorial service. They were led by **General Freyberg**; and in this pilgrimage he was able to express not only his own feelings but also those of the people of New Zealand.

His Excellency the Governor-General has confirmed the promotion of Brigadier W. G. Stevens, CB, CBE, to Major-General and approved his appointment to the Command of the 2nd NZEF. <sup>1</sup> Major-General Stevens' outstanding administrative record shows that he is well fitted to carry out efficiently the special responsibilities of his new post.

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<sup>1</sup> General Stevens relinquished command on 6 Jul 1946.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 461 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

461

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

6 May 1945

Now that the war in **Europe** and danger of battle casualties is over and the 15th Reinforcements are available in Egypt after six weeks' training, it would appear opportune for me to accelerate the **New Zealand Government's** replacement scheme by sending back immediately the 6th and 7th Reinforcements, which number approximately 3000. This will necessitate special shipping arrangements being made. Before any steps are taken I must first be relieved of my present operational role and I would appreciate having the approval of **War Cabinet**. The despatch of the 6th and 7th Reinforcements would reduce the number of troops exposed to malaria, although for the time we remain in **Italy** we would be under strength, but when we join up with the 15th Reinforcements in Egypt that would be remedied. Will you say if **War Cabinet** concurs in my proposal?

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 462 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE<sup>1</sup>

462

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*<sup>1</sup>

8 May 1945

I am happy to report that notwithstanding the recent strenuous campaign all members of the force are in the best of spirits and morale is very high. Now that the war in **Europe** is over it is easy to understand that inquiry is already being made as to the future. I realise this matter is under consideration and that some weeks may elapse before the **New Zealand Government** make their decision. I feel that a short interim statement to meet the present situation should be made to all ranks of the 2nd NZEF in the Central Mediterranean Forces.

This would tend to anticipate and allay possible dissatisfaction among long-service personnel and equally give an incentive to more recent reinforcements to keep fit and efficient. It would seem

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<sup>1</sup> This telegram was also sent to the Prime Minister at **San Francisco**, via the New Zealand Military Liaison Officer, **London**.

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desirable to publish at an early date a statement regarding the policy of replacement and possible future participation in the **Pacific**. I have therefore prepared the following statement for **War Cabinet's** consideration: <sup>1</sup>

The New Zealand Government's policy was announced in October of last year to the effect that the replacement scheme would be carried on so that all long-service men would go home to New Zealand and be replaced from men drawn from industry. This policy has been carried out in the past and the First, Second, and Third Echelons, together with the

4th and 5th Reinforcements, in all 16,000 men, have been sent home to New Zealand. With the arrival in Egypt of the 15th Reinforcements and the finish of the war in **Europe**, we are now in a position to speed up the replacement scheme.

Under the original plan, it was considered that the 6th Reinforcements would be withdrawn in June, when the 15th Reinforcements were available in the field, and the 7th Reinforcements in September. It is now proposed to send the 6th Reinforcements at once, with the 7th Reinforcements to follow as soon as possible, or perhaps even at the same time. This will have the effect of reducing the strength of the Division in **Italy** to between 3000 and 4000 below War Establishment. This can be accepted under the existing circumstances but not before Field-Marshal Alexander releases us from our present operational role here in **Italy**.<sup>2</sup>

Regarding the war in the **Pacific**, an announcement of possible policy will be made by the **New Zealand Government** in the near future. It is obviously desirable that New Zealand land forces should be represented. It is not possible for us to give any guidance in the matter as the question is still under consideration between the New Zealand and British Governments and, furthermore, is dependent upon shipping. When a decision is reached it is certain that men with long service overseas will go back to New Zealand and that men with short service overseas would be used in any future operations.

An early reply would be most helpful.

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<sup>1</sup> Several changes were made by **War Cabinet** to the text of this statement. **General Freyberg** was advised of these changes in a telegram dated 16 May, in which it was stated that 'the purpose of these amendments is to give special emphasis to the importance of shipping at this juncture.'

At this time ships were required for the deployment of forces from **Europe** and the **Middle East** for the war against **Japan**.

<sup>2</sup> See *Trieste*.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 463 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND (SAN FRANCISCO) TO THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER

463

*The Prime Minister of New Zealand ( San Francisco) to the acting  
Prime Minister*

14 May 1945

Your telegram of 12 May. <sup>3</sup> I fully agree with the terms of **Freyberg's** proposed statement regarding replacement and possible future participation of the Division in the **Pacific**, and with **War Cabinet's** proposal that a similar statement should be made in New Zealand. I cannot usefully offer any comments on the future of the Division until I have received the Chiefs of Staff appreciation. <sup>1</sup> I feel that we will need to take into consideration the effect on public opinion in New Zealand of Eisenhower's statement here that no soldier who has served in both the North African and European campaigns should be sent to the **Pacific**.

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<sup>3</sup> See Volume III, *Proposals for Participation in Operations against Japan*. Mr. Nash reported that there was general speculation in New Zealand on the future of the 2nd Division and public desire for a definite statement of the **New Zealand Government's** intentions. He stated that **War Cabinet** considered an interim statement should be made informing the public of the stage reached in the Government's negotiations.

<sup>1</sup> Volume III, *Proposals for Participation in Operations against Japan*.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 464 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE<sup>2</sup> – [EXTRACT]

464

*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*<sup>2</sup>

[ Extract ]

15 May 1945

I know from your telegram of 3 February<sup>3</sup> that the New Zealand War Cabinet 'are very anxious that the Division should be maintained as long as possible'. While I do not wish to influence the New Zealand War Cabinet in making their decision, in view of their stated desire and the changed manpower position I am putting forward fresh proposals which I believe would enable the **New Zealand Government** to retain the 2nd New Zealand Division in the field to the end of 1946. I am, of course, not in a position to know if the proposal is a practical one from the New Zealand manpower point of view.

In making my appreciation to **War Cabinet** in February of possible requirements for 1945, I had to be conservative.<sup>4</sup> Although I thought the war would be over by the end of June, provision had to be made to carry on to November. There was another aspect of planning for the future. The fighting in **Italy** during 1944 had been hard, with heavy casualties, and should the Division be engaged through the summer of 1945 it would be exhausted. This would necessitate the replacement not only of the 6th, 7th, and 8th, but probably the 9th and 10th Reinforcements, before embarking on a fresh theatre of war.

The quick and comparatively inexpensive end to the war with **Germany** has changed the manpower situation which appeared to face the **New Zealand Government** earlier in the year.

In the first place the offensive, fierce while it lasted, was only of twenty-three days' duration from D-day to the day of capitulation, and during the last eight of which we had little fighting. Casualties have been less than had been allowed for and the future wastage for 1945 reduced to loss by sickness. The result is to reduce by 3000 the estimated wastage to the end of 1945 as visualised in your telegram of 8 April. <sup>1</sup>

As reported, we had strengthened the Division for this summer offensive by returning all war-weary personnel and by adding a third infantry brigade. When the Division took the field it was in excellent condition and, in view of the little fighting it has done, it is still fresh and fit to go on should the need arise.

If such a course were adopted, I feel that although the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th Reinforcements should return at once it is for consideration whether the 10th Reinforcements, who have been only one year eight months in the war theatre, with comparatively little fighting, should be returned. No personnel to date have been returned to New Zealand with less than three years and six months' service. With regard to 3rd Division other ranks, few fought in the last battles. Although their service overseas may entitle them to be considered, it is early to think of their relief. I feel that the 3rd Division personnel, especially as they have all had a period in New Zealand, should stay for further service overseas if the Division goes on to another theatre. In pursuance of this policy I would suggest that only a percentage of the time spent in the Islands should count for purposes of replacement.

If these two proposals are agreed to by **War Cabinet**, and I feel they are fair, then the position at the end of 1945 would be as follows:

Overseas strength in all ranks of the 2nd NZEF on 5 May 1945	29,100
Less all ranks to return to New Zealand at once:	
( a) Tongariro	130
( b) 6th Reinforcements	1300

( c) 7th Reinforcements	2400	
( d) 8th Reinforcements	4500	
( e) 9th Reinforcements	2800	
( f) Officers 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th Reinforcements	525	11,655
Leaving		17,445
Add 15th and 16th Reinforcements		6,500
Total		23,945
Less wastage one-third of battle casualties	315	
Seven months' no activity wastage	630	
		945
Approximate total overseas at end of 1945		23,000
		<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Repeated to Mr. Fraser at **San Francisco**.

<sup>3</sup> See *Maintenance of 2nd New Zealand Division* (No. 415).

<sup>4</sup> See *Maintenance of 2nd New Zealand Division* (No. 419).

<sup>1</sup> See Volume III, *Proposals for Participation in Operations against Japan*.

<sup>2</sup> See Volume III, *Proposals for Participation in Operations against Japan*, for rest of text.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 465 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG<sup>1</sup>

465

*The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg*<sup>1</sup>

16 May 1945

Your telegram of 6 May ( **No. 461**). We are very anxious that as many men as can be spared be returned to New Zealand as soon as possible, and have noted with interest your proposal for the return of the 6th and 7th Reinforcements subject to the release of the Division from its present operational role. We would not of course wish, by preferring such a request at this juncture, to cause any embarrassment to the Commander-in-Chief, and would be glad if, in order that we might consider the matter further, you could advise us whether or not it has been discussed with Field-Marshal Alexander and what views he holds. Provided Alexander agrees, then we would raise the question of shipping with the **United Kingdom** authorities.

We have, however, just been informed by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs<sup>2</sup> that plans have been prepared for the allocation of troop transport capacity during the next six months. These provide for the movement of 20,000 from the New Zealand Division in the first quarter and 2700 in the second (an estimated percentage of 66) subject to the approval of the **Combined Chiefs of Staff** and the United Kingdom Government. These plans are moreover liable to modification in the light of operational requirements in the war against **Japan**. If these arrangements mature then a substantial proportion of the Division will, in any case, be returned to New Zealand before the end of September, which is entirely in accordance with our wishes.

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<sup>1</sup> Repeated to Mr. Fraser at **San Francisco**.

<sup>2</sup> The information contained in this paragraph is a summary of advice received by the **New Zealand Government** in two telegrams dated 10 May from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs. The telegrams have not been reproduced in this volume.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 466 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

466

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

23 May 1945

While I appreciate that the bigger question of the ultimate destination of the 2nd NZEF is a matter of high policy to be determined by **War Cabinet**, I have felt for some time that there are matters of detail, such as the disposal of divisional equipment and the method of return of the New Zealand Division, that should be discussed independently of the final decision.

The role in which we are now employed <sup>1</sup> appears likely to last for anything from one or more months, after which we will be relieved by another division. Our operational employment will then be finished.

I assume that no matter what the final decision may be, the whole of the 2nd NZEF will be concentrated in Egypt. There we can either reorganise for future employment or else embark in one lift or by stages for New Zealand.

It will, I know, take some time to arrange for shipping. Embarkation will probably be from **Taranto**. When the main decision has been made, I propose that the Division and other troops in **Italy** should be withdrawn to the south and embarked for Egypt.

The question of the movement of personnel of the 2nd NZEF to Egypt is straightforward, but it is complicated by the question of the disposal of equipment, which must be dependent on shipping and your own future equipment requirements in New Zealand. All our present equipment is, I understand, the property of the **New Zealand Government** and, if they so desire, could be taken to New Zealand. This would require,

however, a greater quantity of shipping. You will recall that in the move from Egypt to **Italy**, whereas seven ships were required for personnel, forty-two were needed for vehicles and heavy equipment. If, however, it is not all required in New Zealand, the disposal of it is presumably a matter for negotiation between the **United Kingdom** and New Zealand Governments. Whether or not the equipment is disposed of here affects planning considerably.

So much for the problem of the war equipment of the Division. The second question I want to consider is the return of the New Zealand Division to New Zealand. Is the force to go back by drafts depending on length of service, or as a Division by units, or a combination of both? This question is not a simple one and I am dealing with various aspects of it in a further cable. <sup>2</sup>

In your telegram of 16 May you quote the provisional plans for the allocation of troop transport between Egypt and New Zealand. The supply offered to you is most encouraging and exceeds expectations, both in the speed with which it is to be made available and the numbers to be returned. If this schedule can be fulfilled and we can get the Division clear of operational commitments in the next few weeks, we could make the necessary arrangements at this end. It is certain that there is no time to be lost in making arrangements for the transfer home of 20,000 men by September, and to ensure against loss of time an early decision should be given upon the following questions:

When released from operational control:

- (i) Is the Division going back to New Zealand?
- (ii) Do you want some of the 2nd New Zealand Division for future service against **Japan**?
- (iii) What equipment, if any, do you want to take back to New Zealand?

As the whole question of the return of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force to New Zealand is most involved and has political aspects, I am preparing for your consideration a separate appreciation on this question, which follows at once.

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<sup>1</sup> See

***Trieste.***

**<sup>2</sup> No. 467.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 467 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

467  
*General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

4 June 1945

In continuation of my telegram of 23 May. It is realised that no decision has as yet been made by the **New Zealand Government** as to the future war effort of the New Zealand forces against **Japan**. In view of your manpower difficulties and the importance of the early return of the 6th and 7th Reinforcements, some forecast has to be made to enable the **New Zealand Government** to order the necessary shipping. Our estimated requirements are based, therefore, on the assumption that the force will concentrate in Egypt, that the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th Reinforcements will return to New Zealand by the quickest route, and that the remainder of the Division, plus the 16th Reinforcements, will reorganise for possible future operations in South-East Asia Command or other theatre. Once the Division is released from operational duties, on a date to be known as D-day, it will be possible for us to embark men for Egypt as fast as shipping can be provided in **Italy** and Egypt, subject to the ten days' journey to **Taranto** and the possible delay of the handing-in of our surplus equipment at Ordnance bases at **Naples**. Should it be necessary from the shipping point of view to embark all or part of those returning direct to New Zealand from **Italy**, this could probably be done, but presents many disadvantages over spending a short period in Egypt.

As instructed, I have now conferred with Field-Marshal Alexander, who fully appreciates the difficult manpower situation in New Zealand and wishes to do all he can to help. He feels, however, that the present unsatisfactory Yugoslav position which keeps the New Zealand forces in Northern **Italy** will resolve itself in the course of a few days. In his opinion it will be safe to forecast D-day at the latest between 14 and 30

**June. The move from Trieste to Taranto will be in our own MT and will take ten days. Although we are now 1100 below War Establishment as a result of sending off the 6th Reinforcements, we have examined the possibility of sending 70 per cent of the 7th Reinforcements as soon as possible and will get the remainder of the 7th Reinforcements, plus the 8th, away as soon as we get the Division to Taranto. If shipping is available, it is quite possible that the 6th and part of the 7th Reinforcements, amounting to approximately 3500, could embark from Egypt by 14 July, and the remainder of the 7th, plus the 8th, in all 5200, by D plus 40. The whole of the remainder of the 2nd NZEF could be concentrated in Egypt by D plus 60, and the 9th and 10th Reinforcements, less certain key personnel, would be ready to commence embarkation by D plus 80.**

**To sum up:**

**D-day between 14 June and 30 June.**

**14 July: 6th and part of the 7th Reinforcements (3500 in all) embark in Egypt for New Zealand.**

**D plus 40: Remainder of the 7th, plus the 8th (5200 in all) embark in Egypt for New Zealand.**

**D plus 60: Remainder of the NZEF concentrated in Egypt.**

**D plus 80: 9th and 10th Reinforcements (7500 in all) embark in Egypt for New Zealand.**

**D plus 80 to D plus 170: New Zealand force re-equipping and training.**

**D plus 170: New Zealand force ready to move to possible theatre of war.**

**These figures do not include ex-3rd Division men or all entitled officers of the 6th to 10th Reinforcements. If these are added the total will be 2000 more. It must be pointed out that shipping from Italy to**



**Egypt must be available so that the reinforcements returning to New Zealand arrive in Egypt ten days before embarkation for New Zealand. At the present time, Allied Force Headquarters reports that there is no indication of shipping to Egypt being available, and this will probably be the case until a decision is reached on the whole major question of shipping.**

DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

468 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG

468

*The acting Prime Minister to General Freyberg*

**8 June 1945**

**Thank you for your telegram of 4 June. We note the arrangements proposed with respect to the withdrawal and moving of the force from Italy to Egypt and concur in the action you propose taking. If there should be any way that we can assist in connection with the provision of the necessary shipping then doubtless you will let us know.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 469 – THE ACTING PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS

469

*The acting Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Secretary of State  
for Dominion Affairs*

21 June 1945

We have been informed by **General Freyberg** of his plans for the return to New Zealand of those men of the Division whom he has decided will be repatriated. <sup>1</sup> There is a total altogether of 20,700, and we are anxious and very much hope that you will find it possible to meet us in this and to arrange that the shipping is available about the dates that the men are ready to leave. This will ensure that those men who will normally return to food production and associated industries of high priority in New Zealand are available to accept employment at the earliest possible date.

Shipping from Egypt will be required as follows:

14 July	5000
30 July	5500
8 September	9500
Total	20,000 all ranks

An early assurance that shipping will be available for the repatriation of these men on the dates required would be appreciated.

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<sup>1</sup> Two telegrams from **General Freyberg** on 10 Jun, giving the numbers to be repatriated in the 6th to 10th Reinforcements and reclassified ex-3rd Division personnel (a total of 20,700), have not been reproduced. In the second of these telegrams **General Freyberg** asked the **New Zealand Government** to make representations to the **United Kingdom Government** for the

**provision of shipping.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 470 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

470

### *General Freyberg to the Minister of Defence*

6 July 1945

As you will realise, the schedule of shipping asked for in my telegram of 10 June <sup>1</sup> was based on the assumption that we would be relieved from our operational role by 20 June. We could in fact have been relieved by 20 June, but it is now 6 July and we are still in **Trieste**. Shipping arrangements have now been confirmed for the 6th and 7th Reinforcements, who are scheduled to leave Egypt about the middle to end of July as originally estimated. D-day, as in my telegram of 10 June, <sup>2</sup> for the move of the remainder of force, is not yet known. Consequently the original forecast of shipping dates will have to be revised. Further, shipping and equipment problems are clearly interdependent, and it seems likely that **War Office** intends to treat equipment and the move of 2nd NZEF as one problem. The War Office are awaiting official confirmation of the **New Zealand Government's** decision for the provision of the force against **Japan** <sup>3</sup> before setting the necessary arrangements in train. We presume that they will take into account our problems of movement to the port of embarkation in **Italy**, and the time factor involved in any handing-in of equipment here, by giving us adequate notice of shipping arrangements.

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<sup>1</sup> Not published. The schedule is that given in **No. 469**.

<sup>2</sup> Not published. **General Freyberg** advised that D-day could be taken as approximately 20 Jun.

<sup>3</sup> See Volume III, *Proposals for Participation in Operations*

*against Japan.*

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 471 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS

471

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs*

4 August 1945

With reference to our message of 21 June ( **No. 469**) concerning shipping for the repatriation of personnel of the 2nd New Zealand Division returning to the Dominion.

Early advice would be appreciated of the proposed plans for the repatriation of personnel from **Italy** and the **Middle East**. We have been advised that one vessel with a capacity of 3600 has been allotted and is due to sail almost immediately from the **Middle East**. <sup>4</sup> Some 15,300 all ranks (2300 officers and 13,000 other ranks) <sup>1</sup> will then remain, and from advice just received we understand that another large trooper has been allocated. We do not know, however, when this vessel is likely to depart.

The many demands upon shipping resources at this time for the deployment of forces in new theatres of operations and the return of others to their own countries are recognised, but we are most anxious to ensure that all personnel of the Division to be repatriated should be returned to New Zealand as soon as possible. We must point out that the early return of men from the **Middle East** to New Zealand will assist us in maintaining, and if possible increasing, supplies of foodstuffs, and in providing housing and other essential services for the rehabilitation of service personnel. The majority of the men in the reinforcement draft at present awaiting despatch have been withdrawn from food production and other primary and essential industries, and the earliest possible

return of men from **Italy** and the **Middle East** to replace them, to provide for expansion of essential activities, and to ensure the despatch of further reinforcements for the **Pacific** land force, would therefore be of the greatest assistance to us.

In view of the services rendered by the New Zealand Division in the **Middle East** and **Europe** since the beginning of the war with **Germany** until its end, we trust that arrangements will be made to ensure repatriation to New Zealand at the earliest possible date, whether via the **Middle East** or **Panama**, of all men who are to return. We would much appreciate very early advice of your proposals.

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<sup>4</sup> This telegram from **General Freyberg**, dated 22 Jul, is not published. The vessel was the *Strathaird*.

<sup>1</sup> The above should read: (2300 all ranks from the Middle East Forces and 13,000 all ranks from the Central Mediterranean Forces). These were the grand totals of a table giving the numbers awaiting repatriation after the departure of the *Stratbaird* which was included in **General Freyberg's** telegram of 22 Jul to the Minister of Defence.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 472 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG (LONDON)<sup>2</sup>

472

### *The Prime Minister to General Freyberg ( London) <sup>2</sup>*

14 August 1945

I have to thank you for your telegram of 11 August. <sup>3</sup> Except that we are endeavouring to prepare for demobilisation at the quickest possible rate, our plans are also at a standstill. A further telegram on policy will depend on the Japanese reaction, and meanwhile I think you should stay in **London**. In anticipation of the cessation of hostilities, **War Cabinet** are of the opinion that you should make personal representations to **War Office** and to the Ministry of War Transport regarding transport. Apart from the question of the return of the 11th and later Reinforcements, we are disturbed at the prospect of delays in bringing the main body of 20,000 men back to New Zealand. From recent reports it would appear there is a likelihood of unrest amongst the men in Egypt, <sup>1</sup> and for this and every other reason we feel we should take all possible steps to obtain the necessary shipping. Please ask **Campbell** <sup>2</sup> to show you our previous telegrams to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs on the transport situation. <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> **General Freyberg** had gone to **London** at the end of July to discuss with **War Office** plans for the repatriation of the 2nd Division and for the participation of a New Zealand force in the war against **Japan**.

<sup>3</sup> See Volume III, *Proposals for Participation in Operations against Japan*. **General Freyberg** advised that plans for the participation of an Empire land force in operations against the mainland of **Japan** were at a standstill as a result of the Japanese surrender offer on 10 Aug.

<sup>1</sup> In a telegram to the Minister of Defence on 13 Aug (not published) **General Freyberg** suggested that he should take advantage of his presence in **London** to discuss with the **War Office** the possibility of arranging leave in the **United Kingdom** for New Zealand troops in **Italy** awaiting repatriation. 'To date the men have been good humoured and have given little trouble,' he said, 'but they are being called upon to face a period under trying conditions, and it is probable that there may be unrest after a time. I feel that the offer of short leave to the **United Kingdom** would do much to avoid possible trouble.'

The proposal was approved by the Government.

<sup>2</sup> **Dr. R. M. Campbell**, Official Secretary to the High Commissioner for New Zealand in the **United Kingdom**; Chairman of the **Public Service Commission**, 1 Nov 1946-.

<sup>3</sup> Nos. 469 and 471.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 473 – GENERAL FREYBERG (LONDON) TO THE PRIME MINISTER

473

*General Freyberg ( London) to the Prime Minister*

16 August 1945

Your telegram of 14 August. Shipping discussions at the **War Office** show that the whole question of allocations is now being considered on the broadest lines. They estimate that no statement of policy could be expected for from seven to fourteen days from the day of the Japanese surrender. I represented the New Zealand point of view to the **War Office**, who held out little hope of the existing arrangements being speeded up as, with the successful conclusion of the Japanese war, the Chiefs of Staff will have to compete with civilian ministries for shipping priorities. As you know, a great deal depends upon whether the **United States** demands can be reduced. It seems doubtful if existing military plans will be speeded up. I have done what I can on my level, but matters of policy of allocation are on too high a plane for me to do much good. I feel that the best plan is for you to cable direct to the British Prime Minister, as all other interests are doing. I am watching the situation here in **London**, and as soon as the United Kingdom Government's policy is issued will cable you my appreciation and outline plan for the return of the force to New Zealand.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 474 – GENERAL FREYBERG (LONDON) TO THE PRIME MINISTER

474

### *General Freyberg ( London) to the Prime Minister*

28 August 1945

Reference your telegram of 28 August. <sup>1</sup> I am sorry that I have not been able to send any shipping programme as the question of priorities in shipping is being dealt with on a Cabinet level and no decision is likely to be given until 10 September. I have certain facts and figures that I have gained by my contacts in the **War Office**, and for what they are worth I send you the following observations. These facts and figures are certain to undergo changes before they are cabled to you officially through Government channels. I need hardly say that it is being dealt with on a very high level and that I take no part in any of the deliberations.

I have seen the **War Office** shipping plans. So far as I can find out the proposals for shipping the New Zealand Forces from the **Mediterranean** theatre of war are as follows. In arriving at these figures some fresh priorities as a result of the cessation of hostilities against **Japan** have to be provided for.

**Priority one: Movement of occupational troops.**

**Priority two: Repatriation of prisoners of war from the **Far East**.**

**Priority three: Movement back of PYTHON <sup>2</sup> and long-service British troops, and the repatriation of Dominion forces.**

No figures can yet be given as firm. The whole shipping situation is being reviewed on 4 September by the Chiefs of Staff and on 8 September by **War Cabinet**. The decision will be given on 10 September.

At the moment the latest figures from the **War Office** for shipping to New Zealand are as follows:

(1) Mid-September from <b>Italy</b> and Egypt	2,400
(2) October to December from <b>Italy</b>	13,000
(3) January to March from <b>Italy</b>	9,100
Total	24,500

Lift No. 1 above is firm and provision for this number will be made. If 5000 troops for the occupational brigade are found from the **Mediterranean** area, this will reduce our total from lift No. 2 by that number. It must be clearly understood that since I have got these figures through unofficial sources they cannot in any sense be taken as official, and I would be glad if you do not comment on them to the **United Kingdom**. No decision is possible, therefore, until after 10 September.

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<sup>1</sup> Not published. The Prime Minister in this telegram requested information on details of the **United Kingdom** leave scheme proposals, and stated that Cabinet was concerned at the possible effect of a public announcement about the scheme being made in New Zealand before the arrangements for the return of the Division had been announced.

<sup>2</sup> This was the code-name given to the British scheme, which came into operation in September 1943, for the exchange between the **United Kingdom** and overseas theatres and garrisons of personnel who had had long service overseas.

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 475 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

475

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

30 August 1945

**Our inability to obtain any indication of the plans of His Majesty's Government in the **United Kingdom** for the provision of shipping for the return of New Zealand personnel in the **Middle East** who are now awaiting repatriation to New Zealand, is causing my colleagues and I much concern. One vessel is already *en route* to New Zealand and we understand that another ship is projected to leave in September. We are being embarrassed by the present uncertainty, not only as a result of feelings among relatives, but also in view of the persistent and reasonable demands on the part of food production, rehabilitation, and other most essential industries for skilled labour, large elements of which are included amongst all groups of the men at present awaiting return. We trust that for these reasons, and for those advanced in my telegram of 4 August to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs ( **No. 471**), early and adequate shipping can be provided. An immediate indication of the plans for the return of the personnel now awaiting transport in **Egypt** and **Italy** would be welcomed.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 476 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

476

### *The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of New Zealand*

1 September 1945

Your telegram of 30 August.

I regret that it has not been possible earlier to give you details of our plans for the repatriation of your forces, but I am sure you will realise that the rapidly changing situation has involved a complete review of all the available shipping and the drawing up of new plans. The **Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington** are now undertaking this review for the period October 1945 to June 1946, and I can at once assure you that New Zealand claims to shipping space will be considered alongside those of the **United Kingdom** and other parts of the British Commonwealth. It will not be possible to let you know how many New Zealanders can be moved from October onwards until this review is completed.

However, I am able to tell you that the *Strathaird*<sup>1</sup> is now on its way to you from Egypt carrying 3700 of your people (this includes some families), and the *Dominion Monarch*<sup>2</sup>, with another 750, from the **United Kingdom**. In addition, the *Strathmore*<sup>3</sup> is due to sail from Egypt in September with 4000 men, and the *Stirling Castle*<sup>4</sup> from the **United Kingdom** with 4500.

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<sup>1</sup> Peninsular and Oriental Line, 22,281 tons.

<sup>2</sup> Shaw Savill and Albion Company, 27,155 tons.

<sup>3</sup> **Peninsular and Oriental Line, 23,428 tons.**

<sup>4</sup> **Union-Castle Mail Steamship Company, Ltd., 25,550 tons.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 477 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

477

### *The Prime Minister of New Zealand to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom*

6 September 1945

In view of the distances involved and the fact that our Division has been kept in **Europe** and the **Middle East** since the first year of the war, we feel that some special consideration should be given to our claims for urgent repatriation. It is disappointing to learn from your telegram of 1 September that the most that can be indicated regarding shipping to bring our troops to New Zealand is that our claims will be considered alongside those of others. Apart from the reasons put forward in my telegram of 30 August ( **No. 475**), there is, in addition, the question of possible unrest, amongst the troops who have already been held for some months in **Italy** and in the **Middle East**. Therefore, I must most earnestly request that strong representations be made to the **Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington** for special consideration to be given to the early transport home of New Zealand troops. <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> A copy of this telegram was also sent to the New Zealand Minister at **Washington** (Mr. C. A. Berendsen), who was requested to discuss the matter personally with Field-Marshal Wilson to seek his support of the Government's representations at meetings of the **Combined Chiefs of Staff**.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

478 – THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE PRIME  
MINISTER OF NEW ZEALAND

478

*The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to the Prime Minister of  
New Zealand*

**8 September 1945**

**Your telegram of 6 September. I fully realise and sympathise with your keen desire for the urgent repatriation of New Zealand troops. We are reviewing as a matter of extreme urgency our overall shipping commitments and resources in the light of the changed situation; but I feel bound to tell you that even greater shortages of shipping than we had feared are revealed by our examination to date. The points you make about the long distance from home and the length of time abroad of New Zealand troops will be taken fully into account when making up the balance sheet. Now that operational movements of **United States** forces to the **Pacific** can no longer be claimed to have overriding priority, we shall be approaching the Americans to ask for a larger share of the available shipping.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 479 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

479

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

18 September 1945

Reference your telegram of 17 September. <sup>1</sup>

My previous statement has been corrected in accordance with your proposed amendments, and I agree that no statement should be made in **Italy** before yours has been made in New Zealand. I suggest that Saturday, 22 September, would be a suitable date.

While I agree that our efforts to get suitable shipping allocated should be stressed to all ranks, it is not easy for me to suggest here that we should have better treatment than **United Kingdom** troops. I feel that the situation could be dealt with better at a conference than as an official statement, and I propose to do so at my conference on Saturday when the whole matter will be dealt with.

Dealing with the scale of accommodation, I do not think we have had any trouble over accommodation standards on board returning troopships. Although it would be good to press this matter on the United Kingdom Government, I feel that to emphasise that there is a possibility of bad accommodation to the troops would be unwise. Further, our men do not expect the same standards as in 1940 to apply in 1945, at the end of a long war when passenger shipping losses have been heavy. The general feeling here is that the troops are prepared to accept the conditions obtaining on board transports, provided that by doing so they will be enabled to return at the earliest date. Such trouble as we have knowledge of in the past has in nearly every case been attributable to the despatch of troops in hastily assembled drafts whose officers and NCOs were without previous knowledge of their men. All possible steps

will be taken to avoid this happening.

Our main object in initiating the proposition for leave to the **United Kingdom** was to alleviate the long period of waiting among those troops who would otherwise be forced to remain in **Italy** until the spring of next year. If we attempt to despatch men on leave to the **United Kingdom** out of their correct reinforcement drafts, as we should if we send the occupational force, not only should we cause resentment among the old hands but we would complicate the leave scheme for the remainder of the troops in **Italy** to such an extent that the scheme would not be workable. Our own problems in concentrating and training the occupational force are not easy and can only be carried out with careful arrangement. It is to be pointed out that half of the occupational force is still in Egypt with the 15th Reinforcements, and that they will require considerable reorganisation and training before being despatched to **Japan**. I do not see how the occupational force can be concentrated in **Italy** and fully trained before the end of November. Should leave be granted to them it would delay their despatch for at least two months.

To sum up, I feel that if a clear statement of policy is made during the next few days, all will go smoothly according to plan:

- (i) The occupational force could be assembled quickly from the single men of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Reinforcements and shipped East direct from **Italy**; and,
- (ii) the 8th, 9th, and 10th Reinforcements would leave in succession for home; and,
- (iii) meanwhile the **United Kingdom** leave scheme would start to operate for personnel awaiting return to New Zealand. In my opinion, there would be little disappointment or trouble.

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<sup>1</sup> On 13 Sep **General Freyberg** had submitted for the Government's approval the draft of a statement on the return of personnel to New Zealand, the provision of an occupation force for **Japan**, and the **United Kingdom** leave scheme. This statement was approved on 17 Sep by the Prime Minister, who suggested, however, that more emphasis should be given in it to

**the efforts being made to obtain the best possible shipping facilities for the voyage home, and further, that the troops selected to garrison **Japan** should also be given leave in the **United Kingdom**.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 480 – GENERAL FREYBERG TO THE PRIME MINISTER

480

### *General Freyberg to the Prime Minister*

9 October 1945

My work as your Force Commander is now nearly finished. I am to report that all major decisions have now been made for getting the 2nd NZEF back to New Zealand. The Division is in winter quarters in **Florence** and **Siena** with good amenities. The United Kingdom leave scheme is about to begin and 105 all ranks per day are going to the **United Kingdom** by motor transport, with the women's services going by train through **Switzerland**. The new club staff has arrived in **London**, where I understand the Club will be opened shortly. The United Kingdom leave scheme is popular. <sup>1</sup>

**Jayforce** is coming into being on or about 15 October and it will be built up and organised in the course of two months. <sup>2</sup> We are having to detail a number of key men and most of the officers from reinforcements earlier than the 13ths. In view of your desire for leave to England for **Jayforce** personnel, <sup>3</sup> we are arranging to send about 100 officers and men of all earlier reinforcement drafts posted to **Jayforce** with the first leave party. They will return before the force leaves for **Japan**.

We have now completed arrangements for handing in equipment. This is going ahead smoothly and will be completed in the course of a few weeks.

The general condition of the troops is good but there is a certain degree of restlessness. Provided we can keep the constant flow of men to New Zealand at a reasonable rate there should be no trouble. I wish it were possible to know when all will be back in New Zealand. A rough statement of the position is as follows:

Present total strength in Egypt	6,300
Present total strength in Italy	16,200
Grand total	22,500
SS <i>Mooltan</i> to New Zealand, early November	3,100
Jayforce to Japan, December	4,000
Possible further ship to New Zealand, December	4,000
Total to go from Egypt and Italy in last quarter of 1945	11,100

The position at the end of the year in the Mediterranean theatre, taking the above forecast, will be:

Strength in Egypt	2,500
Strength in Italy	8,900
Total	11,400

If we get subsequent ships nearly every month, plus one more lift by the hospital ship *Oranje*<sup>4</sup> taking 800, all New Zealand troops should have left the Mediterranean in March 1946. This, of course, is only an estimate.

<sup>1</sup> See page 439, note 1.

<sup>2</sup> See Volume III, *Participation in Occupation of Japan*.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 443, note 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Nederland N.V. Stoomvaart Maatschappij*, 20,017 tons.

As far as I can see, there should now be no further need for me to stay on after I have attended the memorial services and said goodbye. My movements are as follows:

12 October—attend memorial services at the Sangro

14 October—attend memorial services at Cassino

20 October—arrive in United Kingdom for Oxford Degree <sup>1</sup>

**29 October—return to Italy**

**9 November—attend memorial service at Alamein**

**About 13 November—return to Italy and say goodbye and thank the people in Bari, Rome, and Florence; also hand over the command of the 2nd NZEF and leave Italy for the United Kingdom.**

**It now remains for you to choose my successor. I realise that this is a matter for the New Zealand Government. As I expect you would ask my opinion in such a matter affecting the 2nd NZEF, I should advise that Brigadier Stevens be chosen. He is the senior Brigadier and has been in charge of the Base and Force administration during the whole of the war. He knows the history of our financial agreements.**

**Whoever does the clearing up here should for all reasons be given the rank of Major-General. The special and financial powers which the New Zealand Government gave me have borne the test of five and a half years of war and peace. <sup>2</sup> I feel there is no reason to alter these powers except to suggest a reduction and rearrangement of the entertainment allowance. In a following cable <sup>3</sup> I shall send a memorandum summarising the powers which were delegated to me.**

**To sum up, I should be greatly assisted in my final work here if I could be informed:**

- ( Of your agreement to my handing over command of the NZEF when I**
  - a) think it advisable (about 13 November).**
  - b) The name of my successor.**
  - c) Whether you agree to his being made a Major-General.**
  - d) my relief as GOC 2nd NZEF.**

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<sup>1</sup> DCL ( Oxford).



<sup>2</sup> See Volume I, *Appointment of Commander, 2nd NZEF* (Nos. 39 and 40).

<sup>3</sup> Not published.

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DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

481 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO GENERAL FREYBERG – [EXTRACT] – 17  
OCTOBER 1945

481  
*The Prime Minister to General Freyberg*  
*[ Extract ]*  
*17 October 1945*

**I am grateful for your report on the existing situation and for your comments on future arrangements.**

**The New Zealand Government fully agree to your handing over command of the 2nd NZEF in November or at such other time as you think advisable. It is agreed that Brigadier Stevens should be your successor and that he should be given the rank of Major-General.**

**It is also agreed that he should continue to use the special and financial powers which were originally given to you by the **New Zealand Government**, subject to a reduction and rearrangement of entertainment allowances as you suggest.... <sup>1</sup>**

**Consideration is being given to the suggested amendments to the memorandum of special and financial powers for the Commander of **J Force**, and this will also be discussed with Brigadier Stewart.**

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<sup>1</sup> The text omitted referred to the allocation of entertainment allowances to Major-General C. E. Weir, GOC 46th British Division, and to the Officer Commanding **J Force** (Brigadier K. L. Stewart).

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## 482 – THE PRIME MINISTER TO HEADQUARTERS 2ND NZEF (CAIRO)

482

### *The Prime Minister to Headquarters 2nd NZEF ( Cairo)*

8 November 1945

The following statement was made in the House of Representatives today by the Prime Minister:

I wish to announce that **Lieutenant-General Sir Bernard Freyberg**, VC, KCB, KBE, CMG, DSO, LL.D, DCL, is relinquishing command of the 2nd NZEF and is now handing over to his successor, Major-General W. G. Stevens. A Gazette notice to this effect will be issued this afternoon.

The date on which **General Freyberg** gives up his Command will be 22 November, the sixth anniversary of his appointment in 1939. This occasion is, I feel, one which calls for a special expression of appreciation and gratitude on the part of Parliament and the Government and people of New Zealand.

**General Freyberg** has led the 2nd New Zealand Division from its inception and throughout its history he has shared with his men in its splendid feats of courage, endurance, and victorious achievement.

Thanks and praise to its Commander are inseparable from our pride in the 2nd New Zealand Division. The magnificent record of our fighting men must always be associated with their leader.

In **Greece** and **Crete**, in the battles of the African campaigns, at **Minqar Qaim**, at **Alamein**, and in the famous 'left hook' at **El Hamma**, he and his men continually enhanced their great reputation, and so it was right through the Italian campaign, on the **Sangro**, at **Cassino**, and the **Senio River**, until our Division finally reached **Trieste**.

The men of our Division, which under **General Freyberg** became as honoured by our Allies as it was feared and respected by our foes, will always be proud of the service and success to which he led them as the spearhead of the **Eighth Army**. Although in the darkest days the Division had to undertake desperate enterprises, **General Freyberg's** responsibility for the lives of his men always weighed most heavily with him. There were times when he invoked his right, which had been assured by the Government in New Zealand, to refuse to take part in ventures in which he considered the cost would outweigh the gain.

Of constant importance, too, was his determination that the Division would always be provided with the highest possible standard of equipment and the fullest armoured support. It was the emphasis he laid on equipment that gave the Division that extraordinary mobility which enabled it to deliver the very effective series of **Freyberg** 'left hooks' from **Alamein** to the **Mareth Line**.

His care of his men out of the line during times of rest was no less thorough. It was recognised in the **Middle East** and appreciated by New Zealanders that the Forces Clubs and other amenities they enjoyed were unequalled. He was determined that his men got nothing but the best.

For **General Freyberg** the campaign in **Crete** did not end with the withdrawal of our troops in 1941. At the end of September of this year a party of New Zealanders flew to **Crete** for a special memorial service. They were led by **General Freyberg**; and in this pilgrimage he was able to express not only his own feelings but also those of the people of New Zealand.

His Excellency the Governor-General has confirmed the promotion of Brigadier W. G. Stevens, CB, CBE, to Major-General and approved his appointment to the Command of the 2nd NZEF. <sup>1</sup> Major-General Stevens' outstanding administrative record shows that he is well fitted to carry out efficiently the special responsibilities of his new post.

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<sup>1</sup> **General Stevens relinquished command on 6 Jul 1946.**

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# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## APPENDIX I

### *Appendix I*

**Army Headquarters,  
New Zealand Military Forces,  
Wellington, C. 1**

**19 February 1944 MEMORANDUM for:**

**Rt. Hon. the Prime Minister**

### *APPRECIATION OF THE PROBLEM OF THE WITHDRAWAL OF ONE OR OTHER OF THE 2ND OR 3RD NEW ZEALAND DIVISIONS*

- 1. As directed I have prepared the attached appreciation for your perusal.**
- 2. I have the following comments to submit regarding it:**
  - ( The appreciation deals with the problem of withdrawing one of the**
    - a) Divisions and does not discuss the question whether such action should or should not be taken.**
    - b) You will appreciate that certain factors such as ‘Relative Strategical Importance of European and Pacific Theatres’, ‘Present and Pending Operations’, and ‘Shipping’ to some extent, require a more extensive knowledge of Allied resources, strategical plans and intentions, and of enemy resources than is available to me to discuss them exhaustively, but the arguments advanced in the appreciation in respect of these matters admit, I suggest, of little variation, being generally in the nature of principles or self-evident truths.**
    - c) In arriving at a final conclusion, the chief difficulty is to give appropriate weight to each factor. In my view, practically all considerations on the military side are strongly in favour of the retention of the 2nd Division overseas, while on the political side, of which my knowledge of probable and genuine reactions is admittedly superficial and based chiefly on hearsay, the considerations, on the short view at least, favour the retention**

overseas of the 3rd Division. The difficulty confronting the statesman is to weigh the military considerations against his more intimate knowledge of the political considerations, while the soldier is in precisely the opposite position.

3. While the question of whether New Zealand's war effort should be concentrated more on production than hitherto, and if necessary at the expense of the fighting effort, is a matter for advice from the highest Allied authorities, the question of how the increased production is to be obtained, whether in fact it is necessary to reduce the fighting effort to obtain it, and if so by how much, is clearly a matter for the **New Zealand Government**, which alone is able to determine what sacrifices should be required of the people, what reorganisation or adjustments are feasible, and the effect of them.
4. It may interest you to know that after preparing the appreciation, I discussed the main factors and my conclusions with my colleagues at the conclusion of a Chiefs of Staff meeting, and the Chief of the Naval Staff and the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff (in the absence of the Chief of the Air Staff) have authorised me to say that they agree with my conclusions.

(Signed) E. PUTTICK

Lieutenant-General,  
Chief of the General Staff

## *APPRECIATION BY THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF*

*19 February 1944*

### 1. OBJECT

**Return of 2nd or 3rd Division to New Zealand**

### 2. FACTORS

*(a) Relative strategical importance of European and Pacific theatres*

**2nd  
Division**

(i) **Germany** is still the chief enemy. She has a highly

**3rd  
Division**

(i) **Japan** has no important Allied

important Allied country under attack by air and submarine and under some threat of invasion. She is affecting to some degree British production and morale and reducing Allied shipping strength. Although unlikely, it is still possible that she could win the war if by inventions or strategical surprise her submarine and air attacks again became sufficiently effective, or she might create a stalemate. She exposes the people of **Britain** to danger and imposes restrictions in lighting, assembly, and food which after over four years may seriously affect morale.

country other than **China** under similar attack or threat. She is not affecting Allied production or morale, nor reducing shipping to any appreciable extent. Her submarines and air strength are not favourably situated, as are **Germany's**, to create a danger of Allied defeat. She does not affect to any degree the safety or comfort of any large Allied population other than **China**, and her operations have little effect on morale.

(ii) **British and United States** weakness in **Europe** is the small number of battle-experienced divisions to meet the war-experienced German Army. Every battle-experienced division in **Europe** is literally vital to the success of pending operations. There are signs that a really big effort may defeat **Germany** quickly.

(ii) Proportionately, the number of battle-experienced divisions employed and likely to be employed immediately in the **Pacific** areas is very high, and the loss of one is relatively of nothing like the same importance as is the case in **Europe**. There are no indications that **Japan** can be defeated in the near future.

(iii) Participation in the European theatre is marked evidence of the cohesion of the British Commonwealth to our Allies and enemies, stiffens British morale which has been under

(iii) Participation in the **Pacific** theatre from the British Empire point of view is more defensive than offensive in character,



strain for over four years, and follows the principle of true strategy in concentrating on the principal and most dangerous enemy.

An example of a similar attitude to that of New Zealand is **Canada**, who, although her interest in the **Pacific** must be very real, has, except for **Hong Kong** and **Kiska**, concentrated her armed effort in **Europe**.

in that it protects New Zealand and is not directed against the most dangerous enemy. It offers no prospects of quick success, with the consequent relief from various dangers of losing the war and power to concentrate total forces against the one remaining enemy, as is the case in the European war.

## *CONCLUSION*

The advantages resulting and the dangers avoided through the defeat of **Germany** are so important as to make the European theatre of predominant strategical importance, and consequently the fullest possible concentration should be made there to defeat **Germany** at the earliest possible date.

### *(b) Political*

#### **2nd**

##### **Division**

(i) Has very favourable effect in **Britain** and will be of great value to British statesmen in combating war weariness after the defeat of **Germany**, when directing British forces against **Japan**.

(ii) Has unfavourable effect on **Australia**,

#### **3rd**

##### **Division**

(i) Has no effect on British war weariness which is not already obtained by the spectacle of a favourite Dominion endangered by a powerful Asiatic nation.

(ii) Has a favourable

which, faced with a very different strategical problem involving invasion of her territory, attack on her mainland, and exposure to an invasion by balanced forces moving by bounds under cover of shore-based aircraft, withdrew her forces to the Australian and **Pacific** theatres.

effect on **Australia**, which favours **Pacific** nations concentrating on the **Pacific** war and would like to see all New Zealand forces in the **Pacific**.

( *Note:* **Australia's** attitude is probably influenced by two main factors, firstly her original fear of Japanese invasion and later her desire to concentrate all possible forces to push the Japanese further away, and secondly, the political difficulties created by comparisons between the New Zealand and Australian attitude to the global war.)

(iii) May have an unfavourable effect on that section of **United States** opinion which regards the **Pacific** war as the more important, but in view of the heavy **United States** participation in the European theatre, this section is

(iii) Has a favourable effect on that section of **United States** opinion which considers the

likely to be at most proportionate to the forces engaged and events in **Europe** may well reduce it, i.e., success and the power resulting from it to concentrate overwhelming forces against **Japan**, will convince waverers or advocates of concentrating against **Japan** of the wisdom of the ' **Germany** first' strategy.

As the war with **Japan** will continue well beyond the end of the war with **Germany**, there should be ample opportunity for New Zealand to finish the war with **Germany** and then concentrate on **Japan** so as to participate in the decisive concluding stages, and so remove any earlier unfavourable opinion, if such exists, in both **Australia** and the **United States**.

**Pacific** war the more important.

## *CONCLUSIONS*

The withdrawal of 2nd Division, while it would cause acute disappointment in England and probably other parts of the Empire as well as to many in New Zealand, would be unlikely to cause any political difficulties

The withdrawal of 3rd Division would create an unfavourable impression in the **United States Forces** in the **Pacific**, and in that section of **United States** opinion which, for the moment at least, regards the **Pacific** as the more important theatre. Although this unfavourable impression would be reduced if the withdrawal was effected in order to increase production to the level required to meet Allied demands for supplies, it would, on the other hand, be increased because of the prevalence of opinion amongst **United States** personnel that the same result could be achieved by other methods, without reducing the present fighting effort, e.g., by a reorganisation and readjustment of available

**civil manpower, increased working hours, abolition of non-essential activities. ( Note: Opinions in this direction are created or strengthened by the frequency of and the attendances at race meetings, reduced or absence of work on Saturdays (including the closing of many Government offices all day Saturday), apart from any actual knowledge of hours worked or of existence of non-essential activities).**

**Australian opinion would be unfavourable to withdrawal of 3rd Division as a breach of what **Australia** regards as the true role of Australian and New Zealand Forces, namely, concentration of forces against the Japanese.**

**The importance to be placed on the creation of unfavourable opinion in the **United States** and **Australia** is a matter for statesmen, not for soldiers. It is very probable, however, in the event that it is decided to withdraw 3rd Division, that it will be well within the capacity of New Zealand, on the conclusion of the war with **Germany**, to provide one division for the war against **Japan**, and such action would in all probability entirely remove any unfavourable impression existing prior to such re-participation. In the meantime New Zealand's record in the **Pacific**, including weakening of her Home Defences to secure **Fiji**; provision of troops for **Fiji**, **Tonga**, and **New Caledonia** to release **United States** troops for offensive action; garrisoning **Norfolk Island**; construction of airfields in **Fiji**; provision of powerful air forces in the forward area; provision of valuable Naval forces forward, at the expense of her Home Defences and interior economy should, it is suggested, be a sufficient answer to any Australian or **United States** adverse opinion, if any importance is ascribed to such opinion.**

### ***(c) Present and Pending Operations***

#### **2nd Division**

**(i) 2nd Division is engaged in full strength against the enemy in **Italy** and has been allotted a highly-**

#### **3rd Division**

**(i) 3rd Division has 2/3rds of its strength in a very**

**important tactical role, for which its special organisation, training and experience make it peculiarly suitable.**

**There appears to be little if any surplus Allied strength in the Italian theatre, while the operations there are undoubtedly part of the greater invasion plan.**

**Consequently the replacement of 2nd Division by another division would be essential, and within the next several months appears likely to create peculiarly difficult problems of suitability of the replacement division and disorganisation of prepared plans, quite apart from administrative difficulties such as the provision of shipping. The particular value of the 2nd New Zealand Division in influencing the outcome of large-scale operations has already been emphasised on at least two occasions.**

**forward position on the South Pacific front, i.e., Nissan Island, with the remainder chiefly in Treasury Island in close proximity to strongly-held Japanese areas. Both components of 3rd Division are now in a garrison role, though it is possible and perhaps probable that the force holding Treasury Island will shortly be given an offensive role, i.e., to capture islands north of Nissan Island. Operations of 3rd Division are undoubtedly part of a general offensive plan designed to isolate Rabaul, in which, probably, all available divisions have been allotted their roles. Withdrawal of forces in Nissan Island is a dangerous operation and**

may be classed as impracticable until Allied forces are much farther north.

Withdrawal of forces in Treasury Island though exposed to attack is possible, while withdrawal of reinforcements &c., in Guadalcanal and New Caledonia is also practicable, but would result in forward units being unsupported and falling below establishment, besides disorganising the United States offensive plans during a critical period.

## *CONCLUSION*

The withdrawal of either 2nd or 3rd Division is impracticable at the present time and its practicability in future depends upon tactical developments.

The disruptive effect of withdrawal would be most serious in either case but would have wider and more important disadvantageous effects in the case of 2nd Division though tactically less dangerous to the New Zealand troops in their present situations than in the case of 3rd Division.

## **(d) Shipping**

### **2nd Division**

**(i) 2nd Division is almost double the strength of 3rd Division, the distance from New Zealand is five times greater than in the case of 3rd Division, and there is practically no shipping returning to New Zealand with spare accommodation for personnel, equipment, and stores.**

### **3rd Division**

**(i) The probable availability of shipping returning from the Islands to New Zealand, and the much lower strength of 3rd Division compared with 2nd Division and proximity of 3rd Division to New Zealand would make provision of shipping for 3rd Division much easier than for 2nd Division. On the other hand, loading of heavier stores and equipment in view of the primitive facilities would be much more difficult and perhaps impracticable because the time required for loading could not be spared on account of the primary tasks on which the ships are engaged.**

## **CONCLUSIONS**

**The movement of 2nd Division would be very much more expensive in shipping than that of 3rd Division and in view of concentrations of shipping for the invasion of **Europe** is likely to be impracticable.**

**The movement of 3rd Division utilising returning ships may be feasible and is much less expensive in shipping.**

## **(e) Time Factor**

**The practicability of withdrawing either division is dependent upon developments in both theatres and cannot be judged with any accuracy. The conclusions reached under the headings of ( c ) *Present and Pending Operations*, and ( d ) *Shipping*, particularly the latter, indicate that the 3rd Division could reach New Zealand much earlier than an equal**

**number of men from 2nd Division. Further, the tendency thus far has been to employ 3rd Division by brigade groups and not as a complete division, and the probabilities are that this will continue, opening up the possibility of returning one brigade group and leaving the second brigade group in action. There is no such possibility in the case of 2nd Division, and all considerations therefore favour a substantial part of 3rd Division being available in New Zealand many months earlier than in the case of an equal number from 2nd Division.**

***(f) Climate, Relief, and Casualties***

**2nd  
Division**

**(i) 2nd Division has been approximately four years abroad, the first year on a garrison and training role. It has had severe fighting punctuated by periods in reserve. Casualties have been light judged by 1914–18 standards. The number of long-service men has been considerably reduced by earlier casualties and prisoners, and by exemptions and defections from the furlough draft. Practically all men of over three years' service have now had lengthy furlough.**

**(ii) 2nd Division has had some three years in a semi-tropical but healthy climate with good amenities. It is now in a**

**3rd  
Division**

**(i) 3rd Division has been approximately two years in being, as regards 50 per cent of the force, a proportion having about three years' service, but both above categories have had a break of several months' Home Service. Remainder of the Division has had approximately 18 months' service. The Division has had little fighting and negligible casualties.**

**(ii) 3rd Division has been in a tropical climate, which in the areas they have occupied during the last six months has been oppressive.**



temperate climate. Normal relief from the forward area into a reserve role provides the necessary relief from active service strain.

Amenities have been poor. For climatic reasons, normal relief to a reserve role is not sufficient, and the Division requires relief at about six-monthly intervals in a more temperate climate.

(iii) 2nd Division will have fewer climatic casualties and less post-war ill-health on that account, but is likely to have higher battle casualties.

(iii) 3rd Division will have higher climatic casualties with the possibility of a more or less serious legacy of postwar ill-health. It is likely to have lower battle casualties than 2nd Division, but it cannot be assumed that this will continue, in view of the isolated nature and amphibious character of its operations.

(iv) Periodic reliefs of 2nd Division from forward area raises no question of return to New Zealand and therefore no difficulties in return of the Division to the forward area.

(iv) Periodic reliefs of 3rd Division could be suitably carried out by return to **New Caledonia**; but the absence of amenities and sentiment will lead to a demand for leave in New Zealand. If this leave is granted, there is likely to be difficulty similar to that experienced with the furlough draft when the men are due to return to the forward area.

## *CONCLUSIONS*

The factors of length of service abroad and severity of fighting favour return of 2nd Division. The strain on these accounts can be efficiently met by periods of relief in the operational area.

The 3rd Division, however, must have relief from the climate requiring retirement to rear areas, which would bring them within easy

distance of New Zealand and lead to insistent demands for leave in New Zealand. This, in turn, is likely to cause difficulty in the men rejoining the division. On the grounds of military necessity, therefore, and discarding sentiment the factors favour withdrawal of 3rd Division.

### *(g) Re-employment of Troops*

Whichever division returns, a considerable proportion of the men will require to be sent as reinforcements to the other division over a period.

#### **2nd Division**

(i) Men of the 2nd Division would almost certainly flatly refuse to proceed to the 3rd Division so long as there were fit men in New Zealand who had not been overseas.

#### **3rd Division**

(i) Men of 3rd Division would in all probability readily proceed to 2nd Division, but some difficulty would probably be encountered through the contention being continued that fit men in industry should go overseas before returned troops are required to proceed twice.

### *CONCLUSION*

It would be much easier to use men of 3rd Division to reinforce 2nd Division than vice versa.

### *(h) Temporary return of either Division*

This would lead to the disappearance of the division as a fighting formation, requiring reorganisation and training over a period of not less than six months before the division was fit for active service.

### *GENERAL CONCLUSIONS*

Of the factors considered above, the conclusions arrived at in regard to ( a ) *Relative Strategical Importance of European and Pacific*

*Theatres, ( d) Shipping, ( e) Time Factor, ( g) Re-employment of Troops* are decisively in favour of retaining 2nd Division in **Europe**.

( c) *Present and Pending Operations*—slightly favour retaining 2nd Division abroad, while ( f) *Climate, Relief and Casualties*—favour retaining 3rd Division in the **Pacific**, except for the difficulties created in 3rd Division through the necessity on account of climate to grant leave in New Zealand.

( b) *Political*—strongly favour retaining 3rd Division in the **Pacific** though, subject to expert judgment on political issues, it seems that a sufficient answer to any Australian or **United States** adverse opinion is available in New Zealand's past record in the **Pacific** and in the Air and Navy forces remaining there, and a complete answer when after the defeat of **Germany**, a New Zealand division again takes the field against **Japan**.

( h) *Temporary return of either Division*—applies equally to both divisions.

*COURSE RECOMMENDED*

**Retain 2nd Division abroad.**

**Return 3rd Division to New Zealand when the operational situation permits.**

**E. PUTTICK**

,  
**Lieutenant-General,**  
**Chief of the General Staff**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## APPRECIATION OF THE PROBLEM OF THE WITHDRAWAL OF ONE OR OTHER OF THE 2ND OR 3RD NEW ZEALAND DIVISIONS

### *APPRECIATION OF THE PROBLEM OF THE WITHDRAWAL OF ONE OR OTHER OF THE 2ND OR 3RD NEW ZEALAND DIVISIONS*

- 1. As directed I have prepared the attached appreciation for your perusal.**
- 2. I have the following comments to submit regarding it:**
  - ( The appreciation deals with the problem of withdrawing one of the**
    - a) Divisions and does not discuss the question whether such action should or should not be taken.**
    - b) You will appreciate that certain factors such as ‘Relative Strategic Importance of European and Pacific Theatres’, ‘Present and Pending Operations’, and ‘Shipping’ to some extent, require a more extensive knowledge of Allied resources, strategical plans and intentions, and of enemy resources than is available to me to discuss them exhaustively, but the arguments advanced in the appreciation in respect of these matters admit, I suggest, of little variation, being generally in the nature of principles or self-evident truths.**
    - c) In arriving at a final conclusion, the chief difficulty is to give appropriate weight to each factor. In my view, practically all considerations on the military side are strongly in favour of the retention of the 2nd Division overseas, while on the political side, of which my knowledge of probable and genuine reactions is admittedly superficial and based chiefly on hearsay, the considerations, on the short view at least, favour the retention overseas of the 3rd Division. The difficulty confronting the statesman is to weigh the military considerations against his more intimate knowledge of the political considerations, while the soldier is in precisely the opposite position.**
- 3. While the question of whether New Zealand's war effort should be concentrated more on production than hitherto, and if necessary at the expense of the fighting effort, is a matter for advice from the highest Allied authorities, the question of how the increased production is to be obtained, whether in fact it is necessary to reduce**

the fighting effort to obtain it, and if so by how much, is clearly a matter for the **New Zealand Government**, which alone is able to determine what sacrifices should be required of the people, what reorganisation or adjustments are feasible, and the effect of them.

4. It may interest you to know that after preparing the appreciation, I discussed the main factors and my conclusions with my colleagues at the conclusion of a Chiefs of Staff meeting, and the Chief of the Naval Staff and the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff (in the absence of the Chief of the Air Staff) have authorised me to say that they agree with my conclusions.

**(Signed) E. PUTTICK**

**Lieutenant-General,  
Chief of the General Staff**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## APPRECIATION BY THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF – 19 FEBRUARY 1944

### APPRECIATION BY THE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF 19 February 1944

#### 1. OBJECT

##### Return of 2nd or 3rd Division to New Zealand

#### 2. FACTORS

##### *(a) Relative strategical importance of European and Pacific theatres*

##### 2nd Division

(i) **Germany** is still the chief enemy. She has a highly important Allied country under attack by air and submarine and under some threat of invasion. She is affecting to some degree British production and morale and reducing Allied shipping strength. Although unlikely, it is still possible that she could win the war if by inventions or strategical surprise her submarine and air attacks again became sufficiently effective, or she might create a stalemate. She exposes the people of **Britain** to danger and imposes restrictions in lighting, assembly, and food which after over four years may seriously

##### 3rd Division

(i) **Japan** has no important Allied country other than **China** under similar attack or threat. She is not affecting Allied production or morale, nor reducing shipping to any appreciable extent. Her submarines and air strength are not favourably situated, as are **Germany's**, to create a danger of Allied defeat. She does not affect to any degree the safety or comfort of any large Allied population other than **China**, and

affect morale.

(ii) **British and United States** weakness in **Europe** is the small number of battle-experienced divisions to meet the war-experienced German Army. Every battle-experienced division in **Europe** is literally vital to the success of pending operations. There are signs that a really big effort may defeat **Germany** quickly.

(iii) Participation in the European theatre is marked evidence of the cohesion of the British Commonwealth to our Allies and enemies, stiffens British morale which has been under strain for over four years, and follows the principle of true strategy in concentrating on the principal and most dangerous enemy. An example of a similar attitude to that of New Zealand is **Canada**, who, although her interest in the **Pacific** must be very real, has, except for **Hong Kong** and **Kiska**, concentrated her armed effort in **Europe**.

her operations have little effect on morale. Proportionately, the number of battle-experienced divisions employed and likely to be employed immediately in the **Pacific** areas is very high, and the loss of one is relatively of nothing like the same importance as is the case in **Europe**. There are no indications that **Japan** can be defeated in the near future.

(iii) Participation in the **Pacific** theatre from the British Empire point of view is more defensive than offensive in character, in that it protects New Zealand and is not directed against the most dangerous enemy. It offers no prospects of quick success, with the consequent relief from various dangers of losing the war and power to concentrate total forces against the one remaining enemy, as is the case in the European war.

The advantages resulting and the dangers avoided through the defeat of **Germany** are so important as to make the European theatre of predominant strategical importance, and consequently the fullest possible concentration should be made there to defeat **Germany** at the earliest possible date.

*(b) Political*

**2nd  
Division**

- (i) Has very favourable effect in **Britain** and will be of great value to British statesmen in combating war weariness after the defeat of **Germany**, when directing British forces against **Japan**.
- (ii) Has unfavourable effect on **Australia**, which, faced with a very different strategical problem involving invasion of her territory, attack on her mainland, and exposure to an invasion by balanced forces moving by bounds under cover of shore-based aircraft, withdrew her forces to the Australian and **Pacific** theatres.

**3rd  
Division**

- (i) Has no effect on British war weariness which is not already obtained by the spectacle of a favourite Dominion endangered by a powerful Asiatic nation.
- (ii) Has a favourable effect on **Australia**, which favours **Pacific** nations concentrating on the **Pacific** war and would like to see all New Zealand forces in the **Pacific**.  
( *Note:* **Australia's** attitude is probably influenced by two main factors, firstly her original fear



of Japanese invasion and later her desire to concentrate all possible forces to push the Japanese further away, and secondly, the political difficulties created by comparisons between the New Zealand and Australian attitude to the global war.)

(iii) Has a favourable effect on that section of **United States** opinion which considers the **Pacific** war the more important.

(iii) May have an unfavourable effect on that section of **United States** opinion which regards the **Pacific** war as the more important, but in view of the heavy **United States** participation in the European theatre, this section is likely to be at most proportionate to the forces engaged and events in **Europe** may well reduce it, i.e., success and the power resulting from it to concentrate overwhelming forces against **Japan**, will convince waverers or advocates of concentrating against **Japan** of the wisdom of the ' **Germany** first' strategy.

As the war with **Japan** will continue well beyond the end of the war with **Germany**, there should be ample opportunity for New Zealand to finish the war with **Germany** and then concentrate on **Japan** so as to participate in the decisive concluding stages, and so remove any earlier unfavourable opinion, if such exists, in both **Australia** and the **United**

## *CONCLUSIONS*

**The withdrawal of 2nd Division, while it would cause acute disappointment in England and probably other parts of the Empire as well as to many in New Zealand, would be unlikely to cause any political difficulties**

**The withdrawal of 3rd Division would create an unfavourable impression in the **United States Forces in the Pacific**, and in that section of **United States** opinion which, for the moment at least, regards the **Pacific** as the more important theatre. Although this unfavourable impression would be reduced if the withdrawal was effected in order to increase production to the level required to meet Allied demands for supplies, it would, on the other hand, be increased because of the prevalence of opinion amongst **United States** personnel that the same result could be achieved by other methods, without reducing the present fighting effort, e.g., by a reorganisation and readjustment of available civil manpower, increased working hours, abolition of non-essential activities. ( *Note: Opinions in this direction are created or strengthened by the frequency of and the attendances at race meetings, reduced or absence of work on Saturdays (including the closing of many Government offices all day Saturday), apart from any actual knowledge of hours worked or of existence of non-essential activities).***

**Australian opinion would be unfavourable to withdrawal of 3rd Division as a breach of what **Australia** regards as the true role of Australian and New Zealand Forces, namely, concentration of forces against the Japanese.**

**The importance to be placed on the creation of unfavourable opinion in the **United States** and **Australia** is a matter for statesmen, not for soldiers. It is very probable, however, in the event that it is decided to withdraw 3rd Division, that it will be well within the capacity of New**

**Zealand, on the conclusion of the war with Germany, to provide one division for the war against Japan, and such action would in all probability entirely remove any unfavourable impression existing prior to such re-participation. In the meantime New Zealand's record in the Pacific, including weakening of her Home Defences to secure Fiji; provision of troops for Fiji, Tonga, and New Caledonia to release United States troops for offensive action; garrisoning Norfolk Island; construction of airfields in Fiji; provision of powerful air forces in the forward area; provision of valuable Naval forces forward, at the expense of her Home Defences and interior economy should, it is suggested, be a sufficient answer to any Australian or United States adverse opinion, if any importance is ascribed to such opinion.**

### ***(c) Present and Pending Operations***

#### **2nd Division**

**(i) 2nd Division is engaged in full strength against the enemy in Italy and has been allotted a highly-important tactical role, for which its special organisation, training and experience make it peculiarly suitable.**

**There appears to be little if any surplus Allied strength in the Italian theatre, while the operations there are undoubtedly part of the greater invasion plan.**

**Consequently the replacement of 2nd Division by another division would be essential, and within the next several months appears likely to create peculiarly difficult problems of suitability of the replacement division and disorganisation of prepared plans, quite apart from administrative difficulties such as the provision of shipping. The particular value of the**

#### **3rd Division**

**(i) 3rd Division has 2/3rds of its strength in a very forward position on the South Pacific front, i.e., Nissan Island, with the remainder chiefly in Treasury Island in close proximity to strongly-held Japanese areas. Both components of 3rd Division are now in a garrison role, though it is possible and perhaps probable that the force holding Treasury**

**2nd New Zealand Division in influencing the outcome of large-scale operations has already been emphasised on at least two occasions.**

**Island will shortly be given an offensive role, i.e., to capture islands north of Nissan Island.**

**Operations of 3rd Division are undoubtedly part of a general offensive plan designed to isolate Rabaul, in which, probably, all available divisions have been allotted their roles.**

**Withdrawal of forces in Nissan Island is a dangerous operation and may be classed as impracticable until Allied forces are much farther north.**

**Withdrawal of forces in Treasury Island though exposed to attack is possible, while withdrawal of reinforcements &c., in Guadalcanal and New Caledonia is also practicable, but would result in forward units being**

unsupported and falling below establishment, besides disorganising the United States offensive plans during a critical period.

## CONCLUSION

The withdrawal of either 2nd or 3rd Division is impracticable at the present time and its practicability in future depends upon tactical developments.

The disruptive effect of withdrawal would be most serious in either case but would have wider and more important disadvantageous effects in the case of 2nd Division though tactically less dangerous to the New Zealand troops in their present situations than in the case of 3rd Division.

### (d) Shipping

#### 2nd Division

(i) 2nd Division is almost double the strength of 3rd Division, the distance from New Zealand is five times greater than in the case of 3rd Division, and there is practically no shipping returning to New Zealand with spare accommodation for

#### 3rd Division

(i) The probable availability of shipping returning from the Islands to New Zealand, and the much lower strength of 3rd Division compared with 2nd Division and proximity of 3rd Division to New Zealand would make provision of shipping for 3rd Division much easier than for 2nd Division. On the other hand, loading of heavier stores and equipment in view of the primitive facilities would be much more difficult and perhaps

personnel,  
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stores.

impracticable because the time  
required for loading could not be  
spared on account of the primary  
tasks on which the ships are  
engaged.

## *CONCLUSIONS*

The movement of 2nd Division would be very much more expensive in shipping than that of 3rd Division and in view of concentrations of shipping for the invasion of **Europe** is likely to be impracticable.

The movement of 3rd Division utilising returning ships may be feasible and is much less expensive in shipping.

### *(e) Time Factor*

The practicability of withdrawing either division is dependent upon developments in both theatres and cannot be judged with any accuracy. The conclusions reached under the headings of ( *c* ) *Present and Pending Operations*, and ( *d* ) *Shipping*, particularly the latter, indicate that the 3rd Division could reach New Zealand much earlier than an equal number of men from 2nd Division. Further, the tendency thus far has been to employ 3rd Division by brigade groups and not as a complete division, and the probabilities are that this will continue, opening up the possibility of returning one brigade group and leaving the second brigade group in action. There is no such possibility in the case of 2nd Division, and all considerations therefore favour a substantial part of 3rd Division being available in New Zealand many months earlier than in the case of an equal number from 2nd Division.

### *(f) Climate, Relief, and Casualties*

**2nd  
Division**

(i) 2nd Division has been  
approximately four years

**3rd  
Division**

(i) 3rd Division has been  
approximately two years in

abroad, the first year on a garrison and training role. It has had severe fighting punctuated by periods in reserve.

Casualties have been light judged by 1914–18 standards.

The number of long-service men has been considerably reduced by earlier casualties and prisoners, and by exemptions and defections from the furlough draft.

Practically all men of over three years' service have now had lengthy

(ii) ~~furlough~~ 2nd Division has had some three years in a semi-tropical but healthy climate with good amenities. It is now in a temperate climate. Normal relief from the forward area into a reserve role provides the necessary relief from active service strain.

(iii) 2nd Division will have fewer climatic casualties and less post-war ill-health on that account, but is likely to have higher battle casualties.

being, as regards 50 per cent of the force, a proportion having about three years' service, but both above categories have had a break of several months' Home Service. Remainder of the Division has had approximately 18 months' service.

The Division has had little fighting and negligible casualties.

(ii) 3rd Division has been in a tropical climate, which in the areas they have occupied during the last six months has been oppressive. Amenities have been poor. For climatic reasons, normal relief to a reserve role is not sufficient, and the Division requires relief at about six-monthly intervals in a more temperate climate.

(iii) 3rd Division will have higher climatic casualties with the possibility of a more or less serious legacy of postwar ill-health. It is likely to have lower battle casualties than 2nd Division, but it cannot be assumed that this will continue, in view of the isolated nature and amphibious character of its operations.

(iv) **Periodic reliefs of 2nd Division from forward area raises no question of return to New Zealand and therefore no difficulties in return of the Division to the forward area.**

(iv) **Periodic reliefs of 3rd Division could be suitably carried out by return to **New Caledonia**; but the absence of amenities and sentiment will lead to a demand for leave in New Zealand. If this leave is granted, there is likely to be difficulty similar to that experienced with the furlough draft when the men are due to return to the forward area.**

*CONCLUSIONS*

**The factors of length of service abroad and severity of fighting favour return of 2nd Division. The strain on these accounts can be efficiently met by periods of relief in the operational area.**

**The 3rd Division, however, must have relief from the climate requiring retirement to rear areas, which would bring them within easy distance of New Zealand and lead to insistent demands for leave in New Zealand. This, in turn, is likely to cause difficulty in the men rejoining the division. On the grounds of military necessity, therefore, and discarding sentiment the factors favour withdrawal of 3rd Division.**

*(g) Re-employment of Troops*

**Whichever division returns, a considerable proportion of the men will require to be sent as reinforcements to the other division over a period.**

**2nd Division**

(i) **Men of the 2nd Division would almost certainly flatly refuse to proceed to the 3rd**

**3rd Division**

(i) **Men of 3rd Division would in all probability readily proceed to 2nd Division, but some difficulty would probably be**



**Division so long as there were fit men in New Zealand who had not been overseas.**

**encountered through the contention being continued that fit men in industry should go overseas before returned troops are required to proceed twice.**

## *CONCLUSION*

**It would be much easier to use men of 3rd Division to reinforce 2nd Division than vice versa.**

### *(h) Temporary return of either Division*

**This would lead to the disappearance of the division as a fighting formation, requiring reorganisation and training over a period of not less than six months before the division was fit for active service.**

## *GENERAL CONCLUSIONS*

**Of the factors considered above, the conclusions arrived at in regard to ( a) *Relative Strategical Importance of European and Pacific Theatres*, ( d) *Shipping*, ( e) *Time Factor*, ( g) *Re-employment of Troops* are decisively in favour of retaining 2nd Division in **Europe**.**

**( c) *Present and Pending Operations*—slightly favour retaining 2nd Division abroad, while ( f) *Climate, Relief and Casualties*—favour retaining 3rd Division in the **Pacific**, except for the difficulties created in 3rd Division through the necessity on account of climate to grant leave in New Zealand.**

**( b) *Political*—strongly favour retaining 3rd Division in the **Pacific** though, subject to expert judgment on political issues, it seems that a sufficient answer to any Australian or **United States** adverse opinion is available in New Zealand's past record in the **Pacific** and in the Air and Navy forces remaining there, and a complete answer when after the defeat of **Germany**, a New Zealand division again takes the field against**

**Japan.**

**( h) *Temporary return of either Division*—applies equally to both divisions.**

***COURSE RECOMMENDED***

**Retain 2nd Division abroad.**

**Return 3rd Division to New Zealand when the operational situation permits.**

**E. PUTTICK**

**,  
Lieutenant-General,  
Chief of the General Staff**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## [SECTION]

### 1. OBJECT

**Return of 2nd or 3rd Division to New Zealand**

### 2. FACTORS

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## (A) RELATIVE STRATEGICAL IMPORTANCE OF EUROPEAN AND PACIFIC THEATRES

### *(a) Relative strategical importance of European and Pacific theatres*

#### **2nd Division**

(i) **Germany is still the chief enemy. She has a highly important Allied country under attack by air and submarine and under some threat of invasion. She is affecting to some degree British production and morale and reducing Allied shipping strength. Although unlikely, it is still possible that she could win the war if by inventions or strategical surprise her submarine and air attacks again became sufficiently effective, or she might create a stalemate. She exposes the people of Britain to danger and imposes restrictions in lighting, assembly, and food which after over four years may seriously affect morale.**

(ii) **British and United States weakness in Europe is the small number of battle-experienced divisions to meet the war-experienced German Army. Every battle-experienced division in Europe is literally vital to the success of pending**

#### **3rd Division**

(i) **Japan has no important Allied country other than China under similar attack or threat. She is not affecting Allied production or morale, nor reducing shipping to any appreciable extent. Her submarines and air strength are not favourably situated, as are Germany's, to create a danger of Allied defeat. She does not affect to any degree the safety or comfort of any large Allied population other than China, and her operations have little effect on morale.**

(ii) **Proportionately, the number of battle-experienced divisions employed and likely to be employed immediately in the Pacific areas is very high, and the loss of**

operations.

There are signs that a really big effort may defeat **Germany** quickly.

one is relatively of nothing like the same importance as is the case in **Europe**. There are no indications that **Japan** can be defeated in the near future.

(iii) Participation in the European theatre is marked evidence of the cohesion of the British Commonwealth to our Allies and enemies, stiffens British morale which has been under strain for over four years, and follows the principle of true strategy in concentrating on the principal and most dangerous enemy. An example of a similar attitude to that of New Zealand is **Canada**, who, although her interest in the **Pacific** must be very real, has, except for **Hong Kong** and **Kiska**, concentrated her armed effort in **Europe**.

(iii) Participation in the **Pacific** theatre from the British Empire point of view is more defensive than offensive in character, in that it protects New Zealand and is not directed against the most dangerous enemy. It offers no prospects of quick success, with the consequent relief from various dangers of losing the war and power to concentrate total forces against the one remaining enemy, as is the case in the European war.

## *CONCLUSION*

The advantages resulting and the dangers avoided through the defeat of **Germany** are so important as to make the European theatre of predominant strategical importance, and consequently the fullest possible concentration should be made there to defeat **Germany** at the earliest possible date.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## (B) POLITICAL

### *(b) Political*

#### **2nd Division**

- (i) **Has very favourable effect in **Britain** and will be of great value to British statesmen in combating war weariness after the defeat of **Germany**, when directing British forces against **Japan**.**
- (ii) **Has unfavourable effect on **Australia**, which, faced with a very different strategical problem involving invasion of her territory, attack on her mainland, and exposure to an invasion by balanced forces moving by bounds under cover of shore-based aircraft, withdrew her forces to the Australian and **Pacific** theatres.**

#### **3rd Division**

- (i) **Has no effect on British war weariness which is not already obtained by the spectacle of a favourite Dominion endangered by a powerful Asiatic nation.**
- (ii) **Has a favourable effect on **Australia**, which favours **Pacific** nations concentrating on the **Pacific** war and would like to see all New Zealand forces in the **Pacific**.  
( *Note:* **Australia's** attitude is probably influenced by two main factors, firstly her original fear of Japanese**

invasion and later her desire to concentrate all possible forces to push the Japanese further away, and secondly, the political difficulties created by comparisons between the New Zealand and Australian attitude to the global war.)

(iii) Has a favourable effect on that section of **United States** opinion which considers the **Pacific** war the more important.

(iii) May have an unfavourable effect on that section of **United States** opinion which regards the **Pacific** war as the more important, but in view of the heavy **United States** participation in the European theatre, this section is likely to be at most proportionate to the forces engaged and events in **Europe** may well reduce it, i.e., success and the power resulting from it to concentrate overwhelming forces against **Japan**, will convince waverers or advocates of concentrating against **Japan** of the wisdom of the ' **Germany** first' strategy.

As the war with **Japan** will continue well beyond the end of the war with **Germany**, there should be ample opportunity for New Zealand to finish the war with **Germany** and then concentrate on **Japan** so as to participate in the decisive concluding stages, and so remove any earlier unfavourable opinion, if such exists, in both **Australia** and the **United States**.

## CONCLUSIONS

The withdrawal of 2nd Division, while it would cause acute disappointment in England and probably other parts of the Empire as well as to many in New Zealand, would be unlikely to cause any political difficulties

The withdrawal of 3rd Division would create an unfavourable impression in the **United States Forces in the Pacific**, and in that section of **United States** opinion which, for the moment at least, regards the **Pacific** as the more important theatre. Although this unfavourable impression would be reduced if the withdrawal was effected in order to increase production to the level required to meet Allied demands for supplies, it would, on the other hand, be increased because of the prevalence of opinion amongst **United States** personnel that the same result could be achieved by other methods, without reducing the present fighting effort, e.g., by a reorganisation and readjustment of available civil manpower, increased working hours, abolition of non-essential activities. ( *Note: Opinions in this direction are created or strengthened by the frequency of and the attendances at race meetings, reduced or absence of work on Saturdays (including the closing of many Government offices all day Saturday), apart from any actual knowledge of hours worked or of existence of non-essential activities).*)

Australian opinion would be unfavourable to withdrawal of 3rd Division as a breach of what **Australia** regards as the true role of Australian and New Zealand Forces, namely, concentration of forces against the Japanese.

The importance to be placed on the creation of unfavourable opinion in the **United States** and **Australia** is a matter for statesmen, not for soldiers. It is very probable, however, in the event that it is decided to withdraw 3rd Division, that it will be well within the capacity of New Zealand, on the conclusion of the war with **Germany**, to provide one division for the war against **Japan**, and such action would in all



probability entirely remove any unfavourable impression existing prior to such re-participation. In the meantime New Zealand's record in the **Pacific**, including weakening of her Home Defences to secure **Fiji**; provision of troops for **Fiji**, **Tonga**, and **New Caledonia** to release **United States** troops for offensive action; garrisoning **Norfolk Island**; construction of airfields in **Fiji**; provision of powerful air forces in the forward area; provision of valuable Naval forces forward, at the expense of her Home Defences and interior economy should, it is suggested, be a sufficient answer to any Australian or **United States** adverse opinion, if any importance is ascribed to such opinion.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## (C) PRESENT AND PENDING OPERATIONS

### *(c) Present and Pending Operations*

#### **2nd Division**

(i) **2nd Division is engaged in full strength against the enemy in Italy and has been allotted a highly-important tactical role, for which its special organisation, training and experience make it peculiarly suitable.**

**There appears to be little if any surplus Allied strength in the Italian theatre, while the operations there are undoubtedly part of the greater invasion plan.**

**Consequently the replacement of 2nd Division by another division would be essential, and within the next several months appears likely to create peculiarly difficult problems of suitability of the replacement division and disorganisation of prepared plans, quite apart from administrative difficulties such as the provision of shipping. The particular value of the 2nd New Zealand Division in influencing the outcome of large-scale operations has already been emphasised on at least two occasions.**

#### **3rd Division**

(i) **3rd Division has 70 per cent of its strength in a very forward position on the South Pacific front, i.e., Nissan Island, with the remainder chiefly in Treasury Island in close proximity to strongly-held Japanese areas. Both components of 3rd Division are now in a garrison role, though it is possible and perhaps probable that the force holding Treasury Island will shortly be given an offensive role, i.e., to capture islands north of Nissan Island. Operations of 3rd Division are undoubtedly part**

of a general offensive plan designed to isolate Rabaul, in which, probably, all available divisions have been allotted their roles.

Withdrawal of forces in Nissan Island is a dangerous operation and may be classed as impracticable until Allied forces are much farther north.

Withdrawal of forces in Treasury Island though exposed to attack is possible, while withdrawal of reinforcements &c., in Guadalcanal and New Caledonia is also practicable, but would result in forward units being unsupported and falling below establishment, besides disorganising the United States offensive plans during a critical period.

## *CONCLUSION*

**The withdrawal of either 2nd or 3rd Division is impracticable at the present time and its practicability in future depends upon tactical developments.**

**The disruptive effect of withdrawal would be most serious in either case but would have wider and more important disadvantageous effects in the case of 2nd Division though tactically less dangerous to the New Zealand troops in their present situations than in the case of 3rd Division.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## (D) SHIPPING

### *(d) Shipping*

#### **2nd Division**

(i) **2nd Division is almost double the strength of 3rd Division, the distance from New Zealand is five times greater than in the case of 3rd Division, and there is practically no shipping returning to New Zealand with spare accommodation for personnel, equipment, and stores.**

#### **3rd Division**

(i) **The probable availability of shipping returning from the Islands to New Zealand, and the much lower strength of 3rd Division compared with 2nd Division and proximity of 3rd Division to New Zealand would make provision of shipping for 3rd Division much easier than for 2nd Division. On the other hand, loading of heavier stores and equipment in view of the primitive facilities would be much more difficult and perhaps impracticable because the time required for loading could not be spared on account of the primary tasks on which the ships are engaged.**

### *CONCLUSIONS*

**The movement of 2nd Division would be very much more expensive in shipping than that of 3rd Division and in view of concentrations of shipping for the invasion of **Europe** is likely to be impracticable.**

**The movement of 3rd Division utilising returning ships may be feasible and is much less expensive in shipping.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## (E) TIME FACTOR

### *(e) Time Factor*

**The practicability of withdrawing either division is dependent upon developments in both theatres and cannot be judged with any accuracy. The conclusions reached under the headings of ( c) *Present and Pending Operations*, and ( d) *Shipping*, particularly the latter, indicate that the 3rd Division could reach New Zealand much earlier than an equal number of men from 2nd Division. Further, the tendency thus far has been to employ 3rd Division by brigade groups and not as a complete division, and the probabilities are that this will continue, opening up the possibility of returning one brigade group and leaving the second brigade group in action. There is no such possibility in the case of 2nd Division, and all considerations therefore favour a substantial part of 3rd Division being available in New Zealand many months earlier than in the case of an equal number from 2nd Division.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## (F) CLIMATE, RELIEF, AND CASUALTIES

### *(f) Climate, Relief, and Casualties*

#### **2nd Division**

**(i) 2nd Division has been approximately four years abroad, the first year on a garrison and training role. It has had severe fighting punctuated by periods in reserve. Casualties have been light judged by 1914-18 standards.**

**The number of long-service men has been considerably reduced by earlier casualties and prisoners, and by exemptions and defections from the furlough draft.**

**Practically all men of over three years' service have now had lengthy furlough.**

**(ii) 2nd Division has had some three years in a semi-tropical but healthy climate with good amenities. It is now in a temperate climate. Normal relief from the forward area into a reserve role provides the necessary relief from**

#### **3rd Division**

**(i) 3rd Division has been approximately two years in being, as regards 50 per cent of the force, a proportion having about three years' service, but both above categories have had a break of several months' Home Service. Remainder of the Division has had approximately 18 months' service.**

**The Division has had little fighting and negligible casualties.**

**(ii) 3rd Division has been in a tropical climate, which in the areas they have occupied during the last six months has been oppressive. Amenities have been poor. For climatic reasons, normal relief to a reserve role is not sufficient, and the Division requires relief at about six-**

**active service strain.**

**monthly intervals in a more temperate climate.**

**(iii) 2nd Division will have fewer climatic casualties and less post-war ill-health on that account, but is likely to have higher battle casualties.**

**(iii) 3rd Division will have higher climatic casualties with the possibility of a more or less serious legacy of postwar ill-health. It is likely to have lower battle casualties than 2nd Division, but it cannot be assumed that this will continue, in view of the isolated nature and amphibious character of its operations.**

**(iv) Periodic reliefs of 2nd Division from forward area raises no question of return to New Zealand and therefore no difficulties in return of the Division to the forward area.**

**(iv) Periodic reliefs of 3rd Division could be suitably carried out by return to **New Caledonia**; but the absence of amenities and sentiment will lead to a demand for leave in New Zealand. If this leave is granted, there is likely to be difficulty similar to that experienced with the furlough draft when the men are due to return to the forward area.**

## **CONCLUSIONS**

**The factors of length of service abroad and severity of fighting favour return of 2nd Division. The strain on these accounts can be efficiently met by periods of relief in the operational area.**

**The 3rd Division, however, must have relief from the climate requiring retirement to rear areas, which would bring them within easy distance of New Zealand and lead to insistent demands for leave in New Zealand. This, in turn, is likely to cause difficulty in the men rejoining the division. On the grounds of military necessity, therefore, and discarding sentiment the factors favour withdrawal of 3rd Division.**





# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## (G) RE-EMPLOYMENT OF TROOPS

### *(g) Re-employment of Troops*

**Whichever division returns, a considerable proportion of the men will require to be sent as reinforcements to the other division over a period.**

#### **2nd Division**

**(i) Men of the 2nd Division would almost certainly flatly refuse to proceed to the 3rd Division so long as there were fit men in New Zealand who had not been overseas.**

#### **3rd Division**

**(i) Men of 3rd Division would in all probability readily proceed to 2nd Division, but some difficulty would probably be encountered through the contention being continued that fit men in industry should go overseas before returned troops are required to proceed twice.**

### *CONCLUSION*

**It would be much easier to use men of 3rd Division to reinforce 2nd Division than vice versa.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## (H) TEMPORARY RETURN OF EITHER DIVISION

### *(h) Temporary return of either Division*

**This would lead to the disappearance of the division as a fighting formation, requiring reorganisation and training over a period of not less than six months before the division was fit for active service.**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

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Of the factors considered above, the conclusions arrived at in regard to ( *a*) *Relative Strategical Importance of European and Pacific Theatres*, ( *d*) *Shipping*, ( *e*) *Time Factor*, ( *g*) *Re-employment of Troops* are decisively in favour of retaining 2nd Division in **Europe**.

( *c*) *Present and Pending Operations*—slightly favour retaining 2nd Division abroad, while ( *f*) *Climate, Relief and Casualties*—favour retaining 3rd Division in the **Pacific**, except for the difficulties created in 3rd Division through the necessity on account of climate to grant leave in New Zealand.

( *b*) *Political*—strongly favour retaining 3rd Division in the **Pacific** though, subject to expert judgment on political issues, it seems that a sufficient answer to any Australian or **United States** adverse opinion is available in New Zealand's past record in the **Pacific** and in the Air and Navy forces remaining there, and a complete answer when after the defeat of **Germany**, a New Zealand division again takes the field against **Japan**.

( *h*) *Temporary return of either Division*—applies equally to both divisions.

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

## COURSE RECOMMENDED

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**Retain 2nd Division abroad.**

**Return 3rd Division to New Zealand when the operational situation permits.**

**E. PUTTICK**

,  
**Lieutenant-General,**  
**Chief of the General Staff**

# DOCUMENTS RELATING TO NEW ZEALAND'S PARTICIPATION IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR 1939-45: VOLUME II

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