

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

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**All unambiguous end-of-line hyphens have been removed, and the
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**Some keywords in the header are a local Electronic Text Centre scheme
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GUNS AGAINST TANKS : L TROOP, 33RD BATTERY, 7TH NEW ZEALAND ANTI-TANK REGIMENT IN LIBYA, 23 NOVEMBER 1941

NEW ZEALAND IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR



GUNS AGAINST TANKS

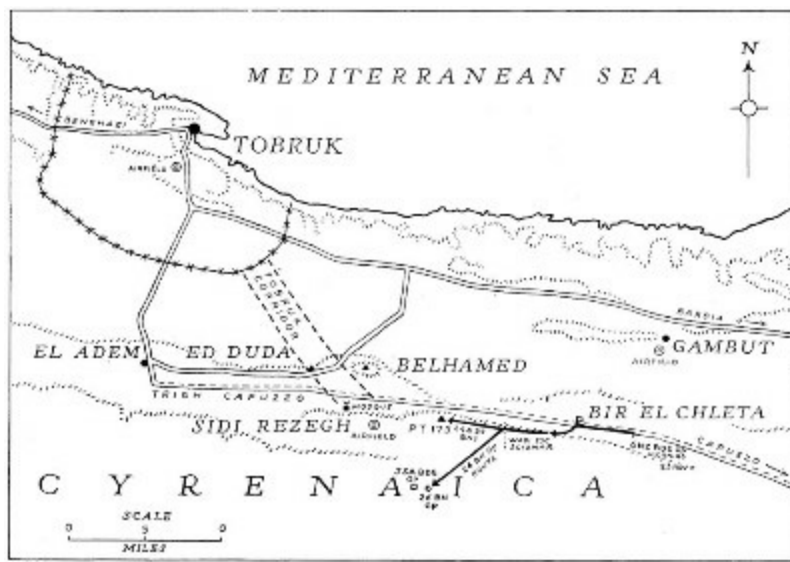
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GUNS AGAINST TANKS

L Troop, 33rd Battery, 7th New Zealand Anti-Tank Regiment
in Libya, 23 November 1941

by
E. H. SMITH

NEW ZEALAND ARMY
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS
WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND
1941



COVER PHOTOGRAPH **Two-pounder firing *en portée***

GUNS AGAINST TANKS

***L Troop, 33rd Battery, 7th New Zealand Anti-Tank Regiment
in *Libya*, 23 November 1941***

E. H. SMITH

WAR HISTORY BRANCH

**DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND
1948**

IT IS THE INTENTION of this series to present aspects of New Zealand's part in the Second World War which will not receive detailed treatment in the campaign volumes and which are considered either worthy of special notice or typical of many phases of our war experience. The series is illustrated with material which would otherwise seldom see publication. It will also contain short accounts of campaigns and operations which will be dealt with in detail in the appropriate volumes.

H. K. KIPPENBERGER

***Major-General*
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

NEW ZEALAND WAR HISTORIES

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MOVING INTO LIBYA

IN November 1941, when the second British offensive in Libya began, the 33rd Battery of the 7th New Zealand Anti-Tank Regiment consisted of four troops, each of four guns. Three troops were armed with two-pounders and one with the old 18-pounder field gun modified for use against armoured fighting vehicles. The two-pounders were carried on the decks of specially constructed lorries, termed *portées*, which were fitted with ramps and winches to enable the guns to be quickly hoisted into place. Special fittings on the lorry enabled the trail and spade to be clamped firmly to the deck so that the gun, pointing over the rear of the *portée*, was ready for immediate action.

During the training in preparation for the campaign, the regimental commander, Lieutenant-Colonel T. H. E. Oakes, * insisted that great attention should be paid to training the gun crews in fighting the two-pounders from the decks of the *portées*: that is, *en portée*. It was obvious that the best place from which to fight an anti-tank gun was from a properly dug gunpit; but the digging of pits took time and, once dug in, the gun could not be moved at a moment's notice. Colonel Oakes therefore made provision in training for those occasions when there was no time to dig pits or when a formation on the move had to be defended against attack.

***Portée* tactics had to be based on the fact that the gun was high off the ground, with the gun-shield the only protection for crew and weapon. This shield could ward off small-arms fire only from the direct front, so that against crossfire, explosive shells, mortar bombs, and armour-piercing projectiles both gun and crew were vulnerable. It was laid down that this vulnerability should be reduced by exposing the gun and its crew to enemy observation for the shortest possible time. The men were taught to fight their guns from behind whatever cover, in the form of ridges or folds in the ground, was available. First the gun made for such cover; then the vehicle was backed up until the barrel of the two-pounder cleared the concealing rise—that is, to a hull-down**

position. A few shots were fired and the *portée* was again run down under cover. That process was repeated, with the gun changing its position as often as possible to confuse enemy gunners. The lie of the land did not always permit this, but on several occasions in the 1941 Libyan campaign these tactics were employed with notable success, thanks largely to the thorough training of crews and drivers.

The initial role of the New Zealand Division in this campaign depended on the success of the armoured divisions of the 30th Corps, which opened the fighting on 18 November by driving across the Libyan border with the intention of first searching out and destroying the enemy tanks, and then continuing westward to relieve beleaguered **Tobruk**. At first reports were most favourable, and accordingly the three brigades of the New Zealand Division, operating under the command of the 13th Corps, set out on previously allotted tasks. That of the 6th Brigade, which had under its

* Biographical details of those named in this account are published on [p. 31](#).

command the 33rd Battery, was to move westward along the Trigh Capuzzo * to an area about half way between the Egyptian border and **Tobruk**, there to clear the enemy from Bir el Chleta and the airfield at **Gambut**. Then, if necessary, the formation was to assist 30th Corps in its **Tobruk** operations.

On the afternoon of 22 November, when the brigade was on its way towards Bir el Chleta, urgent messages from 30th Corps showed that the early reports of British armoured successes had been optimistic. Far from being destroyed, German tanks were pressing in strength against **Sidi Rezegh**, now held by the **Support Group** of the British 7th Armoured Division. The 30th Corps urged that the 6th Brigade should hasten to the relief of **Sidi Rezegh**. Headquarters New Zealand Division ordered the brigade to fall in with these demands. The brigade pressed on, halting at eight o'clock to laager for the night some miles to the east of Bir el

Chleta.

Because the German armour was still strong, and not as weakened as the first reports had indicated, a heavy responsibility was thrown on the New Zealand artillery, and especially on the Anti-Tank Regiment. The British tanks, outgunned by the German tanks and the very effective 88-millimetre and 50-millimetre anti-tank guns, were far too hard pressed to spare much of their strength to protect the New Zealand infantry.

The 6th Brigade kept a strict lookout during the night of 22–23 November. The 33rd Battery's two-pounders were placed round the brigade perimeter, and outside them the infantry manned a series of listening posts. In relays, one gunner watched at the firing position of each anti-tank gun while his crew-mates slept beside the *portée*. The night was tense but without alarm. At 3 a.m. the march to **Sidi Rezegh was resumed with two battalions forward, the 25th on the right and the 26th on the left, the B echelon vehicles behind them, and the 24th Battalion to the right rear. In the darkness L Troop was delayed, and it was a quarter of an hour before Lieutenant C. S. Pepper,² the troop commander, led the four *portées* after the rest of the brigade.**

The troop caught up with the 24th Battalion, under whose command it had been the previous day, at first light, just as the brigade group halted for breakfast. The formation had set out with the intention of swinging to the south to avoid a German force known to be at Bir el Chleta, but in the darkness an error in navigation had resulted in the halt being made right on top of the German position, and when the troop arrived a small engagement was raging. The brigade had clashed with part of the headquarters of the German Afrika Korps. The Germans had a few tanks and armoured cars, but those were quickly dealt with by a squadron of Valentine tanks of the 42nd Battalion, **Royal Tank Regiment, which was in support of the 6th Brigade. In a brisk fight several of the enemy were killed and valuable documents and some high-ranking officers captured. None of the battery's guns had a chance to fire, but there were several casualties among the transport drivers.**

The order of march had been changed overnight, and L Troop now found itself under the command of the 26th Battalion. There was no longer time for breakfast, and the brigade resumed its move towards **Sidi Rezegh**, the gunners allaying the keen appetite of early morning with a

* Trigh Capuzzo, marked on the map as a motor road, was in fact a series of tracks to the south of, and running roughly parallel to, the main **Bardia- Tobruk** highway. Before turning north to **Tobruk**, it passed between the features of Sidi Rezegh and **Belhamed**.

snack from the ration boxes and a short drink from their water bottles. In this campaign it was seldom that they were able to have a full meal prepared by the battery cooks. Each gun carried rations for five days, consisting of biscuits, bully beef, tins of meat and vegetable stew, jam or marmalade, cheese, tea, sugar, and canned milk. The gunners augmented this with whatever they could buy from the Church Army canteen or had received in food parcels from home: generally tinned sausages, tinned fruit, and cake.

The brigade made for the Wadi esc Sciomar, a break in the escarpment three miles east by south of Point 175, a convenient place from which to reconnoitre the position and plan its action. L Troop was on the left front of the 26th Battalion group, followed by four of the Valentine tanks. The gunners were surprised that they and not the tanks headed the advance; but the Valentines, heavily armoured and slow, were not as manoeuvrable as cruiser tanks, and not as well fitted for the lead as the more mobile *portées*.

A few miles before the wadi was reached there appeared to the west a large group of British tanks and other vehicles, some of them still smouldering. (It was learned later that on the previous afternoon enemy tanks had forced the 7th Armoured Division's **Support Group** off **Sidi Rezegh** after heavy fighting.) Movement among them showed that they were in enemy hands, and Germans in trucks were seen making away to

the south and south-west. The range was extreme, but the troop opened fire at the escaping vehicles. Lieutenant Pepper hurried to battalion headquarters for orders, and was told by the battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel J. R. Page ³, that as there were probably British wounded among the wrecks their safety must be the first consideration. By the time Lieutenant Pepper returned and gave the order to cease fire, the troop had fired about fifty rounds at distances above the limit allowed by the range scales. The Germans were seen to be making off to the west with some captured Honey tanks, but the gunners were forbidden to resume firing. Instead, the troop's guns covered the advance of three of the battalion's Bren carriers, which went over to the mass of tanks and trucks to look for British wounded. An ambulance, packed with injured men, came back to the battalion.

The carriers soon returned and the column resumed its march. At the Wadi esc Sciomar it was apparent that the enemy held Point 175, on the escarpment to the east of **Sidi Rezegh**, in force. At half past eleven Brigadier H. E. Barrowclough ⁴, commander of the 6th Brigade, issued orders for the 25th Battalion, with the 24th in reserve, to attack and capture Point 175; the 26th Battalion with its supporting arms was to establish contact with the 5th South African Brigade, five miles south-west of Point 175.

The 26th Battalion group set out at once. With the infantry were the four two-pounders of L Troop and eight 25-pounders of Major A. T. Rawle's ⁵ 30th Battery (6th Field Regiment). Again the troop led the advance, with the guns in a shallow crescent in front of the battalion column, the order from the right being L1, L2, L3, and L4, the centre guns slightly in advance of those on the flanks. Lieutenant Pepper in his 15-cwt. truck rode behind L2, and the troop 3-ton lorry, containing reserve ammunition and rations, in charge of the troop subaltern, Second-Lieutenant I. G. Scott ⁶, followed L3.

The battalion met the South Africans just before half past twelve. They had been in action the previous day, and had dug in on a rise on the southern escarpment. (Though this was 'high ground' by desert

standards, the rise was a very gentle one, which did not offer the slightest obstacle to armoured fighting vehicles.) With the South Africans were a few tanks—those of the 22nd Armoured Brigade which had survived the previous afternoon's action. Colonel Page, who had decided to dispose the 26th Battalion on a smaller rise about a mile to the east, met General Gott, commander of the British 7th Armoured Division, who had under his command twelve 25-pounder field guns, the remnants of the regiment which had been with the 7th **Support Group** at the Sidi Rezegh airfield. These he proposed to site on the east side of the South African position, facing north-east, and he directed that the New Zealand guns be disposed to the east, north, and south of the 26th Battalion area. Should any threat develop against the New Zealanders from the west, the British guns would be moved to cover the battalion's western flank.

THE BATTALION was immediately deployed in an all-round defensive position. Colonel Page placed four of the 30th Field Battery's 25-pounders (E Troop) on the northern side of the perimeter and four (F Troop) on the southern, while L Troop was told to dig its guns in facing east. *

The level ground offered no choice of positions, so the guns were simply sited in line at intervals of about fifty yards along the infantry FDLs **. Once the sites were decided, long training made the procedure automatic. As the gunners reached for picks and short-handled shovels the gun commanders (sergeants in charge of individual guns) leaped to the ground and traced with their heels the dimensions of the gunpits. There had been no chance to brew a cup of tea at breakfast-time or later, and, while the others dug, one man in each crew pumped up the primus stove and soon had a hot drink ready.

Up to this stage the 26th Battalion had not seen the main enemy force. Apart from the South Africans, however, there were scores of knocked-out vehicles, armoured and otherwise, to show that the area had been one of recent desperate combat. The South Africans were only too well aware that their position was known to the enemy. Early that morning three British-type tanks had rolled up to their lines, their turrets open, the crews wearing the familiar black berets of the Allied armoured formations and waving their hands in, presumably, friendly greeting. Approaching slowly, they had ample chance to gain a good general idea of the South African dispositions. When right up to the FDLs, their turrets were slammed down, their machine guns fired a few bursts of unexpected and deadly rounds, and the tanks made good their escape. (Six days later the Germans were to repeat this same trick to break the desperate resistance of the remnants of the

* Diagram A.

**** Forward defended localities. This term is applied to the most advanced areas of a defensive position. They are usually sited to support each other by fire. In the case of an all-round defence, as on this occasion, the FDLs marked the circumference of the area held.**

21st New Zealand Battalion and recapture Point 175.) During the morning one other enemy group had approached, quickly withdrawing when engaged and giving the impression of a reconnaissance.

The real blow fell on the South Africans a few minutes after 3.30 p.m. A strong force of enemy tanks with infantry in lorries approached from the south-west, swung across the brigade's western perimeter and, making good use of the knowledge gained from their earlier reconnaissance, drove hard at the defences.

The smoke, dust, and flames of battle, and the position of the late afternoon sun, made it hard at first for the New Zealanders to see what was happening. A few shells, probably overs, landed in the 26th Battalion area. But very soon after the attack started, urgent messages from the South Africans, asking for all the artillery support the battalion could afford, made it clear that the situation was desperate. The 30th Battery's guns were then moved to the western flank and opened fire at the German armoured vehicles and transport.

About four o'clock, when the L Troop gunners had finished digging their gunpits—L4 was actually in position in the pit—all gun commanders were called to troop headquarters, in this case the troop commander's truck. In charge of the four two-pounders were Sergeants T. E. Williamson ⁷, P. Robertson ⁸, T. E. Unverricht ⁹, and T. H. Croft ¹⁰, of L's 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively. They quickly reported to Lieutenant Pepper, and learned from him that the South Africans were in imminent danger of being overrun, that all the 26th Battalion's supporting guns were to form a line on the western perimeter, and that the troop was to move immediately. The sergeants ran back to their guns. The gunners

cursed more or less automatically when they heard that their digging was all for nothing, but the sight of their commander's truck, with Lieutenant Pepper leaning from the cab and beckoning them emphatically to follow him, made it plain that this was no time for recrimination.

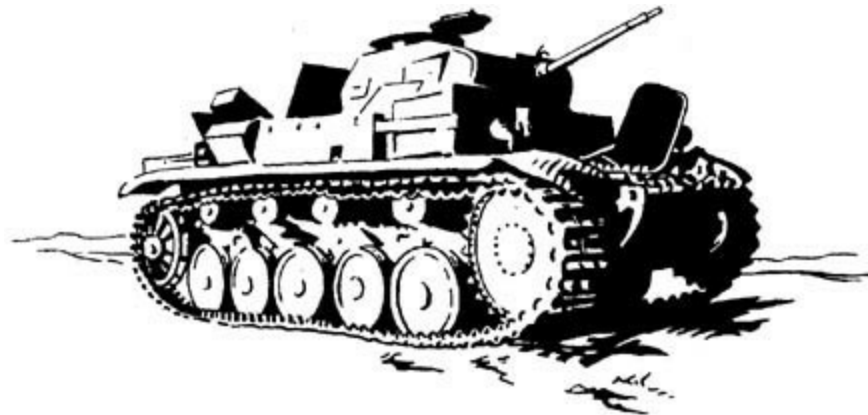
L2 and L3 were the first guns to follow. Their crews had been warned that they would be required to take part in a dusk patrol and were not to take the guns from the *portées* before it was over. L1 and L4 had to be winched back on the *portées* and clamped down before they could start to move. Lieutenant Pepper set a merry pace round the northern flank of the battalion perimeter, and the *portées*, especially the last two, had to travel fast to keep up with him. The four field guns that had been deployed to the north had already moved and were getting into action in new positions, this time preparing to fire over open sights instead of indirectly at distant targets, when the troop raced behind them. Following the original plan, some of the British guns had fallen back to help close the gap on the west of the battalion. The new gunline started from the right with four of the 30th Battery's 25-pounders, then two British field guns, and then two two-pounders *en portée*, also British. When his truck reached the left of this line, Lieutenant Pepper leaned out of the cab with a red flag. First waving it in violent circles, he pointed to the west. Every anti-tank gunner knew then where his weapon was to go into action, and the direction from which the enemy would appear.

The regiment's two-pounder troops had practised many times the manoeuvre which L Troop now carried out in grim earnest: the quick deployment of guns *en portée* to meet a sudden attack. After the signal for action, the pointing flag told the gun commanders in which direction their guns were to face. Each wheeled his *portée* into its place in line facing the enemy. The gunners agreed that nothing they had done in practice could compare for speed with their performance under the stimulus of real action. And there was another time-saving factor: the gun commanders did not have to look for cover. There was none.

It was about half past four by the time the troop's guns, high on the decks of their *portées* on a bare desert and with a sinking sun shining almost directly against them, swung into position on the left of the line. By this time the enemy was aware of the presence of the New Zealanders for small-arms fire was brought down on the 26th Battalion. The South African position was enveloped in swirls of dust and overhung by smoke, shot through in many places by the flames of burning vehicles, and at first it was impossible to make out individual tanks or trucks. The gunners had been told by Lieutenant Pepper that the South Africans were being overrun and that German tanks would almost certainly bear down on the New Zealand position. 'There are lots of them,' he said in warning the gun commanders, 'maybe over 150. But don't let that worry you. They are only little ones.'

The infantry waited in their slit-trenches for the enemy to come within effective small-arms range. On the right of the gunline the 25-pounders were firing steadily, and still farther to the right the anti-tank gunners could hear the gunfire of the other 30th Battery troop *. Two tanks, dimly visible over 1000 yards away on the right front, were thought by the troop to be the Valentines which had earlier accompanied the brigade group. In the haze they could not be certain, and until individual targets offered, there was little point in firing into the confused and dust-choked mass of friend and foe a mile away to the west.

'Keep your engines running all the time,' said Lieutenant Pepper to each gun commander as he hurried round the troop for a final check. Even though there was no cover, the guns were to be moved after each few shots, so that when smoke and dust obscured the position the enemy gunners would not be able to pick them by their flashes.



A GERMAN LIGHT TANK — MARK 2

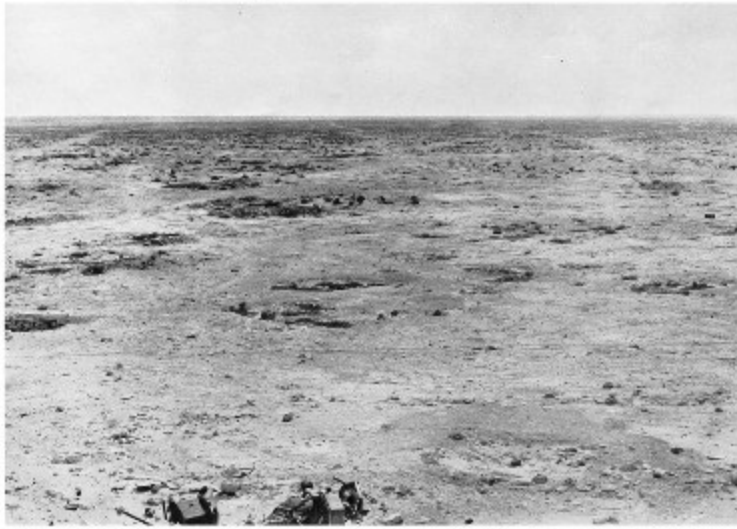
A GERMAN LIGHT TANK — MARK 2

* **Diagram B.**

THE TROOP



THE TROOP



THE DESERT *East from Point 175*

TRANSPORT

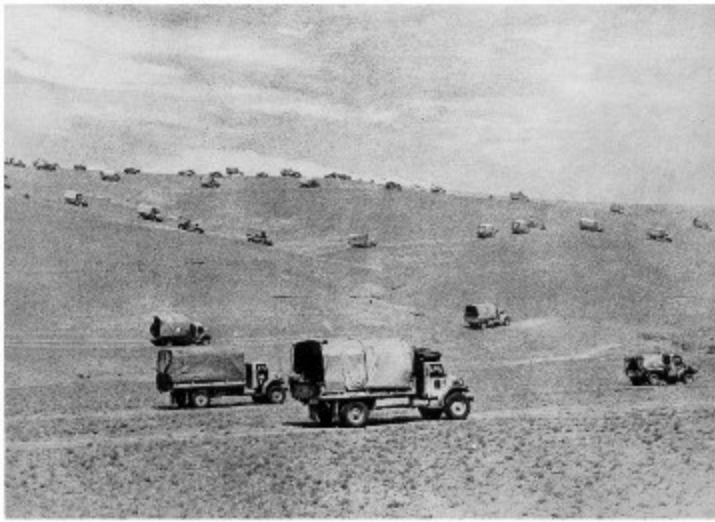


Portée waiting to move:

Gnr A. Graham on left and Sgt T. E. Williamson on right

Portée waiting to move:

Gnr A. Graham on left and Sgt T. E. Williamson on right



DESERT FORMATION



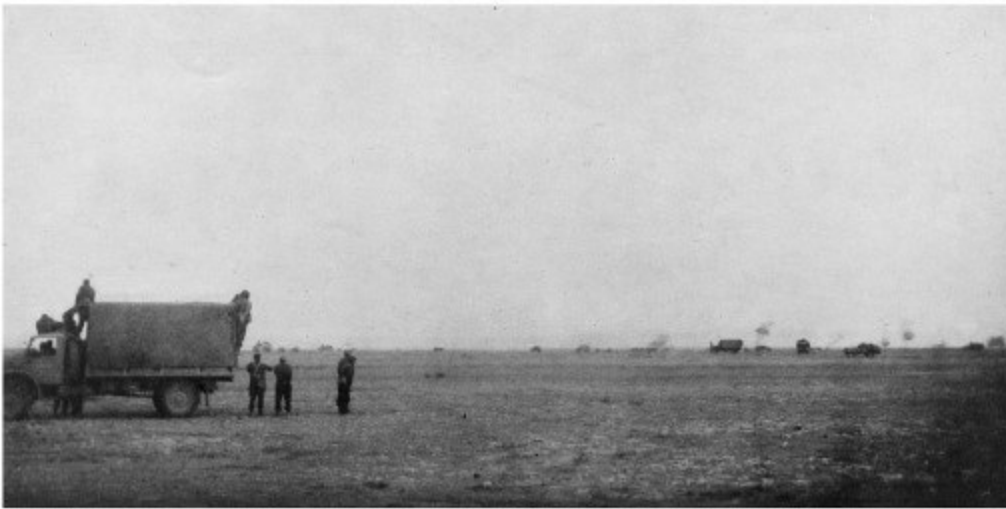
A CONVOY IN THE TOBRUK CORRIDOR

A CONVOY IN THE TOBRUK CORRIDOR



LOADED UP

LOADED UP



CONVOY UNDER SHELLFIRE
CONVOY UNDER SHELLFIRE

HEAVY SHELL-BURST AT BIR EL CHLETA



HEAVY SHELL-BURST AT BIR EL CHLETA

IN A PIT *Dug in, ready for action*



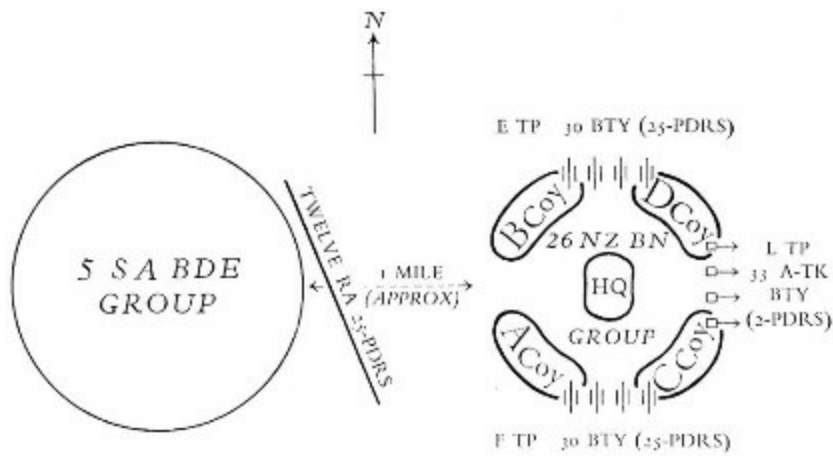
IN A PIT *Dug in, ready for action*



EN PORTÉE A photograph of New Zealanders near porté strike

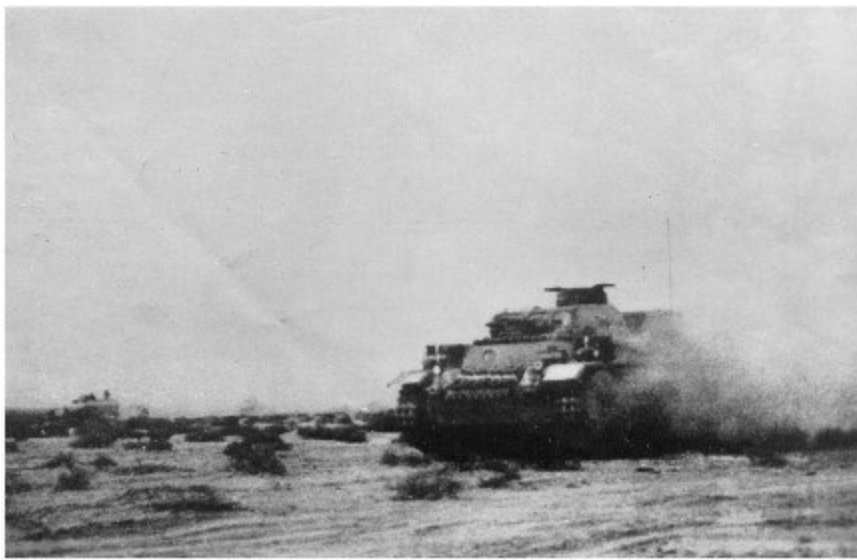
EN PORTÉE A photograph of New Zealanders shows portée action

A. FIRST DISPOSITIONS



Diagrammatic - not to scale

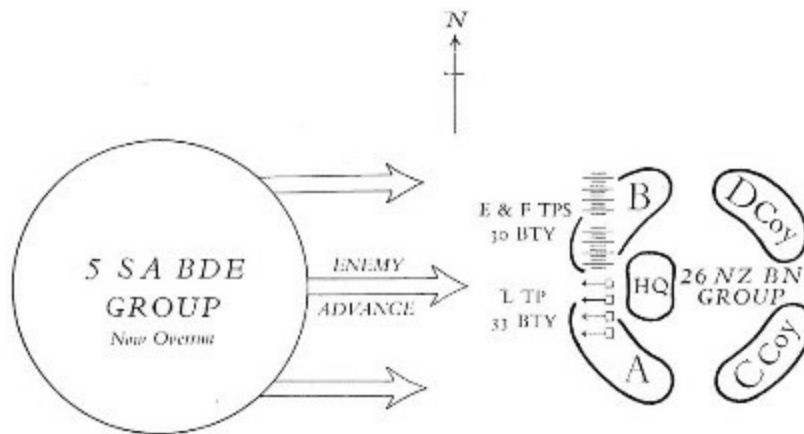
Diagrammatic - not to scale



*As the camera saw it—
a German tank closing
in on 6th Brigade*

***As the camera saw it—
a German tank closing
in on 6th Brigade***

B. FINAL DISPOSITIONS



Diagrammatic - not to scale

Diagrammatic - not to scale

*As the artist painted it—
a tank battle*



***As the artist painted it—
a tank battle***

BATTLE SCENES IN LIBYA



GERMAN ASSAULT ON 6TH BRIGADE

GERMAN ASSAULT ON 6TH BRIGADE



INFANTRY SLIT-TRENCH

INFANTRY SLIT-TRENCH



25-POUNDERS IN POSITION

25-POUNDERS IN POSITION

6TH BRIGADE UNDER FIRE



6TH BRIGADE UNDER FIRE



A GERMAN LIGHT TANK — MARK 2

A GERMAN LIGHT TANK — MARK 2

BURNING VEHICLES



BURNING VEHICLES



A CAPTURED GERMAN
AMBULANCE, AND A
TWO-POUNDER IN THE
FOREGROUND

A CAPTURED GERMAN AMBULANCE, AND A TWO-POUNDER IN THE FOREGROUND



TRUCKS AND TANKS BURN
IN THE DISTANCE
—view from the back of an L Troop
lorry

TRUCKS AND TANKS BURN IN THE DISTANCE — view from the back of an L Troop lorry

A KNOCKED-
OUT PORTÉE



A KNOCKED- OUT PORTÉE

THE TROOP
COMMANDER
Lt C. S. Pepper
and his truck



THE TROOP COMMANDER Lt C. S. Pepper and his truck



A gun crew during training

Sgt Unverricht on left of front row

A gun crew during training Sgt Unverricht on left of front row

GROUPS

*Back Row: A. V. Matthews, C. G. Rowe, W. M. Jamieson, P. J. Keenan, D. Bryant
Front Row: E. A. Frost, N. C. H. Weston, F. D. Nicholson*



GROUPS

***Back Row: A. V. Matthews, C. G. Rowe, W. M. Jamieson, P. J. Keenan, D. Bryant
Front Row: E. A. Frost, N. C. H. Weston, F. D. Nicholson***

THE ATTACK BEGINS

THE GUNNERS did not have long to wait before the Germans were seen to be attacking, with a mass of armoured vehicles, from the South African position. The two supposed Valentines on the right front suddenly wheeled and opened fire. One of their first shots, a 50-millimetre armour-piercing shell, crashed through the lower left side of L1, disabled the gun, smashed the left foot and ankle of the gun-layer, Gunner Andy Graham ¹¹ and came to rest on the deck of the *portée*. (The crew kept this shot, and when Graham went back to New Zealand it was his most cherished souvenir.) Before an effective shot had been fired at the enemy, L1 had been knocked out.

At 1800 yards, the extreme range on the range scale, the remaining three guns opened fire on the advancing enemy tanks. As they cleared the South African position, the enemy descended a slight fall in the ground below the skyline, which would otherwise have allowed them to be easily picked out by the gun-layers. On the other hand, as they drew out of the dust and smoke it was possible for individual vehicles to be distinguished, and the troop went to work in earnest.

Lieutenant Pepper's remark to the gun sergeants that the tanks, though numerous, were small ones, was borne out when the troop started shooting. It was amply demonstrated in later desert campaigns that the more heavily armoured of the German Mark 3 and Mark 4 tanks were impervious to two-pounder fire at ranges over 800 yards. But the early German tanks had much lighter armour. On this occasion the gunners saw tanks burst into flame from hits scored with the range at 1500, 1600, and even 1700 yards. The calibre of the shells which knocked out L1 and scored a subsequent hit on L3, 50-millimetre, showed that there were German Mark 3s among the attackers. It is probable that they were an early type, without the heavier armour of the later Mark 3. It is also probable that there were some German Mark 2s, much lighter tanks, among them; if part of the **Ariete Division** was with the Germans, there would have been Italian M.13s, equally vulnerable,

as well.

Beyond the apparent fact that there was an imposing mass of them, it was impossible for the gunners to form an accurate estimate of the number of enemy tanks in this first drive against the 26th Battalion. It was agreed by all on the spot that the number was at least fifty, but they could not see clearly enough to make an accurate count. Nor was there time to do so. At first the enemy tanks, apparently without knowledge of the identity or strength of the New Zealanders, simply poured down on the position with no sign of a definite plan of attack. When the blast of fire from the 25-pounders and the two-pounders convinced them of the strength of the defence, they withdrew, and a far more cautious policy was adopted. But until the attackers realised the position and altered their tactics, the L Troop gunners worked under great pressure.

Following Lieutenant Pepper's injunction, L3 fired five shots, the tracer tracks of at least two of them showing direct hits on their targets, then changed its position. As its *portée* backed again towards the enemy another German 50-millimetre shell found a mark. It pierced the left side of the shield, miraculously missing both Sergeant Unverricht and the layer, Bombardier C. J. Smith ¹², went on through the cab of the *portée*, mortally wounding the driver, Gunner F. D. Nicholson ¹³, and finished by striking the top of the engine and putting the vehicle out of action. Unverricht jumped to the ground to see the extent of the damage, and was just in time to see Nicholson stagger from the cab and collapse on the sand. Seeing at a glance how badly he was wounded, the sergeant at once set off across bullet-swept ground to find medical assistance.

With half the troop's effective strength out of action, L2 and L4 carried on. In that first few hectic minutes while the tanks closed the range, the little two-pounder shells were most effective. The procedure of ordinary anti-tank shooting was, for a short time, discarded. Normally the Number 1, the gun commander, selects a target and directs the layer until it appears in his telescope. He then gives the range and deflection to be allowed for a moving target. The loader slams a shell into the

breech and, as the spring forces the block home, taps the layer on the shoulder to let him know the gun is ready, and the Number 1 gives the order to fire. The gun's target knocked out, the Number 1 orders 'Stop!' selects a fresh target for the layer, and so on. This time the targets were too thick to be easily selected and the need too pressing for any stops.

'Pick your own target through the telescope, Frank,' said Sergeant Peter Robertson, of L2, to his gun-layer, Bombardier F. C. Barker ¹⁴. Almost at the same time, a similar understanding was reached between Sergeant 'Chum' Croft of L4 and his layer, Gunner A. B. Gordon ¹⁵. Whenever enemy shells came close the *portées* moved; but after every change of position, the initial direction of the Number 1 and his final order to stop were the only formal commands.

As the range closed, the tracer showed hit after hit on the enemy tanks. On the right the field gunners worked like men possessed, firing armour-piercing shot over open sights. They could not match the high rate of fire of the two-pounders, with their semi-automatic breech and light, easily handled ammunition, but one hit with the 25-pound shell was almost always sufficient to disable a tank, while two, three, and even four good shots were often needed from the lighter weapons.

Noticing the troop's rate of fire, Lieutenant-Colonel Page called to Lieutenant Pepper. 'Cyril,' he said, 'if your chaps keep shooting at that speed they'll be out of ammunition in no time.' 'It's all right, sir,' Pepper shouted in reply, 'we've got some extra.' When first the group had met the South Africans he had replaced the ammunition his guns had fired during the morning. The South Africans had urged him to help himself from their supply, and not only had he replaced the rounds fired, but he had also loaded a lot more on his own truck.

After what seemed to the gunners to be nearer half a day than little more than half an hour, the enemy decided he had stumbled on something that presented much more than merely a mopping-up task. The tanks returned to their original start line and fanned out on the flanks in crescent formation. This favourite German method of attack

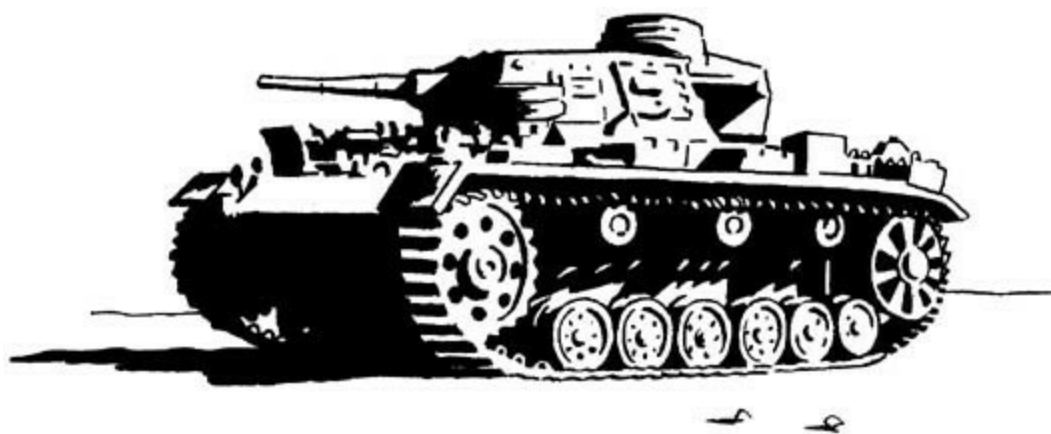
enabled the machine guns at either end of the line to bring a severe crossfire on the defenders. A line of burning vehicles testified to the shooting of the New Zealand guns, both two- and 25-pounders, but the casualties were only a small proportion of the enemy tanks. Enough remained to form a wide crescent and, although more cautiously, resume the attack. By now there was no sign of the British field or anti-tank guns. For some reason they had been withdrawn, and only L Troop's two guns and the 30th Field Battery remained to protect the infantry and take what toll they could of the enemy armour.

Still there was no lack of targets for the two-pounders. Though the enemy tanks had fallen back and fanned out the guns were still able to reach them, though not with the same effect as at the closer range. Lorried infantry joined in the attack, and the troop concentrated some of its fire on the troop-carrying vehicles. Although these would halt and debus the infantry out of range of the guns, the layers, Frank Barker of L2 and 'Abe' Gordon of L4, made targets of them nevertheless. They would lay onto an enemy vehicle or group of infantry with the range at 1800 yards, then cock the gun up a little higher and fire, the gun commanders checking their judgment of the extra range by carefully observing each shot. Several lorries were hit in this way and parties of enemy infantry were scattered while trying to bring their mortars into action.

Meanwhile Sergeant Unverricht had not been able to find assistance for the badly wounded Gunner Nicholson. He reported to Lieutenant Pepper and was directed to get the help of the troop subaltern, Second-Lieutenant Scott, and the troop 3-ton lorry. Lieutenant Scott and his driver, Gunner R. F. Davies ¹⁶, soon backed the lorry to the knocked-out *portée*. The tailboard was lowered and Gunner Nicholson lifted gently to the deck. But when the lorry tried to tow the gun back to a safer place two more casualties were suffered. With the tow-rope attached, Gunner P. J. Keenan ¹⁷, the L3 loader, jumped on the front bumper bar of the *portée* and shouted to Gunner Davies to drive on. He did so, but just as the *portée* was gathering way down a slight incline the three-tonner

unexpectedly stopped. With its steering gear and brakes useless, the *portée* rolled down the slope and crashed into the back of the lorry, Gunner Keenan having his leg badly shattered between the two vehicles. There was excellent reason for Davies' lack of response to shouts to move his lorry out of the way. He had been wounded in the hip by a Spandau bullet as he sat behind the wheel.

The two guns still in action did not waste an opportunity to disrupt the enemy attack. Trucks were bringing enemy infantry well up behind the gradually advancing tanks, and parties were jumping out and trying to bring mortars and anti-tank guns into action. Gordon and Barker, through their telescopes, found that while the setting sun made it hard to sort out their targets initially, once they had the enemy within their lenses the bright background made accurate aiming easy. At extreme range and beyond, they engaged every party of enemy infantry they could see as they left their lorries, and several times the two-pounder shells prevented mortars from coming into action and scattered their crews. Many bursts of flame showed hits. All this time, machine-gun fire from the tanks was sweeping the New Zealand position. Often bullets rattled against the *portées*, and it was by good fortune that there were no further casualties in the troop.



A GERMAN MEDIUM TANK — MARK 3
A GERMAN MEDIUM TANK — MARK 3

REPLENISHING THE AMMUNITION

BEFORE long both crews exhausted their ammunition. Each two-pounder in the regiment carried 192 rounds on the *portée*. In the morning engagement L4 had fired about ten rounds, which reduced its supply to 182, and L2 had fired about sixteen, leaving it with 176. There remained first of all the ammunition on the knocked-out guns. From L2, Gunner A. J. Harris ¹⁸, the Bren gunner, and Gunner M. A. Harry ¹⁹, the ammunition number, made their way over forty yards of bullet-spattered ground to L3. On each trip they brought back eight rounds apiece, a container of four shells in either hand. Gunner P. Quirk ²⁰, the ammunition number of L4, later assisted by the Bren gunner, Gunner L. O. Naylor ²¹, had anticipated the shortage and was already replenishing his supply from the other knocked-out gun, L1. In his case as well, the task of bringing up the extra ammunition meant a most dangerous sprint under fire.

By this time the Germans were shelling the position and in spite of the efforts of the New Zealand gunners had managed to get some mortars into action, but very few of the heavy missiles landed among the troop's vehicles. Either that was good luck, or the enemy might have been seeking first to knock out the field guns on the right of the line. But as the tanks and infantry began to close on the position, the machine-gun fire and armour-piercing shot became heavier. The ammunition numbers carried on until all the shells of the knocked-out guns were carried to the two-pounders still in action.

While the action was in progress its various stages were reported to the 26th Battalion's parent formation, the 6th New Zealand Infantry Brigade. Brigadier Barrowclough ordered the battalion to disengage and retire to the main body of the group. To do this darkness was essential. The question was whether the enemy could be held at bay until last light. It would be about half past six in the evening before there was sufficient gloom to cover the withdrawal. By six the enemy was getting close; but the infantry and guns fought sternly on. After one heavy shell

and mortar barrage the enemy's fire slackened, but the battalion's Bren gunners and riflemen maintained their rapid rate. When some of the crew of L4, not noticing that the light was beginning to fail, took advantage of the lull to smoke the first cigarette of the afternoon, the flare of their matches at once drew the enemy's fire.

Any vehicle moving on the front was fired on by the anti-tank guns, and parties of infantry provided alternative targets. L2 fired all L3's ammunition. Lieutenant Pepper had expected this, and in good time had an extra supply available from his reserve store. By the time the withdrawal was ordered, L4 was using the last of the containers brought over from L1.

The temporary slackening of the enemy's fire did not mean that he was abandoning the attack. Just after seven o'clock, when the 26th Battalion was nearly ready to withdraw, there came a hail of machine-gun fire, which the German infantry followed with a resolute attack. It was dark by the time they had come within 800 yards of the New Zealanders but they could be seen clearly against the glare of burning vehicles. The New Zealand infantry then put the finishing touch to an afternoon of determined and skilful defensive fighting. Led by Captain A. W. Wesley ²², the battalion's B Company counter-attacked in a bayonet charge that caused heavy casualties and completely repulsed the enemy. In this charge this fine officer was killed.

As it could not be taken, away, Lieutenant Pepper ordered that L3, the gun with the knocked-out *portée*, should be made completely unfit for use. Sergeant Unverricht and Bombardier 'Cy' Smith took the breech block with its firing mechanism from the gun.

'Since we're here, Terry,' said Smith, 'wouldn't it be as well to take some of the tinned stuff?'

The sergeant agreed, and each seized as many tins of tongue, sausages, and fruit as he could carry. They had just returned to the troop three-tonner when the heavy machine-gun concentration hit the

area. Both dropped to the ground. Smith lay flat with his head against a tin of sausages, and when a lull enabled him to shift position he found that a German bullet had pierced the tin, missing his head by inches.

THE WITHDRAWAL

THE BATTALION'S withdrawal was made in good order, quickly, and with complete success. German flares were casting a bright light over the position when the troop received orders to retire. Its vehicles, now three *portées*, the commander's 'pick-up', and the troop 3-ton lorry, were in the last party to leave. This comprised the field artillery, which kept up its fire to the very last moment, the battalion's Bren carriers, and the last infantry company, the infantrymen riding on the gun vehicles and the carriers. One German prisoner also found a seat in the troop commander's truck. It was not until eleven o'clock at night that L Troop and the 26th Battalion re-established contact with the 6th Brigade and bedded down for the night near Point 175.

Before the withdrawal the troop's casualties were attended by the 26th Battalion's Medical Officer, Lieutenant G. C. Jennings ²³, who earned the admiration of the gunners by bringing his RAP * truck to within fifty yards of the forward positions.

Reporting on this action, Brigadier Barrowclough wrote: 'It will be appreciated that this small force had been hotly attacked by an enemy column which had already proved itself strong enough to defeat and overthrow the whole of the 5th South African Brigade Group. That the 26th Battalion and its supporting artillery and anti-tank guns were able to maintain their positions and come out of the action with surprisingly few casualties was an eloquent tribute to the high standard of training and fortitude of all ranks. After the action there was no question that the infantry had the highest possible regard for the gunners. Nor were the gunners less generous in their praise of the way in which the infantry first stood its ground and then fought the rearguard action back to the main body of the Brigade group.'

Lieutenant Pepper estimated that L Troop had knocked out 24 tanks as well as many unarmoured vehicles. As the fight progressed the front had become lined with burning vehicles, some South African, many of them transport lorries. In the dust and smoke, with the sinking sun

shining into the eyes of the observer, it must have been extremely difficult to make an accurate count. The fact that eight field guns of the 30th Battery were also in action against the enemy armour made a tally all the more uncertain. It was reported by the British that the German attack against the South Africans and the 26th Battalion cost the enemy 52 tanks. With that as a total figure, and taking into account that the two L Troop guns fired nearly 700 rounds between them in about three hours' fighting, the figure of 24 certainties is at least possible, even allowing for the long range at which many of the shots were fired.

On the debit side, one L Troop gunner was killed and three were wounded, and two guns and one *portée* lost. The afternoon's fighting in this area cost the **Eighth Army** almost the whole of the 5th South African Brigade, as well as some tanks of the 22nd Armoured Brigade. Against that there were the indefinite but certainly considerable German infantry casualties besides the losses in tanks and transport.

At the time of this engagement, it is probable that Rommel thought he had encountered a considerably larger proportion of the New Zealand Division than was actually the case. It was later stated by Colonel Mario Revetria, Chief Intelligence Officer of the Italian forces under Rommel's command, that the German leader had first been under the impression that the 6th New Zealand Infantry Brigade had been virtually wiped out in company with the 5th South African Brigade on 23 November. Instead, on that same afternoon, the 25th Battalion had driven the Germans from Point 175, and the brigade was to take heavy toll of the enemy from the **Sidi Rezegh** escarpment before it was finally dislodged on 1 December.

Throughout this short but severe action the leadership of the anti-tank troop commander, Lieutenant Pepper, was an inspiration to his men, and indeed to all the New Zealanders there. Regardless of the heavy small-arms fire, he moved from gun to gun encouraging the crews, meeting every emergency promptly and with skill. At one stage,

when the arrival of some South African vehicles and the distortion of an order gave the impression that there was a general withdrawal, he corrected the error and by personal visits to each gun made sure that the line was maintained. For this outstanding work under extraordinarily difficult circumstances, and his complete disregard of personal danger, Lieutenant Pepper was awarded the Military Cross. It was a grave misfortune for the troop and the regiment when, three days later, he was so badly injured by a staff car which backed into the slit-trench in which he was resting, that he had to be invalided back to New Zealand.

Good fortune attended L Troop to the end of the short but bitterly-fought campaign. Both the battery's other two-pounder troops, J and K, were overrun with the 24th and 26th Battalions above the mosque at **Sidi Rezegh** on 30 November, with heavy casualties and complete loss of equipment. With the survivors of the 25th Battalion, L Troop was able to withdraw next day, and made its way back to **Baggush** with what remained of the 4th and 6th New Zealand Infantry Brigades.

* Regimental aid post.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

¹ Lt-Col T. H. E. OAKES, MC and bar ^{*}, m.i.d.; **Royal Artillery** (retd); born England, 24 Mar 1895; CO 7 NZ Anti-Tank Regt, 16 May-30 Nov 1941; killed in action, 30 Nov 1941.

² Lt C. S. PEPPER, MC; clerk; born NZ, 18 Nov 1911; Rugby All Black 1935 (**United Kingdom**); injured 26 Nov 1941; died, **Wellington**, 30 May 1943.

³ Lt-Col J. R. PAGE, DSO, m.i.d.; Regular soldier; **Wellington**; born Dunedin, 10 May 1908; CO 26 Bn, 15 May 1940-27 Nov 1941; wounded 27 Nov 1941; invalided to NZ, 25 Feb 1942; Inspector of Training, 26 Aug 1942; GSO 1, Army HQ, 19 Jan 1943; Rugby All Black 1931; 1932 and 1934 (**Australia**); 1935 (**United Kingdom**).

- ⁴ Maj-Gen H. E. BARROWCLOUGH, CB, DSO and bar, MC, ED, m.i.d.; barrister and solicitor; **Auckland**; born **Masterton**, 23 Jun 1894; in First World War rose from Pte to Lt-Col commanding 4 Bn, NZRB; wounded, Messines, 1917; in Second World War commanded 6 NZ Inf Bde, 1 May 1940–21 Feb 1942; GOC **2 NZEF** in the **Pacific** and GOC 3 NZ Div, 8 Aug 1942–20 Oct 1944.
- ⁵ Maj A. T. RAWLE, m.i.d.; insurance clerk; born **Auckland**, 26 Sep 1909; died of wounds, 3 Dec 1941.
- ⁶ Capt I. G. SCOTT; commercial traveller; **Auckland**; born **Australia**, 1 Feb 1914; wounded 2 Dec 1941; p.w. 22 Jul 1942.
- ⁷ Sgt T. E. WILLIAMSON; contractor; Te Kauwhata; born **Gisborne**, 23 Sep 1911.
- ⁸ Lt P. ROBERTSON; labourer; **Wellington**; born **Scotland**, 7 Feb 1919.
- ⁹ Sgt T. E. UNVERRICHT; labourer; Heretaunga; born **Lower Hutt**, 4 Jul 1918; wounded 1 Dec 1941 and 5 Jul 1942.
- ¹⁰ Sgt T. H. CROFT; farm worker; Omihi; born NZ, 6 Nov 1909.
- ¹¹ Gnr A. GRAHAM; labourer; **Christchurch**; born **Scotland**, 28 Nov 1912; wounded 23 Nov 1941.
- ¹² Sgt C. J. SMITH; carpenter; Upper Hutt; born **Wellington**, 23 Feb 1912.
- ¹³ Gnr F. D. NICHOLSON; labourer; born NZ, 19 Feb 1914; died of wounds, 23 Nov 1941.
- ¹⁴ WO II F. C. BARKER; freezing worker; **Auckland**; born **Wanganui**, 23 Apr 1912; wounded 13 Jul 1942.
- ¹⁵ Lt A. B. GORDON; student; **Lower Hutt**; born **Lower Hutt**, 24 Mar 1917.
- ¹⁶ Gnr R. F. DAVIES; sugar worker; **Auckland**; born **Auckland**, 16 Dec 1919; wounded 23 Nov 1941.

- ¹⁷ Gnr P. J. KEENAN; salesman; **Christchurch**; born **Christchurch**, 10 Jun 1919; injured 23 Nov 1941.
- ¹⁸ Sgt A. J. HARRIS; joiner; **Auckland**; born **Auckland**, 26 Dec 1917.
- ¹⁹ Sgt M. A. HARRY; cellarman; **Christchurch**; born NZ, 4 Jul 1914.
- ²⁰ Gnr P. QUIRK; labourer; **Melbourne**; born **Australia**, 13 May 1919; wounded and p.w., 2 Jan 1942; escaped to **Switzerland**, Oct 1943.
- ²¹ Sgt L. O. NAYLOR; labourer; **Lumsden**; born **Lumsden**, 13 Oct 1908; wounded 18 Apr 1941.
- ²² Capt A. W. WESNEY; clerk; born **Invercargill**, 1 Feb 1915; Rugby All Black 1938 (**Australia**); killed in action 23 Nov 1941.
- ²³ Capt G. C. JENNINGS; medical practitioner; **England**; born NZ, 21 Jun 1913; p.w. 13 Dec 1941; repatriated May 1943.

The occupations given in each case are those on enlistment

* First World War

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE OFFICIAL SOURCES consulted in the preparation of this account were the war diaries of Headquarters 6th New Zealand Infantry Brigade and the 26th New Zealand Battalion, and a special report on the campaign by the commander of the 6th Brigade, Brigadier H. E. Barrowclough. Most of the material is drawn from interviews and correspondence with men who took part in the action. The assistance of former members of L Troop, 33rd New Zealand Anti-Tank Battery, and also of the 26th Battalion and the 30th New Zealand Field Battery, is gratefully acknowledged.

THE MAP, DIAGRAMS, and SKETCHES were drawn by L. D. McCormick.

THE PAINTING on **page 17** was by Captain Peter McIntyre.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS come from many sources, which are stated where they are known:

page 9 (top)	I. G. Scott
(bottom)	New Zealand Army official, W. Timmins
page 10 (top)	E. A. Frost
(bottom)	A. B. Gordon
page 11	New Zealand official
page 12	Peter McIntyre
page 13 (top)	F. C. Barker
(bottom)	A. B. Gordon
page 14	T. E. Williamson
page 15	Australian official, George Silk
page 16 (bottom)	A. S. Frame
page 18	A. S. Frame
page 19	A. S. Frame
page 20 (top)	Peter McIntyre
(bottom)	A. S. Frame
page 21 (top)	F. C. Barker
(bottom)	A. B. Gordon
page 22 (top)	Australian official, George Silk
(bottom)	F. C. Barker
page 23 (top)	T. E. Williamson
(bottom)	I. G. Scott
page 24 (top)	T. E. Unverricht
(bottom)	T. E. Williamson

THE AUTHOR, E. H. Smith, is a member of the staff of the **War History Branch**. A former newspaper reporter, he served overseas in the 7th New Zealand Anti-Tank Regiment and is at present writing the history of that unit. He was wounded on 3 August 1944 during the advance to **Florence**.

THE TYPE USED THROUGHOUT THE SERIES IS *Aldine Bembo* WHICH WAS REVIVED FOR MONOTYPE FROM A RARE BOOK PRINTED BY ALDUS IN 1495 * THE TEXT IS SET IN 12 POINT ON A BODY OF 14 POINT

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

Contents

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[frontispiece]

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[untitled]

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[COVERS]

NEW ZEALAND IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR



GUNS AGAINST TANKS

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GUNS AGAINST TANKS

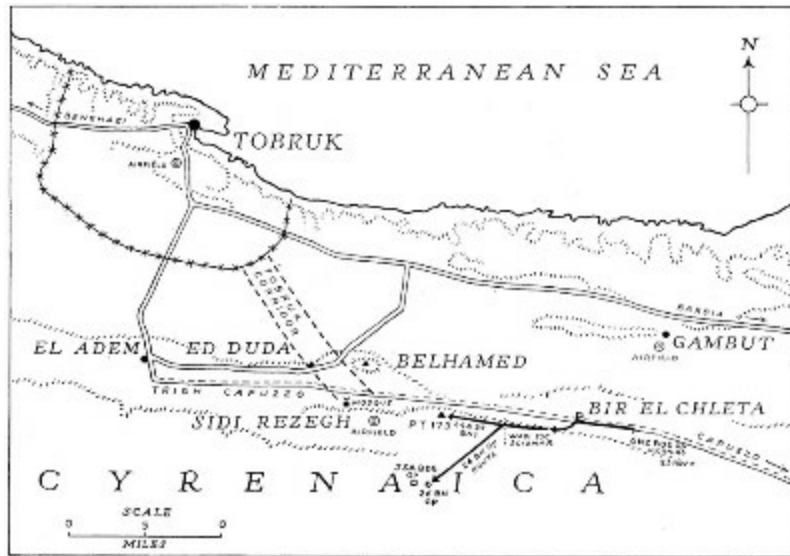
L. Thompson, 2nd Battery, 2nd New Zealand Anti-Tank Regiment
in *Te Kōwhiri*, 11 November 1941

by
E. H. SMITH

THE GOVERNMENT
PRINTERS
WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND
1941

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[FRONTISPIECE]



COVER PHOTOGRAPH **Two-pounder firing *en portée***

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[TITLE PAGE]

GUNS AGAINST TANKS

*L Troop, 33rd Battery, 7th New Zealand Anti-Tank Regiment
in Libya, 23 November 1941*

E. H. SMITH

WAR HISTORY BRANCH

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND
1948

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[EDITORPAGE]

IT IS THE INTENTION of this series to present aspects of New Zealand's part in the Second World War which will not receive detailed treatment in the campaign volumes and which are considered either worthy of special notice or typical of many phases of our war experience. The series is illustrated with material which would otherwise seldom see publication. It will also contain short accounts of campaigns and operations which will be dealt with in detail in the appropriate volumes.

H. K. KIPPENBERGER

Major-General
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[UNTITLED]

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EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

MOVING INTO LIBYA

MOVING INTO LIBYA

IN November 1941, when the second British offensive in Libya began, the 33rd Battery of the 7th New Zealand Anti-Tank Regiment consisted of four troops, each of four guns. Three troops were armed with two-pounders and one with the old 18-pounder field gun modified for use against armoured fighting vehicles. The two-pounders were carried on the decks of specially constructed lorries, termed *portées*, which were fitted with ramps and winches to enable the guns to be quickly hoisted into place. Special fittings on the lorry enabled the trail and spade to be clamped firmly to the deck so that the gun, pointing over the rear of the *portée*, was ready for immediate action.

During the training in preparation for the campaign, the regimental commander, Lieutenant-Colonel T. H. E. Oakes, * insisted that great attention should be paid to training the gun crews in fighting the two-pounders from the decks of the *portées*: that is, *en portée*. It was obvious that the best place from which to fight an anti-tank gun was from a properly dug gunpit; but the digging of pits took time and, once dug in, the gun could not be moved at a moment's notice. Colonel Oakes therefore made provision in training for those occasions when there was no time to dig pits or when a formation on the move had to be defended against attack.

***Portée* tactics had to be based on the fact that the gun was high off the ground, with the gun-shield the only protection for crew and weapon. This shield could ward off small-arms fire only from the direct front, so that against crossfire, explosive shells, mortar bombs, and armour-piercing projectiles both gun and crew were vulnerable. It was laid down that this vulnerability should be reduced by exposing the gun and its crew to enemy observation for the shortest possible time. The men were taught to fight their guns from behind whatever cover, in the form of ridges or folds in the ground, was available. First the gun made for such cover; then the vehicle was backed up until the barrel of the two-pounder cleared the concealing rise—that is, to a hull-down**

position. A few shots were fired and the *portée* was again run down under cover. That process was repeated, with the gun changing its position as often as possible to confuse enemy gunners. The lie of the land did not always permit this, but on several occasions in the 1941 Libyan campaign these tactics were employed with notable success, thanks largely to the thorough training of crews and drivers.

The initial role of the New Zealand Division in this campaign depended on the success of the armoured divisions of the 30th Corps, which opened the fighting on 18 November by driving across the Libyan border with the intention of first searching out and destroying the enemy tanks, and then continuing westward to relieve beleaguered **Tobruk**. At first reports were most favourable, and accordingly the three brigades of the New Zealand Division, operating under the command of the 13th Corps, set out on previously allotted tasks. That of the 6th Brigade, which had under its

* Biographical details of those named in this account are published on [p. 31](#).

command the 33rd Battery, was to move westward along the Trigh Capuzzo * to an area about half way between the Egyptian border and **Tobruk**, there to clear the enemy from Bir el Chleta and the airfield at **Gambut**. Then, if necessary, the formation was to assist 30th Corps in its **Tobruk** operations.

On the afternoon of 22 November, when the brigade was on its way towards Bir el Chleta, urgent messages from 30th Corps showed that the early reports of British armoured successes had been optimistic. Far from being destroyed, German tanks were pressing in strength against **Sidi Rezegh**, now held by the **Support Group** of the British 7th Armoured Division. The 30th Corps urged that the 6th Brigade should hasten to the relief of **Sidi Rezegh**. Headquarters New Zealand Division ordered the brigade to fall in with these demands. The brigade pressed on, halting at eight o'clock to laager for the night some miles to the east of Bir el

Chleta.

Because the German armour was still strong, and not as weakened as the first reports had indicated, a heavy responsibility was thrown on the New Zealand artillery, and especially on the Anti-Tank Regiment. The British tanks, outgunned by the German tanks and the very effective 88-millimetre and 50-millimetre anti-tank guns, were far too hard pressed to spare much of their strength to protect the New Zealand infantry.

The 6th Brigade kept a strict lookout during the night of 22–23 November. The 33rd Battery's two-pounders were placed round the brigade perimeter, and outside them the infantry manned a series of listening posts. In relays, one gunner watched at the firing position of each anti-tank gun while his crew-mates slept beside the *portée*. The night was tense but without alarm. At 3 a.m. the march to **Sidi Rezegh was resumed with two battalions forward, the 25th on the right and the 26th on the left, the B echelon vehicles behind them, and the 24th Battalion to the right rear. In the darkness L Troop was delayed, and it was a quarter of an hour before Lieutenant C. S. Pepper,² the troop commander, led the four *portées* after the rest of the brigade.**

The troop caught up with the 24th Battalion, under whose command it had been the previous day, at first light, just as the brigade group halted for breakfast. The formation had set out with the intention of swinging to the south to avoid a German force known to be at Bir el Chleta, but in the darkness an error in navigation had resulted in the halt being made right on top of the German position, and when the troop arrived a small engagement was raging. The brigade had clashed with part of the headquarters of the German Afrika Korps. The Germans had a few tanks and armoured cars, but those were quickly dealt with by a squadron of Valentine tanks of the 42nd Battalion, **Royal Tank Regiment, which was in support of the 6th Brigade. In a brisk fight several of the enemy were killed and valuable documents and some high-ranking officers captured. None of the battery's guns had a chance to fire, but there were several casualties among the transport drivers.**

The order of march had been changed overnight, and L Troop now found itself under the command of the 26th Battalion. There was no longer time for breakfast, and the brigade resumed its move towards **Sidi Rezegh**, the gunners allaying the keen appetite of early morning with a

* Trigh Capuzzo, marked on the map as a motor road, was in fact a series of tracks to the south of, and running roughly parallel to, the main **Bardia- Tobruk** highway. Before turning north to **Tobruk**, it passed between the features of Sidi Rezegh and **Belhamed**.

snack from the ration boxes and a short drink from their water bottles. In this campaign it was seldom that they were able to have a full meal prepared by the battery cooks. Each gun carried rations for five days, consisting of biscuits, bully beef, tins of meat and vegetable stew, jam or marmalade, cheese, tea, sugar, and canned milk. The gunners augmented this with whatever they could buy from the Church Army canteen or had received in food parcels from home: generally tinned sausages, tinned fruit, and cake.

The brigade made for the Wadi esc Sciomar, a break in the escarpment three miles east by south of Point 175, a convenient place from which to reconnoitre the position and plan its action. L Troop was on the left front of the 26th Battalion group, followed by four of the Valentine tanks. The gunners were surprised that they and not the tanks headed the advance; but the Valentines, heavily armoured and slow, were not as manoeuvrable as cruiser tanks, and not as well fitted for the lead as the more mobile *portées*.

A few miles before the wadi was reached there appeared to the west a large group of British tanks and other vehicles, some of them still smouldering. (It was learned later that on the previous afternoon enemy tanks had forced the 7th Armoured Division's **Support Group** off **Sidi Rezegh** after heavy fighting.) Movement among them showed that they were in enemy hands, and Germans in trucks were seen making away to

the south and south-west. The range was extreme, but the troop opened fire at the escaping vehicles. Lieutenant Pepper hurried to battalion headquarters for orders, and was told by the battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel J. R. Page ³, that as there were probably British wounded among the wrecks their safety must be the first consideration. By the time Lieutenant Pepper returned and gave the order to cease fire, the troop had fired about fifty rounds at distances above the limit allowed by the range scales. The Germans were seen to be making off to the west with some captured Honey tanks, but the gunners were forbidden to resume firing. Instead, the troop's guns covered the advance of three of the battalion's Bren carriers, which went over to the mass of tanks and trucks to look for British wounded. An ambulance, packed with injured men, came back to the battalion.

The carriers soon returned and the column resumed its march. At the Wadi esc Sciomar it was apparent that the enemy held Point 175, on the escarpment to the east of **Sidi Rezegh**, in force. At half past eleven Brigadier H. E. Barrowclough ⁴, commander of the 6th Brigade, issued orders for the 25th Battalion, with the 24th in reserve, to attack and capture Point 175; the 26th Battalion with its supporting arms was to establish contact with the 5th South African Brigade, five miles south-west of Point 175.

The 26th Battalion group set out at once. With the infantry were the four two-pounders of L Troop and eight 25-pounders of Major A. T. Rawle's ⁵ 30th Battery (6th Field Regiment). Again the troop led the advance, with the guns in a shallow crescent in front of the battalion column, the order from the right being L1, L2, L3, and L4, the centre guns slightly in advance of those on the flanks. Lieutenant Pepper in his 15-cwt. truck rode behind L2, and the troop 3-ton lorry, containing reserve ammunition and rations, in charge of the troop subaltern, Second-Lieutenant I. G. Scott ⁶, followed L3.

The battalion met the South Africans just before half past twelve. They had been in action the previous day, and had dug in on a rise on the southern escarpment. (Though this was 'high ground' by desert

standards, the rise was a very gentle one, which did not offer the slightest obstacle to armoured fighting vehicles.) With the South Africans were a few tanks—those of the 22nd Armoured Brigade which had survived the previous afternoon's action. Colonel Page, who had decided to dispose the 26th Battalion on a smaller rise about a mile to the east, met General Gott, commander of the British 7th Armoured Division, who had under his command twelve 25-pounder field guns, the remnants of the regiment which had been with the 7th **Support Group** at the Sidi Rezegh airfield. These he proposed to site on the east side of the South African position, facing north-east, and he directed that the New Zealand guns be disposed to the east, north, and south of the 26th Battalion area. Should any threat develop against the New Zealanders from the west, the British guns would be moved to cover the battalion's western flank.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

IN POSITION

THE BATTALION was immediately deployed in an all-round defensive position. Colonel Page placed four of the 30th Field Battery's 25-pounders (E Troop) on the northern side of the perimeter and four (F Troop) on the southern, while L Troop was told to dig its guns in facing east. *

The level ground offered no choice of positions, so the guns were simply sited in line at intervals of about fifty yards along the infantry FDLs **. Once the sites were decided, long training made the procedure automatic. As the gunners reached for picks and short-handled shovels the gun commanders (sergeants in charge of individual guns) leaped to the ground and traced with their heels the dimensions of the gunpits. There had been no chance to brew a cup of tea at breakfast-time or later, and, while the others dug, one man in each crew pumped up the primus stove and soon had a hot drink ready.

Up to this stage the 26th Battalion had not seen the main enemy force. Apart from the South Africans, however, there were scores of knocked-out vehicles, armoured and otherwise, to show that the area had been one of recent desperate combat. The South Africans were only too well aware that their position was known to the enemy. Early that morning three British-type tanks had rolled up to their lines, their turrets open, the crews wearing the familiar black berets of the Allied armoured formations and waving their hands in, presumably, friendly greeting. Approaching slowly, they had ample chance to gain a good general idea of the South African dispositions. When right up to the FDLs, their turrets were slammed down, their machine guns fired a few bursts of unexpected and deadly rounds, and the tanks made good their escape. (Six days later the Germans were to repeat this same trick to break the desperate resistance of the remnants of the

* Diagram A.

**** Forward defended localities. This term is applied to the most advanced areas of a defensive position. They are usually sited to support each other by fire. In the case of an all-round defence, as on this occasion, the FDLs marked the circumference of the area held.**

21st New Zealand Battalion and recapture Point 175.) During the morning one other enemy group had approached, quickly withdrawing when engaged and giving the impression of a reconnaissance.

The real blow fell on the South Africans a few minutes after 3.30 p.m. A strong force of enemy tanks with infantry in lorries approached from the south-west, swung across the brigade's western perimeter and, making good use of the knowledge gained from their earlier reconnaissance, drove hard at the defences.

The smoke, dust, and flames of battle, and the position of the late afternoon sun, made it hard at first for the New Zealanders to see what was happening. A few shells, probably overs, landed in the 26th Battalion area. But very soon after the attack started, urgent messages from the South Africans, asking for all the artillery support the battalion could afford, made it clear that the situation was desperate. The 30th Battery's guns were then moved to the western flank and opened fire at the German armoured vehicles and transport.

About four o'clock, when the L Troop gunners had finished digging their gunpits—L4 was actually in position in the pit—all gun commanders were called to troop headquarters, in this case the troop commander's truck. In charge of the four two-pounders were Sergeants T. E. Williamson ⁷, P. Robertson ⁸, T. E. Unverricht ⁹, and T. H. Croft ¹⁰, of L's 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively. They quickly reported to Lieutenant Pepper, and learned from him that the South Africans were in imminent danger of being overrun, that all the 26th Battalion's supporting guns were to form a line on the western perimeter, and that the troop was to move immediately. The sergeants ran back to their guns. The gunners

cursed more or less automatically when they heard that their digging was all for nothing, but the sight of their commander's truck, with Lieutenant Pepper leaning from the cab and beckoning them emphatically to follow him, made it plain that this was no time for recrimination.

L2 and L3 were the first guns to follow. Their crews had been warned that they would be required to take part in a dusk patrol and were not to take the guns from the *portées* before it was over. L1 and L4 had to be winched back on the *portées* and clamped down before they could start to move. Lieutenant Pepper set a merry pace round the northern flank of the battalion perimeter, and the *portées*, especially the last two, had to travel fast to keep up with him. The four field guns that had been deployed to the north had already moved and were getting into action in new positions, this time preparing to fire over open sights instead of indirectly at distant targets, when the troop raced behind them. Following the original plan, some of the British guns had fallen back to help close the gap on the west of the battalion. The new gunline started from the right with four of the 30th Battery's 25-pounders, then two British field guns, and then two two-pounders *en portée*, also British. When his truck reached the left of this line, Lieutenant Pepper leaned out of the cab with a red flag. First waving it in violent circles, he pointed to the west. Every anti-tank gunner knew then where his weapon was to go into action, and the direction from which the enemy would appear.

The regiment's two-pounder troops had practised many times the manoeuvre which L Troop now carried out in grim earnest: the quick deployment of guns *en portée* to meet a sudden attack. After the signal for action, the pointing flag told the gun commanders in which direction their guns were to face. Each wheeled his *portée* into its place in line facing the enemy. The gunners agreed that nothing they had done in practice could compare for speed with their performance under the stimulus of real action. And there was another time-saving factor: the gun commanders did not have to look for cover. There was none.

It was about half past four by the time the troop's guns, high on the decks of their *portées* on a bare desert and with a sinking sun shining almost directly against them, swung into position on the left of the line. By this time the enemy was aware of the presence of the New Zealanders for small-arms fire was brought down on the 26th Battalion. The South African position was enveloped in swirls of dust and overhung by smoke, shot through in many places by the flames of burning vehicles, and at first it was impossible to make out individual tanks or trucks. The gunners had been told by Lieutenant Pepper that the South Africans were being overrun and that German tanks would almost certainly bear down on the New Zealand position. 'There are lots of them,' he said in warning the gun commanders, 'maybe over 150. But don't let that worry you. They are only little ones.'

The infantry waited in their slit-trenches for the enemy to come within effective small-arms range. On the right of the gunline the 25-pounders were firing steadily, and still farther to the right the anti-tank gunners could hear the gunfire of the other 30th Battery troop *. Two tanks, dimly visible over 1000 yards away on the right front, were thought by the troop to be the Valentines which had earlier accompanied the brigade group. In the haze they could not be certain, and until individual targets offered, there was little point in firing into the confused and dust-choked mass of friend and foe a mile away to the west.

'Keep your engines running all the time,' said Lieutenant Pepper to each gun commander as he hurried round the troop for a final check. Even though there was no cover, the guns were to be moved after each few shots, so that when smoke and dust obscured the position the enemy gunners would not be able to pick them by their flashes.



A GERMAN LIGHT TANK — MARK 2

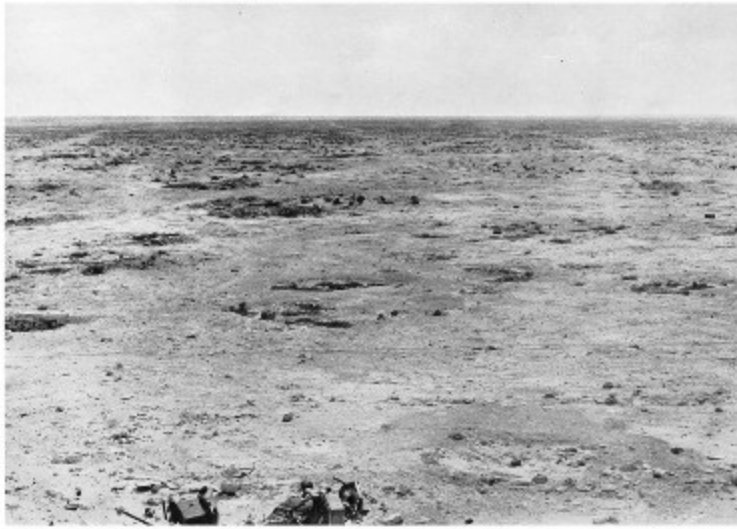
A GERMAN LIGHT TANK — MARK 2

* **Diagram B.**

THE TROOP



THE TROOP



THE DESERT *East from Point 175*

TRANSPORT

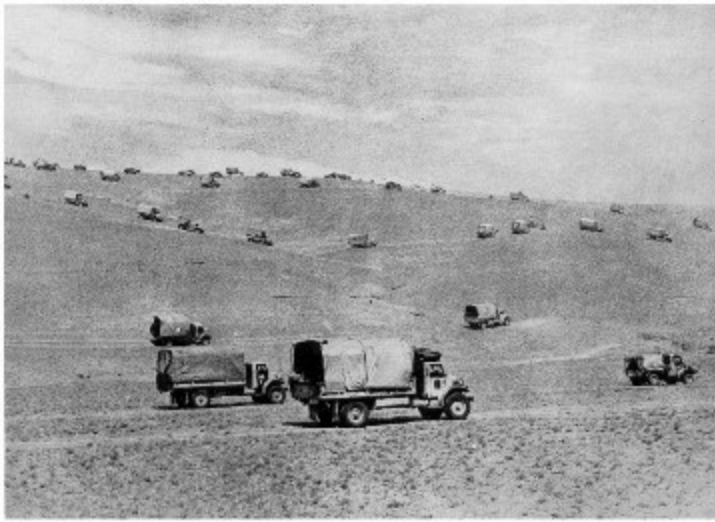


Portée waiting to move:

Gnr A. Graham on left and Sgt T. E. Williamson on right

Portée waiting to move:

Gnr A. Graham on left and Sgt T. E. Williamson on right



DESERT FORMATION



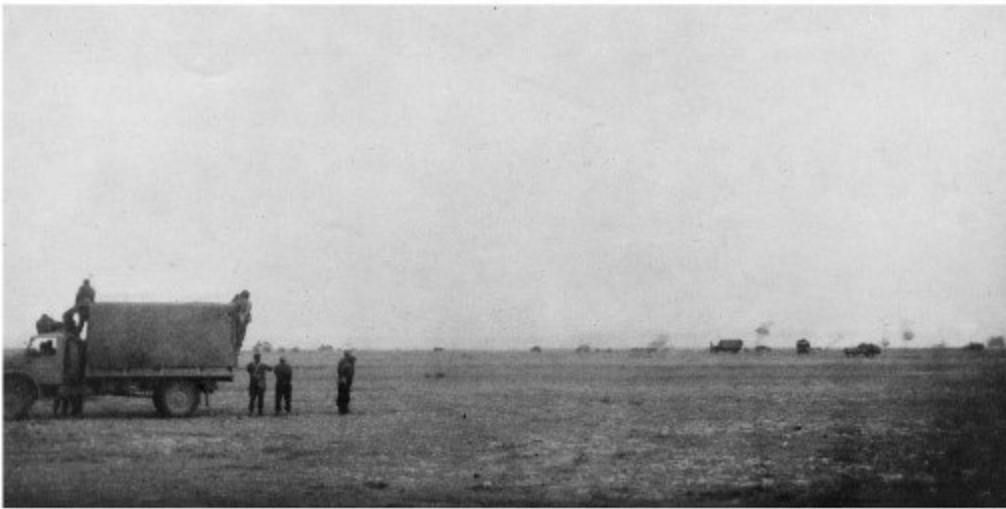
A CONVOY IN THE TOBRUK CORRIDOR

A CONVOY IN THE TOBRUK CORRIDOR



LOADED UP

LOADED UP



CONVOY UNDER SHELLFIRE
CONVOY UNDER SHELLFIRE

HEAVY SHELL-BURST AT BIR EL CHLETA



HEAVY SHELL-BURST AT BIR EL CHLETA

IN A PIT *Dug in, ready for action*



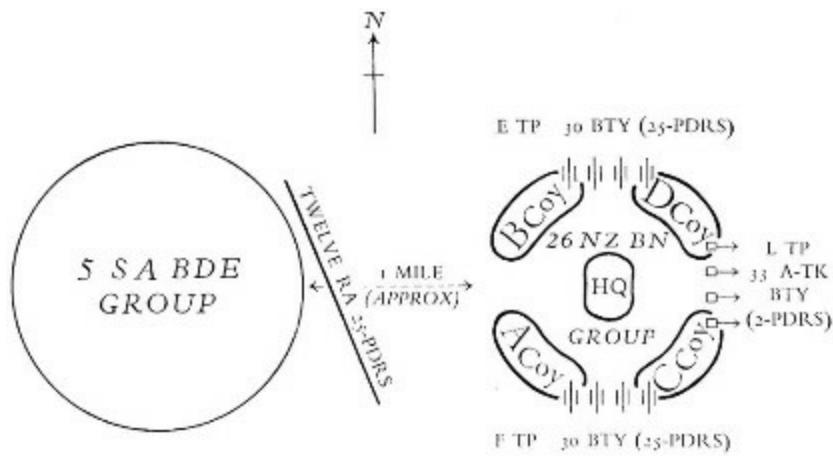
IN A PIT *Dug in, ready for action*



EN PORTÉE A photograph of New Zealanders near porté strike

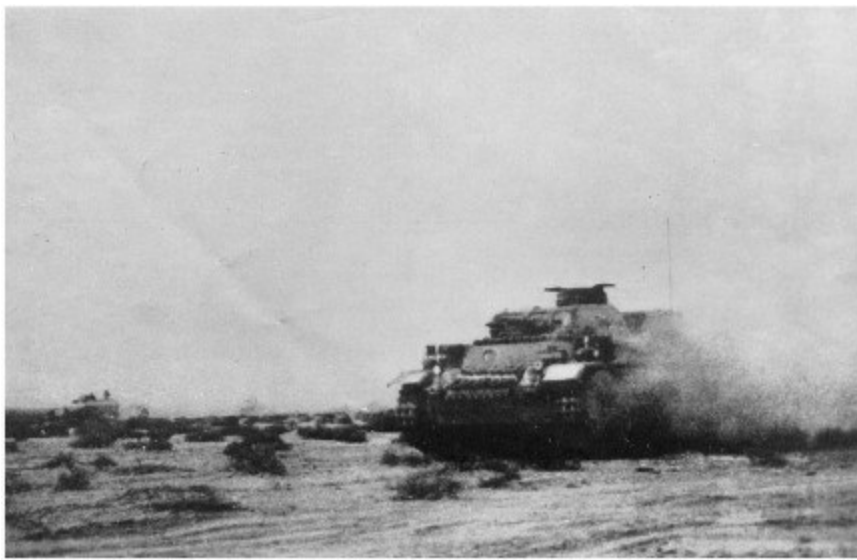
EN PORTÉE A photograph of New Zealanders shows portée action

A. FIRST DISPOSITIONS



Diagrammatic - not to scale

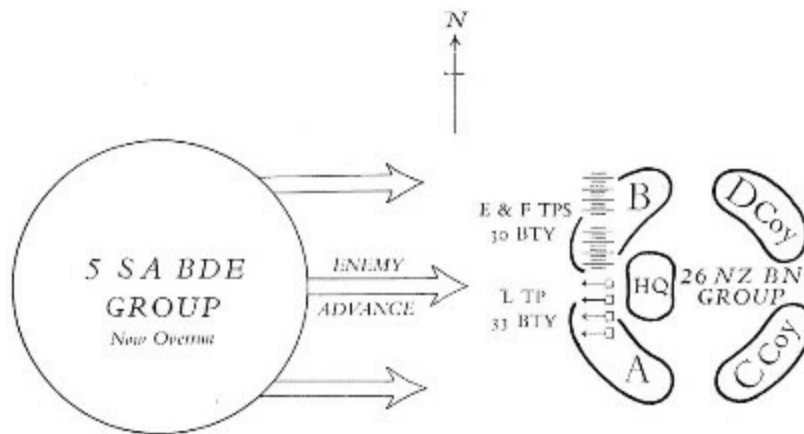
Diagrammatic - not to scale



*As the camera saw it—
a German tank closing
in on 6th Brigade*

***As the camera saw it—
a German tank closing
in on 6th Brigade***

B. FINAL DISPOSITIONS



Diagrammatic - not to scale

Diagrammatic - not to scale

*As the artist painted it—
a tank battle*



***As the artist painted it—
a tank battle***

BATTLE SCENES IN LIBYA



GERMAN ASSAULT ON 6TH BRIGADE

GERMAN ASSAULT ON 6TH BRIGADE



INFANTRY SLIT-TRENCH

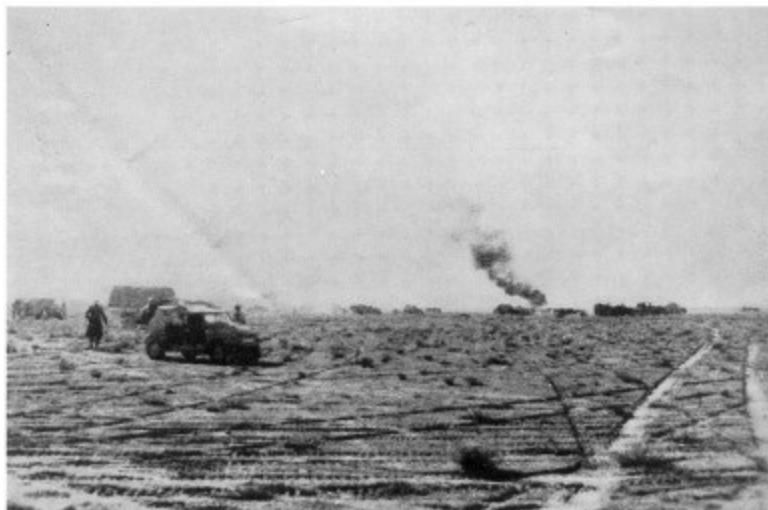
INFANTRY SLIT-TRENCH



25-POUNDERS IN POSITION

25-POUNDERS IN POSITION

6TH BRIGADE UNDER FIRE



6TH BRIGADE UNDER FIRE



A GERMAN LIGHT TANK — MARK 2

A GERMAN LIGHT TANK — MARK 2

BURNING VEHICLES



BURNING VEHICLES



A CAPTURED GERMAN
AMBULANCE, AND A
TWO-POUNDER, IN THE
FOREGROUND

A CAPTURED GERMAN AMBULANCE, AND A TWO-POUNDER IN THE FOREGROUND



TRUCKS AND TANKS BURN
IN THE DISTANCE
—view from the back of an L Troop
lorry

TRUCKS AND TANKS BURN IN THE DISTANCE — view from the back of an L Troop lorry

A KNOCKED-
OUT PORTÉE



A KNOCKED- OUT PORTÉE

THE TROOP
COMMANDER
Lt C. S. Pepper
and his truck



THE TROOP COMMANDER Lt C. S. Pepper and his truck



A gun crew during training

Sgt Unverricht on left of front row

A gun crew during training Sgt Unverricht on left of front row

GROUPS

*Back Row: A. V. Matthews, C. G. Rowe, W. M. Jamieson, P. J. Keenan, D. Bryant
Front Row: E. A. Frost, N. C. H. Weston, F. D. Nicholson*



GROUPS

***Back Row: A. V. Matthews, C. G. Rowe, W. M. Jamieson, P. J. Keenan, D. Bryant
Front Row: E. A. Frost, N. C. H. Weston, F. D. Nicholson***

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE ATTACK BEGINS

THE ATTACK BEGINS

THE GUNNERS did not have long to wait before the Germans were seen to be attacking, with a mass of armoured vehicles, from the South African position. The two supposed Valentines on the right front suddenly wheeled and opened fire. One of their first shots, a 50-millimetre armour-piercing shell, crashed through the lower left side of L1, disabled the gun, smashed the left foot and ankle of the gun-layer, Gunner Andy Graham ¹¹ and came to rest on the deck of the *portée*. (The crew kept this shot, and when Graham went back to New Zealand it was his most cherished souvenir.) Before an effective shot had been fired at the enemy, L1 had been knocked out.

At 1800 yards, the extreme range on the range scale, the remaining three guns opened fire on the advancing enemy tanks. As they cleared the South African position, the enemy descended a slight fall in the ground below the skyline, which would otherwise have allowed them to be easily picked out by the gun-layers. On the other hand, as they drew out of the dust and smoke it was possible for individual vehicles to be distinguished, and the troop went to work in earnest.

Lieutenant Pepper's remark to the gun sergeants that the tanks, though numerous, were small ones, was borne out when the troop started shooting. It was amply demonstrated in later desert campaigns that the more heavily armoured of the German Mark 3 and Mark 4 tanks were impervious to two-pounder fire at ranges over 800 yards. But the early German tanks had much lighter armour. On this occasion the gunners saw tanks burst into flame from hits scored with the range at 1500, 1600, and even 1700 yards. The calibre of the shells which knocked out L1 and scored a subsequent hit on L3, 50-millimetre, showed that there were German Mark 3s among the attackers. It is probable that they were an early type, without the heavier armour of the later Mark 3. It is also probable that there were some German Mark 2s, much lighter tanks, among them; if part of the **Ariete Division** was with the Germans, there would have been Italian M.13s, equally vulnerable,

as well.

Beyond the apparent fact that there was an imposing mass of them, it was impossible for the gunners to form an accurate estimate of the number of enemy tanks in this first drive against the 26th Battalion. It was agreed by all on the spot that the number was at least fifty, but they could not see clearly enough to make an accurate count. Nor was there time to do so. At first the enemy tanks, apparently without knowledge of the identity or strength of the New Zealanders, simply poured down on the position with no sign of a definite plan of attack. When the blast of fire from the 25-pounders and the two-pounders convinced them of the strength of the defence, they withdrew, and a far more cautious policy was adopted. But until the attackers realised the position and altered their tactics, the L Troop gunners worked under great pressure.

Following Lieutenant Pepper's injunction, L3 fired five shots, the tracer tracks of at least two of them showing direct hits on their targets, then changed its position. As its *portée* backed again towards the enemy another German 50-millimetre shell found a mark. It pierced the left side of the shield, miraculously missing both Sergeant Unverricht and the layer, Bombardier C. J. Smith ¹², went on through the cab of the *portée*, mortally wounding the driver, Gunner F. D. Nicholson ¹³, and finished by striking the top of the engine and putting the vehicle out of action. Unverricht jumped to the ground to see the extent of the damage, and was just in time to see Nicholson stagger from the cab and collapse on the sand. Seeing at a glance how badly he was wounded, the sergeant at once set off across bullet-swept ground to find medical assistance.

With half the troop's effective strength out of action, L2 and L4 carried on. In that first few hectic minutes while the tanks closed the range, the little two-pounder shells were most effective. The procedure of ordinary anti-tank shooting was, for a short time, discarded. Normally the Number 1, the gun commander, selects a target and directs the layer until it appears in his telescope. He then gives the range and deflection to be allowed for a moving target. The loader slams a shell into the

breech and, as the spring forces the block home, taps the layer on the shoulder to let him know the gun is ready, and the Number 1 gives the order to fire. The gun's target knocked out, the Number 1 orders 'Stop!' selects a fresh target for the layer, and so on. This time the targets were too thick to be easily selected and the need too pressing for any stops.

'Pick your own target through the telescope, Frank,' said Sergeant Peter Robertson, of L2, to his gun-layer, Bombardier F. C. Barker ¹⁴. Almost at the same time, a similar understanding was reached between Sergeant 'Chum' Croft of L4 and his layer, Gunner A. B. Gordon ¹⁵. Whenever enemy shells came close the *portées* moved; but after every change of position, the initial direction of the Number 1 and his final order to stop were the only formal commands.

As the range closed, the tracer showed hit after hit on the enemy tanks. On the right the field gunners worked like men possessed, firing armour-piercing shot over open sights. They could not match the high rate of fire of the two-pounders, with their semi-automatic breech and light, easily handled ammunition, but one hit with the 25-pound shell was almost always sufficient to disable a tank, while two, three, and even four good shots were often needed from the lighter weapons.

Noticing the troop's rate of fire, Lieutenant-Colonel Page called to Lieutenant Pepper. 'Cyril,' he said, 'if your chaps keep shooting at that speed they'll be out of ammunition in no time.' 'It's all right, sir,' Pepper shouted in reply, 'we've got some extra.' When first the group had met the South Africans he had replaced the ammunition his guns had fired during the morning. The South Africans had urged him to help himself from their supply, and not only had he replaced the rounds fired, but he had also loaded a lot more on his own truck.

After what seemed to the gunners to be nearer half a day than little more than half an hour, the enemy decided he had stumbled on something that presented much more than merely a mopping-up task. The tanks returned to their original start line and fanned out on the flanks in crescent formation. This favourite German method of attack

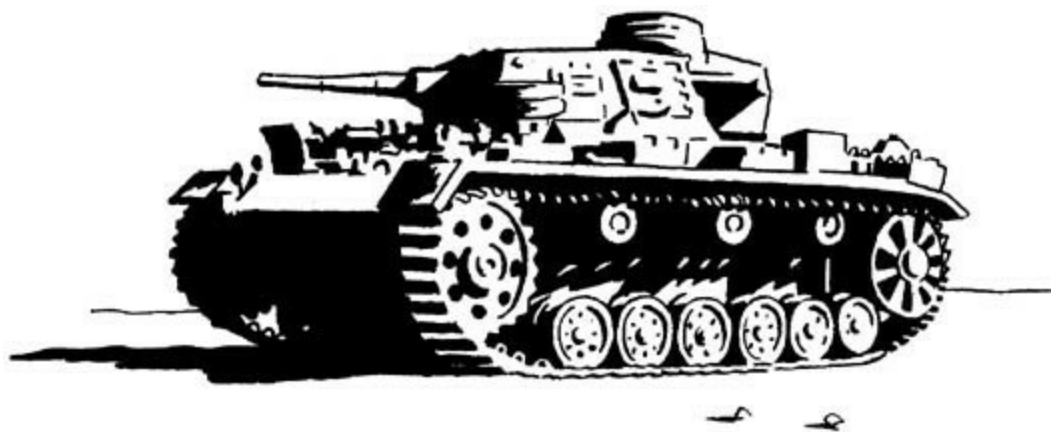
enabled the machine guns at either end of the line to bring a severe crossfire on the defenders. A line of burning vehicles testified to the shooting of the New Zealand guns, both two- and 25-pounders, but the casualties were only a small proportion of the enemy tanks. Enough remained to form a wide crescent and, although more cautiously, resume the attack. By now there was no sign of the British field or anti-tank guns. For some reason they had been withdrawn, and only L Troop's two guns and the 30th Field Battery remained to protect the infantry and take what toll they could of the enemy armour.

Still there was no lack of targets for the two-pounders. Though the enemy tanks had fallen back and fanned out the guns were still able to reach them, though not with the same effect as at the closer range. Lorried infantry joined in the attack, and the troop concentrated some of its fire on the troop-carrying vehicles. Although these would halt and debus the infantry out of range of the guns, the layers, Frank Barker of L2 and 'Abe' Gordon of L4, made targets of them nevertheless. They would lay onto an enemy vehicle or group of infantry with the range at 1800 yards, then cock the gun up a little higher and fire, the gun commanders checking their judgment of the extra range by carefully observing each shot. Several lorries were hit in this way and parties of enemy infantry were scattered while trying to bring their mortars into action.

Meanwhile Sergeant Unverricht had not been able to find assistance for the badly wounded Gunner Nicholson. He reported to Lieutenant Pepper and was directed to get the help of the troop subaltern, Second-Lieutenant Scott, and the troop 3-ton lorry. Lieutenant Scott and his driver, Gunner R. F. Davies ¹⁶, soon backed the lorry to the knocked-out *portée*. The tailboard was lowered and Gunner Nicholson lifted gently to the deck. But when the lorry tried to tow the gun back to a safer place two more casualties were suffered. With the tow-rope attached, Gunner P. J. Keenan ¹⁷, the L3 loader, jumped on the front bumper bar of the *portée* and shouted to Gunner Davies to drive on. He did so, but just as the *portée* was gathering way down a slight incline the three-tonner

unexpectedly stopped. With its steering gear and brakes useless, the *portée* rolled down the slope and crashed into the back of the lorry, Gunner Keenan having his leg badly shattered between the two vehicles. There was excellent reason for Davies' lack of response to shouts to move his lorry out of the way. He had been wounded in the hip by a Spandau bullet as he sat behind the wheel.

The two guns still in action did not waste an opportunity to disrupt the enemy attack. Trucks were bringing enemy infantry well up behind the gradually advancing tanks, and parties were jumping out and trying to bring mortars and anti-tank guns into action. Gordon and Barker, through their telescopes, found that while the setting sun made it hard to sort out their targets initially, once they had the enemy within their lenses the bright background made accurate aiming easy. At extreme range and beyond, they engaged every party of enemy infantry they could see as they left their lorries, and several times the two-pounder shells prevented mortars from coming into action and scattered their crews. Many bursts of flame showed hits. All this time, machine-gun fire from the tanks was sweeping the New Zealand position. Often bullets rattled against the *portées*, and it was by good fortune that there were no further casualties in the troop.



A GERMAN MEDIUM TANK — MARK 3
A GERMAN MEDIUM TANK — MARK 3

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

REPLENISHING THE AMMUNITION

REPLENISHING THE AMMUNITION

BEFORE long both crews exhausted their ammunition. Each two-pounder in the regiment carried 192 rounds on the *portée*. In the morning engagement L4 had fired about ten rounds, which reduced its supply to 182, and L2 had fired about sixteen, leaving it with 176. There remained first of all the ammunition on the knocked-out guns. From L2, Gunner A. J. Harris ¹⁸, the Bren gunner, and Gunner M. A. Harry ¹⁹, the ammunition number, made their way over forty yards of bullet-spattered ground to L3. On each trip they brought back eight rounds apiece, a container of four shells in either hand. Gunner P. Quirk ²⁰, the ammunition number of L4, later assisted by the Bren gunner, Gunner L. O. Naylor ²¹, had anticipated the shortage and was already replenishing his supply from the other knocked-out gun, L1. In his case as well, the task of bringing up the extra ammunition meant a most dangerous sprint under fire.

By this time the Germans were shelling the position and in spite of the efforts of the New Zealand gunners had managed to get some mortars into action, but very few of the heavy missiles landed among the troop's vehicles. Either that was good luck, or the enemy might have been seeking first to knock out the field guns on the right of the line. But as the tanks and infantry began to close on the position, the machine-gun fire and armour-piercing shot became heavier. The ammunition numbers carried on until all the shells of the knocked-out guns were carried to the two-pounders still in action.

While the action was in progress its various stages were reported to the 26th Battalion's parent formation, the 6th New Zealand Infantry Brigade. Brigadier Barrowclough ordered the battalion to disengage and retire to the main body of the group. To do this darkness was essential. The question was whether the enemy could be held at bay until last light. It would be about half past six in the evening before there was sufficient gloom to cover the withdrawal. By six the enemy was getting close; but the infantry and guns fought sternly on. After one heavy shell

and mortar barrage the enemy's fire slackened, but the battalion's Bren gunners and riflemen maintained their rapid rate. When some of the crew of L4, not noticing that the light was beginning to fail, took advantage of the lull to smoke the first cigarette of the afternoon, the flare of their matches at once drew the enemy's fire.

Any vehicle moving on the front was fired on by the anti-tank guns, and parties of infantry provided alternative targets. L2 fired all L3's ammunition. Lieutenant Pepper had expected this, and in good time had an extra supply available from his reserve store. By the time the withdrawal was ordered, L4 was using the last of the containers brought over from L1.

The temporary slackening of the enemy's fire did not mean that he was abandoning the attack. Just after seven o'clock, when the 26th Battalion was nearly ready to withdraw, there came a hail of machine-gun fire, which the German infantry followed with a resolute attack. It was dark by the time they had come within 800 yards of the New Zealanders but they could be seen clearly against the glare of burning vehicles. The New Zealand infantry then put the finishing touch to an afternoon of determined and skilful defensive fighting. Led by Captain A. W. Wesley ²², the battalion's B Company counter-attacked in a bayonet charge that caused heavy casualties and completely repulsed the enemy. In this charge this fine officer was killed.

As it could not be taken, away, Lieutenant Pepper ordered that L3, the gun with the knocked-out *portée*, should be made completely unfit for use. Sergeant Unverricht and Bombardier 'Cy' Smith took the breech block with its firing mechanism from the gun.

'Since we're here, Terry,' said Smith, 'wouldn't it be as well to take some of the tinned stuff?'

The sergeant agreed, and each seized as many tins of tongue, sausages, and fruit as he could carry. They had just returned to the troop three-tonner when the heavy machine-gun concentration hit the

area. Both dropped to the ground. Smith lay flat with his head against a tin of sausages, and when a lull enabled him to shift position he found that a German bullet had pierced the tin, missing his head by inches.

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THE WITHDRAWAL

THE WITHDRAWAL

THE BATTALION'S withdrawal was made in good order, quickly, and with complete success. German flares were casting a bright light over the position when the troop received orders to retire. Its vehicles, now three *portées*, the commander's 'pick-up', and the troop 3-ton lorry, were in the last party to leave. This comprised the field artillery, which kept up its fire to the very last moment, the battalion's Bren carriers, and the last infantry company, the infantrymen riding on the gun vehicles and the carriers. One German prisoner also found a seat in the troop commander's truck. It was not until eleven o'clock at night that L Troop and the 26th Battalion re-established contact with the 6th Brigade and bedded down for the night near Point 175.

Before the withdrawal the troop's casualties were attended by the 26th Battalion's Medical Officer, Lieutenant G. C. Jennings ²³, who earned the admiration of the gunners by bringing his RAP * truck to within fifty yards of the forward positions.

Reporting on this action, Brigadier Barrowclough wrote: 'It will be appreciated that this small force had been hotly attacked by an enemy column which had already proved itself strong enough to defeat and overthrow the whole of the 5th South African Brigade Group. That the 26th Battalion and its supporting artillery and anti-tank guns were able to maintain their positions and come out of the action with surprisingly few casualties was an eloquent tribute to the high standard of training and fortitude of all ranks. After the action there was no question that the infantry had the highest possible regard for the gunners. Nor were the gunners less generous in their praise of the way in which the infantry first stood its ground and then fought the rearguard action back to the main body of the Brigade group.'

Lieutenant Pepper estimated that L Troop had knocked out 24 tanks as well as many unarmoured vehicles. As the fight progressed the front had become lined with burning vehicles, some South African, many of them transport lorries. In the dust and smoke, with the sinking sun

shining into the eyes of the observer, it must have been extremely difficult to make an accurate count. The fact that eight field guns of the 30th Battery were also in action against the enemy armour made a tally all the more uncertain. It was reported by the British that the German attack against the South Africans and the 26th Battalion cost the enemy 52 tanks. With that as a total figure, and taking into account that the two L Troop guns fired nearly 700 rounds between them in about three hours' fighting, the figure of 24 certainties is at least possible, even allowing for the long range at which many of the shots were fired.

On the debit side, one L Troop gunner was killed and three were wounded, and two guns and one *portée* lost. The afternoon's fighting in this area cost the **Eighth Army** almost the whole of the 5th South African Brigade, as well as some tanks of the 22nd Armoured Brigade. Against that there were the indefinite but certainly considerable German infantry casualties besides the losses in tanks and transport.

At the time of this engagement, it is probable that Rommel thought he had encountered a considerably larger proportion of the New Zealand Division than was actually the case. It was later stated by Colonel Mario Revetria, Chief Intelligence Officer of the Italian forces under Rommel's command, that the German leader had first been under the impression that the 6th New Zealand Infantry Brigade had been virtually wiped out in company with the 5th South African Brigade on 23 November. Instead, on that same afternoon, the 25th Battalion had driven the Germans from Point 175, and the brigade was to take heavy toll of the enemy from the **Sidi Rezegh** escarpment before it was finally dislodged on 1 December.

Throughout this short but severe action the leadership of the anti-tank troop commander, Lieutenant Pepper, was an inspiration to his men, and indeed to all the New Zealanders there. Regardless of the heavy small-arms fire, he moved from gun to gun encouraging the crews, meeting every emergency promptly and with skill. At one stage,

when the arrival of some South African vehicles and the distortion of an order gave the impression that there was a general withdrawal, he corrected the error and by personal visits to each gun made sure that the line was maintained. For this outstanding work under extraordinarily difficult circumstances, and his complete disregard of personal danger, Lieutenant Pepper was awarded the Military Cross. It was a grave misfortune for the troop and the regiment when, three days later, he was so badly injured by a staff car which backed into the slit-trench in which he was resting, that he had to be invalided back to New Zealand.

Good fortune attended L Troop to the end of the short but bitterly-fought campaign. Both the battery's other two-pounder troops, J and K, were overrun with the 24th and 26th Battalions above the mosque at **Sidi Rezegh** on 30 November, with heavy casualties and complete loss of equipment. With the survivors of the 25th Battalion, L Troop was able to withdraw next day, and made its way back to **Baggush** with what remained of the 4th and 6th New Zealand Infantry Brigades.

* Regimental aid post.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

¹ Lt-Col T. H. E. OAKES, MC and bar *, m.i.d.; **Royal Artillery** (retd); born England, 24 Mar 1895; CO 7 NZ Anti-Tank Regt, 16 May-30 Nov 1941; killed in action, 30 Nov 1941.

² Lt C. S. PEPPER, MC; clerk; born NZ, 18 Nov 1911; Rugby All Black 1935 (**United Kingdom**); injured 26 Nov 1941; died, **Wellington**, 30 May 1943.

³ Lt-Col J. R. PAGE, DSO, m.i.d.; Regular soldier; **Wellington**; born Dunedin, 10 May 1908; CO 26 Bn, 15 May 1940–27 Nov 1941; wounded 27 Nov 1941; invalided to NZ, 25 Feb 1942; Inspector of Training, 26 Aug 1942; GSO 1, Army HQ, 19 Jan 1943; Rugby All Black 1931; 1932 and 1934 (**Australia**); 1935 (**United Kingdom**).

⁴ Maj-Gen H. E. BARROWCLOUGH, CB, DSO and bar, MC, ED, m.i.d.; barrister and solicitor; **Auckland**; born **Masterton**, 23 Jun 1894; in First World War rose from Pte to Lt-Col commanding 4 Bn, NZRB; wounded, Messines, 1917; in Second World War commanded 6 NZ Inf Bde, 1 May 1940–21 Feb 1942; GOC **2 NZEF** in the **Pacific** and GOC 3 NZ Div, 8 Aug 1942–20 Oct 1944.

⁵ Maj A. T. RAWLE, m.i.d.; insurance clerk; born **Auckland**, 26 Sep 1909; died of wounds, 3 Dec 1941.

⁶ Capt I. G. SCOTT; commercial traveller; **Auckland**; born **Australia**, 1 Feb 1914; wounded 2 Dec 1941; p.w. 22 Jul 1942.

⁷ Sgt T. E. WILLIAMSON; contractor; Te Kauwhata; born **Gisborne**, 23 Sep 1911.

⁸ Lt P. ROBERTSON; labourer; **Wellington**; born **Scotland**, 7 Feb 1919.

⁹ Sgt T. E. UNVERRICHT; labourer; Heretaunga; born **Lower Hutt**, 4 Jul 1918;

wounded 1 Dec 1941 and 5 Jul 1942.

¹⁰ Sgt T. H. CROFT; farm worker; Omihi; born NZ, 6 Nov 1909.

¹¹ Gnr A. GRAHAM; labourer; Christchurch; born Scotland, 28 Nov 1912; wounded 23 Nov 1941.

¹² Sgt C. J. SMITH; carpenter; Upper Hutt; born Wellington, 23 Feb 1912.

¹³ Gnr F. D. NICHOLSON; labourer; born NZ, 19 Feb 1914; died of wounds, 23 Nov 1941.

¹⁴ WO II F. C. BARKER; freezing worker; Auckland; born Wanganui, 23 Apr 1912; wounded 13 Jul 1942.

¹⁵ Lt A. B. GORDON; student; Lower Hutt; born Lower Hutt, 24 Mar 1917.

¹⁶ Gnr R. F. DAVIES; sugar worker; Auckland; born Auckland, 16 Dec 1919; wounded 23 Nov 1941.

¹⁷ Gnr P. J. KEENAN; salesman; Christchurch; born Christchurch, 10 Jun 1919; injured 23 Nov 1941.

¹⁸ Sgt A. J. HARRIS; joiner; Auckland; born Auckland, 26 Dec 1917.

¹⁹ Sgt M. A. HARRY; cellarman; Christchurch; born NZ, 4 Jul 1914.

²⁰ Gnr P. QUIRK; labourer; Melbourne; born Australia, 13 May 1919; wounded and p.w., 2 Jan 1942; escaped to Switzerland, Oct 1943.

²¹ Sgt L. O. NAYLOR; labourer; Lumsden; born Lumsden, 13 Oct 1908; wounded 18 Apr 1941.

²² Capt A. W. WESNEY; clerk; born Invercargill, 1 Feb 1915; Rugby All Black 1938 (Australia); killed in action 23 Nov 1941.

²³ Capt G. C. JENNINGS; medical practitioner; England; born NZ, 21 Jun 1913; p.w. 13 Dec 1941; repatriated May 1943.

The occupations given in each case are those on enlistment

*** First World War**

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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THE OFFICIAL SOURCES consulted in the preparation of this account were the war diaries of Headquarters 6th New Zealand Infantry Brigade and the 26th New Zealand Battalion, and a special report on the campaign by the commander of the 6th Brigade, Brigadier H. E. Barrowclough. Most of the material is drawn from interviews and correspondence with men who took part in the action. The assistance of former members of L Troop, 33rd New Zealand Anti-Tank Battery, and also of the 26th Battalion and the 30th New Zealand Field Battery, is gratefully acknowledged.

THE MAP, DIAGRAMS, and SKETCHES were drawn by L. D. McCormick.

THE PAINTING on [page 17](#) was by Captain Peter McIntyre.

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page 24 (top)	T. E. Unverricht
(bottom)	T. E. Williamson

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[BACKMATTER]

THE AUTHOR, E. H. Smith, is a member of the staff of the War History Branch. A former newspaper reporter, he served overseas in the 7th New Zealand Anti-Tank Regiment and is at present writing the history of that unit. He was wounded on 3 August 1944 during the advance to Florence.

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ACHILLES AT THE RIVER PLATE

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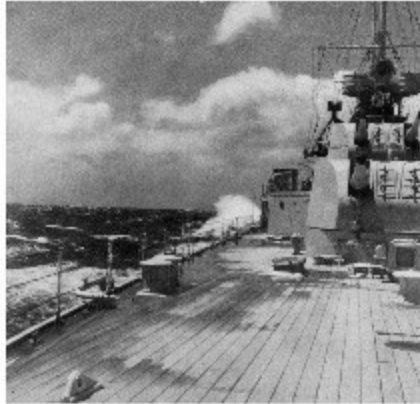
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[COVERS]

NEW ZEALAND IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR
Official History



ACHILLES AT THE RIVER PLATE

BY
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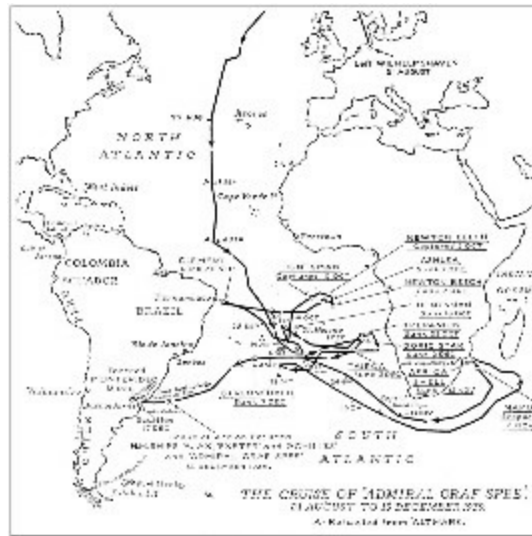
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BY
S. D. WATERS

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[FRONTISPIECE]



Drawn from the German official chart

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[TITLE PAGE]

ACHILLES AT THE RIVER PLATE

S. D. WATERS

WAR HISTORY BRANCH

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

1948

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[EDITORPAGE]

IT IS THE INTENTION *of this series to present aspects of New Zealand's part in the Second World War which will not receive detailed treatment in the campaign volumes and which are considered either worthy of special notice or typical of many phases of our war experience. The series is illustrated with material which would otherwise seldom see publication. It will also contain short accounts of operations which will be dealt with in detail in the appropriate volumes.*

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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

ON PATROL

ON PATROL

AUGUST 1939 was a month of great activity in the German Navy. The war plans of the High Command for commerce raiding in the **Atlantic** were being put into operation. Between 19 and 23 August, eighteen U-boats sailed for their allotted stations; on the 21st, the pocket battleship ***Admiral Graf Spee***, commanded by Captain Hans Langsdorf, sailed from **Wilhelmshaven**; on the 24th, a second pocket battleship, the ***Deutschland***, put to sea, her tanker supply ship having sailed two days earlier. To wait upon the ***Admiral Graf Spee***, the tanker ***Altmark***, carrying three months' stores, had sailed from **Germany** as early as 2 August and, having loaded 9400 tons of fuel oil at Port Arthur, Texas, left there on 19 August for the **Atlantic**. Until war began, the ***Admiral Graf Spee*** was to cruise in an area north-west of the Cape Verde Islands; afterwards, she was to operate on the South Atlantic trade routes.

The broad lines of British naval policy for the protection of sea-borne trade in the event of war with **Germany** and **Italy** had been laid down in an Admiralty memorandum of January 1939. Anticipating attacks by raiders, including **Germany's** three pocket battleships, the memorandum set out the 'traditional and well-proved methods' of trade protection. These consisted in the dispersal or evasive routing of merchant shipping, the stationing of naval patrols in focal areas where cruisers could concentrate in pairs against a superior enemy, and the formation of adequately escorted convoys. Detachments from the main fleet could also be used if required. 'By such means,' said the memorandum, 'we have in the past succeeded in protecting shipping on essential routes and it is intended to rely on these methods again, adapting them to the problem under review.' On the outbreak of war on 3 September 1939, this policy was put into effect; but it was not always possible to provide adequate escort forces for convoys. This was one of the costly results of the drastic whittling down of British naval strength during the past twenty-one years.

During the last week of August active steps were taken to put the

two cruisers of the New Zealand Division of the **Royal Navy** in a state of instant readiness for war. At nine o'clock on the morning of 29 August, Captain W. E. Parry, RN, commanding officer of HMS *Achilles*, received his sailing orders for the **North America** and West Indies Station. During the morning, two Reserve officers from the *Leander* and a draft of young ratings from the training depot joined the ship, which left her berth at **Devonport** dockyard, **Auckland**, at 1.30 p.m. At the last minute a boat arrived alongside with an additional medical officer, Surgeon-Lieutenant C. A. Pittar, RNZNVR, who at one hour's notice had left his private practice to go to sea. The ship's company then numbered 567, of whom twenty-six officers and 220 ratings were from the **Royal Navy** and five officers and 316 ratings were New Zealanders.

After clearing the harbour the *Achilles* proceeded at 14 knots for the Panama Canal; but during the night of 2 September she was ordered by the Commander-in-Chief, **America** and **West Indies**, to alter course for **Valparaiso**, **Chile**, and she increased her speed to 17 knots. Shortly before 1 a.m. (ship's time) on 3 September, the Admiralty signal 'Commence hostilities against **Germany**' was received. From this time on, action stations were exercised daily at dawn and dusk and the ship was blacked out at night. No ship was sighted on the passage across the **Pacific** and the *Achilles* arrived at **Valparaiso** at midday on 12 September.

During the next six weeks, the *Achilles* patrolled the west coast of South America and visited numerous harbours and anchorages in **Chile**, **Peru**, Ecuador, and Colombia, with due observance of the neutrality regulations of those republics. As in August 1914, the outbreak of war had almost completely halted the considerable German trade in those waters. The only German merchant ships at sea, when the *Achilles* arrived on the coast, were fugitives such as the *Lahn* from **Sydney** and the *Erlangen* from New Zealand, which had vanished into the **Pacific** in the week before the outbreak of war and evaded the patrolling cruiser by sneaking into neutral harbours. The advent of the *Achilles*, the only Allied warship in those waters, sufficed to keep German trade at a

standstill and virtually to immobilise some seventeen merchant ships totalling 84,000 tons along a coastline of 5000 miles from the Panama Canal to the Strait of Magellan. Thus was exemplified the truth of the old saying that nine-tenths of naval warfare is made up of the continuous drudgery and monotony of patrol duties and the search for enemy vessels which are not there, but which would be if the patrols were not.

But the restraining influence of the *Achilles* on that coast was about to be removed. On 1 October the Admiralty received word that the British steamer *Clement*, 5051 tons, had been sunk off the coast of **Brazil** on 30 September by an enemy raider believed to be the *Admiral Scheer*. It was, in fact, the *Admiral Graf Spee*, who had struck her first blow. Prompt and far-reaching measures were taken to hunt her down. The *Achilles* was in the vicinity of the Gulf of **Panama** when, on 2 October, she received orders to proceed south-about into the **Atlantic** to reinforce the South America Division of Commodore Henry Harwood, who was operating under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic. From the beginning of the war, the commodore's special care and duty was to protect merchant shipping in the important **River Plate** and Rio de Janeiro areas. He had under his command the cruisers *Exeter* (Captain F. S. Bell, RN), *Cumberland* (Captain W. H. G. Fallowfield, RN), and *Ajax* (Captain C. H. L. Woodhouse, RN), and for about six weeks, the destroyers *Hotspur* and *Havock*. On 5 October the Admiralty informed the Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic, of the formation of eight hunting groups, each of 'sufficient strength to destroy any German armoured ship of the *Deutschland* class or armoured cruiser of the *Hipper* class'.

Thus, the appearance of a single enemy raider in the South Atlantic set in motion a vast naval machine involving twenty-two ships, as well as the despatch of two battleships and three cruisers to **Canada** for convoy escort duties. In British ships alone, this entailed the withdrawal from Home waters of three capital ships, two aircraft-carriers, and three cruisers, and from the **Mediterranean** (for duty in the **Indian Ocean**) of

one battleship, one aircraft-carrier, and three cruisers. In addition, the French Navy provided an aircraft-carrier, two battle-cruisers, five cruisers, and several destroyers to operate off the west coast of **Africa**. These elaborate measures recall the similar widespread dispositions made in 1914 against **Admiral Graf Spee's** Pacific Squadron and in the hunting of the cruiser *Emden*.

After a second visit to **Valparaiso**, where she spent two days making good engine-room defects, the *Achilles* carried on to the southward. She entered the Strait of Magellan at midday on 19 October, anchored overnight, and cleared the **Atlantic** entrance the following evening, arriving at the **Falkland Islands** about twenty-four hours later. After refuelling, the *Achilles* sailed from Port Stanley on 23 October and proceeded to the southern approach to the **River Plate**, where she joined company with HMS *Exeter* three days later. On 27 October the *Achilles* met the *Cumberland*, under orders to patrol with her in the Rio de Janeiro-Santos area. Commodore Harwood transferred his broad pendant to the *Ajax* and the *Exeter* sailed for Port Stanley to carry out urgent repairs. She replaced the *Achilles* on 11 November.

Nothing had been heard of the enemy raider for three weeks, and on 3 November the Admiralty informed the Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic, that all German capital ships and cruisers were believed to be in their home waters. Next day, the Admiralty issued orders that Force 'G' (*Cumberland* and *Exeter*) and Force 'H' (*Sussex* and *Shropshire*) should exchange areas, an arrangement that would not only give the former ships an opportunity to rest and refit, but also provide Commodore Harwood with the hunting group of long-steaming endurance he so greatly desired. The two forces had actually sailed to effect the change-over when, on 17 November, the Admiralty learned that the pocket battleship was in the **Indian Ocean**. The exchange arrangements were immediately cancelled and the ships returned to their respective stations.

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THE MOVEMENTS OF THE GRAF SPEE

THE MOVEMENTS OF THE GRAF SPEE

AFTER SINKING the *Clement* on 30 September, the *Admiral Graf Spee* made a cast more than 2000 miles to the eastward and between 5 and 10 October captured and later sank three steamers—the *Newton Beech*, 4651 tons, the *Ashlea*, 4222 tons, and the *Huntsman*, 8196 tons— all homeward-bound from South Africa. On 14 October, south-west of St. Helena, the raider refuelled from the *Altmark*, to whom she transferred the crews of the sunken ships. Returning towards the African coast, she intercepted and sank on 22 October the steamer *Trevanion*, 5299 tons, homeward-bound from **South Australia**. Six days later the raider again refuelled from the *Altmark* in mid- **Atlantic**. She then made a wide sweep into the **Indian Ocean**, but sighted nothing until 15 November, when she sank the small tanker *Africa Shell*, 706 tons, 160 miles north-east of Lourenco Marques. Next day she stopped the Dutch steamer *Mapia* but allowed her to proceed. Eleven days later, the Admiralty ordered Forces 'H' (*Sussex* and *Shropshire*) and 'K' (*Ark Royal* and *Renown*) to patrol south of the Cape of Good Hope to intercept the raider. But, by that time, the *Admiral Graf Spee* was back in mid- **Atlantic** where, on 26 November, she had refuelled from the *Altmark* and re-embarked the masters and senior officers of the ships previously sunk.

The *Achilles* remained in company with the *Cumberland* till 5 November and then patrolled the coast from Santos to Rio de Janeiro, where she arrived on 10 November and spent two days. Returning south, she met the *Ajax* on 22 November and spent the day searching for the German merchant ships *Lahn* and *Tacoma*, which had escaped from Chilean ports. The search was unsuccessful, both German ships arriving at **Montevideo** during the afternoon. After refuelling, the *Achilles* started next day on another long, independent patrol which took her more than 2000 miles to the north. By the morning of 3 December she was off Pernambuco.

Early in the morning of 4 December the *Achilles* received orders

from Commodore Harwood to return to **Montevideo** on 8 December. Course was shaped accordingly and the ship increased speed to 19 knots to arrive on time. The elusive raider had been located again on the eastern side of the **Atlantic**. The timely concentration of the cruisers of the South America Division was now in progress. It is in the immensity of the open sea, devoid of natural features and obstructions such as restrict the movements of armies, that naval operations differ fundamentally from land warfare. The constant problem of the naval commander is how to intercept an opponent intent upon evasion. From the Cape of Good Hope to the **Falkland Islands** is 4000-odd miles, to the **River Plate** 3700 miles, and to Rio de Janeiro 3270 miles. The shortest distance across the South **Atlantic** is 1630 miles from Pernambuco to **Freetown**, and from that line southward to the Cape is 3100 miles. Even the increased range of observation afforded by the aircraft of the warships searching for the *Admiral Graf Spee* represented but tiny circles in the 10,000,000 square miles of the South Atlantic.

The *Admiral Graf Spee* had returned to the area where she had sunk the *Trevanion* and there, on 2 December, she intercepted and sank the Blue Star liner *Doric Star*, 10,086 tons, homeward-bound from New Zealand and **Sydney** with a full cargo of meat, dairy produce, and wool. The destruction of this ship and her valuable cargo was a considerable success for the raider, but it was shortly to prove her undoing. The *Doric Star* had succeeded in transmitting a distress signal giving her position at the time of attack. Knowing this, Captain Langsdorf left the area at high speed. Early next morning he sighted and sank the Shaw Savill steamer *Tairoa*, 7983 tons, bound from **Australia** to England with a cargo of meat, wool, and lead. This was the day on which Commodore Harwood ordered his cruisers to concentrate off the **River Plate**. On 6 December the *Admiral Graf Spee* refuelled from the *Altmark* for the last time. She was then nearly half-way between St. Helena and the **River Plate** area and about 1700 miles from **Montevideo**. Next day she sank her last victim, the British steamer *Streonshalh*, 3895 tons, laden with wheat from the **River Plate**. In ten weeks the raider had destroyed nine British ships totalling 50,089 tons without the loss of a single life.

When the *Doric Star* reported on 2 December that she was being attacked by a pocket battleship, she was more than 3000 miles from the South American coast. A similar report was broadcast early the following day by an unknown ship—it was in fact, the *Tairoa*—170 miles southwest of that position. Commodore Harwood correctly anticipated that the raider, knowing she had been reported, would leave that area and probably cross the South Atlantic. He estimated that at a cruising speed of 15 knots, she could arrive in the Rio de Janeiro focal area by the morning of 12 December, the **River Plate** area by the evening of that day or early on 13 December, or the **Falkland Islands** area by 14 December. ‘I decided,’ he wrote, ‘that the Plate, with its larger number of ships and its very valuable grain and meat trade, was the vital area to be defended. I therefore arranged to concentrate there my available forces in advance of the time at which it was anticipated the raider might start operations in that area.’

At seven o’clock on the morning of 12 December, the *Ajax* and *Achilles* joined company with the *Exeter* 150 miles east of Punta Medanos, in the southern approach to the **River Plate**. The *Cumberland* was refitting at Port Stanley. During the afternoon, Commodore Harwood gave his captains the clearest picture of his intentions in two brief signals, the first of which began: ‘My policy with three cruisers in company versus one pocket battleship—attack at once by day or night...’, and then set out the tactics to be adopted. The essence of the second signal was that captains were to act ‘without further orders so as to maintain decisive gun range’. During the evening, the British cruisers exercised these tactics. It was a full-dress rehearsal of the drama that was staged next morning.

The *Admiral Graf Spee* was a well-armoured ship of some 12,000 tons displacement, with a speed of 25 knots or better. She mounted six 11-inch guns in two triple turrets and eight 5.9-inch guns, four on each beam. The 11-inch guns had a maximum range of 30,000 yards (15 sea miles) and fired a projectile of 670 pounds. She also had eight torpedo-tubes in quadruple mountings. The *Exeter* was armed with six 8-inch

guns in three turrets, each gun firing a projectile of 256 pounds. The *Ajax* and *Achilles* each had eight 6-inch guns in four turrets, firing a projectile of 112 pounds. The secondary guns of the German ship were the equal in weight of the main armament of either the *Ajax* or the *Achilles*. She could fire a total weight of 4830 pounds as against 3328 pounds from the three British cruisers, though the rate of her 11-inch guns was slower. The British ships had an advantage in speed of about five knots. But against the material superiority of the *Admiral Graf Spee* was to be set a vitally important moral factor. British naval doctrine, established by long tradition, laid down that 'war at sea cannot be waged successfully without risking the loss of ships. Should the object to be achieved justify a reasonable loss of ships, the fact that such losses may occur should be no deterrent to the carrying out of the operation.'

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE BATTLE BEGINS

THE BATTLE BEGINS

AT 5.20 ON THE MORNING of 13 December, the British squadron was in a position about 240 miles due east from Cape Santa Maria on the coast of **Uruguay**, and some 350 miles from **Montevideo**. While daylight was breaking, the ships again practised the tactics to be employed against the enemy raider. The ships' companies fell out from action stations at 5.40 a.m. and reverted to their usual degree of readiness. The squadron then re-formed in single line ahead, in the order **Ajax**, **Achilles**, **Exeter**, steaming north-east by east at 14 knots. The sun rose at 5.56 a.m.



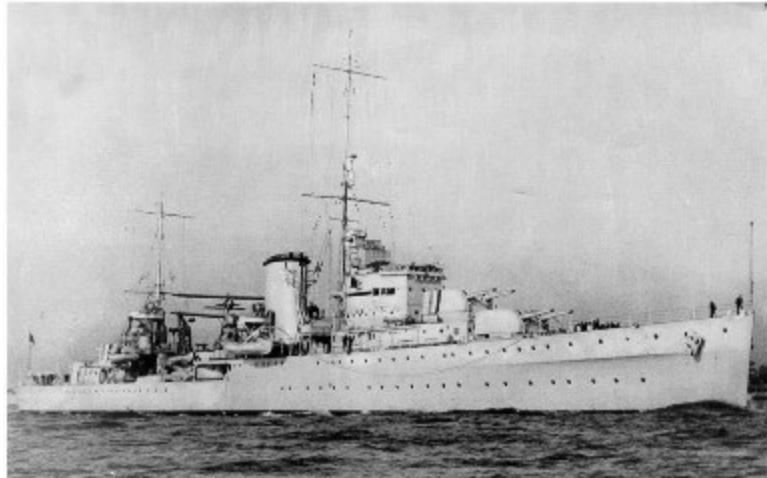
HMS *Achilles*
HMS *Achilles*

in a clear sky, giving extreme visibility. There was a fresh breeze from the south-east, with a low swell and a slight sea from the same quarter. At 6.14 a.m. smoke was sighted on the north-west horizon and the **Exeter** was ordered to investigate. Two minutes later, she reported: 'I think it is a pocket battleship'. Almost simultaneously, the enemy was identified by the other cruisers. When the alarm rattlers sounded in the **Achilles**, a signalman with a flag under his arm rushed aft shouting: 'Make way for the Digger flag!', and proceeded to hoist the New Zealand ensign to the mainmast head to the accompaniment of loud cheers from the 4-inch gun crews. For the first time, a New Zealand cruiser was about to engage the enemy. While their crews hurried to their action

stations, the British ships began to act in accordance with the plan which had already been exercised. The *Ajax* and *Achilles* turned together to north-north-west to close the range, while the *Exeter* made a large alteration of course to the westward. These movements were made in order that the enemy would be engaged simultaneously from widely different bearings and compelled either to 'split' his main armament to engage both divisions or to concentrate his fire on one and leave the other unengaged by his 11-inch guns. According to the German account of the action, the *Ajax* and *Achilles*, when first sighted, were taken to be destroyers and Captain Langsdorf assumed that the force was engaged in protecting a convoy. He decided to attack at once 'in order to close to effective fighting range before the enemy could work up to maximum speed, since it appeared to be out of the question that three shadowers could be shaken off'. At 6.18 a.m., only four minutes after her smoke was first seen, the *Admiral Graf Spee* opened fire at 19,800 yards, one 11-inch turret at the *Exeter* and the other at the *Ajax*, the first salvo of three shells falling about 300 yards short of the former ship.

The British cruisers were rapidly working up to full power and were steaming at more than 25 knots when the *Exeter* opened fire at 6.20 a.m., with her four forward guns, at 18,700 yards. Her two after guns fired as soon as they would bear, two and a half minutes later. The *Achilles* opened fire at 6.21 a.m. and the *Ajax* two minutes later. Both ships immediately developed a high rate of accurate fire. The 8-inch salvos of the *Exeter* appeared to worry the *Graf Spee* almost from the start and, after shifting targets rapidly once or twice, she concentrated all six 11-inch guns on the *Exeter*. At 6.23 a.m. one shell of her third salvo burst short of the *Exeter* amidships. It killed the crew of the starboard torpedo-tubes, damaged the communications, and riddled the funnels and searchlights with splinters. A minute later, after the *Exeter* had fired eight salvos, she received a direct hit from an 11-inch shell on the front of 'B' turret, which was put out of action. Splinters swept the bridge, killing or wounding all who were there, with the exception of Captain Bell and two officers, and wrecking the communications. Captain Bell decided to fight his ship from the after conning position. He

had hardly left the bridge before the ship's head began to swing to starboard. The torpedo officer, Lieutenant-Commander C. J. Smith, who had been knocked down and momentarily stunned, noticed this as he went aft, and he got an order through to the lower conning position which brought the ship back to her course. When Captain Bell arrived aft, he found that all communications with the steering compartment had been cut, and he was obliged to pass his orders through a chain of messengers. For the next hour, the *Exeter* was conned in this difficult manner, the captain and his staff being fully exposed to the blast from the after pair of 8-inch guns and the heavy fire of the enemy. The ship had received two more direct hits forward and further damage from splinters from short bursts.



HMS *ACHILLES* was faster than the *Graf Spee* but had much lighter guns and armour.

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ADMIRAL GRAF SPEE mounted six 11-inch guns in two triple turrets.



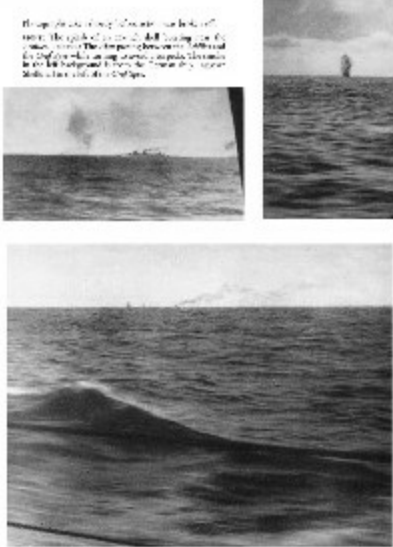
***ADMIRAL GRAF SPEE* mounted six 11-inch guns in two triple turrets**



THE ACHILLES IN THE STRAIT OF MAGELLAN ON HER WAY TO THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

THE ACHILLES IN THE STRAIT OF MAGELLAN ON HER WAY TO THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

IN ACTION

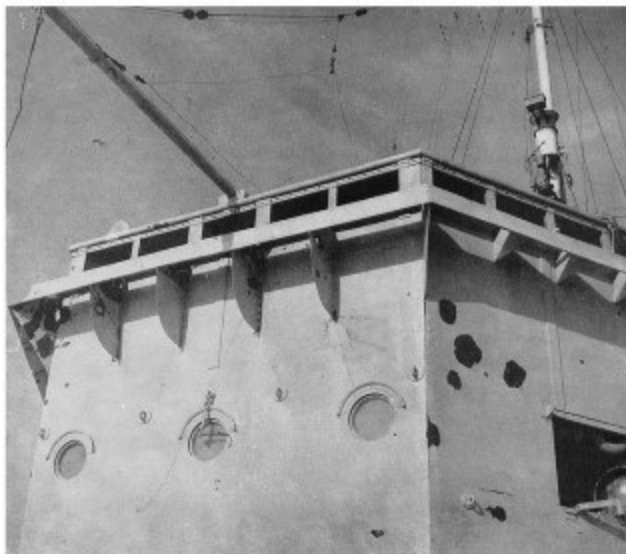


Photographs taken shortly before action was broken off. RIGHT: The splash of an 11-inch shell bursting near the *Achilles*. CENTRE: The *Ajax* passing between the *Achilles* and the *Graf Spee* while turning to avoid a torpedo. The smoke in the left background is from the German ship. BELOW: Shells fall to the left of the *Graf Spee*



Captain W. E. Parry dresses his leg wounds. Behind him is the navigating officer, Lieutenant G. G. Cowburn.

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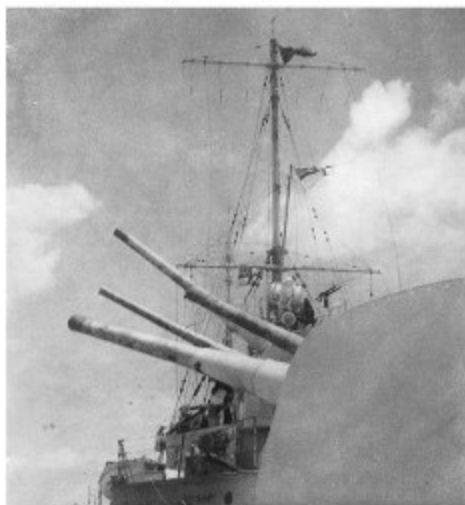


Damage to the bridge structure is indicated by the black patches on the plating. The topmost patch of the right-hand group was made by the splinter that wounded Captain Parry.

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ON BOARD THE *ACHILLES*

The after 6-inch guns of the *Achilles* showing the paint blistered by the heat of rapid firing.

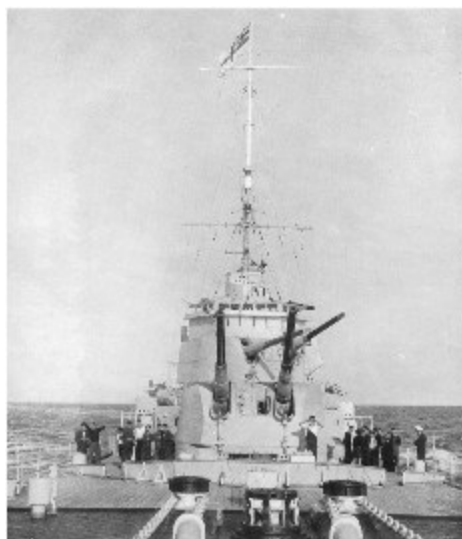


The after 6-inch guns of the *Achilles* showing the paint blistered by the heat of rapid firing



For the first time in action at sea,
the New Zealand ensign flies from
the mainmast of the Achilles.

For the first time in action at sea, the New Zealand ensign flies from the mainmast of the *Achilles*



THE FORWARD GUNS OF THE *ACHILLES*, with their crews taking a spell after the action

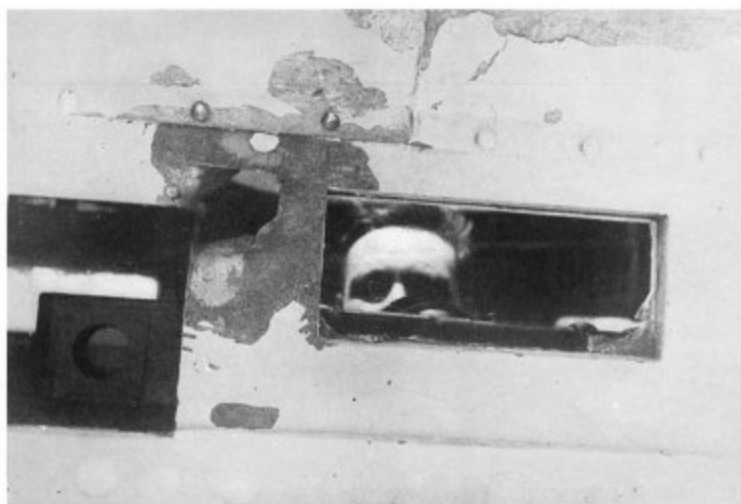
THE FORWARD GUNS OF THE *ACHILLES*, with their crews taking a spell after the action

SHADOWING THE ENEMY



Lieutenant R. E. Washbourn, on top of the director control tower, breakfasts from a sandwich. He took most of the photographs which illustrate this issue.

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Some of the damage to the plating of the director control tower

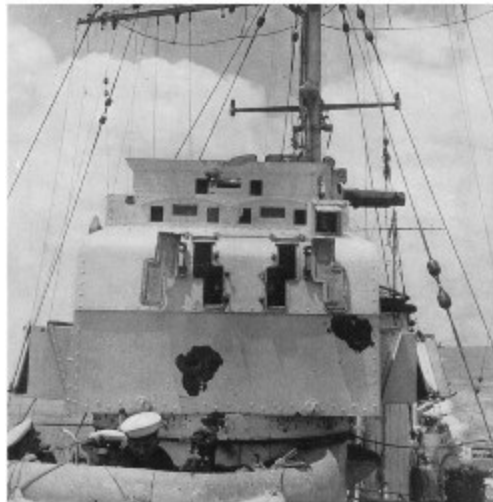
Some of the damage to the plating of the director control tower



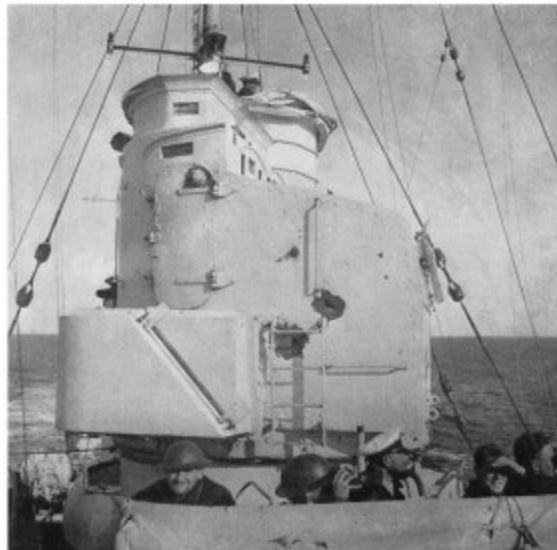
Surgeon-Lieutenant C. A. Pittar during a break in the action

Surgeon-Lieutenant C. A. Pittar during a break in the action

The director control tower of the *Achilles* in which four ratings were killed and two wounded



The director control tower of the *Achilles* in which four ratings were killed and two wounded



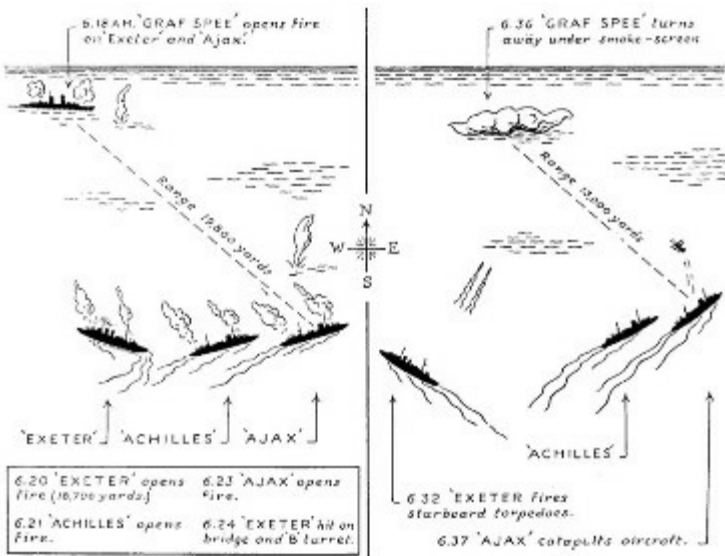
The director control tower showing splinter holes above the signal platform

The director control tower showing splinter holes above the signal platform



'A' turret's crew, and their mascot, relax during the shadowing.

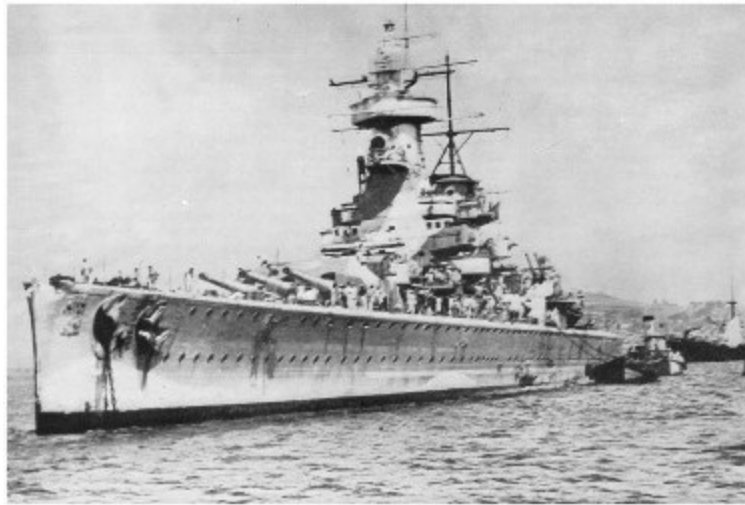
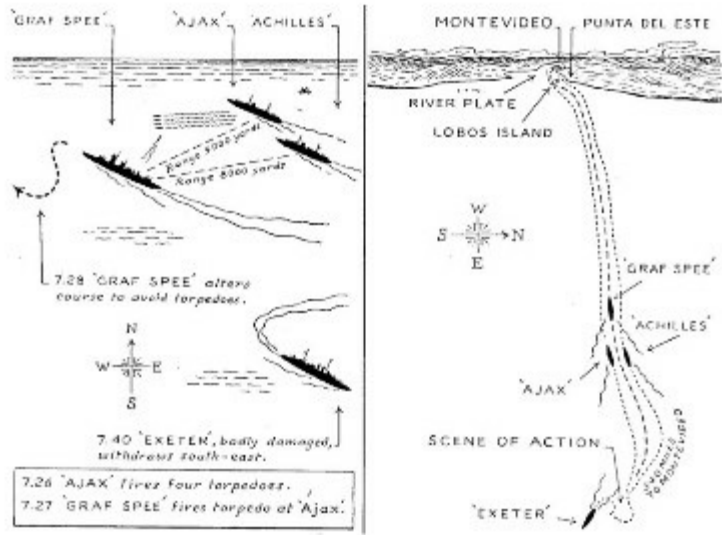
'A' turret's crew, and their mascot, relax during the shadowing



Damaged
woodwork on
the starboard
upper deck



Damaged woodwork on the starboard upper deck



The Graf Spee in Montevideo Harbour. A shell-hole is seen below the forward guns.

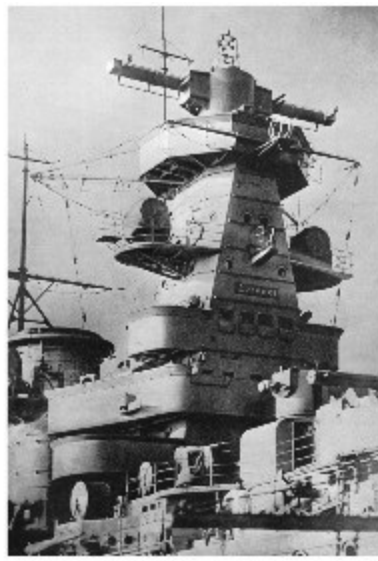
The Graf Spee in Montevideo Harbour. A shell-hole is seen below the forward guns



Captain Hans Langsdorf ashore in Montevideo

Captain Hans Langsdorf ashore in Montevideo

... The name of the tower of the Graf Spee is
Colonel Blücher, the name of the tower of the
Admiral's bridge commemorates the action fought
off the coast of Chile on 1 November 1914; although
greater honour accrued to Admiral Graf Spee and
his ships in the Battle of the Falkland Islands on
8 December 1914, this action was not included
in the ship's battle honours.

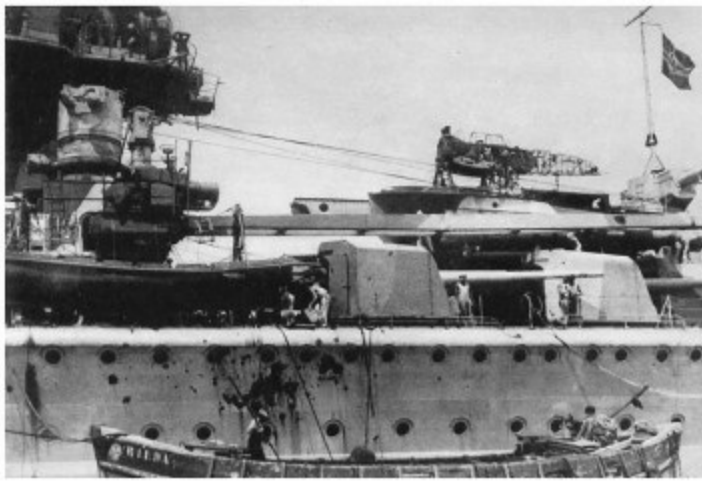


RIGHT: The control tower of the *Graf Spee*. The word *Coronel* above the Admiral's bridge commemorates the action fought off the coast of **Chile on 1 November 1914; although greater honour accrued to **Admiral Graf Spee** and his ships in the **Battle of the Falkland Islands** on 8 December 1914, this action was not included in the ship's battle honours**



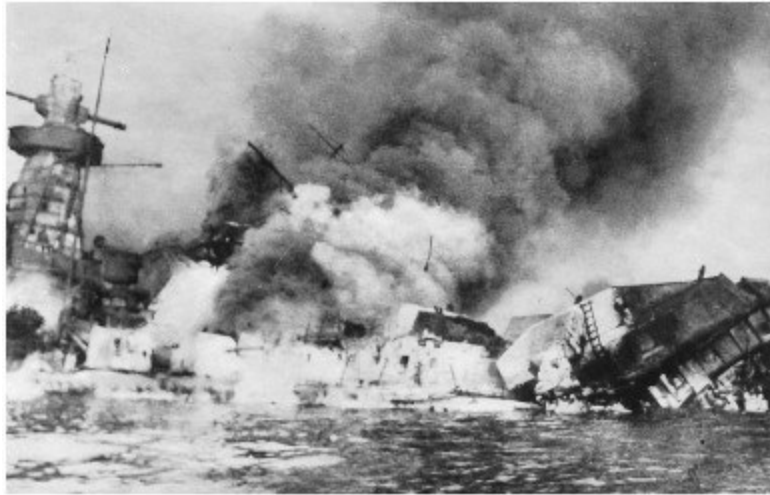
The Ajax (left), minus her topmast, and the Achilles steam towards Montevideo at full speed.

The *Ajax* (left), minus her topmast, and the *Achilles* steam towards **Montevideo at full speed**



The *Graf Spee* in Montevideo, showing her burnt-out aircraft and splinter-holed side plating

The *Graf Spee* in Montevideo, showing her burnt-out aircraft and splinter-holed side plating



Ablaze, the *Graf Spee* is scuttled by her Captain.

Ablaze, the *Graf Spee* is scuttled by her Captain

THE END OF THE *GRAF SPEE*



'A magnificent and most cheering sight'

'A magnificent and most cheering sight'



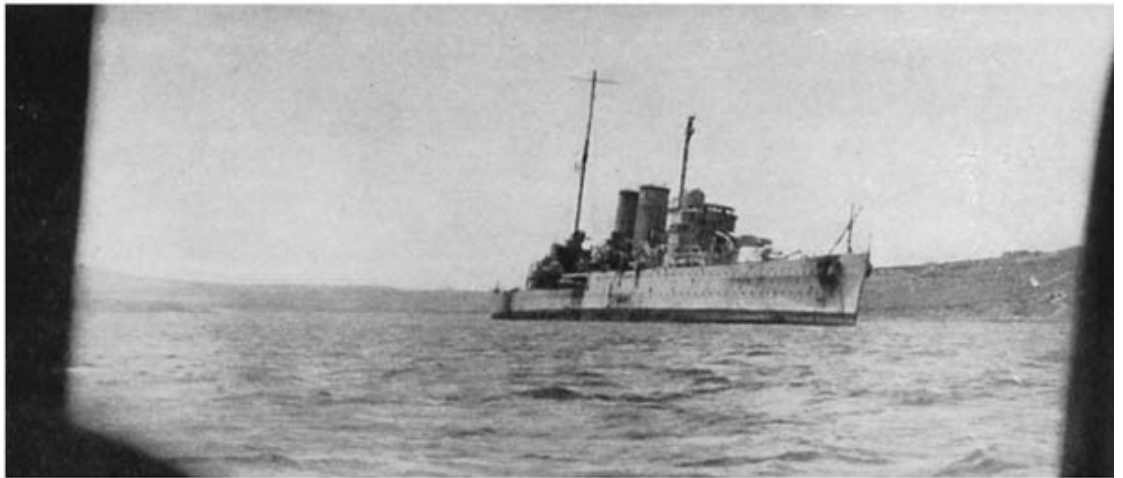
REAR-ADMIRAL
SIR HENRY HARWOOD (right)
WITH CAPTAIN PARRY
ON BOARD THE *ACHILLES*

**REAR-ADMIRAL SIR HENRY HARWOOD (right) WITH CAPTAIN PARRY ON BOARD THE
*ACHILLES***

THE *ACHILLES* STEAMS
PAST THE WRECK OF
THE *GRAF SPEE*,
29 January 1940.



THE *ACHILLES* STEAMS PAST THE WRECK OF THE *GRAF SPEE*, 29 January 1940



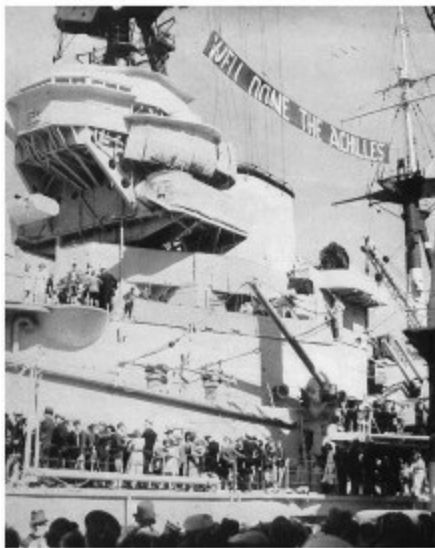
THE *EXETER* AT THE
FALKLAND ISLANDS
AFTER THE ACTION,
from the *Achilles*

THE *Exeter* AT THE FALKLAND ISLANDS AFTER THE ACTION, from the *Achilles*



THE RUSTING WRECK
OF THE *GRAF SPEE*

THE RUSTING WRECK OF THE *GRAF SPEE*



HMS RAMILLIES FLIES HER CONGRATULATIONS IN WELLINGTON ON THE EVE OF THE DEPARTURE OF THE FIRST ECHELON FOR THE MIDDLE EAST.

HMS RAMILLIES FLIES HER CONGRATU IN WELLINGTON ON THE EVE OF THE DEPARTURE OF THE FIRST ECHELON FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

MARCH THROUGH AUCKLAND,
February 1940



MARCH THROUGH AUCKLAND, February 1940

All this had happened during the first ten minutes of the action. In that brief period, however, the *Ajax* and *Achilles* were making good shooting and, steaming hard, were closing the range and drawing ahead on the *Graf Spee*. Clearly, their concentrated fire was worrying her, for at 6.30 a.m. she again shifted the fire of one 11-inch turret to them, thus giving some relief to the *Exeter*. The *Ajax* was straddled three times and she and the *Achilles* turned away slightly to open the range. The *Graf Spee* was firing alternately at the two ships with her 5.9-inch guns, but without effect, though some salvos fell close to them. At 6.32 a.m. the *Exeter* fired her starboard torpedoes, but these went wide when the

enemy turned away to the north-west under a smoke-screen. The *Ajax* and *Achilles* hauled round, first to the north and then to the west, to close the range and regain bearing. The *Ajax* catapulted her aircraft away at 6.37 a.m. under severe blast from her after guns. About a minute later, while she was turning to bring her port torpedo-tubes to bear, the *Exeter* was hit twice by 11-inch shells. One struck the foremost turret, putting it completely out of action. The other burst inside the ship, doing very extensive damage and starting a fierce fire. All the gyro-compass repeaters in the after conning position were destroyed and Captain Bell had to use a boat's compass to con his ship. What little internal communication was possible was being carried on by messengers. Nevertheless, the *Exeter* was kept resolutely in action, her two after guns being controlled by the gunnery officer from the exposed searchlight position. Her port torpedoes were fired about 6.43 a.m. and she then hauled round to a course roughly parallel to that of the *Graf Spee*.

By this time the *Ajax* and *Achilles* had worked up to full power and were steaming at 31 knots, firing fast as they went. At 6.40 a.m. a salvo of 11-inch shell fell short of the *Achilles* in line with her bridge and burst on the water. The flying splinters killed four ratings and seriously wounded two others in the director control tower. The gunnery officer was cut in the scalp and momentarily stunned. On the bridge, the chief yeoman of signals was seriously wounded and Captain Parry hit in the legs. The material damage in the director control tower was miraculously small and no important instrument was affected. After a few minutes, the control tower's crew, in a 'most resolute and efficient way', resumed control from the after control position which had temporarily taken over.

'I was only conscious of a hellish noise and a thump on the head which half stunned me,' wrote Lieutenant R. E. Washbourn, RN, gunnery officer of the *Achilles*, in his report on the action. 'I ordered automatically: "A.C.P. * take over." Six heavy splinters had entered the D.C.T. ** The right-hand side of the upper compartment was a shambles.

Both W/T *** ratings were down with multiple injuries ... A.B. Sherley had dropped off his platform, bleeding copiously from a gash in his face and wounds in both thighs. Sergeant Trimble, **Royal Marines**, the spotting observer, was also severely wounded ... A.B. Shaw slumped forward on to his instrument, dead, with multiple wounds in his chest.... The rate officer, Mr. Watts, quickly passed me a yard or so of bandage, enabling me to effect running repairs to my slight scalp wounds which were bleeding fairly freely. I then redirected my attention to the business in hand, while Mr. Watts clambered round behind me to do what he could for the wounded. Word was passed that the D.C.T. was all right again. A.B. Sherley was removed by a medical party during the action. Considerable difficulty was experienced, the right-hand door of the D.C.T. being jammed by splinter damage. When the medical party arrived to remove the dead, I learned for the first time that both Telegraphist Stennett and Ordinary Telegraphist Milburn had been killed outright. I discovered at the same time that Sergeant Trimble had uncomplainingly and most courageously remained at his post throughout the hour of action that followed the hits on the D.C.T., although seriously wounded. Mr. Watts carried out his duties most ably throughout.... He calmly tended the wounded... until his rate-keeping was again required.... Boy Dorset behaved with exemplary coolness, despite the carnage around him. He passed information to the guns and repeated their reports clearly for my information. He was heard at one time most vigorously denying the report of his untimely demise that somehow had spread round the ship. "I'm not dead. It's me on the end of this phone," he said. The director layer, Petty Officer Meyrick, and the trainer, Petty Officer Headon, are also to be commended for keeping up an accurate output for a prolonged action of over 200 broadsides.... The range-takers, Chief Petty Officer Boniface and A.B. Gould, maintained a good range plot throughout the action, disregarding the body of a telegraphist who fell through the door on top of them....'

* After Control Position

**** Director Control Tower**

***** Wireless Telegraphy**

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE GRAF SPEE RETIRES WESTWARD

THE GRAF SPEE RETIRES WESTWARD

FOR SEVERAL technical reasons, the fire of the *Ajax* and *Achilles* became ineffective for more than twenty minutes from about 6.46 a.m. The *Graf Spee*, however, failed to take any advantage of this, but continued her retirement to the westward at high speed, making frequent alterations of course under cover of smoke-screens. Still fighting gamely with her two after guns, the *Exeter* hauled round to the westward at 6.50 a.m. She had a list to starboard and several compartments flooded as the result of an 11-inch hit under her forecastle. The *Graf Spee*'s range from the First Division (*Ajax* and *Achilles*) was 16,000 yards at 7.10 a.m. when Commodore Harwood decided to close in as rapidly as possible. Course was altered to the westward and the *Ajax* and *Achilles* steamed at their utmost speed. Then the *Graf Spee* turned sharply to port behind smoke and headed as if to finish off the *Exeter*. But, four minutes later, she altered course back to the north-west until all her 11-inch guns were bearing on the First Division. The range was now down to 11,000 yards. The *Ajax* was quickly straddled three times, but was not hit. The enemy's 5.9-inch gunfire was ragged and quite ineffective. At this time the shooting of the *Ajax* and *Achilles* appeared to be very good and a fire was seen in the *Graf Spee*.

The *Ajax* received her first direct hit at 7.25 a.m. when an 11-inch delay-action shell struck her after superstructure at an angle of ten degrees to the horizontal. It penetrated 42 feet, passing through several cabins and the trunk of 'X' turret, in which the machinery was wrecked, and burst in the commodore's sleeping cabin, doing considerable damage. A piece of the base of the shell struck 'Y' barbette * and jammed the turret. Thus, this hit put both the after turrets and their four guns out of action. It also killed four and wounded six of the crew of 'X' turret. The *Ajax* retaliated by firing a broadside of four torpedoes at a range of 9000 yards. They broke surface after entering the water and the *Admiral Graf Spee* avoided them by turning away for three minutes. According to the German account of the action, she attempted to fire a

spread salvo of torpedoes at this time, but only one was actually discharged because at the moment the ship was swinging hard to port. The *Ajax* avoided this torpedo by a sharp turn towards the enemy, thus shortening the range still more, while the *Achilles* crossed her wake.

The *Admiral Graf Spee* now turned away to the west, making much smoke, and zigzagging. At this time the *Ajax* had only three guns in action, but the *Achilles* was making good shooting with her eight, the range being down to 8000 yards. Though the pilot and the observer of the *Ajax*'s aircraft reported that hit after hit was being made, few were observed from either ship. There was disappointingly little apparent damage to the *Graf Spee*, whose fire was still very accurate, and Commodore Harwood remarked to Captain Woodhouse: 'We might as well be bombarding her with snowballs'. The enemy was concentrating his fire on the First Division and the *Ajax* was straddled by about twelve salvos, but neither she nor the *Achilles* was hit. The *Exeter* had been dropping gradually astern, having had to reduce speed owing to damage forward. Finally, power to her after turret failed, due to flooding, and about 7.40 a.m. she steered to the south-east at slow speed 'starting to repair damage and make herself seaworthy'. Later, she was ordered to proceed to the *Falkland Islands*, where she arrived three days later.

Just before the *Exeter* turned away, it was reported to the commodore that the *Ajax* had only 20 per cent of her ammunition left and only three guns in action. He therefore decided to break off the day action and close in again after dark. Accordingly, at 7.40 a.m., the *Ajax* and *Achilles* altered course away to the eastward under cover of smoke. As the ships were turning, a shell from the *Graf Spee* cut the *Ajax*'s main topmast clean in two, destroyed all her aerials, and caused a number of casualties. It subsequently transpired that the reported shortage of ammunition in the *Ajax* referred only to 'A' turret, which had been firing continuously for eighty-one minutes and had expended some 300 rounds. The *Graf Spee* made no attempt to follow the British cruisers, but steadied on a westerly course, heading at 23 knots direct for the *River Plate*. Six minutes later, the *Ajax* and *Achilles* turned and

proceeded to shadow the enemy, the former to port and the latter to starboard, at a distance of about fifteen miles. Almost exactly twenty-five years before— on 8 December 1914— **Admiral Graf Spee**'s four cruisers, *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau*, *Nurnberg*, and *Leipzig*, had fought to the last against a greatly superior British force, 1100 miles to the south of the area from which the powerful ship bearing the name of the German admiral was now retreating at speed from two small cruisers, one of which had only half her guns in action.



HMS *Exeter*
HMS *Exeter*

Yet, according to the German account of the action, the *Admiral Graf Spee* had sustained only two 8-inch and eighteen 6-inch hits. One officer and thirty-five ratings had been killed and sixty wounded. 'The fighting value of the ship had not been destroyed,' the report ran. The main armament was 'fully effective', but there remained only 306 rounds of 11-inch ammunition, representing 40 per cent of the original supply. 'The survey of damage showed that all galleys were out of action, with the exception of the admiral's galley. The possibility of repairing them with the ship's own resources was doubtful. Penetration of water into the flour store made the continued supply of bread questionable, while hits in the fore part of the ship rendered her unseaworthy for the **North Atlantic** winter. One shell had penetrated the armour belt and the armoured deck had been torn open in one place. There was also damage in the after part of the ship.... The ship's resources were considered

inadequate for making her seaworthy ...' and 'there seemed no prospect of shaking off the shadows.' Captain Langsdorf therefore decided to make for **Montevideo**. He signalled his intentions to **Berlin** and received from **Admiral Raeder** the reply: 'Your intentions understood'.

* **The circular steel structure, below the gun-house, enclosing the lower part of the turret.**

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

ON BOARD THE ACHILLES

ON BOARD THE ACHILLES

THE ACTION had lasted exactly eighty-two minutes. In that brief period, the *Achilles* had fired sixty tons of 112-pound shells in more than 200 broadsides. Every one of the 1200-odd shells and cordite charges fired had been manhandled from the magazines to the hoists, from the hoists to the loading trays, and then rammed home. All four turrets reported that after firing from sixty to eighty rounds, the guns began to fail to run out immediately after their recoil, due to heating up, and had to be pushed out by the rammers. The guns remained very hot for some hours after the action. 'The guns' crews,' said one turret officer, 'worked like galley slaves, loving it all, with no time to think of anything but the job. The whole of the turret from top to bottom thought the action lasted about twenty minutes. The rammer numbers were very tired towards the end, but did not appear to notice that till it was all over.... Men lost all count of time. They spoke later of "about ten minutes after opening fire" when actually more than forty minutes had elapsed....'

'Toward the end of the action,' reported Sergeant F. T. Saunders, ***Royal Marines**, in charge of 'X' turret, 'the heat in the gun-house was terrific, even though I had the rear door open and both fans working. The No. 1s of each gun, getting little air from the fans, were sweating streams.... Everyone was very dry and thirsty. There wasn't the slightest delay in the supply of shells or cordite, which speaks well for the valiant work of those in the lower compartments. The ramming throughout was positively deadly; in fact, sometimes I thought they were trying to push the shells to the enemy instead of firing them. I was amused watching various men just tear off a garment as opportunity occurred. Some finished up bare to the waist. One of the rammer numbers was completely dressed in only a pair of white silk pyjama trousers, somewhat abbreviated, and a pair of native sandals. Another was clad in a pair of short drawers and his cap, to which he added later a corporal of the gangway's armband. Everything went like clockwork, drill was correctly

*** Killed in action off Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, 5 Jan 1943.**

carried out, orders and reports passed and so on, just as if it was a practice shoot and nothing at all unusual was happening, except that everything seemed to be done at an amazing speed. The loading was absolutely superb. Marine Russell told me that we averaged seven seconds a round right to the end of the action. When we found we had expended 287 rounds, everyone in the turret was amazed: in fact I re-checked to make sure. The men all thought we'd fired about forty or fifty broadsides and that was my impression too. There was a spirit of grim determination, concentration, and cheerfulness during the whole job. Every man seemed bent on keeping this turret going at full speed.... Marine Harrison, having observed the enemy's possibly first fall of shot somewhere in our wake, was heard to say: "Blimey, he's after our heel!" which I thought was rather clever.... Food of many types was forthcoming from many sources, but I didn't inquire too closely what these sources were. Chocolate and sweets were in abundance, apparently supplied by the canteen staff.'

Not more than one man in ten in the ship's company saw anything of the action. The majority were segregated in groups, and in some cases singly, in gun turrets, in engine- and boiler-rooms, and many other steel compartments below decks where no daylight entered. From the director control tower above the bridge were passed the ranges and much other data from which the robot brains of the calculating machines in the transmitting station, situated in the bowels of the ship and operated by a highly skilled staff, solved the problem of how a ship steaming at up to 31 knots was able to fire accurately, several times a minute, 8 cwt. of shells at another ship moving at 24 knots up to nine miles away. The officer in charge of the transmitting station reported that the spirit of his crew was excellent and all were as bright and cheerful as in a practice run. The detonations of the enemy's 11-inch shells were heard distinctly, sounding like the explosions of depth-charges. "Nutty" (chocolate) was a great help,' he said. 'We missed the free cigarettes, but

we did hear that the canteen door had been blown off.’ Another officer remarked that ‘why the entire T.S.’s crew are not ill with bilious attacks, I cannot imagine, as everything edible was grist to the mill regardless of sequence’. The officer of the after control position reported regarding his crew, Marine Cave and Boy Beauchamp, that ‘they were perfect, the boy going out at one time into the blast of “X” turret to remove some canvas that was fouling vision’.

During the whole of the action the crews of the torpedo-tubes on the upper deck remained at their stations. No man took shelter. The trainers of the tubes were lucky not to have been hit by splinters. One able seaman fell and slipped along the deck under the starboard tubes. As he clambered out he was asked what he was doing there and replied that he thought he saw a three-penny bit. The officer in charge of torpedo-tubes, Gunner G. K. Davis-Goff, * reported that the foremost battle ensign was shot away and fell across the port tubes. ‘We rescued it and hung it up under the starboard whaler. It was later stolen by the signalmen.... During the lull in action, the tubes’ crews played crib and “uckers” ** and had cocoa and sandwiches’

A major part in this naval drama was played by the officers and ratings in the engine-rooms and boiler-rooms of the British cruisers. They saw nothing and heard little of the action while steaming their ships at sustained full power. ‘The behaviour of all personnel,’ reported the senior engineer of the *Achilles*, ‘could not have been better in any way, including general bearing, endurance and efficiency. The officer in charge of the boiler-rooms remarked that he was most

* Now Commander, [Royal New Zealand Navy](#).

** The Navy version of the game ‘Ludo’.

impressed by the behaviour of the stokers tending the boilers. Many of them were youngsters who had never before been below during full-

power steaming....As each salvo was fired, the blast caused the flames in the boilers to leap about a foot out from the fronts of the furnaces; yet the stokers never paused in their jobs of keeping the combustion tubes clean or moved back from the boilers....' The main engines of the *Achilles*, it is recorded, were manoeuvred with far greater rapidity than would have been attempted under any conditions but those of emergency. All demands made on the machinery were met more than adequately, all material standing up to the strain in such a manner that nothing but confidence was felt throughout the action. 'The behaviour of both machinery and personnel left nothing to be desired.' This tribute to the soundness of British shipyard workmanship is underlined by the statement of Captain Woodhouse of the *Ajax* that steam had been shut off the main engines of his ship for only five days since 26 August 1939.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

SHADOWING THE ENEMY

SHADOWING THE ENEMY

THE IRREGULAR ARC on which the *Ajax* and *Achilles* had steamed and fought had brought them by eight o'clock to a position barely twenty miles north-west of that from which they had first sighted the enemy. Shortly after nine o'clock the *Ajax* recovered her aircraft, which had been up for two hours 35 minutes. At 9.45 a.m. the commodore ordered the *Cumberland*, which had been refitting at the **Falkland Islands**, to proceed to the **River Plate** at full speed. She sailed from Port Stanley at noon and made the passage of 1000 miles in thirty-four hours. Meanwhile, the Admiralty had taken steps to meet the situation by ordering the *Ark Royal*, *Renown*, and other ships patrolling distant areas to proceed at once to the South American coast.

The *Achilles*, over-estimating the enemy's speed, had closed to 23,000 yards when, at 10.5 a.m., the *Graf Spee* altered course and fired two three-gun salvos of 11-inch shell from her forward turret. The first fell very short, but the second dropped close alongside the *Achilles*, who possibly would have been hit had she not already started to turn away at full speed under smoke. She resumed shadowing at longer range. About an hour later, the *Admiral Graf Spee* made a clumsy and unsuccessful attempt to throw off her pursuers. Sighting the British steamer *Shakespeare*, she stopped her by firing a shot across her bows. According to the German account, it was intended to torpedo the ship as soon as the crew had taken to the boats, and a signal was made to the *Ajax*: 'Please rescue boats of British steamer'. As, however, the crew made no attempt to leave the ship, Captain Langsdorf refrained from sinking her in view of the possible effect upon the treatment of his own ship in **Montevideo**. When the *Ajax* neared the *Shakespeare*, the latter reported that she was all well and needed no assistance.

The afternoon passed quietly until the *Achilles* sighted a strange vessel and made the signal: 'Enemy in sight, 297 deg.'

'What is it?' asked Commodore Harwood.

‘Suspect 8-inch cruiser. Am confirming,’ replied the *Achilles* who, at a minute to four o’clock, signalled: ‘False alarm’. She had identified the stranger as the British motor-vessel *Delane*, whose streamlined bridge and funnel gave her, at long range, a close resemblance to a German cruiser of the *Blucher* class. Thereafter, the shadowing of the *Graf Spee* continued without incident until 7.15 p.m., when she altered course and fired two 11-inch salvos at the *Ajax*, who immediately turned away under smoke. These were the first shells fired by the enemy for more than nine hours.

At about eight o’clock, being then south of Lobos Island and about fifty miles east of English Bank, the *Ajax* altered course to south-west to intercept the *Admiral Graf Spee* should she attempt to escape round that shallow bank which extends for sixteen miles across the northern side of the Plate estuary. The whole duty of shadowing the enemy now devolved upon the New Zealand cruiser which passed inside Lobos, close to the Uruguayan coast, and increased speed to creep up on the *Graf Spee* before dusk. The sun set at 8.48 p.m., leaving the enemy clearly silhouetted against the western sky. At five minutes to nine o’clock, the *Graf Spee* altered course under smoke and fired three salvos, the third falling close astern of the *Achilles*, who replied with five salvos which appeared to straddle the enemy. This brief engagement was watched from Punta del *Este*, the seaside resort of *Montevideo*, by thousands of Uruguayans, who had a ‘grand-stand’ view and mistook it for the main action. Between 9.30 and 9.45 p.m., the *Graf Spee* fired three more salvos, all of which fell short. These Parthian shots were probably intended to keep the shadowing cruiser at a distance. They did not deter the *Achilles* who by ten o’clock had closed in to 10,000 yards. The enemy’s intention to enter *Montevideo* being clear, Commodore Harwood called off the pursuit an hour later. The *Admiral Graf Spee* anchored in *Montevideo* harbour soon after midnight.

For the whole of the next day, the two small cruisers stood alone between the enemy and the open sea. The *Ark Royal*, *Renown*, *Shropshire*, *Dorsetshire*, *Neptune*, and three destroyers were all making

for the **River Plate**, but none could arrive for at least five days. The arrival of the *Cumberland* during the night of 14 December restored to its narrow balance a doubtful situation. Now it was possible to patrol all three deep-water channels.

On 15 December the *Ajax* and *Achilles* refuelled from an Admiralty tanker. That afternoon, the burial of the German ship's dead took place in a cemetery outside **Montevideo**. The masters and fifty-four members of the crews of British ships sunk by the raider had been released by Captain Langsdorf.

The casualties in the British cruisers during the action were as follows:—

	Officers		Ratings	
	KILLED	WOUNDED	KILLED	WOUNDED
<i>Exeter</i>	5	3	56	20
<i>Ajax</i>	—	1	7	14
<i>Achilles</i>	—	2	4	7
—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	5	6	67	41
—	—	—	—	—

In accordance with the custom of the **Royal Navy**, the cruisers buried their dead in their hammocks at sea.

From the moment she sought shelter in harbour, the *Admiral Graf Spee* became the focal point of a world-wide flood of radio and press publicity which completely overwhelmed the spate of Nazi propaganda and falsities that made shift to gloss over the ignominy of her defeat and flight. Behind the scenes a considerable political and diplomatic struggle was taking place. The German Ambassador had requested permission for the *Graf Spee* to remain in **Montevideo** for fourteen days. On 15 December, he was informed that the ship would be allowed a stay of seventy-two hours in which to make her seaworthy. Captain Langsdorf then informed **Berlin** that there was 'no prospect of breaking out into the open sea', and that 'if I can fight my way through to Buenos Aires ... I shall endeavour to do so'; at the same time he requested instructions

‘whether to scuttle the ship or submit to internment’. His proposal was approved, but he was told that his ship was ‘not to be interned in **Uruguay**’ and ‘if the ship is scuttled, ensure effective destruction’. Captain Langsdorf addressed a lengthy letter to the German Ambassador protesting against the time limit already fixed and intimating his decision to scuttle his ship.

During the afternoon of Sunday, 17 December, the *Admiral Graf Spee* transferred most of her crew to the German merchant ship *Tacoma*, Captain Langsdorf with three officers and thirty-eight men remaining on board to take her out. At 6.20 p.m. she left the harbour and proceeded slowly westward, followed by the *Tacoma* and watched by thousands on shore. The waiting British cruisers steamed in from sea. The *Ajax* flew off her aircraft which sighted the *Admiral Graf Spee* in shallow water, six miles south-west of **Montevideo**. At 8.54 p.m. the aircraft signalled: ‘*Graf Spee* has blown herself up’. The British squadron carried on to within four miles of the wreck, the ships’ companies in the *Ajax* and *Achilles* cheering each other till they were hoarse. ‘It was now dark and she was ablaze from end to end, flames reaching almost as high as the top of her control tower, a magnificent and most cheering sight.’ That night, Captain Langsdorf shot himself. A few weeks later, the rusting wreck of the *Admiral Graf Spee* was purchased by a scrap-metal merchant.

In a message to the New Zealand Naval Board, Rear-Admiral Sir Henry Harwood (he had been promoted as from 13 December) said he was ‘deeply conscious of the honour and pleasure of taking one of H.M. ships of the New Zealand Squadron into action. *Achilles* was handled perfectly by her captain and fought magnificently by her captain, officers, and ship’s company.’ He visited the *Achilles* on 18 December and addressed her company to that effect. After the departure of HMS *Ajax* for England on 5 January 1940, Rear-Admiral Harwood flew his flag in the New Zealand cruiser for three weeks. The *Achilles* visited Buenos Aires and **Montevideo** before sailing on 2 February from Port Stanley for **Auckland**, where she was accorded a tumultuous welcome on her arrival on 23

February. During her memorable cruise, the *Achilles* had steamed 52,333 miles in 168 days at sea and had spent only ten days in harbour.



Admiral Graf Spee

Admiral Graf Spee

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Acknowledgments

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[CASUALTY]

The casualty list of HMS *Achilles* was as follows:—

KILLED

Able Seaman A. C. H. Shaw (Ngongotaha, **Rotorua**)

Ordinary Seaman I. W. Grant (Tainui, Dunedin)

Telegraphist F. Stennett (Stockport, Cheshire, England)

Ordinary Telegraphist N. J. Milburn (Bradford, **Yorkshire**, England)

SERIOUSLY WOUNDED

Able Seaman E. V. Sherley (**Te Awamutu**)

Chief Yeoman of Signals L. C. Martinson (**Devonport, Auckland**)

Sergeant S. J. Trimble, **Royal Marines** (Glengormley, Belfast, **Ireland**)

SLIGHTLY WOUNDED

Captain W. E. Parry, CB, RN

Lieutenant R. E. Washbourn, DSO, RN (**Nelson**)

Ordinary Seaman R. Gallagher (**Levin**)

Ordinary Seaman C. F. Marra (**Waipukurau**)

Ordnance Artificer 4th Class, E. F. Copplestone (Portsmouth, England)

Marine H. J. Blackburn (Gillingham, **Kent**, England)

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THIS NARRATIVE is based on the official reports of Admiral Harwood and his captains, Admiralty documents, and the German official reports. The photographs were taken by Commander R. E. Washbourn or are from his collection, with the exception of [page 24](#) (top) C. P. S. Boyer, (bottom) The Weekly News. The map, diagrams, and sketches were drawn by L. D. McCormick.

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[BACKMATTER]

THE AUTHOR, Sydney David Waters, is a New Zealand journalist who has specialised in naval and merchant shipping affairs. He is the author of *Clipper Ship to Motor-liner* and *Ordeal by Sea*, histories of the New Zealand Shipping Company. He served as a gunner in the 1st NZEF during the First World War.

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[BACKMATTER]

THE TYPE USED THROUGHOUT THE SERIES IS *Aldine Bembo* WHICH WAS REVIVED FOR MONOTYPE FROM A RARE BOOK PRINTED BY ALDUS IN 1495 * THE TEXT IS SET IN 12 POINT ON A BODY OF 14 POINT

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WOMEN AT WAR

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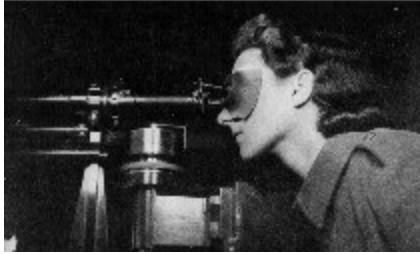
EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[COVERS]

NEW ZEALAND IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR



WOMEN AT WAR



NEW ZEALAND IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR
WOMEN AT WAR
WOMEN AT WAR
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NEW ZEALAND IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR
WOMEN AT WAR
WOMEN AT WAR
WOMEN AT WAR

WOMEN AT WAR

by
D.G.W. HALL

NEW ZEALAND IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS
WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND
1947

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[FRONTISPIECE]



EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[TITLE PAGE]

WOMEN AT WAR

D.O.W. HALL

WAR HISTORY BRANCH

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

1948

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[EDITORPAGE]

IT IS THE INTENTION of this series to present aspects of New Zealand's part in the Second World War which will not receive detailed treatment in the campaign volumes and which are considered either worthy of special notice or typical of many phases of our war experience. The series is illustrated with material which would otherwise seldom see publication. It will also contain short accounts of campaigns and operations which will be dealt with in detail in the appropriate volumes.

H. K. KIPPENBERGER

Major-General
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[UNTITLED]

PRINTED BY

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

WOMEN IN THE SERVICES

WOMEN IN THE SERVICES

WOMEN in New Zealand were not recruited, as they were in **Britain**, into auxiliary branches of the armed forces immediately on the outbreak of war. It was realised only slowly how great was the unexploited asset of the country's woman-power for defence and industry. Nurses indeed were recruited by the Army as soon as war began; but on the whole New Zealand women were at first left to carry on such voluntary work as they could undertake or to enter industry wherever chance offered an opening. Many women, eager to serve, regretted that more use was not being made of their talents and goodwill. If, at the beginning of the war there had been the experience and understanding of women's capabilities that existed by 1945, no doubt far more effective use would have been made of their services, to the great benefit of the whole manpower position. As it was, the first entry of women into the Services seemed to be unplanned and almost haphazard, and provided a sharp contrast to the energy used to recruit, train, and send into action the country's manhood.

In July 1940 the Women's War Service Auxiliary was formed as the result of a meeting of delegates from existing women's organisations from all over New Zealand. This body, acting through its Dominion council, with twelve elected members and four appointed by the Minister of National Service (the Hon. R. Semple), had official status. Its main function was to co-ordinate the activities of women's organisations to enable them to be used to the best advantage of New Zealand's war effort. The W.W.S.A. was intended to supplement rather than supersede the existing women's organisations which were affiliated to it, and it worked in close and harmonious collaboration with the Department of National Service. It established local committees throughout the country and carried out extensive and important work in civil defence and in various phases of the war effort.

When the New Zealand Women's Auxiliary Air Force was founded in January 1941, the first women's service to be established, the W.W.S.A.

handled all applications to enter it and later controlled recruitment for the other two Services. As each of the three Services at different times complained that women were being unduly directed into one of the other Services, it may be presumed that the W.W.S.A. and later the **National Service Department** * carried out their recruiting duties impartially.

The main rivalry for the services of women was not, however, between the different branches of the armed forces but rather between their collective demands and the competing demand, increasing in insistence during 1944, for women in industry. Late in 1943 the recruitment of women was placed on a new basis. The three Services were to estimate their requirements in advance and then, on **War Cabinet**'s approval, they could recruit the authorised number and no more. Arrangements were even made in 1944 for a few women to be discharged to industry, the needs of which were considered to be superior to those of the Services at that time. This indicated a certain wavering in the policy of employing women in the armed forces; it also denoted a confusion of thought. Since women had generally been considered to do their jobs in the Services as well as men—though on some work they could not replace an equal number of men—and to do some jobs better than men, it might have been possible to have made greater use of women at overseas bases, as was suggested, to release fit men for front-line service and men of lower medical grading for employment at home in industry in the heavier work which women admittedly could not do.

All the members of the women's branches of the three Services were volunteers. It was unfortunate that they could not go overseas in larger numbers, as this would undoubtedly have stimulated recruiting. The women who joined the auxiliaries were all eager to do more than the minimum of service, and many were disappointed that they could not serve outside New Zealand. Only a fraction of the W.A.A.F. went overseas, while in the W.A.A.C. the proportion was somewhat larger, but no Wrens served overseas.

* In October 1942 the recruiting of women for the Services was transferred to the **National Service Department**, still in liaison with the W.W.S.A.

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THE WRENS

THE WRENS

THE FORMATION of what became the Women's Royal New Zealand Naval Service was discussed as early as May 1941, but it was not until approximately a year later that the Director (Miss R. Herrick) and her deputy (Miss F. H. Fenwick) were appointed and the work of organising the new Service began in earnest. In the meantime some men in the Navy had already been replaced by women. In the offices of the Naval Officers in Charge at **Wellington, Lyttelton, and Dunedin**, and in H.M.N.Z.S. *Philomel*, the **Auckland** naval establishment, civilian women employees had taken over a number of positions, particularly in the supply and secretariat branch, previously filled by naval ratings who had thus been released for active service. Many of these civilian employees afterwards joined as Wrens, on a voluntary basis, and those who did, although first entered in the rank of Wren, were given an antedated seniority which made them eligible for earlier promotion. Those civilians who did not become Wrens were moved to other branches, after Wrens had been trained to replace them, in accordance with the principle that uniformed and civilian employees should not be mingled in any branch of the naval service and administration. The general principle in operation was that the female employees in **Navy Office** and in such establishments as the Naval Dockyard, **Auckland**, remained civilians, while those women who worked in specifically naval establishments were Wrens. It should be mentioned here that some highly responsible duties were carried out in **Navy Office** by civilians, many of them women.

There was considerable discussion on the conditions and status of Wrens in the Royal New Zealand Navy during late 1941 and early 1942. In practice a close imitation of the British model was adopted, with the exception that in New Zealand only a few commissions were granted on entry: most officers in the W.R.N.Z.N.S. were promoted Wrens. The main question of principle involved in the preliminaries was whether women could be asked to work at night. It soon became obvious that a fighting service could not accept a limitation on the times of duty of its women members if they were to be of any real value. At first the members of the

W.R.N.Z.N.S. were mostly employed near their own homes, but early in 1943 it was established that Wrens must be 'mobile', that is, prepared to serve anywhere in New Zealand.

At first recruitment was carried out through the W.W.S.A. and later through local manpower officers. The W.R.N.Z.N.S. was never wholly satisfied with an arrangement which prevented direct contact between applicants and the Service itself and which was for many reasons cumbersome, even though the other Services were in the same position. It was unfortunate that when in April 1945 Great Britain asked for 200 Wrens to serve at the **British Pacific Fleet's Australian bases, the request could not be complied with; the strength of the W.R.N.Z.N.S. was at that time approximately 500, that is 200 below the establishment of 700, and male ratings had already replaced Wrens in some jobs simply because not enough Wrens were available.**

A factor which had always made it difficult to supply the Service with all the women it required was the high standard of selection. Of the first 870 applications received up to January 1943, 350 were declined because the applicants were unsuitable, insufficiently qualified, or below the medical standard. Throughout the whole period of its wartime existence the W.R.N.Z.N.S. was below complement and eager for more recruits than were available, although the difficulty of providing living accomodation had on some occasions hampered expansion. The 'peak' strength of the Wrens was 519 and approximately 700 women altogether served in this branch of the Royal New Zealand Navy.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

WRENS AT WORK

WRENS AT WORK

THE MOST URGENT naval requirement in mid-1942 was in the signals department. The first Wrens were trained in various types of communications work and immediately began that successful invasion of this branch which might have been predicted from the previous achievements of women in the Post and Telegraph Department. Eventually a substantial proportion of the Wrens acted as visual signallers, coders, or telegraphists at larger and smaller ports and at the **Waiouru** naval wireless telegraph station. Similar full use of Wrens was made in naval accounting and stores work, while women replaced men entirely as cooks and stewards in officers' quarters and in some smaller naval establishments.

The Wrens soon proved themselves in work which had not previously been undertaken in New Zealand by women. In Auckland both the city and the Navy were equally astonished and delighted by the smartly turned out Wren crew of the Commodore's barge. This launch was kept in a state of smartness worthy of the best traditions of the Service and was handled on the water with grace and assurance. One degaussing range was also taken over entirely by Wrens, including the launch which ran out to ships, and the necessary technical work was capably performed by a Wren officer. Wrens operated the D.E.M.S. (Defensively Equipped Merchant Shipping) cinema projector, and a Wren acted as instructor in the 'dome' where films were shown to male ratings as part of their gunnery training before they joined the gun crews of merchant ships. Other Wrens were trained to operate radar equipment and took over watch-keeping duties.

Wrens served as dental and sick-bay attendants, drove naval motor transport, worked in the torpedo branch (highly skilled and specialised work), and replaced men on equal terms in a variety of exacting tasks. At Wellington four Wrens gained commissions and took over from male watch-keeping officers in the merchant shipping office 'very important operational work'. Wrens acted as plotters in naval operations and in the

control room of the direction-finding network. A group of Wrens at **Blenheim** was engaged in 'very highly specialised and secret work' independent of male control.

In Wellington a hostel was established for fifty Wrens; it was afterwards enlarged. In Auckland a similar number was accommodated in a private hotel taken over by the Service, and later some were lodged in barracks vacated by the Army. The nature of their duties scattered many Wrens here and there in groups of eight or twelve, and they lived in small houses, bought or rented for the purpose, close to their work. These Wrens did their own housework, cooking, and housekeeping besides their service duties.

Morale was always very high. The slow method of recruitment, ensuring that no one entered the Service until she had a definite job to go to, made every new entrant feel that she was not only wanted in the Navy but eagerly awaited. (The Director of the W.R.N.Z.N.S. once expressed her regret that the system sometimes resulted in the loss to the Service of some valuable recruits 'who could not or would not wait'.) Nearly all entrants, beginning their career as probationary Wrens, went through a fortnight's disciplinary training at H.M.N.Z.S. *Philomel* 'to learn something of naval customs, traditions, procedure and generally acquiring the art of behaving like a Wren'. After this preliminary training most women either began specialist courses or immediately plunged into the job itself.

Everything possible was done to help Wrens get adequate exercise and recreation when off duty, although those stationed in the main ports had, of course, the best opportunities. The W.R.N.Z.N.S. sports clubs overcame considerable difficulties in their early stages caused by the current shortages of most sports equipment. When they were unable to buy gear for hockey, basketball, and other sports, they were usually able to borrow it; later, better supplies were available. The Wellington sports club soon found its main summer attraction in sailing, in an 'Idle-Along' yacht and a whaler.

The gaiety, contentment, and good sense which pervaded the W.R.N.Z.N.S. are seen clearly in the small cyclostyled magazine produced at irregular intervals, with its record of sport, its occasional touches of satire (Wrens joining a very 'hush-hush' shore station found that even the local schoolchildren knew all about its functions), and its cheerful humour. But perhaps the greatest achievement of the members of the W.R.N.Z.N.S. was to merge themselves so completely and almost indistinguishably in a service of strongly masculine bias; they entered thoroughly into its spirit, and made their own excellent contribution to it without changing its character or being themselves changed by it.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1
THE WOMEN'S AUXILIARY ARMY CORPS

THE WOMEN'S AUXILIARY ARMY CORPS

THE New Zealand Women's Auxiliary Army Corps grew out of the W.W.S.A. almost imperceptibly. Although technically the W.A.A.C. was the last of the three women's services to be established, on its formation in July 1942 (its Controller, Mrs V. Jowett, had been appointed shortly before), a number of women were already attached to the Army and carrying out certain duties, both in New Zealand and in the **Middle East**. The first women to go overseas in any of the three Services were the thirty welfare workers, usually known as 'Tuis', who sailed for Egypt in September 1941 to work at the New Zealand Forces Club in **Cairo**. They were followed to the **Middle East** in December 1941 by 200 more women, clerical workers and Voluntary Aids. All these women were formally enrolled as members of the W.W.S.A., which had recruited them, but were *de facto* members of the Army. In New Zealand itself a number of women were employed in the Army as whole-time typists, clerks, cooks, or waitresses; most of them afterwards became members of the W.A.A.C. This is to ignore for the moment the very wide range of part-time voluntary service given to the Army by the W.W.S.A., and others, in camps or military establishments throughout New Zealand.

The formation of the W.A.A.C. did, however, mark a change of policy: the decision to employ women in the Army wherever possible to release men for active service or, in special cases, for industry. It was realised that, with the growing threat from **Japan** in the **Pacific**, and the decision to leave the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force in the **Middle East**, it was necessary to call on the women of the country to serve in the three auxiliary branches of the armed forces. The women of New Zealand made a vigorous response to this call.

The age limits were wide: 18 to 50 for home service, 23 to 40 for service overseas. More women applied for service outside New Zealand than ever had the opportunity of going. By April 1944 more than three thousand were serving in the W.A.A.C. in New Zealand and 733 overseas, of whom some 200 were in the **Pacific**. By the middle of 1944 the

original attempt to recruit 10,000 women in the W.A.A.C. alone had had to be modified. The numbers serving at any one time never exceeded 4600—the demands of essential industry had become too insistent. Moreover, many women had been released from all three Services because their soldier-husbands or fiancés had returned from overseas for furlough or discharge.

The New Zealand women arriving in the **Middle East** in late 1941 made a vital difference to the atmosphere of the forces clubs in which they served. Before their arrival some misgivings had been expressed whether they would not be 'spoiled' by being too much run after and entertained. **General Freyberg** himself told them on their arrival that while their duty was to supply, as they alone could, the 'home touch' in the clubs, they were not expected to gain the admiration of individuals but rather that of the whole of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force. These qualms proved unwarranted. Although a number of girls married, none could have been accused of neglecting her duty for the sake of a personal good time. Their service was given as unselfishly and as fairly as had been expected of them and justified the care with which they had been selected. In their 'smart green and white uniforms with embroidered N.Z. badges and the N.Z.F.C. epaulettes', the Tuis became an essential element in Army life in the **Middle East, Italy**, and the **Pacific**, and gave a tone of their own to the clubs.

The functions of the W.A.A.C. welfare workers were not exclusively social. Each had a practical job to do, as well as being at all times, and often in trying circumstances, an indefatigable hostess. At the Cairo Forces Club the Tuis immediately took charge of the preparing and serving of sandwiches and fruit salad, looked after the cash desk and the clerical work entailed in running the club, and served in the library or at the information desk. They also undertook the regular visiting of patients in the New Zealand military hospitals in the **Cairo** area. It was not long before they energetically conducted concerts and revues and took part in debates with the men. They acted as partners at the dances held at the club and at the different army messes. They attended these

dances and concerts in evening gowns, and both they and their partners enjoyed this escape from uniform. They also wrapped parcels to send to men in the forward areas, carried out shopping commissions for men in the field, and were always ready to accompany them on shopping expeditions in the city when they came to **Cairo** on leave; many servicemen's womenfolk at home benefited indirectly from a Tui's shrewd knowledge of Egyptian shops and shopkeepers in the intelligently-chosen presents they received from the **Middle East**.

In November 1943 sixteen of the Tuis from Egypt—the original thirty had been meanwhile substantially reinforced—left to help staff the New Zealand Forces Club in **Bari**. Here regular dances and picnics for men on leave were held and hospital visiting continued. The gift-buying service was enlarged by the opening of a gift shop. They even found time during leisure that tended to grow ever scantier to make forays into the surrounding countryside for wild flowers to decorate the club. Tuis served in other clubs opened in **Italy**, at Rome and **Florence**, with the same cheerfulness, efficiency, and good humour. Their hours of duty were always long, and it was difficult for them to get much leave to see something of **Italy**, perhaps the most interesting to the tourist of all European countries. But most had managed to do some sightseeing by October 1945 when, except for a party in the Fernleaf Club in England, they were sent back to Egypt for repatriation to New Zealand. Throughout the whole of their service overseas these girls all owed very much to the care and interest in their welfare shown by **Lady Freyberg**.

In the **Pacific**, members of the W.A.A.C. gave equally valuable service as welfare or clerical workers. From the latter part of 1942 five carried out specially responsible cipher duties in the office of the British agent and consul in **Tonga**, and later a W.A.A.C. detachment of twenty took over welfare duties at a leave centre for New Zealand troops. In Fiji a few members of the W.A.A.C. were seconded to undertake special duties for the local government. In New Caledonia much larger numbers were employed as welfare workers, cashiers, clerks, or cooks. Nearly 200 served with the 3rd Division in these capacities and as Voluntary Aids.

In August 1944 an important change was made in the status of the New Zealand W.A.A.C. in **Italy** and the **Middle East**: its members were given the privileges of officers, while retaining their own rates of pay, and the new designation of 'welfare secretary' or 'secretary'.

Mention should be made here of a small group of women who went overseas as members of the Y.W.C.A. During the war fifteen left New Zealand to work in service clubs in the Middle

W.W.S.A.
Meal-time



W.W.S.A.
Meal-time

W.A.A.C.s airing a
mosquito net
Boguen,
New Caledonia



W.A.A.C.s airing a mosquito net
*Boguen,
New Caledonia*

WRENS ON DUTY



COMMODORE'S BARGE

Auckland

COMMODORE'S BARGE *Auckland*

MRS ROOSEVELT AT THE NAVAL BASE

Auckland



MRS ROOSEVELT AT THE NAVAL BASE *Auckland*



DEGAUSSING RANGE *Wellington*
DEGAUSSING RANGE *Wellington*



ENGINE MAINTENANCE *Auckland*
ENGINE MAINTENANCE *Auckland*

NAVAL WIRELESS RECEPTION *Waiouru*



NAVAL WIRELESS RECEPTION *Waiouru*



DEGAUSSING TECHNICIANS *Wellington*

W.A.A.C. OVERSEAS



FORCES CLUB,
CAIRO

FORCES CLUB, CAIRO

LADY FREYBERG
AND BRIGADIER
A. S. FALCONER
WELCOME FIRST
DRAFT OF TUIS
AT SUEZ



LADY FREYBERG AND BRIGADIER A. S. FALCONER WELCOME FIRST DRAFT OF TUIS AT SUEZ

EXCHANGE
OPERATOR,
NEW
CALEDONIA



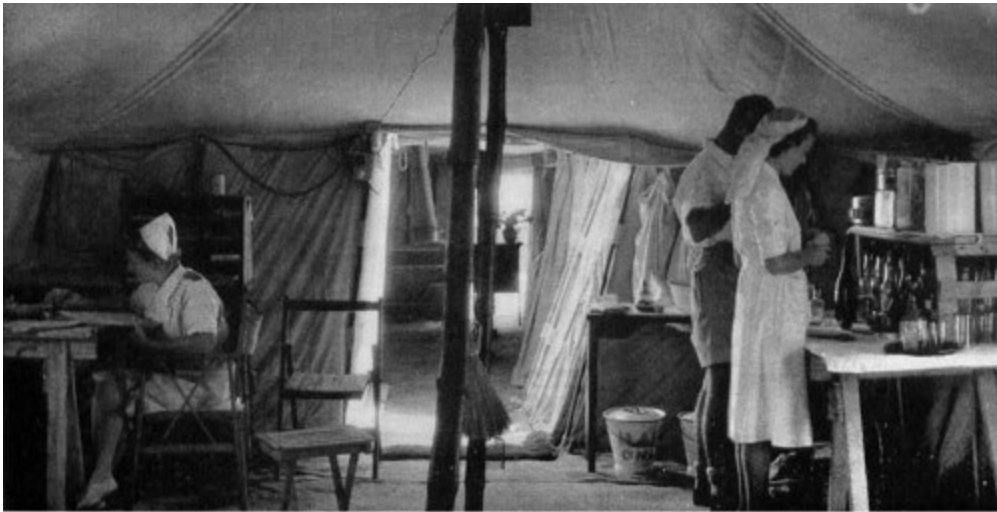
EXCHANGE OPERATOR, NEW CALEDONIA

W.A.A.C.
LINES, NEW
CALEDONIA



W.A.A.C. LINES, NEW CALEDONIA

VARIED SERVICE



HOSPITAL STAFF *near Tripoli*

HOSPITAL STAFF *near Tripoli*

TUIS ON LEAVE *Rome*



TUIS ON LEAVE *Rome*



LABORATORY WORK *Caserta*
LABORATORY WORK *Caserta*

SISTERS AND SOLDIERS *Syria*



SISTERS AND SOLDIERS *Syria*



RED CROSS TRANSPORT DRIVERS
RED CROSS TRANSPORT DRIVERS



WRENS ON VE DAY
WRENS ON VE DAY

LAND GIRL MUSTERING



LAND GIRL MUSTERING

SERVICE HEADS

*Mrs F. I. Kain (W.A.A.F.), Mrs V. Jowett (W.A.A.C.), and
Miss R. Herrick (W.R.N.Z.N.S.)*



SERVICE HEADS *Mrs F. I. Kain (W.A.A.F.), Mrs V. Jowett (W.A.A.C.), and Miss R. Herrick
(W.R.N.Z.N.S.)*



W.W.S.A. DIG TRENCHES

W.W.S.A. DIG TRENCHES

MAKING BATTLE DRESS



MAKING BATTLE DRESS

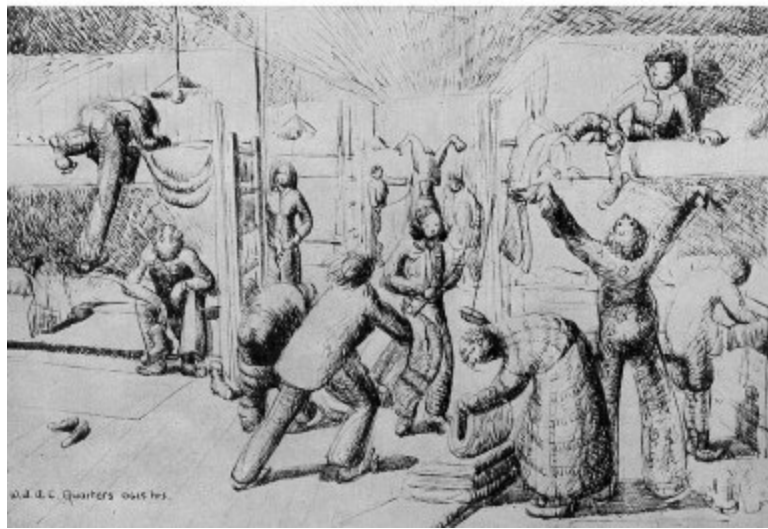
W.A.A.C. IN NEW ZEALAND



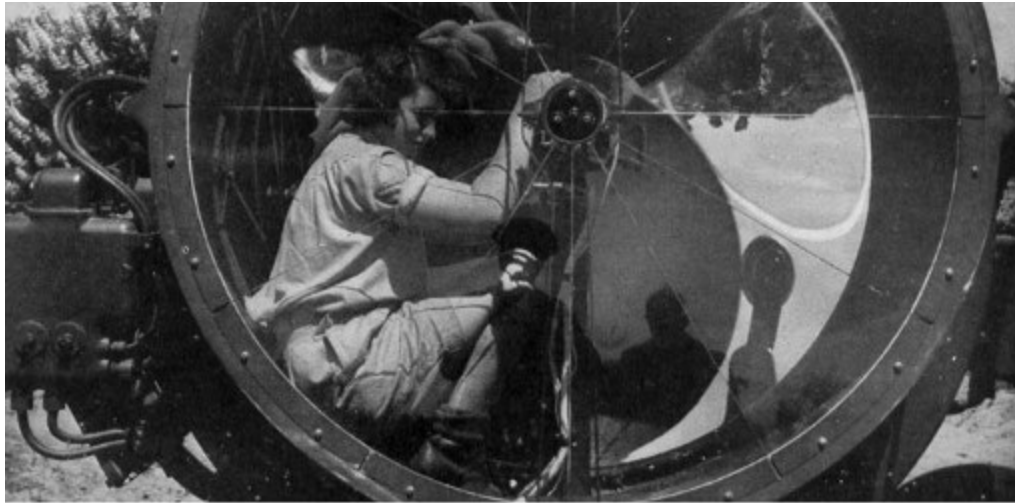
MAORI W.A.A.C.s WELCOME THE RETURN OF THE 28TH BATTALION

MAORI W.A.A.C.S WELCOME THE RETURN OF THE 28TH BATTALION

REVEILLE IN CAMP



REVEILLE IN CAMP



CLEANING SEARCHLIGHT
CLEANING SEARCHLIGHT

PLOTTING TABLE



PLOTTING TABLE

SOUND DETECTORS



SOUND DETECTORS

W.A.A.F. IN NEW ZEALAND



RECRUITS *Auckland*

RECRUITS *Auckland*

PHOTOGRAPHIC SECTION *Whenuapai*



PHOTOGRAPHIC SECTION *Whenuapai*

REFUELLING AIRCRAFT *New Plymouth*



REFUELLING AIRCRAFT *New Plymouth*

GARDENING *Auckland*



GARDENING *Auckland*

MECHANIC



MECHANIC

OPERATIONS ROOM *Auckland*



OPERATIONS ROOM *Auckland*

W.A.A.F. IN NEW ZEALAND AND OVERSEAS



LEAVING FOR FIJI

LEAVING FOR FIJI



MET. OBSERVER

MET. OBSERVER

RECEIVING



RECEIVING

WEATHER REPORT *Suva*



WEATHER REPORT *Suva*

TRANSMITTING



TRANSMITTING

TELEPRINTER



TELEPRINTER



East, India, Malaya, Ceylon, or Burma. One Y.W.C.A. worker was captured at Singapore and remained three and a half years interned in Japanese hands in Java. Ten of these workers had their salaries paid by the New Zealand Patriotic Fund Board. Another New Zealander, Miss Jean Begg, rendered service of outstanding quality as the chief British Y.W.C.A. representative in the Middle East and India. The services of these New Zealand members of the Y.W.C.A. to the British forces as a whole were devoted and untiring. It is noteworthy that since the end of the war twenty more workers have been sent by the New Zealand Y.W.C.A. to India, Malaya, and Japan.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

VOLUNTARY AIDS

VOLUNTARY AIDS

MAJORITY of the members of the W.A.A.C. who served overseas were Voluntary Aids, and they formed a most valuable adjunct to the Army Nursing Service. In the Middle East and Italy 410 women altogether served as V.A.D.s (Voluntary Aid Detachments), as they were familiarly called, as opposed to 220 in the General Division who were engaged in welfare or office work with the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force. The first draft of V.A.D.s, over 180 strong, left New Zealand in December 1941, enrolled as members of the W.W.S.A. (Overseas Hospital Division). These women were selected by the National Voluntary Aids Council, in collaboration with the W.W.S.A., from members of the Order of St. John or of the New Zealand Red Cross Society. Although they had not had the professional training of nurses, V.A.D.s had to have a substantial background of experience before being accepted for duty in military hospitals. They had to possess four certificates, given for elementary home nursing, first aid, hygiene and sanitation, and for sixty hours' practical work in a recognised hospital training school for nurses; to secure these certificates entailed practically a year's spare-time training. The intention was, broadly speaking, that the V.A.D.s should replace male nursing orderlies and should perform equivalent duties. Occasions undoubtedly arose when V.A.D.s assumed rather fuller responsibilities, taking charge of wards of forty to sixty cases, but a sister of the N.Z.A.N.S. was always available on call.

In New Caledonia from late in 1943 V.A.D.s were assisting the medical and nursing staffs of the Army hospitals. Here their living conditions were sometimes very primitive, as were the hospitals themselves at first. At one hospital all water had for a time to be carried, and the women did their own washing in a running creek. A mobile hot shower unit was available once a week. Elsewhere they lived for months in tents with gravel floors, and it was left to the women themselves to make their own surroundings a little more attractive by contriving packing-case furniture, introducing gaily-coloured curtains or upholstery, and growing flowers. Better accommodation was gradually

provided, although the insects, including mosquitoes, innumerable in a tropical climate, were always the source of some apprehension and annoyance.

In spite of difficulties and discomforts, the V.A.D.s, like other members of the W.A.A.C. in the **Pacific**, cheerfully added to their daily tasks the obligation of taking a full part in army entertainments and social life, dancing 'thousands of miles' and attending, and as often as possible engaging in, the various debates, concerts, community sings, card evenings, and educational classes. In all of these their presence was very welcome to the men of the 3rd Division, whether sick, convalescent, or in training.

Not all of the V.A.D.s were doing nursing work. In the **Pacific** they also acted as clerks, telephone exchange operators, and laboratory assistants, and ran the hospital laundries. In the **Middle East** and **Italy** about 7 per cent of the V.A.D.s did necessary clerical work in military hospitals, and some of the remainder were engaged in what might be considered domestic work as distinct from nursing. Others acted as storewomen, drivers, radiographers, dispensers, postal clerks, and masseuses. Towards the end of the war clerical work was undertaken, too, in headquarters at **Florence**, **Bari**, and **Maadi**.

The V.A.D.s had gone overseas aware of their status; they had realised that they would serve as privates and would have small chance of promotion; they had accepted their position as inferior and ancillary to that of the qualified nurses of the N.Z.A.N.S. Though the V.A.D.s did not themselves complain, as time passed others on their behalf argued that they were not being fairly treated. The chief ground of complaint was that their non-commissioned status handicapped them socially and also at times caused them real hardship. Because it was 'for officers only', they were, for instance, debarred from the only hotel in **Tripoli** suitable for European women. Their friends at home felt that they should share some of the high status of members of the Army Nursing Service (who ranked as officers), and that their years of faithful service should be recognised by wider chances of promotion.

The Voluntary Aids' position was in some respects anomalous: they were members of the W.A.A.C. administered by their own officers, but for purposes of duty and discipline they were under the matron and sisters of the hospitals where they worked. In August 1944 this and other anomalies affecting the status of the W.A.A.C. in the **Middle East** and **Italy** were adjusted: at the same time as the members of the General Division became 'welfare secretaries' or, if engaged in a purely clerical capacity, 'secretaries', the V.A.D.s became 'nurses'. Both sections of the W.A.A.C. now assumed the status of officers. This gave them the same standing as the women of most of the other Commonwealth women's services in the same theatres of war. In April 1947 those V.A.D. personnel still in the Army were transferred to the **Army Nursing Service**.

A number of V.A.D.s served in hospital ships. In New Zealand also they were indispensable assistants to the N.Z.A.N.S. and carried out the same varied duties in local service hospitals as they had done overseas.



EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE W.A.A.C. IN NEW ZEALAND

THE W.A.A.C. IN NEW ZEALAND

ONE OF THE immediate effects of the entry of **Japan** into the war, with its threat to **Australia** and New Zealand, was the expansion of coastal and anti-aircraft defences. Women had made a notable success in **Britain** of operating the coastal guns and the different types of defence against enemy aircraft. In New Zealand, with our manpower more and more fully committed, it was felt that women could assume the same responsibilities, even though this meant placing them in the front line of our defence. A proposal made in June 1942, shortly before the formation of the W.A.A.C., envisaged over 8000 women being enrolled in the Army—1800 for duty in bases and fixed establishments, 6400 in coastal and anti-aircraft defences, and 300 in signal units. This was, in fact, very much how the W.A.A.C. developed, at least in its first phase. By November 1942, 2200 women had enlisted in the W.A.A.C. and 135 of these were taking an artillery course at the Army School of Instruction, Melrose. By April 1944 the W.A.A.C. had 3172 members in New Zealand and another 733 overseas.

The decision made in June 1943 to curtail the development of coastal defence schemes in view of the improved situation in the **Pacific** checked the enlistment of women into the Army. They had been trained to operate artillery fire-control instruments, trained also in radio-location, the different branches of signalling, instrument-repairing, and driving and servicing motor transport.

In the meantime the members of the W.A.A.C. had proved their capacity to handle the delicate instruments that enable guns to find their targets and also their ability to lay and fire the guns themselves, whether the heavy guns pointing seaward from coastal forts or the light anti-aircraft Bofors and Oerlikons. That these women were never tested in war, as were their sisters in **Britain**, does not detract from the merit of their high standard of military efficiency, and the degree of our dependence on their services at what was potentially the most dangerous period in our history should be gratefully remembered.

Women in the W.A.A.C. served also in many more humdrum capacities. They were telephonists, telegraphists, wireless operators, teleprinter operators, coders, signal clerks; they gave excellent service as typists and pay and supply clerks and reigned supreme in the commissariat department. In New Zealand, as overseas, their very presence gave camps and coastal defence areas a better tone and greatly helped the morale of home-service troops who at times felt that they had almost the right, stationed so far from the glamour of great events, to become bored and cynical. The members of the W.A.A.C. had an indispensable contribution to make to Army social life.

Perhaps the best tribute that has been paid to the W.A.A.C. is that its retention as a permanent part of the armed forces of New Zealand has been decided. Women are still serving with the New Zealand troops occupying [Japan](#). The report recommending this continuance of women's role in our peacetime forces remarks: 'It is generally acknowledged that during the war, the W.A.A.C. proved its worth. Apart from their value in replacing men, it was found that in certain tasks, women were superior to men'.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE WOMEN'S AUXILIARY AIR FORCE

THE WOMEN'S AUXILIARY AIR FORCE

THE Women's Auxiliary Air Force was the first of the three women's services in New Zealand. Beginning in January 1941 it reaped some of the advantages of being first in the field. By June 1942 its strength had risen to 2100, and it was planning an orderly expansion to 3500 by the end of that year. The R.N.Z.A.F., whose general policy was often more imaginative than that of the older Services, deserves credit for this early realisation that women could give it valuable help.

The Superintendent of the W.A.A.F., afterwards known as Director (Mrs F. I. Kain) and her assistant (Mrs E. N. Carlyon), who late in 1943 succeeded the former as Director, were appointed in March 1941. The W.A.A.F. chose its members carefully by means of touring selection boards which interviewed applicants. The W.W.S.A. was represented on these boards, and after the formation of the other two women's auxiliaries took over recruiting for all three.

In its early days the W.A.A.F. did not provide living accommodation for its members on [Air Force](#) stations. The 200 women who entered [Rongotai](#) in April 1941 either lived at home or found lodgings for themselves, although they were served meals on the station. Most of them were engaged in catering duties. This first entry at [Rongotai](#) was in some degree experimental. The experiment was an entire success and led to W.A.A.F. detachments being added to the complement of nine other stations during 1941 and of many more in the succeeding years of the war. As the number of women in the W.A.A.F. grew and as they became employed in increasing numbers at remote stations or at stations far from their homes, private lodgings proved quite inadequate as accommodation and more and more women were found quarters on the stations themselves.

The W.A.A.F., in common with the other two Services, appealed strongly to younger women, but a number even of the first entrants were older married women, often the mothers or wives of men already with the [Air Force](#) overseas, who in this way made their own personal

contribution. Many joined the W.A.A.F. (and indeed all three of the auxiliaries) who had never worked before outside their own homes; their domestic skill was not misapplied. The minimum age for enlistment in the W.A.A.F. was 18, but the upward limit was determined by physical fitness. The average age of the 1941 members of the W.A.A.F. was 27; it dropped to 23 in 1943, probably reflecting the compulsory direction into essential work of girls from 18 to 21, many of whom preferred a service to a civilian career, and had risen again to 27 in 1945.

Recruiting was hampered from late 1943 onwards by the more urgent requirements of industry. The recruit reception depot at [Levin](#), set up in July 1943, was designed to take 100 new entrants every month, but by February 1944 the number of entrants had dwindled to the point where the establishment was disbanded. The three weeks' course, which was encroached upon by kitting up, and necessary medical and dental examination, inoculation, and vaccination, was mainly devoted to instruction in drill and discipline, including lectures on regulations, service etiquette, and 'such knowledge of Air Force Law as was necessary for an airwoman to know'. Previously, similar courses had been taken by W.A.A.F. entrants at the stations where they first joined.

Owing to the acute manpower difficulties of that time the [War Cabinet](#) was unable, during the latter part of 1943, to allow direct advertising for recruits to the W.A.A.F. 'It was found, however, that the best means of recruiting were the airwomen already enlisted who, by their good bearing and praise of the conditions in the Service, secured many recruits in their own districts.' * The total number of applications to enter the W.A.A.F. made between 1941 and 1945 was 7886; of this number 4753 were accepted for service, indicating the high standard of selection maintained in spite of the acute need for recruits at certain stages during the war. A number of the disappointed applicants were held in essential civilian work by manpower regulations. The highest strength of the W.A.A.F. at any one time was approximately 3800. It was officially stated in November 1947 that the W.A.A.F. is to be retained as

a permanent part of the peacetime establishment of the R.N.Z.A.F.

In January 1943, at a time when the W.A.A.C. already had hundreds of its members serving in the **Middle East** or the **Pacific**, it was decided to despatch a W.A.A.F. party to **Fiji**. This was partly to supply a genuine need and partly to stimulate recruiting, which it was felt would be adversely affected by the greater opportunities for service overseas in the W.A.A.C. It is interesting to note that overseas service was regarded in the women's services (the opportunity never came to the W.R.N.Z.N.S.) as the reward of efficiency, and the eagerness to serve in a more active capacity than at home was always intense. Only volunteers between the special age limits of 23 and 33 were permitted to go overseas; but the numbers needed were so small that a great many who were well qualified to go never had the chance.

The first party sent to **Fiji** had nineteen members. They were shorthand typists, clerks, drivers, and equipment assistants. Later a stronger emphasis was placed on signals duties, and W.A.A.F. wireless operators, telephone and teleprinter operators, and cipher officers formed a substantial proportion of the seventy-seven airwomen who served overseas at the time of the greatest expansion. Others served as meteorological observers and medical orderlies. In the tropical climate of **Fiji** service was limited to eighteen months but usually lasted no more than a year. Later it was further reduced, to nine months, to give a greater opportunity for overseas service to the W.A.A.F. as a whole. In spite of tropical conditions airwomen performed the same duties and worked for the same hours as they would have done in New Zealand.

A small W.A.A.F. detachment served also at **Norfolk Island**. The maximum number of airwomen at any one time on the island was nine—four cipher officers, four medical orderlies, and a clerk-librarian. Here the climate did not interfere with an eighteen months' tour of duty.

A few New Zealand girls went to England and joined the **Air Transport Auxiliary** which was charged with the duty of ferrying aircraft from factories to service aerodromes. Two airwomen were, in 1941 and

1944 respectively, specially released from the W.A.A.F. to go to England for this work, which was, of course, open only to those women who had already qualified as pilots in pre-war years. One New Zealand woman member of the British Air Transport Service, Second Officer J. Winstone, was killed in 1944 in an aircraft accident.

In 1942 a New Zealand woman, Section-Officer Florence Duff, the wife of an officer in the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force, lost her life at sea as the result of enemy action. She had been commissioned in the British W.A.A.F. in 1940 and was travelling out to undertake duty with

* Official administrative history of the New Zealand Women's Auxiliary Air Force, p. 25.

the R.N.Z.A.F., where her experience would have been of great value. It should be remembered also that a number of New Zealand women, who were in **Britain** at the outbreak of the war, served in the three British women's auxiliary services, many of them with great distinction.

The W.A.A.F. began its service in the R.N.Z.A.F. in a spirit of modesty and experiment. It was designed primarily to take over messing, to control every phase of the choice, preparation, and serving of food. In this department it was conspicuously successful from the outset. It was found that only moderate help was needed from airmen once the W.A.A.F. had got into its stride, a man being needed occasionally to help lift heavy containers. The general ratio of replacement was five airwomen to four men. From the beginning the W.A.A.F. gave the responsibility for catering to its trained dietitians.

Not only cooks and messhands entered with the first detachments: clerks, shorthand typists, equipment assistants, medical orderlies, and drivers were also numbered among them. From early in 1943 the good service of the W.A.A.F. was recognised by the employment of its members to replace men in certain technical trades. These airwomen

went through the same training and passed the same trade tests as the men whom they released for service in forward areas.

Women of sufficient education were recruited specially for duty with radar and meteorological units in the course of a campaign during late 1942 which brought in nearly 400 entrants; this was the only recruitment of women for a named task. All three women's services posted some of their members to radar stations; the W.A.A.C. recruited 325 members as the result of the same campaign which it shared with the W.A.A.F. The usual policy, of course, was to give no specific guarantee to an applicant that she would do duty of any particular type. At the same time everything was done to suit the job allotted to the personal qualities, education, and training of the new entrant. Those entrants without special skill were usually first given duty in the messes, but this was for a period only and did not afterwards prevent their being considered for more specialised or responsible work.

It will be obvious that any airwoman concerned with the servicing and maintenance of aircraft was carrying a high degree of responsibility. Others too had men's lives literally in their hands, for instance those who packed and checked parachutes. 'Once you begin checking and packing a parachute you do not leave it until you finish Each cord must be checked and there must be no room for doubt. The parachute must open and you must be certain that it will open.'

Many jobs undertaken by the W.A.A.F. needed thorough training: it took three months to qualify as an instrument repairer, a job demanding special aptitude. One of the most thorough of all courses was that taken by members of the W.A.A.F. running marine craft. The Air Force had its own fleet of launches, a separate little navy that needed just as good seamanship to navigate inshore waters as the small craft of the Navy itself. These girls 'must be able to handle any type of craft, from small dinghies to a whale-boat, or a 25-knot motor launch, recognise running faults and do running repairs'; they had also to be able to use charts and compass and navigate in and out of harbour. Their seamanship course included methods of salvaging marine craft, beaching them for repairs,

laying and picking up temporary moorings for aircraft, sweeping for lost torpedoes, and a knowledge of the 'rule of the road' in narrow or thronged channels. They had also to learn visual signalling, first aid, and artificial respiration and pass a special test swimming 50 yards in all their clothes.

The only airwomen taken for flights in the course of their duty were those passing through the wireless course at **Wigram**. They were taken up so that they might see at first hand the working of wireless apparatus in aircraft and thus gain a better insight into the problems of aircrew with whom they would be exchanging signals. Wherever possible airwomen were given passages in service aircraft when they were posted to other stations or went on leave.

Late in 1942 a qualified officer was appointed to organise airwomen's leisure-time activities. Besides engaging in the organising of physical recreation, she trained a staff of W.A.A.F. instructors who were then posted to the larger stations. An instructress in handicrafts and domestic arts, paid from the funds of the Sarah Ann Rhodes Trust, * was lent to the W.A.A.F. for two and a half years by **Victoria University College**. She usually stayed ten weeks with each large unit in rotation, taking as many classes as possible in the airwomen's spare time. Often at the end of her visit, displays of handicrafts and dresses designed and made by the airwomen themselves were held (this might take the form of a mannequin parade), and these very effectively demonstrated the good use to which her services were put and the practical appreciation by her pupils of her work. Many girls who had not previously ventured on any such activity learned from her to make clothes for themselves or to do different forms of needlework. Members of the W.A.A.F. were also able to take any course they wished through the Army Education and Welfare Service, which provided courses in handicrafts, music, and art as well as in various types of vocational training. The third anniversary of the foundation of the W.A.A.F., 16 January 1944, was celebrated by literary, musical, and handicraft competitions. A selection from the competing exhibitors including tapestry, needlework, etchings, leather work, and

water colours was exhibited in **Wellington**.

* **This is a fund administered by Victoria University College which enables the services of an instructress in home science, handicrafts, and dressmaking, whose headquarters are at Massey College, to be made available to women's organisations and clubs in country districts. The scheme is part of the adult education movement.**

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

WOMEN AND THE WAR

WOMEN AND THE WAR

THE SERVICES of the women who entered the three auxiliaries were so meritorious that it is regrettable their numbers were comparatively so small. They remained in every sense an *élite*. It would, however, give a wrong impression of the willingness and ability of the other women of New Zealand to serve their country if some further explanation were not given, at the risk of some repetition, of the restrictions placed on women entering the Services. From the first, all applications to serve were examined by officers of the **National Service Department**, and applicants already in essential work were not allowed to transfer from their civilian employment into a Service. It is fair to state that although women were thus prevented from serving where they themselves felt they had most to offer, the **National Service Department** did not insist on the return to civilian work of women with special skills who had already joined a women's auxiliary.

It would appear, however, that **War Cabinet** regarded the women's services as being less essential than their male counterparts and, for the most part, as less essential than industry. In September 1943, for instance, when industry had vacancies waiting for 4000 women, priority was given to it, and recruitment into the three women's auxiliaries was virtually stopped. 'Industry' had become a wide term: both hotels and laundries were eventually entitled to bear the proud label of 'essential'. Yet in June 1943 the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force had asked for 800 women to relieve men in clerical and stores duties in camps and bases, a request increased a little later to 982 women to relieve 621 men. Only a very small number of women—twenty typists—went to the **Middle East** in response to this request, although a year earlier the official policy had been to replace men by women in the armed forces wherever possible.

In September 1943 the New Zealand Manufacturers' Federation asked for the cessation of recruiting for women's branches of the Services. Of course, the three auxiliaries had to some extent been to blame for not

recruiting at a faster rate when they had the opportunity during 1942, but shortage of accommodation was at that stage a constant check on the intake of recruits. But even when they enjoyed the fullest official support the auxiliaries had been in some degree hampered by their own diffidence. In May 1941 the chairman of a W.A.A.F. selection committee was reported as saying that 'the board had no more right to take a girl out of essential employment than an employer had to retain her if she could be replaced'. It is difficult to resist the conclusion that women were treated on a different basis from men for manpower purposes. A woman in an essential job had somehow become more 'essential' than a man in an essential job.

Some women were discharged from the three auxiliaries on a voluntary basis in early 1944. Forms asking whether they would or would not be prepared to leave their Service for essential industry were at that time completed by 6629 servicewomen, but only 784 of them volunteered to re-enter civilian life: 254 of them chose the Women's Land Army, and 234 nursing or work in hospitals.

The Women's Land Army, or more correctly, the Women's Land Service, was established in 1940 under the W.W.S.A. to help meet the shortage of male farm labour caused by enlistments in the forces. In September 1942 the Women's Land Corps, as it was first known, was reorganised as the Women's Land Service with improved rates of pay, a dress uniform, and a complete set of working clothes as attractions for recruits. The employment of relatives as land girls on farms was also authorised under the new scheme and recruitment became the responsibility of district manpower officers. By September 1944, with the help of special recruiting campaigns in farming districts, there were 2088 land girls in the service, its highest figure, all of them employed on farms.

On demobilisation women face the same problems as do men and have the same need for rehabilitation assistance and, in New Zealand, the same rights to obtain it. It is true that many servicewomen had demobilised husbands to rejoin, while others had their own work in

industry or in a home waiting for their return. On the whole, women who have had a job in a special emergency like a war tend to want to keep a job after it is over. The friendships which grow in a large organisation, particularly a fighting service, and the satisfactions of a corporate life, can only be replaced by joining some other organisation for a common purpose, and even the daily contacts of office or factory are in their degree a substitute.

The women of New Zealand in the three Service auxiliaries gave their best to help win the war. Their work, apart from spasmodic praises lavished often enough as an incentive to recruiting, has not yet been sufficiently valued or understood. It can only be hoped that their capacity will be fully recognised in the long-term peacetime planning of the New Zealand armed forces.

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THE OFFICIAL SOURCES consulted in the preparation of this account included information from the Department of Labour and Employment and from the Services. The sketch reproduced on **page 18** was by W.A.A.C. Bombardier E. F. Christie, and the drawing on **page 26** by Russell Clark.

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[BACKMATTER]

THE AUTHOR, D. O. W. Hall, graduated at Cambridge with honours in English Literature and in History in 1929. He was Associate Editor of Centennial Publications. He served with the Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve in the Pacific in the Second World War, and is now stationed in Dunedin as Director of Adult Education, University of Otago.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[BACKMATTER]

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THE ASSAULT ON RABAUL : OPERATIONS BY THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND AIR FORCE DECEMBER 1943 – MAY 1944

NEW ZEALAND IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR
1943-1945



THE ASSAULT ON RABAUL

THE ASSAULT ON RABAUL
OPERATIONS BY THE ROYAL NEW ZEALAND AIR FORCE
DECEMBER 1943 - MAY 1944



THE ASSAULT ON RABAUL

*Operations by the Royal New Zealand Air Force
December 1943 - May 1944*

by
I. R. S. BOSS

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Rabaul township, 1945

Rabaul township, 1945

COVER PHOTOGRAPH **Ventura approaching Rabaul**

THE ASSAULT ON RABAU

Operations by the Royal New Zealand Air Force

December 1943 — May 1944

J. M. S. ROSS

WAR HISTORY BRANCH

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

1949

IT IS THE INTENTION of this series to present aspects of New Zealand's part in the Second World War which will not receive detailed treatment in the campaign volumes and which are considered either worthy of special notice or typical of many phases of our war experience. The series is illustrated with material which would otherwise seldom see publication. It will also contain short accounts of operations which will be dealt with in detail in the appropriate volumes.

H. K. KIPPENBERGER

Major-General EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

NEW ZEALAND WAR HISTORIES

PRINTED BY

FIGHTER SQUADRONS

RABAU, on the north-east tip of **New Britain**, was captured by the Japanese on 23 January 1942. Its harbour and port, protected from behind by jungle-covered mountains, made it an ideal naval and air base for their campaign in the south and south-west **Pacific**; they lost no time in fortifying it, building five airfields nearby, and installing one of the heaviest concentrations of anti-aircraft guns in the world.

From Rabaul they occupied **New Guinea** and the **Solomons**, but any plan to capture Port Moresby and **New Caledonia** and to attack the east coast of **Australia** was frustrated by the Coral Sea battle in May 1942 and the American landing at **Guadalcanal** three months later. **Rabaul**, though, was still a menace to the Allies, and its destruction as a naval and air base was one of the chief objects of their South Pacific campaign.

When the main Allied attack started in December 1943 the Japanese were estimated to have two hundred combat aircraft in **New Britain** and ninety in the **New Ireland** area, against which the Allies had 531 fighters and bombers in operational condition in the **Solomons** area. The Royal New Zealand Air Force had two fighter squadrons stationed at **Ondonga** in **New Georgia**— Nos. 14 and 15 * led respectively by Squadron Leaders J. H. Arkwright ¹ and S. G. Quill. ² They were known as the New Zealand Fighter Wing and were commanded by Wing Commander T. O. Freeman. ³ Both squadrons were on their second tour of duty in the **Pacific** and had seen action over **Guadalcanal** earlier in the year. Between them they had destroyed thirty-one Japanese aircraft.

The first major air operation from the **Solomons** against **Rabaul** took place on 17 December, when a fighter sweep of eighty aircraft— American Corsairs and Hellcats and twenty-four Kittyhawks from the two New Zealand squadrons—left **Ondonga** at 5.30 in the morning under Wing Commander Freeman. They flew first to the **Torokina** airstrip at **Empress Augusta Bay** to refuel, and there the time-table was interrupted by the emergency landing of two American aircraft. As a result the

formation was split into two groups, the first, led by Freeman, getting away at nine o'clock, and the second, led by Quill, twenty minutes later.

The New Zealanders flew in sections of four, and at twenty minutes past ten the two sections in the lead, Freeman's and Arkwright's, crossed the coast of **New Britain** over Kabanga Bay, twenty miles south-east of **Rabaul**, at 20,000 feet. By now there were only two aircraft in the third section, one having turned home with oxygen trouble and another with a faulty generator.

As the pilots circled above the target they knew they had taken the enemy by surprise, for the anti-aircraft batteries did not open fire at once and there were no Japanese fighters in the air, though dust on the airfields showed where they had taken off. The weather, except for a layer of wispy cloud at 21,000 feet, was clear, and aircraft could be seen lined up on the runways.

* See [appendix](#) for a list of the New Zealand squadrons that took part in the assault on **Rabaul** between 17 December 1943 and 2 June 1944.



While the formation was making its third circuit, four Zekes * dived from the cloud on the two aircraft of the third section, hitting one in the starboard wing with cannon shell. Arkwright at once led his section in a sharp right turn to come to the rescue, but he turned too tightly

and went into a spin. So did his No. 2. ** The rest of the section followed them down to protect them, but not before Sergeant A. S. Mills ⁴ had fired a short burst at a Zeke and had seen it break in half.

Arkwright climbed up again and was joined by his section, except for Mills, who, with a Zeke on his tail, was weaving with a Kittyhawk piloted by Flying Officer M. E. Dark. ⁵ After re-forming,

* The Zeke was an improved model of the Zero, a Japanese fighter aircraft.

** The RNZAF fighter aircraft flew in pairs, or in sections of two pairs, for protection, the leading aircraft being known as No. I, the second as No. 2. When likely to meet enemy fighters, each aircraft in a pair, or each pair in a section, zigzagged constantly, crossing over or under its opposite number so that between them the pilots could watch the whole sky. This was called 'weaving'.



ZEKE



KITTYHAWK



TONY

the section tried twice to join aircraft that could be seen fighting over **Rabaul**, but it was attacked by Zekes and forced to turn home, the Japanese making a running fight of it for forty miles out to sea.

The first section, meanwhile, was attacking aircraft that had climbed from the **Rabaul** airfields. Freeman and his No. 2, Flight Sergeant E. C. Laurie, ⁶ dived on eight or nine Zekes above Praed Point, shooting down one each, but Laurie's Kittyhawk was hit by cannon shell in the port wing while he was pulling out of his dive to look for Freeman, and he was forced to turn home. Later he joined Dark, who had attacked the Zeke on Mills's tail and then a dive bomber, and together they went to the assistance of a lone Kittyhawk in trouble with seven or eight

Zekes and trailing smoke or glycol. This proved to be Freeman's aircraft. Together the three Kittyhawks shook off the enemy and flew to the coast of **New Ireland**, where Freeman began to circle a valley with the plain intention of making a forced landing. The other aircraft kept guard as long as they could, but Laurie was attacked by a Zeke and Dark had to chase it away. When they returned to the valley there was no sign of Freeman.

The rest of the section—Flight Lieutenant M. T. Vanderpump ⁷ and his No. 2, Flight Lieutenant J. O. MacFarlane ⁸—had dived on eight Zekes that were weaving above shipping in the harbour. Vanderpump shot down an aircraft over Talili Bay, then chased a Zeke that was attacking his No. 2 and shot it down in the bush at the foot of Mt. Towanumbatir, just north of **Rabaul**. Directly afterwards he was attacked by a number of Zekes and Tonys * but escaped by diving over **Rabaul** through an intense barrage of light anti-aircraft fire. MacFarlane, though, was shot down.

Of the second formation, which had left **Torokina** twenty minutes after the first, only the third section, led by Flight Lieutenant P. S. Green, ⁹ saw action. Flying at 16,000 feet, with four American Corsairs 5000 feet above them as top cover, they met fifteen Zekes over Credner Island in St. George's Channel, and when these seemed unwilling to come to grips Green manoeuvred his section to allow the Corsairs to get at them. They scattered at once, three of them, followed by the Kittyhawks, diving to sea-level. Flying Officer H. J. Meharry ¹⁰ chose one and opened fire at 700 yards, closing to 300. Smoke came from the Zeke's port wing root and flame from its fuselage. Then it rolled on its back and dived into the sea. The other two escaped inland, skimming the tree-tops.

That gave the New Zealanders a score of five aircraft out of nine shot down at a total cost to the whole sweep of two RNZAF Kittyhawks, but they had lost in Freeman a leader of outstanding quality. The lesson of the operation was that Allied aircraft could attack successfully the most strongly defended enemy base in the South Pacific.

* **Single-seater Japanese fighters.**

PROTECTING THE BOMBERS

AS THEIR Kittyhawks could not operate at great heights, the usual task of the New Zealand pilots in the bombing strikes against Rabaul was to provide close cover for the American bombers. Slightly above the close cover flew a low cover of Hellcats, and above them a medium cover of Corsairs, with a top cover of P38 Lightnings or Corsairs flying at about 25,000 feet. The close cover—the Kittyhawks—had to stay with the bombers all the time to protect them from any aircraft that might dive through the higher covers. It was a role that called for much flying discipline, as often it meant missing the chance of a fight.

The kind of discipline required is well illustrated by this set of rules drawn up about this time by the commanding officer of one of the New Zealand squadrons:

Keep both pairs of eyes open, the pair in your head and the pair in your back, and remember the sun.

Work as a team and be a little more interested in the safety of the other pilots in the division. They in turn will reciprocate, the whole bringing about a better understanding of mutual support.

Keep your eye on your division leader and follow him implicitly. He knows what he is doing. That is why he is a leader.

Never straggle or be lured away from the bombers. If you are left behind catch up immediately and then never fly straight and level for more than five seconds. If necessary weave with someone—anyone.

Keep radio silence. If it is important, tell your leader, slowly, concisely and quietly. Then stop talking.

Never get the idea that the fight is over, even on the way home. Don't get the idea either that the fight doesn't start until you are over the target.

Don't do the block. * Think quickly, decide immediately, and act simultaneously.

Finally and once again never, never, NEVER straggle.

This high standard of flying discipline was demanded of our pilots because their Kittyhawks were inferior in performance to the original Zeros, except in diving, and could outfight the Zekes only through brilliant teamwork.

The sweep of 17 December was to have been followed the next day by a bomber attack, but this was abandoned because of bad flying conditions. On the 19th, however, a strike was made by American B24 Liberators from **Guadalcanal, and for this the RNZAF Wing provided part of the escort. No. 16 Squadron, led this time by Vanderpump, sent twelve aircraft, and No. 17, led by Squadron Leader P. G. H. Newton,¹¹ another twelve. The latter had arrived at **Ondonga** to relieve No. 14 Squadron, which had completed its second tour of duty and was due to return to New Zealand.**

The Kittyhawks took off from **Ondonga at 6 a.m., flew to **Torokina** to refuel, and met the bombers over **Bougainville** at 11.30 a.m., setting course for **Rabaul**. Instead of forty-eight bombers only nineteen had arrived at the assembly point, so there was some difficulty in arranging the**

*** Get flustered.**

formations. Two more bombers turned back with engine trouble, and the rest set off finally in groups of seven, six, and four, with Newton's squadron covering the first group, and Vanderpump's the other two. On the way to the target, while the bombers were flying at 20,500 feet, several New Zealanders had to turn back because their Kittyhawks could not maintain the height. Among them was Vanderpump.

Anti-aircraft fire was met over **Rabaul**, but it did no serious damage, and no enemy fighters appeared until the Liberators had dropped their bombs and were drawing away from the target. Then four Zekes dived on the rear formation above which Flight Lieutenant J. H. Mills ¹² (No. 17 Squadron) was weaving with his No. 2, Flight Sergeant D. A. Williams. ¹³ When the New Zealanders turned towards them two of the Zekes broke away at once, but the other two continued diving and levelled out 2000 feet below the bombers. Mills followed them, giving two bursts from his gun and hitting one Zeke in the fuselage. It escaped by making a tight turn, only to run into the fire of Williams, who was following his leader down. Hit by two more bursts, the enemy tightened his turn still more, then rolled over on his back and dived to the ground.

During the rest of December bad weather interfered with operations, but on Christmas Eve the New Zealand squadrons, led by Arkwright and Newton, carried out a fighter sweep over **Rabaul** with twenty-four American Hellcats. The sweep approached the target in tiers, with the Kittyhawks forming the two lowest.

When it was about ten miles north-east of the town, forty or more Japanese fighters climbed to intercept it, and at once the New Zealand squadrons, each choosing a group of the enemy, dived to the attack. Soon furious dog-fights were taking place at heights from 18,000 feet to sea-level, with more fighters joining in all the time. Though the Japanese aircraft were better than the Kittyhawks at all altitudes in this kind of combat the New Zealanders always engaged them. They were forced to, for had they dived to safety after striking the first blow those following would have been at the mercy of the enemy. However, the Kittyhawks gave a good account of themselves in these dog-fights, damaging many Zekes and sometimes making a kill.

This particular action is described from one man's point of view by Squadron Leader Newton:

On the way in [to the target] we could see clouds of dust rising off the Tobera strip. When we were about five miles south-east of Praed

Point two groups of 'bandits', with more than twenty aircraft in each, were seen climbing up on our port side. The further group was a little higher than the nearer group. Squadron Leader Arkwright led No. 16 Squadron down on the nearer group, and I went down on the further group, both of us saying on the R/T * that we were going to attack.

I picked a Zeke near the front of the very loose formation and opened fire at 300 yards in a stern quarter attack, continuing firing as I followed the Zeke round in a turn until I was dead astern. The Zeke exploded at the wing roots and started to burn, with bits of the aircraft flying off. He tumbled over and went down in flames. I saw many aircraft shot down by the Squadron in this initial attack. I pulled round to the left, looking for another target. The sky was full of P40s and bandits milling round. I saw a Zeke on my left at the same level doing a left-hand turn. I turned, closing in astern, and fired a one-second burst at 250-300 yards. He did a complete flick roll to the left and when he pulled up I was still astern at 200 yards. I fired a 2-3 second burst and got hits all round the fuselage. He fell off in a lazy roll to the right and went straight down, apparently out of control.

* Radio telephone

I then found another Zeke milling round in the sky where about twelve P40s were mixing with a mass of Zekes. We were now down to about 12,000 feet. I turned in towards him and as he started a gentle turn to the left, I closed right in to 300 yards astern and fired a short burst. He flick-rolled to the left and as he straightened up I fired a long burst from dead astern. He fell away in a lazy roll to the right and then went down in a vertical dive. I rolled behind him and fired short bursts as he came in my sights. I observed my tracer going into the fuselage. I broke away at low level as I saw the Zeke go into the sea. As I was following him down I saw another Zeke go into the sea. This could have been the Zeke I had engaged previously and left in an uncontrolled dive.

I started to regain altitude and was set upon by six Zekes. I fired

several bursts haphazardly at them, but they hemmed me in and I broke violently down again. At full throttle I could not shake off some of the Zekes, so I went right down to the water and headed for the Duke of York Islands. I found another P40 in the same predicament, so we scissored together. As the Zeke broke away we turned back towards the fight. As I saw four P40s making out to the rally point (Cape St. George) and as the fight seemed to be working out from **Rabaul**, we again turned towards the rally point and were immediately pounced upon from above by six to eight Zekes. We used full power and overtook the P40s ahead of us. I saw a P40 low down over the water behind me in the direction of **Rabaul** so I turned back and started to scissor with him. After the first scissor he was shot down by a Zeke. His aircraft trailed smoke and went into the sea, ten miles north-west from Cape St. George. I went right down to the water at full throttle with two Zekes behind shooting. I skidded violently and most of the tracer (7.7 millimetre) went over my head into the sea. The Zekes broke off five miles from Cape St. George where I joined five or six P40s and set course for **Torokina**. We 'pancaked' there at 1300 hours.

In terms of enemy aircraft destroyed this was the most successful action of the war for the New Zealand Fighter Wing. Twelve Japanese aircraft were shot down, four more probably destroyed, and many damaged. Seven RNZAF aircraft were lost but two of the pilots were saved. Flying Officer K. W. Starnes ¹⁴ crashed just off **Torokina** beach and was rescued, while Flight Sergeant Williams, who had been shot down over St. George's Channel, was rescued after six hours in the water by an air-sea rescue aircraft and taken to **Torokina**, where he entered hospital suffering from slight gunshot wounds. The five pilots lost were Flight Lieutenants A. W. Buchanan ¹⁵ and P. S. Worsp, ¹⁶ Flying Officers M. E. Dark and D. B. Page, ¹⁷ and Sergeant R. H. Covic. ¹⁸

By comparison the next operation was almost uneventful. It took place on Christmas Day, when seventeen **RNZAF** aircraft acted as close cover for twenty-four Liberators. The formation was attacked over the target, and Kittyhawks of No. 16 Squadron fired a few bursts at Zeros

that penetrated the higher layers of fighters, but no definite results were observed. This was No. 16 Squadron's last **Rabaul** operation in the tour, and it returned to New Zealand at the end of the year after being relieved by No. 15.

During December 1944 Japanese fighters were shot down for the loss of twenty-three Allied fighters and one bomber. When the first heavy attack was launched against **Rabaul** on 17 December the **Torokina** airfield at **Empress Augusta Bay** had been in use for only twelve days, and at that time not more than a dozen fighters were based on it. The rest, like the Kittyhawks of the **RNZAF**, were based farther south and had to refuel at **Torokina** on the way to **Rabaul**.

During the first fortnight of January 1944, however, more aircraft were brought to **Torokina** and the tempo of the attack increased; so too did fighter opposition. For the first time American



TARGET RABAU

This oblique view was taken on a bombing run in 1945

TARGET RABAU

This oblique view was taken on a bombing run in 1945

IN NEW GEORGIA



SERVICING UNIT, ONDONGA

SERVICING UNIT, ONDONGA



AIRSTRIP, ONDONGA

AIRSTRIP, ONDONGA



SCORE BOARD, ONDONGA, November 1943

SCORE BOARD, ONDONGA, November 1943



FIGHTER PILOT
FIGHTER PILOT



BACK FROM RABAU—First report to Intelligence Officer
BACK FROM RABAU—First report to Intelligence Officer



KITTYHAWKS RETURN FROM RAID, TOROKINA
KITTYHAWKS RETURN FROM RAID, TOROKINA



KITTYHAWK LANDING, BOUGAINVILLE

KITTYHAWK LANDING, BOUGAINVILLE



No. 17 Squadron pilots who took part in the first RNZAF bomber escort mission over Rabaul. (page 6)
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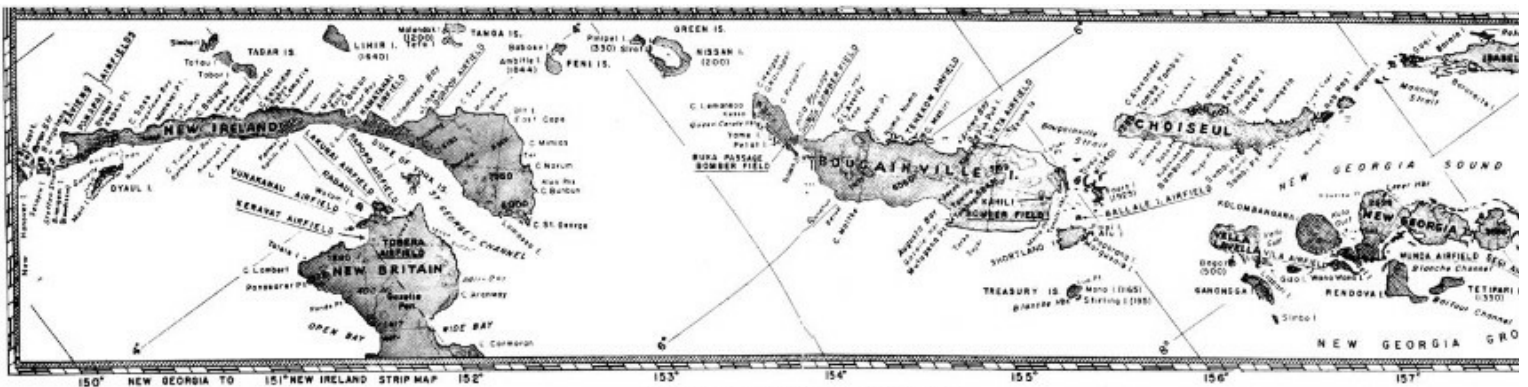


RE-ARMING A KITTYHAWK



AIRMEN'S MESS, ONDONGA

AIRMEN'S MESS, ONDONGA



STRIP MAP FROM BASE TO TARGET

used by RNZAF pilots in their attacks on Rabaul

—slightly reduced in size and redrawn



VENTURA



CATALINA



AVENGER



DAUNTLESS

STRIP MAP FROM BASE TO TARGET used by **RNZAF** pilots in their attacks on **Rabaul** — *slightly reduced in size and redrawn*

BRIEFING PILOTS BEFORE A STRIKE, 1944



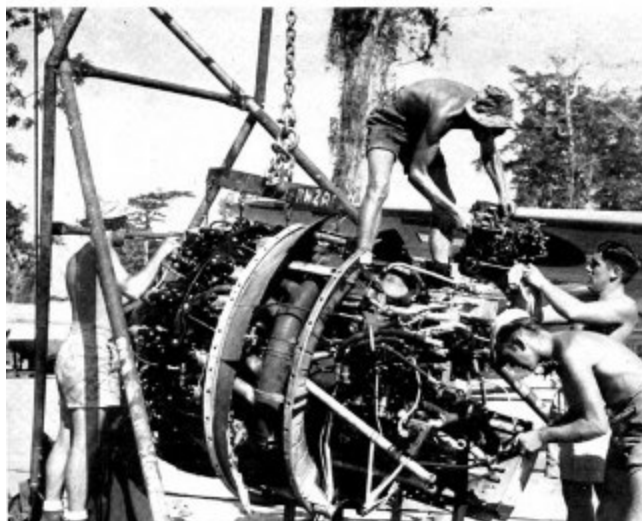
BRIEFING PILOTS BEFORE A STRIKE, 1944

BOMBS GONE



BOMBS GONE

OVERHAULING A VENTURA ENGINE, BOUGAINVILLE



OVERHAULING A VENTURA ENGINE, BOUGAINVILLE



RETURNING TO TOROKINA

RETURNING TO TOROKINA

SERVICING, BOUGAINVILLE



SERVICING, BOUGAINVILLE

BOMBER RECONNAISSANCE VENTURAS



BOMBING UP

BOMBING UP

EN ROUTE



EN ROUTE



BOMBING RABAU

BOMBING RABAU

OVER GREEN ISLAND



OVER GREEN ISLAND

GROUND STAFF CAMP ON BOUGAINVILLE, January 1944

The airmen's mess is in the background.



GROUND STAFF CAMP ON BOUGAINVILLE, January 1944

The airmen's mess is in the background

Photographs of Japanese defences taken in September 1945

SOME DEFENCES OF RABAUL



ENTRANCE TO A STORAGE CAVE

ENTRANCE TO A STORAGE CAVE



SEARCHLIGHT

SEARCHLIGHT

LIGHT
ANTI-AIRCRAFT
GUNS



LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS



RESULTS



Wrecked barges in Simpson Harbour

Wrecked barges in Simpson Harbour

Damaged Japanese aircraft at Rabaul, September 1945



Damaged Japanese aircraft at Rabaul, September 1945

medium and light bombers were used, since fighter sweeps and high-level raids by heavy bombers, though very damaging to the enemy, could not by themselves achieve the main object of the campaign: the destruction of Japanese airfields.

The first light bomber attack was to have been made on 5 January by Dauntlesses and Avengers *, but they were turned back by bad weather. They tried again two days later and again failed. Fighters and flak were thick over the Rabaul area and the target—Tobera airfield—was hidden by cloud, so the bombers, after twice trying to bomb it, flew to Cape St. George in New Ireland and attacked targets there. Two Zekes had fallen to No. 17 Squadron, against which one Kittyhawk had been damaged by flak.

On the 9th the airfield was raided successfully. No. 15 Squadron, under Flight Lieutenant C. R. Bush, ¹⁹ escorted the Dauntlesses and met no air opposition except an attack by phosphorus bombs, which did no harm, ** but No. 17 Squadron, with the Avengers, met a score of Zekes, which dropped phosphorus bombs and then attacked with their guns. Squadron Leader Newton shot down two and Flight Lieutenant A. G. S. George ²⁰ one, but the squadron lost two fine pilots, Flying Officers A. B. Sladen ²¹ and D. L. Jones. ²² Both parachuted into the sea, and though dinghies were seen later by a patrolling Ventura they had disappeared before a rescue could be made.

The usual method of attack in this type of operation was for the bombers to fly towards the target at about 15,000 feet, make a shallow dive to 8000 feet, and then 'push over' into their bombing dive. In the attacks on airfields the Dauntlesses usually led, dropping their bombs on the anti-aircraft batteries from 2000 feet, pulling out of their dive at 1000 feet, and getting away as fast as possible. The Avengers followed close behind them, diving to 1000 feet before dropping their bombs on the runways and then pulling out at 800 to 900 feet. The fighters' task was to weave above the bombers as they approached the target. The top cover stayed above them always, but the close and the low covers

followed them down as they dived so that they could protect them while they reformed—the most critical moment of the raid.

Throughout January and February the Allies attacked **Rabaul** daily except when the weather was unfavourable. Unfavourable weather in the **New Britain** area usually meant that masses of towering cumulus cloud extended from about 40,000 feet above sea-level down to about 1000 feet, with heavy tropical rain underneath. When this happened the target was 'weathered out', and the striking force had to seek an alternative one, but even so the **RNZAF** fighters took part in thirteen successful strikes during January, acting on almost every occasion as close cover for American Mitchells^{***} or for Dauntlesses and Avengers.

The successes of the New Zealand pilots in the air were made possible by the servicing and maintenance staffs. When an aircraft returned from an operation it was literally pounced on by the ground crew. If it was undamaged and had developed no faults, it was refuelled, re-armed,

* Dauntless—a dive bomber. Avenger—a torpedo-bomber. Both were used extensively in the South Pacific as dive bombers.

** The dropping of phosphorus bombs from high-flying aircraft was a feature of the Japanese fighter defence at this time. They were supposed to burst among our aircraft, and although they never hit any they sometimes disorganised the squadrons. Their bursts, moreover, served as rallying points for the Japanese fighters, showing them where they were most needed.

*** Twin-engined medium bombers.

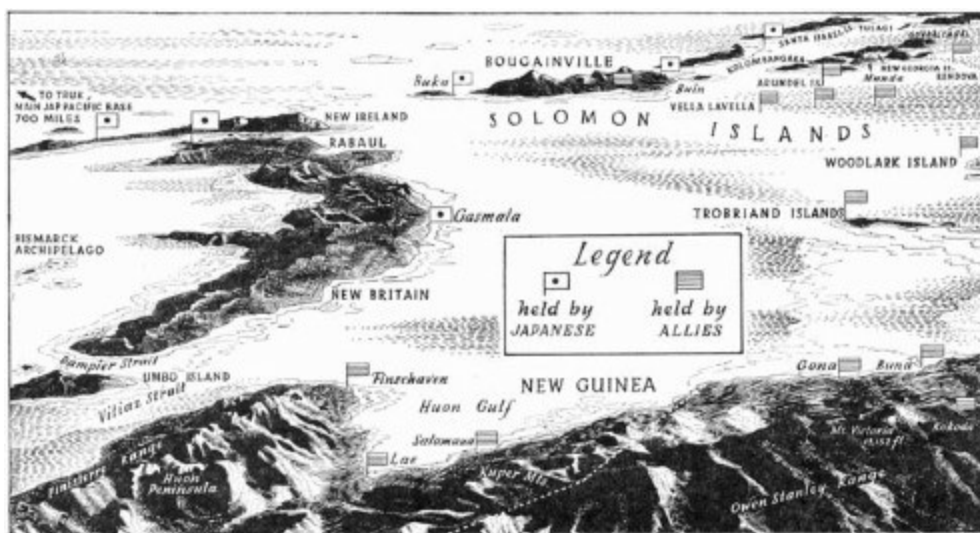
completely checked over, and ready to fly again in half an hour. If, as sometimes happened, it was badly shot about, the ground crew repaired it. If necessary they worked all through the night, often in pouring rain, in the uncertain light of electric torches, and interrupted

by enemy air raids, to have their planes serviceable again for operations at daylight next morning.

On 17 January the **RNZAF Fighter Wing** moved from **Ondonga** to **Torokina**, on **Bougainville**. They regretted leaving quarters in which they had managed to make themselves fairly comfortable, in spite of heat, torrential rain, and frequent air raids, but they were now within striking distance of **Rabaul** and did not have to leave early in the morning and return late at night after refuelling on the way.

BOMBER RECONNAISSANCE OPERATIONS

SINCE THE START of the **Rabaul** offensive, No. 1 Bomber Reconnaissance Squadron of the **RNZAF**, led by Squadron Leader H. C. Walker, ²³ had been stationed at **Guadalcanal** with a detached flight at **Munda**. Its task was to supply aircraft to follow the striking forces to **New Britain** to spot and report the positions of pilots who had been shot down in the sea and, when possible, stay with them until a 'Dumbo' (an air-sea rescue Catalina) arrived on the scene. From



—from an Army Education & Welfare Service bulletin

February until the end of March the rescuing was done by Catalinas of No. 6 Squadron, **RNZAF**, which had a detached flight in the Treasury Group for this work, and altogether they picked up twenty-eight survivors, New Zealand and American, from **Rabaul** strikes.

The **Venturas** * of No. 1 Squadron carried extra dinghies that could be dropped if necessary and they also carried bombs for use after they had finished their patrols. The first 'survivor patrol' was carried out by two **Venturas** from **Munda** on 23 December. They followed a force of **Liberators** bound for **Rabaul**, saw no survivors, but on their way home bombed Cape St. George in **New Ireland**. One was attacked by three **Zekes**, but, apart from a single hit from flak, both returned undamaged to **Munda**.

The next day Pilot Officer D. F. Ayson ²⁴ and Flying Officer R. J. Alford ²⁵ took off in Venturas on the same task. While over St. George's Channel, Alford saw an Allied pilot waving to him from a dinghy, but before he was able to signal the position he was attacked by three Zekes. He scored several hits, but his own aircraft was damaged before he was able to escape into cloud and signal the position of the airman in the dinghy.

Ayson, in the other aircraft, was cruising above the entrance to St. George's Channel. He saw Liberators pass overhead, and at 1.15 p.m. set course with them for **Torokina**. Five minutes later his turret gunner, Flight Sergeant G. E. Hannah, ²⁶ saw two Zekes immediately above him.

At the same moment (said Hannah in his report), I saw tracer off to starboard and then two Zekes coming straight in at seven or eight o'clock, * level, at our height. The next moment I saw two Zekes on the port side, flying level at about five o'clock and 900 yards out. I opened up on the two aircraft to starboard, and they crossed to the back of us, joining the other two on the port side. One Zeke broke away on the port side, and came in from about 900 yards at five o'clock, level with us, firing, and approaching to about 75 yards. I got a good five-second burst at him. He broke off and passed above us at about two o'clock.

At this stage the two Zekes that were above us had dropped to our level and came in, one at five o'clock and the other at six o'clock, firing as they came. I waited until they were at 400 yards before opening up. They broke off at about 350 yards and went up over our tail. I got a really long burst into the second one. I lost sight of him as another attack developed from four o'clock, level, coming to within 300 yards. I fired a burst and saw five or six tracers go into him. He turned straight over the top of us, and then started to lose height immediately. I saw him hit the water. There were still two Zekes chasing us, out about 500 yards on the port side and dead level, and two more on the starboard side at our height, one about 800 yards out and the other at 1000 yards. The two on the port side attacked, the first from four o'clock. I fired a

deflection shot, and saw the tracer go in along the fuselage behind the cockpit. He turned off immediately at about 600 yards.

Just then, an aircraft unidentified at the time, appeared at about three o'clock. He increased speed, got in front of us, and turned as if to make an attack from two o'clock.

I heard the warning, as what we now know to be a Corsair approached, and swung the turret round and got a burst away. While this was going on we were still being attacked from the rear. I swung round again, and managed to get a burst into one aircraft attacking at about

* Twin-engined medium bomber and reconnaissance aircraft, which had superseded the Hudson as standard equipment for the RNZAF Bomber Reconnaissance squadrons.

* This method of indicating direction by the different positions of the hour hand of the clock is used by both the Army and the [Air Force](#).

six o'clock, level, 600 yards out. He broke off and passed beneath us. He came into my view again at six o'clock, and as he appeared I got a full seven-seconds burst into him. I saw tracer hit the engine as he turned to starboard. He went up, turned half over to the right, and then went straight into the water and broke up.

While the attack was at its height, Flying Officer S. P. Aldridge,²⁷ the wireless operator-air gunner, who had been giving the pilot advice and directions over the 'intercom', was wounded, Warrant Officer W. N. Williams,²⁸ the navigator, taking his place at once. Meanwhile the aircraft was being hit repeatedly.

During one particularly violent attack, when I could hear shots hitting all over the aircraft, I went closer to the water and started skidding to the right (reported Pilot Officer Ayson). At this moment the rudder controls went slack. I was left without rudder control, and my

weaving was affected....

When I was told that the attack was over, I checked up on the crew and found W/O Williams was giving first aid to F/O Aldridge. I tested the undercarriage and flaps, and half an hour from base advised tower * that I had a wounded man on board who needed medical attention. I also asked for the runway to be cleared. I landed without rudders, fast, but with no trouble. My crew did a really wonderful job of work.

In Flight Sergeant Hannah's opinion the Japanese pilots had shown outstanding skill and determination, but had repeatedly exposed the bellies of their Zekes as they turned to break away. With side guns he could have done much more damage. Even so, two Zekes were listed as destroyed and three as damaged. Later evidence changed the score to three destroyed and two damaged. This feat, a remarkable one in a Ventura, was recognised by a personal congratulatory signal from General R. J. Mitchell, the American Commander, Air, Northern Solomons.

Mitchell says to Ayson and crew quote for single handedly beggar up finish ** two Nips and three damaged stop A mighty well done and Merry Xmas. Unquote.

During the next two months No. 1 Squadron sent out aircraft almost daily on survivor searches and helped to rescue many Allied airmen. When it returned to New Zealand in mid-February its place was taken by No. 2 Bomber Reconnaissance Squadron (Squadron Leader A. B. Greenaway), ²⁹ which arrived at **Guadalcanal** on 15 February and sent a detachment to **Munda** on the 17th. On the 22nd the whole squadron moved to **Munda**, staying there until it went to **Bougainville** towards the end of April. Its chief task, which it shared with American squadrons at **Munda**, was to take part in daily searches for enemy shipping and submarines in the area between the northern **Solomons**, the eastern tip of **New Guinea**, and eastern **New Britain**.

The squadron had little to do directly with the attack on **Rabaul**.

Searching for enemy shipping and survivors and bombing targets on **Choiseul**, **Bougainville**, and **New Ireland** were its main concern. It made one raid, however, of great importance.

Near Adler Bay, on the west coast of the Gazelle Peninsula in **New Britain**, the Japanese were thought to have a radar station that gave warning of the **Rabaul** raids. The task of finding and destroying it was given to two aircraft captained by Flight Lieutenant B. E. Oliver³⁰ and Flight Lieutenant C. A. Fountaine.³¹ They left **Munda** at half past seven in the morning on 29 February,

* Airfield control tower.

** 'Beggar up finish': pidgin English in the **Solomons** for *kill, wipe out*.

refuelled at **Bougainville**, and took off for the coast of **New Britain**. Making landfall just north of Adler Bay, they turned south and flew low over the tree-tops in search of their target. Fountaine, in the second aircraft, was the first to spot the radar station, which was in a clearing on a low, bush-covered headland at the south end of the bay. He called Oliver on his radio telephone, turned out to sea, and made a run over the station with his front guns firing. He dropped a bomb on the station, and then, making a left-hand turn, came in again, dropping two bombs that exploded on the cliff face just above the target. The first run had taken the enemy completely by surprise, but the defences were in action now and the aircraft was hit by machine-gun bullets.

Oliver, meanwhile, had joined in the attack. Guided by the smoke from Fountaine's bombs, he made three runs, dropping six bombs in the target area. Then Fountaine dropped his last three bombs in a stick. As the aircraft turned home clouds of smoke covered the radar station.

Dive bombers were to have finished the job the next day, but the weather was unsuitable. On 2 March twelve Dauntlesses and six

Avengers set out for Adler Bay. Oliver, who was acting as a path-finder, got there ten minutes before the main force and filled in the time by making two attacks on his own. He dropped two bombs in the target area, one on some huts on the beach below it, and two in the sea. The dive bombers then came in; after their attack Oliver returned to observe the results and drop his last bomb. It just missed the radar screen, which was still standing among the debris. He returned next day with Squadron Leader Greenaway and they strafed and bombed what was left of the radar station until it was destroyed beyond all doubt.

From then on our aircraft were able to approach Rabaul in far greater secrecy, and on 5 March a force of American destroyers steamed undetected up St. George's Channel and shelled Simpson Harbour. This, coming after a long series of attacks from the air, convinced the Japanese that a full-scale invasion was imminent. In Rabaul there was chaos and panic.

Had the Allies attacked then they might have scored a cheap victory. Enemy morale was low, a large quantity of stores had been destroyed by bombing, and there was only one division in the line—the 38th. The troops in reserve had just retreated from western New Britain and were disorganised and in no condition to fight well.

FIGHTER BOMBERS

TOWARDS the end of February the Japanese withdrew nearly all their remaining aircraft from the **Rabaul** area, and by early March it was clear that heavy fighter cover was no longer needed for bombing attacks. The **RNZAF** fighters flew their last mission as bomber escorts on the 6th of the month, and three days later American bombers made their first unescorted attack. From then on a large number of fighters, both New Zealand and American, were free for other jobs, and with this in view many of them had been fitted with bomb-racks and their pilots trained in dive-bombing.

The first attack on **Rabaul** by New Zealand fighter-bombers took place on 7 March, when twenty aircraft from Nos. 14 and 18 Squadrons, led by Wing Commander C. W. K. Nicholls,³² attacked the town. They left **Torokina** at seven in the morning, each carrying a 500-pound bomb under the fuselage, where on former **Rabaul** missions they had carried long-range fuel tanks.

Since the previous day a staging area had been available to Allied aircraft to the north of **Bougainville**, almost half-way between **Torokina** and **Rabaul**. This was on **Green Island**, captured by American and New Zealand troops in mid-February. The formation refuelled there, and soon after eleven the aircraft approached **Rabaul** at 16,000 feet. They dived, released their bombs at between 12,000 and 8000 feet, and left the target smoking fiercely. Neither enemy fighters nor flak had troubled them.

From then on **RNZAF** fighter-bombers carried out strikes almost daily until the end of the war. At first 500-pound general purpose bombs were used, but later it was found that 1000-pounders could be carried safely by fighters. A bomb used extensively against supply dumps was the 500-pound incendiary cluster, which consisted of 126 four-pound incendiaries. These scattered after release and caused widespread fires. Sometimes, when the supply of orthodox bombs was short, depth charges were used.

During March Torokina was under Japanese shellfire for some days and aircraft had to spend the night either at [Green Island](#) or [Ondonga](#), but this did not mean a respite for [Rabaul](#), and by the 10th of the month the town was so badly knocked about that the fighter-bombers were able to give most of their attention to supply dumps, notably those near Vunapope and Rataval, to which the Japanese had dispersed the bulk of their stores, hiding them in coconut plantations. In an attempt to counter these attacks, the enemy moved his anti-aircraft batteries from the airfields to the supply dumps, and at times, particularly at Vunapope, the attackers met intense fire; but the raids were kept up for several weeks and by then the dumps were almost completely destroyed.

Towards the end of March RNZAF dive bombers joined in the attack on the Gazelle Peninsula, making their first raid on the 27th, when six Dauntlesses of No. 25 Squadron, led by Flight Lieutenant J. W. Edwards,³³ accompanied two American squadrons in a strike against an ammunition dump and supply area near Talili Bay. The aircraft dived from 10,000 feet to 1500 feet before releasing their bombs, and then strafed the target with machine-gun fire. The whole area was pitted by bombs, which caused large fires and explosions.

From the end of March until nearly the end of May, Dauntlesses and Avengers of Nos. 25 and 30 Squadrons took part almost daily in dive-bombing raids against supply areas, airfields, and anti-aircraft positions around [Rabaul](#).

Up to the last week of April the fighter-bombers attacked first the town of [Rabaul](#) and then the supply areas in the Gazelle Peninsula. Then they returned to the airfields which the Japanese had succeeded in patching up.

To discover whether an airfield could be knocked out by fighter-bombers alone, a force of twelve Lightnings, twenty-four Airacobras, and twenty-four New Zealand Kittyhawks, the last led by Wing Commander Nicholls, attacked the strip at Tobera on 23 April. Wing Commander

Nicholls said later that eighteen of the Kittyhawk's 500-pound bombs landed on the runway. Afterwards fighter-bombers regularly attacked the rest of the **Rabaul** airfields, keeping them out of commission so effectively that from mid-February until the end of the war only an occasional aircraft was able to operate from the bomb-pitted runways.

To sum up, the results of the air assault on **Rabaul** were as follows: By the end of February no vessel larger than a barge could use Simpson Harbour, which had once held some 300,000 tons of shipping and sheltered important units of the Japanese navy; on **Rabaul's** five airfields, at one time **Japan's** strongest air base south of the Equator, not a single serviceable aircraft remained; **Rabaul** as a town had ceased to exist, and outdoor supply and ammunition dumps had been hit so often that there was hardly an important target left on the Gazelle Peninsula.

The RNZAF played a comparatively small part in all this, but in the period 17 December 1943– 15 August 1945, from the start of the main assault to VJ Day, New Zealand pilots dropped on **Rabaul** alone 2068 tons of bombs.

* * *

APPENDIX

The following New Zealand squadrons took part in the assault on **Rabaul** between 17 December 1943 and 2 June 1944. The dates given are those of their first and last missions on each tour:

FIGHTER SQUADRONS

No. 14 Squadron 17 Dec 1943
No. 16 Squadron 17 Dec 1943 — 25 Dec 1943
No. 17 Squadron 19 Dec 1943 — 21 Jan 1944
No. 15 Squadron 7 Jan 1944 — 11 Feb 1944
No. 18 Squadron 27 Jan 1944 — 11 Mar 1944
No. 14 Squadron 12 Feb 1944 — 26 Mar 1944
No. 19 Squadron 12 Mar 1944 — 20 Apr 1944

No. 16 Squadron 28 Mar 1944 — 12 May 1944

No. 17 Squadron 23 Apr 1944 — 2 Jun 1944

BOMBER RECONNAISSANCE

No. 1 Squadron 23 Dec 1943 — 1 Feb 1944

No. 2 Squadron 29 Feb 1944 — 4 Apr 1944

DIVE BOMBER

No. 25 Squadron 27 Mar 1944 — 17 May 1944

No. 30 Squadron 28 Mar 1944 — 22 May 1944

FLYING BOAT

No. 6 Squadron 11 Feb 1944 — 31 Mar 1944

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

¹ Wing Commander J. H. ARKWRIGHT, DFC; farmer; **United Kingdom; born Marton, 1920.**

² Wing Commander S. G. QUILL, DFC; **RNZAF, Wellington; born **Porirua**, 12 Oct 1919.**

³ Wing Commander T. O. FREEMAN, DSO, DFC and bar; **Royal Air Force; born Lawrence, 1916; killed on air operations, 17 Dec 1943.**

⁴ Flying Officer A. S. MILLS; clerk; Dunedin; born **Invercargill, 20 Dec 1923.**

⁵ Flying Officer M. E. DARK; draughtsman; born Sydenham, England, 1921; killed on air operations, 24 Dec 1943.

⁶ Pilot Officer E. C. LAURIE, DFM; warehouseman; born **Auckland, 1923; killed on air operations, 30 Apr 1944.**

⁷ Squadron Leader M. T. VANDERPUMP, DFC, United States DFC; farmer; Hastings; born **Auckland, 14 May 1920.**

⁸ Flight Lieutenant J. O. MACFARLANE; architect; born **Auckland, 1920; killed on air operations, 17 Dec 1943.**

⁹ Squadron Leader P. S. GREEN, DFC; clerk; **Wellington; born Kawakawa,**

Auckland, 15 Dec 1919.

- ¹⁰ Flight Lieutenant H. J. MEHARRY; traveller; born Reefton, 1917; killed on air operations, 5 Aug 1944.**
- ¹¹ Wing Commander P. G. H. NEWTON, DFC, m.i.d.; engineering draughtsman; **Christchurch**; born **Christchurch**, 29 Sep 1917; appointed to short service commission in **RNZAF**, April 1939; Director of Operations, Air Department, August 1945—January 1946.**
- ¹² Squadron Leader J. H. MILLS, m.i.d.; bank clerk; **Auckland**; born **Dunedin**, 1919.**
- ¹³ Flying Officer D. A. WILLIAMS; cutter; **Auckland**; born **Auckland**, 25 Jan 1920.**
- ¹⁴ Flying Officer K. W. STARNES; school teacher; born **Motueka**, 1919; killed on air operations, 18 Sep 1944.**
- ¹⁵ Flight Lieutenant A. W. BUCHANAN; farmer; born **New Plymouth**, 1911; killed on air operations, 24 Dec 1943.**
- ¹⁶ Flight Lieutenant P. S. WORSP; law clerk; born **Auckland**, 1916; killed on air operations, 24 Dec 1943.**
- ¹⁷ Flying Officer D. B. Page; secretary, Wellington Stock Exchange; born **London**, 1912; killed on air operations, 24 Dec 1943.**
- ¹⁸ Sergeant R. H. COVIC; clerk; born **Gisborne**, 22 Jan 1924; killed on air operations, 24 Dec 1943.**
- ¹⁹ Squadron Leader C. R. BUSH, DFC; assurance agent; RNZAF Station, **Ohakea**; born **Wellington**, 7 Feb 1918; killed in aircraft accident in New Zealand, 30 Nov 1948.**
- ²⁰ Squadron Leader A. G. S. GEORGE, DFC; shipping clerk; **Auckland**; born **Takapau**, **Auckland**, 24 Nov 1922.**
- ²¹ Flying Officer A. B. SLADEN; warehouseman; born **Motueka**, 12 Oct**

1920; killed on air operations, 9 Jan 1944.

²² Flying Officer D. L. JONES; electrical engineer; born **Christchurch**, 12 Feb 1921; killed on air operations, 9 Jan 1944.

²³ Wing Commander H. C. WALKER, AFC, US Legion of Merit; airline pilot; Union Airways, **Palmerston North**; born Edinburgh, 15 Mar 1908; competed in Melbourne Centennial Air Race, 1934.

²⁴ Flight Lieutenant D. F. Ayson, DFC; linotype operator; **Palmerston North**; born **Mosgiel**, 9 Apr 1915.

²⁵ Flying Officer R. J. ALFORD; farmhand; **Cambridge**; born **Auckland**, 1922.

²⁶ Warrant Officer G. E. HANNAH, DFM; boot repairer; **Invercargill**; born **Invercargill**, 7 Oct 1913.

²⁷ Flying Officer S. P. Aldridge; engineer and farmer; born **Te Kuiti**, 16 Jun 1920; killed on air operations, 20 Aug 1944.

²⁸ Flying Officer W. N. WILLIAMS, DFC, DFM; hairdresser; **Christchurch**; born Dunedin, 23 Nov 1913.

²⁹ Wing Commander A. B. GREENAWAY; **Royal Air Force**; RNZAF Station, **Wigram, Christchurch**; born Toowoomba, **Australia**, 13 May 1911.

³⁰ Squadron Leader B. E. OLIVER, m.i.d.; sheep farmer; Whitehall, **Cambridge**; born **Hamilton**, 8 Feb 1912.

³¹ Flight Lieutenant C. A. FOUNTAINE, DFC; farmer; **Kumeroa, Woodville**; born Frankton Junction, 24 Nov 1918.

³² Group Captain C. W. K. NICHOLLS, DSO; **Royal Air Force**; **Sheffield**, England; born Palmerston North, 1913.

³³ Flight Lieutenant J. W. EDWARDS; school teacher; born **Auckland**, 1915; killed on air operations, 10 May 1944.

The occupations given in each case are those on enlistment. The ranks are those held on discharge from the service or at the date of death; where a man is still serving the rank given is that held at the beginning of 1948.

* * *

Acknowledgments

THIS NARRATIVE is based on New Zealand and American intelligence reports, on pilots' combat reports, and on the operational records of the squadrons concerned.

The maps are by L. D. McCormick ([page 4](#)) and E. Mervyn Taylor ([page 26](#)), and the silhouettes on [pages 5, 16, and 17](#) are from aircraft recognition training manuals.

With the exception of the group at the top of [page 14](#), all the photographs are from the [RNZAF](#) official collection. Photographers' names are stated where they are known:

Inside Cover, [pages 22, 23, and 30 \(bottom\)](#) D. H. Vahry

[pages 10, 12 \(top\), and 13](#), L. White

[pages 11 and 13 \(top\)](#) H. A. C. Davy

[pages 14 \(bottom\), 16 \(bottom\), 17 \(bottom\), 18, 19, and 21 \(top\)](#)

C. Stewart

[page 21 \(bottom\)](#) C. T. Cave

[page 24 \(top\)](#) T. W. Ewart

THE AUTHOR: Squadron Leader J. M. S. Ross is Historical Records Officer at RNZAF Headquarters, [Wellington](#). He graduated with Honours in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics at [Oxford University](#) in 1935, and has served in the [RNZAF](#) since 1939.

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NEW ZEALAND IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR
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THE ASSAULT ON RABAUL

THE ASSAULT ON RABAUL
OPERATION BY THE NEW ZEALAND ARMY
AND THE ALLIED AIR FORCE
IN THE NEW GUINEA CAMPAIGN
1942-1943



THE ASSAULT ON RABAUL

*Operation by the New Zealand Army and the Allied Air Force
in the New Guinea Campaign
1942-1943*

by

J. K. S. BOSS

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT
WASHINGTON, D.C.

THE HISTORY BRANCH
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, WASHINGTON, D.C.
HISTORICAL RESEARCH DIVISION
1985

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[FRONTISPIECE]



Rabaul township, 1945

Rabaul township, 1945

COVER PHOTOGRAPH **Ventura approaching Rabaul**

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[TITLE PAGE]

THE ASSAULT ON RABAU

Operations by the Royal New Zealand Air Force

December 1943 — May 1944

J. M. S. ROSS

WAR HISTORY BRANCH

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

1949

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[EDITORPAGE]

IT IS THE INTENTION *of this series to present aspects of New Zealand's part in the Second World War which will not receive detailed treatment in the campaign volumes and which are considered either worthy of special notice or typical of many phases of our war experience. The series is illustrated with material which would otherwise seldom see publication. It will also contain short accounts of operations which will be dealt with in detail in the appropriate volumes.*

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Major-General EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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[UNTITLED]

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EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

FIGHTER SQUADRONS

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RABAU, on the north-east tip of **New Britain**, was captured by the Japanese on 23 January 1942. Its harbour and port, protected from behind by jungle-covered mountains, made it an ideal naval and air base for their campaign in the south and south-west **Pacific**; they lost no time in fortifying it, building five airfields nearby, and installing one of the heaviest concentrations of anti-aircraft guns in the world.

From Rabaul they occupied **New Guinea** and the **Solomons**, but any plan to capture Port Moresby and **New Caledonia** and to attack the east coast of **Australia** was frustrated by the Coral Sea battle in May 1942 and the American landing at **Guadalcanal** three months later. **Rabaul**, though, was still a menace to the Allies, and its destruction as a naval and air base was one of the chief objects of their South Pacific campaign.

When the main Allied attack started in December 1943 the Japanese were estimated to have two hundred combat aircraft in **New Britain** and ninety in the **New Ireland** area, against which the Allies had 531 fighters and bombers in operational condition in the **Solomons** area. The Royal New Zealand Air Force had two fighter squadrons stationed at **Ondonga** in **New Georgia**— Nos. 14 and 15 * led respectively by Squadron Leaders J. H. Arkwright ¹ and S. G. Quill. ² They were known as the New Zealand Fighter Wing and were commanded by Wing Commander T. O. Freeman. ³ Both squadrons were on their second tour of duty in the **Pacific** and had seen action over **Guadalcanal** earlier in the year. Between them they had destroyed thirty-one Japanese aircraft.

The first major air operation from the **Solomons** against **Rabaul** took place on 17 December, when a fighter sweep of eighty aircraft— American Corsairs and Hellcats and twenty-four Kittyhawks from the two New Zealand squadrons—left **Ondonga** at 5.30 in the morning under Wing Commander Freeman. They flew first to the **Torokina** airstrip at **Empress Augusta Bay** to refuel, and there the time-table was interrupted by the emergency landing of two American aircraft. As a result the

formation was split into two groups, the first, led by Freeman, getting away at nine o'clock, and the second, led by Quill, twenty minutes later.

The New Zealanders flew in sections of four, and at twenty minutes past ten the two sections in the lead, Freeman's and Arkwright's, crossed the coast of **New Britain** over Kabanga Bay, twenty miles south-east of **Rabaul**, at 20,000 feet. By now there were only two aircraft in the third section, one having turned home with oxygen trouble and another with a faulty generator.

As the pilots circled above the target they knew they had taken the enemy by surprise, for the anti-aircraft batteries did not open fire at once and there were no Japanese fighters in the air, though dust on the airfields showed where they had taken off. The weather, except for a layer of wispy cloud at 21,000 feet, was clear, and aircraft could be seen lined up on the runways.

* See [appendix](#) for a list of the New Zealand squadrons that took part in the assault on **Rabaul** between 17 December 1943 and 2 June 1944.



While the formation was making its third circuit, four Zekes * dived from the cloud on the two aircraft of the third section, hitting one in the starboard wing with cannon shell. Arkwright at once led his section in a sharp right turn to come to the rescue, but he turned too tightly

and went into a spin. So did his No. 2. ** The rest of the section followed them down to protect them, but not before Sergeant A. S. Mills ⁴ had fired a short burst at a Zeke and had seen it break in half.

Arkwright climbed up again and was joined by his section, except for Mills, who, with a Zeke on his tail, was weaving with a Kittyhawk piloted by Flying Officer M. E. Dark. ⁵ After re-forming,

* The Zeke was an improved model of the Zero, a Japanese fighter aircraft.

** The RNZAF fighter aircraft flew in pairs, or in sections of two pairs, for protection, the leading aircraft being known as No. I, the second as No. 2. When likely to meet enemy fighters, each aircraft in a pair, or each pair in a section, zigzagged constantly, crossing over or under its opposite number so that between them the pilots could watch the whole sky. This was called 'weaving'.



ZEKE



KITTYHAWK



TONY

the section tried twice to join aircraft that could be seen fighting over **Rabaul**, but it was attacked by Zekes and forced to turn home, the Japanese making a running fight of it for forty miles out to sea.

The first section, meanwhile, was attacking aircraft that had climbed from the **Rabaul** airfields. Freeman and his No. 2, Flight Sergeant E. C. Laurie, ⁶ dived on eight or nine Zekes above Praed Point, shooting down one each, but Laurie's Kittyhawk was hit by cannon shell in the port wing while he was pulling out of his dive to look for Freeman, and he was forced to turn home. Later he joined Dark, who had attacked the Zeke on Mills's tail and then a dive bomber, and together they went to the assistance of a lone Kittyhawk in trouble with seven or eight

Zekes and trailing smoke or glycol. This proved to be Freeman's aircraft. Together the three Kittyhawks shook off the enemy and flew to the coast of **New Ireland**, where Freeman began to circle a valley with the plain intention of making a forced landing. The other aircraft kept guard as long as they could, but Laurie was attacked by a Zeke and Dark had to chase it away. When they returned to the valley there was no sign of Freeman.

The rest of the section—Flight Lieutenant M. T. Vanderpump ⁷ and his No. 2, Flight Lieutenant J. O. MacFarlane ⁸—had dived on eight Zekes that were weaving above shipping in the harbour. Vanderpump shot down an aircraft over Talili Bay, then chased a Zeke that was attacking his No. 2 and shot it down in the bush at the foot of Mt. Towanumbatir, just north of **Rabaul**. Directly afterwards he was attacked by a number of Zekes and Tonys * but escaped by diving over **Rabaul** through an intense barrage of light anti-aircraft fire. MacFarlane, though, was shot down.

Of the second formation, which had left **Torokina** twenty minutes after the first, only the third section, led by Flight Lieutenant P. S. Green, ⁹ saw action. Flying at 16,000 feet, with four American Corsairs 5000 feet above them as top cover, they met fifteen Zekes over Credner Island in St. George's Channel, and when these seemed unwilling to come to grips Green manoeuvred his section to allow the Corsairs to get at them. They scattered at once, three of them, followed by the Kittyhawks, diving to sea-level. Flying Officer H. J. Meharry ¹⁰ chose one and opened fire at 700 yards, closing to 300. Smoke came from the Zeke's port wing root and flame from its fuselage. Then it rolled on its back and dived into the sea. The other two escaped inland, skimming the tree-tops.

That gave the New Zealanders a score of five aircraft out of nine shot down at a total cost to the whole sweep of two RNZAF Kittyhawks, but they had lost in Freeman a leader of outstanding quality. The lesson of the operation was that Allied aircraft could attack successfully the most strongly defended enemy base in the South Pacific.

* **Single-seater Japanese fighters.**

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

PROTECTING THE BOMBERS

PROTECTING THE BOMBERS

AS THEIR Kittyhawks could not operate at great heights, the usual task of the New Zealand pilots in the bombing strikes against Rabaul was to provide close cover for the American bombers. Slightly above the close cover flew a low cover of Hellcats, and above them a medium cover of Corsairs, with a top cover of P38 Lightnings or Corsairs flying at about 25,000 feet. The close cover—the Kittyhawks—had to stay with the bombers all the time to protect them from any aircraft that might dive through the higher covers. It was a role that called for much flying discipline, as often it meant missing the chance of a fight.

The kind of discipline required is well illustrated by this set of rules drawn up about this time by the commanding officer of one of the New Zealand squadrons:

Keep both pairs of eyes open, the pair in your head and the pair in your back, and remember the sun.

Work as a team and be a little more interested in the safety of the other pilots in the division. They in turn will reciprocate, the whole bringing about a better understanding of mutual support.

Keep your eye on your division leader and follow him implicitly. He knows what he is doing. That is why he is a leader.

Never straggle or be lured away from the bombers. If you are left behind catch up immediately and then never fly straight and level for more than five seconds. If necessary weave with someone—anyone.

Keep radio silence. If it is important, tell your leader, slowly, concisely and quietly. Then stop talking.

Never get the idea that the fight is over, even on the way home. Don't get the idea either that the fight doesn't start until you are over the target.

Don't do the block. * Think quickly, decide immediately, and act simultaneously.

Finally and once again never, never, NEVER straggle.

This high standard of flying discipline was demanded of our pilots because their Kittyhawks were inferior in performance to the original Zeros, except in diving, and could outfight the Zekes only through brilliant teamwork.

The sweep of 17 December was to have been followed the next day by a bomber attack, but this was abandoned because of bad flying conditions. On the 19th, however, a strike was made by American B24 Liberators from **Guadalcanal, and for this the RNZAF Wing provided part of the escort. No. 16 Squadron, led this time by Vanderpump, sent twelve aircraft, and No. 17, led by Squadron Leader P. G. H. Newton,¹¹ another twelve. The latter had arrived at **Ondonga** to relieve No. 14 Squadron, which had completed its second tour of duty and was due to return to New Zealand.**

The Kittyhawks took off from **Ondonga at 6 a.m., flew to **Torokina** to refuel, and met the bombers over **Bougainville** at 11.30 a.m., setting course for **Rabaul**. Instead of forty-eight bombers only nineteen had arrived at the assembly point, so there was some difficulty in arranging the**

*** Get flustered.**

formations. Two more bombers turned back with engine trouble, and the rest set off finally in groups of seven, six, and four, with Newton's squadron covering the first group, and Vanderpump's the other two. On the way to the target, while the bombers were flying at 20,500 feet, several New Zealanders had to turn back because their Kittyhawks could not maintain the height. Among them was Vanderpump.

Anti-aircraft fire was met over **Rabaul**, but it did no serious damage, and no enemy fighters appeared until the Liberators had dropped their bombs and were drawing away from the target. Then four Zekes dived on the rear formation above which Flight Lieutenant J. H. Mills ¹² (No. 17 Squadron) was weaving with his No. 2, Flight Sergeant D. A. Williams. ¹³ When the New Zealanders turned towards them two of the Zekes broke away at once, but the other two continued diving and levelled out 2000 feet below the bombers. Mills followed them, giving two bursts from his gun and hitting one Zeke in the fuselage. It escaped by making a tight turn, only to run into the fire of Williams, who was following his leader down. Hit by two more bursts, the enemy tightened his turn still more, then rolled over on his back and dived to the ground.

During the rest of December bad weather interfered with operations, but on Christmas Eve the New Zealand squadrons, led by Arkwright and Newton, carried out a fighter sweep over **Rabaul** with twenty-four American Hellcats. The sweep approached the target in tiers, with the Kittyhawks forming the two lowest.

When it was about ten miles north-east of the town, forty or more Japanese fighters climbed to intercept it, and at once the New Zealand squadrons, each choosing a group of the enemy, dived to the attack. Soon furious dog-fights were taking place at heights from 18,000 feet to sea-level, with more fighters joining in all the time. Though the Japanese aircraft were better than the Kittyhawks at all altitudes in this kind of combat the New Zealanders always engaged them. They were forced to, for had they dived to safety after striking the first blow those following would have been at the mercy of the enemy. However, the Kittyhawks gave a good account of themselves in these dog-fights, damaging many Zekes and sometimes making a kill.

This particular action is described from one man's point of view by Squadron Leader Newton:

On the way in [to the target] we could see clouds of dust rising off the Tobera strip. When we were about five miles south-east of Praed

Point two groups of 'bandits', with more than twenty aircraft in each, were seen climbing up on our port side. The further group was a little higher than the nearer group. Squadron Leader Arkwright led No. 16 Squadron down on the nearer group, and I went down on the further group, both of us saying on the R/T * that we were going to attack.

I picked a Zeke near the front of the very loose formation and opened fire at 300 yards in a stern quarter attack, continuing firing as I followed the Zeke round in a turn until I was dead astern. The Zeke exploded at the wing roots and started to burn, with bits of the aircraft flying off. He tumbled over and went down in flames. I saw many aircraft shot down by the Squadron in this initial attack. I pulled round to the left, looking for another target. The sky was full of P40s and bandits milling round. I saw a Zeke on my left at the same level doing a left-hand turn. I turned, closing in astern, and fired a one-second burst at 250-300 yards. He did a complete flick roll to the left and when he pulled up I was still astern at 200 yards. I fired a 2-3 second burst and got hits all round the fuselage. He fell off in a lazy roll to the right and went straight down, apparently out of control.

*** Radio telephone**

I then found another Zeke milling round in the sky where about twelve P40s were mixing with a mass of Zekes. We were now down to about 12,000 feet. I turned in towards him and as he started a gentle turn to the left, I closed right in to 300 yards astern and fired a short burst. He flick-rolled to the left and as he straightened up I fired a long burst from dead astern. He fell away in a lazy roll to the right and then went down in a vertical dive. I rolled behind him and fired short bursts as he came in my sights. I observed my tracer going into the fuselage. I broke away at low level as I saw the Zeke go into the sea. As I was following him down I saw another Zeke go into the sea. This could have been the Zeke I had engaged previously and left in an uncontrolled dive.

I started to regain altitude and was set upon by six Zekes. I fired

several bursts haphazardly at them, but they hemmed me in and I broke violently down again. At full throttle I could not shake off some of the Zekes, so I went right down to the water and headed for the Duke of York Islands. I found another P40 in the same predicament, so we scissored together. As the Zeke broke away we turned back towards the fight. As I saw four P40s making out to the rally point (Cape St. George) and as the fight seemed to be working out from **Rabaul**, we again turned towards the rally point and were immediately pounced upon from above by six to eight Zekes. We used full power and overtook the P40s ahead of us. I saw a P40 low down over the water behind me in the direction of **Rabaul** so I turned back and started to scissor with him. After the first scissor he was shot down by a Zeke. His aircraft trailed smoke and went into the sea, ten miles north-west from Cape St. George. I went right down to the water at full throttle with two Zekes behind shooting. I skidded violently and most of the tracer (7.7 millimetre) went over my head into the sea. The Zekes broke off five miles from Cape St. George where I joined five or six P40s and set course for **Torokina**. We 'pancaked' there at 1300 hours.

In terms of enemy aircraft destroyed this was the most successful action of the war for the New Zealand Fighter Wing. Twelve Japanese aircraft were shot down, four more probably destroyed, and many damaged. Seven RNZAF aircraft were lost but two of the pilots were saved. Flying Officer K. W. Starnes ¹⁴ crashed just off **Torokina** beach and was rescued, while Flight Sergeant Williams, who had been shot down over St. George's Channel, was rescued after six hours in the water by an air-sea rescue aircraft and taken to **Torokina**, where he entered hospital suffering from slight gunshot wounds. The five pilots lost were Flight Lieutenants A. W. Buchanan ¹⁵ and P. S. Worsp, ¹⁶ Flying Officers M. E. Dark and D. B. Page, ¹⁷ and Sergeant R. H. Covic. ¹⁸

By comparison the next operation was almost uneventful. It took place on Christmas Day, when seventeen **RNZAF** aircraft acted as close cover for twenty-four Liberators. The formation was attacked over the target, and Kittyhawks of No. 16 Squadron fired a few bursts at Zeros

that penetrated the higher layers of fighters, but no definite results were observed. This was No. 16 Squadron's last **Rabaul** operation in the tour, and it returned to New Zealand at the end of the year after being relieved by No. 15.

During December 1944 Japanese fighters were shot down for the loss of twenty-three Allied fighters and one bomber. When the first heavy attack was launched against **Rabaul** on 17 December the **Torokina** airfield at **Empress Augusta Bay** had been in use for only twelve days, and at that time not more than a dozen fighters were based on it. The rest, like the Kittyhawks of the **RNZAF**, were based farther south and had to refuel at **Torokina** on the way to **Rabaul**.

During the first fortnight of January 1944, however, more aircraft were brought to **Torokina** and the tempo of the attack increased; so too did fighter opposition. For the first time American



TARGET RABAUL

This oblique view was taken on a bombing run in 1944

TARGET RABAUL

This oblique view was taken on a bombing run in 1945

IN NEW GEORGIA



SERVICING UNIT, ONDONGA

SERVICING UNIT, ONDONGA



AIRSTRIP, ONDONGA

AIRSTRIP, ONDONGA



SCORE BOARD, ONDONGA, November 1943

SCORE BOARD, ONDONGA, November 1943



FIGHTER PILOT
FIGHTER PILOT



BACK FROM RABAU—First report to Intelligence Officer
BACK FROM RABAU—First report to Intelligence Officer



KITTYHAWKS RETURN FROM RAID, TOROKINA
KITTYHAWKS RETURN FROM RAID, TOROKINA



KITTYHAWK LANDING, BOUGAINVILLE

KITTYHAWK LANDING, BOUGAINVILLE



No. 17 Squadron pilots who took part in the first RNZAF bomber escort mission over Rabaul. (page 6)
L. E. Bradley, I. A. Speedy, D. L. Jones, D. A. Williams, P. S. Worsp, J. H. Mills, P. G. H. Newton,
A. G. S. George, B. H. Thomson, R. H. Covic, J. Edwards, B. A. McHardie

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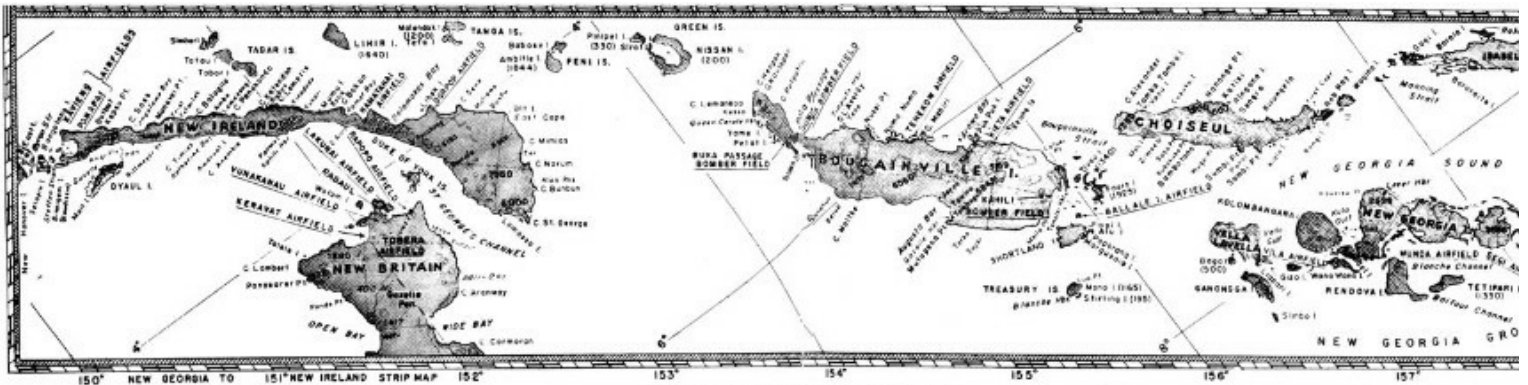


RE-ARMING A KITTYHAWK



AIRMEN'S MESS, ONDONGA

AIRMEN'S MESS, ONDONGA



STRIP MAP FROM BASE TO TARGET
used by RNZAF pilots in their attacks on Rabaul
—slightly reduced in size and redrawn



VENTURA



CATALINA



AVENGER



DAUNTLESS

STRIP MAP FROM BASE TO TARGET used by **RNZAF** pilots in their attacks on Rabaul — *slightly reduced in size and redrawn*

BRIEFING PILOTS BEFORE A STRIKE, 1944



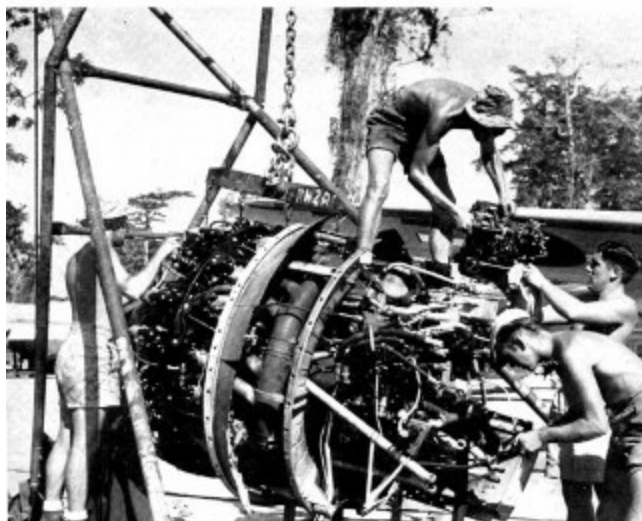
BRIEFING PILOTS BEFORE A STRIKE, 1944

BOMBS GONE



BOMBS GONE

OVERHAULING A VENTURA ENGINE, BOUGAINVILLE



OVERHAULING A VENTURA ENGINE, BOUGAINVILLE



RETURNING TO TOROKINA

RETURNING TO TOROKINA

SERVICING, BOUGAINVILLE



SERVICING, BOUGAINVILLE

BOMBER RECONNAISSANCE VENTURAS



BOMBING UP

BOMBING UP

EN ROUTE



EN ROUTE



BOMBING RABAU

BOMBING RABAU

OVER GREEN ISLAND



OVER GREEN ISLAND

GROUND STAFF CAMP ON BOUGAINVILLE, January 1944

The airmen's mess is in the background.



GROUND STAFF CAMP ON BOUGAINVILLE, January 1944

The airmen's mess is in the background

Photographs of Japanese defences taken in September 1945

SOME DEFENCES OF RABAUL



ENTRANCE TO A STORAGE CAVE

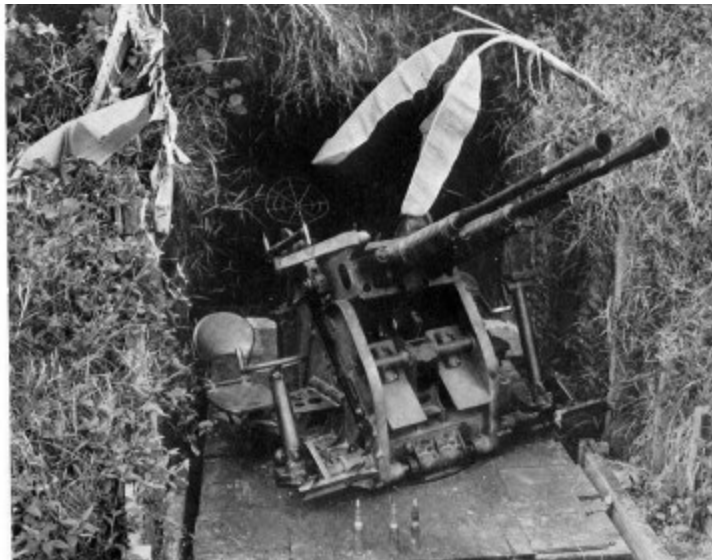
ENTRANCE TO A STORAGE CAVE



SEARCHLIGHT

SEARCHLIGHT

LIGHT
ANTI-AIRCRAFT
GUNS



LIGHT ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS



RESULTS



Wrecked barges in Simpson Harbour

Wrecked barges in Simpson Harbour

Damaged Japanese aircraft at Rabaul, September 1945



Damaged Japanese aircraft at Rabaul, September 1945

medium and light bombers were used, since fighter sweeps and high-level raids by heavy bombers, though very damaging to the enemy, could not by themselves achieve the main object of the campaign: the destruction of Japanese airfields.

The first light bomber attack was to have been made on 5 January by Dauntlesses and Avengers *, but they were turned back by bad weather. They tried again two days later and again failed. Fighters and flak were thick over the Rabaul area and the target—Tobera airfield—was hidden by cloud, so the bombers, after twice trying to bomb it, flew to Cape St. George in New Ireland and attacked targets there. Two Zekes had fallen to No. 17 Squadron, against which one Kittyhawk had been damaged by flak.

On the 9th the airfield was raided successfully. No. 15 Squadron, under Flight Lieutenant C. R. Bush, ¹⁹ escorted the Dauntlesses and met no air opposition except an attack by phosphorus bombs, which did no harm, ** but No. 17 Squadron, with the Avengers, met a score of Zekes, which dropped phosphorus bombs and then attacked with their guns. Squadron Leader Newton shot down two and Flight Lieutenant A. G. S. George ²⁰ one, but the squadron lost two fine pilots, Flying Officers A. B. Sladen ²¹ and D. L. Jones. ²² Both parachuted into the sea, and though dinghies were seen later by a patrolling Ventura they had disappeared before a rescue could be made.

The usual method of attack in this type of operation was for the bombers to fly towards the target at about 15,000 feet, make a shallow dive to 8000 feet, and then 'push over' into their bombing dive. In the attacks on airfields the Dauntlesses usually led, dropping their bombs on the anti-aircraft batteries from 2000 feet, pulling out of their dive at 1000 feet, and getting away as fast as possible. The Avengers followed close behind them, diving to 1000 feet before dropping their bombs on the runways and then pulling out at 800 to 900 feet. The fighters' task was to weave above the bombers as they approached the target. The top cover stayed above them always, but the close and the low covers

followed them down as they dived so that they could protect them while they reformed—the most critical moment of the raid.

Throughout January and February the Allies attacked **Rabaul** daily except when the weather was unfavourable. Unfavourable weather in the **New Britain** area usually meant that masses of towering cumulus cloud extended from about 40,000 feet above sea-level down to about 1000 feet, with heavy tropical rain underneath. When this happened the target was ‘weathered out’, and the striking force had to seek an alternative one, but even so the **RNZAF** fighters took part in thirteen successful strikes during January, acting on almost every occasion as close cover for American Mitchells^{***} or for Dauntlesses and Avengers.

The successes of the New Zealand pilots in the air were made possible by the servicing and maintenance staffs. When an aircraft returned from an operation it was literally pounced on by the ground crew. If it was undamaged and had developed no faults, it was refuelled, re-armed,

* Dauntless—a dive bomber. Avenger—a torpedo-bomber. Both were used extensively in the South Pacific as dive bombers.

** The dropping of phosphorus bombs from high-flying aircraft was a feature of the Japanese fighter defence at this time. They were supposed to burst among our aircraft, and although they never hit any they sometimes disorganised the squadrons. Their bursts, moreover, served as rallying points for the Japanese fighters, showing them where they were most needed.

*** Twin-engined medium bombers.

completely checked over, and ready to fly again in half an hour. If, as sometimes happened, it was badly shot about, the ground crew repaired it. If necessary they worked all through the night, often in pouring rain, in the uncertain light of electric torches, and interrupted

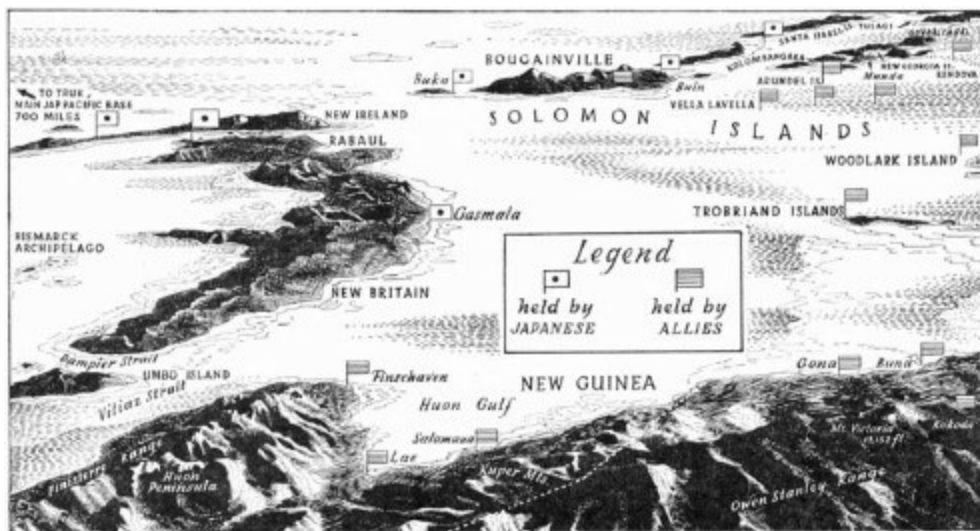
by enemy air raids, to have their planes serviceable again for operations at daylight next morning.

On 17 January the **RNZAF Fighter Wing** moved from **Ondonga** to **Torokina**, on **Bougainville**. They regretted leaving quarters in which they had managed to make themselves fairly comfortable, in spite of heat, torrential rain, and frequent air raids, but they were now within striking distance of **Rabaul** and did not have to leave early in the morning and return late at night after refuelling on the way.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1
BOMBER RECONNAISSANCE OPERATIONS

BOMBER RECONNAISSANCE OPERATIONS

SINCE THE START of the **Rabaul** offensive, No. 1 Bomber Reconnaissance Squadron of the **RNZAF**, led by Squadron Leader H. C. Walker, ²³ had been stationed at **Guadalcanal** with a detached flight at **Munda**. Its task was to supply aircraft to follow the striking forces to **New Britain** to spot and report the positions of pilots who had been shot down in the sea and, when possible, stay with them until a 'Dumbo' (an air-sea rescue Catalina) arrived on the scene. From



not to scale
—from an Army Education & Welfare Service bulletin

February until the end of March the rescuing was done by Catalinas of No. 6 Squadron, **RNZAF**, which had a detached flight in the Treasury Group for this work, and altogether they picked up twenty-eight survivors, New Zealand and American, from **Rabaul** strikes.

The **Venturas** * of No. 1 Squadron carried extra dinghies that could be dropped if necessary and they also carried bombs for use after they had finished their patrols. The first 'survivor patrol' was carried out by two **Venturas** from **Munda** on 23 December. They followed a force of **Liberators** bound for **Rabaul**, saw no survivors, but on their way home bombed Cape St. George in **New Ireland**. One was attacked by three **Zekes**, but, apart from a single hit from flak, both returned undamaged to **Munda**.

The next day Pilot Officer D. F. Ayson ²⁴ and Flying Officer R. J. Alford ²⁵ took off in Venturas on the same task. While over St. George's Channel, Alford saw an Allied pilot waving to him from a dinghy, but before he was able to signal the position he was attacked by three Zekes. He scored several hits, but his own aircraft was damaged before he was able to escape into cloud and signal the position of the airman in the dinghy.

Ayson, in the other aircraft, was cruising above the entrance to St. George's Channel. He saw Liberators pass overhead, and at 1.15 p.m. set course with them for **Torokina**. Five minutes later his turret gunner, Flight Sergeant G. E. Hannah, ²⁶ saw two Zekes immediately above him.

At the same moment (said Hannah in his report), I saw tracer off to starboard and then two Zekes coming straight in at seven or eight o'clock, * level, at our height. The next moment I saw two Zekes on the port side, flying level at about five o'clock and 900 yards out. I opened up on the two aircraft to starboard, and they crossed to the back of us, joining the other two on the port side. One Zeke broke away on the port side, and came in from about 900 yards at five o'clock, level with us, firing, and approaching to about 75 yards. I got a good five-second burst at him. He broke off and passed above us at about two o'clock.

At this stage the two Zekes that were above us had dropped to our level and came in, one at five o'clock and the other at six o'clock, firing as they came. I waited until they were at 400 yards before opening up. They broke off at about 350 yards and went up over our tail. I got a really long burst into the second one. I lost sight of him as another attack developed from four o'clock, level, coming to within 300 yards. I fired a burst and saw five or six tracers go into him. He turned straight over the top of us, and then started to lose height immediately. I saw him hit the water. There were still two Zekes chasing us, out about 500 yards on the port side and dead level, and two more on the starboard side at our height, one about 800 yards out and the other at 1000 yards. The two on the port side attacked, the first from four o'clock. I fired a

deflection shot, and saw the tracer go in along the fuselage behind the cockpit. He turned off immediately at about 600 yards.

Just then, an aircraft unidentified at the time, appeared at about three o'clock. He increased speed, got in front of us, and turned as if to make an attack from two o'clock.

I heard the warning, as what we now know to be a Corsair approached, and swung the turret round and got a burst away. While this was going on we were still being attacked from the rear. I swung round again, and managed to get a burst into one aircraft attacking at about

* Twin-engined medium bomber and reconnaissance aircraft, which had superseded the Hudson as standard equipment for the RNZAF Bomber Reconnaissance squadrons.

* This method of indicating direction by the different positions of the hour hand of the clock is used by both the Army and the [Air Force](#).

six o'clock, level, 600 yards out. He broke off and passed beneath us. He came into my view again at six o'clock, and as he appeared I got a full seven-seconds burst into him. I saw tracer hit the engine as he turned to starboard. He went up, turned half over to the right, and then went straight into the water and broke up.

While the attack was at its height, Flying Officer S. P. Aldridge,²⁷ the wireless operator-air gunner, who had been giving the pilot advice and directions over the 'intercom', was wounded, Warrant Officer W. N. Williams,²⁸ the navigator, taking his place at once. Meanwhile the aircraft was being hit repeatedly.

During one particularly violent attack, when I could hear shots hitting all over the aircraft, I went closer to the water and started skidding to the right (reported Pilot Officer Ayson). At this moment the rudder controls went slack. I was left without rudder control, and my

weaving was affected....

When I was told that the attack was over, I checked up on the crew and found W/O Williams was giving first aid to F/O Aldridge. I tested the undercarriage and flaps, and half an hour from base advised tower * that I had a wounded man on board who needed medical attention. I also asked for the runway to be cleared. I landed without rudders, fast, but with no trouble. My crew did a really wonderful job of work.

In Flight Sergeant Hannah's opinion the Japanese pilots had shown outstanding skill and determination, but had repeatedly exposed the bellies of their Zekes as they turned to break away. With side guns he could have done much more damage. Even so, two Zekes were listed as destroyed and three as damaged. Later evidence changed the score to three destroyed and two damaged. This feat, a remarkable one in a Ventura, was recognised by a personal congratulatory signal from General R. J. Mitchell, the American Commander, Air, Northern Solomons.

Mitchell says to Ayson and crew quote for single handedly beggar up finish ** two Nips and three damaged stop A mighty well done and Merry Xmas. Unquote.

During the next two months No. 1 Squadron sent out aircraft almost daily on survivor searches and helped to rescue many Allied airmen. When it returned to New Zealand in mid-February its place was taken by No. 2 Bomber Reconnaissance Squadron (Squadron Leader A. B. Greenaway), ²⁹ which arrived at **Guadalcanal** on 15 February and sent a detachment to **Munda** on the 17th. On the 22nd the whole squadron moved to **Munda**, staying there until it went to **Bougainville** towards the end of April. Its chief task, which it shared with American squadrons at **Munda**, was to take part in daily searches for enemy shipping and submarines in the area between the northern **Solomons**, the eastern tip of **New Guinea**, and eastern **New Britain**.

The squadron had little to do directly with the attack on **Rabaul**.

Searching for enemy shipping and survivors and bombing targets on **Choiseul**, **Bougainville**, and **New Ireland** were its main concern. It made one raid, however, of great importance.

Near Adler Bay, on the west coast of the Gazelle Peninsula in **New Britain**, the Japanese were thought to have a radar station that gave warning of the **Rabaul** raids. The task of finding and destroying it was given to two aircraft captained by Flight Lieutenant B. E. Oliver³⁰ and Flight Lieutenant C. A. Fountaine.³¹ They left **Munda** at half past seven in the morning on 29 February,

* Airfield control tower.

** 'Beggar up finish': pidgin English in the **Solomons** for *kill, wipe out*.

refuelled at **Bougainville**, and took off for the coast of **New Britain**. Making landfall just north of Adler Bay, they turned south and flew low over the tree-tops in search of their target. Fountaine, in the second aircraft, was the first to spot the radar station, which was in a clearing on a low, bush-covered headland at the south end of the bay. He called Oliver on his radio telephone, turned out to sea, and made a run over the station with his front guns firing. He dropped a bomb on the station, and then, making a left-hand turn, came in again, dropping two bombs that exploded on the cliff face just above the target. The first run had taken the enemy completely by surprise, but the defences were in action now and the aircraft was hit by machine-gun bullets.

Oliver, meanwhile, had joined in the attack. Guided by the smoke from Fountaine's bombs, he made three runs, dropping six bombs in the target area. Then Fountaine dropped his last three bombs in a stick. As the aircraft turned home clouds of smoke covered the radar station.

Dive bombers were to have finished the job the next day, but the weather was unsuitable. On 2 March twelve Dauntlesses and six

Avengers set out for Adler Bay. Oliver, who was acting as a path-finder, got there ten minutes before the main force and filled in the time by making two attacks on his own. He dropped two bombs in the target area, one on some huts on the beach below it, and two in the sea. The dive bombers then came in; after their attack Oliver returned to observe the results and drop his last bomb. It just missed the radar screen, which was still standing among the debris. He returned next day with Squadron Leader Greenaway and they strafed and bombed what was left of the radar station until it was destroyed beyond all doubt.

From then on our aircraft were able to approach Rabaul in far greater secrecy, and on 5 March a force of American destroyers steamed undetected up St. George's Channel and shelled Simpson Harbour. This, coming after a long series of attacks from the air, convinced the Japanese that a full-scale invasion was imminent. In Rabaul there was chaos and panic.

Had the Allies attacked then they might have scored a cheap victory. Enemy morale was low, a large quantity of stores had been destroyed by bombing, and there was only one division in the line—the 38th. The troops in reserve had just retreated from western New Britain and were disorganised and in no condition to fight well.

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FIGHTER BOMBERS

FIGHTER BOMBERS

TOWARDS the end of February the Japanese withdrew nearly all their remaining aircraft from the **Rabaul** area, and by early March it was clear that heavy fighter cover was no longer needed for bombing attacks. The **RNZAF** fighters flew their last mission as bomber escorts on the 6th of the month, and three days later American bombers made their first unescorted attack. From then on a large number of fighters, both New Zealand and American, were free for other jobs, and with this in view many of them had been fitted with bomb-racks and their pilots trained in dive-bombing.

The first attack on **Rabaul** by New Zealand fighter-bombers took place on 7 March, when twenty aircraft from Nos. 14 and 18 Squadrons, led by Wing Commander C. W. K. Nicholls,³² attacked the town. They left **Torokina** at seven in the morning, each carrying a 500-pound bomb under the fuselage, where on former **Rabaul** missions they had carried long-range fuel tanks.

Since the previous day a staging area had been available to Allied aircraft to the north of **Bougainville**, almost half-way between **Torokina** and **Rabaul**. This was on **Green Island**, captured by American and New Zealand troops in mid-February. The formation refuelled there, and soon after eleven the aircraft approached **Rabaul** at 16,000 feet. They dived, released their bombs at between 12,000 and 8000 feet, and left the target smoking fiercely. Neither enemy fighters nor flak had troubled them.

From then on **RNZAF** fighter-bombers carried out strikes almost daily until the end of the war. At first 500-pound general purpose bombs were used, but later it was found that 1000-pounders could be carried safely by fighters. A bomb used extensively against supply dumps was the 500-pound incendiary cluster, which consisted of 126 four-pound incendiaries. These scattered after release and caused widespread fires. Sometimes, when the supply of orthodox bombs was short, depth charges were used.

During March Torokina was under Japanese shellfire for some days and aircraft had to spend the night either at [Green Island](#) or [Ondonga](#), but this did not mean a respite for [Rabaul](#), and by the 10th of the month the town was so badly knocked about that the fighter-bombers were able to give most of their attention to supply dumps, notably those near Vunapope and Rataval, to which the Japanese had dispersed the bulk of their stores, hiding them in coconut plantations. In an attempt to counter these attacks, the enemy moved his anti-aircraft batteries from the airfields to the supply dumps, and at times, particularly at Vunapope, the attackers met intense fire; but the raids were kept up for several weeks and by then the dumps were almost completely destroyed.

Towards the end of March RNZAF dive bombers joined in the attack on the Gazelle Peninsula, making their first raid on the 27th, when six Dauntlesses of No. 25 Squadron, led by Flight Lieutenant J. W. Edwards,³³ accompanied two American squadrons in a strike against an ammunition dump and supply area near Talili Bay. The aircraft dived from 10,000 feet to 1500 feet before releasing their bombs, and then strafed the target with machine-gun fire. The whole area was pitted by bombs, which caused large fires and explosions.

From the end of March until nearly the end of May, Dauntlesses and Avengers of Nos. 25 and 30 Squadrons took part almost daily in dive-bombing raids against supply areas, airfields, and anti-aircraft positions around [Rabaul](#).

Up to the last week of April the fighter-bombers attacked first the town of [Rabaul](#) and then the supply areas in the Gazelle Peninsula. Then they returned to the airfields which the Japanese had succeeded in patching up.

To discover whether an airfield could be knocked out by fighter-bombers alone, a force of twelve Lightnings, twenty-four Airacobras, and twenty-four New Zealand Kittyhawks, the last led by Wing Commander Nicholls, attacked the strip at Tobera on 23 April. Wing Commander

Nicholls said later that eighteen of the Kittyhawk's 500-pound bombs landed on the runway. Afterwards fighter-bombers regularly attacked the rest of the Rabaul airfields, keeping them out of commission so effectively that from mid-February until the end of the war only an occasional aircraft was able to operate from the bomb-pitted runways.

To sum up, the results of the air assault on Rabaul were as follows: By the end of February no vessel larger than a barge could use Simpson Harbour, which had once held some 300,000 tons of shipping and sheltered important units of the Japanese navy; on Rabaul's five airfields, at one time Japan's strongest air base south of the Equator, not a single serviceable aircraft remained; Rabaul as a town had ceased to exist, and outdoor supply and ammunition dumps had been hit so often that there was hardly an important target left on the Gazelle Peninsula.

The RNZAF played a comparatively small part in all this, but in the period 17 December 1943– 15 August 1945, from the start of the main assault to VJ Day, New Zealand pilots dropped on Rabaul alone 2068 tons of bombs.

*** * ***

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

The following New Zealand squadrons took part in the assault on **Rabaul** between 17 December 1943 and 2 June 1944. The dates given are those of their first and last missions on each tour:

FIGHTER SQUADRONS

- No. 14 Squadron 17 Dec 1943
- No. 16 Squadron 17 Dec 1943 — 25 Dec 1943
- No. 17 Squadron 19 Dec 1943 — 21 Jan 1944
- No. 15 Squadron 7 Jan 1944 — 11 Feb 1944
- No. 18 Squadron 27 Jan 1944 — 11 Mar 1944
- No. 14 Squadron 12 Feb 1944 — 26 Mar 1944
- No. 19 Squadron 12 Mar 1944 — 20 Apr 1944
- No. 16 Squadron 28 Mar 1944 — 12 May 1944
- No. 17 Squadron 23 Apr 1944 — 2 Jun 1944

BOMBER RECONNAISSANCE

- No. 1 Squadron 23 Dec 1943 — 1 Feb 1944
- No. 2 Squadron 29 Feb 1944 — 4 Apr 1944

DIVE BOMBER

- No. 25 Squadron 27 Mar 1944 — 17 May 1944
- No. 30 Squadron 28 Mar 1944 — 22 May 1944

FLYING BOAT

- No. 6 Squadron 11 Feb 1944 — 31 Mar 1944

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

- ¹ **Wing Commander J. H. ARKWRIGHT, DFC; farmer; United Kingdom; born Marton, 1920.**
- ² **Wing Commander S. G. QUILL, DFC; RNZAF, Wellington; born Porirua, 12 Oct 1919.**
- ³ **Wing Commander T. O. FREEMAN, DSO, DFC and bar; Royal Air Force; born Lawrence, 1916; killed on air operations, 17 Dec 1943.**
- ⁴ **Flying Officer A. S. MILLS; clerk; Dunedin; born Invercargill, 20 Dec 1923.**
- ⁵ **Flying Officer M. E. DARK; draughtsman; born Sydenham, England, 1921; killed on air operations, 24 Dec 1943.**
- ⁶ **Pilot Officer E. C. LAURIE, DFM; warehouseman; born Auckland, 1923; killed on air operations, 30 Apr 1944.**
- ⁷ **Squadron Leader M. T. VANDERPUMP, DFC, United States DFC; farmer; Hastings; born Auckland, 14 May 1920.**
- ⁸ **Flight Lieutenant J. O. MACFARLANE; architect; born Auckland, 1920; killed on air operations, 17 Dec 1943.**
- ⁹ **Squadron Leader P. S. GREEN, DFC; clerk; Wellington; born Kawakawa, Auckland, 15 Dec 1919.**
- ¹⁰ **Flight Lieutenant H. J. MEHARRY; traveller; born Reefton, 1917; killed on air operations, 5 Aug 1944.**
- ¹¹ **Wing Commander P. G. H. NEWTON, DFC, m.i.d.; engineering draughtsman; Christchurch; born Christchurch, 29 Sep 1917; appointed**

to short service commission in **RNZAF**, April 1939; Director of Operations, Air Department, August 1945—January 1946.

¹² Squadron Leader J. H. **MILLS**, m.i.d.; bank clerk; **Auckland**; born **Dunedin**, 1919.

¹³ Flying Officer D. A. **WILLIAMS**; cutter; **Auckland**; born **Auckland**, 25 Jan 1920.

¹⁴ Flying Officer K. W. **STARNES**; school teacher; born **Motueka**, 1919; killed on air operations, 18 Sep 1944.

¹⁵ Flight Lieutenant A. W. **BUCHANAN**; farmer; born **New Plymouth**, 1911; killed on air operations, 24 Dec 1943.

¹⁶ Flight Lieutenant P. S. **WORSP**; law clerk; born **Auckland**, 1916; killed on air operations, 24 Dec 1943.

¹⁷ Flying Officer D. B. **Page**; secretary, Wellington Stock Exchange; born **London**, 1912; killed on air operations, 24 Dec 1943.

¹⁸ Sergeant R. H. **COVIC**; clerk; born **Gisborne**, 22 Jan 1924; killed on air operations, 24 Dec 1943.

¹⁹ Squadron Leader C. R. **BUSH**, DFC; assurance agent; RNZAF Station, **Ohakea**; born **Wellington**, 7 Feb 1918; killed in aircraft accident in New Zealand, 30 Nov 1948.

²⁰ Squadron Leader A. G. S. **GEORGE**, DFC; shipping clerk; **Auckland**; born **Takapau**, **Auckland**, 24 Nov 1922.

²¹ Flying Officer A. B. **SLADEN**; warehouseman; born **Motueka**, 12 Oct 1920; killed on air operations, 9 Jan 1944.

²² Flying Officer D. L. **JONES**; electrical engineer; born **Christchurch**, 12 Feb 1921; killed on air operations, 9 Jan 1944.

²³ Wing Commander H. C. **WALKER**, AFC, US Legion of Merit; airline pilot; Union Airways, **Palmerston North**; born **Edinburgh**, 15 Mar 1908;

competed in Melbourne Centennial Air Race, 1934.

²⁴ Flight Lieutenant D. F. Ayson, DFC; linotype operator; Palmerston North; born Mosgiel, 9 Apr 1915.

²⁵ Flying Officer R. J. ALFORD; farmhand; Cambridge; born Auckland, 1922.

²⁶ Warrant Officer G. E. HANNAH, DFM; boot repairer; Invercargill; born Invercargill, 7 Oct 1913.

²⁷ Flying Officer S. P. Aldridge; engineer and farmer; born Te Kuiti, 16 Jun 1920; killed on air operations, 20 Aug 1944.

²⁸ Flying Officer W. N. WILLIAMS, DFC, DFM; hairdresser; Christchurch; born Dunedin, 23 Nov 1913.

²⁹ Wing Commander A. B. GREENAWAY; Royal Air Force; RNZAF Station, Wigram, Christchurch; born Toowoomba, Australia, 13 May 1911.

³⁰ Squadron Leader B. E. OLIVER, m.i.d.; sheep farmer; Whitehall, Cambridge; born Hamilton, 8 Feb 1912.

³¹ Flight Lieutenant C. A. FOUNTAINE, DFC; farmer; Kumeroa, Woodville; born Frankton Junction, 24 Nov 1918.

³² Group Captain C. W. K. NICHOLLS, DSO; Royal Air Force; Sheffield, England; born Palmerston North, 1913.

³³ Flight Lieutenant J. W. EDWARDS; school teacher; born Auckland, 1915; killed on air operations, 10 May 1944.

The occupations given in each case are those on enlistment. The ranks are those held on discharge from the service or at the date of death; where a man is still serving the rank given is that held at the beginning of 1948.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Acknowledgments

THIS NARRATIVE *is based on New Zealand and American intelligence reports, on pilots' combat reports, and on the operational records of the squadrons concerned.*

The maps are by L. D. McCormick (**page 4**) and E. Mervyn Taylor (**page 26**), and the silhouettes on **pages 5, 16, and 17** are from aircraft recognition training manuals.

With the exception of the group at the top of **page 14**, all the photographs are from the **RNZAF** official collection. Photographers' names are stated where they are known:

Inside Cover, pages 22, 23, and 30 (bottom) D. H. Vahry

pages 10, 12 (top), and 13, L. White

pages 11 and 13 (top) H. A. C. Davy

**pages 14 (bottom), 16 (bottom), 17 (bottom), 18, 19, and 21 (top)
C. Stewart**

page 21 (bottom) C. T. Cave

page 24 (top) T. W. Ewart

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[BACKMATTER]

THE AUTHOR: Squadron Leader J. M. S. Ross is Historical Records Officer at RNZAF Headquarters, Wellington. He graduated with Honours in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics at Oxford University in 1935, and has served in the RNZAF since 1939.

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[BACKMATTER]

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LONG RANGE DESERT GROUP IN LIBYA, 1940-41

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LONG RANGE DESERT GROUP in Libya, 1940-41

By

R. L. KAY

WAR HISTORY BRANCH
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS
WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND
1941

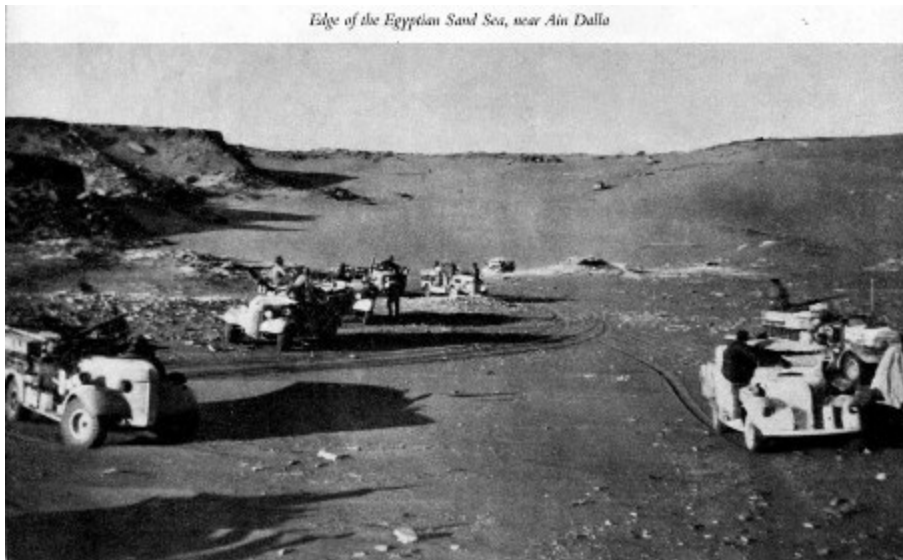
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[FRONTISPIECE]



On the way to Zouar—the Tibesti Mountains

On the way to Zouar—the Tibesti Mountains



Edge of the Egyptian Sand Sea, near Ain Dalla

Edge of the Egyptian Sand Sea, near Ain Dalla

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[TITLE PAGE]

LONG RANGE DESERT GROUP

in Libya, 1940–41

R. L. KAY

WAR HISTORY BRANCH

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

1949

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[EDITORPAGE]

IT IS THE INTENTION *of this series to present aspects of New Zealand's part in the Second World War which will not receive detailed treatment in the campaign volumes and which are considered either worthy of special notice or typical of many phases of our war experience. The series is illustrated with material which would otherwise seldom see publication.*

H. K. KIPPENBERGER

Major-General EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

NEW ZEALAND WAR HISTORIES

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THIS NARRATIVE is based on the war diaries and official documents of the LRDG, and on information supplied by several of the New Zealanders, including Lieutenant-Colonel D. G. Steele and Major L. B. Ballantyne, who served with the LRDG. The maps are by L. D. McCormick, and the photographs come from many collections, which are stated where they are known:

Army Film Photograph Unit Cover, page 9, page 10 (top), page 12 (top), page 13, page 15, page 18 (bottom), page 19, and page 24 (right and bottom) *F. W. Jopling* Inside Cover, page 11 (top), page 16 (centre), page 18 (top), page 20 (bottom), page 21 and page 22
J. L. D. Davis page 12 (bottom), page 14 and page 16 (bottom)
L. B. Ballantyne page 10 (bottom), page 16 (top), and page 23
Regia Aeronautica page 20 (top)
New Zealand Army Official page 24 (top left)

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EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

FORMATION OF LONG RANGE PATROLS

FORMATION OF LONG RANGE PATROLS

THE BATTLES of the North African campaigns of 1940–43 were fought along the shores of the **Mediterranean**. Large forces were prevented, by their dependence on supplies received by sea and along coastal roads and railways, from moving any great distance inland. The only troops to penetrate beyond the outer fringes of the **Libyan Desert** were small motor patrols and the garrisons of remote outposts. It was the function of the Long Range Patrols, which later became known as the **Long Range Desert Group**, to operate in the vast inner desert, one of the driest and most barren regions in the world. These patrols, small, well-armed parties travelling in unarmoured vehicles, were completely self-contained for independent action deep in enemy territory.

To appreciate the difficulties and the achievements of these patrols, it is necessary to understand the country in which they operated. The **Libyan Desert**, which covers western Egypt, north-western **Sudan**, and practically the whole of **Libya**, stretches a thousand miles southwards from the **Mediterranean Sea** and more than a thousand miles westwards from the **Nile Valley** to the hills of **Tunisia**. Plains and depressions, dotted in places by the remains of crumbling hills, extend from horizon to horizon. In the south-east the flat surface is broken by the abrupt escarpment of the **Gilf Kebir** plateau and the isolated mountains of **Uweinat**, **Kissu**, and **Archenu**; in the south-west the rocky ranges of **Tibesti**, reaching 10,000 feet, separate it from the **French Sahara** and **Equatorial Africa**. Huge areas are covered by seas of sand dunes.

Along the **Mediterranean** coast, where winter rains fall occasionally, there are small scattered strips of fertile land, widest in the hilly regions of **Cyrenaica** and **Tripolitania**; elsewhere, the scanty tufts of vegetation extend only twenty or thirty miles inland. In the inner desert no rains occur for ten or twenty years at a time. The arid wastes are relieved only where oases, hundreds of miles apart, are fed by artesian water. The inhabitants of **Libya**, who average one to the square mile, are gathered along the coast and at these oases.

In 1915, as in 1940, Egypt was threatened by invasion from the west. **Senussi** tribesmen, equipped and led by Germans and Turks, were twice defeated near Mersa Matruh (on Christmas Day 1915 and on 23 January 1916) by a British force which included the 1st Battalion of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade. The Light Car Patrols guarding the frontier and the inland oases during this campaign were the pioneers of the **Long Range Desert Group**, who, quarter of a century later, discovered the wheel tracks of their cars and rusted food tins left at their old camps.

Although official interest in the inner desert lapsed in 1918, exploration was continued in peacetime by a few enthusiasts, of whom Major R. A. Bagnold ¹ was the acknowledged leader. In the nineteen-thirties these private expeditions, encouraged by the Royal Geographical Society, traversed most of the desert between the **Mediterranean** and the northern **Sudan**.

When Italy declared war on 10 June 1940, the British in Egypt faced possible attack, not only from **Libya** but also from armies in **Eritrea** and **Abyssinia**. Communications between Egypt and the **Sudan** lay through the **Red Sea**, which might be made unusable by the Italian Navy, and along the Nile Valley, which was open to attack from the west. The Italian garrison based at the oasis of **Kufra**, 650 miles from the **Nile**, was known to possess aircraft and motorised units capable of desert operations. It was possible that this force might attack **Wadi Halfa** in an attempt to sever the Egypt- **Sudan** lifeline and that the Italians might push down into the Chad Province of French Equatorial Africa, through which ran the chain of airfields of the **West Africa- Middle East** route. It was essential to know whether the Italians in southern **Libya** were planning an offensive.

At Bagnold's suggestion, the Long Range Patrols were formed to collect information about the interior of **Libya**, harry the enemy's communications with **Kufra**, and keep in touch with the French outposts on the south-western border of **Libya**. New Zealanders, who had soon adapted themselves to their new environment in Egypt, were

selected for the three patrols. They were volunteers from the Divisional Cavalry, the 27th (Machine Gun) Battalion, and the 7th Anti-Tank Regiment, men who were used to an outdoor life and to handling vehicles.

Advantage was taken of the presence in the **Middle East** of several of the men who had explored the **Libyan Desert**. Major Bagnold was appointed commanding officer. Captain P. A. Clayton,² who had spent eighteen years in the Egyptian Survey Department, came from Tanganyika to command T patrol, and Captain E. C. Mitford³ from a British tank regiment to command W patrol. A New Zealander (Second-Lieutenant D. G. Steele⁴) commanded the third (R) patrol, which was intended to carry supplies. Until they had gained more experience in the desert, the New Zealanders were not expected to lead fighting patrols. The adjutant and quartermaster (Lieutenant L. B. Ballantyne⁵) and the medical officer (Lieutenant F. B. Edmundson⁶) were both New Zealanders; the intelligence officer was Lieutenant W. B. K. Shaw,⁷ who was borrowed from the Colonial Service in Palestine.

Vehicles were needed which could carry weapons and ammunition, petrol for 1100 miles, and rations and water to last each man three weeks. Major Bagnold decided to use 30-cwt. trucks, which were obtained from the Egyptian Army and from a motor firm in **Alexandria**. To make them desert-worthy, doors, windscreens, and hoods were removed, springs were strengthened, and gun-mountings, wireless, water containers and condensers for radiators were added.

Each patrol consisted of two officers and about thirty men, who travelled in a 15-cwt. pilot car and ten 30-cwt. trucks and were armed with ten Lewis machine guns, four Boys anti-tank rifles, one 37-millimetre Bofors anti-tank gun, pistols, and rifles. The Bofors gun was stripped from its carriage and mounted with traversing gear so that it could fire aft or broadside from a 30-cwt. truck with a strengthened chassis. Later the patrols were reduced in strength to one officer and fifteen to eighteen men in five or six trucks. The Lewis guns were replaced by Brownings and Vickers Ks, and the Boys and Bofors by .5-

inch Vickers and 20-millimetre Bredas.

Dependable wireless communication was essential; without it a patrol several hundred miles from its base could not despatch vital information or receive orders. Long-distance communication, sometimes more than 1000 miles, was achieved with low-powered No. 11 army sets. The absence of recognisable landmarks in the desert, much of which was entirely unmapped, made it necessary for the patrols to navigate as if at sea. Each party, equipped with the Bagnold sun compass and a theodolite, had to be able to keep a dead reckoning plot of its course and to fix its position by astronomical observation. The navigators were trained by Lieutenant Shaw and Lance-Corporal C. H. B. Croucher, ⁸ who had a Mate's ticket in the Merchant Marine.

To enable the patrols to operate beyond the range of assistance, the fitters carried with them the tools and spare parts necessary for all running repairs. Very seldom did a vehicle have to be abandoned because of irreparable mechanical defect; the loss of a truck was almost invariably the result of enemy action. The fitters often had to improvise parts for damaged vehicles. One New Zealander (Staff-Sergeant A. F. McLeod ⁹), who served first as a fitter and then in charge of the workshops of A (New Zealand) Squadron, was awarded the BEM.

Across the Sand Sea

The continuous and apparently impassable rolling dunes of the Egyptian Sand Sea, 800 miles in length and with an average width of 150 miles, lie along the western frontier of Egypt. From its northern end to the **Mediterranean there is a 169-mile gap along which the Italians had erected a barbed-wire fence and fortifications. Protected by the Sand Sea, the great distances, the intense heat and the absence of water, the Italian garrisons of southern **Libya** felt secure against attack.**

Captain Clayton led the first expedition into **Libya to reconnoitre the **Gialo- Kufra** track by which the Italians took supplies from **Benghazi** to their garrisons at **Kufra** and Uweinat. Clayton set out in two light cars**

with five New Zealanders (Lance-Corporals Croucher and W. J. Hamilton¹⁰ and Privates R. A. Tinker,¹¹ J. Emslie,¹² and R. O. Spotswood¹³) and one of his former Arab employees. They crossed the Egyptian Sand Sea southwards from **Siwa** along a route that Clayton had taken some years before on a survey expedition. From Big Cairn, a point near the frontier, they struck out westwards into unexplored territory. A level gravel plain stretches for a hundred miles to the west of the Egyptian Sand Sea. Beyond this, the patrol entered a second sea of dunes, the Kalansho Sand Sea, which the Italians had not shown on their maps. Near the western edge ran the **Gialo- Kufra** track, marked every kilometre by tall iron posts. Although Clayton's men spent three days watching for traffic, they saw nothing. A month later another patrol discovered that the Italian convoys, to avoid the cut-up surface, used a route farther to the west. Protected in the north by the horseshoe formation of the Egyptian and Kalansho Sand Seas, the route Clayton had discovered was used by LRDG patrols for operations behind the enemy lines.

Soon after Clayton's reconnaissance, the Long Range Patrols began their first major task. By this time the Italian Army on the coast had advanced from the Egyptian frontier to **Sidi Barrani**. As the enemy might also be on the move in the inner desert, it was decided to examine all the routes leading to **Kufra**. The patrols left **Cairo** on 5 September. Bagnold led the first military force, a group of fourteen vehicles including Mitford's W patrol, across the Egyptian Sand Sea from Ain Dalla to Big Cairn.

Sometimes 500 feet from trough to crest, the dune ranges ran for hundreds of miles to the north-north-west and the south-south-east. The best routes were through gaps in the dunes and on the firmer going in the valleys, along which the patrol could drive in safety and at speed.

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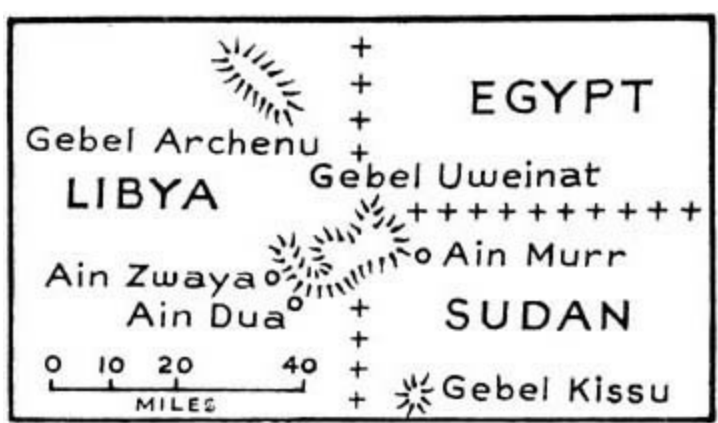
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EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[SECTION]

THE BATTLES of the North African campaigns of 1940–43 were fought along the shores of the **Mediterranean**. Large forces were prevented, by their dependence on supplies received by sea and along coastal roads and railways, from moving any great distance inland. The only troops to penetrate beyond the outer fringes of the **Libyan Desert** were small motor patrols and the garrisons of remote outposts. It was the function of the Long Range Patrols, which later became known as the **Long Range Desert Group**, to operate in the vast inner desert, one of the driest and most barren regions in the world. These patrols, small, well-armed parties travelling in unarmoured vehicles, were completely self-contained for independent action deep in enemy territory.

To appreciate the difficulties and the achievements of these patrols, it is necessary to understand the country in which they operated. The **Libyan Desert**, which covers western Egypt, north-western **Sudan**, and practically the whole of **Libya**, stretches a thousand miles southwards from the Mediterranean Sea and more than a thousand miles westwards from the Nile Valley to the hills of **Tunisia**. Plains and depressions, dotted in places by the remains of crumbling hills, extend from horizon to horizon. In the south-east the flat surface is broken by the abrupt escarpment of the Gifl Kebir plateau and the isolated mountains of Uweinat, Kissu, and Archenu; in the south-west the rocky ranges of Tibesti, reaching 10,000 feet, separate it from the French Sahara and Equatorial **Africa**. Huge areas are covered by seas of sand dunes.

Along the **Mediterranean** coast, where winter rains fall occasionally, there are small scattered strips of fertile land, widest in the hilly regions of **Cyrenaica** and **Tripolitania**; elsewhere, the scanty tufts of vegetation extend only twenty or thirty miles inland. In the inner desert no rains occur for ten or twenty years at a time. The arid wastes are relieved only where oases, hundreds of miles apart, are fed by artesian water. The

inhabitants of **Libya**, who average one to the square mile, are gathered along the coast and at these oases.

In 1915, as in 1940, Egypt was threatened by invasion from the west. **Senussi** tribesmen, equipped and led by Germans and Turks, were twice defeated near Mersa Matruh (on Christmas Day 1915 and on 23 January 1916) by a British force which included the 1st Battalion of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade. The Light Car Patrols guarding the frontier and the inland oases during this campaign were the pioneers of the **Long Range Desert Group**, who, quarter of a century later, discovered the wheel tracks of their cars and rusted food tins left at their old camps.

Although official interest in the inner desert lapsed in 1918, exploration was continued in peacetime by a few enthusiasts, of whom Major R. A. Bagnold ¹ was the acknowledged leader. In the nineteen-thirties these private expeditions, encouraged by the Royal Geographical Society, traversed most of the desert between the **Mediterranean** and the northern **Sudan**.

When Italy declared war on 10 June 1940, the British in Egypt faced possible attack, not only from **Libya** but also from armies in **Eritrea** and **Abyssinia**. Communications between Egypt and the **Sudan** lay through the **Red Sea**, which might be made unusable by the Italian Navy, and along the Nile Valley, which was open to attack from the west. The Italian garrison based at the oasis of **Kufra**, 650 miles from the **Nile**, was known to possess aircraft and motorised units capable of desert operations. It was possible that this force might attack **Wadi Halfa** in an attempt to sever the Egypt- **Sudan** lifeline and that the Italians might push down into the Chad Province of French Equatorial Africa, through which ran the chain of airfields of the **West Africa- Middle East** route. It was essential to know whether the Italians in southern **Libya** were planning an offensive.

At Bagnold's suggestion, the Long Range Patrols were formed to collect information about the interior of **Libya**, harry the enemy's communications with **Kufra**, and keep in touch with the French

outposts on the south-western border of **Libya**. New Zealanders, who had soon adapted themselves to their new environment in Egypt, were selected for the three patrols. They were volunteers from the Divisional Cavalry, the 27th (Machine Gun) Battalion, and the 7th Anti-Tank Regiment, men who were used to an outdoor life and to handling vehicles.

Advantage was taken of the presence in the **Middle East** of several of the men who had explored the **Libyan Desert**. Major Bagnold was appointed commanding officer. Captain P. A. Clayton,² who had spent eighteen years in the Egyptian Survey Department, came from Tanganyika to command T patrol, and Captain E. C. Mitford³ from a British tank regiment to command W patrol. A New Zealander (Second-Lieutenant D. G. Steele⁴) commanded the third (R) patrol, which was intended to carry supplies. Until they had gained more experience in the desert, the New Zealanders were not expected to lead fighting patrols. The adjutant and quartermaster (Lieutenant L. B. Ballantyne⁵) and the medical officer (Lieutenant F. B. Edmundson⁶) were both New Zealanders; the intelligence officer was Lieutenant W. B. K. Shaw,⁷ who was borrowed from the Colonial Service in Palestine.

Vehicles were needed which could carry weapons and ammunition, petrol for 1100 miles, and rations and water to last each man three weeks. Major Bagnold decided to use 30-cwt. trucks, which were obtained from the Egyptian Army and from a motor firm in **Alexandria**. To make them desert-worthy, doors, windscreens, and hoods were removed, springs were strengthened, and gun-mountings, wireless, water containers and condensers for radiators were added.

Each patrol consisted of two officers and about thirty men, who travelled in a 15-cwt. pilot car and ten 30-cwt. trucks and were armed with ten Lewis machine guns, four Boys anti-tank rifles, one 37-millimetre Bofors anti-tank gun, pistols, and rifles. The Bofors gun was stripped from its carriage and mounted with traversing gear so that it could fire aft or broadside from a 30-cwt. truck with a strengthened chassis. Later the patrols were reduced in strength to one officer and

fifteen to eighteen men in five or six trucks. The Lewis guns were replaced by Brownings and Vickers Ks, and the Boys and Bofors by .5-inch Vickers and 20-millimetre Bredas.

Dependable wireless communication was essential; without it a patrol several hundred miles from its base could not despatch vital information or receive orders. Long-distance communication, sometimes more than 1000 miles, was achieved with low-powered No. 11 army sets. The absence of recognisable landmarks in the desert, much of which was entirely unmapped, made it necessary for the patrols to navigate as if at sea. Each party, equipped with the Bagnold sun compass and a theodolite, had to be able to keep a dead reckoning plot of its course and to fix its position by astronomical observation. The navigators were trained by Lieutenant Shaw and Lance-Corporal C. H. B. Croucher,⁸ who had a Mate's ticket in the Merchant Marine.

To enable the patrols to operate beyond the range of assistance, the fitters carried with them the tools and spare parts necessary for all running repairs. Very seldom did a vehicle have to be abandoned because of irreparable mechanical defect; the loss of a truck was almost invariably the result of enemy action. The fitters often had to improvise parts for damaged vehicles. One New Zealander (Staff-Sergeant A. F. McLeod⁹), who served first as a fitter and then in charge of the workshops of A (New Zealand) Squadron, was awarded the BEM.

ACROSS THE SAND SEA

Across the Sand Sea

The continuous and apparently impassable rolling dunes of the Egyptian Sand Sea, 800 miles in length and with an average width of 150 miles, lie along the western frontier of Egypt. From its northern end to the **Mediterranean** there is a 169-mile gap along which the Italians had erected a barbed-wire fence and fortifications. Protected by the Sand Sea, the great distances, the intense heat and the absence of water, the Italian garrisons of southern **Libya** felt secure against attack.

Captain Clayton led the first expedition into **Libya** to reconnoitre the **Gialo- Kufra** track by which the Italians took supplies from **Benghazi** to their garrisons at **Kufra** and Uweinat. Clayton set out in two light cars with five New Zealanders (Lance-Corporals Croucher and W. J. Hamilton ¹⁰ and Privates R. A. Tinker, ¹¹ J. Emslie, ¹² and R. O. Spotswood ¹³) and one of his former Arab employees. They crossed the Egyptian Sand Sea southwards from **Siwa** along a route that Clayton had taken some years before on a survey expedition. From Big Cairn, a point near the frontier, they struck out westwards into unexplored territory. A level gravel plain stretches for a hundred miles to the west of the Egyptian Sand Sea. Beyond this, the patrol entered a second sea of dunes, the Kalansho Sand Sea, which the Italians had not shown on their maps. Near the western edge ran the **Gialo- Kufra** track, marked every kilometre by tall iron posts. Although Clayton's men spent three days watching for traffic, they saw nothing. A month later another patrol discovered that the Italian convoys, to avoid the cut-up surface, used a route farther to the west. Protected in the north by the horseshoe formation of the Egyptian and Kalansho Sand Seas, the route Clayton had discovered was used by LRDG patrols for operations behind the enemy lines.

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EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

RAIDS IN THE FEZZAN

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IN CO-OPERATION with the Free French of Chad Province, the LRDG made a series of raids on the Italian garrisons of the Fezzan, in south-west **Libya**, a region of sandy and stony deserts, long wadis, and fertile oases. The chief objective was Murzuk, the capital of the Fezzan, a thousand miles from the LRDG base in **Cairo** and 350 from the nearest French post in the Tibesti Mountains.

Commanded by Major Clayton, a force comprising G and T patrols, seventy-six men in twenty-six vehicles, left **Cairo** on 26 December 1940 and crossed the Egyptian and Kalansho Sand Seas into unknown country to the north-west of **Kufra**. To reach the Fezzan without being seen, they avoided the routes that led to wells and oases. Leaving the patrols at a rendezvous about 150 miles to the north, Clayton took four trucks to Kayugi, in the foothills of the Tibesti Mountains, to collect Lieutenant-Colonel J. C. d'Ornano, commander of the French forces in Chad, together with two French officers, two French sergeants, five native soldiers, and some petrol that they had brought by camel over the mountains. While Clayton was away, Lieutenant Shaw took three trucks to explore a pass through the Eghei Mountains on the route to **Kufra**. The combined party then continued its journey into the Fezzan by a detour to the north-east of Murzuk. The only men they had seen since leaving **Cairo** were three wandering natives with their camels.

On the morning of 11 January the force reached the road running southwards from Sebha to Murzuk, which they mined and picketed. Major Clayton led the column of vehicles along the road towards the fort at Murzuk. A group of natives at a well, mistaking them for Italians, gave the Fascist salute. The Italian postman, overtaken while cycling towards the fort, was forced into the leading truck as a guide.

The garrison, some of whom were strolling outside the gates of the fort, were taken completely by surprise. Lieutenant Ballantyne led a troop of T patrol to the airfield and the remainder of the force deployed to engage the fort with the Guards' Bofors gun, two two-inch mortars,

machine guns, and rifles. Recovering from their surprise, the Italians offered stubborn resistance. One New Zealander, Sergeant C. D. Hewson,¹⁶ was killed when he stood up to repair his jammed machine gun. At a critical time, when the enemy fire was causing casualties, the T patrol navigator (Corporal L. H. Browne¹⁷) kept his machine gun in action and, although wounded in the foot, remained at his post. Trooper I. H. McInnes¹⁸ manoeuvred his mortar into a position where it could be used effectively: one bomb set the tower of the fort on fire and destroyed the flagstaff.

At the airfield, Ballantyne's troop of six trucks with the Bofors gun from T patrol opened fire on men running to machine-gun posts. Major Clayton, who was accompanied by Colonel d'Ornano, drove off to encircle the hangar. Turning a corner, the truck ran into a machine-gun post firing at close range. Before Clayton could reverse, d'Ornano was killed by a bullet through the throat, and an Italian who had been forced to replace the postman as a guide was also killed. Ballantyne's troop continued to fire on the hangar until its defenders surrendered. About twenty-five men, most of them in air force uniform, were taken prisoner. The troop removed many rifles and thousands of rounds of small-arms ammunition and then set fire to the hangar, which contained three Italian aircraft, a two-way wireless set, some bombs and parachutes. Thick black smoke rose and the noise of exploding bombs was heard for a long time.

After two hours' fighting, the fort, although damaged, had not been captured. The purpose of the raid had been achieved, however, in the destruction of the airfield. It was estimated that ten of the enemy had been killed and fifteen wounded, while the attackers had suffered two men killed and three wounded. Of the twenty-odd prisoners taken, all except two, the postman and a member of the air force, were released for lack of transport space and rations. Hewson and d'Ornano were buried by the roadside near the town. One of the French officers, shot in the leg, cauterised the wound with his cigarette and carried on as if nothing had happened. A guardsman with a serious leg wound had to be taken by

truck about 700 miles across country to the French outpost at Zouar before he could be flown to **Cairo**.

The enemy made no attempt at pursuit. As the patrols drove away from the town, they were concealed in a dust storm which blew down from the north. Early next morning they captured two Italian policemen on camels; they were from the small town of Traghen, about thirty miles to the east of Murzuk. The patrols surrounded the town and sent the two Italians in to call on the police fort to surrender. About a quarter of an hour later an extraordinary procession emerged.

ADJUSTING A
SUN COMPASS



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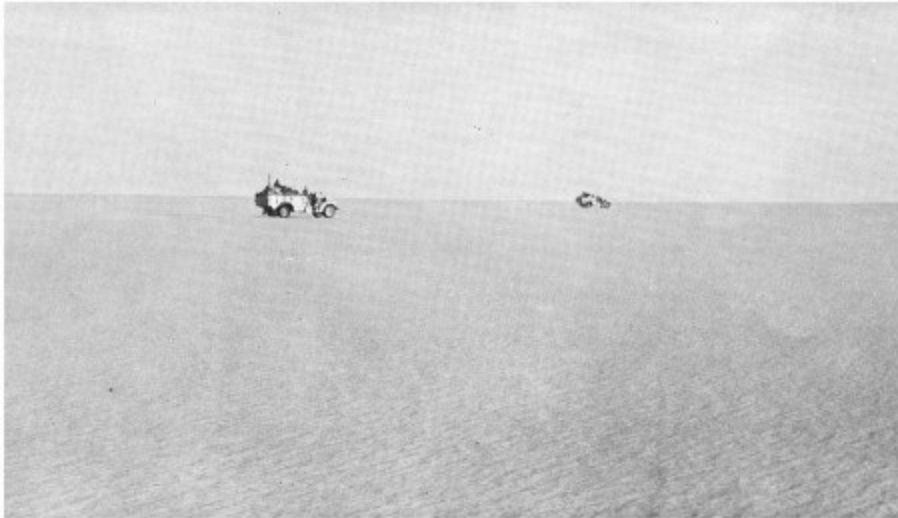
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COUNTRY OF SAND



SAND SHEET

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IN THE FEZZAN

COUNTRY OF ROCK



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LIFE ON PATROL



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REPAIR PROBLEM

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BIVOUAC FOR THE NIGHT

DESERT NAVIGATION



Fixing a position with a theodolite



In the photograph, it is not so clear as it seems that the general direction of the patrol is indicated on the map. The patrol follows the general direction of this line but deviates from time to time as required by the terrain and other considerations. The navigator records the times, sun-compass bearings, and the distance travelled on each bearing by speedometer reading, and plots this data on the map at each halt. The final point on the map arrived at by this method is the 'dead reckoning position'.

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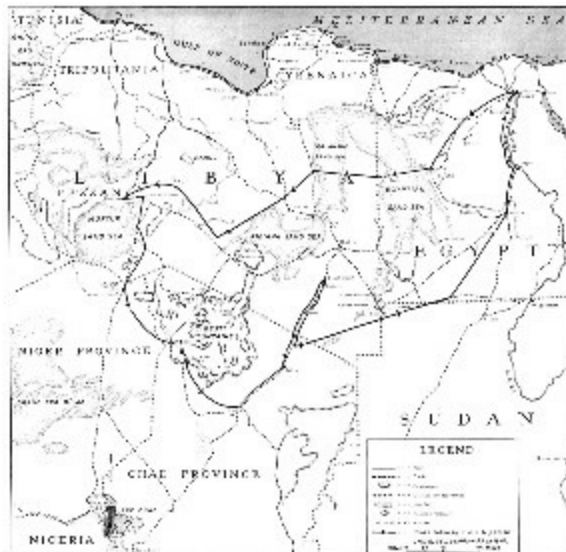
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RAIDING WITH THE FREE FRENCH



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MURZUK HANGAR ON FIRE

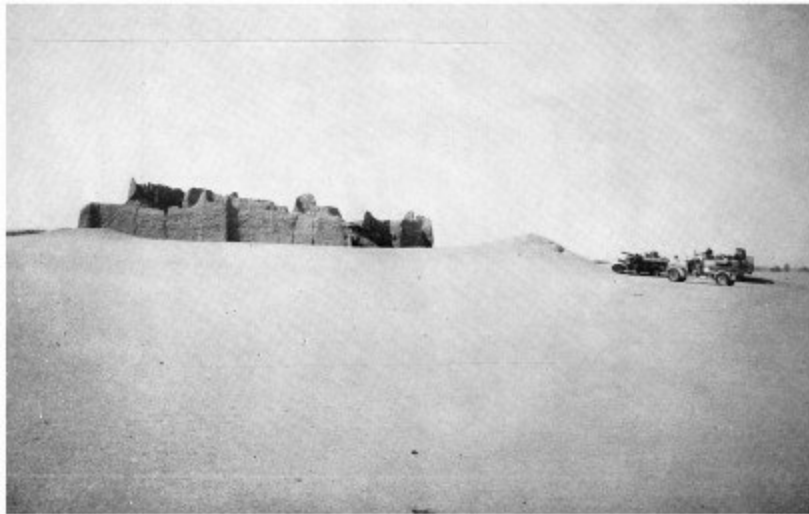


MURZUK HANGAR ON FIRE



THE FREE FRENCH PARADING FOR COLONEL BAGNOLD, *Zouar*

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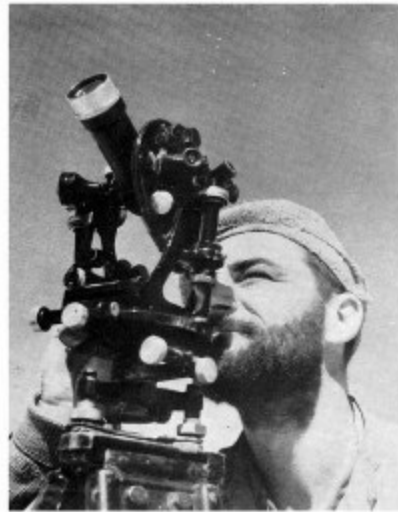
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From Traghen the patrols went a short distance eastwards to Umm el Araneb, where there was another police fort. Warned by wireless from Murzuk, the garrison was prepared for the attack and met the patrols with machine-gun fire. With bullets flying past and spattering the ground all around them, the patrols withdrew to a rise about a mile/ from the fort. Although several trucks had difficulty in getting through some soft sand, nobody was hit. Unarmoured cars with no weapon larger than a Bofors gun were inadequate for an assault on a stone fort. A few shells were fired into the fort and the patrols then turned southwards for Gatrun and Tejerri.

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Ambush at Gebel Sherif

After the death of d'Ornano, Colonel Leclerc ¹⁹ succeeded to the command of the French forces in Chad. Eventually he led these forces through the Fezzan to link up with the **Eighth Army in Tunisia. In January 1941 he planned a thousand-mile advance from his headquarters at Fort Lamy to **Kufra**. His chief difficulty was the provision of supplies and transport. The Free French could expect little assistance from the British, who were then attacking the Italians in **Cyrenaica** with forces much weaker in numbers. Leclerc combed the**

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Clayton's force of G and T patrols travelled over some very difficult country from Zouar to Faya, the French base about half way between Fort Lamy and **Kufra**. From Faya they were to act as an advanced guard for the French force and were to reconnoitre to Uweinat. As it happened, the Italians had evacuated their posts at Uweinat. The LRDG left Faya on 27 January and reached Tekro two days later. The guard at the French post had been increased to twelve; they included the three men who had challenged T patrol when they first visited Tekro. Next day the LRDG left for Sarra, where G patrol stayed in reserve while Clayton took T patrol to Bishara. The Italians, who must have been expecting an attack on **Kufra**, had filled in the wells at Sarra and Bishara.

When T patrol was at Bishara on the morning of 31 January, an Italian aircraft came overhead. The trucks scattered and made for some hills, and the plane flew away without attacking them. The patrol took cover among some rocks in a small wadi at Gebel Sherif, camouflaged the trucks, and prepared to have lunch. The plane returned and circled over the wadi, to which it directed a patrol of the Auto-Saharan Company, the enemy's equivalent to the LRDG. The Italian vehicles were seen approaching but disappeared behind a hill. Clayton told Trooper F. W. Jopling ²⁰ to back his truck towards the entrance of the wadi to see if the enemy was there. The enemy patrol then attacked with heavy and accurate fire at a range of about 200 yards. Three T patrol trucks were set on fire, and Corporal F. R. Beech ²¹ and two of the Italian prisoners were killed. At least three of the attacking party were killed and two wounded.

T patrol comprised thirty men in eleven trucks. The enemy who were forty-four strong in two armoured fighting vehicles and five trucks had the advantage of close co-operation with aircraft and of being armed with **Breda** guns. They made the mistake, however, of covering only one entrance to the wadi. Clayton took the eight remaining trucks out the

other end, circled round and prepared to counter-attack. At this stage the enemy aircraft, which were now increased to three, began low-flying attacks with bombs and machine guns. The trucks scattered and swerved away across the boulder-strewn ground.

Machine-gun fire punctured two tires, the radiator, and the petrol tank on Clayton's truck. The crew changed the tires, refilled the radiator, but ran out of petrol. The aircraft continued to attack and the enemy ground troops arrived, so that Clayton, who was wounded in the arm, and his two New Zealand companions (Lance-Corporals L. Roderick²² and W. R. Adams²³) were forced to surrender. The other seven trucks of T patrol returned to a rendezvous in the south and, under Lieutenant Ballantyne, rejoined G patrol and the French.

Of the four Italian prisoners, two had been killed and two were recaptured by the enemy. Four men from T patrol who were missing were presumed to have been killed or taken prisoner; they were a New Zealander (Trooper R. J. Moore²⁴), two guardsmen (Easton and Winchester), and an RAOC fitter (Tighe). Unknown to the patrol, they were hiding in Gebel Sherif. When their truck caught fire and the ammunition began to explode, they ran for shelter among the rocks. Encouraged by Moore, they decided not to give themselves up to the Italians, but to follow the patrol southwards in the hope that they might be picked up by the British or the French. Easton was wounded in the throat and Moore in the foot. They had less than two gallons of water in a tin and no food. Everything else had been burnt in the trucks.

On 1 February they began walking southwards along the tracks of the patrol. Tighe, who began to feel the effects of an old operation and who could not keep up with the others, was left behind on the fifth day with his share of the water. The other three reached Sarra, 135 miles from Gebel Sherif, on the sixth day; Tighe arrived a day later and sheltered in some huts, where he was found three days later by a party of French returning from a reconnaissance of **Kufra**. They had to wait until dawn before they could follow the footmarks of the other three

men, who had continued walking southwards from Sarra. On the eighth day Easton had dropped behind. Moore and Winchester were seen by two French aircraft that must have realised their plight, but as the ground was too rough for a landing, the planes circled about and dropped a bag of food and a bottle of water. The food could not be found and the cork had come out of the bottle, leaving only a mouthful or two. Next day Winchester, who was a veteran of **Dunkirk**, became too weak to continue. Moore shared the last mouthful of water with him and pushed on alone.

The French party left Sarra at first light on the tenth day. Fifty-five miles to the south they found Easton lying on the ground but still alive. Despite the efforts of a French doctor to save his life, he died that evening. Ten miles farther on they found Winchester, delirious but still able to stand. Another ten miles farther south, they overtook Moore, still walking steadily. He was then 210 miles from Gebel Sherif and believed he could have reached Tekro, eighty miles away, in another three days.

Moore, Winchester, and Tighe remained a month in the care of the French. They spent a week recuperating at an ambulance post at Sarra and were then taken to Fort Lamy, in Equatorial **Africa**. Eventually they were flown to **Khartoum** and returned to **Cairo** by **Nile** river-boat and train.

As the situation had changed following the ambush of T patrol, and as the Italians at **Kufra** were obviously on the alert, Leclerc had to change his plans. He formed a temporary base at Tekro and released the LRDG from further service with the Free French forces. One T patrol truck, under Lance-Corporal F. Kendall, ²⁵ stayed with the French to help them navigate. The two patrols started north-eastwards on 4 February and, passing to the south of Uweinat, reached **Cairo** five days later. Since setting out in December the LRDG had covered about 4500 miles of desert, with the loss of four trucks by enemy action and two by mechanical breakdown. One vehicle with a broken rear axle had been towed about 900 miles from Tummo to Faya before it could be repaired. The casualties included three dead and three captured by the Italians.

The leader of the expedition, Major Clayton, now a prisoner of war, was awarded the DSO. The services of three New Zealanders were also recognised: Corporal Browne, who showed coolness and gallantry in the action at Gebel Sherif as well as at Murzuk, was awarded the DCM, while Moore's march earned him the DCM, and Trooper McInnes's mortar-shooting the MM.

Later in February Leclerc attacked **Kufra** with a force of 101 Europeans and 295 natives. They defeated the Auto-Saharan Company, which withdrew to the north and left the besieged garrison without mobile protection. The French shelled the fort for ten days with their one 75-millimetre gun. Although strong enough to hold out for weeks, the garrison of sixty-four Italians and 352 Libyans, armed with fifty-three machine guns and four Bredas, surrendered **Kufra** to the French on 1 March.

General Wavell's advance into **Cyrenaica** cut off a garrison of approximately a thousand Italians at Giarabub, an oasis in a depression below sea level 160 miles to the south of **Bardia** and twenty-five from the frontier. Giarabub is a holy city of the **Senussi**; a white-domed mosque contains the tomb of the founder of the sect.

While T and G patrols were co-operating with the French in south-west **Libya**, the other New Zealand patrol (R), under Captain Steele, assisted a force which included the 6th Australian **Divisional Cavalry Regiment** in the siege of Giarabub. To prevent any supplies reaching the garrison and the enemy from escaping, the Australians watched the northern approaches to the oasis and the New Zealanders the tracks to the west.

R patrol was engaged on this very tedious task for two months before it was relieved by T patrol on 2 March. The Italian garrison, supplied by aircraft, continued to withstand the siege until attacked by the Australians. A fierce assault during a sandstorm resulted in the capture of Giarabub on 22 March.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[SECTION]

IN CO-OPERATION with the Free French of Chad Province, the LRDG made a series of raids on the Italian garrisons of the Fezzan, in south-west Libya, a region of sandy and stony deserts, long wadis, and fertile oases. The chief objective was Murzuk, the capital of the Fezzan, a thousand miles from the LRDG base in Cairo and 350 from the nearest French post in the Tibesti Mountains.

Commanded by Major Clayton, a force comprising G and T patrols, seventy-six men in twenty-six vehicles, left Cairo on 26 December 1940 and crossed the Egyptian and Kalansho Sand Seas into unknown country to the north-west of Kufra. To reach the Fezzan without being seen, they avoided the routes that led to wells and oases. Leaving the patrols at a rendezvous about 150 miles to the north, Clayton took four trucks to Kayugi, in the foothills of the Tibesti Mountains, to collect Lieutenant-Colonel J. C. d'Ornano, commander of the French forces in Chad, together with two French officers, two French sergeants, five native soldiers, and some petrol that they had brought by camel over the mountains. While Clayton was away, Lieutenant Shaw took three trucks to explore a pass through the Eghei Mountains on the route to Kufra. The combined party then continued its journey into the Fezzan by a detour to the north-east of Murzuk. The only men they had seen since leaving Cairo were three wandering natives with their camels.

On the morning of 11 January the force reached the road running southwards from Sebha to Murzuk, which they mined and picketed. Major Clayton led the column of vehicles along the road towards the fort at Murzuk. A group of natives at a well, mistaking them for Italians, gave the Fascist salute. The Italian postman, overtaken while cycling towards the fort, was forced into the leading truck as a guide.

The garrison, some of whom were strolling outside the gates of the fort, were taken completely by surprise. Lieutenant Ballantyne led a

troop of T patrol to the airfield and the remainder of the force deployed to engage the fort with the Guards' Bofors gun, two two-inch mortars, machine guns, and rifles. Recovering from their surprise, the Italians offered stubborn resistance. One New Zealander, Sergeant C. D. Hewson,¹⁶ was killed when he stood up to repair his jammed machine gun. At a critical time, when the enemy fire was causing casualties, the T patrol navigator (Corporal L. H. Browne¹⁷) kept his machine gun in action and, although wounded in the foot, remained at his post. Trooper I. H. McInnes¹⁸ manoeuvred his mortar into a position where it could be used effectively: one bomb set the tower of the fort on fire and destroyed the flagstaff.

At the airfield, Ballantyne's troop of six trucks with the Bofors gun from T patrol opened fire on men running to machine-gun posts. Major Clayton, who was accompanied by Colonel d'Ornano, drove off to encircle the hangar. Turning a corner, the truck ran into a machine-gun post firing at close range. Before Clayton could reverse, d'Ornano was killed by a bullet through the throat, and an Italian who had been forced to replace the postman as a guide was also killed. Ballantyne's troop continued to fire on the hangar until its defenders surrendered. About twenty-five men, most of them in air force uniform, were taken prisoner. The troop removed many rifles and thousands of rounds of small-arms ammunition and then set fire to the hangar, which contained three Italian aircraft, a two-way wireless set, some bombs and parachutes. Thick black smoke rose and the noise of exploding bombs was heard for a long time.

After two hours' fighting, the fort, although damaged, had not been captured. The purpose of the raid had been achieved, however, in the destruction of the airfield. It was estimated that ten of the enemy had been killed and fifteen wounded, while the attackers had suffered two men killed and three wounded. Of the twenty-odd prisoners taken, all except two, the postman and a member of the air force, were released for lack of transport space and rations. Hewson and d'Ornano were buried by the roadside near the town. One of the French officers, shot in the leg,

cauterised the wound with his cigarette and carried on as if nothing had happened. A guardsman with a serious leg wound had to be taken by truck about 700 miles across country to the French outpost at Zouar before he could be flown to **Cairo**.

The enemy made no attempt at pursuit. As the patrols drove away from the town, they were concealed in a dust storm which blew down from the north. Early next morning they captured two Italian policemen on camels; they were from the small town of Traghen, about thirty miles to the east of Murzuk. The patrols surrounded the town and sent the two Italians in to call on the police fort to surrender. About a quarter of an hour later an extraordinary procession emerged.

ADJUSTING A
SUN COMPASS



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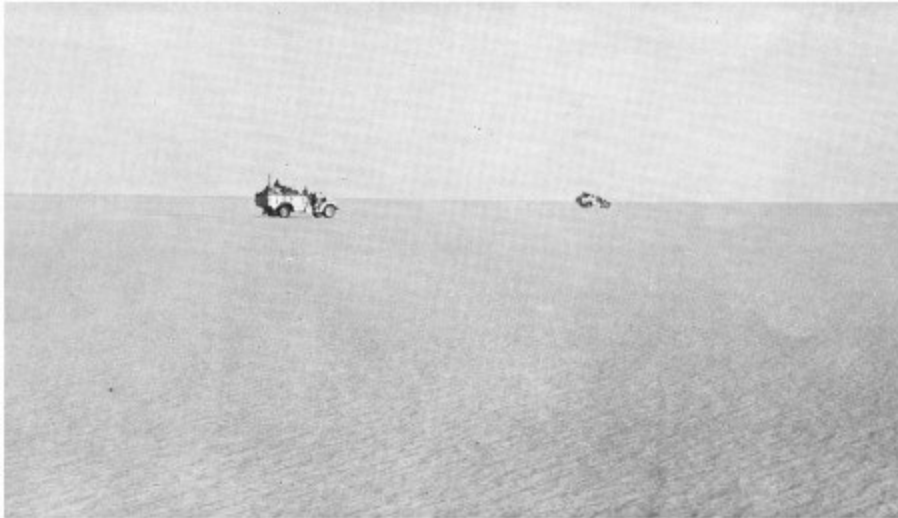
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BIVOUAC FOR THE NIGHT

DESERT NAVIGATION



Fixing a position with a theodolite



In the photograph, it is not so clear as it seems that the general direction of the line is ruled on the map. The patrol follows the general direction of this line but deviates from time to time as required by the terrain and other considerations. The navigator records the times, sun-compass bearings, and the distance travelled on each bearing by speedometer reading, and plots this data on the map at each halt. The final point on the map arrived at by this method is the 'dead reckoning position'.

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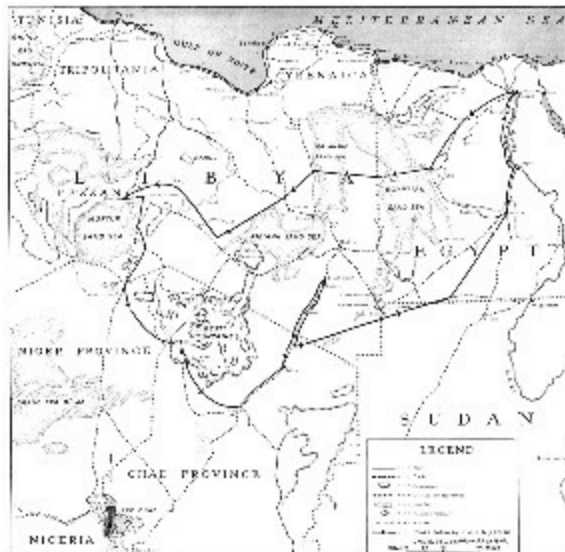
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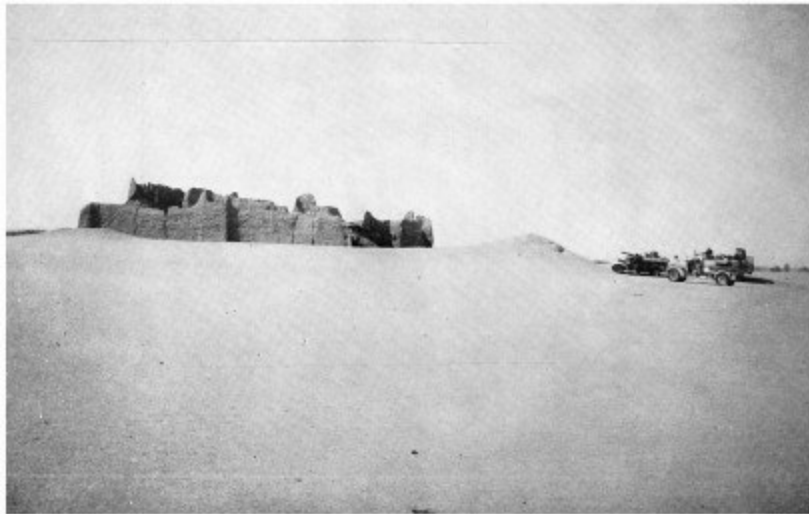


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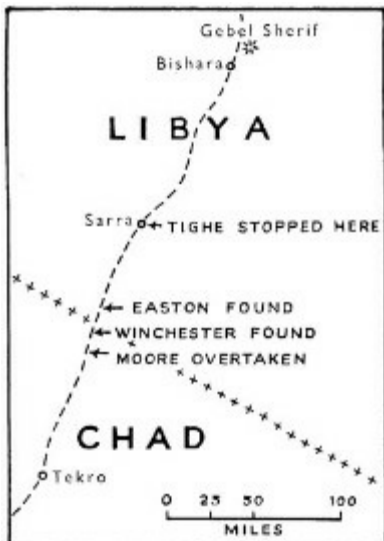
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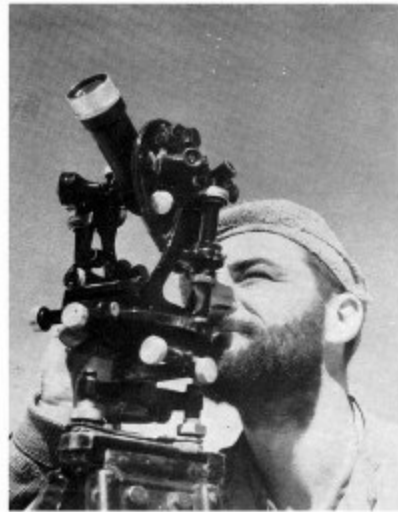
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T patrol comprised thirty men in eleven trucks. The enemy who were forty-four strong in two armoured fighting vehicles and five trucks had the advantage of close co-operation with aircraft and of being armed with **Breda** guns. They made the mistake, however, of covering only one entrance to the wadi. Clayton took the eight remaining trucks out the other end, circled round and prepared to counter-attack. At this stage the enemy aircraft, which were now increased to three, began low-flying attacks with bombs and machine guns. The trucks scattered and swerved away across the boulder-strewn ground.

Machine-gun fire punctured two tires, the radiator, and the petrol tank on Clayton's truck. The crew changed the tires, refilled the radiator, but ran out of petrol. The aircraft continued to attack and the enemy ground troops arrived, so that Clayton, who was wounded in the arm, and his two New Zealand companions (Lance-Corporals L. Roderick ²² and W. R. Adams ²³) were forced to surrender. The other seven trucks of T patrol returned to a rendezvous in the south and, under Lieutenant Ballantyne, rejoined G patrol and the French.

Of the four Italian prisoners, two had been killed and two were recaptured by the enemy. Four men from T patrol who were missing were presumed to have been killed or taken prisoner; they were a New Zealander (Trooper R. J. Moore ²⁴), two guardsmen (Easton and Winchester), and an RAOC fitter (Tighe). Unknown to the patrol, they were hiding in Gebel Sherif. When their truck caught fire and the ammunition began to explode, they ran for shelter among the rocks.

Encouraged by Moore, they decided not to give themselves up to the Italians, but to follow the patrol southwards in the hope that they might be picked up by the British or the French. Easton was wounded in the throat and Moore in the foot. They had less than two gallons of water in a tin and no food. Everything else had been burnt in the trucks.

On 1 February they began walking southwards along the tracks of the patrol. Tighe, who began to feel the effects of an old operation and who could not keep up with the others, was left behind on the fifth day with his share of the water. The other three reached Sarra, 135 miles from Gebel Sherif, on the sixth day; Tighe arrived a day later and sheltered in some huts, where he was found three days later by a party of French returning from a reconnaissance of **Kufra**. They had to wait until dawn before they could follow the footmarks of the other three men, who had continued walking southwards from Sarra. On the eighth day Easton had dropped behind. Moore and Winchester were seen by two French aircraft that must have realised their plight, but as the ground was too rough for a landing, the planes circled about and dropped a bag of food and a bottle of water. The food could not be found and the cork had come out of the bottle, leaving only a mouthful or two. Next day Winchester, who was a veteran of **Dunkirk**, became too weak to continue. Moore shared the last mouthful of water with him and pushed on alone.

The French party left Sarra at first light on the tenth day. Fifty-five miles to the south they found Easton lying on the ground but still alive. Despite the efforts of a French doctor to save his life, he died that evening. Ten miles farther on they found Winchester, delirious but still able to stand. Another ten miles farther south, they overtook Moore, still walking steadily. He was then 210 miles from Gebel Sherif and believed he could have reached Tekro, eighty miles away, in another three days.

Moore, Winchester, and Tighe remained a month in the care of the French. They spent a week recuperating at an ambulance post at Sarra and were then taken to Fort Lamy, in Equatorial **Africa**. Eventually they were flown to **Khartoum** and returned to **Cairo** by **Nile** river-boat and

train.

As the situation had changed following the ambush of T patrol, and as the Italians at **Kufra** were obviously on the alert, Leclerc had to change his plans. He formed a temporary base at Tekro and released the LRDG from further service with the Free French forces. One T patrol truck, under Lance-Corporal F. Kendall, ²⁵ stayed with the French to help them navigate. The two patrols started north-eastwards on 4 February and, passing to the south of Uweinat, reached **Cairo** five days later. Since setting out in December the LRDG had covered about 4500 miles of desert, with the loss of four trucks by enemy action and two by mechanical breakdown. One vehicle with a broken rear axle had been towed about 900 miles from Tummo to Faya before it could be repaired. The casualties included three dead and three captured by the Italians. The leader of the expedition, Major Clayton, now a prisoner of war, was awarded the DSO. The services of three New Zealanders were also recognised: Corporal Browne, who showed coolness and gallantry in the action at Gebel Sherif as well as at Murzuk, was awarded the DCM, while Moore's march earned him the DCM, and Trooper McInnes's mortar-shooting the MM.

Later in February Leclerc attacked **Kufra** with a force of 101 Europeans and 295 natives. They defeated the Auto-Saharan Company, which withdrew to the north and left the besieged garrison without mobile protection. The French shelled the fort for ten days with their one 75-millimetre gun. Although strong enough to hold out for weeks, the garrison of sixty-four Italians and 352 Libyans, armed with fifty-three machine guns and four Bredas, surrendered **Kufra** to the French on 1 March.

General Wavell's advance into **Cyrenaica** cut off a garrison of approximately a thousand Italians at Giarabub, an oasis in a depression below sea level 160 miles to the south of **Bardia** and twenty-five from the frontier. Giarabub is a holy city of the **Senussi**; a white-domed mosque contains the tomb of the founder of the sect.

While T and G patrols were co-operating with the French in south-west **Libya**, the other New Zealand patrol (R), under Captain Steele, assisted a force which included the 6th Australian **Divisional Cavalry Regiment** in the siege of Giarabub. To prevent any supplies reaching the garrison and the enemy from escaping, the Australians watched the northern approaches to the oasis and the New Zealanders the tracks to the west.

R patrol was engaged on this very tedious task for two months before it was relieved by T patrol on 2 March. The Italian garrison, supplied by aircraft, continued to withstand the siege until attacked by the Australians. A fierce assault during a sandstorm resulted in the capture of Giarabub on 22 March.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

OCCUPATION OF THE SOUTHERN OASES

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AFTER THE EXPULSION of the Italians from **Cyrenaica** in February 1941, it was decided to transfer the LRDG base from **Cairo** to a place farther to the west. At first the neighbourhood of **El Agheila** was considered as a site, but as German patrols were active in that area, **Kufra** was recognised as a more suitable station.

By this time the LRDG had been expanded to include a Yeomanry (Y) patrol and a Southern Rhodesian (S) patrol. When G, Y, and S patrols were trained in desert work, the LRDG was divided into A and B Squadrons. A Squadron was composed originally of G and Y patrols, and B Squadron of R, S, and T patrols and the group headquarters, which included the signal, repair, and heavy transport sections.

The fort in the **Kufra** oasis was held by a French garrison of 250 natives, without any form of mobile defence. The outlying oases of **Taiserbo** and **Zighen** were unoccupied. Whoever held these oases, situated in the gap between the **Kalansho** and **Ribiana Sand Seas**, held **Kufra** against attack from the north. Consequently, R patrol was despatched from **Cairo** on 1 April to occupy **Taiserbo**.

Rommel began his offensive in northern **Libya** and by 7 April had occupied the whole of **Cyrenaica** except the fortress of **Tobruk**. The LRDG was ordered to reinforce **Kufra** as soon as possible. By the end of the month, as well as R patrol at **Taiserbo**, S patrol was at **Zighen**, and the LRDG headquarters, T patrol, and the French were at **Kufra**, with **Colonel Bagnold** in command of the Anglo-French force. The detached A Squadron (G and Y patrols, commanded by **Major Mitford**) was at **Siwa**, under the control of the **Western Desert Force**.

Centuries of wind erosion have lowered the surface of the desert at **Kufra** to a water-bearing strata. Many thousands of date palms surround the white salt marshes and two blue lakes, as salt as the **Dead Sea**. Fresh water for the irrigation of crops and gardens is obtained from wells. The entire region has a population of less than 6000, more than half of

whom live/in the central oasis. The garrison obtained supplies of fresh vegetables and meat by encouraging the natives to cultivate gardens and to resume their trade in livestock with Chad and Tibesti.

T patrol relieved R at Taiserbo on 9 June. This oasis, 157 miles from **Kufra**, has only 700 inhabitants and consists of little more than a few palms scattered around brackish salt ponds. The temperature rises above 110 degrees and dust storms are frequent. In their attempts to avoid the flies, which were the worst they had ever experienced, the New Zealanders moved their camp from one site to another. At each place they obtained water by sinking a well to a depth of from five to twenty feet. The flies were not the only pest. Corporal L. H. Browne was bitten by a snake but recovered after suffering hours of agony, and Gunner C. O. Grimsey ²⁶ was stung three times by a scorpion; the man survived but the scorpion died. *

The Sudan Defence Force was responsible for supplying the **Kufra** garrison. Guided by a New Zealander (Corporal Browne), the first convoy, an odd assortment of vehicles driven by inexperienced natives, left **Wadi Halfa** on 28 April. Some undesertworthy lorries had to be left half way and their loads taken over the last 300 miles in two lifts. Consequently, the delivery of the supplies was not completed until 13 May. By that time there was not enough petrol at **Kufra** to evacuate the garrison, should it have been necessary. More suitable transport was obtained from **Cairo** and by the end of June a satisfactory convoy system was functioning.

The LRDG 'air force' was created during the occupation of **Kufra**. Major G. L. Prendergast, ²⁷ one of the pre-war explorers of the desert and an experienced airman, joined the unit in February 1941. Realising the value of aircraft to the LRDG, he had two Waco machines adapted for long-distance flying. Prendergast flew one himself and a New Zealander (Sergeant R. F. T. Barker ²⁸) the other. These aircraft were used for reconnaissance, liaison with the patrols, for bringing in wounded men, and for flights to **Cairo**. When Bagnold was appointed to the staff of General Headquarters at **Cairo** in August, Prendergast became the

commanding officer of the LRDG.

Throughout the summer of 1941, while Rommel's army stood at the Egyptian frontier, the LRDG remained in Italian Libya, without hope of assistance if attacked or surrounded. Enemy activity in the direction of **Kufra, however, was confined to reconnaissance by Italian aircraft, and no attempt was made to recapture the oasis. The French troops were gradually withdrawn from **Kufra** and on 18 July the **Sudan Defence Force** relieved the LRDG of garrison duty. The patrols then returned to their former role of long-distance reconnaissance.**

In anticipation of an eventual British advance into **Tripolitania, the LRDG explored towards the coast to the north-west of **Kufra**. Information was gathered about the 'going' for wheeled and tracked vehicles, sites for landing grounds, and the local supplies of water. At the end of July, T patrol left Taiserbo for the desert to the south of the Gulf of **Sirte**. It was in this region that the New Zealand Division outflanked the enemy at **El Agheila** sixteen months later. One T patrol truck approached at night to within a short distance of the main coastal road, along which enemy traffic was passing. Two or three weeks later, S patrol made a similar reconnaissance farther to the east, between **Gialo** and **Agedabia**. These tasks were completed without discovery by the enemy.**

R patrol relieved the detached G and Y patrols at **Siwa in August 1941 and was joined by T patrol in October. Major Steele was appointed to command the independent New Zealand squadron and an Englishman (Captain J. R. Easonsmith ²⁹) assumed command of R patrol. Steele was awarded the OBE in recognition of his services while in command of A Squadron at **Siwa** and later at **Gialo**. He planned operations which included successful attacks on enemy communications and airfields, reconnaissance as far as **Tripolitania**, and the carrying of demolition parties, search parties, and Arab and British secret agents to various points behind the enemy lines.**

To discover all they could about the enemy and to enlist the support

of friendly natives, British secret agents lived as Arabs among the tribesmen of **Gebel Akhdar** and sent back information by wireless. **Gebel Akhdar**—which means ‘the green mountain’—is a fertile tableland between the sea and the desert. The Italians had established a dozen colonial settlements there before the war.

The LRDG took the secret agents where they wanted to go, delivered wireless batteries, ammunition, and explosives to them, and distributed food among the natives. Constantly in demand for this and similar tasks, the patrols ran what they called a taxi service. Because it was uneconomical to operate at full strength on the short journeys from **Siwa**, they were reorganised as half patrols, each with an officer and from twelve to fifteen men in four or five vehicles. The patrols of A (New Zealand) Squadron became known as R 1, R 2, T 1, and T 2.

Captain Easonsmith, who led several of these expeditions from **Siwa**, earned a reputation for fearlessness. In October, when R 1 patrol was in the hills to the north-west of **Mechili**, he discovered an enemy camp in which there were four light tanks and thirty or forty vehicles. With the intention of seizing a prisoner or two for interrogation, he decided to stage an ambush on a track leading to the camp. Protected by two R patrol trucks stationed behind a rise, Easonsmith pretended that his own truck had broken down on the track a mile or two from the camp. The first convoy that came along was larger than he had expected—there were at least sixteen vehicles. The leading lorry stopped, but before Easonsmith could seize its two occupants they ran off and were killed or wounded. Italians with rifles began to appear from the other lorries. Corporal Spotswood had fired only a few rounds from the back of Easonsmith’s truck when his machine gun jammed. Shouting ‘I must get a prisoner’, Easonsmith ran down the column and bowled grenades among the Italians, who tried to take cover under their vehicles. He captured two men, but one was wounded and later died. The other revealed that the Trieste Motorised Division was on its way to **Mechili**. Having killed six or seven of the enemy and wounded a dozen, the patrol escaped without casualty.

*** Using this dead scorpion as a model, Grimsey designed the badge (a scorpion within a wheel) which became the official insignia of the LRDG.**

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

IN SUPPORT OF THE EIGHTH ARMY

IN SUPPORT OF THE EIGHTH ARMY

TO TAKE PART in the British offensive in **Cyrenaica** in November 1941, the LRDG was placed under the command of the newly-formed **Eighth Army** and the whole group was moved from **Kufra** to **Siwa**. The patrols were to watch the desert tracks to the south of **Gebel Akhdar** and to report on the movements of enemy reinforcements and withdrawals. In addition, **T 2** patrol was to take four British officers and two Arabs to a rendezvous in the **Gebel** and was to collect them three weeks later. **R 1** patrol was to pick up **Captain A. D. Stirling**³⁰ and a party of British paratroops after they had raided enemy airfields to the west of **Tobruk**.

It had been planned that **Stirling's** paratroops should destroy aircraft on the landing grounds near **Gazala** and **Tmimi**. Everything went wrong. Because of bad weather, the **RAF** dropped the parachutists wide of the target, and some of them were lost or drowned in a wadi running bank-high with water after sudden, torrential rain. **R 1** patrol collected **Stirling** and twenty men at the prearranged rendezvous and took them back to the British lines. The next time the parachutists raided enemy airfields they were carried there and back by the LRDG.

T 2 patrol, commanded by **Captain A. D. N. Hunter**,³¹ took the four officers and two Arabs to **Wadi Heleighima**, in the southern hills of **Gebel Akhdar**, to the west of **Mechili**. One of the officers (**Captain J. Haselden**) made his way northwards to the coast, where he signalled to a British submarine which landed a party of commandos under **Lieutenant-Colonel G. C. T. Keyes**.³² **Haselden** led this party to **Beda Littoria**, an Italian colonial village where **Rommel** was known to have his headquarters. The commandos planned to kill the German General on the eve of the **Eighth Army's** advance. **Keyes** and two men, **Campbell** and **Terry**, entered the house at midnight, but unfortunately **Rommel** was not at home. In the fight that ensued, **Keyes** and four Germans were killed and **Campbell** was wounded and captured; only **Terry** escaped. **Keyes** won a posthumous award of the **VC**.

After taking the four British officers and two Arabs to **Wadi**

Heleighima, T 2 patrol was divided into three parties to watch the roads leading to **Mechili**. Lance-Corporal R. T. Porter ³³ was captured by an Italian reconnaissance patrol while on picket duty with the party watching the **Mechili- Derna** road. Captain Hunter, taking two trucks to the area where Porter disappeared, was attacked at close range in a wadi by about twenty Italians in two vehicles, armed with a **Breda** gun. One truck returned to warn the rest of the patrol, but Hunter, Corporal Kendall, and Trooper L. A. McIver ³⁴ were presumed to have been captured or killed. The patrol reported by wireless to headquarters and was ordered to withdraw to **Siwa**. Second-Lieutenant Croucher, with three trucks, was sent to Wadi Heleighima to complete the task. At the rendezvous he found the four British officers and two Arabs, and also Hunter, who had evaded capture. The three New Zealanders, Porter, Kendall, and McIver, were prisoners.

On 24 November, when the battle in the **Tobruk- Bardia** area had reached a critical stage, the role of the LRDG was suddenly changed. **Eighth Army** issued orders for the patrols to 'act with utmost vigour offensively against any enemy targets or communications within your reach'. For this purpose, Y 1 and Y 2 patrols were allotted roads in the **Mechili- Derna- Gazala** area, S 2 and R 2 the **Benghazi- Barce-Maraua** road, and G 1 and G 2 the main road near **Agedabia**. The combined Rhodesian and New Zealand patrols (S 2 and R 2) ambushed nine vehicles and killed and wounded a number of the enemy, Y 2 captured a small fort and about twenty Italians, and Y 1 damaged fifteen vehicles in a transport park. Mechanical breakdowns prevented G 1 and G 2 from joining forces, so G 1 made two independent attacks on road traffic and shot up a few vehicles.

S 2 (under Second-Lieutenant J. R. Olivey ³⁵) and R 2 (under Second-Lieutenant L. H. Browne) drove on to the road in the evening of 29 November, cut the telephone wires, and turned eastwards towards Maraua. They laid the first ambush at a point where the road dropped through a 20-foot cutting. A vehicle approached from the east and, as it drew level, was engaged by machine-gun fire. Olivey noticed that it was

marked with a red cross. Before he could stop his men from firing, however, enemy troops armed with rifles and sub-machine guns clambered over the tailboard. After about a minute of sustained shooting on both sides, several of the enemy were killed and wounded and the remainder dispersed. The patrols moved towards a vehicle approaching from the opposite direction and engaged it with machine-gun fire. The lorry stopped and a liquid, presumed to be wine, gushed from its load.

Continuing along the road, the New Zealanders and Rhodesians attacked four lorries and trailers. They put each vehicle out of action, probably killed the crew, and riddled the load with machine-gun bullets. Taking up positions at a 30-foot cutting, where they over-looked the road in both directions, they attacked two more lorries and trailers and an oil tanker. They wrecked the vehicles and killed all of the enemy except one badly wounded man. The patrols then cut the telephone wires and retired to the south, having completed the operation without casualty. Second-Lieutenant Olivey was awarded the MC, and a New Zealander (Lance-Corporal C. Waetford ³⁶) and a Rhodesian the MM.

Rommel disengaged his forces from the battle in **Cyrenaica** in mid-December and began to withdraw towards **Agedabia**. In an attempt to prevent the enemy's escape from **Benghazi**, Eighth Army despatched columns, including the 22nd Guards Brigade, across the desert to the south of **Gebel Akhdar** to the **Benghazi- Agedabia** road. During this move T 1 patrol navigated and R 1 and R 2 patrols provided flanking scouts for the Guards Brigade. Major Ballantyne's T 1 patrol waited two weeks at the rendezvous near **Bir Hacheim** for the Guards to disengage from the battle west of **Tobruk**. During this wait the patrol survived repeated bombing and strafing attacks by German dive bombers and fighters. The only casualty was **Second-Lieutenant P. R. Freyberg**, ³⁷ who was slightly wounded.

The advance began on 20 December. R 1 and R 2 patrolled the country to the north, while T 1 guided the main column of the Guards Brigade westwards towards Antelat. Corporal Tinker, with two trucks, was responsible for the navigation of the **Scots Guards** through **Msus**

towards Sceleidima, thirty miles to the north of Antelat. A member of Tinker's party, Corporal Moore, was wounded in an air attack. The operation ended in failure. An enemy covering force including thirty tanks held up the outflanking columns in the Sceleidima-Antelat area on 22 December and this enabled the Axis troops to complete their withdrawal from **Benghazi**.

Rommel's forces retired from **Cyrenaica** to strong defensive positions among the salt marshes between **Agedabia** and **El Agheila**. From a base at **Gialo**, an oasis about 140 miles to the south-south-east of **Agedabia**, the LRDG continued to harass the enemy's communications farther to the west.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

¹ Brig R. A. BAGNOLD, OBE, m.i.d.; Founders' Medal of Royal Geographical Society, Fellow Royal Society; born England, 1896; served with **Royal Engineers** on Western Front, 1915–18; Royal Corps of Signals, 1920; original Commanding Officer LRP and LRDG, 1940–41; Inspector of Desert Troops, GHQ MEF, Aug 1941.

² Maj P. A. CLAYTON, DSO, MBE; Founders' Medal of Royal Geographical Society, Fellow Royal Geological Society, Fellow Royal Geographical Society; born England, 1896; served with Royal Field Artillery in **Greece** and **Turkey**, 1915–20; Inspector, Desert Survey of Egypt, 1920–38; Survey Department, Lands and Mines, Tanganyika, 1938–40; Intelligence Corps, 1940; patrol commander LRP and LRDG; wounded and p.w. 31 Jan 1941.

³ Col E. C. MITFORD, MC; **Royal Tank Regiment**; patrol commander LRP and LRDG; first OC A Sqn LRDG, 1941.

⁴ Lt-Col D. G. STEELE, OBE, m.i.d.; farmer; Lake Roto Ma; born **Wellington**, 22 Mar 1912; patrol commander LRP and LRDG; OC A (NZ) Sqn LRDG, 1941–42; CO 22 NZ (Mot) Bn, 1944; CO 27 NZ (MG) Bn, 1944.

⁵ Maj L. B. BALLANTYNE, ED, m.i.d.; sheep farmer; Pongaroa; born Waitahora, 18 Jul 1912; Adjutant and Quartermaster LRP and LRDG; patrol commander LRDG; CO Composite Training Depot **2 NZEF**, 1942.

⁶ Col F. B. EDMUNDSON, OBE, m.i.d.; medical practitioner; **Auckland**; born **Napier**, 22 Jan 1910; Medical Officer LRP and LRDG; CO 4, 5, and 6 NZ Field Ambulances at various times; Deputy Director of Medical Services **2 NZEF**, 1945.

⁷ Maj W. B. K. SHAW, OBE, MBE, m.i.d., Belgian Croix de Guerre with

Palm; Gill Memorial of Royal Geographical Society; born England, 1901; Sudan Forest Service, 1924–29; Department of Antiquities, Palestine 1936–40; Intelligence Corps, 1940; Intelligence Officer LRP and LRDG.

⁸ Capt C. H. B. CROUCHER, m.i.d.; Merchant Navy; Feilding; born England, 25 Feb 1910; commissioned in British Army; patrol commander LRDG; GSO III, G(Ops), GHQ MEF, 1942; Adj LRDG, 1943; IO LRDG (Aegean operations), 1943; GSO II Raiding Forces MEF, 1944; IO LRDG (Adriatic operations), 1944.

⁹ WO II A. F. McLEOD, BEM; motor-body fitter; Auckland; born Canada, 1 Jul 1905; in charge of Light Repair Section, A (NZ) Sqn LRDG.

¹⁰ Cpl W. J. HAMILTON; labourer; Auckland; born Auckland, 23 Jun 1917.

¹¹ Capt R. A. TINKER, MC, MM, m.i.d.; motor driver; Timaru; born NZ, 13 Apr 1913; patrol commander LRDG; now in New Zealand Regular Force.

¹² S-Sgt J. EMSLIE; truck driver; Auckland; born Scotland, 5 Dec 1909.

¹³ Sgt R. O. SPOTSWOOD, m.i.d.; plumber; born Carterton, 8 Jan 1914; killed in action, Italy, 4 May 1944.

¹⁴ Lt-Col J. H. SUTHERLAND, MC; stock inspector; Masterton; born Taieri, 10 Dec 1903; second-in-command of patrol LRP and LRDG; CO 2 NZ Div Cav, 1942–43.

¹⁵ Sgt L. A. WILLCOX, MM; sawmill hand; Wanganui; born Hawera, 25 Aug 1918; wounded 19 Sep 1942.

¹⁶ Sgt C. D. HEWSON; labourer; born Auckland, 27 Jan 1908; killed in action, 11 Jan 1941.

¹⁷ Capt L. H. BROWNE, MC, DCM, m.i.d.; accountant; London; born England, 8 Jul 1908; patrol commander LRDG; GSO III, G(Ops), GHQ MEF, 1942; IO LRDG, 1943; wounded 11 Jan 1941, 31 Jan 1941, 18 Nov 1942, and 22 Dec 1942.

- 18 Sgt I. H. McINNES, MM; labourer; born Waipu, 8 Jun 1908; killed in action, Alamein, 24 Oct 1942.**
- 19 General LECLERC, CB, DSO and bar; born France, 28 Nov 1902; Governor of French Cameroons, 1940; Military Commander of French Equatorial Africa; GOC 2nd French Armd Div; GOC French Far East Forces, 1945; Inspector-General of French Armies in North Africa, 1946; killed in air accident, 28 Nov 1947.**
- 20 Tpr F. W. JOPLING; farmhand; Auckland; born England, 15 Apr 1913; wounded and p.w. Sep 1942.**
- 21 Cpl F. R. BEECH, m.i.d.; radio engineer; born Picton, 24 Jul 1908; killed in action, 31 Jan 1941.**
- 22 L-Cpl L. RODERICK; linesman; born Gisborne, 19 Feb 1913; p.w. 31 Jan 1941; killed in Italy, 6 Apr 1944, while leading Italian partisans.**
- 23 L-Cpl W. R. ADAMS; salesman; Whangarei; born Auckland, 1 Aug 1918; p.w. 31 Jan 1941.**
- 24 Cpl R. J. Moore, DCM, m.i.d.; farm hand; Morrinsville; born Te Aroha, 10 Sep 1915; wounded 31 Jan 1941 and 22 Dec 1941.**
- 25 Cpl F. KENDALL, m.i.d.; carpenter; Kati Kati; born South Africa, 7 May 1904; p.w. 23 Nov 1941.**
- 26 L-Bdr C. O. GRIMSEY; farmer; Te Aroha; born England, 25 Dec 1907; p.w. 27 Dec 1942.**
- 27 Col G. L. PRENDERGAST, DSO; Royal Tank Regiment; CO LRDG, 1941-43; second-in-command Raiding Forces (Aegean operations), 1943.**
- 28 Capt R. F. T. BARKER; engineering foreman; Christchurch; born Waimate, 7 Nov 1909; pilot LRDG aircraft.**
- 29 Lt-Col J. R. EASONSMITH, DSO, MC; Royal Tank Regiment; patrol commander LRDG; OC B Sqn LRDG; CO LRDG (Aegean operations),**

1943; killed in action, 16 Nov 1943.

³⁰ Lt-Col A. D. STIRLING, DSO; Scots Guards; CO Special Air Service; p.w. Jan 1943.

³¹ Maj A. D. N. HUNTER, MC; Royal Tank Regiment; patrol commander LRDG.

³² Lt-Col G. C. T. KEYES, VC, MC; Royal Scots Greys; born England, 1917; killed in action, 17–18 Nov 1941.

³³ L-Cpl R. T. PORTER; clerk; Whangarei; born NZ, 3 Nov 1915; p.w. 22 Nov 1941.

³⁴ Tpr L. A. McIVER; taxi driver; born Wairoa; 22 Feb 1914; p.w. 23 Nov 1941; wounded in battle between Germans and Russians, 9 Feb 1945; died while p.w. 16 Feb 1945.

³⁵ Capt J. R. OLIVEY, MC; Sherwood Foresters; patrol commander LRDG.

³⁶ Sgt C. WAETFORD, MM; truck driver; Whangarei; born NZ, 27 May 1914.

³⁷ Capt P. R. FREYBERG, MC; attached LRDG; wounded 12 Dec 1942; now in Grenadier Guards.

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[BACKMATTER]

THIS WILL BE FOLLOWED BY AN ACCOUNT OF THE LRDG IN EGYPT, LIBYA, TUNISIA, AND THE AEGEAN SEA IN 1942 AND 1943.

THE AUTHOR, R. L. Kay, who is a member of the staff of the War History Branch, was a newspaper reporter before the war and served with the 2nd NZEF Public Relations Service in the **Middle East**. He graduated BA at Victoria University College in 1948.

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PRISONERS OF JAPAN

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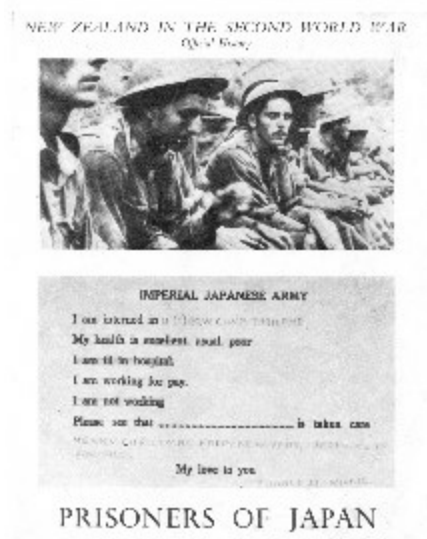
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[COVERS]



PRISONERS OF JAPAN

BY
D. O. W. HALL

JOHN BUCHER BRUNNEN
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS
1001 PUBLON, NEW ZEALAND
1945

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[FRONTISPIECE]



THE LAND OF THE FREE
—from *White Coolie*, by Ronald Hastain, the sketch by Ronald Serale

THE LAND OF THE FREE

—from *White Coolie*, by Ronald Hastain, the sketch by Ronald Serale

COVER PHOTOGRAPH **S Imperial troops capurated by the Japanese Letter-Card
from Thailand**

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[TITLE PAGE]

PRISONERS OF JAPAN

D. O. W. HALL

WAR HISTORY BRANCH

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

1949

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[EDITORPAGE]

IT IS THE INTENTION *of this series to present aspects of New Zealand's part in the Second World War which will not receive detailed treatment in the campaign volumes and which are considered either worthy of special notice or typical of many phases of our war experience. The series is illustrated with material which would otherwise seldom see publication. It will also contain short accounts of operations which will be dealt with in detail in the appropriate volumes.*

H. K. KIPPENBERGER

Major-General EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

NEW ZEALAND WAR HISTORIES

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[UNTITLED]

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EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

PRISONERS OF JAPAN

PRISONERS OF JAPAN

THE NEW ZEALANDERS who fell into the hands of the Japanese were mercifully few. From the armed forces were the survivors of warships sunk in battle in East Indies waters, airmen attached to a **Royal Air Force** unit in **Java**, the crews of planes, **Air Force** or **Fleet Air Arm**, shot down over **Burma** or over **Japan** itself. Among the Army prisoners of war were some New Zealanders serving in the Australian forces who were captured when **Singapore** fell, as well as others, in civil life public servants or engineers in **Malaya**, who were enrolled in the Malayan Defence Force. A miscellaneous group of professions supplied the New Zealand internees in Japanese hands: missionaries and teachers in **China** or **Japan**, officials in **Malaya** or **Sarawak**, engineers and technicians employed in **Thailand** or on the **China** coast.

The places of imprisonment or internment were as varied as the localities and the circumstances in which these people became captives. The conditions of internment were on the whole better than those endured by service prisoners of war. For the latter a broad policy of brutality appears to have been imposed from above. For civilian and service personnel alike the will of local commanders seems to have been the dominating factor, and some surprisingly humane conditions (surprising when set beside the general conduct of the Japanese) were offered to small groups in favoured localities. It is, however, possible to generalise and say that all, prisoners of war or internees, were badly fed by Japanese standards, atrociously by European.

The rights and obligations of prisoners of war in relation to the detaining power are defined in the Geneva Convention. A writer who examined this Convention critically has pointed out that it is a weakness, from the point of view of European troops, that the detaining power is obliged to give its prisoners only the same standard of diet as its own Base troops enjoy. As a Japanese can live on less food, on a smaller total of calories though not, of course, on a less well-balanced 'spread' of vitamins, than a European, the latter on a diet that satisfies the former

must suffer from malnutrition. It is true that the Japanese in any case paid only lip service to the Geneva Convention; they declared their adherence to it after their entry into the war and violated its letter and its spirit in every detail in almost every prison camp. But even if their attempts to conform to the Convention had been sincere, prisoners and internees in their hands must have suffered severely. Some part of the blame for the slow starvation of their prisoners must be attributed to the differences in racial standards, though nearly everywhere it was due far more directly to a cynical disregard of every humane consideration and an active desire first to humiliate and then to destroy their victims. Prisoners of war paid with their blood and their lives for the national sense of inferiority of the divinely-descended children of Nippon.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE INCALCULABLE JAPANESE

The Incalculable Japanese

IN THEIR ENTRY into the war the Japanese provided themselves with every modern weapon, used the latest tactics, and imitated, often with overwhelming success, the western nations in every mechanical and industrial device to increase their striking power and chance of victory. But they themselves were less Europeanised than their ships, planes, weapons and uniforms suggested. How little they had advanced towards civilisation (a condition they understood mainly on the material side) was shown most clearly in their abominable treatment of their prisoners.

The Japanese themselves did not 'allow' their troops to become prisoners of the enemy. It was their duty to die rather than face the world in which they had suffered defeat. Japanese soldiers who fell into the hands of the Chinese, for instance, were considered officially to be dead: their relatives were paid compensation and their glorious death was reported at the Shinto shrines. Never, *never* could these living dead return to their homes to outrage both their sorrowing relatives and their ancestors by contradicting so satisfying a legend.

The Japanese in some degree extended this attitude to those sailors, soldiers, and airmen of the Allies who fell into their hands. (This did not, however, prevent them in some camps attempting to victimise New Zealanders as a reprisal for the shooting of Japanese prisoners at **Featherston** in February 1943; this discrimination broke down in practice because the general treatment of all prisoners was in any case already a terrible victimisation.) Men who should have been dead could have no rights. But the Japanese declared their adherence to the Geneva Convention, which they had not previously ratified and could not therefore have been blamed for not observing. Thus, for the sake of wishing to appear before the world as humane, to appear as though they were capable of behaving by the standards of the European nations, the Japanese greatly increased their war guilt. It would seem, however, that the Japanese were in any case incapable of understanding the humanitarian spirit which lies behind this international agreement.

The Japanese themselves in their own services and even to some extent in civil life practise the active brutality of which prisoners of war were so often the victims. Himself struck by his superiors, the non-commissioned officer passes on the blows to the private on any occasion of displeasure; the humble private slaps or clubs the civilian or, when he is within reach, the prisoner of war.

Among their former prisoners the consensus of opinion seems to be that the Japanese were brutal rather than sadistic and largely unaware of their own brutality, which might find its target in an animal as readily as in a helpless prisoner. (That so much of their motives must be left to conjecture is some indication of the bewilderment of anyone who attempts to elucidate the contradictions of the Japanese character.) Undoubtedly they were arrogant in victory and obsessed with a desire to avenge on individuals the galling pretensions to superiority of the white races over the coloured. This led to calculated humiliations being heaped on their prisoners. An intelligent observer, * who was their prisoner for three and a half years in **Malaya and **Thailand**, considered the main characteristic of the Japanese to be a frightening lack of balance, 'which means that they can swing from murder to laughter in a couple of seconds, and this makes them always unpredictable and impossible to trust in any way'. They have a marked tendency to hysteria. Before attacking prisoners who had offended them, they used to work themselves up into a berserk condition until virtually they did not know what they were doing. Prisoners of war found a very few who were uniformly considerate, fair, honest, and humane. Their national tradition placed no value on these virtues even within the circle of their own families.**

It is impossible not to feel deep indignation at the treatment of their prisoners by the Japanese. But, while pitying the prisoners, one may also pity the Japanese. One ex-prisoner, when asked why the Japanese had beaten up so many prisoners of war for trivial offences or for what were not really offences at all, replied, 'Because they were unhappy'. Many times the Japanese committed atrocities which were directly opposed to

their own interests. The building of the **Burma- Thailand** railway with prisoner-of-war labour is a case in point: it was obviously in the interest of the Japanese war effort to keep this labour force in a condition of health and vigour, yet the callous denial of essential drugs to the sick or of adequate food to any of the workers resulted in the labour force dwindling away through every type of tropical disease being added to malnutrition.



from the Japanese propaganda paper
Freedom

from the Japanese propaganda paper *Freedom*

* John Coast, *Railroad of Death* (Commodore Press), p. 243.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

AFTER CAPTURE

After Capture

THE HOURS following capture are always the most anxious for a prisoner of war. He has no guarantee that his surrender will be accepted. Even such large-scale capitulations as those of the forces defending **Singapore** and **Hong Kong** had an element of uncertainty, for it was widely believed that the Japanese 'took no prisoners'. *

The prisoners taken by the Japanese Navy were generally (but not always) well treated while in its hands. This was true of the coast-watchers captured in the northern Gilberts and of the crew of the *Hauraki*, captured in the **Indian Ocean** in July 1942. But it was not true of the passengers (some of them servicemen) and the crew of the *Behar*, another merchant ship sunk by a squadron of Japanese cruisers in March 1944 in the **Indian Ocean**. The shelling of the ship went on while the boats were being launched. An officer shouting through a megaphone directed the lifeboats to row to one of the cruisers, and as each survivor climbed up a rope ladder on board he was stripped of any valuables and of much of his clothing, beaten and kicked, then tied up and left for many hours in a position of great discomfort. The rest of the voyage, too, was made under terrible conditions.

The Japanese did not interrogate all their prisoners. When they did they often used violence at the interview, and before and after it, to enforce their demands for accurate information. An **Air Force** officer shot down over **Burma** in 1944 was subjected to questioning accompanied by various methods of 'persuasion'. He had been advised to tell the enemy nothing, but 'Japs have no limit to their brutality, so this was bad advice'; he felt that he should have been instructed to tell some sort of prepared story. (**Fleet Air Arm** pilots shot down over **Japan** in 1945 gave, as they had been advised, long, rambling statements with much inaccurate and misleading detail.) This airman held out for a fortnight before giving his squadron number (it was due to move in a fortnight), earning some left-handed admiration from some of his tormentors for his steadfastness.

A few Japanese officers took in good part a complete refusal to give more than name, rank, and number. But, that the use of violence to induce a prisoner to 'talk' was part of a general policy is shown by the establishment in **Japan** itself at **Ofuna**, near Yokohama, of a naval interrogation centre, known as 'Torture Farm'. Here the prisoners, appallingly fed even by Japanese standards, had to engage in exhausting physical exercise, do everything at the double, and suffer mass and individual beatings at the hands of Japanese of above the average height and physique, to demoralise them before their interrogation by teams of intelligence experts. However, most prisoners of the Japanese found it easy to give some answer which would satisfy their questioners without betraying vital information.

Captivity usually began with a long march on foot carrying all baggage. Prisoners captured in small groups often had their valuables taken from them; others surrendering in larger units were better able to retain them. Although they did not realise it at the time, the clothes they carried with them into captivity were likely to have to last them the three or more years of their imprisonment. Prudence in selecting kit to take into prison camp paid heavy dividends.



INTO BONDAGE —from *White Coolie*, by Ronald Hastain, the sketch by Ronald Searle

The first quarters allotted to newly captured prisoners of war were usually the worst of their captivity. To some extent this was due to the

exigencies of war, and in part to the unpreparedness of the Japanese to accept the surrender of large numbers of prisoners. It frequently happened that men were given no food at all during the first two or three days of captivity.

*** In 1904 the Japanese took prisoner large numbers of Russians.**

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

SINGAPORE

Singapore

THE CHANGI PENINSULA was used by the Japanese as a concentration area for the British forces captured at the surrender of **Singapore**. This peninsula of Singapore Island was eminently suitable for the purpose—if the prevention of escapes is the criterion for the siting of a prison camp. Barbed wire across the small portion not already cut off by swamps and river secured the landward side; for the rest there was the sea.

Although a New Zealand doctor witnessed the slaughter of patients and medical staff in a military hospital soon after the surrender, in general the Japanese behaved with restraint, judging them by the standard of the sack of Nanking. The prisoners had their own organisation within the area, and the appearances of the Japanese were comparatively rare. Some Indian guards who had gone over to the Japanese behaved vindictively; but there were other Indians of unshakeable loyalty who made great sacrifices for their European fellow-prisoners and others who paid with their lives for their refusal to collaborate. The quarters were fairly good and the food poor. The curious mentality of the Japanese was seen in their treatment of hungry men caught pillaging. A party who had been beaten for stealing sugar at the docks was surprised to see the Japanese send the sugar to the prisoners' cookhouse. Some Australians who had succeeded in selling some petrol illicitly to Singapore Chinese were punished by several days' exposure to the sun in a confined space; but they kept the money. *

The guards, when they appeared, demanded an exaggerated respect. The first prisoner to see them shouted a warning, then all within sight, whatever their rank and whatever the rank of the Japanese, stood rigidly to attention, saluting or, if without a hat, bowing to the soldier of Nippon when he approached. Failure to stand properly to attention or the omission of any detail from this ceremony would bring down on the head of the offender (and literally on the head) a severe beating. The victim would be lucky if this were given only with the fists. A Japanese once explained to a prisoner that for a guard to slap his face was 'like a

mother lovingly correcting her child'. The broken jaws or broken eardrums commonly resulting from these encounters cannot, however, be attributed to the intensity of the guards' affection.

The 'Changi Square' incident, as it is called, occurred in September 1942, when orders from **Tokyo reached all corners of the Japanese Greater Asia Co-prosperity Sphere that all prisoners of war, who were regarded as having been incorporated in the Japanese forces, should sign a pledge not to escape and to obey all orders. This was universally resisted and almost as universally signed under varying degrees of compulsion. In Changi the 'persuasion' to sign took this form: all the Allied troops, some 17,000-odd, were concentrated in one barrack square (Selerang Barracks), an area of about ten acres. Under indescribable conditions the men held out for three days, many of them already suffering from dysentery and other diseases; then the senior officer, on the advice of the doctors (the Japanese had threatened to cram in the hospital patients as well), ordered the men to sign and himself recorded that the signatures had been given only under heavy duress.**

Towards the end of 1942 the fittest men were drafted away from Changi to work on the **Burma- Thailand railway. Changi, largely depopulated, remained by comparison only one of the better camps. Later, its prisoners were concentrated in Changi jail, which until then had been the place of internment of the British civilians in **Malaya**.**

*** John Coast, *Railroad of Death*, pp. 29–30.**

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE NETHERLANDS EAST INDIES

The Netherlands East Indies

WHEN THE ALLIED forces in **Java** capitulated on 8 March 1942, several hundred members of the **Royal Air Force**, including some New Zealanders, as well as fugitives from Singapore belonging to all three services (some of whom had evaded the Japanese blockade in all sorts of crazy small craft), found themselves unable to leave the island. One party of **Air Force** men made their way to the south coast and began building a boat to take them to **Australia**, but after six weeks the local Javanese police made them surrender to the Japanese. Others also reached the south coast and found it impossible to escape. Another Air Force party at **Tjilatjap**, a south-coast port, made valiant efforts to get away. The Dutch refused to allow them to take over a corvette which was abandoned by its crew but fully fuelled and provisioned—instead it was sunk to block the entrance to a harbour which the Japanese never attempted to use—so in an aged launch, towing two lifeboats, sixty-two men began their journey. After a few miles the launch broke down and one of the lifeboats was damaged in being beached. About a dozen men put to sea again in the remaining boat. * The others remained hidden for six and a half weeks. Then the natives, though sympathetic, unlike most Javanese, urged them to surrender, and as their food supply was in any case nearly exhausted, they walked some miles to do so. They were received by the Japanese with the usual face-slapping as a suitable rebuke for causing trouble.

Those men who were unlucky enough to be captured at the western end of **Java** had an unenviable sojourn in a cinema, together with survivors of **HMAS Perth** and **USS Houston**, and their next lodging in **Serang** jail was little better. Soon they were concentrated in 'Bicycle Camp', **Batavia**, a former Dutch barracks. Most Allied prisoners of war in **Java** passed through this camp, and many also through the inland **Bandoeng** camp. In both the prisoners' own organisation was good. In Bandoeng, a school, ** a library, concerts, and plays helped to make life less unendurable. Later, assemblies of more than three persons were forbidden. Food was poor, but at first it was possible to buy from outside,

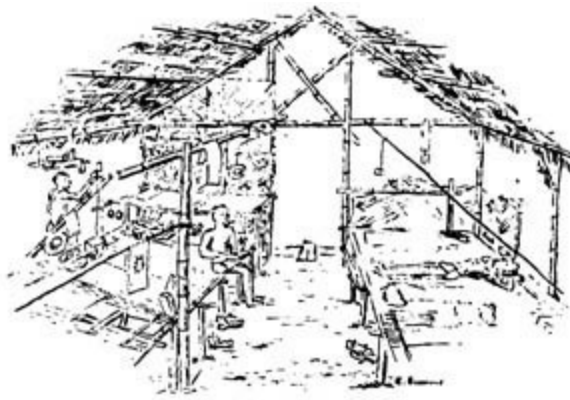
and the Dutch, while they had funds, made an allowance to British prisoners. There were occasionally pleasant surprises: a new Japanese adjutant was annoyed to find that the prisoners were being cheated of their proper allowance of meat; this was a 'disgrace to the Japanese Army' and he had it put right for a few weeks. Rarely were the Japanese so sensitive in these matters. Many prisoners were afterwards taken from Java to work on the **Burma- Thailand** railway or in **Japan** itself.

A number of men, a majority from, the Navy, were captured in **Sumatra**. Some reached there from **Singapore** and found it as difficult to go farther as others had found it to leave **Java**. Some were survivors from ships sunk in Banka Strait, where both Japanese air and surface units maintained a blockade. Conditions of imprisonment in **Sumatra**—the main camp was near **Palembang**—were very bad. Food was poor, even when supplemented by judicious thefts from Japanese stores, and the opportunities for local purchase were limited. A fund was established from a pool of valuables and spare clothing, and most of whatever could be bought, under black-market conditions, was reserved for the hospital. Medical facilities were virtually non-existent, though a doctor with a knowledge of botany made some use of herbal remedies. Of 1200 in the camp it is estimated that four hundred died. The hospital, with its stench from tropical ulcers and dysentery cases, was bad enough to impress the Japanese, who burned it just before the surrender. In the **Sumatra** dry season even water was scarce.

Subsidiary camps throughout the **Netherlands East Indies** were among the worst in Japanese-held territories. At a camp in the Ambon Group the Korean interpreter (Koreans often made themselves more insufferable than the Japanese, until a few weeks before the surrender when they suddenly became wondrous sweet) shouted into a hospital full of desperately ill prisoners, 'Why don't you hurry up and die?' This camp was notorious for its 'blitzes on the sick'. In turning out for working parties men who could scarcely stand, the Japanese would blandly assure them that the 'spirit' would cure them, and perhaps for that reason supplied no drugs. It is not altogether surprising that only 25 per

cent of a draft of 2000 prisoners taken from **Java** to Haruku Island survived life on the island and the terrible two months' voyage to traverse a distance which in peacetime took four days.

Near Makassar, on **Celebes**, were other bad camps where at least fourteen New Zealanders, including survivors of HMS *Exeter*, were imprisoned. Again the sick were among the principal victims. Men whom the doctors sent to hospital had first to parade before the Japanese in charge of discipline 'who was liable to send you to work or make you run around the compound until you collapsed'. In hospital it was a case of 'either get better or die'. In this camp, in the middle of 1945, there were several mass beatings of scores of prisoners (in one case of 300) for one man's offence: the offence for which 300 men were punished was that of bringing into camp food picked up while out on a working party. In many prisoner-of-war camps the Japanese became generally more, rather than less, brutal with the gradual realisation of their defeat. One New Zealander mentioned that trading (among prisoners and to some extent, illicitly, with guards in articles made by the prisoners) was 'the spice of existence and kept men from going mad'. Another naval rating remarked that they were constantly in danger of beatings 'as we tried to outwit the Japs on the supreme matter of food'. No private fires were allowed in Makassar, but the prisoners did their cooking in holes dug under the boards of their beds. One of these men celebrated peace by going out of the camp and chasing and killing a goat. As in most of the outposts of the Co-prosperity Sphere the 'supreme matter of food' obsessed everybody.



'ACCOMMODATION FOUND'

—from *British Battalion (Sumatra) Diary*, a sketch by E. Burgoyne on the Burma-Thailand Railway

'ACCOMMODATION FOUND'

—from *British Battalion (Sumatra) Diary*, a sketch by E. Burgoyne on the **Burma-Thailand Railway**

* This party reached **Australia** after forty-four days at sea.

** The subjects taught included architecture, law, accountancy, and 'about fifteen different languages and dialects, including Russian in three stages and Arabic, as well as the usual modern foreign languages and the Eastern ones'.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE BURMA-THAILAND RAILWAY

The Burma-Thailand Railway

THE MAJOR WORK project carried out by prisoners of war for the Japanese was the construction of the **Burma- Thailand** railway. The line, about 260 miles long, was built in about a year, between October 1943 and October 1944, by approximately 60,000 prisoners of war and an unnumbered host (probably 100,000) of Asiatic coolies. It is estimated that a quarter of the Europeans died; the proportion of deaths among the Tamil, Javanese, Malay, and Chinese labourers, recruited voluntarily with fair promises of pay, was much larger, for if the Japanese treated their European prisoners badly they treated their fellow-Asiatics atrociously.

The construction was of a much lower standard than European engineers would have tolerated. Some important bridges had concrete foundations and above that earth filling and precarious structures of timber. The enemy used very little mechanical equipment, and the formation and laying of the track cut through heavy jungle was carried out by coolies—white, yellow, or brown. The method of work was for sticks to be placed horizontally to show the level to which the track had to be raised; gangs of prisoners under the supervision of a guard then grubbed out earth beside the track with crude hoe-like implements, filled up sacking stretchers, and emptied them on the slowly rising mound.

Men were brought up from **Malaya** by train and from **Java** by sea to work in **Thailand** and **Burma**. The packed journeys in closed carriages or metal trucks or crammed into the holds of archaic ships (650 prisoners in a space 48 feet by 75 feet) were the worst part of most men's experience in Japanese hands. From the railhead they had to march carrying all baggage, perhaps for five or six days, to reach their allotted camp. These camps were strung out at 15-mile intervals along the track. The prisoners' first task was to erect camp buildings with wood from the jungle: first guardhouses and living quarters for the Japanese, then huts for working prisoners, cooking shelters, and the inevitable hospital. The huts had long, thatched roofs and often no walls. Inside, on either side

of a narrow central gangway, were raised bamboo sleeping platforms; each man was allowed between two and three feet of room laterally.

At first officers were required only to head working parties. This gave them the duty of intervening between the guards and the prisoners during the many misunderstandings that arose from ignorance of Japanese or the capriciousness of individual guards; nearly always these misunderstandings resulted in the officer being included in the private soldier's beating. Soon officers as a body were made to work on the railway. If they did not, they were told, then more of the sick would have to turn out. The drive to finish the railway against a prearranged timetable was intense and the guards pushed the prisoners to the last gasp.

In the populated districts nearer the coast in **Thailand** it was possible to get extra food by trading with the Thais, who showed themselves generally friendly. In the inland jungle camps opportunities to get extra rations were more limited. In one camp prisoners were issued with wooden tabs inscribed in Japanese and were allowed out into the jungle to forage for themselves. But while the railway was being built the hours of labour—from dawn to dusk with one *yasume* (rest) every fortnight—left the men with little superfluous strength. The rations which the Japanese issued were a shade more ample than in **Malaya** or **Java**, though they dwindled after the completion of the line.

In 1944 the only work to be done was maintenance and the fittest prisoners were drafted away to **Japan**. Incidentally, it was from 150 survivors of a torpedoed Japanese ship picked up by Allied vessels early in 1944 that the outside world first heard of the conditions on the railway. With 1000 miles to travel to reach friendly territory, either through jungle or across the sea, no one had escaped. The others were drafted in increasing numbers from the jungle towards the coast into what were virtually hospital camps. Here some men had the spirit and the energy to act plays, hold concerts, and carry on a more developed social life.

The Japanese guards on the railway seem to have been among the most savage and badly conducted of any, perhaps because of the remoteness from supervision. An ironic story is told of a Japanese officer in **Burma** jumping down from a passing train when he saw a guard 'bashing' a prisoner and apologising to the prisoner for the ignorant brutality of 'this coolie', whom he then beat up himself before returning to his train. Such interventions were infrequent; indeed, some of the worst atrocities in **Thailand** were committed by Japanese officers, particularly by the engineers. It was revealed after **Japan's** capitulation that the Japanese had planned to massacre their prisoners at the end of August 1945, a plan known, through Thai sympathisers, to the Allies, who had dropped specially trained paratroops to forestall it. These paratroops armed and organised Thais to help in overwhelming the Japanese guards. Similar action had already been taken by the **United States** forces at internment camps in the **Philippines** and by the **Australians** in **Borneo**.

The only support for the prisoners' morale was their sense of solidarity. New Zealanders and Australians, it was generally agreed, came through the ordeal well. In Thailand, as elsewhere, the guards were distinguished by suitable nicknames: the Mad Mongol, Donald Duck, Harold Lloyd, the Black Prince, Blind Boil, Puss-in-Boots, and others which cannot be set down here. This attitude helped morale but was dangerous: one prisoner records that he received a beating for 'silent contempt too plainly shown'.

The railway had been, like nearly all the other work to which the Japanese set prisoners of war, a military project. Naturally it became a military objective, and prisoners still living in camps close to the line were killed when Allied bombers began their attacks in late 1944. The Japanese ran locomotives alongside prison camps when the bombers appeared; anti-aircraft guns were also sited equally close to the camps.

The experiences of prisoners working on the **Thailand** railway throw strange sidelights on the Japanese mentality. The major fact is that the

atrocious treatment of the sick (and of the well so that they rapidly became sick) was against the interests of the Japanese. As one ex-prisoner has put it, 'reason met its last frustration in asking why the enemy should want to destroy the labour force they needed so urgently.' Late in 1944 the Japanese forbade the prisoners' canteens to buy from the Thais any further meat, sugar, or salt, because the Geneva Convention said that these commodities should be supplied by the detaining power. 'If you have to buy them, it means we are not giving you enough. If we stop you from buying them, therefore, it means you are getting enough.' * Logic of Nippon!

THE FALL OF SINGAPORE



Lieutenant-General A. E. Percival signs the surrender at Singapore.
The Japanese leader is Lieutenant-General T. Yamashita.

Lieutenant-General A. E. Percival signs the surrender at [Singapore](#). The Japanese leader is Lieutenant-General T. Yamashita

SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS



Working party at Palembang, Sumatra

Working party at Palembang, *Sumatra*

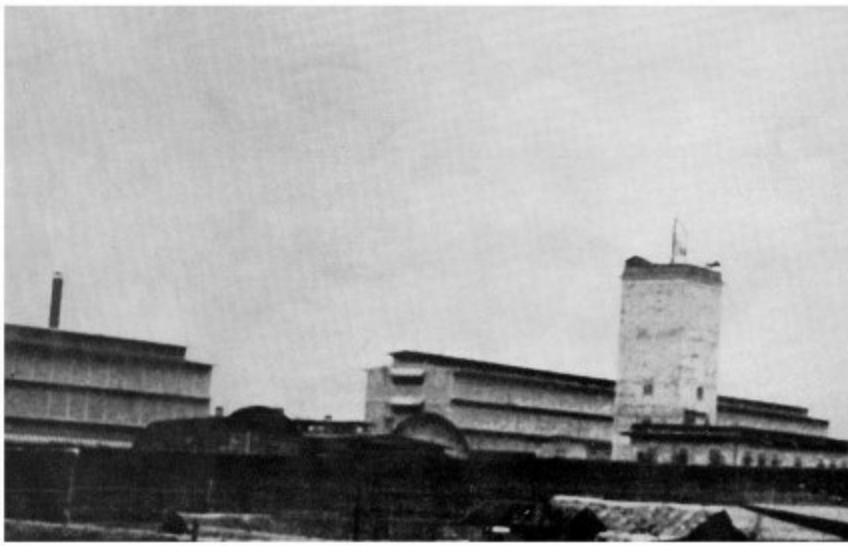


(Above) Signing the pledge not to escape—after orders under duress

(Below) The cookhouse—both these photographs were taken at Selarang Barracks, Singapore



(Above) Signing the pledge not to escape—after order under duress
(Below) The cookhouse—both these photographs were taken at Selarang Barracks, *Singapore*



Changi Jail, used by the Japanese to confine civilian internees and, later, prisoners of war

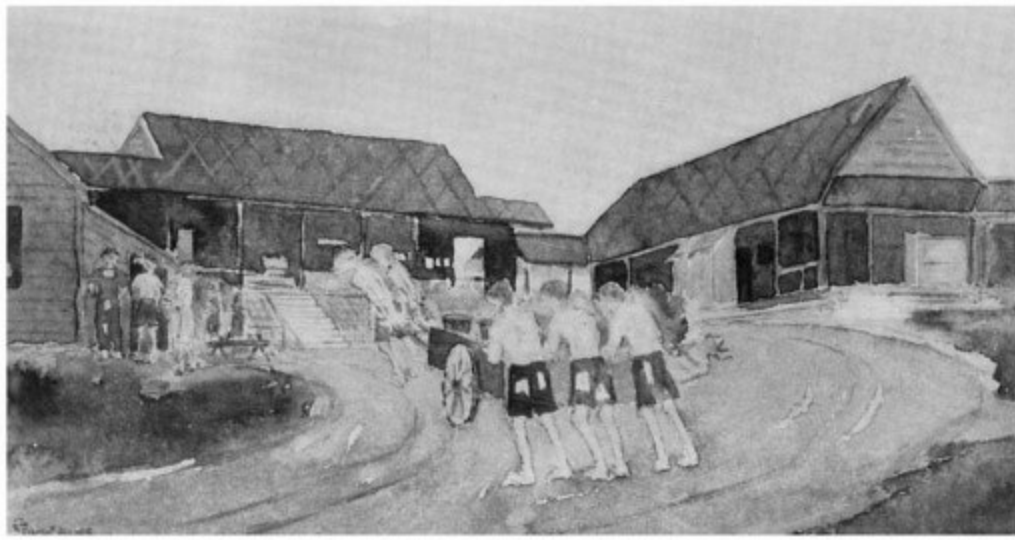
Changi Jail, used by the Japanese to confine civilian internees and, later, prisoners of war



A panorama of Selarang Barracks showing some of the 17,000 Allied troops under 'persuasion' to sign a pledge not to escape

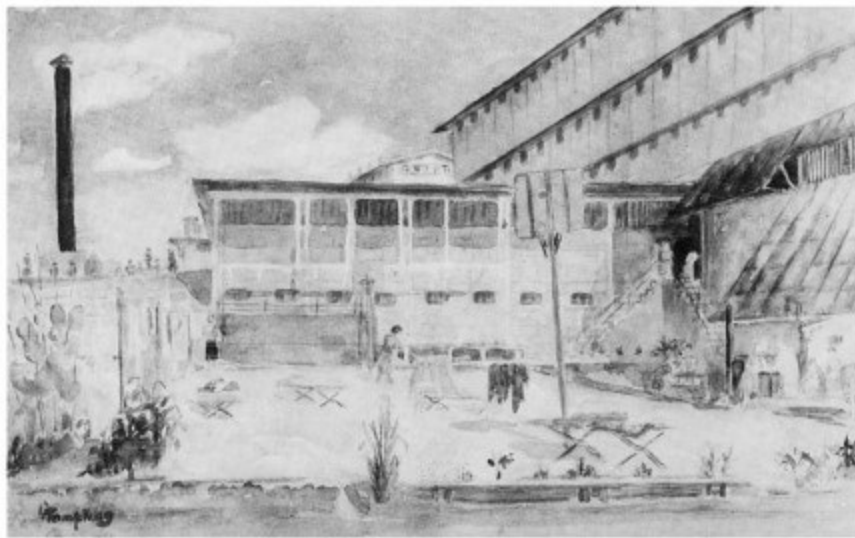
A panorama of Selarang Barracks showing some of the 17,000 Allied troops under 'persuasion' to sign a pledge not to escape

This painting of the Sime Road civilian internment camp was described by the artist, Gladys Tompkins, as 'Our men pushing our rice tubs up to the Hospital Area.'



This painting of the Sime Road civilian internment camp was described by the artist, Gladys Tompkins, as 'Our men pushing our rice tubs up to the Hospital Area.'

Another painting by Gladys Tompkins. A courtyard in the women's section of Changi Jail



Another painting by Gladys Tompkins. A courtyard in the women's section of Changi Jail

The Burma- Thailand Railway

WORK IN THE JUNGLE



PRISONERS OF WAR BUILDING A RAILWAY BRIDGE. The artist, Murray Griffin hid this drawing between sheets of tin stopping the leaks in the attap roof of his hut.

PRISONERS OF WAR BUILDING A RAILWAY BRIDGE. The artist, Murray Griffin, hid this sepia drawing between sheets of tin stopping the leaks in the attap roof of his hut



THE HINTOKU-TAMPI RAILWAY BRIDGE. Rough scrub timber has been used in the construction of this bridge, whose height was 100 feet. Note the small diesel-driven trolley. The photograph was taken in October 1945.

THE HINTOKU-TAMPI RAILWAY BRIDGE. Rough scrub timber has been used in the construction of this bridge, whose height was 100 feet. Note the small diesel-driven trolley. The Photograph was taken in October 1945

RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION CAMP, KANYA, *Thailand*

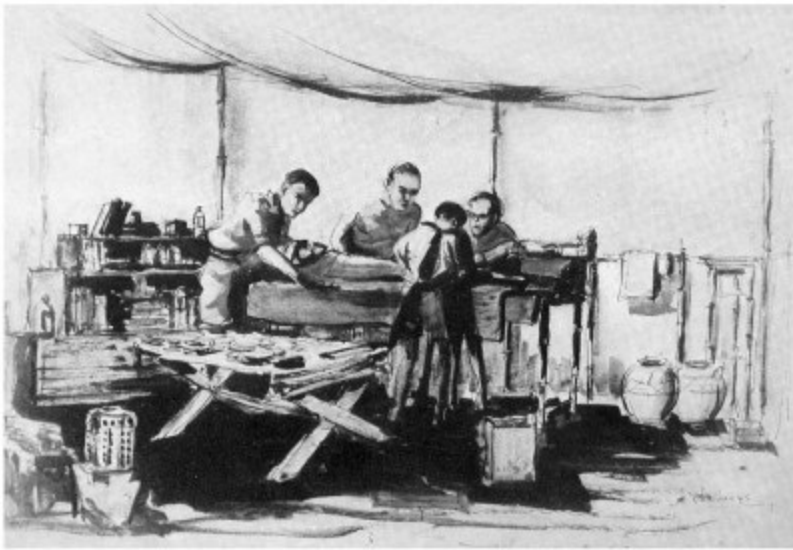


RAILWAY CONSTRUCTION CAMP, KANYA, *Thailand*



THE RAILWAY TRACK FROM
KANACHANA BURI, also photo-
graphed in October 1945

THE RAILWAY TRACK FROM KANACHANA BURI, also photographed in October 1945



OPERATING
THEATRE,
Chungkai

Two paintings
by J. B. Chalker

OPERATING THEATRE, *Chungkai* Two Paintings

CHOLERA HOSPITAL,
Hintok



CHOLERA HOSPITAL, *Hintok*



OMI SUB-CAMP
The gallery by Basil Were was made during the fortnight's wait for evacuation following the Japanese surrender. It shows wooden barracks with tiled roof on the right and, on the left, an air-raid shelter built by prisoners.

OMI SUB-CAMP

This painting by Basil Were was made during the fortnight's wait for evacuation following the Japanese surrender. It shows wooden barracks with tiled roof on the right and, on the left, an air-raid shelter built by prisoners



AERIAL VIEW OF CAMP 4B, Niigata, after the surrender but before the release. Shortage of paint made it hard to get enough for the letters PW on hut roofs.

AERIAL VIEW OF CAMP 4B, Niigata, after the surrender but before the release. Shortage of paint made it hard to get enough for the letters PW on hut roofs

FREE MEN



Civilian internees liberated
at the Sime Road camp

Civilian internees liberated at the Sime Road camp



UNITED STATES
ESCORT CARRIER
BLOCK ISLAND
Allied soldiers freed
from Formosa rest, eat,
and sleep on the hangar
deck. Most of these men
are in bad physical
condition.

**UNITED STATES ESCORT CARRIER
*BLOCK ISLAND***

Allied soldiers freed from *Formosa* rest, eat and sleep on the hanger deck. Most of these men are in bad physical condition

* Rohan D. Rivett, *Behind Bamboo* (Angus and Robertson), p. 329.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

HONG KONG

Hong Kong

By the standards of Japanese prison camps those at **Hong Kong** were relatively humane and well run. In Shumshuipo camp there was a good library, and the prisoners held classes (until mid-1942, when they were forbidden), produced plays and concerts. Sports gear and instruments for a band were sent into this camp, the former bought with money sent by His Holiness the Pope. But malnutrition was common. Food sent in by the **Red Cross** helped to keep up a minimum standard of health, and in one camp a garden of 3 ½ acres was cultivated. A shortage of wood for fuel was a constant annoyance. This was one of the few areas outside **Japan** itself where any clothing was issued to prisoners. In the **Netherlands East Indies, Malaya, Burma, and Thailand**, men who would otherwise have been completely naked were given loin-cloths (nicknamed 'Jap-happies'); few had more than a tattered shirt and a pair of shorts or a loin-cloth at the capitulation.

Even in these relatively good camps the guards gave frequent exhibitions of brutality, arrogance, and bad temper, keeping prisoners in a perpetual state of tension. The prisoners suffered, here as elsewhere, from the universal habit of Japanese officers of backing up any action of a Japanese private. Each guard could make his own camp rules, and did, so that there was no end to the petty annoyances and interferences prisoners had to endure.

The Japanese had the habit in many of their camps of distributing English-language newspapers containing their own versions of the progress of the war. The *Hong Kong News* gave a fairly accurate account of events in **Europe** but a wholly biased and even childishly fantastic story of the **Pacific** war. Like others in **Malaya** and in **Thailand**, the **Hong Kong** prisoners had their own secret radios and knew the real news. This was a service which a few men rendered to their comrades at very great personal risk. Lieutenant H. C. Dixon, RNZNVR, * a radio engineer in civil life, in North Point and Shumshuipo camps constructed several receiving sets under great difficulties. Once valves were

smuggled in wrapped up in the bandages round a prisoner who had been operated on, outside the camp, for appendicitis. The set itself was kept hidden under the ovens in the kitchen and later in a specially built space under a flower-bed, where it was subsequently discovered by the Japanese.

A secret radio was a highly dangerous possession. The senior officers in Shumshuipo, who had instigated the building of this set, had been extremely careful in feeding out news bulletins to the camp. Few were in the secret. But the necessity for drying out the radio after it had been taken from its damp hiding place under the flower-bed made its existence known to other prisoners, one of whom must have been indiscreet. One day the Japanese military police cleared the camp and then went straight to the flower-bed. The radio was not there, but some hours later the Japanese found it on the stove where it had been placed to dry. Lieutenant Dixon and other officers were taken away for a ruthless interrogation which lasted a month. Fortunately they had a story prepared with enough of the truth in it to satisfy the Japanese and reduce the circle of their victims. Dixon was inevitably among these. Another New Zealander, who escaped to **China** in July 1944, reported that he expected that Dixon would have been executed, but, surviving the maltreatment of the Japanese police, who had been especially alarmed because this set could have been used for transmitting, he received a sentence of fifteen years' imprisonment and was released from **Canton** jail at the capitulation.

* Lt H. C. Dixon, MBE, RNZNVR; radio engineer; **Wellington**; born **Wellington**, 24 Apr 1908; taken prisoner at Hong Kong, 25 Dec 1941; released Aug 1945.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE ISLANDS OF JAPAN

The Islands of Japan

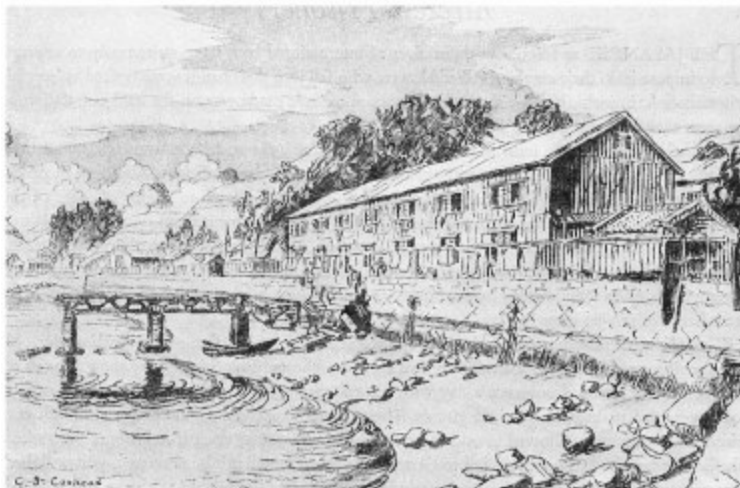
PRISONERS OF WAR taken to the Japanese home islands were no better treated, except in some minor ways, than those who remained in the newly-conquered Co-prosperity Sphere. The voyage itself was the most terrible ordeal. A prisoner who was moved from **Java** to **Japan** (by **Singapore**, Saigon, and **Formosa**) late in 1942 recorded that one man in three died on the way, the living being too weak to remove the corpses and using them as pillows in the ghastly congestion of a hold only four feet high. All who survived went into hospital in **Japan**. The risk of being torpedoed grew as the war proceeded. The *Lisbon Maru*, torpedoed in October 1942 on a voyage from **Hong Kong** to **Japan**, was carrying about 1800 prisoners. She went down by the stern and the 200 men in the after hold had no chance of escape; the 1600 in the forward holds got out into the water where the Japanese machine-gunned them; eventually 930 were picked up.

The camps in **Japan** were widely distributed and were usually attached to some industry: a ship-building yard, a steel-works, a coal mine, or the wharves of a large port. Some were on Hokkaido, the northern island of **Japan**, where the winter climate is rigorous and the summer prolific of mosquitoes. Most of the prisoners going to **Japan** had been given uniforms of a rough, sacklike material, but it was inadequate to keep out the cold in a region whose inhabitants wore fur in winter. The prisoners were set to work shovelling coal, working in factories, digging on the hillsides, or carpentering. Early in 1944 an English-speaking Japanese commandant, a Colonel Emoto, stopped beatings and increased rations, but next year, with his departure and the Japanese reverses, there was a new wave of ill-treatment.

A dockside work camp at Yokohama consisted of a large goods shed fitted with wooden platforms on which several hundred prisoners of all ages and nationalities slept; these quarters were infested with rats, lice, and fleas. **Zentsuji** camp, in the southern part of **Japan**, was one of the few designed to accommodate prisoners of war, but it was cramped and

insanitary, though at first conditions in it were comparatively good. Some of the prisoners were sent to the Kamishi steel-works, about 200 miles north of **Tokyo**. This was twice shelled by the United States Fleet, and the prisoners, quartered between the sea and the factory building, suffered many casualties. Others elsewhere had bombs dropped near them in Allied raids. At the capitulation the Japanese faithfully observed its conditions, putting out 20-foot squares on the roofs of the prison barracks to guide American aircraft coming in to drop supplies for immediate use. To the delight of the prisoners, one of these mercy parcels dropped at Kamishi broke the thigh of a Japanese in the prison office.

The prisoners found Japanese civilians generally friendly and their gentleness and good manners a sharp contrast to the habits of the prison guards. They were glad to trade if prisoners had anything to barter in exchange for their own increasingly meagre supplies of food. At considerable risk



INNOSHIMA PW CAMP ON THE INLAND SEA OF JAPAN
from a painting by G. S. Coxhead

INNOSHIMA PW CAMP ON THE INLAND SEA OF JAPAN
from a painting by G. S. Coxhead

some men were able to get out of their camps at night to forage, but it was hopeless to attempt escape. Propaganda in the English newspapers printed in **Japan** was known to over-reach itself: for instance, it was asserted that 'the New Zealanders were so short of meat they were eating

rabbits'. The food shortage in **Japan** weighed on the civil population just as heavily as on the prisoners and gave everyone a fair idea of the trend of the war.

Representatives of the **Red Cross** and of the protecting neutral power visited many prison and internment camps in **Japan**, as well as in **China** and **Malaya**. Although these visitors were never allowed to speak to the prisoners and comedies of plenty were sometimes played for their benefit (well-stocked canteens were set up for the few hours of their visit and emptied immediately afterwards), they were able to send supplies into the camps. Rather more **Red Cross** parcels were distributed in **Japan** than elsewhere, * though the guards pilfered them mercilessly, saying that everything belonging to prisoners of war was legally the property of the Japanese government.

* Although a prisoner of war in **Japan** itself might receive three or four parcels during the whole of his captivity, a prisoner in Indonesia, **Malaya**, or **China** was lucky if he received more than one in three years. The Red Cross packed and forwarded enough parcels to permit the same distribution as in European prison camps—one to each prisoner every week.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

AIRCREW PRISONERS

Aircrew Prisoners

THE JAPANESE, so insouciant themselves of international law, were quite ready to attempt to impose it on their enemies. Allied aircrew who fell into their hands were treated as 'special' prisoners or 'criminals', because they were supposed to have made war on the civil population of the areas they had attacked.

Aircraft operating from [India](#) in the [Burma](#) theatre from 1944 could not always pass unscathed through the enemy's flak: his light anti-aircraft fire was particularly efficient. Alighting in paddy fields to avoid the jungle, pilots rarely crash-landed without the death or injury of some of the crew, but injuries did not earn them any specially considerate treatment from their captors. It was usually some days before they reached a regular prison, after going through the usual cycle of being handed over by Burmese villagers (sometimes friendly, but in terror of the Japanese), interrogation, and a long journey by punt or ox-waggon which might involve exposure to violence at the hands of pro-Japanese Indians.

These 'special' prisoners were miserably lodged in [Rangoon](#) jail, five men in each 9ft by 15ft cell, sleeping on concrete with a minimum of clothing (the only accessions were the garments of dead comrades), allowed out once a day with a wash once a week, fed a meagre amount of rice and water, and maltreated by their guards. The wounded received no attention, although one prisoner was eventually allowed to undertake the duties of amateur doctor. A prisoner who asked whether his capture had been notified to Geneva was told: 'It will not be necessary, you will die.' However, after some months the Japanese lodged the aircrew 'criminals' with the other Allied prisoners in the adjoining compound. The improvement in sanitation alone, as well as in morale, did much, in spite of the attacks of the guards, to make the sombre Japanese prophecy untrue: untrue, that is, for about half their victims. A prisoner in [Rangoon](#) remarked that moral attitudes were important; the man who exercised, even walking up and down the tiny cells, was not affected by

malnutrition to the same extent as others.

Some Fleet Air Arm aircrew were shot down over **Japan** itself in the last few weeks of the war. These men, too, were 'special' prisoners. They were beaten up, but not with the specialist skill of prison guards, by the local population, then interrogated and lodged in civil jails. One New Zealander was led out before a firing squad, but it was a mock execution. In jail, clad only in an undergarment, these prisoners had to submit to conditions as hard as any in **Japan**. These men owed their lives to the capitulation following so closely upon their capture.

Another late prisoner of war was a fighter-pilot shot down over an outlying island of New **Britain** in June 1945. He broke his leg in the crash and was brought in to **Rabaul** tied to a stretcher. There he was confined in an unlighted cave 15ft long by 3ft wide and 5ft high entered by a barred door about 2ft high and 1ft 6ins wide. He was brought out of this cell only to undergo interrogation. No violence was used against him, but he received no attention for his injury and set his leg roughly himself. He kept up his spirits by singing and helped to pass the time by fraternising with a toad in the cave. After more than two months in darkness the Japanese brought him out and told him of the capitulation. He then found that there were eight other Allied prisoners of war there, some in worse condition than himself.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

CIVILIAN INTERNEES

Civilian Internees

THE CIVILIAN INTERNEES were on the whole better treated by the Japanese than the service prisoners of war. If anything, they received less food, but they also experienced much less direct brutality. They had better facilities than the prisoners of war for recreation and education (schools were organised where children were interned), and they were generally made to work only on duties about their own camps.

The civilians interned in [Malaya](#) were gradually concentrated in Changi Peninsula, first in Changi prison, the civil jail built to accommodate 600 native prisoners but made to receive 3000 or more internees, and later in Sime Road barracks, in both with separate sections for men and women. In these camps conditions were more rigorous than in most other internment centres, and after October 1943 approximated closely to those experienced by prisoners of war. The camp was governed internally by a 'very complex and democratic organisation', which succeeded in checking if not in altogether eliminating rackets, which were, of course, connected with extra food. Discipline, including bowing to the Japanese, was not so much severe as 'humiliating' with 'too much indiscriminate bashing'. Punishments for men internees included 'beatings, kneeling in the sun for long periods, and other subtle methods'. At first, courses of study were organised on a very full scale; a library of 7000 books was collected, and concerts, plays, and other community activities helped to make the time pass.

On 10 October 1943, known to the Changi internees as the 'double tenth', the scene changed abruptly. The military police descended on Changi, searched the building, and left carrying off fifty men and three secret radios they had found. The Japanese suspected that the internees were sending out radio signals and attributed to these a successful Allied attack on a Japanese convoy. How the internees were to collect the information they were supposed to have sent out was apparently not given any consideration. Not all of the fifty interrogated returned, and most of those who did had been badly injured. Everyone endured a cut in

rations, and all forms of study and recreation were abolished except for a weekly concert.

Conditions of internment were severe also at **Kuching**, in **Sarawak**; here the food was poor and a man might receive a beating for smiling through the wire without permission at his wife and child. In China, both at **Shanghai** and **Hong Kong**, conditions were less harsh. In Hong Kong, apart from the inevitable matter of food, the internees were not badly treated, and the Japanese even gave up attempts to teach them to bow. 'Generally speaking, our passive refusal to take the Japanese seriously proved to be an excellent technique,' one reported. These internees successfully combated the usual manufacture of propaganda: 'flashlights were taken off an open-air concert but the audience spoiled them by making V signs just before each flash.' Parcels from friends outside could be brought into the camps in **China** once a month. At **Bangkok**, in **Thailand**, in a camp which the Japanese inspected but did not control, the conditions of internment were relatively mild although the area was intolerably confined.

Many of the internees in **China** or **Japan** were missionaries. The Japanese appear to have treated them with something approaching respect: this does not apply to their attitude to the chaplains captured with military formations. Many missionaries were not imprisoned until months after **Japan** had entered the war. Japanese respect for old age showed itself in their treatment of a small group of nuns and Protestant missionaries interned together in **Japan** itself. They were allowed out to go shopping and for walks under guard; they received kindnesses from their guards and exchanged language lessons with them. A missionary who ran an orphanage in Hong Kong was allowed to remain in charge of it without being interned at all. She was given access to the orphanage funds in a bank seized by the enemy, had a pass to move about, and was not molested even when soldiers were quartered in part of the building; instead, the Japanese, who are supposed to cherish children as well as to respect age, sent some of their own food to the orphans. Except for the increasing food shortage she could hardly have been better treated. A

priest in the Philippines, although not interned until 1944, found that the 2000 internees at Los Banos camp were being fed starvation rations although the American paratroops who liberated them found nearby stores stuffed with rice. The guards at this camp shot it out with the liberating troops while the internees lay flat on the ground in their own quarters; none of them was hurt, but 165 Japanese guards were killed for one casualty among the attackers. This is one of the few instances of direct vengeance descending on Japanese guards.

A New Zealander interned with the Dutch in Java found compensation for his loss of liberty in the books available and in the excellent concerts organised. Discipline was intermittently severe, hundreds of men being lined up on occasion and made to beat each other, a form of collective punishment more usually reserved for prisoners of war. Collective punishments of a less brutal character were frequently inflicted on internees, in a few instances for escapes. In spite of the acute shortage of food the Japanese frowned on personal efforts to supplement rations, and nearly everywhere they made trading 'over the wall' an offence. But even comparatively harsh punishments might fail in their effect. At Wei-hsien in China in 1943, 'one man was caught getting eggs in over the wall and he was imprisoned in a cowshed for a fortnight. He was a Trappist monk and he rather enjoyed his solitary confinement.'

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

FOOD AND HEALTH

Food and Health

THE LIFE OF A PRISONER of war, whether in the Far East, Italy, or Germany, centred around food. Universally throughout the Japanese prisoner-of-war or internment camps food progressively deteriorated both in quantity and quality as the war went on. Some of the blame for this may be laid at the door of the war situation: Japanese supplies (Japan itself consumes more rice than it grows) were disrupted by the successful attacks of Allied submarines and bombers on Japanese shipping. In a small internment camp in Japan an elderly nun, otherwise well treated, remarked that the internees, though short of food, were better fed than the mass of the Japanese people. On the other hand, in almost every camp plenty of food could be produced during the few weeks following the capitulation when the Japanese were desperately trying to redeem themselves, and at this time, too, Red Cross parcels, some of which had been so long in store that their contents had gone mouldy, were issued. Few Japanese prisoners of war had more than two parcels issued to them during more than three years, and then often they received only a fractional share of a parcel. Many camps, however, benefited by Red Cross purchases in bulk. The guards extensively plundered Red Cross supplies, both of food and medicines.

The staple diet was rice and vegetables. The rice would be served with traces of sugar, with pickles or vegetables (often only sweet-potato tops or some pale variety of melon), and occasionally with shreds of meat or of fish. Vegetable soup was also commonly served. In some areas, including Japan, the rice might have barley or other grain mixed with it. * Quantities were almost invariably short, the shortages roughly corresponding to the laziness or black-market opportunities of the Japanese quartermasters. Even when the quantity was nearly enough to give men the illusion of fullness, the deficiency in vitamins began to make itself felt after six months. Although many men caught such tropical diseases as malaria, dengue, or dysentery, the chief disease, immeasurably increasing the deadliness of all the others, was slow starvation. It was malnutrition which killed most of the victims of the

Japanese, and to a large extent it was calculated malnutrition. The food bought by the prisoners with their own funds, or gifts to them, were taken into account by the Japanese. It was apparently their policy to keep their captives below normal—something below their own low standard, that is—so that they would be less likely to give trouble, and, moreover, might disembarass their captors of their presence altogether.

Men fully realised the nature of this life-and-death struggle. They lost no chance of supplementing their diet, and soon learned to steal from the enemy whenever opportunity offered. It paid to eat pilfered food on the spot. While their comrades kept watch, men were known to cram themselves hastily with as much as they could swallow of even raw rice and dried fish. Valuables, such as watches and fountain-pens, were sold to the Japanese, to the civil population, or to other prisoners who had money. Some, in their desperate need, signed cheques at fantastic rates of exchange to get money from fellow-internees or prisoners of war: it would be interesting to know whether those who exacted these cheques have held their fellow-victims to their bargain. They might well take as their example the Thai merchant who allowed prisoners of war after the capitulation to redeem the possessions they had sold to him for exactly what he had paid for



BRITISH BATTALION KITCHEN, THAILAND — a sketch by E. Burgoyne
BRITISH BATTALION KITCHEN, THAILAND — a sketch by E. Burgoyne

them. A man who sold his fellow-prisoners food stolen from the Japanese was regarded as a 'benevolent racketeer'; most rackets were

anything but benevolent.

Prisoners of war were paid, supposedly, at the same rates as corresponding ranks in the Japanese forces. Officers received what would have been substantial amounts but for the Japanese habit of 'banking' a part on their behalf and deducting a sum to cover the cost of their 'keep'. After contributing half or more of the balance to funds for the sick and for other ranks, an officer did not command more than the equivalent of £1 a month. Other ranks who worked were paid on a scale that gave them about 15s a month. At first in nearly all camps there were canteen supplies— usually local fruit and vegetables—and the Japanese took a percentage of the canteen profits. In the last year inflation in all the countries controlled by **Japan** made money of very little value.

In Hong Kong, in 1943 and 1944, the daily ration was 500 grammes of rice and beans, but in 1945 it had dropped to 350 grammes. Rations everywhere declined in about the same ratio as at **Hong Kong**. Dogs, rats, lizards, and snakes were all eaten. In 1945, in the Sime Road civil internment camp at **Singapore**, a snail farm was instituted. Prisoners of war and internees realised the protective value of certain foods. At Hong Kong soya beans, eggs, and synthetic vitamin B1 were bought in small quantities, the usual preference to the sick being given in the distribution. There, too, men ate green swamp weed or garlic, when they could get it, not for nourishment but to check skin diseases.

It is true that some had needs even sharper than food. Some men at times bartered their rations for cigarettes, a form of trading aptly described as 'polite cannibalism'.

The doctors did magnificent work among the prisoners and internees. Rarely were they given any substantial assistance by the enemy: on the other hand, there were numerous cases of deliberate obstruction. Some of the doctors performed amputations and other operations with razor blades, with meat saws, with a piece of sharpened hoop-iron. In Burma the ingenuity of a Dutch chemist supplied a local

anaesthetic concocted from jungle plants. In many camps a little copper sulphate, used in the treatment of tropical ulcers, was the sole medicament supplied, even though other drugs had been provided by the **Red Cross**. One of the most bitter revelations of the capitulation was the large stock of drugs held in store by the Japanese which would have saved the lives of many prisoners. The only occasions when the Japanese showed any solicitude for the health of their prisoners was when epidemics were threatening. Once a man was sick, his chances of survival were further reduced because of the smaller rations given to those who did not work. Also, it was difficult to get men who were ill to touch rice.

The civilians interned in **Singapore** had a diet of about 2000 calories a day to begin with, since during the first two years about 25 per cent more food was available in addition to the Japanese rations. But there were fluctuations and more than one period of crisis. In 1945 the diet had sunk by May to 1500 calories, and it was impossible to work the same hours daily. The death rate was low for the conditions: 18 in 100 during the whole time of internment. This was attributed to the fact that so many of the men working in **Malaya** had passed stiff medical tests before taking up their appointments. Moreover, in a camp community health measures could be enforced. The shortage of medicines (the Japanese did supply a proportion of the drugs asked for) was offset by the knowledge and skill of the 100 doctors in the camp, many of them specialists. And the circumstances of their internment eliminated two causes of illness—over-eating and over-drinking.

The effects of malnutrition were widespread. Men with legs swollen from the effects of beriberi or with hideous tropical ulcers, which often resulted in amputation or death, were common sights in all camps. And 'once a man was a victim of beriberi work held no pleasure ... to drag one foot after another was an effort'. It was a common thing for prisoners and internees to sink in weight from 12 stone to 8 stone, or less. In internment camps only a few of the children, for whom the grown-ups made great sacrifices, were not noticeably affected.

Many prisoners noticed two common effects of malnutrition—dimmed eyesight and unreliable memory. Long after release many still feel physical effects, particularly a tendency to tire easily. Others have confessed to nervous symptoms resulting from their captivity—hatred of crowds, exaggerated shyness, extreme sensibility (to the point of weeping at the cinema).

*** In Japan itself the proportion of rice to its substitutes (millet, barley, maize, and soya bean) in the prisoners' diet was often very low.**

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

RELEASE

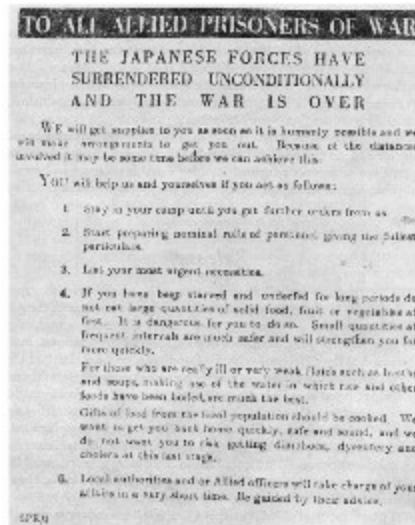
Release

IN MOST OF THE Japanese-controlled areas there was a time-lag between the capitulation and the rescue of prisoners in their hands. In many areas prisoners knew from their secret radios or from the admissions of their guards exactly when the war had ended; a week or more might pass before the Japanese could bring themselves to make a formal announcement. In many camps this interval was used to flood the camp with food, medicines, and hoarded Red Cross parcels, and in most the Japanese intention of fattening up prisoners and internees before they were released was childishly obvious. It was impossible to remedy years of malnutrition in a fortnight, especially as starved men and women could not immediately adjust their digestions to a fuller diet.

In Japan itself Allied aircraft soon identified the camps and began dropping food, cigarettes, medicines, and clothing, as well as radios by which the prisoners could themselves make known their condition and their wants. Early in September men were being taken on board United States hospital ships, where they were ‘processed’ * before being flown out to Manila. New Zealanders mostly went by sea from here to Australia on their way home.

The RAPWI (Repatriation of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees) organisation, functioning under Lord Mountbatten’s command, was in action soon after Japan’s capitulation, though the delay in arranging the surrender of the Singapore area entailed a wait that was peculiarly trying to most prisoners. First, leaflets were dropped from the air addressed to the Japanese. Then some helpers ‘dropped in’ by parachute. Once the initial contact had been made, supplies, medicines, and medical staff were brought in and the camps entirely taken over. Men were evacuated as rapidly as was humanly possible: by air, mostly, if they were fit enough. The prisoners and internees in China were liberated by the British Fleet, and many did the first lap of their homeward journey in carriers emptied of their aircraft for the purpose. The Rangoon prisoners had been freed earlier in 1945 when the

Japanese had retreated from the town. The Sarawak and Celebes prisoners and internees were liberated by Australian troops.



Allied pamphlet dropped in Thailand, 1945

Allied pamphlet dropped in Thailand, 1945

The work of the RAPWI organisation won praise. New Zealanders in Malaya and Java had a further advantage in the speed given to their homeward journey by the RNZAF Prisoner of War Evacuation Flight which arrived in Singapore on 12 September. This small unit ferried released prisoners from Singapore to Auckland.

The capitulation took most prisoners and internees by surprise. They had known that the war had been going badly for Japan, but they had feared that the Japanese would fight on as they had so often declared they would. Some believed that the Japanese would kill their prisoners at the end. So many heartening rumours had proved groundless in the past that liberation was a mental jolt to most prisoners. The emotion was almost unbearable. The transition from misery to happiness had been too abrupt.

*** ‘Processing’ was the comprehensive term for attending to the immediate needs of liberated prisoners of war: it included disinfestation, medical and dental’ examinations, giving particulars of all the circumstances of captivity, the issue of new clothing and kit, and of free cable forms to communicate with**

relatives.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE GAIN AND THE LOSS

The Gain and the Loss

IT IS DIFFICULT to write with moderation of the Japanese treatment of their prisoners. Comprehensive schedules have been drawn up of the many ways in which particular articles of the Geneva Convention were deliberately and cynically violated. The crimes are being dealt with by the proper authorities, and justice will be done where the perpetrators can be identified— no easy matter. No mention has yet been made of the cruelty inflicted on the relatives of prisoners of war and internees by the failure of the Japanese to notify the **Red Cross of the capture or internment of thousands of persons, or by such actions as the burning of prisoners' mail. Some next-of-kin had their first notification that their sons or husbands were in Japanese hands when they received from them, possibly two years after capture, one of the rare cards that the enemy allowed to be sent. Most men sent three or four cards a year, less than half of which reached the addressees. Another device of the Japanese for plaguing their prisoners was to refrain from delivering letters until many months after their arrival. Most letters were never delivered: this is hardly surprising as the Japanese kept no records of the prisoners and internees in their hands.**

It may be thought that the continued castigation of the Japanese in this survey, which relates primarily the experience of New Zealanders, is based on prejudice and exaggeration. On the contrary, the worst atrocities have been left unrelated, and it must be understood that types of maltreatment instanced as having happened in a particular camp or area were practically always common to all camps. However clearly we may diagnose the maladies that have twisted the Japanese spirit, it is no longer possible by explaining to excuse them. No doubt in some ways the Japanese might have been worse. They generally allowed prisoners the restricted exercise of their religion. They did not specially persecute women, though the circumstances of internment inevitably bore more heavily on them than on men. Some Japanese, the most brutal among them, could reveal strange flashes of kindness and generosity.

Former prisoners of war and internees show surprisingly little vindictiveness towards the Japanese. Their feeling is rather one of contempt, and few condescend to outright hatred; some reserve that feeling for fellow-prisoners who acted selfishly or who took advantage of the general misery to gain some personal advantage. An ex-prisoner, however, looking back, noticed signs of hysteria and felt that trivial incidents had sometimes been allowed to take on an exaggerated importance in the unnatural and harsh conditions of imprisonment. One man has lost his 'comfortable belief in the general decency of the human race': he remarks that many who find it easy to be brave on a full stomach become different persons with an empty one. Yet another ex-prisoner noted that 'men from whom one would expect nothing did things of kindness and bravery which astonished one'. Men showed a stern, unyielding pride in taking without flinching the beatings inflicted on them.

It was the solidarity and comradeship, more intense even than while serving in the forces before capture, which sustained most men in captivity. One ex-prisoner robustly stated that he would not have missed the experience for anything. Another gained 'an education that many books or any university in the world could not have taught me'. Another felt that nothing in the future could be worse than his time in Japanese hands. A naval surgeon said roundly that 'my three and a half years with men of high morale under grim conditions have made me quite unable to endure any form of grousing and complaints'. This is a constant theme with former prisoners and internees: they are impatient with the pettiness, self-seeking, and querulousness of people at home, and some explicitly regret the unselfishness and common sacrifice of prison life, a sharp contrast to the 'dog eat dog' spirit of ordinary society. Many men entirely revised their attitude to life and learned in bitter earnest the true meaning of the theme of the prisoner-chaplain's sermon, 'The Wisdom of Adversity'. It is unlikely that much of the heroism of these men and women will ever be recorded in detail, much less rewarded officially. But its reaffirmation of the strength of the moral fibre of ordinary people deserves to be paid the highest honour.



ALLIED AIR DROP OF SUPPLIES
From *White Coolie*, by Ronald Hastain, the sketch by Ronald Searle

ALLIED AIR DROP OF SUPPLIES

—from *White Coolie*, by Ronald Hastain, the sketch by Ronald Searle

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE SOURCES *consulted in the preparation of this account include books written by former prisoners of war, as well as eye-witness accounts and interviews recorded by the author of the official prisoner-of-war volume (Wynne Mason).*

The sketches and paintings are by the artists as credited in relevant captions. The photographs come from many collections, which are stated when they are known:

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page 14 (bottom), page 16 (centre), page 17 Australian War Memorial

page 19 (bottom) S. C. Parker

page 20 (top) RNZAF Official, Dorothy Cranstone

page 20 (bottom) US Navy Official

page 30 Father G. Bourke

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[BACKMATTER]

THE AUTHOR: D. O. W. Hall, graduated at **Cambridge** with honours in **English Literature** and in **History** in 1929. He was **Associate Editor** of **Centennial Publications**. He served with the **Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve** in the **Pacific** in the **Second World War**, and is now stationed in **Dunedin** as **Director of Adult Education**, **University of Otago**.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[BACKMATTER]

THE TYPE USED THROUGHOUT THE SERIES IS *Aldine Bembo* WHICH WAS REVIVED FOR MONOTYPE FROM A RARE BOOK PRINTED BY ALDUS IN 1495 * THE TEXT IS SET IN 12 POINT ON A BODY OF 14 POINT

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

TROOPSHIPS

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[backmatter]

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[frontispiece]

[title page] p. 1

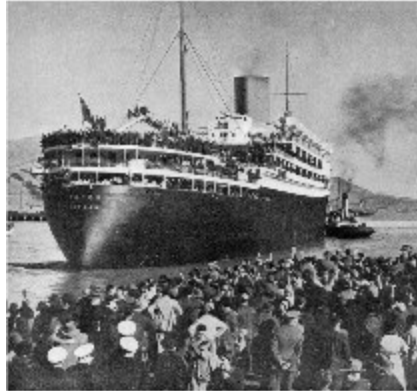
[editorpage] p. 2

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EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[COVERS]

NEW ZEALAND IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR
Official History



TROOPSHIPS

Author: Sir James Cowan
Editor: Sir James Cowan
Illustrations: Sir James Cowan
Published by the Government Printer
Wellington, New Zealand
1948



Illustration by
Sir James Cowan

TROOPSHIPS

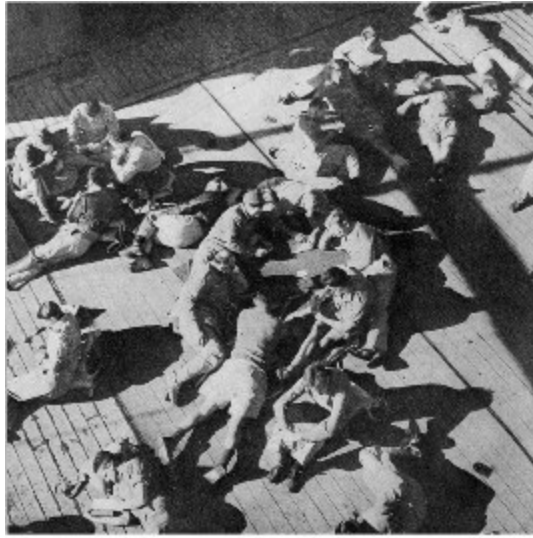
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S. P. LEITCH

NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS
PUBLICATIONS BRANCH
1948

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[FRONTISPIECE]



On the Nieuw Amsterdam

On the *Nieuw Amsterdam*

COVER PHOTOGRAPH The Second Echelon leaves *Lyttelton* in the *Andes*, May 1940

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[TITLE PAGE]

TROOPSHIPS

S. P. LLEWELLYN

WAR HISTORY BRANCH

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

1949

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[EDITORPAGE]

IT IS THE INTENTION *of this series to present aspects of New Zealand's part in the Second World War which will not receive detailed treatment in the campaign volumes and which are considered either worthy of special notice or typical of many phases of our war experience. The series is illustrated with material which would otherwise seldom see publication. It will also contain short accounts of operations which will be dealt with in detail in the appropriate volumes.*

H. K. KIPPENBERGER

,
Major-General
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

NEW ZEALAND WAR HISTORIES

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[UNTITLED]

PRINTED BY

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE FIRST VOYAGE

The First Voyage

ALL WAS READY in the liners. In the cabins the fluffy, woollen blankets were folded on the beds as for peacetime passengers, the hand-basins were spotless, the floors polished. The ships' military staffs—Officer Commanding Troops, his adjutant, quartermaster, messing officer, senior medical officer, sergeant-major—were aboard and at work, and the gangways waited now for the stamp of boots: brown boots and black boots, boots polished that morning in **Trentham** and still bright, boots dusty and dulled after the long train journey from the northern camps, **Papakura** and **Ngaruawahia**.

As the troops came aboard they were directed to cabins—first class for officers, second for senior non-commissioned officer, third for the rest. As yet, there had been no time to convert liners into transports, and only a small proportion of the **First Echelon** was given improvised quarters in the ships' holds. Many of the third class cabins contained six berths, but some only two, and groups and pairs of friends hurried down the companionways and shouted along the corridors in an effort to keep together during these few moments that would determine their cabin mates throughout the voyage.

After stowing their gear and, in some cases, waiting to change into deck shoes and grey jerseys, the soldiers went above to wave and shout to the crowd gathered on the **Wellington** waterfront to watch them sail—an event the authorities had naturally tried to keep secret. Meanwhile, with a steady roll of boots on gangways, unit after unit came aboard, the ships moving into the stream to anchor as soon as they were full. Until nightfall the crowd watched and waited, tooting motor horns and waving to the four liners: *Orion*, *Strathaird*, *Empress of Canada*, and *Rangitata*.

The ships sailed the next day, 6 January 1940, the Polish liner *Sobieski* and the troopship *Dunera*, which had embarked the **South Island** contingent at **Lyttelton**, joining them in Cook Strait. Then the whole convoy, guarded by the battleship HMS *Ramillies* and the cruisers

HMS *Leander* and HMAS *Canberra*, headed west. At six in the evening land faded from view, and soon afterwards the light went, leaving the sea dark and drained of colour. The submarine lookouts, who for two hours had been straining their eyes for periscopes and torpedo tracks, came off duty, and the convoy closed on the *Orion*, the commodore's ship. Behind, in the darkness, six trails of rubbish—broken butter-boxes, bad oranges, empty tins—bobbed and eddied.

No chink of light showed from any of the ships. Only the streams of air from the ventilators, hot and tremulous and carrying a stench of cooking, moist bodies, and rubber shoes, told of the quick, crowded life hidden behind deadlights and thick blackout curtains—1428 men in *Orion*, 1357 in *Dunera*, 1352 in *Strathaird*, 1147 in *Sobieski*, 811 in *Empress of Canada*, 444 in *Rangitata*: men playing cards in mess rooms; men lying in their bunks reading or writing home ('Bill and me are in one cabin, just ourselves—we've got an electric stove and fan, also carpet and wardrobe!'); men drinking in crowded beer bars at small tables completely covered by glasses (Australian and English beer fourpence a pint, New Zealand beer tenpence a quart bottle); men in long queues waiting for a supper issue of cocoa, ship's biscuit, and cheese; keen sergeants in quiet corners reading training manuals; four men in a cabin opening a tin of peaches bought that afternoon from the canteen after an hour's wait in a queue; men playing housie-housie (tombola) in recreation rooms ('Number three—the sergeant! Two-one, the key of the door! And another little shake!'); men, furtively and with scouts posted, playing Crown and Anchor, while veterans of an earlier war, with the years slipping off them and leaving them boys again in Base camps at *Zeitoun* and *Mena*, intone their magic: 'Where you like and where you fancy—the club, the heart, the sergeant-major, and the old hook'. In lounges, designed and furnished by famous interior decorators, officers sit over their drinks and discuss the future: 'The Division can be equipped more easily in England, but the tactical situation—*Italy* not showing her hand—points to Egypt'. Squatting in corridors, smoking and sipping cocoa, the troops talk: 'I've got an aunt in England—Dad was in *Cairo* last war'. A sentry posted near a galley straightens his lifebelt at

the approach of the duty officer and prepares to answer questions:

‘What,’ says the officer, ‘would you do if you smelt smoke?’

Far behind in the darkness, the butter-boxes and oranges, spread now over many miles, float home.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

AT THE FLEET CLUB

At the Fleet Club

IN THE EARLY DAYS of the war New Zealand soldiers in Egypt had no club of their own, and if they chose to spend their leave in **Alexandria** rather than in **Cairo** one of the reasons was the Fleet Club for men of the Merchant and Royal Navies. There, over a bottle of Stella, the ‘tiffy’ from the *Ramillies* and the sergeant from the 5th Field Park Company could renew a friendship started first in **Fremantle** in January 1940 and continued a fortnight later in Colombo. All the old memories came back: that day in the Australian Bight when smoke rolled from the *Ramillies* and the convoy scattered in star formation, while, away on the horizon behind mist and smoke, the guns of the *Leander* and *Canberra* blinked brightly, the reports, something between a cough and a thud, sounding long seconds later. (It was a practice attack, but the troops lining the rails had watched and wondered.) And that day when the shadows lengthened on the *Orion’s* boat-deck and the angry soldiers, boots polished and uniforms pressed, waited for pay, though leave to **Fremantle** and **Perth** had started an hour ago. But when they did get ashore—well, the ‘tiffy’ would remember: he was there, too. And that day when the Kiwi fell overboard—a welcome change from lost medicine balls—and the consequent warning that in future no one need expect to be rescued: the safety of the convoy came first. The day (it was 23 January) when the troops were told officially that Egypt was their destination. Then, in the **Indian Ocean**, manning ship to salute the aircraft-carrier HMS *Eagle* as she steamed down the lines of transports; and the next day seeing one of her aircraft crash and sink. The oily calm of the **Red Sea**; the coast of Italian-owned **Eritrea** slipping past on the port side; the anchor rattling down off Port Tewfik; Anthony Eden and the British Ambassador to Egypt, Sir Miles Lampson, speaking from a hatch-top covered by the Red Ensign; a message from the King: ‘I know well that the splendid tradition established by the armed forces of New Zealand will be worthily upheld....’

White-coated Achmed brings more beer, and at another table a greaser from the *Orcades* talks with members of the **Third Echelon** of

ships they know: *Mauretania*, *Empress of Japan*, *Orcades*, *Ormonde*, *Orion*, *HMAS Perth*, *HMNZS Achilles*, *HMAS Canberra*—ships they have seen ducking and tumbling in the Tasman in a grey flurry (*Troops must remove artificial teeth before being seasick: Routine Order No. 91*), or watched all day sliding past them through seas flecked with flying-fish, or gazed at wonderingly from wharves in **Fremantle** or from the ferry *Rohna* in Bombay Harbour.

With memories of the *Duchess of Bedford* still fresh in their minds—in fifty-seven days she took them from Newport, England, to the patrolled lanes near **North America**, where the cold was bitter, to **Freetown** (Sierra Leone), to **Capetown**, and at last to **Tewfik**—members of the **Second Echelon** describe their two Odysseys. With them the talk is of the *Athlone Castle*, which was in the same convoy as the *Duchess of Bedford* and also carried New Zealanders, and of the *Aquitania*, *Empress of Britain*, *Empress of Japan*, and *Andes*, and the escorts *Canberra*, *Australia*, *Shropshire*, and *Hood*—ships that helped to carry or escort the **Second Echelon** from New Zealand to England, taking it by way of **Fremantle**, **Capetown** (to which the convoy had been diverted in the Indian Ocean because of **Italy**'s attitude to the Allies), **Freetown**, the **Atlantic**, St George's Channel (where wreckage floated and the soldiers saw a tanker hull down and burning), and at last safely to the grey Clyde: a journey of 17,000 miles in forty-six days.

Small wonder that the rest of the Division called the **Second Echelon** the 'Glamour Boys' or the 'Cook's Tourists', and listened not always courteously to their tales of the Battle of **Britain**, alarms at sea, and the antics of the *Duchess of Bedford*, the 'Drunken Duchess', the world's champion roller....

'Last house,' announces a black-bearded petty officer known by sight to nearly everyone in the club. 'May I remind you, gentlemen, that the snowball is now worth over fourteen pounds?'

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

FOOD AND ACCOMMODATION

Food and Accommodation

USUALLY YOU HAD the choice: you could sleep on deck or you could sleep below. Sleeping on deck meant that you were woken at dawn by Lascars ('Wash-ee deck-ee, George!') or by British seamen ('Mind your eye, chum!'), the perfunctory warning preceding only by seconds the stream of cold salt water. Sleeping below meant that you woke six mornings out of seven suffering from a slight hangover caused by the soupy atmosphere of the troop-decks, which smelt always of soft soap, warm oil, stale tobacco, greasy dixies, and unwashed socks.

Troops of the **First Echelon were for the most part accommodated in cabins, but later drafts, travelling in the same ships after they had been modified, slung hammocks above the linoleum-covered mess tables and unrolled mattresses on or under them. Rising early to avoid queueing for a hand-basin or a shower (and in most ships, though reveille was at six o'clock, any time before seven o'clock breakfast was considered early), you bumped against laden hammocks or stepped heavily on out-flung arms.**

Mess orderlies were of course expected to be among the early risers. In some ships they were appointed for the whole voyage, but in others only for a day or a week, how often their turn for duty came round depending on the number of men at their respective tables: usually it was somewhere between twelve and twenty-four. Grabbing dixies for tea and porridge (fruit in the tropics), and shallow trays for bread, butter, jam, and the meat course, they hurried to join the queue rapidly forming outside the galley. Here they showed their table cards to the chief steward, an officer whose naturally suspicious mind was likely to have been soured by many hundreds of attempts to change '13s' into '18s' and so draw extra rations.

The food varied in quality and quantity from ship to ship, though the New Zealand Government was always at pains to make sure that the shipping companies gave the goods and services for which they were paid. On the whole, our soldiers ate well at sea. That is to say, the food

tasted very nice during the first week of the voyage, was tolerated during the second and third, and from then until the ship anchored at **Tewfik** was the subject three times a day of bitter and sometimes brilliant invective. This was due less to any real falling off in the quality of the meals than to a daintiness of appetite caused by tropical weather, the debilitating effect of shipboard life, and the certainty that if you had prunes and rice on the first Monday of the voyage you would have them every Monday till the last.

This is what the men in the **Sobieski** ate on 27 January 1940. Breakfast: oatmeal porridge, beef goulash, boiled potatoes, bread, butter, marmalade, tea, and milk. Dinner: tomato soup with rice, butter, cheese, rock cakes, jam, pickles, and lime juice. Supper: grilled steak with onions, mashed potatoes, spring cabbage, peach compote, bread, tea, and milk. Nothing to complain of there.

And this is what a lance-corporal wrote in his diary about the messing conditions in the **Duchess of Bedford** during her voyage from England to Egypt: 'We have two dining-rooms and there are three sittings to each meal. I'm in the last sitting, by which time the tables are sticky with spilt tea, jam, butter, gravy, bread-crumbs and fish bones, according to what the meal has been. Our own men do the waiting—one man to a table of eighteen, and he'll bring eighteen plates on one tray, so that the bottoms of the plates are always mucky from resting on the food beneath. Sometimes with sloppy food such as porridge or custard, the top plates have nearly emptied themselves into the bottom layers, which, overfilled, drip as they're handed down.... Quite often we'll get the pudding before the meat and often we'll get the meat put out for the previous sitting when not enough men have turned up at their right times.'

When there was trouble in the ships—on the whole there was very little—it was caused nearly always either by bad food or by bad accommodation. The trouble in the **Ormonde**, to which Third Echelon troops were trans-shipped from the **Mauretania** in **Bombay**, was the

result of both. While embarking, the men saw native stevedores dragging fly-covered carcasses—provisions for the voyage—through dust and filth. This, and the fact that the ship was very crowded and rather dirty, led the next day to an outbreak of disorder in which troops took possession of the bridge and the wheelhouse and refused to let the captain put to sea. Happily, the men's mood was neither ugly nor even unduly truculent, so the officers were able to handle the situation without assistance from the shore, and the next day the ship joined the rest of the convoy, which had been sailing at reduced speed.

Far less serious was an incident that occurred at **Freetown** in the *Rangitiki*, which, with the *City of London* and *Elizabethville*, took part of the **Second Echelon** from England to Egypt in December 1940. An order prohibiting troops from sleeping on deck because of malarial mosquitoes was disobeyed by about ninety men, some of whom treated British and New Zealand senior officers with a certain amount of disrespect—the euphemism becomes apparent when one remembers that the decks were unlit and the night dark. They were persuaded to go below at last by their own officers, and the incident is worth mentioning only because of the unique defence of the New Zealand non-commissioned officers who were court-martialled as a result of it. 'They maintained,' runs an official report, 'that when the men had a genuine complaint the NCOs should be with them if they wanted the men to follow them into battle later on. A somewhat New Zealand outlook.'

Against these breaches of discipline it is agreeable to remember a tribute paid to New Zealanders by the master of the **Netherlands** liner *Nieuw Amsterdam*, which brought the first furlough draft back to New Zealand from the **Middle East** in 1943. 'We felt uneasy,' he wrote; 'you were so many. You invaded every corner and did not ask questions; you did not complain and did not want service. Your whole attitude taught us a proud and useful lesson....this was war and no business.... when you left us we felt much more confident. Trooping, after all, was not so bad as it looked, the passengers did not smash the ship to pieces, nothing was ruined. We became friends. Only twice we have had the privilege to

work with you in this war. We can assure you that every time something unpleasant, or minor difficulties, have occurred on board with other passengers, we remarked truthfully: “The Kiwis would not have done that!”

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

RECREATION, TRAINING, FATIGUES, HEALTH

Recreation, Training, Fatigues, Health

THE NORMAL KIWI was neither saint nor sailor (remember the routine order relative to false teeth!) but his gift for ‘jacking himself up’, for making his own amusements, for lying in the sun and doing nothing, stood him in good stead during long, dull voyages. Much was done for his entertainment—games, books, and sports gear were bought from the National Patriotic Fund; there were shipboard magazines (which may speak for themselves); concerts were held in nearly all ships; often the crossing-the-line ceremony was observed, and on most voyages it was possible to see a film at least once a week—but what he remembers best, perhaps, are long hours beneath his favourite lifeboat, his clothes in a heap beside him, the ‘makings’ handy, and his ‘Mae West’, in defiance of routine orders, pillowing his head. And long hours, star-lit instead of sun-lit, when he leant on the rails, a glass at his elbow (in the *Strathaird* more than 1400 glasses were lost or broken before one voyage was half over), and discussed the mysteries of whales, sharks, porpoises, flying-fish, and the *Marie Celeste*, or argued tirelessly and dispassionately that Orion was Venus and *Dunera* the *Sobieski*.

Training, of course, accounted for many hours. In the case of the *First Echelon*, lack of equipment prevented a full training programme, but the decks of the *Orion* were seldom completely clear between a quarter past nine and a quarter past eleven in the morning of men balancing on their shoulder blades and ‘bicycling’ or performing some other feat to which lack of space was no bar. Marching files, wearing boots to harden their feet, stamped round the promenade deck to the alternately swelling and diminishing strains of ‘Colonel Bogey’ played by a stationary ship’s band. Parties from other units, who had been dodging round Lewis gun tripods (‘Aircraft right! Aircraft left! OK, chaps, pack up!’), would grab their impedimenta and press back into doorways just in time to avoid being marched down. In lounges and smoking-rooms, where the depth and softness of the chairs was often responsible for that sharpest of questions, ‘And what did I say last, soldier?’, officers gave lectures on infantry tactics, ammunition, army law, vehicle

maintenance, and hygiene.

Defence duties took up some time—in most ships the troops manned four submarine lookout posts during daylight in two-hour watches and at least two machine guns to combat low-flying aircraft—but fatigues took up more. In the *Dunera*, the first echelon of the New Zealand Divisional Signals (287 all ranks) supplied 102 permanent fatigues for the voyage: thirty mess orderlies, thirteen men for a galley party, ten for signal duties, and the rest for deck-scrubbing and duties in the bakehouse, butcher's shop, canteen, storeroom, and armoury. During its duty week, which came round once a month, the unit was called on to supply sixty sentries, twenty-eight deck scrubbers, four fatigues for the hammock-room, and two for the sergeants' sitting-room—196 fatigues in all.

Of all these duties the most monotonous, perhaps, was sentry-go in the bowels of the ship. After reading the fire instructions, you had a choice between risking punishment by smoking or reading furtively and falling into a heavy stupor induced by listening to the ship as she chattered, sighed, throbbed, slurred, purred endlessly through the night. Aeons elapsed before it was time to return to the guardroom—usually, for some reason, the ship's nursery—and sleep for four hours in your clothes with your head under a rocking-horse and Donald Duck looking quizzically down on you.

Thus the New Zealander at sea under supervision. His free time—no exact calculations are possible—was spent as follows: 15 per cent playing games of chance, 15 per cent doing his washing and watching it dry on deck, 12 per cent listening to and spreading rumours, 12 per cent grumbling about the food, 46 per cent lying on deck in the sun.

While engaged in the last pastime he was not always culpable of sloth. Often he was suffering from headache, a sore and swollen left arm, and a feeling of extreme lassitude. The space in his paybook reserved for Protective Inoculations bore the record of his indignities: TAB * in the Tasman, vaccination in the Australian Bight, Tet. Prop. ** in the *Indian Ocean*. No sooner had he recovered from one than he was

standing again with bared arm under the sardonic grins of orderlies with swabs of iodine and of doctors with blunt needles.

The doctor is an important man in a troopship. In the ships that took the **First Echelon** to Egypt seven emergency operations were performed, one of which was the removal of a mastoid with an electric drill borrowed from the ship's engineers and two carpenter's chisels. Small wonder that reports from medical officers with the **First Echelon** stressed the need for more surgical instruments, drugs, sterilisers, and nursing equipment.

In most ships, however, the sick parades produced only colds, upset stomachs, boils, and tonsillitis, though an epidemic of influenza occurred in ships taking the **Second Echelon** from **Britain** to the **Middle East** and in a ship carrying the 5th Reinforcements to Egypt. It was then that the nurses proved their value.

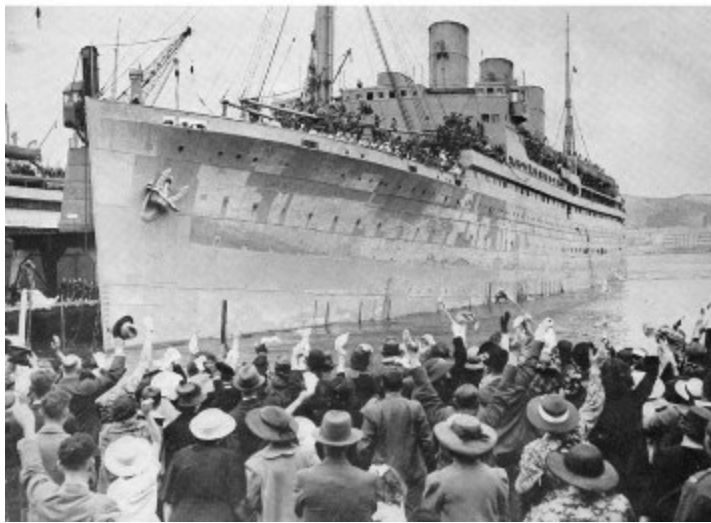
The doctor's last word was said usually a day or two before the end of the voyage. In a little masterpiece of the macabre he would point out that the flesh-pots of Egypt could be enjoyed only at a price. Death lurked in sweets and ices, disease in raw fruit, disaster in Sharia Wagh el Birket.

THE FIRST VOYAGE



The *Sobieski* at Lyttelton

The *Sobieski* at Lyttelton



The *Empress of Canada* at Wellington

FOOD AND ACCOMMODATION



The fortunate

The fortunate

Mess-deck



Mess-deck

Some had cabins



Some had cabins

Sketch from a ship's magazine, *The Queue Ship*



"ROCKED IN THE CRADLE OF THE DEEP - I LAY ME DOWN IN PEACE TO SLEEP"

Sketch from a ship's magazine, *The Queue Ship*

TROOPSHIP AND ESCORT



The First Echelon on the *Dunera*

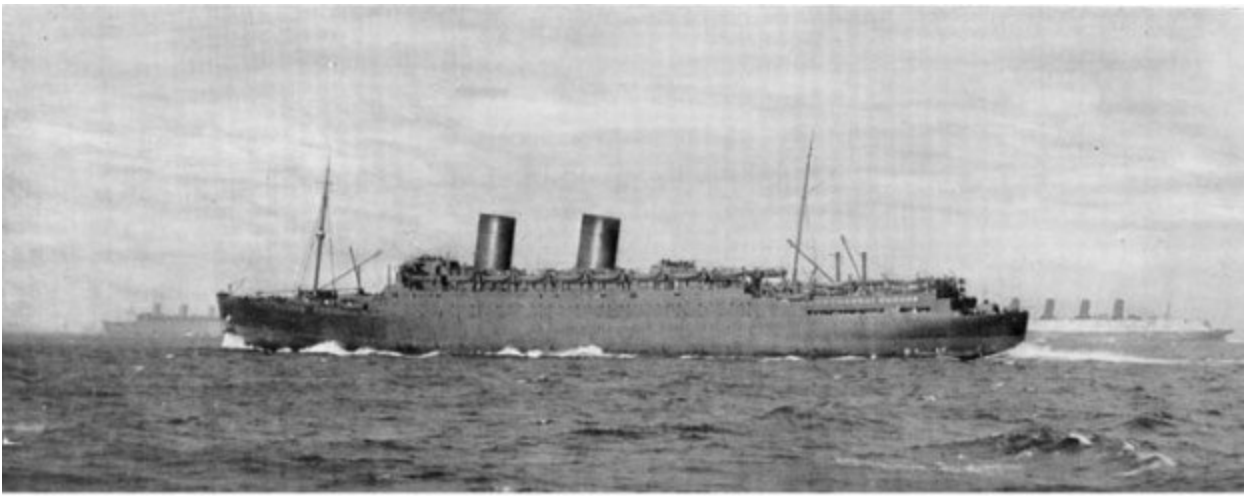
The First Echelon on the *Dunera*

TROOPSHIP AND ESCORT

The *Andes* and HMAS *Australia* in Lyttelton Harbour



The *Andes* and HMAS *Australia* in Lyttelton Harbour



The *Queen Mary*, *Mauretania*, and *Aquitania* in the Irish Sea, June 1940

The *Queen Mary*, *Mauretania*, and *Aquitania* in the Irish Sea, June 1940

First Echelon convoy in the Indian Ocean, January 1949



First Echelon convoy in the Indian Ocean, January 1940

General Freyberg welcomes the New Zealanders at Port Tewfik, February 1940. General Wavell (with cane) is behind him and to his left are Anthony Eden and Sir Miles Lampson.



General Freyberg welcomes the New Zealanders at Port Tewfik, February 1940. General Wavell (with cane) is behind him and to his left are Anthony Eden and Sir Miles Lampson

DUTIES & AMUSEMENTS



Submarine lookout, *Mauretania*

Submarine lookout, *Mauretania*



Sing-song, *Nieuw Amsterdam*

Sing-song, *Nieuw Amsterdam*

Map-reading class



Map-reading class



Magazine cover

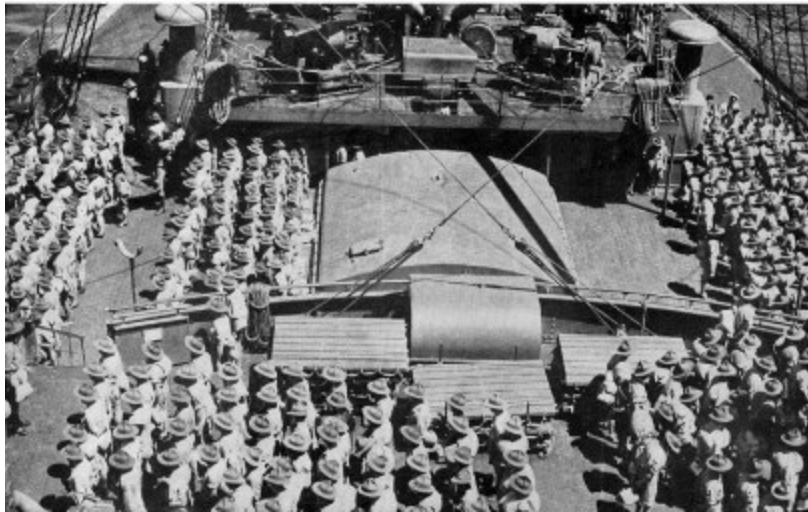
Magazine cover



Editorial staff

Editorial staff

Boat-drill



Boat-drill



'... long hours beneath his favourite lifeboat.'

'...long hours beneath his favourite lifeboat.'



WET CANTEEN
WET CANTEEN



WRITING HOME

WRITING HOME



THE CENSORS
THE CENSORS



BOXING
BOXING



CROWN & ANCHOR
—from a troopship magazine

CROWN & ANCHOR
—from a troopship magazine

SHORE LEAVE



Memorial to COLOMBO
Dover, N.H.

Advanced party at COLOMBO, December 1939

COLOMBO, 1941



COLOMBO, 1941

PERTH
remembered with gratitude by New
Zealand soldiers of both wars.



PERTH

remembered with gratitude by New Zealand soldiers of both wars



DURBAN, January 1941

DURBAN, January 1941



Return from Greece,
Thurland Castle

Return from Greece,
Thurland Castle



Back from Crete,
HMS Phoebe

Back from Crete,
HMS Phoebe

Embarking for Italy



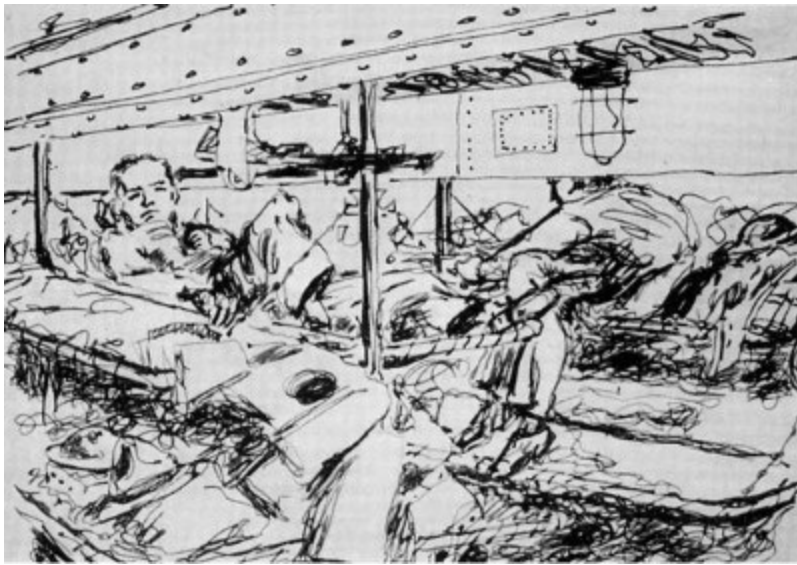
Embarking for Italy

Arrival at Taranto



Arrival at Taranto

THE PACIFIC



'THE BOWELS OF A TROOPSHIP'

'THE BOWELS OF A TROOPSHIP'

MOVE TO GUADALCANAL—in the *President Jackson*



MOVE TO GUADALCANAL—in the *President Jackson*

MAROONED ON EMIRAU
Rangitane survivors in camp



MAROONED ON EMIRAU
Rangitane survivors in camp



RESCUE FROM EMIRAU
Rangitane survivors

RESCUE FROM EMIRAU
Rangitane survivors

RNZAF DRAFT EN ROUTE FOR CANADA



RNZAF DRAFT EN ROUTE FOR CANADA

HOMEWARD BOUND





—from a troopship magazine

— from a troopship magazine

*** Triple vaccine against typhoid and the two para-typhoid 'A' and 'B' infections**

**** Tetanus prophylactic**

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

WAR AND RUMOURS OF WAR

War and Rumours of War

CONSTANT BOAT-DRILL, alarms (practice and real), and a trick of German radio announcers of speaking as though they were in constant consultation with the British Minister for Shipping protected the soldier at sea from feelings of false security. **We-See-All-And-We-Know-All** was what the Germans tried to convey, but they spoil their effects somewhat by sinking ships about whose safety one could reassure oneself merely by going on deck and looking around.

From the moment the ships carrying the **Second Echelon** to England left **Fremantle** the German radio took an enormous interest in them, sinking the *Queen Mary*, which had joined the convoy from **Sydney**, more than once. (Actually there is very good reason to believe that a torpedo *did* pass between her and the *Aquitania* off the Irish coast.) Again, New Zealanders in the *Felix Roussel*, which took to Egypt in October 1940 about 600 members of the **Third Echelon** who had been left in **Bombay** to await transport, heard over the German radio that their ship had been sunk. She very well might have been too, for the convoy had been bombed several times in the **Red Sea**, attacked by a surface raider, and that very morning straddled by bombs while replenishing in **Port Sudan**.

The experience of having their ship hit directly by a bomb, and of putting back to port in England, was reserved for some 200 **Second Echelon** reinforcements in October 1940. None of them was hurt, and the majority went to Egypt later in the convoy that included the *Duchess of Bedford*. Had they sailed with the earlier convoy they would have shared with the troops in the *Rangitiki* the experience of being shelled in the **North Atlantic** on Christmas morning by the German heavy cruiser *Admiral Hipper*. One merchant ship in this convoy, the *Empire Trooper*, was holed above the water line.

Most voyages, however, were mercifully dull, and for this the soldiers could thank the Royal Navy and the Dominion ships. One or more of the latter—HMNZS *Achilles*, *Leander*, and *Monowai*, and HMAS *Canberra*,

Perth, Australia, and *Sydney*—would hand over their task to **Royal Navy** ships somewhere in the Indian Ocean, and then, in farewell, steam down the lines of transports, spray dashing from their bows, while the bands played and the crews—brown line of faces, wider line of white tropical shirts and shorts, brown line of knees—stood stiffly at attention. What had been grey shapes scarcely moving on the horizon were then seen in all their swiftness and beauty by the soldiers dressing their own ships. Every detail was clear: sharp, graceful bow, guns cleared for action, control tower a miracle of strength and balance, after flat gleaming white, and long straight wake, silver like a healed scar.

‘Kiwis thank you for safe escort. Your fine displays of naval efficiency have increased our pride in the British Navy.’ Thus a typical message from an Officer Commanding Troops to the captain of an escort.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

SHORE LEAVE

Shore Leave

THE NEW ZEALAND SOLDIER was at home abroad because he invariably behaved as though he were in his own country and safely hedged about by his own customs and prejudices. As he was cheerful, kind to children, sometimes considerate of other people's feelings, and seldom conspicuously beastly in his cups, much was forgiven him in Rome by the bewildered Romans. In Fremantle and **Perth**, of course, he was understood at once and welcomed as a long-lost cousin, and in **Capetown**, **Durban**, and the cities of England his welcome, though it sometimes came a moment before the understanding, was only the more kind and cousinly for that. The East, though, found him wholly bewildering.

In Colombo the people were used to soldiers—British privates and non-commissioned officers who treated them with that blend of severity and impersonal kindness typical of the best nurses in the best families, and British officers who visited the Galle Face and the Grand Orient Hotel and didn't treat them at all—but New Zealand soldiers were outside their experience. What was the rickshaw boy, untouchable to millions of his own race, to think of the grizzled, rather stout man, twice his own age, who tapped him smartly on the shoulder, saying 'Hop in the back, George,' and then set off down the main street at a smart trot? And what of the broad-shouldered young sergeant who squatted down on the pavement in the blazing sun to make friends with a black slip of a girl of rather less account in her own country than a stray chicken?

To New Zealand soldiers personal contacts were always more important and more amusing than sights—than things. For every minute spent in beautiful Buddhist temples, where saffron-robed priests intoned their liquid and almost perfect English, hours were spent in the market-places in haggling over cigars, ivory elephants, Benares brassware, carpets, carved knives, and cheap jewellery—seldom with the object of making purchases: mostly for the sheer pleasure of destroying social and racial barriers.

Anyway, with a pay of only ten rupees in their pockets, few soldiers could afford elephants and carpets, and Japanese beer cost two rupees the bottle.

This is a strong and rather revolting brew, but the Kiwi soldier is hard-headed, and, though much has been made of his fondness for drinking while on leave, in Colombo, as in **Bombay**, **Cairo**, and **Singapore**, he usually remembered that the good guest does not get drunk in other people's houses or in other people's countries. It was the same man—the same ten, twenty, thirty, one hundred men—who got drunk and missed the ship, who kept the picket busy in **Cairo**, whose conduct led eventually to the closing of the Fleet Club to New Zealanders.

That is not to say that the rest were model tourists. Many a returned man in New Zealand today sighs over sights missed and wonders neglected. He blames only himself that the lovely city of **Perth**, which he is unlikely to visit again, remains in his mind merely as a vision of amber Swan beer heady in tall glasses and a memory of a sunny hour spent resting and eating melons and strawberries among the bright flowers in the public gardens; that Colombo, so magical to E. M. Forster, suggests to him only expensive and doubtful drinks; that **Capetown**, where he took the view from Table Mountain on trust and spent in Delmonico's days that would have paid better dividends on the white beaches of Muizenberg, is as much a mystery to him as Persepolis. Of all the New Zealanders who had a chance to do so, how many visited the Parsee Tower of Silence on Malabar Hill, **Mount Lavinia** in **Ceylon**, and the Museum Constantia at **Capetown**?

What did they do, then, with their shore leave? They ate large meals—steak, four eggs, and chips: in **Capetown**, juicy rump steaks and the eggs of well-bred Wyandottes; in **Cairo**, thin, coffee-coloured steaks and eggs, peppery-tasting, and the size of ping-pong balls. They spent much time in cafés, beer gardens, and soldiers' clubs; they shopped (though 80 per cent of this shopping was mere haggling and 'pricing'), and they

walked endlessly along dusty pavements under hot suns, stopping now for an argument, now for a joke, now for a drink—occupations they would have described collectively as ‘having a bit of a *shufti* * round’. Their leave ended, they returned to their transit camps, their hotels, or their troopships, more than ever convinced that New Zealand was the cleanest country in the world, its food the best and most wholesome, its licensing laws the strangest.

* look

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE MEDITERRANEAN: GREECE

The Mediterranean: Greece

WEIGHED DOWN under greatcoats, haversacks, valises (with blanket rolls bound round them), full web equipment, rifles, ammunition, water bottles, respirators, and in some cases kitbags as well, besides those few heart-breaking odds and ends that constitute the final straw (haversack rations no haversack will hold, ukuleles and cameras they were never intended to hold), the New Zealanders staggered on to the wharves at **Alexandria** and into the ships that were to take them to **Greece**. Straps (supporting, web) cut into their shoulders, their arms ached intolerably, and they answered the mocking questions of the Egyptian stevedores with less than their usual good humour.

To make sure that it would not be crippled before it saw action, the Division was divided into small parties, called flights, and in this way 16,500 men were brought safely to **Piraeus**, the port of **Athens**, in the spring of 1941, in ships of the **Merchant Navy** and the **Royal Navy**. Some of the earlier crossings were rough and one convoy was attacked by aircraft, bombs falling near the *SS Barpeta*, carrying Headquarters 6th Brigade, and setting fire to a tanker, but there was no real interference from the enemy. For this the Division could thank the **Royal Navy**, which had beaten the **Italian Fleet** at the Battle of Matapan (28–29 March).

In the crowded holds of merchant ships and on the mess decks of destroyers comfort was neither found nor expected. Anyway, the trips were short, the warships taking only about twenty-four hours and the slowest convoys not much more than a week. The men slept where they could in their clothes, washed where they could, and spent most of their time keeping an eye on their gear, which lay in contiguous heaps on all the decks.

The Division left **Greece** six weeks later—this time with only light luggage. At Raphena, Porto Rafti, **Nauplion**, **Kalamata**, and **Monemvasia**, sometimes with nothing but a rifle and what they stood up in, the troops shuffled on to the embarkation beaches in the pitch darkness and into

the landing craft, too tired even to think. The landing craft took them to the *Ajax, Griffin, Calcutta, Vampire, Voyager, Perth, Kingston, Glengyle*, and other ships great and small, some of them merchantmen, and the sailors leant out of the darkness to help them up the last rungs of the ladders, relieved them of rifles and packs, handed them through blackout curtains, pointed the way they were to go, and went back to help more men aboard. The men, in torn and filthy battle dress, some with overcoats, some without, sat, crouched, or lay down in the brightly-lit mess decks. Sailors came round with hot cocoa and thick, bully-beef sandwiches, saying: 'Take a couple, chum.' Ave a fag. Make yourself at home at our place'. Then they went back to their watches above, or to their broken watches below, as they had been doing for days past, mocking with their levity and common sense all the tales of heroes at Trafalgar and *Thermopylae*.

Under bombs and machine-gun bullets, the ships went to Egypt or *Crete*, and a month later the men who had been in *Crete* came back at last to Egypt, again in ships of the Navy and Merchant Navy. This time they had less luggage than ever. They limped, strolled, swaggered down the gangways in the bright sunshine, boots cut to ease blistered heels and raw feet, and the sailors said: 'So long, Kiwi. Be good, Snow. Bye, Bill'.

The soldiers met them later in the Fleet Club, but not all of them. Men were missing from most ships, and the cruisers *Gloucester* and *Fiji*, the anti-aircraft cruiser *Calcutta*, the destroyers *Juno, Greyhound, Kashmir, Kelly, Hereward, Diamond, Wryneck*, and *Imperial*, and the transports *Ulster Prince, Costa Rica, Araybank*, and *Pennland* were lost.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE MEDITERRANEAN: ITALY

The Mediterranean: Italy

NEW SHIPS AND NEW CREWS came from England and **America**, and, two and a half years afterwards, the New Zealand Division, with victories behind it as well as defeats, sailed for **Italy**. To the individual burdens it had taken to **Greece** were now added empty two-gallon water cans, bivouac tents (one for two men), and anti-malarial pills and ointments.

Again the Division sailed in flights, not more than one-third of any unit travelling in one ship, though by October 1943 the **Mediterranean** was almost safe. Only one ship was damaged: the motor vessel *Lambrook*. She struck a mine, but managed to limp to **Brindisi**, ten hours away, with back broken and plates rippling. One voyage was much like another, and this impression, written by a member of the 1st New Zealand Ammunition Company, is true of most of them:

Every morning a sea of pewter, burnished and dully shining. Sound of water slushing lazily in scuppers: murmur of stem and bow sighing patiently through the **Mediterranean**: patter of bow-spray falling on smooth swell.

Breakfast in the soupy atmosphere of the troop-decks: electric lights burning: smells of porridge and of sweat and sleep: the appalling clatter of crockery: shouting and jostling of mess orderlies: dixies, warm and slippery. After breakfast, no room to move on deck because everyone has been hounded from below to leave the ship clear for inspection. Impatient waiting for 'Three Gs' to sound. Lunch, with appetites a little keener than at breakfast, and then a long, dozy afternoon. Tea, but not enough of it, for appetites are ravenous now, and, after tea, cards and examination of the day's rumours.

In wartime each troopship carries three rumours—more sometimes, but never less. They seldom vary in their essentials. (1) The enemy has broadcast the ship's name and her date of sailing. (2) An infectious disease has broken out. (3) Senior officers are awaiting court martial on serious charges.

These three, especially the last, go pleasantly with the cool of evening when khaki caterpillars circulate on all the decks, when destroyers fuss around laying smoke-screens, and barrage balloons (midget dirigibles that were silver earlier and are now dark like slugs) are hauled in. The distance between ships has lessened and smoke from a dozen stacks trails across the sea for miles. The spirit of protection and comradeship—the high, brave spirit of the convoys—is all about you. Silence then, and a light blinking quick and secret, and the drawing in, from all the corners of the sea, of the soft darkness.

One by one these transports— *Dunottar Castle*, *Reina del Pacifico*, *Llangibby Castle*, *Nieuw Holland*, *Letitia*, *Arona*, and *Egra* are names New Zealanders will remember—came safely * to port, those with troops to **Taranto** after about five days, those with transport to **Bari** after as much as a fortnight. The troops staggered down the gangways under their terrific loads and marched away into the new country, praying with all their hearts that the next voyage would be the long one home.

* Astonishingly few New Zealand lives were lost in the **Mediterranean**, but the tragedy of the 8000-ton merchantman *Chakdina* should be remembered. While evacuating some 380 wounded from **Tobruk** to **Alexandria** on the night of 5–6 December 1941, she was sunk in less than four minutes by a torpedo-carrying aircraft. The loss of life was appalling. Of the 97 New Zealand wounded aboard, most of whom were stretcher-cases, eighteen were rescued by the corvette *Farndale*.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

PACIFIC VOYAGES

Pacific Voyages

IN OCTOBER 1940 the main body of a force of brigade strength (B Force) went to **Suva, Fiji**, in the *Rangatira* and *HMS Monowai*. They made three voyages, carrying over 900 men each time. When the last draft arrived on 22 November, men of the earlier ones had learnt already to refer to themselves rather ruefully as the ‘Coconut Bombers’, drink kava, and sing ‘Isa Lei’ and a cheerful but disrespectful ballad commemorating the *Monowai*’s seamanly appearance:

Side, side, Monowai side—

Her skipper looks on her with pride

Everything in the *Monowai* was done **Bristol-fashion.**

After Japan entered the war, reinforcements reached **Fiji** in the *Rangatira, Matua, Wahine, and Monowai*, and by early 1942 the force had become the 3rd New Zealand Division. In July, however, the Division was relieved by Americans, and by the middle of August it was back in New Zealand in the role of Army reserve. Most of the troops came home in *USS President Coolidge*.

During November and December it assembled in **New Caledonia**, the main body (7000) sailing in *USS West Point*, and in August 1943 it began moving to an advanced base on **Guadalcanal** in the Solomon Islands, again in American ships escorted by American destroyers. There were three convoys, and each halted at **Efate (New Hebrides)** so that the troops could practise beach landings. Using nets, they trans-shipped to landing craft and were taken ashore.

On 18 September, under enemy observation but also under an umbrella of fighter aircraft, 3700 troops of the 3rd Division disembarked at **Vella Lavella** with their ammunition, petrol, transport, and supplies. The ramps of the landing craft splashed into the sea or fell on soft, muddy sand, and the vehicles bumped away into the jungle while human chains unloaded boxes of ammunition and supplies. Escorted by

American destroyers, the troops had been two days at sea in landing craft and APDs (obsolete destroyers carrying about 200 men), but their only experience worth mentioning was their difficulty in finding room in which to record their votes in the parliamentary election with due secrecy.

The New Zealanders' task on **Vella Lavella** was to relieve American troops and clear the island of Japanese as quickly as possible. While they were doing this, reinforcement drafts arrived at regular intervals from **Guadalcanal** in landing craft, and on 1 October a convoy was caught on the beach by dive bombers. One craft was wrecked, two were damaged, and fifty-two men, including fifteen of the 209th New Zealand Light Anti-Aircraft Battery, were killed in a few minutes.

After clearing **Vella Lavella**, the 3rd Division attacked the **Treasury Islands**, making the first opposed landings in which New Zealanders had taken part since the days of **Gallipoli**. At dawn on 27 October a force of 7000 New Zealanders and Americans lay off the entrance to **Blanche Harbour** in **Mono Island**, which was seen through rain squalls as a green mound wreathed in mist. The men scrambled from the APDs to landing craft and the covering destroyers went into action, ceasing fire at twenty-four minutes past six. Two minutes later the first troops went ashore in the face of Japanese machine guns.

The third and final operation—a landing on **Nissan** (**Green Islands**)—was carried through without opposition on 15 February 1944, though the convoy, which carried a mixed American and New Zealand force of 5800 troops, was bombed in sight of the island.

Bombers were less a menace in the **Pacific** than submarines, which in 1942 and 1943 were active near both **Fiji** and the **Solomons**. In January 1942, off **Suva**, the *Monowai* exchanged fire with a Japanese submarine that had tried to torpedo her, and later in the war another submarine attacked one of the convoys that took the 3rd Division to **Guadalcanal**, a torpedo missing the USS *Fuller* by some 200 yards. The longest **Pacific** voyage, however, was comparatively short, and the

troops seldom had time to become nervous, bored, or tired of the food.

The short 'A s' of the voices from the loud-hailers ('Troops on the after deck...'); cigarettes at 50 cents for two hundred; the politeness, almost the courtliness, of the American crew to strangers; the good food ('chow' was the American term) obtainable after anything up to a three-hour wait in a queue; the compartmented trays it was served on (each with a mug of black coffee balanced in one corner); daily physical training; a few lectures, guard duties, and fatigues; much sun-bathing; the green and purple of distant **Pacific** islands; a glimpse of palm trees beyond breakers; shipping in a crowded staging port (at **Espiritu Santo**, say); double rows of bunks in tiers of four with a gap of two foot six between each row; sharing a ship's hold with 600 others; the continual humming of the forced draught system—by the time they had assimilated all this the voyage was over.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE TROOPSHIP TRACK

The Troopship Track

MONTH BY MONTH, their grey paint chipped and faded and splashed here and there with ugly patches of red lead, their forward and after decks cluttered with Carley floats, Bofors guns, pom-poms, oerlikons, and improvised wash-houses, the troopships cleared **Wellington** heads, carrying reinforcement drafts to the **Middle East** and the **Pacific**, Royal New Zealand Air Force trainees to **Canada** or the **United Kingdom**, and seamen to **Britain** for service with the **Royal Navy**.

Reinforcement drafts for the **Middle East** were limited usually to one shipload (each ship having a permanent Officer Commanding Troops and military staff), and so were the drafts returning to New Zealand for furlough or for discharge to essential industries.

Men of the **RNZAF** bound for **Canada** under the Empire Air Training Scheme, or for the **United Kingdom**, travelled as ordinary passengers, sometimes in parties 250 strong, but usually in smaller drafts. Little was attempted in the way of training (though in British ships the men manned anti-submarine watches), and living conditions were almost of a peacetime standard, making the later voyages to England in troopships suffer by contrast.

Travelling as a civilian, of course, did not guarantee safe arrival. In November 1940 the *Rangitane* was sunk by German raiders a few hundred miles east of **Auckland**, and the civilian passengers were put ashore later on **Emirau Island**, north of **New Guinea**, the men signing an undertaking not to take part in the war. Thirteen Fleet Air Arm entrants were among those released on this condition, but fifteen others were made prisoner, some because they were enrolled members of the **RAF** or the **RNZAF**, some because their passages had been booked by the Air Department or the **Navy Office**.

Naval drafts destined for **Britain** and service with the **Royal Navy** also travelled as ordinary passengers in many cases, though whenever possible a service passage in a commissioned ship was arranged for

them.

In the days before **Pearl Harbour**, men of the New Zealand armed forces sailed to and from **Pacific** bases, **Canada**, and the **United States** in neutral American ships escorted ('trailed' was the term used for this type of escort) by New Zealand warships. At first New Zealanders travelled in civilian clothes, but later they wore uniform.

Month by month the troopships slipped quietly past the heads, and by the end of 1945 New Zealand had sent overseas 114,000 soldiers ^{*}, some 18,000 airmen ^{**}, and 10,000 sailors. Nearly every man and woman in the three services who went overseas left and returned by ship.

^{*} Of these 38,000 went to the **Pacific**, many of them serving later in the **Middle East**.

^{**} A further 19,000 went by air to the **Pacific**.

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HOMeward BOUND

Homeward Bound

AS THE REINFORCEMENT drafts reached the Middle East, men who had seen long service overseas were sent home on furlough or for discharge to essential industries. The first furlough draft sailed from Egypt for New Zealand in June 1943 in the *Nieuw Amsterdam*, the second in January 1944 in the *Scythia*, trans-shipping to the *Mariposa* at Bombay. The ships were very crowded, but under the circumstances it seemed unreasonable to complain.

After victory in Europe, and increasingly after VJ Day, troopships brought back to New Zealand not only servicemen and released prisoners of war but the wives, children, and fiancées of men in the three services.

With the blackout lifted, with no unnecessary parades or picket duties to annoy them, the men had little to grumble about (except the food and the overcrowding) and even less to do. At sea they played Crown and Anchor and two-up, fell into deep day-dreams of the future, and nursed the children on the boat-decks. In port many of them took the opportunity of having a final fling, but not with the old fierce concentration, and they returned almost with relief to the boredom, the day-dreams, and the babies on the boat-deck.

‘Mothers,’ wrote a soldier in the *Durban Castle*, ‘soon grew resigned to losing sight of their children for hours at a time. They always turned up safe and sound, for there is no doubt that Kiwis make good mothers.’ In this ship the children took part in a biblical tableau: ‘The singing of the angels made a scene not unlike a 15th century fresco of choiring angels on the walls of some old Italian church—the same grave, untroubled faces, and the same deep concentration on the work in hand, so characteristic of children and of angels’.

In Australian ports the ships picked up military staffs sent from New Zealand to help with the arrangements for disembarkation and leave.

One after another the ships came into home waters. The *Orion*,

which had left **Taranto** on 10 January with 4500 New Zealand soldiers, 33 sailors, 16 wives and fiancées, and one child, passed the Snares, south of Stewart Island, early in February 1946. Peeping between the rails was the ship's mascot, five-year-old Diana from La Spezia, in the Gulf of Genoa. She was bound for **Auckland** with her mother.

Porpoises—olive-grey sometimes, sometimes steel-blue—played about the ship's forefoot, leaping and plunging in the bow-wave, scraping themselves against the bow-plates, turning cartwheels in twos and threes, and delighting Diana from La Spezia.

The *Orion*, which had sailed with men of the **First Echelon** six years before, came into **Lyttelton** harbour on 9 February. It was a warm, sunny morning.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Acknowledgments

THE SOURCES *consulted in the preparation of this account include the first two volumes of the official 2nd NZEF Narrative, two accounts by D. O. W. Hall, a number of private diaries, and troopship newspapers and magazines.*

The sketches are by J. Figgins ([page 11](#)), Nevile Lodge ([page 15](#)), Frank Haggett ([page 17](#)), Robert Brett ([page 22](#)) and K. Niven ([page 24](#)).

The photographs come from many collections, which are stated where they are known:

Cover George Weigel

Inside Cover, [page 14](#) (*top centre*), and [page 24](#) (*top*) New Zealand Army Official, S. J. Weymss

[page 9](#) (*top*) and [page 12](#) (*top*) Green and Hahn, **Christchurch**

[page 9](#) (*bottom*) C. P. S. Boyer, **Wellington**

[page 10](#) (*top*) and [page 11](#) (*top*) *The Weekly News*, **Auckland**

[page 12](#) (*bottom*) *Star-Sun*, **Christchurch**

[page 13](#) (*top*) C. W. Hawkins

[page 14](#) (*top left*), [page 15](#) (*top right and bottom*), [page 16](#) (*top and bottom left*) and [page 19](#) (*top*) G. R. Bull

[page 13](#) (*bottom*), [page 14](#) (*bottom*), [page 16](#) (*top and bottom centre*), [page 17](#) (*top*) and [page 22](#) (*bottom*) New Zealand Army official

[page 18](#) D. M. Burns

page 19 (*bottom*) G. McIntosh

page 19 (*centre*) Australian National Travel Association

page 20 (*top*) Dr. P. V. Graves

(*bottom*) E. K. S. Rowe

page 21 (*top*) New Zealand Army official, M. D. Elias

(*bottom*) New Zealand Army official, G. F. Kaye

page 23 (*top and centre*) J. G. Penman

(*bottom*) R. H. Blanchard

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[BACKMATTER]

THE AUTHOR, Peter Llewellyn, was until recently a member of the staff of the War History Branch. He served overseas with the 1st Ammunition Company, New Zealand Army Service Corps, from January 1940 until the unit was disbanded in October 1945, and on his return to New Zealand wrote its history.

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[BACKMATTER]

THE TYPE USED THROUGHOUT THE SERIES IS *Aldine Bembo* WHICH WAS REVIVED FOR MONOTYPE FROM A RARE BOOK PRINTED BY ALDUS IN 1495 * THE TEXT IS SET IN 12 POINT ON A BODY OF 14 POINT

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PRISONERS OF GERMANY

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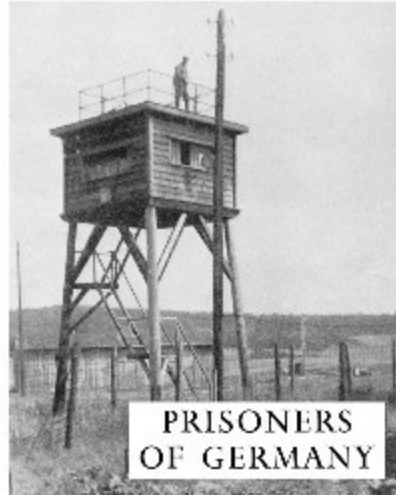
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[COVERS]

NEW ZEALAND IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR
Official History



Authoritative and authoritative
History of the
Prisoners of War
The
New Zealand
Prisoners of War
The
Prisoners of War
The
Prisoners of War



PRISONERS OF GERMANY

By
D. O. W. HALL

EMERY OF WELLS
WELLINGTON, N.Z.

WAR HISTORY UNIT
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE, WELLS
WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND
1945

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[FRONTISPIECE]



Inside the camp—'Anzac Avenue' at Stalag 383

Inside the camp—'Anzac Avenue' at Stalag 383

COVER PHOTOGRAPH The guard tower of Stalag 383

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[TITLE PAGE]

PRISONERS OF GERMANY

D. O. W. HALL

WAR HISTORY BRANCH

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

1949

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[EDITORPAGE]

IT IS THE INTENTION *of this series to present aspects of New Zealand's part in the Second World War which will not receive detailed treatment in the campaign volumes and which are considered either worthy of special notice or typical of many phases of our war experience. The series is illustrated with material which would otherwise seldom see publication. It will also contain short accounts of operations which will be dealt with in detail in the appropriate volumes.*

H. K. KIPPENBERGER

,
Major-General
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

NEW ZEALAND WAR HISTORIES

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[UNTITLED]

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EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

FOREWORD

Foreword

By Sir Howard Kippenberger

DURING the Second World War 9038 New Zealanders were taken prisoner, 68 of them sailors, 575 airmen, 8395 soldiers. Of these, 1251 were wounded when captured. Altogether 560 died while prisoners, of their wounds and of disease; at **Tarawa**, seven New Zealand wireless operators and ten soldiers were murdered by the Japanese.

The great majority of the soldier prisoners were volunteers, victims of the disasters of the early years. In Greece, **Crete**, **Libya** 1941, and Egypt 1942, these men, with their contemporaries in service—of whom only a fortunate few were not killed or wounded—bore the brunt of the costly battles for time while the armies and air fleets of victory were being prepared. Many were left on the beaches in **Greece** and **Crete**. Having arrived there in good order and with their weapons, they were the unlucky ones whom the Navy could not take away. Very many of them wandered in the mountains for months before being captured, all the while making desperate efforts to escape to Egypt. Three or four hundred succeeded in doing so. Those taken in **Libya** and in Egypt before **Alamein** were members of units that had been overrun by tanks. It was almost the customary thing. Our splendid infantry would take a position by a night attack with the bayonet, with none of the air or artillery support that later was always provided. Whatever the opposition they never failed, though usually the losses were grievous. Then the depleted battalions would after daylight be counter-attacked by tanks, infantry, and guns, and when their few and feeble anti-tank guns had been knocked out with their heroic crews, the Panzers, invulnerable to the infantry weapons of the time, would close, trample over the positions, and the choices were surrender or useless death. In those terrible battles we lost, helplessly taken prisoner, many of the best men who ever served

this country, and many who with better fortune would have reached high rank. As one man said in a report written after he had escaped—to be killed in a later battle—‘I had thought of death or wounds but never of surrender. Yet there it was.’

The airmen captured were those who survived after being shot down over enemy territory. A very few had the good fortune to escape to neutral countries. The sailors were taken when their ships, merchant ships, were captured. No warships surrendered.

As prisoners they endured years of uncertainty, privation, and frustration. They unremittingly continued the struggle in every way that courage, pride, and ingenuity could suggest. Some escaped in almost incredible exploits, others continuously strove to escape or unselfishly helped those better equipped. In every camp they bore up against adversity, defied and deceived their guards, maintained discipline, soldierly spirit, and pride of race. Only a very few failed.

I saw those who came out of **Germany after the war ended. They were thin and strained, but they carried themselves as soldiers and as men who knew that they had acquitted themselves as men in a long and bitter ordeal. I was proud that I had served with them in the hard years.**

In these publications, *Prisoners of **Germany*, *Prisoners of **Italy***, *Prisoners of **Japan***, *Escapes*, something of their experience is given. They are honourable chapters in New Zealand’s history.**

The full story will be told in the official Prisoner-of-war volume which will be published during 1950.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

IN GERMAN HANDS IN GREECE AND CRETE

In German Hands in Greece and Crete

THE GERMANS made little attempt to provide properly for the prisoners taken by them in **Greece**. Though some prisoners did not leave that country for more than a year after their capture, every camp in **Greece** was little more than a transit camp. Some of the men captured at the evacuation beaches in the **Peloponnese** were held a few days at **Nauplion** in the playground of a school before they were taken to **Corinth**, where an old stone barracks had been named a transit camp for prisoners of war. Into it, without blankets or mattresses, over five thousand men were crowded; they were each given one cooked meal a day and a ninth of a kilogram (approximately quarter of a pound) of bread.

Corinth was only a staging base to the 'frontstalag' at **Salonika** from which prisoners were sent on by train to **Germany**. There were two camps at **Salonika**—a barracks building in the town and a camp farther out. The first months there were the worst. Dysentery and malaria were rife, the food poor and insufficient (a 70-pound bag of lentils—and nothing else—was daily made into soup for the 5000 men in the camp; in addition each man received a biscuit or a small piece of bread), and the guards were aggressive. The Greek Red Cross supplied some cigarettes, fresh fruit, and vegetables, but it was many months before any other **Red Cross** supplies appeared.

Conditions in the German cages in **Crete** were very similar to those in the camps on the Greek mainland. Most of the New Zealanders were held in a dusty seaside camp at **Galatas** where the only amenity was bathing in the sea, 'a tremendous asset in keeping down the vermin'. The rations issued were mostly captured British stores, but the guards kept the lion's share for themselves and tantalised the hungry prisoners by the amount of food they wasted. One prisoner performed the dangerous feat of stealing a 50-pound bag of oatmeal from a dump guarded by a German sentry. On good days the prisoners had light gruel for breakfast, a hunk of bread for lunch, perhaps with mint tea, and in the evening a thin stew of bully beef, lentils, and beans, 'all stirred up

into something that revolted the hungriest of us'. The best part of the food was the bread. The more enterprising of the prisoners got out at night, picked up what food they could find on the neighbouring farms, chiefly bread, raisins, and vegetables, and returned to camp the next night with their booty. The Austrian guards were generally lenient and some winked at these expeditions.

The prisoners from **Crete** were taken to **Salonika** for transport to **Germany**. The first stage of the journey was the unpleasant, crowded voyage in the holds of some commandeered Greek cargo vessel; the luckier batches of prisoners were allowed up on deck during the day. Even Galatas with the wretched shelter of its tents seemed better than the crowded, verminous barracks at **Salonika**, without beds or blankets, living on food which had already produced beriberi in those who had had to endure it longest. Mint tea was the total breakfast, a lentil soup with the appearance of 'horse-meat having walked through it', the dinner, and an Italian biscuit the tea. The journey to **Germany**, crammed into cattle-trucks, was terrible. Food which would have been adequate for two days had to last the prisoners, with very little supplement, a journey of five or six days, sometimes extended to ten. On some trains no one was allowed to leave the trucks during the whole of the journey. Men arrived in **Germany** weak, exhausted, lousy, and with their spirits the lowest of the whole period of their captivity.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

STALAGS

Stalags

THE CAMPS where most New Zealanders other than officers lived were **Wolfsberg**, in **Austria** (**Stalag XVIII A**), **Gorlitz** (**VIIIA**), east of **Dresden**, and **Lamsdorf** (**VIII B**), in upper **Silesia**. The important camps for non-working non-commissioned officers were **Hohenfels** (**Stalag 383**) and **Fallingbistel** (**357**). Some of these camps later changed their locations and their numbers— a source of some confusion. Airmen were imprisoned in ‘**Luft**’ camps, New Zealanders mostly at **Sagan** (**Stalag Luft III**), naval and merchant seamen in **marlags**: these are not separately described in this survey. **Stalags** were central camps from which men left to go out to work camps, or **kommandos**. A **stalag** had therefore a changing population, although in each there was a core of men who lived there permanently—men unsuited to heavy work or given some administrative function. But every other-rank prisoner passed through a **stalag** at some time in his career of captivity.

Wolfsberg in late 1943 had a population of some 8000 British prisoners, 25,000 French, and numerous Russians, Yugoslavs, and Italians. British troops were lodged in 75-man huts or in old stables: the men slept in three-tiered bunks, generally reserving the bottom bunks for their kit. They were issued with two blankets each. Hot showers were available all day, but, as in most German camps, the fuel issue for heating and cooking was insufficient. Medical care was adequate and the food in the **stalag** infirmary better than in the rest of the camp. The camp had a good gymnasium and a flourishing theatre but few facilities for study. Discipline was fairly lax, thanks to the venality of the guards. **Wolfsberg** was the central **stalag** for the whole of **Austria**, and the camps at **Markt Pongau**, **Maribor**, and **Spittal-an-der-Drau** were in some degree dependencies of it.

Lamsdorf (in 1944 shifted to **Teschen**) was the main camp in the **Silesia-Poland** area. It covered 13 acres and normally accommodated 10,000 men, though in 1943 at least 5000 more were crammed into it. (All the German camps in the East and South became crowded after the

prisoners had been brought there from **Italy**.) Earlier, it had seemed comparatively luxurious. The huts were built of adobe or cob with concrete floors and tarred paper roofs, flat with a slight fall. The water supply at this camp was inadequate and inefficient. The food was poor. Discipline was 'strict but on the whole not unjust'. The prisoners' morale remained high. They liked to show off the superiority of their clothing and equipment and were careful to be smart and well turned-out whenever they left the camp. 'The contrast between us and our guards was striking and caused frequent comment among the civilians.'

Residence in a stalag had the advantages and disadvantages of greater regularity of administration. Rackets, though they had to be better concealed, sometimes reached larger proportions than in kommandos. Inside the camp all sorts of intellectual and social activities were far more fully developed than in smaller groups. On the whole, relations with guards in a stalag were less close than in a kommando, and although prisoners were left more to themselves it was harder for them to escape.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

KOMMANDOS

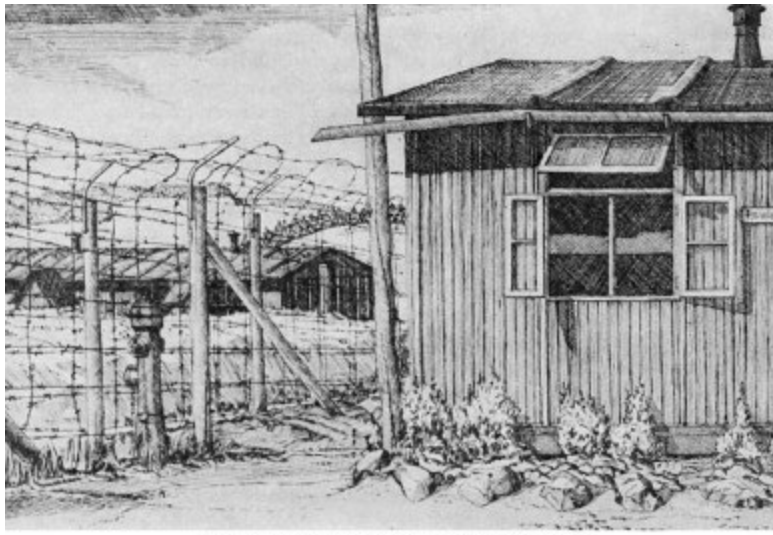
Kommandos

THE WORK CAMPS dependent on each stalag were known as *arbeitskommandos*, often shortened to kommandos. A stalag might have on its strength 5000 to 7000 prisoners of war with another 10,000 to 30,000 men distributed through the farms, factories, railway yards, quarries, and mines of the neighbourhood. Kommandos fell into three main classes—farming, industrial work, and work for the commissariat of the German Army (for instance, unloading stores from trains). They consisted of groups of from six to 500 men, although the usual strength of a kommando was between fifty and 100, as this was an economical administrative unit for a guard of from six to ten to handle with the aid of an interpreter and was also suited to the needs of most industries. Men on kommandos usually went back to the stalag only for disciplinary reasons or for medical treatment. A medical orderly was attached to most kommandos, each of which was administered by the usual man-of-confidence. This man-of-confidence (or *Vertrauensmann*) was elected by the prisoners themselves from their own numbers. He was in charge of the issue of **Red Cross** parcels and clothing and was responsible for all matters concerning the welfare of his fellow-prisoners. As one prisoner remarked, the principle of the elected man-of-confidence was ‘rather ironic in a dictatorship country’.

Work on the land offered the greatest freedom and the best food, but the advantages were ‘to a large extent offset by the arduous nature of the work and the long hours’. The usual practice was for the prisoners to be lodged at some central point from which they marched out every morning under guard to the scene of their labours, returning in the same way to their quarters in the evening. During the day the farmer they were working for was responsible for them to the German authorities, and he also fed them. One prisoner amusingly described the arrival of fourteen prisoners of war at a new village, where the local farmers immediately engaged in a ‘rather obvious wrangle over who should have the big men and who the small’. These farmers had been strictly briefed by the German authorities in the correct demeanour towards prisoners of

war: the general principle was the avoidance of fraternising. When they had got to know each other better, this elaborate structure of restrictive regulations (which had even forbidden the farm children to speak to the prisoners) was regarded by both farmers and prisoners as the 'joke of the century'. Work was hard and the hours long, partly because the implements were generally very primitive, but the food and exercise built up the men's strength to normal. Every Sunday was spent in camp: in winter, resting, reading, or playing games; in summer, swimming, or climbing the neighbouring hills. Towards the end of the war prisoners were made to work on Sundays.

Of all the industrial jobs work in the coal mines was perhaps the worst, with work in the salt mines almost as bad, yet some prisoners were reasonably treated even in the mines. A prisoner in Poland had to get up at 5 a.m. and walk five kilometres to the coal mine where he worked, but his day ended with his return to camp at 4.30 p.m. Allowing two hours for going to and from the mine and another hour for changing and for hot showers after the day's work, actual working hours were less than eight daily. But another prisoner described the German coal-mine foremen in Poland as 'real thugs', and the chief guard of his kommando was a notorious character who was believed to have shot twelve prisoners at various times. Quarrying also was difficult and strenuous work. Many men were employed in factories: this work had advantages in the opportunities it



KOMMANDO BARRACKS ATTACHED TO STALAG XII

KOMMANDO BARRACKS ATTACHED TO STALAG XII

gave to meet other workers—foreign or German—and exchange commodities with them. Generally the work prisoners were ordered to do was not a direct contribution to the German war effort, though there were jobs which were exceptions to this and which prisoners successfully refused.

The German policy was to force prisoners to work under threat of punishment. Many guards found in practice that more conciliatory methods produced better results for both sides. The prisoners were determined not to help the enemy by working hard, and the only occasions when men put their best into the job was when it was on a contract basis and they could, when finished, go home early. Some guards tricked prisoners by beginning the day on contract and, when the allotted task was nearly finished, returning to day labour for set hours. This was not likely to succeed more than once or twice. For their part the prisoners were willing to trick their guards. On one occasion a group greatly reduced the labour of filling in a deep trench carrying power cables by putting boards over it near the surface and throwing earth on top; an Allied bomb exposed the deception to the Germans many months later. Prisoners were able to engage in a good deal of quiet sabotage in the course of their work. On a dam-construction job the concrete mixture was tampered with, tools were lost in the mould with the concrete, and sand was thrown into the bearings of railway trucks.

Men on kommandos were paid anything from 70 pfennigs (IIId) to 3 marks (4s) a day, the highest earnings being in the coal mines. They had very limited opportunities for spending this money; local German wartime beer, greatly despised, was practically the only thing they could buy with their *lagergeld*, notes specially printed by the Germans for the use of prisoners of war. It was possible to remit savings home through the International Red Cross. The real currency with which prisoners corrupted guards, overseers, and any of the civil population with whom they came in contact was provided by the luxury items in their **Red Cross** parcels—tea, coffee, cocoa, cigarettes, and soap. Men had qualms sometimes whether they were not in fact helping their enemies by giving them things denied them by the Allied blockade. But nearly all felt that the advantages to themselves from successful barter were so great that the **Red Cross** authorities would certainly have considered their gifts were being well used, and the effect on the Germans' morale of having to depend on their prisoners for goods they could not otherwise obtain outweighed any mitigation of the enemy's wartime hardships which might result. Barter with Red Cross commodities enabled the prisoners to add eggs, white bread, flour, fresh fruit, milk, and cream to their diet, to acquire contraband articles, and generally to soften the rigours of captivity.

Naturally a small group of men at a distance from the authorities had better opportunities than those who remained in a large camp for coming to terms with their captors. But this relaxation worked both ways. It sometimes happened that living accommodation and conditions on kommandos, which were rarely visited by the International Red Cross, were appalling, the guards offensive and unjust, and the local population hostile and unyielding. The opportunities for sport, recreation, and education were generally smaller and less rewarding than in the main camps. But to most men the kommando was welcome for its closer approximation to the conditions of ordinary civilian life.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS' CAMP

Non-Commissioned Officers' Camp

ACAMP for non-working non-commissioned officers, Stalag 383, at Hohenfels in Bavaria, was well run, largely because the Germans left the prisoners a good deal to themselves, and because the camp man-of-confidence, a British warrant officer captured in 1940, was through long experience expert at handling the Germans. The prisoners lived in small, 12-man wooden huts with low, flattened roofs. Originally the camp had been divided into three compounds, but the posts in these fences had one by one been removed for firewood until the internal divisions had disappeared. As the stalag grew to 7000 men, of whom about 350 were New Zealanders, the huts became more crowded until fourteen men lived in each.

Few were without occupation. A prisoner in this camp remarked that the men who were worst affected by their captivity were those who did nothing but lie apathetically all day in their bunks or sit in the sun. The higher ranks had plenty to do administering the camp: the prisoners themselves ran the kitchen, the parcel store, the sorting of mail, and the sanitation services. A school flourished in a big stable which the prisoners had fitted out for themselves. It was open twelve hours a day, sixty different classes being conducted every day for its 3500 students. A good reference library, as well as a fiction lending library (together over 13,000 volumes), supplied the needs of the camp's readers. In addition, two theatres regularly put on plays, musical shows, or revues, and a symphony orchestra, a piano-accordion band, a pipe band, swing orchestras, and three choirs gave expression to different types of musical accomplishment. Many men kept gardens which supplied the fresh vegetables not otherwise obtainable, and some fattened rabbits, pigeons, and roosters.

Yet the great resource of the prisoners in this camp was sport. The keenest rivalry grew between the twelve 'companies' into which the camp was divided or between the nations of the British Commonwealth. Tournaments were held in football, cricket, tennis, basketball, wrestling,

boxing, hockey, softball, and deck tennis. In summer the fire-fighting reservoir was used for swimming and for international water polo matches, and a model yacht club also held races there; in winter it became an open-air ice-skating rink. Gymnastics and athletic sports were also carried on at this camp, whose area, if not ample, was adequate. Stalag 383 might be arctic in winter, but in summer it was a pleasant place with its view of nearby wooded hills, while even in winter the neighbouring pinewoods, loaded with snow, took on a new beauty. In the dreary winter evenings nearly everyone played contract bridge or other card games; many played chess.

The amenities of this camp were mainly the work of the prisoners themselves who 'made their own fun'. They were helped also by outside agencies, the International Red Cross or the Swedish **YMCA**, which supplied sports gear and educational material; little credit was due to the Germans, although the guards were corruptible and the commandant himself 'not a bad chap'. During two distinct periods, largely because of Allied air attacks on the German railway system, rations at this camp suffered because of the failure of **Red Cross** supplies. The first occasion was for three months in the early part of 1943, when the deprivation was uncomfortable rather than serious. In November 1944 the failure of **Red Cross** food parcels to arrive coincided with progressive cuts in the rations issued by the Germans. Eventually men were living on not much more than a little bread and two potatoes a day. Some small relief was given later by the **Red Cross** 'white angels' (white-painted motor-waggons with consignments of parcels for prison camps), which twice brought parcels. 'Apart from the morning check parade, the majority of the men remained in bed all day to escape the blistering cold outside.' At the end of the war everyone was much weakened by this four-month period on starvation rations.

The greatest hardship at Stalag 383 was the shortage of fuel. The German issue of coal and wood was not enough either to cook meals from **Red Cross** parcels or to keep the huts warm. 'Blowers' * eked out the scanty supplies. Occasionally one representative from each hut was

allowed to join a party gathering dead wood in the forest: but this was two miles away, and the amount one man could carry was limited. As no working parties went out, the wood supply was virtually restricted to what could be found inside the camp itself. Here the prisoners waged a ruthless war of attrition against the Germans, a war which went in their favour but in which time was on the side of the enemy. 'An army of "destructional engineers" sprang up overnight' which reduced the eight beams in the roof of each hut to four or even three, did the same for the beams under the floors, and absorbed any other pieces of wood anywhere in the camp which could be taken without obvious harm or without drawing too rapid vengeance on the takers. In December 1944 the destructional engineers of Hut 171 planned and executed 'one of the greatest fuel drives ever conceived in the Stalag. The target was a large striped sentry box standing just outside the main gate of the camp ... in which the half-frozen sentry was wont to retire from time to time.' This sentry box measured 9ft by 3ft 6ins by 4ft and weighed, as its ravishers were pained to discover, over 3cwt. While the hut's best German speaker lured the sentry some way down the wire to discuss an attractive barter transaction, eight of the men opened the gate and grabbed the box, carrying it into their hut under cover of the dusk. They had to take the hut door off its hinges to get the box in; it was then hastily broken up into small pieces. Next day the Germans made an intensive search for the lost sentry box, lifting the floors of every hut, but without result as the broken fragments had been hidden in an underground darkroom, whose existence had never been suspected by the guards, the trap-door replaced and covered with earth. The prisoners waited a few days and then brought up the fragments a few pieces at a time: 'it proved the best fuel we had ever had.'

* 'Blowers' were ingenious stoves designed to make the most of scraps of fuel by using the forced-draught principle.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

OFLAGS

Oflags

THE GERMANS were extremely respectful to rank. In general, officer prisoners were given all the privileges accorded them by the Geneva Convention's provisions, but they found the Germans harsh enough if they committed any breach of the regulations. Mass reprisals against officers included the removal of all furniture from their quarters and the suspension for several weeks of the issue of **Red Cross** parcels. With their greater leisure and greater resources of technical knowledge, officers had fuller chances than the men of engaging in secret or resistance activities, * and these chances were generally exploited. They had also better opportunities for education and recreation. This burden of time often made captivity more tedious for them than for men who were obliged to work.

Although undoubtedly better treated by the Germans than were the men, officers did not receive any better food and their accommodation could be very poor. At one officers' camp (oflag), in a former school which had held 150 pupils and now accommodated 450 officers, the sanitary system was hopelessly overtaxed. The medical treatment was unusually poor, being administered by German doctors described as 'ignorant, indifferent, and frankly hostile'. Another oflag was in an old castle whose dry moat was the prisoners' chief place of recreation. This camp had a good library, theatre, and orchestra. But the prisoners frequently came into collision with the German authorities, and in any case did not find the quarters comfortable.

Few features of life in oflags differed from those of other non-working camps, although cultural activities were perhaps more fully developed. As in the men's camps, anything that was achieved in the arts or in education was due to the persistence and talent of the prisoners themselves, assisted by the International Red Cross, not to any indulgence on the part of the Germans.

INTO CAPTIVITY



ON CRETE
from a German publication

ON CRETE
from a German publication



AT SANDBOSTEL, NEAR BREMEN, GERMANY

AT SANDBOSTEL, NEAR BREMEN, GERMANY

REALITY



WORKING PARTY, SILZTHAL, AUSTRIA

WORKING PARTY, SILZTHAL, AUSTRIA



THE MIDDAY SOUP, LUCKENWALDE

THE MIDDAY SOUP, LUCKENWALDE



UNDER CANVAS, LUCKENWALDE

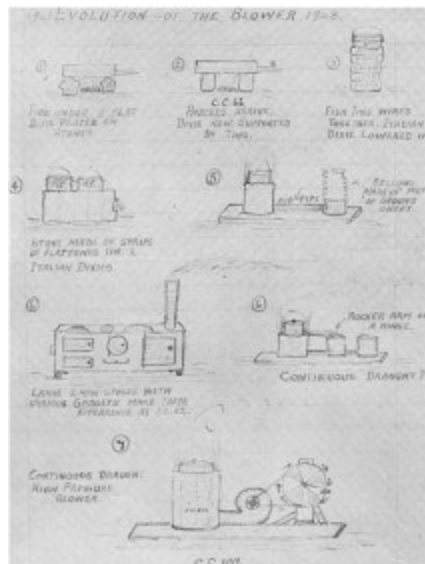
UNDER CANVAS, LUCKENWALDE



PERIMETER WIRE, CHRISTMAS EVE, 1943, STALAG 383, BAVARIA

PERIMETER WIRE, CHRISTMAS EVE, 1943, STALAG 383, BAVARIA

RESOURCE UNDER ROUTINE



Drawing from a diary

Drawing from a diary



No food parcels for this Kommando

Stealing a sentry
box by night to be
used for fuel
(pages 9 and 10)



Stealing a sentry box by night to be used for fuel (pages 9 and 10)

A new-model
cooker at
Stalag 383



A new-model cooker at Stalag 383



The old castle on the hill in the background was typical of Oflag in the early days of the war. The village below is Spangenburg.

**The old castle on the hill in the background was typical of Oflag in the early days of the war.
The village below is Spangenburg**



The day's German ration of ersatz food for an Oflag at Warburg
The day's German ration of ersatz food for an Oflag at Warburg

An inspecting party visiting the Red Cross store at Stalag 383



An inspecting party visiting the Red Cross store at Stalag 383



Prisoners preparing their midday meal from Red Cross parcels.

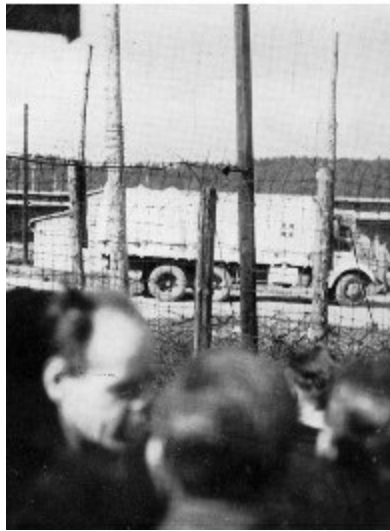
Lunchtime. Prisoners prepare their midday meal from Red Cross parcels



Visitors to a football match at Stalag 383 included the President of the Swedish YMCA, second from left

Visitors to a football match at Stalag 383 included the President of the Swedish YMCA, second from left

The first Swiss Red Cross food relief convoy



The first Swiss Red Cross food relief convoy



Gambling for cigarettes

Gambling for cigarettes

A sports day at a working
Kommando attached to Stalag
XVIII A at Wolfsberg



A sports day at a working Kommando attached to Stalag XVIII A at Wolfsberg



The early morning sun

The early morning sun



A scene from a camp theatre production *Night Must Fall*

A scene from a camp theatre production *Night Must Fall*

ON THE MARCHES



NAZI GUARDS

NAZI GUARDS



A HALT ON THE MARCH
SOUTH AT ETEHAUSEN

A HALT ON THE MARCH SOUTH AT ETEHAUSEN



FOREIGN WORKERS,
GERMAN CIVILIANS, AND
ALLIED PRISONERS MIX
TOGETHER IN A BARN-
YARD.

A British medical officer in the right foreground can be distinguished by his arm-band.

FOREIGN WORKERS, GERMAN CIVILIANS, AND ALLIED PRISONERS MIX TOGETHER IN A BARNYARD. A British medical officer in the right foreground can be distinguished by his arm-band



A COLUMN OF GUARDED
PRISONERS MARCH EAST
THROUGH THURINGEN
FOREST

A COLUMN OF GUARDED PRISONERS MARCH EAST THROUGH THURINGEN FOREST

THE FIRST AMERICAN
SOLDIER ENTERS AN
OFLAG AT BRUNSWICK,
12 APRIL 1945.



THE FIRST AMERICAN SOLDIER ENTERS AN OFLAG AT BRUNSWICK, 12 APRIL 1945

THE AIR RAID PRECEDING
LIBERATION AT STALAG VIIA,
MOOSBURG, BAVARIA



THE AIR RAID PRECEDING LIBERATION AT STALAG VIIA, MOOSBURG, BAVARIA



American Dakotas flew prisoners from Germany.

American Dakotas flew prisoners from Germany



A transit centre in Brussels, whence the prisoners flew to England

A transit centre in **Brussels**, whence the prisoners flew to England

*** Most of this activity is described elsewhere in this account or in the surveys in this series dealing with escapes, but two incidents at one officers' camp may be cited as typical. The first was an escape by twenty-seven officers in 1942, a most elaborately contrived affair. The escapers climbed out over the wire on 'assault ladders' whose three hinged sections were successfully thrown right over the compound fence. A sapper officer had fused the camp lights; the Germans, fearing a general mutiny, did not care to enter the darkened camp, and German-speaking prisoners added to the confusion by shouting contradictory orders to the German guards. Four of the twenty-seven escaped completely. The other incident occurred later: as the Germans had periodically run a heavy traction-engine round the compound to cave in any tunnels, the tunnellers in retaliation dug a broad underground chamber which, when the surface collapsed, completely engulfed the engine; it 'came to rest well down, to the consternation of the German authorities'.**

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE RED CROSS PROVIDES

The Red Cross Provides

THE PARCELS of food distributed from Geneva by the International Red Cross * were the prisoners' life-line. An ex-prisoner of the Germans wrote: 'This point cannot be stressed sufficiently; as all who were in captivity agree, we literally owed our very lives to the **Red Cross** and Order of St. John and our thanks must be put on record to these two humane organisations.' Other prisoners have said that they could never have worked or even kept their health without these weekly parcels. The Germans fully realised their value and gave them transport priority; indeed at some camps they took this extra food into account when fixing the prisoners' ration issue, even though this was a gross violation of the terms of the Geneva Convention.

The rations issued by the Germans were meagre. They varied slightly from place to place. At an Austrian camp in 1943 the rations issued to each man consisted of one-fifth of a 4-pound loaf of black bread daily, vegetable soup five times a week, and potatoes boiled in their jackets and served with meat sauce on the other two days; there was also a weekly issue of four ounces of margarine and seven dessertspoonfuls of sugar, and on Sundays each man received a slice of sausage about two and a half inches in diameter and half an inch thick. These men preferred to go without tea or coffee (the Germans supplied mint tea and a coffee made from roasted barley) rather than waste the sugar ration sweetening it. In the difficult days at the end of the war, the Germans, short of transport, cut down prisoners' rations.

The occasions when parcels failed to arrive brought home to those in enemy prison camps how dependent they were on this extra food. Local distribution to working camps was not always perfectly organised, and newly established camps, whether main camps or working ones, sometimes did not get any parcels for months. Towards the end of the war, the period from about November 1944 onwards, the parcel supply in the depths of a particularly bitter winter, dwindled to nothing, mainly owing to the breakdown of communications under bombing, making the

last months in enemy hands the worst. In early 1945, however, Geneva began sending out every week a fleet of white-painted motor-waggon with consignments of parcels direct to prison camps or to the columns of prisoners which had begun the terrible marches forced on them by their captors as the Allies advanced into **Germany**. The relief which could be afforded by these 'white angels', as these waggons were called, could only be small. They visited one camp of 7000 men twice in four months, each time bringing 10,000 parcels, a total distribution of less than three parcels altogether for each man. But the German rations were so poor by this time that this relief, brought into **Germany** at considerable risk, may in many cases have been decisive; it was the weakest and worst-nourished who fell out from the columns of marchers.

The contents of the parcels from England, **Canada**, **Australia**, South Africa, or New Zealand varied with the country of origin. The Canadian parcels usually contained one pound each of dried milk, butter, jam, biscuits, bully beef, and meat roll, eight ounces of salmon, six ounces each of sardines, prunes, and sugar, seven ounces of raisins, five ounces of chocolate, four ounces of cheese, four ounces of tea or coffee, salt, and a cake of soap. This parcel was the most popular, because while four meat and three fish meals could be made from its main contents, the fruit and the dried milk were interesting additions, and the biscuits could be ground up to make porridge or flour. The English parcel had much more varied contents and cocoa as the alternative to tea. The New Zealand parcel was liked for its honey, but the pound of brown sugar (a larger quantity than in any other parcel) and the raisins did not always arrive in perfect condition as our parcels had the longest journey of all to make.

In most camps the **Red Cross** store had two locks, the key of one held by the Germans, the key of the other by the British man-of-confidence. German orders were that the tins had to be punctured at the time of issue, so as to prevent the accumulation of stores of food which could be used for escapes. In some camps the tins had to be emptied out at once. However, many escapers were recaptured with numbers of

unopened tins in their possession, for the strictest system has flaws in it, especially when guards are in greater or less degree corruptible. Although on occasion the Germans withheld the issue of parcels as a disciplinary measure, they scrupulously respected their contents, and pillaging was a rarity. On the other hand, many next-of-kin parcels never reached the addressees.

* In New Zealand the **Red Cross** and the Order of St. John act as a single body under the control of the Joint Council of the Order of St. John and the New Zealand Red Cross Society for certain purposes. In a specifically New Zealand context the term ‘**Red Cross**’ refers to the Joint Council, whose magnificent work for prisoners of war and internees, for the wounded of both wars, and for the sick and destitute generally, cannot be too warmly acknowledged. The Joint Council expended funds raised for prisoners of war by the National and Provincial Patriotic Fund Boards.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

DISCIPLINE

Discipline

THE GERMANS did their best to govern camps and kommandos through the prisoners themselves. Other-rank prisoners elected their own man-of-confidence; in officers' camps the Senior British Officer had the same functions. All orders to prisoners of war were given through the senior non-commissioned officer at each camp, but the man-of-confidence, who was in charge of all matters concerning prisoners' welfare, had also to carry a considerable burden of administrative duties. Complaints and representations to the German authorities might only be made through the senior non-commissioned officer. With very few exceptions, the senior non-commissioned officers did a splendid job in maintaining morale, prestige, and self-esteem among the men under their command. In some camps they were punished for offences against discipline committed by those under them.

The Germans were better gaolers than the Italians, as those men who had been in Italian prison camps before going to **Germany** immediately noticed. German efficiency made treatment more systematic, less subject to local variations, and in total effect more just and humane; the Germans were 'not petty like the Italians and seem extraordinarily patient with our many misdemeanours'. The same prisoner, however, remarked that some German guards were too eager to shoot, killing or wounding prisoners leaving their huts at night or at any time approaching too close to the wire, although obviously without bad intent. More than one case occurred of mentally unbalanced prisoners being shot while attempting to climb the fences.

Most friction with the Germans came from working parties. The Germans put the greatest pressure on non-commissioned officers to join kommandos 'voluntarily': in one camp the issue of clothing was at first refused to men who did not go out on working parties. In another camp, as one man wrote, 'we are referred to as work-refusing NCOs and not allowed any of the Camp amenities, nor are we allowed to mix with the British prisoners.' Admittedly the numbers of non-commissioned officers

had been swollen by the numerous self-promoted 'stalag corporals', sergeants, or warrant officers. 'Later the Germans got wise to this and would not accept any rank until it had been confirmed by Geneva.' On the job men slacked to the maximum extent possible. In the unpopular coal mines 'krankers' (self-inflicted wounds) became so common a means of avoiding work that eventually the Germans would not transfer men out of the mines for any reason whatsoever. When men regained their health after sickness, voluntary or involuntary, they had to go back into the mine.

Men who did not work or who fell foul of the Germans in other ways were sent to special punishment camps. A man who had served a sentence in the stalag gaol for some offence (escaping, abusing the guards, slacking on a working party, or 'taking [Hitler's](#) name in vain') was sent to a disciplinary camp for the next six months. Discipline at these camps was tough: here occurred occasional shootings, stabbings, and beatings, and the guards were encouraged to oppress their prisoners. However, some Germans had a curious regard for a rebellious prisoner: a German captain told a parade of prisoners at Wolfsberg in 1944, 'I respect these *Disciplinaires*; they are prisoners who have done and are doing their duty. It is the duty of all prisoners of war to attempt to escape and my duty to stop them.' It is interesting to note also that at least one commandant always accepted the word of a prisoner against that of a guard.

Serious offences would be punished by a term in a military prison, shared with German soldiers also serving sentences. A New Zealand warrant officer spent eight months in Torgau military prison for an assault made on a guard in an attempt to escape. While at Torgau he was several times condemned to further 'arrest', in cells on bread and water, for refusing to work, these periods being additional to the original sentence. When representatives of the International Red Cross visited the prisoner-of-war section of this prison, it had been specially cleaned up for their benefit, and as soon as it had been inspected such things as bedding were immediately removed again from the prisoners' quarters.

The conditions, without blankets, parcels, books, games, or any communication with the outside world, were very bad. 'All of us were under great nervous strain ... conditions were so rigid that many of the inmates inflicted wounds on themselves in an endeavour to get treatment in an ordinary prisoner-of-war hospital. In other words, they tried to regain the status of an ordinary prisoner-of-war. Others escaped ... and entered ordinary stalags under false names with the same end in view.'

After the Dieppe raid, in which an order that prisoners should be tied fell into German hands, the Germans made an elaborate and in some ways ludicrous attempt at mass reprisals against their prisoners. All Canadians and all prisoners who had been put on the Germans' black-list for any reason were chained. Handcuffs connected by lengths of chain were used, but the men found it easy to make keys to unlock them. The prisoners would form up in queues to be handcuffed; then, to annoy the guards, they would unlock their handcuffs and queue up again and again to be re-handcuffed: 'This went on time after time and appeared to leave the guards completely mystified and very bad tempered.'

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

RACKETS AND RESISTANCE

Rackets and Resistance

THE GERMAN administration was efficient. The regulations for the control of prisoners of war, in general consonant with the Geneva Convention, were well devised and had few loopholes. How then did men acquire such articles as secret radios, genuine personal documents as models for the forger, cameras and photographic material, as well as the thousand and one other contraband items which helped to alleviate the rigours of prison life? The answer is simple: the German guards were corrupt. Using such commodities as cigarettes, cocoa, tea, coffee, chocolate, and soap, which came to them in their **Red Cross** parcels, prisoners of war by a process of attrition combined with judicious blackmail wore down the never over-strong resistance of most of their captors. Once a guard had yielded he was hopelessly compromised. Taking a bribe from a prisoner exposed him afterwards to being reported to his superiors by the prisoner if he did not 'behave'. This was used deliberately as a means of 'fixing' unpopular guards. Guards were so much in the prisoners' confidence that they would warn them of stool-pigeons being planted in the camp or of approaching searches by the **Gestapo**: here, of course, the guards had the personal motive that the discovery of contraband by the secret police would bring punishment upon them. Naturally, no guard could be induced to do more than a certain amount for prisoners.

It was usual for 'rackets', as these 'gentlemen's agreements' between prisoners and guards were called, to be exploited for the benefit of all prisoners. Extra food was the normal fruit of barter transactions, but in one camp a dentist obtained his materials and also rented a drill illicitly. In at least two oflags the Senior British Officer would only permit barter transactions by selected officers for the purpose of obtaining security and intelligence information or escape equipment. Sometimes individuals ran their own rackets for their own benefit, quite often to the disadvantage of fellow-prisoners. Men who expended cigarettes in the right quarter could avoid leaving stalags on working parties or could wait for the working party they preferred. In most stalags anything

could be bought for cigarettes. These conditions occasionally led to a breakdown of the discipline imposed by the prisoners' own nationality; in **Lamsdorf**, for instance, a razor gang (not New Zealanders) at one time intimidated the prisoners' own officials until strenuous action was taken to break it up.

The elaborate secret organisations built up by prisoners of war to forward escapes or for general resistance to the enemy could have existed without benefit of rackets, but they were usually greatly helped by materials acquired by bribery. Some organisations were highly successful, others were little more than wish-fulfilling hobbies. One officer felt that 'tactical organisations' in camp were a menace in the hands of 'impractical and talkative' officers. Another officer found the organisation in his camp very good with efficient security: no one who could not be vouched for 'ever received any information of a confidential nature'.

The exploit of one camp's secret committee while in transit between camps in April 1944 is too good to pass unrecorded. Before the move 2000 pamphlets were printed: they told, in German, of the good conditions in England, the favourable state of the war for the Allies, and the uselessness of continuing resistance, and to the bewilderment of the **Gestapo** were distributed from the train all along the route. *

* It had been found that the stone lining the latrine walls was suitable for lithography; using this stone, maps, in three colours, were printed for escapers.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

EDUCATION, RECREATION, AND WELFARE

Education, Recreation, and Welfare

THE SCHEME for advancing the education of prisoners of war was first set on foot in the summer of 1941. It could function only through the co-operation of a number of parties— educational bodies, the International Red Cross, and the German authorities. The last gave it a qualified blessing: they censored books to a minor extent and prohibited the study of European history to any date later than 1914. Ninety-four different bodies, from bee-keepers and chiropodists to organists and swimming instructors, and twelve universities * held examinations in the camps; nearly the full range of academic courses could be studied, including the early stages of a medical course. The scheme had originated partly in parents' anxieties about the loss of opportunities their sons suffered in prison camps, partly in the frustration of prisoners' own ambitions. Many men also were aware of the chance offered them of cultivating interests or talents previously foregone for lack of time or money; some wished to acquire knowledge for its own sake. All courses and books were provided free to prisoners of war and examination fees were waived, costs being borne by their respective governments.

Officers had the best opportunity for study. But at a typical stalag it was possible to maintain a 'school', affiliated to the University of **London**, with a roll of 5000 students, out of the 8000 in the camp, studying different subjects from technical and trade training to philosophy, theology, and history. The school kept open from 9 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. and made the maximum use of its five classrooms. The head of this school was the graduate of an English university, and he had a staff of about forty: prisoners with special qualifications gave their time and services with the utmost unselfishness. Books were sent out through the International Red Cross from a specially established section of the Bodleian Library at **Oxford**. Each prisoner's needs were considered individually in the light of his educational standard and his knowledge of his subject, and books were prescribed accordingly; many prisoners followed individual courses of study independently of the camp 'school'.

The degree of enthusiasm and application of prisoner-students is shown by the fact that about three-quarters of those who sat examinations passed them, in spite of the great material hardships of prison life, the long time mails took in transit between **Britain** and the camps, and the distraction of working in a crowded atmosphere; spiritual obstacles had also to be overcome, particularly the peculiar mental lassitude which afflicts the prisoner in spite of all his resolutions. Examining bodies were scrupulous not to lower their standards for the special benefit of prisoners of war.

The great solace of camp life was sport. All sorts of competitive games were played, and although space limitations sometimes made football and cricket impossible, a basketball or deck-tennis court could usually be established even on a pocket-handkerchief ground. The tanks dug in many camps to hold water for fire-fighting in the event of air raids made excellent swimming baths in summer, and in winter were used for skating rinks on which ice hockey could also be played. In a hospital for the disabled, swimming sports were held for the blind, 'comrades guiding them along the course by calling out their names as they swam'. The societies of the **Red Cross** and St. John, working through the International Red Cross at Geneva, supplied most materials for sports and games, and the Danish and Swedish YMCAs also gave generous and valued help.

* The University of New Zealand conducted examinations in German prison camps through the University of **London**.

In kommandos the main recreations were card-playing, reading, and talk. Lack of space in the compounds where prisoners were confined when not at work, and the restriction of their leisure to Sundays, curtailed more vigorous pastimes.

Many camp theatres flourished and absorbed the energies of the talented. Not only were plays put on but the players appeared dressed in something approximating the appropriate costumes, for which purpose

uniforms were dyed, blankets turned into men's suits, and a thousand and one odd rags and pieces of wrapping paper and cardboard changed into men's and women's clothes of unimpeachable smartness. Stage sets, as original and complete as any used in a **London** theatre, were designed and made in the camps, often from the scantiest of materials. The German authorities were usually very sympathetic to dramatic enterprise, and it was sometimes possible for them to hire costumes from civilian agencies on the prisoners' behalf. The high quality of the performances of plays, revues, and musical shows made these among the most satisfying of prison-camp activities, both for the actors and others who contributed to the productions and for their audiences.

In stalags periodicals flourished, usually in the form of wall newspapers. The Germans printed and sponsored a weekly paper, *The Camp*, for prisoners of war, to which prisoners contributed, but which had more than a faint flavour of propaganda. In some areas prisoners' news-sheets were published in the stalag expressly to keep men in kommandos in touch with what was going on. One such periodical, *The Pow Wow*, dealt with questions of distribution of **Red Cross** parcels, administrative details, personal items, and also included messages from chaplains of the different denominations.

The Germans' attitude to chaplains and doctors was curious. They were recognised as protected personnel, but they were not always encouraged to carry on their work. The Germans were reluctant to place prisoner-of-war medical officers in charge of camp infirmaries, because they thought they were too ready to excuse men from work. This was a soundly-based suspicion: most medical officers in captivity prevented as many men working as they reasonably could. Chaplains also were regarded to some extent as trouble-makers—for the Germans—and at first they were not allowed to visit kommandos to conduct services and meet the men. In some camps, but not in all, they were not allowed to preach without a German interpreter being present. In captivity personal problems weighed on men more heavily than in ordinary life, and the chaplains in prison camps did work of the highest value.

Letters, always important to men away from their homes, were the focus of many men's thoughts. Mail came quickly and regularly from the **United Kingdom** (many people in **Britain** wrote to prisoners of war who were strangers to them), but letters from New Zealand were slow in transit. * Prisoners were allowed to send home a card and a letter every week. Delays in censorship were a constant complaint.

* Except for part of 1944 when letters from New Zealand took less than two months to arrive.



EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE MARCHES

The Marches

AS THEIR DEFEAT came closer the general tendency of the German armies was to retreat into the centre of **Germany**, taking with them not only their supplies but their prisoners as well. Thousands of German refugees streamed towards the West in the face of the advances of the dreaded Russians. Thousands of prisoners of war followed them in long, dreary columns on foot. The motive for this mass removal of prisoners is a little obscure. In January 1945 the Germans might still have deluded themselves with the hope of making a peace by bargaining, perhaps by playing off the **United States** and **Britain** against the Soviet. In March and April it was apparent that the German armies could not drive back the Allies, nor could **Germany** hope to make a negotiated peace. The progress of the fighting had already destroyed the value of prisoners of war as hostages before they began their terrible compelled marches. But in **Germany** an order, once given, tended to continue to be carried out long after the reason for giving it had disappeared.

By early 1945 the German railways had been heavily bombed and petrol was in short supply; if prisoners of war had to be moved they had to go on foot. It is difficult to generalise about the routes of these marches. Men in the eastern parts of **Germany** or German-held territory were earliest on the move, but camps in the West were also evacuated to the East and the North. Some camps in the South were left undisturbed until March or April, when they were evacuated farther south only a few days before the liberating armies appeared. The longest marches were from the East to the West, from **Poland**, Silesia, or **Czechoslovakia** into central or southern **Germany**, and the actual distances covered were increased by the general use of back roads and country lanes to avoid the congested main thoroughfares. One good result of the marches was that many men who would otherwise have come into Russian hands were liberated by the Americans or the British. *

In late January 1945 the prisoners in **Lamsdorf**, near the borders of southern **Poland**, were marched off in batches of about a thousand men

to Gorlitz, fifty miles east of Dresden, covering 260 kilometres in fourteen days. After a few days in crowded discomfort in this camp, which had, of course, its own prisoner-of-war population, the prisoners from both camps resumed their journey and marched for a month, with three single days of rest, to Duderstadt, about thirty miles east of **Kassel**. The columns had been billeted en route mostly in barns or empty factories, occasionally in German military barracks. At these barracks the prisoners always got a hot meal; on the farms they were dependent on the charity of the farmers, many of whom were openly hostile. At Duderstadt the marchers were lodged in a brickworks building, in which 4500 men were crowded into insanitary, waterless quarters where the air was filled with a fine red dust. After a week there under the care of guards becoming more and more jittery and savage, they moved on north, reaching Braunschweig in five days; here they were lodged for about a fortnight in barracks evacuated by political prisoners but not by lice. On 10 April a new march began, but it had lasted only three days when tanks of an American armoured division overtook the column.

These prisoners had been on the move for two and a half months. They had been scolded on by nervous guards who clubbed those who fell out and shot men who scavenged for roots in the fields. One guard who personally shot four prisoners was afterwards 'dealt with' summarily by the American troops. The fifty guards who accompanied each column of a thousand prisoners took part in the march, but many of them had bicycles, they had better food than the prisoners, proper billets, and their gear was carried for them in waggons. Yet many of them were in almost as bad case as those they guarded. In some of the guards the accumulating evidence of defeat induced only apathy, in others a neurotic brutality which caused many atrocities.

Food was the gravest difficulty. There was not much of it and its distribution was irregular, men sometimes going two days without any being issued. Some guards angrily repulsed civilian attempts to trade with the prisoners, most of whom still had kit, such as woollen scarves or gloves, which civilians were eager to buy. Most men, remembering

losses in previous moves, began the march loaded with as much personal gear as they could stagger along under. German civilians gave them food only in exchange for something. 'At no time did I see even a drink of water given gratuitously to a sick man,' said one prisoner. The Germans no doubt were hardened to the sight of sick and starving men being hounded through their streets. Sometimes food was issued to prisoners on the move and they had 'to wolf it down while still marching, to the intense curiosity of the Germans, who looked mildly disgusted at such a display of hunger....' Czechs, however, gave food to prisoners as they passed, unless prevented by the guards.

As Red Cross supplies had failed in most camps during November 1944, most of the men began their marches in a weakened condition. The meagre diet on the march and the intense cold, together with the fatigue of marching in all weathers over all types of going from mud to ice, in boots falling to bits, caused widespread and increasing sickness. The men had practically no opportunity of washing either themselves or their garments, and most of them wore the same clothes unchanged for two and a half months. The Germans made little attempt to treat the sick: only the fortunate few were admitted to hospitals. A column of a thousand might have a hundred cases of dysentery, malaria, pneumonia, influenza, crippled feet, or frostbite trailing along behind the main body in a special slow-moving 'sick column'. Some columns provided horse-drawn transport for these men, but numbers of them died.

Many men escaped from these columns and found shelter with friendly foreign workers until the liberating troops appeared. 'One of the most unpleasant details was lack of knowledge of the column's ultimate destination. It was impossible to discover whether the march would continue for five, fifteen, or fifty-five days.' Many had the encouragement that they were marching in the general direction of England.

It might be asserted that, in view of the diminishing resources at their disposal and their acute transport difficulties, the Germans did the best they could for the prisoners on these marches. Though this might

explain, without excusing, the scanty food rations, it does not dispose of the responsibility for the marches taking place at all. Not only were men killed by starvation and the bitter weather, but they were also exposed to the brutality of guards remote from their superiors and to the hazards of war. For many men the marches were by far the harshest treatment they received in [Germany](#), where the treatment of British and American prisoners of war was on the whole reasonable. It was the order to march which was criminal, and the incidental miseries and abominations flowed from that initial order.

*** British prisoners liberated by the Russians in Eastern Europe were very critical of their treatment. The governments of the British Commonwealth considered making protests to the Russian Government, but decided that the hardships suffered by liberated prisoners of war in Eastern Europe were due to the drastic conditions of the time. It appeared that by their own standards the Russians had treated our prisoners as well as they could, while the virtual re-imprisonment of the men was probably due to an oddly applied sense of responsibility for their welfare. About 170 New Zealanders were repatriated by the Russians through [Odessa](#).**

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LIBERATION

Liberation

LIBERATION came to many prisoners far away from the camps where they had spent most of the war. Others enjoyed the spectacle of the familiar guards surrendering their arms, perhaps to the prisoners themselves in anticipation of the early arrival of the Allied armies, and of the gates of their prisons being opened by friendly troops. The long years of boredom and anxiety were rolled back; the day of days had come, for some so much more moving than they had anticipated, for others an anti-climax, a slackening of tension, even a disappointment.

For some the few days following liberation were difficult, especially as prisoners had to assume new responsibilities. Some, armed with German rifles without ammunition, became guards to their former captors. They had still to feed themselves, and sometimes dependent foreign workers as well, in a country collapsing under the last of the strains of war, that of defeat, until full army supply services caught up with the fast-moving tanks. One group, which was not liberated until May 1945, broke out of its Austrian camp; the situation in the locality was confused, with SS formations still resisting. The prisoners fed themselves, looting German food dumps and trains: 'We had a lot of fun, but did not commit any murders or atrocities I am glad to say,' one wrote. Freedom in the first instance did not necessarily mean a Bacchanalian carnival; it might sooner express itself in a return to the forms of Army life. 'Up early, wash, dress as a soldier again. Nothing but guards and duties and orders, counter-orders.' A sapper took command of an Austrian camp and drove away in an enormous car to find the Allied forces. Another New Zealander, a non-commissioned officer, took charge of the town of **Graz**, dispersed the local Nazis, whom he could not entirely protect from the vengeance of the population, and was in complete control when the Allies arrived.

Late in March 1945, the senior British officer at a prisoner-of-war hospital, a New Zealand major, received a deputation from the local South German townspeople, offering to kill the few genuine Nazis in

their town and surrender it. On his orders a messenger was sent to the American forces, who next day occupied the town without resistance. The New Zealander then remained as Town Major for several weeks. Some SS troops hiding in the woods used to make periodical forays in search of food, and to check these raids he instituted patrols of former prisoners armed with captured German weapons. He commandeered a factory generator to supply the town with essential electricity, erected a new 60-foot bridge to replace one blown up by the Germans, and allocated 'all labour between 16 and 60 to farms so that the seed might be sown for next season's harvest'.

This man, like others, had doubly earned his leave by the time he was flown out to English reception areas. The arrangements for the transfer of prisoners from **Germany to **Britain** in Dakotas or Lancasters worked promptly and efficiently. The service was flexible enough to take men from almost any part of **Germany** to **Britain**, using French or Belgian airfields as staging points, within a few days of liberation. Some prisoners from **Austria** were flown out to **Italy**. Going by air was closer to the pattern of liberation which men had sketched in their own minds: the rapid transfer from the prison camp to friendly hands and the excellent and smoothly running organisation reassured those who had been fearful, in the years of captivity, of being forgotten; they found that their needs were being met as rapidly as was humanly possible, and their priority was second only to that of military operations.**

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE GERMANS

The Germans

THE GERMANS in the main observed the provisions of the Geneva Convention and on the whole they treated prisoners of war and civilian internees * with fairness and justice. It is well to bear this in mind, as this account of prisoners of war in German hands cites instances of German brutality or violation of the Convention. But the Germans' consideration for their prisoners fluctuated during the war and reflected the fortunes of war. After the Greek campaign their treatment of prisoners was generally harsh; it improved for a few months and then deteriorated again in the summer of 1942 with the German advance to the Caucasus and Rommel's successes in the **Western Desert**. After Stalingrad and the landings in North Africa a marked change for the better showed itself in German manners and behaviour. Yet, even at the end of the war, many Germans would not admit to themselves that their country could be defeated, and they remained constant in their attitude of rigour to their prisoners. But, by and large, courtesy to prisoners had returned by the end of the war.

The Germans treated the sick humanely except sometimes in forward areas such as **Greece**. The medical equipment they supplied to prison camps was inadequate, however, and prisoners would have fared very badly if it had not been for the special supplies of medicines and comforts sent in through the International Red Cross. The Germans were punctilious about funerals, burying with full military honours those who died of sickness or accident; numbers also were killed in Allied air raids.

Prisoners of war gained considerable insight into the German character in their years of captivity. They remarked on the constantly vituperative, hectoring manner of German non-commissioned officers and their liability literally to scream with rage. Most of their guards they found 'decent chaps', if a trifle wooden and blindly subservient to orders and to rank. Many of them were men of low physical grading or elderly, of a very different type and outlook from German front-line troops,

whose treatment of men at the time of capture was nearly always excellent. The German virtues of order and obedience were fully exhibited in their prison camps, whose commandants on the whole were fair and just.

Another side to the character of **Hitler's Germany** was seen in the Germans' treatment of prisoners of other nationalities. Many camps had a Russian compound, and the condition of the Russian prisoners (whose government did not adhere to the Geneva Convention and who had to exist on the German rations) was pitiable. British prisoners made gifts to them from their own parcels to the utmost extent possible. They were astounded to find the Germans able to behave humanely to one group of captives and so brutally to other groups. But few had not seen these distinctions obliterated before the end of the war.

The fall of greatness has been a constant theme of tragedy. Prisoners of war witnessed, from all too intimate a vantage point, the drama of **Germany's** overthrow. The nation which had filled all **Europe** with terror had been beaten in the field; force had been mastered by greater force; the nation which had waxed great by the sword was perishing by the sword. This historic tragedy should have been profoundly moving as an emotional spectacle. But prisoners of war were generally indifferent to it. That is not to their discredit. Their thoughts were fixed on their own homes, and they did not pause to feel vindictive towards the captors from whom they had at last been liberated.

* About 100 New Zealanders, including some women, were interned by the Germans; they were mostly merchant seamen or passengers captured at sea.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Acknowledgments

THE SOURCES *consulted in the preparation of this account include books written by former prisoners of war, as well as eye-witness accounts and interviews recorded by the author of the official prisoner-of-war volume (Wynne Mason).*

The sketches are by A. G. Douglas (**page 7** and foot of **page 14**), R. W. Collier (top of **page 14**), E. G. Smith (**page 16**), and M. A. Cameron (back cover).

The photographs come from many collections, which are stated where they are known:

Cover, Inside Cover, page 13, page 15 (bottom), pages 16 and 17 (centre), page 17 (bottom), page 18 (top), page 19 (top), page 20 (centre), page 21 (bottom) R. H. Blanchard

page 11 (bottom) W. Maud

page 12 (top) R. Brown

(centre and bottom) J. H. Wilkinson

page 15 (top), page 17 (top) page 19 (bottom) A. J. Spence

page 16 (top) T. G. Bedding

(bottom) A. H. Kyle

page 18 (bottom) J. Ledgerwood

page 20 (top and bottom), page 21 (top), page 22 Lee Hill

page 21 (centre) I. M. Matheson

The photographers risked severe punishment and showed considerable resource in overcoming the technical difficulties of taking and printing photographs while prisoners of war.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[BACKMATTER]

THE AUTHOR: D. O. W. Hall, graduated at **Cambridge** with honours in **English Literature** and in **History** in 1929. He was **Associate Editor** of **Centennial Publications**. He served with the **Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve** in the **Pacific** in the **Second World War**, and is now stationed in **Dunedin** **Director of Adult Education**, **University of Otago**.

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[BACKMATTER]

THE TYPE USED THROUGHOUT THE SERIES IS *Aldine Bembo* WHICH WAS REVIVED FOR MONOTYPE FROM A RARE BOOK PRINTED BY ALDUS IN 1495 * THE TEXT IS SET IN 12 POINT ON A BODY OF 14 POINT

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PRISONERS OF ITALY

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NEW ZEALAND IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR
Official History



PRISONERS OF ITALY



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PRISONERS OF ITALY

5

D. O. W. HALL

WAR HISTORY BRANCH
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS
WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND
1948

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[FRONTISPIECE]



Routine delousing in Campo 57, Gruppignano

Routine delousing in Campo 57, Gruppignano

COVER PHOTOGRAPH Camp perimeter

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[TITLE PAGE]

PRISONERS OF ITALY

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EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[EDITORPAGE]

IT IS THE INTENTION *of this series to present aspects of New Zealand's part in the Second World War which will not receive detailed treatment in the campaign volumes and which are considered either worthy of special notice or typical of many phases of our war experience. The series is illustrated with material which would otherwise seldom see publication. It will also contain short accounts of operations which will be dealt with in detail in the appropriate volumes.*

H. K. KIPPENBERGER

,
Major-General
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

NEW ZEALAND WAR HISTORIES

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[UNTITLED]

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EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

AFTER CAPTURE

After Capture

NEARLY all the New Zealand prisoners of war in Italian hands were first captured by the Germans. A few were caught in **Greece** by Italian occupation troops, and some were airmen shot down over the **Western Desert** or over **Italy**. On several occasions in the Desert campaigns German tanks overran positions held by New Zealanders, and these men found themselves, dazed and unbelieving, 'in the bag'. Some few made their escape shortly after capture; others had the luck to be liberated by our own forces.

The first anxiety of enemy guards was to get their prisoners back quickly into territory they firmly held. But they rarely had transport for prisoners, and the men had to march back distances varying from ten to sixty miles, taking from one to four days on the way. Their first captors. German front-line troops, were usually courteous, correct, and good-natured; often they apologised to their prisoners when they handed them over to the Italians, to whom—since they had been captured in Italian territory—they were to 'belong'. The Italians frequently relieved them of their valuables—wristlet watches, fountain pens, cigarette cases—and on many occasions behaved arrogantly and without consideration for their welfare, although some of the men noticed that their Italian guards were much less demonstrative when there was no audience to witness their warlike demeanour while guarding unarmed prisoners of war.

Few men were given any food at all during the first one or two days after their capture, and until they reached a more or less permanent camp they were rarely given any form of shelter. The Italian prison camps in North Africa were appallingly run, and it was only because their stay in them was comparatively short that many of the men survived. At Benghazi, for instance, in 1942, one of the holding camps used was in a saucer-shaped wadi, a few miles from the town, where a group of date palms provided the illusion of a fertile oasis. Up to two thousand men were herded into 2½ acres, groundsheets set up as tents giving shelter to about a quarter of the number. Sanitation, always a

weak point with the Italians, consisted of three or four trenches, only four feet deep, as the ground was rocky and difficult to dig; after a few days these latrines overflowed and new ones had to be dug. Food was scanty: a daily ration of four ounces of Italian bully beef, perhaps eight ounces of bread, a cup of cooked rice, a cup of synthetic coffee. On this diet, even if supplemented by bread gained by exchanges with the guards for any valuables that had survived the searches, and by prickly pears gathered on expeditions through the wire (at the risk of being shot), the men within a few weeks suffered from the dizziness and 'blackouts' which are symptoms of malnutrition. The other camps, whether barbed-wire pens in the open or massive, fortress-like buildings, provided no better conditions; some were worse.

The prisoners had to languish in these holding camps for anything up to three months waiting for transport to **Italy**. They began to know the Italians better and on closer acquaintance found them mostly humane, though unpractical and inefficient. As there was little to do in the compounds, a few concerts were organised. In one group, men turned to carving small objects from wood and, strange as it may seem, an arts and crafts exhibition was held, in **Cyrenaica**, a few weeks after capture. The listlessness of undernourishment did not encourage energetic pursuits even if they had been available. Trading became important. A man who had been captured in a shirt and shorts was glad to 'buy' an army greatcoat for a tin of bully and twenty cigarettes. Rumour also flowered: one of its strangest blossoms was ' **King Farouk** has given Rommel twenty-four hours to get out of Egypt!' Morale was still high as no man realised that he might remain a prisoner of war for several years.

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ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN

Across the Mediterranean

OFFICER prisoners of war generally did not have long to wait before being taken to **Italy**. Many were flown across the **Mediterranean**; some went by submarine and others by ship. Those who went by submarine—their conditions were very cramped but they were otherwise amiably treated—strongly hoped that the vigilance of the **Royal Navy** would be at least temporarily relaxed. Those who went by air were equally anxious about the activities of the **Royal Air Force**. Many of those on board cruisers or destroyers called at **Crete** or **Greece** before crossing to the south of **Italy**.

The men were taken to **Italy** packed in the holds of freighters. Before they sailed they were issued with three days' rations—two small loaves of bread, four biscuits, and three tins of bully between two men. The voyage, usually by way of **Piraeus**, through the **Corinth Canal**, and thence across the Adriatic, might last longer without more food being issued, although in one ship the prisoners gained access to the ship's stores and so fared reasonably well. In some ships the men had to remain in the hold without light or adequate ventilation, conditions which were worsened by the number of cases of dysentery; in a few ships they had the run of the decks during daylight.

The Mediterranean in 1941 and 1942 was hardly safe for Italian ships. Vessels were torpedoed and prisoners drowned in them without even a chance of escape. One merchant ship with 2000 prisoners in its holds was torpedoed or mined a few miles off the coast of **Greece**. The Italian crew abandoned it immediately, taking off a few of the prisoners of war but leaving most of them and their Italian guard on board. A German engineer officer who remained on the ship saved the situation. Although slowly sinking by the bow, the ship's engines were intact, and with the help of the prisoners he succeeded, in spite of deteriorating weather, in beaching her. Meanwhile, the medical orderlies had rescued the survivors among the prisoners in the forward hold and had attended to their injuries as best they could. Many men got ashore that night by a

bosun's chair rigged between the ship and the top of the cliff, and others later left the ship by a pontoon bridge built by some German marines. Although some took three days to get ashore, the Italians did not move the many injured away to hospital until the last man had come off.

Prisoners of war in Italian hands in Greece were mostly either the survivors of torpedoed vessels or fugitives who had hidden after the German invasion and were later captured by or betrayed to Italian garrison troops. Conditions generally were comparable to the harshness of Cyrenaica rather than to the better-regulated, though not wholly satisfactory, treatment of Italy itself. The Italians seem to have small gift for dealing with the unexpected. The survivors, some of them bare-footed, from the damaged ship whose beaching was described above, were made to march six miles along a road covered with rough metal and bordered by thistles, were imprisoned several days in Navarino Castle, and were then taken by bus and train to Acacia and confined in an intolerably small compound, a field hastily surrounded by barbed wire. Here the prisoners lived in tents and suffered from the cold: it was nearly Christmas, the dead of winter, and some of the men already had frostbite from their misadventures by sea. Rations were meagre; this was one of the camps where some of the more privileged fared better than their fellow-prisoners. Soon there was ample reason for the camp's nickname of 'Dysentery Acre'. As nearly everyone was ill, there was small point in establishing hospital tents. Only the worst cases, some of whom died, were removed to a Greek hospital for treatment.

Bad feeding and confused organisation were not the only faults of which the Italians in Greece were guilty. In a transit camp a man was clubbed and tied up for six hours for not obeying promptly enough a sentry's order to move away from the boundary wire. In another camp a man who had been recaptured after several months' wandering in Greece was punished for an attempted escape by being severely flogged with a rubber whip: this was done publicly on the order of the commandant.

Although Red Cross parcels were occasionally issued to prisoners in Greece, the Italian camps, none of them permanent (though Italian

transit camps had a way of becoming permanent), did not receive the visits of the representatives of the protecting power. The voyage of at least some of the shipwrecked party from **Greece** to **Italy** was satisfactory. These men sailed in an Italian troopship, had the same rations as the Italian troops on board, and were generally well treated.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

TRANSIT CAMPS

Transit Camps

PRISONERS landing in Italy were given a preliminary clean-up at their port of disembarkation, usually Brindisi or Taranto. At Taranto the arrangements, in the hands of the Italian Navy, were efficient. The men had hot showers, very welcome after the cramped conditions on board ship, and simultaneously their clothes were steamed and fumigated to kill the lice—most men had picked up these squalid insects in the North African holding camps. One disadvantage of this necessary process was that the clothes came back with hundreds of creases which could never afterwards be removed. Thus the last vestige of military smartness disappeared from the uniforms in which prisoners had already been forced to live and sleep for weeks or months together.

From the port of disembarkation prisoners of war went to transit camps in the south of Italy. Bari (Campo 75) may be taken as typical of these. In the winter of 1941 it was not a pleasant place. It was overcrowded, 250 officers and 2000 men living in what might have been reasonable accommodation for a quarter of those numbers. Sanitation was bad, medicines and medical equipment scarce (the shortage was general throughout Italy), and the treatment of the sick within the camp rudimentary: only the severely ill were taken to hospital. The rations issued did not exceed 1100 calories daily, and even from this meagre diet some of the Italian supply staff were able to subtract something to sell for their own benefit on the black market. In four months only two and a half Red Cross parcels were issued to each man; the commandant, tersely described as a 'swine,' refused to issue one to each prisoner every week.

Campo 75 had already been the scene of an atrocity which was afterwards punished as a war crime. The General in charge of the district, who vied with the commandant of the camp in his unpleasantness to prisoners of war, had invited two British officers, recaptured after an escape, to demonstrate for his satisfaction just how they had passed through the camp's barbed-wire perimeter. They

reluctantly complied, and as soon as they were well entangled in the meshes he ordered the guard to shoot and himself fired on them with his own revolver. One of the officers was killed, the other wounded. * At Bari also, after a tunnel had been discovered in their section of the camp, the officers' possessions were searched while they were absent on a walk: all **Red Cross** food was confiscated and many personal articles disappeared.

A medical orderly who revisited this camp in the spring of 1942 on his way to be repatriated found it much improved, possibly because it held smaller numbers; the sanitation was better, and the food clean and good. The general tendency of Italian prison camps was for them to begin as transit camps and after several months to become permanent, with some consequent amelioration of conditions.

This survey inevitably cites instances of Italian inefficiency and corruption. It is not its purpose to sum up for and against the Italian people, but it must also be mentioned that while the treatment of prisoners by the Italian Army or by the *Carabinieri Reali* was sometimes harsh, ordinary Italians were often prepared to go out of their way to do prisoners of war a good turn without any hope of reward. Women threw bread into camps like Tuteurano, where conditions were known to be bad, and prisoners who gave their water bottles to civilians to be filled with water while waiting to board trains at **Bari** station in transit to other camps had them returned full of wine. The machine of Fascism regarded it as a duty to behave oppressively, although this was not the sentiment of most Italians.

* Report of the war criminal trial of Maj-Gen Bellomo, 23–28 July 1945.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

GRUPPIGNANO

Gruppignano

GRUPPIGNANO (Campo 57), near Udine, between the Adriatic and the Alps, was a camp in which many New Zealanders were imprisoned; it was the policy of the Italians to carry out the terms of the Geneva Convention by concentrating in the same camp prisoners of war of the same nationality. ** This was one reason for the train journeys which punctuated prisoner-of-war existence. These journeys were made in varying degrees of comfort. If many men moved together, they might be packed tightly into closed trucks resembling furniture vans, with or without wooden seats. The guards were chary of letting prisoners out at halts even though the journey might last three days. On the other hand, small groups of prisoners travelling separately with their guards were usually well treated. Guards were known to buy them food and wine out of their own pockets, and invariably civilian travellers, without distinction of sex, were evicted from their seats to make room for the prisoners.

Every prisoner-of-war camp in Italy had a squad of *Carabinieri Reali*, the police force whose specialist efficiency preceded the advent of Fascism. These men were responsible for security, seemed to be able to over-rule the Army commandant of camps, no matter what his rank, conducted the most rigorous and unexpected searches of personal belongings, and sometimes treated prisoners with the brutality which presumably had become habitual to them in dealing with civil offenders. At Gruppignano the commandant was himself a colonel in the *Carabinieri Reali*; he was also military governor of Udine and an ardent Fascist. This man, Calcaterra, prided himself on the strictness of his discipline, and the thirty cells at Gruppignano were never empty. Had he not been killed by Italian partisans, he would probably have faced war-crimes charges. Many prisoners had something approaching respect for this would-be ogre, and one recorded his satisfaction that Calcaterra at the fall of Mussolini did not, like so many Fascists, attempt to change his coat. Atrocities were committed in this camp—a man who had got drunk was shot by a *carabiniere* while being helped back to his hut, and

another was shot while getting wood after dark—and in general discipline was childishly pin-pricking. Men whose faces twitched on roll-call parade went straight to the cells, without trial or inquiry. If too much talking went on at night in any hut, the *Carabinieri* took several men at random and put them in the cells. Life in the camp's cells was not as bad as it might have been, as extra food and cigarettes were smuggled in by friends, the cigarettes being hidden inside ration bread. When escapes took place, collective punishments were imposed on the whole camp. Although Gruppignano was strictly run by the *Carabinieri*, many prisoners of war preferred this camp to others because it was run efficiently and the 'rackets' which flourished elsewhere were suppressed.

On arrival at Gruppignano, after weeks or months in transit camps, many of the men were in rags and tatters. They and their garments were disinfested, and they were issued with old Yugoslav or Greek uniforms. It was a great relief later to get British uniforms through the **Red Cross** and woollen underwear in the first parcel from New Zealand House. In the camp, baths were irregular and lice common: the periodical steaming of clothes did not kill them all. The medical department was backward, although matters improved when an Australian medical officer took over the sick parades.

In Gruppignano the space available for exercise was ample, but there was no hut set aside for recreation. Cricket, football, baseball, volley ball, and deck tennis were played, much of the material being provided by the British Red Cross, sometimes indirectly: the Italians would not allow balls for cricket and baseball to be supplied, but the prisoners made their own, weaving them from the string round **Red Cross** parcels. 'Blowers' * were a feature of life in this camp, as in many others. The scarcity of fuel was severe throughout **Italy**, and much ingenuity was lavished on the perfection of these cookers; competitions were held between different types and different operators to boil water in the shortest time. Several could bring over a litre (approximately 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ pints) to the boil in less than two minutes. Even the Italian commandant was fond of displaying his camp's 'blowers' to visiting Generals.

Like many of the Italian camps Gruppignano had beautiful surroundings, including a view of the distant Dolomite Mountains. A prisoner has recorded that his main memories of this camp were the beauty of the Alps, the echoing of the bells of the many old churches nearby, stamping the feet on the frozen mud in winter in an attempt to keep warm, the long waits for meals, the weaving of the searchlights along the wire at night, ‘the weird solemnity of the funeral processions out to the gate when a man died’, and ‘the box-like interiors of the huts, the patterns on the walls in the place where I slept, the strange, coke-like smell of a charcoal burner’.

**** Most of the New Zealand prisoner-of-war NCOs and men were confined in Campo 57 (Gruppignano) and Campo 52 (Chiavari); there were smaller numbers at a few other main camps and at numerous working camps, particularly in northern [Italy](#). At one stage Gruppignano housed nearly 2000 New Zealanders.**

*** Blowers were of several different types. This is a former prisoner’s description of the ingenious ‘1942 Rotary Model’: ‘These little blowers, made solely out of old food tins plus an old bit of wire for an axle, a heel plate for bearings and a bootlace for driving belt, are ideal. They create such a draught that we can burn any old bits of swamp wood and rubbish we like to stick in the fire box.’**

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

OFFICERS' CAMPS

Officers' Camps

ALTHOUGH in their treatment of officer prisoners of war they sometimes violated the provisions of the Geneva Convention in detail, on the whole the Italians tried to observe them. The three principal prison camps in which New Zealand officers were held at different times in **Italy** were Padula (Campo 35), an ancient monastery, Poppi (Campo 38), a villa in the **Apennines**, formerly a convent, and **Modena** (Campo 47), a military barracks. A few senior officers lived in a modern country villa near **Florence** (Campo 12) from which Brigadiers J. Hargest and R. Miles made their notable escape, and those ardent spirits who came into too fierce collision with authority were sent to the punishment fortress of Gavi (Campo 5).

At one time Padula was oppressively ruled by an emotional *Carabinieri* colonel who hysterically maltreated prisoners caught attempting escape. * At another time in Padula a kindly, elderly commandant presided over a camp in which a fair standard of comfort had been achieved; prisoners had developed the black market possibilities of the commodities contained in **Red Cross** parcels to get whatever they wanted. It was in Padula, in 1942, that 400 New Zealanders on their first Anzac Day in captivity held their own dawn parade.

Poppi was the first camp set aside exclusively for New Zealand officers, but perhaps through Italian haziness in Commonwealth geography, a few South Africans, Rhodesians, and British were also to be found among its 100 inmates. Until Red Cross parcels began to arrive in the spring of 1942, three months after the establishment of the camp, Poppi was a hungry place where most were too listless to move about unnecessarily and squander energy. (Newly established camps rarely received parcels promptly. There was a time-lag before the International Red Cross became aware of their existence, but as soon as it did, the new camps were sent full supplies.) Like most Italian camps in winter it was bitterly cold: there was the usual shortage of fuel for the *stufas*

(stoves) which were scattered through the different rooms with a delusive liberality. In spite of the small recreation space out of doors, basketball and deck tennis were played on a ground excavated by the prisoners themselves, and many engaged in gardening on the steep slopes. Lectures and courses of study were extensively developed, particularly the study of Italian. On Saturday evenings a formal mess and a smoke concert were held; these were enlivened by wine saved from the week's ration. ** The Florence bookshops had provided Tauchnitz editions of English books before the arrival of **Red Cross** supplies.

Towards the end of 1942 the New Zealand officers were moved to **Modena**, where, with others captured in the **Alamein** fighting, their numbers rose to 200. They shared the camp with 800 South Africans and 200 British. With the additional resources of larger numbers and the productive capacity of the most fertile part of **Italy**, **Modena** was a well-fed camp. It was also comfortable and the Italian staff were well 'managed' by their prisoners. Wine was available in greater quantity than to civilians. The space for exercise was ample, and baseball, football, and basketball were played with keen international rivalry. Entertainments were many and the camp had an excellent orchestra.

Capture



NEW ZEALANDERS IN ITALIAN TRUCKS, July 1942

NEW ZEALANDERS IN ITALIAN TRUCKS, July 1942

Conditions at Benghazi



PRISONERS OF WAR, AFTER THREE MONTHS OF CAMP LIFE

PRISONERS OF WAR AFTER THREE MONTHS OF CAMP LIFE



TENTS IN THE OPEN

TENTS IN THE OPEN



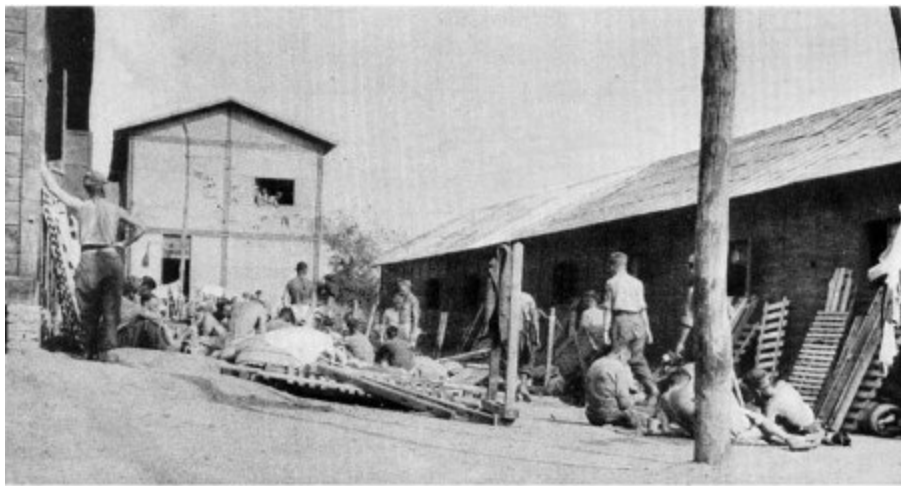
TENTS UNDER PALMS

Then to Italy



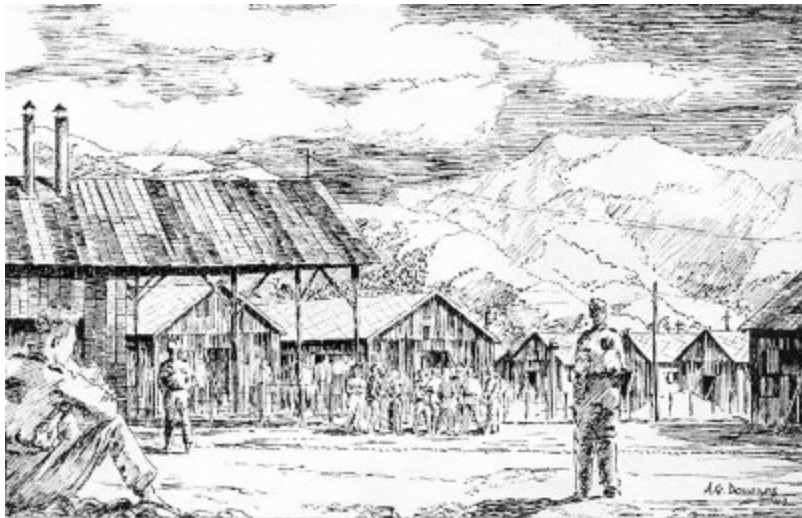
A FUNERAL PARADE, CAMPO 75, *Bari*, December 1942

A FUNERAL PARADE, CAMPO 75, *Bari*, December 1942



ALL BEDS AND GEAR OUT FOR A SEARCH, CAMPO 52, *Chiavari*. Some of the bed slats have been taken off for fuel

ALL BEDS AND GEAR OUT FOR A SEARCH, CAMPO 52, *Chiavari*. Some of the bed slats have been taken off for fuel



CAMPO 57, *Gruppignano*

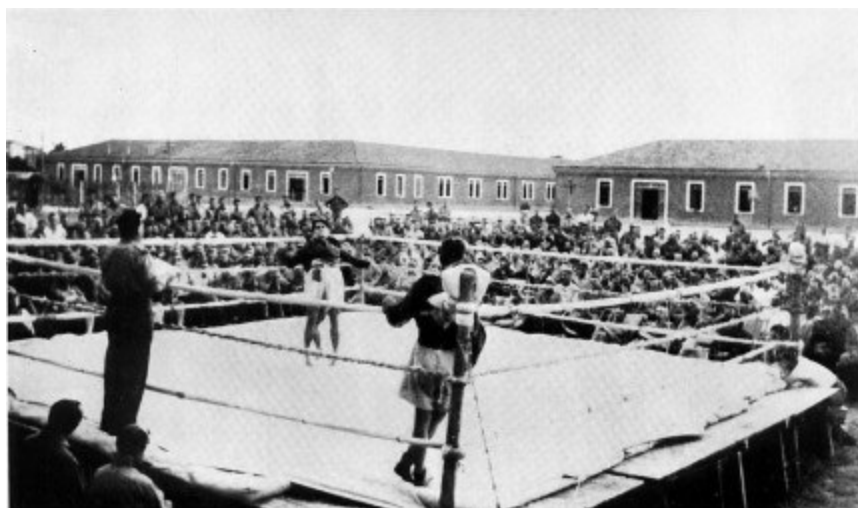
CAMPO 57, *Gruppignano*



NEW ZEALAND OFFICERS AT CAMPO 38, *Poppi*, September 1942

NEW ZEALAND OFFICERS AT CAMPO 38, *Poppi*, September 1942

Officers' Camps



A JIU-JITSU DISPLAY, CAMPO 47, *Modena*, August 1943

A JIU-JITSU DISPLAY, CAMPO 47, *Modena*, August 1943

A VETERANS' RACE AT CAMPO 47
The building on the left was a barrack occupied by New Zealanders



A VETERANS' RACE AT CAMPO 47

The building on the left was a barrack occupied by New Zealanders



THE PUNISHMENT
FORTRESS OF CAMPO 5,
Gavi

THE PUNISHMENT FORTRESS OF CAMPO 5, *Gavi*



THE LOWER COMPOUND,
Gavi

THE LOWER COMPOUND, Gavi

Work & Routine



A SECTION OF THE CAMP
INTERIOR

A CROSS-SECTION OF CAMP ACTIVITY

Food



ONE OF THE KITCHENS OR COOKHOUSES AT CAMPO 57, *Gruppignano*

ONE OF THE KITCHENS OR COOKHOUSES AT CAMPO 57, *Gruppignano*

'SKILLY UP!' CAMPO 57



'SKILLY UP!' CAMPO 57



CAMP MONEY for use in Canteen at Campo 52, *Chiavari*

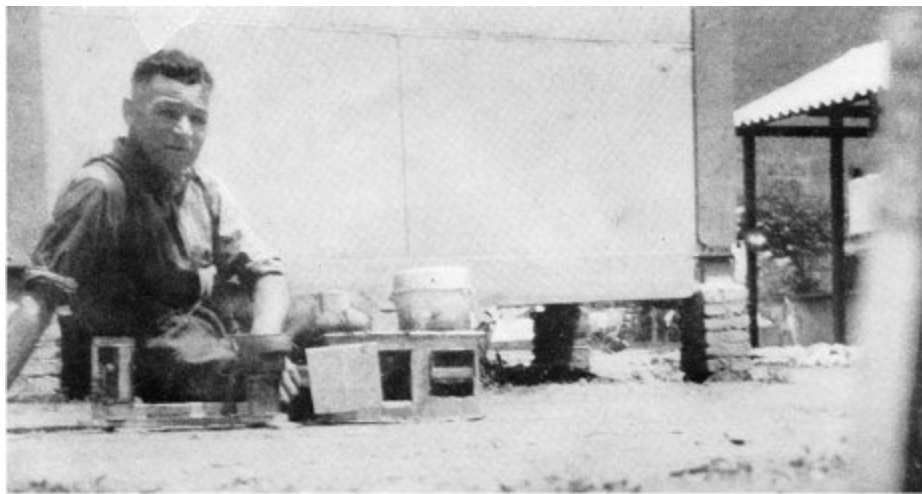
CAMP MONEY for use in Canteen at Campo 52, *Chiavari*



BREWING UP in Campo 52, Chiavari

BREWING UP in Campo 52, *Chiavari*

Guards and Prisoners



A BLOWER AND TIN STOVE MADE FROM RED CROSS PARCELS, CAMPO 52,
Chiavari

A BLOWER AND TIN STOVE MADE FROM RED CROSS PARCELS, CAMPO 52, *Chiavari*



BEES AT CAMPO 52 SWARMED IN A RED CROSS PARCEL BOX

'I COMMAND!'
Italian excitement at New Zealand phlegm



'I COMMAND!'
Italian excitement at New Zealand phlegm

CAN THE COUNT COME RIGHT?



CAN THE COUNT COME RIGHT?



GROUP AT CAMPO 106/20, *Vercelli*

An Italian officer on the left

GROUP AT CAMPO 106 20, *Vercelli* An Italian officer on the left

ITALIAN SISTERS OF MERCY, CAMPO 202, *Lucca*

They nursed our wounded



ITALIAN SISTERS OF MERCY, CAMPO 202, *Lucca* They nursed our wounded

OUTSIDE THE RED
CROSS PARCEL
DEPOT, CAMPO 57,
Gruppignano
The camp leader (left)
and padre are in front of
an Italian guard



OUTSIDE THE RED CROSS PARCEL DEPOT, CAMPO 57, *Gruppignano*
The camp leader (left) and padre are in front of an Italian guard

RED CROSS
PARCELS ARRIVE,
CAMPO 78, *Sulmona*



RED CROSS PARCELS ARRIVE, CAMPO 78, *Sulmona*



MASS EVACUATION TO
GERMANY

MASS EVACUATION TO **GERMANY**



IN A CATTLE TRUCK

IN A CATTLE TRUCK

Although university and professional examinations were not available in **Italy**, the studios at **Modena** did a good deal of work. Ex-prisoners, however, have commented on the quick waning of enthusiasms and their own inability to persevere with continuous study. A central news agency digested the contents of German and Italian newspapers and issued a suitably adjusted version of the news.

As the Allies advanced in **Italy** chances of liberation were very much in everybody's mind. At Modena the nearness of the water level to the surface made the digging of escape tunnels difficult, and interest in them waned as the chances of being liberated by the Allied armies

appeared larger.

* *Horned Pigeon*, by George Millar (Heinemann), Chapter IX.

** *Unwilling Guests*, by J. D. Gerard (A. H. and A. W. Reed), p. 65.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

OTHER CAMPS IN ITALY

Other Camps in Italy

CIRCUMSTANCES varied from camp to camp, but some conditions were fairly general— hunger in the early days, overcrowding in all transit camps, poor sanitation until protests had taken effect, and an atmosphere, until the authorities' bluff had been called, of overbearing truculence and petty restrictions. Tuteurano (Campo 85), near **Brindisi**, rivalled **Bari** as a bad camp, although men straight from the amenities of **Benghazi** were delighted to be given bunks, palliasses, and blankets.

Early in 1942 Tuteurano had an outbreak of meningitis which alarmed the Italians as well as the prisoners: however, one Italian doctor certified several supposed deaths from meningitis as being caused by malnutrition. Discipline was harsh or at least contrary to the Convention: some men were tied up for periods ranging from two to ten hours for trading their boots with the Italian soldiers for bread. When the **Red Cross** found that the camp existed and sent parcels, shortage of fuel to cook their contents became a problem which the prisoners solved by using the shutters from the windows of their huts. To the despair and disgust of the Italians, 150 of these shutters disappeared in a few weeks.

Another camp where many New Zealanders were held was Chiavari (Campo 52), on the Ligurian coast near Genoa. This was considered a fairly good camp. Of course, it is important to remember that a camp which could be very bad at one period, particularly in the early days, might be greatly improved later; few camps had bad conditions permanently, but none was perfect continuously. Discipline was moderate, although the twice-daily *appello* or check parade was strictly enforced. One commandant had himself been a prisoner in the hands of the Austrians in the 1914–18 War and had a certain sympathy with his British captives. However, the *Carabinieri* ran true to form here, as elsewhere, and once, when a tunnel had been found, kicked and beat a hut leader to reveal the names of the offenders. Protests to the camp commandant for this and similar acts of violence were ineffective.

Some New Zealanders passed through Sulmona (Campo 78) where the

prison was located on a site which bore the encouraging name of *Fonte d'Amore*, or Fountain of Love. During 1941 water was turned on for only six hours a day, and in any case the ablution arrangements were inadequate. Men had baths at slightly longer intervals than once a fortnight. The concrete huts were crowded and the lack of ventilation and adequate air space dangerous to health. The outdoor recreation space was small, though there was a hut set aside for recreation. It was typical of Italian inefficiency that the cells at Sulmona were the easiest part of the camp to escape from.

Gravina (Campo 65) was a bad camp. It was cold and hungry. Men died of starvation. Before the autumn of 1942, when **Red Cross** parcels began to arrive, the camp was filled with rows of exhausted men sitting or lying down to conserve their meagre energy. The commandant at this time was believed to be corrupt and to be selling food, boots, and clothing intended for the prisoners in his charge.

No account is given here of the many work camps where from fifty to 200 men lived with rather more freedom than in the main camps, even though their facilities for recreation were more limited. Their contacts with the Italian population were more direct and sympathetic. But, even in a camp like Tuteurano, an Italian civilian cook was at pains to provide from his own resources special cakes at Christmas for the prisoners. Nearly all the 3600 New Zealanders who were in Italian hands at the Armistice had received some acts of kindness from individual Italians which tempered their resentment of the inefficiency of Italian administration.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

WORKING CAMPS

Working Camps

THE ITALIANS were apparently unwilling to allow men to work singly or in small groups as they did on farms in **Germany**. They were employed therefore in groups of from fifty to 100, heavily guarded, a fact that itself contributed to the uneconomic character of prisoner-of-war labour. Another factor was the uncooperative attitude of most of the workers, something the Italians had difficulty in believing. A farm party for instance always had a remarkable 'inability to distinguish between a beet and a weed', and most prisoners on working parties were interested primarily in the black market opportunities given them by direct contact with the Italian people. They did not work very heartily, and the language difficulty was something to hide behind when reproaches were heaped upon them. The Italian guards, unless they were *Carabinieri*, though vigilant to prevent escapes (for which they themselves would be heavily punished), were not good as slave-drivers. Most prisoners felt that the produce of the large farms where they worked was fair game, and acquired extra vegetables and fruit with or without the connivance of friendly guards. Their rations were in any case better as manual workers. On most farms the owner found it politic to be generous, giving his prisoner-workers wine daily and generally attempting to build up a good impression. Soap was very scarce in **Italy**, and with that supplied to prisoners in Red Cross parcels, bread, wine, eggs, and other food could be acquired. It was reputed to be popular with the guards because it was believed to help them in their love affairs.

Hours of work on a typical farm were from 7 a.m. to noon, then, after a two-hour siesta, from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. A party doing navvying work excavating a canal had a nine-hour day in summer but in winter worked only six hours. The pay, at 4 lire a day, was better than the 1 lira paid in camp, but in at least one instance it was still paid in 'camp lire' and had to be sent back to the parent camp to be exchanged for real money and then spent by the Italian officer in charge of the working camp on behalf of individual prisoners, a typically cumbersome Italian arrangement. Generally conditions and treatment were much better

than in camp. When anything happened of which they strongly disapproved, prisoners organised effective strikes or periods of 'go-slow'. It was amazing to the peasants, disciplined by twenty years of Fascism, to see authority challenged, even more amazing when the challenge was successful.

The Italian peasantry were mostly friendly, although the friendship did not always show itself very actively until after the Armistice. Most were indifferent to politics; many were weary of the war and wearier still of Fascism; some had sons of their own who were prisoners of war in British hands. The Red Cross parcels that prisoners received were an obvious contradiction of the propaganda story that England was starving, and in any case many Italians regarded Fascism as a 'shop-window stunt' unable to hide the real poverty of Italy. At work in the fields, vineyards, mines, and quarries, civilian workers would willingly trade and were also eager to pass on information about the war (often the most exaggerated of rumours) whenever the guards' backs were turned.

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LIFE IN CAMP

Life in Camp

THE ITALIANS were themselves short of food. The drastic cut in rations made in March 1942 was applied to Italian base troops as well as to prisoners of war: these are supposed to receive identical rations, and in this matter the Italians kept to the letter of the Geneva Convention. A New Zealand doctor has stated: 'After I escaped and had lived with the Italian people for some time, I was able to get a truer perspective of the poverty of **Italy**, and to realise how much the authorities did try to help us....' Although prisoners of war fared badly and could not have survived without **Red Cross** parcels, the mass of the Italian people, at least in the towns, was no better off.

Food was the main preoccupation of men's thoughts. The Red Cross parcel was the focus of intense interest, and the day of issue was the 'day of days' in prison life. How to deal with the ten pounds or so of tinned food it contained was a problem each solved for himself. The two main schools of thought were 'the seven-day planners who allocated portions for each day' and those who preferred to overeat for two or three days and then go hungry for four or five. Unfortunately the supply of **Red Cross** parcels to camps in **Italy** was sometimes interrupted for months together, though the attempt was always made to make the regular issue of one a week. Peculation and pillaging of parcels occasionally occurred: in one camp an Italian officer and two privates were placed under arrest for 'thieving from **Red Cross** parcels' in transit.

The men themselves ate the bulk food in their parcels, but they sometimes traded away some of the tea, coffee, cocoa, and soap which they contained. It was even possible to dispose of used tea-leaves to advantage. Bread, fruit, eggs, and wine were the chief articles acquired in these illicit exchanges with guards or civilians. The prison canteens offered small opportunity to add to the food supply. They had on sale intermittently figs, grapes, oranges, tomatoes, biscuits, and sweets, but more usually their stock-in-trade consisted of notebooks, pencils, combs, and similar articles; in any case prices were high, 5 lire for a kilo. (2 ¼

lb.) of grapes or 15 lire for a half kilo. of figs, a whole kilo. of figs thus representing approximately a month's pay. Prisoners could make their purchases only with 'camp money', and thus the canteen had a monopoly which seems always to have been exploited to their disadvantage. At some camp canteens bottles of brandy and even of champagne were for sale, but at 200 lire each only "Two-up Kings" or similar gambling aristocracy of vast wealth' could afford to buy them. For each British Commonwealth prisoner of war in **Italy**, the British Red Cross paid a lira a day for the purchase of fruit and vegetables in addition to the Italian ration, but prisoners doubted whether anything like value was obtained for this expenditure.

After the halving of prisoner-of-war rations in March 1942, the daily issue was reduced to a loaf of bread weighing perhaps five ounces and a ladle of macaroni or vegetable stew. Every few days a piece of cheese the size of a matchbox would be issued, and about twice a week there were traces of meat in the stew. Breakfast consisted solely of ersatz coffee, described as 'sugarless and milkless and tasting strongly of earth'. The midday stew was thin: 'Thirty pieces, or more, of macaroni in half a pint of faintly oily water was considered by the fortunate recipient to be quite a lucky occurrence'.

The ration of five Italian cigarettes daily to prisoners of war was punctually distributed. Some wine was also occasionally issued, one-third of a litre of Italian Army issue, christened 'demon vino' by those who found it too sour for their unsophisticated palates. 'Plonk artists' were eager to buy it from comrades in exchange for cigarettes. At Christmas the Italian Red Cross made gifts of cake, biscuits, and wine in some camps; in one the Italian Air Force gave each prisoner a bottle of beer. His Holiness the Pope, at Christmas and at other times, made gifts to prisoners of war of musical instruments, medical comforts, or money to be spent for their welfare.

Books found their way into camps in considerable numbers, at least after the first months of captivity, but not many had the mental energy to study hard. Light novels were favoured. Before 1943 the Italians

would not allow sheet music to be sent into camps as they feared that musical notation might be used as a code. Men welcomed sport, concerts, debates, plays, and revues, organised by the more restless or conscientious spirits; they welcomed the services held by padre prisoners of war; but life tended more and more to be built up on routines. 'There was not much that was done purely for the sake of its being done,' wrote one prisoner. 'A man did not normally read to enjoy a literary form or the skill of a plot. Nor did he genuinely listen to a lecture for enlightenment. He used such happenings to ease the time between meals. There was a peculiar dislike of any irregularity existence is more effortless if built upon simple habit patterns.'

Much time was spent (one cannot say 'wasted') in purely personal gossip. Prisoners were generally able to send a letter-card and a postcard every week, but the arrival of inward mail was very irregular and infrequent. Men would lend their own letters from home to friends who had not had mail, and those who received these favours derived a strong vicarious pleasure from somebody else's family gossip.

No camps had illicit radios, as the general standard of supervisory vigilance in **Italy** was high. But news came in by word of mouth, sometimes from Italians who heard the **BBC**. In one camp the comments in a wall newspaper displeased the Italians so much that it was suppressed; its very title *Domani* ('tomorrow': the stock Italian answer to any request whatsoever) was itself an insult. But this journal still managed to carry on; it was read out in each hut every night. In another camp a prisoners' newspaper called *The Mountain Echo*, consisting of a single longhand copy, was openly circulated. It was highly critical of the Italians, but they never suppressed it. *

* *Give Me Air*, by Edward Ward (John Lane), p. 63.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

GUARDS AND PRISONERS

Guards and Prisoners

THE RELATIONSHIP between a prisoner of war and his guards is bound to be an uneasy one for both parties. The guard cannot fraternise with his prisoner without danger to himself. In Italy there were heavy penalties imposed on guards for any dereliction of duty, especially heavy for failure to prevent escapes. So that guards should never become too closely associated with any group of prisoners, they were changed about every two months. When it was possible to gain some privileges or extras through a friendly guard, the more scrupulous used this for the benefit of their fellow-prisoners as personal exploitation of a successful 'racket' excited resentment.

The Italian guards were efficient, if vigilance in the prevention of escapes or the breaking of camp rules by prisoners is efficiency. At night the Italian sentry was always alert, for 'he is so damned scared he keeps himself wide awake'. Many of the guards were good fellows. One result of the severity of the punishment hanging over the head of any guard who allowed a prisoner to escape or break the rules was that guards would wink at minor infractions of the rules and even at serious ones. A New Zealander who tried to escape from a hospital in a orderly's white coat was able to convince the guard who caught him that it was in their mutual interest to say no more about the incident. *

The morale of prisoners of war is seen most clearly in their attitude to their captors. One officer said that he never settled down to the humiliation and boredom of prison life and 'having to obey orders handed out by an inferior race'. Perhaps the sense of the inferiority of their captors was a necessary element in men's self-esteem, but prisoners had every opportunity of evaluating Italian efficiency: Italians could never refrain from fuss and petty restrictions. Generally the attitude of those in positions of responsibility, camp leaders or Senior British Officers, was extreme belligerence on behalf of those junior to them, often to their own immediate detriment. A New Zealand Regimental Sergeant-Major on many occasions stood up to the

authorities, securing the punishment of an Italian officer who had kicked a prisoner and refusing to call for volunteers from among the prisoners to go on a working party. During the hungry early days in Tukurano transit camp the same man had been placed under arrest for refusing to keep the troops on parade on empty stomachs. It was a habit of the Italians to punish hut leaders and even camp leaders for successful escapes by those under their command.

In many camps prisoners of war achieved a definite moral ascendancy over their captors, who allowed them increasingly to 'run their own show'. The comic drawings of Arthur Douglas made at a small working camp near Ampezzo give the atmosphere of what may be called mature prison life: the guard of a working party lying asleep while prisoners inspect the rust in his rifle, the civilians chatting to prisoners through the wire on Sunday, the untidy peasant corporal in a crowded hut vainly trying to get the evening count right while a practical joker ties his bootlaces together.

** Unwilling Guests, by J. D. Gerard, p. 103.*

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MEDICAL CARE

Medical Care

IN LIBYA and Cyrenaica the Italians treated wounded prisoners of war atrociously—through neglect rather than active brutality. Five days after being taken prisoner, a group of New Zealand doctors, who had been formally thanked for their services to the Italian wounded whom they had treated along with our own in a captured New Zealand field hospital, were separated from the men they had been looking after and sent to Italy. Their protests were silenced by glib promises of rejoining the wounded later, but the latter were left to fend for themselves with practically no medical attention.

In Italy itself some of the wounded were distributed through different military hospitals, where, if they received bad treatment, it was no worse than that given the Italian troops. Each camp also had its hospital. In addition some special prisoner-of-war hospitals were established. Nominally at least all medical care of prisoners of war was in Italian hands, but prisoner-of-war medical officers and orderlies were able to take over much of this work, usually greatly improving the condition of the wounded or sick. In December 1941, in Tukurano, a transit camp, medical treatment was especially poor, a dose of bismuth being prescribed indiscriminately for dysentery, influenza, lumbago, and rheumatism. Requests that men should be taken into hospital were ignored. The prescription of a few stock remedies (partly due to Italian shortage of drugs) for all complaints and complete ignorance of cross-infection among the Italian orderlies were common to many camps. Repatriated or escaped medical officers made two main complaints about the treatment of prisoner-of-war patients: the lack of necessary equipment, medicines, and drugs, and the low standard of Italian medical practice. The special Red Cross parcels of drugs and comforts for the sick saved the lives of many men.

A New Zealand doctor was on the staff of a prisoner-of-war hospital at Lucca (Campo 202). Although the British doctors in this hospital began with ill-defined ancillary duties (“The Italian authorities

apparently expected us to act as dressers.’), they eventually took over the running of the hospital almost entirely. Many stupid and hampering regulations were overcome by ‘our gradual encroachment’. This doctor credited the Italians with sincerely sharing his own desire for the welfare of the 500 patients, though their medical methods were astonishingly callous. The terrible condition of some Yugoslav patients, who had been living on four ounces of bread and some cabbage soup daily, showed that British prisoners were apparently receiving the best treatment **Italy** could give. Nuns were attached to this hospital, and their help with the feeding and welfare of prisoners was invaluable.

A complaint made by medical officers was that the Italians persistently treated them as prisoners of war and not as protected personnel. They had to fight all the time for the status and privileges allowed them as non-combatants under the Geneva Convention: for instance, the right to take two walks a week under guard. But their right to repatriation, together with badly wounded prisoners, was recognised. Patients for repatriation went before a combined Italian and neutral medical board. At Lucca the patients voluntarily submitted to being examined first by an unofficial British medical board, so that the candidature of those who had obviously no chance of passing the board would not prejudice the chances of those who had every right to expect repatriation. Every wounded prisoner hoped for repatriation and it was a difficult and invidious task to select who should go. Once they had made their own selection the doctors’ attitude was to get everybody past the board, and by judicious exaggeration of patients’ infirmities a number of border-line cases were passed. About 220 New Zealanders were repatriated from **Italy** to the **Middle East**. An Italian hospital ship took them to the Turkish port of **Smyrna**, where they were transferred to a British hospital ship for passage to **Alexandria**.

Many doctors and orderlies remained in **Italy** to carry on the work they knew to be vital to the health of prisoners of war. The men who were repatriated were able to report on hospitals and camps in **Italy**, and in some instances protests made through the protecting power,

Switzerland, secured amelioration of the conditions of those who remained behind.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

PRISONERS' WELFARE

Prisoners' Welfare

THE RED CROSS parcels which have been mentioned so often in the course of these surveys of the life of prisoners in enemy hands did not come into their camps by magic. The International **Red Cross**, with its headquarters in Geneva, undertook the distribution of food parcels, clothing, and recreational and educational material to prison camps. The parcels and other commodities were supplied by every country of the British Commonwealth and by the **United States**, if not directly then in the form of money subscribed through each national **Red Cross**. The New Zealand Patriotic Fund supplied money for the welfare of prisoners of war.

The route taken by **Red Cross** supplies was by sea to **Lisbon**, thence by sea to the south of **France** and inland to Geneva, which was the clearing house. In Switzerland, too, the central records of all prisoners of war, the Germans and Italians in British and American hands as well as the British and American prisoners in Germans and Italians hands, were faithfully kept and the necessary information passed promptly to the belligerent countries. Thus the Swiss, with some assistance from other neutrals, particularly the Swedes, undertook to look after the physical welfare of prisoners and also to mitigate the effects of their captivity on themselves and on their relatives by providing the channel of communication for letters and personal information. The Swiss handled these vast problems of organisation, affecting the life and happiness of millions, with characteristic efficiency and the humanity for which their nation is famous.

New Zealand had an organisation of its own at New Zealand House, **London**, to deal with all aspects of the welfare of prisoners of war, though food parcels and military clothing were handled from a central pool in Geneva. Whenever a man was reported as a prisoner of war, even if casually in another prisoner's correspondence, New Zealand House immediately sent him a clothing parcel and followed it with monthly tobacco parcels, each of which contained 200 cigarettes or an

equivalent amount of tobacco. In close collaboration with the New Bodleian Library at Oxford, which was supplying books to the British Red Cross, New Zealand House sent to prisoners the educational books they required to carry on courses of study. A weekly news-letter giving prisoners the New Zealand news gleaned from cables and official sources was also compiled.

Apart from its work for the material welfare of prisoners of war, New Zealand House was a clearing house for information about all New Zealanders in Italian or German hands or about casualties in general. Innumerable personal and special services were given to individuals by the Prisoner-of-war Section, and the staff's persistent and unremitting care did much to keep up the morale of men wearied by long captivity. The service to their relatives was no less valuable and important.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE ITALIAN ARMISTICE

The Italian Armistice

PRISONERS of war in **Italy** waited with eager expectancy for the Allied armies to drive up the peninsula and set them free. An exceedingly sanguine view of the situation was general, and at the Armistice this optimism helped to prevent some getting away who afterwards were taken to **Germany**. One prisoner wrote 'we had a grandstand view of the collapse of a nation. If ever a country got poetic justice I suppose **Italy** did.' It was satisfactory enough at the fall of **Mussolini** to see the bombastic symbols of Fascism being publicly effaced. When the axe and rods were being wrenched off a small bridge, the Italians accorded a prisoner-of-war worker standing by the privilege of dropping the emblem into the water. But the overthrow of Fascism did not mean that **Italy** had yet changed sides. With the disintegration of Italian resistance the situation became more and more confused. **Mussolini's** fall, celebrated so freely by the general population, left prisoners of war carrying on as usual and in some camps was the signal for new vigilance and intensive searches in which all surplus **Red Cross** food was confiscated. In some camps, to prevent the accumulation of supplies for escape, **Red Cross** parcels were no longer issued weekly but at the rate of one-seventh each day.

At the news of the Armistice most camp commandants told their prisoners that they would release them in good time 'if the Germans came'; alternatively, they and their men would defend the prisoners against the Germans. Practically none of them, whether from faint-heartedness, treachery, or sheer inefficiency, kept this bargain. In some cases these fulsome promises must have been deliberately intended to deceive prisoners and keep them inside the wire until the German troops arrived to collect them. As for the prisoners themselves, messages sent out by the War Office in code to the Senior British Officer in each camp had ordered that, should peace be declared, everyone was to remain in camp as a special organisation would arrive by plane to take over every camp. In spite of personal misgivings the Senior British Officers passed on these orders, though some afterwards released men from obeying

them. This policy of the British authorities has been sharply criticised by former prisoners of war: 'It had been a ghastly blunder Thousands of men had been cheated of the freedom they had so anxiously awaited for so long.' * But many never had the shadow of a choice.

The circumstances at each camp at the Armistice varied considerably. Some were entirely deserted by their guards, who flung away their rifles, climbed into civilian clothes, and disappeared homewards. In these and other camps there were mass escapes. In one instance the prisoners took over their guards' quarters and lived in them until the Germans rounded them up. In another camp, the prisoners were warned by civilians that the Germans were close and they were able to disperse into the countryside. In some camps the *Carabinieri* remained faithful to what they conceived to be their duty and kept their prisoners until they could hand them over to the Germans. In many camps a number of the prisoners left hurriedly when the Germans were within sight.

The adventures of those who escaped at the Italian Armistice are told elsewhere. Nobody could have foreseen exactly how the events would shape themselves. Those who got away did not do so solely because they could think quickly; they also had good luck. In many camps escape was impossible, and their inmates, embittered and disappointed, had no choice but to go to [Germany](#).

* *The Way Out*, by Uys Krige (Collins), p. 181.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Acknowledgments

THE SOURCES *consulted in the preparation of this account include books written by former prisoners of war, as well as eye-witness accounts and interviews recorded by the author of the official prisoner-of-war volume (Wynne Mason).*

The sketches are by A. G. Douglas ([page 13](#), [pages 16 and 17](#), [page 19](#), and foot of [page 21](#) and outside back cover), and by Nevile Lodge (top of [page 21](#)).

The photographs come from many collections, which are stated where they are known:

Cover, Inside Cover, [page 18](#), [page 23](#) (*top*), and [page 24](#), Lee Hill

[page 9](#), [page 11](#) (*bottom*), L. Steward

[page 10](#), [page 11](#) (*top*), [page 12](#) (*top*), [page 23](#) (*bottom*), H. R. Dixon

[page 14](#) (*top*), A. C. W. Mantell-Harding (*bottom*), C. C. Johansen

[page 15](#) C. N. Armstrong

[page 12](#) (*bottom*), [page 20](#), W. A. Weakley

[page 22](#) (*top*), P. W. Bates

The photographers risked severe punishment and showed considerable resource in overcoming the technical difficulties of taking and printing photographs while prisoners of war.

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[BACKMATTER]

THE AUTHOR: D. O. W. Hall, graduated at **Cambridge** with honours in **English Literature** and in **History** in 1929. He was **Associate Editor** of **Centennial Publications**. He served with the **Royal New Zealand Naval Volunteer Reserve** in the **Pacific** in the **Second World War**, and is now stationed in **Dunedin** as **Director of Adult Education**, **University of Otago**.

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[BACKMATTER]

THE TYPE USED THROUGHOUT THE SERIES IS *Aldine Bembo* WHICH WAS REVIVED FOR MONOTYPE FROM A RARE BOOK PRINTED BY ALDUS IN 1495 * THE TEXT IS SET IN 12 POINT ON A BODY OF 14 POINT

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GERMAN RAIDERS IN THE PACIFIC

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NEW ZEALAND IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR
Official History



GERMAN RAIDERS IN THE PACIFIC

This map illustrates the movements of German raiders in the Pacific Ocean during the Second World War. It shows the routes of various raider ships, including the *Admiral Scheer*, *Admiral Graf Spee*, and the *Admiral Bismarck*, as well as the locations of their operations. The map also indicates the positions of Allied forces and the areas of their activities.



Admiral Scheer's route is shown in red. The route of the *Admiral Graf Spee* is shown in blue. The route of the *Admiral Bismarck* is shown in green. The routes of other raiders are shown in black. The locations of their operations are indicated by small circles. The positions of Allied forces are indicated by small squares. The areas of their activities are indicated by shaded regions.

GERMAN RAIDERS IN THE PACIFIC

by
S. D. WATERS

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1965

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[FRONTISPIECE]



A German mine adrift in the Hauraki Gulf

A German mine adrift in the Hauraki Gulf

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[TITLE PAGE]

**GERMAN RAIDERS
IN THE PACIFIC**

S. D. WATERS

**WAR HISTORY BRANCH
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND
1949**

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[EDITORPAGE]

IT IS THE INTENTION *of this series to present aspects of New Zealand's part in the Second World War which will not receive detailed treatment in the campaign volumes and which are considered either worthy of special notice or typical of many phases of our war experience. The series is illustrated with material which would otherwise seldom see publication. It will also contain short accounts of operations which will be dealt with in detail in the appropriate volumes.*

H. K. KIPPENBERGER

,
Major-General
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

NEW ZEALAND WAR HISTORIES

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

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EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

GERMAN RAIDERS IN THE PACIFIC

GERMAN RAIDERS IN THE PACIFIC

'THE ONE AND ONLY POSSIBILITY of bringing England to her knees with the forces of our Navy lies in attacking her sea communications,' wrote Admiral Doenitz, Commander-in-Chief, Submarines, and later head of the German Navy, in a memorandum dated 1 September 1939. To that end the main resources of the German Navy were devoted in a mortal struggle that lasted sixty-eight months. The U-boat was the enemy's principal weapon, but he did not hesitate to employ also his most powerful warships whose forays were supplemented by the world-wide operations of a fleet of merchant ships fitted out as auxiliary cruisers.

The operations of German surface raiders, supported by a great and elaborate organisation at home, extended over a period of more than three years and accounted for 182 merchant ships of 1,152,000 tons, an average of about four ships a month. The German aim was the 'disruption and destruction of merchant shipping by all possible means', and the orders to the raiders laid it down that 'frequent changes of position in the operational areas will create uncertainty and will restrict enemy merchant shipping, even without tangible results.' The raider captains 'interpreted their orders with comprehending caution'; but the Admiralty were, on the whole, remarkably well informed about their general movements, and by evasive routeing and such cruiser patrols as were possible with a shortage of that class of ships, kept the vital stream of merchant shipping moving steadily and with relatively small losses. The merchant seamen themselves performed their part and sailed without hesitation in defiance of the raider threat to their safety. The Royal Navy had been cut to the bone during the 'locust years', and when the war came it had to perform 'enormous and innumerable duties' with a woeful shortage of cruisers. Many a ship and many a life were lost as the result of that peacetime improvidence. The provision of adequate cruiser strength would have been a small insurance premium to pay in mitigation, if not prevention, of the losses of ships, cargoes, and men at the hands of German raiders.

The operations of the German auxiliary cruisers covered the period from April 1940 to December 1942. In all, ten ships were employed, one of them making two cruises. Five were destroyed during their cruises in the **Atlantic**, **Pacific**, and Indian Oceans, one was destroyed by an explosion and fire in harbour at Yokohama, and another was damaged in the **English Channel** and returned to **Germany**. That they were efficient fighting ships of their type was shown by the fact that one raider in three separate actions outranged and damaged two British armed merchant cruisers and sank a third, HMS *Voltaire*. Another raider, the *Kormoran*, was responsible for the loss with all hands of HMAS *Sydney*, though she herself was sunk by that cruiser.

Three of the raiders were oil-burning steamships; one was a diesel-electric twin-screw vessel; the others were motor vessels. The largest was of 9800 tons and the smallest of 3287 tons gross register. All were officially known by numbers, but these were apparently allotted at random, and the fact that there was a ship No. 45 did not indicate that there were forty-five raiders. They were also given 'traditional' names. The raiders were very well equipped and capable of remaining at sea for at least twelve months, with the assistance of fuel tankers and supply ships, supplemented by oil and stores taken from captured vessels. Great use was made of disguise. Special workshops and mechanics were carried for this purpose and also for the extensive repair work made necessary by long periods at sea.

In general the raiders' armament comprised six 5.9-inch guns, a number of small guns, and four or more torpedo tubes; they were fitted with the director system of fire control as well as elaborate wireless telegraphy plants. Most of them carried a small seaplane and several were equipped for minelaying. Whatever their tactics in approaching a victim, the attack was always sudden and ruthless, the primary targets being the ship's wireless room, navigating bridge, and defensive gun. Captain Helmuth von Ruckteschell, who commanded two different raiders and who was awarded by **Hitler** the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Insignia of the Iron Cross, is at present serving a sentence of ten years'

imprisonment for his brutal conduct in the sinking of three merchant ships.

The first German raider to operate in the **Pacific** and bring the war to the shores of New Zealand was Ship No. 36, otherwise known as the *Orion*. Formerly the *Kurmark*, of the **Hamburg- America** Line, she was a general cargo steamer of 7021 tons gross register, her maximum speed when clean being about 15 knots. She had a stowage of 4100 tons of oil-fuel, estimated to give her a steaming endurance of 35,000 miles at 10 knots, but this was well above her actual capacity. Her armament comprised one 3-inch and six 5.9-inch guns, six light anti-aircraft guns, and six torpedo tubes in triple mountings, and she also carried an Arado seaplane.






The *Orion* was commissioned by Captain Kurt Weyher at **Kiel** on 9 December 1939 and sailed from **Germany** on 6 April 1940, three days before the German invasion of **Denmark** and **Norway**. She entered the **Atlantic** by way of Denmark Strait, between **Iceland** and Greenland, and cautiously made her way south. Her first victim was the British tramp steamer *Haxby*, 5207 tons, which was intercepted east of Bermuda in the early morning of 24 April. When the *Haxby* made a distress signal she was ruthlessly shelled for six minutes, seventeen of her crew being killed. The master and twenty-four others were taken prisoner and the ship was sunk by a torpedo.

Having refuelled from her supply tanker *Winnetou* about 660 miles from South Georgia, the *Orion* entered the **Pacific**, passing about 200 miles south of **Cape Horn**. She arrived in New Zealand waters in the afternoon of 13 June. The raider was carrying 228 mines, and her orders from the German Naval Command were that they should all be laid in the approaches to **Auckland**. With good visibility, under a cloudless sky, she cautiously approached the land in the early dusk of mid-winter to carry out this operation.

Starting at 7.26 p.m., the *Orion* laid the first row of mines across the eastern approach to the passage between Great Mercury Island and

Cuvier Island. In the clear weather prevailing, said Captain Weyher, it was 'not possible to approach closer than eight German nautical miles to the Cuvier lighthouse without being sighted by the Signal Station'. A second barrage of mines was laid across the approach to Colville Channel in a zig-zag which overlapped the south-east end of Great Barrier Island. A third and much longer barrage was laid across the northern approaches to **Hauraki Gulf**. It extended from a point off the northern end of Great Barrier in a wide arc 6 ½ miles off Moko Hinau Islands, and thence in a straight line to the north-west, passing about six miles outside the Maro Tiri Islands to a point about five miles from the mainland. All the mines were of the moored contact type.

Enemy U-boats, mines, surface vessels, aircraft, and unknown causes accounted for these British, Allied, and neutral merchant shipping losses.

	TONNAGE SUNK	NUMBER
	14,573,000	2,775
	1,385,000	521
	1,558,000	326
	2,828,000	753
	850,000	411
TOTAL	21,194,000	4,786

Enemy U-boats, mines, surface vessels, aircraft, and unknown causes accounted for these British, Allied, and neutral merchant shipping losses

During the operation, which took just over seven hours to complete, three outward-bound steamers and one inward-bound vessel were sighted by the *Orion*, but by eleven o'clock the sky had clouded over and she was not detected. HMNZS *Achilles* and HMS *Hector*, an armed merchant cruiser, arrived at **Auckland** between nine o'clock and midnight while the minelaying was in progress. The last of the mines was dropped at 2.36 in the morning of 14 June and the raider then steamed away to the north-east at full speed.

The mines soon claimed their first victim. In the early hours of 19

June, the *Niagara*, 13,415 tons, bound from **Auckland** for **Suva** and **Vancouver**, struck and exploded two mines and sank in seventy fathoms in the fairway between **Bream Head** and **Moko Hinau**. Fortunately, there was no loss of life. During the morning minesweepers swept and sank two mines close to the position in which the *Niagara* had gone down. On 23 June the homeward-bound liner *Waiotira* reported by wireless that she had cut a mine adrift with her paravane in the same locality. During the week four mines were swept and destroyed in the vicinity of **Cuvier Island**.

The loss of the *Niagara* and the discovery of the mines were the first indications of the presence of a German raider in the **Pacific**. The four main ports were closed to shipping until minesweepers had carried out clearing sweeps in the approach channels to the harbours. When traffic was resumed the inter-island steamers *Rangatira* and *Wahine* made the passage between **Wellington** and **Lyttelton** in daylight. From time to time during the next twelve months, mines that had broken adrift from the **Hauraki Gulf** field were washed ashore or were sighted at sea and destroyed. On 14 May 1941 HMNZS *Puriri* struck a mine, the explosion sinking her immediately. One officer and four ratings were killed. The 25th Minesweeping Flotilla commenced sweeping on 13 June 1941, and by the end of September 131 mines had been accounted for, apart from a number dealt with off Cape Brett.

After leaving New Zealand waters the German raider cruised along the **Australia- Panama** route. She passed the Kermadec Islands on 16 June and three days later captured the Norwegian motor-vessel *Tropic Sea*, 5781 tons, bound from **Sydney** to the **United Kingdom** with 8100 tons of wheat. On 25 June the raider and her prize refuelled from the *Winnetou*. The *Tropic Sea* was placed under the command of the captain of the *Winnetou*, Lieutenant Steinkraus, with a prize crew of twenty-eight men, and on 30 June she sailed for **Europe** by way of **Cape Horn**.

On 3 September the *Tropic Sea* was intercepted by the British submarine *Truant* in the Bay of Biscay and was scuttled by the prize

crew. The *Truant* took on board the *Haxby* survivors and the Norwegian master and his wife, the other Norwegians being rescued next day by a Sunderland flying-boat. Lieutenant Steinkraus and his prize crew landed in **Spain** and made their way back to **Germany**. Three months later he arrived in **Japan** and took command of the captured Norwegian tanker *Ole Jacob*, which was employed to refuel German raiders in the **Indian Ocean**.

During the whole of July and the first week of August, the *Orion* steamed along and across the routes from New Zealand and **Australia** to the various groups of the South Pacific islands, **San Francisco**, and Vancouver, but not a ship was sighted. From 19 to 23 July she cruised near the Fiji Group, and on the 28th refuelled from the *Winnetou* in an area north of the Ellice Islands. After a day's steaming to the Equator, east of the **Gilbert Islands**, the *Orion* proceeded south-west and, passing between the Santa Cruz Group and San Cristobal Island, the most southerly of the Solomon Islands, entered the Coral Sea. On 7 August she refuelled from the *Winnetou* and the empty tanker then sailed for **Japan**.

Captain Weyher recorded in his log that the 'unsuccessful patrols along the previously quoted shipping lanes under conditions of from 20 to 25 nautical miles maximum visibility prove that enemy shipping, even in Australian, New Zealand and South Sea waters no longer steers the peace-time routes. Radio interception shows merely the traffic of **United States** and Japanese passenger ships which apparently still run on these routes.... Under these conditions it was specially necessary to use the aircraft, but this was prevented by the constant swell.'

North-east of **Brisbane** on 10 August, one of the Pacific Phosphate Commission's steamers was sighted, but it altered course away and no attack was made. From 11 to 16 August the raider cruised between **Brisbane** and **Noumea** and its aircraft made a reconnaissance flight over the latter port. In the evening of the 16th she intercepted the French steamer *Notou*, 2489 tons, on passage from Newcastle to **Noumea** with a

cargo of 3900 tons of coal. The crew of thirty-seven, including twenty-seven natives, and one passenger were taken prisoner and the ship was sunk. Twenty-four hours later an unsuccessful attempt was made to close a vessel whose lights were sighted right ahead. This ship apparently saw the raider against the moonlight, for she switched off her lights and 'was lost to sight and could not be found again.' The *Orion* then carried on down the Tasman Sea.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE SINKING OF THE TURAKINA

The Sinking of the Turakina

FROM the early morning of 20 August the raider 'steered along the route Cook Strait— **Sydney**', and late in the afternoon a steamer was sighted on the starboard bow as it came out of a rain squall. This ship was the New Zealand Shipping Company's steamer *Turakina*, 9691 tons, commanded by Captain J. B. Laird, on passage from **Sydney** to **Wellington**. She was carrying some 4000 tons of lead, wheat, and dried fruit loaded at Australian ports and was to have filled her insulated space at **Wellington** with frozen meat for England.

The raider signalled the *Turakina* to stop instantly and not use her wireless. Captain Laird at once ordered maximum full speed, turned his ship stern on to the enemy, and instructed the radio office to broadcast the 'raider signal'. The *Orion* then opened fire at a range of about 5250 yards with the object of destroying the *Turakina*'s radio office and aerials. Nevertheless, the *Turakina* was able to make her signal several times, and it was received by stations in **Australia** and New Zealand in spite of the raider's efforts to jam it. She gave her position as approximately 260 miles west by north from Cape Egmont and some 400 miles from **Wellington**.

The *Turakina* at once replied to the enemy's fire with her single 4.7-inch gun, and, in the gathering dusk, there began the first action ever fought in the **Tasman Sea**. It was an unequal contest, but Captain Laird had vowed that he would fight his ship to the last if ever he was attacked. At the close range of two and a half miles, the raider's fire quickly wrought havoc on board the *Turakina*. The first salvos brought down the fore topmast and the lookout, partly wrecked the bridge, destroyed the range-finder, and put most of the telephones out of action. The galley and the engineers' quarters were hit by shells which set the vessel badly on fire amidships. In little more than a quarter of hour she was reduced to a battered, blazing wreck and was settling aft; more than half her crew had been killed and others were wounded. At least one of her shells had burst on board the raider and wounded a number of

Germans. To hasten her destruction, the raider discharged a torpedo at a range of about a mile, but 'due to the swell it broke surface and hit the steamer on the stern. No visible damage results. The vessel burns like a blazing torch,' wrote Captain Weyher.

Meanwhile, Captain Laird had given the order to abandon ship. The two port lifeboats had been wrecked, but one of the starboard boats got away from the ship with three officers and eleven hands, seven of whom were wounded. A number of wounded were put into the remaining boat, but when it was lowered a sea swept it away from the ship's side and it was some time before it could be worked back again. When the lifeboat came alongside, the badly wounded chief radio officer was put into it and the others were told by Captain Laird to 'jump for it'. At that moment a second torpedo struck the *Turakina*, which sank two minutes later. The only survivors of the explosion were the third officer, the seventh engineer, an apprentice, two able seamen, a fireman, and a steward. They were picked up by the raider, as were the fourteen men in the other boat. An able seaman, who had been badly hurt when the *Turakina's* foremast was shot down, died on board the *Orion* and was buried next day. Captain Laird and thirty-three of his officers and men had died in the *Turakina*, and twenty survivors were prisoners in German hands.

In refusing to stop when challenged and in ordering wireless messages to be transmitted, Captain Laird had carried out an obligation that was accepted by thousands of British and Allied shipmasters. The *Turakina* and her ship's company paid a great price, but the raider was compelled to leave the **Tasman Sea** and did not sink another ship for two months.

The only warship in New Zealand waters at that time was HMNZS *Achilles*, which was lying at **Wellington**. She received the distress signal at 6.56 p.m. and sailed two and a half hours later, at 25 knots, for the **Tasman Sea**. The one flying-boat available took off from **Auckland** early next morning and was sighted by the *Achilles* at eight o'clock. When the cruiser arrived at the position given by the *Turakina* she found no

sign of wreckage or boats. For the next few days the *Achilles* and the aircraft carried on their search, but without success. An equally fruitless patrol was made in the south-west **Tasman Sea** by **HMAS Perth** and Australian aircraft. The raider had, in fact, succeeded in escaping to the southward.

After picking up the survivors from the *Turakina*, the *Orion* steamed away at easy speed to the south-west in generally poor visibility. At midday on 25 August she had reached a position about 200 miles south of Hobart. She then headed north-west and zig-zagged across the Australian Bight to the westward. 'The hopes of the captain for success in these waters were not however realised,' recorded the raider's log. 'Again and again the shipping-lanes from **Capetown** to South Australian ports and from **Aden** and Colombo via Cape Leeuwin to **South Australia** were crossed without sighting a ship. The weather was, as expected, generally very bad. The vessel rolled as much as 34 degrees....'

Assuming that shipping was hugging the coast, Captain Weyher approached to within twenty miles of the south-west coast of **Australia**. During the night of 2-3 September, with the object of disturbing shipping traffic, dummy mines were laid 'in view of the beacon on Eclipse Island, outside **Albany** harbour.' The raider then headed out to sea at full speed. At eight o'clock next morning a 'Hudson bomber appeared and circled the ship twice at an altitude of 600-800 metres'. The bomber made a wireless report as it flew away and from ten o'clock onwards 'at least six aircraft which had just taken off from Busselton were located by radar.' They failed to find the *Orion*, which was hidden by heavy rain squalls. Thereafter, the raider kept well offshore outside the range of air reconnaissance.

For the next five days she cruised along the shipping routes south-west of Cape Leeuwin but sighted nothing. The weather was persistently foul with strong westerly gales. According to the orders of the German Naval Command, the *Orion* was to have met the raider *Pinguin* (Ship No. 33) in that area, but the latter was having good hunting in the **Indian**

Ocean and did not come south of **Australia** till the middle of October. The *Orion* was therefore ordered to return to the **Pacific** to replenish stores from a supply ship from **Japan** and to overhaul her machinery in the Marshall Islands.

Accordingly, on 9 September, the *Orion* sailed to the south-east for eight stormy days until she reached a position about 400 miles south-east of Hobart. She then steamed up the **Tasman Sea** to an area midway between **Sydney** and the North Cape of New Zealand, which she patrolled for five days from 21 September. No ships were sighted. In five days' cruising in the Kermadec Islands area she again drew a blank. On 1 October she headed north, steamed close by the **Fiji** Group four days later, and, passing between Nauru Island and Ocean Island, arrived on 10 October at the atoll of Ailinglapalap, in the Marshall Islands. There she met the supply ship *Regensburg*, 8068 tons, from which she took some 3000 tons of fuel-oil as well as stores and provisions. Another supply ship, the *Weser*, 9179 tons, had been captured on 25 September by the Canadian armed merchant cruiser *Prince Robert*, a few hours after sailing from Manzanillo, Mexico, for the Marshall Islands.

The *Orion* and *Regensburg* left the atoll on 12 October. Two days later the raider captured the Norwegian motor-vessel *Ringwood*, 7203 tons, on passage from **Shanghai** to Ocean Island. The crew of thirty-six was taken prisoner and the ship, after being looted of stores and equipment, was sunk by an explosive charge. On the following night a steamer of 6000 to 7000 tons with 'large though unrecognizable neutral markings on the bows' was sighted steering south-east. The raider's maximum speed of 12.5 knots at that time was not sufficient to overtake the stranger, which disappeared in the darkness. On 18 October the *Orion* and her supply ship arrived at Lamotrek in the Caroline Islands, where they met the raider *Komet* (Ship No. 45) and the supply ship *Kulmerland*, 7363 tons.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

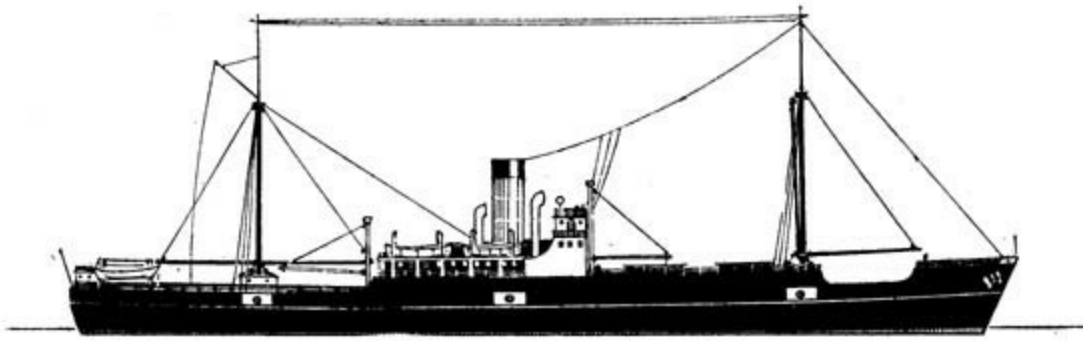
THE KOMET ENTERS THE PACIFIC

The Komet Enters the Pacific

THE *Komet*, which had arrived in the **Pacific** after an extraordinary passage across the Arctic Ocean and the Behring Sea, was commanded by Captain Robert Eyssen. She was a relatively small ship of 3287 tons gross register, built in 1937 as the *Ems* for the Norddeutscher-Lloyd. Propelled by two sets of oil engines geared to a single shaft, the ship had a speed of 15 knots or better. She was armed with six 5.9-inch guns, nine anti-aircraft guns, six deck and four underwater torpedo tubes. She carried one Arado seaplane and a high-speed motor-launch. Her complement was 270 officers and men.

The *Komet* had sailed from Gdynia on 3 July 1940, passed close inshore round the heel of **Norway**, and then made a wide sweep clear of the coast until she reached the North Cape. She then headed eastward across the Barents Sea to the south end of Novaya Zemlya, where she arrived on 15 July.

The Russian ice-breaker, which was to have met her, failed to appear, and the *Komet* spent the next four weeks cruising and waiting. Captain Eyssen had good reason to believe that the Russians were 'carrying on a skilful delaying policy'. On 13 August he received orders to proceed to Matochkin Strait, the narrow channel which bisects Novaya Zemlya, but when the *Komet* arrived there she found no sign of the promised ice-breaker, the *Lenin*, which had gone on with a convoy a week before. Captain Eyssen pushed on into the strait, where he picked up two Russian ice-pilots. The *Komet* finally passed through the strait on 19 August, and, following close behind the ice-breaker *Stalin*, she safely cleared Cape Chelyuskin, the most northerly point of Siberia, 720 miles from the North Pole. Escorted by the ice-breaker *Lazar Kaganovich*, the raider had a stormy passage across the East Siberian Sea. On 1 September, when there were still 600 miles to go to Behring Strait, the ice-breaker suddenly stopped and reported that 'orders had come from **Moscow**' not to accompany the *Komet* any farther eastward but to bring her back.



THE RAIDER *KOMET* (SHIP NO. 45)

THE RAIDER *KOMET* (SHIP NO. 45)

Captain Eyssen, ignoring the Russian protests, went on alone; after passing Wrangel Island, the *Komet* experienced fine, clear weather, and the sea was free of ice. During the night of 4–5 September she entered the Behring Sea. ‘From receipt of orders in the Barents Sea we had taken twenty-three days for nine of which we were stopped or at anchor; that is to say, we took only fourteen days on passage to cover a distance of 3,300 sea miles, of which 720 were through ice.’ On the passage southward from the Behring Sea the *Komet* was joined by the *Kulmerland* from *Kobe*.

On 20 October the *Regensburg* sailed for Yokohama, and the two raiders, with the *Kulmerland* in company, left Lamotrek to operate in the area east of New Zealand, raiding shipping on the *Panama* route. The *Komet* and the *Kulmerland* were camouflaged as Japanese ships, the former bearing the name *Manyo Maru* and the latter *Tokyo Maru*. They had these names and the Japanese mercantile flag painted on their hulls. During daylight hours the three ships steamed in line abreast at masthead visibility distance apart, this giving them a range of observation in clear weather of from 90 to 100 miles. At night the raiders closed to within visibility distance of the *Kulmerland*.

The ships passed south between Nauru and Ocean Islands ‘in the rather vain hope of coming upon steamers carrying cargoes from there to *Australia*.’ From 29 to 31 October the raiders were steaming through the area between the *New Hebrides* and *Fiji*. In the evening of 3 November the lights of a ship were sighted in a position about 250 miles

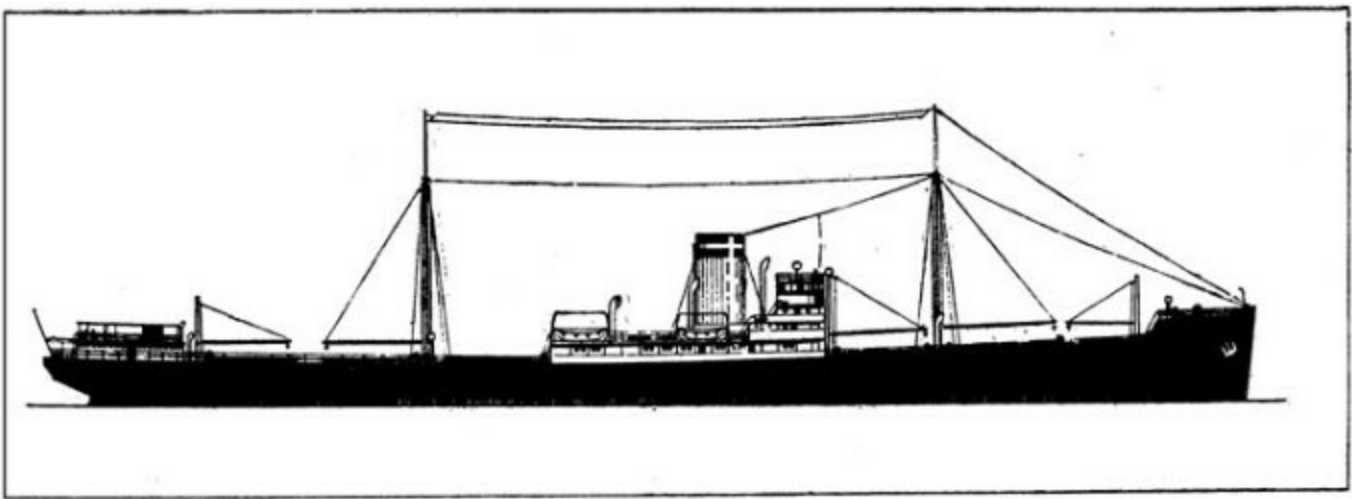
north-west of the Kermadec Islands. She stopped when warning shots were fired ahead of her and proved to be the American motor-vessel *City of Elwood*, 6197 tons. Her name and **United States** markings were seen when searchlights were turned on her and 'without further questioning she was released.'

On 7 November 1940 the raiders arrived in an area some 400 miles east by north of East Cape, New Zealand, on the lookout for ships on the **Auckland- Panama** route. 'After four days of unsuccessful patrolling in conditions of poor visibility, operations were transferred 300 nautical miles further south, so as to concentrate activity on the **Wellington** route', 500-odd miles due east of Cape Palliser. This area was combed for ten days without success, so, assuming that shipping was being routed south of the **Chatham Islands**, the Germans left on 20 November for a position about 100 miles south-east of that group. Four days of cruising in that area failed to locate any shipping, and on 24 November the raiders headed northward intending to proceed direct to Nauru Island, which was to be attacked on 8 December.



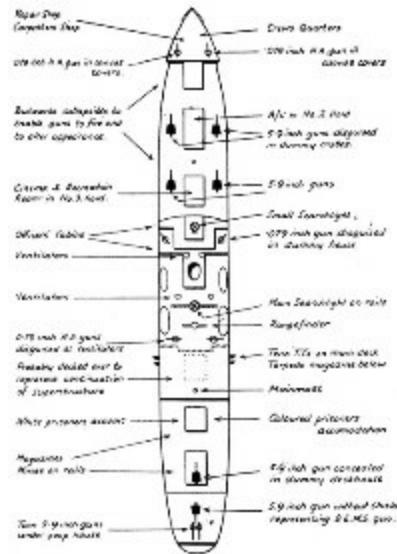
THE OPERATIONS OF THE RAIDERS ORION AND KOMET WITH THE SUPPLY SHIP KULMERLAND from 27 October to 8 December 1940

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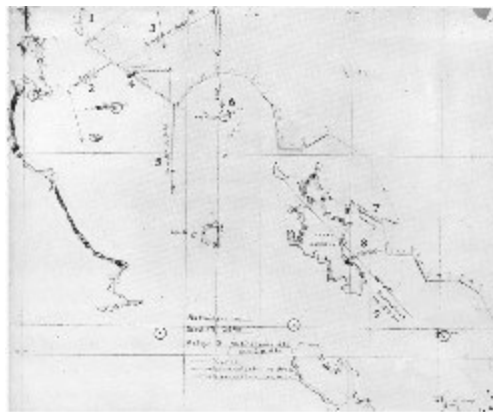
THE RAIDER ORION (SHIP NO. 36)

THE RAIDER ORION (SHIP NO. 36)



DECK PLAN OF THE RAIDER ORION, as in May 1941

DECK PLAN OF THE RAIDER ORION, as in May 1941



This reproduction of the Orion's chart of her course across the approaches to the Hauraki Gulf shows also the position of ships sighted while her minelaying was in progress. The numbers added in black give a key to translations of the notes on the map.

(1) vessel in sight; (2) steamer in sight; (3) steamer in sight; (4) position of sinking of Niagara; (5) steamer in sight; (6) Moko Hinau light; (7) blacked-out vessel; (8) vessel; (9) moon bearing at 2100 hours. The main heading at the bottom of the map states that it is to be superimposed on British 2543, enclosure No. 2 to Report No. 201 of 7 August 1940. The thin line shows the raider's course, the thicker line shows mines about 800 metres apart, and the double lines show mines about 400 metres apart.

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apart.

MINES & MINESWEEPING



Lifeboats from the *Niagara*

Lifeboats from the *Niagara*

A German mine washed up in the Manukau Harbour



A German mine washed up in the Manukau Harbour



HMNZS *KILLEGRAY* at sea near Auckland

HMNZS *KILLEGRAY* at sea near Auckland

Checking the wire on a minesweeper operating between Auckland and Whangarei

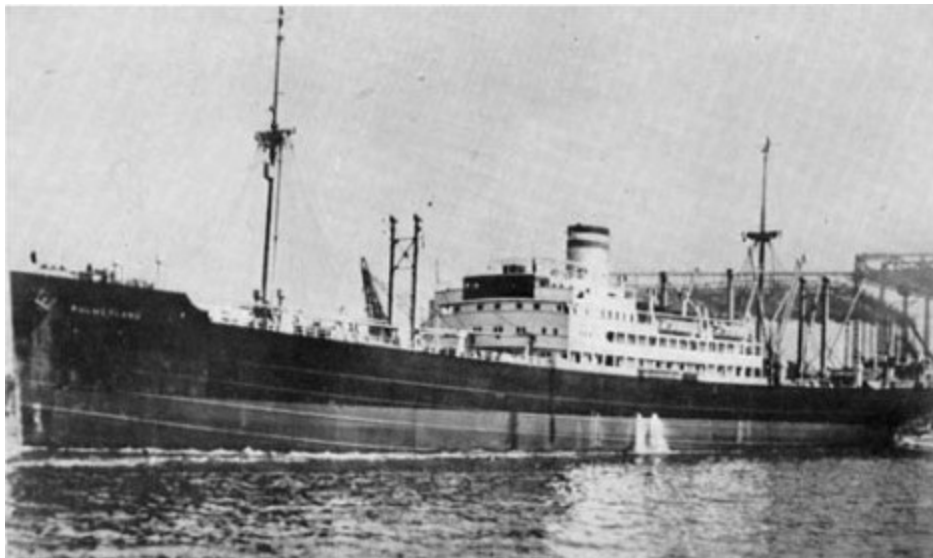


Checking the wire on a minesweeper operating between **Auckland and **Whangarei****



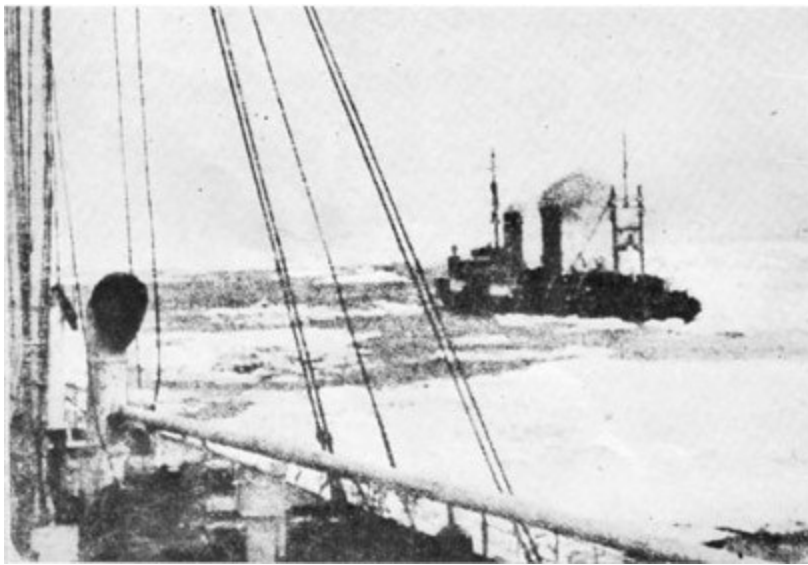
The raider *Komet*
(Ship No. 45)

The raider *Komet* (Ship No. 45)



The supply ship
Kulmerland

The supply ship *Kulmerland*



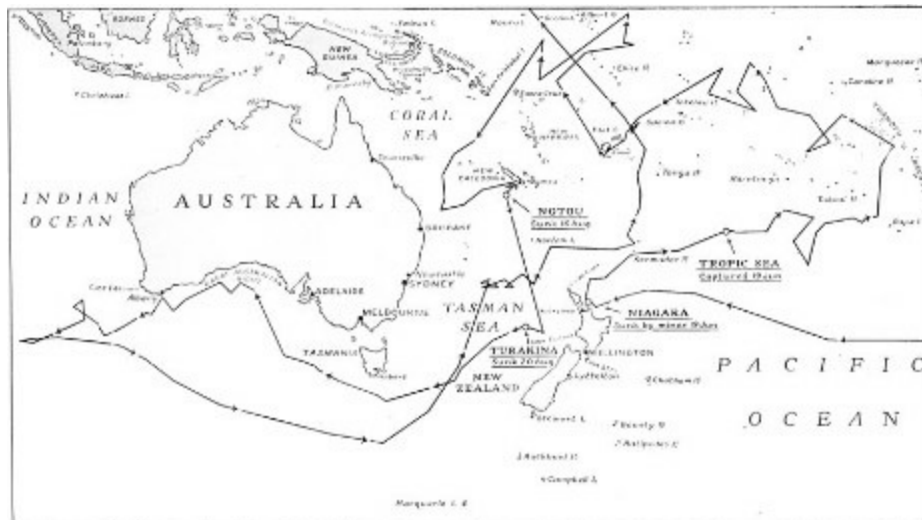
The Russian ice-breaker *Stalin* from the *Komet*

The Russian ice-breaker *Stalin* from the *Komet*



Rear-Admiral Robert Eyssen,
commanding officer of the *Komet*

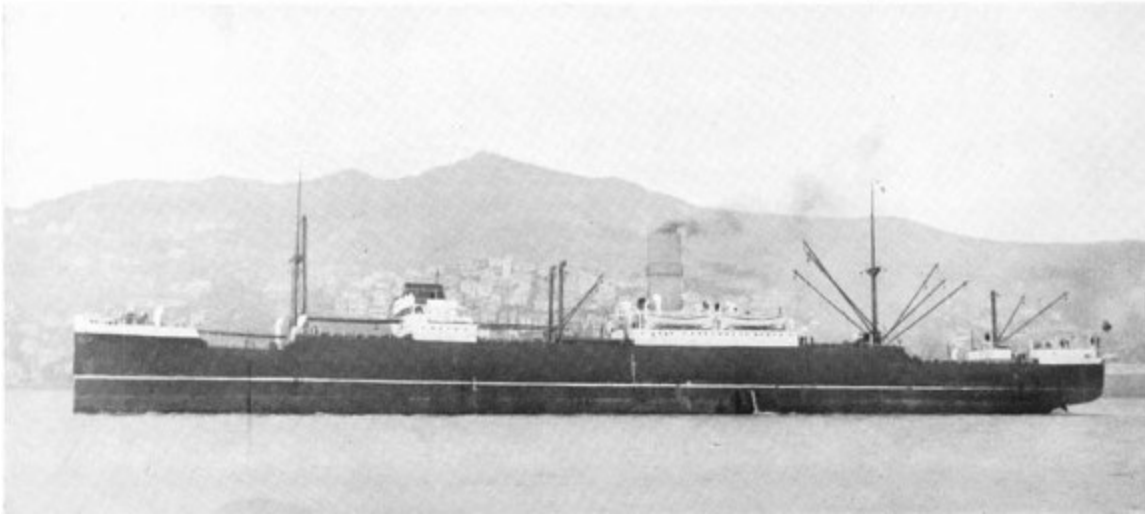
Rear-Admiral Robert Eyssen, commanding officer of the *Komet*



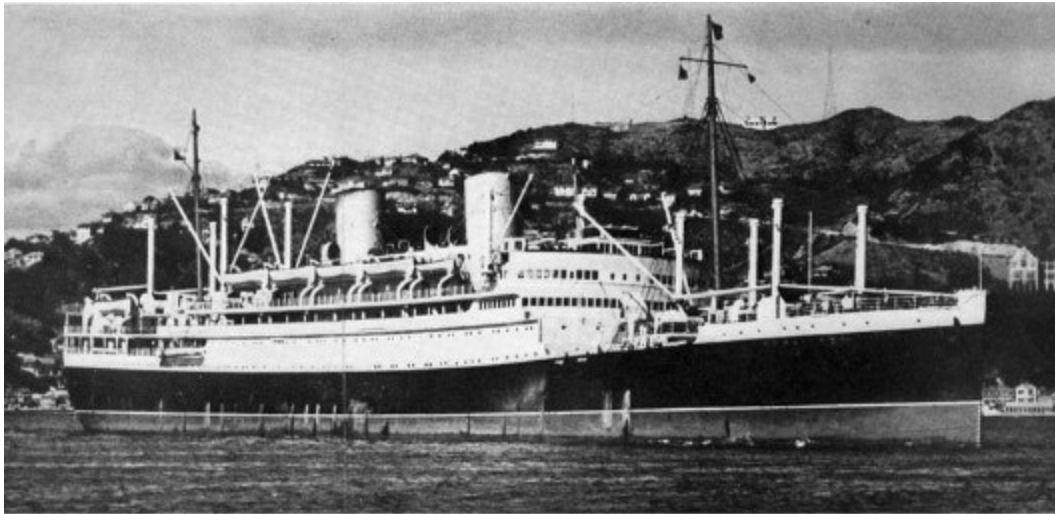
The operations of the raider *Orion*, June to October 1940

The operations of the raider *Orion*, June to October 1940

The *Turakina*, sunk in the Tasman Sea by the *Orion* on 20 August 1940 after a gallant action



The *Turakina*, sunk in the *Tasman Sea* by the *Orion* on 20 August 1940 after a gallant action



The *Rangitane*, victim of the raiders *Orion* and *Komet*

The *Rangitane*, victim of the raiders *Orion* and *Komet*



German raiders at anchor off Emirau Island. The *Komet*, partly obscured by a palm tree, is at left. The funnel and one mast of the *Orion* show behind the supply ship *Kulmerland*, with Japanese markings, on right

German raiders at anchor off Emirau Island. The *Komet*, partly obscured by a palm tree, is at left. The funnel and one mast of the *Orion* show behind the supply ship *Kulmerland*, with Japanese markings, on right



Engineers from the *Rangitane*

Engineers from the *Rangitane*



Chief Engineer A. T. Cox (centre) and passengers from the *Rangitane*

Chief Engineer A. T. Cox (centre) and passengers from the *Rangitane*



The steamer *Nellore* which took the survivors of the ships sunk by the raiders from Emirau Island

The steamer *Nellore* which took the survivors of the ships sunk by the raiders from Emirau Island

SURVIVORS



On board the *Nellore*

On board the *Nellore*



Three of these men are naval airmen from the *Rangitane*; the fourth is a Leading Seaman from the *Port Hobart*. They were prisoners of war in Germany.

Three of these men are naval airmen from the *Rangitane*; the fourth is a Leading Seaman from the *Port Hobart*. They were prisoners of war in **Germany**

Chief Engineer A. T. Cox, Captain H. L. Upton, and Chief Officer E. H. Hopkins of the *Rangitane*



Chief Engineer A. T. Cox, Captain H. L. Upton, and Chief Officer E. H. Hopkins of the *Rangitane*

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

HOLMWOOD AND RANGITANE SUNK

Holmwood and Rangitane Sunk

EARLY in the morning of 25 November their fruitless eighteen days' patrol was rewarded when the *Komet* sighted and captured the steamer *Holmwood*, 546 tons, which had left the Chatham Islands a few hours before for **Lyttelton**. The crew and passengers, numbering twenty-nine, and including four women and two children, were taken off, as well as several hundred live sheep, after which the *Holmwood* was sunk by gunfire. Less than forty-eight hours later, about 450 miles to the north, the raiders scored a second success when they intercepted and sank the New Zealand Shipping Company's motor-liner *Rangitane*, 16,712 tons.

No radio message was transmitted by the *Holmwood* before she was captured, and consequently no warning of the presence of enemy raiders to the east of New Zealand was received. A subsequent commission of inquiry expressed the view that had a wireless message been attempted 'it would probably have reached New Zealand, or, if the enemy had attempted to jam the message, this jamming would have been heard in New Zealand.... The receipt of such a message in New Zealand would have resulted in the recall of the *Rangitane* which had left her anchorage off **Rangitoto** at about 5.30 that morning. Having regard to the position then existing, it is clear that the receipt of a message from the *Holmwood* would have given the Navy certain advantages in searching for the raiders which did not exist at a later date.

'We are fully aware,' said the commission's report, 'that any attempt to send the message would have brought about the shelling of the *Holmwood*, and that this might have meant heavy loss of life, including the lives of women and children. But, having regard to the methods of warfare with which we are faced, that consideration is irrelevant. Loss of civilian lives must be faced in an effort to locate and destroy raiders....'

The *Rangitane* was fully laden with dairy produce, frozen meat, and wool for the United Kingdom. Her crew numbered about 200 and she was carrying 111 passengers, including thirty-six women. She was about 300 miles east by north of East Cape when, at 3.40 in the morning of 27

November, the raiders were sighted.

Captain H. L. Upton at once instructed the *Rangitane*'s wireless office to broadcast the 'suspicious ship message' and, immediately the enemy opened fire, to send the 'raider message'. He also ordered maximum full speed on the engines and altered course to bring his stern on to the *Orion*, which seemed to him to be in the best position to open fire. After signalling by morse lamp, ordering the *Rangitane* to stop and not to use her wireless, the *Orion* switched on a searchlight and commenced firing. When Captain Upton was told that the messages had been transmitted, he stopped his ship. The time was then 3.59 a.m., so that only nineteen minutes had elapsed since the raiders were first sighted. They continued firing after the *Rangitane* stopped. Captain Upton signalled that there were women on board, and shortly afterwards the firing ceased.

The *Rangitane* was considerably damaged and well on fire by this time. Five passengers, including three women, were killed and a number wounded, one of the latter, also a woman, dying on board the *Orion* next day. Two stewardesses and three engine-room hands were killed, and five others of the ship's crew wounded. The conduct of the ship's company was exemplary and in keeping with the traditions of the British merchant service. They went about their duties calmly and did everything possible for those in their charge.

After the firing had ceased, a German boarding party arrived in a motor-launch and ordered the immediate abandonment of the ship. As soon as the passengers and crew had been taken on board, the raiders sank the *Rangitane* by torpedoes and gunfire and steamed away at full speed to the north-east. That evening, when they were 'about 450 miles from the nearest possible air base', a low-flying aircraft on a westerly course was sighted ahead. The *Orion*'s war diary recorded that 'as no radio activity followed, however, it was presumed that the aircraft, in spite of good visibility through the light haze, had not seen the ships against the dark surface of the sea'.

When the *Rangitane's* radio messages were received, HMNZS *Achilles*, which was lying at **Lyttelton**, was ordered to sail with all despatch. She cleared the harbour at 8.10 a.m. and steamed at 25 knots towards the point of attack. HMNZS *Puriri*, which was at **Auckland** with her engines partly dismantled, was ordered to sea, and she sailed at seven o'clock that evening. The flying-boat *Aotearoa*, after refuelling, took off from **Auckland** harbour at 11.11 a.m. It commenced a search at 2.30 p.m. and carried on till about six o'clock without sighting anything. The flying-boat *Awarua* arrived at **Auckland** from **Sydney** at 11 a.m. and, after refuelling, took off at 2.18 p.m. It began its search at 4.30 p.m. and carried on till dusk, but saw nothing.

At one o'clock in the afternoon of 28 November, the *Achilles* reached the southern end of an expanse of oil which extended for nine miles from the position where the *Rangitane* had been attacked. The cruiser sighted a lifebuoy and a number of boxes of butter. The flying-boat *Awarua*, which had been ordered out a second time, arrived at the position at 8.10 that morning. It saw the oil 'slick' and a number of very small floating objects which she reported to the *Achilles*. Not another trace of the *Rangitane* was found.

On 29 November the raiders arrived at the Kermadec Islands and the prisoners were partly re-distributed among the three ships, the thirty-nine women and five children being accommodated in the *Kulmerland*. The raiders then steamed to the north-west, passing between **New Caledonia** and the **New Hebrides** and south-east of the Solomon Islands. On 6 December, a day's steam from Nauru Island, the *Orion* intercepted and shelled the Pacific Phosphate Commission's steamer *Triona*, 4413 tons. The crew, originally sixty-four men, of whom three were killed, and the passengers, six women and a child, were taken on board the *Orion* and *Kulmerland*. The *Triona* was sunk by a torpedo.

Next day the *Komet* sank the Norwegian motor-vessel *Vinni*, 5181 tons, which was loaded with phosphates for **Dunedin**. On 8 December the *Orion* sank the Pacific Phosphate Commission's motor-vessels *Triadic*,

6378 tons, and *Triaster*, 6032 tons, and the *Komet* sank the Union Steam Ship Company's steamer *Komata*, 3900 tons, all within sight of Nauru Island. There were now 675 prisoners—265 in the *Orion*, 153 in the *Komet*, and 257, including 52 women and six children, in the *Kulmerland*.

The German records of the cruise of the *Orion* make it abundantly clear that her commanding officer had no fore-knowledge of the movements of New Zealand shipping, other than that certain general routes were followed, and that the interceptions of the *Turakina*, *Holmwood*, and *Rangitane* were fortuitous. The Germans claimed to their prisoners that they met the *Rangitane* by design and that they possessed information which enabled them to intercept her. This was believed by many survivors from the sunken ships, including the masters of the *Rangitane* and *Holmwood*. But such knowledge of the movements of the *Rangitane* as was paraded by the Germans doubtless was obtained from foreigners among the passengers who were segregated and interrogated in German.

As has been shown, the two raiders and their supply ship carried out an extensive patrol of the trade routes east of New Zealand from 6 to 24 November without success. They were actually leaving the area when they happened first upon the *Holmwood* and, two days later, upon the *Rangitane*. Yet, during that period of three weeks, eleven large ships had arrived at **Auckland** and **Wellington** from the Panama Canal and seven had left for Balboa, while seven ships had arrived from, and five had sailed for, the South Sea Islands and **North America**. In other words, the raiders intercepted only the *Rangitane* out of thirty large overseas ships which passed through the area intensively searched by them.

Moreover, when the dim shadow of the *Rangitane* was first seen in the darkness by the raiders, they had not the slightest idea of her identity but believed her to be a warship. 'The first impression received by the two AMC's * was that of a large warship, at least as big as a cruiser,' states the war diary of the *Orion*. 'As evasion now seemed quite impossible, the commander of the *Orion* determined to attack, in the

hope that one or other of the German ships would have a chance to escape. As became apparent later, the commander of the *Komet* came to the same conclusion. Under these circumstances, after the position of the four ships became clearer and the possibility of firing on one's own ships in the confusion had lessened, the commander of the *Orion* gave orders for the searchlights to be switched on, in order to open fire with his main armament against the supposed enemy warship.' Not until then was she seen to be a two-funnel merchant ship, and not until after she was boarded was she identified as the *Rangitane*.

The *Komet* refuelled from the *Kulmerland* at Ailinglapalap and the three ships then steamed to **Emirau Island**, in the Bismarck Archipelago, where they arrived on 21 December. While the prisoners were being disembarked, the *Orion* lay alongside the *Kulmerland* and took in the 1100 tons of fuel remaining in that ship. By midday, 343 Europeans and 171 Chinese and natives had been landed. Captain Weyher refused to land any European prisoners from his ship as he held that 'trained officers and crews are as much a problem for **Britain** as shipping itself.'

Apart from the natives, the only inhabitants of **Emirau Island** were two white planters and their wives, Mr. and Mrs. Collett and Mr. and Mrs. Cook, who did everything possible for the women and children. The shipmasters and their officers organised their respective ship's companies into camps. The Germans had provided food and other supplies, and these were generously supplemented by the settlers from their own stores.

The Germans had left a lifeboat on the condition that it would not be used to communicate with **Kavieng**, seventy miles away, until twenty-four hours after the raiders had left. The planters, however, sent some natives in a canoe to Mussau Island, fifteen miles distant, for a motor-launch, in which a party went to **Kavieng** for assistance. On 24 December the schooner *Leander* arrived with food and other stores. A doctor also brought medical supplies. Under much improved conditions, the castaways spent Christmas Day in a spirit of festivity. During the

day the Administrator of **New Britain** arrived from **Rabaul** in a flying-boat bringing still more supplies.

Meanwhile, the Naval authorities had arranged for the steamer *Nellore* to proceed from **Rabaul** to **Emirau Island**, where she embarked the stranded passengers on 29 December. The overcrowded ship arrived on 1 January at Townsville, whence special trains took her passengers on to **Brisbane** and **Sydney**. The Australian and New Zealand Governments had made elaborate arrangements for the well-being of those who had passed through so trying an experience.

After leaving **Emirau Island**, the German ships went their separate ways. The *Orion* steamed north to the Caroline Islands to carry out a much-needed overhaul of her engines and boilers and effect further changes in her outward appearance. The *Kulmerland* left for **Japan**, where she arrived on 31 December. The *Komet* steamed towards **Rabaul**, arriving off the harbour during the night of 24 December. There she hoisted out her fast motor-launch *Meteorit* to lay mines in the fairway; but the engines of the launch failed and the operation was abandoned. The *Komet* then steamed to Nauru Island where, on 27 December, she shelled and wrecked the phosphates plant, including the great cantilever loading structure.

According to reports received by the British Phosphates Commission 'about 200 shells had been fired at the shipping plant and oil storage, besides hundreds of rounds of armour-piercing and incendiary bullets. One of the concrete foundations for the cantilever was so damaged that apparently another shell would have brought the whole structure down on the reef.... Of the three sets of main moorings holed by armour-piercing bullets, two of the large buoys were saved by the four-watertight-compartment construction. The oil storage and about 13,000 tons of oil were destroyed and the blazing oil spread in all directions. The 12,000-ton shore bin of the cantilever suffered badly as the blazing oil made the heavy steel [supporting] columns white hot and they collapsed....'

The raiders' attacks on Nauru Island were, in effect, their greatest success in the **Pacific**, since they seriously affected the volume and continuity of the supplies of phosphates to New Zealand and **Australia** and, in less degree, to **Britain**. The sinking of five ships totalling 25,900 tons, including three of the Phosphate Commission's steamers which had been specially adapted to the peculiar requirements of the trade, was a bad blow in view of the increasing shortage of shipping tonnage and the consequent difficulty of chartering suitable vessels. But, far worse was the drastic cut in available supplies of Nauru phosphates and its ultimate economic effect.

The output of phosphates from Nauru and Ocean Islands had reached a peak of nearly 1,500,000 tons in the year ended 30 June 1940, of which the former provided 919,750 tons. It was ten weeks after the bombardment before shipments from Nauru were resumed, the loading of the first cargo starting on 6 March 1941. The British Phosphates Commission estimated that shipments from both islands during 1941 would total 600,000 tons, including 250,000 tons from Nauru, but in the event, because of the bombardment damage and a long period of bad weather, the actual shipments were far short of the estimate. To supplement Nauru and Ocean Islands' shipments of phosphates the British Government refrained from drawing supplies for the **United Kingdom** from those islands and arranged through the Phosphates Commission to give New Zealand and Australian requirements preference up to 120,000 tons from Makatea Island in the **Pacific** and 100,000 tons from Christmas Island (for **Australia**) in the **Indian Ocean**, but, again because of the shortage of shipping, supplies from those sources were relatively small. Several ships chartered to bring phosphates from Egypt to New Zealand were requisitioned for urgent war purposes. It was officially stated in July 1941 that New Zealand farmers were on a ration for fertilisers, based on a total annual importation of 200,000 tons of phosphate rock. Supplies of phosphates from Nauru and Ocean Islands ceased when those islands were occupied by the Japanese in 1942.

* **Armed merchant cruisers**

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

OPERATIONS OF THE PINGUIN

Operations of the Pinguin

AT the end of 1940 seven German raiders were operating on the high seas. Besides the *Orion* and *Komet* in the **Pacific**, there were the *Atlantis* and the *Pinguin* in the **Indian Ocean** and the *Thor* in the **Atlantic**. The pocket battleship *Admiral Scheer* was on her way down the **Atlantic** after sinking HMS *Jervis Bay* and six merchant ships in a convoy and the *Port Hobart* in the **West Indies** area. The *Kormoran* had sailed from **Germany** on 3 December 1940 to operate in the **Atlantic** and Indian Oceans. The *Widder* had returned to **Germany** at the end of October after sinking twelve ships in the **Atlantic**.

On her way to the **Indian Ocean** the *Pinguin* sank five ships and captured another, in which the crews of her other victims were sent to Bordeaux. In the Bay of Bengal she captured the Norwegian tanker *Storstad*, which was renamed *Passat* and to which she transferred some of her mines. Both ships then sailed south of **Australia**. During the night of 28 October 1940, the *Pinguin* laid three rows of minés between Newcastle and **Sydney**, one of which sank the coastal vessel *Nimbin*, 1052 tons. After laying others off Hobart, the *Pinguin* worked in to the coast of South **Australia** and, during the night of 6 November, planted three rows of mines across the entrance to Spencer Gulf. It was in this field that the Federal Steam Navigation Company's steamer *Hertford*, 11,785 tons, was badly damaged on 7 December 1940. In the meantime, the *Passat* had laid her mines off the north-east coast of **Tasmania**, and off Wilson's Promontory and Cape Otway. Between them, the *Pinguin* and *Passat* laid a total of 230 mines. The Federal Company's steamer *Cambridge*, 11,373 tons, was mined and sunk off Wilson's Promontory on 7 December, and the American steamer *City of Rayville*, 5883 tons, off Cape Otway on the following day.

Returning to the **Indian Ocean**, the *Pinguin* sank three well-known New Zealand traders—the *Maimoa*, 10,123 tons, on 20 November, the *Port Brisbane*, 8739 tons, on the following day, and the *Port Wellington*, 10,065 tons, on 30 November. The *Pinguin* then continued

on far to the south-west and on 14–15 January 1941 captured the Norwegian whaling factory ships *Ole Wegger* and *Pelagos* (formerly the *Athenic*), the supply ship *Solglimt*, and eleven whale catchers. The whaling fleet was taken to **France** by prize crews, with the exception of one catcher which was renamed *Adjutant* and retained by the *Pinguin* as a reconnaissance vessel. The *Adjutant* reappears later in this account. During the next five months the *Pinguin* sank three more ships, but her raiding career was ended on 8 May 1941, when she was intercepted and sunk in the north-west area of the **Indian Ocean** by HMS *Cornwall*. The *Pinguin* was the most successful of the German raiders. During her cruise of eleven months she sank or captured thirty-one vessels totalling 156,910 tons.

After shelling Nauru Island, the *Komet* proceeded north about the **Gilbert Islands** and thence far to the south-eastward through the central **Pacific**. About this time Captain Eyssen received notice of his promotion to the rank of Rear-Admiral. During the latter half of January 1941, the raider passed between the Marquesas Islands and the Tuamotu Archipelago, round Pitcairn Island, and thence along the **Panama-New Zealand** route; but no ships were seen. Rounding the **Chatham Islands** on 6 February, she went due south on the 180th meridian to the Antarctic, where she was held up by ice in the Ross Sea about 250 miles east of Cape Adare, the north-east extremity of Victoria Land. She then headed north-west and, passing close by the Balleny Islands, sailed within sight of the ice-bound Antarctic Continent until 28 February, when she shaped course for Kerguelen Island. There she met the raider *Pinguin* and the *Adjutant*, as well as the supply ship *Alstertor*, and spent some time taking in stores and ammunition.

The *Komet* then went north into the **Indian Ocean** and spent more than two months in fruitless cruising along and across the Australian shipping routes. At the end of March she refuelled from the *Ole Jacob*. On 21 May she was joined by the *Adjutant*, and on 1 June they headed away well south of **Australia** for the **Pacific**. On 11 June the *Komet* transferred to the *Adjutant* the mines that six months earlier were to

have been laid outside Rabaul.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

HARBOUR ENTRANCES MINED

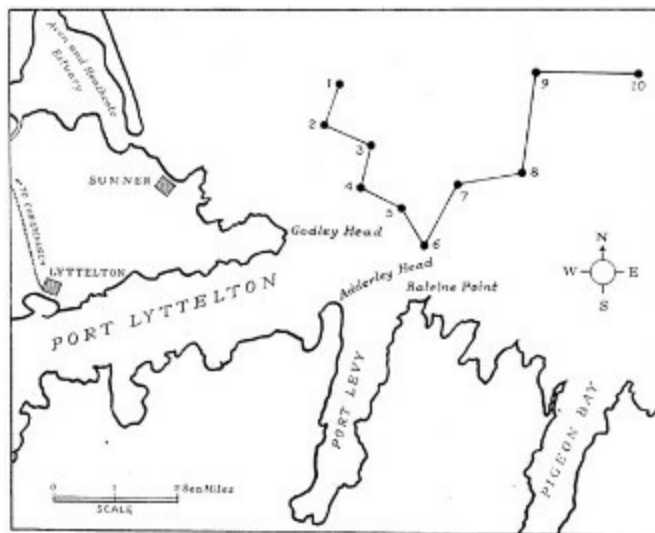
Harbour Entrances Mined

WHILE the *Komet* carried on to a rendezvous near the Chatham Islands, the *Adjutant* steamed in to the New Zealand coast and laid the mines close to the entrances to Lyttelton and Wellington harbours. In each case ten mines were laid, under cover of darkness, across the approaches to both ports. There is no record of any suspicious vessel having been seen in the vicinity of either port at that time. The *Adjutant* was a small ship of about 350 tons, closely resembling a minesweeper, several of which were then operating between Lyttelton and Wellington and for one of which she might have been mistaken had she been seen at night. Nothing was known of the minelaying until more than four years later, when it was revealed by captured German documents. Unlike those laid by the *Orion* in the Hauraki Gulf area, these were a magnetic type of ground mine. It is probable that they were defective when laid, since they have given no indication of their presence. Hundreds of ships have passed safely over the areas in which they were laid and which, during the war, were subjected to routine sweeping by flotillas fitted to deal effectively with magnetic, acoustic, and moored mines.

The following account of the *Adjutant's* bold operation is taken from the Admiralty translation of the war diary of the *Komet*:

At 1130 on 11 June, Ship 45 [*Komet*] sent *Adjutant*, as planned, to lay ten T.M.B. mines in the approaches to the New Zealand harbours of Port Lyttelton and Port Nicholson (Wellington) during the next new moon period. Apart from engine trouble, the voyage to New Zealand is uneventful. The Auckland Islands appear to starboard at 1320 on 20 June. At 1600 on 24 June *Adjutant* sets course 267 deg. [approximately due west] for Lyttelton: wind is force 7 to force 8 [moderate to fresh gale] with corresponding sea. The mines are clear for laying and the ship ready to scuttle herself. It is a dark night. Godley Head light comes into sight at 2130; later, also the Christchurch aircraft homing beacons. They are all burning peacefully. A searchlight at Godley Head directed towards Baleine Point bars the main approach to the harbour.

At 2400 [midnight], when the *Adjutant* is three miles off Godley Head, the light is kept dead ahead. On 25 June, between 0007 and 0122, the ten mines are laid according to plan at a depth of 16.5 to 22 metres [54 to 72 feet], the ship steaming at seven knots. There is no enemy opposition. The *Adjutant* then withdraws on course 50 deg. [approximately north-east]. After 0200, this is altered to 70 deg. [approximately east-north-east] and speed increased to ten knots. Shortly afterwards, the lights of a steamer coming in from the south-east are seen. At daybreak, the *Adjutant* is about sixty miles off the coast. The high snow-covered mountains can be seen clearly; and as the sun rises, it might well be Bodensee [Lake of Constance].



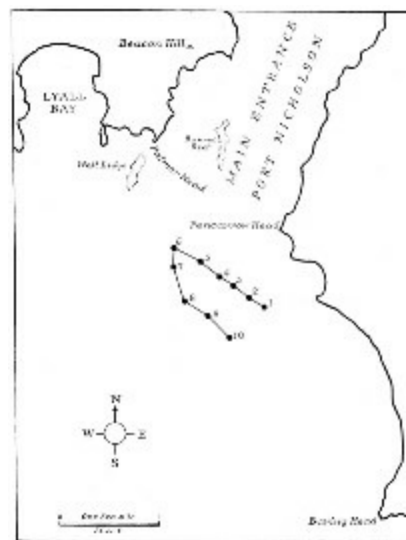
ENEMY MINEFIELD OFF LYTTTELTON

ENEMY MINEFIELD OFF LYTTTELTON

‘On the way to **Wellington**, the second of my objectives, I decided to keep only sixty miles off the coast,’ said Lieutenant Karsten, who was in charge of the minelaying, in his report. ‘I want to lay the mines at **Wellington** tonight before the harbour is warned—and, so far, **Lyttelton** has not reported anything. If, however, I proceed at a safe distance of 150 to 200 miles off the coast, I shall not get there today. The same arrangements hold for **Wellington** as for **Lyttelton**, except that it will be more difficult, as **Wellington** is better defended. Another factor in forcing me to take this course is my engine. The knocking of the big-end bearing of the high-pressure piston is getting progressively worse. I made

a chart of the operation in relation to the engine. I shall reach **Wellington**, but whether I shall get away again is a different matter. However, my orders read "Lay mines at **Wellington**" and I shall carry them out.

'The vessel has been proceeding at seven knots since 1615 to avoid arriving in position too early. Minelaying is to begin at 2330. The night is dark; there is a light north-westerly breeze, force 3; the sea is calm to slight. Baring Head light comes in sight at 2100 and the one at Pencarrow at 2200. "Stand by for action." Here again as at **Lyttelton**, everything is lit up peacefully. The harbour is barred by two searchlights, located between Palmer Head and Pencarrow Head. One acts as a constant barrier and the other sweeps the approach sector at



ENEMY MINEFIELD OFF WELLINGTON

irregular intervals, ending up at three patrol boats with masthead lights, lying to port of the *Adjutant* as she approaches. Minefield is to be laid at full speed (14 knots) and not at seven knots as arranged. Get-away to be covered by a smoke screen. Events developed as follows:

2312 Challenge from Baring Head. *Adjutant* does not reply. Steams through at full speed on course 12 deg. [north by east]. Baring Head makes morse signal to searchlight which, however, sweeps right over *Adjutant* four times.

2316 Order to lay mines, although initial position has not yet been

reached.

2320 When laying fourth mine, *Adjutant* is picked up by a searchlight.

2321 Smoke made. The fifth and sixth mines are laid on the run in, the remaining four under cover of the smoke screen, after turning back, and on a slightly different course from the one intended.

2328 Last mine laid. Depth of mines between 26 and 33 metres [85 to 108 feet].

2330 Smoke stopped. Course set for Baring Head. The searchlight continues to sweep the smoke screen which now separates *Adjutant* from the patrol boats. Shortly after passing Baring Head, the vessel turns landwards and so becomes obscured from the searchlights.'

Lieutenant Karsten describes 'the measures taken by the enemy after the laying of the smoke screen' as follows:

'In the meantime, three searchlights are switched on. One blocks the approach from its position to Palmer Head; the second from the searchlight position to Pencarrow Head; and the third to the south-west. There are three M.T.B.'s [patrol boats] and one minesweeper between the searchlight and Pencarrow Head and one M.T.B. between the searchlight and Palmer Head. One small M.T.B. type of vessel was making black smoke. All the ships were burning navigation lights. The patrol vessels had moved into the beam of the centre searchlight and lay burning masthead lights; they maintained morse communication with the signal station on Beacon Hill.'

After the *Adjutant* had rounded Baring Head, 'all speed is made to get away from the coast. At 0100 on 26 June, the alarm is over. *Adjutant* sets course 90 deg. [east] at 0130 and proceeds at 12 knots. At 0440 a halt had to be made because of engine trouble. At this stage the ship is about seventy miles from [Wellington](#). Considerable W/T traffic can be heard between New Zealand airfields and naval bases. We can expect an organised search. During the day, the vessel proceeds with her engine knocking badly. An unsuccessful attempt is made, during the night of 27 June, to eliminate the trouble. The rest of the voyage has to be made under emergency sail, or using medium and low pressure cylinders; consequently the maximum possible speed is eight to nine

knots.... Ship 45 comes in sight at 0730 on 1 July. The *Adjutant* is sunk at 41 deg. 36 min. South, 173 deg. 07 min. West [north-east of the **Chatham Islands**].’

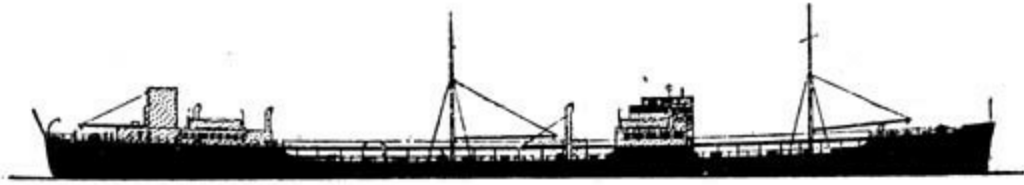
In his assessment of the *Adjutant*’s minelaying operation, Rear-Admiral Eyssen, commanding officer of the *Komet* remarked that ‘at **Wellington**, all the depths exceeded twenty metres, but a large number of ships of over 10,000 tons put in there, and as this port is very favourably situated in relation to the magnetic zone (Value “—570”) the mines, if they work at all, should, according to the data available, also detonate satisfactorily with vessels of 5000 to 7000 tons. I do not think the *Adjutant* was seen during the operation, in spite of the searchlight activity.’ A late entry in the war diary of the *Komet* stated that ‘no news of any sort was ever obtained about losses of shipping brought about by the *Adjutant* minefields.’ In the distribution of awards, the Iron Cross, First Class, was awarded to Lieutenant Karsten, ‘in recognition of the minelaying operation’ and to Lieutenant-Commander Hemmer, ‘in recognition of his former service as a member of the crew of the *Penguin* and latterly of his command of the *Adjutant*.’

At that time, HMNZS *Achilles* was escorting homeward-bound liners from, various New Zealand ports to dispersal points east of the **Chatham Islands** and must have been close to the German ships. The *Komet* then steamed away along the Panama Canal route, and on 14 July 1941, south of the Tubuai. Group, she refuelled from the *Anneliese Essberger*, 5173 tons.

In the focal area of the Galapagos Islands, on 14 August, the *Komet* sank the motor-ship *Australind*, 5020 tons, a well-known New Zealand trader, on passage from **Adelaide** to England. The ship was shelled ruthlessly when she transmitted a distress signal. Her master and two engineers were killed and forty-two of the ship’s company made prisoners. The *Australind* was the first ship sunk by the *Komet* for eight months. On 17 August the raider captured the Dutch motor-vessel *Kota Nopan*, 7322 tons, which, being loaded with tin, coffee, tea and spices, was retained as a prize. Two days later, the British India steamer *Devon*,

9036 tons, formerly of the Federal Line, on passage from Liverpool to New Zealand, was sunk in the same area and her crew taken prisoner.

Her presence having been revealed by the distress signals of her victims, the *Komet* retraced her course to the south-west. She passed close by Pitcairn Island and on 20 September met the raider *Atlantis* and the supply ship *Munsterland* in the area west of Rapa Island. The *Atlantis* had entered the **Pacific after a cruise of eighteen months in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, where she had sunk or captured twenty ships totalling 137,000 tons. Ten days before meeting the *Komet*, the *Atlantis* had captured the Norwegian motor-ship *Silvaplana*, 4793 tons, in a position about 800 miles north-east of the Kermadec Islands. This ship was sent away in charge of a prize crew and arrived at Bordeaux in November. After her meeting with the *Komet*, the *Atlantis* returned to the **Atlantic** on her way back to **Germany**. She was intercepted and sunk by HMS *Devonshire*, north-west of Ascension Island, on 22 November 1941.**



The *Ole Jacob* was a tanker of 8306 tons, built in 1939 and owned in Norway. On her maiden voyage, she arrived at Wellington in the evening of 31 July 1940, and was ordered on to Lyttelton. A few hours later, off Cape Campbell, she crashed into the motor-ship *Armadale*, 4066 tons, which was on passage from Lyttelton to Sydney. Both ships were badly damaged and put into Wellington. The *Ole Jacob* was repaired at Auckland, whence she subsequently proceeded to Palembang, Sumatra. On 10 November 1940 she was captured in the Bay of Bengal by the raider *Atlantis* and sent to Japan in charge of a prize crew.

THE CAPTURED TANKER

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EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

RAIDERS' LONG CRUISES END

Raiders' Long Cruises End

AT the end of September 1941, the *Komet* also started on her homeward journey via Cape Horn. On 17 October she parted company with her prize, the *Kota Nopan*, which arrived at Bordeaux a month later. Near the Azores the *Komet* was met by two U-boats which escorted her to Cape Finisterre; then she closely hugged the European coastline all the way to **Hamburg**, where she arrived on 30 November after a cruise of 515 days, during which she had travelled 86,988 miles. In October 1942, having started on a second cruise, the *Komet* was sunk by British destroyers off Cape de La Hague, in the **English Channel**.

As was mentioned earlier, the raider *Orion*, after leaving **Emirau Island**, had gone north to the Caroline Islands, where she arrived on 31 December 1940, and found the *Regensburg* and the tanker *Ole Jacob* from **Japan** awaiting her. Captain Weyher, fearing that the secrecy of his island bases had been compromised, decided to go still farther north. On 5 January 1941 the German motor-ship *Ermland*, 6528 tons, arrived and 183 prisoners from seven ships were transferred to her. Two days later the *Orion* sailed from Lamotrek, followed by the *Ole Jacob* and the *Ermland*. On the 9th the *Ermland* parted company and left for **Europe** via **Cape Horn**. She took on board 148 prisoners from another German ship in the South Atlantic, and arrived at Bordeaux on 3 April.

The *Orion* and her tanker arrived on 12 January at Maug, the most northerly but one of the Marianas Islands, and carried on the overhaul of her engines and boilers. The *Regensburg* arrived on 18 January with fresh water from **Japan**, and on 1 February the *Munsterland* came in with stores and a Japanese seaplane to replace the German aircraft which was unserviceable. Orders were received from **Berlin** that the *Orion* was to operate in the **Indian Ocean**, and on 6 February she sailed from Maug in company with the *Ole Jacob*. The ships passed through Bougainville Channel, in the Solomon Islands, during the night of 15 February. It was Captain Weyher's intention to sail south through the Coral Sea and the Tasman, but in the afternoon of 16 February the ships

were seen by a flying-boat which circled the *Orion* and then reported by wireless to **Port Moresby**.

The ships separated during the night and the *Orion* steamed eastward to the Santa Cruz Islands, from which she passed down between the **New Hebrides** and **Fiji**. On 25 February the *Orion* refuelled from the *Ole Jacob* in a position about 180 miles north-east of the Kermadec Islands. Thereafter the ships steamed in company across the trade routes east of New Zealand, but not a single vessel was seen. They passed west of **Chatham Islands** on 2 March 1941 and rounded New Zealand to the south of Stewart Island three days later.

For the next three months the *Orion* cruised unsuccessfully in the **Indian Ocean**, the only non-German merchant ships sighted being neutrals—a Vichy French vessel and an American. During much of that time she employed the *Ole Jacob* as a reconnaissance vessel, and for a short period kept the supply ship *Alstertor* in company for the same purpose. The raider's aircraft also made thirty-eight reconnaissance flights.

In the morning of 18 May, when the *Orion* had just crossed the Equator north-east of the Seychelles Islands, her aircraft returned from a flight with the alarming report that a heavy cruiser had been sighted on an intercepting course about forty-five miles away. The *Orion* at once altered course away to the south-east at her utmost speed of 13 knots. Two hours later, smoke was seen to the northward, but in half an hour it had disappeared. The cruiser was probably HMS **Cornwall**, which, ten days earlier, had intercepted and sunk the raider *Pinguin* about 200 miles farther north.

For some time the oil-fuel supply had been a matter of concern to the raiders. It had been hoped to refill the tanks of the *Ole Jacob* from the tanker *Ketty Brovig*, which had been captured on 2 February 1941 by the **Atlantis** and placed in charge of a prize crew. But, on 4 March, the *Ketty Brovig* and the supply ship *Coburg* had been intercepted and sunk by HMAS **Canberra** and HMNZS *Leander*. The Germans did not

learn of this loss until after the sinking of the *Pinguin*.

The *Orion* now received orders to leave the **Indian Ocean**. She refuelled from the *Ole Jacob* for the last time on 3 June and the empty tanker was sent away, arriving at Bordeaux on 19 July. The *Orion* rounded the Cape of Good Hope on 20 June. Two expected supply ships, one a tanker, had been sunk in the **Atlantic** on 4–5 June by HMS *London*, and the homeward-bound *Alstertor* was scuttled when intercepted by British destroyers on 23 June. The *Orion*, therefore, was compelled to load 500 tons of fuel from the raider *Atlantis*, which was met on 1 July about 300 miles north of Tristan da Cunha.

The *Orion* crossed the Equator on 25 July and four days later intercepted her last victim, the British steamer *Chaucer*, 5792 tons, which was attacked by gunfire and torpedoes. Ten torpedoes were discharged, but all failed to detonate. The ship was finally sunk by gunfire, her crew of forty-eight, of whom eighteen were wounded, being taken prisoner. The *Chaucer* was the only ship sunk by the raider in the period of nearly nine months since she was off Nauru Island.

On 16–17 August the *Orion* met the U-boats, U.75 and U.205, west of the Azores and was escorted by them to Bordeaux, where she arrived a week later after a cruise of 510 days, during which she had steamed 112,337 miles. For his exploits Captain Kurt Weyher was complimented by the Fuehrer, awarded the Knight's Insignia of the Iron Cross, and promoted Rear-Admiral.

In the course of their cruises, which covered a period of nineteen months, the *Orion* and the *Komet* accounted for seventeen ships totalling 114,118 tons, of which all but two were sunk or captured in the **Pacific**. One ship was captured in the **Pacific** by the *Atlantis*, and three more were sunk and one badly damaged by the *Pinguin's* mines on the Australian coast. Only four ships were sunk by the *Orion* and the *Komet* in New Zealand waters over a period of about six months. The *Turakina* and the *Rangitane* were the only refrigerated cargo ships lost to the raiders at a time when such vessels were leaving New Zealand at the rate

of eight or nine a month and a similar number were arriving to load. Another refrigerated cargo steamer, outward-bound, the *Devon*, was sunk by the *Komet* a day's steam from Balboa. In view of the fact that the raiders systematically patrolled the **Panama** route, the loss of only three such vessels (one of them in the **Tasman Sea**) is a remarkable proof of the protective value of the evasive routeing of merchant shipping. In the event, the operations caused no check to the regular flow of the Dominion's overseas trade; but, after the sinking of the *Rangitane*, HMNZ Ships *Achilles* and *Monowai* were employed for the next twelve months in escorting refrigerated cargo ships from their ports of departure until they were well clear of New Zealand waters.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

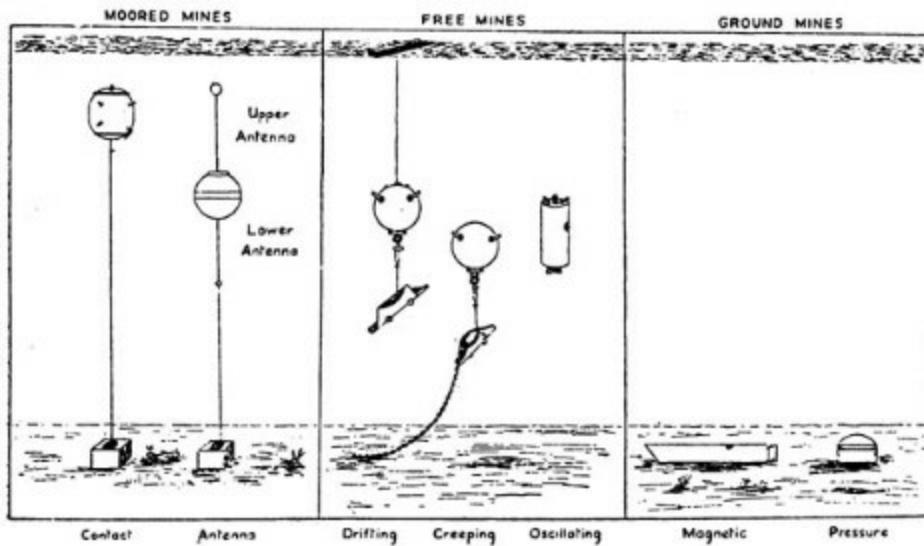
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Acknowledgments

[BACKMATTER]

THE AUTHOR, Sydney David Waters, is a New Zealand journalist who has specialised in naval and merchant shipping affairs. He is the author of two histories of the New Zealand Shipping Company, *Clipper Ship to Motor-liner* and *Ordeal by Sea*, and of *Pamir: the story of a Sailing Ship*. He served as a gunner in the 1st NZEF during the First World War.



Moored CONTACT mine (left) is the type laid by the German raider *Orion*. Anchored at pre-determined depth it is fired by contact with projecting horns. Antenna mine is detonated by contact with antenna.

FREE mines drift, creep, or float, according to type. Oscillating mines are fitted with a hydrostatic switch which is operated by water pressure as the mine rises or sinks.

GROUND mines are detonated by the action of the magnetic field, by the noise of a ship, or by the displacement of water. The German raider *Adjutant* laid magnetic ground mines close to the entrances of [Wellington](#) and [Lyttelton](#) harbours.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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THIS NARRATIVE is based on Admiralty documents, New Zealand Naval records, and German official reports. The diagram of shipping losses was drawn by Roy Stock and the maps by L. D. McCormick. The ship silhouettes and other plans are from official handbooks. The photographs come from various collections which are stated where they are known:

Inside Cover T. W. Collins

Page 14 (top) Commander R. E. Washbourn, RN

page 14 (bottom) *The Weekly News*, Auckland

page 15 (top) T. W. Collins

page 15 (bottom) Department of Internal Affairs, John Pascoe

page 17 (bottom) Alexander Turnbull Library

page 18 (top) New Zealand Shipping Company

page 18 (bottom), page 19, page 20 (top and bottom) A. T. Cox

page 20 (centre), Lee Hill

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

WOUNDED IN BATTLE

NEW ZEALAND IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR
Official History



WOUNDED IN BATTLE

NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT
PRINTING OFFICE
WELLINGTON
1946

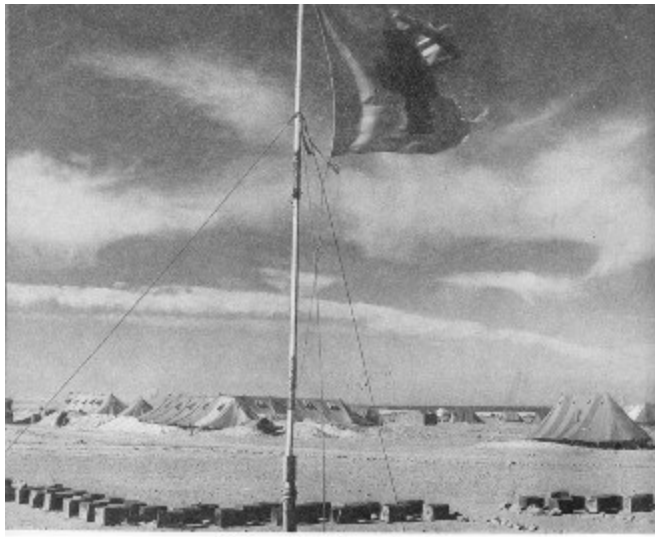
WOUNDED IN BATTLE

by

J. B. MCKINNEY

PRINTED BY
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

WAR HISTORY BRANCH
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS
WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND
1946



a NZ General Hospital, Gerawla, Western Desert

2 NZ General Hospital, *Gerawla, Western Desert*

COVER PHOTOGRAPH **A New Zealand field ambulance**

WOUNDED IN BATTLE

J. B. MCKINNEY

WAR HISTORY BRANCH

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS *WELLINGTON*, NEW ZEALAND

1950

IT IS THE INTENTION of this series to present aspects of New Zealand's part in the Second World War which will not receive detailed treatment in the campaign volumes and which are considered either worthy of special notice or typical of many phases of our war experience. The series is illustrated with material which would otherwise seldom see publication.

H. K. KIPPENBERGER

***Major-General* EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Diary of a Corporal in 26 NZ Battalion:

ON the night of 19 December 1944 at 9 o'clock, 6 NZ Infantry Brigade and 43 Gurkha Infantry Brigade launched an attack under a heavy barrage and threw the enemy back to the line of the Senio River, Northern Italy. Much ground was taken after heavy fighting and over 200 prisoners were captured at a cost to 2 NZ Division of about 20 killed and 80 wounded.

War Diary of Director of **Medical Services**, 2nd NZEF, 20 December 1944

'My section's job on the night of 19-20 December was to cover a party of sappers who were minesweeping a road which ran along the axis of 6 Infantry Brigade's advance. Just after midnight, I went ahead with the officer in charge of the sweepers to inspect the road and we found two demolitions which completely blocked it.

'It was while the two of us were between the demolitions that the enemy began to cover the road with mortar and gun fire. The officer and I dived into a deep ditch and lay there waiting for the shelling to finish. I was thinking about getting up to move on when I experienced a sensation in my legs not unlike being hit on both heels with sledgehammers.

'I had an idea I had been hit, but was not sure until I felt down with my hand and found my battle-dress trousers very warm and sticky from the blood that was oozing out. I called to the officer to let him know that I had been hit and tried to get out of my equipment to make it easier to get at the first field dressing in my pocket.

'My officer had reached me by then. He had a very hard job getting at the wound for a start, not having a pocket-knife and being forced to lie on his stomach to avoid being hit also. At last he managed to rip the leg of my trousers and bandaged my first field dressing over the wound. My leg was just like a log of wood by then and I had no control over it at all. The officer then left me to go back and get someone to carry me out

for medical attention. Instead of feeling scared, as I and most others used to feel when making an attack, I then felt quite happy and lay flat out in the wet ditch and went to sleep. The two soldiers who came for me did not have a stretcher and started to carry me sitting on their clasped hands. I fainted almost straight away and do not know how I reached the floor of the house where I awoke. The thing that I remember most vividly was the intense cold. My leg was aching painfully and I was very thirsty. A regimental stretcher-bearer from 25 NZ Battalion came into the house and he gave me an injection of morphia. The dose was not powerful enough to send me to sleep and did not seem to lessen the pain in my leg a great deal.

‘Communication had somehow been made with the Battalion RAP* and a Bren-gun carrier was promised as soon as it could get through to take me back to a medical officer. A hold-up had been caused by a road demolition which a bulldozer had to fill in before any motor traffic could get through. All the fields on either side of the roads were heavily sown with anti-personnel mines, thus making it very risky for stretcher-bearers to travel across country.

‘The carrier came at last and I was put on board. All I remember of that journey was the bumping, the cold, and the moaning of a fellow-patient. I awoke once more when the carrier stopped and found we were outside our Battalion RAP. Here I waited my turn to be treated.’



RAP CARRIER AT FAENZA

RAP CARRIER AT FAENZA

*** Regimental Aid Post**

Stretcher-Bearers

Throughout the war the regimental stretcher-bearers, by the promptness with which they brought the wounded back to medical aid, were able to save many lives. Officially called battalion medical orderlies, they were infantrymen trained in battle first aid, who went into the attack carrying only a stretcher and a bag of surgical dressings. They were not members of the Medical Corps, but they wore **Red Cross** brassards and were entitled to protection under the Geneva Convention. The subsequent success of the treatment of wounded in medical units largely depended on their efficiency. They had heavy casualties, for their duties were performed under fire. On one occasion, for instance, a stretcher-bearer waded the ice-cold Rapido River at **Cassino** and carried back across it a wounded man—all this under sniper as well as mortar and artillery fire.

Bren-gun carriers and jeeps, adapted for stretcher-carrying, were used where possible in the later stages of the war to bring patients back to the Regimental Aid Post. The jeeps were much preferred by the regimental medical officers. These vehicles, if possible, went as far forward as infantry company headquarters, to which point the patients were brought by stretcher-bearers. This innovation, by shortening the distance a patient had to be carried by hand, was an important advance. In the forward areas the driver of the jeep had to face shelling and mortaring of roads and crossroads; often fire might be called down by the dust raised by his jeep.

‘The RAP had been established in a deserted house and I was very pleased to see the fire burning in the grate. The medical officer examined me and my wounds were dressed. It was found that my left thigh was perforated, involving the femoral artery, and also a wound below the knee was discovered. My thirst was terrific and I was overjoyed when the medical officer gave me a hot drink of cocoa. I was marked down as seriously ill, given a dose of morphia and placed on a jeep, which had been converted to carry stretchers, and sent on the next

stage of my journey.'

Regimental Aid Post

In a fixed position, as was common in Italy, the Regimental Aid Post was often in a partly demolished house. During a battle the medical work at the aid post was carried on under the din of gunfire and exploding shells; the earth shook under the continued shock of explosions.

The chain of medical services really began at the Regimental Aid Post where the medical officer was the advanced representative of the Medical Corps. He was responsible for giving the essentials of first aid treatment to the wounded so that they could be sent on as quickly and as comfortably as possible. To the soldier there was some comfort and reassurance in having a qualified doctor in attendance in the line itself, and this knowledge had its effect on a man's morale before and during an action.

Resuscitation measures were limited to wrapping the patient in blankets, warming him with hot water bottles and hot drinks. Transfusions of whole blood were available only in exceptional circumstances, but blood plasma and serum, which could be kept without refrigeration, were often made up and used for transfusions even at the Regimental Aid Post. * Rapid transfer to the Advanced Dressing Station was always the aim.

*** * ***

'The jeep moved along rough roads on its journey from the RAP to the Advanced Dressing Station and every bump was agony. We safely reached 6 NZ ADS, in a house on the outskirts of Faenza, at half past nine in the morning. I was examined again, given five sulphanilamide tablets, and evacuated to 4 NZ MDS, which had opened in Faenza following the capture of that town on 16 December. The conveyance for that stage of the journey was a motor ambulance car, which was much more comfortable than the Bren carrier and the jeep.'

* Blood is a mixture of a fluid called plasma and millions of tiny red blood cells. When a man is wounded he loses whole blood from the injured vessels and also plasma seeps into the damaged tissues. The body compensates for this by contracting the blood vessels and accelerating the rate of flow by more rapid heart action, and bleeding is stopped by clotting. The loss of blood both produces and accentuates shock.

Blood transfusion is the mainstay of resuscitation. Whole blood is the most useful as it supplies all wants. A transfusion of plasma, which can be preserved in sealed bottles, is sufficient when bleeding is less marked. Saline and glucose solutions are of great use in replacing fluid in patients suffering from loss of fluid alone. Refrigeration is required for the preservation of whole blood but not for plasma, and as plasma can also be dried it is very easily transported.

Many hundreds of our wounded owe their lives to the thousands of bottles of blood, plasma, and glucose-saline that were sent to the forward medical units. A wounded man can lose as much as six or seven pints of blood and still be saved providing his injuries are not overwhelming.

Advanced Dressing Station

The wounded, attended in transit by a medical orderly, were delivered at the Advanced Dressing Station by New Zealand Army Service Corps drivers. Ambulance cars were the usual means of transport. They gave a patient a smoother journey and a greater feeling of security than an open jeep. Valuable assistance to the Field Ambulances' own cars was often provided by drivers and vehicles of the **American Field Service**. This volunteer unit was serving in the **Middle East** before the **United States** entered the war, and it was associated with the New Zealand Division from the fateful days in the desert in 1942, the drivers cheerfully accepting the risks of the forward areas and giving tireless and outstanding service.

The Advanced Dressing Station, at which there were normally three medical officers and sixty men from the Field Ambulance, was usually not far from the line. The duties of the staff were to receive battle casualties from the Regimental Aid Posts, adjust wound dressings, immobilise fractures with splinting, relieve pain and shock and give blood transfusions to the more seriously wounded. Even the worst cases responded magnificently to the blood transfusions. Thus resuscitated, the wounded were made comfortable for the journey to the Main Dressing Station. No operative treatment was done at the Advanced Dressing Station except for the control of serious bleeding and the removal of an almost severed limb. As at the Regimental Aid Post, there was a constant urge to get the casualty to the operating centre with the utmost speed consistent with safety.

The company forming the Advanced Dressing Station had the mobility of the nomads of the desert. Its duties were to keep up with the brigade as it advanced, to be ready to set up a miniature emergency hospital to admit wounded at any time, and to undertake urgent treatment, being careful always to limit the surgical nature of its work so as to preserve the unit's mobility. If called upon to move again, it was able to pack up and be on the move in half an hour. If it still held

patients it might be necessary to leave a detachment to care for them until they were cleared to the Main Dressing Station. Mobility was an essential feature of the desert campaigns, especially when the Division engaged in its famous 'left hooks', and was a highlight of the final advance in **Italy** from the **Senio River** to **Trieste**.

The company adapted itself to the topography of the country as well as to the needs of the battle in setting up its dressing station. In Greece it had first used dugouts burrowed into the hillside and concealed under canvas and cut scrub. Vehicles were parked under natural cover some distance away. Red Crosses were not usually displayed by the medical units at this stage. When it was established that the enemy respected the Geneva Convention, prominent Red Crosses were painted on tents and vehicles. An Advanced Dressing Station was set up on Mount **Olympus**, and in the withdrawal the wounded were treated under the leafy camouflage of olive trees. Again, in **Crete**, the olive trees gave protection from the unchallenged and ever-active **Luftwaffe**.

In the **Western Desert**, tarpaulins fixed over and around three-ton trucks formed the reception and evacuation wards of the Advanced Dressing Station. The Italian terrain in the winter presented difficulties and caused privations. At the **Sangro** one Advanced Dressing Station was set up among thickets of bamboo, the men digging themselves and their bivouac tents into the muddy banks of a tributary of the river, trying to shelter from the frequent heavy rainstorms which made the days dismal and the nights cold. In the slow-moving war in **Italy** a night barrage would throw the tarpaulin shelters and vehicles of the Advanced Dressing Station into a flickering silhouette, and overhead the air would throb with the roar of outgoing shells. Inside the shelters (or in one of the war-battered buildings which became almost indispensable in the winter of 1944 in Northern **Italy**) the sterile instruments were laid out ready and the orderlies on duty waited the first casualties from the impending attack. As the Regimental Aid Posts sent in the wounded a rush might develop; at times the wounded would be cold and exhausted, urgently needing warmth and blood transfusions to prepare them for the

next stage of their journey—on to the Main Dressing Station.



THE RESUSCITATION DEPARTMENT AT 4 MDS, FAENZA

THE RESUSCITATION DEPARTMENT AT 4 MDS, FAENZA

‘The distance to the MDS was short and we reached it at ten o’clock. It was in a commercial bank building in **Faenza. Here I was examined once more. My pulse registered 140 and I was placed in the resuscitation department, where I was given a blood plasma transfusion with morphia included in the drip feed. The transfusion brought my pulse down to 110 and I was considered fit for further evacuation, this time to the Casualty Clearing Station. The plasma bottle was fitted on the side of the stretcher and the transfusion continued while I was travelling.’**



MAP OF ROUTE OF EVACUATION

MAP OF ROUTE OF EVACUATION

STRETCHER-BEARERS

AT MINQAR QAIM



AT MINQAR QAIM

TAKING MEDICAL SUPPLIES ACROSS
THE LAMONE RIVER, FAENZA



TAKING MEDICAL SUPPLIES ACROSS THE LAMONE RIVER, FAENZA



RAP Carrier, near the Senio

RAP Carrier, near the *Senio*



RAP Jeep,
from the Sangro

RAP Jeep, from the *Sangro*

5 NZ Field Regiment
Aid Post, Orsogna



5 NZ Field Regiment Aid Post, *Orsogna*

Labelling wounded men's packs, Rimini



Labelling wounded men's packs, *Rimini*

Blood transfusion in Ambulance Car



Blood transfusion in Ambulance Car

Advanced Dressing Stations



4 NZ FIELD AMBULANCE NEAR
PALEONELLENE, Greece
'Dugouts burrowed into the hillside and concealed
under canvas and cut scrub'

4 NZ FIELD AMBULANCE NEAR PALEONELLENE, Greece

'Dugouts burrowed into the hillside and concealed under canvas and cut scrub'



GERMAN PARATROOPS TREATED BY NEW
ZEALANDERS, Crete
'The olive trees gave protection from the unchallenged
and ever-active Luftwaffe'

GERMAN PARATROOPS TREATED BY NEW ZEALANDERS, Crete

'The olive trees gave protection from the unchallenged and ever-active Luftwaffe'

BRITISH AND ENEMY WOUNDED
Libya



BRITISH AND ENEMY WOUNDED
Libya



OFF THE RAILWAY ROUTE NEAR MOUNT PORCHIA, *Cassino*

OFF THE RAILWAY ROUTE NEAR MOUNT PORCHIA, *Cassino*

At Four Main Dressing Stations



4 NZ FIELD AMBULANCE AT KATERINE, *Greece*
The reception tent is to the right of the ambulance

4 NZ FIELD AMBULANCE AT KATERINE, *Greece*
The reception tent is to the right of the ambulance

MDS IN A WADI, near *Sidi Rezegh*
This station was captured and remained in enemy hands for eight days



MDS IN A WADI, near *Sidi Rezegh*
This station was captured and remained in enemy hands for eight days



A FIELD SURGERY—two vans backed together, *Alamein*

A FIELD SURGERY—two vans backed together, *Alamein*

A FIELD OPERATING THEATRE
—a surgical team applies a Thomas splint, *Cassino*



A FIELD OPERATING THEATRE

—a surgical team applies a Thomas splint, *Cassino*



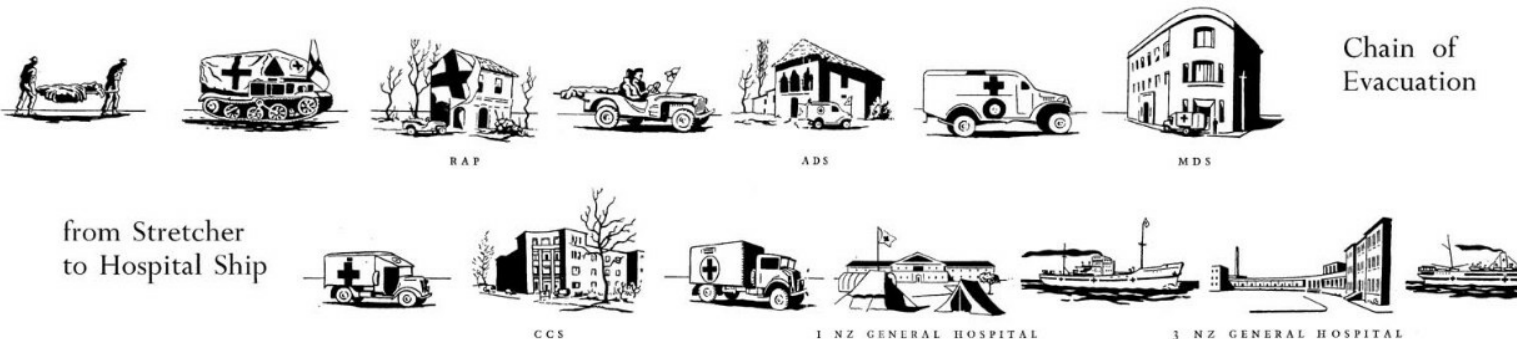
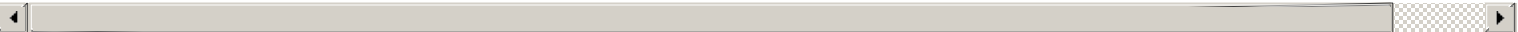
6 NZ FIELD AMBULANCE, *Greece*
Result of enemy aircraft action

6 NZ FIELD AMBULANCE, *Greece*
Result of enemy aircraft action



(Above and right) MDS ON SIDI REZEGH
after it had been taken over by the Germans

(Above and right) MDS ON SIDI REZEGH after it had been taken over by the Germans



from Stretcher
to Hospital Ship

Chain of Evacuation from Stretcher to Hospital Ship





FIELD OPERATING
THEATRE, *Alamein*

FIELD OPERATING THEATRE, *Alamein*



NEW ZEALAND NURSING SISTERS AT A CCS, *Cyrenaica*

NEW ZEALAND NURSING SISTERS AT A CCS, *Cyrenaica*

UNLOADING AN
AMBULANCE CAR
AT 3 NZ GENERAL
HOSPITAL, *Bari*



UNLOADING AN AMBULANCE CAR AT 3 NZ GENERAL HOSPITAL, *Bari*

Casualty Clearing Stations



NEW ZEALAND CCS AT TOBRUK, DECEMBER 1942

NEW ZEALAND CCS AT TOBRUK, DECEMBER 1942



FROM AMBULANCE
CAR TO AIR AM-
BULANCE ON A
TUNISIAN AIRFIELD

FROM AMBULANCE CAR TO AIR AMBULANCE ON A TUNISIAN AIRFIELD

A NEW ZEALAND
NURSING SISTER



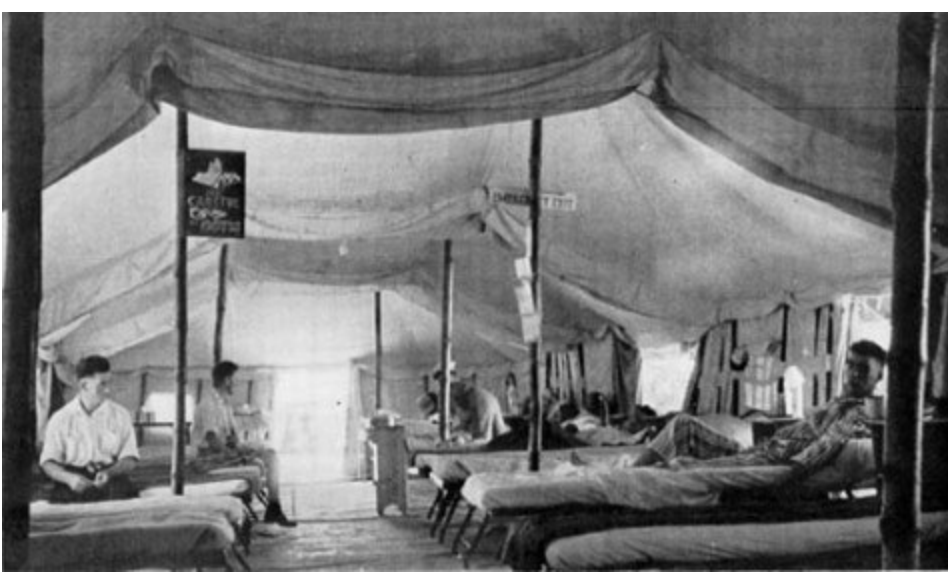
A NEW ZEALAND NURSING SISTER

AN AERIAL VIEW OF
1 NZ MOBILE CCS on
a bypass of the main
road, near *Cassino*.
The theatres and
administration tents
are on the left by the
road, and the wards
on the right.



AN AERIAL VIEW OF 1 NZ MOBILE CCS on a bypass of the main road, near *Cassino*. The theatres and administration tents are on the left by the road, and the wards on the right

GENERAL HOSPITALS



A WARD OF 3 NZ GENERAL
HOSPITAL
Suani Ben Adem, Tripoli

A WARD OF 3 NZ GENERAL HOSPITAL
Suani Ben Adem, Tripoli



VOLUNTARY AIDS, 3 NZ
GENERAL HOSPITAL, *Bari*

VOLUNTARY AIDS, 3 NZ GENERAL HOSPITAL, *Bari*



A SISTER, 2 NZ GENERAL HOSPITAL, *Caserta*

A SISTER, 2 NZ GENERAL HOSPITAL, *Caserta*



A MASSEUSE, *Bari*

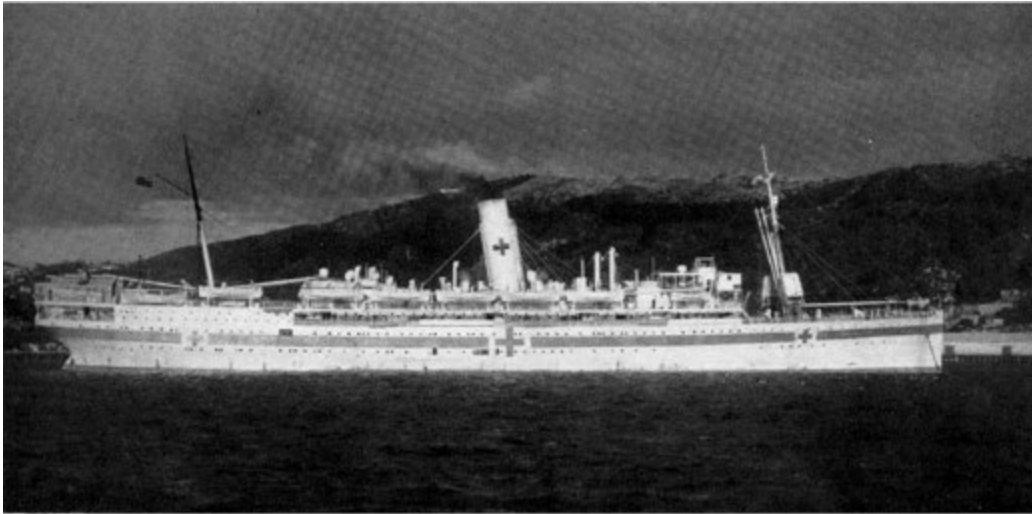
A MASSEUSE, *Bari*



A MEDICAL OFFICER ON HIS ROUNDS, *Bari*

A MEDICAL OFFICER ON HIS ROUNDS, *Bari*

HOSPITAL SHIP *MAUNGANUI*



THE *MAUNGANUI* IN WELLINGTON HARBOUR

THE *MAUNGANUI* IN WELLINGTON HARBOUR



ON THE BOAT DECK

ON THE BOAT DECK

ORDERLIES CARRYING NEW ZEALAND WOUNDED TO THE MAUNGANUI AT PORT TEWFIK after the Second Libyan campaign



ORDERLIES CARRYING NEW ZEALAND WOUNDED TO THE MAUNGANUI AT PORT TEWFIK after the Second Libyan campaign

IN A WARD OF THE MAUNGANUI



IN A WARD OF THE MAUNGANUI



Back in New Zealand



Main Dressing Station

In Italy the Main Dressing Station for battle casualties (battle MDS) was invariably situated near a road seething with traffic. The air of bustle on the road pervaded the dressing station too, with its staff of at least six medical officers and up to 200 men, including the **Army Service Corps** drivers and the medical orderlies. Down this road, fighting against the almost ceaseless stream of traffic pressing towards the forward areas, came the ambulance cars.

Routes to the Main Dressing Station were, in some cases, raw, newly-formed roads hurriedly constructed by the Engineers, or else winding Italian roads that seemed more concerned with strangling their hills, rata-like, than providing a way for traffic. It was not unusual for ambulance cars to arrive at the Main Dressing Station in winter with their bodywork streaked and plastered with clay from scraping along the inner bank, either in squeezing past other vehicles on the narrow stretches or through skidding down into the ditch at the side of the road. Over the long, dependable summer months, the Main Dressing Station could be placed on any type of road, its location being governed only by the evacuation routes.

The road alongside the Main Dressing Station reverberated with the noise of traffic; sometimes it was the clattering of whirling chains on road or mudguard, sometimes the hammering roar of passing squadrons of tanks and the rumble of tank-transporters. In addition, the unit's lighting plant whirled for long hours with its slack, rattling roar.

At any hour of the day or night ambulances halted outside the reception centre. From them came the walking wounded and the stretcher cases. If it was dark, the stretcher-bearers moved with a studied shuffling between Ambulance and Reception, Reception and Resuscitation and Theatre, Theatre and Evacuation—searching out the ground with their feet.

Every so often there was lifted from an ambulance car a patient with

one arm lightly bound to a rigid arm-rest, a part-empty transfusion bottle in the frame clamped to the stretcher, with the red rubber giving-set running down to the needle taped in place in the bend of his elbow. Exposed bandages on walking patients showed patches of dried or damp blood; bandaged hands or arms were dirty and streaked with flakes of blood dried hard. Faces were grimy, with a heavy stubble of beard. A man moving among them, unbandaged and seemingly unhurt, would perhaps be an exhaustion case.

The wounded entered the reception centre with the air of understanding, patient waiting that wounded men always seemed to bring with them. In contrast, the staff of the reception centre worked with all speed to examine their new patients and classify them for treatment. All the more serious or badly shocked cases went to the unit's resuscitation centre with its heated room or tent. Later, some would be moved into the operating theatre.

It was always difficult for medical officers to decide which cases should be operated on at the Main Dressing Station and which should wait until the Casualty Clearing Station was reached. Major surgery was best dealt with at the Casualty Clearing Station as it had better surroundings and equipment for that purpose, and the stability that allowed serious cases, such as abdominals, to be held till they were fit to travel to the General Hospitals. Special conditions arose, however, such as existed at the battle of **Tebaga Gap**, which made it impossible to evacuate the wounded in time for surgical attention in rear units. Under such conditions major surgery was done at the Main Dressing Station, and extra surgical teams were provided so that all the work could be carried out efficiently.

At other times the work was shared by the two units, both working together to allow the maximum amount to be done in the shortest time. Priorities of operation for different types of wounds were laid down as experience dictated. At the time of the battles to break through to the plains of Northern Italy, first priority was given to cases of serious bleeding, mangled limbs, large muscle and open chest wounds. During

these battles wounded were operated on at the Main Dressing Station, at the Casualty Clearing Station, at the special British head, eye, and maxillofacial hospital, and at our General Hospital at **Senigallia**, while some were flown to **Bari** to have their first operations performed at our hospital there. The Main Dressing Station provided resuscitation for the serious cases, giving blood transfusions if necessary, before evacuating them to the Casualty Clearing Station.

The evacuation centre cared for a spaced and steady procession of wounded. Some were drowsy with morphia, others relaxed with the heartening knowledge that they were within sheltering walls after a trying ordeal and the discomfort of travelling. Some came startled and alarmed out of the deep fogginess of anaesthesia, others answered questions obediently and from mere habit, as though they had found something more interesting to hold their attention and had replied out of politeness. This population was transitory, patients being sent on to the Casualty Clearing Station as soon as they were fit to travel.



THE EVACUATION CENTRE AT 4 MDS, FAENZA

THE EVACUATION CENTRE AT 4 MDS, FAENZA

After a period as battle MDS the unit would be tired—sleep was disturbed by the internal noises of the dressing station at work or by the external noises of war; and there was, too, the steady drain of energy from long and intense concentration and the persistent call for quick

and precise work.

But the unit preferred to be battle MDS rather than sick MDS or in reserve. The life was more exacting and more urgent. Constant thought and ceaseless energy saved life and limb for the wounded: the work left a sense of satisfaction and a keen appreciation that it was a task in which any man might take pride.

‘I was admitted to 1 NZ Mobile Casualty Clearing Station at [Forli](#). When I was carefully examined at seven o’clock in the evening it was found that the femoral artery had been severed. The sack of the calf of my leg was opened widely but was bleeding only a little. I was operated on and put to bed with my leg in an iron frame, and 15,000 units of penicillin were injected every three hours from nine o’clock on the night of 20 December to nine o’clock in the morning of 26 December. Also, injections for protection against gas-gangrene poisoning were given six-hourly from midnight on 20 December to six o’clock on 23 December.

‘In spite of all this attention my leg began to get discoloured by 23 December and I had lost all feeling below the knee. The medical officer told me my leg would have to be amputated or else it would most likely endanger my life. At eight o’clock that evening I went into the operating theatre and was put under an anaesthetic. Then my leg was amputated through the lower third of my left thigh. On Christmas Eve I had another transfusion of two pints of blood. For several days I could feel the heat and cold in my missing leg just as plainly as if it were still there, and that sensation wore off only after two or three weeks.’



THE ENTRANCE TO 1 NZ MOBILE CCS, FORLI

THE ENTRANCE TO 1 NZ MOBILE CCS, FORLI

Casualty Clearing Station

In Forli the Casualty Clearing Station was established in a former school building where conditions allowed more than the usual comfort. Here elaborate surgical treatment was carried out as near to the forward areas as was practicable for tactical reasons (usually within 12 to 15 miles), and here, too, was provided the necessary post-operative nursing until the patient was fit to be sent farther along the route of evacuation to a General Hospital. The aim was always to reduce the time-lag between the wounding of a soldier and his first surgical operation. On occasions wounded were sent on to a General Hospital from the Casualty Clearing Station by air.

The Casualty Clearing Station was usually a tented hospital, specially equipped and staffed as a mobile unit. Mobility was of prime importance as the unit had to be ready to move to a fresh site at short notice, or it might have to set up in an open field. It was equipped to hold 300 patients, of whom about one-third could be nursed on beds and the remainder on stretchers. During a battle a Casualty Clearing Station might handle from 200 to 500 patients in 24 hours, with a high proportion of urgent major surgical operations. In active periods the staff was usually supplemented by Field Surgical units, a Field Transfusion unit with its blood bank, and sometimes by a British Mobile Laboratory as well.

As in the Main Dressing Station, the standard practice was to set up the tented wards along a semi-circular road running from the entrance to the exit of the field. First came the reception tent, then the pre-operation ward, with an X-ray tent attached, followed by two to four tented operating theatres and finally some seven or eight tented wards. Each of these wards held 25 patients on beds, or 35 on stretchers. Conveniently arranged about this group were the special departments, medical stores and dispensary, ordnance stores, cookhouses, and mobile lighting sets for the theatres and wards. It was possible to establish the Casualty Clearing Station, pitch tents, and equip wards and theatres

ready to function, within six hours from the time of arrival on the site.

During an action the ambulances would arrive from the Main Dressing Station in a steady stream, one moving in to take the place of another as it pulled out, sometimes two unloading at once. Stretcher-bearers brought the patients into the reception tent. One, perhaps, had his eyes and head bandaged. Another might be very still, with the envelope tied to his battle dress clearly marked 'Abdominal'; he would be passed on immediately to the resuscitation and pre-operation ward. Here his stretcher was placed on trestles. * He was stripped of his clothing, bloodstained and mud-soiled as it was, washed and put into pyjamas. The extent of his injury was carefully estimated, and he was listed in order of priority for operation. In the meantime, the transfusion officer injected warmed blood so that the patient would be in the best condition to stand the operation.

When a patient was taken into one of the operating theatres the anaesthetist gave him an injection of pentothal in the inner vein of the elbow, followed if necessary by an inhalation anaesthetic. The surgeon would call for instruments and begin the operation. His assistant tried to anticipate his wishes, while orderlies held limbs, attended to the steriliser, obtained swabs or anything else demanded by the surgeon. When the excision of the wound was completed it was treated with penicillin and one of the sulphonamide drugs. Damaged limbs were usually encased in plaster and, the operation completed, the patient was carried to one of the tented wards. Here he came under the care of a nursing sister and six orderlies.

The Casualty Clearing Station had on its staff eight nursing sisters of the New Zealand Army Nursing Service who lived and moved with the unit. They provided the high standard of nursing necessary in serious post-operative cases, especially with abdominal wounds. Their presence alone so soon after a soldier had been wounded had a seemingly magical influence on his recovery.

As a surgical centre in the form of a well-found hospital unit within

a short distance of the fighting line, the Casualty Clearing Station was a vital link in the chain of medical services. The work of the surgeons was greatly helped by blood transfusion and by two great life-saving discoveries, the sulphonamide drugs and penicillin, which gave the wounded soldier of the Second World War a much better chance of survival than in the First World War. Speed in evacuation, care in handling, constant supervision and correct treatment during the first few fateful hours from the time a soldier was wounded until he was operated on at the Casualty Clearing Station meant, in many cases, the difference between life and death, or between complete recovery and chronic invalidism.

* * *

‘On Boxing Day I was on the road again—this time in an ambulance of the NZ **Motor Ambulance Convoy** section—to **1 NZ General Hospital** on the sea-coast at **Senigallia**, seventy miles away. The atmosphere in the General Hospital was a great help to morale and I felt 100 per cent better as soon as I was between the sheets. However, I had no sooner settled down than a medical officer came and after examination prescribed another two bottles of blood for me. I did not like having the blood transfusion but I always felt much better and stronger afterwards.

‘December the 28th saw me back in the operating theatre again, and this time my leg was stitched up and two rubber tubes were inserted in my stump. I then started another course of penicillin injections, which were no doubt the direct cause of my stump healing so quickly, but I was not sorry when the sister said that the course was finished.

‘Here I must put in a good word for the nursing sisters I found in the New Zealand hospitals. They were an excellent group and I always had a feeling of safety and security when they were around. The treatment and attention I received at 1 NZ General Hospital was thorough and good all the time, and no praise is high enough for the nursing staffs—both sisters and voluntary aids.’

*** Formerly a kerosene heater was placed under the stretchers and blankets were draped round the trestles, but the application of heat as a means of resuscitation was later discarded, the room being heated sufficiently to prevent undue chilling but no direct heat being applied to the patient.**

General Hospital

At Senigallia 1 NZ General Hospital was established in what had been an Italian children's health camp; up till a few months previously it had been used as a German military hospital. The buildings, though insufficient for a hospital, enabled many of the amenities of a large civilian hospital to be supplied. Water and electricity were laid on, amenities which had not always been available in the hospitals in Egypt.

The central building had lent itself to conversion to the needs of the administrative, laboratory, X-ray and other departments. It also provided some of the wards. A walk beneath a vine-covered pergola ended at a two-storeyed building used as the surgical block. This block showed more window than wall on all sides and was admirably suited for a hospital building. All other accommodation was provided by tents. New Zealand engineers had worked to provide access roads and other conveniences, while Italian labour had been employed on inside alterations.

The main highway passed the entrance to the hospital, and there was the continual noise of transport moving up to the front line and the droning of aircraft overhead. During the last few weeks of summer and in the early autumn, the staff had enjoyed living in tents by the sea, but when the sea breezes turned to boisterous gales, and heavy rain saturated the ground underfoot, and snow a week before Christmas left its aftermath of slush, it was another story. Nissen huts were being erected all over the hospital area to replace tents as wards and living quarters.

From the date it opened on this site, early in September 1944, the hospital had been busy with an inrush of patients. The staff always had its unremitting round of duties. To be a good orderly a man needed to be a jack-of-all-trades. For ten hours a day he dealt with recalcitrant primus stoves and kerosene heaters; he acted as a transport mule in the hospital area, carried large bundles of soiled clothing to the linen store, collected the lotions from the dispensary or medical store, brought rations of soap, kerosene, and methylated spirits from the ordnance

store, went to the main kitchen for morning and afternoon tea for the patients, carried stretcher patients to operating theatre or X-ray department, and was always at the beck and call of sisters and patients. In between times he managed to obtain on the side many needful extras for the wards.

Voluntary aids now attended to many duties which had fallen to the orderly in pre-1942 days. The nurses made beds, took temperatures, washed patients, worked in the operating theatre and special-diet kitchens, delivered meals, swept and cleaned wards, and helped in the ward kitchens.

Sisters were in charge of the wards of 80 to 100 beds, carrying out professional nursing duties as in civilian life. They co-operated with the medical officers in the treatment of patients, keeping a watchful eye on each man's progress, maintaining discipline, but always trying to keep their charges contented and comfortable.

When the **First Echelon** went overseas in January 1940, eighteen sisters of the New Zealand **Army Nursing Service** sailed with it—a small band of women in a trim uniform of grey and scarlet. On the staffs of the New Zealand military General Hospitals in the **Middle East** and the **Pacific** were many more sisters. They, with their reinforcements, brought the total who served overseas to 602, all of them volunteers. By May 1940 more than 1200 nurses from New Zealand hospitals had offered themselves for overseas service.

A sister's service was seldom dramatic or spectacular. Hers was the life of the hospital unit in which she served, sharing its difficulties and problems, its joys and honours. The standard of treatment and service given to each patient was equal to that of any modern hospital in New Zealand, but the difficulties overcome could be known only by those who had worked long hours to establish and maintain that standard.

No sister in a civilian ward, filled with all modern appliances for the patients' well-being, ever viewed her surroundings with more pride than

did a sister of the New Zealand Army Nursing Service who, with the help of her ward staff and walking patients, fashioned furniture from wooden boxes, discarded tins, and other waste material. Many times a sister's thoughts, as she stoked a copper fire or tinkered with a temperamental primus that at a critical moment refused to do anything but gush a sooty smoke-screen, must have turned to the hospital she had left, where the gleaming faucets at a touch would pour forth gallons of boiling water and where the behaviour of the steam sterilisers never gave a moment's worry. Nor, as she endeavoured to work in a duty room that also served as the doctor's office, dispensary, linen room, and perhaps sterilising room as well, could she be blamed if at times she thought with longing of the hospital at home, where there was a room and a place for everything. No, in a military hospital it was no press-button life, but for the sisters who watched their units become efficient hospitals, it was a life that had its rewards.

The medical officers were qualified doctors; many were recognised experts in specialised branches of medicine and surgery. Upon them rested the responsibility for the conduct of the hospital, and their science and skill paved the way for the recovery of so many men to full health and strength. The General Hospitals admitted an annual total of sick and wounded equal to the numerical strength of the 2nd NZEF. The greater proportion were sick, but during the war there were over 16,000 wounded and an almost equal number accidentally injured—all making demands on the surgeons. Throughout the war there was a steady advance in the technique of surgical treatment and the use of drugs, and a surgeon had always to keep abreast of the latest curative developments and apply them as occasion arose.

* * *

'On 7 January 1945 some of us moved out of **1 NZ General Hospital** on our way to **3 NZ General Hospital**, 300 miles farther down the Adriatic coast at **Bari**. We travelled by a British hospital ship, staffed by English men and women of the RAMC. * We were treated very well by the Tommies during our short trip with them.

‘ Bari was reached next morning, and we travelled the short distance to 3 NZ General Hospital by ambulance. We got into bed just in time for lunch. By this time my appetite was returning. This hospital was one of a group situated in what had been planned as an Italian Polyclinic. The medical treatment was first-class as expected. Facilities were as good as those in any civilian hospital. Just a few days before my arrival the hospital had admitted its 40,000th patient. I was one of 900 patients there.’

The British, Indian, South African, and New Zealand hospitals were accommodated in a very extensive group of buildings at Bari, designed as a medical school and hospital centre for the whole of Southern Italy. In November 1943, 3 NZ General Hospital took over part of one block from a British Casualty Clearing Station. This was ready for use, but the main block allotted to the New Zealanders was only a framework with unfinished floors and walls, and with very few glazed windows. Many of the casements were bricked up and there were no fittings for water and sanitation. Demobilised and undisciplined Italian troops were in possession and the building was in a filthy state. A transformation into a well-equipped hospital provided with all the essentials of modern cleanliness and sanitation was effected.

Third NZ General Hospital had come from Tripoli, where it had been a tented hospital clustered round an old fort. There, fittings from a sunken hospital ship in the harbour had provided extra equipment: the capacity of New Zealanders to improvise and adapt had produced first-class hospitals in all situations.

*** * ***

‘On 15 January I tried to use crutches but my good leg was too weak to hold me. I was graded and placed on the list of invalids for return to New Zealand.

‘We embarked at Taranto on 20 January 1945 on the NZ Hospital

Ship *Maunganui* and from then onwards all was a pleasure. The treatment, food, and general atmosphere of the *Maunganui* were excellent and I will always have pleasant memories of the contacts I have experienced with members of the New Zealand Medical Services.'

* Royal Army Medical Corps

Hospital Ship

Amongst the thousands of ships which entered New Zealand ports during the Second World War, there were a few that did not have the dull grey camouflage of war. Their bright white paintwork was relieved by a broad green band girdling the hull; on their sides were two or three large red crosses and the flag of the International Red Cross—a red cross on a white background—flew at the masthead. These were the hospital ships. They were completely fitted with all the equipment necessary today for the treatment of sick and wounded. Cabin walls and fittings were torn out to make large airy wards in which rows of neat white beds were screwed to the decks or suspended to counter the roll of the ship. Other sections of the ship, which might have been music rooms, smoke rooms, or lounges, were also converted to the needs of the sick and wounded.

A central feature was the operating theatre. On its walls were glass cupboards containing shelves of surgical instruments. In other cabins were an X-ray department, a laboratory, a dispensary, a dentist's surgery, and a massage department. None of these lacked anything, either in supplies or fittings. A hospital ship must be self-sufficient.

The *Maunganui*, a troopship of the First World War and a passenger liner between the wars, was converted to a hospital ship at the beginning of 1941. She was a fully-equipped General Hospital afloat, with accommodation for 365 patients. The operating block was the object of special pride: it had been so well designed and equipped in **Wellington** that it was the envy of many British hospital ships.

There was no mistaking the pleasure of the patients returning to New Zealand when they first caught sight of the gleaming white side of the hospital ship at the port of embarkation. There were still pleasant surprises in store for them. In the wards the beds were as good as they looked and the walls were a restful green and cream.

The first meal on board was a revelation to the home-coming men.

After an interval of one, two, three and even more years they tasted excellently cooked New Zealand food—the best the Dominion could produce. It had been kept in perfect condition in the ship's freezing chambers and included plenty of green vegetables and fruit and many delicacies—lamb, chicken, even oysters and whitebait. No wonder that convalescence was rapid on the homeward voyage.

* * *

‘There was great excitement when we sighted the New Zealand coast in the vicinity of **Cape Farewell** on the afternoon of 27 February 1945 and still greater excitement when we sailed up the **Wellington** harbour next morning and berthed at Aotea Quay. Patients lined the ship's rails, and those whose homes were near **Wellington** picked out members of their families in the crowd pressing against the barriers on the wharf and waved and shouted. Soon we disembarked—many who had come on board as stretcher patients were able to walk down the gangway. What a thrill it was to set foot on New Zealand soil again (even if it was only one foot in my case) and know that we would all soon be checked through the Casualty Clearing Hospital on the wharf, and then be taken home by train in special hospital carriages. The chain of medical services had brought some of us right from the front line in Northern Italy to our own homes.’

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE DIARY used in this account is that of Cpl A. A. Swanston, of 26 NZ Battalion. For the description of medical units the author relied on miscellaneous material in the records of the Medical History Section, War History Branch. The map and diagram are by L. D. McCormick, and the photographs come from many collections, which are stated where they are known:

K. G. Killoh Cover

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THE AUTHOR, J. B. McKinney, who graduated at Victoria University College as MA in History in 1939, served in the New Zealand Medical Corps in the Middle East and Italy from 1941 to 1945, and is at present on the staff of the Medical History Section of the War History Branch.

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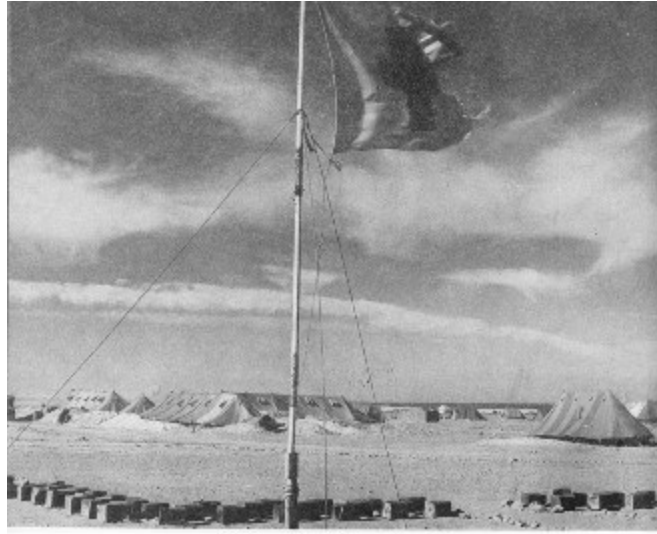
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[FRONTISPIECE]



2 NZ General Hospital, Gerawla, Western Desert

2 NZ General Hospital, *Gerawla, Western Desert*

COVER PHOTOGRAPH A New Zealand field ambulance

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[TITLE PAGE]

WOUNDED IN BATTLE

J. B. McKINNEY

WAR HISTORY BRANCH

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND

1950

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[EDITORPAGE]

IT IS THE INTENTION *of this series to present aspects of New Zealand's part in the Second World War which will not receive detailed treatment in the campaign volumes and which are considered either worthy of special notice or typical of many phases of our war experience. The series is illustrated with material which would otherwise seldom see publication.*

H. K. KIPPENBERGER

Major-General EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

NEW ZEALAND WAR HISTORIES

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

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EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

DIARY OF A CORPORAL IN 26 NZ BATTALION:

Diary of a Corporal in 26 NZ Battalion:

ON the night of 19 December 1944 at 9 o'clock, 6 NZ Infantry Brigade and 43 Gurkha Infantry Brigade launched an attack under a heavy barrage and threw the enemy back to the line of the Senio River, Northern Italy. Much ground was taken after heavy fighting and over 200 prisoners were captured at a cost to 2 NZ Division of about 20 killed and 80 wounded.

War Diary of Director of **Medical Services**, 2nd NZEF, 20 December 1944

'My section's job on the night of 19-20 December was to cover a party of sappers who were minesweeping a road which ran along the axis of 6 Infantry Brigade's advance. Just after midnight, I went ahead with the officer in charge of the sweepers to inspect the road and we found two demolitions which completely blocked it.

'It was while the two of us were between the demolitions that the enemy began to cover the road with mortar and gun fire. The officer and I dived into a deep ditch and lay there waiting for the shelling to finish. I was thinking about getting up to move on when I experienced a sensation in my legs not unlike being hit on both heels with sledgehammers.

'I had an idea I had been hit, but was not sure until I felt down with my hand and found my battle-dress trousers very warm and sticky from the blood that was oozing out. I called to the officer to let him know that I had been hit and tried to get out of my equipment to make it easier to get at the first field dressing in my pocket.

'My officer had reached me by then. He had a very hard job getting at the wound for a start, not having a pocket-knife and being forced to lie on his stomach to avoid being hit also. At last he managed to rip the leg of my trousers and bandaged my first field dressing over the wound. My leg was just like a log of wood by then and I had no control over it at all. The officer then left me to go back and get someone to carry me out

for medical attention. Instead of feeling scared, as I and most others used to feel when making an attack, I then felt quite happy and lay flat out in the wet ditch and went to sleep. The two soldiers who came for me did not have a stretcher and started to carry me sitting on their clasped hands. I fainted almost straight away and do not know how I reached the floor of the house where I awoke. The thing that I remember most vividly was the intense cold. My leg was aching painfully and I was very thirsty. A regimental stretcher-bearer from 25 NZ Battalion came into the house and he gave me an injection of morphia. The dose was not powerful enough to send me to sleep and did not seem to lessen the pain in my leg a great deal.

‘Communication had somehow been made with the Battalion RAP* and a Bren-gun carrier was promised as soon as it could get through to take me back to a medical officer. A hold-up had been caused by a road demolition which a bulldozer had to fill in before any motor traffic could get through. All the fields on either side of the roads were heavily sown with anti-personnel mines, thus making it very risky for stretcher-bearers to travel across country.

‘The carrier came at last and I was put on board. All I remember of that journey was the bumping, the cold, and the moaning of a fellow-patient. I awoke once more when the carrier stopped and found we were outside our Battalion RAP. Here I waited my turn to be treated.’



RAP CARRIER AT FAENZA

RAP CARRIER AT FAENZA

*** Regimental Aid Post**

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

STRETCHER-BEARERS

Stretcher-Bearers

Throughout the war the regimental stretcher-bearers, by the promptness with which they brought the wounded back to medical aid, were able to save many lives. Officially called battalion medical orderlies, they were infantrymen trained in battle first aid, who went into the attack carrying only a stretcher and a bag of surgical dressings. They were not members of the Medical Corps, but they wore **Red Cross** brassards and were entitled to protection under the Geneva Convention. The subsequent success of the treatment of wounded in medical units largely depended on their efficiency. They had heavy casualties, for their duties were performed under fire. On one occasion, for instance, a stretcher-bearer waded the ice-cold Rapido River at **Cassino** and carried back across it a wounded man—all this under sniper as well as mortar and artillery fire.

Bren-gun carriers and jeeps, adapted for stretcher-carrying, were used where possible in the later stages of the war to bring patients back to the Regimental Aid Post. The jeeps were much preferred by the regimental medical officers. These vehicles, if possible, went as far forward as infantry company headquarters, to which point the patients were brought by stretcher-bearers. This innovation, by shortening the distance a patient had to be carried by hand, was an important advance. In the forward areas the driver of the jeep had to face shelling and mortaring of roads and crossroads; often fire might be called down by the dust raised by his jeep.

‘The RAP had been established in a deserted house and I was very pleased to see the fire burning in the grate. The medical officer examined me and my wounds were dressed. It was found that my left thigh was perforated, involving the femoral artery, and also a wound below the knee was discovered. My thirst was terrific and I was overjoyed when the medical officer gave me a hot drink of cocoa. I was marked down as seriously ill, given a dose of morphia and placed on a jeep, which had been converted to carry stretchers, and sent on the next

stage of my journey.'

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

REGIMENTAL AID POST

Regimental Aid Post

In a fixed position, as was common in Italy, the Regimental Aid Post was often in a partly demolished house. During a battle the medical work at the aid post was carried on under the din of gunfire and exploding shells; the earth shook under the continued shock of explosions.

The chain of medical services really began at the Regimental Aid Post where the medical officer was the advanced representative of the Medical Corps. He was responsible for giving the essentials of first aid treatment to the wounded so that they could be sent on as quickly and as comfortably as possible. To the soldier there was some comfort and reassurance in having a qualified doctor in attendance in the line itself, and this knowledge had its effect on a man's morale before and during an action.

Resuscitation measures were limited to wrapping the patient in blankets, warming him with hot water bottles and hot drinks. Transfusions of whole blood were available only in exceptional circumstances, but blood plasma and serum, which could be kept without refrigeration, were often made up and used for transfusions even at the Regimental Aid Post. * Rapid transfer to the Advanced Dressing Station was always the aim.

*** * ***

'The jeep moved along rough roads on its journey from the RAP to the Advanced Dressing Station and every bump was agony. We safely reached 6 NZ ADS, in a house on the outskirts of Faenza, at half past nine in the morning. I was examined again, given five sulphanilamide tablets, and evacuated to 4 NZ MDS, which had opened in Faenza following the capture of that town on 16 December. The conveyance for that stage of the journey was a motor ambulance car, which was much more comfortable than the Bren carrier and the jeep.'

* Blood is a mixture of a fluid called plasma and millions of tiny red blood cells. When a man is wounded he loses whole blood from the injured vessels and also plasma seeps into the damaged tissues. The body compensates for this by contracting the blood vessels and accelerating the rate of flow by more rapid heart action, and bleeding is stopped by clotting. The loss of blood both produces and accentuates shock.

Blood transfusion is the mainstay of resuscitation. Whole blood is the most useful as it supplies all wants. A transfusion of plasma, which can be preserved in sealed bottles, is sufficient when bleeding is less marked. Saline and glucose solutions are of great use in replacing fluid in patients suffering from loss of fluid alone. Refrigeration is required for the preservation of whole blood but not for plasma, and as plasma can also be dried it is very easily transported.

Many hundreds of our wounded owe their lives to the thousands of bottles of blood, plasma, and glucose-saline that were sent to the forward medical units. A wounded man can lose as much as six or seven pints of blood and still be saved providing his injuries are not overwhelming.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

ADVANCED DRESSING STATION

Advanced Dressing Station

The wounded, attended in transit by a medical orderly, were delivered at the Advanced Dressing Station by New Zealand Army Service Corps drivers. Ambulance cars were the usual means of transport. They gave a patient a smoother journey and a greater feeling of security than an open jeep. Valuable assistance to the Field Ambulances' own cars was often provided by drivers and vehicles of the **American Field Service**. This volunteer unit was serving in the **Middle East** before the **United States** entered the war, and it was associated with the New Zealand Division from the fateful days in the desert in 1942, the drivers cheerfully accepting the risks of the forward areas and giving tireless and outstanding service.

The Advanced Dressing Station, at which there were normally three medical officers and sixty men from the Field Ambulance, was usually not far from the line. The duties of the staff were to receive battle casualties from the Regimental Aid Posts, adjust wound dressings, immobilise fractures with splinting, relieve pain and shock and give blood transfusions to the more seriously wounded. Even the worst cases responded magnificently to the blood transfusions. Thus resuscitated, the wounded were made comfortable for the journey to the Main Dressing Station. No operative treatment was done at the Advanced Dressing Station except for the control of serious bleeding and the removal of an almost severed limb. As at the Regimental Aid Post, there was a constant urge to get the casualty to the operating centre with the utmost speed consistent with safety.

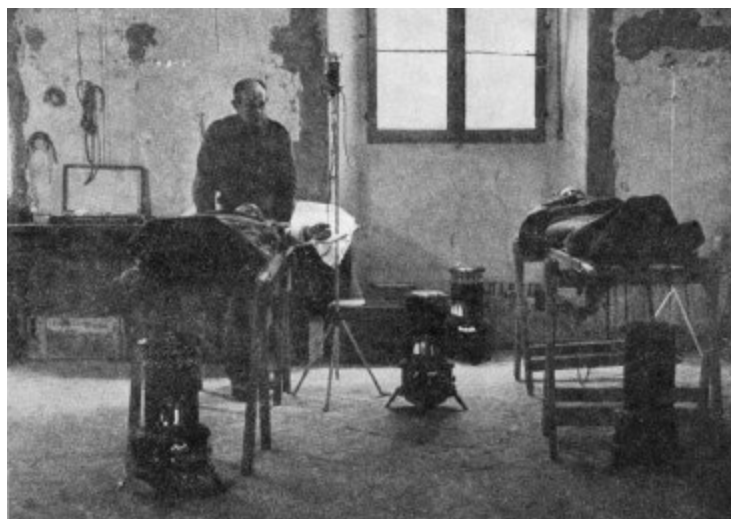
The company forming the Advanced Dressing Station had the mobility of the nomads of the desert. Its duties were to keep up with the brigade as it advanced, to be ready to set up a miniature emergency hospital to admit wounded at any time, and to undertake urgent treatment, being careful always to limit the surgical nature of its work so as to preserve the unit's mobility. If called upon to move again, it was able to pack up and be on the move in half an hour. If it still held

patients it might be necessary to leave a detachment to care for them until they were cleared to the Main Dressing Station. Mobility was an essential feature of the desert campaigns, especially when the Division engaged in its famous 'left hooks', and was a highlight of the final advance in **Italy** from the **Senio River** to **Trieste**.

The company adapted itself to the topography of the country as well as to the needs of the battle in setting up its dressing station. In Greece it had first used dugouts burrowed into the hillside and concealed under canvas and cut scrub. Vehicles were parked under natural cover some distance away. Red Crosses were not usually displayed by the medical units at this stage. When it was established that the enemy respected the Geneva Convention, prominent Red Crosses were painted on tents and vehicles. An Advanced Dressing Station was set up on Mount **Olympus**, and in the withdrawal the wounded were treated under the leafy camouflage of olive trees. Again, in **Crete**, the olive trees gave protection from the unchallenged and ever-active **Luftwaffe**.

In the **Western Desert**, tarpaulins fixed over and around three-ton trucks formed the reception and evacuation wards of the Advanced Dressing Station. The Italian terrain in the winter presented difficulties and caused privations. At the **Sangro** one Advanced Dressing Station was set up among thickets of bamboo, the men digging themselves and their bivouac tents into the muddy banks of a tributary of the river, trying to shelter from the frequent heavy rainstorms which made the days dismal and the nights cold. In the slow-moving war in **Italy** a night barrage would throw the tarpaulin shelters and vehicles of the Advanced Dressing Station into a flickering silhouette, and overhead the air would throb with the roar of outgoing shells. Inside the shelters (or in one of the war-battered buildings which became almost indispensable in the winter of 1944 in Northern **Italy**) the sterile instruments were laid out ready and the orderlies on duty waited the first casualties from the impending attack. As the Regimental Aid Posts sent in the wounded a rush might develop; at times the wounded would be cold and exhausted, urgently needing warmth and blood transfusions to prepare them for the

next stage of their journey—on to the Main Dressing Station.



THE RESUSCITATION DEPARTMENT AT 4 MDS, FAENZA

THE RESUSCITATION DEPARTMENT AT 4 MDS, FAENZA

‘The distance to the MDS was short and we reached it at ten o’clock. It was in a commercial bank building in **Faenza. Here I was examined once more. My pulse registered 140 and I was placed in the resuscitation department, where I was given a blood plasma transfusion with morphia included in the drip feed. The transfusion brought my pulse down to 110 and I was considered fit for further evacuation, this time to the Casualty Clearing Station. The plasma bottle was fitted on the side of the stretcher and the transfusion continued while I was travelling.’**



MAP OF ROUTE OF EVACUATION

MAP OF ROUTE OF EVACUATION

STRETCHER-BEARERS

AT MINQAR QAIM



AT MINQAR QAIM

TAKING MEDICAL SUPPLIES ACROSS
THE LAMONE RIVER, FAENZA



TAKING MEDICAL SUPPLIES ACROSS THE LAMONE RIVER, FAENZA



RAP Carrier, near the Senio

RAP Carrier, near the *Senio*



RAP Jeep,
from the Sangro

RAP Jeep, from the *Sangro*

5 NZ Field Regiment
Aid Post, Orsogna



5 NZ Field Regiment Aid Post, *Orsogna*

Labelling wounded men's packs, Rimini



Labelling wounded men's packs, *Rimini*

Blood transfusion in Ambulance Car



Blood transfusion in Ambulance Car

Advanced Dressing Stations



4 NZ FIELD AMBULANCE NEAR
PALEONELLENE, Greece
'Dugouts burrowed into the hillside and concealed
under canvas and cut scrub'

4 NZ FIELD AMBULANCE NEAR PALEONELLENE, Greece

'Dugouts burrowed into the hillside and concealed under canvas and cut scrub'



GERMAN PARATROOPS TREATED BY NEW
ZEALANDERS, Crete
'The olive trees gave protection from the unchallenged
and ever-active Luftwaffe'

GERMAN PARATROOPS TREATED BY NEW ZEALANDERS, Crete

'The olive trees gave protection from the unchallenged and ever-active Luftwaffe'

BRITISH AND ENEMY WOUNDED
Libya



BRITISH AND ENEMY WOUNDED
Libya



OFF THE RAILWAY ROUTE NEAR MOUNT PORCHIA, *Cassino*

OFF THE RAILWAY ROUTE NEAR MOUNT PORCHIA, *Cassino*

At Four Main Dressing Stations



4 NZ FIELD AMBULANCE AT KATERINE, *Greece*
The reception tent is to the right of the ambulance

4 NZ FIELD AMBULANCE AT KATERINE, *Greece*
The reception tent is to the right of the ambulance

MDS IN A WADI, near *Sidi Rezegh*
This station was captured and remained in enemy hands for eight days



MDS IN A WADI, near *Sidi Rezegh*
This station was captured and remained in enemy hands for eight days



A FIELD SURGERY—two vans backed together, *Alamein*

A FIELD SURGERY—two vans backed together, *Alamein*

A FIELD OPERATING THEATRE
—a surgical team applies a Thomas splint, *Cassino*



A FIELD OPERATING THEATRE

—a surgical team applies a Thomas splint, *Cassino*



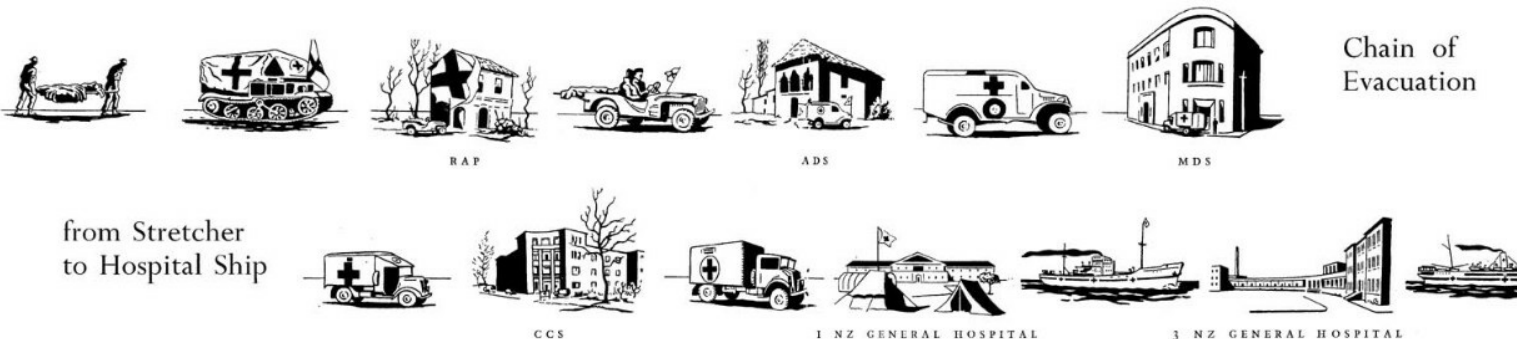
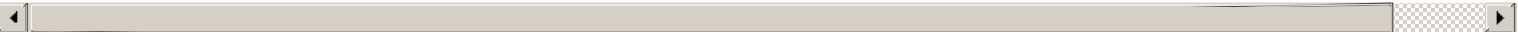
6 NZ FIELD AMBULANCE, *Greece*
Result of enemy aircraft action

6 NZ FIELD AMBULANCE, *Greece*
Result of enemy aircraft action



(Above and right) MDS ON SIDI REZEGH
after it had been taken over by the Germans

(Above and right) MDS ON SIDI REZEGH after it had been taken over by the Germans



Chain of Evacuation from Stretcher to Hospital Ship





FIELD OPERATING
THEATRE, *Alamein*

FIELD OPERATING THEATRE, *Alamein*



NEW ZEALAND NURSING SISTERS AT A CCS, *Cyrenaica*

NEW ZEALAND NURSING SISTERS AT A CCS, *Cyrenaica*

UNLOADING AN
AMBULANCE CAR
AT 3 NZ GENERAL
HOSPITAL, *Bari*



UNLOADING AN AMBULANCE CAR AT 3 NZ GENERAL HOSPITAL, *Bari*

Casualty Clearing Stations



NEW ZEALAND CCS AT TOBRUK, DECEMBER 1942

NEW ZEALAND CCS AT TOBRUK, DECEMBER 1942



FROM AMBULANCE
CAR TO AIR AM-
BULANCE ON A
TUNISIAN AIRFIELD

FROM AMBULANCE CAR TO AIR AMBULANCE ON A TUNISIAN AIRFIELD

A NEW ZEALAND
NURSING SISTER



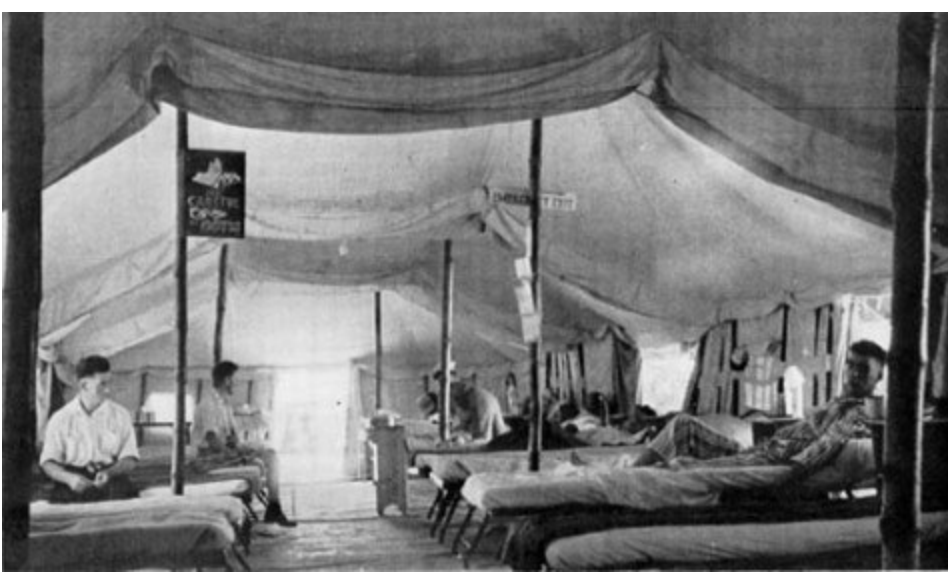
A NEW ZEALAND NURSING SISTER

AN AERIAL VIEW OF
1 NZ MOBILE CCS on a
bypass of the main
road, near *Cassino*.
The theatres and
administration tents
are on the left by the
road, and the wards
on the right.



AN AERIAL VIEW OF 1 NZ MOBILE CCS on a bypass of the main road, near *Cassino*. The theatres and administration tents are on the left by the road, and the wards on the right

GENERAL HOSPITALS



A WARD OF 3 NZ GENERAL
HOSPITAL
Suani Ben Adem, Tripoli

A WARD OF 3 NZ GENERAL HOSPITAL
Suani Ben Adem, Tripoli



VOLUNTARY AIDS, 3 NZ
GENERAL HOSPITAL, *Bari*

VOLUNTARY AIDS, 3 NZ GENERAL HOSPITAL, *Bari*



A SISTER, 2 NZ GENERAL HOSPITAL, *Caserta*

A SISTER, 2 NZ GENERAL HOSPITAL, *Caserta*



A MASSEUSE, *Bari*

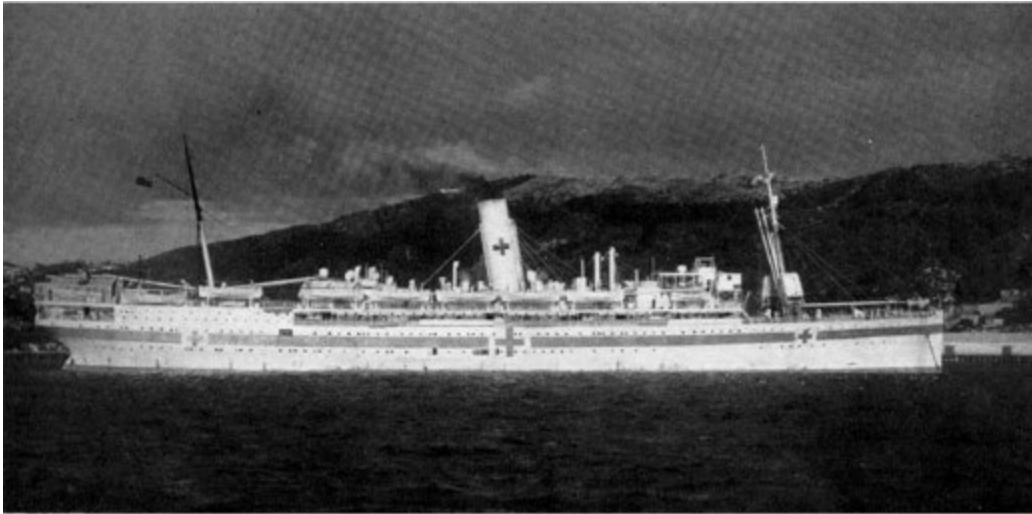
A MASSEUSE, *Bari*



A MEDICAL OFFICER ON HIS ROUNDS, *Bari*

A MEDICAL OFFICER ON HIS ROUNDS, *Bari*

HOSPITAL SHIP *MAUNGANUI*



THE *MAUNGANUI* IN WELLINGTON HARBOUR

THE *MAUNGANUI* IN WELLINGTON HARBOUR



ON THE BOAT DECK

ON THE BOAT DECK

ORDERLIES CARRYING NEW ZEALAND WOUNDED TO THE MAUNGANUI AT PORT TEWFIK after the Second Libyan campaign



ORDERLIES CARRYING NEW ZEALAND WOUNDED TO THE MAUNGANUI AT PORT TEWFIK after the Second Libyan campaign

IN A WARD OF THE MAUNGANUI



IN A WARD OF THE MAUNGANUI



Back in New Zealand



EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

MAIN DRESSING STATION

Main Dressing Station

In Italy the Main Dressing Station for battle casualties (battle MDS) was invariably situated near a road seething with traffic. The air of bustle on the road pervaded the dressing station too, with its staff of at least six medical officers and up to 200 men, including the **Army Service Corps** drivers and the medical orderlies. Down this road, fighting against the almost ceaseless stream of traffic pressing towards the forward areas, came the ambulance cars.

Routes to the Main Dressing Station were, in some cases, raw, newly-formed roads hurriedly constructed by the Engineers, or else winding Italian roads that seemed more concerned with strangling their hills, rata-like, than providing a way for traffic. It was not unusual for ambulance cars to arrive at the Main Dressing Station in winter with their bodywork streaked and plastered with clay from scraping along the inner bank, either in squeezing past other vehicles on the narrow stretches or through skidding down into the ditch at the side of the road. Over the long, dependable summer months, the Main Dressing Station could be placed on any type of road, its location being governed only by the evacuation routes.

The road alongside the Main Dressing Station reverberated with the noise of traffic; sometimes it was the clattering of whirling chains on road or mudguard, sometimes the hammering roar of passing squadrons of tanks and the rumble of tank-transporters. In addition, the unit's lighting plant whirled for long hours with its slack, rattling roar.

At any hour of the day or night ambulances halted outside the reception centre. From them came the walking wounded and the stretcher cases. If it was dark, the stretcher-bearers moved with a studied shuffling between Ambulance and Reception, Reception and Resuscitation and Theatre, Theatre and Evacuation—searching out the ground with their feet.

Every so often there was lifted from an ambulance car a patient with

one arm lightly bound to a rigid arm-rest, a part-empty transfusion bottle in the frame clamped to the stretcher, with the red rubber giving-set running down to the needle taped in place in the bend of his elbow. Exposed bandages on walking patients showed patches of dried or damp blood; bandaged hands or arms were dirty and streaked with flakes of blood dried hard. Faces were grimy, with a heavy stubble of beard. A man moving among them, unbandaged and seemingly unhurt, would perhaps be an exhaustion case.

The wounded entered the reception centre with the air of understanding, patient waiting that wounded men always seemed to bring with them. In contrast, the staff of the reception centre worked with all speed to examine their new patients and classify them for treatment. All the more serious or badly shocked cases went to the unit's resuscitation centre with its heated room or tent. Later, some would be moved into the operating theatre.

It was always difficult for medical officers to decide which cases should be operated on at the Main Dressing Station and which should wait until the Casualty Clearing Station was reached. Major surgery was best dealt with at the Casualty Clearing Station as it had better surroundings and equipment for that purpose, and the stability that allowed serious cases, such as abdominals, to be held till they were fit to travel to the General Hospitals. Special conditions arose, however, such as existed at the battle of **Tebaga Gap**, which made it impossible to evacuate the wounded in time for surgical attention in rear units. Under such conditions major surgery was done at the Main Dressing Station, and extra surgical teams were provided so that all the work could be carried out efficiently.

At other times the work was shared by the two units, both working together to allow the maximum amount to be done in the shortest time. Priorities of operation for different types of wounds were laid down as experience dictated. At the time of the battles to break through to the plains of Northern Italy, first priority was given to cases of serious bleeding, mangled limbs, large muscle and open chest wounds. During

these battles wounded were operated on at the Main Dressing Station, at the Casualty Clearing Station, at the special British head, eye, and maxillofacial hospital, and at our General Hospital at **Senigallia**, while some were flown to **Bari** to have their first operations performed at our hospital there. The Main Dressing Station provided resuscitation for the serious cases, giving blood transfusions if necessary, before evacuating them to the Casualty Clearing Station.

The evacuation centre cared for a spaced and steady procession of wounded. Some were drowsy with morphia, others relaxed with the heartening knowledge that they were within sheltering walls after a trying ordeal and the discomfort of travelling. Some came startled and alarmed out of the deep fogginess of anaesthesia, others answered questions obediently and from mere habit, as though they had found something more interesting to hold their attention and had replied out of politeness. This population was transitory, patients being sent on to the Casualty Clearing Station as soon as they were fit to travel.



THE EVACUATION CENTRE AT 4 MDS, FAENZA

THE EVACUATION CENTRE AT 4 MDS, FAENZA

After a period as battle MDS the unit would be tired—sleep was disturbed by the internal noises of the dressing station at work or by the external noises of war; and there was, too, the steady drain of energy from long and intense concentration and the persistent call for quick

and precise work.

But the unit preferred to be battle MDS rather than sick MDS or in reserve. The life was more exacting and more urgent. Constant thought and ceaseless energy saved life and limb for the wounded: the work left a sense of satisfaction and a keen appreciation that it was a task in which any man might take pride.

‘I was admitted to 1 NZ Mobile Casualty Clearing Station at [Forli](#). When I was carefully examined at seven o’clock in the evening it was found that the femoral artery had been severed. The sack of the calf of my leg was opened widely but was bleeding only a little. I was operated on and put to bed with my leg in an iron frame, and 15,000 units of penicillin were injected every three hours from nine o’clock on the night of 20 December to nine o’clock in the morning of 26 December. Also, injections for protection against gas-gangrene poisoning were given six-hourly from midnight on 20 December to six o’clock on 23 December.

‘In spite of all this attention my leg began to get discoloured by 23 December and I had lost all feeling below the knee. The medical officer told me my leg would have to be amputated or else it would most likely endanger my life. At eight o’clock that evening I went into the operating theatre and was put under an anaesthetic. Then my leg was amputated through the lower third of my left thigh. On Christmas Eve I had another transfusion of two pints of blood. For several days I could feel the heat and cold in my missing leg just as plainly as if it were still there, and that sensation wore off only after two or three weeks.’



THE ENTRANCE TO 1 NZ MOBILE CCS, FORLI

THE ENTRANCE TO 1 NZ MOBILE CCS, FORLI

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

CASUALTY CLEARING STATION

Casualty Clearing Station

In Forli the Casualty Clearing Station was established in a former school building where conditions allowed more than the usual comfort. Here elaborate surgical treatment was carried out as near to the forward areas as was practicable for tactical reasons (usually within 12 to 15 miles), and here, too, was provided the necessary post-operative nursing until the patient was fit to be sent farther along the route of evacuation to a General Hospital. The aim was always to reduce the time-lag between the wounding of a soldier and his first surgical operation. On occasions wounded were sent on to a General Hospital from the Casualty Clearing Station by air.

The Casualty Clearing Station was usually a tented hospital, specially equipped and staffed as a mobile unit. Mobility was of prime importance as the unit had to be ready to move to a fresh site at short notice, or it might have to set up in an open field. It was equipped to hold 300 patients, of whom about one-third could be nursed on beds and the remainder on stretchers. During a battle a Casualty Clearing Station might handle from 200 to 500 patients in 24 hours, with a high proportion of urgent major surgical operations. In active periods the staff was usually supplemented by Field Surgical units, a Field Transfusion unit with its blood bank, and sometimes by a British Mobile Laboratory as well.

As in the Main Dressing Station, the standard practice was to set up the tented wards along a semi-circular road running from the entrance to the exit of the field. First came the reception tent, then the pre-operation ward, with an X-ray tent attached, followed by two to four tented operating theatres and finally some seven or eight tented wards. Each of these wards held 25 patients on beds, or 35 on stretchers. Conveniently arranged about this group were the special departments, medical stores and dispensary, ordnance stores, cookhouses, and mobile lighting sets for the theatres and wards. It was possible to establish the Casualty Clearing Station, pitch tents, and equip wards and theatres

ready to function, within six hours from the time of arrival on the site.

During an action the ambulances would arrive from the Main Dressing Station in a steady stream, one moving in to take the place of another as it pulled out, sometimes two unloading at once. Stretcher-bearers brought the patients into the reception tent. One, perhaps, had his eyes and head bandaged. Another might be very still, with the envelope tied to his battle dress clearly marked 'Abdominal'; he would be passed on immediately to the resuscitation and pre-operation ward. Here his stretcher was placed on trestles. * He was stripped of his clothing, bloodstained and mud-soiled as it was, washed and put into pyjamas. The extent of his injury was carefully estimated, and he was listed in order of priority for operation. In the meantime, the transfusion officer injected warmed blood so that the patient would be in the best condition to stand the operation.

When a patient was taken into one of the operating theatres the anaesthetist gave him an injection of pentothal in the inner vein of the elbow, followed if necessary by an inhalation anaesthetic. The surgeon would call for instruments and begin the operation. His assistant tried to anticipate his wishes, while orderlies held limbs, attended to the steriliser, obtained swabs or anything else demanded by the surgeon. When the excision of the wound was completed it was treated with penicillin and one of the sulphonamide drugs. Damaged limbs were usually encased in plaster and, the operation completed, the patient was carried to one of the tented wards. Here he came under the care of a nursing sister and six orderlies.

The Casualty Clearing Station had on its staff eight nursing sisters of the New Zealand Army Nursing Service who lived and moved with the unit. They provided the high standard of nursing necessary in serious post-operative cases, especially with abdominal wounds. Their presence alone so soon after a soldier had been wounded had a seemingly magical influence on his recovery.

As a surgical centre in the form of a well-found hospital unit within

a short distance of the fighting line, the Casualty Clearing Station was a vital link in the chain of medical services. The work of the surgeons was greatly helped by blood transfusion and by two great life-saving discoveries, the sulphonamide drugs and penicillin, which gave the wounded soldier of the Second World War a much better chance of survival than in the First World War. Speed in evacuation, care in handling, constant supervision and correct treatment during the first few fateful hours from the time a soldier was wounded until he was operated on at the Casualty Clearing Station meant, in many cases, the difference between life and death, or between complete recovery and chronic invalidism.

* * *

‘On Boxing Day I was on the road again—this time in an ambulance of the NZ **Motor Ambulance Convoy** section—to **1 NZ General Hospital** on the sea-coast at **Senigallia**, seventy miles away. The atmosphere in the General Hospital was a great help to morale and I felt 100 per cent better as soon as I was between the sheets. However, I had no sooner settled down than a medical officer came and after examination prescribed another two bottles of blood for me. I did not like having the blood transfusion but I always felt much better and stronger afterwards.

‘December the 28th saw me back in the operating theatre again, and this time my leg was stitched up and two rubber tubes were inserted in my stump. I then started another course of penicillin injections, which were no doubt the direct cause of my stump healing so quickly, but I was not sorry when the sister said that the course was finished.

‘Here I must put in a good word for the nursing sisters I found in the New Zealand hospitals. They were an excellent group and I always had a feeling of safety and security when they were around. The treatment and attention I received at 1 NZ General Hospital was thorough and good all the time, and no praise is high enough for the nursing staffs—both sisters and voluntary aids.’

*** Formerly a kerosene heater was placed under the stretchers and blankets were draped round the trestles, but the application of heat as a means of resuscitation was later discarded, the room being heated sufficiently to prevent undue chilling but no direct heat being applied to the patient.**

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

GENERAL HOSPITAL

General Hospital

At Senigallia 1 NZ General Hospital was established in what had been an Italian children's health camp; up till a few months previously it had been used as a German military hospital. The buildings, though insufficient for a hospital, enabled many of the amenities of a large civilian hospital to be supplied. Water and electricity were laid on, amenities which had not always been available in the hospitals in Egypt.

The central building had lent itself to conversion to the needs of the administrative, laboratory, X-ray and other departments. It also provided some of the wards. A walk beneath a vine-covered pergola ended at a two-storeyed building used as the surgical block. This block showed more window than wall on all sides and was admirably suited for a hospital building. All other accommodation was provided by tents. New Zealand engineers had worked to provide access roads and other conveniences, while Italian labour had been employed on inside alterations.

The main highway passed the entrance to the hospital, and there was the continual noise of transport moving up to the front line and the droning of aircraft overhead. During the last few weeks of summer and in the early autumn, the staff had enjoyed living in tents by the sea, but when the sea breezes turned to boisterous gales, and heavy rain saturated the ground underfoot, and snow a week before Christmas left its aftermath of slush, it was another story. Nissen huts were being erected all over the hospital area to replace tents as wards and living quarters.

From the date it opened on this site, early in September 1944, the hospital had been busy with an inrush of patients. The staff always had its unremitting round of duties. To be a good orderly a man needed to be a jack-of-all-trades. For ten hours a day he dealt with recalcitrant primus stoves and kerosene heaters; he acted as a transport mule in the hospital area, carried large bundles of soiled clothing to the linen store, collected the lotions from the dispensary or medical store, brought rations of soap, kerosene, and methylated spirits from the ordnance

store, went to the main kitchen for morning and afternoon tea for the patients, carried stretcher patients to operating theatre or X-ray department, and was always at the beck and call of sisters and patients. In between times he managed to obtain on the side many needful extras for the wards.

Voluntary aids now attended to many duties which had fallen to the orderly in pre-1942 days. The nurses made beds, took temperatures, washed patients, worked in the operating theatre and special-diet kitchens, delivered meals, swept and cleaned wards, and helped in the ward kitchens.

Sisters were in charge of the wards of 80 to 100 beds, carrying out professional nursing duties as in civilian life. They co-operated with the medical officers in the treatment of patients, keeping a watchful eye on each man's progress, maintaining discipline, but always trying to keep their charges contented and comfortable.

When the **First Echelon** went overseas in January 1940, eighteen sisters of the New Zealand **Army Nursing Service** sailed with it—a small band of women in a trim uniform of grey and scarlet. On the staffs of the New Zealand military General Hospitals in the **Middle East** and the **Pacific** were many more sisters. They, with their reinforcements, brought the total who served overseas to 602, all of them volunteers. By May 1940 more than 1200 nurses from New Zealand hospitals had offered themselves for overseas service.

A sister's service was seldom dramatic or spectacular. Hers was the life of the hospital unit in which she served, sharing its difficulties and problems, its joys and honours. The standard of treatment and service given to each patient was equal to that of any modern hospital in New Zealand, but the difficulties overcome could be known only by those who had worked long hours to establish and maintain that standard.

No sister in a civilian ward, filled with all modern appliances for the patients' well-being, ever viewed her surroundings with more pride than

did a sister of the New Zealand Army Nursing Service who, with the help of her ward staff and walking patients, fashioned furniture from wooden boxes, discarded tins, and other waste material. Many times a sister's thoughts, as she stoked a copper fire or tinkered with a temperamental primus that at a critical moment refused to do anything but gush a sooty smoke-screen, must have turned to the hospital she had left, where the gleaming faucets at a touch would pour forth gallons of boiling water and where the behaviour of the steam sterilisers never gave a moment's worry. Nor, as she endeavoured to work in a duty room that also served as the doctor's office, dispensary, linen room, and perhaps sterilising room as well, could she be blamed if at times she thought with longing of the hospital at home, where there was a room and a place for everything. No, in a military hospital it was no press-button life, but for the sisters who watched their units become efficient hospitals, it was a life that had its rewards.

The medical officers were qualified doctors; many were recognised experts in specialised branches of medicine and surgery. Upon them rested the responsibility for the conduct of the hospital, and their science and skill paved the way for the recovery of so many men to full health and strength. The General Hospitals admitted an annual total of sick and wounded equal to the numerical strength of the 2nd NZEF. The greater proportion were sick, but during the war there were over 16,000 wounded and an almost equal number accidentally injured—all making demands on the surgeons. Throughout the war there was a steady advance in the technique of surgical treatment and the use of drugs, and a surgeon had always to keep abreast of the latest curative developments and apply them as occasion arose.

* * *

'On 7 January 1945 some of us moved out of **1 NZ General Hospital** on our way to **3 NZ General Hospital**, 300 miles farther down the Adriatic coast at **Bari**. We travelled by a British hospital ship, staffed by English men and women of the RAMC. * We were treated very well by the Tommies during our short trip with them.

‘ Bari was reached next morning, and we travelled the short distance to 3 NZ General Hospital by ambulance. We got into bed just in time for lunch. By this time my appetite was returning. This hospital was one of a group situated in what had been planned as an Italian Polyclinic. The medical treatment was first-class as expected. Facilities were as good as those in any civilian hospital. Just a few days before my arrival the hospital had admitted its 40,000th patient. I was one of 900 patients there.’

The British, Indian, South African, and New Zealand hospitals were accommodated in a very extensive group of buildings at Bari, designed as a medical school and hospital centre for the whole of Southern Italy. In November 1943, 3 NZ General Hospital took over part of one block from a British Casualty Clearing Station. This was ready for use, but the main block allotted to the New Zealanders was only a framework with unfinished floors and walls, and with very few glazed windows. Many of the casements were bricked up and there were no fittings for water and sanitation. Demobilised and undisciplined Italian troops were in possession and the building was in a filthy state. A transformation into a well-equipped hospital provided with all the essentials of modern cleanliness and sanitation was effected.

Third NZ General Hospital had come from Tripoli, where it had been a tented hospital clustered round an old fort. There, fittings from a sunken hospital ship in the harbour had provided extra equipment: the capacity of New Zealanders to improvise and adapt had produced first-class hospitals in all situations.

*** * ***

‘On 15 January I tried to use crutches but my good leg was too weak to hold me. I was graded and placed on the list of invalids for return to New Zealand.

‘We embarked at Taranto on 20 January 1945 on the NZ Hospital

Ship *Maunganui* and from then onwards all was a pleasure. The treatment, food, and general atmosphere of the *Maunganui* were excellent and I will always have pleasant memories of the contacts I have experienced with members of the New Zealand Medical Services.'

* Royal Army Medical Corps

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

HOSPITAL SHIP

Hospital Ship

Amongst the thousands of ships which entered New Zealand ports during the Second World War, there were a few that did not have the dull grey camouflage of war. Their bright white paintwork was relieved by a broad green band girdling the hull; on their sides were two or three large red crosses and the flag of the International Red Cross—a red cross on a white background—flew at the masthead. These were the hospital ships. They were completely fitted with all the equipment necessary today for the treatment of sick and wounded. Cabin walls and fittings were torn out to make large airy wards in which rows of neat white beds were screwed to the decks or suspended to counter the roll of the ship. Other sections of the ship, which might have been music rooms, smoke rooms, or lounges, were also converted to the needs of the sick and wounded.

A central feature was the operating theatre. On its walls were glass cupboards containing shelves of surgical instruments. In other cabins were an X-ray department, a laboratory, a dispensary, a dentist's surgery, and a massage department. None of these lacked anything, either in supplies or fittings. A hospital ship must be self-sufficient.

The *Maunganui*, a troopship of the First World War and a passenger liner between the wars, was converted to a hospital ship at the beginning of 1941. She was a fully-equipped General Hospital afloat, with accommodation for 365 patients. The operating block was the object of special pride: it had been so well designed and equipped in **Wellington** that it was the envy of many British hospital ships.

There was no mistaking the pleasure of the patients returning to New Zealand when they first caught sight of the gleaming white side of the hospital ship at the port of embarkation. There were still pleasant surprises in store for them. In the wards the beds were as good as they looked and the walls were a restful green and cream.

The first meal on board was a revelation to the home-coming men.

After an interval of one, two, three and even more years they tasted excellently cooked New Zealand food—the best the Dominion could produce. It had been kept in perfect condition in the ship’s freezing chambers and included plenty of green vegetables and fruit and many delicacies—lamb, chicken, even oysters and whitebait. No wonder that convalescence was rapid on the homeward voyage.

*** * ***

‘There was great excitement when we sighted the New Zealand coast in the vicinity of **Cape Farewell on the afternoon of 27 February 1945 and still greater excitement when we sailed up the **Wellington** harbour next morning and berthed at Aotea Quay. Patients lined the ship’s rails, and those whose homes were near **Wellington** picked out members of their families in the crowd pressing against the barriers on the wharf and waved and shouted. Soon we disembarked—many who had come on board as stretcher patients were able to walk down the gangway. What a thrill it was to set foot on New Zealand soil again (even if it was only one foot in my case) and know that we would all soon be checked through the Casualty Clearing Hospital on the wharf, and then be taken home by train in special hospital carriages. The chain of medical services had brought some of us right from the front line in Northern Italy to our own homes.’**

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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THE DIARY used in this account is that of Cpl A. A. Swanston, of 26 NZ Battalion. For the description of medical units the author relied on miscellaneous material in the records of the Medical History Section, War History Branch. The map and diagram are by L. D. McCormick, and the photographs come from many collections, which are stated where they are known:

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L. V. Stewart Inside Cover

New Zealand Army Official, J. G. Brown pages 4, 7, 26 and 27

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New Zealand Army Official, G. F. Kaye page 9 (bottom), page 10, and page 11 (top, and bottom left)

New Zealand Army Official, G. R. Bull page 11 (bottom right), page 15 (bottom), page 20 (centre and bottom)

Dr. P. V. Graves page 12 (top) and page 14 (top)

Army Film Photograph Unit, page 13 (top), page 16 (bottom right), and page 19 (top)

Dr. G. H. Levien page 13 (bottom)

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***Dr. S. L. Wilson* page 16 (bottom left)**

***New Zealand Army Official, C. J. Hayden* page 17 (bottom right), and page 21**

***Dr. D. T. Stewart* page 18 (top)**

***G. Morris* page 19 (bottom)**

***A. R. Anderson* page 20 (top)**

***Department of Internal Affairs, John Pascoe* page 22 (top)**

***F. A. Marriott* page 22 (bottom) and page 23 (bottom)**

***New Zealand Army Official, M. D. Elias* page 23 (top)**

***The Evening Post* page 24**

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[BACKMATTER]

THE AUTHOR, J. B. McKinney, who graduated at Victoria University College as MA in History in 1939, served in the New Zealand Medical Corps in the Middle East and Italy from 1941 to 1945, and is at present on the staff of the Medical History Section of the War History Branch.

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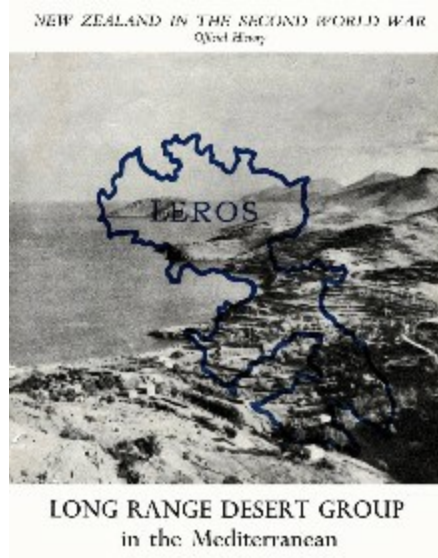
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LONG RANGE DESERT GROUP in the Mediterranean

BY
R. L. KAY

WILEY-BROTHERS, LTD.
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS
WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND
1944

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[FRONTISPIECE]



MAP OF LIBYAN DESERT

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH *Leros in the Dodecanese Islands*

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[TITLE PAGE]

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[EDITORPAGE]

IT IS THE INTENTION *of this series to present aspects of New Zealand's part in the Second World War which will not receive detailed treatment in the campaign volumes and which are considered either worthy of special notice or typical of many phases of our war experience. The series is illustrated with material which would otherwise seldom see publication. It will also contain short accounts of operations which will be dealt with in detail in the appropriate volumes.*

H. K. KIPPENBERGER

,
Major-General
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

NEW ZEALAND WAR HISTORIES

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THE SOURCES consulted in the preparation of this account were the war diaries and official records of A (New Zealand) Squadron, LRDG, amplified by the recollections of the officers and men who served with the unit, the despatches of General Sir Henry Wilson and Vice-Admiral Sir Algernon Willis, *Long Range Desert Group*, by W. B. K. Shaw, *Dust Upon the Sea*, by W. E. Benyon-Tinker, and notes on the Aegean operations by Captain R. A. Tinker. The author is indebted to those who responded so readily to his requests for information. The maps are by L. D. McCormick, and the photographs come from many collections, which are stated where they are known:

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RAIDS BEHIND THE ENEMY LINES

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THE THREE LONG-RANGE PATROLS formed in July 1940 to reconnoitre in southern **Libya** and raid remote Italian outposts had developed by the end of 1941 into two squadrons of the **Long Range Desert Group**, operating in support of the **Eighth Army** offensive in **Cyrenaica**. A Squadron, LRDG, and the **Special Air Service**, working together in bold and skilful raids in the rear of the Axis forces, destroyed scores of enemy aircraft on the ground. The LRDG patrols transported the parachutists to within easy walking distance of enemy airfields, and took them back to their base when their work was completed.

A Squadron, commanded by Major D. G. Steele ¹ and comprising T2, S1, and S2 patrols, * was joined by Captain A. D. Stirling's ² SAS troops at **Gialo** in December 1941, shortly after a British flying column, advancing nearly 300 miles from Giarabub, had captured the oasis from the Italians. The first attack from this base was made by a handful of parachutists taken by S1 patrol to **Tamet**, in the **Sirte** area, where they crept on to the landing ground at night, wrecked twenty-four aircraft with time bombs, and blew up a bomb dump. The same men returned about a week later and destroyed another twenty-seven aircraft, while a party travelling with S2 patrol accounted for no fewer than thirty-seven aircraft on a landing ground near **Agedabia**.

The parachutists taken by the New Zealand patrol (T2, led by Captain C. S. Morris ³) to the vicinity of **El Agheila** discovered that the airfield there was deserted. With a captured Italian lorry leading their five patrol trucks, they then motored nine miles eastwards along the main road at night, passing forty-seven enemy vehicles on the way, until they reached the turn-off at Marsa Brega, a small anchorage used by enemy shipping. There they encountered twenty enemy lorries parked alongside the road, with about sixty men standing around them. Attacking for a quarter of an hour at very close range, the raiders killed at least fifteen of the enemy and wounded many others, without casualty to themselves. While the fighting was in progress, the

parachutists placed time bombs on all the enemy vehicles.

The patrol then continued another ten miles along the road, which was flanked by salt marshes. To prevent pursuit, Corporal G. C. Garven,⁴ who was in the last truck, laid mines in the potholes, which caused seven explosions and probably accounted for that number of vehicles. Before turning off to the south, the patrol cut the telephone wires and blew down many poles to disorganise traffic. Enemy aircraft searched all next day and twice passed overhead without seeing them. Their exploits on this raid earned Morris the MC and Garven the MM.

T2 patrol next took the parachutists to raid the airfields at **Nofilia** and **Marble Arch**, west of **El Agheila**. A Messerschmitt fighter, following the wheel tracks from **Nofilia**, strafed the patrol from a height of only forty feet, despite intense anti-aircraft fire, and killed the paratroop officer. Relays of Stuka dive bombers joined in the attack and bombed and strafed the patrol for six and a half hours. When all the trucks except one were destroyed, the aircraft continued to attack the men on the ground and machine-gunned every bush that might give them cover. The survival of this one truck was due largely to the courage of Private C. A. Dornbush,⁵ who kept his machine

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three gallons of water in a tin, a packet of nine biscuits, an emergency ration of chocolate, and a prismatic compass, which Trooper D. M. Bassett ⁶ had collected from his burning vehicle while it was still under heavy fire. They decided to walk to Augila, an oasis twenty miles from **Gialo** and 200 from where they were stranded; their only alternative was to go to the road and give themselves up.

The cold of mid-winter forced the ten men to march at night and to rest during the warmer hours of the day. Most of them were wearing sandals that soon went to pieces on the rough, stony ground, so they bound their feet with cloth from their jackets and greatcoats. A parachutist, who already had walked many miles in the raid on **Nofilia** and whose feet were almost raw, left the party at the **Marada- El Agheila** track on the third day of the trek, and was not seen again. Next day the others met four Arabs who gave them some dates and water and directed them to a spring. Seeing what they thought were two enemy vehicles approaching, they concealed themselves, but discovered afterwards that the vehicles were those of a British reconnaissance party.

They sat around a fire that night and set off in the morning with their water-can refilled. In their weakened condition, they found it necessary for teams of four men to carry the water in short relays. They lit another fire at the end of the fifth day, boiled some water and made a chocolate drink, which gave them fresh strength for they marched an estimated distance of forty miles the following night. They were very tired on the sixth day, but the cold weather kept them moving. Believing they were only twenty-five miles from Augila, they drank as much of the water as they could and abandoned the rest. In the final stages of exhaustion, they staggered through a dust storm on the seventh day and reached Augila on the eighth. Arabs reported their arrival to the LRDG at **Gialo**. Bassett, who navigated for the party, was awarded the DCM, and Gunner E. Sanders, ⁷ who also had shown bravery on previous occasions, received the MM.

By the end of December 1941, the Axis forces had retreated from **Cyrenaica** to defensive positions among the salt marshes near **El**

Agheila. The remainder of the LRDG moved forward from **Siwa**, which was now too far from the front line, to join A Squadron at **Gialo**. Rommel's counter-offensive, begun on 21 January, and **Eighth Army's** subsequent withdrawal, however, soon necessitated the return of the whole unit to **Siwa**, where it remained until the fall of **Tobruk** in June 1942.

* Corporal G. C. Garven, Gunners E. C. Stutterd, E. Sanders, and T. E. Walsh, and Troopers D. M. Bassett, A. C. Martin, F. S. Brown, and R. A. Ramsay.

The Road Watch

While based at **Siwa** the LRDG patrols ferried paratroops, commandos, and secret agents to and from many places in enemy territory, rescued escapees from prisoner-of-war camps and the crews of crashed aircraft, many of whom had been fed and sheltered by friendly Arabs, and watched traffic on the **Tripoli- Benghazi** road, along which the enemy brought nearly all his tanks and troop reinforcements.

The LRDG kept this road under observation day and night from 2 March until 21 July 1942. The site of the watch was five miles to the east of **Marble Arch**, at a point where the road crosses a flat plain a short distance to the north of a low plateau. The patrols found sufficient cover to make camp and camouflage their vehicles in shallow wadis running down from the plateau. Before dawn each day, two men went out on the plain to select a hiding-place 300 or 400 yards from the road, where they concealed themselves as best they could on ground that was bare except for small, scattered bushes. Equipped with field-glasses, books of vehicle silhouettes, and notebooks, they lay full-length all day, watching the traffic on the road and recording the details of lorries, tanks, armoured cars, guns, and troops as they passed. When it was dark they approached to within twenty or thirty yards of the road and judged the types of vehicles by their sound and outline. Before daylight, they returned to camp, probably without seeing the two men who relieved them at the

appointed time.

If tanks or large numbers of enemy troops were seen going towards the front, the patrol sent a wireless message to LRDG headquarters at **Siwa**, so that by the time the enemy tanks or troops were approaching **Agedabia**, the information would have reached General Headquarters in **Cairo**. When a patrol had been relieved and was clear of enemy territory, it sent a full report of all the traffic it had seen; this information was invaluable to General Staff Intelligence in assessing the enemy's strength in **Cyrenaica**.

There was always the risk of discovery, and occasionally the watchers had to move farther back from the road, but they continued the task without serious interruption and without the loss of one man. Members of Italian repair gangs working on the road wandered about without noticing them, and Arabs who did see them did not betray them to the enemy. R1 patrol had a miraculous escape on 21 March, when an enemy convoy of about 200 troops in twenty-seven vehicles pulled off the road and camped for the night behind the watchers (Private F. R. Brown ⁸ and Trooper G. C. Parkes ⁹ Although the nearest vehicle was only 150 yards away, the two New Zealanders, prostrate under their sheepskin coats, were not detected.

It took three patrols to do this work; while one was watching the road for a week or ten days, another was going out from **Siwa** to relieve it, and a third was returning to the base. The 600-mile route from **Siwa** to the site of the watch crossed the **El Agheila- Marada** track. The enemy must have become suspicious of LRDG movement in this area, for when R2 patrol was returning to **Siwa** in May, they saw men erecting a wire fence along the track. After that the patrols had to go to the south of **Marada**, which added a hundred miles of very soft going to the journey. Even on this route the enemy placed mines on tracks, which wrecked one truck, fortunately without injuring the crew.

The LRDG was also required by **Eighth Army** to interrupt enemy supply columns on the **Tripoli- Benghazi** road, a task that was

incompatible with road-watching. Avoiding the sections of the road where raids would have resulted in the discovery of the watchers, T2 patrol (commanded by Lieutenant N. P. Wilder ¹⁰ operated between **Agedabia** and **Benghazi**, and G1 patrol between **Nofilia** and **Sirte**. At first they tried to place time bombs on passing vehicles, but the speed of the traffic made this impossible, so they then reverted to the simpler method of shooting up transport. T2 had little success, owing to mechanical breakdowns, but G1, after being attacked by enemy troops, made a successful raid on a transport park.

With T1 and T2 patrols under his command, Wilder later returned to the **Agedabia- Benghazi** road and divided his force to ambush different localities. At midnight on 7 June, T1 patrol, with lights shining, drove along the road and through an enemy check post at Magrun. Discovering that they were being followed by two vehicles, they turned out their lights, pulled off the road, and opened fire with all their weapons as soon as their pursuers drew level. They destroyed a troop-carrier and a truck loaded with troops and ammunition, and killed or wounded at least twenty of the enemy. At the sound of the shooting, some Italians farther along the road abandoned three lorries and a trailer heavily laden with timber and supplies. The New Zealanders also left these vehicles blazing fiercely. T2 patrol did not operate that night because of a damaged truck, but a few nights later, when both patrols met an enemy truck collecting troops who had been on picket duty in the Antelat area, they set fire to the truck, killed two of the enemy, and captured six Italians.

The fall of **Tobruk** on 21 June 1942 and **Eighth Army's** retreat to **Alamein** made it necessary for the LRDG to leave **Siwa**. The evacuation was completed on 28 June, a few days before the Italians occupied the oasis. Major Morris took A Squadron to **Cairo** for supplies and then to **Kufra**, a base from which patrols continued to operate in northern **Libya**, while the rest of the unit withdrew to the coast between **Alamein** and **Alexandria** and then to **Faiyum**, about fifty miles to the south-west of **Cairo**.

The Alamein Line extended from the coast southwards to the cliffs of the **Qattara Depression**, a huge basin 150 miles in length, 450 feet below sea level at its deepest point, and passable to vehicles only where narrow ribbons of firm sand wind across its salt marshes. To penetrate behind the Axis positions at **Alamein**, the patrols based at **Faiyum** had to go through the Depression. Renewing their partnership with Major Stirling's **Special Air Service**, they continued to attack the enemy from the rear.

Stirling evolved an alternative to blowing up aircraft with time bombs. Equipped with jeeps, each of which carried a driver and two gunners with twin-mounted Vickers guns, the raiding party, firing outwards from a hollow square formation, drove slowly round the target and shot up everything within range. Accompanied by a New Zealand patrol (Captain Wilder's T1), the parachutists employed this technique one night on two landing grounds at **Sidi Haneish**, where they claimed twenty-five aircraft but probably destroyed many more. They were pursued after daylight by air and ground forces, and in the confused fighting that ensued, Gunner Sanders knocked out four enemy vehicles. The German attack was directed by a Fiesler Storch, which circled overhead and landed from time to time to confer with the ground troops. When it touched down near the patrol, two New Zealanders (Troopers K. E. Tippett ¹¹ and T. B. Dobson ¹² captured the pilot and passenger (a German doctor) and set fire to the plane.

Plans were drawn up to disrupt the enemy's supply lines by wrecking the ports of **Benghazi** and **Tobruk**, through which he received the bulk of his stores. Simultaneous attacks by land and sea were to be made at **Tobruk**, where commandos led by Lieutenant-Colonel J. Haselden were to seize the coastal defence guns, and troops landed from destroyers were to demolish the harbour installations. Lieutenant-Colonel Stirling was to take a force to **Benghazi** to sink ships in the harbour, and the **Sudan Defence Force** was to capture **Gialo**, to provide a base from which Stirling could make further raids in **Cyrenaica**, and to secure the line of withdrawal to **Kufra**. LRDG patrols were to guide the forces to their

objectives at **Benghazi**, **Tobruk**, and **Gialo**, and were to attack subsidiary targets; at the same time an independent LRDG force was to raid **Barce**.

Y1 patrol conducted Haselden's commandos from **Kufra** to **Tobruk**, where they arrived on 13 September. In a night attack, they captured the coastal defence guns, but lost them to a garrison that was much stronger than had been expected, and Haselden was among those killed. The seaborne attack was repulsed with the loss of two destroyers and four motor torpedo boats.

The enemy was waiting for Stirling's parachutists at **Benghazi**. A strong ambush near the suburb of Berka prevented them from reaching the port, and aircraft attacked them all next day. With many of their vehicles destroyed, they made their way as best they could back to **Kufra**. S1 and S2 patrols, under Stirling's command for the operation, were to attack the airfields at **Benina**, but in the dark were led by an Arab guide into an impassable wadi, which delayed them so long that they had to abandon the attempt.

The action at **Gialo** was not planned to coincide with those at **Tobruk** and **Benghazi**, with the result that the enemy had time to prepare. The Sudan Defence Force, accompanied by Y2 patrol, reached the oasis in the evening of 15 September, but failed to take its objectives and was ordered to return to **Kufra** after several days of constant bombing and shelling. In support of this operation, R2 patrol (under Lieutenant J. R. Talbot ¹³ watched the northern approaches to **Gialo**. When the patrol was moving towards the oasis on 19 September, six enemy aircraft attacked with bombs, cannon and machine-gun fire. Fighting back whenever possible, the six trucks dispersed in search of cover and lost contact with one another. Unable to find the rest of his patrol, Talbot returned to **Kufra** with two trucks that had joined Y2 patrol. The R2 wireless truck had overturned while swerving to avoid a bomb, but was replaced on its wheels and towed until it could be put in running order next day. All six trucks eventually reached **Kufra**, but with seven casualties. *

* **Sergeant L. A. Willcox, Lance-Corporal A. D. Sadgrove, and Troopers L. A. Ellis, E. J. Dobson, and M. W. Stewart were wounded in air attacks, Willcox and Private J. E. Gill were injured when a truck crashed over a sand dune on the way back to [Kufra](#), and an English signalman was injured when the wireless truck capsized.**

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[SECTION]

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The cold of mid-winter forced the ten men to march at night and to rest during the warmer hours of the day. Most of them were wearing sandals that soon went to pieces on the rough, stony ground, so they bound their feet with cloth from their jackets and greatcoats. A parachutist, who already had walked many miles in the raid on Nofilia and whose feet were almost raw, left the party at the Marada- El Agheila track on the third day of the trek, and was not seen again. Next day the others met four Arabs who gave them some dates and water and directed them to a spring. Seeing what they thought were two enemy vehicles approaching, they concealed themselves, but discovered afterwards that the vehicles were those of a British reconnaissance party.

They sat around a fire that night and set off in the morning with their water-can refilled. In their weakened condition, they found it necessary for teams of four men to carry the water in short relays. They lit another fire at the end of the fifth day, boiled some water and made a chocolate drink, which gave them fresh strength for they marched an estimated distance of forty miles the following night. They were very tired on the sixth day, but the cold weather kept them moving. Believing they were only twenty-five miles from Augila, they drank as much of the water as they could and abandoned the rest. In the final stages of exhaustion, they staggered through a dust storm on the seventh day and reached Augila on the eighth. Arabs reported their arrival to the LRDG at Gialo. Bassett, who navigated for the party, was awarded the DCM, and Gunner E. Sanders, ⁷ who also had shown bravery on previous occasions, received the MM.

By the end of December 1941, the Axis forces had retreated from **Cyrenaica** to defensive positions among the salt marshes near **El Agheila**. The remainder of the LRDG moved forward from **Siwa**, which was now too far from the front line, to join A Squadron at **Gialo**. Rommel's counter-offensive, begun on 21 January, and **Eighth Army's** subsequent withdrawal, however, soon necessitated the return of the whole unit to **Siwa**, where it remained until the fall of **Tobruk** in June 1942.

* Corporal G. C. Garven, Gunners E. C. Stutterd, E. Sanders, and T. E. Walsh, and Troopers D. M. Bassett, A. C. Martin, F. S. Brown, and R. A. Ramsay.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE ROAD WATCH

The Road Watch

While based at **Siwa** the LRDG patrols ferried paratroops, commandos, and secret agents to and from many places in enemy territory, rescued escapees from prisoner-of-war camps and the crews of crashed aircraft, many of whom had been fed and sheltered by friendly Arabs, and watched traffic on the **Tripoli- Benghazi** road, along which the enemy brought nearly all his tanks and troop reinforcements.

The LRDG kept this road under observation day and night from 2 March until 21 July 1942. The site of the watch was five miles to the east of **Marble Arch**, at a point where the road crosses a flat plain a short distance to the north of a low plateau. The patrols found sufficient cover to make camp and camouflage their vehicles in shallow wadis running down from the plateau. Before dawn each day, two men went out on the plain to select a hiding-place 300 or 400 yards from the road, where they concealed themselves as best they could on ground that was bare except for small, scattered bushes. Equipped with field-glasses, books of vehicle silhouettes, and notebooks, they lay full-length all day, watching the traffic on the road and recording the details of lorries, tanks, armoured cars, guns, and troops as they passed. When it was dark they approached to within twenty or thirty yards of the road and judged the types of vehicles by their sound and outline. Before daylight, they returned to camp, probably without seeing the two men who relieved them at the appointed time.

If tanks or large numbers of enemy troops were seen going towards the front, the patrol sent a wireless message to LRDG headquarters at **Siwa**, so that by the time the enemy tanks or troops were approaching **Agedabia**, the information would have reached General Headquarters in **Cairo**. When a patrol had been relieved and was clear of enemy territory, it sent a full report of all the traffic it had seen; this information was

invaluable to General Staff Intelligence in assessing the enemy's strength in **Cyrenaica**.

There was always the risk of discovery, and occasionally the watchers had to move farther back from the road, but they continued the task without serious interruption and without the loss of one man. Members of Italian repair gangs working on the road wandered about without noticing them, and Arabs who did see them did not betray them to the enemy. R1 patrol had a miraculous escape on 21 March, when an enemy convoy of about 200 troops in twenty-seven vehicles pulled off the road and camped for the night behind the watchers (Private F. R. Brown ⁸ and Trooper G. C. Parkes ⁹ Although the nearest vehicle was only 150 yards away, the two New Zealanders, prostrate under their sheepskin coats, were not detected.

It took three patrols to do this work; while one was watching the road for a week or ten days, another was going out from **Siwa** to relieve it, and a third was returning to the base. The 600-mile route from **Siwa** to the site of the watch crossed the **El Agheila- Marada** track. The enemy must have become suspicious of LRDG movement in this area, for when R2 patrol was returning to **Siwa** in May, they saw men erecting a wire fence along the track. After that the patrols had to go to the south of **Marada**, which added a hundred miles of very soft going to the journey. Even on this route the enemy placed mines on tracks, which wrecked one truck, fortunately without injuring the crew.

The LRDG was also required by **Eighth Army** to interrupt enemy supply columns on the **Tripoli- Benghazi** road, a task that was incompatible with road-watching. Avoiding the sections of the road where raids would have resulted in the discovery of the watchers, T2 patrol (commanded by Lieutenant N. P. Wilder ¹⁰ operated between **Agedabia** and **Benghazi**, and G1 patrol between **Nofilia** and **Sirte**. At first they tried to place time bombs on passing vehicles, but the speed of the traffic made this impossible, so they then reverted to the simpler method of shooting up transport. T2 had little success, owing to

mechanical breakdowns, but G1, after being attacked by enemy troops, made a successful raid on a transport park.

With T1 and T2 patrols under his command, Wilder later returned to the **Agedabia- Benghazi** road and divided his force to ambush different localities. At midnight on 7 June, T1 patrol, with lights shining, drove along the road and through an enemy check post at Magrun. Discovering that they were being followed by two vehicles, they turned out their lights, pulled off the road, and opened fire with all their weapons as soon as their pursuers drew level. They destroyed a troop-carrier and a truck loaded with troops and ammunition, and killed or wounded at least twenty of the enemy. At the sound of the shooting, some Italians farther along the road abandoned three lorries and a trailer heavily laden with timber and supplies. The New Zealanders also left these vehicles blazing fiercely. T2 patrol did not operate that night because of a damaged truck, but a few nights later, when both patrols met an enemy truck collecting troops who had been on picket duty in the Antelat area, they set fire to the truck, killed two of the enemy, and captured six Italians.

The fall of **Tobruk** on 21 June 1942 and **Eighth Army's** retreat to **Alamein** made it necessary for the LRDG to leave **Siwa**. The evacuation was completed on 28 June, a few days before the Italians occupied the oasis. Major Morris took A Squadron to **Cairo** for supplies and then to **Kufra**, a base from which patrols continued to operate in northern **Libya**, while the rest of the unit withdrew to the coast between **Alamein** and **Alexandria** and then to **Faiyum**, about fifty miles to the south-west of **Cairo**.

The Alamein Line extended from the coast southwards to the cliffs of the **Qattara Depression**, a huge basin 150 miles in length, 450 feet below sea level at its deepest point, and passable to vehicles only where narrow ribbons of firm sand wind across its salt marshes. To penetrate behind the Axis positions at **Alamein**, the patrols based at **Faiyum** had to go through the Depression. Renewing their partnership with Major Stirling's **Special Air Service**, they continued to attack the enemy from

the rear.

Stirling evolved an alternative to blowing up aircraft with time bombs. Equipped with jeeps, each of which carried a driver and two gunners with twin-mounted Vickers guns, the raiding party, firing outwards from a hollow square formation, drove slowly round the target and shot up everything within range. Accompanied by a New Zealand patrol (Captain Wilder's T1), the parachutists employed this technique one night on two landing grounds at **Sidi Haneish**, where they claimed twenty-five aircraft but probably destroyed many more. They were pursued after daylight by air and ground forces, and in the confused fighting that ensued, Gunner Sanders knocked out four enemy vehicles. The German attack was directed by a Fiesler Storch, which circled overhead and landed from time to time to confer with the ground troops. When it touched down near the patrol, two New Zealanders (Troopers K. E. Tippett ¹¹ and T. B. Dobson ¹² captured the pilot and passenger (a German doctor) and set fire to the plane.

Plans were drawn up to disrupt the enemy's supply lines by wrecking the ports of **Benghazi** and **Tobruk**, through which he received the bulk of his stores. Simultaneous attacks by land and sea were to be made at **Tobruk**, where commandos led by Lieutenant-Colonel J. Haselden were to seize the coastal defence guns, and troops landed from destroyers were to demolish the harbour installations. Lieutenant-Colonel Stirling was to take a force to **Benghazi** to sink ships in the harbour, and the **Sudan Defence Force** was to capture **Gialo**, to provide a base from which Stirling could make further raids in **Cyrenaica**, and to secure the line of withdrawal to **Kufra**. LRDG patrols were to guide the forces to their objectives at **Benghazi**, **Tobruk**, and **Gialo**, and were to attack subsidiary targets; at the same time an independent LRDG force was to raid **Barce**.

Y1 patrol conducted Haselden's commandos from **Kufra** to **Tobruk**, where they arrived on 13 September. In a night attack, they captured the coastal defence guns, but lost them to a garrison that was much stronger than had been expected, and Haselden was among those killed.

The seaborne attack was repulsed with the loss of two destroyers and four motor torpedo boats.

The enemy was waiting for Stirling's parachutists at **Benghazi**. A strong ambush near the suburb of Berka prevented them from reaching the port, and aircraft attacked them all next day. With many of their vehicles destroyed, they made their way as best they could back to **Kufra**. S1 and S2 patrols, under Stirling's command for the operation, were to attack the airfields at **Benina**, but in the dark were led by an Arab guide into an impassable wadi, which delayed them so long that they had to abandon the attempt.

The action at **Gialo** was not planned to coincide with those at **Tobruk** and **Benghazi**, with the result that the enemy had time to prepare. The Sudan Defence Force, accompanied by Y2 patrol, reached the oasis in the evening of 15 September, but failed to take its objectives and was ordered to return to **Kufra** after several days of constant bombing and shelling. In support of this operation, R2 patrol (under Lieutenant J. R. Talbot ¹³ watched the northern approaches to **Gialo**. When the patrol was moving towards the oasis on 19 September, six enemy aircraft attacked with bombs, cannon and machine-gun fire. Fighting back whenever possible, the six trucks dispersed in search of cover and lost contact with one another. Unable to find the rest of his patrol, Talbot returned to **Kufra** with two trucks that had joined Y2 patrol. The R2 wireless truck had overturned while swerving to avoid a bomb, but was replaced on its wheels and towed until it could be put in running order next day. All six trucks eventually reached **Kufra**, but with seven casualties. *

* Sergeant L. A. Willcox, Lance-Corporal A. D. Sadgrove, and Troopers L. A. Ellis, E. J. Dobson, and M. W. Stewart were wounded in air attacks, Willcox and Private J. E. Gill were injured when a truck crashed over a sand dune on the way back to **Kufra**, and an English signalman was injured when the wireless truck capsized.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE BARCE RAID

THE BARCE RAID

WITH ORDERS to raid Barce town and airfield, 'causing the maximum amount of damage and disturbance to the enemy', Major J. R.

Easonsmith ¹⁴ left Faiyum on 1 September with T1 patrol (under Captain Wilder) and G1 patrol (under Captain J. A. L. Timpson ¹⁵, a total of forty-seven men in twelve trucks and five jeeps. The outward journey, a distance of 1155 miles, involved crossing the Egyptian and Kalansho Sand Seas. During the first crossing, Timpson fractured his skull and a Guards gunner injured his spine when a jeep capsized over the edge of a razor-back dune. They were flown to Cairo from a landing ground near Big Cairn.

From the northern edge of the Kalansho Sand Sea, the patrols crossed southern Cyrenaica to the foothills of Gebel Akhdar. Major Easonsmith took a British agent (Major V. Peniakoff) and two Senussi spies to within a few miles of Barce, where they were to learn all they could about the enemy before rejoining the patrols. After dark on 13 September, the raiding party drove northwards along a road through wooded, hilly country. They were challenged at a police post by a native sentry, who was immediately taken prisoner. A shout brought out an Italian officer, who had to be shot. The rest of the guard, leaving twelve horses in a stable, deserted the post. The sudden halt when challenged had caused two trucks to collide, one of them the truck carrying T1 patrol's Breda gun, and as both vehicles were then unfit to go into action, they were stripped and left at the side of the road.

Peniakoff was waiting at Sidi Selim, but his two Arabs, who may not have had time, had not returned. The medical officer (Captain R. P. Lawson ¹⁶ was left at this rendezvous with the T1 wireless truck to act as a rallying point after the raid. The patrols then drove on to the main road to Barce, where they met two small tanks. Not sure whether the approaching vehicles contained friends or foes, the enemy troops held their fire until the leading jeep was level. The LRDG then opened fire with all weapons and raced through unscathed.

The patrols separated at the entrance to the town, which they entered at midnight, T_I to attack the airfield and G_I the barracks. Captain Wilder led the New Zealanders in their four trucks and a jeep on to the airfield, where they set fire to a petrol dump and a tanker and trailer, which lit up the whole scene, and threw grenades through the windows of the mess building. Driving round the landing ground in single file, they fired incendiary ammunition at each aircraft in turn. Corporal M. Craw,¹⁷ who was in the last truck, placed bombs on the planes that were not already burning and wrecked ten of them. The patrol claimed to have destroyed twenty aircraft and to have damaged another dozen, but the Italians later told a prisoner of war that they lost thirty-five. Although the enemy was shooting wildly from practically every angle and vantage point, the patrol spent an hour on the airfield without casualty. The burning aircraft lit up the whole town.

Expecting the narrow road by which they had reached the airfield to be blocked, T_I patrol drove out down the main street, but encountered very heavy fire from Italian armoured fighting vehicles. Fortunately several tanks that were blocking the way were firing a little too high. The leading truck, driven by Captain Wilder, with Troopers D. S. Parker¹⁸ and H. R. T. Holland¹⁹ at the guns, charged the nearest tank at full speed, crashed it against the next, and cleared a passage. Wilder and Parker attempted to immobilise the tanks by tossing grenades under them, and, although Parker was severely wounded, they transferred from their damaged truck to the jeep, which was following close behind. Holland was seized by Italians before he could get away, and Lance-Corporal A. H. C. Nutt,²⁰ who had left the jeep to go to the assistance of the men in the truck, was also missing. Dazzled by tracer that Wilder was firing, the driver of the jeep (Trooper P. J. Burke²¹) steered into a kerb at a street corner. The jeep overturned, pinning the crew underneath, Wilder and Parker both unconscious and Burke injured. Private J. L. D. Davis's²² truck stopped to extricate the three men, who were revived before they reached the rendezvous.

Two men from another truck, Corporal Tippett and Trooper Dobson,

put the tank Wilder had rammed completely out of action by climbing on to it and exploding grenades and bombs inside the turret, and also immobilised another tank with machine-gun fire and by throwing a bomb under it. Dobson was wounded in the hand. Tippett's truck then took the wrong turning, crossed a rubbish dump, and found a way out through a backyard to the main road.

Corporal Craw's truck, at the rear of the patrol, stopped at Wilder's abandoned truck, saw nobody there, and continued along the street. Craw and his crew tried to avoid two or three armoured cars by turning down a narrow side-street, but finding that they could not escape that way, decided to run the gauntlet. Their truck was set on fire and crashed into a concrete air-raid shelter. The force of the impact threw Craw into the shelter, where he was overpowered by Italians. Trooper K. Yealands,²³ who was badly wounded, and Trooper R. E. Hay,²⁴ who stopped to extricate him from the burning truck, were also captured. Trooper T. A. Milburn²⁵ managed to get clear of the town before he too fell into enemy hands.

To distract attention while the New Zealanders were raiding the airfield, and to do as much damage as possible, the Guards patrol attacked the town barracks, where they killed and wounded a number of men. Major Easonsmith, with two jeeps, attacked other buildings, threw grenades among Italians in the streets, and wrecked a dozen vehicles in an unattended transport park. The LRDG then reassembled at the rallying point and retired to the south. T_I had lost six men, two trucks, and a jeep in [Barce](#), and G_I had lost four men and a truck. Two of the Guardsmen later rejoined their patrol.

Shortly before dawn on 14 September, when the two patrols were approaching the police post to the south of Sidi Selim, enemy troops (150 Tripolitarians under three Italian officers), who had been waiting for their return, opened fire from both sides of the road. Their marksmanship was poor, but they succeeded in damaging a truck, which the patrols then had to tow in addition to the two they had left near the police post the previous evening. Just south of the post, the enemy's fire

wounded three men, including Major Peniakoff and Trooper F. W. Jopling.²⁶

An attempt was made to get the three damaged trucks to go under their own power, but the Tripolitarians renewed the attack before the fitters could complete their work. Easonsmith, in his jeep, chased the enemy back two miles while the petrol and stores were removed from the damaged vehicles and time bombs placed in them. The force then continued its withdrawal until the Guards' wireless truck stopped with a damaged rear axle. Before it could be moved under cover, a reconnaissance plane circled overhead. Six fighters were temporarily distracted by the explosions of the time bombs in the three abandoned trucks, but after strafing in the vicinity of these burning vehicles, they soon reached the area where the LRDG were ill-concealed under some scattered trees. From mid-morning until dusk, aircraft in varying numbers attacked the vehicles and men, mostly with incendiary and explosive ammunition. Wilder and a Guardsman were wounded and all the transport, except one truck and two jeeps, was destroyed. Captain Lawson remained on the surviving truck to shelter a severely wounded man during the attacks, and then managed to get most of the casualties to a safe place a mile or two away.

Jopling and nine Guardsmen began walking to Bir el Gerrari, where G_I patrol had left a vehicle on the way northwards to **Barce**. Lawson set off in the truck and a jeep with six wounded men (Wilder, Peniakoff, Parker, Dobson, Burke, and a Guardsman), a navigator (Davis), and a driver (Private D. P. Warbrick²⁷). Easonsmith organised the remaining fourteen men into a walking party, who took with them rations and water in the other jeep. The doctor soon had to abandon his jeep because of a hole in the petrol tank, but his party reached Bir el Gerrari on 15 September and pushed on next day to a landing ground near the Kalansho Sand Sea, where they found Y_I patrol. In response to a wireless message, the **RAF** evacuated the wounded to **Kufra** and later to **Cairo**.

When Easonsmith's party was approaching Bir el Gerrari on 17

September, having walked about eighty miles, they unexpectedly met S2 patrol. As the other walking party had not reached the rendezvous, Easonsmith and the Rhodesians combed the area for three days but found only eight men; Jopling and Guardsman Gutheridge were missing. Easonsmith later met the other Rhodesian patrol (S1), which had with it two Guardsmen who had walked out of **Barce**. The LRDG then withdrew to **Kufra**, arriving there during an air raid.

Although Jopling, whose leg wound had turned gangrenous, and Gutheridge, who was exhausted, had been unable to keep up with the other eight members of their party, they were not many miles from Bir el Gerrari when they were missed by the search parties. Believing that they could not reach the rendezvous in time, and desperately in need of water, they turned north towards the hills. They came to an Arab camp on the night of 20 September, and were picked up by a party of Italians and taken back to **Barce** on the 25th, twelve days after the raid. Despite the condition of Jopling's leg, the two men had walked at least 150 miles, mostly at night and navigating by the stars.

The raid on **Barce** cost the enemy many men killed and wounded, over thirty aircraft damaged and destroyed, and a number of vehicles. It cost the LRDG six men wounded, all of whom recovered, ten prisoners of war (seven * from T1 patrol and three from G1), several of whom were wounded, and fourteen vehicles. Their part in the operation won Easonsmith and Wilder the the DSO, Lawson the MC, and Craw, Tippett, and Dobson the MM. Tippett's and Dobson's citations also refer to their capture of the Fiesler Storch after the **Sidi Haneish** raid.

* Four of them, Craw, Nutt, Milburn, and Hay, escaped a year later.

EPIISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

THE EIGHTH ARMY ADVANCE

THE EIGHTH ARMY ADVANCE

FOLLOWING THE DEFEAT early in September 1942 of Rommel's final attempt to break through the Alamein Line, **Eighth Army** proceeded with its preparations for an offensive. As Faiyum would cease to be a suitable base for the LRDG when the advance started, the whole unit was concentrated at **Kufra**. The battle began on 23 October and in ten days the shattered remnants of the Axis army were in full retreat to the west. At the request of General Staff Intelligence, the LRDG re-established a watch on the **Tripoli- Benghazi** road, again near **Marble Arch**. During the first spell of watching, carried out by Y1 patrol from 30 October to 8 November, less than a hundred vehicles passed both ways daily. By 10 November, when R1 had relieved Y1, the results of **Eighth Army's** victory were apparent: enemy traffic streamed westwards at the rate of 3500 vehicles a day, and the evacuation of Italian civilians with their furniture, as well as many thousands of troops, confirmed that Rommel did not intend to return.

When it became evident that the enemy intended to withdraw from **El Agheila**, the watch was transferred farther westwards to the **Gheddahia- Tauorga** section of the road. S1 patrol began the first spell in this area on 13 December, and T2 took over a week later. Second-Lieutenant R. A. Tinker,²⁸ leaving a rear camp about thirty miles to the south-west of **Gheddahia**, took nine men in two vehicles to the vicinity of **Sedada**. The watchers, who had great difficulty in passing on foot through enemy camps near the road, did not long escape discovery. Three German armoured cars attacked and occupied their forward camp on 22 December. The men who were able to evade capture began to walk back to the rear camp, which Tinker and three others succeeded in reaching. Tinker withdrew his patrol next day, when eight German vehicles were seen approaching from the north. Five New Zealanders^{**} and an Englishman were missing, but Trooper E. Ellis²⁹

^{**} Troopers Ellis, L. R. B. Johnstone, and J. L. Reid, and Privates C. A. Dornbush and J. M. Simonsen. Reid walked for a

week before he was captured, and later escaped from a prisoner-of-war camp in **Italy**.

and the Englishman (Private E. C. Sturrock), walking for days with no food and little water, made their way independently back to the British lines. They were both awarded the MM.

Long before **Eighth Army** began the advance from **Alamein**, the Intelligence branch of General Headquarters, **Middle East**, had secret agents operating in **Tripolitania**. LRDG patrols were required to carry these men, with their stores and their wireless sets, to a place from which they could complete their journey by camel or on foot. In August, R1 patrol, under Captain A. I. Guild,³⁰ took the first party of three men from **Kufra** to Bir Tala, about 120 miles to the south-east of **Tripoli**. Three months later the same patrol, led by Captain L. H. Browne,³¹ repeated the 2000-mile trip to deliver fresh stores and to relieve the wireless operator, who was ill.

On the way northwards on 17 November, R1 exchanged fire with an enemy patrol between **Marada** and **Zella**, and put two enemy vehicles out of action without loss to themselves. Next day, when attacked at **Wadi Tamet** by at least fourteen enemy aircraft, they took cover in the wadi banks and fought back with all their weapons. An officer of the **Arab Legion** attached to the patrol and the New Zealand navigator (Lance-Corporal N. O'Malley³² were killed, another New Zealander (Private M. F. Fogden³³ was wounded, and two trucks were damaged beyond repair. Browne sent a party back to **Kufra** with the wounded man and, although wounded himself, carried on to Bir Tala with two trucks to complete his task.

When Rommel withdrew in December from his defensive positions at **El Agheila**, his retreat was hastened by a 'left hook' by the New Zealand Division around his southern flank. This outflanking move involved crossing the **Marada- El Agheila** track, through country that had become well known to the LRDG during the road watch. Guided by Browne's R1

patrol, the column reached the Bir el Merduma area, to the west of **Marble Arch**, in the evening of 15 December, but was unable to prevent Rommel's **Afrika Korps** from breaking out to the west. R1 then led the Division in another outflanking movement at **Nofilia** on 17 December, but again the enemy escaped.

R1 patrol's next assignment was to reconnoitre the country beyond **Wadi Tamet**. Browne was injured and a South African survey officer was killed on 22 December when their jeep struck a mine on a landing ground near the wadi. Browne, who had served the LRDG with distinction since the formation of the unit, was awarded the MC. With Second-Lieutenant K. F. McLauchlan ³⁴ in command, the patrol continued the reconnaissance until ambushed by two German armoured cars near the **Gheddahia- Bu Ngem** track on 27 December. The wireless truck, containing three New Zealanders * and an Englishman, and a jeep carrying a South African officer and his driver, were captured, but the rest of the patrol skilfully evaded the enemy.

While Eighth Army was driving into **Tripolitania** from the east, General Leclerc's Fighting French Forces of Chad Province moved into the Fezzan from the south. This form of Anglo-French co-operation had been planned a year earlier, when R2 patrol, led by Second-Lieutenant C. H. B. Croucher, ³⁵ had been despatched to a French outpost in the Tibesti Mountains to act as a wireless link between the Allies. Rommel's counter-offensive in **Cyrenaica**, however, had necessitated the postponement of the French advance and the recall of R2 patrol.

As Leclerc lacked the support of fighter aircraft for his operations, LRDG patrols, including R2, were sent to the Fezzan to destroy enemy aircraft on the landing grounds at Hon and Sebha,

* Lance-Bombardier C. O. Grimsey, Private K. C. J. Ineson, and Trooper R. D. Hayes.

but unfortunately, because of heavy rain and very difficult going,

their attempts failed. Although the French were exposed to air attack, they succeeded in capturing one Italian outpost after another, while the LRDG blocked the enemy's line of retreat to the north. T1 (under Captain Wilder), Y2, and an Indian patrol * mined the roads, destroyed transport, killed a few Italians, and took a number of prisoners.

Eighth Army entered **Tripoli** on 23 January 1943. This advance of 1400 miles in three months had made it necessary for the LRDG to move its base from **Kufra** 600 miles north-westwards to **Zella**, and later another 150 miles to Hon. The unit's Heavy Section, equipped with 6-ton and 3-ton lorries, moved the base from one place to the next in a single journey. The heavy transport was usually employed in ferrying supplies to forward dumps, or from the nearest depot to the LRDG base—from **Wadi Halfa** to **Kufra**, from **Mersa Matruh** to **Siwa**, from **Msus** to **Gialo**, from **Nofilia** to **Zella**, and from **Misurata** or **Tripoli** to Hon. Transporting rations, petrol, ammunition, and equipment over such great distances, created special problems for the quartermaster, Captain D. Barrett, ³⁶ who received the MBE in recognition of his efficiency and capacity for hard work.

* An Indian Long Range Squadron of four patrols came under the command of the LRDG in October 1942.

Reconnaissance in Tunisia

Some weeks before the fall of **Tripoli**, General Sir Bernard Montgomery explained to the commanding officer of the LRDG (Lieutenant-Colonel G. L. Prendergast ³⁷) that the patrols would be required to reconnoitre the country in southern **Tunisia** through which a column outflanking the **Mareth Line** would have to pass. To enable the patrols to operate so far from their base at Hon, dumps were established near the Tunisian frontier and arrangements made with Allied Headquarters at **Algiers** for supplies to be available at Tozeur, about a hundred miles to the west of **Gabes**.

In January and February 1943 the LRDG and the Indian LRS explored the territory to the south and west of the range of hills extending southwards from **Matmata**. They reported daily by wireless about the going, obstacles, cover, water supply, and sites for landing grounds, and on their return the patrol leaders conferred with Captain Browne at Headquarters New Zealand Division, where a model was made to demonstrate possible lines of advance.

Crossing the frontier on 12 January, T1 patrol, under Captain Wilder, were the first troops of **Eighth Army** to enter **Tunisia**. About thirty miles to the south-west of **Foum Tatahouine**, they found the pass through the hills that became known to **Eighth Army** as Wilder's Gap; this was on the route followed by the **New Zealand Corps** two months later. Other patrols explored the country farther to the west, T2 in the area to the south of **Djebel Tebaga**, between **Matmata** and Chott Djerid, a huge salt marsh, and G2 in the area between the Chott and the Grand Erg Oriental, an impassable sand sea extending into southern **Algeria**.

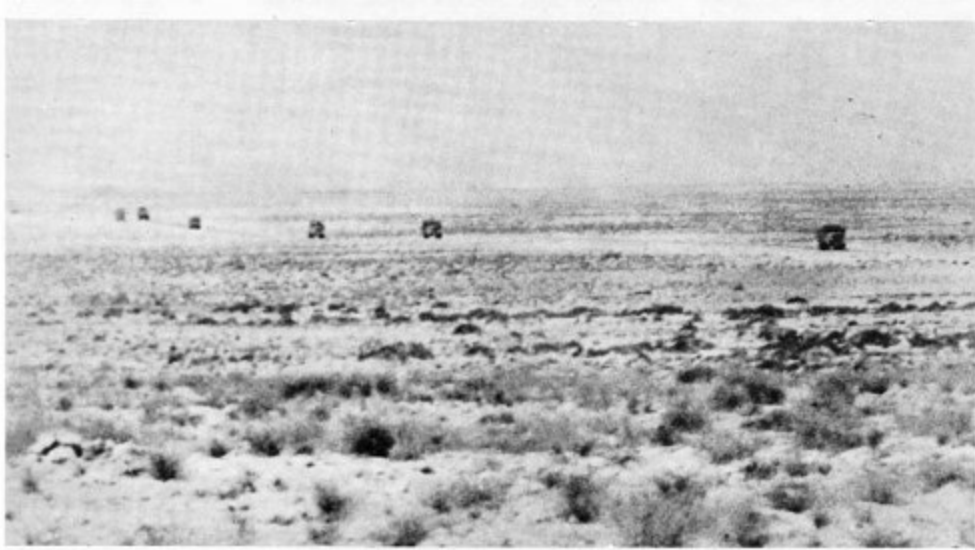
T2 patrol, under Lieutenant Tinker, and accompanied by a party of 'Popski's Private Army' (Peniakoff's Demolition Squadron), established a base camp in a wadi about twenty miles to the south of **Ksar Rhilane**. Tinker and Peniakoff, each with two jeeps, then went north towards **Djebel Tebaga**, through country that was found to be suitable for the passage of a force of all arms.

THE ROADWATCH



HOW THEY WATCHED

HOW THEY WATCHED



WHAT THEY SAW
Enemy transport on the
Tripoli-Benghazi road

WHAT THEY SAW

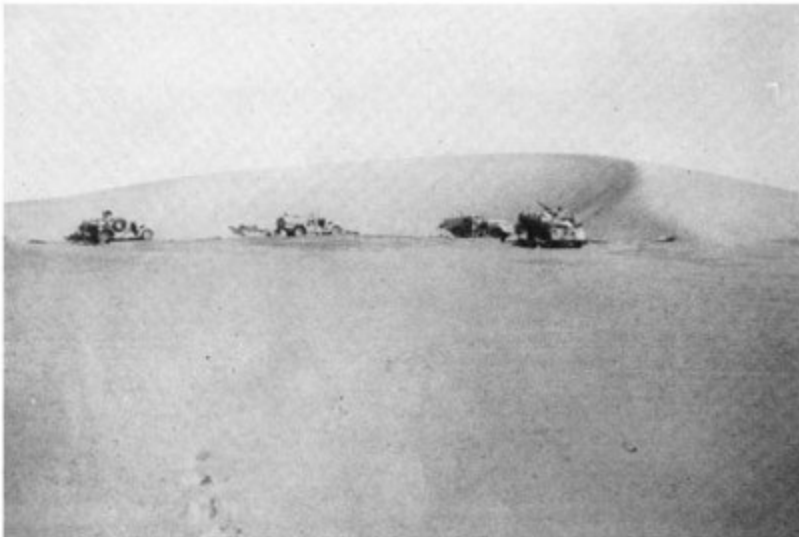
Enemy transport on the Tripoli- Benghazi road

HOW THEY HID
Two patrol trucks
under camouflage



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RAID ON BARCE



A SAND DUNE typical of the
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T1 PATROL before the raid

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IN GEBEL AKHDAR
Captain N. P. Wilder explains the
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AFTER THE RAID A truck burns
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INTO TUNISIA



THE FIRST TROOPS OF EIGHTH ARMY TO ENTER TUNISIA
T1 patrol on the border on 12 January 1943

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IN THE ÆGEAN



AN LRDG PATROL ON A CAIQUE

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THE ISLAND OF NAXOS

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R1 PATROL'S WIRELESS POSITION ON LEROS
The wireless was put out of action by bombs

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ON A MINESWEEPER from Turkey to Haifa. On the left are the New Zealanders J.L.D. Davis, C. A. Yaxley and M. D. Richardson. Captain C. K. Saxton of T1 patrol is at right in rear



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A natural corridor extended between **Djebel Tebaga** and the **Matmata Hills** towards the coast at **Gabes**; this was the **Tebaga Gap** through which the outflanking of the **Mareth Line** was to be accomplished. After avoiding German troops preparing defences near **Matmata**, Tinker and Peniakoff parted to continue with their separate tasks, Peniakoff to carry out demolitions in the **Matmata** area and Tinker to examine the country in the direction of Chott Djerid. On the way back to the base camp, Tinker rejoined Peniakoff at **Ksar Rhilane** and learned that the camp had been shot up by enemy aircraft. All the vehicles had been destroyed and two New Zealanders (Lance-Corporals R. A. Ramsay ³⁸ and

R. C. Davies ³⁹) had been wounded.

Everybody except Sergeant Garven, a French officer and two Arabs of the PPA, who remained to keep a rendezvous with S2 patrol, had moved from the base camp to **Ksar Rhilane, where there was a mixed gathering of thirty-seven men: sixteen of the LRDG, thirteen of the PPA, six French parachutists, and two SAS parachutists. The French had been following the route taken by Stirling's SAS troops when one of their jeeps had broken down, and Stirling had left the other two men because of vehicle trouble. Not long afterwards Stirling and his party were captured near **Gabes**.**

The LRDG had two jeeps, the PPA two, and the French one, but there was not sufficient petrol to take all five a hundred miles. With three jeeps, the wounded men, and petrol for 150 miles, Tinker set out for Sabria, an oasis near Chott Djerid, while the remainder of the men followed on foot, with their supplies in the other two jeeps. Tinker was to send back relief for the walkers, but if Sabria was not held by the Fighting French, he would have to go to Tozeur.

Sabria was in the hands of the Germans. An Arab guided Tinker's party, without being detected, past the oasis to Sidi Mazouq, where the natives cared for them. At this stage they had travelled sixty miles and were still over a hundred from Tozeur. As there was not sufficient petrol to complete the journey around the shore of Chott Djerid, Tinker decided to cross the salt marshes by a camel track to Nefta, a village about sixteen miles from Tozeur. Where the surface was firm it was possible to drive at top speed, but where water seepage formed a quagmire the jeeps lurched through muddy pools on to hard lumps of coagulated salt and sand. They were the first vehicles ever to cross the Chott.

At Nefta, Tinker arranged by telephone for the French to supply petrol from Tozeur. He refuelled two of his jeeps and sent them back to meet the walking party—they did not attempt to recross the Chott—while he went to **Gafsa, about sixty miles to the north-east of Tozeur, to obtain transport from the United States Army and to report by wireless**

to **Eighth Army**. The Americans at **Gafsa**, unable to help, told him to go to **Tebessa**, a hundred miles to the north-west, in **Algeria**. Although not wholly convinced by Tinker's story, the Americans at **Tebessa** lent him two jeeps and allowed him to report to **Eighth Army**.

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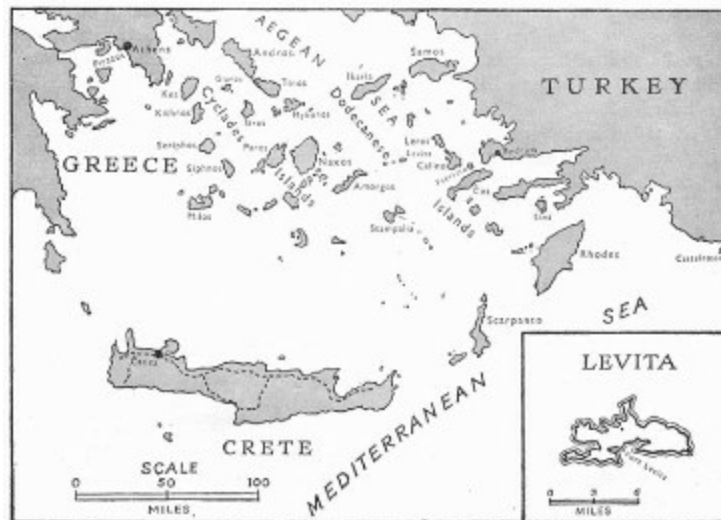
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The New Zealand Corps passed through Wilder's Gap and remained at an assembly area while the route was plotted to the north-west. A wadi with steep, rocky escarpments presented a very difficult obstacle, but Tinker, accompanied by an officer * of the New Zealand Engineers, found a place where tracks could be made by machinery to get the Corps transport across. Meanwhile, the T2 navigator (Corporal Bassett) guided a New Zealand Provost party marking the ' **Diamond** track' along the line of advance. The Corps left the assembly area on 19 March, the day before **Eighth Army** launched its frontal attack on the **Mareth Line**, advanced to Tebaga along the route reconnoitred by the LRDG, and made contact with the enemy on the 21st.

Reacting to this threat to his right flank, the enemy attempted to hold the **Tebaga Gap** with 21 Panzer and two other divisions. General

Montgomery despatched **1 Armoured Division** to reinforce the **New Zealand Corps**. With powerful support from the **RAF**, this force broke through the gap on 26 March and left the enemy with no option but to abandon the **Mareth Line**. The New Zealanders entered **Gabes** three days later. When the Axis forces were driven back into a corner of **Tunisia**, there was no further scope for the LRDG, which therefore was released from **Eighth Army** and returned to Egypt to rest and reorganise.

The war in North Africa ended with the Axis surrender on 13 May 1943. During the two and a half years that the armies had advanced and retreated along the coast, the patrols of the LRDG, operating behind the enemy lines, had dominated the vast inner desert. Their next undertaking was in a different theatre of war, the **Aegean Sea**.



MAP OF AEGEAN SEA

Map of Aegean Sea

* Captain J. A. Goodsir

[SECTION]

FOLLOWING THE DEFEAT early in September 1942 of Rommel's final attempt to break through the Alamein Line, **Eighth Army** proceeded with its preparations for an offensive. As Faiyum would cease to be a suitable base for the LRDG when the advance started, the whole unit was concentrated at **Kufra**. The battle began on 23 October and in ten days the shattered remnants of the Axis army were in full retreat to the west. At the request of General Staff Intelligence, the LRDG re-established a watch on the **Tripoli- Benghazi** road, again near **Marble Arch**. During the first spell of watching, carried out by Y1 patrol from 30 October to 8 November, less than a hundred vehicles passed both ways daily. By 10 November, when R1 had relieved Y1, the results of **Eighth Army's** victory were apparent: enemy traffic streamed westwards at the rate of 3500 vehicles a day, and the evacuation of Italian civilians with their furniture, as well as many thousands of troops, confirmed that Rommel did not intend to return.

When it became evident that the enemy intended to withdraw from **El Agheila**, the watch was transferred farther westwards to the **Gheddahia- Tauorga** section of the road. S1 patrol began the first spell in this area on 13 December, and T2 took over a week later. Second-Lieutenant R. A. Tinker, ²⁸ leaving a rear camp about thirty miles to the south-west of **Gheddahia**, took nine men in two vehicles to the vicinity of **Sedada**. The watchers, who had great difficulty in passing on foot through enemy camps near the road, did not long escape discovery. Three German armoured cars attacked and occupied their forward camp on 22 December. The men who were able to evade capture began to walk back to the rear camp, which Tinker and three others succeeded in reaching. Tinker withdrew his patrol next day, when eight German vehicles were seen approaching from the north. Five New Zealanders ^{**} and an Englishman were missing, but Trooper E. Ellis ²⁹

**** Troopers Ellis, L. R. B. Johnstone, and J. L. Reid, and Privates C. A. Dornbush and J. M. Simonsen. Reid walked for a week before he was captured, and later escaped from a prisoner-of-war camp in Italy.**

and the Englishman (Private E. C. Sturrock), walking for days with no food and little water, made their way independently back to the British lines. They were both awarded the MM.

Long before Eighth Army began the advance from Alamein, the Intelligence branch of General Headquarters, Middle East, had secret agents operating in Tripolitania. LRDG patrols were required to carry these men, with their stores and their wireless sets, to a place from which they could complete their journey by camel or on foot. In August, R1 patrol, under Captain A. I. Guild,³⁰ took the first party of three men from Kufra to Bir Tala, about 120 miles to the south-east of Tripoli. Three months later the same patrol, led by Captain L. H. Browne,³¹ repeated the 2000-mile trip to deliver fresh stores and to relieve the wireless operator, who was ill.

On the way northwards on 17 November, R1 exchanged fire with an enemy patrol between Marada and Zella, and put two enemy vehicles out of action without loss to themselves. Next day, when attacked at Wadi Tamet by at least fourteen enemy aircraft, they took cover in the wadi banks and fought back with all their weapons. An officer of the Arab Legion attached to the patrol and the New Zealand navigator (Lance-Corporal N. O'Malley³² were killed, another New Zealander (Private M. F. Fogden³³ was wounded, and two trucks were damaged beyond repair. Browne sent a party back to Kufra with the wounded man and, although wounded himself, carried on to Bir Tala with two trucks to complete his task.

When Rommel withdrew in December from his defensive positions at El Agheila, his retreat was hastened by a 'left hook' by the New Zealand Division around his southern flank. This outflanking move involved

crossing the **Marada- El Agheila** track, through country that had become well known to the LRDG during the road watch. Guided by Browne's R1 patrol, the column reached the Bir el Merduma area, to the west of **Marble Arch**, in the evening of 15 December, but was unable to prevent Rommel's **Afrika Korps** from breaking out to the west. R1 then led the Division in another outflanking movement at **Nofilia** on 17 December, but again the enemy escaped.

R1 patrol's next assignment was to reconnoitre the country beyond **Wadi Tamet**. Browne was injured and a South African survey officer was killed on 22 December when their jeep struck a mine on a landing ground near the wadi. Browne, who had served the LRDG with distinction since the formation of the unit, was awarded the MC. With Second-Lieutenant K. F. McLauchlan ³⁴ in command, the patrol continued the reconnaissance until ambushed by two German armoured cars near the **Gheddahia- Bu Ngem** track on 27 December. The wireless truck, containing three New Zealanders * and an Englishman, and a jeep carrying a South African officer and his driver, were captured, but the rest of the patrol skilfully evaded the enemy.

While Eighth Army was driving into **Tripolitania** from the east, General Leclerc's Fighting French Forces of Chad Province moved into the Fezzan from the south. This form of Anglo-French co-operation had been planned a year earlier, when R2 patrol, led by Second-Lieutenant C. H. B. Croucher, ³⁵ had been despatched to a French outpost in the Tibesti Mountains to act as a wireless link between the Allies. Rommel's counter-offensive in **Cyrenaica**, however, had necessitated the postponement of the French advance and the recall of R2 patrol.

As Leclerc lacked the support of fighter aircraft for his operations, LRDG patrols, including R2, were sent to the Fezzan to destroy enemy aircraft on the landing grounds at Hon and Sebha,

* Lance-Bombardier C. O. Grimsey, Private K. C. J. Ineson, and Trooper R. D. Hayes.

but unfortunately, because of heavy rain and very difficult going, their attempts failed. Although the French were exposed to air attack, they succeeded in capturing one Italian outpost after another, while the LRDG blocked the enemy's line of retreat to the north. T1 (under Captain Wilder), Y2, and an Indian patrol * mined the roads, destroyed transport, killed a few Italians, and took a number of prisoners.

Eighth Army entered **Tripoli** on 23 January 1943. This advance of 1400 miles in three months had made it necessary for the LRDG to move its base from **Kufra** 600 miles north-westwards to **Zella**, and later another 150 miles to Hon. The unit's Heavy Section, equipped with 6-ton and 3-ton lorries, moved the base from one place to the next in a single journey. The heavy transport was usually employed in ferrying supplies to forward dumps, or from the nearest depot to the LRDG base—from **Wadi Halfa** to **Kufra**, from **Mersa Matruh** to **Siwa**, from **Msus** to **Gialo**, from **Nofilia** to **Zella**, and from **Misurata** or **Tripoli** to Hon. Transporting rations, petrol, ammunition, and equipment over such great distances, created special problems for the quartermaster, Captain D. Barrett,³⁶ who received the MBE in recognition of his efficiency and capacity for hard work.

* An Indian Long Range Squadron of four patrols came under the command of the LRDG in October 1942.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

RECONNAISSANCE IN TUNISIA

Reconnaissance in Tunisia

Some weeks before the fall of **Tripoli**, General Sir Bernard Montgomery explained to the commanding officer of the LRDG (Lieutenant-Colonel G. L. Prendergast ³⁷) that the patrols would be required to reconnoitre the country in southern **Tunisia** through which a column outflanking the **Mareth Line** would have to pass. To enable the patrols to operate so far from their base at Hon, dumps were established near the Tunisian frontier and arrangements made with Allied Headquarters at **Algiers** for supplies to be available at Tozeur, about a hundred miles to the west of **Gabes**.

In January and February 1943 the LRDG and the Indian LRS explored the territory to the south and west of the range of hills extending southwards from **Matmata**. They reported daily by wireless about the going, obstacles, cover, water supply, and sites for landing grounds, and on their return the patrol leaders conferred with Captain Browne at Headquarters New Zealand Division, where a model was made to demonstrate possible lines of advance.

Crossing the frontier on 12 January, T1 patrol, under Captain Wilder, were the first troops of **Eighth Army** to enter **Tunisia**. About thirty miles to the south-west of **Foum Tatahouine**, they found the pass through the hills that became known to **Eighth Army** as Wilder's Gap; this was on the route followed by the **New Zealand Corps** two months later. Other patrols explored the country farther to the west, T2 in the area to the south of **Djebel Tebaga**, between **Matmata** and Chott Djerid, a huge salt marsh, and G2 in the area between the Chott and the Grand Erg Oriental, an impassable sand sea extending into southern **Algeria**.

T2 patrol, under Lieutenant Tinker, and accompanied by a party of 'Popski's Private Army' (Peniakoff's Demolition Squadron), established a

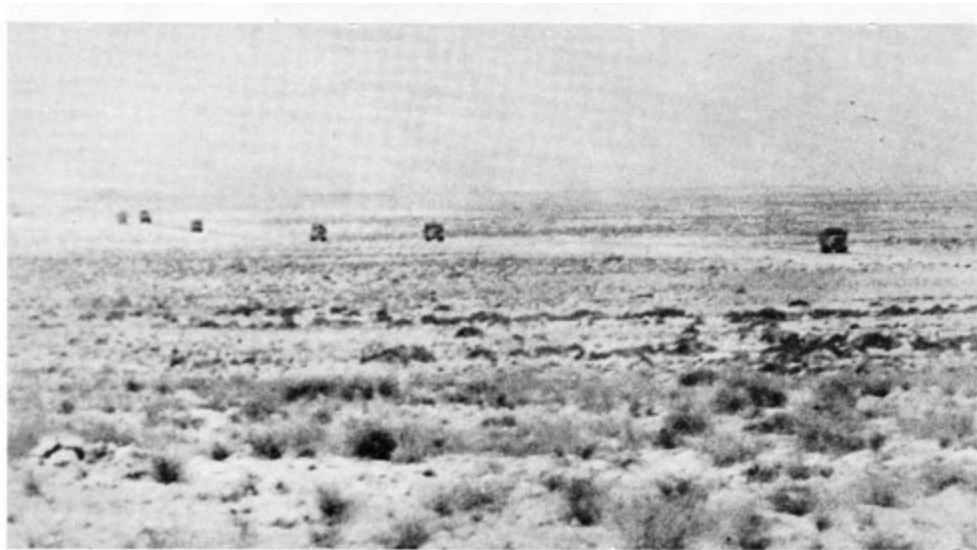
base camp in a wadi about twenty miles to the south of **Ksar Rhilane**. Tinker and Peniakoff, each with two jeeps, then went north towards **Djebel Tebaga**, through country that was found to be suitable for the passage of a force of all arms.

THE ROADWATCH



HOW THEY WATCHED

HOW THEY WATCHED



WHAT THEY SAW
Enemy transport on the
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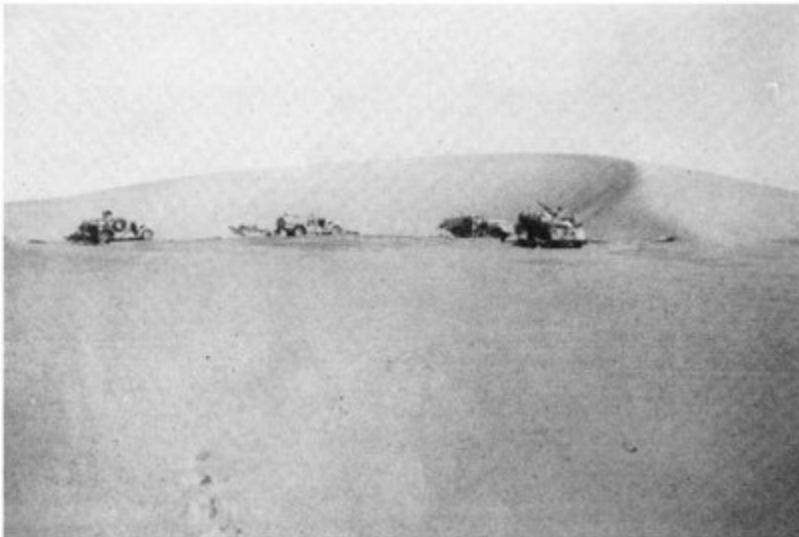
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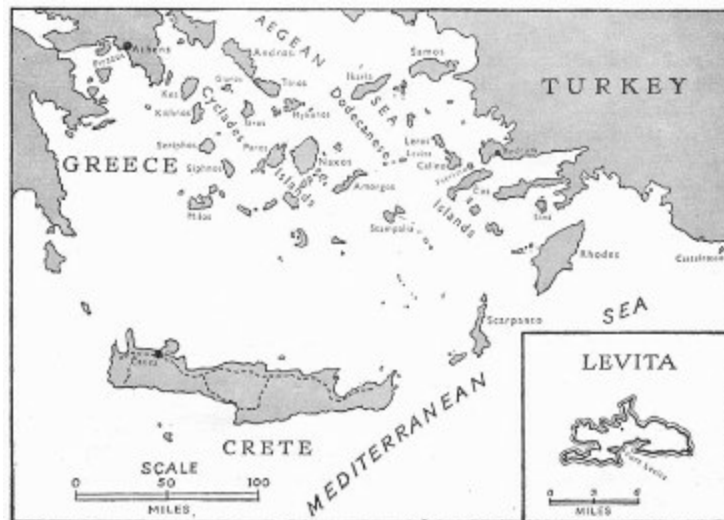
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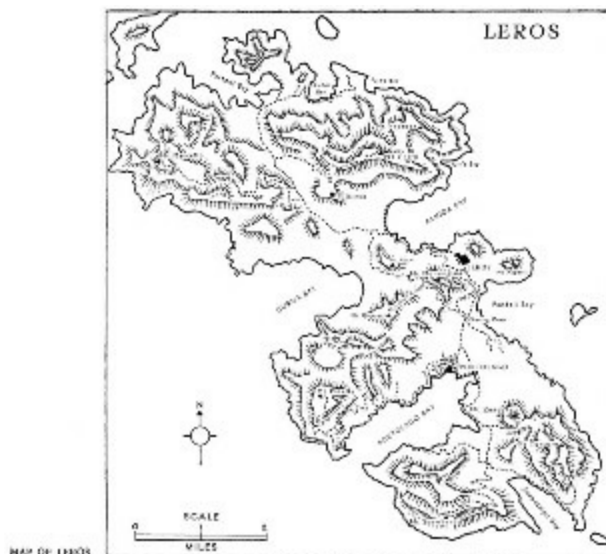
EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

INVASION OF THE DODECANESE ISLANDS

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WITH THE OBJECT of containing German forces in the eastern **Mediterranean** and diverting part of the enemy's air force during the Allied invasion of **Italy**, and also of taking advantage of any weakness in the enemy defences that might follow the Italian capitulation, British forces from the **Middle East** occupied the Dodecanese Islands in the **Aegean Sea** in September 1943. The enemy's command of the air, however, enabled him to counter-attack and regain possession of these islands during the next two months. In the course of these operations, patrols of the LRDG were employed as raiding and reconnaissance parties in the enemy-held islands, and as garrison troops.

When Italy collapsed, the Germans assumed control of **Crete**, **Rhodes**, and **Scarpanto**. As a preliminary step to an assault on Rhodes and to harass the extended German garrisons, the British secured the islands of **Cos**, which had the only airfield, **Leros**, where there was a naval base, and **Samos**, which would be an advanced base in the north, as well as other small islands. Reinforcements were taken without opposition by air to **Cos**, by destroyer to **Leros**, and by small local craft to **Samos** and other islands.



MAP OF LEROS

Before going to this new theatre of war, the LRDG spent the summer

of 1943 at The Cedars of **Lebanon**, where the men were trained in mountain warfare. The patrols travelled long distances as self-contained units, and received supplies dropped by the **RAF** under wireless direction. B (British and Rhodesian) Squadron also trained on the **Levant** coast to operate from submarines, but A Squadron, which included approximately 110 New Zealanders under the command of Major Guild, had no opportunity for amphibious training.

A Squadron, leaving **Haifa** ten days after B Squadron, sailed on the Greek destroyer *Queen Olga* on 21 September in convoy with three other destroyers and reached Portolago, **Leros**, during an air raid the following day. Little damage was done to the port, so work was begun immediately unloading stores and making camp at Alinda Bay, on the eastern side of the island. A few days later the *Queen Olga* and HMS *Intrepid* were sunk at Portolago and the naval barracks were damaged in heavy air raids.

Two A Squadron patrols were despatched from **Leros** on 25 September for the Cyclades, a chain of islands off the south-east coast of the Greek mainland, to watch and report on the movements of enemy shipping and aircraft. A party from T1 patrol went to Kithnos and M1 * patrol to Giaros. In addition, a Rhodesian patrol (S1) was sent to Simi, a small island off the coast of **Turkey** and about fifteen miles to the north of Rhodes, and M2 patrol to Stampalia. The remainder of the LRDG, together with the Special Boat Squadron and some commandos, were concentrated on the island of Calino, two or three miles to the south of **Leros**. On their arrival on 25 September they received a tumultuous welcome from the Greeks, who had been oppressed by the Italian garrison.

The enemy already had begun his air attacks on Cos, the only island from which fighter aircraft could operate to protect the sea and land forces in the Aegean. The number of fighters that could be based on the Cos airfield was not sufficient to ward off for long the determined attacks of a strongly reinforced **German Air Force**. The enemy invaded Cos by sea and air on 3 October and, despite the stubborn resistance of a

battalion of the **Durham Light Infantry**, overwhelmed the garrison next day.

The troops on Calino, six miles away, were given no warning of the invasion, and as a result the LRDG narrowly escaped losing a patrol. Captain Tinker had set out on 28 September with a composite patrol of twelve men to investigate some mysterious signalling to **Turkey** from Pserimo, a small island midway between Calino and Cos. The signaller, who was sent back to Calino for interrogation, was found to be a Greek in British pay as an agent.

The invasion fleet bound for Cos, including merchant ships and landing craft, escorted by flak ships and three destroyers, arrived in a cove on the south coast of Pserimo before dawn on 3 October and began the assault on Cos half an hour later. The enemy put eighty troops ashore at Pserimo to establish headquarters and dressing stations. They quite unexpectedly encountered Tinker's men, who left hurriedly for the high ground, hustled on by heavy volleys of fire from the escort ships. Enemy patrols searched the island that day and the next, but Tinker's party was taken off in the late afternoon of 4 October and returned to Calino with the loss of only one man captured.

* M1 and M2 were British patrols formed during the training period in **Lebanon**. M1 was under the command of A Squadron and M2 was led by a New Zealander (Lieutenant K. H. Lazarus) in the British Army.

The LRDG had been ordered to counter-attack Cos the previous night—an impossible task—but this order was cancelled and all the troops on Calino, which was now considered untenable, were instructed to return to **Leros**. Stores and troops were loaded into every available craft and a strange fleet of little ships struggled out from Calino in the evening. They reached **Leros** at various times throughout the night and, in anticipation of air attacks, unloaded and moved the stores away from the wharves before daylight. A dive-bombing raid by fifty-five aircraft

began at 5.30 a.m. and lasted four hours. An Italian gunboat and several small craft were sunk and buildings and installations destroyed.

The garrison on **Leros** comprised Headquarters 234 Brigade, a battalion of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, a company of the **Royal West Kents**, and the Raiding Forces (about 200 men of the LRDG, 150 men of the SBS, and thirty commandos). The only anti-aircraft defences, 40-millimetre **Breda** guns, and the five coastal-defence batteries, each of four 6-inch naval guns (off British ships), were Italian. Five LRDG patrols were despatched to the battery positions to stiffen the morale of the Italian allies and if necessary prevent them from turning their guns against brigade headquarters. The task of seeing that the gun crews were at their posts, and that they manned their guns, called for tact, patience, and even force. The Italian communication system, inefficient in any case because of the demoralisation of the signalmen, was damaged by bombing, and in the later stages before the invasion the only communications were the LRDG wireless links.

The bombing attacks were continued every day, often by sixty or more aircraft, and the coastal batteries were among the targets selected. The battery on Mount Marcello, in the north-west, where Y2 patrol was stationed, was put out of action on 8 October, and the battery on Mount Zuncona, to the east of Portolago Bay, where R1 (under Lieutenant D. J. Aitken ⁴⁰) was stationed, was put out of action next day. Aitken's patrol was then withdrawn to A Squadron headquarters.

German landing craft were seen entering the bays of Calino on 10 October, and next day the coastal batteries shelled the enemy from **Leros**. The LRDG sent parties of two or three men to Calino to gather information about enemy activity there. On one occasion a New Zealander (Sergeant R. D. Tant ⁴¹) failed to return to the rendezvous. Captured by the enemy, he was taken from Calino to Cos, but escaped to **Turkey** and arrived back at **Leros** after being missing for a fortnight. He was again taken prisoner, however, during the invasion of that island, by the same company of German paratroops.

The loss of the Cos airfield was a major setback, for without air cover merchant shipping could not enter the Aegean with the anti-aircraft guns, transport, and stores needed for the defence of **Leros** and **Samos**, and the Navy could avoid unacceptable losses only by operating at night. It was doubtful whether **Leros** and **Samos** could be held indefinitely without the capture of **Rhodes**, a major operation for which the resources were not available in the **Middle East**. Nevertheless, the Commanders-in-Chief of the three services decided to hold **Leros** and **Samos** as long as supplies could be maintained.

Destroyers, submarines, and smaller craft brought troops, supplies, six 25-pounder guns, twelve Bofors guns (which were strapped on submarines), jeeps and trailers. Mortars, machine guns, ammunition, wireless equipment, and other stores were dropped by parachute. The garrison was reinforced by 400 men of the Buffs, who were the survivors of the troops on three destroyers sunk by mines off **Calino** on 24 October, and by a battalion of the King's Own. *

* The King's Own Royal Regiment

Patrols in Outlying Islands

The invasion of **Leros** had been expected to follow the fall of **Cos**, but bombing attacks on enemy airfields in **Greece**, **Crete**, and **Rhodes** by Allied aircraft based in **North Africa** and **Cyprus**, and offensive sweeps against enemy shipping in the Aegean, delayed the assault until mid-November. So that an invasion force might be anticipated and if possible intercepted, LRDG patrols were stationed in the outlying islands astride the sea and air routes to the **Dodecanese** to watch the movements of enemy shipping and aircraft. Acting on information sent by T1 patrol from **Kithnos**, the Navy sank on 7 October a convoy consisting of six landing craft, an ammunition ship, and an armed trawler. There were only ninety survivors from 2500 troops. The destruction of this convoy prevented the enemy from making an immediate assault on **Leros**.

Captain C. K. Saxton ⁴² and six men of T1 patrol were taken to Kithnos in an 18-ton caique * of the Levant Schooner Flotilla, which made the voyage in three stages at night and was concealed during daylight against the shores of two intermediate islands. Kithnos was occupied by a garrison of between fifteen and twenty Germans in charge of a permanent observation post and wireless direction-finding station. At first it was intended that T1 should stay a fortnight, but so valuable was the information they obtained that it was decided to leave them on the island for a month. The enemy knew they were there, but Saxton's men avoided discovery by changing their hiding-places, which were mostly in stock shelters, and by moving at night. Sergeant J. L. D. Davis, who had some knowledge of their language, obtained from several of the local Greeks reliable information about the enemy dispositions in the neighbouring islands and about shipping routes. His conduct throughout the Aegean operations won Davis the BEM.

Kithnos was admirably situated for observing the routes from Greece to Crete and the Dodecanese Islands. T1 patrol, which kept a constant watch for shipping and aircraft, sighted a convoy passing between Kithnos and Siros islands in the afternoon of 6 October, and reported by wireless its size, speed, air cover, and probable route; this was the convoy sunk by the Navy off Stampalia. The LSF caique returned with supplies and took Saxton and the wireless operator to a small island off Seriphos to charge the wireless batteries, a noisy operation that might have betrayed them to the enemy. While they were away, Davis, who was left in command of the observation post on Kithnos, saw two small convoys moving at night.

After capturing Cos, the enemy consolidated his position in the Cyclades by occupying many of the islands. Believing that they were cut off and would have to find their own way back, T1 planned to escape to Turkey by capturing a German caique or by taking a local fisherman's boat, but before they attempted to do this T2 patrol arrived by LSF caique to relieve them. Saxton's patrol, with two of the Greeks who had helped them, returned safely to Leros on 23 October.

T2 (five men under Second-Lieutenant M. W. Cross ⁴³) were disembarked at Seriphos because that island was thought to be safer than Kithnos, which the enemy patrolled with seaplanes. A Greek helped Cross's party to find a suitable hiding-place in an abandoned goat-house on top of a 300-foot cliff at the northern end of the island, from which they had a magnificent view. The local inhabitants kept the patrol constantly informed about the movements of the enemy garrison, reported to be between twenty and fifty strong, in the town about four miles away. The postmaster passed the information by telephone to a monastery, and a priest sent a runner to the New Zealanders' hideout. T2 spent three weeks on Seriphos without being observed, although once the enemy sailed so close inshore below their cliff that they could have dropped a stone in the boat.

They saw only one vessel, a steamer of about 6000 tons, but when the enemy began an airlift from [Athens](#) to Rhodes with four large flying boats escorted by seaplane-fighters, they reported the times that the aircraft passed the island. Six Beaufighters shot down the flying boats when they appeared one day without fighter escort. T2 was relieved by a British patrol and returned to [Leros](#) on 9 November with three Greeks.

Seven men from R1 patrol, under Lieutenant Aitken, spent seventeen days on Naxos, one of the largest of the Cyclades Islands, to which they were taken by motor launch. They confused the garrison of 650 Germans, who undoubtedly knew they were on the island, by making long cross-country treks. The local inhabitants, as on the other islands, warned the patrol of the enemy's movements and were at times embarrassingly friendly. The patrol saw single ships but no convoys, and reported a concentration of shipping in Naxos harbour, which was attacked by two Mitchell bombers escorted by two Beaufighters. The RAF sank two ships, but at the cost of two aircraft shot down. The pilot and navigator of a Beaufighter that crashed in the sea were rescued by Greeks and taken into the town, where their wounds were dressed by a doctor and they were hidden until the LRDG patrol could smuggle them out under the noses of the enemy. R1 took the two airmen back to

Leros, where they arrived on 6 November without casualty.

*** These small local craft were fitted with tank engines, giving them a speed of six knots, and manned by the Navy with a crew of three. They were camouflaged with their masts down so that they could not easily be detected when lying close inshore.**

The Assault on Levita

The survivors of the enemy convoy sunk on 7 October were landed on Stampalia, where the LRDG had M2 patrol. A small naval craft (the *Hedgehog*) despatched from **Leros to bring back ten prisoners of war for interrogation, called with engine trouble at Levita, about twenty miles to the west of Calino. A party sent by motor launch to the assistance of the *Hedgehog* found only a smouldering wreck and was fired on from the island. As the possession of Levita was considered essential to the Navy, and as it would be useful as an observation post, the commander of 234 Brigade ordered the LRDG to capture the island. Major Guild and Captain Tinker urged that a reconnaissance should be made before the assault force was landed, but permission to do this was not granted.**

It was decided to attack with forty-eight men under the command of Captain J. R. Olivey, ⁴⁴ the force including twenty-two from A Squadron under Lieutenant J. M. Sutherland, ⁴⁵ and the remainder coming from B Squadron. Sutherland's patrol (R2), was withdrawn from the coastal battery on Mount Scumbardo, in southern **Leros, and was joined by a few men from R1 and T2 patrols. The B Squadron party included Y2 and part of S1 patrol. In case the enemy should be occupying both ends of Levita, B Squadron was to land to the west of the port, which is on the south coast, and A Squadron to the east. The objective was to reach the high, central ground overlooking the port.**

The landings were to be made from two motor launches in small, canvas boats, but as these had been punctured in air attacks, the troops had to patch them with sticking-plaster before they could practise

rowing in them. The force had four infantry wireless sets for inter-communication between the two parties and with the launches, and a larger set for communication with **Leros**. When they were about to leave at dusk on 23 October, however, it was discovered that the A Squadron set had not been 'netted in' with the others.

Most of the men were violently seasick before they reached Levita. It took A Squadron a long time to float the canvas boats from the tossing launch, but they eventually got away and landed on a very rugged coast, where the men rescued as much of their gear as they could from the rocks and dragged it up a cliff face. Sutherland told his wireless operator to try to get in touch with Olivey, but at no stage was he able to do so.

After disembarking the two parties, the motor launches were to shell a house thought to be occupied by the enemy in the centre of the island. Instead of shelling this building, however, they concentrated on an old hut on a ridge in front of A Squadron. When the shellfire ceased, Sutherland's party moved towards the ridge and discovered nearby the burnt-out hull of the *Hedgehog*. They then came under machine-gun fire from the rear, presumably from somewhere near their landing place. This kept them pinned down on bare ground until they were able to get together and rush the gun position, which they captured with a dozen prisoners. Trooper H. L. Mallett ⁴⁶ was severely wounded and died despite the efforts of the medical orderly (Private B. Steedman ⁴⁷) to save him.

Although they again came under machine-gun fire, A Squadron continued to advance and secured the ridge before daylight. They flushed the enemy out of the hut, but did not occupy it because it was in a vulnerable position. Trooper A. J. Penhall ⁴⁸ was mortally wounded, but Trooper R. G. Haddow, ⁴⁹ although severely wounded in the stomach, recovered as a prisoner of war. Several other men received minor wounds.

At the first streaks of daylight, three or four seaplanes began to take off from the Levita harbour. The New Zealanders, who overlooked the harbour from the ridge, opened fire, and for a moment it seemed that

Trooper L. G. Doel ⁵⁰ had put one seaplane out of action with his Bren gun, but it moved out of range and took off after some delay. When the seaplanes came overhead and began to strafe, the men returned the fire, but as their bullets only bounced off harmlessly they decided not to waste ammunition.

Having met no resistance on landing, B Squadron was within 500 yards of the enemy headquarters by dawn and could hear fighting on the other side of the island. Had Sutherland been able to make contact with Olivey by wireless, he would have advised him of his position, and B Squadron could have gone ahead without fear of firing on A Squadron. The Germans, who received reinforcements during the day, isolated the New Zealanders on the ridge with air attacks and machine-gun and mortar fire, while they encircled and captured most of the B Squadron party.

Having disposed of B Squadron, the enemy was then able to employ his full strength against A Squadron, which was holding three positions on the ridge. Sutherland had with him the wireless operator, the medical orderly, the wounded, three or four other men, and the German prisoners. Sergeant E. J. Dobson ⁵¹ was in charge of a party in a central position, armed with a Bren gun, a Tommy gun, and some rifles, and farther away on high ground, Corporal J. E. Gill ⁵² had the third party. Trooper J. T. Bowler, ⁵³ who went down to the landing place for water, and a man who attempted to deliver a message from Gill to Sutherland, were not seen again and were presumed to have been killed. The enemy eventually overwhelmed Sutherland's force, but Gill and three men avoided capture for four days by hiding among some rocks. They were unable to attract the attention of a launch that circled the island and, as they were without food and water, had to give themselves up to the enemy.

With instructions to evacuate the force from Levita, the commanding officer of the LRDG (Lieutenant-Colonel Easonsmith) * arrived by launch during the night 24–25 October, but found only

Captain Olivey, the medical officer (Captain Lawson), and seven men of B Squadron at the rendezvous. Olivey returned with Major Guild the following night to search for the missing men, but found nobody. The LRDG lost forty men on Levita.

Easonsmith conferred with the senior officers of A and B Squadrons on 28 October about the future of the LRDG. It was recommended that, with the exception of the patrols in the Cyclades Islands watching for the movement of enemy invasion forces, the LRDG should return to the **Middle East to train reinforcements and reform. Major Guild left by destroyer for Egypt on 31 October to endeavour to have the LRDG withdrawn. On his arrival he learned that the New Zealand Government had already raised the question of recalling the New Zealand Squadron, which had been committed to an operational role in the Aegean without the Government's knowledge, although the usual procedure was to consult it before committing New Zealand troops to a new theatre of war. The Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East** (General Sir Henry Wilson), stated that it was impossible to replace the New Zealand Squadron at such short notice, and asked that it remain with the LRDG until replacements could be trained. It was agreed that the squadron should be withdrawn as soon as the tactical situation allowed.**

*** Easonsmith became the commanding officer of the LRDG on 17 October 1943, when Colonel Prendergast was appointed second-in-command of the Raiding Forces in the Aegean.**

The Battle of Leros

Only part of A Squadron was withdrawn from, **Leros before the invasion began. Lieutenant Aitken and twenty men from R1 patrol and squadron headquarters left for Palestine by destroyer on 7 November. R2 patrol, reconstituted with eight New Zealanders and two Englishmen under Second-Lieutenant R. F. White,⁵⁴ relieved T1 at the Scumbardo coastal-defence battery position on 8 November, and T1 moved to an olive grove on the northern side of Alinda Bay, where they were joined by**

T2 when they returned from Seriphos next day.

Despite the delays imposed by the Navy and the Allied Air Force, the enemy succeeded in assembling an invasion flotilla at Cos and Calino for the assault on **Leros, which he began at dawn on 12 November after two days' intensified bombing. The Scumbardo coastal-defence battery shelled a convoy at maximum range, but the batteries in the north, which allowed the invasion force to get closer than the minimum range of their guns before opening fire, were unable to prevent the enemy from landing. Five hundred Germans were disembarked on the north-east coast of the island, where they gained possession of the high ground between Palma and Grifo Bays, including Mount Vedetta, but were held throughout the day by the Buffs and patrols of B Squadron. Another 150 troops who were landed at Pandeli Bay, to the south-east of **Leros** town, after making some progress were counter-attacked by a company of the Royal Irish Fusiliers and were pinned down on the lower slopes of Mount Appetici.**

A warning had been received the previous day that German airborne troops were assembling at **Athens. In anticipation of a parachute attack, Captain Saxton's T1 patrol and Lieutenant Cross's T2 patrol moved inland from Alinda Bay, and were joined by a British patrol and some SBS troops to make a force thirty-odd strong. Early in the afternoon of 12 November, thirty-five Junkers transport planes, escorted by Stukas, seaplanes, and other types of aircraft, approached at a low altitude from the west and dropped 500 paratroops on the narrow strip of land between Gurna and Alinda Bays, where they were engaged immediately by the troops in the area, including the composite LRDG-SBS group. Major Redfern, who led the LRDG in this action, was killed by a parachutist. Fierce fighting developed around the Rachi ridge, but although temporary successes were gained the paratroops could not be dislodged.**

Throughout the battle perfect co-operation existed between the enemy air and ground forces. Except for a brief period during the airborne invasion, the **German Air Force, which flew more than 500 sorties in the day, met no anti-aircraft opposition because of the lack of**

ammunition.

By occupying the Gurna- [Alinda](#) isthmus, the enemy could isolate the northern sector from the rest of the island. He reinforced the Pandeli landing during the night and had possession of Mount Appetici by midday on 13 November. A strong counter-attack in the centre of the island drove the enemy into a pocket between Rachi ridge and Alinda Bay, a gain that might have had a decisive effect on the battle had not the arrival of fresh paratroops caused an unexpected reverse. Two of the fifteen Junkers transports were shot down and a third released the troops from such a low altitude that their parachutes could not open, but those who landed safely were able to restore the position. Meanwhile, in the north-east, the enemy occupied Mount Clidi, where the LRDG blew up the Italian coastal-defence guns, and Captain Olivey sent his last message at 3 p.m., saying 'Germans here'.

After the failure of a night counter-attack against Appetici by a company of the King's Own, supported by a naval bombardment, the enemy drove southwards from that feature towards [Charing Cross](#). Although this thrust was held on 14 November, the Germans secured a foothold on Meraviglia, at the top of which Fortress Headquarters was located in tunnels. The Buffs and the LRDG patrols in the north recaptured Clidi, but the Royal Irish Fusiliers and the King's Own, although they took 200 prisoners and inflicted fairly heavy casualties, still were unable to drive the enemy from Rachi ridge. The German Air Force flew more than 400 sorties, mostly against Clidi, the positions south of Rachi, Meraviglia, and Windmill ridge (between Meraviglia and Mount Giovanni), where the 25-pounders and Bofors guns were located. Most of the guns were knocked out, together with their meagre supplies of ammunition.

Lieutenant White's R2 patrol on Scumbardo directed the Italian coastal-defence battery to shoot landwards against targets to the north of Rachi and on Appetici. The shells passed over a ridge on Meraviglia with only about ten feet to spare, but some accurate shooting was

reported at a jetty in Alinda Bay. The battery engaged enemy positions, including a castle near **Leros** town, until all its ammunition was spent on the last day of the battle.

At daybreak on 15 November the enemy forces were confined to the Rachi and Appetici areas, except for a few men cut off on the cliffs of Clidi. Further efforts were made to capture Rachi, but despite the help of reinforcements from the **Royal West Kents**, brought by the Navy from Samos Island, little headway could be made. Undoubtedly the relentless onslaught of the enemy air force contributed to this failure. Communications were disrupted, making control and movement difficult, the fighting deteriorated into small skirmishes, and the troops were showing signs of fatigue.

Lieutenant-Colonel Easonsmith, with two or three men, reconnoitred **Leros** town to see whether the enemy was infiltrating around that side of Meraviglia. He found no enemy, but when he returned to make a second reconnaissance his party was ambushed and he was killed.

The Germans launched a heavy attack on Meraviglia at first light on 16 November. All types of aircraft, including Stukas and outmoded seaplanes, flew more than 600 sorties against the British positions and strafed anything that moved, without a shot being fired in return except by small arms. The ground assault, which came from the east, met stubborn resistance and seemed to have spent itself before midday. This would have been the time to counter-attack, but the troops at Fortress Headquarters were too few, and the disruption of communications prevented other forces being moved up for the purpose. No doubt appreciating the helplessness of the British situation, the enemy renewed the attack with great vigour and overran Meraviglia.

Fortress Headquarters and Headquarters LRDG destroyed their documents and wireless equipment before withdrawing to Portolago. An attempt was made to rally all the troops in the south of the island for a counter-attack but morale by this time was very low and the result was a dismal failure. Organised resistance collapsed and silence descended on

the island later in the afternoon. The fortress commander ordered the surrender of **Leros** about 6 p.m. Troops wandered around without knowing what to do, and the Germans made no attempt at that late hour to round up the stragglers.

The LRDG patrols in the north were cut off from their headquarters in the south. Major the Earl Jellicoe ⁵⁵ had taken command of the composite LRDG-SBS group, which was manning machine-gun posts on the northern coast, in case the enemy should land further reinforcements there. When news of the capitulation was received about midnight, the men in the vicinity were rounded up with the aid of two jeeps. A party of about twenty-five, including T1 and T2 patrols, took possession of an Italian caique and small motor boat in Parteni Bay, persuaded the Italians to open the harbour boom, and sailed to a small island north of **Leros**, where they hid during daylight. They reached Bodrum next night and joined an old minesweeper, in which they made a three-day voyage down the Turkish coast and across to **Haifa**.

After the surrender, most of Headquarters LRDG dispersed in the south near Mount Patella. Colonel Prendergast, Captain Croucher, Captain Tinker, and several others, including two men from R2 patrol, hid on Mount Tortore. The remainder of R2 escaped that night in two parties. Lieutenant White and four men baled out a little rowing boat that had been sunk at Serocampo Bay and made a perilous journey to join other escapees near Bodrum. Colonel Prendergast's party remained hidden on **Leros** until 22 November, when they were evacuated by an **RAF** air-sea rescue launch. Small groups continued to escape up to a fortnight after the surrender.

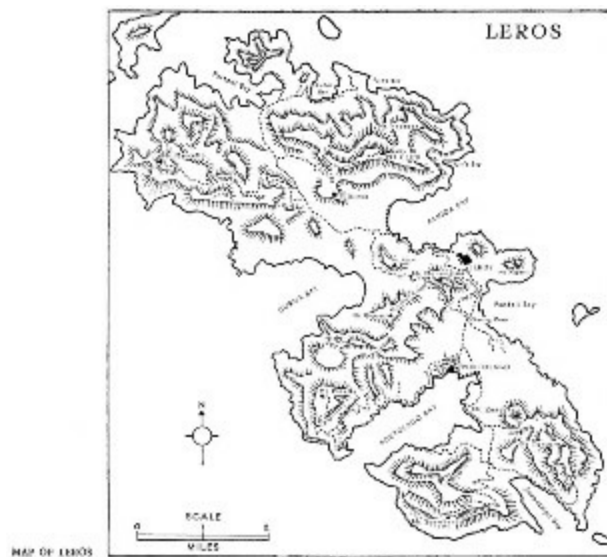
The LRDG did everything that could be expected of it during the fighting on **Leros**, often setting an example to the other troops, and when the island fell the men endured many hardships in order to escape. In the end, only two men of A Squadron were captured on **Leros**. This was the last operation in which the New Zealand Squadron participated. It was disbanded on 31 December 1943 and most of its members, after a spell at the New Zealand Armoured Corps Training Depot in Egypt, were

posted as reinforcements to the Divisional Cavalry with the 2nd New Zealand Division in [Italy](#).

[SECTION]

WITH THE OBJECT of containing German forces in the eastern **Mediterranean** and diverting part of the enemy's air force during the Allied invasion of **Italy**, and also of taking advantage of any weakness in the enemy defences that might follow the Italian capitulation, British forces from the **Middle East** occupied the Dodecanese Islands in the **Aegean Sea** in September 1943. The enemy's command of the air, however, enabled him to counter-attack and regain possession of these islands during the next two months. In the course of these operations, patrols of the LRDG were employed as raiding and reconnaissance parties in the enemy-held islands, and as garrison troops.

When Italy collapsed, the Germans assumed control of **Crete**, **Rhodes**, and **Scarpanto**. As a preliminary step to an assault on Rhodes and to harass the extended German garrisons, the British secured the islands of **Cos**, which had the only airfield, **Leros**, where there was a naval base, and **Samos**, which would be an advanced base in the north, as well as other small islands. Reinforcements were taken without opposition by air to **Cos**, by destroyer to **Leros**, and by small local craft to **Samos** and other islands.



MAP OF LEROS

Before going to this new theatre of war, the LRDG spent the summer of 1943 at The Cedars of **Lebanon**, where the men were trained in mountain warfare. The patrols travelled long distances as self-contained units, and received supplies dropped by the **RAF** under wireless direction. B (British and Rhodesian) Squadron also trained on the **Levant** coast to operate from submarines, but A Squadron, which included approximately 110 New Zealanders under the command of Major Guild, had no opportunity for amphibious training.

A Squadron, leaving **Haifa** ten days after B Squadron, sailed on the Greek destroyer *Queen Olga* on 21 September in convoy with three other destroyers and reached Portolago, **Leros**, during an air raid the following day. Little damage was done to the port, so work was begun immediately unloading stores and making camp at Alinda Bay, on the eastern side of the island. A few days later the *Queen Olga* and HMS *Intrepid* were sunk at Portolago and the naval barracks were damaged in heavy air raids.

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Cos by sea and air on 3 October and, despite the stubborn resistance of a battalion of the **Durham Light Infantry**, overwhelmed the garrison next day.

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The invasion fleet bound for Cos, including merchant ships and landing craft, escorted by flak ships and three destroyers, arrived in a cove on the south coast of Pserimo before dawn on 3 October and began the assault on Cos half an hour later. The enemy put eighty troops ashore at Pserimo to establish headquarters and dressing stations. They quite unexpectedly encountered Tinker's men, who left hurriedly for the high ground, hustled on by heavy volleys of fire from the escort ships. Enemy patrols searched the island that day and the next, but Tinker's party was taken off in the late afternoon of 4 October and returned to Calino with the loss of only one man captured.

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The LRDG had been ordered to counter-attack Cos the previous night—an impossible task—but this order was cancelled and all the troops on Calino, which was now considered untenable, were instructed to return to **Leros**. Stores and troops were loaded into every available craft and a strange fleet of little ships struggled out from Calino in the evening. They reached **Leros** at various times throughout the night and, in anticipation of air attacks, unloaded and moved the stores away from

the wharves before daylight. A dive-bombing raid by fifty-five aircraft began at 5.30 a.m. and lasted four hours. An Italian gunboat and several small craft were sunk and buildings and installations destroyed.

The garrison on **Leros** comprised Headquarters 234 Brigade, a battalion of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, a company of the **Royal West Kents**, and the Raiding Forces (about 200 men of the LRDG, 150 men of the SBS, and thirty commandos). The only anti-aircraft defences, 40-millimetre **Breda** guns, and the five coastal-defence batteries, each of four 6-inch naval guns (off British ships), were Italian. Five LRDG patrols were despatched to the battery positions to stiffen the morale of the Italian allies and if necessary prevent them from turning their guns against brigade headquarters. The task of seeing that the gun crews were at their posts, and that they manned their guns, called for tact, patience, and even force. The Italian communication system, inefficient in any case because of the demoralisation of the signalmen, was damaged by bombing, and in the later stages before the invasion the only communications were the LRDG wireless links.

The bombing attacks were continued every day, often by sixty or more aircraft, and the coastal batteries were among the targets selected. The battery on Mount Marcello, in the north-west, where Y2 patrol was stationed, was put out of action on 8 October, and the battery on Mount Zuncona, to the east of Portolago Bay, where R1 (under Lieutenant D. J. Aitken ⁴⁰) was stationed, was put out of action next day. Aitken's patrol was then withdrawn to A Squadron headquarters.

German landing craft were seen entering the bays of Calino on 10 October, and next day the coastal batteries shelled the enemy from **Leros**. The LRDG sent parties of two or three men to Calino to gather information about enemy activity there. On one occasion a New Zealander (Sergeant R. D. Tant ⁴¹) failed to return to the rendezvous. Captured by the enemy, he was taken from Calino to Cos, but escaped to **Turkey** and arrived back at **Leros** after being missing for a fortnight. He was again taken prisoner, however, during the invasion of that island, by the same company of German paratroops.

The loss of the Cos airfield was a major setback, for without air cover merchant shipping could not enter the Aegean with the anti-aircraft guns, transport, and stores needed for the defence of Leros and Samos, and the Navy could avoid unacceptable losses only by operating at night. It was doubtful whether Leros and Samos could be held indefinitely without the capture of Rhodes, a major operation for which the resources were not available in the Middle East. Nevertheless, the Commanders-in-Chief of the three services decided to hold Leros and Samos as long as supplies could be maintained.

Destroyers, submarines, and smaller craft brought troops, supplies, six 25-pounder guns, twelve Bofors guns (which were strapped on submarines), jeeps and trailers. Mortars, machine guns, ammunition, wireless equipment, and other stores were dropped by parachute. The garrison was reinforced by 400 men of the Buffs, who were the survivors of the troops on three destroyers sunk by mines off Calino on 24 October, and by a battalion of the King's Own. *

*** The King's Own Royal Regiment**

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

PATROLS IN OUTLYING ISLANDS

Patrols in Outlying Islands

The invasion of **Leros** had been expected to follow the fall of **Cos**, but bombing attacks on enemy airfields in **Greece**, **Crete**, and **Rhodes** by Allied aircraft based in North Africa and **Cyprus**, and offensive sweeps against enemy shipping in the Aegean, delayed the assault until mid-November. So that an invasion force might be anticipated and if possible intercepted, LRDG patrols were stationed in the outlying islands astride the sea and air routes to the **Dodecanese** to watch the movements of enemy shipping and aircraft. Acting on information sent by T1 patrol from **Kithnos**, the Navy sank on 7 October a convoy consisting of six landing craft, an ammunition ship, and an armed trawler. There were only ninety survivors from 2500 troops. The destruction of this convoy prevented the enemy from making an immediate assault on **Leros**.

Captain C. K. Saxton ⁴² and six men of T1 patrol were taken to **Kithnos** in an 18-ton caique * of the Levant Schooner Flotilla, which made the voyage in three stages at night and was concealed during daylight against the shores of two intermediate islands. **Kithnos** was occupied by a garrison of between fifteen and twenty Germans in charge of a permanent observation post and wireless direction-finding station. At first it was intended that T1 should stay a fortnight, but so valuable was the information they obtained that it was decided to leave them on the island for a month. The enemy knew they were there, but Saxton's men avoided discovery by changing their hiding-places, which were mostly in stock shelters, and by moving at night. Sergeant J. L. D. Davis, who had some knowledge of their language, obtained from several of the local Greeks reliable information about the enemy dispositions in the neighbouring islands and about shipping routes. His conduct throughout the Aegean operations won Davis the BEM.

Kithnos was admirably situated for observing the routes from **Greece**

to **Crete** and the Dodecanese Islands. T1 patrol, which kept a constant watch for shipping and aircraft, sighted a convoy passing between Kithnos and Siros islands in the afternoon of 6 October, and reported by wireless its size, speed, air cover, and probable route; this was the convoy sunk by the Navy off Stampalia. The LSF caique returned with supplies and took Saxton and the wireless operator to a small island off Seriphos to charge the wireless batteries, a noisy operation that might have betrayed them to the enemy. While they were away, Davis, who was left in command of the observation post on Kithnos, saw two small convoys moving at night.

After capturing Cos, the enemy consolidated his position in the Cyclades by occupying many of the islands. Believing that they were cut off and would have to find their own way back, T1 planned to escape to **Turkey** by capturing a German caique or by taking a local fisherman's boat, but before they attempted to do this T2 patrol arrived by LSF caique to relieve them. Saxton's patrol, with two of the Greeks who had helped them, returned safely to **Leros** on 23 October.

T2 (five men under Second-Lieutenant M. W. Cross ⁴³) were disembarked at Seriphos because that island was thought to be safer than Kithnos, which the enemy patrolled with seaplanes. A Greek helped Cross's party to find a suitable hiding-place in an abandoned goat-house on top of a 300-foot cliff at the northern end of the island, from which they had a magnificent view. The local inhabitants kept the patrol constantly informed about the movements of the enemy garrison, reported to be between twenty and fifty strong, in the town about four miles away. The postmaster passed the information by telephone to a monastery, and a priest sent a runner to the New Zealanders' hideout. T2 spent three weeks on Seriphos without being observed, although once the enemy sailed so close inshore below their cliff that they could have dropped a stone in the boat.

They saw only one vessel, a steamer of about 6000 tons, but when the enemy began an airlift from **Athens** to Rhodes with four large flying

boats escorted by seaplane-fighters, they reported the times that the aircraft passed the island. Six Beaufighters shot down the flying boats when they appeared one day without fighter escort. T2 was relieved by a British patrol and returned to [Leros](#) on 9 November with three Greeks.

Seven men from R1 patrol, under Lieutenant Aitken, spent seventeen days on Naxos, one of the largest of the Cyclades Islands, to which they were taken by motor launch. They confused the garrison of 650 Germans, who undoubtedly knew they were on the island, by making long cross-country treks. The local inhabitants, as on the other islands, warned the patrol of the enemy's movements and were at times embarrassingly friendly. The patrol saw single ships but no convoys, and reported a concentration of shipping in Naxos harbour, which was attacked by two Mitchell bombers escorted by two Beaufighters. The RAF sank two ships, but at the cost of two aircraft shot down. The pilot and navigator of a Beaufighter that crashed in the sea were rescued by Greeks and taken into the town, where their wounds were dressed by a doctor and they were hidden until the LRDG patrol could smuggle them out under the noses of the enemy. R1 took the two airmen back to [Leros](#), where they arrived on 6 November without casualty.

* These small local craft were fitted with tank engines, giving them a speed of six knots, and manned by the Navy with a crew of three. They were camouflaged with their masts down so that they could not easily be detected when lying close inshore.

THE ASSAULT ON LEVITA

The Assault on Levita

The survivors of the enemy convoy sunk on 7 October were landed on Stampalia, where the LRDG had M2 patrol. A small naval craft (the *Hedgehog*) despatched from **Leros** to bring back ten prisoners of war for interrogation, called with engine trouble at Levita, about twenty miles to the west of Calino. A party sent by motor launch to the assistance of the *Hedgehog* found only a smouldering wreck and was fired on from the island. As the possession of Levita was considered essential to the Navy, and as it would be useful as an observation post, the commander of 234 Brigade ordered the LRDG to capture the island. Major Guild and Captain Tinker urged that a reconnaissance should be made before the assault force was landed, but permission to do this was not granted.

It was decided to attack with forty-eight men under the command of Captain J. R. Olivey, ⁴⁴ the force including twenty-two from A Squadron under Lieutenant J. M. Sutherland, ⁴⁵ and the remainder coming from B Squadron. Sutherland's patrol (R2), was withdrawn from the coastal battery on Mount Scumbardo, in southern **Leros**, and was joined by a few men from R1 and T2 patrols. The B Squadron party included Y2 and part of S1 patrol. In case the enemy should be occupying both ends of Levita, B Squadron was to land to the west of the port, which is on the south coast, and A Squadron to the east. The objective was to reach the high, central ground overlooking the port.

The landings were to be made from two motor launches in small, canvas boats, but as these had been punctured in air attacks, the troops had to patch them with sticking-plaster before they could practise rowing in them. The force had four infantry wireless sets for inter-communication between the two parties and with the launches, and a larger set for communication with **Leros**. When they were about to leave at dusk on 23 October, however, it was discovered that the A Squadron

set had not been 'netted in' with the others.

Most of the men were violently seasick before they reached Levita. It took A Squadron a long time to float the canvas boats from the tossing launch, but they eventually got away and landed on a very rugged coast, where the men rescued as much of their gear as they could from the rocks and dragged it up a cliff face. Sutherland told his wireless operator to try to get in touch with Olivey, but at no stage was he able to do so.

After disembarking the two parties, the motor launches were to shell a house thought to be occupied by the enemy in the centre of the island. Instead of shelling this building, however, they concentrated on an old hut on a ridge in front of A Squadron. When the shellfire ceased, Sutherland's party moved towards the ridge and discovered nearby the burnt-out hull of the *Hedgehog*. They then came under machine-gun fire from the rear, presumably from somewhere near their landing place. This kept them pinned down on bare ground until they were able to get together and rush the gun position, which they captured with a dozen prisoners. Trooper H. L. Mallett ⁴⁶ was severely wounded and died despite the efforts of the medical orderly (Private B. Steedman ⁴⁷) to save him.

Although they again came under machine-gun fire, A Squadron continued to advance and secured the ridge before daylight. They flushed the enemy out of the hut, but did not occupy it because it was in a vulnerable position. Trooper A. J. Penhall ⁴⁸ was mortally wounded, but Trooper R. G. Haddow, ⁴⁹ although severely wounded in the stomach, recovered as a prisoner of war. Several other men received minor wounds.

At the first streaks of daylight, three or four seaplanes began to take off from the Levita harbour. The New Zealanders, who overlooked the harbour from the ridge, opened fire, and for a moment it seemed that Trooper L. G. Doel ⁵⁰ had put one seaplane out of action with his Bren gun, but it moved out of range and took off after some delay. When the seaplanes came overhead and began to strafe, the men returned the fire, but as their bullets only bounced off harmlessly they decided not to

waste ammunition.

Having met no resistance on landing, B Squadron was within 500 yards of the enemy headquarters by dawn and could hear fighting on the other side of the island. Had Sutherland been able to make contact with Olivey by wireless, he would have advised him of his position, and B Squadron could have gone ahead without fear of firing on A Squadron. The Germans, who received reinforcements during the day, isolated the New Zealanders on the ridge with air attacks and machine-gun and mortar fire, while they encircled and captured most of the B Squadron party.

Having disposed of B Squadron, the enemy was then able to employ his full strength against A Squadron, which was holding three positions on the ridge. Sutherland had with him the wireless operator, the medical orderly, the wounded, three or four other men, and the German prisoners. Sergeant E. J. Dobson ⁵¹ was in charge of a party in a central position, armed with a Bren gun, a Tommy gun, and some rifles, and farther away on high ground, Corporal J. E. Gill ⁵² had the third party. Trooper J. T. Bowler, ⁵³ who went down to the landing place for water, and a man who attempted to deliver a message from Gill to Sutherland, were not seen again and were presumed to have been killed. The enemy eventually overwhelmed Sutherland's force, but Gill and three men avoided capture for four days by hiding among some rocks. They were unable to attract the attention of a launch that circled the island and, as they were without food and water, had to give themselves up to the enemy.

With instructions to evacuate the force from Levita, the commanding officer of the LRDG (Lieutenant-Colonel Easonsmith) * arrived by launch during the night 24–25 October, but found only Captain Olivey, the medical officer (Captain Lawson), and seven men of B Squadron at the rendezvous. Olivey returned with Major Guild the following night to search for the missing men, but found nobody. The LRDG lost forty men on Levita.

Easonsmith conferred with the senior officers of A and B Squadrons on 28 October about the future of the LRDG. It was recommended that, with the exception of the patrols in the Cyclades Islands watching for the movement of enemy invasion forces, the LRDG should return to the **Middle East to train reinforcements and reform. Major Guild left by destroyer for Egypt on 31 October to endeavour to have the LRDG withdrawn. On his arrival he learned that the New Zealand Government had already raised the question of recalling the New Zealand Squadron, which had been committed to an operational role in the Aegean without the Government's knowledge, although the usual procedure was to consult it before committing New Zealand troops to a new theatre of war. The Commander-in-Chief, **Middle East** (General Sir Henry Wilson), stated that it was impossible to replace the New Zealand Squadron at such short notice, and asked that it remain with the LRDG until replacements could be trained. It was agreed that the squadron should be withdrawn as soon as the tactical situation allowed.**

*** Easonsmith became the commanding officer of the LRDG on 17 October 1943, when Colonel Prendergast was appointed second-in-command of the Raiding Forces in the Aegean.**

THE BATTLE OF LEROS

The Battle of Leros

Only part of A Squadron was withdrawn from, **Leros** before the invasion began. Lieutenant Aitken and twenty men from R1 patrol and squadron headquarters left for Palestine by destroyer on 7 November. R2 patrol, reconstituted with eight New Zealanders and two Englishmen under Second-Lieutenant R. F. White,⁵⁴ relieved T1 at the Scumbardo coastal-defence battery position on 8 November, and T1 moved to an olive grove on the northern side of Alinda Bay, where they were joined by T2 when they returned from Seriphos next day.

Despite the delays imposed by the Navy and the Allied Air Force, the enemy succeeded in assembling an invasion flotilla at Cos and Calino for the assault on **Leros**, which he began at dawn on 12 November after two days' intensified bombing. The Scumbardo coastal-defence battery shelled a convoy at maximum range, but the batteries in the north, which allowed the invasion force to get closer than the minimum range of their guns before opening fire, were unable to prevent the enemy from landing. Five hundred Germans were disembarked on the north-east coast of the island, where they gained possession of the high ground between Palma and Grifo Bays, including Mount Vedetta, but were held throughout the day by the Buffs and patrols of B Squadron. Another 150 troops who were landed at Pandeli Bay, to the south-east of **Leros** town, after making some progress were counter-attacked by a company of the Royal Irish Fusiliers and were pinned down on the lower slopes of Mount Appetici.

A warning had been received the previous day that German airborne troops were assembling at **Athens**. In anticipation of a parachute attack, Captain Saxton's T1 patrol and Lieutenant Cross's T2 patrol moved inland from Alinda Bay, and were joined by a British patrol and some SBS troops to make a force thirty-odd strong. Early in the afternoon of

12 November, thirty-five Junkers transport planes, escorted by Stukas, seaplanes, and other types of aircraft, approached at a low altitude from the west and dropped 500 paratroops on the narrow strip of land between Gurna and Alinda Bays, where they were engaged immediately by the troops in the area, including the composite LRDG-SBS group. Major Redfern, who led the LRDG in this action, was killed by a parachutist. Fierce fighting developed around the Rachi ridge, but although temporary successes were gained the paratroops could not be dislodged.

Throughout the battle perfect co-operation existed between the enemy air and ground forces. Except for a brief period during the airborne invasion, the **German Air Force, which flew more than 500 sorties in the day, met no anti-aircraft opposition because of the lack of ammunition.**

By occupying the Gurna- **Alinda isthmus, the enemy could isolate the northern sector from the rest of the island. He reinforced the Pandeli landing during the night and had possession of Mount Appetici by midday on 13 November. A strong counter-attack in the centre of the island drove the enemy into a pocket between Rachi ridge and Alinda Bay, a gain that might have had a decisive effect on the battle had not the arrival of fresh paratroops caused an unexpected reverse. Two of the fifteen Junkers transports were shot down and a third released the troops from such a low altitude that their parachutes could not open, but those who landed safely were able to restore the position. Meanwhile, in the north-east, the enemy occupied Mount Clidi, where the LRDG blew up the Italian coastal-defence guns, and Captain Olivey sent his last message at 3 p.m., saying 'Germans here'.**

After the failure of a night counter-attack against Appetici by a company of the King's Own, supported by a naval bombardment, the enemy drove southwards from that feature towards **Charing Cross. Although this thrust was held on 14 November, the Germans secured a foothold on Meraviglia, at the top of which Fortress Headquarters was located in tunnels. The Buffs and the LRDG patrols in the north**

recaptured Clidi, but the Royal Irish Fusiliers and the King's Own, although they took 200 prisoners and inflicted fairly heavy casualties, still were unable to drive the enemy from Rachi ridge. The German Air Force flew more than 400 sorties, mostly against Clidi, the positions south of Rachi, Meraviglia, and Windmill ridge (between Meraviglia and Mount Giovanni), where the 25-pounders and Bofors guns were located. Most of the guns were knocked out, together with their meagre supplies of ammunition.

Lieutenant White's R2 patrol on Scumbardo directed the Italian coastal-defence battery to shoot landwards against targets to the north of Rachi and on Appetici. The shells passed over a ridge on Meraviglia with only about ten feet to spare, but some accurate shooting was reported at a jetty in Alinda Bay. The battery engaged enemy positions, including a castle near [Leros](#) town, until all its ammunition was spent on the last day of the battle.

At daybreak on 15 November the enemy forces were confined to the Rachi and Appetici areas, except for a few men cut off on the cliffs of Clidi. Further efforts were made to capture Rachi, but despite the help of reinforcements from the [Royal West Kents](#), brought by the Navy from Samos Island, little headway could be made. Undoubtedly the relentless onslaught of the enemy air force contributed to this failure. Communications were disrupted, making control and movement difficult, the fighting deteriorated into small skirmishes, and the troops were showing signs of fatigue.

Lieutenant-Colonel Easonsmith, with two or three men, reconnoitred [Leros](#) town to see whether the enemy was infiltrating around that side of Meraviglia. He found no enemy, but when he returned to make a second reconnaissance his party was ambushed and he was killed.

The Germans launched a heavy attack on Meraviglia at first light on 16 November. All types of aircraft, including Stukas and outmoded seaplanes, flew more than 600 sorties against the British positions and strafed anything that moved, without a shot being fired in return except

by small arms. The ground assault, which came from the east, met stubborn resistance and seemed to have spent itself before midday. This would have been the time to counter-attack, but the troops at Fortress Headquarters were too few, and the disruption of communications prevented other forces being moved up for the purpose. No doubt appreciating the helplessness of the British situation, the enemy renewed the attack with great vigour and overran Meraviglia.

Fortress Headquarters and Headquarters LRDG destroyed their documents and wireless equipment before withdrawing to Portolago. An attempt was made to rally all the troops in the south of the island for a counter-attack but morale by this time was very low and the result was a dismal failure. Organised resistance collapsed and silence descended on the island later in the afternoon. The fortress commander ordered the surrender of **Leros** about 6 p.m. Troops wandered around without knowing what to do, and the Germans made no attempt at that late hour to round up the stragglers.

The LRDG patrols in the north were cut off from their headquarters in the south. Major the Earl Jellicoe ⁵⁵ had taken command of the composite LRDG-SBS group, which was manning machine-gun posts on the northern coast, in case the enemy should land further reinforcements there. When news of the capitulation was received about midnight, the men in the vicinity were rounded up with the aid of two jeeps. A party of about twenty-five, including T1 and T2 patrols, took possession of an Italian caique and small motor boat in Parteni Bay, persuaded the Italians to open the harbour boom, and sailed to a small island north of **Leros**, where they hid during daylight. They reached Bodrum next night and joined an old minesweeper, in which they made a three-day voyage down the Turkish coast and across to **Haifa**.

After the surrender, most of Headquarters LRDG dispersed in the south near Mount Patella. Colonel Prendergast, Captain Croucher, Captain Tinker, and several others, including two men from R2 patrol, hid on Mount Tortore. The remainder of R2 escaped that night in two parties. Lieutenant White and four men baled out a little rowing boat

that had been sunk at Serocampo Bay and made a perilous journey to join other escapees near Bodrum. Colonel Prendergast's party remained hidden on **Leros** until 22 November, when they were evacuated by an **RAF** air-sea rescue launch. Small groups continued to escape up to a fortnight after the surrender.

The LRDG did everything that could be expected of it during the fighting on **Leros**, often setting an example to the other troops, and when the island fell the men endured many hardships in order to escape. In the end, only two men of A Squadron were captured on **Leros**. This was the last operation in which the New Zealand Squadron participated. It was disbanded on 31 December 1943 and most of its members, after a spell at the New Zealand Armoured Corps Training Depot in Egypt, were posted as reinforcements to the Divisional Cavalry with the 2nd New Zealand Division in **Italy**.

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- ² Lt-Col A. D. STIRLING, DSO; **Scots Guards**; CO Special Air Service; p.w. Jan 1943.
- ³ Maj C. S. MORRIS, MC; branch manager; **Christchurch**; born Fairlie, 6 Apr 1905; patrol commander LRDG; CO A (NZ) Sqn LRDG 1942; chief instructor NZ AFV School, **Waiouru**, 1944.
- ⁴ Sgt G. C. GARVEN, MM; farmer; **Otorohanga**; born **Wellington**, 16 Apr 1918.
- ⁵ Pte C. A. DORNBUSH, MM; truck driver; Mangaweka; born NZ, 16 Jun 1917; p.w. Dec 1942.
- ⁶ 2 Lt D. M. BASSETT, DCM; farmer; Rangiora; born **Christchurch**, 6 Feb 1914.
- ⁷ Sgt E. SANDERS, MM; seaman; born **Christchurch**, 29 Dec 1915.
- ⁸ Pte F. R. BROWN, MM; labourer; born Taumarunui, 11 Aug 1913; died in NZ, 23 Dec 1944.
- ⁹ Tpr G. C. PARKES; labourer; born NZ, 28 May 1910.)
- ¹⁰ Lt-Col N. P. WILDER, DSO; farmer; **Waipukurau**; born NZ, 29 Mar 1914; patrol commander LRDG; CO 2 NZ Div Cav, 1944; wounded 14 Sep 1942.)
- ¹¹ Cpl K. E. TIPPETT, MM; car painter; **Te Awamutu**; born **Lyttelton**, 27 Sep

1914.

¹² Tpr T. B. DOBSON, MM; farm labourer; Seddon; born NZ, 25 Feb 1916; wounded 14 Sep 1942.)

¹³ Capt J. R. TALBOT; storekeeper, **Motueka**; born South Africa, 4 Jun 1910; patrol commander LRDG; p.w. 15 Jan 1943.

¹⁴ Lt-Col J. R. EASONSMITH, DSO, MC; **Royal Tank Regiment**; patrol commander LRDG; CO LRDG 1943; killed in action, 16 Nov 1943.

¹⁵ Capt J. A. L. TIMPSON, MC; **Scots Guards**; patrol commander LRDG.)

¹⁶ Capt R. P. LAWSON, MC; Royal Army Medical Corps; medical officer LRDG.)

¹⁷ L-Sgt M. CRAW, MM; farmer; Manawatu; born **Auckland**, 4 Oct 1915; p.w. 14 Sep 1942; escaped 13 Sep 1943.

¹⁸ Sgt D. S. PARKER; derrickman; **Gisborne**; born NZ, 24 Feb 1918; wounded 14 Sep 1942.

¹⁹ Sgt H. R. T. HOLLAND; insurance superintendent; born **Wellington**, 29 Mar 1910; p.w. 14 Sep 1942.

²⁰ L-Cpl A. H. C. NUTT; farmer; Motukarara; born **Christchurch**, 25 Aug 1911; p.w. 14 Sep 1942; escaped Sep 1943.

²¹ Tpr P. J. BURKE; taxi driver; born Gore, 4 Sep 1917; wounded 14 Sep 1942 and 25 Nov 1942.

²² Sgt J. L. D. DAVIS, BEM; clerk; Stratford; born Taumarunui, 9 Jan 1914.

²³ Tpr K. YEALANDS; truck driver; **Blenheim**; born **Blenheim**, 16 Apr 1921; wounded and p.w. 14 Sep 1942.

²⁴ Sgt R. E. HAY; painter; Dunedin; born Dunedin, 11 Dec 1913; p.w. 14 Sep 1942; escaped Sep 1943.

- ²⁵ **Tpr T. A. MILBURN**; stock agent; **Port Chalmers**; born Dunedin, 6 Feb 1918; p.w. 14 Sep 1942; escaped Sep 1943.
- ²⁶ **Tpr F. W. JOPLING**; farm hand; **Auckland**; born England, 15 Apr 1913; wounded 14 Sep 1942; p.w. 25 Sep 1942.
- ²⁷ **Cpl D. P. WARBRICK**; cartage contractor; **Taupo**; born Taupo, 8 Mar 1908.)
- ²⁸ **Capt R. A. TINKER**, MC, MM, m.i.d.; motor driver; **Timaru**; born NZ, 13 Apr 1913; patrol commander LRDG; now in NZ Regular Army.
- ²⁹ **Cpl E. ELLIS**, MM; shepherd; **Masterton**; born **Temuka**, 6 Jun 1913.
- ³⁰ **Maj A. I. GUILD**; farming student; **Christchurch**; born **Temuka**, 19 Feb 1916; patrol commander LRDG; CO A (NZ) Sqn LRDG 1942–43.
- ³¹ **Capt L. H. BROWNE**, MC, DCM, m.i.d.; accountant; **London**; born England, 8 Jul 1908; patrol commander LRDG; GSO III, G (Ops), GHQ MEF, 1942; Intelligence officer LRDG 1943; wounded 11 Jan 1941, 31 Jan 1941, 18 Nov 1942, and 22 Dec 1942.
- ³² **L-Cpl N. O'MALLEY**; shepherd; born Havelock, 9 Oct 1910; killed in action, 18 Nov 1942.)
- ³³ **Sgt M. F. FOGDEN**; farmer; **Auckland**; born **Lower Hutt**, 19 Aug 1915; wounded and p.w., **Sidi Rezegh**, 23 Nov 1941; released 25 Dec 1941; wounded 18 Nov 1942.)
- ³⁴ **Capt K. F. Mc LAUHLAN**, MM, m.i.d.; civil engineer; **Wellington**; born **Invercargill**, 20 Jun 1912; patrol commander LRDG.
- ³⁵ **Capt C. H. B. CROUCHER**, m.i.d.; **Merchant Navy**; Feilding; born England, 25 Feb 1910; commissioned British Army; patrol commander LRDG; GSO III, G (Ops), GHQ MEF, 1942; adjutant LRDG 1943; IO LRDG 1943; IO Raiding Forces 1944; IO LRDG 1944.
- ³⁶ **Capt D. BARRETT**, MBE, m.i.d.; clerk; **Napier**; born **Paeroa**, 8 Dec 1909;

adjutant and quartermaster LRDG.

³⁷ Col G. L. PRENDERGAST, DSO; [Royal Tank Regiment](#); CO LRDG 1941–43; second-in-command Raiding Forces 1943.

³⁸ L-Cpl R. A. RAMSAY, EM; farmer; [Huntly](#); born [Hamilton](#), 21 Sep 1917; wounded 28 Jan 1943.

³⁹ Sgt R. C. DAVIES; clerk; [Picton](#); born [Picton](#), 3 May 1915; wounded 28 Jan 1943.

⁴⁰ Maj D. J. AITKEN, m.i.d.; slaughterman; [New Plymouth](#); born [Leeston](#), 11 Oct 1917; patrol commander LRDG; J Force 1946; now in NZ Regular Army.

⁴¹ Sgt R. D. TANT; clerk; [Christchurch](#); born [Christchurch](#), 20 Mar 1919; p.w. 16 Nov 1943.

⁴² Maj C. K. SAXTON, m.i.d.; commercial traveller; [Dunedin](#); born [Kurow](#), 23 May 1913; patrol commander LRDG.

⁴³ Capt M. W. CROSS, MM; farmer; [Palmerston North](#); born [Balclutha](#), 16 Apr 1917; patrol commander LRDG.

⁴⁴ Capt J. R. OLIVEY, MC; [Sherwood Foresters](#); patrol commander LRDG.

⁴⁵ Capt J. M. SUTHERLAND; farmer; [Waimate](#); born [Waimate](#), 9 Apr 1913; patrol commander LRDG; p.w. 25 Oct 1943.

⁴⁶ Tpr H. L. MALLETT; lorry driver; born NZ, 3 Apr 1914; died of wounds, 24 Oct 1943.

⁴⁷ Pte B. STEEDMAN; labourer; [Auckland](#); born NZ, 21 Aug 1915; p.w. 25 Oct 1943.

⁴⁸ Tpr A. J. PENHALL; shepherd; born NZ, 14 Mar 1910; p.w. 25 Oct 1943; died of wounds while p.w., 28 Oct 1943.

⁴⁹ Sgt R. G. HADDOW; film booker; [Wellington](#); born NZ, 9 Jul 1921;

wounded and p.w. 25 Oct 1943; J Force 1946.

⁵⁰ Tpr L. G. DOEL; freezing works employee; **North Auckland**; born **Whangarei**, 10 Mar 1915; wounded 22 Jul 1942; p.w. 25 Oct 1943.

⁵¹ Sgt E. J. DOBSON; labourer; born NZ, 15 Aug 1910; wounded 19 Sep 1942; p.w. 25 Oct 1943; died while p.w. 6 Apr 1945.

⁵² Cpl J. E. GILL; contractor; Matamata; born NZ, 1 Jul 1912; p.w. 29 Oct 1943.

⁵³ Tpr J. T. BOWLER; shepherd; born **Napier**, 25 Sep 1914; killed in action 24 Oct 1943.

⁵⁴ Capt R. F. WHITE; farmer; Hororata; born England, 21 Mar 1910; patrol commander LRDG.

⁵⁵ Maj the EARL JELlicoe, DSO, MC; **Coldstream Guards**; CO Special Boat Squadron in the Aegean.

EPISODES & STUDIES VOLUME 1

[BACKMATTER]



THIS WAS PRECEDED BY AN ACCOUNT OF THE LRDG IN LIBYA IN 1940 AND 1941

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