

28th Māori Battalion Cassino

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

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

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

• CASSINO: FEBRUARY - MARCH 1944 •

The battle of Monte Cassino was a stop and start affair. We took over from the Americans. I was a member of No. 7 Platoon which was part of 'A' Company and we were camped below Mt Trocchio near an artillery observation post whose guns were hundreds of yards back in the gully below. It was a weird sensation when the guns fired over our heads.

Mt Trocchio was a mile or two south of Cassino. It was a kind of grandstand where all kinds of soldiers, privates and generals watched with the naked eye or powerful binoculars.

From here we watched the bombing of the Monastery. The Americans and the R.A.F dropped hundreds of bombs, and most of them were right on target. And after the smoke and dust had cleared we were surprised to see people still climbing back up the steep hill.

On the night of the attack 'A' Company assembled on the start-line at 9 o'clock (we called it 2100 hours in those days). It was across the Rapido River near the railway line.

Wally Jones was our platoon commander. We had to advance onto the Railway Station which was mortared every now and then. One time the shelling was so bad that we had to shelter in a drain for awhile and of course it was half full of water much to our discomfort.

About this time I had to take over as runner for the night. Back to Company Headquarters which was on the start-line. I was sent to see what the situation was and how the rest were faring. I was told a few boys were wounded and pinned down on our right flank from the Railway Station.

Our platoon managed to advance on to the Station and dig in. Shells were dropping all around us so we didn't waste time. Some of the boys were wounded. When I went to attend to one, Barney Brass, I found that he was dead so I covered him up.

When I was working my way back to the rest of the boys a mortar landed in an old bomb-crater and sprayed upwards. A piece of shrapnel passed through my hip cavity and perforated my bowel in seven places - unknown to me at the time.

I was able to get back to the wall of the station and was attended to and bandaged up by Charlie Rapira and others.

Then things started to happen. Ruben Paniora was one of those wounded and tanks could be heard coming through in the distance. Stretcher bearers and Charlie Rapira walked me back to the Rapido River where we found a stretcher. By this time I was feeling a bit cramped up and groggy. The boys put me on the stretcher and carried me back to the 'first aid post'. Arrived there I was attended to and put in an ambulance which took me to the General Hospital where I was operated on by a Doctor Christie, whose brother I knew well because he was a farmer in our district. Some of the conditions were terrible - mud and slush all around and the doctors and nurses didn't have it easy.

After a day or two my brothers John and Kia and my mates from the battalion came to see how I was doing. They came by jeep from the Battalion which was still at Cassino.

After recuperating enough to sail home I was told that the Hospital ship 'Maunganui' was to sail, pick up a few more boys in Egypt and head back to New Zealand. I felt a bit sorrowful leaving my mates.

The voyage home took a fair while. On the trip home we were looked after very well by the nursing staff, in particular, a nurse Ingram. I hope she is still around. She was one of our top nurses. She seemed to be always on hand when needed.

Others of the boys on board ship were Monty Wikiriwhi, Joe Wordley, Hepi Nau, Adam Pou and a few others I knew but can't remember their names

P.S. If ever a soldier says he was never afraid at times in the front line he must have been inhuman. Many a time I have prayed and mentioned my folk back home in silence.

Kia ora ra e hoa ma.

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Cassino: L to R Back Row
P. Robson, C. Balzer, S. Ulrich, H. Lambert, L. McRae,
J. Aperahama, Ben Christy.
Front Row
P. Ornberg, M. Raureti, H. Falwasser, J. Ngapo, B. Tomoana,
H. Takarangi

