

# 28th Māori Battalion

## His First Action

Accession Number 1996.450: This is an excerpt of the recollections of members of the 28th Māori Battalion published in the 17th reunion magazine "Golden Jubilee 1940-1990: The Maori Battalion Remembered" held by the National Army Museum Te Mata Toa and protected by copyright law



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

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

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

• From the N.Z.E.F Times: October 9, 1944 •

## A Maori Bn Corporal Describes HIS FIRST ACTION

### The First Attack on Orsogna:

We all remember this attack as "the night of December the 7th, 1943". It started at 2.30 in the afternoon, and to some of us it was great because it was our first action. Before we started, our officer, 'Boy' gave us a short talk and said to keep our eyes open and go in boots and all. He said he had confidence in us, and that we wouldn't fail.

We packed our gear into our small haversacks and started to move up to the road that led into the village of Orsogna. However half way up the hill Jerries started to shell us so into a small drain we dived. One landed a little too close and one of the lads, Charles, got a nick in the backside. It was really funny; he looked at us and said, "You know I think I've been hit in the...." He didn't come any further with us but stayed back.

After ten minutes we moved on up the road past tanks that were to support us, and we felt very good to have them, believe me. We turned off the main road onto a side track and started to climb again, up to the top, and over came the shells again. Myself I dived into some blackberry, not that it would stop anything, but I felt quite safe.

On once more - my section was the forward section of the forward platoon - and this time over some flat ground and then down a steep hill into a small swamp. All this time the artillery was pounding hell out of Jerry and his known positions, and the sound of that rumble, rumble, rumble, gave us a great feeling to go on and do the job that we were sent to do. Down into this small swamp we went and all the time Jerry was feeling around us with those guns of his. We looked to the right and there was a steep hill to be climbed.

By this time we were wet through with perspiration but our minds were set. Up and on we went. Then came the rain - but it didn't make any difference, we were wet already. I felt in the pocket of my shirt for the time. It was 3.30 and we had a fair way to go yet. All the houses we passed were smashed to the ground; the trees were broken in half; only yesterday they were green and proud, and now just fallen giants.

Finally we came to the bottom of our main objective and it reared steep and high, covered with scrub and trees. We looked at it, and 'Boy' said, "Come on; let's go, chaps. Give it all you have." I looked at my best cobbler, Freddie, from the South Island. He looked back at me; we didn't speak, but inside we were feeling the same. Up we went. There was a house part way up. We ran as far as that to take shelter and get a bit of wind back in our lungs, then on again. I was praying hard - the first time I ever prayed.

I clutched my rifle and ran, then Jerry opened up with the Spandaus. Tracers were whistling all around us, and we could hear the Germans yelling. Don't know what for. It was a hard job climbing, and we kept just below the top to reform. I could hear my heart thumping away as if it would burst open my ear-drums. Then 'Boy' yelled out, "Over you go!" And over we went.

I saw Tom fall, and then Jim. I saw the German that did it run up a small quarry, but he didn't run far. Charlie and I saw to that. Our brains were working overtime. Charlie rushed to me and said, "Dal, quick. Some ammo. I've run out." I knelt down and took some clips from my pouch and gave them to him, and he and I rushed on. To our right there was one of the B....'s in a shallow trench, screaming like a child, "Kamerad! Kamerad!"

We hauled him out and back behind some rock and started to strip him. We saw Sonny bandaging Jim, and felt like putting an end to this chap, but he rushed over to help Sonny. To our ears came the yell, "Come on!" It was Henry, so away we went through grapevines and maize that had been smashed by our artillery fire. We came to the Railway line and moved over to the right to a cemetery where we dug in.

Before we reached the place where we were supposed to dig in, some chap had joined our section and followed up behind. We called out, "Who's that?" The answer came back, "It's alright - it's me," in perfect English too. We went back, and to our surprise it was a German soldier. He didn't last long. Henry and I saw to that with our bayonets.

Then came the time to dig in. 'Boy' said to me, "Get the lads together and see that they dig in." I said, "Henry is here." Then Boy and I started to tell him what to do, but he couldn't hear; his ears had gone deaf on him. Anyway, we got to work and were soon dug in. My trench was the nearest to the wall of the cemetery.

It was very narrow and wasn't deep; but when we were counter-attacked I was well out of sight, believe me.

Massey called out for my field dressing because Andy had been hit and was losing a lot of blood. While we were bandaging him we heard tanks, and up went our morale. Then someone came tearing over to say that they were German tanks; and to get out of it before it was too late.

There was a lot of rushing about, chaps were grabbing up their gear and moving back to the ridge that we had stormed a few hours before. The time was around 10.30 at night, the moon was shining, and it looked pretty grim, men lying about. However, six of the lads led by Freddie picked up Andy, our Sergeant, and started to carry him back to the RAP. Myself I had three rifles on each shoulder, two picks, and a shovel, and away I went. Just over the road there was a tangle of electric wires all over the place, and of course I had to get mixed up in it. I heard Kino laugh. I was nearly crying, but I got out and ran on towards the cliff.

We all got down there and Mahima had two of the Germans that didn't get out, and was just putting a finishing touch to them; very grim, but it had to be done. By this time we had lost our mates and we got mixed up in another company. Ike and I dug our trench right close to some dead, and it wasn't at all pleasant, but we stuck it. Things were going pretty hot all that night, and I heard our signal bloke, Rube, working overtime, and he did a great job. We fought on until we were nearly out of ammunition, and Peter said to pack up and go down to the bottom of the ridge where Mac would lead us back. We had to get back. It was useless sticking there.

Back at our area we got breakfast and it was very welcome, and then to sleep we went. Before that, 'Boy' called us together and said that we did a great job, and he was proud of us. We were proud of him, too. He was a great guy and I say this for all the lads. They'd follow him through anything if he wanted them to. He was a damn great chap all through.

D.L. Falwasser