

28th Māori Battalion

Mumps

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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)

No: 65258, TAWHAI, William

His Story



I WELL remember the evening when we boarded the Aquitania. I was a 15 and a half year old young Maori going to war. No 65258 had marched into Papakura Military Camp with the 6th Reinforcements, but he sailed with the 7th Reinforcements, September 1941.

The evening we went aboard the Aquitania in Wellington they stuck us in that stinking hole down near the water-line. It was so hot and we were so browned off I thought I'd open one of the portholes, which was all right while we were standing at the wharf, but when we got out to the open sea those mountainous waves of water showered through the porthole and into the ship - our kit-bags floated everywhere. We managed to close the porthole before the next wave.

Shortly after this we went up to the Wet Canteen. We had drink after drink but eventually made our way back to our very low deck. On the way back, as I was going around a corner, throwing my empty handle up in the air and catching it on the way down, Lieutenant Te Punga came around the same corner. Instead of Bill Tawhai catching the empty handle he stared at Te Punga and the empty handle smashed to the floor, so Te Punga said, "I'll see you in the morning, Tawhai."

The next day I was sick, sea-sick and ended up in the Ship's Hospital. I was so sick that they put me to bed. After a few days the Sister told me I had mumps. I laughed at her, because this Maori didn't know that you can have mumps down there. I told her that you got mumps up around your neck where your glands are. She then said to me that I had mumps down there and I tell you they were both swollen.

At Port Tewfic I was taken off the ship on a stretcher with mumps down there. It was the beginning of the war for me. The rest we would like to forget, but not our comrades. - We Will Remember Them.

After being back in Maadi Camp from the Desert for a break, one morning we all fell in on parade, and Colonel Awatere asked for volunteers for Bludger's Hill. He wanted a section to join the Provost up on the Hill. He asked for volunteers, but no one stepped forward, so Mukda (Peta Awatere) stepped out between the ranks - I was at the end of the front rank. He said, "You, out! You, out!" and so on, until he had about eight of us. He then told us to go and pack and then we marched up to Bludger's Hill.

We were under the command of Sgt. Wikiriwhi from the Provosts. But we were not happy being called Bludgers. But we had to do what the commander said. After a few days we got settled in. We found that we didn't have to march, or go on parade or anything like that. All we did was polish our side-arms, boots and badges ready for Duties in Cairo at night.

All we did in the morning was sleep in because of late duties. Our duties were patrolling streets in Cairo, being posted at entrances to Hotels, Service Clubs, Casinos and Cabarets, checking on Leave Passes and of course looking after the drunks.

We finished between 1 and 2am and slept in for most of the morning. In the afternoon we got ready for more duties in Cairo. We got to like Bludger's Hill. Sometimes we did Escort Duties with nurses, WAAFs, WAACs, seeing them back to their barracks in Cairo after Dances, Parties and whatever. And we were very popular with all Services and even the Wogs. We worked in well with our Pakeha comrades, and all in all we did not mind being called Bludgers. At times we felt sorry for the rest of the Battalion who had to go on route marches, night marches, rifle drill and other duties, and now it is 'Saida' from a one time Bludger.