

28th Māori Battalion

One Who Followed in His Father's Footsteps

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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)

Paratene Jackson BENNETT Sub - Lieutenant

A YOUNG member of the family to serve overseas was Paratene who was born in Hastings in 1926. He was educated at Hastings High School and at Te Aute College from which institution he left to join the Fleet Air Arm Division of the Navy.

When in England he transferred to H.N.Z.N.V.R, and became the first Maori to gain a commission in the Navy when made a Sub-Lieutenant, He later served on Motor Torpedo Boats.

Back in civilian life he became involved in education serving as Principal in a number of schools and when he retired in 1989 he was an Acting Inspector of Schools.

He now lives in retirement in Rotorua.

ONE WHO FOLLOWED IN HIS FATHERS FOOT-STEPS Manu BENNETT

IN AUGUST 1944 I received my commission with the Royal New Zealand Chaplains Department and was drafted in September of that year into the 13th Reinforcements who left New Zealand for the Middle East and Central Mediterranean zones a couple of weeks later.

We embarked in Wellington on board an Indian troop ship the Dunatar Castle.

The night before we sailed Euruera Tirikatente MP came to bring a gift of money so that I might buy "comforts" for the troops. He stayed in my cabin for an hour or more expressing pride and concern for the Battalion and the race as a whole. It was a visit that I valued greatly. The memory of it is rekindled each time I meet any of his family.

It was on our way that I had to perform the first of the hard tasks which befell a chaplain. I was asked by the Commanding Officer to tell Roy Te Punga that Paul had been killed in action.

On arrival in the Middle East I was immediately attached to the Maori Training Depot in Maadi. I took over from Tunoa Wanoa who by this time was on his way home.

After almost a year in Maadi I was given the opportunity to go to Italy where I found myself, first in the Maori Depot in Toranto, then the New Zealand Base Camp in Sanbasilia just out of Bari. This base camp was not a large one so when the Americans from their own huge air base in Goia, a mile or so from Bari, asked if we could supply some episcopal (An-

glican) services I was the one asked to do it.

This gave me entry into all the comforts of their base amenities including their PX stores, which added greatly to life's comforts. I also had the doubtful pleasure of going on one of their "reckies" in a Flying Fortress which was very exciting until I heard the pilot and the navigator arguing about the reading on the instruments. Then as was my habit I had to resort to my own form of navigation which ended up with "Amen".

From the base camp I had the good fortune to be able to get to Rome from time to time and besides all the places of antiquity and history that go to make up this ancient and holy city, I was able to visit the Vatican, which was of course, pretty special to a young priest even though Anglican. Of particular cultural value and from the point of view of sheer delight were the opportunities to attend the many opera performances. To hear people like Gili sing at that great open air theatre amongst the old remains which have historically adorned the Ancient Gardens of Caracalla for so many centuries was a delight.

It was also in Rome where one enjoyed the atmosphere of New Zealand at our Forces Club where nearly everybody was a New Zealander and the accent and icecream reflected the New Zealand way of life.

My experience of "Live action" happened almost by accident. While on leave in Rome in early April 1945 a group of us who were serving in base units including a Maori nurse, decided to visit the Battalion who had been pulled back to a "rest area". On reaching the "rest area" we discovered the troops preparing to move forward toward the Senio River and after a conference with Col. Awatere and Major Baker, it was decided that I should remain with the Battalion until Wi Huata returned. He was either on leave or on a course. Within two or three days Wi returned and a few days later they sent me back to base camp, where I received a "please explain" note from my Senior Chaplain at Divisional Headquarters. They were evidently putting together a Cadre of advanced troops for regrouping once war had ceased in Europe and I was to be the Chaplain, but nobody knew where I was.

I remained in base camp until the European theatre collapsed, enjoying a very relaxed tour of duty.

In September 1945 I was posted back to Maadi with the proposed advanced troops on board the re-floated troop ship "The New Georgic". However one night out of

Tewfik the OC Troops announced that Japan had surrendered.

I found myself back at Maori Training Depot. Maadi from the end of September until New Year's Eve 1945 when we embarked on board the "Dominion Monarch" which had already picked up the Bn. from Toranto, Italy.

My last three months in Maadi were quite an experience. There was no longer a war on and everything was so relaxed. Often I found myself the only one with rank sufficient enough to sign for rations and pay, a function an authority not generally exercised by a chaplain.

On the voyage home there were other chaplains of different denominations besides Wi and myself. There was also a fairly large group of war brides who joined the ship in the UK and the "OC Troops" assigned me to them as Chaplain and Welfare Officer. It was my job also to run an orientation course for them on life in New Zealand. I remember a few of them taking fright one day when in my lecture I opened up with a line which went, "Well, in New Zealand we have three kinds of people - Maori - Pakeha and only a few white men".

It was a fairly uneventful voyage home and the closer we got a sort of restlessness seemed to pervade the ship. I think the one unspoken question we all had was, "What will home be like now? How will we relate to people including loved ones?" especially after such long absences for some.

Tension mounted as dawn broke and there in the near distance was the shore line of Aotearoa and for long periods men's voices were hushed as we sailed up and down the coast because of bad weather. Then around mid day there we were, the 28th (Maori) Battalion and attachments, on the 23rd January 1946 at home at last.

I am sure that none of us could fully understand the deep emotional stress of the "home coming". For many the need to be alone with one's own thoughts was paramount. The order "to disembark" at Pipitea Wharf that 23rd day of January 1946 was filled with mixed and somewhat confused emotions, both happy and sad.

Manu Bennett

For a family to have had seven sons in the Armed Forces, all holding commissions, three wounded on the battlefield, one p.o.w. and serving in four branches of the Services is no mean achievement and the fact that they all came home was a matter for rejoicing.

H.C.A.L.