

28th Māori Battalion

There and Back and Still a Teenager

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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)

• THERE AND BACK - AND STILL A TEENAGER •

Getting Our Sea-Legs

I sailed overseas, 1941, on the 'Aquitania' from Wellington for Sydney, where we joined the Queen Ships, Mary and Elizabeth, which were choc-o-bloc with Aussie troops. We sailed around and through the Great Australian Bight which is said to be the roughest place in the world; certainly three of the biggest ships in the world were thrown around like corks; we got sick as dogs. The waves were as big as hills for about four days.

A.W.O.L. For The First Time

We arrived in Fremantle, anchored outside the harbour and a tanker pulled up beside the ship about 7 p.m.. There were hundreds of fellows climbing down onto the tanker to go ashore. There were so many they sent an Officer to take us ashore and we got ashore about 10 p.m. We dispersed, a number of us going to where I went, Perth, which is about an hour on the bus. We booked into a hotel at Perth and stayed drinking in the bar till about 10 a.m. the next day, then the place was swarmed with Aussie Military Police and they were taking anything that looked like a Kiwi soldier. They locked us in a clink in Fremantle till they mustered everyone. After about three hours we started back to the ship to hear the bad news - 28 days Field Punishment to be done when we arrived in Maadi Camp, Cairo.

I Grow Up Fast

The next stop was Ceylon but we didn't go ashore. There it was we saw some of the biggest sharks we'd ever seen. The next morning we woke up we were out in the never-never again heading towards the Red Sea. At the Red Sea I had my 22nd birthday, but I was actually having my 16th Birthday. We finally made it to Port Tewfik in Mid Summer (and was it hot) and then of course to Maadi.

Mistaken Identity

I had told all sorts of B.S. to get away to the war to be with my two brothers Manuel and Watti. Even my name, I changed it to Harry my youngest brother's name and it's been Harry ever since. My real name is Thomas. This younger brother of mine died about six months ago and was buried at Mititi where we last had the Tai Tokerau Mini Reunion. I said "We will remember them," on his grave, because I felt he went overseas too because I pinched his name.

A Triple Wounding

I came back from the war blown up in both legs and in the eye, my left eye. It happened at Takrouna and if it wasn't for Jack Colman I wouldn't be here now. I got blown up in the right foot, Jack bandaged it and then I was on his back. He had carried me back about 100 yards from where I got it in the foot when I got sniped in the knee. The bullet went right through my knee. Jack bandaged my knee. If it hadn't been for my knee the bullet would have gone through his stomach. By this time I was getting a bit weak and eyes getting a bit foggy through loss of blood. I was again on Jack's back and we were about another hundred yards from where I copped it in the knee when a shell landed in front of us. I had my chin on Jack's shoulder I copped a piece of shrapnel just below the eye. I thought I had lost my eye for a moment.

"Again, Jack", I said "I'm hit again.

"Oh no!" said Jack.

He let me down, bandaged my head with what little bandage we had left, then it was on his back again.

Farewell My Friend

Further back we were confronted with hundreds of our tanks ready to go into action. By this time I was getting really sore and didn't very much care what was happening. A few more of the boys who were wounded were being carried back. Jack got me back to the Casualty Clearing Station and that was the last I saw of Jack Colman. He left me and went back to the Battalion and next day he copped it. I was in Sfax Port ready to board the hospital ship back to Egypt when I heard in a Daily Report that Jack had been killed.

Hospital Ship Home

Anyway 5 days to Alex then back by train to 2.G.H. Hospital, Port Said and after about 6 weeks at 2.G.H it was home. We boarded the hospital ship 'Orange' for home. We left 4 days after the first furlough boys came home. We arrived in Melbourne 4 days after the 39'ers.

There was one of the nurses from 2.G.H. who had been married over there and was supposed to have her baby soon after arrival in N.Z.. She had them a day before we got to Melbourne, they were twins and both died and were buried at sea, which was very very sad.

We were in Melbourne a day and a night and had a good time. Four days after we arrived in Wellington, I was still in plaster from the hips down. The wharf at Wellington was crammed with people waiting for their loved ones.

Hospital And Rehab Centre And Back To Civvy Street

After being in about three hospitals I finished up in a Military Hospital in Rotorua, now Queen Elizabeth Hospital with a lot of the boys, Ray Rautahi, Bert Meihana, Kara Rika, Mita Hape, Reg Walsh, Jimmy Grace, Sonny Sadlier, Bill Friday, Jack Graham and many more. We were about two years, I think in the 'Rotorua Military' Annex. It was good there and we had some great times - times I will never forget with the boys. It was home away from home. About a couple of years after, nearly all of the boys that were there finished up at D.S.R.L. at Auckland, each one took a different trade, I took up Cabinet Making. They were happy days especially with the boys from my own district. We went our own ways, got married and started bringing up a family.

We Will Remember Them

I do not regret telling lies, telling all sorts of lies to go to the war and get shot up, but I mourn for those of our mates who did not come home, also those who came home and since have now passed on. We will remember them.

As I look back bold men like Jack Colman, Jack August, Rewiti Ihaka great leaders, and that goes for a lot more of our mates and relatives who still sleep there.

Mai Koetoe i roto ite Ariki

65178 Harry Dunn
6th Reinforcement