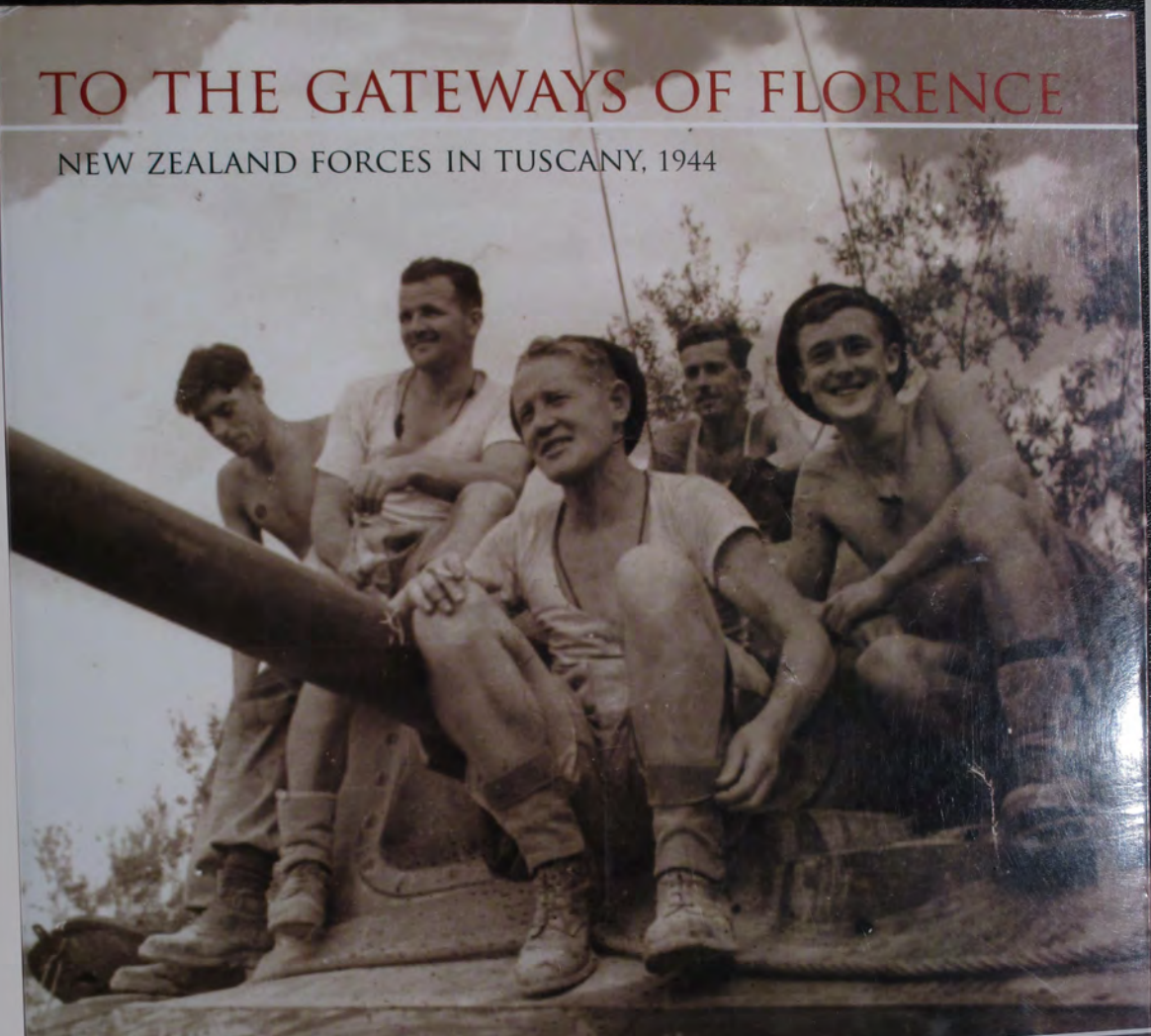
TO THE GATEWAYS OF FLORENCE

NEW ZEALAND FORCES IN TUSCANY, 1944



Edited by Stefano Fusi

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From 21 July to 4 August 1944, the Chianti area of Tuscany was the scene of bloody fighting as Allied forces waged a bitter battle to wrest Florence from German hands. At the heart of the struggle were soldiers of the 2nd New Zealand Division, many of whom would not live to see their homeland again.

For 50 years after the end of hostilities, collective memory held that the liberation of towns like Tavarnelle Val di Pesa had been the work of American troops. But research by then mayor of Tavarnelle, Stefano Fusi, and his wife Jill Gabriel, herself a New Zealander, confirmed that it had been soldiers of the 28th Maori Battalion and the 23rd Infantry Battalion who had led the offensive through much of Chianti. And while debate persists over whether they or South African forces were the first to reach Florence, it is beyond doubt that New Zealanders played a pivotal role in freeing the great city.

First published in Italy in 2009 as *I Giorni Della Liberazione*, this book pays homage to the men who traversed the globe to free this beautiful corner of Tuscany, and the civilians who survived occupation and aided the Allies. *To the Gateways of Florence* is a translation that preserves the structure of the original book, with the addition of new material and photographs. It balances expert accounts from Italian and New Zealand historians – on topics from the course of the tank battles in Chianti to the contribution of Maori soldiers – with the personal testimonies of the New Zealand soldiers and Italian civilians who lived through the battles that decided the war. A rich selection of photographs and memorabilia from archives in New Zealand and Italy illustrates the work.

It is hoped that *To the Gateways of Florence* will honour the memory of those whose sacrifice forged lasting bonds of friendship between two peoples from opposite ends of the Earth.

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Front cover: Bill Harrison's tank crew (see page 79); back cover: the bridges of Florence after the city's liberation (see pages 245–48).

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INTRODUCTION

Sestilio Dirindelli, Simone Gheri and Massimiliano Pescini

It is with immense satisfaction, as well as a touch of pride, that we present the publication in New Zealand of this book, which was launched in Italy in April 2009 and met with great success and interest from the public and press in Tuscany. This authoritative and original work received third prize in the important Premio Firenze award in Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, in December 2010, for a detailed text illustrating or describing events that took place in our area, from a human point of view, and setting them in the historical context of those years.

It is a book keenly desired by the three municipalities that we represent, as it documents the research carried out over the last few years in order to recount the story of the liberation of the Chianti area and the battles that brought the Allies up from Southern Italy to the gateways of Florence, so that it does not get lost in the history of the Second World War.

The liberation of our territory was carried out paying a high price in sacrifice and a substantial loss of human lives among the New Zealand troops – the protagonists of this liberation — who engaged the German soldiers in tough and ruthless battles.

For us this book was not only an opportunity to rediscover a piece of history upon which a guilty silence had fallen, but also an occasion to honour and thank once again, after all these years, those men who came from so far away to fight against Nazism/Fascism and restore liberty and democracy to our country.

The desire to write this book was strengthened by the great friendship struck up with the veterans of the Italy Star Association from Christchurch, New Zealand. We wish sincerely to thank all those who told their stories, sent diaries or testimonies, or wrote just to keep memories alive. After more than 60 years, the veterans' stories provide us with a new, interesting and poignant outlook on the events.

Finally, we are certain that the story recounted by Italians and New Zealanders in this book will receive a warm welcome in New Zealand, no doubt equal to the one it received upon publication in Italy.

Sestilio Dirindelli
Mayor of Tavarnelle Val di Pesa

Massimiliano Pescini
Mayor of San Casciano

Simone Gheri
Mayor of Scandicci

Reading and living our history together

Stefano Fusi

I feel extremely privileged to be able to introduce this book, which is being published in New Zealand, home of those soldiers who came all the way to Italy to fight the Nazis/Fascists, and of many who lost their lives in our fields and on our roads.

For the Chianti area the Second World War meant tough fighting, tank battles, air raids, hundreds of deaths, an even higher number of wounded persons and atrocious civilian massacres. The fact that the battle for Florence, fought by the New Zealand troops on the Chianti hills in order to reach the gateways of the city, had been forgotten and unspoken does not in any way diminish the extraordinary nature of those days and events.

For a long time the local population remembered the foreign soldiers who had arrived from the south to liberate the Chianti area and the city of Florence as being Americans. This was partly because they spoke English and also because many of them – the 28th Maori Battalion – were dark skinned like African Americans. There were no recollections of the commitment, the sacrifice and the actions of the New Zealand battalions that substituted the French troops after Siena and fought a difficult battle to liberate our territory, inch by inch, for many days, against expert German forces who were extremely motivated and well armed.

The cultural, social and institutional path leading to the realisation of this book originated from here — from the need to recover historical memory. The book was a great success when it was published in Italy because it filled a gap and quenched a thirst for truth that the passing of time had rendered more urgent and necessary.

It was along this path that a strong and sincere deep friendship was forged with the New Zealand people who live so far away from Tuscany and from the Chianti area, but to whom, for obvious reasons, we feel so close and friendly, and express our gratitude. Our friendship has strengthened over time and has also been sealed by the decision made by the municipalities of Tavarnelle Val di Pesa and Scandicci to erect two monuments to the fallen New Zealanders: one in the main square of Tavarnelle, the other near the Fattoria di San Michele in the area where one of the toughest and bloodiest battles was fought.

This strong friendship is particularly important to me due to the dual Italian/New Zealand citizenships

held by my wife and children, and has grown during many visits to those long narrow islands in the South Pacific. There, in the land of the 'kiwis', I had the opportunity of verifying first hand just what this process of research, preservation and valuing of a national military history (too often forgotten or underestimated in Italy) means for the New Zealand people.

If we in Italy have only recently become aware and rediscovered these facts, New Zealand military historiography has openly written about the Italian battles. That includes the aforementioned one at San Michele, which has more than once been described as a 'second Cassino', testifying to the view that its price in human lives was second only to the better-known battle for the famous monastery.

Over the past few years there has been an intense correspondence of letters, photographs and testimonies with many veterans or their families. This is mainly thanks to our close bond with the Italy Star Association — a relationship that has grown over time. In fact there are several new and previously unpublished testimonies by soldiers who fought in Italy in this edition. The same process took place in Italy, too, and we therefore received many new and interesting testimonies that have been published in this book in addition to those previously published from Italian citizens who lived through the terrible days of liberation.

The Italian edition was launched in 2009 on the occasion of celebrations for 25 April, a day that due to a happy and significant coincidence represents double festivities: the liberation of Italy from the Nazi/Fascist occupation and Anzac Day. The celebrations were particularly memorable due to the great turnout by locals, and also the very emotional participation of a large delegation of New Zealanders 'guided' by two splendid veterans, Jack Cummings and Doug Leckie. Also present were Joan, Jack's wife; Monty Soutar, Maori historian, and his daughter Oriwia; Jeffrey Plowman, military historian; and Mike Crean, journalist.

In conclusion, let me reiterate the value and the significance of this work, which for us represents a commitment — a precise historical, cultural, political and moral duty. The duty to recount the war not in a banal way or with cynical and distorted curiosity, but rather to let young generations come to understand the horror, brutality, terrible suffering and profound devastation that war causes. The duty to remember and honour those who, with their enormous sacrifices in those battles in our fields, our vineyards, our olive groves, permitted Italy to awaken to democracy, liberty and justice and remain a united country — a fundamental value that assumes even more significance in this year, which marks and celebrates 150 years of Italian unification.

The duty to read and live together a piece of history that has united us forever.

Stefano Fusi
Provincial Councillor, Florence
Mayor of Tavarnelle Val di Pesa, 1999–2009

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all we would like to thank Jack Cummins, president of the Italy Star Association, for his valuable collaboration and the enthusiasm with which he helped us right from the beginning, as well as all the other veterans who sent us their personal testimonies. The families of yet others who died fighting in our territory sent war diaries and recollections.

We would particularly like to mention the following people: Fiona McHardy, daughter of Lieutenant Georges Forbes McHardy, and Sue Scott, daughter of Lieutenant Charles Stephen Reeves, killed in Tavarnelle on 24 July 1944. Sue was seven years old when her family received the telegram informing them of Charles' death. Her father was killed when he was called up to substitute a companion at the Front on one of his days off. Peter Scott provided a very important link with the veterans. His father, Clem Scott, a soldier in the 20th Armed Regiment, had fought and been wounded in the Battle of Cassino. Our acknowledgement also to Wes Anderson, brother of Ernest Edward Anderson, killed in Tavarnelle on 23 July 1944; John Barrington, son of soldier Vernon Arthur Barrington, killed in Tavarnelle on 22 July 1944; John Leonard, grandson of Sergeant John Francis Leonard, killed in Tavarnelle on 22 July 1944; and Peter Hosking, son of Sergeant Noel Hosking from the 23rd Battalion, who came to Italy to visit the place where his father died.

We received a very moving letter from Joyce Steel, wife of Robert Laidlaw, a soldier who was killed in Tavarnelle, probably near the village of Romita, on 22 July 1944. Their daughter Kate was born two months after her father left for the Front. Joyce and Kate came to Italy a few years ago to visit the places where Robert had fought and to pay homage to his tomb at the Commonwealth Cemetery in Girone, Florence.

We would also like to mention and thank everyone else who generously contributed to the research carried out in New Zealand: Mike Crean, journalist for *The Press* (Christchurch); Dolores J.N. Ho, archivist at the Waiouru Army Museum; Valerie Carmana Mayer, honorary Italian consul in Christchurch; Norm Withers, deputy mayor of Christchurch; Ginette Page, president of the Wellington Garibaldi Club; and Richard Gabriel, Joan Morris, and Elizabeth and Paul Wolstenholme for their valuable assistance.

Many thanks to all the Italian people who generously told their extremely moving stories: Claudio Biscarini, historian; Mario Forconi, Lorenzo Sulli and Chiara Benelli for the material and photographs they supplied; Ivan Tognarini, president, and Simone Neri Serneri, director of the Historical Resistance Institute in Florence for their collaboration. A special thank you to Fabrizio Nucci of Editore NTE, publisher of the Italian edition.

To conclude, we would like to thank the following institutions for the financial support they provided towards the realisation of this book; for the Italian edition: Regione Toscana, Provincia di Firenze and Comune di Firenze, Banca Chianti Fiorentino e Monteriggioni, Dante Alighieri golf and country club spa, Coop Unica, Toscana Energia, Publiacqua spa and Toscana Enologica Mori; and for the New Zealand edition: Società Dante Alighieri di Auckland, Società Dante Alighieri di Christchurch, Cracroft Chase and A Touch of Italy.

Stefano Fusi and Jill Gabriel

Italian soldiers in Cefalonia, 1943.

1

From the crisis of the Fascist regime to the Allied landing in Italy

Francesco Catastini

When the New Zealand soldiers who would come and liberate the Chianti area in the summer of 1944 landed at Taranto in October 1943, the crisis of the political, military, social and economical institutions was in an advanced state.

From when they first entered into war the operations of the Italian Armed Forces had not managed to distinguish themselves in efficiency or decisiveness. At the end of 1942 the outcome of the war called for by Benito Mussolini became evident in the tragic conclusion of the military expedition against the Soviet Union and defeat in North Africa.

Conditions for Italian civilians had worsened from the moment the Italian Army had attacked France; the military disintegration did nothing to improve the domestic situation; for example, ration cards for basic essential items made life difficult, especially in large cities. But most of all, the dissension against the regime that had been hidden and isolated up until then was being manifested more bravely; in March 1943 there was a wave of strikes in the most important and strategic industries.

Considerable intolerance towards Mussolini's politics was also maturing in the Gran Consiglio del Fascism.[1] This culminated during the night of Saturday 23 July 1943, when the High Council passed a vote of no confidence regarding the Duce.[2]

The day after, as soon as he came out from his meeting with King Vittorio Emanuele III, who had informed him that he had been replaced with Maresciallo[3] Pietro Badoglio (1871–1956), Mussolini was arrested and jailed first in Ponza, then on the island of Maddalena and finally at Campo Imperatore (Gran Sasso), a place considered practically impregnable. However, on 12 September 1943 Mussolini escaped with the help of a German paratroop regiment.

Badoglio was nominated as the new head of Government. He had already acted as head of the Eritrea

Campaign; in 1949 he would be recognised as a war criminal by the United Nations War Crimes Commission.

Civil liberties and citizenship rights were partly reinstated. Despite this, there were many cases in which the protagonists of the spontaneous demonstrations — which broke out when the news of Mussolini's arrest was spread — were arrested (and then convicted). The war continued, even though armistice negotiations with the Allied forces were already under way.

After the Anglo-American forces had definitively beaten the German and Italian troops in Casablanca, North Africa in January 1943, United States (US) President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill decided on a landing in Sicily. At Normandy, preparatory operations for the landings ensued over many months. Churchill managed to convince Roosevelt of the advantages in occupying Southern Italy: namely gaining control of shipping in the Mediterranean Sea and therefore the restoration of merchant traffic towards the Middle East and Far East, which up until that moment had been conducted by ships forced to circumnavigate the African continent. Moreover, according to the English, disembarkation in Sicily would almost certainly be the catalyst for a crisis within the fascist state.

After occupying Pantelleria and Lampedusa in June, the Allied forces landed in Sicily between Syracuse and Pachino on 10 July 1943. Two months later, on 9 September, one day after the announcement of the Cassibile Armistice, they disembarked at Salerno. The principal goals the Allies had set themselves, that is the crisis of the regime and Italy's exit from the conflict, were rapidly achieved, albeit at a very high price. However, after these initial successes the advances of the Allied army became somewhat inconsistent. Following a series of victories that took the Anglo-Americans as far as Naples, things became complicated. The reasons for this slowdown, apart from the purely tactical, were internal contrasts: the interests of the US, Great Britain and the Soviet Union differed. If the US had managed quickly to expel the Russians from the Italian arena, they would not have been able to do the same with the British: their Empire had fought and defeated the Italians on land and at sea, and this, according to them, gave them the right to define the victors according to their own interests.

Therefore, since the Allied forces had already landed in Sicily, an important series of political questions emerged that had, up until that point, been dealt with from only one theoretical point of view: what type of armistice should be negotiated with one of the main powers of the Axis? What political status should be awarded them? And how should the occupied territory be administered?


CORRIERE DELLA SERA

ARMISTIZIO

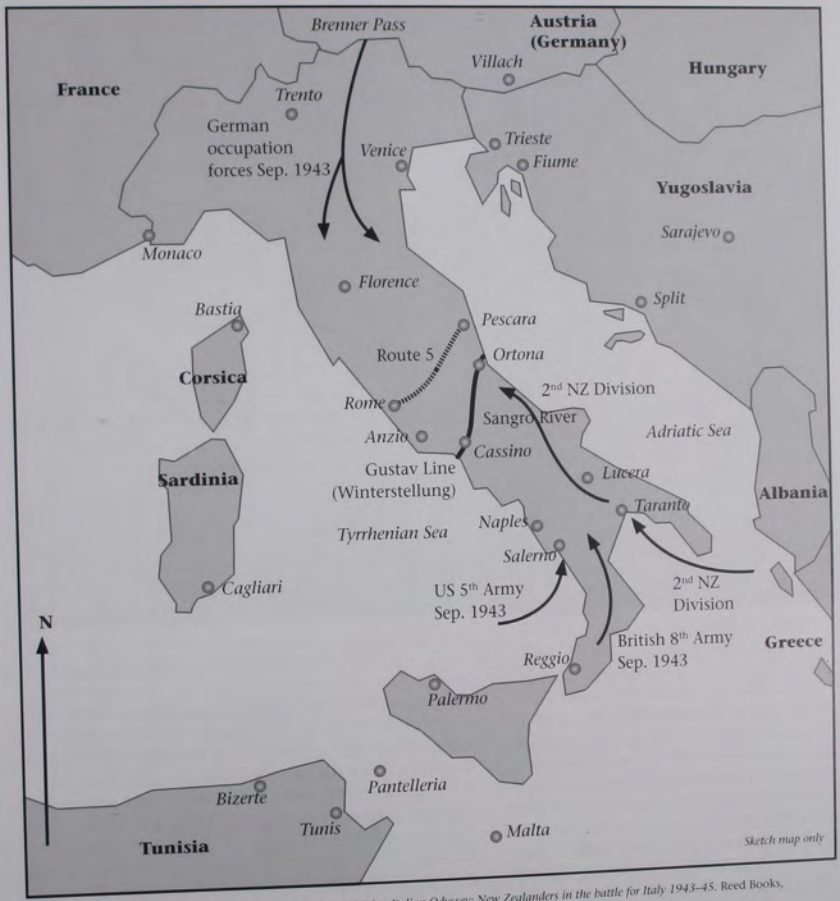
Le ostilità cessate tra l'Italia l'Inghilterra e gli Stati Uniti

Il messaggio di Badoglio

STALINO SGOMBRATA

RISALIRE

Front page of the Corriere della Sera *newspaper announcing the Armistice, 9 September 1943.*



Italy, October to November 1943. Source: Matthew Wright. *Italian Odyssey: New Zealanders in the battle for Italy 1943–45*. Reed Books, Auckland, 2003; page 21.

The Allied invasion of Sicily, July 1943.

On 8 September 1943 the head of the Badoglio government sent a message to the Allied headquarters in Algiers, informing Eisenhower[1] that it was unable to announce the official Armistice due to the considerable number of German troops present on the outskirts of the capital. The government advised against sending the air-transported division promised by the Allies because the Italians were unable to supply the fuel and vehicles required by the disembarked units. Eisenhower did not acknowledge the request to delay the announcement, and threatened severe reprisals. At 4.30 p.m. Radio New York anticipated the news of the signing of the Armistice with Italy. A short while later the king, Badoglio and the ministers of the war, navy and air force gathered at the Quirinal where news of the announcement of the Armistice, broadcast by the Americans, arrived.

In the north, German units commanded by Erwin Rommel began to capture Italian soldiers and occupy strategic points, in particular industrial plants and roads. In a radio message transmitted at 7.45 p.m., Badoglio

notified the Italian people of the Armistice, which had been secretly signed on 3 September at Cassibile in Sicily by the Italian plenipotentiary General Castellani, and by the American General Smith.

> *Given the impossibility of continuing the unequal battle against the overwhelming strength of their adversary, and with the intent of avoiding further and more severe disasters for the nation, the Italian government had asked General Eisenhower, the chief-in-command of the Anglo-American Allied Forces, for an armistice. The request was accepted. Consequently, all acts of hostility against the Anglo-American forces by the Italian forces had to cease everywhere. The Italians would, however, respond to any attacks from any other source.*

King Emanuele III and Badoglio left Rome and travelled by naval ship from Pescara to Brindisi, an area already occupied by the Allied forces. Left without precise orders, the army dispersed almost everywhere. The Germans, who had obtained reinforcements from Brennero a few days beforehand, immediately launched Operation Achse. They activated the dispositions that had already been predetermined for such an eventuality, occupying the peninsula, disarming and capturing hundreds of thousands of Italian soldiers in Italy, Greece, Albania, Yugoslavia and other fronts, and sending them to imprisonment in Germany. Only the naval fleet, with the exception of the battleship *Roma* that was sunk by the Germans, managed to avoid the enemy and give themselves up to the Allied forces on the island of Malta. The announcement of the Armistice was a disaster for the Italian army: 60,000 dead or missing as well as more than 600,000 soldiers imprisoned in Germany.

All this took place while the German army was experiencing serious operational uncertainties regarding the manoeuvres that the Anglo-Americans might have carried out (they expected a disembarkation at Salerno and were worried about the possibility of a landing at Termoli, which in actual fact happened only in October), and the actions that the king, Badoglio and the Italian high commanders were undertaking.

Following the deposing of Mussolini in July 1943, which also marked the beginning of diplomatic negotiations between the Italians and the Allies regarding surrender, Badoglio and his general staff were not only incapable of organising the return of the troops located in other war zones (for example, in the Balkans, Greece and Russia), but also of defending Italian territory. Even evidence of the movements that German troops undertook following the official announcement of the Italian surrender did not prompt the military leaders to give precise orders. At 12.20 p.m. on 8 September 1943, General Vittorio Ambrosio, chief of General Army Staff, urged reaction to any armed violence by the Germans and the population in order to avoid being disarmed and overtaken; at the same time he categorically advised against taking initiatives or carrying out hostile acts against the Germans. Ten minutes later, General Mario Roatta[5] sent out a general alert order that all units should 'gather together and remain ready and vigilant'. He advised them to have faith in their leaders and calmly carry out their orders for the benefit of the nation. But it was not clear to which orders Roatta was referring. Things were no different even for the capital, Rome, as no serious defences had been prepared.

It is precisely for this reason that the king and Badoglio escaped first to Pescara and then to Brindisi.

As evidence of the atmosphere of disintegration within the Italian Armed Forces, it is worth quoting a series of testimonies collected by Claudio Pavone, one of the leading Italian historians of the period. 'The soldiers passed by like a flock of scattered sheep,' recalled Primo Levi. Roberto Battaglio spoke of 'a humiliating spectacle.' One of the most touching diaries of partisan life, written by Pietro Chiodi, related that, 'It breaks my heart to see groups of soldiers herded along like animals by the SS.'

On 29 September 1943 the so-called Long Armistice

Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini during Hitler's visit to Venice, 1934.

was signed, which, apart from some very onerous clauses, stipulated that Italy should declare war on Germany, assuming a role that was defined as co-belligerent. Even though it was ambiguous, without doubt the new status placed Italy in an unusual situation: defeated enemy, but also new ally.

While the Allied forces organised their forces in Italy and started preparations for disembarkation in Normandy, the situation in Italy was becoming extremely complicated. On one side was the Kingdom of Italy or the South, with Brindisi as the capital. On the other was the Italian Social Republic, more widely known as the Republic of Salò.

After his escape from prison on 12 September 1943, Mussolini had been taken to Munich in Bavaria. On 18 September, Munich radio announced the birth of a new fascist state. 'The State we wish to institute will be national and social in the broadest sense of the word: it will therefore be fascist in the sense of our origins.' In actual fact it was to be a puppet state of the Third Reich. Only a few states recognised the new entity, notably not Francoist Spain, which Mussolini had helped immensely during the Spanish Civil War. Mussolini managed to keep his most faithful men and a part of the army with him. For the most part he 'governed' the more industrialised part of the country together with the German forces almost until the end of the war.

While political manoeuvres were beginning to delineate a picture whose outlines were slowly but inevitably becoming more distinct, the military campaign was beginning to limp. The Germans, defeated by the Americans at Salerno, began their retreat towards the Gustav Line — a fortified line on the border between Lazio and Campania. This fortification was rendered stronger by the characteristics of the area: on the Tyrrhenian side, the Aurunci Mountains offered a difficult barrier to overcome because of a lack of roads. The Adriatic side also presented a morphology that was extremely favourable for the defenders: the hilly terrain was furrowed by a series of brimming watercourses.

General Albert Kesselring.

The line was penetrated after months of violent battles between 11 and 21 May 1944. General Clark, leader of the 5th American Armed Corps, made what was a very serious mistake. Instead of blocking the German withdrawal, he preferred to concentrate on Rome, which he entered on 4 June. Two days after the landing in Normandy he monopolised the attention of the mass media and the opinion of the public, spotlighting the priorities of the Allied forces. The Americans and the English had been debating for some time on how to continue the Italian Campaign. The former insisted on the opening of a second front in southern France; the latter wanted to continue operations in Italy in the hope of rapidly breaking through into northern Italy in order to reach Vienna before the Armata Rossa.[6] The American option — disembarkation in the south of France — would have removed many units from the Italian scene and slowed down the thrust of the Allies north of Rome, blocking, in fact, Churchill's resolutions.

The American option, known as Operation Anvil-

Dragoon, won, and led to the disembarkation of an American Armed Corps, reinforced by French troops, near Marseille on 15 August 1944. A large part of the troops destined to the task were taken from the Italian front, denying Alexander[7] the chance to go ahead with his plans. The effects of this strategic diversion started becoming obvious around July and were more apparent in August. The entire French Armed Corps was withdrawn from Italian territory, and the presence of the American troops was also reduced. The Italian Campaign was destined to last for many more months.

The reduced American military presence had a notable political outcome: the English had the task of carrying on the affairs of the Allied Forces Headquarters[8], that is, relationships with the Italian governments and maintaining direct contact with the Resistance.

In his instructions issued on 7 June 1944, General Alexander ordered the 8th British Armed Corps to proceed towards Arezzo-Bibbiene-Florence, and the 5th American Armed Corps to advance towards Pisa-Lucca-Pistoia. The English, aiming to pass Lake Trasimeno on both sides in order to occupy Arezzo, were held up for several days in southeast Tuscany on the so-called Trasimeno Line and in southwest Tuscany along the Ombrone and Orcia rivers.

Nevertheless, the Allied operations, now supported by partisan formations, quickly led to the liberation of central Italy. Livorno was liberated on 19 July 1944. In Florence, at 6.10 a.m. on 11 August 1944, the Tuscan National Liberation Committee — the body that governed the local partisan groups — gave the order to attack. At 6.45 a.m. a fireman rang the Martinella Bell in Palazzo Vecchio, signalling insurrection. Florence was liberated that same day. The partisans single-handedly fought the retreating German troops until 13 August. Pesaro was liberated on 19 August 1944, followed by Pisa on 2 September, Lucca on 5 September and Pistoia on 8 September.

At that point the advance of the Allies halted just before the Gothic Line — a fortified defensive line created by the Germans to delay the advance of the Allied troops. The line crossed the country for 320 km and divided the Italian peninsula in two. It stretched from Rimini in the east to the district of Massa e Carrara in the west. The Allies continually attempted to break through until the autumn of 1944, even launching specific but unsuccessful attacks on the Giogo and Futa passes. The troops of Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, chief commander of the Armed Forces of German Occupation in Italy, achieved the goal of delaying an Allied advance in order to gain more advantageous defensive lines. With the departure of seven American divisions from the scene in June 1944, the English were left to manage the summer-autumn military campaign of that year almost single-handedly. The campaign, which should have completed the liberation of the peninsula, had to contend with tenacious German resistance along the Gothic Line.

To complicate matters, the proclamation by General Alexander, which arrived on 13 November 1944, was interpreted by both the partisans and their organisational-political referents as a sort of order to disband. The decree was broadcast on Radio Italia Combatte in Bari.

> *Patriots! The summer campaign, begun on 11 May and conducted uninterruptedly until after the breaking through of the Gothic Line, has ended. The winter campaign has now commenced. Regarding previous Allied advance, patriots are requested to provide simultaneous action: now the rain and the mud will, without doubt, slow the Allied advance down, and patriots must cease their previous activities to get ready for the new phase of combat and face a new enemy: winter. This will be very arduous for the patriots due to the difficulty in supplying food and clothes: the nights which permit flying will be few in the near future and this will also limit the possibility of air drops. The Allies will do their best to supply provisions. In consideration of the above, General Alexander instructs the patriots as follows. 1) Cease large-scale operations; 2) save ammunition and materials and be ready for new orders; 3) await new orders which will be given by Radio*

Italia Combatte or by special means or posters. It is wise not to expose oneself in risky actions; the password is: stay alert, stay guarded; 4) take advantage, however, of auspicious occasions for attacking Germans and fascists; 5) continue gathering military information concerning the enemy; study their intentions, their movements and communicate everything to whoever is in charge; 6) the aforementioned dispositions may be cancelled by orders for special actions; 7) as new factors could intervene to modify the course of the winter campaign (spontaneous German retreat due to the influence of other fronts), patriots should be prepared and ready for the next advance; 8) General Alexander asks group leaders to convey to their men his congratulations and high esteem of the collaboration given to the troops commanded by him during the previous summer campaign.

Many partisans interpreted the proclamation as an order to demobilise and they disbanded. It appeared to be a repetition of the confusing advice that had been spread on 8 September 1943. However, thanks to the tenacity of the Corpo Volontari della Libertà (Voluntary Liberation Corps) formed in Milan on 9 June 1944 — as a result of negotiations between the Allies and the Italian government in which the partisan groups were officially recognised — the same outcome was averted, as they explained to the various regional command posts that the proclamation was simply an announcement of the winter campaign methods.

It was, however, a tough winter for the partisan groups. Round-ups and clashes with the fascist RSI militia and the German soldiers put their resistance capacities to the test. The Allied army remained drawn up south of the Gothic Line and broke through it only in the spring.

It took military forces and partisans just a few days to invade northern Italy in April 1945. Milan and Turin were liberated on 25 April. The war officially ended on 29 April 1945 with the unconditional surrender of the German army. Mussolini had been captured on 27 April while trying to escape to Switzerland. Wearing the uniform of a soldier of the Wehrmacht[9], the Duce was hidden in a vehicle transporting retreating German troops. Recognised by the partisans who were checking the retreating military columns, he was arrested and executed the following day. His body and those of other members of the Social Republic hierarchy were displayed hanging upside-down in Piazzale Loreto, Milan, on 29 April 1945. On 10 August 1945 in this same square, the Germans had shot 15 people (anti-fascists and partisans) and left their bodies there as a warning to the population.

Notes

1. High Council of Fascism.
2. Mussolini.
3. Chief of local police.
4. Dwight David 'Ike' Eisenhower (Denison, 14 October 1890–Washington, 28 March 1969) was a US general and politician. Chief in Command of the Allied Forces in Europe during the Second World War with the rank of Armed Corps General, he was the 34th president of the United States of America from 1953 to 1961.
5. General Roatta, Chief of General Army Staff since 25 July 1943, existing head of the Italian Expedition Corps in the Spanish Civil War and Commander of the two Army Corps in Croatia. On 4 March 1945, General Roatto escaped with the help of the Carabinieri [local police] and the re-assembled Military Information Service (SIM), guided by Colonel Pompeo Agrifoglio, during the trial for the killing of the Rosselli brothers. One week after the escape the trial ended and Roatta was given a life sentence. At first Roatta took refuge in Vatican City and then, with his wife, in Spain, from where he would return in 1966, thanks to an amnesty. Roatta is only one of the many Italian war criminals who did not pay for their actions during the Second World War.
6. Red Army.
7. Harold Rupert Leofric George Alexander (Tyrone, 10 December 1891–Slough, 16 June 1969), British general, head of the Allied Expedition Corps that landed in Sicily.
8. The Allied Forces Headquarters controlled all Allied forces operations in the Mediterranean from 1942 until the end of the war.
9. German Armed Forces.

The War Reaches Tuscany

Andrea Pestelli

Allied commanders had always considered the Italian front to be a secondary front. As a result, military operations almost never had the incisiveness that could have reduced the length of the Italian Campaign and change the overall destiny of the Second World War. Perhaps this was exactly what the Allied leaders wanted, especially Roosevelt and Stalin, who had joined forces against Churchill and with whom their opinions clashed. It must be remembered that if Churchill's point of view had prevailed, the Iron Curtain[1] would probably never have reached the Italian border.

This seems to be the only explanation for the extremely slow progress of the Allies up the peninsula. Although Sicily was taken in 38 days, some nine months passed from the landing in Calabria (on 3 September 1943) until Rome was taken on 4 June 1944. Many of these months were spent penetrating the Gustav Line; a breakthrough that hinged on the three battles at Cassino (January to May 1944), and were perhaps the most bloody moments of the entire Italian Campaign.

Then the rivalry between General Alexander,[2] chief commander of the Allied troops, and his subordinate, General Clark,[3] commander of the 5th American Army Corps, came to the fore. This rivalry was clearly evident in the battle for Rome.

Some days after the fall of Cassino, favourable conditions allowed the Allies to wedge themselves between the 14th and 10th German Army Corps towards Valmontone and isolate General von Vietinghoff's 10th Army Corps in a pocket. But General Clark, having entered the opening of Mount Artemisio, headed firmly towards Rome instead of obeying orders from the chief commander, because he wanted to be remembered as the conqueror of the Eternal City. General Alexander wrote about this episode in his memoirs.

> *When the final battle for the liberation of Rome had begun, the task of the Anzio contingent was to break*

out of the beach-head and cut off the main German supply line on the Cassino front line. But for some unaccountable reason, Gen. Clark's Anglo-American troops never reached their objective, even if, according to information that I later received, there was nothing to stop them doing so. Instead, Mark Clark moved his attacking point north of the Albani hills towards Rome.

If he had managed to carry out my plan, damage to the enemy would have been much more severe: most of the German forces south of Rome would have been destroyed.[4]

Subsequently, on 4 June 1944 only American troops entered the Eternal City, led by the young 88th Division. The 14th German Army Corps had rapidly reached the sector on the other side of the Tiber and Aniene rivers, while the 4th Parachute Division had crossed Rome, heading northwards. There was a surprise awaiting the Americans; not one bridge had been blown up in the city on strict orders from Field Marshal Kesselring,[5] who still respected places of Italian culture. In this way the field marshal conceded a considerable advantage to the Americans, which he later came to regret, so much so that two months later he had all bridges in Florence destroyed, with the exception of Ponte Vecchio because it was especially dear to Hitler.[6]

After the fall of Rome, the German Army Corps found themselves at a critical stage. The 14th Army Corps, now led by General Lemelsen, had come out of the fighting for the capital in particularly bad shape, and for the time being could not halt Clark's 5th American Army Corps, which were closing in. In 12 days (between 4 and 16 June) the corps had managed to advance 140 km at a pace corresponding to the pursuit of a beaten enemy. General von Vietinghoff's 10th Armed Corps were in better condition, so Kesselring decided to move General Fridolin von Senger's XIV Armoured Corps to Lemelsen's Armed Corps, placing them in a central position between the LIV Corps on the right along the coast, and the I Parachute Corps on the left. Initially (around 12 June), von Senger was not happy about this decision.

I was assigned only third order divisions. Two were the so-called country divisions of the Luftwaffe, composed of personnel from exuberant aviation; the third was a division made up mainly of Turkmen and only 25% was made up of German units. Only when I was assigned, one by one, first the battered 3rd Panzer-Grenadier Division and then the 26th Armoured Division and the 90th Panzer-Grenadier Division, could one speak of a predestined command action in my section. When the XIV Armoured Corps took command, the pace of the Allied advance slowed down to 30 km in the week from 16–23 June and, successively, to 30 km in three weeks.[7]

The merit that von Senger attributes to his XIV Corps should actually go to Kesselring who, following the hasty retreat from Rome, had known how to reorganise his army, carrying out the necessary moves to stop the leaks that had formed among his units. On 23 June 1944 the entire German army had completed deployment along the Albert Line from Follonica to Lake Trasimeno, which held until 28 June.

However, another important factor that caused the slowdown of the Allied advance in the month of July can be found in the progressive weakening of the 5th American Army Corps, which had to supply seven divisions for Operation Anvil-Dragoon, a planned Allied landing in Provence.

After the fall of Rome another 'high-level' tug-of-war began. Once again Churchill would have liked to crown the Italian Campaign with a march on the Balkans, yet once again Roosevelt opposed him. It is important to point out that in this case, despite the famous rivalry with Chief Commander Alexander, General Clark was also against Operation Anvil-Dragoon, as he declared in 1950:

A campaign that would have changed the entire history of relations between the Western world and Soviet Russia faded out, not to nothing but to something much less than what it could have been. The weakening of the forces in Italy for the invasion of southern France to the impact of an episode in the Balkans was one of the greatest political errors of the war.

Operation Overlord (landing in Normandy) and its derivative, Operation Anvil-Dragoon (landing in Provence), ruined the Mediterranean war. Stalin was the third person to enjoy the outcome and derived inestimable advantages from the disagreements of the Western leaders.

The entire 6th Army Corps, composed of three American divisions (45th, 3rd and 36th) and all four of General Juin's French divisions, were gradually withdrawn from the Italian Front from mid-June 1944. The last two Moroccan divisions were withdrawn on 22 July, after they had already entered Castelfiorentino and Certaldo and were near Barberino and Tavarnelle. Especially serious was the loss of the Moroccan Mountain Division, which Alexander hoped to use in the mountain operations against the Gothic Line.

This weakening of the 5th American Armed Corps also explains why the width of its attacking front was considerably reduced when compared to the 8th British Armed Corps. I consider groundless the thesis, supported by some, that Alexander had moved the attacking front of the 8th Armed Corps so that the English would have occupied Florence after the Americans had taken the glory for the conquest of Rome.

According to Colonel G.A. Shepperd,[8] at this point, the equilibrium of the forces in Italy was against the Allies,[9] and also because Kesselring had received reinforcements (namely the 34th Infantry Division, removed from the Russian Front and the 16th SS Division).

I believe that Shepperd made his comparison based simply on the number of the divisions and not on their size and weaponry. If we consider that the German divisions in July 1944 were less than 40% of the nominal manpower (as well as weaponry) while the Allied divisions were always full, one can easily see that the scales were still tipped in favour of the Allies and that if the battle at the Front proceeded slowly, this was also a result of the tactics used by the two armies.

German tactics

During the retreat across Tuscany during July and August 1944, Field Marshal Kesselring organised a succession of defence lines, beginning at the Albert Line. The Allies experienced what an 'aggressive retreat' by the Germans was: a progressive and orderly withdrawal of troops that allowed the Germans to take advantage of any errors committed by the enemy.

In the area south of the Arno Line, these defence lines rarely consisted of fixed positions such as those at Cassino or along the Gothic Line, but were composed of a series of mobile positions organised along the crests of hills and river valleys. These positions were tasked with delaying any Allied advance towards the north for as long as possible, allowing completion of the works being carried out along the Gothic Line, or Grunlinie (Green Line) as the Germans called it.

These lines were given women's names (Lilli, Marlene, Nora, Olga, Paula and so on) but were indicated on the Wehrmacht maps as 'main defence lines' or Hauptkampflinie (HKL). Along these lines were the so-called 'fighting posts' (Gefechtsvorposten), which were defended by small rearguard units the average size of a company and sometimes flanked by armoured vehicles that were able to keep the enemy occupied right up to the last minute and then, by surprise, rapidly retreat. The most adept units for this type of tactic, which required great mobility, were undoubtedly the motorised ones such as the 3rd and 29th Panzer-Grenadier divisions.

The engineering divisions took care of placing mines and bombs in strategic points within the territory. When

the rearguard units retreated they blew up the bridges, roads or houses on the roadsides in such a way that the debris completely blocked them. Cypress trees along the route were often blown up because, falling across the roads, they obstructed or slowed down the Allied advance even further. As well as the mines placed in order to cause demolitions and obstacles to advancing vehicles, German engineers showed great skill (that would later become legendary) at placing anti-tank mines and explosive anti-personnel booby traps.[10] These traps were also positioned inside houses, so as to decimate the Allied advance-guard patrols when they burst in to check for the presence of the enemy.

The engineering divisions, which almost always worked behind the infantry troops, also had the task of rendering zones behind the front line safe for the withdrawing divisions as they were being threatened by the partisans. Further back, other divisions of the German Engineer Corps began preparing successive halting lines.

The difficulties encountered in an unequal battle were aggravated by other problems such as lack of sure information regarding positions, the number and intent of the enemy,[11] the shortage of food that increasingly forced troops to pillage the belongings of Italian civilians, and minimum rest periods that led to troops who were physically and morally worn out. Ideals began to waver and the force of the German units was to be found mainly in the bond that united the commander to the soldiers. General von Senger stated that:

> *In 1944–45 it was already difficult to convince the front-line soldiers to fight for Hitler or even for Germany. We even sang satirical songs against Hitler, songs that no one contested because one does not contest a front-line soldier.*

Regarding General Fries, commander of the 29th Panzer-Grenadier Division, Senger recalled:

> *... he had the habit of objectively evaluating situations, of remaining close to reality, of exercising his commanding actions in an easygoing way and of not aspiring to personal accolades. He cared about his soldiers and could therefore count on them on every occasion. Everyone trusted him.*

Allied tactics

It has never been completely understood why the Allies were so determined to meet the enemy slowly head-on, travelling upwards through Italy, hill after hill, river after river, instead of outflanking them with amphibian landings, which could have placed the enemy in serious difficulty.

Moreover, using the frontal assault tactic, the Allies almost never carried out their actions using infantry because this would have certainly meant a high price in terms of human lives. Instead, the preferred strategy was to put their enormous supply of means on the field, extensively battering the enemy with artillery or armoured vehicles in order to exhaust them and force them to retreat to the successive defence line. Additionally, it must be noted that in July 1944 the Allies had complete control of the skies; the Luftwaffe had totally disappeared, forcing the Germans to move exclusively at night.

Unlike the Germans, the Allies could count on an extremely efficient information service and on an abundant supply of food and materials. Even in terms of psycho-physical attrition the Allies were decidedly at an advantage: the availability of troops was such that each unit, after having served on the Front, could enjoy a period of relaxation of between 15 and 20 days and consequently return well-rested for the next attack.

The Allied strategy was almost a waiting game. The excessive power of their means was so high that results would have come sooner or later, they only needed to be patient. But waiting meant that the Allies sometimes did not take advantage of favourable situations that unexpectedly arose, such as the aforementioned case of the Valmontone.

The opinion of German Colonel Gerhard Muhm,[12]

with whom this author has had opportunity to speak, is that the Allied commanders did not know fully how to exploit their superiority of means. Allied tactics were imprinted with an excess of rigidity in the sense that once an order was received, fighting conditions could not be changed without another prearranged order. According to Muhm a German commander, on the other hand, acted according to the tactics of the assignment (Auftragstaktik).

> *... a mission was ordered and therefore a task, leaving the executor with the liberty of choosing the most adept action on the basis of the evolution of the situation.*

Kesselring's affirmation that, 'If I had their means, I would conquer Italy in a week!' may seem excessively disrespectful towards Allied commanders, but there is a foundation of truth in it.

A column of trucks crossing a Bailey bridge over the Arno River, near Figline, 11 August 1944. Imperial War Musuem, London

Notes

1. Border between the Nato countries and the Communist countries of the Warsaw Pact.
2. Sir Harold Alexander, born in Tyrone, Northern Ireland on 10 December 1891.
3. Mark Wayne Clark was born in Madison Barracks in the State of New York on 1 May 1896. He was the youngest lieutenant general in the United States.
4. John North. *Le Memorie del maresciallo Alexander*. Garzanti, Milan, 1963.
5. Field Marshall Albert Kesselring was born in Markstedt am Mein in Franconia on 30 November 1885.
6. A.O.K. 14: Telegram dated 1 August 1944 from the Command of 14th Army Corps to 1st Parachute Corps. 'By order of the South-West Supreme Command (Field Marshall Kesselring) absolutely no military measures against the "Vecchio" are to be taken, not even anti-human mines and so forth. Any measures already taken should be immediately cancelled.'
7. Fridolin von Senger. *Combattere senza paura e senza speranza. (Fighting without Fear and without Hope.)* Longanesi, Milan, 1968.
8. G.A. Shepperd. *La campagna d'Italia 1943–45*. Milano, Garzanti, 1975, p. 360.
9. *Ibid.*
10. The Germans used various types of mines, the most common being the Teller Mod. 42. anti-tank. They were like large plates, with a side handle for transportation. There was also the S Mi 35 anti-personnel mines, with three contact horns. This explosive was lethal. When the unlucky person trod on it, the body of the mine flew upwards and let out a deadly burst of steel marbles. There was also the Holzmine 42 wooden anti-tank mine and the wooden Schuv 42 anti-personnel mine. A large number of these explosives were attached to door handles or under floors, or attached by invisible wires to wine flasks or common objects. Victims were almost always innocent civilians.
11. Fridolin von Senger. *Combattere senza paura e senza speranza. Op. cit.*: 'We knew little about the enemy. Only occasionally did we capture a prisoner who was interrogated by the Corps commander before being transferred to the Armoured Corps Headquarters.'
12. Gerhard Muhm, born in 1924, was an exemplary product of German military training. During the Italian Campaign he was awarded four decorations for bravery; in July 1944 with the rank of captain, he commanded the first company of the 1st Battalion of the 15th Panzer-Grenadier Regiment that operated in the Montespertoli area.

2

The advance of New Zealand soldiers from San Donato to the gateways of Florence

Stefano Fusi, Fabrizio Morviducci and
Franco Calamassi

The call of the soldiers
Our blood has soaked these fields,
These towns, these stony mountainsides
By night, by day, we gave up our lives
Futures, sweethearts, children, farms and homes
In blazing heat/winter snow
Flooded rivers/filthy cellars
Bombed out casas/roadside ditches
On the altar of democracy.
We lie in good Italian earth at Sangro,
Cassino, Firenze, Faenza, Rimini,
Venite nell'amata Italia
Come to our beloved Italy
Come because we love you.

Fiona McHardy Elworty, daughter of George Forbes McHardy, Second Lieutenant of 22nd Battalion, killed by the Germans on 28 November 1944 along the Lamone River, near Forlì.

The summer of 1944 was hot, very hot, with tropical temperatures. All the testimonies and documents from that period agree on this. We do not, however, wish to talk about the climate, but rather of the fact that in those weeks, the Front and the war passed through the entire Chianti area in the tough battle conducted by the Allies in order to free Florence from the Germans. Also, this is the story of the soldiers who came to fight from far-off New Zealand, where many would never return.

Sherman tank moving in convoy towards Florence. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

The German limitation strategy

We have to wonder why the Germans defended the area south of Florence so strenuously; what value and strategic significance could the Chianti hills have had for them?

The sole purpose appears to be simply gaining time, a feat the Germans somehow managed to achieve. New Zealand troops had to gain the area inch by inch, the hard way. But the Chianti area was not a strategic zone. All things considered, it was not very defendable as events would demonstrate, even if the configuration of the land made life hard for the attackers and easy for those defending it.

The hilly land slowed the Allies' advance considerably and gave German engineers time to complete the main defensive line, the Gothic Line, which ran along the Apennine Mountains. It was on this line that the Third Reich had placed their hopes of resistance, guaranteeing that the factories situated in the Padana Plains could be utilised for German war necessities.

It was necessary to gain time if the defences were to be completed properly; in order to do so the German paramilitary troops in charge of construction (who also used Italian prisoners) had to complete their task. The objective was to defend the Po Valley, which contained industrial plants and where agricultural production was centred. As a result of this aim, the people in the Chianti area were involved in the Germans' delaying tactics.

Hitler ultimately decided the destiny of the Chianti area and its inhabitants during a meeting held on 3 July 1944. For the Germans, no front line was of minor importance and Hitler refused to accept any idea of retreat, not even when evidence of possible defeat was put before him. At the beginning of July the German commander of the armed forces in Italy, Kesselring, was hoping to fall back on the Heinrich Line;[1] however, when he put this idea to the Fuhrer, the answer was negative. Kesselring's suggestion would have saved the Chianti area from front-line combat. Instead, it was decided that the area south of Florence would become a battleground and that the Germans would defend it inch by inch in order to delay advance towards the north as much as possible. They would fall back on the Arno River line only after having strenuously defended the area south of it. Furthermore, after the Allied disembarkation in Provence, there would be no chance of a second Allied landing in Italy north of the Apennine Mountains, a situation that would have forced Kesselring to retreat more rapidly.

The German defensive tactics

The military tactics chosen by the Germans were an 'aggressive retreat' along a series of flexible defensive lines. The Tavarnelle area was crossed by a defensive line called Nora,[2] but in reality the Germans counted on halting the New Zealand advance along the defensive axis running from Montelupo to San Michele a Torri to Cerbaia, which they had named the Paula-Maedchen Line.

In both cases, neither defences with particular fortifications nor trenches were constructed. This was also true for successive defensive lines that were constructed as the battle neared Florence. The choices were made based on how geographically and physically suitable a given area was for organising defensive battles using armed vehicles.

The New Zealand advance plans

All in all, the methods chosen by the New Zealand troops for the conquest of the Chianti area were quite simple: the use of a frontal advance, a strategy that some historians have defined as rather poor in tactical inventiveness. The 28th Maori Battalion was to take Tignano, Tavarnelle and then, via Noce and Bonazza, reach San Pancrazio, Lucignano and Montespertoli along the west side of the Pesa River.

The considerable loss of human lives in the bloody battle of Cassino prompted the New Zealand commanding officers to be more cautious. For example, it was for this reason that, particularly in the second part of the campaign, many attacks were carried out at night

mainly using artillery and armed vehicles in order to reduce human loss. The number of human lives lost was still very high. It is estimated that more than 200 New Zealand soldiers lost their lives in the fighting south of Florence.

Rome to the Americans, Siena to the French, and Florence to the ...?

Even war needs its honours and acknowledgements and so as part of a sort of distribution of these honours, as well as the obligations of the war, the Allied commanding officers decided that the liberation of the city of Florence — particularly important due to its symbolic value and the resonance it would have in the world — would be attributed to the English troops, after Rome had been liberated by the Americans and Siena by the French on the route from southern to northern Italy.

However, the official history does not quite coincide with the stories, testimonies, documents and recollections of those who fought that battle, and in particular, the New Zealand soldiers.

The French arrive in Tavarnelle

By the end of July, two divisions of the French Expeditionary Corps, led by General Juin, had reached Tavarnelle. The French troops, after having fought in the Barberino area, had received orders to withdraw behind the front line and they were waiting to be transferred to another front — the French one — to contribute to the liberation of their own homeland. They were replaced by New Zealand and Indian troops. The New Zealanders substituted for the French in the Tavarnelle area, while in the Barberino area the Indian 8th Infantry Division arrived to replace the Moroccans and Algerians. The New Zealand soldiers were known as 'Kiwis', the name taken from the curious flightless bird that lives in New Zealand, and which is one of the most recognisable symbols of the nation.

How the New Zealanders were deployed in the area

In Italy the New Zealanders had fought in the epic battle of Cassino, which had cost them dearly with the sacrifice of 343 lives, and then once again — this time in Tuscany — on 13 July 1944 on the outskirts of Arezzo, where they reinforced the effort carried out by the English to liberate the city. They had been given a few days of rest until 21 July, when they were called up to replace French troops on the Florentine front, who were busy demolishing the defences that the Germans had erected on the hills south of Florence.

The mission assigned to them was a simple one: break through the enemy lines between Tavarnelle and San Casciano and reach Scandicci on the banks of the Arno River. The New Zealanders were certainly not expecting the task to be easy, but they had been told that the enemy was retreating and that any battles to be undertaken would not be, in actual fact, as ferocious as those that they ended up having to fight.

As soon as they had replaced the French on the front line, the New Zealanders deployed 5th Infantry Brigade, commanded by Brigadier General Stewart, in San Donato. On the right-hand side of the town was the 23rd Infantry Battalion commanded by Lieutenant Colonel W.B. Thomas; while the 28th Infantry Battalion — the unit made up of Maori soldiers under the guidance of Lieutenant Colonel Young — was positioned on the left. Behind the lines, as a reserve, was the 21st Battalion, which had set up camp near Castellina.

Deployed on the right-hand flank of the New Zealanders, towards the Greve Valley, was the 6th South African Armed Division. On the left-hand flank, towards the Valdelsa Valley, was the 8th Indian Division. Each battalion had two platoons of medium-sized tanks from the 18th New Zealand Regiment at its disposal.

The New Zealanders from the 23rd Battalion established their headquarters in San Donato. Half of the town had

Destroyed Tiger near Villa Moris, Romita. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

been destroyed by heavy shelling and the streets were full of debris.

The plan drawn up by New Zealand's Lieutenant General Sir Bernard Freyberg called for the 23rd Battalion to take San Donato and then head towards Sambuca and the Cassia main road, following the course of the Pesa River. The 28th Maori Battalion had the task of covering the flank of the 23rd Battalion, travelling along the road that led to Tavarnelle, then proceeding to Romita along the Cassia Road.

The German troops

Defending the German positions were Colonel Heins Trettner's paratroopers, with the 11th and 12th regiments of the 4th Paratrooper Division. They were mainly very young soldiers, however, they were flanked by a group of

experienced veterans, some of whom had taken part in the battle of Crete, won from the English in a memorable air attack in 1941.

The Germans had a substantial armament at their disposal — especially automatic weapons — and could count on the support of several Tiger I tanks from the 508th Heavy Artillery Division and self-propelled guns.

The advance of the 23rd Battalion from San Donato towards Sambuca and the Cassia Road

22 July 1944: the first day of fighting

The arrival of the New Zealanders was immediately noticed by the Germans. On 22 July 1944, a few hours after the soldiers had taken over positions previously held by the French, the information office of the 14th German Armed Corps wrote:

> *... arrival and concentration of a considerable number of enemy forces during the afternoon in the San Donato area; forces transported by approximately 360 trucks, arrival of 45 tanks.*[1]

For the Germans, it was vital to acquire information regarding the enemy's forces and equipment. Likewise for the Allies. But the Germans, who could no longer count on an aerial reconnaissance force, could only do so in two ways: through the infiltration of agents into the enemy lines or by using information from captured prisoners. On 22 July the battle commenced at first light, as soon as the take-over from the French had been completed. However, the advance was slow, partly due to the communication systems between the various units, which had yet to be perfected.

The order to attack was transmitted by the command post of the 13th Corps to General Freyberg. The awaited codeword was 'skegness', which marked the start of the operations. At 6.20 a.m. on 22 July 1944, the cannons of the 5th Artillery Regiment opened fire on the area known as Macereto, where German troops had been sighted.

The battle for San Martino a Cozzi

The first real obstacle was encountered at San Martino a Cozzi, which had to be occupied because it was located on a junction of the road that lead to Morrocco and Sambuca, which the French had erroneously declared to be already liberated. San Martino was taken, but the New Zealanders were not initially supported by tanks and their officers had a hard time convincing the American officer commanding four Sherman tanks to intervene in order to flush out the Germans who had entrenched themselves in the houses. The officer refused to expose his tanks to the shelling from the German self-propelled gun that presided over the junction. In the end the Americans fired some cannon shots at snipers hidden behind the windows of one house.

Two platoons were sent ahead without waiting for the support of the tanks and, when they were close enough, the German soldiers hidden among the houses opened fire leaving three dead and three wounded on the ground, while eight were taken prisoner (three of them managed to escape the day after).

The New Zealanders were forced to withdraw, wait for reinforcements and plan a more organised attack. In particular, it was decided that the artillery would be supported by mortars that fired approximately 300 shots, as well as cannon-fire from the 5th Field Artillery Regiment. At this point the attack was successful and the New Zealanders started clearing out the houses in the little hamlet, one by one. At the end of this terrible man-to-man combat 30 soldiers were either dead or wounded, including five who had been taken prisoner. Eight Germans had been captured.

Fighting had been particularly violent the whole day. In his diary, soldier Doug Leckie clearly remembers the intensity of the fighting:

German parachutist. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

We attacked at 9.20 a.m. in order to capture the group of houses known as the village of San Martino. We took aim and cleared out two houses, but after two hours of furious fighting we were forced to withdraw, sometimes fighting at a distance of only 10 metres from the enemy, because we had run out of ammunition.[4]

We were heavily assaulted while we went back for ammunition. We retreated in an orderly manner, firing as we moved, each of us covering the others. Four American tanks and some Shermans should have supported us but they refused to move from behind an embankment because they wanted to destroy a self-propelled gun. All they did was to fire four shots with their 75 mm at the snipers who were shooting out of the windows. Later on we found out that they had gotten into serious trouble and faced court martial. That terrible day seemed to last a week. At the end of it I was absolutely exhausted mentally.[5]

The matter-of-fact daily report by the German Intelligence of the 14th Armed Corps gives an idea of the severity of the fighting that day:

In eight heavy attacks the enemy only managed to gain an insignificant amount of ground [...] suffering serious losses. Enemy penetrated in locality 2.8 km to the north and 3 km to the northeast of Tavarnelle has been driven back by our counter-attack in intense house-to-house fighting and at least eight enemy tanks have been put out of use.[6]

The fighting at Macereto

Nevertheless, having taken San Martino, the New Zealanders turned towards Sambuca, occupying a locality called 'Il Macereto'. The soldiers still did not have the support of the Americans tanks so, shortly after having taken possession of the area, they had to retreat under heavy gunfire from a German counterattack. The New Zealand offensive regained strength after having obtained — not without considerable effort — the support of the American tanks.

It was only late in the day, at around 8 p.m., that the New Zealand troops managed to establish themselves at Macereto and Ginestra. A New Zealand tank was destroyed in the battle. The soldiers were so exhausted the battalion command post sent them a container of tea by jeep as a reward.

Morrocco is liberated

Meanwhile, an advance towards Morrocco had begun at 4 p.m., supported by tanks that had come across the fields from Macereto. The determining factor in this battle was the artillery fire, which flushed out the Germans who were shooting from inside houses.

After the artillery fire it was the infantry's turn to clear out the surrounding area and the isolated farmhouses, proceeding in single file and given cover by the tanks. About 60 prisoners were taken in the Morrocco area and on the Belvedere farm. At 9 p.m. the hamlet of Filinelle was also liberated. The New Zealanders continued their advance during the night, reaching the junction with Cerro Road and stopping not far from La Rocca farm.

23 July: La Rocca

Early the next morning, New Zealand troops attacked the Germans defending La Rocca. After two hours of fighting the New Zealanders liberated the area, capturing three German soldiers, while the rest of the troops headed towards Florence.

The New Zealanders' next goal was the village of Romita. Thanks to a combined artillery and infantry manoeuvre, the group of Germans who were barricaded inside the houses was forced to surrender. Shortly afterwards, at midnight, Poggio Petroio was also liberated.

That afternoon the New Zealanders targeted Villa Moris (nicknamed 'Villa Strada'), which the Germans defended with several tanks. The Germans opened fire and hit a Sherman tank from the 18th Regiment, which caught fire; three soldiers were killed, an outcome that forced the New Zealand forces to retrace their steps to Romita.

24 July: Romita

Having observed that the German tanks had left Romita — where reinforcements had arrived — the New Zealand advance recommenced, preceded by heavy cannon-fire starting at 6 a.m. in the morning. As soon as the infantry and vehicles started to move forward the Germans opened fire with machine guns and mortars. Mines and debris on the ground halted the new advance.

Destroyed Panzer IV tank at Point 337. Jeffrey Plowman Archives

At that point the divisional commanders decided to call in the 21st Battalion, which had been at rest, to replace the 23rd, which was temporarily sent to rest at a Regimental Aid Post set up inside Villa Lorini in Morrocco. The 23rd Battalion had suffered 18 deaths and 71 wounded. Seven soldiers were missing.

The 21st Battalion Command Post was set up at La Rocca, while the first advance troops were directed towards Villa Moris. There, they discovered that the defensive posts of the enemy had already been dismantled and that the Germans had retreated. The men of the 21st Battalion could therefore move on to the village of Santa Cristina, in the municipality of San Casciano, where they joined with advance troops from the 28th Maori Battalion arriving from Bonazza.

New Zealand soldiers at Morrocco where a Regimental Aid Post was set up.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

Sambuca is liberated

Meanwhile, Sambuca had been liberated on 23 July 1944. A column of tanks and armoured cars, coming from the old Canonica Road, had crossed the Pesa River and liberated Sambuca during the afternoon. The bridge was destroyed by the Germans but, under heavy enemy shelling, New Zealand sappers had built a passage across the river.

At 7.30 p.m., trusting information received from an 'apparently friendly Italian' (as sources recall) who had assured them that Fabbrica was free of Germans, the New Zealanders started marching again. Unfortunately, not only was Fabbrica not empty, to the contrary it was an important German military headquarters that was still very much active.

As the New Zealanders got close to the first group of houses the Germans fired using every available weapon, leaving three dead and four wounded. The Germans also fired mortars and one of the shells hit Major William (Bill) Hoseit's command post, killing the major and three other soldiers. The New Zealand soldiers had to retreat to Sambuca for the time being, leaving Fabbrica firmly in German hands.

At this point the Kiwis decided to reorganise the units, creating a special force called Armcav, under the command of Major Robinson, and composed of the A Squadron of the 19th Regiment, the C Squadron of the Divisional Cavalry, the 2nd Company and the mechanical section of the 22nd Motorised Battalion, as well as an M10 squad, engineering, machine gunner and transmission units, a bridge-erecting vehicle and a bulldozer.

It was the troops of this newly created formation who occupied Fabbrica in the early hours of the morning of 25 July, after discovering that it had been abandoned by the Germans during the night. Later on they discovered that the day before leaving, the Germans had carried

New Zealand soldiers at Morrocco.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

out a ferocious massacre of civilians at Fabbrica, for no apparent reason except for spreading terror, just as they had done 48 hours earlier at Pratale, killing 12 farmers.[7]

The advance of the 28th Maori Battalion from Tavarnelle to Romita

In order to strengthen the 'pincer manoeuvre' thought up by General Freyberg, troops of the 28th Maori Battalion had headed from San Donato towards Tignano on the afternoon of 22 July, before proceeding towards Tavarnelle. Tignano had been semi-destroyed by exploding mines and had been hit by a great deal of cannon-fire. It was still in enemy hands when the artillery of the 5th Regiment cleared the road for advance, firing further shots into places where the enemy had been sighted. For the taking of Tignano — which occurred early evening at around 7 p.m. — a surrounding manoeuvre, which led to several prisoners being taken, was executed.

The road leading to Tavarnelle had been mined by the retreating Germans so the intervention of the sappers was

The New Zealand commanding officer directs troops at La Romita.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

The Tiger tank captured by 2nd Division at Villa Moris, near Tavarnelle.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

necessary in order to make it safe. The liberation of the main town did not take place until the following day.

23 July: Tavarnelle is liberated

Fighting was not necessary for the liberation of Tavarnelle because the Germans, who had held the town previously, decided to withdraw during the night. Having left the area of Tignano at around 5 a.m., three companies of the Maori Battalion (B, C and D, with A as reserve) overcame the difficulty posed by roads littered with rubble and mines, and entered Tavarnelle at about 7 a.m. One of the first soldiers to enter the town recalled that:

> *Upon arrival we found the town of Tavarnelle to be almost completely devastated and destroyed by the demolition caused by German cannons with the intention of blocking the streets. However, the inhabitants of the town, as in many other areas, were busy working to clear the streets from the debris.*[8]

The liberation of Tavarnelle is remembered for another, more cheerful episode. Archives of the battalion show that the New Zealand soldiers were not enthusiastically welcomed, but they did not particularly mind as they:

New Zealand soldiers wearing hats in a moment of relaxation.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

Soldiers resting at their camp.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

> *found something more interesting than welcoming parties. One of the shops in the town had a pretty window full of accordions and a new operational phase saw the Maoris with their rifles at rest over their shoulders producing sounds from their new toys … a squad of beginner bagpipe players would have been embarrassed by them.*[9]

Sergeant Tautini Glover was one of the first soldiers to enter Tavarnelle. He recalled:

> *I remember one shop in Tavarnelle well. It had one of those metal grid roller doors that they use there. We got hold of a mine and a grenade. The mine contained TNT, which is highly explosive, and we placed a grenade beside it. We attached a string to the safety pin and moved away. We pulled the string and the explosion destroyed the roller door. Then we went into the shop. It was full of musical instruments and each of us took an accordion. All of the boys had a gun and an accordion, until they became too heavy and we threw them away. There were lots of them in our Unit — we got them that way. We never paid for them.*

In fact, it probably wasn't a shop, but more likely the room where the town band stored their instruments.

After this musical 'digression' the Maori troops started marching again, despite enemy fire coming from the Romita ridge — the Germans had positioned cannons and mortars at Villa Moris. While approaching Bonazza the soldiers discovered, at their expense, that there were several German tanks positioned near the cemetery, which opened fire on them. Three Sherman tanks were hit, sustaining serious losses. Father Guardie, the military chaplain for the 18th Regiment, heroically risked his life under enemy fire in order to pull several men out of burning tanks and then organised first aid and transport for the wounded.

Reinforcements arrived and the German commanding officer of the Tiger I tank that had fired decided to move to the cemetery, in order to find a better position and attempt to reach the Cassia Road. The decision was, however, fatal. In fact, as long as the tank was moving it could not shoot, and a New Zealand shell severed a tube that prevented the tank from continuing, forcing the crew to abandon the vehicle, after sabotaging it, in a cornfield.

This was the first time during the Italian Campaign that the New Zealand tanks had clashed with the notorious and feared German Tiger tanks. From that moment on, for all of the Allies but most of all for the New Zealanders, all German tanks encountered would be Tigers in their

View from the turret of the first Tiger destroyed by the New Zealanders in the advance towards Florence. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

memoirs and documents, to the point where the battle in the Chianti area up to Florence would be recalled as taking place in 'Tiger country'.

The destruction of the aforementioned Tiger was a cause for celebration for the 18th Regiment, because it marked the first time that a German tank had been beaten by a component of the 2nd Division.

However, it was a result obtained at a high price in human lives: the day's fighting left six soldiers dead and 11 wounded — the worst daily toll for the 18th Armed Battalion during the entire Italian Campaign.

German leaders had decided to adopt military tactics that involved positioning the strongest tanks, the Tigers, at Villa Bonazza and Villa Moris, approximately 1.5 km apart. The tanks were on adjacent ridges, which guaranteed good visibility over the whole battlefield, and control over both the valleys and the ridges. This strategy meant that the Tigers were 'mobile forts' around which the infantry could be grouped, even though deploying them in this unusual manner exposed them to damage or loss, which in fact is what happened. Nevertheless, this tactic worked for the Germans as it allowed them to delay the advance for at least a day and caused heavy losses to the New Zealanders.

At this point the Maori soldiers got to work flushing the Germans out of Villa Bonazza. The area was liberated in a cold steel attack using bayonets attached to guns. About 20 German soldiers were captured.

Assisted by tanks from the 18th Armed Regiment, the advance started again on the morning of 24 July. It began with the liberation of the houses in Bonazza, from which the Germans had retreated and where, upon arrival, the New Zealanders found all the inhabitants in the church singing. 'Only God knows what stories they were telling and what they were waiting for,' wrote the official author of the story of the 28th Maori Battalion in his diary.[10] In the meantime, the Germans had also left Il Sodo farm.

The following hours were used to consolidate positions and organise the subsequent stages of advance.

The last fighting in and around Tavarnelle took place on the afternoon of 24 July; from that moment on the area was completely free of Germans. The war then moved ahead, to San Casciano.

Towards San Casciano

The New Zealand Armcav advanced very quickly. Once Fabbrica was liberated — which had cost a high price in lives — the 23rd Battalion arrived in Bargino at about midday.

Here they were forced to stop as the bridge over the Terzona Stream had been blown up, and the German cannons positioned further up in San Casciano began to fire at the New Zealanders.

The next day the New Zealanders decided not to go lightly on San Casciano, and it was heavily bombarded by fighter-bombers, hit by the artillery and bombed once again in the afternoon in an attempt to limit loss of human life among the Allied soldiers.

The New Zealand strategy for San Casciano

San Casciano was one of the bastions of the Olga Line — the new German mobile defence line. Contact with the Olga Line meant a change of strategy was required by the New Zealanders, who wanted to reach the bridges over the Arno River at Signa and the Ponte alla Vittoria[11] (in Florence) as soon as possible. In order to do this, 6th Brigade, which had been resting, was brought forward to be sent as a support for 5th Brigade, with the intention of following the breakthrough on the Pian dei Cerri[12] towards Scandicci, after having secured a bridgehead over the Pesa River at Cerbaia.

All this was to take place while the Armcav concentrated on San Casciano. But, if German troops continued to hold the town, then plans would be modified so as to launch the 4th Armed Brigade towards the bridges in Scandicci and Florence.

The task of gaining a bridgehead over the Pesa River was given to the 21st Battalion. After a day's marching and fighting, the battalion reached its target, on 25 July. The bridge over the Pesa had, however, been destroyed and the first attempts to cross the river at night failed due to a barrage of enemy fire and holes caused by artillery. Three tanks were put out of action in the first few hours.

Meanwhile, other units of the 21st Battalion advanced as far as 1.5 km past Montagnana towards La Ripa. It was during those hours that the New Zealanders found a large number of works of art from the Uffizi Gallery stored in the cellars and various rooms in Montegufoni Castle, owned by the Sitwell family.

The South Africans could not keep up with the New Zealanders, which left one flank almost undefended. It was decided that the taking of San Casciano was indispensable for continuing the advance towards Pian dei Cerri, and the initial idea of a surrounding manoeuvre was therefore discarded.

On the other side, the German commanding officers had issued orders that the positions in San Casciano be kept at all costs, even with counterattacks, as had happened in the Poppiano area. In actual fact, things did not go this way. At 9.45 a.m. on 27 July, the news arrived that the Germans had abandoned San Casciano.

New Zealand armoured vehicles moving towards San Casciano. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

It was ten o'clock in the morning when the men of the 22nd Battalion entered San Casciano. The scene facing the New Zealand soldiers was one of great destruction; debris all over the place and mines and explosive traps laid everywhere by the German paratroops before they left the town.

It was necessary to clear the area, searching house to house for snipers, while the engineers tried to clear the roads by removing rubble and mines with the aid of bulldozers. One tracked vehicle went over a mine, killing two men and wounding three more.

At midday the parties swapped over and the German artillery started shelling San Casciano. The New Zealanders still hoped to reach San Michele a Torri quickly and from there proceed towards Florence. But by now they had the Paula Line — a new German defence line — in front of them, stretching from Montelupo to San Vicenzo as far as Torri La Romola, which from then onwards became the Maedchen Line leading to Impruneta, Martellina di Strada in Chianti and San Polo.

The hopes of the New Zealanders to forge ahead were crushed at San Michele a Torri and La Romola when they

New Zealand military vehicle in Roma Street, San Casciano. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

A Sherman tank; San Casciano in the background. Jeffrey Plowman Archives

were confronted with a long, head-on battle that would last almost a month.

The difficult road to Florence

The Germans, knowing well that over the course of history Florence had been threatened by forces crossing the Arno River between Empoli and Fucecchio and then advancing towards the city from the west, had prepared themselves for this possibility and formed plans for a counterattack in the Fucecchio marshlands. When they realised that the New Zealanders intended going another way, and that they would opt for a frontal attack passing through the Porta Romana Gateway, they deployed their forces on the northern bank of the Arno River in such a way as to resist as long as possible.

The Paula Line

The Allies were in a much better position regarding means of transport, men and weapons. Thanks to the Enigma machine[13] captured from the enemy, the Allies could decode all the German coded messages, which enabled them to follow the activities and movements of each German division.

However, the Allies had serious logistical problems. Their supply camps were a long way behind — south of Lake Trasimeno — and all provisions had to be transported by road since very few trains were operating.

The Germans were exhausted by the Allied advance and had undergone substantial losses, both in terms of men and vehicles. Furthermore, there were no more turnovers at the Front for them; home leave for soldiers was almost non-existent and replacements were not enough to cover their losses, even using the many

New Zealand tanks in San Casciano. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

hundreds of dispersed soldiers who had managed to re-establish contact with their divisions. Before the arrival of the Front, the Germans had set up an important radio connection centre at Mosciano, codenamed Muggelsee, which received all information from army command posts south of Florence. The 14th Armed Corps Command Post was also in the same area.

La Romola

The first operations against the Paula Line began on the morning of 28 July 1944, but there had already been an Allied air attack on the armoured vehicles at La Romola the previous day, the first of a very long series of attacks. In order to sustain the battle south of Florence, 11 air raids a day were authorised in the five days from 30 July to 4 August, with the launching of 61 tons of bombs on various targets. Eighty-two tons of bombs were launched in a single day (2 August). The attack on La Romola began at 1 a.m. in the morning by men of the 22nd Motorised Battalion and the 19th Armed Regiment, with the aim of joining up with the South Africans on the road to Giogoli. The march proceeded quite quickly at first and the New Zealanders, protected by tanks but still under fire from mortars and machine guns, managed to get close to Spedaletto and behind Pisignano. To reach La Romola they had only to cross the valley of the Sugana Stream. At first it looked as if the Germans were not going to raise much resistance, worn out as they were by the tough fighting of the previous days, but this was an erroneous assessment.

As the day went on things became increasingly complicated for the New Zealanders. Encouraged by their first successes, the 4th Brigade command post ordered a platoon from the 1st Company of the 22nd Battalion to

ABOVE: The hill where the fighting near La Romola took place. MacMillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch
BELOW: View of La Romola. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

go out on reconnaissance with some tanks. The platoon was to descend Sugana Valley and head up towards La Romola to hassle the enemy, which was thought to be retreating. But they fell into a trap. While the tanks were exploring and sight was limited due to the nature of the land and natural obstacles, a German Tiger suddenly appeared in front of the New Zealand tanks and fired, taking the Allied vehicles by surprise. The three Sherman tanks were destroyed, and three soldiers were killed while several were wounded. A German diary reported the episode in this way:

> *Target reached, distance estimated, everything ready. I slowly come out from under cover. Siegfried Wiedmann, the artilleryman, has destroyed them with three anti-tank shells.*[14]

The surviving crews from the tanks that went up in flames took cover with the platoon in a house where civilians gave them some wine to drink. The Germans hit the area with every type of weapon available, trying to prevent retreat, until the New Zealand artillery made its presence felt and permitted the soldiers to return to their units.

Until that moment the Paula Line had remained fundamentally intact: the Germans waited in their positions, firing as far as past San Casciano without counterattacking (for the time being). The New Zealand artillery responded to the German shelling and was directed by Captain R. M. Clark, who was positioned with a radio operator as advance observers, in a farmhouse. Clark did not move from that position, even though enemy fire had located them. From there he transmitted co-ordinates for the artillery until the Germans had had enough and decided to attack the farm, destroying the radio post.

It quickly became evident that the Germans were firmly present in their positions and had no intention of withdrawing. The news that 'the enemy is still numerous at La Romola, where there are about 40 tanks' arrived at the New Zealand command post at 8.37 a.m. According to the recollections of some civilians, there were no less than 30 German tanks inside the village of La Romola. The men from the New Zealand information service consider this number to be too high, estimating that the Tigers present could not be more than a dozen, perhaps even fewer. News regarding the strength of the enemy

Tanks from the 20th Armoured Regiment at La Romola. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

was not certain but, in actual fact, a few minutes after receiving that piece of information the New Zealand heavy and medium artillery commenced firing on La Romola. Despite this heavy artillery fire, an advance did not proceed and the New Zealand troops remained under enemy shelling and machine-gun fire, incurring heavy losses.

The Germans resisted at La Romola, despite Allied artillery firing some 17,900 shots. The New Zealanders were beginning to run out of ammunition. Replenishments had yet to arrive from Lake Trasimeno. The toll at the end of the day was bitter: 12 of the 14 Sherman tanks employed that day were out of use. At this point it was decided that soldiers of the 23rd Battalion would attack Sant'Andrea in Percussina in order to conquer La Romola. A pincer attack on La Romola could then be attempted from Sant'Andrea.

The attack on Sant'Andrea began during the night of

The square in La Romola. Jeffrey Plowman Archives

29 July. The 9th Platoon was chosen for this difficult task. Once they got past Spedaletto, about 500 metres[15] from the houses in Sant'Andrea, the platoon fell under terrible barrage from German cannons.

Despite this, an order to keep going was received. The shelling, together with the fact that the campaign had already incurred heavy losses at San Martino, which was commanded by newly arrived officers, was the cause of a very disorderly deployment. The soldiers refused to advance. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas arrived on the scene and personally went to the head of his men and started to advance, supported by three tanks from the A Squadron of the 20th Regiment. Several German parachutists were captured and this was enough to raise the morale of the New Zealanders. While Thomas returned to his headquarters, the Allied soldiers got as far as the houses in the village that the Germans had abandoned. The enemy withdrew to the northern part and barricaded themselves in Villa Mazzei, from where they controlled the northern exit of the village.

In that moment and in that context, the New Zealanders were exposed to a counterattack, and for this reason they decided to advance further with Lieutenant Karsten's platoon. However, the platoon was blocked by barrage fire. Karsten was struck down dead.

In the meantime, the tank support was held up on the road to Spedaletto due to damage along the route. The New Zealanders could only hit Villa Mazzei using mortars; using heavy artillery was out of question due to the close proximity of their own soldiers. It was at this point that the Germans launched a sudden counterattack at 1.30 p.m., to which the New Zealanders responded efficiently, leaving 12 German parachutists dead. At the

New Zealand soldiers loading ammunition on to tanks during the advance towards Florence. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

View of three strategic points of the advance towards Florence: Santa Maria (top), San Michele (centre) and Cerbaia. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

end of the day the Tiger protecting Villa Mazzei, by now being attacked from more than one side and blinded by smoke bullets, retreated, freeing up the field. A Company was sent off to rest.

Meanwhile, after having seen the three tanks burn in the Suganella Valley, soldiers from the 22nd Battalion had retreated to the church in Pisignano, where they remained for the whole day, not immune to enemy shelling. Three soldiers died in the attempt to cross the valley.

On 30 July 1944 Sergeant Allan Clinton and three other soldiers were sent out on forward reconnaissance as bait that would permit the observers to locate enemy posts around La Romola in preparation for a new attack. The plan worked, although one soldier was wounded.

The time of the attack was arranged for 1 a.m. on the morning of 31 July 1944, and would be carried out by the 22nd Battalion with the support of C Squadron of the 20th Armed Regiment and two other units. The password was 'Doughboy'.

That day General Freyberg wrote in his diary that the enemy had resisted well in its positions, conceding that resistance had not been properly evaluated after the taking of San Casciano. But the lesson of the lost Sherman tanks was not in vain, and Freyberg insisted that the anti-tank vehicles go ahead to combat the Tigers at La Romola. Consequently, the 17-pound anti-tank vehicles and the M10 self-propelled vehicles, able to fight efficiently against the feared German tanks, were positioned.

The plan elaborated by the New Zealanders foresaw that the first move would be made by a Maori squad that was to occupy Casa del Carpione, while the artillery would open fire immediately afterwards, advancing approximately 100 yards [15 m] every four minutes, with all the New Zealand cannons, the 57th Field Artillery of

the 6th English Division and the 70th and 75th Regiments participating in bombardments.

The Maori did their duty and, after having crossed the Suganella Gully, took Casa del Carpione. The supporting tanks, however, could not get across the gully, which was a natural and not easily surmountable obstacle.

The Germans had opened fire with mortars and machine guns. The Maori squad also reached Faltignano and Villa Zaira. As it was impossible to cross the Suganella Gully, the tanks had to pass through the 23rd Battalion's sector, but they were immediately subjected to enemy fire and one of them was put out of action. With the support of the heavy artillery, the Tiger I that controlled the area was forced to withdraw.

At 1.30 a.m. on 1 August, after having captured several German nurses and having killed approximately 20 soldiers, the New Zealand infantry entered Torrebianca. Casa Ralli was not occupied until that afternoon.

Meanwhile, the men from the 4th Brigade were about to break through the enemy line at La Romola. The attack by the 22nd Battalion commenced at 1 a.m. on 31 July, with the outstanding support of the heavy artillery. A terrible battle erupted in the Suganella Valley.

Right from the start, heavy losses were incurred as the Germans swept the area with machine gunfire. It was a dark night with low visibility, which obstructed the movements of the New Zealanders. There were some moments of great confusion and other communication problems between the companies and the battalion, and between the platoons and the company command posts, that were exacerbated because several officers fell during the first phases of the battle.

However, despite the heavy losses and the great chaos, the Kiwis fought courageously and managed to destroy the enemy positions. The first to reach the houses in the village was the 15th Platoon led by Lieutenant L.L. Thomas, who had destroyed two groups of machine gunners during their advance. The soldiers of the 15th Platoon barricaded themselves inside some of the houses on the outskirts of the village, where they were joined by the soldiers of the 13th and 14th platoons a short while later. The 1st Company opened the way through the vineyards, reaching the houses on the east side of La Romola with the 7th and 8th platoons. Twenty-one prisoners were taken, and about 15 Germans were killed.

La Romola eventually was taken during the night. The New Zealanders consolidated their positions in the following hours, assisted by the arrival of tanks, and were subjected to shelling by the Germans who hit the village heavily. In the explosion of one building, hit perhaps by cannon fire or because it was mined, nine soldiers died immediately and another 10 died later due to their wounds.

There was one curious episode. On 30 July, while scouring the territory surrounding La Romola that had just been conquered, the Kiwis succeeded in capturing a Tiger tank and its crew without firing a single shot. While a squad was investigating the houses, two soldiers literally bumped into a Tiger tank as they were coming around the side of a house. The tank appeared to be abandoned but the soldiers managed to capture the entire crew (four men), who were sleeping or preparing breakfast. The tank was taken behind the New Zealand lines to the Tank Retrieval Unit to be painted with New Zealand colours and join the Allied vehicles. The idea of redeploying the tank among the New Zealand lines was almost immediately shelved due to the risk of generating identification problems: even if it did show the New Zealand insignia, such a well-known tank could mislead Allied planes and cannons. Just looking at the Tiger struck fear into soldiers. Not long after the capture of the tank, the first to be tricked were the infantry of the 21st Battalion marching towards Scandicci after Poggio Issi and Poggio alle Monache had been conquered. The soldiers had just taken the two ridges and were enjoying the sight of Florence and the Arno River when, all of a sudden, they were frozen by the sight of a Tiger moving quickly towards the military column.

The church and school at San Michele. Jeffrey Plowman Archives

A Tiger can easily destroy a Sherman; therefore there was considerable relief when we were informed that an officer of the 22nd Battalion had captured the Tiger intact and had decided to take it back behind the lines as a souvenir.[16]

The battle of San Michele

The battle for Pian dei Cerri is one of the least-known military operations of the campaign that crossed Tuscany from July to September 1944; it is also one of the most ignored campaigns within military studies.

The New Zealanders had already begun to concentrate on San Michele on 27 July, after crossing the Pesa River. The codename assigned to the small village was 'Atlanta', while Pian dei Cerri was rebaptised 'Brooklyn'. After evaluating the area, it was bombed that afternoon, although some civilians testified that the first bombs had already fallen in Oratorio Road on 24 July. The civilians from the intact part of the village, realising that the area would be the scene of hard fighting that would likely last for days, had taken refuge in the cellars of the farmhouse at La Fratta, along with provisions and supplies.

The task of seizing Pian dei Cerri was assigned in particular to the battalions of Colonel Burrow's 6th Brigade. At first the 24th and 26th battalions were deployed, while the 25th Battalion remained behind the lines to defend the bridgehead at Cerbaia. The first Company of the 26th Battalion started moving at about 1.30 a.m. on 28 July, almost immediately capturing two Germans, who had not noticed their arrival, from a machine-gun station. The German response began at sunrise, with infernal shelling unleashed against New Zealanders positioned on both sides of the road leading up to Pian dei Cerri. Also firing on them was a self-propelled cannon, located at La Romola, which was still in hostile hands at the time. The attack of the 26th Battalion had, however, placed the German commanding officers in a difficult position. A gap was opened in the main formation, forcing the Germans to retreat, even though they did take several prisoners with them.

The other company of the 24th Battalion, which had the task of commencing advance, also found itself facing a murderous barrage as soon as it came near Il Castellare. Accounts agree that there was extreme chaos in the first few hours of battle and that the German shelling was precise and efficient. The Germans considered the positions assumed by the New Zealanders to be weak and vulnerable. With the objective of repairing the breach in the line, grenadiers of the 1st Battalion of the 15th German Regiment unleashed a counterattack at 8 a.m. They regained the farm at Finolo di Sopra (Upper Finolo) and later, following numerous battles, La Casetta and the

farm at Finolo di Sotto (Lower Finolo) as well. The Kiwis had to retreat to Casa Monteggi, where the Germans counterattacked again, but without success. They did, however, manage to capture three Sherman tanks with their crews and take them back behind German lines.

At this point the New Zealanders managed to destroy German telephone communication lines, which initially created serious problems for the Germans who had to send relay couriers by car or on foot. In order to signal danger they had to launch different coloured signal rockets; each colour was associated with the type of message being sent.

Soldiers from the 26th and 24th battalions found themselves caught in crossfire, and the battle continued furiously for several hours in various areas of the Front. Heavy use was made of Sherman tanks, which duelled with enemy Panzers. There were also several German counterattack attempts, most of which were repressed.

At the end of the very hard day, the 1c Office of the 14th German Armed Forces wrote:

> *The 15th Armed Grenadiers Regiment, which at about 3 p.m. had counterattacked enemy interruption north of Cerbaia despite heavy artillery fire from the enemy, managed to push back the determined New Zealand combatants who were attacking continuously, causing heavy losses of men and material to the enemy. Our main fighting line is completely in our hands once again after eight hours of fighting in the tropical heat.*[17]

In just one day of fighting, 16,400 artillery shots had been fired at the scene of the battle. It was proposed that Lieutenant General Fries' Division be mentioned in the news bulletin of the German Armed Forces for their actions because:

> *In the heavy defensive fighting to the south of Florence, the 29th Armed Grenadier Division, under the command of Lieutenant General Fries, has once again extraordinarily distinguished itself, and with its great capacity of resistance, and the heroic defensive determination of all its grenadiers, has inflicted serious material and human loss to the enemy.*

The following day, Saturday 29 July, would be the longest day for both the 24th Battalion and San Michele a Torri.

29 July: the longest day

Reinforcements of men and vehicles arrived at the New Zealand positions during the night, to fill the gaps created by the previous day's battle. At an early hour, while it was still dark, the New Zealand artillery opened fire on the German positions. Then the men of the 24th Battalion began to advance, reaching Casa Mezzocolle relatively easily from one side, killing six Germans and taking another six as prisoners.

From the other side they reached San Michele without meeting opposition. One platoon was deployed in the church and the vicarage, another in several houses in the area south of the village, and a third in the school. A few German soldiers were captured and it all seemed to be over by 3 a.m. The infantry moved in first, followed by armed vehicles. Two tanks positioned themselves near the church. A jeep with two wounded New Zealanders and five prisoners aboard hit a mine on the road to Poggetto, which the sappers had earlier cleared. Only one person survived.

At 6 a.m., at first light, the Germans opened fire with mortars, machine guns and a tank. The German shelling came from the hill where Casa Il Monte was located, and the New Zealanders replied with all available means. It was the prelude to the German counterattack. The grenadiers moved towards the church supported by several Panzers. The counterattack was repelled but the battle was violent. From midday onwards the fighting worsened, with a German tank in action in the northern part of the village and groups of grenadiers infiltrating among the houses. The situation was becoming difficult for the

Destroyed house at La Romola, where ten men from the Anti-tank Regiment died. Jeffrey Plowman Archives

New Zealanders. The wounded were placed in the crypt of the church. Another two Shermans were sent out in support but one of them overturned on an embankment and only exceptional covering fire saved the crew. The Germans occupied the loft of a barn, which placed them in a dominant position, and a Sherman destroyed the building before in turn being destroyed by a German self-propelled vehicle.

There was a short break in fighting during the afternoon, then the New Zealanders called for and received the intervention of fighter-bombers. Nevertheless, they did not manage to stop the counterattack from starting up again at about 7.30 p.m. The New Zealand soldiers barricaded inside the church came under fire from the short-range self-propelled vehicles. The German grenadiers tried to block the road to Il Poggetto, where reinforcements coming from Castellare were headed. The New Zealand reaction was decisive and ferocious: the Kiwis fired using all available weapons. Groups of soldiers, who had reached useful firing positions after a tiring march across the Mezzocolle farm, also participated in the fighting. With the Shermans out of action, several Panzers now controlled the village, while a group of New Zealand soldiers had taken refuge in the crypt of the church.

Even though the commanding officers had given orders to retreat, difficulties in communication and movement made it impossible to diffuse the order. The commanding officers present in the area near the church decided that the only thing to do was to resist as long as possible, deploying their men in the crypt and just outside the church. A new attack by the Germans was repelled and a Panzer forced to retreat.

Later that evening the Germans decided to withdraw, leaving the village to the remaining soldiers of the New Zealand Company barricaded in the church. Fresh troops and nine Sherman support tanks arrived during the night from Castellare.

The New Zealand commanding officers managed to re-establish radio contact and get a clearer idea of the situation from those barricaded in the village at 11.35 p.m., thereby resolving the confusion and uncertainties that had characterised the previous hours.

Shortly beforehand, at 10.25 p.m., six fighter bombers had hit the area near San Michele where civilians had reported the presence of German self-propelled vehicles. These vehicles were used during the battle for a new type of tactical action. Instead of advancing on foot, grenadiers were loaded on to the armed vehicles and set down close to the village, exposing the men to as little enemy fire as possible in the hope of limiting casualties during the advance phase.

That morning, at 1 a.m., the Germans received an evacuation order: withdraw and close the lines north of San Michele immediately.

At first light on 30 July the New Zealand artillery opened fire once again on the German posts north of the village. Two New Zealand soldiers were killed by enemy fire. From the road that led to Il Poggetto, men and armed vehicles recommenced their advance under mortar and machine gun fire, eventually reaching the church and the farm at San Michele, while other men stationed themselves ready to defend the crossroad on the Provincial Road to Scandicci. That day there was a first encounter on the Provincial Road with Indian troops, who were engaged in the Montelupo area.

The Germans were exhausted from the previous battle and in particular opposed resistance to the cannon and mortar fire from a position nearby, in the San Niccolò a Torri area, which also remained active the following day. Stationed there were one self-propelled vehicle, three tanks, three mortars and two machine guns. The

The building in Via delle Croci where men of the 26th Battalion took cover.
Jeffrey Plowman Archives

Germans left that position on 1 August when it was no longer defensible and when they had carried out their task of guaranteeing an orderly retreat of almost all their troops.

Two tanks, positioned in the northern part of the village, were almost immediately driven out by further heavy shelling from the New Zealand artillery and Allied aviation attacks.

The German defensive line had by now been broken through and Florence 'could be seen'. That same day Kesselring issued an order to mine all the bridges in Florence except Ponte Vecchio. The retreating Germans also planned to mine the powerstation at Tavarnuzze.

During the course of the battle at Pian dei Cerri, the Germans used a large amount of mines. Many New Zealanders, and some of their vehicles, were blown up by various types of anti-personnel and anti-tank mines, all of which were lethal. The Germans were also experts at laying explosive traps and could hide a trap anywhere — in fruit trees and even in wine cellars — often killing civilians, sometimes long after the end of the war.

The battle for San Michele remains engraved in blood in the memories of the New Zealand soldiers and the military history of that part of Italy. Numerous heroic actions were enacted by the Kiwis. The divisional newspaper reported:

> *... many courageous actions were carried out in those few hours, but none equals the efforts of a soldier from Mount Eden. He had brain concussion from a previous battle and was a patient in the emergency ward when the attack began. He immediately grabbed a Piat*[18] *... and forced himself into action. From the doorway he saw a Mark 4*[19] *... which was moving forward in order to shoot inside. When the tank was ten yards away, with the cannon lowered to finish off the New Zealanders, the infantry soldier fired his Piat. The bullet hit the joint between the turret and the body of the tank, blocking the cannon. The soldier from Auckland fired three more shots which did not penetrate the tank but did force it to retreat. The air filled with dust as the tanks destroyed the houses, floor by floor. ... Mounds of debris from the buildings formed an insurmountable barrier for the Germans.*[20]

The road leading to the fattoria (farm) at San Michele.
Jeffrey Plowman Archives

Scandicci comes back to life

After conquering San Michele a Torri, the small village in Scandicci nicknamed 'little Cassino' due to the violence of the battle, the New Zealand soldiers had not yet finished their task of liberating the hills southwest of Florence in order to clear the route towards the city. There were still two hills to take: Pian dei Cerri and Poggio alle Monache, the two highest points of the ridge, before finally descending to the outskirts of Florence. It would not be an easy task.

The retreating Germans had orders to resist as long

as possible before ultimately seeking shelter on the right bank of the Arno River. The men obeying General Freyberg were, however, determined to end the game and enter Florence.

The fighting was extremely ruthless. In the battle to take La Romola and the Faltignano area, which took place on 30 and 31 July, the 2nd Division Artillery had used up all of their 25-pound cannon ammunition;[21] in fact the successive attack was postponed for a day until the trucks from the ammunition deposit near Lake Trasimeno returned. While waiting for the offensive, several soldiers from the 22nd Battalion found shelter in a villa in the area.[22] There were some surprises. Among the luxurious furnishings of the villa was a Bechstein grand piano, described by the soldiers as 'beautiful in appearance as well as timbre.'[23] The piano came in handy. Near the positions occupied by the artillery, the New Zealanders found 40 Italian evacuees sheltering in a semi-underground cellar. Among them was a young Florentine woman who told them she was an opera singer. The New Zealanders described her as 'singularly attractive'.[24] She willingly offered to sing for them, accompanied by her father, who played the very precious instrument found in the villa. From the diary of a soldier by the name of Gain, we have the following record.

> *It would not be possible to comment on all the songs she performed, but we were particularly moved by her interpretation of Schubert's* Ave Maria. *It was magnificent and in order for the boys to be satisfied, she had to concede a couple of encores. Her performance was impeccable and she sang for so long that it was not difficult for us to understand that we had a singer of great talent before us.*[25]

It was a memorable performance. The pauses between the songs were filled with spontaneous military choruses. And at the end there was dinner for everyone prepared by 'old George', the battalion cook.[26] Coffee was served in porcelain cups found in the villa, which were probably extremely valuable, and those fortunate enough to get one could sip their coffee while they enjoyed the tomato sandwiches that served as 'supplement' to the water-biscuits handed out by the Allied army.

There was, however, a war to fight outside the villa. The offensive postponed by a day took place on the night between 1 and 2 August. The New Zealanders moved from La Romola towards the Poggio Valicaia area and from San Michele a Torri along Croce Road, in the immediate surroundings of Pian dei Cerri.

At the Front was the 28th Maori Battalion, which could count on the support of the artillery and the 27th Machine gunners. The 21st Battalion, faced with more difficulties than the 28th Maori Battalion, only managed to take Poggio alle Monache, halfway between La Romola and Giogoli, the following night. The fighting of this brief but decisive advance was intense. The Germans were well armed and could count on a considerable number of Tiger tanks, the terror of the Allied tank drivers who had mostly been allocated American-made M4 Shermans.

On 2 August, while the infantry was consolidating its position on the ridges, the German tanks continued to invoke fear in the Valicaia area. The German soldiers were barricaded in the Baggiolino manorhouse and had forced the New Zealanders to retreat to the Carbognano farm. During this battle, a MkIV Panzer came along the (present day) Poggiona Road looking for New Zealand M10 anti-tank vehicles called in to support the troops. At a distance of less than 400 metres from the Allies, the German tank began to pull back. It was the wrong move. Two artillerymen came out of Carbognano farm and manned the 17-pound anti-tank cannon, which they had positioned in the farmyard and was protected by a low wall. A single shot and a huge dose of luck did the rest. The shell penetrated a critical point under the turret and blew it nearly two metres into the air. The vehicle caught fire and the ammunition exploded.[27] Without delay the Germans took revenge: the M2 cannon that

Tiger tank at Giogoli; see also photo on page 88. Jeffrey Plowman Archives

had destroyed the Panzer was put out of use by a well-centred mortar shell.

One last effort was required in order to take Poggio Valicaia, the Via delle Croci Road and Poggio alle Monache, on the Volterrana Road. The artillery received a request for barrage fire from the commanding officers of the 21st and 22nd battalions. When the ridges had been taken, the soldiers finally saw Florence in the distance.

At that point a great deal of the Scandicci area had been conquered. Still to go were the historical residential area and the Settimo Plain. The New Zealanders descended down to Scandicci from Giogoli on 3 August. During the offensive for Florence, the Medical Division of the New Zealand Division established an advance medical unit inside the Duca degli Abruzzi School.[28] Built in 1937 according to the principles of rationalist architecture so dear to the Fascist regime it was, in fact, the only public building, apart from the Town Hall in Piazza Matteotti, big enough to accommodate a large number of people in Scandicci. The battle wounded arrived immediately. An intermediate gathering point was set up in a non-specified villa on the hills overlooking Florence. Transport was not easy and it proved necessary to create a changeover point where the ambulances could stop and from where

the jeeps carrying the wounded could depart.[29] The diaries of the II Medical Unit report that the school was not damaged, despite night bombing. Evidence of the New Zealand descent into Scandicci can also be found in the *Liber Chronicus* of the Parish of Casignano. In his memories of the war passing through his village, Don Pietro Mazzei, the parish priest, wrote:

> *On the morning of the 3rd the first two Anglo-American trucks or tanks (I can't remember which) arrived from Giogolino and lodged at the Villa, then there was a continuous flow of tanks and trucks which went to lodge in the gardens of the Villa and in the fields. They positioned cannons at the end of Casignano near Vingone and in the 'crater'. There were American soldiers and New Zealand soldiers (two of these, who died at Vingone in an encounter with a German tank in which two German soldiers also died, were buried in the village of Casignano, near Ponte di Casignano, at the bottom of the slope). On the first evening of the day on which the Anglo-Americans arrived, a New Zealander came into the vicarage to ask if there were any Germans. He was a good young Catholic who, once he had ascertained that there were no enemies present, asked if he could go into the church where he knelt down to pray.*[30]

Another testimony of those days can also be found in the war diary of Tom Sherlock, one of the New Zealand veterans. On 1 August 1944, he wrote:

> *The roads are dusty as usual. We saw what must have been the house of a rich Fascist upon a hill. I have never seen such vicious and intentional destruction. Priceless paintings and furniture deliberately destroyed. My comrades hoarded souvenirs.*[31]

On 2 August he recorded that:

> *We lazed around in the area and two men from the anti-tank division were killed by mines which had been placed in a field of tomatoes. After that, no one felt like roaming around if they didn't have to.*[32]

On 4 August the New Zealand tanks descended into the valley, with the soldiers seeking to establish whether the bridges over the Greve River were still intact. The bridge over the Pisana Road had been blown up, as had the other one, the famous bridge that had seen the insurrection on 28 February 1921, when the citizens of Scandicci had set up barricades against the army and Fascist paramilitary squads which had come to 'clean out' the city. 'The insurrectionary tumult of Scandicci quashed by the artillery,'[33] read the headline in the *La Nazione* newspaper, clearly expressing the violence of what had happened. After the killing of Spartaco Lavagnini by the Fascists, the citizens of Scandicci revolted along with those of the Florentine Oltrarno (the other side of the Arno). It was a revolt that was suppressed by cannon shots from the Royal Army and a bayonet attack that broke through the barricade that the citizens of Scandicci had placed across the main access bridge to the city. Twenty-three years later the retreating Germans decided to resolve the problem at its roots, not with barricades to stop the Allied advance, but with a powerful load of explosives. After the arrival of Allied troops, Scandicci came back to life. The National Liberation Committee[34] set itself up in the offices of the Mutual Aid Society in Via de' Rossi (which had been requisitioned during the Ventennio, the 20-year fascist rule, to become Fascist House), thus signifying the rebirth of democracy.

The New Zealanders left the city a few days later. They were initially replaced by the Canadians, then by the Japanese-Americans from one of the most well-known units of the US Army.

The skirmishes went on for several days. Germans and fascists crossed the Arno River on the San Donnino footbridge in order to create disorder in the Settimo Plain. They inflicted the most damage, however, during their

View of the Arno River and Ponte Vecchio, Florence.

MacMillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch

View of the Arno River and Ponte Vecchio, Florence. Jeffrey Plowman Archives

retreat, blowing up the steeple and Colombaione Tower of the ancient Cistercian Abbey of San Salvatore and San Lorenzo a Settimo. Even though the New Zealanders did not physically remain in the residential area of Scandicci, the city was liberated thanks to their offensive.

After having taken the Poggio Valicaia area and then Giogoli, General Freyberg's men did not encounter any particular resistance until they reached the Arno River. The Germans had retreated towards Florence, leaving the Scandicci territory, which was not considered strategic. The advance of the Allies had to be delayed for as long as possible along the Arno because the last defensive line would be the Gothic Line.

At the gateways of Florence

'We were the first to enter Florence.' For many New Zealand veterans this is still an open wound. They do not accept that history awards the credit to the South Africans. For Kiwis it is a point of honour to tell everyone that they were the first to arrive at the Ponte alla Vittoria

area. Be it legend or half-truth, it is possible to read about it in several testimonials by veterans of the Italian Campaign conserved in the library of Te Papa Museum in Wellington, New Zealand, and to hear about it firsthand from those who can still tell the story. Frank Harvey, who participated in the 'battle for Florence', records:

> *I confirm it — we really were the first to enter Florence. However, the Allied high commanders decided to attribute the merit to the South Africans, but it was just a question of propaganda. We were at the head of the attack, and we entered the city immediately after the German retreat. There was no sign of the South Africans that day. We heard on the radio that the merit was not going to be ours. Morale is very important in war and they needed encouragement.*[35]

Whether the New Zealanders like it or not, the South Africans have always affirmed their merit, and official documents confirm their argument. But they also recognise the courage of the Kiwis who were engaged in several tough battles, first on the Scandicci hills and then during the race towards the Arno. One confirmation of this theory comes from another direct testimony. In his diary, Tom Sherlock recorded on 3 and 4 August, that:

> *Things seem to be precipitating for Florence. Our men have certainly done the hardest work. It would be a great honour if we were the first to take Florence. ... It seems that the South Africans have arrived south of Florence, but news is scarce as usual.*[36]

Even before the destruction of the bridges over the Arno, the Germans had already turned the city into a battlefield using propaganda. A tangible sign of the war of nerves in progress appeared on 3 August, as noted in the war diaries of the 14th Armed Division when the Germans, who claimed there had been a violation of the status of 'open city' of Florence, bombed the Porta Romana, Ponte alla Vittoria and Bellosguardo areas. It was a prelude to the demolition of the bridges and the Por Santa Maria area.

General Freyberg, the New Zealand commander, defined the Germans as 'rabid dogs' in his war diary. 'Knowing that we would never bomb Florence, they have transformed it into a military cantonment and are now waiting for us to bomb them.'[37] The day after, the general noted that the area south of Florence was full of snipers and, even when he received the news that some of his troops in Cerbaia were under fire from the German artillery that was firing from Florence, he still did not order a mortar attack on the residential area.[38]

The soldiers of the South African Imperial Light Horse were the first to arrive in the Ponte Vecchio area on 4 August, but they were welcomed by bursts of MG machine guns and shots by snipers who were firing from the opposite side of the river. The New Zealanders entered the city on the morning of 5 August. The C Company of 23rd Battalion prepared the advance and took Villa Capponi, taking 15 men as prisoners. Then a platoon crossed the Greve River at La Gora and made contact with the South Africans. Another platoon, together with the three from D Company, got on the tanks from the A Squadron of the 19th Regiment, marking the beginning of a race across fields and country roads, over the Marignolle Hill, before entering the suburbs immediately south of Florence at about 11 a.m. The scene described by Colonel Thomas, who was on a tank and later wounded in the fighting, was one to remember:

> *In just a very short time hundreds of people came out into the streets clapping frenetically, offering flowers and fruit to the tanks. Wine, champagne and even whisky were held up to us in glasses and bottles. It was an exciting moment. We moved closer to the Arno and I called the Brigade on the radio to tell them of our success. 'A great show, but withdraw immediately,' was the reply they got. It was like a bolt of lightning from a clear sky for the troops, after they had managed to get*

Ponte Vecchio, Florence.

MacMillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch

that far. But later on events showed that the message could not have been more appropriate.

In fact, while they were turning back all hell broke loose: snipers, machine gun spray and artillery fire hit the tanks transporting the soldiers. Thomas was the only one wounded and the New Zealanders retreated to a position between Villa Capponi and Giogoli.[39]

The Maori Battalion reached an area west of Ponte alla Vittoria and were probably the first New Zealand soldiers physically to set foot within the built-up area of Florence. They had the task of rendering the area safe and allowing engineers to survey the bank of the river in order to find places where it was possible to cross over and continue the advance.

The men from the B and D companies of the 28th Battalion positioned themselves along the river and managed to hold out despite dense machine gun fire that was coming from the other side of the river. The Germans had established several defensive posts at the Cascine, probably taking into consideration the Allied attempt to construct a bridge or find a place to ford in that section of the river. One squad, with an officer and ten men from B Company, did manage to ford the river and proceed about 100 metres without meeting the enemy. Other explorers, from D Company, discovered a good place for the tanks to cross over (the Arno was dry), just a few metres downriver from the Vittoria Bridge, but they noticed an enemy presence in the Cascine area.

Other New Zealanders were also involved on the left bank, between Scandicci and Lastra a Signa, in support of Indians from the 8th Division who were to engage the

South African soldier and companion in Florence. Jeffrey Plowman Archives

Germans in the battle to liberate Signa; still more were busy liberating Empoli. A testimonial of the arrival in Empoli comes from another New Zealand veteran, Frank Harvey:

> *I still have the image of Empoli as it appeared before us in a valley behind the last hill in my mind. The houses were almost all deserted. It was a very spectral scene. I remember that a pretty girl called out to me from a bombed house. I can still see her in that scene of destruction. I moved closer because I thought she needed help, but when I realised that she was inviting me into the bedroom I took off. I feared that it was a trap and that there could have been Germans hidden somewhere inside. There were still lots of snipers about.*[40]

The battles continued, however, on the Florentine front. Other details regarding the arrival in Florence emerge from the diaries of the 27th Battalion. The first is another dig at the South Africans, 'who found the path smoothed for them thanks to the fact that the New Zealanders had conquered the hills south of the city.'[41] The other relates to the soldiers of the machine gun unit which, with the support of some tanks and the artillery, had the task of going to help the Maori Battalion in their advance toward the Argingrosso and Ponte alla Vittoria areas. They encountered many difficulties in crossing one of the numerous ditches present in this part of the Florentine plain. The Germans had opened the locks and raised the level of the canal in order to make crossing difficult. In the end, four pieces of light artillery were towed by the only truck that had forded the canal, and they arrived in time for the Maori soldiers' entrance into Florence. There were also reactions from the Germans from this side of the city with machine gun bursts and isolated sniper shots.

By now the battle of Florence was coming to an end. On the afternoon of 4 August the commanding officer of the 6th South African Armed Division congratulated General Freyberg for his excellent work. Freyberg replied with a slightly caustic remark, 'We could not have done differently, and this has saved you many losses.'

The toll in blood for the New Zealanders was, however, very high. During the 32-km advance towards Florence, which commenced on 22 July, more than 200 soldiers lost their lives, 710 were wounded and 29 became prisoners of war. While the division remained on the southern bank of the Arno (on the night of 15 August), a further 34 soldiers were killed and 107 wounded. Between 22 July and 16 August, 52 tanks from the 4th Armed Brigade were also damaged or put out of action, almost an entire regiment.

New Zealand troops poured into the city immediately after its liberation. They remained there, partly in the hope of finding a prestigious base for their own troops.

This activity was considered of such importance that it even warranted space in the information service reports. An operation was organised in order to find premises for the group and the Hotel Baglioni was selected. In fact, on 9 August 1944 a Lieutenant Richardson was sent specifically from Rome to Florence to investigate. After visting the hotel[42] he went to report to his superiors, who were still encamped outside the city. Richardson spoke highly of the luxurious Florentine hotel, which had not been damaged during the battle and was therefore perfect for occupation. Permission to enter the building was given only on 19 August, the date on which the premises were only temporarily assigned. A definitive all-clear was given on 3 September, but in the 15 days between these dates the Kiwis guarded the hotel to stop other Allied soldiers pinching it from them. Once they had taken possession of the structure, they 'removed' civilians from the building and started spring cleaning before moving in.

The liberation of Florence was one of the key passages of the Italian Campaign. After Rome, Florence was the city most loved by the English for its works of art and its Renaissance charm. Everything possible was to be done to save the city and its priceless cultural patrimony. Even before the battle of the bridges, the commanding officers of the 8th Armed Force had issued very strict rules for all soldiers. In a document dated 25 July 1944,[43] the Kiwis took these regulations regarding behaviour seriously. One of the main restrictions was the banning of all off-duty soldiers entering the city unless expressly authorised by the commanding officers in order not to obstruct war operations. In accordance with these military regulations, the troops' rest periods and training activities were not to interfere with the civilian population.

Since the city had been declared off-limits for soldiers not on duty, the rules regarding vehicles were also very strict; those found driving in the built-up area without authorisation were stopped and their vehicle requisitioned. Curfew was from 9 p.m. until 5 a.m. and during these hours the city became accessible only to

Destroyed buildings, Florence.
MacMillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch

soldiers because civilians had to stay put at home.

The high-ranking English commanding officers, and New Zealand officers too, made sure that the men respected the monuments and works of art. All churches, art treasures and libraries in Florence were considered priceless, and every soldier was made aware of this. Any theft or damage was to be considered a serious crime that was punishable, according to the military code, by court martial.

Did anyone disobey the ban on entering the city? It did happen, of course. The atmosphere of peace that was felt meant that the soldiers wanted to visit Florence, even though it was risky due to the presence of snipers. They tried to get in using any means possible, for example, by hitchhiking or crossing the Arno River by boat. On 23 August 1944, Tom Sherlock wrote in his war diary that:

> *We secretly hitch-hiked back to Florence. After a series of rides we reached the city, which was out of bounds for off-duty soldiers. We hid our identity cards and gave an Italian a packet of cigarettes to let us cross the Arno to enter the city. Without our weapons we were very conspicuous. There were lots of Italian partisans in the central streets — all of them wearing something to distinguish themselves, sometimes just a handkerchief. The snipers were still active, especially at night. Artillery fire was still being exchanged, mainly in the northern part of the city. A shell scraped the roof of the cathedral yesterday. However, a few shops are still open and the prices are reasonable, so much so that I have been able to buy quite a few presents. At 4 p.m. in the afternoon we visited the beautiful Duomo [*cathedral*] and then returned to camp at sundown.*[44]

The New Zealand soldiers wanted to know everything about the country. For those who had arrived from the other side of the world, the voyage had been rather exhausting: one month at sea from their home country to Egypt, then training and on a ship once again to Italy, the baptism by fire on the Sangro River, then the fighting at Cassino. Many of them had never left home before; many of them would never return home. A testimonial of the New Zealand soldiers' sentiments comes once again from Tom Sherlock's diary:

> *My four years and three months of military service during the Second World War were the greatest adventure of my life. Of course, we were not always fighting in those years. But the moments of training or other boring activities (most of the time) were alternated with others of absolute terror in which we lost comrades-in-arms whom we loved as brothers. But there was no time for tears or pain. The only thing to do was to forge ahead, immediately erasing those horrible things from our minds.*[45]

Before arriving in Florence there had been many moments of tears and pain, partly due to the fact that the Germans had planned their retreat in such a magisterial way to delay the Allied advance for as long as possible.

Florence has a special place in the hearts of many New Zealand soldiers, not only because of the many war stories about who got there first. Veterans Earle Crutchley, Lachlan Griffon, Frank Harvey, Tom Sherlock and Jack Cummins all agreed that:

> *Florence has remained in our hearts, together with all the people we met in Tuscany. We had come from Africa, we had fought against the Italians and were therefore prejudiced and wary in dealings with the population. But in the end we were won over by all the affection received during the offensive that led to the liberation of the city. What struck us was the simplicity of the Florentine people, the hopes that the population placed on us, as well as the poverty and the suffering we witnessed. The Italians welcomed us as liberators and we have never forgotten them.*[46]

Tiger Country

'Tiger Country' was what the Kiwis called the Chianti area where the battles south of Florence took place, and was taken from the name of the tank manned by German troops.

The Tiger tank question is, however, rather more complicated. In fact, in all of the armed battles, the New Zealanders and many Italian civilians called any German tank they saw by this name. So it was that Freyberg's men gave the Tavarnelle-Florence area the name 'Tiger Country'.

The reality was undoubtedly different; most of the sightings refer to Panzer IV tanks or self-propelled vehicles. Furthermore, violating regulations regarding utilisation modalities (intense use was made of them to create gaps in the enemy lines in battles south of Florence), the Tiger was used as a sort of mobile fort that the infantry troops worked around.

The New Zealanders also elaborated, with written descriptions, on their experiences during the often unfortunate encounters with Tiger tanks during the battle for Florence. They recounted that these tanks were often used in highly visible (for the tanks) positions and were well camouflaged with branches. The sites were carefully chosen and reached by roads not visible to the enemy. The tanks could fire freely from these positions and then withdraw to a new and previously planned-out line.

When, on the contrary, it operated in direct support of the infantry, the Tiger was utilised as an artillery weapon to fire on houses and the positions held by the New Zealanders. If, on the other hand, the vehicle was accompanied by another tank or self-propelled vehicle, it sometimes could not be heard until the last minute, just before it appeared. The Tigers were often accompanied by between 6 and 12 infantrymen, who protected them from the enemy on foot and from anti-tank weapons. One of the few effective defences against this steel giant was the use of artillery, which, as noted on several occasions, forced a tank to retreat. Due to the high speed

Civilians on Via Mazzetta, near the Palazzo Pitti, welcoming the 23rd Battalion in to Florence.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

New Zealand troops with a joyful populace in Florence. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

of its shells, another efficient weapon was the 17-pound anti-tank cannon.

Many of the things learned by the New Zealanders in the battles of the Chianti area would prove useful in the next battle, which would take place a few weeks later against the Gothic Line in the Apennine Mountains.

The New Zealand tanks were American-made Shermans, which had earned themselves the sad nickname of 'Ronson', from the name of the famous lighter, because of the way they caught fire so easily. The greatest fear of any tank driver is the idea of being burnt alive inside his vehicle. Soldiers fight practically blind from inside a tank, in a narrow space, with the smoke from the cannon often incompletely expelled, among piled-up ammunition and other equipment; even without taking the deafening noise of the motor into consideration. Although it was against the rules, in many cases extra ammunition was stored in the turret so as not to run the risk of running out. This was, dangerous, however, especially if the vehicle was hit in battle. Another problem with the Shermans was the very tall turret, which offered a clearly visible reference point for the enemy.

All these problems became immediately obvious when the New Zealand tanks went to fight in Cerbaia, La Romola and Pian dei Cerri.

The conflict between the Tigers and the Shermans was not only a military one but an industrial one. The Sherman tanks were quite well armed but there was no comparison in a one-to-one battle. The tactics manuals spoke clearly regarding the use of the Allied tanks. 'It takes four Shermans to destroy one Tiger, with the probability of losing three of them.'[47] And for this reason, in the end, they got the better of them; for each Tiger produced in Henschel's factories there were 40 new M4 tanks made ready to engage it.[48]

The Sherman turned out to be a good tank, and they operated for most of the Second World War. However, in terms of technology, the Tiger was second to none. It was a concentration of technology and simplicity: in a quarter of an hour it was possible to completely replace the tracks, choosing from 52 cm or 72.5 cm tracks depending on the terrain on which they were to be used. Inside the cabin there was total comfort for the five crew members. To change direction the driver used a steering wheel similar to that of a car, instead of the difficult levers present in most other tanks at the time. Above all, the Tiger had an 88 mm cannon in the turret, capable of perforating the armour of most of the Allied tanks.

As well as the Tigers, the Germans also had Panzer IVs, which were more vulnerable but no less feared.

The field hospital at Tavarnelle

Not too close to the front line where it could be reached by enemy artillery fire; not too far away from where battles were still being intensely fought. These were the reasons that led the New Zealand commanding officers to choose Tavarnelle for the establishment of a military field camp. Therefore, a few hours after it had been liberated, logistic activities for setting up the hospital began. The hospital operated as a first-aid station, directly receiving soldiers who had been wounded at the Front.

These were busy days for the New Zealand doctors and nurses. From 22 July to 5 August, during the battle south of Florence, 694 wounded soldiers passed through the field hospital. For three days, from 25 to 27 July, the 6th New Zealand Main Dressing Station (MDS) ran a first-aid station near San Donato, where 161 wounded soldiers were treated. To improve logistics, the 6th MDS was transferred to just north of Tavarnelle on 27 July, and set up a field hospital that remained operative until 17 August, with four field ambulances sent from Civita Castellana. The chosen site was the top of a low hill near Romita, which offered ample space for the entire encampment.

Taken to the field hospital in Tavarnelle were all those wounded in the fighting and the battle for the liberation

Main Dressing Station in Tavarnelle.

of San Casciano and, in particular, San Michele, the latter a dividing point in the fight for the liberation of Florence. In all, 161 soldiers were treated there.

The field hospital consisted of a series of military tents where wounded soldiers were treated or operated on. They then had a few days of convalescence, staying the least amount of time necessary. For more serious cases and those who needed special treatment, the Allied health procedure detailed the transfer of the wounded to a better-equipped centre set up just outside Siena. For especially problematic cases there was a further transference, first to the Lake Trasimeno area and then to a proper hospital situated near Caserta. In these cases it was an extremely hard and exhausting trip for the soldiers, as it was undertaken in difficult conditions, partly by plane as far as Naples and then by ambulance. Sergeant H. Brennan, in service at the 6th Main Dressing Station recounts:

> *The men who were responsible for splendidly defending San Michele passed through the field hospital in Tavarnelle, including the extremely courageous soldier who had rolled off his stretcher in the gathering point to take on, with his Piat machine gun, a Tiger tank which had very noisily started to move in order to evict the defenders of the church crypt. When an ambulance brought in a soldier with a head wound who had his legs strapped together, the ambulance attendant was pretty exhausted and asked for help in keeping the patient on the stretcher.*[49]

An Indian soldier receives treatment at the Medical Service of the 5th Division.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

The presence of New Zealand health workers also offered the opportunity to assist the civilians. The same Allied

General Freyberg greets staff from the 6th New Zealand Hospital. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

recollections relate the episode in which the doctors and nurses stayed in Tavarnelle for two days, treating about 40 wounded persons and some Italians who had the bad luck of stepping on a German mine, as well as several sick children brought in by 'worried mothers'.

Sergeant Brennan went on to recount that:

> *There were some very moving civilian casualties. One father brought in his five children, all badly burnt by the flames (which they themselves had provoked) that had flared up from a pile of cordite fuses which they had been too close to. A mother brought us her four children who had stepped a mine — one of them had his legs in shreds.*

Several soldiers who did not survive their wounds were buried near the hospital. Sergeant Brennan recalls:

King George VI's visit. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

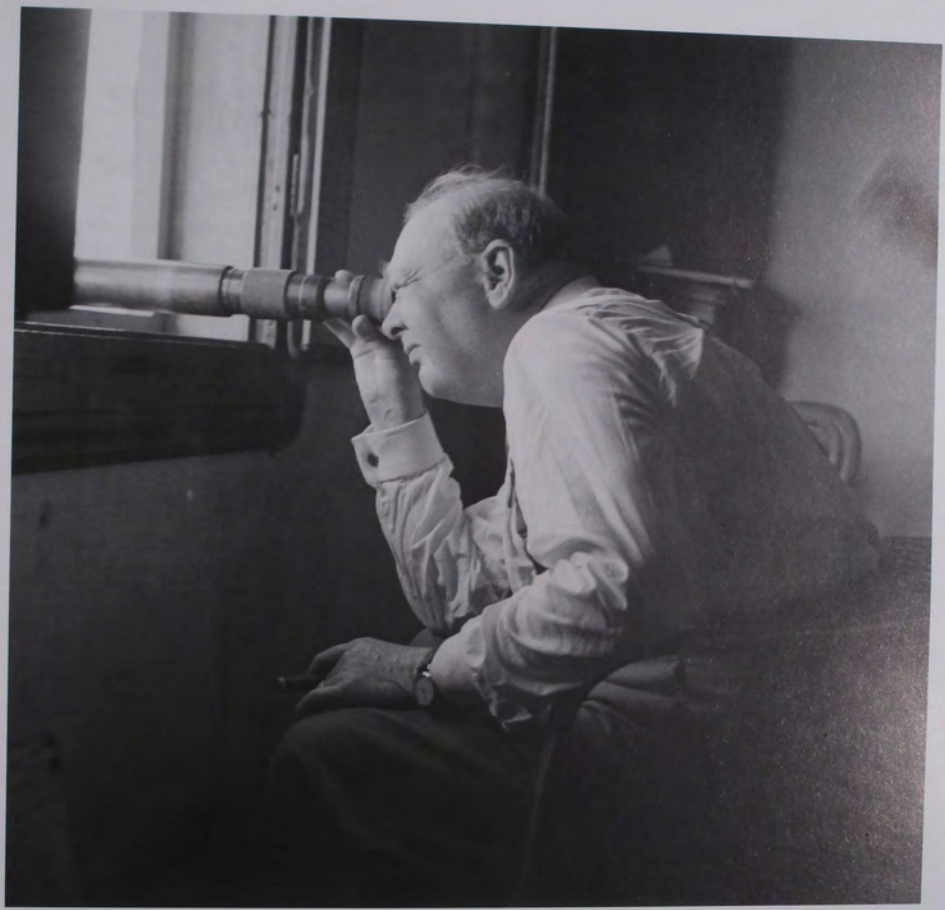
There were 50 tombs in the cemetery before it was closed. A group of volunteers took care of it, bringing in a large quantity of tiles. They used the tiles to create practical red walkways between the tombs and to cover each mound. The contours of the lines of crosses faithfully followed the contours of the road. Two large stone vases of irises had been placed on either side of the entrance, and there was another large vase containing the same flowers inside the cemetery at the base of a large cross. It was a simple but extremely touching arrangement. Truck drivers passing by usually poked their heads out of their windows to look at it as they drove by.

King George's visit

King George VI of England arrived in the Chianti area at the end of July 1944. His Majesty was in Italy to review all the troops of the Commonwealth countries fighting against Germany. A special, well-deserved acknowledgement went to the New Zealanders involved in opening up the way for the liberation of Florence, a city with which the English have had a special affectionate bond for centuries.

Furthermore, the English considered Italy and the Italian front to be of great strategic and military importance. During the 20-year Fascist reign England and Italy had remained on good terms, as well as maintaining economical and financial relations, and Churchill and Mussolini were bound by a relationship that historians have defined as controversial in many respects.

In that phase of the conflict Italy was predominantly



Prime Minister Winston Churchill in Florence. Imperial War Museum, London

seen as a precious bridgehead for rapidly penetrating into the Balkans in order to beat the Russians, who were advancing from the East, and to reduce the already obvious influence the Soviets would have on Eastern Europe. This strategic choice would, a short time later, prove to be of minor importance in light of the American decision to prioritise the thrust into Germany from the west, from France.

For the British, as demonstrated by the king's visit, the Italian front was vital because once the Apennine Mountains had been crossed, they would have penetration into Eastern Europe, with a strategic vision that went beyond the logics of war and already looked towards post-war equilibrium. Just a short time afterward, the prevailing logic of the Americans would render the Italian front secondary from those weeks onwards.

King George's visit to the soldiers at the Front therefore served several purposes: most obviously and without doubt to let the closeness of the Crown in those difficult and arduous moments be felt by the soldiers who fought and died far so from their homes, their families and their loved ones. But also, looking ahead to the post-war period, it served to underline the role of Britain in the Mediterranean and Southern Europe from a geopolitical point of view.

The King's visit took place on 26 July in a place called Montecino near San Casciano. A parade of 140 military troops was organised to welcome him. As photos testify, King George VI travelled relatively informally, in a jeep. The vehicle stopped at a pre-arranged point and the king reviewed the rows of soldiers. The official New Zealand war chronicles state that the monarch stayed on for a few minutes to talk to the men.

The men fighting in the Tavarnelle area were also mobilised for this occasion and then immediately returned to their units at the Front. On 25 July 1944, Tom Sherlock wrote that, 'Tomorrow 14 men from our platoon will form the guard of honour for King George VI who is visiting troops in Italy.'[50] He continued the following day, after having been chosen to be part of the guard of honour:

> *We left our area at 9.45 and travelled for 10 miles, forming a line on each side of the road. Every building, window and lane in even the smallest villages is under strict surveillance. The Italians must stand at a distance from the official car, at least the distance a grenade can be thrown. The road was sprinkled with water before the unit passed by. The King had a short chat with our Colonel Steele and seemed to be quite spontaneous and easy-going. The members of his unit were covered in dust. When we got back to the camp at 1.30 p.m. we found the whole company ready to depart at 2 p.m.*[51]

A few hours later that group of soldiers would be in San Michele, fighting the bloodiest battle of the area.

Notes

1. The German defensive line that ran from the sea to the Arno River, passing roughly through the confluence point of the Elsa River.
2. The German defence line between Romita and Fabbrica.
3. A.O.K. 14, Krigstagebuch no. 4., Tagesmeldung 22 July 1944, National Archives, Washington.
4. A. Ross. *Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939–1945. 23rd Battalion*. War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1954.
5. *Ibid.*
6. A.O.K. 14, Krigstagebuch no. 4, 1c. Tagesmeldung 23 July 1944, National Archives, Washington.
7. The following persons were killed at Pratale on 23 July 1944: Angiolino, Attilio and Oreste Cresti, Bruno, Giuseppe, Livio, Marcello, Omero and Serafino Gori, Giovanni Raspolini, Carlo and Giuliano Lotti. The victims of the massacre at Fabbrica were Giuseppe Vermigli, Carlo Viviani, Brunetto Bartalesi and Bruno Villani.
8. M. Hutching and R. Ravel (eds). *A Fair Sort of Battering*. Harper Collins, Auckland, 2004.
9. *Ibid.*
10. J.F. Cody. *28 (Maori) Battalion*. Historical Publications Branch, Wellington, 1956.
11. Victory Bridge.
12. Cerri Plains.
13. Deciphering machine invented in 1918 and used by the German army and navy up until the Second World War.
14. A.O.K. 14. Krigstagebuch no. 4, 1c. Tagesmeldung 23 July 1944, National Archives, Washington.
15. 1 yard = 0.914 metres.
16. *Cf.* Joseph F. Cody, 21st Battalion. *The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939–1945*. Historical Publications Branch, Wellington, 1953, p. 361.
17. A.O.K. 14, Krigstagebuch no. 14, 1c. Tagesmeldung 23 July 1944, National Archives, Washington.
18. Piat stands for Projector Infantry Anti-Tank weapon.
19. An army tank used by the Allies.
20. *New Zealand Expeditionary Forces (NZEF) Times*. Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force, 7 August 1944.
21. The field cannon Mk 2, with traversable 360° carriage. It was an evolution of the 1939 model, which made its debut in the defeat of the English at Dunkirk in 1940. It was also used as an anti-tank cannon because it could deploy perforating shells.
22. Probably Villa Tattoli.
23. *Cf.* Robin Kay. 'From Cassino to Trieste, 27 (Machine Gun) Battalion.' *The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939–1945*. Historical Publications Branch, Wellington, 1967, p. 431.
24. *Ibid*, p. 432.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Cf.* W.E. Murphy. '2nd New Zealand Divisional Artillery.' *The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939–1945*. Historical Publications Branch, Wellington, 1966, p. 630 and following pages.
28. *Cf.* T. Duncan M. Stout. 'New Zealand Medical Services in the Middle East and Italy.' *The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939–1945*. Historical Publications Branch, Wellington, 1956, p. 376.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Liber Chronicus of the Parish of San Zanobi a Casignano*. Unpublished ms, p. 120 and following pages.
31. Tom Sherlock. Unpublished war diary.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Cf. La Nazione*. Newspaper, 3 March 1921.
34. *Cf.* Fabrizio Morviducci. *Via dei Rossi 26*. Centrolibro, 2003, p. 31.
35. Oral testimony. Recorded in Christchurch, August 2007.
36. *Cf.* Tom Sherlock. Unpublished war diary.
37. *Cf.* Robin Kay. 'Italy Volume II — from Cassino to Trieste.' *The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939–1945*. Historical Publications Branch, Wellington, 1958, p. 434.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*
40. Oral testimony. Recorded in Christchurch, August 2007.
41. *Cf.* Robin Kay. '27 (Machine Gun) Battalion. *The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939–1945*. Historical Publications Branch, Wellington, 1958, p. 434.
42. *Cf. War Diary, 2nd New Zealand Division*. August 1944. National Archives, Wellington.
43. *Cf. 2nd New Zealand Division ADM Instruction N12*. National Archives, Wellington.
44. *Cf.* Tom Sherlock. Unpublished war diary.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Oral testimony. Recorded in Christchurch, August 2007.
47. *Cf.* Arrigo Petacco. *La Seconda Guerra Mondiale*. Armando Curcio Publishers, IV, Rome, 1970.
48. *Ibid.*
49. J.B. McKinney. 'Medical Units of 2nd NZEF in the Middle East and Italy.' *The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939–1945*. Historical Publications Branch, Wellington, 1952.
50. *Cf.* Tom Sherlock. Unpublished war diary.
51. *Ibid.*

Tiger tank captured by the New Zealanders in the field in front of Villa Moris. Jeffrey Plowman Archives

3

Tiger Country

Jeffrey Plowman

The battle for Florence in 1944 was one of the defining moments for New Zealand armour in Italy. Up until then the men of General Freyberg's 4th Armoured Brigade had had it relatively easy. Admittedly, the PzKpfw IVs[1] and StuG IIIs[2] they had run up against had a better gun and slightly better armour, but this advantage did not matter at the ranges the New Zealand tank crews had been encountering them in Italy. Nevertheless, while resting at Arce in June, judging by the number of wrecked Panther[3] tanks lying around the Liri Valley they would have had a taste of things to come. However, nothing could have prepared them for anything as formidable as the Tiger, which they met the following month.

The arrival in Chianti

The 2nd New Zealand Division moved back into the line on the night of 21 July, replacing the 2nd Moroccan Division of the French Expeditionary Corps, who had been withdrawn to take part in Operation Anvil, the landings in southern France. The widening of the 8th Army's front, brought about by the departure of the French, had given the Allies another approach to Florence west of the Chianti Hills in Tuscany. It was here that the division was plugged into the line.

Chianti country, with its low undulating ridges, often alternating between thickly wooded blocks, olive groves, vineyards and wheat fields, was quite different to the more open country the division had been used to in the past. Despite that, good progress was made on the first day; Morocco falling to the 23rd Battalion, while, on their right, Tignano was taken by the 28th Maori Battalion.

It was a different story the next day. Tavarnelle Val di Pesa fell to the Maori Battalion around 7.00 a.m. on 23 July without a fight and from there they were directed to take a road to the north, as the 23rd Battalion had crossed their line of advance. Pushing north, the latter quickly overcame a small force of Germans holding the village of Strada. However, beyond there they ran into stronger opposition at Point 332, near Villa Moris,[4] which acquired

Tiger tank, near Villa Moris. Pat Gourdie

the name of the 'Castle' because of the prominent crenulations of its tower. Here, one supporting tank from the 18th Armoured Regiment was hit and set on fire, one man killed and the rest badly burned, one fatally. The battalion then launched a full-scale attack on the position, the tanks from the ridge providing cover, but this soon came to naught. The area around the Castle was thick with Germans, backed up by four tanks or assault guns, and no further progress was made that day. But, if they were having problems, things were much worse on the other side of the valley.

Advancing north from Tavarnelle, the Maori Battalion soon came under mortar fire, while fast shells started coming down the road from the direction of Villa Bonazza. With assistance from the leading troops of B Squadron of the 18th Armoured Regiment, the Maori forces began to clear some of the buildings in the general area. When the tanks began to deploy to the right of the road to shoot up the villa, they flushed a Tiger from the vicinity of the cemetery. The first victim was the officer's tank in 10 Troop. After receiving direct hits from armour piercing high-explosive rounds, the tank caught fire, the turret crew being hurt badly, one later dying. The lead tanks were withdrawn to better positions and in the process another tank was hit but managed to limp back to cover. During the continuing engagement a fire started under another tank and the commander was injured trying to put it out. Another tank took a direct hit in the turret, the entire turret crew being killed. 7 Troop came forward through the burning tanks but they were unable to knock the Tiger out. Instead, it made off down the valley in the direction of Villa Moris, initially under heavy fire from B Squadron's tanks.

Eventually only Corporal Johnstone's tank was able to fire at the Tiger with any chance of success and so the rest of the troop kept up a supply of ammunition for him. Johnstone had to use high explosive shells to observe their bursts, and knocked off the tops of some tall trees in the gully, following this up with armour piercing high-explosive rounds against the Tiger. To little effect apparently, as they could see the shells bouncing off it as the tank attempted to escape. In the end it was brought to a halt in a maize field just short of the Villa Moris and blown up by its crew, though in the fading light this was not evident to the men from B Squadron. Examination of the wreck the next day showed it to be covered in hits, none of which had penetrated barring one, which had in fact split a weld seam on the rear of the machine.

The net effect of this encounter was more psychological than anything else. The New Zealand tank crews, realising that their tanks were no match for the Tiger, became a little more cautious, something that was noted with disappointment by their supporting infantry. Up until now they had been willing to take on anything, but then the Tiger became something of a bogey and from this point on the air was filled with persistent rumours of Tigers somewhere ahead.

Destroyed buildings, Cerbaia. Jeffrey Plowman Archives

But it was not all doom and gloom. Their encounter with the Tiger at Villa Bonazza had given them a glimmer of hope for dealing with this dreaded weapon: 'Yank smoke'.[5] Unlike its British counterpart, which used white phosphorous as its ingredient, Yank smoke used hexachloroethane. White phosphorous burned hot and dispersed quickly, whereas hexachloroethane burnt cold and hugged the target. German tank crews hated it because it managed to seep through any orifice or crack, often aided by the engine compartment cooling system that sucked it into the fighting compartment even faster. New Zealand tank crews soon learned its value, ensuring that at least a quarter of the shells in their ready round rack in the turret were smoke shells. When any armoured vehicle was encountered the first shell fired off was more often than not Yank smoke.

Only two units fielded Tigers in Italy; the one facing the New Zealanders at that time was the Panzer-Abteilung 508 and they were never at full strength. Fortunately for the 4th Armoured Brigade no more Tigers were encountered until after the capture of the town of San Casciano Val di Pesa, which, along with Cerbaia, was one of the next major objectives for the New Zealand Division. Cerbaia was the target of troops moving north from Villa Bonazza while San Casciano became the responsibility of Armcav, an ad hoc force drawn from the Divisional Cavalry, 22nd Motor Battalion, 19th Armoured Regiment and elements from 7th Anti-tank Regiment, artillery and engineers.

San Casciano fell on 27 July, after which Armcav was dissolved and the 20th Armoured Regiment took over providing support for 22nd Battalion during the mopping up of the town.

The fall of this strategic hilltop town provided General Freyberg with two possible routes of advance. One led off along the east bank of the Pesa River to Cerbaia, while the other took the more direct route to the town of La Romola via the hamlet of Pisignano.

The first battle at La Romola

While two troops from B Squadron of the 20th Armoured Regiment set off to reconnoitre a route to Cerbaia, the other two, under the command of Captain Rae Familton and accompanied by infantry from the 22nd Battalion, began their probe towards La Romola in the early hours of 28 July. This force made good progress and dawn found them on the Pisignano Ridge overlooking the valley of the Sugana Stream, where the crews settled down to prepare breakfast. They had little time to enjoy it. Familton received orders to keep up the pressure and push on regardless and so, without hesitation, he ordered one tank from Lieutenant John Ritchie's troop into the valley below.

Ritchie drove down the steep track to a small flat area overlooking a road. Coming under desultory fire, he proceeded to open up on the opposite slope with machine gun and cannon fire. Emboldened by this limited response, Familton sent down Sergeant Bell's tank and then, when this drew no strong reaction, a third under the command of Corporal Harrison. For about five minutes after Harrison's tank pulled beside its new companions, there was no response. Then all hell broke loose. Somewhere in the valley a Tiger opened up on the troop and within minutes all three were out of action.

Harrison's tank was hit on the turret at 7 o'clock, killing the turret crew and setting the tank on fire. The driver and his spare counterpart clambered out and made for nearby cover. An armour piercing round struck Sergeant Bell's tank, spall from the round striking the grenade box. Bell lost a foot in the process. He ordered his crew out and then leapt from the top of the turret to the ground. He ordered his men to leave him there but they ignored him and dragged him to a nearby ditch, where they took cover. Bell's and Ritchie's tanks caught fire shortly afterwards. The other crews took shelter in a nearby cornfield before making their way back to a nearby casa.

Sherman tank, San Casciano. Imperial War Museum

Familton sent down a Regimental Aid Post carrier to rescue the wounded and the Germans called off their fire until they had been evacuated. The other men then made their way back in twos and threes at ten minute intervals. Thus ended the first battle for La Romola.

The advance towards Cerbaia

At the same time as Familton's force launched its probe towards La Romola, the 26th Battalion, to their left, was attempting to push north as well. Following their occupation of Cerbaia on the morning of 27 July, they had received information to the effect that the Germans

One of the 20th Armoured Regiment Shermans knocked out during the first attack on La Romola. Jock Montgomery

Bill Harrison's crew in the advance towards Florence (The crew are, from left to right: A. Campbell, Arnold Manion, Bill Harrison, Alec Paisley and G.L. Day.) Bill Harrison

had withdrawn to the hills north and west of the town. The 24th Battalion had gone forward during the day from Castellare and occupied positions on the ridge that ran between San Michele a Torri and La Romola, and now the 26th Battalion was to join up with them to expand their hold on the ridge. For support they were to have C Squadron of the 19th Armoured Regiment, while B Squadron was to go forward to help the 24th Battalion.

That night both battalions began their push up the road from Castellare. Unfortunately, the 24th Battalion experienced difficulties and by dawn they were well short of their objectives. The 26th Battalion made better progress, so much so that by dawn it was apparent that one company had gone further than intended, taking positions around a casa at Point 281,[6] and was now out on a limb. Worse still, thanks to the need to sweep the road for mines, the tanks had lagged behind considerably, only three from B Squadron reaching the 24th Battalion. Seven from C Squadron eventually managed to push past a demolition lower down, also bringing up some much needed Vickers[7] and anti-tank guns to the isolated company from 26th Battalion. From then on things started to deteriorate.

Having observed the arrival of the Shermans, the Germans began to pump armour piercing rounds down from the direction of La Romola and soon the position was under heavy shellfire. More ominously, at around 9.30 a.m. enemy armour was observed moving into the area forward of La Romola. From a range of 1700 yards[8] the German tanks began to engage the squadron commander's tank under Captain McInnes, which had taken shelter behind a prominent casa beside the road. Two of the crew had hopped out to brew a cup of tea but when the tank came under fire they tried to get back in to start it up. Before they could do so the ninth shell hit the tank, setting it on fire. McInnes, who had been sitting on the turret hatch, was blown to the ground by the explosion. The other two died in the inferno. The other tanks responded by putting a strong concentration of fire down on the German tanks on the other ridge,

ABOVE: Via delle Croci, Scandicci. Trevor Corbishley
BELOW: A PzKpfw IV tank near Via delle Croci, Scandicci.
Trevor Corbishley

forcing them to withdraw. This engagement continued but during a bout of retaliatory fire another tank from C Squadron was hit in the radiator and immobilised in the middle of the road. The Germans then put in a strong counterattack on the exposed company, forcing them to abandon their position and C Squadron had to leave their immobilised tank. Having driven this company back, the Germans seemed to pause in their counterattack, only to renew it later in the afternoon albeit with less success. The three B Squadron tanks remained with the 24th Battalion, but by late afternoon all three had been knocked out.

The rest of C Squadron was less fortunate. Directed down the wrong road, the lead tank ran up a bank and overturned. The other tanks continued down the road to the valley below but came under fire from a German self-propelled gun, which hit and 'brewed-up' several of them. One tank managed to get across the valley without being hit but then could not return to the other side because of the attention it was receiving from the self-propelled gun. With night falling and no support available, its crew soon came under attack from German infantry. Somehow they survived the night and over the radio the other crews heard of their epic struggle. The Germans attacked the tank time and time again, forcing them to swing the turret about to deal with them. Intermittently they lobbed grenades out of the pistol port or other hatches and even fired Very lights (coloured flares). When their own infantry got across to them at daybreak they found the tank surrounded by dead Germans.

The attack on San Michele

With this planned avenue of approach to Florence blocked, the division turned its attention to the next ridge, on which sat the village of San Michele. The attack would be carried out by 24th Battalion, who would be supported by the 19th Armoured Regiment. D Company set off at 1 a.m. on 29 July. Under a barrage they managed to occupy the village without any difficulty, one platoon occupying the church, another the schoolhouse and the other at the southern end of the town. The leading tanks from 7 Troop arrived at dawn already one tank down, the troop corporal having been killed by machine gun fire on the way up. The intention of the lead platoon was to push on to occupy the crossroads north of the church, but 7 Troop's commander, Lieutenant McCowan, refused to move beyond the church. Once it became light the Germans began to shell the village, damaging buildings and forcing some of the defenders to shift positions.

The fattoria north of the church at San Michele. Jeffrey Plowman Archives

Around midday one section in the southern part of the village moved to a barn. Several Germans then attacked, occupying the loft above, and from there they started to make life difficult for the men below until more tanks from Lieutenant Woolven's 5 Troop arrived. One tank tried to manoeuvre to where it could get a shot but overturned on a bank. A second tank was luckier, blasting the loft away after the section below had made their getaway under supporting fire from the rest of their platoon. Later in the day the platoon captured another house nearby to establish a firing position for one of their tanks. No sooner had Woolven moved there than his tank was knocked out by a self-propelled gun. Woolven switched to his sergeant's tank but it was hit soon after and the turret jammed.

At the northern end of the village the first counterattack was launched on the church at around 8.30 a.m.; however, it was easily repulsed. A second and more forceful attack was launched an hour later, this time supported by tanks. The Germans launched another eight counterattacks, all of which were broken up by artillery fire directed by McCowan from the church tower, with a long lead

The southern part of San Michele. There is an upturned Sherman in the background. Jeffrey Plowman Archives

down to his tank. On one occasion when the attacking troops broke into the hamlet he returned to his tank, knocking out a PzKpfw IV. Around 7.15 p.m. the walls of the church began to collapse under shell- and mortar fire, trapping the defenders inside. Eventually, with the main gun of McGowan's tank jammed and reports of Tigers approaching, his and Woolven's tank were withdrawn from San Michele, leaving the infantry to their fate.

More counterattacks were launched, though these were dispersed by artillery fire. On one occasion a Pzkpfw IV penetrated as far as the church, only to have its turret jammed by a determined infantryman with a PIAT (Projector Infantry Anti-Tank gun). Eventually the attacks waned, leaving New Zealand troops in command of the village. At 1 a.m. the following morning, 25th Battalion, accompanied by more tanks from the 18th and 19th Armoured regiments, finally secured the village.

The strong counterattacks experienced in the New Zealand sector at San Michele, and at Point 281 on the adjacent ridge, signalled a change in the situation. No longer were the Germans fighting rearguard actions and falling back. Now they seemed determined to make a stand on the Paula Line and fight it out.

Ongoing clashes at La Romola

The New Zealand Division was also facing difficulties on its right flank. The main body of South African troops were still to the southeast, held up by enemy fire and difficult going around Greve. Thus, until the high ground on the South African front was taken, any attack by New Zealand on its right flank could face heavy casualties. This also offered the shortest route to Florence.

To overcome this, 5th Brigade was brought around to the right to secure the ground. The key to this line of approach was La Romola, a village that was proving to be a thorn in the side of the division. In an attempt to find a way around this position, one troop from the 20th Armoured Regiment and a platoon of infantry moved north from San Casciano to Cigliano on 29 July. They attempted to cross the dry gully of the Burro Suganella but came under observation from La Romola and were heavily mortared and shelled. The ground also proved too difficult to cross. The other arm of the probe towards Spedaletto, actioned by Lieutenant Colemore-Williams' 4 Troop, had more luck and the following morning they set off to attack Sant'Andrea, the town just beyond it. After crossing the gully they soon reached Sant'Andrea itself, where the infantry began to clear out the houses, while the tanks took up anti-tank positions and shot up enemy strongpoints in the village. But then a Tiger supported by a self-propelled gun made its appearance and began to fire on their supporting infantry. Attempts were made to shell the Tiger but they were unable to drive it off.

The Germans made three attempts to retake Sant' Andrea but all were repulsed, on one occasion disclosing their positions in the cornfields and olive groves too early, prompting the tanks to rake the olives with machine gun and shellfire, using the trees to get an airburst effect. The Tiger moved down into the village. Following a call from the infantry for support, Colemore-Williams moved his tank around the church into a firing position, where a German with a Panzerschreck rose up and rested his weapon on an olive tree. Colemore-Williams disposed of him with a high-explosive round from the 75 mm and then sprayed the area with machine gun fire, killing another 15 men. Shortly after, the Tiger nosed around a bend 100 yards down the road, but was forced back into cover by two rounds of smoke, followed up by six or seven armour piercing and high-explosive rounds. Colemore-Williams withdrew behind the church and moved his corporal's tank into a position where it could fire down the road if the Tiger reappeared. Later, the Tiger pulled out altogether.

This prompt response was successfully repeated the following day at Il Pino, when 5 Troop from 20th Armoured Regiment encountered another Tiger. While supporting an attack by Maori infantry, the corporal's tank took a direct hit from a Tiger, killing the driver. Lieutenant Cross put down some smoke in front of the knocked-out tank and then went out on foot to have a look. After spotting the Tiger, he brought his own tank round behind the corporal's tank and lined up his tank on it while still turret down. When they were ready he moved the crippled tank into a hull-down position, and the gunner fired two rounds of 'Yank' smoke at the Tiger, once again followed by five or six armour piercing rounds, causing the Tiger to withdraw promptly. The last view they had of it was of an armour piercing round bouncing off its turret as it drove off.

In the end the La Romola situation had to be resolved. The defining attack took place overnight and into the morning of 30/31 July. Responsibility for securing the town fell on the shoulders of the 22nd Battalion. For support they had C Squadron of 20th Armoured Regiment, each troop having a detachment of engineers. In addition, 11 Troop, starting from Cigliano on the right, used a bulldozer to clear a track down to the valley floor. That route was even worse than the one at Pisignano.

The attack kicked off at 1 a.m. and things immediately began to go wrong. Intense German shellfire covered the start line as the platoons got into position and then the New Zealand artillery joined in, throwing up foul dust and smoke, cutting visibility even further. The result was a shambles. The infantry assault broke into a series of isolated groups, all moving independently, many believing they were the only ones left to carry out the task. Radio links failed and men remained out of communication, sometimes for hours on end. The enemy was misled too: several parties of Germans, absolutely convinced that

the attack had failed, walked innocently into captivity or death.

Nevertheless, by dawn isolated groups of infantry had penetrated and entered La Romola, among them 15th Platoon. They had had a harrowing night, initially splitting up after crossing the start line, then being held up for two hours in a house on the outskirts of La Romola. It was there that they nearly shot some fellow infantrymen, a burst of Bren gun fire directed questioningly above the roof brought a response of, 'Stop that Bren, you silly buggers!' Thereafter, the survivors from 13th Platoon emerged from the gloom. After unsuccessfully trying to raise company headquarters or the tanks they pushed on, arriving at La Romola at daybreak.

Things were no better for the tanks. In the dark the infantry soon left them behind, with Lieutenant Overton's 11 Troop failing to meet up at all. They had to wait for several hours while the bulldozer cleared a track for them and then they were sent on the wrong path by the engineers. Some of the bends in the track from Cigliano were too sharp to get round and the tanks had to back up to get room to turn. When they got to the bottom, Overton's tank threw a track on the last turn. Fortunately the other tanks in the troop were able to get past. Overton and his gunner got out to try to fix it but came under mortar fire and were forced to take shelter under the tank.

On the right, 9 Troop, working with the 5th Platoon under 2nd Lieutenant Woolcott, arrived in La Romola at dawn, their commander leading the tanks forward on foot. Woolcott was not with his platoon but had gone on ahead with a small patrol. Approaching a cluster of houses, he and another man burst in through the front door of the top dwelling, while the rest sped around the side and ran straight into a Tiger tank, undamaged and in perfect running order, complete with the odd olive branch on top for extra 'camouflage'. Inside were Lieutenant Heberer and his crew from 3 Kompanie, schwere Panzer-Abteilung 508. One man moved forward to inspect the tank and then climbed on top. To his surprise the hatch came up and, before he could surrender, the Germans did. That was not the end of the story. While the tank recovery crew were dragging it out the road collapsed and the tank rolled on to its turret, necessitating a full recovery operation. It was eventually driven away but the sight of a Tiger moving down the road towards the rear areas of the battalion created the impression of a German breakthrough, causing a minor panic.

View of La Romola from Pisignano. Jack Cummins

Towards Scandicci

Units in the division often went to extraordinary lengths to deal with the threat of a Tiger, like the one supposedly harassing infantry on the hills in the vicinity of Pian dei Cerri. No major assault was launched after the fall of La Romola, Freyberg calling a brief halt to the division's attack. When the assault was renewed it was on a three-brigade front, the division pivoting on the 5th Brigade on the right. The left arm of the attack was launched by the 25th Battalion, up the Poggio-Cigoli Road towards Point

An overturned Sherman tank, San Michele. Archives New Zealand

337. They were to receive support from 18th Armoured Regiment; when a tank identified as a Tiger was spotted a small force was assembled to deal with it. This involved some infantry from 25th Battalion and a few Shermans, while the 7th Anti-tank Regiment were ordered to supply a 17-pounder anti-tank gun and one of their newly acquired M10 tank destroyers.[9] Lieutenant Curry, commander of D Troop, received the unenviable task of providing an M10; this was to create a major headache. At the start of the day Curry had only three of his complement of four available (the fourth was out of action because of mechanical problems). Under normal circumstances it would have been enough, but events were to prove otherwise. After Curry sent out orders for the M10s, the crews set out to ready their vehicles to move. The crew of D3 was inside a small church, with their M10 parked outside concealed from the Germans by some trees, but behind it was a road on which Bren gun carriers and other vehicles were moving, kicking up a huge cloud of dust. The Germans decided they would put down some mortar fire in to the dust cloud and, while they were firing at this dust a mortar shell went straight down the open turret of the M10 and killed two of the crew. A third crewman died of wounds.

Curry took D4 with him to an assembly point near the 25th Battalion headquarters, leaving D2 two or three miles[10] away on radio-listening watch. After attending the battalion meeting in the early evening to learn of their role in the coming attack, which was to start with a barrage at 11 p.m., Curry went forward with D4 to the start line. However, following along behind the tanks, the dust was so great that neither he, atop the M10, nor the driver could see the road. They ran off into a ditch, throwing a track in the process. Curry told the crew to disable the guns by removing the breechblocks, head back down the road, find a place for the night and wait for the recovery vehicle to get them out. This they did, taking shelter in a casa being used as 25th Battalion headquarters. It was one of the big vineyard estate houses, with a brick tunnel-like entrance and an oval-shaped roof. Later that night

a shell exploded outside the entrance, sending shrapnel whistling down the tunnel, killing one of the crew and wounding another.

With his third M10 out of action Curry called up D2, only to be told a short while later that the battery was too flat to start the motors. On reporting this the infantry colonel blew his top somewhat and ordered Curry to have an M10 at his headquarters by daybreak. Curry took the almost flat battery to Regimental B Echelon, about five miles away, and rooted out the sergeant in charge of vehicle maintenance at about 1.00 a.m. Lacking a battery of similar capacity, there was nothing for it but to give the battery a quick booster charge. This took till around 5 a.m. so Curry did not get back to D2 until 5.30 a.m., arriving at 25th Battalion headquarters around dawn. He was ordered to take it to 31 Battery headquarters, where he would be joined by a 33 Battery 17-pounder[11] from 33 Battery, and then to proceed to Point 337 by road to deal with the reported Tiger.

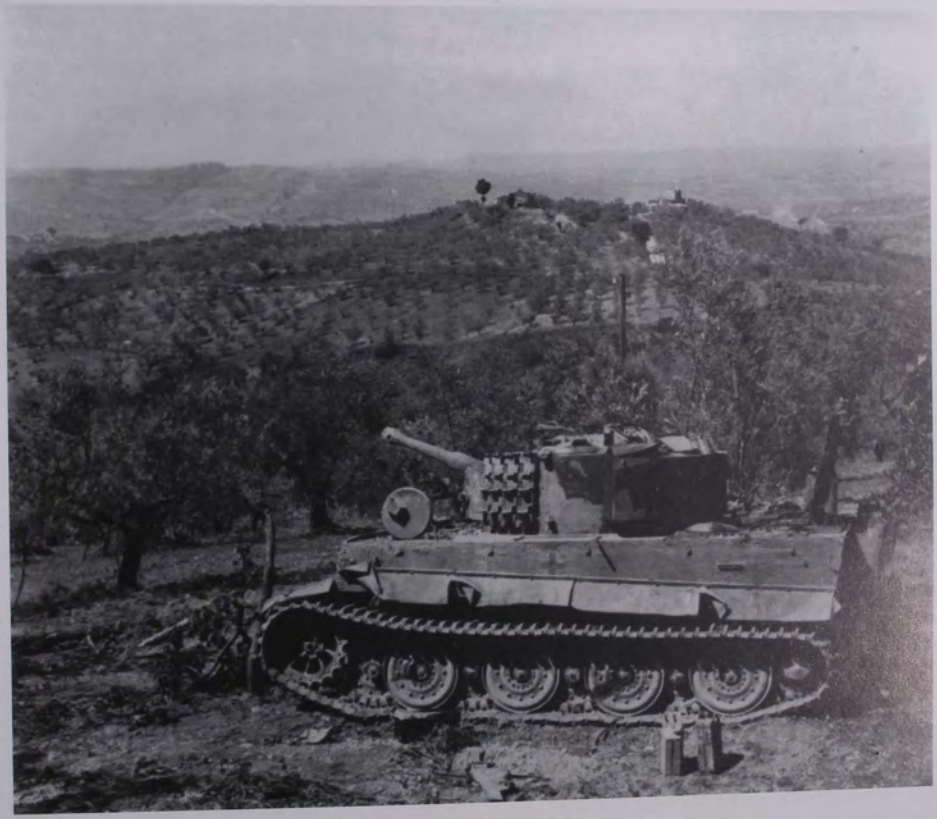
The 17-pounder took some time to arrive but eventually they set out for Point 337, arriving late in the afternoon. The placement of the gun and the M10 was done as night was falling, to give concealment. Efforts to site the M10 in the only cover available, within the grounds of a big casa, had to be abandoned as the gate opening was too narrow, so the 17-pounder was put there instead, and the M10 was placed round the corner in a hull-down position. The M10 crew spent an uncomfortable night, maintaining hourly changes of sentry duties, while the 17-pounder crew had a better time of it since the infantry were on sentry duty in the casa above. The following morning, the crew of the 17-pounder were having breakfast on the ground floor of the casa when the soldiers above called down to warn them of an approaching tank. The enemy tank initially came trundling down the road, its crew out of the turret. It suddenly stopped and started backing up the road. Two of the 17-pounder crew dashed out of the house and fired one shot at the tank, striking it below the turret.

The result was spectacular. The turret went six feet into the air and within seconds the rest of the tank started smoking and was engulfed in a sheet of flame as the ammunition inside began exploding. What was originally thought to be a Tiger turned out to be a PzKpfw IV, though some observers were fooled by the schurtzen armour and later tried to claim that it was a PzKpfw IV disguised to look like a Tiger.

While 6th Brigade had gained its objectives with unexpected ease, 4th and 5th brigades were surprised by the determined resistance they encountered. On the night of 31 July the 22nd Battalion sent out a patrol to occupy a high point about 1000 yards or so to the northeast of La Romola. They were thrown back, as was another force consisting of some carriers, an infantry platoon and two tanks, later that afternoon. Then, on the night of 1 August, two companies from 22nd Battalion, supported by two troops of tanks from 20th Armoured Regiment, pushed on and took La Poggiona. This prompted a furious response from its German defenders, who rallied swiftly and counterattacked. They were thrown back twice before the New Zealanders were forced to withdraw, their ammunition running low.

During the advance on La Poggiona, Lieutenant French's troop ran into another Tiger tank. Unfortunately the infantry were too close to call down a 'stonk' on it. French was in the lead tank and when he drove round a corner his tank was hit on one track. The crew climbed out, found the machine was still mobile, got back in and backed off.

Corporal Innes and his tank and crew were not so lucky. Though ordered to pull back, Innes came upon a big casa and, for some reason, decided to seek cover there. His driver managed to back the tank right in beside it, covering most of the turret but with a small part of it still visible. A large armour piercing round hit the side of the casa, sending dust flying everywhere. The next one went straight over the driver's hatch and, with the intercom set to send (so that the whole regiment could hear), Innes



The Tiger captured at La Romola. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

The Tiger shown on page 55, outside the grounds of Villa la Sfacciata, Scandicci. National Army Museum, New Zealand

ordered his driver to 'Put it into gear and get down that strada as fast as you can bloody go.' After getting back on to the road they found there was insufficient room to turn, so they had to reverse the tank a bit. When the driver tried to move off again he was unable to operate the gear-shift lever. Innes dropped down into the turret to try his luck but failed; the transmission was locked in reverse. By now the Tiger was lumbering up the road towards them, no more than 200 yards away. With no other option Innes ordered the crew to bail out, which for the driver meant switching over to the spare driver's side as the gun was over his hatch. As they did so the Tiger loosed another shot at them, the round striking the road in front of the tank. The crew joined Maori troops in a nearby casa but they too were under attack. The Germans came getting pretty close and began throwing hand grenades into the house. At this point Innes made a dash back up the road to A Squadron headquarters to call for a stonk. When it came down the rest of the crew made their escape alongside the Maori soldiers.

The attack was renewed the following night. La Poggiona was taken by a small force of men who were quickly reinforced by two more platoons and some tanks in preparation for more counterattacks, as the enemy was still thought to be holding part of the northern side of the hill. None came and when dawn arrived and the morning mists dispersed, almost all firing ceased and the men on La Poggiona found themselves looking down on a magnificent view of Florence.

Entering Florence

That morning, on 3 August 1944, the Maori Battalion set off on the right. By 8.30 a.m. they had captured the town of Giogoli and begun their push towards Galluzzo. With them was 6 Troop of the 20th Armoured Regiment, under the command of Lieutenant Heptinstall. 6 Troop made good progress, initially taking its first objective on a ridge. However, pushing on through an olive grove they soon lost contact with their supporting infantry. Reaching the Villa la Sfacciata, they discovered that the road ahead ran through a short cutting and then downhill, disappearing from sight behind a wall. Fearing an ambush, Heptinstall tried to outflank it by following another track, but this soon proved a mistake and he was forced to return the way he came. In the end, with the other tanks of his troop covering him, he decided to rush through the cutting at top speed and turn quickly left on to the road at the far end.

Heptinstall made it out onto the road but ran into trouble. Troop Sergeant Innes had spotted the turret of a Tiger out to one side, but his gunner could not get a shot at it. Before Innes could warn his commander, the Tiger fired and hit the Sherman. Heptinstall baled out safely and returned to his troop. He made two attempts to get back to the tank but some Germans in the olive groves and behind the wall drove him back with stick grenades and small arms fire. The next day they found the Tiger, abandoned on the road behind the wall, its transmission stuck in reverse. They also found the rest of Heptinstall's crew, cut down by machine gun fire.

That was the last major encounter between Tigers and the tanks of the 4th New Zealand Armoured Brigade. The New Zealand attack had broken the back of the German defences and now they were in full retreat, but the New Zealanders had lost the race to Florence to the South Africans. The 11th South African Armoured Brigade and the 5th New Zealand Brigade's axes converged on Route 2 at Galluzzo and, on the night of 3 August, the South Africans got there first. From there they sent forward a patrol of seven men who, with the guidance of some locals, reached the Ponte Vecchio around 4.00 a.m. Finding that all but the bridge had been destroyed and the path to it blocked by demolitions, they returned to their unit. Shortly afterwards the South Africans began mopping up operations and by 8.30 a.m. their tanks reached the Arno River. The New Zealanders were not long in following up and later that morning tanks from the 19th and 20th Armoured regiments entered the city in support of the Maori Battalion.

Notes

1. Panzerkampfwagen, literally translates as 'armoured fighting vehicle; the German word for 'tank'.
2. Sturmgeshütze, German for assault gun. Essentially an armoured vehicle based on the PzKpfw III, with the turret replaced with a 75 mm gun in a limited traverse mount.
3. The German name for the PzKpfw V tank.
4. Villa in the neighbourhood of Romita.
5. Yank smoke, or American smoke.
6. Between San Michele a Torri and Romola, in the vicinity of Via delle Croci.
7. English machine gun.
8. 1 yard = 0.9144 metres.
9. The M10 Gun Motor Carriage was a self-propelled tank destroyer produced in the United States.
10. 1 mile = 1.6 kilometres.
11. With shells weighing 17 pounds (1 pound = 435 grams).

Allied soldiers on a ship sailing to Normandy.

4

New Zealand in the Second World War

Christopher Pugsley

'Both with gratitude for the past, and with confidence in the future, we range ourselves without fear beside Britain. Where she goes, we go. Where she stands, we stand.'[1]

On 6 September 1939, New Zealand Prime Minister Michael Joseph Savage used these words when he spoke to the nation. On 3 September, in concert with the United Kingdom, New Zealand had declared war on Germany. This was a decision made by a small country of 1.5 million people, loyal to Empire, but also by a Labour government, many of whom had been imprisoned for their opposition to conscription in the First World War. New Zealand's declaration of war was an admission that its government's peace and disarmament initiatives through the League of Nations had failed, and it began the Second World War with no coherent view on how New Zealand's contribution should be made, other than it must work as one of the Allied nations to destroy the ambitions of Hitler's Germany.[2]

Michael Savage, prime minister of New Zealand, 1935–40.

There was a sombre realisation of war's realities from an older generation who had seen their men so joyously march to war 25 years before, and had lived with the shattered dreams of those who returned. Women, who had seen their fiancées and brothers go to war in the First World War, now saw their sons depart. Thousands of Territorial soldiers were 'called up for the duration' and a major construction programme began to build barracks for troop accommodation. Coastal batteries were improved and added to, coast watch stations established, and wire entanglements erected on likely landing beaches. Public Safety Emergency regulations were passed, introducing petrol rationing and censorship regulations. This was followed by price stabilisation measures, aimed at forestalling the rapid increase in prices and cost of living that had been a feature of the First World War.

New Zealand was far less prepared in 1939 than it had been in 1914. The Territorial Forces had been run

Some of the first New Zealand volunteers at Hopuhopu military camp, ready to be trained and enlisted as soldiers.

down to almost nothing, and there was a total lack of modern arms and equipment. Belated steps were taken from 1935 on to increase defence preparedness. The Royal New Zealand Air Force was established as a separate service in 1936, and an increase in defence expenditure was mostly directed to this service. An interdepartmental Organisation for National Security was established, with its secretariat based in the prime minister's office. This was to play a crucial role in harnessing the national effort in the years ahead. However, the Savage government was reluctant to contemplate the contribution of an overseas expeditionary force, and given Labour's vehement opposition in 1916–17, even more reluctant to consider one based on conscription.[3]

On 6 September 1939 Cabinet authorised the mobilisation of a Special Force of 6600 volunteers between the ages of 21 and 35 for active service within and beyond New Zealand, but were still undecided on how it should be employed. Within a week 12,000 men had volunteered, and the government — gripping both the urgency of the situation and the public mood — offered a complete infantry division to be raised in three echelons for service overseas.[4]

New Zealand had raised 17 battalions of infantry in the First World War, each of which had taken their designation from the province that raised them: Auckland, Wellington, Canterbury and Otago. Now the battalions were numbered, starting with number 18 for drafts raised from Auckland, Wellington forming 19th Battalion, the South Island combining to produce 20th Battalion, and so on.[5] A separate Maori battalion, 28th (Maori) Battalion, was raised with volunteers from every tribe in New Zealand, and would be the only infantry unit to be manned by volunteers throughout the war.

The New Zealand navy and air force

In 1939 the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy, renamed the Royal New Zealand Navy in 1941, possessed two modern 6-inch Leander-class cruisers, HMS *Achilles* and *Leander*, and the minesweeping trawler, *Wakakura*. Even before the outbreak of war, *Achilles* was released to its war station in the Atlantic, and *Leander* sailed for

The landing at Normandy.

the cable station on Fanning Island with a platoon-size garrison, drawn from the 593-strong Regular Force.[6]

Achilles won fame in the defeat of the *Admiral Graf Spee* off the River Plate on 13 December 1939 and galvanised public opinion, being the first tangible proof that New Zealand was playing its part. *Leander* was equally successful, in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, sinking the Italian auxiliary cruiser *Ramb I* in February 1941 and seizing the Vichy-French motor vessel *Charles L.D.* the following month, before returning to New Zealand in September.

Control of New Zealand merchant shipping was taken over by the government at the outbreak of war, and three trawlers were fitted out as minesweepers for the defence of home waters. Other small craft were used for port duties. The fast passenger liner *Monowai* was requisitioned and fitted out as an armed merchant cruiser, and six merchant ships were armed with 4-inch guns. The German merchant raiders, *Orion* and *Komet*, brought the war to New Zealand waters in 1940, laying mines and attacking shipping that led to the loss of the *Niagara*, *Turakina* and *Rangitane*. Always the forgotten heroes, merchant seamen on New Zealand registered ships numbered 2990 in 1940, and by 1945, 110 were known to have died with 123 interned.

Some 7000 New Zealanders served with the Royal Navy during the Second World War, on every type of craft from battleship to midget submarine and in every ocean. New Zealand naval strength peaked at 10,635 in September 1944, 4901 of whom were serving in the Royal Navy. More than 1000 New Zealanders joined the Fleet Air Arm of the Royal Navy. The growing number of surplus pilots from 1944 on left little prospect of flying with the Royal Air Force (RAF), with New Zealanders making up 10% of Fleet Air Arm officers.[7]

Initially the role of the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) was to provide trained aircrew to the RAF under the Empire Air Training Scheme; its own operations were limited to coastal surveillance and reconnaissance using obsolete aircraft. Eight hundred and eighty pilots were to be trained in New Zealand. In addition, partly trained personnel (520 pilots, 546 observers and 936 air gunners) were sent to Canada to complete their training before posting to the RAF. By 1941 these quotas had been exceeded, with New Zealand providing 1480 fully trained and 850 partly trained pilots a year. This was part of a Commonwealth contribution that allowed the RAF to expand its first-line combat strength from 332 squadrons in September 1942 to 635 squadrons by the end of 1944.

As part of the pre-war expansion of the RNZAF, New Zealand had ordered 30 twin-engine Wellington bombers. The first six, along with their New Zealand crews, were training in England when war was declared. These became the basis of No.75 (New Zealand) Squadron RAF, the first of seven designated New Zealand squadrons in the RAF. There were already a large number of New Zealanders in the RAF, and Flying Officer E.J. 'Cobber' Kain became the first British air ace of the war, with 14 aircraft to his credit before being killed in an aircraft crash in June 1940. Four New Zealanders commanded fighter

Flight Officer Edgar James 'Cobber' Kain.

squadrons during the Battle of Britain and 95 fought as fighter pilots, with Hurricane and Spitfire pilots such as Des Scott, Al Deere, Johnny Checketts and others capturing public attention. However, New Zealand was equally well represented in both Bomber and Coastal commands.

The casualty figures reflect New Zealand's contribution. In October 1944 New Zealanders with the RAF peaked at 6127 out of a total of 10,950 known to have served with the RAF during the war. Of these, 3285 were killed, at least 138 seriously wounded, and 568 became prisoners of war.[8]

The battle of attrition fought in the skies over Europe, which saw 30% of all New Zealanders who served with the RAF killed, was New Zealand's equivalent of the Somme and Passchendaele during the Second World War.

The formation of the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force (2NZEF)

The major effort facing New Zealand in the first months of the war was in raising the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force (2NZEF). It was achieved by voluntary enlistments; a total of 60,000 enlisted in the services in the first nine months of the war. Egypt was decided on as the logical training base and Peter Fraser, acting prime minister for the terminally ill Savage, refused to let the New Zealand convoy sail until, over the protests of the Admiralty, he got an increase in the size of the naval escort. Japan, an ally in 1914, was now a potential foe. New Zealand's contribution of an expeditionary force was confirmed only after Britain reassured New Zealand that Japan was unlikely to direct its attentions southwards in the immediate future, and if the unlikely did happen Britain's 'duty to our kith and kin would prevail' over all other obligations.[9]

The three echelons, totalling almost 20,000 men, lacking equipment and only partially trained, sailed in January, May and August 1940. It was a small group of regular officers and warrant officers in their forties who bore the brunt of resurrecting this military force for overseas service. Balding citizen soldiers, who had reputations as sound platoon and company commanders in the First World War, led hastily raised untrained battalions.

There was no obvious choice to command 2NZEF. Major-General John Duigan, the General Office Commanding (GOC) New Zealand Forces, was close to retirement and did not have the confidence of his government nor his subordinates. In November 1939, after careful deliberation and consultation, Fraser accepted Major General Bernard Freyberg's offer to command 2NZEF.

English-born but New Zealand-raised, Freyberg won legendary fame with the British forces in the First World War. He proved the ideal choice to command the NZEF and would combine the appointments of GOC 2NZEF with that of GOC New Zealand Division for most of the war.[10]

In battle Freyberg proved an adept tactician who, despite the bitter aftertaste of failures in Greece and Crete, won the grudging admiration and respect of his men, and the trust of Fraser (who became prime minister on 1 April 1940).

The Royal New Zealand Navy battlecruiser, HMS Achilles.

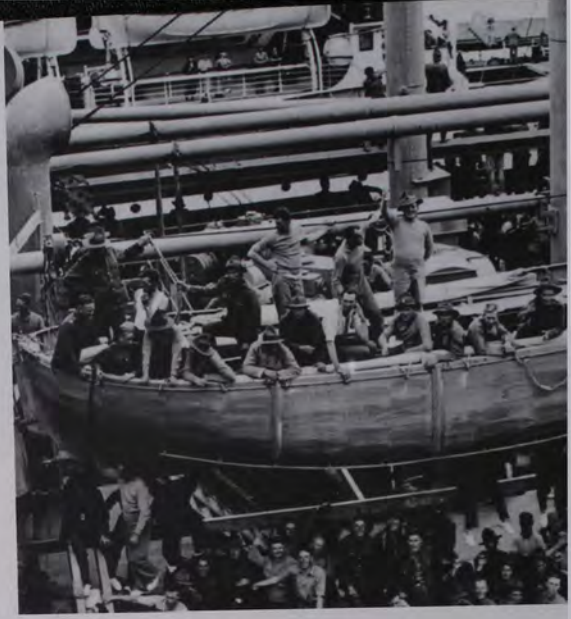
Freyberg and Fraser drew up guidelines in the form of a 'charter' on the relationship to exist between 2NZEF and its government.[11] Both men understood that 2NZEF was the national army of New Zealand, and were determined that it be recognised as such. It was not to be absorbed and dispersed into the mass of the British Army. To achieve this, Freyberg had to walk the fine line between being a loyal subordinate to his British superior commanders and also meeting his responsibilities as an agent of the government of New Zealand. It was a relationship that was tested in defeat on Greece and Crete in 1941, and again in adversity during the worst of the Libyan and Egyptian campaigns of 1941 and 1942.[12] He had to educate Middle East Command that 2NZEF was:

> [The] *Expeditionary Force of a Sovereign State, a partner in the British Commonwealth of Nations … an ally, and a very close one it is true, but we are not part of the British Army … All major decisions, such as the employment of the force, are made by the New Zealand War Cabinet, and the force only comes under the command of an Allied Commander in Chief for operational purposes.*[13]

In 1942 Fraser invited the leader of the National Party opposition and two other senior members to be part of the War Cabinet, but the arrangement broke down after only three months. Under Fraser's capable and often inspired leadership Labour won the 1943 election, and would continue in office until 1949.[14]

Mythologised at Gallipoli, 'Anzac', which stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, was an important symbol for both Australian and New Zealand servicemen to aspire and served as a powerful motivating force throughout the Second World War. However, in 1939 Freyberg was lukewarm about forming a combined army corps, believing that New Zealand had outgrown such a need. Fraser agreed with him, considering such a buffer would only dilute the New Zealand division's identity, and add another unnecessary link in Freyberg's line of communication with his higher command.[15] An Anzac Corps did come briefly into existence during the Greek campaign of 1941, but it did not survive the evacuation.[16] Later attempts to revive an Anzac Corps foundered when Japan entered the war.

Split by the diversion of the Second Echelon to the United Kingdom after the fall of France, it took 18 months



before Freyberg eventually assembled his division in Egypt. With Europe overrun and Italian forces in Libya threatening Egypt, keeping it together was a constant battle. After Italy entered the war, Freyberg had to strike a balance between essential training and meeting urgent manpower requests from O'Connor's Western Desert Force. He provided signals and transport, and reluctantly allowed members of his Divisional Cavalry and 27th (Machine Gun) Battalion to be temporarily detached to the Long Range Patrol, later better known as the Long Range Desert Group. They remained temporarily detached until 1943. Freyberg's division was not complete until March 1941 when the Second Echelon joined it in Egypt. Three days later, on 6 March 1941, the first elements of the division sailed for Greece.

The disastrous campaigns in Greece and Crete

The Greece and Crete campaigns were New Zealand's equivalent of the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign. However, while Gallipoli held promise of success and important strategic gains, initially at least Greece was a doomed enterprise from the start. The German invasion on 6 April 1941 broke through the weak Greek army and threatened to outflank 'W' Force made up of the New Zealand Division, 6th Australian Division and the 1st British Armoured Brigade. Under constant air attack from the Luftwaffe, the force withdrew through potentially strong positions that it lacked the resources to defend. Like Gallipoli, enthusiasm and individual enterprise could not compensate for command inexperience and poor staff work. Of the 16,720 New Zealanders who served in Greece, 291 were killed, 599 wounded and 1614 taken prisoner.

The hasty evacuation from Greece saw two of the division's three infantry brigades dumped on Crete and involved in its defence under Freyberg's overall command. New Zealanders numbered some 7000 of the 35,000 mixed garrison consisting of British, Australian and Greek forces, which lacked all the essentials for an effective defence such as vehicles, heavy weapons, radios, equipment, and most critically of all, air support.

Aided by ULTRA intelligence, which provided details of German air and sea landing plans, Freyberg's defensive plan appeared sound. However, many of his subordinate commanders were exhausted. Dispirited by the failure in Greece they did not share Freyberg's confidence. Despite the initial successful repulse of the German parachute and glider landings on 20 May 1941, Lieutenant Colonel L.W. Andrews VC, commanding 22nd Battalion, lost his nerve and withdrew his battalion from Point 107, the vital

Peter Fraser, prime minister of New Zealand, 1940–49.

At the port of Lyttelton, New Zealand soldiers say goodbye to their families before leaving for war. The voyage to Europe took many weeks, with the constant risk of submarine attacks.

heights controlling Maleme airfield. This allowed critical German reinforcements to be flown in the next day. Following an unsuccessful New Zealand counterattack, the fate of the campaign was sealed and evacuation the inevitable consequence. New Zealand casualties at Crete numbered 671 dead, 967 wounded and 2180 captured (including 488 wounded), a total of 3818 out of the 7702 New Zealanders on the island.

Crete saw the highest proportion of losses suffered by New Zealand in any ground campaign during the Second World War, and came closest to mirroring the casualty lists of Gallipoli and the Western Front. Fraser was in Egypt en route to London, and insisted that every effort be made to evacuate the garrison, which was done at great loss in both ships and lives. It was the first time a New Zealand prime minister had directly involved himself in tactical decisions concerning the NZEF, but the interests of New Zealand demanded nothing less.

What made Greece and Crete — and indeed the campaigns in North Africa — different for New Zealand from those of the First World War was the high percentage of prisoners of war that featured in the casualty statistics. Less than 500 New Zealanders were taken prisoner during the First World War, compared to 7876 in 2NZEF alone during the Second.[17]

It provided a different dimension for the families at home living with the anguish of the telegram reporting that their loved one was missing, and then weeks or months later the notification of his captivity. Personal effects were returned as if he was dead. Family life revolved around the routine of packing POW Red Cross parcels, and the receipt of a letter about every six months.

General Bernard Freyberg.

Crete was the graveyard of a number of New Zealand reputations, and shook Fraser's faith in Freyberg. The prime minister made clear to his commander that in future he expected to be reassured before each major operation to which New Zealanders were committed that adequate resources, particularly in the form of air and tank support, were available. The resources were certainly available in November 1941, when after a period of rest and retraining the full strength New Zealand Division, 20,000 strong and with 2800 vehicles, took part in Operation Crusader, the 8th Army offensive to relieve the besieged port of Tobruk. However, Freyberg grew increasingly unhappy as to how British armoured resources were employed, particularly as it was his infantry that bore the brunt of the fighting to open the corridor into Tobruk, and then had to withstand Rommel's counterattack without sufficient tank support. This was some of the hardest fighting involving the division during the war, at a cost of 982 dead, 1699 wounded and 1939 taken prisoner. After Tobruk's relief the exhausted division was withdrawn to Syria for rest and retraining.

War on the doorstep

It was during this battle that the New Zealanders heard that Japan had entered the war and that New Zealand itself was threatened. New Zealand faced a war on its very doorstep. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour brought the United States into the war. In February 1942 the fall of Singapore proved how illusory the fortress was as a bulwark against Japanese ambitions in Asia. Four days later, Darwin was bombed. The effect on 2NZEF was immediate; reinforcements dried up as all trained men were retained in New Zealand. Morale was also affected, there being a general feeling in the division that it was more important to go back and fight the Japanese in the Pacific. The withdrawal of the first two Australian divisions increased this belief.[18]

However, the situation facing the 8th Army in Egypt prevented any immediate return. In June 1942 Rommel's offensive and advance into Egypt saw the New Zealanders rushed back to the action. They took part in a series of savage encounters in defence of Egypt on the Alamein line in the summer of 1942. By the time the line had stabilised in August the soldiers had lost faith in army command, hated British armour and held Rommel in high regard. Distrust of British armour and a lack of infantry reinforcements led 2NZEF to withdraw the badly mauled and under strength 4th Infantry Brigade and reshape it into an armoured formation.

The New Zealanders played a critical role at Alam Halfa where the newly appointed 8th army commander, Lieutenant General B.L. Montgomery stopped Rommel's attempt to break through. Freyberg's division was his infantry spearhead during the Battle of El Alamein in October 1942, opening a corridor for British armour to pass through. The New Zealanders led the advance on Tripoli, fighting in turn at Sollum, Halfaya Pass, the left hooks at El Agheila and Nofilia, Medinine, and the third left hook at Tebaga Gap. It ended with hard and costly fighting at Enfidaville, before Freyberg took the surrender of the Italian First Army, including the German 90th Light

Men from the New Zealand infantry waiting to be transferred to the Front, October 1944. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

Division, and the fighting in North Africa ended on 13 May 1943. Between November 1941 and May 1943, New Zealand losses were made up of 2755 dead, 5036 wounded and 3622 taken prisoner in North Africa. At the end of the campaign the division was under strength and exhausted. It desperately wanted to go home.

The consequences of war for New Zealand

At home in New Zealand it was a distant war. However, all this changed in June 1940. The public certainties of victory that had been a feature of the First World War, even during the darkest months of 1917 and early 1918, were shattered after the fall of France, and darkened again with the entry of Japan in December 1941. Even more than with the manufactured hatred of the 'bestial Hun' in 1914–18, the Second World War was a crusade against an evil that threatened the survival of the British Empire and of New Zealand's way of life. Any outspoken opposition to the war earned public disapproval, and 'aliens' of German, Italian and Japanese origin who might be disloyal were interned for the duration just as they had been in the First World War. Appropriately enough it was in May 1940 that *God Defend New Zealand* was made the national hymn.[19]

At the beginning of the war, volunteer home guard units modelled on the British system were set up to

Long Range Desert Group, the unit of the British army that specialised in reconnaissance, information gathering and navigation in the desert.

protect 'hearth and home.' The fall of France led to their formal recognition by the government as a semi-military organisation, which would provide pickets and coastal patrols, guard vital points, and co-operate with the army in the event of an emergency. All privately owned rifles were impressed to equip the Home Guard and by May 1941 its strength reached 100,000. This was formalised on 30 July 1941 when the Home Guard became an integral part of the military forces. The National Military Reserve, formerly a Territorial Reserve, was also incorporated and mobilised. In response to the deteriorating war situation the Emergency Reserve Corps Regulations were gazetted in August 1940. These linked the Emergency Precautions Scheme (EPS), the Women's War Service Auxiliary (WWSA) and the Home Guard under the National Service Department.

Emergency Precautions schemes became compulsory for all local authorities and at the end of six months recruiting it numbered 80,000 people. In each municipality the local mayor became chief warden, and suburbs and towns were divided into blocks and sections led by wardens and subwardens who headed local committees. They were responsible for 'air-raid shelters, anti-gas precautions, lighting controls, evacuation procedures, auxiliary fire brigade, emergency communications, demolition work, water supply and the protection of vital points.'[20] It was a total community effort, modelled on the British experience. Slit-trenches were dug and air raid shelters built, and there were air raid drills on a regular basis.

An intense effort was made to increase food and raw material production, as well as establish the local production of munitions and other secondary goods whose supply had been cut off by the war. Walter Nash, as minister of finance, managed to finance the war effort without overseas borrowing. Price stabilisation measures were introduced to avoid inflation, and the high wages that the population was earning were absorbed by war loans and war bonds. In this way New Zealand managed to pay for war expenditure from current revenue and by borrowing on the domestic market. 'Farm exports were taken over by the Government for bulk sale to the United Kingdom at prices lower than the prevailing world level, but still high. A share of the farmers' earnings was held back in reserve accounts as an anti-inflationary measure.'[21] By judicious financial management 'the increase in the cost of living in New Zealand in wartime was considerably less than with most Allied powers.'[22]

New Zealand matched its contribution in manpower overseas with home production, shipping 1.8 million

A New Zealand soldier and the graves of some victims in the desert.

tons of meat, 685,000 tons of butter, and 625,000 tons of cheese to the United Kingdom. In addition 5.4 million bales of wool were appraised for shipment, much of which remained in storage in New Zealand. When Japan entered the war, New Zealand supplied United States forces in the Central Pacific, producing 190,000 tons of meat, 23,000 tons of butter, and 137,000 tons of vegetables. In addition, New Zealand industry produced war equipment and munitions to the value of £42 million.

Labour established a national register of all persons over 16 to be directed into industry and other essential work. In January 1941 married men without children were called up for home service, and by July all married men were called up. With over 80,000 men and some 1000 women in the services, critical shortages emerged in the labour force. 'Manpowering' became the term to describe industrial conscription, whereby both men and women were directed into essential industries and by March 1944 these employed over 40% of the labour force. Already in late 1941 a Land Corps, later the Women's Land Service, was set up to provide female labour to farms.

The volunteer work that had absorbed so much of the women's war effort in the First World War continued with fundraising, packing parcels for the troops and the knitting of socks and balaclavas, all carried out under the auspices of the National Patriotic Fund Board. The Women's War Service Auxiliary (WWSA) was set up in 1940 to co-ordinate women's war work through the provision of drivers, cooking, home nursing and first aid. Their battle to have the right to wear a uniform became an important symbol of the women's war effort. This was followed in 1941 by all three services, in turn, enlisting women, and by 1943 more than 8000 women were in the forces.

Women were in increasing demand to replace men in essential industries. Appeals already had been made to attract more women into factory work, and in June 1940 labour legislation was suspended to allow women to work night shifts if satisfactory arrangements could be made to transport them home after their shift. In 1939 there had been 180,000 women in the workforce; by 1943 this had risen to 228,000. Pay rates also rose from 47% of men's pay in the mid-1930s to 60% in 1945. The war saw certain occupations such as herd testers and Auckland women tram conductors receive equal pay. The Public Service Association began a campaign for equal pay for civil servants in 1943, and the percentage of women employed in the public service grew from 5% in 1939 to 25% by 1946.[23]

The National Service Emergency Regulations of 1940 introduced conscription. A General Reserve was established, made up of all males between the ages of 16 and 46. Voluntary enlistment ended on 22 July 1940,

Soldiers at rest in Galatas during the Crete campaign.

Prisoners of war.

when all males between 18 and 46 became liable for ballot. This was amended in 1942, making any member of the armed services liable for service wherever required whether in New Zealand or overseas. As a matter of policy no soldier under the age of 21 was permitted to serve outside New Zealand. Conscription was administered by the National Service Department, which was the civilian agency responsible for recruiting and training men for service overseas for each of the three services. By the end of 1941 there were 109,000 men, including territorials in the three services.

Appeal Boards were set up to deal with objections, and those excused were sent to labour camps. Of the 7000 appeals, 600 were upheld and a further 800, mainly conscientious objectors, refused to accept the finding of the Board and became military defaulters sent to detention camps 'for the duration.' Camp conditions were spartan and the rules harsh. After release the defaulters still faced the loss of civil liberties, being banned from employment in the Public Service, ineligible to vote until the 1951 elections, and barred from the teaching profession until the 1960s.[24]

Japan's entry into the war was accompanied by an increase in military and industrial mobilisation for home defence. By July 1942 the strength of the three services totalled 154,549, or 43% of the eligible population, with 58,200 serving overseas. American victories at Coral Sea, Midway and in the battle for Guadalcanal led to more personnel being released for overseas service. By 1944 a crisis in manpower led to the withdrawal of 3rd Division from the Pacific — in order to maintain reinforcements of 2nd Division in Italy and sustain production of food and supplies. By November that year, 340,846 men, including volunteers, had been called up for military service, with 80,959 serving overseas.[25]

New Zealand soldiers.

New Zealand soldiers in the desert near Minqar Qaim.

The landing in Italy

The Pacific War faced New Zealand with the dilemma of defending homeland or deferring to Allied grand strategy and continuing its presence in Egypt. The deciding factor was the decision by the United States to position forces in New Zealand as a base for operations. In late 1942 Fraser was persuaded, by Churchill and Roosevelt, that the return of 2NZEF would disrupt essential shipping, and that the Allied cause would be better served if it remained in North Africa. Roosevelt undertook to send a United States division to New Zealand on condition that the New Zealanders remained in Egypt and Fraser agreed.[26]

The issue was raised again at the end of the campaign in North Africa, when the Allied high command requested that the division take part in the Sicily landings. Fraser could not guarantee this, having promised that the future of the division would be decided by parliament, and this uncertainty ruled the New Zealanders out of the Sicily campaign. Once again it was the combined recommendations of both Churchill and Roosevelt that persuaded a reluctant New Zealand government to retain its forces in Europe. Curtin, the Australian prime minister, did not disguise his anger at New Zealand's decision.[27]

During 1942 New Zealand embarked on a major construction programme of airfields, camps and coastal defences to protect itself against Japanese attack. During this time it was invaded by those Roosevelt sent to protect it. The 'American invasion' began at the end of May 1942 with the arrival in Auckland of the convoy carrying 145 Regiment of the 37th (US) Division, and the setting up of Vice Admiral Ghormley's South Pacific Headquarters in Auckland. The North Island soon resembled one vast military establishment with camps for American servicemen centred on Auckland (29,500 personnel) and Wellington (21,000 personnel). The new arrivals made an enormous impression on New Zealand society.

New Zealand soldiers in Taranto, 1945. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

From New Zealand they embarked for operations in the Central Pacific and, in turn, hospitals in New Zealand received the American wounded. In all some 100,000 United States servicemen passed through New Zealand en route to war. Some 1400 New Zealand women married US servicemen, many of whom settled in the United States.[28]

There were inevitable tensions, particularly when the New Zealand soldiers returned on furlough leave from the Middle East, but as one New Zealand soldier wryly noted, 'Yanks not to blame, it's the way of soldiers the world over.'[29]

New Zealand had already deployed a brigade-strength garrison to Fiji and smaller garrisons to other South Pacific islands, including a number of coast watchers. The Fiji garrison became the nucleus of a second New Zealand division, 3rd Division, that deployed to New Caledonia in November 1942 as a two infantry brigade-strength formation after training in New Zealand. Commanded by Major General H.E. Barrowclough, who had commanded 6th Infantry Brigade with distinction in the battle to relieve Tobruk, 3rd Division deployed to Guadalcanal in August 1943. In September that year its two brigades took part in two separate amphibious landings on Vella Lavella and Mono islands as a prelude to a major landing by United States marines on Bougainville. In February 1943 the division mounted an amphibious landing and secured the Nissan or Green Islands. Their capture marked the end of the Solomon Islands campaign, and effectively the end of the 3rd Division's operational role. In March 1944 it was withdrawn to New Caledonia and gradually reduced to cadre strength. Its personnel were sent as reinforcements to Italy or returned to essential industries in New Zealand. It was disbanded on 19 October 1944 and it was the RNZN and RNZAF that continued New Zealand's contribution to the Pacific War.[30]

Both *Achilles* and *Leander* took part in the battle for control of the sealanes around Guadalcanal. *Achilles* was badly damaged by Japanese aircraft, returning to service in time for the final operations off Okinawa and in the Sea of Japan with the British Pacific Fleet. *Leander* was torpedoed in a night action between ships of the American Task Force and the Japanese Navy off Kolombangara in the Solomons in July 1943. It was only the superb

seamanship of her captain, Commander S.W. Roskill RN, that prevented the ship from sinking. HMNZS *Gambia*, a light Fiji-class cruiser, was lent to New Zealand to replace *Leander*. With *Achilles*, it took part in operations in the Sea of Japan, and was struck by a Kamikaze aircraft while the 'cease hostilities against Japan' signal was flying, announcing the end of the war. A large number of small ships and motor launches of the RNZN also served in the Pacific, with two minesweepers, HMNZS *Kiwi* and *Moa*, sinking the Japanese submarine *I-1* off Guadalcanal in late January 1943.[31]

The Pacific War changed the RNZAF from a training organisation providing aircrew for the RAF into a truly independent air force with its focus on operations in the Pacific. At its peak in February 1945 the RNZAF numbered 7929 personnel in the Pacific, with a total of 24 squadrons serving at some time in theatre. At the war's end the New Zealand Air Task Force was supporting Australian ground operations to clear Bougainville, New Ireland, and other bypassed Japanese garrisons, while the United States forces advanced on the Japanese mainland.[32]

In Italy the New Zealanders of 'Freyberg's Circus' landed at Taranto in October 1943 and spent 19 months slogging their way up the Italian peninsula before reaching Trieste in May 1945. It was a very different war from North Africa, and the division — consisting of two infantry and one armoured brigade — while ideally balanced with its mix of armour and infantry to conduct a desert campaign, lacked the infantry numbers to perform effectively in Italy. The division's initial success in crossing the Sangro ended at Orsogna, where four unsuccessful attacks, in November and December 1943, led to heavy casualties. The New Zealanders realised that they had much to learn about the co-ordination of infantry and armour in the hills of Italy. The division was again unsuccessful in hard difficult fighting at Monte Cassino between February and May 1944. This was followed by the advance to Florence in July and August, Rimini in October and November, and the battle for Faenza in December.

Women from the New Zealand Agriculture Corps.

Women from the Female Auxiliary Service.

Allied vehicles at Cassino.

Peter Fraser signing the United Nations Charter, June 1945.

By Christmas 1944 it was a tired and weary division that was losing its fighting edge and suffering from a critical shortage of infantrymen. Freyberg recognised the dangers and reorganised the division, forming an additional infantry brigade. The release of veterans back to New Zealand on furlough saw them replaced by reinforcements drawn from 3rd Division in the Pacific. After hard training it was this revitalised division that led the 8th Army in the crossing of the Senio and the pursuit to Trieste in April and May 1945. At the end of the war in Italy, 2nd Division was the longest serving division in the 8th Army. Its losses over six years of war totalled 6581 dead, 16,237 wounded and 6637 prisoners of war. New Zealand's decision to keep it in Europe allowed it to play a significant role in a major theatre of war, an opportunity it would not have had if it had returned to the Pacific in 1943.[33]

The war ended after the dropping of the atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the surrender of Japan on 15 August 1945. Its suddenness took New Zealanders by surprise, with many anticipating a hard fought invasion of Japan involving further New Zealand casualties. New Zealand was a different country in 1945. On the home front, war's end saw the creation of a welfare state and the central role of government in the affairs of its people. What had seemed radical in 1939 had become the norm by 1945. It had been a world war of such scale that it forced New Zealand constantly to assess where its national interests lay, and what its priority of effort should be. This often put it at odds with its allies; Australia resented New Zealand's failure to return 2NZEF to the Pacific in 1943, and both Britain and the United States were angry at the temerity of the Anzac pact between Australia and New Zealand of 1944, when both countries sought to assert some control over postwar security issues in the Pacific.

Under Fraser's careful and pragmatic leadership, New Zealand generally accepted the role it was asked to play. He ensured New Zealand had a voice, and worked hard to make the United Nations, which was established in the closing months of the war, the forum where the country could be heard to effect. Unlike 1918, there was no such conviction that this was a war that would end all wars. New Zealand faced the postwar world with the knowledge borne from its growing maturity as a nation; an awareness that victory gave no certainty of future security and that security was only possible for an isolated and modest nation if it continued to play its small but meaningful role in world affairs.

Notes

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2. F.L.W. Wood. *The New Zealand People at War*. War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1958, pp. 42–71.
3. Wood, op. cit., pp. 72–89.
4. Kay, op. cit., p. 3.
5. Major-General Sir Howard Kippenberger. *Infantry Brigadier*. Oxford University Press, London, 1949, pp. 1–7.
6. A.H. McLintock (ed). 'Defence Army.' *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, Volume I*. Government Printer, Wellington, 1966, pp. 461–67.
7. W.E. Murphy. 'Wars.' McLintock, op. cit., pp. 568–69.
8. W.E. Murphy. 'The Air Force.' McLintock, op. cit., p. 575.
9. Wood, op. cit., p. 99.
10. The title '2 New Zealand Division' was not officially adopted until 29 June 1942. Kay, op. cit, p. 3.
11. For full text, see *Documents relating to New Zealand's participation in the Second World War, 1939–45, Volume I*. (Three volumes.) War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1949, No. 39.
12. For an example of Freyberg's employment of these powers, see J.L. Scoular, *Battle For Egypt*. War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1955, pp. 1–6.
13. *Army Quarterly*. October 1944, p. 33. Quoted in Wood, op. cit,. p. 102.
14. 'History'. McLintock, op. cit., pp. 57–65.
15. *Documents relating to New Zealand's participation in the Second World War, 1939–45, Volume II*. (Three volumes.) War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1951, pp. 1–16.
16. The Anzac Corps was formed under General Blamey's command on 12 and 13 April 1941. W.G. McClymont. *To Greece*. War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1959, p. 223.
17. W.G. Stevens. *Problems of 2NZEF*. War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1958, p. 292.
18. Clarence J. Moss. 'Circus Days'. War Diaries, MS 93/134, Auckland Imperial War Memorial Museum; quoted in Chris Pugsley et al. *Scars on the Heart: Two Centuries of New Zealand at War*, 1996, p. 202.
19. Lauris Edmond (ed). 'Chronology of Events.' *Women in Wartime: New Zealand Women tell their Story*. Government Printer, Wellington, 1986, p. 265.
20. Rose Young. 'The Home Front.' Pugsley et al., op. cit., pp. 204–217.
21. A.H. McLintock (ed). 'History.' *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, Volume II*. Government Printer, Wellington, 1966, p. 63.
22. *Ibid*.
23. Rose Young. 'The Home Front.' Pugsley et al., op. cit., pp. 204–217
24. *Ibid*.
25. A.H. McLintock (ed). 'Compulsory Military Service.' *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, Volume I*. Government Printer, Wellington, 1966, pp. 384–86.
26. *Documents relating to New Zealand's participation in the Second World War, 1939–45, Volume II*. op. cit., pp. 141–55.
27. *Ibid*., pp. 182–221.
28. Rose Young. 'The Home Front.' Pugsley et al., op. cit., pp. 204–217. See also Nancy M. Taylor. *The Home Front, Vol. I*. Historical Publications Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1986, pp. 621–61.
29. Clarence J. Moss. 'Circus Days'. Op. cit., p. 203.
30. O.A. Gillespie. *The Pacific*. War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1952.
31. S.D. Waters. Op cit.
32. J.M.S. Ross. *Royal Air New Zealand Air Force*. War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1955. See also John Crawford. *New Zealand's Pacific Frontline*. Headquarters, New Zealand Defence Forces, Wellington, 1992.
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Members of the 28th Maori Battalion in the Marecchia River area on the Adriatic Coast, 22 September 1944. From left to right: Wi Kaipuke (aka Bunny Yates) of Manutuke, George Rata (King Country), Eru Haumata (Bay of Plenty) and Mahuta Hunana (Whangaparaoa). Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

5

The price of citizenship: Maori involvement in the Italian Campaign

Monty Soutar

The indigenous people of New Zealand, known as Maori, were involved in the liberation of Tavarnelle during 1944. In fact, they made a sustained and valuable contribution to the armed forces throughout the Second World War.

Many volunteered immediately and left for overseas service with the first echelon of the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force (2NZEF) in January 1940. There would be men of Maori descent in most of the battalions throughout the war, while numerous Maori volunteers also served in the other services.

A handful of Maori women went abroad with the New Zealand Army Nursing Service, while many younger men served in the Royal New Zealand Navy and Royal New Zealand Air Force. Some did so because their qualifications fitted them for a particular service, others joined out of interest, and others joined because they were underage but found they could be accepted into the service of their choice. Since enlistments for 2NZEF, particularly in areas of dense Maori population, were overseen by Maori registration officers who knew the candidates' families, there was less chance of army service if underage.

Treaty obligations

Nonetheless, the Maori war effort is most directly associated with 28th (Maori) Battalion, the all-Maori unit that the government had agreed to establish in October 1939 following representations by the Maori members of parliament on behalf of the tribes. A volunteer unit (apart from the officers appointed), it would be additional to the nine battalions and support units already forming. Most Maori who had previously volunteered for overseas service transferred to the Maori Battalion.

Constructed out of a desire by Maori to represent themselves, at the same time the unit reflected an eagerness not only to prove that they were the equal of their Pakeha (i.e. European New Zealanders) comrades in war, but also to earn the full benefits and privileges

of New Zealand citizenship conferred by the Treaty of Waitangi that was signed in 1840 by Governor Hobson on behalf of the Queen of England, and the chiefs of the several tribes. Even in 1939 the sense of equality and acceptance was marginal.

The Treaty focus was a valid one: equality of sacrifice as a consequence of equal citizenship was the basis on which many tribal representatives believed their young men would serve voluntarily. 'British sovereignty was accepted by our forefathers,' explained Ngata, 'and it has given the Maori people rights which they would not have been accorded under any conqueror.' He went on:

> *We are participants in a great Commonwealth, to the defence of which we cannot hesitate to contribute our blood and our lives. We are the possessors of rights which we must qualify to exercise, also of obligations which the Maori must discharge always in the future as he has done in the past.*[1]

This sense of obligation arising out of the responsibilities of citizenship was apparent among many tribes. Some groups within other tribes, however, took a more measured position. A few, for example, were against the formation of an infantry battalion. Some argued that casualties were bound to be numerous because of the new type of warfare and therefore the population would not be able to maintain a constant flow of reinforcements, especially once the unit had entered combat. 'Let our young men enlist by all means,' said one leader, 'but let our men join up dispersed among Pakeha units. This will lessen the possibility of heavy losses.'[2] Others objected, arguing that the Maori contribution would not be as distinctive.[3]

Some supported the idea of the unit having a pioneer role. They believed that although a race not quite 90,000 strong would be unable to keep up its commitments to an infantry battalion, the strength of a pioneer unit could be maintained no matter how long the struggle.[4]

Others objected to Maori troops being deployed overseas at all and called for the unit to be kept in New Zealand for home service only.[5] Although most who objected to overseas service did so for historical anti-British reasons, there was also apprehension because of the toll suffered in the previous war.

Front left to right: Watene Haig, Eru White and another Maori soldier loading shells near Faenza. Monty Soutar Archives

But the sense of obligation was strong, despite the apprehension. As one of the volunteers later wrote:

> *Their request could not be denied them by their elders and chieftains, all their long history had been steeped in the religion of war, and the training of the Maori child from his infancy to manhood was aimed at the perfection of the warrior-class, while to die in the pursuit of the War God Tumatauenga was a sacred duty and a manly death.*

Moreover, if Maori were to have a say in shaping the future of the nation after the war they needed to participate fully during it. Ngata summed the situation up: 'We are of one house, and if our Pakeha brothers fall, we fall with them. How can we ever hold up our heads, when the struggle is over, to the question, "Where were you when New Zealand was at war?"'[6]

Members of the Maori Battalion in Egypt.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

28th (Maori) Battalion

The Maori Battalion was organised on tribal lines under tribal leaders, though influential Maori were to be disappointed by the appointment of Pakeha officers to senior positions. After three months training, 681 men including 39 officers left Wellington for Egypt with 2NZEF's Second Echelon. Because of the diversion of the echelon to the United Kingdom, for the second half of 1940 Maori troops found themselves undergoing training for the defence of southern England, occupying a variety of camps.

The battalion departed for the Middle East in January 1941. From Egypt they were despatched to Greece and Crete where they took part in the forlorn defence of those islands. After evacuation to Egypt they returned to action in the North African campaign of November 1941 where the unit, as part of the British Eighth Army, was again well to the fore. By May 1943 the Maori Battalion's continual hard fighting was reflected in the casualty rate among its men. Very few of the original 681 remained and the gaps in the unit had been filled by reinforcements many times.

The Italian Campaign

On 5 October 1943, the battalion left Egypt to begin an operational role in Italy. Two-thirds of the unit was still untried and made up of much younger men then the original battalion. They were part of the 22,000-strong Second New Zealand Division which, with a newly joined armoured brigade, reinforcements and general hospital, was to renew its association with the British Eighth Army. The journey across the Mediterranean was without incident, the Allies having dominance both in the skies and on the sea. 'The sight of so many ships going together,' wrote Sergeant 'J.B.' Walker, 'makes the song true: *Britannia Rules the Waves*.'[7]

The division landed at Taranto, where a base was established. Field Marshall Montgomery planned to use the division as a hard-hitting, fast-moving force. After

Maori Battalion soldiers relish the thought of devouring a fresh supply of the Maori delicacy titi, or mutton-birds. From left to right: Tom Poki of Whangara, unknown, and Rodney Pitt of Gisborne.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

The abbey at Monte Cassino, which was destroyed by the fighting.

fighting in the wide expanse of the desert, the Maori veterans found it odd to see a civilian population so close to the front line. 'It is a sad picture to see so many people made homeless,' wrote Walker. 'The sight of women with their kids looking for shelter and food is damnable.'[8]

The New Zealanders were first tasked with helping breach the Gustav Line in the eastern coast sector. This meant crossing the Sangro River and pushing north as part of the Eighth Army's drive to turn the German defences. On the west coast the Americans would be driving towards Rome.

Progress was slow and with the full onslaught of winter setting in, the push north along the east coast was put on the backburner and the Germans won a welcome respite. For the new members of the Maori Battalion, this first taste of battle was but an appetiser for a much more costly encounter to come: the Battle of Cassino.

There were four main battles of Cassino during the first five months of 1944. Attached to the American Fifth Army under Lieutenant General Mark Clark, the Second New Zealand Division fought in the second and third battles, and its Armoured Regiment gave support in the fourth. Soldiers from many other nations were involved, including Americans, Canadians, French, Indians, British and Poles. In all, 343 New Zealanders were killed or died of wounds. Of these, 58 (17%) were men of the Maori Battalion. A further 1211 Kiwis were wounded, of whom 227 (19%) were Maori.

After its heavy casualties at Cassino the Second New Zealand Division was given a short respite, some 20 miles further inland at Isernia. Spring was in the air and the countryside was green and beautiful. For a fortnight each company of the Maori Battalion was permitted to visit Napoli (Naples), Pompeii and Caserta. 'The boys enjoyed their holiday,' said Second Lieutenant Nepia Mahuika, 'some enjoying Italian wine, some going after the Italian signorinas, and others admiring the township of Pompeii.'[9]

These were pleasant times for the battalion, but all too brief. The battalion returned twice more to the Cassino area, on both occasions to the steep and rocky ridge of Colle Belvedere, from where there was a great view of the monastery, the ruined town and the towering Monte Cairo. The Germans finally gave up Cassino after bitter fighting during the battalion's second posting to Colle Belvedere. British and Polish troops moved into a largely empty town and the ruins of the monastery. The enemy had withdrawn to avoid being outflanked.

Advance to Florence

As the Allies continued their push up the Italian peninsula, the Maori Battalion became involved in the thrust towards Florence. Accompanied by Sherman tanks, its infantry companies traversed the Tuscan countryside while the Germans carried out a slow and determined fighting withdrawal.

As the Germans fell back towards the Gothic Line, casualties mounted on both sides. On 21 July, C Company's Major Bully Jackson had 100 men and four officers available to him: Mahuika, Tibble, Paniora and Waititi. Within 12 days, three of them had been injured. Twenty-one of his men had been wounded and nine killed, most of them from the latest batch of reinforcements.

Stationed near the walled town of San Donato, the Maori soldiers were keenly appreciated for their generosity by the hungry children who called at their camp begging for food. Reminded of their own kin in their villages back at home, they withheld nothing from the Italian children. 'They were like angels fallen from heaven,' one child recalled, 'certainly far kinder than the Moroccan infantry who had been in the area before them.'

When C Company entered the freshly vacated township of Tavarnelle on 23 July (the Germans withdrew in the night), barricaded windows did not stop the men looting the shops' merchandise, including the buiding where the town band's instruments were stored. 'They lay anti-tank mines at the doorways, attached a hand grenade to the lock, whipped around the corner and pulled the string attached to the pin. A bit of an overkill but certainly effective,' recalled Tini Karawa.[10]

A group of Te Whanau-a-Apanui men removing a radio from a destroyed building in Florence. At left is Norman Perry (later Sir Norman Perry). He was with the YMCA, but attached to the Maori Battalion in Italy. Norman Perry Album

Borsellino hats and piano accordions were among the spoils. With some of the new reinforcements unwisely wearing the hats in place of their helmets, and others making music, the men continued on their way through the streets of Tavarnelle.[11]

Unsurprisingly, the residents of the town were not very excited over their deliverance.

The men never knew when they would come under fire. Advancing towards Podere del Molino, 15th Platoon, under Second Lieutenant Whiro Tibble, was fired on by a group of Germans hidden behind stacks of tedded wheat. Charlie Kutia of Tolaga Bay was hit badly and lay in the open. His brother, Hapi, who with Tibble was ahead of the platoon, asked over and over again to be allowed to help him. In the end Tibble relented and Kutia's cousin, Karawa, passed him a field dressing. 'No sooner had Hapi reached Charlie and bent down to pick him up, when his helmet went flying through the air. Hapi had been shot in the head.'[12]

Karawa, watching the wheat, spotted a camouflaged helmet bob up, giving away the position of the German machine gunners. He called to Tibble that he had them in the sights of his Bren gun. 'What are you bloody waiting for?' replied Tibble. Karawa hit one immediately, and then shot two others as they ran up the slope — sufficient revenge, he thought, for the loss of his cousin.[13]

The platoon took cover in a stable facing an enemy-occupied house. Suddenly a hail of stick grenades rained down on them from the house, leaving the men little choice but to retreat. Tibble broke the sash off the only window at the rear of the building and his men raced away with bullets whizzing past them. A stray piece of shrapnel embedded itself in Karawa's forehead and a bullet pierced Tibble's lip, cut through a nostril, and skimmed across an eye.[14]

C Company lost four other men that day: Rongo Hinaki, Duncan Tangira, Jerry Atkins (or Kawha) and Leslie Chalcraft. Chalcraft's parents were English, but having been raised in Tokomaru Bay, he enlisted as a Maori. The wounded included Wessie Apiata, who had trodden on a landmine, Urikore (Jerry) Kahaki, Kaumoana (Sam) Kingi and Lance Corporal Hiroki McRoberts. Corporal Wharekawa Wanoa and Karikari Tipene had been wounded the previous night. On 25 July, near Villa del Corno, Hape Parata of Te Kaha, who had only recently recovered from a chest wound received at Colle Belvedere, was killed and Sergeant Wiremu (Bill) Hogan of Ruatoria was wounded.[15]

Haki Tangira of Te Whanau-a-Apanui was mortally wounded and as he lay dying Pipi Te Hei was called to his side. Hei had been raised in Reporua and until that moment had not known that Tangira was his real father.[16]

On 27 July, Major Peter Awatere took over command of the battalion from Colonel Young, who was suffering from jaundice. Captain Jacky Baker was placed in charge of C Company and Bully Jackson headed back to Maadi to take over the Maori Training Depot. A reshuffle of senior positions was also required because the adjutant, Captain Rangi Tutaki of Porangahau, was now in a German prisoner-of-war camp.[17]

At San Casciano on 29 July, Sergeant Sam Goldsmith, Corporal Bill Rowlands and Harry Matehe were wounded by mortar fire. The following evening C Company attacked Campiano, with 15th Platoon now under Sergeant Kelly Kiwha, 14th Platoon led by Second Lieutenant Paniora and 13th Platoon by Sergeant Matchitt. As they advanced, Tuhina (Man) Hikitapua was shot in the head and left for dead. Fortunately one of his 14th Platoon mates looked back and saw him trying to get up. 'I heard the boys calling, that fulla's still alive.'[18]

Awatere told Baker by radio to withdraw the company because support arms could not get forward and there were three enemy tanks on their objective, a hill called Point 207. Baker responded that the company 'should not have to fight over the same area once more.'[19] Awatere agreed and Baker held his position. Early next morning the Germans relinquished Point 207.

C Company was ordered to take Point 250, a hill about 1000 yards away across rough, wooded country. The three Sherman tanks accompanying them had gone only 100 yards before a Tiger tank knocked out one of them. 'The driver of the tank was trapped in his escape hatch and unable to get out as the tank exploded in flames. As the fire started to consume him I shot him with my revolver. Awful cries', said Baker.[20]

The advance of the Maori Battalion beyond Rimini. In front vehicle, from left to right: Hone Turner, Te Tuhi Callaghan, Jack Toroa, Poihipi Paora and Lieutenant Monty Searancke. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

Matchitt and four of his men — Wiremu Wharepapa, Arapeta Pirini, Heremaia Parata, Tama Gage and Len Helmbright — were 'wounded by a shell or a mine while crawling through a line of grapevines.'[21]

Baker and a tank officer cleared a path through the minefield, each with his bayonet prodding forward. When they came to a wide-open rising area they realised there was no easy way to cross. 'We still had one tank left, commanded by Charlie Passmore,' recalled Baker. 'I said to him that he was to position himself in the middle of the line and to fire at anything in front of him to keep the Germans' heads down and to keep firing as he went forward. The company fanned out on either side of the tank and charged with bayonets.'[22]

Down a hill and across a gully, C Company ran for about 500 yards with bayonets unsheathed, the Sherman in their midst. The Germans 'dug in along rows of vines, were routed, many put to flight, and many killed.'[23]

Passmore got a Military Cross for this action, while Baker gained a bar to his Military Cross for his leadership in this and subsequent actions. There were no casualties during the charge, but Paniora and Karauria Mitchell of Tikitiki were wounded by mortar fire while resting in a building.

The company went on to capture Balbani, a huge villa atop a knoll, and a casa called Le Montanine. These were to have been the battalion's objectives two days' later. As they advanced a German machine gun crew nested near the casa fired off its last rounds, including explosive bullets. One of these hit Uma Te Kani in the armpit and blew away his upper chest. Captain Baker remembered:

> *You could see his heart pumping. He was not far from me and was calling out, 'Jacky, Jacky.' I ... clutched onto his hand. The two German machine gunners came out from their machine gun pit with their hands above*

Padre Wi Huata.
Harris Album

their heads to surrender. I motioned them over to me and when they stood at Uma's feet looking down at him I shot them both with my revolver. They didn't have to fire those last bullets. The fight was over for them. I sent them with Uma who had just passed away then.[24]

This was the worst possible news for Te Kani's younger brother Apa, who had arrived with the latest reinforcements.

On 3 August 1944, John Waititi was wounded for a third time when C Company tried to take the village of Giogoli (three miles from the outskirts of Florence). Sergeant Kelly Kiwha, Tani Wharekura and Tom Webb were also hit. They were taking cover in a terraced garden on a knoll when a sniper lined them up. 'He realised he couldn't hit us with his rifle, so he started sending mortars up', recalled Waititi. 'One of those landed inside our terrace. My mates all missed it — but I dunno, I must be magnetic. I got hit again. It smashed my hand up.'[25]

Tau Rewhareha was one of those who came to help. 'Before I could yell out to him he got shot,' said Waititi. 'Right between the eyes. He fell back on to me.' Te Ua Keepa and Bronco Kaui were also killed.

That night Baker asked his cousin, Sergeant George Ngata (Sir Apirana's grandson), to recover Rewhareha's body. All three men had been raised at Waiomatatini. Ngata did not see the sense in risking more lives to recover a corpse and a heated argument broke out. Baker recalls that:

I eventually had to order him to do it. He took a few men from his platoon and about midnight went out and brought back Tau's body. We wrapped it in a blanket and Padre Wi Huata said some prayers and we buried him. When we were finished George asked why had I ordered him to do this and I said so that when we get home we can tell the whanau that we had looked after him.[26]

Florence

During the final stages of the advance on Florence, no reports were coming in to Fifth Brigade Headquarters from Major Awatere. Fearing something was wrong, Brigadier Pleasants sent three officers to find him. Second Lieutenant Jack Knowles recalled:

We hightailed it into the outskirts of Firenze [Florence]. *We caught up with Peter on the southern side of the river in the area known as San Frediano. He had just backed his jeep through a shop window to see if he could pinch a pair of shoes. I said to him, 'The Brig's awfully upset. What's happened to your radio?' And he smiled at me and gave me that big Maori smile and said, 'Turned it off, eh?'* [27]

It turned out that Awatere, remembering occasions when the Maori Battalion had had to allow another unit to be first into a town, was not having that happen here. 'I was damned if I was going to let someone else take

Colonel Peter Awatere.

Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

Florence.'[28] The Germans had withdrawn from the historic city during the night of 3 August. John Knowles of 27th (Machine Gun) Battalion recalled that:

> *Peter Awatere was a law unto himself. A lot of it was I think play acting … I remember one day when a young British officer came up … and I was reasonably regimental, I at least had my shirt on and my rank on and he looked around the group that was sitting on the ground, came across to me and said, 'Where can I find the colonel?' I said, 'There he is, down there.' There was Peter Awatere dressed in nothing but a pair of Khaki shorts and he had a knife about 9 inches long and he was busy paring his toenails …*
>
> *… One night when an attack was going in … I was in* [Awatere's] *headquarters. He committed them. Earlier in the day he had said to somebody, 'Go and get me a piano.' Once he had given the go-ahead and was waiting for the reports to come back he sat down and played Chopin.*[29]

John Waititi recalled that:

> *All the officers were waiting for his orders. The Americans were with us as the attack was to be co-ordinated with them. He was in a room off to the side and the Yanks were getting frustrated with how he long he was taking. Then he stepped out dressed only in his long johns, boots with a belt and pistol holster. We were used to his antics but the Yanks were wondering what had hit them. But then he outlined the plan of attack and they were absolutely impressed at the thoroughness of his presentation.*[30]

In September, the Kiwis returned to the Adriatic coast to help the Canadians capture the port city of Rimini, at the eastern end of the Gothic Line.

Italians and Maori

Maori troops appeared regularly in the Italian news, despite making up only a small proportion of the New Zealand Division. They endeared themselves to the locals more readily than any other Allied troops, certainly more easily than most expected. They made a conscious effort to acquire more than just the basic elements of the Italian language and gained a reputation for their skills in reading, writing and speaking Italian.[31] 'It was [in Camerino] that I found the time to learn Italian grammar,' wrote Second Lieutenant Mahuika. 'Colonel Awatere had long studied the language and he was good. He could quote the poet Dante with ease.'[32]

The Maori also seemed to have an affinity with the Italians. One Kiwi journalist observed:

> *Italians (especially in the South) cared little or nothing about colour differences, but even in the north the Maoris were accepted always as New Zealanders and*

Tini Karawa and Maria Piselli in Florence. Nga Taonga a Nga Tama Toa Trust Archives

Officials of the Maori Battalion, with some Italian friends. From left: Lieutenant Selwyn Park and Lieutenant Colonel James Henare (Commanding Officer of the battalion). Nga Taonga a Nga Tama Toa Trust Archives

> *sometimes, to the envy of their Pakeha friends, as the best class of New Zealanders. They were generous, of course, but they didn't buy their friendship with Italian families. Italian women, of all ages, liked Maoris and it was not just a matter of sex. They seemed to think the same way. Maoris have a directness of approach that appealed to the Italians, and their independence, physique and geniality made a big impression.*[33]

George Wharehinga wrote, 'Kua mohio koe ki te pai to ahua ki a ratou kua pai mai hoki ki a koe. ... Penei ano i a tatou. Na, ka mauria ano te aroha i waenganui i te iwi, ki nga tamariki.'[34] (You knew if you were courteous to them they'd act the same towards you. We [Maori] are like that. So we took our kindness among them and the children.)

Maori generosity to Italian civilians, particularly those in distress, was widely recognised. When Robert Ru Henry, a Rarotongan who arrived with the Fourteenth Reinforcements, caught up with the battalion past Forli, the trucks had just pulled up to let the men eat a hot meal. The men had filled their mess tins when a group of Italian women and children, clearly hungry, appeared out of nowhere. Henry had heard about the warrior reputation of the battalion. 'I always thought to myself, by jeez wild Maori boys. [Yet they] picked up their meals, looked at these women [and said], "Here you can have it."' When they noticed the perplexed look on Henry's face they remarked, 'We are going to get a meal after. These people might not.'[35]

The Maori love of music soon meant that popular Italian songs like *Buona Notte Mio Amore* (*Goodnight My Love*) became part of the battalion's musical repertoire. Having an appreciation of good music in common with Italians helped bring the two races closer. Serenading Maori struck up relationships with signorinas wherever they had leave.

Maori soldiers preparing a meal.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

Maori soldiers being welcomed in Florence. Monty Soutar Archives

Fighting prejudice

While the Battalion had fought for the British Empire half a world away, their fight was also about putting Maori on an equal footing with Pakeha in their own country. They returned from Italy to New Zealand in December 1945. En route the battalion stopped over in Perth, Western Australia, where the men were given shore leave. Returning to the ship at midnight, Captain Nepia Mahuika heard one of a group of Pakeha soldiers call to him from the top deck, 'You look neat in your uniform now, but when we get home, you'll be working for me.'[36]

From the wharf he could not make out who the men were, but after he related the incident to his cabinmates, his cousin, Major Wi Reedy, and Second Lieutenant Te Kooti Wahapango of Paroa (near Whakatane), went up to the top deck and knocked down the first soldier they came across. While their actions may have provided some immediate solace to the offended officer, the remark, albeit the view of a small minority, was a reality check for the Maori veterans.

Many years would have to pass before the bigotry that lay behind the comment levelled at Captain Mahuika dissolved. Such attitudes permeated the highest levels of government. Even as members of the Maori Battalion were returning to their homes, politicians and other leaders were debating the form equality should take for Maori, 'with their growing nationhood.'[37]

In parliament the member for the Bay of Islands argued that if Maori were to have equality with Europeans they should forfeit their four seats in the House. Some Pakeha warned, however, that until equality was reached it was advisable that Maori hold on to all the privileges they could. Other politicians accused some Maori of exploiting the Social Security Act, as if to suggest that all Maori were therefore not deserving of equal treatment. The acting prime minister, Walter Nash, countered this by pointing

Soldiers from the Maori Battalion playing a game of tug-of-war in Libya. At front is Captain Peter Awatere.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

out that Pakeha were equally guilty of abusing the act.[38] The overseas war experience was a great leveller for Maori and Pakeha, and the army itself probably achieved more to bring about at least the illusion of equality than all the social policies of the 1930s.[39]

One Pakeha veteran, for example, who had worked on farms around Gisborne with Maori labourers prior to the war, had held common negative stereotypes about Maori. Then he witnessed Maori in action in northern Italy. After the war, while walking down the street in Gisborne, he passed some Maori veterans. When these men looked at him, he silently acknowledged them. Later he told his nephew that 'it was because I knew what the 28th had been through'. Attitudes between many of the soldiers, at least, had certainly changed for the better.[40]

At the Te Poho-o-Rawiri welcome, Colonel Peter

Awatere, aware of the issues facing the two races, assured the Pakeha officials present that with their help the Maori veterans would work towards a better society in the coming peace.

> *We have gained our victories but there is a bigger battle ahead. That is the battle for existence in civilian life … If you will provide the guidance, we will do all we can to materialise the beautiful sentiments expressed tonight. We will not shirk. We will work to make this truly the best country in the world.*[41]

Despite their willingness to work towards change, for Maori such change would be gradual. After the Wellington welcome to the battalion, Noel Raihania and some of his C Company mates had bought a carton of beer and deliberately sat down to drink a few bottles on the sidewalk. The law at that time (long-standing and apparently brought in for the benefit of the race) prohibited Maori from purchasing alcohol to take away from licensed premises. On this occasion the police did nothing, even though the soldiers were flouting the law. Raihania said:

> *Katahi tonu matou ka hoki mai i te whawhai e kore pea matou e mauheretia. Engari tae atu ana ki te wa kainga ka hoki ano ki te ture ara ma te Pakeha rawa e hoko mai nga pia a kia tae rawa ki waho o te paparakauta ka homai ai a matou pia, me te toro mai a tona ringa mo tana rua pounamu hei utu mo tana mahi. Mutu rawa ake te utu atu a te tokoono, tokowaru ranei o matou he nui ke atu nga pia a te Pakeha poro haurangi nei i a te kotahi o matou.*[42]
> *(We were just back from the war and we figured we would not be locked up. When we got back home the law applied again so that we had to get a Pakeha to buy our beer and outside the pub he'd distribute it. He would hold out his hand for his two bottles as payment for his effort. When six or eight of us had each finished paying his commission, this old drunken Pakeha had more beer than any one of us.)*

Gradual though they were, changes to policies or acts of parliament would have been more difficult to achieve if Maori had been reluctant participants in the war. Once they brokered agreements in the corridors of power, Maori leaders would always point to the voluntary enlistment of their men as justification for those changes.

Notes

1. Eric Ramsden. *Sir Apirana Ngata and Maori Culture*. A.H. & A.W. Reed, Wellington, 1948, pp. 55–56.
2. Sergeant Hironi (Ceylon) Wikiriwhi. 'Maoris in the Middle East.' WA II 1 DA 68/15/4, Archives New Zealand.
3. *Gisborne Herald*, 15 September 1939.
4. In the First World War, a pioneer battalion was attached to each infantry division. These units were responsible for digging trenches, building roads and other duties behind the front line, and were expected to have fewer casualties than the infantry units.
5. Henare Kingi Waiaua to Paikea, 11 September 1939. AD 1 226/19/7 vol. 1, Archives New Zealand.
6. Wikiriwhi, 'Maoris ... Op. cit.
7. Sergeant John Walker to his wife Mary, 28 November 1943. In Mary Walker to Ngata, 20 February 1944. MS-Papers-6919-0343, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.
8. *Ibid*.
9. Nepia Mahuika. 'Aku Korero.' Memoirs of the Second World War written for his family, 1997, p. 36.
10. *Pipiwharauroa*. Vol.15, No. 6, June 2007, p. 4.
11. *Mana*. No. 27, April–May 1999, p. 38; *Pipiwharauroa*. Op. cit., p. 4.
12. *Pipiwharauroa*. Op. cit., p. 4.
13. *Mana*. No. 27, April–May 1999, p. 38; *Pipiwharauroa*. Op. cit., p. 4.
14. *Pipiwharauroa*. Op. cit., p. 4.
15. 'Report on Operations of C Company, 28 NZ (Maori) Bn during advance on Florence, 23 July–10 Aug. 1944.' WAII 1, DA 68/10/1, Archives New Zealand.
16. Personal comment by Marijka Warmenhoven, 2008.
17. Ronald Baker. 'Whanau History of Participation in the Second World War 1939–45: The 28th Maori Battalion', 2007.
18. Tuhina Hikitapua interview, 24 November 1994.
19. 'Report on Operations of C Company, 28 NZ (Maori) Bn during advance on Florence, 23 July–10 Aug. 1944.' WAII 1, DA 68/10/1, Archives New Zealand.
20. Baker. 'Whanau History ...' Op. cit.
21. J.F. Cody, *28 (Maori) Battalion*, War History Branch/Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1956, p. 398.
22. Baker. 'Whanau History ...' Op. cit.
23. *Ibid*.
24. *Ibid*.
25. *Mana*. No. 27, April–May 1999, p. 31. Waititi recovered in hospital and later returned to C Company. One of the first of his men whom he met on his return was Charlie Shelford, who presented him with a sniper's rifle saying, 'I got the bugger who got you.' Personal comment by John Waititi, 8 May 2008.
26. Baker, 'Whanau History ...' Op. cit.
27. Jack Knowles interview, 22 May 2004.
28. *Ibid*.
29. *Ibid*.
30. Personal comment by John Waititi, June 2008.
31. Leslie Hobbs. *Kiwi Down the Strada*. Whitcombe & Tombs, Christchurch, 1963, p. 85.
32. Mahuika, 'Aku Korero.' Op. cit., p. 46.
33. Leslie Hobbs. Op. cit., p. 85.
34. George Wharehinga interview, 7 November 1998.
35. Robert Ru Henry interview by Rangi Logan at Panmure RSA, 1998.
36. Nepia Mahuika interview, 8 April 1995.
37. *Gisborne Herald*, 5 September 1945, p. 4.
38. *Gisborne Herald*, 30 August 1946, p. 4.
39. Leslie Hobbs. Op. cit., p. 91.
40. Personal comment by Graham Coe, 2 April 2008.
41. *Gisborne Herald*, 8 September 1945, p. 5.
42. Personal comment by Nolan Raihania, 10 May 2008.

6

Something to fight for: New Zealand soldiers' recollections

Edited by Gianna Magnani and Angela Mori

Note: unless necessary for clearer understanding, these recollections have been reproduced without editing of text.

John Knowles

Lieutenant, 27th Battalion

My war in Tuscany

The disagreement between the American and British commanders continued to haunt the conduct of the war in the Mediterranean Theatre, even becoming apparent to the officers of lower rank. We had reached the point at which it could be said we were far better equipped than the enemy, but each time any great strategic or political prizes appeared obtainable, Alexander was denied the critical superiority required for success. Seven of his divisions were withdrawn for the 'Grand Plan'[1] and six more for an operation in Southern France. Even later the Canadian Corps was withdrawn before the Spring Offensive. The slow progress up the ravelled leg of Italy left the countryside literally ploughed by shellfire and any relief for the beleaguered population was given a low priority. It prompted a renowned war historian to say that the Allies were subjecting Italy to the cruelest

John Knowles.

Radio post in a villa used as headquarters by the 23rd Battalion in the advance towards Florence.

Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

revenge for allowing Mussolini to remain in control for so long. In central Italy Alexander had 11 divisions to hold 21 German divisions.

Following on from the New Zealand Division's arrival in Italy from North Africa it had been constantly in action from the Sangro to Cassino, and then up the Val di Comino to Sora, before going into a rest area at Arce. The general position was that the capture of Arezzo, in addition to pressure further west, had forced the enemy into another fighting withdrawal to a new line based on the River Arno. By the middle of 1944 the 8th Army had taken over from the 5th Army a 15-mile sector astride the route Siena–Empoli, which was being vacated by 2 Moroccan Div. This was the quickest route to Florence and 2NZ Div. had been directed to seize crossings over the Arno River on a thrust line: Castellina–San Casciano–Signa. On the right, 6th South African Armoured Div. would strike direct to Florence and on the left, 8th Indian Div. would give flank protection and follow up every withdrawal. The Div. sector was to be held with two battalions forward supported by armour and machine guns. While the situation remained fluid each forward battalion would conduct its own advance with Brigade coordinating times and distances. 5th Brigade with No. 1 Company of 27th (MG) Bn moved up to Castellina on 21 July. My Platoon, No. 1, was loosely attached in support of 28th Maori Battalion, but remained under direct command of Brigade.

We advanced rapidly, giving supporting fire to both 23rd and 28th Battalions from several different locations, passed through Tavarnelle and moved into a position overlooking the Pesa River valley, where we fired to good effect at enemy movement in Sambuca. Here, I was suddenly advised that my turn for LOB (Left out of Battle) had come up and at 9 a.m. on 23 July I handed over command to one of my colleagues and left the area. I was none too happy about this because I had built up an extremely efficient team and must admit to a certain amount of jealous paternalism, however I had hardly reached our B Echelon when there was a frantic call for me to return and resume command. My replacement had moved the platoon forward and come under the direct fire of a German 88, resulting in three killed and four wounded, including himself. The Company Commander

John Knowles.

who had driven me back to the platoon mentioned that he would do his best to fit in my LOB entitlement as soon as possible. This was overheard by the platoon, which made it clear that this would not be tolerated and 'Lucky Jack', a nickname I had gained through my platoon not having had any casualties since the start of the campaign, was to remain with them. Not only was I extremely flattered by this but it worked, and I was never again moved nor, I might add, did we have any further casualties. Over the following few hours I received six reinforcements and continued with a full complement of 42.

The NZ Division was holding the crest of a ridgeline facing towards Florence and, with ammunition supplies renewed, was scheduled to move forward again within 24 hours. I was able to reconnoitre an almost perfect position on a slight forward slope behind the ridgeline, and to find cover for my gun trucks behind a large villa situated right on the crest, which provided a springboard for further advance in support of the Infantry Battalions. The only problem was that the entrance to the villa was on the forward slope facing the enemy. Fortunately that night our artillery opened fire on a distant target and, under cover of their fire, we were able to move into and around behind the villa unobserved. The vehicles were sheltered under an overhang which was obviously where farm machinery had been stored. With two battalions dug in along the ridgeline there was little chance of finding myself cut off by a counterattack. So far so good, now we only had to manage to stay undetected through the next day and a half. The villa turned out to be a bigger and more pretentious mansion than the one we had left earlier, but with a difference. Although it had not been looted, everything possible had been vandalised: earthenware had been smashed, paintings torn from the walls, and wine casks in the cellar had been broached. Once we had prepared the gun pits, liaised with the neighbouring infantry and arranged our own local defence, we retired to those rooms not facing the front and not covered in the excrement the German troops loved to leave for us.

The next morning we were horrified to see an approaching jeep with its usual clouds of dust coming up the road and swinging into full view of the enemy. There were two officers in the vehicle, one in British uniform and the other in American. Still under cover, I cursed them loudly and told them to get out before they brought fire down on us. One called out that they were MFAA (Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Subcommission) officers, but that only earned them a little more of my invective and they departed. We waited with bated breath to see whether the enemy thought it worthwhile to shell the area, but we were lucky — obviously a lone reconnaissance jeep was not considered important enough for the 88[2] to reveal its position. Of course, the possibility that the vehicle might have in fact been German did occur to us, but it had headed well back into our own lines.

With radio silence being observed I could not report the incident until later, and when I did it was explained that because every region of Italy was so rich in works of art, and none so rich as Tuscany, that in an effort to protect the greatest and most nearly complete artistic heritage mankind possessed, preventive steps had been taken by Allied Command. A separate section, the MFAA, had been established as a subcommission of the Allied Control Commission with authority over the entire artistic heritage of Italy. A guide had been published and distributed down to battalion level, yet none of our

New Zealand vehicles crossing the Pesa River.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

battalions seemed to have knowledge of it. A later check revealed that 5th Brigade had heard of it and had been visited by an American officer called Hartt, now recognised as a well respected world authority on the subject. At the time it made me look at what the Germans had used to keep their backsides off the cold tiles and, of course, what we had automatically taken over. Yes, they were paintings taken off the walls and I even recognised one from my old secondary school art appreciation studies. They were immediately restored to a position leaning against the walls, and the troops' buttocks were reintroduced to the cold hard floor.

After the attack we were to again move forward, but in the meantime I was required to be at the Maori Battalion commander's elbow, the gunline being controlled by the senior section commander, a sergeant. Communication between all subunits being by radio. The Maori Battalion HQ at the time was in another lovely villa, which did not appear to have been vandalised. While we were waiting on zero hour the Maori commander, Lt. Col. Arapeta Awatere, amazed us by locating a grand piano and playing classical music by Chopin and Mozart to a standard more attuned to the concert stage. He was a man of many talents.

The move to the next bound completed, my platoon, a troop of tanks and an artillery FOO[3] were withdrawn from the immediate front and summonsed to 5th Brigade HQ. We were then included in a force called Armcav along with tanks of A Squadron, 19th Regiment, C Squadron Div. Cav., carriers from the 22nd Battalion, a troop of tank-destroying M10s and a detachment of engineers. The keeping of personal diaries or cameras was forbidden, which is a pity because all official records about this period seem at variance with what actually happened. This is not only my opinion, but others have also claimed that this is the case.

A short period of waiting at Brigade HQ ended when all communication from 28th Battalion ceased, and Armcav was ordered to 'find' the Maoris and provide any support required. It appeared that in the absence of any strong enemy opposition they had turned right, across the advance line of 23rd Battalion. Up to this point we had been lucky in that bridges over most streams had been taken and held by active local partisan forces. The tanks, followed by one of my gun trucks, then crossed a shallow canal where the depth of water started to increase, probably because floodgates further upstream had been released. The tank commander returned across the water and picked up my other three guns, ferried these over and we loaded them on to my one vehicle, and with the men on foot we continued. There was only enemy sniper opposition and shortly afterwards we found ourselves in the outskirts of the city at S. Quirico. From here on we had been given the order that Florence must be treated as an open city.[4] Fire was only to be returned if the enemy first opened fire on us, and even then it must be restricted to small arms. By the time we reached Pignone we encountered the 28th Battalion Commanding Officer walking along the road with the leading platoon, and he

directed the tanks and my machine gunners to advance to the area of Ponte Vittoria with his leading company and set up a defensive box. We were then to reconnoitre as far as Ponte Vecchio, which Intelligence had advised was the only bridge left standing, and to consider how this could be covered to prevent German reinforcements coming back over the Arno.

It was during this reconnaissance that a young woman approached us to say that she had seen the German engineers laying mines in the rubble at the southern end of the Ponte Vecchio, and she offered to show us the locations. The tank commander and I accepted her offer and, under sniper fire, she assisted us to locate and mark their sites. This act was recorded in one of our official histories and although never officially recognised, one of our more recent generals made a point of presenting her with a commemorative medal on behalf of the Army. As a result of my reconnaissance I moved my guns into Villa del' Ombrellino at Bellosguardo, and from a position in the grounds could not only cover Ponte Vecchio but for some distance both up and down the river. Two days later I observed the tanks of the South Africans advancing through Galluzzo and we were ordered to pull out. We had not fired a single shot, in spite of sniper fire from the other side of the river.

A decision had been made for political reasons that 6th South Africa Armoured Division were to be given the honour of 'liberating' Florence. Right from the beginning of the war the NZ Division had not been granted such an honour, and we were somewhat disappointed, none more so than Peter Awatere. Although the situation may appear to contain an element of confusion it should be remembered that orders were that 'while the situation remained fluid each forward battalion would conduct its own advance with Brigade co-ordinating times and distances'. So, in actual fact, no order had been disobeyed. However, it was also a fact that the moment our small supporting group reached the Maori Commander, radio contact was miraculously restored.

Soldiers from John Knowles' No. 3 gun team.

The Div. was now on the left of Florence with all three platoons of 1 Coy still supporting 5 Brigade, mainly in Harassing Fire tasks. My gunline was firing so consistently that the area of each gun appeared as only a ball of steam. The water jackets on the guns were boiling.

Following a successful attack on Empoli we were to be relieved by an American division; meanwhile a second US division on the left was to launch an attack to square the line up to the south bank of the Arno. The infantry battalion on their right flank was faced with a long well-defended slope all the way to the river. Their problem was that they ideally needed long-range machine guns, something they did not have, so my platoon was placed in support for the operation. We duly reported to the American battalion commander in his HQ at the top of the slope. The reception was not quite as I had expected; he immediately complained that he had asked for support in this, his Unit's first action, and was sent a 'junior officer with a bunch of gypsies.' His Unit, which had only just arrived in the theatre, presented an immaculate appearance, trousers were even pressed, and I had to admit we could not compete. To start with it was more than a year since we had had a new issue, it was in the change of seasons so that a mixture of summer and winter clothing was being worn and after several trips to the Laundry and Bath Unit one was lucky not to end up with items originating in some Allied nation.

Added to which, our gun trucks would hardly have been accepted in a secondhand car yard. Small wonder that he merely ordered me to 'join the advance with Joe's company.' I countered with, 'Sir, I am not under command, but in support. Please detail the tasks you wish me to perform and then leave me to do them.' He did so with bad grace. We went into a position actually in rear of his HQ, on a reverse slope with my OP[5] in a small tower above a farm building. There were so many towers and spires on the crest that the chance of drawing enemy attention was minimal. During his attack we were able to utilise the arc of fire and beaten zone to cover his leading formations all the way to the objective, and then on to the enemy positions on the far bank of the river. At one particular time we concentrated on enemy withdrawing across an underwater bridge and inflicted maximum damage. I was aware of the CO's presence alongside me in my OP. Afterwards he expressed amazement that the gunline operated so efficiently, as though it was part of a parade ground drill, and that we had inflicted more damage to the enemy than his entire battalion. He asked how long we had been in action and I delighted in replying, 'some of us since 1939.' A slight exaggeration, but it had the desired effect: 'Holy cow.' He personally shook hands with every member before we departed. Then we were on the move again, back to the 8th Army front.

Notes

1. This refers to the landing in Normandy.
2. Anti-tank machine gun.
3. Forward Observation Officer.
4. The term 'open city' refers to a city that has, upon explicit or tacit agreement by the belligerent parties, been given over to the enemy without fighting in order to avoid its destruction. The statute of open city is attributed taking into consideration the special historical interests of the city or due to the substantial number of civilians in the population. A city declared 'open' must not, however, present any strategic interests in the conflict taking place because its liberation must not determine the final outcome of the war.
5. Observation Post.

German prisoners. MacMillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch

Bob Cochrane.

Bob Cochrane, medical orderly

(Extract from a letter sent to the editors of this book by Lieutenant John Knowles after publication of the Italian edition.)

As a point of interest, the man standing by the truck in the photograph above deserves a mention. His name is Bob Cochrane and he was one of the Platoon who had been trained by our battalion doctor to be our medical orderly. He was picked out because as a farmer from a remote area of New Zealand he had taken a first aid course to care for his family, and a veterinary course to care for his animals. As I think I explained, our semi-independent type of operation meant that we had not only a mechanic/armourer equipped to company scale, but we also had our own medical orderly, Bob. He had stocked up on medical supplies and equipment from a broken down German hospital truck and opened up a 'clinic' any time our position was near a village. He recorded 19 deliveries from Italian mothers caught without help in forward areas. Who knows what famous Italian businessman had his bottom first spanked by a Kiwi back country sheep farmer?

Eric Batchelor

Platoon Commander, 23rd Battalion

The battles at San Donato[1]

You were at the action of San Donato. Now, it was after Cassino, I believe. What was the action surrounding San Donato?

Well, we were moving forward to an attack and the Germans shelled us and the platoon officer got wounded, wounded in the arm, so the company commander gave me a job to do. I took over at that stage. He said, take a section out and have a look and see what you can find. So I took a section out. I came up against a house, put some men around one side and around another side and I went in, from the back end, you might say. It was a big, double-storied house, there was a big stable there but, strange as it may seem, I could smell the Germans. I could smell sauerkraut and I could hear voices inside so I booted in the door and rushed in. There were four Germans in there so we collected those.

Now the boys were coming in by that time. Took them out to the door, spoke to them, asked their Sergeant Major if he had any friends anywhere around the place and he said, oh yes, one. So I said, right, where is he, what's his name? He said, Schmitt, so I went to the door and yelled out 'Schmitt' and the silly bugger answered. I went out and collected him too. At roughly about the same time in the same area, after a bit of a scrap, I went out, poking my nose around the shelled-out homes and houses. I went into one and there was a pair of boots sticking out from under a groundsheet so I gave them a boot and a dirty great German jumped up in front of me. So we collected him and asked him if he had any cobbers and he said one, so I collected him as well, so it was done. But after collecting those first few Germans, the Battalion Commander told me to take the whole platoon out as we were going to put an attack in on the flat. To take the platoon out and clear the whole feature. So we did and created a lot of bloody noise.

And you must have collected Schmitt's binoculars as well?

Oh yes, that's right. This bloke Schmitt's spot binoculars. I got those.

When you were out on this particular action or actions like it, was your objective to lay waste to the enemy or was it to try and bring them back for an information purpose?

Do whatever was required. Mostly we brought them back because they didn't seem to fight too much once you got close to them.

Just for the tape, I'll just say that this particular action in San Donato was when Eric received his first Distinguished Conduct Medal, or DCM.

At the time, what do you think would have led to the action? Now, obviously you were involved in a lot of patrols and a lot of actions. What do you think of this first DCM? The action was more unique, if you like, or …

Well, I didn't ever give it much thought, actually. I could never ever see any reason why I got a DCM. There didn't seem to be much there that I did. But mind you, you'd never get anything unless you'd got a bunch of good blokes watching your backside. It's more them that really earn a decoration, I think. You were just the lucky one out in front. But the fact that I had to take over a platoon at a moment's notice, that helped too.

So, showing leadership?

Precisely. Probably that's what a sergeant was for, anyway.

So, you obviously brought back a number of prisoners?

Oh yes, sometimes. Quite a lot.

And this particular time in San Donato?

Well, what made things so successful was when the rest of the battalion put an attack in on the flat, there wasn't a shot fired. All the Germans had cleared out. We'd created so much bloody noise, so much fuss and bother

you might say, on the left flank that they thought there was a hell of an attack coming in. Course we got their forward patrols. They'd had no information of what was going on. So that would help.

After that particular skirmish, were you sort of heading towards Florence at that stage?
Yes, we would be. We struck quite a bit of opposition there. I still had the platoon at this stage. Went forward and managed to liberate a village, cleared the countryside that way. I wanted to go into Florence but they said no. But I found out later that McCurl had got in before me, the bugger. He didn't want me going in, I don't think. And we got the odd German there. It was all information from the prisoners.

Was Florence a big scrap, or not particularly?
Not from our point of view, no. We actually liberated it but we had to stand still and let the South Africans take it. It was their turn to take something.

Was that how it worked?
That's how it worked, yeah. Yes, they hadn't done a hell of a lot so I suppose they needed something. Nice city, though. Got leave in Florence.

Right. I was going to ask you about leave in Italy. We talked about leave in North Africa and, of course, Cairo was a place of leave. Obviously you were on the move quite a bit in Italy. In fact, you were on the move most of the time. In terms of leave, what sort of leave did you get and how did you use it?
You could get a week, about seven days. That's about all. I got seven days in Bari, I think, at one stage and I had seven days in Florence. That's all the leave I had. In North Africa, as far as that went, you didn't get any leave from the battlefront. Only if you happened to be back in Cairo or Maadi for manoeuvres, or whatever it may be. You'd get leave then, you'd get a week. You might get a fortnight if you were lucky.

How did you spend your time in Florence?
Well, strange as it might seem, we went wandering around a lot of the churches, looking at the Michelangelo paintings, and so on.

There's the big Uffizi Gallery in Florence. Did you see it? It might have been closed.
Didn't see it.

It would have been closed and probably the paintings would have been shipped away.
Yes, they'd be all locked away safely. The only reason we saw them in the churches was because they were painted on the walls and the ceilings. Of course there wasn't much in the way of shops open. Nothing much to spend your money on. Bit of wine, a bit of beer, now and again. Wasn't too much beer in Italy. Plenty of wine.

Notes

1. Oral testimony preserved in the Waiouru Army Museum, New Zealand

Laurie Aitken

Sergeant, 23rd Battalion Mortar Platoon

The 23rd Battalion between San Donato and Fabbrica

At that time I was a Sergeant in the 23rd Battalion Mortar Platoon. On 22 July, north of San Donato, a patrol under Second Lieutenant Allan McCartney was sent forward to ascertain if Point 337[1] was clear of the enemy. This patrol did not return and that afternoon I had to follow the route taken by the patrol to determine their fate.

A very slow task, having to crawl in places due to lack of cover. What I discovered was devastating to me. 'All killed.' I had known Allan all my life, having lived four miles[2] apart on the Otago Peninsula.

On 23 July we moved into Sambuca in readiness for the attack on Fabbrica, heavy shelling during the

day. Information received by Major William Hoseit, Commanding Officer of A Company, indicated that Fabbrica was clear of enemy troops. This proved false. As the company neared Fabbrica they met with terrifying enemy resistance, resulting in heavy casualties.

From memory I believe there were over 20 killed in this encounter, including William Hoseit, plus the seven or eight soldiers from the previous day's patrol. Company relieved that night by the 21st Battalion.

Notes

1. San Martino a Cozzi.
2. 1 mile = 1.609 km.

Allan Coleman

Soldier, 20th Regiment

22 July 1944

Two letters from Mum, parcel from Rene. Mac and I went to a village today, got very drunk and met an old English Baroness. They would not believe us New Zealanders as thought NZrs were all black and wore rings in their noses according to German propaganda.

23 July 1944

It is one year since leaving New Zealand. Wrote to Ril, Mary, Doris and had an Air-gram from Peggy. It is very wet and muddy and the outlook is far from A1 but it has been, and probably will be, a lot worse.

24 July 1944

Usual day — thunder and passing storms. Hitler has been wounded. What a pity he was not killed. Air-gram from Marj and Mum, have just had a parcel from home and a real beaut, too. Went to see Ian in evening and am writing now as I lie in bed. The crickets are chirping and all is quiet. Suppose by tomorrow night it will be different as we are off once more to see old Jerry.

This will be my last entry for a while as I am leaving this behind, as I would not want it to fall into enemy hands. Must remember to burn all letters and addresses before moving as it is easily forgotten and no indication of unit can be carried in action.

Well, for now I close this dairy and hope to continue it before long, as long as the vagaries of War permit.

25 July 1944

Leaving at 7.10, we got to our new area, a distance of 64 miles, driving all night through the dust. Siena is a beautiful place. We park amid oak trees and got a few hours glorious sleep. Rex is in hospital, new gunner Shirly Hodson. From here on I cannot remember dates as it was just one action after another.

At Tavarnelle we waited a day then pulled on. Saw Ted Warren on the way to Cerbaia, San Michele, San Casciano, etc. Jerry was very tough and counterattacked most of the time. Patrol 9 with Infantry took La Romola starting out in the dark and getting there in daylight. The Germans had just left the area ahead of us: candles were still burning and meals still hot on the tables. One Tiger was captured intact as the crew were all asleep, thank God, or I would never be writing this now.

All that day we stayed at La Romola and Ted[1] stonked (shelled) us worse than any time I have ever seen. Laurie Clark got a bit through his leg and a Tommie[2] alongside me got a nasty bit of shrapnel in his back. It's just one shell after another and that night the noise is as deafening as our own and Jerry's guns pound away, mostly at us as we are a wedge in his defences. Spandau, Vickers, Grenades and Bren are going off all about us and it is hard to know if you are in your lines.

We are all dirty and hungry and sleep is impossible even though to lie down would mean instant slumber. The 88s[3] are screaming overhead and the top storey of the house we are in has been hit times without number.

The dawn finds us ready for the expected counterattack but it does not come so start to get a cup of chai. That day Patrol 9 goes out to probe his defences and after

Allan Coleman.

advancing ¼ mile we are heavily stonked and Spandaus make things unpleasant. I was in the front Tank, there is no Infantry and where we were stopped a Spandau was firing on us from a place we could not reply to. I saw a whole tree alongside us disappear in a burst of red flame from an 88 and the resultant airburst wounded our Commander.

Two Tigers were reported advancing towards us and as our guns could not knock them out, did not feel too happy.

Our own Artillery opened up with all they had but unfortunately dead on top of us. I thought that stonk would never end and as it was steaming hot inside the Tank and powder fumes were everywhere, it was not exactly like home.

Saw what I thought was a Ted hopping across a wall below us so in a burst of generosity gave him about half a belt for good measure.

Eventually retire to former position and able to inspect damage. The Tank was a shambles as everything outside was full of shrapnel holes. The ration box had suffered heavily and tea, sugar, thermette, honey, bully, etc, was mixed up in a tangled mess. Lights, siren, etc, were gone with the wind and tin hats full of holes where they were hung outside.

That night we got ammo and fuel and managed to get 1½ hours sleep.

Next morning we left again and supported Infantry to take heights overlooking Florence. The Artillery put down a heavy barrage, which crept over us and over the PBI (poor bloody infantry) and stopped in front of Jerry. Owen Hughes was wounded and Ray Pierce killed. A Spandau was firing in scrub around Tanks and made it impossible to get out. Next morning we were overlooking Florence and it looks like a beautiful big place but the hills behind look like a second Cassino.

6 August 1944

Neil and I go back to Tavarnelle and spend a day with some Italian friends (Guglielmo and William Grochini), hitchhike back (23 miles) at 10 p.m. Letters from Mum and one from Jean. Sent Air-grams to Mum and Johnny.

7 August 1944

Jerry is doing a bit of shelling but nothing to worry about. Am going to write some letters today. At night the sky is a sheet of light from the Guns and sparkling tracer makes patterns across no man's land.

Question is often raised: do our Gunners never sleep? Don't know what we would do without a sense of humour.

Visited Dick Meyer's grave yesterday and made quite a nice job of it with rocks all round. He got it when an AP (armour piercing shell) went through the Tank he was in.

8 August 1944

Wrote to Marj, Mum and Johnny. Inspection of Tanks. Medical inspection A1.

10 August 1944

Wrote Air-grams to Doris, Jean, Abel and letter to Mum.

11 August 1944

Jerry very active last night with a lot of Spandau (German Machine Gun) fire and our Artillery put down a terrific barrage. Sky lit up with flashes and roar is continuous. Neil and I away playing bridge. Do a bit of washing. Fine day, but windy. 8 p.m.: the nightly hymn of late has just started and both sides are at it but Jerry is getting much

more than he sends. It has been raining cats and dogs and mud is up to your neck.

12 August 1944
Neil and I went to Tavarnelle once more and I took scarpes (shoes) for Laura Danya (nice looking girl). Left at 4 p.m. and got back with Yanks.

Notes

1. British slang, adapted from the Italian word, 'tedeschi', meaning a German soldier in the Italian Campaign.
2. German wartime slang for a British soldier.
3. Anti-tank machine gun.

Desmond Arthur Dawson
Soldier, 27th Battalion

I was a member of the 27th Machine Gun Battalion 2NZEF,[1] and would have passed through Tavarnelle. Val di Pesa on the way to San Michele, where we arrived approximately 27 July 1944. The battle for San Michele is referred to as a 'miniature Cassino', where our group lost all of our equipment due to enemy and friendly shell fire. I still have photos of San Michele taken just after the battle, plus photos of the same area taken in 1982 when I revisited the village.

Notes

1. The Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force was the force New Zealand sent overseas during the Second World War. It was numbered to differentiate it from the expeditionary force dispatched in the First World War.

Martyn Uren
Soldier, 26th Battalion

Towards Florence[1]
On Thursday 20 July, we were told that we were packing up for a move south of Florence, there to join in a six-division attack in this central sector. Our divisional objective was the Pisa–Florence road just to the west of Florence, while the task of taking that city was given to the South Africans.

On the 21st I watched the guns go past, a strange feeling, and tagged on near the end of the column with my six or seven B-echelon vehicles.

To my disappointment we bypassed Arezzo, went west 30 miles, turned north 10 miles, bypassing yet another city famous in Italian antiquity, Siena. However, I was to see much of this city at a later date.

Our bivouac that night was amid the oaks, six miles north of it. Here, there stretched for miles a splendid oak forest and we pitched our bivvies on the mossy turf and lichen-covered stones of a low rolling hill. At our back in a perfect emerald setting was the pearl-like city, throughout the ages walled against aggression. Rising from out of the white palaces and buildings I saw the black and white spire of its famous cathedral. Set as it was amid the vineyards and green fields and oaks, closed within high walls, Siena seemed to me one of the most jewel-like cities I had ever seen. My memory ran to these words of Hutton, and I reserved for the future the pleasure of a visit to the town that so captures the imagination of the traveller.

> *A situation lofty and noble, an aspect splendid yet ethereal, a history brave, impetuous and unfortunate, a people still living yet still unspoiled by strangers … caught about by her vineyards as with a kirtle of green, girdled with silver and gold — the silver of her olives mixed with the gold of her corn.*

Its architecture, even from this distant hill, seemed to me rather wonderful. Indeed, Siena has constantly attracted visitors for the sake of its art and its architecture, for the picturesque nature of its surroundings; and students, too, who come to hear the purest Italian in all Italy. It seems that Siena has shut in and has closely guarded that which is beautiful; that from its long struggle as a powerful

M10 tank destroyer in San Casciano. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

republic, with its equally powerful neighbours Florence and Perugia, it has gained a separate entity, a separate history, a real grandeur and simplicity all its own.

At dusk on Saturday the gun group moved forward 10 miles. On Sunday I went forward in a jeep and reconnoitred a position with the Battery Captain less than a mile behind the guns. It was a most unusual position, rather like a crow's nest, and from this eyrie we could clearly see the battle down below us. I saw our infantry take Tavarnelle[3] on the road from Poggibonsi to Florence, saw a tank battle and a smoke screen that I could not understand. Who was who out there was impossible to decipher, there was the smoke and fog of war, the crump of shells, the mushroom billows of dust which are shells bursting on the plain.

I went up to the guns — why I do not know, perhaps I was lonely — and, as if to point out that, after all, life in the wagonlines or B Echelon was perhaps a quieter, safer place, a fast, huge 170 mm shell hit the road behind our tail, almost closing the road for all time. On the way back we had to steer a perilous path around its crater.

At 5 that evening, so that these large vehicles might have the cover of dusk in which to occupy the mountain crow's nest, I brought the B Echelon forward nine miles, and we settled down for the night.

On Monday morning the battle was rolling away in the blue distance of the Florence plain. Progress was good; our infantry being well past Tavarnelle on the road to Florence. By Tuesday it was apparent that the New Zealanders were some miles ahead in a salient that pointed straight for the objective city. We could hear the Indians on our left rear and the South Africans on our right rear.

The guns by now had moved twice: we were 10 miles behind, too far for communication and rations. At 2 p.m. we moved 10 miles north to an area past Tavarnelle. Life was one long pack-up-and-move, very much a war of movement. Here the guns one moment were 500 yards ahead of us; next morning seven or ten miles away. It was good. The spirit was good. Florence was giving the New Zealanders something to go for. They had the bit in their teeth. All ranks enjoyed themselves.

There is little doubt that had we been allowed we should have taken Florence many days before it was finally captured. But we were in a salient and much was dangerous. To leave the flanks open was a risk that the army commanders do not wish, nor do they need, to take. Furthermore, what was probably more important, the taking of Florence was earmarked for the South African division. The ultimate result was, as you will see, that we waited for a week for our flank to catch up; finally got impatient and entered Southern Florence; whereupon the Maoris (who at 3 a.m. were really beginning to enjoy the place) were ordered out and the South Africans invited in.

But I am anticipating events: let us return to the war of movement.

New Zealand soldiers on the banks of the Pesa River.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

On Wednesday 26 July, I again visited the guns. Already the battle had rolled away. The infantry were then about eight miles south of Florence. From a hill that day I watched a dozen dive bombing Kittyhawks swoop down upon a concentration of Tiger tanks and guns, then watched a divisional 'stonk'[3] crash down upon them, which filled the air with clouds of dust and smoke.

Perhaps my diary entry of 27 July will give some idea of the spirit and fast movement of these splendid few days:

> *Guns moved another seven miles forward, now rather to the southwest of Florence. Went to guns in a jeep. They seem to be right up on the tail of the infantry (they were, a thousand yards behind them). The attack last night was a successful one. All the villages around us now were in German hands until this morning. Shelling on the road as I went up; I missed the Battery Captain, went back in spite of shellfire, missed B.C. again. B. Echelon moved new area, caught them up 4 p.m., brewed tea. Moved battery on to Route Two so as to support 4th Armoured Brigade's attack on Florence along Route Two.*

New Zealand soldiers observing a destroyed Tiger tank.
MacMillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch

It is indeed a busy war that necessitates moving B Echelon three times in the one day! It took me all day to find them and I caught them at 4 p.m., moving in accordance with this new plan.

Beside the road to Florence winds the Pesa, a pretty tree-skirted river that flows softly over rounded pebbles. On its either bank are cornfields and meadows ripe with golden wheat, hastily vacated by their Fascist lords. We stopped for days in a wheat field such as this. Our wheels crushed down the heavy-headed stalks as we came in off the bitumen road, and I am afraid that the best use the yellow crop was put to that season was to provide us with soft beds on which to sleep. A few yards ahead of us was the blown bridge where Route Two crosses the Pesa, before that river turns northwards to follow the road which crossed it. This bridge was already being replaced by a Bailey. Even as we dallied in the field (the guns had crossed the river, which was easily fordable), engineers bolted together the huge Meccano set and the road was open.

Ahead of us stretched a line of hills, undulating and fertile, crowned by villas and farm houses. The nearest of these hills had, nestling on its summit, a grand old house belonging to a Fascist.[4] The position commanded a splendid view of the Pesa Valley and, on clear days, it was even possible to see the dome of the magnificent Cathedral of Florence.

One day Doug and I went up there in a jeep. The house is surrounded by stately cypress trees that stand like furled umbrellas, timeless guardians of the mansion. Inside was furniture such as I had never seen before. Carved oak chairs and tables, tapestries, great carved wardrobes,

in song; the infantry and tanks edging ever nearer to the beautiful city of the plains.

From the hill we saw the city's suburbs spreading like a flock of sheep over the green meadow. We saw, too, our dive-bombing fighter planes swooping down like gulls upon the German guns and tanks.

This was the last. On the night of the 3rd our armour and infantry had fought their bitter way across the flat expanse; they had dominated the low features to the southeast. At 3 a.m. the Maoris jubilantly entered southern Florence, within four hours they were withdrawn again.

This occupation, however, took effect only as far as the Arno River, which cuts the city into two unequal portions. For days the shrine of art, culture and music knew a reign of terror. The Germans firmly established themselves in buildings on the northern shore and machine gunned, sniped and mortared down the city streets from across the river.

A room in Villa Piatti, used by the Germans as an observation point and subsequently destroyed by the 26th Battalion.
From Diamond Trails of Italy *by Martyn Uren*

On that Friday I made an attempt to get into Florence in a truck, but could find no bridge to cross the small river to the south of it. I did, however, inadvertently come across our next gun position, which was situated in a field of deep luscious grass, great red tomatoes, and peach trees heavy with ripe fruit. Here I stayed for long enough to see our guns come in, then retired to our casa on the hill. On the road I passed the still smoking hulk of a Tiger tank, the smell of death pervading the air.

The following day we were withdrawn and Canadians took over our positions in the orchards. For a couple of days we were to rest in the dried-up bed of the Pesa, then to relieve the 8th Indian Division on the left flank of the 8th Army. And so to the shallow expanse of rounded pebbles we withdrew, pitching our bivouac tents in the Pesa's course, hoping that the waters would not be released by some demolition upstream.

From here I did eventually gain admission into Florence. Doug took me in his jeep. We used the same road around the low hills, passing the now quiet remains of the grotesque Tiger, and not far away from it three hulks of Shermans.

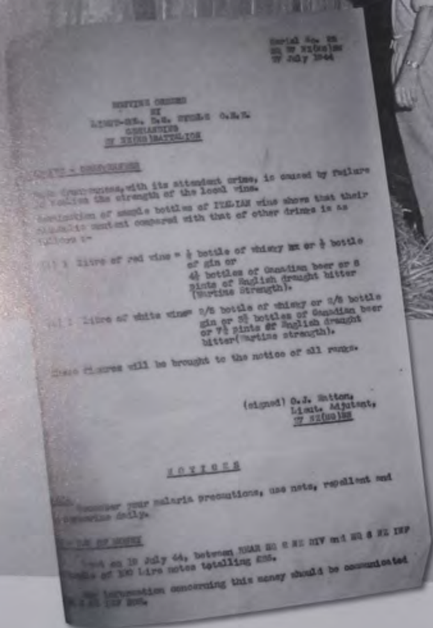
The beautiful city on the Arno, home of Dante and Michelangelo, came upon us suddenly round the bend of the hill road. We saw the river and its seven bridges, the river that gave Florence its raison d'etre, and knew ironically that this was No Man's Land. No Man's Land in the city that has given to the world its greatest art and some wonderful literature! Here in the centre of the 'Athens of Italy' was drawn a deadline, across which none could pass. And even as we entered the town by a new Bailey across the small river at its most southern extremity (where I had failed to cross two days before), we heard machine guns clattering and echoing down the wide streets.

We had hoped to see an art gallery but, of course, this was impossible. All the treasures painted by the peerless

hands of Giotto, Andrea Orcogna,[5] Ghirlandaio, Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Machiavelli were hidden well away; and the noisy guns that sprayed the streets barred the way to further exploration. We contented ourselves with poking our jeep through all the streets south of the river and thinking back on what we might have seen. Each street opened out into wide vistas of the beautiful countryside, as if in invitation to those who sought inspiration to come and drink at the pool of learning and culture. Thus speaks Cecil Headlam[6] in reference to the Lily of Tuscany:

> *From all the surrounding hills, through vineyards and cornfields and olive plantations, flanked by slim cypresses and gardens laden with lilies and irises, you look across a smiling land upon city beautiful, famous*

New Zealand vehicles at Sugana, advancing towards Florence past destroyed Sherman tanks from 8 Troop, B Squadron, 20th Armoured Regiment, knocked out during the first attack on La Romola on 28 July. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand



Serial No. [illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible] July 1944

ROUTINE ORDERS
BY
LIEUT-COL. [illegible] O.B.E.
COMMANDING
[illegible] BATTALION

[illegible] - DRUNKENNESS

[illegible], with its attendant crime, is caused by failure [illegible] the strength of the local wine.

[illegible] of sample bottles of ITALIAN wine shows that their [illegible] content compared with that of other drinks is as [illegible]:-

[illegible] 1 litre of red wine = ½ bottle of whisky or ½ bottle of gin or 4½ bottles of Canadian beer or 8 pints of English draught bitter (Wartime Strength).

[illegible] 1 litre of white wine 2/5 bottle of whisky or 2/5 bottle gin or 3¾ bottles of Canadian beer or 7¼ pints of English draught bitter (Wartime strength).

[illegible] figures will be brought to the notice of all ranks.

(signed) O.J. [illegible],
Lieut. Adjutant,
[illegible]

NOTICES

[illegible] your malaria precautions, use nets, repellent and [illegible] daily.

[illegible] OF MONEY

[illegible] on 19 July 44, between [illegible] and [illegible] of 100 Lire notes totalling [illegible].

[illegible] information concerning this money should be communicated [illegible].

'Drunkenness is mostly caused by underestimating the strength of the local wine. The analysis of ordinary bottles of Italian wine show that the alcoholic level contained in them is the following, comparing it with other beverages: 1 litre of red wine is equal to half a bottle of whisky or half a bottle of gin or 4½ bottles of Canadian beer or 8 pints of English draught beer (during the war). 1 litre of white wine: 2/5 bottle of whiskey or 2/5 bottle of gin or 3¾ bottle of Canadian beer or 7¼ pints of English draught beer. These examples must be made known to all ranks.'

Order by the Lieutenant Colonel of the 27th Battalion, July 1944

in history, famous in commerce, famous in art and letters and for the adventures of the soul of her great sons.

But now, for a brief few days, blood ran in the gutters. We came to the end of a street and ran into a smoking pile of rubble. A Canadian came out and said, 'Just 10 feet to your left is a bad spot. Jerry is sniping down the street and he is mighty deadly.' 'What happened here?' we asked, pointing to the ruin. 'Mortared it an hour ago,' was the reply. 'The river is a hundred yards past here. Two people killed here today.'

And blood upon a street corner: a few hundred yards away a saddened, bewildered crowd watched a woman run across a fire-swept intersection; saw her fall at a burst of machine gun fire; saw a man, who ran to pick her up, fall, too; applauded by hissing in their teeth,[7] a British armoured car, under command of a ridiculously cool major, which ran into the hail of bullets and fired a Browning at the house that sheltered the Germans, while some Italian Red Cross men rescued the two who were hurt. A strange sight to disturb the serenity of Florence!

The city that produced the peaceful beauty of the writings of Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca and Villani was now writhing in misery and torture. For many days, and even weeks, there was no water supply as the Germans had tapped the mains. Nor was there food until we captured all the city by forcing them to evacuate. The position, militarily, was difficult. We could not, or rather would not, fight a battle in such a monument of age and grace. So Florence suffered. Her quiet byways, which concealed artisans in silk and leather, alabaster and ivory, painting and sculpture, were ruffled by the wind of war, and flecked by its blood. But never desecrated: she was saved, it seemed, by the memory of her greatness. Her literature and her art reached out appealing hands, and the lily of the Tuscan plains was spared.

A New Zealand soldier checks provisions, near the Pesa River.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

Notes

1. Excerpt from Martyn Uren, *Diamond Trails of Italy*, Collins, Auckland, 1945.
2. Tavarnelle Val di Pesa.
3. This term herein used is one coined by Brigadier 'Steve' Weir (now Major General of the 46th Division), one of the greatest artillery commanders of the war. It came into being first at Alamein, where we learnt to concentrate every gun we had upon one important target, however small.
4. Villa Piatti, owned by Count Piatti, now called Villa S. Andrea a Fabbrica.
5. Andrea di Cione di Arcangelo, known as L'Orcagna (active in Florence between 1343 and 1368) was an important Italian painter, sculptor and architect. As an architect he was famous for the tabernacle in the Loggia di Orsanmichele (1355–59).
6. Cecil Headlam, English historian and writer, author of many travel stories.
7. Italian method of applause, also used at operas when asking for an encore of an aria that has been well rendered. This sibilant sound is typical of the quiet emotion of the Italians; they rarely shout, even at horse races.

Sergeant J.G. Male

2nd NZ Division Field Security Section

Intelligence Service Report
San Casciano, July 1944

On the morning of 25 July we heard at Div. HQ that San Casciano had fallen, and about 3 o'clock that afternoon Jock and I loaded our gear on the Dodge[1] and set out. Two miles from San Casciano, where the tarseal started winding up to the town, we passed the 22nd NZ (Motorised) Battalion on tanks, resting at the roadside.

Everything was quiet and we couldn't even hear gunfire. Nearer the town, at a diversion, a Bern carrier sailed out of a vegetable patch, laden with marrows. One of the crew gave us half a dozen. It was still absolutely quiet.

San Casciano had been smacked about quite a lot on the outskirts, and there wasn't a civilian to be seen. We pulled up as near to the centre of the town as we could, at a crossroad where the road bent toward the country again. The engineers had taped off the streets and there were 'Mine' notices everywhere. There were still no civilians in sight, and it looked as if we would have a job finding a billet. One big white house near the crossroad looked promising, but the front was plastered with notices about mines. However, we reconnoitered it carefully, treading through the rubbish and broken glass that littered every floor. The house was bare. What hadn't been hidden by the owner before he fled had been thoroughly looted. We returned to the truck, to survey the rest of the town. A civilian poked his head out of a building and we promptly grabbed him. The Municipio,[2] he said, had been completely blown up by the Germans before they left. The Carabinieri Caserma[3] was also uninhabitable. He didn't think any Carabinieri had stayed behind. The Casa del Fascio[4] right behind us, that big building with the tower.

The Casa del Fascio was the least damaged building in San Casciano, and we selected a big room on the ground floor for an office. There was another room upstairs crowded with furniture, and we made the first civilians we found sweep out the office and install furniture. A room next door would serve as a billet in the meantime. The next thing to do was to put up our shingle — a Servizio di Sicurezza[5] notice on the doors, and signs in the streets.

It was while Jock was painting a big FSS[6] sign on a wall down the street that we learned Jerry[7] wasn't so far away after all. He was painting away placidly — hardly any noise to indicate that the war was still on — when there was a burst of Spandau fire into the wall a couple of feet over his head. Jock decided not to worry about the rest of the sign. We learned from some men from the 22nd Battalion that they themselves, soon after we had passed them on the road earlier in the afternoon, had been mortared, with casualties.

By 1800 hrs we were fairly comfortably established and after a brew-up we set out looking for business. Jock proceeded to search the Casa del Fascio for documents, and I went out in to the streets to see how many Italians were beginning to show up. The first I saw were two young men in shorts, with large packs, obviously from some distance away. I took them to the office and got their story. They lived some distance ahead, and had hiked from south of Rome, following up the advance. No, they hadn't seen any AMG[8] proclamations, and they didn't know they weren't supposed to come into a forward area. The usual story. Might be all right; might not be. Obvious cases for Refugee Interrogation Point. Difficulty was where to keep them overnight. I took them along to the billet, gave them something to eat and set them to work cleaning up. Tomorrow they could go down to Section HQ at Main Div. and from there to the POW[9] cage and RIP.[10]

Meanwhile, Jock hadn't found much of interest in the Casa del Fascio beyond a few unimportant PNF,[11] GIL[12] and Dopolavoro[13] documents; a photograph of Mussolini, a Republican Fascist flag and some flimsy tin hats. The

Lieutenant H.W. Tingey in the turret of a New Zealand M10. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

fascists would have to wait until more civilians arrived back to give us information.

The night was noisy and sleepless, the first of several such. We had 25-pounder batteries just behind San Casciano, and Jerry was not only ranging on the batteries but systematically searching the town. At 2200 hrs our Vickers machine guns, posted up on buildings all around us, opened with a ferocious chatter. A counterattack?, we speculated uneasily. We were cut off from information, and it was uncomfortable to think that San Casciano was the head of a wedge-shaped salient that Jerry might try to straighten out. But we remembered the amount of armour that had rolled past during the afternoon, and were reassured.

Next morning Italians began trickling back into San Casciano, mostly standing around in sad groups looking at the wreckage of their houses. First visitor was the vice-capo of the local partisans, and at last we were able to get some reliable dope on San Casciano. Population of the commune: 14,000 (normally, that is), plus 3500 refugees. Just about everybody, however, is in hiding in the fields. About 80 partisans operated in the neighborhood, but they too have gone to ground. The Carabinieri are in hiding, the Maresciallo[14] in charge of the Caserma went off with the Germans. Not only was the Municipio destroyed, but the Podestà[15], the Segretario Communale[16] and most of the other officials preferred to take their chances with the Germans. San Casciano, says our partisan, was a stronghold of Republican Fascists, and it's likely that we shall find a good proportion of them have escaped with

Jerry. The partisans and the local Committee of Liberation will be able to give us all the political dope we want.

Our first and primary job, however, is not politics but military security proper, and this entails, first and most importantly, the control of civilians who are wandering about in the forward areas. Those coming through the lines from Florence and the North must be detained, interrogated and checked against blacklists. Those coming from the south and trying to cross the lines to enemy country must also be brought in smartly. Movement, in fact, must be cut down to minimum, and the first thing to do is issue a proclamation setting up a 1 km restriction. According to the strict letter of the security book, 10 kms movement is permitted, but here we are in a very forward salient, and until things are clearer we'll make our own laws. To enforce the proclamation we shall need about 20 reliable Italians to operate 'checkposts' on all the roads near the town. Fortunately there arrives a Carab who was in service in the town and vouched for by the partisans. He is appointed temporary Marescíallo and instructed to select 20 good partisans for blockpost work, and smartly.

An AMG Civil Affairs Officer arrived that day, surveyed the ruins of the town despondently, and observed that there didn't seem to be many civilians or civil affairs to administer. We passed on what we know, and he set up office in the same building as ourselves, spending the morning posting proclamations.

After lunch we (AMG and ourselves) are chatting idly in the foyer of our building when some intensive hate arrives. First a salvo about fifty yards down the road. Boom, whistle, crash, and glass tinkles from windows and dust rises. Come in out of the rain, says AMG, and we retire to a secure inner room. Later someone claimed he had counted over 300 shells in the town. It means, we reflect, that civilians will be even less inclined to return home.

The day's most interesting visitor is Benchi Osvaldo di Pilade, who announces himself as Inspector of all Committees of Liberation in Firenze province, and

Destroyed buildings, Florence.
MacMillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch

mentions casually that for some time past he has been coming and going between the lines, using three forged identity cards in the process. He claims a long history of anti-Fascist activity; sentenced in 1926 to 20 years' imprisonment, of which he served three years solitary confinement on the Island of Elba; then six and a half years in various prisons on the mainland; and next three and a half years of special surveillance. He passes on much useful stuff about underground resistance in Florence, but since he obviously cannot be permitted to continue his travels between German and Allied-held territory, he is given a job helping reorganise the Municipio. Later we may take him along to Florence with us; if and when.

Evening meal is interrupted by a distraught young signorina with a sad tale about her papa being removed by two New Zealand soldiers and a blond interpreter, and taken away to a mysterious 'Comando Inglese' for questioning. Reason given: soldiers have found Fascist documents in her papa's house. But this was all a mistake; the documents had been stored in the house with the belongings of one of the local doctors, a big-time fascist who had since escaped with the Germans. Papa hadn't known a thing about the documents. We know that no member of the New Zealand Field Security section spirited Papa away, and promise the signorina we'll make inquiries. (Two days later, Papa was still missing, but the third day he turns up, having been taken along by the soldiers, it transpires, to another Field Security section, there questioned, and later released. Memo: troops should be warned again that detention of civilians and searching of houses is a job for Field Security and Field Security only.)

Third day. Five Carabinieri proper have turned up in town, and they have been placed under command of Pietro, our acting-Maresciallo. The 20 partisans, after a good deal of lecturing and instruction, are working the road checks fairly efficiently, and are bringing in a steady stream of customers, mostly young men who have lately come through the lines or are trying to get north. Typical example is that of Biagoni Giovanni di Adamo and Greco Giuseppe fu Angelo, who were stopped by a control point just south of San Casciano early in the morning. Interrogated in our office, they admitted dejectedly that they had left Naples on 10 July, having heard that Florence had already been liberated. (This is possible, rumours among civilians being what they are, but most unlikely.) They had stayed in Rome three days, then came north via Siena, Poggibonsi and San Donato. They admit they were following up the advance as closely as possible, but deny intending to cross the lines. Biagoni is carrying uncensored mail, an offense under AMG Proclamation. Neither Italian features on our blacklist, but they are obviously a 'danger to security in fwd areas,' as the security textbook phrase has it. So, just to be sure, they are sent back to RIP for a thorough check, with the recommendation that in any case, they be handed over to AMG for trial under the Proclamations.

Meanwhile, AMG is slowly restoring, or rather attempting to create order, out of the commune's complete chaos. Mayor, town clerk (segretario comunale) and a few other officials are appointed — we are called in here to check up on their background from a security point of view. The Municipio is established in the second floor of the Casa del Fascio, which has become, in effect, the nerve centre of the town. Proclamations are pasted up warning civilians that there is a death penalty for looting shattered houses. The bakery is started up again; there is a daily ration of flour; refugees are being fed: a start is made in clearing rubble and broken glass from the streets. Life is far from normal, but at least confidence has been restored, and civilians are returning from their shelters in the fields and beginning to reorganise themselves.

And meanwhile, too, the leaders of the partisans have been preparing some information for us about the worst political elements in the town. At first the partisans expect the automatic removal and imprisonment of anybody they denounce to us as a fascist. Patiently we explain the fact that if a man joined the fascist party in

1926 and was a good party member, it's not sufficient grounds for arresting him. We are interested primarily in certain elements of the Republican Fascist Party, the party reformed after Mussolini's fall in July 1943; and in those who were responsible for reforming the PRF[17] locally; in those who served in the Republican Guard; and in those who collaborated (fanatically) with the Germans; in those, briefly, 'who by virtue of their political beliefs and background, constitute a potential threat to security in the area.' Finally we arrive at a little list of about 40 men, more than half of whom have gone away with Jerry. These 20 who remain we sift again, finally arriving at five whose arrest and removal, on the face of what evidence the partisans can give offhand, seems imperative. Number one on the list is Giustini Adolfo, the son of Giuseppe (deceased), a landed proprietor, Fascist of the Year 1922, Squadrista, and most important, one of a small group of ardent fascists who organised the Republican Fascist Party in San Casciano in 1943: it was in his house that the inaugural meetings of the PRF were held.

Once again we emphasise to the partisans that British justice demands, in the case of these fascists, something stronger than a mere verbal denunciation. Not before we have a watertight case against Giustini will we arrest him. This proves not too difficult. Any number of reputable citizens are prepared to come forward and swear, and sign their names, that Giustini was a Republican Fascist of the blackest shade; that he was a denouncer and oppressor of anti-fascists; that he had helped organise the PRF; that he had collaborated with the Germans; that he had betrayed partisans; and that he had been a pro-German and anti-Allied propagandist up until the final days of the German occupation. It's sufficient. We summon a Carabinieri and go forth to arrest Giustini and search his house.

This is always a painful business, and Giustini's case is no exception. His home is intact, unlooted by the Germans. He makes a great show of assisting us in the search, produces all his private documents and correspondence, pries with us into every corner of the house. As we expected, nothing to report. Only paper of interest is a letter from the Segretario Politico to Caro[18] Adolfo which links Adolfo definitely and strongly with the local PRF. It is when we order Giustini to pack a valise with his personal belongings and prepare to come away with us that the fun starts. His womenfolk, of whom seven have appeared on the scene, look at us with horror and hate. Wailing and imploring. Shrill protestation of innocence. We reply with honeyed reassurances, to quell the noise, that Giustini is in no physical danger, that his detention and fair trial has been ordered by the Allied Military Command, and there is nothing they can do about it, so a little less wailing please.

New Zealand soldier in the Tuscan countryside.
MacMillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch

Giustini comes meekly. He had probably been expecting us anyway. Three hours later he is on his way to a POW cage and justice. By next morning two others, of similar background and history, have also been arrested.

Early next morning (before the news of the arrests has got around) a deputation of citizens arrives. They

A destroyed villa near San Casciano.

Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

storm into the office, all talking at once. We demand order and a single spokesman. After the usual preambles and assurance of anti-fascist and pro-Allied sentiment the complaint is stated. The British had assured them that the fascist regime would be crushed and criminal fascists punished. San Casciano had been liberated three days now, and fascists were still at large. How come? We reply carefully and deliberately, renewing assurances that fascism will be eradicated and fascists punished. But piano, piano. Everything cannot be done in three days. Also, scrupulous care and investigation before a man is deprived of his liberty and so on. And then, dramatically, we announce that three of the biggest fascists in town have already been arrested. Exclamations of 'Bravo!', broad smiles, and the deputation leaves to spread the news. The town is excited. Our prestige soars. A member of the deputation brings us a two litre flask of prime old Vinsanto.

In the meantime our days are fully occupied with the usual run of security problems. Two cases of flashing lights that drag us out to forward areas at ungodly hours of the night (as usual, without result); the odd Italian wandering suspiciously around gunsites (such are generally removed to a rear area, out of harm's way); one case of a cut signal wire which presents the usual difficulties. But the main job remains control of civilian

A small church and the town hall, San Casciano.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

Via Roma, San Casciano.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

movement, and the number of Italians handled seems to justify the precautions we are taking. We can't boast definitely that we have caught any agents. One or two of the suspicious young Italians sent out of the area for further checking may well have been agents, but we can't say for sure. We have found no messages in secret ink, no maps stolen from 8th Army HQ, no documents sewn away in coat lapels. And, unfortunately, no beautiful, suspicious blondes. (We often wonder what we would do with a blonde spy if we caught one.)

The advance continues toward Florence. New Zealanders and South Africans are pressing into the outskirts. On the morning of the sixth day, our job at San Casciano finished, we make sure that no loose threads have been left (no prisoners languishing in the local goal), and pack our gear on the truck again and make our farewells. It is a gray morning, drizzling with rain. We splash down a wretched road to Div. HQ, and learn that our next assignment is Scandicci, a suburb of Florence. We draw rations and set out to repeat San Casciano (with variations) all over again.

Notes

1. Small military truck used by the Allies.
2. Town hall.
3. Local police station.
4. Fascist hall.
5. Security Service.
6. Field Security Section, an Intelligence unit of the British army.
7. Nickname for the German troops.
8. Allied Military Government. The AMG had the task of administering the territories occupied by the Allies during the Second World War.
9. Prisoner of War.
10. Refugee Interrogation Point.
11. Partito Nazionale Fascista (National Fascist Party).
12. Gioventù Italiana del Littorio (Italian Lictorian Youth Group). A fascist youth organisation created in 1927 for the 'spiritual, sportive and paramilitary preparation of the young.'
13. Opera Nazionale Dopolavoro. An association created in 1925 by the Fascist regime with the aim of occupying workers' free time.
14. Chief Police Officer.
15. Mayor.
16. Town Clerk.
17. Partito Repubblicano Fascista (Republican Fascist Party).
18. 'Caro' means 'dear'.

Jack Cummins
Soldier, 22nd Battalion

A day with rations
A warm sunny afternoon. Rations to be taken forward to my platoon, this time ensconced in a church approximately 300 yards back from the roadway which ran along the valley below La Romola and was to be the startline for that night's attack on La Romola. Skirting around the outskirts of San Casciano, I found gravel-surfaced road leading down to the church that was my destination. I stopped to take stock of the situation, all was quiet in my immediate vicinity, but there was some heavy shellfire on the roadway just below my destination, and what appeared to be some shellfire on the road I was to take. Deeming it unwise to take the obvious route, I thought to go crosscountry using some belts of trees and various patches of scrub for cover.

Just as I was about to embark on this, in retrospect a rather hazardous if not dangerous journey, my company commander surprisingly burst through the bushes in front of me and demanded to know where I thought I was going? 'Well sir,' I explained, 'as the roadway is under shellfire I thought to go across country.' That he most emphatically told me not to do! 'Wait until after dark,' he said, and this I did. I located a very comfortable casa nearby, put my jeep in a safe place, and took the afternoon off! It had a most comfortable bed upstairs, clean sheets and all, so a couple of hours kip was in order. There was not soul about; it was like I had the world to myself.

Came darkness however and it was time to go. This time down the roadway and straight to the church building I was looking for. As I approached I saw a knocked-out Jeep in front of the building and what appeared to be a body lying on the road beside it. I bent down to shift the body out of my way to discover it was a large patch of oil from the knocked-out jeep. This was obviously the CO's jeep and would explain how it was I met him earlier in the afternoon.

Jack Cummins at right.

I duly delivered the meal I was carrying to a very hungry platoon, who appeared to be pleased at the prospect of a hot meal.

I don't remember much of that night except that I was kept busy with various tasks. According to our Battalion history all the Battalion's vehicles had been knocked out. This I dispute because my vehicle was never ko'd and at some stage of the time I was working with two jeeps, one being serviced and loaded while I was away, ready for my return.

I returned to the same place in 1992 and found it much the same, the scrub had grown somewhat, but the same casas were there, much the same as they had been for many years.

I did not take part in the actual attack itself as I had many other tasks to carry out and was kept busy throughout the night with the multitude of tasks that go hand-in-hand with such engagements.

A day or so before the battle I was talking with two men I was friendly with, and one of them asked me to

Jack Cummins, second from right.

take some of his things back to the safety of B echelon. This I did and was distressed to learn a day or so later that these two were missing, believed killed. Nobody knew where they were. They had been sent on a patrol to check on enemy positions. One of the three-man patrol had returned badly wounded and unable to give a clear description of their whereabouts.

Two days after the battle our Sgt Major and I were searching the area for lost automatic weapons when a civilian from a nearby house informed us of two bodies nearby. We asked, 'Were they "Tedeschi"?' He replied, 'No, similar you,' and indicated the location. We both went to look and here were our two missing men. They were brought in and laid to rest in a small cemetery set up in the grounds of a nearby church. They now rest along with many of their comrades in the Commonwealth Cemetery near Florence.

The night after the capture of La Romola I was manning a sentrypost in a narrow street about 25 yards from the town square, when a tremendous explosion occurred. A short time later a very badly hurt man was brought to my position; sadly he died a short time later. He was one of seven men killed, who were occupying a house which, unknown to them, was the storeplace for a quantity

Jack Cummins, kneeling, bottom right.

of explosives left behind by the retreating Germans. I returned to this spot a year later and, using a borrowed camera, photographed the remains of the building, which had been neatly stacked on the site. A group of local children gathered around and were duly included in the photo. In 1992 I returned to the same spot in La Romola: the building had never been rebuilt and the site is currently used as a carpark. I did, however, meet a lady who identified herself as being one of the children in the 1945 photo. A small world indeed.

The Battalion's objective was to clear the area beyond La Romola and on one occasion, while the area was still under attack, I drove through the village and inadvertently got caught up in an artillery barrage from our own artillery. I had obviously overrun our forward position and was forced to take shelter under a small bank on the roadside. When it was all over I was astonished to find another jeep with stretchers fitted parked on the roadside, but no sign of any occupant. A search of the surrounding area failed to find any person dead or alive and to this day, despite several enquiries I have no idea as to why it was there. Could it have been a ghost?

George Forbes McHardy

Commander, 22nd Battalion

War Diary

Near San Casciano, Sunday 30 July 1944

Well, here we are at the end of quite an eventful week and I think for the first time we can truthfully say that we've struck the headline news. We relieved a Coy [Company] one evening early in the week and started our advance up a road early next morning, having Brian Pattison's troops and also tanks in support. Lifting mines, repairing demolitions with the help of engineers and investigating houses, etc. Plenty of fruit: peaches, pears,

plums, tomatoes and apples en route. Looking out of the window now I can see a bulldozer filling a huge blow in a road. Jerry blows practically every bridge and culvert.

We had got on well so lay up for a day and had a great view of a village being dive-bombed — it was devastating. Clouds of yellow dust from tiles and bricks sky high. Next morning we entered the village — multi-debris and the boys collected a few trinkets. Patrolling round that evening I picked up my first Jerry prisoner — a young Pole who had stayed back with some Ities. No rest for the wicked — so that night we pushed on again a few miles till we got a warm reception about 3 a.m. Moving into deserted houses at daylight and shooting up everything in sight with tanks. Continually shelled all day and I collected a wee bit of shrap in the thigh in the afternoon. We were relieved that night and I had to get a lift out in the CO's[1] jeep as it was a bit stiff. Came back to a feed and reasonably quiet night except for mozzies, which were vicious. They evacuated me yesterday back to the CCS[2] where they reckoned I was ok and would just be stiff for a few days ...

George Forbes McHardy.

Monday 31 July 1944

My 'poco' little shrap wound in the thigh had been pretty sore and stiff the night before and our doc thought there might be a small chance of infection so they evacuated me, but after passing through the ADS[3] and MDS[4] the CO at the CCS said I was ok and could return to my unit the next day. I quite agreed with him when I saw some of the other poor casualties they were dealing with. So here I am having a quiet day or two with our B Echelon. It was quite interesting passing through the mill and seeing the different processes the wounded go through ...

This is the most attractive rolling hilly country, pretty well covered with olive and other trees. Ideal for Jerry to defend and I can assure you he is making good use of it. They are most tenacious in the face of severe dive-bombing and shelling. They've been told that 'the British take no prisoners as they are so angry about the flying bomb,' however, we are getting a few.

Villages and houses have been badly knocked about and the local people suffer terribly — many casualties and property destroyed. I'm fed up with the war at the moment so let's not talk about it anymore. You'll know more or less where we are as the papers have been quoting the din in the race for Florence — so we may get there one day. I believe it's been declared an open city so should be worth seeing.

The sun is setting behind high hills in the distance — a golden red or orange. Each day is as perfect as the one before with only man and his futile works to mar it. Let's hope the world really benefits by this war and so-called civilised nations learn their lesson. But I doubt whether people will strive to maintain a proper peace and prosperity for 'all' sufficiently once the battle is won. Everything (almost) is put to maintaining a war effort but

Engineer J.A.Q. Campbell removing a mine.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

only half measures to maintain and improve peacetime conditions. Time enough for all this I suppose — but I've seen whole blocks in villages disappear in a cloud of dust and rubble from the bomb and other houses collapse and crumble under gunfire, and then there's the human sacrifice. One can't help wondering at the madness of mankind. But, my darling, I'm most fortunate as I've a wife, children, home and friends who provide me with confidence and faith and I thank God for my good fortune. And I believe the least I can do after the war is to endeavour to straighten out some inequalities and improve the lot of many less fortunate people ...

Friday 10 November 1944
Dear Bet,
Here I am writing this in quite a palatial writing room of the big hotel which the Div. has taken our as our Club. Five of us officers from the Battalion arrived here last Sunday evening after an all day trip through Perugia and Arezzo. The former is a fine big town and beautifully situated partly on a hill. Had lunch at an Officers' Transit Hotel there — quite a fine, big hotel. There had been terrific rain last week and high flooding which messed up the roads — temporary bridges and fillings suffering.

We saw Assisi perched on a hillside a mile or two off our track. Got there about dark at 5.30 and had a job finding the pub as the streets run at all peculiar angles with curves as well. Good comfortable beds with boxspring mattresses and another as well. We've a private bathroom attached to our room containing all five of us. It's been a bit wet and dull all week until today, which has been sunny though fresh.

The Cathedral (Duomo) is huge and most imposing with multicoloured marble and sculptured columns and pinnacles — but bare and dull inside. I climbed Giotto's Campanile, which is built to match the Duomo, and was rewarded by quite a good view of the city (409 steps to street level). Ten or twelve churches or palaces are visible from there and I visited quite a few but nearly all tapestries and moveable pictures have been hidden and some taken by Ted. Saw the Medici Chapel and Royal apartments at the Pitti Palace. The latter are huge with wonderful crystal chandeliers and brocade-covered walls and chairs.

Glimpsed through an exhibition of modern art opposite organised for Allied Forces — quite interesting. This is across the Ponte Vecchio — the only bridge still standing but the streets at either end are a mass of rubble except for a narrow path cleared. This morning I found another modern art exhibition — of course there are some lovely pictures but many I wouldn't give tuppence for. Then visited Palace Medici-Ricardi containing another Medici Chapel[5] with very fine murals and then the Sala Danza with wonderful vault decoration by Jardini[6] I think. The town is full of people and soldiers and shops very bright and full of an amazing variety of stuff: clothing, I got a

New Zealand soldiers in front of the Duomo, Florence.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

Soldiers in the countryside on the outskirts of Florence.
MacMillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch

few felt shapes, glassware and crockery, leatherwork and very fine bookshops. All sorts of ornaments and mosaic work but poorly mounted. There's practically no silver and gold is unheard of. Have been out looking over San Casciano, La Raviola[7] and Lastra this afternoon, scene of activities some months back.

It's been a good week in spite of not touching one drink. T'was hard to bear as you can imagine; my mates have been flogging it along and one night there was a terrific party till well after midnight — the day George Sainsbury and Peter Willock arrived. George is a real menace and does nothing by halves — however, I believe your family are aware of the Sainsbury abilities!

After dinner tonight we went round to the Excelsior Hotel where G. & Co. are staying — listened to the orchestra and watched the dancing for a while. An Officers' Hotel and most of the girls servicewomen of one sort or another — some quite easy to look at — but very crowded, especially with Yanks.

We saw *La Boheme* at the opera and it was really very good — much better produced and more enthusiastically acted than in Naples. A huge opera house, which might hold 2000. *Rigoletto* was cancelled on Thursday afternoon because of power failure but we are to see it tomorrow. Sunday we set off back to join the Battalion ...

Letter written to George Forbes McHardy's wife, by a member of his battalion

1 December 1944

My Dear Betty,

I cannot express my feelings concerning Forbes' death, but I offer you my deepest sympathy and I will endeavour to do all that is within my power to assist you, My Dear, and the family in the future.

I know that you would like to have what information is available, and I have delayed writing this until I had had the chance to meet some of the officers of the battalion, which I did today.

On the night of the 27–28 last, Forbes and a few of the men of his platoon went on a reconnaissance patrol along the riverbank northeast of Forli. They reached the river, and were then to move along the bank. They went over and down to the river once and then back over the Embankment. There they moved further upstream before investigating again. As they reached the top of the embankment for the second time an enemy post, which they had been unable to detect in the darkness, opened fire from a very close range. Forbes died instantaneously, for he received the burst of fire in the chest. The remainder of the patrol had sufficient time to investigate his condition before they were driven off by the enemy using grenades. The men of his platoon were able, under cover of the Red Cross Flag, to go out and recover his body.

The Padre of the unit, Paul Sergel, from Hamilton, was at school at Christ's with Forbes and myself. He got a message to me as soon as possible. He, of course, conducted the service and the Commanding Officer of the Battalion and several other officers were present. I was very pleased that Jack Chambers could be present and Allen Bibby from Onga also. Every man of the Battalion whom I have met has said how popular Forbes was in the unit and what a great influence he had as an officer amongst the men of the unit. The CO told me that he could not wish for a finer officer, in every respect.

New Zealand Forces Club, Florence.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

I know that these remarks are no comfort to you, My Dear, but I can assure you that no one has done his duty more efficiently than Forbes.

I am to receive his effects and will write again as soon as possible.

My Love to you and the children,
from Douglas

Jock Wells recalls the death of George Forbes McHardy

After Cassino, Forbes joined the same company as myself, which was B Coy. He had No. 10 Platoon (a group of about 30 men) and I had No. 11. We became great friends and 'rivals', each claiming to have the better platoon. Often in times of idleness, and there was plenty of that, we would just sit and chat. Once I said to him, 'What are you doing here Forbes? You have a wife and several children and a large farm — you have no right to be here at all.' He replied, 'I have something to fight for.'

Together we were granted one week's leave and were sent off to Florence and stayed at the NZ Club. He was recovering from an illness — I think it was Hepatitis — so

we had a lovely quiet time together, doing some shopping for the folks at home and seeing the sights. We went to the Opera twice and saw *La Boheme* and *Rigoletto* — the second time we decided to do ourselves well so hired a Box (which only cost the equivalent of £2.00). It is easy to recall the actual date as a strange thing happened: the curtain rose and the whole cast was on stage and then sang in English, *It's a long way to Tipperary*. Forbes looked at me with a wry smile and said, 'I think we are in the wrong place.' However, they then announced that it was the anniversary of Armistice Day of World War One and that was their tribute to the British soldiers present. So that would be 11 November 1944. We returned from leave as the Battalion was moving back into the line. I was transferred to Brigade Headquarters, a fairly safe job, and Forbes took over my old platoon. Only about one week later I heard that Forbes had been killed in action, so I went to attend his funeral — certainly one of the saddest days in my service career. I spoke to some of the men who were under Forbes, and they told me that he was just too brave, he would walk around in times of danger as if he was still on his farm.

Notes

1. Commanding Officer.
2. Casualty Clearing Station.
3. Advanced Dressing Station.
4. Main Dressing Station.
5. The Cappella dei Magi.
6. Refers to the gallery on the first floor of the palace that contained frescoes by Luca Giordano.
7. The author is probably referring to La Romola.

Duncan Hart

Gunner, 18th Battalion

My recollections

I was a gunner in a Sherman tank during that period. I vividly remember watching the bombing of San Casciano by the RAF (United Kingdom Royal Air Force) from the surrounding hill. Also, Jack Edgar, killed that day, was a particular friend of mine, as was the driver of that tank who came from my home town.

Duncan Hart with other gunners on a tank.

Our tank was involved and this was an occasion I would rather forget, even though we all survived the experience but lost our tank. This day was also the day that I leaned that my mother had died in New Zealand. My memories recall the fear we had of meeting the superior German Tiger Tank. It was a formidable opposition.

I didn't have the pleasure of visiting Florence till later, but have visited on a number of occasions since. I was 22 years of age during this stage of the war.

Bruce Henry Grainger

Soldier, 26th Battalion

My big OE

We left the rest area on the 8th of July and went to a position south of Arezzo, where we relieved the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders.[1] They had suffered heavy losses from an attack at night from the Germans. We advanced across the next hill and came across many dead Highlanders. Cyril[2] and I each got a pair of binoculars

View of Florence.
MacMillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch

from the bodies of two of their officers. Further on, we called for an artillery barrage on some Germans on a ridge half a mile away, but our artillery put the stonk down on us. As we had no cover, we lost men, killed and badly wounded — not me though, I had my lucky ring on. One of the men killed was Frank Tyson, who had won the MM (Military Medal) earlier in Italy.

The enemy withdrew from that area and we were sent to a new position in Tuscany, with our next target the town of Cerbaia, which was just over the Pesa River. We set off and after a mile or so ran into an artillery and mortar stonk and suffered a few casualties, including two killed and several wounded. One of the soldiers killed was

Duncan Hart (third from right) on a tank.

Dick Cobden-Cox. He was from the Canterbury Regiment and from Rangiora. Cyril was one of the wounded. He was out of action for a few months.

On we went, down the main road to Cerbaia, George Lock — our CSM — Sgt Jim O'Reilly and myself. When a machine gun opened up and I dived into a ditch, George said, 'Get out of there Henry, you have to be unlucky to get hit.' The bullets were flying all around us and he just kept walking on. I could see then why he was the Battalion's most decorated soldier. (I got his job a year later).

George Lock took over temporarily while Charlie Cowan was sent to Bari to instruct new reinforcements for a month. George Lock and Jim O'Reilly were both older men and were commissioned in the field later.

We finally chased Jerry out of the town and set about having a look around. We went into a few shops and I came out with two hats and two pipes. I have a photo of me with one of the hats, taken at war's end in Italy. The other one was a Borsalino and I wore that after the war.

Four of our chaps got some fowls and were plucking them under a tree when some enemy mortar came over,

From left to right: Sam Syme, Bob Rossiter and Bruce Grainger.

one bursting in the tree above the pluckers. Bob Mace — our VCC (Vice Company Commander) and Captain — lost two feet and Sgt. Teri Vaatau got a homer.

On we went to San Michele, where we were attacked by the enemy, suffering several casualties, including workmate Len Smith, who got his third wound and was sent home. We got a new Company Commander after that, and my new boss was George Murray, a fine leader who became a good mate. Major George Murray went to Egypt with the advance party of the First Echelon in 1939 and served until the war in Italy ended in May 1945. He later recommended me for a commission in the field.

On we went and had the job of clearing the town of Empoli, just over the Arno River coming from Florence. We took over from the Maori Battalion, who got driven off. Major Murray and I were up with the leading Platoon when we were fired upon from some of the buildings. Our wireless operator got a small wound and didn't want to carry on so I took the radio and called up our tanks. But before they arrived we had two killed. One was only 10 yards from me and was blown to bits, (that one was Corporal John Carswell from Temuka, the other one was Des Moore, ex-1st Canterbury Regiment), and many wounded, including George Seabourn. Once again I was not touched.

Eventually we gained control of the town and as soon as we started to drive towards Florence I got a message on the radio from General Freyberg to stop where we were. He had orders from Army HQ not to go any further because the Yanks were to take over. They had to be first into Florence. Just like what happened at Rome. I had to go back and lead the Yanks in for the takeover.

Notes

1. Infantry Regiment of the British army, part of the Scottish Division.
2. Cyril Clark.

John Clark

Soldier, 23rd Battalion

Baptism by fire

'We Germans are fighting the whole world,' said a tall blond German paratrooper, in perfect English.

He glanced in our direction to see what effect his remark had on us. Apparently he was inviting comments

Postcard distributed among the New Zealand troops for Christmas, 1944.

but none of us spoke. I for one would like to have told him a thing or two, but at the time I was feeling far from argumentative because of my wounds, which had just been dressed by a German doctor. The blond seemed very proud of his statement and his comrades were too, judging by the excited and enthusiastic conversation that followed in their guttural language.

I was lying on some clean straw on the stone floor of a casa. I had been stripped of my clothing, including boots and socks. There was an American jacket lying beside me so, sitting up, I put it on and took stock of my surroundings. Next to me on a mattress was Ces, being attended by the doctor. He was badly wounded in the groin and groaned occasionally.

Beside him, leaning against the wall and looking far from happy, were Rangi, Snow and Bob. Each forced a smile as one after another caught my eye. Like me, they are wondering what's next, I thought. In the corner beside them, and fully covered with a white sheet, were three unmistakable forms: Jack, Basil and Ron. Poor devils. I had met them first at Arce where I had joined the division. They had been good to me, a new chum. Jack was our section leader and a real good scout. It was hard to realise that it was 'finito' for him.

Ranged along the opposite wall, some sitting and some standing, were about 15 Jerries. All had apparently not shaved for a day or two, but nevertheless appeared to be in good spirits. Probably the remark of the English-speaking German, together with our capture, had something to do with it. Or maybe it was the vino of which there was a good supply of bianco in the room. At the door stood another Jerry, while looking out the window directly opposite was another paratrooper on guard.

The blond spoke again and asked who we were, but none of us answered. 'That's all right, Kiwis,' he said, 'we picked you the moment you opened your mouths.' I took it that he meant by our speech. I expected that we were in for a cross-examination, but no further questions were put to us except by the doctor as to Ces' and my comfort.

Apparently the area was well defended, as within a short time I must have seen over 30 different Germans. This casa was no doubt their headquarters, and those not on duty outside spent their time in the house playing cards, or drinking wine, or sleeping in the adjoining room. There was probably a picket upstairs too, by the sound of occasional movements.

The door opened. This time it was our tall blond questioner, who muttered something in German to the men in the room, then turning to my unwounded comrades he said, 'We are taking you three back now. You had better say goodbye to your pals. They will have to remain here until 5.30 when we will take them back after the relief takes over.'

The three of them shook hands with Ces and I. 'See you in the POW camp,' each said, trying to make light of their position. Tears welled in my eyes as they filed out the door. I just couldn't help it. Ces must have felt their going too, as he did not speak.

Later, we were given something to eat. It appeared to be tinned Irish stew with lots of vegetables in it. I was hungry and enjoyed it. Ces, now in a bad condition and

unable to sit up, could eat but little. We were offered wine, but I declined. Apart from not liking the stuff, I needed all my wits about me. I was feeling better after the meal and wondered about my chances of escape.

All was quiet in our area, but incessant shelling and mortaring was going on some distance away on our left. The flies were becoming troublesome in the room, and picking up a dirty white towel off the floor I covered my face and got some relief from them. I felt a little drowsy, and as I lay there I retraced events.

Two days ago we had all been more or less happy and carefree. The division was out resting, our spell barely half spent according to the general opinion. Then came the shock — 'in tomorrow.' How the boys had cussed and sworn. Yesterday morning reveille had been at 0430 hrs. The usual routine: breakfast, packing, and rolling gear; loading on to trucks followed and we were on the way.

The road had been full of traffic moving to and from the Front. And the dust — our faces were caked with it, ears full of it, and clothes covered with it. The sun in the assembly area had been hot, broiling hot. Shade under the trucks and that offered by the grapevines had been eagerly sought, and then to rest and sleep till nightfall. Sleep! Impossible with such thoughts hammering through one's head as the past, folks at home, and what might lie ahead.

'Would I be afraid?' I had thought. I had heard a dozen times that, 'anyone who says he wasn't afraid the first time in was a damn liar.' I tried to console myself with the saying that 'imaginations are a thousand times worse than realities.' How true I knew that was now. It had been hell in that assembly area with such mental torture.

The information that it was believed that the enemy had pulled out had bucked the boys up somewhat. Their faces had noticeably brightened and there had even been a little banter. The fact that we had to relieve the French, or rather the Goums,[1] and perhaps in the morning commence an advance, had not seemed so bad after that news.

Those Goums sounded very happy at going out as we trudged past them on the way in. Wouldn't I have been, too? 'San Donato, world famous for its wines.' It was our platoon commander who whispered that as we passed through that battle-scarred village. It had seemed a short three-mile march to our destination, but it had been good to get there. Some of those shells had been landing a little too close to the road for my liking. I was not too happy about them, as throughout the march I had in the back of my mind what I had often heard when listening to past campaigns discussed by the old hands was, 'so and so got his as we were going in.' Those French had made too much noise for my liking too, when we took the casa over from them. I was glad to see them go when I remembered having heard of parties being wiped out during noisy changeovers.

What a nark it had been for our section to dig in out front and sit in slitties all night when that casa had looked so inviting. And what a night! I don't remember any nightmare to compare with that night. Heavens, I must have seen thousands of Jerries, and everything I looked at seemed to move. What a relief it had been to creep back to that casa this morning and have a smoke. That was easily the most enjoyable smoke I've ever had. That hot meal that the Quarter had brought up to the casa for us before we started out was timely. My nervousness hadn't interfered with my eating like it did at the assembly area, when I had really forced those two hot meals down.

I wonder what happened to our other two sections, and the officer? When Jack led us down the right of the road he said the other two had fanned out and were moving down over on the left. There had been no sign of them at the objective, the crossroads. Jack had said we had better go up to this house and wait for them. We had been lucky up till then and all had been quiet in our area. There had been a fair bit of shelling and mortaring on the far left, though.

When we moved up the hedge (it looked like blackberry) I felt something was going to happen. The feeling was

New Zealand infantrymen marching towards Florence. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

strong when Jack motioned to us to halt and he, Basil, and Ron turned the corner of the hedge and proceeded in the direction of the house. I watched through that gap in the hedge. Jack moved up to within five yards of the door and Basil and Ron stopped a bit further back and appeared to be watching in the direction of the rear of the house.

All hell seemed to be let loose when those spandaus opened up and spat bullets along the front of the house. Jack must have heard something when he let go that burst of Tommy-gun into the closed door. I remember seeing the three of them mown down as I ducked. It was only natural for the rest of us to turn and run back down the hedge, but what a scare we got when we saw those Jerries in our path. They must have let us walk into their trap.

I remember a burst of bullets whizzing over my head, and then I was bowled over with a couple in my hip. At the same time I noticed Ces crumple up.

I must have gone out to it then as the next thing I knew was that German doctor bending over me. So that was my 'baptism of fire' as the military manuals call it,

and I never even fired a shot. Poor Jack, Basil and Ron.

I must have dozed off and awoke with a start. I could hear a woman's voice, and for the moment thought I must be in hospital. No, she was speaking in Italian. I pulled the towel off my face to see what was going on. The woman was talking excitedly to the Germans and pointing through the window. I couldn't make out what she was saying, but picked up 'Inglese Soldato.' I suddenly remembered that our company was to be relieved at 0830 hrs. Something must have happened, I thought, it must be late afternoon. Ces was either asleep or unconscious, and I leaned over and looked at his watch — 10 o'clock! I could hardly believe it.

Shells began bursting near the house and a Jerry officer came dashing in to give a few orders, with the result that all the Germans picked up their weapons and moved out with the exception of one who was left to guard us with an automatic weapon. They climbed a hill to a casa about 600 yards away and took up positions in and around it. I could see them through the door. Apparently two spandau posts had been left in our vicinity as the odd Jerry would come in for a drink of water or wine.

Our guard did not appear to relish his job and was very nervous about it. He asked me if the black Kiwis came would they shoot him through here, pointing to his chest. I said no, but that didn't seem to relieve his uneasiness. Later he went into the next room and I leant over to Ces, who had awakened, and told him I was going to make a bolt for it at the first opportunity and that I might be able to get help for him. 'Don't be a fool,' he said, 'you'll get riddled if you try that.' However, I had my mind made up.

Suddenly there was a rattle of small arms fire in the area, and soon a German came running in with a wound in his knee. The guard bound it up and away out he went again. The house came in for a shower of bullets, and a burst of Tommy-gun came through the window. It must be our boys I thought, and shuddered to think of what might happen if a grenade came through the window. The firing died down, probably because there was no answer from our casa. The attack must have passed on up the road to our left.

Later I got up to relieve myself, when through the window I noticed one of our tanks moving up the road, about 500 yards away. The guard was messing around in the next room so I grabbed up the towel and waved it through the window. I nearly yelled for joy when I saw the tank stop and, without a word to Ces, I bolted out the door and ran for my life. I must have looked a sight, tearing through the grapevines and maize with only a jacket on. My bandage slipped down my leg and I gave it a kick off my foot as I ran. All my thoughts were on reaching the tank, and I don't remember if my wound hurt during the flight or how my bare feet fared, but I do recollect expecting a hail of bullets to smack me on the back. Not a shot was fired and I reached the tank and clambered inside. I told the officer my story, and he said he had intended putting a few rounds into the house, but as it had looked empty he had resisted. He was sorry he could not help Ces as, besides having no room for a stretcher case, he was going into an attack.

We moved on and soon the tank began firing. With each recoil of the gun the blood began to spurt from my wounds. My bare feet were trod on and hot shell cases landed on them, too. We stopped and the officer got out to go over to another tank that had come up.

I was debating whether to get out and try to find my way back or stop where I was when one of the crew spied a Tiger tank ahead. That decided it for me. I said, 'I'm off,' and climbed out and ran back down the road. Mortar shells were falling in all directions and my legs were covered in blood from my hip. I turned a corner and saw a small village of about four houses. There was movement about the place but I couldn't tell if it were friend or foe. I hesitated and then decided to chance it.

What luck! I had landed right back with my own platoon. I was bandaged up, and told my story. Still in my semi-naked attire I later walked back to the RAP,[2]

Destroyed Tiger near Villa Moris, Romita. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

about a mile further on, just as dusk was falling.

I learned later that it was not possible to get Ces that night, but the rescue party found him alone in the casa next morning and in a fairly bad condition. It appears that the Germans had pulled out from that area in a hurry, but in so doing the guard had left Ces with a bottle of water and a Luger pistol for his use. Talking to Ces later in hospital, he said he had told the Padre, who was a member of the rescue party, that I must be dead and wouldn't believe I had escaped until he saw me for himself.

Our three comrades were given a decent burial by the Padre. Ces is away home, and I am still getting treatment in hospital. I wonder what fate has befallen the other three members of our section who were taken prisoners of war.

Notes

1. Moroccan soldiers who fought in an auxiliary unit of the French Army.
2. Regimental Aid Post. Front line medical staff incorporated in the infantry or artillery battalions who give first aid treatment.

Reginald Minter

Soldier, 24th Battalion

The battle at San Michele[1]

.... It would have been June, July 1944. I was then attached to A Company. We went to San Michele. Just before San Michele was a little town, about three or four miles south. We were going up to take a ridge of hills. Slow landscape going up to the hills. There were two or three country lanes mixed in with little houses and villages going up to this place. A Company went into this big farmhouse complex. It was a three-storey stone building with outbuildings. We caught the Germans a bit by surprise, I don't know why. We got about 22 prisoners. It was quite easy. We also captured a German truck, so they put the prisoners in the German truck and one of our guys drove the truck back to Battalion Headquarters with the prisoners.

We'd been in this building for about two hours. On the right was 26 Battalion, and they'd advanced further up another country road towards the hills, another 400 or 500 yards further up to another farmhouse. About two hours after we'd taken the prisoners and consolidated in this building, all hell broke loose, because obviously the Germans didn't appreciate this house being taken for tactical reasons, so he shelled us very heavily for half an hour. Then he shelled other areas to the extent that 26 Battalion lost both their tanks. There were no casualties, but it disabled the tanks. The whole area was plastered for several hours. 26 Battalion had to withdraw to behind us, and the tank crew all scrambled into our building. One of them brought their Browning machine gun off the tank, plus ammunition.

Reginald Minter.

The shelling stopped for a while and then another big lot came in, and then we were counterattacked by a German regiment or something.

They encircled us. We were surrounded in the finish and we called what they call a 'murder', which is a heavy artillery stonk, on our own position. It worked too, although we got a couple of direct hits on the building. It was a very solid building — must have been there for hundreds of years. The Germans got a lot of casualties.

Sergeant Barrow and I had the back windows, we defended the back. We had the American Browning from the tanks. Oh, I forgot, during all this we had a heavy machine gun section attached to us. The shelling got so heavy for them that they had to come inside, too, for protection. So we were quite an armed building. We had the tank, with their Browning machine gun, we had a Vickers machine gun, plus all our own arms plus, if we ran out of ammunition, we had a whole truckload of German ammunition in the barn down below.

That's the only time I thought I might be POW: but I only thought it for about half an hour and then I could see we were right. By that time D Company of our battalion had occupied the little village of San Michele, and [the Germans] attacked them. He had a Panther tank there. Our view was perfect because we were on a slight knoll of a hill, then it had a slight valley and up the other [side] was the village, so we looked straight across at them. The company commander, Major Howden, had all the guns pointing at San Michele in support of D Company, because D Company was then being counterattacked. They had a tank against them as well, which we didn't. It was funny because the tank, the Panther, came down this road with, I should say, half a dozen Germans sitting on the back of it. They soon went when the Browning opened up on them! I'm sure they must have killed a few of them off that tank, because it was really direct fire on to it.

Anyhow, we supported them as much as we could. They thought they'd have to retire too, but they held on

and in the finish it was the air force — oh, I forgot to mention that while we were in dire straits, we had direct contact with the air force. We had an artillery O Pip[2] with us when we got into this house, so we were very fortunate because that's how we brought the stonk on ourselves. The artillery O Pip also brought the air force on, and they strafed all around us. We sent a green and orange flare up and that identified our position, and then the DAF, Desert Air Force — it kept its name over in Italy — strafed all around us.

After about three or four days one intelligence officer went from our battalion and he counted over 107 bodies. So they had a lot of casualties, the Germans. In our little possie, we lost 11 killed, but more wounded.

Notes

1. Testimony published in *A Fair Sort of Battering: New Zealanders remember the Italian Campaign*. Megan Hutching (ed). Harper Collins, Auckland, 2004, in association with the Ministry for Culture and Heritage.
2. O Pip is slang for Observation Post.

W.B. 'Sandy' Thomas

Lieutenant Colonel, 23rd Battalion

The advance towards Florence

In late July 1944 we had a particularly bitter battle for the small but commanding village of San Andrea. We had many casualties. I think we should never forget what great soldiers the Germans were. Personally I rate them the best in the world. Even when they were withdrawing and facing certain defeat they fought fiercely.

I remember the last real scrap we had before our race to Florence. My Battalion Headquarters at that time was in a particularly lovely house just back from San Andrea. I remember just after our success a party of 11 United States officers arrived out of the blue. They were from OSS.[1] They wanted, urgently, some 'fresh' German prisoners. We were able to supply these from our battle. The Yanks were all ethnic German Americans. They stripped the prisoners of all their documents and their uniforms (which we generously replaced with ball gowns and dresses from the bedrooms above) and they interrogated them furiously. That completed, they donned the German uniforms and my Intelligence Officer took them up to the front line where they disappeared into the night.

Many months later they all came to see me in the Military Hospital in Caserta after I had been wounded — they told me they had been able to pass through the German defences and remove the detonators from the explosives which otherwise would have blown up many bridges on the main road to Milan.

On the 4th of August we swung through a lovely town early in the morning. As there was little sign of enemy action the soldiers were travelling crowded on to our tanks. The people seemed thrilled to see us and our welcome there was quite unforgettable. The Mayor at that time produced three German prisoners, which the Resistance people had captured. While they were being loaded on to the leading tank, two boys aged about 15 also clambered on to the tank. The squadron tank commander, Major Hugh Robinson, saw them but,

Lieutenant Colonel Sandy Thomas.

Shelling on San Michele a Torri and Pian dei Cerri. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

remembering he was young once, and as there was no enemy fire, he allowed them to stay. We swept on but when we got through San Cristofano there seemed no way, with all the bridges destroyed, we could get the tanks down the valley and over the Greve River. It was then that the two boys proved their worth. In broken English and by gesticulation they showed Major Robinson a way down the sides of the valley to a possible fording place. So we were able to cross the Greve River and race on to Florence.

I have always regretted that we did not take the names of those two gallant boys. Of course we thanked them, and gave them cigarettes and two watches, which just might have once been worn by German soldiers. I suppose those boys will be in their eighties now.

The New Zealand soldiers loved Italy and many, including me, returned time and time again to savour its beauty — and to laugh with its happy citizens.

Notes

1. Office of Strategic Services, special Intelligence forces.

J. Keenan

Soldier, 23rd Battalion

The battle to liberate Florence

On 3 August 1944 the 23rd Battalion, together with the 28th Maori Battalion and a Squadron of the 19 Armoured Regiment, went forward to San Cristophano[1] under Sgt McDowall of B Company

23rd Battalion wrote 'Big Headlines! NZ Infantry ride into action on tanks.' B Company led the advance into Cristophano whilst C Company came up to consolidate the position. The tanks were held up due to mines and the infantry went on unsupported. It was here that our C Company Lt J. Cameron and Private E.H. Bradley were killed in action. We found Villa Capponi clear of the enemy.

Dead German soldiers. MacMillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch

It was then that came the mad exhilarating dash for Florence. Sandy[2] and his men were keen to be the first to enter Florence. Colonel Thomas had taken a seat in the front of Major Robinson's tank. That was typical of our CO, who liked to be up front with his troops.

C Company of the 23rd Battalion believes that we were the first troops to enter Florence via Marignolle and entered the Southern Suburbs of Florence about 11 a.m. Sgt Blampied wrote that it was here that his:

> *... jeep left its position behind the CO's tank and smartly moved to the head of the column and thus had the honour, together with our tank, of being the first New Zealanders to enter Florence. Never had such a welcome been given New Zealand troops as met the boys on this occasion. The streets were packed with madly cheering people — old and young men and 'buono' signorinas, all dressed in their Sunday best and with every appearance of genuine pleasure at seeing the troops.*

Colonel Thomas, our CO added:

> *In no time there were thousands in the streets, cheering frantically, throwing flowers and fruit on to the tanks. Wine, champagne and even whisky were passed up in glasses and bottles. It was a great moment. We approached the Arno River and I called up Brigade on the wireless set and reported our success — they said 'Good show, but withdraw immediately!'*

Apparently an entry into Florence was not included in the plans for the New Zealand Division. Blampied records that at first the news was a shattering blow to the

Gordon Johnson.

New Zealand soldiers at the Hotel Baglioni in Florence. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

troops after having come so far, but later events proved the message could not have arrived at a more appropriate time. Snipers, against whom the New Zealanders had been warned by the Italians, opened fire as the column withdrew. The Spandau fire quickly thickened and shells began to explode on the road. 'It was a very worrying time for me,' said Colonel Thomas, 'with all the lads sitting so vulnerable on the top of the tanks.' I was sitting astride the 75 gun on Robbie's tank when I was hit and I fell down on to the path of the tank which, thank God, stopped dead. Fortunately the shrapnel wound in the wrist was the only one sustained at this juncture and the withdrawal continued, without further losses, to the area between Villa Capponi and Giogoli.

Although it has been recorded that the South Africans were first to enter the outskirts of Florence and they were credited in the 8th Army News[3] with that honour, it was generally believed that due to political unrest in South Africa they were given the honour to improve the morale of the South African people at that time of unrest.

Notes

1. Probably refers to San Cristoforo, near Greve, in Chianti.
2. W.B. 'Sandy' Thomas, commanding officer of the Company.
3. 8th Army newspaper.

Gordon Johnson

Soldier, 5th Regiment

I met an Italian Girl[1]

Old Freyberg grabbed the most important hotels all through Italy. He did this in Rome, he did it everywhere. He grabbed the Baglioni Hotel in Florence, and one night they put a concert on for the people that were there on leave from the army. They invited local people. A girl came on one night. She wasn't very pretty; she was nicely built but she wasn't attractive in that sense, but she sang *Ave Maria* and I tell you the guys there, they were all in tears. They wouldn't let her go. What a gorgeous voice. All the Kiwis were very homesick at that stage.

In Italy we were going through their country and it was tragic half the time. It was terrible. At mess time we'd have a tin and we'd be eating and here's not only kids but young

The Santa Trinita bridge, Florence. Imperial War Museum, London

people, standing there with their tins. And the jokers would eat some of their meal and then they'd give the rest to them. Italy wasn't a good place to have a war. The animals, you'd see them lying dead. All the houses around were bombed. We had to knock them down because the enemy could hide behind them or in them or under them. This happened all through our advance in Italy.

On another occasion we were in a wee village and the Italians — they know all their operas — and they put one on for the New Zealand Div. as we went through. Right up in the gods, the Italians were allowed in. When it was over, they kept yelling out, 'Più! Più! Più!', which means 'More! More! More!' We thought they were booing. We were prepared to throw them out till someone realised that what they were saying was 'More!'

There were a few factories open by this time. I went to a place where they had porcelain or glass and wee boys, just kids, 12 years old, sitting in a row, would paint the most beautiful things on it. Flowers. They would paint it with a grey paint which I eventually worked out was zinc, and then they would put it in a furnace and bake it on, then they would put it in a silver bath and the silver would replace the zinc. I brought a glass thing home for my mum done in that style.

Notes

1. Testimony published in *A Fair Sort of Battering: New Zealanders remember the Italian Campaign*. Megan Hutching (ed). Harper Collins, Auckland, 2004, in association with the Ministry for Culture and Heritage.

Colin Simpson

Memories[1]

You look down on the Ponte Vecchio across the Arno. A covered bridge, a larger and straighter version of Venice's Rialto, it still has old goldsmiths' and silversmiths' shops in it, and a lot of other shops that cater to tourists. Significantly, the American tourist bible, *Fielding's Guide*, devotes 15 lines to 'What to See' in Florence and a good page and a half to 'What to Buy' and 'Where to Shop'. Shopping has become truly the raison d'etre of travel for many American women.

Of the five very old bridges that spanned the Arno, only the Ponte Vecchio remained at the end of the war. The retreating Nazis blew up the other four, including the bridge that Florentines regarded as the most beautiful

bridge in the world, the Ponte Santa Trinità. Michelangelo drew the design for it. Ammannati carried out the architecture in 1569. After the dynamiting in 1944 there were only some stumps of masonry sticking out of the Arno and debris at the bottom of the river.

Now the Ponte Santa Trinità spans the Arno, just as it used to. Its recreation is a 'miracle worked by Italian civic pride in the beautiful, and by architectural and constructional skills.'

The supervising architect, Riccardo Gidzulich, worked to Ammannati's original plans and the notes left by the head mason 400 years ago. The Arno was dammed, the bridge fragments brought up from the bottom, including the statues that were on it, which were pieced together. Studying the fragments, Gidzulich found that the chiselling and cutting must have employed tools no longer in use so he figured out what the tools were, had them made, and had artisans taught to use them. The stone for the new bridge was taken from the same quarry Ammannati had drawn his stone from. Gidzulich became so familiar with the original work he found errors in the plans but he called them 'adorable errors' and they are perpetuated in the new bridge, which was three years in building: it spans 330 feet. It was a great day for Florence when, two months before I was there, the new Ponte Santa Trinità, with all the inimitable grace that Michelangelo gave the arches, was opened by the Premier of Italy.

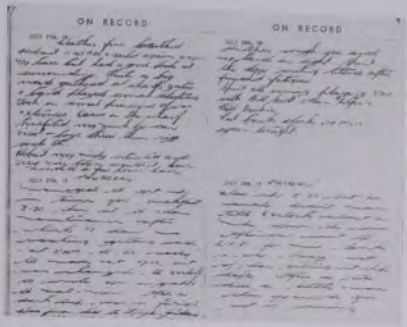
The Uffizi Palace is one of the world's greatest art galleries. The collection begins where painting, as we know it, began with Cimabue and his shepherd-boy pupil, Giotto, who was to eclipse his master. Then, touching only the peak artists, we come to Fra Angelico, Fra Filippo Lippi and the great master of the next century — the 15th — Botticelli. This is where you see not only Botticelli's *Adoration of the Magi*, his *Birth of Venus* and half a dozen others but his great allegory of *Spring*, in which Flora is one of the most enchanting figures ever painted.

Here are Leonardo da Vinci's unfinished *Adoration of the Magi* and his *Annunciation*. Bellinis and Bronzinis and Durers and Memlings and Mantegnas and Holbeins; here are Rembrandts and Tintorettos and Titians and Andrea del Sartos; Rubens and Raphael are here with Correggio and Caravaggio and — well, what else do you expect? Michelangelo's *Holy Family*? It is here. Then there is the Pitti Palace, full of more Old Masters and modern art as well.

Soldiers in front of the Duomo in Florence.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

Frank Bulling.

Frank Bulling on a tank.



Frank Bulling's diary.

In the Uffizi I hired a guide to direct me so that I might not miss some masterpiece in one of the many rooms of this great gallery. The guide charged 2000 lire (28s. 6d. Aust.) an hour and felt that he should earn it by talking incessantly. But he had one story that was worth the whole fee. There are, in any such collection, madonnas and madonnas and madonnas. An American woman tourist, after passing her fiftieth *Madonna and Child* painting, had turned to the guide and said, 'Why does she always have to have a li'l *boy* in her arms? Why can't she have a li'l *girl* sometimes?'

In the afternoon I took a sightseeing tour. The cathedral also has priceless works of art. In the church of Santa Croce are the tombs of Michelangelo, Galileo and Machiavelli. Then the coach drew up at the Uffizi for its passengers to spend half an hour and where I had spent half the morning. I didn't go in again. Outside is the Piazza della Signoria where Savonarola burnt the 'vanities' and where he himself was hanged and then burnt. (Among those who deeply mourned the friar who championed republicanism against tyranny, and morality against corruption, was Botticelli).

In this square, now centred with a fountain, is a copy of Michelangelo's statue *David* (the original is in the Galleria dell'Accademia) and in front of the famous Loggia, to one side, stands Benvenuto Cellini's *Perseus*.

Notes

1. Testimony from *Wake up in Europe*. Colin Simpson, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1960.

Frank Bulling

Corporal, 18th Regiment

War Diary

Tuesday, 25 July 1944

On the march again at 4.30 on way to Maori HQ where we were to support D Company Maoris.

Everything went well for a good distance, then we struck a little opposition, which developed into something big and Bob's tank was knocked out so things got really sticky. Withdrawal after dark.

Wednesday, 26 July 1944

After breakfast moved up to HQ where we were until approx. 2.30 when moved forward to support the Maori advance. A little shooting and received a little back. Returned to HQ after tea. Based for night in a great mansion. After a good shower was soon to bed.

Thursday, 27 July 1944

Managed to get up in time for breakfast at 8.30, then sat

to do maintenance after which I did my washing and at 5 p.m. started getting ready to move out at 7 p.m. but was changed to 9 o'clock so wrote an airgraph to Mum. After a dark trip settled down for night. Was promoted to L/Cpl on Friday.

Friday, 28 July 1944
Was up 5.30 but as usual didn't move until 8 o'clock, about a mile down the road. In afternoon went to LAD for new tank so was busy most of the day getting it ship-shape. After tea did a little more then lay around for most of the evening.

Saturday, 29 July 1944
Had a very lazy day. Heat is terrific so shade is much sought these days. Went down to stream for a swim in afternoon arriving back to find three presents waiting for me. Also quite a few newspapers so spent evening reading.

Sunday, 30 July 1944
Nothing doing at all today so took the chance to have a good rest and do a little washing. Frank Grange was over to see me in evening. Received a little mail today.

Monday, 31 July 1944
Was shifted to gunner in new tank so was busy sorting out ammo all morning. Was to have moved tonight at 8.30 but after call, packed up ready, it was cancelled so we listened to wireless.

Tuesday, 1 August 1944
After a very easy day, swim in afternoon and conference at 5.30. Had tea and packed up ready to move at 9 o'clock to support 25th Battalion. Was terrible day and I was starting to get really tired.

Noel Hosking.

Noel Hosking
Sergeant, 23rd Battalion

Letter sent by soldier Arnold Muirhead to Noel's brother Les, on Noel's death

I want to offer you my deepest sympathy in your family's tragic loss. Noel and I were pretty closely associated over the past two and a half years and his death has been a personal blow to me. I have sent his wife a postcard of the village on the outskirts of which he was killed.

Noel was leading a patrol in an effort locate an AT[1] gun holding up our advance. The patrol was fired on and Noel was killed instantly by spandau bullets. His companions settled the account and scattered the Huns.

His body was recovered the next morning and his last resting place is in a neat little New Zealand cemetery 10 or 15 miles north of Siena and a little north of San Donato.

Noel's effects were checked by the platoon commander and the CQMS,[2] his personal belongings being sorted out for sending home. The following items were collected from his uniform and handed to the CQMS: fountain pen, pencil, wallet containing photos, stamps and 1262 lire, signal ring and a pair of scissors. His paybook was also recovered and handed in.

Some of the fellows with cameras have taken photos of Noel's grave and when we can have them developed I'll send you one. I'll also send a photo to his wife.

Once again let me assure you of my deepest sympathy.

Noel was killed at Romita, Tavarnelle Val di Pesa, on 24 July 1944.

Notes

1. Anti-tank.
2. Company Quartermaster Sergeant.

William (Bill) Harrison

Tank Commander, NZ Armoured Corps

Bill Harrison.

War Diary

Bill Harrison's daughter, Dianne, recognised her father on the front cover of the Italian edition of this book and wrote to say that, 'he is the handsome, blond soldier in the centre of the picture, holding a cigarette in his right hand.' She recounts the following story about her father, whom she never knew as he died five years after the war, when she was only three years old.

I have a lovely story of my parents becoming engaged to be married while my father was in Italy. My mother was in New Zealand and my father asked her to marry him by letter. The Italian family in whose casa he was staying gave him a silver engagement ring. I still have the ring. I would love to know who they were and if anyone still remembers my father.

23 July 1944
Moved through Siena at 5.30 a.m. Have travelled 105 miles by tank in a week.

24 July 1944
On two hours notice to go into action at Tavarnelle.

25 July 1944
Went into action with 23 Infantry Regiment. Then, after five days we were relieved by South Africans. Stan Harrison (Bill's cousin) was killed in an action on our left flank. Still carried on in action with Maori Battalion. Last attack on Florence started at 6 a.m. on Friday.

4 August 1944
Entered southern suburbs of Florence. Our troop no. 4 were first Allied troops in Florence. That night came out of action for first time, dead beat and pleased to be relieved by 19 Regiment. Now resting behind front line, intermittent shelling.

Archie McKenzie

Private, A Company, 21st Battalion, NZEF

An aerogramme home

Extracts from two letters from Archie to his sister, Joyce, sent from Tuscany.

23 May 1944
Dear Joyce,
I was glad to get a 'graph the other night. We'd scrambled for hours, up one of those Italian mountains, reaching the top (our top) at midnight and someone announced, 'letters for McKenzie and Fitz.' Fitz is a new mate of mine. In case you didn't know, we haven't all conveniences up there, such as lighting, and besides we find it advisable to observe a strict blackout, so I had to pocket my two 'graphs not knowing who they were from. I guessed which were mine. Anyway, Fitz and I stuck together as we slid down this side and read our mail next morning — one from you and one from Dad. This looks good: we have a packet of biscuits and some mouldy chocolate and Pete is melting the choc over an anaemic flame, dipping the biscuits and laying them out on a rack to dry so we may get choc biscuits for afternoon tea.

... Well, must be going shortly, so give my best regards to Jack. Thanks to him I took the mountaineering, alright! Recovering from my spell in hospital. Would you please give the AA my address so they can send my bulletins here.

Cheerio and love from Archie XX

3–4 July 1944
Dear Joyce,
Now, this letter should have been written a couple of days ago, but going by air should make up for the delay. I like these airmail letters better than airgraphs, as I can get so much more on. I can, and do, write more to some people than to others though, so a 'graph conveys enough, sometimes. This is a privilege reinstated. I think they were used in Egypt at one time, and I hope they are available for our correspondents in NZ.

Your weather is certainly a contrast with ours: I'm perspiring while writing at 2020 hrs and I'm wearing only two light garments with no undies and the tent has a roof with no skirts!

To comply with malaria precautions we must wear long sleeves and long pants, put up our mosquito tents and 'TAKE your MEPRICRINE!' This is the longest summer in my experience, since November, and still going strong as the grapes are only half-grown.

It was beer day yesterday and it was distributed at nearly 8 o'clock on Sunday night, a bottle per two men at 30 lire (1 shilling 6 pence). In Egypt, canteen beer was 3½ piastres or 'ackers' after the refund on the bottle of two pints, and the last issue on the long sea voyage was 6' with 2' refund on bottles?!!!? Ohh, I'm so thirsty !!! Oh for a glass of sparkling Waitemata!

... I anticipated this experience a long time and, although I need not have come, I am very glad I did, and when I did.

In some places, I feel that Italy is a vile country yet, mostly it is beautiful with a grand climate, though warm. We get water by truck and it gets warm, but I have a can on a rope and let it down into a deep shaded washout, where it stays really cold, so I have visitors for a drink of water, these hot days. That well alongside the house in Kaikohe yielded deliciously cold water on the hottest days. There are wells close by here, too. One of the greatest public amenities here is the provision of water in

the streets of all villages, and frequently one comes across places on what may be called wayside tracks: delightful cold water running from a ½-inch pipe concreted in, but many of these are out of order, the pipes having been damaged by Tedeschi. Italy surely has learned a lesson she will not forget for generations. Hmm! It looks like rain, I declined going for a swim today, having had near two hours yesterday, and I have writing to do.

Yes, I know pharyngitis alright, it having kept me out of camp for 10 days, from Paihia. On the whole I've had remarkably good health in the last 18 months. I've had a couple of colds that only lasted a few days.

Specially glad I didn't go for a swim, as rain simply fell. I dropped my writing and dashed out to bring in washing off the tent. I'd had it open for air, too. I've made the wee tent pretty roomy and comfy, too.

I've made good enough use of this paper. The cake will be welcome! Cheerio,

Love from Archie, X

Archie died on 26 July 1944, at San Quirico, Montespertoli.

Edward P. Healy

D Company, 23rd Battalion

Last letter home[1]

26 June 1944

Dear Mum, Dad and All,

A new type of air letter which you should get in pretty good time. Received your welcome graph of 27th May since I last wrote. I take it Jack will be home by now and I'll bet none of you are sorry. If 'Churchill' knows anything it might not be long till we are all there. Am back with my unit now and having quite a fair time.

Have had a day's leave to Rome since I have been back and it is one of the best towns I have seen, by far the best in this country so far.

There was a sort of special day for a percentage of the 'Mickey Doolans.' First of all, they held a special Mass in a gigantic church as big as a paddock; 'Church of St Mary', I think they called it. Later we were received in audience by his Holiness, the Pope, at the Vatican City. There are some really wonderful sights to be seen about the town — one would really need a week there to see everything.

Got another patriotic parcel the other day, from Auckland district this time, one of the best yet.

There is a swimming pool not far from here, it is pretty deep and dirty, but it is wet.

Closing down till next week. Keep the chin up.

Edd

Sympathy letter to Mr and Mrs Healy from a family friend

1 August 1944

Dear Ned, Nellie and Mary,

Accept our very deepest sympathy. I will always remember the day Eddie came back from the mail bus to speak to me when on final leave — so manly and such a fine type of young man.

Will be over to see you all first opportunity.

Jack McChesney

Edward died at Tavarnelle towards the end of June 1944.

Tom Sherlock

Soldier, 27th (Machine Gun) Battalion

The greatest adventure of my life, June 1944[1]

June 4th, 1944, my lucky day! The German army was in full retreat, as we thought. On leaving Sora, we found ourselves ambushed while driving up an open road. The Germans opened fire from both sides of the steep surrounding hills. We abandoned our vehicle and sheltered behind an abandoned tank. A shell burst in

Tom Sherlock.

front of me; I often wondered if you hear the shell that killed you. I think I did. It killed Johnstone and George Booth was badly injured while we made a quick run to the stone house nearby. My gun lying near the tank was a total loss. But Bob Emmerson lost an eye and Eddie Hall was also wounded. Brian Joyce from Headquarters copped it too. That night we heard that Rome had fallen.

I'm quoting from a copy of a letter that our Platoon Commander Brian Moss wrote to a friend, Noel.

> *Then when the stink died down a bit and the shells were coming in with a few seconds between them, the chaps, one by one, started for a house. Another two were wounded on the way. And then Tom Sherlock, who was beside me, got up to make a break for it, a shell screamed in and burst in about 8 ft from him, and 10 ft in front of me. I thought this was it for us both. Tom swung around and I expected to see him hit from head to foot and in that moment my heart was really in my mouth. The thought of him killed really shook me and in that piercing moment between the shell burst until when he turned around and I saw that he was all right, my mind just raced. I thought how his people would take it and what I was going to say in the letter and how it would put the rest of the Platoon down in the dumps, so all in a tenth of a second. It was by a miracle that he was not hit, and the relief was so great that I could have laughed out loud. On the same occasion the behavior of the chaps was great. The morale of the Platoon was good.*

My machine gun was not replaced for about a week and five reinforcements arrived to join the Platoon. George Bell from Nelson joined me as my number 2 and remained with me until the battalion was converted to an infantry battalion. About this time Keith Mills and I were granted a week's leave in Rome.

Soon after, I was fortunate in getting down to Cassino for a look around. The place still lay in rubble and a building on Castle Hill which had suffered a direct hit marked the place where 200 Italians who were sheltering were killed. The smell was terrific and the bodies were finally destroyed by fire after pouring petrol over them. NZ graves are here and there, the whole place bore a stagnant odour. There was no doubt the Germans had been using the Monastery, as ammunition and arms laid about the place.

In the rest areas we usually get our washing done by Italian women, we repay them by giving them leftovers from the cookhouse.

I often find times a little weary, wondering how all this is going to end. But now that the Second Front has opened up with the invasion of France and the Germans losing ground here in Italy, things are looking up. We progress forwards, the Air Force are doing a great job, knocking out German tanks and vehicles and self-propelled guns that are left on both sides of the road. Does not pay to wander about — two anti-tank boys were killed near us yesterday.

August 1944

On the 6th of August we were relieved by the Indian Division. We have a grand view of Florence and the surrounding countryside. We are firing on a average of 1200 rounds a night on Jerry mining parties. Our OC[2] reported our strike as excellent.

Notes

1. Pages from Tom Sherlock's war diary.
2. Officer Commanding.

George L. Jones

Signalman, 2nd New Zealand Division

George Jones.

George served for two years in Italy (1943–45) and was involved in liberating Tavarnelle Val di Pesa. Although he can't remember the town, he does recall travelling through the general area. One event in particular stays in his mind. The New Zealanders occupied a villa and found a grand piano. One of the Kiwis was a good pianist and the men all had a good sing-along.

George returned to Monte Cassino with his wife in 1985, and again in 2004 to Trieste with 104 comrades to commemorate the ending of the war. He recalls it was a very moving time for all involved.

John Francis Leonard

23rd Infantry Battalion

John Leonard.

Born on 28 November 1918 in Invercargill, New Zealand, John was one of 11 children. His parents were farmers in a very quiet corner of New Zealand.

John wanted to be a priest but was conscripted: he didn't volunteer to fight. When passed by the conscription panel as fit, he told them he wanted to be registered as a conscientious objector on religious grounds. This was a very grave and very unwelcome action at that time. When asked if that meant he was refusing to fight, John

George Watson.

Earle Crutchley.

said no, he would fight, but he wanted his views known.

He went on to fight with the 23rd Infantry Battalion and led men bravely into battle as lance sergeant, according to his battalion diary. He served in Italy with two of his brothers; one whom was very badly wounded at Monte Cassino.

John was wounded on 14 April 1943 and killed in action at Tavarnelle on 22 July 1944. His death was a sad blow for the very small community from which he came.

George H. Watson
Divisional Supply Company

George served in the New Zealand Division from the start of the Italian Campaign in 1943 until it ended at Trieste, in May 1945. He says, 'Throughout that time we learnt to admire the Italian people and found them most hospitable, friendly and supportive of our efforts to make the world a better place.'

He remembers that the New Zealand Division had some hard times in Italy in 1943 and early 1944, especially in the Sangro area and at Cassino. When the division was involved in the advance towards Firenze they found the Tuscan countryside very attractive, but the hilly nature provided good defensive conditions for the Germans and further hard fighting occurred. 'We were pleased to be able to push them back and remove from the local people the scourge of Nazidom and the success at Tavarnelle was a satisfying part of this. Everywhere in that part of the country we were welcomed effusively by the Italian people and it was pleasing to experience their kindness.'

George was part of a support unit involved in liberating Tavarnelle. He recalled that, 'Although I was not able to

New Zealand trucks at Piane, 1944. Earle Crutchley.

enter the town, I was very close and able to contribute in a small way.' George has returned to Italy three times since the war.

Earle Crutchley

Gunner, C Troop, 25th Battery, 4th Field (88) Regiment, 2nd NZEF

Earle left for overseas service in 1942 and returned to New Zealand in 1945. He arrived in Maadi (Egypt) as an infantryman in the 2nd New Zealand Expeditonary Force. He was later transferred to the artillery, where he became a Gunner/Driver of a Quad that towed a 25-pounder gun.

After the Desert Campaign, the 4th Field Regiment was sent to Bari in Italy. From Bari they drove to the Sangro, where they had their first confrontation with the Germans. They headed through a pass to Cassino, which Earle remembers as a horrific battle; their guns were firing constantly during the engagement. The New Zealand Artillery, including Earle's troop, gave support to the Polish Corps, who eventually captured Monte Cassino.

Other battles where Earle's 'Charlie' Troop, as part of the 4th Field Regiment, were engaged in fighting include Sora, on the way to Rome, Forli Rimini and Padua. Their guns supported the infanty of the 2nd NZEF on the outskirts of Florence.

Tavarnelle, 1944.
The Town Hall was destroyed by heavy bombing.
Mario Forconi Archives

7

Seems like yesterday: Italian witnesses remember the passing of the Front

Stories of the war in Tavarnelle

When the New Zealanders entered the town of Tavarnelle on the morning of Sunday 23 July, they found the streets deserted and the Cassia Main Road blocked by debris. The inhabitants had abandoned their houses at the beginning of June to go and stay on farms scattered around the countryside.

For the farming families it was the most natural thing in the world to offer food and shelter to the evacuees. Although they owned nothing, being poor sharecroppers who had to give 50% to the farm owners, they took in whole families, giving them whatever they could spare. And not just for a few days, but even for several months.

Luciana Morandi

'At the end of May the Germans started mining the town, placing explosive devices all along the sewage pipes. There was a large round manhole leading to the sewers in the centre of the town. The soldiers went down it and mined all of the Cassia Road and then the houses, too. Later on they sent us all away. We had seen them doing something but we didn't know when and if they would have done it. One day they announced that we all had to leave the town because it was dangerous, and so we all had to go away. We were at the Commenda farm, staying with the Poli family. Forty people had taken refuge there. I have often wondered how they managed to feed everyone. They had opened their house to us and given a bedroom to each family. There were ten of us sleeping in one room.'

From the middle of July, with the Allies approaching — Castellina was liberated by the French Expeditionary Corps on 15 July — all hell broke loose in Tavarnelle and the surrounding areas. One no longer felt safe anywhere. The civilians took shelter from the shelling in cellars or specially dug-out trenches. In these situations one placed one's faith

in the experience of those who had fought in the Great War. Their undisputed 'expert' authority was of great moral support in the most difficult moments.

'We were evacuees for a month and a half. It was about, one and a half months later that they set off the mines. I was staying near the parish church with a farmer called Poli. We had gone there thinking it was a safe place, but instead it was right in the line of the shelling. When the cannon shots started to fall near the house we were living in, my father and my uncle, who had fought in the 1915–18 war, said, "We can't stay in the house or the stables any longer, we have to go behind the house so that the shells which are short fall in front of the house, and those which are long pass over us." But the nights were cold and damp. A trench of about 20 metres long was dug and we all slept in it every night.'

Sestilio Silei

'There were two families in my house in Casaglia. Their house had been requisitioned by the Germans so they had fled and come to stay with us. We went down into the woods below the house to build a sort of refuge. Even their command post was behind our house. The general set up his office in our house, taking over one room. A great pandemonium of shelling began the day after.

We heard a great racket. There was a cedar wood down there. They had taken all their vehicles and ammunition there under those trees. A cannon shell hit one and it caught fire, the munitions exploded — blasts and bangs — it sounded like the end of the world. The women who were in the house ran down into the cellar because their refuge had been built in the wrong place, on the side where the shelling was coming from. When this vehicle caught fire all the other vehicles in the woods took off. They all came around to my house to take shelter and everyone went down into the cellar. It was quite an evening ... The Germans moved on the day after — they all disappeared.'

Even the local mines filled up with evacuees. A terrified mass of people with scant provisions were crammed into these dark and damp tunnels in dangerously unhygenic conditions.

Mario Conforti

'During the period when the Front came through, five or six Germans appeared one morning. They came in and sent us away because our house faced Prumiano where the Front was, and they used it as a fort and threw us out of the house. I remember that there were two young Germans who even took down the pictures of the saints off the walls saying, "All kaput, out, out!" We went to the furthest house in Casaglia — the one at the end — and fell asleep in a shed. The shelling began the day after and we all went down into the cellar. Fulco Checcucci's father was there and other refugees, too. They had tied the door shut with a belt because the door kept opening with the shelling and everyone was crying. The firing stopped and we went back up. There were two dead oxen and the house had been hit so we left and went down below Tignano, where the lignite mine was.

There were lots of people in this mine — it was long but it was a disaster. There were children; people with diarrhea; it was a real disaster. One morning we went back to Bartalesi's house where the dead oxen were and we took some meat from them to have something to eat. It lasted us for a few days. We stayed for five or six days in the mine.'

The last few days were the worst. The Germans abandoned their defensive line at Nora — which also included Tavarnelle — and ordered the evacuees to leave their homes and shelters and go to Florence. Naturally no one obeyed them. For these simple country folk the city was as far away as the moon. After having gathered up what they could of their possessions, they wandered from one place to another looking for refuge under the crossfire of the artillery.

A New Zealand tank crew taking a rest break. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

Sestilio Silei

'The house was full of Germans. At one point, when they reorganised the line, they made us leave, they sent us all out of the house — they wanted to send us all to Florence. Florence meant northwards. They gave us permission to take a couple of oxen and two carts. There were 32 of us. There were three families in my house, it was a big house. We were all outside when they started to yell, "Raus, raus, raus!", "You must go away!" We were tempted to go down towards the lignite mine, many people could shelter there, it was a safe place. But there was a German officer who took out a compass and said, "North, that way!" We started off with the carts. The roads had been ruined by the shelling, what desolation! Where shall we go, where shall we go? We took the Mulinaia Road down towards Sambuca. When we reached the first house there was a man there who said, "If you want to stop here, I am the only one in the house because my wife is in the shelter with my son." So we stayed there, where the oxen were usually kept. All their oxen had been taken away by the Germans. We stayed in the stables, sleeping squashed together like pigs when they are cold — children, babies — it was terrible. And just as well there was a big oven, we could bake some bread and we could gather fruit, peaches. One day we had a tremendous scare, there was a tree in front of the house and we had gone outside a little that afternoon. The children were there, too. All of a sudden a cannon shot fell really close by, it sent shivers up our spines. We jumped up and ran inside. The last one in went to close the door — "Boom!" A shot, a rush of air sent him flying to the centre of the room. Another

shot hit one side of the house; the fragments had destroyed the tree in front of the house which we had been sitting under.'

The last thing the Germans did before retreating was to set off the mines along the Cassia Road. The idea was to halt, if possible, or at least delay, the arrival of the Allied troops. Witnesses report that they saw a large red glow in the direction of Tavarnelle at around midnight on 22 July. A few hours of calm followed, after days and nights of furious shelling in which no one had been able to get any sleep. At around dawn on the morning of the 23rd a great roar of military vehicles announced the arrival of the New Zealanders.

Marcello Morandi

'As soon as daylight arrived that morning — most likely no one had managed to get any sleep — we started hearing the shooting. We looked out of the window which overlooked the road leading to Romita, and there we began to see the tanks and troops advancing from the Morocco Road. We didn't know if they were Germans or allies. I started to say, "Look, they have padellino helmets, they are English!", because the English had strange helmets that looked like bowls. All very happy, we went downstairs and realised that they were already there, they were outside our house. There was a New Zealand soldier outside the door holding a large saucepan. We found out that he was a New Zealander because he told us, he spoke a little Italian and he paid me some compliments because he had a son who was more or less my age. I went back inside the house and said to my mother, "Can you imagine, mummy, they drink chamomile tea! You should see how much they have made of it!"; they made tea, but we only knew about chamomile tea.

Our first contact was with these New Zealanders. On that same morning we all went out on to the road to watch the army pass through, and they all went past us. It was a tranquil event because the Germans had already left. Among other things, my father was a heavy smoker and for many months he had had to smoke all sorts of things like yellow paper and 'old man's beard' vines. Then he found himself amongst these men who threw cigarettes to the civilians. Since my father was a barber he immediately started shaving the soldiers and came home with a mountain of cigarettes.'

Isolina Brogelli

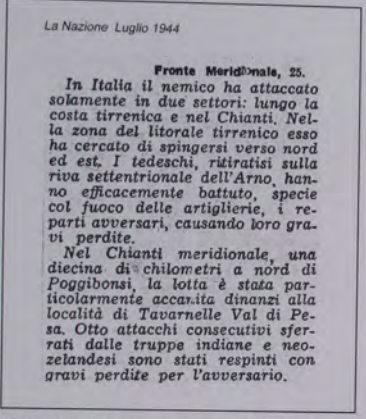
'The next morning when we got up two old people turned up. "Do you know," they said, "the Americans have arrived." A short while later an old man came by with a bucket. He wanted some water to make tea with, so then we understood. They must have come from Morocco. It was 23 July, a Sunday. After the war the ones who had passed through Florence came back to this house, because when these Americans (I don't know if they were Americans or New Zealanders) came through with the Front, our menfolk began to return home. When they saw that the soldiers were here they came back and gave them something to drink, as is the custom ...

"Stay here because now big bang, bang!", they said. They wanted to go to San Casciano, so they said that the shelling might pass close by. "Now big bang, bang, go and hide."' [7]

La Nazione (Florence) newspaper report: Southern Front, 25 July 1944

The enemy has only attacked two areas in Italy, along the Tyrrhenian coast and in the Chianti area. In the coastal area he attempted to advance towards the north and the east. Withdrawing towards the northern bank of the Arno River, the Germans fought efficiently, in particular using artillery fire, causing serious loss to their adversaries.

In southern Chianti, about ten kilometres north of Poggibonsi, fighting was particularly relentless around the town of Tavarnelle Val di Pesa. Eight consecutive attacks launched by the Indian and New Zealand troops were repelled, with serious losses sustained by the enemy.



La Nazione Luglio 1944

Fronte Meridionale, 25.

In Italia il nemico ha attaccato solamente in due settori: lungo la costa tirrenica e nel Chianti. Nella zona del litorale tirrenico esso ha cercato di spingersi verso nord ed est. I tedeschi, ritiratisi sulla riva settentrionale dell'Arno, hanno efficacemente battuto, specie col fuoco delle artiglierie, i reparti avversari, causando loro gravi perdite.

Nel Chianti meridionale, una diecina di chilometri a nord di Poggibonsi, la lotta è stata particolarmente accanita dinanzi alla località di Tavarnelle Val di Pesa. Otto attacchi consecutivi sferrati dalle truppe indiane e neozelandesi sono stati respinti con gravi perdite per l'avversario.

Article from La Nazione *newspaper, 25 July 1944.*
Mario Forconi Archives

Mite Brettoni

'When the Allies arrived we were all in the cellar because we heard the shelling destroying the villa.[1] I remember all of us being there and so much shelling. At a certain point, the head farmer said, "I am old, if you don't care enough to go a raise a flag, we will all be killed." So my grandfather, poor fellow, entered the villa without making a sound, went up the stairs and draped a sheet out of the window. Five minutes later the shooting stopped and these Zealanders arrived.

... They arrived at the villa as soon as the flag had been put out. We were all in the cellar so they came down there. These Zealanders had practically almost been in the garden when they saw the flag. When my grandfather descended the stairs he found himself face to face with them. There was a German in the cellar with us who, upon hearing the New Zealanders I think, ran down the stairs, cut his arm with a knife and threw himself on the ground. While this German guy was lying on the floor, we wanted to hassle him a bit but the Zealanders said, "No, he prisoner, prisoners sacred." ... They were such good, good, good men!

It wasn't that bad on the farm because we could kill a chicken or two so we weren't dying of hunger. Then, however, we had to spend the last couple of days closed up in there. They gave us bread. They really were kind men. They didn't want us to stay in the building at night because it was close to the road and they said, "Tonight much bombing, go in cellar." They took us to the cellars under the villa where it was like being in a fridge at night — so cold, so terribly cold.'

Those soldiers who had come from so far away were blond and happy, it didn't even seem like they were at war. They formed the advance guard of that great multiracial army that would, in the following months, have continued to circulate in the town, offering not only chocolate and cigarettes, but new role-models. It had a great impact on the countryfolk and those who were young at the time discovered a whole new world.

Armando Sanesi and Luigi Marranci

During the days of liberation, the shelling from one side or the other caused numerous casualties among the civilians. Giuseppe Socci, Walter Betti and Lorenzo Betti were hit and killed at Palazzuolo on 23 July while they were waving a white flag from a tower as a sign of welcome.

Armando Sanesi and Luigi Marranci died on 24 July. The two young men had remained hidden for a long time in order to avoid being rounded up. On the Monday they decided to go and meet up with their girlfriends at Paganello to celebrate together, but were unaware that the area was still under fire. A cannon shot hit them full on and flung them against a wall. Their families only managed to recognise them from their clothes.

An acacia tree that was split in two by cannon-fire at Magliano.
Mario Forconi Archives

Antonietta Sanesi, Armando's sister

'We were liberated on the 23rd, a Sunday. All the New Zealanders came, they filled Ceccatelli's house. Then these two fellows — my Armando and Gigi Marranci — had girlfriends at Paganello, just past Noce, so the day after, the 24th, they went to visit them. Then, at a certain point that evening, they said, "We're off." Along the way they bumped into Orland, Naldini's son, who said, "I'm not taking the shortcut, I'm going along the road." Nothing happened to him because he went that way but the others took the shorter route and a cannon shot hit them full on and reduced them to a pulp. My mother went to see him, she recognised him by his trousers. They both died together, Luigi and my Armando. We kept them hidden from Ceccatelli, we didn't have anybody because my uncle was old, my other uncle was old, too. There were only women — there weren't any men. The Germans wanted the men. They didn't hurt us but they were really mad, furious, because they wanted the men. But there weren't any men, there was only Armando who was 18 and my uncle who would have been about 50.'

SAN DONATO

The inhabitants of San Donato in Poggio left the town around the middle of June. The situation had worsened following the killing of a German soldier in Pietracupa on 13 June and the death of Egidio Gimignani. Many families found shelter with the farming families in the Argenna valley. It was not difficult to find someone to take you in; everyone knew each other in this small community, and was often a relative.

Renato Ermini

'After they had killed the German soldier we had to leave — the whole town evacuated because a tank was coming up from Piazza. And just as well there was an SS Colonel staying with the Marquise Torrigiani at Montecchio because he practically saved the whole town. We came to Valle here, below the Castle of Valle, then to Sicelle down in the Argenna, where later on the Germans bombed the bridge, to stay with some of my dad's relatives. We children almost had fun. Then, there at the house, they set up the German command post. The soldiers passed by on the horses to steal things and then they took everything there and ate it.

My family and the Pacciani family were staying there, plus the farmer and around 30 Germans. We all went there. There was a huge storeroom so we all went in to rummage around.

At the farmhouse there was always a piece of bread or something to eat. There was the massaia, the woman who worked for everyone, then my mother and another lady. My dad knew all these farmers because he had always worked there. In those years all the farmers had sheep so there was cheese, which they kept hidden away. So, anyway, some farmers had cows — no, no, we never went

The Philharmonic Society Centre in San Donato was destroyed by bombing. Mario Forconi Archives

without. They killed the pigs in secret, they were pretty well organised. The farm owners couldn't say anything — if they saw that a sack of wheat was missing, they had to keep quiet because they had warehouses full of it.'

The departure of the Germans camped in the houses was always preceded by a great commotion as the cables for the field telephones were dismantled, weapons, ammunition and furniture were loaded up. These moves took place mostly at night, with the scattered groups of soldiers gradually reunited to form long columns. The last to pass by were the engineers with their explosives.

'We could tell they were about to leave. The Germans loaded up fast and left. They began to overtake the others who were almost the last to join the columns.

We were right near the road, we saw all the tanks that night. They continued moving all night, not so much during the day. The transfers took place at night so as not to be .... because then we heard lots of cannon fire, shooting, shelling.

When the Germans were about to leave they began to gather up all their things and leave. They retreated because they were not fighting troops — they were artillerymen and then, most of all, they had the animals with them. I remember the night before there was a party in the courtyard with a piano accordion. They danced and there were a few girls nearby, evacuees, so the Germans invited them to dance.

... The last ones to leave blew up the bridge, which did

not obstruct anyone because a tank arrived and everyone said, "How will it get across now?" It neared the river, saw the destroyed bridge, reversed, went down the riverbank and came up over here without the least fuss.'

Before abandoning San Donato and moving towards Sambuca, the German artificers — there were two of them according to witnesses — blew up the mines that had been placed outside the walls. The medieval gateways and the adjacent buildings were destroyed. But not all of the bombs exploded. Escaping surveillance one night, some inhabitants had neutralised several of the mines by pouring water from the sewers onto them. Without this sabotage action, all that would have remained of the village of San Donato would have been a heap of rubble.

Silvano Semplici[2]

'I can clearly remember when the mines were laid. The Germans took several people to dig the holes: Ugo Secci, Donato Semplici, Gallileo Salvini and Roberto Morelli. The mines were placed all through the town. There must have been about three quintals of trinitrotoluene. They laid them about a fortnight before the Front passed through. When these people realised that they had to lay mines, they did so in such a way that they would not explode. They saved the whole area down there, including the tower.[3] I was only a lad and just happened to be there.

I have always heard people say that when they set off the mines there were only two young Germans left behind, whose combined ages didn't add up to 40.'

Ottaviano Lusini

'When they mined the town, they mined all the gateways. Here everything collapsed, only the arches remained intact, that's all. Over there was another beautiful arch, above it was a lovely room with a window, but they didn't rebuild it. There were only two Germans setting off the mines. They had a motorbike. First they blew up the Fontino bridge. Then, one hour later, the town exploded.

... When the town blew up, we realised that the Germans had gone away because nearly all of the town collapsed, apart from the centre, and then the gateways. Two soldiers had stayed behind to set off the mines, and we realised there was nothing we could do, the last outpost was the one over there.

There was also a big battle in Castellina, but they didn't mine the town at all like they did in San Donato. They mined everything in San Donato, even if half of the mines didn't go off because water had been thrown on them. That building over there didn't blow up because they had thrown water on the blasting gelatin.'

That there were only a few Germans left to defend the area was confirmed by many witnesses. This did not stop them obstructing the Allies' advance with every means possible, applying to the letter the tactics of the 'aggressive withdrawal' theorised by Kesselring. The formation of the territory was also on their side, in that it offered more advantages to the defenders than to the attackers.

Don Danilo Cubattoli

'Because the Allies progressed calmly we said, "Look, they've all gone." At my father's, too, we said, "There's no one left, there's no one left." But there was a farmer from there who kept chickens. Every now and then we heard a shot. "Where is he, where is he?" Then they went over there in a tank — the soldier was inside the chicken coop. He had hidden in the chicken coop and was firing at anything that came down the road. A German. He had stayed back, you see. They had nothing to eat so they ate onions. These poor young men were scared, too.'

The first Allies seen by the inhabitants of San Donato were the Moroccans — the ferocious assault troops attached to the French Expeditionary Corps that had liberated Siena and Castellina in Chianti. One can imagine that the welcome

The crew of a Tiger Tank; photo taken by a German prisoner.

Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

they received was not a particularly joyous one. Fortunately they stayed for only a few days; this was their last stop before leaving for the French frontline, but they still managed to spread panic. The changeover with the New Zealanders and the Indians from the 8th British Armed Forces took place on 22 July at San Filippo, located between Poggibonsi and Barberino Val d'Elsa. From then onwards, the organisation of that sector of the frontline passed over to General Freyberg.

Almost a week went by between the liberation of Castellina and that of San Donato — a very long period of time considering that only a few kilometres separated the two towns. The reason for such slowness can be explained by the tenacious resistance demonstrated by the Germans and by the reorganisation of the Front with the changeover between the 5th and the 8th Armed Forces.

Renato Bonini

'It took ages — it seemed as if these Americans and, these English soldiers would never get here. Once the Germans had left at about half-past 5/6 o'clock in the afternoon, we saw huge clouds of dust rising from the Castellina hills. It was a row of tanks with Moroccans and Americans descending, and there were some attacks by the Germans who still had the odd patrol here and there. It seemed like there were 100,000 of them, instead there were three of them over here, three over there and they were shooting. They stopped frequently as they were not sure about going ahead because they could still get caught in traps. Then, bit by bit, they advanced. That afternoon, at about half-past 5/6 o'clock, the Americans and the Moroccans reached Leccio. The Moroccans arrived here, too, and raped two or three women at Leccio. Not people from here, evacuees. The commanding officers said, "The women must stay inside, all women inside please."

... Here in San Donato we were liberated on 18 July. In Tavarnelle, instead, there was some resistance. Many died in San Martino.

... When the tanks arrived we all went to see them. Then they started handing out chocolate, but just to the women. "Please go inside," this commanding officer spoke Italian well. So the women obeyed him, however a few of the evacuees who were still around town were raped, two of them were taken in Tignano. The next morning they had to be transported to the hospital in Siena. Then there was the changeover. The last two Moroccans died where the public conveniences are inside the town walls, in that

German ordnance after a battle with New Zealand soldiers. MacMillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch

small field, machine gunned down by an airplane. We don't know if it was a German one or an Allied one.

That night they stopped here,[4] and after having effected the changeover the next morning the advance headed off once again and reached San Donato. They didn't manage to liberate the town that night. There were batteries firing, it seemed as if it was a strong line like the Gothic Line.

They were all in motor vehicles, this road was not tarsealed — you should have seen the dust, the commotion of those tanks with their caterpillar tracks, and the trucks. They didn't just go on the road, they went all through the fields. It wasn't a simple operation. When they heard shooting they didn't know what kind of resistance they would meet so they advanced with extreme caution. It took them a long time to cross that piece of land — they were scared.

Renato Ermini

'... We heard the cannon shots, but the Front had already passed through here in San Martino. They were here for eight days, but there were only about ten Germans, they were the saboteurs ... Over there where the Agip petrol station is, there was a string of them — about ten

Germans died and a few Americans, but most of them were Germans.

... The first to arrive were the dark-skinned ones — all Moroccans — troops commanded by the French who had set up camp here at Montecchio. They put up all their tents below the manorhouse and then here in the pine grove.

The Moroccans were the assault troops, and then came the English, the Americans, the New Zealanders, but the first impact was with the Moroccans. They had sheepskin waistcoats ... they raped a couple of girls near Barberino. They arrived drunk and if there were no officers they only had to see a skirt or a young girl and they were off, they were beasts. The Germans were afraid of the Moroccans, they said, "The Moroccans — zac!"[5] The more pacific of the Germans were frightened, because only a few SS had come up here — we saw their cars but they were just passing through.'

THE BATTLE AT SAN MARTINO A COZZI

Costantino Canocchi's[6] testimony provides us with some previously unpublished details regarding the battle at San Martino — the bloodiest of all the battles fought in the territory of Tavarnelle. The battle took place on the morning of 22 July and cost the lives of 30 New Zealand soldiers.

Costantino Canocchi was 11 years old and had evacuated with his family to Pratangi, one of the farms on the San Martino estate. According to his recollections, the New Zealanders who had returned to attack the hamlet (after their first failed incursion) were taken by surprise and massacred by the Germans, who were hidden in the woods. It was, therefore, a full-blown ambush.

Costantino Canocchi

'That morning we were all in the cellar. I went outside with the head of the family. We both looked out from a small terrace and heard the firing and whistling of bullets in the Chiara gully nearby. They had already started shelling San Martino from San Donato because the New Zealand command post was there; from there they left to continue the Front. First of all they took the Canaglia Road — the main road — and then they also came from Cerbaia in order to encircle the area. Some of them took one line, and the rest took the other.

When the New Zealanders reached San Martino, they were shot at from the windows of the villa because they were to protect them with the cannon but, instead, they didn't protect them. So they retreated, got more troops from Cerbaiola and went back to surround San Martino. This first attack took place at about 6.30 in the morning. I think there were two or three casualties. Then it took them quite a while to get reorganised.

At about 9 o'clock the shelling started up again and we were quieter than ever.

They had military maps and knew all the little lanes. At the de' Bardi springs they took a track through the fields. There was also a vegetable garden and the weeds in the garden were quite tall. When they reached there to go up towards San Martino, the Germans, who had hidden themselves there at the entrance to the woods ready to shoot, took them full on and massacred them. They had been told there weren't any Germans but, instead, there were some. There was a real battle there. Afterwards we saw all the bandages and the bloody sheets. About 25 or 26 New Zealanders were killed in that stretch of land. At Mannello's place, under a row of cypress trees, there was a line of dead soldiers — all New Zealanders.

Eight or nine Germans also died in that locality. Later I went back with my dad and saw them being buried. Then, a short time later, they dug them up again.'

The death of Giuseppe Scarpelli, capoccia[7] at the Pratangi Farm

On 22 July 1944 at San Martino a Cozzi, Giuseppe Scarpelli, head man at the Pratangi farm, was shot dead while he was going into the stables to feed the oxen. The battle

had been over for just an hour, and the poor man was probably mistaken for a German soldier. The trip to the field hospital in Fonterutoli was in vain. Scarpelli died the following day. Costantino Canocchi's testimony, told to Marco Secci in 2006, helps to reconstruct this episode.

Costantino Canocchi

'At about 11–11.30 a.m. the cattle started to become restless in the stables because they were not used to it. This man probably looked out of the door and then closed it again. Perhaps the soldier with the machine gun was right there or not very far away. He saw someone open the door and close it again, so he didn't hesitate, he kicked the door in and entered. He saw a movement and fired.

This happened after the second incursion of the battle at San Martino a Cozzi; the Germans were retreating ... Coming in out of the sunshine, entering the dark stable, it was hard to distinguish. The New Zealander saw something move and considering the battle that had just taken place, he didn't hesitate to shoot. This man[8] opened the door and fell in front of the cellar door. He had been shot in his back and chest and he called towards us for help. We were in the cellar, we distinctly saw an English helmet and we said to ourselves "They have arrived!" Then we took him into the cellar. Shortly afterwards they knocked and asked if there was a wounded person. They came to get him that evening and took him to the Fonterutoli field hospital, and he died there.'

SAMBUCA

The inhabitants of Sambuca took refuge in the woods, in farmers' houses and at Badia a Passignano. The immense cellars and olive mill at that monastery gave shelter to dozens of evacuees, while the upper floor was occupied by a German command post. Whole families spent the last week before liberation in the ditches that descended from the slopes of the Badia hills towards the valley. They slept lying on the bottom of the ditches, with some hay and a few blankets to protect themselves from the dampness.

Aldemaro Giannozzi

'We went to a farm up there, to Brogino's place, which was called Poggione, at Badia. I remember that we left there almost immediately, there had been an air battle right over Sambuca — an airplane came down near Ponte Nuovo. When I was an evacuee staying with a farmer, I had an uncle who worked for the railways in Florence, and as soon as he heard, "The Germans are here," he went into the field of corn. The corn plants were tall so it must have been May, or the beginning of June roughly. The Germans came to get the oxen, they set fire to the wheat, too, and therefore it didn't seem to be so safe anymore — everyone advised us to go to Badia, down where the olive mill was. There were lots of families, they all slept there; each family occupied one of the big rooms with their family members and acquaintances. As a boy it was actually quite fun because I could run about all over the place. There was another boy and also a cousin of mine who was two or three years older than me. Children don't notice danger as much and so we wandered around inside and in the convent upstairs, in this open castle.

There were Germans at Badia, and a German command post, but they weren't any bother, they were on the other side. We were all staying in the part where the olive mill was, below the cellars.'

The battle at Campiglioni preceded the liberation of Sambuca by just a few hours. Maria Becheroni,[9] who was 12 years old at the time, was staying with her family at the Giani family's house — the owners of the farm at Campiglioni. Therefore, she was only a few hundred metres from the battleground and could see the Germans withdrawing and the bridge blowing up.

Maria Becheroni

'The Giani farm was close to the vicarage. They took us in

together with three other families from Sambuca. There were five of us and the Gianis had seven children. Two shelters were built — one for the young people, the other for the older people and the babies. We were down below Filinelle, the others were below the church ... These shelters had been dug in the ground, they had built a sort of reinforcement and we put hay and blankets on the ground. They were quite large, several people could fit in them. We spent a few nights there. Then they started to bomb where we were. So my dad said, "Let's go back to the Giani's house," as it had a pretty well-covered cellar. We put down hay and blankets and slept there for two or three nights. ... On the day of the battle we heard the machine guns and the whistling of the shots. The Germans had placed the machine gun in the farmyard. Campiglioni, where the battle took place, was one of the Giani family farms, the one where we had evacuated to. It was close to the house, the wounded all came to us. There was a well in the farmyard, they gave them a drink, then put all the seriously wounded on a cart after having bandaged them up. We didn't see the dead bodies but they told me that there were lots of them in Campiglioni. Mr Giani, the overseer, saw them. ... The next morning he wanted to go and see what had happened to the farm, but they started firing and he was hit by a piece of shrapnel. There was a New Zealand command post at the church so they bandaged the wound and sent him to Siena.

... There were lots of wounded soldiers in the farmyard. They were taken to Sambuca where the Red Cross was. The others pursued on, they went to the church and took the mill road. My dad said there were lots of them, about 150. I saw them pass by, too. The Red Cross came and picked up the wounded soldiers. We had low windows so I saw the Red Cross truck go over the bridge at Sambuca. "Look," said my father, "it's the Red Cross, the bridge will blow up soon." And in fact, shortly after the Red Cross had gone over it and unloaded the wounded soldiers we heard an explosion and the bridge blew up.'

The New Zealanders entered Sambuca on the afternoon of 23 July. They found the town divided into two. As usual, the retreating Germans had blown up the two bridges over the Pesa River. This obstacle was quite easily resolved. Crossing over at the weir, the Allies flattened out a road that connected the two sides of the river once again. The few inhabitants present, who had never seen a bulldozer in their lives, curiously watched the whole operation.

Arnolfo Bagni

'We returned home when the English arrived. I went down with my dad and we saw the New Zealand trucks along the Pesa River. We saw them the day after the Front had passed through. We had gone back to see what had happened. Gone was the bridge, the chapel at Sant'Anna — I was from there, near the Sant'Anna chapel, and the houses nearby had all collapsed. We saw the American trucks. I was with my dad and we said, "What's all this lot?" They were strangers to us. We saw that they were making some tea in the petrol containers.

... We knew that they had arrived because there had been some tank battles. From the Secci family's house I saw a fight between tanks at the cemetery at Badia a Passignano. I was over that way. When the English arrived it was Saturday or Sunday and we said, "Now they will enter the town, too," but they didn't, they turned back. We watched them from up there. They crossed the town the day after instead. The bridge no longer existed so they crossed over at the weir. They made a road, they had bulldozers. We saw bulldozers for the first time ever, we hadn't even known they existed.

... I remember that on the last day we were in that gully there in Badia, I had a bit of a fever so I returned home and lay down for a bit in the stables. At first I heard noises coming from between the Badia cemetery and Badia. There was a battle between tanks when the Americans arrived ... There was a cannon, over there where the Cresti family lived, which fired continuously, even during the night, towards Castellina.

New Zealand soldier N.J. Shephard uses a detector while Lieutenant B.C. Moss defuses the mines found. The area cleared of mines is indicated with ribbons. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

This fighting lasted one or two days. On the Saturday night they arrived here at the San Lazzaro chapel. Then, seeing that the bridge no longer existed, other vehicles arrived and they prepared a route across the river. Then we saw these trucks pulled up along the road. What are they doing?, we wondered.'

Liberation meant the end of a nightmare, but the return home here, as in all the places where the war had passed through, was a sad moment for the evacuees. Wreckage and desolation were everywhere, and people and towns could no longer be recognised. The numerous homeless organised themselves in schools and recreational halls while waiting to rebuild what they had lost. And then there were the mines sown by the Germans in the town and riverbanks. Since there was no longer a bridge the people were forced to cross on foot, risking their lives. By some miracle, no accidents were reported.

Arnolfo Bagni

'There were mines — the town here and that part over there were all mined and there were lots of anti-tank mines in the Pesa valley. We were lucky that no one got killed, because every now and then we came across anti-tank mines. We had to cross over to come to this side, the bridge didn't exist anymore. We put up some footpaths and walking along these we found some and said, "There's a mine." Big yellow pans like this, but we avoided them once we had gone past them. A farmer from these parts called Viciani had watched the Americans; he dismantled the mines and took them down there. We used to go and get him and say, "Viciani, we've found a mine." And he came and removed the fuse. ... We saw where they had buried the Germans, we went to have a look, I recall. There were quite a few dead soldiers there, buried where the Macereto restaurant is. There were many scattered

about, when we saw them they were already buried. Later on, at the end of the war, they were all taken away. But these tombs remained spread about in these fields for a while. We knew that there was a German body over there and a New Zealand corpse further down. Then they took them all away.

... Then we came home. I remember that we found our house wide open. The Germans had been there, they had left the pans and other things. However, my dad had had the sense to brick up the most valuable things under the stairs and they hadn't touched any of those. The town was really bad in this area — two of the three arches collapsed when the bridge blew up, it was a bitter blow. The nearby houses had been targeted, then there had been the cannon shelling, the German cannon-fire from Fabbrica. You can still see signs of the shrapnel in this house. Many families lost their houses. Whole families had to live in one room. There was a small bar behind the recreational hall and one family went to live in it. Others had to make do in the schools. Then, almost immediately, rebuilding began and each person set out to reconstruct what little they could as soon as possible. There were less damaged houses, of course, but I don't think there was one intact roof left in the whole of Sambuca.'

The passing of the Front was an epic event for the inhabitants of Tavarnelle, San Donato and Sambuca, which saw them involved in the great collective history with their modest personal stories. It is a question of only a few days that, in retelling, expand and really do become the tragic adventure of an entire population.

PRATALE

When the Front passed through, the Papini family[10] had already evacuated to the Sardelli farm at Pratale, where many inhabitants from Sambuca had taken shelter. On the evening of 23 July a German patrol, with its usual brutal methods, ordered the evacuees to leave the house immediately and go to Florence. The same scene was repeated in nearby houses. The reason for all this would only become clear to the evacuees the next morning, when the lifeless bodies of 12 men were found on the Gori family farm.

Nazareno Papini

'When the Front passed through I was staying at the Sardelli farm in upper Pratale. There were lots of families from Sambuca there, about 60 people. The Sardellis were farming friends of my dad's, and we decided to go and stay with them because we felt safer there ... Then, that evening[11] they came and sent us away. They surrounded this house — "Go away, go away, everybody to Florence!" Instead of going to Florence, we took a lane which led to the woods called Sassaia. Many people went to Badia but we stopped before that, at one of my grandfather's farms called Il Poggio. Others continued on past Badia and went to the Rimaggio gully, where there were some shelters. Later on we found out that they had also sent other families away. Anyway, the Germans made everyone leave, they probably didn't want anyone nearby while they were shooting. They didn't do anything to us but they were determined and arrogant when they said, "Go away!" Then, when we were up there, this man arrived. He was the father of a boy who had been shot, with his wife and an 18-year-old boy who had typhoid fever, and he said that there were Germans who had separated the men from the women. They had kept back the men from the Cresti and the Gori families and this man, Maurizio Raspollini, had sent them away. A German had accompanied them to where we were now. He and his wife were crying, they imagined the worst, but they didn't know anything — whether they had shot them or not.

Then night fell and we all slept at Poggio. The following day Raspollini said to my father, "Bruno, let's go and see what has happened," and they went from Poggio to Pratale. They were away for a long time and the women were worried. They returned and told us the bad news,

that there had been this execution. They said that young Giovanni had run off. My dad has always told of how each of the families had embraced each other, that is, the Crestis and the Goris had huddled together but young Giovanni could not be found. His father began to search for him and found him further down, not far away, dead, in a little lane leading to the woods. It seems that the Goris and the Crestis stayed together but he was by himself and tried to escape. Later on, my dad came back to collect the bodies with Alfredo Ciappi, the miller, and one of his uncles. They placed them on two carts, covered them with sheets and took them to the cemetery at Badia.'

Notes

1. Villa Bonazza.
2. Testimony told by Silvano Semplici to Marco Secci in the video *Il passaggio del fronte a San Donato in Poggio e la battaglia di San Martino a Cozzi*, Comune di Tavarnelle Val di Pesa, 2006.
3. Il Fondaccio.
4. At Madonna di Pietracupa.
5. 'Zac!' would be accompanied by a gesture of throat cutting.
6. Testimony told by Costantino Canocchi to Marco Secci in the video *Il passaggio del fronte a San Donato in Poggio e la battaglia di San Martino a Cozzi*, Comune di Tavarnelle Val di Pesa, 2006.
7. Head man.
8. Giuseppe Scarpelli.
9. Testimony told by Maria Becheroni to Marco Secci in the video *La Liberazione di Sambuca Val di Pesa*, Comune di Tavarnelle Val di Pesa, 2007.
10. Testimony told by Nazareno Papini to Marco Secci in the video *La Liberazione di Sambuca Val di Pesa*, Comune di Tavarnelle Val di Pesa, 2007.
11. 23 July.

San Casciano: First Steps Towards a Difficult Return to Normality

Marco Nucci

Hard times awaited San Casciano during the days of the passing of the Front. The weeks preceding 27 July 1944 had seen the strengthening of the anti-fascist formations. In his essay dedicated to San Casciano in the book *La Liberazione della Toscana*,[1] Giovanni Frullini wrote:

'The news of the signing of the Armistice made the situation even more complicated: on one side groups of young people organised aid for the soldiers on the run, on the other, the Fascists established the Republican Fascist Party. The struggle spread like wildfire; Pisignano, Cerbaia and Montagnana formed the Partisan Brigade, which took the name of Il Rosselli, and many share-farmers enrolled. Together, factory workers, farmers and artisans helped the Resistance, providing food, hiding those refusing to be called up by the Salò Government in their own houses, protecting and hiding Jews.'

In the report sent to the Tuscan CLN,[2] chaired by Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti, and regarding the activities carried out between the spring and summer of 1944, the San Casciano CLN evidenced the efforts made by the local anti-fascists to make contact with the Allied troops and prepare the ground for the liberation of the town.

'The local National Liberation Committee was constituted on 21 June 1944 and comprised the following members: Hon. Primo Calamandrei (Christian Democratic Party); Corrado Ghiribelli (Socialist Party); Dante Tacci (Communist Party); and Lt. Col. Angelo Chiesa, present mayor of the Municipality of San Casciano, as co-ordinator and organiser of the teams of young people. Meetings were held in many localities in order to prepare the town for the

Bombardment near San Casciano. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

impending arrival of the Allies. Due to the imminent arrival of the war, the committee members moved to Florence at the beginning of July in order to protect themselves and their families. Substitutes Guido Binazzi, Guido Cenciosi and Pier Carlo Masini from Cerbaia took over and carried out their missions. One of these, at Scopeti, in the presence of Mr Gino Bertoletti of the Florence Socialist Party and Lt. Col. Chiesa, was to define agreements for the actions to be undertaken given the proximate arrival of the Allied troops. However, the young people could not actively participate because the weapons promised by Florence had never arrived. As the Germans had been raiding everything and everyone in the last few days before the arrival of the Allies, a retreat was decided upon, with the aim of reaching the day of liberation unharmed in order to be able to continue the work commenced to assist the Allied troops. A large part of the town was destroyed by violent bombing on 26 July and the Allies made their entrance of the morning of 27 July. The committee representatives made contact with the Allied Headquarters the following day, through Osvaldo Benci, who was the go-between. The first activities they undertook were to assist the numerous persons affected by the war and organise resumption of everyday life in the town. On 14 August the heads of the Committee, who had already returned from a newly-liberated Florence, re-constituted the Committee, with two representatives from each party ...'[3]

In the hours following the arrival of the Allied troops in San Casciano, New Zealand Captain H. Baker, in the capacity of Officer of Civil Affairs of the AMG,[4] wrote a report about the possible need for evacuation of the townspeople to his superiors:

'The city is still under grenade fire and we recommend that the inhabitants do not return there, with the exception of squads to repair the roads and carry out the most essential renovations. The Field Security Section has called for roadblocks to prevent circulation and permit persons coming from the Front to be questioned. Notices have been posted in the city and more copies are needed for the surrounding areas. The regulations for the civil police roadblocks, curfew and anti-pillaging measures have been established. A temporary mayor and a Council have been nominated ... It is believed that there are still many mines in the city. Diesel and petrol will be needed for the agricultural machinery and for the mill tractor, once it has been found. Those who have taken refuge in the country are eating what they can find. The approximately two quintals of flour found in the city will help feed the troops stationed there.'[5]

In the days and weeks following the arrival of the Allies, various committees were formed to reactivate the economy of the area and to handle the large number of evacuees. A Civic Agricultural Committee,[6] composed of institutional representatives, land owners and sharecroppers, was established.

The Civic Evacuee Assistance Committee was also assisted by the institutions headed by the mayor, Lieutenant Colonel Angelo Chiesa. Many women were involved, as well as Don Ivo Biodi, a very active figure in the Resistance, together with parish priests Don Nello Anichini, Don Tebaldo Pellizzari, Don Lido Cappelli and Don Nello Poggi.[7]

Damage to the ecclesial buildings was significant. The church of the provostship of San Casciano had been gutted by bombings and cannon fire. A brief report included in the Allied government papers stated that:

'The ecclesial buildings and parsonage belonging to the provostship Church of San Cassiano in San Casciano Val di Pesa are among the worst damaged in the town: the roofs and ceilings of the central nave seem to have been completely demolished; only the roof trusses and some supporting structures are intact. The rooves and the decorated ceilings of the two aisles are in a very dangerous state and therefore must be demolished. Inside the Church

New Zealand vehicles at Cerbaia. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

the altars, balustrades, cornices, paintings, confessional boxes and the pulpit etc. have suffered considerable damage; all the stained glass windows and fittings have been smashed and torn off. A great deal of the roof covering and ceiling in the Presbytery and the choir has caved in on the chairs and the wood panelling causing severe damage. Even the bell tower has been damaged on the corners by grenade fire in such a way as to impede full use of the bells. The manse has been completely devastated and none of its rooms has been spared — the rooves, walls, floors and doors have been damaged so severely that repairs will be very complicated and expensive. The basement rooms seem to be less damaged, while the buildings to the north of the church have suffered serious cracks and damage, especially the roofs and the walls."[8]

Other information was gathered from reports arriving from the liberated villages. In Cerbaia there were approximately 3000 people — between evacuees and actual residents — who were all temporarily under the

care of doctors from San Casciano and the locality of La Ripa, because the doctor from La Romola who normally assisted the town had fled. Cerbaia was not in such a bad state as San Casciano regarding housing and healthcare. There were no seriously damaged buildings and nor were there situations that could lead to the spread of contagious diseases. The AMG tried to establish a chain of leadership in Cerbaia that included important local people. 'Pier Carlo Masini has been nominated Deputy Mayor,' states Captain H. Baker in the final considerations of his report. 'Proclamations have been put up. A temporary Council constituting the priest, a representative of the evacuees and a labourer, has been established.'[9]

Baker sent another report from Mercatale on 4 August that the 2000 civilians present in the town were being assisted by a pharmacy and a doctor. Two cases of typhoid fever had been reported in Montefiridolfi but these were not, however, declared dangerous. Like the other villages and the main town, Mercatale was without electricity. As well as the considerable damage to the houses, the churches had suffered badly. Don Angelo Ciardi, from Sant'Angelo at Vico l'Abate, in the parish of the Municipality of San Casciano,[10] wrote to the bishop of Florence on 1 August:

'I fear I bring you bad news, your Eminence ... it is my duty to inform you that the church and the manse at Vico l'Abate have also been the object of extremely heavy shelling. Most seriously damaged is the manse — practically uninhabitable due to the bad state of the roofs, the walls, the door and the window fittings.'[11]

Another letter was received by the bishop of Florence on 5 August from Don Francesco Fulignati, prior of San Martino a Cofferi and manciple vicar of Sant' Andrea a Luiano, parishes that would be subsequently abolished and annexed to Mercatale. The parish priest lists the damages incurred in the two churches in this communication. The church of San Martino could still be used, despite the

IV November Street in San Casciano.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

cutting down of all the trees and the 'presence (30 days) of more than 400 horses and numerous German, English and South African trucks', but Sant' Andrea a Luiano had been badly damaged. Don Franceso wrote:

'The Church, the sacristan, sacred furniture, living quarters and farm houses have been rendered unserviceable and almost completely destroyed by the fighting which lasted eight days. ... Destruction of sown fields due to ground hardening caused by hundreds of tanks positioned on the farm. ... Rumour has it that a military commission for the estimation of war damage is operative. There have been four civilian deaths and many injured.'[12]

Water had become a particularly serious issue in the San Casciano area since, as stated by Baker in his report, 'the aqueduct has been partially destroyed and is probably mined. Water is drawn from wells. For the moment, a council and a deputy mayor, Alfredo Mattoncetti (a builder) have been nominated.'[13]

The last village to send in a report on 5 August was La Romola, which had been very badly damaged during the bloody battles and liberated at the end of July. Half of the buildings had been damaged, although 30% of them were described as easily repairable. The gravity of the situation is highlighted in a letter from Don Raffello Sguanci, prior of the S. Maria Church at La Romola, sent two weeks after the end of the fighting. He wrote, 'I shared all the risks and consequences of a battle, which began on 27 July and went on until 4 August, with my people. La Romola is unrecognisable. It awaits whoever is able to reconstruct it morally and materially.'[14]

Notes

1. 'The Liberation of Tuscany.' *La Liberazione in Toscana: La storia e la memoria*. Giampiero Pagnini Editore, Florence, 1994.
2. Comitato Liberazione Nazionale (National Liberation Committee).
3. B.29 File acts and correspondence from the Cnl cc. 450, 9 September 1944–22 May 1946.

4. Allied Military Government.
5. 'Municipality of San Casciano Val di Pesa 1944.' Allied Government Documents, initial report of CAO, San Casciano.
6. Members were: Angelo Chiesa (Mayor and president); the local Chief of Police; Don Nello Poggi from Cerbaia (ecclesiastical representative); Pietro Saccaridi, representative for the farmers; Eng. Arturo Bonaini; Bruno Auzzi, representative for the sharecroppers; Gino Callaioli (Le Corti); and Carlo Roselli (secretary).
7. Members of the Civic Evacuee Assistance Committee: Angelo Chiesa (mayor and president), Don Ivo Biondi, Emilia Lumachi, Cassa Bonaini, Antonietta Pedani, Miss Magni (secretary).
8. Damage to the artistic patrimony. Church provostship of San Casciano in San Casciano Val di Pesa: metric computation and assessment of the damage incurred to the Church buildings and the manse of this Church due to aerial bombings and cannon fire on 23, 24, 25 July 1944.
9. 'Municipality of San Casciano Val di Pesa 1944.' Allied Government Documents, initial report of CAO, Cerbaia.
10. The parish was subsequently abolished and annexed to S. Giuseppe Artigiano at Passo dei Pecorai.
11. Giulio Villani (ed). *Preti Fiorentini: Giorni di Guerra 1943–1945*. Lettere al Vescovo, Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, Florence, 1992, p. 113.
12. Op. cit., p. 121.
13. 'Municipality of San Casciano Val di Pesa 1944.' Allied Government Documents, initial report of CAO, Mercatale.
14. Villani, op. cit., pp. 137–38.

San Casciano: Testimonies from the Front

Antonio Taddei

Alfredo Pasquini

Alfredo entered Bargino on a New Zealand tank

Born in 1929, Alfredo Pasquini was a 15-year-old boy in July 1944. At that time he lived with his sharecropper family in a farm house in the countryside surrounding Pergolato, near Bargino. He saw the bombs fall on San Casciano, but he also had the opportunity to ride on one of the New Zealand tanks that had come to liberate the town from the German troops.

'I'll start from July 24. The Germans fired mortars the whole day, then, on the night of the 25th there was the most absolute silence. The next morning a farmer appeared out of the woods and came up to us saying, "There are New Zealanders at Pergolato!", so my father wanted to go and see our house. Once inside we found a map on the table left by the Germans (which I still have today) as well as a hand grenade with a wooden handle, and dirt all over the place. Then we went into our neighbours' house where you could see the houses at the Fornace from down in the cellar. The bridge had been blown up. We moved on towards the Murlo Estate. There was an encampment of New Zealanders there. Even now I can still recall my friend's story. He saw two officers observing the road, leaning on the pigsty. When they left, my friend went in to see if there were any pigs left but instead he found a petrified German soldier with his gun ready to shoot! The soldier said "I go Florence," but shortly afterwards the New Zealanders came back, captured him and with a kick on the behind took him to the camp. While I was outside on 26 July, I saw the bombs fall on San Casciano and this was a very emotional experience for me. From Pergolato we could see the fighter bomber planes dive towards the town — as the crow flies we were about five kilometres away. I didn't have a watch but I think it was just after midday. We saw the flames of the explosions as clearly as if it was night time. A group of New Zealanders camped near our house. I remember that, on his way to the fields the next morning, my father saw some mounds of soil and immediately thought that they were German mines. He advised the officer in command of the camp to be careful, but when the officer arrived on the spot he started to laugh. These little mounds of soil were not covering mines, but the soldiers' calls of nature. Going down to the Fornace we encountered the soldiers who were having a bite to eat, and as soon as they had finished they gestured that we should get in the tanks with them. You can't imagine the joy we felt when we looked out of the turret. They offered us some cigarettes and with a jerk, rotating the cannon, we went as far as Bargino. There were three tanks. At Bargino they stopped and pulled out a coloured map, asking us to point out where we were. "Bargino!" we exclaimed. At that point

they made us get down. We returned home happy to have been in a tank and they departed. Shortly afterwards they would enter San Casciano.'

Giancarlo Matteuzzi

A 'house-shop' for the New Zealanders in San Casciano

Giancarlo Matteuzzi was a 12-year-old boy in 1944 who lived with his family in a rented house on the road to Empoli, near of the centre of San Casciano.

'My parents had a small shop fronting the road — at that time we sold a bit of everything and there were rooms upstairs. During the passage of the German soldiers, they came looking for men to dig holes for the mines that the Germans were going to blow up during their retreat. At a certain point these German soldiers burst in shouting incomprehensible sentences. My mother tried to hide my brother Enzo, going through into the courtyard, but since the soldiers were already inside the house she managed just in time to put him to bed before they came into the bedroom. My mother implored them to leave him there because he had contracted a contagious disease. Despite this, the soldiers pulled the blankets off and seeing the skinny, frail body of my brother, they decided that he really did have a serious disease. In actual fact this was not true — he was very slightly built, but healthy! Before leaving they fired a round of machine gun bullets at the house, in fact it is still possible to see these holes today. Seeing that he had managed not to get taken, Enzo took refuge in the fields below the church of Santa Maria at Argiano together with some other men for a few days. I remember that my mother prepared some food and I furtively managed to get it to him. Since the Germans also raided food, wine and oil, some people who worked in the nearby Antinori wine cellars decided to remove all the bottles of wine from the cellars and hide them inside an empty cistern in the courtyard behind our house. There were so many of them. Once the bottles had been put inside, they covered the cistern over with some boards. When the Germans arrived they went inside our house and "rummaged around" room by room. They also walked over the cistern, in fact, they made the boards shake with those heavy boots, but fortunately it did not occur to them to check what could be under those boards, otherwise they would have taken all the bottles away. At the end of the war the bottles were all taken back to the Antinori wine cellars.

Before the arrival of the New Zealanders, I recall one curious episode. Once, some elderly people sitting on a wall in front of the shop enjoying the sun, were searched by the Germans, and while one man was being searched panic broke out. It felt like one of the elderly persons had a gun inside his jacket. A pandemonium followed, which was only resolved when the weapon was found — it was just a pipe, mistaken for a gun!

When the New Zealanders finally arrived, our shop was transformed into a kitchen: rations were prepared there for the other soldiers who were encamped in the fields where the factories are today. There were also some generals stationed nearby in Villa Cigliano. This was a sort of headquarters and Winston Churchill came there in August 1944 and I managed to get a look at him. Escorted, he passed through greeting everyone with the "V" sign. The New Zealanders stayed in our shop for about two months. I also remember that a young woman fell in love with one of the English soldiers; in fact they got engaged and exchanged rings. A love that only lasted the length of the soldier's stay in San Casciano. Then, just as it had united them, the war separated them.'

Rosanna Tacci

A young girl in the battle of Petriolo

Rosanna Tacci was a teacher for several decades. She taught in the elementary school in San Casciano for many years. During an encounter with the students on the occasion of the sixtieth Anniversary of the Constitution, she recounted a touching experience that took place when she was 12 years old.

Italian countryside during the war.

Gordon Johnston Collection

'It is difficult to understand just what the war was and the horror of the war. I experienced it firsthand. The New Zealanders arrived in San Casciano and the Germans started to retreat after having mined various areas of the town. Because of the great danger the citizens were in, the National Liberation Committee advised everyone to abandon their houses and they did so. Only a dozen people remained and they were all killed. We began to evacuate, to leave, and for me as a child it was an incredible event. I saw elderly people, children, men and women on wagons, carts and prams or on the shoulders of their family members for those who had no means of transport, carry from their houses as much as they could — mattresses, beds, pans, all that could be transported and the most extraordinary thing was this continuous line of vehicles heading towards the countryside like a procession. The things that we could not take with us were bricked up in the cellars of the houses in the hope of saving them from any eventual bombing or robbers who could have stolen them. It was all useless, because later on everything was destroyed. I was amongst those unfortunate people who paid the price of a useless war and I was in that procession with my little bundles and all my personal belongings. Together with my family, I took refuge at Petriolo, a few kilometres from San Casciano, in the locality of Cigliano. On 26 July a frightful rat-a-tat and some tremendous explosions made us jump — everyone was shouting, "They are setting off the mines!" In fact, that was what was happening. From upon a rise I saw our aqueduct, which was different from how it is today. I watched it collapse like a papier-maché castle, swallowed by a vortex of flames and dense smoke, and shortly afterwards I heard the drone of the airplanes and then a frightful shower of bombs, which fell in clusters on San Casciano. Some people were crying, some were imploring, some were praying; I was totally terrorised and stunned by everything I was seeing. It was then that I really understood what war was. Until then I had not understood. But for me the worst was still to come — unbeknown to us we had ended up in a death trap because Petriolo was on the defense line of the Germans who were retreating and for two days we were in the middle of a crossfire of shelling. The New Zealanders were firing from Spedaletto and there were German cannons 200 metres away from our house so we were stuck in the middle of all this shooting. I was horror-stricken, I could no longer eat or sleep, I clung on to my mother or my father with my hands over my ears in a dark cellar under the house. The bombs fell all over the place. Two Germans entered the courtyard in a

T.K. Norman and a 'friend', found in a destroyed building in San Casciano. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

moment of ceasefire and we came out of the cellar. They were looking for food and having heard a pig grunt they ordered the woman to hand it over to them. She began to scream like mad — she wouldn't give it to them because it wasn't hers, it belonged to the farm owner. So they lined us all up along the wall with our hands above our heads and the machine guns pointed at us shouting, "If you don't give pig, we make you all kaput." They weren't very kind so we expected to be killed. Luckily we heard the crackling of a machine gun nearby and the Germans fled almost immediately. Shortly afterwards some New Zealand soldiers arrived and positioned a machine gun on the roof of the house we were in and then started shooting like mad at the German posts 200 metres away from us. It was an inferno of metal and fire for the entire night. Down in the cellar we were suffocating from the smoke and the gunpowder. The window at the top of the cellar was broken and from there the explosions invaded the room with their blinding light. Metal fragments flew everywhere and I was terrorised by that sight. One woman died and several people were injured. At dawn, Dante, my father, decided to leave there or we would have died like mice. He handed me a bundle with my personal belongings and in the other hand I held a doll that I hadn't wanted to leave behind. Loaded down with possessions, my father held me by the arm, pulling me through the clods of earth in a field of olive trees where it was impossible to walk. The passing of the Front was terrifying — shots whistled from all directions, clouds of soil covered us with each explosion, we threw ourselves to the ground to avoid the bombs and then craters opened in the ground all over the place. I don't know how, but we managed to reach the Cigliano farm where the New Zealanders were, safe and sound. The day after we went to San Casciano with the idea of going back to our house in Bardella. When we got to the Niccolini Theatre in Roma Street where I lived, I nearly had a heart attack — San Casciano wasn't there anymore. There was only a heap of rubble — the houses no longer existed. In its place was this mountain, which rose up towards the sky for metres and metres, tangles of electric wires swayed here and there. To get across we had to climb the debris like you climb a mountain with the danger that there could be unexploded mines underneath, but in the hope of finding something different on the other side. This wasn't to be. We found more debris, the few houses still standing had only severed walls and empty window frames, the rooves had collapsed and there were no longer any roads. Standing before that scene of destruction and death, in that frightening silence, I did what I had not had time to do before — I cried in desperation. And from there we crossed the rubble to get to Le Corti, where we took shelter. There was no water, electricity or food so we managed the best we could. Somehow we had to begin to reconstruct our town.'

Paolo Grassi

The bombs at the public washing place

In Calzaiolo, a few hundred metres from the village and the State Road, was an old public washing place, near which many hand grenades and anti-personnel mines had been hidden. Paolo, a resident in the small Chianti village, recalls:

'Just after the Front had gone through, the fields were strewn with cannon shells and hand grenades, so several

An informal chat between Prime Minister Winston Churchill and General Bernard Freyberg during Churchill's visit to the New Zealand troops of the 8th Armed Corps, shortly after the battle in Florence. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

residents, together with the New Zealanders, gathered up everything they could find and decided to bury it all not far from the public washing place, which is now derelict. Like many other families, we sheltered in a sort of cave and went back to our house every now and then. The soldiers from the German command post, which was stationed in Bargino, also laid mines on many roads beyond the bridge. We saw them doing this and therefore avoided using the roads. One day we saw three Germans driving down the road in a sidecar. They hit a mine while going round a bend and were thrown up into the air. Two of the soldiers landed not far from the vehicle while the third was flung an incredible distance and ended up in the middle of a field. They were all killed. One of the vehicle's wheels even ended up down here at the house and two towels got stuck in the grape pergola. Two of the Germans were then buried by my poor father where they had fallen, while the third was burnt as soon as the New Zealanders arrived.'

Gianfranco Fusi

Under Churchill's oak tree

'Winston Churchill stopped here in August 1944 in order to encourage his men who had come to the Chianti area to restore peace and democracy.' This is the inscription that Gianfranco Fusi would have liked to have placed at the foot of the giant oak tree located at the start of Cigliano Road in the Municipality of San Casciano, to commemorate the brief visit the British prime minister paid to the Allied troops during the days of the liberation of the Chianti area. The wish could not be fulfilled because 'Churchill's oak tree,' as it was known to everybody, was cut down in December 2007 because it had died and had become completely hollow, presenting a danger to those who walked underneath it.

'We had left San Casciano because my mother was afraid of the bombings, and found hospitality in one of the houses on the Cigliano farm where my uncle was a farmer.

Winston Churchill visiting New Zealand troops in Italy shortly after the battle for the liberation of Florence. At left is General Freyberg.
Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

All around my uncle's house was an encampment of about 50 Germans. I remember that a German officer, seeing me in priest's clothes, came into the house, sat down at the table and told me to stay outside because the English were going to bomb it. We spent the night in a refuge; it is difficult to describe the infernal noise, the whistle of the shells. At dawn the next morning I told my uncle that I wanted to go and see what had happened to the house. With dread I looked across the courtyard — the house was safe except for a few windows which had been smashed by flying debris. Where the Germans had been camping up until the previous day, the olive trees were all "upside-down"; that is, the tree tops were where the trunks should have been.

The day after, silence dominated the whole area. Suddenly I saw someone in shorts arrive from where the Antinori Wine Cellars are today; he wasn't a German but a New Zealander officer in reconnaissance, with a gun in his hand and a dagger stuck in one of his socks. I went towards him (I was wearing my priest's robe). I waved to him and he waved back, a bit hesitant. In broken Italian he asked me if there were any Germans around. We offered him a drink and then he left on foot and later returned aboard a tank. Behind him, in single file, were other New Zealand soldiers. The troops arrived the next morning and camped here, setting up their headquarters in the house. As the days passed the area filled up with more New Zealand soldiers.'

Martin Gilbert, Churchill's biographer, reported the news of the British prime minister's visit to Tuscany:

'Churchill managed to reach the front line on 20 August. During his visit he inspected and addressed a contingent of the Armed Brigade of First Canadian Division. Before going to lunch he inspected a half-field battery and then proceeded on to an observation post near the Arno River, about two miles from the Front.'

Valentina Antinori

Germans and New Zealanders in Villa del Cigliano

Built in the second half of the fifteenth century, Villa Cigliano was a strategic place during the war. It was first taken by storm by the German troops and then was a command post for the New Zealand soldiers. It was here that Sir Winston Churchill stopped off for a one-day visit to the troops.

'The New Zealanders arrived at Villa del Cigliano very early one morning, at about 5.50 a.m. The Germans had fled during the night, rushing left, right and centre, without an officer to command them. Someone had obviously notified them of the imminent arrival of the

New Zealanders. I was in bed with my elderly mother. I slept with her because she was terrorised by the fact that the Germans had mined the villa. Therefore, when we heard footsteps on the gravel right outside our window my mother became very agitated. I tried to calm her down and then quietly peeked out of the window. I saw that these soldiers were wearing completely different uniforms from the Germans and realised that the Allies had arrived, although I did not know what nationality they were. They were, in fact, New Zealanders.

So we woke up the servants who were on the top floor and asked them to prepare some milk for the soldiers. I recall one soldier in particular — I don't think he was an officer — called George Spooner. I remember his name well because he was always so kind to my two-year-old son. He brought him chocolate bars — something very rare in those days. I was 24 years old at the time.

I didn't see Churchill — they managed to keep his arrival such a secret that I only heard about it the following day from some officers who often came to visit us in the afternoon for a chat and have a wash in the garden pond.

One day the Allies notified us that that night would be a "bad" one; that is, shooting and cannon-fire. This is what happened and a part of the villa was hit by the shelling. Once, they even took us to my aunt's farm in Castelvecchio, a few miles from San Casciano, because they were expecting a violent attack. At a certain point the jeep couldn't go any further up the dirt road, so the hunting warden picked up my son and his son and carried them to the new refuge. They were both the same age. There we found other people who had had to leave their houses, too. I think we slept there for a couple of nights and then they came back and got us in the jeep.'

San Casciano devastated by the war

Francesco Fusi

In the summer of 1944 the countryside surrounding San Casciano became, either by necessity or choice, an imposed refuge for the majority of the population of the town and the villages surrounding it.

During the weeks of great uncertainty and general apprehension that preceded the passing of the Front in July, this countryside played an undeniable and indisputable role in sheltering the entire population that had fled from the main residential areas previously mined by the German saboteurs and repeatedly involved in Allied fighter-bomber shelling. Already in September 1943, and even more increasingly as the Front neared, the farming families, sharecropping on the Tuscan farms like in the rest of central and northern Italy, had significantly contributed to the genesis of that complex and compound process which goes under the name of Resistance. Offering at their own risk aid and shelter to whoever was fleeing, to ex-political prisoners, draft dodgers, dissidents and opponents of the past Fascist and Salò regimes or likewise opposing, for example, the policies of forced stockpiling and the ever-increasing demand for labour made by the Germans, the sharecroppers and farmers, in fact, ultimately constituted a generous supply of human resources for the partisan groups, providing them with support and assistance as well as new recruits.

The rural area around Mercatale was immediately chosen by the first local anti-fascist groups as the ideal scenario in which to establish small operative nuclei, as it was impossible to do this in the main town that was considered the 'enemy stronghold.' In fact, from spring 1944 onwards, intense co-ordination and support activities for the partisan groups that sometimes operated fortuitously in the area were noted in Mercatale. These activities were, in fact, sustained by the extensive

Sherman tanks entering San Casciano. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

solidarity that the farming families more often than not demonstrated towards the fight for liberation. Osvaldo Benci, director of the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI) sent to the Pesa Valley with the task of reorganisng the local branches on behalf of this organisation, temporarily uniting them with the liberation movement, recalls:

'I was informed of the situation in San Casciano, which was, as I already knew, the Fascist "stronghold" of the area, while in the more populated outlying villages conditions were more favourable for us due to the presence of a greater number of allies and supporters. Therefore we

decided to organise small groups in the villages, whose task was to conduct political and organisational activities as well as capillary propaganda amongst the residents with political tendencies similar to ours. With the help of comrade Alfredo Mattoncetti, we established a large group in Mercatale, which had a greater possibility of carrying out propaganda amongst the population and the farming families. This was due to the anti-fascist knowledge and orientation of the population and to the limited surveillance of the few fascists in the area.'

The Mercatale area and surrounding countryside became the main collection centre for the weapons that were stolen from the Germans — weapons that would then be passed on to the partisan groups operating mostly to the south, such as the Faliero Pucci Group present in the areas around San Donato. Furthermore, right in the Pian di Melograno, not far from Mercatale, the Germans had installed a weapon and ammunition depot that was raided several times by the local squads who acted under the orders of Ermete Nencioni, a lieutenant in the Italian army back home after 8 September.[1]

This solidarity network covered all the rural settlements, often encountering proper linking centres in the parishes, parish churches and convents.

Evidence of underground activities already existing in the area was a first refuge nucleus organised for draft dodgers, Jews, ex-prisoners and Allied soldiers in the San Martino ad Argiano parish along the road to Empoli, thanks to the consent of Don Ivo Biondi. Similarly, immediately after Mass on Christmas Eve 1943, Doctor Alfredo Lumachi, a central figure for the Catholic anti-fascist group in the area, agreed with Brother Tarcisio da Baggio, president of the Frati Minori Cappuccini Order of San Casciano, to create a refuge centre for wanted soldiers in the convent in Grevigiana Road.[2] Therefore Brother Ruffino from Castel del Piano (whose real name was Angelo Sani) got busy and secretly dug out a refuge destined to hide young men on the run in the woods near the Convent 'in his scant spare time created by sleeping and resting less.'[3] Likewise, local anti-fascists, who were particularly unpopular with the Germans, were more than once hidden in the La Croce Convent of the Frati Minori in San Francesco Road. It was in this way that many of the parishes in the area, during those terrible days preceding the passing of the Front, after already having been refuges for draft dodgers and political prisoners, did not hesitate to become places of shelter for the numerous evacuees as well as, in some cases, a sort of logistic base for the local anti-fascist forces: 'One safe reference point was the Santa Maria Macerata Church and Don Lido Cappelli, anti-fascist parish priest and man of culture. You could listen to Radio London in his house every day, and receive news and aid as well as advice.'[4] The role of providing assistance, effected mainly by the numerous farming families in the area, had to adapt itself to the widespread evacuation. In fact, in July 1944, almost all the inhabitants of San Casciano were living in the countryside surrounding the town. Many families had left their houses to seek refuge in the farmhouses and on the farms dotted around the territory, in the cellars of the manorhouses, or in other shelters, more often than not accepting the hospitality of close or distant relatives, or acquaintances.

The taking of San Casciano on the morning of 27 July, made possible partly by the pre-arranged German retreat towards the north, posed many difficulties for the troops of the New Zealand brigades, as had happened during the previous lengthy breakthrough attempts on the Pesa River. Despite these problems, this led to the end of the control of a neuralgic road network centre. Or at least this was the opinion of the Allies regarding the advance towards the Paula Line and the bridges over the Arno: 'San Casciano ... is the stronghold across Road no. 2 on the route to Florence, with Mercatale at its side like an eastern anchor,'[5] as General Freyberg described the town in his diary. Once the town had been taken, the Front moved northwards for the last decisive attack, towards

Italian countryside. MacMillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch

the Arno valley and in the direction of the Apennine mountain range. After the passing of the Front, tough challenges and difficult months awaited the entire newly-liberated population.

Shortly beforehand, in San Casciano, between the end of May and the following month, the men from the local CLN,[6] pressed by the imminent arrival of the Front and in the void left by the departure of both Podestà[7] Romboli and General Achille Dell'Era, the prefectorial commissioner, had very courageously decided to take upon themselves a last crucial effort: to save the population by depriving the enemy of the provisions destined for their troops. These were mainly flour and oil, which were stored in the municipal stock warehouses. So the local CLN, assisted by the remaining administrative personnel in the Town Hall, organised the evacuation of the entire town population. Dante Tacci, key figure in the town PCI and its representative within the Liberation Committee, recalls:

The municipal offices in San Casciano, destroyed by bombing. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

'People ... began to use every means available — carts, cars, vans — to evacuate furniture, objects and possessions. Many non-transportable items were hidden, bricked up in cellars and places thought to be safe ...

In the countryside, the psychologically prepared farming families not only took the evacuees into their houses but shared with them the economic and moral sacrifices and dangers, and often paid the price in person.'[8]

The evacuees received a portion of flour and oil for each member of the family. Once this was done, and after the Germans commanding the square in San Casciano had found the warehouses empty, the CLN hastily summoned the administrative personnel and, following the advice of the Florentine CLN, ordered them to abandon the town hall at once. The committee members locked the main door of the building and hurried away, taking shelter in the areas surrounding the town, to await the enemy's retreat.

Having been evacuated to the nearby countryside and managing to get through the uncertain days of the passing of the Front, the challenge that awaited the inhabitants of San Casciano was that of a 'return to normality.' Over the following months this pressing task would be the responsibility — in different proportions according to often divergent logics — of on one hand, the men from the local CLN who, with the backing of the

Allied authorities, had created the first temporary post-war council administration, and on the other hand, of the well-oiled bureaucratic and military machine of the AMGOT[9] and in particular the Allied governor appointed to the control of the district of San Casciano.

On 27 July, the day the town was liberated after the passage of the advance guards, the AMG personnel immediately also entered San Casciano in the form of the CAO,[10] the Allied force officially responsible for civil matters in the district, who was a true and proper 'plenipotentiary' governor. To those functionaries, in all the districts of the territories liberated by the Allied armies, were assigned the management, decision-making and administrative tasks that would, in normal times, have been awarded to the peripheral Italian departments. According to such procedures, on a central level the liberation forces had a wide margin of control of a political, economical and financial nature over the actions of the Italian government, and therefore, also over its peripheral administrative structures. The rights of a juridical nature which founded such a prerogative had previously been included in detail in the Armistice document signed in Cassibile and, above all, in the later one signed in Malta where, furthermore, in the articles of the Instrument of Surrender it had been decided successively to nominate a Control Commission, the one that, in fact, in November 1943 would have become the ACC,[11] which depended on the General Headquarters of the Allied forces. The ACC and the AMG actually constituted a single organisation operating in Italy after 31 December 1945, which, with regard to administrative and economical control, practically normalised the prominent role that the Allies had already carved out for themselves on a military and strategic level.

According to this scheme, as soon as an area had been liberated it was immediately placed under the administration of the Civil Affairs officers from the Allied military government annexed to the advance troops. These areas that were — as was the case for the San Casciano district — very close to the Front, were subject exclusively to the authority of the AMC, which substituted the Italian authorities, exercising sovereign power, nominating the local civil functionaries and issuing orders and proclamations.

The work of Captain Baker (the first of a series of New Zealand officials to perform this task) falls exactly into this scheme. Having reached San Casciano, from 27 July onwards he hastily contacted the main members of the CLN, choosing from among its members Lieutenant Colonel Angelo Chiesa, a high-ranking Italian officer evacuated to the countryside near Mercatale, and previously designated head of the interparty military command by the local anti-fascist forces. Chiesa was temporarily nominated mayor — the first in the postwar period — an act with which the AMG, through Baker, conceded the formation of a provisory town council. On 2 August, Mayor Chiesa formalised the nomination of his councillors with Order 2/b: Don Ivo Biondi (DC); Castrucci Tito (DC); Duchi Giocondo (PCI); Lumachi Alfredo (DC); Nencioni Guido (PSI); Giuntini Ugo (PCI); and Dante Tacci (PCI).[12] These names were all well-known to the local anti-fascism group.

Once the Allied governor had taken up office and the town council had been restored, albeit only temporarily, it could be considered that the lengthy task of returning to normality had commenced; that is, the process of material and spiritual reconstruction of the whole community began, the completion of which would be long in the waiting. In particular the prerequisites necessary for the repopulation of the town were still a long way off.

The first measure taken was to establish the Evacuee Aid Office, whose initial task was to conduct a census of the inhabitable houses and assess the extent of the actual damage. A preliminary approximate but indicatory assessment conducted by the Allies estimated that 65% of the buildings in the town had been completely destroyed and were therefore not repairable.[13] Other later data shows that at the end of the fighting the rooms that had been

destroyed or seriously damaged in the town of San Casciano numbered 2154 out of a total of 5680 existing before the war.[14] Engineer Dino Bacci, commissioned by the Ministry of Public Works to execute the project for the municipal urban reconstruction plan, also stated in one of his reports, dated 1947, that the average percentage of destruction and damage incurred by the buildings in the town centre amounted to 58%.[15] Without doubt, the whole urban structure of the town had suffered indelible wounds.

This had been provoked by both the destruction caused by the Germans, who had mined the main roads of the town, and the heavy bombing ordered by the Allies in support of the advance of the New Zealand battalions.

For their part, the Germans had long since predetermined the destruction of several buildings using mines. This practice was part of a consolidated military strategy aimed at slowing down the Allied advance by destroying and blocking the roads. Others believe instead that many of the demolitions were contrived mainly to create space for the German howitzers positioned to thwart the imminent Allied troops whom it was thought would have reached the town along the Cassia and Borromeo main roads and the Colle d'Angola Road. Whatever the real strategic reasons, the following buildings were mined and then blown up due to their central position: the town hall in Machiavelli Street; the Oratorio (Oratory) della Concezione in Piazza delle Erbe (called 'the little church' by the locals), completely destroyed and never rebuilt; the medieval walls and other buildings close to Piazza delle Erbe; the Suffragio Church (Santa Maria al Prato) in Morrocchesi Street; and the porticciola, the last ruins of the four castle gateways surrounding the town. Other buildings were mined in Borgo Sarchiani, in IV Novembre Street, in Garibaldi Avenue, yet again the historical town walls in Via dei Fossi, and some houses along Grevigiana Street.

At the end of July, Dante Tacci, who was staying just outside San Casciano, watched the mines being set off from a distance when, 'we saw the town watertank collapse, while from lower down a huge cloud of smoke and flames rose up towards the sky as if it was a volcano about to erupt.'[16]

Not long afterwards it would be the turn of the Allied bombs. Freyberg's diary of 26 July, at 1.30 p.m. reads, 'Casciano was heavily bombarded by the fighter bombers, then hit by the entire artillery and bombed once again in the afternoon.'[17] During those same hours, Major Keith Hutcheson, commander of Armcav, the special squad that liberated the town the following day, had stopped by the Pesa River with his troops. He saw the air raid and, 'we watched our bombers deliver a terrible blow to San Casciano. One moment the town was sparkling in the sunshine. One second later our bombs fell and a yellow blanket of dust and smoke rose from it. As this cloud dispersed we could see the town in ruins.'[18]

The profile of the town changed drastically. Even Don Adriano Grossi, manciple vicar of S. Antonino Martire at Bonazza (Tavarnelle Val di Pesa) emphasised in a letter to Cardinal Elia Dalla Costa on 19 August that, 'San Casciano is a scene of real desolation.'[19]

Yet another realistic picture of how serious the material damage to the town was following these circumstances is provided by Tacci, who recorded that:

'... the scene before our eyes was shocking: gutted houses, debris blocking the roads as high as the first floor of the collapsed or semi-destroyed buildings. Desolation everywhere: demolished doors, fallen shutters, telephone and electricity cables in a formless tangled mass in the air; there was no water in the aqueduct ... The vital structures had been destroyed — the Town Hall had been razed to the ground, right to the foundations, all the offices had disappeared: the civil offices and the historical archives had papers strewn everywhere.'[20]

The most pressing urgency was the removal of the debris that blocked the town streets. Teams of civilians assigned

Corsini Avenue, San Casciano. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

to various tasks were formed as quickly as possible: small units composed of three or four people and armed with a cart divided themselves among the areas that had been most badly destroyed by the war.

The presence of mines and unexploded bombs obviously caused problems in the removal of the debris. The Allied military government, later followed by the Italian government, decided to create teams of mine-clearers trained in specialised schools who could then be sent all over the country. In actual fact, most of the time the initial interventions of mine-clearing were carried out at great personal risk by civilians and farmers. Teams of mine-clearers were also formed in San Casciano, composed of local people lacking any technical knowledge except, perhaps, a few rudiments explained to them by instructors paid by the Unione Nazionale Protezione Antiaerea (UNPA).[21] This local manpower, enrolled, as often happened, more by force than voluntarily, received food and lodgings foreseen by the rations for workers with heavy jobs and a daily pay of 150 lire, with an extra bonus of 5 lire for each mine they deactivated.[22]

The need to find new material with which to rebuild or render bombed buildings safe, a compelling need obviously linked to the initial phases of reconstruction, and the evident difficulties that arose in the attempt to satisfy this demand, led the temporary administrational personnel, the mayor and the various council officers to send numerous requests for help to the Allied governor.

On 14 November, Capitan Keegan, the new Civil Affairs Officer in San Casciano (Capitan Baker's successor)

contacted, through Major Clinkscales, provincial headquarters personnel. Capitan Keegan forwarded a list of materials and quantities necessary for the most urgent repairs, requesting materials that he knew to be already available at the building-material factories in Ferrone and Impruneta, and cement from near Settimello (Sesto Fiorentino), as soon as possible.[23] In the meantime, possible stopgap solutions had to be improvised. In an ordinance dated October 1944, Mayor Chiesa ordered the requisition of all the tiles covering the manure yards in the area so they could be used for repairing the roofs of the buildings in the town straight away.[24] The difficulties in obtaining building materials were due to war damage and the collapse of the provincial and regional industries. Further difficulties were, without doubt, those represented by the terrible state of the streets and main road networks.

Transport problems made starting up of the flow of food supplies particularly difficult. It is true that this was immediately reactivated under the responsibility of the SEPRAL (the Provincial Food Section) but, like all the other districts south of the Arno, San Casciano was right behind the front line and for this reason the main roads were mostly destined for the transit of military convoys, which obviously had the priority over all civilian traffic. Furthermore, primary food requirements had to be covered by importing food from other already liberated Italian regions or the supplies had to come from other provinces situated south of Florence, one of these being Siena. 'AMGOT did not, however, include the supplying of foodstuffs to the civilian population among its main priorities.'[25]

The passing of the Front radically influenced the economic revival of the population and the liberated territories. As self-sufficient economical units, the farming households had been deprived of their usual survival instruments. Agriculture, the principal means of sustenance and source of earnings for entire communities of the Chianti area, had received a severe blow. Imagine

Borgo Sarchiani, San Casciano.

Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

25. P. Ginsbourg. *Storia d'Italia dal dopoguerra a oggi. Società e politica 1943–1988*. Einaudi, Turin, 1989.
26. ACSC. Various documents from the Allied headquarters 1944, 2184, bundle 2; San Casciano Town Council no. 1403 to the AMG headquarters in San Casciano, 4 November 1944.
27. *Headquarters Allied Military Government Florence Province, Report of the Provincial Commissioner for the period 0001 hrs September 1944 to 2400 hrs 9 September 1944, Appendix 'E' Province of Florence Grain Collection*. National Archives, Washington, RG 331/10800/115/143, published in R. Absalom, *Gli Alleati e la ricostruzione in Toscana 1944–1945: documenti anglo-americani*. L.S. Olschki, Florence, 1988, p. 502.
28. At the beginning of 1945 it was known that a small group of armed men were hiding out in the woods surrounding Ginestra Fiorentina. The Allied authorities had traced the murders of three people in the same area back to them. Captain Robertson had even organised an expedition to find the band, an operation that took place with the help of about one hundred local policemen, but which was not successful. C. Biscarini, op. cit., p. 207–208.
29. C. Salvianti. R. Ciapetti. Op. cit., pp. 219–220.
30. J. F. Cody. '21 Battalion.' *The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War*. Historical Publications Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, New Zealand, 1953, p. 359. Cody also recalls a similar episode where a soldier from 21st Battalion had attempted to break into a safe in Empoli, but failed. Also cf. C.Biscarini, op cit. no. 94, p. 86.

San Michele a Torri: the civilian odyssey

Gabriella Congedo

Before the passing of the Front, the town of San Michele a Torri wasn't so different from how it looks today; a group of houses around the church and the fattoria (farm), another cluster of dwellings about a kilometre further up called 'La Palazzina', a series of small hamlets and several isolated houses. These places are only a few hundred metres away from each other but at that time they were small worlds, each with its own history and identity. Even when the fighting was at its worst they found themselves experiencing different situations.

Most of the inhabitants were farmers who worked for the fattoria at San Michele. Their lives revolved around the farm and in the immediate environment. The women ran the houses and took care of the domestic animals, and the younger women often worked as dressmakers or embroiderers.

The passing of the Front hit this small community like a cataclysm. It was among these hills that the most decisive — and bloodiest — battle was fought for the conquest of Florence. A battle fought metre by metre, house by house, with an unprecedented amount of shooting, extremely heavy losses on both sides and enormous suffering for the population.

At the first signs of what was about to happen, towards the middle of July, the inhabitants of San Michele did not abandon the town — partly because they would not have known where to go — but instead built refuges. These were usually horseshoe-shaped trenches covered with branches and soil, some of which were large enough to hold entire families. The choice of the most suitable positions and the 'supervision of the job' was the task of the elders who had been in the Great War. They knew — or thought they knew — which direction the shelling would be coming from. But when the Allied artilleries began to hit hard (according to several witnesses this happened around 24 July), it became evident to everyone that these shelters were unsafe.

Silvano Vignozzi

'I remember the first two or three shots. They hit the church bell tower in San Michele. I remember this because I was making a shelter in the woods below Marciola. There were Germans all around my house and so I went a bit further up. There was this man working with me and suddenly we heard "boom, boom", some cannon-fire, but in the distance, towards San Gimignano. After a while we saw two or three shells hit the bell tower and a cloud of brick-red smoke coming out of it. This man and I, we rushed into the shelter. Then the others came, there were 14 of us, it was quite big. We had cut some treetrunks and placed them all across the top of the shelter. Then we had

The remains of a New Zealand truck at San Michele. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand

laid a thick layer of wood on top of that and then soil. We saved our lives by going in there. Three bombs from the plane fell about 30 to 35 metres from where we were. It was Sunday, I remember. Then the sun disappeared. For a couple of hours you couldn't see anything, you couldn't breathe — there was a terrible smell and so much dust. It was really frightening!'

Ida Agnoloni

'My dad had been in the Great War, but this war seemed different to him from the war he had fought in. When the Front started to get closer, you could hear the bombing coming nearer. We began to go and hide. Each evening we went to spend the night in a place we called 'the cave'. There was a huge rock with a hollow space underneath it. Each of us took our blankets and went to sleep there. Tanks passed by all night on their way to Florence. They were beginning to retreat, and we kept quiet ... We had spent one night there when my dad said, "It's not safe to stay here," so we went to the Leona gully. We put two or three loaves of bread, some oil and a few tomatoes into a basket and went to the Leona gully. When some airplanes passing overhead saw us, the cannon-fire really started raining down, the kind that explodes in the air ... They saw us and launched this cannon-fire that blew up in the air, lots of red fragments fell all around us. My father hugged us tightly.

In the meantime, however, my mother and Renzo, my brother, had gone back to the house because little Renzo had left a blackbird in a cage hanging under the fig tree. We heard them, they lasted about half an hour, a quarter of an hour and then they calmed down so we said, "Let's go." Shortly afterwards we left too, because they had launched two of those things on us and my dad said, "They've seen us and now they'll kill us." So when the activity in the woods stopped, we raced away. We could hear the first shell, we huddled together, all four of us — me, Dad, Cosetta and Anna. The cannon-fire fell on us, one from over there, then we didn't hear anything so walked on a bit. Then we heard a shot coming from near Montagnana; they were over there. We huddled together again and the shots fell just ahead of us. We managed to get home somehow. When we got there we went down into Adriana the shopkeeper's cellar. It was small and there were a lot of people in it. A German soldier came and said, "No, no good here, go away!" and so everyone from Palazzina went to the cellar at San Michele.'

Piero Pacifici

'When the Allied troops started firing we spent a couple of days in the woods. A shelter covered with tree trunks and branches had been dug. The Allies came from Cerbaia onwards. They fired cannon shots continuously for a whole day and then advanced with their tanks. Bullets cost less than men, they had the means, and they used them.

One night there was tremendous bombing. Two people who had not managed to find a place in the shelter dug some holes in the ground but a bomb came down, fragments of it flew everywhere and one of them bled to death.[1] We moved from this shelter in the woods to the manorhouse because it was safer. I remember that I was carrying a live rabbit, which I held by its ears.'

Loretta Verdiana[2]

'The week before the passing of the Front my dad looked out of the window, which faced directly towards Poggibonsi, and said, "Look, there's cannon-fire in Poggibonsi — the war is going to come through here."

When the Germans arrived my dad couldn't work anymore because they took the animals away.[3] So he built two shelters, one under Vasco's house and one facing the Leona hillock. Then one morning the Germans sent us away from the house, it was a Tuesday I think. They said, "Go away, tonight all houses kaput!" They positioned 11 tanks all around, then they came inside. We had come back from the shelter (we slept in the shelter at night)

Ida Agnoloni's class.

and they sent us away. "Everyone to the village because tonight all the houses kaput!" ... The shelling went on for several days, but less frequently, not continuously. From there we went to the cellars in San Michele.

Only two cellars in San Michele were large enough and safe enough; in Via dell'Oratorio (La Fratta) and at the manorhouse. About 60 persons took refuge in the first, and about 200 in the second. They were mostly women, the elderly and children. The fit and healthy men continued to hide in the woods in order to avoid round-ups. The Germans regularly combed the territory, searching for draft dodgers, deserters and escaped prisoners.

The Germans occupied the top floors and the outer parts of the cellars of both the manorhouse and the farmhouse at La Fratta, while the civilians were crammed in at the back.

A firing position was set up at the manorhouse. This meant it was one of the epicentres of the battle, which reached maximum intensity on 28 and 29 July. The refugees were huddled up among the wine barrels while all hell let loose over their heads. They were liberated by the New Zealanders on 30 July.

Vasco and Anna Maria Verdiani.

The situation at La Fratta was quite different due to the fact that the Germans had established an observation point there, complete with field telephone. This post supplied firing co-ordinates to a self-propelled gun located a short distance away, which fired towards Cerbaia. On 31 July a rumour spread amongst the refugees at La Fratta — perhaps brought back by someone who had managed to cross the lines — that the Allies were preparing carpet-bombing in order definitively to evict the Germans from the town. While they were trying to save themselves they encountered the first New Zealanders and therefore learnt that the area had been liberated.'[4]

Ida Agnoloni

'I think that there were about 160 people in the cellar at the manorhouse. We were on the lower level, above us was the sotto-fattore[5] whose name I don't recall. There were some young people who prepared food for us and every now and then they brought us down something to eat. Then, at a certain point, even the water ran out. My sister was thirsty so my mother gave her some dessert wine to drink and when we came out of the cellar she started running and we couldn't find her. While we were there the Germans came to load the machine guns, then they went up to the top of the ramp and began to fire.'

Loretta Verdiana

'There were 200 or 300 of us, it was full of people. There were 30 small children aged between two and three years old, the poor things just didn't stop crying. We were all in the lower cellar; there was also Francalanci the priest, Bucciolini the fattore[6] and Conti the sotto-fattore. We couldn't stay in the top cellar because the Germans were in it. When we arrived in the morning we saw the tank — it moved out from under the loggia, fired and returned under cover. That was why they were firing at us.

There was continuous bombing. Father Francalanci counted minute by minute how many fell. We were in the dark with the door open, we could see lots of shelling ... At about 2 a.m. on Saturday night we heard two planes passing overhead. We said, "Now they'll drop the bombs," and they did — 12 bombs, all around the farmhouse. The nearest one was at the bend in the road where the roundabout is now. They launched two there, then at the Uccellare and so on, because they wanted to destroy the village. Later on they found the holes. So Mario Michelangeli and Giuseppe Conti, the sotto-fattore, crossed the Front and went to the Castellare where there was a command post, to tell them to cease firing because there were lots of civilians in the village.'

Remo Sereni

'When we got to the cellar at La Fratta there were already many other people there, perhaps about 40 people — women, elderly people and children. There was nothing to eat. Somebody tried to get to the oven to make some bread but it was hit by cannon-fire. We had left our rabbits at home at Torri so we decided to go and get them. Me, my sister and my mother went. When we reached the

little bridge at Torri, the cannon-fire started and we had to return to the cellar — it wasn't possible to get anything. We tried once again, but the place we kept the rabbits in was full of sleeping Germans. Even the second time around we had to leave without rabbits or anything else.

The New Zealanders arrived at the outskirts of the town on the morning of 30 July, but part of San Michele remained in German hands for another three days. The civilians' ordeal was, therefore, not over yet. They left the manor-house and headed towards Castellare, where the New Zealand command post was, on a nightmarish trip under fire by the German artilleries, over ground which was full of mines and littered with bodies and dead animals.

The commanding officers ordered all the families living in Palazzina to evacuate and go over to the other side of the Pesa River, towards Montagnana, where they were put up by the farmers. Several days passed before they could return home, but at least they were safe. In the meantime they could watch, almost as if they were at the movies, the Allied bombardments on Marciola and Pian dei Cerri.'[7]

Ida Agnoloni

'That Sunday morning, when we all left the cellar, there were still Germans at Uccellare.[8] When they saw us fleeing they began to shoot at us so we lay down under the rows of grapevines. Along the road were dead animals, dead Germans — real carnage. We went down to the Pesa River towards Cerbaia. When we got to that gully, we realised that my dad and my Uncle Tito weren't with us anymore. They had continued along the gully while we crossed over; that is, they went to Castellare and we went to upper Cerbaia instead. There was a vineyard there, with lots of trenches and sleeping soldiers. So we carried on further down and went over the Pesa River. There was a little bridge over a stream so we took our clothes off, washed them, lay them in the sun and then put them back on again. We had nothing else.

Ida Agnoloni.

There were some farmers living on the other side of the Pesa River and they took us in. I don't remember their names. They prepared some meat broth for us because they had secretly butchered some calves, and we thought it was a banquet.'

Piero Pacifici

'As soon as the New Zealanders arrived that morning at about 7.30 or 8 a.m., we heard a burst of machine gun fire at the door. Having heard that there were Germans in the house, they went straight to the top floor to capture them. We ran off immediately towards Cerbaia, because the Germans regained part of San Michele. I saw a dead German soldier on the roadside. There was also bombing at Castellare. It seemed like Judgement Day and the Germans were firing from San Michele. Because we didn't

think it was safe even there, we fled to Montagnana. After a few days I fell and broke my arm. An Allied ambulance took me to the civilian hospital in Siena. With my broken arm I was the one who was the best off.'

Loretta Verdiani

'The New Zealanders arrived at about eight o'clock in the morning. They had those big hats with netting on them. The cellar door was open with everyone inside and there were only six Germans in front of the cellar.

They sent us away. Once they had left the manor-house, the farming families all went back to their own houses. They asked us where we lived and we answered, "Up there, in Palazzina." We couldn't go back because the Germans were still there. There were 16 or 17 families from Palazzina, including ours, all large families. The Germans were there because they [the New Zealanders] had already lost it twice — they had already retreated twice from Castellare to Palazzina.

We reached Castellare through the fields. There were mines along the road so the men went ahead and told us where to be careful. There was a soldier on sentry duty in the courtyard of the villa. We all went into a large room where there was a commanding officer. While he was talking to the heads of the families, a cannon shell fell and hit the young soldier in the courtyard, so the officer said, "At this point I cannot let you stay here — I will send for a truck to take you all to Siena." The men didn't agree with this, so the commanding officer said, "Cross over the river and go into those houses over there."

We crossed the Pesa River, which was almost dry, and went to those families. We stopped at the second house, the home of the Camici family, who had a spinning mill. When the wife saw us she said, "Poor things. Look at the state they are in!" They prepared baths for everyone and gave us something to eat. Then they said that they could only take in one family so they divided us up amongst the nearby houses. We went to my father's sister's place in Montepaldi.

A scene of absolute devastation awaited the inhabitants of San Michele upon their return to the town. Destroyed houses, burnt trees, wrecked military vehicles, weapons, ammunition and abandoned bombs. There were pieces of steel everywhere, while the corpses of the dead soldiers were still lying where they had fallen. Furthermore, here they had not experienced that air of excitement that had accompanied the passing through of the Allied army in other areas. The New Zealanders had left immediately and the only known encampment was quite a distance from the town. '

Silvano Vignozzi

'We had left the shelter at the bottom of the field. I had already seen my dad because he came every day. He was old. He came early in the morning if there was something to get — a flask of wine or water — we drank a lot while we were in the shelter. He told me that there was this [dead] German, a man had helped him put the soldier on a ladder, and they put him into a hole in a trench. They threw him in it and covered him up a bit. I had all his documents, with his name and surname. I would have liked to have written to his family, but there was no one who could write in German and so I couldn't do anything.'

Loretta Verdiani

'We went back as soon as Scandicci had been liberated. Once we got past Castellare and were heading up towards San Michele, we came across dead animals, horses, all sorts of everything, corpses of soldiers with just a bit of soil covering their faces. My father tried to encourage us on. Then we reached Palazzina. There were three military trucks in front of Adriana's shop[9] — two were already full of dead bodies — and we could see those young men with their blond hair. What a scene it was. The entrance was full of dead bodies — a pile this high, they were filling up the other truck. We didn't sleep for a month because of the impression it made on us.

We found our house in ruins. When it began to rain in October we had to use umbrellas in the kitchen. We slept with five other families in Massimo Luchini's house for six months. There were mountains of shells of all sizes on the lawn — it was a real sight. My dad said, "There'll be trouble if you pick one up." There were pieces of metal this long on my brother's lawn. There were piles of them. A man came to collect the metal but you weren't allowed to take the shells — the army came to take them away.

... When we got back home there was nothing left, they had taken everything. We had only the clothes on our backs, which we washed in the evening and put back on the next morning. A man came by selling black fascist shirts. My mother bought two of them and made a dress for each of us so we would have a change of clothes. Life went on like this for quite a long time.

The battle of San Michele had ended, but the effects of that week of intense shooting would be felt for many years to come. There were hardly any cattle left because of the cannon-fire and raiding. The huge amount of pieces of metal rammed into the ground and the tree trunks — the elders recall that saws broke — made the farmers' lives even more wretched.

But the worst wounds were those that remained impressed in the lives of the people. One painful chapter, still not very well known, is the one regarding the accidents caused by bombs and explosive materials which took place after the passing of the Front. Many people were killed or mutilated, but the real victims were the children. The abandoned weapons were an irresistible temptation for them. At San Michele, little 8-year-old Umberto Poli was blown to pieces by a bomb on 31 March 1945, the day before Easter. Marcellino Lotti, his playmate, was also killed.[10] Others fared better but the memories and physical scars are still fresh. They were the consequences of a tremendous war that had not exhausted its destructive potential.'

Aldo Bonifazzi

'It was 6 August, right after the battle. Late that afternoon my dad, who had been wounded by the bombing a few days before and couldn't move, said to me, "Let the sheep out for a while to eat." There were only 35 left out of 105. I went over to the field in front of the Fornace where there was a haystack, a trench with a spade still in it and cartridges — there had been shooting. I went in to look, I was just a boy, you know, I was curious.

The sheep moved into the upper field where there was a vineyard and they started eating the grapes, so I sent the dog to chase them out. It was just a puppy that had never been with sheep before, but he understood me! The sheep came down from the bank and one stepped on a mine. I was facing towards it and 'boom!', it exploded. The sheep didn't die but the dog was wounded on the ear. It fled towards the house. You should have seen how fast it ran! My dad said, "What have you done?" "It's the same leg as yours!" I replied. I couldn't stand up. Even now there is still a hole this big. When they picked me up they also saw the wound up here and my dad got a fright. The New Zealanders who were in the big farmhouse had heard everything and came straight away in a truck. They put me into it and took me to get the wound treated, first in Cerbaia, then in Romita on the Cassia Road and afterwards to Siena to be operated on. I arrived there at 6 a.m. the following morning. I returned home on 5 October, two months, less a day, later.'

Piero Pacifici

A Jewish family at San Michele

Armando Pacifici was a humble Jewish shopkeeper from Florence. After 8 September he took refuge at San Michele a Torri with his wife and 9-year-old son, Piero, in order to avoid being deported. Everyone in the town knew who they were but no one turned them in.

'We had a haberdashery shop in Borgo Pinti, Florence. We had to close it after the Armistice because they had started rounding up the Jews there. Most of my schoolmates were deported. The shop was sequestered. My parents and I

Umberto Poli.

Dante Poli.

found a place to stay in San Michele a Torri, at a man called Neri Valente's place. He had three children. We paid him board — this man was poorer than we were — he earned a living digging trenches in vineyards. In the evening we ate by the fire, after having gone into the woods to search for mushroom and potatoes. One day a uniformed local policeman, who was our friend, came into town and asked about us, but no one said a word. Everyone in San Michele knew we were Jews but no one ever turned us in.

My father used to go to Florence on his bicycle to steal things from our shop, taking cases of his goods that he then sold in San Michele. He waited for the alarm to sound so that everyone was in their shelters and no one was on the roads. Then he raised the rolling shutter on the shop front and went in. Since this was dangerous, he later arranged to get in through the cellar in an adjacent building so that he would not be seen from the street. He risked his life but there was no alternative. We had no money but we had to eat. At times we had to go into the fields and take things without the farmer's permission.'

Loretta Verdiana

The mule

Primo Verdiani had to feed and clothe a family of 11 with his job as a wagon driver. The bread and the flour given to him by the bakers he delivered wood to helped to keep them from starving. When the cannon-fire began to fall on San Michele, the first thing he did was to take his mule to a safe place — it was the most precious thing he owned.

'... When he arrived home after three days, my father went straight to see how the mule was doing, because he

had removed it from the stable under the house and taken it down to the Leona gully. It had been hit by cannon-fire and my father said, "They have taken my arms away." The poor man did not know what to do; he had to start delivering wood again. There were no farm animals left, the Germans had taken them all. They used to stop at the farmers' stables and take them all away. Once they had taken two oxen and hitched them up the wrong way; the right side was on the left side. What a mess! We were watching them from the bedroom windows, and the animals were walking crookedly, from side to side.

One day my father heard that they were selling an army mule in Siena. He left on foot with my brother — three days there and three days back. Then they had to sell this mule again after two or three months because of the way it used to kick. There was a cattle dealer in San Colombano at the time, they called him Sciabolino, and my dad managed to buy a mule from him.'

Giovanna Fondelli

The Vezzosi brothers

The killing of two brothers — Loris and Domizio Vezzosi — which took place on 17 July 1944 at San Vincenzo a Torri, was one of the most atrocious episodes of the war in the Scandicci area. Some reconstructions of the event accredit the theory that the brothers were involved with the 'Carlo Rosselli' partisan

Loris Vezzosi.

Domizio Vezzosi

group operating between Montagnana and Scandicci, but this has always been denied by family members.

We have decided to recount a previously unpublished version of the facts related to us by Giovanna Fondelli, the wife of Carlo Vezzosi, Loris's son. Mrs Fondelli lived with Loris's widow, Francesca Pacini, for 20 years, becoming custodian of her memoirs.

Loris Vezzosi was 30 years old, Domizio was 39. Loris had been married for only 15 months.

'Loris was in the army and worked for the railways in Florence. He was a tall, good-looking man. After 8 September he went to work on the Sassoli estate. He was quite religious and not involved in politics. That Monday morning he went to the farm as usual. At midday his wife, carrying their 6-month-old baby, went to take him his lunch and stayed on to chat with some other women. At that moment two Germans passed by with two or three repubblichini.[11] They had rounded up the men in the town because a German soldier had been wounded nearby and they claimed that the partisans had done it. Domizio was one of the prisoners. Knowing that his wife was outside the manorhouse, Loris poked his head out of the door to see what was going on and was captured. They took them to the first house after the manorhouse. Domizio and another man were taken upstairs. The Germans pretended to kill them to get the others to talk. Loris, who was downstairs, managed to hit one of the two Germans and went upstairs to save his brother, while all the other prisoners ran off. There was a scuffle with the other soldier who fired, wounding Loris on one leg and Domizio on his neck. The Germans went to look for reinforcements. With his wounded leg, Loris headed towards town. In the meantime, someone had informed Domizio's wife who, together with her father, went to get Domizio with a cart. But on the way back they encountered a German patrol, which shot Domizio in the head.

When Loris reached the town he was still bleeding. Instead of crossing the Pesa River to save himself he headed towards his house — perhaps he was worried about his wife. The Germans spotted him going through the vineyard and captured him. His wife was nearby and they threatened to kill the baby. They tied Loris to the military van with a rope and dragged him to the Casa di Caccia.[12] The farmers who saw him go by recount that the soldiers hit him repeatedly and he said he was innocent. They tortured him to make him talk and when he was almost dead they took him to the pink house where there was still a beam intact, and hanged him.

Then the Germans went back and set fire to the parents' house. That night they also bombed Loris's wife's house.

The Vezzosi brothers' tomb.

They were all left with nothing. That evening some friends came, got the body down, covered it with a sheet and took it to the cemetery. The next morning, Domizio was also taken to the cemetery. Their father, seeing another body, lifted up the sheet to see who it was and realised it was his other son.'

Left homeless, Loris' widow was given a room in the vicarage by the parish priest in San Vicenzo — one of the few, if not the only person, who really helped her. In order to feed herself and her son she went to work in a brick factory and, only many years later, managed to obtain a meagre pension.

Notes

1. Artemio Bianchi. The episode is also remembered by Loretta Verdiani.
2. Loretta Verdiani is Franca's twin sister; they lived through the abovementioned events together.
3. Loretta and Franca's father was a wagon driver.
4. From the testimonies of Aldo Bonifazzi and Remo Sereni.
5. Second-in-charge farmer.
6. Head farmer.
7. These bombings probably occured on 2 August. This episode was recalled by Ida Agnoloni and Umberto Lari.
8. A small wood situated in the upper part of San Michele a Torri.
9. A medication post for wounded German soldiers had been set up in Adriana's shop during the battle.
10. This tragedy emerged from the testimony of Dante Poli, Umberto's father.
11. Supporters of the Republic of Salò.
12. Hunting House.

Franca Ferrantini Ciceri

An evening at the Hotel Baglioni, Florence, summer 1944

'I was born in 1923 so the events of the last world war, 1939 to 1945, when I was about 20 years old, are well known to me.

Thanks to the many non-Italian soldiers, including New Zealanders who opportunely arrived generously to help us fight against the German invaders, freedom and peace were eventually restored and we are therefore eternally grateful to all of them.

A clear recollection, even though it was rather a long time ago, brings back to mind one pleasant episode that took place at the Hotel Baglioni during that sad and difficult period.

One day last spring my son, who is a history enthusiast, gave me a book entitled *21 Luglio–4 Agosto 1944 — I giorni della liberazione: Le truppe neozelandesi da San Donato alle porte di Firenze*, and as I leafed through it I was struck by the photograph on page 170: that thin girl, ill at ease behind the microphone on the temporary stage at the Baglioni ... was me!

The photograph and the caption under it immediately made memories come flooding back.

I don't remember exactly how, but as I was studying opera singing at the time, I received an invitation to go to the Hotel Baglioni that evening to sing for the New Zealand soldiers in Florence. Because I was very shy I didn't want to go, but a friend of mine at the time convinced me to sing in honour of our liberators.

And I'm glad I did because, once I had overcome my shyness, I willingly sang *Ave Maria* by Schubert for all the soldiers in the room. Seeing that the boys were very moved and shouted requests for other songs, I immediately sang several more classical songs in countermelody together with my friend, who is also in the photo. The boys were extremely enthusiastic.

It was a great pleasure, as well as being a very emotional moment, to recognise myself after so many years in that photograph, which I didn't even know existed, despite my shabby appearance and clothes (the situation could not have been otherwise after all we had been through!).

I therefore warmly thank the curators of the book for the emotion they have given me. And I send dear and grateful thoughts to all those boys from way back then, on the other side of the world.'

Bagno a Ripoli (Florence) 31 October 2010.

Duccio Cavalieri

A warm summer's night in 1944

Regarding the episode at La Romola during the San Michele-Cerbaia battle in Tiger Country, oral witnesses report a version that differs from the official one. This story is recounted here by Duccio Cavalieri and is based on the words of Livia Nesi-Del Re, his grandmother. Livia was married to Silvio, one of the three Del Re brothers. While the Front was passing through, Livia was staying with friends in Via di San Gaggio, Florence. From the cellar where she was hiding with her children, Enos and Marisa, Livia first heard the footsteps of the German soldiers who began shooting and throwing hand grenades in the windows wherever they saw light or movement. Then she saw the first partisans carefully walking down towards Porta Romana, followed by the noise of the first Allied tanks. The other members of the Del Re family were staying in their house in La Romola.

The Del Re family was a family of blacksmiths who had been forging horseshoes and tools for farmers for centuries. The solidly built family home was a large, medieval, three-storied building right in the middle of a road junction in the centre of La Romola. The retreating German sappers mined the house so that the rubble would block the passage of tanks through the junction.

The family clearly saw the Germans doing their work and also watched the New Zealand soldiers settle in to the building for the night. On that warm summer's night in 1944, Stefano, the eldest of the Del Re brothers and who did not speak English, approached the soldiers, telling them that the house was mined and urging them to either remove the mines or leave the house. It is reported that Stefano said, 'Please leave, the Germans have mined the house, you are all going to die in your sleep. If you don't want to leave, let me in, I know where the mines are. Help me remove the mines and then you will be able to sleep as much as you want.'[1] Stefano was trying to save the house and their lives. The soldiers did not understand Italian and, thinking he did not want to let them sleep in the house, did not let him in. Livia reports the exact words Stefano heard were: 'Go away, Fascist, we just want to sleep, tomorrow we will be gone.'[2] When Stefano insisted, frantically shouting in Italian, 'The house is mined. Tonight BOOM!, and you will all die!'[3] the Kiwis pointed a Thompson machine gun at him and told him to leave immediately or be shot.

During the night the timer lit the fuses and the mines went off. The house was reduced to rubble and all of the soldiers inside died. The following day Stefano Del Re wandered around in desperation among the debris and the dead bodies, frustrated at not having been able to prevent the tragedy due to language difficulties and lack of mutual trust.

From a technical point of view, a time bomb is a much more viable hypothesis than a random gunshot, given that the German sappers left several other time bombs and mines in San Casciano and Florence.

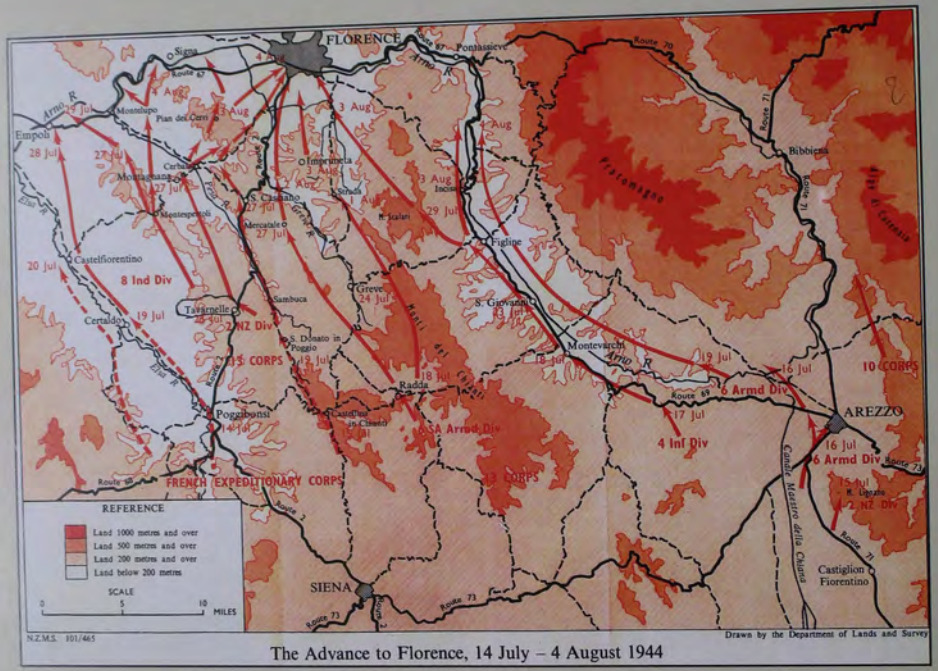
The destroyed house can be seen in the picture showing the ruined house in La Romola (see page 51).

Notes

1. Translated from Italian.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*

Appendix

Photos, maps and documents



The Advance to Florence, 14 July – 4 August 1944

The advance to Florence, 14 July to 4 August 1944.

The horizontal lines shown with names are: Quebec (on the border between Tavarnelle and San Casciano), Savannah (past Bargino), Concord (in the direction of San Pancrazio), Douglas (in the direction of Lucignano) and Hamilton (north of San Casciano). These represent the advance objectives of the 21st Battalion, the 28th Battalion and the Armcav towards Florence on 24 July 1944.

Notes on the deployment of the New Zealand troops of the 24th and 25th battalions at San Michele, 30 July 1944.

The advance of the 5th New Zealand Infantry Brigade from 22 July to 4 August 1944. Shown on the map are the strategic locations, the advance lines of the battalions and the dates of displacements.

Extracts from Division newspapers

Division newspapers are periodic publications, usually fortnightly or monthly, destined for the armed forces. Also very common among the New Zealand troops during the Second World War, they were usually delivered together with the mail to the soldiers engaged on the various front lines of the war. The most popular with the New Zealand soldiers were the *NZEF Times* (the newspaper of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force) and the *Eighth Army News* (the 8th Armed Division newspaper). As well as reporting the vicissitudes of the war, these publications helped to raise the morale of the soldiers, transmit the sense and the value of the war, and give the soldiers news of the main events in their homeland.

The *NZEF Times* was published between June 1941 and December 1945 and was distributed each week to the members of the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force, first in Egypt and then in Italy. It contained news from the front and articles about New Zealand.

The Battle of San Michele was amply reported in these newspapers; in the editions of 6 and 7 August 1944, the violet battles that had raged over those two days were succinctly reported.

'The obstinate defence of the town represents one of the most brilliant actions of the New Zealand Division in the Italian Campaign ... The air filled with dust as the tanks destroyed the houses, floor by floor ... One officer counted 250 shells which fell on the Church ... It is difficult to estimate enemy losses, but one New Zealand officer believes that they would have suffered between 60 and 100 dead.

... The Kiwis take San Michele after 24 hours of hell ... a triumphant page in the courageous battles fought by the Kiwis ...'

Also enthusiastically reported by the newspapers were the king's visit, the soldiers' arrival in Florence ('an incredible battleground') and all the episodes regarding the destruction of the feared German Tigers.

N.Z.E.F. TIMES Page — 4 Monday, August 14, 1944.

City Of Florence Forms An Incredible Battleground

[From a NZ War Correspondent]

FLORENCE, August 6. — The city of Florence is one of the most incredible battlefields in this most incredible of all wars. Today is the third since the South African and New Zealand troops moved to the first portion of Florence which lies south of the Arno. Since then there has been an marked change in the position. The Germans are continually trampling us to fire or their occupation across the river, hoping to find no cause which would enable them to defend the main part of the city. There will be no such excuse.

I am writing this despatch under the protection of a sub-stantial building just past the outskirts, and can see the whole panorama of the city unfold to the south-east route of Via de Gaiole-arden, a narrow street leading to Porta Verdun. Every house has been blown down, or is a tottered wreckage I can see from my window.

Looking down the street over the jolted rubble I can see the tower of Palazzo Vecchio. From there, the enemy can direct fire on every movement in the whole countryside across the river-front. It is our enemy, always. Open targets are not fully given to the fact that movement over the bridges is the business of a few hundred yards.

A South African infantryman is crouched in the entrance of an art shop on the left of Via de Gaiole-arden. He is not ready. He says I am old friends with the Germans in the common strategy of Anglo football. Behind us the Piazza is clear, except for a few Italian civilians who are also creep down to a well which their provision has not been stolen.

All hell is now breaking loose in the east corner. Gunfire has started be-

Yesterday, the people were cautioning that the house of the station was not quite safe. Today the Germans appear to be regularly installed that the Arno front of the Allies had not pro-gressed beyond the platform.

Artillery Duel .

Last night in Florence was a night of artillery duel. The underground organisation Party Resistance was like a beleaguered garrison, with tinned food and shells shooting overhead from both sides. The enemy artillery fire was of guns for our own front and Southern artillery thunder-ed emotionally to an attempt to silence the heavy German guns on the south bank of the Arno.

The artillery pulse last for a long day. One highlight was when they endured a bolus over a known bridge and fired a heavy concentration of shells every ten-ped to drive the enemy from the head of a wooden bridge throwing it to the river below. Another was the appointment of the Florence Cathedral. Our artillery was shelling enemy artillery which was firing from the dome and a number of shells fell harmlessly on it.

Today, the Fascist-Partisan underground organisation and German machine-

GERMAN OFFICERS SHOT FOR RETREATING

ITALY, Sunday. — The Germans who have turned to fight in the Gothic Line have paid certain to fight in bitterly, and an American correspondent, Jack Fleischer, of the New York Sun, says that who would be the first to retreat, or surrendering, who would run. Five Germans who so lary from the head of a column were shot by a firing squad on the ground.

Today we have established that the Germans are executing Germans who refuse to fight. Executed is now pending on officers who refused to fight. Two have been executed, and seven others are awaiting the sentence without interest.

His Majesty the King with a senior New Zealand officer during his recent visit to the Italian front.
—Official Photo., 11/761

LOST

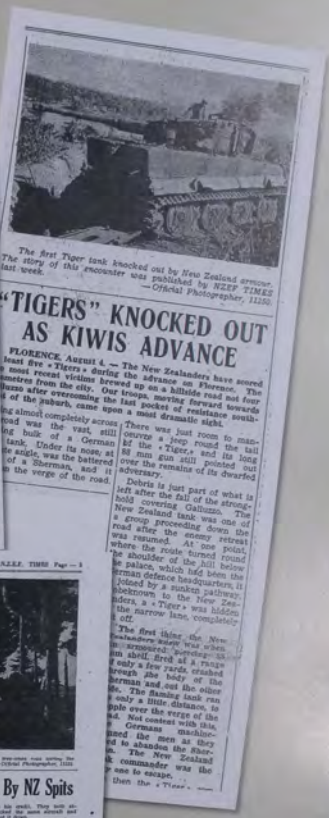
Lost: Valise containing my identity, medical of photographs, diary, and Commonwealth Bank of Australia deposit book. Re-ply 2NZ/8 Coy C.P. Section, 1 NZ Fd. Regt. LJ Re-ward offered.

Lost: Wallet containing money, personal papers, and photographs, in Bari or 42 R.E. Adv. Base. Reply 42NZ Fd. W.T. Coln. 1 Fd

COATES MEMORIAL ERECTED

AUCKLAND. — A handsome granite memorial has been erected in memory of the late Sir Joseph Coates at the summit of Mount Wellington overlooking Panmure. It is 30 metres high and is of Scotch granite. The late Sir Joseph Coates was well known in Auckland.

The memorial, the entire cost of which was met by the late Sir Joseph's family, is situated on the highest point of the mountain, and is reached by a winding road. The memorial is visible for many miles. It is a tall shaft, with a bronze bust of Sir Joseph Coates on the front. The base is of granite, and the whole memorial is surrounded by a granite balustrade.



The first Tiger tank knocked out by New Zealand armour. The story of this encounter was published by NZEF TIMES last week.
—Official Photographer, 11/760.

"TIGERS" KNOCKED OUT AS KIWIS ADVANCE

FLORENCE, August 4. — The New Zealanders have scored least five « Tigers » during the advance on Florence. The g most recent victims hereed up on a hillside road not four metres from the city. Our troops, moving forward towards luzne after overcoming the last pocket of resistance south-s of the suburb, came upon a most dramatic sight.

nd almost completely across There was just room to man-oad was the vast, still ouvre a jeep round the tail og bulk of a German ld the « Tiger, » and its long tank. Under its nose, at e angle, was the battered over the remains of its dwarfed of a Sherman, and it adversary.

n the verge of the road. Debris is just part of what is left after the fall of the strong-hold covering Galluzzo. The New Zealand tank was one of a group proceeding down the road after the enemy retreat was resumed. At one point, where the route turned round the shoulder of the hill below ge palace, which had been the German defence headquarters, it jobbed by a sunken pathway. blockhouse to the New Zea-nders, a « Tiger » was hidden the narrow lane, completely off.

The first thing the New-Zealanders saw was what appeared to be armoured turret, an shell, first at a range only a few yards, crashed rough the body of the erman and out the other de. The flaming tank ran only a little distance, to pple over the verge of the ad. Not content with this, Germans machine-ned the men as they d to abandon the flam-. The New Zealand commander was the e one to escape.

then the « Tiger »

Monday, August 14, 1944. N.Z.E.F. TIMES Page — 3

Casualty List No. 170

The following is Casualty List No. 170 for the week ended July 30, 1944. New Zealand has been notified in the case of all casualties included in this list.

KILLED IN ACTION

(16921 S/L I-o-L McCarron, DFC
(40113 Lieut. Jamison, C.R.A.
(4420 Pte. Dreyer, T.W.
(42502 Pte. Hodgkinson, A.S.
(42420 Cpl. (T/L/Sgt.) O'Brien, J.P.
(33402 Pte. Smith, C.H.
(34320 Pte. Waikiri, F.D.
(900 Cpl. Brown, L.R.
(6100 Tpt. Kingsford, J.J.
(42420 Pte. Hodgkinson, A.S.
(38710 Cpl. Gardner, T.E.
(6101 Tpt. Anderson, J.R.
(6102 Tpt. Findlay, G.M.
(6103 Tpt. Gardner, J.
(27601 L/Cpl. (T/Sgt. Stevenson, C.
(34270 Pte. Lenihan, C.R.
(6104 Tpt. Lindsay, A.A.
(6105 Tpt. Lyon, R.
(37570 Pte. Walker, T.F.
(34410 Cpl. Nicky, E.P.

Previously Reported Missing

(3500 S'Sgnl. Purdy, J.
(42417 Sgt. Bell, R.H.
(42317 Sgt. Bell, T.W.
(6097 Pte. Hutchins, R.E.
(1135 Pte. Brown, F.T.
(6096 Pte. Brown, I.

Previously Reported Wounded Bel. PW

(6098 Tpt. Harrison, T.S.

DIED OF WOUNDS

(37100 Tpt. Donaldson, I.

Previously Reported Wounded and Missing

(6099 L/Sgt. Morton, R.D.

Previously Reported Wounded

(42649 Pte. Parr, C.W.
(42420 Pte. Hodgkinson, A.S.
(42424 Pte. Whyte, A.W.
(42700 Pte. Cornish, G.D.
(6070 Sgnl. McLeod, J.
(42420 Pte. Wylie, R.G.
(7407 Spr. Wells, R.G.
(41766 Pte. Arden, T.J.
(41763 Pte. Cullen, W.J.
(41919 Pte. Green, R.V.
(41764 Pte. Hall, J.
(6074 Pte. Cain, T.F.G.
(7407 Cpl. Edwards, W.H.
(41765 L/Cpl. Roberts, J.A.
(40307 Pte. Wright, J.J.
(42420 Pte. Hodgkinson, A.S.
(42420 Tpr. Dean, J.A.
(3858 Spt. Peck, F.
(6044 Tpr. (T/L/Sgt.) Hamm, J.
(6072 Pte. Wallace, F.
(6073 Pte. Wallace, P.
(6230 Pte. Morris, E.N.T.
(41763 Pte. Cullen, W.J.
(6075 Tpr. Reid, M.A.
(41759 Tpr. Simmons, R.C.
(41760 Tpr. Stanley-Page, R.H.
(41761 Pte. Dowding, R.C.
(41762 Pte. Hall, W.D.
(6077 Pte. Reid, C.M.F.
(7407 Cpl. Reid, I.A.
(6078 Pte. Rennie, A.E.
(6079 Pte. Rennie, R.H.
(42420 L/Cpl. Dean, R.S.
(6080 Pte. Fenn, E.V.A.
(6082 Pte. Robertson, A.
(6083 Pte. Robertson, J.A.
(6084 Pte. Stanford, F.H.
(6085 Pte. (T/L/Cpl.) Ward, A.

(42700 Pte. Whiting, D.
(37500 Pte. (T/Cpl.) Otto, Peter, D.M.
(6086 Pte. Gosling, A.G.
(41926 Pte. Graham, L.S.
(41927 Pte. Hooper, L.
(41928 Pte. (T/Cpl.) Shaw, J.

MISSING

(42253 Pte. Ball, W.D.
(42802 Pte. Bennett, R.W.

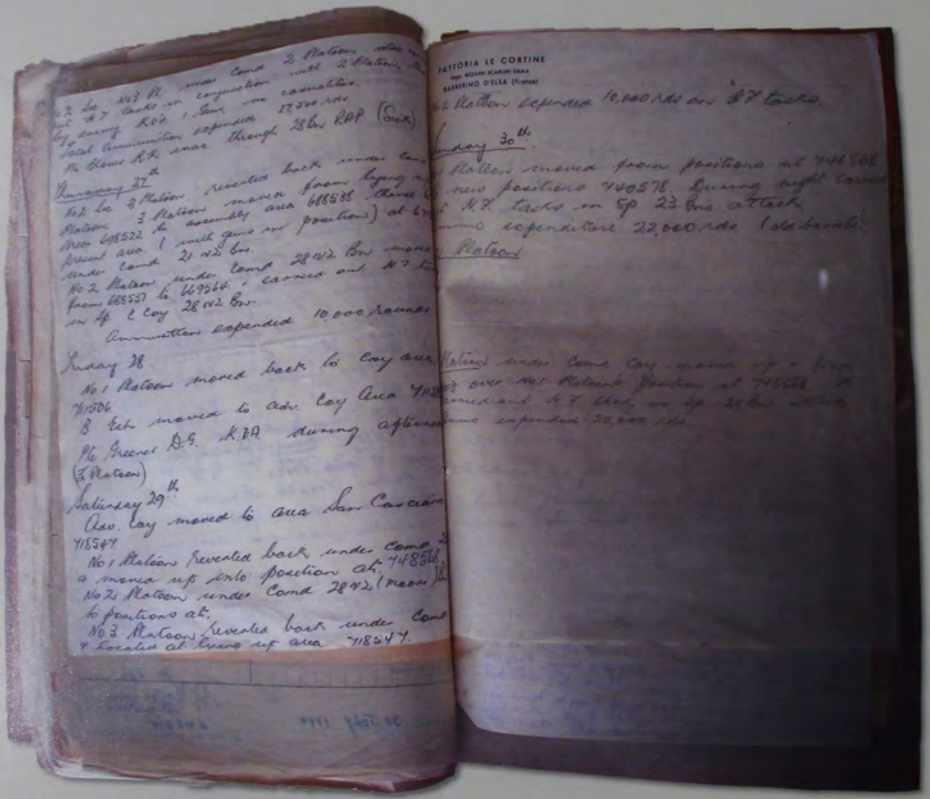
New Zealand transport and a tank move forward along a river-road, once under the advanced towards Florence.
—Official Photographer, 11/22

Ammunition Blown Sky High By NZ Spits

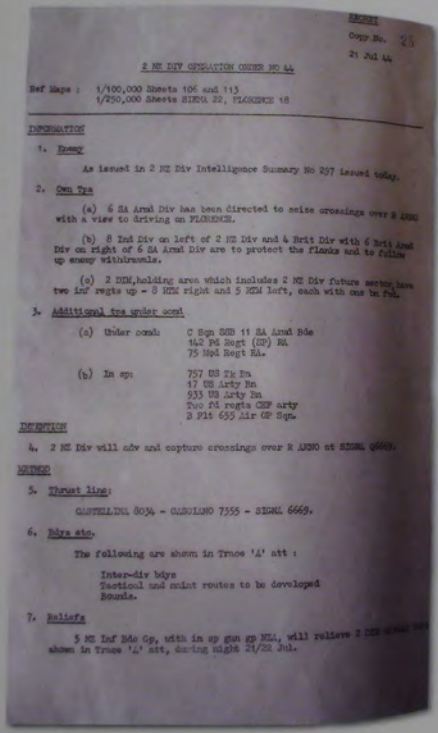
LONDON. — Spads and Aubrie was 2000 feet in the air from an ammunition-packed home in Lafter, near Flers, when it disintegrated after an attack by two squadrons of Spitfires led by W/Cmdr. E.P. Wells, Cambridge, New Zealand.

The Spitfires were then cir-cling about 10,000 feet when they saw the Aubrie. They took at-tacked the same aircraft and shot it down.

F/O M. Noel, of Auckland, and Sgt. J. Hall, of Auckland, had carried out attacks. « Clouds concealed almost the whole way from Regiard to the target-ed Noel. « Over the target area the clouds were broken and visibility was good. The target area was reached and the pilot from flew to the clouds to. There was a pretty intense barrage and many



The registers of Le Cortine Estate in the municipality of Barberino Val d'Elsa, used by a New Zealand commanding officer to write his war diary; the pages above relate to displacements on 27–30 July.



SECRET

Copy No. 25

21 Jul 44

2 NZ DIV OPERATION ORDER NO 44

Ref Maps : 1/100,000 Sheets 106 and 113
1/250,000 Sheets SIENA 22, FLORENCE 18

INFORMATION

1. Enemy

As issued in 2 NZ Div Intelligence Summary No 257 issued today.

2. Own Tps

(a) 6 SA Armd Div has been directed to seize crossings over R ARNO with a view to driving on FLORENCE.

(b) 8 Ind Div on left of 2 NZ Div and 4 Brit Div with 6 Brit Armd Div on right of 6 SA Armd Div are to protect the flanks and to follow up enemy withdrawals.

(c) 2 DIM, holding area which includes 2 NZ Div future sector, have two Inf regts up - 8 KDH right and 5 KDH left, each with one bn fwd.

3. Additional tps under comd

(a) Under comd: C Sqn SRD 11 SA Armd Bde
142 Fd Regt (SP) RA
75 Med Regt RA.

(b) In sp: 757 US Tk Bn
17 US Arty Bn
533 US Arty Bn
Two Fd regts CEF arty
2 Flt 655 Air OP Sqn

INTENTION

4. 2 NZ Div will adv and capture crossings over R ARNO at SIENA Q6669.

METHOD

5. Thrust line:

CASTELLINA 8034 - CASOLINO 7355 - SIENA 6669.

6. Bdrs etc.

The following are shown in Trace 'A' att :

Inter-div bdys
Tactical and maint routes to be developed
Bounds.

7. Reliefs

5 NZ Inf Bde Gp, with in sp gun gp NZA, will relieve 2 DIM [illegible] shown in Trace 'A' att, during night 21/22 Jul.

- 2 -

8. Timings

(a) Timings for relief, and time for passing of comd will be arranged mutually by comds concerned.

(b) Time for assumption of comd by 5 NZ Inf Bde gp will be signalled to this HQ soonest possible by codeword JERSEY followed by time.

(c) At JERSEY, 2 NZ Div will assume responsibility for sector within own bdys.

9. Task on completion of relief

(a) On completion of relief, 5 NZ Inf Bde gp will adv against the enemy as early as possible on 22 Jul along thrust line given in para 5 above.

(b) Codeword for start of adv will be SEVENSEAS, at a time to be decided by Comd 5 NZ Inf Bde.

10. Engrs

NZE will :-

(a) Attach dets each sqn to 7 NZ Fd Coy under comd 5 NZ Inf Bde.

(b) Improve UP route in vicinity of VALLIGLI 6529.

(c) Be prepared to furnish additional NZE assistance to 5 NZ Inf Bde gp if called for.

(d) Proceed with constr of air-landing strip at a site to be selected by G III (Air).

11. Reserves

Remainder of 2 NZ Div and att tps will remain in some area South of CASTELLINA until called fwd. All fmns and units will remain on three hrs notice to move.

12. TC

(a) Separate UP and DOWN routes have now been set and suitably named between SIENA and CASTELLINA. These are shown in Trace 'A' att.

(b) 2 NZ Div Pro Coy will be responsible for TC on above routes.

(c) 5 NZ Inf Bde gp will control traffic North of CASTELLINA, assisted by 2 NZ Div Pro Coy, but rd timings will be co-ordinated by phone through G III (Air) at Main 2 NZ Div.

[illegible]

13. Replenishment

Sups and POL Q8224.

14. Amn

AP open at Q8192?9.

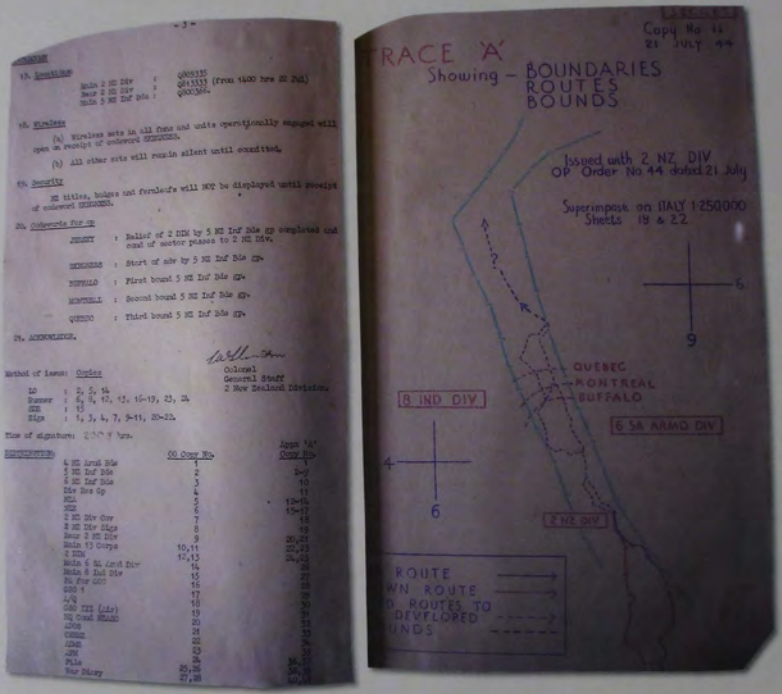
15. Medical

5 MDS open at Q8163?6.

16. PW

PW collecting pt at Main 2 NZ Div.

Order no. 44, dated 21 July 1944. This order was transmitted to all the troops of the 2nd New Zealand Division. It signalled the start of operations in the Chianti area.



Order no. 44, dated 21 July 1944. The New Zealand soldiers received instructions regarding the first advance lines, shown with codenames Jersey, Skegness, Buffalo, Montreal and Quebec. The boundary lines are shown on the map on the right.

National Archives, Wellington

View of the damage to the Ponte Vecchio bridge in Florence. Before abandoning the city on 11 August 1944, the Germans destroyed all the bridges over the Arno River except Ponte Vecchio. Imperial War Museum, London

Ponte Vecchio, Florence. Imperial War Museum, London

Civilians on the ruins of the Ponte alle Grazie bridge, destroyed by the Germans.

Imperial War Museum, London

The Ponte alle Grazie bridge, Florence. Imperial War Museum, London

The AM-lira (Allied-Military Currency) was the currency issued in Italy by the Allied Miliary Government for Occupied Territories after the invasion of Sicily in 1943. 100 AM-lire was worth 1 US dollar.

Mayor Stefano Fusi (left) with veteran Doug Leckie during the commemorative ceremony on 25 April 2009 in the main square of Tavarnelle, in front of the monument dedicated to those who lost their lives in the Second World War: New Zealand soldiers, Italian soldiers and civilians.

Mayor Simone Gheri (centre) with veterans Jack Cummins and Doug Leckie during the wreath-laying ceremony on 24 April 2009 at the monument to the fallen New Zealand soldiers near the village of San Michele a Torri, Scandicci.

Mayor Ornella Signorini (right) with veteran Jack Cummins and his wife Joan attending the wreath-laying ceremony on 25 April 2009 at the monument dedicated to those who lost their lives during the Second World War.

From left to right: Fabio Incatasciato, mayor of Fiesole and Stefano Fusi, mayor of Tavarnelle, with veterans Doug Leckie and Jack Cummins on 24 April 2009 during commemorations held at the Allied Soldiers Cemetery in Girone (Fiesole, Florence).

Group photo on 27 April 2009 in front of the monument in the main square of Tavarnelle bearing the names of the fallen New Zealand soldiers. From left to right: Mayor Stefano Fusi, Jill Gabriel, Jack Cummins, Deputy Mayor Sestilio Dirindelli, Doug Leckie and Giuseppe Guttadauro, president of the local town council.

Group photo at the commemorative service held on 24 April 2009 at the Allied Soldiers Cemetery in Girone (Fiesole, Florence). From left to right: Sestilio Dirindelli, Stefano Fusi, Jill Gabriel, Joan Cummins, Mike Crean, Doug Leckie, Jack Cummins, Gianna Magnani, Oriwia Soutar, Angela Mori and Monty Soutar.

Lest we forget

Monument to the New Zealand soldiers, San Michele.

Monument to the fallen, Tavarnelle Val di Pesa.

... is it really worth dying for?

During the compilation of this modest contribution to the reconstruction of historical memory, we asked ourselves more than once just how we, today, would have answered the call to fight the Nazi-fascists. We asked ourselves if we would, here, today, be willing to go, as the New Zealand soldiers did, tens of thousands of kilometres away to uphold values of liberty, equality and social justice. We asked ourselves what had motivated — over and above, obviously, the call of military obedience which is rather strong in the Anglo-Saxon tradition — these lads to leave New Zealand in order to liberate Italy. Just what was in their souls?

Then we came across this short text by Giorgio Spini, a liaison officer in the 8th British Armed Corps at the time, which was published a few years ago by the Municipality of San Casciano as the opening of a beautiful collection of photographs from the war. In the words and the questions gathered by Giorgio Spini in the darkness of a gutted house in San Casciano, in those questions about Italy and Italians, seeking the knowledge they implied, are the answers to our queries.

We have forgotten that more than 60 years ago hundreds of thousands of young men came to Italy not only from New Zealand, but also from England and the United States to liberate Italy and the Italians, without receiving any form of repayment, without receiving anything in return.

The questions posed by a New Zealand soldier one night in devastated San Casciano entrust us, today and those yet to come, tomorrow, with a great responsibility — to ensure that the freedom gained at such a high price of human loss is worthy of being lived, out of respect for those who believed that the words liberty, social justice and democracy were worth fighting for and sometimes even dying for.

We feel deep and sincere gratitude towards them and

Florence War Cemetery, Girone.

hope that this book helps to ensure that this gratitude does not fall into oblivion.

Giorgio Spini

In July 1944, when the British soldiers from the 8th Armed Corps arrived in San Casciano, the town resembled Pompei. The town centre was one great pile of rubble: all over the rest of the town you could see collapsed walls and roofs smashed by the bombs. All the inhabitants had fled and the only living things about were two or three hungry cats. At the time I, too, was in the 8th Armed Corps, in a unit rather pompously named Psychological Warfare Branch Combat Team, perhaps because we did not actually fight but wandered up and down the Front line gathering information on those very amusing Germans and their Fascist bootlickers, which we threw into a cauldron marked 'General Intelligence, 2.' I had been sent to San Casciano — renamed 'Saint Chessaiano' due to the way the British soldiers pronounced it — in fact, to find someone to interrogate, but I failed because there was no one left. There were stray cats, but General Intelligence is not a branch of the Animal Protection Society.

So, like many other towns and cities in Italy, San Casciano had paid for the criminal madness with which Mussolini had thrown our nation into an absurd and deadly war. However, as well as this, let's say, 'general' destiny, it had also shared the tragic destiny of the regions where the Front had passed through, devastating everything metre by metre, because another of Hitler's criminal madmen had decided that the advance of the Allies should be condemned to death. Rommel, who really did know about war, had advised the Germans not to ruin themselves defending the peninsula that Allied air superiority would have transformed into a slaughter of human flesh, and to go immediately to lie in wait safely on the Apennine peaks, or perhaps even on the Alps. But Lance Corporal Hitler believed he knew more than Marshal Rommel and had wanted defence to the death in order to support the Fascist Republic puppet government. And the Germans paid for the sanguinary stupidity of their Fuhrer with just under 450,000 dead or wounded soldiers. Unfortunately, the ill-fated Italian population paid an even higher price, like the inhabitants of San Casciano, who were not guilty for Hitler's madness, nor, all in all, for Mussolini's madness.

The Italians have somehow forgotten, but the approximately 320,000 casualties from the Allied armed corps in the Italian Campaign must be added to this total. In any case, even those young men with their tin helmets and khaki-coloured battledress who had descended upon Saint Chessaiano, had a high probability of getting shot sooner or later, or perhaps even getting killed.

New Zealand is a highly democratic nation. It is one of the first countries in the world to grant women the vote and to have a Labour Party socialist government. This explains why, despite the fact that the Japanese threat was impending, its government decided that the first enemy to beat was Fascism and sent the New Zealand lads to fight and die in Italy, right on the other side of the world. And it also explains why the New Zealand Expeditioary Corps maintained a high level of civility even in the midst of the horrors of war; no racial discrimination among the soldiers of white and Maori origins; bravery in battle but also great respect for the unfortunate civilians; no pillaging, no raping, no violence. And a kind of bewilderment for what the soldiers managed to understand of the economic-social conditions of the Italian workers. Many of the troops were country lads, sons of free farmers, mostly sheep farmers. They were astonished to learn that the Tuscan farmers had to give half of the fruits of their labour to a boss who did no manual work at all.

I remember one night in which my work had taken me back to San Casciano again. On the way out of the built-up area, where the La Posta restaurant is now, the jeep that I was travelling on was fired on by the Germans. We jumped out and took cover inside a semi-destroyed

house. In the darkness I became aware of the presence of a detachment hiding there while waiting to descend on to the Falciani bridge under the cover of the night. From their accent I understood that it was a unit of New Zealanders. From my English pronunciation they understood that I was not British. 'French Gaullist?' a voice asked me from the dark. 'No, Italian anti-fascist,' I replied. And that voice from the darkness continued bombarding me with questions: Is it true that many Italians are against Mussolini? Is it true that after the war Italy will become a democratic country like ours? In the darkness, interrupted only by the occasional flashes of an explosion, I could not distinguish the face of that stranger. He was probably a sheep farmer from so incredibly far away who wanted to know so many things about Italy, right there on the Front. But I think I know why he insisted so pathetically: he wanted to know if it really was worth it, in case that night, in a town called Chessaiano, the bloody Krauts — the Germans — killed him.

The division had a field radio with them and at a certain point this began to croak something. Then the New Zealanders gathered up their helmets and weapons and slipped silently out into the night, forming a single-file row along the road to the Falciani bridge. Someone whispered an order and the division started off, disappearing almost immediately into the darkness. In its place, in front of the ruined houses, an ambulance appeared silently and placed a light displaying the sign of the Red Cross on the road, in order to be ready to take in those who had the misfortune to be shot, that very night and near that very town called Chessaiano, so many miles away from New Zealand.

NEW ZEALANDERS IN GIRONE MILITARY CEMETERY

The 2nd New Zealand Division began operations in Italy on 13 July 1944. During the advance for the liberation of Florence, the New Zealand Division lost more than 1000 men, 293 of whom died.[1]

Research carried out in the Archives of the New Zealand Defence Force, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission[2] and the National Military Museum in Auckland, New Zealand, resulted in the compilation of this list, which shows the names of the New Zealanders who died in the advance from San Donato in Poggio to Florence and who are buried in the military cemetery in Girone, on the road from Florence to Pontassieve.

ADAIR, WILLIAM HENRY
Second Lieutenant
Died 03/08/1944, aged 29
From Gisborne, Auckland, New Zealand

ALLEN, STANLEY
Soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 12/08/1944, aged 38
From Oxford, Canterbury, New Zealand

ANDERSON, ARTHUR HERBERT
Soldier in the 18th Regiment
Died 23/07/1944, aged 28
From Frankton Junction, Auckland, New Zealand

ANDERSON, ERNEST EDWARD
Soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 23/07/1944, aged 22
From Paroa, Westland, New Zealand

ANDERSON, JAMES PELLEW
Corporal in the 25th Battalion
Died 02/08/1944, aged 23
From Wangaehu, Wellington, New Zealand

ANDERSON, MAURICE
Soldier in the 26th Battalion
Died 12/08/1944, aged 22
From Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand

AORANGI, JOHN
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 25/07/1944, aged 26
From Tauranga, Auckland, New Zealand

ATKINS, JERRY
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 24/07/1944, aged 23

AUGUSTINE, ARTHUR FREDERICK
Engineer in the 7th Regiment
Died 17/08/1944, aged 27
From Owhango, Auckland, New Zealand

BALLIE, WILLIAM CHARLES
Engineer in the 6th Regiment
Died 28/07/1944, aged 33
From Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

BAKER, RICHARD JOHN
Artilleryman in the 5th Regiment
Died 02/08/1944, aged 36
From Timaru, Canterbury, New Zealand

BARLASS, JAMES DICKIE
Corporal in the 27th Battalion
Died 23/07/1944, aged 28
From Auckland City, New Zealand

BARRINGTON, VERNON ARTHUR
Soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 22/07/1944, aged 21
From Hurleyville, Taranaki, New Zealand

BEATTIE, ROBERT FREDERICK
Soldier in the 25th Battalion
Died 31/07/1944, aged 24
From Lower Hutt, Wellington, New Zealand

BELHAMINE, EDWARD
Lieutenant
Died 25/07/1944, aged 30
From Trentham, Wellington, New Zealand

BERRY, REGINALD HENRY
Soldier in the 22nd Battalion
Died 28/07/1944, aged 22
From Horopito, Wellington, New Zealand

BLAIR, WILLIAM GEORGE RUSSELL
Soldier in the 24th Battalion
Died 26/07/1944, aged 25
From Rangiriri, Auckland, New Zealand

BLAKIE, JAMES
Soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 22/07/1944, aged 34
From Lochiel, Southland, New Zealand

BORTHWICK, THOMAS JAMES
Soldier in the 22nd Battalion
Died 01/08/1944, aged 25
From Ohura, Taranaki, New Zealand

BOTTLE, HENRY ROSS
Soldier
Died 03/08/1944, aged 23
From Oamaru, Otago, New Zealand

BRADLEY, EDMUND HUGH
Soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 03/08/1944, aged 26
From Riwaka, Nelson, New Zealand

BRENTON, MERVYN KEITH
Corporal in the 19th Regiment
Died 28/07/1944, aged 27
From Belfield, Canterbury, New Zealand

BREWER, PHILIP D'ARCY
Infantry Sergeant in the 22nd Battalion
Died 31/07/1944, aged 25
From Rahotu, Taranaki, New Zealand

BRIDGE, ARTHUR
Cavalry soldier in the 18th Regiment
Died 26/07/1944, aged 29
From New Plymouth, Taranaki, New Zealand

BRISLANE, REX MICHAEL
Infantry Corporal in the 23rd Battalion
Died 24/07/1944, aged 27
From Wakefield, Nelson, New Zealand

BROWN, GEORGE CLEMENT DEAN
Soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 12/08/1944, aged 30
From Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand

BROWN, IORWAITH NORMAN
Corporal in the 18th Regiment
Died 23/07/1944, aged 30
From Stanmore, New South Wales, Australia

BROWN, RAYMOND BARRINGTON
Soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 22/07/1944, aged 22
From Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand

BURR, JOHN HOSKING
Soldier in the 21st Battalion
Died 02/08/1944, aged 36
From Auckland City, New Zealand

CADDY, RONALD SAMUEL
Soldier in the 24th Battalion
Died 09/08/1944, aged 21
From Karangahake, Auckland, New Zealand

CAMERON, JAMES HENRY ANSON
Second Lieutenant in the 23rd Battalion
Died 03/08/1944, aged 31
From Greymouth, Westland, New Zealand

CAMPBELL, ROBERT JAMES
Soldier in the 21st Battalion
Died 02/08/1944, aged 31
From Waipahi, Otago, New Zealand

CASWELL, JOHN WILLIAM GEORGE
Soldier in the 26th Battalion
Died 13/08/1944, aged 26
From Timaru, Canterbury, New Zealand

CHALCRAFT, LESLIE WILLIAM
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 24/07/1944, aged 21
From Chertsey, Surrey, England

CHAPMAN, ARTHUR STEPHEN
Artilleryman in the 7th Anti-tank Regiment
Died 01/08/1944, aged 23
From Nelson City, Nelson, New Zealand

CHAPMAN, EDGAR HOWARD
Soldier in the 24th Battalion
Died 29/07/1944, aged 23
From Umawera, Auckland, New Zealand

CHATTERTON, HAROLD OWEN
Soldier in the 20th Regiment
Died 03/08/1944, aged 26
From Riccarton, Canterbury, New Zealand

CHEALE, JAMES WILLIAM
Engineer in the 7th Regiment
Died 17/08/1944, aged 30
From Paeroa, Auckland, New Zealand

CLARK, EDGAR RICHARD
Engineer in the 8th Regiment
Died 26/07/1944, aged 22

CLARK, RAYMOND JOSEPH
Artilleryman in the 7th Anti-tank Regiment
Died 01/08/1944, aged 23
From Newmarket, Auckland, New Zealand

CLEARWATER, COLIN SOUTER
Soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 22/07/1944, aged 21
From Mataura, Southland, New Zealand

COBDEN-COX, RICHARD
Soldier in the 26th Battalion
Died 27/07/1944, aged 21
From Rangiora, Canterbury, New Zealand

COOMBE, JOHN BENNIE MURRAY
Lieutenant in the 25th Battalion
Died 03/08/1944, aged 35
From Wanganui, Wellington, New Zealand

COOMBE, MALCOLM ALBERT
Sergeant in the 21st Battalion
Died 25/07/1944, aged 27
From Wanganui, Wellington, New Zealand

COPLAND, JAMES
Sergeant
Died 30/07/1944, aged 32
From Waimumu, Southland, New Zealand

COTTAM, SYDNEY GRAHAM
Second Lieutenant in the 25th Battalion
Died 01/08/1944, aged 24
From New Plymouth, Taranaki, New Zealand

CRAINE, WILLIAM FLETCHER STEWART
Artilleryman in the 7th Anti-tank Regiment
Died 01/08/1944, aged 27
From Feilding, Wellington, New Zealand

CRAVEN, STANLEY JOHN
Soldier in the 20th Battalion
Died 31/07/1944, aged 33
From Dannevirke, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand

CROMPTON, ROBERT
Sergeant in the 21st Battalion
Died 02/08/1944, aged 23
From Umtali, Southern Rhodesia

CROSSMAN, TREVOR ARTHUR
Artilleryman in the 36th Surveillance Battery
Died 28/07/1944, aged 22
From Blenheim, Marlborough, New Zealand

CRUICKSHANK, REGINALD JOHN
Soldier in the 22nd Battalion
Died 31/07/1944, aged 21
From Stratford, Taranaki, New Zealand

CRUMP, DOUGLAS RONALD
Lieutenant in the 18th Regiment
Died 07/08/1944, aged 25
From Auckland City, New Zealand

CURRY, BASIL ROBERT
Artilleryman in the 7th Anti-tank Regiment
Died 01/08/1944, aged 23
From Wellington City, New Zealand

DAVIES, REECE VAUGHAN
Artilleryman in the 7th Anti-tank Regiment
Died 01/08/1944, aged 24
From Tauranga, Auckland, New Zealand

DEEHAN, FRANCIS HENRY
Soldier in the 22nd Battalion
Died 02/08/1944
From Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand

DONALDSON, IAN
Cavalry Soldier in the 18th Regiment
Died 23/07/1944, aged 24
From Te Awamutu, Auckland, New Zealand

DONEY, PERCIVAL CLIFTON
Artilleryman in the 14th Regiment
Died 23/07/1944, aged 29
From Eketahuna, Wellington, New Zealand

DUNBAR, ALEXANDER
Corporal in the 22nd Battalion
Died 12/08/1944, aged 22
From Wairoa, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand

EDGAR, JOHN ALEXANDER
Sergeant in the 18th Regiment
Died 26/07/1944, aged 28
From Auckland City, New Zealand

EGGERS, VICTOR FRANK
Soldier in the 26th Battalion
Died 28/07/1944, aged 22
From Upper Moutere, Nelson, New Zealand

FINDLAY, ALLEN MUNRO
Sergeant in the 18th Regiment
Died 23/07/1944, aged 23
From Manurewa, Auckland, New Zealand

FLEETE, LEONARD ANTHONY
Artilleryman in the 14th Regiment
Died 23/07/1944, aged 24
From Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand

FLEMING, ROBERT CLARENCE
Soldier in the 22nd Battalion
Died 27/07/1944, aged 22
From Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand

FOLEY, WILLIAM JAMES
Sergeant in the 7th Anti-tank Regiment
Died 01/08/1944, aged 23
From Stratford, Taranaki, New Zealand

FROST, JAMES PATRICK
Corporal in the 19th Regiment
Died 28/07/1944, aged 26
From Waimate, Canterbury, New Zealand

GARTHWAITE, ATHOL RICHARD JAMES
Cavalry soldier in the 20th Regiment
Died 28/07/1944, aged 29
From Southland, New Zealand

GORDON, JOHN EDWARD
Corporal in the 23rd Battalion
Died 22/07/1944, aged 32

GORDON, JAMES PRYDE
Second Lieutenant in the 23rd Battalion
Died 24/07/1944, aged 22
From Invercargill, Southland, New Zealand

GRAHAM, IAN WILLIAM
Artilleryman
Died 02/08/1944, aged 22
From Ormond, Auckland, New Zealand

GRAHAM, IRWIN REES
Soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 12/08/1944, aged 24
From Methven, Canterbury, New Zealand

GRAVES, BRIAN BENTLEY
Lieutenant in the 5th Regiment
Died 29/07/1944, aged 26
From Wellington City, New Zealand

GRAY, ANDREW ORR
Corporal in the 24th Battalion
Died 30/07/1944, aged 33
From Christchurch, New Zealand

GRAY, ROBERT MOWBRAY
Cavalry soldier in the 20th Regiment
Died 14/08/1944, aged 22
From Gisborne, Auckland, New Zealand

GOODWIN, BENNETT
Artilleryman in the 7th Anti-tank Regiment
Died 03/08/1944, aged 34
From Waimamaku, Auckland, New Zealand

GOWER, MAX VINCENT
Soldier in the 27th Regiment
Died 23/07/1944, aged 23
From Forth, Tasmania, Australia

GREENER, DESMOND GEORGE
Soldier in the 27th Regiment
Died 28/07/1944, aged 21
From Otorohanga, Auckland, New Zealand

GRIFFITHS, GORDON NEIL ROSS
Corporal in the 18th Regiment
Died 25/07/1944, aged 25
From Rotorua, Auckland, New Zealand

GUILFORD, GORDON ALEXANDER
Soldier in the 25th Battalion
Died 15/08/1944, aged 23
From Broadfield, Canterbury, New Zealand

HAERE, EDWARD
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 01/08/1944, aged 22
From Tolaga Bay, Auckland, New Zealand

HALIDONE, BENNIE
Corporal in the 25th Battalion
Died 30/07/1944, aged 23

HALL, JAMES ALAN THOMAS
Soldier in the 25th Battalion
Died 02/08/1944, aged 30
From Feilding, Wellington, New Zealand

HAM, PHILIP
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 24/07/1944, aged 22
From Tokaanu, Auckland, New Zealand

HAMPTON, JOHN MOFFATT
Soldier in the 20th Regiment
Died 31/07/1944, aged 24
From Ashburton, Canterbury, New Zealand

HARRISON, STANLEY PAUL
Corporal in the 20th Regiment
Died 28/07/1944, aged 24
From Templeton, Canterbury, New Zealand

HARVEY, ALBERT JAMES
Soldier in the 26th Battalion
Died 11/08/1944, aged 35
From Invercargill, Southland, New Zealand

HEALY, EDWARD PETER
Corporal in the 23rd Battalion
Died 24/07/1944, aged 23
From Mossburn, Southland, New Zealand

HENARE, HEMI KEO WIREMU
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 30/07/1944, aged 24

HENDRA, THOMAS HENRY
Corporal in the 27th Regiment
Died 23/07/1944, aged 38
From Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand

HENRY, IVAN HAROLD
Artilleryman in the 5th Regiment
Died 29/07/1944, aged 22
From Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand

HENWOOD, STEWART DESMOND
Soldier in the 21st Battalion
Died 02/08/1944, aged 22
From Auckland City, New Zealand

HERBERT, SIDNEY JAMES
Corporal in the 19th Regiment
Died 28/07/1944, aged 24
From Edinburgh, Scotland

HERRIES, EWEN WALTER
Artilleryman in the 7th Anti-tank Regiment
Died 26/07/1944, aged 38
From Hastings, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand

HETA, DAVE
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 31/07/1944, aged 22
From Pupuke, Auckland, New Zealand

HEWITT, DANIEL JOHN
Artilleryman in the 4th Regiment
Died 28/07/1944, aged 27
From Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand

HIGGINSON, JAMES CECIL PATRICK
Soldier in the 21st Battalion
Died 28/07/1944, aged 26
From Auckland City, New Zealand

HINAKI, RONGO
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 24/07/1944, aged 21
From Whangara, Auckland, New Zealand

HITCHCOCK, JOHN TREVOR
Artilleryman in the 7th Anti-tank Regiment
Died 03/08/1944, aged 23
From Nelson City, Nelson, New Zealand

HITCHON, WILLIAM EDWARD
Soldier in the 4th Regiment
Died 12/08/1944, aged 23
From Auckland City, Auckland, New Zealand

HODGKINSON, WILLIAM WAGSTAFF
Artilleryman in the 7th Anti-tank Regiment
Died 29/07/1944, aged 27
From Hastings, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand

HOLMAN, CLARENCE PATRICK
Soldier in the 22nd Battalion
Died 27/07/1944, aged 26
From Hawke's Bay, New Zealand

HOSEIT, WILLIAM
Infantry Major in the 23rd Battalion
Died 23/07/1944, aged 33
From Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand

HOSKING, NOEL JAMES
Infantry soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 24/07/1944, aged 30
From Dannevirke, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand

HOWARD, FRANCIS LEONARD
Soldier in the 18th Regiment
Died 30/07/1944, aged 26
From Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand

HUGHSON, ROBERT WILLIAM
Soldier in the 18th Regiment
Died 23/07/1944, aged 27
From Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand

HUMPHREY, GEORGE FREDERICK
Engineer in the 7th Regiment
Died 17/08/1944, aged 33
From Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand

IAKOBA
Corporal
Died 23/07/1944, aged 55

INSTONE, NIGEL LAWRENCE
Soldier in the 25th Battalion
Died 02/08/1944, aged 22
From Inglewood, Taranaki, New Zealand

IPSEN, NORMAN OLE
Soldier in the 26th Battalion
Died 28/07/1944, aged 24
From Lyttelton, Canterbury, New Zealand

JAY, HORACE ALBERT
Soldier
Died 09/08/1944

JAMISON, COLIN BONAR ALLEN
Lieutenant in the 18th Regiment
Died 27/7/1944, aged 21
From Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand

JENSEN, SYDNEY JOSEPH
Soldier in the 24th Battalion
Died 30/07/1944, aged 30
From Nelson City, Nelson, New Zealand

JONES, JAMES OLIVER EDGAR
Artillery Soldier
Died 22/07/1944, aged 56
From Hastings, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand

JONES, JOHN NOWLAN
Second Lieutenant in the 25th Battalion
Died 01/08/1944, aged 25
From Makirikiri, Wellington, New Zealand

KARENA, ERNEST
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 01/08/1944, aged 21
From Taranaki, New Zealand

KARSTEN, ROY
Lieutenant in the 23rd Battalion
Died 30/07/1944, aged 27
From Nelson City, Nelson, New Zealand

KAUI, TE WHANAU KANGARO KITEPO
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 03/08/1944, aged 31
From Mangatuna, Auckland, New Zealand

KEEPA, TEUA
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 03/08/1944, aged 31
From Te Kaha, Auckland, New Zealand

KERR, STEPHEN VICTOR
Soldier in the 25th Battalion
Died 01/08/1944, aged 25
From Kaikoura, Marlborough, New Zealand

KEVERN, JOHN
Soldier in the 20th Regiment
Died 03/08/1944, aged 32
From Invercargill, Southland, New Zealand

KINGSFORD, JOHN JOSEPH
Soldier in the 18th Regiment
Died 23/07/1944, aged 30
From Auckland City, New Zealand

KRONE, FRANK KENNE
Sergeant in the 21st Battalion
Died 26/07/1944, aged 25
From Caterham, Surrey, England

KUTIA, HENRY HAPI
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 24/07/1944, aged 20
From Tolaga Bay, Auckland, New Zealand

LAIDLAW, COLIN ROBERT
Soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 23/07/1944, aged 27
From Rapaura, Marlborough, New Zealand

LANE, CLIVE GEORGE PERCIVAL
Soldier in the 20th Regiment
Died 03/08/1944, aged 22
From Gisborne, New Zealand

LANE, JAMES HENRY POOLE
Sergeant in the 26th Battalion
Died 01/08/1944, aged 25
From Kaikoura, Marlborough, New Zealand

LEAN, ROCKE HARVEY
Cavalry soldier
Died 23/07/1944, aged 31
From Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand

LEITH, THOMAS CLOUSTON
Soldier in the 21st Battalion
Died 25/07/1944, aged 33
From Lauder, Otago, New Zealand

LENNANE, WILLIAM MICHAEL
Artilleryman in the 7th Anti-tank Regiment
Died 01/08/1944, aged 24
From Gisborne, Auckland, New Zealand

LEONARD, JOHN FRANCIS
Sergeant in the 23rd Battalion
Died 22/07/1944, aged 25
From Invercargill, Southland, New Zealand

LILLEY, ROBERT CHARLES
Soldier in the 26th Battalion
Died 04/08/1944, aged 35
From Waddington, Canterbury, New Zealand

LINDSAY, ALBERTO AUBREY
Soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 23/07/1944, aged 31

LINNELL, IAN MALCOLM
Soldier
Died 30/07/1944, aged 23
From Auckland City, New Zealand

LOCKWOOD, ARCHIE JAMES
Soldier in the 25th Battalion
Died 02/08/1944, aged 25
From Tolaga Bay, New Zealand

LOGAN, ARCHIBALD DOUGLAS
Non-commissioned officer in the 7th Anti-tank Regiment
Died 30/07/1944, aged 36
From Devonport, Auckland, New Zealand

LUDBROOK, REGINALD HUMPHREY
Infantry Sergeant in the 22nd Battalion
Died 12/08/1944, aged 32
From Hastings, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand

MARSHALL-INMAN, IAN LYMBOURNE
Second Lieutenant in the 21st Battalion
Died 28/07/1944, aged 32
From Tirau, Auckland, New Zealand

MATHIAS, FRANK ALURED
Soldier in the 20th Regiment
Died 03/08/1944, aged 31
From Waipiata, Otago, New Zealand

MAYFIELD, GERARD EDWIN CHATER
Sergeant in the 27th Regiment
Died 29/07/1944, aged 43
From Bethlehem, Auckland, New Zealand

MEDWAY, LESLIE JOHN CECIL
Soldier in the 22nd Battalion
Died 30/07/1944, aged 22
From New Plymouth, Taranaki, New Zealand

MEYER, EDWIN
Cavalry soldier
Died 27/07/1944, aged 22

MEYER, MAURICE WILLIAM PATRICK
Engineer in the 8th Regiment
Died 03/08/1944, aged 28
From Wellington, New Zealand

MIDDLEMISS, STUART FULTON
Soldier in the 26th Battalion
Died 27/07/1944, aged 25
From Blenheim, Marlborough, New Zealand

MIO, WETINI
Infantry soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 01/08/1944, aged 24
From Torere, Bay of Plenty, New Zealand

MITAI, HARRY
Corporal in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 01/08/1944, aged 27
From Omaio, Opotiki, New Zealand

MOLLOY, TERENCE WILLIAM
Corporal in the 22nd Battalion
Died 30/07/1944, aged 27
From New Plymouth, Taranaki, New Zealand

MONTGOMERY, WILLIAM YOUNG
Corporal in the 23rd Battalion
Died 23/07/1944, aged 35
From Carmunnoch, Lanarkshire, Scotland

MOORCOCK,RONALD JOHN
Soldier in the 25th Battalion
Died 09/08/1944, aged 22
From Napier, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand

MOORE, DESMOND JOHN
Soldier in the 26th Battalion
Died 13/08/1944, aged 21
From Sydenham, Canterbury, New Zealand

MORRIS, ATHOL RUSSELL
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 31/07/1944, aged 25
From Kawhia, Wellington, New Zealand

MORRIS, GEORGE ORMOND
Soldier in the 25th Battalion
Died 09/08/1944, aged 25
From Wellington City, New Zealand

MUNDY, MAURICE JAMES
Infantry soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 23/07/1944

MURFITT, CECIL SAMUEL
Soldier in the 22nd Battalion
Died 30/07/1944, aged 24
From Manaia, Taranaki, New Zealand

McCALMAN, CHANEL JAMES
Corporal in the 28th Battalion
Died 01/08/1944, aged 28
From Seatoun, Wellington, New Zealand

McCARTNEY, SYDNEY ALLAN
Second Lieutenant in the 23rd Battalion
Died 22/07/1944, aged 24
From Portobello, Otago, New Zealand

McDOWELL, GORDON FRANK
Cavalry soldier
Died 03/08/1944, aged 23
From Richmond, Nelson, New Zealand

McEWIN, KENNERLEY JOHN
Infantry soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 03/08/1944, aged 22
From Palmerston North, Manawatu, New Zealand

McGREGOR, DONALD
Non-commissioned officer in the 4th Regiment
Died 12/08/1944, aged 25
From Wangaehu, Wellington, New Zealand

McINNES, DOUGLAS
Captain of the 19th Regiment
Died 31/07/1944, aged 25
From Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand

McIVOR, THOMAS ALEXANDER
Soldier in the 21st Battalion
Died 02/08/1944, aged 25
From Wyndham, Southland, New Zealand

McKENZIE, ARCHIBALD WILLIAM
Soldier in the 21st Battalion
Died 26/07/1944, aged 34
From Kaikohe, Auckland, New Zealand

McKENZIE, CHARLES WHITNEY
Soldier in the 26th Battalion
Died 11/08/1944, aged 24
From Edendale, Southland, New Zealand

McLEAN, DONALD CHRISTOPHER
Soldier
Died 28/07/1944, aged 35
From Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand

McNEIL, JOHN HUGH
Lieutenant in the 22nd Battalion
Died 30/07/1944, aged 24
From Woodville, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand

NAERA, KEPA
Infantry soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 24/07/1944, aged 23
From Gladstone, Wellington, New Zealand

NAERA, TOGO
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 11/08/1944, aged 24
From Ohinemutu, Auckland, New Zealand

NEWPORT, BASIL ANSLEY
Corporal in the 23rd Battalion
Died 22/07/1944, aged 23
From Nelson City, Nelson, New Zealand

NICHOLLS, AUSTIN GEORGE
Soldier in the 20th Regiment
Died 28/07/1944, aged 32
From Nelson City, Nelson, New Zealand

NICOL, WILLIAM JOHN
Lieutenant in the 2nd Cavalry Division
Died 26/07/1944, aged 28
From Wanganui, Wellington, New Zealand

NILSSON, GORDON LINDSAY
Soldier in the 22nd Battalion
Died 30/07/1944, aged 29
From Havelock North, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand

OLORENSHAW, JOHN TURNER
Corporal in the 26th Battalion
Died 11/08/1944, aged 22
From Springfield, Canterbury, New Zealand

PARATA, HAPE
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 25/07/1944, aged 24
From Te Kaha, Auckland, New Zealand

PARIS, HARRY JAMES
Second Lieutenant in the 24th Battalion
Died 26/07/1944, aged 24
From Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand

PARKER, ASHLEY ARTHUR
Soldier in the 21st Battalion
Died 02/08/1944, aged 28
From Anderson's Bay, Dunedin, New Zealand

PELHAM, DOUGLAS JAMES
Soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 15/08/1944, aged 23
From Lower Hutt, Wellington, New Zealand

PENE, PANI
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 22/07/1944, aged 40
From Levin, Wellington, New Zealand

PENGELLY, LEONARD HENRY
Soldier in the Cavalry Regiment
Died 03/08/1944, aged 26
From Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand

PETERSON, KENNETH WALTER
Soldier in the 21st Battalion
Died 24/07/1944, aged 22

PIERCE, RONALD CHARLES
Soldier in the 20th Regiment
Died 02/08/1944, aged 22
From Hawarden, Canterbury, New Zealand

PLAYER, MAITLAND ALLEN
Solder in the 25th Battalion
Died 09/08/1944, aged 28
From Waihue, Northland, New Zealand

PRIAULX, ROY LESLEY
Soldier in the 21st Battalion
Died 26/07/1944, aged 22
From Avondale, Auckland, New Zealand

PRICE, RHYS DAVID
Sergeant in the 22nd Battalion
Died 09/08/1944, aged 30
From Tolaga Bay, Auckland, New Zealand

PRINCE, JACK
Engineer in the 5th Regiment
Died 25/07/1944

PRINGLE, JOHN WILLIAM
Corporal in the 23rd Battalion
Died 31/07/1944, aged 23
From Oamaru, Otago, New Zealand

RANGI, TAMATI
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 25/07/1944, aged 26
From Greenmeadows, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand

REEVES, CHARLES STEPHEN
Second Lieutenant in the 7th Anti-tank Regiment
Died 24/07/1944, aged 33
From Greendale, Canterbury, New Zealand

REID, JOHN HENRY FRANCIS
Soldier in the 7th Anti-tank Regiment
Died 01/08/1944, aged 28
From Wairoa, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand

REWHAREWHA, TAU
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 03/08/1944, aged 24
From Waiapu, Auckland, New Zealand

RICHARDSON, CECIL
Soldier in the 22nd Battalion
Died 26/07/1944, aged 26
From Gisborne, New Zealand

RIDDLE, IAN GOODLAND
Soldier in the 22nd Battalion
Died 28/07/1944, aged 29
From Eltham, Taranaki, New Zealand

ROWLANDS, LEON EDWARD
Infantry Corporal in the 21st Battalion
Died 26/07/1944, aged 22
From Cambridge, Auckland, New Zealand

RYE, GORDON RAYMOND
Soldier in the 22nd Battalion
Died 03/08/1944, aged 23
From Hawera, Taranaki, New Zealand

SANDERSON, DONALD EDWARD
Corporal in the 21st Battalion
Died 26/07/1944, aged 23
From Paeroa, Auckland, New Zealand

SCANNELL, PATRICK LOUIS
Sergeant in the 7th Anti-tank Regiment
Died 01/08/1944, aged 30
From Springbrook, Canterbury, New Zealand

SCOTT, ROBERT FRASER
Corporal in the 24th Battalion
Died 28/07/1944, aged 22
From Gisborne, New Zealand

SEED, LIONEL MERVYN
Soldier in the 24th Battalion
Died 29/07/1944, aged 23
From Waitoa, Auckland, New Zealand

SHIRREFFS, NISBET LAMONT
Corporal in the 6th Regiment
Died 01/08/1944, aged 27
From Invercargill, Southland, New Zealand

SHRIMPTON, STANLEY GORDON
Artilleryman from the 7th Anti-tank Regiment
Died 01/08/1944, aged 23
From Lowgarth, Taranaki, New Zealand

SIMPSON, JOHN ALEXANDER
Corporal in the 19th Regiment
Died 28/07/1944, aged 33
From Wellington City, New Zealand

STAPLES, LES VERNON
Soldier in the 25th Battalion
Died 02/08/1944, aged 25
From Lower Hutt, Wellington, New Zealand

STEPHENSON, NORMAN ALFRED
Second Lieutenant in the 4th Regiment
Died 01/08/1944, aged 35
From Lower Hutt, Wellington, New Zealand

STEWART, LESLIE
Soldier in the 26th Battalion
Died 04/08/1944, aged 27
From Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand

SWANEY, TREVOR JAMES STANLEY
Artilleryman in the 4th Regiment
Died 02/08/1944, aged 22
From Ashburton, Canterbury, New Zealand

TAI, JACKIE
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 01/08/1944, aged 22
From Waioeka Valley, New Zealand

TAMBLYN, RONALD WILLIAM
Soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 22/07/1944, aged 21
From Island Block, Otago, New Zealand

TANGIRA, TUTU DUNCAN
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 24/07/1944, aged 22

TANNER, NOLAN HENRY
Sergeant in the 27th Regiment
Died 29/07/1944, aged 24
From Tauranga, New Zealand

TAUTU
Soldier
Died 27/07/1944, aged 19

TAWHIAO, DIXON
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 02/08/1944, aged 27
From Tauranga, New Zealand

TE KANI, UMUARIKI RAMLEIGH
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 01/08/1944, aged 23

TELFAR, KEVIN WILLIAM
Artillery soldier in the 7th Anti-tank Regiment
Died 01/08/1944, aged 22
From Waitara, Taranaki, New Zealand

TERRY, GEORGE HAROLD
Sergeant in the 24th Battalion
Died 28/07/1944, aged 25
From Karakonui, Auckland, New Zealand

TOMBAS, BRIAN BENTLEY
Lieutenant in the 5th Regiment
Died 29/07/1944, aged 26
From Wellington City, New Zealand

TOOVEY, ALFRED CLAUDE
Artilleryman in the 7th Anti-tank Regiment
Died 26/07/1944, aged 38
From Warkworth, Auckland, New Zealand

TUCKER, ERNEST EDWARD FREDERICK
Soldier in the 24th Battalion
Died 29/07/1944, aged 26
From Auckland City, New Zealand

TUFFIN, GEORGE HOWARD
Soldier in the 22nd Battalion
Died 31/07/1944, aged 21
From Wanganui, Wellington, New Zealand

TURNER, FREDERICK GEORGE
Soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 12/08/1944, aged 27
From Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand

TURREL, THOMAS CROSLAND JIM
Soldier in the 21st Battalion
Died 26/07/1944, aged 26
From Auckland City, New Zealand

UATUKU, CLAUDE
Corporal in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 04/08/1944, aged 26
From Ruatoki, Auckland, New Zealand

VALINTINE, DENZIL ALFRED
Soldier in the 22nd Battalion
Died 30/07/1944 aged 22
From Kilbirnie, Wellington, New Zealand

VILES, ALAN RAYMOND
Corporal in the 22nd Battalion
Died 30/07/1944, aged 23
From Apiti, Wellington, New Zealand

WALKER, TERENCE NIALL
Soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 23/07/1944, aged 22
From Blenheim, Marlborough, New Zealand

WALLACE, HAROLD
Soldier in the 24th Battalion
Died 30/07/1944, aged 36
From Ruawai, Auckland, New Zealand

WARD, KENNETH MERVYN
Soldier in the 26th Battalion
Died 11/08/1944, aged 21

WAUCHOP, THOMAS STEWART
Lieutenant in the 22nd Battalion
Died 25/07/1944, aged 34
From Gisborne, New Zealand

WEVELL, PHILLIP SYDNEY
Soldier in the 22nd Battalion
Died 30/07/1944, aged 33
From Farnham, Surrey, England

WHAREAITU, HONE KIRA
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 01/08/1944, aged 28
From Whakarewarewa, Auckland, New Zealand

WHITE, ROY ARTHUR
Soldier in the 26th Battalion
Died 14/08/1944, aged 27
From Wairarapa, Wellington, New Zealand

WHITE, WALTER ALFRED
Engineer in the 5th Regiment
Died 01/08/1944, aged 34
From Auckland City, New Zealand

WHITEHORN, FRANCIS JOHN HUNSDEN
Non-commissioned officer in the 7th Anti-tank Regiment
Died 01/08/1844 aged 25
From Northland, New Zealand

WICKEN, WALTER ALEXANDER
Soldier in the 22nd Battalion
Died 30/07/1944, aged 31
From Paki Paki, Hawke's Bay, New Zealand

WILLIAMS, JOHN THOMAS
Sergeant
Died 08/08/1944, aged 54
From Invercargill, Southland, New Zealand

WILSON, OLIVER EDGAR
Soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 22/07/1944, aged 32
From Gore, Southland, New Zealand

WILSON, VICTOR WARD
Soldier in the 27th Battalion
Died 02/08/1944, aged 37
From Dunedin, Otago, New Zealand

WINIATA, DICK
Soldier in the 28th Maori Battalion
Died 01/08/1944, aged 33
From Wairoa, New Zealand

WORDSWORTH, WALTER
Corporal
Died 22/07/1944, aged 57
From Gateshead, England

YOUNG, SAMUEL ROBERT
Soldier in the 23rd Battalion
Died 31/07/1944, aged 21
From Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand

Notes

1. Data from the Official New Zealand Military Historiography, published in the volume North from Taranto. New Zealand Defence Force, 1944.
2. Non-profit organisation founded in 1917 to honour the men and women of the Commonwealth who died in the First and Second World Wars.

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Imperial War Museum, London

MacMillan Brown Library, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand

National Archives, Wellington, New Zealand

New Zealand Defence Force, Wellington, New Zealand

Private archives

Chiara Benelli and Lorenzo Sulli Archives

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