

From
HOLLYWOOD
to Wellington



TAP for caption



TAP for caption

~~Below 2nd Mar Division in
Wellington, 1943~~

~~Hendipiditia dolo verum,
volore, voleriorit, ipsa~~





Author Bruce Petty looks at New Zealand's home front during World War II *Equissus dolo cum hariatem abor sunt et ut hil moluptatatur re core*



WHEREVER you go in New Zealand, whether to its large cities, small towns, or even parts of the country where towns no longer exist, you will be struck by the fact that there are memorials to the young men – and in some cases women – who sacrificed their lives for war. For some, going off to war was an obligation, and for others it was an opportunity to see another part of the world and have a great adventure, as more than one Kiwi veteran told me.

In the village of Omata, near New Plymouth, Taranaki, on the west coast of North Island, you will find one of these memorials. I have visited it on numerous occasions, noting the number of individuals from both WWI and WWII etched into the cold marble. Many thoughts went through my mind as I ran my fingers over the columns of names. To begin with, I noticed there were almost twice as many names chiselled into the marble for WWI as for WWII. I also noted that for WWI the same surnames occurred more than once in some cases. This led me to imagine that some mothers may have lost two or even all of their sons in that conflict. On the list of names for WWII, I saw fewer names but couldn't help but note that some of those surnames were the same as others listed for WWI. Again, my imagination took over and

Left The Omata memorial, which displays the names of servicemen from WWI and WWII. Courtesy Bruce Petty.

I envisioned a poor woman who lost her husband in the First World War and a son in the Second.

According to those who study the demographics of war, WWII was the largest and most destructive manmade act in history. Military historians aren't even sure how many people died worldwide as a direct or indirect result of that conflict. Some estimates put the total as high as 80 million — maybe more. Looking back today, we can only imagine the anxiety that people, especially parents of military-aged young men, must have felt as the world once again prepared to launch into another world war.

At the outbreak of WWII, the population of New Zealand was approximately 1.6 million. This small nation had a Home Guard of roughly 100,000 men, many of whom had served in the First World War. Soon the Second New Zealand Division was formed and sent off to fight alongside their British counterparts in Greece, Crete and later in North

Below "Mapping Unit" (detail) painting by P G Navarro, Second Marine Division, World War II. Courtesy Bruce Petty.





Africa. The Maori Battalion was part of the Second New Zealand Division and likewise saw combat for the first time in those theatres. (Maori also served in the Home Guard, the Royal New Zealand Navy, and the RNZAF and RAF.)

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941 (8 December in Australia and New Zealand) other Japanese forces moved rapidly south, taking British strongholds such as Hong Kong and Singapore. New Zealanders and Australians alike, with most of their fighting men on the other side of the world, felt especially vulnerable to the new threat coming south out of Asia. However, American **President Roosevelt**, at the behest of **Winston Churchill** and Prime Ministers **Peter Fraser** of New Zealand and **John Curtin** of Australia, redirected

US Army divisions originally trained and destined for Europe to Australia, and US Marine Corps and Navy personnel to New Zealand. These were followed later by US Army troops.

Within the first four months of America's entry into the war, it had over 100,000 military personnel south of the equator. One US Marine Corps brigade, reinforced, was sent to Pago Pago, American Samoa, in January 1942, followed by another in March. Elements of the Second Marine

Division, scattered from Iceland to California, were sent to Wellington and settled in camps throughout the area. Other elements of the Second Marine Division were rerouted to Guadalcanal in August 1942 to aid the First Marine Division in their desperate early days to secure a foothold in the Solomon Islands and stop the Japanese march south. They would later join the rest of the division in camps outside of Wellington in late February 1943, before moving out in late October 1943 to be blooded on Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands.

Before leaving for Tarawa, some members of that division had spent up to eleven months in New Zealand, longer than any other unit of its size.

New Zealand, which was and still is an agrarian nation was pretty much cut off from the rest of

“*New Zealanders and Australians alike, with most of their fighting men on the other side of the world, felt especially vulnerable*”

Below "18th Marines",
a painting by P G Navarro.
Courtesy Bruce Petty.



Below Joe Wetzel enlisted in the US Marine corps during the Depression years, and was sent to Guadalcanal with other elements of the Second Marine Division. He then spent about eight months in New Zealand, before going to Tarawa, Hawaii, and the Marianara Islands. While in New Zealand, he met and married a New Zealand girl. Wetzel has lived in New Plymouth, north Island since wars end in 1945



the world in terms of foreign travellers. However, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, and the “Friendly Invasion” of US military personnel, that changed. Most New Zealanders I interviewed told me that everybody in New Zealand knew about the US in those days because of the plethora of Hollywood movies that inundated the country—movies about cowboys and gangsters. However, when I interviewed veterans of the Second Marine Division most of them told me few if any of them had ever heard of New Zealand. Furthermore, when elements of the Second Marine Division left Guadalcanal in late February 1943 to join up with the rest of the division they were not told where they were going when they boarded ship. One of them told me they just assumed they were on their way to “another stinking island to fight more Japs!” When they entered Cook Straits and saw a modern city before them, some of those hardened marines started crying. They knew then they were not going to fight on another stinking island, but have some time to rest and recuperate.

A lot of these US Marines and sailors coming to New Zealand from Guadalcanal were sick with recurring bouts of malaria and other tropical diseases, and many others suffered from what we today would call post traumatic stress syndrome. By this time, most of New Zealand’s young men had been gone for three years or more while parents, wives, children and friends and family members worried about whether they would ever see them again. At the same time, a lot of American military personnel coming to New Zealand were young, some as young as 13 and 14. Today in the US there is an association for these underage veterans.

For many of these young Americans this was their first time away from home. A lot of them were homesick and frightened. New Zealand families with sons of their own they had not seen, and might not see for years, took in these young American servicemen. New Zealand families gave these young American fighting men a home away from home. As a result, a lot of these now aged veterans told me that they always considered New Zealand their second



Above June Baudinct-Taringa, and her daughter, Tanya Savage. June has lived all her life wondering who her American father is, and Tanya has been helping in the search ever since she started having children of her own.

Below and right Shirley Anne Winistoerfer Fairest, as she looks today, and her father, Francis W Winistoerfer as he looked as a young US Marine. Shirley only discovered who her father was eight years after he passed away.



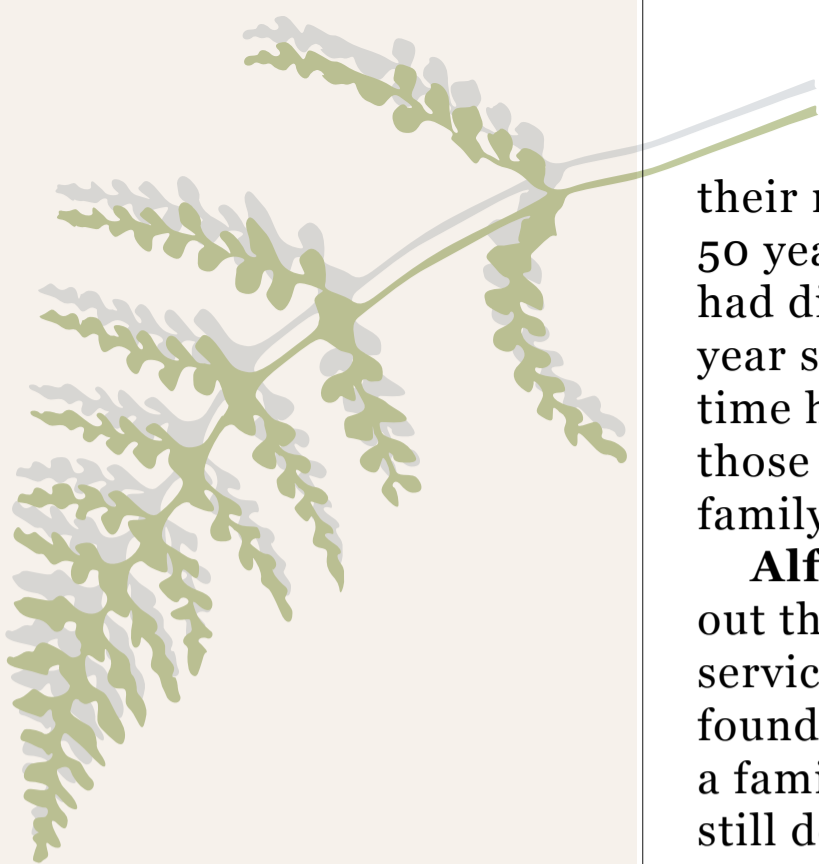
home. The Second Marine Division Association made this clear in the 1960s when they started having their reunions in New Zealand every fifth year. During these reunions they reconnected with Kiwi families and in some cases old girlfriends.

With so many New Zealand men off fighting the war, New Zealand women took over running the farms, working in factories and doing other work that had traditionally been done by the men folk. There was little in the way of romance for New Zealand women during the early war years, but that all changed with the arrival of young and seemingly exotic Americans, who came courting with flowers, boxes of chocolates and hard-to-find nylon stockings. The Americans also introduced the population to things like donuts, milkshakes and the latest dance grazes from the US, such as the Jitterbug.

Relationships between New Zealand women and American men started almost as soon as the men stepped off their ships. According to the official record, 1,400 war brides resulted mostly from the American presence in New Zealand. There were also a large number of children born out of wedlock as well as hushed up abortions. Some of these children were put up for adoption, while others were raised by single mothers. However, since having a child out of wedlock was socially unacceptable at that time, many of these children didn't learn for years that their biological fathers were American servicemen; others probably never knew. **June Baudinet-Taringa**, a "Cook Island Maori" didn't find out that her biological father was a US Marine until she was in her late teens, and to this day does not know his name or even if he survived the war. Her mother refused to talk about him to her.

Shirley Fairest knew she was somehow different from her brothers, but could never quite put her finger on why until she was 15 and her aunt inadvertently let the truth slip from her lips. After years of wondering and searching she finally found out who her Marine Corps father was as a result of meeting up with a group of Second Marine Division veterans on one of





their return visits to New Zealand. Shirley was 50 years old by then and discovered that her father had died eight years earlier. However, the following year she travelled to the US and met for the first time her father's side of the family. She described those two weeks with her father's side of the family as "the making of me."

Alfred Leach, like Shirley Fairest, didn't find out that his biological father was an American serviceman until he was a teenager, and like Shirley found out as the result of a slip of the tongue by a family member. However, unlike Shirley, Alfred still does not know who his biological father is. The last thing he said to me in his oral history interview was, "I don't have to have much to satisfy me, I don't think. If I could see a photo..."

Since the end of the war, countless American veterans have returned to New Zealand to try to locate children they left behind. Likewise, countless numbers of New Zealanders have been trying to locate their American fathers. In both situations there have been heart-warming successes as well as heart-breaking failures.

A lot of New Zealand women moved to America after the war. There were also American servicemen who elected to make New Zealand their home and not return to the US.

John Wetzel of Louisiana, met and married **Peggy Whiting** while in New Zealand. Wetzel survived Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Saipan and Tinian. Since his bride didn't want to live in the US, Wetzel decided to make New Zealand his home. He was one

of four former marines to settle in New Plymouth after the war, and was the last one living in that city until his death a few years ago.

Likewise, **Robert Clinton Libby** of the Second Marine Division, who married a local girl before shipping out to Pacific battlefields, spent his formative years

Below and right Clint Libby's father, Robert Clinton Libby, was one of many American servicemen to meet and marry New Zealand women during the war. He was also among those who survived multiple Pacific island battles, and return to New Zealand, making his home. He returned to the U.S. only once after that. Clint is held by his father in this photo.-





Below and right Sylvia Whitehouse Carrigan as a teenager, and Clifford Carrington, as a young US Marine. Both photos were taken in New Zealand, during the war. Note the old 03, A-3 Springfield rifle Clifford is holding. This was the priority to being issued the newer M-1, Garand rifles, the mainstay of US ground forces during WWII.

bouncing from one foster home to another until he escaped to the US Marine Corps. He had no problem making New Zealand his home after surviving multiple island battles. As a former foster child, he had nothing to go back to in the US.


Clifford Carrington of Illinois, and also a member of the Second Marine Division, was one of many marines taken in by a New Zealand family. The Whitehouse family of Otaki, north of Wellington, was close to Carrington's camp at Tihati Bay. They were the family that adopted him and some of his buddies. **Sylvia Whitehouse** was their teenage daughter. She and Carrington married in 1990.

After spending so much time in New Zealand, members of the Second Marine Division and the people of New Zealand had become so close that for the first time New Zealand newspapers printed not only the names of New Zealand casualties from the war, but also the names of Americans killed on Tarawa. And although it may have been a memorable time for young and not-so-young New Zealand women and US servicemen stationed in New Zealand the home front situation was cause for concern among New Zealand fighting men both at home and overseas. It was of special concern when some of them started receiving "Dear John" letters from girlfriends, and in some cases wives.

In 1943, some New Zealand servicemen started coming home on furlough only to find the Yanks had taken over. There was any number of alcohol-fuelled fights and riots. Much of the discord had to do with women, and also racial attitudes on the part of some Americans. The US military was

still segregated in those days and Maori home on leave did not take kindly to some of these American attitudes. In spite of some of these confrontations, few Americans who spent time in New Zealand during the war had unkind things to say about the country or the people. In fact, both New Zealand and US military





authorities were kept busy throughout the war years rounding up American deserters who preferred life in New Zealand to combat in the Pacific. During one of their efforts to round up these deserters, American Military Police and New Zealand civilian authorities were surprised to come across an American sailor who had jumped ship 25 years earlier.

Unlike the Americans who first came to New Zealand during WWII, there are few Americans today who have never heard of New Zealand. However, those WWII veterans who are still with us are well into their eighties and nineties. The Second Marine Division Association veterans of WWII have stopped having their five-year reunions in New Zealand, and for those still standing there are few friends and comrades left to lift a pint with and share their memories. 🍷

RECORDS *to help with* YOUR RESEARCH

You can find a large number of useful military records on findmypast.com.au to help you discover more about your military ancestors. You will find useful records for **Australia and New Zealand** including New Zealand WWI Soldiers, various honour rolls such as the **Australasian Imperial Expeditionary Forces Roll of Honour** and more. For those with ancestors from the US, you will find some useful records available including **WWI draft cards**, **WWII army enlistment records**, **WWII Prisoners of War records** and more.

TAP highlighted words to visit the FMP online resources

