

## GI Joe Down Under

### AMERICAN INFANTRYMEN IN NEW ZEALAND DURING WORLD WAR II



BETWEEN FEBRUARY 1942, when the US destroyer bringing the advance guard docked in Wellington harbour, and October 1944, when the Stars and Stripes was finally lowered over the naval base in Devonport, approximately 100,000 American troops visited New Zealand.<sup>1</sup> The *New Zealand Listener* published a handy guide to service badges and uniforms captioned 'How to tell them', illustrated with a drawing of two smartly dressed women and two uniformed men appraising each other (Figure 1). Readers were enjoined to study the insignia in order 'to pay our visitors the compliment of calling them by their correct official names'.<sup>2</sup> The image of the men and women eyeing each other and the injunction to polite exchange set the tone for a great deal of the subsequent public commentary about the interaction of New Zealanders and Americans. Whatever the private commentary on the alleged sexual predation of the Americans and the tendency of New Zealand taxi-drivers, shopkeepers and the like to rip off customers unfamiliar with pounds, shillings and pence, most of what has been written about these wartime encounters has emphasized civility and mutually beneficial exchange. This paper examines American experiences in New Zealand from a different vantage point using the commentary elicited from soldiers by a US Army research branch questionnaire. The soldiers who



**Figure 1:** New Zealanders were fascinated by the sexual politics of the American military's use of the country as a staging post and rest area. This *Listener* drawing captures the appraising and sidelong nature of the interaction. Source: *New Zealand Listener*, 18 September 1942, p.23.

responded to this survey may have enjoyed their encounter with New Zealand and its people but that encounter was framed by their experiences of the inequities of military service, inequities which for many became sharper during their time in the country.

Verdicts on the nature of the American presence in New Zealand during World War II have ranged from the triumphant to the facetious. Stanley Frankel's of history of the 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division can stand for the triumphant version of these events: 'The troops filed through Auckland's streets to the railroad station, accompanied by thousands of townspeople who had all brought their children along to see the "giant American soldiers"'.<sup>3</sup> A chapter on the 'American invasion' in Nancy Taylor's *The New Zealand People at War* describes the soldiers' impact on New Zealand's 'man-denuded scene': 'hats were doffed, even in lifts; seats were offered on trams. . . . In talk they were cheerful and easy; their agile "ma'ams" and "sirs" gratified the elders, girls found them wittier and less serious than New Zealanders'.<sup>4</sup> Harry Bioletti's book, *The Yanks are Coming: The American Invasion of New Zealand, 1942-1944*, is a relatively nuanced piece of work, notwithstanding its title and pervasive nostalgia, but it too falls back on images of parades, kind ladies pouring tea and whirlwind romances.<sup>5</sup> Jock Phillips's illustrated work, *Brief Encounter: American Forces and the New Zealand People, 1942-1945*, is also strong on images of fun and fraternization, although it makes space for wreath-laying and sorrowful farewells.<sup>6</sup> The overall picture conveyed, despite the *de rigueur* commentary on American incomprehension of New Zealand racial etiquette and New Zealand men's sexual jealousy, is one of harmony and humorous cultural exchange. New Zealanders learned to jitterbug and Americans tried hot tea, mutton and fruitcake.

Little has been written from the soldiers' point of view. Hampered by a lack of local sources and lulled perhaps by the politeness and nostalgic reveries of visiting ex-soldiers, written accounts tend to describe American experiences in New Zealand as idyllic. Martin Russ, describing the preparations for the Gilbert Islands campaign, depicts shore leave in New Zealand as an experience of unalloyed pleasure: 'Of all the distant duty stations and liberty towns of World War II, none matched Wellington, New Zealand, for its friendliness to foreign troops . . . they were treated with unflinching hospitality, respect and affection.'<sup>7</sup> John Zimmerman's *Where the People Sing*, a full-length book about the author's relationships with Maori and his impressions of Maori culture, relies heavily on stock images for its descriptions of New Zealand. The New Zealander, 'brown or white', extended 'his' hospitality 'because it was impossible for him to do otherwise'; Wellington was 'a strange, old, friendly city' after 'the ugly, complacent avarice of San Diego', and New Zealand itself was characterized by 'matter-of-fact and unostentatious interracial good feeling'.<sup>8</sup> This kind of imagery tapped into a long tradition of depicting New Zealand as an Arcadia, peopled by friendly natives. In this discursive formation the country overflowed not with milk and honey, but, far more usefully, with steak and willing dance partners.

Food was usually associated with the hospitality of older women, and femininity routinely figured as a contest between motherliness and sexuality,

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with the appropriate symbol for Mum being the tea tray, while eligible women, 'dates', were associated with alcoholic refreshments. After unloading their ships, the marines in Robert Leckie's *Challenge for the Pacific* slip away to promenade Wellington's 'quaint' streets, dance with its girls and 'savor such exotic potions as rum-and-raspberry or gin-and-lemon'.<sup>9</sup>

Most American commentaries say relatively little about individual New Zealanders, reducing them to 'types', and are silent about the political situation in New Zealand. Women feature as hostesses and dates, men as patriarchs and fellow soldiers. New Zealand's military reputation is usually acknowledged and, with it, the masculinity of the Kiwi male. The open-hearted hosts and hostesses praised by Martin Russ have 'sons fighting in Anzac units in North Africa and elsewhere, and some had lost sons in battle'.<sup>10</sup> Zimmerman also noted the stoicism with which New Zealanders were bearing their wartime losses. Invited in for a talk and a smoke by a chance acquaintance who had recently lost a son in North Africa, Zimmerman was full of praise for the way the man bore his loss, 'the toughness that lay in the fibers of his rugged body'.<sup>11</sup> When civilian men are criticized it is not for cheating soldiers out of their spare cash or for their sexual proprietariness, but for their work habits. The military historians repeatedly tell the story of the operational crisis produced by New Zealand's unionized stevedores refusing to work long hours to unload the American boats.<sup>12</sup> Brigadier Griffith claimed that his men spent some of their few idle moments decorating hotel lavatories with anti-union obscenities.<sup>13</sup> In his book on the Guadalcanal campaign, Robert Leckie goes so far as to invent dialogue to dramatize the situation. He depicts General Vandegrift, the assistant commander of the 1st Marine Division, arriving in Wellington in June 1942 to the news that the unloading of cargo was behind schedule: "'What the hell is wrong?'" Vandegrift exploded. "They work differently from us" [his aide answered]. "They stop for morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea. If it's raining they don't work at all."<sup>14</sup> Images of watersider intransigence and marine efficiency were exaggerated in the published memoirs. The watersiders' legitimate grievances, such as the expectation that they would unload live ammunition, do not figure in these stories.<sup>15</sup>

There is a sense of irony in some of the portrayals in keeping with the prevailing view that a good soldier kept his sense of humour even when faced with funny money, strange places and stranger accents. John Lardner's book, *Southwest Passage: The Yanks in the Pacific*, chronicles a US Army press correspondent's tour of duty in the Pacific. His chapter on New Zealand describes a self-reliant people, willing to take care of themselves and sensitive to allegations that the American army was there to 'save' them. He wrote: 'The African record [of the New Zealand soldiers], including the native Maori troops, has been brilliant in every way, and the people at home can cite every line of it.'<sup>16</sup> Peter Fraser is depicted as a competent leader, rugged-edged but sharp and manly, albeit presiding over 'tea, scones, and sandwiches, the trimmings without which no Burgess of that stoutly Anglican country can confer and feel completely dressed'.<sup>17</sup>

Evidence from the US Army's soldier surveys suggests that the experience of New Zealand was, for many, more conflicted than conventionally portrayed

in the histories and reminiscences sampled above. Ideas about family, country and home shaped the soldiers' time in New Zealand. This material applies particularly to soldiers who were brought to New Zealand after a period of service elsewhere in the Pacific rather than to men passing through the country on their way to their first posting in the Islands. It is testimony to the friction that existed within the army units and the prevalent resentment of officers. It also underlines how aware soldiers were of the fragility of their bodies, and of their passing youth. As one man wrote: 'I feel that I have had my fill of combat in the South Pacific . . . I was in several different battles and on five beachheads. I would like to see fellows in the states sent out here quickly as well as men in "soft" service jobs be given a chance for combat. The jungles affected my health and general feeling greatly and I've had enough. If I were in the European theater I know I could endure it longer and also do a better job.'<sup>18</sup> Fears that they would not get back home, and outrage that those they left at home were not being properly looked after also featured prominently.<sup>19</sup> This is a very different discourse about military service and the South Pacific sojourn than that expressed in the published accounts.

The soldier surveys were administered by the research branch of the United States Army's Information and Education Division.<sup>20</sup> Established in October 1941, the research branch was charged with the collection and analysis of data relating to soldiers' attitudes and opinions on a wide range of subjects. Soldiers were asked what they thought worth fighting for and what they hoped to do after the war. Other surveys canvassed soldiers' opinions on American race relations and whether they would advise their sisters and girlfriends to join the newly formed Women's Army Corps. The research branch also solicited information on the minutiae of military life: food, discipline, mail service and medical care. A survey section collected sociological data, while the so-called experimental section was more psychological in orientation, concerning itself with measuring the effectiveness of army training films and other official propaganda on soldiers' opinions. The information was intended for general use by army policy-makers. Most of the research used soldiers based in the United States as subjects but some studies were undertaken of US soldiers overseas. A selection of soldiers stationed in the Pacific were surveyed in March 1944. The sample included several hundred American soldiers camped at Warkworth, about 40 kilometres north of Auckland, who were asked to complete a 65-question survey (Survey 143) about their combat experience. My data is drawn from their replies to this questionnaire.

The research branch generally aimed to produce reports that quantified attitudes. The quest was for a composite soldier. To this end most of the questions asked for replies that rated the soldier's opinion on a preset scale, providing a check list of possible answers. For example, a question like 'Do you feel proud of your Company?' might be written, 'Which of the following best describes how you feel about your Company?' and allowed only four possible answers: very proud, fairly proud, undecided and not proud. The difference between very proud and fairly proud was never easy to pin down, while undecided and not proud covered a multitude of emotions. The information gathered on these scales was further processed into bar graphs and percentage analyses and reported in

the aggregate. Very little qualitative material made it through the quantitative sieve into the branch's reports.

Most surveys allowed space for what the researchers described as 'free responses', an open-ended section at the end that invited respondents to comment on issues not covered elsewhere in the survey. This was true of the questionnaire administered to the Warkworth soldiers. One lined page was provided for longhand comments headed by the statement, 'If you have any further remarks to make on any subject relating to your combat experience please write below as fully as you like.' With the exception of the answers to this last question, the original questionnaires were not retained by the army once aggregate data had been extracted. The raw data collected from the surveys was stored on computer punch cards, most of which were destroyed in 1962.<sup>21</sup> The 'free responses', however, were later microfilmed and copies have been deposited in the United States National Archives in Maryland.

The soldier surveys are a rich source of data. During the war, dozens of reports were produced on topics as diverse as recruits' educational levels and their post-war plans for education, attitudes to women in the services, recreation, entertainment, mail service, censorship and the experience of African-American soldiers. After the war Samuel Stouffer, a civilian ex-employee of the Army Research Bureau, and a group of other social scientists reporting to a special committee of the Social Science Research Council produced a four-volume account of the surveys under the general title *Studies in Social Psychology in World War II*.<sup>22</sup>

If the researchers had had their way we would not be able to identify the survey administered in New Zealand. It was an important tenet of research branch practice that the surveys be anonymous and that specific units and commanders not be identifiable. Soldiers were instructed to frame their answers in general terms. An instruction printed on the forms made no bones about the methodological commitment to subjugating the soldiers' individual opinions and the disinterest in their individual problems. It stated baldly: 'We do not know or care who you are personally.'<sup>23</sup> Though this was a rather forbidding way to begin a poll, other parts of the instructions encouraged more self-expression and a belief that the replies were important. The instructions on the survey forms stressed that it was 'not a test with right or wrong answers'. Respondents were expected to decide what was representative about their situation and report that, rather than to use the survey as a forum to air their personal grievances: 'The information obtained in this way is very valuable to the army. It helps those who have to decide what are the best ways to handle various problems in the Army.'<sup>24</sup> One man's troubles were his own, many men's troubles were the army's concern.

Although the men were instructed not to put their names or unit numbers anywhere on the form, several disobeyed the instructions, allowing the batch to be identified as including soldiers who served in the 25<sup>th</sup> and 43<sup>rd</sup> US infantry divisions. Many more mentioned New Zealand as a place and explicitly connected their experience in New Zealand to an increasingly jaundiced attitude to army life. Their comments indicate widespread resistance to the anonymity and depersonalization of army life, and a weary cynicism about the army's

attitude to ordinary soldiers. As one joked, despite the research branch's claims that their statements were being read with care, he believed his reply would be seen only by a lowly member of the Women's Army Corps: 'Here's hoping the WAC that read[s] this enjoys it.'<sup>25</sup> Several commented that they would like to sign their names to their surveys but were not allowed to. One offered to meet with researchers, despite the possible repercussions.

Some soldiers left the free response section blank, although, as the blank pages were not microfilmed, it is impossible to ascertain how many soldiers skipped the question. Of the approximately 500 who felt moved to write anything, most penned only a terse sentence or two. Twenty per cent wrote a full paragraph and a few filled the whole page with commentary. One reply was illustrated: a picture of a woman's head was carefully drawn alongside the comment, 'We need more women!'<sup>26</sup>

The soldier surveys are a frustrating source to use. They will not fill all, or even the most important, gaps in our understanding about these men. The comments offer tantalizing glimpses into the preoccupations of some of the soldiers who visited New Zealand during the war, but because each free response was detached from the rest of the original survey, important information has been lost. The information in the rest of the form about age, military experience, education background and other matters would have helped contextualize the free responses and would have allowed more sense of the representativeness of the sample.

New Zealand's military visitors were a heterogenous group. Evidence provided by the survey respondents suggests they were unusual in many ways. New Zealand was a staging post before it was a rest area. Not all the military personnel who spent time in New Zealand were infantrymen, and not all were combat veterans. The majority of the infantrymen in New Zealand in 1942, mainly from the 37<sup>th</sup> and 43<sup>rd</sup> divisions, had not yet seen combat, although members of the 43<sup>rd</sup> would return in 1944 after participating in battles in the Solomon Islands with the 25<sup>th</sup> division. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> divisions of the US Marine Corps stationed in the Wellington and Kapiti Coast areas in 1942 and 1943 were also training for later conflicts in the Pacific. They, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> division of the Marine Corps based in Auckland in early 1943, may have given replies different from those given by the soldiers in Survey 143. The use of New Zealand as a rest area for large detachments of American troops was discontinued in June 1944.<sup>27</sup> Thus the respondents to Survey 143 were atypical in several respects. They were infantrymen, not marines; combat veterans rather than recent inductees; and they visited near the end of New Zealand's period as a large-scale American base.

In keeping with their experience of extended military service in remote areas, and often in trying physical conditions, it is hardly surprising that the men of the 25<sup>th</sup> and 43<sup>rd</sup> divisions were discontented. The commonest complaint voiced in the free responses was that it was time to go home. Aware that he had only one short page to fill, one soldier's replies took on a staccato urgency: 'They keep men over here too long. There are plenty of men to help us fight. I feel like we are doing more than our share. You are mostly likely to get wounded or some kind of disease. Men back in America think it is easy to kill a few dozens

[sic] japs. But they haven't talked with anyone [who] knows the score. One year is too long to go without seeing civilization.'<sup>28</sup> There were repeated comments about the difference between the European and Pacific wars, many Pacific-based soldiers believing that Pacific service was both more arduous and less well respected. 'I believe 18 mths is long enough overseas on this side. This heat really gets you low in spirit. If they can release them on the Europe side I can't see why they can't this side. We haven't seen a woman or anything in 18 mths and now they give us 3 mths to rest and see thing [sic]. We are enjoying ourselves for only one mo. Now we are just training again. They can't teach us anything and only a few of us can get 10 days furlough and I don't think it fair.'<sup>29</sup> Aware that the army was interested in them because it was worried about morale, and that it prided itself on being a citizens' army imbued with 'American' values, some respondents linked the despair they felt about the length of their service and their chances of getting home to an increasingly jaundiced attitude to the war's aims: 'If we thought we had a chance of going home sometime to see what we are fighting for we might feel a little more like fighting. Why not send some of those other outfits over that are supposed to be wanting to get into action and let us go home for a while to see for ourselves if it is worth fighting for.'<sup>30</sup> These men felt that they had done their share, and adapted the military's discourse of democratic service to shape their sense of entitlement to discharge and more equitable treatment. After outlining his grievances against the 'Brass hats' over their isolation in Warkworth and the lack of transportation, one added archly: 'I thought this was a democratic army. I wonder ???'<sup>31</sup>

The idea that army service was taking loyal Americans and turning them into cynics was a powerful one. Rather than depicting military life as a manifestation of patriotism, many replies characterized it as patriotism's antithesis: the private world of home and family became the repository of ideas of purity and patriotism, the public world of army life a source of disillusionment and putrefication.

When war broke out I was glad to be in. I wanted to come over and fight. Well I've done about 90 days of fighting. The rest of the time we were considered as dogs. Many times in this Army I felt that what we're supposed to be fighting is happening right in our own Army. To tell the truth I am disgusted with the whole damn business. I'm an American not a jerk but the way we are treated makes me feel that we are dirt under some of our leaders. The way I feel right now is get me home, get me out of the Army and let me feel free again. During combat things were okay we knew what we were doing and done it. That was okay but as soon as the battle is over the shit started again. I wish that some of these leaders of ours would get it through their head that we are still men and not dogs and the only reason we are in this damn army is because of the war. A good many of us are too disgusted with this army life. The only thing I have gained from this Army is malaria and all the other jungle rot in my system. All I want now is home the quicker the better.<sup>32</sup>

Coming to New Zealand did not assuage their sense of grievance; in fact for many the experience of being 'rested' in New Zealand only added to their anger. They felt they were being fobbed off instead of rewarded: 'We have been sent to this country for a rest. But we do not consider this a rest. We do too many

things that we know all about and don't interest us at all. When we get a rest we want a good rest. We do not like the way they treat us in the short times we have in town on a visit.' Numerous soldiers listed the campaigns in which they had been involved as proof of their credentials. Many others cited the length of time they had been away from home — usually several years — and used their family ties as an argument for early release. Being forgotten at home and forgetting home were common fears; in the slippages of memory lay the danger of losing one's individuality to the army's generic soldier. 'Staying away from our relations for a long time has made some of us forget just what it is like to be able to clean up and enjoy ourselves.' They also voiced deep resentment of other troops seen to have a lesser claim on resources and sympathy. 'Can't the tables be turned[,] we are all human. But I am not a coward and I don't want some one else to do my part, I think we should be sent home for a while and give some of the fellows a chance that "say" they are mad because they haven't been sent over.' Soldiers still stationed in the United States were obvious targets but inter-service rivalries also surfaced: 'We have been treated like a bunch of dogs. But who gets the credit, the officers and the marines.' Or equally passionately: 'Who in hell and what the hell are they? *Men* or *Gods*? After all we all want to get back in one piece.'<sup>33</sup>

Military service is intensely hierarchical, and resentment of the hierarchies of privileges this entails is as much a part of the experience of army life as uniforms and short hair cuts. As one of the Warkworth-stationed soldiers complained: 'the brass are much too salute happy in a rest area. Let them send us back to the states. Then I'll salute every Tom, Dick and Harry.'<sup>34</sup> The army considered that the attitudes of enlisted men to their officers were a key element in combat readiness. The research branch endorsed this opinion. Other surveys administered to infantrymen found that there was a strong relationship between combat readiness and confidence in company leadership. 'Since battle so often calls for prompt obedience to orders and for team work when explanation can not be given, it is obvious that the substitute for explanations must be confidence in the leader.' Confidence was not a simple matter of the men's opinion of their officers' military capabilities. Taking a personal interest in one's men was important in establishing an officer's trustworthiness: 'the everyday relationship of officers to men in all types of situations'. Soldiers considered 'helpfulness with personal problems', fairness with leave passes and furloughs, and endeavours to get mail and supplies as part of the leadership package.<sup>35</sup> Seemingly trivial decisions about privileges and resources had serious ramifications. As one disgusted GI complained: 'We have a Lt — that won't even try and get a truck to bring the girls to our dances. Isn't that crap for you.'<sup>36</sup>

The comments of enlisted men on their officers' behaviour while resting in New Zealand suggests that it frequently undermined the respect good officers had earned while in combat areas. Their complaints were framed as a commentary about the conflict between the democratic idealism associated with the idea of Americanism and the experience of military service. Complaints about the uncooperativeness of certain officers, understandable in the context of boredom and sexual frustration, shaded into political barbs aimed at the army hierarchy. 'Officers getting too much over enlisted men such as better beds[,]

best seats in movies[,] jeeps to use for personal use[.] I thought we wear [sic] fighting to make all men equal[,] if that is democracy I will take communism.'<sup>37</sup> Troops stationed in Warkworth were aggrieved by how little effort had been made to arrange for their entertainment: 'If this is what they call a rest John Hancock should sign the Const. all over again. They bring us to a rest area and where do they shove you about fifty miles from the city. The officers think there [sic] Clark Gables with there [sic] uniforms on and in my opinion they look like hell.'<sup>38</sup> 'When I first came into the army I was patriotic but some of the cheap tricks I have seen officers [play], the supposed gentlemen of the army, they are a crummy bunch of conceited bastards.'<sup>39</sup>

The tension in these comments derives from a logical paradox. An important tenet of mid-twentieth-century America, at least as the men in this self-proclaimed citizens' army saw it, was that all men were fundamentally equal. Yet at the heart of the army's philosophy of man-management was a core belief that all were not equal, hence the need for ranking. This contradiction created the paradox. Enlisted men were convinced of their own humanity; they were, as several vehemently put their case, 'not dogs'. Instead of blithely accepting that the army was creating a system in which the personhood and masculinity of 'men' was different and subordinate to that of officers, they insisted that theirs was the normative masculinity, and that officers' privileges, because they deviated from this norm, impugned their status as officers, men and gentlemen. Take this soldier's argument for example:

I am not the brightest fellow in the world but I consider myself average. I have been brought up in the American way i.e. I have an equal chance with every one else, no one has the power to tell me I must do one job or maybe another. As a result I find I can not spin around on a dime just because an officer says so. The only way I will ever willingly is by example. Our officers today expect things of you but fail to comply with existing regulations themselves. I have no respect for them.<sup>40</sup>

Another advocate of a unitary standard of respectable masculinity was more succinct: 'The insistence that an officer is a gentleman and a soldier is not is untrue and un-American.'<sup>41</sup> Enlisted men insisted that because all men were equal, officers should not behave like officers, but like men. By delegating tasks officers distinguished themselves from men and tainted their masculinity: 'Officers do not live like the men and are treated like a bunch of babies.'<sup>42</sup> The ultimate proof that rank and manhood were uneasy companions was the prohibition on enlisted men settling grievances with officers by fighting. One soldier cited the regulation as final proof of his lack of respect for his commander: 'I think Gen. Patton should be knocked on his ass by an enlisted man just to see how fast he'd call the firing squad.'<sup>43</sup> Complaints that officers expected men to dig their foxholes, that officers ate separately from men, merged into complaints of cowardice, poor planning and favouritism. Leadership required decision-making and administrative ability but also the guts to live like a man:

[O]nly one officer in the Company would I risk my life to save, due to the fact he is the only one who is on the ball, so as to speak, he has just made major & if his superior officer rates at Lt. Colonel in my estimation Major S. should be a general. He asks no

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man to do anything he considers ridiculous or that he could not do himself, nor does he ask any man to go any place he would not go himself. A real man, a fine leader and soldier.<sup>44</sup>

This reply is less temperate, but perhaps more honest in its choice of language:

HAVEN'T GOT THE BREAK WE ARE SUPPOSE[D] TO GET WANT TO GO HOME HAD PLENTY OF THIS SHIT OFFICERS GET THE BEST BREAK AFTER WE'VE BEEN TOGETHER IN COMBAT WHY SHOULD THEY, THEY ARE NO BETTER THAN WE ARE THEY GET ALL THEY WANT AND WE GET SHIT. SO FUCK THEM. WE HAVE BEEN OVERSEAS TO [sic] DAMN LONG. ITS ABOUT TIME WE WERE GOING BACK HOME. THEY GOT PLENTY OF MEN BACK HOME DOING NOTHING. JUST SITTING ON THERE [sic] ASS AND HAVING A GOOD TIME WHILE WE ARE GETTING A ROTTEN DEAL.<sup>45</sup>

Saluting, or rather punishment for failing to salute officers, was a particular bone of contention. The salute was more than just a military nicety, it marked the boundaries in the relationship between officers and men. The gesture signalled deference and respect, something not all men felt. It also marked the shifting codes of behaviour between the all-male fighting zone, the mostly male rest-camp and the town. Its absence in combat, officially in order to avoid officers being identified and targeted by enemy fire, was interpreted unofficially by ordinary soldiers as a recognition of the dependence of combat officers on fighting men:

After coming out of combat officers are 'Chicken Shit' as 'Hell'. They don't do much for enlisted men. Only when they were in combat were they friendly. Because they [k]new the danger of their lives. We do not salute in combat or call them 'Sir'. We would catch hell if we did. Now we even get plenty of extra duty and all our passes cancelled if we do not salute or say 'Sir'. So next time it won't be the same. If we go back in combat we won't protect their 'ASSES'. They will have to stick to officers for protection.<sup>46</sup>

After complaining about the lack of rest he was getting in the 'so-called rest area', an especially aggrieved soldier elaborated on the shifting etiquette of saluting:

The rottenest trick of all though is the officers that walk around the main streets of Auckland and arrest enlisted men for not saluting them. They're ordered to do that by Division. Many times the men don't see the officer as the streets are too crowded which makes it very awkward to salute. They are arrested never the less. We went through combat and called them by their nic[k] names and now we have to do just about everything but kiss their feet. Saluting in camp is ok but when you are in town to enjoy yourself it's not fair. You're always in constant fear that there is an officer lurking in corners waiting to grab you and then you get confinded [sic] to seven days in camp.<sup>47</sup>

Some men believed that vindictive officers enjoyed catching non-saluters out in town. A cartoon in the navy newspaper *Kiweekly* captured the sentiments of many enlisted infantrymen when it showed a beaming enlistee saluting an officer in front of a city store. 'Disappointed?', the caption read (Figure 2).

Food and civilian hospitality were seldom mentioned. Afternoon teas and plates of steak and eggs were not relevant in this context. Where food was



**Figure 2:** Servicemen often resented the way military discipline infringed on their free time. This cartoon satirizes officers' expectation that enlisted men should defer to them even while on leave in town. Source: *Kiweekly*, 3 April 1944, p.4.

discussed it was again tied to questions about the distribution of resources and military injustice: 'Talk about the food. You see pictures of what fighting men get. Well I have never gotten fat from it . . . But officers and special troops ate like kings. Sounds good to me. They have beer every week.'<sup>48</sup> To clinch the argument that unnecessary obstacles were being put in the way of his repatriation this man raised the issue of Eleanor Roosevelt's recent Red-Cross-sponsored tour of the Pacific: 'If they can get planes to bring Mr Roosevelt's wife over here they can get boats to bring us back.'<sup>49</sup> This was in stark contrast to the Army-approved sentiments that Mrs Roosevelt 'reminded one more of some boy's mother back home, than the wife of the President of the United States', representing 'to the average soldier in this far away outpost, the folks back home, and everything we hold dear'.<sup>50</sup>

At the time New Zealanders were often intimidated by their supposedly sophisticated and cosmopolitan visitors, but for men who had been stationed in the Solomon Islands and other Pacific island groups for months on end, New Zealand was seen as 'civilization'. That previously admirable officers would behave differently back in 'civilization' made many soldiers angry. Soldiers wanted consistency from their leaders, not context-dependent etiquette. 'I don't think they care whether we enjoy [sic] ourselves or not. We know we are going back in combat soon, and we can say our stay here has been a misserable [sic] one. I could write much more but, if it were known who I was who is thinking of such things I'd be hanged the following day. There are only a few enjoying themself [sic] here and I guess you know who those are. The Brass.'<sup>51</sup> Differential access to resources — most particularly women, alcohol and leisure — highlighted the gaps between the ideals these men felt they were fighting for and the hierarchies of army service.

Despite the repeated pleas to be allowed to return to the United States, there was also a great deal of anxiety about returning. Again sexuality was an issue.

Army life attempted to normalize abnormal behaviour: groups of men thrown together for long periods of time without female company. A few saw this as a valuable life lesson, one commenting, 'I have learned that men can live with out women and make the best of it.' Evocative though his statement is, men with same-sex desires did not use the free responses to voice their opinions. Those who were interested in women, or uninterested in learning to live without them, repeatedly remarked on the downside of the experience of military camaraderie and the inadequacy of a short leave in New Zealand for filling the gap. 'After several years overseas and several combats and being sick of guy smells more than a 2 or 3 day pass in New Zealand to get back into the groove mentally & also physically.'<sup>52</sup> In one of the more extreme responses a soldier described how fear had taken him over: 'I was two nerves [sic] all the time. I felt darn scared when going to the front and when Jap plans [sic] was over head. I don't think I could stand another combat because the first one made me all upset all the time and when I see wounded men it made me feel sick when I see them.'<sup>53</sup> Another was more explicit about the way his worries had affected his sexual functions:

I went into combat after spending seven months in Hawaii where I was extremely unhappy. I could never go to sleep early and would toss all nite sometimes. For a while after we got to Guadalcanal I was better but after combat I lapsed into my insomnia again only worse. I had a terrible feeling of loneliness and had a constant urge for masturbation. I no longer get an erection in the mornings and during my stay in New Zealand I found I could not raise an erection even when making violent love to a woman. I'm afraid to go back home like this — and yet I want to very much.<sup>54</sup>

Needless to say, this is not the kind of information the research branch intended to elicit when it asked men to comment on matters relating to their combat experience.

Entering the state of patriarchal heterosexuality — in simple terms marrying and establishing a family household, an important marker of normative masculine adulthood in this period — was denied soldiers for the duration of service. Two respondents complained of being unable to see their recently born children, both suggested they should be allowed home leave expressly for this purpose. Some men broke ranks and became engaged to be married while stationed in New Zealand. Some even married, though they were not able to set up house until after leaving service. This created a new set of conflicts with the army and with idealized American values, in this case the image of a land open to immigrants. 'Some changes should be made in the immigration laws so a soldier that has fallen in love with a girl in a foreign country can get her into the U.S. immediately after the war without waiting for a place in the immigration quotas (maybe 4 or 5 years) before he can be married. Most of us are going to be pretty old anyway and want to get our families started. Is it our fault that 'the girl of our dreams' is not an American?'<sup>55</sup>

Another man fretted about the impact of military service and anti-malarial drugs on his fertility:

I am anxious to get back to get married and raise a family as my girlfriend that I am engaged to is getting old and if she doesn't start in soon she will be to[o] old and after

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waiting two years and a half I think she really loves me. I have heard after taking atabrine tablets sometimes it will sterilize the man so that he can't have any children for a few years ... according to the Reader's Digest and other magazines we need more children, more marriages to increase the present population. How can they do it if they don't give the family a chance?<sup>56</sup>

The free responses to Survey 143 do not provide a complete picture of the soldiers stationed in the South Pacific, nor of the men's experience while resting in New Zealand. Nor do they tell us much about wartime New Zealand. They were not intended for this purpose, and any information about the country in them is there against the express instructions of the survey-takers. For most of the men surveyed, the stay in New Zealand was too little, too late, and no substitute for a 'real' furlough at home. Sexuality and heterosexual dating were central parts of the interaction, but those activities were framed by a wider competition within the individual units for status and resources. Instead of the images of bountiful hospitality and recreation offset by sexual and racial tension that permeate the public accounts, the soldier surveys alert us to a different set of idealized images and 'real world' tensions. Ideas about 'American' values and equality among men are set against tensions created by the contradictory nature of military life. The behaviour of the units' officers while on leave was interpreted in ways that increased men's militancy and, if their statements are to be believed, also lowered their morale. The surveys also offer insights into the way military masculinity was constructed in relation to ideas about other men, 'guy smells' as one respondent termed them.

These men were balancing sharply contrasting emotions about military service. Most agreed with the justification of the war, yet few agreed with the way the army interpreted those justifications and many resented the war's impact on their individual lives. Soldiers perceived the army as an institution that violated their rights even as it asked them to make sacrifices in pursuit of others' rights. Citizenship was both a duty to be performed and an injustice to be borne. Men back 'stateside' were part of the polity soldiers fought to protect, yet undeserving of that protection — the very existence of large numbers of uniformed men who had not seen overseas service was cited as proof that the war was not being fought along democratic lines. In a very different context James Scott has argued that every subordinate group creates a 'hidden transcript' that subverts the ideologies that justify their own domination.<sup>57</sup> Far from being the 'standard issue' griping of the 'average' GI, the way soldiers talked about their day-to-day experiences of service, their hopes for the future, their anger and frustration is an important part of the social history of the war. Their talk about the war resisted the hierarchies of military service and the strictures of military discipline. Moreover it figured a masculinity that, although conflicted, embattled and sometimes even chickenshit-scared, was at the same time driven by an idealized, unitary American masculinity grounded in notions of fairness and equality.

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## GI JOE DOWN UNDER

### NOTES

1 War History Narrative, 'The Americans in New Zealand', p.4, New Zealand National Archives, Wellington.

2 *New Zealand Listener*, 18 September 1942, p.23.

3 Stanley A. Frankel, *The 37th Infantry Division in World War II*, Washington, 1948, p.45.

4 Nancy W. Taylor, *The New Zealand People at War: The Home Front*, Wellington, 1986, p.642.

5 Harry Bioletti, *The Yanks are Coming: The American Invasion of New Zealand, 1942-1944*, Auckland, 1989. There are also some recent publications by amateur historians. Denys Bevan's *United States Forces in New Zealand, 1942-1945*, Alexandra, 1992, devotes 400 pages to American use of New Zealand as a staging post. Jack and June Hinton's *The Friendly Invasion of New Zealand by American Armed Forces*, Auckland, 1996, reproduces site maps, photographs and even cafe menus to aid veterans in reliving their war visits.

6 Jack Phillips with Ellen Ellis, *Brief Encounter: American Forces and the New Zealand People, 1942-1945, An Illustrated Essay*, Wellington, 1992.

7 Martin Russ, *Line of Departure: Tarawa*, New York, 1975, pp.30-31.

8 John Zimmerman, *Where the People Sing: Green Land of the Maoris*, New York, 1946, pp.ix, 5, 45, 76.

9 Robert Leckie, *Challenge for the Pacific: Guadalcanal —The Turning Point of the War*, New York, 1965, p.52.

10 Russ, p.30.

11 Zimmerman, p.7.

12 William Manchester, *Goodbye Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War*, London, 1981, p.167; Graeme Kent, *Guadalcanal: Island Ordeal*, New York, 1971, p.2.

13 Brigadier General Samuel B. Griffith, *The Battle for Guadalcanal*, Philadelphia, 1963, p.21. Bill Twining, an American officer, gave a more balanced account when interviewed by Denys Bevan: that he saw graffiti to the effect that 'all wharfies is bastards' long before the marines arrived, and that there was no proof that the later graffiti was put up by Americans. His testimony highlights the extent to which the conflict between unionists and marines has been retold in ways that exaggerate the distinctions between soldiers and civilians. Bevan, p.109.

14 Leckie, p.43. Leckie describes in some detail the labour required of marines ordered to unload and reload their own ships in an end-run around the so-called 'socialist' unions. Wellington's Aotea Quay turned into 'an ankle-deep march of tons upon tons of cereal, cigarettes, candy and little tins of C rations . . . churned into a pulpy mass by the feet of thousands of toiling Marines or the wheels of flat-bed New Zealand trucks', p.52. See also General Alexander A. Vandegrift and Robert B. Asprey, *Once A Marine: The Memoirs of General A.A. Vandegrift*, New York, 1964, p.102.

15 Twining remembered military relations with the watersiders as complicated and often frustrating but felt the disputes were better characterized as 'work stoppages' than strikes. There were some trivial grievances, including waterside workers' preference for tea over coffee: 'But not every [rain] shower was followed by a stoppage and I would never say wharfies wouldn't work in the rain as a matter of course.' Twining also acknowledged that civilian dockworkers were asked to unload ammunition: 'a violation of union rules and port regulations for hazardous cargo'. Bevan, p.108.

16 John Lardner, *Southwest Passage: The Yanks in the Pacific*, Philadelphia, 1943, pp.269-71, emphasis added.

17 *ibid.*, p.271.

18 Microfilm of free responses to surveys, RG 165, Research branch, Survey 143, Reel 25, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), College Park, Maryland.

19 'My mother is all alone and can't live off the paltry 15 dollars a month the government allows her for an allotment[sic]'; 'As yet I haven't seen my son, accept [sic] from pictures. In May he will be 1 year of age and growing fast. Keeps me low in spirits not being able to see him. There should be some facilities made for men like myself to see their family at least once every six months. Something should be done quickly'; 'If my parents could get the care taken of them that they need such as medical attention and other things such as food and clothing problems I could get down to business to keep my mind more on my job instead of studying about the welfare of my folks at home'; 'I wouldn't want to go back home and have my younger brothers and sisters just know me in name only.' Free responses, Survey 143, Reels 25 and 26.

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20 'The American Soldier in WW II, Attitude Surveys of the Army Research Branch', US National Archives Reference Information papers, no.xx, NARA.

21 In some cases 'microdata' in the form of punch cards still exists.

22 *Volume I, The American Soldier: Adjustment During Army Life; Volume II, The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath; Volume III, Experiments in Mass Communication; Volume IV, Measurement and Prediction*; Princeton, 1949-50.

23 Instructions, March 1944, Survey 143, Reel 25, RG 165, NARA.

24 *ibid.*

25 Free responses, Survey 143, Reel 26.

26 *ibid.*

27 Bevan, p.169. Bevan notes that small numbers of army personnel, including nurses, were rested in New Zealand even after it lost its designation as an official rest area.

28 Free responses, Survey 143, Reel 26.

29 *ibid.*

30 *ibid.*

31 *ibid.*

32 *ibid.*

33 *ibid.*, emphasis in original.

34 *ibid.*

35 'What the Front-line Infantryman Thinks', p.8, Report B-81-2, RG330, Box 992, NARA.

36 Free responses, Survey 143, Reel 25.

37 *ibid.*

38 Free responses, Survey 143, Reel 26.

39 *ibid.*

40 *ibid.*

41 *ibid.*

42 *ibid.*

43 Free responses, Survey 143, Reel 25.

44 Free responses, Survey 143, Reel 26.

45 *ibid.*

46 Free responses, Survey 143, Reel 25.

47 *ibid.*

48 *ibid.*

49 *ibid.*

50 Corporal Terry Flanagan, 'As We See It', *Pacific Times*, 29 August 1943, p.4.

51 Free responses, Survey 143, Reel 25.

52 Free responses, Survey 143, Reel 26.

53 *ibid.*

54 *ibid.*

55 *ibid.* One hundred New Zealand-born persons were allowed to enter the US each year as 'quota' immigrants. Although wives of American citizens were not subject to quota restrictions on immigration, many servicemen worried about how the law would affect their foreign-born fiancées. American Consulate, 'Information Petition Form 633', American Red Cross records, War Brides, New Zealand, RG 200, 6184, NARA.

56 *ibid.*

57 James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven, 1990. See also Scott's *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven, 1985.