

## **‘When in Doubt Brew Up’:**

### FOOD, DRINK AND THE WRITINGS OF NEW ZEALAND’S WORLD WAR II SOLDIERS



LET US START WITH A STORY. It is 1941, or maybe early 1942. Trevor and Red, two infantrymen, are bivouacked in the North African desert waiting for a German attack. The pair keep watch from their slit trench, waiting for dawn and wondering if warm food will be brought into the line. Sure enough, before long some beans appear for breakfast. After that there is nothing to do but smoke and wait for something to happen, listening to the gunfire in the distance. ‘Silver Fern ... Only the best, that’s all. What a godsend that parcel was.’<sup>1</sup> But New Zealand tobacco, like New Zealand memories, needs to be carefully husbanded. The war, like the day described in the story, is seemingly endless: ‘Go easy on it boy. We don’t know how long it’s got to last. We’d better roll racehorses.’<sup>2</sup> The men’s future is alluded to in their hope that might be worth eking out some cigs to smoke tomorrow. Their past is conjured in a brief fantasy about sitting in a pub back home with a schooner of beer or a rum and raspberry.

Eating and drinking are simultaneously expressions of people’s most basic needs and the occasion for some of their most complex cultural interactions. Food, the sociologist Ian Carter reminded us in his essay ‘Eternal Recurrence of the Trivially New’, is a double-coded cultural symbol.<sup>3</sup> Food is a biological necessity but it is also an area of our lives where we exercise choice, choice shaped by both our personal likes and dislikes and wider cultural norms. Carter takes part of the title of his essay from Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche’s phrase ‘eternal recurrence’ was tagged to the essay to capture the individualistic, here-and-now-ness of food’s cultural significations. The second phrase of the title alerts us to the tendency to treat the details of foodways, food experiences and food memories as trivialities – part of the background noise of our lives and our history. This article looks at the way food stories and food imagery were used in the memoirs written by New Zealand soldiers who served overseas in World War II. Like Carter, I am interested in the eternally recurrent aspects of the cultural meanings attached to food culture, arguing that soldiers told food stories as a way of alluding to their bodily needs and those other eternally recurrent aspects of military life, boredom, institutionalization, and the possibility of death. I am also interested in food and food stories as a way in

which soldiers could draw attention to relationships, both to other soldiers and to the people they left at home. Self-reliance and choice are other themes of the stories. Their food stories allowed them a means to present themselves as independent and self-governing, like Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, 'standing free, lonely and defiant against the world'.<sup>4</sup>

But back to Trevor and Red. Speculating about an imaginary choice of tippie was an alternative to contemplating their next meal – the default front-line menu, tinned 'bully' beef and water. Even a cup of tea was out of the question. "“What about a bit of bully?” “What else is there?”, asks Trev. “Bully”, wisecracks Red.<sup>5</sup> Then 'Jerrys' attack out of nowhere, interrupting lunch. Six are shot dead: 'no more sausage' for those bastards. Another lies nearby, wounded and calling intermittently for a friend. Near nightfall Trevor sneaks over to where the injured German is lying, intending to silence him. He balks at killing the man at close range and offers to dress his wound. Things have gone too far though; the Jerry is bleeding out. At the injured man's request, Trevor finishes him off and returns to the trench. Red says nothing but pushes over a partly eaten tin of meat. Trevor digs out a spoonful, looks at it, and then puts it down again: 'No thanks.'<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 1:** Soldiers cooking around a small fire, Western Desert, North Africa

**Source:** Photographs relating to World War 1914–1918, World War 1939–1945, 1/4-019371-F, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington

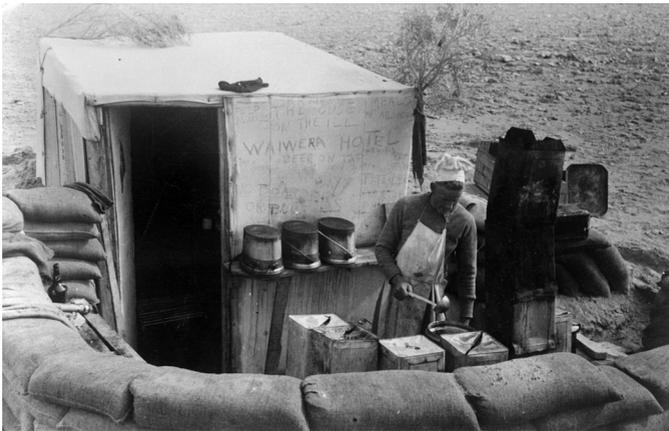
Trev and Red's bully beef is a compact allusion to the narrow, comfortless and sensorily deprived lives of men at the 'sharp end'. The author of this story, Dan Davin, a New Zealand Division veteran, was engaging in a self-conscious act of literary fashioning. Red and Trev are types, their dialogue

part of Davin’s professed effort to capture the New Zealand soldier’s world and habitually laconic style. In this world, he recalled, emotions were expressed only ‘briefly, casually almost, and even inarticulately’.<sup>7</sup> Few soldiers wrote fiction. Many, however, wrote letters, diaries and memoirs.<sup>8</sup> Food motifs feature in many of these writings. Like Davin, soldiers found food stories a useful trope: food was everyday, essential and easier to write about than feelings or actual combat. Most soldiers’ food stories were not as dramatic as Davin’s juxtaposition of bully beef and butchered enemy, but they drew on the same themes: the quotidian aspects of army life, soldiers’ efforts to exert some control over their lives, the place of food in the rituals of soldier sociability and psychological survival, and touchstone memories of home as expressed through provisions. A close reading of soldiers’ food writings highlights the men’s preoccupations with self and their ambivalent relationship with army life. The discussion concentrates on commentary about the years 1940–1943, during which period the New Zealand forces assembled in Egypt at Maadi camp outside Cairo, fought major actions in Greece and Crete, then regrouped and joined the fight to clear the Axis forces out of Egypt, Libya and Tunisia before decamping to Italy. Sources which allow for analysis of Māori soldiers’ attitudes to food are sparse – Māori authored few available letters, diaries or memoirs – but those writings which do exist suggest that Māori shared their compatriots’ preoccupations with food and also used food to stories to explore issues about self and personal identity.

This is not an exercise in the empirical documentation of soldiers’ food practices.<sup>9</sup> Their selective, allusive and partial discussions of provisioning and consumption render the soldiers’ accounts of food more like Davin’s self-consciously literary treatment of the topic than sources to be trawled through for data about army provisioning. Nor are there easy divisions to be drawn between writing about sustenance during the war and the comments recorded later in memoirs. Distinctions between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ are important but all treatments of this topic are clearly crafted. These are cultural narratives told about the conditions of military service and the impact of army life on individuals. Created by soldiers out of their ‘real life’ experiences, they are as selective and constructed, as dependent on authorial selection and editing as any fiction, or any letter written in the foreknowledge of likely censorship.<sup>10</sup>

The creation and afterlife of these letters, diaries and memoirs is part of an important cultural process by which the happenings of the war years have been transformed into cultural memory.<sup>11</sup> In an article about collective memory and cultural identity, Jan Assmann has made a useful distinction between everyday communications about the meaning of the past and cultural memory texts

comprised of a ‘body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose “cultivation” serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self image’.<sup>12</sup> The entry of servicemen’s letters, diaries and memoirs into the public domain, through deposit in libraries and archives or publication (often edited and financed by the serviceman or his family), suggests a widespread desire to participate in the process of transforming a set of everyday communications into cultural memory. The popular effort to memorialize the war in written form, and to preserve and circulate those writings, is partly impelled by a sense of the importance of the events they chronicle, but it also draws strength from the idea that these are events which have wider meanings and from which there are lessons to be learned. Mieke Bal’s reminder that cultural memory ‘for better or worse’ links the past to the present and the future is salutary.<sup>13</sup> The need for this linkage is pressingly felt by those who have lived through traumatic events but it is also felt by subsequent generations: we repeatedly retell their war stories not just because we are interested in what happened during war – the ‘then-ness’ of the events – but because we are also interested in what remembering these stories says about us now. *Lest We Forget*, the oft-repeated phrase used to encourage the memorialization of New Zealanders at war, is not just an injunction to remember the dead, but a statement about what sort of society we see ourselves becoming.



**Figure 2:** Soldiers used ironic references to the comforts of home to comment on the deprivations of war. Here a New Zealand cookhouse in the desert which would have served neither alcohol nor pub-style meals has been dubbed the Waiwera Hotel.

**Source:** Photographs relating to World War 1914–1918, World War 1939–1945, DA-01029-F, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington

Servicemen’s writings about what the war meant are not unitary nor even internally consistent, but they are grounded on some distinct assumptions about masculine self-reliance, comradeship, authority, morality and individualism. The contradictions and challenges implicit in the soldiers’ food stories point toward a more complex cultural history of wartime experience than the nationalistic and gender-blind framework in which their stories are conventionally read.<sup>14</sup> Cumulatively they become parables about masculinity, war’s rights and wrongs, army discipline, army hierarchy and soldierly camaraderie. Ideas about men’s rights, duties and pleasures are also conveyed in the food discourse; so too reflections on the corporeality of the human body which, after all, was both meat and in need of meat. Food had symbolic plasticity and appeared in a variety of social contexts with a variety of meanings attached. Letters, diaries and memoirs repeatedly comment on the welcome arrival of parcels of food from home (evidence that a soldier has not been forgotten), the highs and lows of army tucker (evidence or otherwise of the army looking after its own) and the joys of a good feed (evidence that a soldier could look after himself). Food could evoke memories of home or emphasize the strangeness of wartime living conditions; it could bond men together or underline their existential separation. It was a multifaceted marker of status and identity.

The history of the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force (2NZEF), commonly known as ‘the Second Division’ (or ‘the Div’ to insiders), has been extensively canvassed in a multi-volume series of official histories.<sup>15</sup> In part as a response to the 50- and 60-year anniversaries of wartime events, a second wave of World War II histories began to appear in the 1990s and 2000s. Aimed at a general readership, these battle and unit histories are still primarily narrative in focus.<sup>16</sup> A substantial group of so-called ‘new’ military histories about other forces look at food in the context of combat,<sup>17</sup> but only one of New Zealand’s ‘new’ military historians has dealt with food in any detail. John McLeod’s *Myth and Reality: The New Zealand Soldier in World War II* notes the extent to which food was a topic of constant conversation among soldiers and provides a two-page description of army rations.<sup>18</sup> Because of the disciplinary consequences of excessive drinking (and a fondness – then and now – for images of New Zealand masculinity as mildly transgressive and prone to boyish high jinks) more has been written on alcohol than about everyday sustenance.<sup>19</sup>

And what of national ‘character’ and nationalism, the lenses through which so much of Australasian military history has been refracted?<sup>20</sup> Certainly the sense of having been personally involved in events of international and national significance helps explain why so many people have taken the

trouble to write war stories, and why the memoir is a more common mode for framing their stories than the full-scale autobiography.<sup>21</sup> But, to put it plainly, New Zealand soldiers' food narratives are not best located in any language of emerging nationhood. Some comments make culturally specific reference to particular brands or regional specialties, but a great deal of the discussion refers to items comfortably within the culinary culture of the British diaspora: tea with milk and sugar, bacon and eggs, roasted joints of meat, fritters and fruit cakes. The soldiers' remarks on the topic of food and drink are more often ruminations on the condition of being human than the preconditions of becoming a nation. Food stories are used as markers of personal identity and small-scale ties to specific communities, not signs of national maturation. They allow us access to a sensibility and set of values elided by the overarching nationalist interpretation. It is important for historians to take individual experiences and relate them to the big picture – indeed this is the standard way of using soldiers' letters, diaries and memoirs, as building blocks for 'big picture' histories of battles, campaigns, or national experiences – but the big picture can obscure as much as it reveals.

Novice soldiers learned military bearing formally and informally. Uniforms were issued, parade ground drills practised, discipline inculcated in matters as small as the folding of blankets and the polishing of boots and buttons. Recruits learned to manage the irritations of army living: buddying up with old acquaintances or with new mates; exchanging gossipy 'latrine-o-grams' in the communal toilet; queuing at 'mess parades and growling about the food'.<sup>22</sup> Soldiers quickly absorbed the prevailing philosophy that fitting in mattered, the army's challenge to 'fashion a soldierly force from ... hard men and baby-faces, Skinny and Tubby, Lofty and Shorty'.<sup>23</sup> Who you ate with, what you might share with your messmates, what the army might furnish for your sustenance and what you might supplement that basic ration with: these not only determined whether you were Skinny or Tubby but were also part of soldiers' need to maintain an equilibrium between the army's insistence on uniformity and their own need to maintain a sense of self. Food was also a marker of status. Soldiers had a keen sense of justice and the unequal distribution of food and drink between officers and men was an obvious peg on which to hang their resentments of army hierarchy. In a letter home from the troopship transporting him to the Middle East, Joe Brewer complained that there were double standards even in the serving of tea: 'In fact [the weather is] very cold, and I think that if officers are given afternoon tea, gunners in exposed positions on cold days should also be given a cup of tea.'<sup>24</sup> Later, in the desert, Struan MacGibbon enjoyed 'a great feed of tinned peaches, milk and Kornies. (An officer's but what is

good for the goose...').<sup>25</sup> There were also tensions between different groups of enlisted men. Lofty Bray, a proud early enlistee, recounts an incident in the mess at Maadi camp in Cairo that earned him a formal reprimand. A group of new arrivals refused to share their margarine. Bray took the margarine by force and dished out a scolding 'in real colourful army language'. He was confined to barracks for six days, but considered the punishment well earned because he had stood up for the established ethos: 'We were used to looking after the other fellow. ... any first echelon man would be pleased to share, and I think the reinforcements learned a good lesson to pull together.'<sup>26</sup>

Soldiers were required to take turns serving in the officers' mess. Many resented the implications of this chore, though Ted Lewis remembered that the fact that unpleasant chores were communal took some of the sting out: 'Fatigues in the cookhouse, shower houses and latrines were shared, and even waiting on tables in the officers mess had its humorous moments.'<sup>27</sup> John Blythe found the gulf between officers and other ranks less humorous when he encountered a high-school friend in the guise of a senior officer. Embarrassed about the disparity in their status, Blythe excused himself after a brief chat. Army protocol meant that the normal rituals of friendship could not be observed: 'He could not offer me a drink or even share a cup of tea and it was a ridiculous situation for two contemporaries to find themselves in.'<sup>28</sup>

Once a year, on Christmas Day, the positions were reversed and officers would serve the ordinary soldiers' meals, a practice one of Davin's more jaundiced characters deemed 'the slightly self-conscious saturnalia of officers waiting on the men, all the painstaking apparatus with which the army tried to replace the missing family and home'.<sup>29</sup> Not all soldiers were as cynical. Sergeant William Phipps's 1940 diary notes that he ate his Christmas dinner early, 'before we were detailed to act as mess orderlies at the men's mess table ... the officers carried out the actual serving'.<sup>30</sup> Private Harold Jamieson delighted in writing to his fiancée about 'our waiters (who by the way were our officers)' serving dinner.<sup>31</sup>

The army trained its own cooks but regular soldiers were required to take turns assisting with food preparation. Many jokingly reported that their new skills would surprise friends and relatives. 'At my earliest convenience', joshed Jamieson, 'I shall publish my new book, "One Thousand and Two New Methods of Preparing and Serving Boneless Beef" (commonly called "Bully Beef" but often referred to by other names)'.<sup>32</sup> The gender and class implications of the army's allocation of domestic work were also noted. Owen Gatman, the son of a Methodist minister, professed himself quite ready for a job as a housekeeper at war's end.<sup>33</sup> Others were less resigned to domestic

work. After a day spent on cookhouse fatigues, Percy Johnson vented his disgust in his diary: ‘What a war effort!’<sup>34</sup>



**Figure 3:** ‘Spud barbers’ at work, Hove Supply Dump in the Cassino area, Italy, World War II  
**Source:** Photograph taken by George Bull, Photographs relating to World War 1914–1918, World War 1939–1945, DA-05613-F, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington

The intricate emotional and organizational calculus involved in getting enough food and the right kind of food was part of what made it a rich topic. The army’s hit-and-miss approach to soldiers’ welfare is also narrated through food. It was customary for the orderly officer and sergeant to tour the mess at mealtimes, a somewhat perfunctory concession to consumer feedback. Sydney O’Callaghan recalled: ‘Each meal an officer came through the mess room asking if there were any complaints. He received plenty.’<sup>35</sup> Ian McLaren laughed: ‘The regular procedure was to enter the mess and walk quickly down the aisles saying loudly and repetitively “tea hot, tea hot, tea hot” and quickly disappear outside usually to some howls of protest.’<sup>36</sup> Execrable food turned Keith Sinclair into an inadvertent mutineer:

At one time the quality of the food deteriorated badly and our numerous complaints to our NCOs were ignored. ... I typed out a letter to the colonel which most of us signed. ... The sergeant-major took me before the colonel who told me that the round robin amounted to mutiny and that I was lucky not to face a court martial. ... I had not gone through the ‘proper channels’. Thereafter I resolved to keep out of trouble; to ‘work the system’ to my advantage. And it was possible. Within a disciplined environment in the armed forces there was a great deal of freedom.<sup>37</sup>

Wig Gardiner established his credentials as a good-hearted junior officer by narrating an incident where he was rebuked for drawing senior officers' attention to the rank and file's foul food.<sup>38</sup>

In camp officers generally ate better than ordinary soldiers, in the sense of having both better food and, usually, better conditions to eat it in. General Freyberg, the New Zealand Commander-in-Chief, brought his own cook from Britain to cook for the Division's 'A' mess.<sup>39</sup> The general, his chief administrative officer W.G. Stevens remembered, was a hearty eater, and thanks to the generosity of his New Zealand admirers, had a steady supply of delicacies to grace his table. Most accounts of Freyberg present him as a general with a common touch; Stevens balances this with a strategic anecdote suggesting the general was a man who could believe himself democratic because he was almost unaware of his own privileges. Congratulated after a special meal of oyster soup, tinned chicken and other hard-to-find edibles, Freyberg 'airily' remarked that they were all off the ration; 'but I think', recalled Stevens, that 'these little extras sent out so generously from New Zealand had to him become almost part of the ration'.<sup>40</sup>

Ordinary soldiers did not have access to the largesse of civilian New Zealand on the same scale as their commander-in-chief, but they did receive a liberal supply of parcels from home, some addressed to them personally, others sent for the benefit of soldiers generally. The mail service between New Zealand and the Middle East was erratic. Sometimes there would be no letters or parcels for weeks, then a glut. On one 'red letter day' Sydney O'Callaghan received 14 parcels.<sup>41</sup> The parcels were tangible (and toothsome) evidence that soldiers had not been forgotten. Their arrival occasioned feasting. The whitebait patties Percy Johnson cooked up, using tinned fish from one of his fiancée Tui's parcels, brought back 'shades of crib and Tui! ... She's a peach! I love her all over again.'<sup>42</sup>

There is little emphasis on the exotic in these tales of foraging in foreign lands but a great deal of nostalgia for the familiar. Whether or not these soldiers enjoyed trying new food while on leave in Cairo or Bari seems to have been beside the point. What they stressed in their letters was that there was no substitute for the food they had been brought up with. Bob Wilson jokingly reprimanded his parents for describing their turkey dinners: 'it makes my mouth water. ... we don't do so badly for food although ... sometimes I look at it and just chuckle to think what we would say of it at home.'<sup>43</sup> Soldiers come closest to asking for sympathy in their asides about the creature comforts of home. As Harold Jamieson remarked on Christmas Day 1942, 'how little did I think a few years back that one day I would look

upon bread as a luxury'.<sup>44</sup> But these accounts were not primarily directed at maligning the standard of food in the army. They were exercises in self-fashioning. Army life, like travel, it was widely agreed, changed a man, but how much? The food stories in the men's letters in particular seem to have been part of strategies of stabilizing men's identities by linking their military and pre-military identities. The specificity of their accounts of domestic cuisine provided them with a sentimental language that pulled together a variety of cultural commonplaces: that there was no place like home, that good, plain cooking was best, and that an army man was still mum's boy at heart. As Keith Warner told his parents, 'I always think of No. 18 Sturges Ave' round dinner time 'and wish I was there to taste some of those jam tarts ... I suppose my greedy brother is there everyday ... I hope they are too rich and make him trot. ... I guess you had better get in plenty of practice Ma for the day when I get back, I miss rattling the cake tins when I come home at night.'<sup>45</sup>

Once units left camp, water was almost always scarce and provisioning could be difficult. Food stories were used by soldiers to allude to the hardships they experienced out in 'the blue' without labouring the point. Soldiers could not protect themselves from adversity or hardship but they could present themselves as reacting to trying circumstances in admirable ways. A description of a weary trip to a new desert camp illustrates how humour was an effective tool in this self-fashioning: 'We landed here in the dark after a tiring journey and the C.O. made a speech and said that he regretted that we had had our rations for that day, there was no tea for us but he could give us a cup of tea and biscuits. One wag behind me remarked that this place would suit him because at that rate there would be no need to get up for breakfast.'<sup>46</sup>

Soldiers repeatedly present themselves as making ingenious use of the available provisions. Jim Rolfe commented on the inventiveness with which soldiers used the contents of parcels from home. Andrews Liver Salts apparently made an excellent raising agent for baking, and malted milk could be used for flavouring pancakes. A grand stew could be made from 'unofficial rations' by combining two cans of tomatoes, and one can each of meat, sausages, bully beef and potatoes.<sup>47</sup> Near the beginning of his best-selling memoir *Gunner Inglorious*, Jim Henderson lovingly catalogued the contents of the truck taking him into the Libyan desert: 'three blackened billies, beating a devil's tattoo', two primuses and 'a Bengazi burner', condensed milk, Kraft cheese, fig jam, 'bully and biscuits *ad nauseam*', tinned bacon, sausages, canned beetroot 'stolen in mistake for preserved black currants', dried apricots 'looking like corpses' ears', oatmeal, salt, tea, sugar, coffee and cocoa. The most prized items: a single bottle of whisky half-jokingly reserved

for medicinal purposes, tinned fruits ‘purchased with our own money’ and a big can of toheroa soup optimistically earmarked for Christmas Day in Benghazi.<sup>48</sup> The mixture of items – some army issue, some from home, some legitimately bought, others pilfered – epitomized the improvised nature of soldiering.



**Figure 4:** Cooking a meal on the road in Egypt

**Source:** Photographs relating to World War 1914–1918, World War 1939–1945, DA-01387-F, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington

Soldiers might reminisce about the last booze-up and look forward to the next, but tea was the beverage they marched on. In his novel *For the Rest of Our Lives*, Davin satirized the army’s reliance on tea: ‘tea on the march, tea before breakfast, morning tea at the Naafi or from a YMCA truck, tea washing down biscuits and bully, tea in the evening with more biscuits and bully. ... The army’s specific for everything except sudden death, for every woe.’<sup>49</sup> ‘WHEN IN DOUBT BREW UP’ read the graffiti on the side of one of the army trucks that carried New Zealanders across the North African desert.<sup>50</sup> Soldiers carried small camping stoves and fuel in their gear and were not dependent on army timetables or cooks for their brew-up. Tea drinking, even in altered circumstances, was a clear connection to pre-war life: tea was drunk in homes, in workplaces, on picnics, in the bush and on farms – as well as at war.

Tea's multiple associations made it a useful device for writers looking to conjure images of the comforts of everyday soldierly sociability. While a big booze-up could mark a special event, the brew-ups delineated the familiar and the mundane. As Ted Lewis, a draughtsman turned army mapmaker, recollected, the tedium of army life was regularly punctuated by tea and 'conversation about things back in New Zealand and the inevitable yarns'.<sup>51</sup> Roger Smith captured the routine of comfort of joining his mates for tea: 'Bull and Jeff had dug their bivvy against the wall. ... I usually wandered over and spent each evening yarning with them, timing my arrival by the buzzing of their primus. I would hear it start up and could make my bed, smoke a cigarette, get my things ready for the morning and arrive just as Bill put the tea in the billy. I nearly always seemed to have picked my cup up on the way, and oddly enough to have left my tobacco behind.'<sup>52</sup> Transposed into hazardous conditions, tea making was a simple pleasure made poignant by adversity. Hugh McKenzie details brewing up for 12 while bullets whizzed past. McKenzie's depiction of boiling the billy under fire was a nod towards the quiet heroism that was a hallmark of a good soldier: stay calm and look after your mates in a crisis.<sup>53</sup>

Rather than trumpet the fears and dangers attendant on life 'in the blue', soldiers told stories about their attempts to preserve routines and small



**Figure 5:** Meal-time in Crete, May 1941

**Source:** Photographs relating to World War 1914–1918, World War 1939–1945, DA-11038, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington

pleasures: a nicely rolled smoke, a cuppa, a yarn, a well-worn joke. A hot drink could symbolize vulnerability because even this small comfort could be hard won. Jim Henderson’s *Gunner Inglorious* describes ‘lonely little figures’ in the Libyan desert coming into focus out of the morning mist. Camp stoves fire up, ‘small flashes of yellow flame’. Every man is thinking, ‘just enough water for half-a-cup of tea all round’. A junior officer is trying to get a burial party together. In the tug-of-war between the officer’s desire to get the job done and the men’s desire to be left in peace, the tea is a symbol of the soldiers’ insistence on some control of their morning. As one jokes, ‘without a cup of tea I’m not at my graveside best’. In the end the men trudge off: ‘There are only a few dead ‘uns. We’ll be done in ten minutes and breakfast will be up by then.’<sup>54</sup>

But this is a description of no ordinary morning and no ordinary brew-up. We are told the date and the place: Monday, 1 December 1941, Sidi Rezegh, one of the ‘big shows’ in the fight against the German Panzerarmee in North Africa. The New Zealand forces suffered heavy losses, and Freyberg and his staff came close to being captured. Henderson never got his tea. By the time the dead were buried the shooting had started. His next cup would be days coming: ersatz coffee served by a kind German medical orderly. Badly wounded, he eventually had a leg amputated and was repatriated after a horrific spell in an Italian prison hospital. He recalled the British nurse’s greeting: “‘Welcome home, boys, oh welcome home.’” ... “‘Have you got a cuppa tea waiting?’” “‘We have an’ all.’”<sup>55</sup>



**Figure 6:** New Zealand soldiers evacuated from Crete savouring a hot drink  
**Source:** Photographs relating to World War 1914–1918, World War 1939–1945, DA-06841-F, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington

Food features in soldiers' accounts of the evacuation of Greece and the Battle of Crete. Soldiers use images of scarcity and scavenging to illustrate the extent to which the army hierarchy failed them and to present themselves as endeavouring to shape their destiny in a situation badly out of control. In April 1941 the Allied forces in northern Greece were forced to retreat in the face of advancing German troops. Their fighting withdrawal from the area south of Mount Olympus through Larissa, Lamia and the Thermopylae Pass was a nightmare of sleeplessness, aerial attack and broken lines of supply. Michael Hanan, part of the infantry's rearguard, remembered being homesick, excited and afraid: 'It was too cold to sleep and bully beef and biscuits washed down with water didn't do much to help.'<sup>56</sup> Evacuated to Crete, the survivors of the Greek retreat found themselves without cooking pots, plates or cutlery. Cooking was done in scoured-out petrol tins. 'Rations', Bill Gentry remarked in a letter designed to amuse the folks at home, 'are naturally on the slim side, but are very good considering everything and there are really lovely oranges on the Island.'<sup>57</sup> William Phipps, an enlisted man, was less complimentary about the state of affairs: 'Men hunted about for old fruit tins and feverishly got to work cleaning and fashioning them into containers from which they might drink tea, gallons of it. There was a tin of bully beef to every three men, a slab of white bread, some cheese, and for the lucky ones, an orange.'<sup>58</sup>

The real prize for the 'lucky ones' was not an orange, it was survival. On 20 May 1941 the skies above Crete began raining German parachutes. Before the month was over 671 New Zealand soldiers would die on Crete. Nearly a thousand more were wounded and another 2200 taken prisoner, the largest group of New Zealand prisoners of war taken in any single battle during the Second World War.<sup>59</sup> Detailed to take his unit to assist in the defense of Crete's Maleme aerodrome, once there Phipps reported to an officer with 'no knowledge of our movements or future'. After contacting another officer 'who knew less', he decided to make his stand on the issue of rations. Whatever else the army bureaucracy might dish them out, his men deserved to be fed: 'I would concentrate on jacking up food for my blokes. I really got cracking and learning Brigadier Hargest of 5 Brigade was in conference with senior officers in a nearby marquee I barged in as he was detailing the defenses of the local area. Spotting me he said, "what's your trouble sergeant?" I told him that I had thirty hungry men who besides being pushed from pillar to post with no one claiming [sic] responsibility for them were sadly in need of something to eat.'<sup>60</sup>

Matters rapidly deteriorated following the German airborne paratroop attack. Days and nights of fighting with little food and no sleep ensued. Alan Queree, a private in 20 Battalion, was attached to 28 Maori Battalion

for a rearguard action. His account of preparing for the fight uses food as an emblem of 28 Battalion's resilience and the etiquette of interracial co-operation: 'On the way there, I was sneaking through some railway sheds out of view of aircraft (I hoped) when a voice came up from a large railway turntable pit. "Hi, pakeha, you want some kai?" Looking down I saw two Maoris with a sheep or a goat, turning it on an improvised spit. They hacked off a large chunk of half-raw meat and handed it up – nectar!'<sup>61</sup>

Accounts penned by those who did not get out of Crete in time use food stories to mark their abandonment and signify the inner resources required to survive their ordeal. Even in extremity, these stories insist, people have choices about how they distribute food and how they deal with basic bodily needs. Herb Stove was captured on Crete after 14 days of being 'blitzed almost beyond human endurance'. Sheltering in caves near Sfakia, hoping for the British ships to return and uplift them, he and his companions went days without food. After being captured, 'our only conscious thoughts were of food. Would they feed us? No.' The starving men finally found a few biscuits 'in amongst the filth in the bottom of one of the vehicles'. It was too small a find to feed everyone so they gave them to the soldier judged to have the greatest need, 'one of our chaps, who by this time was becoming steadily weaker'. Food remained in perilously short supply even once they reached the POW camp. The ravenous men's tiny POW mess tins, no bigger than small salmon tins, became 'instrument[s] of torture': 'We tried to be cheerful to save face before the Germans', but the mess parades 'saddened the bravest hearts in our hungry band'.<sup>62</sup>

John Blythe was with the allied forces fighting their way up the eastern coast of Italy during 1943. Mess halls were a thing of the past. Mess trucks would park in the battered village streets. The men would collect their food and eat perched on the rubble. One meal in particular stuck in his memory because of the macabre conjunction of dinner and dismemberment: 'The cookhouse truck was situated just off the road in bare ground further down the village street. On the road itself were the severed remains of two or three Germans; legs encased in trousers and jackboots, the odd arm or two, pieces of jacket, indescribable lumps, stick bombs and a couple of coal-scuttle steel helmets. As we queued at the tailboard a single shell whooshed over our heads to land in front of the bonnet. ... This kind of thing was not exactly good for one's appetite.'<sup>63</sup> Blythe uses this image of the cookhouse amongst the corpses to convey his weariness and the desensitization caused by the conditions of front-line life, yet it is a cautious rendering of the trials of war. The bathos of the last sentence insists on the primacy of the quotidian and deflates the horrific image of soldiers eating amongst decomposing human

remains. He hints at desensitization in the next paragraph, recounting how, days later, a grave registration unit arrived to remove the rotting bodies. A shout of protest went up: ‘howls that [the mound] contained only pieces of Jerry made them desist – at least while we ate our lunch’.<sup>64</sup>



**Figure 7:** Red Cross workers with mobile canteen on the wharf at Alexandria as repatriated POWs come ashore from the hospital ship *Tairea*

**Source:** Photograph taken by George Robert Bull, Photographs relating to World War 1914–1918, World War 1939–1945, DA-03220-F, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington

Because army provisioning – even when not disrupted by military reversals – was often monotonous, opportunities to vary the basic diet were seized upon. The hoarding, thieving and bartering of food gave soldiers a break from culinary routine and a measure of control over their lives. Cooking for oneself and sharing food with one’s mates was a treat. Many soldiers believed they could do a better job with the rations than the army cooks.<sup>65</sup> On occasion a grand meal could be produced. In a rare stroke of luck Percy Johnson and his mates bartered cigarettes for eggs and a Tunisian lamb. Peas were pinched from a nearby field and the next two days marked by feasting: ‘Had two breakfasts this AM. The cook’s, then cooked ourselves bacon, eggs, liver, kidney and heart at 10 AM and was she good! Am elected chief cook of our lamb and she’s going pot-roasting on a primus. Turn it every ½ hour

with loving care. Peas ready to go on now.'<sup>66</sup> In 1942 Roger Smith celebrated his birthday in the desert by making oyster fritters for his friends, a small privilege wrested from an impersonal system of 'rations' and communal catering.<sup>67</sup> It was a special occasion: 'one of those evenings that linger in a man's memory all his life ... wrapped in that cheerful trusting companionship that is war's only virtue and at times makes its tragedy almost bearable'.<sup>68</sup>

Lofty Bray's memoir of his years as an army driver is laced with stories about food. Initially boredom was the problem; being camped for six months near the watering point at Baggush, 200 kilometres from Alexandria, 'meant living on baked beans every day sometimes twice a day, for months at a time ... then it would be bully beef for months'.<sup>69</sup> Monotony gave way to scarcity. 'Starved' for two weeks as part of the rearguard of New Zealand forces retreating in Greece, Bray did a Scarlett O'Hara and vowed never to go hungry again. At Port Said he and a trainload of other soldiers raided a canteen supply train pulled up alongside, stripping it of cigarettes, food and beer. Returning from leave in Palestine, no money left, he and some mates robbed the Arab food vendors at the train station. On returning to duty he fitted his new truck with extra water cans and a lockable box under the cab to fill with food: 'I had starved once, but would not let it happen again.'<sup>70</sup>

Hoarding, trading and stealing were all ways in which soldiers could insist on the difference between self and army, system and individual, but they also constituted a system within a system. While Bray and his fellows were breaking rules by stealing food, they were doing so within a clear moral economy. This purloining and redistribution of food was governed by what Bray described as the 'eleventh commandment of army life': don't get caught. It was also justified by a sense that soldiers were entitled to act outside the bounds of conventional morality and that a sensible man on the spot was likely to make better choices about the distribution of resources than a distant bureaucracy. This was a form of situational morality, and indicative of the extent to which service life was understood as distinct from normal life. Entry into the army had suspended the normal rules for these men along with their normal means of providing for themselves; when the army failed to provide properly for them, soldiers had to fill the breach. Describing the troops pulled up beside the supply train, Bray underlines their poor physical condition: 'just skin and bone ... hungry, starving and very dry'.<sup>71</sup> The language of the Ten Commandments, specifically 'Thou Shalt Not Steal', did not apply. The goods were 'unloaded', 'acquired', or 'borrowed', not stolen. As Bray says in his account of the robbing of the 'wog' food vendors, 'after all, it was a troop train and we were broke – we applied the Eleventh Commandment'.<sup>72</sup>

Similar rationalizations are evident in Jim Rolfe's account of his brother Jack's escapades. Jack Rolfe was a member of the Army Postal Unit. Stationed in the western desert during 1942, the bored postal workers started making raids on supplies at a nearby railhead, 'which if they could acquire their "share" would ease the burden of their isolation'.<sup>73</sup> It is never specified who the nicked goods were intended for, though Rolfe claims front-line troops were never disadvantaged by their actions. Humour is used to conceptualize the pilfering. Rolfe confides that a South African soldier once told him that New Zealand troops were expected to steal: 'a kiwi is a bird with a blunt arse and a blunt beak that runs around the battlefield screaming, "loot", "loot"'.<sup>74</sup> He and his mates, Rolfe claims, collected up their official rations so seldom that the unit in charge of provisioning them began to worry they were starving. Pilfering was also justified by an appeal to egalitarianism. Whatever their rank, men were entitled to make themselves comfortable. The booty was shared: 'The hospitality at the postal depot was greatly appreciated by everyone collecting mail and others camped nearby.'<sup>75</sup> There was an ethos of egalitarianism and a belief in sharing, but in practice loyalties were very localized.<sup>76</sup>

Stealing goods to sell on the black market escalated dramatically when the New Zealand troops reached Italy but it was a concern throughout the war.<sup>77</sup> These thefts were not particularly shameful. Because letters were subject to army censorship the thefts are not much discussed therein, but they are recounted in the diaries and memoirs without embarrassment. A longstanding divisional 'in-joke' dubbed the Kiwi soldiers and their commander 'Freyberg and the forty thousand thieves'. The 5 Field Ambulance B Company mascot was a dog affectionately called 'Looter'. Boots, blankets and food were all in high demand; tyres and sometimes even entire vehicles disappeared. In Maadi camp German prisoners of war were routinely used to guard NZEF stores from Egyptian thieves. As the war progressed, more attention had to be paid to safeguarding goods from New Zealand soldiers. 'It is almost tragic to have to say', Major General Stevens reported in his official history, *Problems of 2 NZEF*, 'that the only reliable guards, in the closing stages [of the war] either in Italy or Egypt, were German prisoners of war.'<sup>78</sup>

Smith marked the end of his North African service with food and conversation: 'There was much to remember, much to regret, and our own safety to be thankful for. More basically, there was sleep, whole nights of it without mosquitoes; there was food, cooked food at regular intervals eaten leisurely; and there was mail, letters to be read and written. ... We entertained each other in a rough but whole-hearted manner; you brought your own cutlery, but ate and drank all that your host possessed, and talked

and talked.<sup>79</sup> Soldiers' discourse about food allowed them to speak to the complexities of their relationships with each other, their superior officers and the people they had left at home. It is also a discourse notable for its sensory dimensions and its ability to evoke the corporeality of military service. The food stories and the memory texts in which they are embedded speak to soldiers' need to craft images of themselves as self-reliant and resilient beings exercising choice within an institution that radically curtailed their choices. New Zealand soldiers prided themselves on the egalitarianism and military prowess of the New Zealand Division, but like it or not they were caught up in a hierarchical and imperfect system. Provisioning was a gauge of the efficiency of the army as a system and an indication of the level of concern for their welfare among 'the brass' and the administrative staff on 'Bludger's Hill'. Illegal and punishable behaviors around food – scrounging, thieving and hoarding – were commonplace and rooted in an ethos of rational self-care and almost mythic self-reliance. They fed into the notion of army life as a system that might be recollected with pride, but which needed to be resisted in practice.

These various and varied food stories provide us with insights into the day-to-day military experience; but they also take us beyond the factual recounting of who served where and did what, to issues about how the raw experiences of war are transformed into stories that make cultural sense. Through their stories soldiers remembered, reworked and critiqued army life. The stories also function as more universal reflections on hardship, masculine competence, the value of humour, friendship and the nature of humanity. Shifting the focus from the New Zealand Division to individuals within 'the Div' allows a different picture to emerge than the proto-nationalists of Anzac lore. These were men with sentimental ties to home, men who in all likelihood would have approved of New Zealand's post-war transition from imperial Dominion to independent nation, but who lived their lives in a different register and on a different scale from any hindsight-driven forging-of-a-nation history. In writings contemporary to the war and in their later memorializations of war, New Zealand's World War II soldiers created cultural narratives that challenge our tendency when reading back to take the particularities out of individual war histories and prioritize the generalities. These men knew that food was significant and that it could be used as a sign of much more than a full belly and a good brew.

DEBORAH MONTGOMERIE

*University of Auckland*

## NOTES

1 Dan Davin, 'Below the Heavens', first published in *The Gorse Blooms Pale*, London, 1947, republished in *The Salamander and the Fire: Collected War Stories*, Oxford, 1986, pp.1–11. 'Racehorse' was slang for a very thin, hand-rolled cigarette.

2 Davin, 'Below the Heavens', p.1.

3 Ian Carter, 'Eternal Recurrence of the Trivially New: Food and Popular Culture', in Claudia Bell and Steve Matthewman, eds, *Cultural Studies in Aotearoa New Zealand: Identity, Space and Place*, Melbourne, 2004, p.85.

4 Carter, p.85.

5 Davin, 'Below the Heavens', p.5.

6 Davin, 'Below the Heavens', p.11.

7 Davin, *Salamander*, p.xv.

8 Most of the letters penned by World War II servicemen remain in private hands. This essay draws on 50 collections in public archives, principally the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, and the Auckland War Memorial Museum Library, Auckland. Over 150 New Zealand servicemen have published memoirs about their World War II service. Many more have contributed to edited collections. Jill McAra's collection *Stand for New Zealand: Voices from the Battle of Crete*, Christchurch, 2004, for instance, brings together the recollections of 23 men. Other ex-servicemen have produced lengthy manuscript accounts of their war intended for family circulation, some of which are entering the public domain posthumously.

9 Given the selectivity and partiality of soldiers' documentation of their diet, aiming for empirical comprehensiveness would be foolish. The texts are evidence of what the soldiers chose to tell us about their food, not what they actually ate.

10 The psychological literature on memory insists on memory's constructed and partial nature, and is a useful corrective to the uses of the term 'memory' as a naturalistic, populist and more authentic other to history and historiography, as in Pierre Nora's 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', *Representations*, 26 (1989), pp.7–25.

11 The literature on memory and culture is complex and multifaceted. I prefer the notion of cultural memory to social or collective memory, two other commonly used terms, because it comes closest to capturing the changed function of the memories as they move from the individual and family domain to the public domain. Collective memory implies a spurious unity, while social memory elides the question of how individual memory and social context are connected and suggests too easy an alliance between memory studies and social history methods. The terms national memory, public memory, vernacular memory and the Foucauldian counter-memory are also commonly used. For incisive discussions of the historical literature on memory, see Peter Fritzsche, 'The Case for Modern Memory', *Journal of Modern History*, 73 (2001), pp.87–117, and Wulf Kansteiner, 'Finding Meaning in Memory Studies: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies', *History and Theory*, 41 (2002), pp.179–97.

12 Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), p.132.

13 Mieke Bal, 'Introduction', in Mieke Bal, Jonathon Crewe and Leo Spitzer, eds, *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, Hanover and London, 1999, p.vii.

14 The meaning of soldiers' writings tends to be treated as self-evidently descriptive, even by academic historians, evidenced by the popularity of edited collections of their letters and diaries, absent any sustained analysis. See for example Jock Phillips, Nicholas Boyack and E.P. Malone, eds, *The Great Adventure: New Zealand Soldiers Describe the First World War*, Wellington, 1988; Glyn Harper, ed., *Letters from the Battlefield: New Zealand Soldiers Write Home, 1914–18*, Auckland, 2001; Glyn Harper, *Letters from Gallipoli: New Zealand Soldiers Write Home*, Auckland, 2011. Kate Hunter's 'More Than an Archive of War: Intimacy and

Manliness in the Letters of a Great War Soldier to the Woman He Loved, 1915–19', *Gender & History*, 25, 2 (2013), pp.339–54 is an excellent example of how fruitfully World War I letters can be analyzed within a gendered framework. My book *Love in Time of War: Letter Writing in the Second World War*, Auckland, 2005, p.135, argued that historians need to treat wartime letters as complex, culturally mediated documents, not just positivist pieces of proof about what happened to soldiers and their families.

15 Technically the New Zealand Division was a subset of 2 NZEF comprised primarily of fighting units and some support services. Non-divisional units included railway construction groups, mechanical equipment companies, a survey battery, prisoner of war camps, a Graves Registration and Enquiry Unit, censor sections and sundry support units such as the Field Bakery section and the mobile surgical unit. See W.G. Stevens, *Problems of 2 NZEF*, Wellington, 1958, pp.277–92. On the 50 volumes of official history about New Zealand in World War II see Ian McGibbon, "'Something of Them is Here Recorded": Official War History in New Zealand', in Jeffrey Grey, ed., *The Last Word: Essays on Official War History in the United States and the Commonwealth*, Westport CT, 2003. By my count there are over a hundred published memoirs detailing the experiences of New Zealanders in World War II and an additional number of memoirs and autobiographies with substantial sections on the war.

16 Matthew Wright, *A Near-Run Affair: New Zealanders in the Battle for Crete, 1941*, Auckland, 2000; Megan Hutching, ed., with Ian McGibbon, Jock Phillips and David Filer, 'A Unique Sort of Battle': New Zealanders Remember Crete, Auckland, 2001; Megan Hutching, ed., with Ian McGibbon, *Inside Stories: New Zealand POWs Remember*, Auckland, 2002; Matthew Wright, *Desert Duel: New Zealand's North African War 1940–3*, Auckland, 2002. For comments about food in unit histories see Julia Millen, *Salute to Service: A History of the Royal New Zealand Corps of Transport and its Predecessors, 1860–1996*, Wellington, 1997, pp.192, 198–200, 219; Brendan O'Carroll, *The Kiwi Scorpions: The Story of the New Zealanders in the Long Range Desert Group, Honiton*, 2000, pp.58–59. For an overview of writing about New Zealanders and the wars of the twentieth century in the 1880s and 1990s see Deborah Montgomerie, 'Reconnaissance: Twentieth-Century New Zealand War History at Century's Turn', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 37, 1 (2003), pp.62–79.

17 Richard Holmes, *Acts of War: The Behavior of Men in Battle*, New York, 1985, pp.125–9 discusses soldiers' perennial problems with hunger and poor quality food as a source of combat stress. His comments about battle stress are reproduced almost verbatim in Dave Grossman's *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, Boston, 1995, pp.69, 72, 94. Similarly Mark Johnston's excellent *At the Frontline: Experiences of Australian Soldiers in World War II*, Melbourne, 1996, discusses the relationship between poor provisioning and battle stress.

18 John McLeod, *Myth and Reality: The New Zealand Soldier in World War II*, Auckland, 1986, pp.111–14.

19 On alcohol see Stevens, *Problems*, pp.217–18, 245, 276; McLeod, pp.72, 120, 124–5, 127–34, 136.

20 New Zealand's nationalist historiography has conventionally treated the wars of the twentieth century as forcing houses for New Zealand national identity. Keith Sinclair's *A History of New Zealand*, Harmondsworth, 1959, p.227 declares that after World War I there was 'a very general agreement among the New Zealanders that they were a new nation'. Jock Phillips has produced nuanced discussions of the multiple and intersecting identities of New Zealanders at war, within larger arguments about the making of national identity: see for example '75 Years Since Gallipoli', in *Towards 1990: Seven Leading Historians Examine Significant Aspects of New Zealand History*, Wellington, 1989, pp.91–106, and 'War and National Identity', in David Novitz and Bill Willmott, eds, *Culture and Identity in New Zealand*, Wellington, 1989, pp.91–109, both of which emphasize the gap between proto-nationalist official interpretations of

the war and soldiers' disillusion with the war itself and with their (mostly) British commanders. However, his essay, 'National Identity and War', in Ian McGibbon, ed., *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*, Auckland, 2000, pp.347–50, argues that 'for much of the twentieth century war made a major contribution to New Zealanders' sense of themselves', as the 'more assertive' nationalisms produced by the experiences of the two world wars were then extended and reinforced by subsequent acts of commemoration and interpretation. Paul Baker suggests that one outcome of the Great War was a new willingness to distinguish between British and New Zealand interests 'and to place New Zealand's interests first': *King and Country Call: New Zealanders, Conscription and the Great War*, Auckland, 1988, p.229. The tide of interpretation shifted in the early 2000s with James Belich's *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000*, Auckland, 2001, emphasizing 'Dominionism' and the 'culture of recolonization' as the drivers of New Zealand's participation in World War I, and a 'tightening' of ties to Britain as a result of the war. World War II, he contends, was another period of heightened belief in the Britishness of New Zealand, with 'recolonisation triumphant' at war's end: Belich, pp.112, 296. Felicity Barnes argues that the soldier tourists who visited London participated in a project of creating an imagined geography in which 'New Zealand's London', and by extension, Britain, was a central and constituent element of twentieth-century 'New Zealand': Felicity Barnes, *New Zealand's London: A Colony and its Metropolis*, Auckland, 2012, ch.1. Matthew Wright suggests that a notion of a 'dual patriotism' serves better to describe the way New Zealand identity developed within an imperial framework in *Shattered Glory: The New Zealand Experience at Gallipoli and the Western Front*, Auckland, 2010, p.321. The duality of New Zealand soldiers' patriotism is implicit in Christopher Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience: New Zealand, Australia and Empire in the First World War*, Auckland, 2004, for example p.309, where New Zealand's relationship with Britain is described as a 'comfortable cloak'. Graham Hucker's fine-grained case study of World War I Taranaki found 'a distinct British, not New Zealand, minded community' in 1918: 'The Armistice: Responses, Understandings and Meanings for a Rural Region', in John Crawford and Ian McGibbon, eds, *The Great War: New Zealand, the Allies and the First World War*, Wellington, 2007, p.569 (emphasis in original).

21 Laura Marcus provides a useful discussion of how deeply rooted the public/private distinction is in the generic distinctions between memoir and autobiography. Not only does autobiography imply the 'evocation of a life as a totality' as opposed to "'memoirs" which offer only an anecdotal depiction of people and events', but the distinction also rests on the idea that the writers of memoirs 'are inadequate to the profundities of introspective autobiography': *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice*, Manchester and New York, 1994, pp.3, 21. Notions of class and cultural capital are also tied up with the distinctions between those capable of self-reflection and those who are not, but the memoir's generic engagement with history in the form of public events is part of the reason for its lower status as a literary form: 'the inner/outer life, private/public dichotomy and the hierarchy of value attached to these can readily be turned into an autobiography/memoirs distinction', p.21.

22 Jim Henderson, *22 Battalion*, Wellington, 1958, p.2.

23 Tony Vercoe, *Yesterday's Drums: Echoes from the Wasteland of War*, Wellington, p.23.

24 N.H. (Joe) Brewer, *The Soldier Tourist: A Personal Account of World War II*, Auckland, 1999, p.61.

25 John MacGibbon, ed., *Struan's War*, Wellington, 1991, p.75.

26 Bray, p.72.

27 Lewis, p.11.

28 John Blythe, *Soldiering On: A Soldier's War in North Africa and Italy*, Auckland, 1989, p.175.

29 Dan Davin, *For the Rest of Our Lives*, London, 1945, p.155.

30 William Phipps, 'What Do You Make of That Sergeant?', typescript, author's private

collection, p.40.

31 Hobbs, p.101.

32 Hobbs, p.178.

33 Martyn Thompson, ed., *On Active Service*, Auckland, 1999, p.25. See also p.101: ‘we will make excellent domestic servants on our return home’.

34 Johnson, p.41. Jim Rolfe comments wryly that when the news of Pearl Harbor came he was ‘busy on that important military task of peeling sacks and sacks of potatoes’: Jim Rolfe, *Brothers At War: A Kiwi Family’s Story*, Auckland, 2004, pp.49–50.

35 S.R. O’Callaghan, *One Sapper’s War*, Christchurch, 1994, p.3.

36 I.D. McLaren, *Your Obedient Servant: Perspectives of a Soldier*, Dunedin, 1997, p.10.

37 Keith Sinclair, *Halfway Round the Harbour: An Autobiography*, Auckland, 1993, p.71.

38 Noel ‘Wig’ Gardiner, *Freyberg’s Circus: Reminiscences of a Kiwi Soldier*, Auckland, 1981, p.42. See also Jack McFadzean’s account of losing his Lance Corporal’s stripe after complaining about inadequate food at Maadi camp: *A Scottish Kiwi & A Soldier at War*, Masterton, 1998, pp.116–17.

39 Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C.: Soldier of Two Nations*, London, 1991, p.167.

40 W.G. Stevens, *Freyberg, V.C.: The Man, 1939–45*, Wellington, 1965, pp.48–50.

41 O’Callaghan, p.30.

42 Rex Johnson, ed., *The Johnson Line: Percy’s Army Years*, Wellington, 1997, pp.49, 65.

43 Bob Wilson to Mum, 14 Dec. 1941, Wilson Papers, MS 95/75, Auckland War Memorial Museum Library (AWMML), Auckland.

44 Margaret Hobbs, ed., *Tell Our Story: World War II in North Africa*, Wellington, 1999, p.101.

45 Keith Warner to Mum and Dad, 30 May 1941, Warner collection, MS 99/78, AWMML, Auckland.

46 Robert Wilson to Mum, 14 Dec. 1941, Wilson Papers, MS 95/75, AWMML, Auckland.

47 Rolfe, pp.18, 66.

48 Jim Henderson, *Gunner Inglorious*, Wellington, 1945, (six printings), republished 1957, 1974, pp.17–18.

49 Davin, *Rest of Our Lives*, p.79.

50 Lewis, p.46.

51 Lewis, p.46.

52 Roger Smith, *Up The Blue: A Kiwi Private’s View of the Second World War*, Wellington, 2000, p.41.

53 H.R. Mackenzie, *On Active Service: War Diary and Letters Home*, Wanganui, 1996, p.55.

54 Henderson, *Gunner Inglorious*, pp.23–25.

55 Henderson, *Gunner Inglorious*, pp.176, 179.

56 Tony Williams, *Anzacs: Stories from New Zealanders at War*, Auckland, 2000, pp.14–15.

57 Sally Mathieson, ed., *Bill Gentry’s War*, Palmerston North, 1996, p.83. Mathieson, Gentry’s daughter, edited the letters for publication after her father’s death. The originals were deposited with the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington.

58 Phipps, p.75.

59 Glyn Harper, ‘Crete’, in McGibbon, ed., *Oxford Companion*, p.128. In his volume in the Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939–1945, *22 Battalion*, Wellington, 1958, Jim Henderson writes, ‘Of all the days of the war one stands alone in the minds of the battalion’, 20 May 1941, p.34.

60 Phipps, p.77.

61 McAra, p.96.

- 62 H.L. Stove, 'Escapees in Crete', in McAra, ed., *Stand For New Zealand*, pp.117–18.
- 63 Blythe, p.119.
- 64 Blythe, p.119.
- 65 For example, Percy Johnson commented that when his portion of the convoy was separated from the cooks' trucks, 'we still manage our own meals with rations drawn each day from the QM. We make a better meal of it than they dish out too': Johnson, p.63.
- 66 Johnson, p.91.
- 67 Smith, p.82.
- 68 Smith, p.82.
- 69 Nelson 'Lofty' Bray, *A '39er's Story: Remembering the Mediterranean War, 1939–1943*, Christchurch, 1996, p.30.
- 70 Bray, pp.48, 54, 58–59.
- 71 Bray, p.54.
- 72 Bray, p.58.
- 73 Rolfe, p.65.
- 74 Rolfe, p.19.
- 75 Rolfe, pp.42–43.
- 76 This is acknowledged even in some of the official histories. Henderson's *22 Battalion*, for instance, discusses how 'You did not actually seem aware of anything beyond the battalion', pp.6–7, and looks at the role of the platoon as the unit of most immediate interaction.
- 77 See for example Rolfe, pp.77, 107, selling cheese and bread; Johnson, p.87, selling biscuits.
- 78 Stevens, *Problems*, p.220.
- 79 Smith, p.98.