

# BEGINNING ANOTHER PAGE OF N.Z.'S HISTORY

By N.Z.R.B.

**T**HE first page in another chapter in New Zealand's history was written in the full beauty of a summer morning, not many weeks ago, when 6,700 men comprising the 1st Echelon of this Dominion's Second Expeditionary Force sailed for Egypt. Great modern liners carried them; warships were their grim guardians. Soon after 6 o'clock the first ship of the convoy, H.M.A.S. Canberra, steamed majestically down the harbour; by 8 o'clock only grey shapes of scarcely moving ships could be discerned in Cook Strait. Soon they were lost in the haze which hung like gossamer over the sunlit seas. New Zealand had said farewell to her soldiers — silently except for the cheers which echoed distantly over the water.

The moving drama of that summer morning began on September 1, when a state of emergency was declared in New Zealand. Hitler had invaded Poland, and the heart of the Empire had sent out its first call. When war was declared New Zealand answered.

## Swift Action

Within a few weeks all that great and cumulative activity which accompanies preparation for war was in full swing—the building of camps, the manufacture of uniforms, the organisation of a vast machine which must function and endure until the struggle ends. Trentham, Burnham, Ngaruawahia, became like towns in the making, so swiftly were buildings raised, roads constructed, water and electric power supplied to them, drainage systems installed. Simultaneously the call went out for volunteers and was swiftly answered by New Zealand's manhood, just as it had answered twenty-five years previously. Between October 3 and 6 the men were in camp, following officers and non-commissioned officers who were already in training. But still the building and organisation forged ahead. Papanui camp was completed, perfect in military requirements. The Air Force spread its training centres throughout the Dominion, opening new ones, enlarging those already in operation, as the military camps had been enlarged and perfected to accommodate thousands in place of peace-time hundreds.

## Nerve Centre

The office of the Minister of Defence, the Hon. F. Jones, became the nerve centre of this vast organisation, the Minister himself working night and day as the magnitude of the effort threw more and more responsibility on his department. Messages passed, with the speed of light, almost, between Well-

For the second time in New Zealand's history, her soldiers are camped in Egypt. On the evening of February 12, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon. P. Fraser, announced over the air the safe arrival there of the 1st Echelon of the 2nd N.Z. Division. Mr. Anthony Eden flew from England to greet them and the Australians, who arrived at the same time. Now, like the men of 1914-18, our men are becoming familiar with the land of Antony and Cleopatra and the storied Nile. On these two pages is the story of their departure and the events leading up to it.

ton and London, advising, requesting, answering, suggesting. With increasing and exacting demands which tested and proved their capacity, New Zealand's permanent staff swiftly organised the various units which go to the making of a modern army—the training of infantry men and artillery men, of signalers and machine-gunners, of tank, anti-tank, and Bren Gun units, of the army service corps, of cooks and clerks, of stretcher-bearers and mechanics. On them lay the Herculean task of equipping and training and feeding the first units of New Zealand's army overseas. Major-General Duigan and his permanent staff were ready to meet any and every emergency—the huge organisation was soon working with almost mechanical precision. This young nation, just entering her 100th year, had turned bravely from her normal course and embarked wholeheartedly to send men for the third time overseas.

## Consultations

On October 11 the Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon. Peter Fraser, left for England, travelling from Auckland by air to consult with the Home authorities.

Then Group Captain Saunders, Chief of Air Staff, sailed for Canada, to discuss with other Empire representatives

particulars of the great Air Force training scheme in which New Zealand will play her part. And if mystery shrouded departures and undertakings, it was a necessary precaution in the interests of our men and the affairs of State.

Speculation was rife. Who would command the forces; would they go overseas? These two questions were answered by the Prime Minister, the Right Hon. M. J. Savage, on November 23, when he announced that Major-General B. C. Freyberg, V.C., would command the 2nd New Zealand Division and that the Dominion would send a fighting force overseas. Both announcements were greeted with enthusiasm. So the weeks went by. Khaki-clad figures became a familiar part of everyday life, no longer subject of astonished comment and wonder. Rumour, always intensified by war, grew fantastic with grotesque prediction concerning the destination of our men. Week by week saw the training of our volunteer army advance to its final stages. Manœuvres were held. Soldierly figures, tanned by sun and slim with exercise, moved in ordered formation across the dun-coloured stretches of Waiouru and the green downs of Cave, names long since grown familiar. Then back to camp for their final leave just before Christmas.



Slipping the last cable

Then, on Christmas Day, Mr. Fraser returned, bringing with him General Freyberg, who was to see for himself the men he was so proud to command. How New Zealand honoured him with civic receptions is still a vivid memory.

## Transports Arrive

Now the great transports crept into Wellington Harbour unannounced, but there for all the world to see. Fine ships they were, among the finest afloat, cleanliness and distinguishing colours hidden under coats of drab grey, and dun and black. There was no doubt about their mission as barricades appeared on the wharves. An excitement as of imminent, fateful events, ran through the city with the arrival of H.M.S. Ramillies, then H.M.A.S. Canberra. These two great warships came in from the open sea without fuss or fret, the first ending a long journey which had started in Scapa Flow, the day before the Royal Oak was sunk. Now here she was on the other side of the world—powerful, efficient, her great 15in. guns innocently pointing to the hills of the city. Round the barricades jostled civilians and soldiers, eager to see something of Britain's armed might at first hand. Our own H.M.S. Leander came, too, to add her sturdy strength to the convoy.

Then one memorable day the cities of Wellington, Christchurch and Auckland echoed to martial music and the measured tramp of marching feet. It was a day glad with sunshine. Citizens paid their last outward tribute to youth and courage, and came in their thousands to form animated guards of honour as the men went by on their farewell march. Few there were who looked on unmoved.

Then one afternoon in January the transports cast off from Wellington wharves, swung out into the stream, and dropped anchor, with their cargoes of New Zealand's first consignment of man power for World War II, finally cut off from physical contact with homes and relatives.

## Silent Embarkation

The ships drew away from empty wharves. No announcement preceded their departure. In small groups one day, and in quiet train loads the next, the troops assembled to go in silence to their berths.

But wooden barricades and a strict censorship could not hide the tall decks of the troopships; could not hide the khaki colouring their rails, hanging to davits, astride ventilators, up derricks, in crow's nest and rigging; could not keep away the mothers who came to the

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