

CONTRASTS OF WAR AT PALMERSTON NORTH

(By O. A. GILLESPIE)

NAKED brown bodies swaying and leaping in the sun to the exultant cries of the haka; overhead air-planes roaring defiance to the skies. Such a scene could be enacted only in New Zealand—the contrast of Maori warriors recalling methods of the past and the proof of what science and mechanisation have brought to the field of war. To-day the Maori goes to battle armed with modern weapons, transported by mechanical vehicles; his fierce war dance now belongs to the realm of entertainment.

That unique scene on the Milsom Airdrome, Palmerston North, was the culmination of an inspection by the Minister of Defence, the Hon. F. Jones, and a display by the Royal New Zealand Air Force machines from Ohakea. It stirred to enthusiasm over 8,000 people. The Minister hurried there from important consultations in Wellington. Free Saturday afternoons are not for him at this critical hour. As his car carried him nearer to the airdrome he had visible proof of the crowds, for a long serpent of cars crept for miles along the road and delayed, by a few minutes only, his arrival on schedule.

But soon everything is moving to schedule under a sky which harbours no shielding cloud. The sun drenches the green acres of Milsom, glistens on the bayonets of the Maoris, drawn up in mass formation for inspection. The Royal New Zealand Air Force Band sets every foot tapping to "Tipperary" as the Minister moves through the stalwart, immobile ranks, his now practised eye quick for details which would escape the notice of the inexperienced. He notes the fine carriage of the men, the fit of the uniforms, the suitability of equipment. Then back to the saluting base, there to take the salute as each company marches by in line, heads to the right, each line moving as one man, arms swinging as one.

A member of Parliament sitting beside me whispers a story. It illustrates vividly the keenness of the Maoris. "The other morning, at about 2 o'clock, some of the officers were roused by unusual noises from the men's quarters," he told me. "They got up to investigate and found the men drilling each other, smartening up those who hadn't been long in camp so that they wouldn't let the Battalion down during the inspection."

Company by company the splendid lines go by. It is impossible to believe that some of those men have been training for only about nine days. But that is true.

Now the Battalion has reformed and a surprise is in store. Suddenly every man starts singing—a battalion marching song specially written for the Maoris and suitable for those melodious voices. The swinging rhythm, the vigorous words, the emotional effect of nearly a thousand voices singing without musical accompaniment is something to remember. No sooner has the stirring melody died

away than the Minister, through the microphone, expresses his own and the Government's pleasure in a brief but earnest speech.

Now the scene changes. Bronzed young men from the Wereroa Air Force Training School, clad in white shorts, demonstrate the common sense and the suitability of modern physical training as the Army knows it. There is every excuse for a comparison with the ancient Greeks; that is the only thought as one watches these young men in actions which bring to life figures on a Greek frieze. Their physique, their radiant health, the ease and grace with which they play their organised games sets elderly men remembering lost youth; shows youth, by perfect example, what the daily dozen will do for them.

Meanwhile five silver moths which have been floating on the horizon draw nearer. They reveal themselves as Air Force machines from Ohakea, flying in ordered formation under such delicate control that their wings seem to tip each other in flight. Signals which we do not understand send them manoeuvring in powerful sweeps and movements of geometric pattern whose accuracy is uncanny. So, too, is the effect of over 8,000 upturned faces watching the flight of those robot birds. Then the bombing begins. A red Verrey light spurts high against the sun as a signal to begin. Three machines dive to their objective and soon great bowls of smoke billow from the ground as the harmless bombs explode. Again and again they race out of the blue, roaring near to the earth as they release their destructive cargoes, lifting to the skies again with the derision of thunder after the bombs have fallen. Had those bombs been real, all living things near that objective would have been annihilated. This is the grand spectacle of the day; fruit and proof of man's conquest of the air. Children lie on their backs in the sun, the better to watch those machines in flight, and point with shouts of laughter to the air-men, too easily visible at the controls. To them it is merely the adventure of a day, the realisation of something they have seen on the films.

Soon the air is silent except for the song of larks whose haven is the green farms about Milsom. But the day is not over. Breaking through the restless throng of onlookers come Maori warriors, singing a melody plaintive but inspiring which rises above the surge of chatter and comment. Their uniforms have gone and in place of them they wear the traditional costume of their forefathers—bodies bare except for the rustling reed skirt, wooden spears in their hands. Crowds press about them, many for the first time watching a Maori haka performed by experts.

It was an exciting exhibition of the war dance, quivering bodies moving in rhythm, the facial grimaces, the leaping, the gestures, all accompanied by songs and chants. As the last war cries died

away and the brown bodies remained rigid in fearsome attitudes a plane swept overhead. The contrast of those two expressions of war was like a shock.

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No more fitting climax could have ended a day which was organised with the permission of the Minister of Defence to aid in combating loss of revenue suffered by the Manawatu Agricultural and Pastoral Society since the Maoris have taken over the show grounds for their training.

For Distinguished Conduct

(By M.H.M.)

IT'S no secret and never was, the way a new recruit became a hero and incidentally, a sergeant, all in the space of a few short minutes, and the only reason it did not get into the papers was the regrettably incurable habit of all reputable newspapers of putting in a full stop just before coming to the best bits.

You remember, or more probably you do not remember, an inconspicuous paragraph about a tent; first it was on fire, then again it was not on fire, and that was all. No drama, not a word to stir the imagination. If there had been you might have seen—first, a blazing tent, and emerging from it, in no sense unhurried, a blazing Sergeant-Major, the front of his drill tunic rosily aflame. Then in an infinitively split second, a recruit flashing across the greensward, throwing his arms about his Sergeant-Major in an abandoned embrace, hugging him closer, closer still, till willy-nilly, the fire went out.

Then—a scorched but happy recruit stammering excuses: "But, sir, I've only been joined up two weeks." And his C.O.: "Never mind about that, my man, you're a Sergeant."

Chorus: "And a jolly good Sergeant, too" (apologies to G. and S.)

(Note: This actually occurred at Ngaruahia about two months back.)

Cost of a Warrior

The approximate cost of putting fighting men into the field has been worked out by the Bulletin of International News. In the Great War the cost of every man in the field amounted to £177. This included food, clothing, pay, medical services, training quarters, movements and separation allowances. Added to this was guns, ammunition, tanks, small arms, etc., which amounted to another £164, making a total of £340 a head. The cost to-day is estimated at about £600 a head because of increased costs. The Royal Air Force is the most expensive. Under modern conditions it requires at least £2,500 a man every year. In the Royal Navy the figure is about £650 a man, which includes all but new buildings.



LIEUTENANT-COLONEL S. Kenrick, Officer Commanding the 5th Field Ambulance, which has been training at Burnham. He was formerly in practice in Auckland

SEEING THE SIGHTS

EVERY opportunity is being given to the men of the 1st Echelon to see the sights of Egypt, including places of historical interest which are not in the immediate vicinity of the camp.

This information has been conveyed to the Minister of Defence, the Hon. F. Jones, in a letter from Major-General Freyberg, V.C., who expressed his great pleasure at the physique of the men and their excellent state of health when they arrived in Egypt.

The General told Mr. Jones that parties of officers and men are being regularly organised for sight-seeing trips. Private people and various societies had also been very kind, and were doing all they could to assist in the entertainment of the troops.

A picture theatre, with a seating capacity of 1,000, had been built near the camp, and two sessions were held each evening.

Since their arrival in Egypt, the health of the troops had been excellent, and a large swimming bath was being constructed for the use of the men.

At a recent recruiting rally in Christchurch, the Minister paid a tribute to General Freyberg's interest in the welfare of all ranks. "Our boys are being well catered for," he said. "I would like to say that they could not be in better hands than General Freyberg's."