

of these Maori volunteers as undertaken by James Cowan 60 years ago is no longer available to the reading public: a precious few copies remain locked up in the vaults of libraries and archives, seemingly available for research work but hidden from the eyes of a younger reader and shunning the publicity they deserve in the annals of Maori heritage.

It might be well worth mentioning that a similar fate has also befallen the book about the 28 (Maori) Battalion, 2nd NZEF, by J.F. Cody, an equally comprehensive and equally detailed yet all-but-forgotten account of the renowned Maori Battalion in the Second World War.

Armistice Day

At the eleventh hour on the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918, the guns fell silent throughout the world after four years of an unprecedented war effort. Armistice came into effect and hostilities ceased. 65 years later to the day, on Armistice Day, 11th November, 1983, the New Zealand Ensign was hoisted at Taihoa Marae in Wairoa, as veterans of the Maori Contingent and Pioneer Battalion of the 1st NZEF gathered yet again for a traditional re-union.

Words cannot adequately describe what an exceptional honour and moving privilege it was for a younger man to attend this re-union as an observer. The men who were present there as of right, are members of a unique and most exclusive club indeed.

Taken as a whole, Te Hokowhitu-A-Tumatauenga Association is a fairly large body of Maori veterans — many hundreds of returned servicemen who saw active service with the 28 Battalion in the Second World War, in J-Force (Japan), Kayforce (Korea), the Malayan Emergency, the Confrontation in Malaysia and Borneo, and more recently in Vietnam. But of the 2227 Maoris who had served overseas during the First World War, only 48 are still with us to tell the tale on 11th November, 1983.

All of these distinguished and hardened veterans of the 1st NZEF are now in their eighties and nineties, and no wonder their numbers have in recent years been rapidly diminishing. And owing to advanced age and the rigours of a long journey to Hawke's Bay, only nine of these 48 veterans felt able to make it to Wairoa this year. But what a formidable group they are!

The oldest man present at Taihoa Marae, Mr Richard Bell of Te Kuiti, is no less than 96 years of age. Another veteran present, Mr Alexander Melles of Dannevirke, has seen service in both



Wairoa culture group who assisted with the pohiri at the official welcome and hosting of the veterans.

World Wars, and in this respect he represents a fair number of officers and soldiers of the 1st NZEF who, 25 years later, constituted the core of the 2nd NZEF as well, bringing in with them a wealth of experience which was at a premium in the opening stages of the Second World War. Mr Melles was eventually demobilised as a Major, and sports a host of battle decorations and medals on his chest, including the Military Cross and Bar.

The nine veterans of the Maori Contingent and Pioneer Battalion, 1st NZEF, who made it to Wairoa in November 1983, were: Joseph Spencer Lockwood from Gisborne, Hau Tahu from Tuai, James Waitaringa Mapu from Napier, Alexander George Melles from Dannevirke, Arthur Mackereth from Kawakawa, Richard Bell from Te Kuiti, Thomas Tinana Lee from Te Kuiti, George Nicholas from Tauranga, and Harry Wahapu from Cambridge.

The previous re-union of 1st NZEF Maori veterans took place at the same marae seven years ago, in 1976. After many years of more frequent — at times annual — re-unions, it had been decided that 1976 was to see the last get-together of First World War Maori veterans. Fortunately, this was not to be the case, and seven years later they gathered yet again for what was described, this time, as "definitely" the last re-union ever to be held — and no more.

The Association Conference and annual General Meeting held at Taihoa Marae was chaired by Mr Barry Green of the Department of Maori Affairs. The agenda for this meeting, which opened with the traditional prayer and two-minutes silence in honour of First World War veterans who had passed away during the preceding twelve months, included many items of special interest to Association members and a

comprehensive review of the Association's affairs. However, of the various resolutions carried at this meeting, the most gratifying resolution made was the determination by members to hold yet another re-union next year.

Another feature of this fascinating weekend in Wairoa was a visit to the Association's farm, some 17 miles away from the marae. The 5000-acre Hereheretau Station was set aside by the Crown in 1917, well before the war came to an end, in anticipation of the Maori units returning to New Zealand, and in 1925 it was transferred to the Maori Trust that has been administering the farm ever since. With a total stock of 13500 head of sheep, of which 7000 are breeding ewes, the Hereheretau wool-shed has been turning out as much as 49 tonnes of wool per annum in the last financial year. The 48 Maori veterans of the 1st NZEF take keen interest in this farm and its yield, of which they are the direct beneficiaries.

Anybody's equal

In the course of the twentieth century and two World Wars, the Maori soldier has achieved universal recognition, by friend and foe alike, as a formidable warrior: he takes soldiering in his stride, is extremely well-disciplined and scoffs at discomfort and hardship, his fine combat qualities are awe-inspiring and globally respected, and the 28 (Maori) Battalion of the 2nd NZEF has arguably become the most famous single unit in the British Empire and Commonwealth of Nations, with the possible exception of the Gurkha regiments alone. It has often been stated by countless foreign observers, time and again, that man-for-man the Maori soldier was anybody's equal, and that in battle conditions the Maori soldier simply had no equal.