

28th Māori Battalion

From the Diary of a Nursing Sister

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"No infantry had a more distinguished record, or saw more fighting, or alas, had such heavy casualties."

*Lieutenant-General Bernard Freyberg, Commander of the 2 NZEF,
commending the 28th Māori Battalion.*

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[28th Māori Battalion \(28maoribattalion.org.nz\)](http://28maoribattalion.org.nz)

From the Diary of a Nursing Sister

After joining the New Zealand Army Nursing Service, and spending a few weeks in Trentham and Waiouru, I was transferred to the Hospital Ship "Maunganui". We sailed from Wellington in September 1943 on what was normally a two months round trip to Port Tewfik and back. I discovered in Cook Strait that I was no sailor, and was excused from the daily ward scrubbing and cleaning chores that occupied everybody on the outward journey. The afternoons were free.

Stepping ashore at Fremantle after ten days of buffeting was a relief, and while admiring the gardens in Perth, another Sister and I were approached by a lady who chatted for a while, then invited us home for lunch. "Home" was the Perth Hospital, and she was Miss Siegle the Matron. We were overwhelmed by this unexpected kindness, and the subsequent tour of Perth which she organised with a friend — Matron of another Hospital — who owned a car. They then drove us back to the ship. I have forgotten many things that happened in those days, but not that. It was special.

Our next port of call was Colombo, Richshaw rides, lunch at the Galle Face Hotel, shopping and browsing kept us occupied and soon we were on our way to Port Tewfik and then sailed up the Suez Canal for the first time, to Port Said. Before long we were in the Mediterranean and heading for Tripoli where it was rumoured, we were to pick up our 3rd General Hospital personnel and move them to Italy. The day before our arrival in Tripoli our propeller shaft broke. We returned to Port Said, laden with British patients who disembarked there, then waited about until the powers-that-be had decided what to do with us. A small skeleton staff was retained on board and the rest of us were sent to 1 G.H. at Helwan and 2 G.H. at Kantara. The "Maunganui" was to sail without any patients — to Sydney for repairs. Two weeks later we were recalled, and the ship sailed for Scotland instead carrying British patients. We were to stay for three months.

Cleaning of wards followed the disembarkment of patients, then we were given a months leave. I spent most of mine in London with a few days during the Christmas period in Sussex with my fathers relations. London was teaming with the armed forces of numerous countries, and there were many conducted tours. I went on a number of these to the usual places like Westminster Abbey, Windsor Castle, Tower of London etc. We, of the "Maunganui" often met at the N.Z. Club, where we met other New Zealanders as well and arranged to meet each other for dinner, usually at such places as Lyon's Corner House, and for visits to the theatre. There was a wide choice of plays and ballets and we saw as much as we could in the time available.

There was a thick London fog the day I caught a train for Edinburgh. I nearly froze on that journey. I visited the Castle, Hollywood Palace, took a bus to the Forth Bridge,



**Hospital life — Bari (3 NZGH) 1943.
Sister Pare Koopu-Saxby (Mrs Marsden).**

and browsed around the shops and streets before my departure for Glasgow and the "Maunganui". We were divided into three groups and sent to nearby Military Hospitals to join their staffs. Some went to Stirling Castle, some to Edinburgh Castle and I was among those who went to Buchanan Castle in the village of Drymen, four miles from Loch Lomond. I enjoyed working in the wards again and walking about the countryside which was often under snow. The Scottish people were so kind and friendly, it was lovely to meet them. Later three of us returned to the ship to change places with those who formed the skeleton staff there. With no patients and only the occasional crew member to treat, we had ample leave which we spent on trips to Edinburgh and some places nearer Glasgow. When the "Maunganui" went into dry dock for cleaning and painting, we took ourselves off to Aberdeen. From there we took a bus trip to Braemar, returning along the same route, so getting two views of Balmoral Castle.

Back on the ship, we were on and off duty for a while, then everybody returned and we were given a further weeks leave before our departure from Scotland. So off I went to London again. That week there had been some very heavy air raids — as bad as the 1940 Blitz, we were told — and we saw evidence of this in the heaps of bombed buildings lying about.

We had noticed that in the theatres, when the “AIR RAID” sign appeared in front of the stage, no one moved, and we didn’t either, no did we stir from our beds when the air raid siren sounded, but this time, because the raids were so much worse, we were urged to go to the basements of the Services Clubs we stayed at, until the “ALL CLEAR”.

I took a train to Woking, Surry — noticing considerable recent damage near Waterloo Station — to visit Brookwood Cemetery and look for the grave of my fathers brother, Lt. Col. Conrad Gordon Saxby, C.O. of the Pioneer Battalion at the end of World War 1, and found not only his, but also that of a friend — Apanui Ngamoki — who died during World War 2.

Before returning to the ship I managed to fit in a visit to Inverness where I was shown the sights by an ex-patient from Buchanan Castle. We cleaned the ship, made beds in readiness for some New Zealand and Australian patients, and all too soon, it was goodbye to Scotland, and we were on our way. We had two ports of call, Gibraltar and Bizarta before Taranto where some patients embarked. At Port Tewfik the ambulance train was delayed by a dust storm, but the patients arrived in due course and we were on our way. There were great welcoming scenes on the wharf in Wellington, then leave for the staff after an absence of eight months instead of the usual two, and soon the cycle began once more.

After the “Maunganui” sailed I applied for and was granted permission to transfer to 3 G.H. in Bari, and it was there that I spent the remainder of my time in the NZANZ, returning to New Zealand with the 28th (Maori) Battalion at the end of the war.

Pare Marsden



Ben Porter on German bicycle — complete with driver.