

Chapter 12: Cassino: His Last Battle

Hitler was right when he later told me that here was the only battlefield of this war that resembled those of the last.

von Senger und Etterlin¹

A man can walk over an anti tank mine, but if he steps on an anti-personnel mine, then it is all up.

Kippenberger in July 1943²

The two Allied armies in Italy were deadlocked at the beginning of 1944. In an effort to break out on the western side of the peninsula US General Mark Clark, commander of Fifth Army, devised a plan involving a frontal assault and amphibious landing but he needed extra divisions from Eighth Army to implement it. On the extreme west flank X British Corps were to attempt a crossing of the Garigliano River and advance into the Aurunci foothills on 17 January 1944. On 20 January US II Corps would mount an assault across the Rapido River in the centre of the line, while on their right flank, a French Corps would attempt to outflank the town of Cassino from the north. This three-pronged attack, it was felt, would draw in every available German division in the German X Army when, on 22 January, VI US Corps would land two divisions thirty-five miles south of Rome driving into the Alban Hills. This would cut Routes 6 and 7 and sever the German supply lines. Once a breach had been made by the frontal assaults a armoured mobile force would be directed through the gap and exploit to the isolated VI Corps. This role was initially allocated to a reinforced New Zealand Division.

On 17 January, the day the British X Corps crossed the Garigliano in what

¹ von Senger und Etterlin, *op. cit.*, p.215.

² Kippenberger, quoted in *New Zealand Truth* 23 July 1943, p.11, Biography of Major General Howard Karl Kippenberger DSO and Bar, ED, compiled by SSGT E.C. Grayland, Archives Section, Army HQ, 17 May 1944, WA II DA 406/97 NZNA.

was to be the only successful part of the whole operation, the New Zealand Division left the Adriatic sector in great secrecy. All identifying badges and insignia were removed and the senior staff officers cooked up an elaborate deception plan which, if it did not fool the Germans, certainly fooled those New Zealanders not in the picture.³ The role allocated the New Zealanders was explained by Freyberg:

Your Division is to be in reserve with role of exploiting any break through which is made. For this as you know force is fully equipped and trained and I am confident that your Division experienced as it is now in these conditions will give excellent account of itself should opportunity to exploit occur.⁴

When the New Zealand Division moved into line on 3 February forming the NZ Corps, it was already apparent to many that the renewed attempt to break the deadlock had failed. The crossing of the Rapido River by the US II Corps was an unmitigated catastrophe — “the biggest disaster to American arms since Pearl Harbour”.⁵ Demonstrating considerable prescience, Freyberg conferred with Kip as early as 25 January and recorded :

Spent most of the afternoon talking to Kipp — felt things are not going too well and investigated possibility of being called on to take Cassino.
(Another Tacrouna?)⁶

5 Brigade moved into line on 5 February to free up two US regiments for another attack on Cassino. It was Kip's and the New Zealanders' first close look at the US forces and Kip was not impressed with their command system. He could not believe how units and formations were allocated tasks planned in detail and were expected to follow the plan to the letter. Nor could he believe the omissions from the written orders or the fact that when a plan had failed, units were

³ Sir Leonard Thornton interview, *op. cit.*

⁴ Freyberg to Min Defence Wellington, cipher message P191, 11 January 1944, WA II 8/49 NZNA.

⁵ F. Majdalany, *Cassino: Portrait of a Battle*, London, 1957, p.60.

⁶ Freyberg Diary, 25 January 1944, WA II 8/46 NZNA.

expected to implement without alteration the same plan at a later time. As Kip commented "Such things were done often enough by British Generals in 1915 and 1916 but I would not believe that such an abysmal ignorance of war was still possible and questioned him [CO US 141 Regiment] closely. It was so". One thing that Kip considered quite unforgivable was that no senior commander in either US division "had been forward or was at all in touch with his men".⁷ This was anathema to Kip and it is little wonder that he and Freyberg expected the last attack of US II Corps to meet with the same lack of success as their previous attempts. The attack failed as expected and the New Zealand Corps had to take over the Cassino sector and attempt to breach the formidable Gustav Line. As Freyberg was informed via Clark's COS, General Gruenther, "the torch was now thrown to NZ Corps".⁸

The terrain of central Italy was renowned as a defender's paradise. More than 2 000 years earlier Hannibal had travelled through Spain and the European Alps with his army and elephants rather than risk an attack on Rome through the hostile terrain south of the great city. Only two commanders had successfully taken Rome from the southern approach — Belisarius in 536 and Garibaldi in 1849. Many more had tried. Nowhere was the defensive potential better exploited than at the line formed by the Abruzzi mountains running along the peninsula between Naples and Rome and it is impossible to avoid these mountains with one hill following another all the way to Rome. There were only two routes to Rome from Naples — along Route 7, the coast road which could be easily flooded from the Pontine marshes, or Route 6, the inland route. Route 6 passes through seventy-five miles of mountains but the Liri Valley, once reached at the town of Cassino, provides flat, easy passage all the way to Rome.

While the mountains could be lightly held on either side of the junction town of Cassino, the town itself and the heights above formed the a strong defensive barrier. Cited on the junction of two valleys, one of which reaches all the way to Rome, Cassino was the ideal place from which to guard the gates of the capital. Behind the town is a 1700 foot peak, Monte Cassino, which dominates the approach to the whole valley. As one draws near to Cassino from Naples in the south, Monte Cassino:

⁷ *Infantry Brigadier*, pp. 350,351.

⁸ General Clark to General Keynes, Freyberg Diary, 11 February 1944, WA II 8/46 NZNA.

transfixes your attention so completely ... you barely notice the river or the buildings but only the great mountain towering above the far end of town half a mile ahead, like a gigantic flying buttress to the mountain mass stretching away to the right.⁹

Astride the mountain was and is a massive four-storied building, twice the size of Buckingham Palace, the mother house of the Benedictine order founded in 529 AD by St Benedict. If Monte Cassino dominated the approaches to the Liri Valley, the abbey on this massif appeared to subject all who approached Cassino to its hostile and arrogant gaze.

The Italian General Staff before the war had concluded in a study of the terrain about central Italy that the position of Cassino, when approached from the south, was impregnable. Since that time German engineers had greatly improved the defences. The heights above the town had been blasted to form defensive fire points, the Rapido River south of the town had been flooded and both sides of the river sown liberally with mines and belts of barbed wire. Cassino had been emptied of civilians and turned into a fortress of anti-tank obstacles, machine gun and sniper posts, concealed self-propelled guns and tanks. All cover in the approaches to the town had been either cleared or booby-trapped and the artillery had commanding fields of fire with perfectly sited observation posts on the heights above the town. It was only in "defiance of topography"¹⁰ and of reality, that central Italy could be said to ever have been a soft underbelly for an invading army.

Defending the position of Cassino was 15 Panzer Grenadiers, supported by 200 guns, numerous nebelwerfers and about sixty well-concealed tanks. At the end of February 1944, 15 Panzer Grenadiers, no slouches in the defensive role at all, were replaced by 1 Parachute Division, veterans from Crete and "reputed the best Division in the German Army".¹¹ The defences at Cassino were undoubtedly the strongest point in the whole German line yet it was here that the Allies had decided to break through and link up with VI Corps now stranded on the Anzio

⁹ Majdalany, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁰ D. Hapgood and D. Richardson, *Monte Cassino*, Sydney, 1984, p.21.

¹¹ *Infantry Brigadier*, p.353.

beachhead. Kip regarded the Cassino terrain and German defences as as “strong as any position could be without being impregnable” and felt “a little unlucky having to deal with so awkward a problem in my first battle as a divisional commander”.¹²

On 3 February 1944 New Zealand Corps was formed by joining 4 Indian Division to the New Zealand command plus adding a US Combat Command and additional artillery of three field, five medium regiments and four anti-aircraft battalions. This gave Freyberg, who commanded both the Corps and New Zealand Division, two battle-hardened divisions with which to exploit when the time came, over 300 tanks and a formidable array of firepower. When the role of the corps changed from exploitation to frontal assault it became impossible for Freyberg to be both Corps and Divisional commander. On 14 February he informed the New Zealand Government:

In order to keep clear of detail I have subject to your approval brought in Brigadier KIPPENBERGER to command NZ Div temporarily with the rank of Major General.¹³

Two days latter came the reply, “Your action in regard to KIPPENBERGER is warmly approved by War Cabinet”.¹⁴ Kip now had a divisional command and a major task for which to prepare it.

The command of a division in the field marks the pinnacle for a fighting commander. Beyond this level of command, that is as a Corps or Army commander, the general ceases to be a fighting commander and becomes more of an administrator or organiser whose primary responsibility is to coordinate the diverse elements within his or her command to achieve victory. Some commanders like Freyberg are clearly unsuited to this high command, being primarily fighting commanders. As a divisional commander Kip had a massive amount of firepower at his disposal and considerable freedom of action as to how he could use it. With about 15 000 men under command and providing adequate

¹² *ibid*, pp.353, 355.

¹³ Freyberg to External Wellington (Minister of Defence) and General Puttick, cipher message P.193, 14 February 1944, WA II 8/50 NZNA.

¹⁴ External to Main NZ Corps, cipher message II Appendix 17, 16 February 1944, WA II 8/50 NZNA.

reinforcements are available, a division is capable of mounting high intensity operations for a considerable period of time. While the gap between battalion and brigade command was large, Kip now commanded an all arms formation consisting of two infantry brigades, one armoured brigade, a machine gun battalion, divisional cavalry, artillery, engineers, signals, ASC and numerous other units; a ten-fold increase on his previous command. To gain an idea of scale: neither Australia nor New Zealand has deployed a division on operations since 1945, and that while both nations still maintain the divisional structure for their armed forces, neither is capable of maintaining a full strength division with their current regular force strengths.

The New Zealanders and Kip made an immediate impression at Cassino. An Indian Army brigadier remarked:

My first admiration of the NZ Div began when Kip ... button-holed me when we chanced to meet on the wayside and asked if I could fix a few hours instruction in mules, with which some of his chaps were unfamiliar. Some of my old sweats, like many of the regular Indian Army, were almost mules themselves. So the matter was quickly laid on, and for about three hours we did an intensive course on the conveyor belt principle. ... But what struck me was the instant grasp of an opportunity to get some information and I said to myself "These chaps mean business".¹⁵

Freyberg, after much discussion, study of maps and ground reconnaissance decided to attack Cassino from two directions — from the north in the heights above the town and from the west using the New Zealand Division. This plan in effect continued the American attacks which had already twice failed. Freyberg rejected a plan by Kippenberger and others to cross in the centre of the Liri valley near San Angelo and outflank the Cassino position, a plan very similar to the attack that finally took Cassino in May. The German commander at Cassino, Lieutenant General Frido von Senger und Etterlin, stated

¹⁵ Brigadier C.J.C. Malony to Stevens, letter, 11 July 1960, Correspondence M 84 - 006 -1 /03, Stevens Papers ATL.

that Freyberg's plan was "so similar to the first one that it could not hold any surprise. There was nothing new in it".¹⁶ Freyberg's plan was undoubtedly affected by the haste with which it had had to be prepared as "urgency had been given to the attack on the 16th as it was known that a great enemy counter attack on Anzio was being prepared".¹⁷

The plan was fraught with difficulty for both divisions. 4 Indian Division was having immense difficulties in just establishing itself in the heights above the town. Taking over from the exhausted 36 US Division, it was found that the US commanders really had no idea where their front line troops were. Instead of taking over a securely held sector as the Indians expected, heavy fighting was needed for them to gain their very startline. This was compounded by the fact that all their supplies, once in position, had to come by mule trains many of which suffered heavy losses on the way to the front line position. Added to this, the divisional commander, Major General Tucker, was sick and the temporary commander, Brigadier Dimoline, found it impossible to make Freyberg understand the tremendous difficulties under which his new command was then operating. Even someone as astute as Kip could state after the war that he "never really appreciated the difficulties until I went over the ground after the war".¹⁸

Nor was the task any easier for the New Zealanders on the flat below. Kip could not attack Cassino on a wide front as he would have liked because the flooded river prevented such a broad movement of troops. There was only one approach line to the town; along and astride the railway causeway. This, too, presented great difficulties. It was known to be mined and had at least ten demolitions in its pathway. The narrowness of the embankment would permit an attack by only two companies of infantry. As Kip stated, "the longer and harder one looked and thought, the more difficulties one saw".¹⁹ His final plan was for two companies of 28 (Maori) Battalion to cross the Rapido and secure the town's railway station and a small group of mounds two-hundred yards south of the station known as the Hummock. Working through the night the New

¹⁶ von Senger, *op. cit.*, p.206.

¹⁷ Kippenberger, notes on Italian Campaign H.K.K., NZ Department of Internal Affairs, MS 1555 ATL.

¹⁸ *Infantry Brigadier*, p.356

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.355.

Zealand Engineers would attempt to repair the railway embankment to allow tanks of 19 Armoured Regiment and the rest of 28 Battalion to cross the plain and attack the town from the south linking up with 4 Indian Division. 23 Battalion would then pass through the Maoris' position and widen the bridgehead. The mouth of the Liri valley would then be secured. Everyone recognised the weaknesses of the plan -- the narrowness of the initial frontal attack and the necessity for the engineers to work at a frantic pace to repair the railway causeway, possibly under fire, and, in daylight, certain to be under observation from Monte Cassino. Before the attack was launched it was decided to bomb that feature, and in particular, to destroy the historic abbey perched upon its heights.

The bombing of the Monte Cassino abbey on 15 March 1944 was one of the most controversial actions taken by the Allies during the war. The abbey was known to be of great historic significance and to house priceless artworks. Moreover, the Germans had publicly declared that they were not using the monastery, and if it was damaged, could be expected to claim a great propaganda victory. Yet the abbey was in a war zone with German defences dug right up to its wall. A three-hundred metre neutral zone had been abandoned by the Germans as the Allies approached Cassino in mid January. There were German positions dug into the hillside beneath the monastery too. Whether or not it was occupied, and nearly all Allied troops believed this to be the case, the monastery did form part of the German front-line positions and as such was a legitimate target of war.

General Clark maintained after the war that the bombing had not only been "an unnecessary psychological mistake in the propaganda field", but was "a tactical military mistake of the first magnitude".²⁰ Clark always maintained that he had opposed the bombing, claimed he did all he could to prevent it and laid the blame squarely at the feet of Freyberg. The bombing of the abbey was not a tactical mistake although the timing of the bombing certainly was. No one's opinion on this matter is more concise and logical than Kippenberger's. At the time the question of bombing was raised:

²⁰ Clark, *op. cit*, p.296.

I said that the abbey must be destroyed. It was a *place d'arms* a potential fortress and observation post which could not be left intact on the crest of a hill our troops were required to storm. Whether occupied or not didn't matter. If not occupied today it might be tonight or while the assault was under way.²¹

Why the abbey had to be bombed Kip cogently explained in another letter. It was:

in [General] Alexander's words, an integral part of the Cassino position and every soldier in the Army facing Cassino believed that the Germans were using it as an observation post and would have been disgusted with his Commanders had they taken no action. ... It was a question of morale and of showing both to the Germans and our own people a complete and ruthless determination to take every means available for victory.²²

The need to show soldiers, soon to fight and possibly die in the forthcoming struggle, that buildings mattered less than their own lives was paramount, and Kip, after the war, was able to convince the new Abbot of the monastery of this fact. "Why did you destroy my abbey?", the Abbot had asked. After an hour long explanation from Kip, the abbot admitted: "I suppose that if I was in your position I would have done the same".²³

Certainly most soldiers at Cassino believed the monastery should be bombed. R. G. Drummond of 25 Battalion had a "clear recollection" after the war of seeing a gun flash "at night close to and on the east side of the Abbey" and stated:

My opinion, which was shared by all I came in contact with, was that the Abbey was too good a position not to be used by the Germans and that we, in similar circumstances, would certainly have used it. But then, our ideas

²¹ Kippenberger to Scoullar, letter, 6 January 1956, WA II 11/6, KC, NZNA.

²² Kippenberger to Scoullar, letter, 4 November 1949, WA II 11/6, KC, NZNA.

²³ Dan Davin, broadcast discussion between Davin, Costello and von Senger, J. Henderson's Digger's Session, 2ZB c. 15 February 1958, Glue Papers.

of morality would be somewhat lower than the Huns' no doubt.²⁴

The morale of those fighting must have plummeted had their lives been risked while the building they were to assault remained untouched. Phillips believes that for all the troops then in central Italy, an attack on Monte Cassino was "unthinkable" without an attack on the abbey as well.²⁵ Every soldier in the division "believed implicitly the the Abby (*sic*) was being used as an observation post and as a fortress" and would have been "disgusted with their commanders if it had been left alone".²⁶

At 0928 hrs on 15 February 1944 the first bombs from the "Heavies" fell on Monte Cassino Abbey. There were many spectators and a picnic atmosphere dominated as the soldiers cheered each time the abbey was hit. Many of the bombs dropped by the B-17s missed their target despite perfect bombing conditions and some landed more than seventeen miles away narrowly missing General Clark's HQ. In the afternoon the abbey was bombed again by B-26 Marauders; medium bombers who completed the task with more efficiency and greater accuracy than the B-17s. An NCO summed up the day's work in his diary: "Target cabbaged real good".²⁷ The New Zealand Division's G Diary was equally succinct: "Monastery now a shambles".²⁸ Two hundred and thirty-nine allied bombers had dropped 454 tons of bombs on Monte Cassino that day. No monks were killed in the bombing but more than 100 civilians were. The monks and the civilians had refused to believe the warning leaflets fired on the abbey by allied artillery. No Germans appear to have been killed in the bombing.

The deed was done, but any advantage was totally wasted when no follow up attack was launched on Monte Cassino Abbey. This is the great tactical mistake that was made, not the bombing itself. Freyberg had been well aware that

²⁴ R. G. Drummond to Ian Wards, letter, 10 August 1954, Cassino — Correspondence, WA II 3/26 NZNA.

²⁵ Phillips, *op. cit.*, p.216.

²⁶ Kippenberger to Latham, letter, 3 November 1949 181/55/1, Glue Papers.

²⁷ Staff Sergeant Kenneth E. Chard Diary, 15 February 1944, quoted in Hapgood and Richardson, *op. cit.*, p.208.

²⁸ WD G Branch NZ Corps, 15 February 1944, War Diary General Staff Branch NZ Corps 15-29 February 1944, WA II 1 DA 20.1/1/5 Micro 3834 NZNA.

4 Indian Division would not be ready to mount an attack on the feature by 15 February yet he had not cancelled the bombing scheduled for that day. Sir Leonard Thornton, then Kip's chief staff officer, believed that the bombing of the abbey was "a wasted effort". He explains:

I've never quite understood why we went ahead and allowed the bombing to take place. The Indians were not ready to attack. Why Freyberg agreed, I think it was a question of face.

When the attack was made two days later, "Any advantage that could have arisen from it was lost".²⁹ Von Senger thought it "strange" that the New Zealand Corps "waited for two days after the bombing before making serious and costly efforts to force a breakthrough".³⁰ In the end no lives were spared by the destruction of the historic monument and Freyberg alone must answer for this charge.

The first New Zealand assault on Cassino, Operation A VENGER, coincided with a full-scale attack by 4 Indian Division on the abbey on the night of 17/18 February 1944. Two companies of the Maori Battalion advanced behind an artillery barrage along the railway causeway and drove out the three battalions of 211 Regiment defending the railway station. One company took the railway station and a large crescent shaped engine shed known as the Round House. The attempt by the other company to capture the Hummock failed. In the heights above the town three battalions of 4 Indian division tried to take the troublesome Point 593 and the abbey itself. They reached to within 400 yards (366 metres) of the monastery but these were "four-hundred of the longest yards in the world".³¹ Before dawn all three battalions were withdrawn to their start lines and Dimoline categorically refused Freyberg's request to launch another attack on the abbey that day.

The success of the New Zealand effort on the flat now depended on the

²⁹ Sir Leonard Thornton interview, *op. cit.*

³⁰ von Senger, *op. cit.*, p.205.

³¹ Majdalany, *op. cit.*, p.155

engineers' ability to bridge the demolitions across the railway causeway. This would have enabled support weapons and tanks to follow the infantry across. Unfortunately the engineers' program lagged behind from the start. 5 Brigade's War Diary that dawn stated: "Engineers have only one demolition to finish, but have been heavily mortared and suffered casualties".³² By 0700 hrs the diary recorded that "Engineers forced to withdraw by small arms fire".³³ They were one demolition and 300 yards (274 metres) away from the beleaguered Maoris. The repair work could not be attempted in daylight and Kip now had a very difficult decision to make.

At daybreak, Kip ordered the two Maori companies to hold their positions and decided, fully aware of the risks involved, to conceal the Maoris' position by a concentrated smoke screen. And it very nearly came off. A first counterattack at 0715 hrs was successfully repulsed by New Zealand artillery, as was another at 1400. Meanwhile Kip, Freyberg and the engineers anxiously waited for nightfall. At 1515 hrs, however, the Germans committed the very last of their reserves, and, in a combined infantry and armour pincer attack, they advanced under cover of the smokescreen, and successfully drove the Maoris from the station. 5 Brigade's War Diary recorded:

28 NZ BN was attacked from N by tks (which came down sunken road) and simultaneously by the inf who had crossed the R GARI previously; many casualties, including OC B Coy caused by retirement.³⁴

Kip, visiting the front, immediately confirmed the decision to withdraw.³⁵ Out of 200 Maori soldiers who had taken part in the attack, 130 casualties were incurred including 20 killed, eighty wounded and 24 POWs. Thirty sapper casualties were also suffered.

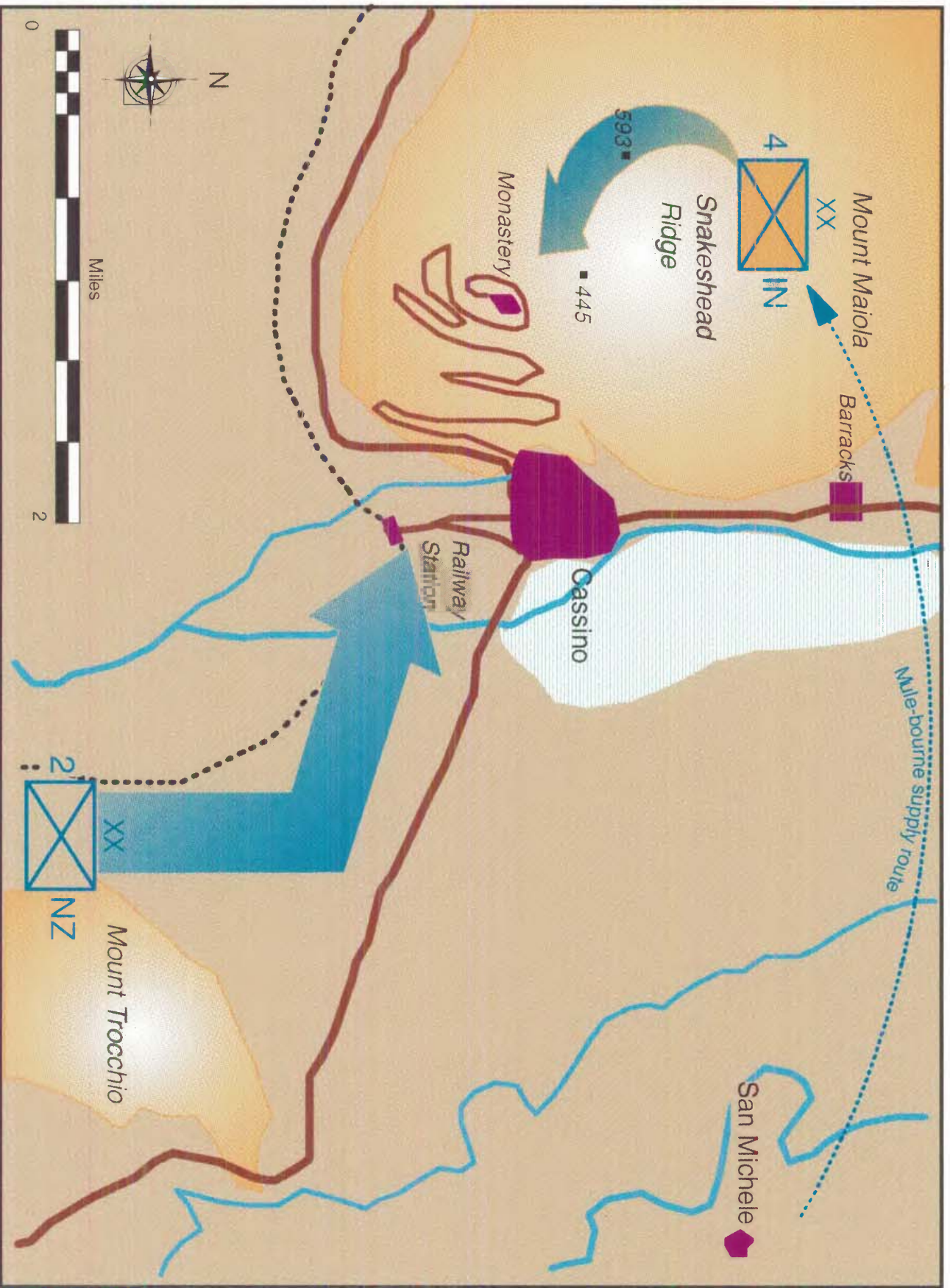
It had been a close run thing but it was another defeat for the New Zealanders in Italy. The presence of local German armour had proved decisive in turning the Maoris out of the station but the failure of the engineers' to bridge the causeway had doomed AVENGER. As Thornton has commented, "That one

³² 5 Bde WD, 0607 hrs 18 February 1944, WA II 1 DA 52/1/50 NZNA.

³³ *ibid*, 0700 hrs.

³⁴ *ibid*, 1620 hrs.

³⁵ *ibid*, 1623 hrs.



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demolition probably cost us the whole of the operation at Cassino".³⁶

The German commanders were delighted with the success of their final counterattack which had succeeded against expectation. Kesselring stated to the German X Army commander:

Convey my heartfelt gratitude to *211 Regiment*, and to *1 Parachute Regiment* not quite so strongly. I am very pleased that the New Zealanders have had a smack on the nose. You must recommend the local commander for the Knight's Cross.³⁷

Kip in *Infantry Brigadier* made a statement that at first glance could appear callous and almost heartless. According to Kip; after the attack

It was no use repining. Two editors from New Zealand were at my mess and we had a particularly gay evening, joined half-way through by the General and his mess. Soldiers should not worry, you do your best and do not cry over spilt milk.³⁸

Kip's attitude was entirely correct for a commander on the spot. If he had lost heart or had broken down under the strain of losses and renewed failure, then his active command days would certainly have been over. No one would follow a commander who had lost self composure and nerve. This is not insensitivity but recognising reality and, as Kip demonstrated after the war, there would be ample time for repining and recrimination later.

Cassino remained unconquered and Freyberg was still under intense pressure to mount another attack. On 19 February Freyberg consulted Kip about the next attack and whether they should attempt a river crossing or a frontal attack on the town. Kip favoured a river crossing, to which Freyberg responded that it gave "the best chance for attacking the village". Kip replied, "It is the only plan I can see".³⁹ But Freyberg changed his mind during the day and opted for a

³⁶ Sir Leonard Thornton interview, *op. cit.*

³⁷ Kesselring to Vietinghoff, quoted in Phillips, *op. cit.*, p.239.

³⁸ *Infantry Brigadier*, pp.357-3.

³⁹ Freyberg Diary, 19 February 1944, WA II 8/46 NZNA.

frontal attack on Cassino from the north. Kip was not happy. For some time now he had become concerned that Cassino was turning into a First World War battle characterised by “futile and wasteful attacks”.⁴⁰ He now believed that the next battle of Cassino would be another such debacle and was determined to do something about it. Thornton recorded in his diary:

Kip was away all day on a recce of the front. ... On his return he informed me that the attack on Cassino would be impossibly costly and that if he were asked to do it he would literally hand in his papers and ask to resign. ... He is dissatisfied about the whole campaign here and says that the strategy, including the landing of only three divisions at Anzio, is faulty. On the other end of the lever Jumbo Wilson and Alexander spent most of the morning with Bernard [Freyberg] presumably pressing him to do something even if he does it wrong.⁴¹

This is quite a revelation, and Thornton at the time was astonished. It was also a dereliction of duty on Kip’s part. He had accepted the rank of GOC and it was his duty to command the division through the good times and bad. Command is not an occupation that can be given up when things get unpleasant. It was Kip’s duty to express his doubts about the coming operation as forcefully and as clearly as possible, but once he had done so and the plan of attack decided upon, it was his duty to do everything possible as GOC to ensure the plan’s success. If Kip had resigned the effect on the New Zealand Division would have been catastrophic. It would have seriously impaired morale and undermined all confidence in Freyberg as a caring and compassionate commander.

But Kip did not resign. Kip and Freyberg conferred that night and Kip “was apparently overwhelmed by the persuasion as it transpired this morning that we are to attack Cassino from the north with the full weight of every aircraft within flying range”.⁴² The new plan, Operation DICKENS, was ready and approved on 20 February. Two factors had convinced Kip that the operation was feasible; one was the combined weight of firepower that the Allies would hurl against

⁴⁰ Sir Leonard Thornton, *Freyberg VC: Episode 3 Into the Mire*, *op. cit.*

⁴¹ Thornton Diary, 19 February 1944. The Diary remains in the possession of Sir Leonard Thornton, also *Freyberg VC: Episode 3 Into the Mire* and Wards interview, 30 December 1992.

⁴² *ibid.*, 20 February 1944.

Cassino; the second, that, for the first time, two divisions would attack side by side and the Cassino defences would be flooded with infantry from at least six battalions as soon as the bombing of the town halted.

There was more pressure on the lever on 23 February when Freyberg received a message from General Alexander:

I put great store by this operation of yours. It must succeed, as it is vital for us to gain control of the whole of the MONTE CASSINO spur and establish a bridgehead over the RAPIDO. If we cannot exploit this time, we must at least gain an exit into the plain for future operations when we launch our big offensive later -- the all out offensive to assist OVERLORD.⁴³

Freyberg now had the very difficult task of convincing everyone in his command that the attack was worthwhile. He had an enthusiastic supporter in Kip who produced what is known in the sales business as a "Benjamin Franklin". That is Kip prepared a list of "Troubles" and "Blessings" for the operation. The four "Troubles" listed included the strong enemy defences, the necessity to approach under observation and the limited tank support available. These were outnumbered by the seven "Blessings" which featured such advantages as the overwhelming concentration of firepower at their disposal, the lack of minefields and so on.⁴⁴ As any salesperson who uses this selling device knows, the exercise must always favour the positive, the "Blessings" side of the balance sheet. Kip quoted the outcome of this exercise "to everyone I found doubting our prospects".⁴⁵ His senior staff officer, however, remained sceptical:

Bernard is very enthusiastic about the attack on Cassino. We are to have 14 000 tons of bombs, the largest weight of air attack ever staged in direct support of a single army operation. It does not alter my opinion that this will prove to be one of the most difficult attacks we have ever done.⁴⁶

⁴³ H.R. Alexander to Freyberg, letter C 331, 23 February 1944, W A II 8/50 NZNA.

⁴⁴ *Infantry Brigadier*, p.359.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p.359.

⁴⁶ Thornton Diary, 22 February 1944.

While the plan for the attack was completed on 20 February, bad weather delayed the implementation for nearly a month. This long period of waiting took its toll on the New Zealand Division and sapped all enthusiasm contributing to a mood of dark pessimism. This pessimism was greatly accelerated on 2 March 1944 when Kippenberger climbed Mount Trocchio in order to view the New Zealand artillery firing on the village of Cassino. Accompanying Kip was his ADC, Frank Massey, grandson of the Prime Minister Kip had resented parading for after the Somme battle:

With 1400 hrs in mind I made my way back to Kipp and remarked that there were a number of wooden boxes dug up and left on the rocks. Kipp verified that the hill had been heavily mined and that casualties had occurred — the mines were covered over between the rocks — my intuition made me tread from rock to rock — only about two steps and I was sailing through the air — the explosion was enormous — blown several yards down hill. I knew it was either a direct hit on “the man with the red band on his hat” or that he had trodden on a mine!! He was lying awkwardly and knew he had trodden on a mine and asked if his feet were still intact — my left side was a mess. This extraordinary man asked me to open my left eye and when he saw it was in place I rolled my jacket for a pillow under his head and he said to make sure morphia was brought up with the stretcher bearers — he also told me not to go directly down the hill but to go along the ridge until I found a taped lane down to the artillery lines which were clear of mines. ... One booted foot was not there and the other a mess but intact and I noticed one of his fingers seemed to be around the wrong way. He talked to me about his feet which I assured him were there — there was blood but the blast must have sealed the wounds so I waited with Kip for help to come.⁴⁷

Help soon arrived in the form of a stretcher party from D Company of one of Kip's favourite battalion — the 23rd. As they approached Kip raised his head to shout “Be careful boys, there's mines here”, to which a private of the battalion

⁴⁷ Frank Massey to author, letter, 16 October 1992.

gave “a soldier’s reply, ‘Fuck the mines!’ ”.⁴⁸ Help also arrived in the form of Major Alan Wilson, an army doctor, who rendered Kip what assistance he could and assisted in moving him down the difficult slope to an ambulance and to the New Zealand Casualty Clearing Station. One of the soldiers first on the scene recorded in his diary, “Mines everywhere. Lucky no one else collected one. General in pretty bad way”.⁴⁹

On the way down from Mount Trocchio one of those carrying the stretcher recalled:

We having some difficulty in transferring the stretcher on this steep slippery slope to another team and then this is the bit I remember so vividly. Kippy with two feet virtually blown off and still conscious quietly said — “Sorry to cause you all this bother chaps”. That’s the most wonderful picture I can give you of the man.⁵⁰

In the ambulance on the way to the CCS Wilson gave Kip a blood transfusion,⁵¹ the best treatment for shock and blood loss at that time.⁵² The prompt action of the stretcher team from 23 Battalion and the attention given him by Wilson undoubtedly saved Kip’s life on those cold slopes of Trocchio.

Morale in the New Zealand Division, already worn thin by the trials of a winter campaign in central Italy, plummeted to an all-time low when the men learnt of Kip’s serious wounding. Martin Donnelly’s reaction is typical:

I remember feeling that if war meant someone like Kippy got hurt it’s time we bloody all packed up and went home. If it had happened to Freyberg it would have been accepted because of the risks he ran and because he was a warrior. But somehow not Kip. He shouldn’t get hurt”.⁵³

This feeling, according to Donnelly, was widespread in the battalion in which he

⁴⁸ Ross, *23 Battalion*, p.321.

⁴⁹ G.E. French Diary, Thursday 2 March 1944, copy in author’s possession.

⁵⁰ Bob Clucas to author, letter 22 March 1992.

⁵¹ Amy Wilson to author, letter, 23 February 1994.

⁵² Ellis, *The Sharp End*, p.172.

⁵³ Donnelly interview, *op. cit.*

was serving. Angus Ross noted that “No soldier of the 23rd who kept a diary failed to record the loss of the Divisional Commander as a disaster of some magnitude”.⁵⁴ The Prime Minister of New Zealand summed up the general feeling when he cabled Freyberg that the War Cabinet and he were “greatly shocked to learn of Kippenberger’s injuries. ... His being laid aside is certainly a heavy blow to the Division”.⁵⁵

Kippenberger’s wounding, with another attempt at Cassino pending, could not have come at a worse time for Freyberg and the New Zealand Division. Freyberg recognised this when, in a characteristically thoughtful gesture, he telegrammed Kip’s wife in New Zealand with details of his recovery and stated that Kip “is an officer we can ill afford to lose. Not only do I lose irreplaceable and intrepid commander but also a close personal friend”.⁵⁶ Freyberg had earlier told Kip how “very much you are and will be missed by all” and that in four years of campaigning with the New Zealanders “nobody has meant more to me than you have”.⁵⁷

Kip however, was very philosophical about his wounding, blaming himself for straying from the taped laneways. He also claimed that he was not sorry to be removed from active command, a claim that later evidence reveals as untrue:

soldiering is a sterile business and personally I do not repine over being jolted off the upward path. I always felt the loss of men and beloved friends more and more and am not sorry to be relieved of that recurring hurt. Perhaps as a reaction I was losing all sense of personal caution and towards the end was taking the most outrageous risks, though I’ve never been unduly cautious. Indirectly this was the cause of my being hurt. I was driving to Cassino, of which we then held the fringe, in a jeep with young Massey my ADC, when I remembered Thornton having told me that morning that Massey had said that being a platoon commdr was

⁵⁴ Ross, *23 Battalion* p.321.

⁵⁵ Fraser to Freyberg, cable message, 4 March 1944, Personal File H.K. Kippenberger, D2/10021 Base Records Wellington.

⁵⁶ Freyberg to Ruth Kippenberger, personal telegram C/1189, 7 March 1944, D2/10021.

⁵⁷ Freyberg to Kippenberger, letter, 7 March 1944, Glue Papers

dangerous but being my ADC was far more so. So I decided to climb to an OP on Mount Trocchio instead and there stepped on a mine. I must have felt that I was riding for a fall, for they tell me that I greeted the M.O., being semi-conscious, 'Hello Alan, it had to come'.⁵⁸

This is an extremely revealing letter. Not only does it show how deeply Kip had been affected by the loss of many close friends but it also shows that he tended to take unnecessary risks in an effort to compensate for the loss of so many of his troops and personal friends. It was almost as if, because Kip had been forced to place so many lives at risk, he felt compelled by his conscience to run equally as many himself. In war, soldiers and front-line commanders are forced to run more than enough risk of death and injury, it is the nature of the business. Taking unnecessary or outrageous risks is not only irresponsible, it is folly and a failure of command.

In some ways Kip's wounding was inevitable, as Eugene Grayland pointed out:

An officer who disregards his own safety to go out looking for the fullest first-hand information on a battle situation cannot expect his luck to hold indefinitely.⁵⁹

Kip had been pushing his luck now for four years and had had many close escapes. On Mount Trocchio that March morning Kip's luck ran out.

Kip's loss was certainly "a sad blow to the whole division".⁶⁰ With one unplanned stroke of good fortune the Germans had ended the active military career of a talented New Zealand commander and dealt a major blow to the success of Operation DICKENS. Little wonder that a "black cloud of depression"⁶¹ settled over the New Zealand Division.

⁵⁸ Kippenberger to Henderson, letter, 26 November 1944, Glue Papers.

⁵⁹ E. Grayland, *Famous New Zealanders*, Christchurch, 1967, p.122.

⁶⁰ Freyberg Diary, 2 March 1944, WA II 8/46 NZNA.

⁶¹ J. T. Burrows, *Pathway Among Men*, Christchurch, 1974, p.183.

On 15 March 1944 Operation DICKENS commenced with a three-and-a-half hour bombing of Cassino by 500 planes. In another display of precision bombing, less than half of the bombs fell within the confines of the town and one group of bombers mistook the town of Venafro, more than ten miles away, for that of Cassino and punished it heavily. There followed an intense artillery barrage by more than 900 guns which fired over 250 000 shells of all calibres. All told "bomb rack and gun barrel would discharge upon Cassino four or five tons of high explosive for every German in the garrison".⁶² It was to little avail. Only one battalion of infantry was committed to clear the town and they soon lost support of the squadron of tanks. At 1600 hrs the next infantry were ordered into the town in support of the battalion first committed and still struggling to reach the first objective. Only one company was sent immediately; the rest of the battalion was committed into the fray that night. The battle developed into one of encounter and attrition. As Thornton commented "Kip's worst fears had been realised".⁶³ The battle dragged on until the end of March but the opportunity for victory had been lost on the first day when too few infantry were committed to the attack on the heels of the intense air and artillery barrage. Von Senger commented that "there seemed no urgency for the ground attack".⁶⁴ Although the New Zealand infantry captured three-quarters of the town the western fringe stubbornly held out against all attempts to clear it. Nor were the heights above the town or the ruins of the monastery taken.

Kip was unequivocal as to why the battle ended once again in stalemate and failure for the New Zealand Division. As he wrote after the war, while the bombing and artillery had been very successful in smashing the town and destroying half the garrison:

then Ike Parkinson entirely disregarded my plan, which he knew, for swamping the defence with infantry before it [the garrison] had recovered, and Bonifant dribbled troops into it so slowly as to lose all the possible gains of our crime.⁶⁵

⁶² Phillips, *op. cit.*, p.266.

⁶³ Sir Leonard Thornton, *Freyberg VC: Episode Three Into the Mire*, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴ von Senger, *op. cit.*, p.213.

⁶⁵ Kippenberger to J. L. Scoullar, letter, 6 January 1956, WA II 11/6 NZNA.

According to Kip, the whole conduct of the battle was "so grossly mismanaged, that writing our own account will be difficult".⁶⁶ There is no doubt at all that had Kip been commanding the operation as had been planned, he would have flooded the defences of Cassino with infantry. Had this happened while the defenders were still stunned by the massive weight of firepower that had been hurled against them, DICKENS would have had a much better chance of success than was the case on 15 March 1944. The battle, like Crete in 1941, had been lost on the first day and New Zealand commanders were responsible for the defeat.

On 11 May 1944 Alexander unleashed his two armies now concentrated in central Italy on a twenty mile front. Using thirteen divisions to the Germans' four, 1600 guns and 2000 tanks, the fourth battle of Cassino was "one of the best pieces of planning and staff work of the war: it ensured that this battle was half won before the first shot had been fired".⁶⁷ Faced with encirclement from two successful flank attacks the German garrison withdrew from the ruins of Cassino and the monastery on 18 May. The Polish flag flew over the ruins of the abbey at 1030 hrs that morning. As Phillips stated, "So at last the great fortress fell, it was never conquered".⁶⁸ Only the overwhelming brute strength of the Allies had turned the Germans out of the Gustav Line and had negated the advantages of the terrain the thinly stretched German defenders enjoyed. Speaking of Cassino, General Alexander quoted the great Admiral Horatio Nelson: "Only numbers can annihilate".⁶⁹

The New Zealanders had great motivation to take Cassino. As Sir John White has stated: if Cassino had fallen to the New Zealanders, "We would indeed be regarded as the *corps d'elite* of the British Army".⁷⁰ Sir Leonard Thornton echoed this sentiment when he stated that it would be "a great feather in the New Zealand cap" to take Cassino, but that the failure to do so was

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ Majdalany, *op. cit.*, p.225

⁶⁸ Phillips, *op. cit.*, p.337.

⁶⁹ Alexander quoting Nelson, in Majdalany, *op. cit.*, p.221.

⁷⁰ Sir John White, interview, Wellington, 23 January 1993.

a “bitter blow”.⁷¹

Yet the New Zealanders had not performed badly at Cassino and the March battle had taken all but a belt of strong points in the western sector of the town. No troops could have performed better although the New Zealanders were worn out in the process. Even Mark Clark, no lover of Dominion commanders or Eighth Army formations, told Freyberg as the New Zealanders left Fifth Army:

Undiscouraged by the hardships of unfavourable weather and extremely difficult terrain, and in the face of a desperate stubborn enemy, your command has fought with outstanding valour and determination.⁷²

If the troops had performed to the best of their abilities had the commanders performed equally well?

Of all the battles fought in western Europe in this war, none more resembled the nature of the struggles of the Great War than that of Cassino. Why the Allied commanders chose to keep plugging away at the Gustav Line's strongest point is a mystery. As Phillips has stated:

On its military merits alone no competent soldier would have chosen to assault Cassino in March 1944. He would have looked askance at the very notion of trying to storm the strongest fortress in Europe in the dead of winter by a single corps unsupported by diversionary operations.⁷³

Freyberg, under the terms of his Charter, could have refused to mount such an operation and did consider doing so. He only agreed to do the assaults at Cassino when he learned another division would have to fight at Cassino if the New Zealanders refused this operation. Freyberg did, however, set a limit of 1000

⁷¹ Sir Leonard Thornton interview, *op. cit.*

⁷² Mark W. Clark to Freyberg, letter, APO # 464, 31 March 1944, WA II 8/51 NZNA.

⁷³ Phillips, *op. cit.*, p.342.

casualties on the New Zealand attacks if no substantial gains had been made.⁷⁴ Once locked in to an assault on Cassino there were very few options available to Freyberg and only two directions from which to launch an attack. In some earlier advice to his officers Freyberg had stated that "Surprise is the greatest factor in battle".⁷⁵ There would be no opportunities to use this crucial factor at Cassino and, as von Senger stated, his first attack at Cassino contained nothing that was new.

To make up for the lack of surprise and the difficulties of terrain, massive firepower was brought to bear on the Cassino defences. Yet the sheer weight of metal was not enough to take the town nor could the divisions well-developed cooperation between all arms be put to use in the streets of Cassino.

Between 22 February and 2 March a workable plan was developed whereby infantry would be flooded into the town and at least six infantry battalions committed to the fighting before nightfall on the first day. This was the plan Kip intended to follow to the letter. In the event he was absent from the battle and only one battalion was committed to clear the town followed by one company four hours later. It would be another five-and-half hours before that battalion was fully committed and a third battalion was not used until 17 March — two days after the attack had commenced. The enemy paratroopers were astounded at this lack of follow-up and recorded in their war diary "The enemy must have thought his heavy bombing and barrage would result in an easy success".⁷⁶ Why this delay occurred is puzzling; more so the fact that Freyberg permitted it to occur and did not order Parkinson or Bonifant to commit more infantry until the fourth day of battle. Of all the mistakes made by the New Zealand commanders at Cassino, this delay on 15 March is probably the most serious. Phillips has stated that one company committed to the action on 15 March was equivalent to a whole battalion two days later. He writes "The conclusion seems inescapable that this delay cost the corps its best opportunity of 'gate crashing' Cassino" and that "had infantry been poured in, Cassino might

⁷⁴ Freyberg to Kippenberger, letter, 30 July 1956, quoted in Phillips, *ibid*, p.342. The 1 000 casualty limit was made in a statement by Freyberg to Phillips and is quoted in Phillips, p.352.

⁷⁵ Freyberg, Notes for Commanding Officers Appendix 9 n.d., W A II 8/32A NZNA.

⁷⁶ 1 Parachute Division War Diary, quoted in Phillips, *op. cit*, p.348.

have been taken fairly cheaply".⁷⁷ As mentioned earlier, this was certainly Kip's conclusion and it was the conclusion of the higher commanders as well. Clark, for example, stated in a report on operations at Cassino:

The follow up of infantry must be immediate and aggressive, employing the maximum infantry strength available. The maximum amount of infantry was not employed in this attack, nor was the attack aggressively pushed. Too great reliance was placed on the ability of the bombing to do the task alone.⁷⁸

To be fair, however, one must consider the situation of Parkinson commanding the division and Bonifant commanding 6 Brigade. This was Parkinson's first attempt at commanding the New Zealand Division and he had inherited someone else's plan in doing so. He was not an infantry officer but a gunner and had not really demonstrated great skill in his command of an infantry brigade to date as 6 Brigade's attacks on Orsogna verified. Thornton has remarked that Parkinson appeared "completely past it ... and he was pretty tired"⁷⁹ before the battle had begun. Cassino would be the only time Parkinson commanded the division.

Ian Bonifant, on the other hand, proved himself to be a very able brigade commander. Like Parkinson, Bonifant was not an infantry officer but came to 6 Brigade from the Divisional Cavalry. Bonifant was most reluctant to take up this position too and recounted of his meeting with Freyberg:

I had no idea what the General wanted me for when he sent for me, no idea in the wide world. I told him I didn't want to command a brigade. So he finally finished up by saying, 'Ian, you'll do as you're told'.⁸⁰

Bonifant could well echo Kip's earlier view in that he was very unlucky Cassino

⁷⁷ *ibid*, pp.347, 349.

⁷⁸ Report of Ground Commander, Training Memo No.5, Allied Force HQ APO 512 4 June 1944, Lessons from the Cassino Operation 15 - 22 March 1944, Reports on Battle of Cassino, WA II 8/EE NZNA.

⁷⁹ Sir Leonard Thornton interview, *op. cit.*

⁸⁰ Bonifant interview, *op. cit.*

was his first experience of commanding an infantry brigade.

The conclusion seems inescapable, though, that with Kip's wounding went New Zealand's best chance of taking Cassino in the March battle and this was the view expressed to Kip at the time by General Alexander when he visited Kip in hospital and later by General Gruenther.⁸¹ The delay in flooding the town with infantry, which Kip had considered essential to his plan's success, plus the quality of the elite paratroopers defending the ruined town spelled disaster for the second New Zealand attack on Cassino. Cassino proved to be their "Stalingrad on the Rapido".

Kippenberger's performances in Italy had been mixed too. After the March battle of Cassino, General Galloway of 78 Division had stated that "It is still a desert army and we have a lot to learn".⁸² This certainly applied to the New Zealand Division and to Kip. During the Cassino operation Kip was not seen at his best. He was somewhat depressed at the prospect of a frontal attack on this fortress town and had made his intention to resign the divisional command known to his senior staff officer. This, as GOC 2 New Zealand Division, he had no right to do. He was also taking unnecessary risks when he was somewhat tired and jaded by more than three years of constant campaigning from which the New Zealand furlough had provided little rest. Thornton has stated of Cassino: "At this stage in the war everybody was really getting very tired". In this he included himself, then a young man in his twenties. Even Freyberg's normal confidence and infectious optimism evaporated at Cassino, the only time during the war it did so.⁸³ Regarding Kip and other commanders, Thornton added they "were all getting a bit battleweary".⁸⁴

Despite this, Kip could still function as a very competent commander. His first attack on Cassino very nearly came off and was defeated by the demolitions in the railway causeway and by the presence of German armour in the third counterattack of the day. His plan for the second attack, provided it was carried out to the letter, offered the only prospect of success. With Kip there to command

⁸¹ Wounded 1944, note in the Glue Papers.

⁸² quoted in Phillips, *op. cit.*, p.351.

⁸³ Stevens, *Freyberg VC: The Man*, p.89.

⁸⁴ Sir Leonard Thornton interview, *op. cit.*

the battle the chances of success were greatly improved. Without him the likelihood of failure loomed ever larger and then became a distinct reality.

Kip must have impressed the higher commanders, Dempsey excluded, as both Alexander and Leese informed Kip he would have again been offered command of a British division in Eighth Army after Cassino.⁸⁵ Even in 1944 there was a serious shortage of competent divisional commanders who could combine courage with imagination and foresight. Kip was such a commander. The time had come to demonstrate his great leadership abilities at divisional level but he was to be cruelly robbed of the opportunity to do so by his taking an unnecessary risk on Mount Trocchio on 2 March 1944. His active military career was ended on that hill, but in many ways, it was also to prove a new beginning.

⁸⁵ Kippenberger to Henderson, letter 26 November 1944, Glue Papers.

Postscripts

But losing his legs was not the end for Major General Kippenberger — just a new beginning.

Mrs Margaret Denham, Kip's sister.¹

The loss of Kippenberger's feet — the one not removed by the "schu" mine was so badly damaged that it needed amputation — necessitated long months of recovery. It also meant much pain for Kip, pain he would attempt to hide for the rest of his life. As he had done with his first wounding eighteen years earlier Kip played down the pain and stressed the progress of his recovery. On 10 March 1944 he telegraphed Ruth, "I am getting along very well. No need to worry. Little pain. Much kindness". Three days later came another reassuring message:

Darling you really must not worry. I am having wonderful treatment and am healing "quickly". I am not going to be depressed. It may all be for the best.²

Treatment in Italy and specialist treatment in the United Kingdom resulted in a nine inch tibial stump on the left leg and an eight inch tibial stump on the right. Both limbs were soundly healed with no tender spots and a "satisfactory" limb fitting. Also present in both limbs was the feeling of a phantom limb, mainly the ball of each foot and the toes. The feeling was constant but more pronounced when standing.³

Kip took great efforts to conceal the pain walking caused him. Most of those who knew him well though were aware of the cost of his mobility. Jim Henderson, also an amputee of the war, while working on the Official Histories, recalled inadvertently meeting Kip in the lavatory which could only be reached by climbing up a flight of steps:

¹ Margaret Denham, "General's interest started with toy soldiers", Feature Article by Ray McCausland, *Ashburton Guardian*, 9 June 1984.

² Kippenberger to Ruth, telegrams, 10 and 13 March 1944, D2/10021.

³ Proceedings of Medical Board, Christchurch 7 May 1946, D2/10021.

and saw him secretly in utter despair, so drained a face and the two sticks, one in each hand, gripping like a shipwrecked sailor for rescue, this terrific challenge, this mountain of pain of 2 steps, maybe 3 to mount.⁴

The perceptive Henderson has been haunted by this image of Kip ever since. It was, however, a vision of agony that Kip strove to hide from all those with whom he came into contact and made a mockery of the surgeon's claims in 1944 that "he will only have five per cent disability below normal".⁵ The "thin and light-footed" Kip,⁶ unable to exercise or remain physically active, began to put on weight; the youthful lean features filled out and Kip's appearance aged rapidly .

The death of Brigadier James Hargest on 12 August 1944 by shellfire while attached as an observer with 50 (Northumbrian) Division delayed Kip's return to New Zealand by over a year. Kip was appointed, at the specific request of the New Zealand War Cabinet,⁷ to Hargest's job dealing with the rehabilitation of New Zealand POWs. It was the second time in Kip's career that Hargest's misfortune had created a new opportunity for him.

The Repatriation Unit which Kip headed was responsible for the smooth relocation of POWs to New Zealand. It was an administrative task in which Kip was largely a figurehead and signing authority, the demanding paperwork being largely carried out by a dedicated staff who came to revere their new CO. One thing Kip insisted on doing though was personally to see off each departing draft of ex-POWs. Martin Donnelly spent three to four months with the Repatriation Unit and has recalled:

On these occasions, even with his feet, he wouldn't just go along the front

⁴ Jim Henderson to author, letter 28 November 1991.

⁵ Puttick to Mrs Kippenberger, message, 20 May 1944, NEWZMIL for Defender, ML 487, NZLO London, Pers File of Major General Kippenberger 7/4/44—18/2/46 WA II 1 DA 1.202/9/P HKK NZNA.

⁶ Denham interview, *op. cit.*

⁷ Defender Wellington to NEWZMIL London, message, 3 September 1944, WA II 1 DA 1.202/9/P HKK, NZNA.

row, he wanted to see everyone and stop and talk. ... He was indefatigable in that way and would never see a draft off unless he had seen every man in it.⁸

While this was rewarding work, it was in many ways also anti-climatic, and Kip regretted not being with the New Zealand Division.

Driving out from London one day Kip suddenly asked his driver:

Kip: Fred, how would you like to be back home?

Driver: Yes Sir. I miss my family and my wife in New Zealand.

Kip: No Freddie, back home with the division! Not back in New Zealand!⁹

The New Zealand Division had been his life for the last four years and it was sorely missed. But in March 1945, Kip did return to the New Zealand Division at the express wish of Freyberg.¹⁰ The division was then in intensive training in northern Italy for the forthcoming spring offensive. Freyberg at this time was determined to smarten up the division by a series of ceremonial parades. A junior officer witnessed the effect of Kip's return on 23 Battalion:

Sandy Thomas began to drill the Battalion and it wasn't good. ... We had been called to attention for yet another attempt to get some timing in the rifle exercises when a car was driven close to the parade ground and, with some difficulty, a senior officer got out, using sticks. The word got around — 'Kip is back'. ... This was his first visit back to the division. Thomas gave the command 'Battalion slope arms' and then facing General Kip, 'General salute — present arms'. I have never witnessed such a dramatic change in interest and attitude on a parade. The timing of the exercises was excellent;

⁸ Donnelly interview, *op. cit.*

⁹ Townley interview, *op. cit.*

¹⁰ Freyberg to Kippenberger, personal message, 25 February 1945, WA II 1 DA 1.202/9/P HKK NZNA.

the rifles struck boldly and proudly, the troops were steady! It could not have been a better compliment to a much admired and great New Zealand soldier.¹¹

On parade the following day, with Freyberg and Lieutenant General McCreery present, 23 Battalion did not reach the same “truly great” standard of precision it had demonstrated for Kip.¹²

Kip took the salute of a parade of nearly 2000 officers and men of NZASC on 19 March, attended the parade of the divisional artillery on 22 March and of 5 Brigade on 24 March. On a visit to the Maori Battalion Kip was presented with a carved walking stick made from a pick handle used at Cassino. The eyes of the figures on the stick were made from the shattered glass of the monastery chapel and the rubber tip from a jeep destroyed at Cassino. It delighted the Maoris to see Kip “lean heavily on his carved stick” at the ceremonial parades.¹³

Kip’s return to the division was a very moving experience for him and he had been very happy and somewhat surprised to see the division “so obviously at the top of its form at the end of a long and hard campaign”. He announced that he would leave the division “with very great regret”.¹⁴

In 1946, in an inspiring choice of candidate, Kip was appointed Editor-in-Chief of New Zealand’s Official History of the Second World War. It was his dream job, but it soon proved to be no easy task.¹⁵

In 1948 Kip was elected President of the New Zealand Returned Servicemen’s Association, a position he held for the next seven years. Working as Editor-in-Chief of the Official Histories and carrying out the duties as President of the RSA occupied most of Kip’s time in the post-war years. The tasks associated with the RSA Presidency certainly kept him very busy. They ranged

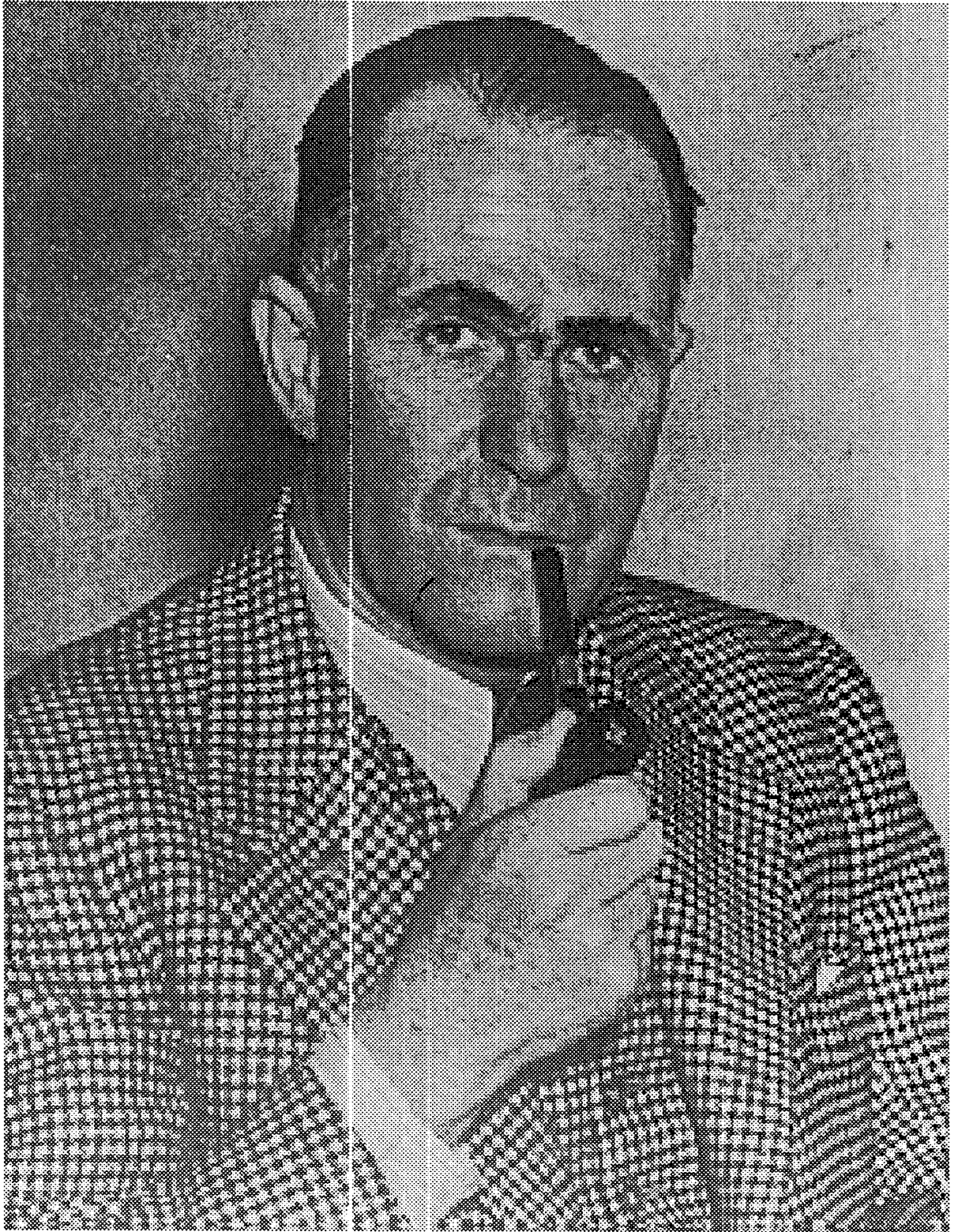
¹¹ F. Rennie, *Regular Soldier. A life in the New Zealand Army*, Auckland, 1986, p.66.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ Cody, *28 Battalion*, p.450.

¹⁴ R. Kay, *Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939 - 45 Italy Volume II From Cassino to Trieste*, Wellington, 1967, p.390.

¹⁵ See Appendix 1.



The Major General. Very much a public figure in post war New Zealand.
(Margaret Denham)

very widely from organising awards and decorations for its members, attending formal dinners and annual balls, to attending Anzac Day marches, to advising the government on policy, to lobbying for compulsory military service and increased immigration to New Zealand, to pressuring the government for a national war memorial, to attending unit reunions and a host of other duties associated with the RSA's top job. Kip took his duties as RSA President very seriously. Ian Wards has commented that Kip "was very certain that the RSA had a role to play in New Zealand social life and certainly a role to play in advising politicians about military affairs".¹⁶ Kip believed that the RSA:

is an association of those who had the privilege of serving New Zealand overseas in war. The association has two great functions: guarding the interests of those disabled, the dependents of the dead and those who have suffered by their service; and by its social activities preserving the good comradeship which brightened service in war, and so forming a great unifying factor in the community.¹⁷

It was certainly an enlightened and liberal role Kip wanted the RSA to play in New Zealand society but the position of RSA President was not always a happy one for Kip. He was involved in a number of controversial issues as RSA President, some of which turned very nasty indeed and Jim Henderson believes that Kip "chafed semi-silently at its elephantine policies and mentality"¹⁸

Kip's post-war health had not been good and during the 1950s it seriously deteriorated. There was the strain of walking on artificial limbs, a strain Kip tried to keep hidden but which Jim Henderson's earlier revelation showed to be constant and intense. For many years after his injury he had suffered from frequent headaches and black outs. In 1955, after collapsing at the opening of a

¹⁶ Wards interview, 10 January 1993.

¹⁷ Kippenberger, quoted in a special feature in *The Evening Post*, Saturday 18 April 1953 by Brent Mallory, WA II 1 DA 406/82 NZNA.

¹⁸ Jim Henderson to author; letter, 28 November 1991.

Rehabilitation Centre in Christchurch,¹⁹ an exploratory operation at Wellington Public Hospital revealed a lesion on the brain above the right ear and he was flown to Dunedin for surgery.²⁰ Three weeks later though Kip was back at work at the Official Histories, an operation having been deemed unnecessary through the provision of a new drug. As Wards remarked at the time: "He has been through the mill a bit, and will probably be some weeks before he is on top again".²¹ Kip though believed he had made "an extraordinary good recovery".²²

Ruth Kippenberger's health had been poor too and in April 1957 it took a serious turn for the worse. Kip wrote to his cousin, Basil Borthwick, on 18 April:

My wife is very gravely ill, has been unconscious or is semi delirious for the past four days and it is very uncertain whether she will recover. ... Her heart is standing up pretty well and the position is not without hope, but as once I told you in Crete, it is 'iffy'.²³

While in hospital Ruth's condition was serious enough to warrant her receiving the last rites by a Catholic priest.²⁴ Kip's next letter though contained some very good news for his cousin. Kip wrote:

The doctors told me it was all over on Friday but miraculously she didn't die and each day since has improved. This morning she was bright, very happy, asking for a hairdo and lipsticks and she is going to recover. It was a very near thing indeed.²⁵

Unfortunately this was to be Basil Borthwick's last letter from Kip. On 4 May 1957, while he was preparing the house for Ruth's return from the hospital, while cleaning the stove Kip turned to his daughter and remarked, "I've never

¹⁹ Denham interview, *op. cit.*

²⁰ Kippenberger to H.R.C. Wild, letter, 10 February 1955, Glue Papers.

²¹ Wards to McClymont, letter, 7 March 1955, WA II 3/16b NZNA.

²² Kippenberger to Davin, letter, 27 April 1955 IA 181/53/1 Part II, Glue Papers.

²³ Kippenberger to Borthwick, letter, 18 April 1957, copy in author's possession.

²⁴ Denham interview, *op. cit.*

²⁵ Kippenberger to Borthwick, letter 26 April 1957, copy in author's possession.

had such a bad headache before".²⁶ He collapsed and lapsed into a coma. He died eighteen hours later in Wellington Public Hospital of a cerebral haemorrhage which had been caused by an arterio-venous malformation of the right middle cerebral artery.²⁷ He was only sixty years of age.

There was a full military funeral on 7 May 1957 which brought central Wellington to a standstill. Tributes poured in from all over the world and from all parts of New Zealand and Ruth Kippenberger received more than 1 000 letters and telegrams of condolence.²⁸ The New Zealand Prime Minister stated that Kip's "untimely passing would be mourned by thousands who were his comrades during the war, and by a community which had the deepest respect for his talents, his uprightness and his record".²⁹ Walter Nash, the Opposition Leader, stated Kip:

was one of the greatest figures in New Zealand's military history, always brilliant in the field. I have never known anyone bear such suffering, so quietly and with so little fuss.³⁰

The military funeral was impressive and Ruth Kippenberger, who survived for another ten years, watched the funeral cortege from her hospital room window.³¹ Writing on behalf of the Kippenberger family to thank the New Zealand Army, Monty Fairbrother, Kip's deputy on the Official History project and a close friend, commented:

Peter Fraser once said, I understand, that the Army Department could be relied on best for solid efficiency. Yesterday was an example. I have heard

²⁶ Denham interview, *op. cit.*

²⁷ Details of Death Certificate, copy in author's possession.

²⁸ Ruth Kippenberger to Fairbrother, record of conversation, Glue Papers.

²⁹ "Mr Holland's Tribute. 'Notable Citizen Soldier' ", NZPA, in *The Press*, 6 May 1957.

³⁰ "Great Loss to New Zealand. Mr Nash's Tribute", NZPA, in *The Press*, 6 May 1957.

³¹ Geddes interview, *op. cit.*

many praiseworthy remarks about the impressive and well-organised ceremony, which went its course without a fault. "Kip" would have been proud of his last parade.³²

Kip would have indeed been very proud.

Kip's post-war career had certainly been very active and varied. He had led a full life in every sense of the term which did not stop with the loss of both feet nor with the end of the war. After the war Kip continued to display the leadership style and skill that had made him such a popular and revered commander during that great struggle. He had chosen for his personal creed a passage from the Old Testament, Micah 6-8:

What doth the Lord require of thee but
to do justly and to love mercy and to
walk humbly with thy God.

For the best part of sixty years, in war and peace, Kip had done just that.

³² Monty Fairbrother to Brigadier L. W. Thornton, letter 8 May 1957, D2/10021.

Conclusion: A Very Short List

There's no such thing as a born leader. It's something you have to learn.¹

By this time I had seen enough of war to know that the first essential of command is competence. Personal charm, or savage discipline, or individual bravery are good things in their place and at the right time; but men, I knew now, would forgive any vices in a commander so long as he was capable.

John Mulgan²

The Introduction identified five essential qualities a successful commander must possess. They were moral and physical courage, intelligence, health, fighting spirit, and the ability to command loyalty and affection.

There is no doubt that Kippenberger possessed the combination of moral and physical courage so highly valued by Clausewitz.³ Kippenberger despised chateau generalship and led from the front as much as possible. Knowing he was putting men at risk of life and limb, Kippenberger felt it a moral imperative to run equal risks of injury and death. Richard Holmes has written:

It is a fundamental truth that a military leader will not succeed in battle unless he is prepared to lead from the front and to risk the penalties of doing so.⁴

It was a fundamental truth that Kippenberger, through his experience on the Somme and through his study of military history, thoroughly understood. In

¹ Royal Military College Duntroon, recruiting slogan.

² Mulgan, *op. cit.*, p.68.

³ Clausewitz, *op. cit.*, p.140.

⁴ Holmes, *op. cit.*, p.341.

Greece, his first campaign as a military commander, Kippenberger shared the risks of combat and led his battalion from the front maintaining control over it during a very difficult, long, tiring withdrawal through very harsh terrain. He also commanded the demolitions of two key mountain passes with great coolness and courage and had narrowly averted capture doing so. The Greek debacle established the pattern for the rest of Kippenberger 's campaigning.

J.F.C. Fuller identified courage as one of the three "pillars" of generalship and agreed with Napoleon that the moral elements of courage were three times more important than the physical ones.⁵ Kippenberger firmly believed and instilled in his subordinates that "It was the duty of every officer not to be 'yes-men'".⁶ That is Kippenberger expected his men to give their honest opinions about future plans and operations and express their concerns providing their arguments were based on fact, common sense and experience.⁷ His clash with Montgomery in Tripoli was an example of this. It had taken great moral courage to defend New Zealand troops in the face of Montgomery's ire. Later, in Italy, when his brigade was forced to make repeated attacks at Orsogna, most of which he felt sure would fail, Kippenberger expressed his concerns to the corps commander, General Dempsey, and it almost cost him his command. It was a rule he always followed with Freyberg who valued highly Kippenberger 's contributions and regarded Kippenberger "as the officer closest to him in the New Zealand Division during the six war years".⁸

While Kippenberger was a person of great moral courage, prepared to take risks, make decisions and speak his mind, it has to be stated that on one occasion on this score Kippenberger failed the ultimate test. According to Norman Dixon, it "requires greater moral courage to fire a congenial subordinate whom one knows personally".⁹ Yet at El Mreir on 4 July 1942 Kippenberger lacked the moral courage to sack a battalion commander who had lost his nerve in battle. It was fortuitous that the next action of 23 Battalion removed this officer from command, but it was failure of moral courage on Kippenberger 's part not to have removed him earlier than this.

⁵ Fuller, *op. cit*, pp.35,23.

⁶ Kippenberger on Freyberg, note, Glue Papers.

⁷ *ibid*.

⁸ P. Freyberg, *op. cit*, p2.

⁹ Dixon, *op. cit*, p.396.

There is also no doubt that Kippenberger was a person of high intelligence. This is especially revealed in his understanding of what made men function in war and in his thorough understanding and application of infantry tactics. Battle tactics are “a notoriously difficult subject to teach, unless one is in a ‘genuinely tactical situation’ — that is someone is shooting at you with live ammunition”.¹⁰ Yet Kippenberger’s understanding of battle tactics was “nothing short of amazing”,¹¹ the result of his long years of preparation and his great aptitude for learning on the job.

Alam Halfa and El Alamein were real turning points in his military career. At Alam Halfa, despite the failure of Operation BERESFORD, Kippenberger demonstrated how much he had learned from the previous New Zealand disasters. Of the two brigades used in the attack, the one commanded by a novice was practically annihilated while Kippenberger’s brigade took most of its objectives and survived several enemy counterattacks. If the Maori Battalion had not lost control during BERESFORD it is likely that Kippenberger’s brigade would have taken and held all its objectives. This it did on the opening night of the the last battle of El Alamein despite another fit of over-enthusiasm by one of his battalions. Kippenberger’s brigade was one of only two in all of Eighth Army to take all its objectives in this attack. At El Alamein in October 1942 Kippenberger was at his peak: a thoroughly competent, efficient and inspirational commander.

Medenine, the most successful defensive battle in North Africa, is probably the best example of Kippenberger’s tactical ability. Here Montgomery, after the battle, took Kippenberger’s eight principles of defence as his own.

Kippenberger’s command abilities at the tactical level of war confirmed that he was the most obvious successor to Freyberg. When Freyberg was elevated to corps command in Italy, Kippenberger was appointed to command 2 New Zealand Division. Unfortunately for Kippenberger, his first battle as a divisional commander was at Cassino, the strongest part of the Germans’ defensive line which had already resisted two previous attempts to penetrate it. Kippenberger’s first attempt on the town was narrowly defeated by one

¹⁰ P. Griffith, *Battle Tactics on the Western Front*, London, 1994, p.52.

¹¹ Blundell, *op. cit.*, p.20.

unrepaired demolition and three-hundred yards. Still unable to make Freyberg try something other than a direct frontal attack, Kippenberger became alarmed at the way the battle was turning into another Passchendaele wherein his division would be wasted away in futile and costly frontal attacks on a very heavily defended position. So alarmed did Kippenberger become at this prospect that he threatened to resign, a move which would have been a grave dereliction of duty. However, Freyberg was able to persuade Kippenberger to stay on and help plan the next attack. Kippenberger believed Cassino would fall only if massive firepower was brought to bear and the town immediately flooded with at least two divisions of infantry. Kippenberger's tragic wounding robbed him of the opportunity to put this plan into action and also robbed the New Zealand Corps of its best chance of success at Cassino.

Jim Burrows, in answer to the question as to what it was that made Kippenberger so beloved of the men he commanded gave as part of the answer:

In the first place we trusted Kip because we felt that here was one who had dedicated himself completely and absolutely to the task ahead. ... He was so completely absorbed in the military picture that as an individual he counted for little. Such absorption to the complete exclusion of his welfare, his own personal safety, made men realise that here was one who thought more of them than of himself.¹²

McManners believes that in war "it is essential that everybody in a unit trusts their commanding officer" and that the "only important factor is professional competence".¹³ My epigraph from John Mulgan identifies competence as "the first essential of command".¹⁴ This certainly accounts, in part, for Kippenberger's success as a military leader, for without intelligence and courage, professional competence will always elude a military commander.

It has to be stated though, that Kippenberger's infantry tactics were not infallible, as Takrouna clearly demonstrated. At Takrouna, Kippenberger was undoubtedly very tired and strained after ten months of tough campaigning. This fatigue is certainly evident in his planning for the battle in which he failed,

¹² J.T. Burrows, "Major General Sir Howard Kippenberger, KBE, CB, DSO, ED, died Wellington, 5 May 1957", in Pringle and Glue, *op. cit.*

¹³ McManners, *op. cit.*, pp.46,48.

¹⁴ Mulgan, *op. cit.*, p.68.

like all other commanders, to take account of the change in terrain and in which he treated Takrouna, the dominant peak on the Enfidaville plain, as a minor feature. At Takrouna Kippenberger marched his brigade into a lethal killing ground and the resultant heavy casualties reduced him to tears. It was his greatest tactical blunder of the war.

Throughout his campaigning, Kippenberger had ample opportunity to demonstrate the quality of health or robustness. The real test of this quality is the ability to perform at the highest levels when one's physical health has been affected by the poor conditions in which one is fighting. Freyberg gave an excellent demonstration of this upon his return to the division prior to Alam Halfa. Despite the fact that his neck wound was still healing and that his hospital treatment had given him a "frightful body rash" which in the peak of the desert summer "was far worse than any wound", Freyberg did not allow his physical condition to affect his work rate, judgement or temper.¹⁵ Kippenberger repeatedly demonstrated this quality. In Crete, for example, despite having to march many miles on a badly twisted ankle, Kippenberger carried out what he regarded as the best soldiering of his career. It should also be noted that Kippenberger's command turning points of Alam Halfa and El Alamein were achieved when he was still recovering from a serious illness and at a time when his regular daily routine included a post breakfast vomiting. The ability to soldier on in the face of adversity is the quality of robustness and all successful field commanders need to possess it.

Kippenberger also possessed great fighting spirit. This took the form of an iron self control, what Holmes has called "the iron repression of fear" whereby leaders in war "ruthlessly suppress[ing] their own symptoms of fear".¹⁶

¹⁵ *Infantry Brigadier*, p.192

¹⁶ Holmes, *op. cit.*, p.207.

Kippenberger managed to control his fear and remained unflappable in a crisis. This was an essential quality for a successful New Zealand commander as the 2 New Zealand Division went through so many disasters in its first two years of campaigning — Greece, Crete, Belhamed, Minqar Qaim, Ruweisat Ridge to name just a few. Crete demonstrates this better than any other battle. While a good number of the senior New Zealand officers were paralysed by indecision and self-doubt, Kippenberger, in charge of a composite formation, commanded with great courage, dash and determination. He was also responsible for one of the great high points of the campaign, one that became a defining moment in New Zealand's military history — the retaking of Galatos. Kippenberger's leadership during a moment of great crisis had been inspirational and it marked him out for command beyond that of a battalion.

Leslie Hobbs has written that to show calm passivity in the face of great difficulty was seen as the ideal officer quality and that to be accused of “flapping” was a damnable charge.¹⁷ It was a charge that could not be levelled at Kippenberger. J.F.C. Fuller believed that “until a man learns to command himself it is unlikely that his command over others will prove a profitable business”.¹⁸ Kippenberger had achieved a remarkable degree of self-command.

There is even one testimony that Kippenberger enjoyed being in the storm of battle. According to Peter McIntyre, New Zealand's Official War Artist, “Some people become stimulated in battle; I remember General Kippenberger telling me that in battle he experienced a feeling of wonderful elation”.¹⁹

This fighting spirit is also evident in that Kippenberger always sought to initiate offensive action against the enemy whenever possible. Offensive action is one of the accepted principles of war and is seen as the determination of a commander to “gain and retain the initiative”. It is also regarded as “essential in most circumstances to the achievement of victory”.²⁰ From the beginning of his campaigning Kippenberger demonstrated his understanding of the importance of offensive action. Digging in on the Aliakmon Line in Greece, Kippenberger fully expected the New Zealand Division to move forward of this line to engage the advancing enemy and was very disappointed when it did not do so. On Crete

¹⁷ Hobbs, *op. cit.*, pp.65-7.

¹⁸ Fuller, *op. cit.*, p.23.

¹⁹ P. McIntyre, *op. cit.*, p.14.

²⁰ *The Fundamentals of Land Warfare*, p.28.

Kippenberger pestered Puttick again and again for permission to launch a strong counterattack to drive the Germans from the Prison Valley and was utterly disgusted when it was not forthcoming. When Galatos was taken by the Germans later in the campaign Kippenberger lost no time in organising a vigorous counterattack on the village, one that was spectacularly successful. On the Alamein Line prior to Alam Halfa, Kippenberger was unhappy with the standard of patrolling of his brigade and planned and staged a major raid on the enemy's forward positions. Not only was the raid a great success, it snatched the initiative away from a demoralised enemy and gave Montgomery his first Eighth Army success. Kippenberger's campaigning is replete with such examples of offensive action which is a firm indicator of a strong fighting spirit.

The one quality in which Kippenberger surpassed all other New Zealand commanders, including Freyberg, as well as surpassing most military commanders of the war, was in his ability to command loyalty and affection. This was reflected in a number of ways.

Firstly, an essential aspect of command at which Kippenberger proved to be a master is the ability to pick good subordinate commanders and then inspire them to give of their best. McManners believes that the promotion of talented individuals to responsible posts is "the single most important administrative task in any army",²¹ while Griffith believes that the ability to pick the right people and sack the wrong ones is "the most important skill a general must possess".²² While not as successful at sacking the wrong people as he should have been, Kippenberger proved most adept at selecting men of talent for his subordinate posts; men like Burrows, Fairbrother, Romans, Harding, Bennett, Upham and so many other outstanding leaders. As Eric Townley has stated:

Burrows, Hinton, Upham ... they were all men who followed the leader and that's why they became such great men. They were all products of

²¹ McManners, *op. cit.*, p.32.

²² Griffith, *op. cit.*, p.29.

Kip.²³

And having selected men of talent as his subordinates, Kippenberger also proved adept at delegating them important tasks. According to Glue:

General Kippenberger had that rare gift of being able to to delegate work and at the same time convey the impression that you were the only person he'd think of trusting with such an important job. This naturally put you on your mettle. He had the gift of inspiring loyalty in those who worked under him. He listened to your ideas and let you do it your own way. At the same time, quietly but firmly, he imposed his own high standards; and if any work fell below those standards you felt you had let him down. The final responsibility was his, and his alone.²⁴

This ability to select people of talent and provide them direction and example while leaving them free to achieve the tasks allocated them is indeed a "rare gift" of leadership.

Secondly, Kippenberger engendered in nearly all who served with him great respect, affection, and, at times reverence. Townley has said of Kippenberger's command qualities:

I learned during the war and I have learned many times since, that being an officer in the infantry the greatest thing you can obtain, better even than valour awards and bravery awards, the greatest thing you can obtain from your men is respect. That's the greatest word in the army between an officer and his men. And by God, Kip had our respect. Mainly because he would never ask us to do anything he didn't do himself. And he knew exactly what we were going through.²⁵

Writing immediately after Kippenberger's death, a former member of the War Histories Branch described Kippenberger as one of "three men in my lifetime

²³ Townley interview, *op. cit.*

²⁴ Glue, paper on delegation given to business course, n.d., Glue Papers.

²⁵ Townley interview, *op. cit.*

whom I could respect",²⁶ and Hobbs claimed 'Kip' was "the most respected man in the New Zealand Army".²⁷ While Townley, Hobbs and others are correct in their assessments, the feeling for Kip of his men went beyond respect. He was a revered and loved commander.

Angus Ross is unhappy with any suggestion of reverence for Kippenberger:

I don't think revered is the right word. I would not myself use it. I use the word impressive as I told you. ... I would hold strongly that we did not revere him in the sense that I would give to that word. But we were impressed and ... we had confidence in him. We all felt strongly we couldn't let him down. We had to perform to the best of our ability. He was our brigadier. He was not only an infantry brigadier, he was *our* brigadier. ... We felt we couldn't let Kip down.²⁸

Perhaps this is not reverence for a commander but it is far more than respect.

While men are very uncomfortable about talking of love for other men, it is this emotion that Kip engendered in his men. "A Civilian" observed this at 20 Battalion's first reunion after the war: "Here at last was the Re-union! Here at last was Welcome to Kippenberger of the 20th, from nearly 800 hearts that loved him".²⁹ After the original colours of the battalion were presented to Kippenberger at the reunion, the *Reunion Programme* concluded: "We bid the old flag 'Well done!'; its custody is in the most deserving hands. Two corners of every man's heart: Kip and the flag".³⁰ While Kippenberger's relationship with 20 Battalion was undoubtedly a special one, this love for Kippenberger was not confined solely to it. Charles Upham has testified that "there was no better loved man in the New Zealand Division than he [Kippenberger] was".³¹ Witness this tribute:

²⁶ Cyril H. Bleukie to Glue, 7 May 1957, Glue Papers.

²⁷ Hobbs, *op. cit.*, p.49.

²⁸ Ross interview, *op. cit.*

²⁹ "A Civilian Looks On" (Mrs Ruth Page), *20th Reunion and Welcome Home to Major General Kippenberger Souvenir Booklet*, p.30.

³⁰ *20th Reunion and Welcome Home to Major General Kippenberger Souvenir Booklet*, p.18.

³¹ *Kippenberger — Letters from a Soldier*, T 214, Radio New Zealand Sound Archives, recorded 1959.

As he did to thousands of others, he established himself in my mind as one of those rare commanders who hold their place in the hearts of men not only by the respect for their professional efficiency and power of leadership, but by the affection with which they are held by all. In all my searching of our command characters for his equals in this, I find only two, Nelson and Roberts.³²

Norman Dixon believes an ideal military leader is one who “manages to combine excellence as a task-specialist with an equal flair for the social or heroic aspects of leadership”. For this to occur the military leader has to “combine extreme professionalism in the realising of military goals with a warm humanity which earned them the lasting affection and loyalty of their men”.³³ Dixon believes that very few people are able to achieve this balance and names as examples Wellington, Nelson and Slim. With the allowance for scale, New Zealanders are justified in adding Kippenberger’s name to this very short list.

³² Tribute by Robert McQuarrie, 5 May 1957, Glue Papers.

³³ Dixon, *op. cit.*, p.219.