

Chapter Two:

The Regiment is Born, 1889-1908

*Brother Hal can do the falling,
The splitting, and the hauling,
And little sister Mary milk the cow;
I'll be back in time for shearing,
And to burn the new bush clearing
(With a laurel wreath, perhaps, upon my brow).
Tu Quoque, 2 February 1900.*

In New Zealand the nineteenth century closed with an explosion of patriotism and imperial sentiment. Germany's growing industrial power and military successes made the Britons of the South Seas as fearful as those in the north of German intrigue in Southern Africa. Most New Zealanders accepted without question the assertion that the British Empire was a God-given vehicle of enlightenment and justice to one-third of the world's people, and regarded the refusal of the Boer republics of South Africa to accept British sovereignty as ingratitude and folly.

South Africa was the focus of British and New Zealand military interest from the mid-1890s, and the refusal of the Boer Republics to give full civil rights to British settlers within their territories gave rise to fierce indignation and support for Cecil Rhodes' plan to paint the map of Africa red — from Cairo to the Cape of Good Hope.

Near the close of the 1890s press reports on the African situation transformed talk into action with hundreds of sturdy New Zealand youths, mainly farmers' sons, offering themselves for the Volunteers. War in South Africa was believed to be imminent and the New Zealand government, eager to do its bit for 'the Motherland' recognised the dozens of new Volunteer companies formed by eager would-be soldiers. An advertisement in the *Bay of Plenty Times* of 7 February 1900 informed readers that:

Volunteers were invited from men who were good rough-riders and good shots, preference being given to those who could provide their own horses and gear. Each man had to pay 75 pound sterling (without horse) or 50 pound sterling (with horse).²

The war scares of the 1890s brought the Hauraki Regiment into existence. In an effort to bring some order to the numerous new companies, and to older units left over from the Land Wars and from the 'Russian invasion threat', the government ordered a restructuring of the Volunteer force. In the South Auckland-Bay of Plenty region seven previously independent military units were combined with four new companies, to create the Second Battalion of the Auckland Regiment, soon to be entitled the Hauraki Regiment.

Of the corps combined to make up the new regiment, the Thames Naval Artillery was the oldest formation. Formed in 1869 to protect a goldfield port from possible Russian raiders, the small unit, of about sixty volunteers, was proud of its continuity, efficiency and, above all, of its military band of thirty-eight musicians.

All other formations combined in the new regiment were infantry companies, and the earliest formed of these was the Te Aroha Rifle Volunteers, formed on 15 September 1892 by Captain E. W. Porritt. First armed with Sneider rifles, then with Martinis and Martini Enfields, this company, for a time merged with the Piako Mounted Rifles, prided itself on the standard of its marksmanship and its victories at rifle club competitions.

Of the remaining earlier companies, the Tauranga Volunteers began in 1896, and the three companies of the Ohinemuri Rifles, were formed in 1897, and centred in Paeroa, Karangahake and Waihi. The First Ohinemuri Company has the most interesting history.

The Ohinemuri Company's minute books indicates the club-like nature of the company's life-style. Soldiers enrolled in the company each paid one shilling (ten cents) per month and new prospective members were carefully screened before being accepted to the ranks. Their names were posted on a notice-board and then balloted for by the committee which consisted of the company officers and N.C.Os. A prospective member could be refused by being literally 'blackballed', by three black balls being lodged in the battalion's ballot box. As with most Volunteer companies, the unit decided upon its own uniform and elected a 'Kharki' colour with maroon facings and cartridge loops. A slough hat or field service hat completed the outfit.

The Ohinemuri Rifles began their life one year before the Coromandel Rifle company and the Onehunga Rifle company were joined to the new regiment. Like these later creations, and like the Huntly Rifle company and the Rotorua Rifle