

## Chapter Five:

# Dispersed for Action, 1939-1948

*Regiments which had already been in existence for upwards of fifty years and which already carried on their colours the battle honours of two wars were through a lamentable lack of appreciation of the value of tradition not allowed to go overseas as regiments with district associations.*

BAY OF PLENTY TIMES,  
30 October 1950.<sup>1</sup>

In the Second World War the identity of the Hauraki Regiment, as well as that of other New Zealand regiments, was partly lost through the dispersal of members of the Regiment throughout the Second Expeditionary Force. The desperate demands made on New Zealand for soldiers for the European theatre and then for the Pacific front, together with requirement for Home Defence, forced the General Staff to spread its thin layer of trained soldiers carefully. Even so, the identity of the Hauraki Regiment was not entirely lost during the war. It was retained as far as possible in three companies, one in each of the three first echelons of the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force. In each of the 18th, 21st and 24th Battalions, B Company was comprised mostly of men from the Hauraki Regiment.

W. D. Dawson, in his official history of the 18th Battalion, captured on paper the mixed emotions of Hauraki troops and their families on the departure of the battalion's recruits from their home towns into embarkation camp. He wrote:

*Auckland, Whangarei, Hamilton and Paeroa all farewelled the advance party and main body in style, with bands and civic functions. Then they went back to their everyday life, while the battalion settled down to work at Hopuhopu (Camp) in the rain.<sup>2</sup>*

At Hopuhopu Camp a 'new' issue of uniform was distributed. Battledress was not ready for issue for months and the Hauraki company were dressed in 'reconditioned Territorial uniforms' with buttons heavy with green mildew and with greatcoats occasionally scarred by bullet holes from World War One.<sup>3</sup>

The webbing issue was also antiquated and was well described by Dawson as 'a mass of brass knobs and buckles'.<sup>4</sup> Effective training was made difficult by shortages in almost every branch of weaponry and communications equipment. The Battalion possessed only eighteen Lewis guns, which were meant to serve as anti-aircraft as well as ground weapons, and the signallers had only a few field telephones, telephones, signal lamps and flags. Wireless sets were well in the future. Morale was dealt a blow by the use of crossed sticks on the ground during training exercises, to represent anti-tank guns and machine guns.

The 18th Battalion, with its Hauraki Company, was transported to Egypt in the comfort of the luxury liner *Orion*. The Haurakis were helped in maintaining their identity within the Battalion by the appointment of an officer from their Regiment, Major J. M. Allen, as Battalion Second-in-Command. Major Allen, member of parliament for Hauraki from 1938 to 1941, was a farmer who had given generously of his time to the upbuilding of the Regiment. From May to November 1941 he was Commanding Officer of 21 Battalion, with the rank of Lieut.-Colonel and his death in action on 28 November 1941 brought dismay to all Haurakis both in Libya and at home. His death resulted from a miscalculation. Major H. G. Burton reported that:

*Just before dark Col. Allen came upon his car and told me he was going out to see some of his men who were some distance away. He told me the direction he was going, and I advised him not to go. Some of our troops who had just reported in stated that they had contacted enemy in large numbers in that direction. "The boys will be expecting me, so I must go," he said, and with a wave of his hand he entered his car and he and his driver set off into the blue.<sup>5</sup>*

It seems likely that 21 Battalion commander had mistakenly assumed that a waddie between himself and his