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"WORLD FAMOUS IN NEW ZEALAND": ANALYSIS OF LIEUTENANT-GENERAL BERNARD FREYBERG'S COMMAND CAPABILITY

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Master of Defence Studies

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GENERAL BERNARD FREYBERG'S COMMAND CAPABILITY**

By Lieutenant-Commander C.A. Stevens

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**ABSTRACT: BERNARD FREYBERG; COMMAND CAPABILITY AND THE
FREYBERG LEGEND**

Lieutenant General Bernard Freyberg commanded New Zealand's national army, the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force (2NZEF) for six years from 22 November 1939 until 22 November 1945. He occupies a unique place in the New Zealand military paradigm, his length of unbroken operational high command in wartime is unprecedented as is the number of personnel he commanded. Never before or since has a military mission of this magnitude been undertaken by New Zealand. At the time, his influence and the consequences of his actions on New Zealand were of immense significance. Freyberg was ultimately successful in commanding 2NZEF and left a towering legacy and a huge reputation; however, losses on Crete and at Cassino became contentious in the late 20th century and clouded assessment of Freyberg's capability.

There is an absence of a unifying assessment that analyses source materials, considers previous assessment and ties together the resultant appraisals within a specified command capability assessment framework to draw out a consolidated evaluation and calibrate it to the New Zealand context.

This research thesis sets out to close this void in the New Zealand context. Bernard Freyberg's inherent leadership and personal qualities of resolve, courage and integrity coupled to a robust and balanced set of command competencies enabled him to create, maintain, sustain and develop New Zealand's precious small national army into an efficient, resilient and highly regarded fighting unit that would serve with distinction through the entirety of the Middle East Campaign of World War II. Moreover, Freyberg's unique set of competencies ideally matched the needs of New Zealand's army, Government and society as it fought in a remote,

prolonged and draining multi-theatre global conflict.

PART 1 INTRODUCTION

1. MILITARY HERO MYTHOLOGY IN THE NEW ZEALAND CONTEXT AND THE FREYBERG LEGEND

New Zealand is a young country founded on broad democratic, egalitarian and peaceful principles. Its society has a generally modest, unassuming and un-militaristic outlook which while embracing the concepts of duty, honour and sacrifice in the service of one's country is, by and large, ambivalent to the notion of martial heroism. After both major conflicts of the 20th century, New Zealand society consciously decided that while honouring the sacrifice of the fallen it would ultimately move on from the bitter memories of war; indeed, the losses at Gallipoli, Paschendale Crete and Cassino have become the defining military actions of the New Zealand psyche.²

As New Zealand moved away from its colonial roots finding its own place in the world post World War II, military mythology lost even more of its relevance within New Zealand society. The lack of any direct threat to New Zealand, the declaration of New Zealand as a nuclear free state and ultimately its withdrawal from ANZUS in 1985 meant that for 25 years New Zealand society would become distinctly anti-military in its outlook, eschewing the notion of martial mythology or historiography. However the 9/11 attacks and the advent of the War on Terror changed New Zealand society's view point and rekindled interest in international collectivism.

New Zealand, therefore, has few enduring military heroes and even fewer enduring heroic military commanders. At the head of this rarefied pantheon of New Zealanders sit Freyberg and the double Victoria Cross winner, Charles Upham.

² In a parochial quirk of perspective, New Zealand's victories would belong to the greater Allied collective of which New Zealand would play its small part while the losses would be owned solely by New Zealand.

The former grouping led by Charles Upham and the more recent Willie Apiata comprises solely the 23 New Zealand VCs, while it is arguable that the roll call for higher commanders consists only of Edward Chaytor³, Andrew Russell⁴, Keith Park⁵, Howard Kippenberger⁶, and Bernard Freyberg.

The commanders were all professionally competent, serving with distinction and enjoying the loyalty of the service men and women under their command. They would all would spend part of their careers in New Zealand's Territorial Forces, all would command division-size formations and all would survive their service across both world wars despite four of the five wading ashore at Gallipoli in April 1915.

Andrew Russell symbolised New Zealand's latent organic potential and led the way for all future New Zealand commanders. He was New Zealand's first native-born divisional commander, taking command of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade in 1914 and leading it at Gallipoli. In 1915, Russell was knighted, promoted and placed in command of the New Zealand and Australian Division fighting at Gallipoli. Following the withdrawal from the peninsula, Russell was placed in command of the reformed New Zealand Division in France, commanding it through to the end of World War I. Russell would enhance his and the division's reputation during the battles of the Somme, Messines Ridge and the Last One Hundred Days Offensive. However, Russell would also preside over New Zealand's greatest defeat, Paschendale. The

³ Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, "Edward Chaytor" available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Chaytor accessed 01 October 2012, 1. & Ministry for Culture and Heritage, *The Encyclopedia of New Zealand; Chaytor, Edward Walter Clervaux*. available from <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3c13/1>; Internet; accessed 29 August 2012, 1-2.

⁴ Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, "Andrew Hamilton Russell" available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Hamilton_Russell accessed 28 September 2012, 1-2. & Ministry for Culture and Heritage, *The Encyclopedia of New Zealand; Russell, Andrew Hamilton*. available from <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3r34/1>; Internet; accessed 29 August 2012, 1.

⁵ Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, "Keith Park" available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keith_Park accessed 28 September 2012, 1-3. & Ministry for Culture and Heritage, *The Encyclopedia of New Zealand; Park, Keith Rodney*, available from <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/5p9/1>; Internet; accessed 29 August 2012, 1 -2.

⁶ Denis Mclean, *Howard Kippenberger Dauntless Spirit* (Auckland: Random House New Zealand, 2008), 11-13.

division would be severely mauled, suffering 2,735 casualties on one day, 12 October 1917. Despite this event, Russell would be offered higher command by Field Marshall Haig, turning it down (as a portent of Freyberg's own actions 25 years later) to stay the course with his New Zealanders. Retiring from active service at the end of World War I, Major General Russell was recalled in 1940 as the Inspector General of New Zealand Forces retiring again in 1941 aged 73 years old.⁷

Lieutenant Colonel, Edward Chaytor followed in Andrew Russell's footsteps. Chaytor hailed from a wealthy New Zealand farming family and served in Egypt and Gallipoli before replacing the promoted Russell to command the New Zealand Rifle Brigade at Gallipoli. Here though their paths would diverge, Chaytor remained in the Middle East. Promoted to Major-General in 1917, he commanded the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division capturing Rafa and Amman. A knighted Chaytor retired as the commander of New Zealand's military forces in 1926 and left New Zealand for retirement in England. Chaytor's ability and successful high command confirmed that Russell was not an exception and that latent high command potential existed within the fledgling dominion of New Zealand.⁸

Chaytor and Russell were widely recognized after the war to end all wars but this legacy was set aside by World War II. Despite important and founding contributions, they remain today shadowy figures on the sidelines of New Zealand's military historiography.

Park and Kippenberger each held high command in World War II. Park held the pivotal role

⁷ Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, "Andrew Hamilton Russell" available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Hamilton_Russell accessed 28 September 2012, 1-2. & Ministry for Culture and Heritage, *The Encyclopedia of New Zealand; Russell, Andrew Hamilton*. available from <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3r34/1>; Internet; accessed 29 August 2012, 1.

⁸ Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, "Edward Chaytor" available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Chaytor accessed 01 October 2012, 1. & Ministry for Culture and Heritage, *The Encyclopedia of New Zealand; Chaytor, Edward Walter Clervaux*. available from <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3c13/1>; Internet; accessed 29 August 2012, 1-2.

of commander 11 Group, RAF Fighter Command, during the Battle of Britain, later Air Officer Commanding Malta during its siege and finally Allied Air Commander South East Asia where he was a very able air component commander under supreme commander Louis Mountbatten.⁹ Kippenberger briefly commanded the Second New Zealand Division in Italy, his command cut short when his feet were blown off by a land mine at Cassino. Although Park served in the RAF and his association with New Zealand and its forces serving was indirect, his legacy is today widely recognized within New Zealand and internationally. Kippenberger's unrealized command ability, his loyalty and dauntless spirit, captured in a book of that title,¹⁰ are today held as yardsticks for New Zealand military leadership. Both Kippenberger and Park were thrust into pivotal battles involving New Zealanders. They were each extremely competent, diligent and inspired leaders who in their own way possessed quiet confidence and sometimes taciturn personalities. Their quiet, unassuming but effective style of leadership resonates well with the New Zealand's psyches perception of itself.

2. FREYBERG'S COMMAND CONTEXT AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR ANALYSIS

Lieutenant General Bernard "Tiny" Freyberg commanded New Zealand's national army, the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force (2NZEF) and its component Second NZ Division (2nd NZ Division or colloquially "The Div"), for six years from 22 November 1939 until 22 November 1945. He occupies a unique place in the New Zealand military paradigm: his length of unbroken operational high command in wartime is unprecedented as is the number of personnel he commanded. Some 76,000 personnel served in 2NZEF at a time when New Zealand's total

⁹ Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, "Keith Park" available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keith_Park accessed 28 September 2012, 1-3. & Ministry for Culture and Heritage, *The Encyclopedia of New Zealand; Park, Keith Rodney*, available from <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/5p9/1>; Internet; accessed 29 August 2012, 1 -2.

¹⁰ Denis Mclean, *Howard Kippenberger Dauntless Spirit* (Auckland: Random House New Zealand, 2008)

population was a mere 1.6 million.¹¹ Freyberg would apply the New Zealand government's will and vision to create a complete national army encompassing combat, combat support, combat service support arms and the various military and non-military support administrations required to achieve this vision. In so doing, Freyberg transposed a significant and complete slice of New Zealand across the globe first to Egypt and later in Italy. He would command 8 percent of all New Zealand men or some 4 percent of the total population. Never before or since has a military mission of this magnitude been undertaken by New Zealand. At the time, the consequences of his actions, and operational and administrative decisions on New Zealand society and its population were of immense significance. It is extremely unlikely that New Zealand will ever see another national commander with so much responsibility or authority resting on his or her shoulders.

Freyberg's command and leadership of 2NZEF, therefore, has been the subject of much comment and analysis within New Zealand and to a lesser degree internationally. This literature provides a rich seam of opinion, commentary and analysis from which to tap. Much of the early commentary was biographical or autobiographical memoirs, authored by those who served in 2NZEF or fought alongside it and deals with the shared experience of the group. Because of this collective experience and Freyberg's central role and massive influence across the formation, most of these works are limited by unintentional but inherent bias toward Freyberg. Notwithstanding Stevens, Kippenberger, Cox et al. knew Freyberg first hand as a person and as a commander, their commentary speaks to his personal strengths, characteristics and style. This bias through loyalty is often counterbalanced with contextual examples of Freyberg's foibles and idiosyncrasies. Stevens in *Freyberg, VC, The Man* often describes a strength then offsets it with a

¹¹ New Zealand, Statistics New Zealand, *The New Zealand Official Year Book 1939* (Wellington: New Zealand Government Printers, 1939) available from www.3.stats.govt.nz/New_Zealand_Official_Yearbooks; internet accessed 13 September 2012, 27/387

quirk.¹²

Even the monologue of the official New Zealand war histories of the 1950s and 1960s demonstrate the deft and tactful handling of contentious events by the network of “The Div”s” old boys led by Kippenberger and tasked with authoring New Zealand’s official histories. The war history branch constructed a series of well researched informative histories outlining the facts, celebrating the successes, discussing the defeats but assiduously avoiding criticism of any individual within 2NZEF. Because of this diligent avoidance of criticism and Freyberg’s centrality, they too are limited by inherent bias.

Despite the prevailing internal anti-war sentiment of the 1980s, declassification of the ULTRA transcripts revived interest in Freyberg’s leadership among some New Zealand scholars. Barber and Tonkin- Covell reviewed Freyberg’s performance following the release of ULTRA intelligence concluding in *Churchill’s Salamander* that Freyberg, although not an undiscovered genius, emerged from their analysis “strong and impressive, a brilliant divisional commander and also a highly able corps commander”.¹³ Wright, another latter day New Zealander free of connections to the Freyberg myth, contends: “Freyberg was a man of action who stood in a class by himself”.¹⁴ In another publication, Tonkin- Covell categorized Freyberg as a “workman-like methodical commander; a careful practitioner of the profession of arms; solid and reliable”.¹⁵ Clearly, Freyberg, on balance, is assessed as sound and capable; however, for international authors criticism remains and the question of his core competency is contentious.

International discussion of Freyberg’s performance from the late 1950s through to the

¹² W.G. Stevens, *Freyberg, V.C. The Man* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1965)

¹³ Laurie Barber and John Tonkin- Covell, *Freyberg: Churchill’s Salamander* (Auckland: Century Hutchinson, 1989), 263.

¹⁴ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg’s War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 245.

¹⁵ John Tonkin- Covell, “Lieutenant General Bernard Freyberg: a Necessary Commander?” in *Born to Lead? Portraits of New Zealand Commanders*, ed. Glyn Harper and Joel Hayward, 97-119. (Auckland: Exisle Publishing, 2003), 118.

early 1970s is generally of English or US origin and centers on the failures of Crete and Cassino with a focus further up the command chain. Analysis seeks to interpret Freyberg's battle actions in the fog of war from a top down perspective. Often, there is little consideration of the New Zealand national context influencing the events around Freyberg or the human element of war. From this top down perspective, Freyberg tends to be airily dismissed as an unsound minor character. Whereas the centrality of Freyberg's strength of character creates bias and limits the former commentary, due to the importance of these qualities, its complete absence in the latter is in itself limiting. Indeed, the secondary source material display almost three published schools of critique: First, those with whom Freyberg served, Singleton-Cates, Stevens, Cox, Kippenberger et al and more recently Watty McEwan consider Freyberg's humanity and its effect on their lives and 2NZEF's journey through World War II.¹⁶ Secondly, Tonkin- Covell Smith, Barber, Majdalany and Simpson focus on battle and tactical assessment and the extrapolation of these findings to the wider command continuum and the prosecution of New Zealand operations in World War II, and finally, Wright and Paul Freyberg seek to rebut criticism and reset the legacy delivering humanistic chronological accounts of wide breadth.

Depending on the integrity of the account, all commentary draws to some degree on the primary source documents held in the war archives of the New Zealand State Archive which are publicly available. These documents consist of military and political correspondence, divisional activity reports, lecture notes, dispatches, speeches, reports, Freyberg's personal files and, the central document, the GOC diary authored and annotated by Freyberg's military PA firstly Sir John White and later Murray Sidey.¹⁷ The war archives provide the bedrock of material to work from and these documents inform the differing historical interpretations.

¹⁶ Watty McEwan, *Salamander's Brood* (Masterton: Fraser Books, 2007)

¹⁷ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary – Part 1-VI, 1939-October 1945* (New Zealand Archives, Department of Internal Affairs: WA11 8 5/43- 46 &7/67-68)

While the large body of published work provides assessment of his military acumen, a chronological account of 2NZEF's campaigns and discussion of Freyberg's personal characteristics there is an absence of a unifying assessment. This unifying assessment requires the analysis of source material and consideration of previous assessments to tie together the resultant appraisal within a specified command assessment framework, thus drawing out a consolidated evaluation which can be calibrated to the New Zealand context.

The framework here applies Pigeau and McCann's Competency, Authority and Responsibility Model to focus on Freyberg's command situation in four key periods in his tenure of 2NZEF. The first, his professional low point immediately following the fall of Crete, the second, the apogee of his career at the conclusion of the North African campaign, the third, his personal low point, Cassino, and finally the denouement of his career and tenure; the Italian summer campaign of 1945. In analysing Freyberg's situation across the four key waypoints and his actions in sustaining his command this thesis puts the Freyberg myth in the New Zealand context asserting that Bernard Freyberg's inherent leadership and personal qualities of resolve, courage and integrity coupled to a robust and balanced set of command competencies enabled him to create, maintain and sustain New Zealand's precious small national army. Furthermore, it asserts that Freyberg's competencies enabled him to develop the New Zealand Division into an efficient, resilient and highly regarded fighting unit that would serve with distinction through the entirety of the Middle East Campaign of World War II. Finally, it argues that Freyberg's unique set of competencies ideally matched the needs New Zealand's army, government and society as it fought in a remote, prolonged and draining multi-theatre global conflict.

3. WHO WAS LIEUTENANT GENERAL BARON BERNARD CYRIL FREYBERG OF WELLINGTON

Bernard Cyril Freyberg arguably was New Zealand's most famous and accomplished military general in war and peace. He was born in London on 21 March 1889 and immigrated to Wellington, New Zealand's capital city as a two year old with his family as they sought a better future in the antipodes. Bernard was the youngest of five sons and was nicknamed "Tiny".

Finishing school in December 1904, young Bernard took up an apprenticeship as a dentist completing his training and leaving Wellington in 1908 for work in a rural town, Morrinsville.

Freyberg joined the New Zealand Territorial Army and was gazetted as a 2nd Lieutenant in the 6th Hauraki Regiment whilst living there. Freyberg left Morrinsville and New Zealand travelling to

North America in March 1914 in search of higher education and adventure. At the outbreak of World War I, Freyberg sailed for England where contacts in the NZ Territorial Army and a

serendipitous encounter with Winston Churchill at Horse Guards provided Freyberg with a commission in the Royal Naval Division (RND). This appointment was a turning point for

Freyberg. It marked the start of a life-long friendship not only with Churchill but with many of the affluent and educated young members of the British establishment who had enlisted in the

RND. Freyberg went on to win a DSO at the Gallipoli landings for his solo 3 & ½ kilometre swim to plant flares on the beach at Bulair and was twice wounded during the campaign, finally

being evacuated with the rest of his company in late 1915. Freyberg fought at the Battle of the Somme, winning a Victoria Cross for his decisive action and personal valour at Beaucourt, there

getting seriously wounded again in the process. Back in England his reputation as a courageous and charismatic antipodean warrior was growing. Freyberg became something of a universal

celebrity amongst the intelligentsia, establishment and young gentry whom he had befriended on

joining the RND, meeting his future wife Barbara McLaren through his friendship with the Asquith family.¹⁸

Transferring to the army but still carrying the effects of his wounds, Freyberg returned to France in 1917 to command 173 Brigade of 58th London Division, newly promoted to temporary Brigadier-General, the youngest in the British army. During the third battle of Ypres, he was again seriously wounded, suffering a bad leg wound that became infected. Serious consideration was given to amputating his leg. Freyberg was sent back to England to recuperate. In the interest of retaining his rank, he returned to France and front-line service early, in January 1918, and once again commanded with valour, being awarded two bars to his DSO prior to the finish of the war.

The interwar years brought marriage to Barbara, a family and a career in the permanent British army. Typically, Freyberg's reports discussed his personal qualities, his intellectual capability and potential for higher command.¹⁹ Freyberg worked determinedly through the 1920s and 1930s reaching the rank of Major General in 1934. Disaster struck Freyberg this year; a medical examination prior to posting to an Indian appointment diagnosed him with a heart murmur and he was medically downgraded. In 1937, with no change in medical grading, Freyberg retired from the army, settled in London and pursued a new career in property development, company directorships and politics.

At the outbreak of World War II, Freyberg was reinstated as a Major General still with the pre-existing medical downgrading and posted as General Officer Commanding (GOC) Salisbury Plain. The New Zealand Government was at that moment searching in England for a general officer to command its 2NZEF and 2nd NZ Division, as it had recognised that no-one from New

¹⁸ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 21.

¹⁹ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 165-166.

Zealand's existing army cadre held the skills required. Through a mutual friend, Freyberg was approached to fill the vacant position. After politicking which involved Freyberg drafting a sample and hypothetical terms of reference for GOC 2NZEF, he was offered the job. Following a very brief consideration and a change in medical grading, he accepted, taking command on 22 November 1939.

Freyberg created the 2NZEF organisation and led its fighting arm 2nd NZ Division for the duration of World War II. He would savour the victories of North Africa and Italy and rue the defeats of Greece, Crete and Cassino. He was twice badly wounded, twice knighted and promoted to Lieutenant-General in the process.

In late 1945, Freyberg sailed to New Zealand with Barbara, to take up the appointment of Governor-General. After serving two full terms, the Freybergs departed New Zealand for England in 1952. A much loved commander and governor-general, Tiny Freyberg would not return to New Zealand again.

Back in England, Freyberg was asked to take up the position of Lieutenant-Governor and Deputy Constable of Windsor Castle, a position Freyberg accepted. Lord Freyberg remained active in returned services and New Zealand affairs. He took up several directorships and sat in the House of Lords. Towards the end of the 1950s, Freyberg was diagnosed with Parkinson Disease. Barbara and Bernard lived at Windsor Castle until his death on 4 July 1963 from a burst abdominal aorta weakened by his wounds of World War II at the age of 74.

Lieutenant-General Baron Bernard Cyril Freyberg of Wellington, VC, GCMG, KBE, KCB, DSO (three bars) is buried in the churchyard of St Martha's on Hill in Surrey. He remains the only person to have won the Distinguished Service Order four times.

4. PIGEAU AND MCCANN'S COMPETENCY AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

MODEL

In "Re-Conceptualizing Command and Control" published in the *Canadian Military Journal* 3 no.1, Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann propose that command capability is comprised of three independent dimensions: competency, authority and responsibility.²⁰ Pigeau and McCann express all three independent dimensions are axes of a three dimensional command capability matrix²¹, and each dimension possesses its own specific internal classes.²²

Competency is the sufficient ability to carry out a task and is divided into four classes; physical, intellectual, emotional and interpersonal.²³ Physical competency is often considered the primary competence for armed forces and consists of sufficient strength and fitness, good health, agility, endurance and well-developed sensory motor skills. Intellectual competency is the cerebral ability to find solutions to difficult problems and encompasses, in the higher intellectual sense creativity, flexibility and the ability and willingness to learn. At a lower level, the ability to reason, visualise, assess and decide are the key requirements. Emotional competency is the emotional perspective, resilience, malleability and toughness to cope under stressful situations. Interestingly, Pigeau and McCann also consider a sense of humour as an important tool in the emotional competency tool box. Interpersonal competency is the ability for human social interaction; the proficiency of relating to and communicating with peers, subordinates, superiors and others outside the organisation you have dealings with to promote better teamwork. Key

²⁰ Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann, "Re-Conceptualizing Command and Control" in *Canadian Military Journal* 3 no.1, Spring 2002, 59.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

²² *Ibid.*, 59-62.

²³ *Ibid.*, 59.

elements of interpersonal competency are trust, respect, empathy and perspective.

Authority is defined as the degree to which a commander is empowered to act and is divided into two classes: legal and personal.²⁴ Legal authority is the power to act assigned by an external source such as a government and is expressed in law and regulation. It provides authority for assignment of resources, personnel and the enforcement of obedience amongst those subject to that law. It is an external authority closely associated with command. Personal authority is given to individuals by their peers and subordinates informally and tacitly, it is derived from that person's credibility, character, reputation, experience and actions over time. Enduring personal authority stems from a person's ethics, values, courage and integrity. Effective authority held by commanders at any level will be that which has sufficient personal authority to motivate and inspire those around him or her and enough legal authority to achieve the mission or task.

Responsibility is classified as the degree to which an individual accepts the legal and moral liability commensurate with command. Pigeau and McCann consider the fundamental concept of responsibility is that it cannot be assigned; it has to be accepted and has two elements, extrinsic and intrinsic.²⁵ Extrinsic responsibility is the degree to which the individual accepts accountability up, across and down the down the command chain, for the legal and personal authority that comes with his or her position. Intrinsic responsibility is considered by Pigeau and McCann as the most fundamental dimension of command capability. It is the degree of self generated obligation a person feels toward the mission. It is the source of all motivation, effort and commitment, and drives creativity. Intrinsic responsibility is associated with honour, loyalty and duty.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

With authority comes responsibility. Pigeau and McCann contend that unless the individual assigned the authority is willing to accept both the legal and moral responsibility that comes with it, the risk of misuse of that authority is increased. Pigeau and McCann describe a balanced command envelope which is the ideal continuum of command development; the ideal situation for any individual should be the acquisition of appropriate and commensurate levels of competency, authority and responsibility. Across this envelope Pigeau and McCann identify four different types of command: dangerous command, maximal balanced command, minimal balanced command and ineffectual command.²⁶ Maximal balanced command is obtained when an individual has high personal and legal authority and has accepted a commensurate degree of extrinsic and intrinsic responsibility. Pigeau and McCann assert that balanced command provides assurance that the authority assigned and earned will be treated with the required level of responsibility so that power is exercised safely and appropriately; it is, therefore, the desired command state. Ineffectual command occurs in situations where an individual has accepted high levels of responsibility without the relative amount of authority being given. Although responsibility has been given, power over resources or a clear mandate to act has not been authorized. Minimal balanced command is defined as the situation where the commander is assigned little authority and has little expectation of being held accountable: low authority and low responsibility levels. Responsibility and authority are in balance but little scope for initiating change is granted or expected, therefore command capability is minimal. Dangerous command is manifested when a commander has been assigned or has earned significant authority but has not accepted the responsibility for the use of this power. Significant potential for abuse of the power held by the commander exists in this situation.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

PART 2. ANALYSIS OF FREYBERG'S COMMAND

5. THE LOWEST EBB: THE FALLOUT FROM CRETE, MAY 1941

BACKGROUND

The allied campaign in Greece in 1941 by most accounts was an unmitigated disaster and the defence of Crete although prepared for a German airborne invasion was a debacle. Crete's defence was bitterly contested but ultimately lost. Freyberg arrived on Crete as an evacuee from Greece along with the shocked and disrupted units of the Operation LUSTRE taskforce on 29 April 1941. Crete was considered a strategic priority for both the British and the Germans. The airfield at Maleme provided the island's holder with the ability to project air power and deny control of the sea across the eastern Mediterranean. For the Germans, access to Crete's airfields would enable unchallenged air support to its campaign in North Africa and also the Balkans, and would severely impede British naval activity in the Mediterranean. The British were well aware of this situation and Churchill strenuously sought to deny the island to the Germans by ordering its urgent defence. On paper, the defenders had a significant advantage in terms of held ground and force numbers; however, the RAF was unable to provide any air support and the vast majority of the defenders were ragged, tired and bereft of any equipment heavier than what could be carried by hand as they evacuated Greece. The lack of RAF air control over and around Crete also precluded any significant and ongoing sustainment of the island. Because of the sustainment and air power issues, in effect, any German operational plan merely had to call up a continuous and unrelenting blockaded siege on Crete for it to fall. The only real advantage for the defenders was the recent cracking of Germany's operations Enigma codes; however, strict rules around the use of ULTRA intelligence derived therefrom prohibited any action that could alert the enemy to Enigma's compromised state. The British knew an assault from the air was imminent so there

was little time to plan. The defence of Crete needed a commander who could quickly assess options, devise sound plans and execute an active defence when the attack commenced. The most important task for the commander of Crete's defense was effective consolidation and coordination of the disparate elements that comprised the defending garrison spread across the island. Communications and mobility were critical for any success but they were also the key weaknesses in British capability on Crete. Both Wavell and Churchill proposed the appointment of Freyberg as commander CREFORCE responsible for Crete's defence. Freyberg demurred. He understood the nature of the challenge, was fearful of the result on the new but ragged New Zealand Division and was unable to get the approval or at least acquiescence of the New Zealand government. After some disingenuous politicking, Wavell in Cairo convinced Freyberg that New Zealand was supportive of his role in Crete's defense and that it was his duty to accept.²⁷ Freyberg was not confident of success and, unbeknownst to him, neither was the New Zealand Government, Prime Minister Fraser making arrangements to fly out to Egypt.²⁸ Freyberg busied himself with the defense of Crete, handing over the NZ Division to Brigadier Puttick. Freyberg's analysis and plan for the defence of Crete was militarily sound and dealt with the key issue: foothold denial, in particular airfields, utilizing dynamic units with command devolved to brigade level.²⁹ Following six days of steady German bombing, the assault for Crete opened on 20 May 1941 with the invasion from the air by 6,000 Fallschirmjäger of Fliegerkorps VII and IX.³⁰ The battle would rage for seven days. The inexperienced and poorly led New Zealanders defending the land approaches around Maleme eventually buckled under the pressure, withdrew away from the airfield and thereby allowed the German reinforcements to land directly at

²⁷ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War* (Auckland: Penguin 2005), 51-53.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 54

²⁹ Laurie Barber and John Tonkin-Covell, *Freyberg: Churchill's Salamander* (Auckland: Century Hutchinson, 1989), 11-19.

³⁰ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War ...*, 64.

Maleme. Wright concluded that “the active defence rested on individual commanders and here Freyberg was let down.”³¹ Once Maleme airfield had fallen, giving the Germans a secure foothold on the island and the counterattacks had failed, the plan, as Freyberg had feared, unraveled. In due course, Crete was lost and the remnants of CREFORECE scrambled across Crete to evacuation points on the south shore at Sphakia.

Freyberg’s arrival in Alexandria thereafter signaled a crisis in his command of the NZ Division and 2NZEF. Nearly 25 percent of his force was lost, some 4,036 of the division’s men falling into German hands over the two campaigns. Moreover, the casualty list from Crete alone had reached 671 killed and 967 wounded.³² To compound the loss, much of the division’s materiel had been left behind in the two evacuations and morale was low. The NZ Division was in tatters.

Militarily, the fortunes of Lieutenant General Wavell, CNC Middle East, and his command were mixed. The early easy victories against the Italians were long past and the defeats in Greece and Crete coupled with the arrival of the Deutsche Afrika Korp (DAK) in North Africa signaled a significant shift in the balance of power. Politically, despite Germany’s impending invasion of the Soviet Union, Great Britain and its Empire stood alone against the Axis and the losses were mounting. Churchill, needing a victory had counted on Wavell, Middle East Command and Freyberg to provide one on Crete; on this score, Wavell and Freyberg, both friends of Churchill had failed, badly, to check the Germans or at least slow them down.

The arrival in Alexandria of New Zealand Prime Minister Peter Fraser and War Cabinet

³¹ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg’s War* (Auckland: Penguin 2005), 61.

³² Laurie Barber and John Tonkin- Covell, *Freyberg: Churchill’s Salamander* (Auckland: Century Hutchinson, 1989), 109.

2. Ian McGibbon, “Introduction” in *Inside Stories*, ed. Megan Hutching, 18-45. (Auckland: Harper Collins, 2002), 22.

Secretary Karl Berendsen now brought a New Zealand political context to Freyberg's crisis. Earlier, Freyberg had sent Brigadier James Hargest to Alexandria to brief Wavell on the Greece debacle and developments on Crete. Hargest was scathing of Freyberg's command ability and on discovering the presence of Fraser and Berendsen provided them with the same back brief.³³ Upon the division's return to Alexandria another of Freyberg's divisional brigadiers Lyndsey Inglis, also took the opportunity to roundly criticize Freyberg's ability to Fraser and Berendsen in a private meeting.³⁴

A court of inquiry established to investigate the Greece campaign and defeat of Crete heard evidence from all concerned and eventually exonerated Freyberg, concluding not unreasonably, that the air superiority of the Luftwaffe over Crete was the most important contributing factor to the islands fall.³⁵ This conclusion, however, hardly protected Freyberg from the inevitable political and military backlash of losing so many men in such a major defeat.

FREYBERG'S COMMAND SITUATION: MAY 1941

Freyberg's situation was tenuous. Analysis of Freyberg's command situation in May 1941 using Pigeau and McCann's three dimensional command capability model provides insight into the pressure and challenges Freyberg faced arising from the embarrassing foray into Greece, the loss of Crete and their deleterious effects on his expeditionary force and his ability to effectively command it.³⁶

There was no issue with Freyberg's physical competency, his reputation preceded him

³³ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 78.

³⁴ Hargest was a sitting New Zealand MP and close friend of Fraser. Although not evident at the time, on Crete the failure of Hargest's 5th infantry brigade to hold Maleme airfield, due to his poor leadership has been cited as the single most significant contributor to the fall of Crete.

³⁵ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War ...*, 80-81.

³⁶ Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann, "Re-Conceptualizing Command and Control" in *Canadian Military Journal* 3 no.1, Spring 2002, 53-63.

and unlike many of the other recalled World War I veterans he did not appear adversely affected by the previous war or by the intervening years of peace. He remained, at over six feet tall, a commanding physical presence and even at this early point in his relationship with his Kiwi's, the men in the division saw a gritty, resolute commander apparently without fear, a man who abhorred losing to, in his own words, "the hated Boche". Geoffrey Cox recalls Freyberg as a huge boy scout figure striding around the hills of Greece in his lemon squeezer hat.³⁷

Barber and Tonkin- Covell-Smith systematically rebut the claims that Freyberg bungled Crete, asserting that Freyberg's command on Crete demonstrated a high level of intellectual competency, arguing that he understood the intelligence summaries provided by the Ultra transcripts and used them to best advantage where possible creating a competent plan that addressed the key points with the available resources. The plan unraveled not because of Freyberg's incompetence but because of poor command decisions in lower formations that Freyberg had little visibility of, because of poor communications, until too late.³⁸ Wright concurs.³⁹ This realistic view however, was not evident due to the fog of war, the agenda driven testimony of Hargest and Inglis, and Churchill's political quest for a guilty party.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, Freyberg could have done better; he had placed too much faith in unproven subordinate commanders and did not identify an alternative plan should these commanders fail him.

Through the vicissitudes of Greece, Crete and the subsequent inquiry, Freyberg demonstrated superior emotional resilience and sound interpersonal competency in his relationships with the other ranks and junior officers. The actions of Hargest and Inglis, however speak to an underlying interpersonal problem with some of his immediate subordinate

³⁷ Geoffrey Cox quoted in Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 48.

³⁸ Laurie Barber and John Tonkin- Covell, *Freyberg: Churchill's Salamander* (Auckland: Century Hutchinson, 1989), 10-44 & 110-121.

³⁹ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 58-62.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 110-121.

commanders: Crete had exposed their command and leadership deficiencies and Freyberg's presence as GOC NZ Division and 2NZEF had effectively blocked their command aspirations.

The New Zealand government had its doubts as to Freyberg's competency. Although exonerated, Freyberg was an easy scapegoat in Middle East Headquarters' politics. His intellectual competency was under a cloud and his career blighted.

Freyberg's legal authority was vested in the charter he held from the New Zealand Government giving Freyberg the specific authority to make decisions, as the sole judge, to the employment of the 2NZEF in cases of sufficiently grave or special circumstances, and to communicate these decisions directly to the New Zealand Government. Moreover his communication would be directly with the New Zealand Government and with the Army Department for any matter concerning or connected with the training and administration of the 2NZEF. Freyberg was to communicate directly with the New Zealand Government or Commander-in-Chief, under whose command he was serving, in respect of all details leading up to and arising from policy decisions. In all matters pertaining to equipment, he was to communicate with the British War Office through normal channels, and then through the Liaison Officer of the High Commissioner's Office in London, the former to be the official channel. In matters of command, Freyberg was to adhere to the normal military channels between the War Office and the GOC 2NZEF. Freyberg was to establish the necessary administrative headquarters and base and line of communications units for the functions of command, organization, (including training), administration with which he was invested. Furthermore Freyberg was authorized to organize, (train) change, vary or group units and formations in such manner as he considered expedient from time to time and finally, he was authorized to fix and alter the establishment and composition of units and formations as the exigencies of service may in his

opinion require from time to time.⁴¹

Clearly, the New Zealand government placed significant command authority (and responsibility) on his shoulders. He was responsible for not only leading the New Zealand Division in battle but also creating the support and administrative structure of 2NZEF including a whole new camp at Maadi through which the NZ Division would pass en-route to theatre. However, at this point, Fraser was not confident of his new commander or his competency, and was wont to usurp the military- political boundary by dealing directly with Middle East Command when it suited him. This tendency annoyed Freyberg who explained to Fraser that if the New Zealand government were to deal directly with Middle East Command he could not accept the full responsibilities of his charter.⁴² On a personal level, the battles of Crete and Greece had started to forge a strong relationship between the junior leaders of the division and their higher commander. Many of the men who would lead and command in their own right, and who would eventually usurp recalcitrants like Hargest and Inglis, saw in Freyberg a person of authority, loyalty, great courage, and determination.

The effects of the court of inquiry, Churchill's quest for a scapegoat, the disloyalty of Hargest and Inglis, and the actions of Fraser in dealing directly with Middle East Command eroded much of Freyberg's authority. Politically, he was on notice from Fraser who was actively seeking his replacement. Militarily, Wavell, who was one of his only supporters, was about to be replaced as part of the Crete and Greece fall-out, and within the division he was stuck with a group of recalcitrant agenda-driven senior leaders. The only positive was the personal authority amongst the men of the division that Freyberg was developing through his leadership and strong interpersonal skills.

⁴¹ Laurie Barber and John Tonkin- Covell, *Freyberg: Churchill's Salamander* (Auckland: Century Hutchinson, 1989), 280-281.

⁴² Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 326.

A huge responsibility rested on Freyberg's shoulders. The mandate of his charter gave great latitude and also great responsibility. Freyberg understood from the start the magnitude of the task and accepted that responsibility. Furthermore, he understood the dichotomy of reporting directly to a government half a world away while in an operational theatre, and being answerable to the regional and Imperial chains of command.

He remained on the Imperial Officers list, seconded to the New Zealand Government but in accordance with his charter was determined to place the wishes and needs of the New Zealand government first. That he understood the nuances and conflicts inherent in this situation and willingly accepted the intrinsic responsibility at all reflected well Freyberg's intellect, determination and integrity. His conduct throughout both campaigns had demonstrated his extrinsic responsibility. He balanced his loyalty to both sets of superiors and worked with the men of his command to fight the battles and then following defeat extract his forces from the war zones. Freyberg cared about his men and he actively saved them from an even bigger debacle. In Greece he was evacuated amongst the last formations on 29 April 1941 and again from Crete on 31 May, the last echelons being evacuated on the 1 June 1941.

To summarize, Freyberg's command at this stage is categorized by Pigeau and McCann's model as ineffectual command.⁴³ Although exonerated, the specter of Crete hung over Freyberg's career. His competency was questioned by his political and military superiors, some of his peers and even some of his direct reports from within the division. This shadow of incompetence impacted the confidence his superiors had in him and severely eroded Freyberg's authority. His responsibility to the New Zealand government remained high as did his commitment to fulfilling those responsibilities. Pigeau and McCann describe ineffectual

⁴³ Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann, "Re-Conceptualizing Command and Control" in *Canadian Military Journal* 3 no.1, Spring 2002, 63

command as a situation where the commander is powerless to accomplish the mission yet feels responsible for not having done so. Moreover, they assert that the individual in this position is placed under tremendous psychological pressure.⁴⁴ In the face of significant enemy threats in North Africa and a pressing need to rebuild and rehabilitate his division, Freyberg had a considerable amount of work to do to remediate his command situation and to reset it to its optimally balanced command condition.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

6. APOGEE: VICTORY IN NORTH AFRICA, MAY 1943.

BACKGROUND

In June 1941, Wavell was replaced with General Claude Auchinleck, an Indian Army officer who though trained in modernized and mechanized orders of battle still held an Imperial small-war viewpoint. Auchinleck still clung to Wavell's operational construct of centrally commanded box defences and brigade level tactics. Freyberg's view was that while box defence and brigade-based action may have been suitable for the tactically and materially inferior Italian forces, the arrival of DAK changed everything. The New Zealander, like Auchinleck and Wavell, did not want a return to the attritional static warfare of World War I but, unlike the others, he viewed the desert as a vast campaign ground that would provide well-led division-sized mobile forces with organic armour and artillery, the greatest opportunity for success: this conception was a very similar doctrinal position to that of his new adversary Rommel.⁴⁵

The consequence of these tactics for the NZ Division was the continued expectation that the division would be deployed as brigades piecemeal as and where Middle East Command saw fit, reinforcing failure and raising questions of British operational and tactical decision making. Freyberg, however, viewed the mid 1941 failures of BREVITY and BATTLEAXE, with which the division was thankfully not involved, as confirmation of his tactical doctrine.

As a result of these failures, Freyberg redoubled his efforts to rebuild and prepare the division for the action it would see in the near future. Moreover, he steadfastly refused to allow the division to be broken up and deployed piecemeal; in so doing, he infuriated Auchinleck and his staff, improved his standing with the New Zealand Government and ensured the division's brigades would not be liquidated in box defences as the detached brigades of the Indian,

⁴⁵ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 85-88.

Australian and South African divisions were.

Auchinleck's CRUSADER aimed to relieve Tobruk and took place in November 1941. The actions of the NZ Division in blunting the DAK and forcing the corridor to Tobruk provided the only success in an otherwise failed effort. The NZ Division had been successful despite significant battle losses arising from brigade group tactics and the absence of armoured support, because of Freyberg's skillful command in purposely concentrating his forces, his tactical ability to act quickly, meticulous training and preparation, and some plain good luck.

In review of CRUSADER afterwards, Freyberg continued to disagree with Auchinleck's tactics and dispositions. He viewed the continued piecemeal destruction of brigades at the hands of the enemy as extremely wasteful and voiced his concern at the detached command of armour and artillery. Despite the failure, Middle East Command did not share Freyberg's view and Auchinleck did not change his operational or tactical outlook. The pressure on Freyberg to reassign his brigades to other commands for box defence duty remained. Nothing changed.⁴⁶

In June 1942, Axis forces moved again in Cyrenaica prompting the rushed return of the NZ Division from Syria where it had been training and re-equipping. The division was deployed into the Mersa Matruh defensive box. Throughout the battle that broke out on 27 June 1942, the Allied forces were picked off piecemeal, due to extremely poor armoured and artillery support. Once again, the division fought well although the complete absence of armoured support cost it dearly. Freyberg, although seriously wounded, was furious at the outcome.

Auchinleck eventually managed to check and halt the axis forces at Alamein but like Wavell before him, he too had run out of time and was replaced in mid-August 1942 by Montgomery. Montgomery visited the division on 13 August 1942. Freyberg explained to him his concept of

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 107-108

operations and the difficulties of working with detached armour. He outlined his position as national commander and his desire to keep the division intact. To his surprise, Montgomery agreed with his appraisals and confirmed that he viewed the division as a national entity.⁴⁷

In Montgomery, Freyberg found a man who while idiosyncratic in the extreme shared the same operational view of the theatre and applied the same tactical approach as he did. Moreover, Montgomery respected Freyberg's situation as a national commander and recognized the quality of the division Freyberg had built following the Crete debacle.⁴⁸ It was a watershed for Freyberg and his command of 2nd NZ Division and 2NZEF. No longer would Freyberg be the doctrinal outlier. His concept of operations was shared and synchronised with the operational commander and his division recognised for its quality and tactical excellence. Freyberg and the NZ Division under Montgomery would finally have the opportunity to realise and demonstrate their combat potential.

Montgomery's first operation, LIGHTFOOT, in late October 1942 commenced with a massive artillery barrage followed by a wide-fronted assault on the Alamein line to throw back the Axis forces. The NZ Division's role was to crumble the DAK and Italian forces in its area of operations. Once again, Freyberg was not confident of effective armoured support and once again he was proved right. LIGHTFOOT dislodged the Axis forces in part but the fighting was vicious and the battle stalled inconclusively after three days duration.

Montgomery then decided on a change of course. A new plan, SUPERCHARGE, would involve the NZ Division punching a hole in the Axis forces positioned on Miteiriya Ridge with two additional brigades and armour under its direct control. Once breached, 8th Army armour would pour through and unseat the Axis forces. Freyberg was given the task of drawing up and

⁴⁷ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 123.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 122-123.

executing the plan for his area of operations. A plan revolving around a coordinated mobile all arms operation was devised. This time, Freyberg assumed tactical command over all land elements operating in his sector. His tactical HQ would coordinate and lead from the front using two converted tanks to function as his mobile forward headquarters. He was concerned that his infantry and artillery would make the objectives, but then be exposed to flanking fire if “his” armour was too risk averse. His pressure on the armoured unit commanders to reach objectives and deliver their role would be sustained and insistent. By 3 November 1942, the hole at the ridge had been punched through and armour poured through the breach. Rommel and the Axis forces disengaged and started withdrawing. The tide of the battle for North Africa had turned. A relentless pursuit of the withdrawing Axis forces westwards across the North African desert to Tripoli would follow.

As always, 2NZEF published a lessons learned booklet for internal distribution.

Montgomery provided a preamble to the introduction:

What this pamphlet does not bring out is the magnificent leadership of LT General Sir Bernard Freyberg, the Commander of the New Zealand forces in the Middle East. His splendid example, untiring energy and infectious optimism were an inspiration to the whole Army; wherever the battle was most intense, there was General Freyberg to be found. Such outstanding leadership can rarely have been seen in the history of the British Army.⁴⁹

Freyberg banned the publication of this paragraph but was knighted again on 20 November 1942 “in recognition of supreme gallantry and excellent achievements of the New Zealand troops and their Commander in recent operations”.⁵⁰ SUPERCHARGE established the NZ Division’s reputation as a dynamic hard hitting force and re-established Freyberg’s personal connections with the highest levels of the British establishment to his, the division’s and New

⁴⁹ Earl of Rocksavage, “*A Days March Nearer Home*” (Bumpus, 1947): 156, quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 408.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 408.

Zealand's advantage.

Montgomery, like Freyberg, envisaged breaking the Axis forces completely by outflanking their withdrawal with a series left hooks from a mobile force that would skirt the inland Western Desert. An armour-augmented NZ Division was selected as the flanking anvil that the DAK and Italian forces would be driven against by the remainder of the 8th Army. The division would conduct a series of left hooks from November 1942 through to the end of March 1943 first at Sollum, then west of El Aghelia, Tripoli and finally through the previously impassable desert south of the Matmata hills to Tebaga Gap behind the Axis last line of defence at Mareth. Each time the NZ Division closed the Axis forces there would be bloody engagement and then a speedy withdrawal by the Germans and Italians. Technically, these engagements were a series of tactical victories to the Allies but not the decisive campaign-ending hammer strike envisioned. Freyberg now faced significant tactical, operational and strategic crises. He was short on reserves and reinforcements. Divisional manpower attrition had now become a major tactical consideration; untrained reinforcements from New Zealand were arriving in small numbers only and desert diseases and combat were taking a toll on the men in the field. The heady days of unlimited New Zealand manpower were over. War industry and military demand for manpower exceeded New Zealand's capability to supply more personnel. Operationally, Freyberg was deeply concerned about the length of his supply lines and the ability of support functions to keep up with the division's mobile race across the dessert. Moreover, the length of his supply lines meant that if the enemy chose to stand and fight, Freyberg's up-scaled division was in effect on its own. Freyberg found himself dealing with the same considerations Rommel faced when he too had reached the limit of his supply lines, namely, to act with caution searching for a decisive advantage while avoiding an attritional clash beyond the means of his force or to

accept great risk for great gain. Freyberg chose the former. He was determined that the division would not overreach or overrun itself and suffer the same fate as the DAK at Alamein.

Strategically, the war in the Pacific was going poorly for the Allies, the Japanese were on Australia's doorstep and there was pressure to return the division home to defend the Pacific. In this context, Fraser and the New Zealand government relied heavily on Freyberg's judgment and appraisals.

The Mareth line was the last major backstop for the Axis forces in eastern North Africa. Freyberg's division, now comprising nearly 20,000 men, arrived at Tebaga Gap and waited to concentrate. The concerns of manpower attrition, length of supply lines and isolation were foremost in Freyberg's mind. To the north, the 8th Army had been pushed back from Mareth by enemy action and Montgomery changed tactics. The main thrust would now come through Tebaga Gap from the NZ Division augmented by a full corps HQ provided by Lieutenant-General Horrocks and his 10 Corps. It has been variously argued that Freyberg was relieved of his command. Wright and Paul Freyberg argue that Horrocks and his HQ were placed in support of the NZ Division and that a dual command had been established. Events following, where Freyberg was given corps command, tend to support this argument.⁵¹ Freyberg planned and executed a major all-arms battle through Tebaga Gap assisted by elements of the Desert Air Force. It was a success: enemy resistance crumbled and collapsed. Tebaga Gap was forced and once again the Axis forces were in headlong retreat westwards; this time, they had nowhere to go.

A few sporadic battles occurred following Mareth, including a vicious assault on Takrouna but for all intents and purposes Axis resistance was over in North Africa. Freyberg

⁵¹ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 159-162 & Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 429-433.

took the unconditional surrender of all Axis forces at Enfidaville on the 12 and 13 May 1943. Freyberg's war in North Africa was over.

FREYBERG'S COMMAND SITUATION: MAY 1943

Freyberg's career was now at its apogee and he was at the pinnacle of his success. Freyberg had rehabilitated his command situation, re-mustered and re-equipped his division. Using the now elite shock troops of the NZ Division, he successfully overcame the early desert penny packet losses and fought the Axis forces in Africa in a series of mobile hard hitting left hooks that pushed the enemy ever westwards from the cusp of campaign victory at Alamein to utter collapse and eventual surrender to Freyberg at Enfidaville on 13 May 1943. Analysis of Freyberg's command situation in May 1943 using Pigeau and McCann's three dimensional command capability model describes the competency, authority and responsibility he combined together to achieve this success.

As late as September 1941, Fraser was still canvassing for a successor to Freyberg. Despite the misgivings about his corps level command ability, Wavell and Auchinleck considered that Freyberg was still the man for the NZ Division. Wavell went so far as to offer employment in India with him if he was replaced.⁵² The actions of the division under Freyberg's command during CRUSADER and the June battles of Mersa Matruh had dispelled any misgivings Middle East Command had in regard to his competency as a divisional commander. His troops were well trained and effective, his division cohesive and successful. Moreover, Maadi had become a bustling New Zealand town in the middle of Egypt and the 2NZEF administration and support organizations were performing well. Freyberg and his division had the respect of their comrades and adversaries. Wright provides an Allied perspective from a U.S. intelligence report prior to

⁵² Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 326-328.

Minqar Qaim:

In the battle which is sure to come within a few days outcome depends almost entirely on Freyberg's (sic) Division and air support. New Zealand Division is by far the best fighting unit in the Middle East. Freyberg (sic) is a very great leader of men possessed of tremendous courage and sound judgment. My personal opinion is that New Zealanders are superior to the German 90th light.⁵³

Rommel, reviewing the NZ Division's breakout at Minqar Qaim, had come to much the same conclusion. He had a healthy respect for the New Zealanders, and he too understood the quality of Freyberg's leadership and the quality of the division's combat power and cohesiveness. This assessment is no faint praise considering Freyberg and Rommel had similar doctrinal views and that Freyberg had assiduously analysed Rommel's tactics to effect his defeat:

Unfortunately the New Zealanders under Freyberg had escaped. This division, with which we had already become acquainted with in 1941-42, was among the elite of the British Army, and I should have been very much happier if it had been safely tucked away in our prison camps instead of still facing us.⁵⁴

The obligation that Freyberg felt as a national commander responsible to the New Zealand government and his steadfast refusal to allow any breakup of the division into separately deployed brigades frustrated Auchinleck and his staff. This frustration, however, had the reciprocal effect on Fraser; Freyberg's resolute advocacy of his charter and the division's needs built Fraser's confidence in him as did his command of the division through CRUSADER. As a result of Freyberg's combat success and his advocacy for sound doctrinal concepts, his men and the division, within Middle East Command there would be no questions asked of Freyberg's competency as a divisional commander for the rest of his tenure as GOC 2NZEF.

By the end of the North Africa Campaign, Freyberg had reached the age of 54. He had

⁵³ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 115.

⁵⁴ Erwin Rommel, *The Rommel Papers* (Collins, 1953): 238,240, quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 378.

been the commander of 2NZEF for two and half years of which two years were spent with the NZ Division in combat. He was at the peak of his powers and the apogee of his command situation in North Africa and his career. In terms of intellectual competency, at the very least, his strategy and tactics for the defeat of the Axis forces in North Africa were in tune with those of his army commander, Montgomery. Wright et al allude tangentially to the possibility of Montgomery calling others' ideas his, but this assertion is inconclusive.⁵⁵ Freyberg and the NZ Division became Montgomery's preferred option: SUPERCHARGE was derived from Freyberg's existing breakout plan for LIGHTFOOT and was executed through the NZ Division sector with tactical command assigned to Freyberg when LIGHTFOOT bogged down. Montgomery recognized Freyberg's superior competency in all-arms maneuver warfare which explains why he and the division were selected for the left hooks and the hitherto impassable route to Tebaga Gap. Despite Montgomery being renowned for hyperbole when it reflected well on him, it is not unreasonable to suggest he was sincere when he classified Freyberg as "easily my best fighting divisional commander. The best fighting divisional commander I have ever known".⁵⁶

Fraser too had recognised in Freyberg the superior qualities he had been searching for in 1939. Freyberg had duly become part of the senior group managing the military fortunes of New Zealand. In so doing, he transcended his role as a tactical commander and was operating in a military strategic context, grappling with such issues as the possible return of the division to New Zealand and the now chronic shortage of reinforcements. Fraser's confidence in Freyberg was so great that he reluctantly telegrammed Churchill suggesting Freyberg be considered for higher

⁵⁵ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 134 & Glyn Harper, "Major General Howard Kippenberger: The Education of a Commander" in *Born to Lead? Portraits of New Zealand Commanders*, ed. Glyn Harper and Joel Hayward, 128-131. (Auckland: Exisle Publishing, 2003), 126.

⁵⁶ Nigel Hamilton, "*Monty*" (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1981), quoted in Watty McEwan, *Salamander's Brood* (Masterton: Fraser Books, 2007), 121.

command above divisional level:

Freyberg has more than fulfilled all our expectations and we are deeply appreciative of his outstanding services to New Zealand. As Commander of the New Zealand Division in five campaigns in which he has acquitted himself with the greatest distinction, we feel that he is due for some further recognition. You should make it clear that while nothing is further from our desires than to lose him, it would be a source of greatest regret to us if his association with the New Zealand Forces should react detrimentally to his own prospects for a senior command.⁵⁷

Freyberg now faced a new conundrum. Without a doubt, Freyberg wished to take the opportunity of higher command; however, to do so would mean relinquishing command and leaving 2NZEF. At this point, a subtle but significant change in Freyberg's viewpoint had occurred. Until now, his sense of duty and his commitment to the government was the overarching factor of his heavy responsibility to New Zealand. In commanding the division through Greece, Crete and North Africa, Freyberg had developed a stout emotional attachment to the men and women of 2NZEF. Kippenberger claimed he rediscovered his New Zealand roots and later when Freyberg visited the 19th Indian brigade for the first time at Orsogna, he introduced himself to Colonel Moloney as "Freyberg, the New Zealander".⁵⁸ Even for Freyberg, a man of high aspirations and strong credentials, because of this new emotional dimension, leaving 2NZEF for a higher command opportunity would not be easy. In his response to Fraser, he speaks not only to his sense of loyalty, integrity, responsibility and a new sense of belonging to 2NZEF, but also, as a subtext, it is evident that his reserves of emotional resilience were being tested:

I deeply appreciate your kind thought but my personal wish is to return to the division and the 2NZEF. From a personal point of view I have no military ambitions save one – to be at the head of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force and bring it back at the end of the war, which, please God, will be soon.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 431.

⁵⁸ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 169.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 433.

Freyberg's legal authority had remained high after Crete, albeit with stern instructions from Fraser as to the limits thereof and how Fraser wanted communication improved. However, Freyberg's personal authority had been damaged by Crete and its aftermath. Freyberg took a multi stranded approach to repair this damage. Freyberg's attitude to welfare of men of the division and his inspirational, gritty and courageous leadership in battle had paid great dividends. His enlightened attitude to discipline had once again frustrated Middle East Command though, an apocryphal example being Freyberg's reply to Major-General Arthur Smith who complained that the New Zealand soldiers never saluted their superiors: "Try waving to them, they'll always wave back".⁶⁰

Freyberg, hurt by the criticism of Hargest and Inglis, decided to take concrete steps to build better relationships with his subordinates. He engaged them firstly by instituting a collective and consultative operational planning process, the colloquially named "Divisional Cabinet" that would remain in place for the rest of hostilities which involved and engaged the senior leaders of the division "consisting of Freyberg and the senior brigadiers and when an operation was being prepared, plans would be fully and even outspokenly debated. Freyberg would listen carefully to everyone in turn, then sum up and make the final decision."⁶¹

Secondly, he deliberately set out to entertain, informally, his senior leaders so that he could get to know them better and they he. Freyberg, searching for answers to the divisions' failures and striving to meet his commitment to the New Zealand government, utilised his strong interpersonal skills to reestablish his authority and build relationships. His interpersonal skills catalysed his agile searching intellect and intrinsic authority into a deft, careful and personable programme of internal authority building and top down capability and personality evaluation of

⁶⁰ Fred Majdalany, *Cassino Portrait of a Battle* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1957), 101.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

his staff. Those subordinates who showed potential and met Freyberg's high standards of professional conduct and personal integrity would remain. Those who did not would be sent elsewhere; the underperformers that he could gently move aside he did. Stevens tells of a man who could not bear to be unkind.⁶² Puttick would be sent back to New Zealand as CGS, Andrews and other would follow. Hargest would be captured at Mersa Matruh, escape (writing a book of his exploits), and then be killed at Normandy in 1944 never returning to 2NZEF, while Inglis would remain with the division, finally resigning in 1944 when he was passed over for temporary divisional command.

By the time of Montgomery's arrival in North Africa, Freyberg's steadfast advocacy of the NZ Division and 2NZEF had restored and enhanced the authority he had with Fraser and, as Stevens says; "he was now one of us in every way".⁶³ The men belonged to him and he belonged to the men. Moreover, the break in Freyberg's relationship with Churchill had been mended; Churchill telegraphed Freyberg on 4 July 1942: "Deeply moved to hear of your new wound and new glory. Trust that your injury is not serious and that you will soon be back commanding your splendid division. All good wishes to you and them."⁶⁴

Freyberg was at the peak of his authority. Extrinsically, Fraser trusted him completely allowing him to go to the limits of his charter, often seeking his strategic and military political advice on wider issues beyond the mandate of his charter. Freyberg's actions and those of the division enabled him to develop high levels of authority. The men of 2NZEF developed a great respect and an enduring deep affection for Tiny Freyberg. Moreover, this personal authority permeated New Zealand Society, Freyberg's actions and character had generated a powerful

⁶² W.G. Stevens, *Freyberg, V.C. The Man* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1965), 41.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁶⁴ Winston Churchill, "*Second World War, Vol 4, The Hinge of Fate*" (Cassell, 1951) quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 381.

reputation within the hearts and minds of all levels New Zealand society, and the first seeds of the Freyberg myth had been sown. In developing his relationships with Montgomery and his staff, Freyberg was able to prosecute his war objectives, meet the demands of his charter and sustain and maintain 2NZEF and the NZ Division in its entirety to this point. His input into tactical, operational and strategic issues was valued and actively sought by his peers and superiors and finally, his privileged and long term relationships with Churchill and other members of the British establishment provided him with, in some cases, superior intrinsic authority to his military peers and superiors in the Middle East.

Freyberg remained heavily burdened with the responsibility of command, training, support and administration for all echelons of 2NZEF and its fighting element, the NZ Division. He remained resolutely committed to those responsibilities. If anything, Freyberg's already profound burden of responsibility became greater. Broader issues such as manpower shortages and Japanese military expansion in the Pacific affected every decision he made regarding the New Zealand troops in the Middle East. As his internal authority increased, the demands on him for advice and direction too increased. His steadfast commitment to his charter, the New Zealand government and the men and women of his command remained constant.

To summarise, following the disaster of Crete, Freyberg rehabilitated his command situation and redeemed himself. Freyberg created and organized the support functions of 2NZEF from virtually nothing. His preparation of his division was meticulous, and the division he commanded in battle provided the Allies with the only glimmers of light in North Africa from 1941 to mid 1942. In so doing, he exceeded the expectations of New Zealand, its government and its society, decisively answering the lingering questions about his competency, regaining the confidence of the New Zealand Government, his military superiors, peers and subordinates and

reestablishing his informal contacts throughout the British establishment. He remained staunchly committed to 2NZEF and his insightful appreciation of the battle space and requirements for victory demonstrated a strong intellect at least the equal of those who had hitherto commanded in Middle East Command.

Freyberg's position on the command capability space occupied the balanced command envelope. Freyberg demonstrated the required competencies, possessed superior levels of personal and legal authority, and carried his high load of extrinsic responsibility well. His staunch advocacy and commitment to 2NZEF demonstrated his high levels of intrinsic responsibility. In May 1943, the apogee of Freyberg's career was reached. His competency was superior and unquestioned. Intellectually, his tactical and operational appreciations for the war in the Middle East gained wide acceptance with his military superiors. He was a good practitioner of higher tactics. His physical endurance, toughness courage and presence allowed him to inspirationally lead his men in the very heart of battle.

Freyberg was highly regarded by his military colleagues and political masters. His loyal, resolute and courageous character had, through his life, enabled Freyberg to forge strong enduring friendships often with people of influence or power enabling him to move about these relationships and contexts with significant personal authority. Moreover, Freyberg used the wide ranging and broad legal authority provided in his charter carefully to steward and develop the valuable and limited resources of the Dominion of New Zealand. With this authority came the increasingly heavy weight of responsibility. Freyberg remained steadfastly committed to his responsibility to New Zealand and its soldiers even at the personal cost of his higher command aspirations.

Freyberg's position on Pigeau and McCann's command continuum was optimal:

Balanced Command, competency was superior and authority was developed to such an extent that it was commensurate with the heavy burden of responsibility he held.

7. PERSONAL LOW POINT: THE ROAD TO ITALY AND CASSINO, MARCH 1944.

BACKGROUND

After the collapse of the Axis in North Africa, Freyberg and the division made their way back to the New Zealand Expeditionary Base Camp at Maadi just outside Cairo and waited for the next development in the Middle East campaign. Within the division the returning forces recouped, reformed and re-mustered. The process of generating organic armour was completed; to this end, the 4th Infantry Battalion converted to the new Sherman tank and assumed its place in the division's order of battle. The longest serving members of the division, the Greece and Crete veterans, were sent home to New Zealand on a furlough scheme. Reinforcement drafts arrived from New Zealand replacing the furlough men. Training was carried out, courses were completed and leave was taken where possible. It was a busy time and the division gradually prepared for inevitable deployment again in the field because the British were hard pressed. The main question was where? Would the division transfer to Europe, return to the Pacific or redeploy to South East Asia under Mountbatten?

The arrival of the US land combat forces into the Middle East marked the swing away from imperial dominance of Allied operational planning. US manpower and war materiel flooded into the Middle East area of operations and was now building in the UK for the planned invasion of continental Fortress Europe. The Soviet Union continued to bleed German forces on the Eastern Front but attrition on both sides was monumental and unsustainable. The shift in western geopolitical power from the British to the US was now becoming evident. The British strategic preference was to wait, and wait some more, while strategic bombing took effect, patiently building forces in Great Britain to launch a well prepared strike across the channel at a time and place of its choosing. This prospect would take time and an extraordinary degree of

planning. The US with larger manpower and materiel capacity, asserting its new position and taking a greater say in the prosecution of the war, pressed for a policy that envisaged a concentrated drive into France through one operation to be executed as soon as possible. The Soviets, however, disagreed. The Soviet position was that the US and British were unduly delaying, waiting for the Germans to bleed out in Eastern Europe at the hands of the Soviets. The Soviet Union put pressure on the western allies to do more sooner. Churchill, in his inimitable way grasped an opportunity to relieve pressure on the Eastern Front, knock Italy out of the war and retain some options for southern France or northern Europe while building forces and planning for a main invasion of Europe through France in 1944. This route, Churchill thought, would be achieved by attacking Italy, Hitler's soft underbelly, across the Mediterranean with forces now available following the defeat of the axis in North Africa.⁶⁵ In the end, the US acquiesced but unhappily. Friction was evident and support came at a price: a lower operational priority was placed upon the Italy venture along with resource limitations. New Zealand participation arose through its close location in North Africa, the impending use of its higher formation the British 8th Army and because of a vacillating New Zealand Government. The Australian division in North Africa urgently sailed south for combat in Papua New Guinea and New Zealand was under pressure from the Australians to follow suit. However, Churchill applied pressure of his own to the New Zealand government to remain in the northern hemisphere. The interim decision was to stay, but the question of redeployment options was not solved at this point and would remain a festering irritation for Freyberg until late 1944.

The plan for the combined invasion of Italy envisaged a sea landing in Sicily, Operation HUSKY, and on to the mainland via the straits of Messina, Reggio di Calabria and Salerno,

⁶⁵ Brendon Piers, *Sir Winston Churchill: Biographical History* (Cambridge, Churchill College Cambridge) available from http://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/archives/collections/churchill_papers/biography/; Internet; accessed 12 December 2012

Operations BAYTOWN and AVALANCHE. The west coast combat would be undertaken by the US 5th Army under the ambitious but inexperienced General Mark Clark, while the British 8th Army under Montgomery would drive up the east coast. The two legs of the operation would be split by the Apennines running the length of the peninsular.

The New Zealanders were well placed for an operational role. The NZ Division was recognized as a small self-contained mobile national army; well resourced, rested and acknowledged as the premier discrete fighting unit of the Imperial forces in the Middle East. Freyberg too had been acknowledged for his leadership, command, and tactical and operational battle-space mastery.⁶⁶ It was assumed that the battle-hardened New Zealanders would play a key mobile role in the quick push through Italy. Later, as Montgomery left and preparation for OVERLORD built, it was even proposed that “The Div” go with him redeploying to England for breakout operations in Western Europe if they were not sent home and the New Zealand government agreed.⁶⁷ Freyberg disagreed. In his view, it was likely that the division would be employed only as an operational reserve if it was transferred to Western Europe at this late stage. His recommendation to stay the course in Italy due to redeployment timings and the operational delay it would cause gave the New Zealand government an opportunity to revisit its choice to keep the division in Europe altogether. Freyberg’s recommendation was accepted by Fraser and the New Zealand government.⁶⁸ It is obvious too that Freyberg had been thinking of higher command opportunities, and it appeared that his temporary command of 10 Corps may have

⁶⁶ Freyberg family papers, quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 408.

⁶⁷ Hamilton quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 452 & Freyberg’s personal signals to New Zealand P191 4 January 1944 quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 452-453.

⁶⁸ Department of Internal Affairs, *Documents relating to New Zealand’s Participation in the Second World War 1939-45 Volume 11* (Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, 1951), 200-204.

become permanent⁶⁹ Stevens reflects on a discussion between he and Freyberg on the same subject. Stevens implies that Freyberg's preference for higher command had to involve continued command of the division. Clearly, this could not be the case, which meant that Freyberg remained as a divisional commander with the NZ Division.⁷⁰

Mussolini was deposed in July 1943 and on 8 September, as BAYTOWN commenced Italy surrendered. German forces in Italy quickly put down the Italian armed forces, taking over and garrisoning Italy as an occupied country: the south under Field Marshal Kesselring and the north under Field Marshal Rommel. The German OKW plan was to hold Northern Italy cutting off Allied options through the Balkans by conducting a slow attritional withdrawal up to the middle of the peninsular using the geography and weather conditions to enable the construction of consolidated and strengthened defensive lines below Rome, tracking across continental Italy at the Liri valley, the Winterstellung or Winter Line.⁷¹

In October 1943, Maadi was drawn down and 2NZEF deployed across the Mediterranean to a new forward operating base at Bari in southern Italy. Under Montgomery's command, the division would be pushed along the eastern side of Italy crossing the Sangro and capturing Castel Frentano in early December. The division pushed up against stiff German opposition at Orsogna, the eastern tip of the Winterstellung, which they were unable to dislodge. To Freyberg, it had become evident that the deserts campaign tactics of maneuver, speed and broad fronts were not applicable to the Italian theatre. Much like World War 1, overcoming the topography and weather conditions that constrained timings and breadth of maneuver against a well prepared and tenacious adversary were the key operating considerations. In late December 1943, in appalling

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 192-199.

⁷⁰ W G Stevens, *Freyberg, VC; The Man* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1965), 123-125.

⁷¹ Ralph Mavrogordato, Chapter 12, Hitler's Decision on the Defense of Italy in *Command Decisions*, ed. Kent Roberts Greenfield, 303-323 (Washington DC: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1960) available from http://www.history.army.mil/books/70-7_0.htm internet; accessed 20 September 2012, 303-312.

weather conditions that halted any further operations on the east coast, the division was withdrawn into reserve.

Meanwhile on the west coast, Clark's 5th Army was pushing the Germans back towards Rome. Progress was made but losses were costly amongst the relatively inexperienced US forces. In December, Clark's advancing 2nd Corps pitched inland picking up route six as it followed the Garigliano River toward Cassino. Concurrently, the US 6th Corps, a two division amphibious force under Clark landed at Anzio (Operation SHINGLE) to destabilise the defenders. The goal was, ideally, to capture Rome or at the very least, draw off German forces from the Winterstellung. For the Allies, this move was planned to shift the main effort west to open the advance through the Liri valley and into the plains beyond. For the Germans, Cassino and the valley it sat in was both funnel and the bulwark for their Winterstellung. The natural features of the area and man-made improvements shaped by those same features gave the defenders an extremely strong advantage. The Germans extracted every ounce of this advantage for Cassino's defence. The Liri River had been diverted and the small plain to the west of Cassino Township towards San Angelo had been flooded to form a swamp and barrier. Cassino itself had been emptied and extensively fortified with typical German ingenuity. Well-developed and layered defences with interconnected fields of fire and slowing obstacles would draw the advancing Allied forces into designated killing zones where the advance would stall and the attackers would be worn down and liquidated. The steep sided and barren Monte Cassino (Monastery Hill) stretched out behind, looming over Cassino and overlooking all entries, exits and the key route six roadway. It afforded commanding observation for artillery and infantry defensive plans. Sitting atop Monastery Hill in the defensive line was the imposing Benedictine abbey which the Germans claimed had been set aside as a demilitarized area.

Into these well developed and resourced defenses, Clark pushed his 2nd Corps across the swamped plain in a frontal assault to cross the Liri at San Angelo. A further force, the US 34th Division swept across the Rapido north of Cassino and up the north eastern gulleys of Monte Cairo and Monte Cassino to neutralize the heights above Cassino Township from the rear. Two attacks at San Angelo took place and both were easily and comprehensively thrown back by the defenders. Two of the regiments comprising 2nd Corps were so severely mauled they were disbanded and removed from the 5th Army order of battle.⁷² Meanwhile, the 34th Division became pinned down amid deadly enfilading fire on a two featured ridgeline commonly called the snakes head.

The outcome completely stalled the Allied advance. Clark could go no further. Other than the holding forces of the 34th Division on the snakes head the Winterstellung remained intact. Clark's forces at Cassino were, for the time being spent, The American conceding so to Alexander on 8 February 1944. Moreover, SHINGLE had turned from an Allied opportunity to a liability. Clark's Anzio commander, Lucas, had consolidated his beachhead rather than breaking out. Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, now in command of all Italy reorganized his defences, redeploying his northern reserve and HQ to neutralize, contain and liquidate Lucas' beachhead. There had been no drive to Rome, no destabilisation and no reassigning of forces from the Winterstellung. Indeed, as the Germans redeployed to push Lucas back into the sea, resources required for any Allied push past Cassino were needed at Anzio just to hold the beachhead. Instead of destabilising the defenders, SHINGLE's effect was to destabilise the Allied main effort through the Liri valley. The fortunes of the war in Italy and the reputations, and therefore careers, of Alexander and Clark and theatre commander, Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, were

⁷² For the surviving US GIs in the units involved the losses were so grievous that post war their associations took the unprecedented action of requesting an inquiry into Clark's planning and prosecution of these small actions.

at stake. There would be no mobile breakout for Freyberg and the division to exploit. However, Freyberg was not yet made aware of this setback.

Freyberg, waiting south of Cassino at Mignano, was summonsed in pouring rain to Clark's headquarters where he was presented with a corps command tasked first with remaining ready to exploit an increasingly unlikely break out along route six. Secondly Freyberg was also ordered to prepare a plan that would overcome the defenses of Cassino, open route six through the Liri valley and reduce pressure on the Anzio beachhead by drawing off German resources. His scratch command, New Zealand Corps (NZCORPS) would consist of the 2nd New Zealand Division, the 4th Indian Infantry Division and later the British 78th Infantry Division. Because of the sustained and increasing German pressure on Anzio, there could be no delay. An immediate pressure reducing engagement was required. Freyberg possessed little more than a week to hand over his division to Kippenberger, assess his new command and staff, set up his headquarters and devise a new plan, including pre-positioning and handover of field positions for offensive action. Clearly, this was not enough time for a task of this magnitude and as Barber and Tonkin- Covell understate, "this was unsatisfactory".⁷³

Clark was ambitious, inexperienced and remote. Moreover, he was an attritionalist and despite the resource limitations in Italy he was not concerned by casualties. Clark had scant regard for the patient, crumbling pressure tactics of the battle-weary but experienced Imperial armies and later it would become evident that Clark did not like having Imperial forces under his command. Furthermore, he considered Freyberg a "prima donna" and the New Zealanders as subject to special treatment as a result of their status in theatre.⁷⁴ Clark wrote to Alexander

⁷³ Laurie Barber and John Tonkin- Covell, *Freyberg: Churchill's Salamander* (Auckland: Century Hutchinson, 1989), 200.

⁷⁴ Mark Clark, *Calculated Risk* (London: George G Harrop & Co., 1951), 283-284 & Trevelyan quoted in Laurie Barber and John Tonkin- Covell, *Freyberg: Churchill's Salamander ...*, 194.

actively requesting not to have Freyberg brought under his command.⁷⁵ Freyberg was unaware of this situation until 1951.⁷⁶

Freyberg's initial plans envisaged a sweeping flanking movement from the southwest to isolate Monte Cassino via the Garigliano. This maneuver would be executed concurrently with an assault over the Rapido, which avoided the flooded Liri, towards the Cassino railway station and with a resumption of the assault on the heights of Monte Cassino from the rear snakes head massif. Time did not allow adequate development or preparation of the planned southwest flanking element. The constant bad weather worked against any pre-positioning and moreover NZCORPS could not generate quickly enough the resources required to execute this leg of the plan, so it was abandoned. The Liri remained in flood at San Angelo. Moreover, reports from the snakes head to Clark remained unrealistically optimistic that one more push through to the summit would turn out the Germans on the hill.⁷⁷ Amidst the conflicting operational politics, a confusing tactical situation generated by wildly variable reports and dual command intent Freyberg's plan was downscaled to a shifted continuation of Clark's plan. The main effort would move east from San Angelo to Cassino and use fresh experienced troops spread over the same general terrain type and features.⁷⁸ Freyberg's realizing his forces' limitations, the time pressures and the geographical and manmade constraints placed in front of him by the enemy made his own assessment of success "that it was no more than a 50/50 proposition".⁷⁹ Looking at the front and reflecting on a costly and bitter entrenched battle in North Africa, Freyberg commented to Kippenberger, on 15 February 1944, that it could be "another Takrouna".⁸⁰ He was well aware of

⁷⁵ Mark Clark, *Calculated Risk* (London: George G Harrop & Co., 1951), 283.

⁷⁶ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 535.

⁷⁷ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary – Part V, October 1944-January 1945* (New Zealand Archives, Department of Internal Affairs: WA 8 7/67), 06 February 1944, 521.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 06 February 1944, 521.

⁷⁹ Fred Majdalany, *Cassino Portrait of a Battle* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1957), 107

⁸⁰ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary...*, 25 January 1944, 515.

the constraints and the conflicts placed upon his plan and NZCORPS by timing, politics, weather and terrain. Moreover, his previous experience meant he had a healthy respect for the strength of German defensive works. The dominating feature in Freyberg's view was Monte Cassino (Monastery Hill). For route six to be opened, Cassino Township must be taken and before the township could be taken the heights of Monte Cassino must be held and controlled. The Abbey atop Monastery Hill concerned him as it did his subordinate commanders. Kippenberger wanted it bombed and Tucker was not confident that his division could achieve its task of taking the high point of Monte Cassino, upon which the abbey stood, without the abbey (and its military occupants) first being softened. Freyberg did not trust the Germans, so despite their protestations that the abbey was not pressed for military use and sat in a de-militarised area, Freyberg took the view that it was such a dominating feature on the high point of the battle-space that it indeed had become part of the defences and that "if the monastery were hit it cannot be helped".⁸¹ If it was not occupied currently, in all likelihood the abbey would be as soon as fighting reached the hill top, at which time it would be attacked and reduced anyway. It had to be softened and it just as well be at a time of the Allies choosing. After the fact, Clark describes how he refused to sanction the abbey's bombing and how he was overruled by Alexander. In so doing, Clark shifted the blame to Freyberg – a nice little segue for the "Liberator of Rome" to deflect the blame resulting from German propaganda and self righteous post war criticism away from himself.⁸² The contemporary GOC diary describes the same conversation. It, however, clearly diarizes Clark acquiescing to the bombing and so differs significantly from Clark's recollections some seven years later.⁸³ Freyberg was never particularly troubled by the bombing of the abbey;

⁸¹ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary – Part V, October 1944-January 1945* (New Zealand Archives, Department of Internal Affairs: WA 8 7/67), 11 February 1944, 524.

⁸² Mark Clark, *Calculated Risk* (London: George G Harrop & Co., 1951), 299-303

⁸³ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary...*, 12 February 1944, 526.

it was regrettable but it was the consequence of war, and neither seemed the Pope who offered sanctuary to Paul Freyberg and granted Freyberg, Fraser and some divisional officers an audience on 9 June 1944.⁸⁴

Freyberg was notified on 14 February 1944 that his son Paul had been posted as missing in action at Anzio.⁸⁵ He was devastated; this loss was for Freyberg a very, very personal low point. It was the only time in six years of command that Stevens, Kippenberger and Davin ever found him bereft and disconsolate.⁸⁶ Despite Freyberg only wanting to soften the abbey, it was effectively destroyed. Between 0930 and 1330 on 15 February 1944, 442 tons of bombs were dropped on the abbey and the surrounding area. Operation AVENGER, the second battle for Cassino, commenced. As soon as the bombing finished, Tucker's Indian Division now under Brigadier Dimoline moved from start positions across the snakes head making for the summit of Monte Cassino. They too advanced into the same withering enfilading fire that the 34th Division had faced. The attacks and counter attacks that comprised the battle for snakes head ridge and monastery hill would be the hinge of the battle of Cassino itself. The Indian Division faced an extremely difficult task. Logistic support to the ridge entailed two days of mule haulage with the final ascent by manpower across the enfiladed ground; much of the resupply column's ammunition, food and water never even made it to the troops so desperately clinging to the ridge and the divisions' infantry were pressed into service to man handle the supplies up to the snakes head. The ridge offered very little cover and was shared sometimes by both attackers and defenders concurrently. The Indian Division could place no more than two companies at any one time on the ridge while resupply and re-manning for the defenders was much simpler, running

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 9 June 1944, 596.

⁸⁵ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary – Part V, October 1944-January 1945* (New Zealand Archives, Department of Internal Affairs: WA 8 7/67), 14 February 1944, 528.

⁸⁶ W G Stevens, *Freyberg, VC; The Man* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1965), 91.

down from the summit. Notwithstanding, Dimoline was not dynamic or creative in his actions, demurred on agreed objectives, start points and timings, and moreover, required constant chivying from Freyberg to meet planning and staging objectives.⁸⁷ Because of Dimoline's conduct and previous unrealistic intelligence reports, throughout AVENGER, Freyberg was unable to develop a realistic and complete picture of the snakes head battle, could not understand the Indian Divisions' seeming intransigence and therefore failed to discern how unlikely they would be of success.

Clark began to pressure Freyberg for results. Reports back from the Indian Division continued to be cautiously optimistic however the key objective of the summit remained steadfastly beyond the reach of Dimoline's forces. Dimoline could not or would not adapt to find alternative solutions to the seemingly intractable problems on the snakes head. Meanwhile the bitter fighting above Cassino was steadily eroding and attriting the fighting capacity of that unit. Despite Monastery Hill not being in Allied hands, on the night of 17 February 1944, Freyberg ordered forward elements of the NZ Division to attack. The 28th Maori Battalion scurried across the causeway over the Rapido making for the railway station. Once there, they hoped to eject the Germans defending it and open the causeway; next, they would provide force protection to the combat engineers who would erect two bailey bridges over the Rapido. Then, the massed tanks of the NZ Armoured Regiment would cross the Rapido and enter Cassino. The railway station was captured and held but the mine clearance and bridging was incomplete by daybreak. In the morning, the bridgehead area was registered by enemy artillery and the bridging work destroyed. From dawn, NZCORPS artillery filled the railway station area with smoke to protect the Maoris hopefully until dusk when a second effort would be pushed in. However, using the smoke for cover, German tanks and infantry forced the Maoris off the railway station around 4pm. The

⁸⁷ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary...*, 12-15 February 1944, 526-529.

Maoris had no antitank guns, could not fight off the German attack and thus withdrew. Of the 200 Maoris at the railway station, 130 became casualties.⁸⁸ It was another close run for Freyberg and his forces, which left Freyberg frustrated. The Indian Division, despite all the pressure could not overcome the topography and, notwithstanding the valiant effort, a lack of anti-tank guns and some poor luck had led to the Maoris getting pushed off the railway station. The Germans however, were surprised; they did not expect to win back the railway station at all.⁸⁹ A crucial point in the battle had been reached.

After four weeks of fighting costing 7,500 casualties, the Allies had gained only a foothold over the Garigliano and a start point on a gun raked ridgeline behind the monastery. The defenders positions in, around and overlooking Cassino were far too strong to allow a successful continuation of the same battle plan with the resources Freyberg had on hand in NZCORPS. Freyberg paused, reassessed and considered new options. The pressure from further up the command chain remained persistent.

The same decision points for Freyberg were extant. The heights and the town needed to be overcome. Without the heights you could not hold the town and without the town there was no access to the Liri valley. Forging the Rapido downstream of Cassino was still not an option in view of the weather conditions and the precarious nature of the snakes head meant it was no longer considered as a start point for launching the primary attack on Monastery Hill. In the meantime, Dimoline had been replaced by Major-General Galloway and the British 78th Division arriving in the Cassino sector was assigned to NZCORPS.

Freyberg's new plan (Operation DICKENS) envisaged a two pronged attack sweeping toward Cassino from the east. One prong would assault the township to liquidate the defenders

⁸⁸ N C Phillips, *The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939- 1945 Italy Volume 1: The Sangro to Cassino* (Wellington: Historical Publications branch, 1957) 237.

⁸⁹ Fred Majdalany, *Cassino Portrait of a Battle* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1957), 161.

and the second prong would assault Monastery Hill with armoured support using an access road. The access road left Cassino from a point called The Castle. The Indian Division would sweep down a gully to the road, joining up with the second prong at a point called Hangman's Hill. From here, the hill crest was to be assaulted. DICKENS was not a popular plan. Kippenberger openly discussed his dissension with his principal staff officer Colonel Thornton, telling Thornton if ordered to attack Cassino frontally he would resign his command of the division.⁹⁰ Freyberg's authority was at risk from within. He would need to utilise, fully, his intellectual and interpersonal competency and his authority to convince his subordinate commanders that DICKENS was a viable operation. Freyberg's innovative thinking and power of influence won the commanders over with what Freyberg considered the operation's key to success. A massive bombing attack on Cassino would pulverize the defenders and defenses to render the town inert. Immediately following this bombardment, under a huge creeping barrage, in-flooding infantry would evict the desultory remnant garrison while the hill attack would surge through to the access road at The Castle and on to Hangman's Hill. Combat engineers of the town attack would clear the roads for the armour which would support both attacking prongs of infantry, as required, clearing route six and taking the heights. Inwardly, however, Freyberg had his doubts; he remained concerned with the resource limitations and the potential impact on movement the bombing would have. Nevertheless, the pressure on Freyberg to force Cassino meant that his options were limited by higher command direction as Clark continued to build pressure on NZCORPS to deliver some relief for Anzio and for other higher commanders.

DICKENS needed three days of clear weather to dry out the ground for the armour and infantry. Now, the weather closed in and it started to rain and snow. The programmed start date

⁹⁰ Thornton quoted in Denis Mclean, *Howard Kippenberger Dauntless Spirit* (Auckland: Random House, 2008), 270.

was 20 February 1944. The bombing plan was called up and cancelled daily for 21 consecutive days. Meanwhile, the mustered assault troops waited shivering around their start lines. While waiting, Kippenberger fretted, climbing Mount Trocchio on 2 March to view the area, facing Cassino, his troops would traverse. On the way down, he stood on a German mine blowing off one foot completely and mangling the other so badly it required amputation. This event was another hammer blow to Freyberg's personal resilience. Although a man of many friends, Kippenberger was one of Freyberg's closest.⁹¹ Freyberg felt this loss keenly and so too the New Zealand Division as within, Kippenberger was as highly regarded as Freyberg. Moreover, the division had lost its best commander behind Freyberg. Freyberg wrote to Kippenberger personally:

My very dear kip.

I want you to know how very much you will be missed by us all and none more than your old Divisional Commander... Our joint lives have been cast in difficult times. They have been hard but in the main satisfactory days. When I go back again to civil life I will take with me abiding memories of these four years and with them I feel nobody has meant more to me than you have. I feel we shall meet again in New Zealand perhaps, but wherever you may be I feel certain of your friendship as I hope you may feel certain of mine. God bless you and keep you safe and all sympathy.

Bernard Freyberg.⁹²

Freyberg appointed Brigadier Parkinson as Commander of the NZ Division the next day.

Parkinson, competent, steady and the next best, was not however of the same high quality as Kippenberger. Freyberg had to push the NZ Division into Cassino with its third best

commander. Parkinson found himself subject to much of Freyberg's tactical attention as

Freyberg strove to eke out a victory at Cassino. It is from this period that criticism of Freyberg as a micromanager arises.

⁹¹ Denis Mclean, *Howard Kippenberger Dauntless Spirit* (Auckland: Random House, 2008), 273.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 273.

Operation DICKENS began promptly at 0830 on the Ides of March. After another massive bombing raid, the dust settled and Cassino Township had been obliterated. It was now an unnavigable contiguous pile of rubble. Roads no longer existed and buildings were unrecognizable. NZ Division infantry moved in on a single battalion front. The going was tough and although the combat engineers struggled to clear routes and fill massive bomb craters, good progress was made by the infantry. The heights attack enjoyed early success too. Infantry advanced to The Castle where the road up to the monastery opened out, and the Indian Division had descended to Hangman's Hill to make the last assault on the abbey. All that was required was for the three parts of the operation to link and force the heights with armour. It then started to rain and communications broke down. The infantry then discovered that the garrison had emplaced themselves securely and were now shooting the attackers from strong points around them in the demolished houses. Moreover, the Germans had parked heavy tanks hull-down within houses and when the houses were bombed these tanks became fortified high caliber nodes for the defenders. Of particular importance was the route six intersection which was covered by emplaced tanks in the Continental Hotel. That night the Germans teetered on defeat, but the Allies were also struggling. The defenders had suffered appallingly during the bombing but had been able to infiltrate back through the porous Allied lines to reoccupy their noded defence points in the houses. Their defences, though battered, were operable and now well hidden by the destruction wrought by the bombing. The Allied effort had started well but a lack of numbers initially pushed into Cassino by Parkinson, despite Freyberg's urging, precluded attempts to link up at Cassino's northern edge. Moreover, the combat engineers were having a torrid time in the pouring rain and pitch black clearing mines, repairing roads and filling huge bomb craters. Freyberg understood the need to retain the initiative and moving through the tactical

headquarters of subordinate commanders kept the pressure on them, typically urging the Commander Royal Engineers (CRE): “Keep at them, everything depends on what is done tonight.”⁹³

The desperate struggle continued through 16-17 March 1944, neither side gaining an enduring advantage or initiative. Clark continued to pressure Freyberg. Both bickered with each other over the question of infantry numbers in the town. Clark wanted the town flooded with attackers to stop the infiltration. Freyberg responded that the town was literally crawling with defenders and attackers now. Any more would clog the area creating more chaos, reduce reserves, load up the logistic support requirements and cause quantities of unnecessary casualties. Moreover, as Freyberg pointed out, no-one had yet determined how the defenders were infiltrating anyway. The terse exchanges went back and forth. Clark’s attritional, distant and unsupportive command style clashed with the almost polar opposite style of Freyberg’s highly-involved, people-centric leadership and his aversion to unnecessary loss.⁹⁴ Freyberg, under heavy stress, stood his ground and would not back down. Clark, for his own reasons, would not direct him to flood the area with infantry.⁹⁵

In Cassino, the German defenders held on, continued to infiltrate and manned the strong points and nodes. The attackers constantly fought house to house, often fighting over the same house on different days while trying to stop the infiltration, link up and then force the heights from the monastery road. On 19 March 1944, Freyberg sought the decisive blow with three renewed attacks: through the town, at the monastery and finally, executing a surprise attack with armour to the northwest and rear of Monte Cassino at Albanetta Farm. All attacks started well

⁹³ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary – Part V, October 1944-January 1945* (New Zealand Archives, Department of Internal Affairs: WA 8 7/67), 15 March 1944, 547.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17 March 1944, 552-553.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 17 March 1944, 552-553.

but petered out unsuccessfully. The attackers were tiring. Clark continued to pressure Freyberg but Freyberg sensed the initiative shifting to the enemy and the efforts of the attackers becoming more desperate. The situation in the town, at The Castle and on Hangman's Hill was becoming more and more chaotic. While the fighting continued through 21 March 1944, Freyberg's diary shows that he had recognized DICKENS was reaching its culminating point. Casualties were mounting and were no longer sustainable in any of NZCORPS units. Freyberg would not destroy his force in an engagement it likely could not win. Freyberg, using his wisdom borne of years of combat experience and a strong tactical pragmatism, began considering consolidation options. While Cassino would not be won by NZCORPS, the gains made by the blood, sweat and lives of its men would not be totally lost.⁹⁶

On 23 March 1944, Alexander held a conference for his commanders in the Cassino sector. Freyberg reported to Clark that "the New Zealand Division can go no further and that the Indian Division on Hangman's hill should be withdrawn".⁹⁷ Alexander concurred with Freyberg, calling off the battle and allowing Freyberg to consolidate and evacuate those units of NZCORPS still out in the field. It must have been a bitter day for Freyberg. The New Zealand Corps was dissolved on 26 March 1944 and the Indian and New Zealand Divisions withdrew to reconstitute and regroup. Freyberg's leadership of NZCORPS at Cassino had ended. Freyberg's command of NZCORPS did not deliver a victory; however, on balance it was not the complete failure subsequent assessments have claimed: NZCORPS committed German forces to Cassino, thereby relieving pressure at Anzio. It established and consolidated the start points for future Allied operations in the Liri valley. Moreover, Freyberg achieved these objectives in the face of insuperable odds without allowing NZCORPS elements to be destroyed, thus denying the

⁹⁶ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary – Part V, October 1944-January 1945* (New Zealand Archives, Department of Internal Affairs: WA 8 7/67), 21 March 1944, 563.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23 March 1944, 572.

Germans tactical objective of force liquidation.

FREYBERG'S COMMAND SITUATION: LATE MARCH 1944

The recount of Freyberg's war in Italy up to the dissolution NZCORPS describes the background, the fabric and the context of Freyberg's situation. It allows some degree of insight into Freyberg's conduct and thought processes during this time. Analysis using Pigeau and McCann's three dimensional command capability model demonstrates that Freyberg's remained a highly competent commander across the three dimensions of command used in this framework. Freyberg's performance at Cassino reveals that he was suitable for both divisional and higher command. Furthermore, the assessments across the balanced command envelope show Freyberg's situation remained balanced at the close of NZCORPS' two battles for Cassino. Finally, given the movement of Freyberg's command situation through his tenure of 2NZEF and despite a natural tendency and competency for divisional commands, Freyberg continued to develop positively his command capability focusing by necessity during his command tenure of NZCORPS on higher level command and control.

Freyberg's personal low point at Cassino arose from a strategic situation that delivered a compromised and restricted Italian campaign which had stalled as a result of a headlong rush, in poor operating conditions, into a well planned and effective enemy redoubt at Cassino. Because Cassino was the centre point of a defensive line that for all intents and purposes stretched across continental Italy it was unable to be ignored. Moreover, an attempt to restart the stalled campaign with an amphibious operation landing at Anzio, itself a debacle, dragged more resources away from the required assault on the enemy redoubt and over time bought forward the need for such an assault.

Into this, as an available, highly competent and trusted commander, Freyberg was pushed, his task to either exploit a breakout in the Liri valley or in the event of others failing, to assault Cassino. From the start, his command of NZCORPS and his planning conceded advantage to the defender. Externally, geography, weather, time and the combat situation elsewhere in Italy provided key advantage to the German commander, General Von Senger. Internally, limits placed upon the campaign by strategic imperative, resources, timings, personalities, cultural divides and the vicissitudes of the new combined joint operating context served to complicate matters further. Tactically, from the start, the enforced dual role for NZCORPS further compromised the fighting power of the unit.

Sitting atop this unsatisfactory military situation for Freyberg, was a set of personal circumstances that would severely strain Freyberg's emotional competency, resilience and his ability to stay focused on the battle for Cassino; Freyberg experienced the loss of his son Paul at Anzio, the grievous wounding of his closest friend Kippenberger, on the slopes of Mount Trocchio, and finally his willful commitment of his NZ Division into a combat situation he knew it was not equipped or assembled for. The battle would be an attritional slugging match for a commander who was dismissive, unsupportive, thought little of the NZ Division and, finally, was not concerned with human wastage. Political and military criticism of the monastery bombing fuelled by German propaganda added more stress, testing Freyberg's resolve further.

That this point was the low there is no doubt. The normally positive and ebullient Freyberg was absolutely disconsolate and bereft. His aura of power and authority deserted him briefly. Freyberg's very personal but nonetheless very public low point was so unusual and so unique that both Stevens and Burrows felt compelled to write of it. Stevens assessed:

One occasion when I think his normal optimism and confidence temporarily left him was at Cassino. It was the only time in the war when I saw him looking

depressed and walking along slowly with shoulders hunched and hands in his pockets.....

I have never forgotten this unusual picture.⁹⁸

Brigadier Burrows, commander 5NZ Brigade provides this insight:

I was walking carefully along the side of route six, the road that led straight to Cassino. The enemy at the Cassino end could easily see the movement along the road and with field glasses probably see in detail more than was good for anyone careless enough to stay long in view. I had been as far forward as I wanted to go and was moving back along a ditch in the shadow of a hedge when I was horrified to see General Freyberg, generals red hat and all, walking by himself along the road toward me. I immediately came out to meet him but I doubt he saw me until I was very close and spoke to him. I knew from past experience that he gave very little thought to his personal safety; on the other hand, he did not do silly things. Moreover he was almost always accompanied by his aide. So to walk like this, in full view of anyone with good field glasses seemed to me to be most unlike him. I said „I think sir we should move off the road.“

To my surprise he made no objection and we walked to the shadow of hedge and eventually to where his driver was waiting anxiously with his car.

Later I heard that on this morning he had received news that his son Paul was missing in Anzio.⁹⁹

That Freyberg could deal with these personal crises and conflicts, quickly regaining his equanimity and remain an effective and committed commander demonstrates the superior quality of Freyberg's emotional competency resolve and resilience.

Freyberg's physical competency is without question. Although he worked and lived in the field, he understood his body well. He ate, drank and smoked with moderation, and he maintained his fitness. The wounds that he had suffered in North Africa had healed well and there was no evidence of any long term effects. Freyberg's physical endurance was noteworthy. Although 55, he maintained a working tempo that was easily commensurate with the tasks he had in hand. Despite very few periods of leave and only occasional sickness, Freyberg never seemed to lack the energy required of his role. Although deeply shocked by Paul's reported loss

⁹⁸ W G Stevens, *Freyberg, VC; The Man* (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1965), 91.

⁹⁹ Burrows quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 465.

and then again with Kippenberger's severe wounding, he recovered his equanimity and resolve quickly. Indeed, and as always, Freyberg's stature, endurance and physical presence were key strengths that his commanders drew on during the tough periods of fighting in Cassino.

In terms of intellectual competency, Freyberg had proved without doubt in North Africa that he possessed a strong, critical and broad intellect. Moreover, he was able to move with speed and agility across multiple complex problems to deduce and discern simple key factors and innovative solutions for his and his teams' action. Just as important, despite often being accused of vagueness, Freyberg was an active listener, coalescing ideas once again to reach key decisions and innovative solutions for action. As Majdalany, Wright, et al describe, these strengths were at the core of "The Div Cabinet" and remained in place for Cassino and NZCORPS.¹⁰⁰ Freyberg's commander General Clark, on the other hand, did not possess Freyberg's wealth of experience nor did he demonstrate a similar level of mental agility. At San Angelo and Cassino, Clark's plans for an attritional continuation remained fixed. At San Angelo, Clark's inability to discern or face up to his attacks' culminating point led to its continuation and the implicit wastage that occurred. Freyberg faced with two totally different tasks as commander of NZCORPS, immediately assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the previous efforts. For the breakout, his plan was one of exploitation and movement, strongly influenced by Mareth, Tebaga Gap and el Hamma.¹⁰¹ The plan envisaged another all-arms operation with coordinated command and control and integrated all-arms thrusts supported by close air support.¹⁰² When confronted with the attack on Cassino itself, Freyberg and "the cabinet" looked at the failures at San Angelo and tried to make an assessment of the efforts in flanking Monte Cassino and taking its heights.

¹⁰⁰ Fred Majdalany, *Cassino Portrait of a Battle* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1957), 101-102 & Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 82-83.

¹⁰¹ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 191.

¹⁰² WAI/8/50 conference HQ NZCORPS 0800 07 February 1944 cited in Laurie Barber and John Tonkin- Covell, *Freyberg: Churchill's Salamander* (Auckland: Century Hutchinson, 1989), 198.

Reports back from remote commands, particularly 2nd Corps in the hills behind were inaccurate and too optimistic. US Intelligence assessments on the enemy order of battle and its morale state were also too optimistic.¹⁰³ None of this situation was known to NZCORPS at the time. Clark's push into the Liri valley was with three corps. Freyberg had two divisions. A piecemeal attritional engagement, which the defenders wanted would attrit and eventually destroy NZCORPS as a fighting unit, if not actively conducted otherwise. In opening the Liri valley for exploitation the key defences must be dealt with differently to what had gone before. Limitations had to be overcome with movement, speed, technology, innovation and determination. Freyberg's plans called up all these enablers and included the softening of the abbey by bombing and later the reduction of the town defences and garrison by aerial bombardment. These plans were not the slow-minded musings of a ploddingly incompetent commander. They were the efforts of an innovative mind seeking to overcome, with very little notice and a light temporary corps sized formation, the same intractable problems that defeated his predecessor at Cassino, the 5th Army commander Clark, and that would take his successor, the theatre commander Alexander, thirteen divisions, two months of preparation and one week of bitterly contested fighting to achieve.¹⁰⁴ That Freyberg could come so close to success while constrained by time, situation and resources as he was, clearly demonstrates his intellectual acuity.

The fallout after Crete was a professional nadir but in its aftermath, Freyberg was able to take action to remedy what he saw as his own failings. Cassino was different. Freyberg had been fighting and commanding continuously for nearly four years. His responsibilities had not diminished. The tone of his correspondence to the New Zealand Government indicates that Freyberg was growing weary:

¹⁰³ Laurie Barber and John Tonkin- Covell, *Freyberg: Churchill's Salamander* (Auckland: Century Hutchinson, 1989), 202.

¹⁰⁴ Fred Majdalany, *Cassino Portrait of a Battle* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1957), 230-231.

From a personal point of view I have no military ambitions save one – to be at the head of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force and bring it back at the end of the war, which, please God, will be soon.¹⁰⁵

Although there is no evidence in support, it would seem evident that at some opportune time in the future, Freyberg would stand aside and the division would be handed over to Kippenberger. Therefore, the loss of Kippenberger affected him not only deeply on a personal plane but also in the context of his potential tenure of the division and succession planning for command.

Freyberg's relationship with Montgomery and Alexander was collegial, sound and as friendly as the imperial chain of command would allow. He had rebuilt his reputation in the desert and his Commonwealth commanders understood and valued Freyberg for his intellect, resolve, steadfastness and inspirational leadership. Throughout his career, Freyberg had used his strong character and imposing presence to develop robust relationships based on respect and trust. Despite Freyberg's best efforts, this type of relationship would not occur with Clark. It is clear that there was testiness in the relationship. Freyberg and he bickered over the manpower question in Cassino Township and disagreed strongly over the bombing of the abbey.¹⁰⁶ Paul Freyberg described his father's relationship with Clark: "...relations with Clark were correct, but formal rather than close, and marked by reservations on both sides."¹⁰⁷ It is clear from ample contemporaneous citations and subsequent authorship that Clark did not want any British troops under his command and in particular did not want Freyberg, who he considered a prima donna, or the New Zealanders.¹⁰⁸ Clark complained: "No use giving me, an American, -British

¹⁰⁵ Department of Internal Affairs, *Documents relating to New Zealand's Participation in the Second World War 1939-45 Volume 11* (Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, 192).

¹⁰⁶ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary – Part V, October 1944-January 1945* (New Zealand Archives, Department of Internal Affairs: WA 8 7/67), 17 March 1944, 552.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 458.

¹⁰⁸ Trevelyan quoted in Laurie Barber and John Tonkin-Covell, *Freyberg: Churchill's Salamander* (Auckland: Century Hutchinson, 1989), 194.

troops.”¹⁰⁹ Moreover Clark felt that: “Freyberg had been directed by Alexander to prepare recommendations for employment of his reinforced New Zealanders on the fifth Army Front. I had not been consulted about such recommendations. I got a definite impression that 15th Army Group and Freyberg were going to tell me what to do. I objected as diplomatically as possible, pointing out that their plans for using the new Zealanders and the Indian Troops in the Monte Cassino sector would not fit well.”¹¹⁰

Barber and Tonkin- Covell tell us further that Clark resented their assignment to his command, telling his staff: “These are dominion troops who are very jealous of their prerogatives. The British have found them difficult to handle. They have always been given special considerations which we would not give to our own troops”.¹¹¹ While it is clear the Clark did not want the New Zealanders or Freyberg, his motives remained hidden and undisclosed. In hindsight it seems evident that Clark, an ambitious, directive and remote commander with little combat experience, did not want his command disrupted by outside and in particular Empire troops. Freyberg’s reputation and larger than life persona, built upon strong character traits, valour and vast experience, threatened the inexperienced Clark so much so that he attempted to veto Freyberg’s arrival. Moreover Alexander wished to utilize an available Freyberg to break the stalemate that Clark could not. Clark certainly interpreted this as being a slight. Clark’s ambition and his therefore heightened sense of objection would inform and define the Freyberg–Clark relationship. Clark’s ego prevented him from optimizing the relationship and Freyberg, uncharacteristically, was unaware of Clark’s hubris, failing to alter his approach, however treating him with the respect due a senior commander but remaining forthright in his

¹⁰⁹ Laurie Barber and John Tonkin- Covell, *Freyberg: Churchill’s Salamander* (Auckland: Century Hutchinson, 1989), 194.

¹¹⁰ Mark Clark, *Calculated Risk* (London: George G Harrop & Co., 1951), 283-4.

¹¹¹ Clark diary quoted in Laurie Barber and John Tonkin- Covell, *Freyberg: Churchill’s Salamander* (Auckland: Century Hutchinson, 1989), 194.

recommendations to him and unafraid to speak his mind when required. Paul Freyberg, Barber and Tonkin- Covell, et al note that between Freyberg and Clark's Chief of Staff, General Al Greunther, there was however, a high degree of cooperation, professional respect, understanding and personal warmth that would offset the remote and unsupportive Clark. Despite the Clark relationship, interpersonal competency remained a strength for Freyberg and his situation in terms of authority remained strong. Freyberg had developed and now maintained a robust and enduring personal authority down, across and up the Imperial chain of command. Freyberg, through his actions, strength of character and presence, created for him, the division and New Zealand a special niche in Middle East Command. He possessed a high degree of autonomy and was indeed New Zealand's agent in the Middle East. This high level of personal authority was, as expected, the bedrock of Freyberg's ability to effectively command 2NZEF and act more widely in the interests New Zealand. Freyberg's situation with the US Forces on the west coast of Italy was interesting. Superficially, his commander, Clark, never wanted any British troops under his command and remained dismissive of Freyberg's reputation; however, the campaign commander Alexander saw Clark's efforts stalling as a result of the fighting up the west side of Italy. Moreover, Alexander understood that Clark's forces would be expended cracking open route six either at San Angelo or Cassino and at the very least would not be able to continue if not bolstered by more manpower. Alexander, and a begrudging Clark, needed an exploiting force and which better force than the battle-hardened and well proven NZ Division led by the experienced and eminently capable warrior, Freyberg. Despite being dismissive of Freyberg, Clark felt threatened by Freyberg's towering reputation in the face of his own relative inexperience. *Calculated Risk* clearly illustrates Clark's ambition and sense of entitlement.¹¹² Clark however underestimated Freyberg's professionalism, and he failed to understand

¹¹² Mark Clark, *Calculated Risk* (London: George G Harrop & Co., 1951), 332.

Freyberg's character, his integrity and his wealth of experience in combat and staff roles. Despite the tension and pressure, Freyberg in his dealings with Clark would never be any less than professional.

Therefore, superficially Freyberg's personal authority appeared to be significantly diminished by the Clark command relationship. In fact, this is not the case. Clark, for all his protestations approved both NZCORPS plans, including bombing of the abbey and town. Moreover, despite the bickering between he and Freyberg on 17 March, Clark never ordered or directed Freyberg to push more troops in.¹¹³ Clark did not like Freyberg, but at the time he needed him, to achieve what he could not- to open up the Liri and to relieve pressure on his troops in Anzio. Freyberg's personal authority with Clark, therefore, remained high despite Clark's later protestations otherwise.

Alexander, the campaign commander, rated Freyberg highly. They had served together in North Africa, and Alexander was rightly confident that NZCORPS would successfully exploit the breakout through the Liri valley. When this expectation did not occur, he was satisfied that Freyberg had the ability to crack Cassino and that he would channel his intellect and determination to succeed. As Clark recalls, Alexander supported Freyberg in the bombing of the abbey, despite Clark's misgivings.¹¹⁴ Moreover, as the battle drew on, Alexander realized the situation was against Freyberg and the resources he had available. This is confirmed in a response Alexander wrote to a probing letter from Churchill about the stalling of the Allied campaign at Cassino. Alexander emphasized the limitations placed in front of Freyberg: "The [next operational] plan must envisage an attack on a wider front and with greater forces than Freyberg has been able to have for this operation. A little later, when the snow goes off the

¹¹³ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary – Part V, October 1944-January 1945* (New Zealand Archives, Department of Internal Affairs: WA 8 7/67), 17 March 1944, 552.

¹¹⁴ Mark Clark, *Calculated Risk* (London: George G Harrop & Co., 1951), 300-302.

mountains, the rivers drop, and the ground hardens, movement will be possible over terrain which at present is impassable".¹¹⁵

Freyberg's personal authority within NZ Division remained strong. Freyberg certainly pressured the NZ Division commanders for results in the battle for Cassino, but this result was what they had come to expect of him and as always he carefully and actively listened to them weighing their recommendations and placing them where appropriate into consolidated plans for action. Cassino was a tough and bitter struggle but the men of the division knew they were led by a hard but fair minded and considerate commander. Despite misgivings over tactics, the trust and mutual respect that Freyberg had generated with the men of the division consolidated and enhanced his authority.

Within the Indian Division of NZCORPS, affairs were markedly different. Toker had become ill leaving command to Brigadier Dimoline who, as the division's specialist artillery commander, was far from an ideal choice to lead the division in a complicated, desperate and remote ridgeline infantry battle. With Freyberg, Dimoline was reluctant, demurring, evasive and taciturn.¹¹⁶ Freyberg understood that Dimoline's task was unenviable and difficult but there is no surviving correspondence to suggest that Dimoline ever told Freyberg the task was beyond his or his force's capability, which in the end it was. If intelligence and battle reports had been accurate and had Dimoline informed Freyberg directly of the true nature of the snakes head battle, Freyberg may have sought other options. Instead, pressured across the battle space, he found Dimoline's constant reluctance and inability to meet objectives hugely frustrating and hard to understand.¹¹⁷ Major-General Galloway replaced Dimoline and although the task remained

¹¹⁵ Fred Majdalany, *Cassino Portrait of a Battle* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1957), 217.

¹¹⁶ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary – Part V, October 1944-January 1945* (New Zealand Archives, Department of Internal Affairs: WA 8 7/67), 11-16 February 1944, 527-529.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11-16 February 1944, 527-529.

insurmountable for the Indian Division, better communication and authority over the Indian Division meant at least Freyberg had a better appreciation of their real situation on the heights over Cassino.

Freyberg's personal authority with the New Zealand government remained high throughout this period. His decisions at Cassino were accepted and supported by the government. His recommendations with respect to Kippenberger and Parkinson's command of NZ Division were confirmed without delay or question.¹¹⁸ He was candid with both the New Zealand government and Alexander that when the New Zealand casualties at Cassino got to 1,000 he would withdraw the division from the battle.¹¹⁹ He was constantly involved with development of New Zealand war policy and development of options for operations beyond Europe later in 1945 or 1946. Beyond the military paradigm, his recommendations with respect to opening diplomatic posts for his staff were taken up by the fledgling New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Geoffrey Cox was sent to the US and later Paddy Costello posted to the Soviet Union. In terms of his stewardship of New Zealand Forces and his legal authority contained therein, he remained constantly and heavily burdened, furthermore so between 6 and 26 February 1944 as commander NZCORPS.

Freyberg felt his sense of duty keenly. His extrinsic and intrinsic responsibility was balanced at a high level. He was given an extremely high degree of responsibility by the New Zealand Government, and he willingly accepted all of it as part of his role. This responsibility spanned the breadth of New Zealand's participation in the land war in the Middle East Theatre and extended through the command chain of 2NZEF top to bottom. To the outsider, Freyberg would always carry his burden of responsibility lightly; however, it was a significant burden. He

¹¹⁸ Department of Internal Affairs, *Documents relating to New Zealand's Participation in the Second World War 1939-1945* (Wellington: Historical Publications branch, 1951), 283.

¹¹⁹ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 462.

accepted and remained responsible for the through- life leadership and management of all New Zealand land forces in the Middle East, and as the war wore on, further afield. Even as Cassino loomed, as an example, his diary describes his dealings with, and discussion of, sentences for two New Zealand soldiers found guilty of murder in North Africa.¹²⁰

At Cassino, Freyberg had atop his already heavy burden the added responsibility of forcing the route through the Liri valley that blocked the whole Allied advance in Italy. To achieve this objective, Freyberg had a force he knew was barely adequate and large enough or equipped for a drawn out attritional engagement. He would have to determinedly but quickly throw his force against a well constructed defensive line hoping that his preparation, the quality of the troops and some luck would see him through.

It is remarkable that in spite of crushing personal losses, immense responsibility and a plan and situation that did not auger well for success, Freyberg, throughout both NZCORPS attacks, continued the battle resolutely, determinedly and innovatively taking the defenders to the very edge of their endurance but not quite gaining the victory the Allies so dearly wanted. There was no dishonour in the failure of NZCORPS at Cassino. Despite Clark scathing comments in *Calculated Risk*, there was no fall out either. Montgomery, followed by Leese, Alexander, Churchill and Fraser, all knew and trusted that Freyberg had done all he could with what he had. It just was not enough. NZCORPS was disbanded. Freyberg returned to the NZ Division.

¹²⁰ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary – Part V, October 1944-January 1945* (New Zealand Archives, Department of Internal Affairs: WA 8 7/67), 5 January 1944, 513.

8. DENOUEMENT: REORGANIZATION, RIVERS AND THE RACE TO THE END, APRIL 1945.

BACKGROUND

The division moved into reserve sector to rebuild, providing security to Allied supply lines. Freyberg resumed command. Lieutenant-General Oliver Leese, replacing Montgomery in command of the 8th Army, welcomed back Freyberg and the division: “the 8th Army is never the same place without the 2nd New Zealand Division”.¹²¹ Addressing the wastage and repairing the damage from Cassino was in the front of Freyberg’s mind. The divisional artillery had remained behind at Cassino and had been assigned to 13 Corps to continue harassing the enemy and to prepare for the next push to open the Liri valley. Meanwhile at Anzio, Lucas had been replaced with General Truscott and the German efforts to throw the Allies back in to the sea had, despite all the pressure, come to nothing. For the time being, the German attack at Anzio had expended itself and the beachhead was no longer threatened. The garrison of the Winterstellung plugged its defences, made good its losses and awaited the next Allied attempt to break it.

Alexander’s strategic direction was to “force the enemy to commit the maximum number of divisions in Italy at the time the cross-channel invasion is launched.”¹²² Operation DIADEM envisaged a theatre-wide assault on the Winterstellung to turn the Germans out using the gains made by DICKENS to open route six through the Liri valley, and route seven, the Apennine way, to Rome and beyond. Clark’s 5th Army would shift west to pressure the southern flank opening route seven. The 8th Army would push up against Cassino and one of its elements, The Polish Corps, would saturate Monastery Hill from the rear and pinch out the garrison on Monastery Hill, forcing open route six. When the time was right, Truscott would break out from

¹²¹ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg’s War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 202

¹²² Fred Majdalany, *Cassino Portrait of a Battle* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1957), 221

Anzio to link with Clark's spearhead. Conducted in the summer fighting season, DIADEM, would force the clash of 13 Allied divisions against four German at Cassino to achieve the three to one superiority not available to Freyberg during February and March.¹²³

Back at the NZ Division, there were problems. Majdalany claims that "after Cassino, the division was never quite the same again."¹²⁴ Morale collapsed, with the consequent breakdown of discipline. The men were tired. Some of those at Cassino had been with the division for four years. Those lucky enough to win the ballot for the furlough scheme had found return to New Zealand difficult. There was difficulty re-assimilating into society, relationships had ended, friends were overseas and marriages had crumbled. Moreover, 40,000 fit young men, of whom 13,000 were unmarried, were employed in essential work. To the furlough men, it seemed all too easy to avoid the draft and therefore military duty. To exacerbate this perception, the average working wage in New Zealand was greater than the field wage of the overseas forces. The people at home did not seem to understand what the war was like and what the men had endured. Beyond the noisy initial appreciation of the homecoming, life had to, and did, go on. The cumulative effect on the men was profound. As leave expired and the returning drafts re-mustered at Trentham Military Camp, a mutiny occurred. The army, pressured to release all 6,000, furlough men discharged all the Maori, married men with children and men over 41.¹²⁵ A further 2,500 were medically downgraded and discharged. Some 500 were charged with desertion, convicted and sentenced to hard labour. Freyberg was not involved or implicated in the debacle with the furlough drafts back in New Zealand. However, those soldiers that returned were troubled by their experiences on furlough and the veterans who had remained in Italy were

¹²³ Fred Majdalany, *Cassino Portrait of a Battle* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1957), 225

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 194

¹²⁵ FLW Wood, *The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939-1945, Political and External Affairs* (Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, 1958), 267

reaching the end of their combat usefulness.

Freyberg had written to Peter Jones, the New Zealand Minister of Defence, to draw attention to the fatigue of the men and the manpower situation and to also consider redeployment closer to home, as early as January 1944:

...signs are not lacking now that many of the old hands require a prolonged rest. I feel therefore that if there is to be heavy fighting throughout 1945 a replacement scheme would be required for all long service personnel. Such a changeover would not be easy but would be essential in the interest of the efficiency of the force Taking into consideration the your manpower difficulties and probably future commitments in war against Japan I have come to the conclusion that the time may well be opportune for the complete withdrawal of 2NZEF.¹²⁶

Moreover, the casualties sustained during NZCORPS assault on Cassino had effectively reduced reserves to zero.

Since 1942, New Zealand had deployed a division into the Pacific. This division, the 3rd New Zealand Division under the Americans General MacArthur and Admiral Halsey, fought in the Solomon Islands through 1943 and 1944, but it was clear that New Zealand was struggling in the face of a burgeoning war economy to provide the manpower resources required for two divisions. Moreover, there was political pressure on New Zealand to act closer to home in the Pacific just as there was pressure to remain in the Middle East. Freyberg was asked to provide some guidance by the New Zealand government. To Freyberg it came down to two options: they could stay the course in Europe until Nazi Germany fell or withdraw to fight in the Pacific later in 1945.¹²⁷ There were many good reasons to withdraw closer to home not the least being the opportunity to re-equip and refit the worn out NZ Division. However, with the arrival of the US in the South Pacific, success in stemming and reversing Japan's expansion and the time lag

¹²⁶ WAI 8/49 Freyberg to Jones 31 Jan 1944 quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 413.

¹²⁷ Department of Internal Affairs, *Documents relating to New Zealand's Participation in the Second World War 1939-45 Volume 11* (Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, 1951), 200-204.

required for redeployment and retraining for the Pacific, the retention of 2NZEF in Europe seemed to Freyberg the best decision. Should 2NZEF return home it would be unlikely to be prepared for fighting in Japan before the end of 1945. The New Zealand Government chose to consider the wide range of options provided by Freyberg and others, demurring and in the meantime continuing to put forward limited supply and support to both divisions. Once again, Freyberg found himself constrained by ongoing manpower restrictions. He patched up the division as best he could and stood them ready in reserve to push through the Liri valley when called on.

An elaborate Allied deception plan executed by the Allies between February and May 1944 fooled Kesselring completely. When *DIADEM* commenced with a 1,060 gun artillery barrage at 11 pm on 11 May 1944, Kesselring estimated he faced only six Allied divisions when in fact he faced 13.¹²⁸ For seven days, the Allied armies assaulted the Winterstellung pushing more and more troops into Cassino to eject the German garrison in a vicious and unremitting battle prosecuted using broadly similar field tactics to what Freyberg had envisaged three months previously, and starting from the points gained by NZCORPS during *DICKENS*. On 17 May 1944, on their second attempt, the Polish Corps finally overran the defenders on Monte Cassino linking up with the remainder of the 8th Army assault in the Liri valley. Cassino fell to the Allies on 18 May 1944. The Winterstellung's southern flank had crumbled. The pressure became too much for the defenders. The Canadian Corps started to flood route six and, the 5th Army opened route seven. The 5th Army's objective now was to link with the breakout of Anzio, while the Canadians exploiting the opened route six pushed hard at the retreating Germans. Route six became clogged, highlighting one of the limitations of campaigning in Italy. The geography limited opportunity for mobile mechanised combat. The Germans withdrew from contact. On 25

¹²⁸ Fred Majdalany, *Cassino Portrait of a Battle* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1957), 225

May 1944, Truscott broke out of Anzio. Fearful of being cut off below Rome, Kesselring ordered the retreat of the German 10th Army. Alexander's clear orders to Clark were that the 5th Army spearhead was to move east and then square up and sit across the German line of retreat to cut off and capture the complete retreating German 10th Army. This movement would have terminated the Italian campaign and achieved all objectives set by the Allies for the Italian Campaign. However, on the coast Clark had different imperatives, objectives and plans; recalling

... [I] was shocked that Alexander had made this decision without reference to me. I should point out at this time that the 5th Army had an extremely difficult time throughout the winter campaign, and that we were now trying to make up for our earlier slow progress. We had massed all our strength to take Rome..... We not only wanted the honour of capturing Rome, but we felt that we more than deserved it..... My own feeling was that nothing was going to stop us on our push to the Italian capital. Not only did we intend to become the first army in fifteen centuries to seize Rome from the south but we intended to see that the people at home knew it was the 5th Army that did the job.¹²⁹

Clark shifted his line of advance north west ordering his forces to move inland to take Rome thereby clearing the route for a free retreat by seven divisions of the 10th German Army. His commander at Anzio, Truscott was completely surprised by Clark's orders to move for Rome

... [I] was dumfounded. This was not time to drive northwest where the enemy was still strong; we should pour our maximum power into the Valmontone Gap to insure the destruction of the retreating German Army. I would not comply with the order without first talking to General Clark in person..... However he was not on the beachhead and could not be reached even by radio..... Such was the order that turned the main effort away from the Valmontone Gap and prevented destruction of the enemy¹³⁰

Truscott considered later that "there has never been in my mind any doubt that had Clark held loyally to General Alexander's instructions, had had he not changed the direction of my attack to the north west on May 26, the strategic objectives of Anzio would have been accomplished in

¹²⁹ Mark Clark, *Calculated Risk* (London: George G Harrop & Co., 1951), 322

¹³⁰ Truscott quoted in Fred Majdalany, *Cassino Portrait of a Battle* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1957), 256.

full. To be the first in Rome was a poor consequence for this lost opportunity.”¹³¹ Clark would enter Rome with the lead units of the 5th Army on 4 June 1944 as the substantial remnants the German 10th Army drew back through the hole provided by Clark to the Trasimene Line to link up with the 14th Army.

OVERLORD, the invasion of fortress Europe through Northwestern France, commenced on 6 June 1944, fully illuminating Italy as the side show it had become. Clark “had got to Rome before Ike got across the channel..... [he] had won the race to Rome by only two days.”¹³² Political expediency and ambition had trumped military considerations. Rome was, very briefly, a glittering political prize, the allure of capturing Rome distracting from, and gained at, the cost of the true center of gravity in Italy; the garrisoned German armies. Despite attempts by Matthews and others to minimize Clark’s actions and to claim otherwise, there was no legitimate military reason for this move.¹³³ Clark’s drive to Rome was an act of egocentric narcissism in the face of strategic military need, operational pragmatism and tactical orders otherwise. It was a colossal error that drew out the Italian campaign for another 11 months costing thousands of Allied and German lives. Had the 5th Army carried out its higher orders it is likely the German occupation of Italy would have collapsed. It is axiomatic to suggest Rome would then have been liberated and the Allied forces could have been drawn down to a garrison providing security and a bulwark against unlikely German interference in northern Italy. Options for redeployment through the Balkans, southern France, northern Europe or, in New Zealand’s case, the Pacific could have been explored. None of these options were now available. Moreover, both sides would be committed to the same stalling attritional campaign objective: tying up the maximum

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 259.

¹³² Mark Clark, *Calculated Risk* (London: George G Harrop & Co., 1951), 346.

¹³³ Sidney Mathews, Chapter 14, General Clark’s Decision to Drive on Rome in *Command Decisions*, ed. Kent Roberts Greenfield, 351-364 (Washington DC: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1960) available from http://www.history.army.mil/books/70-7_0.htm; Internet; accessed 20 September 2012. 351-363.

number of enemy forces in Italy to prevent them being deployed elsewhere.

At the start of June 1944, the division was moved forward to reinforce 13 Corps' thrust through Avezzano to the Trasimene Line at Arezzo. Resistance was effective, organized and concentrated. As Freyberg had feared, the line of advance was too narrow.¹³⁴ The New Zealanders advanced towards Monte Lignano where they faced stiff resistance. The 4th Indian Division turned the German flank. As the division continued to advance, the facing elements of 75th Panzer Division, as Freyberg described it, "hooked it".¹³⁵ Casualties in the push from Cassino to Arezzo were 116 killed in battle and died of wounds.¹³⁶ After a rest at Cortona, the division rejoined 13 Corps, continuing to wear down the German fighting withdrawal, taking first San Andrea and then finding themselves facing the Arno River outside Florence on the 31 July 1944.

Despite Freyberg's concerns otherwise, Florence, an open city, fell with little damage on 4 August 1944.¹³⁷ However, the crossings of the Arno and the skirmishing outside Florence were costly to the NZ Division. Freyberg, understanding the great weight of Allied effort in Western Europe, told one of his staff officers, Colonel Bill Thornton: "the war was not going to be won in their locality and it was too nearly over to justify a lot of additional NZ casualties."¹³⁸ While New Zealand could not afford casualties it could afford ammunition. Freyberg altered his approach to combat conditions. To offset manpower issues Freyberg innovated, committing technology to the battlefield to overcome the enemy in the absence of manpower. He and his artillery commander Weir, devised "stonk" patterns similar to those used in the desert to great

¹³⁴ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 206.

¹³⁵ Robin Kay, *The Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939-1945, Volume 11: From Cassino to Trieste* (Wellington: War History Branch, department of Internal Affairs, 1967), 111.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹³⁷ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary – Part V, October 1944-January 1945* (New Zealand Archives, Department of Internal Affairs: WA 8 7/67), 2-4 August 1944, 628-634.

¹³⁸ Thornton quoted in Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 475.

effect and his combat engineers experimented with mechanizing field equipment, in particular flamethrowers mounted on tank hulls. In the face of resistance south of Florence, when his corps commander complained of the divisions high consumption of heavy ammunition, Freyberg replied “no ammunition- no fight”.¹³⁹ This phrase would be used again and again as the division moved steadily north, thereby joining the enduring Freyberg lexicon. A further 177 New Zealanders had died since Monte Lignano and the wounded list for the previous two months of operations was approximately 1,000. Freyberg held poor battle field discipline responsible for many of the casualties when addressing his officers:

About 75 per cent of our casualties were from shell or mortar fire and our total casualties in our last operation were 20% of the battle force exposed to the enemy. The shell fire was not heavy. If the German battle discipline was the same as ours their forces under or shell fire would have been annihilated. There appears to be a slackness of leading and a slackness of battle discipline... I cannot help but think the casualties are due to a lack of experience with junior leaders and the absence of battle drill.¹⁴⁰

Battle field discipline was being eroded by the long term effects of combat on the old hands. Problems of fatigue and collapsing morale were pressing and reached through the division from the ranks to the junior officers. As Wright describes “soldiers were succumbing to the temptations of wine, women and Italian property... the men treated Chianti like beer and so called “plonk” missions – illegal journeys ranging hundreds of kilometers in search of wine to steal -had become endemic.”¹⁴¹ Freyberg initially unconcerned with the occasional short range plonk mission became more and more concerned as the situation started to spiral out of control. He decided that the division’s junior leaders were not only letting their men down in combat but also in respect to discipline and welfare. Freyberg took prompt and active steps to curb this

¹³⁹ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 475.

¹⁴⁰ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary – Part V, October 1944-January 1945* (New Zealand Archives, Department of Internal Affairs: WA 8 7/67), 8 August 1944, 635.

¹⁴¹ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg’s War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 210

errant behaviour and to reestablish the high standards of professionalism that he expected across all levels of the division. He personally directed the behaviour to stop: “There are dozens of cases of vehicles moving all over the country in search of either loot or drink... I want you to get this question of drink, this question of pillage, this question of dress under control.”¹⁴² Freyberg well understood the dilemma he now faced. The division through fatigue was slowly falling apart and his resources to rebuild it at this time were almost nonexistent. Freyberg and his senior staff would have to repair what they had, mitigate the inherent operational risks and continue. Freyberg knew that withdrawal of the division because of fatigue was neither a political nor a military option.

The division rested after the entry to Florence, moving to Sienna while Alexander, trying to tie down Kesselring in Italy to prevent the redeployment of German forces elsewhere in Europe, devised a move on the Gothic Line stretching across Italy from Pisa to Rimini. Alexander’s plan consisted of a large single approach frontal attack through the Apennines to Bologna. Freyberg was not confident that this movement could be achieved quickly and with few casualties: “it looked like Cassino all over again...(sic) and that... the chances of a quick and cheap success were not great.”¹⁴³ The plan changed. Clark and the 5th Army would press through the Futa Pass to Bologna and the 8th Army would press the Gothic line along the Adriatic coast. Preparation for the battle got underway. On the 23 August 1944, Freyberg was in Rome and heard that his friend, Churchill, “was in town and wanted to see him and the division.”¹⁴⁴ Freyberg made hurried plans, cancelled the divisional headquarters move to Foligno and returned to Sienna to await the arrival of “Colonel Kent.”¹⁴⁵ Churchill visited the men of the division as they

¹⁴² Matthew Wright, *Freyberg’s War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 210.

¹⁴³ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary – Part V, October 1944-January 1945* (New Zealand Archives, Department of Internal Affairs: WA 8 7/67), 22 August 1944, 643.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 23 August 1944, 643

¹⁴⁵ Churchill’s nom de plume in Italy

marched en-route and then lunched with Freyberg and the senior officers of the division at Sienna. His eagerness to visit demonstrated the high regard he held for Freyberg and the division, and as always, he had fulsome words of praise for both: "I raise my glass to you my dear Bernard, and the gallant New Zealand Division whose name is honoured and cherished among the Nations. Its career and record is one that will live not only in the history of New Zealand but in the history of the British Empire as an example of duty honour and valour. For four and a half years you have been at the fore front of the battle..."¹⁴⁶

Alexander's move on the Gothic Line, Operation OLIVE, achieved its aim in part. It tied down the Germans but for little gain to the Allies. The 5th Army, now stripped of the French Mountain Corps and several American divisions, could not take Bologna and the 8th Army slowly pushed north as far as Faenza. Italy's winter weather and geography that funneled lines of advance finished the offensive in December 1944. Until the weather cleared and the ground dried in late March-early April 1945, Allied activity was confined to holding lines, active patrolling and preparations for the resumption of offensive action in summer 1945.

Freyberg was away from the division. His plane had crashed at 8th Army tactical headquarters on 3 September 1944.¹⁴⁷ Despite walking away, he had suffered a penetrating wound to his abdomen. He required surgery and a convalescence of six weeks. Freyberg cabled the New Zealand government recommending Brigadier Weir, his artillery commander, be promoted to command the division. Without Freyberg's steadying hand or gentle dialogue, acrimony erupted at the division; Parkinson was upset but accepted the situation; Inglis, commanding the Armoured regiment, the senior brigadier and the last of the recalcitrants from 1941, however, objected strongly. Freyberg, still unwell, would not acquiesce but would not

¹⁴⁶ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary – Part V, October 1944-January 1945* (New Zealand Archives, Department of Internal Affairs: WA 8 7/67), 24 August 1944, 643

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3 September 1944, 648.

confirm his decision either. Inglis, bitterly disappointed and feeling that the command was his entitlement, resigned before Freyberg could see him. Steve Weir commanded the division, in Freyberg's absence, as a temporary Major-General.

As he convalesced, Freyberg continued to fret over falling morale and declining battle discipline within the division, reaching the conclusion that it was time for all the veterans to go home. With the New Zealand government's approval, Freyberg organized a new furlough draft, the Tongariro Scheme that returned home all men, except for a few specialists and senior officers, who had served abroad more than three years. This time, however, the draft would return home for discharge, the men having done their duty and more. The combat context had also changed. The winter pause gave an opportunity to reconfigure the division to better meet the Italian conditions and delay the in-field effects of manpower constraints caused by the Tongariro Scheme and the continuance of the 3rd Division that would otherwise prevail in mid 1945. The Allies had achieved air superiority, so the requirement for anti-aircraft regiments no longer existed. Italy was not conducive to fast-paced, wide-fronted, mobile operations so the divisional cavalry was also deemed surplus. So too was the anti-tank battalion. The Germans, confronted with these same operating constraints, had sent their heavy tank regiments to defend the homeland. The divisional cavalry, the anti-aircraft, anti-tank regiments and the administration units that supported them would be disbanded and the men re-trained as infantry.¹⁴⁸ On 11 September 1944, Fraser cabled Freyberg in hospital confirming finally that the 3rd Division would withdraw from the Pacific and be disbanded. Its manpower would bolster war production at home and would provide the bulk of the 13th & 14th reinforcements who would augment

¹⁴⁸ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary – Part V, October 1944-January 1945* (New Zealand Archives, Department of Internal Affairs: WA 8 7/67), 6 September 1944, 650.

2NZEF in the Middle East.¹⁴⁹ Finally, Freyberg would be able to free himself and the division of the manpower constraints that had plagued its operational decisions since Alamein in North Africa. By this time, Freyberg also had well realized that the war was winding down. Allied victory seemed assured, and he was free of any ambition for higher command. Freyberg set about putting his considerable talent, energy and intellect into rebuilding the division focusing on operations and tactics in Italy that would take New Zealand and its division to the European wars' end.

Freyberg immediately did some rough calculations. He cabled New Zealand that the reinforcements should see the division through to late 1945. However, much training and preparation was required.¹⁵⁰ Freyberg visited all the units being disbanded, personally delivering the message and fielding the men's questions and concerns.¹⁵¹ The division's reorganization gathered pace in the winter lull.

The division moved south to Villanova to reorganize and train in late December 1944. The replacements arrived, the unit re-organisation took place and Freyberg bid farewell to the Tongariro Scheme veterans as they departed for home and return to civilian life. As he did in the desert, Freyberg analysed the tactical behavior and nuances of his enemy, looking for weakness and strength. Freyberg redeveloped his all-arms, air & land battle concept to meet the narrow line of advance and the multiple threaded river operating context of the Lombardy plains of northern Italy, the division's likely area of operations. Freyberg's solution was to apply fast, concentrated and agile, integrated combat power supported by well coordinated artillery fire against the enemy likely to be fixed on a high river bank opposite, to break and disrupt him. Once this phase proved

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 11 September 1944, 651.

¹⁵⁰ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary – Part V, October 1944-January 1945* (New Zealand Archives, Department of Internal Affairs: WA 8 7/67), 13 September 1944, 651.

¹⁵¹ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 479-480

successful, Freyberg's concept called for quick bridging and deployment of exploiting armour, the enemy unable to withdraw and reorganize on the next high river bank in time for the next New Zealand assault. Cab rank aircraft called in by forward air controllers would eliminate any points of resistance unable to be reduced by the infantry or by shelling. River crossings, infantry assaults, combat bridging, quick deployment of armour were all developed, exercised and tested by the division separately and then in one combined exercise. The reorganization, training and integration of reinforcements went well; the division was tested, rested, configured, equipped and ready for the summer campaign in 1945. The NZ Division, New Zealand's national army, was stronger, more complete and better suited to its area of operations than it had ever been before. It now comprised three infantry brigades of three battalions, an integrated armoured brigade, coordinated artillery, headquarters staff plus combat service and service support units. Wright considers it had "twice the strength on the ground of any other in the field."¹⁵² In December 1944, Alexander, promoted to Field Marshal, had left Italy to become the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in the Mediterranean leaving Mark Clark in command of the 15th Army Group and the land commander in Italy. Clark did not substantially change Alexander's plan for the 1945 summer offensive in Italy that no longer sought to hold German forces in Italy but rather to destroy them south of the Alps in Italy.¹⁵³ In February 1945, to square up the front the 5th Army pressed through the Futa Pass to Bologna. Later, in mid April, the 8th Army forced the Gothic Line on the Adriatic coast. Despite Germany's impending collapse, on the ground, enemy resolve and esprit-de-corps amongst the premier units remained strong. The Fallschirmjäger, the German airborne units, now used as regular light infantry had a remarkable ability to reconstitute into smaller battle groups after being smashed time and again. The NZ Division moved north to

¹⁵² Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 220

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 218.

Russi and the Senio River in late March 1945 to await the start of the Adriatic summer campaign and the dénouement of Freyberg's career. In front of the division were the Senio, Santerno, Sillaro, Reno, Gaiana, Po and Adige Rivers. After the huge opening bombardment of Operation BUCKLAND on 9 April 1945, the NZ Division went into action. The months of well choreographed tactical assault training, preparation and organization that Freyberg had carried out showed itself in the success that the division enjoyed throughout the last campaign in Italy. Following the opening barrage, spearhead units of the division quickly assaulted the Senio, flaming its banks and the defenders. There was little resistance. Bridging went in and the armour moved across. By the end of the next day, forward elements of the division were at the Santerno preparing to flame and shell the far river bank. As at Alamein, Freyberg kept the pressure on his commanders with such encouragement as: "Crack ahead with your guns ... Keep them firing while you have got the chance."¹⁵⁴ "We have got him well on the run."¹⁵⁵ "Shoot off plenty of ammunition – fire at any likely target."¹⁵⁶ "The motto for today is whips out."¹⁵⁷

On 13 April 1945, the division approached the Sillaro. Just as at Alamein and Mareth, Freyberg was in his element. His superiors reinforced the division with 45 Gurkha Brigade to exploit his success. The Allied crossing of the Sillaro River would require a set piece attack and just as at Alamein, Freyberg would conduct the attack and break-out in his sector supported by other units specifically assigned to lever off Freyberg's tactical mastery.

On 14 April 1945, the division launched its attack. Freyberg did not want the enemy to withdraw behind the Po fearing an extended fighting season. However, he correctly reasoned the defenders would likely make for a lesser river between the Sillaro and the Po. The northern bank

¹⁵⁴ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary – Part V, October 1944-January 1945* (New Zealand Archives, Department of Internal Affairs: WA 8 7/67), 11 April 1945, 722-24.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 11 April 1945, 722-24.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 11 April 1945, 722-24.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 12 April 1945, 722-24.

of the Sillaro was captured on the evening of 16 April 1945. The Germans had withdrawn and the race for the next river was on. The retreating German forces withdrew through the 4th Parachute Division digging in on the banks of the Gaiana River. This position would be the last stand for the Germans on the Adriatic coast. With overwhelming force on their side, Freyberg and the New Zealanders would finally have their opportunity to avenge the losses on Crete and at Cassino at the hands of the Fallschirmjäger. Observing the success of the division and the combat proficiency of the men Freyberg, with satisfaction, wrote to White “these weeks saw the division at its best.”¹⁵⁸

Freyberg’s execution of the Gaiana River battle demonstrates a clear and precise mastery of the battle space, including the combatants, tactics, application of battle field technology, weather and the inherent geographical constraints. Moreover, it completes the picture of Freyberg’s military capability, free of national and high military politics, theatre and operational goals and objectives that had taken so much of his time earlier in his tenure. Freyberg was able to focus solely on tactical mastery of the enemy and his defences. The execution by the division of Freyberg’s last combat operation, at the Gaiana River, was a spectacular success. Freyberg, concerned that the “para boys” would “hook it” ordered the commander of 43 Gurkha Brigade to cross the river and “test the market at dusk”.¹⁵⁹ The enemy, however, remained on the northern bank of the Gaiana to feel the full effect of Freyberg’s tactical mastery and the NZ Division’s application of its combat power. The 4th Parachute Division would be mauled, pounded by the artillery, flamed by the crocodiles and then overrun and liquidated by the divisional infantry. There were few prisoners and by 20 April 1945 the front had collapsed and the NZ Division was on the Idige River. By 25 April 1945, the division was at the Po joining up with the US 5th Army

¹⁵⁸ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg’s War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 220.

¹⁵⁹ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary – Part V, October 1944-January 1945* (New Zealand Archives, Department of Internal Affairs: WA 8 7/67), 18 April 1945, 735.

which had swept eastwards from Bologna. Within divisional and Freyberg historiography much has been made of the Gaiana operation. This closing battle of Freyberg's was a master class.

Cox, Paul Freyberg, Wright et al use this operation, its plan and its execution as an example of Freyberg's organisational and tactical mastery:

Freyberg's plan revealed his mastery of the set piece battle; a heavy bombardment, flamethrowers, then an advance by the infantry behind a creeping barrage running to a depth of 3.6km. His plan detailed movements down to the minute including the rate of infantry advance.... Freyberg managed to get enough [ammunition] for a near- 100000 round bombardment from 192 field pieces backed by an array of heavier weapons.¹⁶⁰

The enemy was effectively smashed and withdrew in confusion. Prisoners flooded in and negotiations for ceasefire and surrender were underway. On 2 May 1945, when news of Hitler's death became known in Italy, the ceasefire took effect. It seemed the campaign was over. There was elation, relief and exultation. Behind it all, Freyberg was dog tired. But it was not over yet; Alexander concerned about Yugoslav Communist ambitions east of the Isonzo River, instructed the new 8th Army commander, McCrery, to deploy a force into Trieste to stabilise the situation. Politics returned to Freyberg's command. He now became embroiled in the tensions between east and west. The division raced across the Piave to Trieste. Once again, and for the final time in a stellar career spanning 39 years, his military superiors would look to Freyberg, the safe and trusted pair of hands. Freyberg would take New Zealand's Division, his division, to confront, stare down and diffuse Tito's ambitions for Trieste.

The war in Europe finished officially on 8 May 1945. Freyberg consulted with the New Zealand government with respect future deployment in the Pacific. It was agreed that the division would shift south, draw down in Europe and reconstitute in New Zealand for service in Japan late in 1945 or early in 1946. Freyberg felt he had fulfilled his obligation to New Zealand. Natural

¹⁶⁰ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 223.

selection through the previous six years of combat and Freyberg's assiduous evaluation and preparation of the division's leaders had created a strong succession plan. Kippenberger and Inglis were the last of the veteran World War I senior officers to depart. The new breed was changing the guard; Weir, Thomas, Gentry, Thornton and others were more than able to lead a New Zealand force into Japan and beyond. Freyberg sought and was granted his release. Freyberg relinquished command of the New Zealand division on 17 October 1945, six years to the day since his first appointment.

FREYBERG'S COMMAND SITUATION: APRIL 1945

Freyberg's apogee of command was at the conclusion of the North Africa campaign. His own and the NZ Division's performance were central to the success of the campaign. His command of 2NZEAF and its fighting arm, the NZ Division, was an outstanding example of fighting leadership and command throughout the principal European Allied campaign of that time. Through their exploits in North Africa, he and the NZ Division would capture the hearts of all New Zealanders (at home or abroad), very briefly capture the imagination of the Commonwealth nations and ensure New Zealand's fledgling place in the collective paradigm of post World War II international relations. The climax of Freyberg's career, however, would be Cassino. Had NZCORPS prevailed at Cassino, Freyberg may have been ranked as one of the great commanders of World War II. However, given the political, military, resource and condition constraints faced by the Allies in Italy at that time, the task handed to Freyberg was insurmountable, even to a commander of his considerable ability. Subsequent international historiography that consigned Freyberg to a side bar as a barely adequate journeyman responsible for the unnecessary destruction of Cassino and the wanton bombing of its Benedictine abbey was

unfair and at best uninformed. Throughout the summer of 1944 until the Italian Campaigns conclusion in mid 1945 Freyberg remained a superior commander who was trusted, effective, innovative and well regarded by his political masters, superior commanders, peers and subordinates alike. This last year of Freyberg's command of 2NZEF would be his dénouement; it was the "...the final part of [his] narrative in which the strands of the plot are drawn together and matters are explained or resolved".¹⁶¹ Wright is correct in concurring: "it enabled Freyberg to demonstrate the complete range of superior qualities he possessed as a commander."¹⁶²

Intellectually, Freyberg continued to demonstrate his superior competence. His ongoing and resilient intellectual ability to synthesize the many and ever changing strands of his command situation into coherent, innovative, and effective courses of action was remarkable. Freyberg's reorganization of the division that disestablished redundant formations, replaced fatigued veterans and finally reconfigured and prepared the division optimally for combat in Italian conditions demonstrated a high level of esoteric and practical intelligence.

That he was able to maintain this intellectual acuity, agility and capacity for high reasoning, despite the long term and unremitting pressure of combat and command was outstanding and clearly confirmed his high emotional competence through the strength of his character. His personal qualities, sense of duty, commitment, resolve and determination were incredibly strong and proved key enablers for his high level of intelligence. Utilising this dogged strength of character and intellectual agility, Freyberg surrounded himself with capable junior leaders and transcended his personal nadir: the bitterness of defeat, the collapse of morale, the combat fatigue of the old hands. In so doing, he would accomplish his most telling achievement by taking a worn out and defeated military formation and transforming it into a division

¹⁶¹ Oxford Dictionary Online, accessed at <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/denouement>: Internet; 05 December 2012

¹⁶² Matthew Wright, *Freyberg's War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 223

resourced, equipped, trained and capable of delivering decisive combat power of the type needed to fight and attain glory in northern Italy.

Freyberg's personal authority remained strong among his superiors. After Cassino, there was no fall out or degradation of his authority, either personal or legal. The drawdown of resources in Italy from mid 1944 meant that leaders of Freyberg's quality were highly valued and highly useful in the grinding combat through Italy. Alexander and the Imperial chain of command, and later to a lesser extent Clark and his staff, understood that Cassino was an extremely difficult challenge and accepted that Freyberg, thrust into Cassino with inadequate forces and inadequate preparation had done all he could. The prosecution of the war in Italy simply had to go on. Freyberg's honest and transparent dealings with the New Zealand government in his conduct of operations, his efforts to work cooperatively to repatriate the divisions' veterans while retaining the required degree of divisional combat power and his assistance in developing a long term plan for New Zealand land operations after the war in Europe confirmed and assured his political and high level military authority. Within the division, however, his authority wavered after Cassino. The temptations of Italy, whether booze, loot or women, the collapse of morale due to combat fatigue of the veterans and the disruption caused by the return of the first furlough drafts preoccupied the division and eroded Freyberg's authority incrementally. He was quickly aware of it and understood his limited ability to deal with the underlying causes due to manpower constraints. As with the aftermath of Crete, Freyberg took decisive and diverse steps to reassert his authority by dealing with issues he could resolve as and where he could. Initially, Freyberg would organize coordinated and controlled leave periods to provide some respite, but concurrently he would also harden discipline forcing the men to comply with clear standards of expected behaviour. As always though, he would retain his sense

of humour, his sense of fairness and his deep affection for the men of the division, remarking of the plonk missions: “Isolated instances are funny”¹⁶³ Later, when possible, Freyberg would actively replace all the long service veterans with reinforcements from the disbanded 3rd Division. By the end of the fighting in Italy, Freyberg’s personal authority had been restored within 2NZEF and his towering reputation would be embedded in the psyche of New Zealand, at home and for the many expatriate Kiwis who would settle abroad following their war service. Through their experiences, the 70,000 men and women of 2NZEF would share an emotional attachment with Tiny, The General, or “The old Scamp”, as Davin and Costello called him. For some soldiers, service in “The Div” would be defining event of their lives. As the returned soldiers flooded home, within New Zealand - at home or abroad, Freyberg’s reputation was secure.

Majdalany observed: “The New Zealand Division would never be the same after Cassino.”¹⁶⁴ Freyberg rebuilt his force. It would be a new New Zealand Division. Wright concludes that the division was the most complete and powerful Allied combat unit of the 1945 summer campaign.¹⁶⁵ The new New Zealand Division would utilize the full envelope of its combat power to restore and enhance New Zealand military and political prestige and finally best the hated Boche on the river banks of Northern Italy.

The degree to which Freyberg accepted his responsibilities, both assigned and personal, remained extremely high. Despite and because of Italy’s diminished priority and importance after the opening of OVERLORD, Freyberg remained burdened by the heavy load as New Zealand’s agent in the Middle East. Through late 1944 and 1945, it was manifested most visibly in his

¹⁶³ John White, *General Officer Commanding Diary – Part V, October 1944-January 1945* (New Zealand Archives, Department of Internal Affairs: WA 8 7/67), 8 August 1944, 636

¹⁶⁴ Fred Majdalany, *Cassino Portrait of a Battle* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1957), 194.

¹⁶⁵ Matthew Wright, *Freyberg’s War* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 220

resolve and determination to remodel how the NZ Division conducted operations in Italy. Accepting that the division was not optimally configured to campaign successfully in Italy, Freyberg used his authority and his responsibility to lever his own creative ability by effectively re-organising, re-manning, re-equipping and re-training the division for the combat it would surely see in early 1945. As the summer offensive commenced, his burden became ever more heavy. As well as conducting New Zealand operations, he would be responsible for and subject to, a constant stream of important visitors from New Zealand conducting troop visits. He now had to consider for the New Zealand government what options existed for 2NZEF after the completion of the war in Europe. Furthermore, Freyberg would be tasked with the practical responsibility of drawing down and repatriating all army servicemen and women and 2NZEF materiel back to New Zealand ready for its next anticipated tasking in the Pacific.

Freyberg's superior command capability, in terms competence, authority and responsibility, and the optimally balanced command envelope he acted within is profoundly demonstrated by the spectacular success of the new New Zealand Division in the denouement of his career, the summer campaign in Italy during 1945.

PART 3 CONCLUSIONS

9. COMMAND CAPABILITY, THE NEW ZEALAND CONTEXT AND THE MYTHOLOGICAL BASELINE

Pigeau and McCann's CAR framework provides a clear explanation of Freyberg's strong, balanced and enduring command capability. Freyberg undoubtedly possessed the robust physical competency required to command large formations in arduous conditions over long periods. He held an ongoing and resilient intellectual ability to synthesize the many and ever changing strands of his command situation into coherent, innovative, and effective courses of action. Moreover, Freyberg's emotional and interpersonal competencies were the outstanding strengths in his very replete command capability skill set. Freyberg possessed a towering personal authority which, after Montgomery's arrival in North Africa, was never again questioned and, as the New Zealand agent, in Middle East he held tremendous extrinsic authority which he used diligently and wisely. The CAR framework suggests Freyberg balanced this authority with a high degree of intrinsic responsibility generated by his powerful personal sense of duty and strong emotional attachment to 2NZEF and in the end, New Zealand itself. Finally, the CAR framework also puts, in stark relief, the unremitting and heavy burden of external responsibility that Freyberg alone shouldered on behalf of New Zealand, its government and society.

The four key waypoints in Freyberg's military tenure of 2NZEF highlight that, despite losses and set-backs, while each competency was challenged or tested through a range of situations at different times, his complete command capability envelope never failed him or led to the destruction of his force. Moreover, the waypoints demonstrate Freyberg's ability to both learn from his mistakes and to use key strengths to manage situations to best effect with the range competency, authority and responsibility he had available to him.

After the fall of Crete, Freyberg faced a situation where his command competency was questioned, his authority reduced, personal and professional networks affected and his ability to command significantly impacted. The North African apogee of his command of 2NZEF illustrated how Freyberg, through his superior intellect, strong interpersonal skill and inspirational leadership rehabilitated his command situation and reasserted his authority by demonstrating his mastery of the North African battle space. Cassino, his personal low point, found Freyberg pushed into an insuperable attritional battle with inadequate forces and a dismissive and unsupportive commander, General Mark Clark. On Clark's orders, the two NZCORPS battles of Cassino mauled his division and accelerated the impending combat fatigue of the division's veterans. As a weighty capstone atop this, Freyberg's son, Paul, would be posted missing in action at Anzio and his closest colleague Kippenberger, the erstwhile successor to command the NZ Division, was so grievously wounded that he would not return to the division. Despite these crushing personal losses, Freyberg once again applied his agile, innovative intellect, resolve and determination to assault Cassino with two inventive attacks that maximised his narrow options and attempted to mitigate the limited combat power he was able to apply. Alexander's fourth and successful battle for Cassino followed a plan similar to Freyberg's concepts, started from the gains NZCORPS achieved and applied the full combat power of 13 Divisions. The denouement of Freyberg's career, the final waypoint, allowed Freyberg, free of any higher command aspirations or opportunities, and away from the centre point of World War II to express his culminating tactical and organisational prowess at its highest point. With limited resources in a low priority theatre, he regenerated, reorganised and retrained the NZ Division to conduct agile, hard-hitting offensive operations on the braided and stop banked plains of north eastern Italy in the summer of 1945.

Freyberg was a commander whose success was driven fundamentally, by a high level of competency but which was weighted down by a significant degree of responsibility, as Pigeau and McCann suggest. Freyberg's intellectual competency was strong. He was able to discern, assess, adapt, innovate, regenerate and overcome. Freyberg displayed an intellectual resilience that allowed him to learn and grow from mistakes. His physical and emotional competency was equal or superior to all around him - his subordinates, peers, superiors and foes. These competencies were plainly evidenced by the duration, scope and, ultimately, the success of his command through the campaigns in North Africa and Italy. Despite the post war erosion of Freyberg's reputation because of the criticism of Crete and Cassino and the small scale of New Zealand's operational contribution, at critical moments during his tenure, Freyberg's superior competency was utilized by operational commanders, in particular, Montgomery, Alexander and Leese, as they saw Freyberg as the preferred option; a highly competent and trusted commander who could get the job done.

As Freyberg learned from his experience and developed his command, his competency became ever more evident and his authority improved significantly. With the arrival of Montgomery, despite changing nothing, it became balanced with his burden of responsibility, allowing him to exercise the authority required of a national commander, that of balanced command. By his actions in North Africa, Freyberg reset his command situation and increased his authority. From being a divisional commander facing imminent replacement, saved only because a suitable replacement was unavailable, Freyberg became, at the North African campaign's end, acknowledged as one of the best fighting divisional commanders in that theatre and an authority on desert maneuver warfare.

For Freyberg, the potential for higher command loomed. However, his commitment to the

New Zealand Government and his emotional attachment to 2NZEF meant he struggled to accept the opportunity. Moreover, at the close of the North African campaign, the early signs of his war weariness started to show. The Italian campaign ultimately sidelined the NZ Division in a secondary front, unsuited to the division's order of battle, operating contexts and equipment. As the land campaigns in Europe, west and east, continued, Italy became more and more irrelevant; however, the two foes engaged each other in a series of attritional clashes to ensure that each remained committed in-theatre thereby preventing any redeployment to support operations elsewhere. Cassino would extinguish any higher ambition Freyberg still held, and later, OVERLORD would effectively expunge any further higher command opportunity.

As New Zealand's agent in the Middle East, Freyberg used his authority carefully and wisely to best effect, throughout his tenure. He steadfastly advocated for his command and tried to drive efficient success with the least acceptable loss to 2NZEF by balancing military considerations and political imperatives where no higher New Zealand Army headquarters existed.

Freyberg's sense of responsibility to his charter, the government of New Zealand and the men and women of 2NZEF was outstanding and of huge importance not only to the success of his command but to the sustainability and ultimate survival of 2NZEF. Moreover, Freyberg's wider viewpoint encompassed a new place for New Zealand in post war international relations. His understanding and management of the manpower and geo-political crises he faced whilst leading the NZ Division at Alamein and again with NZCORPS at Cassino placed huge responsibilities on his shoulders and burdened his intellectual and emotional reserves. Additionally, at Cassino, the loss of Paul and the wounding of Kippenberger tested his emotional resilience to the utmost. His success in ultimately balancing these demands and responsibilities

throughout his tenure was another exemplary personal quality enhanced by his intelligence and connections, that ensured the survival of his expeditionary force, enabled its sustainable success and provided a strong future view for New Zealand in international relations after World War II.

What stands out particularly among Freyberg's many superior command attributes was his interpersonal competency. Freyberg's life was punctuated by longstanding and enduring relationships spanning the widest range of humanity. He was able to make and retain personal connections with the lowest ranked member of his command through to arguably one of the most influential men on the Allied side, Winston Churchill. Even the fractious relationship with Clark, seemed to Freyberg, relatively cordial prior to the publication of *Calculated Risk* in 1951.¹⁶⁶ These relationships did not occur by chance or in isolation. They were the result of his personal attributes; his values, ethics, strength of character and natural leadership. These character traits help to explain why his success and that of his command were generated over time rather than instantaneously. Freyberg needed time to make connections, understand and recognize the abilities of those who worked for him, those he worked with and for, and to build the enduring relationships that would ensure success.¹⁶⁷ This ability to influence across wide networks of diverse people was the hinge for his innovative, agile and creative intellect, and was the lightest lever for his authority when he needed to exercise it. Freyberg clearly understood his capacity to wield influence and forge relationships and used it deftly. Despite inherent bias, the earliest writings and the recollections of those people who served with Freyberg provide great insight into Freyberg's interpersonal competency. Stevens' comments in *Freyberg; The Man*. are typical. Without exception, all contemporaries and those who knew the man speak of a towering personality and influence: intelligent, determined, resolute, and without fear but at the same time

¹⁶⁶ Paul Freyberg, *Bernard Freyberg V.C. Soldier of Two Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991), 534-535

¹⁶⁷ Given the duration of Cretan campaign this perhaps provides an alternative insight to its failure rather than the simplistic assertion of bungling poor leadership.

kind, thoughtful, humble, considerate and loyal.

New Zealand emerged from the interwar depression and entered World War II as a small, isolated and sparsely populated dominion in the South Pacific heavily reliant on its security in world affairs by the unchallenged umbrella protection of the Empire which came to an end with the loss of Singapore on 15 February 1942. At the outbreak of war, New Zealand's population of 1.6 million was redeveloping a moderate level of wealth and restoring a reasonable standard of living thanks to burgeoning farm commodity exports to England, the Empire, and the US West Coast and also through a Keynesian Labour Government intervention, the New Zealand welfare state. Through its participation in the Boer and World War 1, New Zealand understood that security came at a price. New Zealand society was committed to paying its way for that protection but its resources and finances were limited. Therefore, the country could ill-afford reckless mistakes or irresponsible use of its valuable human capital. In 1939, New Zealand's military forces were totally unprepared and unready for any kind of military activity more complex than localised defence. The New Zealand Army lacked manpower, equipment and experienced senior leadership. Participation in an extended remote global conflict required an immediate and significant injection of manpower and equipment but, most importantly it required experienced, competent and responsible senior leadership. New Zealand found these qualities in Freyberg.

Complementing his training and experience, Freyberg's physical, intellectual and interpersonal competencies, his intrinsic authority and his internal responsibility ideally suited New Zealand's needs. Freyberg was able to deftly navigate his way vertically through the machinations of Empire, New Zealand, Commonwealth and Allied politics, both civil and military, and, horizontally across the strategic, operational and tactical span of military

operations. Freyberg's strong and balanced command capability enabled him to develop New Zealand's hollow, undermanned and unequipped peacetime paper army into, by mid 1942, a small but complete, credible and capable national army. Freyberg would require and use the full range of his command capability to fight the division from Greece through to Trieste five years later. His tenure included defeats and significant loss of life. However, Freyberg's ever responsible and considered use of his command powers sustained and developed the division by enhancing its reputation for hard hitting, determined and resolute application of combat power across a wide range of operating contexts. The summer campaign of 1945 and the final race to Trieste were material evidence of Freyberg's successful, responsible and considered application of his command powers. At wars' end, the division (and 2NZEF) remained an effective and highly regarded fighting unit.

Freyberg optimised his command capability and the division's combat capability with his interpersonal strengths used to forge strong relationships with Allied commanders around him and to cement a unique niche for 2NZEF and New Zealand in the Allied Middle East military and Empire political milieus. Moreover, beyond the conflict of World War II, the division's exemplary combat record provided an important plank in New Zealand's war contribution which would be the springboard and the authority for New Zealand's place as one of the pioneers of the United Nations thereby establishing itself as a responsible, committed and important small nation player in international affairs in the second half of the 20th century.

In the case of Freyberg and 2NZEF, criticism stayed within the group. Freyberg was the face of the NZ Division to the men and women within and to those political, civil and military without. 2NZEF (including "The Div") existed as its own entity with its own rules, rites and

norms, and as Majdalany states, it was a “closed shop.”¹⁶⁸ His assessment is well considered, informed and telling. Freyberg would meet the original drafts in camp in 1940. In Greece and on Crete, he would leave with the last of them to get off. Freyberg would be severely wounded at Minqar Qaim, and he would send the old hands home (including his PA and ADC) in 1944, while he, himself, remained to continue the fight. Freyberg shared with his men the bitter taste of defeat on Crete and at Cassino. He toasted the victory with them at Tripoli and Trieste. When the final echelons of 2NZEF made it back to New Zealand in 1946, Freyberg now Governor-General, would be waiting for them.

The men and women of 2NZEF belonged to Freyberg and he belonged to them. This deep bond of identity, service and duty through the shared experiences of the expeditionary force meant that other than petty internal gripes within, no criticism would be brooked of “the General” from without. Any criticism of Freyberg was personal; a criticism of the group and its war service, and therefore in turn a criticism of the unit, brigade or battalion and of, finally, the servicemen and women. Rebuttal of any criticism would be swift, pointed and universal. Across the government and body politic of New Zealand, there was also an abiding gratitude, appreciation and understanding of the depth and breadth of Freyberg’s assiduous and dutiful service to them and New Zealand, of the quality of his leadership, his innate sense of duty and the strength of his personal traits.

While Freyberg knew how lucky he was to command men of the quality of New Zealand’s Expeditionary Force so too New Zealand understood how lucky it had been to have Freyberg. Freyberg was indeed a unique person at a unique time, and for six years the synchronicity of the man and the events was the ideal situation for New Zealand.

Where is fact distinguished from legend? In analysing Freyberg’s situation across the

¹⁶⁸ Fred Majdalany, *Cassino Portrait of a Battle* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1957), 98.

four key waypoints and his actions in re-mediating and maintaining his command, Bernard Freyberg's inherent leadership and personal qualities of resolve, courage and integrity coupled to a robust and balanced set of command competencies are comprehensively demonstrated. These competencies discussed and reviewed using Pigeau and McCann's CAR framework enabled Freyberg to create, maintain, sustain and develop New Zealand's precious small national army into an efficient, resilient and highly regarded fighting unit that would serve with distinction through the entirety of the Middle East and Italian campaigns of World War II. Moreover, Freyberg's unique set of competencies ideally matched the needs of New Zealand's army, government and society as it fought in a remote, prolonged and draining multi-theatre global conflict.

Lieutenant General Baron Bernard Cyril Freyberg of Wellington, VC, GCMG, KBE, KCB, DSO (three bars) is well deserving of the New Zealand affectionate sobriquet "World Famous in New Zealand"

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