

NZAR ID A18 American Forces in New Zealand WWII compiled by John Osborne

Between June 1942 and mid-1944 there were between 15,000 and 45,000 American servicemen in camp in New Zealand. For both visitor and host it was an intriguing experience with much of the quality of a Hollywood fantasy. The American soldier found himself 'deep in the heart of the South Seas', in the words of his army-issued pocket guide. He was in a land of tree-ferns and semi-tropical 'jungle'. He usually came either before or immediately after the horror of war on a Pacific island, and he found a land of milk and honey (literally), of caring mothers and 'pretty girls'. Little wonder that in later years Leon Uris would write a novel about the experience (*Battlecry*) and that Hollywood itself would make a film (*Until they sail*) with Paul Newman as the heart-throb.



<http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/japanese-expansion-in-ww2>

American Camp in New Zealand



Center: First of many: Sergeant Nathan E. Cook, 37th Infantry Division, comes down the gangway at Prince's Wharf in Auckland to become the first American soldier to step onto New Zealand soil, 13 June 1942. Right: An American officer and a Tainui kuia (elderly woman) share food from a hangi at Ngāruawāhia in February 1943.

Auckland/Northland Refer map above left

- Whangarei area: Three Mile Bush; Maungatapere
- Warkworth area: Riverina HQ, Wilson Rd (3 camps); Rodney Showgrounds; Goatley's Road (4 camps); The Knoll; Old Great North Road; Camp (L. Beresford's land); Woodcock's Road (3); Carran's Road; Wylie's Road; Falls Road; Perry's Road; Matakana (2); Dome Camp (Kaipara Flats); Whangateau; Artillery Range, Tapora; Pakiri Beach.
- Auckland: Mechanics Bay; Auckland Domain (Inner); Auckland Domain (Camp Hale); Victoria Park; Cambria Park (Puhinui); Waikaraka Park (Onehunga); Camp Bunn (Tamaki); Mangere Crossing; Western Springs

Wellington/Kapiti/ Wairarapa

- Paekakariki area: Paekakariki; Camp Russell; McKay's Crossing; Judgeford Valley; Pauatahanui; Titahi Bay; Plimmerton; Paraparaumu
- Wellington/Hutt: Hutt Park; Kaiwharawhara Park Road; Anderson Park; Central Park
- Masterton: Memorial Park; Solway Showground

Overview - US forces in New Zealand

The American invasion began in Auckland on 12 June 1942 as five transport ships carrying 'doughboys' of the US Army sailed into the harbour. Two days later Marines ('leathernecks') landed in Wellington. They had arrived as a result of the outbreak of war in the Pacific six months before. From the New Zealand perspective the Americans strengthened New Zealand's defences against possible Japanese attack; the Americans saw New Zealand as a valuable source of supply and a staging post for operations against the Japanese in the Pacific.

American life in New Zealand between 1942 and 1944 was centred on the camps, most of which were within marching distance or a short train journey from Wellington or Auckland city. Some of the soldiers were here to train for forthcoming battles on Pacific islands. They practised landings and jungle marches. Others had returned from the war and were here for rest and recreation or to recover their health; and there were some whose job was to provide the supplies for a modern army.

The American forces worked hard and men craved time off. But New Zealand leisure habits were very different to American ones. So the visitors devised their own forms of entertainment and established enclaves of American culture. There were games of baseball, jazz concerts, dances, and five Red Cross clubs which offered cheap hamburgers, doughnuts and Coca-Cola.

Between 28 August and 3 September 1943 New Zealand played host to Eleanor Roosevelt, First Lady of the United States. She came to visit the American forces, inspect the work of the American Red Cross, and study the contribution of New Zealand women to the war effort

The presence of thousands of well-paid Americans as part of a large army brought about a minor economic boom in New Zealand and affected local patterns of commerce. Dry cleaners, taxi drivers and milk bars did well; there was increased activity on the wharves; and market gardeners came under pressure to grow more cabbages for the soldiers in the Pacific.

For many people of both nations, the most memorable aspect of the American invasion was the home visits. Often these were arranged formally, with New Zealand families signing up to offer the Americans a weekend at home. New Zealanders generally warmed to their extrovert guests, while the Americans in turn appreciated the home comforts and genuine kindness offered by their hosts.

Romantic liaisons between American servicemen and New Zealand women inevitably developed. The soldiers were starved of female company, and many Kiwi women enjoyed the Americans' good manners and their offers of taxi rides, ice-cream sodas and flowers. Some 1500 New Zealand women married American servicemen in these years. This was not universally welcomed, especially by Kiwi men, and there were a number of fights and plenty of muttering about the invading 'bedroom commandos'

There were also tensions between some American servicemen and Māori. As a result, strenuous efforts were made to build inter-racial bridges – Princess Te Puea arranged a series of visits to Ngāruawāhia in Waikato, and the Americans were also welcomed by Ngāti Pōneke Young Māori Club in Wellington and onto a marae in Gisborne.

The American invasion began to ebb in late 1943. For some New Zealanders it was a relief to see the men go; for others it was an occasion of sadness and, before long, grief as many Americans died, especially in the invasion of Tarawa, in the Gilbert Islands. For both visitors and hosts the 'brief encounter' left powerful memories.

Acknowledgements & special thanks to: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/us-forces-new-zealand/overview>
<http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/WhatsOn/exhibitions/SliceofHeaven/Exhibition/InternationalRelations/Pages/ww2object.aspx?irn=2544>
http://newzealand.usembassy.gov/70_years.html <http://pinterest.com/usembassynz/70th-anniversary-since-us-troops-in-nz/>