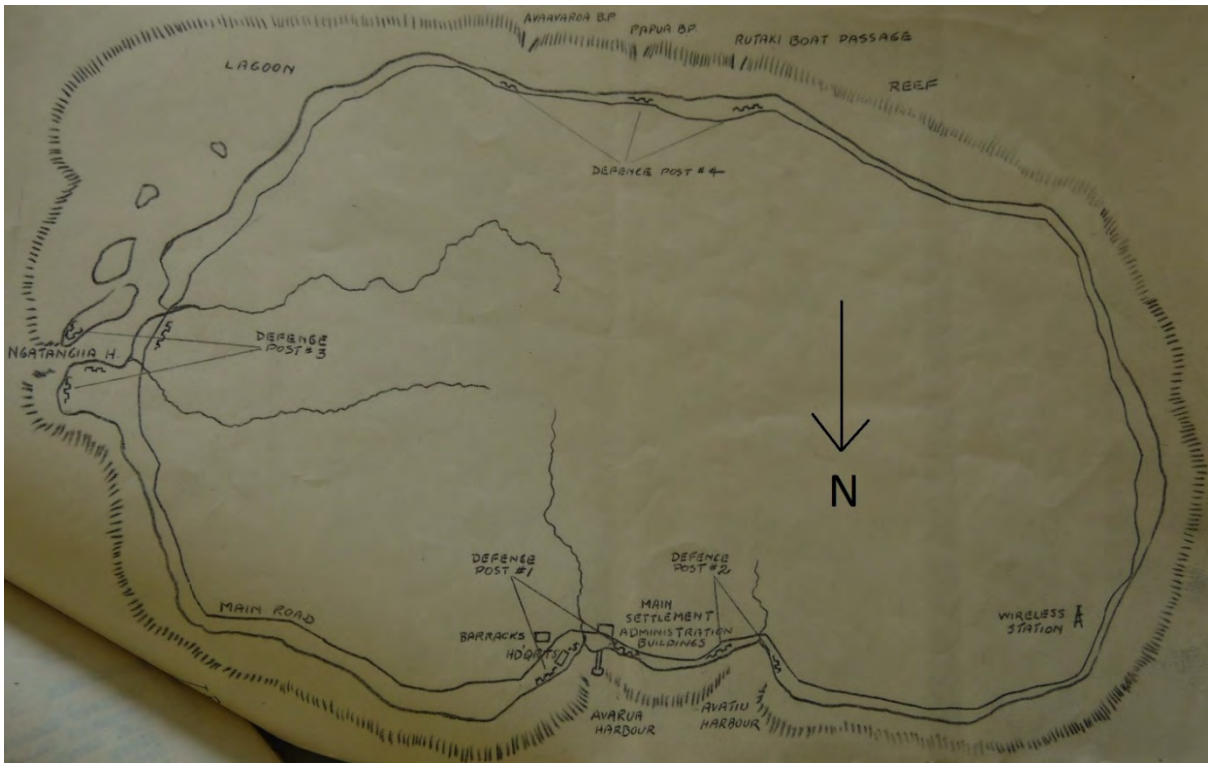
The Cook Islands Local Defence Force
1941-1945
By Barry O'Sullivan

Many New Zealanders have gone to the idyllic Cook Islands and roamed around the main island of Rarotonga, mountainous, jungle covered and a tourist destination. Many know about the Rarotonga soldiers who serviced overseas on active service during WW1. But what is less understood is the Cook Islands and their service during WW2. During WW2 the Cook Islands were a territory of New Zealand and as such should be considered part of the New Zealand war effort.

The Cook Islands group is divided into the lower islands of, Aitutaki, Atiu, Mauke, Mitiaro, Mangaia and the northern islands of Penrhyn, Manihiki, Rakahanga, Pukapuka, Palmerston, Nassau, Suwarrow, Rarotonga and a number of other smaller islands. The land was first settled by Polynesian voyagers. The Europeans gave the islands the name of Cook Islands which translates in the local Maori language as *Kūki 'Āirani.* The islands endured European 'discovery', contact and colonial rule. They were proclaimed a British Protectorate in 1888 and in June 1901 they were annexed by New Zealand and since 1903 the islands have had their own island administration department as part of the New Zealand Government in Wellington. The main island of Rarotonga had the main government administration and resident commissioner at Avarua with each island having a subordinate resident agent. In 1965 the Islands were given self-governing status but were still assisted where needed by New Zealand and there still exists a special status relationship. Today, Rarotonga is the base for the Cook Islands government.

The main island of Rarotonga has a mountainous centre with a road that runs around the outside. There was no airstrip until 1944 and the whole island is protected by a ring of reefs with only a few holes for ships to access the island. The seat of administration and the only anchorage inside the reef is located at Avarua with the total estimated population of Rarotonga in 1941 of 5,689[i].



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Just after war was declared on 3rd September 1939 Mr J D Campbell[ii] a resident of the island and president of the local RSA made a report on the islands defence needs and likely targets. This report dated 14th September 1939 identified that the most likely cause for enemy activity would be to gain access to secret wireless codes, to demolish the wireless station and to raid the island for stores and provisions. The most likely form of attack would come from enemy shipping or from a boat landing on the island from an enemy ship. The houses were widely spread and it was noted that they were surrounded by large amounts jungle to take shelter in, in the case of bombardment. The wireless station was located on the western side of the island was isolated and in a position that could easily be destroyed by gun fire from a ship. The report recommended a small force of about 100 and listed the stores needed for that small force. This force was to be made up of local volunteers and officered by Europeans. The senior NCOs were to be locals who had served in the previous war, some of whom were qualified marksman. The physical fitness of the men was also mentioned and the men would not have to be physically fit or have the best eyesight as it was envisioned that there would not be any long marches or hardships encountered while serving. The uniform was to consist of NZ Infantry felt hat and puggaree, khaki shirt with NZ Forces buttons, khaki shorts, rubber soled canvas shoes, web waist belt, frog, ammunition pouches and hat badge.

Material and Equipment required from New Zealand[iii]

100 Rifles
100 Bayonets & scabbards
100 Belts, waist, web
100 Frogs, web
100 Pouches, ammunition
100 Slings, rifle, web
2,000 Rounds .303 rifle ammunition
100 pairs shoes, rubber soled, canvas
100 Hat badges.
2 Light machine guns with tripod mounting, and extra leg so that fixed lines of fire can be used.
3,500 rounds for machine guns
100 Infantry felt hats
100 Infantry hat bands
500 N.Z. Forces buttons, small

Material required in Rarotonga

Khaki drill, sufficient for 100 shirts and 100 shorts
Cotton
Calico
Targets, grouping rings etc, could be made in Rarotonga.

While the island was not considered of vital importance or in any real danger, the report from Campbell was raised and considered in August 1940 when the resident commissioner, Mr H.F. Ayson, brought up the matter with the Secretary of the Cook Islands Department in Wellington. The force was to consist of three platoons stationed at Avarua, Titikaveka and Arorangi (the last two to be machine gun sections). The threat of submarine activity was highlighted and it was noted that the current arms on the island consisted of 24 short magazine Lee Enfield rifles and 24 uniforms which were used for official Guard of Honour duties. There were also 12 serviceable rifles and 4 .303 rifles in private hands. A supply of great coats was asked for so they could be worn by those guarding the wireless station at night. In October 1940 the New Zealand Chiefs of Staff committee recognised that Rarotonga was a target (although not important) and suggested that a militia type force could be established and that supplies for its defence would be sent from New Zealand. The main reasons given for the need to supply and organise a militia on the island were to keep fresh supplies from falling into enemy hands, to report enemy activity, to inflict causalities if a landing was made and '*to*

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uphold the prestige of the Cook Islands from easily falling into enemy hands without resistance'. They recommend that the following supplies be sent from New Zealand.

100 Rifles
100 Bayonets and Scabbards
100 Pull-throughs and oil bottles
100 sets of Mills web equipment, 1908 pattern, waist belts, frogs, pouches, rifle slings.
12,000 rounds of .303 rifle ammunition
2 medium (Vickers) machine guns
4,000 rounds for machine guns
12 High explosive grenades
100 Infantry felt hats
100 Infantry hat bands
500 NZ Forces small buttons
100 pairs rubber soled canvas shoes
100 Hat badges
Khaki drill fabric, sufficient to make 100 each of shirts and shorts
Cotton
Calico

While the badge design is not mentioned it is most likely that the WW1 made badge of the Cook Islands Company of the Maori Contingent or the N.Z. Pioneer badge (as issued to the Aitutaki Home Guard[iv]) was worn on the hat and cap. It was noted by the NZ Chiefs of Staff that no personal from New Zealand could be spared and that the resident commissioner had to raise and officer the unit from the local population. A wireless telegraph set was also to be dispatched to the island to act as an emergency back up in case the wireless station was destroyed but as no wireless set could be immediately spared it took two years before a set was delivered. A coast watching network was also established. This group was made up of locals and came under the direction of the islands' chief of police.

By December 1940 the need to place the local defence force on a legal basis was recognized and so an order of Council was drawn up using the Samoa Local Defence Force Regulations 1939[v] as a template. As there were no territorials and very few Europeans in the Cook Islands it was envisaged that a Home Guard model of service could be introduced and that none of the local population were required to serve overseas. The possibility of overseas service was widely anticipated by the locals who know doubt had heard the stories of the islands veterans and the benefits they received after service, but on the other hand it is likely that the NZ Government didn't want to send them overseas due to the medical issues that plagued the Rarotonga's of the 1st NZEF. As was the accepted practice of the time, a European officer was needed to be found to command the unit. Mr Campbell was considered the best option but was no longer available as he was in New Zealand serving in the R.N.Z.A.F.[vi] The next choice was Mr Reginald Mordaunt Leigh Gladney[vii], a Canadian veteran of the 1st World War. Gladney had served with the 86th Machine Gun Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, and had experience in the use of machine guns and infantry tactics. Gladney was already booked to leave Rarotonga for America so a paid position was needed to be found for him to keep him on the island. A government job at the Agriculture Department was suggested but his re-employment at this department was turned down due to him being found unreliable and unsatisfactory but in March 1941, and due to the war emergency Gladney was appointed as Inspector of Noxious Weeds at the Department of Agriculture.

On the 9th of April 1941 the Order in Council for *The Cook Islands Local Defence for Regulations 1941*[viii] was released. This order was made under the Cook Island Act of 1915 and gave the Government of New Zealand the legal powers and ability to raise, organise, appoint officers and maintain discipline of the local defence force. A local defence committee was established to oversee

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the running of the Cook Islands Local Defence Force as it was known (hereafter called the Force), this committee consisted of

Judge H.F. Ayson
Doctor E. P. Ellison
Mr. G. Robinson, Superintendent, Radio Rarotonga.
Mr. H. J. Korgan, Registrar of Courts.
Mr. G. Innes, Chief Officer of Police.
Mr. L. J. Warren, Manager, Union Steamship Company.
Mr. R.M.L. Gladney, Captain of proposed local defence force.
Mr. H. Larsen, clerk to the committee.

Gladney was appointed as a Captain in the Force on the 14th April 1941 and was encouraged to come to New Zealand for a refresher course of instruction. During his absence a New Zealand officer was to be sent to Rarotonga. In May the local defence committee set about putting together regulations and a plan for the Force. This plan worked on the idea of a full-time force and differed from the original militia type force that the New Zealand Chiefs of Staff had wanted. The regulations for the Force contained the detailed instructions for raising the Force and consisted of organisation, service eligibility, terms of service, rates of pay, headquarters and barracks, scope of duties, composition of personal, recruiting, uniform, defence works, equipment, transport and disposition of force, etc. and it is very likely that these unofficial regulations were later used to govern the Force.
Organisation – the Force was to be raised from volunteers between the ages of 18 and 50 years.
Eligibility – male British subjects, pass medical examination, take the oath of allegiance to His Majesty the King.

Term of Service – for the duration of the war and for six months after if required. Can apply for service in the NZEF if required. Can be discharged if unable to for fill duties. To undertake training and to wear the uniform prescribed. Members of the Force were to be paid and receive daily rations. The officer was to receive pay as well as a messing allowance. No pay or allowance was paid for spouses or dependants.
Recruiting – the Force was to be made up of males from local villages, these numbers were calculated on the population of the villages and ensured a mix that was designed to avoid jealousies between villages.

Position	**village**	**% of force**	**No. of locals**
Captain Gladney			1
Sergeant Major Raiatia Tepuretu[ix] (age 49)			1
Quartermaster Sgt George Karika[x] DCM (age 47)			1
Returned soldiers		25%	23
Other Ranks		75%	
	Avarua	50%	38
	Arorangi	17%	11
	Titikaveka	10%	8
	Muri	5%	4
	Ngatangiia	10%	8
	Matavera	8%	6
			100

Headquarters and Barracks – the headquarters of the Force was to be located at vacant Mitchell's store, adjacent to the wharf in the main settlement of Avarua and was rented from the owner. The building was to be used for training, headquarters, officers, storerooms and living quarters for the Gladney. The barracks was to be located in the Makea Nui Ariki compound (home of the Cook Island royal family) and was to consist of newly erected buildings in the local fashion which were to be used as sleeping quarters, mess and cook houses and latrines.

Duties – duties of the Force were to prevent any surprise landing by a merchant raider, to protect the harbours at Avarua, Avatiu and Ngatangiia and the reef passages at Avaavaroa, Papua and Rutaki. It was envisioned that any landing would happen at night by a small boat from a larger vessel. During the day shipping could be seen well before they became a threat. During the day sentries were to be posted to protect equipment and supplies and 24-hour guards were to be stationed at the wireless station, at the three harbours and at the three reef passages.

Composition – the Force was to be composed of a HQ company of 20, plus 3 platoons each with 1 medium machine gun section (8 or 9 each) and 2 rifle sections (9 each). Each platoon had a sergeant in command.

Service Dress uniform – (suggested) a khaki drill shirt with shoulder straps, open neck, rolled sleeves and badges be worn. Khaki drill shorts and web belt. Lightweight Khaki painted sun helmet (to be purchased locally) and brown leather sandals.

Walking out uniform – khaki drill shirt, khaki drill slacks and leather belt, service dress hat, canvas shoes or brown leather boots or shoes.

Fatigue Uniform – singlet and denim shorts.

Defence structures – trenches, machine gun emplacements were to be constructed at the main defensive positions and huts were built from local materials for night sentries. Telephones were linked up to the main telephone lines already on the island. An armoury with a cement floor and corrugated iron sides and roof was constructed on government land behind the public works depot and was hidden from the sea.

Equipment – greatcoats and a cape or ground sheet were going to be needed for night time duties and wet weather conditions. Blankets for bedding and a palliasses (mattress cover) filled with local coconut fibre or kapok.

Cooking – to be done in the native way over open fires but cooking pots would be required. The soldiers were to provide their own mess tins or plate, mug and eating utensils. The force was to be provisioned through New Zealand with rice, meat, sugar, flour and with as much native food as possible.

Transport – A unit truck for the transportation of equipment was need and this could be requisition form the island's Administration Transport Department as required. Gladney had his own car and only need to be reimbursed for its usage. Most of the local men had bicycles.

Signalling – Night signalling lamps were required as well as Verey flare pistols and coloured flares.

Gladney was to be appointed Captain of the force on a full-time basis so there was no need for him to be employed at the department of agriculture. By the middle of May 1941 additional equipment needed was
3 light machine guns
4 Verey pistols with white and coloured cartridges
1 day and night signalling lamp
Leather for sandals, for 100 men (heavy sole leather and light split hide for straps)
100 army greatcoats (large sizes)
100 Water poof capes
100 Blankets
100 Paillasses, empty
Regulation issue eating utensils for 100 men
6 camp kettles (dixies to be made locally, kitchen utensils to be purchased locally

In May 1941 The Cook Islands Administration put forward these proposals to the Cook Islands Department in Wellington and as the whole plan was bigger and costlier than that authorised by the Chiefs of Staffs Committee the whole idea of a local defence force was put back to the Chief of Army Staff at the Army Department for consideration. The original plan (authorised by the War Cabinet on 21st November 1940) was for a militia type organisation which was approved, but what the local defence committee now planned for was a full-time force. After deliberation the new plan for a full-time force was declined and only a militia type force was approved. 425 locals volunteered for the Force with only 100, who were fit for overseas service, being chosen. Of the returned soldiers who volunteered, 28 were medically fit and no one had machine gun experience. In June 1941 an order was placed for the supply of material for uniforms to be made locally and included khaki drill, blue denim fabric and 650 small brass imperial forces buttons. The blue denim fabric was not available from defence stores so it was supplied by Messrs Witt & Scott ltd of Wellington. In July 1941 a uniform was made in New Zealand for Captain Gladney which comprised of a khaki Tweed service dress uniform, a khaki drill uniform, 1 Service dress hat with badge, 3 poplin shirts, 3 cellular shirts, 3 pairs drill shorts with stockings, shoes and trench coat being supplied from stores and no doubt included a brown leather Sam Browne belt and brace. The uniform worn by the Force was khaki with a New Zealand regulation felt hat[xi] (which today, is incorrectly referred to as a lemon squeezer) for service dress and blue cotton for patrol dress. The khaki uniform varied between a drill, cellular and later American made Chino fabric.

The original photo belonged to Tere Mataroa (far right, back row). Others in the photo (may not be in order) L-R back row; Tutupu Ariki, Marii Tautu, Revi Aunguna, Charlie Ward, Tipokoroa Tipokoroa, Tapai Pirangi, Johnville Cowan, Eberdeen Tei, Rangi Mokotua, Tere Mataroa, L-R front row; Tiputoa, Temata, Kore Veroa, Ngatae Makiroa, Nooapii Veroa, Tere Vitoria, Teariki William Cuthers, Takaia Pu.

Cook Islands Local Defence Force, Arorangi section. Circa late 1941- early 1942. This image shows men dressed in the blue patrol dress uniform. The blue denim fabric was sourced from New Zealand then made into uniforms on Rarotonga. Thigh pockets can be seen on the trousers which indicates that they were made in the Battle Dress style. They also wear matching blue field service caps with two brass buttons to the front. They are wearing 1908 pattern infantry web equipment and carry Short Magazine Lee Enfield rifles. On their feet they are wearing sandals which indicates that the image was taken before the issue of boots. Source *William Kainana Cuthers. (Cook Island writer)*

In August 1941 the proposed regulations put down by the local defence committee were being used as a guide as to what was and was not to be supplied to the force. It was agreed that the leather for the sandals and 100 greatcoats and 100 waterproof capes would be sent. Gladney arrived in New Zealand on the 15th August 1941 for an officer's refresher course that was held at the Army School in Trentham (18th August to 19th September). In his place Captain Charles Alymer Rattray[xii], New Zealand Temporary Staff, was sent to Rarotonga to act as an instructor, arriving on the island on the 3rd August 1941. Rattray investigated the Force and prepared a report. Among other things his report recommended that the Force should consist of 25 full time permanent men made up mostly of grade 1 returned soldiers and 75 Territorials. This plan was agreed to by the local defence committee as they had had their plan rejected but still wanted some form of Force in case of attack.

Rattray's report found that the islanders were despondent at not being allowed to serve overseas and as such they didn't want to serve locally as volunteers. A factor leading to the despondency was

that the proposed regulations of May 1941, that were drawn up by the local defence committee, were published and this got the locals excited about service. It was found that the two full time NCO's of QMS Karika and SM Tepuretu drilled a small group of locals who '*turned up when they have nothing else to do*'. Gladney left Auckland on 23rd September to return to Rarotonga and Rattray arrived back in New Zealand on the 11th October. With the worsening outlook of the war it was approved on 31st October 1941 that the local defence forces in Samoa and Rarotonga would be brought under the direct control of the New Zealand Army Chief of Staff. In Rarotonga Gladney was busy organising guards at the main points and constructing machine gun emplacements and weapons pits.

The returned soldiers platoon undertook to do voluntary sentry duty at night at Avarua wharf until the pay issue was settled. They constructed a kikau shelter on the beach and Gladney asked the resident commissioner for permission to supply the guards with meals and cups of tea. Gladney drew up 'Water Front Standing Orders' and 'Instructions for Guard commanders' notices. Part of this was that guard challenges were to be in both English and the local Maori language. The guard was to be dressed in denim battle dress and have a rifle, bayonet and web equipment. Two Vickers guns were to be mounted and aimed at the harbour entrance. On 12th November 1941 a public notice was released from the Resident Commissioner's Office instructing the local population about what to do under the guard conditions. With the attack on Pearl Harbour on 7th December 1941 and the Japanese entry into the war the situation in the Pacific worsened and on the 10th December the War cabinet approved that the Force was to be organised into 5 groups of 20 serving 5 days in rotation with 14 days training in camp.

One day later on the 11th December 1941 approval was given for the establishment of the Rarotonga Local Defence Force and on 30th January 1942 for the full-time mobilization of the Tongan, Rarotonga and Western Samoan Defence Forces which was authorised by the War Cabinet. In January 1942 Gladney made a full survey of the island and came to the conclusion that the force of twenty permanent soldiers (he likely didn't know that the force had been mobilised) could not deter a landing via the sea. He recommended a plan that in case of an emergency that the force was to escape to the island's interior and that the best option was for a meeting place at a small area of flat land on top of Mount Tekou at the head of the Takuvaine valley. The plateau[xiii] was an ideal place for defence and even had its own water source and was described '*as a saucer like depression on the plateau which only has one reasonably easy point of entry'* (this geographical feature is visible on Google maps and can be found at the head of the ridges which run between and parallel to, Happy Valley road and Uraua Drive). Gladney proposed building tracks and defensive works at the site as well as having a store of iron rations (tinned food) and a portable wireless radio. This plan was approved in early July 1942 by the Deputy Chief of General staff.

As the war progressed extensive earth works and wiring was constructed at the 2,000 ft high plateau. This area was used to store reserves of ammunition and three months rations. The plan was to have 6 months reserve rations in store at locations around the island as well as relay on a monthly supply being sent from New Zealand by ship. The plateau was ideally situated for a view of the entire island and with a clear view out to sea for a significant distance. The post was guarded by a section 24 hours a day on a 7-day rotation. Tuakata hill was a point 300 feet above sea level and with views of both harbours was the site chosen for a field headquarters and consisted of strongly constructed M.M.G, Mortar and observation posts.

In this area was to be built native store houses and sleeping accommodation and was covered with wire that the grape vines used to make excellent natural camouflage. A 24-hour guard was stationed at this point under the direction of Sergeant Taripo, described by Gladney *'as my most reliable native NCO'*. The field headquarters was 12 to 15 minutes by foot from the sea and was the location for the first reserves of ammunition as well as being used as a training depot for the mortar and MMG sections. Guards were posted at Avarua and Avatiu harbours and during the day 4 Bren LMG were mounted in especially constructed pits. The men were barracked near to the guard locations. Night patrols were carried out by sections in full battle order and encircle the whole island with bases at Matavera, Ngatangiia Harbour, Maii, Avaavarea, Papua and Rutaki boat passages, Arorangi and Metu Tea. The outlying positions form Ngatangiis to Rutaki were patrolled by an NCO on a bicycle with the closer areas of Arorangi and Metu being covered by an NCO from headquarters. A 24-hour guard was also kept at a building constructed up the Tamaaru valley, this building housed all the food from the various local island trading companies.

By February 1942 the Force had a roll of 93 and Gladney was asking for a European warrant officer and two NCOs to assist in working the Force to an efficient level. At this time Sergeant Major Tepuretu resigned, it would seem that Gladney had disciplined him for having a sentry under his charge asleep at his post. Tepuretu was demoted on the spot and ordered to take down his rank. Tepuretu was marched through town under an armed guard and charged. Because he was publicly shamed, he resigned in protest. Gladney was sanctioned for this course of action but no further action was taken against either party. (Because he resigned, he was still eligible for a gratuity and service medals). As the Force was now on a full time basis the leather sandals previously locally made from New Zealand leather was not considered to be sufficient so 125 pairs of boots as well as 5 tins of khaki cleaner, 2 light machine guns (Lewis or Bren), 20 pounds of chargers, 10 cases of high explosives and 200 pounds of gelignite were ordered from New Zealand.

In April 1942 T/Warrant Officer Class II J W Berry[xiv], T/ Sergeant R M Edwards[xv] and T/Sergeant B S Bretherton[xvi] left for Rarotonga on board the *Maui Pomare.* It would seem that Bretherton did not make the trip as a Sergeant Hill is mentioned in relation to New Zealand NCOs stationed on the islands. From 21st December 1941 Gladney rented a house from Jagger and Harvey which was on the beach front. This house was used as his residence, headquarters, orderly room, store house for food stuffs and as a cook house for the men. Due to the arrival of the New Zealand NCO's (Berry, Hill and Edwards) a house was rented from Bonar and Shearman which was 200 yards west of the HQ. Another order was place for supplies from New Zealand and consisted of more boots, 100 rounds of ammunition for a .45 colt pistol and for a 9 mm luger pistol, leather for boot repair, hobnails, heel and toe plates for boots, 100 anti-gas respirators and 100 steel helmets, rifle grenade dischargers and assorted rifle parts. As from 19th June 1942 the US Navy assumed overall control of all forces in the South Pacific with Vice Admiral Ghormley as commander but this had no impact on the Force as the unit continued to receive all orders and administration from New Zealand authorities. In August 1942 Gladney placed another order, this time for Verey pistols and flares, rifle oil, flannel for cleaning rifles, 1 telephone with 4 handsets and wire, .303 tracer ammunition, 300 cellular shirts, 300 khaki drill shorts, 300 pairs woollen socks and 125 pairs putties. All these were supplied except for the telephone set which was unavailable. In October 1942 the island finally got issued with 3 miles of cable, 4 type D, Mk V, telephone sets and 24 dry cell batteries. But an emergency telephone set was still not available as Rarotonga was not seen as a priority.

In December 1942 the thought was that the Force could revert to a Territorial unit with a small permanent force of which Gladney agreed, as the initial threat of a sea borne boat landing had diminished and the idea that support could be received from the Americans stationed on Penrhyn and Aitutaki islands.

During December 1942 medical problems with the local volunteers started to show due to them being aggravated by military service. Some of the locals had latent TB (tuberculosis) and as they were not X Rayed prior to service the extent of the problem was not known (75 to 100 X ray plates had been recommended to be sent to the island in May 1941). Gladney wanted all members to be X rayed which was carried out by the chief medical officer on the island and any found with the disease were to be discharged. V.D. (venereal disease) was also looked into and anyone found with V.D. was suspended, sent home and told to seek medical assistance. Any that did and were considered cured by the doctor were reinstated. Sick pay was paid but any members with a long-term illness were discharged. A couple of locals died from natural causes while on service and these men were buried by the Force with coffins being paid for from the war expenses account. One of these was Morning Iro[xvii]. Another local was found to have leprosery and as was the practice of the time, was sent to the leper colony of Makogai Island, Fiji. His uniform was burnt.

In December 1942, the force was divided into 4 platoons each with 3 sections and each had 2 identical half companies based at Avarua and Avatiu harbours, each platoon came under the command of a New Zealand Sergeant with local NCOS. There are 4 Light machine gun sections, two 3" mortar sections, two Vickers machine gun sections, 4 rifle, rifle bomber and grenade sections. The strength of a section was 7 men and 8 for the mortar and MMG sections.

In March 1943 the Force consisted of 1 officer (resident), 1 warrant officer (NZ), 2 sergeants (NZ) and 100 other ranks all Rarotonga. The weapons they had were 2 Vickers, 4 Bren guns, 115 rifles with bayonets, 2 mortars, 512 Mills grenades, 1,000 HE mortar rounds, 4,000 .303 rounds for the machine guns and 77,000 .303 rounds for rifles, but during March a hurricane demolished 2 ammunition huts and water damaged a quantity of 3" mortar rounds. Up until now Gladney had been using his own car and claimed expenses as well as replacement types and parts. The car was getting mechanically worn out and was unreliable so in April 1943 a 1939 standard model Ford V 8 (Army number 14636) was shipped to Rarotonga for use by Gladney. During May 1943 another order was place for stores which included boots, bicycle types, tubes and seats, boot repair leather, pull-throughs, waterproof capes, torches, mortar flares as well as other sundry items. On 20th April 1943 a decision was released on the future of the Force. It was decided that the Force would revert to a Territorial unit with a small cadre to help with training, stores, administration and to act as a frame work for rapid re-mobilisation. Because the rapid demobilisation of the force as a whole would create economic hardship to the locals the plan was to spread the demobilisation over a three-month period.

The Force reverted to a Territorial status on 7th August 1943. At this date the Force was split into two which paraded on alternate weeks and at the end of three months a cadre of 20 men was chosen to remain full time. The platoons were called up for a day's training per week. After a few weeks there was discontent at not being paid for the week they did not work. One local private who was drunk, refused to hand in his rifle and equipment and encouraged others to revolt against the ruling. This

private was arrested by Sergeant Shaw[xviii] and spent 14 days in detention. Those who did not like the week about roster were given the option of asking for a discharge, 27 of whom were granted. The question of pay was always a sore point with the locals who received less pay per week than the Samoa Defence Force soldiers. In June 1943 a daughter of a Rarotonga paramount chief, Makea Nui Takau Ariki called on the Prime Minister of New Zealand and raised the issue of pay with him. As a result, new pay rates were calculated.

Rates of Pay comparison

	Rarotonga	Samoa
Private	2/-	3/6
Lance-Corporal	2/3	3/6
Corporal	2/6	4/-
Sergeant	3/6	4/6
Quartermaster-Sergeant	5/-	6/
Sergeant-Major	6/-	7/-

New rate of pay* effective from 1st July 1943

	Pay	Efficiency Pay	Total pay
Private	3/-	6d	3/6
Lance-Corporal	3/3	6d	3/9
Corporal	3/6	6d	4/-
Sergeant	4/-	6d	4/6
Quartermaster-Sergeant	5/6	6d	6/
Sergeant-Major	6/6	6d	7/-
*plus, free rations			

During January 1944 the local Home Guard unit stationed on the island of Aitutaki was winding up and all the stores were transited through Rarotonga. Gladney asked permission to take supplies from the shipment for the Force and for his own use and that of the attached NZEF personal. This was authorized by Army Headquarters in Wellington on 17th March 1944.

List of Stores taken out of Aitutaki

Home Guard materials before return to New Zealand

Caps, Field Service	110
Chevrons, 3 bar	15
Chevrons, 2 bar	12
Chevrons, 1 bar	22
Badges, arm worsted, crown, large	4
Badges, cap brass N.Z. Pioneer	100
Bands, hat, N.Z. Infantry	46
Whistles, artillery	6
Cotton, drill, khaki, yards	158
Attachments, brace, W.E. Patt 37	2
Belts, waist	1
Bottles, water, Mk VI	1
Braces, W.E. Patt. 37 left	1
Braces, W.E. Patt. 37 right	1
Carriers, W.E.	1
Cases, binoculars, W.E. Patt. 37	1

Cases, pistol, W.E. Patt. 37	1
Haversacks, W.E. Patt. 37	1
Haversacks, officers, W.E. Patt. 37	1
Lanyards, pistol	1
Pouches, ammunition, W.E. Patt. 37	1
Straps, haversack, W.E. Patt. 37, left	1
Straps, haversack, W.E. Patt. 37, right	1
Tins, mess	1
Badges, shoulder, gilt stars	12
Trousers, khaki drill (local make) pairs	47

In May 1944 Sergeant Edwards returned home as there was no more need for a full complement of New Zealand sergeants. In September 1944 the strength of the force was 91, 20 of whom were on permanent duty with the company attending 1 full days training per week. The 20 permanent staff were split into two and work on alternate weeks. While not working for the Local Defence Force they were employed in the construction of the airfield. Weekly inspections of the stores based at the Tuakata and Tekou depots were carried out as well as the other usual military duties a garden was kept with surplus vegetables being sold to raise funds for sports equipment. On one half day a week the units fishing net was used to catch fish which supplemented the bully beef ration. In October 1944 talk started as to the disbandment of the Force. Gladney had asked to be relieved of duties due to health issues and was given sick leave. An official visit was planned by the New Zealand government and it was suggested that the Force should not be disbanded until after the visit. This visit would give official thanks and give acknowledgment for the Force's service. By the end of November, the Samoan and Rarotonga local force were to be disbanded with only a small garrison to remain on Samoa. The war cabinet approved the disbanding of the Samoa and Rarotonga force on 16th December 1944 with all equipment and stores were to be sorted, packed, accounted for and returned to New Zealand.

The official visit took place from 27th to 31st December 1944. The Prime Minister Mr Peter Fraser, Mr AG Osborne M.P.[xix] and the official party visited Penrhyn, Aitutaki and Rarotonga[xx]. This visit was captured on film by the New Zealand National Film unit. The footage was released to the public as Weekly Review number 179 and titled *Official Visit Pacific Islands*. Today the film can be seen on 'You Tube' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJbhAwZ8S2c and is the third of four short films on the newsreel archived and uploaded by Archives New Zealand. Because of the way the film has been cut it is difficult to identify which scene was filmed on which island (The film features a Catalina aircraft and aircraft on air strips (the US built air strips on Penrhyn (1942) and Aitutaki (1943) and the New Zealand Government built the airstrip on Rarotonga (1944). As the Force was kept alive until after the official visit it is likely that the Home Guard unit on Aitutaki were reassembled to act as a guard of honour on that island. The footage shows two groups of soldiers and it is likely that the group with the felt hats are the Cook Island Local Defence Force and the group with the field service caps and leather belt and ammunition pouches are from the Aitutaki Home Guard. In May 1945 Gladney was allowed to resign from the Force as he was taking up the position of resident agent on Penrhyn island. It was recommended that Shaw take command of the force until a final decision was made on the fate of the force.

In June 1945 Shaw was given the temporary rank of 2nd Lieutenant and received free accommodation. Gladney left for Penrhyn on the 20th July 1945. During the Prime Minister's visit, it was decided to delay the disbandment of the Force and to offer their service to the British Government for service in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands as a garrison force but this was rejected and the Force was finally given the go ahead to disband on the 14th September 1945. To prevent any hardship the local members of the Force were given the option of 1 months' notice. A parade was held on the 19th September 1945 where the Resident commissioner gave the news to the Force and also offered an official vote of thanks for their service. All members of the Force were medically boarded before discharge. Details of unit strength and stores on hand were drawn up on the 15th September. The nominal roll of 58 contained 11 men on continuous service, 24 men on alternate weekly service and 22 men who served 1 day a week. The stores list contained clothing and personal equipment on hand as well as firearms, ammunition and general stores.

Equipment

141 Rifles (including 28 damaged)
116 Bayonets
115 Scabbards
2 Vickers .303 MMG, chests & spares
4 Lewis .303 LMG, chests & spares
2 3-inch mortars, chests & spares
94 Steel helmets
91 Respirators
78 Waist belts
80 Braces
86 Cartridge carriers, left
79 Cartridge carriers, right
83 Haversacks
53 Frogs, old type
20 Frogs, new type
22 Frogs, leather
81 Water bottles
13 Pack straps
37 Packs
91 Rifle slings
3 Cartridge pouches
1 Verey pistol
Group scoring disk
4 Field telephones
Telephone cable, used
Night aiming lamp
7 rolls flannelette
100 dummy rounds
40 Pull throughs
40 Oil bottles
7 Whistles
68 Outfits, anti-dim
.303 S.A.A. full boxes 44,000 rounds
.303 S.A.A. loose, 9,000 rounds
2,600 .303 tracer rounds
119 cases of 3-inch mortar bombs (6 per case)
60 boxes 36 H.E. grenades, (12 per box)
26 Vickers belt boxes and belts

Clothing

39 Capes, unissued
18 Capes, returned
11 pairs boots, unissued
25 khaki cellular shirts, unissued
16 American type shirts, returned
40 Shorts, khaki drill, unissued
28 Shorts, khaki drill, returned
20 long trousers, khaki drill, returned
39 khaki battle dress, locally made, returned
160 Buckles, shorts
29 Puttees
24 Hats, felt, unissued
50 Hats felt, returned
44 Field Service Caps, returned
111 Pugarees
33 Greatcoats, returned
Boot repairing gear (assorted)
100 Badges
13 Chevrons, 1 bar
1 Chevron, 2 bar
18 Chevrons, 3 bar
2 Crowns
1 Waggon with broken spring
1 wall clock, Post office type

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All stores were to be returned to No1 sub depot at Ngaruawahia, New Zealand. The wagon with a broken spring and the food items were to be disposed of locally, the wall clock was transferred to the Island Administration. All the stores coming to New Zealand left on the 4th October. The food stuffs and kitchen utensils were taken over by the Hospital with their value being charged by the Defence Department to the Island Administration. Shaw returned home in December 1945. The corrugated iron and timber that Gladney supplied from his own plantation, which were used for defence building on the island, were dismantled and the materials sold to the Cook Islands Administration. The barbed wire was so entangled in growth that it was not recovered, the car was sold locally for £10.

On disbandment those discharged members of the force were given a mufti grant of £10 and were allowed to keep items of uniform and clothing issued to them except for the felt hat, badges and pugarees. A gratuity of 6d a day was also to be paid to those with good conduct. 50 men were discharged for misconduct during the war including those who refused the alternate week plan when the Force was put on a Territorial basis in August 1943. Pensions were not part of the original condition of enlistment but in December 1945 the cabinet agreed that a war pension on medical grounds could also paid to those of the Force that applied and fit the criteria. 7 locals qualified for a weekly permanent pension of between 4/- and 20/- per week. These men were examined by the resident doctor Dr. Wilson.
81 members of the Force were eligible for service medals. 38 qualified for the Defence medal, New Zealand Service medal and the War medal. 21 for the New Zealand Service medal and War medal and 22 for the War medal. At least 65 other locals served with the Force but for a number of different reasons they did not qualify for an issue of medals.

In May 1946 Mr Osborne M.P. made another visit to Rarotonga and received a deputation of Ex members of the Force at a meeting with the Resident Commissioner. The members raised concerns about the service conditions they were exposed to. Some of the complaints were no pay initially, no clothing or bedding, no cooking utensils, teeth extracted but no dentures supplied. Not being eligible for commissions, they wanted coffins supplied just like the WW1 veterans and government jobs. As these men were mostly returned men from the last war who had seen overseas service it would seem that they wanted the same privileges for the current servicemen. The supply of food was also brought up but it was found that the men voted down having prepared dishes of Kumara, taro, rice, tea, bread and pancakes cooked on flat steel and in native stone ovens and four-gallon and instead asked for an individual issue of bully beef in tins. The use of local foodstuffs was used to feed the Force but the bully beef tins would have been novel to the islanders and easily taken home for the family or traded with other locals if unopened. The complaints were not taken any further.

It was not always an island paradise for the New Zealand NCOs. Sergeant Blows[xxi] was sent home in disgrace for hitting local soldiers, discharging a revolver while drunk, threatening a local soldier while drunk, concealment of a venereal disease, neglect of duty during a hurricane and for using foul and insubordinate language to the commanding officer. Blows was charged in the local courts but there was an issue of jurisdiction and the commanding officer, Gladney didn't have any official manuals to work from and no court martial could be convened in Rarotonga so the matter was dropped. After an investigation in New Zealand it was found that the civil court in Rarotonga did have jurisdiction and that as Gladney was not a commissioned officer of the 2 NZEF that he had little power over the

New Zealand NCOs. As a result, Gladney was given an honorary commission in the 2 NZEF and gazetted on the 14th February 1944. In August 1943 two local members of the Force, were found guilty of stealing rations from the ration station on Mt Tekou. They were convicted and sentenced to 6 months imprisonment then dishonourably discharged from the Force. They were however, paid a £10 mufti allowance after the war but they did not qualify for the good conduct gratuity.

Europeans connected with the Force
(locals of the Force are listed in a separate spread sheet)

Captain Reginald Mordaunt Leigh Gladney.
Captain Charles Alymer Rattray 9235
Sergeant & 2nd Lieutenant George William Shaw 603318
Anderson, Union Steamship company (part time, assisted with initial training)
Warren L J, Union Steamship company (part time, assisted with initial training)
T/Warrant Officer Class II John Waldwyn Berry 70335
T/Sergeant Ronald Marcus Edwards 49775
Sergeant Hill (not enough known to identify further)
T/Sergeant Bruce Oswald Blows 615757

Next time you are lucky enough to go to the idyllic Cook Islands or return home, remember that even in this isolated outpost that the threat of war came and that the Cook Island Local Defence Force served. Some may lie on the beach and enjoy the weather, the swimming, visit family and friends but for me I will be trekking to Mt Tekou to explore the outpost and not forgetting to visit the grave of Ettie Hornibrook (nee Rout)[xxii] to place some flowers.

Barry O'Sullivan
29th July 2019

Thanks to William Kainana Cuthers a descendent of a member of the Force and a writer on the subject of the Cook Islands who helped with local names, cultural sensitivities, additional information and the great photo. If anyone has any more information or photos please feel free to contact me.

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'Aitutaki Home Guard' R17963849 ACGA 8280 It1 667/ IT 122/2/5
Defence of New Zealand by Peter Cooke
New Zealand Army Uniforms and Clothing 1910-1945 by Barry and Matthew O'Sullivan
New Zealand Army Personal equipment 1910-1945 by Barry and Matthew O'Sullivan
Thanks to the NZDF Medals office for help with the medal lists

[i] AJHR Report of the Cook Islands Administration. Section A 3 for the year ending 31st March 1941

[ii] James Douglas Campbell, Lieutenant 12/1578. Attested 16/1/1915, Auckland Regiment, struck off strength 23/2/1917.
[iii] Mr Campbell's report of 14th September 1939
[iv] A Home Guard was formed on Aitutaki and held 19 parades during 5 months in 1943
[v] New Zealand Gazette, 1939/20. 21st February 1939
[vi] Flying Officer R.N.Z.A.F. NZ 405206
[vii] Gladney- commissioned 15/08/1915, served Canada, England, France. W.I.A 23/08/1917. Struck of strength 7/01/1918 to join the R.F.C. as a ground gunnery instructor. Re appointed to C.E.F 15/08/1918 and served in Siberia. Demobilized 12/5/1919.
[viii] New Zealand Gazette, 1941/60, 17th April 1941
[ix] WW1 service number 16/1200
[x] WW1 service number 19289
[xi] '*New Zealand and the Peaked Felt Hat*' Published in *the Volunteers*, NZ Military Historical Society, Nov 2013 Vol. 39 p 72-79
[xii] Captain Charles Alymer Rattray 9235. NZ Temporary Staff (temporary replacement for Gladney) of Christchurch. The Press 9th September 1941
[xiii] Grid reference 21° 13' 37.315" S 159° 47' 0.769" W
[xiv] John Waldwyn Berry 70335, Died while POW 21st November 1943, Italy
[xv] Ronald Marcus Edwards, 49775
[xvi] Bruce Stapleton Bretherton, 70508
[xvii] died in hospital while still a member of the force
[xviii] George William Shaw, 603318 Sergeant, 2nd Lieutenant
[xix] Mr A G Osborne Parliamentary Under-secretary to the Prime Minister
[xx] AJHR Report of the Cook Islands Administration. Section A 3 25th July 1945
[xxi] Bruce Oswald Blows, 615757, NZTS
[xxii] '*The New Zealand Volunteer Sisterhood*' Published in *the Volunteers*, NZ Military Historical Society, July 2016 Vol. 42 No 1, p11-26.

THAT WAS THEN... The above photo was taken of the Arorangi home defence force during World War II between 1939 – 45. One of the seven ex-servicemen still alive today and to whom the photograph belongs to, Tere Mataroa, (far right back row) stated that the platoon were to travel overseas to serve. However Makea Takau returned especially from New Zealand to prevent the platoon form leaving preferring them to remain in Rarotonga to guard the island. The men were trained by New Zealand officers (L – R BACK ROW): Tutupu Ariki, Marii Tautu, Revi Aunguna, Charlie Ward, Tipokoroa Tipokoroa, Tapai Pirangi, Johnville Cowan, Eberdeen Tei, Rangi Mokotua, Tere Mataroa. (L – R FRONT ROW): Tiputoa Taio, Tamata Apera, Kore Veroa, Ngatae Makiroa,

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