

“WE MAY NOT BE GOLIATH BUT WE HAVE DAVID’S SLING”: MEDIA AND
THE PERCEPTION OF THE NEW ZEALAND HOME GUARD, 1940-1942.

by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my major sources of inspiration in New Zealand.

To “Mum” and “Dad” otherwise known as Dr. Lauren Stangl and Dr. Jeffery Stangl, there is frankly not enough room on this page to chronicle everything I could say. What began as a simple trip to see my family in New Zealand, has blossomed into a passion for the history of your nation, one directly responsible for this specialized thesis. Thank you for allowing your Torbay home to become my own since 2013, one always characterized by a warm atmosphere, incredible home cooking, and constant laughter. Summer camping trips on the boat to Mahurangi, the long drive up to Cape Reinga, afternoons at the Bach in Matarangi, weekly trips down the street to Waiake Beach with takeaway, and evenings along the waterfront in Auckland, all helped to inspire this thesis. To Nathan, thanks for being a sounding board for my ideas, the constant drives around the North Shore, and introducing me to that legendary strawberry ice cream in Kumeu. To Isabelle, thanks for your nonstop motivation and reminding me that no matter what may be happening in the world, you can always find something positive to be your guide.

Lastly, this thesis is dedicated to New Zealanders during the Second World War. Your tenacity in the face of such adversity, your nearly nonstop commentary, and humor remains an utter privilege to have chronicled as part of my primary sources for this thesis. It is my earnest hope, that this thesis may serve as an accurate record of some of your candid reflections during the darkest parts of the Second World War for your Dominion.

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Within New Zealand, massive thanks are due to the New Zealand government, National Library of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa, The Auckland War Memorial, and especially all of the newspapers of New Zealand within the Papers Past Project. Special thanks to Professors Glyn Harper and Peter Lineham at Massey University for their conversations about New Zealand history and for their excellent advice on sources. This thesis title is a direct quote from the propaganda film *New Zealand is Ready* (1941).

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on New Zealanders' perception of the Home Guard through a specific lens of culture demonstrated through wartime printed newspapers across New Zealand. These newspapers allowed for a public forum for New Zealander's thoughts on the Home Guard, enabling a national debate on the purpose of the Home Guard over the course of the Second World War. Critically, these print newspapers and public opinion drastically influenced the direction of the Home Guard, illuminated the problems the Home Guard faced, and often received a response from the New Zealand Government. The Home Guard's initial difficulty with recruitment, the impressment of private rifles by the New Zealand government after a failed voluntary campaign, and the later enactment of compulsory enrollment, firmly question the realistic effectiveness of the Home Guard. Competing narratives between the New Zealand government and New Zealanders, both involved in the Home Guard and not affiliated, collectively influenced the Home Guard from 1940 until 1942, as New Zealand feared invasion by the larger Japanese Empire.

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CHAPTER 1- 1931-1940: INTRODUCTION

The Home Guard is a voluntary, unpaid, part-time force, having its origin in the desire of patriotic citizens engaged in ordinary civil occupations to make some active and voluntary contribution to defense, especially to the defense of their own localities. -*The Evening Post, October 30, 1941*¹

Throughout the far-flung British Empire in the early twentieth century, no nation was further removed from Britain by sheer distance than the island Dominion of New Zealand. Separated by over eleven thousand miles and no fewer than two oceans in each direction, this geographical isolation from Britain has bestowed upon New Zealand both blessings and curses in the tumultuous times of war. The First World War left the nation scarred yet proud of its own military and imperial contributions within the British Empire with respect to the recent global conflict. With the rising threat of fascism in Europe twenty-one years later, New Zealanders found themselves in a very familiar situation of supporting the defense of the British Empire. Once again, New Zealand sent its sons away to the sun-drenched Mediterranean where their fathers had fought, mobilizing its resources and people at home for this new worldwide conflict. However, the Second World War would force New Zealanders to face a very different threat much closer to their doorstep in the form of the Japanese Empire. Far to the north of New Zealand, the rapid territorial expansion of the Japanese Empire loomed as a serious threat to the nation. With the majority of its soldiers fighting in the Mediterranean Theater, New Zealand's citizens now found themselves employed in a shared national defense.

¹ *Evening Post*, Volume CXXXII, Issue 105, 30 October 1941, Page 11. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/EP19411030.2.105>

The expansion of New Zealand's history of the Second World War in recent years has taken a detailed look at the experiences of civilians on the home front. One lens that has gained interest among New Zealanders in the past twenty years is the stories of women both at home and serving abroad with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. These books are a mix of both oral history compilations and studies done using available documents on the subject. Megan Hutching's book, *Last Line of Defense: New Zealanders Remember The War At Home*, views the experiences of women serving in the Auxiliary Services of the Royal New Zealand Air Force and their contributions to the war effort as pilots.² Other books on the role of women in the war detail interviews and correspondence; Jim Sullivan's *Doing Our Bit: New Zealand Women tell their stories of World War II*, uses the interviews of fifty women who participated in various elements of the home front and active service.³ Eve Ebbett's *While the boys were away: New Zealand Women in World War II*, takes a much broader view of the role of women on the home front looking at women's roles through military and civilian perspectives.⁴ Books such as these that focus on smaller social histories such as women during the war begin to uncover what New Zealand military historian Deborah Montgomery describes as, "the intricate agendas and unconscious desires that shape oral history narratives of wartime experiences."⁵

² Megan Hutching, *Last Line of Defense: New Zealanders Remember The War At Home*, (Auckland: Harper Collins Publishing, 2007)

³ Jim Sullivan, *Doing Our Bit: New Zealand Women tell their stories of World War II*, (Auckland: Harper Collins Press, 2002)

⁴ Eve Ebbett, *While the boys were away: New Zealand Women in World War II*, (Wellington: Reed Publishing, 1984)

⁵ Deborah Montgomerie, "Reconnaissance, Twentieth Century New Zealand War History at Centuries Turn" *New Zealand Journal of History* 37, No. 1, (2003) 72

Lesser known experiences are just beginning to receive the attention they need in the Second World War's overall narrative. The experiences in particular of New Zealanders who opposed the war itself, and found themselves harshly punished for doing so, have received some literary attention in the past ten years. Allen Handyside's book, *Indeterminate Sentence*, describes the experiences of those that refused to fight during the war in New Zealand due to personal or religious beliefs.⁶ In addition, David Grant and Michael Morrissey delve further into the topic with, *Out in the Cold: Pacifists and Conscientious Objectors in New Zealand during World War II*, delving into the plight of men who were held in isolated camps in North Island and their dealings with a government largely unsympathetic to their objections.⁷ These examples of home front social histories make up a slowly expanding scholarship about the impact of the war on average New Zealanders, ranging from micro-histories about smaller groups to larger narratives about society as a whole such as Stevan and Hugh-Eldred Grigg's book, *Phoney Wars: New Zealand Society in the Second World War*.⁸ Regarding the history of New Zealand's Home Guard, New Zealand historian Nancy Taylor's *Home Front Volume I*, is the only twentieth century secondary work on the topic of the Home Guard. Yet, even Taylor herself devotes only a small section to the Home Guard within her voluminous study, with much of the book magnifying other elements of the home front. While Taylor's book discusses the Home Guard, through an excellent general overview of the organization, she does not specifically deal with the relationship of the Home

⁶ Allen Handyside, *Indeterminate Sentence* (Wellington: Philip Garside Publishing, 2005)

⁷ David Grant and Michael Morrissey, *Out in the Cold: Pacifists and Conscientious Objectors in New Zealand during World War II* (Auckland: Royal New Zealand Foundation for the Blind, 2014)

⁸ Stevan and Hugh Eldred Grigg, *Phoney Wars: New Zealand Society in the Second World War* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2017)

Guard and New Zealand's media.⁹ Penny Summerfield and Corinna Peniston-Bird's cultural history on the British Home Guard, *Contesting Home Defense: Men, Women, and the Home Guard in the Second World War*, is a groundbreaking and multi-faceted look at the British Home Guard, which deals with the impact of Britain's Home Guard on its media, albeit with more of an emphasis on the postwar period and popular memory.¹⁰

This thesis on New Zealanders' perception of the Home Guard uses a cultural lens, focusing on New Zealand's newspaper print media, forming a cross section of New Zealand society through the point of view of multiple newspapers across North and South Island during the war. Home Guardsmen and even those uninvolved with the organization found an eager outlet for their thoughts through newspapers, encompassing both complementary and critical commentary of the organization. Additionally, the formal perspective of the New Zealand government and its officials towards the Home Guard is displayed through New Zealand Police Gazette gazetted orders, formal Parliamentary Papers, and detailed newspaper articles that mirror both the shifting situation in the war and the government's reaction regarding changing public opinion towards the Home Guard. Moreover, the Home Guard's perception not only shifted over the course of the Second World War, but contrasted sharply with the organization's reality. Key moments for the Home Guard, such as the initial difficulties with recruitment, the later impressment of rifles by the government, and the enactment of compulsory enrollment, offer insight onto the realistic effectiveness of the Home Guard to defend New Zealand. Unfortunately, this study has been limited due to the COVID-19

⁹ Nancy M. Taylor, *The New Zealand People at War: The Home Front Volume I* (Wellington: Historical Publications Branch, Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1986)

¹⁰ Penny Summerfield & Corinna Peniston-Bird, *Contesting Home Defense: Men, Women, and the Home Guard in the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007)

pandemic, such as the inability to access Home Guard documents in the National Archives of New Zealand alongside oral history interviews with any surviving Home Guardsmen. Such interviews would have been an excellent complement to many opinion articles used in this thesis. As a result, this perception of the Home Guard is based on newspapers, using both factual reporting and opinion articles, concluding with the Home Guard's realistic capability in the annual reports of the National Service Department.

Particularly concerning its perception, the usage of newspapers as a public forum shows that New Zealanders, of many varying opinions, *collectively* influenced the development of the Home Guard during the Second World War, as impassioned debates in New Zealand's newspapers exploited both the Home Guard's failures and its triumphs alike. From opinion columns to main articles, it is clear that the Home Guard was by no means universally supported, nor detested, by the citizens of New Zealand. The drama of an inept and ill-equipped Home Guard played out on the pages of New Zealand's newspapers. Additionally, a mixed public perception of New Zealand's defensive needs, the lack of decisive leadership from the New Zealand government pertaining to the Home Guard, and woefully inadequate material resources for the Home Guard, severely hampered its realistic military capabilities as New Zealand's final line of home defense.

The first glimpses of the reasoning for the Home Guard are noticeable in the years just before the outbreak of the Second World War, with the formation of imperial defense policies and the changing status of New Zealand that would influence its wartime defensive strategy. Within its own corner of the world, New Zealand contemplated its future in the aftermath of the granting of Royal Assent to the 1931 Statute of Westminster. Until this point New Zealand had remained simply another outpost of the

British Empire, but with the stroke of a pen New Zealand's status within the British Empire shifted. The autonomy granted by the Statute of Westminster elevated New Zealand's status, affording greater independence within the Commonwealth of Nations.¹¹ However, New Zealand displayed a remarkable hesitancy to accept these new changes, as evidenced by a specific clause inserted into the statute allowing New Zealand to delay independence outlines pertaining to the dominion until as late as 1947.¹²

However, this increased independence did not imply that New Zealand would become independent of its connections to Britain. On the eve of the Second World War, New Zealanders affirmed their resolve in the strategically important center of Singapore. New Zealand's faith in Singapore for its defensive needs was due to an inability to operate effectively on its own, especially without the critical element of British naval superiority in the Pacific backing New Zealand's troops.¹³ New Zealand's stance towards the Singapore Naval Base was even a quantifiable statistic, as the Dominion invested over one million pounds into the development of the Singapore Naval Base, in the hope that the Royal Navy would continue to project its power and ensure the Far East defense of New Zealand and other British possessions.¹⁴ Prewar defensive arrangements called for the formation of a strategic perimeter around New Zealand. Consisting of the islands of New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga, and other important islands, they would form a buffer around New Zealand and Australia and ensure a strong sense of security.¹⁵ New

¹¹ Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006) 471

¹² J.B Condliffe and W.T.G Airey, *A Short History of New Zealand* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd, 1966) 257

¹³ Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War*, 476

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 485.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 476.

Zealand's military again found itself operating within the bounds of imperial forces, but now as part of the British Empire's overseas defensive plan, one that wagered much on the mighty Singapore Naval Base.

The certitude placed in British imperial strategy would be put to the test with the outbreak of the Second World War on September 1, 1939 with the German invasion of Poland. Quickly following the French and British declarations of war on September 1 was New Zealand's own independent declaration of war on Germany on September 3, 1939. The mindset of Britain's island dominion was one of resolute belief in the ability of the British Empire to wage an effective war, as documented by Prime Minister Michael Savage in his September 5, 1939 broadcast to the nation, "With gratitude towards the past and confidence in the future we range ourselves without fear besides Britain. Where she goes, we go, where she stands, we stand."¹⁶ This level of confidence in the ability of the British Empire to triumph in this conflict was significant within New Zealand, as demonstrated by the number of soldiers who quickly volunteered for overseas service.

In the days following New Zealand's formal declaration of war, thousands of young New Zealanders seeking to do their part met the nation's call for overseas service. In contrast to the First World War, the New Zealand government did not simply commit troops to the imperial war effort. It offered an expeditionary force on the condition that it remained a unique entity, and that its commander Major-General Bernard Freyberg was only responsible to the New Zealand Government.¹⁷ With these provisions secured, the first waves of soldiers departed on January 5 and May 2, 1940, respectively, for the

¹⁶ Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin Publishing, 2003) 392

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 393.

Mediterranean, and with New Zealand's first rate fighting forces away, the New Zealand government looked to its civilians to begin the nation's preparation for defense.

With the New Zealand Expeditionary Force away in the Mediterranean, the nation watched the events unfolding in Europe closely following Germany's invasion of Poland. The following months would see the stalemate on the western front shattered, as Belgium and the Netherlands fell to German aggression. The ultimate shock to New Zealanders came with the Fall of France in June 1940, as the pre-war defensive plans that relied on the strength of the Royal Navy grew increasingly unlikely with Britain under threat.¹⁸ The influence of the Fall of France and the subsequent Battle of Britain on New Zealand's police is undeniable, as the strategic chaos created by the humiliating capitulation of France deeply disturbed the New Zealand government. This unease was reflected by the National Service Department in 1945, "The strategic emergency caused by the fall of France in 1940 called for every possible assistance in actual combat zones."¹⁹ Given the yet unseen Japanese aggression towards New Zealand, the acute threat Germany posed to Britain itself formed the backbone of the New Zealand government's military response, also viewed in hindsight by the National Service Department, this time in 1943, "At this time the dominant factors of the war situation had been the collapse of France and the Battle of Britain. There was an immediate need to dispatch troops overseas to save what might have been a world-wide disaster. This urgent call was felt throughout New Zealand, and the whole spirit of the Dominion's war effort

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 401.

¹⁹ REPORT OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT ON ACTIVITIES UNDER THE NATIONAL SERVICE EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1940, AND THE INDUSTRIAL MAN-POWER EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1944, *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1945 Session I, H-11a, Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1945-I.2.2.5.12>

reflected the strategic emergency of England and the Empire as a whole.”²⁰ Despite the urgency of the war in Europe, months leading up to the establishment of the Home Guard saw North Island, and by extension New Zealand itself, directly threatened by the otherwise distant war abroad in Europe.

New Zealanders undoubtedly woke up with horror on the morning of June 20, 1940, hearing the news that the liner *Niagara* had been sunk just a few hours after leaving Auckland destined for Vancouver, the culprit of its sinking being a mine laid just outside the Auckland waters.²¹ The *New Zealand Herald* noted miraculously there was no loss of life and all passengers and crew aboard had been rescued with considerable assistance, alongside the discovery of a second mine off Auckland.²² Addressing the visible security concerns, Prime Minister Peter Frasier attempted to allay New Zealanders fears, declaring that such mines were not unusual and provided convincing evidence the sinking was not a deliberate act of “internal treachery.”²³ Regardless, the following day saw outward shipping exceeding five hundred tons from the Port of Auckland closed in lieu of security concerns due to the potential threat of unseen costal mines.²⁴ An emotional editorial following the sinking appearing in the *New Zealand Herald* eloquently spoke to its implication on New Zealand itself: “The next thought, the only

²⁰ NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT REPORTS OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT AND OF THE INDUSTRIAL MAN-POWER DIVISION ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT UNDER THE NATIONAL SERVICE EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1940, THE EMERGENCY RESERVE CORPS REGULATIONS 1941, AND THE INDUSTRIAL MAN-POWER EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1942, *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1943 Session I, H-11a. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1944-I.2.2.5.12>

²¹ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23687, 20 June 1940, Page 11. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19400620.2.81.1>

²² *Ibid*, 11.

²³ *Ibid*, 11

²⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23688, 21 June 1940, Page 8. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19400621.2.73>

one that counts, is that the grim fact of war has been brought to the very gateway of New Zealand...New Zealand is at war, and in war there is no half-way house. These islands are enemy territory to a ruthless, daring and resourceful foe, and are open to attack by any means offering.”²⁵ The editorial further implored New Zealanders to dive headfirst into the war, with the sinking galvanizing the nation to action against an unrelenting enemy, “Realisation of that fact should spur the country first to cast into the Empire pool every resource that can usefully be contributed, and second, to look for its own ramparts. This is the plain lesson of the war brought near by the loss of the *Niagara*.”²⁶

This loss would resonate in the coming months, as the auxiliary cruisers such as the German *Orion* operated off the coast of New Zealand, the aforementioned vessel sinking the *Turakina* on August 20, 1940, near Cape Egmont and well within New Zealand’s own territorial waters.²⁷ The New Zealand government undoubtedly kept these incidences in mind in the closing weeks of August 1940, as the decision was made to form a home defense force upon which New Zealanders could actively contribute towards, a volunteer organization that would give New Zealanders a sense of purpose and serve as a deterrent towards any further foreign aggression.

²⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23687, 20 June 1940, Page 8. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19400620.2.37>

²⁶ *Ibid*, 8.

²⁷ Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War*, 486

CHAPTER 2 – MID-LATE 1940: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE HOME GUARD AND INITIAL RECRUITMENT EFFORTS

This chapter concerns the formation of the Home Guard from August 1940 to the end of December 1940, specifically focusing on recruitment efforts targeting New Zealanders not eligible for service overseas to join the Home Guard. Additionally, the positions of several government officials towards the Home Guard and its recruitment drive, encompassing primarily patriotic rhetoric, are unveiled for the first time in New Zealand's newspapers. Finally, the initial opinions of prominent government officials and New Zealander citizens, towards the recruitment drive and the Home Guard itself, are displayed within the pages of early newspaper coverage of the fledgling defensive organization over the course of its turbulent first six months.

Led by the Governor-General of New Zealand, the Executive Council enacted the *Emergency Reserve Corps Regulations 1940* to govern the establishment of a plan for home defense. The regulations founded the *Emergency Reserve Corps*, the umbrella organization made up of the Home Guard, Emergency Precautions Organizations, The Women's War Service Auxiliary, and other necessary organizations approved by the Minister of National Service.¹ The Minister of National Service, the Hon. R. Semple, governed these organizations, although local authorities under Semple's oversight would primarily operate the decision-making process. Regulation Five, Six, Seven, and Eight

¹ *New Zealand Police Gazette*, Volume LXV, Issue 35, 28 August 1940, Page 694. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/periodicals/NZPG19400828.2.13>

dealt specifically with the operation of the Home Guard, and most importantly of all, established its official duties with regards to the wartime defense of New Zealand.

The duties of the Home Guard formally consisted of three critical elements. First, the promotion of physical and military fitness along with efficiency of its members. Second, providing various functions such as guarding the coastline, sentry duties, pickets and patrols, and guarding other strategically important areas. Finally, organizing its own members into specialist positions or other expert duties, for the purpose of cooperating with any branch of armed forces or emergency precaution organization that necessitated the involvement of the Home Guard.² In addition, Regulation Eight, established by direct order of the Governor-General, could formally mobilize the Home Guard for active military defense service.³ While not directly referenced in the aforementioned regulations, the Home Guard fell below the Territorial Force, itself the reserve of the New Zealand Army, in the greater defensive hierarchy of New Zealand.⁴ To address the needs of the nation, the Home Guard was divided into subdivisions with a chain of command stretching from the Minister of National Service down to Dominion Commander, District Commander, and Area Commanders in charge of their specific locality.⁵ Within each locality, an established committee would govern specific elements, such as parades, provisioning, places of assembly, and matters not explicitly mentioned

² *New Zealand Police Gazette*, Volume LXV, Issue 35, 28 August 1940, Page 694. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/periodicacommanderZPG19400828.2.13>

³ *Ibid*, 694.

⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23738, 19 August 1940, Page 9. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19400819.2.71>

⁵ *Ibid*, 694.

in the regulations.⁶ Enrollment in the Home Guard, for males over the age of sixteen, was as simple as signing a form and swearing an oath of allegiance in front of a designated official, such as a commissioned officer, subdivision commander, or justice of the peace.⁷ Upon completion of the form and swearing of the oath, the member became an official member of the Home Guard subject to the orders of their commanders and other officers.

With these regulations formally adopted by the New Zealand government, it would still take some time for them to be put into practice across New Zealand. Over the following months in late 1940, the nation's newspapers and citizens reacted to the establishment of the Home Guard and the government's scheme for national defense amidst a determined recruiting drive. From the pages of the *New Zealand Herald*, the first public coverage of the establishment of the Home Guard and the New Zealand government's defensive scheme emerged in August, 1940.

The *New Zealand Herald* and *Press* offered some of the first comprehensive analysis of the government's plan for home defense, dedicating articles on August 19, 1940, to the public broadcast by Prime Minister Peter Fraser and Minister Semple. *The New Zealand Herald* concentrated its article on the wide-reaching impact of the regulations with regards to the emergency precaution organizations, dedicating two paragraphs on the Home Guard. While reiterating the *Emergency Reserve Corps Regulations* to its subscribers, the *New Zealand Herald* noted that service in the Home Guard was "entirely voluntary" and "enrollment of members of the guard would be made

⁶ Ibid, 694.

⁷ Ibid, 694.

through local authorities.”⁸ The article published by *Press*, by comparison, focused on Minister Semple’s similar speech and the technical outline of the Home Guard under the aforementioned regulations. However, *Press* took particular interest in Minister Semple’s comments on Home Guard recruitment. “I feel confident,” said Minister Semple, “that there is no need for me to make any appeal for physically fit men to join up with the Home Guard when it is established in their districts. It is already abundantly evident that there are thousands of people in New Zealand who have only been awaiting a lead of this nature to enable them to take an active part in the war effort.”⁹

The August 20, 1940 edition of the *New Zealand Herald* further detailed the broadcast made by Minister Semple the previous night, with a specific focus on the reactions of local Auckland union groups to the prospect of enrollment in the Home Guard.¹⁰ The *New Zealand Herald* broke down the speech given by Semple into a concise summary: the framework of the Home Guard would be an opportunity for men to train in their community, the organization would be similar to the army system, and the drilling of members would be in the hands of the local leaders.¹¹ The paper emphasized to its readers the added role of local Returned Soldiers’ Association chapters to drilling new members in Auckland: “This is where the Returned Soldiers’ Association would be able to pull its weight.”¹² In addition, the paper informed its readers that Minister Semple

⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23738, 19 August 1940, Page 9. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19400819.2.71>

⁹ *Press*, Volume LXXVI, Issue 23102, 19 August 1940, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19400819.2.39>

¹⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23739, 20 August 1940, Page 9. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19400820.2.89>

¹¹ *Ibid*, 9.

¹² *Ibid*, 9.

would begin visiting local areas to assist in the setting up of Home Guard committees, alongside discussing the Home Guard with local officials and citizens. However, Semple's recruitment drive would be somewhat tempered, as the paper noted "It will be early next month before they will be able to enroll members of the Home Guard."¹³

The Vice-President of the Farmers Union, A.C.A Sexton, displayed one notable civilian reaction to Semple's speech, declaring immediate action would follow the Prime Minister's words. Sexton observed that other members of the community, who had advocated for an auxiliary defensive force, hoped that the government in Wellington would not rush into creating the group without first consulting the knowledge of local officials.¹⁴ Sexton advocated to the paper's readers that calling meetings in every possible locality and forming those areas into military districts in conjunction with the army would be an excellent course of action.¹⁵ Where Mr. Sexton's comments strike an interesting chord is his opinion that the Home Guard should be in close cooperation with the army. While technically under Regulation 5C, the Home Guard could be called to assist His Majesty's Forces, or be mobilized for national defense under the Defense Act of 1909 and Regulation 8, it still functioned independently under the Emergency Precaution Scheme and its own commanders. This position was later clarified by Minister Semple to the *Northern Advocate* on August 28, 1940: "It would, in fact, be a civil army that would be given training in such activities that it would be able to co-operate with the army if called upon."¹⁶ Cooperation with the army functioned as a major point of

¹³ *Ibid*, 9.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 9.

¹⁶ *Northern Advocate*, 27 August 1940, Page 7. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NA19400827.2.99>

discussion between civilians and Home Guard members, this topic would later resurface in 1941 when the proposition of absorbing the Home Guard into the army developed into a major issue for the organization itself and the New Zealand government.

With enrollments in the Home Guard officially starting in September, Minister Semple found himself addressing a variety of audiences, such as Labor Party meetings and public town hall events. Wellington's *Evening Post* documented one of his notable appearances on October 3, 1940, at an address to the inter-branch committee of the Labor Party, where Semple discussed the Home Guard in detail. Semple's address opened with the threat faced by New Zealand now that it was at war and in the middle of a "danger zone" that required the nation to "fight themselves out" to survive. The *Evening Post* stressed that due to these circumstances, Semple's job was to "organize the 300,000 men in New Zealand not eligible for overseas or territorial service" into a fighting force.¹⁷ The *Evening Post* discussed the specifics of Semple's plan to organize the men of the Home Guard into a fighting force with local terrain knowledge, learning how to fight, and how to shoot should an invasion come. What stood out and warranted its own section, titled "Cannot Survive Alone," was Semple's comments regarding New Zealand's war mentality and shared common ties with Great Britain.¹⁸

The *Evening Post* viewed with interest Semple's comments that anyone who thought New Zealand could not be held without British aid "had something wrong with their mentality" and that New Zealand's working people had more to defend compared to

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 13.

any worldwide nation.¹⁹ The *Evening Post* rounded out Semple's speech by highlighting his comments that members who joined the Home Guard would be trained by the Physical Welfare organization, and that "young people that went through training would emerge better for it" after their enrollment.²⁰ Semple's somewhat insightful comments apparently sought to highlight New Zealanders connections with Britain in the form of imperial patriotism. His comment, of "We realize that if the Mother Country goes down, we go down with her," appealed to this same sense of common patriotism.²¹ Indeed, the clouds of war in the Pacific seemed to only be growing closer with the announcement weeks earlier of the signing of the Tripartite between Germany, Italy, and the Japanese Empire. The *New Zealand Herald* described the visible nervousness in New Zealand surrounding the announcement of the pact. In weighing its options, the paper examined the situation, "If the news should prove to be correct, its implications will call for the most serious examination. Japan's alliance with Britain's enemies does not put Japan at war with Britain, although it must increase the risk of such a development. It is suggested, in fact, that the pact provides against Japan's entrance into the European war."²² The effectiveness of Semple's patriotic rhetoric would remain to be seen in the coming months, with the figures from the initial Home Guard recruitment offering a clearer picture of his impact.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 13.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 13.

²¹ *Evening Post*, Volume c, Issue 82, 3 October 1940, Page 13. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/EP19401003.2.136>

²² *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23773, 28 September 1940, Page 10. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19400928.2.44>

With the government's recruiting drive now underway, New Zealanders motivation to join the Home Guard increased with the closing of reserve enlistment opportunities in November 1940. The *Northern Advocate* from Whangarei published the story on November 19, 1940 via a distance report from Wellington by the Press Association.²³ Reporting on a formal announcement by the Minister for Defense, the Hon. Fred Jones, the *Northern Advocate* informed its readers that the government would no longer be accepting Class II enlistments for the National Military Reserve.²⁴ This report brought added significance, as the Home Guard now remained the only viable option for those seeking to aid the New Zealand war effort. The *Northern Advocate* contemplated, that even though various horseback units had been deployed to defend their assigned communities, there remained a large section of coastline that was open to the opportunity of invasion by New Zealand's enemies. Jones employed a very specific pitch to aid in his effort to recruit additional men to the Home Guard, by focusing on returned soldiers that had not enlisted in the National Military Reserve. By framing their contributions as instructors and leaders, Jones sought to convince returned soldiers that, even though the Home Guard was not the only option for them, it would nonetheless be an excellent choice.²⁵

What drew the attention of the *Northern Advocate*'s editors, however, was the comment Jones expressed as a representative of the government on the role of the Home Guard in an emergency. The Home Guard, he expanded, would not "form part of the

²³ *Northern Advocate*, 19 November 1940, Page 8. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NA19401119.2.120>

²⁴ *Ibid*, 8.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 8.

military forces at this stage,” but “should it be necessary...units or sub-units of the Home Guard would be absorbed into the army.”²⁶ This draws an interesting parallel to the comments of A.C.A Sexton, who, in the months before, had advocated for closer cooperation with the army. While this cooperation through absorption was only warranted in the event of an emergency, the specific recruitment of returned military soldiers to aid in the development of the Home Guard demonstrated non-emergency cooperation occurring nonetheless.

While Minister Jones carried out his own form of recruitment, Minister Semple was in the midst of his own patriotic drive across the nation. In addition to his national radio broadcasts drumming up support for the Home Guard, Semple appeared at multiple town hall meetings across New Zealand. Attempting to speak directly and personally to citizens he sought to recruit into the Home Guard, these meetings drew responses from citizens in published media. In the same manner in which government ministers Semple and Jones used New Zealand’s media to voice support for the Home Guard, the citizens of New Zealand found a common forum in published media to express their support, advice, and even criticism of the Home Guard.

In the closing days of November 1940, Semple spoke to a town hall meeting in Auckland in a manner similar to his speech delivered in Wellington the previous month. This meeting was not documented directly by the *New Zealand Herald*, but instead described by a citizen attendee named Stanley Fowler. He had deemed the message impactful enough to write to the *New Zealand Herald*, his thoughts appearing in print on

²⁶ Ibid, 8.

November 30, 1940.²⁷ Fowler expressed his approval of the speech given by Semple, and gave a specific reference to Semple's comments on the necessity of a Home Guard of volunteers. Fowler implored the editor and readers that if, "The potential dangers are so great...that only a compulsory Home Guard will meet the need...an organization of this kind will allow every man to take his part in defense."²⁸ A solution in the manner provided by Fowler would certainly provide a remedy to the recruiting situation the New Zealand government found itself in December 1940, one that appeared to be troublesome.

In December 1940, the work of the past four months by the New Zealand government to convince New Zealanders of the Home Guard's value became known. The *New Zealand Herald* reported on the recruiting situation in Auckland on December 12, 1940, at a meeting led by Sir Ernest Davis, the chairman of the Auckland Home Guard Committee. The *New Zealand Herald* led its article with an emboldened title proclaiming, "Only 1000 City Men...Committee Disappointed." The paper described the reaction of Davis to the numbers as "apathy was inexplicable in view of the potential dangers in which the country was faced" in addition to a sense of disbelief.²⁹ Representing the Auckland Home Guard Committee, Davis stated to the *New Zealand Herald* that both its own planning and the Home Guard defensive scheme satisfied the Home Guard committee.

The *New Zealand Herald* reflected on Davis's statement to its readers: that the response to the Home Guard enrollment had been poor, efforts would likely redouble to

²⁷ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23827, 30 November 1940, Page 14. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19401130.2.133.9>

²⁸ *Ibid*, 14.

²⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23837, 12 December 1940, Page 12. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19401212.2.103>

recruit more members, and could include a publicity campaign directed towards potential recruits. The numbers stated by the committee were truly disheartening, with only one-thousand enlistments coming from the city of Auckland itself, and a meager four-hundred recruits from the surrounding countryside.³⁰ The appeal of the committee to recruit another one-thousand guardsmen by the following week, in light of the aforementioned one-hundred recruits enlisted a day, seems to have been a lofty goal for the Auckland Home Guard committee. The *New Zealand Herald* noted with interest that the committee declared its indebtedness to the Women's National Service Corps, Women's War Service Auxiliary, and Justices of the Peace for their support in the recruitment campaign. The work of these defensive services in assisting Home Guard recruitment, along with the poor number turnout in Auckland, brings serious doubts on the supposed "planning and defensive preparations" on behalf of the Home Guard as a national organization. A closer look at why recruitment was struggling, is visible with the reactions of local potential Home Guard recruits in suburban and town hall meetings in the final weeks of December. These reactions were carefully recorded by the *New Zealand Herald* through multiple independent accounts published in the same article on December 12, 1940.³¹

At an evening meeting of local Otahuhu railwaymen interested in joining the Home Guard, a flyer circulated by the government during the recruitment effort delivered a contradictory message to its readers. The letter had stated to the railwaymen that their work constituted a sufficient level of importance to warrant continuing, despite any national emergency. The clarifying question asked to Davis concerning the flyer itself,

³⁰ *Ibid*, 12.

³¹ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23837, 12 December 1940, Page 12. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19401212.2.103>

received a response from the chairman that “he had not heard of the flyer previously” and that he would figure out the information immediately. This comment drew a strong reaction of surprised laughter from the crowd of railwaymen, who then expressed their puzzlement at the minister’s confused answer.³² This blunder on the part of the New Zealand government may have turned some Home Guard members away, but considering the *New Zealand Herald* noted large attendance at the meeting, it is clear that within town halls, there evidently was support for the Home Guard from New Zealanders.

New Zealander’s initiative with home defense was demonstrated in one bizarre example, when local confusion in another flyer came to a head in the subdivision of Waikato. Where an already established organization called the Waikato Mobile Force had existed for some time before establishment of the Home Guard. The enthusiasm of the members of the mobile force was something that the New Zealand government tried to capitalize on by encouraging them to join the Home Guard. The *New Zealand Herald* remarked that General Sir Andrew Russel had attempted to clarify the confusion felt by mobile force members the month previously. However, this incident led to demands for a statement from the Minister of National Service on the perplexing situation.³³

On the contrary to this confusion in the countryside, various other town hall events demonstrated the results of the New Zealand government’s recruitment drive. Meetings throughout Auckland subdivisions implied to yield encouraging recruitment numbers, especially in the face of the government’s failure to recruit a substantial number

³² Ibid, 12.

³³ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23837, 12 December 1940, Page 12. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19401212.2.103>

of guardsmen. A town hall meeting in the suburb of Papatoetoe received fifty new recruits, while in Mount Albert forty of the one-hundred fifty attendees enlisted immediately, and in Mount Eden forty-five citizens enlisted in the Home Guard.³⁴ These numbers had surpassed the daily average of one-hundred members reported earlier, although it was not immediately clear if this trend would last, especially in light of the very recent deficit of Home Guard recruits Sir Ernest Davis had dealt with in Auckland.

Valid concerns among New Zealanders regarding Home Guard recruitment remained present as 1940 drew to a close, but these concerns were not limited to only recruitment, and expanded to more visible issues pertaining to the guardsmen themselves. The perception of the Home Guard was also beginning to take shape publically in these newspapers, ranging from a patriotic organization spurred on by an eager government, to a difference perception of governmental officials unable to respond to basic questions concerning the operation of the Home Guard, the latter very amusing to New Zealanders. As the Home Guard took a more definite physical shape outside of formal regulations, the voices of New Zealand's citizens in this discussion grew ever louder, as greater issues such as rifle impressment and army incorporation joined the fray in this blossoming national conversation regarding the Home Guard. Moreover, the realistic military capability of the Home Guard would be seen more visibly, as issues over arming the Home Guard would dominate New Zealand's newspaper pages the following year, alongside governmental officials and Home Guard officers offering their own thoughts.

³⁴ Ibid, 12.

CHAPTER 3 – EARLY-MID 1941: RIFLES, COL. ALDRED, AND MINISTER SEMPLE: THE INCORPORATION OF THE HOME GUARD INTO THE ARMY

This chapter will analyze the heated discussion over the course of the first six months pertaining to the issues of arming the Home Guard. Additionally, the willingness of the New Zealand government to exercise its authority, to ensure the Home Guard had weapons to defend against Japanese invasion, would be cast into serious doubt through its apathetic response. The response was covered in extensive detail through newspapers, many of them providing a platform for New Zealanders to decry governmental apathy, in addition to criticizing governmental officials such as Minister Semple for their treatment of the Home Guard. Appealing to New Zealanders' shared sense of common defense proved to be a challenge for the government, which seemed willing to display its authority with regard to the war effort, yet sought to appeal to citizens to contribute willingly in areas where the government was unable to provide the means. Finally, these published debates would expand to matters of formal organization and cooperation as the Home Guard grew in size over the course of 1941.

In November 1940, Col. M. Aldred, the Home Guard Commander for the Auckland District, journeyed to Papakura to speak to community members interested in joining the Home Guard.¹ Interestingly, Aldred's address carried the same sentiments Minister Semple had employed: working to stir the patriotic feelings of those present, and

¹ *Franklin Times*, Volume XXIX, Issue 135, 22 November 1940, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/FRTIM19401122.2.42>

emphasizing the very real danger New Zealand faced as a nation from invasion. These comments were noted by the *Franklin Times*, which had dispatched one of its reporters to cover the Home Guard meeting, in short paragraph bulletins focusing on key elements of Aldred's speech. Whether by sheer coincidence or deliberate act, Col. Aldred reinforced the yet to be seen December 1940 appeals of Sir Ernest Davis and the Auckland Home Guard Committee. Aldred, responding to a question on the importance the Home Guard's manpower: "The more men that join up, the less likely any enemy is going to come to our shores. The more we defend, and let the enemy know we are going to defend New Zealand, the more likely he is to say 'it's not worth it.' To stay out of the Home Guard and refuse to defend your own country is simply asking the enemy to come here."²

Aldred's tone captured immediate interest from the reporter from the *Franklin Times*, who described the former's address as, "straight from the shoulder common sense." Aldred's willingness to be forthright with responding to Home Guard questions was tested later in the meeting, the concerns of one citizen regarding the availability of rifles deemed important enough by the reporter from the *Franklin Times* to warrant its own section, alongside a detailed response from Aldred on the urgent matter. Aldred's reply to the question of rifles for the Home Guard was tempered somewhat by a reluctance to divulge sensitive wartime information, noted by the *Franklin Times* as "he knew how many rifles were in New Zealand but he could not divulge the information." Aldred continued his answer by divulging, "there are 30,000 privately owned rifles in the country and I am putting it up to the powers-that-be that these rifles should be made available to the Home Guard...if a man won't come into the Home Guard then we should

² Ibid, 6.

get his ‘bally’ rifle.” This resounding ending to Aldred’s response was met by audible cheers by present Papakura residents and general public, alongside a special notation of their reactions by the reporter from the *Franklin Times* as the gathering ended.³ Col. Aldred’s discussion of rifles for the Home Guard at the Papakura could hardly have been more relevant considering the state of rifle distribution. Only two days prior, readers of the *New Zealand Herald* were greeted with what must have been a concerning image, a picture taken by a *New Zealand Herald* photographer of members of the Hukerenui Home Guard at assembly with the caption, “NORTH AUCKLAND HOME GUARD: Some of the 60 members of the Hukerenui Home Guard. They are drilling with sticks until rifles are available.”⁴ Conversations such as Aldred’s with Papakura community members offer one of the first calls by an individual, in Aldred’s case a Home Guard officer, for decisive governmental action on this issue of rifles.

A Home Guard member under the pseudonym Signalman wrote to the *New Zealand Herald* on February 6, 1941, in response to a long brewing Home Guard debate.⁵ Signalman identified himself as the originator of the ongoing discussion, and wanted the *New Zealand Herald’s* editor and readers to know that his only motive was to offer constructive criticism.⁶ Signalman immediately decried previous respondents for insisting on “orthodox drill” for the Home Guard without giving any reason for why it should be necessary. Signalman noted that a respondent’s suggestion that “a Home Guardsman

³ Ibid, 6.

⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23818, 20 November 1940, Page 11. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19401120.2.99.1>

⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23883, 6 February 1941, Page 11. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410206.2.119.4>

⁶ Ibid, 11.

should be able to present arms” provided a purely ceremonial function, and that such instruction offered nothing “appropriate to the Home Guard” in terms of useful combat training.⁷ Despite Signalman’s remarks in response to Home Guard observers, he enunciated to the *New Zealand Herald’s* readers that his primary argument had not been dealt with by anyone. Signalman asserted that if the Home Guard were called on, many of the “specialist” jobs they sought to accomplish would have to be improvised, and to counter such a deficiency, guardsmen should be assessed for their particular skills.⁸ Each man’s civilian trained profession could sort the guardsmen out: such as farmers handling barbed wire, equestrians to establish transportation, and experienced workers to handle high explosives. Signalman finished his statement with a strong declaration to his fellow guardsmen, that by following this method, they could avoid the Home Guard becoming “a pale imitation of the Territorial Force and National Military Reserve,” and instead be a competent force to defend New Zealand.⁹

Later that month, on February 27, 1941, Col. Aldred’s address in Papakura on the issue of rifles for the Home Guard found new life with a published statement by Prime Minister Peter Fraser. The *Waikato Independent* carried the story to its readers, taking care to denote the urgency with which the Prime Minister used during his appeal. The status of rifles in New Zealand has reached a critical stage, according to the Prime Minister, “with the increased arms requirements of the continually joining numbers of men joining up, it had been found impracticable to make an adequate supply available to

⁷ *Ibid*, 11.

⁸ *Ibid*, 11.

⁹ *Ibid*, 11.

the Home Guard.”¹⁰ This lack of supply presents an explanation for Aldred’s hesitancy to divulge information regarding government held available rifles. The Prime Minister insisted rifles would be needed not only for practical fighting purposes but also to train members of the Home Guard. In this regard, he was directing his appeal to rifle club members and private firearms owners, to consider making their rifles available for use.¹¹ The Prime Minister spoke in an encouraging manner, making it clear he trusted New Zealanders to respond to the government’s call for arms, “The government was empowered to requisition rifles under war regulations, but I feel confident that all owners who could would respond.” This included the issuance of amnesty from any police action, to individuals owning rifles that could be considered illegal or subject to penalties, “Under the circumstances, can assure you that action will not be taken against you.”¹² The *Waikato Independent* emphasized the conclusion of the Prime Minister’s overture to rifle owners, one that echoed Col. Aldred’s statement months earlier, that “if they could not lend their services, he would at least ask them to lend their rifles” to assist the Home Guard’s efforts.¹³

The Prime Minister’s plea to the public was not the only visible example of the government’s solicitation to New Zealanders to contribute rifles for home defense. Another notice had been published by the *Opotiki News* two weeks earlier to the south, in Wanganui. Reflecting a statement made by the commanding officer of the Wanganui Home Guard, General R.D Hardie, D.S.O, this bid was directed towards persons with

¹⁰ *Waikato Independent*, Volume XLI, Issue 3820, 24 February 1941, Page 7. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WAIKIN19410224.2.38>

¹¹ *Ibid*, 7.

¹² *Ibid*, 7.

¹³ *Ibid*, 7.

unregistered firearms. This included a statement from Inspector J.A Dempsey of the Wanganui Police declaring with regards to rifles changing hands under the Arms Act of 1920, “it was desired now to have all of these brought forward and registered as soon as possible.” Hardie attempted to soothe the concerns of citizens that they would be prosecuted for their firearms, he said according to the *Opotiki News*, “that the Home Guard was in need of arms and ammunition, and no doubt many people would be willing to hand unregistered rifles over the guard but were afraid of police action for having them in their possession. The police had agreed not to prosecute anyone handing firearms or ammunition to the Home Guard.”¹⁴ In a fashion similar to Minister Semple’s comments on August 19, 1940 to *Press*, and Prime Minister Fraser’s statement documented by the *Waikato Independent* on February 27, 1941, General Hardie displayed the same sense of calm that New Zealanders would step forward and do their duty without having to be motivated otherwise.

Minister Semple displayed a remarkable frankness in working to assure the New Zealand public the Home Guard was being taken seriously by the government, chronicled through an interview by the *Otago Daily Times* during the minister’s visit to Invercargill on March 5, 1941. The *Otago Daily Times* noted that there was no evidence yet for the necessity of conscription, as enrollments in the Home Guard totaled “70,000, and within the next few weeks it is expected membership will reach 100,000, a position regarded by the authorities as very satisfactory”¹⁵ Representing the government in his capacity as

¹⁴ *Opotiki News*, Volume IV, Issue 254, 10 February 1941, Page 3. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/OPNEWS19410210.2.27>

¹⁵ *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 24549, 6 March 1941, Page 9. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19410306.2.102>

Minister of National Service, Semple reiterated, “With 100,000 armed members of the Home Guard in various parts of the country, and a strong force of organized territorials, there will be a good defense organization in New Zealand.” The minister further elaborated that no cost would be spared in preparing the nation for defense as, “the prosecution of the war comes first, and the cost second, provided there is no extravagance.”¹⁶

While providing solid evidence the government was taking the Home Guard seriously in its role as a defensive organization, the questionable ability of the government to adequately provide for the Home Guard, in the same manner as the aforementioned rifle issue, conjured a surprising admission of governmental uncertainty. Demonstrated vividly through Minister Semple’s admission that to, “provide the men with uniforms and equipment will be a problem, but everything possible is being done in that direction.”¹⁷ Semple’s reply that the government was having issues with arming and equipping the Home Guard drew not only the interest of the *Otago Daily Times*, but the nearby *Lake Wakatip Mail*. Both papers found a common theme not only through the minister’s comment regarding uniforms and equipment, but a suggestion made that the Home Guard should be equipped and cooperate fully with the army.

The *Lake Wakatip Mail*’s March 11, 1941, issue took a different stance compared to the *Otago Daily Times* regarding the minister’s comments, instead examining his answer to suggestions of conscription, alongside army cooperation, and even the minister’s thoughts on the Home Guard. The paper detailed that the minister’s insistence

¹⁶ Ibid, 9.

¹⁷ Ibid, 9.

that conscription was not necessary was a response to, “a question whether compulsory membership; as suggested in a letter forwarded to every municipality by the Stratford Borough Council, was under consideration by the government.”¹⁸ The minister reiterated that “each man was as important as the next,” and reinforced the government's position that conscription for the Home Guard was not necessary at the moment. The *Lake Wakatip Mail* observed with interest where the *Otago Daily Times* had not, the minister's complementary comments on the Home Guard, “These men are doing a real job of work, and it would be impossible to defend the country without them. In addition to the Home Guard there is a strong force of trained territorials and together they will make a good defense organization.”¹⁹

Comparisons to the training of the territorials blended into previous discussion of army incorporation. The minister admitted that the Home Guard would “receive only spasmodic training, whereas men to be drawn in the fifth ballot for territorial service would receive a thorough and intensive training to equip them fully for any emergency.” The *Lake Wakatip Mail* examined alongside the *Otago Daily Times* a suggestion that had called for “members of the Home Guard to be drilled and equipped by the army department to bring them to the highest standard of efficiency” This combination of drill, army incorporation, and rifle issues would come to occupy the published thoughts of anxious and increasingly vocal New Zealanders as 1941 advanced onward.

¹⁸ *Lake Wakatip Mail*, Issue 4509, 11 March 1941, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/LWM19410311.2.22>

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 4.

The various responses of government officials to the aforementioned issues and a lack of firm direction from the government did not go unnoticed by both the New Zealand media and citizens and guardsmen alike. Only days after the *Lake Wakatip Mail* detailed Minister Semple's comments, the *New Zealand Herald* reported, with noticeable worry, on the meeting of Home Guard subcommittees and members of the central committee in Auckland on March 14, 1941. The committee members strongly vocalized, "the view that the apathy of the government was killing the Home Guard movement" alongside a frustration towards the New Zealand government for its apathetic stance.²⁰ This apathy was noticeable in the statistics of enrollment and distribution of Emergency Precautions Scheme personnel in Auckland, which according to those present, consisted of 18,000 persons enrolled, while the active duty Home Guard only contained 6,000 names "of whom only 60 per cent were effectives."²¹

This was in direct response to a government proposal to "withdraw men from the ranks of the Home Guard men for specialist work, such as police auxiliaries, traffic control, and other duties" that the assembled members protested would have "a serious effect on the guard." These citizens produced a resolution to the government in response requesting that such auxiliaries not come from the Home Guard and instead "procure them from volunteers in the emergency organization, excluding key and technical men, with a view to them being trained specially for the tasks to be performed."²² This pushback from New Zealanders offers a clear demonstration of this brewing frustration

²⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23914, 14 March 1941, Page 9. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410314.2.120>

²¹ *Ibid*, 9.

²² *Ibid*, 9.

by non-governmental citizens and Home Guard committee members alike, one that later at the same meeting; would reach what can only be described as a boiling point.

The *New Zealand Herald* took an immediate interest in the proposed resolution those present proposed to the government, one that clearly displayed their collective frustration, “A resolution was put forward that the Government should be asked to state whether it wanted the Home Guard to function or not.” This outpouring of frustration in the original statement was tempered somewhat by a revision of the proposition to the government, instead asking that the “associate-Minister of National Service. The Hon. D. Wilson, to visit Auckland at the earliest possible moment for the purpose of discussing with the central committee and sub-committees the Government’s attitude towards the movement.”²³ This demand from those serving in the movement, and those actively involved in coordinating it, for the government to be absolutely clear on its attitude towards the Home Guard, found an eager outlet in some New Zealander’s editorials.

Under the pseudonym *Home Guardsman*, one member of the organization criticized the recent regulations made to the original *Emergency Reserve Corps Regulations of 1940* to the *New Zealand Herald* on March 19, 1941. Referring to the previous published March 11, 1941, article concerning the new powers granted to Minister Semple, Home Guardsman loudly called out the hypocrisy of the new changes in light of the original terms. *The New Zealand Herald* allotted Home Guardsman a generous amount of space to voice his anger towards the Minister’s new powers, “Change with changing circumstances is understood, but drastic breach of contract

²³ Ibid, 9.

without consultation with those concerned is neither wise nor courteous, and we feel sure is not in accord with the policy of proper authorities. No regulation or change should be made that has the tendency to check enthusiasm or encourage apathy.”²⁴

This sense of apathy referenced by Sir Ernest Davis in December 1940 and now by Home Guardsman in 1941, only seemed to be reinforced by the notices regarding the provision of rifles to members of the Home Guard, indicating that this apathy was present in other Home Guard circles aside from recruitment. The issuance of rifles in particular offered the most striking example given the government’s recent encouragement of the civilian population to lend their rifles to the government for usage by the Home Guard. The *Lake Wakatip Mail* covered the address of Colonel W.I.K Jennings, staff officer of Wellington Home Guard, to an assembled parade of guardsmen at Garrison Hall in which he voiced encouragement and disappointment. The *Lake Wakatip Mail* described Jennings' comments with clear curiosity given his stance towards the Home Guard: “Colonel Jennings said the appeal for rifles had received a disappointing response. In an effort to demonstrate the Home Guard’s appeal, owners of rifles in the Home Guard learned they would have the use of their own rifles in the guard, and in the event of their having more than one, they could nominate the use of the other rifles they possessed.”²⁵

Concerning the distribution of these firearms, Colonel Jennings, “advised owners if not already members to join the Home Guard, or if unfit or over age, to hand over the rifle or nominate it to a friend in the guard.”²⁶ Jennings did not dedicate his entire address

²⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23918, 19 March 1941, Page 10. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410319.2.131.2>

²⁵ *Lake Wakatip Mail*, Issue 4510, 18 March 1941, Page 2. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/LWM19410318.2.13>

²⁶ *Ibid*, 2.

to illustrating his point further, with the *Lake Wakatip Mail* noting, “He expressed his pleasure at the bearing of the local guardsmen and spoke in encouraging terms of the possibilities of achieving something worthwhile in the defense of the country.”²⁷

Jennings' remarks offer an almost direct comparison to Col. Aldred's statement in Papakura on November 22, 1940, in working to drum up as much practical enthusiasm for the Home Guard as possible, while bluntly noting the government's urgent need for rifles for the Home Guard for both training and practical usage.

The *New Zealand Herald* reported on March 20, 1941, the progress of the distribution of rifles for the Home Guard in Wellington, an indicator both of the government's promises alongside the encouraged enthusiasm on the part of New Zealanders. The paper opined that the authorities in Wellington had “issued 200 rifles to members of the Home Guard in Wellington City and suburbs. These rifles are to be used for drill purposes only and not to be employed in musketry. In addition, approximately 50 rifles which were handed in by private owners to the police have been issued to the Home Guard.”²⁸ The demarcation of 200 rifles for training and not for active usage speaks loudly regarding the state of rifles in the Home Guard, leaving a serious doubt on both the adequate supply of rifles for the government, a statement Col. Aldred declined to delve into, and the enthusiasm, or in this case, hesitancy, of New Zealanders to give up their privately owned rifles.

²⁷ Ibid, 2.

²⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23919, 20 March 1941, Page 8. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410320.2.53>

This hesitancy to participate in collective home defense efforts, alongside rifle donations, found an extremely vocal critic in the Mayor of Hamilton, Mr. H.D. Caro, whose incensed comments recorded by the *New Zealand Herald* at a Home Guard enrollment meeting included, “Unless or until we get a bomb or two dropped on the town, the people will not wake up to their obligations.” The *New Zealand Herald* noted the mayor's exasperation as “what he described as the appalling apathy of people with regard to defense measures, at a meeting held in East Hamilton last night” alongside a poor attendance of “40 many of whom had already enrolled.” While Mayor Caro’s statement that “the people of New Zealand were too well fed and cared for, and they had become lazy and careless” was not shared by other government officials, frustration with New Zealanders defense involvement would be tested significantly in the coming months.²⁹

Despite this bleak outlook of New Zealanders defensive obligations, at least as Mayor Caro’s fiery comments implied, there seemed to be a ray of hope with Home Guard recruitment. Minister Semple’s announcement that Home Guard recruitment was approaching the goal of 100,000 members was detailed through the *New Zealand Herald* on March 25, 1941. Semple’s enthusiasm for this increase was clearly visible, “the interest being shown all over the Dominion is very gratifying” giving special attention to efforts at “Palmerston North, Dunedin, Hamilton, Rotorua, Napier, and Wellington.”³⁰ This contrasts interestingly with Mayor Caro’s comments in Hamilton only days before

²⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23920, 21 March 1941, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410321.2.62>

³⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23923, 25 March 1941, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410325.2.42>

Semple's announcement, where it seemed recruitment was lacking in Hamilton. Semple described the greatest increases in recruitment as, "the position is generally better in the country districts than in the larger centres" but despite this urban areas such as Wellington and even Auckland, with its document recruitment issues, recorded an increase from 7,500 to 8635 members from January 31 to February 28.³¹

The *New Zealand Herald* observed this increase was possible despite that "Certain key men previously in the Home Guard had been transferred to the emergency precautions services, as they were regarded as essential men in the main-tenance of public services."³² This seems to have been an effrontery to the assembled Auckland committee members and Home Guard subcommittees who, on March 14, 1941, had submitted a resolution calling for the exact opposite. Despite optimistic recruitment numbers, in his own address, Minister Jones reinforced Semple's comments on March 6, 1941 in stating provisioning of Home Guard uniforms would be delayed due to overseas commitments, somewhat dampening this surge of Home Guard positivity.³³

With the advent of April 1941, the outcome of the government's appeal to New Zealanders for serviceable rifles for the Home Guard fast approached a boiling point of its own. The *Ashburton Guardian* deconstructed Minister Semple's somewhat alarming statement to its readers on April 2, 1941, as "the response to the appeal to owners of serviceable .303 rifles to give them for use by the Home Guard had been so amazingly

³¹ *Ibid*, 6.

³² *Ibid*, 6.

³³ *Ibid*, 6.

poor that he could see no alternative to impressment.”³⁴ In a more abbreviated manner compared to the coverage by the *Waikato Independent* of Prime Minister’s statement on February 24, 1941, the *Ashburton Guardian* made clear the sense of appeal by the government again to New Zealanders through Semple’s paraphrased statement, “It was necessary to have the rifles in the interests of the defense of the country.” This would be accomplished through impressment of private rifles from New Zealanders, “when circumstances warranted, the rifles would be returned to owners, and if loss or damage occurred the owners would be compensated.”³⁵ Coverage such as this from New Zealand’s newspapers displayed an frustrated and somewhat nervous government concerning the response to rifle impressment, the government’s attitude towards impressment resembling the enactment of a last ditch effort, due to civilian apathy.

Impressment seemed inevitable with additional coverage from the *Gisborne Herald* on April 23, 1941 confirming a lackluster response, “So poor has been the response to the Prime Minister’s appeal made in February for serviceable .303 rifles for use by the Home Guard that so far only 50 have been handed in at police stations throughout the Auckland police district.”³⁶ This number exactly matched the amount of rifles handed in to police stations in Wellington reported by the *New Zealand Herald* on March 24, 1941, showcasing a dismal failure of the government’s effort to convince New Zealanders to offer up their rifles for national defense. While ample commentary found its way into New Zealand’s newspapers, patriotic rhetoric and calls for unity seemed to

³⁴ *Ashburton Guardian*, Volume 61, Issue 146, 2 April 1941, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AG19410402.2.52>

³⁵ *Ibid*, 6.

³⁶ *Gisborne Herald*, Volume LXVIII, Issue 20537, 23 April 1941, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/GISH19410423.2.34>

do little to persuade New Zealanders to surrender their rifles for Home Guard usage.

While impressment coverage by New Zealand's newspapers reaffirmed the seriousness of the situation through documentation of government officials such as Minister Semple and the Prime Minister, the response of the public remained surprisingly apathetic, as evidenced by the number of rifles voluntarily surrendered despite a plethora of articles.

The first coverage of the impressment of rifles came from the *Ashburton Guardian* at the start of the month on April 1, 1941. This limited coverage, however, came in the form of the analysis of a letter received by area commander Captain E. A. Cockroft from the National Service Department. The paraphrased letter vaguely detailed the upcoming mechanism by which conscription would be enacted, as the *Ashburton Guardian* commented, "Every Home Guardsman owning or possessing a rifle, states the letter, must formally hand it in so that he may come under the compensation provisions of the regulation, and, more-over, this will be necessary in order that all rifles will be under effective control." The *Ashburton Guardian* further described Cockroft's remarks that both Home Guardsmen in possession of rifles and civilians alike would each receive a receipt, denoting their rifle had been impressed for defensive purposes.³⁷

Comprehensive coverage of this major announcement came from multiple papers across North Island in the final weeks of April and beginning of May, through an announcement by the Prime Minister concerning rifle impressment. The day following Anzac Day saw shared coverage by the *Auckland Star*, *Ashburton Guardian*, and *Evening Post*, on the aforementioned announcement, with each newspaper maintaining the core of

³⁷ *Ashburton Guardian*, Volume 61, Issue 145, 1 April 1941, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AG19410401.2.24>

the announcement, but varying greatly with their coverage of the more specific elements of the Prime Minister's announcement. The *Auckland Star* covered the basics of rifle impressment: all .303 rifles and parts were needed by the government, alongside explanation of the government's reasoning, by noting "the impressment order covered all privately-owned .303 rifles of all makes, and unserviceable rifles of this caliber should also be handed in as it was quite possible they might be repaired."³⁸

The *Ashburton Guardian* quickly followed behind the *Auckland Star* with its own coverage in a more succinct manner compared to the other papers, drawing its readers attention to the soon to be gazetted rifle impressment order. The *Ashburton Guardian* focusing on the urgency of the Prime Minister's message in its brief update to its readers. Specifically, regarding swelling Home Guard ranks and the government's failure to arm them, "In existing circumstances it presented a major problem and that it was therefore impera-tive that every rifle in the country should be made available to ensure that as far as humanly possible the Home Guard would be adequately trained and equipped to meet any situation that may arise."³⁹

The *Evening Post* provided the most substantial coverage of the papers published on April 26, 1941, beginning with the Prime Minister's comments that "Mr Fraser stated that the situation regarding the supply of rifles to the home defense forces had been carefully considered and in light of existing circumstances the Government deemed it

³⁸ *Auckland Star*, Volume LXXII, Issue 97, 26 April 1941, Page 3 (Supplement). Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19410426.2.211.52>

³⁹ *Ashburton Guardian*, Volume 61, Issue 165, 26 April 1941, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AG19410426.2.48>

necessary to obtain the use of all privately owned .303 rifles.”⁴⁰ However, what caught the attention of the *Evening Post* editors was the government's stance towards citizens concerned with giving up their rifles, especially those in the Home Guard and needing rifles for animal control, “Any applications for retention on these grounds or on the ground of national interest will be investigated by competent department officers and will receive careful consideration.”⁴¹ In closing, the *Evening Post* stressed the Prime Minister's now familiar appeal to contribute their arms, “By doing this they will greatly assist the Government and will be contributing towards the national war effort.”

Following the initial coverage by the *Auckland Star*, *Ashburton Guardian*, and *Evening Post*, the news of the official call for the impressment of rifles traveled at incredible speed through newspapers across the country. Almost all newspapers carried the same sense of urgency to their readers, the matter of rifle impressment was of critical importance and New Zealanders cooperation was not only needed, but now mandated by the government. Many of the papers emphasized the Prime Minister's assurance that “All rifles impressed would be held on loan and would be returned in good order or be replaced” alongside the Prime Minister's plea that “urged all who had rifles in their possession to take them to the nearest police station without delay.”

The advent of April 28, 1941 saw a large wave of published newspaper material in light of the Prime Minister's appeal, with the *Evening Star*, *Gisborne Herald*, *Otago Daily Times*, *New Zealand Herald*, and *Press* all printing articles on rifle impressment,

⁴⁰ *Evening Post*, Volume CXXXI, Issue 97, 26 April 1941, Page 10. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/EP19410426.2.70>

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 10.

alongside follow up articles in greater detail compared to their first bulletins, by both the *Auckland Star* and *Northern Advocate*.⁴² Many of the papers carefully reassured their readers, their rifles would be on loan, and those seeking exceptions to the impressment order, would each have their individual cases reviewed under careful consideration with regards to the Minister's judgment.

This first wave of published material was soon surpassed by an avalanche of newspaper articles on May 3, 1941, detailing both the formal impressment order in writing and directions from many newspapers to their readers on how to proceed with the impressment process. The formal notice appeared in sections for both public notice and advertising, with some newspapers taking out multiple articles to alert their readers to this critical national defensive development. The long impressment order began with notable governmental formality, uniformly repeated across New Zealand's newspapers:

By notice published in the N.Z Gazette dated 1/5/41, pursuant to the Emergency Reserve Corps Regulations, 1940 (Amendment No. 1). ALL PER-SONS HAVING IN THEIR POSSESSION .303 RIFLES OF ANY MAKE, DESIGN OR PATTERN, WHETHER SERVICEABLE OR UNSERVICE-ABLE, AND WHETHER OWNED BY THEM OR BY SOME OTHER PER-SON, are required to give up possession of such Rifles to the Government on loan for Home Defence purposes on or before THE 15TH DAY OF MAY 1941.

⁴² *Evening Star*, Issue 23870, 28 April 1941, Page 10. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ESD19410428.2.85> ; *Gisborne Herald*, Volume LXVIII, Issue 20540, 28 April 1941, Page 7. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/GISH19410428.2.77>; *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 24592, 28 April 1941, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19410428.2.37> ; *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23950, 28 April 1941, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410428.2.49> ; *Press*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23314, 28 April 1941, Page 10. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19410428.2.74> ; *Auckland Star*, Volume LXXII, Issue 98, 28 April 1941, Page 8. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19410428.2.100> ; *Northern Advocate*, 28 April 1941, Page 7. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NA19410428.2.103>

The entire text of the order appeared in multiple papers, with different sections either in all capital letters or in lowercase, depending on editorial discretion. The *Evening Post*, *Evening Star*, *Press*, *Otago Daily Times*, *Gisborne Herald*, *Manawatu Standard*, *Northern Advocate*, and *Ashburton Guardian* all provided the full text of the order as public notice on behalf of the government.⁴³ Many of the aforementioned newspapers broke down the context of the order, informed their readers of the fast approaching May 15, 1941 compliance deadline, or provided information for local residents on compliance. The *Evening Star*, *Auckland Star*, *Manawatu Standard*, and *Northern Advocate* each also published short paragraphs directing their readers attention to their advertising columns, before informing them further that registered owners would each be receiving individual notices the following week.⁴⁴ The articles reinforced the Prime Minister's assertion that failure to receive a notice did not excuse New Zealanders from compliance, alongside

⁴³ *Evening Post*, Volume CXXXI, Issue 103, 3 May 1941, Page 7. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/EP19410503.2.18> ; *Evening Star*, Issue 23875, 3 May 1941, Page 2. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ESD19410503.2.5.5> ; *Press*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23319, 3 May 1941, Page 15. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19410503.2.89.4> ; *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 24597, 3 May 1941, Page 1. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19410503.2.7.7> ; *Gisborne Herald*, Volume LXVIII, Issue 20545, 3 May 1941, Page 2. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/GISH19410503.2.11.3> ; *Manawatu Standard*, Volume LXI, Issue 130, 3 May 1941, Page 2. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/MS19410503.2.8.6> ; *Northern Advocate*, 3 May 1941, Page 1. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NA19410503.2.2.6> ; *Ashburton Guardian*, Volume 61, Issue 171, 3 May 1941, Page 1. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AG19410503.2.3.3>

⁴⁴ *Evening Star*, Issue 23875, 3 May 1941, Page 7. Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ESD19410503.2.31> ; *Auckland Star*, Volume LXXII, Issue 103, 3 May 1941, Page 8. Papers Past, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19410503.2.51> ; *Manawatu Standard*, Volume LXI, Issue 130, 3 May 1941, Page 10. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/MS19410503.2.84> ; *Northern Advocate*, 3 May 1941, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NA19410503.2.48>

noting that all rifles whether owned by the person or not, serviceable or not, and registered or not, would need to be turned in to the authorities by May 15. The *New Zealand Herald* and *Northern Advocate* (now its third article on May 3 relating to impressment) each published short bulletins informing the 1,000 owners of registered rifles in the Auckland area they would soon be receiving their notices.⁴⁵ The *Gisborne Herald* addressed the issuance of notices in Gisborne, while *Press* sorted the technicalities of Home Guardsmen retaining their impressed rifles through a direct enquiry to area commander Major D. S. Murchison, for further clarification from the government.⁴⁶

The physical process of handing ones rifles in was relatively simple, the *Gisborne Herald* described the four methods by which one could comply with the order:

“On or before May 15, 1941, you are required to either- “(1) Hand in the rifles or rifles in your possession to the nearest police-station, if you have not already done so; or “(2) Lodge with the nearest police officer a written application for leave to retain possession; or “(3) notify the police officer that you are an active member of the Home Guard and desire to have exclusive use of your rifle; or “(4) if the rifle is not now in your possession you should notify the local police officer of the name and address of the person whom you have either transferred or loaned it.”⁴⁷

With four options open for New Zealanders to demonstrate their compliance with the impressment order, the dust began to settle after the sudden fury of published newspaper articles. The days following the formal announcement and gazetting of the

⁴⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23955, 3 May 1941, Page 10. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410503.2.73> ; *Northern Advocate*, 3 May 1941, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NA19410503.2.45>

⁴⁶ *Gisborne Herald*, Volume LXVIII, Issue 20545, 3 May 1941, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/GISH19410503.2.43> ; *Press*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23319, 3 May 1941, Page 8. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19410503.2.47>

⁴⁷ *Gisborne Herald*, Volume LXVIII, Issue 20545, 3 May 1941, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/GISH19410503.2.43>

rifle impressment order saw the public begin to respond to the order, both in the form of letters to the editor and compliance. Anonymous author “*Common Sense*” wrote to the *New Zealand Herald* on May 7, 1941 to provide their thoughts, establishing their credentials as a west Auckland wife whose husband and brothers both owned rifles. Common Sense declared “should there be any threat of invasion our rifles could be put to much better use in the hands of the men who have been using them for years than in other hands.” After offering her thoughts that the country should be defended from both coasts by men familiar with the terrain, Common Sense expressed her hope that farmers’ usage of rifles to euthanize sick or injured animals would be taken into account, “that the Government’s impressment scheme will not be applied without due consideration.”⁴⁸

As the public’s response to the impressment order now began to take on steam, the *Manawatu Standard* provided commentary on Palmerston North’s progress on May 8, 1941. The article opened optimistically: “There has been a fair response to date in Palmerston North in the delivery of .303 rifles to the police following the issuing of the impressment order, which was received by most owners on Monday. In all, over 1500 impressment notices were sent out.”⁴⁹ As to the quality of the rifles, the *Manawatu Standard* dryly noted that “a wide variety of types has been received, some being in excellent condition and others not as good.”⁵⁰ While the amount of notices sent out to those residing in the area was concrete, the statistics of the number of rifles surrendered were evidently still unknown.

⁴⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23958, 7 May 1941, Page 13. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410507.2.129.6>

⁴⁹ *Manawatu Standard*, Volume LXI, Issue 134, 8 May 1941, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/MS19410508.2.28>

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 6.

The *Manawatu Standard* attempted to explain this unknown factor as best it could, “A large pro-portion of these rifles held in this po-lice district are in the country and no reports have yet made up as to the number of rifles which have come in from those areas to the district police stations.”⁵¹ Communication delays and travel time could also easily have slowed the response of many rifle owners and this was not limited to owners, “The impressment orders had to be sent out with only two days’ notice and the assistance of a number of typists from the departments of Public Service was co-opted.”⁵² This hurried response to expedite impressment notices alongside the government’s short turnaround deadline of May 15, 1941, presented a difficult quandary for New Zealanders. Calling into question the government’s trust of its citizens given previous events, alongside the urgency of rifles necessitating quick action on behalf of the government.

The *Bay of Plenty Beacon* offered a small insight into this question through its own reporting on the progress of the rifle impressment order and citizens' reactions on May 12, 1941. The local news section of the paper took a markedly different stance compared to the informative style many of the aforementioned papers had chosen, instead choosing to call out the behavior of citizens who had not surrendered their rifles. The *Bay of Plenty Beacon* opened with reminding its readers, “Those people in the Whakatane district who have in their possession rifles or a rifle are reminded these must be handed into the local Police Station before May 15.”⁵³ This helpful attitude quickly shifted on the very next line, calling out both the authorities and residents to the “fact that the circular

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 6.

⁵² *Ibid*, 6.

⁵³ *Bay of Plenty Beacon*, Volume 4, Issue 304, 12 May 1941, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/BPB19410512.2.14>

issued did not make this request absolutely clear has been responsible has been responsible for the re-sponse being very slow, and also has left what some selfish people consider a loophole to hold their rifles so that they may continue to enjoy shooting for sport.”⁵⁴ The *Bay of Plenty Beacon* then took it upon itself to explain the circumstances that allowed an active Home Guardsman to keep their rifle and the application that needed to also be filled out.

The *Bay of Plenty Beacon* offers a sharp retort to the smooth progress noted by the *Manawatu Standard*, albeit in a different region: laying blame on both the authorities for not making their instructions clear and selfish residents of Whakatane District not willing to comply with the order. Apathy on the part of these “selfish people” and neglect of the impressment order offers an interesting example that would be tested across New Zealand in the following weeks. One that would offer the most compelling evidence yet of the success or failure of the government’s bold plan to galvanize New Zealanders behind a common ideal of home defense.

As the May 15, 1941, impressment deadline drew within the 72-hour mark, the *Ellesmere Guardian* appealed to its readers on May 13, 1941, to turn in their rifles to the police. The *Ellesmere Guardian* took on an encouraging tone in light of the coming deadline that contrasted notably with the *Bay of Plenty Beacon*: “In connexion with the impressment of .303 rifles, ordered by the Government, it would greatly assist the police if owners would deliver their rifles to the Police Stations at Leeston or Southbridge as

⁵⁴ Ibid, 4.

soon as possible. It is understood that any owner of a .303 rifle who is a member of the Home Guard will have his own weapon handed back to him for use as a guardsman.”⁵⁵

The following day the *Gisborne Herald* detailed the announcement that rifles owned by members of the Home Guard “may be re-issued to their owners on the recommendation of the platoon and company commanders, if approved by unit commanders.” Stringent conditions followed the explanation, alongside commentary from the *Gisborne Herald* that, “As far as possible, these wishes should be given effect to, states the area commander’s memorandum.”⁵⁶ After dealing with these technicalities, the *Gisborne Herald* described the state of impressment as being to the satisfaction of local authorities: “‘The rifles are coming in quite well in Gisborne, but there are still a few outstanding,’ said the officer in charge of the impressment of .303in. calibre rifles at the Gisborne Police Station this morning.”⁵⁷ The article's closing paragraph gently reminded readers of the *Gisborne Herald*, failure to turn in rifles by the deadline would entail action “liable to be taken against persons holding outstanding rifles in their possession.”⁵⁸

With the impressment deadline within 24 hours, the *Ashburton Guardian* offered one final afternoon update on the progress within the city on May 14, 1941. Focusing on the efforts by the Ashburton Police, the paper opened its article with an analysis of the situation. “One hundred and fifty rifles,” it announced, “had been dealt with at the

⁵⁵ *Ellesmere Guardian*, Volume LXII, Issue 37, 13 May 1941, Page 3. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/EG19410513.2.11>

⁵⁶ *Gisborne Herald*, Volume LXVIII, Issue 20554, 14 May 1941, Page 11. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/GISH19410514.2.147>

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 11.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 11.

Ashburton Police Station under the impressment of .303 rifles up to early this afternoon...One Hundred and eleven rifles have been actually handed in at the Police Station, while the police have been notified that 38 have been dealt with by the unit commanders of the Home Guard.”⁵⁹ This was followed by an appeal by Senior-Sergeant J.F. Cleary to “persons who are not in the Home Guard but who desire to hand in their rifles over to Home Guardsmen should first hand their weapons into the police station and receive a receipt.”⁶⁰ This appeal was made to clear up the realization that if they did so, the police would not have a formal record of their weapons and then be unable to return them. Further details regarding the rifle nomination for the Home Guard were provided by the *Ashburton Guardian*, demonstrating a hope for all rifles to be accounted for before the deadline. As the deadline passed for the impressment of rifles on May 15, 1941, there still remained little tangible evidence to be seen from across the country of New Zealanders compliance with the order, despite a bombardment of information in New Zealand’s newspapers and persistent reminders from the New Zealand government. Scattered evidence in Ashburton and Gisborne offered a small sample of New Zealanders willingness to contribute under compliance orders before the deadline. In the months that followed, this evidence can be plainly seen from newspapers across New Zealand, expanding beyond Ashburton and Gisborne, alongside earlier contributions in Wellington and Auckland well before the government’s formal announcement of impressment.

Following the wave of impressment notices sent out in Palmerston North, the *Manawatu Standard* resumed its coverage of rifle impressment on May 19, 1941. Despite

⁵⁹ *Ashburton Guardian*, Volume 61, Issue 180, 14 May 1941, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AG19410514.2.68>

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 6.

eleven days having elapsed since its previous update, the *Manawatu Standard* remained noticeably vague in its assessment of the situation:

The majority of the 1500 or more .303 rifle which were the subject of impressment orders in the Palmerston North police district have now been handed in. Apart from these are a number which are the subject of ap-peals to the Minister of National Ser-vice, for under the regulation gov-erning the impressment a rifle may be retained if it is required for the des-truction of deer or of vermin, such as wild pigs. The returns from the coun-try police stations have not yet been received, but 375 rifles have been handed in at Palmerston North. ⁶¹

The collection of 375 rifles hardly seems to fit the “majority of the 1500 or more .303 rifles” the *Manawatu Standard* claimed were surrendered in response to the impressment order, despite the still awaited returns from more rural districts and exemptions. In the weeks that followed, the *Opotiki News* released its own update for Gisborne that seemed much more optimistic: “Only a few rifles of .303in. Caliber remain outstanding in Gisborne as a result of the impressment regulation, and the police are making further enquiries regarding those arms. In the Gisborne police dis-trict 100 rifles have not been hand-ed in, but of that number about 80 are registered in the names of residents in Taneatua, Whakatane and Opotiki districts.” ⁶² Regardless of the lack of statistics, the reporting from both the *Manawatu Standard* and *Opotiki News* demonstrated that New Zealanders were now, grudgingly or willingly, complying in notable numbers with the impressment order, as the *Northern Advocate* would soon confirm on its own.

⁶¹ *Manawatu Standard*, Volume LXI, Issue 143, 19 May 1941, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/MS19410519.2.34>

⁶² *Opotiki News*, Volume IV, Issue 293, 3 June 1941, Page 2. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/OPNEWS19410603.2.10>

The *Northern Advocate* added its coverage to the impressment statistics on June 10, 1941, now a full month after the government deadline had passed. The paper reported that, under the “News of the Day” column: “Under the impressment regulations, 450 rifles from the Whangarei police district, which embraces the whole of Northland, have been surrendered. Twenty owners have made application for retention of their rifles, principally for the destruction of deer, wild pigs, and wild cattle, and they have been forwarded to the Director of National Service for consideration. Home Guardsmen owning rifles have surrendered them, but have had them returned.”⁶³

Interestingly, is direct mention by *The Northern Advocate* of New Zealanders that made applications for exemption to the impressment order, an overlooked aspect in other impressment articles. New Zealanders such as “*Common Sense*” who wrote to the *New Zealand Herald* on May 7, 1941, and the unnamed twenty owners who applied for consideration of their exemptions, as noted by *The Northern Advocate*, offer perhaps the most intriguing element of rifle impressment. The need to retain rifles to defend New Zealanders livestock and deter wild animals is clearly visible, however, there remains very little statistical information regarding the success or failure of their applications to the Director of National Service. Despite this lack of statistical evidence, some New Zealanders evidently desired to keep their weapons in private possession, be it for livestock means, or as the *Bay of Plenty Beacon* grumbled, “selfish people consider a loophole to hold their rifles so that they may continue to enjoy shooting for sport.”⁶⁴ One

⁶³ *Northern Advocate*, 10 June 1941, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NA19410610.2.41>

⁶⁴ *Bay of Plenty Beacon*, Volume 4, Issue 304, 12 May 1941, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/BPB19410512.2.14>

New Zealander broke this mold on June 16, 1941, choosing a very radical response to rifle impressment.

Keir Hardie Samms' radical action in violation of the impressment order captivated the attention of the *Auckland Star*, *Evening Post*, *New Zealand Herald*, *Northern Advocate*, *Manawatu Standard* and *Gisborne Herald*, featuring as a story of national significance with coverage across New Zealand on June 16-19, 1941.⁶⁵ The incident began when Samms responded to the government, writing to the authorities notifying them he had destroyed his .303 rifle in anticipation of the rifle impressment order being issued across New Zealand. The incident was immediately prosecuted under Sub-Inspector E.T.C. Turner of the Christchurch Police, who noted the government contacted Samms after issuance of his impressment notice.⁶⁶ Samms claimed in his defense, "he had not been aware that he had to notify the de-struction of the rifle. He did so im-mediate[ly] [after] the impressment notice was sent."⁶⁷ Turner in a statement to the press described, "Inquiries were made and Samms made a statement to the police in which he said that, be-cause of his holding conscientious views, he had anticipated the im-pressment notice and destroyed the rifle, throwing it in pieces into the Heathcote

⁶⁵ *Auckland Star*, Volume LXXII, Issue 140, 16 June 1941, Page 8. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19410616.2.102> ; *Evening Post*, Volume CXXXI, Issue 140, 16 June 1941, Page 3. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/EP19410616.2.10> ; *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23992, 16 June 1941, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410616.2.46> ; *Manawatu Standard*, Volume LXI, Issue 167, 17 June 1941, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/MS19410617.2.73> ; *Gisborne Herald*, Volume LXVIII, Issue 20585, 19 June 1941, Page 3. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/GISH19410619.2.16>

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 3.

River.”⁶⁸ Simms’ arraignment in court received detailed coverage, as every newspaper eagerly awaited the government’s response to a blatant disregard for New Zealanders to unify behind home defense.

Keir Hardie Simms’ day in court found him fined 20s and costs for the destruction of his rifle, a small sum considering the impact he immediately made through national newspapers.⁶⁹ While Simms did not face prison time for his actions of particular significance is the exact charge on which Simms was arraigned, not for having destroyed his rifle, but instead for having *failed to notify* the authorized arms officer of the destruction of his rifle, a very different matter. Simms could easily have been made an example of by the government, the establishment of a much sterner financial penalty for the destruction of an impressed rifle, would have offered stark warning to any New Zealanders who considered following Keir Hardie Simms bold action. Nonetheless, Simms exceptional case, of a New Zealander openly refusing to comply with the impressment order through the destruction of his rifle, is certainly not the standard by which impressment refusal can be judged.

New Zealanders in July 1941 again offered their thoughts in print on impressment, although with a different stance compared to *Common Sense*, now advocating for greater effort and contribution on the part of those who may have slipped underneath the nose of the order’s text. In addition to the words of its citizens, the acting-Prime Minister and the government offered its own commentary on the rifle impressment

⁶⁸ *Northern Advocate*, 16 June 1941, Page 3. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NA19410616.2.20>

⁶⁹ *Evening Post*, Volume CXXXI, Issue 140, 16 June 1941, Page 3. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/EP19410616.2.10>

issue through official statements to the media concerning the Home Guard, increasing in frequency as the winter months passed by. Although the rifle impressment order had captivated New Zealand's newspapers for the previous two months, the issue of recruitment for the Home Guard still quietly simmered in the background. Furthermore, two new divisive issues would dominate the national stage for the foreseeable future: equipment for the Home Guard and the volatile army incorporation issue.

The arrival of July 5, 1941 marked almost two months since the formal deadline for New Zealanders to surrender their rifles under the impressment order had passed. Although the impressment issue certainly did not receive active monitoring in New Zealand's domestic print media, citizens still sought to make their voices heard. "7 M.M" represented one of these concerned citizens seeking to add to the continuing impressment conversation in writing to *Press*. 7 M.M opened his letter to *Press* affirming the contributions of his fellow citizens, before launching into exposing the .303 rifles left untouched by the order "All patriotic owners of .303 rifles were willing to hand in their arms without complaint, believing that a shortage of weapons was preventing the arming of the Home Guard. It now transpires that the order applied only to private owners: arms dealers were and are exempted. These dealers throughout the Dominion have a larger number of rifles on their shelves which are almost without exception standard military .303's, with military sights, magazines, safety catches, etc."⁷⁰

7 M.M's frustration soon became plainly visible regarding the government's stance towards impressment, "Inquiry from the Police Department elicits information that

⁷⁰ *Press*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23373, 5 July 1941, Page 5. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19410705.2.29.3>

if one were to now buy a .303 weapon from the commandeered stocks of the dealers, one would have to hand it in, under the order of impressment, This makes it seem that the Home Guard is still short of rifles; but, if that is so, why not impress the dealers' rifles?"⁷¹ Attacking what they believed to be exemptions to impressment order, 7 M.M continued their barrage, "Perhaps the powers dear an out-cry of "confiscation" from an organised body of businessmen (con-trasted with unorganized citizens) and would sooner private persons footed the bill. Against this, the police say that it is unlikely that a permit to buy a .303 would be issued."⁷²

7 M.M's grew even more critical of the government, ending with an attack on the specifics of the impressment order and the government's stance towards private owners, "Perhaps there is an objection to private persons owning firearms; but, if so, why are other high-power arm, such as 7 m.m. or .250 calibre, allowed?"⁷³ Decrying the technical confusion 7 M.M concluded, "Truly the policy of the authorities is a mystery or a muddle. The muddle is illustrated by the example of the .303 savage rifle. Although this weapon cannot use .303 military ammunition, it is nevertheless included in the order."⁷⁴ This supposed sense of inequality among citizens and business owners regarding impressment was not limited to 7 M.M, and within days a second citizen wrote to *Press* to express their own thoughts on the government's confusing impressment position.

On July 8, 1941, another New Zealander, under the pseudonym "*Army Rifle*," expressed an extremely vocal agreement with the earlier statement made by 7 M.M:

⁷¹ Ibid, 5.

⁷² Ibid, 5.

⁷³ Ibid, 5.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 5.

“‘7mm’s’ letter exposes the ridiculous and unfair position caused by the impressment of rifles. It is ridiculous that rifles should remain in dealers’ hands if the Home Guard needs them, particularly if, as ‘7mm’ states, non-standard arms have been issued to guards.”⁷⁵ Army Rifle expanded this sense of inequality to those who used their rifles to keep deer and other pests away, alongside advocating for weapons instructors, “It is unfair to the Army instructor who has to teach rifle shooting to men issued with bolt actions, lever actions, and single shot rifles while the genuine article lies idle on the dealers shelf.”⁷⁶ The frustrations of Army Rifle and 7 M.M directed at the government appeared to be a shot in the dark the government would not respond to directly, however, evidence demonstrating these complaints influenced a policy change are clearly visible.

The following day on July 9, 1941 the *Patea Mail* excitedly covered the announcement by the acting-Prime Minister the Hon. W. Nash, regarding improvements for the Home Guard. The *Patea Mail* focused on the statement by the acting-Prime Minister, paraphrasing the majority of his comments for its readers relating to the Home Guard, “Mr. Nash said the impressment of privately-owned rifles had been exceptionally valuable to the Home Guard movement, and, in order to enable full use of the weapons to be secured at the earliest possible moment, arrangements had been made for the inspection and repair of the impressed rifles to be carried out by private gunsmith firms throughout the Dominion.”⁷⁷ The impressment situation seemed to only improve further with the declaration by Nash that “adequate supplies of .303 and .22 ammunition is to be

⁷⁵ *Press*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23375, 8 July 1941, Page 10. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19410708.2.85.7>

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 10.

⁷⁷ *Patea Mail*, 9 July 1941, Page 2. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/PATM19410709.2.8>

issued for Home Guard training, and immediate arrangements were being made for the necessary quota to be released.” This release of ammunition, in tandem with additional army rifles that were to soon be distributed by the army, offered immense promise for improvement for the Home Guard’s arms shortage.⁷⁸

The *Patea Mail* commentary of Nash’s statement reverberated with almost limitless potential regarding other Home Guard neglected elements, “From discussions with the Home Guard authorities, the War Cabinet was convinced that supplies of boots, rifles, and ammunition would give the greatest measure of satisfaction to members of the Home Guard, as well as constituting very valuable assistance in training.”⁷⁹ However, this statement by the acting-Prime Minister was not without fault. Despite this notable and commendable effort, Nash confided to New Zealand’s domestic print media that this optimistic outlook was not without its own issues.

While the situation for the Home Guard was supposedly improving significantly, the *Patea Mail* drew its readers attention to Nash’s comments regarding the government’s reserves: “Mr. Nash added that he regretted that unforeseen demands on stocks of material were continually rising, and it was utterly impossible at present to make any definite promise as to when any material issue could be looked for, but no stone was being unturned to enable the promise of uniforms for the Home Guard to be kept with it was humanly possible to do so.”⁸⁰ This remark draws an interesting concern, as Mr.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 2.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 2.

Nash's comments seem to only muddle the situation for the Home Guard regarding supplies of ammunition, rifles, and equipment.

As a representative of the government, the acting-Prime Minister's comments do very little to reassure both Home Guardsmen and the readers of the *Patea Mail* that the situation was under control. These supplies were available for distribution perhaps, but there remained much to be seen regarding both the quality and quantity of the supplies the government could release. In addition, Mr. Nash's comments that "it being utterly impossible at present to make any definite promises" regarding supplies for the Home Guard, seems to contradict his assurances that these supplies were available at all. Furthermore, his closing comments regarding the distribution of uniforms that "no stone was being left unturned to enable the promise of uniforms for the Home Guard to be kept when it was humanly possible to do so" reverberates as a hollow promise. This ambiguity is perhaps best summarized in Mr. Nash's own words, words that readers of the *Patea Mail* saw immediately upon reading this very article, "the Government is not yet in a position to make a comprehensive statement covering the control and training of the Home Guard."⁸¹

Updates in New Zealand's domestic print media decrease in frequency with the advent of the winter months, as the original excitement and rapid updates gradually eased across the country. The *New Zealand Herald* provided one of the final progress updates on July 25, 1941, through its documentation of the rifles impressed in Auckland. The paper observed, "More than 1200 rifles of .303 type have been received by stations in the

⁸¹ Ibid, 2.

Auckland police district, but about 100 remain unaccounted for. Included in those not yet impressed are a number of rifles held by guardsmen who are not aware of the new provision.”⁸² This provision required an almost trivial surrender of rifles, by members of the Home Guard, who were immediately handed back their rifles with a receipt in case of damage sustained during their service, “Although the original regulations stated that owners in the Home Guard did not have to comply with the impressment order it is now provided that their rifles should be impressed.”⁸³ Auckland was evidently having better progress compared to the 375 rifles surrendered in Palmerston North and 450 rifles from the Whangarei police district, but uncertainty remained regarding if these rifles were enough to fit the sizable needs of the Home Guard. A strong answer to this question of uncertainty emerged on September 15, 1941 and later formally on September 17.⁸⁴ This answer provided by a note in a “Home Guard News and Notes” section of the *Waikato Independent*, “There is provision for the impressment of firearms for the Home Guard. Any firearm impressed from the stock-in-trade of a licensed dealer under the Arms Act will become property of the Crown, instead of being taken on loan, and the owner is to receive compensation agreed upon or fixed by arbitration.”⁸⁵

The ongoing issue of rifle impressment for the Home Guard by the New Zealand government unveiled a significant underlying problem: the government seriously lacked a definite position regarding arming the Home Guard. The initial optimism regarding rifles

⁸² *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 24026, 25 July 1941, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410725.2.48>

⁸³ *Ibid*, 6.

⁸⁴ *New Zealand Police Gazette*, Volume LXVI, Issue 37, 17 September 1941, Page 693. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/periodicals/NZPG19410917.2.11>

⁸⁵ *Waikato Independent*, Volume XLI, Issue 3905, 15 September 1941, Page 5. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WAIKIN19410915.2.28>

in early 1941 that was motivated by an electric mixture of volunteerism and patriotism, then replaced by a merciful tone that attempted to reassure New Zealanders they had nothing to fear surrendering their rifles, and lastly impressing the rifles forcefully to make up the notable shortage, functions as a tremendous example of the government's apathetic outlook towards the Home Guard. The forceful impressment of rifles can, understandably so, be viewed as an option of last resort on behalf of the government that was selected out of necessity for the defense of New Zealand.

However, critical evidence of the government's apathy towards rifle impressment is plainly visible on two separate occasions months before the impressment order. On February 27, 1941, through Prime Minister Peter Frasier's comments recorded by the *Waikato Independent* that "it was impractical to make an adequate supply available to the Home Guard."⁸⁶ With an even earlier example occurring on November 22, 1940, with Col. Aldred's direct appeal to the government "there are 30,000 privately owned rifles in the country and I am putting it up to the powers-that-be that these rifles should be made available to the Home Guard."⁸⁷ Given the critical urgency of the situation, the government's failure to take decisive action allowed the rifle issue to fester until May 1941, when it then appeared, through statements by government officials such as Minister Semple in April 1941, that the government's hand had forced by citizen noncompliance and a lackluster response to a call for citizens to voluntarily surrender their private rifles.

⁸⁶ *Waikato Independent*, Volume XLI, Issue 3820, 24 February 1941, Page 7. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WAIKIN19410224.2.38>

⁸⁷ *Franklin Times*, Volume XXIX, Issue 135, 22 November 1940, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/FRTIM19401122.2.42>

CHAPTER 4 – MID-LATE 1941: CONTROL AND TRAINING OF THE HOME GUARD

This chapter will analyze the confrontation between Col. Aldred and Minister Semple that occurred over the course of the final six months of 1941, a significant confrontation that offered the spark for monumental changes regarding the overall control and training of the Home Guard. This conflict saw a deluge of coverage in New Zealand's newspapers, encompassing extremely critical commentary of the New Zealand government, commentary that directly influenced the Home Guard's shift in direction. Additionally, material issues regarding the clothing and equipping of the Home Guard are expanded in the latter half of 1941 as the reorganization of the Home Guard commenced. Finally, the relationship between New Zealanders and the government pertaining to the Home Guard, in light of the incorporation of the Home Guard into New Zealand's Defense Forces, is reevaluated. This reevaluation encompassed the formal transfer of the Home Guard from the National Service Department to army control, alongside shifting public perception of the government's attitude towards the Home Guard, away from benevolent oversight and instead towards an apathetic one.

Despite this clear evidence of apathy, the issue of rifle impressment offers a single window onto the New Zealand government's attitude towards the Home Guard. The words of the acting-Prime Minister speak extraordinarily loudly towards two key underlying issues: control and training of the Home Guard itself. Issues that the acting-Prime Minister had declared as late as July 9, 1941, "the Government is not yet in a

position to make a comprehensive statement covering the control and training of the Home Guard.”¹ The government’s dismal response to the Home Guard training question, answered by Minister Semple, had been documented by the *Lake Wakatip Mail* on March 11, 1941, “receive only spasmodic training, whereas men to be drawn in the fifth ballot for territorial service would receive a thorough and in-tensive training to equip them fully for any emergency.”² This effectively allocated the Home Guard to a position paling in importance to the Territorial Service, in spite of Minister Semple’s words meant to soothe their concerns: “These men are doing a real job of work, and it would be impossible to defend the country without them.”³ Additionally, control of the Home Guard had been established under formal regulations; however, citizens such as A.C.A Sexton and Minister Semple’s acknowledgement of the suggestion that in vulnerable areas the Home Guard should be army drilled and equipped, offered a strong counter to the government’s inability to provide and train the Home Guard, generating an explosion of controversy between Minister Semple and Col. Aldred in July 1941.

Before this tipping point of frustrations was reached, the appointment of General Sir Guy Williams as a special advisor to the New Zealand government in late May 1941 had come as a hopeful sign that things would finally begin changing for the better with the Home Guard. The *New Zealand Herald* reported the announcement with unbridled excitement on May 21, 1941, while denoting the clear similarities between England’s situation and New Zealand’s. “Training methods” it observed, “were revised and training

¹ *Patea Mail*, 9 July 1941, Page 2. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/PATM19410709.2.8>

² *Lake Wakatip Mail*, Issue 4509, 11 March 1941, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/LWM19410311.2.22>

³ *Ibid*, 4.

itself expedited; equipment was im-proved until new production was available; the whole problem of de-fence was tacked with resource, in-genuity and courage. Who can say that similar methods are not re-quired to-day in the organization of defense in New Zealand?"⁴ Of particular notice, the *New Zealand Herald* signaled out Williams role with the Home Guard, declaring he "will be called upon to study the establish-ment and efficiency of the Territorial Force; the value of the Home Guard and its possible reorganis-ation for the selection of that num-ber of men which can best be trained and equipped for active work in the field; and the coordination of all defence plans, embracing both military and civilian organizations."⁵ Citizens such as Osterley Park agreed with the appointment of General Williams and offered their own advice for Home Guard reorganization, such as standardized training manual, improving experience with improvised equipment and weapons, establishing headquarters that allowed for greater cooperation with the army.⁶ What would drive this monumental confrontation was the late July 1941 release of General Williams official report concerning the possible change in the Home Guard's relationship to the Army.

The first notice of this seismic shift came from the *Auckland Star* and its parliamentary reporter stationed in Wellington. The *Auckland Star* offered a sharp contrast to the reporting of the *New Zealand Herald* by focusing on reporting news from across New Zealand as quickly as possible through the assistance of telegraph lines. Through this quick method of reporting came a flash bulletin from Wellington by the

⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23970, 21 May 1941, Page 8. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410521.2.31>

⁵ *Ibid*, 8.

⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23975, 27 May 1941, Page 12. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410527.2.116.4>

aforementioned parliamentary reporter on July 21, 1941 pertaining to the release of General Williams report on New Zealand's defensive capabilities.⁷

According to the *Auckland Star*, the crux of this report rested on the relationship of the Home Guard to New Zealand's regular standing army. The *Auckland Star's* parliamentary reporter clarified the statement of the Minister Semple, that the current relationship of the Home Guard to the army was "under consideration at the present" and that the public would see the report in a few days.⁸ Auckland's Home Guard District commander Col. M. Aldred received notice of the government's intent for the future of the Home Guard, and discussed the matter with local newspapers, drawing a strong statement from Semple. What had drawn the ire of the minister was Aldred's statement, covered by multiple papers throughout North Island. Aldred had mentioned that "all reasonably fit men would come more directly under army control...and that arms, ammunition, and equipment of all kinds would be more readily available" and his statement was later thoroughly documented in the *Gisborne Herald* on July 22, 1941.⁹ The potential of Aldred's comment is difficult to estimate, as the incorporation of the Home Guard into the army was certainly a sensitive topic, one that the minister did not want to muddle.

In response to Aldred, the minister's tone was cutting: "I will ask individuals to take no notice of an individual who has published what he had no right to publish. What he said is not official and the public should take absolutely no notice of it... They will get

⁷ *Auckland Star*, Volume LXXII, Issue 170, 21 July 1941, Page 8. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19410721.2.87>

⁸ *Ibid*, 8.

⁹ *Gisborne Herald*, Volume LXVIII, Issue 20613, 22 July 1941, Page 9. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/GISH19410722.2.127>

a correct statement in a few days' time when the whole matter has been properly dealt with. I am at a loss to know where this individual got his information from.”¹⁰ The minister's reply to Aldred displays itself, to the reader of the same July 21, 1941, edition of *Auckland Star*, as both a criticism of Aldred and a frustration seemingly towards a disregard of proper government channels. While the minister may have been content with the tone of his response to Aldred as the superior government representative, the New Zealand media and Home Guardsmen found a common ground over the following three days with regards to the army incorporation issue.

Within forty-eight hours of the publishing of the minister's statement, newspapers across North Island on July 23, 1941 leapt unanimously to the defense of Aldred. The *New Zealand Herald*, *Auckland Star*, and *Evening Post* rushed to Home Guard committees and parades held immediately to discuss the minister's statement with their respective communities. The *New Zealand Herald* took a particularly critical stance of the Minister of National Service and dedicated a large section to the vicious reaction of local Home Guard committees to the minister's statement. The *New Zealand Herald* had displayed these critical sentiments toward the Minister of National Service before, notably during the “Motor Fiasco” on March 14, 1941, regarding the government's impressment of vehicles for use by the army. Bearing striking similarities to the issue of rifle impressment, *The New Zealand Herald* had directly criticized the manner in which the transportation department, of which Minister Semple oversaw, allowed appeals to be exempted from the vehicle impressment order, alongside the decision of the

¹⁰ *Auckland Star*, Volume LXXII, Issue 170, 21 July 1941, Page 8. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19410721.2.87>

transportation department to step in as, “characteristic of those central authorities which are always perpetually jealous of their authority, and always on the watch to see that nobody shall exercise one iota of it so far as it can be prevented.”¹¹ Drawing an immediate furious response from Semple the following day, the *New Zealand Herald* offered a headline declaring “MR. SEMPLE IRATE, as the Minister noted “the attitude of the paper was a very unhelpful one.”¹² The very response of the Minister of National Service to such criticism by the *New Zealand Herald* despite the difference in category of the incident, would directly be reflected by the reactions of Home Guardsmen and the various contributions of New Zealand’s print media. Comments by Semple regarding Col. Aldred having essentially overstepped his bounds alongside the rigid formality Semple insisted on regarding such announcements, would present the ideal opportunity for the *New Zealand Herald* to lead the criticism towards the Minister.

Opening its article with the bold title “Colonel Defended”, the *New Zealand Herald* went on the offensive against the minister through publishing guardsmen’s official and unofficial protests made towards the minister’s comments. Mr. A. Tronson, the commander of the Remuera Home Guard furiously informed the *New Zealand Herald*, “Mr. Semple’s recent outbursts have disgusted those giving their time to the movement, and his statements were responsible for keeping many men away from parades.”¹³ The paper, with a short statement from Mr. S. Campbell, briefly covered the

¹¹ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23914, 14 March 1941, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410314.2.36>

¹² *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23915, 15 March 1941, Page 8. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410315.2.61>

¹³ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 24024, 23 July 1941, Page 8. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410723.2.93>

reaction from the Pukekohe Home Guard committee secretary encompassing both "bitterly resenting the tone of the remarks of the minister" and "astonishment" from the guardsmen themselves upon reading the statement from the minister. Wellington's *Evening Post* additionally dedicated a section of their article "Tone Resented" to Mr. Campbell's statement on Aldred's character, noting the praise heaped upon the colonel in light of his "arduous and devoted service to the Home Guard movement" in Auckland.¹⁴

The *Auckland Star* focused its fact-oriented reporting on the Remuera Home Guardsmen. The paper published the statement from the Remuera Home Guard in full for its readers, but focused on the actions of the Minister of National Service himself and the reaction of the guardsmen. The *Auckland Star* noted that all but one of the 115 Remuera Home Guardsmen present adopted a statement supporting Aldred. Describing the attack as "entirely unwarranted" in the circumstances and even "detrimental to the well-being of the guard and are discouraging the men who are doing their duty without any assistance from the Minister of National Service" in light of the minister's statement. However, the *Auckland Star* saved the most enticing information from the Remuera meeting for its last sentence, the guardsmen had considered the attacks "further reason to remove the Home Guard from the Department of National Service and place it under Army control."¹⁵ The sentiment to shift to army control, one of the major issues concerning the Home Guard, would now gain incredible momentum in light of the minister's public outburst.

¹⁴ *Evening Post*, Volume CXXXII, Issue 20, 23 July 1941, Page 8. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/EP19410723.2.86.2>

¹⁵ *Auckland Star*, Volume LXXII, Issue 172, 23 July 1941, Page 5. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19410723.2.16>

As the dust settled on July 24, 1941 the *New Zealand Herald* brought multiple important bulletins to its readers' attention regarding the incident of the previous week. The government had made an official announcement through acting-Prime Minister Nash that Home Guard reorganization plans were well under way and an early statement was expected soon. Though this acceleration of incorporation plans should have been emphasized, the *New Zealand Herald* focused a large portion of the article on the ongoing rift between Aldred and Semple. The minister gave his first public statement since the incident "To suggest I would do anything to injure the Home Guard is ridiculous."¹⁶ Despite what was reported in the press, the minister insisted that "It is unlikely I would do anything to destroy the organization I assisted to create and which, in my opinion, is essential to the safety and welfare of the country," especially given his position as Minister of National Service.¹⁷ The *New Zealand Herald* noted that the minister had dismissed comments that the incident was a result of a personal grievance with Aldred and that as a result the comments had not been made in the best interests of the Home Guard.¹⁸ Following his comments, the *New Zealand Herald* detailed that Semple's sentiment focused more on the publishing of information outside official channels, and that by doing so Aldred had let down the government and Semple had taken exception. Aldred stepped into the fray with his own explanation, that he had disclosed the information to "allay the growing dissatisfaction among guardsmen regarding their future" and appealed to his guardsmen to resume their duties¹⁹

¹⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 24025, 24 July 1941, Page 13. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410724.2.133>

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 13.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 13.

Despite Semple's and Aldred's statements, the anger felt by guardsmen at seeing Aldred attacked by the minister had exposed a wide and deep discontent within the Home Guard. The *New Zealand Herald* documented a meeting of the local battalion commanders in Auckland who assured Aldred of their steadfast support and loyalty, despite the "unsatisfactory conditions pertaining in the Home Guard under the Ministry of National Service" in addition to ordering Auckland guardsmen to resume their duties as usual. Major J.H. Herrold formally requested escalating the issue further, through a meeting of Home Guard area commanders on that coming Friday. He had considered Semple's words "an insult personally and to officers and guardsmen" who served under Aldred.²⁰ The anger led a member of parliament from Waikato, W.S. Goosman, to propose the government act quickly after having been approached by two Home Guard area commanders. This quick action was warranted according to Mr. Goosman due to "considerable dissatisfaction and unrest within the Home Guard" that if not acted on quickly, would cause interest in the Home Guard to evaporate and the organization to collapse. The *New Zealand Herald* implored the urgency of this situation brewing within the Home Guard, such as complaints that guardsmen had to divert funds to petrol expenses to reach parades.²¹

The following days of July 25 and 26, the *New Zealand Herald* continued to allow ample space for extremely vocal criticism of Minister Semple within its opinion columns. Anonymous author *Unitas* directly attacked what they believed to be the Semple's socialist inspired views: "When Mr. Semple and the Gov-ernment formed the

²⁰ Ibid, 13.

²¹ Ibid, 13.

Home Guard they evidently had in mind a semi-demo-cratic ‘people's army’ on the lines proposed by Mr. Tom Wintringham in his widely-circulated little book, ‘New Ways of War.’...His book shows a considerable dislike for orthodox British military organization and discipline, and envis-ages a reserve army very similar to the Spanish Republican irregulars beside whom he fought.”²²

Unitas accused Semple of maintaining the Home Guard as his own “‘private army,’ carefully insulated from control by, and contact with, the defense forces” and was now suffering the consequences of his actions.²³ Unitas ended his piece with an appeal on behalf of the Home Guard for army incorporation, while also throwing Semple’s actions back into the minister’s face: “Perhaps he now has some regrets. The Home Guard, not being restrained by King’s Regulations, is holding meet-ings, passing resolutions, and giving a good deal of critical back-chat. The burden of its complaint is that it is tired of civilian control and wants to be part of the Defense Forces. The sooner that is done, the better for the Dominion.”²⁴

The following day on July 26 a second anonymous author, *Battalion Commander*, directed their entire opinion article to vehemently criticise Semple’s personal conduct alongside his work for the Home Guard. Battalion Commander directly addressed what they deemed Semple’s unjustified actions in responding to Col. Aldred:

The Hon. R. Semple’s state-ment setting out the reason for his completely unwarranted attack of Col-onel M. Aldred, District Commander of the Home Guard, entirely misses the main point at issue. Even assuming the Colonel had been indiscreet in publish-ing confidential matter-and this is extremely doubtful

²² *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 24026, 25 July 1941, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410725.2.22.5>

²³ *Ibid*, 4.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 4.

as the allegedly ‘confidential’ information had been Home Guard gossip for weeks past-this would in no way excuse or justify the insulting manner of the Minister’s reference to Colonel Aldred.

Battalion Commander intoned Semple's references to Col. Aldred as “this individual” went much deeper and insulted the Home Guard itself, “a deliberate insult to the District Commander obviously reflects on the whole movement and as such as strongly resented.”²⁵ Battalion Commander ended with a hard hitting attack on the Minister’s comments published on July 24 that noted his effort “day and night” in organizing the Home Guard:

In referring to the four months’ work he undertook in recruiting for the Guard Mr. Semple should remember that many of us in the movement have worked for eight months without pay, publicity, reward, or recognition. And in spite of departmental indifference, in the interests of the Home Guard; and this quite apart from the fact that the majority of us also served our country for several years, not months, in the Great War.²⁶

This barrage of words on Semple’s personal conduct and “effort” put in regarding the Home Guard’s organization ended with Battalion Commander’s loud declaration to the public, “The public should be informed that we in the Home Guard feel very strongly in this matter. Is it too much to expect the Minister to be big enough to apologise to the Colonel, or will he be content himself with the palpable shuffling of the mere politician.”²⁷ The published reactions of the New Zealand public to the July 1941 confrontation between Aldred and Semple, through multiple independent newspapers, demonstrated the charged emotion and common opinions with which New Zealanders viewed the government’s stance towards the Home Guard. Outbursts such as Minister

²⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 24027, 26 July 1941, Page 8. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410726.2.21.2>

²⁶ *Ibid*, 8.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 8.

Semple's over matters such as Home Guard information confidentiality and his insistence on the necessity of proper governmental channels to disseminate information, found virtually no public sympathy. Instead, the collective criticisms of Minister Semple as a representative of the New Zealand government through his work pertaining to the Home Guard, and the subsequent change to army control, demonstrates New Zealanders collective power to influence the Home Guard's direction. This influence on the government can be seen directly through parliamentarians such as Mr. Gooseman, himself approached by Home Guard area commanders seeking his assistance, alongside an indirect influence through New Zealanders published words in newspapers, words that were unquestionably read by government officials, as Minister Semple had demonstrated.

With discontent running high among Home Guardsmen and officers alike, alongside a supposed apathetic government, and the Minister of National Service attacking his subordinates for breach of policy, the Home Guard's future looked increasingly bleak. Mr. Goosman's suggestion for remedying the situation had echoed many of the prior recommendations already made by citizens and Home Guard members alike in the past year. In his opinion, three major things necessitated immediate action: efficiency must be secured immediately to ensure proper training, arms and ammunition needed to be provided at once, and the Home Guard should be placed under army control immediately to take on a bigger role in home defense.²⁸

Slowly over the course of late 1941, the Home Guard was incorporated into the New Zealand Army in the aftermath of the "Auckland Incident". However, some

²⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 24025, 24 July 1941, Page 13. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410724.2.133>

questions remained unanswered about the finer details of the incorporation scheme, leading the Minister of Defense, the Hon. F. Jones, to update the public on September 26, 1941 about the government's progress. The *New Zealand Herald* brought the information to its readers through a report from Wellington covering a statement by the Minister of Defense, narrowing its focus on the minister's statement to three major principles that had been adapted for New Zealand from the British Home Guard. Minister Jones emphasized to the *New Zealand Herald* that the Home Guard's primary objective would continue its duties in defending areas near or around their homes. He also stated that the Home Guard would remain a volunteer force but encouraged guardsmen to attend specialist training for which they would be compensated at Territorial Army rates of pay. Finally, Jones promised that the Home Guard would be equipped, trained, and supplied with commissioned and non-commissioned officers.²⁹ In addition, personnel of government departments involving "railway, Post and Telegraph" would upon mobilization be activated as "signals and auxiliary transport companies" in their own right as Home Guard members, a statement no doubt thrilling the Otahuhu railway men and the opinion writer Home Guardsman.³⁰ The *New Zealand Herald* noted that clothing in particular remained a considerable problem, alongside the distribution of arms and ammunition, but nonetheless these logistical matters proceeded smoothly with the aforementioned changes.

In the months following the announcement of incorporation, New Zealand citizens and Home Guardsmen again wrote in to offer advice in the midst of this shift.

²⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 78, Issue 24080, 26 September 1941, Page 8. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410926.2.83>

³⁰ *Ibid*, 8.

Waitakere's Company Commander J. T. Beck wrote to the *New Zealand Herald* on October 29, 1941 on the matter of army incorporation. Beck noted, "I can assure your readers we were highly pleased, especially as we have existed for so many months on unfulfilled promises," reflecting the improvement on Home Guard's previous status under the Ministry of National Service. Through J.T. Beck noted he disagreed with some aspects of army instruction, he proclaimed, "we of the Home Guard regard it as a privilege to give our time and in many cases money to assist in the fight for freedom" despite the shortcomings.³¹ These shortcomings were mentioned by other New Zealand citizens, such as W. Perry. M.L.C, President of the Dominion Council of the New Zealand Returned and Services Association, who implored in the October 29, 1941 issue of the *Evening Post*, "Members of the Home Guard must assume that the Government was doing its best to assure that the Home Guard would have equipment as soon as possible...Men in the Home Guard now must realise that they must stay in it, and train, until the equipment arrived, as much valuable time would be saved."³² Mr. Perry's optimistic comments almost perfectly reflected those of Minister Semple earlier on March 6, 1941 that, "To provide the men with uniforms and equipment will be a problem, but everything possible is being done in that direction."³³

In the following days on October 30 and 31, the *Evening Post* continued its coverage with the announcement of a special army order pertaining to the Home Guard.

³¹ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 78, Issue 24108, 29 October 1941, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19411029.2.24.3>

³² *Evening Post*, Volume CXXXII, Issue 104, 29 October 1941, Page 8. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/EP19411029.2.59>

³³ *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 24549, 6 March 1941, Page 9. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19410306.2.102>

This order clearly adding needed clarity regarding the Home Guard's defensive role, "In defining the object of the Home Guard the Order states that its duty will be to augment the defenses of the Dominion by providing static defense of localities, protection of vulnerable and key points, and giving timely notice of enemy movements to superior military organizations...Its value lies not in in-dividual action by its members, but in proper co-ordination with other parts of the Defense forces."³⁴

Of particular note was the order's mention of equipment and uniforms, echoing Minister Jones statement on September 26, 1941, as the *Evening Post* happily allocated the issue space, "The following scale of uniform and personal equipment will be provided as soon as possible for members of Division I:- Battledress, cap, steel helmet, great coat, boots, and web equipment. Two armbands will be provided for members of Division II." The government prioritizing Division I, "50,000 of all ranks fit for combat duties, who will be trained and equipped as soon as possible," contrasted sharply with the meager two armbands for the remaining guardsmen. Despite calling for a Home Guard numbering over one-hundred thousand strong, it seemed the government was only able to equip, if at all successfully, only half of the total guardsmen. Considering the noted difficulties in equipping Home Guardsmen, leaving a strong sense of doubt that the government would be able to fulfil the goal outlined in the special army order.³⁵

On October 31, the *Evening Post* detailed the remit carried by the Dominion Council of Returned Services Association that held a "hope that full use would be made

³⁴ *Evening Post*, Volume CXXXII, Issue 105, 30 October 1941, Page 11. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/EP19411030.2.105>

³⁵ *Ibid*, 11.

of returned soldiers of the past and present wars in the appointing of Home Guard staff and executive officers.”³⁶ Taking a forward approach in line with the president of the organization, W. Perry, the Dominion Council of Returned Services Association advocated its own headquarters to, “institute a Dominion-wide campaign asking the Government to introduce compulsory universal national service.”³⁷ The *Evening Post* broke down the stated reasoning for such a bold measure as, “the failure of a very large number of eligible men to enrol in the Home Guard, National Military Reserve... and other national service organisations.”³⁸ This stated desire of the New Zealand Returned and Services Association, in light of the clear difficulties faced by the Home Guard, to expand to universal national service seems unfathomable considering with its *current enrollment* the Home Guard was under equipped, undergoing a major organizational overhaul, and ripe with dissatisfied guardsmen. However, the lofty goal of the organization was not meritless, as during 1942 the Home Guard recruitment issue would emerge like a specter to haunt the defense organization once again.

The confluence of issues plaguing the Home Guard could not have come at a worse time, as the advent of December 1941 saw the start of the war in the Pacific Theater for New Zealand. The Attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 drew the slumbering giant of the United States of America to war with the Japanese Empire in the aftermath of a devastating surprise attack. As pre-war defensive plans, long held in reserve, went into motion for New Zealand one of the key tenants of its survival in the

³⁶ *Evening Post*, Volume CXXXII, Issue 106, 31 October 1941, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/EP19411031.2.21>

³⁷ *Ibid*, 4.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 4.

Pacific, the Royal Navy, suffered its own incredible naval setback. Sortieing out from the Singapore Naval Base, Force Z, including the battleship *Prince of Wales* and the battlecruiser *Repulse*, found itself under heavy attack from Imperial Japanese Navy land based bombers. The two capital ships were unable to repel the attack and were subsequently sunk, provoking an outcry of panic and regret in New Zealand as news of the battle arrived on Dec 11. The *New Zealand Herald* reported the loss of the ships in a state resembling mourning and anger, “With profound regret we record the loss by enemy action of two brave ships, the battleship Prince of Wales and the battlecruiser Repulse. These are ‘sore and heavy tidings’ and the blow to the Royal Navy a heavy one. Official details are few at the time of writing, but it may be hoped that some of the ships’ companies have been spared the fate that befell their ships...Both the British and American Navies have suffered loss in the same way-by aerial attack by a treacherous enemy.”³⁹ Additional information concerning Japanese landing in Malaya featured prominently in the *New Zealand Herald* as its editors worked to assure their readers that the situation was not lost on land, as imperial forces from India were arriving in Rangoon equipped, “with the most modern weapons and special transport vehicles” alongside bomber and fighter aircraft from the Netherlands East Indies reinforcing Singapore, including more naval units.⁴⁰ The impact of these devastating attacks reverberated across New Zealand, especially at the governmental level, as reflected upon later in a report by the National Service Department in 1945, “The outbreak of war with Japan brought an

³⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 78, Issue 24145, 11 December 1941, Page 8. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19411211.2.53>

⁴⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 78, Issue 24145, 11 December 1941, Page 9. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19411211.2.80.1>

immediate change in the situation. The need for home defense became of paramount importance, and mobilization proceeded accordingly.”⁴¹

In light of this pessimistic news across the Pacific Theater, a much needed Christmas present emerged for the Home Guard on Christmas Eve 1941, as the *Gisborne Herald* optimistically reported Minister of Defense Jones update on uniforms for the Home Guard, “arrangements had been completed to make available a fairly large number of battledress uniforms to Territorials. This would release a large number of service uniforms which, after being cleaned, would be issued to Home Guard units in various parts of New Zealand. It is anticipated that it will be possible to make the first issues of these uniforms within the next few weeks. It is hoped eventually to provide battledress for all Territorials and uniforms for the Home Guard completely, but it must be remembered that we have overseas commitments.”⁴²

Despite such positive sentiment, some New Zealand citizens still considered the work inadequate, multiple inquiries drawing a published response from Brigadier P.H Bell in the December 29, 1941 issue of *Press*. The commanding officer of the Northern Military District, Bell vented his visible frustration, “I sometimes wonder whether these criticisms emanate from Home Guardsmen whose desire it is to help the organization or from people whose objects are entirely the opposite...This is no time for petty or petulant statements which are so often made by those who are not in possession of the complete

⁴¹ REPORT OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT ON ACTIVITIES UNDER THE NATIONAL SERVICE EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1940, AND THE INDUSTRIAL MAN-POWER EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1944, *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1945 Session I, H-11a, Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1945-I.2.2.5.12>

⁴² *Gisborne Herald*, Volume LXVIII, Issue 20647, 24 December 1941, Page 7. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/GISH19411224.2.99>

facts.” With regard to the equipment issue Brigadier Bell pointed to problems beyond his control, “Many calculations in regard to the arming, clothing, and equipping not only of Home Guard units but also of territorials and National Military Re-serve units, which have been upset by cir-cumstances over which neither Government nor the Army-or Home Guard authorities- have any control, but the situation has improved and it is hoped that it will continue to improve.”⁴³

Col. Aldred echoed this sentiment in his own statement to *Press*, “Home Guard battalions have, in spite of equipment difficulties, reached a high standard of efficiency” with equipment difficulties impacting Aldred himself considering evidence from *Press* demonstrated, “Lack of uniforms and equipment is seriously troubling Home Guardsmen throughout the Auckland district. Substantial issues, have, however, been made re-cently, and there is no doubt that the Army is making every effort to arm and equip the guard fully.”⁴⁴ Despite this damper, both Bell and Aldred expressed their admiration for their guardsmen's “keen and enthusiastic” demeanor and willingness to serve New Zealand through home defense.

As a tumultuous chapter for the Home Guard closed in 1941, there were nonetheless three notable achievements for the organization to be proud of: the number of Home Guardsmen enrolled was steadily approaching one-hundred thousand, the impressment of rifles had made it possible to arm more of its members, but most importantly, the Home Guard was formally incorporated into the army and could now

⁴³ *Press*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23523, 29 December 1941, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19411229.2.45>

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 6.

play a large role within New Zealand's defense force. However, these praiseworthy achievements came with four significant drawbacks to the organization and by direct extension the New Zealand government: A long brewing discontent within the Home Guard regarding its position under the National Service Department erupted onto the national stage in July 1941, triggered in part due to Minister Semple's very poorly selected comments regarding Col. Aldred's behavior, alongside continual promises by the government regarding uniforms and equipment that seemed to only allow the problem to fester, and most critically of all, a remarkable sense of apathy on behalf of the government regarding its stance on the Home Guard and with the rifle impressment fiasco and an apathetic response from New Zealanders on the same issue, all threatened the continued existence of the Home Guard.

Nevertheless, the enthusiasm and incredible motivation of many Home Guardsmen would continue to drive the organization forward through sheer will if necessary, working and succeeding in developing the necessary administrative changes within the Home Guard itself. No longer content with passively accepting judgement from the Ministry of National Service, influential figures within the Home Guard advocated for these proposed changes themselves. These proposed changes allowed for an enormous outpouring of opinions from New Zealanders both within and outside the Home Guard, catapulting issues onto a collaborative national stage, allowing New Zealanders to actively influence the Home Guard in this critical year of the war.

CHAPTER 5 – EARLY-MID 1942: MAJOR MELROSE, EQUIPMENT, AND COMPULSORY ENROLLMENT: HOME GUARD EXPANSION

This chapter will analyze the expansion of the Home Guard throughout the critical year 1942, during which New Zealanders voices grew to a crescendo amidst the firebrand advocacy of Major T.H Melrose in demanding a radical, grassroots reorganization of the Home Guard. Additionally, Melrose's attack on the lack of direction from the New Zealand government unleashed a rogue wave of criticism, primarily through Home Guard and civilian editorial pieces, towards the government itself, questioning its lackluster support of the Home Guard despite strong support among New Zealanders for the Home Guard as a defensive organization. Finally, unfulfilled promises by the New Zealand government towards the Home Guard regarding the issuance of uniforms and equipment for the organization, alongside a reversal of the volunteer status of the Home Guard through compulsory enrollment, saw the Home Guard pushed towards a breaking point that threatened to render the organization utterly and completely ineffective.

With the advent of February 1942, the war was now knocking on New Zealand's door. Further north, the Japanese Empire accomplished what had been considered the impossible: the mighty naval base and strategic linchpin of Singapore had fallen to the Japanese military juggernaut. M.G.C McCaul, past president of the Wellington Chamber of Commerce and Associated Chamber of Commerce, voiced visible concern for the Dominion in writing to the *Auckland Star* in the days before the Fall of Singapore: "to-day, we can no longer rely upon Singapore as a barrier to Jap-anese invasion, all these

things that appeared vital then, and were of the utmost importance then, simply fade into insignificance now we are face to face with the likelihood of invasion....The people of this country must speak with one voice on the subject of our adequate defense in this imminent danger.”¹

In the following days, the *New Zealand Herald* reported on the Fall of Singapore with a clear apprehension of what was to come, after Australian Prime Minister John Curtin’s declaration that the Japanese would inevitably attack Australia, adding pressure onto the defense of New Guinea near New Zealand’s outer defensive perimeter.²

Historian Ashley Jackson’s later commentary on strategic implications for New Zealand given the aforementioned events such as the Sinking of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, resonates strongly with New Zealand’s situation, “With American and British power temporarily crippled in the Pacific, a handful of raw New Zealand soldiers manned slit-trenches along the coastline of their homeland, shouldering old-fashioned rifles, secure in the certain knowledge that, if they chose to come, the Japanese would brush aside their opposition.”³

Mr. McCaul’s appeal for unity throughout the country, especially given the traumatic events of the past two months, would find another major advocate, one within the ranks of the Home Guard with as large of an impact to rival those of Ministers Semple or Jones during 1941. Into this apprehensive period of New Zealand’s defensive position stepped Major T.H. Melrose, commander of the Hamilton Home Guard, leading

¹ *Auckland Star*, Volume LXXIII, Issue 35, 11 February 1942, Page 6. Papers Past Project National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19420211.2.39.2>

² *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24201, 17 February 1942, Page 5. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19420217.2.68.1>

³ Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War*, 485

a crusade against apathy towards defense. What began as a simple speech on February 23, 1942 to his guardsmen in Hamilton, quickly catapulted Major Melrose to national prominence, and the *New Zealand Herald* provided extensive coverage of both the speech itself and subsequent cascade of comments regarding it. Echoing the speech of Colonel W.I.K Jennings on March 18, 1941, where both disappointment and encouragement had been visible,⁴ Major Melrose expressed similar sentiments towards his guardsmen in the face of the troubling statistic that for every Home Guard member there were ten members of the Emergency Precautions Service. The *New Zealand Herald* noted Melrose's response to the troubling statistics with great interest:

What was needed in New Zealand, Major Melrose added, was a spirit of belligerency, whereas the building up of the [Emergency Precautions Service] only created a spirit of pacificism and defeatism...The Home Guard was untrammelled by regulations and was an unorthodox defense unit of great fighting potentiality. However. The battalion members were now thoroughly disillusioned as a result of their disheartening experiences and because inspiring leadership was entirely lack-ing on the part of the Government.⁵

Melrose's speech went beyond criticizing the lack of leadership but stopped short of shutting the government out, quoted at length by the *New Zealand Herald*, Melrose instead advocated for a total collective effort of New Zealand's resources for the war: "Major Melrose said the machinery of the town should be immediately be mobilised for the manufacture of weapons. The material, plant and skill were all available, and all that was needed was encouragement from the Government. As things were at present, apart

⁴ *Lake Wakatip Mail*, Issue 4510, 18 March 1941, Page 2. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/LWM19410318.2.13>

⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24206, 23 February 1942, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19420223.2.41>

from members of the armed forces, the people of New Zealand were not putting 1 per cent of their energy into the war effort.”⁶

Melrose’s attack on New Zealanders’ apathetic attitude appears as a toned down version of Mayor H.D Caro’s identical statement on the “appalling apathy of people with regard to defense measures” in East Hamilton on March 21, 1941.⁷ Although Melrose did not extend his attack naming to particular government officials, the major made it extremely clear that he simply did not care what the formal repercussions for his actions were, something the *New Zealand Herald* sharply noted “No matter what the consequences were, he intended to launch a campaign with the object of impressing on the civilian population the need for a more determined and spirited effort in preparing for the de-fense of their country.”⁸

By the end of the week, a tremendous outpour of support for Major Melrose flooded the pages of the *New Zealand Herald* in a deluge of both opinion articles and major editorial pieces. The *New Zealand Herald* excitedly reported on Major Melrose’s progress in light of his “energetic steps” towards organizing his campaign, “He said during a visit to Auckland yes-terday that already his battalion had received 50 new enrollments since he drew attention to the need of them, at a parade in Hamilton last Sunday. He had also received offers of help from a number of people in official and private positions.”⁹ One of the offers came from a very familiar figure to Melrose, “Major

⁶ Ibid, 4.

⁷ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23920, 21 March 1941, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410321.2.62>

⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24206, 23 February 1942, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19420223.2.41>

⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24209, 26 February 1942, Page 8. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19420226.2.92>

Melrose stated he had received a letter from the Mayor of Hamilton, Mr. H.D. Caro, in which he promised 100 per cent support in everything he might be able to do to arouse the public to the need for helping to defend the Dominion. Red tape and regulations, said Mr. Caro, were hold-ing the people in bondage. Inspired leadership was the urgent necessity.”¹⁰ Major Melrose’s firebrand activism for the Home Guard went beyond simply attacking the passive spirit of defense across New Zealand, instead taking a more radical approach compared to anything seen so far throughout the country. Of interest to the *New Zealand Herald* was Melrose’s call for Home Guard diversity, “Included among Major Melrose’s plans is the formation of a women's section of the Home Guard. Women would be suitable for such duties as first-aid treatment of wounded, and for signalling, transport driving, and cooking. He had often in the past received offers of assistance from women and was convinced the country’s need was such that every available man should be released for fighting.”¹¹

Advocating for total defensive effort, Melrose implored for the physical and mental expansion of the Home Guard, “In-stead of a Home Guard with a nominal role of 100,000, there should be one with an active roll of 500,000. A national outlook should take the place of a local one. What did it matter if some buildings were destroyed, or even if a whole town were bombed, if the country was saved?” In addition, Melrose opined that New Zealanders such as those making over 100,000 pounds should be prepared to give 10,000 pounds to the defense of the country. These extremely radical measures reinforcing his unbridled determination to, “without regard for any official disapproval of

¹⁰ Ibid, 8.

¹¹ Ibid, 8.

his actions, to awake the people to the need for a realistic attitude toward their country's defense and spur them into helping in every possible way.¹² While Major Melrose's utterly absurd suggestion of an active roll of 500,000 Guardsmen did not captivate the New Zealand public, many of his ideas quickly spread across New Zealand, drawing commentary from a plethora of individuals who almost unanimously agreed with him. Melrose's activist demeanor was precisely what the Home Guard needed, immediately fanning the smoldering embers of its public support into a roaring patriotic fire, while also offering an extremely blunt critique of the government's handling of the Home Guard. Melrose's words directly critiqued the government's lackluster handling of the Home Guard and almost overnight found a deep resonance through a torrential flood of support in published newspaper editorials throughout New Zealand, universally supporting an effort at reform within the Home Guard. These opinions and editorials struck at the government's handling of the organization to varying degrees, yet unanimously found the current efforts by the government to be less than desirable.

The first commentary on behalf of the New Zealand public came from *A.G. Quartley*, who wrote to the *New Zealand Herald* on February 25, 1942 taking Major Melrose's words to heart in an enthusiastic editorial:

Major Melrose is right. What attitude will preserve this land-that the father should be proud to regard himself as a shield for his children, or should a father be thankful that his children are a shield for him?...This hour demands that civic leader-ship should take an unwavering stand that offensive defense is urgent and will be successful. Arms and work are necessary, but they are useless unless the will and determination permeated the whole community.¹³

¹² *Ibid*, 8.

¹³ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24208, 25 February 1942, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19420225.2.24.6>

The next day, anonymous author *E.H.* wrote with a similar attitude focused on defending the family, declaring his credentials to his fellow guardsmen:

Home Guardsman since its inception, I would like to pay tribute to Major Melrose for his outspoken comment, as reported in Monday's HERALD. He deserves the thanks of all New Zealanders. I fully agree that we need inspiring leadership from the top. The Home Guardsmen have been very patient for a long time...we want orders and inspiration from the top. It is our duty to our forces overseas, to our women and children, that we be able to handle arms and are ready to defend our country come what may. ¹⁴

Another anonymous author, *C.C.*, advocated for expanding the Home Guard though not nearly as radical an expansion as Major Melrose suggested:

The question of Home Guard strength is being discussed many months too late, but recent transfers to the Territorials, the transferring of Post and Telegraph and railway workers to the [Emergency Precautions Service], coupled with a continuous lack of Government support, is chiefly responsible. I think it is logical to assume if we had 200,000 armed Home Guards-men in this Dominion the enemy would think twice about landing on our shores. ¹⁵

On February 28, 1942, New Zealander *P.O Bonham* wrote to correct the error made by the *New Zealand Herald* regarding his 1,000 pound donation to the Home Guard, that was actually 200 pounds with a guarantee to raise it to 1,000 pounds. Offering his thoughts regarding New Zealanders economic contributions to the war effort, P.O Bonham beseeched citizens with a similar tone as A.G Quartley and E.H.:

Home Guard committees cannot function without definite financial backing, but I make bold to say that given this backing, these committees will soon coordinate their efforts throughout New Zealand and very substantially improve their weapon equipment from plant and materials at present unused in this country. What is more essential at the pre-sent dangerous time than a well-armed Home Guard, 250,000 strong, to ably support the regular army and ring New Zealand with a wall of steel? ...Democracy only acts fully when dan-ger is acute. It is acute now, so will groups of 10 or 20 earnest men forget the taxation they are

¹⁴ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24209, 26 February 1942, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19420226.2.26.2>

¹⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24210, 27 February 1942, Page 2. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19420227.2.24.2>

paying and stand behind their respective Home Guard battalions and support a movement that can and will fend off this very real and terrible threat to our wives, daughters, and sweethearts. Let the voice of an angry nation be heard.¹⁶

Additional voices joined P.O Bonham in the opinion section on February 28, anonymous author *Parent* wrote in to both praise the paper for its coverage and offer his own thoughts towards the government's handling of the Home Guard:

I wish to endorse the remarks of your correspondent 'E.H.' re Home Guard. Things have come to a pretty pass when the individual has to show a lead to the Government in connection with the protection of our country against an invader. Hats off to Major Melrose for the stand he has taken and to your paper for the support you have accorded him. Major Melrose's lean is an inspiration to all who have their country's welfare at heart. To have held the interests of members of the Hamilton Home Guard for over 12 months under such adverse conditions is a tribute to his fighting qualities and his love for country.¹⁷

Another anonymous author, *Tin Hat*, echoed this sentiment in their letter regarding both the Home Guard and the Emergency Precautions Service, pointing another finger towards the government's lackluster leadership and to express his disappointment regarding its support for the Home Guard, "The problems of the Home Guard have often been ventilated. We look to the Government of the day for leadership in such times. In their well-voiced socialistic programme it seems a pity that they have not yet devised some means of socialising the brains of the country."¹⁸

In the midst of this barrage of opinion articles editors of the *New Zealand Herald* offered their own approval on February 26, 1942, in a long editorial concerning the Home Guard's manpower:

¹⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24211, 28 February 1942, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19420228.2.30.7>

¹⁷ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24211, 28 February 1942, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19420228.2.30.2>

¹⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24211, 28 February 1942, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19420228.2.30.5>

Having laboured long under a sense of being ignored and neglected, the Home Guard, through some of its responsible officers, is de-manding that its position be defined and its needs considered...There is, moreover, much force in the contentions of Major Melrose, of Hamilton, that the emphasis should be on facing and resisting the enemy rather than on preventing or patch-ing up damage attack might do. As the organization that represents active defense, the Home Guard deserves a higher place in the re-gard of the community and more consideration from the Government than it has had up to the present.¹⁹

Taking into consideration the tidal wave of commentary, it seemed Major Melrose's influential speech had aroused as much debate within New Zealand's print media as Col. Aldred and Minister Semple's confrontation in July 1941. The fallout of Major Melrose's provocative speech had unearthed a similar feeling of near unanimity among New Zealanders, however instead of the Minister of National Service taking the blame, the government as a whole was now beginning to feel this strong frustration from Guardsmen and New Zealand civilians alike. This sense of dissatisfaction from New Zealanders that the government was failing to provide leadership and inspiration for the Home Guard cannot be understated, only P.O Bonham, who took issue with the lack of financial support for the Home Guard, was the only opinion writer who did not directly mention their disappointment with the government's lackluster leadership.

New Zealanders had found a firebrand Home Guard advocate in Major Melrose, who loudly and willingly brought to light, just as Col. Aldred had unintentionally done so in July 1941, an overwhelming opinion of apathy on behalf of some New Zealand government ministers towards the Home Guard. Although Major Melrose's words found more civilian advocates, compared to Col. Aldred's draw of predominantly enlisted and active Home Guardsmen, they nonetheless drew needed attention in New Zealand's print

¹⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24209, 26 February 1942, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19420226.2.37>

media to unsatisfactory conditions in the Home Guard. The coming months would demonstrate if the New Zealand government was listening to these complaints, as the critical issue of uniforms and equipment took over the national spotlight. The urgency of the uniform and equipment issue found the *New Zealand Herald* publishing a second major editorial piece on March 2, 1942, only days after showing its approval regarding Major Melrose's advocacy for the Home Guard. Taking up the editorial reins, the *New Zealand Herald* offered optimistic remarks regarding the Home Guard's uniform issue, "The arrival and distribution of uniforms to at least some of the Home Guard are a hopeful sign that the long period of neglect this organ-isation has suffered is coming to an end."²⁰

Directing its scathing criticism towards a familiar target, the Minister of National Service, the *New Zealand Herald* directed its editorial efforts to the recent announcement of the transfer of personnel between the Emergency Precautions Service and Home Guard, "Mr. Semple repeated, in effect, much of the criticism which has been heard from other sources about the present anomalous position. Until the new powers were obtained and put into operation, he said, efficient organization of neither body could be obtained."²¹ The *New Zealand Herald* loudly lambasted both Minister Semple for his paradoxical position and the government for its apathy:

This is a remarkable admission-indeed confession-from the Minister charged with organising manpower to the best advantage. It is surprising also to find him speaking on a lack of authority to do what he admits to be necessary if the country is to be fully prepared. On the face of it emergency regulations issued early in the war enable the Government to call on men to perform any duty that has to be

²⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24212, 2 March 1942, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19420302.2.32>

²¹ *Ibid*, 4.

done. If they are not adequate for so apparently simple a process as filling the ranks of the Home Guard, this is a lamentable late hour to be meeting the deficiency. The fact is, the Home Guard has never had the consideration due to it, and the responsibility rests wholly with the Government.²²

Lamenting the lateness of the hour for both the organization of the Emergency Precautions Service and Home Guard alongside a strong lack of government consideration was not limited to the *New Zealand Herald*. Writing to the *Otago Daily Times* on March 2, 1942, anonymous author *R.F.R.* attacked the government's apathy, writing a long editorial on the government's failure regarding uniforms:

Long before the war began to come dangerously close to our shores, the Home Guard was promised uniforms...Not only have the Home Guardsmen worn out their own clothes in the service of their country, but in spite of the unfair treatment that has been meted out to them, they have displayed in their training a willingness and en-thusiasm that are unsurpassed in any other unit. Why have we waited until the danger has become imminent? There has been ample time to fulfil these promises regarding proper uniforms. The Minister of Defense stated recently that all that is possible is being done. And yet I understand that some of our woollen mills are still manufacturing civilian attire. Is that not a shameful state of affairs?²³

Indeed, as *R.F.R.* had passionately stated, the government had ample time to issue uniforms for the Home Guard and yet still stumbled. Minister Semple had stated as early as March 6, 1941 that providing uniforms would be a problem,²⁴ Minister of Defense Jones himself had noted on March 25, 1941 that uniforms would be delayed due to overseas commitments²⁵, while acting-Prime Minister Nash on July 9, 1941 had intoned

²² *Ibid*, 4.

²³ *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 24854, 2 March 1942, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19420302.2.75.4>

²⁴ *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 24549, 6 March 1941, Page 9. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19410306.2.102>

²⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23923, 25 March 1941, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410325.2.42>

“no stone was being unturned to enable the promise of uniforms for the Home Guard.”²⁶

Despite Minister Jones' promise on Christmas Eve 1941, that Territorial uniforms would be cleaned and ready for Home Guard use “within the next few weeks”²⁷ Col. Aldred had revealed on December 29, 1941 that the “Lack of uniforms and equipment is seriously troubling Home Guardsmen throughout the Auckland district.”²⁸ Some Home Guardsmen even took the matter into their own hands rather than wait for the government, the *New Zealand Herald* publishing a picture of One Tree Hill Home Guardsmen as early as April 7, 1941, showing off “special working dress which they have purchased themselves.”²⁹ Compared to a much later picture by the *New Zealand Herald*, published the same day as R.F.R.'s comments, showing “Members of an Auckland Home Guard unit wearing their new uniforms which were issued yesterday.”³⁰

This gap between private purchase and governmental assistance seemed even more ridiculous with the announcement on March 4, 1942 that “special shoulder badges” would be issued immediately made of “black cloth with the words ‘Home Guard’ sewn in white” for Home Guardsmen, despite there still being considerable problems regarding the issuance of uniforms for the Home Guard.³¹

²⁶ *Patea Mail*, 9 July 1941, Page 2. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/PATM19410709.2.8>

²⁷ *Gisborne Herald*, Volume LXVIII, Issue 20647, 24 December 1941, Page 7. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/GISH19411224.2.99>

²⁸ *Press*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23523, 29 December 1941, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19411229.2.45>

²⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23934, 7 April 1941, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410407.2.15.1>

³⁰ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24212, 2 March 1942, Page 7. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19420302.2.101>

³¹ *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 24856, 4 March 1942, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19420304.2.28>

Despite visible allotment of some Home Guard uniforms and “special shoulder badges”, R.F.R.’s editorial again spoke directly to the heart of the uniform and equipment issue, advocating for total conversion of civilian factories to fill the considerable gap:

When the mills are producing military cloths to their maximum weaving capacity then, and only then, can we claim to be making an all-out effort as far as materials are concerned...such is not the case at the present, and it shall be to our everlasting disgrace if the making of uniforms is not stepped up immediately to the very limit of our production capacity. These comments are made not for the sake of criticism, but in an endeavour to see that the right thing is done by our country and the men who are so will-ingly helping to defend it. ³²

Demands for greater leadership and a drive towards Major Melrose’s “spirit of belligerency” found yet another voice with the meeting of the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce on March 3, 1942, where Major A.A. McLean spoke to what was described by the reporter for the *New Zealand Herald* as, “a large and representative attendance” of Hamiltonians. Recalling Major Melrose’s words in the weeks before calling for a more active defense of the nation, citizens such as Mr. J. Marnane “asked why all the factories in New Zealand were not en-gaged in munitions work” while Mr. W.R. Shattock advocated for “the Government to declare a state of emergency and to mobilise the whole manpower and wealth of the country for the war effort.”³³

The assembled chamber of commerce agreed, passing a resolution unanimously to draw attention to, “every foundry and factory in New Zealand be directed to utilize all available materials which can be improvised for the manufactur-ing of effective war weapons...every available factory or workroom making clothing for our forces...that red

³² *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 24854, 2 March 1942, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19420302.2.75.4>

³³ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24213, 3 March 1942, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19420303.2.89>

tape and inefficiency in all out national life be pushed aside for unrestricted action.”³⁴

The actions of the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce would join the ranks of other local bodies, such as those in Auckland, in succeeding in receiving a reply from the New Zealand government. However, before the reply would reach the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce additional events involving the Japanese Empire would underscore the realistic threat it posed to New Zealand. March 8, 1942 saw a reconnaissance flight launched from submarine I-25 fly over Auckland and Wellington, and while this flight did not directly damage any property or spark alarm among New Zealanders, it reemphasized the fragility of New Zealand’s defensive position in the same manner as the Sinking of the Niagara had done in June 1940, while showing the reach of the Japanese Navy.³⁵ Mayor H.D. Caro comments on March 21, 1941 of “Unless or until we get a bomb or two dropped on the town, the people will not wake up to their obligations,” now seemed a very frighteningly realistic possibility given the reconnaissance ability of the Japanese Navy.³⁶ Concerns about the ability of the Japanese Empire to conduct bombing raids on New Zealand, given their advancement south and projection of force, were additionally acknowledged by the New Zealand government in the National Service Department’s 1943 report, “Whereas large-scale bombing from the air had been previously thought unlikely, it was now considered a possibility, and provision had to be made rapidly to meet this and other new hazards.”³⁷

³⁴ Ibid, 6.

³⁵ Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War*, 487

³⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23920, 21 March 1941, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19410321.2.62>

³⁷ NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT REPORTS OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT AND OF THE INDUSTRIAL MAN-POWER DIVISION ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT UNDER THE NATIONAL SERVICE EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1940, THE EMERGENCY RESERVE CORPS REGULATIONS 1941, AND THE INDUSTRIAL MAN-POWER EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1942, *Appendix to*

In the weeks following the reconnaissance flight over Auckland and Wellington, the Prime Minister's letter responding to the complaints found extended coverage from both the *New Zealand Herald* on April 6, 1942 and *The Ashburton Guardian* on April 9, 1942, each detailing the expected War Cabinet proposals regarding the Home Guard alongside information on uniforms and equipment. The *New Zealand Herald* detailed the Prime Minister's response to a specific letter from Auckland Mayor Mr. J.A.C Allum, conveying the Prime Minister's "acknowledging resolutions of a recent Auckland meeting on the subject."³⁸ The transfer discussion within its editorial piece on March 2, 1942 resurfaced, as the Prime Minister announced the approval of the War Cabinet to, "(1) Provision of compulsory powers to ensure members of the Home Guard discharge their obligations; (2) power to transfer men from the Home Guard to the Emergency Reserve Corps; (3) power to transfer men from the Emergency Reserve Corps to the Home Guard."³⁹ The *Ashburton Guardian* clarified this specific reply was made due calls from the north on, "measures to be taken to fill the ranks of the Home Guard and provide uniforms and clothing for members of the Guard."⁴⁰ Of concern was the Prime Minister's note, "It is a matter of regret to the Government that it has not been possible to date to fully clothe and equip the Home Guard." With only "11,260 service uniforms" issued, the Prime Minister implored Home Guardsmen to, "accept the in-avoidable situation with the consciousness that clothing and equipment will be issued to them as

the Journals of the House of Representatives, 1943 Session I, H-11a, Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1943-I.2.1.9.13>

³⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24216, 6 March 1942, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19420306.2.87>

³⁹ *Ibid*, 6.

⁴⁰ *Ashburton Guardian*, Volume 62, Issue 125, 9 March 1942, Page 2. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AG19420309.2.11>

soon as possible.”⁴¹ Again, R.F.R.’s words echoed loudly towards the situation “How can it be said then that the Home Guard is being put into uniforms ‘as fast as we possibly can’?”⁴²

Despite the Prime Minister’s efforts to placate Home Guardsmen and reassure them the problems of the Home Guard were being taken care of, widespread discontent within the Home Guard simmered beneath the surface and threatened to spill over. Home Guardsman, *An Old Rifle Club Member*, found a major problem with the training of the Home Guard. Declaring himself to be “a returned soldier,” to the *Otago Daily Times* on March 4, 1942, An Old Rifle Club Member revealed, “During my years’s membership our company has fired five rounds of .303 at a range of 25 yards. This was a waste of ammunition as far as training was concerned, but that is a year’s total...Further, rifles issued are for drill purposes only and are not to be fired except in an emergency.”⁴³ Home Guardsman, *Would-be Rifleman*, wrote in on March 9, 1942 to the *Otago Daily Times*, expressing his befuddlement and approval of An Old Rifle Club Member’s comments, “Having been a member of the Home Guard for close on 12 months. I would ask the use of all the drilling and uniforms in the world to a soldier if he has not learned the first thing about how to shoot, and how is it possible for him to do this without practice?”⁴⁴ Others pointed fingers elsewhere, *Guardsman* on March 10, 1942 accused the Emergency Precautions Service of sheltering “shirkers who should be drilling with

⁴¹ Ibid, 2.

⁴² *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 24854, 2 March 1942, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19420302.2.75.4>

⁴³ *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 24856, 4 March 1942, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19420304.2.72.1>

⁴⁴ *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 24860, 9 March 1942, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19420309.2.79.3>

the Home Guard” while *Open to Correction* accused Minister Semple’s recent announcement of favoring conscription, being the result of Home Guardsmen being mocked by “youths of 20 or so sneer-ing.” and now sought to call them into service as revenge.⁴⁵ Despite the assertion of this outlandish remark by Open to Correction, the claim that Minister Semple favored conscription found some tentative validity on March 16, 1942.

The *Otago Daily Times* announced with a sense of apprehension the notification from Prime Minister Frasier, placing the urgent information in bold, “An announcement that the War Cabinet had approved regulations providing for compulsory service for the Home Guard was made by the Prime Minister, Mr P. Fraser, yesterday. Amendments to the National Service Emergency Regulations embodying this decision have been passed.”⁴⁶ These regulations effectively gave Minister Semple the power to, “direct any class or classes of persons to undertake such service as may be considered necessary in the prosecution of the war effort. Pre-viously a direction could only be made to individuals.” Despite the Prime Minister’s assurance that this would, “enable adequate labour to be quickly diverted for the purpose” Regardless, the *Otago Daily Times* noted, “No direction has yet been made under these provisions, and publicity will be given through the press as soon as any direction is made.”⁴⁷

As Open to Correction likely relished having indirectly predicted Semple’s new powers, the Home Guard found a willing champion for its brewing discontent in the

⁴⁵ *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 24861, 10 March 1942, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19420310.2.84.3>

⁴⁶ *Otago Daily Times*, Issue 24866, 16 March 1942, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/ODT19420316.2.23>

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 4.

Leader of the Opposition, Mr. S.G. Holland. The *New Zealand Herald* reported on March 27, 1942, that after having toured the country Mr. Holland sent a telegram urging the Prime Minister to not ignore the extremely pressing issue, “the matter be made the subject of an extensive inquiry with a view to rectifying the position.”⁴⁸ With conscription on the way and discontent deeply sowed in the Home Guard, the winter months would see Minister Semple and the Home Guard clash again on the national stage.

April 30, 1942 found the *New Zealand Herald* happily reporting to its readers that the Home Guard inquiry previously request made by Mr. Holland had been approved:

The organization, training and em-ployment of the Home Guard are at present being inquired into in Auck-land by the members of the defense and military affairs committee of the War Council. The members of the com-mittee, Major-General Sir Andrew Russell, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., the Hon. W. Perry, M.L.C., and Messrs. L.G. Lowry and E.T. Tirikitene, M.P.’s arrived from Wellington yesterday and subsequently began their inquiry in a room at the Chief Post Office.⁴⁹

The *New Zealand Herald* detailed that the committee would essentially function via direct reports, “Senior officers of the Home Guard throughout the Northern Military District attended the inquiry. They in-cluded the district director, Colonel M. Aldred, and all the group directors in the district. Proceedings of the com-mittee included receiving information from these officers on the position of the Guard in their respective areas.” In closing with the government’s perspective, the *New Zealand Herald* mentioned that, “In granting Mr. Holland’s request the Prime Minister said the task of the committee would

⁴⁸ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24234, 27 March 1942, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19420327.2.61>

⁴⁹ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24261, 30 April 1942, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19420430.2.77>

be to ascertain what further practical steps could be taken in the desired direction, using Mr. Holland's telegraph as the committee's general order of reference.”⁵⁰

As the Defense and Military Affairs Committee began working on its large task, the regulations approved for compulsory service in the Home Guard took over the spotlight. As the news raced across New Zealand that the Home Guard would now formally be subject to compulsory enrollment, New Zealand's newspapers again recorded the impact of the compulsory enrollment alongside the actions of Minister Semple during compulsory enrollment itself. The drive for compulsory enrollment reached the pages of *Press* on May 1, 1942, *Press* succinctly describing the important upcoming effort for its readers, “Compulsory enrolment for the Home Guard service of all male British sub-jects resident in the Dominion who have attained the age of 35 years but not the age of 51 years is required by an order gazetted to-day. With the exception of certain exempted classes, these men are to apply for enrolment no later than May 7.”⁵¹ *Press* detailed that despite Minister Semple's comment that this order would deplete the numbers of those serving in the Emergency Precautions Service, effectively a manpower drain, that “It did not necessarily follow that because a man applied for enrolment with the Home Guard, he would be selected for Home Guard service. Selection committees would be formed in various centres, consisting of representatives of the Emergency Precautions Service, Home Guard, and manpower committees.”⁵² Minister Semple insisted that this policy was well founded, “The whole purpose in calling up men for the Home Guard service is

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 6.

⁵¹ *Press*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23626, 1 May 1942, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19420501.2.41>

⁵² *Ibid*, 6.

part of the national policy to ensure the best possible use of available man-power in regard to the needs of the Armed Forces, the Home Guard and Emergency Precautions Services.”⁵³

The *Auckland Star* approved of the decision in its own response the same day, “The Government’s latest decision concerning the Home Guard offers the welcome prospect of a systematic approach to the problem of using the remaining manpower in the Dominion.”⁵⁴ Despite Home Guard equipment problems that caused, “enthusiasm for service in it dwindled and many men thought they could be more immediately useful in the [Emergency Precautions Service.]” the *Auckland Star* optimistically remarked that now, “every man will have the nature of his service decided for him. Many men have long desired this, and ask for nothing better.”⁵⁵ This infectious optimism carried over to the *New Zealand Herald* on May 4, 1942, detailing the rapid pace of enrollment in Auckland, “No time is being lost in Auckland following the announcement by the Minister of National Service, the Hon. R. Semple, concerning the procedure to be adopted in providing additional personnel. It is the intention of the Auckland Manpower Committee to make available immediately for Home Guard service men in the gazetted age group who appear to be eligible and whose civilian obligations do not conflict with their ability to undertake service.”⁵⁶ This extended to the expected enrollment numbers as the *New Zealand Herald* excitedly noted, “It is expected that the city units of the Home

⁵³ Ibid, 6.

⁵⁴ *Auckland Star*, Volume LXXIII, Issue 101, 1 May 1942, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand. <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19420501.2.46>

⁵⁵ Ibid, 4.

⁵⁶ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24264, 4 May 1942, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19420504.2.40>

Guard will be substantially reinforced within the next few days. Since the Minister's announcement was made on Friday a considerable flow of applications for enrolment have been received at the Manpower Committee office. It is hoped that within the seven-day period allowed by the gazette several thousand applications will pass through the office.”⁵⁷ Another progress update from *Press* arrived on May 6, 1942, a sense of quiet optimism emerging from its deconstruction of Minister Semple's statement, “The Minister said that many units of the Home Guard were in urgent need of additional personnel, and in such districts the selection and posting of men would commence within a few days. Calling up notices would be issued to all men selected for Home Guard duty.”⁵⁸ As the enrollment deadline loomed on May 7, the lackluster response to the rifle impressment issue perhaps loomed in some New Zealanders minds, would compulsory enrollment be any different?

A hopeful answer to the enrollment question emerged in Auckland as the *New Zealand Herald* and *Auckland Star* closely monitored the situation. The *Auckland Star* described Auckland residents progress the day before the enrollment deadline with nervous optimism, “From the steady flow of applications for enrolment in the Home Guard received at the Auckland Manpower Committee's offices since the compulsory regulation began on Monday some 250 men have received their calling-up notices, and selection committees will shortly commence consideration of the cases of 1800 additional names on hand.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 4.

⁵⁸ *Press*, Volume LXXVIII, Issue 23630, 6 May 1942, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/CHP19420506.2.43>

⁵⁹ *Auckland Star*, Volume LXXIII, Issue 105, 6 May 1942, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19420506.2.52>

The selection process appeared to be more holistic than anticipated as the *Auckland Star* reported the core considerations as concerning, “A man’s occupation, hours of work, availability for mobilisation and any position occupied in the Emergency Reserve.”⁶⁰ The *New Zealand Herald* took over coverage of Auckland enrollment on May 8, 1942, documenting the previous day's progress, “Approximately 750 men residing in Auckland and the vicinity have been posted direct to the Home Guard under compulsory enrolment up to last night.” The *New Zealand Herald* commented that despite these numbers representing men who were “clearly available” for Home Guard service and the “substantial number of men” who appealed their notices, “It is expected when all are in hand the Auckland roll will contain a good many thousand names.”⁶¹ The *Auckland Star* confirmed this expectation on May 8, 1942, as staff of the Auckland Manpower committee were “kept busy” dealing with a flood of enrolment applications, “By this afternoon about 1000 men residing in the Auckland area had been posted under compulsory enrolment direct to the Home Guard.”⁶²

With compulsory enrollment bearing optimistic fruit and Mr. Holland’s inquiry underway, it seemed the Home Guard was heading into calmer waters after a stormy opening half of 1942. With this notable progress being made, the government released its annual report concerning the military situation in New Zealand, offering a notable checkpoint analysis of the Home Guard. Compiled by Lieutenant-General E. Puttick, the *Military Forces of New Zealand Annual Report* was presented to parliament on July 21,

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 6.

⁶¹ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24268, 8 May 1942, Page 7. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19420508.2.109>

⁶² *Auckland Star*, Volume LXXIII, Issue 107, 8 May 1942, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19420508.2.95>

1942. Lieutenant-General Puttick opened his report concerning the incorporation of the Home Guard into the army “The Home Guard was instituted as a civil organization, but it is now an integral and important part of the army” as of mid-1942. On the Home Guard equipment issue, Lieutenant-General Puttick commented, “the equipment situation has improved beyond expectations with a consequent improvement so far as the Home Guard is concerned” but still needed work.⁶³ The Home Guard’s training outlook was also optimistic: “training in the Home Guard has made great strides during the period since 1st August last.” This confidence was enough for Lieutenant-General Puttick to declare, “I feel justified in saying the Home Guard is an organization that will render an excellent account of itself should war extend to these shores.”⁶⁴ Despite Lieutenant-General Puttick’s encouraging words in his report to the government, the perspective of the government in this July 21, 1942 did not necessarily cover the plethora of problems the Home Guard faced.

Major Melrose’s impassioned activism and subsequent coverage of his actions unveiled a deep dissatisfaction with the government’s handling of the Home Guard as an organization, furthering claims made by outspoken New Zealanders, such as Major Melrose, that decisive action was not only needed, but could be found through passionate grassroots activism on behalf of the Home Guard. A dismally low number of uniforms allotted to Home Guardsmen, an equally frightening shortage of equipment such as rifle and ammunition, and reversals of government policy concerning compulsory enrollment,

⁶³ MILITARY FORCES OF NEW ZEALAND. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE GENERAL OFFICER COMMANDING., *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1942 Session I, H-19. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1942-I.2.1.9.18>

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, H-19.

all threatened to derail the Home Guard during a critical stage of the war considering the real threat of invasion by the Japanese Empire.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

When delving into newspaper accounts of the previous twenty-three months, a more complex view of the Home Guard emerges, a multifaceted one laced with the intricacies and complexities of rifle impressment, army incorporation, equipment, uniforms, voluntary recruitment, and compulsory enrollment. Months after the issue of compulsory enrollment dominated the pages, the results of the committee convened to placate the problems within the Home Guard were practically finished. Leader of the Opposition and Minister of War Expenditure, Mr. Sidney Holland, found himself questioned by the *Auckland Star* on September 1, 1942 regarding sensitive Home Guard issues. Holland's words almost reflected the editorial stance of the *New Zealand Herald* on February 26, 1942 in stating to the *Auckland Star*, "The Home Guard has been a very patient organization-I might almost say long-suffering," said Mr. Holland. "It is extraordinary how well the keenness has been maintained in many, if not most, districts." Despite this praise for the Home Guard, even Mr. Holland himself as an advocate for the Home Guard was pressured for a firm answer to the question of uniforms. Holland insisted, "The supply of uniforms for those lacking them is one of the first things requiring attention. Both with regard to clothing and equipment, I do not think I should say anything that will be construed as a definite undertaking that deficiencies will be rectified immediately. I may say the Home Guard is entitled to and can expect preference over the [Emergency Precautions Service] in the matter of uni-

forms.”¹ Mr. Holland’s hesitancy to offer anything that could be seen as definite, while tentatively offering the Home Guard preference in uniforms, speaks loudly to the inability of the government, and even the Leader of the Opposition, to make any promises that simply were unable to uphold. Despite assurances that everything was being done from multiple government officials, time and time again the Home Guard found itself facing great uncertainty, soothed somewhat by the release of the committees report on October 15, 1942.

The *New Zealand Herald* provided coverage of the report to its readers in a detailed article, taking care to note Lieutenant-General Puttick’s specific wording on the Home Guard. The report effectively functioned as a checkpoint for the Home Guard, viewing its combined strength through both Division I and II, which totaled 109,226 men as of October 8, 1942.² The *New Zealand Herald* demonstrated through Puttick’s statements many of the recommendations pertained to “Division I,” which had been described earlier in the October 30, 1941 issue of the *Evening Post* as consisting of “50,000 of all ranks fit for combat duties,” while Division II made up the remaining Home Guardsmen. Despite the hopeful sign that, “over 60 per cent of Division I of the guard were now armed,” the committee recommended a drastic step beyond rifle impressment: “personnel not equipped with .303 or similar rifles should be provided with .22 rifles, shotguns, revolvers, all such weapons in private hands to be requisitioned for the purpose.” In addition, comprehensive training would allow “every member of

¹ *Auckland Star*, Volume LXXIII, Issue 206, 1 September 1942, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AS19420901.2.65>

² *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24405, 15 October 1942, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19421015.2.43>

Division I to fire the full rifle course laid down for Territorial Force, although shortage of .30 ammunition made it necessary for men armed with this caliber of rifle to fire the greater part of the course with .303 rifles.”³ Uniforms had seen improvement in their own regard, with the issuance of “83,127 pairs of boots, 39,000 service dress uniforms and 36,000 battle dress uniforms” alongside recommendation that “further reduction be made in the percentage of cloth allotted for civilian use” a step towards what author R.F.R. had advocated for months earlier. With these recommendations made alongside other administrative orders, the *New Zealand Herald* closed with noting Minister Jones’s “deep appreciation of the importance of the guard and of the excellence of its work.”⁴

Despite these reassurances from government officials of varying ranks and degrees, the Home Guard’s trajectory over the course of the war shows a different picture, muddied by problems that continued to impact the Home Guard until its disbandment in December 1943. Recruitment efforts in 1940 until mid-1943 had shown varying degrees of success. The initially dismal start that had characterized much of 1940 is perhaps best summarized in Sir Ernest Davis’s comments on December 12, 1940, “apathy was inexplicable in view of the potential dangers in which the country was faced.”⁵ This sense of apathy for recruitment came despite Minister Semple’s earlier declaration that the Home Guard would remain “entirely voluntary” on August 27, 1940.⁶ Semple reiterated this position on March 11, 1941 when he noted, “Compulsory

³ Ibid, 4.

⁴ Ibid, 4.

⁵ *New Zealand Herald*, Volume LXXVII, Issue 23837, 12 December 1940, Page 12. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19401212.2.103>

⁶ *Northern Advocate*, 27 August 1940, Page 7. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NA19400827.2.99>

membership of the Home Guard is not contemplated by the government at present.”⁷ This sense of apathy was somewhat absolved by satisfactory recruitment in early 1941, described by the 1943 report of the National Service Department, “personnel was recruited through publicity campaigns with the result that more than one hundred thousand volunteers had joined up by April, 1941.”⁸ However, the enactment of compulsory enrollment in 1942 due to manpower losses and Minister Semple part in its enactment, calls attention to his previous assurances that such a method was not necessary for the Home Guard. Offering recruitment and compulsory enrolment as an example of shifting wartime viewpoints and self-assurances of its success despite early apathy.

The issue of rifle impressment functions as very strong evidence of both apathy and a shortage of resources for the Home Guard, on behalf of the government, especially considering its critical importance to the functioning of the Home Guard as a fighting organization. Despite Col. Aldred’s early impressment call to the “powers-that-be that these rifles should be made available to the Home Guard” the issue festered well into early and mid-1941.⁹ Prime Minister Fraser’s February 24, 1941 comments that “it was impractical to make an adequate supply available to the Home Guard” offer a humbling admission by the government of their failure to adequately provide rifles for the Home

⁷ *Lake Wakatip Mail*, Issue 4509, 11 March 1941, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/LWM19410311.2.22>

⁸ NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT REPORTS OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT AND OF THE INDUSTRIAL MAN-POWER DIVISION ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT UNDER THE NATIONAL SERVICE EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1940, THE EMERGENCY RESERVE CORPS REGULATIONS 1941, AND THE INDUSTRIAL MAN-POWER EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1942, *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1943 Session I, H-11a, Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1943-I.2.1.9.13>

⁹ *Franklin Times*, Volume XXIX, Issue 135, 22 November 1940, Page 6. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/FRTIM19401122.2.42>

Guard.¹⁰ The chaotic process of rifle impressment never reached the potential number of contributions envisioned by those such as Col. Aldred who had called for 30,000 rifles, as shown by the National Service Department 1943 report, “Privately owned .303 rifles were impressed in May, 1941, with the result that some eighteen thousand passed to the Home Guard.”¹¹ Furthermore, the October 15, 1942 recommendation that impressment be expanded to, “.22 rifles, shotguns or revolvers, all such weapons in private hands” offers a tremendous example of the severe weapons shortage facing the Home Guard, allowing only 60% of *Division I* alone to be properly armed, despite efforts of the rifle impressment drive across New Zealand.¹² Decisive impressment action from the government and a more compliant private sector could have remedied this problem much earlier, before arming the Home Guard became a major problem. Additionally, civilian resistance to rifle impressment, passive through a slow response to voluntary surrender rifles, alongside active resistance such as Kerr Hardie Simms destroying his rifle, severely hampered the Home Guard.

The constant problem of uniforms for the Home Guard functioned as the pinnacle of the government’s apathy towards the movement; no other functioning element was rife with empty promises or appeals than the uniform issue. As early as March 9, 1941, with the Home Guard rapidly approaching almost one hundred thousand men, only “11,260

¹⁰ *Waikato Independent*, Volume XLI, Issue 3820, 24 February 1941, Page 7. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/WAIKIN19410224.2.38>

¹¹ NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT REPORTS OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT AND OF THE INDUSTRIAL MAN-POWER DIVISION ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT UNDER THE NATIONAL SERVICE EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1940, THE EMERGENCY RESERVE CORPS REGULATIONS 1941, AND THE INDUSTRIAL MAN-POWER EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1942, *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1943 Session I, H-11a, Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1943-I.2.1.9.13>

¹² *New Zealand Herald*, Volume 79, Issue 24405, 15 October 1942, Page 4. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/NZH19421015.2.43>

service uniforms” had been issued according to the Prime Minister who was himself informed by the Quartermaster-General making the Prime Minister ask that Home Guardsmen, “accept the in-avoidable situation with the consciousness that clothing and equipment will be issued to them as soon as possible.”¹³ With only a small portion of Home Guardsmen properly equipped with uniforms, the repeated promises that all was being done on the government’s behalf, by multiple representatives of the government, was not the true situation, was indirectly acknowledged in the 1943 National Service Department report, “A further major difficulty, which has never been fully met, lay in the provisions of a sufficient supply of equipment.”¹⁴ This situation was, indeed, being slowly rectified with the issuance of “3,000 sets of uniforms a week” as noted in the October 15, 1942 report. However, the lateness of this change and the suggestion only in October 1942, that civilian cloth production be reduced to fill this enormous Home Guard uniform gap, presents itself as a solution that should have been proactively implemented much earlier in the war. Reflecting on Mr. Holland’s reluctance to address the uniform situation with a clear projection, the government could have spared much of the criticism it received by being more transparent.

Nevertheless, across all these problems facing the Home Guard there remained a single constant that allowed it to continue as an organization, despite these tremendous hurdles. The tenacity and enthusiasm of the Home Guardsmen themselves found praise

¹³ *Ashburton Guardian*, Volume 62, Issue 125, 9 March 1942, Page 2. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/AG19420309.2.11>

¹⁴ NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT REPORTS OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT AND OF THE INDUSTRIAL MAN-POWER DIVISION ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT UNDER THE NATIONAL SERVICE EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1940, THE EMERGENCY RESERVE CORPS REGULATIONS 1941, AND THE INDUSTRIAL MAN-POWER EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1942, *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1943 Session I, H-11a, Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1943-I.2.1.9.13>

showered upon them, as the *Ellesmere Guardian* reflected upon the movement on August 6, 1943, “The Home Guard has had many reserves and disappointments, but not once did it fall down on the job. The fortunes of war-good as far as the safety of this country is concerned-were such that it was not put to the test. Consequently, in common with the Territorial Force, there is always a tendency to underestimate its value. But when the history of the war is written, and the dangers once threatening New Zealand are made fully known, there will be no under-estimation of the value of a Home Guard force of more than 100,000 men prepared, of their own free will, to cast back an invader into the sea, with bare hands alone if necessary.”¹⁵ This adaptive-ness was applauded by the National Service Department itself in its 1943 report, “In spite of its difficulties, an extraordinary spirit of enthusiasm may be said to have characterized the Home Guard when taken as a whole.”¹⁶ Regardless of their varying positions on the Home Guard itself, New Zealanders resolutely supported the Home Guard as their own defensive organization, and of a particular note, their support grew even stronger in the face of government mismanagement. The reasoning for such strengthened civilian resolve, pertaining to the Home Guard, warrants further study concerning the relationship between the Home Guard and the New Zealand government.

However, the enthusiasm of the Home Guardsmen themselves and an overwhelmingly supportive public perception regarding the Home Guard itself, did not

¹⁵ *Ellesmere Guardian*, Volume LXIV, Issue 62, 6 August 1943, Page 2. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers/EG19430806.2.7>

¹⁶ NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT REPORTS OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT AND OF THE INDUSTRIAL MAN-POWER DIVISION ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT UNDER THE NATIONAL SERVICE EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1940, THE EMERGENCY RESERVE CORPS REGULATIONS 1941, AND THE INDUSTRIAL MAN-POWER EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1942, *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1943 Session I, H-11a, Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1943-I.2.1.9.13>

necessarily reflect its realistic potential as a fighting force in the face of an actual invasion by the Japanese Empire. Alongside the well documented problems with arming and equipping the Home Guard, the voluminous 1942-1945 reports of the National Service Department speak to this potential. Lieutenant-General Puttick's aforementioned comments in his 1942 Military Forces of New Zealand report, while redacted in its exact wording due to wartime censorship, additionally admit that the Home Guard's equipment requirements, "were quite beyond the capacity of this country to provide, but the arrival of equipment from abroad and a considerable increase in production are now leading the *appreciable* results."¹⁷ Furthermore, despite regarding the Home Guard as "a most valuable part of the Army in New Zealand" his comments concerning the exact capacity in which it would, "render an excellent account of itself" should the Japanese Empire invade, do not explicitly elaborate on if this account would be one of success or merely a delaying action.¹⁸

This pattern of indistinct statements concerning the Home Guard's realistic potential continued with the National Service Department report in 1943, while emphasizing its crucial role compared to other home defense organizations within New Zealand, "the risk of invasion had now rendered its function a matter of great importance, and the needs of the Emergency Reserve Corps had no sooner been filled compulsory methods than a controversy broke out as to whether some of the new personnel should have not been made available to the Home Guard instead...new and substantial demands

¹⁷ MILITARY FORCES OF NEW ZEALAND. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE GENERAL OFFICER COMMANDING., *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1942 Session I, H-19. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1942-I.2.1.9.18>

¹⁸ *Ibid*, H-19.

were being placed on the Guard as a part of the general scheme of building up the defensive organization of the Dominion.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, the reversal of the territorial gains of the Japanese Empire afforded by the establishment of the New Zealand Third Division was lauded by the National Service Department in its 1944 report as, “one of the factors that which turned the balance and hence enabled large scale reductions to be made in the home-defense forces” and thus made organizations such as the Home Guard now unnecessary.²⁰ These reductions of home defense forces in the latter half of 1942 were happily enacted by the New Zealand government as, “it had become apparent that substantial reductions could be and, in fact, were made in the home-defense forces,” given recent successes in the Pacific Theater.²¹ These reductions were also significantly aided by the additional, “crucial reverses of Japan at Guadalcanal and of Germany and Italy at El Alamein” by New Zealand’s overseas forces alongside the contributions of Allied forces in both the Mediterranean and Pacific Theaters.²²

In the face of this patriotic bravado, a grievous statement by the National Service Department in its 1945 report seemingly contradicts the Home Guard’s realistic

¹⁹ NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT REPORTS OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT AND OF THE INDUSTRIAL MAN-POWER DIVISION ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT UNDER THE NATIONAL SERVICE EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1940, THE EMERGENCY RESERVE CORPS REGULATIONS 1941, AND THE INDUSTRIAL MAN-POWER EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1942, *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1943 Session I, H-11a, Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1943-I.2.1.9.13>

²⁰ NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT REPORTS OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT AND OF THE INDUSTRIAL MAN-POWER DIVISION ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT UNDER THE NATIONAL SERVICE EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1940, THE EMERGENCY RESERVE CORPS REGULATIONS 1941, AND THE INDUSTRIAL MAN-POWER EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1942, *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1944 Session I, H-11a. Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1944-I.2.2.5.12>

²¹ *Ibid*, H-11a

²² REPORT OF THE NATIONAL SERVICE DEPARTMENT ON ACTIVITIES UNDER THE NATIONAL SERVICE EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1940, AND THE INDUSTRIAL MAN-POWER EMERGENCY REGULATIONS 1944, *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, 1945 Session I, H-11a, Papers Past Project, National Library of New Zealand, <https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/parliamentary/AJHR1945-I.2.2.5.12>

effectiveness and its importance, “Despite the degree of preparedness achieved by September of that year, [1942] there was scant ground for optimism in the face of invasion” as New Zealand’s capacity to maintain its wartime commitments reached what can only be defined as a breaking point.²³ Thus, at the peak its readiness in manpower and having made great strides to overcome its constant shortages of equipment and weapons, the Home Guard and by extension New Zealand’s home defense, was nevertheless inadequate in the face of an invasion by the Japanese Empire.

Condemningly, this admission was made by the National Service Department *after* the threat of invasion had passed and the process of the disbandment of its home defense forces had begun. There is no question the threat of invasion by the Japanese Empire was firmly entrenched in the minds of New Zealanders and the New Zealand government: effectively affording the Home Guard a secondary role of reassuring the New Zealand people they were not utterly helpless, while allowing New Zealanders to play a presumed part in the defense of their own Dominion. While the Home Guard may have in reality been ineffective militarily as a homegrown defense force, its contribution to the New Zealand home front, even if it was a theoretical and not directly admitted by the New Zealand government, proved invaluable in maintaining a shared sense of purpose among New Zealanders during the darkest years of the war for their island Dominion.

A mixed public perception of New Zealand’s defensive needs, the lack of decisive leadership from the New Zealand government pertaining to the Home Guard, and woefully inadequate material resources for the Home Guard severely hampered its effectiveness as the final line of New Zealand’s home defense system. A failure of early

²³ Ibid, H-11a.

recruitment for the Home Guard throughout 1940 was only rectified with the enactment of compulsory enrollment in 1942, despite statements from Minister Semple that the Home Guard would remain a volunteer force. The rifle impressment fiasco uncovered both a severe rifle shortage within New Zealand, somewhat placated in 1941 with the forced impressment of private rifles after a dismal response, alongside an extremely visible hesitancy of New Zealanders to turn over their private firearms, was an issue that the New Zealand government admitted they had never been able to resolve. Finally, uniforms and equipment promised to the Home Guard continually fell short of guardsman's expectations, despite assurances all was being done to equip them, alongside a severe material shortage due to a prioritization of overseas commitments for soldiers abroad.

This study offers only a single avenue by which one can view a cross section of New Zealand society during the Second World War, demonstrating how the public viewed the series of mismanagement blunders and scandals throughout the short history of this home defense unit. Such a home defense study finds welcome expansion through the usage of additional archival resources, government documentation, wartime correspondence, alongside chronologically ending with the disbandment of the Home Guard after the threat of invasion in December 1943. Such a robust study would allow for an enriched understanding of the role the Home Guard played in national defense, especially concerning domestic media's impact on New Zealanders popular opinions towards their own homegrown defensive organizations during the Second World War.

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