

The New Zealand Army

As I was concluding my time running the NCO Academy, I was designated to go - as an exchange officer - to take a Tactics Course with officers in the New Zealand Army. Strictly speaking, the 'exchange' was supposed to be on the basis that the US Army in Hawaii would give a New Zealand officer a year in command of a rifle company of the Division, and the US Officer would get the same in New Zealand. So that they each could learn how the other Army functioned up close and personally. But the New Zealand Army was so small, that they settled on the idea that I should take their Tactics Course along with NZ officers. That would be shorter - only three months. But that would permit me to become knowledgeable of how their Army was organized and operated at the 'tip of the spear'. So if or when our Armies in the Pacific ever had to fight in the Pacific Theater together our key officers would be better able to coordinate our joint officers.

So I flew from Honolulu on Qantas Airlines, first into Sidney, Australia, then with no lay over, into Auckland, New Zealand on the north Island.

I was not sure what to expect until I was driven up to Camp Waioru high in the 'tussock' and sheep grazing country. Waioru's main function was the support of the New Zealand Armor units - such as they had. The entire NZ Army is less than 7,000 soldiers.

Hawaii Years (2)

Category: Hawaii, New Zealand, Thailand Based Years

Published: Thursday, 01 September 2011 13:11

Written by dave

Hits: 3635

I was warmly greeted by the handful of officers who run the camp, and staff the small Army school. I don't think we had more than 10 officers taking the 'Staff and Tactics' Course that I was to attend.

I learned that the New Zealand Army which served in North Africa and Greece against the Germans in the early 1940's took so many casualties - some 7,000 killed, and captured, or wounded, in WWII that was a national calamity. That was on top of the 16,000 killed in WWI, with 41,000 wounded. They only had 45 killed in the Korean War, and 37 in the Vietnam War. Ever since those two world wars the people and government of New Zealand have been very cautious about committing its forces to violent combat.

I learned - of course it was obvious - that their Army was modeled and equipped like the British Army. And as such, tactically, for lack of highly mechanized, ample weapon and ammunition equipped American Army, they have to populate the ground rather than overwhelm by firepower. Big difference from my experience in Korea, where we substituted firepower for people. Industrial America can afford that.

The officers who took the class with me were fully aware of just how highly combat decorated I was and how much actual combat experience I had compared with them.

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Their staff and tactics work was, as far as I could see, quite professional. But I didn't learn anything of much value to me professionally while I was there.

What I DID learn was how hard they drink - and 'play' - which is very rough and tumble, even in the officer's club. For they believe in such 'play' as a way to toughen up their junior officers, even to the point of throwing each other through the windows of the club on weekly party night. Then they are accustomed to pay for the damages to the club they cause, without complaint, the next morning. New Zealand Army Officer Culture.

I was pulled into many of their 'games', and found myself quite drunk a number of times. Their officers go back to the hardest drinking western US customs.

The one geographically significant item I learned that New Zealand could have been, except for the sea, a mirror of early Colorado. The same population, the same number of square miles, the same weather (latitude), and the same reliance on sheep and herding that Colorado had in the 1880-1910.

But THE big surprise came when I learned that New Zealand has an abundance of TROUT, just like Colorado. Really BIG trout.

I learned that trout were not native to New Zealand. But Western writer, Zane Gray, after he made a lot of money

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traveled to and liked New Zealand. So he paid for several shiploads of live Rocky Mountain Trout to be sent to New Zealand which had none. The trout population exploded, and has been THE fresh water game fish ever since.

I really enjoyed being taken fishing by those NZedders as they are called, where I caught larger trout than I ever would have in my home state of Colorado.

The only other memorable thing that happened, was that I found, in Auckland, in a Military Uniforms store, the Greek Cross of War with Crown ribbon. The Greeks served with the New Zealanders in WWII, and one Greek Infantry Battalion served in our 7th Cavalry Regiment in the Korean War. I was awarded the Greek Cross of War, Class C, by the Greek Battalion Commander in 1951 during heavy combat against the Chinese when I helped them rescue a cut-off company. But they didn't have a supply of medals or ribbons to give me, to accompany the typed Citation, which I still have. But I still have the ribbon with Crown.

I have always prized it, because I saw that the Greek Soldiers and Officers who served next to us in Korea were really top drawer Combat Soldiers.