

GUERRILLAS UNLEASHED

THE epoch-making event of the month was undoubtedly the Commando Exercises of October 20 to 23, when an intrepid band of hand-picked guerillas plunged courageously into the (virtually) uncharted country between



Lakes Tarawera, Okareka and Okataina. Led by 2nd/Lieut. Macneil, and including S/M. Puki ("Nimrod") Green, the mighty hunter, and Sgt. John ("Professor") Reid, pathfinder extraordinary, this superb collection of masculinity comprised Cpl. A. K. ("Griffo") Griffith, Ptes. J. Wilson, H. E. Needham, A. T. Collins, K. Hayden, D. R. Craig, L. S. Hayward, A. S. Morrison, J. W. Owen, F. P. Scott, K. Corner, H. P. Hopkins, C. W. Guinness, E. L. Harker and D. Broadbent.

The four days spent in the open proved profitable from every point of view, and even the moaners, who, like the poor, are always with us, showed by their very moaning, how much they enjoyed themselves. The party covered over 50 miles, some of it through rather difficult country, and gained much helpful information about the land in its military aspects, the food resources, topographical features, physical and mental requirements for such a trip, etc. Everybody stood up well to the journey, even through the really tough parts.

One of the most pleasant features of the exercises was the splendid co-operation of the civilian population with whom the guerillas came in contact. Their hospitality was comprehensive, and they proved of material assistance in many ways, especially when the Game Stalkers' Club returned from abortive sorties. Mr. and Mrs. Miller and Mr. and Mrs. May, especially, merit the party's thanks for their ready understanding of the needs of the Army.

On Tuesday, getting off to a flying start, the band followed the main road as far as the Native School and then struck off over the hills in the direction of Lake Okataina. On the way a call was made at the school-house, and Jim Wilson and Dan Craig went in search of tea, spending half-an-hour in the process. The whole thing was rather mysterious until we learned of the red-headed school-mistress.

Touching picture: John Reid, surrounded by scores of Maori children, telling them a few more tall stories.

The day was very wet and misty, which made bearings difficult. However, the



bush was reached before noon and an elegant repast made off dry rations. The forage party, headed by "Nimrod" Green, succeeded in scaring hell out of a stray deer and two rabbits.

Skilled deduction located a fairly easy track through the bush. After the main body emerged, however, the forage gang turned up missing, the intrepid S/M. having hauled himself down a ravine after some beast or other. After much debate, it was decided to follow him, and then began the epic of Okataina Ravine.

Sheer, slippery, devilish, trackless, creeper-entangled—slips, scrambles, slides and assorted profanity—that is the descent in a few words! Scotty, Hoppy, Griff and Craig wrapped in a madman's web of vines and creepers—all this to the bottom and then at the top of a sheer cliff is heard the happy accents of the great Nimrod. So up it is. And, boy, was it tough! Handholds on vines and ferns, a foot at a haul, one slip meaning instant destruction, or something. But the party survived to greet with choice epithets a leering S/M. at the top. "Dr. Green, I presume."

It was decided then to spend the night above Lake Okataina. Bivvys were made under the only shelter for miles, a tiny tree and a semi-cannibalistic meal was made off some "game," the details of which it might be rash to mention.

And then it rained! And rained! The "waterproof" ground-sheets were soon soaked, and those who fled the "shelter" for the fire were entertained by the muffled oaths of the other huddled forms half-floating in water.

Some cameos. "Scotty" with true Lancelotian stolidity, keeping the blazing fire going and trying unsuccessfully to make a brew. Hayward and Wilson in a moaning chorus. Owen huddled like a Red Indian in a miserable blanket. Corner and Puki blissfully snoring in a torrential downpour. Mr. Macneil with a damp posterior. John Reid in that frightful shirt only, laughing loudly as he holds a damp pair of shorts to the fire.

Damn spirits revived next day with the returning sun, and the boys went cracking well round the bush towards Lake Okareka. After a drying-spell at a woodshed, they arrived at the shores of the lake. By good luck, enquiries were made at the house of Mr. Miller who magically produced large quantities of guerilla gargle. This, combined with a clear, sunny sky, sent morale up 100 per cent.

Wednesday was spent in the vicinity of the lake, while the "Bring 'Em Back Alive" Club plunged some 12 miles into the Tarawera country, to be once more frustrated. Several of the party borrowed a boat and surveyed the far side of the lake where it flows underground into Lake Tarawera. Even the Hill-Billies enjoyed themselves.

In the evening our good friends entertained us. The spectacle had to be seen to be believed of eighteen "commandos" crammed into a small room, Mr. Macneil picking up matchboxes with his mouth, Guinness, Harker and Broadbent shouting encouragement, Craig crooning Maori melodies, and Reid "going to town" with "Bolero." Guerilla warfare de luxe!

On Thursday, under the guidance of the gazelle-limbed Mr. Miller, the party entered into the most interesting part of the journey through the country on the near side of Lake Tarawera moving towards the Blue Lake.

Jim Wilson, the resourceful cook, was sent on to prepare a camp. The march was not an easy one, taking over eight hours, without food, and with brief spells only.

Steady going was kept up over many different types of country, fern, bush, volcanic chasms, lava-flows, wash-outs, ridges, valleys, etc. Many interesting sights were seen, the curious monument of the Rev. Spencer, the chasms left by the Tarawera eruption, sheer cliff-faces, sandy beaches, and, in the distance, Te Wairoa waterfall. Eventually, the party arrived on a high hill overlooking the Blue and Green Lakes.

And then a superb, squatting descent for several hundred feet, with "Griffo" leading the way, a la Luna Park, and Owen and Morrison fighting madly with creepers.

A good camp was made on the Blue Lake, and, while some strolled the seven miles to the Buried Village, the others held a sing-song round the fire. Rain again, but a borrowed tarpaulin helped this time.

On Friday, the guerillas returned cheerfully with "She Was Poor, But She Was Honest" as favourite marching song. And what a mob of ferocious backblockers they looked as they bowled into camp—felt hats a-saging, denims caked with mud, flourishing beards and tousled hair. A sight to make the elegant finch. No wonder the Colonel grinned!

When is the next trip, mate?

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