
 NINTH ARMY SKI SCHOOL

(A Short Commentary)

A quick yet restrained excitement beat on ~~static~~ ^{ecstatic} tattoo when the following order in the usual mysterious fashion managed to circulate from sundry latrines :-

"You will nominate 1 Officer, 1 NCO, and 1 man, suitable to undergo a 3 weeks course in Ski-ing as potential instructors with the view to forming ski troops within the Bn. Return to be rendered etc, etc....."

What a course! What a glorious 3 weeks holiday! How grand to meander in the snows and idle in lofty grandeur. More excitement and enthusiasm reigned when these precious few lucky enough to be selected paraded at the RAP for the high altitude fitness examination.

At 0615 hrs, Sunday 18th March. 42, having consumed an early breakfast we set out for the Ninth Army Ski School high in the LEBANON mountains at LES CEDRES, the well-known winter and summer resort.

The 18 hour journey was filled with such wonders and beauties as to be an ever living memory. Attendant beauties ever brought a deep joy born of familiarity with our own New Zealand scenery. Never once a dull moment; never once a minute not filled with wonder and amaze at every view, every panorama.

At long last weary with the tiring journey but still able to respond to the rousing cheer given by other students awaiting our arrival, we pulled up in front of the Ski School.

From then on our steps were guided by the efficient organization of the school. Bundling out of the trucks our quarters in this ex-hotel were allotted us. No sooner was this completed than we were summoned to mess, to be initiated into what was thereafter to be our staple diet - bully beef. There followed in due course our ski issues - boots, gloves (wind and woollen), wind jacket and slacks, cap, goggles, and a frightfully complicated-looking pamphlet on Ski-ing.

The following day we were introduced into the peace-time sport and war-arm of ski-ing. This was preceeded by a few lectures on the art by the Chief Instructor, and fitting of ski's by the Sergeant Instructors.

Few of us had had any previous experience. But we were there to learn and to do our best to succeed. Under very able Sergeant- Instructors (Australian) we proceeded on to the nearby slopes in 8 or 10 men parties. Stepping onto the soft, crunching, whiteness we were buoyed up with that same joyous enthusiasm which attended us when first we realised we were to proceed on this course.

"Skis on!"

"Line up along this crest" said the Sgt.

(This is going to be great fun!)

A second look at the slope, - Whew! It is steep!

"Follow me" said the Sgt.

We did. This was fun.- we did our best that is.

Few of us went more than a yard. Some even fell where they were. Few reached the bottom in good order and those that did crashed in their success. Skis and stocks were everywhere. Bodies were spread-eagled in every conceivable fashion. Chaos reigned supreme.

At long last the base of the slope was reached amid much laughter and chaffing on all sides. It was fun. However, no sooner were we there than - "Up again", said the Sgt.

We were not spared. Up we had to go. Up that long, long slope we had to sweat. It was a climb. At long last we were there gathered about the Sgt at the crest. We saw his pitying smile as he looked us over. And then he began to talk whereupon we received a 15 minute lecture with "this-is-not-a-holiday" theme, and those familiar words such as "perseverance, determination, etc, etc" predominating we were chastened, depressed and yet the will to do rose and the spirit to succeed assailed us. Thereafter the holiday spirit vanished.

Three weeks of the hardest work any of us had ever experienced was our lot. By persistence, repetition, determination we progressed, we improved we became more experienced.

At the end of the first week we were tested - the recruits test. All 18 of our Officers and NCO's passed. At the conclusion of the 3 weeks course Easter Sunday the advance Training Test was carried out. Of our 12 Officers and NCO's who entered 4 passed. This was rather a high percentage as of the 65 all ranks who participated but 12 passed. So there is no doubt that our Battalion received more than it's share.

The Test:-

To climb the 3,200 feet to Col. Les Cedres within 2½ hours and within 1½ minutes of arrival to fire 5 shots at a foot bull at a 100 feet, 4 out of the 5 to be hits.

To descend immediately the same altitude and fire as above, the descent to be accomplished within 30 minutes.

The following passed the test:-

2/Lieut. Francis.M
2/Lieut. Wood. A.C .
Cpl. Merriman.W
L/Cpl. Newton.H.

As the final days of the course drew on, everyone realised the enormity of this subject. Without doubt 3 weeks is all too short. In the closing stages we but mastering the foundation of Ski-ing, snow-ploughing, snow plough and stem turns, telemark running and general control and balance on varying slopes. A few had only begun to master the stem-christiania turn. They were lucky and perhaps had a bent for the subject. Some of us were less fortunate.

And the course is over. Perhaps if we were given the opportunity of regular practice to build on the foundation laid by the Ninth Army Ski School we would prove ourselves as skiers. The standard of training, knowledge and ability of the able instructors is wasted unless we are able to continue with regular practice. As ski-troops we are not as yet sufficiently experienced to fulfil our role in that capacity. But perhaps with a little further experience we would be able to prove our worth and be a suitable striking force for our Division.

REFERENCE

Archives New Zealand = Te Rua Mahara o te Kāwanatanga
28 NZ (Māori) Battalion Diary, WAI 1 1664 DA 68/1/28, Appendix D2