

MEDIA RELEASE: For immediate release



War in Paradise: The Unofficial Story of New Zealand Soldiers in New Caledonia

War in Paradise is a multi-sensory installation telling the captivating stories of New Zealand soldiers based in New Caledonia during World War II. The exhibition opens on Saturday, 21 March in Auckland War Memorial Museum's Pictorial Gallery.

The arrival of World War II transformed New Caledonia, famed as a picturesque paradise, into the largest forward Allied base in the Pacific theatre. For the majority of young New Zealanders who made up the 3rd Division, it was the first time they had left our shores.

New Zealand forces began landing at New Caledonia in November 1942. By March 1943, nearly 20,000 New Zealanders were stationed on the island, primarily based at Bourail on the western coast of New Caledonia.

Once in New Caledonia the 3rd Division began a punishing regime of training in jungle and amphibious warfare; a style of fighting hugely different to previous, conventional conceptions of combat tactics.

The heat, humidity, snakes and insects, including the ever-present mosquito, added to the challenges in adjusting to this new environment.

Director of Auckland War Memorial Museum, Dr Vanda Vitali, says "War in Paradise explores the soldiers' sense of exhilaration and dislocation, how they related to the local Kanak, French, Indonesian and Vietnamese communities, and how they coped in the sweltering 'Paris of the Pacific' while preparing to confront the Japanese."

The central exhibition space contains a gravel footpath, reminiscent of the New Zealand war grave cemetery just south of Bourail.

Enhancing the viewer's experience is a soundscape composed by Wellington musicians Plan 9, which recreates the popular music from the period with New Zealand and American favourites and a taste of popular French lullaby, mingled with Kaneka chants, to transport the audience to New Caledonia of the 1940s.

War in Paradise is told through an installation of photographs by official war photographers and extracts from the 3rd New Zealand Division's unofficial history series. Alongside the historic images is a fresh look at New Caledonia and the New Zealand War Cemetery and Memorial in Bourail through recent photographs by respected New Zealand photographer Paul Thompson.

War in Paradise is not an exploration of war in the Pacific but rather of the New Zealand Army's presence in a Pacific country during a time of war.

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War in Paradise was developed by the Museum of Wellington City & Sea in collaboration with Bourail Museum. Historic images sourced from Archives New Zealand Te Rua Mahara o te Kawanatanga.