

Māori Farewell, “Pö atarau”

History of the song:

In 1913 the Australian musician, Clement Scott, wrote the tune, "Swiss Cradle Song".

In 1915 the Māori words "Pö atarau" were added to this tune and used to sing farewell to WW1 soldiers leaving New Zealand for France & Gallipoli.

After the war, in 1920, Maewa Kaihau wrote the English words, "This is the hour..." for her daughter who was leaving New Zealand to live in another country. This became the "Haere Ra Waltz Song", which was sung when steamships were departing New Zealand. It was also sung for ANZAC troops leaving home for WW2 from 1939. English wartime singer, Gracie Fields, learnt "Haere Ra" on a visit to New Zealand in 1945. Her version of it, known as "Now is the Hour", became a world-wide hit song in 1948.

Many versions of this song have been recorded using the Māori words followed by the English words, thus uniting nations and cultures from opposite sides of the world.

VJ Day (15th August 1945):

On the 7th December 1941, Japan launched a surprise aerial attack on the US Navy base at Pearl Harbour, Hawaii. Immediately, the US declared war on Japan. Germany, being an ally of Japan, then declared war on the US, turning the war already raging across Europe into a global conflict. After Adolf Hitler had surrendered and the war in Europe had ended (VE Day, 8th May 1945) the Potsdam Declaration was issued, 26th July 1945, calling for Japan to surrender. The Japanese leaders refused to sign and so the decision was made to drop 2 atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima & Nagasaki on the 6th & 9th August, in an attempt to end the war. On the 15th August, Emperor Hirohito of Japan urged the Japanese people to surrender.

The conflict in the Far East covered countries such as Burma, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines and involved two and a half million British & Allied troops.

300,000 soldiers were taken as prisoners of war. They suffered badly and were frequently tortured; 100,000 died as prisoners. They were forced to build the “Death Railway” from Thailand to Burma costing the lives of 12,000 Allied soldiers (one for every railway sleeper laid).

Huge celebrations took place when VJ Day was declared and in the UK these were led by King George VI. However, most of those who fought and suffered in the Far East would not get back to their home countries until well after the victory celebrations were over. Prisoners of war waited for months for ships back to the UK and some Allied troops wouldn't return home for nearly 2 years! Viscount Slim, Supreme Allied Commander of Southeast Asia, in an address to the troops warned them that, “You are, and will remain, the forgotten army”.

St Andrew's Ipplepen Youth Choir have chosen to sing the Māori Farewell in recognition of the strong links between Great Britain and New Zealand. A bond well demonstrated in the linking of military forces during the 2 World Wars. Recording the song for VJ Day has taught all of us the importance of appreciating the sacrifice and devastating loss of life that occurred on both sides of the conflicts; lest we forget.