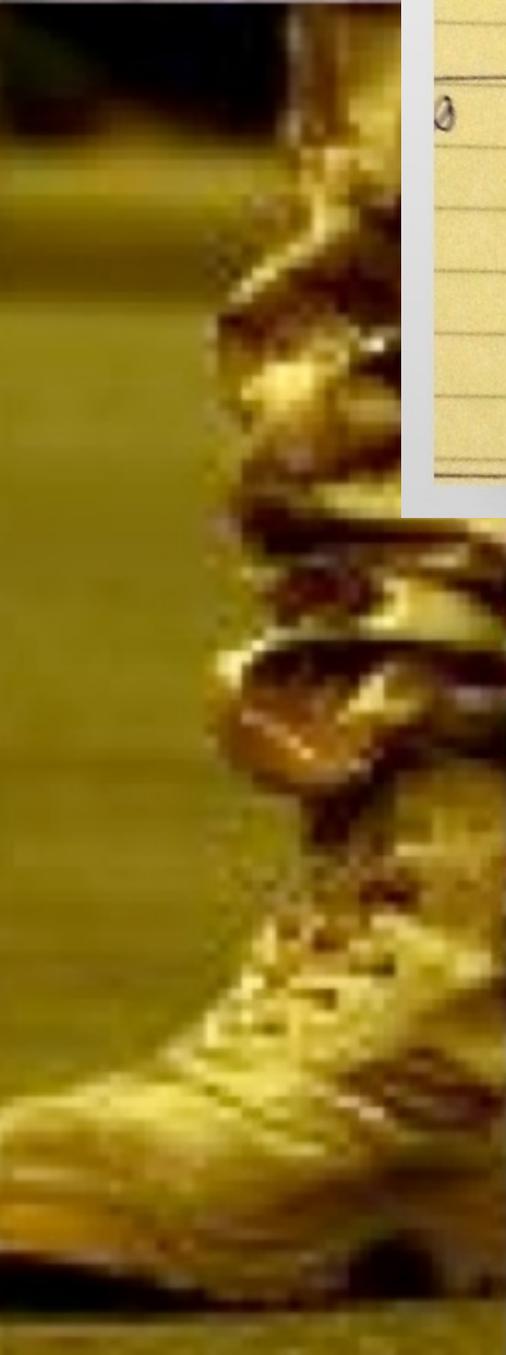


K.M HARRIS



...e help with food
...tion as i don't ha
...say. any donation
...change a lot.
...for your help and
...support



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 2 - The Green Machine
Female Soldier 'Anon'

DEDICATION

For my Nan.

Love you always and miss you heaps.

Kimmy xxx

THE GREEN MACHINE

One of the most amazing friends I have in my life is ex-military. I have a lot of ex-military friends, and this friend in particular is one of the many that I consider family - the kind related by love.

The 'Green Machine' (a soldiers nick name for the New Zealand Army) was her way of life from 2003 until 2012. She did well when she was in the Army, and was a well-respected, fit and healthy Maori female soldier. Like many other soldiers, she had her fair share of challenges and obstacles too, but the many rewards that the military lifestyle provided, balanced those hard times. For the most part, just knowing that her Army brothers and sisters were going through the same thing as what she was going through, was enough to keep her 'gunning'.

Although my friend has permanently left her career serving as a full time soldier in the New Zealand Army, her determination to keep pushing forward now that she's a civilian is one of the reasons why I approached her to ask if I could tell her story. Being the generous, helpful and supportive person that she is, she said 'yes' to support this project four days after I had emailed her. She even sent me a self-written piece of a part of her life that I could write about. The only thing she was wary of, was putting her name to the story and after you read her piece, I'm sure you will agree with me that her wariness is in fact her humbleness. When I read her story, I couldn't believe that I was reading about my mate. I remember her exactly as this story depicts yet, I never appreciated how incredible she was at the time.

In respect of my dear friends privacy, I will not reveal her identity. However, we are fortunate enough to still be inspired by her story by being able to have a personal, true and one on one experience with her directly. With her permission, I am pleased to inform you that the following extract is an experience from my friends' life that she has written for us all - herself. Ever supportive of a cause that uplifts and empowers women in a positive way, I would like to take this opportunity to thank her tremen-

dously for the contribution that she's made, and I encourage you to tell all of your friends and sisters, that they're brilliant and beautiful women.

To my friend,

I've said it before and I'll say it again.....'YOU ARE PHENOMENAL!'

Working in a supermarket full time for a year and a half after I finished school seemed ok to me. I had a job and the time to really think long and hard about what it was I really wanted to do. At the time, I thought that I would never make it into university and soon discovered that a few of my old school peers were laughing at me because of my then career choice. This upset me because fortunately for them, they WERE at University or Polytech. However, I have them to thank for the next step I decided to take, as it would end up being one of the best decisions I could have ever possibly made.

I joined the New Zealand Army in 2003 as a Soldier in the trade of Supply Technician and thoroughly enjoyed the role. One month after Basic Training, I travelled for the first time to the South Island of New Zealand on the Interislander Ferry, a means of transport that I'd never experienced before. Having been in the Army for only one year, I was fortunate enough to go to Darwin, Australia for 6 weeks. I loved the travel that my new job provided and enjoyed the opportunities that it was offering too but something else soon caught my eye and life as I knew it, was about to change for good.

In 2006, my interest in becoming a Physical Training Instructor (PTI) developed. I wasn't fit at the time and was a bit bigger than I am now, but the goal I had in mind to become a PTI motivated me to train long and hard. Famed for being physically and mentally demanding, I wanted to be at my fittest and strongest to try and pass the PTI selection process, so I gave training everything I had.

To help make things easier for when I did go through to PTI selection, I requested to attend the 6 week Assistant Physical Training Instructors Course. This fitness course is a course conducted in the military and taught by military personnel with the main focus on teaching students the necessary skills to be able to take group

classes. Like many military courses, there was a fair amount of condensed theory, lesson planning and of course, practical elements that were physically challenging. Out of any course that I'd ever done, this by far was the most difficult I'd come across but also the most fun. To maintain sanity and to not lose the plot completely, having the balance of working hard and playing hard was imperative to me and the other aspiring students. It also helped that I was working with a group of highly motivated and like-minded people, and we were all out to get through the intense course successfully.

Towards the end of the course, after all the theory and class taking tests had been done and dusted, there was one last obstacle that needed to be completed called 'The Longest Day'. This test is based on approximately 15 hours of non-stop physical activity and really, this is the one thing that everyone who does this course, gets naturally anxious about. The night before The Longest Day was due to start, we slept inside the indoor gymnasium on the training mats used to do workouts on. It was lights out at 7pm.

We were woken to a siren and instructors screaming at us to hurry up and get our kit packed away. I did a quick time check; it was 2am. Adrenaline kicked in and I was frantic, trying as quickly as I could to get all of my sleeping gear into my Army pack. Our dress was our army issue PT (physical training) shorts, our army issue PT t-shirt and running shoes. Our first exercise was the Beep Test (15m laps of the gym in a certain amount of time before the beep goes off). We must've started on level 9 instead of level 1 because those beeps came through pretty fast! I was definitely wide-awake by then and our recovery between each lap was the Iron Chair (sitting position, back against the wall which is basically a nice way to make your thighs burn). I looked around at some of my classmates and was glad to see that I wasn't the only one puffing so early in the test! We finished that exercise and quickly changed into army trousers, army boots and our military issue rugby jersey. We moved straight into the next activity, which was climbing a rope for 10m unassisted using only body strength. We each had to quickly complete 10 rope climbs before needing to put our packs and webbing on. With our rifles in our hands, we waited anxiously for the next set of instructions.

Just our luck; not only was it really dark, but it was also raining. My mood dampened thinking about the 30kg of weight I had to carry plus the rainwater on top of that too. I knew I had to sort my mood out fast. We'd only been going for about 40mins so I began to apply 'self-talk'. I taught myself how to self-talk during Basic Training in

Waiouru. It worked well for me as it helped me to stay motivated and not give up even when I thought things seemed so out of reach. It wasn't easy but over the years I've learnt from experience, that the mind has so much power and influence over the body.

14 KM and two hours of pack marching later, we were at our first checkpoint and there was some morning light. It was at this point that we ate pancakes, bacon, baked beans and sausages. With bags under our eyes, we all scoffed our food down not saying a word.

Our next task included 7KM of Orienteering or more running. We were split into 2 teams and had to stay connected the whole time with a rope. This was particularly difficult especially as all 3 of us females were a bit slower than the males so we had to work extra hard to keep up. From there the next lot of activities included a 400m pool swim, 30KM run and bike in pairs with a river crossing swim in between, 10KM river and sea kayak in pairs (this was my favourite as my legs got to have a rest) and a 7KM run carrying a log on a soft sand beach to name a few. There were a few more activities but because of the physical and mental exhaustion, I can't remember anymore. I do remember our last activity though and that was the New Zealand Army entry-level fitness test. This is the fitness test that one must do when applying for the New Zealand Army and is a combination of a 2.4KM run, pressups and curlups. We all managed to get through this last task with some of us only just managing to make it in the required time. The Longest Day started at 2am that morning and finished at 5.20pm that afternoon. We completed the day with a well-deserved BBQ and beers.

After 6 weeks of early morning rises, late finishes, running to and from meal timings, a 15 hour day full of physical activities in the rain or in short, an all round intense experience, I passed my APTI course and was ready to take on the next challenging level of progressing to the PTI Selection.

Well so I thought....

A month before the PTI selection, myself and two others who were getting ready for selection, worked and trained at the Linton Military Camp Gymnasium. When everyone else in camp started work at 8am, work started at 7am for us and finished at 5pm when everyone else knocked off at 4-4.30pm. Our tasks included sweeping the floors, wiping down the weights in the weights room, getting rid of the weeds in the

gardens and picking up any rubbish. There were often periods where during training sessions, some instructors loved to test our mental strength. They would attempt to put us down in the worst way and often it would be quite demoralising for the boys, especially if I beat them at anything. I did ok in regards to the way we were treated because my heart was set on becoming a Physical Training Instructor so I took each negative remark with a grain of salt.

The week of the PTI selection started on a Saturday in Waiouru where we had to go through a psych test as well as a physical test. We were allowed to rest on the Sunday, but still had to run to and from the *wharekai* (eating quarters) during meal timings. We were in bed by 7pm.

At 2am on the Monday, the instructors (with that wonderful siren) were heard screaming in our barracks. Feeling prepared and ready to go in PT shorts, a PT t-shirt and running shoes, we were made to run, jog on the spot and sprint around camp before being forced back to barracks. None of us showered; we just went straight back to bed because we didn't know how long we'd get to rest. After sleeping for a few more hours and having breakfast, we were at the gym. The actual 3-day test was about to begin.

The first activity we needed to pass was the New Zealand Army Required Fitness Level test. I ran the 2.4km run in 9mins 45secs and did 29 pressups just as I'd done on the Saturday. The final part of that test was the curl-ups. We needed to do 130 to be able to move on. I got to approximately 50 before being warned about my technique. I got to 70 and was told to stop. That was the end of selection for me and it had barely even started.

Devastated, I returned home and to work feeling a whole range of emotions including anger, extreme disappointment, hurt, frustration, embarrassment and humiliation. I cried for about a day and wanted to leave the Army. My good boss at the time had a yarn with me and I ended up staying put for a further four more years.

I look back now and even though it wasn't really that long ago, had I passed selection and become a PTI, I know that I wouldn't be in the position that I'm currently in. The chain of events that happened shortly after returning from PTI selection, have led me to where I am right now. Apart from pursuing a career in social work and learning

about my Maori history through our Maori language and culture, I have a fiancé who is honestly one of the most beautiful people, both inside and out, that I've ever met. He is very supportive in whatever choices I make and he is also my best friend. We have a home together as well as a cute dog and we're very happy.

The reason why I wanted to share this particular story about myself is because these events have taught me a lot about myself and exactly what I'm capable of. It has assisted in shaping me as a person and has helped me to develop and grow immensely. I know that life is full of challenges and failures can come in different forms and at different levels. I know for sure that although it may not be easy, I am blessed with the ability to manage and overcome whatever life throws at me.

*Camouflaged in green skin,
blotched with tussock brown patches,
she proudly bears a badged beret -
an image of pressed perfection.*

*A humble Maori woman,
a courageous, determined Soldier.
She's run for miles, exhausted her muscles.
Conditioned, athletic, robust.*

*Prepared and Alert.
Trained to be of service.
At a moments notice - she'll move!*

*And like the words
in a New Zealand Army Gymnasium,
this Soldier is
'Fit to Fight.'*