

"Battle of Manners Street"

Archives New Zealand



Hundreds of soldiers and civilians slugged it out on the streets of Wellington during the 'Battle of Manners St', the most infamous clash between New Zealanders and American servicemen during the Second World War.

Allies fighting each other was not good publicity, and news of the three-hour brawl was hushed up at the time. The incident may have begun after white soldiers from the southern United States insulted local Māori. American sailors and New Zealand merchant seamen also became involved.

At any one time during the two years after June 1942, between 15,000 and 45,000 American soldiers and sailors were based in New Zealand (see 12 June), either before or immediately after experiencing the horrors of war in the Pacific.

The 'American invasion' led to a clash of cultures. Romantic liaisons developed between American troops and New Zealand women, and about 1500 New Zealand women married Americans during the war.

Many New Zealand men, especially soldiers serving overseas, resented the popularity of these American 'bedroom commandos'. Tensions erupted into large-scale fights in Auckland and Wellington.