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Warfare 1914-1918 (New Zealand)

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Between August 1914 and November 1918 approximately 102,000 New Zealand soldiers fought alongside Australian troops as part of the British army's campaigns at Gallipoli in 1915, on the Western Front from 1916 to 1918, and in Sinai-Palestine from 1916 to 1918.

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Introduction

New Zealand's contribution to the First World War was as a junior but nonetheless dedicated member of the Imperial British war effort. Perceptions of a German threat to security in the Pacific prior to the First World War, matched with New Zealand's close economic, political and social and cultural links to Great Britain, contributed to New Zealand's enthusiastic response to Britain's declaration of war on Germany on 4 August 1914.

New Zealand's Army of 1914

New Zealand's military establishment of 1914 was shaped by both the experience of warfare in South Africa between 1899 and 1902 and by the British military requirements for standardised imperial military units. Mounted infantry performed the vital protection, reconnaissance and dismounted roles in the field, while infantry formed the bulk of New Zealand's 20,000-strong Territorial Force established in 1910, under the command of Major-General Sir Alexander Godley (1867-1957).

Training and Equipping the Territorial Force

A territorial training system was introduced in mid-1911 at the direction of Field Marshal LordHoratio Herbert Kitchener (1850-1916), which required staged conscripted service by young New Zealand males between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. Peace-time arrangements saw New Zealand establishing seventeen infantry regiments and twelve mounted rifles regiments raised within provincial boundaries. Specialist units including engineers, post and telegraph and medical services were generally staffed by officers and men who had corresponding professional roles in civilian life.

The uniforming, equipping and arming of New Zealand forces was based on British military establishments. New Zealand Army other ranks' uniforms, introduced in 1912, were modelled on the British 1902 Pattern uniform, with a four-pocket tunic and trousers, wrapped from ankle to knee in woollen puttees, matched with either a peaked forage cap or wide-brimmed felt hat. The felt hat was originally worn in the Australian style with a crease running from front to back. However, a hat with the crown shaped into four dents rising to a peak, first adopted by the Wellington Infantry Battalion, the Otago Mounted Rifles and the New Zealand Field Artillery, became associated with the Wellington Infantry Battalion during the Gallipoli Campaign and was adopted by the New Zealand Division in 1916 as the iconic New Zealand military "lemon squeezer".

The standard rifle was the .303 calibre Lee Enfield; either the Long Lee Enfield used in South Africa or, for the mounted units, the newer rifle, Short Magazine Lee Enfield No.1. Infantry were equipped with a New Zealand modification of the 1908 Mills Burrows webbing equipment, manufactured by the Mills Equipment Company, while Engineers were provided with a basic webbing garrison rig. Mounted Rifles Regiments used New Zealand designed and manufactured bandolier equipment, while the New Zealand Field Artillery wore the standard British 1903 Pattern leather bandolier. Modern 18-pounder field guns and 4.5-inch howitzers were imported to New Zealand for training together with the .303 Mark III Maxim Gun. General Sir lan Hamilton (1853-1947), Inspector-General of the Overseas Forces, visited the 1914 annual camps throughout the country, observing that "after a comparatively short period of continuous training the infantry would... be ready for war as regards their tactical efficiency".^[1]

Preparations for War

New Zealand had readied for war late in July 1914 as the crisis in Europe deepened. When news of Britain's declaration of war reached New Zealand on 5 August 1914, the government offered an Expeditionary Force under the command of Major-General Godley to assist the British war effort on the Western Front. When this offer was accepted by the British government on 12 August a volunteer force drawn principally from those with previous military service quickly assembled a "Main Body" of a brigade of four battalions of infantry, a brigade of three regiments of mounted rifles, the Otago Mounted Rifles as a separate divisional mounted rifles regiment, and support units. The various units were recruited within each of the four military districts: Auckland, Wellington, Canterbury and Otago. Each district provided an Infantry battalion and a regiment of Mounted Rifles. Troopers provided their own saddlery, soldiers their own boots. Patriotic societies provided shirts and other comforts, while the Defence Force supplied uniforms, equipment and weaponry.

First Victory

A hastily-assembled expeditionary force of 1,374 New Zealand troops landed at Apia, German Samoa on 29 August 1914 to accept the surrender of the second German possession after Togoland to fall to allied troops following the outbreak of war. New Zealand's victory was almost short-lived with the appearance on the skyline of the German cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, but both warships departed without firing a shot at the New Zealand troops who had gathered on the beach to observe their movements.^[2]

Departure of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force

The Main Body assembled in Wellington in September 1914 and the 8,454 men and 3,815 horses sailed the following month

once sufficient naval escort had been obtained (including the Imperial Japanese naval vessel *Ibuki*). After a voyage punctuated by the destruction of the German raider SMS *Emden* by the HMAS *Sydney*, the combined Australian and New Zealand force disembarked at Alexandria in December 1914 where they were to be prepared for active service before transferring to the Western Front. Turkey's entry into the war in October 1914 soon involved New Zealand forces in Middle Eastern conflict. In December 1914 New Zealand troops were part of the armed presence in Cairo to support the British establishment of the new Sultanate in order to suppress any local disturbances. In February 1915 New Zealand troops first went into battle against Turkish forces which had crossed the Sinai Desert to attack the Suez Canal. The ease with which this attack was repulsed gave the New Zealanders a false impression of Turkish military capabilities.

The Gallipoli Campaign 1915

On 25 April 1915 New Zealand troops were committed together with Australian forces near Gaba Tepe as part of the Anglo-French amphibious assault on the Gallipoli Peninsula. While peacetime training had emphasised how mounted infantry and infantry should work together, New Zealand's mounted regiments and horses were left in Egypt in April 1915. New Zealand infantry landed close to Ari Burnu at the small cove now known as Anzac Cove on 25 April, following behind the main Australian assault on the heights north of Gaba Tepe. New Zealand troops first went into action on the morning of 25 April, and for the rest of the campaign became intermingled with the Australian forces in the small allied foothold at Anzac Cove. Amongst the significant battles in which the New Zealand forces took part were the defence of Anzac Cove on 2 May the attack on Krithia on 8 May and the Sari Bar offensive between 6 and 9 August.

Tactics employed by New Zealand troops developed from the massed infantry attacks for which their peacetime training had prepared them, through to the bitter hand to hand bayonet fighting and grenade tactics developed for the August offensive. Specialist machine gun units and sniping and observation sections were also developed during the campaign. The mounted rifles regiments arrived in May 1915 and played a significant role in the New Zealand assault towards Chunuk Bair on 6 August. The 18-pounder field guns and 4.5-inch howitzers of the New Zealand Field Artillery were also vital in suppressing Turkish threats at Anzac Cove, while the sole Victoria Cross won by a New Zealander at Gallipoli was awarded to Corporal Cyril Bassett (1892-1983) for his tireless work during 8 August to maintain lines of communication with the advance New Zealand forces on the crest of Chunuk Bair. The New Zealand experience at Gallipoli was most notable for the challenges presented by the terrain, diet, rampant dysentery, water shortages and poor sanitation, a combination best described as an epic of endurance. A select number of New Zealanders who landed on 25 April remained at Anzac Cove to take part in the final evacuation in December 1915. The 7,500 New Zealand casualties included 2,721 dead.^[3]

The New Zealand Division 1916-1919

The New Zealand forces in 1916 were again concentrated in Egypt, where the infantry brigade was increased to a full infantry division under the command of Major-General Sir Andrew Russell (1868-1960) for service in France. The New Zealand Division was now comprised of the First and Second Infantry Brigades and the Third New Zealand Rifle Brigade raised in 1915, elements of which had taken part in the brief Senussi Campaign in western Egypt from November 1915 to January 1916.^[4]

Arrival in France 1916

In May 1916 the New Zealand Division left Egypt for Marseilles and thence to Armentières as part of I ANZAC Corps, 2rd Army. In June 1916 the Division became part of II ANZAC Corps commanded by Lieutenant-General Godley and learned the essentials of trench warfare and raiding while keeping the opposing German forces *in situ* during the commencement of the Somme Offensive. The lessons were hard-learned, for by mid-August the division had suffered some 2,500 casualties. In September 1915, as part of the 4th Army, the division attacked towards Flers, and during twenty-three days of attacks and skirmishes suffered some 7,000 casualties, including 1,500 dead. Amongst the dead was Sergeant Donald Brown (1890-1916), posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for leading an assault on German machine gun positions and rallying his men amidst heavy shellfire.

Features of the New Zealand Division

A distinctive feature of the New Zealand Division was the presence of Maori and Pacific Island troops in what became known as the New Zealand (Maori) Pioneer Battalion. As the New Zealand Native Contingent, Maori troops were based in Malta in 1915 and took part in the August 1915 offensive on Sari Bar at Gallipoli. In 1916 a Pioneer Battalion comprised of Maori Pioneers, reinforcements from the Pacific Islands of Nuie and the Cook Islands and personnel from the Otago Mounted Rifles Regiment arrived in France, where they staged two trench raids in mid-1916, thereafter undertaking trench construction and other support work, as well as operating the Divisional Trench Warfare School. New Zealand Tunnellers, many of them former coal miners, served with distinction at Gallipoli and on the Western Front, particularly at Messines in 1917 and at Arras from 1916 to 1918. A New Zealand Cyclist Corps was also formed in March 1916 to operate as mobile light infantry, but from July 1916 the unit largely worked behind the New Zealand lines in support roles, fighting as infantry in April and July-August 1918. Other specialist New Zealand units operated .303 Vickers Medium Machine Guns and Trench Mortars.

Meanwhile in New Zealand the demands of keeping a full division – some 20,000 soldiers – in the field required the introduction of conscription on 16 November 1916. Initially, balloting was used to make up the shortfall in volunteers, but from August 1917 recruits other than volunteers were conscripted. Single and newly-married men were the first to be balloted, but this was extended to married men without children in October 1917, and in 1918 married men with one or two children were also being called up. Those who refused to serve were classed as defaulters and were court-martialed and sentenced to hard labour, while fourteen were forcibly enlisted and shipped to the Western Front. Archibald Baxter's (1881-1970) published memoir of his brutal treatment in the frontline as a conscientious objector, *We Will Not Cease*, remains a classic of anti-war literature. Some Maori – particularly those in the Waikato Region who remained incensed at the confiscation of Maori land during and after the New Zealand Wars of the 19th century – also resisted conscription, arguing that it contravened the Treaty of Waitangi.^[6]

The New Zealand Division was also supported by a network of camps, hospitals and depots in England, commanded by Brigadier-General George Richardson (1868-1938). The principal New Zealand base was at Sling Camp in Wiltshire which could accommodate up to 5,000 men, while additional camps provided training for specialist troops. The three New Zealand General Hospitals at Brockenhurst, Walton-on-Thames and Codford were capable of treating in excess of 3,500 men. Wounded or sick soldiers were then sent to convalescent homes before either returning to the Division via Etaples in France, or being repatriated to New Zealand via the discharge depot at Torquay. [7]

The New Zealand Division in Belgium 1917

In 1917 the New Zealand Division, expanded with a Fourth Brigade formed in March 1917, took part in two major offensives in Belgium. In June 1917 the division played a key role in seizing the Belgian town of Messines following the detonation of three large mines located under the German trenches. Captain Samuel Frickleton (1891-1971) won the Victoria Cross for braving heavy artillery fire to destroy two enemy machine-gun posts. The success of this attack is commemorated in part by the twinning of Messines with the New Zealand town of Featherston. The division's involvement in the Third Battle of Ypres, attacking the Passchendaele Ridge resulted in what remains New Zealand's most disastrous military day. On 4 October the division captured Gravenstafel Spur, and a week later was given the objective of capturing Bellevue Spur. On 12 October New Zealand troops attacked across waterlogged ground at Passchendaele suffering some 2,700 casualties without gaining Bellevue Spur. In December 1917, the Division was in the Polygon Wood sector, and on 3 December attacked the Polderhoek Chateau, where Private Henry Nicholas (1891-1918) was awarded the Victoria Cross for single-handedly shooting, bayoneting or bombing all the members of an enemy strong point.

One consequence of the military debacles of 1917 was that New Zealand military discipline was hardened in response to the lowering morale/discipline of the troops. Five New Zealanders were executed between 1916 and 1918, four on the charge of desertion and one for mutiny. All five sentences were finally pardoned by the New Zealand government in 2000.^[8]

The New Zealand Division in France 1918

From 24 March 1918 the New Zealand Division, reduced to three brigades, played a key role in halting and turning the German Spring Offensive which had split apart the British 3rd and 5th Armies. New Zealand troops stabilised a gap in the lines between Hebuterne and Hamel, at the cost of 500 dead and 1,800 wounded. A collection of New Zealand units were also in the desperate fighting to hold the line on the Lys, with 201 men of an Entrenching Battalion isolated and taken prisoner at Meteren on 16 April. The allied counterattack in July included the successful New Zealand assault at Rossignol Wood, where Sergeant \$Warfare 1914-1918 (New Zealand) - 1914-1918-Online

Richard Travis (1884-1918) won the Victoria Cross for destroying German defences and single-handedly killing two machine gun crews and their reinforcements. The reputation of the Division at this time was detailed in a German intelligence appraisal captured at Hebuterne:

A particularly good assault Division. Its characteristics are a very strongly developed individual self-confidence or enterprise, characteristic of the colonial British, and a specially pronounced hatred of the Germans. The Division prides itself on taking few prisoners.^[9]

From August 1918 the New Zealand Division again played a key role in defeating the German army across the old Somme battlefields of 1916 towards the Hindenburg Line and thence to the River Selle. Five New Zealanders were awarded the Victoria Cross during the last 100 days of the war. On 4 November New Zealand troops liberated the town of Le Quesnoy by scaling the massive Vauban-designed defensive walls by ladder, thereby liberating this historic village without loss of civilian life. Following the 11 November Armistice, New Zealand troops marched into Germany in December 1918, occupying Cologne until the division was concentrated at Mulheim and disbanded by 25 March 1919.^[10]

The New Zealand Mounted Rifles in Sinai and Palestine 1916-1918

The New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade, under the command of Brigadier-General Edward Chaytor (1868-1939) served with Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division as part of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. Some New Zealanders also served in this campaign with the Imperial Camel Corps. The New Zealand Mounted Rifles fought alongside Australian and British forces in the Sinai, taking part in the battles of Rafa Romani and Gaza. Chaytor had demonstrated his ability to command mounted troops, particularly his "real eye for ground and a fight" and took command of the Mounted Division in April 1917, while General Sir Edmund Allenby (1861-1936) assumed command of the Expeditionary Force. The New Zealanders then fought in the Battle of Beersheeba in October 1917, advancing to Jaffa on 16 November once the Turkish line had been broken, resting at Richon le Zion while Jerusalem was liberated in December.

In February 1918 the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade broke through the Turkish lines at El Muntar, opening up the advance to Jericho. Raids against Amman and Es Salt were less successful, but in September 1918, as part of "Chaytor's Force", a composite division of mounted rifles, infantry and artillery, the New Zealanders attacked towards Megiddo, where Turkish forces quickly surrendered. On 22 September the Mounted Division crossed the Jordan River, taking Es Salt the following day and Amman on 25 September, covering more than seventy kilometres and taking 3,000 prisoners in the process. New Zealand machine gunners destroyed a column of retreating Turks in the Barada Gorge, near Damascus, which was in turn entered by Australian Light Horsemen on 1 October. The New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade was already back in camp at Richon le Zion when the Armistice with the Ottoman Empire came into effect on 31 October. One regiment returned to Gallipoli to monitor the Armistice, while the rest of the Brigade experienced uneasy relations with the local Arab population, culminating in the massacre of the villagers at Surafend in revenge for the murder of a New Zealand soldier. The Brigade returned to Egypt in December 1918, where it helped to suppress nationalist unrest before returning to New Zealand. New Zealand's casualties during the Sinai-Palestine Campaign totaled 1,470, of whom 543 died. [11]

Other New Zealand Units

New Zealanders also served with Australian signalers in Mesopotamia in 1916 and 1917 and in Persia in 1917, as part of the ANZAC Wireless Squadron, which provided mobile wireless communication and interception services. Four New Zealand Sergeants served with the Syren and Elope forces of the British North Russia Expeditionary Force until withdrawn in March 1919, while a number of New Zealanders volunteered to serve with the North Russian Relief Force. Other New Zealanders served with Dunsterforce in Mesopotamia and Persia in 1918 and 1919. It should also be noted that significant numbers of New Zealanders served with the Australian Imperial Force (Wilfred Victor Knight (1890-1915) was the first New Zealander killed at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 while serving in the 1st Australian Infantry Battalion), while a smaller number, most of whom were officers, served in the British army, including John Hugh Allen (1887-1915), the son of Sir James Allen (1855-1942) the Minister of Defence, who was killed in action on 6 June 1915 while serving as a Lieutenant in the Essex Regiment at Gallipoli. [12]

New Zealanders in the Royal Navy

Some 500 New Zealanders served with the Royal Navy, including Lieutenant-Commander William Sanders (1883-1917), who served on Royal Navy minesweepers in 1916 before transferring to Q-Ships. In February 1917 Sanders was given command of HMS Prize, a captured German schooner which had been converted into a Q-Ship for the purpose of enticing German submarines within range of the Q-Ship's guns. Sanders' ship encountered the U-93 on 30 April 1917, during which engagement both ships were badly damaged. Sanders received the Victoria Cross for his coolness under fire. Prize was lost with all hands on 14 August 1917, when it was torpedoed by the U-48. A significant contingent of New Zealanders were serving on the HMS Pyramus and the HMS Philomel at the outbreak of war in 1914, while HMS New Zealand, gifted by New Zealand to the Royal Navy and launched in 1911, fought at Heligoland Bight in August 1914, Dogger Bank in January 1915, and at Jutland on 31 May 1916. The battlecruiser came through these engagements largely unscathed, which the crew attributed to their captain wearing during the fighting the Maori Tiki and Piupiu gifted to the ship during a visit to New Zealand in 1913.

When HMS *Philomel* was decommissioned in 1917, it became a depot ship in Auckland, only briefly returning to active service in 1918 as a depot ship for trawlers converted for minesweeping operations in response to the activities of the German raider SMS *Wolf*, which had laid mines off New Zealand. Two New Zealand hospital ships, the *Maheno* and *Marama*, were equipped and dispatched to assist in the treatment of troops during and after the Gallipoli Campaign.^[13]

New Zealand Airmen

New Zealanders also served with the Royal Flying Corps, the Royal Air Force and the Royal Naval Air Service including Major Keith Park, (1892-1975), later Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park, in command of 11 Group, Royal Air Force during the Battle of Britain in 1940, and Arthur Coningham (1895-1948), later Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham, commander of the Desert Air Force in North Africa and the 1st Tactical Air Force in 1942 and 2nd Tactical Air Force during D-Day. Second Lieutenant William Rhodes-Moorhouse (1887-1915), whose mother was of Maori descent, flew with 2 Squadron in France in 1914, and on 26 April 1915 continued with his attack on a German rail junction at Courtrai in Belgium despite having been badly wounded and his aircraft severely damaged. He returned to base but died the following day. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross. Major Keith Logan "Grid" Caldwell (1895-1980), later Air Commodore, was commissioned into the Royal Flying Corps in 1916 and became noted for his aggression as a pilot in Nieuport and SE5A fighter aircraft in 60 and 74 Squadrons. The leading New Zealand ace of the war was Ronald Burns Bannerman (1890-1978), later Air Commodore, who was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and Bar in recognition of his three-month active service in Sopwith Dolphins on the Western Front in 1918.^[14]

The Cost of the War

New Zealand maintained large military training camps near Wellington, at Trentham and Featherston, and smaller camps at Awapuni and Narrow Neck, where some 120,000 men were trained over four years. Approximately 102,000 New Zealanders embarked for active service of whom 18,000 died as a result of their service and some 41,000 were wounded or became sick. Twenty-five years later, sons of many veterans of the First World War enlisted for service in the Second World War.^[15]

Conclusion

New Zealand emerged from the First World War with an enhanced status as a Dominion within the British Empire, signing the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 and becoming a member of the League of Nations upon its formation. During the 1922 Chanak Crisis, New Zealanders once again volunteered their services in the looming conflict with Turkey, but the popular militarism which had prevailed in 1914 gradually faded once the Chanak Crisis ended and communities began to erect their war memorials and count the cost of the war. Anzac Day, the anniversary of the first landings of Australian and New Zealand soldiers at Gallipoli on 25 April, became a national day of war commemoration from 1916 and the Gallipoli Campaign itself became understood as a defining event in the development of New Zealand's national identity. [16]

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Notes

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- 5. † Originally entitled the New Zealand Maori Contingent when it was formed in October 1914, the unit was reformed into the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion in February 1916 with the addition of non-Maori personnel and became the New Zealand (Maori) Pioneer Battalion in September 1917 when it again became an entirely Maori unit. See Cowan, James: Maori in the Great War. Auckland 1926, online: http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-CowMaor.html (retrieved 16 August 2016
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