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NEW ZEALAND & THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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Introduction

"*When New Zealanders went to war, they were ignorant of its causes and innocent of its meaning.*"[1]

On the 5th August 1914, New Zealand found herself at war. Britain had declared war on Germany, and as a loyal and patriotic member of the British Empire, New Zealand followed suit within a matter of hours, by formally announcing its own Declaration of War from the steps of the Wellington General Assembly Library. At this time, New Zealand was the youngest Dominion in the Empire with a population of just over one million and "*as remote from the affairs of the world as we were remote from the realities of war*".[2] For most New Zealanders, it took a stretch of the imagination to comprehend that the country was at war on the other side of the world.[3] In many ways, New Zealand's entry into the war was characterized by a sense of enthusiasm and adventure, and a somewhat 'light-hearted and carefree' spirit, later to be 'shattered by the horrors and suffering of the long war that followed'.[4] New Zealand was about to undergo a rude and shocking awakening to the realities of war. Pre-1914, New Zealand had no conception of the costs involved with such a war. By 1918 however, New Zealand would never again approach war with such naïveté or innocence, nor commit its soldiers to battle in the same spirit or manner.[5] As Ena Ryan, a child at the time of New Zealand's entry into the war, said: "*…though I didn't know it, that was the door shutting on this quiet, innocent, peaceful, colonial New Zealand. We've never been the same again*".[6]

This essay will discuss New Zealand's involvement in the 'Great War' of 1914-1918 and the impact that this war had on New Zealand society. It will canvas such topics as the impact of New Zealand's British heritage; the country's war effort and service abroad; New Zealand's most important and significant battles in the country's history – Gallipoli, the Somme and Passchendaele, as well as the Anzac Legacy; the social dimensions of war on the home front; Armistice and loss; the instituting of Anzac Day; New Zealand nationhood and identity; and lastly, the 'forgotten war' and the legacy of the 'silent soldiers'.

New Zealand's British Inheritance

Part of the mythology surrounding New Zealand at the outbreak of war concerned New Zealand's ties with 'Mother England' and the perceived role of New Zealand occupying a special place in the British Empire. New Zealanders somewhat excessive devotion to Britain came from a strong feeling of attachment: firstly, due to the fact that Britain was for most colonists New Zealand's ancestral homeland; and secondly, by bonds of sentiment, economic trade and financial debt.[7] As Philip Soljak states:

> "*Racial, cultural, political and economic ties bind New Zealand more closely to Britain than any other Dominion or colony. Pioneer leaders had planned to make of New Zealand a veritable* "*Britain of the South,*" *preserving much of the old economic order; only irresistible social forces thwarted their purpose*".[8]

Devotion to this 'motherland' stemmed, firstly, from Government policy, which from the 1880s up until the First World War consistently supported the British campaign for imperial federation. Although this notion was supported by other colonial Governments, it was whole-heartedly and persistently pursued by New Zealand alone.[9]

Secondly, 'the tradition of Empire' was itself a deeply-rooted belief in New Zealand at this time. The colonists saw Great Britain in the image of Queen Victoria: respectable, moral and the most powerful entity in the world.[10] The first generation of colonists believed that the mission of the British was 'to expand and rule the uncivilised world', and that it was 'the birthright' of the colonists to carry out this 'noble task'.[11] This belief was so deeply ingrained in the colonists' psyche, that in the 1840s Governor Grey advocated – unsuccessfully – to extend the British Empire in the Pacific by annexing Samoa, Fiji and most of the islands in the South Pacific to create a 'Grand Island Dominion' centering on New Zealand.[12]

Thirdly, the colonists considered New Zealand to be 'the most dutiful of Britain's daughters', a claim which neither the Canadians, nor the Australians, nor the South Africans ever contested.[13] This sentiment was echoed in 1873 by Anthony Trollope, who upon visiting New Zealand wrote in his book *Australia and New Zealand*: "*It may be well to notice here that as Auckland considers herself to be the cream of New Zealand, so does New Zealand consider herself to be the cream of the British empire*".[14] In 1885, when fears of an Anglo-Russian war abounded, J.A. Froude, who was visiting New Zealand at the time, also observed that 'the patriotism of the colonists was

inflammable as gunpowder', a feeling which reached its climax during the Boer War when the Canadians, Australians, and New Zealanders competed with each other to help Great Britain in repressing the Boers in South Africa.[15] According to Keith Sinclair, this sort of 'hysterical imperialism', composed of 'a crude and intolerant racial prejudice and militarism, as much as of love of the motherland', persisted in New Zealand society for a long time.[16]

In light of these considerations then, it is easily understood why Britain's call to arms was so enthusiastically received in New Zealand on the 5th August 1914.

New Zealand At War

On the outbreak of war, the country threw itself into a frenzy of patriotic activity. Crowds gathered in every town and district to cheer and sing patriotic songs, while throughout the country thousands of men flocked to the local drill halls to enlist in the main body of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force.[17] Ena Ryan recounts how the real worry was not the fact that the country was at war, since Great Britain always won her wars, but rather, how to get there in time, since it was widely believed that the war would only last three months.[18]

According to Ena, some young farmers from the back country of the North Island were so eager to enlist that they rode their horses straight down to the recruiting office in Wanganui, signed up, gave their horses a slap on the back and left them to make their own way home.[19] As Christopher Pugsley states: "*For young men who had not traveled beyond their isolated home town, the war offered escape and a chance to see the world*".[20] Other young men enlisted for other reasons. For example, Ewen Pilling, a university student, enlisted for patriotic reasons – to fight for 'God, King and Empire'. On the outbreak of war, he wrote in his diary:

> "*I believe that the Empire to which I belong stands on God's side in the cause of righteousness and justice in this world and that his servants must array themselves against the power and evil influences and ambitions of a nation like Germany. I believe God calls me in this* way".[21]

For others, like George Skerret, an engineer from Bluff, patriotism was not the foremost reason for enlisting. He writes:

> "*There was a parade called for the Territorials and I volunteered. I don't know why, I think it was because I wanted to be with my mates. King and*

> *Empire was the last thing on my mind. Not everyone was keen to join but many changed their minds when they saw that everyone was going*". [22]

While in the present day the Great War is often shrouded by notions of futility and incompetent, blundering generals, in 1914, and throughout the duration of the war, the New Zealand soldiers serving and dying abroad were well aware of what they were fighting for: "*The one fact that shone out of all the letters home was the absolute belief in what they were fighting for – King and Country and their loved families back home*".[23] The cost of fighting to preserve the rights and freedoms, now taken for granted by so many, was terribly high, and by the time the war ended, those who returned from the war agreed that such a war must never happen again. However, in 1914-1918 'it was something they had to do'.[24] As John A. Lee, who lost an arm in France, later wrote:

> *"With all its rottenness, war was a great adventure in comradeship. There was a brotherhood of suffering among the "other ranks" that stretched even across no-man's-land and incorporated Fritz. I am glad I felt the chafe of a pack strap and the cut of a helmet against my forehead and suffered what other men suffered. I am glad I went".*[25]

<u>New Zealand's War Effort & Service Abroad</u>

The 'Territorial Force' of the New Zealand Army was founded by The Defence Act of 1909, which at the same time introduced compulsory military training for high school cadets.[26] British instructors were brought to New Zealand to create this new army, and in 1910 the British Major General, Alexander Godley, was appointed General of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZDF) of some 30,000 men.[27] Within weeks of war being declared, New Zealand's 'Samoan Force' of 1,413 men and women sailed on His Majesty's New Zealand troopships *Monowai* and *Moeraki,* with an escort of warships, where they seized and occupied German Samoa.[28] Consequently, New Zealand became the first country in the world to occupy a German territory during the First World War.

Two months later on 14th October 1914, the main body of the NZEF departed for Egypt, commanded by Godley, and numbering 8,574 men and 3,818 horses.[29] It was the largest single body of New Zealanders ever to sail from our shores. The New Zealand convoy sailed for Australia, where it was joined by the 20,000 strong 'Australian Imperial Force' convoy, and then

on to Egypt where the New Zealanders joined with the Fourth Australian Infantry Brigade and the First Australian Light Horse Brigade to form the New Zealand and Australian Division commanded by Godley.[30] Following much discussion, the Corps was renamed the 'Australian and New Zealand Army Corps', which gave the Corps its legendary title: the ANZACs.

The ANZACs went on to serve 'King and country' in six countries. In Egypt, they fought the Turks at the Suez Canal. In Turkey they took part in the infamous landing at Gallipoli in April 1915, where they remained in battle with the Turks for nine months. In Palestine part of the ANZACs reorganised into the 'Mounted Rifles' where they continued to fight the Turks until the Turkish surrender in October 1918. Meanwhile the rest of the ANZACs, including the New Zealand Division, had been transferred to the Western Front, and from September 1916 until the allied victory in November 1918 the ANZACs went into action in France, Belgium and Germany, where they participated in the bloody battles of Flers, Messines, the Somme and Passchendaele. During this time, 700 New Zealanders also fought with the British in the Royal Flying Corps, later reorganised into the Royal Air Force (RAF), and several thousand men served with the Royal Navy in Northern European and Mediterranean waters, or on New Zealand's own battle cruiser *New Zealand* which participated in the battle of Jutland.[31] Maori volunteers numbering 2,200 were also involved in active service too, particularly at Gallipoli and in France, while across the channel, large groups of New Zealand women operated as nurses in British hospitals, such as the Codford Hospital in London where wounded New Zealand soldiers recuperated and said of the 'Sisters' that they were "*just all right and are kindness itself*".[32]

According to Soljak, New Zealand's military effort in the Great War may be gauged by the fact that of a total population barely exceeding one million, 124,000 New Zealand men entered the armed forces, 75 percent of which were volunteers. One hundred thousand New Zealand troops went overseas, representing 10 percent of the whole population of the country at that time. In total, New Zealand casualties in the First World War totaled 68,000, including 18,000 killed and 41,000 wounded.[33]

Important Battles in New Zealand's Military History

There are several battles which are of particular importance to New Zealand, both in terms of participation and performance of New Zealand troops, and the impact these battles had on New

Zealand society. For those who fought in these battles, and for those who lost family members in them, the experience and loss was devastating and had long-term ramifications.

The ANZAC Landings & Legacy at Gallipoli

The first battle of enduring significance to both New Zealand and Australia occurred at Gallipoli. It began with the infamous allied landings on the Turkish peninsula on the 25th April 1915, and continued for nine months until the troops were evacuated in December of the following year.

Before the landings at Anzac Cove, the ANZACs had spent six months undergoing training in the Egyptian desert. Impatience and frustration, and the perception that the British were sidelining the Corps in favour of the Canadians and Indians, resulted in mounting friction between Australian and New Zealand soldiers of the ANZAC Corps.[34] As Claude Pocock of the Canterbury Mounted Rifles wrote in 1915: "*The Australian…is a skiting bumptious fool who thinks nobody knows anything but himself. If we meet or see them in a restaurant or anywhere in town there is generally a row of some kind*".[35] Indeed, several disturbances did occur in Cairo, the worst of which – known as the 'Battle of the Wazzir' – took place on Easter 'Good Friday' of 1915, when a riot between certain libertine groups of the ANZAC troops in the brothel quarter of Cairo resulted in several buildings being destroyed by fire. Among the rioters three Australians and one New Zealander were wounded, and while at the ensuing enquiry each side blamed the other for the incident, both countries made a financial payment in reimbursement for the damage.[36]

The disaster that is Gallipoli began soon afterwards. The assault was originally formulated by Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty (1911-1915), as part of his strategic masterplan to end the Turkish Ottoman Empire's involvement as an Enemy power in the First World War, by landing Allied forces on the Gallipoli peninsula, who would then quickly invade, travel to and conquer the Turkish capital city and seat of government in Constantinople, resulting in an Allied open sea route between Europe and Asia. However, quite disastrously and infamously, nothing went according to plan.

On April 25th the appointed day of the Allied 'landing invasion' (following a full month of hesitation, indecision and delays by Allied naval commanders which gave the Turks ample opportunity to reinforce all their coastal defences), the ANZACs – who were meant to wait in reserve and then follow up the retreating Turks – were hastily and prematurely landed by Allied

ships on the wrong beach, 1,500 metres north of their true target destination, and surrounded by rough, inhospitable and scarcely surmountable terrain.[37] By 9am there were 12,000 inexperienced and disorganised Australians ashore.[38] As Tony Fagan of the Auckland Infantry Battalion states: "*It was a matter of just a disorganised crowd of those fine brave fellows not knowing where to go, no one in charge, no orders, no possibility of officers, because they were all scattered in the scrub*".[39]

Unaware that the 'surprise landing' in the Dardanelles had been spotted and observed by Turkish forces from the outset, and that armed Turkish troops were rapidly advancing towards the beach, the first New Zealanders began landing on the northern tip of Anzac Cove an hour later, with orders to reinforce the Australian line on 'Baby 700', a hill leading up to the ridge of Chunuk Bair.[40] Like the Australians, the New Zealanders were also disrupted and scattered by the hilly and impassable landscape, thereby becoming targets for the Turkish snipers who were now lethally in action above the cove. One New Zealand Lieutenant later wrote in his journal:

> "*Some New Zealanders are amongst the first wounded, which shows that those who were first ashore were somewhat cut up. The New Zealanders did splendidly when once they disembarked. As one wounded Australian said to me, 'I thought our fellows could fight, but by – those New Zealanders, when they came up they gave them hell!' Today's casualties are estimated at over 4000*". [41]

All New Zealand's Commissioned Officers (COs) and Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) were killed or wounded that first day, and few New Zealanders reached the Australian line on Baby 700 alive.[42] Their bodies littered Shrapnel Valley and Monash Gully, while scattered bands of ANZACs clung desperately to parts of the ridge around the hill, thereby forming the ANZAC frontline which would remain static for the next nine months.[43]

During these long months of stalemate that followed, several attempts were made by the ANZACs to capture Baby 700. One such attempt became known as 'Bloody Sunday' when a night attack turned into a 'fiasco', supposedly caused by 'inept command decision', resulting in the Otago Infantry Battalion losing 400 of its 800 men.[44] Another disastrous attack known as the 'Cape Helles Failure' resulted in the deaths of a further 853 New Zealanders.[45] Only one mission was successful at Gallipoli – the seizing of Chunuk Bair by the New Zealand Infantry Brigade, at the cost of 700 casualties.[46] On the 8th August 1915, the New Zealanders at Chunuk Bair were for

48 hours 'at the throat of the Turkish Empire'.[47] It was at this moment that New Zealanders had their first opportunity to directly influence the course of world events. Brigade Major Temperley of the New Zealand Infantry Brigade wrote: "*had support been forthcoming at the right time and place…the Turkish Army would have been beaten, Constantinople would have fallen and the War might have been shortened by two years*".[48] Unfortunately, these strategically important heights were lost by the British troops who relieved them, and as Pugsley states, "a priceless opportunity lost".[49] Some 500 Maoris from the Maori Contingent also participated at Gallipoli, hauling water and digging and enlarging trenches from the 'Maori Pa' No. 1 outpost to those further afield.[50]

In a letter home Sergeant George Bollinger of the Wellington Infantry Battalion described these fighting conditions at Gallipoli in detail:

> "*The heat is intense; flies swarm the trenches in millions. The stench from the bodies of our men lying on trenches in front is choking and nearly unbearable. The world outside has great confidence in their men but I often wonder if they realize or try to realize what a hell the firing line is and know that every man desires and cannot help desiring immediate peace*". [51]

As Chris Pugsley writes: "*the Anzacs believed they were going to see war fought properly by the British professionals. Instead they found they had nothing to learn, and that what was needed most of all, common sense, was in short supply*".[52] Indeed, Glyn Harper considers that it was at Gallipoli that the New Zealand soldier discovered his natural talents and military potential, however these abilities could not compensate for failures in planning, leadership, logistics, administration, and insufficient training.[53]

Sections and platoons that had joined from small town and district New Zealand were now a fraction of their original strength, and every New Zealand family would feel that cost.[54] Indeed, as one Lieutenant Colonel P.C. Fenwick of the New Zealand Medical Corps writes: "*New Zealand is paying every bit of her share for the Empire…I know our boys did well, but it is a big price to pay. God help their mothers when they see our casualty lists*".[55] Of the 8,556 New Zealanders who served on Gallipoli, 2,721 died, either during the fighting in the various battles or as a result of wounds or disease.[56] Of this number 252 were buried at sea and 1,669 have no known graves.[57] Twenty-five wounded New Zealanders were taken prisoner by the Turkish: six died in captivity and one after repatriation.[58]

By the time of the rather chaotic evacuation in December, 4,700 wounded New Zealanders were haphazardly evacuated to either Egypt, Malta or England.[59] Lieutenant Colonel Herbert Hart of the Wellington Infantry Battalion said of this evacuation: "*So all we have suffered and sacrificed here has been in vain, a most glorious chance in the history of this war, absolutely failed and lost by the most absurd and ridiculous manner the scheme was commenced*".[60] According to Pugsley, no country traveled so far to fight in this campaign, nor suffered so many casualties for the size of its force.[61] These casualties included not only those who had been killed or wounded, but also the survivors, who, racked with guilt at having survived when their mates had died, returned to an uncomprehending New Zealand and were forced to adjust back to daily life as if they had never been away.[62] To make matters worse, little recognition was given for the effort made by the New Zealanders at Gallipoli. For while Australian commanders made sure that their soldiers received their fair share of gallantry awards, New Zealand commanders did not.[63]

Nevertheless, the experience of Gallipoli marked a step of self-discovery for New Zealanders. There was a growing realization that imperial interests were not necessarily New Zealand interests, and that as a nation we needed to speak out for ourselves.[64] It has often been said that New Zealand attained nationhood on the bloody slopes of Gallipoli.[65] In particular, the struggle at Chunuk Bair has been described as 'New Zealand's finest hour', a notion that was echoed by Ormond Burton of the New Zealand Field Ambulance:

> "*If New Zealanders have a day that is uniquely ours, it is 8 August 1915…the way men died on Chunuk is shaping the deeds yet to be done by the generations still unborn…When the August fighting died down there was no longer any question but that New Zealanders had commenced to realize themselves as a nation*".[66]

Certainly, the Australians and New Zealanders felt that the battle had not been fought in vain. In one respect, Gallipoli confirmed the belief that the New Zealanders were good and capable soldiers. From the outset the New Zealanders believed that they were the best troops there – tougher and 'with more initiative and dash than the British'.[67] By the time of their evacuation, they felt that they had proven themselves to be "*as good as the best in the world*".[68] Lieutenant Colonel William Malone of the Wellington Infantry Battalion echoed this view stating: "*They are all splendid. I cannot sufficiently express my intense admiration of them all. None better in the world*".

Another important development at Gallipoli was that all the animosity that had existed between the Australians and New Zealanders in Egypt had vanished during the fighting. As James Leys at the New Zealand and Australian Division Headquarters wrote soon after: "*The one thing about this skirmish is that it has bound the Australians and NZ's with loops of steel and friendships have been formed which will never be broken*".[69] This bond formed the basis of what is now an Anzac legacy, characterised by close military cooperation, and strong cultural and sentimental connections that have remained strong between the two nations to this day. It is a relationship which, along with the war dead, is remembered and commemorated on Anzac Day each year on both sides of the Tasman Sea.

The Battle of the Somme

Following Gallipoli, New Zealanders spent the remainder of the war in the trenches on the Western Front. It is estimated that out of all New Zealand's casualties in the Great War, 84 percent were sustained in the trenches of France, equating to some 49,560 men.[70] One of these important battles for New Zealand was the 'Battle of the Somme', which began on the 1st July 1916 and lasted until the 15th September of the same year.

In late April 1916, the New Zealand Division had arrived in France through the port of Marseilles. Nineteen thousand strong, it had only been in existence for six weeks, and although it had in its ranks many Gallipoli veterans, it was considered to be a raw untested organisation with the majority of its officers and NCOs lacking experience.[71] The commander of the Division, Sir Andrew Russell, was determined to make his New Zealanders the finest division in France. Consequently, discipline was strict, saluting and dress standards were enforced, and photo-taking was forbidden.[72] However, the Division's real training for war began not in camp, but in the trenches on the Belgian border near the industrial town of Armentières, where the Division experienced its first 'blooding'.

Unfortunately for the New Zealanders, this so-called 'quiet sector' or 'nursery', which was intended to introduce divisions into the ways of trench warfare in France, and considered to be a harsh and demanding test for soldiers and officers alike, was bustling with activity in preparation for the British offensive on the Somme.[73] So instead, of a slow introduction to the realities of war, the New Zealand soldiers were forced to learn the realities of chemical 'poison gas' warfare,

artillery fire, and trench raids the hard way, with their lives on the line. Not surprisingly, casualties were high.

By August the New Zealand Division was marched off to the frontline of the Somme. Interestingly, it was on this grueling march that the soldiers changed the shape of their hats into the 'lemon squeezer', supposedly shaped to represent Mt Egmont, a design which soon became the distinctive New Zealand headdress for the rest of the First World War as well as the Second World War, and later became the ceremonial headdress of the New Zealand Army.[74]

On arriving at the Somme, the Division attacked towards the village of Flers as part of a final attempt to break through the last of the German defensive lines. Despite the fact that the supporting tanks became bogged in the mud and while under heavy artillery fire, the New Zealand Division was successful in seizing its objective and made the largest single advance in a day by a division in the Somme battle.[75] Both the infantry of the Division and the engineers of the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion, a mix of indigenous Maori and British Pakeha troops who were nicknamed "Diggers" for their communication trench digging exploits on the Somme, were praised by the British High Command.[76] One British Army Commander named Rawlinson was reported to have said that: "*…they had done all that was asked of them, and more, and that no Division in the Army had done better*".

As Chris Pugsley states, from this time on, the New Zealand Division had a reputation for being "one of the finest fighting divisions in France".[77] However, though the battle had won the Division much praise, in human terms the cost had been very high. During the Battle of the Somme, New Zealand received 7,400 casualties – the equivalent of seven of its twelve infantry battalions (58 percent of its total infantry forces).[78]

In its attack on the Somme, the New Zealand Division took all its objectives and was 'in the line' for three solid weeks from 15 September until 2 October 1916 – the longest unbroken spell of any division during this phase of the battle.[79] When the soldiers were finally withdrawn from the line, their efficiency and fortitude had earned them a formidable reputation, but the men themselves were exhausted, having reached the limits of their endurance.[80]

These soldiers emerged from the battle war-torn, weary and silent – a fact that caused them to be dubbed the "Silent Division". They were caked in mud, unshaven, their clothes were ruined and they had the appearance of walking skeletons.[81] As one soldier wrote in a letter home:

> "*We must have been a sorry spectacle. Much of our clothing was in rags. Most of us wore sandbags for puttees. Corporal Fletcher, whose trousers had long since gone west, had a sandbag kilt. A waterlogged, mud-plastered greatcoat with the skirts hacked off, mud-laden boots and legs, ammunition and rifles made up an almost intolerable burden for each man*".[82]

By the end of the Somme, the New Zealand soldiers had become professionals, but their experiences in the trenches had driven away the last of their previously-held, but ill-informed, ideas that had overlooked or underestimated the great difficulty and often high cost involved when good forces show 'courage under fire' to triumph and win glorious and long-remembered victories over wicked foes in war. From this time on, the Division would develop into a tough, focused and disciplined fighting force. However, as A.J.P Taylor states, the Somme battle: "*set the picture by which future generations saw the First World War: brave helpless soldiers; blundering obstinate generals; nothing achieved*".[83]

The Battle of Passchendaele

For veterans and historians alike, no word conjures up such horrific images of the First World War as that of 'Passchendaele'. The battle fought here has come to epitomize the tragedy and suffering of the entire war, and particularly, the futility of trench warfare. While the tragedy of Passchendaele 'has evoked more horror and loathing than any other battle-name' in the United Kingdom and Canada, in New Zealand the disaster is largely an untold story.[84] Harper considers that most New Zealanders remain ignorant of this pivotal event in our country's history, as both New Zealand's worst military blunder, and the greatest disaster of any kind to strike our small and vulnerable nation.[85]

The Battle of Passchendaele took place in October 1917 following the successful capture of the village of Messines in June. This earlier victory was credited to the planning and execution of the New Zealand Division and to "*...fearful shell-fire the most nerve-wracking I have seen*".[86] New Zealanders took part in two main ANZAC attacks in the advance on Passchendaele. The first attack on 4 October, and led by the Australians, was a great success and ended with the capture of

Gravenstafel Spur, one of two spurs above the village of Passchendaele in Flanders. The second attack, however, fought to capture the village of Passchendaele itself, was such a terrible failure that it passed into legend as 'Black Friday'.

On the 12th October 1917, following a British-Australian defeat against unexpectedly strong German resistance three days earlier on the 9th, the New Zealanders were dispatched to the front on short notice. Recent rainfall had turned the ground into wet mud and slime, causing the support artillery to become bogged in the mud well behind the frontline, which in turn resulted in no preliminary artillery barrage being fired prior to the attack. Hundreds of unsupported New Zealand men attacked towards Passchendaele village only to find the German barbed wire uncut, causing them to become easy targets for the entrenched Germans armed with heavy machine guns. The men were utterly exposed. They were cut down in a merciless hail of machine gun bullets from both the front and the flank and died on the wire, while the wounded sank down into the wet ground and drowned in the muddy Belgian swamps of the Ravebeek Creek, below Bellevue Spur.[87]

A New Zealand sergeant, W.K. Wilson, recorded in his diary that day: "*A day that will long be remembered by New Zealanders. Our boys and the Aussies went over at 5.30 and got practically cut to pieces…This is the biggest 'slap up' the Nzers have had. Far worse than the Somme I believe*".[88] Another soldier of the Division, Ira Robinson, described the scene in detail in a letter to his sister:

> "*All the stretcher-bearers were killed or wounded and the wounded had to just lie where they were, in some cases for 24 hours on end. It was awful to hear their groans all though that awful day and night. We could not help them as we had to hold the line and there were only a few of us left by now…our rifles would not work – they were jammed with mud, also the machine guns…we were relieved after putting in five days and nights in mud up to our knees and without anything to eat or drink except our 24-hours' rations… a sorry looking lot we were. Some without coats, others without puttees, and most with their clothes all in rags and tatters, and all dead hungry and weary and just tottering with fatigue. The saddest part of all was calling the roll next day*".[89]

The horror of this ordered Passchendaele 'advance', which came at the cost of 843 New Zealand souls, reached the highest levels of the New Zealand government. At a meeting of the Imperial

War Cabinet in London, an angry New Zealand Prime Minister, William Massey, is said to have berated his British counterpart, Lloyd George, saying:

> "*I was told last night…that the New Zealanders…were asked to do the impossible. He said they were sent to Passchendaele, to a swampy locality where it was almost impossible to walk and where they found themselves up against particularly strong wire entanglements which it was impossible for them to cut. They were, he said, simply shot down like rabbits. These are the sort of things that are going to lead to serious trouble*".[90]

This was the first occasion that New Zealand troops had failed to achieve their objective. According to Stewart, the troop's mortification and chagrin at this failure was indescribable.[91] One soldier noted in his diary: "*This is the first occasion when NZ troops have failed. The whole affair failed on account of the awful weather conditions and also through lack of sufficient preparation and coordination with the artillery*".[92] No longer able to boast of their proud reputation of always securing their objectives, the men of the New Zealand Division felt bitter at the losses associated with this futile attack, and relieved when ordered to leave the 'accursed' Passchendaele swamp.[93]

One New Zealand historian, Nicholas Boyack, has claimed that because of the large number of casualties sustained by the New Zealand Division, and its subsequent impact, Passchendaele "*must be considered the most important event in New Zealand Military History*".[94] While the same claim has been made concerning Gallipoli in World War I, and subsequently with regard to New Zealand's participation in the battles of Crete and Monte Cassino during World War II, the experience of Passchendaele is considered an especially significant one for New Zealand.[95] It is considered that the catastrophe at Passchendaele affected more New Zealand families and shattered more lives on a single day than any other event in the nation's history.[96] As Harper states: "*Nearly every New Zealand family was affected by Passchendaele, or knew someone who was*".[97] The significance of Passchendaele, New Zealand's one great military failure in Belgium, can be measured when one considers that 6 per cent of New Zealand's total casualties occurred in just one morning of action on 12 October 1917.[98] This tragedy has to be ranked as the very worst in New Zealand's path towards nationhood.

Many New Zealand soldiers blamed the British Generals, especially General Godley, who was particularly despised by the ANZACs as an 'incompetent and foreign, true-blue British officer'.[99]

However, other officers of the Division, namely General Haig and Sir Andrew Russell, also shared the blame. Harper considers that, in fact, it was the British imperial system of command that failed the New Zealanders on the morning of 12th October 1917, a system which had higher commanders 'leading from the back' as it were, rather than 'leading from the front', and in which men like Godley, Haig, and Russell, were trained to internalise any doubts they may have had.[100] Unfortunately, he concludes, New Zealanders paid the ultimate price for these inadequacies.[101]

Survivors of the doomed Passchendaele battle soon became bitter about this experience. Eventually this bitterness would reach New Zealand as the veterans returned home at the end of the war. As one veteran soldier is recorded as saying: "*The older we get the more bitter we feel about the needless suffering and the loss of so many of our friends*".[102] Anger generated by the Passchendaele attacks never died, particularly after the ground won with so much blood and suffering in 1917 proved impossible to hold the following year. The ground which had been won over four months, at the cost of 275,000 casualties, was lost in just three days in 1918.[103]

The Liberation of Le Quesnoy

Unfortunately, Passchendaele was not the only ground in Europe to be hard-won and then lost. Following their defeat at Passchendaele, the 'broken and dispirited' New Zealanders wintered in the wastes of the Ypres Salient, where they spent 'the bleakest Christmas of the war'.[104] The following March, 1918, the New Zealanders were rushed back to the Somme to 'plug the gaps' on the French and British line, in an attempt to stop the German advance on Amiens.

Military conscription, which the government had introduced in New Zealand in 1917, supplied a constant flow of reinforcements to the New Zealand Division, making it the strongest outfit in France.[105] Ira Robinson wrote of conscription in a letter to his sister: "*I don't think they will call up very many more men in NZ…I myself am quite satisfied that NZ has done more than her share in this war and I think what men she has now should stay where they are, otherwise the country will be ruined for want of labour*".[106] Reinforcements continued to flow in, however, and consisted mostly of married men in their 30s, reportedly 'less agile in body' and 'less flexible in mind', but still 'far superior to their German and British counterparts'.[107] As one of the platoon commanders wrote:

> "*I do believe the New Zealand soldier is about the best in the world. I think I have told you before that he is not a great one for singing and laughing, in fact*

> *he is rather dour. But on the whole he is intelligent, and if he is told what he has to do, and understands the reason for it, he is very good. And I must say they are responsive in a quiet, subtle way*". [108]

The New Zealanders held the line on the Somme until October 1918, when they were involved in what was to become the last movement of the war – the capture of a German garrison on the outskirts of a French walled town called *Le Quesnoy*. Determined to minimise civilian casualties, the Division passed the town and successfully forced the garrison to surrender in the *Forêt de Mormal* further ahead. Upon scaling the town walls, the New Zealanders were greeted by:

> "*wildly excited citizens…*[who] *poured out of their houses and fell upon our necks, kissing us, weeping, laughing, and madly wringing our hands. We were loaded with apples, and wine in abundance was pressed upon us; needless to say we needed very little pressing*".[109]

Today, each year the town of Le Quesnoy celebrates this liberation. In the town there is a monument to the New Zealanders who liberated them, and the local school is still named after Lieutenant Averill, the New Zealander who led the scaling party in 1918.[110]

War on the Home Front

Despite being thousands of miles from the scene of the conflict, the war had an enormous impact on those who remained in New Zealand, affecting peoples' lives like no other. If not by the end of the Gallipoli campaign in December 1916, then certainly by the end of the attacks at Passchendaele a year later in October 1917, nearly every New Zealand family had experienced the cost of war first-hand.[111] As Harper states: "*The war was a huge chasm between a paradise imagined and the reality that was…The legacy of the war, with its destruction, horror and suffering, was overwhelming and irreversible*".[112] There were three distinctive traits that characterized New Zealand life during the war.

Firstly, as far as the Germans were concerned, the wartime propaganda machine, along with the troops' experiences on the front line, had drastically changed peoples' perceptions of the Germans since the start of the war. A campaign of hate was waged against Germany throughout the war, which denigrated the enemy and transformed him into a monster, even a devil.[113] Rudyard Kipling captured popular sentiment about 'the evil Huns' when he wrote: "*However the*

world pretends to divide itself, there are only two divisions in the world today – human beings and Germans”.[114]

‘Frightfulness’ was the word coined to describe German methods of warfare, particularly their modern weapons of submarines and poison chemical gases, such as mustard gas, which the Germans had repeatedly used against tens of thousands of Allied soldiers causing instant blindness, crippling, and long, slow and agonisingly painful deaths up to 6 weeks after skin exposure.[115] On the battlefield, this ‘frightfulness’ was experienced day by day by the New Zealand and allied troops. When five of Robinson’s close friends and soldiers were killed by a German shell, he wrote in a letter home: “*This last stint has made me very bitter towards Fritz and I will never think of him as anything but a savage again and will treat him as such*”.[116] In New Zealand, hatred of Germans also welled up to endemic proportions.[117] Politicians and foreigners were viewed with suspicion, and Germans became the focal point of New Zealanders’ hatred and anger. John Alexander Lee, an ex-convict who was working at Otamatea during the war, recounted this public outrage in a radio interview:

> “*I also saw what prejudice could do at Otamatea… the foreman of the area that I was working on was a German… I remember private groups of workers going to Coates to tell him that they didn’t want to work under a German. Of course, you’ve got to remember the spirit of the times. When the 1914 war broke out, folk got hysterical. If you look at the Auckland papers then, you’ll find that people chopped up German-made pianos; they broke butchers’ windows because there were German sausages in the window. Folk went mad*”.[118]

Secondly, as Sinclair concludes, the stress and strain of the country’s overly zealous war effort, in keeping nearly half the eligible male population in arms, had produced neuroses which found outlets far from their source.[119] The conflict between sectarianism and religion became a second war on the home front, with talk of Catholic plots in the public service, charges of Catholics with enemy sympathies, and reportedly ‘near-pornographic’ anti-Catholic propaganda being circulated widely.[120] Likewise, in the political domain, tensions created political havoc between the major parties. In the run-up to the wartime election, the Labour party was suspected of pro-German sympathies for ‘the most criminal nation on earth’, and accused of being ‘unpatriotic’ and ‘disloyal’ to the Empire.[121] Despite this, however, the party still succeeded in winning the

wartime election, largely thanks to its new and popular blueprint for a socialist society in New Zealand.[122]

Thirdly, on the domestic front, with hardly any families left untouched by the death or injury of someone dear to them, the war affected all levels of New Zealand society like no other tragedy.[123] The loss of so many New Zealand sons, husbands and fathers, caused suffering on an immense scale. One New Zealand mother, who lost three sons in succession during the war, wrote: "*it is a hard task to be the mother of soldiers…We feel so helpless here, there is nothing to do but weep and I try not to*".[124] Most families received telegrams informing them of their son or husband's death or wounding, but nothing more was ever heard.[125] The geographical separation and isolation only served to worsen this pain and many families were unable to deal with their grief.[126]

Many New Zealanders never again emerged into the light from the dark shadow of this First World War, as John Mulgan states: "*We felt the tragic waste and splendour of this first Great War, and grew up in the waste land that it produced*".[127] These ordinary New Zealanders, deeply hurt by the massive casualties they had suffered, found an outlet for their anger in turning against anything military.[128] For large segments of the population, New Zealand men in uniform quickly came to be seen as 'unthinking, uncaring militarists' who might send 'brave, helpless soldiers' to their deaths 'without giving it a second thought'.[129] Despite these assertions being untrue and irrational, especially with regard to the commanders and soldiers of the New Zealand Army, this deep-seated – if short-sighted – anti-military prejudice born of grief and bitterness continued to endure in New Zealand society over many following decades. As Oliver Duff wrote of this inter-war era following the outbreak of the Second World War in 1941: "*No one was so ridiculous in those days, so derided and so despised, as the [New Zealand] man who ventured out in uniform*".[130]

In fact, this unhealthy and politically-blinkered anti-military prejudice has been fostered in New Zealand society ever since – even following New Zealand's full participation in World War Two and the great, long-honoured and celebrated Allied victory that was collectively won against the Nazi German Empire in Europe and the Empire of Japan in the Asia-Pacific in 1945. Indeed, the prejudice has endured in New Zealand into the modern era, even in spite of the universally understood reality that militaries are a necessary defensive and emergency instrument of the civilian government in each country, with each military existing for the purpose of providing

physical security and protection to the nation's civilian population in times of threat, crisis, aggression or invasion.

This negative attitude of mistrust, suspicion, hostility, and even contempt towards soldiers on the part of a significantly large portion of the New Zealand population, worsened further by the experience of New Zealand forces fighting in the lost Vietnam War during the 1960s and 1970s, is a legacy that the New Zealand Defence Force – especially soldiers of the New Zealand Army – continues to live and cope with to this current day, at the dawn of the 21st century.[131]

Armistice & Loss

The First World War ended on the 11th November 1918. On the event of the Armistice, most soldiers found it hard to believe the war was really over. As one New Zealand soldier wrote in a letter:

> "*It took us quite a while to realise that it was all over, & that we would go over the top no more, but we are just beginning to believe it now. Fancy no more shells, no more bullets, no more sleeping in dirty wet trenches, etc. etc. I was just about on the verge of tears, thinking of putting in another winter on the line*". [132]

In New Zealand, the country held a national holiday each time one of Germany's allies surrendered, and then other public holidays were held to celebrate Armistice Day and Peace Day.[133] The allied victory was celebrated up and down the country and hundreds greeted the thousands of returned soldiers. The First World War had been a dreadful experience for New Zealanders, both at home and abroad. Ira Robinson wrote of the war: "*I don't think ever there was such a hellish war. It is wicked the way whole beautiful towns and villages have been absolutely ruined*".[134] "*I guess old Fritz is sorry he ever started this tangi [a Maori word for funeral]*", he later added.[135]

The nation paid dearly for its involvement in, what has been described as, 'the most important and deadly conflict in the twentieth century'.[136] More New Zealand men were killed in the First World War than in the Second World War, and it was such a terrible experience that those who lived felt lucky to be alive.[137] By the end of the war New Zealand has sent 19.4 per cent of her men to the war, compared to 13.5 per cent for Australia and Canada.[138] As a proportion of its

population, New Zealand had the highest casualty rate of all the British Dominions.[139] There were 68,000 casualties in all – 1 in 17 of the population – of which 18,000 had been killed, 16,697 receiving burial while another 5325 had no known grave.[140] Every one man in sixty-five of those who went to war overseas did not return, and those who did were 'maimed in body and mind'.[141] Sinclair states in fact that New Zealand's death-toll was even greater than that of Belgium, which had six times the population and was a battlefield.[142]

New Zealand's massive death tally was soon worsened when a post-war influenza pandemic raging through Europe in 1918, and referred to as the 'Spanish Flu' though it originated in Asia, spread to New Zealand via the troop ship *Niagara*.[143] The virus spread from community to community during the Armistice celebrations, causing shops, bars, movie theatres, schools and public transport to grind to a halt, and causing the deaths of a further 8,000 New Zealand citizens.[144] It is believed that 40 to 50 percent of the country's population were affected by Influenza in some way at this time.[145]

For a population of just over a million people, these losses were mourned by a very large proportion of people. Establishing memorials was one way for these people to express their grief and remember their dead. Communities all over the country raised funds and set up memorials in the form of obelisks, arches, columns, plaques, gates, halls, trees, gardens, stained glass windows, rocks, and a range of other things, in an attempt to remove the geographical dislocation of the war and to build tangible 'eternal' reminders to preserve their memories.[146] Sometimes, a war memorial by the side of the road is the only sign left that, prior to the First World War, there was once a small township existing at that place.[147]

In one sense, this national grieving united all sectors of society in grief. Pakeha, Maori, Right, Left, rich, poor, man, woman and child – everyone had suffered in this particularly 'egalitarian sacrifice'.[148] This 'equality in death' was mirrored in the War Graves Commission's choice to place the same uniform headstones for all ranks to mark the graves of all New Zealand soldiers, who were buried in various locations in France and Belgium.

Anzac Day

Another way to remember the dead was the instituting of 'Anzac Day', as a day of national mourning and remembrance.

The first Anzac Day was commemorated in both Australia and New Zealand five days after the dramatic ANZAC landings at Gallipoli on 25th April 1915. On 30th April, a half-day holiday was declared by the New Zealand government, flags were flown, and patriotic meetings were held around the country, where descriptions of the landings and casualty lists were eagerly read, and newspapers 'gushed about the heroism of the New Zealand soldiers'.[149] Indeed, from the very beginning, the public perception of the ANZAC landings were mixed with strong feelings of national pride. In the eventual failure at Gallipoli, this event became even more sacred in the minds of New Zealanders, and the courage and sacrifice of the New Zealand soldiers in adversity a central notion.[150]

Demands for some form of public remembrance on the anniversary of the landings, both as a public expression of grief and to rally support for the war effort, were soon voiced, leading to the establishment of Anzac Day as an annual holiday to be held on 25th April each following year. Returned ANZAC veterans and servicemen quickly claimed 'ownership' of the commemoration, and routinely led the public processions to either churches or town halls, where speeches were given which commonly called for national unity, imperial loyalty, remembrance of the dead, and the need for new volunteers.[151] On this first Anzac Day in New Zealand, 2,000 people attended the service in Rotorua, while in London the day was commemorated by a procession of 2,000 ANZAC troops and was followed by a service at Westminster Abbey.[152]

By 1916, the word 'Anzac' was prohibited for trade and business purposes, which further enshrined the Anzac myth and sacredness of the commemoration. In the decades that followed, the yearly ceremony became an opportunity to extol ideas of patriotism, national unity, nationhood, and a desire for peace. However, despite the day being marked as an enshrined public statutory holiday from 1921 on, public enthusiasm for commemorating the day rose and fell during the Depression years of the 1930s, when the message of the day changed from encouraging ideas of unity and selflessness, to the need for military defence preparations with the rising threat of Adolf Hitler's National Socialist 'Nazi Reich' in Europe and Imperial Japan's aggressive expansionism in the Asia-Pacific, to the importance of remembering world history and not forgetting past lessons learnt at great human cost and sacrifice.[153]

More than anything else, however, Anzac Day became, not simply a day of remembrance, but a day that commemorated and defined our sense of nationhood. Today, while commemorations on Anzac Day have extended to remember New Zealanders who have served and died during the

Second World War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, the limited wars of the Cold War, the peacekeeping forces killed in East Timor and those still serving in Afghanistan, more than any other day in the national calendar, it is on Anzac Day that New Zealanders remember and celebrate our nationhood.

New Zealand Nationhood & Identity

Although New Zealand had taken its first step towards nationhood in standing apart from the Australian Federation in the late 1800s, to become a self-governing British Dominion in 1907, and in sending its own representatives to Imperial Conferences, it was not until the First World War had been fought and won that its people approached full and conscious nationhood.[154]

It was on the bloody slopes of Gallipoli that New Zealand first became a nation. In 1935 W.P. Morrell concluded that it was there that New Zealand had 'announced its manhood to the world': "*The men who fought, fought for the Empire, but also for New Zealand…By the very fact of coming to the Old World and coming in a body, they could not but realize that they had as New Zealanders their own individuality*". [155] It was at the 'crucible' of Gallipoli that New Zealanders found themselves 'separate from, and better than, their British counterparts', and where a pragmatic approach and a sense of independence birthed New Zealand into a real nation.[156]

Moreover, it was through this experience that the citizens of New Zealand came to see themselves as true 'New Zealanders', rather than just Britons living overseas. Indeed, in the late nineteenth century, the majority of adults living in New Zealand, over the age of fifty, were immigrants who considered themselves to be 'British' – a notion which was passed on to the younger generation.[157] By identifying themselves with the British, these colonists claimed a share of the traditional British qualities of sportsmanship, fair play, modesty, discipline, and courage, along with British greatness.[158] By the beginning of the twentieth century, this claim had been extended to such a degree, that the colonists, upon reflecting on their 'genteel' middle-class or aspiring lower-class family heritage, considered themselves to be 'more British than the British'.[159] For many New Zealanders this meant 'better than the British', the majority of whom had been long regarded as under-paid, under-fed, under-privileged folk who lacked the initiative to migrate to New Zealand.[160] However, by the time of the First World War, most of the country's population had been born in New Zealand, and while the people's identity was still tied up in belonging to

the British Empire, the younger generation saw themselves as both Britons *and* New Zealanders with twin loyalties.

The transition to a greater emphasis on a fully New Zealand identity is considered to have begun with the soldiers, who in going overseas and encountering various English-speaking people, became increasingly aware of the differences between them.[161] In addition to mixing with the Australians in Egypt and at Gallipoli, these New Zealanders also met with the British, Canadians, and the Americans during the course of the war. This contact brought a growing consciousness of not only a distinctly New Zealand accent, but also the fact of possessing different values and a lifestyle with a flavour of its own.[162] The experience of mixing with the 'showy' but 'badly behaved' Australians[163]; the 'disorganised and dishonest' British;[164] the 'decent' but 'very keen' Americans[165]; as well as the 'filthy' French, in whose villages many New Zealanders were billeted during 1917-1918[166]; all served to birth a new sense of Kiwi identity among New Zealanders. By 1918, New Zealanders had begun to feel that they belonged to a nation.[167] The soldiers who returned to New Zealand, felt that they were distinctly New Zealanders, and this conviction in turn spread to the general population. According to Sinclair, by the time of the Second World War, most people born in New Zealand, if asked to identify themselves, would without hesitation say that they were New Zealanders.[168]

Along with this new identity also came a strong sense of pride. The New Zealanders were proud of their political and economic achievements, particularly: for being the first nation in the world to give women the vote, and for the country's world-renowned old-pension laws; of their success in establishing themselves in a new land; of their sporting feats in horse-racing, tennis, and most importantly in rugby, especially after the All Black tour of Great Britain in 1905 where New Zealand lost only one game of thirty-two – and that an ever-to-be-debated game with Wales – proving themselves to also be the best rugby players in the world; and above all, they were now quite justly proud of their feats of arms – against Boer, Turk and German.[169] Throughout the battles of the war, whether at Gallipoli, on the Western Front or in Sinai and Palestine, the New Zealanders earned a reputation as superb soldiers.[170] The outstanding record of the Maori battalions, which had served with the NZEF overseas, also won popular support for the efforts of native leaders to restore the pride and self-confidence of their race.[171] Moreover, they considered New Zealand to be the most beautiful country in the world and boasted of having the highest standard of living in the world, with good food and healthy outdoor lives.[172] In many respects, New Zealanders felt that New Zealand was a great place to live.

Thus, the New Zealand nation now had firm foundations, which although tested and tried by the coming eras of Depression and a Second World War, became the very foundations on which modern-day New Zealand is built.

The Forgotten War & the Legacy of the 'Silent Soldiers'

The First World War is regarded as 'the most important and far-reaching political and military event of the century'.[173] For the first time in history a war touched the lives of millions of people across the globe, bringing Americans, Australians, Canadians, Africans, Asians and New Zealanders to parts of the world they otherwise would never have seen.[174]

In New Zealand, the war affected peoples' lives and the country in ways that, as Harper states, 'we haven't yet been able to understand'.[175] By 1920 New Zealand had been transformed. Too much blood had been shed, and pain borne, for the nation to go back to where it had been before the war. The old certainties and pre-war ideals, such as the conviction that war reinvigorated nations, created character, was manly, and could achieve bloodless victories, and glory at little cost, were eroded or had vanished entirely.[176] Notions of duty, honour, sacrifice and Empire all suffered too.[177] New Zealand no longer strove to imitate the British Empire and the entire concept of utter devotion to another country or entity was abandoned. A spirit of independence had been birthed in this land and things would never be the same again.

In September 1917, a soldier wrote these memorable lines in his diary:

> *'Adieu, the years are a broken song,*
> *And the right grows weak in the strife with wrong,*
> *The lilies of love have a crimson stain,*
> *And the old days never will come again.'*[178]

For New Zealand, these words were equally true. One leading military historian has written that 'the influence of a major war is generally held to continue to shape a society for a century after its end'.[179] If this is so, New Zealand continues to live with the legacy of the First World War to this day. Sadly, however, the Great War and its important role in our nation's heritage has been too often neglected, even forgotten. That so few New Zealanders know anything about the Battle of

Passchendaele, New Zealand's worst military disaster, only emphasizes this fact.[180] As Harper states:

> "*As a nation we have inherited a reluctance to explore fully our war experiences, and thus we emulate those silent soldiers of the Great War. Consequently, what should have been an unforgettable experience has all but disappeared from our collective memory*".[181]

Indeed, in New Zealand, memories of the Great War have been repressed for over eighty years.[182] There are three possible reasons for this. Firstly, the men who returned from the war were unable to talk about their horrific experiences for some time, and when in nearing the end of their lives that time finally came, few people were willing to listen.[183] Secondly, the image of the New Zealand soldier as an emotionally and physically 'hard man' was such a powerful social force that most returning soldiers believed it their duty not to inflict their personal pain on others.[184] As a result, they become living casualties – 'silent soldiers' – who in keeping the trauma of their experiences to themselves, and repressing their memories, often developed psychological and behavioural dysfunctions, and exhibited tendencies towards suicide under their burden of 'survivor's guilt'.[185] Thirdly, unlike other nations, such as Canada and Australia, which have built up their military legends of 'supersoldiers' or 'diggers', New Zealanders have often felt uncomfortable talking about military successes, and have tended to focus on heroic and disastrous failures.[186]

These have all contributed to making 'The Great War' in New Zealand largely a forgotten war. Perhaps now, at the dawn of a new century, New Zealand can give this event the significance it so fully deserves, not only as an integral part of our nation's history, but of our birth as a New Zealand nation as well.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the First World War had a drastic and lasting effect on New Zealand society at the beginning of the twentieth century. Not only did it transform the way New Zealanders saw themselves and the nation of New Zealand, it also changed popular perceptions about war, the previously unquestioned principle of loyalty to Empire, and birthed a new spirit of independence and identity which have remained to this day.

It has often been said that it was during the Great War that New Zealand lost its innocence. It could also be said, however, that it was this very experience that brought the nation to maturity, combining all the various peoples of New Zealand into one people with one nationality, and pushing New Zealand into forming its own ideals and role in the wider world, and shaping our national character.

Anzac Day, the Anzac legacy, and the hundreds of memorials and plaques that adorn towns and cities across New Zealand and Europe, all serve to remind the nation of what was lost and what was gained during this most crucial and trying time of our nation's history.

They are also reminders of the costly insanity of nations embarking on a course of war – not for any noble purpose of fighting for what is good, just and right in the world, or to forcefully protect vulnerable and threatened people who are unable to defend or protect themselves from aggressive violence – but merely to attain glory, increase power, gain territory or achieve status. Fortunately, New Zealand has learnt this lesson well.

May it never be forgotten.

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