

New Zealand and the First World War



Firing a trench mortar

On 28 June 1914 Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and his wife Sophie were assassinated in the Bosnian city of Sarajevo. The fallout from this faraway event would ultimately claim the lives of 18,500 New Zealanders and wound a further 50,000. Places thousands of miles from home with exotic-sounding names such as Gallipoli, Passchendaele and the Somme were forever etched in the national memory during what became known as the Great War.

The war took more than 100,000 New Zealanders overseas, many for the first time. Some anticipated a great adventure but found the reality very different. Being so far from home made these New Zealanders very aware of who they were and where they were from. In battle they were able to compare themselves with men from other nations. Out of this came a sense of a separate identity, and many New Zealand soldiers began to refer to themselves as 'Kiwis'.

The significance of the war on New Zealand society was summed up by a man who participated in it from Gallipoli to France. Ormond Burton went from being a stretcher-bearer at Anzac Cove to a highly decorated infantryman on the Western Front. He believed that 'somewhere between the landing at Anzac and the end of the battle of the Somme New Zealand very definitely became a nation'.

Quick facts and figures

- The total population of New Zealand in 1914 was just over one million.
- In all, 120,000 New Zealanders enlisted, of whom 103,000 served overseas.
- A total of 2227 Maori and 458 Pacific Islanders served in the New Zealand forces.
- At least 3370 New Zealanders served in the Australian or imperial forces, winning four Victoria Crosses.
- In all, 550 nurses served with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, and many others enlisted in the United Kingdom.
- A total of 18,500 New Zealanders died in or because of the war, and nearly 50,000 more were wounded. More than 2700 died at Gallipoli and 12,500 on the Western Front.
- The names of those who died are recorded on approximately 500 civic war memorials throughout New Zealand.

How to cite this page: 'New Zealand and the First World War', URL: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/ww1-overview>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 5-May-2010

MCH, 2010C

~~Page 974~~

Timeline 1

1918

P118

3rd

