New Zealand in Samoa   (MCH, 2020hh)

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The Samoan archipelago, located in the south-west of the Pacific Ocean, comprises six main islands, two atolls, and numerous smaller islets. Its closest neighbours, the northern islands of the Tonga group, are 210 km to the south-west.

In the late 19th century the Samoan islands became highly desirable to Britain, Germany and the United States as a refuelling stop for coal-fired shipping. A civil war broke out between local factions backed by each of these powers.

P Samoans were not consulted when Britain, Germany and the United States agreed to partition the islands following the end of this civil conflict in December 1899. Germany acquired the western islands (Savai'i, 'Upolu and seven smaller islands), while the United States acquired the eastern islands (Tutuila and the Manu'a group) to support its Pacific fleet.

P When war broke out in Europe in August 1914, Britain asked New Zealand to seize the wireless station at Apia in German Samoa as a 'great and urgent Imperial service'. The dominion's response was swift. Led by Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Logan, the 1385-strong Samoa Advance Party of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force landed at Apia on 29 August. There was no resistance from German officials or the general population. Next day a proclamation by Logan established a New Zealand-run British Military Occupation of Samoa. Read more about the capture of German Samoa.

The relative quiet of New Zealand's wartime administration was shattered by a devastating influenza pandemic in November 1918, which killed approximately 8500 Samoans, about 22% of the population. For survivors, the disaster, and especially the administration's bumbling response to it, was seared into memory. It became the foundation upon which other grievances against the New Zealand administration would be laid.

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