



New Zealand's First World War Centenary Programme

Information Sheet 2 – Our programme narrative

July 2014

This information sheet (number 2) provides a high-level narrative of New Zealand's participation in the First World War.

Why is the centenary important for New Zealand?

2014 marks 100 years since the start of the First World War, widely considered the most significant and traumatic event for New Zealand since 1840. In 1914 New Zealanders rallied to the British Empire's cause, to defend the ideals of justice and freedom. We went to war because Britain did. We were a dominion of the British Empire, along with Australia, Canada, and other members of what was to become the Commonwealth.

New Zealand entered the First World War on a wave of positive national opinion, to protect the British Empire. Soldiers expected to be home by Christmas. The scale and impact of this global conflict would alter many of our preconceptions. In the face of appalling experiences, the war brought out in New Zealanders the qualities of endurance, courage, friendship and commitment to a sense of decency and shared values. At home and in Turkey, France and Belgium, and Sinai / Palestine, many New Zealanders came to see themselves as Kiwis - versatile, practical and highly praised here and abroad for their fighting ability and achievements.

Important narratives from the war tell the effects of a modern industrial-age conflict, on an unprecedented global scale, affecting families, communities and everyone at home in New Zealand. By the time the Treaty of Versailles officially ended the war in 1919, its impact on New Zealand was far reaching. The legacy of the conflict has been enduring. We continue to see the influence today – not just in our symbols and memorials, but also in politics and society, in diplomacy and security, internationally and in our sense of nationhood and identity.

The human cost of this significantly different war was profound. Overall, out of a total population of just over one million, more than 100,000 New Zealanders served overseas with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF). Almost one in five were killed; 41,000 were wounded. New Zealand's casualties, per capita, were higher than those of the United Kingdom or any of the other dominions. The supposedly short war for Empire

in 1914 became a forge for the creation of the Anzacs in 1915. The transition to an extended national war effort gave way to new realisations and requirements to support fighting on an entrenched Western Front in France and Belgium from 1916. The largely static nature of trench warfare and heavy casualties placed an extreme load on New Zealand. In 1917 national morale plunged as the published names of the dead grew and the war effort and conditions at home took their toll. In 1918 a powerful and decisive Allied military effort achieved a breakthrough on the Western Front, leading to the Armistice signed on 11 November.

After the conclusion of the war, New Zealanders were not able to return home immediately due to the shortage of ships, and the involvement of some in the occupation of Germany. Through 1919, returning soldiers and communities and families stood together again on New Zealand ground, on a place that was both new and old, looking for the plan to rebuild. New Zealand's place on the international stage, our signature on the Treaty of Versailles, introduced a new position in global statesmanship as well as a stronger sense of being New Zealanders.

The WW100 Programme

The First World War Centenary Programme WW100 will span New Zealand through the centenary period (2014-2019), encouraging public participation in events, projects and activities that will explore how New Zealanders' war experiences helped to shape our evolving national identity and aspirations.

Many other countries are also commemorating the First World War, and its impact on them. New Zealand's commemoration focuses on the First World War impact on us.

2014: Duty and Adventure

In 1914, Britain's proclamation of war of 4 August was read to an excited audience of 15,000, in the grounds of the New Zealand Parliament. New Zealand men rushed to sign up in response to the proclamation of war, eager to cross the globe to reach the European battlefields before the perceived 'short war' ended. WW100 marks the announcement of the commencement of war on 4 August, followed by national commemorations to mark the occupation of German Samoa in late August and the departure of troops for Egypt in October.

The Commencement theme recognises that 100 years ago, until 4 August (5 August NZ time), we were at peace. In 1914 New Zealand was a dominion of the British Empire, not a fully independent country. When Britain went to war, so did we. Through this theme the scale of New Zealand's commitment – the Main Body of troops was the largest military expeditionary force to leave these shores at one time – and the imperial sentiment supporting this war for King and Empire are presented.

The **Centenary is Important** theme marks our place in this international conflict, the influence of the war and our purpose in this commemoration. The war and its impact at home and abroad influenced who we have become. New Zealanders' sense of national identity within the Empire was strengthened as a result of achievements on the battlefields and commentary in the media back home. This was carried through to the international arena and in 1919 we signed the Treaty of Versailles in our own right. The centenary period will give New Zealanders further opportunities to reflect on the meaning of the First World War and its role in shaping our nation and our shared values.

In addition to national commemorations marking the announcement and departures of troops, two publications have already been launched in the 2013: *The White Ships: NZ's First World War Hospital Ships*, and *New Zealand and The First World War* (a general illustrated history). The WW100 programme of inspiring and enlightening exhibitions, concerts and events has already seen the NZSO perform its beautiful and moving WW1 Concert, and the acclaimed premiere of *Rotunda* by the NZ Dance Company.

The key commemorative events in New Zealand are the Announcement that war had been declared

(4 August) and the Capture of German Samoa (29 August). New Zealand is also participating in international commemorations and leading New Zealand commemorations to mark the commencement of war in London, Glasgow and Liege. In New Zealand, Council programmes around the country will engage with re-enactments of troop departures.

Events in communities span exhibitions, sporting events, concerts, performances and commemorations. Examples include *The Home Front*, an exhibition showing what the soldiers left behind in the Taupo District; *Life 100 Years Ago*, museums and others across New Zealand collaborating to tweet interesting daily diary entries from this day, 100 years ago; and Crows Feet Dance Collective's full-length dance work to accompany *The Armed Man*, a stirring and poignant 'mass for peace' by Welsh composer Karl Jenkins.

2015: The Anzac Connection

The organisation of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force with the Australian Imperial Force occurred on the training grounds in Egypt, as the command was unified under Lieutenant General William Birdwood. Anzacs quickly became the name for Australian and New Zealand soldiers who served on the battlefields of Turkey and later all Australian and New Zealand soldiers. The landing at Gallipoli and the battle for Chunuk Bair are recognised as focal points in our Anzac commemoration and also in literature and cultural commentaries.

The influence of Gallipoli on the development of our **national identity** is part of the theme. A popular, enduring view of the significance of the war on New Zealand society was summed up by Ormond Burton who went from being a stretcher-bearer at Anzac Cove to a highly decorated infantryman on the Western Front. He famously said that 'somewhere between the landing at Anzac and the end of the battle of the Somme New Zealand very definitely became a nation'.

The **Anzac Spirit** theme will be marked by the opening of Pukeahu National War Memorial Park and the dedication of the Australian Memorial in the week leading up to Anzac Day in 2015.

Anzac Day at Pukeahu is a flagship event in the WW100 programme. This centenary of the Anzac landings provides a focus for New Zealanders at events around

the country and it is also being commemorated overseas (as are Chunuk Bair and Armistice Day).

The publication programme launches *New Zealand's WW1 Heritage Sites* and *The Soldiers Experience*. The legacy programme delivers Heritage Trails in Gallipoli and Western Europe and improvements to monuments or walking tracks at these locations. A series of short films is being screened on television and six sporting events are part of the arts, cultural and sport programming during the year.

2016: Transition – a National War Effort

In 1916, New Zealand soldiers moved to the principal front in the war, serving in France initially. The third phase of the Battle of the Somme, known as the Battle of Flers-Courcelette, started on 15 September. New Zealand infantry 'went over the top' at 6.20am. The New Zealanders achieved their objectives but experienced heavy losses. By the time the Somme campaign ended in November, one in seven of the 15,000 members of the New Zealand Division had been killed and 40% were wounded.

At home, almost everything and everyone was focussed on **the war effort**. The great majority of the working population contributed to the war effort through their involvement in farming, manufacturing and other industries. Aside from its fighting men, New Zealand's greatest contribution to the British Empire's war effort was its meat, dairy and wool products, which were delivered to the UK – despite a considerable threat from German submarines – by the ships and seamen of the merchant marine.

In some occupations there was a significant increase in women's employment, although the war did not lead to an enduring change in female employment patterns. Women played a more prominent role in community-based patriotic, fundraising and relief efforts. By 1920 the nation's combined patriotic societies had raised at least £5.69 million in cash (equivalent to nearly \$700 million today) and despatched goods valued at £560,000 (\$66 million today) to men serving overseas.

The role of the state expanded during and after the war. There was a significant increase in government revenue (through taxation) and spending, which had long-term consequences for economic management. The war also led to the introduction of pensions and other assistance to returned servicemen, helping to lay

the foundations for the longer-term expansion of social welfare.

The **Service to Compulsion** theme looks at the introduction of conscription and the conscientious objectors' story. Not everyone supported the war: some Maori (especially in Waikato and Taranaki) were reluctant to fight for a Crown that had dispossessed them of land. These were the only areas where conscription would be applied to Maori. Others opposed the war on religious-pacifist, Irish nationalist or socialist grounds. The Labour Party generally supported the war but condemned wartime inflation and profiteering, and opposed the conscription of men without a corresponding conscription of wealth. One of its MPs, Paddy Webb, was sentenced to two years' hard labour for refusing his own call-up.

The **Industrialisation and Organisation** theme will include the centenary of the Nursing Corps, the role of New Zealanders in the Royal Navy and merchant marine, the history of the Pioneer Battalion (largely made up of Maori and Pacific Island soldiers) and the changes in warfare technologies that were introduced.

The lead commemoration is the Battle of the Somme (Flers-Courcelette) on 15 September, both at Pukeahu National War Memorial Park and in France. The publication programme launches *The Price We Have To Pay* and *The Western Front*.

2017: The Grind of War

Through the strategic success of the Battle at Messines on 7 June, and the great horror of the Battle of Passchendaele (Bellevue Spur) on 12 October, the full reality of the Western Front is driven home as the staggering human cost rises. Meanwhile, the Sinai and Palestine campaigns in the Middle East continued through this period.

The **Reality Check** theme acknowledges the suffering at home and 5,000 dead New Zealanders in Europe. It looks at women in the workforce and the role of Patriotic Societies. The **Military Professionalism** theme will profile the role of New Zealanders in the air war and the efforts of the Pioneer Battalion, as well as changes in medical techniques developed to treat soldiers.

Commemorative services for the Battle of Messines on 7 June, the Battle of Passchendaele on 12 October and Beersheba on 31 October occur in New Zealand and

overseas. Four publications are scheduled to be released: *New Zealand and the Air War*, *The War Against the Ottoman Turks*, *The Maori Experience* and *New Zealand's War at Sea*.

2018: The Darkness Before the Dawn

The majority of New Zealanders killed in the First World War lost their lives in the Western Front battles from 1916 to 1918. More than 12,000 New Zealanders died on the Western Front in two and a half years of fighting; this was more than in the entire Second World. New Zealanders achieved recognition here – all but one of New Zealand's 11 First World War Victoria Crosses were won on the Western Front, six of them in 1918. During the German Spring Offensive of March 1918, which could have decided the war in their favour, New Zealand forces played a critical role in stopping the German advance on Amiens.

In the last week of the war Le Quesnoy was liberated by New Zealand forces – one of the Division's many successes on the Western Front in the last 100 days of fighting, when the New Zealanders were the spearhead of the British 3rd Army. The New Zealand artillery developed an outstanding reputation as mobile warfare – including the coordinated use of tanks and planes – took over.

Important commemorations occur for the Liberation of Le Quesnoy on November 4 and for Armistice Day on November 11. The publication programme launches *The Home Front*.

2019: Finding Our Way Back

Soldiers were not able to return immediately due to a shortage of ships, and the need for personnel for the occupation of Germany. For many, the return took over ten months, well into 1919. The journey back is also a metaphor for the return to a peacetime society. 2019 is the time to reflect on the future. In 1919 New Zealand and the other dominions signed the Treaty of Versailles in their own right. New Zealand also became a full member of the newly established League of Nations, indicative of emerging independent standing.

Commemorative events mark the Treaty of Versailles on 28 June, Peace Celebrations through July and Soldiers Returning Home, also through July.

The impact of WW1

Of all the events that have shaped New Zealand since 1840, it could be argued that none was more traumatic or more significant than the First World War. For just over four years this tiny, still essentially colonial society found itself caught up in a war without precedent, a modern industrial conflict that enveloped much of the globe. By the time the Treaty of Versailles officially ended the war in 1919 nearly everyone in New Zealand had felt its impact.

The legacy of the conflict has been enduring. Many things we take for granted today – the more than 500 civic war memorials that stand vigil in communities across the country, the annual Anzac Day service on 25 April, institutions like the RSA, the symbolic red poppy – all owe their origins to our involvement in the so-called 'war to end all wars'.

New Zealand and the other the dominions signed the Treaty of Versailles in their own right. The dominions also became full members of the newly established League of Nations (an important forerunner to the United Nations). This was another sign of their emerging independent standing. The Balfour Declaration of 1926 established the equal status of Britain and its self-governing dominions, and in 1931 the Statute of Westminster embodied this principle in law (even though New Zealand's Parliament did not adopt the statute until 1947).

The First World War can certainly be seen as a key element in the evolution of New Zealand nationhood, although it should be recognised that many other important events, trends and milestones – before and after the Great War – have also influenced our identity. The centenary period should give New Zealanders further opportunities to reflect on the meaning of the First World War and its role in shaping our nation and our shared values.

More information is available at:

- WW100.govt.nz
- firstworldwar.govt.nz
- nzhistory.net.nz
- anzac.govt.nz