THANK YOU

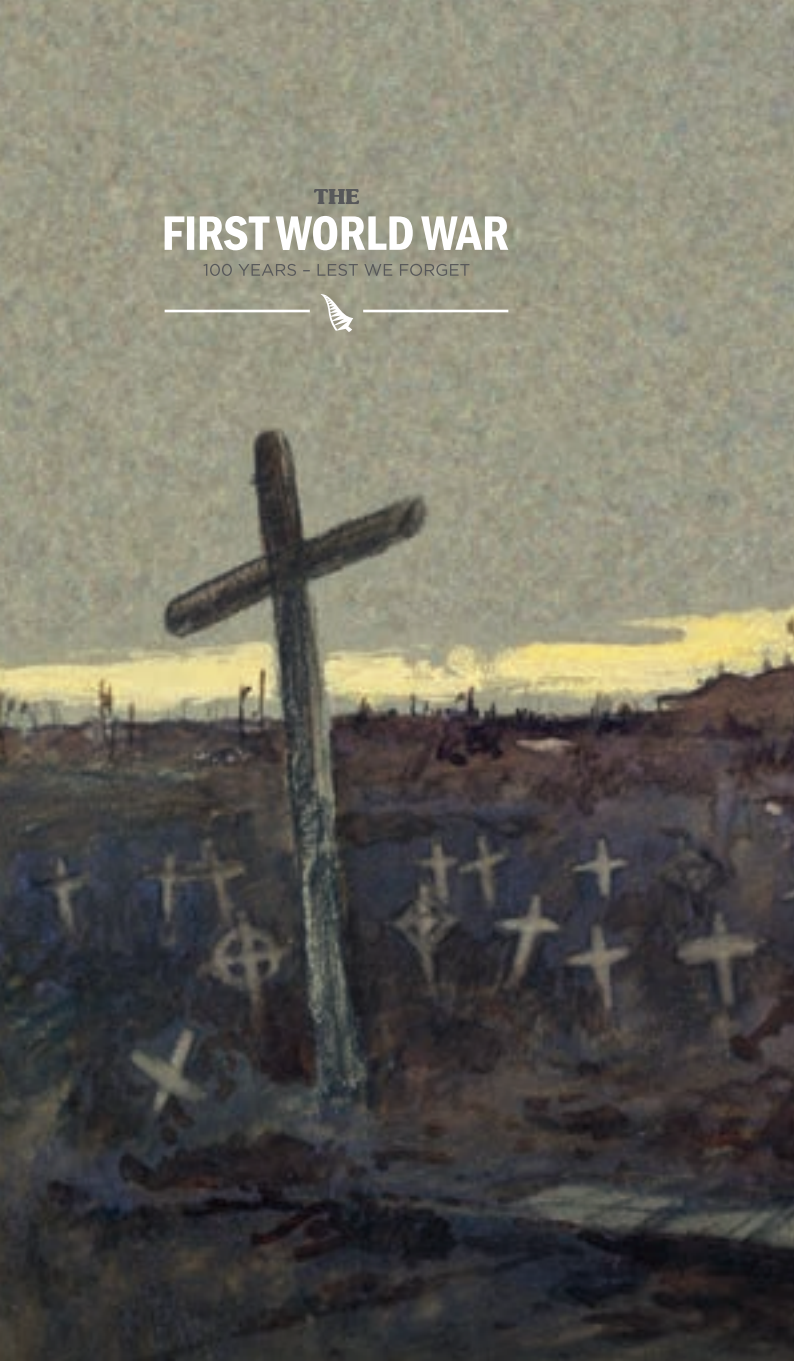
Thank you to the Knight family for sharing your memories, photographs and documents to assist us in telling some of New Zealand's 1917 story.

INTRO PAGE PHOTO: Ellen Knight, born 7 July 1872 and died 13 March 1966, photographed here around 1912, before the First World War began.

1917

THE DARKEST HOUR

NEW ZEALAND'S STORY



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These commemorative stamps have been issued in conjunction with WW100 – a programme established by the New Zealand government to mark the First World War centenary through a range of activities from 2014 to 2018.

IMAGE LEFT: 'The Battle of Polygon Wood' is one of a number of paintings by war artist George Butler depicting the battlefield at Polygon Wood, Belgium, where the New Zealand Division was stationed in late 1917 and early 1918.

INTRODUCTION

After three years stalked by death and dread, New Zealanders were weary and wary of a war that had no end in sight. In January 1917 the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, including the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade, took the Sinai Peninsula and soon began pushing north-east to Gaza, boosting morale back home. But the bigger picture looked grim. The Western Front was deadlocked, Romania had been forced to retreat on the Eastern Front, Russia was on the brink of a revolution that would eventually see the empire exit the war, and America and China wouldn't declare war on Germany until later that year. To New Zealanders living through it, it looked like the Allies may well lose.

In England, New Zealand recruits training at bleak, barren Sling Camp would soon face much worse. On the Western Front they lived in trenches, dugouts and tunnels with the cold, mud, rats, lice, scabies and illness, while standing sentry, doing monotonous trench repairs, sleeping on lumpy ground, eating endless bully beef, smelling the stench of dead men, always fearing shelling and snipers. And that was before they went over the top.

When New Zealanders died horrific deaths at Messines in June, followed by pointless deaths at Passchendaele in October, the country endured its darkest hour. When Passchendaele was painted as a success in newspapers, soldiers began to feel misrepresented and misled. This feeling trickled through to their loved ones back in New Zealand. On the following pages we tell the story of mother of ten Ellen Knight, one of many women heartbroken by losing children to the Great War. But her sacrifice was bigger and her grief greater than most, as she farewelled three sons forever.

LEFT: New Zealand and British troops detrain at Poperinge, Belgium, close to the Passchendaele front line some time between July and November 1917.

By the end of 1917 new technologies – especially the Mark IV tank, the Livens gas-canister projector and lighter machine guns – were promising to break the stalemate on the Western Front and help the push into Palestine. But this was little comfort to men with faces mangled by shrapnel. Enter New Zealand-raised surgeon Harold Gillies, who set up a pioneering facial-reconstruction unit, working deep into the night to give them back some sort of dignity.

As for the naval war, few New Zealanders knew how close the Germans had got to New Zealand, even after a mine blew up merchant ship the SS Port Kembla *off Farewell Spit. The government kept the real cause quiet, not wanting morale to fall further.*

New Zealand society was changing. Playing on fears about the war, the temperance movement called for prohibition and got bars closed at six o'clock, while women determined to do more than raise funds and families took jobs in traditionally male fields. Meanwhile, strikes by miners and seamen saw protest politics intensify, and conscientious objectors were jailed as the increasingly desperate war raged on.

ABOVE: Silk postcards were popular souvenirs to send or bring back to New Zealand for soldiers serving on the Western Front.

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A MOTHER MOURNS — ELLEN KNIGHT

Ellen Knight of Dannevirke, mother of ten, saw three of her boys killed during the First World War: Herbert, shot dead by a sniper at Gallipoli in 1915; George, killed at Passchendaele in 1917; and William Douglas, her eldest, felled by a shell in France in 1918. She wrote to her sons constantly during their service, her letters offering some form of comfort from home while acknowledging her family's duty to contribute to the war. Ellen would outlive most of her children, and died at Whakatāne aged 93.

LEFT: After losing three sons to the First World War, Ellen would also see her youngest, Maurice, perish in the Second World War. However, Ellen would live to 93 years old, passing away in a Whakatāne nursing home in 1966.

A MOTHER MOURNS – ELLEN KNIGHT

"Men must work while women weep," wrote Ellen Knight to son George after getting his letter saying he was enlisting. "I had a good blub & feel better," added the mother of ten children aged between 23 and six. "I dare say it will mean the three [boys] but I am ready to do my duty always as you are to do yours. But please God you may not be wanted or if you are you will be spared to come back 'heroes'."

Ellen lived in Dannevirke, while husband Herbert helped their eldest son Douglas at his farm between Whakatāne and Ōpōtiki. Farm workers were exempt from going to war, but George and younger brother

PAGE 3: George Knight of the Otago Infantry Regiment, commissioned Second Lieutenant in June 1917, would be killed leading his men during the Battle of Passchendaele on 12 October 1917.

Herbert sailed in February 1915 for Egypt, then on to Gallipoli. "Have no fear we will both stick together and come back safe," George wrote home. It wasn't to be. On 8 May 1915 the young, boisterous Herbert was shot dead by a sniper at Cape Helles after volunteering to bury a mule. George wrote to break the news, saying he'd marked Herbert's grave under an olive tree with a named cross, and planted flowers. Ellen saw the casualty list before George's letter arrived, replying: "I prayed so hard that you might both come back to me, but it is part of God's great plan & we must bear it but it is a hard task bearing to be the mother of soldiers."

A few of Ellen's letters to George have survived. She wrote every few days, downplaying her own fears, passing on snippets of family life and trying to keep his spirits up. The light-hearted, lovable George had scares – surviving a shoulder wound, illnesses, a septic finger – before he was tragically shot dead at Passchendaele on New Zealand's darkest day, 12 October 1917.

ABOVE: The Knight family pictured at the golden wedding of William and Augusta Knight, 17 June 1896. On the right, Ellen holds Herbert dressed in white, with George and Douglas seated in front.

The following day, before the family was informed, Ellen's shy, serious eldest son William Douglas (known as Douglas) sailed from Wellington, having been excused from the farm. On 1 September 1918 Douglas was killed during the Bancourt Ridge offensive, felled by a shell while returning with an arm wound to bring back a wounded corporal. The letter he'd written to Ellen earlier that day arrived after she heard the news. She never opened it.

In a shoebox, she kept all her sons' letters and all the letters of sympathy, some from survivors who praised her sons' heroism and said they'd died instantly with no suffering. Did they? Did Ellen believe it? Did her faith – in the British, in God – ever falter? The devout Anglican found comfort in her religion, believing she would reunite with her children in a better world.

Thankfully Ken, who turned 18 in 1917, was never called up, and took over Douglas's farm. But daughter Margarette was struck by rheumatoid arthritis in 1918, and her mother became her carer. Ellen's marriage was a strained, distant one, and Herbert died in 1937. A year later Ellen and Margarette moved from Levin to Auckland.

The next war didn't spare Ellen. Her youngest, Maurice, died aged 36 while training troops in India in 1944. Margarette and Francis also died before their mother. With her eyesight declining, she moved in with daughter Dorothy in Gisborne aged 87, then to a Whakatāne nursing home.

When Ellen died aged 93, her family found the shoebox full of letters. They say she didn't die bitter, believing she'd see her children again.

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FROM EGYPT TO JERUSALEM

Beginning with the Battle of Rafah in January and ending at the Battle of Jerusalem in December, 1917 saw New Zealand mounted soldiers help capture the Sinai Peninsula from Ottoman forces before pushing into Ottoman Syria. Here, Major General Edward Walter Clervaux Chaytor and Brigadier General William Meldrum of the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division stand outside a mosque in Beersheba, one of a number of battle sites in Palestine.

ABOVE: Locals saddling a pack horse for a New Zealand soldier on the Palestinian Front in late 1917.

FROM EGYPT TO JERUSALEM

While the Western Front consumed New Zealand's attention, no one could forget the Middle East, where one in six New Zealand soldiers would fight in the Palestine campaign. As 1917 dawned, the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) was on the verge of accomplishing its mission: pushing the Ottomans out of the Sinai Peninsula. Unlike the static trench warfare of the Western Front, this was a fluid, fast-changing conflict, where new tactics were key.

In a pre-dawn raid on 9 January, troops encircled and attacked the Ottomans' last major stronghold in Sinai: Rafah garrison. Speed was of the essence, before word could reach Ottoman reinforcements 30 kilometres away in Gaza. The New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade (the Mounteds) attacked from the rear, without any natural cover apart from

PAGE 7: Troopers of the Wellington Mounted Rifles outside an unknown building in Jaffa during the 1917 campaign in the Middle East.

the dark. The 2,000 Ottomans held off EEF troops as time ticked by. Had word got to Gaza? Just before the order came to retreat, the Mounteds broke through the line, and other brigades followed.

What a moment. Bookending two years at Gallipoli and in the desert, the Battle of Rafah was a turning point in this theatre of war. It was also a much-needed morale boost back in New Zealand.

After work on the railway, road and water pipeline, the EEF's horsemen got a new mission in March: to chase the Ottomans north-east towards Palestine. They had to take Gaza first. In the First Battle of Gaza on 26 March, the Mounteds helped break through some of the Ottoman defences, but approaching darkness and Ottoman reinforcements forced a retreat. New technologies were beginning to be unleashed in this theatre of war, but gas shells and eight tanks had little effect at the Second Battle of Gaza from 17 to 19 April.

ABOVE: Soldiers pose with a biplane in Palestine. Large numbers of British aircraft operating in the Middle East would lead to the creation of the Palestine Brigade of the Royal Flying Corps in 1917.

With 6,444 casualties, little ammunition left, and strong Ottoman defences, the Allies had to retreat again. A six-month stalemate followed.

Determined to take Jerusalem, EEF troops captured Beersheba garrison and its vital wells on 31 October, beginning the Third Battle of Gaza. They finally forced the Ottomans to abandon Gaza on 7 November, but the wider Southern Palestine Offensive continued. They took the port of Jaffa, then secured control of shipping to Jerusalem after a surprise river crossing of the Auja (Yarkon) River and attack on 22 December. By 30 December, they'd captured then defended Jerusalem, and were poised to advance inland.

ABOVE: Troopers of the 3rd (Auckland) Squadron, Auckland Mounted Rifles Regiment fire a distinctive Vickers machine gun.

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SLING CAMP

George Knight would arrive at Sling Camp, Salisbury Plain, England in January 1917, one of around 4,000 troops at the camp at any given time. While training new recruits was its primary purpose, Sling also served as a recovery and reconditioning stop for soldiers returning to the front. The cold weather and isolation of the camp meant it was unpopular with many, and it was in these bleak conditions that some unfortunate men would write their final letters home.

With all Kind Thoughts
and Good Wishes
: from :
SLING CAMP.

From

ABOVE: Number Three canteen at Sling, one of the positive memories for troops where the food was "whole-some, well-cooked, well-served on hot plates".

SLING CAMP

Sling didn't exactly scream welcome to new recruits who'd marched in from Bulford railway station. It was a place with rows of huts huddled in front of the bare, chalky hills of Salisbury Plain. A place where regime, conformity and monotony ruled.

Sling was the last stop before France, mainly for new recruits but also for soldiers regaining fitness after illness or injury. Up to 4,500 troops lived here at its peak, and thousands more passed through. Many a last letter carried the Sling postmark.

The camp was divided into four battalions – Canterbury, Otago, Wellington and Auckland – each with its own huts, headquarters and staff. By 1917 most new arrivals were doing a 30-day course including physical training in the notoriously slippery,

PAGE 11: A stock postcard from Sling Camp. Many of these were posted to New Zealand soon after troops arrived at the camp, letting those at home know that their loved ones had arrived in Europe.

wind-swept 'Bull Ring' area. Think firing-range practice, fusing and throwing bombs, bayonet fighting, gas-mask drills, trench digging, mock attacks and battle re-enactments.

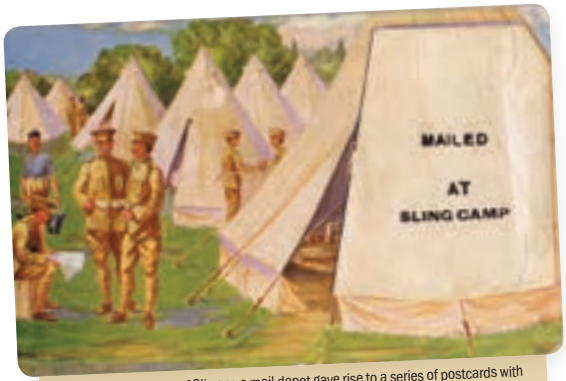
Having survived Gallipoli and a bullet through the shoulder in France, George Knight arrived at Sling on 5 January 1917. Deemed temporarily unfit, George held various positions including paymaster. Although he usually played down hardships in letters home, George wasn't a fan of his new permanent base - and not just because he didn't fancy "loafing around". He called it "this other last place on God's earth". The wind whipped your face, your boots were always muddy, and you shared your huts with rats. You were confined to barracks for dirty boots or buttons, and made to parade at a moment's notice. "We are messed about," George wrote home. "We don't call it messed either, it isn't writable." Was it necessary discipline or indoctrination to produce compliant soldiers?

ABOVE: Inside Number Five canteen, where soldiers in the later years of the war would find billiard tables, good libraries and a cinema. Education would also be introduced towards the end of the war.

It wasn't all bad. There were billiard tables, a library, and a YMCA with a cinema. George made friends, had fireside chats with his Uncle Douglas, grew his own flowers and vegetables, picnicked, went tobogganing, biked to other towns, and visited London on leave. He also wrote long, descriptive letters home and to sweetheart Phyllis Secker, remembering everyone's birthday and anniversary.

George was selected for the 20-day Officer Training Course, including lectures on tactics, compass work, field engineering, administration, map reading and handling the men. The new Second Lieutenant left Sling in June for France.

Meanwhile, trouble was brewing for Sling. In September 1917, ten New Zealand soldiers heading to Sling were killed in a train accident. The following year the flu epidemic would decimate the men. In 1919, a riot by soldiers impatient to return home was punished by forced labour carving the giant chalk kiwi that still symbolises Sling.



ABOVE: The popularity of Sling as a mail depot gave rise to a series of postcards with the catchphrase 'Mailed at Sling Camp', as seen in this postcard from John McCormick.

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THE BATTLE OF MESSINES

Tasked with removing the Germans from Messines Ridge in Belgium to clear the way for the later assault on Passchendaele, New Zealand soldiers would initially achieve most objectives with minimal losses. German guns would recover, however, and as the New Zealanders were relieved on 9 June many would be killed on their way back from the front. Here, General Godley salutes surviving soldiers of the 2nd Infantry Brigade during a troop review after the Battle of Messines.

ABOVE: George Butler captured many scenes typical of the Western Front, including the devastation on the road to Neuve Eglise, a small village behind the lines.

THE BATTLE OF MESSINES

Before they could attack Passchendaele in Belgium, the Allies needed to capture nearby Messines Ridge. It would be the New Zealand Division's first major battle after the devastating losses at the Somme. The New Zealanders had perhaps the least enviable task of the nine infantry divisions: attacking Messines, fighting their way to a point past the town, holding these areas, and capturing enemy guns close to their new strongholds.

Methodical preparation saw the British shell German strongholds for 26 days before the main attack, destroying many guns. The Brits were careful, though, to use only half their artillery so the Germans would be surprised by the largest artillery bombardment ever seen to that point in modern warfare.

PAGE 15: A view of the Wulverghem Road looking towards Messines, Belgium, taken from the first line position of New Zealand troops during the First World War.

When intermittent Allied shelling stopped at 2.50am on 7 June, the full moon had sunk beyond the horizon. The Germans rushed to their positions, expecting an attack. But they didn't expect what came. At 3.10am, 19 mines laid underneath the German front line exploded with a deafening boom heard across the English Channel, with 600 tons of explosives tearing apart 10,000 German soldiers. Others were dazed by blinding smoke and dust. The Germans left unharmed immediately launched counter-attacks.

The New Zealanders heard all this while waiting silently in their trenches. Ten seconds later they went over the top, moving in columns over No Man's Land and up the ridge. A 640-metre-deep "creeping barrage" of howitzers fired ahead and above the infantry as a shield. The 72 tanks accompanying them achieved little, but gas canisters fired from the new Livens projectors dazed many Germans.

ABOVE: Two New Zealand soldiers shown leaning over a trench wall in the Messines sector during the First World War. One is taking sights with his rifle.

Meanwhile, 300 aircraft masked the sound of tanks, while also plotting Allied and German positions.

The New Zealanders captured their objective just beyond the village by 5.20am. The main battle was soon over, but more New Zealanders were killed defending the ridge than during the advance. Shells fell on them like rain as groundwater seeped through and collapsed the walls of the trenches they were digging. One New Zealander killed here on 8 June was Private George Fox, a Post & Telegraph linesman and keen rugby player from Waipukurau who'd survived a gunshot wound to the chest at Gallipoli. Another mother, Elizabeth Fox, mourned, having already lost son Tom at the Somme.

Counter-attacks continued until 14 June. New Zealand's 3,700 casualties, including 700 dead, were a devastating loss for a small country. The Allies had taken Messines Ridge and were eyeing up Passchendaele. New Zealand's darkest hour had yet to come.

ABOVE: A painting by George Butler shows a stretcher party carrying a wounded soldier on the Western Front.

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SS PORT KEMBLA

A merchant ship carrying war supplies from Australia to Great Britain, the SS Port Kembla *was sunk by a German mine just 17 kilometres off Farewell Spit in September 1917. One of two Australian steamers sunk by mines laid in New Zealand waters during the war, reports at the time suggested that an engine room explosion was responsible, ensuring that New Zealanders were unaware of how close the war had come to their shores. She went down without a loss of crew, but her cargo of frozen meat, wool, lead and 270 bags of mail would never make it to the men at the front.*

FOOD TRANSPORT SUNK.

BY INTERNAL EXPLOSION.

OFF FAREWELL SPIT.

ALL HANDS SAVED.

FATE OF THE PORT KEMBLA.

CREW BROUGHT TO NELSON.

MAILS FOR NEW ZEALAND LOST.

ABOVE: One of the only known images of the *Port Kembla* before it was sunk off the coast of the South Island.

SS PORT KEMBLA

In 1917, few knew just how close the Germans had got to New Zealand. But a wake-up call was about to sound.

In September 1917, the freighter the SS *Port Kembla* was carrying £1 million worth of supplies (including food, wool, lead, tallow and 270 bags of mail) from Australia to Britain, with a stop-off planned in Wellington. But in the early hours of 18 September it struck a mine in the sea west of Farewell Spit.

With the radio damaged and communication impossible, the ship sank in 20 minutes, leaving the 30 crew time to climb into two lifeboats but not to take their things. Captain Jack and two officers remained on board until the last moment, then dived into the freezing waters and were hauled into the boats.

PAGE 19: The first news of the *Port Kembla*'s sinking suggested that an internal explosion, not a mine, had caused the damage.

The Merchant ship *Regulus* happened upon the lifeboats then towed them back to Nelson. Alerted by a lighthouse keeper, hundreds of locals greeted them at the wharf. Guests of honour at a local hotel, they were taken on drives, taken to the pictures, taken to afternoon teas, and so taken by the place that Captain Jack joked they didn't want to leave. People felt for the crew, and for the Australians whose mail would never be delivered to their boys.

The official inquiry was closed to the public. The New Zealand government figured the culprit was a mine, but kept that quiet. After all, admitting that our merchant ships were in danger and that we were defenceless at sea wouldn't exactly boost morale. Citing an "internal explosion", the government suggested that someone on board had planted a bomb, fanning flames of resentment against German-born New Zealanders.

ABOVE: The rescued crew of the *Port Kembla* pictured outside their accommodation in a Nelson hotel, September 1917.

ABOVE: The SMS *Wolf* was a converted freighter fitted with six 15-centimetre guns, multiple smaller guns, four torpedo tubes and more than 450 mines.

In fact the culprit was the German raider SMS *Wolf,* on a 15-month secret mission to interfere with Allied merchant shipping – including the "breadbaskets" of Australia and New Zealand – disguised as a merchant ship but with a scouting plane, guns, torpedoes and mines. While Downunder she laid 35 mines off Farewell Spit, 25 mines off Three Kings Islands in Northland, and 30 off New South Wales. They sank 13 ships, including trans-Tasman liner the SS *Wimmera* in June 1918, killing 26 passengers and crew.

After this, two New Zealand fishing trawlers quietly became minesweepers, clearing 37 mines off Farewell Spit and Three Kings. Twenty-two would wash ashore; one was never found. The *Wolf* would also capture and sink 14 ships, taking supplies and prisoners back to Germany. Despite rumours of a German raider in New Zealand waters, nothing was confirmed until after the war.

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THE TECHNOLOGY OF WAR

With the trenches of the First World War proving insurmountable for either side on the Western Front, technology advanced in an attempt to break through the line. Tanks made their first failed appearance on the battlefield in September 1916, but by the time this tank was photographed during the Battle of Messines in 1917, refinements in design were beginning to have some impact. Initially experiments in a more mobile version of warfare, by the end of 1917 tanks were being deployed in great numbers.

ABOVE: Members of the Royal Navy manoeuvre a tank, or 'landship', over a trench during the Battle of Cambrai just west of the French town.

THE TECHNOLOGY OF WAR

The question keeping generals awake was how to break the stalemate of trench warfare, which had seen thousands wounded, maimed and killed. Their master plans just weren't achievable with the technology they had. But in 1917 technological innovations emerged and were the catalyst for new tactics.

Mark I tanks debuted at the Somme in September 1916. These armoured beasts running on tracks certainly took the Germans by surprise, but most of them broke down or were immobilised by artillery fire. The Allied troops hated these 'landships', and for good reason: they were smelly, slow, noisy, cumbersome, always breaking down and getting stuck in shell craters and trenches. Inside, you breathed putrid fumes and risked carbon-monoxide poisoning.

PAGE 23: Christopher Nevinson's propaganda work 'Making the Engine' from 1917 draws on cubism and futurism to capture the technological nature of the First World War.

But the design was finetuned, and the Mark IV was introduced. At Messines in June, 72 Mark IV tanks lagged behind but helped a little. At Passchendaele in October they got stuck in the mud. However, tanks started demanding respect at the Battle of Cambrai in November, where 476 advanced in three-tank triangle formations to provide cover for the infantry and tear down the barbed wire; few broke down or were immobilised by fire. When a rogue commander ordered his division to follow the tanks rather than attack alongside them, those tanks were destroyed. This showed that infantry and tanks were quite the double act. Together they helped break the deadlock of static trench warfare, where even three kilometres an hour was an improvement. They could now cross sophisticated trench systems and most craters, and tear through German barbed-wire entanglements. (The Germans, however, didn't rate and barely used tanks.)

ABOVE: 'Diehard', part of the British Army's Tank Corps and one of around 2,100 tanks used by the British Empire during the war. Painted by Nugent Welch.

Tanks had repaired their reputation but artillery was still king, with cannons and howitzers (mortar shells) fired accurately over long distances, and creeping barrages that helped protect the infantry and tear down barbed wire. The Germans did rate flamethrowers, which projected a long stream of burning fuel, but the Brits considered them too dangerous to operate. The Germans also rated gas shells, which weren't killers but sidelined soldiers for six to eight weeks. So the British introduced the Livens projectors to fire gas canisters more accurately. The British infantry was also using the lighter Lewis machine gun, which could be carried by one soldier rather than two.

Meanwhile, in the Middle East, tanks and gas shells achieved little, but scouting, aircraft and artillery were helping the Allies push into Palestine, and the railway under construction would soon transport men and supplies. Advances in technology would continue to change the way this war was waged.

ABOVE: The French Saint-Chamond tank, depicted here by M Jonas, was initially developed for trench warfare but would prove more effective later in the war when battlefields became more open.

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PLASTIC SURGERY

As trench warfare revolved around continuous artillery barrages and snipers, the survivors found themselves reporting to first aid stations with horrific head injuries, often the only body part exposed to the enemy munitions. During the war New Zealander Harold Gillies, pictured far right, would become a pioneer in facial reconstruction, successfully lobbying for the creation of a specialist facial plastic surgery hospital, The Queen's Hospital, which opened in Kent in 1917.

PLASTIC SURGERY

As the weapons of warfare changed, so did the injuries. Soldiers peering over the parapets in trenches copped fire from snipers and machine guns. But shrapnel from exploding shells was the biggest killer. When these twisted shards of metal rained down they could destroy a chin, cheek, eye or whole face without killing a man. Around 15 per cent of the British survivors had 'facial trauma' and filled convalescent wards in France and England. Sixty thousand British soldiers suffered head or eye injuries, and some navy and aircraft veterans suffered burns.

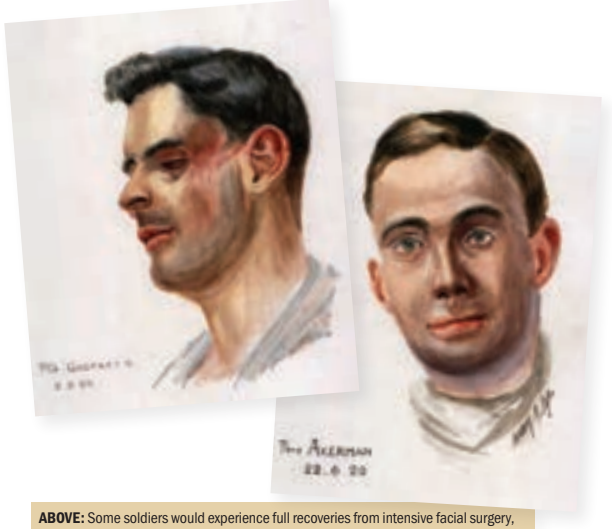
Enter Harold Gillies, a Dunedin-born, Wanganui-schooled surgeon who practised in England and served with the Royal Army Medical Corps. While on leave, he saw French surgeon Hippolyte Morestin

ABOVE: The plastics theatre at The Queen's Hospital, Frognal, Sidcup.

PAGE 27: No. 2 New Zealand General Hospital at Walton-on-Thames, Surrey, where Henry Pickerill's unit for treating facial and jaw injuries suffered by New Zealand soldiers was established in 1917.

remove a facial tumour and graft skin onto the wound. Inspired, and wanting to help a flood of disfigured casualties, Gillies successfully lobbied army authorities to start a facial-reconstruction unit at Cambridge Military Hospital in 1915.

There were more men than beds, so in August 1917 The Queen's Hospital was opened at Frognal Estate in Kent with first 300 then 560 beds. Spilling over to nearby hospitals and houses, the unit eventually provided more than 1,000 beds, admitted more than 5,000 servicemen, and performed more than 11,000 operations between 1917 and 1925. According to a nurse, Gillies treated "a stream of wounded men with half their faces literally blown to pieces, with the skin left hanging in shreds and the jawbones crushed to a pulp".



ABOVE: Some soldiers would experience full recoveries from intensive facial surgery, while others would suffer mentally and physically from their scars, often preventing them from reintegrating with society on their return to New Zealand.

Some men needed a dozen operations over two or more years. Gillies did a dozen operations a day, sketching noses on envelopes, cracking jokes to lift patients' spirits and working until midnight. Despite the crude tools and the lack of resources, his were pioneering treatments. For instance, Gillies let a flap of skin on a patient's wound curl in on itself, sewed it into a tube, then grafted it onto the face in the 'suitcase-handle' technique. In 1918 Gillies was joined by New Zealand surgeon Henry Pickerill.

Before-and-after drawings, diagrams, photographs, stereographs, X-rays, watercolours and wax models have survived. The New Zealand records contain 98 watercolours. Some men didn't look too bad afterwards; others have just the hint of a chin, or a bulbous mass for a nose.

Some men were stoic. Some refused to see their families. Some used prosthetic masks and eye patches. Many never really reintegrated into society on returning home, conscious of pitying looks and averted eyes. However, they knew they would have been much worse off without the father of modern plastic surgery.

LEFT: Harold Gillies at age 22, photographed in 1902 while studying medicine at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge University.

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PASSCHENDAELE

The deadliest day in New Zealand's military history, 12 October 1917 saw 845 lives lost at the Belgian village of Passchendaele. Included in the casualty list was George Knight from Dannevirke, fatally shot through the chest and throat, and buried in an unmarked grave alongside countless other soldiers killed during the failed offensive. Post-war the Tyne Cot Cemetery would memorialise these fallen troops close to where they perished, alongside other sites at Buttes, Polygon Wood and Messines.

ABOVE: A burial party at Bellevue painted by George Butler shows a typical post-battle scene as New Zealand survivors bury the dead.

PASSCHENDAELE

12 October 1917 was the deadliest day in New Zealand's history. The failed attempt to capture the Belgian village of Passchendaele resulted in 3,700 New Zealand casualties, including 845 killed.

By early October George Knight had been back at the front for three months. He was restless. On 4 October the British won the Battle of Broodseinde, where 484 New Zealand soldiers died. That day George wrote home saying he'd been promoted to company commander. "I am liable to be called up to go to the front line to help in the big attack," he wrote. "I have been looking forward to this for ever so long. As for coming through safely, it is in someone else's hands and I'll do my share."

A 9 October attack gained little ground, with 5,700 Allied casualties. Senior officers warned against proceeding with an attack planned for 12 October, given rain and mud that would smother British

PAGE 31: New Zealand engineers photographed resting in a large shell hole at Spree Farm, Ypres Salient, 12 October 1917.

artillery and destabilise their platforms. Yet the First Battle of Passchendaele went ahead. Exhausted from weeks of engineering work, New Zealand's 2nd Brigade and Rifle Brigades were ordered to march to the front line and wait 24 hours in water-logged shell craters.

At 5.25am on 12 October, under German fire, a composed-looking George Knight led his company over the top and up Bellevue Spur. Rather than screening the infantry and killing Germans, the wonky, weak creeping barrage killed many New Zealand soldiers. Meanwhile, the tanks got stuck in the mud, drawing fire. The rain drove down and many wounded soldiers drowned in shell holes turned mud craters. Others were incinerated by flamethrowers.

Crucially, the British artillery bombardment failed to cut the barbed-wire entanglements protecting German machine-gun and artillery embankments. After three-quarters of his men had fallen, George and his remaining men reached the wire, 50 yards deep. Those who tried to penetrate it got tangled up and shot, while others took cover in shell craters. George's darkest hour had come.

RIGHT: *The Daily Mail Official War Post Card* series acknowledges the Anzac bond in France, January 1917. Both countries would suffer horrific losses at Passchendaele later the same year.

He knew their attack was pointless. Did he feel betrayed? Angry? When the order came to return to the trenches, George stood up to call out to the men – the only way to let them know – and was shot fatally through the chest and throat. "From the time we got between 20 yards of the German line we all knew that we were practically going to our death," wrote survivor LM Hart to Ellen, "and no one must have known better than Mr Knight who like the hero that he was, met his end." His men had to leave his body to drag back the wounded across 4.5 kilometres of mud and craters. The attack was finally abandoned that afternoon. When the Canadians finally took Passchendaele on 6 November, it no longer mattered much strategically.

To boost morale, Passchendaele was painted as a success, but there was no hiding that casualty list. No wonder many New Zealanders began feeling misled by the powers that be.

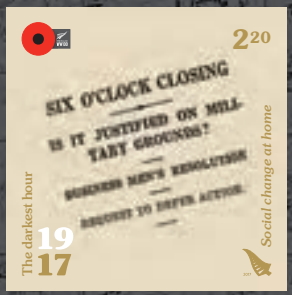
A century on, New Zealand's Passchendaele Society is preserving the memory of those who fell there.

ABOVE: Tyne Cot Cemetery in Belgium where George Bernard Knight, whose remains were never found, is commemorated in the New Zealand Apse. More New Zealand First World War graves are at Tyne Cot than any other cemetery.

1917

THE DARKEST HOUR

NEW ZEALAND'S STORY

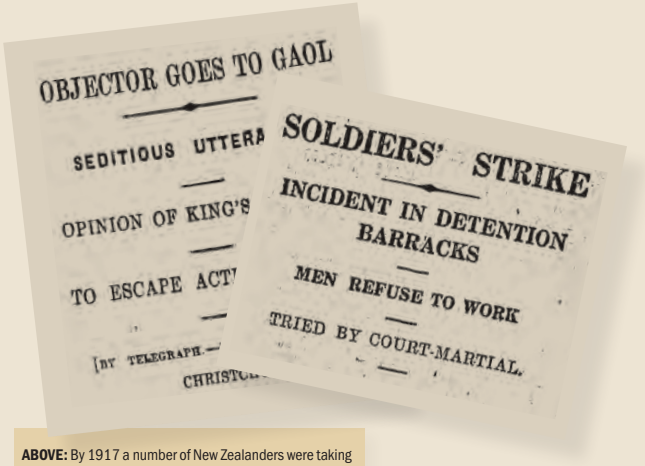


SOCIAL CHANGE AT HOME

The temperance movement, conscientious objection, mining unrest and shipping strikes all had their day during the First World War. Arguably none had a greater impact on the population at home than six o'clock closing, introduced by temperance supporters as a wartime measure to "retain productivity". The catalyst for the six o'clock swill, this wartime act of parliament would still be in effect 50 years later, casting an unusual shadow of the war on New Zealand shores from the depths of 1917.

HIS LITTLE BIT.

Grandson: Grandpa, the people say you did nothing to win the great war.
Grandpa: Me? Gracious me, boy, I signed the six o'clock closing of bars petition.


OBJECTOR GOES TO GAOL

SEDITIOUS UTTERA

OPINION OF KING'S

TO ESCAPE ACT

[BY TELEGRAPH—

CHRISTC

SOLDIERS' STRIKE

INCIDENT IN DETENTION BARRACKS

MEN REFUSE TO WORK

TRIED BY COURT-MARTIAL

ABOVE: By 1917 a number of New Zealanders were taking a stand against a seemingly never-ending war, including conscientious objectors and serving soldiers.

SOCIAL CHANGE AT HOME

Back home, war was proving a catalyst for social change, as New Zealanders continued to put up with much for the greater good.

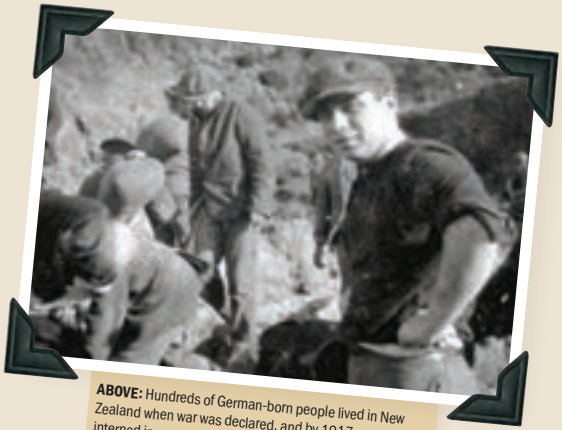
The temperance movement emerged in Britain and the United States in the early 19th century, arguing that alcohol was the cause of poverty, ill-health, neglect, violence and immorality. By the 1880s prohibition was a hot potato in New Zealand politics, a highly emotional, polarising issue. Women, who often bore the brunt of drunk husbands, linked the "demon drink" to women's rights. In 1886, temperance groups formed a national network, the New Zealand Alliance (NZA), which lobbied for total prohibition. Between 1894 and 1908, 12 of 76 New Zealand electorates "went dry", banning liquor

PAGE 35: The public reaction to six o'clock closing was mixed, with many sceptical of its importance to the outcome of the war.

sales. Then, in 1911's national referendum, numbers fell just short of the 60 per cent threshold required for prohibition.

When war broke out, the temperance movement seized its chance to get prohibition enshrined in law. It played on fears that soldiers would overindulge in alcohol and prostitution, and that drunkenness would hamper productivity. So when the NZA presented the government with petitions of 160,000-plus signatures, and the new National Efficiency Board advised prohibition, the government was worried. Could it risk alienating half the nation?

It chose a halfway measure. The "temporary" Sale of Liquor Restriction Act was introduced in December 1917, ending liquor sales at six o'clock sharp. Workers and soldiers who finished work or training at five o'clock soon dubbed it the six o'clock swill.



ABOVE: Hundreds of German-born people lived in New Zealand when war was declared, and by 1917 many were interned in camps on Somes Island and Motuihe Island.

Given that the new legislation was framed as crucial to the war effort, many individuals didn't want to argue against it publicly. New Zealanders soon got used to the idea, and six o'clock closing was made permanent in 1918. In 1919 49.7 per cent of New Zealanders voted for prohibition, the closest the country ever came to outlawing alcohol. The temperance movement never achieved prohibition, but had a long hangover, with the six o'clock swill only abolished in 1967.

Meanwhile, burgeoning protest politics saw miners and seamen strike to demand change in their working conditions. In April 1917 the government passed War Regulations making "seditious" shipping strikes punishable by jail.

Despite the scorn piled on conscientious objectors, who refused to enlist due to religious or pacifist beliefs, 100 were held in New Zealand prisons and prison camps by the end of the year. Fourteen of the most stubborn were sent to England in July and ten were sent on to France. There, four men, including the pacifist movement's figurehead Archibald Baxter, were tied to posts in the open.

ABOVE: As the war outlook became grim, novelty greeting cards began carrying the message of peace, invoking icons of New Zealand life alongside the call for "peace and plenty".

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A CHANGING WORKFORCE

The Census and Statistics Office Military Service Section, photographed in Routh's building in Wellington during a military service ballot, shows the changing nature of New Zealand's clerical workforce during the late war years. Nearly 60,000 men had left for overseas by 1917, and the country looked to women to fill varied commercial and professional roles left empty, or to 'keep them warm' until the men returned.

ABOVE: In the absence of more than 60,000 men overseas, women were brought into the paid workforce. These women are being taught wool testing and classing at the Masterton Technical School in November 1917.

A CHANGING WORKFORCE

As the war dragged on, many women wanted to do more than fundraise and keep the home fires burning. The workforce beckoned.

The Women's National Reserve was established in 1915 to link, centralise and train women working or willing to work, but existed largely in name only.

By 1917 nearly 60,000 New Zealand men had left to fight overseas, and people were needed to take their jobs. Before the war, women had worked mainly in domestic jobs. Now women – particularly young women without children – began taking traditionally male jobs in the professional and commercial fields. Think teachers, cashiers, post office clerks, government administrators and shop assistants.

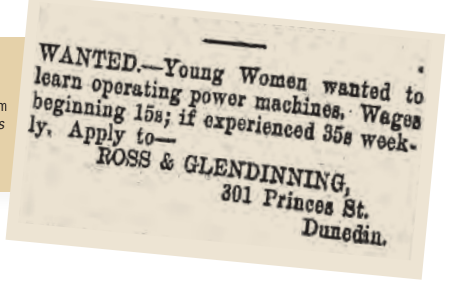
In her late teens, Ellen's daughter Margarette

PAGE 39: One of six lithographs on women's work produced by Archibald Standish-Hartrick in 1917 for the British Propaganda Bureau's portfolio to be exhibited and used to raise funds for the war effort.

(Barbie) Knight worked in an office. She was described in a letter by family friend Sybil Lee as "cheery & very interested in her job... It is a very good thing she is doing office work because she comes in fresh & full of life & brightens the household". Was she enjoying the greater independence and her own wages? Her elder sisters Phyllis and Dorothy had full days too. They helped their mother with household chores and the younger children, fundraised for the war effort and the Belgian Relief Fund, and knitted for their brothers even while at the pictures. Meanwhile, George's sweetheart Phyllis Secker worked as a teacher.

Many women took government jobs. In the photograph featured on the stamp, women working in the Census and Statistics Office's Military Service Section are conducting a military service (conscription) ballot. Mary Mulcahy, the new wife of Audit Department clerk-turned-soldier James Mulcahy, joined the Military Service Section as a temporary employee on 1 April 1917. She resigned when James arrived home.

Were women only keeping the seats warm for men?


WANTED.—Young Women wanted to learn operating power machines. Wages beginning 15s; if experienced 35s weekly. Apply to—
ROSS & GLENDINNING,
301 Princes St.
Dunedin.

RIGHT: A typical newspaper advertisement from *The Tuapeka Times* asking for female workers.

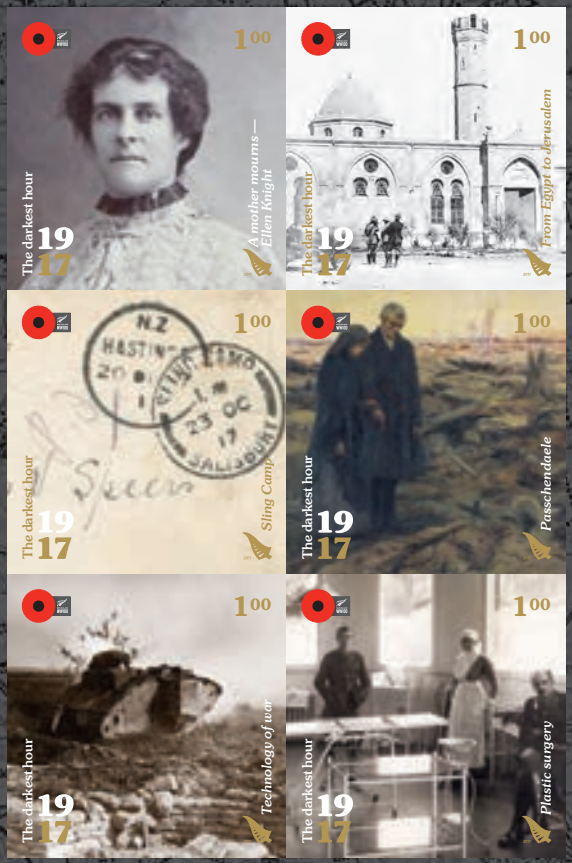
LEFT: The cover of this knitting book compiled by the Countess of Liverpool includes a poem extolling the efforts of women at home, and the men's sacrifice for Empire and Freedom.

After the war many men argued that working was harmful to women's health – and employers faced intense pressure from the likes of the Returned Soldiers' Association to return jobs to men. And many did. But of course, many men were never coming back – and the thousands of women left widows didn't have the option of being only wives and mothers. Women tended to leave professional and administrative jobs, but stay on in roles such as textile workers and shop assistants.

While it was still a man's world, women had proved their worth and society was starting to change. But in 1917 they were thinking less about feminism and more about winning the war and getting their men home.

"I wonder that any sane person who knows the destruction, the degradation, the misery and the sorrow caused by war, can regard it as anything else than diabolical in the extreme..."

Archibald Baxter



1917

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NEW ZEALAND'S STORY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

COVER AND STAMP Knight Family
iv National Collection of War Art, Archives New Zealand AAAC 898 NCWA 514
vi Imperial War Museum (Q 3965)
2 Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries, Postcard 1917
3 Knight Family
4 Knight Family
5 Knight Family
STAMP Imperial War Museum (Q 13162)
7 Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand PA1-q-605-34a-2
8 Imperial War Museums (Q12320)
9 Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand 1/2-067455-F
10 National Army Museum, New Zealand (2007.518)
STAMP Glenn R. Reddiex, private postcard collection, http://100nzww1postcards.blogspot.co.nz
11-14 Glenn R. Reddiex, private postcard collection, http://100nzww1postcards.blogspot.co.nz
STAMP Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand 1/2-012783-G
15 Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand 1/4-009464-G
16 National Collection of War Art, Archives New Zealand AAAC 898 NCWA 462
17 Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand 1/4-009460-G
18 National Collection of War Art, Archives New Zealand AAAC 898 NCWA 473
STAMP Ian Farquhar
19 Colonist, 19 September 1917
20 Ian Farquhar
21 Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand 1/2-015919-G
22 Public Domain
STAMP Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand PA1-f-091-H391
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24 Public Domain
25 National Collection of War Art, Archives New Zealand AAAC 898 NCWA 402
26 National Collection of War Art, Archives New Zealand AAAC 898 NCWA Q555
STAMP Dr Andrew Bamji
27 Glenn R. Reddiex, private postcard collection, http://100nzww1postcards.blogspot.co.nz
28-30 c/-Gillies Archive
STAMP National Collection of War Art, Archives New Zealand AAAC 898 NCWA 456
31 Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand 1/2-012935-G
32 National Collection of War Art, Archives New Zealand AAAC 898 NCWA 477
33 Public Domain
34 New Zealand War Graves Trust
STAMP *The Evening Post*, Volume XCI, Issue 149, 24 June 1916
35 *Observer*, 23 June 1917
36 *The Evening Post*, Volume XCIII, Issue 62, 13 March 1917
37 Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand 1/2-091237-F
38 Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand Eph-A-CARDS-New-Year-1917-01
STAMP Statistics New Zealand
39 National Collection of War Art, Archives New Zealand AAAC 898 NCWA Q407
40 Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Libraries AWNS-19171115-36-4
41 *The Tuapeka Times*, 1917
42 Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand BK 810-Cover

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