



THANK YOU

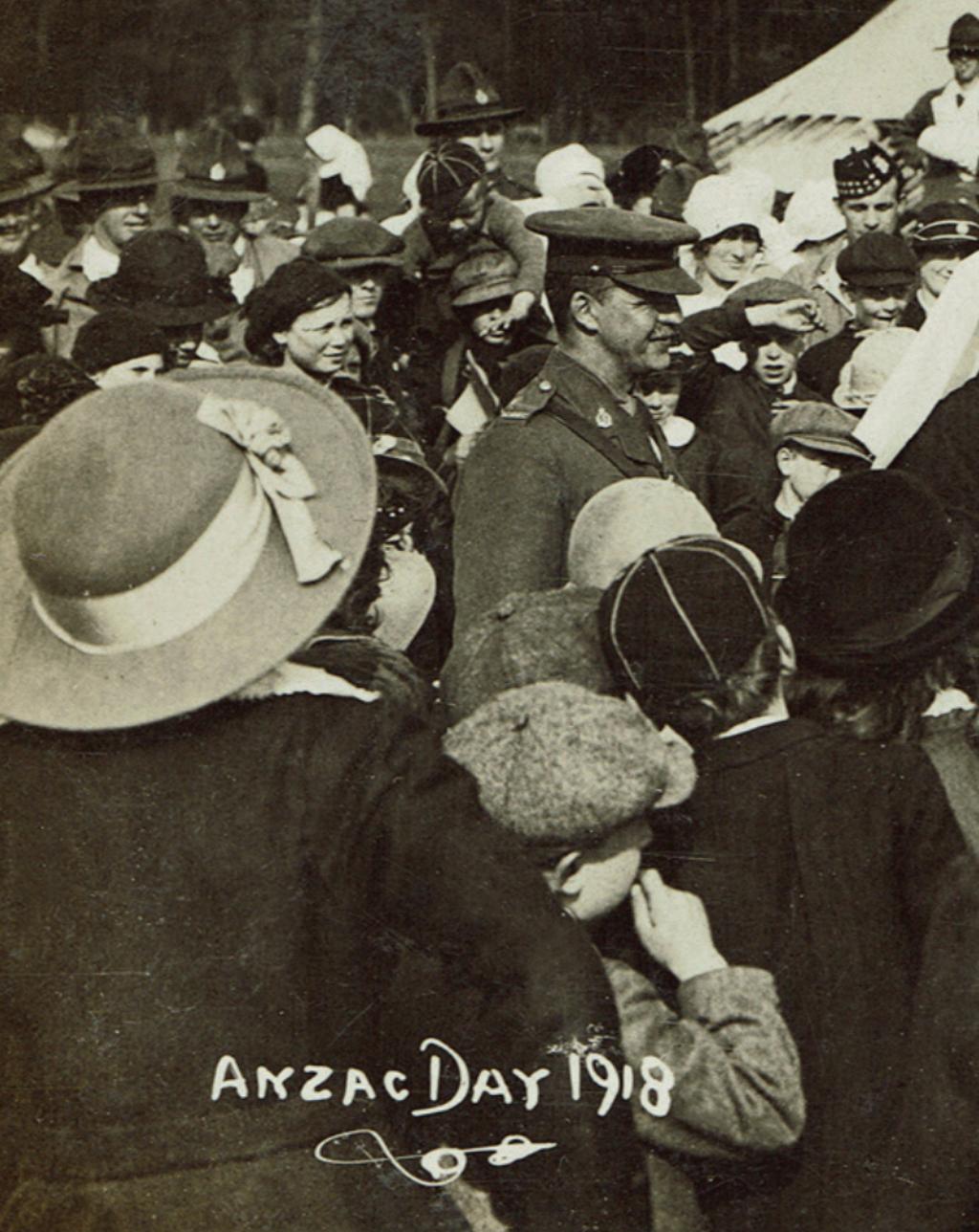
Thank you to the Gordon family – in particular Arthur’s grandson, John Gordon – for sharing with us memories, photographs and documents to assist in telling Arthur Gordon’s story, and for giving further insight into the story of New Zealand in 1918.

COVER: Arthur Gordon, born near Tapanui, Otago in 1895, was the eldest of eight children.

1918
BACK FROM THE BRINK
NEW ZEALAND'S STORY

THE
FIRST WORLD WAR

100 YEARS - LEST WE FORGET



ANZAC DAY 1918

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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.

LEFT: Anzac Day 1918 at Brockenhurst, one of a number of hospital sites for New Zealand troops.



INTRODUCTION

When 1918 dawned, few New Zealanders were feeling optimistic about the year to come. The war, supposed to have ended by Christmas 1914, had dragged on for more than three long, lethal years. Just 11 weeks before New Year, the bloodbath of Passchendaele saw 845 New Zealand soldiers die in the deadliest day of the country's history. Many mothers, fathers and wives had heard the fateful knock of the telegraph boy.

Meanwhile, New Zealanders were feeling increasingly distrustful of government propaganda that told them the Allies were winning, when the casualty lists told another story. The use of new technologies, such as tanks and aircraft, had done little to interrupt the static trench warfare of the Western Front. And now, the Russian Revolution had led that country and another ally, Romania, to withdraw from the war. The one bright spot was that the United States had joined the Allies and was building up its forces in France.

Then everything changed on the Western Front. The German Spring Offensive between March and July failed to make a decisive breakthrough, and the Germans haemorrhaged men they couldn't replace. In August, the Allies launched what would become the Hundred Days Offensive. As the war became fast-moving and left the trenches for open ground, replacement weapons and fresh troops boosted Allied morale.

LEFT: New Zealand soldiers sightseeing aboard a charabanc, an early form of bus that troops would take for tours of the countryside while on leave or during recovery.

NEW ZEALAND'S 1918 STORY

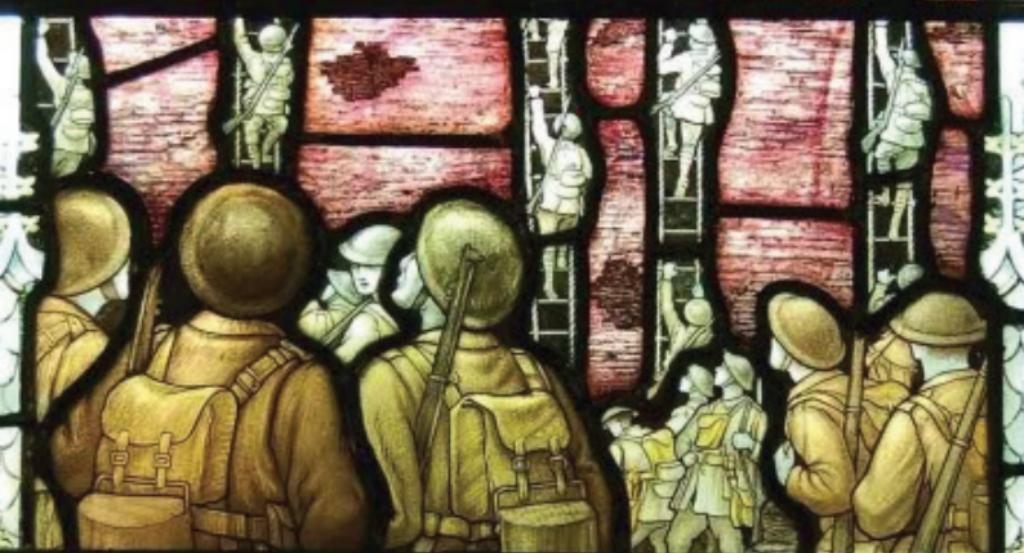
The New Zealand soldiers were surviving on rations and rumours, but the scent of victory was getting stronger. They helped to force the Germans to retreat beyond their last major defensive position, the Hindenburg Line. Then the New Zealand Division was tasked with capturing fortress town Le Quesnoy – and scaled the walls in a daring assault that went down in history.

The writing on the wall became signatures on paper when the Germans signed the Armistice of 11 November 1918, also known as the Armistice of Compiègne. Technically it was a cessation of hostilities for now, but in reality the war was over. When news of the Armistice was read to the New Zealand troops, they didn't show much emotion, but were surely flooded by relief.

On the morning of 12 November the news arrived in New Zealand, and the nation finally let out a collective breath. Most workers were granted the day off. However, not everyone risked congregating in public places to celebrate: some had the so-called 'Spanish flu', and others feared catching it. Around 8,600 New Zealanders died from the influenza pandemic, or its complications, including



ABOVE: William James Simpson, like many others, was killed in September 1918 with the end of the war in sight.

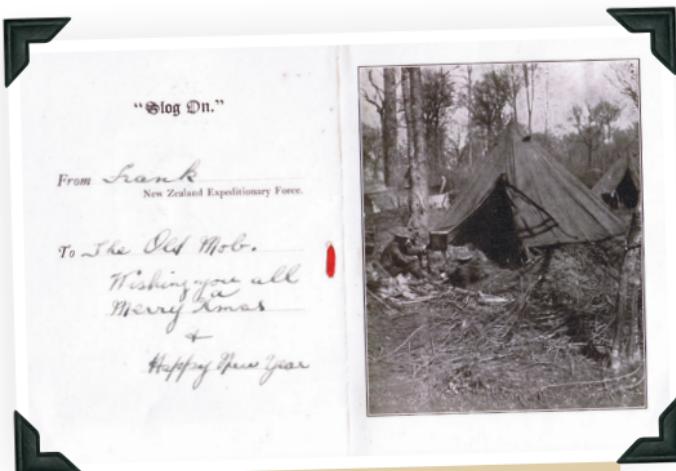


Le QUESNOY
4 NOV R
1918

NEW ZEALAND'S 1918 STORY

soldiers on the Western Front and in England. The return of the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion as a unit in April 1919 served as a proxy for the country's communal welcome to the troops still trickling in. Of the 40,000 casualties who survived, many thousands were suffering from physical disabilities and others were mentally damaged. The government accepted its duty to provide physical and mental rehabilitation, vocational training and a land-settlement scheme that helped many men to establish farms.

However, finding a new normal was impossible for the most damaged. They, like New Zealand, were forever changed. Embroiled in world events, an isolated country had done its bit and become less naive and more secure in its own identity – at great cost. The tally of New Zealanders who died in the war (including through illness and other misadventure) was over 18,000, the highest number, per capita, of the British Empire.



ABOVE: Slog On. Christmas 1918 would not be the end of postcards home for some still serving overseas, like Frank of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, writing to the 'Old Mob' back home.

1918

BACK FROM THE BRINK

NEW ZEALAND'S STORY



SERVING HIS COUNTRY - ARTHUR GORDON

Arthur Gordon, the eldest of eight children from a Tapanui farming family, left New Zealand with the 20th Reinforcements in December 1916. He served on the Western Front in the Otago Regiment from June 1917 until suffering life-threatening injuries during the Allies' Hundred Days Offensive, losing both legs to an enemy shell. After returning to New Zealand in 1920, Arthur spent much of his life as an advocate for injured and disabled soldiers.



GETTING ON WITH LIFE

ARTHUR GORDON

Born in 1895, Arthur Gordon grew up the eldest son of eight children on the Gordon dairy farm near Tapanui, Otago. After his schooling he worked as an orchard labourer in nearby Roxburgh.

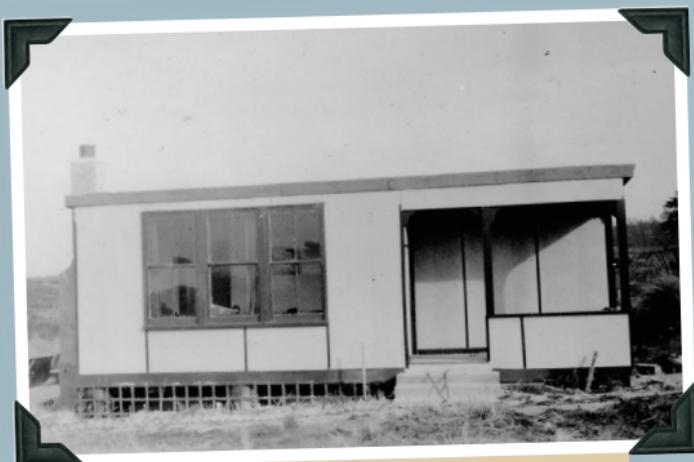
Arthur volunteered for the New Zealand Expeditionary Force in 1916, believing it his Christian duty. His war diaries record his experiences. During his four months' training at Featherston Military Camp, he heard that his best friend Bob Hay had been killed in action. Arthur sailed from Wellington on 30 December 1916 as part of the J Company's 20th Reinforcements. By early March he was at Sling Camp in England, with its 'deadly strict' discipline. By 1 June he was at the front. On 3 June he discovered that his uncle Gideon had been killed by a high-explosive shell; another uncle, Robert, would die in the same way.

Arthur served mainly in the 14th Company of the Otago Regiment's 3rd Battalion – under Sergeant Jim Courtney Falconer, his former employer in Roxburgh – and also fought with five other units at various times. Like most New Zealand soldiers Arthur had short periods of training and leave in between longer periods of going between active duty in the trenches and work in camp. This included sentry duty, digging trenches and erecting wire entanglements, sometimes through the night in freezing conditions. Shells that 'only left pieces' of men narrowly missed him many times.

NEW ZEALAND'S 1918 STORY

At the Battle of Messines in June 1917 Arthur was behind the lines and heard the 'deafening roar' of mines blowing up under the German lines as the New Zealanders went over the top and advanced quietly in small groups. Despite New Zealand's 3,700 casualties, Arthur still believed in 'the greatest battle in progress ever fought'. That month he became a platoon runner, trained in map-reading so he could carry messages between posts. "I was glad as it is a very interesting job," Arthur wrote.

He heard rumours of 'big stunts' after The Battle of Passchendaele began on 31 July. As September 1917 became October, the New Zealand Division marched through Ypres towards the front line. They were charged with the 4 October attack on Gravenstafel Spur. "Will one come through it?" Arthur wrote. "My job is to carry orders so I will be on the move all the time." They took the spur, but by the time they'd consolidated their position 500 New Zealanders had died. Arthur passed the bodies of Sergeant Falconer and friend Harry Dickson.



ABOVE: The settlement of Taieri Mouth around 1959.

NEW ZEALAND'S 1918 STORY

Arthur wasn't one of those sent over the top on New Zealand's 'blackest day' at Passchendaele on 12 October, but by then the war had become a living nightmare for him. Taking cover in muddy shell holes, Arthur couldn't sleep for a week because of freezing temperatures, driving rain and rheumatic (joint) pain. From there his health deteriorated – flu, dysentery, trench fever, constant colds, rheumatism – but if he could move, he worked. His diaries testify to his growing horror and disillusionment, and to his increasing criticism of commanders' decisions and the appalling conditions. "I was never before so sick of the game." However, he never lost his courage or his wry sense of humour.

On 24 March 1918, as the German Spring Offensive began, the New Zealand Division was rushed south to the Somme where they helped to stabilise the front. Carrying messages between posts, Arthur somehow survived the shelling of a trench he'd ducked into.



ABOVE: New Zealand troops in the French village of Bertrancourt on the Somme. They are accompanied by horse transport.

During the Allies' Hundred Days Offensive, Arthur was running a message to headquarters on the evening of 31 August, accompanied by a friend. Only Arthur survived the shell. His lower legs were damaged beyond repair and he was also wounded in the left forearm and neck. He was stabilised and shipped to hospital at Walton-on-Thames in England, where one leg was amputated above and one below the knee. He would have around eight more operations on his stumps due to gangrene, a potentially life-threatening necrosis.

After recovering, he slowly learned to walk on artificial legs fitted to his stumps, always with the help of a stick. His stumps caused him pain for the rest of his life, with morphine only taking the edge off.

In February 1920 Arthur arrived home at the new family farm in Heriot to tears and hugs. Unable to farm he trained as a draughtsman, and in September 1920 started at the Lands and Survey Department in Dunedin. As he negotiated Dunedin's deep street gutters, his artificial legs fell off more than once. He patiently waited for rescue.

In 1922, he married Matilda (Chrissie) Sproule, whom he had known before the war. In memory of Arthur's sergeant Jim Courtney Falconer, they named their first son Keith Courtney Gordon. The couple also had Arthur Graeme (Graeme), now 88, and William Geoffrey (Geoffrey). The family settled on a sizeable rural property at Abbotsford on Dunedin's outskirts.

NEW ZEALAND'S 1918 STORY

Arthur, a fairly strict father, didn't show any psychological problems beyond the odd quirk. But the war had shaken him to the core. The man who had frowned on 'Fritz' for shelling a church on Sunday no longer attended church.

A draughtsman job that he considered fairly easy left him time and energy for his life-long advocacy for disabled servicemen. Arthur became President of the Returned Soldiers' Association (RSA) Dunedin branch in the early 1930s, received an RSA Gold Star, and later organised reunions. He became the Chair of the Limbless Committee within the RSA in 1936.

Arthur believed that disabled servicemen should be treated better, and lobbied the government on everything from the development of better artificial limbs to improving paltry war pensions for which many deserving men did not qualify. Fellow veterans were his closest friends, and the only people he spoke to about the war.

Arthur was horrified by news of the Second World War. Yet, aged 45, he volunteered and became Captain of the Green Island Home Guard, fearful of the Japanese. In 1944 Arthur co-founded the Otago and Southland War Amputees' Association, helping to secure a bequest of coastal land at the Taieri River mouth so that financially stretched disabled servicemen could holiday there. He visited his cottage there often. He was involved in the New Zealand War Amputees' Association throughout his life.

RIGHT: Livingstonia Park, the site of the Otago and Southland War Amputees Association health camp in 1953.

LIVINGSTONIA PARK
The site of the
OTAGO & SOUTHLAND WAR
AMPUTEES ASSN. (INC.)

HEALTH CAMP

PEACE, RESPECT, PROPERTY



NEW ZEALAND'S 1918 STORY

Arthur's brother Irvine died in an accident in 1951 and left the family farm to his siblings. Arthur moved to and managed the farm on his siblings' behalf so that his mother Mary could keep living there.

Arthur was devastated when wife Chrissie died suddenly of heart failure in her 50s. Then aged 61, Arthur moved to a small rural holding in Blenheim and later a flat, living alone with help from family. He enjoyed his garden, grandchildren and reading.

Arthur was visiting son Keith in Australia when he died of heart failure on 27 August 1978, aged 83. His ashes were interred under a headstone in the family plot at Tapanui. His hadn't been an easy life, but he'd used his experiences to advocate for those less fortunate. As for himself, he simply got on with life.



ABOVE: Taieri Mouth around 1959, showing the location of the first War Amputees' Association cottage.

1918
BACK FROM THE BRINK
NEW ZEALAND'S STORY



GREAT AIR WAR

Powered flight was barely ten years old by the time the First World War erupted. It quickly became the focus of rapid technological advances, as each side sought every battlefield advantage. The Sopwith Camel was a welcome sight to New Zealand troops on the Western Front, and many New Zealand pilots served with the Royal Flying Corps, later to become the Royal Air Force, during the war.



NEW ZEALAND'S 1918 STORY



LEFT: In 1918, stylised aircraft dogfighting over an attractive landscape and rolling hills depicted a very different war experience from that on the ground.



RIGHT: A cap badge from the Royal Flying Corps. In April 1918 they would be merged with the Royal Naval Air Service to form the Royal Air Force.

PAGE 18: More than 800 New Zealanders served in air forces during the war, including the Royal Flying Corps, the Royal Navy Air Service, and the Australian Flying Corps.

GREAT AIR WAR

Aircraft were just coming into military favour at the war's outset. By 1918 they had become the latest incarnation of each side's attempt to 'one-up' each other by using innovation and technology, such as cavalry, ships and tanks. This was about creating both a tactical advantage and a psychological edge, as a visible symbol of the clash between two mechanical empires.

It's debatable how much impact aircraft had on the outcome of the war. However, they were certainly useful in reconnaissance for the artillery and in aerial photography, because the value of that information outweighed the danger of being shot down. As reconnaissance became regular, each side began to attack the other's 'recce' planes. Fighter planes were sent up to protect them, which led to bigger battles and bombers attacking ground targets.

Before the development of parachutes, aviators also risked 'friendly fire' from other pilots and anti-aircraft artillery, as Arthur Gordon noted.

"Our anti-aircraft [artillery] was firing on Fritz's and accidentally caught our own plane which came down buckled up from a terrible height."

Arthur Gordon often looked up at the noisy "flying tractors".

"One of our tri-planes gave us a good display of nose-diving, cork screwing and loop the loop."

NEW ZEALAND'S 1918 STORY

New Zealand didn't yet have an air force. However, through their own initiative around 1,000 New Zealand men served with other air forces, largely Britain's Royal Flying Corps (renamed the Royal Air Force in 1918). About 250 New Zealanders saw active service with squadrons, mostly as air rather than ground crew. Seventy-five of them died.

Auckland bank clerk Keith Caldwell sailed for England in January 1916, and was commissioned in the Royal Flying Corps in April. He arrived in France in July. Seemingly fearless, he excelled at finding enemy aircraft and enticing them into combat. On one occasion he nursed his crippled aircraft to ground level before jumping clear. After a brief period as an instructor in England, Keith was promoted to major and given command of No. 74 Squadron. In the final eight months of the war, 'Tiger Squadron' aviators destroyed or drove down more than 200 enemy aircraft that were 'out of control' (certain to crash). Keith was one of very few squadron commanders to risk his life in offensive patrols.

Keith, who received the Military Cross and the Distinguished Flying Cross, heads the list of New Zealand's 14 'flying aces', who were lionised back home. Keith became a farmer, founding captain of the Auckland Aero Club, and commander of the Royal New Zealand Air Force's (RNZAF's) territorial division. During the Second World War the RNZAF station commander was posted to India and England and became an Air Commodore, a high-ranking officer.

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NEW ZEALAND'S STORY



**HUNDRED DAYS
OFFENSIVE**

The failure of the German Spring Offensive by July 1918 gave the Allies an opportunity to counter-attack along the length of the Western Front, a strategy that saw rapid advances and the liberation of enemy-occupied territory, including areas shattered by the previous four years of war. Mobility replaced static trench warfare and by the end of three months the Allies were deep behind the old front lines.



1918
Burke

HUNDRED DAYS OFFENSIVE

When the war started in 1914, many on both sides thought it would be over by Christmas. The reality was anything but fast-moving, with years of static trench warfare seeing numerous lives and limbs lost to gain a few hundred metres here and there. However, by early 1918 there was light at the end of the trenches, with battles being fought on open ground and Allied victories proving decisive.

The German Spring Offensive between March and July 1918 couldn't achieve a decisive breakthrough – and the million German casualties couldn't be replaced, while the Allied casualties could. The British commanders felt increasingly confident in their main objective – pushing the Germans out of France by forcing them to retreat beyond the Hindenburg Line, the last major German defensive position.



ABOVE: Some buildings could be repurposed at short notice, such as this artillery outpost depicted by Nugent Welch during the Hundred Days Offensive in 1918.

PAGE 24: One of the first attacks of the Hundred Days Offensive was known as the Second Battle of Bapaume. It was during this operation that Arthur Gordon was wounded, ending his war.



ABOVE: Infantry and tanks advance quickly after the capture of Grévillers by New Zealand and British troops.

From 8 August the Allies launched a series of rapid advances in a period later dubbed the Hundred Days Offensive, given its three-month duration through to 11 November. This counter-offensive was carried out according to a deliberate strategy to attack at different points up and down the front, leaving the Germans constantly off-balance. Technology, including tanks and aircraft, played a part in these victories. But more crucial was the fact that the Allies, unlike the Germans, were bolstered by an influx of troops – including United States forces – and replacement weapons.

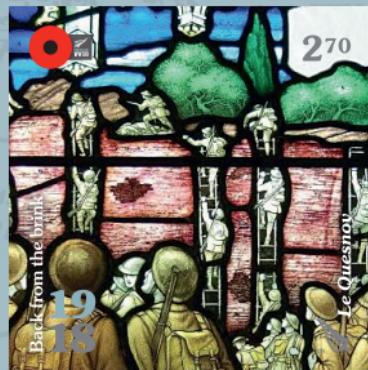
The offensive began with the decisive blow of the Battle of Amiens, where 50,000 German prisoners were taken. The New Zealand Division brought up the rear, then, avoiding booby traps, pursued the Germans to Bapaume.

The New Zealand Division played a key part in the Second Battle of Bapaume (21 August to 3 September), suffering between 2,500 and 3,000 casualties. During a German counter-attack Arthur Gordon's lower legs were pulverised by a German shell as he ran a message. The Germans eventually withdrew and the Allies followed.

By now, the New Zealand soldiers were still making do with rumours, but the forward momentum was palpable. Between 7 and 14 September the New Zealanders fought their way through Havrincourt Forest and Gouzeaucourt Wood. On 29 September the New Zealand Division came out of reserve as the army penetrated the first defences of the Hindenburg Line. The New Zealanders seized the town of Crèvecœur-sur-l'Escaut on 1 October, establishing a foothold across the Scheldt Canal.

On 8 October the Allies took the village of Esnes, capturing more than 1,000 German prisoners, but sustaining 800 New Zealand casualties, including 150 dead. The New Zealanders continued pursuing the Germans, advancing 18 kilometres. After a week's rest, the New Zealand Division fought in the final stages of the hard-won Battle of the Selle (17-25 October), forcing the Germans back further.

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LE QUESNOY

In 1923 St Andrew's
Anglican Church,

Cambridge, installed a series
of windows commemorating
the men of Cambridge killed
during the First World War.

The last panel of three,
partly shown here, depicts
New Zealand soldiers scaling

the walls of Le Quesnoy
on 4 November 1918, one
week before the Armistice.

Commemorative windows,
statues and plaques were
erected after the war in small
towns across New Zealand,
many of which had been
particularly hard hit by
war casualties.



LE QUESNOY

By November 1918 the New Zealand soldiers who had been helping to drive back the Germans sensed victory was near, despite the usual lack of information from their superiors.

The New Zealand Division was tasked with capturing the fortress town of Le Quesnoy on 4 November.

The orders didn't specify how. Rather than surrounding the town and waiting it out, they decided to scale the formidable walls, which artillery could never have brought down. Had the German retreat, and the scent of victory, led to a perception of diminished danger? Had it given the New Zealanders the appetite for a daring assault?



ABOVE: A postcard shows an entrance to the Garden of Remembrance, Le Quesnoy.

NEW ZEALAND'S 1918 STORY

First they surrounded the town. At around 5.30am the New Zealand artillery bombarded the walls and its defences – two sets of ramparts that sandwiched a moat – using flaming petrol bombs that exploded in balls of fire. The men then scaled the complex network of outer ramparts with ladders. Due to the height of the inner walls they could only manage to position a ladder on a narrow ledge atop a gate. With the cover of mortar fire, Lieutenant Leslie Averill was the first of a small group of men who quickly climbed the ladder and over the wall, exchanging shots with fleeing Germans. The garrison quickly surrendered.

What a moment for the men. The townsfolk, who had been under German occupation for four years, emerged from their cellars overjoyed. The muddy, smelly soldiers were kissed and handed flowers. Meanwhile, other New Zealand Division battalions attacked either side of the town and pushed on into the Forêt de Mormal. It was the New Zealand Division's most successful day ever on the Western Front, capturing 2,000 German soldiers and 60 field guns.

After years of suffering in silence, there was a sense not so much of celebration, but of relief and accomplishment. They'd been through hell and deserved to savour the moment and get a little glory. It did come at a cost. Four hundred New Zealanders were wounded that day, and 50 men are buried in Le Quesnoy's military cemetery.

NEW ZEALAND'S 1918 STORY

Le Quesnoy is the site of one of four New Zealand battlefield memorials on the Western Front. Streets are named after New Zealand places, there is a New Zealand garden, and the stained-glass window pictured here immortalises the New Zealand soldiers. Many New Zealanders, including politicians and All Blacks, have visited, and the bond between the town and its liberators has stood the test of time.



ABOVE: The 4th Battalion of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade, on parade in the market square of Le Quesnoy the day after the capture of the town.

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NEW ZEALAND'S STORY



ARMISTICE

The Armistice of Compiègne, signed by the Allies and Germany on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, was the agreement that brought the fighting to a close on the Western Front.

Although not a surrender by Germany, the Armistice would pave the way for the peace treaty known as the Treaty of Versailles to be signed six months later. The Auckland Town Hall is shown here during the Peace Festival celebrations that accompanied the treaty's signing on 28 June 1919.



VICTORY!

NEW ZEALAND'S 1918 STORY

ARMISTICE

From September 1918 onwards, it was clear to commanders on both sides that the Allies were going to win. While the soldiers were told very little, there was no hiding the fact that victory was near, and New Zealanders back home felt hopeful despite distrusting propaganda.



ABOVE: 12 November in Oamaru as the crowds and flags fill the main street.



ABOVE: Peace celebrations in Gisborne on 12 November 1918.

NEW ZEALAND'S 1918 STORY

The slow war ended quickly: within days Bulgaria surrendered. Then Poland and Yugoslavia declared themselves independent states, and the Ottoman Empire signed the Armistice of Mudros on 30 October. Four days later, Austria-Hungary also signed an armistice. The Germans, now fighting on their own, decided to 'come to terms' in an attempt to save (some) face. The Armistice of 11 November 1918 – also known as the Armistice of Compiègne – took effect on the 11th hour (French time) of the 11th day of the 11th month. At the time the official story was a cessation of hostilities for now. The terms included the withdrawal of German troops from France and Belgium, the preservation of infrastructure, the exchange of prisoners, the surrender of German warships, submarines and weapons, and conditions for prolonging or terminating the armistice.

New Zealand troops were still near Le Quesnoy when a telegraph message was read out, saying "Hostilities will cease" and "Defensive precautions will be maintained". The soldiers reacted in a matter-of-fact way, but they were immensely relieved. Memories were still too raw for elation. In England, Arthur Gordon had just been downgraded from dangerously to seriously ill when he heard the good news.

NEW ZEALAND'S 1918 STORY

The message "Armistice signed" arrived at New Zealand post offices shortly before 9am on 12 November. Signal guns, whistles and bells spread the news. Not until this moment could New Zealanders really believe that their men would come home. It was bittersweet news for the families of those who would never return.

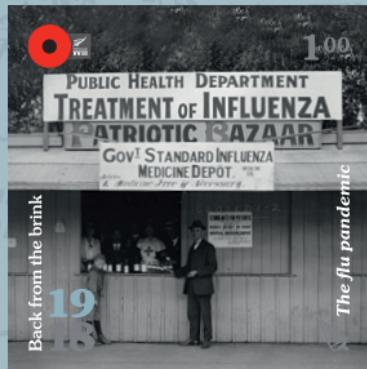
Although a peace treaty had yet to be negotiated, most New Zealanders thought the war to end all wars had an outright winner. They were justly proud of the contribution of a small country at the bottom of the world. People gathered in town halls and squares. Impromptu parades saw cars and people wrapped in flags, even quickly decorated floats.

It soon became clear that fighting wouldn't resume. For 10,000 men in military camps across New Zealand, the war was over. New Zealand's 56,436 troops overseas could begin to emerge from their waking nightmare. But, in a sense, the war continued for them, with work still to do and the passage home delayed for many months. As for the physically and psychologically damaged, would the war ever be over?



ABOVE: A supplement from the Auckland Star newspaper announces peace and the signing of the Armistice in November 1918.

1918
BACK FROM THE BRINK
NEW ZEALAND'S STORY



THE FLU PANDEMIC

An influenza depot in Christchurch, shown here, was one of the many emergency measures taken by the Public Health Department as the pandemic gripped the country at the end of the First World War. Businesses and public places closed up and down the country, but military camps and some communities, particularly Māori, suffered while the virus ran its course.

R & M BEATTIE
· HAIR & SKIN ·
SPECIALISTS
ROOM NO 10 FIRST FLOOR.

DR STEVENSON



NEW ZEALAND'S 1918 STORY

PUBLIC WARNING

BE IT KNOWN TO ALL MEN THAT, according to Medical opinion, a further outbreak of the Influenza Epidemic may occur within the next few months. It is, therefore, hereby proclaimed that the safest and most useful remedy in the primary stages of the outbreak is Alcoholic Stimulants, which should be available to all citizens. It is, however, the purpose of a certain section of the community to prohibit the use of this valuable and indispensable remedy which all doctors of repute recommend and use in all influenza cases. The public is hereby warned not to jeopardise their individual lives by acquiescing in the demands of Prohibitionists to prevent the use of alcoholic stimulants, either in health or disease.

Dr. T. H. A. VALENTINE,

Chief Health Officer and Inspector-General of Hospitals,

says: "From what I have seen during the Epidemic, I am convinced that it is necessary that alcohol should be available for the people."—*vide* Epidemic Commission evidence, March 11, 1919

ABOVE: With alcohol considered a necessary preventive stimulant by the Chief Health Officer, prohibitionists were drawn into the fight against the flu.

THE FLU PANDEMIC

Not all New Zealanders could celebrate the Armistice because, in early October, the second wave of the 1918 influenza pandemic (the flu) reached New Zealand. It killed around 8,600 New Zealanders, mostly in the first two months. In a terrible irony, New Zealand lost about half as many people to the flu as it had in the whole of the war. Worldwide, the pandemic killed somewhere between 50 million and 100 million people, around 9 per cent of those infected.

Before this outbreak, the flu was considered more a nuisance than a killer. Then, early in July, a highly infectious strain emerged among British and French troops on the Western Front, and spread rapidly. Those killed included 322 New Zealand personnel on the Western Front and in English camps. Imagine surviving the war then dying of the flu – or losing a loved one at home.

PAGE 42: Health professionals were spread thinly during the height of the flu pandemic, meaning volunteer relief workers, like those pictured, were critical.

NEW ZEALAND'S 1918 STORY

The virus reached New Zealand in early October. Before vaccinations, your best hope was to avoid the infected. The streets emptied as businesses and public places closed. Some communities were largely spared. Others were decimated. Although exact figures are elusive, it's thought that the virus infected about a third of the population. Some died the same day they fell ill. Many died not of influenza itself but its complication pneumonia, including brave doctors, nurses, chemists and Red Cross and St John ambulance volunteers. In some centres, inhalation sprayers were used to disperse zinc sulphate in public, with people crowding around to breathe in useless vapours.



LEFT: Emergency ambulances alongside the Wellington Town Hall during the 1918 flu pandemic.



ABOVE: A view of a ward in Masterton Hospital at the time of the 1918 influenza pandemic.

NEW ZEALAND'S 1918 STORY

The close quarters of New Zealand military camps were dream hosts for the virulent virus, with about half the inhabitants falling sick. The flu's victims were also disproportionately Māori, with up to a quarter dying in small communities. The Pacific Islands, which had sent soldiers too, didn't escape the virus. On 7 November 1918, the New Zealand ship SS *Talune* arrived at Apia, Samoa from Auckland, with no quarantine for sick passengers. Around 8,500 Samoans – nearly a quarter of the population – subsequently died.

How did people cope with this awful postscript to the war? Partly by attributing blame. A rumour swirled that the RMS *Niagara* had brought the virus and escaped quarantine because Prime Minister William Massey and his deputy were in a hurry to disembark. Historians think that the *Niagara* probably wasn't the culprit, although the virus most likely arrived with soldiers. The government, criticised for its quarantine procedures and inadequate response to the pandemic, established a royal commission that led to major reforms.

Postponing society's return to normal, the pandemic was another reminder that the country's involvement in world events wasn't always positive. However, it was dwarfed in most people's psyches – and eventually in the historical record – by the long shadow of the war.



RIGHT: A brass and copper inhaler, made by A. & T. Burt of Dunedin, was used during the 1918 influenza pandemic to administer zinc sulphate down the throat.

1918

BACK FROM THE BRINK

NEW ZEALAND'S STORY



DEMOBILISATION

The difficulty of returning 56,000 soldiers to New Zealand meant that many remained overseas months after the signing of the Armistice. It was also a difficult time for some of those who made it back, particularly the wounded and those affected mentally and emotionally by war. Influenza would also interrupt the demobilisation process, claiming a number of victims living in demobilisation camps at home and overseas.



DEMOBILISATION

Although the Armistice of 11 November 1918 had been signed, the war wasn't yet over in a practical sense, as the wheels of demobilisation creaked into motion. It was a logistical challenge. There just weren't enough ships for the more than 56,000 New Zealand soldiers overseas.



ABOVE: Some soldiers returned to New Zealand after marrying while serving abroad. Here English wives arrive in New Zealand for the first time alongside their husbands.

NEW ZEALAND'S 1918 STORY

After the Armistice, the exhausted New Zealand Division marched through France and Belgium to join the occupation of parts of Germany. In Cologne the men did garrison duty (protecting against a possible civil uprising), took educational courses and saw the sights. A small number chose to continue to serve in Germany and France for a year or so, particularly helping people to return to their homes and helping to restart agricultural industries. By April all the New Zealanders who wanted to leave for England had done so, arriving to New Zealand camps and demobilisation depots.

The plan was for troopships to take 1,000 New Zealanders home each week of 1919. In general, men returned home in the order they had gone overseas, with priority given to the sick but stable, to married men, and to those whose skills were most needed at home. Many men were left waiting many months, or more than a year, felt frustrated and under-valued. Things progressed more quickly in Egypt, where the last troopship left in July 1919.



ABOVE: Fit members of the main body arrive home on board the transport ship *Hororata* in 1919.

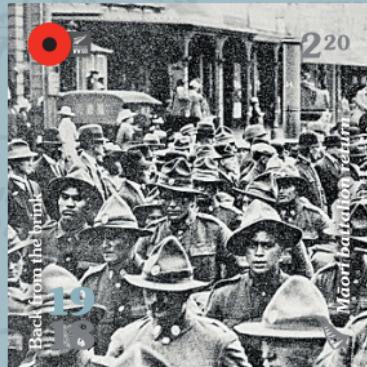
NEW ZEALAND'S 1918 STORY

Those in charge recognised that the men in England needed to fill their time productively. A Compulsory Educational Scheme began helping men to prepare to re-enter civilian life. Educational courses and vocational training, particularly in farming, were available, if flimsy and under-resourced. Some took up scholarships to agricultural colleges and universities. Sport, especially a Dominions Rugby Championship, was a welcome diversion. But this didn't ease the frustrations of those desperate to get home. At the notoriously strict Sling Camp, a riot broke out in March 1919 over troopship delays following a strike by shipwrights. Subsequently, parades and educational courses there were made voluntary, while some men were kept busy digging the famous Bulford Kiwi on a nearby hillside.

Of course, not everyone could leave. Some died of their injuries, influenza or tuberculosis during demobilisation. Some were recovering from multiple surgeries, including Arthur Gordon at Walton-on-Thames. Sister Jean Naismith, formerly Matron of Tapanui Hospital, helped to care for him. Slowly he regained his balance and learned to walk on artificial legs. Other servicemen, locals and two army-nurse cousins visited him. In June 1919 he was well enough to make a short visit to his father's hometown of Inverness, Scotland.

Arthur sailed for home in November 1919. In March 1920, the last New Zealand troopship left England. Some New Zealand soldiers and nurses stayed behind, usually to marry locals.

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NEW ZEALAND'S STORY



**MĀORI BATTALION
RETURN**

The reluctance of the high command to allow 'native' troops to occupy Germany meant that the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion, made up mainly of Māori and Pacific Islanders, could return home largely as a single unit in April 1919. Its return would serve as a delayed welcome-

home celebration for the New Zealand public. On 6 April the Māori Battalion marched up Queen Street to a pōwhiri in the Auckland Domain, before a tour down the country.



MĀORI BATTALION RETURN

Because soldiers trickled in troopship by troopship to welcomes from families, friends and perhaps the mayor, New Zealanders didn't get the chance to get together and celebrate the homecoming of their men. To cheer, cry and hug after four years of keeping a 'stiff upper lip' in the face of horror and dread.



ABOVE: In May 1919, a 'Hui Aroha' was held in Gisborne for East Coast members of the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion returning from World War 1.

The New Zealand Pioneer Battalion – made up mainly of Māori and a few Pacific Islanders – had always served as a unit, doing physical labour and engineering work. It was the only battalion to return from the war as a unit, because the British High Command decided ‘native’ troops shouldn’t take part in the occupation of Germany. Celebrations held to welcome the ‘Pioneers’ in towns around the country were a sort of proxy to welcome back all the men who had returned earlier and would return later – and to shed tears over those who would never return.

More than 1,000 men stepped off the SS *Westmoreland* in Auckland on the morning of 6 April as guns fired a salute, steamers sounded their sirens, and bands played. Dignitaries, including acting Prime Minister James Allen, greeted the men with brief speeches. The battalion marched up Queen Street then attended a pōwhiri in Auckland Domain, greeted by iwi representatives from around the country.



ABOVE: A Taranaki chief welcoming the returned Māori warriors at Pūtiki Pā, Whanganui.

Tonia Studios, Photo.

After this, they went on a sort of national tour, dropping men home on the way. They were greeted by pōwhiri on their home marae, followed by public parades and receptions. It was big news. For instance, the *Horowhenua Chronicle* reported that battalion members from the western North Island and the South Island arrived in Whanganui to a large gathering at Pūtiki Pā. The men from Levin and Ōtaki found fellow Māori waiting at the Levin railway station, then joined a public celebration chaired by the mayor. Some Pioneer Battalion members reported feeling moved by their reception, but the dominant emotion was happiness at being reunited with loved ones.

A Pioneer rugby team later toured the country, playing a series of provincial games. Was all this a much-needed national celebration that doubled as catharsis? Or a piece of propaganda inducing New Zealanders to feel patriotic about the war?

From a Māori perspective, it hadn't been a good century. They'd succumbed to European diseases and been stripped of their land and language, and their tribal structure had been weakened. Although every Māori soldier who went overseas had volunteered, they had been swept up in someone else's war (then were disproportionately infected by the influenza pandemic). Their vital war work included digging trenches and drains, laying railway lines, erecting wire entanglements and burying telephone cables, often under fire. During the war 2,227 Māori and 458 Pacific Islanders served as Pioneers; 336 died and 734 were wounded.

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THIS IS THE BADGE 2⁷⁰
OF THE *New Zealand*
WAR AMPUTEES' ASSN.



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19
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Rehabilitation

REHABILITATION

As soldiers returned to New Zealand with long-term injuries and disabilities, the New Zealand government responded by dedicating resources, including investing in hospitals and facilities, towards rehabilitation.

The War Amputees' Association, established in 1918 at the New Zealand Military Hospital in Surrey, England, was one of a number of independent organisations that also recognised the needs of the injured and disabled.



REHABILITATION

In almost the reverse of their training for war, many tens of thousands of returned servicemen faced the difficult task of finding a new normality back in New Zealand. For those still in relatively good physical and mental health, the challenge was big enough. How could you turn yourself from a soldier back into a citizen after experiencing what you had? For others, the immediate challenge was coping with and hopefully recovering from physical and mental injuries.

The government recognised its moral duty to direct the physical and mental rehabilitation of servicemen. From early 1918 the Defence Department began implementing its own dedicated medical system by taking over some public hospitals and also operating established military hospitals. The rehabilitation wasn't what we'd get today, but it was significant for its time.

Trentham Military Camp hospital was the initial diagnostic centre. The King George V Hospital in Rotorua took mainly men with orthopaedic problems. Red Cross nurses introduced new forms of occupational therapy here and in other hospitals. Men who had contracted tuberculosis went to the Pukeora Tuberculosis Sanatorium near Waipukurau, or the Cashmere Sanatorium in Christchurch. The Featherston and Narrow Neck camp hospitals treated men with heart problems. Reconstructive plastic surgery took place at Dunedin Hospital under Henry Pickerill.

PAGE 60: A soldier at the Daison villa, Torquay. New Zealand soldiers who were deemed unfit for further active service were discharged or evacuated from this depot.

Many men returned home with psychological and nervous conditions, usually called 'shellshock'. Symptoms spanned paralysis, blindness, deafness, mutism and speech disorders, limping, nightmares, insomnia, heart palpitations, dizziness, disorientation and depression. The public was outraged that these 'broken heroes' were sent to mental hospitals, considered 'home to the hopeless'. So Queen Mary Hospital in Hanmer Springs became a residential rehabilitation facility for men with shellshock (and later, its common by-product, alcoholism). The residents shared a cinema, tennis courts and often friendships with locals.



ABOVE: A nurse fundraising for the copper trail competition where regions around New Zealand competed to reach other cities in the length of pennies as a fundraising initiative in 1918.

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Rest was considered most important in treating shellshock. Some recovered. Others didn't. It's impossible to know how many men had post-traumatic stress disorder (which wasn't officially recognised until 1980) but an understanding of it began with the shellshocked men of the First World War.

Arthur Gordon didn't show any psychological problems. One of many men who became regular outpatients, he visited hospital for further surgeries, artificial-limb fitting and pain relief. He taught veterans of both wars how to master the use of artificial limbs, and also pressured the government to develop better limbs than the crude ones available.

The Returned Soldiers' Association (RSA), formed as a federation of local associations, helped and advocated for veterans and their rights.

Through the RSA and amputee organisations, Arthur Gordon pushed the government to grant war pensions to more men, knowing that financial pressures exacerbated men's problems.

In 1929, an official inquiry found that about 5,000 returned servicemen were still unable to maintain themselves or their dependants.

Some men were irreparably damaged – physically, mentally or both. Some became recluses; some alcoholics. However, many men with employment and support, including Arthur, managed to resume relatively normal and even happy lives.

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RESETTLEMENT

The return to civilian life for soldiers was difficult for some. As the number of demobilised men swelled so too did the need for resources to help with their return to work and productivity. More than 12,000 veterans were assisted into homes in the growing towns and cities, while many others chose to work the land, the government supplying loans to those who preferred rural life.



RESETTLEMENT

The government knew it had a duty to help with not just the rehabilitation of servicemen but their return to work too. Men who couldn't, or didn't want to, go back to former jobs could opt for government help to find new ones. The Repatriation Department helped to arrange vocational training to prepare men for new professions, such as industrial trades and as administration officers. Arthur Gordon retrained to become a draughtsman. Businesses were encouraged to employ and train disabled soldiers, while others were established by the government for this purpose.

From 1931 to 1934, Arthur Gordon was seconded by the government as an Employment Officer for Disabled Soldiers. He investigated several industries and proposed what became the Disabled Returned Soldiers Leather Factory, opened in Dunedin in 1933. During that time, as the secretary for the government's Disabled Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment committee, he lodged a report about how to help them better re-integrate.

The government helped 12,000 veterans to buy or build houses in towns and cities, but many men preferred the quieter country life – and outdoor work was considered rehabilitative. Through legislation, the government created a major resettlement scheme where soldiers could purchase or lease cheap farmland around the country. In an agricultural economy, the government thought that

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more smallholding settlements would increase food production for local consumption and export, but the main driver was the government's responsibility to returned servicemen.

More than 10,500 returned servicemen (and eight returned nurses) were assisted onto 1.6 million hectares of land by 1924. More than 5,000 took up government loans to buy small properties, and others took up leases of larger blocks. It was the luck of the ballot draw as to whether you got the outskirts of Auckland or the remote central North Island.

Remote land suited those who wanted to retreat from the world. Other men found it more isolation than they could take. Some were angry about how hard it was to make it work. Much of the farmland hadn't been investigated or surveyed thoroughly. For instance, in Mangapūrua Valley near the Whanganui River, men abandoned land that was infertile, steep and prone to erosion.

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The 1920s and 1930s were bad years for agricultural exports, and many men lost or gave up their farms. But despite its dismal reputation, the farm settlement scheme was not a catastrophic failure, except in the more remote areas. Many more succeeded than failed.

This scheme changed New Zealand's landscape by carving up land into small blocks, with small towns springing up as agricultural service centres. A more restricted land scheme for soldiers and the unemployed of the depression continued until the 1960s. It was a catalyst for the country's wider social-welfare system. The Great War had changed New Zealand forever.

"If the war was not the defining moment in the creation of a modern New Zealand identity, it was certainly a key milestone along the way."

Damien Fenton



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