

AOTEAROA

Our Whakapapa,
Our Stories



World War One

World War 1

The First World War, the Great War, or the War to End All Wars.

The war of 1914-1918, while the second global conflict in modern history, still holds an abject, horrific fascination for many. This titanic struggle, borne from decades of peace and rivalries, saw the ruin of empires that had lasted for centuries and plunged the world into darkness, not just for its duration, but for decades afterwards. This war facilitated the rise of communism, anarcho-nationalism, and national-socialism. It triggered the creation of the Soviet Gulags, the Death Camps, and laid waste not only the generation that fought it, but the generations following.

This war also inspired a cultural revolution, art styles changed, music evolved. Mental health became a subject of study, rather than derision, and developments in communication technology brought the world closer than ever before. Great leaders were tempered in the flame of war and came out stronger for it, while others were worn down.

There is no doubt the Great War, while often taught as merely the four years of conflict, has had one of the greatest impacts on human society in the last two hundred years. The entire globe has been shaped in some way by the clash of titans that occurred over 100 years ago.

“The lights are going out all over Europe and we will not see them lit again in our lifetime.” British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey.

In this booklet we will cover the following:

- Causes of the First World War
- New Zealand before the war
- Key campaigns:
 - Samoa
 - Gallipoli
 - Palestine
 - Somme
 - Passchendaele
 - The 100 Days Offensive
- Key leaders during the war:
 - General Russell
 - General Godley
 - Field Marshal Haig
 - Marshal Pétain
 - General Ludendorff

The Causes of the War

To trace the origins of the First World War we need to go back briefly to the end of the Napoleonic wars and the treaty of Vienna.

Napoleon's forces had been defeated by the forces of Prussia and Britain, and Britain had put into effect a principle of 'balance' in mainland Europe, designed to ensure that no individual country gained enough power to pose a threat to the rest of Europe.

With France being one of the most powerful and formidable nations, Britain provided Belgium with guarantees that, should it be attacked, Britain would enter the war on Belgium's side. This gave Britain a bridgehead in Europe between its two imperial rivals: the Dutch, and the French.

While the idea of a balanced Europe worked for a while, in 1870-71 Prussia demonstrated the weakness in the plan during the Franco-Prussian War, defeating the French Army. (The Battle of Sedan resulted in 17,000 French soldiers killed. About 104,000 officers and men were captured, including both the French Emperor and high command. German losses numbered 460 officers and 8,500 men). Following this defeat the Prussian and allied German states succeeded in capturing Paris and declaring a united Germany (formerly 38 different states, not including the Austrian Empire) under Prussian leadership on the 18th of January 1871.

While Britain and her Empire had no involvement in this particular war, there was no doubt that the balance of power had dramatically shifted, with Germany now one of the strongest powers in Western/Central Europe. They had stripped France of the border regions Alsace and Lorraine.

Under Kaiser Wilhelm 1st and the chancellor Otto Von Bismarck, German international politics was one of peaceful intentions. Germany was involved in no other conflicts, apart from their contribution to the allied relief of Peking during the Boxer rebellions. Bismarck was also eager to continue Britain's idea of balance in Europe, with the five superpowers of Britain, France, Russia, Austrian Empire, and now Germany, ensuring that no one became dominant.

Bismarck also ensured that other than minor ports in China, Germany did not push for an overseas empire, or the large navy required to maintain it, thus preventing the colonial powers such as Britain, Portugal, America, and France from feeling threatened in any way.

These policies granted Germany the time to settle into its role as one of the most powerful industrial nations at the time.

In 1890, Wilhelm 1st and his son both died, resulting in Wilhelm 2nd taking the throne. He was quick to sack Bismarck and reverse many of the decisions made by the Chancellor. This resulted in Germany's establishment of colonies in Africa as well as South East Asia and the Pacific (including Samoa). Germany also conducted a rapid build-up of a deep-water navy to challenge Britain's naval dominance. This led to the infamous 'battleship race', an industrial race to build bigger and faster ironclad battleships and cruisers. Not only did this increase tensions between Germany and

Britain, it also led to the permanent establishment of British military intelligence, feeding false battleship designs to the Germans and resulted in the German Abwehr military intelligence being established to counter its efforts.

Wilhelm's drive to give Germany its 'place in the sun' caused him to threaten French control of Morocco, and even to build the Orient Express, threatening various nations interests in the Middle East. The Kaiser's habit of making threatening statements to other nations when his actions were protested caused extra stress and it was often done without consulting the German foreign office or government. As tensions rose, increased power was given to the military.

As a result of this aggressive attitude, Germany found itself increasingly isolated in the political arena, eventually having to ally itself with the significantly weaker and crumbling Austrian Empire. Desperate to find more allies to reinforce its imperial claims Germany grew ever closer to the failing Ottoman Empire.

At this point France and Russia signed a military alliance to suppress Germany. France had been fortifying its borders (e.g. the town of Verdun,) in preparation for potential conflict. Britain, attempting to stay out of European affairs, sought to limit the damage that this potential modern war would inflict by renewing their guarantee of Belgian neutrality, reinforcing their commitment to the 1815 Treaty of Vienna. By doing this Britain sought to ensure that any war was between the great powers.

In 1914, Serbia, a member state of the Austro/Hungarian Empire, played host to the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro/Hungarian throne. A keen modernist, Franz Ferdinand was an outspoken supporter of the independence of the ethnic and nation states that made up the Empire. He desired the creation of a Commonwealth in the Balkans, that, while friendly to Austria, would be able to make their own decisions. As a result, he was not popular within the Austrian Court. During the visit to Sarajevo, he was attacked on several occasions by members of a fanatical anarchist student group known as the Black Hand Gang. The first attempt on his life was a bomb thrown at his car from the crowd. It missed and detonated under the following car, severely injuring the occupants. The crowd turned on the bomber and attempted to beat him to death before he was rescued by police.

Following the official function at the main government building Ferdinand requested to be taken to the hospital where the injured bomb victims were. While there, he spent time with each victim, chatting and wishing them each a speedy recovery. Leaving the hospital his driver took a wrong turn as he was unfamiliar with the route. He drove past the final assassin who was walking home having witnessed the failed attempts. Seizing his chance Gavrilo Princip leapt on to the running board of the car, shooting and killing Franz Ferdinand and his wife.

Peculiar fact: The number plate of the Arch-Duke's car was A111118 – think about it! The Austrian government, seeing an opportunity to reassert dominance and isolate Serbia from increasing Russian influence, made an outrageous demand for monetary compensation, one they knew Serbia would not be able to meet. When Serbia protested, and offered a smaller amount Austria threatened invasion. At this point Russia pledged their support for Serbia and threatened Austria. Kaiser

Wilhelm announced his recommendation that Austrian internal affairs be left alone and that military intervention by Russia would result in an armed response by Germany. France, seeing an immediate opportunity to take revenge on Germany for their defeat of 1872, not only announced their support for Russia, but also mobilised its army. Alarmed at France's military build-up Russia and Germany both mobilised their armies. King George V, Kaiser Wilhelm, and Tsar Nicholas frantically exchanged telegrams, attempting to defuse the situation. Kaiser Wilhelm ordered the army to stand down but was informed by German High Command that, "*once the trains started rolling, there is no going back.*"

When the Kaiser attempted to force the army to back down, he was sent on *holiday* to Norway for two weeks with his wife and family. Upon his return, war had been declared, with German armies following a pre-set plan to circumvent the French fortified border by advancing through Belgium (the Schlieffen Plan). Britain, making good on its guarantee to Belgium was forced to dispatch the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) of 230,000 men to France where they performed a fighting retreat at the Battle of Mons. This battle bought the French time to rush their armies north to stop the German advance at the River Marne, only a short distance from Paris. This resulted in the famous Taxis a la Marne where the French army confiscated every taxi in Paris to rush troops to the front. It was along these lines that the first trenches were dug, and a previously highly mobile war of cavalry and armoured cars reduced itself to the first stalemate of the war.

Supporting Links

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Sedan>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Otto-von-Bismarck/Imperial-chancellor>

New Zealand

At the start of the Great War NZ was not an industrially advanced nation. Instead, we had an international reputation for agricultural goods. The NZ Army, as a permanent military force, was still in its infancy, having only been created from the NZ militia forces in 1908. This force was headed by the austere British staff officer General Alexander Godley. While a master of organisation and training of the NZ Army, he was less than popular with the men under his command due to his severe lack of personal skills. (This would have severe repercussions during the Gallipoli campaign, with several officers refusing to follow his orders for the sake of their men.)

All NZ males in the militia forces between the ages of 17 and 35 were required to attend three weeks of military training every year. This allowed NZ, despite its small population of only one million, to field a full division throughout the war, regardless of sustained casualties. This effective and highly efficient training system meant that when war was declared, NZ was ready to dispatch the first forces within three weeks.

Supporting Link

<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/people/alexander-godley>

New Zealand in German Samoa

While the bulk of the NZ force was dispatched to Egypt and the Suez Canal several hundred men were sent in the other direction to capture German Samoa, in particular the harbour at Apia. The harbour had a powerful radio station capable of communicating with Berlin, and the facilities used to harbour the German East Asia Squadron. The German garrison, being small with only a handful of soldiers and police, offered no resistance. The islands were taken without a shot being fired. When the German East Asia Squadron, under the command of Admiral von Turpitz, arrived off the coast they decided not to attack the poorly armed NZ garrison. They decided instead to attempt a dash back to Germany, with the exception of the SMS *Emden* which stayed in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean, going on to inflict a huge amount of damage to opposing ships.

Supporting Link

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_cruiser_Emden

New Zealand in Egypt

The rest of the NZ forces were sent to Egypt in October/November 1914 and soon found themselves in a rotation of training, drill, and boredom which resulted in numerous incidents in Cairo.

Initially only the infantry and engineers were sent to fight in April 1915, the first arena being Gallipoli.

The Gallipoli Campaign

When the Ottoman Empire joined the war on the side of the central powers (Germany, Austria, Turkey) the Dardanelles (off the coast of Turkey) and the naval passage it provided to the Black Sea and Russia, was closed to the entente (Britain, France, Russia, Italy, and Japan).

As a result, Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, organised for a joint Anglo-French naval force to power its way up the Dardanelles, destroying the shore forts and capturing the Ottoman capital of Istanbul. The Ottomans, aware of the threat posed by the then largest fleet on earth, as well as the strategic importance of the Dardanelles, had laid several naval mines in the centre of the channel allowing their own ships to go round them close to the naval forts on shore. On the 18th of March, the fleet advanced into the Narrows and disaster struck. Five ships struck mines and in the confusion the rest of the fleet was ordered to retreat. Churchill was livid and the Turks were surprised, expecting the convoy to continue through the Narrows, bombarding Turkish positions to clear the way for the rest of the fleet.

Churchill's plan was revised and the decision made to make another naval attempt; but this time, supported from the land by military forces.

The joint Anglo/Indian/French force was to land at the bottom of the peninsula at Cape Helles it was decided that the Anzac Division, using the infantry of both Australia and NZ, was to be landed further up the peninsula in an attempt to cut across land and therefore prevent Turkish reinforcements from reaching the forts on

that side. This would allow the main force to defeat the Turks on the peninsula and grant the navy the access that was needed.

This attack was planned in three weeks which was nowhere near the amount of time that was necessary. Troops needed to be trained, supplies stocked and logistic routes planned. The British commanders also needed to ensure that intelligence was accurate. All facets of the planning needed more time.

As a result, the forces that landed on Gallipoli, (with the exception of the Royal Marines at Cape Helles,) had next to no training in conducting a naval landing. Due to this lack of training, lack of accurate charts and generally rushed atmosphere, mistakes were made on many levels. The navy landed the Anzacs at the wrong beach. There was a lack of rations, no fresh water and no infrastructure for a long campaign, it was a disaster. This had a devastating effect on the soldiers' health and morale.

However, from the landing in April 1915 through to the evacuation in January 1916, the New Zealanders fought bitterly against well entrenched, well equipped, well trained, committed Turkish soldiers who were defending their homeland.

The target of the ANZACs was control of Chunuk Bair, the highest point on the peninsula, and a crucial strategic objective. An initial attack by the Auckland regiment was repulsed with excessive casualties.

Chunuk Bair was eventually captured but only kept for two days. The decision was finally made to evacuate all Entente troops from the Gallipoli Peninsula, and this was achieved over a period of a week. Due to the minute detail in planning, all troops, horses, mules and 1600 tons of equipment was removed in that time with no loss of life.

Supporting Link

<https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/62308/wwi-centennial-disaster-dardanelles>

New Zealand in Palestine

Despite the setbacks at Gallipoli, advances in the Middle East had been successful, partly because of Field Marshall Edmund 'Bloody Bull' Allenby's strategic knowledge, and his awareness of local customs, culture, and behaviours. It was also thanks to the brilliant leadership, both military and political, and the intelligence gathered by T.E. Lawrence of Arabia.

Following the evacuation from Gallipoli, the NZ division was split. Most of the mounted units remained in Egypt under Allenby's command, while the infantry and artillery units were sent to Britain for retraining, rest, and re-equipping.

As a result the NZ mounted rifles were heavily involved with fighting against Turkish defences in Sinai, Palestine, and up into Syria. They were a key component of the Battles of Beersheba, Jerusalem, and Megiddo, performing well and establishing a NZ camel corps.

New Zealand at the Western Front

In Europe, the NZ division was shipped to France for more training at Étaples, the major Entente training centre. It had a reputation for harshness. It was also a hospital centre for the wounded who were being shipped back to Britain or other countries in the Empire. (When full, it could accommodate 500,000 men.)

The NZ division arrived at the frontline just in time to join the second month of the Battle of the Somme. Despite being trained in the new, more efficient, modern and safer methods of waging war the NZ soldiers did not have a good start. With an unknown commander mistiming the advance, they charged about 30 seconds too soon and ran straight into their own rolling artillery barrage. Despite this NZ soldiers managed to achieve their objectives and contributed to the successful culmination of the taking of the Somme one month later.

General Ludendorff was a Prussian, mainly responsible for Germany's military policy and strategy in the latter years of World War I. In 1913 Ludendorff was transferred to the infantry as regimental commander. When war broke out in 1914, he was appointed quartermaster in chief (supply and administration) of the 2nd Army in the west. One of the main commanders of German forces in the west and one of the main organisers of the Kaiserschlacht offensive. (see below)

General Russell from NZ was known for his meticulous planning. Having been sent to Gallipoli, Russell and his men were instrumental in the seizure of Chunuk Bair, clearing Ottoman outposts and opening the way for an infantry advance. In 1916 Russell took control of the NZ division in France. He was a front line General, seen to take personal risks. The NZ division became one of the best fighting divisions in France, due largely to Russell's insistence upon daily inspections, strong discipline, and efficient administration.

During their time on the Western Front the NZ division became known as the silent division due to their lack of complaints and lethal efficiency in combat. Their darkest days came in 1917 during the disastrous attacks at Passchendaele where over 800 New Zealanders were killed in one day. New Zealand has never lost more soldiers at one time.

Despite the losses, objectives were again taken and held. Finally, during both the Kaiserschlacht offensive and the counterattack of the 100 Days Offensive, New Zealanders fought not only with tenacity and courage, but also with recorded honour.

At the Battle of Le Quesnoy, the New Zealanders were aware of the risk of extensive civilian casualties if they had used standard tactics. Instead, they launched an incredibly high risk assault on the town. They managed to fight their way through the main gate, assisted by a handful of men who had climbed a single ladder to gain entry from the rear of the town. They forced the German garrison to surrender without damaging the town itself.

The Entente broke through the German defensive line and pushed them back to where they had started. This demoralised the German population who were starving,

there was mutiny in the German navy, army units in Berlin rebelled, and the whole nation fell to pieces within a week.

Following the German surrender in November 1918 the New Zealand division was stationed as an occupying force in the German city of Cologne for several months while it was quietly and slowly broken up and shipped home.

Supporting Link

<https://dwy960815.wordpress.com/2012/05/07/the-treaty-of-versailles/>

Haig was in charge during the horrific slaughter of the Somme offensive in 1916 and the equally bloody battle of Arras the following year. Many hard lessons were learned, paving the way to ultimate victory in 1918, with a series of victories unmatched in Britain's military history. Haig was greatly respected until after his death in 1928, but he was later a much-maligned character, being blamed retrospectively for the deaths of hundreds of men. (His funeral procession was attended by crowds, compared only in number to that of the late Diana, Princess of Wales.) Haig was instrumental in setting up a care centre for veterans returning from war and the Earl Haig fund still operates today.

Pétain was a popular leader with his soldiers, understanding their way of thinking. He utilised their strengths and made a point of protecting them wherever possible. His victory at the Battle of Verdun in 1916 was a high point in his career. The situation was practically hopeless, but he successfully reorganised both the front and transport systems, made prudent use of the artillery and was able to inspire in his troops a heroism that became historic.

Pétain went on to play a very important role in World War II.

Supporting Links

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Erich-Ludendorff>

<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/people/andrew-hamilton-russell>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-46064486>

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Philippe-Petain>