

LIVING THROUGH HISTORY

**NATIONAL
ARMY
MUSEUM**
TE MATA TOA

NZ History
Red Cross



He waka eke noa

We are all in this together

History isn't something that happens to someone else. Right now, you are living through an extraordinary event that is changing the New Zealand way of life: the COVID-19 pandemic. Future students might look back on this moment and ask: how did they feel? How did they make it through?

We can ask the same questions about another time when Kiwis lived through extraordinary times: **New Zealanders during World War II** (1939-1945).

Then, like now, a major global crisis forced everyday New Zealanders to reconsider the way that they were used to living. Many men and women went overseas to risk their lives for their country. Some of them were caught by the enemy side and became prisoners of war. What happened to them next? How did the people still at home in New Zealand help them?

For each of the activities below:

- **Read** about the New Zealand experience in World War II.
- **Reflect** on how this is similar to what you are seeing now.
- **Respond** to the questions or instructions at the end of each activity.

Share your answers with your classmates and teacher! We all have our own unique experiences, and we can all learn just as much from each other as we can from our nation's history.



Activity 1: What is Humanitarian Aid?

In 1859 a Swiss businessman named Henry Dunant was on a business trip to Italy and saw the aftermath of a battle. Deeply affected by the 40,000 mostly unattended casualties on the battlefield, he was shocked by the lack of people and medical aid available to help the wounded soldiers. As a result, he published a book on the horrors of war, *A Memory of Solferino*, in 1862.

Dunant decided that the world needed:

- an organisation to help everyone in times of war (The Red Cross).
- a treaty (a signed agreement between two or more sides) recognising that the organisation was **neutral** and allowing it to provide aid in a war zone. (The Geneva Convention).

On the other side of the world from Henry Dunant, in New Zealand, at the same time, Tauranga Māori toa (warriors) were talking about the same ideals. They had gathered to discuss leader Rāwiri Puhirake's ideas about the treatment of the wounded, in a battle that they knew was coming. Hēnare Taratoa, a preacher and teacher, was one of those warriors, and it was he who wrote a Code of Conduct. This code said that enemy soldiers who were wounded would be helped, not killed.

After the Tauranga battle of Gate Pā, the British were stunned, not only by their defeat, but by Māori **compassion**. Māori chose not to mutilate or kill the British wounded soldiers, but instead gave them water. Giving your enemy water is an example of **humanitarian aid**.

1a Research: Hēni Te Kiri Karamū has been remembered in written history primarily for her involvement in the battle at Pukehinahina, (Gate Pā) on 29 April 1864. The women who had helped construct the fort at Pukehinahina had been ordered to leave before the British force attacked. Hēni Te Kiri Karamū, stayed, as she was recognised as a warrior.

What did Hēni do for Colonel Booth of the British forces?

1b Reflect: there are many examples of humanitarian aid during this COVID-19 lockdown. What are some of the things that some people in New Zealand need help with? Who is giving this help?

Dunant created the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 1863. The 1864 Geneva Convention was based on Dunant's idea for an independent organisation to care for wounded soldiers.

In 1901 he received the first Nobel Peace Prize, together with Frédéric Passy, making Dunant the first Swiss Nobel laureate.

Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Dunant, May 6, 2020



neutral

not supporting either side, helping both sides in a conflict.

compassion

sympathetic pity and concern for sufferings or misfortunes of others.

humanitarian aid

assistance to people who need help. It is usually short term help until the long-term help by government and other institutions replaces it. Among the people in need are the homeless, refugees, and victims of natural disasters, wars and famines.



The Red Cross is also called the Red Crescent and the Red Crystal, depending on which country in the world it is.

Activity 2: WW II and New Zealand

Prisoners of War (PoW)

The Geneva Convention is a treaty (a signed agreement). In 2020, 196 countries are signatories of the convention – this means that 196 countries (virtually the whole world) agree with these rules.

However, during the years of World War II there were far fewer signatories. For example, neither Japan or the USSR (Russia) had signed. That meant, if you were taken prisoner by those countries, you were not protected and could be treated much however they chose.

At the start of the war, both the British and German governments agreed to treat each other's PoWs more humanely, by following the Convention so New Zealand followed suit. Italy also agreed to abide by the Convention when it entered the war in June 1940.

The rules that were agreed on were to protect people who were no longer taking part in hostilities. This included the sick and wounded, prisoners of war, and civilians. The Geneva Convention said that PoWs would be fed adequately, treated humanely and would be allowed to receive help from the Red Cross.

During the Second World War many, many New Zealanders were captured and became prisoners of war or went 'into the bag', as they called it. One in 200 of New Zealand's population of the time were held in captivity. Most of the 8,348 soldiers captured were caught in the battles in Crete, Greece and North Africa in 1941 and 1942.

The impact back in New Zealand was terrible. Thousands of people were getting letters saying their sons, brothers, fathers and uncles were now prisoners of war. The Red Cross, with government support, rapidly created a parcel packing facility in their Wellington headquarters but until it could really get up to speed, the New Zealand Red Cross asked the Canadian Red Cross to send parcels on its behalf over four months (around 2500 parcels).

At first, most New Zealand PoWs were in Italian 'campos'. Eventually, though, almost all the New Zealand PoWs ended up in German-controlled 'Stalags' because Italy changed sides, and the Germans moved quickly to ship 2614 New Zealand prisoners in Italy to camps in Austria, Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland.

Although the prisoners suffered from boredom and depression, in general, the Geneva convention was followed and the men were adequately cared for. 716 succeeded in escaping.

2a In New Zealand we know what a treaty (like the Geneva Convention) is as we have a very famous one. What is it called?

2b If you sign a document you are saying that you understand and agree with that document. It is an important and legal concept. Why do you think we have signatures?



Displaying contents of Red Cross parcel at Stalag 383 - Germany

Activity 3: Red Cross Parcels by the numbers

Red Cross parcels were packages containing mostly food, tobacco and personal hygiene items sent by the International Association of the Red Cross to prisoners of war.

During World War II these packages added food to the **deficient** diets in the PoW camps, and helped the prisoner's survive. They also added to their **morale**.

In New Zealand by 1942, 600 food parcels were being sent a week and 4,000 clothing parcels were sent over the year. These were packed by 1,500 voluntary workers. Between 1941 and 1946, 1,139,624 parcels were packed and sent overseas. A nutritionist, Dr Muriel Bell from Otago University, gave advice to the New Zealand Red Cross Society of the vitamin value of the food parcels.

In addition, there was a communications bureau to talk to PoWs. In the final year of the war 177,276 communications were sent.

Red Cross also staffed Medical Units in the war and provided supplies to hospital ships. New Zealand Red Cross had three hospital ships under their care - the *Maunganui*, *Oranje* and the *Somersetshire*. Relief was also sent to our troops in the Pacific, such as infrared lamps to be used on the hospital ships and ambulances for the medical units.

After WW II, former New Zealand prisoner of war, Gunner Jim Henderson wrote, "We used to say after the war the Red Cross should take over the world and run it. They'd shown what they could do in a world mad with war."

deficient

not having enough.

morale

the confidence, enthusiasm, and discipline of a person or group at a particular time. E.g. good morale means that individuals or people in a group are happy and upbeat.



American Red Cross Standard Package No. 6 for Prisoner of War FOOD CONTENTS:	
Evaporated Milk, irradiated	1 14½ oz. can
Lunch Biscuit (hard-tack)	1 8 oz. package
Cheese	1 8 oz. package
Instant Cocoa	1 8 oz. tin
Sardines	1 15 oz. can
Pork Meat	1 12 oz. tin
Comed Beef	1 12 oz. tin
Sweet Chocolate	2 6 oz. bars
Sugar, Granulated	1 4 oz. package
Powdered orange concentrate (Vitamin C)	1 7 oz. jar
Prunes	1 16 oz. package
Instant Coffee	1 4 oz. can
Cigarettes	2 20's
Smoking Tobacco	1 2¼ oz. package

3a Find out what the communications bureau of the Red Cross was. In some parts of the world the families were only allowed to send a 25 word message to their PoW sons. They were only allowed to talk about family matters (not the war). 25 words isn't many! Write a message telling an imaginary soldier as much about your family as you can.

3b The Red Cross packages always had tobacco or cigarettes in them. Was this a good thing?

3c Reflect – what did Gunner Jim Henderson mean?

Red Cross Parcel Contents



Red Cross Parcels



Activity 4: Deficient Diet

The diet in the prison camps was barely adequate. If you don't get enough to eat it is very easy to get sick and then die.

In the Italian camps, the PoWs got watery soup with a little cabbage, plus tiny amounts of meat if they were lucky. With this was a bun and small amounts of cheese, macaroni, rice, sometimes lentils, and occasionally a darker rye bread, depending where they were. If prisoners were lucky they might get an issue of rough red Italian Army wine.

In the German camps, the original diet was mint leaf tea each morning, swede or barley soup, and potatoes at noon, and bread, margarine, sugar and sausage at night. Coffee was issued now and again, which was widely believed to be made from acorns. Gunner Henderson recalled it "tasted like burnt ink".

As the war progressed, the official camp rations were reduced, with swedes often switched for mangel-wurzels (a kind of coarse beet normally only fed to cattle). The soup became more watery and perhaps had some stringy old horse meat in it.

When the first parcels arrived, one PoW noted, "We carried them back to our rooms and gloated over them... the first cup of tea was like drinking nectar."

If the men got one parcel each a week, times were good and a roaring trade began as non-smokers traded their cigarettes for cherished items of food. But at times, the parcels were scarce and had to be carefully divided up. The Germans often bayoneted the tins so they couldn't be hoarded for escape attempts.

A major factor, perhaps unforeseen by Red Cross agencies, was the cold - many food items were inedible when eaten cold - try eating a tin of cold spam (meat) in the snow. There weren't enough camp cooking facilities, so in time, prisoners developed ingenious solutions to heat their food.

4a Look at the diet the PoW's were fed. What were the main food groups that they didn't get?

4b Scurvy was a famous disease that used to kill sailors back in the time of Captain Cook. Find out why they got this disease and what the cure was.

4c Why do you think the rations were reduced as the war progressed?



PoW Red Cross women from United Services Club meet ship bringing repatriated PoWs from Italy



PoWs receiving Red Cross parcels

Activity 5: Getting the parcels to the PoW's

Red Cross parcels were stockpiled in huge warehouses and initially sent by train through France to Switzerland, but this caused many problems. Eventually, the Red Cross HQ in Geneva came up with a better solution: custom-painted ships, in white with large green stripes and huge Red Cross symbols, ablaze with lights, sailed on pre-approved routes. Eventually, 321 ships were sailing under ICRC flags. In Switzerland, the International Committee of the Red Cross stockpiled the crates and arranged distribution through German-occupied zones on German trains in sealed wagons guarded by German soldiers.

New Zealand Red Cross Parcels

New Zealand relatives had to buy parcels and were given a choice:

A - 4 shillings	B - 4 shillings	C - 6 shillings	D - For invalids - 6 shillings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 Alp milk chocolate • 1 condensed milk • 1 cheese • 1 block chocolate • 2 packets tobacco • 2 packets citrol • 1 tin Liebig • Handkerchief or towel or sewing kit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ¼ pound (110 g) tea • 1 condensed milk • ¼ pound (110 g) sugar • 1 jam • 1 pound (450 g) biscuits • 1 block chocolate • 6 Maggi soups • 1 packet tobacco 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 day shirt • 1 vest • 1 under drawers • 1 pair socks • 1 towel • 2 handkerchiefs • 1 toothbrush • 1 toothpowder • 1 washrag • 1 soap 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 pound condensed milk • 1 pound cocoa • 1/2 pound sugar • 1 pound Quaker Oats • 1 pound cod liver capsules • 1 box extract of malt, Ovomaltine or "Mellins Food"

5a There are items in the New Zealand parcels that we can't buy anymore. See if you can find out what these items were? e.g. Liebig

5b You are in a PoW camp. You have one filthy torn uniform, you're hungry and cold. You are sick with the flu. Which Red Cross parcel would you want the most?

5c What would happen if your family in New Zealand was poor and couldn't pay for a parcel for you?

Beyond the Worksheet

These activities has shown you just a few examples of how past New Zealanders came through a crisis together. But history doesn't stop happening.

How is humanitarian aid working right now?

- The modern Red Cross still sends out food parcels to provide basic food and other needs for those affected by natural disasters, wars and persecution. Members of the New Zealand Red Cross whānau are on the ground, helping Kiwis in lots of different ways. They're doing things like:
 - Delivering around 11,000 meals every week through the Meals on Wheels programme.
 - Delivering medical supplies from pharmacies to vulnerable people using volunteers.
- **Make** a list of five other organisations in New Zealand who help us when we need it.
- What is a Food Bank? **Search** (on the internet) New Zealand Food Banks and see what you can find out. Why are food banks needed in New Zealand right now?



7th General Hospital Crete with Red Cross sign on ground



Mobile Surgical Unit with Red Cross laid out at Maadi 1941

References:

The NZ Red Cross <https://www.redcross.org.nz/>

Webster, Mark. Over one million Red Cross Parcels in WW2: [Over one million Red Cross Parcels in WW2](#). Retrieved May 11, 2020

Wikipedia. Red Cross Parcel. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_Cross_parcel
Retrieved May 11, 2020.