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for teacher support materials (TSM) for the following texts in this issue of the *School Journal* instructional series:

	TSM
The Children's War	✓
Underground Soldiers	✓
King and Country	✓

The New Zealand Curriculum

LEVEL

4



SCHOOL JOURNAL
JUNE 2014

The New Zealand Curriculum

LEVEL

4



SCHOOL JOURNAL

June 2014



FIRST WORLD WAR

1914-1918



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga

New Zealand Government

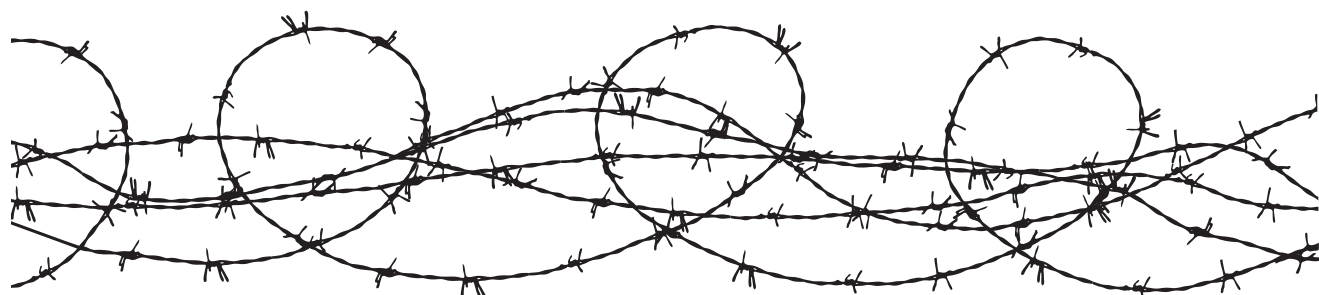
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TITLE	READING YEAR LEVEL
The Children's War	8
Lest We Forget	8
Underground Soldiers	7
Dawn Service	7
King and Country	8
Sky-high	7

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Level 4 June 2014

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CEYLON

MALAY STATES

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ISLANDS

TOKELAU ISLANDS

SAMOA

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THE WORLD IN 1914




Countries in the British Empire

The Children's War

by Jock Phillips



*For four long years, from 4 August 1914 until 11 November 1918, New Zealand, as part of the **British Empire**, was at war. Tens of thousands of New Zealand men were fighting on the other side of the globe: on the steep slopes of Gallipoli, in the deserts of the Middle East, in the muddy trenches of France and Belgium. These places were a world away from the classrooms of peaceful New Zealand – so how did the war reach children here? And how did it involve them?*



People at home closely followed the war's progress, especially with so many loved ones away. They read articles in their local newspapers (many of which had been censored). They got letters and postcards from the soldiers themselves, which had also been checked by the authorities. And they scanned the lists of **casualties** that were published each day and discussed the **telegrams** that could arrive at any time.

Because war was everywhere, it was impossible to keep children from hearing about it. Besides, most of them were directly affected. Countless fathers, brothers, uncles, and cousins had been shipped overseas as soldiers – and children had gone to the wharves and railway stations to wave goodbye. These men were often gone for several years. One in five of them would never come back.

In the beginning, people were excited about the war, especially many young men, who saw it as the chance for a great adventure. The recruitment of soldiers began straight away – and although the New Zealand government had offered eight thousand men to Britain, within just four days, fourteen thousand had volunteered. Most thought they'd be home by Christmas. But they weren't – the war dragged on.

For many New Zealanders, 1917 was a turning point. The war was at a stalemate, and the flood of men eager to fight had reduced to a trickle. The previous year, the government had been forced to introduce **conscription**. Then came the horror of Passchendaele, when more than eight hundred New Zealanders were killed in a single day. Morale plummeted – for both soldiers and civilians – and people became despondent. The enormous death toll was more and more difficult to justify.

The government wanted people to stay positive about the war, even children. It wanted people to see the war as a joint effort – and for those back home to believe that the sacrifices were worth it. Women kept busy fundraising and organising care parcels for soldiers. Children were expected to be good for their mothers – and be useful. It was their duty to help win the war. They were even encouraged to see themselves as soldiers of the British Empire, just like their fathers at the front.



Honouring the Flag

Children were expected to show their support for the war each morning, before they even got inside their classrooms. Most schools had a flagpole, and the school day would begin with students saluting the flag – something that became a government order in 1917. To increase the feelings of unity and pride, children were asked to sing a special song during flag-raising ceremonies.

Although some of these songs mentioned “our native country’s flag” (meaning the New Zealand flag), the government preferred that children saluted the “flag of Empire”, which was the Union Jack. This ritual was usually followed by a patriotic talk from the head teacher, who was sure to mention the British king (George V), the Empire, and the “boys” overseas.



*We love our native country's flag,
to it our hearts are true.
Above we wave in splendid folds,
the red and white and blue.
Then hail the flag, the bonny flag,
of red and white and blue.*

(a song published in the *School Journal*, 1914)



1914

4 AUGUST:

Germany invades Belgium, and so Britain declares war on Germany.

29 AUGUST:

New Zealand troops capture German Sāmoa.

16 SEPTEMBER:

The New Zealand government announces a Māori **Contingent**.

16 OCTOBER:

The **New Zealand Expeditionary Force** leaves the country.

24–25 DECEMBER:

The unofficial Christmas truce is held on the **Western Front**.

War Stories

Inside the classroom, students spent the day surrounded by maps of the Western Front and photos of Empire heroes. During lessons, they worked their way through the *School Journal*. Between 1914 and 1918, the Journal contained a lot of material about the war – with one catch: it avoided the unpleasant truth about the soldiers’ experiences. Instead, the war was given a positive spin, with stories of heroism and success. Students were told about New Zealand’s “conquest” of German Sāmoa, “without a shot being fired”.¹ When they learned about Gallipoli, they were told of the success of the landing, not of the ultimate defeat. The Journal reassured readers that officers at Gallipoli had led their men “splendidly”.

Children were also provided with heart-warming or benign stories about the war. They read about pigeons and dogs in war (“our four-footed soldiers”); about the use of **dirigible balloons**, the wireless, and motorcycles. In 1915, an article called “Christmas and War” was published in the Journal. This told of the unofficial truce the previous year, when German and British soldiers on the Western Front left their trenches on Christmas Eve to talk and sing together. Readers were informed that “friend and foe mingled freely, each side more than a little surprised to find what good fellows, after all, the others were.”

¹ All of the quotes in this article are from the *School Journal* 1914–1918.



1915

3 FEBRUARY:

New Zealand troops become involved in their first combat, helping to defend the Suez Canal.

25 APRIL:

New Zealand soldiers land at Gallipoli.

6–10 AUGUST:

The Battle for Chunuk Bair takes place, with around 850 New Zealanders killed.

15–20 DECEMBER:

The **Allies** are evacuated from Gallipoli, where more than 120 000 on both sides died.

Empire Pride

The government was especially keen that children receive “short lessons on the history of the Empire” and their “duties to it”. In many ways, this was the kind of material the *School Journal* had always contained. During the war, children read about how New Zealand joined the British Empire through the Treaty of Waitangi. They were reminded that the Empire covered a quarter of the earth’s surface and contained a quarter of the world’s people. They learned about other children in the British Empire – in Canada, Australia, South Africa, and India. This was to make readers feel part of one big Empire family.

New Zealand children were also encouraged to love England, the “motherland”. The Journal contained poems that expressed this idea, like Robert Browning’s “Oh, to be in England/Now that April’s there!” and Rupert Brooke’s poem “The Soldier”, published in the Journal a few months after he died in 1915: “If I should die, think only this of me:/ That there’s some corner of a foreign field/That is for ever England.”

Children dressed up to show their patriotism



1916

10 MARCH:

The tunnellers are the first New Zealanders to arrive on the Western Front.

1 AUGUST:

Conscription is introduced in New Zealand.

4 AUGUST:

The Battle of Romani takes place in the Sinai Desert.

15 SEPTEMBER:

New Zealanders attack on the Somme.



The desolation of the Western Front: something School Journal readers weren't told about

One of the most important lessons was for children to think of themselves as future heroes. Who knew when the war would end ... and when another generation of soldiers would be needed? In 1917 – when New Zealand soldiers were dying at Messines and Passchendaele – the Journal asked children: “Now, what can you do for your Empire?” The answer was to “learn all you can of the brave men and women who made the Empire great, and try to be like them.” So the Journal published articles about British explorers like David Livingstone, naval heroes like Lord Nelson, and the great English navigator James Cook. It also followed the adventures of Ernest Shackleton, whose team’s perilous journey to Antarctica began in 1914. Shackleton was the perfect example of a contemporary Empire hero: courageous, resilient, and self-sacrificing.

1917

9 APRIL–16 MAY:

The Battle of Arras takes place.

7–9 JUNE:

New Zealand soldiers fight in the Battle of Messines.

4 OCTOBER:

The Third Battle of Ypres begins.

12 OCTOBER:

New Zealand has its “blackest day” of the war, with over 800 New Zealand soldiers killed at Passchendaele.

“Little Crusaders”

“The Empire expects every child this day to do his or her duty.”

(Lord Nelson, quoted in the *School Journal*)

Children were expected to help with the war in practical ways too, not just read about it. They knitted scarves and socks, stitched handkerchiefs, and wrote cheerful letters – all of which were sent to the soldiers. Children were also expected to make sacrifices. The Secretary of Education was quick to suggest this when, in the second month of the war, his ideas about money for war ambulances were published in the *School Journal*: “Any sums offered should be donations from the children themselves, and not from the parents ... or, if a parent be called upon to help for the moment, the child should deny himself or herself some pleasure or make some sacrifice until the parent is repaid.” In this way, the secretary believed that the gift would be “truly noble”.



Students stitching handkerchiefs for soldiers

1918

MARCH:

The Germans launch a major **offensive** in a final effort to win the war.

23 SEPTEMBER:

The last major action occurs in the Middle East.

11 NOVEMBER:

The **armistice** with Germany is signed.

20 DECEMBER:

The New Zealand Division arrives in Germany as part of the **Army of Occupation**.



New Zealand children were indeed “noble” when it came to the war effort. In 1916, they raised £18,300 (about \$2 million today) by collecting glass bottles. These were worth a lot of money during the war because they were in short supply. The money from selling the bottles was sent to the “poor children of Belgium”, whose suffering received a lot of attention during the war. Children also raised funds for the Red Cross – an organisation that supported hospitals and soldiers during the war. To get this money, they collected bottles and scrap iron, performed in patriotic concerts, sold pet lambs, and saved their pocket money. Near the end of the war, “copper trails” became popular. In 1918, Auckland challenged Wellington to build a trail of copper pennies along the main

trunk line. Schoolchildren along the way took part, and the trail’s progress was reported in the newspapers.

While fundraising brought in a lot of money, it also taught wartime values. As the Journal noted in 1918, children were learning “to serve others”. They were also learning “the lesson of thrift, which our Empire tells us will help to win the war. Bravo, little crusaders!”



1919

25 MARCH:
The New Zealand Division disbands.

23 APRIL:
The New Zealand Tunnelling Company arrives home.

28 JUNE:
The Treaty of Versailles is signed, officially ending the war.

19–21 JULY:
Official peace celebrations are held around New Zealand.

Fit for War

Finally, children were taught that it was good to be fit and healthy – on the inside as well as the outside. Being fit meant they would be ready to serve their country. Boys from the age of fourteen did compulsory military training, and many high schools had a cadet force, in which boys learned a soldier's skills. From 1914, every school had to teach a certain number of hours of physical education.

Children were also given lessons in morality, including stern warnings about the dangers of alcohol and cigarettes. Soldiers of the future could not afford to have vices. And at home, while their mothers were “sad and anxious” over absent “soldier fathers and brothers”, children were instructed to be busy and cheerful, truthful, and obedient. Being hard working and good would help to win the war.

School cadets practising a drill



1920

MAY:

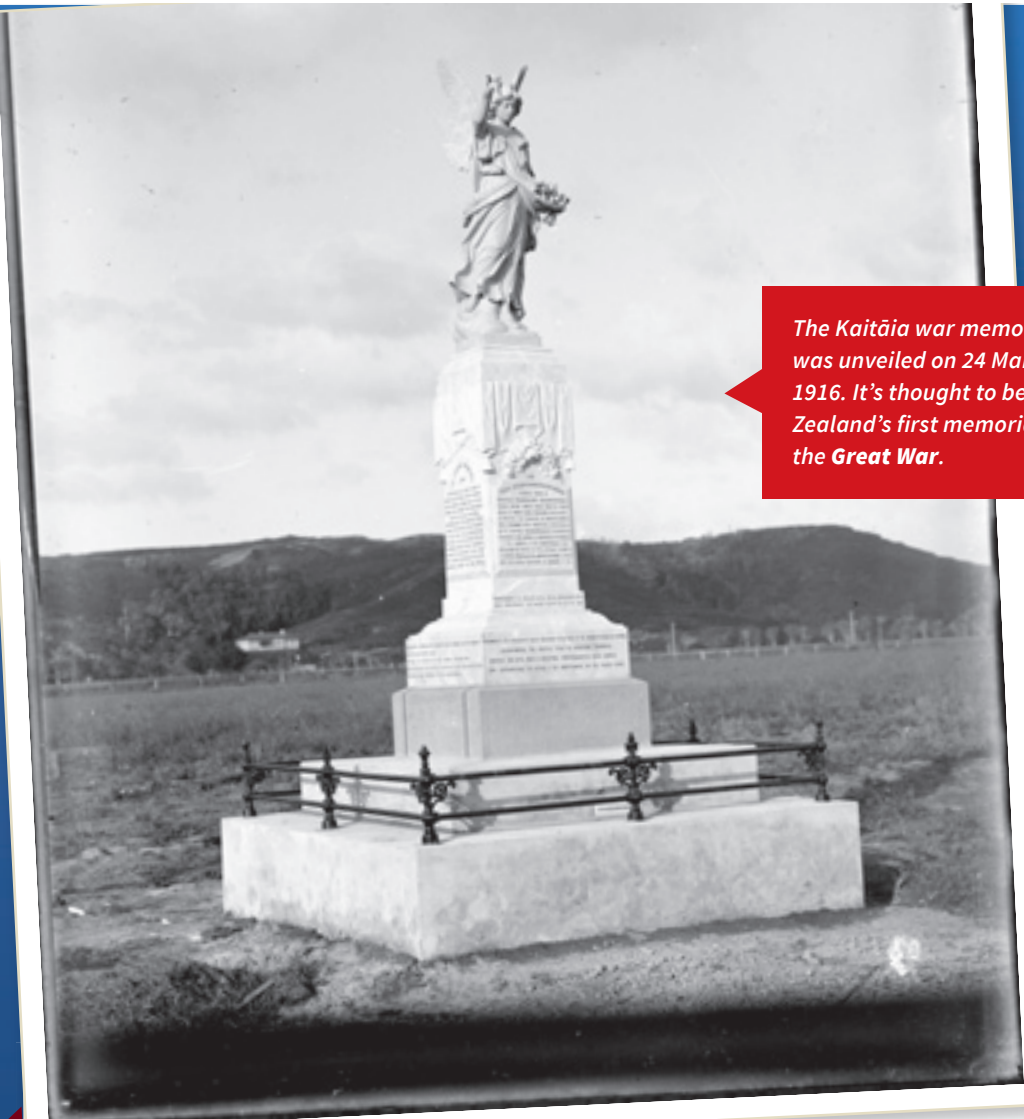
The last New Zealand troops arrive home.

15 NOVEMBER:

The Āwhitu war memorial is unveiled, one of many built in the 1920s around New Zealand.

DECEMBER:

The League of Nations mandates New Zealand to administer the former German Sāmoa.



The Kaitiāia war memorial was unveiled on 24 March 1916. It's thought to be New Zealand's first memorial to the Great War.

Remembering

The First World War had a profound impact on New Zealanders. Around 42 000 of our soldiers were injured, and 18 000 died. This was a casualty rate of over 50 percent, one of the highest of any country in the British Empire.

Most New Zealand soldiers were buried on the battlefields of Europe, Gallipoli, and the Middle East – distant places most relatives would never visit. So to commemorate their dead, almost every community built a war memorial.

Many were on the main street, where they couldn't be missed. Some memorials were the traditional obelisk, a stone pillar that points to the sky. Others showed the figure of a soldier. Memorials also took the form of school gates, community halls, bridges, and arches. Eventually, more than five hundred public memorials were built around New Zealand. To see some of them, and to learn more about the First World War, go to: www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/first-world-war

Dawn Service

Things my mother told me about Great-grandad

That he always wore a brown jumper.
That he had tufts of hair like white feathers.
That he didn't like the word "um". (Once
he made her brother write it down on a piece of paper
and bury it in the garden.)
That his laugh always turned into a wheeze.
That his chest sounded like it had ropes and pulleys in it.

That once he wore a leather flying jacket
and stood on the wing of a biplane, waving.
That once he was only nineteen. That he looked like a boy then.
That he wrote in a logbook with a soft pencil
about how nervous he was to fly.
That he looked forward to the mail cart coming.
That he and his friends would stand right there in the field, all quiet
with their goggles and boots, reading letters from home.

Things my mother didn't tell me about Great-grandad

Whether he was scared the first time he flew alone.
How tightly he gripped the controls.
How long the nights seemed. Whether he had bad dreams.
Who he thought about when he couldn't sleep.
What it felt like to hear shells bursting close by.
How many friends he lost over the Western Front.
Why he didn't talk about the war when people asked him.

What he would think about us coming here at dawn
still warm from our beds
to listen for his name. Whether he would look up at the rows
of people, their faces blurry with sleep, wearing red poppies
and at the bright lamps anchored in the sky
and the flags hung like coats on the cenotaph
or whether he would keep his head down,
looking at his polished boots.

Ashleigh Young



King and Country

by André Ngāpō

16 August 1914

Tipu watches the raging debate across the marae ātea. The open space in front of the meeting house is like a battlefield. Most of the men wear suits, and they are focused, armed with carefully chosen words. They stand, one by one, to take shots at the other side.

“And even if they ask us to fight, why should we?” shouts one old warrior, resolute in his korowai. “This isn’t our war. It belongs to the British. Let them fight it!” Nods and sounds of agreement ripple through the crowd. Tipu looks at his brother, but his eyes are locked on the action, giving nothing away.

The next chief begins his whaikōrero, coming quickly to his main point. “What will we do if the enemy lands here? Will we lay down our patu? No! We will have no choice but to fight.” The chief waves his own patu, emphasising his every word. “So why wait?” he continues. “Let us fight now, alongside the white man as equals.” There are cheers – louder than before – and Tipu joins in. This is what he came to hear.

Eventually all the chiefs have had their say, but as the people make their way from the marae, the talk continues. “I don’t know about you,” Tipu says, “but I’m signing up. I’m not missing out on a chance like this.”

“We’ll see, little brother,” Rongo says. “We’ll see.”



19 September 1914

The war cry sounds across the paddock, and Tipu feels the thrill run deep.

Rugby matches are one of the few times he socialises with Pākehā. The Settlers are favourites to win. They usually are. They know the rules inside out.

The crowd cheers at the starting kick. Tipu catches the ball straight off and sprints towards the line of opposition players, the leather oval tucked into his side. One of the young farmers lines him up – the one they call Big George – and even though Tipu is the youngest on his team, he’s also one of the largest and the most desperate to prove himself. Tipu throws out a fending arm, but Big George wraps him in a great tackle.

“That’s right, Big Georgie,” shouts a man on the sideline. “You show him!”

The two of them battle throughout the game. Although the Māori are losing, Tipu does his best to take on George. They play each other to a standstill, the crowd cheering for both sides – but especially for the two determined, young opponents.

After the game, the teams line up to shake hands. “Not bad,” says George, his big red face creased with a smile. “Better luck next time.” Tipu smiles back warily and takes George’s sweaty hand. He shakes each player’s hand in turn, but the last man is distracted by a commotion on the sideline. Tipu turns to see his younger cousin, Rāhia, waving a newspaper.



“Look! They’re calling for a native contingent,” he yells.

“Are you going?” George asks, once he’s taken a look at the article.

“Yes,” says Tipu. “For sure.”

“I’ve already signed up,” George says. “I’m going to fight for king and country. Someone has to teach those Germans a lesson. I’m heading off for training next week.”

Rongo studies the paper intently. “Hey, Tipu. It says here you have to be twenty to go.”

“What?” says Tipu.

Tipu follows behind Rongo, barely able to control his anger. His horse stumbles, and Tipu yanks on the reins, cursing in frustration. Back at the village, his whaea sees the look in his eyes.

“He aha, Tipu?”

Tipu doesn’t answer and storms into the whare. He throws himself on

his bed, listening as Rongo explains how Tipu is too young to sign up.

“But I think I’ll go,” Rongo says to their mother carefully. “Everyone else is – and they’re saying it won’t last long.”

There is a short, heavy silence.

“I know your father’s iwi supports the government,” Whaea says, “but some Māori have good reason not to fight this war. Don’t forget your Waikato tīpuna, son.”

Whaea has never forgotten.

Tipu listens as she reminds Rongo of the land confiscation in the Waikato during the 1860s, of the lives lost trying to defend that land in the colonial wars. “There are more important things than a young man’s adventure,” their mother says firmly. “When our land is returned, then you will have my blessing to go.”

Tipu waits for a response that never comes.



3 August 1915

Rāhia is reading Rongo's letter. Whaea makes him read it aloud most days. It was written in May and sent from Egypt, and the postmark shows it has travelled through England – both places Tipu has never seen. Tipu has heard Rongo's letter countless times, knows the words by heart, and this time, he barely listens. Instead he imagines he is alongside Rongo, doing the haka his brother describes, shirtless beneath the North African sun.

Tipu senses his mother leaning in his direction. He knows what she will say.

“The British in Egypt! Yet another land they have taken from the native people.” Whaea's voice is stony and hard, but her eyes are shiny with the tears that have been there since the day Rongo left.

Tipu feels torn. He knows that he should be loyal to his mother's iwi, that he should stay with her now Rongo has gone. But news has spread about Gallipoli. Big George has been killed there. Tipu wants to be with his brother more than ever.





8 September 1916

Tipu and the other new recruits hastily make their way along the deep trench that they call Turk Lane. It is being built by the Pioneer Battalion, behind the front line in France, where they are supposedly safe – although the lieutenant has just spoken about the shelling the day before and of the need to be on guard.

“Are you all right, Tipu?” the lieutenant asks. “You don’t look so good.”

“I’m fine,” Tipu says.

But Tipu isn’t fine. He’s shocked by the smell and the chaos and the injured soldiers they’ve passed; overwhelmed by the long journey they’ve made to reach France, so far from home. And he still hasn’t seen his brother, despite the lieutenant’s assurance that Rongo is nearby. Instead, they pass three neat mounds in the dirt, and Tipu’s heart drops – yet more dead.

A short distance ahead, a group is digging through the mess that the shelling has caused. One of the men looks up and moves towards them. “Tipu!” he calls.

It’s Rongo, covered in mud. While the rest of the battalion works to clear the debris, the two brothers embrace each other for a long time.



Rongo finally speaks. “You don’t know how good it is to see you, little brother.” Tipu keeps his arms around Rongo, grips him tight. He’s not ready to let go.

“How is everyone at home?” Rongo eventually asks. He gently pushes Tipu away.

“They were all fine when I left,” Tipu replies. “Whaea was relieved to hear you’re behind the front line.”

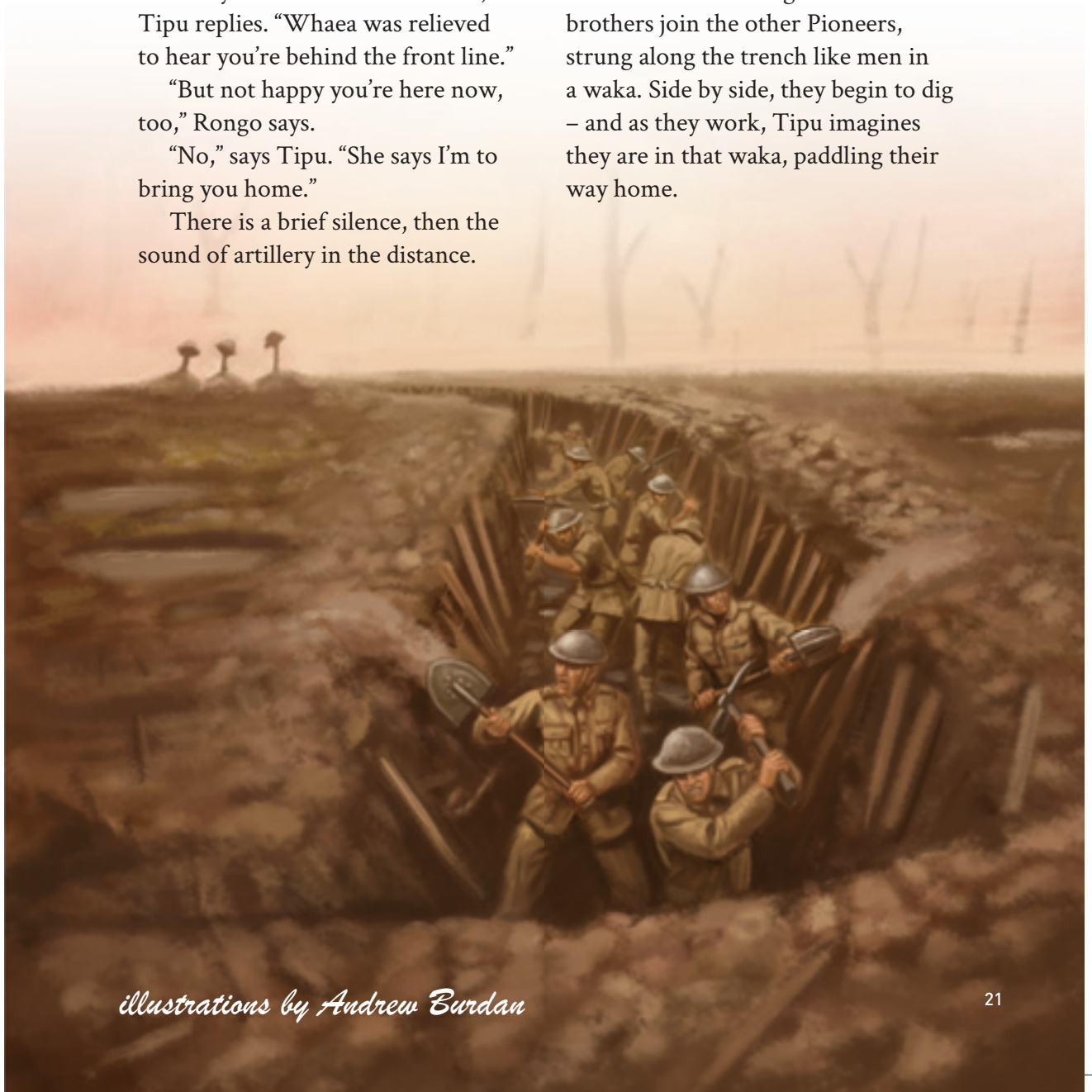
“But not happy you’re here now, too,” Rongo says.

“No,” says Tipu. “She says I’m to bring you home.”

There is a brief silence, then the sound of artillery in the distance.

Rongo looks towards the three graves, and Tipu can see the grief and his brother trying to hold it back. Probably he knew the men, but Tipu can’t bring himself to ask. Instead he walks towards some shovels and takes one from the pile.

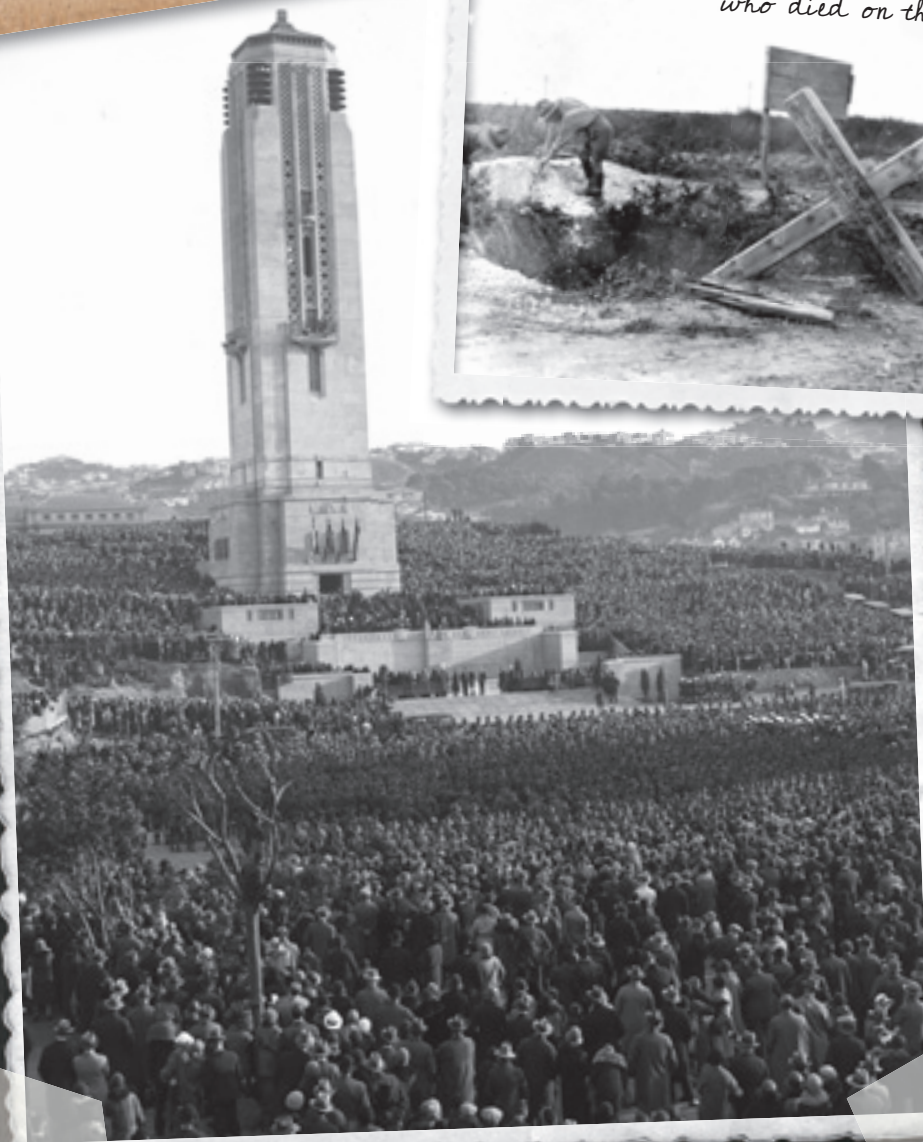
The sound of gunfire grows fainter with the sunlight. The two brothers join the other Pioneers, strung along the trench like men in a waka. Side by side, they begin to dig – and as they work, Tipu imagines they are in that waka, paddling their way home.



Lest We Forget

by Jane Tolerton

*A cross to remember those
who died on the Somme*



*The opening of the National War Memorial,
Wellington, Anzac Day, 1932*

Saving the Past

Oral history is the oldest way we have of remembering the past. Long ago, before people could write, it was the only way. People told stories, from one generation to the next, to share things like information and ideas. Māori have a rich oral tradition. Reciting whakapapa, for example, is the main way iwi trace common ancestors and pass on this knowledge.

Modern historians understand the importance of these oral traditions, and over the last few decades, there has been a growing interest in oral history as a way of capturing individual perspectives. This is done through recorded interviews. Sometimes an oral history will be about a person's life – the things they've done, the experiences they've had, and the society they were part of. Oral history can also focus on a specific topic, like the sinking of the *Wahine*, or the 1981 Springbok tour ... or the First World War. This kind of oral history gives an "eye witness" account of historical events.

Oral history adds character and personality – the human details – to our knowledge of the past. This is because everyone has their own story and their own way of telling it. But perhaps most importantly, oral history is a way of "saving" the past. Recordings of interviews are sometimes kept together in a special archive, a bit like books in a library. Most can be listened to, some of them online.

In Their Own Words

In the late 1980s, two New Zealand historians began a special oral history project: they interviewed **veterans** of the First World War. Over two years, eighty-five men were interviewed and the conversations recorded. These interviews are now held at the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington and form one of the largest collections of its kind in New Zealand. Anyone can listen to these interviews.

Most men who came home from the war were reluctant to talk about their experiences, and so their families couldn't really ask them questions. Historian Jock Phillips says this resulted in a kind of "national amnesia" about the war. People wanted to forget about it. But of course the soldiers remembered it. Some remembered it vividly, and as they got older, they became more willing to talk. They wanted people to know about the war – how it really was and how it affected their lives. The following memories come from those veterans.



Adventure

Many of those who went to the First World War were looking for adventure, but most also had a strong sense of duty to serve New Zealand and the **British Empire**. Fred Dill mentioned both of these motivations. Fred lived on a farm near Warkworth, and he joined up with his three best friends just two days after the war began. "We were frightened that we wouldn't get there before it had finished," he said.

Frederick Tate signed up the day he turned twenty. "I regarded that as a birthday present to myself. That was the spirit of the time." Sydney Stanfield, who lied about his age and arrived on the **Western Front** when he was still only fifteen, was also caught up by the sense of excitement. "I thought it would be a great adventure, and it'd be real fun. And so it was – up to a point. Past that point, it wasn't funny at all!" The newspapers, which were the only mass media at the time, promoted these ideas. They often wrote about "our boys" on their "great adventure", even when they were also publishing long lists of the dead and wounded.



Sightseeing in the Middle East



A camel ride in Egypt



Eating porridge in the Sinai Desert

Going into Battle

Frank Hunt arrived at Gallipoli three months after the first New Zealanders landed. He said the atmosphere before they got there was like going to a football match. "We were in a jolly mood and ... looking forward to going and joining the chaps we knew." This quickly changed when the newcomers saw the poor condition of their friends, who'd only had tinned corned beef, "hard tack" (which was a bit like a dog biscuit), and jam to eat.

Shortly afterwards, going up to Chunuk Bair, Frank was hit by **shrapnel**. He was carried down to the beach and "put on the heap with the dead people". A family friend came to see Frank's body so that he could tell Frank's parents he'd seen him. The friend saw Frank's foot twitch, which saved his life.

Jack White remembered walking forward at the Battle of the Somme, on the Western Front, when events happened very quickly: "... one chap had his rifle knocked out of his hands. Another chap suddenly staggered out of the line, fell flat on his face and turned over

and grunted – and that was all. Our set orders were if our friends were wounded, we were not allowed to look after them or even talk to them, just go on walking past.

"Suddenly there was a roar like an eruption of a volcano and four shells landed amongst this long line. I was hoisted into the air and I felt a sting in my right shoulder, and I'm walking on air – my feet were going, but I wasn't touching the ground. I was just going along with the air pressure. Then I fell into a big shell hole." Jack's friends thought he had been "blown to pieces" as he disappeared into the mud, and they sent letters to his relatives saying he was dead. But Jack survived. "One thing I'll say for the Germans: as far as soldiers went, they played the game. They could have shot me easily as anything because [when I got up again] I was walking in front of one of their lines. A couple of Red Cross men with a stretcher came up. I said, 'Never mind the stretcher, I want to get the hell out of here.'"

New Zealand troops on the Western Front



Like Jack White, Bert Stokes also had an amazing stroke of luck. During the Battle of Messines, he was sheltering in a shell hole when it was sprayed with shrapnel. "Our officer was wounded in the leg, and our **NCO** in the arm," Bert explained. "It wasn't till after we'd been looking after them that I suddenly looked down and saw my tunic was torn."

In the breast pocket of his tunic, Bert had a little leather folder – a pocketbook given to him by his cousin Gladys when he left for the war. He had wondered how it could possibly be of any use and had finally decided to use it for family photos. "I took out my pocketbook – and because it was made of two bits of sheet metal, I didn't realise I'd been hit." What Bert had initially thought of as a useless gift had saved his life. Later, Bert's mother kept the pocketbook in a frame. "She wouldn't let anybody handle it!"



Bert Stokes with his pocketbook



*Bert Stokes at Trentham
Army Camp (third from right)*



*Sydney
Stanfield, who
joined up at the
age of fifteen*

Emotions

Sydney Stanfield was in the **infantry**. He described going into battle: “You just blunder along and hope you don’t get shot at . . . You’re not afraid because the movement takes all the fear out of you. It’s sitting in little wet holes and being shot at with big stuff, heavy shell fire, high explosive – that’s the nerve-racking part.”

Often, the soldiers became fatalistic, believing that if they were going to be hit, there was nothing they could do. “It’s not long before you develop a spirit that says, ‘Well, if your number is on it, you’ll cop it,’” Gordon Neill said. Many commented that it was the living conditions – the bad food, the lack of sleep, the rats, the lice, the constant danger, and the feeling that it would never be over – that really got them down.

Sydney Stanfield again: “I felt that the war was never going to end – it was going to go on forever. I felt it was not possible that I would survive the war. I can remember feeling that I’d be quite happy to engage in any sort of slavery at all if I could be taken away from this misery.” Many men suffered from **shell shock**. One soldier, who didn’t want to be named, said, “I wasn’t aware of having shell-shock symptoms, but I had this absolute horror of going back into trench warfare . . . this feeling of horror was part of the shell shock. It affects your nervous system. Your whole nervous system went taut, like a banjo string.”



Gordon Neill

*Tent mates at
Trentham: Of these
eight men only one
(fourth from right)
would survive.*



Comradeship

During the war, because they were in the same stressful and dangerous situation, most soldiers formed very close friendships. When Charles Hartley was wounded at Gallipoli and transferred to hospital, he asked the doctor to fix him up as soon as possible. He was worried about his friends – and he said that when he rejoined his regiment, “I was glad to get back, back to the mates again.”

Thomas Eltringham was also very focused on his comrades: “Never let your mates down.” That was a good motto. People used to say

to me, ‘Were you scared?’ I’d say, ‘Yes, who wouldn’t be?’ But my biggest worry was not to let my mates think I was scared.”

The mounted troops had the extra comfort of being with their horses. “I had a glorious horse, the most beautiful horse I have ever ridden. They took it away from me, and I was heartbroken,” said Harry Porter, remembering the end of the war when the horses were no longer needed. Only four horses out of the original ten thousand came back to New Zealand after the war.



Coming Home

After the **armistice**, the New Zealand Division marched to Germany, where the soldiers became part of the **Army of Occupation**. Some of the men stayed with German families. Bert Stokes remembers that the locals were quite friendly. "We sat in restaurants talking to them as much as we could. We even talked to German men who were also at the Battle of Passchendaele. After we'd been there for a while, we thought that we shouldn't have been fighting with these people."

After a couple of months in Germany, the New Zealanders went to England to wait for a ship home. Some waited a long time because so many ships had been sunk in the war. Once the men finally got home, fitting back into society wasn't easy. Many had nightmares for years or became depressed. A lot said they didn't want to talk about the war – not that they were ever asked many questions. Claude Wysocki was surprised when people treated him as if he'd been on holiday. "Well, you're back. Did you have a good time? Did you have a good journey?" Claude remembered they would ask him. "No one said, 'You must have had a crook time, overrun with lice and living on horseflesh.'"

Many of the returned soldiers said that people back home had no idea of the reality of war. This made them feel isolated – a feeling that was intensified by the fact that almost every soldier had lost close friends. Fred Dill was wounded in Egypt when a bullet went through his left lung and passed out his back. He eventually came home, the only survivor out of his group of best friends.

Almost all of the men interviewed for the World War One Oral History Archive were in their nineties (the oldest was ninety-nine). The project gave them a chance to talk about the war properly, before it was too late. "The important thing is to enter into discussion, no matter how difficult it is," said Gordon Neill, who had been a prisoner of war in Germany. He hoped that being interviewed would save future generations from a similar experience.

"It makes me angry when I think of the terrible loss of life and the things we had to put up with in the war," Gordon says. "If anything I'm saying now will dissuade people from human destruction and war, I have spent my time well."



Becoming an Oral Historian

Anyone can learn to become an oral historian – if they are prepared to listen – and anyone can be interviewed. One of the best things about oral history is that it explores the lives or experiences of ordinary people, capturing an “unofficial” version of the past. Often oral history gives a voice to people who might have remained unheard.

If you want to be an oral historian, whether you choose to do a life history or a topic-based interview, there are a few things to think about first.

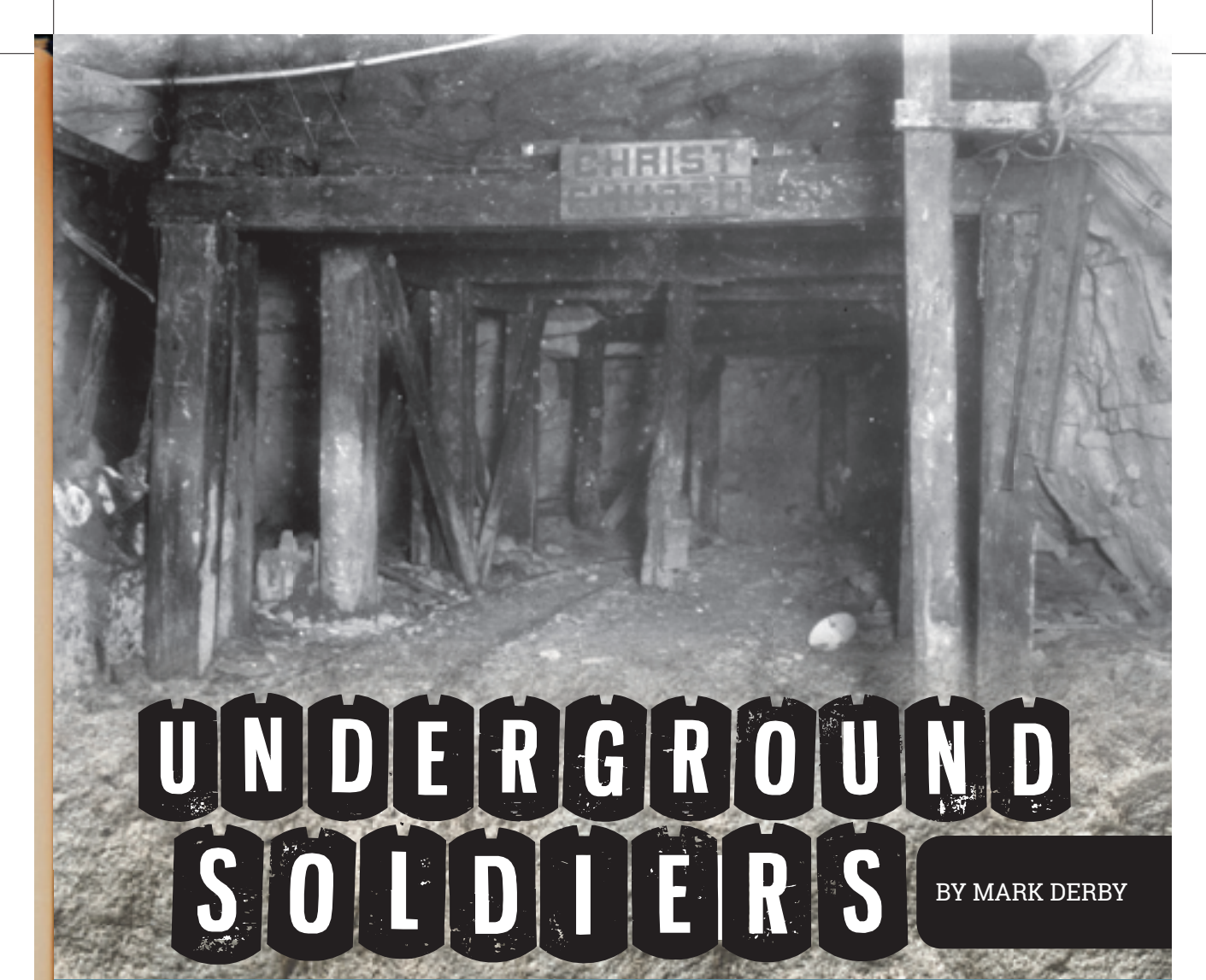
Before the Interview

1. Make sure that the person you are interviewing is happy to be interviewed and has an idea of the topics you want to cover. Tell them what you hope to learn.
2. Arrange a good time for the interview, when neither of you will be rushed.
3. Prepare your list of questions. These need to be open-ended, starting with “What”, “When”, “Where”, “Why”, and “How”. Open-ended questions get people talking and produce more information. Don’t say “Did you like school?” (a closed question that can only be answered “yes” or “no”). Instead ask, “What do you remember about school?” Treat your questions as a starting point only. Don’t be scared to stray off the list – you never know where the conversation might lead.
4. Make sure that you have good recording equipment and know how to use it.
5. Let your subject do the talking. You want to get as much information from them as possible.
6. Instead of commenting, smile and nod to show that you’re interested.
7. Listen carefully. If something doesn’t make sense to you, it probably won’t make sense to a listener afterwards. If you’re confused, say things like “What do you mean by that?” or “Remind me how you know that person.”
8. People sometimes pause when they’re asked a question. Give them plenty of time to think and don’t worry about the silences. In the end, these won’t matter.
9. At the end of the interview, remember to thank the person for their time.
10. Make sure the person knows what you plan to do with their interview. Check if they are happy for other people to listen to the recording.

The Interview

1. Try out the recording equipment just before you start the interview to make sure that it’s working and that both of you are recording clearly.

For more information about how to record an oral history, go to:
www.nzhistory.net.nz/hands/a-guide-to-recording-oral-history
www.natlib.govt.nz
www.oralhistory.org.nz



CHRIST

UNDERGROUND SOLDIERS

BY MARK DERBY

When some schoolboys stumbled into a tunnel underneath the French city of Arras around twenty years ago, they made an amazing discovery. The tunnel led 30 metres underground into enormous caverns. Names, signs, and graffiti were painted on the bare rock walls. One message read "Kia ora NZ", and it had a big fern-leaf drawn on each side.

The boys had accidentally rediscovered a huge, secret hiding place for soldiers, carved out almost a hundred years ago during the First World War. Thousands of men once rested in these stone caverns. The soldiers came from Britain and Canada to fight the Germans – but the underground network that sheltered them was mostly built by miners from New Zealand. They were members of the New Zealand Tunnelling Company, a special unit of the New Zealand army formed during the First World War.



THE TUNNELLERS FROM NEW ZEALAND

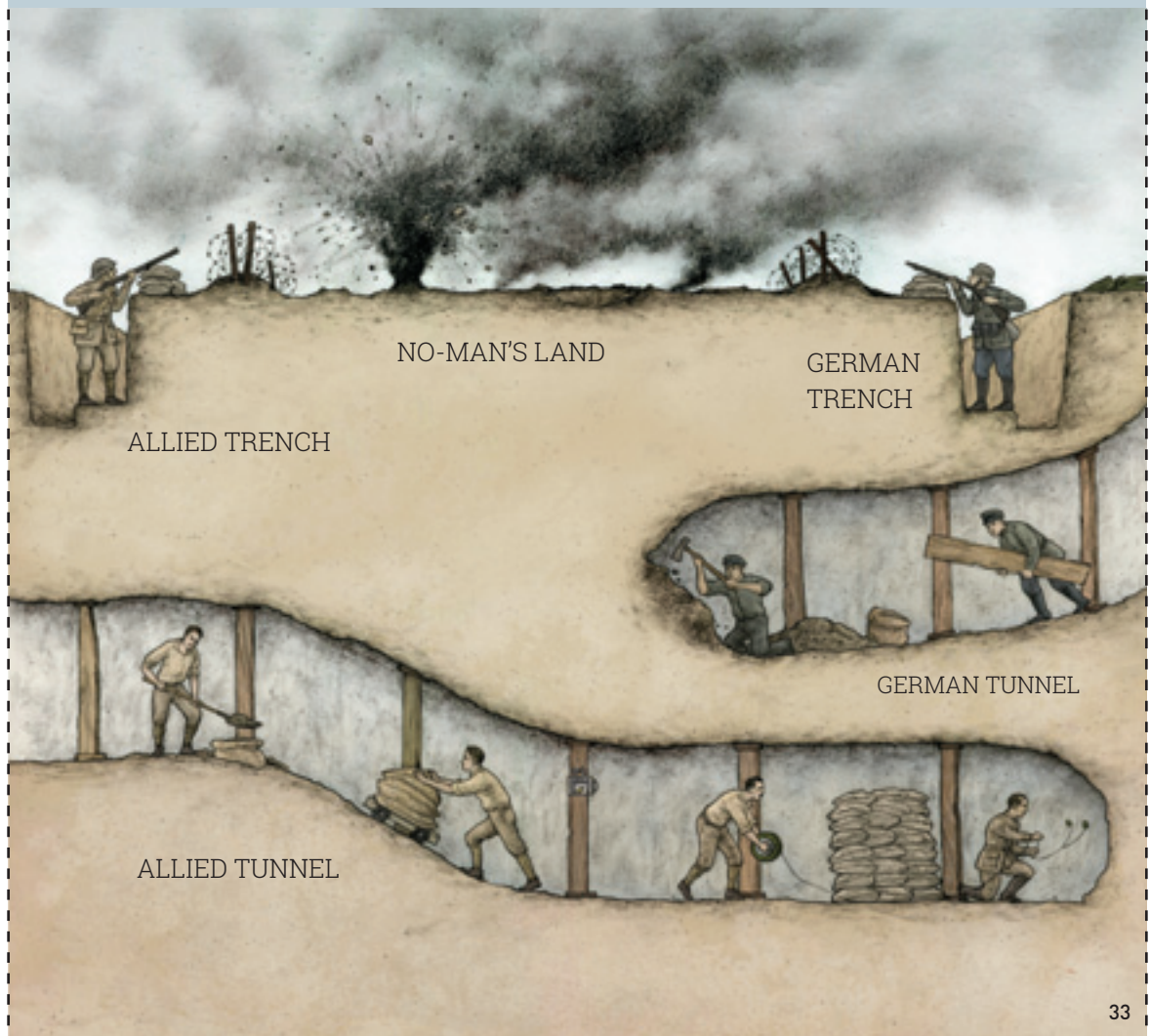
The men who volunteered for the New Zealand Tunnelling Company were mostly miners from towns like Waihi or Reefton – or they were bushmen and labourers. They were rough, tough men, used to working in dangerous situations and looking out for their mates. Many belonged to trade unions and didn't take kindly to authority, but they soon learned to march, salute, and take orders. In December 1915, after basic military training in Auckland, more than four hundred men left for the **Western Front**. Several smaller groups of tunnellers followed later as reinforcements.

The Tunnelling Company arrived in the northern French town of Arras in the freezing winter of March 1916. Arras had once been beautiful – but by 1916, it was in ruins. Most of the civilians had been evacuated, and British troops occupied the shattered buildings. Every day, German **artillery** fired shells into the town. Other tunnelling companies were already based near Arras, and each one was in charge of a certain area. The New Zealanders were sent to replace French tunnellers who were digging beneath a network of trenches named the Labyrinth. It was here – just north of Arras – that the New Zealanders joined the war underground.

Tunnel Warfare

The First World War began in August 1914, when the German army invaded Belgium and then swept into France. The **Allies** stopped the German advance, and both sides dug a long line of trenches that faced one another. This was the Western Front. The space between the two sets of trenches was called no-man's land. The Allies tried to capture the

German trenches by sending thousands of soldiers across no-man's land on foot. Huge numbers died after being shot at or shelled. To limit the risk to their men, both sides began to dig tunnels that led under no-man's land. There they used explosives in the hope of killing soldiers in the enemy trenches overhead. This was known as tunnel warfare – the war underground.



THE WAR UNDERGROUND

Around Arras, the ground was mostly sandstone, which was soft and easy to dig through. Using picks and shovels, the miners dug their tunnels 30 metres below the surface. Soldiers had to haul the loose rock up to the surface in sandbags and scatter it carefully, well away from the tunnel entrance. Otherwise an enemy plane might spot the distinctive white rock on the brown soil, and the enemy artillery would aim its shells straight at the tunnel entrance.

Tunnelling on the Western Front was dangerous and frightening. Often it was a race against time. Men on both sides worked quickly to dig their tunnels and explode their bombs before the enemy beat them to it. This was called counter mining. Once a tunnel was directly beneath the enemy, tunnellers packed it with tonnes of explosive. Then they stacked sandbags behind this explosive to concentrate the blast, then detonated it from a safe distance. Sometimes enemy soldiers were blown into the air, and their trenches were turned into deep craters. Enemy miners working underground could also be killed in these explosions.

Carbon monoxide was another killer that could be released underground at any time. Because this poisonous gas is invisible and has no smell, miners on both sides carried canaries and white mice in cages. These creatures were quickly affected by carbon monoxide and acted as an early warning sign of the gas.

AN UNDERGROUND CITY

One day, some off-duty New Zealand officers found ancient quarries beneath Arras where sandstone had been mined to build the town. Some of these quarries were huge, cathedral-sized caverns. The British quickly realised that these caverns could be connected and extended towards the enemy trenches to move an entire army safely underground. Thousands of troops could be sheltered and hidden before launching a surprise attack on the Germans.

Over the next five months, the New Zealand tunnellers worked in secret alongside the British. For a short time, the company was reinforced with forty-three soldiers from the Pioneer Battalion. The men worked around the clock in eight-hour shifts to create a complex system of caverns and tunnels able to hold 25 000 troops. The tunnels had to be wide enough for soldiers to march through while wounded men were carried on stretchers in the other direction.

The secret labyrinth also needed facilities, such as toilets, cookhouses, chapels, and a large hospital. Running water and electric lighting were installed, and a horse-drawn railway moved supplies. To help with navigation, the tunnellers named caves after their home towns. Signs such as Auckland, Wellington, Nelson, Christchurch, and Dunedin were painted on the walls. Some soldiers also scratched messages and drawings in the rock.

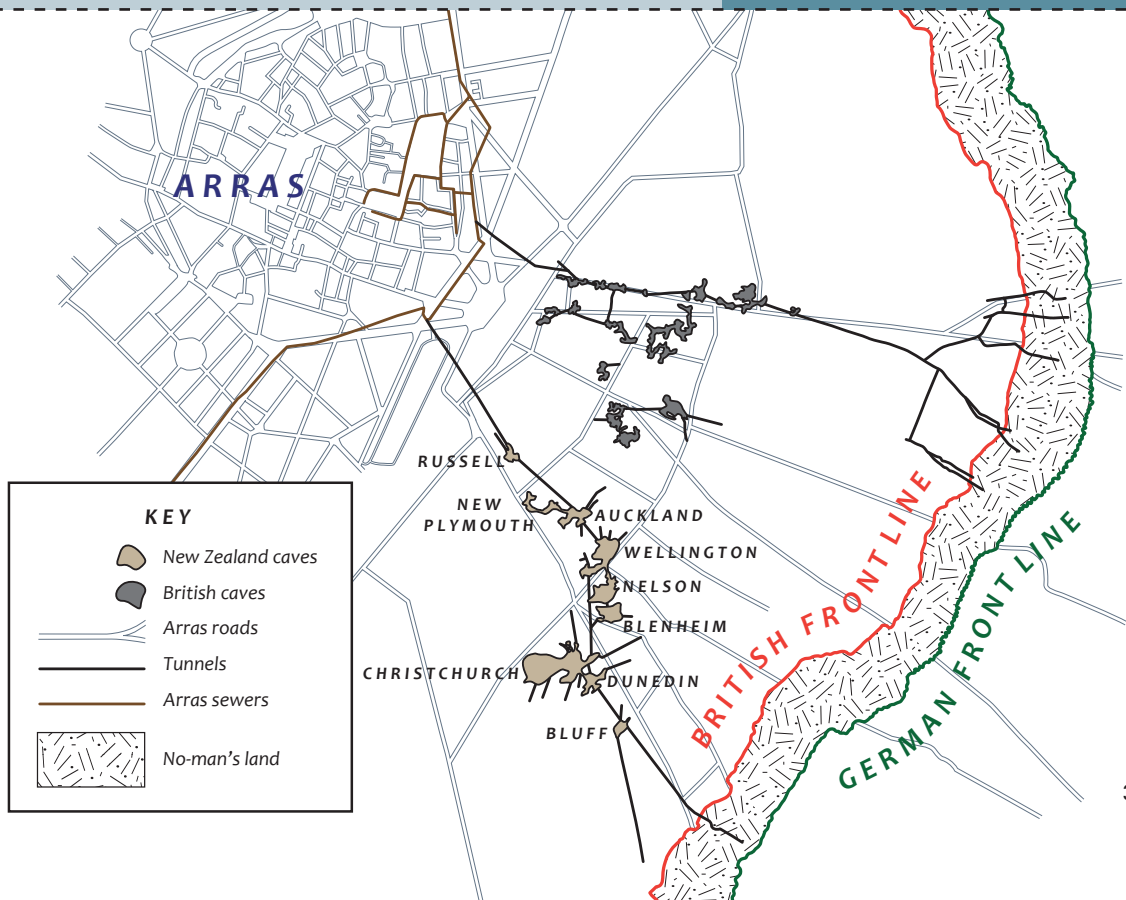
Geophones: Keeping Track

The tunnellers kept constant track of the enemy. They did this through a piece of equipment called a geophone – a pair of disc-shaped microphones connected to earpieces. By moving one disc around until the sound was equally loud in both ears, a miner could tell where a noise was coming from and how far away it was.

Geophones were helpful, but they also caused stress. Using one meant sitting in a dark tunnel for hours, straining to hear the faint tap of the enemy's picks – and being able to distinguish this sound from many others. Through the geophone, it was sometimes possible for a miner to hear the enemy packing their explosives. When that noise stopped, it meant the inevitable explosion could happen at any time.



Many soldiers' lives depended on the skilful use of a geophone.



THE BATTLE OF ARRAS

By early April 1917, the underground city was ready. So too were the three massive piles of explosives that would launch the attack, as well as the exit tunnels that led right up to the German line. The British and Canadian troops moved in – and at 5.30 a.m. on Easter Monday, an enormous explosion ripped through the air. Then, in freezing wind and sleet, the troops poured out of the exit tunnels.

As planned, the Germans were caught by surprise. That day, the Allies advanced 11 kilometres into German-held territory. Given the stalemate, this was considered a victory. However, the German troops soon fought back. Lines of stretcher-bearers carried wounded British and Canadian men back down the exit tunnels into the underground hospital. There, doctors and nurses struggled to save their lives. Nearly forty thousand Allied troops were killed in the Battle of Arras. But without the underground cave system, many more might have died.



The Battle of Arras



WORK ABOVE GROUND

After the Battle of Arras, the tasks of the Tunnelling Company changed. The men worked mainly above ground, helping to hold territory captured by the Allies. To do this, they built deep dugouts and machine-gun posts, and they repaired roads and bridges. Most of the tunnellers had no training for this kind of work, but they quickly learned on the job. The construction work was still dangerous, and some of the men were killed by shells, machine-gun fire, and poisonous gas.

By August 1918, the German troops were retreating towards their own country. As they withdrew, they left behind hidden "boobytrap" bombs. The tunnellers had to find these and carefully blow them up before the area was safe for other soldiers to enter.

The war ended on 11 November 1918, but the tunnellers carried on. Their skills were desperately needed to repair ruined towns in France and Belgium. The Tunnelling Company finally arrived back in Auckland in April 1919 – and for a time, their work was mostly forgotten. Today, Arras has a special visitors centre, with a lift that goes down to an underground museum in the "Wellington" cave. The town also has a memorial to the more than fifty New Zealand tunnellers who died during the war.



▲ *The Havrincourt Bridge, built by the New Zealand tunnellers*



◀ *The New Zealand tunnellers working in France*

SKY-HIGH

BY ROBERT SULLIVAN
ILLUSTRATIONS BY
TIM GIBSON



The war was everywhere back then – on posters telling us to do our bit, in Waihi’s local rag saying we’d be heroes. So I signed up along with all the other diggers. And because we were miners, we were sent to France – with a pick and shovel for weapons – to tunnel under the German front line. I remember rats the size of cats and bully beef and hard tack and scratching away at white chalk ... all the time eyeing the canary, in case of poisonous gas.

MAY 1916, NEAR ARRAS



I might take a break, practise my bagpipes. OK, Sarge?

Quit your joking, Charlie. This isn't the time.



We've heard Fritz on the geophones. You need to get out.



Cool heads, lads. Cool heads.

Right, leave those last sandbags. Watch the wires.



Move! We're blowing the tunnel.



BOOM!

We'd been at the front six months, digging under the Germans and blowing up their trenches. Of course, they reciprocated. It was a game of cat and mouse. Then one day, a couple of our men found something.

Officers have confirmed that there are old quarries beneath Arras.

I've heard the chalk's softer than butter.

We could be through in no time - pay Fritz a surprise visit.

Perhaps they'd like to meet the entire Third Army?

Exactly what we had in mind, Richards.

The officers had big plans. Pretty soon, our company was to play its part in one of the greatest battles of the Western Front.

NOVEMBER 1916, ARRAS

It was all top secret of course. We were to link the old quarries underneath the town and dig tunnels that would take thousands of troops under no-man's land. We'd deliver them right to the German front line. They said it would end the stalemate, maybe even the war.

We worked around the clock in shifts. Each day, we tried to break the previous day's record.

*It needs to be wider. Those wee **Bantams** might be able to swing their picks in here, but I can't.*

How 'bout I eat your rations, then. Do us both a favour ...

It wasn't only the rations that were in short supply. We were constantly on the scrounge for timber. The army seemed to think we could build props out of thin air.

Don't ask, Sarge.

I see nothing.

22-11-16: Today the men dug 239 feet. The best to date. 🎉

In December, reinforcements arrived from the Pioneer Battalion. Even though we liked the Brits, especially the Bantams, it was great to be with fellows from home. They made jokes we could understand – and they sure knew how to swing a pick. We had trouble keeping up with them.



We had a good Christmas that year. We put down a hāngī. Some of the Pioneers even managed to find a couple of chickens ...



Now where on earth –

Don't ask.

We had a lot of laughs. One time, a soldier brought in a German prisoner and some of the Pioneers did a haka. They rolled their eyes, stuck out their tongues ... the full works. We almost felt sorry for poor Fritz.



Come on, Sarge. We'll keep him as our mascot.

The fun didn't last. The Pioneers were transferred to another place, and we carried on digging.

APRIL 1917

By April, we'd built an entire city underground. It was kitted out with running water, a ventilation system ... the works. There were even a couple of operating theatres down there, all rigged up with proper lighting. We were ready to blow the Germans sky-high. Then there was a last-minute hitch ...





You right there, Tommy?

I'm OK
thanks,
Sarge.

Don't worry - we'll be back in
plenty of time to watch the show.



We were used to repairing
cave-ins, but working in a
gas leak was something else.



The gas always found a way in.
Our eyes were soon streaming.

We could only dig in short shifts. We'd have a break, then take another turn.

Come on, lad. We're nearly done.

We were heading back ...

... when another shell hit.




Sarge!

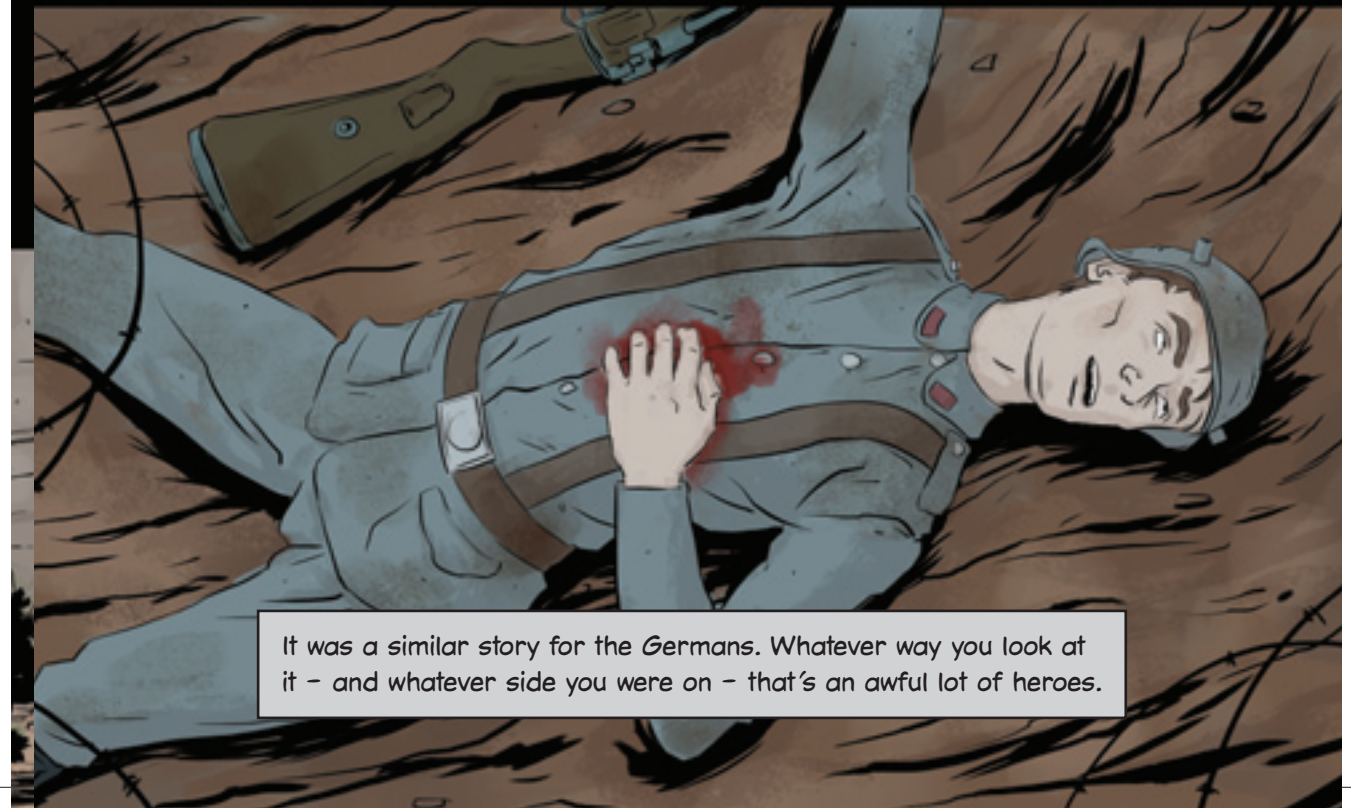


Where's Sarge? We need to get him.





The Battle of Arras lasted just over a month. Some said it was a victory for our side. But we heard later that over 150 000 of our men were killed or injured.



It was a similar story for the *Germans*. Whatever way you look at it - and whatever side you were on - that's an awful lot of heroes.

Glossary

Allies: the British Empire, the Russian Empire, and France were the main Allied nations (fighting against Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire – known as the Central Powers)

armistice: a truce

Army of Occupation: the army that occupies conquered territory after a war

artillery: large guns used during a battle

Bantam: the nickname for a soldier who was below the British army's minimum regulation height

British Empire: all of the territories under the control or leadership of Britain

casualties: soldiers who are dead, wounded, sick, captured, or missing

conscription: when the government orders people to be soldiers

contingent: a group of soldiers

dirigible balloon: a kind of airship with a metal frame and gas-filled bags, mostly used for spying on the enemy

Fritz: slang for German soldiers

Great War: another term for the First World War

infantry: soldiers trained to fight the enemy on foot and up close

NCO: a non-commissioned officer

New Zealand Expeditionary Force: the main part of the New Zealand army in the First World War

offensive: an attack or series of attacks

shell shock: a psychological reaction to warfare (today called post-traumatic stress disorder)

shrapnel: small pieces of metal thrown out when a shell explodes

telegram: a message sent by telegraph, then written on paper and delivered by hand

veteran: a person who has fought in the war

Western Front: one of the main lines of fighting in the First World War (there was also an Eastern Front), the Western Front stretched around 700 kilometres across northern and eastern France and Belgium (see the map on pages 2–3)

