New Zealand at War

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Helping to Win the War

by Dick Grace

More than seven thousand soldiers fought in the 28th (Māori) **Battalion** during the Second World War. The Battalion fought mainly in the Middle East, North Africa, and Italy.

At home in Aotearoa, Māori schoolchildren helped to raise money to buy a **canteen truck** for the Battalion. The truck was stocked with food and drink. It travelled with the soldiers until the end of the war.

In this article, Dick Grace describes how he helped to raise money for the truck when he was a schoolboy.

I started school in July 1941 at Tuparoa Native School. Tuparoa is on the East Coast of the North Island. I felt very excited on my first day. My mother had made me a blue hat to go with my blue shorts. I didn't have shoes, though. No one wore shoes in those days – we couldn't afford to buy them. I got my first pair of shoes when I went to boarding school in 1950. They gave me blisters.

All the **whānau** in our village were poor, but we always had enough food. We grew vegetables and crops. We caught eels from the ponds and creeks. Most families had hens, ducks, and a cow too.

My brother and some of my cousins joined the army and went to war. The men who were too old to go to war joined the **Home Guard**. I remember them marching around our school picnic area. Instead of rifles, they had broomsticks.

During the war years, the children at our school dug gardens and grew vegetables. We sold the vegetables to raise money to buy a canteen truck for the Māori Battalion. It was called *Te Rau Aroha,* which means the Leaf of Love.

Our parents raised money for the truck, too. They also sent **food parcels** to the soldiers.

We played lots of war games. We dug **trenches** in the sand with our hands. We used driftwood for make-believe guns. No one wanted to be the enemy, so we took turns.

In 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour in Hawai'i. Many people were worried that Japan might **invade** New Zealand.

One day when we were in our classroom, we heard the sound of an aeroplane. Our teacher told us to **evacuate**. We all had to go quickly to the pine trees behind the school. We had to lie down in the pine needles. As we lay there, we heard the plane coming closer. Then we saw it. It was just a small plane. It flew over the school and disappeared over the hills.

Our teacher said it was probably just someone from the Gisborne Aero Club.

The war ended in 1945. About a year later, a serviceman, Charlie Bennet, drove *Te Rau Aroha* around New Zealand. He thanked all the Māori children and their families who had raised money to buy the truck.

When the truck came to Tuparoa, we all went to see it. We were so excited by the bullet holes and dents in the body of the truck. We **realised** that we might have helped to win the Second World War.

Te Rau Aroha is now in the National Army Museum at Waiouru.

Members of the Māori Battalion with the truck in Italy

The truck in 1946 at Waitangi

The truck in 1980 after it was restored

Glossary

battalion	a large group of soldiers (usually about one thousand men)
canteen truck	a truck that carries food and drink for soldiers
evacuate	leave an unsafe place
food parcel	food that is collected and sent away to someone who needs it
Home Guard	volunteers who stayed in New Zealand to defend the country in case the enemy invaded
invade	enter a country to take it over
realised	understood clearly
trench	a long, deep hole that soldiers used as shelter from enemies' bullets
whānau	Māori for family

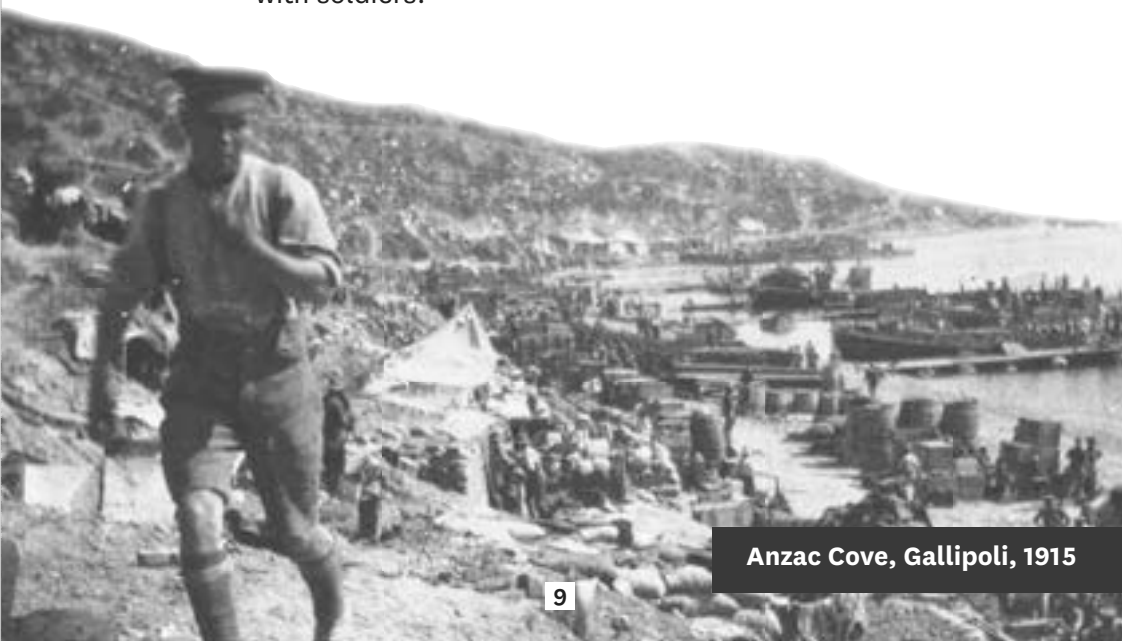
illustrations by Andrew Burdan

Anzac Biscuits

by Philippa Werry

Anzac Day is important in New Zealand and Australia. Schools and shops are closed. Many people get up early to go to dawn parades. There, they remember all the soldiers who fought and died in the First World War and many other wars since then. They especially remember the soldiers who died on the 25th of April 1915. That was the day Anzac soldiers fought at Gallipoli in Turkey.

Some families also bake Anzac biscuits on Anzac Day. But what do tasty, crunchy, crispy biscuits have to do with soldiers?



Anzac Cove, Gallipoli, 1915

Nobody knows who made the first Anzac biscuits.
They may have begun as a kind of oatcake – a biscuit often made in Scotland. (Settlers from Scotland had brought the recipe for oatcakes to New Zealand and Australia.)
Or maybe hungry soldiers made up the Anzac recipe.

However, it's likely that the first Anzac biscuits were made by the mothers, wives, and girlfriends of soldiers. These women wanted to send food parcels to the men overseas. The food parcels were carried in navy ships. The ships took two months to arrive! They had no refrigerators either. So the food in the parcels had to be long-lasting as well as tasty.

Overseas, the soldiers already had army biscuits to eat. But the biscuits were very hard. The men would often mash them up to make **porridge** or stews.

The new biscuits were softer. They were made from things that were cheap and easy to get, such as oats and coconut. They were packed in tins so that they stayed fresh. At first they were called "soldiers' biscuits". Later, they were named after the soldiers who had fought at Gallipoli.

Today, there are many different recipes for Anzac biscuits. Some have nuts, spices, or dried fruit.

Here's a recipe you can try on the next Anzac Day.

Anzac Biscuits

You will need:

½ cup white flour

½ cup sugar

½ cup rolled oats

¾ cup coconut

100 grams butter

1 tablespoon golden syrup

½ teaspoon baking soda

2 tablespoons boiling water

1. Mix the flour, sugar, rolled oats, and coconut in a bowl.
2. Melt the butter and golden syrup in a saucepan. Use a low heat.
3. Put the baking soda in a cup. Then add the boiling water. The mixture will foam up. Add this to the mixture of butter and golden syrup.
4. Pour the liquid mixture into the flour mixture. Stir.
5. **Grease** a baking tray. Put tablespoonfuls of the mixture onto the tray. Keep them about 4 centimetres apart.
6. Bake at 180°C for about 15 minutes or until the biscuits are a golden colour.

Glossary

Anzac	stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
grease	lightly coat with butter or oil
porridge	a food made from rolled oats

Pigeon Post

by Philippa Werry

Some people think pigeons are pests. They're noisy, and they leave a mess all over the footpath. This may be true, but there is something special about pigeons. These birds can find their way back home from almost anywhere.

Homing pigeons are pigeons that have been **trained** to fly long distances. They can find their way home from hundreds of kilometres away.

Pigeons have been used to carry messages for thousands of years. They even carried messages at the time of the **ancient** Egyptians. And it's because of pigeons that the first airmail postal service in the world started in New Zealand.

The *Wairarapa* on the rocks after it crashed into Great Barrier Island on the 29th of October 1894

On the 24th of October 1894, the steamship *Wairarapa* set off from Sydney, Australia. It was the start of a six-day trip to Auckland. Two hundred and fifty people were on board.

But the *Wairarapa* didn't arrive at Auckland on the 29th. On the 1st of November, people learnt the dreadful truth. The *Wairarapa* had smashed into cliffs on the northern coast of Great Barrier Island.

Great Barrier Island is 100 kilometres north of Auckland. At that time, the mail to and from the island had to be carried by the local **steamer**, the *Argyle*. Nobody in Auckland knew about the shipwreck until the *Argyle* arrived there on the 1st of November. It had taken three days for the news to travel 100 kilometres.

Stamps and flimsy from Great Barrier Island

A man named Walter Fricker had an idea. Walter kept pigeons in Auckland. He thought that pigeons would be a faster way to carry news. On the 29th of January 1896, his bird Ariel carried the first pigeon message from Great Barrier Island to Auckland. It took Ariel about one and a half hours.

The first regular pigeon mail service started in 1897. Messages were written or typed on pieces of paper called flimsies. A bird could carry three or four flimsies at once. The flimsies were stamped and then tied around one leg. Fast birds could **cover the distance** in less than an hour.

Pigeons had carried messages before, but this was the first time that a postal service had used them to deliver mail, using airmail stamps. They were the first airmail stamps in the world.

The pigeons were kept in a **loft** in Newton Road, Auckland. When one of the pigeons came home, it would fly through a small door into the loft. The door set off a bell in the office below. Someone would climb up to remove the message from the pigeon's leg. Then they would release the bird into the main part of the loft.

The pigeon loft in Newton Road, Auckland

In 1908, a **telegraph** link was opened between Great Barrier Island and the **mainland**. People didn't need the pigeon mail service any more. The service soon stopped.

A soldier carrying military pigeon boxes, 1940

Cher Ami in the National Museum of American History

Croix de Guerre

War Heroes

In the two world wars, pigeons were used in the **front lines** of battle. Many flew into gunfire, storms, and poisonous gas. They faced hawks in the air and rats in the trenches. They carried cameras and maps as well as messages. Many of these messages saved lives.

One famous pigeon was **Cher Ami**. This bird won the French **Croix de Guerre** after saving the lives of 194 men. The men had become lost during the terrible battle of Verdun in the First World War.

The men tied a message to the bird's leg. The message said where they could be found. Cher Ami flew back to **headquarters** with the message. All 194 men were rescued, but Cher Ami was badly hurt. He died in 1919.

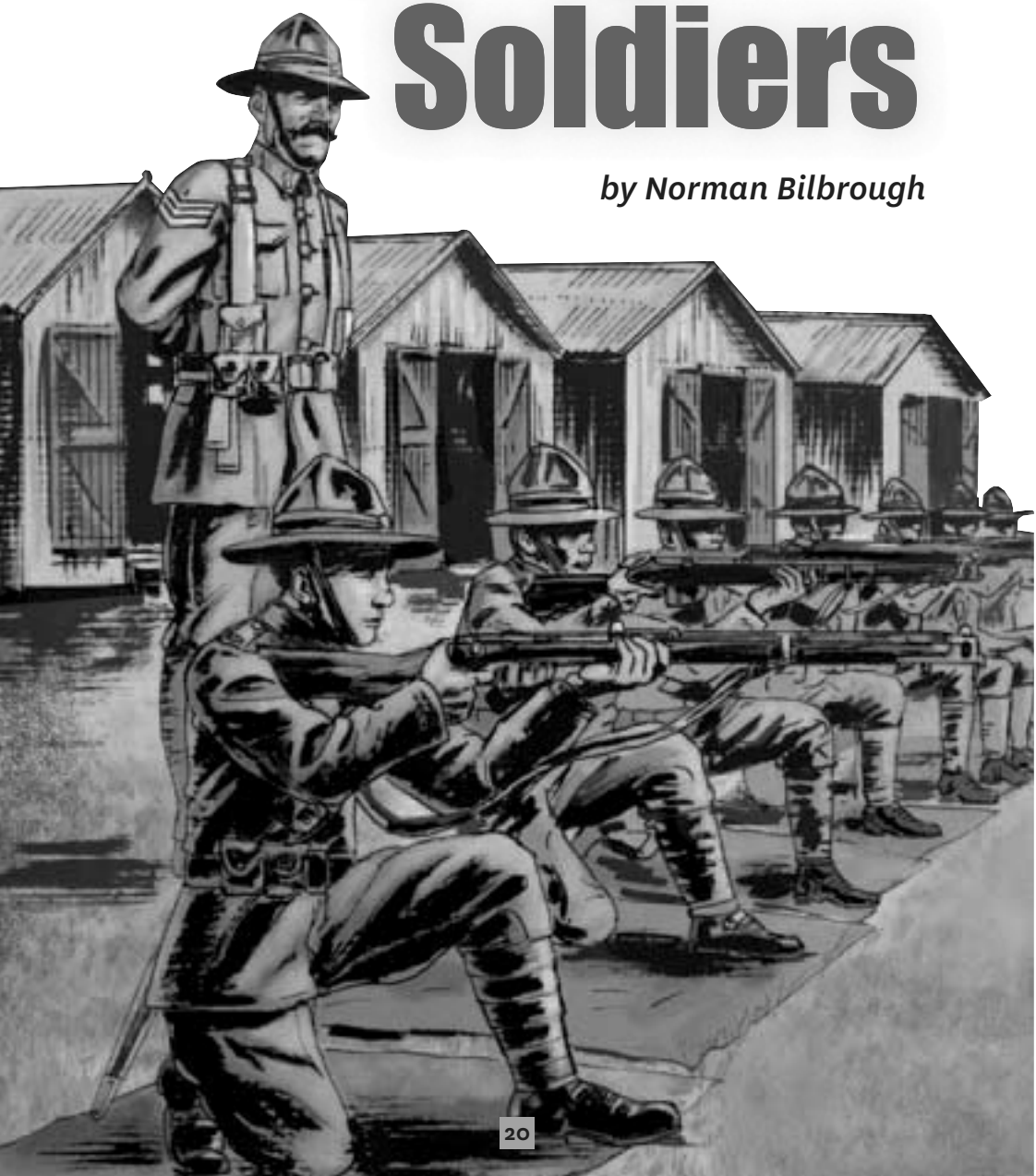
Pigeon baskets at a first-aid post in France during the First World War

Glossary

ancient	who lived thousands of years ago
Cher Ami	French for Dear Friend
cover the distance	travel between two places
Croix de Guerre	French for Cross of War, a war medal
front lines	the places in a war that are closest to the enemy
headquarters	the place where important messages are sent and received
loft	a home for pigeons, often a large room under the roof of a shed
mainland	the main part of a country
steamer	a ship that is powered by steam
telegraph	a system for sending messages along a wire
trained	taught to do a job

Boy Soldiers

by Norman Bilbrough



Stan Stanfield was helping his dad on their farm in the Wairarapa when his mum ran outside. She told them that war had begun in Europe. It was 1914.

Stan said, "Well, I'll be going." He was thirteen years old.

When Stan was fourteen, he joined the **cadets**. Along with other boys, he was given a uniform and a rifle. He went to training camp to practise marching and shooting. Men had to be twenty before they could go to war. So Stan lied about his age. He **enlisted** when he was just fifteen, and many other boys did the same.

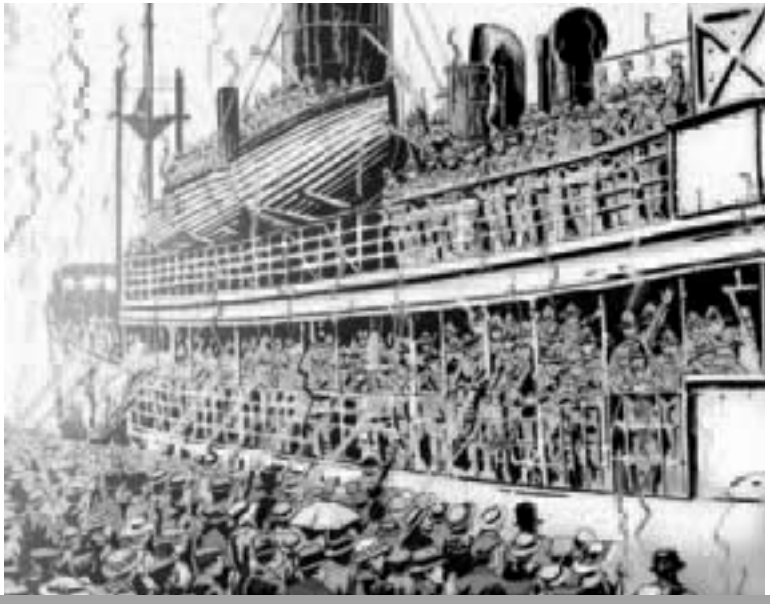
"People were so excited about the war," said Stan. "We thought we had to fight for the **British Empire**."

Looking back later, Stan didn't think he was brave. "I thought it would be fun," he said. "But it was no fun at all."

Len Coley was a boy who lied about his age, too. He came from Palmerston North. Most of his friends had signed up for war, and he was lonely. Len trained as a soldier. Then he had a medical examination. He was given an envelope and told to take it to army headquarters.

Instead, Len opened the envelope. He read that the doctors said he couldn't fight because he had once had rheumatic fever. Len tore up the letter. In May 1916 – at the age of seventeen – he left New Zealand on a troopship.

Over the next three years, Len fought in all the major battles in France and Belgium. He and Stan Stanfield never met each other, but they both found out what it was like to be a boy soldier in the war.



The Western Front was a long area of fighting in Europe. It ran for 700 kilometres from Switzerland, through France and Belgium, to the North Sea. Soldiers from both sides dug their trenches at the Western Front.

Stan Stanfield had arrived in England before Len. By May 1916, he was training at a camp. He was a hungry teenager, but there was never enough to eat. Later he was sent to a huge military base in France. The Battle of the Somme was only 100 kilometres away. The rumbles of gunfire sounded like a volcano erupting.

In June the next year, Stan fought in the Battle of Messines in Belgium. He had to carry two hundred **rounds of ammunition**, three bullet belts, food, water, a shovel, and a rifle with a **bayonet**.

"We just **blundered** along," Stan remembers. "If we came under **heavy fire**, we would jump in a hole. Sometimes the hole was full of water."

Len was at Messines, too. One day, his sergeant's arm was badly cut by **shrapnel**. As Len looked on, the sergeant cut through the rest of his arm with a knife. Then he picked up his arm and shook the hand. "Goodbye, mate. You've served me well," he said.

Len bandaged the sergeant's stump. Then he and his sergeant both fainted. When the sergeant woke up, he buried his arm in the ground.

When they weren't fighting, the soldiers spent hours picking lice from their uniforms. The trenches were full of rats. The mud was thick and deep. Hundreds of horses were lost in it, and so were thousands of men.

Next, both Len and Stan fought in the Battle of Passchendaele in Belgium. The battle was hopeless from the start. Stan remembers feeling like "**gun fodder**". He was shot in the back and sent to hospital. When he returned to the front, he was put in charge of a group of soldiers who had just arrived from New Zealand. They were all older than him. "I had to tell them when to get up and go and when to put their gas masks on."

Len wasn't shot. But he was **gassed**. He found it hard to breathe for the rest of his life.

On Len's nineteenth birthday, his battalion went to a French town. They wanted to take a bath there. But German soldiers saw them and began **shelling**. After the attack, Len's battalion helped the local people who had been hurt. Len had to bury a mother and her baby. He never forgot it.

The **Allies** called the big German shells "**Jack Johnsons**". The shells made a terrible noise – and they always hit somebody. Stan's mate Jim was killed beside him. Stan came back the next day to bury him.

Like all soldiers, Stan was homesick. "I was a young boy. I thought I wasn't going to survive," he says. "But when I came back to New Zealand, the only place I wanted to go was the pub." Stan had nightmares for years. "I could hear the shells and the machine guns."

When Len came home, he set fire to his uniform. He didn't talk about the war. But he wrote about it. Writing helped him to recover from the things he had seen. In 1930, he visited the old battlefields of Ypres and Passchendaele.

About three hundred boys and under-age young men from New Zealand enlisted in the war. Either they lied about how old they were, or the army did not care that they were under age. Some of these boys wanted a great adventure. Others wanted an army pay packet. Many wanted to prove that they were men. After all, they had been taught at school to honour the British Empire. They had been taught to love their country.

Stan Stanfield

Len Coley

Glossary

Allies	the name for the countries that fought on the side of Britain
bayonet	a stabbing blade at the end of a rifle
blundered	ran without knowing where the danger would be
British Empire	the parts of the world that were once under British control
cadet	a young person, usually of school age, who trains in the armed services
enlisted	joined the army, navy, or air force
gassed	made sick by poisonous gas
gun fodder	men thought of as nothing more than "food for guns"
heavy fire	the firing of many guns at once
Jack Johnson	a type of German shell named after an American boxing champion
round of ammunition	a single bullet or explosive
shelling	hitting with explosives
shrapnel	small pieces of metal thrown out by a shell blowing up

illustrations by Andrew Burdan

Acknowledgments

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