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BETWEEN TWOC WORLDS:

A STUDY OF THE LETTERS, DIARIES AND REMINISCENCES OF SOME OTAGO AND SOUTHLAND SOLDIERS IN THE GREAT WAR

Mindy Chen

Presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of B.A.(Hons) in History at the University of Otago

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ABBREVIATIONS

a) UNITS

A.I.B. Auckland Infantry Battalion
N.Z.E.F. New Zealand Expeditionary Force
N.Z.F.A. New Zealand Field Ambulance
N.Z.F.E. New Zealand Field Engineers
N.Z.M.C. New Zealand Medical Corp
N.Z.R.B. New Zealand Rifle Brigade
O.I.B. Otago Infantry Battalion
O.I.R. Otago Infantry Regiment
O.M.R. Otago Mounted Rifles

b) SOURCES

B. Book
D. Diary
L. Letter
O. Oral Interview

c) REPOSITORIES

A.T.L. Alexander Turnbull Library
D.P.L. Dunedin Public Library
H.L. Hocken Library

d) OTHER ABBREVIATIONS

b. birthdate
D.O.W. Died of Wounds
E. Enlistment date
K.I.A. Killed in Action
R.T.N.Z. Returned to New Zealand
## ILLUSTRATIONS

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Thank you all.
INTRODUCTION

This is an attempt to gain some understanding of the First World War as experienced by the ordinary New Zealand trench soldier. It is not a military or political history of the War but is rather, the story of the men in the ranks. It seeks to understand with what assumptions and hopes young men of New Zealand entered the European War; what they encountered at Gallipoli and the Western Front; what they thought about issues such as discipline, the nature of War, the causes they fought for, their enemy, their fellow fighters, themselves as New Zealanders, Britain as the Imperial heartland and the home front in New Zealand. Finally, changes brought about in their thinking by their War experiences is examined.

Bill Gammage's study of Australian soldiers in World War I, *The Broken Years* has been employed as a model for this study of the experiences of thirty-seven New Zealand soldiers. Because of the limitation of time, I have focused on soldiers from the Otago-Southland area about whom information is most readily accessible. A.E. Byrne's *Official History of the Otago Regiment* provides the context for their experience. Had time permitted, a more extensive and representative system of sampling would have given the study a broader base.

To ensure that written and oral sources are cross checked with some hard data, the *Alphabetical Roll of the N.Z.E.F.* was investigated. But only the briefest information is provided by these. The *Alphabetical List* does not give the last New Zealand address, age or occupation for soldiers who volunteered between August 1914 and October 1916. The Defence Department holds the soldiers' Attestation
Forms which include this information. But access to these forms is limited to soldiers' families and Defence personnel. Some of this information was sent to me, however, although I could not check the form's myself. Future researchers concerned with New Zealand World War I soldiers will have to devise some means of overcoming this difficulty.

Certain areas of the War experience were notable for the soldiers' silence. New Zealand soldiers, like their Australian counterparts wrote and said little about religion, politics and sex. It is difficult, therefore, to write about these areas with much certainty.

Some of the sources of bias in the soldiers' letters can only be noted and care taken in interpreting them. Limitation must have been placed on the writers' freedom of expression by the knowledge that a censor was reading them. Furthermore, soldiers' letters were often handed around the family or friends and knowledge of this must have affected the soldiers' tone, subject matter, and candour. Diaries were generally brief, and lacked detail, description and narrative, but there was a stronger emphasis on opinion and feeling. To a lesser extent, the reverse is true of letters. This is possibly because the soldier could express his most extreme thoughts in his diaries without fear of offence. Problems of everyday living were so humdrum that they did not bother to record them. There was little chance of forgetting the monotonous routines or the terrible conditions. On the other hand, letters explained conditions of living and fighting in more detail while opinions which would conflict with the civilians' known views were often held back.
About a quarter of the cases studied were based on oral interviews. Oral history is a historical discipline still in its infancy and there has been much debate about its reliability. In this study, it was invaluable. It unearthed information about the ordinary soldier which was impossible to obtain in any other way. It both complemented and supplemented written sources and helped to reinterpret, clarify and fill in gaps and weaknesses in the documents. For example, letters and diaries yielded very little on why the soldiers volunteered, the emotions associated with a bayonet charge and their experience of returning to New Zealand after the War. The majority of the veterans interviewed did not keep diaries and few wrote home diligently. If their oral accounts were discarded, the experiences of this group of people who will soon die, would be lost forever.

One of the strongest objections made about oral accounts concern their subjectivity. This study, however, is less concerned with precise facts of date or time than with presumptions, assumptions and anecdotes. Another objection is that it is retrospective, over a long span of 64 years in this case, and therefore is prone to distortions influenced by subsequent changes in values and norms. But when account has been taken of the fallibility of memory with age or illness, there still remains the overriding fact that the stark newness and intensity of these soldiers' experiences, coming in the formative years of their lives left an indelible impression upon them.

The methodology used for the oral interviews closely followed that prescribed in Paul Thompson's The Voice of the Past: Oral History (London, 1978). The interviewees were mostly from the
Montecillo War Veteran's Home in Dunedin. The other two were referred to me by friends. Had time permitted, inquiries at the Returned Servicemen's Association, Old People's Homes and newspapers would have yielded other interviewees, diaries and letters.

Preparations before the interviews entailed gaining some understanding of the narrative, terminology, technical terms and correct phraseology with respect to World War I. A set of questions was also constructed and taping equipment checked. The interviews were held either in the veteran's rooms at Montecillo Home or in their homes. All the old soldiers were interviewed alone. My questions were restricted to the soldiers' personal experience, what they themselves saw, did and felt. Each interview lasted between one and two hours. Immediately afterwards I recorded my comments on the character of the interviewee, jotted down any additional remarks made off the tape and noted the feeling of the interview as a whole. Later the tapes were transcribed with as much of the texture preserved as possible. In the margin of the transcripts I noted anything unusual which affected the meaning of what was said, for example, uncertainty, avoidance, enjoyment, pretence and other nuances. Two copies were made of the transcripts, one to divide up into subjects and the other kept whole to retain a sense of context. Use of oral evidence is extremely time consuming because each hour of interview requires three to four hours of extra work to convert it into a manageable form.

In evaluating its reliability, oral evidence was subjected to the same sort of tests as the written sources. Reading the interview or the whole set of a soldier's letters and diaries gives a good idea of the general reliability of the informant. For
example one veteran vehemently denied that he ever visited the brothels of Egypt, France or England but later commented that he always used the prophylactics issued for protection against V.D.

Where possible, all evidence was cross checked with secondary sources or the soldiers' attestation forms. These forms give a soldier's name, rank and subsequent promotions, regimental affiliation, enlistment and other dates, next of kin, casualties, theatres of operation in which he served, conduct record, date of birth and location, nationality, address, occupation, marital status and religious denomination. Unfortunately much written and oral evidence could not be cross checked. Yet such information was valuable precisely because it could not be extrapolated from any other sources. The authenticity of such evidence can be weighed but, being unique, not confirmed.

Thirdly, the evidence was weighed against a wider context of time and place to see if the evidence of each soldier 'rang true'. In oral evidence, particular attention had to be paid to the intervention of retrospective assessments. For example one veteran who had held the rank the equivalent to a private at Gallipoli vehemently condemned the overall strategic planning of the Gallipoli campaign when he would have had little or no knowledge of the overall operation at the time.

Individual differences also had to be taken into account. Some wrote their diaries and letters to record the most momentous time of their lives, some for their family and friends. Some writers and interviewees exaggerated their suffering, and some their merriment. Many toned down the pain and the trauma caused by the War. Of course much of the material is subjective, it could not be
otherwise. The War was so unprecedented in its form and intensity that their experience is necessarily a heightened subjective one - on every level of consciousness. This is the story of their experiences and it must include instances in which they exaggerated, erred, and belittled.

I have tried to emphasise the individual and wherever possible, have endeavoured to let the soldiers speak for themselves. In the last analysis, oral evidence as the letters, diaries and reminiscences all helped to convey the words and feelings of the ordinary New Zealand soldier and made for a history which is personal and social.

Several simplifying conventions are used. The fullest information about any soldier is contained in the first footnote of each chapter which refers to him. The rank shown is that which the soldier held at the time of writing or, in the case of interviewees, the rank he would have held at the time he was referring to. To avoid interruptions of the narrative I have not used sic. to indicate punctuation or spelling errors in quotations.
"The future was obscure and uncertain; but, with a feeling of eerie anticipation, he felt the freshness of the dawn of a new mysterious life, when men met men in mortal fight, when the false standards of civilization went to the devil and man was man. It was good to be alive; to be one of that brigade of fine hefty fellows on the edge of the great adventure, when they would join in the greatest sport on earth."


Britain's declaration of war on Germany on 14 August 1914, was received by the loyal New Zealand colony with near unanimous approval. New Zealanders up and down the country talked excitedly of the coming war and generally speaking, anyone who was at all eligible was keen to enlist. Often those too young to go, falsified their ages; those rejected at one station, tried again at another. One veteran admitted "I was turned down on account of my eyesight, but I had a pretty good memory and when I applied again I got in." ¹

A study of the experience of the First World War must involve some understanding of this unquestionably heartfelt and intense enthusiasm for war which, in retrospect, appeared naive and foolish even to some of the soldiers themselves. One commented: "None of us had any idea of what modern warfare was really like. If we had had we might not have been so very keen to enlist."² But the mood of August 1914 was almost irresistible, Ormond Burton described:

There was enthusiasm and a haze of rather splendid feeling. A great adventure was opening up, all the humdrum of life suddenly fell away and men were like young gods in a new world of romance. ³

It is clear that the war mobilized a traditional, noneconomic and romantic vision of what war was and what it would mean. Men drew upon a fund of imagery which they had absorbed as children and teenagers,
and came to see August 1914 as the great opportunity they had long
dreamt of for excitement and adventure. The momentum to enlist was
very strong and the attitude that: "everybody else was doing it, I
didn't want to miss out." seems to have been widespread. All imagined
that it would be an affair of great marches and great battles, quickly
decided.

For most the prospect of an uncertain but exciting future in the
company of the boys, and free from the constraints of civilian
respectability was certainly more attractive than their present occupation.
"To tell yer the truth" Robert Bowie admitted "it was a break from my
work at the Otago Daily Times. I was cashier there and I just wanted
a break. Another relished the "chance to travel and see things and
risk the dangers." Robert Wylie of Dunedin explained:

I thought it over a weekend along with another chap
and we both came to the conclusion that we had nothing
to lose. I decided that I would see a bit of the world.
I was prepared for anything that might happen.

They were intent upon having some fun and being in on the biggest event
in history. Moreover, to be a soldier fighting for right against wrong
commanded the respect, admiration and approval of a society whose
emphasis was strongly placed on patriotism to King and Country. One
soldier's father wrote to him after his enlistment: "Well Len, I feel
proud of being your father. Good men like you are going to save the
Empire."

Although most volunteers were not primarily motivated by the
desire to "save the Empire," there were nevertheless few who went to
the war utterly devoid of any patriotic feeling. They had a positive
sense, varying in strength, that what they were doing was for the
general good and that it was worthwhile. They were undoubtedly proud
of belonging to the British Race for "Rule Britannia" had been the
theme of their history lessons and it was presumed that Britain was always right and would always win. The attachment to the Mother Country was particularly strong for those New Zealanders who had been born or who had family links there. While in training at Trentham camp, Private L.M.Hart remarked: "It is surprising the number of old country chaps one meets. I should say that a good quarter of the men are from home." 

Many young New Zealanders felt obliged to enlist as proof of their manhood. Eric Lake commented: "The others were going, your friends were going, and you should go. There was a fear that you would be reckoned a coward if you were fit and didn't go." The Church too put moral pressure on men to enlist as Fred White recalled:

War broke out, Professor Davis the Pastor at Knox delivered a speech on Sunday afternoon for men only and he told the horrible brutality of the Hun and the poor little Belgian children. He made the most of it. Monday morning came and everybody rushed to the recruiting office including me and my brother, we were pretty close. He was 19 and I was just 17 so we juggled up the figures and made a mess of it cause we ended up the same age. He got in but I got tossed out. I tried a new recruiting office, passed fit and went into Trentham Camp April 1915.

The Community, caught up in the almost festive atmosphere of August 1914, also did its share to flush out those eligible to enlist. No young men out of uniform was safe from the attention of these well meaning women who want around presenting white feathers, a symbol of cowardice. Many reacted to this affront on their manhood and honour and enlisted:

I didn't want to go but I was single, 27 and I was getting white feathers handed to me. Well, I tried to enlist but Dalgety (his employer) said 'no you're reserved occupation, you can't go' and I said 'to hell with it, I'm going.' No I'm no hero I didn't want to fight but I couldn't stand that.

One soldier grew indignant as he recalled: "I was only 18 and a girl came up and gave me a white feather. If she did that today I'd put her
over my shoulders and spank her arse, I mean backside, good and solid
... I faked my age, I said I was 20 ... mad to go."

Nevertheless, he, like every other volunteer at the time, were anxious to get to the
fight. Most held that they were mature, and able, and as men they
were keen to 'do their bit.' One man advised his mother: "You tell
Bill's mother not to worry and show her a good example as a man can't
be propped till his time is up." 14

For some, the pay promised must also have proved an attraction
and Charles Kerse informed his mother that: "Some of these chaps
will have more money than they ever had before." Others had their
own personal reasons for enlisting.

Whatever their incentive or motivation these men were sincere.
They went readily to fight and to endure hardships and discomfort.
This eager and confident army of 1914 may be called the innocent army.
Its members:

felt the freshness of the dawn of a new mysterious
life when men met men in mortal fight, when the false
standards of civilisation went to the devil, and man
was man. It was good to be alive; to be one of the
brigade of fine hefty fellows on the edge of the great
adventure, when they would join in the greatest sport
on earth. 16

The individuals of this innocent army were to attain the knowledge
of good and evil through their experience at the war - some early on
at Gallipoli, some at the Somme, others at Messines, or on that
bloody battlefield of Passchendaele.

Tahuna Park was selected as the concentration point for the
Otago Province. Later on recruits trained at Trentham or Featherstone
Camps. For most the spell in the training camp was a holiday. The
army was generous in its supply of food, allowing one and a half pounds
of meat for everyman per day, twice as much as the Imperial Army allotments, moreover food was substantially the same for all ranks. All were agreed that these were fairly pleasant weeks. One man informed his parents: It is just like a strenuous holiday. I feel stronger, eat and sleep better." Another boasted: "we marched 17 miles in one day and had no dinner but it was a mere trifle... it was not half as hard as a day behind the harrows, and we all arrived as fresh as daises." 19

Men threw themselves into the Physical exercises, drilling, inspections, route marches; shooting, bayonet practices and mock battles with enthusiasm for they were eager to make the grade. "It was all accepted as part in parcel of volunteering." Robert Wylie explained and most took on the determined attitude of "alright, she's tough, but I can take it." In the training camp, regimentation had not yet been perfected as Private Kersa told his mother: "We are supposed to get up at 6.15 a.m. but it is generally 7 before we get up." And private Hart observed that the officers were a :"strict lot but not so bad as is generally believed." Even so, some found particular officers rather obnoxious. One complained that:

There are some rotten things going on here. One often feels like hitting an officer or Non Com. (Non Commissioned Officer) but it doesn't pay. They have the upper hand. A few of the boys in our hut counted out one of the quarter masters the other day and we all were 'hauled' over the coals for it in front of the whole parade. But it was really no disgrace as all the boys know what sort of a man we had to deal with... he is a regular nuisance to all the boys and it is only his uniform that saves him from a knock out. We let out our grievances to the officer commanding and I believe the rotter was well put in his place by the Major. 24

These men were civilians, and superimposed civilian codes on their new roles as soldiers. They saw the army as a job and believed that once their training was over the balance of the day belonged to them to be spent as they chose. Despite the ruling that they were not
allowed out of camp unless authorized, evidence abounds of incidences of absence without leave. Private Kerse told his parents:

I nicked out of camp last night with a pal and we had a great time coming in, dodging the pickets among the lupins, but got through safely. Les got away out one night about 2 a.m....when he was near the gate of the camp, two chaps came along. When he saw they were privates, he stepped out and kidding he was a picket called out, 'Halt!' and asked if they had a pass. When they said 'No' he said 'Well, what were you going to do?' 'Scale the fence' they said. 'So am I' said Les 'Give me a leg up'.

Drunkenness too appears to have been a problem with men on leave. In a country in which prohibition sentiments were growing, officials were quick to reassure parents that drunkenness would be severely punished and that no alcohol would be permitted to soldiers on the troopships without a medical certificate. Nevertheless after pay night, many men arrived back in camp "dead drunk and refused to be escorted to the camp lock-up." Physical violence had to be sometimes used to bring them under control. Smuggling of alcohol into the camps was also tried. William Downie Stewart recounted this experience on guard duty one night:

We had to collect all passes and search the men. They hid it in their trousers and sox etc. I had to stand guard over three of them in a tent for a good while and they had me in fits with their talk. One wanted me to let him go back, I told him I would be shot at dawn if he escaped so he said 'All right old sport I won't get you into trouble but I did promise to take the missus to the pictures tomorrow night and if they fine me I can't do it.'

What comes through is the attitude that it was not really very terrible to be "put on the mat and crimed." They were civilians and judged army doings by egalitarian civilian standards typical of New Zealanders. Bill Gammage discovered that this was also a feature of the Australian soldiers' make up which was to remain unchanged throughout the war.
In the training camp there was a general air of anticipation and excitement and the men behaved like children on the verge of their long awaited holiday. Gunner Harold Abernethy described the mood:

It's hard to write a letter with the boys around you talking etc. and a graphaphone going at the top with the boys stamping their feet to keep time. There's a highland jig going just now. We can't keep still. Anything to make a noise.

Rumours were rife as to their possible destination: France, England, German East Africa and Egypt, all had their turns as the favourites.

Finally, the Main Body embarked for overseas duty on 16 October 1914. They were given a warm send off by the thousands of friends, family and well-wishers who turned up at the Wellington Harbour for the occasion. Most Otago men had already said their farewells when they sailed from Port Chalmers on 22 September. Some felt the parting sorely and wondered whether they would see their loved ones again. But for most, these reservations were over shadowed by the festive atmosphere of the send off and the prospect of grand adventure ahead. One wrote: "the wharf was packed. It was great fun. The crowd threw up lots of fruit and we were perched right along the whole length of the boat, grabbing here and there." Another enthused: "It was a thrilling sight to look down on the thousands of people on the wharf... I guarantee there weren't many who didn't feel a thrill go right through them." Robert Wylie expressed the sentiment of many eager for action: "I didn't care a rap. I was off with the boys and it was no hardship for me to part with friends. It didn't trouble me at all."

Even later on, when the huge casualty lists had begun pouring into New Zealand, the subsequent reinforcements continued to exhibit this sense of festivity and merriment at embarkation. At the height of the Somme offensive, one departing chaplain remarked: "the men round here have been singing gloriously in parts and with great gusto all sorts of
appropriate and also unsuitable airs". Despite their realisation of what the parting might mean the Otago men not having experienced the fighting were convinced that war was glorious, exciting and worthwhile, and that as men, they had to do their duty. They may even come home heroes. Nevertheless Ronald Watson Sinclair perceived that "A very great number of men, aye and officers too have been very thoughtful and communicative. In spite of their gaiety, they have felt the parting very keenly." 34

Once they had put out to sea, most soldiers turned to thoughts of future prospects. For the overwhelming majority the sea voyage was an entirely new experience, some had never even seen a ship or a train before they enlisted and the sentiments of Private Kerse were echoed again and again by his fellow soldiers: "By Jove, we are in for a great time of it and I wouldn't have missed this for 20 years of ordinary life. When I just think of the different places we will go to and the things we will see, it is great." 35 Most were convinced that they had: "nothing but good times to look forward to." 36

The troopship carrying Otago men to the front were reported in the Otago Witness as being the most comfortable, clean and well fitted. 37 However the soldiers told a different story. The main consideration seemed to have been one of packing as many men and horses on board as possible. The sleeping quarters were cramped and situated deep in the hull, bunks were four tiered, "consequently no one could sit up except the ones on the top." 38 In the middle of the room there was a barrel for anyone that was sick and the smell of vomit and many sweaty bodies is best left to the imagination. The deck was not much better, for during the day its free portions became so crowded with men anxious to escape the heat and stuffiness of the hull that it was difficult to move let alone do any serious training.
These cramped conditions compounded the most common complaint voiced during the six weeks journey—boredom. Fatigues, duties, token drilling and lectures only took up a small portion of the day and for the greater part the majority lay around in the sun talking, smoking, sleeping. Two weeks into the journey, one complained of the "same old routine. It is making us very discontented being cooped up here with practically nothing to do." Some sought to while away the time playing cards or gambling and both these activities continued to be favourites of the soldiers when away from front line duties. But otherwise it was "the same old thing over again, three feeds and bed at night." Life on board was getting very "stale" and a fire alarm one day "helped to break the monotony." Gunner Abernethy informed his parents: "By the time we get to our destination we will be very lazy. What we do most of is eat and sleep and a very good deal of eating." 42

The journey was, however, not entirely agreeable. These big hefty sons of New Zealand who were preparing to do brave deeds in the coming battles nevertheless succumbed to a good deal of seasickness and found the repeated innoculation injections somewhat intimidating. Trooper Colbran observed that: "Some men objected and were told they would be classified as incapable and get no pay, so they yielded," and Private Hart informed his mother: "a good number of men fainted after it." 44

As the troopships neared the equator, men began to comment about the increasing heat to which they were unaccustomed. Their uniforms became more scanty and informal and at night they were permitted to sleep on the deck rather than in the stuffy and "oven-like" cabins down in the hull. The crossing of the equator was observed with full ceremony with King Neptune and his attendants presiding. Private Kerse described the fun: "The officers sat on a chair on a raised
platform and after getting a mock shave with a wooden razor were tipped backward into a canvas bath... It was a great sport." 45 In the afternoon there was either a holiday or a sports period which generally ended with everyone being dunked.

As the weeks passed complaints increased of the lack of fresh water for washing purposes, salt water being altogether impossible to get a good lather on and left one feeling rather sticky. The food too had deteriorated and became an additional source of monotony. Jam and butter were often lacking and the cheese suffered from its increasing age. The tea, Private Hart complained, was: "beyond description and very few have the courage to tackle it." 46 A death on the troopship Ruapehu, during that first voyage, dampened the spirit of the men. One Main Body man reported that "it had a very depressing effect on the whole ship. Even the crew went about without their usual jokes and noise." 47 The man was wrapped in a Union Jack and buried with full military honours. This gloom over one death contrasted with the almost callous acceptance of hundreds of deaths at once when war made men's lives cheaper and more dispensable. Then, the dead were very rarely accorded the comparatively elaborate burial of this soldier.

Bill Gammage in The Broken Years said of Australian First World War soldiers:

They remained incorrigibly civilian... and until they reached the front they considered the army a job which should be regulated by the conventions attached to any employer-employee relationship... They always retained the right to be ruled by their own judgement. 48

This aspect of the Australian character is also born out by the New Zealand soldiers surveyed in this study. Despite the emphasis put on active service conditions and strict discipline during the sea voyage, men nevertheless voiced their complaints loudly. They wrote of "knocking off at four p.m." 49 and striking for "better bread, more
butter", and "better pay." Private David Grant noted on one occasion:

The food was no good so one company ran riot and shook things up for a bit, the Major tasted the food and decided it unfit to eat so we got better food after and... so all ended happily and the chief steward was able to come out of his hiding place where he had been out of sight for a couple of days as he was the main cause of the bad food and was to be thrown overboard, but he got out of sight too quickly for them.

At sea, the soldiers had to tolerate their boredom and confinement, but once their ship was in port, they thought it only fair that they should be allowed ashore. When they were not, a convenient misunderstanding of orders often meant that leave was taken anyway. Private Wells recorded "No leave granted, so a lot jumped on the boat and went ashore." When they were granted leave they often "forgot" to return, when the leave expired and many found themselves subsequently on "the mat", which they considered unnecessary and unjust.

On shore, their behaviour was often questionable. The main problem was a free access to alcohol after being "dry" on the ship. The authorities tried to put an officer in with each group of men to make sure they "didn't go mad in the hotel." But this did not seem to lessen their appetite and William Downie Stewart informed his sister that:

a few got so bad they could hardly march back. Last night there was a pretty wild scene on the 'Tahiti' and some men who tried to get ashore got in conflict with the guard and one or two got a nasty bayonet wound. He added, 'don't say anything about this, of course one does not want to cry down their reinforcement but the discipline is bad'.

These soldiers egalitarian streak came out strongly in their attitude towards their officers. They admitted that officers were necessary to the war effort but they resented the strongly the hierarchical emphasis which resulted in striking differences on an every day basis. Private Hart after complaining about the food to
his parents continued:

The officers, however, got the very best of everything. I happened to see one of their menus the other day and it nearly took my breath away. One would never get better fare in any first class hotel in New Zealand. Champagne and various wines were only two minor items, but just compare them to the stuff (called tea) which is served to us and one sees the differences between the officers and private. One cannot blame the officers for "accepting" all this of course, but it is in their power to improve our lot."  

Their opinion and behaviour toward their officers were based on the civilian criteria, of friendliness, fairness, competency and character rather than on the military principle of disciplined obedience. Private Kerse wrote of a Second Lieutenant who attempted to drill some men:

"He finished up in the middle and had to ask the sergeant to take the squad. We laughed. My cobber knows him and reckons he's a wowser."  

He warned that any incompetent officer who gets "offside" with his men "will need to be jolly careful when he gets into action."  

The men were quick to react to what they regarded as authoritarian excess and sometimes serious trouble resulted. On one troopship a riot broke out when a bully-sergeant from Dunedin ... tried to make the C.B. (Confined to Barracks) men stand with their faces to the wall for two hours. The crowd resented this and counted him out, counted everyone out - and things looked very ugly. The officers were at mess at the time and they had to make a hasty exit. It was only the Colonel's threat to read the Riot Act and the turning of the hose on the boys that stopped what would have been a very serious mutiny."

This particular colonel was liked by the men precisely because he treated them "as men and not as a lot of school boys."

The destination of the fleet was the subject of many conversations and rumours. It had become the general consensus and hope of the men that they would get to the Old Country - England. To their initial dismay, however, they were ordered to disembark in Egypt, for Turkey
1. Otago Infantry entraining at Tahuna Park, Dunedin.

2. Disembarking at Alexandria.
had by now entered the War. As the prospect of terminating their long
journey and the chance of seeing Old Egypt dawned, the men grew more
excited. They disembarked on 3 December in Alexandria and were camped
at Zeitoun station four miles from Cairo and on the edge of desert.

At first the camp was bare and conditions were rough. But
tents were rapidly put up and a canvas town gradually emerged. Strenuous
and exhausting training was commenced at once. Men were instructed
in arms drill, musketry and bayonet fighting, shooting, tactical
schemes of attack, skirmishing and trench techniques, and these were
tested in many mock battles. Initially the Otago Mounted Rifles were
trained in quick dismounts going into various firing positions. But
this outdated mode of fighting was soon made obsolete by the development
of the war, and the Mounteds soon became fed into the Infantry battalions.
Twenty miles route marches with full pack, which weighed up to 70
pounds, were held for every one. In the heat and sand of the desert,
these were exhausting affairs. For after arriving at their destination,
the soldiers had to spend hours doing manoeuvres, attacking
imaginary enemies, and digging useless trenches, which they subsequently
filled again. A weary march home, dinner and bed followed.

In the first month, the soldiers flung themselves into these
tasks with great enthusiasm for they were desperately keen to prove
themselves fit for the most rigorous tasks, which they believed would
soon come their way. But after two months in Egypt they were still
drilling and trudging the unending miles while great battles were
being fought on the Western Front. A mood of increasing restlessness
developed.

For the Otago infantry there was one brief dash of excitement.
Towards the end of January 1915, they were ordered to the Suez Canal
to counter a Turkish advance. But their excited anticipation of
active combat could only be contrasted with what they actually encountered when they arrived, for they were put into reserve and continued training. One frustrated soldier complained that they had come "only to be kept messing around" and F.M. Spencer of the Medical Corp reported: "Our life here is one long holiday, swimming in the canal, watching steamships sailing up and down and swimming for tins of cigarettes or tobacco thrown overboard from the P and O boats..." A third private recorded with disgust:

11/2/15 Fatigue, improving fortifications. Hungry.
12/2/15 Ditto
13/2/15 Ditto

"There had been little risk, and no glory." And so the Otago Infantry men returned to their "old address" at Zeitoun and kept on training.

In their times off, the soldiers explored the mysteries of ancient Cairo. At first these were attractive and one even felt thankful to the Kaiser for this opportunity to see story-book places. They were impressed by its size and cosmopolitanism with its "niggers, French, Italian, Greek, Spanish and every nationality under the sun." These New Zealanders climbed the Pyramids, carved their names on its peaks and took chips of it away. They inspected various mosques, visited the museum and ancient palaces and wandered through many gardens and bazaars. But their interest was soon exhausted and in the course of time Otago men grew to hate the place and its inhabitants.

Their accounts increasingly emphasised negative aspects of Egypt. All agreed that it was "the dirtiest place on the face of the earth" and they were disgusted at the natives who lived in hovels like "a nest of rats." Spencer commented that even: "Maori pahs are friendly compared with them." They were unaccustomed to the filthy streets with pungent rotting matter lying about everywhere, and the numerous beggars, deformed and crippled people who lined the
sidewalks all presented a visual affront to soldiers who came from a land with little poverty.

The contact with the Egyptians only served to strengthen New Zealanders' conviction that as Englishmen they were the aristocracy of all races. Even before they disembarked, they had received instructions: "to treat them with authority and let them know we are the masters." After a few days in Egypt one affirmed that: "the natives are an extremely low class," while another commented that one could "hardly help regarding the nigger as animals when you see them lying about." Although these comments revealed quite an explicit racism, they were only expressive of the attitudes widely held by Europeans at the time. Bomadier Scott commented of the magnificent ancient architecture of Egypt: "One cannot imagine the present Egyptian people building anything like these. The ancient Egyptians must have been a different race altogether." Another thought it "very strange at first trusting one's life to a black-skinned people in trains, trams, cabs, barbers shops and everywhere." Incidents in which "Gypos" overcharged, sold fakes, served poisonous drinks and stole from the soldiers; and rumours of soldiers having been knifed and disappeared all reinforced the soldiers' low impression of them. One declared:

> The more I see of these scum the worse my opinion of them grows. They have no idea of cleanliness, honesty or morality and their habits are such as would put the lowest of the lower animals in the shade. Most of them live by their animal cunning in the art of robbery. They are only fit to be kicked and they get that in plenty.

Accordingly, they treated the Egyptians with contempt and disdain and had much fun at their expense. They commandeered donkeys and street cars, and careered wildly through the streets. They upset street stalls and crashed into shops and cafes "like a pack in full
They victimised Egyptian vendors and used their sticks generously on those who pestered them to buy or insisted on payment. Some poor "Gypos" were tossed in blankets by laughing soldiers and others set on nervous horses who were sent racing into the desert, often returning without their riders. One veteran recalled with enjoyment: "We used to do that every morning. They'd say 'Oh Mister, we frightened' but we thought it a great joke." 76

In the city, the New Zealanders were generally undisciplined creating chaos and confusion wherever they ventured. Trooper Colbran recorded an: "extra big brawl which resulted in a nigger or two getting shot, a New Zealand trooper getting his ear sliced off and several other damaged people," 77 and Private Maloney noted that the soldiers ribaldry made the populace "very nervous." He observed that "if there is the slightest rumpus, the Gyppo shop keepers put up their shutters for miles around." 78 The military police was generally quite impotent to control their behaviour for these 'Red Caps' were hated and scorned as men too 'cold footed' to fight in the front lines. Of course the soldiers' conduct was due not only to their contempt for the Egyptians but also to their unmilitary indiscipline and their disgust at being confined in this 'land of sand, sin and sweaty socks,' every drilling, kept far from the real arena of battle.

Perhaps nothing in Cairo staggered the imagination of the average New Zealander as did the notorious Red Lamp district of the Wassar. At a time when Dr Truby King was emphasising the sanctity of home life and the honour of women back in New Zealand, these troops confronted the brothels of the Wassar as a plain and open fact. There "prostitutes sat in rows in the street soliciting custom or beckoned from the windows, dashed out and accosted passers by." 79 Letters home were practically unanimous in their silence on the
subject of prostitution and understandably so, for the firm belief of those at home was that their noble sons, brothers, husbands or sweethearts were going to be heroes and would never be connected with such an indecency. Comments made in their diaries were generally of an indirect nature. Falconer noted: "One sees all the sin and degradation it is possible to see in the world." 80 Private Maloney went further in claiming that "for vice the backwaters of Cairo are without precedent... Sodom and Gomorrah have their prototype in modern "Cairo". 81 Private Hart seemed even more alarmed when he declared:

I saw more that was repulsive, disgusting and immoral to the very last degree in that one evening than in the whole of my life before. One would never believe that such a state of things were possible unless he had seen it with his own eyes. 82

These comments betray shock and disgust rather than participation. Many maintained that they "went out of curiosity" 83 and were "in no way tempted." 84 The "Venereal Hospital"; referred to in one diary 85 only two weeks after the first New Zealand forces landed, however, told a different story. One soldier confided in his diary rather perceptibly that "the army tends to give one an unmoral outlook on life and we do things here that we wouldn't dream of doing in civilian life." 86

The soldiers had been severely warned before they disembarked, of the evils of Cairo. Lance Corporal Wylie recalled "we were told exactly what would happen. We would get V.D. for sure and that would be the end of our career, Oh yes there were very strong words." 87 These lectures put fear into some of the number, temporarily anyway. One old soldier recalled:

I was 18 at the time and one of these Tabbies got a hold of me and snuggled up and oh I suffered the agonies of the damned because I thought that if you did anything at all you were straight for the V.D. Camp... the place was too wicked for a young fella like me. I had to grow up. 88
Many did grow up; very quickly. Mention of the Wassar brought a mixture of reactions from old soldiers. Some refused outright to comment, some avoided making anything but the most vague allusions to it. One veteran even preempted the question, when asked whether he was given leave he replied with a tinge of anxiety "Yeah... Now what are you after." Most became distinctly embarrassed and none spoke frankly on the subject. This was hardly a surprise for they were conversing with a young person of the female sex and their traditional sense of what was appropriate, well-mannered and decorous prevented them from opening up about such a delicate subject.

From the high rate of V.D. recorded it seems that quite a high proportion must have partaken of the pleasures of the Wassar. General Godley was of the opinion that he might lose ten per cent of his troops to the disease. Nevertheless the authorities were, for a long time, opposed to the issue of prophylactics on the grounds that this would "encourage 'vice' by the belief that it could be indulged in with impunity." Moreover, the mere mention of its possibility aroused the strongest opposition of New Zealand women. Soldiers were thus discouraged by their doctors, chaplains and military commanders but the number kept on rising and by the end of 1915 there had been at least 10,000 Australasian cases with 9,000 more in 1916. One soldier recalled in whispered tones what happened back in Camp: "Just every now and again we had what was known as a 'dangle parade' and the doctor came and inspected our privates, it was pretty degrading."

Later, through the work of Ettie Rout a New Zealand woman, more official recognition was given to the problem which continued to persist on the Western Front and prophylactics were eventually issued. When the huge number of casualties from Gallipoli began to appear the soldiers' attitude to 'vics' became even more philosophical.
Private Maloney lamented: "Many soldiers have paid the price and now languish behind the wire. Who can blame them. Tomorrow they may be sent to the Peninsula and a soldier's grave. Why not make the most of the shining hour." This attitude came, also, to be applied to alcoholic drinks. In the years before the war, anti-liquor sentiment in New Zealand had been exceedingly strong and great pressures were brought to bear on the Government to severely restrict the amount of alcohol accessible to the troops. Burton explained that:

good women who had sent their sons to war for a patriotic ideal did not want them to be subjected to the temptations that are inseparable from the use of liquor. They might never see their boys again, and if they had to die, they wanted them to die clean.

Clutha Mackenzie wrote satiracally of this puritanical attitude:

The dear old wowser boys at home in New Zealand would get upon their hind legs an' say 'is it right that our dear boys should be let go free in such a dreadful city, what with the awful drink, and gamblin' and worse than that, dear brethren. No, we will petition the Minister of Defence to stop the dreadful catastrophe, to put the pubs outer bounder an'ter never have any wet canteens in the camps. Oh, our poor innocent boys'

The soldiers, however, viewed the issue in terms of their manhood and

Private Kerse recorded with some vehemence:

When we came here, General Godley, who is a bit of an old woman, I hear, was not going to let us have a wet canteen; so General Maxwell went off at him and asked him if he had brought boys or men. General Godley said 'Men', so General Maxwell says 'treat them like men'.

Thus the old solid values of chastity and sobriety fell casualties to the war. Those at home could neither condone nor understand, and sensing this the soldiers began to omit subjects belonging to this delicate category from their correspondences. A gap had appeared between the civilian and the soldier in their
thinking and their action. This gap was to increase, widen and deepen through the four years of the war until the soldier was to find himself estranged.

For now they were desperately eager for battle. Already the war seemed incredibly old and still they drilled. All hoped that "this sham energy work won't last much longer." Discipline became lax and military offences multiplied. Absence without leave sometime for days, drunkenness, attacks on native and military police and insubordination all featured regularly. Even so, at least one man judged the New Zealanders "a pretty happy and wonderfully disciplined body of men." Several New Zealanders compared themselves to the Australians in this respect of discipline and their comments that the Aussie was rougher, tougher, "kicked up more rows" on leave and was more hated by the natives than the New Zealanders, seen to be born out by Bill Gammage's study. But it was also the general consensus that "they are on an average quite as good physically if not better than ours, they look to be more accustomed to an open air life. The Australian bushman is of the finest stamp to be seen in camp."  

This favourable opinion of Australian physical capacity contrasted with their impression of the English 'Tommies' from the old Country which was one of cautious disappointment. One judged:

Their accent is pretty broad and it takes us all our time to follow some of them. They have a very peculiar way of raising their tone at the end of sentences and questions that gets monotonous. Most of them are just boys right from cotton and iron mills. Coming from such a sphere they are very small too, their average height being about two or three inches less than ours "But" this New Zealander was quick to add "they are full of patriotism and are dead keen on getting to the front."  

For the moment anyway, the New Zealanders had no objection to "knocking about together with the Tommies."
These Otago Southland boys continued to react against apparently pointless or unfair restrictions. One soldier boasted that when they arrived in Egypt, two hotels, the Grand and the Continental, were "supposed to be reserved for officers but they soon found out they couldn't keep the New Zealander Tommy out and there were soon as many privates at dinners at night as officers." At least once when some of their number were put under arrest in the guard tent the soldiers "got their bayonets and had a charge at the guards with the result that some were wounded." The men, grew increasingly restless, dissatisfied and riotous. When the canteen increased the price of beer "they took matters into their own hands and pulled down the tent and took all the beer." Then they "started on the dry canteen to pay off old wrongs... The tents were soon full of biscuits, fruit and other articles." Moreover, on those long, exhausting and by now terribly tedious marches, the men found a way to lighten their 70 pound packs. One explained, "we stuffed them with straw so they looked bursting with possessions."

Complaints now increased of inept officers who had come out with the later Reinforcements. Spencer judged that two from Otago were absolutely "the limit." Another believed, however, that the typical Otago N.C.O. "came off his high horse as the training progressed and although he wasn't just one of you he was more or less inclined to say 'gidday Jack,' except the higher ones of course." The "higher up ones" were detested particularly if they were thought to be excessively authoritarian or lacking in civil propriety when speaking to the men. One old soldier commented with obvious annoyance;

Some of the discipline was absolutely stupid. I asked an officer why we had to do this particular manoeuvre with the gun and along comes a Sergeant-Major bellowing at me "Stand to attention when you're talking to an officer!! Well, what I was asking was perfectly reasonable and when you get that, your back would go up a mile. You just hated anything like that."
Consequently they resented having to salute men they did not respect and avoided it if they could at all get away with it.

The New Zealand soldiers' indiscipline, fierce independence and hatred of the Imperial mounted police were amply born out in the Wassar Riot of Good Friday 1915. Australian and New Zealand soldiers took possession of the area, smashing up some gift shops. They threw prostitutes out of several houses, hurled pianos and beds down from the top floor windows, piled them up and "made a bonfire all down the centre of the street." Some of the houses caught fire and when the fire brigade arrived, the hoses were cut. The British military police attempted to disperse the rioters by firing on them. A number were wounded and the rioters retaliated. One declared "you don't shoot down the chaps from the colonies and get away with it." He continued, "you should have seen those Red Caps do a scoot! I don't think they got away unharmed; one, I heard, never got away at all."

For several hours the rioters were in charge but by early morning the excitement had died away. Leave to the city was stopped at once, Burton claimed that "in consequence the canteen was raided and the cinema set on fire." The exact cause of the Wassar Riot is unclear but there had been longstanding grievances against the "poisonous drink" and the diseased women of the area. Burton deemed it the work of some irresponsible drunks, but Private Maloney defended the Riot as having "served the useful purpose of impressing on the native mind the might and majesty of the Nation, which is able to gather such a virile soldiery to their colours." The increasing restlessness of the troops also contributed to the Riot. One veteran claimed that "everybody was fed up with the training. They were rearing to go and to really do something and they took it out on Cairo."
In their months in Egypt there had been nothing much to excite their pride or their interest. They believed they were "the picked men of a hardy open air people" and they knew they were more than ready for action. In January one soldier had informed his parents: "If you were to see these men now and compared them with what they were the first fortnight of concentration in New Zealand you would be astonished. Smarter in their movements, taking a pride in their uniform and appearance... the men really have done mighty well." More than one General had commented on the splendid appearance, physique and efficiency of the New Zealand Division. But still they drilled and dug and marched. The fact that General Godley had his wife with him when the troops were working out makes hardly surprising that her supposed remark "Oh make them do it again" spread like wild fire.

Lance Corporal Wylie declared:

Everybody was fed up. We were wanting to do something more than what we were doing, training, training, training. We'd had had a guts full and we thought that anything would be better. We were spoiling to get going and when we got word to move we cheered. That was what everybody wanted.

Finally their time had come and excitement reached a fever pitch. This was the fiery test which would prove their quality and give them the right to be ranked with the heroes of the Western Front. On Sunday 11 April the Otago Regiment left Zeitoun. They were pleased to be leaving Cairo, its heat, sand and people. On the 13th these soldiers boarded the Annaberg and headed for Mudros Harbour. On disembarking two days later the Otago Men encountered a tremendously inspiring sight for here was gathered an immense fleet of transports, tugs and launches all waiting the word to move and to safeguard these were nearly 20 warships of which the largest and most powerful was,
of course, the huge Queen Elizabeth. Britain was the greatest nation on earth and she had gathered

half a hundred thousand men together from the extremes of the globe differing in colour, race and language all with one set intention, the breaking of might and wrong in the cause of right and justice

Most Otago men no doubt believed this for although they had had very personal reasons for enlisting they were nevertheless convinced of the justice of their cause and devoted to its achievement. They were tremendously idealistic and desperately keen. They were ready to endure any hardship. Private Kerse enthused: "It is going to be hot stuff this time and ... is not going to be as trifling as the Suez Canal Business." 121

Innocently, they believed they would see New Zealand again before the next Christmas.
CHAPTER ONE

FOOTNOTES


15. Ibid., L. 16/9/1914.


20. Lance Corporal R. Wylie, O. 8/7/1914.


25. Private C.A. Kerse, L. 18/9/1914

26. Otago Witness, 9/9/1914 p.28


34. Ibid


37. Otago Witness, 9/9/1914 p.28

38. Lance Corporal R. Wylie, O. 8/7/1914.


40. Ibid., D. 19/11/1914.

41. Ibid., D. 28/11/1914.
44. Private L.M.Hart, L. 16/3/1915.
47. Private C.A.Kerse, L. 27/10/1914.
51. Ibid
55. Lieutenant W.D.Stewart, L. to sister Rachael 9/1/1916.
58. Ibid.
60. Ibid
62. F.M.Spencer, N.Z.M.C. L. 12/12/1915 A.T.L.
63. Private C.A.Kerse, D. 11,12,13/2/1915.
64. O.E.Burton, The Silent Division, p.27.
68. F.M.Spencer, L. 2/1/1915.
72. Bomadier Robert Hamilton Scott, 3rd Brigade N.Z.F.A.,
b. 12/7/1889 (Oamaru), farm worker Central Otago,
E. 10/2/1915, R.T.N.Z. 10/7/1918 no longer fit for service,
L. 13/2/1916 A.T.L.
73. F.M.Spencer, L. 2/1/1915.
75. Private J. Maloney, L. /1/1916.
78. Private J. Maloney, L. /1/1916.
79. O.E.Burton The Silent Division, p.23.
81. Private J. Maloney, L. /1/16.
82. Private L.M.Hart, L. 27/7/1915.
84. Private J. Maloney, D. 27/1/1916.
85. F.M.Spencer, D. 17/12/1914.
86. Private J. Maloney, D. 27/1/1916.
89. Ibid.
Vol. 1 no. 1 1967, p.12.
91. Ibid
92. Ibid., p.16.
100. Private L.M.Hart, L. 22/7/1915.
103. F.M.Spencer, L. 7/1/1915.
111. Anzac (pseud.), *On the Anzac Trail*, p.104.
113. Ibid.
117. F.M.Spencer, L. 7/1/1915.
CHAPTER TWO

GALLIPOLI

"... it was no triumphal procession from village to village as it has been so sanguinely painted for us"

Cecil Malthus, Anzac: A Retrospect, p. 61

The Otago Regiment set sail on the morning of Saturday 25 April for the Gallipoli Peninsula. At this time the 3rd Brigade of Australians were in the midst of effecting a near impossible landing on the strip of beach to be immortalised as Anzac Cove. They suffered an immense number of casualties but on the Anabar.f. the Otago men had heard that "the Australian Division had landed before dawn and driven The Turks back three or four miles." This was an exaggerated distance but such good news stirred up great excitement. Aware of the magnitude of the campaign now under way, Captain Thomas Russell Ritchie of the Medical Corps declared "if things turn out as expected, Australia and New Zealand will have reason to be proud of the share which their troops took in the operation." And conscious, as all were, of their colonial status, he thrilled at the thought of having the opportunity to prove themselves "capable of carrying out their little part of the programme unaided." The men were full of hopes and a few fears," Cecil Malthus observed:

We hoped for success and we hoped we would not disgrace ourselves, but we had no assurance of that. Everyman even to himself was an unknown quantity and could only soberly resolve to do his best. The next few days would be momentous and revealing.  

Shortly after 2.30 p.m. the first troops of the Otago Regiment landed: "we dashed for safety as soon as we got ashore but by then Johnny Turk was sending over shrapnel and there wasn't enough shelter
to keep us out of trouble." From this point, the soldiers' letters, diaries and reflections give no exact picture of their activities in the first days after the landing. This was partly due to ignorance of strong sea current, the landing consequently being made a full mile north of the intended landing area. There the harsh physical terrain and enemy defences were entirely unexpected. Instead of open plain, they encountered almost vertical cliffs with the Turks possessing the highest points. Byrne, in his *Official History of the Otago Regiment* described the situation:

> The line taken up by the troops who had been landed up to this stage became heavily engaged at every point. The intervals of time between various landings; the fact that companies and half companies had on arrival been directed to where they were most urgently required at the moment; and the broken and precipitous nature of the scrub-covered country, all contributed to confusion and intermingling of units, detachments from all brigades serving alongside each other.

Some took up positions in the firing line, others in reserve positions and others were simply told to "dig in" for shelter.

Otago soldiers were shocked at the number and the condition of the casualties they encountered at their landing; dead and dying lay everywhere and wounded men dragged themselves or were carried down to the beach in increasing numbers. In the ensuing days they were to see much more suffering amongst people of their own Battalion and some became casualties themselves. For the majority this forceful introduction to war resulted in an emotional disorientation which expressed itself in the extreme paucity of their accounts of the long awaited event. Some diaries came to a sudden halt on 25 April to resume a week or so later with the briefest accounts of their days. Charles Kerse recorded: "26/4/15 stayed in trench all day. Plenty of shrapnel etc. in Death's Valley. 1/5/15 moved from trenches 6 p.m. Heavy attack on hill, Heavy casualties."
Little apparent emotion is betrayed and other accounts were similarly brief, vague and almost evasive. This contrasted with the lofty expectations and excited emotions of the few days and hours before the landing. Moreover it contrasted with the continuing excitement of Captain T.R. Ritchie who had remained on board the Seangbee as a medical officer:

I am writing this late at night off the coast of Gallipoli Peninsula, after a day full of excitement... When we arrived in the Seangbee at 5 o'clock the warships were going at hammers and tongs and it was a splendid sight. The flashes of the guns, the terrific explosion as they were fired and the tremendous clouds of earth tossed on a hillside where the shells exploded made a fine spectacle... The machine guns and rifles... added to the noise... and its echo helped to swell the music. After dark the flashes of shrapnel shells as they burst looked very pretty.

He "pitied the poor Turks who happened to be in the vicinity." Yet for Private Kerse it was only two years later in France that he was able to write about these days in general terms. He wrote:

"It is awful to look back now and anyone talking about it brings all the horror of it back to me."

The carnage was immense. Up to midnight of 25 April Byrne estimated the figure to be 1,500. Medical services were hopelessly overstretched with far more casualties than had been anticipated. This intensified the suffering of the wounded both on the beach where they lay untended for hours in the scorching heat having to endure the swarms of flies, the pain and the effects of their wounds, and on the overcrowded transport ships taking them off the Peninsula. Cecil Malthus lamented:

Even the most badly injured had to be tipped into the boats without their stretchers, which were indispensable ashore and anyhow would have taken the room of six men a piece in the crowded boats. Rows of other wounded were lined along the beach, dumped on a blanket or just on the bare earth or shingle.
3. The Gallipoli cliffs: unscalable heights in places, with Turks shooting from the top.

4. The tragic fate of the Anzac Wounded. Men sick up to death lying on the deck; tired, suffering, uncomplaining men with wounds that became septic before they reached Alexandria.
Conditions on the hospital ships were appalling. On the Lutzow's first trip, Ormond Burton, recorded that "the only man aboard with any medical knowledge was a veterinary officer. The men died 20 and 30 a day." On its second journey the Lutzow carried only a skeleton of trained staff and all seriously wounded men were placed in holds which were unhygienic, poorly lit and ill-equipped. Burton observed that "For 12 hours an orderly would be alone with 60 desperately wounded men in a hold dimly lit by arc lamp. None of them had been washed and many were still in their torn and blood-stained uniforms." Rough bandaging not touched for two or three days meant that men lay in an appalling mess of blood and filth. Speaking to a man who was in the New Zealand Medical Corps on Gallipoli Charles Kerse recorded two years later: "He reckons the medical service broke down six hours after the landing and that nobody knows yet in New Zealand the amount of suffering and the number of deaths that could have been prevented." Trooper Benjamin Clyde Colbran was in Alexandria when these shiploads of wounded began arriving. The sight of these broken men was his first introduction to the realities of war:

It's not until one sees the results of war that one realises what it is ... There are about 2,000 wounded as a first consignment and boatloads arriving every day. I saw a dead German and several colonials and the wounded were in a horrible state as there was no accommodation and practically no medical men on the troopships.

On the whole, the departed casualty was not envied, the war was as yet too young and the men to eager for closer combat with the terrible Turks. The wounded were impatient to return. A.S.Falconer of Dunedin who suffered a bullet wound two days after the landing recorded: "Nearly all of us were hit and some killed ... nearly all of number nine Platoon were put out of action." But after
five days in a Cairo hospital he complained "we ought to be content but this inactivity gets on one's nerve." 18 Another soldier declared himself just longing to get back: "I don't care if I get a smack the first day as long as I get a Turk or two." 19

The desire for revenge was strong after the loss of so many mates. Rumours that the Turks were mutilating the dead and wounded, though untrue, added insult to injury. One private confided in his diary "They took no prisoners but bayoneted everything." 20 Another wrote:

The Turks put up their hands and surrender but the men simply riddle them with bullets. The Turks are killing the wounded and mutilating the dead, and so our men are not feeling inclined to give them any quarter, and in this I think everyone agrees. Anyone found in our lines who cannot give a satisfactory account of himself ... is promptly given a dose of lead 21

Most of these Otago men recognised the great military feat which had been effected at the landing and they were proud to have taken part. F.M.Spencer declared:

I should say that for the duration of incessant fighting and for the proportion of casualties on either side this has been about the hottest battle of the war. Our total muster in the Australia and New Zealand Corps was approximately 20,000 that landed on April 25th (15,000 Australian and 5,000 New Zealanders (about 1,000 Otago). Last night casualties came to 5,000 killed and wounded and about 500 missing. That is pretty fair going eh? 22

Against strong Turkish defences and great geographical handicaps the ANZAC troops had stormed, then defended a strip of land one and a half miles from the sea. After the first few days however a virtual stalemate prevailed. No massed Turkish counter attack from the end of April to the evacuation in December seriously threatened their control. But at the same time no Allied Soldier was to pass the points the ANZACs had reached until 1918. Nevertheless there was at no level and at no stage a passive acquiescence in
stalemate. A consistently aggressive fighting spirit was one of the major characteristics of the defence of ANZAC. Tony Ashworth in his book *Trench Warfare 1914-18* The live and Let live system writes:

"Evidence from sources suggest that tacit truces emerged on all fronts except Gallipoli. From dawn to dawn it was genuine infantry warefare." 23

They fought each other all day with rifle and bomb. Sometimes they charged over the top only to be blown to failure and oblivion. In the evening they crept out on raids and patrols. Live and let live did not develop. During May the primary task for the ANZAC troops was to consolidate the ground won. In those weeks "exhausted men fought a hundred fights: attack and counter attack followed in unwearying succession." 24 The dead lay piled thick in No Man's Land while the gains made were negligible. One such fruitless venture was undertaken by the Otago Battalion. Along with the 13th and 16th Battalions of the A.I.F. (Australian Imperial Force) they were to capture the hill known as Baby 700 at Quinn's Post. Otago were delayed for an hour in getting to the scene, however, because of heavy sniping and congestion in the narrow trenches caused by stretcher bearers mingling with half a battalion of the Naval Brigade. By the time they arrived the advantages of simultaneous attack were entirely lost for the Turks had been aroused and the Australian attack had lost its momentum. Nevertheless Otago men advanced immediately over No Man's Land. The Turks held their fire until the very last minute and from front and flank sprayed the attackers with a shower of machine gun and rifle fire. 25 Men fell in rapid succession, most dying where they fell for it became impossible to retrieve them under such fire. Those unhit dug in where they could and held on for two days and part of three nights but the
attack had obviously failed and the remnant withdrew. Spencer observed cryptically: "Did no good - mowed down by machine guns. Otago lost heavily." 26 Lieutenant Richards, who was in the trenches observing for the New Zealand battery during the attack, saw his brother, an officer with the Otago Battalion fall, and then saw him left behind when they withdrew. Captain Ritchie observed: "He is feeling much cut up about it as he does not know whether his brother is alive or not." 27 Byrne estimated Otago's loss as being practically half its strength in both officers and men while the net result in respect of ground permanently gained was nil. 28 This kind of costly yet fruitless venture shook the confidence of the men.

Other factors in their daily existence took a toll on the soldiers. Continual deafening noise was one of these. The crash of shells "stunned" one and "absolutely lays a man out with shock for some time." 29 F.M.Spencer informed his parents:

The bombs ... come down to earth with a tremendous roar, shaking the whole hillside. Then the artillery gets going and you can see the red-hot shells flying over head then bursting and giving a lurid flash of light all over the sky just like sheet lightening. The bullets whistling through the air make a sound like wind blowing through the pire tree at night and added to the bursting of shells and bombs and the crackle of rifle fire the lot combine to give a pretty queer experience. 30

Living beneath the surface of the earth in narrow winding trenches too was a 'queer experience'. Safety now consisted in burrowing into the ground between solid walls of earth those at exposed points have a very "naked feeling." 31 Johnny Turk was a crack shot and Spencer complained that "the strain on the nerves is tremendous." 32

An unusual event took place on 24 May. From 7.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. there was a truce for the purpose of burying the dead or "planting stiffs." 33 After a month of intense fighting thousands
of Turkish and Anzac dead lay thick in No Man's Land where they could not be reached for burial. Some had been there for weeks and in the tropical heat, their stench was becoming unbearable. One Anzac wrote:

I never saw so many bodies crowded into the same space before; there were literally thousands of them. And the condition they were in! I dare not describe the sights I saw ... It paid to smoke hard all the time.

He continued:

I saw a magnificent diamond ring on a Turkish officer's finger but he was in such a state of putrefication that I allowed him to retain it. 34

There was some fraternizing in the exchanges of cigarettes, biscuits and smiles. For those in the burial party and those in the trenches, the sudden silence of the guns was a strange experience. One thought it "the queerest feeling going" not to have the usual incessant roar. 35

For a few hours men were safe to peer over their parapets and scrutinise the landscape and the 'invisible fiends' they had been fighting. The armistice was strictly observed by both sides and the experience ameliorated the Otago men's attitude toward the Turks. It was generally agreed that "Johnny Turk was alright, he was fair enough, a clean fighter." 36

As 4.30 p.m. approached men returned to their trenches and heads disappeared again under the surface of the earth. A shot rang out and fighting resumed.

No major offensive was undertaken at Anzac during June and July but this period saw an ever alarming decline in the general condition of the troops. As Byrne noted: "In no other theatre of war in which our infantry afterwards served did the conditions under which they lived and fought ever approach those which prevailed on the Gallipoli Peninsula." 37 Soldiers who survived Gallipoli concurred with this verdict. From France one wrote "a week on the Peninsula was worth a month in the front line here." 38 From the time of the landing, the Anzacs had lived in a narrow crescent-shaped wedge with the sea at their backs and the enemy on all sides. Whether
in the line or not they were always fair targets for the Turkish snipers. At a more mundane level, the soldiers had to endure a myriad of annoyances and inconveniences. By June they were entering into a long "beastly hot" summer. Men began to shed superfluous clothing and the popular uniform became "boots, shorts, identity disk, hat and when circumstances permitted a cheerful smile." Lice began to make their appearance in the men's clothing. These were blood sucking parasites which clung to their hosts with ferocious tenacity and reproduced at high speed. For the soldiers, the common reaction was one of horror: "I thought it was just awful! I thought I was the only one with it but then you find out everybody had it and there was no cure. They were worst at night when you're trying to sleep. You can feel them crawling all over." So this affliction was soon accepted philosophically as an occupational hazard and the men did what they could to battle the lice when not engaging the Turk. One man recorded his mates taking their shirts off and hunting lice "they caught about 14 each. One chap's thumb nails were well smeared with blood and he had bites all over his body." 

Harder for the soldiers to tolerate were the swarms of green bottles flies "something to make a saint swear" complained Spencer. Uncovered latrines unburied corpses provided their breeding ground. "Oh they were HELL" one veteran recalled with obvious agitation "You've got no idea what they were like. You'd make a dug out and you'd get a sheet of waterproof stuff for the side and it would be black with flies. We used to get a flame and burn them all off. After ten minutes they were just black again. You had to wave your biscuit all the time." Every meal was literally a pitched battle and the regular fare of watery jam on biscuits was usually consumed with a few tenacious flies who would not be moved.
Any fresh meat was soon hidden by a black layer and maggots crawled about freely. Disease and a loss of appetite followed while diarrhoea and dysentry became almost epidemic. The implications of such ailments for soldiers labouring in narrow trenches with scanty latrine facilities can only be guessed at.

Part of the cause of sickness was the lack of clean, fresh water. Captain Ritchie identified the major source of contamination: "There are hundreds of men buried in the Valley, mostly only a foot or so below the surface and the drainage from them must go into these shallow wells." Reporting later to the Commission on Sanitation conditions on Gallipoli he revealed that only one or two medical officers had any chemicals for treating the water. This contaminated water was meted out in meagre portions of a quart a day and to keep clean men took baths in the sea. One old soldier recalled "there were no changes of clothing, I had the same singlet on when I landed in April as when I was put on the hospital ship in August." Swimmers, as everyone else, were never completely free from the attention of Turkish snipers. Trooper Colbran wrote of one or more being hit each day, but he continued to have two baths a day. When a man was shot, through the head right next to him, however, he decided the risk was too great and a dirt smeared page in his diary testified to his abstention from the water the next day.

Complaints about the food increased as the months wore on. Quantity was not often a problem but what there was proved completely unappetising and unsuitable. Salty and stringy Fray Bentos bully beef was the main staple along with, hard biscuits, fatty bacon, onions and water. The continued unvaried diet lost its already small attraction. Captain Ritchie commented: "Men could not stomach the incessant bully beef. I could not do it myself at all. None of us
used to eat more than we had to to keep alive." 48 In the line, cooking was forbidden for any smoke would draw instant fire but out of them men would try in all sorts of ways to make the bully more palatable. It was a daunting task and many a tin ended up strengthening the parapet or as material for shrapnel proof residences. 49

The bacon deteriorated with the heat and mention of it drew an animated response for an old soldier:

The sourbelly was revolting. If you could get a piece with one streak of lean on it you were luckily. We called it the Lance-Corporal bacon - all fatty. We wouldn't eat it, it was packed in boracic and terribly salty. We boiled it down and used it with a wick as slush lights." 50

The biscuits, aptly named 'dog biscuits' and 'Huntly and Palmers' paving stones' proved quite a task for these New Zealand soldiers whose standard of dental health was known to be very low. "You could nibble round it gradually you'd get it all eaten, but I knew some chaps who lost a few teeth in the process." 51 Some resourceful souls made them into porridge especially when the weather became cooler. Private Wells noted "we grate them up and with a bit of condensed milk it makes quite a decent meal." 52 Later on, fresh meat, bread and eggs and tinned milk arrived but never in sufficient quantities. Moreover distribution proved a problem and the meat was often off by the time it reached the men. Private Wylie told the story of all :"I got gradually thinner and thinner. When I got off Gallipoli I was just a skeleton." 53

After the initial furious fighting they settled down to consolidating their positions. This involved exhausting fatigues which greatly taxed the men's energies. In the line men had to work to increase such protection as they had and out of the line they worked at establishing field dressing stations, carrying stores, ammunition and water from the beach; constructing communication
trenches, building dug outs and shelter along the slopes of the ridges, stretcher bearing and making roads and tracks. One soldier wrote: "After a fortnight in the trenches we were relieved and sent down to the beach for a spell, or at least so it was called. It proved to be no spell, however, for we were doing pick and shovel work of four hours on and four hours off night and day for a week." 54 Tired men were called to carry, to dig or to labour at one or other of the heavy fatigues by day and by night, in or out of the line.

Added to this was the mentally and emotionally exacting monotony of their daily existence which emerges as one of the persistent themes of the World War I experience. From April until the end of July constant fighting took place, the same old shelling, bombing and rifle fire, the same old fatigues and unvaried diet. Ormond Burton captures this mood of boredom amidst danger and death:

A dangerous life is not necessarily an exciting one. A man is not the less bored at living in a clay ditch six feet wide and eight feet deep for a week on end without being able to move more than 50 yards to the right or left, because at some unknown moment a shell may blow him to smitherens. In war danger is part of the very atmosphere. Beyond a certain point it could not be guarded against. Snipers were always busy, shrapnel burst everywhere. These dangers could not be avoided. They were exceedingly annoying - sometimes even terrifying - but as a general rule not exciting. After the fierce rush of the landing battles; a daily routine was established; soon nothing was new; nothing was interesting; nothing was profitable. 55

Souvenir hunting, the great pastime of the earlier days had by now lost much of its attraction. One veteran recalled with amusement "we all collected great lumps of Copper metal and other bits and pieces till we came to the conclusion, this is a mug's game ... we acquired a bit of sense left them behind." 56 In this situation mail, though irregular, was highly valued. "I don't think I was ever so pleased at getting a letter before." Trooper Colbran declared
"A little news from home goes a long way here now." 57 Another Main Body man recalled with disappointment: "All the time I was on Gallipoli I got one parcel and a letter or two from my mother. The girl I was chummy with never wrote to me. She was there to greet me when I came back but 'no' I thought, 'you didn't write to me while I was away, we'd better part'." 58

In the trenches, it was the day-by-dayness and the lack of meaning which proved trying. Death was random, illogical, devoid of principle and a depression took hold. Gone were the eager anticipations of adventure. The day after the landing Captain Ritchie was still convinced that "It would be only a matter of days when the Narrows will be in our possession and the Constantinople should not be a very difficult proposition." 59 But in time the men came to realise that the operation thus far had been, at least, a partial failure. Certainly "it was no triumphal procession from village to village as it had been so sanguinely painted for us." 60 wrote Cecil Malthus. Most of all, these men had not anticipated their monotonous lice and fly ridden existence with its tedious diet, crippling disease and exhausting labours. And so, first hand experience stripped War of glamour. "Most of us want to get out of this already" confessed one young farm labourer "We have been here two months already and are longing for the end of the war and a good feed." 61 The excitement was gone, now it was "duty" that called. But, in spite of the miseries of Gallipoli, men still wanted above all to win, their pride had been stirred. "Everyone has nothing but praise for the way the colonials have been doing." 62 One reported. Another resolved that:
It would take a mighty lot of men to shift us now. Occasionally the Turks or the Germans in charge show a little humour ... yesterday afternoon the force was given 24 hrs to quit ... That seemed to us almost more than humorous thinking we would get out after coming all this way to stay. 63

In the middle of July, the men's hopes were renewed at the prospect of a new all out offensive. This, as Sir Ian Hamilton wrote in his despatch, was the "one strong thrust forward which might give us command of the Narrows." 64 Britain had at last consented to reinforce the Peninsula in sufficient numbers for one great advance. If this failed, however, there would be no others. In essence the plan was for an Anzac offensive combined with a landing of 27,000 new troops at Suvla Bay who would move rapidly inland, sweeping in on the flank of the Anzacs and so complete the victory.

Great hopes were pinned on this venture, its success would end this hellish time on the Peninsula with honour and pride. Its failure was as yet unthinkable and all energies were now directed to this one end. By now, however, the men were not the fit young gods who had landed months before and one of them wrote: "It takes a long time to prepare for an advance and we are getting weaker numerically and physically I believe our troops have created a record of nearly four months under ceaseless fire." 65 Captain Ritchie reported that "every man had diarrhoea, 99 per cent of the men there had diarrhoea very badly." 66 The worst cases were evacuated but the remaining "were going out to attempt one of the most difficult feats ever planned in the history of war." 67

The August offensive is adequately described in Byrne's or Waite's histories. For the men who actually did the fighting, all they knew was what was going on in their "little squares." 68 These presented the grimmest sights any had yet seen. Again little detailed record is kept of the August days for men could not comprehend
the wholesale slaughter of their fellows in the prime of youth, nor
the sight of the severely wounded unable to get help. For sanity's
sake they want to ponder on it too long. They were heavily sniped
when moving through the winding valley. Hart recorded:

We had advanced up this valley about half a mile when
the inevitable shrapnel began to burst over our heads
again. The Turks had got the range beautifully ...
A regiment of Tommies, who were making their way down
the Valley; met us at this point and with everyone
trying to get out of the way of the shrapnel at the
same time an undescribable mix up occurred. The Turks
made their fire hotter than ever and I do not know
to this day how I escaped being hit. Men were falling
all round me ... many of whom must have been badly
trampled on. 69

Arriving at their trenches, they prepared to charge the enemy
lines. "Tonight is the night" Trooper Colbran wrote in the hours
before a charge, "we are going to try and take the trenches in a
surprise attack which means there will be no bombardment of the
barbed wire. If we can surprise them, I don't think it will be
hard, but if not we will suffer." 70 He wrote to his mother in the
realisation that it may be his last letter. In the trench warfare
of World War I, the attacking troops almost always suffered wholesale
massacres from the rapid firing machine guns in the opposing trenches.
Such was the fate of Anzac troops during the offensive. Private
Colbran's entry for the next day revealed a dramatically altered
handwriting. The bold strokes of the previous day had become a
shaky scrawl: "Our surprise failed and we were fired on as soon as
we left the trenches. The shells and bombs with a hail of bullets
was terrible. I got hit in front of the first trench and had to lay
there for half an hour. Then I managed to crawl 50 yards to a little
shelter. In two or three hours I was dragged into the dressing
station and lay all night in the cold and all day in the sun with men
groaning and dying all round." 71 Private Leonard Mitchell Hart with
the newly arrived 5th Reinforcement was put straight into the firing line. He recorded:

The sight that presented itself is one which I shall never forget. There were dead and wounded lying everywhere. The wounded were so numerous that it had been impossible to cope with them all, and many had lain there since the Saturday... The smell of the bodies was becoming intolerable and the flies swarmed in millions. It was pitiful to see some of the wounded covered with them from head to foot but too weak even to attempt to chase them off... When a man was killed in the trenches all that could be done was to throw him on the parapet and leave him till we could spare time at night to bury him. For the first week there was very little burying done and the stench was simply intolerable. 72

For the next few days all he recalled was "blazing away at the Turkish trenches to keep them quiet." 73 Losses were excessively heavy, Byrne recorded that 17 officers and over 300 other ranks were killed or injured. 74

For the surviving men, it was the day to day loss of an increasing proportion of their mates that ground down their nerves. One recorded: "Another of my mates named Kitto was shot, I had just come in from the gun party and sat down along side him when a bullet got him through the neck. He fell right forward on his face." 75 Another recalled, "originally there were 16 of us we were all firm friends, but we lost most of them." 76 Private Hart noted the fate of other companies which had landed with him only days before "at a roll call... it was found that only 40 remained of the original 300." 77

Other privations weakened the force further during the offensive. Great quantities of water had been stored before the advance but it taxed the utmost strength of the troops to carry it up to their fighting comrades. Moreover the chaotic situation which generally prevailed prevented the water from getting through. 78 "We all learnt what real hunger and thirst are like" he continued. Private Hart told his parents:
The quart of water which we had in our water bottles when we left the beach was all most of us had for two days. We soon discovered that it was impossible to eat the bully beef when there is no water to be had as ... it is like eating salt and coupled with the great heat of the weather it brings on such a thirst as has sent not a few men mad.

Those wounded suffered a fortuitous fate for again medical arrangements were grossly deficient. Some had to lie where they fell with their smashed leg, pierced torso, eyes blown out or worse for hours or even days in the hot sun tormented by flies and thirst, hoping for help. At night they could very well be missed by the stretcher bearers and so the agony continued. Many died waiting. Even for those rescued, it was a long three miles down to the beach and Burton has described the enormous difficulties the steep terrain presented for both bearer and wounded. Little wonder that "any wounded man who could walk had to do so." and Private Hart described one such party of walking wounded which he encountered on his way to the line:

A more gaunt and bloodstained looking lot I had never seen but I have seen many worse since. They seemed to be cheerful in spite of their wounds and many smoked and laughed as they went. I remember one chap with a great wound in the neck and nothing on but a pair of blood-soaked trousers and boots saying 'hurry up chaps they were bayoneting our wounded when we left!' The cheerfulness and bravery of the wounded was often alluded to.

One veteran explained that "it was a matter of pride, you just don't complain." A medical corp man marvelled:

Some great men amongst the wounded. One man has his right hand blown away, wounds all over the front of his body from a bomb, he will probably lose his sight. When asked 'How are you old man?' he replied 'Right as rain.' Another, lower jaw blown away, asked for pen and paper and wrote 'We took the trench.'

On the boats going to hospitals in Egypt, the inadequate facilities continued to exacerbate the suffering of the wounded. Private Colbran explained:
The boat could hold 530 but we had over 1,000. The orderlies were kept busy and the poor nurses were dressing wounds all day, most of them being in a horrible state. The doctors were operating night and day. Twice a day we would stop and bury five or six. About 40 died in our two and a half days' run to Alexandria. I saw our fine old Colonel (Bauchop) go overboard. 85

Private Charles Kerse from Gore who was wounded during the offensive, told his parents that after the carnage he had seen "a man treats life very lightly." 86

By 15 August it was clear to all that the offensive had failed. Byrne recorded that the total strength of the Battalion on 16 August, including the 300 Otagoites of the 5th Reinforcement who had arrived during the offensive, was 360 all ranks. 87 By 14 September when the Battalion moved off to Lemnos for a rest period only 130 were left. 88 The wastage of manpower is starkly obvious.

After the August offensive, diarrhoea wrought further damage. One soldier recalled: "everyone had it. You'd have to go eight to ten times a day and it took all the strength out of you." 89 Practically nothing could be done to alleviate the curse. The medical officers could not even obtain castor oil which was then considered one of the best remedies of diarrhoea. The diet now included cold rice, bacon and onions but as one commented: "It was not much good for keeping up one's strength and everyone soon looked gaunt and played out generally." 90 Sleep had been practically impossible during the August advance but it continued to elude them.

Private Hart complained:

We had to put in 24 hours in the front trenches or firing line during which we were not allowed to sleep ... After this one felt very much like a good sleep but instead we were given only four hours in the supports during which to sleep and then eight hours of pick and shovel. Our numbers had been so much cut down by now that there were not enough men for the reserves, the result being that we had to do our
24 hours in the firing line, eight hours in the supports, and 16 hours pick and shovel. This made only eight hours sleep out of 48 and the condition of the men after a fortnight of this can well be imagined. Most of them, especially those who remained of the Main Body and Second, Third and Fourth reinforcements, broke down completely and had to be sent away. If we had not been relieved when we were there would have been hardly any men left to hold the place, for hardly a man amongst us was in any way fit to stand it.  

Hart found that after 4 months on the Peninsula his weight had dropped from 11 stones five pounds to nine stones 13 pounds. And when he left the Peninsula only three or four were left of his old platoon. 

For those left on Gallipoli, the absence of hope for a further advance or relief became unendurable. Death was random, it was everywhere, it surrounded and closed in on them. Even those already wounded were not safe in the dressing stations. Spencer recorded:

Last night we had a few shrapnel balls through the roof while we were dressing patients ... For the last few days we have had a perfect hail of shrapnel down here, and the men from the trenches say 'it is much safer there.'

The strain began to tell and many began to complain that their nerves were "getting pretty shaky." 

Men wanted to make it all mean something but death, wound or escape was a consequence of blind accident and Alexander Aitken concluded that it was "useless to philosophise." They were not callous or insensitive but they had to accept such incidents and they described them without much emotion. During heavy fighting there were so many falling that Charles Kerse told his mother "it was worse hearing of a friend's death than actually seeing them go down in the rush and excitement of the engagement." Robert Wylie said of losing a friend: "It wasn't as hard as I thought it would be. You just said, 'Oh well, he's gone'. You had to go on ... you had to go on. Men were being wounded all over the place." Somehow
amidst the carnage they had to keep their sanities intact and they had to do it by themselves for it was considered unmanly to show fear. One veteran concluded that "If you'd been frightened life wouldn't have been possible on Gallipoli." 98

Unlike earlier times wounded and sick men were pleased to get off the Peninsula. Some wounded a second time were no longer yearning to return as they did the first. And for many the comparison between coming onto the hospital ships and heaven was often made. One old soldier recollected: "Oh the relief and contrast when you got onto the ship. You hadn't had a bath for ages and it was eight days since my wound had been dressed at all and oh, it was like coming into heaven." 99 Private Wells declared that most of them did not want to go back, they were "full up of it." 100

By November the weather had cooled considerably and rations became very short. Private Wells recorded "Yesterday and today, we had tea for breakfast, a bit of rice for dinner and a small dish of bully beef stew for tea. The trouble is they cannot get the mules to stand on their feet, the track is too greasy". 101 Another recalled that for a week the daily ration was two Huntly and Palmers 'paving stones'. 102 Winter was fast approaching and a snowstorm which swept the Peninsula for four days at the end of November left a trail of impossible conditions and sick men. It revealed the impossibility of hanging on in Gallipoli through the winter months. In the trenches Private Wells wrote "all we do is keep a lookout over the parapet and stamp our feet to try and keep the circulation going ... it is still bitterly cold, a lot of chaps are going away sick." 103

The grim physical conditions strengthened the feeling of pointlessness and depression. One veteran remembered telling an officer: "What the deuce is going to be done. We can't go forward and the Turks can't push us back. We'll never get off this place." 104
Meanwhile Sir Ian Hamilton's request for heavy reinforcements to effect a final victorious campaign before winter set in was refused. A decision had been made to evacuate the Peninsula. By meticulous planning and extreme secrecy, the men were successfully brought out in stages. Comments were few on the subject of the evacuation. There was a general realization that their continued presence and suffering were to no obvious purpose and most were glad to leave the varied privations of the Peninsula behind them. On the other hand, the implication of defeat by the evacuation was a bitter pill. Private Charles Stephen Wells, a 20 year old plumber from Invercargill, described the representative feeling: "It was a crying shame the stuff that was burned and broken on the Peninsula after we left but the stuff was nothing to the lives that were lost and the hardship endured taking the position, and then to evacuate it, why it just about makes a chap cry." The Gallipoli campaign had ended. Its effects, however, were only beginning to emerge.

The men who came off Gallipoli were not the same eager, healthy, athletic youths who had been so keen to prove themselves eight months earlier. It had been their first experience under fire and they had suffered a terrible ordeal. Out of the 8,450 New Zealand men who took part 2,721 were killed and 4,752 wounded - a staggering 88 per cent casualty rate. The survivors had seen and endured too much to emerge unchanged.

In the fighting, they were not the heroes and young gods performing exciting and courageous deeds that they had expected to be. They were grey men, dirty, tired and sickly; performing grey chores and leading grey existences. War was not exciting, it was not glorious.
An obvious transformation was in the outward appearance of the Gallipoli men. As an untried soldier on his way to the Peninsula in September, Alexander Aitken of the 6th Reinforcement described the men he saw in Lemnos having a rest. They were:

listless, weak, emaciated by dysentery, prematurely aged. They had also suffered in nerves... it was unnatural to walk abroad at large without the fear of sudden death. They were suffering, one night say, from an induced agoraphobia; it was this, quite as much as bodily and nervous exhaustion, that kept them within the marquees. They resembled in some respects the survivors of an earthquake, except that those have the compulsive urge to sit outside, not inside. ¹⁰⁷

At night there were "moans heard within the marquee, muffled shouts, upstartings, alarms, nightmare hallucinations wholly forgotten, as far as could be observed in the daylight of waking." ¹⁰⁸

This loss of weight and general physical and mental deterioration was often alluded to. Captain Ritchie wrote a month after he was wounded, "weighed myself ... found I was only eight stones 13 lbs. As I have been getting fatter this last fortnight I must have been considerably less than this a few weeks ago." ¹⁰⁹ Another had grown "a patch of grey hair." ¹¹⁰ Private Kerse, wounded and hospitalised for a second time, observed: "Everyone's nerves are gone the nightmares I had for two weeks after I left were terrible. It was always dodging shrapnel and dig, dig the whole night. I would wake up in such a sweat that it would take me a minute or two to make sure I was safe in bed."¹¹¹ Nightmares followed some through their lifetime. One old soldier talking about his time on the Peninsula, 67 years later, suffered gruesome nightmares that night, calling out in his sleep to mates who never came off Gallipoli.¹¹²

Some became more lenient in their judgement of those who had not yet enlisted. Private Kerse, who in the pre-Gallipoli days had judged such people "too lazy and scared of roughing it"¹¹³ had by August moderated his opinion. He told his parent not to be:
too hard on the chaps who have not enlisted. They will be having a rough enough time of it, I guess they may have got the chat of what it is really like here. Some of the chaps who bravely enlisted show the white feather when they get here and they are not usually private. I remember a chap who was malingering for a long time in the base camp here before he finally had to go: it was a funny thing but I saw him on a stretcher at the Field Hospital I think he was dead. 114

Others, took solace in drink. William Downie Stewart wrote of a Captain, who had served with great distinction and extraordinary gallantry on Gallipoli, up on a serious charge of drunkenness. The Captain had been severely wounded and detailed for New Zealand but had "slipped through" and got back to the Peninsula. 115

Despite the weariness of mind and body, there had also developed amongst the Gallipoli men, a deep-seated pride in themselves as fighters and New Zealanders. They had passed the test with flying colours. Ormond Burton even went so far as to argue that New Zealanders achieved nationhood at Gallipoli. 116 The men knew they had fought well. One soldier announced: "After Gallipoli, the New Zealand Division was one of the five best divisions in the British army ... We were classed A." 117 Great admiration had been expressed in the press of New Zealand and Britain for the fighting abilities of the Anzacs and this newly gained pride altered the way many viewed the Mother Country and her offsprings. Before active fighting, there was a prevailing recognition amongst the Otago men of their comparative inferiority next to the Imperial soldiers of Britain. "We ought to be thankful", one soldier judged, "that we are able to join in do our share when these old countrymen are fighting so well." 118 The performance of the English Tommies, however, prompted a dramatic change in opinion. One labourer reported:
The general consensus of opinion is that the Tommies are in the main, greatly inferior to the Colonials ... some extraordinary instances are quoted, where our troops have carried a line of trenches, on being relieved the new garrisons have been driven out by the Turks and our men had to go in again to retake the position.\(^{119}\)

More particularly, during the August offensive, it had been clearly observed that the landing at Suvla was not being vigorously pursued by the British troops this led to bitter criticisms by the New Zealanders who believed that their supreme effort had been let down. Private Maloney informed his wife that: "Had the forces at Suvla moved forward on, the Peninsula would have been ours. Inexperienced troops refused to advance because they lacked water. The delay robbed the Australians and New Zealanders of certain victory."\(^{120}\)

Men declared themselves sadly disillusioned with the standard of British soldiery. It was obvious to these New Zealander soldiers that they were physically and even mentally inferior. The nationalism which was sympathetic but patronizing was that the Tommies were not equipped to stand up to the rigours of Gallipoli. "They are the product of years of industrialism" one man judged, "Their bodies have been stunted and their outlook cramped."\(^{121}\) Much, too, was made of the absence of class distinctions in New Zealand which, the men believed, encouraged a greater freedom and the development of a strong sense of self respect. They believed and were told that "initiative ... was their greatest asset apart from courage."\(^{122}\) On the other hand: "These poor Tommies were ground down by the upper classes" and couldn't be expected to do much."\(^{123}\)

This conviction reinforced the men's dislike of 'unnecessary' military discipline. Eric Lake recalled that after Gallipoli they "were inclined to be more rebellious especially against the English police. You wouldn't obey if you could possibly get out of it."\(^{124}\)
There was no doubt that the Gallipoli men needed to be straightened out again for they had carried the slackness of discipline in dress, drill and manner of the Peninsula back to Egypt. They felt an obvious superiority, they were a separate caste whom the world had recognised as doers of immortal deeds. They had no need to boast, spoke rarely and then only in grudging syllables. Aitken observed:

some men wore caps, some slouch hats, some pith-helmets; some had long trousers, some shorts; some riding breeches; some had puttees, some none; some had long Enfield rifles, some short. All clothing was frayed, torn, sun-faded. Parade-ground drill had degenerated, men sloped and ordered arms by the principle of lease action in a single circular movement, avoided saluting, kept step but little else.

Lieutenant William Downie Stewart, who arrived in Egypt after the evacuation "considered it an insult to ask men who had been to the Peninsula to start squad drill again" and he warned the camp commandant Major Ross that "if he was not careful he would have a mutiny."

He learnt later that there had really been a mutiny when the Major tried to keep the men working the previous Saturday and Sunday and that he had already been 'counted out' by the men at Zeitoun.

A shorter period of drill was introduced.

At first, leave was severely restricted, the reason, according to Alexander Aitken, was simply that pending an issue of new uniforms the Gallipoli soldiers were not presentable. But leave was taken anyway and on New Years' Eve 1915-16, resentful troops broke camp in large numbers. While in town, the wild behaviour of these soldiers evoked the complaint that they "infested every hotel, and lay about everywhere wandering about every vestibule hall and bar and getting merrier all the time." 128

The diary of William Downie Stewart provides a hint of the way New Zealand military commanders viewed the situation. He described a
a meeting with all the officers in which:

The old question of the discipline of the colonial troops came up. Russell thinks they need more still and says their good name at Anzac was earned for them by only a percentage... several times hundred of men left the firing line without orders not necessarily because they were scared but just got sick of it and thought they could get out. Russell says if we win the war and the colonials go back no better disciplined than now it will be a disaster - He admits their great virtue of dash but says the greatest blunder is to teach them to think they are the finest troops in the world. I told him that I noticed all men from the Peninsula were most particular to keep their rifles clean but careless about shaving. He said 'but you must make them.'

Until an officer had proven himself, the men accorded him little deference for they continued to impose their civilian standards. While in town Lieutenant Stewart complained that in spite of his rank, he found troopers "continually rushing up wanting to shake hands or borrow a shilling." On the whole however, New Zealand officers accepted these standards. Lance Corporal Wylie judged that they "got more friendly with his men than what the British officers did. The British remained officers all the way through, they kept their rank and ceremony whereas the New Zealand officer did not. They didn't expect all the saluting and stuff. In fact some were known by their Christian names." There was an intense dislike of General Godley precisely because of his "harshness with the men whom he never praises."

This did not go down well with the proud and egalitarian New Zealanders and on the Peninsula Godley was known as the "Bloody Butcher" and the "Dug-out King" meaning that he never risked his own life by coming out of the dug outs. General Birdwood on the other hand, earned the men's favour for he remembered even the nicknames of the men he met in the trenches. In the opinion of at least one English Captain, however, Birdwood was too slack and spoilt the colonials.

For those lower down the hierarchy who had to deal with the men on a day to day basis, the path to success Lieutenant Stewart discovered,
was to do as one officer he observed, "he keeps the men up to the mark and yet he does not nag them." 136

At this time, there was a general dissatisfaction with the system of promotions to replace those officers and N.C.O's lost on Gallipoli. When later reinforcement men were chosen over earlier men who had served on Gallipoli indignation rose. Private Colbran of the Main Body declared "men were picked out by favouritism... I had been left out and an 8th Reinforcement man put in my place. It is an insult and I have not felt so annoyed since joining the army." 137

Another exclaimed in disgust that newer men were chosen "because their drill is still fresh in their minds not knocked out of them like it is us." 138 Such a system was regarded with disdain. This was part of the British Military machine: rigid, disciplinarian and humourless.

These same features were encountered by wounded Otago men who were hospitalised in English institutions. Many complaints were made concerning the "strict discipline, red tape and want of freedom generally which prevails." One soldier recalled "God the rules, rules, rules. I hadn't been in there ten minutes and I had broken ten rules." 140 Another concluded "There is nothing free and easy about them as is the case with the Australian or New Zealand nurses." 141 One soldier recounted:

I was wounded in the leg, the shrapnel went right through my thigh into my testicle ... the doctor said 'Oh that was a narrow escape' referring to the testicles. I said something about a man being no good without those and he said 'You filthy beast! I meant nothing of the sort. It missed the main artery by a sixteenth of an inch'. Well that's your belly Englishman for you. 142

Feelings toward things British began to harden. An indignant Private Lake recalled his eviction from the convalescent home run by General Godley's wife and his subsequent plight:
We were just fooling around in the dormitory one chap hit me with a pillow. I collapsed on my bed and my bed collapsed just as the matron came in. 'Fit enough to do that, you're fit enough to go to the base', and I said 'Thank God'. Well I had to go to the orderly room for the offence and ... we'd got a new officer from New Zealand. The previous one used to just tear up Mother Godley's crime sheets ... so I told the new officer what a terrible place it was for rules he said 'how dare you slander the work of a noble woman... 14 days detention'. This meant the military prison and the belly English ran it. They were absolutely brutal. I hadn't fully recovered from my leg wound and they put a pack of bricks on my back and I collapsed. When I came round they said 'You might have broken your Mother's heart but you won't break ours and they fished out a tripod. It had three wheels and big pieces of metal up they strung me up by the wrist and forced the thing round. I went out and they had to put me back into hospital The Aussies hated them and so did we. 143

Not surprisingly such treatment generated further hatred of the English disciplinary code and combined with the New Zealanders' low opinion of English troops and pride in themselves to produce a Nationalism unknown in the pre-Gallipoli days. William Downie Stewart noted this national pride as a further reason for the dislike of the English General Godley who placed English officers into good jobs but ignored perfectly competent New Zealand officers. He observed "the fact is all are agreed that they want a purely New Zealand army with General Russell in charge." 144 Strong words indeed, for New Zealand at this time was still very much Britain's dutiful daughter. Yet for those who had seen and experienced her military machine in operation Britain was no longer fit to lead New Zealand. Bomadier R.H. Scott, a farm labourer from Dunedin, records the general feeling in his diary:

In our tent we often have arguments at night, our favourite subject being Tommies ... and all are of the opinion that those we met at Anzac were an inferior crowd of men. If they are a fair sample of Englishmen then I am sorry to have the English flag over me ... it seems that the Englishmen of the past is a different man to the one today. The race must be deteriorating
I think we ought to get a flag for the British Empire and let the Tommies keep his flag to play with. Another illustration of the deterioration of the Englishmen is the British Parliament. What a mess they have made of this war. No doubt the majority of MPs are Englishmen and from what I have seen of the race I can easily understand why such a bungle was made of the management of the Dardanelles operation. Let us have an Empire Parliament to take charge of Imperial affairs and perhaps it would be as well to do away with a flag called English. 145

They were anxious to be recognised as 'New Zealanders' and made many requests to General Godley for the national fern leaf to be worn by all New Zealand soldiers as a distinctive badge.

Another event evidenced this national orientation. During March 1916 the Prince of Wales inspected the New Zealand troops in Egypt. In turn, he was being carefully scrutinised by them as symbolic of the King and country for which they were supposedly fighting. They "were non too impressed. One thought him "pleasant looking boy but frail." 146 Another reported that "he swagged his shoulders as he walked as a child does when trying to look grown up." 147 And a third recounted: "As he came over the bank, the Maoris let out an awful yell, the opening of the haka and the Prince very nearly went over his mount's head. The Maoris gave a wonderful haka but the poor Prince seemed to be astounded." 148

However, for now, most men were prepared to reserve their final judgement until they had seen England itself. They had heard too much about its power and glory to reject it outright and the attitude "Please God, that one day before returning to New Zealand we may have the luck to see the Metropolis of the world - London." was fairly representative. 149

Meanwhile, they continued their revelry. The discipline problems of their first period in Egypt continued in their second. On Christmas day 1915 one trooper casually recorded "we saw a good concert at
the soldiers' club. The boys burnt a motor car and had a little row." 150 They visited more sights and partook of their pleasures. At this time the work of Ettie Route in trying to persuade the authorities to institute some precautionary measures to lower the alarmingly high V.D. rates were becoming more generally known. One grateful soldier acknowledged: "Her activities are somewhat criticized in certain quarters', but he hoped that "possibly at a later date her good work will be recognised. Even with the most broadminded people, there is a good deal of innate mid-Victorian prejudice. There is no such humbug with Ettie. She is doing great work." 151

Three and a half months passed and the New Zealand soldiers were told that they were now to fight in the legendary Western Front. Most were well enough pleased, it could not be worse than Gallipoli and anyway they declared themselves glad to be saying goodbye to Egypt that "repulsive, yet fascinating land of sun, sand and sin." 152 They had had a rest, and in addition to 'doing their duty', they now had their good reputation to fight for. They were the brave and daring Anzacs and they would conquer any foe. One enthused: "We have our youth and the experience we are going through is tremendously stimulating." 153
CHAPTER TWO

FOOTNOTES


4. Cecil Malthus, Anzac: A Retrospect, p.44.


14. Ibid.


18. Ibid., D. 2/5/1915.


28. A.E. Byrne, Official History of the Otago Regiment, p. 32.


34. Ibid., p. 193.


37. A.E. Byrne, Official History of the Otago Regiment, p. 43.


42. F.M. Spencer, D. 27/6/1915.


49. O.E. Burton, The Silent Division, p.85.


55. O.E. Burton, The Silent Division, p.86.


60. Cecil Malthus, Anzac : A Retrospect, p.61.


64. A.E. Byrne, Official History of the Otago Regiment, p.45.


67. O.E. Burton, The Silent Division, p.93.


71. Ibid., D. 7/8/1915.

73. Ibid.

74. A.E. Byrne, Official History of the Otago Regiment, p.66.

75. Private L.M. Hart, L. 1/1/1916.


78. A.E. Byrne, Official History of the Otago Regiment, p.65.


80. O.E. Burton, The Silent Division, p.104.


82. Ibid.


84. F.M. Spencer, D. 30/5/1915.

85. Trooper B.C. Colbran, D. 19/10/1915.


87. A.E. Byrne, Official History of the Otago Regiment, p.67.

88. Ibid., p.67.


91. Ibid.


94. Ibid., L. 4/6/1915.


99. Ibid.


102. A. Aitken, Gallipoli to the Somme, p.30.


105. Private C.S. Wells, D. 17/12/1915.

106. Michael King, New Zealanders at War, p.115.

107. A. Aitken, Gallipoli to the Somme, p.8-9.

108. Ibid, p.11.


111. Ibid., L. 18/6/1915.


114. Ibid., L. 19/8/1915.


120. Ibid.

121. Ibid.


124. Ibid.

126. A. Aitken, *Gallipoli to the Somme*, p. 46.

127. Lieutenant W. D. Stewart, D. 17/2/1916.

128. Ibid., D. 18/1/1916.

129. Ibid., D. 26/3/1916.

130. Ibid., D. 18/1/1916.

131. Lance Corporal R. Wylie, O. 8/7/1915.


133. Ibid., L. to sister Rachael 6/12/1915.

134. Ibid., D. 7/3/1916.

135. Ibid., D. 18/2/1916.


143. Ibid.


147. Ibid., D. 28/3/1916.


149. Ibid.


"The wounded come in a continual stream ... the War goes merrily on."

Corporal John Maloney, Otago Infantry Battalion, letter 23/8/1917

Mid April 1916 saw the Otago men safely landed in Marseilles, France. At last, they had arrived at the destination which, as new volunteers, they had anticipated going to more than a year ago. Some decided to take a look before moving on and not a few dodged guard that day. One found "the people ... pretty amiable especially the girls". Another wished he could "parlez-vous francaise" with the attractive ladies. The numerous brothels attracted condemnation. One soldier, however, admitted frankly "we ducked away and had a good time with the French girls. We told them to find out when our train was leaving and they didn't let us miss it.

On the long journey taking them to the billets in the French interior, these Otago soldiers enjoyed the refreshing scenery which was eagerly absorbed after the Egyptian deserts. The greenness of the farms, orchards and vineyards, and the warmth of the welcome given by the smiling, saving people made some feel a little homesick for New Zealand. And yet there was a difference for "the populace seemed to be in black. Even now with the war not 2 years old, France seems to be bled white." The country was in mourning for its lost sons. The Otago men did not ponder too long over this depressing subject. They were ranked amongst the best of soldiers and they looked forward to consolidating this reputation. "With us it is fun all the way," one soldier wrote to his wife. "The saving grace of the Anzac Corps is their capacity to make the most of the shining hour. If the truth
be known, this crowd absolutely enjoy the war." 5

Their chance came on 20 May when the New Zealanders took over the lines east of Armentiere. This was known as the 'quiet' sector, meaning that only a passive resistance rather than an active aggression was engaged in on both sides. The departing Tommies advised: "Doan't ye fire at 'im, choom, and he woan'd fire at ye" 6 Tony Ashworth calls this choice 'not to aggress the 'live and let live sytem', the antithesis of the official 'kill or be killed'. 7 Second Lieutenant Stewart informed his sister:

When we first came into the line ... it was very quiet and whole days would go by with hardly more than a few rounds of artillery being fired by either side. As we generally know the favourite spots for the Germans to fire at, it came to be considered exceptionally bad luck if a man got hit 8

Another wrote: "I can hardly realise that I am actually in the trenches out here with the Germans about 100 yards off. There is a crop of oats between us but I guess nobody will be bothered about oats..." 9 Thus the Otago men had a fairly gentle introduction to war on the Western Front.

The complex trench system combined the functions of offence, defence, communication and supply. Between and separating the trenches of each opposing army lay No Man's Land, a continuous strip of ground, on average 100 to 400 yards in width, held by neither but patrolled at night and fired across by day by both. There were usually three parallel trench lines: the front; the support 70 yards back; and the reserve, another 500 yards back. Connecting these were communication trenches perpendicular to the three trench lines.

At Armentiere the New Zealanders' task was to hold the line against an enemy offensive. This involved continuous day and night
watches; night patrols sent out to determine or counter enemy movement in No Man's Land and advanced listening posts to warn of approaching enemy parties. About 20 yards in front of the front trench, a continuous belt of barbed wire some ten yards broad and three feet high was staked in No Man's Land and wiring parties were regularly sent out at night to perform an unpleasant job. Private Kerse recorded:

I was over the parapet two nights running with a party fixing wire entanglements which occasionally get knocked about a bit by the artillery. A sniper had a few shots at us... Flares are sent up... on dark nights which light up No Man's Land very brightly. There was a fearful tangle of loose barbed wire on the ground and we just had to fling ourselves down amongst it and it took us five minutes to get up out of the tangle when up would go another flare.

Ration carrying and fatigues often made the spells from the trench harder work than in the trenches. Nevertheless, the first months were not severe, and the new recruits even expressed quite a liking for war. Second Lieutenant Stewart wrote to a friend:

Last night I was out on a most exciting venture for a staid person like me... I took out a patrol... over no-mans-land toward the Hun Trenches. It was most eerie and... I felt quite thrilled and school boyish over the whole thing and surprised to find that though I am a nervous person (terrified of rats etc) I felt as serene and confident as I had been in Dunedin.

Even a main body man wrote: "It is great to think I've done a turn in the front line in France with Fritz about 80 yards away.... I am happy now.... and am ready and very fit to do what duty come along."

The end of June however, signalled a new phase in the fighting at Armentiere. The high command, in an effort to keep alive the principle of aggression, instituted the policy of raids with the object of gaining information and harassing the enemy. The idea was that a raiding party would approach the enemy trenches in silence.
or behind an artillery barrage which supposedly frightened the enemy, made him rush for cover, enter his trenches, seize prisoners, maps and documents and speed back to its own lines. Raids certainly increased the level of aggression on both sides as desired by the High Commands but for the infantrymen it meant an intensified strain on the nerves, increased casualties and subsequent retaliatory fire which often badly smashed their trench system. Raids were to become very unpopular.

One soldier informed his sister:

> We have raiding parties near on once or more a week and sometimes they are a great success and sometimes quite otherwise ... of course while the raid is on not only does the Hun fight the men who come in but he retaliates heavily with artillery on our lines. 
> .... then in addition to that he usually hits a counter raid a few nights later and so it goes on. 13

Second Lieutenant Stewart described one disastrous raid of the 4th Otagos on 13 July:

> The usual rule is for our guns to bombard enemy trench and then our men rush forward into No Man's Land and enter the trench before the Hun has recovered his senses, well in this case the Hun poured shrapnel ... over our men and continued to shell them and our trenches for over an hour ..... so that no living thing could miss being killed or wounded .... It was hell with a vengeance. Our men never had a chance to even start across No Man's Land. It was terrible to see the men trying to struggle back. 14

When the order finally came to withdraw a handful of 18 scrambled back unhurt. Out of the 181 in the raiding party 35 were killed, 122 wounded and 6 reported missing. The task of bringing in the dead and wounded from No Man's Land was formidable. During that night "we got all the wounded" one man reported "but it was two nights before we got all the dead in - in fact .... we are not likely to get some eight or nine who are over near the Hun lines." 15
Alexander Aitken wrote of a friend who lay wounded with a badly fractured thigh:

> We asked if it was very bad. He simply said, 'I think I'm done for.' 'Don't think that, Jim' said Paddy, 'they'll fix you up all right' 'No, Paddy, I know.' He spoke quietly, with the same high calm, far beyond his years - he was, I suppose, my own age, twenty-one perhaps twenty-two - and he knew better than we. 16

For those who survived, the bitterness and grief was intense.

"Nearly all of my best friends were killed" wrote Lieutenant Stewart

> It was an awful night and I shall never forget it ... the very finest and bravest were killed and I feel as if I was almost at fault for not being wounded myself. 17

Private Aitken recorded his reaction after coming in from stretcher bearing:

> It took a strange form of rounding on the nearest person .... concerning the stupidity of the whole plan with its wanton expenditure of life ... less complicated symptoms were a jumpiness at shell-bursts, and broken sleep. To certain persons in places of safety ... who have never had the experience of enduring hours of bombardment, or of seeing their comrades blown to pieces, shell-shock indicates a lack of moral fibre ... each time I closed my eyes I heard again ... the whistle of the falling mortar-bombs, and I saw Hughes, Robertson, Sergeant Brée, Harper .... 18

It was during this time too that the men heard of the unsuccessful attack, to their right of the 5th Australian Division at Frommells. 5,500 men lay dead and wounded upon a miniature battlefield and the fault, it was believed, belonged to the British commanders. Private Maloney recorded:

> Our informants, men mostly from New South Wales ... say there is great bitterness and sorrow in the brigade... They didn't speak too highly of the Divisional commanders who should have had something to say to their men ... for whirling them into an undertaking, the results of which, out of war time, would be a national disaster of the first magnitude.
He declared that "the more one sees of this war, the more it makes one spit blood." 19

It was during their three long months at Armentiere that the Otago Men encountered the heavy artillery bombardments little known on Gallipoli. One man asserted:

The effect of shell fire is curious. It reacts on the stomach muscles giving one a feeling of nausea ... This is a young man's war, only strong constitutions and iron nerves can withstand the daily nerve shatterings. 20

Another observed that "the concussions caused by the big shells and trench morters .... made men in the near vicinity quite dazed and can do nothing." 21

Here too were first encountered the huge rats so frequently mentioned in the men's descriptions of trench life. These brown and black rats were huge, bold and fecund and would feed on food scraps and the tender flesh of dead young men. Their favourite portions were the eyes and the livers 22 and even a wounded man was prey if he could not defend himself. Soldiers found it was wiser not to dwell too long on this major indecency of the war but rather wrote of its lighter side. "I don't mind them" Gunner Abernethy explained "as long as they keep off me when in bed ... a few weeks ago ... I was suddenly awakened by a sharp nip on the ear... luckily he didn't get a big piece of my ear." 23 Another woke to find the prints of a rat's muddied paws stamped on the side of his face. 24 Retaliation, even on a small scale, brought gratification. One related:

Two or three big ones run along the parapet at night. One stopped right in front of me ... so without moving. I picked up a big clod and hit him fair and square. It bowled him clean over and he went for his life. A lot of the chaps shoot at them and have great fun. 25
The men also found the sight of shell-shocked rats lying on their backs with straightened limbs and dazed looks, somewhat pitiful for they were, in that respect, fellow sufferers.

The three months passed slowly. There was little excitement as Bomadier R.H.Scott of the Artillery describes:

The officers tell us what targets we are firing at and so give us a little interest in the shooting. We can never see our targets but use a chimney as an aiming point and the controlling officer orders the bearing right or left. The one consolation is that the more shells we fire the sooner the end of the war will come. 26

The constant unmitigated sense of danger and its evidence all round them, wore down their initial enthusiasm. Second Lieutenant Stewart informed his sister: "This part of the fighting is very trying for the men .... they feel the strain more to see one or two of their mates go everyday, far more than if they lost more and felt we were gaining something." 27 Alexander Aitken asserted that danger could not really be brought home to the man in safety. 28 This is true to some extent, and yet the reader can get some sense of what the men were feeling from their constant references to the closeness of death which picked them off in a haphazard fashion. Most decided they would "far rather hop over the parapet and gallop across the paddock than crouch in the bottom of a trench waiting for the trip west. 29 One soldier informed his family: "If anything happens to me you must remember that it is mostly bad luck." 30 Readers of these soldiers' diaries will encounter patches, particularly during the men's time in the front lines, where records kept are frustratingly brief and vague, betraying little of their activities or feelings. Yet these empty pages reveal a picture which words could not describe. It is almost as if the soldier, weary in mind and body at the end of a day,
is registering in his little book that he has survived another 24 hours

Mid August came and finally the men were relieved and proceeded to the back lines for a much needed change. The most satisfying and invigorating aspect was the opportunity of a bath and a change of clean clothing for men who knew they were filthy in body, and felt contaminated in mind and soul. The men were tired of the day to day fighting of Armentiere and looked forward to a decisive attack that would hasten the end of the war. They were now plunged into the vortex of the Somme offensive. These soldiers were more knowledgeable in the ways of war, and as a result more subdued than previously at the prospect of entering a major offensive. Lance-Corporal Kerse declared: "It won't be any fun but we don't worry about it. We have been looking forward to it." 31

The first attack was scheduled for 6.20 a.m. 15 September. It was to be carried out behind a protective screen of advancing artillery fire - technically known as the creeping barrage. British tacticians, however, ignored the fact that static machine guns must give a great advantage to the defender and time and again threw troops forward against wire and a deadly hail of bullets. Zero hour came and the Otago men scrambled over the top. Few can remember clearly what happened or what they felt after that. To most it seemed a strange sensation being upright in No Man's Land with so much happening that seemed chaotic and unreal. One veteran recalled: "You're in the thick of it. It enters your mind ... but you don't think much about it. Everything was happening at once guns garrunding away. I can't think that I thought anything." 32

Private Aitken described the atmosphere of a charge:
I passed through the smoke .... In an attack such as this under deadly fire, one is as powerless as a man gripping strongly charged electrodes powerless to do anything but go mechanically on; the final shield from death removed, the will is fixed like the last thought taken into an anaesthetic which is the first thought taken out of it. Only safety or the shock of a wound will destroy such auto-hypnosis at the same time all normal emotion is numbed utterly. 33

In none of the Otago men's diaries, letters or reflections were men able to give a lucid description of what they and their units actually accomplished during an attack. Charles Kerse gave this piecemeal account of the attack of 15 September written on the same day:

Hopped parapet and could see considerable movement in German trenches. Followed barrage very closely, few casualties from it. Good shooting all the way up. Final charge of 20 yards; Fritz retreated from 2 trenches both full of dead. Advanced 50 yards in front of trench and dug in. Got heavily shelled all day. In party to go back for overcoats. Moonlight terrible sights.... Relieved 2 o'clock .... 12 men left in platoon. Huns massed for counter attack 5 p.m. Our artillery smashed them up in time. 34

The first objective of the Somme was carried but victory could not avert tragedy. Of the 20 officers and 816 other ranks who went into action only 376 survived physically intact. One wrote:

We have had two terrible days .... They say we have done well and at one stage we had the pleasure of seeing the Huns throw down their rifles and run before us and we used our rifles to good purpose. 35

He recalled a year later:

It was a heart breaking spectacle to see the handful of exhausted men in the battalion compared with the great force that went in three weeks before. The Company lined up and I will never forget 9 men left in the 1st platoon out of about 55, 11 men and a Corporal in the next platoon out of about 50. It was pretty hard. 36
An old soldier, Private White, recalled the First Somme with emotion:

We called it Black Friday, 210 of us went in that morning. 43 of us came out. I lost four mates that day Tom Aitken, Dick Carter, Billy Sim and Stan Scathe, I lost them all that day .... so there you are, that was the Somme. 37

For the attacking soldiers there was often a mad hysteria which accompanied the atmosphere and the enlarged adrenalin flow of a charge. A man whose comrades were killed in No Man's Land could go mad with sorrow and blood lust and for him the Germans in the opposing trenches became objects of vehement hatred. Charles Kerse wrote after a Somme attack:

I can hardly realise that I am alive after what I have been and come through since the thirteenth .... Brian had a cobber of ours killed near him and went mad for a while when he got into the Hun trench and he did kill, at hands up and running away anyhow all, He is a good shot - enough said. 38

and after the attack of 1 October, when many of his friends were killed, he reported:

The Huns we struck in the trench seemed to have no heart for fighting but we just shot them down all the same. It is amazing how savage one gets and I could have gone on chasing and shooting all day. 39

The attack was renewed on 25 September up Goose Alley, and again Otago were victorious. But again, the sacrifice was high. Burton estimated Otago losses in access of two thirds its strength. 40

The attack of 27 September, by the first Otago Battalion was even more of a disaster. Aitken believed that the two previous successes had caused a lack of thoroughness in the plans for the attack and there was a general suspicion that the staff "were counting on our making a flying dash and capturing Gird trench by luck." 41
The enemy lines had not been sufficiently battered and as soon as the Otago Infantry scrambled over the parapet, the German machine guns fired into the mass of advancing men. No aiming was necessary. The guns traversed to and fro across the field with devastating effect, and it was only a question of time before every officer and almost every man became a casualty. Private Grant wrote of one man:

A shrapnel shell burst behind him and he got twenty-one bullets through him: three went into his back and one through his chest. fourteen through his right thigh and three through his left arm, he is still alive. 42

Byrne believed that this attack:

Unquestionably represented the Regiment's most bitter and costly experience on the Somme. When the Battalion marched out of the line on the night of the 28th it was reduced to a strength of 113, which was considerably below that of a company. 43

The final effort was to come on 1 October and with so many of their comrades gone, some made ready to die. One wrote: "just before we went over the parapet four of us arranged to scribble a letter to the others if we were wounded." 44 After the attack two letters were sent.

The Second Battalion, already depleted, moved forward at zero hour in four waves and, though it succeeded, many were again cut down by the deadly cross fire. The Battalion entered 333 strong and came out with a skeleton of 148. 45

The men had been 23 days in the desperate fighting of the Somme. They had ultimately gained all their objectives and at times more, and had received the commendations of Sir Douglas Haig the Commander-in-chief of the British forces. But the cost was grotesquely out of all proportion to the gains made.
As usual the wounded could not all be dealt with and many died unnecessarily. Bomadier Scott recorded: "Two wandered into our Battery and slept in the open. No stretcher bearers would take them as they were busy with the front line casualties. One man died about noon time...We buried the other poor fellow after dark." 46

Private Aitken, wounded in the charge of the twenty seventh, lay in a No Man's Land strewn with bodies, some motionless, some not, cries of agony filled the air. He continued: "I leave it to the sensitive imagination. I once wrote it all down, only to discover that horror, truthfully described, weakens to the merely clinical." 47

Few, indeed, had any desire to dwell too long on these horrendous sights and recorded them only in the most cryptic manner. One veteran explained: "You saw them dropping around you. It was just a case of carrying on; we didn't stop or think about what we saw." 48

Another commented stoically:

In an advance, the fellows are just buried where they fell ... there is no cemetery on the Somme. It is one vast cemetery... If a man is finished with this world it matters not a scrap where he is buried. 49

Aitken too discovered that his sympathy was at that point "abstract almost to vanishing point." 50

The wet and muddy conditions compounded the misery and exhaustion of the men. Rain and artillery had churned the earth into a muddy morass of "black porridge" 51 through which tired men had to wade. In mud filled ditches they had to eat, sleep, carry and work. One wrote: "The mud is up to our waist in some places, we have nothing to sleep in, not even an overcoat." 52

In these conditions the stretcher bearers tasks were arduous in the extreme. Their mercy was infinite but their strength was not.
5. The horrific conditions in the Somme trenches with mud up to one's knees.

6. Weary troops outside their dugouts.
It was impossible for the frustrated men to try and convey these conditions to those at home, and Charles Kerse was delighted when he found a newspaper cutting which came close to doing this:

To form an idea of what one feels like after a few days of wet weather, fighting on the Somme just think of a Taranaki cowyard at its worst, after, say 6 weeks rain. Multiply the result eleven times, then roll in it taking special care to rub it well into your hair, eyes, ears, mouth and rifle. Take a days rations and stamp them well into the mixture also, and use a newly emptied benzene tin for drinking purposes. Carry a nice hefty load, for instance, a bag of potatoes, through it all day, being sure to fall down every minute and a half, and consider yourself buried several times by shells that are too close for comfort. Continue treatment for somedays, being careful not to wash or shave during the period. You can realise now what the cablegram means when it is reported that the weather interfered with the operations." 53

Wet conditions was also responsible for the appearance of trench feet caused by having stood for hours, even days on end in the mud filled trenches. The feet would gradually go numb, turn red and blue and in extreme cases gangrene would set in. In this case, toes or even a whole foot would have to be amputated. The only remedy was for the men to change socks and dry their feet as often as possible. But as one soldier complained: "You would get your feet soaked in disinfectant and dried and washed, you'd be back in ten minutes and they would be wet and cold and full of mud again." 54

It was an awful time and it broke much in them. One recalled a friend waking up from a short nap "almost in hysterics. White as paper he was, and shaking ... he told us of the dream he had had ... that the Germans had rushed up and bayonetted us all in a heap. Just what was liable to happen anytime." 55

Some cracked completely under the strain. "A man in our line blew half his head off with a rifle this evening" Trooper Colburn reported, "He had told the Chaplain he intended to commit suicide. 56
Blighty offered the only honourable escape, and there were few who did not dream of receiving a wound that was not bad enough to kill but ensured escape from the lines for a period. Wounded men grinned as they pointed to their injury and said "By jove, look at this boys, what a lovely blightly." One not so fortunate wrote:

Steve got it after we left our trench. Lucky dog, he missed the worst time. We all had our hair cut very short and Steve said a lot of times "It will be stiffer if a man gets to hospital with this" We used to roar. When he knows what is left of our platoon - twelve, he will be too thankful to worry over his looks. I don't like to think about our poor company, it is too awful.

He continued about others who "had luck in the big push" and expressed himself, pleased, that "such a large number are enjoying themselves in hospital." 59

Those left to carry on were, at least, relieved and allowed to withdraw behind the lines for a temporary rest. But it was a "hell of a tramp in mud to Carlton trench." One wrote "fell in mud about ten times, absolutely beat." 61 Men straggled past, haggard, blood shot eyes, slouching past in loose file, slouching anywhere, anyhow. It had been a terrible ordeal and recovery came slowly, for even here the billets were damp, producing a good deal of sickness.

Bomadier Scott recorded:

Mud plentiful. The road is flooded to a depth of one foot in the centre and many feet at the sides. The cookhouse and left section billet is 100 yards along the road and we have to wade through water to get our meals. It is very cold and uncomfortable with ones boots full of water all day ... parts of the floor of our billet is flooded. 62

November brought snow and the worst winter for a generation. It ended the miseries caused by the mud for the ground became frozen solid but it brought other discomforts. Frostbite cases increased,
frozen ink had to be minced up before it would write\textsuperscript{63} and washing was impossible. Private Hart declared:

\begin{quote}
If one can get some unfrozen water for a wash, it freezes on his hair, eyebrows, or moustache as soon as it touches them. I have felt some pretty cold days and nights in Southland but nothing to touch this. \textsuperscript{64}
\end{quote}

February came and the "sudden thaw made the terrain the region of the line absolutely quagmire." Lance Corporal Maloney stated:

\begin{quote}
High boots were served out to the troops but ... cases of trench feet were numerous in spite the universal application of whale oil. The saps are full of water and dug outs practically uninhabitable ... and the war goes merrily on. \textsuperscript{65}
\end{quote}

New recruits discovered the lice now familiar to older soldiers. One complained: "I was mortified to discover that I was simply alive with vermin ... I bathed myself vigorously and burnt my underclothes, also pressed tunic and trous. with a hot iron but the beggers stay on. It is a rotten feeling." \textsuperscript{66} But soldiers only felt dirty while they retained a civilian sense of cleanliness. When pollution became a mental as well as physical state, lice no longer mattered.

In war, there was a constant confusion and transgression of those distinctions that had preserved order and cleanliness. At the front, men lived with the rats that grew fat on the corpses of men. Here, the smell of the dead, the rotting, the putrid, the unwashed, and the contents of latrines pervaded. Mud, dirt and vermin invaded the most personal spaces. The constant encounters with the dead, the half dead, the mangled and the mutilated resulted in a cumulative mental strain and a sense of contamination which was ineradicable. Those at home, however, could not understand this nor did the soldiers
try to make them and only the most innocuous comments were made about such offensive aspects of the war. The gap was widening between civilian and soldier.

Similarly, the men realised that even the 'Heads' who directed their fate did not and could not know what the War was really like for them. When Joseph Ward and William Massey visited their camp the men were cynical that they would be any more enlightened. Conditions were improved to "Make things look good". One soldier stated:

I wish Fritz would start shelling like billy-oh just to give them a fright. I don't know if they went into the trenches at all; I don't think they did. We'll be interested to see the accounts of their visit on the NZ papers."  

For the men, the romances and grand illusions of war had crumbled into dust. The truth was much less alluring:

Every second thousands of guns of the Western Front hurl thousands of pounds worth of shells against the enemy and the wastage of men is more fearful. Every minute the boat loads of bright youths are being ferried across the Rubicon. Fine young lives sacrificed on the alter of this tragic War."  

Some were completely 'fed up'. Corporal Kerse wrote:

Bert is in the pipe band so he won't have to kill a Hun. He is getting very deaf but he is a bit of a nut and says he won't fight anymore and won't even argue the point if they let him alone.  

The majority still wanted to see the war won and the Hun beaten. But their motivation to fight had changed. Gone was the buoyant, optimistic anticipation of adventure present in 1914. Now men performed their cumbersome duty as best they could and for some, this duty centred on a revenge for their dead comrades. Charles Kerse observed the desire of the majority to go home "Still" he resolved:
until the Huns are fairly licked, we don't want to see peace and although we are fed up at times, the thought of all the good fellows who have gone is enough to make us feel we will go on with the war, no matter what it costs us. When I read the list of ... killed I just want to stay here and fight the Germans till we kill them all. 71

During October 1916 the New Zealand Government announced the introduction of conscription and, unlike their Australian counterparts, most of these Otago soldiers endorsed the policy. "It will shake up some of the laggards" 72 one commented. Another realised the hardship conscription would cause in many families and yet he reasoned "it is the same the world over ... no matter where one goes in France you never see an able bodied civilian of military age and the presence of mourning among women is simply astounding." 73 Some declared their disgust at the presence of conscientious objectors in New Zealand and prescribed a spell in the frontlines as an antidote. This, and other horrifying punishments were just what men like Archibald Baxter became subjected to. The soldiers' endorsement for conscription, however, was qualified by their knowledge of what these men were coming to and Kerse recounted a lecture in which, as officer trainees, they were told "the men we would get now would be conscripts and would be clever. One sergeant interrupted and said "They must be sir, when they have kept out of it for so long'." 74

Letters from home were a great psychological comfort, a link with home and pre-war realities. But they were irregular. Private David Grant wrote of one soldier who received "forty-eight at one time" thus, he explained "we are sometimes a long time without news." 75 All too often anyway letters got fewer and more stilted the longer a man was away from home. The gap between the fighting and the home front continued to increase.
By March 1917 the Otago Regiment, 1401 strong had entered the Messines Sector. Again it was obvious that 'live and let live' had prevailed but this was soon to end for preparations were now under way for a big attack on the Messines Ridge scheduled for 7 June 1917.

Zero hour came at 3.10 a.m. and the men "hopped the bag"

Private Grant reported:

> It was a neat and well carried out bit of business from start to finish. Old Fritz was taken completely by surprise and you never seen such frightened beggars as the Fritzies that rushed down hill with their hands up yelling 'Kamerad'. I couldn't help laughing at them. 76

Within a few hours the New Zealanders had captured Messines. Casualties suffered during the attack was not excessive but subsequent retaliatory shell fire proved costly. From 6 June to 9 June the total casualties sustained by the Regiment numbered 567. 77 Trooper Colbran reported "all last night carrying wounded in and out of the dressing and operating rooms ... some have terrible wounds and almost fall to pieces when the bandages are taken off." 78 Another observed "some awful wounds and suffering and some wonderful bravery and cheerfulness ... one man who was to have his leg off at the thigh and did not know said to the M.O. medical officers 'I do hope it is bad enough for me to get to blighty'." 79

The soldiers saw even more hideous sights of war. Corporal Maloney described the scene which confronted him on entering a German trench:

> German dead lay everywhere. We counted 26 dead in one heap ...... They presented a ghoulish appearance. In their agony they had torn at their clothes, ... They were all semi-nude. I suppose that they must have been crazed by the intense bombardment and probably suffocated with the fumes from the mines. To me they looked like men who had gone mad. I have never seen anything so stark and tragic. 80
Messines was the first offensive for Chaplain Ronald Sinclair Watson. He told his parents on his 26th birthday "all I want to say is, so far as my small experience goes war is HELL." He continued "six months of the war are gone and with it all the confident optimism I had on January 1st. All I am doing now is to live one day at a time." The future was not worth worrying about for the end of war seemed far away. One soldier observed perceptibly "As time goes on, the armies become more proficient at slaughtering one another." Civilization had mechanized and multiplied the means of war.

Severe depression set in for some who had been fighting since the beginning. After Messines, Lance-Corporal Kerse confided his overwhelming sense of despair to his mother:

It seems funny for me to be telling you these things as I have always kept this sort of thing back. Don't let anyone see this, whatever you do. A man will have to carry on with the game somehow. It makes me sick at times, and I don't care what happens to me ... Well, I must stop this rot and have a smoke to cool my nerves down a bit.

... Burn this when you have read it and forget it too." 

Men did not want to go back to the mud and slush the killing and suffering. Private Hart felt a profound despondency as he returned to the front after a short leave in London:

Tuesday (the fateful day) I was to be seen with full pack up, making my way dejectedly towards Victoria station... Men returning from ten glorious days leave are the same as they were when I returned from my last one fifteen months ago ... scarcely a word was spoken in the carriage which conveyed us back ... so dejected and down hearted were we all ... the comparison between sitting in the stalls of the Criterion theatre and a day or two after to be trudging through the cursed mud of Flanders is too ludicrous... it will be a while before some of those pictures of life in London fade away to give place to uglier, coarser and more inhuman ones of life here."
The world of peace and war were two irreconcilable worlds with two sets of irreconcilable codes of behaviour. For the fighting soldiers, there was a sense of having lived two lives and being unable to resolve the contradictions between them. They were an enigma to themselves, for their behaviour did not conform to one set code but vacillated between the philosophy of war 'kill or be killed.' and that of his civilisation which taught that the taking of life was wrong. Everyday they were torn between cruelty and tender pity. For example Corporal Maloney described the gruesome fate of some Germans with an almost malicious callousness to his wife:

A party of 15 Huns walked in file to their doom ... Some of them were practically cut into two by the continual stream of bullets. The shoulder straps were promptly cut off the dead and their boots removed as souvenirs. Their pockets were searched and all letters, diaries and papers extracted. ... a friend told me that it was down right murder. Of course, one doesn't worry ... some of them had letters on them addressed to their wives and sweethearts. Daddy won't come home any more! 85

Yet less than two weeks later he recounted his feelings as his working party was shelled by the enemy:

Two lads working on either side of me were torn to ribbons. I could see their vertebrae. One whimpered and died. It was an awful scene the cries of the wounded and dying on all side ... I dashed into the headquarters and asked for stretcher bearers. They had none there, I was more or less in a hysterical condition and called them for everything ... I hastened back and found that another shell or so had lobbed over ... more were dead ... The lad on the stretcher in front of me ... breathed with a heavy sputtering gurgle which got fainter and fainter. I called the bearers to stop and look ... His windpipe was perforated, and his soul had gone forth. We took him off and ... went back for another 'carry' ... at the dressing station ... one fine big fellow sat propped up in the corner, his face ashen coloured. He has been badly smacked in the lines and there was foam at his mouth ... one little fellow had a left hand that looked like raw meat, it was so mangled. Dicky had a big shear and snipped off chunks of flesh ... two or three fainted at the sight ... at this stage I fear I was pretty far through. 86
The conflict continued as men were plunged further into the world of war.

Worse was to come for the Otago men, at Apres on the slopes leading up to Passchendaele. Ypres itself was a battered husk of a city when the Regiment came to it. "It is in ruins. There does not appear to be one building which is not destroyed and some of the buildings have been grand" recorded one soldier. The Regiment was instructed to relieve an English Brigade and try and take what they had failed to take, the Passchendaele ridge. On 10 October the Otago boys proceeded for the front lines and the ground they passed was full of foreboding. Lance-Corporal L.M.Hart described the scene:

Our track led over five miles of newly conquered ground without lines of communication, roads, or anything but shell holes half full of water. The weather had for some days been wet and cold and the mud was in places up to the knees. We struggled through this sea of mud for some hours, and everyone was feeling pretty well done. It was quite common for a man to get stuck in the mud and have to get three or four to drag him out. You can have no idea of the utter desolation caused by modern shell fire... not a blade of grass, or trees, here and there a heap of bricks marking where a village or farmhouse had once stood, numerous 'tanks' stuck in the mud, and for the rest, just one shell hole touching another... The ground was strewn with the corpses of numerous Huns and Tommies. Dead horses and mules lay everywhere, yet no attempts had been made to bury any of them.

John A. Lee wrote, in the chronical of the N Z E F:

Often have I read of this weird land of desolation but what I have read in the light of what I have seen recently, fills me with a sense of the inefficacy of words. For the ruthlessness of man has made it appear a country wholly forsaken by nature. It is for all the world like a great, actual No Man's Land, only not in military parlance, for it is a No Man's Land possessed.
Arriving at the front they found that the "Tommies had not attempted to dig trenches but had simply held the line by occupying the long lines of shell holes." They took over and waited.

For the next two days, it rained off and on, men would drop off to sleep and wake to find themselves half sunk into the mud. Some, unweary of deep mud filled shell holes became lost forever. Sergeant Harwood recalled:

we walked on duckboards about one foot wide. If you stepped off them you were finished. You just went straight down. There was a young chap came to report to me. I said 'make yourself at home, we'll be going over the top in the morning.' Next morning I never saw him. I didn't worry, I never made no inquiries. Later, years after the War I went to a man's house to get a loan and I saw this chap's picture on the wall. It was the man's brother and he said he was still missing. He went over the side I suppose. Dozens of others did. We never worried, it was no good worrying.

Through the miserable hours, men waited, huddled together tired, hungry, nerves on edge, knowing that soon, they were quite likely to be killed or terribly maimed.

As on the Somme there was not much in the way of strategy, they were to advance over No Man's Land in three waves after 5.25 a.m. on 12 October and rush the German trenches. In the darkness of zero hour the guns opened up with a roar that shook the ground. The charging men were supposed to proceed 100-150 yards behind the protection of the creeping barrage but instead the barrage fell about 200 yards short, opening right into the midst of the advancing men. Lance Corporal Hart complained: "We had a curse of a time cut to blazes between our own guns and Fritz's machine gun fire ... the boys were dropping on all sides." Moreover the barrage had not been sufficient to demolish the enemy's line and a hail of machine
gun bullets swept the ranks with devastating effect. The men struggled on knee deep in the quagmire, their guns clogged up with slime rendering them useless. On reaching almost the top of the ridge, the survivors found a long line of practically undamaged German concrete machine gun emplacements with barbed wires entanglements in front of them, fully 50 yards deep. Dozens got hung up in the wires and shot down before the surviving comrades. Private Grant recorded: "I only saw one of our company up at the wire with me and he, poor fellow got his head split open with an explosive bullet ... poor George Scott got a bullet across his face which blew out both eyes and broke his nose." 94

The attack had petered out in the face of wire and machine gun fire. It was now broad daylight. Lance Corporal Hart wrote: "and what was left of us realised that the day was lost. We lay down in shell holes or any cover we could get and waited. Any man who showed his head was immediately shot. They were marvellous shots those Huns." 95 The rain continued and the surviving attackers lay in the muddy slime without food throughout the day. They withdraw under the cover of darkness.

The full extent of the tragedy now revealed itself. Lance Corporal Hart recorded "We had nearly lost eighty percent of our strength and gained about three hundred yard of ground in the attempt. This three hundred yard was useless to us for the German still held and dominated the ridge." 96 Hundreds of badly wounded men lay in No Man's Land, many strung up on barbed wire right in front of the German trenches. Filthy mud pressed itself against their open wounds, cold hours and even days in the pelting rain completed their misery. At night, as many wounded as possible were brought in, but still
hundreds lay out in the open. One soldier recorded:

The second day after this tragic business, we were surprised to see about half a dozen Huns suddenly appear waving a white flag ... a sign that they were asking for a truce to take in their wounded and bury their dead. It was granted and not a shot was fired on either side during the whole of that afternoon. It was a humane and gallant act and one worthy of such gallant defenders as those particular Huns certainly were. Our stretcher bearers were able to go and take all our wounded from the barbed wire, a thing that would have been impossible otherwise.

The dead were left where they fell but over 500 wounded had to be brought in.

The task was mammoth. Corporal Maloney wrote:

The battlefield in all directions was clothed with groups of bearers, who carried on the work without molestation and on the thirteenth (Saturday) practically everyone who could be pressed into service were used to bring the poor chaps in. They had to be carried to Spree Farm a distance of 3 to 4 miles, over the boggiest country imaginable. On Gravenstafel a stretcher with six bearers sank into the mud which was up to their armpits. Ropes were used to pull them out. The stretcher was actually resting on top of the mud. The Maoris here did yeoman service in bringing up planks and laying them crosswise to give a foothold. Goodness knows how many men perished - drowned in the mud. Never have I had such a melancholy experience. It would wring the heart of the hardest man to see the groups of bearers dozens of them struggling along, with the poor chaps on the stretchers suffering from the bumps and stops.

The scale of the carnage had been barbarous. Byrne recorded 809 casualties with 201 of these killed. One man who went over in the first wave reported: "My company has come out with no officers, only one Sergeant out of seven, one Corporal and 30 men. Even then we are not the worst." Days later Corporal Maloney found in the mud sacks of ruined rations which should have been delivered on the twelfth. The whole ordeal, as Trooper Colbran declared had been "worse than the prison tortures of Siberia."
Bitterness and grief consumed the Regiment for it was the first
time they had failed in their objective and still with the most appalling
slaughter. Lance Corporal Hart consoled himself:

We have nothing to be ashamed of, as our commander
afterwards told us that no troops in the world could
possibly have taken the position, but this is small
comfort when one remembers the hundreds of lives that
have been lost and nothing gained." 102

And as the truth gradually came out, anger grew to a fever pitch. It
was now known that three days before the New Zealand attacks, two
English Divisions had tried to take the same ground and were thwarted
primarily by the same intact enemy wire. Moreover before the attack
a scouting party had confirmed that no impression had been made on the
wire by our artillery. Requests for increased shelling met with
little reply, for the efforts of the artillery were bloood by the
boggy conditions. Bomadier Scott described:

Horses are only able to pull the guns to within
a quarter of a mile of the battery position ... 
after that the road is a sea of clay into which
one sinks to ones knees almost every step. Across
the bog we pulled the guns with dragropes, about
100 men to each gun ... a few men got stuck in
the stuff had to be pulled out." 103
8. Taking ammunition up to the Front.

9. Stretcher bearers carry a man out of the Flanders mud.
Scores of live shells had to be thrown into the mud "so that the wheels would turn." The result was that less than half of the guns were got into position and most sank down immediately they commenced to fire. The stunt was doomed from the start and yet British Staff ordered the men to go ahead and be slaughtered. Corporal Maloney judged it "one of the most shockingly conceived battles in history." Lance Corporal Hart declared:

Some "terrible blunder" has been made. Someone is responsible for that barbed wire not having been broken up by our artillery. Someone is responsible for the opening of our barrage in the midst of us instead of 150 yards ahead of us. Someone else is responsible for those machine gun emplacements being left practically intact, but the papers will all report another glorious success, and no one except those who actually took part in it will know any different."

Hart recounted:

During the night after we had relieved the Tommies prior to our attack on the ridge we were surprised to hear agonised cries of "stretch bearer" "help" - "For God's sake come here" etc. coming from all sides of us. When daylight came some of us, myself included, crawled out to some adjacent shell holes from where the cries were coming and were astonished to find about half a dozen tommlies, badly wounded, some insane, others almost dead with starvation and exposure, lying stuck in the mud and too weak to move. We asked one man who seemed a little better than the rest what was the meaning of it and he said that if we cared to crawl about among the shell holes all round about him we would find dozens more in similar plight. We were dumbfounded, but the awful truth remained, these chaps, wounded in the defence of their country had been callously left to die the most awful of deaths in the half frozen mud while tens of thousands of able bodied men were camped within five miles of them behind the lines... When we came upon them they must have been in the mud and rain for four days and night ... I have seen some pretty rotten sights during the two and half years of active service, but I must say that this fairly sickened me. We crawled back to our trenches and inside of an hour all our stretcher bearers were working like the heroes that they were, and in full view of the enemy whom, to his credit, did not fire on them. They worked all day carrying out those Tommies of whom I am afraid some will be mad men for the rest of their lives even if they do recover from their wounds and exposure... Whoever is responsible for the unnecessary sacrifice of these lives deserves to be shot more than any Huns ever did.
He could not understand why an armistice was not asked for to carry out these wounded men and he added bitterly: "I suppose our armchair leaders call this British stubbornness. If this represents British stubbornness then it is time we called it by a new name. I would suggest callous brutality as a substitute." 107

The hatred and contempt for the staff was intense, for they were not compelled to suffer the deaths and injuries caused by their own decisions. The fighting men realised that they had more in common with even their German enemies in the ditches than with these commanders. who, because of their immunity were inclined to be liberal with others' lives. Otago men saw more that disgusted them. In an old German dugout only one mile away from camp:

there were about 50 dead Tommies all lying spread out over the floor as though they had been thrown in there hastily. They had evidently been dead some months ... on inquiry [it was discovered] that they had been put in there (while wounded) during the advance of 1st July and had been forgotten. 108

"After reading this," Lance Corporal Hart warned his parents "do not believe our lying press who tell you that all the brutality of this war is on the Huns' side... The Hun is no angel ... but we survivors of Passchendaele Ridge must all admit that they played the game on that occasion." 109

The shadow of death hung about everywhere. Gas attacks, with their accompanying rotting of the body within and without, continued to increase. Men lost their voices and their sight and their skin became badly blistered. For the worst affected the pain was unbearable and most had to be strapped to their beds. Relief in the form of death took up to four or five days. Moreover, the gas mixed with the rain and mud and was released again whenever the sun warmed up the
atmosphere. Gas masks provided were of the most crude and primitive sort and smothered the wearer after a short time. One vomited inside his. 110

On top of all this, another depressing European winter was approaching and prospects for the war appeared exceedingly grim. The Russian effort had entirely collapsed and the Germans were soon to mass for an all out attack. Physically, mentally and morally, men were reaching the limits of their endurance and yet the war was still "a good way from being finished." 111 Victory paled into the distance and despondency took hold. One declared "I am fed to the teeth with the sight of maiming and blood and the handling of dead bodies." 112 A second said he had "a tired feeling all over and didn't feel inclined to do anything," 113 and a third reported that he was "very down in the dumps and didn't care whether a shell came his way or not." 114

The German offensive was launched in March 1918 and dealt a devastating blow to the Allies. Everywhere retreating civilians presented the most pitiful spectacles. Trooper Colbran observed these refugees:

carrying bundles, wheeling perambulators, leading cows and driving big lumber wagons ... when I ask them where they are going they say they don't know. They just keep going with the stream of traffic and Lord knows where they sleep or get tucker. The English and Colonials at home would know more what war was if they had a taste of this. It is sad. 115

By May, however, Allied recovery was under way and American troops were beginning to pour into the Western front. The Allied advance had begun.

For the Otago men at Rossignol Woods during July 1918 it still seemed as if war would last forever. One informed his mother "we will win, if not this year, perhaps next" 116 and the reception given to Massey and Ward, visiting the sector, revealed an unprecedented level of cynicism and war weariness. Charles Kerse recorded:
10. A disillusioned and war weary 'Tommy'
Bill Massey and Joe Ward have been kicking round the Division this last few days ... I heard they got rather a crook hearing from the mob this time no one would cheer them. If they could hear some of the adjectives that are applied to them by our fellow they would sure take a fit ... on Bill's statement about 'fighting to the last man and the last shilling' all the others showered curses on him and Jimmy Allen. 117

Jingorism no longer swayed the men for in the trenches they lived at a level of primitive instincts fear, hunger, thirst, and with physical extremes, deafening noises, sudden flashes, extreme cold and agonising pain. Continuous bombardment, in particular, disintegrated men's nerves for its sensation was not just that of sound, it was almost tangible, its victims felt it more than heard it. For some the fear of life became greater than their fear of death. Blighty men left with great elation. Self inflicted wounds increased in number, some shot themselves, and not a few went mad. Suicide would not have been too difficult on the battlefield and it can never be known just how many exercised a deliberate carelessness in the face of enemy fire to end their hellish existence.

Shell shock cases multiplied as the war progressed, some men wept uncontrollably, became nervous, frightened and haunted by nightmares. Yet even the worst shell shock cases were only recognised as battle casualties with the greatest reservation. Physical wounds could be easily justified, but mental and emotional disfigurements were difficult for the men themselves to recognise and understand let alone explain to their officers. And just as the first cases of trench feet were labelled "cold feet", many Generals viewed shell shock victims as cowards and malingerers who ought to "pull themselves together." 118 Shell shock was an extreme point along a steady progression of emotional torment, produced by the inability to reconcile conflicting standards and values. Simply because one did not break
down did not mean that one was not suffering intense anguish. It is only surprising that everyone did not go mad.

As the war lengthened, the soldier recognised his defencelessness, vulnerability and increasing powerlessness over his own life. The war had stripped him of his civilian status, effaced his former dignities and propelled him into a world where distinctions between life and death were blurred and from which he had no escape except through wounds, death or insanity. Private Fred White stated: "We just wondered who would be the next to die ... It was the nature of things. It was preordained. We couldn't do a thing, not a thing could we do - except obey." Most resolved to "just take life as it comes ... it is no use being otherwise." 

Fatalism gripped the ranks. A great majority became firmly convinced that "if there was a bullet or shell with your number on it, it would get you. If not you were alright, you'd come home." One veteran explained: "We never analysed ourselves. We lived for today and hoped for tomorrow. We never gave tomorrow a thought You might be dead tomorrow" and after the manner of fatalists most regarded "being alive and well as merely luck." The War continued on apparently without end and more continued to die. Seeing a score of graves opened ready for the next comers one wondered if he would "be in that roll call" but concluded "who cares." After the Somme's slaughter Private Hart recorded of his platoon: "Five men out of 50 who can claim to have come through without a scratch. Unfortunately this is a case of alright so far." The existing evidence and, the principles of chance all pointed to the inescapable conclusion that it was "only a question of time in this war and you will get smacked."
This attitude opened the way to premonitions about death. Some who were killed "had an idea they were for it." The extinction of choice had become linked with the extinction of life and each in his own time, surrendered the hope of outliving the war and having a life in the world of peace. It was almost as if the soldier experienced a kind of death to that world for to all intents and purposes, he had ceased to exist for it, and it had ceased to exist for him. Eric Leed in *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in WWI* (1979) has linked this experience with the notion of being 'invisible'.

Some soldiers came to acquire a morbid resignation, a fascination even, with the prospect of death which helped them endure the horrors and sufferings of the war. They began to see death as a means of giving some sense of purpose to their chaotic lives. One soldier wrote:

> And why should there be any fear? A man can but die once, even if the worst does happen. And I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that I have done my duty without wrangling for a cushy job. Granted that I have been a bit of a waster. If I 'go west' I have still got the chance of making good and dying fame ... and so I can look forward to the future with satisfaction from every point of view.

The case of Charles Allanton Kerse of the Main Body is notable for his increasing certainty of death as the war progressed. After the Somme charge of 15 September he warned his mother for the first time: "Don't think because I have got off that I will always get off because I don't. I just don't worry. When my turn comes I will get it." Coming out of the Somme he confided "between you and me, there might be small chance of me seeing New Zealand again. In any case while the war lasts and I last, I want to be here." During Messines he became more certain that he was "never likely to see New Zealand again." After the Passchendaele slaughter, he remarked on his luck so far but was convinced "Old Fritz will stop my tricks one of
these days I feel sure." 133 His preparation for and reconciliation to death became more and more thorough. At the end of 1917 he wrote:

If I am killed next year, as I probably will be, I won't have a single regret, as I reckon I have crammed a lifetime of amusement and life of the world into the three years I have been at the war. I have seen the most beautiful side of some cities and have also seen the horrible and sordid side of them. I have had a great time and really it has been good for me, this war, in spite of all the hellish spots ... Jack Gordon's death ... is a great pity in some ways but to be killed in a stunt and have such a good record is just my ideal. 134

This preoccupation with death intensified in the following months and he sought to prepare his parents for it:

I think that there is no necessity to make a fuss over a man killed in action as it is what we are here for and life is very short at the longest and far better in some cases for a man to die for such a cause than to live long and never fire a shot ... 135

Second Lieutenant Charles Kerse, having commenced service with the Main Body as a Private in August 1914, was killed in action 25 July, 1918, less than four months before peace was declared.

Men had come to believe quite seriously that war would literally never end and would become a permanent condition of mankind and yet they were equally determined that they would win.

Ronald Sinclair expressed the common sentiment:

I am going to give up wondering when the war is going to end. I can't see how it is to finish ... I am going to feel I am on the winning side and I am going to live as much as possible in the present. 136

Men who had 'died' to a future civilian life found their lot easier to endure. They became better soldiers because they lived for now, for their mates and their battalions. The bond of comradeship cemented between those who endured the same fate was intensely strong. Fierce loyalty, intimacy and exclusiveness came to characterise these informal groups. The war had in some sense equalised men, erasing all sorts
of social barriers present in civilian life and Kerse, a wool classer, thought it funny after all these years "that Callan, a man who went to the university ... is with us here... and liable to be killed at any time." 137

Many soldiers and veterans came to see comradeship as one of the intrinsically positive things to come out of war for:

The common danger and the community of interest arising from living in perilous surroundings, where remarkable occurrences are a daily happening have engendered an affection for one another not possible in prewar. Friendships made here will endure. 138

Loyalty was intense. Private White recalled: "Mack had pneumonia, he was told to stay in his dug out. We were numbering off and getting a tot of rum just about to go over the top when walking down comes Mack. He was ordered to get back to bed but he didn't want to be separated from me." 139 Losses were keenly felt. After the carnage of Passchendaele Leonard Hart wrote "it will take a long time to pick up comrades like them again ... things seem quite different now that they are gone and their places filled with strangers." 140 These friendship groups came to replace the soldiers' natural families as the source of immediate emotional and material security for the war had come to encompass the soldier's whole real world and his comrades were the only 'family' he had in that world. Tony Ashworth calls these groups "small welfare states" which guaranteed each member's well being provided he in turn contributed to the well being of others." 141 Comradeship gave the soldiers the affection, esteem and sense of power which he had left behind in the civilian world and it made tolerable an uncertain and disastrous world.

Touching as it is, this strong bond of comradeship, just as fatalism, was a result of the longevity of the war experience, the trauma of 'contamination' and the sense of having 'died' to the
civilian world. Certainly it went hand in hand with an increasing
estrangement from the home front. Thus, both positive and negative
features of the soldiers' war experience may be said to emanate from
the same phenomenon. Comradeship also functioned in a number of ways to sustain
the war from which it emerged. Firstly, comradeship generated a
hatred for those who had killed or wounded one's comrades which
expressed itself in a desire for revenge. Private Bowie recalls
"It was at Messines when we were going back to our lines, there were
about 50 Germans in the prison compounds. One chap was so wild
about his mates being killed that he threw a bomb into the middle
of them." In a circular Fashion war produced comradeship which
produced vengence which in turn produced war. Vengeance spawned
vengeance. Secondly, bravery in battle was a function of group loyalty,
group affection, and the consequent desire to seek the approval of
that group. In battle, when every instinct screamed at the soldier
to run back and hide, it was partly the few of his comrades'
collective contempt and feeling of betrayal that made him go on.
Men were afraid of nothing so much as ceasing to be a man in the eyes
of others. Private Grant wrote of a friend who refused a job in
the Pipeband because he thought "the others might think he was cold
footed." Another who had missed Passchendaele felt glad to be
alive but "ashamed of being away so long." Some, like survivors
of the Holocaust, actually felt guilty for having surviving a charge
unhit when many of their mates fell. Loyalty to one's fellows was related to loyalty to the Battalion
which figured largely in the lives of most Otago Infantrymen. As a
unit of 1,000 men it was not so large as to seem impersonal and
being a regional unit there was a strong sense of community. Moreover
the longer a man was attached to it, the stronger was his devotion to
the battalion's honour and tradition. Hence when men were away they
felt an irresistible pull to go back even as they realised how appalling
were the conditions. One man in hospital with a wound declared
himself "fearfully homesick for the Battalion" and thought it "rotten
to be out of it." 148 Another, training for a commission complained
"this time in England, in fact, anywhere away from the Battalion is
just wasted and it is just the ... time actually with the Battalion
that count." 149 He asserted "I know my job is with the boys and
when I get there I will be as happy as larry." 150 Even a trip
back to New Zealand did not entice him. Similarly Private White
asserted "I never hoped for a blighty. I had mates and I didn't
wish to be anywhere else and they were the same." 151

For the Main Body men in the Battalion, the "stick to it" feeling
was particularly strong for they were intensely proud of having
been in it from the start. This pride meant a potent "contempt
for a man, especially a late reinforcement, who swings the lead." 152

It may be argued that so far as the Otago men were concerned,
membership in a clique and in the Battalion aided each man's ability
to endure by supporting an offensive spirit. Aggression was rewarded
with approval, inertia with disapproval. This concurs with Ashworth's
thesis that elite fighting units did not adopt a 'live and let live
policy with respect to the enemy. 153 The men of the Otago Regiment
prided themselves in their fighting skills and their performance at
Armentiere and Messines revealed their reluctance to live and let live.

A certain callousness, too, aided life in their world of maiming
and killing. Sergeant Harwood recalled the journey to the Passchendaele
front: "we saw all the men and horses dead and dying. It was terrible
but we just kept marching and didn't take any notice - you couldn't. Things were different there." Another reported being hit by a man's severed leg on the Somme. But as a matter of expediency it "did not do to worry too much about the sober side of War." Watson spoke for the majority:

One becomes a trifle callous over here and yet in a way I am glad it is so. Once a chap was greatly upset when death forced itself on him. Now when we hear someone we knew well had been killed or 'gone west' we say 'Poor chap' and with a jolt we think of his people at home or his wife and then we go on and back again to the old war job ... sometimes one almost wishes that others at a distance should see with our eyes.

Certainly being at the front, particularly during the frenzy of a charge, men experienced an anaesthetization of their former civilian sensitivities. One soldier commented that the death of a friend hit him much harder when he had been "away from the killing part of the war for 2 months or so." Private White summed up the mentality of the infantryman: "You see things occur, they just come in a flash and they're gone in a flash and you forget all about them. We never thought about what was happening. You had to accept it that was the lot of your life."

Men, nevertheless wanted some meaning or purpose which would make their "lot" more tolerable. For most trench fighters some commitment to country and cause was retained, they were "doing a little for the great cause." Some sought to believe that war, in itself, was a positive and beneficial experience. Charles Kerse told a friend that "a trip out here will be the making of him" and another declared his two years' experience worthwhile because of all he had learnt. The war made many feel much older than their physical years and some no doubt looked it. Sergeant Kerse, who had the appearance of a 34 year old man in 1917, was in fact only 22.
Religious significance, too, came to be attributed to their ordeal and Private Grant recorded a general "belief going round that this war will finish at the biblical time of forty-two months." Some were sustained by a profound hatred of the enemy and committed to their defeat. It is interesting that these were not generally men who came into frequent and close contact with the Germans. One old soldier still declares vehemently:

To hell with the Huns. There’s only one good hun and that’s a dead one. You can’t trust them and they’re dirty with it. We were stretcher bearing with big red crosses on our arms and we were picking up Huns as well. But once they fired on us we left the Hun where he was, he could die. ‘Good luck to ya Mate’. Never tell me there’s a good Hun. They’re rotten and they stink, they still stink. They’re a bad breed. They always were, right through history, always been the dirty mob.”

Such sentiments were naturally extended to all Germans and some demanded to know why enemy aliens were not interned in New Zealand. One pledged: "if any of us get back and those people are kicking round there will be some rows ... one chap is going to pinch some grenades to take back ... and give those Germans fireworks." Enemy aliens were withdrawn from the N.Z.E.F. in August 1916 after one desertion. For, the soldiers, some commitment to country and cause, a belief in the intrinsic value of their war experience; a desire to destroy the enemy or some other convictions helped to sustain them in their unpleasant task.

These New Zealanders were resigned to their fate but they continued to resist being made into automatons in the British Military Mold. They were fighters, but they abhorred all attempts to make them into unquestioning soldiers and though "not too bloody much" of the British officers for whom the ability to salute, and polish buttons were the judge of a soldiers' worth. Lance-Corporal Maloney recounted:
an inspector from the War office did the rounds ... and fairly spat fire and brimstone ... although I fancied we drilled rather decently. We stood to attention like the Grenadiers while he fumed up and down waiting for someone to move. One poor hound actually dropped his rifle! You'd have thought the end of the world had come ... Then a kit inspection, and if there ever was a perfect and complete kit inspection, I'd like to hear about it. Happily, the little tartar started on the Imperial section first and gave them hell. By a fluke he ... discovered that the pull-through and oil bottle was missing from ... one rifle ... After that pull throughs and oil bottles were the only things that mattered ... and immediately there was a great scrounging for the missing articles. The Australians kindly presented us with enough to go round, after they'd been passed ... When our turn came ... [he] seemed somewhat disappointed to find that we had everything. 168

In contrast he recalled an inspection by the popular General Braithwaite when some in the back row "were actually shaving while the front were being inspected." 169

Particularly obnoxious to these New Zealanders was their time at Sling camp under British instructors where petty offences such as "not folding their blankets neatly enough" brought punishment. All agreed that the English Sergeant Majors were "bullying, foul-mouthed men", that they worked them "like donkeys" and that their system of training was designed to "cow the men and break their spirit." 173 Little wonder, as in Egypt, they rebelled against this type of tyranny. Trooper Colbran asserted: "The colonials give these S.Ms a rough time and won't stand bullying. All our men in the segregation camp (which is a few hundred) broke camp today." 174 They thought the English 'Tommies' rather pathetic for putting up with each treatment as the one Charles Kerse relates:

We had a good laugh one day watching a bayonet instructor teaching a crowd ... He held up his right hand and said 'see here I have five fingers. When I double them up, it forms a knot and with that knot I will hit you between the eyes and see if I can't knock some sense into your wooden skulls.' The coves just gaped at him ... If an
As a sergeant himself, Kerse found them "twice as easy to manage as our coves." 176

Moreover these Otago men detested the humiliating punishments dealt out for discipline offences. Particularly abhorrent was the First Field Punishment which compelled the offender "to work all day at the dirtiest work and then ... are strapped to a crucifix for two hours in public view." 177 Its cruelty and hypocrisy was obvious and one soldier wrote: "I don't know whether they do this in Germany in the army but I know if they did this with any of our prisoners there would be an uproar in the press." 178 Another reported: "50 of our fellows cut a Tommy loose from a wagon wheel doing field punishment. Devil of a row." 179 A few days later he noted: "a New Zealand Lance Corporal ... court martialled for kicking a Tommy military police in the dial ... Lance Corporal acquitted. Great rejoicing in camp." 180

Men expected competence, bravery, civility and common suffering from their own officers. Those who did not match up, particularly newly arrived officers trained in New Zealand, were treated with contempt as the "laugh stock of the Division." 181 They were seen as "wowsers who had been 'swinging the lead' in N.Z." while the men had been doing the real hard fighting and men found them "absolutely useless until they have been here for months." 182

On the other hand, those promoted through service received the loyalty and respect of their men and they, in turn, felt a loyalty to those under their charge. Charles Kerse explained: "Some N C O's are very tactless but I was long enough in the ranks to ... know to give every joker civility, which is the main thing." 183
He declared himself always "for the men and against the hanky panky, business any new half-pie officers tried to work on them." 184 Mutual affection cemented the bonds of loyalty across the ranks for all those who had to endure the same hardships.

The world of war certainly was not what the men had anticipated and most would have gladly left it but there was no honourable escape apart from death, wounds or madness. Their fatalism, their manhood, their comradeship and some belief in the rightness of their cause, helped them to endure the ordeal of the War. These soldiers had become 'invisible' to the world they inhabited as civilians and gradually that world became less and less real, its values less and less relevant. From four years of War, the combatants were to derive a new outlook which strengthened their old attitude towards discipline but incorporated a host of new values and standards alien to those who had not inhabited their new world.
CHAPTER THREE

FOOTNOTES


5. Ibid


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50. A. Aitken, Gallipoli to the Somme, p.172.


57. Private D.A. Grant, L. 14/10/1916.


60. Ibid., L 9/10/1916.

61. Ibid., L 1/10/1916.


63. Private D.A. Grant, L. 20/12/1917.


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120. Private D.A.Grant, L. 20/9/1917.
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132. Ibid., L. 9/5/1917.
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134. Ibid., L. 28/12/1917.
135. Ibid., L. 16/1/1918.
138. Lance Corporal J. Maloney, L. /5/1917
141. T. Ashworth, Trench Warfare 1914-1918, p. 155
142. Eric J. Leed, No Man's Land, p. 25.
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CHAPTER FOUR

ESTRANGEMENT

"In your dreams now you were never a civilian, you were a soldier. Even when you dreamt you were back in New Zealand you were a soldier. It was your life."


The world inhabited by the Otago trench fighters of World War I was dramatically different from the normal civilian world, and as a result, they too, became 'different'. The most obvious change came in the combatant's growing disillusionment with the war he was nevertheless committed to fight to the end. He had not anticipated the long years of torture which involved wretched and often foul physical conditions; exhausting labours, varied privations; continuous deafening noise; unmitigated tensions; horrific carnage; hideous sights and desperate depression and hopelessness. More unexpected and less obvious to detect was the general despondency caused by the soldier's realisation that in this new world he was not man but fighting material, 'cannon fodder'. This was a violent descent from the soldier's initial naive and lofty image of the role he would play in the War, in which bravery, courage and daring were to be the foremost element. To varying degrees all combatants had viewed the War as an unprecedented opportunity for the hero in them to break forth. But, this was the first truly modern war and its mechanisation somehow diminished the individual's significance in its final outcome. As one man lamented "to see the great numbers ... that come here to shoot makes me see how little one man counts." 1

The hardest thing for the ordinary soldier to endure was the "monstrous boredom, the exhaustion, the unheroic, mechanical day-to-day War in which terror, fear and death were inserted." 2 Sometimes for
months, men could only record, to their utter distaste, the performance of some dull, commonplace labour, digging, carrying, cleaning. After two months of carpentering in camp, one man declared it "the most monotonous and sickening" time he had ever had. Still there a month later, he became convinced that the authorities had forgotten about him and later, he wrote almost apologetically "this does not sound much like the war you read about." 

Mechanization had blown the war into a monstrous operation in which there was no place for individual heroism. Eric Leed described the ordinary soldier's experience as one of "social descent" of "learning how to become a common man" whom nobody released and who had to do his grey, anonymous dirty work instead of heroic deeds! One man found that after two and a half years as a Private, he had great difficulty studying for an N.C.O. examination. He reasoned:

that the habits and practice of War do not develop one side of the brain. In the ranks, for instance, little intelligence is needed. The rations arrive automatically, billets are found and a great organisation wafts one about from one sector to another like pawns in a great power game. Brains are not necessary. 

Similarly, one veteran recalled with keen disappointment and disgust: "It was a case of have no brains, have no understanding, just be a clod ready to do what you were ordered and no questions asked." They were disgusted that they often read more about the War in civilian newspapers than they themselves knew and many complained of the humiliating way they were treated, as if their intelligence, their emotions and their dignity were blindfolded. Trooper Colbran described one such occasion:

Some bishop gave a service in church. As many of our Company as could be found were mustered and marched up to church. There they were told to dismiss and go into church as though voluntary. A few went in and some of these were sent out again to make room for officers.
For these soldiers, leave to England was the principal haven in which their humanity could again emerge from the depth to which it had been driven. These ten day respites were fairly infrequent, once a year or less. But during that brief stay men could be men again. They could eat hot food, sleep in a real bed, on a soft mattress, between clean sheets and they could wash as often as they liked. It was a glorious feeling to be able to mingle with ordinary people who were not afraid to walk in the open. It was heavenly to have the affections of young women even if they had to be bought.

Men on leave toured every conceivable place of interest in London and other parts of England: Westminster Abbey, the Tower, Parliament buildings, Buckingham Palace, St. Paul's Cathedral, Hyde Park, the theatres, the matinees and many more. They were the finest sons of the Empire and they had come to see the Mother Country for themselves. They were proud to be New Zealanders and, as the magnificent Anzacs fighting so far from home, these Otago men became the recipients of much English hospitality. One soldier declared:

We always stick for the slouch hat, our national headgear. If we discarded that we would lose our individuality, and our birthright. The old hat acts as an 'open sesame'. It is surprising the number of people who come up to us in the streets and invite us into their homes. 10

Yet, Otago men came to realise that England was not all that it had been made out to be. Charles Kerse lamented: "london people give me the blues, they look so miserable and are so horrible to speak to." 11 One man thought London "a city of smoke and commerce" 12 which compared to the beauties of Paris "fades into a dirty slum." 13 In the same vein Private Grant concluded after a few days of sightseeing: these old shows are right enough in their own way but do not impress the Colonials like the old country people who seem to look on them with adoration. They are all so wrapped up in their old styles that the devil himself could hardly shift them. 14
The men had seen more of the world and in its light their previously held assumptions about others and about themselves became changed. Britain no longer seemed so mighty, so grand, so full of all that was wise, good and powerful. These New Zealanders' experience in the war had disillusioned them about the fighting capabilities of the English Tommy. They were generally described as small, pale-faced, lacking in spirit and intelligence and on the whole "a very miserable class."  

The Otago men's contempt for them is revealed in Sergeant Kerse's account of one group of 'Tommies' he had to instruct during his time in England:

The are the worst crowd we have had and seem to be devoid of intelligence... I had to take charge of the firing party... and it is a job to keep these stupid owls from shooting one another... during gas drill one awful specimen couldn't breath through his mouth at all and he was nearly strangled. The Sergeant Major said 'let him go Sergeant. The sooner he is gassed the better'... it is fearful to see these starved wretches.  

Their inferior quality was judged to be the price paid "for the boom times of the Nineteenth Century when Britain built up her vast wealth... The workmen and their women folk have paid in flesh and blood and each succeeding era sees a further decline."  

Criticisms of Britain's conduct of the war, also increased in harshness and severity. Private Grant complained that had "they had some of the go of the colonials ... there would not have been so many casualties in this war." Moreover he thought it "a damned shame the way they are shoving us into it and letting the Tommies shirk." Bomadier R.H.Scott recorded on 4 June 1916:

Just received news that the much boasted of British fleet has been knocked about. I am half glad of this as it will take some of the swank out of them and waken the cabinet into action which is badly needed.  

The British Government's under-payment of its soldiers was also judged to be scandalous. One wrote:
If the government can pay men five or six shillings per day for work behind the line then they ought to pay the same to the man who risks his life instead of a measly shilling a day especially when they do such sensible things as supplying the enemy with gravel to build pill boxes with. 21

By the end of 1917 Private Grant declared himself "looking forward to America to finish the war ... the British haven't got enough grains." 22 Such sentiments seem to confirm the opinion of Lieutenant Black of the Otago Mounted Rifles. After the Gallipoli campaign, he judged Britain a "shattered idol" and predicted that "this war instead of drawing the Empire together will drive it apart as the Colonials will no longer worship the fetish of English troops or English institutions." 23

New Zealand as a nation no longer seemed so inferior and subordinate to Britain, and many became convinced that "a great deal of prestige had passed to the colonials." 24 All agreed that "the average colonial ... has as much polish and just as good idea of the fitness of things as the average Englishman." 25 Lance-Corporal Maloney declared: "We ex-civilians are the prototypes of the new army ... our men and the Canadians and Australians are universally sound right through" 26 and possessed "the nerve and capacity to rise above harsh conditions the like of which had never been equalled before." 27 The Scottish soldiers, too, were accorded these dazzling attributes. They were well loved by the Otago men for their fighting capacity, similar dispositions and familial ties. One soldier remarked that it was "surprising how many Jocks have brothers in the N.Z.E.F." 28 and many agreed that "the New Zealander and the Scotties get along like brothers" 29 while the "Tommies get the cold shoulder". 30 In fact Kerse commented that "they hate the Tommies worse than we do." 31 and thought it "a great pity all the British army is not Jocks." 32 These were the men who would destroy the 'Huns' and win the War for mankind.
Until May 1916, the Otago soldier's perception of his enemy was based on the abstract images produced by propaganda. The Germans were portrayed as aggressive, barbaric, destroyers of culture, violators of the aged and young and so forth. An image which evoked a fierce hatred and gave a justifiable motivation for killing. However, this image was to become transformed by the War. The soldiers came to see that the enemy was neither entirely evil nor entirely different from oneself. This process of empathy was facilitated by the enemy's proximity and endurance of the same stresses and hardships. Private Hart, after complaining about the ghastly conditions of the 1916-1917 winter, added that "as Fritz is probably in the same position, it works both ways."  

Fred White recalled "when we were doing fatigues at Armentiere we'd hold our shovels up for old Fritz to have a shot at. If he missed we'd wave our shovels then he'd have another go." Some recognised that the press was often unfair. Eric Lake stated: "the propaganda about the brutal Huns and that wasn't right. They'd say these Huns shelled churches but they didn't say that we had observation posts up the towers." 

Even more forcefully, the aftermath of the Passchendaele debacle showed the Otago men that the German was a decent sort of person who, like oneself, could be trusted to keep his side of the bargain. A reluctant admiration resulted. Private Grant informed his friend:

Old Fritz treated us pretty fair. We had a sort of a truce to get the wounded in, they had a rough time lying out all night in the rain and plenty of them were nearly dead from exposure... I saw one come down from the wire after lying out there for three days, he picked up a water bottle had a drink came stumbling down to our line and what a cheer he got; old Fritz could have shot him easily too, yet for some reason they did not.
And so the vehement hatred so strenuously fostered in their training
days largely faded away in the personal documents of trench fighters.
One veteran sighed, almost apologetically, as he said "No they weren't
bad only if you didn't kill them they were liable to kill you. It was
a stupid game." In We Will Not Cease Archibald Baxter recorded
the consensus of the soldiers that "if the War were called off, they'd
become friendly in no time." This was contrary to the prevailing
civilian attitude towards the Germans which had continued to correspond
to the abstract propaganda images, and it was one of the differences
that signified the soldiers' estrangement from the civilian society.

World War I was an experience of radical discontinuity. In it,
the soldier's identity, which had been formed by his interaction with
those closest to him, his parents, friends and lover, was disintegrated.
The psychic contradictions presented by the two worlds and the conse-
quent modification of the soldier's outlook meant that he was
literally "made" strange to the people, the things and the attitude
of his past.

Religion was one aspect of their former world which became
almost obsolete in their new one. Corporal Maloney informed his
wife:

Sunday existed in our minds merely as the day of the
tobacco issue. The army takes no heed of the Sabbath.
The men of God can do but little. The war is a godless
monster. During the last few days I have thought things
over and wonder why in these times of stress the lads
have not responded to the spiritual urge. Perhaps it
is that death holds no fear for those who have experienced
the spell of modern war. The indifference to the hereafter
is one of the remarkable sides of army life. 39

The soldier could not help but notice the underlying contradiction
between the teachings of Christianity and his activities in the War.
Archibald Baxter challenged:
Was there a parson at the Front who dared to preach: 'Thou shalt not kill' that all men are brothers and God the Father of all, irrespective of race, creed or colour, and that things being so, the combatants on both sides should fraternize with the enemy. 40

Correspondingly Christmas day meant no more for the soldier than the possibility of a better feed. Its message of 'peace and goodwill to all men' was so blatantly contrary to war as to verge on the absurd. L.M.Hart told his parents stoically 'My Battalion will be in the line for Christmas day ... I suppose someone has to be there Christmas or not ... well it is not much use wishing you a Merry Xmas and a happy New Year ...' 41

For the majority who were without any strong religious convictions, Christianity and the values and morals associated with it were rendered somewhat meaningless once the complex of social relationships with which they were associated were suddenly swept away. Accordingly many of the former social and moral restraints fell away. In Civilian Into Soldier, John A. Lee describes the soldier's mentality:

I've sold tea and taught Sunday School, been pure all my life and now I'm going to get killed. I was a simple Christian patriot ... now I don't believe in God any longer. I don't want to sell tea. I could kick myself for all my lost opportunities. I want to drink wine instead of cocoa ... all my life I've been in a mental cage and now I'm out of it but I'm going to get killed before I get a chance to be a healthy sinner. I had to get into this bloody uniform to get out of my cage. 42

The high incidence of V.D. revealed one area in which restraint was loosened. On leave the soldiers had a short respite from hell and they wanted something that was the farthest removed from it. They were not deliberately unfaithful but absence did not make the heart grow fonder. Those women who waited at home would always wait because war was interminable and they were likely to be dead next week. Thus a parson's severe condemnation evoked this response from one soldier:
I sympathised a bit with him... but he has not been out here long and if he were suddenly transferred from all the hell and mud and stench of a front line to leave in either Blighty or Gay Paree, he might fall badly too. 43

One veteran recalled:

There was a chap who always said he wouldn't have anything to do with girls. He was going on leave and other chaps told him that he would never know when he would get killed and while he had life in him he should enjoy himself. Well, when he came back he told us that he had enjoyed himself. 44

Research of Colonel Ashburn of the United States army and Colonel Harrison of the British indicate that "the all-round risk of infection from illicit sexual intercourse is about three per cent." 45 New Zealand troops had individual disinfection kits and were issued with six prophylactic tubes every time they went on leave, being thus, one of the most 'protected' armies. Nevertheless their V.D. rate was amongst the highest of the Imperial troops. 47 Clearly then there was a great deal of illicit sexual intercourse going on. The army's attitude is described by Lance Corporal Maloney:

Drony palmed off the job of giving the company their leave instruction... He said 'countless Mothers' will bless you for what you're about to do.'... When I read it, the subject matter was of such an intimate nature that I demurred. Well, being on order, out I went and addressed the assembled company ... I then proceeded to read to them the pamphlet giving instructions in the use of preventatives and prophylactics. I hadn't proceeded very far when there was a titter in the ranks which became so infectious that the whole company burst into loud laughter. This of course made it hard for me to keep a straight face. I then lectured them. Whatever our private views were on the subject of morality the Army being a soul-less machine, looked at morals from the purely practical aspect, that of the danger of needless wastage of man power. We were in this war to engage the enemy. To do this with the greatest efficiency it was necessary that each man be fit and therefore he should take every precaution to guard against the red scourge. There is no room for false modesty in war whatever the individual may think and do, the fact remains that the Military atmosphere in war time looks upon gratification of the sexual impulse as almost of necessary duty. Certainly the attitude
of many has changed. I suppose men herded together in close quarters, with hard food and outdoor life must naturally lose that aesthetic civilian outlook and as conversation naturally is rabelaesian, the general tendency is to look upon war time armours as something part and parcel of the routine of war. 48

This war mentality was also applied to drinking and gambling although periodic edicts, sermons and lectures frowned upon them with some severity. To the soldier who was directed to kill, these prohibitions of minor immoralities were seen to be a "straining at gnats while swallowing immense camels." 49

Trench fighters recognised that there were immense differences separating the worlds of peace and war, and men on leave expressed the sense of being in "another world." 50 Charles Kerse marvelled:

The first day I wondered if I was dreaming at all ... I often think to myself 'can this really be me, seeing Paris after all the hundred and one places I have been in where a yard either way would have been death.' It is amazing and I never thought there was such a lovely city within 14 hours train journey all those months I was in the line. 51

But in that world of peace, the soldier was only a temporary visitor and when his ten days were up he had to return to the business of war again. The longer they were soldiers, the more unreal peace became. John Maloney wrote in January 1917: "it is difficult now to realize what peace was like. We seem to have been fighting for many moons." 52

During that time, a subtle but basic change in outlook took place in the combatants. There was an increased tendency towards countering opposition by force and a general weighting of emphasis in favour of the physical as opposed to the mental and spiritual dimensions of life. This seems quite natural for physical force is, after all, the most basic characteristic of War. And just as they had imposed civilian standards and values on the military at the start of the war so men now, began to impose the outlook they
had acquired in the war on civilian situations. Charles Kerse advised his parents as regards their mention of strikes in New Zealand: "If they would recall what is left of the Main Body, we would give them strikes. A few Mills grenades would put the wind up them." 53 Similarly Leonard Hart cursed the civilian red tape which threatened to confiscate his prized, but forbidden, souvenirs which included German rifles, bayonets and waterbottles. He threatened to "smash them all to bits." 54 One Main Body man was disgusted that he had to pass a written examination to gain a commission. He wrote:

I came in here and settle to work but about half an hour and I sling all the books into the corner and say 'To hell with it!' After all these months of war, a man has to come down to this. If I get through it will be on the practical (what really matters.) 55

This emphasis on the physical or practical is revealed again in Charles Kerse's view of education. He wrote home:

Sports are a fine thing and I just wish they had more of it in my day. What the dickens does it matter if the kids don't learn much, if they get a chance to develop their frames and sporting instincts. I am as well off as the next cove and I learnt nothing at the High School. 56

Many soldiers sensed their increasing isolation and estrangement from the home front. They had become citizens of another world. Eric Lake explained: "In your dreams now you were never a civilian, you were a soldier. Even when you creamt you were back in New Zealand you were a soldier. It was your life." 57 This being so, they felt like aliens in that civilian world. Chaplain Watson wrote, after being wounded and detailed for New Zealand: "It is fine to get the chance of getting home again but after France and the men for so long one feels very awkward and shy ... like a child, one has to learn again." 58 Likewise, Charles Kerse was hesitant at the prospect of staying with some relatives while on leave in London and
remarked, "I have been so long used to being on my own and just pushing my frame into the handiest hotel that I rather dreaded having to be respectable and having to talk to people etc..." The next day he recorded with relief "I survived dinner all right and did not break anything." The soldiers were not comfortable or 'at home' with civilians. They neither altogether understood nor approved of their mode of thought. Kerse declared: "One thing I hate is this cursed respectability." Regarding promotions, he told his parents "I may not get a commissio min but would be quite satisfied to go back as Sergeant. It is very hard to explain it to you but I do not want you to be disappointed ... there is nothing in a commission from my point of view." 

As the war continued there developed a general aversion to the homefront. The soldiers had come to realise that those at home could not begin to understand what they were going through and even worse that some did not even seem to care. Captain T.R.Ritchie commented on the quality of some tobacco sent to them: "This stuff was mouldy and as far as we could see had never even had a nodding acquaintance with a tobacco plant." He added with disgust "apparently all the old stocks in the world are being sent to soldiers at the front." Moreover, many at home revealed a reprehensible ignorance of the soldier's lot. Trooper Colbran recorded in his diary "received letter from Mother ... asks why I don't ask to go home to New Zealand. Some people seem to have strange ideas of the army." 

The problem was that even had those at home wanted to know the realities of trench fighting, they could not without experiencing them first hand. Its conditions were too novel and its industrialized dimensions too unprecedented. Before John Guy arrived at the Front, John A. Lee wrote that those who had been there could not tell him
what it was like, they were "choked to silence by his wall of ignorance." For:

\[
\text{trench life had a content beyond length, breadth and depth... trench language could only be appreciated by the body that had wallowed in trench mud... the suffering... was beyond description, something men could know, something men could feel, something men could talk about only to those who had known and felt.}
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Other factors widened the chasm of incomprehension. Firstly, few soldiers wrote the truth in their letters. On the contrary these letters were often full of inconsequential trivia. John Laffin in *Letters From the Front 1914-18* suggests that the tendency to pitch the horrors in low key is due to the writer's protective mechanism obscuring some of the worst of his experiences. Louis Simpson speculates that: "To a foot-soldier, war is almost entirely physical. That is why some men, when they think about War, fall silent." John Ellis puts forward his belief that many of these men were only technically literate and had no experience translating their feelings into words. These explanations doubtlessly applied in some cases but three other factors were probably more important. For a start, knowledge that censors might read the letter must have placed a severe restriction upon a soldier's freedom of expression. Many alluded to this in their letters and some, to avoid the censors sent their letters via friends going on leave to be posted in England. An example is the extremely frank and condemnatory letter of L.M.Hart of 19 October 1917 describing the bungling of the Passchendaele offensive. A second reason, also suggested by Paul Fussell was the "decent solicitude for the feelings of the recipient." Ronald Watson admitted "there are things one tries to hide in letters and forget." What good could possibly result from telling the truth which was so often offensive? The overriding reason, however, for
the men's silence, was the fact that they found it impossible to convey the ghastliness to those who had not been there. P. Fussell noted that the presumed inadequacy of written words to convey the facts about trench warfare is one of the motifs of all who wrote about the war. The look, the smell, the noise were indescribable.

The rigidly censored press which tended towards a heroic grandiosity about the War reinforced civilian ignorance. Fussell quotes Barbara Tuchman on the raising of the idiom of warfare in Britain:

Retreat or advance, win or lose, blunder or bravery, murderous folly or an unyielding resolution, all emerge alike clothed in dignity and touched with glory... Everyone is splendid: soldiers are staunch, commanders cool, the fighting magnificent. Whatever the fiasco, aplomb is unbroken. Mistakes failures, stupidities or other causes of disaster mysteriously vanish.

The daily communiques supposedly describing the doings of each night on the Western Front were similarly concealing. Alexander Aitken noticed a limited selection of euphemistic adjectives such as "sharp" and "brisk" which he later learnt had quite precise meaning. An incident which involved "brisk fighting" or "sharp retaliation" meant that 50 or more per cent of a company had been killed or wounded.

Even before Gallipoli, one soldier had become suspicious of the news in the daily press. He remarked that it was always "the same thing, victory all the time, with never a reverse of which there must be plenty." After Gallipoli Private Hart informed his parents "Much that I have read in the papers about things alleged to have happened on the Peninsula is absolute nonsense." He cited the story of an Australian and a Turk who supposedly wrestled on the edge of a precipitous cliff and then fell into the sea and remarked that "in order to reach the water, they would have had to roll along about 100 yards of level beach."
Likewise Kerse advised his parents after being three weeks on the Somme: "I expect you will get big screeds in the papers about the New Zealanders and if you take my tip you will take it with a grain of salt. Some of the companies had stiff going to give them their due." The anger and bitterness which misleading reports of the fighting caused amongst trench fighters who had to live amidst its very real and very harsh reality is evident in this poem written by a wounded soldier in hospital:

To the War Vultures

(Written in Pont de Koubbkh Hospital in the Gallipoli days)

by D.H.L.

To say that you do not realise
Back in our dear Homelands;
And the papers duly patronise
Us and the high commands.

I know the filthy noxious flow
of words that hide the truth,
That cast a glamour a glow
0'er war that murders youth.

For phrases make a "Taily" sell -
"Naked troops" of "giant frame,"
And how we fought like "fiends from hell,"
And "war's the finest game."

You thrill to a "brilliant bayonet charge"
Through "storms of nickelled lead";
Why are the head-lines black and large?
"Well ...er... those who charged are dead."

Can nothing stop the poisonous flood
Of cheap and stupid lies,
And tell of shattered flesh and blood,
Depict the sacrifice?

Did they tell you aught of shattered thighs
And the sickening, crashing fall?
Can you hear the moans for water rise?
You hear them not at all!

What do you know of agony's thirst
When wounded have to lie,
Where Death is beckoning... who'll be first
To save them ere they die?
You do not know but you shall know
If ever we return,
And thrust the papers in below
The fire and let them burn. 78

The soldiers became resigned not only to death in the War but also to the truth that they were alone in comprehending the horrors of modern warfare. This induced them to withdraw more and more into their own fellowship. The very intensity of their suffering had given them a strange sense of pride and had welded them together in common identity. Men admitted that they talked less and less of 'home' 79 and some, who had pined for their sweethearts every day in the first months, made fewer and fewer mention of them in their diaries. 80 One remarked: "New Zealand seems a fearfully long distance away ... the future 'apres La Guerre' seems full of all kinds of vague possibilities." 81 But for some, there were no thought of 'apres La Guerre', for they had become so changed and so estranged that they no longer fitted into that other world. More importantly, the Western Front had become their whole world, everything that was important to them was here. They had nothing to go back to. Some even refused the opportunity of leave to New Zealand and this was, naturally near impossible to explain to those at home. With as much tact and reserve he could muster Charles Kerse told his mother:
"although some chaps took forward to a trip to New Zealand and build on it I never counted on a trip myself and have got into the way of just taking what comes along and feeling quite satisfied that everything is for the best." 82 Later, after rigorous questioning from his father, he admitted "I don't really want to go much." 83

In this frame of mind, the armistice of 11 November 1918 found some surviving Otago soldiers totally unprepared. Suddenly, the world they had grown to accept as possessing the immediately 'real' and
'worthwhile' things in life disappeared and many were at a loss as to how to react. Burton notes that the news of peace was received "without excitement."

In fact, virtually none of the diarists mentioned the armistice and those who did merely noted its occurrence. It is interesting that expressions of joy came generally from those soldiers who had been in France less than a year and also, mainly in letters to those at home who would have expected the soldier to be pleased. Corporal Ezekiel Mawhinney wrote "we have seen our last shell burst I think ... a man knows now that he will get back." But the majority were still somewhat flabbergasted and somewhat disconcerted at the prospect of peace. Fred White explained that for himself and his mates "it was unreal to think that we'd be going home some day."

The sudden dismantling of the new world the soldiers had inhabited meant for most a temporary loss of direction. For several years now, they had lived so intensely and exclusively for their battalions that all else had been forsaken. One lamented "some of the big purposefulness and strong determination characteristic of the past years ... have gone out of my life ... The tremendous task is done." Most recorded their subsequent activities cryptically. The only events described at any length were the various clashes men had with the military authorities. In one, the attempts of the 'Red Caps' to stop the gambling resulted in "a couple of them being shot by the colonials in the camp." Apparent preferential treatment of those newly arrived also led to some riots. Fred White protested that:

some of the ones just come were going home first and got more leave while some of us who'd been right through the war, maybe wounded once or twice, were passed over. And the older soldiers were given fatigues and we thought that the ones who'd just come should do them.
The realization that War was over found many soldiers anxious to throw off some of the restraining military disciplines. Leslie Herbert Sinclair recorded that on the sea journey back to New Zealand, the Colonel on board began to expound a long list of rules and regulations. Sinclair continued:

He did not seem to realize that the War was over ... someone on the outside of the assembly said 'Shut up', 'What's that' said the Colonel 'I'll have that man put in irons'. Like a shot the answers came 'shut up you silly old fool or we'll throw you overboard'. He did shut up and from that day there was no more discipline on that ship. 90

And so the men arrived home to the cheers of a grateful nation. But the cheers soon faded away as those who had remained at home sought to forget the War and return to normalcy. These civilians did not understand the soldiers' ordeal neither did they want to and they expected these returned men also to return quickly to 'normal'. Eric Lake recalled with disgust "you were a fine chap for going away but when you came back we were the lowest of the low ... we had to fight like mad to get recognised." 91 Bitterness and frustration was intense amongst returned soldiers who now had to "start at so many beginnings and build up little by little from new bases." 92

One badly wounded man denounced wholesale those men who had not gone to fight:

they are just white-livered, cold footed, rubber spined swines!... what right have these damned cowards to go to theatres, dances, football matches and concerts; to lie warm in bed at night and eat soft tucker by day-to-line their soft, easy-going useless lives, while I and the like of me have to go out and live, fight - aye, and die - like beasts. 93

The bitterness comes through again in another soldier who had been wounded at Gallipoli and returned to New Zealand in 1916:
I was working for a 'cold-footed' farmer who could have gone to fight. When the armistice was declared he shoots off to Dunedin to celebrate and leaves me to do all the work on the farm. If there was any celebration I think I should have had a bit. That chap was a mean cow and it did hurt.  

Some lucky few returned to their old jobs. Robert Wylie recalled that his "first day back at work was torture. Inside all day after being out in the open for so long. But "he sighed 'You had to adjust, there was nothing else for it." Some were not so fortunate. One protested: "When I came there was a girl in my job. I had been promised it, however, no job and you'd go to place after place and they'd say 'Oh well, come back after the next ballot'." They were understandably angry for they had risked their lives for their country and now they were forced to solicit jobs from, and compete with those 'wowsers' who had stayed comfortably at home. In April 1920, Leonard Mitchell Hart who had been a railway cadet before the War, wrote:

As for the railway it is unlikely that I will trouble them again, let them retain the gallant staff of ink slingers who stepped into our jobs the moment we stepped into khaki. At any rate I am a free man and not held down... by uncompetent heads of department.  

The 'homes fit for heroes' were bestowed only on the very lucky few. Hart informed his sister that he had no idea what he was going to do: "I went in for three different soldiers' land ballots but was not successful in any of them. The number in each ballot is amazing." In one ballot for three sections of the Cheviot Estate, more than 631 entered. It is no wonder that the Chanak Crisis of 1922 found him and many other returned soldiers eager to re-enlist. Some became so bitter, hurt and angry about their humiliating re-entry into the civilian world that they refused outright to speak about it even from the distance of 1982.
11. Those who returned maimed were even more to be pitied than the dead.
There is no doubt that the War had brought most of them intense pain, suffering and anguish. Their reintegration into civilian life, which rightly belongs to another study, proved for some to be equally painful. They were older men and the values they had acquired through the War had become etched into their very beings. They were back in New Zealand, back at home. But were they at home? The men who had endured the War at its worst had become everlastingly differentiated from everyone except their fellow soldiers; strong Returned Servicemen's Associations sprang up all over the country to honour this exclusive brotherhood.

In surviving a catastrophe, a man's attitude to it becomes subtly changed. The sheer hell of the War and the amount of "cash, energy, time, health, comfort and safety" sacrificed by the soldier made it something he would "not have missed for worlds." The overwhelming majority were glad they had gone and had "had a share in the biggest thing of history." They believed it was up to them to "remember the good times and forget the bad." and they clung tightly to their fervent conviction that "some good must come out of it all."
CHAPTER FOUR

FOOTNOTES


4. Ibid., D. 14/8/1916.

5. Ibid., D. 20/9/16.


12. Ibid., 23/6/17.

13. Ibid., 19/6/1917.


17. Lance Corporal J. Maloney, L. /1/1917.

18. Private D.A.Grant, L. 1/1/1917.

19. Ibid., L. 20/12/1917.


29. Private D.A. Grant, L. 1/1/1917.


36. Private D.A. Grant, L. 26/10/1917.


40. A. Baxter, *We Will Not Cease*, p. 112.

41. Lance Corporal L.M. Hart, L. 15/12/1917.


46. Ibid.


51. Sergeant C.A.Kerse, L. 31/7/1917.

52. Lance Corporal J. Maloney, L. 1/1917.


56. Ibid., L. 7/6/1917.


60. Ibid., L. 21/12/1917.

61. Ibid., L. 2/9/1917.

62. Ibid., L. 2/10/1917.


65. J.A.Lee, *Civilian Into Soldier*, p.43.

66. Ibid., p.43-44.


73. Ibid., p. 175.
75. F. M. Spencer, L. 12/12/1915.
80. particularly noted in the diary of R. S. Falconer, H. L.
82. Sergeant C. A. Kerse, L. 1/2/1918.
83. Ibid., L. 3/2/1918.
89. Ibid.
93. Anzac (pseud.), *On The Anzac Trail*, p. 204.


98. Ibid., L. 7/2/1920.

99. Ibid., L. 7/10/1922.


CONCLUSION

Out of a total population of one and a quarter million, New Zealand sent 100,000 of its sons in the prime of their manhood away to fight the Great War. What did these men encounter, what did they think, how did they feel and how were they changed by their experience? The answers lie scattered in fragments throughout the documents and accounts of New Zealand soldiers, seldom if at all systematically rendered as a dimension of War experience but frequently found in distinct and implied form. The War was unprecedented as was the intensity of experience which it spawned. In all sorts of ways the New Zealand soldiers were changed by it. Their experience seems very similar to that of Australian soldiers as portrayed by Bill Gammage. But there is one notable difference; World War I had a less significant impact on New Zealand nationalism.

It is obvious that the soldiers' perspective of the War was vitally different from the official or public perspective. A history of the War based on the accounts, written and oral of the men in the ranks shifts the balance from the military, strategic and political analysis frequently found in military histories to a more human one which focuses on the lesser men, seldom in the public eye. The experience of war needs to be examined from below just as every other sphere of social history should be examined from the bottom up as well as the top down. After all, the War was fought by ordinary soldiers as well as generals. The soldiers in the trenches were more than mere statistics; they were men.
APPENDIX

Infantry Organization

New Zealand offered one brigade at the beginning of the War. This consisted of four battalions, Auckland, Wellington, Canterbury and Otago. Each battalion is composed of four companies, in the case of Otago these were:

- the 4th Dunedin
- the 8th Southland
- the 10th North Otago
- the 14th South Otago

A Company consists of four platoons and a platoon of four sections. The approximate numerical proportions were:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>brigade</td>
<td>4,000 men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>battalion</td>
<td>1,000 men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>company</td>
<td>250 men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>platoon</td>
<td>62 men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>section</td>
<td>15 men</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

From 11 February 1916, another infantry brigade was added so that there were now two Otago battalions, the First and the Second.
1. Diaries and letters


Allen, John Hughes, officer, D. 1915, H.L.

Colbran, Benjamin Clyde, Trooper, O.M.R., farm labourer, D. 1914-1918, A.T.L.


Grant, David Albert, Private, O.I.R., farmer, 17 L. to Leslie McKillop 1916-1918, H.L.

Hart, Adrian Mitchell, Farrier, N.Z.F.E., L. to parents and sister 1915-1919, A.T.L.


Jones, Victor McPherson, Private, N.Z.M.C., draper's assistant, L. to parents 1918, A.T.L.


Maloney, John, E. Private promoted to Corporal, O.I.R., labourer D. 1915 - 1917, A.T.L.


Mawhinney, Ezekiel, E. Private promoted to Sergeant, O.I.R., Dunedin Training College student, L. to parents 1917-1919, A.T.L.


Sinclair, Leslie Herbert, E. Private promoted to Sergeant, N.Z.M.C. civil servant, "Reminiscences of a Retired Public Servant."A.T.L.

Spencer, Frederick Montgomery, Sergeant, N.Z.M.C., student, D. and L. 1914-1918, A.T.L.
Stewart, William Downie, Second Lieutenant, O.I.R., Member of Parliament, D. and L. to sister Rachael and Helen Rolleston 1915-1916, H.L.

Watson, Ronald Sinclair, Chaplain 4th class, O.I.R., clergyman, L. to parents 1916-1918, H.L.


2. Oral Interviews


3. Books and newspapers


The Anzac Book: Written and Illustrated in Gallipoli by the Men of Anzac.


New Zealand At the Front: Written and Illustrated by men of the New Zealand Division.

Otago Witness August - December 1914.
B. POST-WAR MATERIAL

1. Histories of the War


Waite, F., Official History of New Zealand's Effort in the Great War : Gallipoli Auckland, 1919.

2. Personal Reminiscences


3. Other Books


King, M. New Zealanders At War, Auckland, 1981.


