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Malcolm Ross: A forgotten casualty of the Great War

by Ron Palenski

A thesis prepared in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Arts
Abstract

This thesis examines the role of Malcolm Ross as the New Zealand official war correspondent during World War I and compares his performance and influence with that of his Australian counterpart, C. E. W. Bean. It outlines Ross's early life and attitudes to provide context for his appointment and explains the circumstances leading to his appointment, which were accompanied by terms and conditions that restricted his ability to perform the duties required of him. Criticism of Ross is explored in the context of the political climate in New Zealand; criticism of war correspondents generally is examined in the light of censorship and other government or military restrictions on what could be written. Despite the restrictions and criticisms, Ross was a prolific, active correspondent from 1915 until 1919. Comparisons with Bean are made throughout, both in terms of reporting during the war and post-war, especially with the effects on war historiography in New Zealand and Australia. The thesis concludes that while Ross was the most suitably qualified applicant for the unique position – the only official war correspondent to be employed by the New Zealand Government – his employers imposed restrictions that diluted the power of his pen. Ross paled into a historiographical insignificance compared with Bean, but the fault was not Ross's alone.
Acknowledgements

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My family knows how grateful I am for encouraging me while I pursued what was essentially a self-indulgence.
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Introduction

The name of Malcolm Ross is but a shadow in the past. His name is known to those who have studied New Zealand’s involvement in World War I as the country’s official war correspondent from 1914 until 1919. To the general public, however, the name is barely known. Even to those acquainted with his work, Ross remains an enigma. Two recent examples serve to illustrate Ross’s historical anonymity. A former career diplomat and civilian head of the New Zealand Defence Department, Denis McLean, recorded that New Zealand had no correspondents in World War I.¹ He wrote that when the New Zealanders went to France, they called themselves the Silent Division – “whether to make a trans-Tasman comparison or simply to establish taciturnity as the rule is not established. Certainly there were no New Zealand war correspondents to report from the front.”² An Australian, John F. Williams, in an attempted debunking in 1999 of the Anzac myth, mentioned Ross just once and said he was a Canadian.³ Williams recorded a meeting between the British commander-in-chief in France, General Sir Douglas Haig (later Field Marshal the Earl Haig) and some war correspondents, which included the Australian, C. E. W. Bean, “and the Canadian, Ross.”⁴

A lack of appreciation and understanding of Ross’s role has had considerable influence on the way New Zealanders perceived, and subsequently remembered and commemorated, the country’s part in the Great War. So scarce were books about New Zealand’s involvement in World War I for nearly half a century it was as if New Zealanders did not want any reminders about the events that supposedly helped shape the country’s nationalism. The Government produced four quasi-official histories in the immediate post-war years – books which are anodyne, almost unreadable and barely informative by modern eyes – there was a smattering of unit and regimental histories and some personal recollections, but it was not until the mid-1930s that classics such as those by Ormnd Burton, Robin Hyde and John A. Lee were published.⁵ Another two

¹ Denis McLean, The Prickly Pair – Making Nationalism in Australia and New Zealand (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2003), 103.
² Ibid.
³ John F. Williams, Anzacs, the Media and the Great War (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1999), 203.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ See O.E.Burton, The Silent Division (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1935); John A. Lee, Civilian Into Soldier (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1937); Robin Hyde [Iris Wilkinson], Passport to Hell (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1936). For the official histories, see Major Fred Waite, Official History of New Zealand’s
decades would pass before Alexander Aitken and Cecil Malthus produced, reluctantly so we are told, their reminiscences.\textsuperscript{6} Christopher Pugsley’s masterly \textit{Gallipoli – the New Zealand Story} seems to have ushered in the new era in World War I book publishing and historiography and a consistent stream has followed.\textsuperscript{7}

Numerically, New Zealand was always the junior partner in the Anzac joint venture that began at Gallipoli in 1915 and continued at different times on the Western Front.\textsuperscript{8} In a literary sense, New Zealand maintained that junior status after the war. Australia produced 12 volumes of Official War History which were seen as setting new standards for the genre and it has had a diverse and lively war historiography ever since. More than any other single person, C. E. W. Bean carried Australia’s battle honours on through the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. He was the official Australian war correspondent throughout the war, he was general editor of the \textit{Histories} and wrote four of them himself, and he founded and later directed the Australian War Memorial. Bean’s diaries, correspondence and other papers in the Memorial represent a Rosetta Stone of understanding of Australian involvement in the war (and of New Zealand as well).\textsuperscript{9} He was the progenitor of Australian war historiography and contributed in no small measure to the way in which Australians today perceive not only their country’s role in war, but themselves as legatees of their soldiers who had gone before. Visitors to the Australian War Memorial can see in large letters on a wall at the entrance Bean’s imperative: “Here is their spirit in the heart of the land they loved. And here we guard the record which they themselves made.”


\textsuperscript{7} Christopher Pugsley, \textit{Gallipoli – the New Zealand Story} (Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984).

\textsuperscript{8} According to Pugsley, 416,809 Australians enlisted from a population of about 5 million; New Zealand contributed 100,660 from a population of just over a million. See Christopher Pugsley, \textit{The Anzac Experience – New Zealand, Australia and Empire in the First World War} (Auckland: Reed, 2004), 69 and 276.

\textsuperscript{9} See Michael Piggott, \textit{A Guide to the Personal, Family and Official Papers of C. E. W. Bean} (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1983).
Bean is an honoured and revered figure in Australia, yet his New Zealand counterpart is barely known. Malcolm Ross, a Wellington parliamentary journalist, had a brief similar to Bean’s; it was intended he compile material for at least one official history and there was a plan for him to collect artefacts and ephemera with a view to establishing a New Zealand war museum. But where Bean succeeded in the tasks set him, Ross failed. Bean’s name and fame is still widely known in Australia; Ross’s name is known barely at all in New Zealand and his fame as a recorder of war is non-existent. Bean created a framework for an Australian collective memory; what Ross created has not been remembered.

Bean was chosen as the official war correspondent by his peers, members of the Australian Journalists’ Association. Ross’s appointment was preceded by bickering between New Zealand newspaper owners and editors and politicians. Ross was not the first choice. His appointment was controversial and shadowed by accusations of cronyism and of his having an over-developed belief in his own abilities. His appointment, and subsequently his reporting expertise and writing style, was criticised in Parliament. Bean’s reporting and later writing were central to the manner in which Australians perceived their country’s role in the war; his literary influence, and his development of what has been styled as the “heroic myth”, continues to shape Australian perceptions of the war. Additionally, Bean’s Histories have been described as setting a new standard for official military histories and, indeed, served as an exemplar for New Zealand to make a better job with its histories after World War II.

Set against Bean’s achievements, Ross’s influence on how New Zealanders came to perceive the war was almost inconsequential. Australians were sated with the works of Bean and others, but New Zealanders were starved. Four times as many Australians as New Zealanders served in World War I, but there was more than mere numerical reason why Australians remembered and imagined their role in the war in a way in which New Zealanders did not or could not. The role of Malcolm Ross was central to this dearth of understanding but the fault should not fairly or wholly be

attributed to him. Politicians and newspaper owners in an intensely polarised political world and others showing more self than national interest can also be blamed. New Zealand may have been poorly served by its first official war correspondent; but he was poorly served by those whose responsibilities lay beyond their own narrow interests. New Zealand suffered (especially by comparison with Australia) not so much because of the choice of correspondent, but because of the manner and circumstances in which he was chosen and subsequently by the way in which his ability to properly perform the duties allotted to him was constrained.

This thesis is focused on Ross’s role as the official war correspondent, but his experiences in the years 1914-19 cannot be taken in isolation. In evaluating how he performed his duties, it is necessary to provide context by sketching in background that led to his controversial appointment to such a potentially influential and opinion-shaping position. Factors such as Ross’s age at the time of his appointment – he was 52 in 1914 (Bean was 35) – and his depth and breadth of experience as a reporter need to be taken into consideration. Likewise, the fact that he had already led a full life and one of no little achievement. He was in most respects the ideal person for such a position when he was appointed in late March 1915 (the appointment eight months after the start of the war itself an indication of government vacillation). No other reporter in New Zealand had had such diverse experience as Ross and few could have matched his ability to acquire “contacts” – the lifeblood of journalists: he was well connected both in New Zealand and at the imperial core in London.

Unlike Bean, Ross left no diaries or papers other than a few letters. The corpus of his war’s work is his writing for newspapers and liberal use therefore is made of his dispatches to evaluate his effectiveness. These carry with them, however, the constant qualifications of censorship and the fact newspapers always had the choice of what to publish and what not to.

Ross fulfilled his duties from April 1915 until September 1919 yet for much of the time suffered from a chorus of coruscating criticism directed at him by politicians and some newspapers whose motivation seemed based on their political persuasion rather than a desire to more fully inform New Zealand of what its troops were doing overseas. Toward the end of the war, he was shunned also by the military hierarchy whose inherent distrust of journalists could flower again now that their expertise was no longer necessary to keep New Zealanders informed and to help with recruiting.
Australia, it will be argued, got its appointment right with Bean and he was given the tools and the support to do the job, not just for the duration of the war but for many years afterward. New Zealand, it is contended, also had the right man at the right time but got it wrong.

The first chapter provides the context for Ross’s appointment as official war correspondent in 1915. It traces his early years in Dunedin when he was prominent in sporting and journalistic circles and developed friendships with people such as James Allen and Thomas Mackenzie, with whom he had wartime associations when they were Minister of Defence and High Commissioner to the United Kingdom respectively. Ross’s career as one of New Zealand’s successful pioneer climbers is also traversed and demonstrates that he had a degree of fame in colonial New Zealand outside of his journalistic exploits. The chapter covers some of his newspaper assignments and his diligence and enterprise that led him to diversify into small publications about New Zealand as well as to write a book about his climbing days. It shows too that he went beyond journalism with some of his activities, including working for a British Government committee inquiring into the economic assets of Empire countries. His journalistic assignments with the Governor, Lord Ranfurly, and his reporting of the so-called Samoan rebellion in 1899, a catalyst for the start of his subsequent work as a war correspondent, are also covered.

The second chapter concentrates on the manner of Ross’s appointment to the role of official war correspondent and contrasts it with the manner in which Bean was appointed in Australia. It relates the series of events which led to the New Zealand Government deciding that it would appoint a correspondent rather than have a newspaper or group of newspapers send a reporter with New Zealand troops. It points out the virulent political climate at the time and how it embraced not just Members of Parliament, but also newspapers and how Ross was seen as an ally of the Prime Minister and leader of the Reform Party, William Massey. The chapter includes newspaper comment before and after the appointment of Ross and incorporates the conditions which governed it.

The unsuccessful invasion of the Gallipoli Peninsula by Imperial and French forces forms the centrepiece of the third chapter. It shows how Ross’s role as official war correspondent unfolded and deals with the particular constraints under which he operated in addition to the general constraints applying to other correspondents. Prominent among the latter are Bean and the Englishman, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, and
the chapter relates how homefront New Zealand and Australian understanding of the campaign was established. The chapter also explains the role of Ross’s son, Noël, during the war, and relates how Ross was criticised at home for his work, or a perceived lack of work, while with New Zealand forces.

A connection between criticism of Ross and the failure of the Government to appoint him to write New Zealand’s official war history is established in the final chapter. Although Ross was not involved in the officially-sanctioned war histories and wrote nothing for specific New Zealand consumption, he did write a significant contribution for a compendium history of the war published in London.

Although Ross was not able to fulfil the role of official correspondent to widespread satisfaction, and not even to his own satisfaction, the fault did not lie entirely with him. The thesis concludes that the restrictions placed on Ross, coupled with the self-interest of politicians and politically-aligned newspapers, prevented him having the enduring influence he could have had, and which Bean has had.
Chapter One

The early years: ‘I have been in some tight corners’

Malcolm Ross led a full and active life prior to World War I and many of his acquaintances and contacts later in his career were formed during his younger years. His involvement in journalism and outdoor pursuits, especially in rugby and mountaineering, led to his knowing a wide and eclectic range of people. Telling of his climbing exploits in particular led to his writing in the first person, a style unusual in newspapers for the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This chapter outlines Ross’s accomplishments and provides examples of the development of his writing style.

Ross was born on 13 July 1862, in the farming community of Saddle Hill, overlooking the Taieri Plain, the first of six children for Mary Ross (née McDonald) and Alexander Ross, who had emigrated from Scotland. The family moved to Palmerston where the children were educated and Malcolm subsequently went to the University of Otago, but did not gain a degree. In 1882, at the age of 20, he joined the editorial staff of the Dunedin morning newspaper, the *Otago Daily Times*, as a reporter. He was a prominent player in the formative years of rugby in Dunedin and played four games for Otago over the 1885 and 1886 seasons as a wing threequarter, two against Canterbury, one against Wellington and one against the New South Wales team of 1886. After an Otago trial match in July 1885, Ross was said to have played brilliantly. In an assessment of each player, the *Otago Witness* said of him: “Probably the fastest man in the team, in which he fully deserves a place. Runs and dodges well, but... is weak as a dropkick.”1 After Otago had beaten New South Wales in September 1886, the same newspaper said of Ross that he had “gone on steadily improving in the game, his kicking being better than usual and his collaring not so weak as generally supposed.”2

For all his supposed improvement and evident enthusiasm for rugby, Ross did not play again for Otago but two years later was appointed the Otago Rugby Football Union’s honorary secretary. It was a significant year for Otago rugby, and doubtless a busy one for Ross as well, because in addition to his reporting duties with the *Otago Daily Times*, his part-time secretaryship had to oversee the secession of Invercargill clubs to form the Southland Rugby Union and also to organise the opening matches of

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2 Ibid., 17 September 1886, 26.
The 1886 Otago rugby team. Malcolm Ross is second from left in the middle row. On his right is the Otago secretary, John Chapman, whom Ross succeeded in the role.

Malcolm Ross on Mt Cook.

National Library of New Zealand 1/2-002922-F
the first visit to New Zealand by a British rugby team. The British team, organised as a commercial venture by two professional sports promoters, Alfred Shaw and Arthur Shrewsbury, and captained by a Lancastrian, Robert Seddon, beat Otago 8-3 and 4-3 in its first two matches and later in the tour returned to Dunedin for a scoreless draw. At a banquet in the City Hotel in Dunedin on the night of the second match, Ross appeared on the speech list as one of the respondents to the toast to the press, which had been proposed by John Chapman, the treasurer of the Otago union and Ross’s predecessor as secretary. Another respondent to a toast that night was James Allen, a member of the House of Representatives and a vice-president of the union. Allen, like Ross, had played for Otago and the two men’s careers continued to intertwine until after the war. Another vice-president of the union, Thomas Mackenzie, also a member of the House of Representatives, apologised for his absence from the dinner but he too had a lifelong acquaintance with Ross.3

Ross and Mackenzie were together in a vastly different outdoor pursuit when, in December 1888, Mackenzie led a party organised by the Otago Daily Times to Fiordland to search for a Dunedin academic, J. Mainwaring Brown. Ross was assigned by his paper to report on the search. Professor of English language and literature at the University of Otago, Brown had disappeared when he left his two companions on an exploration party to the west of Lake Te Anau for a “short stroll” before lunch. Despite extensive searching, Brown’s body was never recovered. The venture into the harsh and largely unexplored hinterland was not a first for Ross and, indeed, he became among the foremost of New Zealand mountaineering pioneers.

Ross’s sporting interests were evidently diverse. He was said to be an enthusiast for athletics, tennis and cycling as well as rugby but his achievements in the first three sports appeared not to have matched those in rugby or, in the sport for which he was most noted, mountaineering. In athletics, Ross competed in 100 and 220 yards sprints in meetings at the Caledonian Ground in Dunedin and he had rueful reason to note while on Gallipoli 30 years later that his sprinting days were well behind him. In cycling, he was said to have been among the first in the South Island to ride a “high bike” (penny farthing).

Ross was a founding member of the New Zealand Alpine Club, was the second editor of the New Zealand Alpine Journal and was among a small group of New

3 Ibid., 4 May 1888, 27.
Zealanders who pioneered climbing, especially in the Southern Alps, spurred on by the unwanted prospect of visiting climbers being first to the summits of New Zealand’s major peaks. In 1914, Ross chronicled his mountaineering career in A Climber in New Zealand. James, Lord Bryce, a former president of the (English) Alpine Club and diplomat and politician, wrote of him in a prefatory note: “Among these native mountaineers Mr Malcolm Ross has been one of the most daring and most persevering.” Ross and a brother, Kenneth, first attempted Mt Cook in 1894 (and had to abandon the attempt because his leave from work had expired) and did not attempt to reach the summit of New Zealand’s highest mountain again until 1905 when, in company with Tom Fyfe, Peter Graham and Samuel Turner, the first successful traverse was accomplished. It was probably Ross’s finest mountaineering achievement, though he also made noted climbs of Mt de la Beche and the Minarets in the Alps, and Mt Earnslaw and the Remarkables in the Lakes district. The pioneering work of New Zealanders in the high mountains was characterised by their finding their own methods and their own routes, unlike climbing in Europe where guides led the mountaineers and where routes were well defined. This led to some accusations that the New Zealanders did not show enough caution, to which Ross responded: “My answer to that will be that we were always, or nearly always, doing pioneer work and so had to discover the dangers as well as the routes.” This spirit of taking risks to gain achievement was evident when Ross and Fyfe in 1897 made the first crossing from the head of the Tasman Glacier to the Whataroa. “Ross took as his motto a quotation from the Arctic explorer, Nansen, who had written that a line of retreat was a wretched invention and that it was better to keep looking ahead,” another noted climber and explorer, John Pascoe, wrote. “In other words, Ross saw that a crossing from the Tasman valley to the Whataroa would be such a tough proposition that it would be a case of burn the boats and press on regardless.” On the second day, Fyfe’s effectiveness was reduced after injuring a leg on concealed rocks and the pair also ran out of food but for some stale bread. Ross overcame the first problem by discarding his sleeping bag and taking Fyfe’s gear in his own swag, and the second by killing a small wren with a catapult.

For all the evident dangers, Ross took a phlegmatic, nonchalant approach to his writing about his exploits. He decided, he explained, to attempt the first successful

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4 Malcolm Ross, A Climber in New Zealand (London: Edward Arnold, 1914).
5 Ibid., 21.
7 Ibid., 114.
assault on the Double Cone of the Remarkables, overlooking Lake Wakatipu, while
"sauntering leisurely" on the wharf at Queenstown:

Pausing in my perambulation, I leant up against the paddlebox of
the little steamer Mountaineer and began to watch the play of
light and shade on the serried peaks of the Remarkables through
the rings of smoke which I puffed from my cigarette. Having
decided to climb, puffing more energetically at my fast-vanishing
cigarette, I resumed my walk at a brisker pace and began to think
out the plans for a lonely mountain climb.8

Recalling the traverse of Mt Cook in 1905, he wrote of a difficult part of the descent:

Graham lowered me down with one rope, Fyfe and Turner
anchoring on the rocks above. For a little way, by clawing at the
rock with feet and hands, and by the friction of my body, I was
able to descend with some slight amount of dignity and I told
Graham to lower away. Then, as I reached the part where the
[ice] chimney sloped inward from the perpendicular, I lost
contact with the rocks and hung suspended like Mahomet’s
coffin between heaven and earth. The strain of the rope round
one’s waist, threatening to effect a complete change in one’s
internal anatomy, and a vague clawing at air with one’s hands
and an equally vague searching for foothold with the nether
limbs as you dangle in mid-air at the end of a 40ft rope with
precipices and snow slopes of over a thousand feet below, have a
chastening influence on the most seasoned mountaineer, and,
however exhilarating the experience may be, it is always with
feelings of supreme satisfaction and almost devout thankfulness
that he once more comes to close grips with mother earth. At all
events, when after my brief and more or less graceful gyrations
at the end of that particular rope, I found the strain removed from

8 Otago Witness, 21 December 1888, 8.
my waist, and footholds and handholds once more actual realities. I made no complaint, even though the middle finger of my left hand, which had been cut on the sharp rocks, was spurting blood and dyeing the snow at my feet a beautiful crimson. 9

The mountaineering side of Ross’s life also led to his playing a direct role in the introduction of the European mountain antelope, the chamois, to New Zealand; an experiment in acclimatisation that Ross believed was “unique in the world”. 10 Ross met an Austrian naval officer and adventurer, Ludwig Ritter von Höhnel, in New Zealand in 1906 and discussed with him the prospect of importing chamois from Austria. Von Höhnel, who at the time was an aide-de-camp to the Austro-Hungarian emperor, Franz-Josef, said he would seek the emperor’s permission providing Austria in turn could gain kiwis, kea, kakapo and wekas. The two of them saw the general manager of the Tourist Department, Thomas Edward Donne, and the minister responsible for tourism, Joseph Ward, and the exchange was agreed, with eight chamois – two males and six females – arriving in New Zealand on 14 March 1907. Von Höhnel had evidently gained the blessing of his emperor because The Times in London, reporting on the animals’ travels, recorded that progress on their acclimatisation would be reported to the high commissioner in London and to the emperor, “who has taken great personal interest in the experiment.” 11 Ross wrote that on a subsequent visit to Vienna, he visited the zoo in Schönbrunn to which the New Zealand native birds had been transplanted:

All but one had died. He was a sedate and venerable kea and very sad he looked, confined as he was in an ordinary parrot cage. I said a few words to him in his own kea language, he cocked his head knowingly on one side and eyed me curiously as if he had heard the sounds before but had almost forgotten them. 12

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9 Ibid., 14 March 1906, 15.
10 Ross, A Climber in New Zealand, 3.
11 The Times, 13 May 1907, 10.
12 Ross, A Climber in New Zealand, 4.
Ross married Forrestina Elizabeth Grant, daughter of George and Forrestina (née Hay) Grant, at Knox Church in Dunedin on 7 March 1890. The witnesses were a sister of Forrestina’s, Catherine, and a medical student, Robert Church, who later worked as a medical practitioner in Naseby and Dunedin and served on the University Council. After a reception at George Grant’s house in Queen Street in Dunedin, the pair embarked on a honeymoon in the Tasman valley and thereafter Forrestina – or Forrest to use the hypocoristic name by which she was known publicly, though her nickname to Ross and intimates was “Bessie” – accompanied her husband on many of his tramping or climbing expeditions. She seemed to accept that gender determined her role. “I was the second woman to go so far up the glacier in those early days and by reason of my sex, I was constituted housekeeper and chief cook in our gypsy camp under the shoulder of Aorangi,” she wrote. Forrest readily matched her husband’s love of the mountains: “Very few who once go mountaineering fail to return. There is magic in the clear air and marvellous surroundings – the call of the Alps is alluring and insistent.”

Forrest Ross subsequently became the first woman member of the New Zealand Alpine Club. She and Malcolm initially lived in Great King Street in Dunedin before moving to Royal Terrace. Forrest had been born in Brixton, London, on 23 June 1860, and arrived in New Zealand with her family when she was 10. She was educated at Otago Girls’ High School, became an assistant teacher at Tokomairiro High School in May 1878 and trained at the Normal School, Dunedin, for a year before she went to the University of Otago. She became mistress at Forbury School in 1881 and then taught English at Otago Girls’ High School until her marriage, when she resigned. Their only child, Noël, was born in Dunedin on 5 December 1890.

When the family moved to Wellington, Forrestina became a parliamentary correspondent for the Wellington Evening Post and, later, the paper’s first “lady editor,” as the women journalists assigned to overseeing the women’s pages with recipes,

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12 Presbyterian Church Marriage Registers, vol 2 1890-91, Hocken Library
13 Otago Boys High School Old Boys Register (Dunedin: Otago High School Old Boys’ Society, 1963), 180.
14 Mrs Malcolm Ross (Forrestina Ross), Mixed Grill (Wellington: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1934), 9.
15 Ibid., 15.
fashions and other perceived women's interest stories were styled. Dunedin Member of Parliament, lawyer and family friend, William Downie Stewart, wrote of Forrest:

Her articles as a parliamentary correspondent were always bright and witty, and I have known members of parliament who sought her acquaintance in the hope that their speeches might find favourable comment in her weekly review of parliament as seen from the gallery. One country member said to me, 'My electors don't read Hansard, but they do read Mrs Ross's comments, so I hope they will regard me as a rising statesman'.

Forrest Ross was involved in an unusual incident in Parliament that reflected the male elitism of parliamentary politics of the 19th century and the quaintness of transplanted British tradition. She recalled in her book Mixed Grill that during a lengthy debate on the Estimates one year the Premier, Richard John Seddon, became frustrated by the delaying tactics of the Opposition and complained to the Chairman that there were strangers in the gallery.

This meant that the House had to be cleared of all save the members. So the men in the Press Gallery filed out and both the Speaker's Gallery and the Public Gallery were emptied and the doors locked. It was nearly midnight and there remained no one except Mrs Seddon and myself. The Premier advanced to the middle of the chamber and called out to Mrs Seddon to go home – she folded her work and went, leaving me, a lone woman, the only outsider. The Premier then rose and said, 'I call your attention to the fact, Mr Chairman, that there's a lady in the Gallery,' and Mr Guinness, looking straight at me, said, 'I see no lady in the Gallery.' He told me afterwards he considered the

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18 Forrest Ross, Mixed Grill, foreword.
19 Arthur Robert Guinness (1846-1913), MP for Grey 1884-1913, chairman of committees 1893-1903, Speaker 1903-13
Ladies’ Gallery, as in the House of Commons, quite outside the House and invisible to him and he meant no insult.\textsuperscript{20}

Malcolm Ross forsook the world of journalism in 1889 when he became private secretary to James Mills, managing director of the Union Steam Ship Company that Mills had founded in 1875. It was a time of rapid expansion for the company that came to dominate the New Zealand coastal and trans-Tasman shipping business. The \textit{New Zealand Free Lance}, a Wellington weekly newspaper, remarked later that Ross “was so successful as an \textit{Otago Daily Times} reporter that the USS Company marked him down as its own and made him a private secretary.”\textsuperscript{21} Two years later, Ross was joined at the company by his brother-in-law, Thomas Whitson (who had married one of Forrest’s sisters), who was the company’s secretary from 1891 until 1911.\textsuperscript{22} Ross stayed with the company until 1897 when he moved to Wellington to resume his journalistic career and became parliamentary correspondent for various newspapers. Professional duty must have overcome any residual loyalty Ross felt for the USS Company when in 1909 he reported on the loss of one of the company’s passenger steamers, the \textit{Penguin}, in Cook Strait with the loss of 75 lives. Ross reacted to what he called absurd rumours circulating in Wellington about bodies of the victims not being attended to. “Complaints have been made that the Union Company has neglected its duty,” he wrote. “I have no brief for the Union Company but I know from intimate general knowledge of all the circumstances that the local manager has been thoughtfulness itself and that he has worn himself out in an exceedingly trying ordeal.”\textsuperscript{23}

On hearing of the shipwreck, Ross borrowed a horse and rode to Oteranga Bay on the rugged south coast of Wellington where bodies and wreckage had been washed ashore. He was among the first on the scene and wrote at length of riding along the beach and finding the results of the disaster. It would have been a chastening experience and Ross – injecting a personal touch to his reporting, as he often did – wrote:

\textsuperscript{20} Forrest Ross, \textit{Mixed Grill}, 229.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{New Zealand Free Lance}, 3 September 1904, 1.
\textsuperscript{22} Gavin McLean, \textit{The Southern Octopus} (Wellington: New Zealand Ship and Marine Society and the Wellington Harbour Board Maritime Museum, 1990), appendix.
\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Otago Witness}, 17 February 1909, 33.
I am supposed to have nerves of iron and I have been in some tight corners in my time without feeling any qualms to speak of, but I confess that this hour’s solitary ride along the body-strewn beach made my heart ache. It was not so much seeing the bodies of men – that was a familiar sight – but what tore at one’s heartstrings was the sight of so many poor women and children drowned.24

By then, Ross was well established as one of the leading journalists in New Zealand. As with most reporters who spend any significant time working in Parliament, he became on first-name terms with the leading politicians of the day and, indeed, his and Forrest’s home at 32 Hill Street – with Parliament across the road – became “the frequent rendezvous for keen Parliamentary debates and intelligent discussions”.25 A particular friend was the Reform Party leader, William Massey, who lived with Malcolm and Forrest in Hill Street for some time. This association later led to the accusations of favouritism and cronyism when Ross became the official correspondent during World War I. While Ross undoubtedly would have benefited from handily-placed friends and acquaintances, his record of diligence and achievement was such that it provided ample evidence that he could also stand or fall on his own merits. The fact Ross was also the correspondent in New Zealand for The Times in London, at a time of strong and unquestioned constitutional and emotional links between the two countries, meant Ross was being courted as much by politicians as he was courting them. He also stepped outside of the normal bounds of newspaper writing when he and Forrest established themselves as theatrical agents, most notably for the visits to New Zealand by the Australian diva, Dame Nellie Melba, in 1903 and the Polish pianist and statesman, Ignace Jan Paderewski, in 1904. Ross’s standing as a journalist, mountaineer and entrepreneur led to his becoming something of a celebrity in his own right. Rather than merely writing the news, he became the news, an early 20th century version of the so-called “media personalities” of a century later. A measure of journalists acquiring this wider status is when they are written about in other publications and in 1904, the New Zealand Free Lance had this to say about Ross:

24 Ibid., 31
25 McCallum, DNZB, vol II.
It is quite a common practice in the United States for pressmen to leave Newspaper Row to become managers and *avant coureurs* for dramatic and musical companies. In the colonies, the pressman generally sits tight to newspaperdom and does not even go out on the road for a vacation. Are times changing? Are we in the experimental stage journalistically as well as politically? The Wellington papers have been capitalising Mr Malcolm Ross’s name as representative for Pianist Paderewski. There is no end to the experience Mr Ross is piling up into his journalistic life... now he has become the representative in the capital city of the prince of pianists, Paderewski. Here’s to you, Malcolm. May your shadow never grow less.26

Ross’s style of descriptive reporting with liberal use of the first person was well known to readers of the *Otago Daily Times* and the *Otago Witness* through the 1880s and his move to Wellington in the late 1890s introduced it to a wider audience. Because of his use of the personal pronoun, newspaper editors had to give Ross a byline — a personal attribution — rather than continue with the more common habit of the time of lengthy columns either without attribution or with some concocted pseudonym. This would have been done on the reasonable basis that in a story containing frequent use of the word “I”, it would help readers’ understanding if they knew who the “I” was. Readers would also be able to assign credibility by knowing the identity of the writer, and Ross’s considerable experience outside of journalism lent his reporting authority and gravitas. Ross’s penchant for using the first person, at a time when it was so infrequently employed by other writers, was not to go unnoticed by journalists on rival publications. There seemed also a touch of vanity about Ross and his use of the personal pronoun, a sense of name-dropping and showing he counted the famous among his acquaintances. A good example of this was when he interviewed, while still employed by the USS Company, the celebrated American raconteur and writer, Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain). Ross explained how he encountered the great man:

26 *New Zealand Free Lance*, 3 September 1904, 1.
My first glimpse of Mark Twain was as he was pacing up and down the vestibule at Menzies's [in Sydney] one evening after dinner; and, as the sporting reporters say, I spotted him at once. He is very like his portraits, only greyer, and there is no mistaking him. Later on it was my good fortune to meet him on the Union liner Mararoa, en route to Dunedin, and to have several interesting chats with him in the intervals during which he left his work for a change of scene and a smoke on the upper deck.27

Mark Twain showed he remembered Ross when he later wrote about his round-world tour:

Dunedin, same date ... the people are Scotch. They stopped here on their way home to heaven – thinking they had arrived. The population is stated at 40,000, by Malcolm Ross, journalist; stated by an MP at 60,000. A journalist cannot lie.28

Perhaps no series of stories established Ross in the national consciousness, and consolidated his growing reputation as a writer of substance, more than his dispatches from Apia during the so-called Samoan Rebellion of 1899, when monarchial succession in Samoa became caught up in the imperial aspirations of Germany, Britain and the United States. The three imperial powers had agreed to a treaty in 1889 providing for the neutrality and autonomous government of the Samoan islands and its first article provided that, when the king died, his “successor shall be duly elected according to the laws and customs of Samoa.”29 After the death in August 1898, however, of the king, Malietoa Laupepa, a dispute about succession arose and it was referred to the Supreme Justice of Samoa, William Chambers, an American. He decided in favour of Tāmāfili and supporters of the other claimant, Mataafa, rejected the decision “and strife and confusion ensued, in which the people and officials of German

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27 *Otago Witness*, 14 November 1895, 37.
origin were partisans on one side and those of United States and British nativity partisans on the other.”

Ross and another reporter, Frederick Rollett of the _New Zealand Herald_ in Auckland, went to the islands in February 1899 on a New Zealand Government trading vessel. Ross wrote:

> On landing, we find that feeling runs with much bitterness between the British and the Americans on the one side and the Germans on the other, and all sorts of lies and rumours were in the air till we felt inclined to agree with [Robert Louis] Stevenson’s suggested motto for an Apian coat of arms, ‘Enter Rumour, painted full of tongues’. The history of Samoan politics is too complicated for the average reader to bother with. It is a history of consular and commercial intrigue, and of mismanagement – a comedy of errors that occasionally ends in tragedy.

Ross reported that Samoa was in a state of anarchy.

> Once more affairs Samoan have reached the acute stage of civil war. Brave men have been shot down and their heads cut off within the municipal boundary. Food has been destroyed, the houses of natives and Europeans looted, whole villages ruthlessly destroyed by fire and women stripped and robbed of their clothing and jewellery. With three great powers like Germany, Great Britain and America holding sway here, one would think such a state of affairs utterly impossible. But avarice and duplicity, scheming and lying have disintegrated the little colony of Europeans at Apia and instead of peace and goodwill there is hatred, malice and envy and all uncharitableness.

Ross in his first despatch left no doubt about where he thought the fault lay:

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30 Ibid., 768.
To be sure, it would not have happened ... if the Germans had united with the British to prevent it, but they looked on idly while German agents fomented the rising. German spades were lent to dig the trenches and the modern German rifle is to be seen in the hands of rebels. What a satire it is on the tripartite control.

Ross again had Robert Louis Stevenson uppermost in his mind when he wrote:

Would that the thin, wasted figure of the Scottish scholar had been spared for a few years to finish his footnote to history. In what burning words he would have sent it forth to all the world. But the red-roofed house that just peeps through the palms of Vailima is tenantless. The weeds are running wild in the tropic garden, and we can only make pilgrimage to the tomb on the mountain that overlooks the harbour where, under the wide and starry sky, the sailor is home from the sea, and the hunter home from the hill.

Ross stayed in Samoa until May and though his writing clearly reflected the British imperial view – he at one point quoted Rudyard Kipling’s ‘The White Man’s Burden’ – he and Rollett attempted journalistic impartiality and objectivity by interviewing figures on all sides of the conflict, including the German consul and the rebel king, Mataafa. The rebellion ended with the three powers and the Samoans agreeing to abide by the decisions of a commission, which partitioned the Samoan archipelago between Germany and the United States. The Americans took eastern Samoa (Tutuila and the Manu’a group) and the Germans the rest. Britain withdrew claims to Samoa entirely, in exchange for various German concessions, including recognition of new German-British boundaries in the Solomon Islands and British treaty rights in Tonga. This confirmation of Germany’s imperial desires in the Pacific lasted until the outbreak of World War I, when New Zealand forces – with Ross again along for the ride as a reporter – retook Samoa for the Crown. The United States’ claim

32Ibid.
on eastern Samoa – initially to bolster its trans-Pacific communications between Hawaii and the Philippines – continues. Ross was back in the South Pacific a little over a year later, accompanying the New Zealand Governor, Lord Ranfurly, on a voyage with the express purpose of annexing the Cook Islands and Niue as part of the British Empire. The Cooks until then had had the status of a protectorate and fell under Ranfurly’s jurisdiction. Ranfurly had been to the main island of the Cooks group, Rarotonga, in April 1899 to hear a range of grievances and noted:

The petitions were chiefly grievances of the white population against the Natives, and there was nothing of any moment in any of them. The firebrand who seemed to have caused this state of affairs presented a huge petition with something like 78 counts in it. After having gone through about a dozen, and finding the facts entirely incorrect, my temper, in the heat, was aroused and, tearing the petition in two, I informed him that if he gave any further trouble, a sitting of the High Commissioners Court would be held, the result of which might possibly be his being deported from the island. From that day, we had no trouble.33

Later in 1899, the Rarotongan queen, Makea, petitioned Ranfurly in Wellington for the Cooks to be annexed rather than continue as a protectorate. Approval was granted by the Secretary of State in London and a light cruiser, the Mildura, in which Ranfurly had made his first visit, was despatched from Sydney to Wellington to pick up Ranfurly and his party, which included Ross. They left Wellington on 28 September, 1900, into the teeth of a gale “and we certainly had by no means a pleasant time for many hours after. Dinner was a most difficult and unpleasant meal, the boats were being lifted on the davits by the seas and the cutter was washed away,” Ranfurly wrote.34

Ross in his first despatch echoed the Governor’s sentiments, if a little more colourfully. Noting that some of the sailors and marines missed the meal:

33 Two expeditions to the Cook Islands and annexation, New Zealand notes (1) – 1897-1901 [the Earl of Ranfurly], (MSX-4950, Ranfurly family:papers, Alexander Turnbull Libray) (hereafter ATL).
34 Ibid.
Why, the whole of the Pacific and all the colonies might have been annexed by a foreign power for all we cared ... As to the chronicler of this cruise, he must candidly confess to a few hours’ silent meditation in the seclusion of his cabin and a thorough agreement with the philosophy of a junior lieutenant who remarked that a man who would sell a farm to go to sea must be a born idiot.\(^{35}\)

A condition of Ross’s inclusion on board was that he forfeit his cabin should someone more important require it. When the Mildura arrived off Rarotonga, this happened. Ranfurly’s representative on the island was Colonel Walter Gudgeon, a noted New Zealand figure who had seen much service in the Land Wars, had been Under-Secretary of Defence and a Native Land Court judge. Gudgeon, appointed by Ranfurly the year before and seen as having great influence in the Rarotongans’ decision to agree to annexation, took the cabin and Ross was consigned with his bedding to wherever he could make himself comfortable.

[For] the rest of the cruise, I had no permanent habitation and was like the Son of Man, in that I had no place to lay my head – always excepting the poop deck, the signal-house, or the wardroom floor ... on those nights on the way to Penrhyn, we would take a blanket or a rug and camp on the poop deck. And in the middle of the night, or the early morning, the sudden tropic rains would come swishing under the awning and, before we knew where we were, we would be soaking wet and would have to take up our beds and run.\(^{36}\)

Ranfurly’s annexation run extended from Rarotonga to the outer Cook islands of Mangaia, Aitutaki, Penrhyn and Manihiki and then on to Niue and the process of pomp and formal annexation proceeded without complications, Ross faithfully recording every stop and every gubernatorial pronouncement. At Penryhn, the northernmost of the Cooks, Ross, the Mildura’s doctor and Ranfurly’s aide, Charles

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 24 October 1900, 70.
\(^{36}\) Ibid., 21 November 1900, 11.
Hill-Trevor, at Ranfurly’s request visited a small island near the main island of Penrhyn that had become a leper colony. The disease, according to Ranfurly, had been brought to the islands 21 years before by locals returning from Samoa and Hawaii. Ross said about 20 people were on the small island, of whom 12 or 13 showed signs of leprosy. “The fact there is leprosy so close to New Zealand should be a matter of some concern to us, and is another argument in favour of annexation and proper control of these islands. It is one of the problems of the Pacific that will have to be grappled with.” Ross photographed several of the sufferers for the doctor. “Never have I had, and never do I wish to have again, such gruesome sitters.”

Ross had shown a keen interest in, and aptitude for, photography since his earliest climbing days and as a result he left not just written accounts of his various travels, but also photographic records. Ross’s photos from the Mildura cruise were gathered in an album by Ranfurly and subsequently deposited in the National Library of New Zealand. In addition to sitting wherever he could and typing his dispatches, Ross also had to process the glass plates from his camera. On the trip to Penrhyn, just south of the Equator, Ross recalled the Fahrenheit temperature as being in the 90s. “At night-time I would turn the engineer’s cabin into a photographic darkroom. With every crevice shut, and the lights still burning under a red cloth, it would immediately become a Turkish bath and the perspiration would trickle down and try to spoil my plates.”

Ross continued his journalistic association with Ranfurly in 1904 when he was a member of the Governor’s party that ventured into the Ureweras. Ranfurly had been invited to be the first Governor to meet the Tuhoe people on their own land in 1901 but the visit had to be called off because of the death of Queen Victoria. “[It] was not our custom to attend gatherings when the greatest lady in the land had died and it would be impossible to come at the present time but I would go at a later date,” Ranfurly recorded. It was an arduous journey when it eventually took place in March of 1904, comprising train from Wellington to Napier, four hours by steamer from Napier to Wairoa, a nine-hour drive to Waikaremoana in wagons each pulled by three horses, another nine hours by boat and horseback to Ruatahuna, another

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37 Otago Witness, 28 November 1900, 11.
38 Album documenting the Pacific cruise of Lord Ranfurly on HMS Mildura in October 1900, and the annexation for New Zealand of the Cook Islands and Niue (ATL PA1-q-633).
39 Otago Witness, 21 November 1900, 11.
40 Ranfurly, New Zealand notes (2), 1901-04 (ATL MSX-4951).
horseback ride of five and a half hours to Te Whaiti, then another wagon ride of six hours to Ruatoki. The Minister for Native Affairs, James Carroll, and Gilbert Mair, then a resident magistrate among the Arawa people, were also members of the party, acting as guides, interpreters and generally fonts of all knowledge of the Tuhoe people and the fighting that had occurred in the Urewaras during the Land Wars. Mair had been awarded the New Zealand Cross in 1866 for his gallantry commanding “loyal natives”. Again, Ross supplemented his written dispatches with a photographic record of the trip.

Later that year, Ross took the unusual step of writing a letter to the editor of the paper that employed him, *The Times*, taking issue with a former governor, Lord Onslow. Onslow had questioned the accuracy of reports that Ranfurly had been the first representative of the Crown to visit the heart of the Ureweras. Onslow, Ross wrote in his letter, visited only the fringe of the Urewera demesne and said a proposal to take Onslow through the Urewera country “was coldly received and discouraged by the chiefs. That is no reflection on Lord Onslow’s popularity with the Maori people, but meant simply that the Urewera natives, at that time, were not friendly to the authorities.”

Ross accompanied Ranfurly on lesser trips and was with him during the visit to New Zealand in 1901 by the Duke and Duchess of York (later King George V and Queen Mary). Ross was an unabashed admirer of the Governor, as he made plain in a letter in June 1905 when Ranfurly had ended his vice-regal term and was back in England:

> Strictly between ourselves, Lord Plunket is not a worthy successor. The Maoris do not take to him – in fact, they are rather inclined to make fun of him and they call him ‘Blanket’! ... Altogether, everyone is disappointed with the new occupants of Government House, but perhaps it is because the former occupants set us a rather high standard. Anyhow, we should all give a great deal to see you and Lady Ranfurly and Major

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41 *The Times*, 15 December 1904, 4.
Alexander [Dudley Alexander, the Governor's aide-de-camp] back again.42

The Wellington weekly, the New Zealand Free Lance, chronicled, a little tongue in cheek, how Ross championed the Governor:

Malcolm Ross ... combats the assertion, or supposition, or fallacy, that princes, peers and governors have a continual picnic and no washing up. Malcolm has been with the vice-regal party on its extended trips and describes how the mail bags stare His Excellency in the face at every bend of the road, how mounted policemen chased him with telegrams, telegram boys, on roller skates, stuck him up at every rise, and motor cars, with kingly despatches, reared their heads from every hollow. When you read that the Governor is 'resting' in Dunedin, or 'spending a quiet day at the Bluff', you may generally take it for granted that both he and his private secretary are working 'eyes out' at despatches and private and official correspondence. Malcolm, who was at Government House during the Royal Tour, remembers how when the newspapers announced that the Duke of York spent a quiet evening at Government House, he and his staff, as well as the Governor and his staff, were working till long after midnight.43

Ross was no sluggard himself when it came to work. In addition to his daily output for newspapers, he also produced on his own accord various small publications extolling the scenic virtues of New Zealand and wrote descriptive chapters on New Zealand scenery for the New Zealand Official Year-Book.44 He also produced a small book on the Duke of York's tour. Its frontispiece was a poem called 'Welcome' by a brother, Macdonald, and it ended with another poem, 'Farewell', by his wife, Forrest.

42 Ranfurly, Letters 1905 (ATL MS-Papers-6357-11).
43 Free Lance, 18 June 1904, 4.
In between, Ross wrote enthusiastically about the royal progress throughout New Zealand and illustrated the whole with his own photographs.\textsuperscript{45} When the Duke and Duchess were in Wellington, Ross was summoned to Government House to show them a collection of his photos. “A number of views secured during the recent annexation cruise of HMS \textit{Mildura} in the Pacific Islands were also shown by means of the optical lantern,” the \textit{Otago Witness} reported.

Their Royal Highnesses were keenly interested in the views, many of which were of a country which the lecturer had explored for the first time. Afterwards, Mr Ross had the honour of being presented to the Duke and Duchess who, during a conversation about New Zealand scenery and other matters, thanked him cordially for affording them such a treat.\textsuperscript{46}

In 1913, Ross added another string to his bow of versatility when he became the New Zealand secretary of the Dominions Royal Commission, an inquiry set up by the Imperial Conference of 1911 – a forerunner of the present biennial Commonwealth heads of government meetings – to inquire into the natural resources of each part of the Empire represented at the conference (New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Canada and, still then in its separate state, Newfoundland). The purpose was to investigate:

\begin{quote}
The development attained and attainable, and the facilities for production, manufacture and distribution; the trade of each part with the others and the outside world, the food and raw material requirements of each, and the sources thereof available, to what extent, if any, the trade between the different parts has been affected by the existing legislation in each, either beneficially or otherwise, and by what methods consistent with the existing fixed policy of each part the trade of each part with the others may be improved and extended.\textsuperscript{47}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{45} Ross, \textit{The Duke In Southern Isles} (Wellington: McKee and Co, 1901).

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Otago Witness}, 26 June 1901, 28.

Ross thus found himself both reporter and recorder when the commissioners sat in New Zealand during February and March of 1913. Like a benign Jekyll and Hyde, Ross by day recorded the submissions to the commissioners and by night tapped away at his newspaper despatches. The commission was chaired by Sir Edgar Vincent (later Viscount D’Abernon), a financier and former Conservative member of Parliament and later the British ambassador in post-war Berlin. Among the commissioners was a noted novelist, Sir Henry Rider Haggard, who had held various government posts, especially in South Africa. Evidence adduced ranged from concerns in New Zealand about insufficient immigration from Britain to the extent of coalfields to improved communications between Britain and New Zealand (and especially avoiding having to cable through the United States) to a suggestion by the acting chairman of the Bank of New Zealand, Harold Beauchamp (Katherine Mansfield’s father) that an Empire Development Board be established. While the ethics of Ross’s journalistic role could have been questioned since as secretary he was privy to information denied the public, it has to be assumed that he would have been conscious of the balancing act required of him and vigilant about writing for newspapers only what was determined should be made public. Since no complaints about Ross’s integrity or efficiency followed in the commission’s wake, it has to be assumed he trod with his customary alacrity the fine line required of him. Certainly none of the commissioners could have taken exception to this passage in The Times by Ross:

> Courtesy, ability, alertness and a thorough knowledge of their business are the qualities with which the commissioners are credited. Though their courtesy led them to say many nice things about the country, its people and its products, the public noted with satisfaction that this quality did not prevent them from cross-examining an ignorant or pretentious witness in a manner that was all the more effective for being studiously polite. But a majority of the witnesses were not of this kind, and the commissioners expressed special gratitude for the help provided by officers of the Public Service, of whose competence and conscientiousness they formed a high opinion. In one respect the

48 Rider Haggard’s works included *King Solomon’s Mines, She* and *Allan Quatermain*.  
49 *The Times*, 12 January 1914, 7.
procedure adopted by the commissioners is likely to do us a real service. Their preference for a written statement in chief from the witnesses greatly expedited their task, and our own royal commissions have suffered so much from prolixity that the example is sure to be widely followed.\(^{50}\)

Shortly after the commission’s report was made public, Ross went on the trip to Europe that included his visit to the zoo in Austria. He had also been in Britain in 1907 when he again laid bare his imperial leanings, not so unusual for the time, by writing a lengthy piece about Rudyard Kipling and Kipling’s home, Bateman’s in Sussex, despite not being able to visit the house.\(^{51}\) Ross’s wife, Forrest, also visited Britain, but without her husband, and subsequently produced a book that retold her adventures and impressions.\(^{52}\) She renewed acquaintance in Paris with Dame Nellie Melba – “It was an old promise that we should meet in Paris, and Madame, who forgets nothing, hearing I was in London, had telegraphed me to come over and be her guest”\(^{53}\) – and generally indulged in an antipodean’s European grand tour. She mixed the impressions of a tourist with the comments of a political commentator and had this to say after listening to Emily Pankhurst and her daughter, Christabel, at a suffragette demonstration in Hyde Park:

In New Zealand we have no surplus women, nor have we, for which one offers heartfelt thanks, the submerged population that is to be found in England, in whose hands a vote would be most dangerous. One speaker declared that, in New Zealand, the reform had been gained by just such a strenuous struggle, but that is a statement not borne out by fact. We gained our franchise easily – indeed, it came upon many women as a surprise, and we wear our privilege – as the princess did her learning - ‘lightly, like a flower’.\(^{54}\)

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 23 May 1913, 7.
\(^{51}\) Otago Daily Times, 28 September 1907, 13.
\(^{52}\) Mrs Malcolm Ross, Round the World With a Fountain Pen (Wellington: Blundell Brothers, 1913).
\(^{53}\) Ibid., 65.
\(^{54}\) Ibid., 130-131; Forrest was clearly influenced by Tennyson’s poem, “The Princess,” which included the lines: “Wearing all that weight, Of learning lightly like a flower.”
Chapter Two

The appointment: ‘His Vainness, Malcolm Ross’

When World War I began in August 1914 and politicians and newspaper executives began casting around for the best method, and the best person, for reporting the war for New Zealand readers, the name of Malcolm Ross was always uppermost. He was a well-established and well-regarded reporter with diverse experience and, crucially, experience outside of New Zealand. He was known to be a personal friend of the Prime Minister, William Massey, and as a reporter for more than a decade in the Parliamentary Press Gallery, he would have been on first-name terms with most politicians. He had also been the correspondent for *The Times* in London and therefore had a wider influence. He was a man of considerable achievement in outdoor pursuits and was acknowledged as one of the pioneers of New Zealand mountaineering. Through working with New Zealand and British Government and vice-regal officials, he had a wide circle of acquaintances and was known to the King, George V. In most respects, except perhaps his age – Ross was 52 in 1914 – there seemed no one more suitably qualified for the position of New Zealand’s first official war correspondent. Yet his appointment was accompanied by controversy.

By contrast, the appointment of Charles Bean as the official correspondent to accompany the Australian Imperial Force was straightforward and painless. Bean was voted into the position by a majority of members of the Australian Journalists’ Association. He beat by one vote Keith Murdoch, who would later loom large as the Anzacs’ toehold on the Gallipoli Peninsula grew ever more tenuous. Ross’s appointment was bedevilled by government indecision, accusations of political bias and personal criticism and derision. Some confusion accompanied the appointment of war correspondents in Australia, but nothing by comparison with New Zealand. The Australian Defence Minister, Edward Millen, soon after war was declared asked the two major Australian newspaper groups, the *Sydney Morning Herald/Melbourne Argus* combination, and the *Melbourne Age* and *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, each to nominate a representative. They selected the celebrated “bush poet,” “Banjo” Paterson and Peter Schuler, the son of the editor of the *Age*. Millen, himself a former journalist, seemed to have acted precipitately without reference to the British Government but his Liberal Government was defeated on 5 September, 1914. His successor in the incoming Labor Government, George Pearce, overrode the decision.
and asked the Australian Journalists’ Association to decide. Paterson and Schuler still went with the Australian Imperial Force, but were based mainly in Egypt.¹

Ross was back from his European trip when war was declared in 1914 and he persuaded the commander of New Zealand forces, General Alexander Godley, to allow him to accompany the advance party that went to Samoa to wrest control of the island group from Germany. Ross and Godley had come to know each other, if only in a journalist-army officer relationship, while Godley was reorganising New Zealand’s defence. More than two years before, Ross had interviewed Godley about concerns expressed by rugby and soccer authorities that Godley’s insistence on daylight parades on Saturdays was curtailing their sporting activities.² However close the relationship may have been, Ross approached Godley while the New Zealand force for Samoa was assembling at the Buckle Street barracks in Wellington and suggested that he accompany the force as a reporter. Though the destination of the troops was not supposed to be publicly known at the time, Ross must have had an inkling – he was so well connected it would have been surprising had he not – and told Godley his knowledge and previous experience of Samoa would stand him in good stead. Godley obviously agreed because after the troops had had a ceremonial march from the Basin Reserve into the city and back again, Ross went to Parliament where the Prime Minister, William Massey, saw him on the telephone. Their ensuing conversation was the first intimation for Massey that Ross was embarking with the troops, something Massey later recalled in Parliament.³

Ross through his connections and his initiative had secured an advantage over his journalistic rivals. Other newspapers – the Evening Post in Wellington and the Guardian in Ashburton – had applied in writing to the Government to send reporters with the force, but Ross moved more quickly than did the bureaucracy.⁴ Ross had been to Samoa, filed his stories of the bloodless takeover, and was back in Wellington by the time his presence with the troops was questioned in September, 1914. The questioning was led by the Opposition leader, Joseph Ward, not on the basis of Ross’s competence or initiative, but on Ross’s perceived political leanings. It was well known in Wellington that Ross and Massey were close and Ward criticised

² The Times, 11 May 1912, 5.
³ New Zealand Parliamentary Debates (hereafter NZPD), vol 169, 8 September 1914, 778-780.
⁴ Ibid., 780.
Massey in Parliament for what he called “a one-sided arrangement being made in the special interests of the Reform Party as far as the press were concerned.” The thrust of Ward’s criticism was that Massey gave his friend and political ally the plum journalistic job of reporting New Zealand’s first action of the war. This was why Massey had to say he learnt of Ross’s imminent departure only by chance and that he had nothing to do with the decision. Newspapers then were closely aligned with political factions – much more than they are today – and, indeed, some newspapers such as the *Dominion* were established by politicians. Ward argued that Ross’s reporting benefited only Reform newspapers rather than all New Zealand newspapers. It was an argument mounted periodically throughout the war about Ross, or at least with Ross as the central if unwitting figure, and reflected more about imagined political sensitivity than it did an objective assessment of the quality of Ross’s writings or of the contents of the newspapers generally. To a neutral observer, the political inclinations of daily newspapers were exposed almost exclusively in their editorial columns and rarely in their reports of events. The conduct of the war, and support of the imperial government, had bipartisan support throughout the war – hence the formation of a coalition war cabinet – and in any case, even the most rabid political observer would have been hard put to find anything politically objectionable in any of Ross’s writings. Ward’s objections to only some newspapers receiving Ross’s coverage were partly met when Ross had returned from Samoa and at Massey’s suggestion he supplied a separate report – although much shorter – for the United Press Association and that was circulated to all daily newspapers. But this did not satisfy the newspapers which supported Ward’s Liberal Party. One of them, the *Evening Star* in Dunedin, in an editorial accused the Government of introducing “partyism into patriotism.” It complained: “We question Massey’s ability to ensure general acceptance of his explanation as a satisfactory or complete rebuttal of a fairly well supported charge of political favouritism.”

The close relationship between Ross and Massey seemed not to be in doubt. Guy Scholefield recorded that Ross “frequently entertained W. F. Massey and others of the right wing” but he warned that the political opinions of working journalists could not always be taken for granted. “In most offices, both upstairs and down, were

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5 Ibid., 778.
6 Ibid., 779.
7 *Evening Star*, 11 September 1914, 4.
staff members opposed to the policy of their paper. New Zealand had acquired a reputation for offering haven to journalists whose opinions were disapproved of by their employers.\textsuperscript{8}

The exchange in the House of Representatives between Massey and Ward in September of 1914, as already outlined, led to the muddled handling of the appointment of an official correspondent and had echoes for the rest of the war. It reflected more the political bias of the complainants rather than of the correspondent and showed a misunderstanding of the nature of journalism and the role of newspapers. The inherent difficulties and security issues of war reporting were problems enough, as the British Government painfully discovered, without also having an overlay of political paranoia. New Zealand newspapers hardly helped either. Unlike their Australian counterparts, they showed no interest in sending reporters themselves once New Zealanders were in action in 1915 and relied wholly on either Ross as the official correspondent, or on official dispatches or on the reports from correspondents of other nationalities (or on letters home from soldiers). This reluctance by newspapers to independently seek out the news continued until late in World War II when finally, in March of 1945, the \textit{Standard} and the \textit{Dominion} in Wellington and the weekly newspaper, \textit{Truth}, sent their own reporters to write about Royal New Zealand Air Force operations in the south-west Pacific.\textsuperscript{9}

While censorship and restrictions on war reporters were to be a vexed issue throughout the war, Ross avoided any problems with a stroke of his pen – or the tapping of typewriter keys – on the Samoan expedition. The two New Zealand troopships carrying the force of about 1500 troops, the \textit{Moeraki} and the \textit{Monowai}, and their Royal Navy escorts, the cruisers \textit{Psyche}, \textit{Pyramus} and \textit{Philomet}, headed first for New Caledonia so they could join up with the greater firepower of the French cruiser \textit{Montcalm} and, even more welcoming, the Australian battle cruiser, \textit{Australia}, and its cruiser escort, the \textit{Melbourne}. Such a force was deemed necessary because the German armoured cruisers \textit{Scharnhorst} and \textit{Gneisenau} were believed to be roaming in the area. With the force assembled, Ross wrote in Noumea: “One might have posted news of our expedition here, but, so far as I was concerned, I decided to play the game and send nothing. Letters [reports] sent from here might fall into the hands

\textsuperscript{8} Guy Scholefield, unpublished autobiography (MS-Papers-0212-67), Alexander Turnbull Library [hereafter ATL].

of the enemy, and, so far as our expedition was concerned, might give away the whole show." Consequently, he wrote nothing until he was back in Wellington when he dispatched a full, four-part report of the expedition to those newspapers which paid him and the shorter version via the United Press Association to those which did not. Ross continued to "play the game" when home and he ended his despatch to the United Press Association by saying that "troopship No 1" had arrived back in Wellington, but, "It is inadvisable at the present juncture to place on record anything regarding the movements of the other ships."11

Ross’s reporting of the Samoan venture was in a style with which his readers had become familiar over the years. It was not what would today be known as "hard news" but it was nevertheless informative, bearing in mind that New Zealanders had had no news other than the official Government announcement that the German governor of Samoa had surrendered and the island group had been taken by the New Zealand forces without a shot being fired. Ross exhibited no detectable political bias but he left no doubt about where his nationalistic loyalties lay. After the exchange of authority in Apia, he wrote: "The hitherto despondent Englishman [in Apia] became cheery again and the Teutonic barometer fell to zero."12 Ross also reported the New Zealand expedition for The Times in London, at first briefly and later in more depth.13 The latter dispatch was reproduced under Ross’s name in a New York Times magazine in 1915, though with some minor changes (whether Ross’s own or editorial changes at the newspaper it is not possible to know).14 A passage that appeared in London but not in New York related to the raising of the Union Jack on the Apia courthouse. Ross reported who was in the official party and continued:

On the left the high chiefs, Tanu Malietoa and Tamasese – who had been especially invited by Colonel Logan15 to attend the ceremony – with other high chiefs, made a picturesque group. Fifteen years previously I had seen the young King placed on his throne...with the representatives of the Allied fleets of Britain and America and the civil authorities of these nations in

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10 Otago Daily Times, 8 September 1914, 7.
11 Ibid.
12 Otago Daily Times, 11 September 1914, 2.
13 The Times, 22 October 1914, 5, 3 November 1914, 5.
15 Colonel Robert Logan, New Zealand Staff Corps, commanding officer of the expedition.
attendance, and the Germans, who had been fomenting a native rebellion with their usual crooked diplomacy, conspicuous only by their absence.

Within a few weeks of Ross’s return from Samoa, Ward again raised in the House of Representatives his concern that any war correspondent should represent all newspapers and not newspapers of a political bent opposed to his own. The context was an announcement by the Minister of Defence, James Allen, that the Secretary of State for the Colonies (Lewis Vernon Harcourt, later the 1st Viscount Harcourt) had cabled Wellington: “I am to state that arrangements can be made if New Zealand Government so desires for one war correspondent, representing the whole press of New Zealand, to accompany the British forces in the field, such correspondent being subject to the regulations enclosed.” Allen went on to say that the New Zealand High Commissioner in London, Sir Thomas Mackenzie – the former tramping and rugby colleague of both Allen and Ross and also, more significantly, a former political ally of Ward’s and his brief successor as prime minister in 1912 – had recommended a New Zealand journalist based in London, Guy Scholefield. He was there representing four New Zealand newspapers (the New Zealand Herald, Evening Post, Press and the Otago Daily Times) which formed a consortium known as New Zealand Associated Press, an arrangement that lasted until 1989. It did not escape Ward’s notice that the four were Reform newspapers but, ironically, Scholefield before he went to London had worked for a paper supporting Ward, the New Zealand Times. Ward said he had nothing personally against Scholefield but felt New Zealand should follow the example in Australia, where Charles Bean was voted by the Australian Journalists’ Association to be the official correspondent. Ward’s concerns about political bias notwithstanding, he did have a genuine point that if there was to be only one official correspondent, that correspondent’s dispatches should be made available to all newspapers irrespective of the political leanings of their owners or editors. That begged the question, which would soon be answered, about why four newspapers which were paying Scholefield’s wages and had sent him to Britain should agree to his work being made available to their opposition. One answer clearly was that the Government would have to hire a journalist for the position but for the moment Massey was having nothing to do with that. When

16 NZPD, vol 171, 14 October 1914, 16-19.
he was asked in the House if the Government had any financial responsibility for Scholefield’s appointment, he replied: “Not one-hundredth part of a farthing.”

One of the four papers that paid for Scholefield to be in London, the *Press*, was contemptuous of the criticism voiced by Ward. It editorialised: “We cannot understand why it is that whenever the Opposition newspapers find themselves beaten in the matter of ordinary journalistic enterprise, they get Sir Joseph Ward or some other sympathetic member to make a fuss about it in Parliament. What they hope to effect by this proceeding, except to advertise their own want of initiative, we cannot imagine.” The *Press’s* view was that Ward seemed to think because there were supporters of both the Government and the Opposition in the Expeditionary Force, it followed that “there ought to be a Government and an Opposition correspondent accompanying the expedition. We altogether demur to this view.”

None of the New Zealand politicians, obsessed with parochial political considerations or not, could have known that a larger issue was standing in the way of any official correspondent. Horatio Herbert Kitchener, the First Earl of Khartoum, had been appointed Secretary of State for War on 5 August, the day after war was declared, and he was opposed to the presence of reporters in theatres of war. Martin J. Farrar, in a study of newspaper reporting on the Western Front, argued it was Kitchener’s “policies and decisions which shaped and moulded the role of the war correspondent during this early part of the hostilities.” Those correspondents who had been appointed in Britain were refused travel orders by the War Office and reporters who found their own way to France and Belgium were arrested. While Kitchener was said to have taken a dislike to reporters during the Sudan campaign in 1885 (“Out of my way, you drunken swabs,” he was quoted as telling a group of them), the real issue was one of security versus information for the public. The argument was encapsulated by two contrasting letters to the editor of *The Times* within a month of the beginning of the war. One reader, Charles Whibley, argued that indiscreet reportage had jeopardised various campaigns in the past, including the Battle of Trafalgar and the war in the Crimea: “No nation has ever permitted war correspondents to follow the army without suffering bitterly for its indulgence.” The contrary view was put by a noted naval publisher, Lord Brassey,

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17 Ibid., 19.
18 Press, 9 September 1914, 8.
21 The Times, 1 September 1914, 12.
whose opinion was that the presence of Australian correspondents in South Africa had had a significant effect on popular sentiment in Australia and led to increased recruitment. The Australian contingents, he said, “would never have been heard of unless the country had been aroused by well-timed publicity.” Kitchener’s concession to telling the British people what its troops were doing was to supplement brief official communiqués with what were called “eye witness” reports, usually written blandly and sometimes deliberately inaccurately by seconded officers. This gradually changed during 1915 and correspondents were allowed under strict conditions. One who encouraged change was the British commander of the Gallipoli campaign, General Sir Ian Hamilton, who wrote: “The whole of this press correspondence; press censorship; despatch writing and operations cables hang together and will end by hanging the Government.” He argued that the danger of the enemy learning too much could be kept in bounds and was of small consequence “when compared with the keenness or dullness of our own nation.” Hamilton’s endorsement of correspondents was to have unfortunate repercussions for him.

War correspondents developed from the Crimean War as newspaper owners and editors sought to boost circulation through having their own stories from the front rather than relying on government statements. The development through the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century and early in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century coincided with increased literacy (and therefore increased newspaper sales) and the gradual advent of illustrations in newspapers, first artists’ sketches and then photographs. “All that was needed now were bigger and better wars,” was Phillip Knightley’s tongue-in-cheek view of what he called the golden age of war correspondents. World War I, however, brought to an end the freedom newspapers hitherto had in where to send their reporters and what they could write. The British Government in particular saw the need for control through censorship and the restriction of correspondents’ movements. Knightley argued:

To enable the war to go on, the people had to be steeled for further sacrifices, and this could not be done if the full story of what was happening on the Western Front was known. And so began a great conspiracy. More deliberate lies were told than in

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} General Sir Ian Hamilton, \textit{Gallipoli Diary} (London: Edward Arnold, 1920), 321.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Knightley, 39.
\end{itemize}
any other period of history, and the whole apparatus of the state went into action to suppress the truth.25

Correspondents became an integral part of the British propaganda campaign, and similar government moves were made in the other combatant states on both sides. Journalists for the most part became willing agents of their governments. Philip Gibbs, one of four British correspondents to be knighted after the war, was frank about his acquiescence to the wishes of the state:

We identified ourselves absolutely with the armies in the field ...
... We wiped out of our minds all thoughts of personal scoops and all temptation to write one word which would make the task of officers and men more difficult or dangerous. There was no need of censorship of our dispatches. We were our own censors.26

The war upon which the world embarked in 1914 was of course on a vastly greater scale than anything previously. It was the first total war in which citizen armies were deployed and in which civilians were at risk and targeted. Moreover, the fighting over the previous 30 years which allowed the role of the war correspondent to develop into a distinct branch of journalism were either regional wars or skirmishes and often against people (such as in Africa and China) whom the British held to be inferior. Fanciful accounts were written and sketched without government interference. As Gibbs observed: “I have a secret and rather wicked suspicion that the war correspondent of the old type did not see so much as his imaginative dispatches and thrilling sketches suggested to the public.”27 By contrast, a war in which newspaper readers were reading of their own kin, or of people they knew; when troop trains could be seen daily taking men to France and hospital trains returning; when the sound of explosions in northern France could be heard on a still day in southern England; such imperatives dictated that the war be conducted in a manner never known before. This included propaganda and restricted war correspondents.

25 Ibid., 80.
27 Ibid., 189.
New Zealand’s experience of war correspondents in 1914 was negligible. Those who wrote about the New Zealand Wars in the 1860s were combatants who later wrote reports or diaries and two reporters were sent by newspapers to the Boer War though one of them returned early because of illness. The Government and newspapers were treading fresh ground in the last few months of 1914, therefore, when how the war would be reported became an issue. Self-interest and local interests continued to dominate. The New Zealand Associated Press (NZAP) objected to the notion that Scholefield should work for all newspapers, saying that such a role amounted to “commandeering our correspondent for the benefit of competitors who had not shown sufficient journalistic enterprise to make arrangements of their own.” The group said no other New Zealand newspaper had tested the War Office decree that only one New Zealand war correspondent could be appointed and pointed out that Britain had several (though all were forced to stay in London at the time) and Australian newspapers had ignored the British view. Bean remained the only official correspondent but others sent by newspapers, such as Paterson and Schuler, were based in Cairo and allowed occasional visits to Gallipoli. NZAP would not agree to Scholefield’s dispatches being made available to all newspapers and the Government subsequently withdrew its approval of him. Scholefield metaphorically shrugged his shoulders at what was happening in his name 19,000 kilometres away. “I was a mere pawn and the dice were loaded against me when the Massey government was accused of favouring the papers I represented,” he wrote. “The fact is that the Liberal papers had taken no steps to have a correspondent of their own. This squabble showed how much party feeling had become embittered since I left New Zealand.” Scholefield showed he bore no ill will toward his eventual replacement, Ross:

Shortly after the Gallipoli landing the New Zealand Government made its decision about an official war correspondent [sic – the decision was three weeks before the landing]. Not unexpectedly, they appointed my old friend Malcolm Ross, journalist and mountaineer who in 1899 had

30 Scholefield, unpublished autobiography.
been correspondent during the fighting in Samoa. A year or two hence he would be my guide, philosopher and friend during my visit to the New Zealand Division in France.\(^3\)

Scholefield stayed in London until 1920 and in addition to reporting war news from Britain for his four papers, he made occasional visits to the Western Front and visited naval bases and the Italian front. He returned to New Zealand to become editor and managing director of the *Wairarapa Age* and later had a distinguished career as biographer, archivist and librarian of the General Assembly Library.

Objections to Scholefield were also voiced by his newspapers’ competitors. Henry Brett, manager of the *Auckland Star*, said the proposal to use Scholefield could not be agreed to for many reasons.\(^3\) One was cost, another was the likelihood of his copy being “mutilated” by censors and a third reason was competing with organisations which already supplied overseas news. Tellingly in the light of subsequent events and how the war was later to be remembered in New Zealand and Australia, Brett said:

“The Australian association [ie, Australian Associated Press] and the [Sydney] *Sun* syndicate are almost certain to have specials [ie, correspondents] with the contingents leaving Australia and as the whole of the Australasian forces will be working together, we may I believe rely upon pretty full accounts of the doings of the Australians being sent to the Australian papers.” Brett, a senior and influential figure in the New Zealand newspaper industry at the time, made two judgmental errors in the one letter. One was his belief that Australian correspondents would bother to take the trouble to write about the activities of New Zealand troops and the other was to see the word “Australian” as synonymous with “Australasian.”

The Main Body of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force sailed from Wellington on 16 October 1914, but without any official war correspondent. In the meantime, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Sir Francis Bell, a member of the Legislative Council, had become involved. He told the manager of the Press Association, William Atack, that he favoured H.T.B. Drew, who worked for the *Evening Post* in Wellington, and the chairman of the Press Association, George Fenwick, wrote to Atack, advising that if the Government was going to appoint Drew

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\(^3\) Ibid., 166.
\(^3\) Henry Brett to William Atack, 19 September, 1914, New Zealand Press Association correspondence, (75-12345-47, Box 98), ATL.
or anyone else, it should pay the whole salary and costs. Eventually, the Government announced on 19 February 1915, that it would be appointing an official war correspondent and Bell wrote to the Press Association suggesting it nominate the names of three people to assist in the appointment. Applications were sought and a committee of editors was set up to sift through them and make a recommendation to the Government. The composition of the committee was balanced: Charles Earle of the *Dominion* and William Trigg of the *Press* represented so-called Reform papers and the Liberals (or Wardists) were represented by Cecil Leys of the *Auckland Star* and Mark Cohen of the *Evening Star* in Dunedin.

There seemed a reluctant acceptance by newspapers of the Government's involvement. The *Press* said in an editorial it did not think it the duty of the Government to come to the assistance of newspapers but it felt it unlikely the appointment would create a precedent. It noted the Government had said:

> The last thing which the men who have volunteered for service abroad desire is that the official correspondent shall have as his duty provision for the publication of grievances, scandals or complaints. His function will be to record the history of the part taken by the New Zealand forces in the great struggle in which they are about to take part.

The *Press* commented: "This is very well put: and we need hardly point out that the Government is not asking for immunity for itself, since the responsibility for the management of our troops on service is not the Government's." The Auckland morning newspaper, the *New Zealand Herald*, argued the course chosen was probably the best, provided only that the position of official correspondent was competently filled.

At about this time, an Auckland weekly newspaper, the *New Zealand Observer*, which touted itself as being a "bright and racy journal, full of crisply written gossip" began a war-long campaign of derision and disdain against Ross. Unlike daily newspapers, its editorial comments were scattered throughout the paper and its allegiance was to the Liberal Party. Founded in 1880, during the war years the paper

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33 George Fenwick to William Atack, 9 December 1914, NZPA correspondence.
34 Bell to United Press Association, 19 February 1915, NZPA correspondence.
36 *New Zealand Herald*, 23 February 1915, 4.
was owned by George Dixon, whose only other claim to national fame was being manager of the Original All Blacks in 1905-06, and William Blomfield, a talented, prolific and sometimes acerbic cartoonist. The Observer, when speculating who may be appointed, made clear its view of Ross:

At first thoughts the plum was considered certain to go to His Vainness, Malcolm Ross, but his cake is already considered dough. Malcolm starts a story thuswise: 'I went to the war. I had much trouble to get to the war. My head swelled with the heat of the sun. My horse fell from under me. I told General Blank how to conduct the siege. I believe we shall win', and so on.'

The committee of editors reduced 46 applications to four: Malcolm Ross, Fred Doidge of the Auckland Star, Syd Waters of the Press and Ernie Hall of the Evening Post. The Cabinet was required to make the final choice and Massey, as he later said in Parliament, excused himself from the debate. His friend, Ross, was chosen. Seventy-two member newspapers of the United Press Association and 48 non-member journals were asked if they would take Ross's dispatches and 85, including 15 non-members, replied they would. William Atack was sceptical: "I am bound to say that it would require almost a genius to do good work under the censorship conditions which take all the marrow out of a war correspondent's work. For these letters [dispatches] a charge of one shilling a copy was made to recipients ... a number of non-association papers refusing to pay and being struck off."

Ross's long-established habit of using the personal pronoun now became a double-edged sword, with the potential on the one hand of his being seen as authoritative and on the other as being vain. The New Zealand Observer was in no doubt about which side of the sword it saw. It was satirically scathing and continued its derisive commentary on Ross thus:

37 New Zealand Observer, 27 February 1915, 5.
39 Ibid.
Me!
Malcolm Ross of Wellington has been awarded the position of official correspondent with the New Zealand section of His Majesty’s Australasian forces in the field.
I leave New Zealand to her fate,
I go without a qualm.
I go my pen to agitate,
I go the Turks to calm.

I – e’en Myself, yea – truly Me!
I who have Massey led;
I leave to let the whole earth know
I did it ‘on my head’.

I have to counsel Johnny French,
I, Kitchener’s right hand!
I teach Duke Nick to dig a trench;
I lead the bally band.

My orders to My Cabinet;
My crested seals conceal,
My understudies know not yet
My gauntlet’s made of steel!

My useful scholar Liverpool
My fiat has in hand,
My genial, gentle over-rule
My man will understand.

I leave the Church, the Press, the State;
I take my brains with Me.
I fear to save them is too late;
I, who am I – d’ye see?
My photograph is on the shelf;
My alphabet close by.
My single letter by itself,
My universal ‘I’.

My Doidge, My Waters and My Hall
My little strivers who
My job attempted to forestall,
My Massey tried to woo –

My ear in which to pour a tale;
My earmarked little perk;
My boarder William shall prevail,
My oracle to work!

Criticism was not confined to the Auckland weekly. The New Zealand Times, a morning daily in Wellington, carried three letters to the editor which were critical of the appointment not so much because of Ross’s ability or suitability, but because it was seen as the Government rewarding one of its allies. “The whole thing was cut and dry as far as the Government were concerned from the start,” wrote one correspondent. This anonymous correspondent, identified only as “Onlooker,” felt this was not a reflection on Ross “although I think a younger and more active man should have been selected.” This was a view echoed by a far more authoritative – or at least more identifiable – source, the acting manager of the Press Association, L.F. Cocks, who wrote in a letter to Atack: “The selection of war correspondent was a surprise to me. Don’t you think Ross is rather too old for such work? In my opinion, Hall would have been a much better man.” The Christchurch Spectator expressed similar sentiments, according to the New Zealand Observer. It quoted the southern paper as saying, “Malcolm Ross got the appointment as war correspondent for New Zealand. The

40 New Zealand Observer, 10 April 1915, 5.
41 New Zealand Times, 1 April 1915, 7, 3 April 1915, 4.
42 Cocks to Atack, 2 April 1915, NZPA correspondence.
wonder is any other journalist had the audacity to apply.\textsuperscript{43} The \textit{Spectator}, a Christchurch weekly published from 1889 until 1928, was owned by the \textit{Observer}.\textsuperscript{44}

Any journalist, then or now, would have looked aghast at the conditions of appointment but presumably the attraction of such a significant appointment would have outweighed any misgivings about the restrictions imposed. The most onerous were that while in Britain, Ireland or Europe, any dispatches had to be sent to the High Commissioner in London who would then forward to New Zealand any, in part or in whole, that he thought fit. Dispatches had to be posted, not telegraphed, meaning that publication in New Zealand was weeks, and sometimes months, after the events they described. Even then, the dispatches on arrival in New Zealand had to be censored before being sent to newspapers. “Any smart reporter could do the work this correspondent will be permitted to do,” the \textit{New Zealand Free Lance} commented. “Men above the reporter class will not relish the idea of writing matter to be sub-edited by the Hon Thomas Mackenzie. So much at least is clear.”\textsuperscript{45}

The conditions stated that while in Egypt, Ross had to send his despatches regularly to the Department of Internal Affairs in Wellington and he was expressly forbidden from using either cable or telegraph.\textsuperscript{46} They provided Ross with a payment of £450 a year from the date of his appointment until the date of his return to New Zealand and allowances of £1 a day while in Egypt and £2 10s a day when “at the seat of war” in Europe.\textsuperscript{47} An allowance of 15s a day when not with forces was granted. Ross was instructed “to provide material to be used ultimately for a history of the part taken by New Zealand troops in the war.” Ross was unable to fulfil the latter condition, through no fault of his, as will be seen.

The tortuous web of censorship was made harsher in New Zealand because of the distance from the source. Dispatches from all correspondents were first censored in the field where they were written, then in London and then again in Sydney and in Wellington. Attack was understandably not impressed. “Among other things, the war

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{New Zealand Observer}, 17 April 1915, 3.
\textsuperscript{44} Guy Scholefield, \textit{Newspapers in New Zealand} (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1958), 93; see also Guy Scholefield, \textit{A Union Catalogue of New Zealand Newspapers} (Wellington: General Assembly Library, 1938), 12.
\textsuperscript{45} \textit{New Zealand Free Lance}, 27 February 1915, 1.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{New Zealand Times}, 2 March 1915, 7.
\textsuperscript{47} There is no evidence that this was reviewed once Ross went to Gallipoli, a “seat of war” not known at the time the conditions were written.
has introduced us to the nuisance of military censorship,” he wrote in a report to directors:

One would have thought that reasonable beings would have been satisfied with the censorship in London and that item passed by the bureau there could have been admitted without question into New Zealand and elsewhere. But that is by no means the idea of the gifted experts who were put on the job in Australia and New Zealand, qualified no doubt by a lifelong acquaintance with the technique of cable and press messages generally. They knew much better what was required that the London censors and so after passing through the fine mesh of the fountainhead, all messages were poured [sic] over again, first in Australia and then in New Zealand. 48

The conditions applying to Bean were much broader. When he and other correspondents were temporarily confined to a camp on the island of Imbros, Bean protested to the Australian army commanders that with such confinement, it would be impossible for him to do the work for which his Government had appointed him:

The Australian Government in the instructions given me during my interviews with the Minister for Defence attached importance to two points: (a) to having with this distant force a representative who could satisfy the poignant anxiety of Australians for news of their own men – their daily life, behaviour in action, their peculiar Australian interest which could only be given by an Australian, and (b) to … special instructions given to me to write after the war the history of the Australian part in the war, as a permanent record for libraries, schools, and the national generally. In their speeches at the dinner given to me in Melbourne before I left, the Minister for

48 Sanders, 46-47.
Defence and other ministers laid special stress upon the latter point. 49

Australian historian Kevin Fewster, who wrote a book based on Bean’s Gallipoli diaries, elaborated on Bean’s perception of his role:

While he held strongly that the correspondent should be briefed as fully as possible on events at the front, he did not agree with those who contended that it was the journalist’s place to question authority or criticise strategy. Bean firmly maintained that his rightful role was to report, not criticise. Nor did he see it was his place to sensationalise his copy or scoop his fellow correspondents on any story. 50

Bean, unlike Ross, was able to cable his dispatches to Australia. The United Press Association (UPA), which advised the New Zealand Government on the appointment of the war correspondent, had details of Bean’s method of transmitting his stories back to Australia long before the appointment of Ross was made. The UPA’s representative in Sydney, Joe Bradley, wrote in some detail to his superior, Attack, in January 1915 giving the details of Bean’s filing methods, the cost of cabling to Melbourne which was borne by the Government and other information relating to the activities of Bean and the “ unofficial” correspondents (that is, those such as Paterson and Schuler who were sent by newspapers). Bradley noted that the Sydney papers were not at that time using Bean’s stories (including his own paper, the Sydney Morning Herald), because they refused to pay the cost of onward transmission from Melbourne. “The Sydney papers are standing out because the service will cost them more than the Melbourne subscribers. They want the letters free of telegraphic charges from Melbourne.” Bradley’s comments on the quality of Bean’s early dispatches were later echoed by New Zealand critics of Ross: “I might add that the letters so far have been of a purely chatty, descriptive character and have contained very little actual news of the doings of the force.” 51

49 Fewster, 135.
50 Ibid., 13.
51 Joe Bradley to Attack, 27 January 1915, NZPA correspondence.
It seems clear that fear of a heavy cost was what motivated the Government to prevent Ross from cabling. The UPA noted in 1915 that the cost of cables from Egypt to Australia was 4½ pence a word and that the association offered Ross’s “letters” – the word commonly used at the time for dispatches or stories – to each of its subscribers at one shilling each.\(^{52}\) A. C. Wilson, who studied the history of telecommunications in New Zealand, said press rates were usually half the standard cable rate.\(^{53}\) Later in the war, the Minister of Defence, James Allen, asked the New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF) headquarters in Cairo to supply regular news about the New Zealand forces in Palestine. He asked if news could be supplied at no more than £20 a month. The NZEF commander in Egypt, Major-General Edward Chaytor, replied that amount would cover only 195 words. Chaytor said he had been told by the Eastern Telegraph Company in Cairo that press messages could be sent only by authorised press representatives and must be addressed to a recognised newspaper or agency. Chaytor organised the reports Allen requested and addressed them to “Gazette Wellington” which qualified for the press rate of 7d a word that applied to Cairo-Wellington messages.\(^{54}\)

Evidently undaunted by the conditions or the public criticism of his appointment, Ross enlisted in the army on 1 April 1915 and within a week, he and his wife embarked on the Union Steam Ship Company’s Mokoia for Sydney, where they transferred on April 15 to the Morea, bound for London via Suez. When he sailed, his appointment had still to be approved by the British authorities, who continued to be touchy about the appointment and deployment of correspondents. The Governor of New Zealand, Earl Liverpool, had cabled the Secretary of State for the Colonies on 1 April:

Am desired by Prime Minister inform you that Mr Malcolm Ross has been selected as the official War Correspondent with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. Prime Minister would be glad if you would kindly telegraph to me by return if the appointment approved as in these circumstances Mr Ross will leave New Zealand 8\(^{th}\) April via Suez Canal. Prime Minister

\(^{52}\) Ibid.


\(^{54}\) Allen-Chaytor correspondence, May 1918 (WA1 3, box 6, XFE885), Archives New Zealand.
would be glad to learn to what authority in Egypt or elsewhere Mr Ross should report himself.\footnote{Liverpool to Harcourt, 1 April, 1915, Appointment of war correspondent in the Dardanelles (ADM1/8427/205), National Archives, United Kingdom (hereafter Admiralty).}

The Secretary of State, Lewis Harcourt, replied two days later that the War Office was “prepared to approve” Ross’s appointment but that it did not entitle him to expect to accompany forces operating in the Dardanelles. One of Harcourt’s underlings, Sir Hartmann Just, the first assistant under-secretary to deal specifically with the Dominions, made a personal intervention on Ross’s behalf. He sent a hand-written note to the Permanent Secretary of the Admiralty, Sir Graham Greene:

Dear Greene. I believe that the question of war correspondents with the Expeditionary Force in Egypt is in your hands and I therefore send you this telegram [Liverpool’s]. We are also sending a copy officially to the War Office. You will notice that Lord Liverpool is very anxious for an immediate reply. Malcolm Ross is an excellent selection.\footnote{Admiralty, Just to Greene, 1 April 1915.}

It is likely that Just would have known Ross personally through Ross’s work with the Dominions Committee and also from when Just visited New Zealand for three weeks in early 1914.\footnote{The Times, 13 January 1914, 7.} The War Office Permanent Secretary, Sir Reginald Brade, also wrote to Greene acknowledging he had seen Liverpool’s telegram and noted, “So far as we are concerned, probably there will be no objection to the appointment, and the Force would be allowed to have their correspondent just as the Australians were allowed to be accompanied by Bean.” Brade added without explanation: “I am afraid that the representation of the newspapers of these Dominions is going to give you some trouble.”\footnote{Admiralty, Brade to Greene, 2 April 1915.} Events would show that neither the Admiralty nor the War Office would have any trouble with either Bean or Ross, but would with the correspondent they agreed would represent the London-based newspapers, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, and an Australian neither was asked to approve, Keith Murdoch.
Greene replied to Just that his political superior, the First Sea Lord, Winston Churchill, had taken charge of which correspondents would be allowed in the Dardanelles and he had decided there would be three: one representing London newspapers; another representing British provincial newspapers and both the domestic agency, the Press Association, and the London-based international agency, Reuter; and the third representing the “associated colonial press.” The third, Greene said, would be at the recommendation of the Empire Press Union – a London-based umbrella organisation of owners and editors – and it was considering Bean. “If you have any influence with that body,” Greene told Just, “I think it would be an advantage if you would get in touch with them and find out what they wish to do. It is just possible they may like to nominate Mr Ross instead of Mr Bean and, if so, there would be no objection on our part.”

Bean, who was already on his way to the Dardanelles by this stage, would have been alarmed by such a suggestion, had he known of it. He had appealed in March for support from the Australian High Commissioner in London, Sir George Reid, who had written to Harcourt urging that Bean be allowed to accompany the Australian forces. In the event, the Empire Press Union failed to agree on a representative and Greene wrote to Harcourt on 18 April advising him that Bean and Ross had been approved. Three days later, Harcourt cabled Liverpool: “Nomination of correspondent to represent Dominions Press with Expeditionary Force in Dardanelles. As Empire Press Union have failed to come to agreement it has now been decided to permit Ross to accompany force.”

The pair, plus Ashmead-Bartlett and the British provincial press representative, Lester Lawrence, were initially under the control of the Admiralty since the Dardanelles campaign had begun as a purely naval affair. Once the attempt to find a way through the Narrows to Constantinople had failed and the Admiralty sought the army’s help with a land campaign, it became apparent that the pressmen should come under the control of the army. The sense of this shift in accountability was seen first by the commander of the naval forces, Vice-Admiral John De Robeck. He wrote to the overall commander of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, General Sir Ian Hamilton, a week after the 25 April landings and suggested that dispatches from correspondents with the army be censored by a military officer and those from any

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59 Admiralty, Harcourt to Liverpool, 21 April 1915.
embarked on board ships be censored by naval authorities. Hamilton refined the process and suggested to De Robeck that since any correspondents on board ships would probably be writing about army matters, his general headquarters should take over all censorship responsibilities except for reports on naval matters, in which case they would be referred to the navy. He even suggested that if a report was about both military and naval matters, the censorship would be shared. De Robeck concurred.60 Two months later, the more sensible arrangement of the army taking over all responsibility for the correspondents was agreed between Greene at the Admiralty and Brade at the War Office.61

Ross probably knew none of these bureaucratic niceties as his troopship made its way across the Indian Ocean and up the Red Sea and into the Suez Canal. He was conscious though that in journalistic terms, he was well behind the news. His first dispatch from Cairo was dated 20 May 1915, just five days short of a month after the initial landings on the Gallipoli Peninsula. Under no illusions, he wryly noted: “Before these lines can reach the New Zealand press, the early descriptions of the fight will doubtless have become familiar to readers, who will already know something of the splendid heroism and marvellous endurance of their troops.”62 Even so, Ross was not to be denied the chance to match the heroic rhetoric of the early reports filed by Ashmead-Bartlett.

But there are many lines to be added yet, and even a twice-told tale of such a glowing epic will send the blood tingling through the veins again. It is an epic which will be handed down to succeeding generations in Australia and New Zealand and that will survive as long as the British people remain on the face of the earth. It is scarce too much to say that nothing finer has ever occurred in warfare. It is a feat before which the achievements of the ancient Greeks and Romans will pale into insignificance and it will be my endeavour, in this and subsequent articles, in the plain and simple language of the soldiers themselves, to give the

60 Admiralty, De Robeck to Hamilton, 2 May 1915.
61 Admiralty, Greene to Brade, 11 July 1915.
62 Evening Post, 3 July 1915, 13.
people of New Zealand some adequate idea of the glorious deeds of her brave sons.\(^6^3\)
Chapter Three
Gallipoli: Myth and reality

While it was evident that New Zealand politicians and newspaper owners and editors groped in an unfamiliar dark with the appointment of a war correspondent, it was equally evident there was little more light for the correspondent himself. For all Ross’s journalistic experience, his only previous battle assignments had been to Samoa in 1899 and 1914, forays which were no more than colonial versions of the skirmishes with which northern hemisphere war correspondents were familiar. Ross was now embarking on an assignment the like of which no one, not even the most informed and non-partisan – of which there were noticeably few in New Zealand positions of authority – could imagine. As with the soldiers who enlisted in the first weeks of the war, there was much jingoistic hope of adventure but little appreciation of the realities that would rule for the next four years. The prevailing mood was succinctly captured by one of the early recruits, Cecil Malthus: “Without a pang, without doubt or hesitation, we dropped the life that had absorbed us. No resolve or decision was involved. It just had to be that way. And so the great adventure began.”

Political posturing and, it seemed, the politics of envy had accompanied Ross’s appointment and would continue to dog him throughout the war. He had also to endure, if not overcome, the onerous restrictions placed upon him by the New Zealand Government plus the restrictions and censorship imposed by the British Government on all correspondents as it sought ways of controlling not so much what the enemy might learn from correspondents’ dispatches, but what the civilian population at home might learn. Ross, as he had demonstrated on the Samoan venture, was prepared to “play the game” even if, as he also demonstrated, he did not agree with the rules.

First, though, Ross had to tend to the deeds of his own son. He related in his first dispatch how a Castle Line ship flying a Red Cross flag nosed its way into the canal and wounded soldiers waved bandaged hands and arms in greeting from its portholes. Ross said “a mother and her husband were anxious about their son” and asked across the

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Portrait of Noël Ross in the uniform of a lieutenant in the Royal Field Artillery

from Noël Ross and His Work
water if any New Zealanders were on board. Curiously, he wrote in the third person even though it was evident he was writing about the concern he and Forrestina had for their son, Noël. On being told there were New Zealanders on board, they dashed to where the wounded were being landed. They found a private named Isherwood from the Canterbury Regiment:

and the mother asked if he knew her son. Strangely enough, she had picked on the one man in all the ship out of her son’s company. The son, he was able to tell her, was wounded, but alive, and likely to recover soon. The mother had to leave in half an hour for England. The father was going to the front. Next day he spent searching unsuccessfully through the several widely separated military hospitals for his son. On the second day they had an accidental and extraordinary meeting. But that is another story.

Ross contrived to conceal his relationship with his subject in his next dispatch, also filed on 20 May, which included a recounting by Noël Ross of the fighting on the peninsula and how he was wounded and his subsequent evacuation to hospital in Cairo:

L.-Cpl Noël Ross, who is in hospital here suffering from shock and an injured spine and leg, had an extraordinary experience. A shell exploded near him when he was range-finding on the Sunday [25 April] but he went on fighting and later – on the Wednesday – collapsed on the battlefield.

Ross told how his son lay unconscious for 16 hours before being treated and was then taken on board the hospital ship. The rest of the story relates what Noël told his father from his hospital bed of the events on Gallipoli. Though the Evening Post did not let on

2 Evening Post, 3 July 1915, 13.
3 Private Francis Ramsbottom Isherwood, Canterbury Infantry Bn, from Governor’s Bay, Lyttelton.
4 Evening Post, 3 July 1915, 13.
5 Ibid., 5 July 1915, 8.
it knew the story was by a father about his son, it did comment that it had abridged it somewhat because “much of the information has already been published in these columns.”

This was the first instance of Ross being hampered by the conditions under which he had to work. His stories appearing in New Zealand weeks and sometimes months after the news they were reporting was the bane of Ross’s life on Gallipoli and was a direct result of the restrictions imposed upon him by the Government, restrictions which were exacerbated by the censorship process. The most onerous restriction was the inability to cable because of the cost that would incur.

Ross might have appreciated the irony when he learned that Noël, while recovering in Cairo, had indulged in some war reporting of his own. The younger Ross, who had worked in the reading room at the Christchurch Sun before enlisting, filed an account of the 25 April landing to the paper for which his father was a correspondent, The Times in London, and that august journal was so taken with it that it prefaced Noël’s work:

The following grim and characteristic story of the landing on the Gallipoli Peninsula – five days of hell, as he himself calls it – is told by a New Zealander who took part in the fighting. In a covering letter, the writer says: ‘I have had my second turn with the “unspeakable Turk” and as a result am in hospital with a wrecked spine and rather a badly tangled set of nerves, caused through concussion from a shell and a fall. The enclosed is perhaps crude, but I made rather an effort to write it, and Nurse says never again – for a while anyhow’. The ‘enclosed’ is probably the most vivid personal narrative of the Gallipoli fighting which has yet reached this country.

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6 Ibid.
7 Noël Ross’s first “turn with the Unspeakable Turk” was as being part of the New Zealand force which deterred a Turkish attack on the Suez Canal.
8 The Times, 1 June 1915, 7.
It was bylined “by a New Zealander” and bore the date of 5 May – while Malcolm Ross was still at sea – and was published in The Times on 1 June. It is worthwhile recording something of the younger Ross’s war service and the remaining two years of his life because the lifestyle he and his mother adopted in London – with occasional visits from Malcolm Ross – provides an insight into what seemed an extraordinary magnetism on the part of Noël Ross and the presumed influence of the father. It also provides a context for later judgments on the worth of Ross as a war correspondent. The New Zealand Free Lance, for example, said after the war that Ross’s work was affected by his son’s death, though it needs hardly to be noted that hundreds of thousands of people, in positions of influence or otherwise, had sons killed in the war. And to further underline context, it should be noted that the New Zealand Free Lance shared ownership with Ross’s most enduring critic, the Observer.

Noël Ross was sent to London in June for further treatment but was discharged from the army “on account of wounds received in action” in September 1915. He persisted, however, and was eventually commissioned in the (British) Royal Field Artillery, but was deemed not fit for overseas duty and was confined to the role of gunnery instructor. He continued to suffer from the effects of his Gallipoli mauling, however, and was discharged after a medical board ruled him unfit for duty. He had been staying with his mother at the Dudley Court Hotel in Queen’s Gate, but when soldiering was denied him they moved into a 300-year-old cottage on the hill at Hampstead, Hollybush House, which was a London residence for them and a haven when on leave for Malcolm. It eventually housed an array of war memorabilia – water colours of Gallipoli, German helmets, Prussian and Turkish bayonets and a makeshift flag of red, white and blue that had been souvenired from a ruined house in France, where it had flown from a window as a welcome to British troops. These were the types of artefacts Malcolm Ross had originally been charged with collecting for a proposed New Zealand war museum.

9 New Zealand Free Lance, 21 May 1919, 4.
12 Ibid., 15.
Greatly sorrowed as Noël was at his inability to serve in the war, his life developed rapidly in a different direction and one, no doubt for someone who valued contacts in high places, that earned the pride and approval of his father. Encouraged by the prominence and approbation accorded him by *The Times*, Noël approached the editor and was given a position on the editorial staff. “With enthusiasm he entered upon this new work, and his writings quickly attracted the attention of Lord Northcliffe and of many readers of *The Times,*” his parents later wrote. Among his readers was Rudyard Kipling, who, apparently impressed with what he read, invited Noël to a weekend at his Sussex home, Bateman’s. Kipling “was like a boy and with an exuberance of youthful joy, got Noël to perform a Māori war dance that scared the simple labourers and set the cattle running.” Noël also joined the London social elite when Violet, Lady Cecil, the wife of Lord Cecil, son of a former British Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, invited him for a weekend at their country estate, Bodiam, where they were joined by Kipling’s daughter, Elsie. “Tomorrow, Miss K [Elsie Kipling] comes over for me in her two-seater car, and we go to their place for lunch.” There were also visits to Cliveden, the grand Buckinghamshire home of the Astor family which, among many other assets on both sides of the Atlantic, owned the Sunday newspaper, the *Observer*. “In that hospitable home of the Astors he was a welcome guest and there he met from time to time many of the celebrated people of the day,” his parents recalled.

Forrest Ross wrote enthusiastically to her husband about their son’s social life:

Noël came back to London with the Kiplings this afternoon. He had a most wonderful time – no one else there, which was delightful. Kipling and he sat up until one o’clock in the morning talking and the great man went right through the book [*Light and Shade In War*], criticising, admiring and chuckling. He says your Last Load is magnificent … Your verses are fine, so you ought to

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13 Alfred Harmsworth, then Baron (and later first Viscount) Northcliffe, one of the early British newspaper barons who had bought *The Times* in 1908; he also held various government roles, including Minister of Munitions and director of propaganda).
15 Ibid., 10.
16 Ibid., 8.
17 Ibid., 11.
be pleased. He has … stacks of advice and wants both you and me to visit him … come over.  

The “Last Load” was a reference to a chapter by Ross about the evacuation of sick and wounded from Gallipoli.

Journalistically, Noël Ross was also busily engaged, his writings for *The Times* ranging from a whimsical piece about the racing of high bicycles (“penny farthings”) to two separate visits to the Royal Navy’s Grand Fleet at Scapa Flow. The first was with a group of journalists and on the second he (and other journalists) accompanied the King, George V, to both the fleet and to munitions works. “These were great days for the young author and he was very happy,” his parents wrote. The happiness was increased with his engagement to a Sydney woman, Eileen Buchanan, but during a war in which constant happiness for anyone was a rare commodity, it did not last. Toward the end of 1917, Noël’s constitution, weakened by his wounds, could not ward off typhoid and he died on 19 December – on the very eve of his wedding: “On a grey winter’s day, when London lay under a shroud of snow, he passed peacefully away in the presence of the three who loved him so well.”

His death and funeral – he was buried at Hampstead Cemetery – provided further impressive evidence of the array of friends and acquaintances he had acquired in his brief time in London. The editor of *The Times* received a letter from Buckingham Palace:

The King was grieved to read in this morning’s *Times* of the death of Mr Noël Ross at the early age of 27. His Majesty knew him well and was always impressed with his personality. I am to express to you and to the staff of *The Times* the King’s sympathy in the loss

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18 Forrest Ross to Malcolm Ross, 21 December 1916 (Ross papers, MS-Papers-8108), Alexander Turnbull Library (hereafter ATL).
20 Ibid., 9.
21 Ibid., 23.
of a gallant colleague, whose promising career has so tragically been cut short on the eve of his wedding.\textsuperscript{22}

The King, then the Duke of York, had met Malcolm Ross in New Zealand in 1901. A telegram addressed to Malcolm Ross, Holly Bush Cottage, Holly Mount, Hampstead, was delivered on 20 December: “All at \textit{The Times} most deeply grieved at the passing of your dear son and genius.” It was signed, “Northcliffe.” And another: “Our deepest sorrow and sympathy to you both. Kipling.”\textsuperscript{23} \textit{The Times} obituary on its leader page paid this tribute:

In Noël Ross were joined the gift of graceful writing and the gift of a joyous heart. His enthusiasm, his gaiety, his unconcealed and almost boyish enjoyment of the lighter side of life, his freshness of outlook, and his natural charm of speech and manner will not easily be forgotten by those among whom he lived and moved.\textsuperscript{24}

Perhaps the most surprising tribute – surprising, at least, from the distance of years – was from the erstwhile general officer commanding (GOC) the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, General Sir Ian Hamilton. It cannot have been often that a British general would give such pause to the death of an antipodean lance-corporal who had briefly served under him more than two years previously. Hamilton in a letter to the parents laid bare his feelings:

I have felt the sting of this same sorrow of yours too sharply to write to you before. The chief attraction (amongst a multitude) of your boy to me lay in his intense vitality, and although that was no shield against shells or bayonets, it makes it yet more natural and yet more cruel that his young life should have been cut short by an ordinary illness. I had something of the same feeling with regard to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 24.
\item \textsuperscript{23} William Downie Stewart personal papers (ARC-0164/001), Hocken Library.
\item \textsuperscript{24} \textit{The Times}, 21 December 1917, 9.
\end{itemize}
that splendid figure of heroic youth, Rupert Brooke, of whom your boy so often and in so many strange ways reminded me.  

Since it was highly improbable that Hamilton, as the commander on board ship, had met Noël Ross, a non-commissioned officer among thousands on shore, in the first week of the Gallipoli invasion, it has to be assumed that they had met socially in London. Their initial meeting was perhaps through the agency of Malcolm Ross, who was known to Hamilton during the Gallipoli campaign. However they met, the attraction between the older, senior officer and the younger, junior former soldier, seemed genuine. Perhaps more indicative of this extraordinary bond than the letter of sympathy was the fact Hamilton readily agreed to a request from Malcolm Ross that he write a foreword for the book he and Forrest had published as a tribute to their son, Noël Ross and His Work. The book comprised articles the younger Ross had written for The Times and for Punch, plus some letters he had written as a boy to school friends and to his parents. The classically educated Hamilton was at his most eloquent as he traversed the articles, which had been sent to him in galley proof form. The proofs were too slender evidence, he wrote, to convince those who never knew Noël Ross that he would have set his mark upon literature:

I could say a great deal about the personality of Noël Ross, but I am discouraged by the thought of how far short of the reality any appreciation of mine would carry the reader who had never seen him. My hope is that Reviewers and Public will take off their spectacles and remember their own ardent boyhood or girlhood when they read these letters, and especially these schoolboy letters. Then a monument more enduring than bronze will have been raised to a splendid young New Zealander; then the Old Country will know something of a being who was the embodiment of sunlight. Like Apollo, he was fair to see. 

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25 Malcolm and Forrest Ross, Noël Ross and His Work, 27.
26 Ibid., x.
Hamilton had been invited to the marriage between Ross and Eileen Buchanan and he recorded:

I was saying I was too fond of the boy to be able to write about what has been to me a tragedy. I will only say this, that I shall never forget the sad news coming in without a word of warning; the silver bowl, a wedding present destined for his happy future home, on the table before us at the moment, on the point of being sent to Hampstead. So my wife tore up her letter of congratulation, and many radiant visions seemed to fall to earth with the fragments.27

The sum of the collective tributes was a remarkable outpouring at a time when sudden death was commonplace, even expected, and grief was a constant companion. Very few in New Zealand or Britain – or many other places besides – would not have been touched by the shock and the aching emptiness of losing someone close. Within Ross’s own sphere of friends and acquaintances, there must have been an untold number. It showed that grief can withstand the frequency of its feeling. It was what Australian historian Pat Jalland called “the silent heartache of the Great War.”28

Malcolm Ross and his son were in Cairo together for just over a week before Noël was shipped to Britain for further treatment. Malcolm found getting to Gallipoli was not as straightforward as he may have imagined. “It was one thing to start for Gallipoli, quite another to get there, especially if you are not a fighting man,” he noted.29 Ross related how he was told by others that he would never be allowed to embark for Gallipoli but he spoke to a range of officers and sent off his credentials to Hamilton – then waited. The English novelist, Sir Compton Mackenzie, had been seconded to join Hamilton’s staff as an intelligence officer and he too had trouble, two weeks before Ross, convincing authorities in Egypt that he needed a ship to Gallipoli. Mackenzie

27 Ibid., x-xi.
29 Evening Post, 13 August 1915, 4.
recorded he asked a “disagreeable little major” at the Alexandria headquarters of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force how long he might remain in Egypt and the major replied: “I can’t give you the least idea of anything. It may be for two months. It may be for ever.”

As it was with Mackenzie, so it was with Ross but eventually he was contacted and told Hamilton had approved his joining the force.

Ross’s first dispatches from Gallipoli were filed in the last week of June and it was obvious from the outset that the Government refusing to allow him to cable his stories severely constrained him from fulfilling his stated intention of giving “the people of New Zealand some adequate idea of the glorious deeds of her brave sons.” Censorship was also a severe restriction. His first despatch was dated 24 June yet not published in New Zealand until 13 August – the week following the briefly successful assault on Chunuk Bair, by which time many of New Zealand’s “brave sons” had performed “glorious deeds” but these were not able to be recorded in a timely fashion by Ross. This discrepancy in timing was to bedevil Ross for the duration of the Gallipoli campaign. On 24 July, for example, he wrote about a visit to Quinn’s Post, a key strongpoint whose defences and organisation had been transformed by the celebrated commander of the Wellington battalion, Colonel William Malone. Ross, as ever, was constrained by censorship from mentioning names but it was obvious (at least with hindsight) who he meant when he wrote:

The genial colonel who is in charge and shows you round was a Taranaki barrister, and his motto is that the art of war lies in the cultivation of the domestic virtues. Therefore he is transforming Quinn’s into a model workshop and dwelling place wherein you can even drink a cup of tea in peace!

The trouble for Ross was that his cumbersome filing method meant the story did not appear in New Zealand newspapers until 23 September, several weeks after it had been widely reported that Malone had been killed when trying to retain the heights of Chunuk

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31 Peter Stanley, Quinn’s Post, Anzac, Gallipoli (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2005), 101.
32 Dominion, 23 September 1915, 6.
Bair. Similarly, Ross wrote feelingly of the death of a Dunedin friend, Colonel Arthur Bauchop (but again without mentioning names):

At the outpost, the Otago colonel was preparing to lead his men into battle as soon as the shades of light fell. He was, as ever, cheery and brave. In the dusk outside his dugout we sat and chatted of the prospects of the night attack. The men, he said, were eager and in high spirits, though they knew there was stiff work ahead. We listened to two of them soberly discussing, with a strong Scottish accent, the question of whether on the eve of a battle a man should shake hands with his chum or not. With the old Covenanter spirit, they decided that there should be no such goodbyes. With these words, the gallant colonel buckled on his armour and went off with his regiment and a platoon of Māoris into the darkness. He succeeded in accomplishing the task that had been set him that night, and more. Sad to tell, he was shot through the head and spine after a dashing charge at the head of his men into a Turkish trench.33

That was not published in New Zealand until 13 October, long after Bauchop’s death had been reported.

By this time, Ross’s activities – or lack of them – were prompting comments in New Zealand. The Observer, in a piece scoffing at some of the excessive prose of the English correspondent, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, snidely slipped in a mention of Ross “sitting in the Heliopolis Hotel in Cairo with a bottle of Burgundy and his favourite fountain pen.”34 The editor of the Waikato Independent, A.A. Reese, wrote to the Press Association of Ross’s dispatches: “The stuff so far received has been piffle.”35 Questions were also being asked in Parliament by Liberal members. The Member for

33 Evening Post, 13 October 1915, 11.
34 New Zealand Observer, 14 August 1915, 2
35 Reese to United Press Association, 23 July 1915 (New Zealand Press Association correspondence, Acc 75-213, 45-47, Box 98), Alexander Turnbull Library (hereafter ATL).
Riccarton, George Witty asked—sarcastically, it is assumed—in the House of Representatives what had become of Ross. “Had he been killed or interned? Little or no news had been received from him and he was apprehensive that something might have happened to that gentleman.” The Minister of Defence, James Allen, replied that he had no intimation that Ross was either wounded or interned. A month later, a Wanganui member, William Veitch, asked if the Government would either direct Ross to go to the front and make his reports there or return to New Zealand. He said the Wanganui Herald (founded by the former Liberal premier, John Ballance) had reported that Ross’s reports were not giving the satisfaction anticipated. He also criticised Ross for including in one of his reports the erroneous information that the noted New Zealand tennis player, Anthony Wilding, had been killed at Gallipoli. It was true Wilding had been reported killed at Gallipoli, but the initial mistake could hardly be attributed to Ross.

The Observer commented that Ashmead-Bartlett and soldiers’ letters were all that was worth reading. What the paper did not say, and perhaps could not have known, was that the veracity of both could be questioned. The Minister of Defence, James Allen, had written to the chairman of UPA, George Fenwick, long before the Gallipoli landings complaining of the amount of incorrect material from Egypt being published. He asked Fenwick how he could stop the publication of “incorrect news.”

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36 *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates* (hereafter NZPD), Vol 173, 31 August 1915.
37 Ibid., 20 September 1915.
38 *The Times*, 12 May 1915, 8.
40 Ibid., 14 May 1915, 7.
41 *New Zealand Observer*, 14 August 1915, 2.
There has been so much of it extracted from letters of disappointed troopers and others that I begin to wonder what is truth, but the climax has come when the newspapers published information that two New Zealanders had been murdered in Egypt.\(^{42}\)

According to Allen, the general officer commanding the NZEF, Alexander Godley, had told him there was no foundation to the reports two New Zealanders had been murdered.

It was evident that the factors weighing most heavily against Ross – and which must have been weighing heavily too on his mind – were the censorship and the cumbersome and time-consuming method of filing imposed upon him by the New Zealand Government. While other correspondents such as Bean and Ashmead-Bartlett were constrained by the same censorship, and equally frustrated, they had the comparative luxury of being able to cable their stories and have them published within two or three days of the events they described. Nothing could have been more galling for a correspondent than to work with colleagues who, Ross knew, would always have the best stories published first. Ross’s despatches therefore became supplementary to not only the official dispatches, usually brief and bland and not always the whole truth, emanating from Hamilton’s headquarters via London, but also to those of Bean, Ashmead-Bartlett and various other correspondents who spent less time on the peninsula. Indeed, as the United Press Association developed (and became the New Zealand Press Association in 1942) reports from its correspondents became known as “supplementaries” or, more generally, “supps.” NZPA correspondents as recently as the 1980s prefaced their reports from around the world as “NZPA supp.”\(^{43}\)

Ross complained to Allen about the restrictions under which he was operating and Allen cabled the general officer commanding the NZEF, Alexander Godley:

“Malcolm Ross appears to be hampered by want of opportunities or too severe censorship. Please rectify as far as possible so that New Zealand papers may have adequate benefit from Ross’s writings.”\(^{44}\) Godley’s reply was succinct: “Opportunities

\(^{42}\) Allen to Fenwick, 29 January, 1915 (8 D1/53), Archives New Zealand (hereafter ANZ).

\(^{43}\) See Sanders, *Dateline – NZPA*, which relates the history of NZPA’s overseas correspondents.

\(^{44}\) Allen to Godley, 21 September, 1915 (8 D1/53), ANZ.
A detail of the censored Ross dispatch that prompted the manager of the Press Association, William Attack, to write to the Prime Minister, William Massey.

AD1 51/217 Archives New Zealand
for Ross not lacking. Steps taken rectify censorship of telegrams." A week after Allen’s cable to Godley, Ross sent a hand-written letter to Allen headed “Personal”:

All our despatches are severely censored and it is very difficult to make them interesting in regard to the intimate details that New Zealanders would like to read about. I would have liked to have written about Bauchop and Malone and many other gallant fellows who have gone, but mention of names is absolutely interdicted. You might let Cabinet know all this in confidence.  

One heavily censored report filed by Ross was one too many for William Atack, the manager of the United Press Association. He sent the report to the Prime Minister, William Massey, and complained of the “unfair and scandalous way New Zealanders have been treated by the censor.” Names of New Zealanders awarded decorations had been excised but the name of an English officer had been left intact. Atack complained:

It is a fair surmise that Mr Ross wrote the awards to New Zealanders compared favourably with those to the British army and that this excited the jealousy of the unworthy and contemptible censor.  

Bean had strong views on not so much censorship *per se*, but on the unthinking manner in which the blue pencil was taken to reports. One entry in his diary reads:

Censor … not only bans information of military value – which of course is right – but spends most of his time ruling out any truth calculated to “depress or alarm” the public. That is worse than useless with British people – it is harmful. The one thing to buck
them up is to let them know exactly how things are – good or bad. It was so in the Boer War – in Queensland the one thing which made every man in Parliament rise to his feet and sing the National Anthem – including some that in ordinary times you would call anti-British – was the news of the “Black Week” reverses. They have chucked the advantage to the winds, they have destroyed the confidence of the British nations in the British official news.48

The Government had by this time dispatched a Member of Parliament, Lieutenant-Colonel Heaton Rhodes, to the NZEF to report on a range of issues the force faced in Egypt and Gallipoli. These primarily concerned medical treatment, postage facilities, the distribution of gifts from New Zealand to soldiers and the vexed issue of the accuracy and speed of reporting casualty lists. Ross was added to Rhodes’s shopping list. The best outcome for Ross was that after an exchange of cables between Rhodes and Massey, he was given permission to cable – rather than post – “news of important engagements or events” although how these were defined and by whom was not made clear.49 But unhappily for Ross, though he no doubt knew this already, Rhodes reported that if discrimination existed in censorship “it was certainly in favour of New Zealand on account of its distance from the theatre of operations.”50 Rhodes also canvassed with Godley, Brigadier-General George Johnston, the New Zealand artillery commander, and Ross another part of Ross’s brief: to collect artefacts for an eventual New Zealand war museum. Rhodes said Ross would do what he could but “I would not put our correspondent to the task of collecting the autographs of senior military and naval officers.”51 Rhodes noted how dangerous it was for Ross and other correspondents on Gallipoli:

During my stay at Gallipoli I found that the life of war correspondents was a particularly arduous and dangerous one. At

48 Diaries and notes of C. E. W. Bean concerning the war of 1914-18 (hereafter Bean papers) (AWM38 3DRL 606 item 5), Australian War Memorial (hereafter AWM).
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
A man of vision: Charles Bean in a trench in France in 1916.

Bean a year earlier in a communication trench on Gallipoli. This photograph was taken by Peter Schuler of the Age, Melbourne.

Australian War Memorial PS1850
all times they ran the risk, in the trenches and behind them, of being hit by shells or stray bullets, and during the early operations and up to the end of August were undoubtedly great.\textsuperscript{52}

One essential and insurmountable problem for Ross was that he arrived late because of the vacillating by newspapers and the Government over how the war should be reported and by whom. By the time Ross landed on Gallipoli in June 1915, the tone of reporting had already been set by Ashmead-Bartlett and, to a lesser extent, by Bean, and indelible impressions of the fighting had been created in New Zealand and Australia. The Anzac legend had already been well established and Ross’s inability to compete on equal terms with the other correspondents merely compounded the inadequacy.\textsuperscript{53} Ashmead-Bartlett set the standard with his first reports from on board a ship off the Gallipoli coast on the morning of the 25 April invasion. Bean was with the invasion fleet but did not receive permission from Sir Ian Hamilton to write until 2 May. Bean later wrote in a letter to the \textit{Australasian Journalist} that there were advantages in not being able to write for the first week of the invasion:

In some ways I am glad I didn’t get leave to write during the first few days as I should not have been on my guard against many stories – mostly the best ones – which turned out to be pure fiction.\textsuperscript{54}

Before Ashmead-Bartlett’s report was published on 8 May, the only published news had been the official communiqué that a landing had been effected. This was complemented by attempts by reporters in Cairo to embellish the official line with rumours and second and third-hand accounts which they could pick up. It was Ashmead-Bartlett’s dispatch that put flesh onto the bones and, in the case of Australia in particular, galvanised a nation. With a well-honed skill for the dramatic phrase, a turn of

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 13.

\textsuperscript{53} The legend is centred on Australian military pre-eminence on Gallipoli. This view is countered by, among others, Christopher Pugsley in \textit{The Anzac Experience – New Zealand, Australia and Empire in the First World War} (Auckland: Reed, 2004), 19-37.

hyperbole and some poetic licence – and possession of a few but not all the facts – 
Ashmead-Bartlett single-handedly with one dispatch established an enduring legend. 
The story was written in chronological fashion, beginning with the move from Mudros 
to close to the Turkish mainland and the transfer of troops to ships' pinnaces, which 
passed for landing craft in the first major amphibious assault in warfare. When the first 
boats reached shore, “The Australians rose to the occasion,” Ashmead-Bartlett wrote:

They did not wait for orders or for the boats to reach the beach, but 
sprang into the sea and formed a sort of rough line. They rushed 
the enemy’s trenches, although their magazines were uncharged. 
They just went in with cold steel.55

When the Australians saw the heights confronting them, with a second line of Turkish 
defenders, “this race of athletes” proceeded to tackle the cliff.

There has been no finer feat in this war than this sudden landing in 
the dark and the storming of the heights, and above all, the holding 
on whilst reinforcements were landed. These raw colonial troops in 
these desperate hours proved worthy to fight side by side with the 
heroes of Mons, the Aisne, Ypres and Neuve Chapelle.56

Ashmead-Bartlett, though employed by the English Daily Telegraph, was the 
correspondent for all the London-based daily newspapers. His report was picked up by 
the Reuter news agency and sent throughout the Empire. Its effect was such that it 
created him an instant celebrity. It apparently accelerated recruiting in Australia and the 
Town and Country Journal said of it: “Mr Ashmead-Bartlett’s graphic account of the 
glorious deeds of Australians in the Gallipoli peninsula has sent a thrill of pride 
throughout the whole Commonwealth [of Australia].”57

55 Fred and Elizabeth Brenchley, Myth Maker (Milton, Queensland: John Wiley and Sons, 2005), 262.
56 Ibid., 265.
The New South Wales Department of Instruction republished his account and dispatches by Bean in a booklet, *Australians in Action: the Story of Gallipoli*, for the benefit of school pupils in the state.\(^{58}\) Articles by the two were also reproduced in a newspaper magazine after the evacuation in December 1915.\(^{59}\)

Ashmead-Bartlett’s report was displayed as prominently in New Zealand newspapers as it was in Australian, but with some differences. The word “Australian” became “Australasian,” even though New Zealanders were not part of the initial predawn assault. Ashmead-Bartlett’s ringing phrase, “race of athletes,” which would undoubtedly have found proud acceptance in Australia, disappeared somewhere on its way across the Tasman. Rather than the “race of athletes” proceeding to scale the cliffs, New Zealand newspapers preferred the neutral collective pronoun, “they.”\(^{60}\)

A British member of Parliament, Aubrey Herbert, was an intelligence officer on Gallipoli because of his expertise in Turkish and Arabic (it was he who organised the May ceasefire at Anzac so both sides could bury their dead). Herbert rather astutely, and unusually at the time for an Englishman, reflected on the distinction between New Zealanders and Australians and also pointed, unknowingly, to the restrictions faced by Ross. Speaking of the New Zealanders, he wrote:

> The great distance from their own country created an atmosphere of loneliness. This loneliness was emphasised by the fact that the New Zealanders rarely received the same recognition as the Australians in the press, and many of their gallant deeds went unrecorded or were attributed to their greater neighbours.\(^{61}\)

Although some soldiers later treated correspondents’ words with disdain, Herbert’s point was keenly felt in a theatre of war where there was no New Zealand correspondent, as a lieutenant with the Auckland Mounted Rifles, A. Briscoe Moore, made clear:

\(^{58}\) Ibid.
\(^{60}\) *Evening Post*, 8 May 1915, 9; *Otago Daily Times*, 8 May 1915, 8.
A study of Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett taken during the 1920s.

from Myth Maker
Throughout the Sinai and Palestine campaigns, the New Zealand Mounted Rifle Brigade had no official correspondent to chronicle its doings, with the result that but few people not immediately concerned have any idea of the experiences of this, for a time, forgotten unit. The brigade got little official recognition from Imperial or Australian correspondents – many times … the work done by the New Zealanders was credited to others …

Ashmead-Bartlett was something of a colourful figure, with accumulative descriptions by various contemporaries leading almost to a conclusion that he was a living embodiment of the fictional hero of Evelyn Waugh’s novel, *Scoop*, which caricatured the well-fed, well-watered and well-equipped English war correspondent. He also had decided opinions, not without some basis of experience, on how war should be conducted in general and on the Gallipoli campaign in particular. He was said to have warned Sir Ian Hamilton three days before the landings about the difficulties of the tasks ahead and wondered, on 2 May, “whether Sir Ian Hamilton would really face the true facts.” This led to inevitable conflict with Hamilton and when Ashmead-Bartlett returned to Britain in June to re-equip himself after a ship he was on was torpedoed, he evidently aired his opinions on Gallipoli to all who would listen. “Yet probably the amount of harm Ashmead-Bartlett’s pessimism wrought at home has been over-estimated,” Compton Mackenzie wrote. “He was, after all, only one extra sack of coal unloaded on a Newcastle of ill-will.”

The Australian journalist and historian, Les Carlyon, painted a graphic pen portrait of Ashmead-Bartlett when he spoke at the inaugural memorial dinner of the C. E. W. Bean Foundation in Sydney in 2001:

Ashmead-Bartlett brought a Parisian chef to cook for him. He got about in a yellow silk dressing gown with crimson trim. He liked

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65 Mackenzie, 89.
to drink, preferably champagne, He was always broke. He didn’t know whether he was a journalist or a political player, and he was sometimes careless with facts. His glum demeanour seemed to say that he was the only person who could truly see what was going on and that it was lonely to be surrounded by so many small minds. But we should not take him lightly. He was right about most things at Gallipoli.  

Ashmead-Bartlett’s return to Gallipoli in June led to Hamilton deciding all the war correspondents should be based in a camp on the Aegean island of Imbros, where Hamilton’s headquarters were also established. This was particularly unwelcome news for Bean and Ross because it meant they would not be able to continue to live in dugouts among the troops on Gallipoli. Bean fired off a letter to Australian headquarters, saying “it is quite impossible for me to do at Imbros the work for which my Government appointed me.” Bean could have been writing for Ross when he concluded his letter: “I would submit that my case is really quite distinct from that of private correspondents or of British correspondents.” Bean had expressed a similar frustration earlier when he was in Cairo waiting for permission to join the Australian forces who were on their way to Gallipoli. It was a slight to Australia, he said, for the War Office to treat him as if he were just another English correspondent. One of Bean’s champions was a senior Australian officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Brudenell White, and Bean remarked:

White, who has more genuine sense in his little finger than many War officials have in their small minds, knows that I can do no

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68 Bean to headquarters, Australian 1st Division, 27 June 1915, Bean papers (AWM38 3DRL 606 item 9), AWM.
harm and may do much good ... I'm the representative of my country and not of a newspaper.69

Ross and Bean sought a dispensation from Hamilton, who agreed they could alternate between the camp and the front as often as they liked. Ross later described the camp as "quite a pleasant place, at once the joy of all invited to it and the envy of all who passed by."70 Of the meeting with Hamilton, Ross said "we found Sir Ian quite charming and willing to give us all our former liberty in getting about."71

The British correspondents lived at the camp permanently, making trips across the water to Gallipoli and Helles, while Bean and Ross lived mostly on the peninsula, using the camp as a refuge "where, in safety from the Turkish shells and bullets, we could write up – as far as the censor would allow – the doings of our own men."72 Ross shared a tent with two machine guns when the camp was first established, then got his own tent and, as autumn approached, he and the other correspondents bought a two-storied stone house that they named Château Pericles.

From the dug-outs of Gallipoli and the Château Pericles on Imbros to a hospital in Cairo, thence to the luxury of Shepheard's, and on to a tent in the desert at Lake Timsah, I went by uncertain stages, never knowing what a day or an hour might bring forth. Months afterwards it was a pleasant change to meet the British war correspondents, and, for a time, to be their honoured guest in a real château in France, with a great garden, a tennis lawn, a billiard table, and five motor-cars at their disposal. There I slept in a great high-ceiled room into which almost you could have put the whole of the Château Pericles, and all the dug-outs I ever had on Gallipoli. And yet there are times when wistful eyes look back

69 Bean diary entry, 14 March 1915, Bean papers (AWM38 3DRL 606 item 2), AWM.
71 Ross to Forrest, 3 August 1915 (MS-papers-8168), ATL.
72 Ross, "Abodes of an Anzac," 78.
What Malcolm Ross termed “the abodes of an Anzac.” Above, he emerges from the dugout built for him by Turkish prisoners at the direction of the British Member of Parliament and intelligence officer, Aubrey Herbert. Below, The fondly-remembered Chateau Pericles on Imbros.

both photographs from *Light and Shade In War*
across the fields of France and the leagues of sea that separates me from my old abodes at Anzac.\textsuperscript{73}

The dugouts on Gallipoli, probably because they represented “home” and a semblance of privacy and safety – though not much of either and less of the latter than of the former – recur in the writing of Ross and others. Ross’s first “permanent” dugout at Anzac was made for him by two Turkish prisoners at the direction of the British MP and intelligence officer, Aubrey Herbert. In such circumstances, a man’s home may still be his castle but it was a castle to be shared. Cecil Malthus, a private in the Canterbury battalion, arrived at Anzac in the first week of August during the Chunuk Bair assault:

We found a hut bearing the name of Malcolm Ross, the New Zealand press correspondent, and made ourselves at home in it, as he had left a note to say he would be several days away. There was a keg of Greek wine that we felt sure he would wish us to do justice to.\textsuperscript{74}

For all the differences in personality and nationality between the various correspondents, including the fundamental difference that Ross and Bean were employed by their governments and the others by newspapers or agencies, there was cooperation between them. None could be everywhere at once and the British needed also to write about British troops at Helles, so they shared information. One such occasion led to some Ashmead-Bartlett embellishment. During the August assault on Chunuk Bair, Ross supplied Ashmead-Bartlett with a description of an attack by the Māori Pioneer Battalion. Ashmead-Bartlett reported to his newspapers:

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 84-85.
\textsuperscript{74} Malthus, \textit{Anzac – A Retrospect}, 102.
Although few in numbers, they closed on the Turks with fury using their rifles’ clubs, swinging them round their heads and laying out several with each sweep.\textsuperscript{75}

Bean asked Ross if he had told Ashmead-Bartlett this and Ross replied that he had not, but that Ashmead-Bartlett had later said to him: “I say, I hope you didn’t mind my inserting one or two things in your account – one or two things I heard from officers.”\textsuperscript{76}

Ashmead-Bartlett left Gallipoli soon after, his accreditation withdrawn by Hamilton because of “the Murdoch affair.” The story can be briefly told. Keith Murdoch, who had been runner-up to Bean in the journalists’ poll that chose the Australian correspondent, arrived on Gallipoli on his way to London to take up a reporting role. Ashmead-Bartlett told Murdoch of his misgivings about the way the campaign was being run and wrote a letter for Murdoch to take to the British Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith. Murdoch was stopped in Marseilles on the way to London and the letter taken from him. In the event, he wrote his own letter from memory. Who told Hamilton to have Murdoch intercepted in Marseilles? No conclusive answer has appeared. Some historians have blamed Henry Nevinson, representing the English provincial newspapers, for being what Ashmead-Bartlett called “the Judas in our camp.”\textsuperscript{77} One historian blamed Ross.\textsuperscript{78} A cook at the correspondents’ camp has also been blamed. The answer will never be known but rather than an informant from among the correspondents, it seems just as likely that Hamilton was so suspicious of Ashmead-Bartlett that he ordered Murdoch’s interception just in case. Ashmead-Bartlett returned to London, there to continue his campaign against Gallipoli, arguing that Hamilton should have attacked in the first place at Bulair at the neck of the peninsula and that there was general command incompetence. He also continued his campaign the following year with a lecture tour of New Zealand and Australia – in New Zealand, he was accompanied throughout by an army officer to ensure he complied with

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Evening Post}, 26 August 1915, 7.
\textsuperscript{76} Macleod, 116.
\textsuperscript{77} Brenchley, 169.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
censorship. He was constrained from any criticism of government policy on conduct of the war, any criticism of generals, any discussion of censorship and any “invidious comparisons.” By this time, Hamilton had been dismissed as the Gallipoli commander and the peninsula had been evacuated. Ashmead-Bartlett may have contributed to the debate against Gallipoli, but could not take all the credit. “We had started the ball rolling,” he later wrote. Intriguingly for one who had such an influence in the Tasman world, Ashmead-Bartlett in his lectures was critical of “the prolonged panegyrics on the Anzacs” in newspapers. Admiration for the Anzacs threatens to destroy the true perspective of their place in the Empire’s armies, he said, neatly overlooking the fact he had been the original panegyrist. The Dominion in an editorial said it could assure Ashmead-Bartlett that “our pride in our own soldiers does not blind us to the equally superlative merits of the British troops.”

The Murdoch association with Gallipoli did not end in 1915. Keith Murdoch after the war became a newspaper owner in Australia and his son, Rupert, developed and expanded the business into one of the biggest and most influential news media companies. The Murdoch-owned News Corporation was one of the principal financial backers of the 1981 Australian film, Gallipoli, which perpetuated the heroic imagery of 1915 and the myth that Australians fought gallantly at the behest of incompetent, callous British generals. It was an example of the power of cinema to influence public imaginings of historic events.

A graphic example of the co-operation between correspondents came at the end of the Gallipoli campaign in 1915 when Ross and Bean were together to cover the evacuation, the night when the Allies called it a day. Ross, though, was suffering from

79 Army Department papers (AD10 8/1), ANZ.
80 Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, The Uncensored Dardanelles (London: Hutchinson and Co, 1918), 258.
81 Dominion, 18 May 1916, 4.
82 Ibid.
83 Gallipoli, 1981, directed by Peter Weir; the production company was R&R Films, part-owned by Rupert Murdoch. The film centred on the fatal charge of the Australian Light Horse at The Nek on 7 August 1915 and portrayed the officer who gave the final order as English. In fact, he was an Australian, Lieutenant-Colonel John Antill. See Les Carlyon, Gallipoli – Commemorative Edition (Sydney: Macmillan, 2005), 401-402; and John Hamilton, Goodbye Cobber, God Bless You (Sydney: Macmillan, 2004), 307-308. For a general counter to popular myths about World War I, see Gordon Corrigan, Mud, Blood and Poppycock (London: Cassell, 2003).
jaundice and so ill he had to be transferred from the cruiser on which both were stationed to a hospital ship. Bean recorded:

I went with poor old Ross to the hospital ship *Dunluce Castle*. He was so seedy today that the doctor had him put off immediately he got up. He has a temperature which looks like paratyphoid and there is nowhere on these ships to put a sick man when the ship’s in action.\(^{84}\)

Bean cabled James Allen:

Ross with me on warship up to within a few hours of evacuation. Has been fighting against serious illness for three weeks and after managing to remain at Anzac to last was invalided to hospital ship, much against his will, by ship’s doctor. Almost collapsed while writing and asked Bean to furnish NZ Government with message.\(^{85}\)

As a result of Ross’s illness, the story of the evacuation published throughout New Zealand was written by Bean, yet attributed to Ross. The successful withdrawal was a hugely significant story and newspapers gave it the treatment it deserved. In Wellington, for example, the morning newspaper, the *Dominion*, gave it prominent treatment. “The Anzac evacuation,” the first headline read, followed by: “Vivid account by Mr Malcolm Ross.”\(^{86}\) Other newspapers treated it similarly, and all attributed it to Ross, even those who had been critical of him. While Bean filed the story in Ross’s name, and it would have landed in newspaper offices with the Ross attribution, there was an obvious clue in the first paragraph that Ross could not have been the author. The story began:

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\(^{84}\) Bean diary, 16 December 1915 (AWM38 3DRL 606 item 22), AWM.

\(^{85}\) Bean to Allen, 1 January 1916 (8 D1/53), ANZ.

\(^{86}\) *Dominion*, 1 January 1916, 7.
How the *Dominion* in Wellington headlined the dispatch, attributed to Malcolm Ross, about the evacuation from Gallipoli. It was in fact written by Charles Bean.

*Dominion*, 1 January, 1916
Three miles away, across the grey, silky sea, lies the dark shape of the land. Eight months ago, just as the first lemon grey of the dawn was breaking over that long, lizard-shaped mountain, I watched such signs as were visible of the landing of the Australian troops in Gallipoli. Now, as night falls gradually down upon the same historic hills, I am watching for the signs of their departure.87

Ross of course did not watch the lemon grey dawn, or any other sort of dawn, over Gallipoli on 25 April. He was then on board ship on the way to Egypt. It was not just newspaper editors and sub-editors who did not spot the difference. Heaton Rhodes, in his report to the Government, was glowing in his praise of the account. Ross “pluckily remained” for the evacuation despite doctors’ advice, Rhodes said.88

His three articles on the evacuation, which I was privileged to read before their dispatch to the Dominion, give a graphic and detailed account of these memorable operations. Mr Ross had an exceptional opportunity of observing the final movements, for, when the other correspondents were ordered to the war ships, he was sent to a hospital ship, which lay closer to the shore than the former. He had thus a better general view up and down the coast.89

Ross’s service record shows he was admitted to hospital in Cairo on 13 December suffering from jaundice and that a month later he was sent to a convalescent home at Luxor.90 He was still able to file, on 22 December, his own story on the evacuation.

Early in December, a German paper stated that the Dardanelles undertaking would have been abandoned long ago if it were as

87 Ibid.
88 Rhodes, 13.
89 Ibid.
90 Service personnel file, Hon Captain Malcolm Ross, NZDF Personnel Archives, Trentham.
easy to get out of the jaws of the lion as to get into them. Well, here we are clear out of them, spending a merry Christmas.\textsuperscript{91}

Ross’s dispatch embodied many of the tales which became a part of the legend of the evacuation – a military exercise that was well planned and well executed, had necessities such as decisive command, transport and secrecy and, in all essential elements, had what the original landings had lacked. Ross included the stories, now oft-told, of soldiers pleading to be the last to leave; of the various subterfuges employed to make the Turks think the Anzacs were still there in force; of the greetings and Christmas notes left in trenches for the Turks; and perhaps the most moving of all, the sadness of leaving ground so dearly won and held:

Somewhat pathetically one of the New Zealand soldiers put this phase of thought to his battalion commander: “I hope, Sir,” he said, “that those fellows who lie buried along the dere will be soundly sleeping and not hear us as we march away.” The idea that his dead comrades might think the living were forsaking them seemed to have made a deep impression on his mind.\textsuperscript{92}

Ross, because of the restrictions on his method of filing and also because of his late arrival on Gallipoli, was undoubtedly overshadowed in the public memory by the prose of Ashmead-Bartlett and Bean, however exaggerated the former may have been and however Australian-focused the latter may have been. But Ross’s contribution does not deserve to be dismissed entirely. While waiting in Cairo for permission to go to Gallipoli, Ross wrote the first news account of an incident that would later be regarded as one of the epics of the war: the lone swim by Bernard Freyberg to light flares at Bulair at the neck of the peninsula in an attempt to persuade the Turks that the main assault would be mounted there.

\textsuperscript{91} New Zealand Herald, 22 February, 1916, 4.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
The first *Anzac Book*, edited by Charles Bean in late 1915 and early 1916
One of the most extraordinary and daring feats in the war has been accomplished by a young New Zealander who, however, is not serving with the New Zealand forces.\(^{93}\)

He called Freyberg a born soldier – this was at a time when Freyberg would have been little known in New Zealand – and wrote at length and in detail of the action that gained him a Distinguished Service Order (DSO). (It is interesting to note, as an aside, that the German origins of the Freyberg family attracted none of the calumny in New Zealand that was inflicted upon others with names which were either German or just “sounded” German).\(^{94}\)

Bean left the Mediterranean theatre in early January 1916 for London and for a first visit to the Western Front.\(^{95}\) His main task at the time, while Australian troops were rested and reorganised, was editing *The Anzac Book*, a compilation of sketches, poems and reminiscences by Anzacs, with proceeds from sales going “for the benefit of patriotic funds connected with the A. & N. Z. A. C.”\(^{96}\) The compilation was described by Ken Inglis as “the Anzacs’ school magazine.”\(^{97}\) Among Ross’s three contributions was this whimsical reflection:

The Happy Warrior (A Soliloquy)

Somewhere in the Anzac Zone

In my sandy dug-out by the sea
Of Saros beyond Samothrace,
I’m as happy as happy can be,
And I’m bent upon washing my face
Before I go into my tea;
But the water’s so scarce in this land

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\(^{93}\) *Evening Post*, 21 July, 1915, 7.

\(^{94}\) See, for example, James N. Bade (ed), *Out of the Shadow of War* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998).

\(^{95}\) Fewster, 200-201.


That we do all our washing with sand —
And we always have sand in our tea.

In my fly-filled dug-out by the sea
Near Anzac, beyond Samothrace,
Both the cook and the colonel agree
That you must have some semblance of grace
At breakfast, at dinner, and tea,
To prevent you from damning the eyes
Of the savage and pestilent flies —
For you always have flies in your tea!

In my shell-swept dug-out by the sea
Of Saros, beyond Samothrace,
I’m as happy as happy can be,
Tho’ the shrapnel comes flying apace
Over moorland and mountain and lea —
For I wish you to quite understand,
Tho’ the hens have vacated the land,
Yet we always have shells with our tea!98

Back in Cairo, Ross was able to almost immediately benefit from the Government’s decision, thanks to Rhodes, to allow him to cable stories when the news warranted. The last withdrawal from Gallipoli, that of the British and French troops, took place over the New Year and Ross was able to send a dispatch from Cairo on 22 January. In marked contrast to the earlier time lags to his copy, this dispatch was published in New Zealand just three days later.

After the abandonment of Anzac and Suvla, the Turks were more keenly on the alert and the evacuation of Helles was regarded as

98 Ibid., 33-34
Malcolm Ross with British correspondents Henry Nevinson (left) and Lester Lawrence on Imbros. They are wearing the green armbands denoting war correspondents.

Australian War Memorial GO1411
more difficult. Once again, however, brilliant British generalship completely outwitted the enemy.99

Ross so far had just been a plain “Mr” in a military world in which rank really did have its privileges (commensurate with responsibilities). He sought an honorary rank of captain to put him on a par with Bean, who had been commissioned from the outset. James Allen asked the Wellington-based New Zealand army commandant, Alfred Robin, if Ross could be given the same rank as Bean and Robin replied he could dress similar to an officer but could not wear any badges. “Military rank and badges would classify him as a combatant soldier.”100 Nevertheless, Ross’s service record shows that he was approved as an honorary captain by the NZEF commander, Alexander Godley, at the New Zealand camp at Moascar, near Cairo, on 1 April, the day before Robin’s reply to Allen. He was gazetted as a captain – the last formal step in the process – on 20 April, the notice saying he was “granted the honorary rank of captain for the period of the war.”101 (Several other non-combatants were accorded honorary commissions in the same Gazette and it is most likely this was done for the practical reasons of messing and transport arrangements). A photo of Ross on Gallipoli, taken by Bean, shows Ross already wore officer-style uniform anyway, complete with a tie, but no badges of rank. He also wore the green armband indicating a war correspondent.

Ross’s bête noire, the New Zealand Observer, noted the commissioning “with a good deal of hooray” and thought the title “will apparently give him a combatant rank and a chance to follow MPs e’en to the cannon’s mouth.”102 Ross bore this constant criticism stoically, at least publicly. He remarked to James Allen early in 1916: “The criticism about myself does not worry me much, but it has been beastly mean and unfair, not to say untrue.”103 After the collection of stories by Ross and his son was published in 1916 as Light and Shade In War, Ross revealed more of what he thought of his critics to his sister Ina:

99 Dominion, 25 January 1916, 5
100 Allen to Robin, 1 April 1916; Robin to Allen, 2 April 1916 (AD1, 51-217), ANZ.
101 New Zealand Gazette, no 24, 20 April 1916, 1134.
102 New Zealand Observer, 26 August 1916, 4.
103 Ross to Allen, 28 April, 1916 (8 D1/53), ANZ.
It has been splendidly reviewed in all the English papers and is selling well. The squeakers in New Zealand will be very sick when they hear what the best London critics think of us.  

He had also written to Ina on 4 June, 1916, warning her not to make public the contents of his letter:

I don’t want any boasting about Noël’s success in the New Zealand papers, many of which are distinctly jealous of the Ross family. The Post people thought Noël good enough only for the Police Court and the New Zealand Herald took him off literary work to canvas [sic] for ads! It shows what their judgment was worth.

The criticism of Ross was not just contemporary. He has seldom been mentioned in later accounts of New Zealand involvement in World War I but when he has been, it has either been neutral and without comment or it has been dismissive of his news sense, his writing ability and of his accuracy. Such accounts, as in a recent book on New Zealanders’ role in the Battle of the Somme in 1916, risk a charge of judgment based on nearly 90 years’ hindsight and of applying early twenty-first century standards and practices of journalism to the unique circumstances of 1915-19. In Andrew Macdonald’s recent history of the New Zealanders’ role at the Somme, Ross is accused of writing “bland for the most part and largely a rehash of army communiqués” and of lacking balance and reliability. Macdonald wrote that Ross gave only the barest of details of the New Zealanders’ part in the Morval attack on the Somme in September of 1916:

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104 Ross to Ina Ross, 1 January, 1917 (MS-Papers-8108), ATL.
105 Ibid.
106 Pugsley included only a biographical paragraph on Ross in his Gallipoli – the New Zealand Story. He did not mention him at all in The Anzac Experience. Critical comment of Ross as a reporter is contained in Andrew Macdonald, On My Way to the Somme (Auckland: HarperCollins, 2005), and in Michael Field, Black Saturday: New Zealand’s Tragic Blunders in Samoa (Auckland: Reed, 2006).
107 See Macdonald.
108 Ibid., 160.
Ross had once again given the basic facts, but again omitted the heavy casualties and the details of what had been a near-disaster. Perhaps the censors stripped his stories of these facts; perhaps they did not. Either way, Ross’s coverage of the division’s part in the Battle of Morval was minimalist, non-critical and misleading. It implied all had gone relatively well for the soldiers of [the] 1st Brigade, but that was far from the truth.\textsuperscript{109}

Macdonald concedes with his mention of censorship one reason why Ross had not been able to write a fuller account and one more to Macdonald’s liking, but censorship was only one of the handicaps under which all correspondents – not just Ross – operated. Censorship was a device that came into play only after an article was written; correspondents were also restricted in what they were told, or in what they could observe, and often those doing the telling – company or battalion commanders, for example – would have been restricted in what they knew. Clarity through the fog of war was a rarity on the Western Front and generally men could have known only the barest detail of actions in which they were involved and even less about other actions and less again about the total picture. It was only after post-war interviews with participants, studies of unit diaries and examination of divisional and corps commanders’ orders and correspondence that some clarity as to intention and result could be gained. As Ross once observed:

The nearer you are to the front the less news you get, and the later you are in getting it. But you see more and hear more, though what you see cannot altogether be recorded for enemy information, and what you hear is largely inarticulate.\textsuperscript{110}

If Ross could be accused of painting a rosy picture when the reality was often anything but, that was equally true of every correspondent, and of every official

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 201.
\textsuperscript{110} Dominion, 21 November 1916, 9.
communiqué, throughout the war. From Gallipoli to Le Quesnoy, from a New Zealand perspective, the incongruity of "positive" outcomes in news columns alongside the stark reality of column upon column of casualty lists was always evident. This was equally so in letters written by soldiers, as Lieutenant A. B. Sievwright of the Wellington-West Coast Regiment demonstrated:

The papers will have told you how well the New Zealanders did on the Somme. It was magnificent. Nothing could hold our lads, and they went forward as if on parade. It was great to see them, wave after wave, extended in straight lines, moving forward under our barrage ... Our casualties were not as heavy as the Hun suffered. Few escaped, and our lads shot to a finish. It was indeed a bloody affair. But we know we can beat the Boshe [sic].

In one of the reports in which Macdonald found fault, Ross lauded the work of the New Zealand gunners:

During the last 48 hours, our artillery has done magnificent work. In the darkness, through mud, rain and heavy shelling, they shifted batteries forward into action over ground full of craters. By midday yesterday [21 September 1916], almost all of the guns were in position and had registered. The batteries were shelling beautifully, the shells bursting in a row on the enemy lines.

Any artilleryman would have welcomed such positive publicity about their role. They were less pleased the following year when Ross found fault with artillery support of the infantry at Passchendaele and in so doing, undermined the contention that his material was always non-critical. Ross wrote of Passchendaele:

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111 Dominion, 13 December 1916, 6.
Before our men lay the most adverse conditions for an attack—greasy mud, waterlogged shellholes, concrete redoubts fronted with wire and crammed full with machine-guns. The greatest impediment to success was the inefficiency of the artillery. It had been impossible to bring many guns up, and accurate shooting was considerably hindered by the constant slipping of the gun trails. The sum total of this was that the infantry had not the splendid barrage essential for the thorough cutting of the wire and the shocking of the pill-boxes.\(^{113}\)

This provoked a stinging riposte from someone using the pseudonym “Gunner”, which was gleefully seized upon by the *New Zealand Observer*. The paper said artillery officers, non-commissioned officers and men were “exceedingly hurt and angry” at articles “purporting” to have been written by Ross declaring “the so-called failure of the infantry to the inefficiency of the artillery.”\(^{114}\) Quite why it used equivocal phrases such as “purporting” and “so-called” it did not explain. It quoted at length from “Gunner’s” letter, which said Ross did not know what he was talking about and questioned whether he would have known the trail of a gun from its muzzle.

We out here have many a hearty laugh over much of Malcolm Ross’s “tripe,” as we call it. To us, he and his work are a huge joke but a joke which at times has its limit. The limit is reached when it takes the form of such piffle as has appeared in your publication [*Chronicles of the NZEF*] and I voice the universal opinion when I state that it shall not pass unchallenged.\(^{115}\)

But was Ross’s observation of the artillery piffle? The failure of the artillery to cut the wire at Passchendaele was generally held to have been a significant contributing factor to what military historian Glyn Harper called a tragedy without equal in New Zealand

\(^{113}\) *Chronicles of the NZEF*, 14 November 1917, 153.
\(^{114}\) *New Zealand Observer*, 16 February 1918, 5.
\(^{115}\) Ibid.
history. He quoted from what he called “an excellent account” by Corporal Harold Green of the New Zealand Rifle Brigade:

[The] fire from the German pill boxes was hellish and our barrage failed. The emplacements for the guns were not solid enough and the guns tilted, causing trouble in our ranks from the shells of our own 18 pounders.

Harper himself said the “weakness” of artillery support was one reason for the failure and this was the general view of participants and later recorders. Even the history of the New Zealand artillery acknowledged the Passchendaele barrage was “weak and patchy as a direct result of the conditions under which the guns had to shoot” and that the artillery was “almost reduced to total immobility.” Ross’s greatest offence in the offending passage, it would seem, was his use of the word “inefficiency.” Perhaps “inability” (because of the effects of the weather) may have been a less offensive word to the sensitive defenders of the artillery, who would have been smarting at their contribution to such a costly failure. Bean’s view was that the New Zealand Division had been defeated “by obstacles which no hastily renewed bombardment could have overcome.” He said no blame could be attached to the artillery. “Its commander ... had reported on the previous day that his guns might be unavailable to give effective support.”

The opinion by “Gunner” of Ross’s work as “tripe” was as unremarkable as it was non-specific. Such comments about newspaper reports during the war were common. When Cecil Malthus came to write his second volume of war memoirs, he talked of the need for research to complement his knowledge. He wrote that he gained no material of any value from the newspapers and periodicals of the war years.

117 Ibid, 74.
118 Ibid, 88.
121 Ibid.
I plodded through great quantities of such stuff, and found nothing in it of truth or reality; nothing but false sentiment, hate, hysteria, boastful lies and distortions. Some of the early personal narratives by New Zealanders were hardly better. 122

The Australian general, John Monash, described one of Bean’s dispatches as “silly tosh.” 123 Some newspapers refused to publish Bean stories and it was written of him:

While some editors complained that Bean’s dispatches were insufficiently graphic, his writing was sober and painstakingly accurate, and sought to convey, within the limitations imposed on him, something of the experience of Australians at the front. 124

Underlying the generalised criticism of newspaper reporting during the war were the deliberate propaganda campaigns mounted by the warring nation states. John F. Williams, in his study of (primarily) Australian media and the war, quoted liberally from the anti-war British politician Arthur Ponsonby:

In his seminal 1920s study Arthur Ponsonby argued that the effective conduct of modern war demanded state-endorsed mendacity. The mass media had no choice but to collaborate with government and the military in the implementation of a system of information dissemination which inflated minor successes, concealed disasters, incited hatreds and disguised the nature of battlefield experience. 125

123 Williams, 2.
A NATURAL MISTAKE.

Rifleman Jones (on seeing the New Zealand war correspondent in the trenches)—to his mate within the dugout: Come on, Bill: get yer gear—the war's over.

Malcolm Ross is a target for the New Zealand Observer—again.

New Zealand Observer. 9 June 1917
Ashmead-Bartlett made the point more bluntly: “It is heartrending work having to write what I know to be untrue.”\footnote{Ashmead-Bartlett, 101.} Another of the British war correspondents, Philip Gibbs, summed up how the British correspondents saw their role:

We had no other desire than to record the truth as fully as possible without handing information to the enemy, and to describe the life and actions of our fighting men so that the nation and the world should understand their valour, their suffering, and their achievement. We identified ourselves absolutely with the armies in the field, and we wiped out of our minds all thought of personal “scoops” and all temptation to write one word which would make the task of officers and men more difficult or dangerous. There was no need of censorship of our dispatches. We were our own censors.\footnote{Philip Gibbs, Adventures In Journalism (London: William Heinemann, 1923), 231.}

The New Zealand Observer, and it is tempting to write the word “inevitably,” summed up its view of Ross when it published in June of 1917 a cartoon showing a soldier peering into a dugout accompanied by the caption: “Rifleman Jones (on seeing the New Zealand war correspondent in the trenches) – to his mate within the dugout: ‘Come on Bill, get yer gear – the war’s over’.”\footnote{New Zealand Observer. 9 June 1917, 17.} For a newspaper that slashed at Ross throughout the war, this may have been the unkindest cut of all, implying as it did that Ross appeared in frontline trenches only when the war was over. It should be said in defence of Ross that he had no place being in an operational frontline trench, just as thousands of other troops who had other duties had no place being in them either. Even had he wanted to be and been able to be – and there were times on Gallipoli, in particular, when exposure to action was unavoidable – he would undoubtedly have been given short shrift. For the daily newspapers in New Zealand during the war, it was sufficient to publish news columns and for them to confine comment to the editorial page and the great majority of that comment was on strategic and political aspects rather than tactical
matters. A summation of the repetitive excoriation of Ross by unidentified writers at the *Observer* showed a level of ignorance of the realities of World War I, and particularly of his role, that was much greater than any of the supposed failings of its favourite target.

The *Observer* did not just target Ross, however. In one scathing condemnation of the “ghastly rubbish” and “grievous piffle” written by British war correspondents and republished in New Zealand, it even found room for mild commendation of Ross.129 This was prompted by a report of a successful New Zealand raid that was headlined, “Two more successful raids by Anzacs – Picked men standing six feet high.” The report then attributed a lack of casualties to the sprinting ability of the New Zealanders while under machine gun fire. The *Observer*’s dismissal of such reporting was headlined: “Blither. Tripe, Balderdash and Swank.” The tenor of its comments was that the New Zealanders should not be singled out as being any different to British, French or German troops and that the New Zealand soldiers themselves did not think they were:

Nothing is more distressing to the colonial soldier than to be the butt of the correspondent’s fertile imagination and his saccharine praise ... If a Māori chops a tree down, some correspondent yells about it at greater length than he would about a five hundred mile advance by the Czar’s armies ... This discrimination is hateful to the people whose sons and brothers are doing their simple duty and it is painful to the soldiers who are doing it. When you know that these war correspondents and novelists are not allowed to see the events they describe, you know also that they are camp yarns and “latrine rumours” ... The New Zealand official correspondent has already said that the expansive guff printed in London about Anzacs is poison to them.130

Among the novelists referred to by the *Observer* was John Masefield, one of several noted writers (Arthur Conan Doyle, John Buchan and H. G. Wells were others) pressed into

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129 *New Zealand Observer*, 8 July 1916, 3.
130 Ibid.
propaganda service by the British Government. Masefield noted that the Anzacs (and the men of the Royal Naval Division) had not had more than six months’ active training before they were in action on Gallipoli.

They were, however, the finest body of young men ever brought together in modern times. For physical beauty and nobility of bearing they surpassed any men I have ever seen; they walked and looked like the kings in old poems, and reminded me of the lines in Shakespeare:

Baited like eagles having lately bathed.

Masefield continued in similar vein when writing of the preparatory work undertaken by the New Zealanders and Australians before the August offensive:

It is difficult to praise a feat of the kind, and still more difficult to make people understand what the work meant. Those smiling and glorious young giants thought little of it. They loved their chiefs and they liked the fun, and when praised for it they looked away with a grin.

It can readily be understood, therefore, how New Zealand (and Australian) soldiers could squirm with embarrassment at, or be angered by, such “expansive guff” and Ross would have been better placed than British correspondents to know how the soldiers regarded such descriptions. It is little wonder that soldiers dismissed the copy of correspondents (viewing them collectively) as piffle and tripe. Of Ross’s views, the Observer noted:

133 Baited like eagles having lately bathed: As full of spirit as the month of May; And gorgeous as the sun at midsummer – from Henry IV.
134 Masefield, 112.
The official New Zealand war correspondent, in sending a glowing account of a small sample of trench warfare in which New Zealanders were engaged, is good enough to say that the Anzacs don’t want a lot of fuss made in London about these small conflicts. Which is probably true.135

During the Somme battle in 1916, Ross had this to say:

Being myself a New Zealander, I have been somewhat careful not to unduly praise the fighting qualities of our force. So far as the second great effort in the Somme battle is concerned, I am quite convinced that in anything I have written I have understated the case.136

Bean applied his perspective in 1917 when he wrote that to speak of the feats of “an Anzac” or of “the Anzacs” was unpopular with the men to whom it applied. “You will never hear the men refer to themselves as Anzacs. They call themselves simply Australians or New Zealanders.”137 It was not that they were not proud of being Anzacs or that they disliked being clubbed together:

The reason why they always avoid calling themselves “the Anzacs” is that the term was at one time associated in the press with so many highly coloured, imaginative, mock heroic stories of individual feats, which they were supposed to have performed, that its use from that time forth was, by a sort of tacit consent, irrevocably damned within the force … The noun, “an Anzac,” now bears with it in the force the suggestion of a man who rather approves of … swank.”138

135 New Zealand Observer, July 1 1916, 17.
136 Dominion, 21 November 1916, 5.
138 Ibid., 231-232.
Criticism of Ross was on two levels: one that he was often too late with the news and that his dispatches were frequently beaten by those from correspondents of other countries. He would have been as conscious of that as anyone and the reason was the Government's refusal to allow him to cable. That restriction was relaxed after the intervention of Heaton Rhodes, but Ross cables were brief because of cost and the majority of his stories were still posted. The other level of criticism was that he did not accurately or even fairly reflect the views of soldiers or of activities in the frontline, but that criticism was levelled from time to time at all correspondents and indeed, Ross wrote that he was careful not to unduly praise the fighting qualities of New Zealanders. Ross avoided the excessive prose of some of his colleagues, particularly Ashmead-Bartlett.
Chapter Four

‘No one could do it better’

Correspondents were criticised throughout the war for their exaggerated or distorted reports of fighting, though they were limited by censorship and by what information they were given or could otherwise learn. The criticism was expressed by the soldiers themselves as well as, in the case of Malcolm Ross, critics at home. In 1917, Ross followed the example set in 1915 by the Australian correspondent, Charles Bean, and edited a book in which soldiers could express their own views of the war and of themselves or, at least, a lighter and sanitised version of their views.

The vehicle was *New Zealand at the Front*, a New Zealand equivalent of *The Anzac Book*, edited by Bean toward the end of the Gallipoli campaign.¹ Ross followed the example set by Bean on Gallipoli and canvassed the men of the New Zealand Division for contributions, whether they be poems, short stories or illustrations. He had intended to widen the book’s scope to include the New Zealanders still in Egypt or those fighting in Sinai and Palestine, but reported it proved to be impracticable in time for the book to be ready to be included in the Christmas mail.² In his editor’s note, Ross was almost damning in faint praise of the efforts of his contributors. The intention was to produce a book for home consumption that showed in a light-hearted way the feelings of the soldiers. But Ross, from his preface, was almost apologetic that it was neither a literary nor an artistic masterpiece:

These are the offspring of the battlefield. Therefore they may show a lack of polish, a certain roughness, that would not be so apparent had they been evolved under more favourable circumstances. It may be said of these productions that they are the children of the imagination of men who, in the wielding of the sword, have scant time for the handling of the pen and brush. Therein lies their particular virtue. If they have neither the quality of culture nor of

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² Ibid., xi.
genius, at least they have the merit of freshness, and reflect something of the ideas, the temperament and the life of men who, from a sense of duty, find themselves engaged in a mighty conflict in a strange environment, far from their own land.³

Ross’s reservations presumably did not apply to his own contributions, which included some sketches and this poem, based on the New Zealanders’ action at Messines:⁴

May 7, 1917
The Ridge against the gold and grey of morn
Curves clear, with walls and tree in silhouette;
And all its fields are fair, save where the rusting wire
And the brown earth of winding trenches run
Athwart the emerald of the nether slopes.
Now all is strangely quiet, for no man stirs.
June 7, 1917
From out the smoky pall of battle strife
The Ridge looms grey, but with uncertain line.
And all its stricken fields are brown. No green remains.
Our dead lie thickly in the broken town—
All strangely still, and quiet, unheeding now
The thunder of the conflict they have won.

Another edition was published in 1918 when the war was over and it was reviewed in The Times, which said it maintained the reputation of its predecessor and “it is no small tribute to Captain Malcolm Ross ... to say that New Zealand at the Front 1918 is as full of freshness and originality as the perennially fresh and original and likeable people of New Zealand themselves.”⁵ The publication prompted a querulous memorandum in Wellington from W. H. Montgomery, the assistant director of Base

³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., 141.
⁵ The Times, 25 November 1918, 5.
The first edition, published in 1917, of *New Zealand At the Front*, edited by Malcolm Ross.
Records, the clearing house and repository for all military personnel matters. He asked his superior, the director of Base Records, Major Norton Francis, if Ross had the authority to produce such a “popular book,” and worried that “such a work may take the cream off the popular history which the Government proposes to issue.” He then conceded he did not know enough about New Zealand at the Front 1918:

Of course this may be not the nature of the History which, perhaps, is only a collection of short stories. Unless the nature of the work was known no opinion can be offered except that the Government should undertake no financial responsibility for the enterprise.6

Francis, in a hand-written note on the memorandum, said it was difficult to comment until more detailed information was available. A year earlier, Francis in a note to the adjutant-general had commented: “In recording the deeds of our soldiers, money should be spent with no grudging hand.”7

Among Ross’s pre-war accomplishments had been a reputation as a skilled amateur photographer, as evidenced by his alpine work – among the earliest in New Zealand – and his photographic recording of various trips, especially with Ranfurly. But it was a skill seldom used during the war. Ross took photographs while on Gallipoli, though few appear to have survived. “I got quite a number of photographs, which I hope will turn out all right,” he wrote to his wife in August of 1915.8 He was banned altogether from taking photographs once he got to France, though some of his shots, especially of the taking of the fortress town of Le Quesnoy in 1918, survive.9 Ross wrote at some length of the capture of Le Quesnoy:

Fifty years hence there will be old men sitting in their inglenooks in New Zealand telling their grandchildren tales of the storming of

6 Montgomery to Francis, 1 November 1918 (AD78, 27/10/a), Archives New Zealand (hereafter ANZ).
7 Francis to adjutant-general, 14 July 1917 (AAOM 6029, P46502/1930), ANZ.
8 Malcolm Ross to Forrest Ross, 3 August 1915 (MS-papers-8168), Alexander Turnbull Library (hereafter ATL).
9 Christopher Pugsley, “‘Who is Sanders?’ New Zealand’s Official Cameraman on the Western Front 1917-1919,” Stout Centre Review 5, no 1 (March 1995), 19; for Ross photos, see http://timeframes.natlib.govt.nz
Le Quesnoy. The more one sees of the wonderful old fortress, more remarkable seems the achievement. Men of Mouvres would have held it for a month. The Germans lost it in a day. The inner and outer ramparts, with their moats and island bastions in between, bid defiance to the invader. That such a fortress should fall to New Zealanders is an episode in history.10

Ross’s role and the quality of his work, or a perceived lack of quality and quantity, continued to exercise the minds of politicians in New Zealand throughout the war. James Allen, who was frequently Acting Prime Minister during the war as well as Defence Minister, was told by a deputation from the United Press Association in March of 1917 that Ross’s dispatches, or the timing of them, were unsatisfactory. Allen cabled the Prime Minister, William Massey, who was in England at the time:

There has been a good deal of talk about Malcolm Ross’s letters. The general opinion is that they are unsatisfactory. A deputation from the Press Association waited upon me recently and expressed a similar opinion and asked that they should be discontinued.11

At a Cabinet meeting on 11 April 1917, a suggestion was made to recall Ross. The file notes no action was taken.12 In October the same year during a supply debate in the House of Representatives, members defeated by 33 votes to 13 an amendment to the Department of Inland Revenue vote that an item of £1600 for salary, allowances and expenses of the official war correspondent be reduced by £600 “as an indication that in the opinion of the House Mr Ross should be recalled.”13 Massey told the House that when he had been in Europe earlier in the year, he had sought opinions about Ross from the Anzac Corps commander, Major-General Sir Alexander Godley, and from the commander of the New Zealand Division, Major-General Sir Andrew Russell. Massey tabled both replies, which

10 Chronicles of the NZEF, 6 December 1918, 221.
11 Allen to Massey, 17 March 1917 (Allen correspondence, 8 D1/53), ANZ.
12 Allen correspondence.
13 New Zealand Parliamentary Debates (hereafter NZPD), vol 181, 31 October 1917, 704.
were supportive of Ross staying in the role and both were of the view that if he was replaced, the interests of the New Zealand troops would suffer. The Liberal member critical of Ross two years before, George Witty, spoke strongly for the amendment and said that if money was not owing to Ross, he would “strike out the £600 and leave it at £1.”

His argument was one aired several times before – that Ross could not be doing his job properly because his stories appeared in New Zealand sometimes months after the events they described. Witty’s view was that if British and Australian correspondents could cable all their stories, then so could Ross. Witty’s argument then turned to the fanciful:

He was told that Mr Ross lived in a dugout some distance from the front, while other correspondents were just behind the firing line and saw all that went on; then, after the event, Mr Ross signalled to them and over a glass of whisky and a cigar they told him the news and he took all the credit and the pay.

Massey during the debate said that Ross’s dispatches were being sent by the High Commissioner in London, Sir Thomas Mackenzie, to English newspapers and were being widely used. This had applied to Bean’s stories from early in 1915 but did not begin with Ross’s until 1917. Such was the level of debate in Wellington that Massey was asked if Ross was also being paid by the English papers which used his stories; and Witty’s view was that Ross was paid to write for New Zealand papers, not English ones, not apparently realising – or not wanting to acknowledge – that it was Ross’s dispatches to New Zealand which were also sent to the papers in England. Ross’s filing arrangement by this stage of the war was that his dispatches were sent direct to “Gazette Wellington” (the *New Zealand Gazette* qualifying as a publication and thus attracting reduced press cable rates) with copies to the High Commissioner in London and to the Bloomsbury Square, London headquarters of 1NZEF. At the latter, a journalist who had enlisted, Lieutenant H. T. B. Drew, headed what was styled the Military Publicity Department and he was

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14 Ibid., 705.
15 Ibid., 706.
16 Ibid.
responsible for sending Ross’s stories on to British papers. Ross cautioned Drew against “flooding” the British press with stories of only New Zealand interest and noted that he continued to write specifically for The Times:

I have written a special article for The Times on the work of the New Zealanders in this battle. It may be a little bit too long for them, but I am hoping they will be able to find space for it.¹⁷ The only trouble about giving things exclusively to The Times is that the other London papers may cool off a bit, but of course a good notice in The Times is worth all the rest put together as it gets a world-wide circulation. However, you are on the spot and I must leave that to your discretion. I feel sure I can leave it to you to decide what is worth sending to the British press and what is not.¹⁸

The commander of New Zealand troops in Britain, Brigadier George Richardson, discussed with Drew a request from the Daily Telegraph in London for better publicity for New Zealand troops in France. Richardson in his reply to the newspaper neatly encapsulated the bind in which the Government (and therefore the army) had got itself into by directly employing Ross:

Newspaper publicity is not really the work the military should be connected with but under the circumstances it has fallen to our lot to attend to this matter, for the present at any rate.¹⁹

By this time, Ross was also regularly writing for Chronicles of the NZEF, a fortnightly newspaper begun in London by Clutha Mackenzie, who had been blinded at Gallipoli. Mackenzie, the son of the High Commissioner, described it as “a paper to gather and dispense all interesting information concerning New Zealand soldiers in Europe and a

¹⁷ The Times, 16 September 1918, 6. This related to the fall of Bapaume (“... the Wellington men had advanced right through the town and on the other side they joined hands with men of the Rifle Brigade. Bapaume had fallen.”)
¹⁸ Ross to Drew, 13 September 1918 (WA 10/1, 6ZWR 11/5), ANZ.
¹⁹ Richardson to Daily Telegraph, 7 September 1918 (WA 10/1, 6ZWR 11/5) ANZ.
Ross’s contributions included some dispatches intended for New Zealand newspapers, but also some stories written specifically for *Chronicles*. He continued to write for the paper until his return to New Zealand.

In the House of Representatives in Wellington, not even Ross’s supporters could get it quite right. MP Thomas Wilford did not agree with critical comments about Ross and thought some opinions of Ross’s work “stood very high indeed.” But then Wilford rather undermined his argument when he said “the account credited to Mr Ross of the landing at Gallipoli was not particularly convincing.” No one mentioned in the debate that Ross was neither there for the landing nor wrote about it. Wilford at least could see future value in Ross:

> He thought that what New Zealand would need when the war was over would be some connected account of the intimate human relations and doings of our boys. All parents would treasure such a book. The only man who could give that was the man who had been with our forces from the start and it would be a mistake, considering that Mr Ross must now have as good a “run of the ropes” as he would ever have, to send some new man out to learn the game.

It was the first public mention of Ross writing the official history of New Zealand’s role in the war since his conditions of appointment were published in 1915. It had not slipped from the minds of those in authority, however. Earlier that year, the editor of the *Press* in Christchurch, William Trigg, in a letter to James Allen gave both his view of Ross’s dispatches from the front and his advocacy of Ross becoming the official historian. It summarised Ross’s good and bad points, its worth leavened only by the fact that Trigg had been Ross’s employer before the war and therefore could be seen as partisan:

20 *Chronicles of the NZEF*, 30 August 1916, vol 1, no 1.
21 *NZPD*, vol 181, 31 October 1917, 707.
22 Ibid.
Before you come to any decision in regard to the history of the war, I would suggest that you read *Light and Shade In War* by Malcolm and Noël Ross, just published. I venture to think that you will agree that the book shows that Malcolm Ross is capable of writing very well about the war. It is quite true that there has been general dissatisfaction with his letters from the front, but he has to contend with serious disadvantages, not the last being the fact that his letters are held up until their contents have become anticipated very largely by other correspondents, and their interest in consequence considerably diminished ... Ross [is] inclined to be too diffuse and he sometimes does not make the best selection from his material, but he has been a first-hand observer of so much that has happened during the war in all the theatres in which the New Zealanders have been engaged that he occupied a unique position. A book worthy of the occasion might be produced if he were put to work under the direction of a competent editor.23

New Zealand's brief military history up to the second decade of the twentieth century did not include a glowing chapter on official war histories. An attempt had been made to produce a history of New Zealand's first overseas deployment, to the Boer War, but a manuscript prepared by an accountant and militia officer, F. E. Beamish, was left to languish – and eventually lost – by the military authorities who, at that stage, had sole control of the publication.24 The army commandant in New Zealand throughout the war, Major-General Sir Alfred Robin, had decided views of what constituted an official history and said of the Boer War manuscript:

The real reason why it was not printed is because it seems to require editing or revising either by some experienced literary expert or by a small committee to make it a history. It is not yet too

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23 Trigg to Allen, 9 February 1917 (AD1 51/217), ANZ.
late to do this. From a rough glance, I consider it should be revised in some way as opinions, criticisms and copies of irresponsible letters and newspapers do not constitute a history worthy of issue by a government.25

An official – official in the sense that the cost of publication was underwritten by the government – history of New Zealand’s role in the Boer War was not published until 1949, by which time a war history branch had been established within the Department of Internal Affairs to facilitate the publication of World War II official histories.26

Ross had friends in high places – both Massey and Godley were keen on him to write the official history – but he also had opponents in key positions, with Robin the most notable and influential of them. Ross, in the view of military historian Ian McGibbon, “fell victim to a military hierarchy in Wellington whose approach was heavily influenced by a narrow conception of official history.”27 Robin envisaged an “Official History” – “an exact statistical and chronological record of all events connected with the war” – and a “popular” history, with the Imperial General Staff at the War Office in London providing strategic and tactical appreciations.

The man or men selected will have to spend at least a year on the work, and probably longer, if all the facts are to be properly digested. It is not considered that Mr Malcolm Ross would be likely to settle down to such work, unless remunerated at a very high rate. In any case, he has not the necessary technical knowledge of military routine.28

25 Robin to Rhodes, 19 November 1919 (AD 34 8015, Box 4), ANZ.
28 Robin to Allen, 10 February 1919 (AD1 51/217), ANZ.
It is perhaps instructive to note that Robin in his letter referred to Ross as “Mr” and not as captain. Robin’s view contrasted sharply with that of his superior, Godley, who cabled to Allen:

In view of the fact that Malcolm Ross is a professional journalist in close touch with the London literary world and has throughout the whole course of the war held the official appointment of New Zealand war correspondent necessitating a continuous and close scrutiny of work of NZEF and that he has had access to and now has trace of all official and many other documents and records, I consider him well qualified to write the Official History and recommend his appointment. I do not know of anyone who could do it better.29

Massey’s view was equally emphatic, as he demonstrated in a cable to Allen, noting the comparison with Australia:

Ross desires to know whether Government requires him write Official History. His duties as correspondent practically finished. If History is to be compiled, work should be commenced now. Australia working for some time. Ross says he has seen every battle and is strongly recommended high commands. Has all records (from) landing Gallipoli, France. My opinion is only man make success.30

The entreaties from Massey and Godley were in vain, however, as Robin (and eventually Allen) held sway. Within nine days of Massey’s cable being sent, the Defence Department in Wellington (presumably on Robin’s instructions) sought an opinion from the solicitor-general about whether Ross could be compelled to hand over material he had

29 Godley to Aller, 4 April 1919 (AAOM 6029 P46502/1930), ANZ.
30 Massey to Allen, 12 February 1919 (AD1 51/217), ANZ.
collected and whether he could be constrained from a publication of his own without the consent of the Government. The solicitor-general, John Salmond, replied that Ross was not constrained so long as he complied with his original terms of appointment and was not in breach of copyright.  

Four volumes of history were eventually produced, with Ross playing no part in any of them. The proposed official histories as envisaged by Robin were never produced but confusingly the four so-called “popular histories” that were published bore the imprimatur of “official.” The author of the volume on the New Zealand division’s activities in France, Colonel Hugh Stewart, summed up the difficulty of the task and at the same time unwittingly pointed to the difficulties which had confronted Ross for the previous four years:

> It has been at once a labour of love and yet or perhaps just because of that a rather heart-breaking task to an at all critically conscientious writer. It is so easy to write balderdash and so extraordinarily difficult to get truth. In dealing with every battle one is faced with inconsistencies, obscurities, lacunae ... In the end I had to jettison to some extent the ideals with which I set out.

In the light of Robin’s comment that Ross would likely want to be “remunerated at a very high rate,” it is instructive to note that Stewart imposed conditions when he was initially approached. One was that he retain the rank of colonel while employed, another related to the completion date, the third was that he be paid £500 and the fourth that he be granted a royalty of 25 per cent. These conditions were conveyed to Allen by Brigadier George Richardson, who commanded New Zealand forces in Britain, and he added: “There is no

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31 Defence to solicitor-general 21 February 1919; solicitor-general to Defence, 25 February 1919 (AD1 51/217), ANZ.
33 Stewart to Allen, 1 September 1919, as quoted in McGibbon, “Something of Them Here is Recorded.”
other officer here suitable except Malcolm Ross whose experiences and facilities give him special advantages for this work”. Allen’s reply was almost brusque:

£250 to Stewart approved. No royalty. Stewart to be paid at colonel’s rate. Malcolm Ross not approved. Inform Col Stewart I look upon it as a duty which I trust he will undertake for his country.

McGibbon drily noted: “It is not clear what Stewart, who had resided in New Zealand for little more than a year before enlisting in 1NZEF, made of this appeal to patriotic duty.” Stewart had been born and educated in Scotland and after positions at Rugby School in Warwickshire and Liverpool University, was appointed professor of classics at Canterbury College, Christchurch, in 1912. He returned to Britain in 1926.

The _New Zealand Observer_ expressed its normal pungent and forthright view of the plans for an official history, but did not mention Ross:

This Great War is the biggest thing that ever happened. In it New Zealanders have done the biggest things that New Zealanders ever did. Their part in the gigantic conflict is worthy of the best work the best writer in New Zealand – or out of it, can do. It should be written by a man of talent and of deep sympathy – and God forbid that he has been chosen for any political reasons or that he should be a Government official...If the official element is uppermost, the Government will be able to pay a number of thousand pounds to produce something as interesting as Hansard or Cruden’s “Concordance.”

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34 Richardson to Minister of Defence, 18 January 1919 (AD78 27/101), ANZ.
35 Allen to Richardson, 22 January 1919 (AD78 27/101A), ANZ.
37 Guy Scholefield, _A Dictionary of New Zealand Biography_ vol 2 (Wellington: Department of Internal Affairs, 1940), 334.
38 _New Zealand Observer_, 15 June 1918, 3; Cruden’s _Concordance_ was a concordance of the King James Bible created by Alexander Cruden and published in 1737.
As McGibbon noted, the four volumes of “official” history have dominated the historiography of New Zealand in World War I. While Christopher Pugsley, McGibbon, Glyn Harper and others have in the past quarter of a century greatly expanded the literature on such a significant period in New Zealand history, there still is no single volume on New Zealand’s war effort, whether from a strategic and tactical point of view or a cultural history of how the war affected New Zealand both at the time and later.

This is vastly different from the position in Australia, where the official histories edited and written by Bean formed the bedrock of a lively and diverse war historiography. McGibbon, indeed, cited the “perceived excellence” of Australia’s official history as the motivation for New Zealand to make a better effort at recording its endeavours in World War II.

For all Bean’s prodigious output and standing in Australian war historiography, praise for his work was qualified:

Bean, superlative journalist that he was, had little real understanding of the military technicalities of doctrine, organisation, command, training and administration, and these hardly feature in his work. They were, however, the key to success on the battlefields of the First World War. The official history, as a result, has all the virtues, and the vices, of Bean’s journalistic background.

41 In addition to the 12 volumes of the Official History, see also Paul Macpherson, Bibliographies of Military History (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1987) and Peter Dennis, Jeffrey Grey, Ewan Morris, Robin Prior with John Connor, eds, The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995).
42 Ibid.
43 Peter Dennis et al., Oxford Companion, 89.
Malcolm Ross’s letter to Charles Bean, written on 14 November, 1919.

Bean papers (AWM38 3DRL 6673 item 370)
Bean had written to Ross in November of 1919 and asked him what New Zealand was doing about an official history and if he were writing it. Ross in his reply was able to convey a sense of frustration and some bitterness:

Allen has not been able to make up his mind yet who should write the Official History! All I know is that he would not like me to do it, but he is confronted with the advice of all the generals and several others that I ought to do it. I shall probably refuse to do it now if he does ask me, for a variety of reasons, of which more later.44

Five days later, Ross sent Bean a copy of a prospectus prepared by the publishers about the New Zealand histories and repeated his views:

A file is now passing through the Defence office (in which I have been recommended by all the generals) but I think I must now decline, even if Allen asks me to do it, as it is too late and I have settled down in the old journalistic groove again. Your history will, I know, be the best of them all.45

H. T. B. Drew by this time was back in Wellington and trying to set up a War Historical Records section in the Department of Defence. He wrote almost a *cri de coeur* to Bean – boldly headed “private” – explaining the internal politics affecting the planned histories and blaming “incompetents” for influencing Allen and attributing a lack of action to “our small-visioned people.” In a post-script, he added:

Ross is back, but I have not seen him yet. I am afraid he is out of the running for the official historical work. He has not hit things with the public, press or officialdom, somehow, though I am one

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44 Ross letter to Bean, 9 November 1919, Bean papers (AWM38 3DRL 6673 item 370), AWM.
who says it is not altogether his own fault. We are a small, and in some ways, a peculiar people. We have very largely developed one of the traits of the Nazarines.\textsuperscript{46}

For all the military antipathy toward Ross, he was still able to write a history of New Zealand’s involvement in World War I. Over three chapters, “The Voyage, Egypt and Gallipoli,” “On the Western Front” and “The Sinai-Palestine Campaign,” he wrote about 45,000 words on New Zealand involvement for a compendium history published in Britain in 1924 and edited by a British civil servant and historian, Sir Charles Lucas.\textsuperscript{47}

Ross’s history was in a chronological narrative form, recounting each step of the march along the way as New Zealanders made their mark in Samoa; in Egypt and in the first repelling of the Ottoman Army at Suez; then Gallipoli, and on to the Western Front with the unfamiliar names that would soon become familiar signposting the way: Armentières to the Somme, Messines to Passchendaele, then the finale at Le Quesnoy and the march into the Rhineland to join the army of occupation. He traced too the New Zealanders whose war remained rooted in the desert, the men who fought in Sinai and Palestine. Ross drew on his memory and his despatches and when neither of these was available to him, he complemented his own experiences with those of others. His son Noël could never have been far from his thoughts; and in the early years of the war, seldom far from his typewriter either. Writing of the Main Body’s voyage to Egypt, Ross talked of the egalitarianism of “the flower of the manhood of a young nation” answering the Empire’s call:

Down below in the big mess-room of one of the ships two hundred and fifty men were scraping their tin plates and draining their tin

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., Drew to Bean, 8 October 1919. This was an intriguing comment by Drew and his juxtapositioning of the phrase “a peculiar people” with his reference to “Nazarines” (he presumably meant Nazarenes) suggests a religious connotation and one, in the context, he must have expected Bean to understand. Nazarenes were the original followers of Jesus. “Peculiar” is used in the King James Version of the Bible in its pure form meaning “special”, as in 1 Peter 2:9: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people.” Drew may have meant that New Zealanders had an evangelical view of life, a restricted view, and frowned upon difference. In other words, New Zealanders were narrow minded and saw Ross as having ideas above his station: a tall poppy who needed trimming.

\textsuperscript{47} Sir Charles Lucas, ed, \textit{The Empire At War vol III} (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1924).
mugs, waited on by forty of their fellows. A bank teller and an auctioneer were serving the porridge. A student and a runholder ladled out the stew.  

Compare that passage with this written by Noël Ross and published in the Wellington morning newspaper, the Dominion, in 1915:

Down below in the big mess room, its marble panelling marked by undressed boards, two hundred and fifty men are scraping their tin plates and draining tin mugs, waited on by forty of their fellows. A bank teller and an auctioneer are serving out the porridge to one mess. At another an erstwhile auctioneer and a Canterbury runholder ladle out the stew.

The father also borrowed heavily from the memory of the son when recounting the chaotic attempts to evacuate the wounded during the first few days on Gallipoli when casualties were much higher than the British high command had anticipated: “One of the New Zealand wounded, whose description can be relied upon, relates his experience as follows.” Ross then quoted at length from his son’s description of his evacuation, as recounted to his father when lying in a hospital bed. Since Ross was neither on the voyage with the Main Body nor at Gallipoli in April, he had to gain his information from somewhere and it seemed entirely natural that he should rely on the accounts given by someone he could trust. He no longer had any standing with the New Zealand Government or with military authorities either, so those avenues of information were closed to him. Ross during his time as correspondent only once ventured briefly east from Suez into the desert and so had no personal knowledge of the work of the New Zealanders in Sinai and Palestine. For information from that theatre, he borrowed from –

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48 Malcolm Ross, “The Voyage, Egypt and Gallipoli,” in The Empire at War, 268.
49 The Dominion, 2 March 1915, 7.
50 Ross, “The Voyage etc.” 279.
and gave full credit to – the recollections of a lieutenant in the Auckland Mounted Rifles, A. Briscoe Moore.  

It may be indicative of Ross’s feelings toward his former employers who denied him the chance to write an official history that he did not quote from any of the four Government-sponsored histories. In at least one case, he went considerably further than the “official” version. Fred Waite in the Gallipoli history wrote so briefly as to be almost dismissive of the suggestion of withdrawal from Gallipoli on the night of 25-26 April, less than 24 hours after the initial landing: “Re-embarkation was suggested, but a conference was held and the generals decided to hold on.”

Ross drew from General Sir Ian Hamilton’s memoirs to provide a much more detailed account, quoting in full the message sent from shore by the Anzac commander, General William Birdwood, to Hamilton at his headquarters on board ship. Ross even noted that Birdwood’s message was in the handwriting of the New Zealand commander, General Alexander Godley. The message included these desperate lines:

Even New Zealand Brigade which has only recently engaged lost heavily and is to some extent demoralised. If troops are subjected to shell fire again tomorrow morning, there is likely to be a fiasco, as I have no fresh troops with which to replace those in the firing line. I know my representation is most serious, but if we are to re-embark it must be at once.

Ross observed that Hamilton was advised by the naval officer in charge of the landing, Rear-Admiral Cecil Thursby, that re-embarkation would take at least three days and he reproduced Hamilton’s reply to Birdwood, which included the telling last line: “You have got through the difficult business, now you have only to dig, dig, dig, until you are safe.”

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52 Waite, 86.
53 Ross, “The Voyage etc,” 277.
54 Ibid.
In another divergence from the official line, Ross chose a difference in emphasis when recounting the most notorious event involving New Zealanders in the war, the sacking of a village and the murder of more than 30 Arabs in Palestine after the armistice. Guy Powles in the “official history” used words such as “disturbance” and “riot” when telling how New Zealanders and others reacted to the murder of a New Zealand machine-gunner by an Arab who had been caught stealing from the New Zealander’s tent.

Ross used Moore as his source for his retelling of the events, relating that New Zealanders, Australians and British artillerymen decided upon retribution after first removing women and children from the village:

In revenge for the murder of the New Zealand soldier the infuriated troops went through the village clubbing some of the male inhabitants, after which they set fire to the place. A Bedouin camp nearby was similarly treated and in all 38 natives were killed.\(^{55}\)

The New Zealand, Australian and British Governments paid £858 11s 5d each in 1921 for the rebuilding of the village, Surafend.\(^{56}\)

Ross used his contribution to Lucas’s history as an opportunity to fill in some of the gaps he had been forced by censorship to leave in some of his dispatches from France. One example was in a report of the Canterbury battalion capturing German trenches during the Somme battle:

One captain, particularly, distinguished himself, showing splendid courage and energy. He continually rallied the tired and discouraged men and led them personally. The corps commander ... particularly desired to express to the colonel in command his appreciation of the sound conception of the plan and to the captain

\(^{55}\) Ross, “The Voyage etc,” 380-381.

\(^{56}\) See correspondence between governments (AD 10 2/10), ANZ.
who led the men his admiration of his gallant conduct and courageous leading.\textsuperscript{57}

Ross was able to elaborate on this action in his history and identify the captain as Fred Starnes, who was awarded the Distinguished Service Order.\textsuperscript{58} Another example was in a cabled – rather than posted – dispatch written after the New Zealanders had captured Messines in 1917:

There was nothing more splendid than the action of a West Coast miner, a corporal, who was wounded 15 minutes after the battle began. Yet he fought on for five hours, until he was again wounded, this time severely ... he saw that one well-placed enemy machine gun threatened to hold up our advance ... the corporal, with one rifleman, advanced through the barrage and put this and another gun out of action, killing 14 men of the two crews. The same corporal was also instrumental in putting out of action one, if not two, other machine guns. Eye witnesses spoke in terms of glowing praise of his dash and bravery.\textsuperscript{59}

Again, Ross was able in his history to identify the soldier as Lance-Corporal Samuel Frickleton, who was awarded the Victoria Cross for his gallantry:

By the destruction of these two guns he saved his own and other units from very severe casualties and his magnificent courage and gallantry ensured the capture of the objective. During the consolidation of the position he received a second severe wound. He set, throughout, a great example of heroism.\textsuperscript{60}

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Otago Daily Times}, 25 September 1916, 2.
\textsuperscript{58} Ross, "On the Western Front," 326.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Otago Daily Times}, 26 June 1917, 5.
\textsuperscript{60} Ross, "On the Western Front," 339.
Ross served four years and 169 days overseas with the New Zealand forces and ended his active duty involvement with the division in March of 1919 after it had formed part of the occupation of Cologne. He was reassigned to administrative duties in London while waiting for demobilisation and a passage home. In one of his last dispatches, he traversed the previous four years of the division:

Formed at the beginning of 1916 from the remains of the brigade that earned undying fame on Gallipoli and the then newly formed Rifle Brigade, it crossed the seas to France, where it quickly began to earn fame on the battlefields of the Western Front. The Somme, Messines, Passchendaele, Bapaume and Le Quesnoy are milestones along its victorious pathway. Through all its fighting career it has been commanded by the one general [Major-General Sir Andrew “Guy” Russell] whose high ideals the division has always endeavoured to achieve. In all its stirring history it has never been in retreat. Only once has it failed to take an objective [Passchendaele] and even in that failure, which was an attempt at the impossible, it added to its record yet another splendid page of heroism and determination. The fewness of the prisoners it has lost, as well as the battles it has helped to win, may be taken as some measure of its bravery.\(^6\)

Ross arrived back in New Zealand and was discharged from the army on 3 September, 1919, returning to his former duties as parliamentary correspondent for several newspapers, primarily the *Press* in Christchurch. In May 1921, Ross was transferred from the army’s active list to its retired list with the rank of captain and told he was entitled to wear uniform at appropriate times. The erstwhile commander of New Zealand forces in Britain, Brigadier Richardson, now back in Wellington overseeing the transition of the army to a peacetime role, wrote to Ross:

\(^6\) *Otago Daily Times*, 5 April, 1919, 10.
We realise that you have done a great deal for the NZEF and have had a strenuous and trying time during the four and a half years of war; therefore do not think that we are placing you on the Retired list for any other purpose than reorganisation.62

While Ross eschewed any writing about the war, he seemed to maintain his interest in outdoor pursuits, as the fourth annual report of the Tararua Tramping Club in Wellington noted: “During the year, a social evening was held at which Messrs Malcolm Ross and Johannes C. Andersen delivered most interesting lectures.”63 Working back in Parliament, Ross continued to cultivate friends and acquaintances in high places, if this letter to MP William Downie Stewart was any indication:

My Dear Downie. I was very much taken with your speech tonight which is the best yet – easily. Can you get me half a dozen proofs of it from the printing office as soon as it is set up and corrected?64

Though hand-written in pencil, the note was on House of Representatives letterhead. Among the friends to whom Ross intended to send the speech were Sir Charles Lucas and Leo Amery, variously a British conservative politician, a war correspondent and an imperial theorist.

Ross retired from his newspaper duties in 1926 and in 1929, he was made an honorary member of the (English) Alpine Club. He suffered paralysis for the final two years of his life and died at home on 15 April 1930. Major-General Sir Robert Young was general officer commanding the New Zealand Military Forces and would have been known to Ross as commander of infantry and rifle brigades at Gallipoli and on the Western Front. He wrote to Ross’s widow, Forrest:

62 Richardson to Ross, 25 May 1921 (AD 51/217), ANZ.
63 New Zealand Times, 21 June 1923, 4; Danish-born Andersen (1873-1962) was a noted author and librarian and was librarian of the Alexander Turnbull Library from 1918 until 1937.
64 Ross to Downie Stewart, 23 July 1923, Downie Stewart collection (MS-0985-012/011), Hocken Library.
He did exceptionally good work and by his dispatches kept the relatives and friends of our soldiers well posted, as far as the regulations allowed, of their general welfare and of their activities. To him indirectly the members of the NZEF were much indebted for the many comforts and privileges extended to them on service, and I feel sure that those who still survive will mourn the loss of one who was to them, by the power of his pen, a sincere friend in their trials and hardships.  

A Press Association obituary recounted his various achievements and noted:

His many articles sent to the Dominion from the front were read with deep interest, recording as they did the exploits of the New Zealanders in numerous engagements, and on his return to the colony [sic] he was congratulated far and wide for his excellent services.  

Ross would surely have seen the irony of the praise that went his way in death but which had been sparse in life. *The Times* in London, the newspaper that Ross had served for 12 years as fulltime correspondent (1900-1912), and more years as an occasional correspondent, reported a full account of his achievements, especially as a pioneer mountaineer, and summed him up thus: “A naturally quiet and reserved man, Ross spoke little of himself and especially little about his war experiences. He did not quite belong to his generation, and most of his friends were younger men.”  

Ross cultivated acquaintances of some note or notoriety and this habit was noticed by Bean on Gallipoli:

Malcolm Ross is a kindly chap but I can’t quite make him out. He has been an outspoken admirer of Bartlett’s from the day B. arrived here, almost to the point Toadyism – but B. is so brilliant

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65 Young to Forrest Ross, 17 April 1930 (AD1 51/217), ANZ.
66 *Otago Daily Times*, 16 April 1930, 9.
67 *The Times*, 16 April, 1930 16.
that I think it may be just real honest admiration. At the same time I have heard him give away B. behind his back in a manner which completely staggered me. I don’t really think Ross can be quite genuine but, after all, which of us are? He has got some very lovable and excellent points.

Bean’s reference to “giving away” Ashmead-Bartlett came in July of 1915 when the two Anzac correspondents had a meal with William Maxwell, the press censor.

I was rather surprised that Ross told Maxwell everything that Ashmead-Bartlett had told him – how he wanted to join in protesting: that we were not to bear-led. I wouldn’t think of protesting, but I don’t think I’d give him away either.

Ashmead-Bartlett experimented with cine photography on Gallipoli and Ross accompanied him on one occasion, then wrote enthusiastically to his wife:

Bartlett had his Kinematograph and took various pictures. If these turn out all right and receive the sanction of the War Office, you may see them at “The Palace.” You may be able to recognise me in several of them.

The novelty of moving pictures was more likely to have prompted such a child-like comment rather than any vainness, but there is almost comical footage later in the war of Ross. The occasion was a visit by the New Zealand High Commissioner to Britain, Sir Thomas Mackenzie, to the New Zealand Division at a training area in France. The film shows soldiers marching behind a regimental band, then Mackenzie addressing the

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68 Fewster, 165.
69 Bean diary 6 July 1915, Bean papers (AWM38 3DRL 606 item 10), AWM.
70 Ross to Forrest Ross, 3 August 1915 (MS-papers-8168), ATL.
troops. Ross is clearly visible, taking notes while Mackenzie waits to speak, but every so often he glances surreptitiously up at the camera.\textsuperscript{71}

Unlike Bean, Ross left no diaries (or none that has survived) and, as has been noted, wrote little, if anything, about the war after 1919 aside from his contribution to Lucas’s history. For a man characterised by his critics on the \textit{New Zealand Observer} as being vain, he left remarkably little by which history could remember him. His vainness, if such it was, was made manifest publicly by his habit, not at all common for the time, of writing in the first person but, paradoxically, he did not write very often about himself. He frequently noted what he saw or what he heard, but less frequently of what he did. Of his own travails during the war, especially his bouts of illness (jaundice at Gallipoli, bronchitis in France) and the death of his son in 1917, he wrote not at all. On at least two occasions, he fell foul of the British military hierarchy over relatively minor matters; one was compensation for a car he owned but which had been damaged by the military; and the other was a contretemps over cross-channel transport priority.\textsuperscript{72} These were the types of petty incidents which may have sent the keys clicking on Ashmead-Bartlett’s Empire typewriter, but Ross’s machine remained silent. If vainness has personal ambition as a concomitant, Ross’s historical anonymity has become the antithesis of that ambition.

\textsuperscript{71} Film of visit by Sir Thomas Mackenzie to New Zealand Division, 9-10 September 1917 (IWM 157), Imperial War Museum.
\textsuperscript{72} See Ross correspondence (WA10 1, 6 ZWR11/5), ANZ.
Conclusion

As official war correspondents with the New Zealand and Australian forces in World War I, Malcolm Ross and Charles Bean had a similar brief. Simply stated, they were charged by their governments with reporting on the activities of their compatriots in war and to gather information to be used later in official histories. They were also required to gather artefacts and ephemera for later museums. Bean fulfilled his brief to an extent probably never imagined in 1914 by either himself or his government. Ross did not.

There was another similarity between the pair: each was employed by his government – not, as with most war correspondents, by a newspaper, a group of newspapers or, as in the case with some British writers, by the Newspaper Proprietors Association. The word “official” in their designation as war correspondents was no meaningless adjective. It meant they were the properly authorised reporters for their governments and, as such, they acquired a quasi-formal standing within the military organisations they joined. Each was given honorary military rank. Their distinctive standing when compared with other correspondents such as Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, who represented the London daily newspapers on Gallipoli, was underlined when the general officer commanding the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, General Sir Ian Hamilton, decided all the correspondents should be encamped on the island of Imbros rather than on the Gallipoli peninsula. Bean and Ross remonstrated with Hamilton, saying their responsibility was to be with their countries’ troops on Gallipoli and Hamilton conceded this by allowing them to base themselves at Anzac.

Ross and Bean acted at the direction of their governments; the other correspondents were primarily accountable to editors and newspaper owners. It was a significant distinction and one that was often overlooked as Ross, in particular, was criticised in New Zealand for the quality – or lack of quality – of his work. Bean was on a free rein within the overall instruction of writing primarily about Australian forces; Ross was on a tight leash. All of the war correspondents, Ross, Bean and the others, were subject to severe censorship, the like of which neither they nor those imposing it had encountered before.

The marked differences between Bean and Ross were evident from the beginning and almost destined one to success and achievement and the other to not so much a lack of achievement, but to a climate in which achievement would be only grudgingly acknowledged, if at all.
When Britain declared war on Germany in August 1914 and New Zealand and Australia followed suit, as they were bound to do, the two Tasman neighbours chose different paths for how the battlefront would be reported to the home front. An early assertion of Australian independence led to the appointment of two correspondents rather than the one the imperial government decreed, but within a month a change of government in Australia saw a change in method and Bean was chosen after a poll among his peers on the Australian Journalists’ Association. Bean was thus able to join the Australian – and New Zealand – forces in the initial convoy to Egypt.

New Zealand at this stage was still embarking on a tortuous path, one that was pockmarked by newspaper indecision and parsimoniousness and by politicians putting their parties ahead of their country; self-interest ahead of national interest. The initial decision to appoint the London correspondent of four newspapers, Guy Scholefield, to the position of official correspondent seemed a logical one until it was pointed out that he served (and was paid by) only a section of the press and that section saw no good reason why it should subsidise the cost of coverage for the others. Malcolm Ross, showing a journalistic initiative that was otherwise lacking among his competitors, was able to persuade the commander of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, General Sir Alexander Godley, that his previous experience in Samoa fitted him ideally to be the correspondent on New Zealand’s first foray into action, the wresting of control of Samoa from Germany. Ross’s presence with that force drew the ire of the leader of the Liberal Party, Sir Joseph Ward, and of those newspapers which toed the Liberal line, the so-called Wardist papers. Ward saw Ross as an ally of the Prime Minister, William Massey – which he was – and argued there should be two correspondents: one writing for the Wardist papers and one for the papers favouring the Reform policies of the Massey government. It was both an impractical and a disingenuous argument – the latter particularly because while newspapers showed their political stripes in their editorial columns, they tended not to do the same in the writing and presentation of news. Ward’s argument also ran counter to the national unity of purpose that accompanied the outbreak of war and which led to the formation of a coalition government for much of it, with Massey and Ward showing, publicly anyway, a non-partisan approach.

The failure by the four newspapers which employed Scholefield to allow him to write for all, and the noticeable lack of interest by any other newspapers, or group of newspapers, to send a reporter to the war, led almost inevitably to the Government
making the appointment itself. The Government at least chose a politically balanced panel of editors to advise it and the advice was to appoint Malcolm Ross, a recommendation with which the Cabinet agreed (Massey saying he took no part in the appointment because of his friendship with Ross). Having decided to pay the piper, the Government could now compose the tune. The conditions of appointment it imposed were restrictive and onerous with two of the more draconian requirements being that the High Commissioner in London, Sir Thomas Mackenzie, would in effect have a right of veto over anything Ross wrote, and the other that he not be allowed to cable direct to New Zealand. A multi-layered system of censorship – dispatches were censored first where they were written, then in London, then in Sydney and then in Wellington – just added to the ties that bound Ross’s hands. The constraint against cabling was because of cost; the other conditions seemed to reflect more the Government’s lack of experience with war correspondents and its perceived need to control the flow of news rather than any particular wish to inhibit Ross.

It could be wondered that if indeed Ross had influence with Massey and other political decision-makers, why he could not persuade them to impose less rigorous restrictions on his reporting during the war. As outlined in Chapter One, he had known men such as the Minister of Defence, Sir James Allen, and Mackenzie from an early age yet his personal relationship was clearly not strong enough to overcome the limiting factors in his role. The New Zealand Government slavishly followed the dictates of the British Government in the matter of war correspondents, despite ample evidence from an early stage of the war that the Australians went their own way and blithely ignored whatever dictates came from Whitehall.

The New Zealand Government was not paying for a correspondent in any accepted newspaper sense of the word: it was paying for an amanuensis. Any criticism of Ross, and there was much by the so-called Wardist papers, has to be seen in the context not of what Ross did, but what he was allowed to do. Some of the criticism of Ross may have been justified but too heavy an emphasis on his alleged shortcomings clouds the complete picture.

The indecision in Wellington led to Ross not arriving at Gallipoli until June 1915, more than six months after Bean, and when the heroic narrative of the landing had already been well established by Ashmead-Bartlett. Even then, Ross could not catch up, irrespective of the quality of his writing. His instruction that he could only mail dispatches meant that he was always well behind Bean, who cabled reports to Australia
and London, and Ashmead-Bartlett, whose cabled reports to London were sent when warranted to the rest of the Empire. The censorship that constrained each of the correspondents further exacerbated Ross’s problems, as indicated by his complaint to Allen after he had been unable to report in timely fashion the deaths of, among others, Colonels William Malone and Arthur Bauchop. It was as a result of that complaint, plus disquiet in New Zealand about the quality of Ross’s dispatches, that led to the Government’s emissary to Gallipoli, Lieutenant-Colonel Heaton Rhodes, intervening and gaining permission for Ross to cable stories of especial interest. This Ross did for the rest of the war but these were notable for their brevity – because of cost – and he continued to file more lengthy dispatches by mail. In the last two years of the war, Ross’s dispatches were also sent to British newspapers – which Bean’s had been from the outset – and he was also able to widen his coverage by regular contributions to the fortnightly London-based newspaper for troops, Chronicles of the NZEF.

Many, if not most, of the complaints in New Zealand, from Liberal MPs and from the weekly newspaper, the New Zealand Observer, were subjective and need to be treated with caution. They appeared to be following an agenda laid down in a virulent political environment in which newspapers took trenchant stands in their editorial and opinion columns according to their political leaning. Complainants seemed unaware of, or loath to acknowledge, the various constraints under which Ross and other correspondents operated. If total war was a new experience for those involved in it, it was even more so for those who viewed it from afar. Critics of Ross in New Zealand could have had little appreciation of the day to day tribulations confronted by Ross and other correspondents, just as they did of the daily privations and dangers to which soldiers were exposed. Ignorance at home was, ironically and inevitably, a direct result of the censorship imposed by London and to which the New Zealand Government acquiesced, not that it had a choice in the matter.

There was much that Ross and other correspondents could not write. And what they could not write, their readers could not comprehend. They could not convey aspects of the war such as the meagre amount of land over which the battles on Gallipoli were fought and the consequential proximity of their foes. Not even the finest of pens could adequately convey the heat of summer, the bone chill of the brief taste of winter toward the end of 1915; the unvaried, indifferent quality of food; the lack of water; the perpetual threat of sniper, machinegun or shellfire; and worst of all, the unrelieved presence and smell of the rotting flesh of their comrades and enemies and the
resultant flies and debilitating disease. On the Western Front, troops at least had the relative luxury of rest periods and occasional leave in Britain, neither of which had been available at Gallipoli. But in France and Belgium industrialised, total war brought its own unique features: static warfare which committed frontline troops to trenches frequently waterlogged and muddied, when death could come from drowning if not from a bullet; to advances toward an entrenched enemy in the face of machinegun fire and barbed wire that may, or may not, have been cut by artillery bombardment; to the constant prospect of death or maiming by shrapnel or by bullet; to the unimaginable and unrelenting chorus of the roar of thousands of guns all firing at once; to a live friend alongside in one second to a dead one the next.

Such things could not be written about. Such things could not be imagined, because they could not be known, by those who stayed at home. It would have been easy in the Wyndham Street, Auckland, office of the Observer or the Liberal lobby of Parliament to read and scoff at a dispatch from Ross or from someone else; less easy to apply some objective understanding, even sympathy, over the conditions in which the dispatch may have been written and about the events it was describing.

The central issue is whether Ross should have been the official war correspondent. To form an opinion that someone else could have done the job better is to know the unknowable. Nothing can change the fundamental fact that Ross was appointed and carried out his duties for four and a half years. None of the newspapers critical of Ross put his ability to the test, or matched their convictions with their bank balances, by sending a reporter more to their liking; the Government made no attempt to recall him or replace him despite talk of doing so and, indeed, Ross by the end of the war continued to have strong support from Massey – which is not surprising given their friendship and political common ground – and from senior officers such as Godley.

Ross's coverage was widely used throughout the war, even given the exigencies of small wartime newspapers caused by the need to conserve newsprint. Editors or those responsible for editorial decisions on newspapers continued to find room for Ross's stories, however much he may have been criticised. His writing style would not have been pleasing to all tastes and he seldom wrote what today would be referred to as a "hard" news story: the reason was plain to see. The "hard" news had already been conveyed either in official communiqués – no matter how misleading they may have been – or by correspondents who had more efficacious filing methods than Ross was generally allowed. He knew, for example, that when he wrote about the death
of Malone on Gallipoli, his report could not be published until many weeks later, by which time it was commonly known that Malone had been killed. Similarly, on the Western Front, he had to contrive to write stories that would not be overtaken in a news sense by the effluxion of time or, on the occasions he was allowed to cable, brevity became the soul of his reportage. Ross therefore had to do what any other reporters in similar circumstances would have done – he opted for the “timeless” stories or compiled a personal narrative of New Zealanders’ roles in battles, the essence of which had already been reported.

Bean was in a similar position throughout the war to Ross, though he was able to cable. In the expectation of writing the official history, Bean spent a great deal of time interviewing participants in battles, checking and verifying and corroborating stories, not for immediate publication, but for the eventual history. Ross too obtained information with a history of New Zealand’s role in the war in mind, but this opportunity was denied him by the military hierarchy in Wellington, which did not want a journalist writing official history. The military vacillated over an official history of New Zealand involvement in the Boer War and did so also after World War I, with the result that New Zealand is still poorly served by official accounts of New Zealand service between 1914 and 1919. Indeed, Ian McGibbon believed it was Bean’s monumental effort with the Australian histories that provided the example for New Zealand to do a better job after World War II, by which time the Boer War history was also eventually published.

Any analysis of Ross’s life and work can be based only on what he and others wrote at the time. Accumulated knowledge and understanding of how warfare or journalistic practice developed since World War I provides only a flawed wisdom in hindsight. People can be judged only in the context of the times in which they lived. Ross left little for posterity – just a few letters and a collection of photographs. No diary has come to light and there has been no sign of anything he said or wrote about his war experiences after he returned to New Zealand in 1919, aside from his contribution to Sir Charles Lucas’s Empire At War, in which he did not mention himself. The New Zealand Free Lance speculated that the quality of Ross’s work was affected by the death of his son at the end of 1917; that may be so but as dreadful an ordeal as it undoubtedly is for a father to outlive a son, it is a commonplace occurrence in wartime.
Among Ross acquaintances, Sir James Allen and Rudyard Kipling also lost sons in the war, but they received sympathy rather than being told the deaths adversely affected their work.

Ross clearly had a keen sense of his place in the times in which he lived; he was one of the most, if not the most, prolific of journalists in the pre-war period and he cultivated acquaintances which would have been as invaluable professionally as they would have been satisfying personally. His involvement with people such as Paderewski and Melba and with the Dominions Commission indicated that he also looked beyond daily newspaper writing. He surely would have felt himself the most appropriate person to be the official war correspondent and justified if he believed no other applicant had the same breadth of experience. But war changes people – and it could be argued that World War I brought about the most profound of changes – and after Ross returned in 1919 the absence of war stories, the absence of a diary or any form of reminiscences, indicates that Ross was a changed man; it was as if he wanted to get on with what remained of the rest of his life and for he and Forrest to grieve for their dead son. In that respect, they would have been no different from thousands of others. Where Ross differed was that he was in a unique position to tell a fuller story of what New Zealanders did in those hellfire years. But on the official level he was not allowed to and at the personal level he chose not to. A man who lived his life by writing stayed silent. Perhaps because he had had enough; perhaps because the years had caught up with him; perhaps because he was bitter at being denied the opportunity to write an official history; perhaps because he felt deeply the partisan criticisms of him during the war. No one can know.

As Susan Crane observed: “The difference between collective memory and historical memory marks the separation between lived experience and the preservation of lived experience.” The appointment and lifelong work of Bean ensured a seamless transition between collective and historical memory for Australia. In New Zealand, in large part because Ross was not allowed to aspire to match the achievements of Bean, a gap has always remained.

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Appendix 1

Brief biographical sketches of principals mentioned in the text:

Allen, Sir James (1855-1942). A rugby colleague of Ross’s in Otago, Allen was Minister of Defence throughout World War I and was frequently Acting Prime Minister. He was New Zealand High Commissioner to the United Kingdom from 1920 until 1926.

Ashmead-Bartlett, Ellis (1881-1931). An experienced and eccentric war correspondent who on Gallipoli represented the London daily newspapers. He wrote the first stories about the Anzac landing but later had his accreditation withdrawn because of stories critical of the conduct of the campaign.

Bauchop, Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur (1871-1915). A Boer War veteran, Bauchop commanded the Otago Mounted Rifles and was killed at an early stage of the attack on Chunuk Bair in August of 1915. Ross was among his last visitors before the attack.

Bean, Charles Edwin Woodrow (1879-1968). Australia’s official correspondent throughout the war. He became general editor of the Australian Official History of the 1914-1918 War and wrote six of the 12 volumes himself. He oversaw the organisation and establishment of the Australian War Museum (later renamed the Australian War Memorial). He was chairman of the AWM board from 1951 until his retirement at the age of 83 in 1963. Bean wrote several other books about his war experiences beyond the Official Histories.

Drew, Henry Thomas Bertie (1878-1950). A journalist, Drew enlisted with the NZEF and was seconded to the force’s London headquarters where he set up a publicity section, which brought him into frequent contact with Ross. After the war, he tried to set up a
war history branch within the Defence Department and wrote one of the authorised histories of the war. He later leased the Manawatu Daily Times and during World War II, he was dominions liaison officer with the United Kingdom Ministry of Information.

Godley, General Sir Alexander (1867-1957). A British army regular soldier who reorganised New Zealand forces before the war and commanded the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. Godley commanded the Anzac and NZ Division on Gallipoli and was later in the war commander of the Anzac Corps.

Hamilton, General Sir Ian (1853-1947). General officer commanding the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force March-October 1915. He was in overall control of the Gallipoli invasion. Hamilton had some personal contact with Ross during the occupation and subsequently developed something of a bond with Ross’s son.

Mackenzie, Clutha (1895-1966). The youngest son of Sir Thomas Mackenzie and Ida, Lady Mackenzie. Serving with the Wellington Mounted Rifled on Gallipoli in 1915, he was blinded by shellfire during the battle for Chunuk Bair. He established a fortnightly newspaper, Chronicles of the NZEF, in 1916 and edited it for the rest of the war. Briefly a Member of Parliament, most of the rest of his life was devoted to care for the blind and the development of Braille. He was knighted for his services to the blind.

Mackenzie, Sir Thomas (1854-1930). An early tramping and rugby colleague of Ross’s, he was briefly Prime Minister in 1912 and he was New Zealand High Commissioner to the United Kingdom from 1912 until 1920. Among various commissions and conferences in London, Mackenzie served on the Dardanelles Commission which inquired into the causes of the Gallipoli failure.
Malone, Lieutenant-Colonel William (1859-1915). Commander of the Wellington Battalion whose reputation was enhanced by his leadership at the Second Battle of Krithia and for his reorganisation of Quinn’s Post. He was killed after holding the heights of Chunuk Bair, the most advanced position on Gallipoli, for a day.

Massey, William (1856-1925). Reform Party leader who was a friend and confidant of Ross’s. He was Prime Minister throughout World War I and championed Ross for the role of official historian.

Murdoch, Keith (1885-1952). An Australian journalist, he was given permission by Hamilton to land at Anzac on his way to a posting in London. He carried a letter from Ashmead-Bartlett critical of the conduct of the campaign and had the letter taken from him in Marseille en route to London. Father of Rupert Murdoch, one of whose companies part-funded the 1981 Australian film, Gallipoli.

Ranfurly, Earl of (Sir Uchter John Mark Knox) (1856-1933). Ranfurly was the 15th Governor of New Zealand. Ross accompanied him on several official trips, including to the Cook Islands.

Richardson, George Major-General (1868-1938). Originally seconded to New Zealand from the British army, Richardson from 1916 until 1919 was the senior New Zealand military officer in the United Kingdom. He was later in charge of the reorganisation of New Zealand’s peacetime army and for much of the 1920s was New Zealand administrator in Samoa.

Robin, Alfred Major-General (1860-1935). Robin was commanded of New Zealand forces in New Zealand throughout World War I, effectively in charge of recruitment and organising reinforcements.

Ross, Forrestina (nee Grant) (1860-1936). She resigned as a teacher in Dunedin when she married Malcolm Ross in 1890. She was
subsequently a reporter in Wellington and was one of the first women to work in the parliamentary press gallery. She was also one of the first women mountaineers in New Zealand.

Ross, Noël (1890-1917). The only son of Forrestina and Malcolm. He was wounded within days of the landing at Gallipoli in 1915. He was subsequently declared unfit for further service and lived with his mother in London until his death.

Schölefield, Guy (1877-1963). A journalist and briefly named as New Zealand's official war correspondent when he worked in London. He was editor of the Wairarapa Age from 1921 until 1926, when he became the Parliamentary Librarian. He was also Dominion Archivist and wrote widely, including establishing New Zealand Who's Who and compiling the two-volume Dictionary of New Zealand Biography.

Ward, Sir Joseph (1856-1930). Leader of the Liberal Party and Finance Minister in the wartime coalition cabinet. He accompanied Prime Minister William Massey on frequent trips during the war to Britain and to New Zealand troops.
Appendix 2

From the *New Zealand Times*, 2 March 1915

WAR CORRESPONDENT

CONDITIONS OF THE APPOINTMENT ISSUED

The following conditions have been issued by the Government, with reference to the position of official war correspondent, applications for which are now being called:

"1. The selection in New Zealand of a correspondent is subject to confirmation by the Imperial Government and until such confirmation, the provisional appointment will not take effect.

"2. The correspondent, after confirmation of his appointment, will be required to leave New Zealand for either Egypt or England as the Government may direct, and at such time as the Government may direct. A return saloon passage to and from either Egypt or England will be provided at the cost of the Government. In the event of the first passage being to Egypt, the cost of the subsequent voyage to and from England will also be provided.

"3. The correspondent is in all matters to be subject to the direction of the New Zealand Government and of the High Commissioner for New Zealand, and must comply with any specific directions received.

"4. His principal duties will be to remain as near as possible to the New Zealand forces at the seat of war, and to write regularly detailed accounts of events in which New Zealand forces are engaged, and of matters of especial interest to New Zealand and the New Zealand forces. If the New Zealand forces are divided into several sections, he will be expected to travel, if permitted by the war authorities, from section to section, so that general information as to all the New Zealand forces may be obtained.

"5. He must in all matters strictly submit to such limitations and restrictions as the Imperial military authorities impose. Subject to such strict compliance, he is expected to keep as near to the firing line as war correspondents of the press are usually permitted to approach."
“6. He is not in any case to send news or information by cable to New Zealand. He is to send his despatches as frequently as possible by course of post to the High Commissioner in London, and he may, whenever he desires to send news of special and urgent importance, send such news by telegram to the High Commissioner. The despatches sent to the High Commissioner by post or telegraph will be transmitted by the High Commissioner to New Zealand. The reasonable cost of such telegrams will be allowed. This condition applies only when the correspondent is with the forces on the Continent of Europe or in Great Britain or Ireland. When in Egypt, the correspondent is to send his despatches regularly by course of post addressed to the Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington. In this case, he will not use either cable or telegraph.

“7. He will be paid a salary at the rate of £450 per annum from the date of his appointment until the date of his return to New Zealand.

“8. He will receive allowances at the rate of 15s per day except when with the forces on the Continent of Europe or when actually in Egypt. In Egypt he will receive allowances of £1 per diem. When at the seat of war in any part of the Continent of Europe the allowance will be £2 10s per diem.

“9. No further allowance will be made for transit or living expenses. The correspondent is expected, out of the respective allowances, to make provision for his transit and locomotion and all other expenses.

“10. The Government reserves the right to terminate the appointment at any time upon one month’s notice to the correspondent, who, in that event, must return to New Zealand, and will be paid his salary until a reasonable approximate date for his arrival in New Zealand.

“11. The correspondent is expected, in his dispatches and otherwise, to provide material to be used ultimately for a history of the part taken by the New Zealand troops in the war. He is therefore expected to make himself acquainted generally with the disposition of all Imperial forces and also of the enemy at points where the New Zealand forces are associated.

“12. It is impossible to define, with complete accuracy in advance, all the duties of the correspondent, and it is, therefore, a necessary condition that the Government has power to add other conditions and directions to those above stated. Generally, the correspondent is to supply news from the seat of war of special interest to New Zealand of the nature generally supplied by press correspondents at the war;
and also to supply material ultimately for a history of the part taken by the New Zealand troops, and is to be subject to the orders and directions of the New Zealand Government and of the High Commissioner.”