

# THE GREAT WAR TIMES

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FROM THE WHANGANUI  
WWI CENTENARY PROGRAMME



## THE BATTLE OF MESSINES PREPARING FOR PASSCHENDAELE

In 1917 the British Army on the Western Front faced a strategic dilemma. The Americans had joined the war but would not arrive for some time, and as the Tsar had been deposed, the Russians might not continue the fight. The French Army was exhausted, mutinous in places and would not fight offensively. Lastly, the Royal Navy wanted the Belgian channel ports taken so the Germans couldn't use them as U Boat bases. Field Marshal Haig, therefore, decided to mount the Third Battle of Ypres with the grand aim of clearing the Germans from Belgium.

Before this major battle could commence, Haig needed to secure the British right flank along the Messines Ridge. In May 1917 he entrusted this task to General Plumer and the Second Army which included the New Zealand Division within II ANZAC Corps. Plumer was a thoughtful soldier and careful planner. Insisting on detailed preparation for the battle and the achievement of surprise, he scheduled the attack for 7 June. Plumer also insisted that his attack would only go as far as it could realistically achieve, which meant infantry objectives could go no further forward than the range of the British artillery.

Plumer's preparations included developing a detailed artillery plan for the pre-attack bombardment and also in support of the assaulting troops. Before full action, no more than a third of Plumer's 2500 guns ever fired at one time. When they eventually all fired together, the Germans would be stunned by massive firepower onto their artillery positions and vital points, thus preventing them from disrupting the infantry attack. In addition, 19 mines that had been dug under the German positions over the previous year were to be detonated. Plumer's aim was to shatter German coordination and effectiveness, as much as to physically defeat them.

The attack commenced with the detonation of the mines at 0310 on 7 June. The attacking infantry, which had rehearsed all their movements, were all

clear of their trenches by 0317. Keeping well up with the creeping protective barrage, they cleared the first German positions on schedule. The infantry then sent in new forward assault elements to quickly take the second German line. By 0500 the New Zealanders were able to leapfrog through and attack the village of Messines itself, effectively breaking into its defences and clearing it from the inside out. All 2nd Army's initial objectives had been achieved by 0700 and they consolidated at the top of the ridge, dealing with German counter attacks and waiting for the Australians to conduct the last leapfrog and take the German rear positions. Ironically, this is when most of the New Zealand casualties occurred. Because so few men had fallen in the earlier part of the attack, their part of the ridge was overcrowded when the German artillery was finally able to respond.



Map of the Battle of Messines

Ref: Battle of Messines map, URL: <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/battle-messines-map>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 22-Mar-2017

Messines was a stunning success but was not followed up for another seven weeks. By then a very dry period was broken by abnormally high rainfalls and the Germans had had time to reorganise their defences. Plumer's 2nd Army was now given a diversionary role only for the main offensive, a feint toward Lille. As part of these operations the village of La Basse Ville needed to be taken. The New Zealanders had one unsuccessful attempt on 26 July, but had been beaten back because of a strong point at the estaminet (inn)

on the Warneton Road. An attack on 31 July deployed a special force of 20 men led by Lance Corporal Leslie Andrew, who was tasked to destroy the machine guns in this position. Overwhelmingly successful, Andrew was awarded the Victoria Cross for his bravery.

When Plumer's 2nd Army was given major offensive roles in the Passchendaele battles, "bite and hold" tactics were not so successful. There were no mines to provide a shock and the artillery could not achieve the surprise crescendo or carefully prepared support that gave victory at Messines. The New Zealanders returned for a series of attacks in October, achieving little. The Canadians took Passchendaele on 18 October, but there was no breakthrough and the British offensive ceased.

Grateful thanks to the author Colin Richardson, retired Army Colonel and co-author of *Acts of Valour* with Glyn Harper

## LANCE CORPORAL LESLIE WILTON ANDREW VC



**Leslie Andrew, soon after his deeds at La Basse Ville, for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross**

Whanganui Regional Museum Collection ref 2003.64.3

During World War I Lance Corporal Leslie Andrew fought a very hard battle while facing great odds. Brought up in Whanganui, the son of the headmaster of Wanganui East School, he became a railway clerk. Andrew lied about his age and enlisted in 1915 in the Wellington West Coast Company in the 2nd Battalion of the Wellington Infantry Regiment, New Zealand Expeditionary Force. He arrived in France at the Somme in September 1916, where he fought for just eight days before being wounded in the neck.

In July 1917 his battalion attacked La Basse Ville, Lorraine, in north east France, in the lead-in to the Passchendaele Campaign. Andrew commanded a small group of soldiers directed to attack a German machine-gun post which was firing from an inn. As he led his men forward they came across another machine-gun post which he attacked ferociously, capturing the gun. Andrew continued with an attack on the original machine gun post in the inn, capturing and destroying it. He and a companion then discovered yet another machine-gun and destroyed the position with hand grenades before they rejoined their company.

For his "most conspicuous bravery" Corporal Andrew was awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest military decoration awarded for "valour in the face of the enemy" to members of the armed forces of Commonwealth countries. He was just 20 years old.

One of the captured machine-guns was sent to Whanganui where it became part of the Wanganui Public Museum collection. This medium machine gun is a Maxim MG08 GWF Spandau with a calibre of 7.92.

Andrew went on to achieve outstanding success in a long military career. He was commissioned a lieutenant in 1918 and served throughout the inter-war period. At the outbreak of war in 1939 he was given command of the 22nd Battalion which he led during many of the major desert actions. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order in 1942 for his outstanding leadership of the battalion during the campaign.

He then returned to New Zealand and was promoted to full colonel, commanding the Wellington Fortress Area for the rest of the war. After the war Andrew commanded the New Zealand Victory Contingent to London in 1946. He retired in 1952 with the rank of Brigadier.

Hot off the press is the news of Corporal Willie Apiata VC unveiling a plaque honouring Corporal Leslie Andrew VC at Wellington Railway Station, an apt site given his early career working for the Railways.

# ANAESTHESIA IN WORLD WAR I

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Anaesthesia developed rapidly during World War I. The impact of better anaesthesia for wounded troops had a long lasting impact on civilian anaesthesia.

At the start of the war, anaesthesia was usually provided with chloroform. This was first introduced in 1847 and doctors came to prefer it to ether because of its faster onset. It was usually given by a nurse or orderly by dripping it on to a mask over the patient's face. This often resulted in an overdose; the correct dose of chloroform is about 3% but via an open drop mask it can reach 30%. For all that, even this rudimentary anaesthesia saved many lives. Its first use in a major conflict was in the American Civil War. The Union Army recorded 90,000 chloroform anaesthetics, usually for amputation, cutting the operative death rate from about 75% to 25%. The British continued to use chloroform during the Boer War.

Anaesthesia at Gallipoli, again often for amputation, was also by chloroform. There are few, if any, direct references to this in New Zealand histories.

As the New Zealanders moved to the Western Front, the wounded benefitted from the developments in anaesthesia pioneered by the British Army. Early experience with chloroform raised concerns about mortality in shocked soldiers. Dr Geoffrey Marshal was ordered to improve anaesthetic care, and eventually he designed a system which delivered oxygen, nitrous oxide and ether at a controlled rate. Anaesthetic mortality fell, and chloroform was abandoned. Marshal's system remains the basic method of delivering anaesthetic gasses and oxygen today, albeit in a much modified form. Anaesthetists seldom use nitrous oxide now, and ether has been replaced by safer, and less explosive, agents.

There were other anaesthetic developments in World War I that had major and ongoing impact in civilian healthcare. Blood transfusion became widely adopted in the wounded. It is interesting that during the Vietnam War there was a move away from blood to the use of other intravenous fluids, basically salty water. In modern warfare, there has been a move back to blood, reinventing the wheel design from 100 years ago.

The advent of issuing steel helmets for front line troops lead to much increased survival rates for soldiers who had suffered head and facial wounds. The treatment of these wounds at Queen's Hospital in Sidcup in the United

Kingdom, posed major challenges for the anaesthetists, as they had to keep the patient asleep and oxygenated, whilst the surgeon operated on the face. The surgeon pioneering this work was a New Zealander, Sir Harold Gilles. Many soldiers required multiple operations, and to avoid using tracheostomies, the technique of placing a rubber tube through the nose or mouth into the trachea was developed and refined by Dr Ivan Magill. These tubes are still called Magill tubes, and the technique of endotracheal intubation is now a basic anaesthetic skill. It is also used in intensive care and by paramedics for patients suffering cardiac arrest or major trauma.

Tourniquets were widely used to stop bleeding from limbs in World War I. They were officially abandoned in 1946 as they were considered too dangerous. Experience in Afghanistan showed the utility of tourniquets, and they are now part of a soldier's basic life-saving medical kit.

Would these innovations in medical care have occurred in the absence of warfare? The answer is probably yes, but at a slower pace. But despite the benefits of medical advances made during conflict, one thing remains true; war is hell.

Grateful thanks to Major Graham Sharpe, Anaesthetist, RNZAMC



## Field Anaesthesia

A UK Army surgeon removes a bullet from a soldier's arm in a field-ambulance tent of the East Lancs Territorials at Cape Helles, on the Gallipoli Peninsula, in 1915. The patient has a cloth over his face and has been given chloroform by an orderly on the right.

Source: © Copyright Kable 2016, a trading division of Kable Intelligence Limited

# QUEEN ALEXANDRA'S MOUNTED RIFLES

## PART 3 THE PALESTINE CAMPAIGN

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In early 1917 the New Zealand Mounted Rifle Brigade (NZMRB) entered Palestine and began a first assault on Gaza from the south. The Second Squadron, which was the Queen Alexandra's Mounted Rifles (QAMR), was commanded by Major Jack Sommerville. In *The Kiwi Trooper* by Ted Andrews, an almost laconic description of the assault gives a fair indication of the extent of their achievements:

“We were without our No 1 Troop ... but No 2, 3 and 4 Troops were under Lieuts. Pierce, Allison and Bill Foley, all first class leaders. The 6th Manawatu led the advance, followed by us, with the 9th in support. About 4.30pm just after the advance had begun, we captured a Turkish Field Ambulance and were told to guard 130 prisoners and valuable medical equipment until the Aussies arrived.”



**This New Zealand Mounted Rifles badge was worn on the shoulder below a number running from 1 to 12 which identified the Regiment that the unit was attached to**

Whanganui Regional Museum Collection Ref: 1802.313

A Turkish gun position was located on the edge of town. Colonel Meldrum (Wellington Regiment Commanding Officer) ordered Major Sommerville to attack with QAMR and some of the 6th Manawatu Squadron under Lieutenant Black. Charging with bayonets, they killed the gunners and the two large Krupp 77 mm guns were captured.

Two further assaults were made before the eventual capture of Gaza. In the third assault in October the New Zealanders captured the important redoubt of Tel el Saba, from where they watched the now famous Australian Light Horse charge into Beersheba.

Two more stiff fights took place at Ayun Kara, south of what is now Tel Aviv, on 14 November, and across the River Auja on 24-25 November. The battle at Ayun Kara was the worst single day in the QAMR war since Gallipoli, with 44 men killed, 141 men wounded and 41 horses also killed. The Auja fight resulted in another 54 casualties.

Moving down the inhospitable Jordan Valley in 1918, the Anzac Mounted Division captured Jericho and the western banks of the Jordan River. Conditions in this dry

and extremely hot area incapacitated thousands of men and horses. Malaria and mosquitoes, spiders, snakes and centipedes contributed to the misery. In daytime, swarms of flies plagued all. The NZMRB spent approximately a month at a time in the valley before rotated out to a rest camp.

From the Jordan Valley the NZMRB took part in two unsuccessful raids across the river in the highlands around El Salt and Amman and along the Hejaz Railway.

In September, in the finale of the war in the Middle East, the NZMRB crossed the Jordan River again to play a major role in the capture of Amman and the entire Turkish 2nd Corps. With its armies in Palestine, Syria and elsewhere defeated, Turkey sued for peace at the end of October 1918.

The QAMR, as part of the Anzac Mounted Division, took part in many engagements since the Egyptian Expeditionary Force had set out from the Suez Canal two and a half years before. Their return to New Zealand was delayed because of a lack of shipping; most returned home in 1919.

## A MANAWATŪ WAR STORY

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James Quarrie Cameron was a farmer at Sanson, Manawatū. He enlisted in the army and joined the 21st Reinforcements of the Wellington Mounted Rifles in August 1916. He embarked on SS *Manuka* from Wellington in February 1917 for Sydney where the troops spent five days camping at the Showgrounds. They then sailed on the RMS *Morea* to Colombo, then to Bombay, where they stayed in the Callaba Barracks. They then sailed on the SS *Mashobra* to Suez. Cameron spent ten weeks at the Imperial School in Kartoum where he underwent a signaller's course. Gaining a first class certificate, he served in the Palestine Campaign as a signaller.

During his stay in Sydney he had visited his Godmother Annie McKillop, a sister of the future saint, Mother Mary McKillop. Annie pinned some of Mother Mary's religious medals onto his uniform, which he wore throughout his service. He was never wounded and was called "Lucky Jim" by his comrades. At Cameron's funeral, Charlie Webb, a member of his platoon and a lifelong friend, stood at his graveside and told the story of when, during a fierce battle and under heavy fire, his horse was shot from under him. Cameron rode back into the gunfire and scooped Webb onto his own horse and dashed to safety. Webb's comment was, "He should have got a medal".

Cameron was discharged from service in April 1919. In 1920 he acquired a rehabilitation farm at Oroua Downs near Foxton, where he lived for the rest of his life. He was

# A VISIT TO ARRAS

very involved in his local community as a JP, a member of the Manawatu-Oroua Power Board, the Rongotea RSA, the Foxton Racing Club, the Manawatu A & P Show and Chairman of the Manawatu Dairy Company.

Cameron was always interested in his horses and raced several, including the champion Triton, who was successful in New Zealand and Australia. He was also a show judge.

And what happened to Mother Mary McKillop's medals? Cameron's father farmed at Mt Stewart, Sanson. When he was dying, James pinned the medals onto his father's pajamas, and they were buried with him in the Feilding Cemetery.

There is a strong link to Whanganui in this story too. The Sisters of St Joseph of Nazareth arrived in Whanganui in 1880. They immediately set up a school for girls which they named the Sacred Heart Convent. Mary McKillop, known now as St Mary of the Cross, was at that time the Mother Superior of the Mother House in Adelaide and visited Whanganui four times.

Many thanks to Mary Barber for this account of James Quarrie Cameron's war and subsequent life – he was her father



**Charlie Webb (left) and James Quarrie Cameron**  
From the collection of Mrs Mary Barber



**An exit from one of the caves at Arras to ground level**

Photograph: Ann McNamara, 2017

Researching the New Zealand Tunnelling Company's involvement in the construction of the underground tunnels in Arras, France, during World War I resulted in Jenny Shaw and Ann McNamara both visiting the town and La Carrière Wellington, the Wellington Quarry Museum. From 1916, a network of galleries was set up by the New Zealand tunnellers to link the underground quarries together and get closer to the German positions.

Visitors don a safety hat and then descend 20 metres in a glass-sided lift to the chalk caves below. What follows is an amazing guided tour underground, showing where more than 20,000 people lived and worked. You see sleeping quarters, a hospital, kitchens, offices and even a chapel. Audio-visual displays show soldiers going about their tasks and create an unforgettable and emotional experience for the visitor.

Around the centre of the town, a photographic exhibition, *Eyes of the Battle of Arras*, is presented as a walking trail. Each of the totems has a photograph and a short account of a soldier or nurse involved in this battle in 1917. The Faubourg d'Amiens Cemetery in Arras contains the graves of some New Zealanders killed in the Battle of Arras.

Thanks to Ann McNamara for this personal account of her visit to Arras. Both Ann and Jenny Shaw serve on the production team of the *Great War Times*.

# NEW ZEALAND VOLUNTEER SISTERHOOD

In July 1915, during the Gallipoli Campaign, Ettie Rout established the New Zealand Volunteer Sisterhood (NZVS) to provide catering and hospital services for New Zealand soldiers in Egypt. A rift occurred between Ettie Rout and NZVS because of Ettie's advocacy of practical prophylaxis. The Sisterhood felt she was using their name without their backing. In London they worked with the Women's International Street Patrol (WISP) doing "street work" for the YMCA. The patrols tried to prevent the transmission of venereal disease by dissuading men and women, particularly those who were drunk, from engaging in "licentious activities".

Three women in the Whanganui-Taranaki area joined the NZVS and worked in military hospitals in Egypt or with the YMCA in London.

**Fanny McHugh** was born in Auckland, moved to Marton and married Henry McHugh, a farmer in the Turakina Valley. She had six children, helped on the farm, acted as a midwife and nurse and opened the Turakina general store in 1893. In 1904 she moved to Manaia where she worked as a midwife. After her five sons enlisted in 1914 she joined the NZVS and worked

nursing and caring for soldiers in Egypt. By 1918 Fanny was in London and worked for WISP with a fellow volunteer from New Zealand, Adelaide Ballantine. After the war Fanny returned to New Zealand and joined the Department of Health where she worked until 1926 as social hygiene lecturer.

**Adelaide (Ada) Ballantine** was born in Whanganui and worked near Manaia at the Kaupokonui Dairy Company. With the NZVS team, she helped set up a canteen in Tel er Kibir, Cairo, which supplied fruit salad and blancmange to balance the diet of bully beef and hard biscuits that the army supplied to the soldiers. Later she moved to London and became involved with the YMCA, working with Fanny McHugh and Dora Murch. Ada returned to Whanganui at the end of the war and lived with her sister, Elizabeth Winks.

**Dora Murch** attended Wanganui Girls' College; her parents moved to Hawera in 1896. She joined the NZVS, leaving New Zealand in October 1915 with Ada Ballantine, and then signed on with the New Zealand YMCA in London. While at Walton-on-Thames Hospital she and Ada chartered a steamer and took badly wounded New Zealand soldiers in spinal chairs for an outing on the Thames River, the funds for the outing donated by Taranaki ladies. After the war ended, Dora ran the Hotel d'Ostend in Paris where returning soldiers stayed when seeing the sights before heading home. In 1919 Dora returned to New Zealand and continued her service with the YMCA. She married Frederick Pirani in 1925 and later moved to Christchurch.



**The Sisterhood Before Voyaging Overseas, 1915**

Photographer: S P Andrew

Ettie Rout, hatless, is in the middle, Dora Murch is at far right of the front row and Ada Ballantine is third from right in the back row.

Alexander Turnbull Library Ref: 1/1-014727-G

# KNITTING FOR THE SOLDIERS

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New Zealand women have always knitted. Women at home supported troops overseas by knitting socks, balaclavas, scarves and gloves. This clothing was included in the parcels sent to soldiers. Knitting gave friends and relations at home a meaningful task which would benefit the servicemen and women. Apparently, soldiers on active service wore out a pair of socks every fortnight; knitting new socks to keep up was an important wartime contribution.



**Her Excellency's Knitting Book, published in 1915**

Ref: Content ©Wellington City Libraries

Lady Liverpool, wife of the Governor of New Zealand, set up a patriotic fund during the war. In March 1915 she challenged the women and children of New Zealand to knit enough socks for each member of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force to have two pairs. They rose to the occasion. Women knitted up a storm at home while schoolboys and girls knitted in their classrooms. Lady Liverpool authorised New Zealand's first locally published knitting book, Her Excellency's Knitting Book, which contained patterns for socks, balaclavas and gloves.

Within six months 30,000 pairs of socks had been made for the servicemen. Attention was paid to the design of the socks sent. To avoid the ridge caused by casting off at the toe, which could cause discomfort to the soldiers, women used a darning needle to thread wool through the last remaining stitches and draw them together (Kiwi initiative!). In addition, a special rifle glove was knitted, only partially covering the thumb and index finger, so that it did not "impede the free motion of the hand when engaged in firing the rifle".

# BOOK REVIEW

## *ANZAC GIRLS: THE EXTRAORDINARY STORY OF OUR WORLD WAR I NURSES*

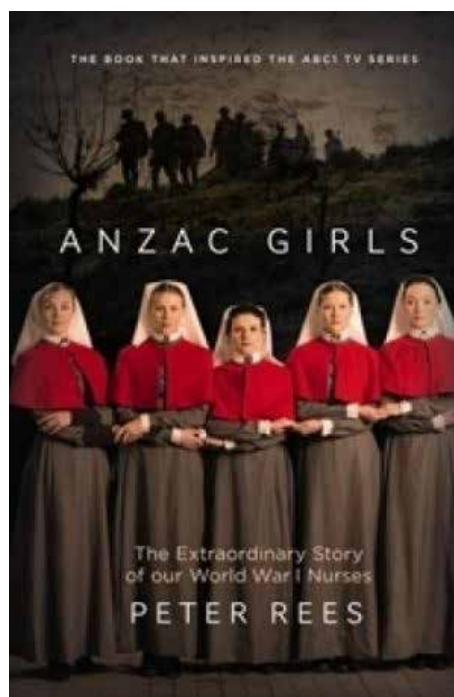
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This book by Peter Rees, first published in 2007, uses the diaries and letters of Australian and New Zealand women who served as nurses during World War I. It also records the effect the war had on them. The author states, "It is not intended as a definitive history but a representative account".

Unlike Australia, the New Zealand Army Nursing Service (NZANS) was not fully established until shortly after the war began. In all, 610 women served in the NZANS while another 100 New Zealand women served in related services such as the Red Cross.

Discriminated against in every way, especially in pay and legal status, nurses could not hold military rank as only men could legally be members of the armed forces. They often worked in appalling conditions in ill-equipped and crowded medical facilities. Many of these women were single, young and inexperienced when they left New Zealand and the effect of adjusting to the social, emotional and physical demands placed upon them is reflected in their accounts.

The sections in the book feature Gallipoli, the Marquette and the Western Front. New Zealand nurses are well represented in all chapters and their names are recorded in a separate New Zealand Nurses Honour Roll at the end. This book inspired the riveting ABC television series of the same name. It's a great read and can be borrowed from the Whanganui District Library or easily ordered, if not in stock, at any local bookshop.



# WHAT'S ON

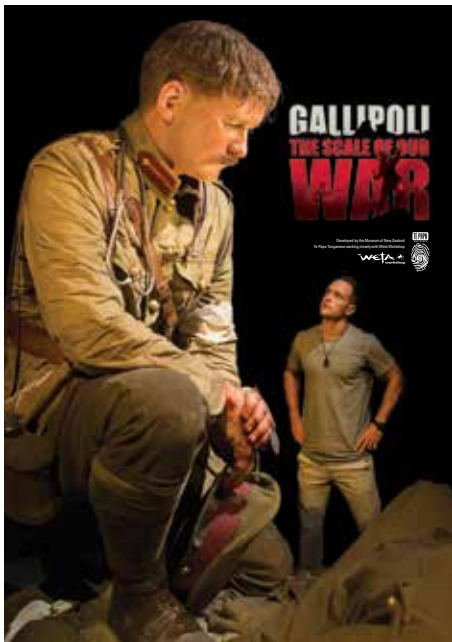
## EXHIBITION REVIEW

### GALLIPOLI - THE SCALE OF OUR WAR

This is a very important exhibition. How do we imagine the scale of the Great War, the First World War, World War I, the War to End all Wars? Te Papa has managed to do just that using the personal stories of eight New Zealanders, seven soldiers and a nurse, who served at Gallipoli. The letters, the memorabilia, the accompanying text and the recorded voices are ordinary – they speak in the vernacular of the day. This very ordinariness makes it an extraordinary and emotional experience for visitors.

You move from person to person, each illustrated with magnificently-wrought giant human figures of the protagonist – Weta Workshop creativity and detail at its best, with sweat, unshaved whiskers, expressions of stress and fatigue and authentic dress and poses. As you move through the exhibition, the tension and intensity increases, to mirror the battle.

Gallipoli runs until April 2019. Entry is free. It's worth a special trip to Wellington to see this great show.



*For information on all national activities commemorating the centennial of World War I, visit the official website [www.ww100.govt.nz](http://www.ww100.govt.nz).*



#### World War I New Zealand Postcard

This patriotic New Zealand postcard, now battered with age, was sent to a boy in Whanganui, Cecil Glenny of Alexander Street, from his Aunty Lou.

Whanganui Regional Museum Collection ref 1802.1035.2

## WORLD WAR I EXHIBITIONS

### NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM, WAIOURU

*Food Glorious Food: an army marches on its stomach*  
to November 2017

*Going Underground: Tunnellers of WWI*  
to December 2017

A photographic exhibition by Brett Killington that explores the tunnels under Arras in France

### NATIONAL WAR MUSEUM, BUCKLE STREET, WELLINGTON

*The Great War Exhibition* by filmmaker  
Sir Peter Jackson